



ASSOCIATE VICE CHANCELLOR
FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

MEMORANDUM

TO: Deans, Associate Deans, Chairs, Faculty
FROM: Erin Finzer, Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs
RE: **Reporting Unofficial Withdrawals (Academic Non-Attendance) from a Course**
DATE: January 21, 2020

Note on Terminology

The term “academic attendance” is taken from the US Department of Education as an attempt to broaden the meaning of “attendance” in the digital age, when being physically present in a class is obviously too narrow. “Academic non-attendance” is our own derivation of the negative form of the USDE’s term. USDE’s guidance regarding what counts as academic attendance appears below.

Why roster maintenance and withdrawing students from class for “academic non-attendance” is important

Roster maintenance at the start of the semester

Getting students who are academically attending but not on the roster to register prior to the official census day for reporting purposes—the 11th day of class—means we can count them in our official headcount, which gives us credit in the new state productivity funding formula under progression metrics. This official number is also published widely, so the higher it is, the stronger we look to the public. Getting students registered before census day also reduces the need for special registration, which requires a great deal of manual processing by Student Accounts, Financial Aid, and Records and Registration and keeps these staff from doing other business.

Getting students off the roster who have not attended academically prior to census day is important because including them in our census report when they are, in fact, not attending, can create a great deal of extra, manual work for our Office of Institutional Research to correct the record later on. Federal reporting will not allow us to count these students, which means that these students also negatively impact us in the state’s productivity funding formula because they do not count as progressing towards their degree.

The importance of dropping students from class for academic non-attendance to comply with external regulatory bodies

To comply with Title IV federal financial aid regulations, course instructors are required to report when a student has unofficially withdrawn from a class, which is the date on which a student



stopped academically attending a course. Failure to comply exposes the university to legal risk and even to the possibility of being unable to administer federal financial aid, which would effectively close the institution. It is the university (not the student) that must document that an activity counts as academic attendance.

Failure to report that a student has unofficially withdrawn from a course also exposes the university to sanctions from other regulatory bodies, such as the Higher Learning Commission and the Department of Homeland Security.

Administratively dropping a student for academic non-attendance in a timely way may also benefit the student, in that it may allow students to retain loan eligibility in the future and may release the student from some charges or financial aid debt associated with the course.

When and how instructors should report students for academic non-attendance

From the 6th day of classes through the last day of classes (For Spring 2020 Full term: 1/28/2020 – 5/04/2020)

Instructors should submit **Non-Attendance Drop Forms** (available at <https://ualr.edu/records/files/2019/09/Non-AttendanceExtenuating-Circumstances-Drop-Form-3.pdf>), which will result in an administrative drop of the student from the course. For each course dropped, the student will receive a grade of **W**, which will not impact GPA but may impact future financial aid eligibility by negatively impacting the student's satisfactory academic progress (SAP) score.

Instructors should make reasonable efforts (e.g., an email and a phone call) to contact the student before submitting the form.

If communication reveals that a student has stopped academic attendance due to extenuating circumstances that merit special, processes exist for other means of administrative withdrawal. Contact the Office of Records and Registration (569-3110; records@ualr.edu) or your college dean's office for more information. *It is never appropriate to administratively withdraw a student because the student is unhappy with their grade.*

Consultation Day through the day that final grades are due (For Spring 2020 Full-term: 05/05/2020 -05/14/2020)

Because it is in the student's and the institution's best interest to report early for non-attendance, it should be the very rare exception that an academically non-attending student has not been dropped prior to Consultation Day. However, if for some exceptional reason, a Non-Attendance Drop Form has not been submitted prior to Consultation Day, the instructor must enter a final grade of **FX**. The **FX** is an internal notation that tells the Office of Financial Aid to audit the student for academic non-attendance; only an **F** appears on the student's transcript. Both an **F** and an **FX** have the same financial aid implications because, like a **W**, they both negatively impact the student's score of satisfactory academic progress (SAP).



What counts academic attendance

General--The USDE offers the following general guidance for what counts as academic attendance (34 CFR 668.2 (l) (7)):

"Academically related activities include but are not limited to the following:

- physically attending a class where there is an opportunity for direct interaction between the instructor and students;
- submitting an academic assignment;
- taking an exam, completing an interactive tutorial, or participating in computer-assisted instruction;
- attending a study group that is assigned by the school;
- participating in an online discussion about academic matters; and
- initiating contact with a faculty member to ask a question about the academic subject studied in the course.

Online--The same USDE regulation (34 CFR 668.2 (l) (7)) provides the following specific guidance for the meaning of academic attendance for online courses:

"In a distance education context, **documenting that a student has logged into an online class is not sufficient**, by itself, to demonstrate academic attendance by the student. A school must demonstrate that a student participated in class or was otherwise engaged in an academically related activity, such as by contributing to an online discussion or initiating contact with a faculty member to ask a course-related question. Examples of acceptable evidence of academic attendance and attendance at an academically-related activity in a distance education program include:

- student submission of an academic assignment
- student submission of an exam,
- documented student participation in an interactive tutorial or computer-assisted instruction,
- a posting by the student showing the student's participation in an online study group that is assigned by the institution,
- a posting by the student in a discussion forum showing the student's participation in an online discussion about academic matters, and
- an e-mail from the student or other documentation showing that the student initiated contact with a faculty member to ask a question about the academic subject studied in the course."