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Required Student Participation in Class-Related Events

Submitted by Clara Krug

4/2/2006

Motion:

That Section 309 of the Faculty Handbook be revised to include the following statement as paragraph 3:

Faculty who require students to participate in an on-campus or off-campus event on a weekday when classes are in session should provide other faculty with written notification in advance of that event. Faculty who receive such notification are not required to excuse the students from class. Nor are they required to allow students to submit at a later date any course work missed because of such an event.

Rationale:

In more than one unit, over time, some faculty who organize such events, including off-campus trips, do not provide such notification.

SEC Response:

4-10-2006: After consultation with Dr. Krug, the SEC has modified the motion to read, Section 309 of the Faculty Handbook should be revised so that the second sentence in the second paragraph reads "When students are absent due to illness, representing the University in athletic events or other activities, or special situations, instructors should be informed in advance of reasons for absences, but these are not excuses."

Senate Response:

This motion was defeated at the April 18 Senate meeting.

Motion: Required Student Participation in Class-Related Activities

Clara Krug, CLASS: The motion is "When students are absent due to illness, representing the University in athletic events or other activities, or special situations, instructors should be informed in advance of reasons for absences, but these are not excuses." I submit that motion. The motion was seconded.

Clara Krug (CLASS): This is in response to discussion at the last Senate meeting indicating that perhaps we should include this in Section 309 of the Faculty Handbook. There is already information in Section 309 that specifies each faculty member's right and responsibility to determine attendance policies in his or her classes. However, it does not address concerns related to other faculty assuming that students will be able to be excused from classes for the other faculty member's class-related events or University-related events.

Don Fausett (COST): When students are absent due to illness, instructors should be informed. Who is this obligation on to inform the instructors when students are absent due to illness?

Pat Humphrey (COST) Senate Moderator: To tell you the truth, honestly, I am not sure. That was in there to begin with. In some cases, it is up to the student to bring a doctor's note to prove that they were ill. In some cases, I have had students bring me notification ahead of time for planned surgeries and things of that nature.

Richard Flynn (CLASS): Clara, as I read the motion as it is now written, it really does not specify who has the responsibility to notify the instructor, but I would assume that the responsibility would be the student's.

Clara Krug (CLASS): That is what I intend. We could add that I guess, because it would need to be the student presenting something to the faculty member in class. It might initiate with the coach or another instructor, but the student would be the person delivering it. That is typically what happens in my classes anyway.

Marc Cyr (CLASS): In the second line of the motion as written, if you put in the three words "require students to" between the words should and provide that will put the responsibility on the students. The professor can then give them a written note if he wants to, but it is up to the student to let the professors know.

Clara Krug (CLASS): Marc, are you reading from the Senate Executive Committee's action that revised the motion?

Marc Cyr (CLASS): No, I am looking at the. . . , no, I am sorry.

Clara Krug (CLASS): At the original motion?

Marc Cyr (CLASS): I am sorry.

Clara Krug (CLASS): That is okay. And, I am sorry, but would you repeat that.

Candy Schille (CLASS): I am all for making the institution primarily an academic exercise, but is it really practical to give any faculty member the power to prevent a football player from going on an away game?

Clara Krug (CLASS): I think it is just important that the person inform the faculty member in advance, so that the student will be informed of what work needs to be made up. I do not know that the basketball coach would appreciate my keeping one of his or her players away from a game, but I would like to know that the person's not going to be there so that the person may, on the bus, or the plane, do French exercise #35 on page 312. That is the main point of this. During this semester in particular, there have been egregious assumptions by some faculty members that students are going to be excused without anything in writing. I tend to want to believe my students when they tell me that they are supposed to be on a trip.

Mary Marwitz (CLASS): When this issue first surfaced my understanding was that there was some collegial responsibility among faculty to say my requirement causes your student to be out of class. And for that reason, I am not sure there is a need for the illness part. That seems to me a real personal thing, and it is different when a student is sort of caught between obligations from two different University requirements.

Clara Krug (CLASS): Yes, that was inserted the Senate Executive Committee. That was not part of my original motion.

Pat Humphrey (COST) Senate Moderator: Illness was in the paragraph to begin with.
Clara Krug (CLASS): Yes, but this is what I would be comfortable with, if I may, "when students are absent because of representing the University in athletic events or other activities or special situations, instructors should be informed in writing in advance by the students, of reasons for absences. However, these are not excuses."

David Robinson (CLASS): I do not see that this changes anything at all. I mean, it says faculty should be informed, well, I guess they sort of ought to already. What happens if they are not informed? And in anticipating the answer to that, well, then we can decide whether to excuse them or not. We can already do that. So, I am not sure why we should pass something that changes nothing.

Clara Krug (CLASS): Section 309, Paragraph 2, currently reads "The University's administrative offices do not issue excuses to students for class absences. When students are absent due to illness, representing the University in athletic events or other activities, or special situations, instructors may be informed of reasons for absences, but these are not excuses." This particular policy does not include "should be informed," it does not include "in advance," it does not include "in writing," and it does not identify "the student" as the source of the information.

Richard Flynn (CLASS): The way I interpret that language is that I may get the bandleader or the football coach sending me a list of the students' games, or I may not.

And that is, in a sense, the University issuing excuses, or issuing what are not excuses, rather. Sometimes I get the lists, and sometimes I do not. And even though, in my syllabus it says that I will entertain excusing people for official University business, it may be that this does not do anything. I tend to agree with Dr. Robinson.

Caren Town (CLASS): I do not entertain excuses at all of any kind for anything, so I guess I am kind of uncertain about why we would want to put all this language in about sending things in advance, and putting things in writing. It seems to constitute a situation where somebody's going to give you even more paperwork that we do not want to look at, or at least I do not want to look at it. So I guess I would say we should just leave it as it is. We may or may not get information, but when we elaborate on what might be excuses, then it seems to sort of encourage more of this process or paperwork coming from the Athletic Department or the Band, or notes from the doctor. I think each person has a policy that is different, and I really would hate to specify more paperwork that I do not want to see coming across my desk.

Pat Humphrey (COST) Senate Moderator: I think I agree with you because everybody does, according to Section 309, have the right and responsibility of having their own attendance policy. I think the germaneness of this, as I understand it, was that certain other faculty members were trying to tell their students that they should give a note to their other teachers or tell their other teachers that they were going on this field trip and it would be an excused absence. Somebody else is trying to say that you will excuse their students.

Clara Krug (CLASS): That appears more in the original motion. Faculty who require students to participate in off-campus or on-campus events on a weekday when classes are in session should provide, etc. etc., and that does not necessarily constitute an excuse. That was where it emanated.

David Alley (CLASS): I just wanted to support Caren's contention that this probably is contingent on each individual instructor's attendance policy, and the situation, Pat, that you are describing seems to be a breach of the instructor's prerogative to enforce that attendance policy--an instructor telling a student that my excused absence will also work in another instructor's class. That just seems to be hopefully an isolated violation.

Mary Marwitz (CLASS): This is a question for information, I guess. Is it possible for faculty to require students to attend activities and events other than what is during class time? I can understand that the University would require attendance at a football game or a swim meet, or something like that, but the way this is written, it is about faculty. So, for example, if my cultural studies class is going to Augusta to the museum, I have always assumed that I cannot require that they go. I can invite them to go, and if they choose to take an absence in another teacher's class then that is their business and the other teacher's business.

Pat Humphrey (COST) Senate Moderator: I do know that, correct me if I am wrong, GSU 1210 instructors require students to go to certain lectures and cultural activities, but not a particular one on any one set night.

Donna Saye (COST): We have a schedule of events that students can attend, and we require them to attend some of the events, but students would have several alternative time choices and should never miss a class to attend a first-year event.

Kent Murray (CLASS): If students receive their syllabus the first day of class as expected with the attendance policies in there outlining the objectives and requirements for the course, then they should know events they must attend from the beginning and be able to negotiate that with other faculty if the other faculty feel it acceptable.

Alice Hall (CHHS): Can we call the question? The call to question was seconded and carried.

Pat Humphrey (COST) Senate Moderator: Clara, would you please read the motion as we currently understand it.

Clara Krug (CLASS): The motion as currently stated is a revision of the Senate Executive Committee action motion, which reads "When students are absent because of representing the University in athletic events or other activities, or special situations, instructors should be informed in writing in advance by the students of reasons for absences. However, these are not excuses."

Pat Humphrey (COST) Senate Moderator: The motion was defeated. I think we need to go back to Section 309 and look at our own policies and make sure students understand them.