Students, faculty battle over attendance

Jason Casillas
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Mandatory attendance policies have come as an unpleasant surprise to many students at Sacramento State.

Senior Carey Carson, a 25-year-old business major, said these policies came as a major shock.“I did not think I’d be forced to go to class at all,” she said.

Senior communication studies major Laura Henningsen said that students are responsible adults who can determine themselves how to best utilize their academic careers. “I think we’re at a level where we should be our own boss,” Henningsen said. “I thought we left that back in high school.”

Although there is currently no universal mandatory attendance policy at Sac State, the university recommends that students attend all classes, said Sac State spokeswoman Ann Reed. Due to the lack of a mandatory attendance policy, the importance and role of attendance falls directly into the hands of the individual professors. This has led to a great variance in policies.

English professor Jon Price has a policy for his bi-weekly literature classes that states a student’s grade may drop “radically” with three or more absences. He said that he requires attendance because the lectures provide information that is not necessarily in the book.“This (education) is a serious business,” he said. “If you miss a certain amount, you have missed too much. It’s in the students’ best interests that we have that policy.”

Some students said they believe that the choice to attend classes should be their own because they are making a financial investment in higher education. “Since we’re paying for our education, it should be our choice whether we attend and pass,” Carson said.

Some faculty members said they agree with this philosophy. Music professor Jeffrey Edom does not require his students to attend class. “If you want to fork out $1,400 and not go to class, what business is it of mine?” he said. Edom said he thinks that because attendance is integral to doing well, a strict attendance policy is not needed.

“There is a natural penalty,” Edom said. “If you don’t go to class, you are not going to do well. If (professors) make them go, then it’s nothing more than glorified babysitting.”

Some professors said they feel if they didn’t implement such policies, no one would show up for classes. Communications professor Nick Burnett, vice department chair, said he acknowledges these fears. “It’s hard for professors to realize they’re not the center of the universe,” Burnett said. “They are not doing it to make students’ lives miserable, but they are passionate about their subjects.”

Carson said there is often little solace for students who are legitimately sick or have had extenuating circumstances that prevent them from attending. “I haven’t found leniency as far as making up anything in college,” Carson said.

Henningsen, a disc jockey at the student-run radio station KSSU, said she is required by the station to attend a show that airs at the same time as one of her classes.

Henningsen said she values her experience at KSSU more than a three-hour lecture about media history. She said she will miss class for the radio show, even though it means losing 15 points in a 200-point course.

“There comes a point where you have to choose between outside activities and your class,” Henningsen said. “I don’t think it’s fair, but I don’t have any other option.”

Freshman English major Janine LaCrosse said she has heard complaints about the attendance policies at Sac State. “I think it’s lame when you don’t go and get a C instead of an A, when you truly have an A,” LaCrosse said.

Micro/molecular biology senior Erik Pelzman said he has had grades affected by missing classes. “I was late to a class once and didn’t get attendance for that day,” Pelzman said. “It was because the guy relieving me at work was late.” Even though it was the only class he missed, he still lost 15 points and his grade dropped from an A- to a B+, Pelzman said. Pelzman said he thinks it is the professor’s responsibility to give valuable lectures. This would make the attendance policies irrelevant. “If a student can not go to class and still do well, then something is wrong,” Pelzman said.