This is a study of attendance policies at Buffalo State College for all classes offered during fall semester, 2002. Several studies have suggested that attendance is a significant issue at colleges and universities across the country. Absenteeism rates as high as one-third have been reported for elite universities and 40% at large public institutions.

Background

The literature suggests that several factors must be considered when examining absenteeism and its impact on learning. Namely,

1. Students attend class more often when the perceived quality of instruction is higher; students may have better uses of their time if the perceived quality of instruction is low.
2. Absenteeism rates differ according to whether or not the instructor is “regular” faculty or a part-time instructor.
3. Motivation to achieve and attendance have an interactive effect on grades.
4. Absenteeism rates vary according to class size.
5. Absenteeism rates tend to be lower in classes with heavy math content.

Method

All course syllabi/outlines submitted to the dean’s offices fall semester, 2002 were reviewed. For each syllabus, the following information was gathered:

- Whether the course was lower (100-200) or upper (300-400) level
- The faculty/department in which the course was offered
- Whether the faculty member teaching the course was “regular” full time or part time
- Whether or not there was an attendance policy
- Whether or not there was required attendance
- Whether or not there were a number of specified excused absences; if so, how many
- Whether or not the instructor required proof for excused absences
- Whether or not absences affected the course grade; if so, how?

A total of 880 class syllabi/outlines from 35 departments were reviewed; 352 were lower (100-200) level and 528 were upper (300-400) level. They were spread across all three faculties: 250 from FASE, 282 from FNSS and 348 from FAH. The classes were taught by 650 full-time faculty and 230 part-time faculty.
Results

Description:

While there is a policy that requires all instructors to submit course syllabi/outlines to the dean’s office every semester, compliance appears to be around 75-80%. Of the 880 class syllabi:

- 814 (93%) have a written attendance policy
- 654 (74%) require attendance
- 379 (43%) specify a number of excused absences
  - 50 classes allow 1 excused absence
  - 108 classes allow 2 excused absences
  - 167 classes allow 3 excused absences
  - 30 classes allow 4 excused absences
  - 15 classes allow 5 excused absences
  - 9 classes allow 6 excused absences
- 194 (22%) require proof for any excused absence
- 754 (86%) link class attendance to the class grade
  - 387 (44%) directly link class attendance to the class grade
  - 343 (39%) link class participation (and therefore attendance) to the class grade
  - 24 (3%) require attendance for exams/quizzes only
  - 126 (14%) do not link attendance to the class grade

Some departments have a standard attendance policy that can be used by all instructors. Examples of these are appended.

Analysis:

There is no significant difference between lower and upper level classes on attendance policies.

There are significant differences:

- between full-time and part-time faculty. Part-time faculty members are more likely to require attendance than were full-time faculty. Further, while part-time faculty relate attendance to class grade full-time faculty members are more likely to relate class participation to the grade.

- amongst the 3 faculties. Attendance is required most often in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities (86%) and the Faculty of Applied Science and Education (76%) and least often in the Faculty of Natural and Social Sciences (59%). There is also a significant difference amongst faculties in how attendance relates to class grades. (See Table on next page)

- depending on class size (as determined by the quota). The smallest classes (with quotas under 30) are most likely to have attendance required (83%) and the largest classes (with quotas over 100) are least likely to have attendance required (56%).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attendance</th>
<th>A&amp;H</th>
<th>ASE</th>
<th>NSS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relates directly to grade</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relates to grade through class participation</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relates to grade through exams/quizzes</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No relationship to grade</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recommendations:**

1. Chairpersons should be reminded that ALL class syllabi should be sent to the Dean’s offices include a stated attendance policy.

2. Chairpersons should be encouraged to have a discussion with the faculty about attendance in classes—Is it a problem? Is it related to student success? Does the department have an attendance policy for all courses? Do faculty members require attendance?
Exs. Of Department Attendance Policies

Design:

Attendance for all the courses in the Department of Design is mandatory. Students will be allowed 3 absences without penalty. Any absence in excess of 3 will result in a letter grade reduction of the final course grade (per absence). All absences will be counted no matter what the reasoning or excuse. Any special medical or personal problem that occurs, where absenteeism will exceed the allowed 3 will require verification by the Dean of Students and may require course withdrawal or incomplete status on final grade.

Students are required to be on time and remain for the entire scheduled course time. Two late arrivals and/or early departures without faculty approval will equate to one absence.

Educational Foundations:

(CTE) Regular attendance is required in the belief that there is value in the interchange of ideas among the group; only the most urgent and legitimate of reasons (i.e. medical documentation) will be accepted for absence. Each student is personally responsible for all information transmitted in announcements and handouts during the class session.

(EDF) Regular attendance is expected. The class is a source of information and activities that cannot be replicated elsewhere. More than 3 absences will require a documented excuse. Repeated unexcused absences will result in a lower of your grade.

Elementary Education (field):

Attendance and punctuality at all class and field experiences are mandatory. In the event of illness or emergency, the instructor and cooperating teacher must be notified prior to 8:00 a.m. on the day of the absence or tardiness. Students who are absent will be docked one half-letter grade for each absence incurred. All elementary classroom absences must be made up depending on instructor. Two or more absences can result in being dropped from the course or automatic failing grade.

Exceptional Education:

Class attendance is required. Each student will sign an attendance sheet. I will count the number of students in the classroom and compare it against the number listed on the sheet. If there is no match, the sheet will be discarded and no one will receive attendance points that day. There are (5) attendance points available. Students must be present for the entire class to receive credit for class attendance.