

My Policies Concerning Class Attendance & Participation

Attendance & Participation Assessment: Success in my classes, as in most, is greatly favored by regular attendance and participation, and therefore I keep track of them. But I do not assess attendance and participation quantitatively by assigning points. Instead, I assess these factors qualitatively and subjectively at my discretion (i.e., A-level, B-level, etc.) at the end of the semester. This is partly because I find that most students' attendance and participation correlates rather well with their performance on written work, and therefore worrying over a precise point system is not worth it. However, I do use my qualitative assessment of attendance and participation to adjust students' final grades in borderline cases, especially when a student contributes to class at a level above their performance on written work.

Attendance Guidelines: 1) you do not earn credit just for attending class, which is expected; 2) in classes that meet twice a week, any more than THREE unexcused absences is excessive; in classes that meet three times a week any more than FOUR unexcused absences is excessive; missing this much class usually leads to misunderstanding of course materials and assignments; 3) missing more than SIX classes without valid excuses may be grounds for failing the class; and 4) valid excuses are limited to university-recognized religious observances and for well-documented major illnesses or emergencies in the immediate family.

Participation: You should try to speak up often, and I will also try to call on students. But quality of contribution counts more than quantity. Quality contributions reflect your familiarity with the readings and your effort to ask good critical questions about them, such as: What are the main questions the author tries to answer? What is the author's main argument? What specific arguments, assumptions, or evidence are used in support? What is left out? Good participation also means that you listen to others and try to engage seriously but respectfully with what others say.

When you Miss Class: There is no practical way to "make up" for missing class: lecture and discussion cannot be entirely repeated for individual students. Nor is it fair or practical to ask if "anything important was covered," or "what were the key points covered," or if you can do any extra assignments. Instead, it is your responsibility to: 1) let me know by email about your absence, preferably before class; 2) get lecture notes from a classmate; and 3) keep up with the assigned readings. After you have taken these steps, you are also welcome, as always, to meet with me to ask any specific questions you may have about the material.