

The Registrar's Chronicle

Attendance is Important

According to the Fiscal Year 2011 A-133 audit, the University was not diligent in insuring that student dates of attendance were properly recorded, in a timely manner. As a result, the University was not in compliance with the Special Tests and Provisions - Return of Title IV Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) Funds - Nonattendance.

The Findings stated that "the institution did not always document attendance in at least one class for students who received Title IV HEOA funds and return applicable Title IV HEOA funds to the Federal programs". Of concern, students were awarded funds they should not have been awarded, and funds that should have been returned, were not. The findings also declared that for students who received Title IV HEOA funds during the Fall 2010 term, 4 out of 13 student records audited did not have documentation of their attendance in at least one class. Since there wasn't any documentation, students received an average \$590 (\$534 in PELL grant funds & \$56 Federal Loan funds) for which they were not eligible.

The University relies on instructors to timely indicate non-attendance information in the Blackboard class roster, identifying students to drop for failure to attend the first class meeting. For the most part, undergraduate students are flagged. The findings urged the University to do likewise concerning graduate students. Specifically, the Department of Education recommended that the University "enhance its procedures to ensure the accurately and timely calculation and return of unearned Title IV HEOA funds to the applicable Federal programs when unable to document attendance in at least one class and return \$590 (\$534 in PELL grant funds & \$56 Federal Loan funds) to the applicable Federal programs". The University should also perform a complete review of students' attendance records to determine if any additional Title IV HEOA funds should be returned to the applicable programs.

In order to comply with the Department of Education's audit findings, the University will now require that all undergraduate and graduate faculty report first class meeting attendance by the end of the first week of the semester (end of drop & add week). Faculty must use the First Day of Attendance (FDA) tool in BlackBoard. If a student is present on the first day, faculty will bring up their class roster and press the green present button; if a student is absent, they will press the red absent button. Once this is completed for all students, the roster can be submitted. In addition, faculty will indicate the last date of class attendance on their final grade rosters through BlackBoard. When a final grade is entered that indicates the course was not completed (e.g. Incomplete grade), the instructor can immediately enter the last date of attendance. Where previously instructors teaching graduate courses did not track attendance in Blackboard, it is now a required tool and now available for use by faculty. Currently this is the only, and by far the best, option that faculty has to submit attendance-related information.

The A-133 audit highlights the importance of taking attendance. Failure to do so not only prevents the Office of the Registrar from updating the student's status in a timely manner, it also causes financial consequences—both to the institution and to the student. The institution has to pay back some, if not all, of the financial aid awarded in this circumstance, and then try to collect from the student.

So, a best or superior practice is to take attendance since such action ensures that the University is in strict compliance with federal financial aid regulations.

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