



*The PEPNet
Past Posts is a
compilation of
the most
frequently
discussed topics
on the PEPNet
listserv.*

Past Posts

Best Practices and Policies Related to Postsecondary Class Absences and/or Dropping Classes for Students Using Interpreting or Speech-to-Text Services

Postsecondary disability offices vary in their policies and practices regarding student use of interpreting and speech-to-text services. Questions about best practices for dealing with student absence from class or dropping a class are frequently posted on the listserv.

PEPNet has also developed a Frequently Asked Questions document on whether or not institutions can cancel services. You can find this document by going to <http://www.pepnet.org/faq.asp>

September 2009

Question:

Our college's policy is that Deaf students must call to inform me 24 hours in advance if they will not be attending class so that I have adequate time to cancel the interpreter. If they are a no-show 3 times in a row, their interpreter is suspended until they come in to meet with me.

I have a student that did not call me and missed a class. (She has been known to do this frequently in the past.) If she were to miss three times, I would suspend her interpreter. The kink in that plan is that there is another Deaf student in the class that utilizes the same interpreter (a VRI interpreter, by the way). I cannot forbid the no-show student from attending class, but I also cannot stop her from utilizing the interpreter. I also cannot put the onus of "policing" the student (to not use the interpreter) on the instructor. How do I give a consequence in this scenario?

Coconino Community College

Responses:

I don't see a problem. I'm assuming that the reason your college has this policy is to prevent you from spending funds for an accommodation that is being abused or misused. Since you are paying for the interpreter whether the student attends class or not, I think that the professor's attendance policy is the more relevant issue.

Location not available

When faced with this - I also pondered on this, yet it all boils down to "the service is there because there is another Deaf student in the class, lucky for that other student!" You are already saving money/interpreter by having two Deaf students in one class together rather than two separate classes, it really isn't a loss to you/your office. Therefore, this is the benefit to the Deaf student having that privilege (if I miss class the other one is there, "no worries.") Of course it is appreciated that our students cancel their services in advance with us - but do you really want to add complexity to this kind of situation?

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Now if BOTH of those Deaf students were to be absent, one calls in 24 hours in advance and the other doesn't --- what do you plan to do? If they BOTH don't call in thinking the other will show up, the obvious answer to this is they both get a strike for this class.

Location not available

Maybe evaluate your reason for having the policy in the first place. It's respectful of the student to let us know that they will not be attending class, but why have a deaf student jump through additional hoops. When you say that you have adequate time to cancel the interpreters, does this mean so that your school doesn't have to pay them?

*University of Arizona
Tucson, Arizona*

I don't see a problem either. Although it is understood that you are trying to be cost effective as well as fair (well not to the interpreter) the only person losing out on the deal in this case is the student who is not attending class. She loses the lecture. I would just let it go.

Students at a college should not be policed. Three absences constitute dismissal from class or an F. I am saying there should be some standard for all and no game playing.

Location not available

I have a similar policy. The students several consequences for missing 3 consecutive classes (per class). The first occurrence is a reminder on the importance of attending class and procedure is to call DS Office 24 hours prior. The second occurrence requires students to receive conditional services. Students have to call 30 minutes prior to start of class to confirm attendance. No call allows me to cancel services for the class. The third occurrence is when the student will have services suspended until the student meets with the interpreting coordinator. The fourth occurrence is suspension of services for the remainder of the semester. It has rarely come to suspending services for the semester.

The key part that I try to include with the students is reminding them if they plan to graduate the first step is attending classes. I also remind students that they are responsible to use their accommodations wisely. You may want to schedule a time to talk to the student missing class. Maybe the student is missing classes because s/he is not interested in the course material or the class is too early in the morning. This may be something for the student to consider next semester when registering for classes.

University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

One other thing to check out is whether your office has retention as part of its mission. If your Disability Services office has, in addition to its role as service provider, some function to assist in the retention of "minority"/underrepresented populations as part of its mission, then you might want to ask a counselor to follow up with the student regarding attendance. Perhaps the student needs some additional supports in place besides interpreting, i.e. non-disability related supports, and may need a referral to, say, your EOP office.

San Francisco State University, California

September 2008

Question:

Do any of you, especially you who are at community colleges, have a policy in place for your Deaf/HH students whereby if they decide to drop a class they must come in to talk to a counselor or other disability services staff member before they do so or their services may be in jeopardy? We have had a significant problem with students dropping classes, then being placed on academic probation. We are trying to brainstorm the best possible approach so that we can provide the guidance students need to avoid this issue. We would appreciate knowing what you all are doing. Thanks!

Columbus state Community College, OH

Responses:

Our deaf students add & drop their classes the same way hearing students do due to all kinds of reasons. They are not required to talk to anyone. We do ask the deaf students to advise the DSS coordinator of any changes in their schedules. Their services are never in jeopardy due to dropping a class.

*Wake Tech Community College
Raleigh, NC*

She wanted to see about creating a policy where if students don't talk with a guidance counselor, their services could be in jeopardy. For example if a student drops a class without talking to a counselor, they'd not be able to get priority registration or maybe no services at all the next quarter/semester.

Frankly, this kind of schematic is hard to pull off without coming off as being overly paternalistic. Of course, the students should notify your department when dropping a class so that you can assign the services elsewhere. However, students should be allowed to add/drop as permitted by school policy. There are better ways to handle this. If it's an issue of the student not knowing about school policy and academic probation, then educate them before that happens. Maybe require a meeting (if the school doesn't do that already!) to discuss those academic policies before admitting them or providing services.

If the student knows about those consequences, then there's not really much you can do other than to request that they come in to meet with a counselor if they seem to really be struggling. I feel really uneasy with the idea of forcing a meeting in order to be able to drop a class, especially considering that taking away services for refusing to meet with the counselor would most likely be illegal.

This kind of policy would also act to alienate those students who drop classes only for good cause. Speaking for myself, I would not appreciate being required to come in and meet with a counselor every time I dropped a class and having to justify that decision. That's a decision I'm perfectly capable of making on my own (and I believe most, if not all, deaf students are just as capable of making this decision on their own). Therefore, if I was in this situation, I would probably refuse to meet with a counselor, then threaten legal action if the office threatened to take away my services based on this refusal.

Location not available

I used to work in Ohio up to about a year ago out of the Zanesville office, and it's been more than a year since I left, so I don't know current RSC policy there. I do know that where I am now in Pennsylvania, for those who receive VR support, if they failed a class or are about to fail a class, and wish to retake the class, we won't pay for the class in question. I've heard of other counselors withdrawing support for the entire term/quarter/semester even if it's one class that they flunked out of or dropped out of. This could serve as a powerful motivator for many students. For the few who don't care, it could be a valuable counseling and guidance tool for VR counselors, perhaps to help them think about other career goals.

New Castle, PA

We do not have any requirement that they see someone before dropping a class. In this regard they are treated no different than all the other students. We strongly encourage that they do meet with a counselor or specialist because if they don't complete 50% of their classes they will be put on warning and if there is no improvement they can be put on probation or suspended. This 50% completion policy applies to all students not just deaf.

Austin Community College, TX

May 2008

Question:

I am curious what policy is in place in regards to providing interpreting services to students who have failed a class or have withdrawn multiple times from the same class? Do you continue to provide services as long as they register for the class? At what point are we able to stop and not be breaking a law? At what point are institutions no longer liable?

*Ivy Tech Community College
Indianapolis, IN*

Response:

We treat hearing and deaf students the same. How many times can a hearing student repeat a class? That's the number of times a deaf student can take a class with the accommodation of an interpreter or other services. In the past at Wake Tech the student handbook stated a student could repeat a class 2 times; however, that policy was not enforced. Disability Services provided accommodations for repeats as long as the student wanted to register & pay for the class. Hopefully changes will be made soon to rectify this situation college wide.

*Wake Tech Community College
Raleigh, NC*

Our Adult Basic & Secondary Education program addressed the issue of long term student retention, which allowed some students to stay in the same classes/program for years, by establishing benchmarks for each student. Students could stay in the class as long as they were making progress (5 points improvement in standardized test scores required each year); if the student failed to make the grade, then they couldn't come back the following term.

I think more classes, especially credit classes, should have similar expectations and established limits. Student retention is important, but not to the detriment of their financial aid, or their relationship with VR or other funding sources. However, these same students may also elect to audit the class - removing the hurdle of making a grade - and we're still responsible for providing the interpreters.

*Lane Community College
Eugene, OR*

We have experienced the same problem. What we do is fall back on the gpa and completion percentage requirements that all students at our college must follow. We cannot create separate standards for the Deaf students. As long as the student is allowed to attend classes we have to provide services, like it or not.

To avoid academic probation students must complete 50% of the courses they register for and maintain a 2.0 gpa to maintain good standing. Of course when they fall below these standards they are first put on alert then if they don't improve, warning and finally suspension.

Look to see what your college policy is re: poor performance.

Even though I cant deny services I can and do have serious talks with students re: their performance and when it comes time for putting interpreters in their classes they are not high on my priority list. We try to group students into the same class so if this student is taking a general class i.e. history or English and I have another deaf student in one of these classes I will tell the student, with the poor performance, that I strongly suggest they take the same class.

Austin Community College, Texas

There were a lot of good responses today about students who are deaf or hard of hearing having the same opportunities to withdraw from classes as their hearing peers. There may be some natural consequences as a result of dropping (or failing) classes -- these may include jeopardizing VR support, status with family health insurance, increased auto insurance premiums, etc.

What we didn't address is why a student might withdraw from a class. On some campuses, the final drop date can be pretty late in the semester. The student may not be doing well in a class and might be advised to withdraw from it rather than to get a low or failing grade. Which is worse? Failing a class and having it affect your GPA, or withdrawing from a class and completing less than the desired amount of credits that semester? It's hard to say unless you're the student. And some students will still be learning a lot during the time they're in class -- it's not only slackers who make the decision to drop a class. For students who really struggle with English skills, they may spend a few semesters in the same developmental/remedial class before they complete it. Is the time well spent? For some students, yes... even though progress may be slow.

You may need to revisit the mission of your institution. When I worked at a community college a long time ago, our mission was to serve a very diverse community. Many of the students enrolled in the college to improve their basic skills (these were hearing students), so the college looked at progress a bit differently. Don't let the cost of access services distract you from talking to your administration about what ANY student on your campus has the opportunity to do.

PEPNet-South