Online & Hybrid Attendance Best Practices

While new and returning scholars ended the last academic year online, many are still adjusting to our new normal. Below is a summary of the considerations of best practices for attendance to support scholars' success.

What does it mean to "attend" an online or hybrid class?

Attendance is critical to an institution appropriately using federal aid funds. Taking attendance allows the institution to make precise determinations of when a scholar last attended class, which has implications for the use of federal funds and what federal funds must be returned. When it comes to attendance in an online or hybrid course, it may seem a little unclear how participation is defined. In the Federal Student Aid Handbook, we have precise information to draw from that can help guide our decision-making when designing courses for an online or hybrid environment.

What is a fair indication of attendance?

According to the Federal Student Aid Handbook, acceptable indications of attendance in an online or hybrid course may include:

- Scholar submission of an academic assignment
- Scholar submission of an exam
- Documented scholar participation in an interactive tutorial or computer-assisted instruction
- A posting by the scholar showing the scholar's participation in an online study group that is assigned by the institution
- A posting by the scholar in a discussion forum showing the scholar's participation in an online discussion about academic matters
- An email from the scholar or other documentation showing that the scholar initiated contact with a faculty member to ask a question about an academic subject studied in the course

Prepare scholars for the online & hybrid environment

Scholars used to learning in a physical classroom may have challenges adjusting to the online and hybrid experience. To help scholars thrive in these environments, we've summarized best practices in orientating scholars to online learning.

- Develop a course instruction video that:
  - Provides tips on time management, goal setting, and planning and prioritizing work. More information can be found in the Online Academic Success Guide
  - Takes scholars on a guided video tour through your Canvas layout, pointing out the different features and functionality, including the online community. Show scholars how to find materials, assignments, and assessments, and how to communicate with you and their peers
  - Reviews course requirements, provides estimates for the time scholars should spend each week on coursework, and reviews course materials
  - Discusses the modality of the course (e.g., hybrid, rotating face-to-face) and expectations of participation

- Communicates course attendance expectations clearly at the start of the semester
- Encourages scholars to speak with you during online office hours or by appointment if they are unsure of attendance and participation expectations

Course considerations in an online & hybrid environment

- Be flexible with, but do not eliminate, due dates and penalties for late coursework
- If the scholar notifies you that they plan to miss an in-person class due to illness, consider planning for them to engage with course content via Zoom or other methods, where possible
- Adapt materials to an electronic format for scholars needing to attend class remotely
- As appropriate, consider adjusting time-limited activities, like quizzes and exams, to allow for longer completion windows
- As needed, share the UT guidelines regarding self-isolation
- Be patient with scholars and yourself. Provide flexibility without sacrificing accountability.

Scholar Success Resources

If a scholar is continuing to have issues with their health or attendance, direct the scholar to the appropriate resources.

- Academic Success Center—academic, attendance, scholar engagement concerns
- 865-974-HELP (4357)— mental health or well-being concerns (available 24/7)

Other ways to Track Scholar Engagement

Attendance is one way to track engagement. The table below provides alternatives for tracking engagement in the online environment.

Recording Attendance in Live Online Sessions
Pros and cons of attendance capturing methods

	Scholars who check in to the class are marked as present	Scholars who participate in activities are marked present	Attendance is based on quiz performance & score cutoffs	Attendance is based on the time spent in the online call
Incentive for being attentive	Low	Medium	High	Low
Benefits other than attendance	None	Boosts engagement and participation	Boosts engagement and participation	None
Could it be perceived as punitive or harsh?	No	No	Yes	Yes
Attendance tracked over the entire duration?	No	Yes, if there are multiple activities to participate in	Yes, if there are numerous tests to attempt	Yes
Scholar-side internet quality requirement	Low bandwidth	Low bandwidth	Low bandwidth	High bandwidth
As per the Federal Scholar Aid Handbook #	Invalid method	Valid method	Valid method	Valid method

As per the handbook, "in a distance education context, documenting that a scholar has logged into an online class is not sufficient, by itself, to demonstrate academic attendance by the scholar."

References

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