Attendance & Participation in Lecture-Format Classes

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 for lecture-format classes with about 30 or more students, I do not assess attendance and participation using a precise, quantitative system that attempts to record points for individual class meetings. Instead, I assess these factors qualitatively and subjectively at my discretion at the end of the semester, and then determine a grade level (i.e., A-level, B-level, etc.) and a corresponding number of course points that reflects each student's overall level of participation. 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 an excessively precise point system is not worth it. However, attendance and participation may still have a significant impact on final grades, especially in borderline cases.

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 athletic participation (but in both of these cases you must inform me of your planned absences by the end of the second week of classes); and for well-documented major illnesses or emergencies in the immediate family. 5) In cases of absence for quizzes, paper due-dates, and exams, you should inform me of your absence in advance if at all possible. Missing class on such days without prior notice to me may result in a failing grade for that assessment.

Participation Goals: 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. 4) 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.

Rubric for Assessing Participation in Lecture-Format Classes: The grading rubric below, which I have adapted from one offered by the UW-Madison *Writing Across the Curriculum* website, presents the system used in my lecture-format classes, where participation generally counts for 8% of the course grade (or 40 course points, out of a total of 500 course points).

Outstanding Contributor, A level (= 7.4 - 8 of the maximum of 8% of the course grade, or 37-40 points of 40 course points possible): Contributions in class reflect exceptional preparation. Ideas offered are always substantive, provide one or more major insights as well as direction for the class. Challenges are well substantiated and persuasively presented. If this person were not a member of the class, the quality of discussion would be diminished markedly.

Very Good Contributor, AB level (= 7.0 – 7.39 of the maximum of 8% of the course grade, or 35-36 course points of 40 possible): Contributions in class reflect thorough preparation. Ideas offered are usually substantive, provide good insights and sometimes direction for the class. Challenges are well substantiated and often persuasive. If this person were not a member of the class, the quality of discussion would be diminished.

Good Contributor, B level (= 6.6 – 6.9 of the maximum of 8% of the course grade, or 33-34 course points of 40 possible): Contributions in class reflect satisfactory preparation. Ideas offered are sometimes substantive, provide generally useful insights but seldom offer a new direction new direction for the discussion. Challenges are sometimes presented, fairly well substantiated, and are sometimes persuasive. If this person were not a member of the class, the quality of discussion would be diminished somewhat.

Contribution Needs Improvement, BC level (= 6.2 – 6.5 of the maximum of 8% of the course grade, or 31-32 course points of 40 possible): Contributions in class show attention to readings, lecture, and other course materials, but are either very few or reflect the need for more careful attention to course materials.

Contribution Weak, C level (= 5.6 – 6.1 of the maximum of 8% of the course grade, or 28-30 course points of 40 possible): Contributions are either extremely few, reflect a weak grasp of course materials, or in some cases may actually be unproductive because of a lack of connection with class topics.

Contribution Unsatisfactory, D or F levels (= 0 - 5.5 of the maximum of 8% of the course grade, or 0-27 course points of 40 possible): Contributions are either none or are highly uninformed or disruptive to the class.