
 <p>INNOVATIVE JOURNAL ЮНКВАТ МЕДИЦИНСКИ ФАКУЛТЕТ</p>	<p>Contents lists available at www.innovativejournal.in</p> <p>INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF NURSING DIDACTICS</p> <p>Homepage: http://innovativejournal.in/index.php/ijnd</p>	 <p>IJND ISSN: 2231-5454</p>
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Make Attendance Count for Nursing Students

None

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15520/ijnd.v8i06.2173>

The philosopher, pedagogue, and author Mortimer Adler (1902 – 2001) stated that, “All genuine learning is active, not passive. It (learning) involves the use of the mind, not just the memory. It is a process of discovery in which the student is the main agent, not the teacher.” Previously, Horace Mann (1796 – 1859) in his treatise entitled *On the Art of Teaching* insisted a teacher will give students a reward with every new discovery “by leading them (students) to discover truths for themselves.” Most recently in the text *Generation Z Goes to College* (2016) Corey Seemiller and Meghan Grace wrote that as the current generation of students matriculate to college, it is important to create an ethos of learning which augments students’ abilities to learn. While technology certainly plays a part in the teaching/learning process, technology per se does not necessarily ensure learning. Further, the authors suggested that learning can occur in a number of settings including *interactions* and *experiences* with peers, faculty and staff.

Throughout nearly 30 years of teaching Pre Nursing students at multiple schools including courses in nutrition for human development, as well as disease prevention, I have developed (and will occasionally modify) a personal Teaching and Grading Philosophy Statement. Part of this Statement discusses the characteristics of an “A Student” as well as those of a “C Student.” These various characteristics include Preparation, Curiosity, Retention, Attitude, Talent, Results, as well as Attendance:

The “A Student” – AN OUTSTANDING INDIVIDUAL

ATTENDANCE – “A” students have virtually perfect attendance. Their commitment to class is similar to that of the professor. If an absence is anticipated, “A” students will make necessary arrangements with the professor ahead of time.

The “C” Student – A TYPICAL INDIVIDUAL

ATTENDANCE – “C” students miss class and/or are tardy frequently. They have less than good time management, scheduling, and prioritizing skills and place other issues ahead of this class. Occasionally, poor health or constant fatigue renders them as being unable to perform well.

However, in Pre Nursing, or Nursing Program courses, where enrollment may be high; or there is an emphasis on presenting material to prepare students for high-stake examinations, leaving little time for other tasks to be

accomplished (e.g., tracking attendance), what is an effective strategy which may improve attendance, therefore boost student participation and ultimately learning?

The following represents a recommendation (based on personal experience and observation) to faculty teaching Pre Nursing or Nursing students: 1) attendance daily attendance should be taken; 2) attendance should involve the students being an active participant in this process; and 3) when class attendance is incentivized, it can not only motivate students to come to class, but may help improve class grades as well.

Certainly not all, but many schools currently utilize a student ID card swipe system for automated attendance taking. However, this paper proposes and recommends attendance being determined via a simple daily class participation by the student. Everyone (daily) receives a disposable 3x5 card, with which students are asked to research on their phone and write responses to something salient to class in a given day. Examples include (but not limited to) new terms to define; a summary of a published research paper; or equations to solve. Subsequently, students are typically asked to explain, share, and teach what they just learned/discovered with a class colleague, i.e. the student is actively participating in delivering class material. Daily, cards which include the student’s name are returned to the faculty who records attendance. This process consumes 8 to 12% of class time, as well as several minutes subsequently to record students’ attendance. Some literature has identified attendance, (active) participation, and work completed (not necessarily grades however) as “evidence of course pursuit.”

Nearly three decades of teaching nursing students indicates that students who are more likely to attend class, are similarly more likely to achieve a higher course grade. While based on this observation, one cannot conclude a cause and effect relationship between attending class and the final grade, nursing students should be at the very least encouraged to attend. Moreover, it is recommended that attendance be incentivized; and that attendance comprise some component in determining the final grade. Lastly, it is recommended that students not simply swipe an ID card, nor that a faculty “take roll”; rather a brief student-focused activity should be performed as part of the attendance recording process. By doing so, you may well see improved attendance, improved participation, and improved learning.