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## Attendance Tracking Gets Upgrades, Changes this Semester

Effort helps improve retention, keeps university in compliance with federal regulations

JANUARY 19, 2016 BY MICHAEL NEWSOM



The university has announced changes to its attendance recording policy, which take effect this semester, and upgrades to the online system instructors use to record the class roll data.

OXFORD, Miss. – The University of Mississippi continues to improve its policies and procedures for instructors to verify classroom attendance in an effort to make sure students who don't go to class also don't wrongfully receive financial aid.

Since the fall 2015 semester, instructors have been required to take attendance using the "Attendance Verification Interface" of the myOleMiss class rolls and grades section, or use attendance scanners, and to confirm students' attendance during the first few days of

the semester. This semester, faculty will get to use an upgraded and improved interface system to record the data.

"Attending classes and interacting with faculty are essential elements of our mission," said Noel Wilkin, senior associate provost. "We have a responsibility to document whether students attend classes. This information is critical in our predictions of student success and ensures compliance with federal requirements."

Instructors are required to confirm students' attendance at least once during the first two weeks of class during fall and spring semesters. If attendance hasn't been verified in a class by an instructor, and if the student has not voluntarily dropped the course, the university will administratively drop unconfirmed students from classes.

Beginning this year, the rules are also in effect during intersession and summer sessions. During the shorter summer sessions and intersessions, the attendance must be registered during the first few days of class.

The new procedures will help the university with its overall goal of providing the best education possible for students, said Brandi Hephner LaBanc, vice chancellor for student affairs. The administration appreciates faculty efforts to track attendance and comply with these procedures, she said.

"We appreciate the time and attention to detail that our faculty have invested to make this successful," Hephner LaBanc said. "The true beneficiary of this new process is still the student – we use these data to help reach out to students, support and retain them. This is just another way Ole Miss personalizes the university experience."

The new system will help identify no-shows very early in the semester and also identify students whose financial aid must be modified because they dropped courses or never attended. Attendance is mandatory for establishing eligibility for aid purposes.

The new requirement also helps the university more accurately determine enrollment and credit hour production data, which is submitted to external groups, including the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning.

The data that results will also help the university develop ways to maximize its retention rates.

Another benefit of the new measures is making seats available more quickly to other students who may wish to take a specific class.

The process has worked well so far, said Laura Diven-Brown, director of financial aid.

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"The fall implementation went very smoothly, across thousands of course sections, and we truly appreciated the cooperation of our faculty and students with the process," Diven-Brown said.

Instructors have an important role in monitoring attendance because the rules have many financial aid repercussions for students, she said. Failing to attend has consequences for Title IV financial aid, including Pell Grants and student and parent loans.

The university also will be locking enrollment for federal aid purposes, which is also a new policy. For spring semester, this will happen at the end of day Feb. 15.

"If the locked enrollment doesn't match the awards students received, we will have to make adjustments, which could include paybacks," Diven-Brown said. "So it is very important to confirm students' attendance during the first few weeks of class, since there may be required financial aid adjustments."

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