# Class Attendance: An Investigation of Why Undergraduates Choose to Not Attend Class

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#### Abstract

Limited research is available on the reasons undergraduate students choose to not attend class, especially literature focused on students in agriculture and natural resources. This study examines this issue by surveying undergraduate students on potential reasons to not attend class. A majority of the students agreed upon 23 reasons for not attending class and those reasons were related to personal issues, class structure, instructor behavior and issues, student performance and class scheduling. The number one reason was attendance is not taken in the class.

#### Introduction

American society and the U.S. government place great importance on higher education because of individual and societal benefits that are associated with higher education (Ishitani, 2006). This commitment and belief in higher education is demonstrated through our societal and government investments (Ishitani, 2006) and the plethora of research investigating attrition in higher education (Bean, 1982; Braxton et al., 1988a; Braxton et al., 1988b; Chen and DesJardins, 2010; Gilardi and Guglielmetti, 2011; Ishitani, 2003, 2006; Ishitani and DesJardins, 2002; Iwai and Churchill, 1982; James, 1988; Jones et al., 2010; Mallette and Cabrera, 1991; Metzner and Bean, 1987; Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Pascarella and Chapman, 1983; Pascarella et al., 1983; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1978, 1980, 1983; Stage, 1988; Stage and Hossler, 1989; Stampen and Cabrera, 1986, 1988). The aforementioned attrition studies have examined variables such as undergraduate research,

student background characteristics (e.g., gender, race and ethnicity, high school academic achievement and parents' educational attainment), community college, institutional characteristics, engagement styles and financial aid with the broad goal of decreasing attrition or increasing degree completion. Moreover, it seems almost unnecessary to say, but another important aspect of decreasing attrition and obtaining a college degree is probably class attendance and fewer inquiries have sought to understand why undergraduate students choose to not attend a given class.

Friedman et al. (2001) stated "class attendance is a puzzle" (p. 124) and undergraduates choosing to not attend class appears to be a growing trend (Massingham and Herrington, 2006). Investigations into class attendance rates have reported on any given day 20-40% of undergraduate students are electing to not attend class (Friedman et al., 2001; Romer, 1993; University of Florida, 2009). This is troubling and should be of concern for administrators and faculty since numerous studies have shown that not attending class has a negative effect on class success (Chen and Lin, 2008; Clump et al., 2003; Devadoss and Foltz, 1996; Dobkin et al., 2007; Gump, 2005; Marburger, 2001; Marburger, 2006; Massingham and Herrington, 2006; Rodgers, 2001; Romer, 1993)

In addition to affecting a student's educational success, Wyatt (1992) stated when students skip class this behavior negatively affects faculty morale and Devadoss and Foltz (1996) suggested absenteeism also negatively affects the students who attend class and the overall teaching-learning environment (Devadoss and

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Foltz, 1996). Correspondingly, Westrick et al. (2009) reported the consequences of absenteeism are more far reaching than students' academic performance and disruptions in the classroom. Students who frequently miss class often do not recognize that the classroom is a community to which they belong and that when they are absent, learning declines, student and teacher morale decreases and academic standards are compromised. (p. 1) Furthermore, Westrick et al. noted faculty-student interactions and the observation of faculty are crucial elements of the professional socialization process of college students.

Determining specific reasons for why undergraduate students are choosing to not attend class may generate valuable information for administrators and faculty that could be used to improve class attendance, thus improving the learning environment and student success. This research might also help to reduce attrition in higher education. This study will examine the issue of absenteeism by investigating the reasons why undergraduates in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences at the University of Florida are choosing to not attend class.

#### Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The theoretical bases for this study are Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of basic needs and Atkinson's (1957) expectancy-value theory of achievement motivation. The aforementioned theoretical bases allow the researchers to address the reasons for not attending class in a holistic manner. Maslow (1970) posited that there is a hierarchy of five basic needs that affect motivation: (a) physiological, (b) safety, (c) belongingness and love, (d) esteem and (e) self-actualization. Additionally, "Maslow (1968, 1970) believed human actions are unified by being directed toward goal attainment" (Schunk, 1999, p. 308). This theory is most often thought of as a fixed order of needs, but Maslow (1970) suggested that the hierarchy "is not nearly so rigid" (p. 51) and gave several example of exceptions. "A more realistic description of the hierarchy would be in terms of decreasing percentages of satisfaction as we go up the hierarchy of prepotency" (Maslow, 1970, p. 54). Atkinson's (1957) expectancyvalue theory of achievement motivation postulated, the strength of motivation to perform some act is assumed to be a multiplicative function of the strength of the motive, the expectancy (subjective probability) that the act will have as a consequence the attainment of an incentive and the value of the incentive: Motivation = f (Motive X Expectancy X Incentive). (pp. 360-361)

Hence, expectancy-value theory of achievement motivation suggests, "behavior depends on how much

individuals value a particular outcome (goal, reinforcer) and the expectations of attaining that outcome as a result of performing given behaviors" (Schunk, 1999, p. 314). In an educational setting, Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of basic needs and Atkinson's (1957) expectancyvalue theory of achievement motivation may provide motivational reason for not attending class and generate valuable information that could be used to increase attendance, thus improving student performance.

#### **Class Attendance and Performance**

A review of the literature indicated class attendance decreases as the academic term progresses (Marburger, 2001; Rodgers, 2001; Van Blerkom, 1992, Zhao and Stinson, 2005) and the reasons for this decline in attendance have only been hypothesized. Most of the research done to determine if attendance has an effect on class performance has been conducted in the area of economics education. Rodgers (2001) found in a study of 200 business and economic students that attendance had a significant effect on performance. Students who had average attendance scored between 1.3 and 3.4% lower than students with perfect attendance. The average attendance was 68% with the percentage of students attending class being higher in the first half of the semester compared to the second half of the semester. Marburger (2001) found absences increase by 9% on Friday as compared to Monday and Wednesday and that "overall, absenteeism increased the probability that the average student would respond incorrectly to the average exam question by 14.6% on the first exam, 14.4% on the second exam and 7.5% on the third exam" (p. 105). According to Marburger (2006), absent students were 9% to 14% more likely to respond incorrectly to course content covered in their absence than were students who were present. Dobkin et al. (2007) reported in three large economic classes:

A 10 percentage point increase in the pre-midterm attendance rate is associated with a 0.13 standard deviation increase in the midterm score. Similarly, a 10 percentage point increase in the total course attendance rate is associated with a 0.15 standard deviation increase in the final exam. (p. 11)

Romer (1993) found a significant relationship between attendance and performance in an intermediate macroeconomics course. A student that only attended a quarter of the lectures earned a C– compared to a B+ for students who attended all of the lectures. Furthermore, attendance alone accounted for 31% of the variance in performance. Romer also found at three elite universities/colleges that absences in economic classes were about one third on a typical day. Zhao and Stinson (2005) divided two macroeconomics sections into four

consecutive three and a half week time periods and found on average students missed 16.57, 18.57, 21.14 and 21.71% of classes. "A typical student, who missed 2.4 weeks throughout the semester, could earn 4.3 points more if he/she were not absent from any class" (Zhao and Stinson, 2005, p. 5). Massingham and Herrington (2006) stated "students who attended lectures and tutorials had a better chance of success on all assessments in particular the final exam" (p. 97). Chen and Lin (2008) reported attendance had a significant impact on class performance and the more a student attended class, the greater the positive effect of attending. A study of agricultural economics students by Devadoss and Foltz (1996) found attendance rates that were higher (89%) than Romer (1993) and Rodgers (2001) (67 and 68%) and suggested the difference may be due to the fact class sizes were smaller and were comprised of students specializing in agricultural economics. However, they too reported a significant relationship exists between attendance and class performance.

The research done in areas outside of economics is limited, but similar results have been found. In Adolescent Development and Introduction to Educational Psychology classes, Van Blerkom (1996) found a "significant correlation between class attendance and final grade in *the courses*, r = .46, p < .001" (p. 5). Van Blerkom (1992) found attendance in undergraduate psychology courses steadily declined during the semester and class attendance correlated significantly with course grades. These findings are consistent with studies of economic students (Marburger, 2001; Rodgers, 2001; Zhao and Stinson, 2005). Gump (2005) studied 300 undergraduates in an Introduction of Japanese Culture course and reported a significant strong negative correlation between absences and final grades for each of the four semesters of data collection. Seniors were found to have the most absences and second lowest average of final grades. Sophomores had the least absences and the highest average of final grades. Gump (2004) also looked at students from an Introduction of Japanese Culture course and found that students with a B+ average or higher had 0.5 absences (SD = 0.7) compared to 1.4 absences (SD = 1.5) for students that had an average below a B+. Gump (2006), a study of 172 undergraduates, reported a positive relationship between the importance students attributed to attendance and their attendance rates.

#### **Reasons for Not Attending Class**

Limited research is available that seeks to determine the reasons why undergraduate students choose to miss class. Van Blerkom (1992) reported students in 17 sections of undergraduate psychology classes gave the following reasons for being absent:

- (a) the need to complete an assignment or extra credit project or to study for another course
- (b) the class was boring
- (c) severe illness such as the flu
- (d) minor illness such as a headache, cold, or sore throat
- (e) too tired to go to class because of active social life
- (f) oversleeping. (p. 491)

Friedman et al. (2001) asked 50 undergraduates to provide a reason for not attending each course that they were currently taking. After eliminating duplicates, 33 reasons were produced and were categorized into the following categories: (a) unavoidable inability to be present, (b) choice of other school activities, (c) choice of other non-school-related activities, (d) irresponsible leisure pursuits, (e) avoiding anticipated class experiences and (f) lack of incentive. In the same study, Friedman et al. reported a survey of 333 students enrolled in multiple sections of a social science course revealed that the most common reasons for being absent were (a) being sick (38.1%), (b) being tired or overslept because of completing schoolwork the night before (32.5%), (c) being tired or overslept because of fun the night before (32.0%), (d) personal task (22.0%), (e) attendance is not taken or does not influence my grade (21.6%), (f) wanted to take a break during the time class was meeting (20.7%) and (g) out of town or on my way out of (or back to) town (20.1%). A survey used by Gump (2004) gave students six rationales for missing class (weather, health, preparedness, preoccupation, inconvenience and personal choice). The students were asked to choose all options that applied to their absences or potential absences.

The most common rationale chosen for missing class was health (84%) followed by preoccupation (66%), weather (42%), personal choice (26%), inconvenience (16%) and preparedness (8%). A focus group of 33 pharmacy students gave the following reasons most often for not attending class: "*class is before or after test, faculty read their notes, personal logistics and 2 or more hour breaks before or after class.*" (Fjortoft, 2005, p. 110). Massingham and Herrington (2006) stated:

University students include as their main reasons for not attending lectures and tutorials as being: busy, sick, at work, bored, having technology alternatives (eduStream) and the teacher. When there are no health and lifestyle factors involved, the most important influence on attendance is student attitudes to learning and motivation, such as "the topic was boring" and "I don't like the subject." (p. 96)

Westrick et al. (2009) reported that the top five main reasons for a pharmacy student not attending class was

(a) being sick, (b) tired or overslept because of studying the night before, (c) working on an assignment or studying for a test, (d) attendance is not taken or does not influence grade and (e) course content is available from another source.

Health/illness, course content being available from another source, need to complete an assignment or study for a test, being tired, oversleeping, attendance is not taken, class or topic is boring and preoccupation/busy are commonalities in the literature on reasons to not attend class.

#### **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this study was to examine an entire college with 21 undergraduate majors and more than 50 specializations at a large land-grant university to add to the limited research of specific reasons why undergraduate students elect to not attend class. The objectives that framed this study were as follows:

- 1. Identify the top 10 reasons why undergraduate students in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences at the University of Florida do not attend a given class.
- 2. Determine if attendance in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences at the University of Florida is influenced by (a) class size, (b) class scheduling, (c) class structure, (d) course classification (e) instructor behaviors and issues, (f) student performance, (g) personal issues and (h) learning activities.
- 3. Compare top 10 reasons for not attending class based on student attendance.

#### Methodology Research Design, Population and Sample

The research design was descriptive survey research. The target population of this study (N = 3781) was all undergraduates in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences at the University of Florida. The sample was a convenience sample of 785 students in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences at the University of Florida, which consisted of 21% of the target population. Participants self-reported gender, age, class level, major, ethnicity, when they were admitted to the university, grade point average and the number of times students did not attend class during the past four weeks. The sample consisted of 197 males and 588 females. The average age of the sample was almost 22 years old (M =21.95, SD = 4.88) with a range of 17 to 61 years old and a mode of 21. The class level of the sample was 13.4% freshman, 13.5% sophomores, 31.3% juniors and 41.9%

seniors. Their mean grade point average was 3.37 (SD = 0.46) on a four point scale and 64.3% were admitted as freshman while the remaining 35.7% were transfer students.

The participants described their ethnicity as the following: 0.05% American Indian or Alaska Native, 5.1% as Asian, 5.4% as Black or African American, 1.1% as Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, 76.1% as white and 11.2% as other. Additionally, all majors within the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences at University of Florida were represented and the students reported that they were absent from class-sessions approximately four times (M = 4.06, SD = 4.64) during the four weeks prior to taking the survey.

Demographic information was obtained from the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences and the sample was found to be representative of the target population on all demographic variables except for gender. As a result, the data were weighted according to Biemer and Christ (2008) to create a sample that was representative of the target population in regard to gender. After the data was weighted based on gender, the data was compared to the target population again and the sample was determined to be representative of the target population on all demographic variables.

#### Instrumentation

The survey used in this study was developed in four phases. First, the researchers searched the class attendance literature to develop a list of potential reasons why students would choose to not attend class. Secondly, the researchers added potential reasons to the aforementioned list based on Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of basic needs and Atkinson's (1957) expectancy-value theory of achievement motivation. Thirdly, the researchers visited a large lecture course of approximately 150 students in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences at the University of Florida. The students in the lecture course were given the list of potential reasons developed in the first two phases and were asked to delete reasons they felt were not appropriate and add reasons that were not represented on the list. In the fourth and final phase, the researchers met to discuss and evaluate the reasons deleted and added from the list by the students of the large lecture course.

A consensus was reached among the researchers and that list became the items for the class attendance survey. The survey focused on the statement, "I am likely to not attend class when..." with a Likert scale of 1 to 5 where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree or disagree, 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree. Furthermore, prior to data analysis, the researchers clustered the survey items into the following categories:

(a) class size, (b) class scheduling, (c) class structure, (d) course classification (e) instructor behaviors and issues, (f) student performance, (g) personal issues and (h) learning activities.

#### **Data Collection**

Data were collected during the last five weeks of the fall 2010 semester at the University of Florida online using the Qualtrics Survey software. Dillman et al. (2009) web survey implementation procedures guided the methods used to obtain responses from the target population and multiple contacts were used. Four emails were sent approximately one week apart to the entire target population (N = 3781): (a) prenotice, (b) email with a link to the survey, (c) reminder email with a link to the survey. The undergraduate students in this study volunteered to participate and take the online survey by digitally signing an informed consent that was approved by the University of Florida's Institutional Review Board. The survey took approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete.

#### **Data Analysis**

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data and percentages were reported. The researchers combined the strongly disagree and disagree response categories to obtain disagreement percentages and the agree and strongly agree response categories to obtain agreement percentages. To address the issue of missing values in the dataset due to item nonresponse, the multiple imputation procedure was used in the Statistical Analysis System (SAS), as described by Yuan (2000). Multiple imputation (IM) is one of the recommended methods used by statisticians to address the problem of attrition due to list-wise deletion of observations with one or more missing values in multivariate analyses (see Schafer and Graham, 2002).

Furthermore, the terminology proposed by Davis (1971) was used to describe the magnitude of the associations between reasons students were likely to

miss class and the number of class sessions absent the four weeks prior to completing the survey. To that end, correlations from .01 to .09 are negligible, .10 to .29 are low, .30 to .49 are moderate, .50 to .69 are substantial, .70 to .99 are very strong and a correlation of 1.00 is perfect. Spearman's correlational coefficient was used due to the ordinal nature of the data. The number of class sessions in which a student was absent the four weeks prior to completing the survey were grouped into the following categories: (a) no absences, (b) one to two absences, (c) three to five absences, (d) six to 10 absences and (e) greater than or equal to 11 absences.

#### **Methodological Limitations**

The findings of this study may not be generalizable beyond the target population – undergraduate students in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences at the University of Florida. Therefore, readers should use caution when generalizing the results of this study unless data confirms the target population of this study is representative of other populations of undergraduate students. Furthermore, close-ended survey questions limit the participants in the reasons for choosing to not attend class, thus all reasons for choosing to not attend class may not be represented.

## **Results**

### **Objective One**

Identify the Top 10 Reasons Why Undergraduate Students in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences at the University of Florida Do Not Attend a Given Class.

Five of the top 10 reasons for not attending class were related to personal issues, but the most common reason was related to class structure, "Attendance is not taken," with 93.4% agreement. Class structure accounted for two of the top 10 reasons and instructor behaviors and issues accounted for three of the top 10 reasons. All of the top 10 reasons were agreed upon by a majority of students and the agreement percentage ranged from 62.5% to 93.4% (see Table 1).

#### **Objective Two**

Determine if Attendance is Influenced by (a) Class Size, (b) Class Scheduling, (c) Class Structure, (d) Course Classification, (e) Instructor Behaviors and Issues, (f) Student Performance, (g) Personal Issues and (h) Learning Activities.

uble 1. Top Ten Reasons Why Undergraduate Students in the College of Agriculti	ıral
and Life Sciences at the University of Florida Do Not Attend a Given Class	

I am likely to not attend class when	%	Category
1. Attendance is not taken	93.4	Class Structure
2. An emergency arises - I have to meet an urgent unexpected need	90.6	Personal
3. I have a severe illness such as the flu	89.4	Personal
4. I have a funeral to attend	88.4	Personal
5. I have permission from the instructor to miss class because of a school related function	82.9	Instructor
6. The instructor does not know the content	70.1	Instructor
7. It would allow me to extend an out-of-town trip	67.7	Personal
8. I have a wedding to attend	64.6	Personal
9. The course content is available from another source (e.g., I can get it from the text, web, tutor, classmate's notes)	63.7	Class Structure
10. Lectures of poor quality	62.5	Instructor

#### **Class Attendance:**

#### **Class size**

The majority of students did not agree class size influenced their decision to attend class. The percentage of students who agreed, however, that their attendance would be influenced by class sizes of greater than 45 students was substantially higher than those agreeing that a smaller class would affect attendance (Table 2). Additionally, the magnitudes of the associations between class size and the number of class sessions absent the four weeks prior to completing the survey were low.

#### **Class scheduling**

A complete summary of class scheduling issues is presented in Table 3. Only one reason was agreed upon by the majority of students, "The class meets the day before or after a holiday." Nearly half reported a religious holiday would influence attendance. The least agreed upon reasons dealt with certain days of the week, including Thursday, Tuesday and Wednesday. A majority (68%) of the class scheduling items had a low association with the number of class sessions absent the four weeks prior to completing the survey. However, 26% of the class scheduling items had moderate associations.

#### **Class structure.**

Students agreed several issues related to class structure influenced their decision to attend class (see Table 4). Six reasons were agreed upon by the majority of students, (a) "Attendance is not taken," (b) "The course content is

available from another source (e.g., I can get it from the text, web, tutor, classmate's notes)," (c) "The material covered in class is not consistently relevant to the exam," (d) "Attendance does not influence my grade," (e) "I have technology alterna-

tives to get class content," and (f) "The instructor does not allow students to enter late." The least agreed upon reasons were (a) "My peers often miss class," (b) "I do not have the required materials for class," and (c) "The chairs/desks are not comfortable." Furthermore, 44% of the class structure items were moderately associated with the number of class sessions absent the four weeks prior to completing the survey.

#### **Course classification**

The majority of students did not agree course classification influenced their decision to attend class (Table 5). However, the students indicated they were more likely to miss class if the course was a general education course and were less likely to miss class if the course was a general elective not within their major, an elective within their major, or a required core course within their major. In addition, all of the course classification items had low associations with the number of class sessions absent the four weeks prior to completing the survey.

#### Instructor behaviors and issues

A summary of instructor issues is presented in Table 6. The majority of students agreed six instructor behaviors and issues influenced their decision to attend class. These included (a) "I have permission from the instructor to miss class because of a school related function," (b) "The instructor does not know the content," (c) "Lectures of poor quality," (d) "The instructor does not present information in an interesting way," (e) "The instructor does not present information in a clear manner," and (f) "The instructor just reads from his/her notes." The least agreed upon reasons were (a) "The instructor digresses," (b) "The instructor's handwriting is not readable," and (c) "The instructor does not allow for questions." Additionally, items related to the psychological closeness of the instructor and student had similar and consistent agreement ranging from 40.2% to 45.3% agreement and the associations between instructor behaviors and issue items and the number of class sessions absent the four weeks prior to completing the survey were low (74%) and moderate (26%).

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Table 2. Class Size Issues that Influence Class Attendance						
I am likely to not attend class when	Agree %	Neither agree or disagree %	Disagree %	r <sub>s</sub>		
The class has more than 45 students	16.6	16.6	66.8	0.28		
The class has 30 to 45 students	3.0	27.6	69.4	0.28		
The class has 15 to 30 students	0.7	11.9	87.4	0.10		
The class has less than 15 students	0.2	11.6	88.2	0.16		

Table 3. Class Scheduling Issues that Influence Class Attendance					
I am likely to not attend class when	Agree %	Neither agree or disagree %	Disagree %	r <sub>s</sub>	
The class meets the day before or after a holiday	56.8	14.8	28.3	0.28	
It is a religious holiday	49.8	17.7	32.5	0.03	
It is my only class of the day	36.8	14.2	49.0	0.38	
The class is scheduled in the morning	32.9	14.9	52.2	0.36	
The class is hard to reach (e.g. far from where I live or work, parking is inconvenient)	31.6	16.1	52.2	0.30	
The class is scheduled at an inconvenient time	30.5	18.5	51.0	0.31	
I have a two or more hour break before or after class	27.8	16.8	55.5	0.27	
The class meets on Friday	22.6	21.8	55.5	0.21	
It is my first or last class of the day	20.5	16.7	62.8	0.30	
The class session meets more than 3 hours	19.6	18.2	62.2	0.12	
The class is scheduled to meet in the evenings	17.0	17.7	65.3	0.17	
The class session meets 2 to 3 hours	13.6	16.6	69.8	0.12	
The class session is less than 1 hour	11.0	17.2	71.8	0.18	
The class is scheduled to meet at a location that is not the normal meeting location	10.5	22.3	67.2	0.16	
The class meets on Monday	7.5	21.0	71.6	0.24	
The class is scheduled to meet in the afternoon	6.3	18.6	75.1	0.13	
The class session is 1 to 2 hours	3.2	23.6	73.2	0.22	
The class meets on Wednesday	1.1	17.8	81.0	0.16	
The class meets on Tuesday	0.7	23.6	75.7	0.20	
The class meets on Thursday	0.1	22.9	77.0	0.18	

I am likely to not attend class when...

Attendance does not influence my grade

I am not interested in the course content

The course does not have pop quizzes

The course content is available from another

source (e.g., I can get it from the text, web, tutor,

The material covered in class is not consistently

I have technology alternatives to get class content

The instructor does not allow students to enter late

The instructor does not provide materials beyond that offered in the text, PowerPoint slides, or

I do not have the required materials for class

Attendance is not taken

classmate's notes)

relevant to the exam

I can make up the work

readings

I

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Т

I do not feel obligated to attend

Other students are disruptive

My peers often miss class

The scheduled class topic is boring

The chairs/desks are not comfortable

A summary of student performance issues is presented in Table 7. The majority of students agreed two student performance issues influenced their decision to attend class. The two reasons were (a) "I have deadlines for other academic work," and (b) "I am studying for a test in another course." Additionally, "I have already earned enough points for the grade I want" was agreed upon by 50% of the students. The least agreed upon reasons dealt with the level of success currently being experienced in a course and the difficulty of the course.

Moreover, 42% of the associations between student performance items and the number of class sessions absent the four weeks prior to completing the survey were moderate and the remaining 58% were low.

#### **Personal issues**

**Disagree %** 

1.5

23.1

24.8

30.8

33.1

32.0

33.2

38.2

52.8

51.5

54.8

49.7

55.5

611

57.1

73.9

 $r_{s}$ 

0.38

0.29

0.27

There were eight personal issues students agreed influenced their decision to attend class and a complete summary is presented in Table 8. The items agreed upon by the majority of students included (a) "An emergency arises - I have to meet an urgent unexpected need," (b)

"I have a severe illness such as the flu," (c) "I have a funeral to attend," (d) "It would allow me to extend an out-of-town trip," (e) "I - 0.07 have a wedding to attend," (f) "I 0.35 have a job related conflict (e.g., an interview or work shift)," (g) 0.34 "I oversleep," and (h) "I have the 0.39 opportunity to attend a career/pro-0.39 0.16 fessional development event." The least agreed upon reasons were 0.39 related to hunger, personal appear-0.37 ance and dislike for other students. 0.20 Negligible (22%), low (59%) and moderate (19%) associations were 0.19 found between the personal issues 0.29 items and the number of class ses-0.19 0.20 sions absent the four weeks prior to completing the survey.

The majority of students did not agree any learning activities influenced their decision to attend class (see Table 9). The reason with the greatest agreement related to learning activities was "I cannot concentrate during lecture," and the reason with the least agreement was "The class contains group activities/discussion." Additionally, the associations between the learning activity items and the number of class sessions absent the four weeks prior to completing the survey were low (71%) and moderate (29%).

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Learning activities .24 .28 .23 .17

Table 5. Course Classifications that Influence Class Attendance					
am likely to not attend class when	Agree %	Neither agree or disagree %	Disagree %		
he class is a general education course	17.7	13.9	68.4	0	
he class is a general elective not within my major	10.6	20.6	68.7	0	
his class is an elective within my major	3.2	20.1	76.7	0	
he class is a required core course within my major	1.5	8.5	90.0	0	
				_	
		~ ~ .			

Table 4. Class Structure Issues that Influence Class Attendance

Agree %

93.4

63.7

62.3

55.4

51.2

50.3

48.3

44.8

28.0

26.7

26.5

22.2

21.2

20.3

18.2

8.0

Neither agree

or disagree %

5.0

13.2

12.9

139

15.7

17.7

18.4

17.0

19.2

21.8

18.7

28.1

23.2

18.6

24.7

18.0

Tuble 0. Instructor Denaviors and Issues that Influence Class Altenaunce					
I am likely to not attend class when	Agree %	Neither agree or disagree %	Disagree %	r <sub>s</sub>	
I have permission from the instructor to miss class because of a school related function	82.9	8.9	8.2	0.11	
The instructor does not know the content	70.1	13.2	16.7	0.26	
Lectures of poor quality	62.5	14.4	23.1	0.32	
The instructor does not present information in an interesting way	56.8	15.7	27.6	0.29	
The instructor does not present information in a clear manner	54.1	13.4	32.4	0.27	
The instructor just reads from his/her notes	51.4	15.7	32.8	0.33	
The instructor is rude	45.3	21.0	33.7	0.22	
The instructor does not care if I am in class	43.9	21.9	34.2	0.27	
The instructor does not notice if I am in class	42.0	20.3	37.7	0.28	
I am not respected by my instructor	40.2	21.9	37.9	0.19	
The instructor's speech is unclear	39.8	18.4	41.7	0.28	
The class is boring	35.5	17.6	46.9	0.34	
I do not like the instructor	29.5	22.1	48.3	0.27	
The instructor is repetitious	28.3	24.5	47.2	0.33	
I like the subject matter, but the instructor is boring	24.4	19.8	55.7	0.30	
The instructor goes too quickly	21.9	21.7	56.4	0.12	
The instructor digresses	18.7	33.0	48.3	0.22	
The instructor does not allow for questions	18.1	24.7	57.2	0.11	
The instructor's handwriting is not readable	18.1	22.8	59.0	0.22	

#### **Objective Three**

Compare Top 10 Reasons for Not Attending Class based on Student Attendance.

A few differences were found between the top 10 reasons students were likely to miss class and the number of class sessions in which students were absent (Table 10). "Attendance is not taken" was present among every category except the one to two absences category. "I have a wedding to attend" was not found in the six to

10 absences category. "The instructor does not know the content" was not identified in the  $\geq$  11 absences category. "It would allow me to extend an out-of-town trip" was not present in the no absences category. "The content is available from another source (e.g., I can get it from the text, web, tutor, classmate's notes)" was not found in the no absences or one to two absences categories. "The material covered in class is not consistently relevant to

Table 7. Student Performance Issues that Influence Class Attendance					
I am likely to not attend class when	Agree %	Neither agree or disagree %	Disagree %	r,	
I have deadlines for other academic work	58.6	15.4	26.0	0.33	
I am studying for a test in another course	56.6	15.5	28.0	0.40	
I have already earned enough points for the grade I want	50.0	15.5	34.4	0.31	
Class is before or after a test	45.1	14.6	40.3	0.32	
I do not find the class challenging	32.0	19.2	48.8	0.30	
I know the grade that I will receive	32.4	19.5	48.0	0.29	
I have not completed an assignment that is due	31.5	17.9	50.6	0.23	
I have not prepared for class	17.2	24.2	58.6	0.25	
I am not capable of achieving the course objectives	10.5	21.7	67.9	0.17	
Assignments are too easy	11.3	16.6	72.1	0.18	
I am currently not experiencing success in the course	11.7	14.5	73.8	0.22	
The course is difficult	3.9	14.3	81.8	0.17	

Table 8. Personal Issues that Influence Class Attendance				
I am likely to not attend class when	Agree %	Neither agree or disagree %	Disagree %	r <sub>s</sub>
An emergency arises - I have to meet an urgent unexpected need	90.6	5.3	4.1	0.09
I have a severe illness such as the flu	89.4	6.5	4.1	0.12
I have a funeral to attend	88.4	7.4	4.2	0.09
It would allow me to extend an out-of-town trip	67.7	13.6	18.8	0.31
I have a wedding to attend	64.6	19.2	16.2	0.15
I have a job related conflict (e.g., an interview or work shift)	55.7	19.2	25.1	0.09
I oversleep	55.1	17.4	27.5	0.36
I have the opportunity to attend a career/professional development event	52.7	21.7	25.7	0.16
I have a personal task/errand to do at that time (e.g., dentist appointment, airport pickup, shopping)	49.4	17.2	33.4	0.26
I have a campus-related appointment or activity at the time of class (e.g., to meet an advisor, to participate in an athletic event, attend an extracurricular activity)	48.2	19.9	31.8	0.20
I have to care for someone else (e.g., child or sick person)	46.4	24.8	28.8	0.05
I have out-of-town visitors	41.2	20.3	38.5	0.24
I have gone home and did not want to return to campus	40.9	16.8	42.3	0.36
The weather was bad	35.0	18.9	46.1	0.26
I did not have a ride to class	30.8	18.5	50.7	0.19
I feel tired from lack of sleep	30.1	18.7	51.2	0.37
I have a minor illness such as a headache, cold, or sore throat	27.3	19.4	53.2	0.17
I am embarrassed to walk in late	26.6	11.9	61.4	0.11
I am dealing with an emotional situation (e.g., relationship issues/breakup)	25.8	20.7	53.5	0.26
I am stressed	24.5	21.5	54.0	0.30
I do not feel safe on campus	22.0	16.5	61.4	0.01
The course does not relate to my personal career goals	20.3	21.8	57.9	0.26
I am recovering from alcohol or drug use (e.g., hangover)	17.6	23.1	59.3	0.25
I am concerned about my personal hygiene	14.3	26.9	58.8	0.08
I am too tired to go to class because of an active social life	13.4	16.2	70.5	0.33
I do not like participating in class	12.5	23.0	64.5	0.24
I want to attend a social event (e.g., party, movie, exercise with a friend)	12.2	14.7	73.1	0.27
I am spending time with my boyfriend, girlfriend, partner, or spouse	11.8	17.2	71.0	0.23
I feel socially isolated in class	9.9	20.1	70.0	0.24
I am hungry	8.9	18.0	73.1	0.21
I am concerned about my personal appearance	5.2	16.5	78.3	0.09
I dislike a student or other students in that class	13	18.2	77 5	0.17

Table 9. Learning Activities that Influence Class Attendance				
I am likely to not attend class when Agree % Neither agree or disagree % Disagree % r.				
I cannot concentrate during lecture	27.8	17.1	55.1	0.37
It is a review day	19.2	12.2	68.7	0.12
The activities in class do not lend themselves to my preferred way of learning	18.2	22.3	59.5	0.30
Other students are giving presentations	16.2	20.9	62.9	0.19
I do not want to participate in a scheduled activity	14.4	21.7	63.9	0.22
There is a guest speaker	8.8	17.5	73.8	0.19
The class contains group activities/discussion	6.7	15.0	78.3	0.14

the exams" was not identified as a top ten reason in the no absences and  $\geq 11$  absences categories.

"I have to care for someone else (e.g., child or sick person)", "It was a religious holiday" and "I have a job related conflict (e.g. an interview or work shift)" was only found in the top 10 of the no absences category. "Lectures are of poor quality" was only present in the no absences, three to five absences and six to 10 absences categories. "I have not prepared for class" was only identified in the one to two absences category. "Attendance does not influence my grade" was only found in the  $\geq 11$  absences category. Lastly, "I am studying for a test in another course was only present in the six to 10 absences category.

#### Summary

The purpose of this study was to add to the limited research of specific reasons why undergraduate students elect to not attend class and several of the reasons why students were likely to not attend class were consistent with prior research (Fjortoft, 2005; Friedman et al., 2001; Gump, 2004; Massingham and Herrington, 2006; Van Blerkom, 1992; Westrick et al., 2009). There were 23 reasons why the majority of students in this study were likely to not attend class (see Table 11). The top three items dealt with attendance not being taken, emergencies and illness. The top three categories of items were personal issues (8 of the 23), class structure (6 of the 23) and instructor behaviors and issues (6 of the

Table	10. Top Reasons Students are Likely to Miss Class Based on Self-Reported Class Attendance	
Number of class sessions		
absent during the four	Top 10 reasons to likely miss class	f
weeks prior to the survey		5
	Attendance is not taken	110
	I have a funeral to attend	99
	An emergency arises - I have to meet an urgent, unexpected need	99
	I have a severe illness such as the flu	94
	I have permission from the instructor to miss class because of a school related function	89
ino absences	I have a wedding to attend	61
	I have to care for someone else (e.g., child or sick person)	57
	It is a religious holiday	56
	I have a job related conflict (e.g., an interview or work shift)	53
	The instructor does not know the content	53
	I have not prepared for class	230
	An emergency arises - I have to meet an urgent, unexpected need	213
	I have a severe illness such as the flu	211
	I have a funeral to attend	203
1 to 2	I have permission from the instructor to miss class because of a school related function	192
1 to 2	The instructor does not know the content	158
	I have a wedding to attend	144
	It would allow me to extend an out-of-town trip	144
	Lectures are of poor quality	132
	The material covered in class is not consistently relevant to the exams	130
	An emergency arises - I have to meet an urgent, unexpected need	237
	Attendance is not taken	235
	I have a severe illness such as the flu	234
	_ I have a funeral to attend	234
3 to 5	I have permission from the instructor to miss class because of a school related function	215
5 10 5	The instructor does not know the content	198
	It would allow me to extend an out-of-town trip	196
	The course content is available from another source (e.g., I can get it from the text, web, tutor, classmate's notes)	188
	The material covered in class is not consistently relevant to the exams	184
	I have a wedding to attend	178
	I have a severe illness such as the flu	118
	An emergency arises - I have to meet an urgent, unexpected need	116
	Attendance is not taken	113
	I have a funeral to attend	110
	I have permission from the instructor to miss class because of a school related function	110
6 to 10	The course content is available from another source (e.g., I can get it from the text, web, tutor, classmate's notes)	102
	It would allow me to extend an out-of-town trip	101
	The instructor does not know the content	100
	The material covered in class is not consistently relevant to the exams	99
	1 am studying for a test in another course	98
	Lectures are of poor quality	9/
	I nave a juneral to attend	48
	An emergency arises - I have to meet an urgent, unexpected need	4/
	Auendance is not taken	4/
	I have a severe liness such as the flu	40
≥ 11	Lectures are or poor quarity	45
	It would allow use to acted an out of town trip	45
	Attendered does not influence my crade	44
	Libra a wadding to attend	44
	The course content is available from another source (a.g. Lean get it from the text, such types located in the source of the sou	43
	The course content is available from another source (e.g., i can get it from the text, web, tutor, classifiate's notes)	43

Table 11. Reasons that the Majority of Undergraduate Students Choose to Not Attend Class			
I am likely to not attend class when	%	Category	
1. Attendance is not taken	93.4	Class Structure	
2. An emergency arises - I have to meet an urgent unexpected need	90.6	Personal	
3. I have a severe illness such as the flu	89.4	Personal	
4. I have a funeral to attend	88.4	Personal	
5. I have permission from the instructor to miss class because of a school related function	82.9	Instructor	
6. The instructor does not know the content	70.1	Instructor	
7. It would allow me to extend an out-of-town trip	67.7	Personal	
8. I have a wedding to attend	64.6	Personal	
9. The course content is available from another source (e.g., I can get it from the text, web, tutor, classmate's notes)	63.7	Class Structure	
10. Lectures of poor quality	62.5	Instructor	
11. The material covered in class is not consistently relevant to the exam	62.3	Class Structure	
12. I have deadlines for other academic work	58.6	Student Performance	
13. The instructor does not present information in an interesting way	56.8	Instructor	
14. The class meets the day before or after a holiday	56.8	Class Scheduling	
15. I am studying for a test in another course	56.5	Student Performance	
16. I have a job related conflict (e.g., an interview or work shift)	55.7	Personal	
17. Attendance does not influence my grade	55.4	Class Structure	
18. I oversleep	55.1	Personal	
19. The instructor does not present information in a clear manner	54.1	Instructor	
20. I have the opportunity to attend a career/professional development event	52.7	Personal	
21. The instructor just reads from his/her notes	51.4	Instructor	
22. I have technology alternatives to get class content	51.2	Class Structure	
23. The instructor does not allow students to enter late	50.3	Class Structure	

23). Student performance (2 items) and class scheduling (1 item) were also represented in the 23 reasons agreed upon by a majority of students. In addition, most of the associations between reasons students are likely to not attend class and the number of class sessions absent had a low or moderate magnitude. Since no one item explained a large portion of the variance in absences, the low and moderate associations support the finding that there are multiple reasons (23 in this study) for which students are likely to not attend class. Furthermore, differences in the top ten reasons to not attend class based upon the student attendance categories only differed slightly. This suggests that regardless of the number of class sessions missed the top 10 potential reasons for missing class do not differ for a majority of the students.

Similar to Marburger (2001), the results of this study show that the undergraduate students were more likely to not attend class on Friday as compared to other days of the week. Furthermore, Romer (2001) hypothesized that the differences in attendance rates may be a result of class size. Supporting, Romer's hypothesis an increase in agreement percent to not attend class was noted in this study. However, a majority of students did not agree class size influenced their decision to not attend class.

Many of the reasons students agreed upon were related to Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of basic needs, though not all of the items related to Maslow were shown to influence class attendance. In regard to physiological needs, the undergraduate students suggested severe illness and oversleeping would influence their decision to attend class, but few students agreed a minor illness or being hungry were reasons to be absent. This finding is encouraging because it suggests that minor physiological needs do not deter students from attending class. Safety needs such as feeling safe on campus and disruptive students appear to have a minor effect on the decision to not attend class in this study. This may suggest that College of Agricultural and Life Sciences students believe the University of Florida has few issues related to student safety. Data related to love and belongingness needs revealed mixed results. Attending events like a funeral or a wedding were agreed upon as a reason to be absent by a majority of students, but attending a social event or spending time with a boyfriend, girlfriend, or partner had low agreement. This is also encouraging because the students indicated major life events were reasons to be absent from class, but casual social events were not reasons to miss class.

Additionally, teacher-student rapport is related to love and belongingness and esteem needs. The items related to love and belongingness showed moderate agreement and therefore, appear to have an influence on students' decisions to not attend class. Furthermore, the item "I have already earned enough points for the grade I want" is related to esteem and had moderate agreement. Thus, the aforementioned item also appears to influence class attendance and may partially explain why previous studies (Marburger, 2001; Rodgers, 2001; Van Blerkom, 1992, Zhao and Stinson, 2005) found class attendance decreases as the academic term progresses. What's more, having a job related conflict was agreed upon by a majority of the students and this may be associated with meeting a physiological need, love and belongingness need and/ or esteem need. In regard to Maslow's final category of needs, self-actualization, course difficulty and not being capable of achieving course objectives were agreed upon by very few students as a reason to not attend class. This may suggest that College of Agricultural and Life

Sciences students are striving toward self-actualization. Ormrod (2008) stated, "*individuals striving toward self-actualization seek out... and want to learn for the sake of learning*" (p. 459).

Many of the reasons students agreed upon were related to Atkinson's (1957) expectancy-value theory of achievement motivation. A majority of the student agreed other academic work or studying for a test in another course were reasons to not attend class. This may indicate that the undergraduate students place greater value on completing pressing assignments or studying for an approaching test than attending a given class and the possibility of success on immediate academic tasks prevail over the possibility of failure on future academic tasks. Also, instructor knowledge and quality of instruction influenced the students' decision to attend class, which suggests the students placed little or no value on attending classes where the instructor lacked subject matter knowledge or facilitated learning experiences of poor quality. Moreover, this study suggests less value was placed on attending a class in which the information could be obtained from another source, missed work could be made up, the class was before or after a holiday, missing the class would extend an out-of-town trip, it is a religious holiday, attendance does not influence their grade or is not taken and when students had already earned the desired grade.

Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations are given to faculty/ instructors for increasing class attendance in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences at the University of Florida:

1. Take attendance. Attendance not being taken was the number one reason students were likely to not attend class. In larger classes where taking attendance is more cumbersome and is not an effective use of instructional time, teaching assistances could be utilized for this task. Other strategies that could be considered are sign-in sheets, clickers, seating charts, arriving early and taking attendance as students arrive to class, short in-class assignments, ticket-out-the-door activities and question/comment cards. The authors recognize each of the aforementioned strategies have their shortcomings and may not be appropriate for every class session or instructor. Therefore, the authors suggest using a variety of attendance strategies.

**2.** Know the course content. Subject matter knowledge is essential to effective teaching (Darling-Hammond and Bransford, 2005).

**3.** Develop quality lectures/class sessions. McKeachie (2010) is a resource that provides tips on making lectures and courses more effective.

4. Discuss how the material covered in-class relates to the assignments/exams in the course. This

will help the student understand the relevance of the inclass material and make connections to future use.

**5. Plan rigorous courses**. Only 3.9% of the students agreed that they were likely to not attend class if the course was difficult.

6. Present information in an interesting and clear manner. A majority of the students agreed they were likely to not attend if the information was not interesting or presented clearly. Interest can be developed by allowing students to test/use new knowledge, using students' prior knowledge and experiences, raising perplexing questions, showing specimens, pictures, short video clips, case studies, presenting students with a problem to be solved and so forth. Teachers that demonstrate clarity explain concepts in a concise and clear manner, provide clear directions for activities and assignments, answer questions intelligently, create an organized lesson and do not use vague words (Rosenshine and Furst, 1971).

**7.** Allow students to enter late. Not allowing students to enter late was a reason that was agreed upon by a majority of the students.

**8.** Develop teacher-student rapport. Teachers who exhibit characteristics such as being considerate, understanding, approachable, democratic, reliable, encouraging, having positive body language, encourages questions and comments from students, provides clear expectations, knows the students by name, utilizes high levels of verbal and nonverbal teacher immediacy behaviors and so forth are described as being effective at building teacher-student rapport (Wilson et al., 2010).

Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations are given to administrators for increasing class attendance in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences at the University of Florida: (a) minimize school related functions during instructional time; (b) consider the timing of religious holidays when planning the academic calendar; (c) promote the importance and relevance of general education courses; (d) provide teaching and learning professional development opportunities for faculty/instructors in student engagement, planning and delivering quality lectures, instructor clarity and building teacher-student rapport; and (e) ensure faculty/instructors possess subject matter expertise in the courses they assigned to teach.

Future research should seek to determine if other populations of undergraduate students agree upon similar reasons for not attending class. This information could be used to improve class attendance among other populations. One limitation of this study was that the close-ended survey questions limited the participants' reasons for choosing to not attend class. Qualitative research or open-ended survey questions could be utilized to allow for other possible reasons for not attending

class. Future research should also further investigate the influence of the following on class attendance: (a) class size, (b) class scheduling, (c) class structure, (d) course classification, (e) instructor behaviors and issues, (f) student performance, (g) personal issues and (h) learning activities.

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