

CEPP Report on Spring 2021 Attendance Policy

CEPP intends to let the temporary changes to the attendance policy that were in effect in Fall 2020 expire and return to the status quo ante.

Skidmore faculty voted electronically on July 28-30, 2020 to adopt a temporary change to the attendance policy for the Fall 2020 semester. The recommendation behind this vote was developed by the ad-hoc Academic Affairs Advisory Group (AAAG) over Summer 2020 in anticipation of a difficult semester, at a time when a widespread Covid-19 outbreak seemed likely. The temporary policy states that “Skidmore faculty [will] not take student attendance into account when determining courses grades or when determining who will be permitted to take a final examination.” The rationale provided by AAAG states that the policy is intended to help students who may be quarantined due to the spread of Covid-19, to incentivize responsible behavior in case of an outbreak, and to protect the college community by minimizing the chances of high-risk exposure. FEC further clarified, on July 28, 2020:

If approved by the faculty, this proposal would only apply to the Fall 2020 semester. Should there be cause to consider an extension of the suspension of the attendance policy ... beyond the Fall 2020 semester, a proposal will be brought before the faculty for discussion at a faculty meeting.

After hearing from a number of concerned faculty members, and a robust internal discussion which included members of the faculty, students, and the administration, CEPP has reached a different recommendation for Spring 2021. We intend to let the temporary attendance policy expire at the end of Fall 2020. This change is motivated by three reasons:

- 1) The remarkable resilience, despite recent events, that the college community demonstrated in the face of severe social restrictions to contain the spread of Covid-19. To date, we have not experienced a widespread outbreak of Covid-19.
- 2) The consequences of the temporary attendance policy proved more disruptive than was anticipated. Faculty reported sporadic, and at times severe, declines in class attendance that appeared to be unrelated to illness. Lack of attendance has an impact on academic performance – even though students are not penalized for non-attendance, it affects their course performance. Faculty reported serious disruptions to labs, and other hands-on learning experiences, that require robust and consistent attendance.
- 3) The possibility of designing a more nuanced and context-specific attendance policy if individual faculty members are empowered to make their own decisions.

CEPP believes strongly, however, that a return to the previous policy can only work if both students and faculty remain mindful of the risks of spreading Covid-19. In that spirit, we urge faculty members to think ahead, and be prepared to be flexible and understanding when students have to miss classes due to real or suspected exposure to the virus. We also urge students not to attend in-person classes if they experience any symptoms of Covid-19, or if they suspect that they may have been exposed to someone who displays these symptoms.