

Covering Classes Missed Because of Professional  
Involvement: Illustrations and Discussion

Janet R. Matthews

Loyola University-New Orleans

Stephen F. Davis

Emporia State University

Jane Halonen

Alverno College

Antonio E. Puente

University of North Carolina-Wilmington

Roundtable presented at the annual convention of the American  
Psychological Association, August 16, 1991, San Francisco, CA

Covering Classes Missed Because of Professional Involvement:  
Illustrations and Discussion

Welcome to our roundtable discussion. The format we will be using is for each of the members of this panel to first give a brief statement about personal policy regarding what warrants missing a class, the issue of missing a class in contrast to canceling a class, and why we are as active away from our campuses as each of us tends to be. After this brief statement from each panelist, we will each discuss in more detail one way we have found useful to handle our missed classes. We hope to then have an open discussion with the audience about our ideas as well as others which you may suggest.

This past year was one of the first times I canceled a class rather than planning some activity during an absence. I did that because there was a regional psychology convention in my city and I was trying to provide some incentive for the students to attend it. I knew that one of my departmental colleagues had made attendance a requirement for her course and that one of my seniors was presenting so it seemed like a viable alternative in this case. At the end of the semester, I added questions to my course evaluation to attempt to evaluate student response to this cancellation. The first question asked whether it was a good idea to cancel class so students could attend the convention. In my abnormal psychology class the response rate was 28 "yes," 1 "no," and 1 "unsure." In my developmental psychology class there was a unanimous "yes" from the 25 students attending class on evaluation day. The other question asked whether the student had attended the convention. In abnormal, the response was 5 "yes" and 25 "no." In developmental, the response was 7 "yes" and 19 "no."

My typical policy is to schedule either a test which is administered by someone else or a class activity. I will discuss my favorite activity in the next part of our program.

Although I try to limit my trips so that there is not more than 1 in any month, I am not always successful. Perhaps I am being narcissistic but I believe my students benefit from

my activities. First, I am renewed when I return from professional trips. I have fresh ideas and I tend to be happier about myself. Second, I have had the opportunity to get to know a range of people during these trips. When my students have questions about their programs, especially graduate schools, I am in a better position to make phone calls for clarification. Finally, there is the role model aspect of my activities. Regardless of the career which the student may choose, I hope I am setting the stage for individuals who will be active in their profession.

Although I have used films designed for class presentation, I had not really considered the use of feature films in the classroom until I attended a poster session at the Mid-American Conference for Teachers of Psychology. At that conference, Drew Appleby had a poster and handout about feature films which are appropriate for classroom use. I will briefly summarize how I have used his suggestion. Last year I tried this activity with my clinical class and the student reaction to it was so positive that I have now built it into the course schedule for the upcoming semester regardless of whether or not I happen to be in town. The film I used was "The Dream Team." I told the students that this film would take two class periods for them to see. Since I was going to be away from campus for both of those classes, I arranged for someone else to show the film. The class before the first installment, I have them a general description of the film. I also asked how many of them had already seen it. There were only a few students who had previously seen it. I then told them to view the film with certain concepts from the course in mind. They were to focus individually on each of the main characters who make the field trip to the city. For each person they were to decide what type of therapy would be most beneficial and why they had made that selection. They were told that this would be one of the essay questions on the next exam in the course.

Students who had previously seen the film comments later that they viewed it completely differently with the set they were given. Other students noted that even though they were psychology majors and hoped to have a career in one of the mental health professions, they had never applied their coursework to the movies they saw. Other students commented that the feature film seemed to give them a more realistic picture of the patient behavior than they often found in "staged" presentations for class use. During pre-registration, I had some students approach me and ask if they were going to have the "movie" assignment they had heard about from some of their peers. Upon further questioning, I learned that they were unanimous in their positive feeling about this activity. They seemed pleased that I would be using it in their class.

It would be easy to overuse films in class. Of course, it is also possible to use just segments of films rather than taking the amount of time needed to show an entire feature film. For my purposes, the entire film seems appropriate since I am trying to have the students observe behavior in a range of situations and determine what is, and is not, important for their recommendations. If I had selected only those scenes which provide the behaviors of importance, they would not have the same experience.

## Covering Classes During Periods of Professional Activity

### I. Reasons for Missing Classes

- A. Conventions/Professional Meetings (5)
- B. Board/Committee Meetings (6)
- C. Teaching Overseas/Workshops (1)
- D. Court Appearances

### II. Involvement of Others

- A. Chair of Department (verbal)
- B. Dean of College (form)
- C. Secretaries (itinerary & schedule)
- D. Students (see below)
- E. Public Information (electronic mail)

### III. Potential Activities

- A. Short Absences (1-2 classes)
  - 1. Guest lecture (e.g., faculty)
  - 2. Film/video tape (e.g., The Mind)
  - 3. Outside of class assignment (e.g., research)
- B. Long Absences (2-4 classes)
  - 1. Video taped lectures
  - 2. Postdoctoral/Faculty lecture (with pay)
  - 3. Alternate time for classes
- C. Additional
  - 1. Longer office hours
  - 2. Extra classes in evenings or weekends
  - 3. Help sessions before each test
  - 4. Attempt to be there for tests

### IV. Potential Problems

- A. Students- missed contact & assistance
- B. Chair- missed contact
- C. Colleagues- "jealousy"

### V. Potential Solutions

- A. Clear rationale & justification for absence
- B. Whenever possible, provide advanced written notice
- C. Have original and backup plan in place
- D. Have one primary contact person responsible
- E. Publicize reason & justification for missed classes
- F. Consider using fellows and junior faculty

### VI. Summary