



Faculty Forum

From the Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence

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Responses to Gary Pool's February FORUM, "Who Teaches Academic Responsibility?" were more numerous and spirited than any responses we have received so far. Sixteen faculty responded and one response was three pages, single spaced! We regret that we can't print more of the responses since the dialogue they create is rich and valuable, but hopefully the excerpts below will give everyone some sense of their flavor.

Excerpts from Faculty Responses

I share Gary's frustration and concern. I find the situation especially distressing among part-time students who tend to believe that part-time matriculation means part-time instead of full-time effort.

Walt Foegelle, Health Sciences

I wholeheartedly agree with Gary Pool's thesis. It is deeply discouraging to be seen as an ogre because I live up to what I regard as a serious commitment to my students and to the university.

Joan Byrd, Art

The fact that 1,069 W's were given after the "free period" does not necessarily indicate that they were improperly given. The Record specifies that students shall receive a grade of "W" after the drop period if (a) they are passing or (b) they withdraw from the university. The only improperly assigned "W" would be one given to a failing student after the first one third of the semester. But the more important issue is what a "W" represents. It is merely a statement that the student did not finish the course. It should not be inflexibly construed as an escape from or shirking of responsibility. We are an educational, not a penal institution. Students should not be punished because they overestimate the number of hours they can handle, have some serious personal problems, or simply decide that the learning experience in a particular class is not what it should be.

Bill Hyatt, Criminal Justice

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The implementation of the "W" policy varies widely from college to college because a variety of factors lies behind "W" grades, such as (1) the operation of the Registrar's office, (2) the philosophy of advising or counseling, and (3) the philosophy of discipline. Faculty responsibility regarding "W's" grows out of our philosophy of advising and will hopefully fit together with the individual student's situation. Following a regulation just because it is there will not necessarily get anyone to vote for anything. Perhaps showing that a quasi-governmental system like a college can respond to individual needs might encourage both responsibility and participation.

James Syphers, Social Work

I confess! I admit it! Alas, my past has reared its grotesque head and my sins are laid bare. Yes, I, too, cut classes before vacations when I was an undergraduate. I didn't mean to shirk academic responsibility. I never dreamed that it would lead to. . . to this. I guess the responsible thing to do now is to call the University of Tennessee and tell them I'm sending back my M.S. and Ph.D. They were earned under false pretenses.

Jeff Neff, Geosciences/Anthropology

Since I have started requiring attendance in basic mathematics courses the success of my students has significantly increased. Students can take up to 4 absences for personal reasons, and the 5th results in an "F." The students must accept the responsibility of saving absences for serious problems, or for special cases such as the Friday before a major break. What to do about students who request a "W" after the deadline, but who do not have serious, extenuating circumstances? I occasionally find that a student who is denied a "W" will put forth the necessary effort to earn a passing grade.

Charles E. Mitchell, Mathematics & Computer Science

The lessons of academic responsibility are taught throughout high school and college as the student becomes more and more independent, and are built on the foundation of individual responsibility which is learned throughout life. If we have to start teaching individual responsibility at this late date, chances of success are severely minimized. To thrust the concept of academic responsibility as a totally new concept upon a college student, as opposed to a logical extension of previously known behavior, is like putting a player into a football game as quarterback when he has no idea of the rules of the game.

Richard Wohlman, Mathematics & Computer Science