



Morgan Benton <morgan.benton@gmail.com>

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## Missed Classes and Grading Policy

4 messages

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**Frattaroli, Gregory Douglas - frattagd** <frattagd@dukes.jmu.edu>  
To: "morgan.benton@gmail.com" <morgan.benton@gmail.com>

Thu, Jan 22, 2015 at 1:42 AM

Dr. Benton,

I am contacting you regarding last week's missed classes as well as the two grading policies you offer.

To begin, I apologize for my absences. I put my priorities in the wrong order and cared more about the social aspect of college life than that of the academic. As laid out in my goal setting for this week I plan to attend all classes, but do find it difficult to do so. This is not due to you or your teaching methods. Quite frankly I find that you are the most interesting/intriguing professor I have had at James Madison University and can tell that you are not just a good teacher, but a good person that cares about the well-being of his students. This is hard to come by, and I am sure you do not need me to validate this for you so I will continue.

The reason that I find it may be difficult to come to classes is due to the amount of work I have with other classes. I am a Business Major with a very difficult schedule this semester. My other classes are of more direct importance to me strictly because the grade I get in those classes essentially decides what internship I can get this summer and that relates to my future careers. While I thoroughly enjoy your class, it makes more sense to focus on these other classes as they pertain to my major more directly.

This is where my grading policy questions come into play. I believe that I heard you speak to it in the first class, that if choosing the "pick your own grade" policy you will record whichever grade we say that we want. My question is, if you believe we deserve a grade of a C or lower, while we ask for an A, (Deserved or not) what grade will be recorded?

I appreciate you taking the time to answer these questions in advance and am willing to speak to you in person if you would rather carry out the conversation that way. Thank you.

Best Regards,  
Greg Frattaroli

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**Morgan Benton** <morgan.benton@gmail.com>  
To: "Frattaroli, Gregory Douglas - frattagd" <frattagd@dukes.jmu.edu>

Thu, Jan 22, 2015 at 12:48 PM

Hi Greg,

So I'm not sure I follow your logic. Why sign up for a class that you don't plan to attend? Seems like a colossal waste of your money and both of our time. If you want to learn programming, why not sign up for the class during a semester when you'll have less other work and time to focus on it.

If learning how to program is important to you, then I recommend that you figure out how to manage your time so that you can put an honest effort into it. If learning programming is not important to you, why not just drop? This is not a required class for you, after all.

It's also inconsiderate for you to hold a seat in the class if you're not going to use it. I had a waiting list of students who needed this class this semester as it is required for their major who couldn't get in. I don't mind you having the seat, but I'd like you to think about how you'd feel if a non-major took up a seat in a class you needed to graduate, preventing you from enrolling, and then proceeded not to take the course seriously.

My policies are extremely flexible because I want people to have freedom to tailor the experience to their own needs. It is not intended that people use it as a vehicle to pad their GPA. If that is your motivation, then you've really bought into the silly backward logic of our educational system, and I don't really think this experience will benefit you in any tangible way. Why would you want a programming class on your transcript if you don't know how to program? It would be really embarrassing to be asked about it in an interview, and to have to admit that you didn't really learn anything, or worse, lie and say that you did.

All of that being said, choose-your-own-grade means exactly that. Whatever you tell me to report to the registrar is what I will report. The word "deserve" in connection with grades has no real meaning for me. I don't think grades are valuable, or meaningful. You might as well ask me if I think you "deserve" to be paid three pennies, four, or five. The sum is so insignificant, it is kind of pointless to even talk about it.

If I'm really the most interesting/intriguing professor you've ever encountered, why wouldn't you bend over backwards to find a way to prioritize this class? If you are not interested in and passionate about your other classes, why are you taking them? Why would you sacrifice the opportunity to do something deep and meaningful at this moment in your life, in exchange for something that is purely pragmatic and expedient? I think this is the trap that our society creates that is all too easy for people to fall into. I also am not convinced that this is a path to happiness. It makes me feel that either your priorities are confused and we should spend some time exploring them, or you are being insincere.

All of this is not intended to be harsh. I am not upset with you in any way. I do, however, want you to understand how silly your logic sounds to me. I'm not surprised to hear you say the things you've said. Our society trains our young people to think like that. Frankly, it's messed up.

So, I recommend one of the following:

1. Drop right now and give the seat to someone else who will take it more seriously
2. Figure out a way to make this class and the other students in it a priority that you can devote a meaningful amount of your time and energy to

Of course, you've paid your tuition, you have a seat, my policies are already determined and so you can choose to stay in and ride it out. But I don't think either of us would find that very admirable. Do you?

Cheers,  
Morgan

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**Frattaroli, Gregory Douglas - frattagd** <frattagd@dukes.jmu.edu>  
To: Morgan Benton <morgan.benton@gmail.com>

Fri, Jan 23, 2015 at 4:14 AM

Dr. Benton,

I had all intentions on planning to attend this course thoroughly at the time of sign up. I had previously wanted to be a Computer Information Systems minor, completing CIS 221

Principles of Programming. Upon completion of that course, I was not accepted into the minor program despite receiving the necessary grade of a B. The other class I was contemplating taking was full when I found out and decided to stay the course in order to keep 15 credits and graduate on time.

I do feel for the students whose seat I may be taking up. It was never my intention to screw them out of a class or steal someone's spot. I took this course because learning how to program was once important to me, but having been denied by the minor made me lose my aspirations. I heard from a friend that you were a cool teacher to take that was also easy to get a good grade in.

I 100% agree with you that GPA is a backwards system to determine learning, but it is the system that is used and it is sadly what I need raise in order to attain what I wish in life. I believe that it is unfair to judge someone on the same grading scale while giving each student different professors, tests, quizzes, etc. I do not endorse it, but I am a prisoner to the system. (without trying to sound too dramatic)

As for the comment I made about you being the most intriguing/interesting professor, I was sincere when I said that and I have been sincere to you about everything I have said thus far. It is not my plan to go behind your back, or lie to you. If that was the case then I would not be writing these e-mails to you. I respect you as a professor and as a person. I wanted you to understand the logic behind my reasoning which is this: I can go to your class to learn a valuable skill that I personally will not continue after this course, while lowering the grades of my other courses. Or I can spend my time on my major courses while still receiving the grade of an A in your class. Economically, I believe the latter is the most sensible decision.

This may answer your question about my priorities, which I will admit are not in the same order as they were when I began this university. I used to loved to learn about things that interested me, now I feel that I have so much pressure to succeed that I have to go about it in whatever means possible. If this means not going to class and scumming my way into an A to make time for my other classes then it may be something I have to do, even if it is something I am not proud of. Your e-mail hit home with not because it was mean, I did not take it that way. It hit home because you are right in many of the things you have said; it would not be admirable to go through your course without showing effort and come away with an A.

I am not being insincere in any of what I am saying. I would hope that you respect me talking to you about it as opposed to not coming to class at all without explaining my thinking to you. With that being said, I do not think me explaining my thinking makes my actions any more right. I am at a crossroads right now and I need to do some soul searching to figure out what I am going to do. I do not mean to upset you or undermine your teaching ways, for in other circumstances I believe I would excel in your course.

I appreciate you taking the time to get back to me and give me a different perspective of how to view this situation. I will see you in class tomorrow morning.

Sincerely,  
Greg Frattaroli

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**From:** Morgan Benton <[morgan.benton@gmail.com](mailto:morgan.benton@gmail.com)>

**Sent:** Wednesday, January 21, 2015 10:48 PM

**To:** Frattaroli, Gregory Douglas - frattagd

**Subject:** Re: Missed Classes and Grading Policy

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**Morgan Benton** <[morgan.benton@gmail.com](mailto:morgan.benton@gmail.com)>

Sun, Mar 1, 2015 at 6:06 AM

To: "Frattaroli, Gregory Douglas - frattagd" <[frattagd@dukes.jmu.edu](mailto:frattagd@dukes.jmu.edu)>

Hi Greg,

Just wanted to throw it out there, that you are always welcome to come back to class and actually, you know, do some stuff. :) Perhaps your other classes are under control and you can devote some time to learning to program. You never know, you may find it to be something you'll really like and want to do later on...

Cheers,

Morgan

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