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# *Planning for academic success: Understanding when withdrawing from a course is the best option*

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Many students enter the fall semester in transition. Whether they are entering as a first year or returning for their final semester the fall is a time of new beginnings in the academic year. These transitions can mean students find themselves struggling to make the adjustments to the academic challenges and most often turn to their parents and family for advice. We always recommend the best advice to your student is to contact their academic advisor. However, it is also helpful for you to understand some academic policy and how to access those to be better prepared to offer advice. For this article we are focusing on withdrawing from classes.

## **Withdrawing from classes**

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USF's policy for withdrawing from classes states:

*A student may drop a course(s) during the drop/add periods (first five days of classes) and no entry of the course(s) will appear on any permanent academic records. No tuition or fees will be assessed for course(s) dropped within that period.*

*A student may withdraw from a course(s) between the second and tenth week of the semester (except for summer sessions - see the Summer Schedule of Classes for dates). However tuition and fees will be assessed for any course(s) withdrawn by the student after the first week. The student's academic record will reflect a "W" grade for any course(s) withdrawal between the second and tenth week of the semester. Under specific conditions, refund of tuition and fees may be requested in writing from the Office of Purchasing and Financial Services. See "Refund of Fees" under Financial Information for complete details.*

*Students who withdraw may not continue to attend classes.*

*Effective fall 2011, all undergraduate students will be limited to a total of five course withdrawals while enrolled as a degree-seeking or a non-degree seeking undergraduate student at USF. The five course withdrawals will be limited to three course withdrawals for students with less than 60 semester credit hours, and two course withdrawals for students with more than or equal to 60 semester credit hours. Only in extenuating circumstances will approval be granted for more than five course withdrawals. Appeals for additional course withdrawals due to extenuating circumstances must be submitted to the Academic Regulations Committee in the college of the student's academic major.*

<http://www.ugs.usf.edu/catalogs/1213/pdf/DropsWithdrawals.pdf>

Implications for the policy are 1) students need to consider before the end of the first week of classes how their courses will work together and create a plan for success; 2) students need to monitor their progress up to midterm and be aware of the deadline to withdraw; 3) students need to be aware of how their academic status and standing play a role in their decision to withdraw; and 4) students need to understand the conditions for late withdraw via Academic Regulations Committee (ARC) petition.

### During the first week of classes

Before the end of the first week of classes students should review the syllabus for each course and consider the types and timings of assessments, the instructor's expectations for attendance (particularly if student is aware of commitments that may affect their ability to attend), and their motivation for taking the course (required, optional, elective). This is one of the most important times in the semester and can make the difference in the student's success for the semester. Students who do not take the time to reflect and research their course selections are more likely to run into challenges later. We encourage students to take on challenges and to have high expectations, as long as they are realistic and clear about the skills, abilities, and resources they will use to meet those expectations.

Remember: The student is responsible for ensuring that he/she has dropped or been dropped from all undesired courses by the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> day of classes. Errors occur because the student thinks the instructor will drop them or they will be dropped automatically.

### Progress up to midterm

After the first week of class the student is fee liable for the course and to withdraw from the course without academic penalty they must use one of their five opportunities for the W grade. This must be done prior to the withdraw deadline (tenth week of classes for fall and spring). For fall 2013 that date is Saturday November 2<sup>nd</sup>. Students are notified of the date for each semester in OASIS. They will be able to monitor their progress via Canvas (or Blackboard) and starting fall 2013 all 1000, 2000, and 3000 level courses are required to submit mid-term grades prior to the deadline to withdraw from classes. Midterm grades are not definitive in predicting success or failure. Students typically have opportunities to improve their grades at this point IF they put in the efforts and utilize all the available resources. Again, a student should be realistic in their assessment of improving their grade. If they tell you all they need are As the rest of the semester, please ask them exactly how they are going to earn those A grades!

### Academic status and standing

Making the decision to withdraw from a course should not be taken lightly. Students have limited opportunities to withdraw (see policy), so they need to examine the implications. Students who withdraw are more likely to delay their graduation. This may be common sense, but your student may need to be reminded of this when they are in the middle of a challenging course and see the W as an 'easy out.' In addition to progression concerns, students need to consider their academic standing. If they are on Academic Probation and withdrawing from a course will ensure they will earn a 2.0 or better to avoid dismissal, it makes sense to utilize the opportunity to withdraw. But, if they have already utilized all their opportunities to withdraw (based on hours earned), they need to consider what strategies they can use to retrieve their grade, which gets back to the point above regarding monitoring their progress.

Other implications for financial aid, scholarships, and excess hour surcharge policy also need to be taken into consideration.

## Petitioning ARC

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As stated in the policy if there are extenuating circumstances a student may petition the ARC in the student's college to be allowed additional opportunities to withdraw from a course beyond the limit. The ARC will only consider circumstances beyond the control of the student:

*Petitions can be approved if a documented university error has occurred (e.g. an administrative error or incorrect advice from a university official), or if the committee determines that you experienced extenuating circumstances beyond your control of such severity that the physical or mental ability to drop by the drop deadline was impaired. Such circumstances need to be supported by independent, objective and verifiable documentation from a licensed professional or professional with certified expertise in the applicable professional area. Petitions should be submitted as soon as possible in accordance with action requested but must be received within 6 months of the end of the semester during which the petitionable event occurred. If a petition is submitted outside of that timeframe, it is critical to explain the reason and provide documentation for the delayed request.*

*All submitted documentation is subject to verification. Submission of false, forged or fraudulent information will result in a referral to the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities.*

<http://www.ugs.usf.edu/arc/>

A student who is experiencing challenges should inform their instructor and meet with their academic advisor as soon as possible for guidance. There are also confidential resources on campus (Counseling Center, SOCAT, and Victim's Advocacy) if the student is not comfortable discussing their circumstances with their instructor or academic advisor. These resources can also support the student in petitioning the ARC.

For instructions and more information on the ARC petitioning process go to <http://www.ugs.usf.edu/arc/>.

To plan for academic success requires being aware of your options. At times withdrawing from a course can be the best option. You can aid your student in making those decisions by understanding the academic policy.

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