

# The Northerner Online

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## Attendance is part of the price students pay for public education

*By Jonathan T. Reynolds*

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Dear Editor,

In the Jan. 12 edition of The Northerner, Sean Dressman argued that students at Northern Kentucky University should not be required to attend classes. In so doing his editorial reflects a poor understanding of how public universities work.

First, let me respectfully point out to Mr. Dressman that every student who attends NKU is subsidized to the tune of about 50 percent of costs. These funds come from state funding, the campus endowment, grants, donations and the like. Think of this as an automatic scholarship provided by the fine people of the Commonwealth of Kentucky, along with people from a host of organizations, corporations and alumni groups who have seen fit to invest in NKU students. They do so because they believe that a liberal arts education is good for both the individual and the wider community. Students are not simply customers; they are also the product.

Further, Mr. Dressman needs to be aware that he is attending an institution that was built with money other than his own. Current tuition only helps maintain the facilities and services that others generously helped to establish. When you cut class - missing class for a good reason is another matter - you throw away not only your own money but that of the generous people who helped to build this campus. That is a rather ungrateful thing to do.

Education is an unusual commodity. It is the only investment where the customer wants as little in return for their money as possible. As such, there is something of a conspiracy between lazy students and lazy faculty. Students are all too happy when a class is cancelled: "Woohoo! I'm getting less education for my tuition dollar!"

The explanation for such economically irrational behavior comes from the fact that things are expected of students when they come to class.

It is demanding and frequently stressful work. But here too lies the logic behind expectations of attendance. Hiring a teacher isn't just hiring somebody to help you learn, it is also a process of hiring someone to make you learn. Think of us as very demanding personal "brain trainers." We are here to get your flabby cerebral cortex off the couch and whip it into a lean, mean, critical-thinking machine.

In Mr. Dressman's own words: "To me this university has one job: provide the means to get an education and help people grow and learn. The teachers have one job: to teach and give students a good education."

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Frankly, I just don't see how Mr. Dressman expects us to do our job for students who aren't in class.

Jonathan T. Reynolds  
Associate Professor of History

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