

excerpted from "Cracking Down on Skipping Class"
in the *Wall Street Journal* by Douglas Belkin on January 14, 2015

Skipping class undetected for a game of ultimate Frisbee might become a thing of the past as more universities adopt mandatory-attendance policies and acquire high-tech trackers that snitch when students skip.

At Villanova University, student ID cards track attendance at some lectures. Administrators at University of Arkansas last semester began electronically monitoring the class attendance of 750 freshmen as part of a pilot program they might extend to all underclassmen. And at Harvard, researchers secretly filmed classrooms to learn how many students were skipping lectures.

The moves reflect the rising financial consequence of skipping too many classes and, consequently, dropping out. More than four in 10 full-time college students fail to graduate in six years. Many are stuck with crippling student debt and no credentials to help them pay it back. Graduation rates also figure into closely watched school rankings.

In response, schools are under pressure from taxpayers and parents to increase retention and graduation rates, said Mike Reilly, executive director of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers. Schoolwide policies on attendance are fairly rare but growing, Mr. Reilly said.

Many colleges are using "retention alert systems" that monitor behaviors that can lead to dropping out—including playing hooky. "There's just so much more at stake now than there was 20 years ago and parents want to protect their investment; they want to make sure their kids are in class," said Rosalind Alderman, who leads the retention effort at St. Mary's University in San Antonio.

If professors report a student is skipping class at St. Mary's the student's "risk level" elevates from green to yellow to red in the school's monitoring system.

The latest entrant into the market of tracking student's whereabouts: Class120, a \$199-a-year notification service that tracks a student through the GPS in their smartphone and alerts their parents (or another third party) in real time if their child isn't within a geofence mapped around the classroom where they are scheduled to be.

"For most students, if they miss too many classes, there is no safety net," said Jeff Whorley, whose company, Core Principle, has mapped about 2,000 college campuses to create the system. "Just three days of missed classes can completely unravel a semester."

The app's reminder was jarring for Caleb Hiltunen, a sophomore at Columbia College in Chicago who was a beta tester for Class120. One morning last semester he was sick in bed when the app pinged to alert him he missed class—a notification that would go to a student's parents once the app is live.

"I think it's good stuff," Mr. Hiltunen said. "I had a roommate freshman year kicked out of college for not attending enough classes. This kid was smart but he was lazy and had no motivation. I think something like this could have helped him."

Attendance is the best known predictor of college grades, even more so than scores on standardized admissions tests, said Marcus Crede, a professor of psychology at Iowa State University who studies the subject. The correlation is particularly high in science, engineering and math. And grades, in turn, seem linked to graduation rates, he said.

University of Arkansas began experimenting with mandatory attendance as a way to boost its 62% six-year graduation rate, said Provost Sharon Gaber. "We talk about helicopter parents," she said. "Well, some of these kids haven't learned how to get out of bed on their own yet."

Prompt: After reading "Cracking Down on Skipping Class," write an essay between 500 and 800 words in which you **argue whether or not Cal Poly should adopt a campus-wide mandatory attendance policy and implement high-tech tracking of student attendance**. If you believe Cal Poly should monitor students' attendance behavior in order to improve graduation rates, support your position with compelling arguments that expand upon or go beyond those points already offered in the article. If you do not agree, then defend your position and explain why tracking student attendance would not improve Cal Poly's graduation rates. Your essay should show an understanding of the article without simply repeating it, and you should incorporate specific details from your own experience and knowledge into your response.