

*The Ethical Professor*  
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**Is It Ethical to Keep Students Enrolled Even After  
They Stop Attending Class?**

*To drop or not to drop?*

Every semester, as I teacher I am faced with many administrative decisions regarding adding and dropping. Whom do I add? How soon do I drop a student that doesn't show up? How late into the semester should I add a student? How late into the semester should I drop a student? Although there are administrative policy answers to these questions, there are also ethical implications for these decisions.

“Becky” was enrolled in my class this semester but she never showed up. In the second week I dropped her and added “Hector” in her place. Certainly, I made the right decision. By the third and fourth week, however, it is too late to add students to my class given the amount of material already covered, and yet some other students stopped showing up. Then by the seventh and eighth weeks, other students have clearly stopped showing up and doing their work.

I want students to take responsibility for their own adding and dropping. I also want to have high enrollment and high success rates. I also want to do what is best for the students. The Schedule of Classes says that it is the students’ responsibility to drop their classes that they do not wish to continue: it is not my job. I am also told through administrative memos that when it is clear that students are no longer participating, I should drop them. I am also told that I need to maintain high enrollment and to decrease the withdrawal rates. I am also told that I should avoid high failure rates.

What is the most ethical decision regarding faculty initiated drops? Should I drop all students who have clearly stopped taking the class, even up until the eighth and twelfth weeks of the session? Or should I expect them to take responsibility for their own decisions? How I handle drops has a real effect on my retention and success rates, and on student transcripts.

What are the most ethical choices regarding dropping students who have not dropped themselves?

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