Reconsidering Late Registrations at NMSU

Background and Motivation

Fourteen years ago, Faculty Senate Proposition 05-13/14 asked NMSU to move the deadline for students to add courses without instructor approval from two weeks to two days after the first day of classes. The proposition cited research indicating that late registrations are associated with lower grade outcomes, persistence, and retention, and noted that late registrations increased the faculty administrative burden. This policy has since been NMSU's *status quo*.

In September 2026, President Fermé emailed Chair Finlator and Vice-Chair Bello to ask that NMSU's late registration policy be revisited (Appendix 1). He asks only that the interval between when instruction begins and when course adds require instructor approval be lengthened in order to support rolling admissions. The question is whether a change can be made that offers students flexibility without weakening student success or adding complexity for instructors. This memo summarizes the context, cites current practices at 19 peer institutions, and notes pro's and con's to such a change.

Definitions

Several definitions for important days are useful. Institutions vary as to whether deadlines occur at 16:59 or 23:49, although experience suggests that the latter gives students more time to deliberate.

add-without-approval deadline: This is the deadline for students to add courses without seek approval from the instructor, department head, or dean.

refunded drop deadline: this is the deadline for dropping a course so that it will not appear on the student's transcript and 100% of associated tuition and fees will be reimbursed. Some institutions refund 0% of tuition/fees after this deadline while others (such as UTEP) gradually decrease the refund from 100% to 0% over several weeks. While not mentioned in President Fermé's email, this deadline can also be used to encourage timely registration.

census: this is the day on which official enrollment counts are taken. It usually coincides with a final registration deadline.

Findings and Options

NMSU's peer institutions set add-without-approval deadlines ranging from zero to ten class days into the term, but always prior to census (Appendix 2). Five class days is typical. Considering NMSU's history and practices at peer institutions, four natural options arise. NMSU could

- change nothing;
- move the add-without-approval deadline to the end of the fifth class day. This would compromise between the two-week policy prior to Proposition 05-13/14 and the current two-day policy. It would enable students to experience each weekday once before the deadline. For terms beginning on Wednesdays, this would be the first Tuesday.
- move the add-without-approval deadline to the second Friday. This would enable students to experience one half-week and one full week before the deadline. For terms beginning on Wednesdays, this would be the eighth class day;

- move the add-without-approval deadline to the tenth class day. This would enable students to "shop" for two full weeks. For terms beginning on Wednesdays, this would be the second Tuesday. This would effectively undo the changes proposed by Proposition 05-13/14.

In addition to moving back the add-without-approval deadline, NMSU could take two other steps to improve student outcomes.

1. Discourage faculty from allowing students to add following the add-without-approval deadline. For example, some institutions require instructor and department head and/or dean's approval for late course additions.
2. Take further steps to encourage early registration and contact students proactively who have financial or administrative holds well before the term begins.

Arguments For and Against

This section summarizes pro's and con's of *moving* the add-without-approval deadline closer to census.

Pros

- As mentioned in President Fermé's email (Appendix 1), this removes the need for students to solicit instructor approval for classes that have not even convened.
- Many students add courses late for reasons that fall outside their control such as financial holds or housing instability. For these students, an early add-without-approval deadline does not encourage proactive registration so much as it adds extra delay and even expense. These concerns are not contemplated by O'Banion 2012, which was cited in support of Proposition 05-13/14.
- Experience indicates that the current add-without-approval deadline leads to a significant administrative burden for instructors and advisors, who must field many emailed requests for overrides and signatures. Moving the deadline back could alleviate some of this burden.

Cons

- The risk that students will join the class late may force some instructors to start their classes slowly (O'Banion 2012). For example, lab courses may delay defining lap groups and performing arts courses may delay assigning roles. By denying requests for overrides and late course additions, these instructors may use the current early add-without-approval deadline to "hit the ground running."
- Delaying the add-without-approval deadline invites students to commit to their courses incompletely early on (O'Banion 2012). For example, they may feel less motivated to complete early homework assignments or engage in icebreaker activities as long as there is a chance they will switch courses.
- More broadly, studies consistently indicate a strong association between late registration and student grade outcomes, retention, and persistence (Smith, Street, and Olivarez 2001, Phelps et al. 2025). Importantly, however, t*hese associations are not necessarily causal*; that is, additional variables such as lack of commitment (Fujiwara 2026) or a tendency to procrastinate may simultaneously delay registration and hinder persistence. For example, an analysis of 204 students in a single introductory computer science course confirmed the late enrollees had weaker grades, but also revealed that they were significantly less likely to attend office hours or exam review sessions (Phelps et al. 2025).

References

O'Banion, T., (2012). "Late Registration: May it Rest in Peace," Community College Journal, 83 (1), p 26-31

Smith, Street, and Olivarez (2001). "EARLY, REGULAR, AND LATE REGISTRATION AND COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT SUCCESS: A CASE STUDY. " Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 26(3), p 261-273

Fujiwara 2026, https://osf.io/preprints/edarxiv/xyf64_v1

Phelps et al. (2025). "Assessing Course Policy Impacts: Late Course Enrollment and Its Effects on Student Performance and Incomplete Grades." Proceedings of the 56th ACM Technical Symposium on Computer Science Education V. 2 (SIGCSE TS 2025), February 26-March 1, 2025, Pittsburgh, PA, USA. ACM, New York, NY, USA, 2 pages. https://doi.org/10.1145/3641555. 3705048

Appendix 1: Email from President Ferme 8/13/2026

Dear Kristian and Oladayo (Joe Bull copied),

I am writing because it has come to my attention that we have a practice of allowing students to enroll and unenroll in classes for only 2 days, before they are required to get an instructor/faculty signature. To me, that is odd. At my former institutions, that period was at least a week.

This, to me, causes unnecessary friction for our students (and frankly, to our faculty). Let me explain why:

1) There are classes that only meet Monday-Tuesday (I just saw one on someone's schedule). That means that our current system (which is currently slated for a last day to add a course without an instructor signature by Thursday, Aug. 20 at 5:00PM) does not even give a student the chance to be in the class to make a decision that requires a faculty signature (and actually, the last day to add a course with and instructor signature is the following Friday, Aug. 28, which is less than the 2 weeks most other institutions allow students to add courses). That seems odd.

2) As a faculty member, I understand that students shop their courses as much as possible during the first week of classes. To have people bringing papers to be signed the first week (and the students then have to bring those to their advisers, who then have to process them to the system, etc., etc.) is simply a distraction… Give them one week and give the faculty one week to settle into the course, before having to make decisions about who gets in and who does not.

3) The longer deadline supports NMSU rolling admission. We are still admitting students during the first two week (census is at the end of the second week), so it would make sense to give them the opportunity to add classes as they are enrolling, without having the extra hoop of having to chase 5-6 signatures as they become our students.

4) Since there is a lot of traffic in and out of courses in the first week, if a student needs to go chase signatures for the last 1-2 seats in a class, sometimes that means they lose the opportunity to someone else who might have just had the luck of being able to catch the faculty after class while they were rushing to another class. It would be fairer to let students do it on their own.

Anyway, I would like to bring this up for review with the Faculty Senate leadership and the Curriculum Committee (maybe not the best one, but it is something that faculty need to weigh in on) during the next couple of meetings.

Thank you

Valerio

Previous Legislation

Senator J. Cook identified two previous items of legislation that may refer to registration:

- Proposition 05-13/14 initiated the current two-day add-without-approval window https://inside.nmsu.edu/facultysenate/propositions/2013-2014-propositions/05-1314/

- Proposition 22-14/15 modifies ARP 6.92, the policy governing withdrawals and medical withdrawals, but does not address course adds https://inside.nmsu.edu/facultysenate/propositions/2014-2015-propositions/22-1415/

Appendix 3: Table of Late Registration Policies at Peer Institutions

Institution & Link	policy notes	add without approval	refunded drop	census
NMSU	Students may add courses up to second day of classes without instructor signature. $25 Late registration fee applies starting third day of classes. 100% refund up to 16 days later.	2 days	16 days	16 days
Oklahoma State U	Late *initial* enrollment fee applies starting on the first day of classes. If already enrolled, additional classes may be added without additional late enrollment fee for two weeks. 100% refund, nonrestrictive drop/add deadline seven days later. [Shopping always costs.] No mention of instructor consent. Academic calendars & registrar's page indicate add without approval deadline of 5-8 days	8 days	8 days	
Kansas State U	$65 Special Handling fee assessed for registration starting first day of classes. Sitting in on classes for which students are not registered is not permitted, even if registration is blocked by a hold. (more restrictive than NMSU). Instructor consent required after 7th day of classes.	7 days	22 days	29 days (20th instruction day)
North Dakota State U - Main (16-week session)	Courses may be added up to tenth day; that's also the deadline for dropping with 100% refund. $25 late fee after enrollment deadline. Permit needed to add classes after 10 days.	10th calendar day / 8th class day	10 days	29 days
U of Nevada Reno	Initial registration deadline 3 days before classes begin. Late initial enrollment fees are assessed 2 days before classes begin.	5 days	10 days	?
UT San Antonio	Registration closes 9 days before term begins. Late registration (requires instructor and dept head approval) begins same day and has a fee. Deadline to add a class is ten days after term starts. Fees are unclear.	0 days	16 days	16 days

Institution & Link	policy notes	add without approval	refunded drop	census
U of Wyoming	The last day to add classes is the fifth day after first day of term, though different cites seem to indicate up to 8 days. The last day to drop courses tenth day after first day of term. Late adds probably require approval, but this is not obvious.	8 class days?	10 days	?
UTEP	After sixth class day (fall/spring), late registration requires dean's approval; late registration possible days 7-12. Late registration fee applies starting first day of classes, grows from $25 to $50. Partial refunds only starting first day per Texas Education Code 54.006	6 days	0 days; refunds < 100% refund up to 20 class days	17 days (12th day of class)
U of Idaho	Late registration fees assessed starting second day of classes. Deadline to add/drop without instructor consent is one full week of classes (eighth calendar day). The deadline to add with permission is twelfth day; this is also census / deadline for dropping w/ 100% refund.	7 days	12	12
Northern Arizona U (16 week option)	$50 late enrollment fee begins on third day of classes. Last day to add a course without instructor consent is tenth day of classes. Last day to drop with 100% refund is 11th day (Census is 22nd day)	10 days	11	22
Colorado State, Fort Collins	"restricted drop" ends on fifth day of classes, "regular add" ends two days later. deadline for adding with override, census, and dropping are on 17th day.	7 days		17
Oregon State U	(They have a quarter system)			
Washington State U	$25 late registration fee begins first day of classes. Last day to withdraw w/ refund or add without instructor consent is 7th day of term. Census is 12th day; late registration with $100 fee begins afterwards.	7 days		
South Dakota State U	The deadline to add or drop with 100% refund is census, 11th day. Instructor consent required starting on 12th day.	11 days		
U of Arkansas	Add courses through end of 5th day, no fees, no consent needed. For 6th through 10th days of the term, students can add courses but need dept and dean's approval and incur $25 late registration fee. Drop courses through 10th class day (12th since first day of classes). 100% refund through 7th day of term.	5 days		
Mississippi State U	5th class day is the last day to drop a course. 6th class day is last day to register or add a class. No mention of instructor consent.	6 days		
U of Hawaii at Manoa	$30 Late registration assessed starting first day of classes. Deadline to add or drop with 100% refund is end of 9th day of classes. Deadline to drop is at 23 days.	9 days		

Institution & Link	policy notes	add without approval	refunded drop	census
Utah State U	Students may add courses without petitioning for consent through 5th day after classes start. May add courses or drop with 100% refund through 22nd day of term.	5 days		
UNM	Students may add courses with no fee through 12th day of the term. Enrollment authorization form required to change enrollment after 14th day of term. Students may drop courses with 100% refund through 19th day of the term.	14 calendar days/ tenth class day		19 calendar days/ 15th class day
Montana State U	Students have seven days to add without approval. They may add during days 8-15 with approval. No mention of late fees.	7 days		
U of Alaska, FB	Students have 7 days to add courses without instructor approval. May drop courses with 100% refund through 12th day.	7 days		
U of Louisiana at Lafayette	Students have 10 days (for example, F26) to drop or add classes with no fee penalty. First 5 days are “Schedule Adjustment Period” so no approval required. Afterwards, need instructor’s and academic dean’s approval. $50 late registration fee assessed days 11-19. $100 late registration fee starts on day 20.	5 days		