Dear Professor: A Chronicle of Absences
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Author’s Preface

Like many artists and writers in New York City, I teach to make a living. As of this writing, I am an adjunct professor in three major universities, teaching art history to undergraduate students as well as a fair sprinkling of adults and senior citizens who wish to brush up on their general knowledge and understanding of art.

The following anthology compiles a selection of over two hundred emails I received from students in the past few years in which they excuse, justify, or explain their non-attendance in class. Taken together, they paint a staggering portrait of university life in the digital age where missing class is frequently glossed over by an endless string of virtual exchanges that have nothing to do with serious study and learning. Judging from these, at turns candid, beseeching, sometimes even curt or sly emails, it would appear that the American college student of the twenty-first century feels entitled to succeed without really trying.

And yet, re-examining this overwhelming accumulation of epistolary apologies, I cannot help feeling increasingly empathetic towards those who wrote them. Their affected courtesy cannot hide a host of insecurities and sense of isolation, consumed as they are by constant distraction, craving connection yet unable to sustain it. I wish my absentee students would understand that their apologies for missing in action are not my concern. What does matter and what they themselves should be concerned about is that they are missing in on the action.

— Filip Noterdaeme