As an addendum to my last email, there are usually three reasons advanced by the students for dropping a course.

(i) They are doing poorly in the course. It is perfectly reasonable for a student to get out of a class where they might get a failing grade and end up on probation. However, the reality is frequently different. There is another side to the story – namely, the instructor’s. In almost every single case, the student is doing fine in the class even though they are uncomfortable with the material. The reason for the discomfort is that the student did not seek help from the instructor during office hours. In such cases, I routinely decline the request to drop the class. The student ends up with a very good grade after they make an effort to meet with the instructor. There have been but one or two instances where I have allowed a student to drop a class but the reason has to be much more substantial.

Please check with the graduate advisor and with the instructor to make sure you have the right pre-requisites to take topics classes.

(ii) It is not unusual for a student to walk into my office 2 weeks (or even 2 months) after the semester has started and say “I need to drop this 5xxx course. I did not intend to take it and I have not attended a single lecture. I only signed up for it as a favor to my friend and to help this class make”. I certainly understand the sentiment behind the statement, but the student is doing more harm than good. If 4 students sign up for a class to help one friend and all of them drop the class after two weeks, then we will have one class with one student and one faculty member. It is much better and efficient for the student to simply sign up for a self-study class with the same faculty member. Our faculty expend enormous amount of energy to create interesting topics courses for our graduate students. It is simply not right if students sign up for courses and then drop it two weeks later and add more thesis hours or Math 7000 hours. This loop-hole (if it did exist) is not going to exist anymore. In the future, I will decline such requests.

(iii) Scheduling problems: It is possible that the students think their schedule is going to be different than what it actually turns out to be
when they signed up for a class. However, such problems are usually discovered within the first week of the semester and the student should not be needing the graduate advisor’s permission to add a different class. After two weeks have passed, if a student says “I need to drop this 5xxx course. I did intend to take it, but I have not attended a single lecture. I have a scheduling problem and I teach at the exact same time as this class”, then in the future, I will require the student to take another active class (and not simply sign up for Math 6000/7000 hours) even though they have missed time.

Of course, there are always exceptions like severe illnesses or emergencies which will require a different decision than the normal one.

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From: Iyer, Ram  
Sent: Wednesday, March 23, 2011 2:53 PM  
To: Math Grad Students; Math Faculty  
Subject: Dropping courses after the semester has begun

Dear Graduate students,

It is already more than 6 months since the TA/RA/GA orientation that we held at the beginning of the Fall semester, and I would like to remind everyone about the procedure for dropping a course.

For a student to drop a course, they have to meet with the graduate advisor first. They cannot just simply drop the form off in the office and assume it is going to get done. It is my experience that in most cases, the students did not need to drop the course and eventually they did very well and got an excellent grade. For the graduate advisor to make the decision on whether or not the drop is warranted, a face to face meeting is essential.

Thank you for your time and have an excellent rest of the spring semester.
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