

2011

Pre-service Teachers' Attendance at Lectures and Tutorials: Why Don't They Turn Up?

Grace Oakley
University of Western Australia

Graeme Lock
Edith Cowan University

Fiona Budgen
Edith Cowan University

Brenda Hamlett
Edith Cowan University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte>



Part of the [Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Oakley, G., Lock, G., Budgen, F., & Hamlett, B. (2011). Pre-service Teachers' Attendance at Lectures and Tutorials: Why Don't They Turn Up?. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 36(5).
<http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2011v36n5.3>

This Journal Article is posted at Research Online.
<https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol36/iss5/3>

Pre-service Teachers' Attendance at Lectures and Tutorials: Why Don't They Turn Up?

Grace Oakley
University of Western Australia
grace.oakley@uwa.edu.au
Graeme Lock
Fiona Budgen
Brenda Hamlett
Edith Cowan University

Abstract: Research indicates that attendance at lectures and tutorials is associated with university students' level of success and satisfaction, and pre-service teachers' relatively low levels of attendance at scheduled classes is of significant concern to many lecturers. However, little research has been undertaken to investigate the factors associated with absenteeism among pre-service teachers. This study investigates rates of absenteeism among different groups of pre-service teachers in a large School of Education in a Western Australian university and considers pre-service teachers' self-reported reasons for being absent from lectures and tutorials. The results show that levels of attendance and reasons for absence at lectures vary according to demographic factors such as age, paid employment, entry pathway, course, mode of study and year level of study. Level of attendance at tutorials is affected by the same factors, except that the year of study (first, second, third or fourth) does not appear to be an influence. The relationships between attendance and achievement are also interrogated.

Introduction

The context

The School of Education concerned is one of the largest in Australia and offers both undergraduate and graduate diploma programs for pre-service teachers in Early Childhood Studies, Primary, K-7 and Secondary.

Primary modes of delivery are face-to-face lectures (normally one hour) plus face-to-face tutorials (two hours), which are supplemented by online materials on the Learning Management System (LMS), BlackBoard™. There is some variation in the ways that individual unit coordinators use BlackBoard™, but it is mostly used as a repository for lecture notes, PowerPoint™ slides and workshop materials. Many unit coordinators also make use of the bulletin board

feature (asynchronous communication) and some podcast their lectures, post interactive quizzes and provide links to videos, articles and other activities on the Internet.

The literature

Concerns held by university lecturers about student absenteeism are nothing new and student attendance has been an issue for decades, if not centuries (Massingham & Herrington, 2006). Romer (1993) asked the three questions: What is the extent of absenteeism; what impact does it have on learning, and; should anything be done about it? It seems that, more than fifteen years later, very similar questions are still being asked, even though the teaching and learning context has changed a great deal. During recent years there have been considerable shifts in student characteristics and expectations due to widened higher education participation and other social, political and economic changes, as well as developments in the ways in which course content can be delivered with the availability of increasingly sophisticated Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).

Absenteeism from lectures and tutorials is a source of concern to teacher educators for several reasons, not least the commonly held belief that low attendance leads to low achievement. Existing research into the relationship between attendance and achievement is inconsistent and contradictory (Barrett, Rainer, & Marczyk, 2007), although there is no shortage of studies that do, indeed, show positive correlations between attendance and achievement (Arulampala, Naylor, & Smith, 2007; Clump, Bauer, & Whiteleather, 2003; Colby, 2004; Gump, 2005; Kirkby & McElroy, 2003; Newman-Ford, Fitzgibbon, Lloyd, & Thomas, 2008). Possibly the most well known study of this kind is Colby's (2004), which posits a '70% rule'. Colby found that if a student does not attend at least 70% of sessions, they have a two in three chance of failing the unit. More recently, Newman-Ford and her colleagues found that students who do not attend at least 70% of learning events have a one in three chance of failing (Newman-Ford et al., 2008). It is acknowledged, however, that the direction of causality may be questioned and the relationship between success and attendance may not be straight forward (Arulampala et al., 2007; Martins & Walker, 2006; S. Moore, Armstrong, & Pearson, 2008; Rodgers, 2002). Various student characteristics seem to mediate the impact of attendance or absence: for example, in one study the adverse effect of missing class was found to be greater for better-performing (second year economics) students than other students in the same cohort (Arulampala et al., 2007). Another correlate of poor levels of achievement is a high drop-out (attrition) rate (Romer, 1993). Given the recommendations in the *Review of Australian Higher Education* (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008) regarding targets for degree attainment and funding arrangements, the impact of absence from classes, which appears to be mediated by demographic factors, should be given serious consideration by universities.

In the case of teacher education, lecturers sometimes express concerns that pre-service teachers whose attendance is low may somehow manage to scrape through the unit(s) concerned, but may ultimately become less effective classroom teachers, or may not have optimal school practice experiences due to missing out on rich discussions, hands-on experiences and explanations of important concepts in lectures and tutorials. However, there seems to be little research evidence to address this concern. Anecdotal evidence suggests that lecturers see low attendance at lectures and tutorials as an indicator of a low level of motivation and commitment on the part of the pre-service teacher and research indicates that there is a link between attendance at classes and motivation (S. Moore et al., 2008). In the context of teacher education, where the notion of 'professionalism' is seen by lecturers to be highly important, low attendance at lectures and tutorials can be perceived as a lack of commitment to the teaching profession and, ultimately, a lack of concern for the best outcomes for children.

Low attendance of students at classes can also impact negatively on tutors' and lecturers' careers. Research has shown that there is a relationship between attendance at classes and students' evaluation of lecturers (Davidovitch & Soen, 2006). It is, perhaps, not surprising that students whose attendance is poor tend to rate lecturers less favourably than do students whose attendance is good. Since lecturers' careers and promotion prospects hinge to some extent on student evaluations, there are concerns that students who do not attend classes are still permitted to submit evaluations. Davidovitch and Soen have acknowledged that the direction of causality is unclear, however, and that students' attendance may be low because they do not rate their instructors highly, and not the other way around. Chenneville and Jordan (2008), for example, found that when questioned about whether students believed missing a class indicates a lack of respect for the instructor, responses varied (41% agreed, 24% were undecided, 35% disagreed). Nevertheless, it is indisputable that students whose attendance is very low experience fewer samples of lecturers' teaching from which to make informed and valid conclusions about quality of teaching.

The discussion above has revealed that there are some serious adverse effects of student absenteeism from classes in cases where the primary mode of delivery is either face-to-face or 'blended' (lectures and tutorials are supplemented by online materials, but not intended to be replaced by online materials). It has also been posited that students' orientations towards study may not be what their lecturers expect or approve of (Fraser & Killen, 2003). Attention will now be turned to some of the major factors that may influence students' attendance or non-attendance at lectures and tutorials.

University lecturers sometimes fear that providing materials and information online is a disincentive for students to turn up at classes (Barrett et al., 2007), and there appears to be a perception that attendance has decreased since materials, including lecture notes, have become available on Learning Management Systems (LMS) such as BlackBoard™. However, at least one study (Babb & Ross, 2009) has found that the provision of PowerPoint™ slides and lecture notes prior to lectures can actually increase lecture attendance. Other researchers (e.g. Bowman, 2009) have found that posting materials such as PowerPoint™ slides on LMS makes no significant difference to attendance. It

seems likely that the type and quality of the online material may be a mediating factor.

Because of the wider social, economic and political context, today's students often find it necessary to engage in paid employment. The Australian Student Finances Survey (Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee, 2006) showed that 70.6% of full-time undergraduates engaged in paid employment during semester, and worked an average of 14.8 hours, with one in six working 20 hours a week. Twelve percent reported that they regularly went without food and other essentials to make ends meet, and 22.7% reported that they regularly missed university classes because they had to go to work. Other students (6.8% of full time and 7% of part time students) reported regularly missing classes because they could not afford transport to university.

Two recent studies have examined the relationship between attendance and employment. Kulm and Cramer (2006) found that students with a higher number of employment hours had lower grades as more employment meant less time preparing for class; however, there was no correlation between attendance and employment. Furthermore they revealed a positive correlation between employment and persistence towards degree completion. In a study (Anderson, 2006) completed among 148 students in paid work at James Cook University, Cairns campus, 78% of students found that work impacted detrimentally on study, and 40% believed that the university did not cater well for students in paid employment.

Research (Kirkby & McElroy, 2003) indicates that another determinant of lecture attendance is the length of time it takes to travel to university, with attendance being lower for those with longer distances to travel. When students have a very busy schedule, with work, study and sometimes family commitments, travel time can be a disincentive to attend university.

Gender has also been shown to be a determinant, with male students more likely to skip classes (Kirkby & McElroy, 2003; Woodfield, Jessop, & McMillan, 2006), although the possible reasons for this are yet to be fully explored. It should be noted that there is no research to support this tendency in the case of pre-service teachers.

Another potential incentive for attending classes relates to how 'interesting' the class or the lecturer is. Indeed, some lecturers feel that they are almost expected to do a 'song and dance' routine in order to attract today's students to lectures and tutorials. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there is a common perception that younger (Generation 'Y') students, in particular, expect to be 'entertained' in lectures and tutorials. In other words, students may find 'boring lectures' a valid reason for non-attendance. Salopek (2003) has argued that Generation Y people, who are usually what Prensky (2001) would call 'digital natives' because they grew up with digital technologies all around them, prefer a different approach to learning. In general, they are said to be visual learners who are attracted to graphics, animation and video; they are active as opposed to passive; they can be somewhat impatient and have a relatively short attention span; the boundaries between work and play are increasingly blurred to them; and they must be able to see payoff for their efforts. Most undergraduates at

university at the time of our study (and 70% of the students who completed our survey) were aged 29 or less and thus in the Generation Y age range.

Personality characteristics of lecturers may also impact on students' attendance. Massingham and Herrington (2006) have discussed how the 'likeability' or 'charisma' of individual lecturers can attract students to lectures and tutorials. They suggest that lecturers who do not have magnetic personalities should find other ways of maximising student attendance (although we are not ruling out the possibility of lecturers developing their personality). Conversely, unappealing lecturers may actually act as a 'push' factor, actively keeping students away.

Gump (2004) found that 84.7% of undergraduate (Introduction to Japanese Culture) students indicated that 'interest' was a reason they would attend class, suggesting that lecturers should endeavour to make their courses as interesting as possible as a means of improving attendance rates. In fact, in Gump's study, students were more likely to state 'interesting material/lecturer' as a reason to attend than they were to state 'classes are compulsory', making this a very important factor. Gump does not explain what students mean by 'interesting' or what makes an 'interesting' lecture or class, however.

As mentioned above, attendance is not compulsory in the Primary Education program at the university where our research was carried out, although vigorous discussions have been held as to whether penalties (and/or rewards) should be introduced, and how these might be implemented. Some (R. Moore, 2005, p. 26) research shows that making attendance compulsory can be effective in deterring students from skipping class, while other research shows that it may be more effective to emphasise the academic benefits of class attendance than to impose penalties for non-attendance. Moore found that attendance improved when staff regularly and repeatedly discussed quantitative benefits with students. That is, when students were made aware of the correlation between attendance and success, they understood the importance of attendance and changed their behaviour somewhat. Other studies have found that taking measures to increase attendance did not positively influence students' grades (Arulampala et al., 2007; Martins & Walker, 2006).

Students' views about attendance policies are unclear. Chenneville and Jordan's (2008) research showed that only 20% of students were in favour of attendance policies, yet 71% reported that they were less likely to miss classes for classes where an attendance policy was in place. Launius (1997) found that 84% of (Psychology) undergraduates said their attendance would improve if they were to receive credit for attendance (rewards), and Gump's research (2004) found that 66.7% of (Introduction to Japanese Culture) undergraduates indicated they would be persuaded to attend classes if credit was given for attendance. It seems that students do not necessarily understand or believe that they are likely to receive credit in the form of higher achievement for full attendance and participation.

Pearce (2005) found that the time of day influences attendance; early and late classes do not generally tend to be as popular with students. As well, having only one lecture or class timetabled in a day has been found to be a factor that acts as a disincentive for attending. It will come as no surprise to most university lecturers that the time of semester also appears to be a factor, with attendance

dropping off towards the end of the semester (Colby, 2004; Newman-Ford et al., 2008). Class size also appears to be a factor in whether or not students attend, with absenteeism being more prevalent in large classes (Gump, 2005; Kirkby & McElroy, 2003).

Genuine illness is recognised as a major reason for students not attending lectures and tutorials. In Pearce's study (2005), genuine illness was the main self-reported reason for absence. Mental illness and substance abuse are also relatively prevalent in today's society and it is not unreasonable to expect a proportion of pre-service teachers to suffer from such problems. Indeed, Pearce (2005) found that being under the influence of drink or drugs was a reason students gave for staying away from class.

Moore et al. (2008) have suggested that there may be 'absentee types' and that different explanations for absences might signal variable levels of motivation. This, of course, assumes that the reasons individuals give for absences have distinctive patterns. Moore et al. also propose that the reasons given by students may in reality mask deeper-seated reasons such as stress or a sense of failure.

Another categorisation of students is presented by Dolnicar (2004), who identified 'idealists' and 'pragmatists'. Idealists, who consisted of more mature aged students with working experience, reported genuinely enjoying lectures. Students labelled pragmatists were usually the younger students and reported that they attended lectures merely to get the information they need to succeed in the course rather than for intellectual stimulation or for the intrinsic satisfaction of engaging with the content. In vocational courses, such as teacher education, it is perhaps not surprising that there appears to be a high degree of instrumentalism or pragmatism; students may have enrolled primarily for the qualification, not for the knowledge itself. It has been suggested that grade maximising students may strategically choose to miss selected classes in order to spend time on important assignments. This strategic behaviour may actually work in these students' favour and, in such cases, 'making classes compulsory could be inefficient' (Arulampala et al., p. 23). Newman-Ford et al. (2008, p. 701) summarise that 'absence can be viewed as a personal decision based on an individual's ability to attend as well as their motivation to attend.'

Method

Instruments

The present survey included a range of response sets. Socio-biographical data included age group, gender, entry pathway into university, course, year level, hours of paid employment per week, and mode of study (full or part time).

Respondents were asked to read a series of statements that listed possible reasons for non-attendance at lectures and tutorials (see Table 1) and to indicate on a Likert scale how applicable the reason for non-attendance (statement) was to them during Semester 1, 2008. The ratings were: never, rarely, occasionally, quite often, and frequently. Space was available for respondents to list 'other' reasons for missing class.

The survey statements were closely based on those used by Massingham and Herrington (2006) in their study of the attendance of Business students at the University of Wollongong, and were related to the issues described in the literature review, above.

Reasons for not attending lectures	Reasons for not attending tutorials
Genuine illness	Genuine illness
Too busy	Too busy
Paid employment	Paid employment
Too tired	Too tired
Uninteresting lectures	Uninteresting tutorials
Didn't like the lecturer	Didn't like the tutor
Could not be bothered	Could not be bothered
Did not fit lifestyle	Did not fit lifestyle
Unit was boring	Unit was boring
Lecture notes available on BlackBoard	
Do not need to attend lectures to pass	
Lectures are a waste of time	

Table 1: Survey: Potential Reasons for Non-attendance

Participants

A total of 648 pre-service teachers (from the Primary Education program) were given the survey, 524 of whom were undergraduate Bachelor of Education students, which is a course of four years' duration. The other 124 students were studying for a one year post graduate Graduate Diploma in Education. There were 812 students (617 in the Bachelor of Education and 195 in the Graduate Diploma of education) (ECU, School of Education, 2009) enrolled at the time, thus 80% of all students received surveys.

Procedure

In week four of semester two, 2008, paper-based (anonymous) surveys were distributed to pre-service teachers during tutorials, as it was known that these had a higher rate of attendance than did lectures. Pre-service teachers had been informed about the forthcoming survey through pre-survey flyers being displayed on faculty notice boards and on the BlackBoard™ Learning Management System. Time was allocated during the tutorial for pre-service teachers to complete the surveys, which were then collected by the staff member. Pre-service teachers who were absent from the tutorials during the week that surveys were administered were aware that they could contact a staff member to obtain a copy of the survey, if desired.

Findings and Discussion

A total of 267 students responded and the overall response rate was 41.2%, with 43.9% for the Bachelor of Education students and 29.8% for the Graduate Diploma students. Most of the pre-service teachers surveyed (74.2%) were female and the rest (25.8%) were male.

The majority of the pre-service teachers surveyed reported that they engaged in some paid employment (see Figure 1), with only 17.4% indicating that they did not engage in paid employment at all. More than three quarters (76.5%) of the students surveyed reported that they engaged in a least six hours paid employment per week, with 20.7% reporting that they engaged in at least 21 hours of paid employment each week.

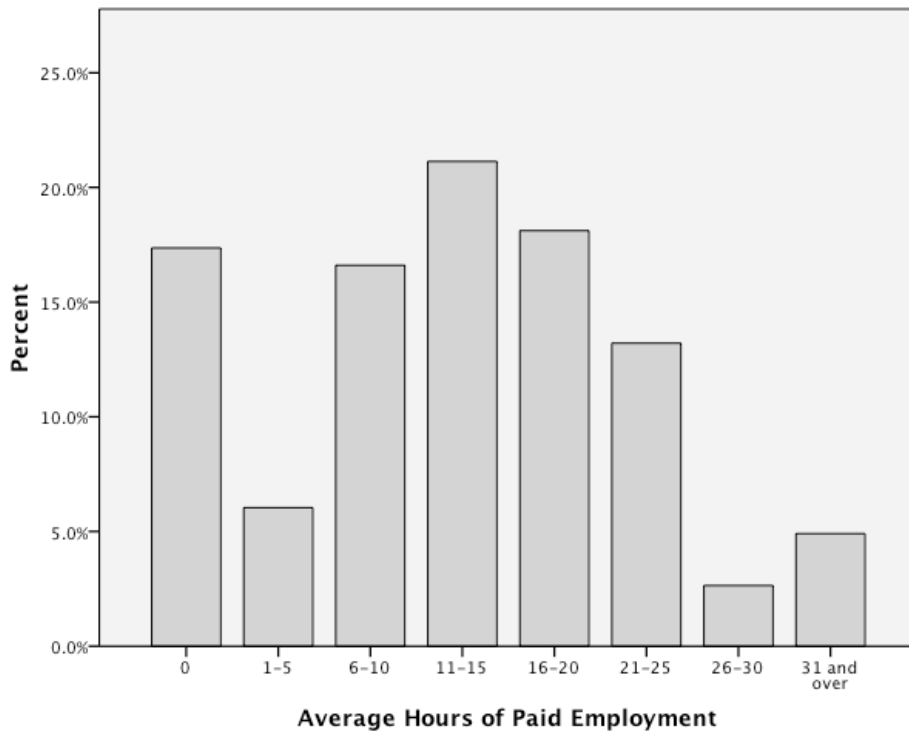


Figure 1. Distribution of students by average hours of paid employment per week.

Attendance at lectures

Of the pre-service teachers who completed the survey, 56.2% reported that they had attended 91-100% of lectures in the previous semester (see Figure 2), 75.7% reported that they had attended 81-90% of lectures, while 85.8% reported that they had attended 71-80% of lectures. This means that almost 14% of the students surveyed missed at least 30% of the semester's lectures, which translates to a significant number of students putting themselves at serious risk of failing the course, according to Colby's (2004) 70% rule, as discussed in the literature review. Since some students were absent for the survey, it could be that even more than 14% regularly missed lectures. Figure 2 shows that the older the students were, the more lectures they claimed to have attended.

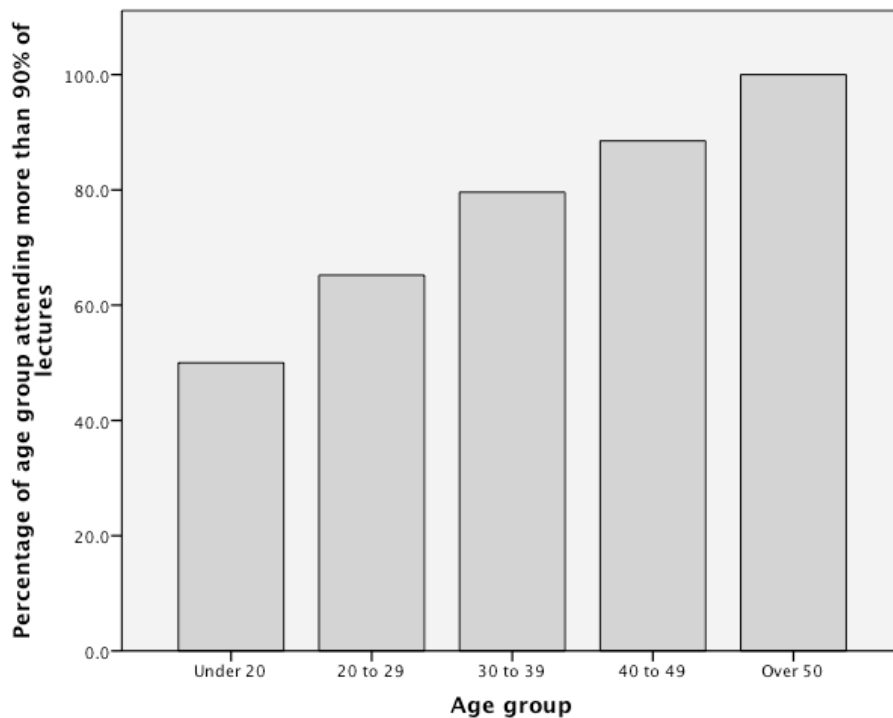


Figure 2. Percentage of students by age group who attended more than 90% of lectures.

With reference to the relationship between attendance and achievement, those students who had attended most of the lectures were just as likely to have failed one unit as anyone else; overall, 11% of the cohort had failed one unit as opposed to 12% of those who had attended 91-100%. The number of lectures attended did not appear to have an impact on whether a student failed one or two units. On the other end of the scale, those who attended 91-100% of the lectures were *not* more likely to than others to achieve High Distinctions. According to Chi Square analysis, there was no significant relationship between attendance at lectures and level of achievement. Thus, in our sample, the relationship between

attendance at lectures and academic failure did not conform to Colby's (2004) rule.

Reasons for non-attendance: Lectures

The mean scores of the reasons given for missing lectures are shown in Table 2 (with a score of 1 representing 'rarely' and a score of 5 representing 'frequently'). The most frequently cited reason for missing lectures was 'genuine illness', which is in concurrence with some of the existing research findings (e.g. Pearce, 2005), although it must be noted that the existing research base does not give a conclusive picture about the main reasons for students attending or not attending classes; it is likely that there are many mediating factors that are yet to be investigated. Some of the possible mediating factors, such as age, are discussed below.

Reason	Mean
Genuine Illness	2.18
Uninteresting Lectures	2.14
Too tired	2.09
Too busy	1.98
Lecture notes available on blackboard	1.86
Unit was boring	1.81
Paid employment	1.71
Could not be bothered	1.69
Do not need to attend lectures to pass	1.68
Did not like lecturer	1.65
Lectures are a waste of time	1.62
Did not fit lifestyle	1.40

Table 2: Reasons for Non-attendance at Lectures (Mean Scores)

Chi square analysis shows that, in the present study, there was a significant relationship ($p=.009$) between age and 'genuine illness' being given as a reason for non-attendance, with younger students (under 29s) being less likely to 'never' use this reason than were older students. Forty eight percent of 40-49 year olds responded that this would 'never' be a reason for not attending lectures whilst only 16.7% of under 20s and 20.4% of 20-29 year olds reported that genuine illness would 'never' be a reason for non-attendance. There was also a significant relationship between Course and 'genuine illness' being given as a reason for non attendance ($p=0.002$), with the post-graduate Graduate Diploma students being much more likely to report that they 'never' used genuine illness as a reason for non attendance. Since Graduate Diploma students are generally older than Bachelor of Education students, this is perhaps not a surprising result. Part time students were more likely than expected to 'never' use genuine illness as a reason for non attendance, with 77% of them indicating 'never', as opposed to only 37% of full time students. Since older students were far less likely to be

absent, it follows that they would be less likely to cite *any* of the reasons as explanations.

The second most commonly cited reason for not attending lectures was 'uninteresting lectures', and the younger the student, the more likely they were to use this as a reason, which may well be partly attributable to the characteristics of Generation Y students, as discussed above. There was also a significant relationship ($p=.028$) between the number of hours worked per week and the use of 'uninteresting lectures' as a reason for non-attendance, with those who worked more than 11 hours per week tending to be less likely to say that finding lectures uninteresting is 'never' a reason for non-attendance. In other words, those who worked longer hours were more likely to cite 'uninteresting' lectures as a reason for missing lectures. This finding that 'uninteresting lectures' was a major reason for non-attendance aligns with other research, where the quality of teaching (as judged by students) has been shown to be correlated with student attendance (e.g. Davidovitch & Soen, 2006). An area for further study might be to investigate the features of an 'interesting' lecture as perceived by pre-service teachers.

The third most frequent reason given for non-attendance at lectures was 'too tired' and this reason was significantly related to the number of hours of paid employment, year level, age, course, entry pathway and mode of study. However, it was not significantly related to gender. According to the chi square analysis, Graduate Diploma students were more likely than expected to indicate that they 'never' use tiredness as a reason for not attending lectures, with 62.9% of them claiming that this was 'never' a reason for non-attendance at lectures, as opposed to only 37.1% of undergraduates. There was no significant difference between the number of hours worked (paid employment) per week for part time as opposed to full time students, so in this particular study it may be that part time students were genuinely less tired, perhaps attributable to fewer hours of university study. It is acknowledged that the number of hours per week of unpaid work and home duties, which was not investigated in the survey, could also be a factor.

Attendance at tutorials

Self-reported attendance at tutorials (sometimes known as workshops) tended to be higher than at lectures, with 66.7% (as opposed to only 56.2% for lectures) claiming to attend more than 90 per cent of tutorials; 88.4% reported that they attended more than 80 per cent of tutorials, and 95.5% indicated that they attended more than 70 per cent (see Figure 3). This suggests that students might see tutorials as more crucial to success than lectures or, for some, it could simply be an effect of the tendency for attendance to be higher for smaller classes.

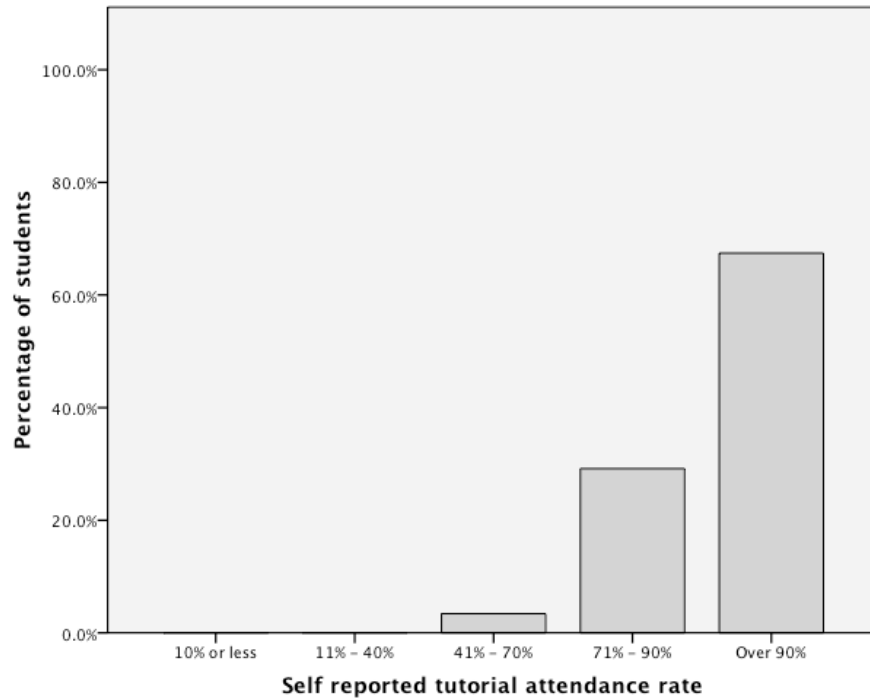


Figure 3: Self reported attendance rates.

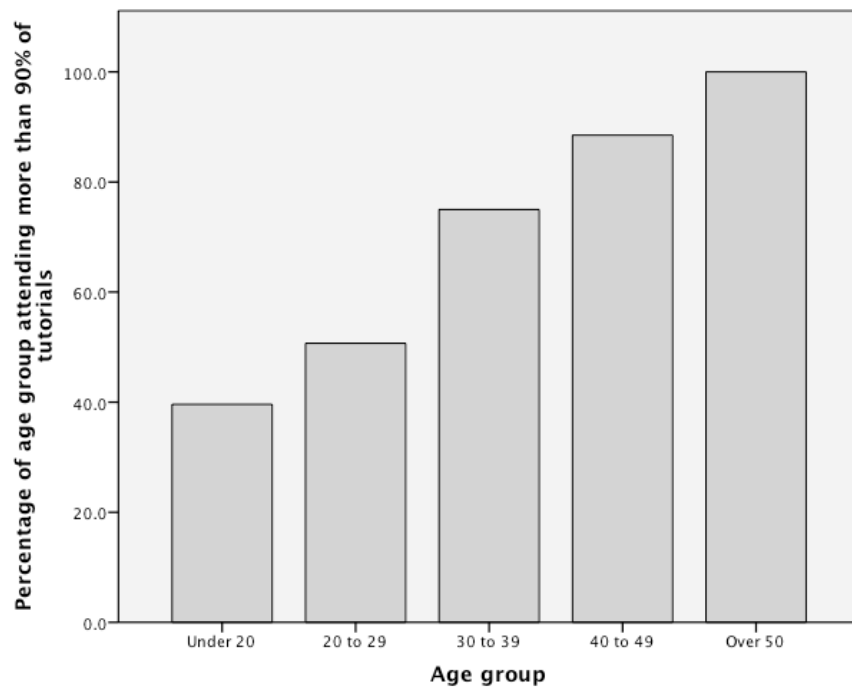


Figure 4. Percentage of students by age group who attended more than 90% of tutorials.

As was the case with lectures, the older the student, the higher was the percentage of the (reported) tutorials attended. On average, only 50% of students 20 years of age or under managed to attend most (91-100%) of the tutorials. In this sample of pre-service teachers, there was no significant relationship between

the reported number of tutorials attended and level of achievement in units. This is contrary to 'popular wisdom' among lecturers and many previous research findings that students with poor attendance are more likely to fail academic units. It would be interesting to investigate why it is that some students appear to be able to succeed in university assessment without attendance at activities whilst others obviously find the need to attend. Another question that, perhaps, should be asked relates to the assessment tasks: are they really measuring what they ought to?

Reasons for non-attendance: Tutorials

In Table 3, the mean scores of the reasons given for non-attendance at tutorials are shown.

Reasons	Mean
Genuine Illness	2.15
Too tired	1.79
Too busy	1.7
Uninteresting Tutorials	1.64
Unit was boring	1.54
Paid employment	1.52
Could not be bothered	1.50
Didn't like the tutor	1.42
Did not fit lifestyle	1.29

Table 3: Reasons for Non-attendance at Tutorials

Various reasons were given for non-attendance at these classes. As was the case for lectures, the reason most frequently stated was genuine illness. Overall, the mean scores were lower for tutorials than for lectures, indicating that none of the reasons (except illness) were used as often as an explanation for missing tutorials as they were for missing lectures.

Gender was not a significant determinant of attendance at tutorials, which is in contrast with results found by Kirkby and McElroy (2003). However, the gender balance of pre-service teachers (female dominated) may be very different from that of economics students.

The open ended question in the survey revealed that there were several other reasons for non attendance at lectures. The most frequently cited reason, cited by 10 of the 267 respondents (3.7%), was 'preparing assignments for other units'. This indicates that some pre-service teachers may have time management difficulties, or perhaps that assessment issues need to be re-examined. If assessment tasks are interfering with engagement in other learning activities, could they be adjusted to prevent this? The second most frequent 'other' cause cited (9 students) for not attending lectures and tutorials was 'personal issues'. This is not surprising, as anecdotal evidence suggests that lecturers are often told by students about personal issues such as marital and relationship breakdowns, difficulties in fitting in with the rest of the study cohort, and mental health issues. Universities do attempt to assist in these issues by providing counseling and medical services; nonetheless, many students struggle to balance 'life' issues with their study commitments. A few (6) students cited childcare problems, not feeling like going to the lecture (5), and large breaks between lectures or classes (4) as reasons for not attending. Two or three students reported that they had arrived late and felt uncomfortable about entering the class late, had car troubles, found lectures too early or late in the day, or preferred to spend time in the university bar.

Concluding comments

Perhaps the most notable finding is that attendance at lectures and tutorials did not seem to impact on the achievement of students in terms of units passed or grades of units. According to chi square analysis, there were no significant relationships. This does not mean that attendance is not important because it clearly is for some students. However, despite the absence of a significant relationship in this study, the fact remains that almost 14% of the surveyed students reported that they missed 30% of the semester's lectures. Given Colby's (2004) 70% rule, and the previous research showing positive correlations between attendance and achievement (Arulampala et al., 2007; Clump et al., 2003; Colby, 2004; Gump, 2005; Kirkby & McElroy, 2003; Newman-Ford et al., 2008), further research into this aspect is warranted. One explanation for the conflicting results could lie in the students' self-reporting of their levels of attendance. Students with low attendance levels may not have wished to acknowledge the fact or may simply have lost track of how many classes they missed. When considering the recommendations in the *Review of Australian Higher Education* (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008) regarding targets for degree attainment and funding arrangements, such research would seem to be a priority.

The age of the student appears to be significant to this discussion. In our sample, the older the student was, the more classes (lectures and tutorials) they appear to attend. This may be related to a preference for face to face as opposed to online learning. It may also be the case that younger students do not perceive a need to attend face to face classes in order to pass units, perhaps because they are somehow able to make better use of online materials and other learning resources provided. Older students, who are far more likely to attend classes, appear to have a different attitude towards what is required in order to succeed at university. This may be related to their level of confidence or to their personal theories of what learning entails. This is an area, together with what pre-service teachers consider to be the features of an 'interesting' lecture, seems to warrant further investigation.

Another finding of some note is the relatively high proportion of pre-service teachers working long hours of paid employment each week. While 20.7 per cent of students surveyed worked 21 hours or more each week, this figure increases to 38.8% for hours of work exceeding 16 and 59.9% for over 11 hours of weekly paid employment. These figures can be discussed with reference to two studies discussed in the literature. First, the report from the Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee (2006), which revealed that one in six students worked 20 hours or more each week. In this research almost one in five pre-service teachers were working more than 20 hours each week, and if these figures are representative of university students across Australia, then an upward trend of longer hours of paid employment might be apparent.

These figures should also be considered in relation to the findings of Kulm and Cramer (2006) who found that students with a higher number of employment hours achieved lower grades, an issue that might have significance for universities given the previously discussed recommendations in the *Review of Australian*

Higher Education (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008). Might high weekly employment hours impact the rate of degree attainment? This quandary presents itself as an opportunity for further study, including the reasons for students working long hours in paid employment.

References

- Anderson, M.J. (2006). Degree of fit: University students in paid employment, service delivery and technology. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 22(1), 88-103.
- Arulampala, W., Naylor, R. A., & Smith, J. (2007). Am I missing something? The effects of absence from class on student performance.
- Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee. (2006). *Australian university student finances 2006: A summary of findings from a national survey of students in public universities*. Canberra: Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee.
- Babb, K. A., & Ross, C. (2009). The timing of online lecture slide availability and its effect on attendance, participation, and exam performance. *Computers & Education*, 52, 868–881.
- Barrett, R., Rainer, A., & Marczyk, O. (2007). Managed learning environments and an attendance crisis? *The Electronic Journal of e-Learning*, 5(1), 1-10.
- Bowman, L. L. (2009). Does posting PowerPoint™ presentations on WebCT affect class performance or attendance? *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 36(2), 104-107.
- Chenneville, T., & Jordan, C. (2008). Impact of attendance policies on course attendance among college students. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 8(3), 29 - 35.
- Clump, M. A., Bauer, H., & Whiteleather, A. (2003). To attend or not to attend: Is that a good question? *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 30(3), 220-224.
- Colby, J. (2004). *Attendance and attainment*. Paper presented at the 5th ICS-LTSN Annual Conference. Retrieved 11/9/2009, from <http://www.ics.heacademy.ac.uk/italics/Vol4-2/ITALIX.pdf>
- Davidovitch, N., & Soen, D. (2006). Class attendance and students' evaluation of their college instructors. *College Student Journal*, 40(3), 691-703.
- Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations. (2008). *Review of Australian Higher Education (Bradley Review)*. Canberra, ACT: DEEWR.
- Dolnicar, S. (2004). *What makes students attend lectures? The shift towards pragmatism in undergraduate lecture attendance*. Paper presented at the Conference Proceedings of the Australian and New Zealand Marketing Academy. Retrieved 11/9/2009 from <http://ro.uow.edu.au/commpapers/81>
- Fraser, W. J., & Killen, R. (2003). Factors influencing academic success or failure of first-year and senior university students: do education students and lecturers perceive things differently? *South African Journal of Education*, 23(4), 254 – 260.
- Gump, S. (2005). The cost of cutting class: Attendance as a predictor for student success. *Journal of College Teaching*, 53(1), 21-26.
- Gump, S. E. (2004). Keep students coming by keeping them interested: Motivators in class attendance. *College Student Journal*, 38(1), 157-160.
- Kirkby, A., & McElroy, B. (2003). The effect of attendance on grade for first year Economics students in University College Cork. *The Economic and Social Review*, 34(3), 311–326.

- Kulm, T. L., & Cramer, s. (2006). The relationship of student employment to student role, family relationships, social interactions and persistence. *College Student Journal*, 40(4), 927-938.
- Launius, M. H. (1997). College student attendance: Attitudes and academic performance. *College Student Journal* (31), 86-92.
- Martins, P., & Walker, I. (2006). *Student achievement and university classes: Effects of attendance, size, peers, and teachers* (Discussion paper). Bonn: Forschungsinstitut zur Zukunft der Arbeit Institute for the Study of Labor.
- Massingham, P., & Herrington, T. (2006). Does attendance matter? An examination of student attitudes, participation, performance and attendance. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, Vol 3(2), 82-103.
- Moore, R. (2005). Attendance: Are penalties more effective than rewards? *Journal of Developmental Education*, 29(2), 26-32.
- Moore, S., Armstrong, C., & Pearson, J. (2008). Lecture absenteeism among students in higher education: A valuable route to understanding student motivation. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 30(1), 15-24.
- Newman-Ford, L., Fitzgibbon, K., Lloyd, S., & Thomas, S. (2008). A large-scale investigation into the relationship between attendance and attainment: A study using an innovative, electronic attendance monitoring system. *Studies in Higher Education*, 33(6), 699-717.
- Pearce, J. (2005). *An analysis of student absenteeism in first year biology students*. Leeds, UK: LTSN Centre for Bioscience.
- Prensky, M. (2001). Digital natives, digital immigrants. *On the horizon*, 9(9).
- Rodgers, J. R. (2002). Encouraging tutorial attendance at university did not improve performance. *Australian Economics Papers*, 41, 255-266.
- Romer, D. (1993). Do students go to class? Should they? *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 7(3), 167-174.
- Salopek, J. (2003). Going native: Cross the generation gap by learning to speak. *T&D*, 57(4), 1-3.
- Woodfield, R., D, Jessop, D., & McMillan, L. (2006). Gender differences in undergraduate attendance rates. *Studies in Higher Education*, 31(1), 1-22.