

IS IT ME? WHY STUDENTS DON'T TURN UP FOR CLASS

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SUBTHEME: Other

BACKGROUND

It is arguably well-known among academics that class attendance drops as the term progresses (Corbin 2010). To accommodate the diverse needs of students, especially in postgraduate cohorts who juggle multiple commitments outside of study, many courses now offer students flexibility in how they attend classes such as coming to campus in-person, joining live online or asynchronous watching of recordings. However, there is often a gap between the mode that students prefer or intend to engage with and what they actually do. The Intention-Behaviour Gap (Sheeran 2016) describes the inability to convert an intended behaviour into an action and can be shaped by factors such as the quality of the intention or conflicts between desires and obligations. Understanding these influences could help academics to better support student engagement.

AIMS

This study aimed to understand why students choose certain attendance modes and what helps or hinders them in adhering to those choices.

DESIGN AND METHODS

Students enrolled in one of two postgraduate courses in the School of Population Health were invited to take part in this longitudinal study. Participation was incentivised with a prize draw for a \$100 gift voucher. Participants completed two surveys - one early in the term to record *intended* attendance mode with follow-up at the end of term for *actual* attendance. Attendance options were in-person, live online or asynchronous viewing of recordings. Flexible attendance was defined as selecting two or more modes of attendance. In the follow-up survey, students were asked what hindered (barriers) or helped (enablers) them attend in their preferred mode. These open-ended questions were thematically analysed to identify common patterns.

RESULTS

A total of 102 students completed the survey. Students who intended to watch the recordings (31%) or switch between attendance modes (31%) were most likely to adhere to those intentions (90% and 81%, respectively). In contrast, students who intended to attend exclusively in-person (16%) or join live-online (23%) were more likely to switch to another attendance mode (88% and 91%, respectively), with the switch predominantly to the flexible mode. Reported barriers to attending in the preferred mode were predominantly external factors such as conflicts with work schedules and family commitments. On the other hand, enablers tended to be within the control of academic staff such as access to online sessions and recordings and establishing an engaging learning environment.

CONCLUSIONS

Students may not always be able to attend classes in their preferred attendance mode. However, teaching academics can help bridge this gap by providing flexible and engaging learning environments that meet students where they are at.

REFERENCES

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