

## **FEEDBACK ON ATTENDANCE HURDLES**

*Sourced from the UMSU Education Public student workshop*

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Attendance Hurdles have been in discussion in several meetings including the Academic Board, highlighting the need for a deeper review. In response, UMSU collated concerns through means of data collected by the Southbank UMSU Representative, 2024 UMSU Welfare Department's Cost of Living Report, and talking to students via collectives. The Education Department at UMSU holds a collective every other week on various topics of importance to students. On 1st April, Tuesday, we had our third Education Action Collective based around attendance hurdles and the de-weighting of first year subjects.

The collective brought together 35~40 students across a range of faculties, year levels and both Parkville and Southbank campuses. While we acknowledge the limitations of this sample size, the conversation revealed a consistent pattern of concern around how attendance hurdles intersect with broader challenges such as academic cost of living, accessibility, and the rigidity of the first-year model. These insights provide a valuable foundation for understanding student sentiment and identifying opportunities for reform. Below is a summary of the discussion topics, the concerns, and the potential solutions.

### **Issues Identified:**

#### ***Accessibility concerns:***

1. Students complained about having to commute for more than an hour to come to a short tutorial and having to head home straight after.
  - a. *Note:* This issue was exacerbated by the fact that most places on campus are too expensive for them to afford eating at. While the Campus Canteen has been helpful, it is only able to cater to a small number of students for the time being.

2. Since the workshop/tutorial content (and in some cases, lecture content) isn't recorded, it means that students can't catch-up even if they have special consideration or an AAP.

***Lack of Academic Engagement:***

1. Students attend classes just to meet the hurdle and do not engage or learn much from the class. Many Arts and History students felt like the classes were low engagement despite the attendance hurdles and that the only reason they came was to alleviate the pressure of failing the subject.

***Cost of Living Concerns:***

1. In the current cost-of-living crisis, a significant amount of students are working part-time jobs (or two) to help make ends meet and pay for rent and other basic necessities. However, most of the research that led to the implementation of attendance hurdles was done at a time when students were expected to focus on their studies full time without having their time and energy diverted on basic necessities.
2. Attendance hurdles do not work in the current state of things and as we've seen from direct feedback the hurdles are adding an undue amount of pressure and students are worried about failing the subjects not due to lack of effort or merit, but because they have to juggle several things at once and it is getting impossible to.
3. My-ki fares are off the charts currently unless you have a concession myki which is only available to undergraduate domestic students (for a concession year-long pass available to international undergraduates, you have to pay up-front which isn't always viable). Attendance hurdles are unfair to those who live further out to reduce rent prices but have to come in everyday.

***General concerns:***

1. Students feel it's too harsh and unsustainable. Some courses have attendance hurdles for all their subjects and students are marked absent if they're 10 minutes late to a four hour long tutorial.

### **Alternatives for Attendance Hurdles and Further Action:**

1. Lower all attendance hurdles to 7/12 or similar ratios and allow for better flexibility.
2. Introduce or increase participation marks instead of hurdle requirements. Most subjects have a 5% participation mark which can be increased to 8-10% to encourage students without making it a hurdle.
  - a. *Note:* A general complaint about participation marks (for some subjects) is that it's unfair to students who do not want to speak up in class even when they are active participants. Hence, the method of participation will have to be varied.
3. Introduce the divided-participation mark system- Currently, a lot of FEIT subjects implement this and it has been successful for increasing engagement. Students get a pre-workshop assignment / weekly quiz (this can be changed to suit each faculty) worth one point which they either have to do before/during/after class.
4. Have an assignment where the students who come to class can do a simpler version of it (eg: MCQ) but those who don't come have to do a slightly difficult version (eg: short answers).

### **Student Testimonials:**

- "There are attendance hurdles for linguistics where I must attend 9/11 tutorials. I believe that 9/11 is too harsh with little leeway. Important to keep in mind that students at this age have their own personal life"
- "4th year Arts Perspective: attendance hurdles for **everything**. 80% of tutorials have hurdles for every subject. I once did a law breadth which had an attendance hurdle for the lectures. I also work two jobs and have timetabling issues which have made me really worry about accidentally failing the subjects."
- BFA Production - "We have 75-80% attendance hurdles for every subject! For some subjects, even the lectures have attendance hurdles. Why not get rid of at least lecture attendance and give us recorded lectures."

- "Most people are in from 9-1, five days a week except every other friday where they have to come in for 1hr class and no other classes with some students having a 2+ hour commute"
- "Lectures aren't recorded which means that we can't catch up even if we have ongoing consideration or special circumstances. And if we are more than 10 minutes late, to even a 4 hour tute we are marked absent."