

# Influencing factors on lecture attendance at a tertiary institution

**Y. Jordaan**

Department of Marketing and Communication Management  
University of Pretoria  
South Africa  
e-mail: yolanda.jordaan@up.ac.za

## **Abstract**

The tendency towards decreasing class attendance by students is a concern for many tertiary institutions. Various factors contribute to the motivation of students, which in turn directly or indirectly influence them to attend lectures. The aim of the study is mainly to investigate which factors are related to the problem of low lecture attendance, and to determine the relation between lecture attendance and online support for students, gender, age, year level groups and faculty groups. A non-probability sample was drawn at the largest residential university in South Africa. Some of the findings showed differences between female and male lecture attendance, lecture/r quality as well as reasons for attending classes. It was also observed that there is a positive association between lecturer evaluation and lecture attendance by students. The results provide insight into a better understanding about class attendance and may enhance interaction between students and lecturers.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The tendency towards decreasing class attendance by students is a concern for many tertiary institutions. Some researchers state that 25 per cent or more students are likely to be absent from lectures on any given day (Friedman, McMomb and Rodriguez 1999, 9). Poor lecture attendance can have a negative influence on students' performance: as the semester progresses, poor lecture attendees may perform increasingly worse (Van Walbeek 2004, 868). Various factors contribute to the motivation of students, which in turn directly or indirectly influences them to attend lectures. It seems that students learn best when they actively participate in class (Fritschner 2000, 359) and increased lecture attendance also contributes to better learning gains (Riffell and Sibley 2004, 4). Previous research highlighted the impact that student participation (Fritschner 2000; Howard and Henney 1998; Kotzé and Du Plessis 2003), student expectation (Buckley, Novicevic, Halbesleben and Harvey 2004; Fassinger 1995), and the ability of the lecturer (Dolnicar 2005; Wilson and Lizzio 1997) have had on attending formal lectures.

LeBlanc (2005, 4) observed that lecture attendance could be affected by the immediacy and attentiveness of the lecturers. Fung and Carr (in LeBlanc 2005, 4) posited that face-to-face learning methods carry more preference among students, and influence lecture attendance positively. Findings from one study have shown

that a good lecturer makes a significant difference in the whole student academic environment, not only to improve the lecture attendance, but also to increase the students' understanding of the subject matter (Devados and Foltz 1996, 504). Friedman, McMomb and Rodriguez (1999, 9) found that lack of respect for the lecturer also plays an influential role in the lecture attendance of students.

Galichon and Friedman (in Launius and Margaret 1997, 4) listed important factors that influence lecture attendance, such as boredom in lectures, beautiful weather, outside employment and dislike of the lecturer. Devados and Foltz (1996, 504) show in their study that students prefer certain times and days of the week over other. Brooks and Rebeta (in Launius and Margaret 1997, 3) and Van Walbeek (2004, 861–883) also discovered that there are relationships between the gender differences of the students and their academic performances.

Although various studies have been conducted globally to determine the main contributing factors that induce students to attend lectures, a modest amount of research has been performed in a South African context. This also holds true for the faculties on which previous research was conducted, which mostly included students in the social science and arts faculties (Fritschner 2000, 342–362; Fassinger 1995, 82–96). This study will have a specific focus on students in the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences and the Faculty of Law at the largest residential university in South Africa.

Published research on this topic also displayed inconsistencies between gender and age groups with regard to their behaviour as well as the influence of the year level of undergraduate students. Conclusive findings of the impact that the rating of the lecturer has on lecture attendance is also lacking. The purpose of the study is therefore to determine the key factors that influence lecture attendance by undergraduate students.

## **LITERATURE BACKGROUND**

### **Students' expectations toward the lecturer and lecture attendance**

The expectations that students have before their first class meeting can influence whether they will have a positive or negative attitude towards the lecturer or subject. Fassinger (1995, 85) argues that classroom interaction may also have an influence on student expectations. Students that place emphasis on classroom interactions will have a negative perception towards the lecturer and his/her subject, if the amount of participation does not match students' set expectations. A study conducted by Buckley, Novicevic, Halbesleben and Harvey (2004, 138–144) provide evidence that the expectations of students about a course can be managed, and should be managed, as unrealistic expectations may lead to a disturbance in the students' performance adaptability necessary to achieve specific learning outcomes (Buckley et al. 2004, 141–142).

### **Influence of age, gender and year level on student participation**

Lecturers need to understand the factors that form students' expectations and perceptions regarding participation in order to encourage effective student participation (Kotzé

and Du Plessis 2003, 190). The level of participation seems to directly influence the presence of students in lectures. Karp and Yoels, as well as Howard, Short and Clark (in Howard and Henney 1998, 386) confirmed that a small number of students (2 to 5) accounts for the majority (50% to 75%) of interactions between the lecturer and the students. Research by Fritschner (2000, 343–344) revealed that different age, gender and course levels contribute to the level of participation of students in lectures. For example, students who are 24 years and younger communicate twice as much in class compared to students older than 24 years. In a similar study, Howard and Henney (1998, 386) found that younger students (<24) interacted three times more than older students and that a greater percentage of females as opposed to males contributed to lecture interactions.

A study by Fritschner (2000, 346–347) indicated that as the course level increases, females participate more in lecture interactions than males. For example, only 17 per cent of females interacted verbally at the first-year level, compared to 34 per cent at second-year level classes. Research conducted by Riffell and Sibley (2004, 4) revealed that there is a difference in the attendance of lectures between first-, second- and third-year level students. Studies done by Devados and Foltz (1996, 504) have shown that first-year students do not attend their lectures as regularly as their more senior peers at the university. Their research findings also show that students aged 18–20 years have the weakest lecture attendance compared to the older age groups. It can also be noted that older students behave more responsibly towards lecture attendance.

### **Lecture and lecturer quality**

Research has shown that certain characteristics of a course have a major impact on the prospect of lecture attendance by students. One of these characteristics is that students who have the privilege of selecting their subjects themselves seem to be more motivated in attending the lectures than students who are obliged to take a subject (Friedman, McMomb and Rodriguez 1999, 12). Lecture attendance could also be affected by the immediacy and attentiveness of the lecturer and one study observed that face-to-face learning methods carry more preference among students (LeBlanc 2005, 4). Another point of view is that better relationships between students and lecturers may result in a stronger commitment by students to attend lectures and participate in class discussions (Fassinger 1995, 93). It is suggested that by having a sound relationship with the lecturer, students will be able to increase the confidence with which they perform various activities in class. However, others argue that some students only attend lectures to acquire information that will assist them in preparation for examinations (Browne and Race in Dolnicar 2005, 105).

According to Buckley et al. (2004, 139), students' expectations that a course will have a certain format can be influenced by interactions with their peers. The decision by certain students not to attend class could therefore result in conformity with their peers. Karp and Yoels (in Fritschner 2000, 342) postulate that lecture attendance is

influenced by those students who try to influence others to stay away from class and that students are irritated with peers who speak too much in class. However, peer-to-peer interaction in the classroom can also enhance the learning process and increase students' achievements. It is therefore suggested by Bishop (2000, 1) that it is important for the lecturer to encourage peer-to-peer interaction and in the same sense ensure that all the students in the classroom have a sound relationship with each other.

Devados and Foltz (1996, 504) believe that lecturers should introduce penalisation and rewarding policies which will have a positive influence on lecture attendance of students. Moore (in LeBlanc 2005, 5) also discovered that lecture attendance will be improved when awarding bonus points to students. However, Friedman, McMomb and Rodriguez (1999, 8–16) add that respect should be the driving force of lecture attendance instead of fear of the lecturer. A study conducted by Launius and Margaret (1997, 2–4), found that 70 per cent of students felt that the lecturer should give credit for attending his/her lecture and 84 per cent of students said that they would attend more lectures if the lecturer would allocate attendance points that would contribute to their grade marks. These authors believe that rewarding students with attendance points would increase their lecture attendance, and they are likely to appreciate the opportunity to earn those rewards. Another study has shown that if the lecturer made lecture attendance a requirement, 12.7 per cent more students would attend lectures (Devados and Foltz 1996, 504).

Worth noting is that many authors suggest that the ability of the lecturer to motivate and encourage his/her students plays an important role in class participation and class attendance. Lecturers' aptitude to present lectures in a well-structured manner, not only seem to influence the amount of class participation, but also the amount of confidence that students place on a lecturer's ability to explain difficult material (Wilson and Lizzio, 1997, 34–35). Hill, Lomas, and MacGregor (2003, 15–20) found that the quality of students' experiences is influenced by lecturer expertise in the classroom. Lecturers that have received awards for good teaching, attract up to 9 per cent more students to attend lectures than other lecturers without these lecturer awards. Furthermore, it is suggested that learning is more efficient when the lecturer offers students the opportunity to interact more and to participate in lectures, rather than staying fixed on the lecture textbook (Devados and Foltz 1996, 504). Dolnicar (2005, 104) concludes that lecturers need to make the students feel part of the lecture and create an entertaining atmosphere.

### **Support provided to students**

Hill et al. (2003, 15–20) state that students value an institution's support networks. This view is supported by Lundgren and Nantz (2003, 64) when one of the main conclusions from their research showed that students viewed the availability and accessibility of course material on the web as an adequate excuse not to attend class. The comment by Hill et al. is further supported by the findings of McCray (in Greasley and Bennett 2004, 975) where it is stated that '... studies of virtual environments have focussed

on distance learning courses where students enter the course without expectations of significant amounts of face-to-face contact with the instructor(s)'.

Research conducted by Schwartz (1997, 9) focused on the influence that the World Wide Web has on student attendance. He noticed that the web has led to less lecture attendance by the students in some courses. He also determined that students who made use of the web to access lecture information, without attending lectures, missed valuable interactive lecture information. Today, many institutions are incorporating Internet technologies to place course material such as handouts, class notes, study guides and course schedules on an intranet to make it available to students enrolled in the course. Lundgren and Nantz (2003, 61) refer to this as the transition phase to the new paradigm which allows for more flexibility in the scheduling of lectures, access for non-campus based students and greater freedom in designing the curriculum.

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES**

The study had the following objectives: (1) to investigate the reasons for lecture attendance by students, and more specifically to gain insight into what drives undergraduate students to attend lectures; (2) to determine whether there are differences between gender, age and year level groups and if so, what the nature of these differences are; (3) to establish the level of online student support of two selected faculties at a tertiary institution in the Gauteng province; and (4) to gauge whether the lecture attendance between the students from the two targeted faculties differ.

Based on the discussed literature on lecture attendance, and to address the objectives of the study, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant difference between male and female students in terms of their class attendance, lecture quality and lecturer quality.
- H<sub>2</sub>: There is a significant difference between male and female students in terms of the reasons why they attend classes.
- H<sub>3</sub>: There is a positive association between lecturer evaluation and lecture attendance by students.
- H<sub>4</sub>: There is a significant difference between different year level groups in terms of their lecture attendance, lecture quality and lecturer quality.
- H<sub>5</sub>: There is a significant difference between different year level groups in terms of the reasons why they attend classes.
- H<sub>6</sub>: There is a significant difference between the degree of online student support used in the Faculty of Law and the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences.
- H<sub>7</sub>: There is a significant difference between the students from the Faculty of Law and the students from the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences in terms of lecture attendance.

## METHOD

### Sampling, measurement instrument and data collection

A non-probability sampling method was used and the target population consisted of undergraduate students from the Faculty of Law and Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences at the largest residential university in South Africa. Due to time and money constraints, a random sample was not feasible and a convenience sample was used. Lecturers willing to support the research project were approached for permission to survey their students and the realised sample size consisted of 313 questionnaires from the Faculty of Law and 405 questionnaires from the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences (thus a final sample of 718 respondents).

Dolnicar's (2005) measurement instrument was used as the basis for this empirical study. Pre-testing was conducted involving 20 students (10 from each faculty). Some of the question wordings from the original student questionnaire were slightly adapted to apply to the South African environment. The final version of the questionnaire consisted of three sections. Section A contained percentage scale questions about students' opinions on lecture quality, lecturer quality, and class attendance rates, as well as nominal scale questions on the type of extra support that is offered for this particular lecture. Section B contained 17 items about students' motivation to attend lectures. Section C included socio-demographic questions relating to students' age, subject code, year of study and faculty in which registered.

Data was collected by means of self-completion questionnaires during the last quarter of the year and questionnaires were handed out to students during class meetings after the necessary permission was obtained from the Ethics Committee, respective Faculty Deans and involved lecturers. Consent was also obtained from each student and no incentives were given for participation.

## RESULTS

The sample characteristics are as follow: males represented 35 per cent and females 65 per cent; the largest age group was 18–19 year olds (35%), then 20 (18%), 21 (22%), 22 (13%) and >23 (12%). A total of 82 per cent have attended the lectures offered in the subject, and the distribution between the different year levels were 27 per cent on first year level, 42 per cent on second year level, 26 per cent on third year level and 5 per cent on fourth year level (only the Faculty of Law had fourth year level undergraduate students).

### Hypothesis 1

In Hypothesis 1, two groups (male and female students) are compared on variables measured on a ratio scale and were tested using the two-sample t-test. The null hypothesis states that there are no differences between the gender groups in respect of the tested variables, namely, class attendance, lecture quality and lecturer quality. Table 1 shows the results for the t-tests.

**Table 1:** Percentages and t-test results for gender groups on the different lecturing variables

Lecturing variables	Male (%)	Female (%)	p-value
Class attendance	76.26	84.17	0.000
Lecture quality	70.92	74.31	0.029
Lecturer quality	71.06	76.46	0.003

From Table 1 it can be observed that the t-test results show significant differences between gender groups' perceptions in terms of their lecture attendance, lecture quality, and lecturer quality. These findings suggest that male and female students differ about lecturing issues with females showing higher class attendance, as well as perceptions that higher lecture and lecturer quality is provided to the students.

## Hypothesis 2

In  $H_2$ , two groups (male and female students) are compared on variables measured on a nominal scale and were tested using the two-sample chi-square test for independency ( $\chi^2$ ). The null hypothesis states that there is no difference between males and females regarding the reasons why they attend lectures. With a 2x2 table, it is often recommended that Yates's correction for continuity be applied to obtain a modified chi-square statistic (Diamantopoulos and Schlegelmilch 1997, 177). This is designed to correct or compensate for a possible overestimate of the chi-square value. Yates' correction for continuity is therefore reported in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Percentages and chi-square test results for gender groups in terms of the main reasons why they attend lectures

Factors influencing class attendance	Male (%)	Female (%)	p-value
To find out what I am supposed to learn	91.8	89.5	0.397
To find out about assessment tasks	66.5	69.8	0.423
It is easy to get to university at that time	21.6	17.5	0.224
I enjoy them	50.2	58.8	<b>0.035</b>
To make sure I don't miss anything important	88.2	92.8	<b>0.055</b>
My friends attend	30.3	25.1	0.163
I am expected to be there	27.3	25.9	0.738
Easier than learning it myself	57.6	54.2	0.447

The weekday is convenient for me	33.1	26.6	0.085
To make the knowledge meaningful	73.5	73.6	0.961
It enthruses me	38.0	44.1	0.133
To find out about the latest thinking	42.9	32.0	0.005
The time of day is convenient for me	29.5	28.0	0.748
To make sure I learn the fundamentals	73.9	76.3	0.366
To work on problems	50.8	57.4	0.112
To find out the 'real world' applications	56.7	56.1	0.932
To get exam tips	89.8	89.8	1.000

The findings from Table 2 indicate that two of the listed 17 factors (reasons) influencing class attendance show significant differences between the two gender groups (values indicated in bold print), namely enjoyment ( $p=0.035$ ) and to find out about the latest thinking ( $p=0.005$ ). When one investigates these percentages, it is clear that females enjoy classes more than males (58.8% versus 50.2%), but that males feel stronger about attending class to find out the latest thinking as opposed to females (42.9% versus 32%).

### Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 was formulated to measure the association between lecturer evaluation and lecture attendance by students. Before testing the hypothesis, the assumption of normality was determined using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and the results indicated that the data differed significantly from a normal distribution. This led to a decision to use the non-parametric Spearman's rank order correlation test, instead of Pearson's product moment correlation test.

The results of the Spearman's rank order correlation test indicated that there is a positive association between the lecturer evaluation and the lecture attendance dimensions, with  $r=0.38$ , and  $p=0.001$  (one-tailed). The coefficient is positive (value above zero), of normal magnitude ( $r=0.38$ ) and highly significant ( $p=0.001$ ). There is thus support for the alternative hypothesis,  $H_3$ .

### Hypothesis 4

In  $H_4$ , four groups (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year students) are compared on variables measured on a ratio scale and were tested using analysis of variance (ANOVA). The hypothesis stated that there is a significant difference between different year level groups in terms of lecture attendance, lecture quality and lecturer quality. For each of the variables, an ANOVA was conducted to assess the differences between the

groups. If the ANOVA showed a significant difference, a follow-up Scheffé *post hoc* test was performed to reveal where the differences between the year level groups occurred. The ANOVA test results are depicted in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Percentages and ANOVA test results for different year level groups in terms of their class attendance, lecture quality and lecturer quality

Lecturing variables	1 <sup>st</sup> year (%)	2 <sup>nd</sup> year (%)	3 <sup>rd</sup> year (%)	4 <sup>th</sup> year (%)	F value (%)	p-value (%)
Class attendance	82.08	78.97 <sup>ab</sup>	83.65 <sup>a</sup>	88.51 <sup>b</sup>	3.176	0.024
Lecture quality	73.16 <sup>a</sup>	72.31 <sup>b</sup>	72.73 <sup>c</sup>	84.12 <sup>abc</sup>	3.793	0.010
Lecturer quality	72.40 <sup>a</sup>	75.44 <sup>b</sup>	73.29 <sup>c</sup>	87.06 <sup>abc</sup>	4.307	0.005
<sup>a</sup> and/or <sup>b</sup> : The results of the Scheffé <i>post hoc</i> tests are indicated with <sup>a</sup> and/or <sup>b</sup> . All mean values containing the same letters (for example, <sup>a</sup> ) indicate that the groups differ significantly from one another. All mean values containing different letters (for example, an <sup>a</sup> or <sup>b</sup> ) indicate that these groups do not differ significantly from one another.						

All the ANOVA test results (p-values) shown in Table 3 indicate significant differences between the different year level groups. Second year level students differ from both third and fourth year level students in terms of class attendance with fourth year level students attending the most classes (88.5%). Fourth year level students differ significantly from first, second and third year level students in terms of their opinions on the quality of the lecture as well as the quality of the lecturer. It is clear that fourth year level students rate the quality of lectures and lecturers the highest of all the groups (84% and 87%).

## Hypothesis 5

In Hypothesis 5, the four year level groups are compared in terms of the reasons why they attend classes. Variables were measured on a nominal scale and were tested using the k-sample chi-square test for independency. The findings are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4:** Percentages and chi-square test results for different year groups of the reasons why they attend lectures

Factors influencing class attendance	1 <sup>st</sup> year (%)	2 <sup>nd</sup> year (%)	3 <sup>rd</sup> year (%)	4 <sup>th</sup> year (%)	p-value
To find out what I am supposed to learn	92.7	88.0	92.1	82.4	0.108
To find out about assessment tasks	68.2	69.8	67.4	58.8	0.619
It is easy to get to university at that time	16.7	24.3	14.0	8.8	0.009

I enjoy them	53.1	58.3	53.2	67.6	0.284
To make sure I don't miss anything important	91.1	89.7	93.2	91.2	0.634
My friends attend	30.2	25.7	23.9	26.5	0.552
I am expected to be there	28.3	25.6	25.7	17.6	0.618
Easier than learning it myself	62.8	52.5	49.5	73.5	<b>0.006</b>
The weekday is convenient for me	33.5	32.2	20.5	14.7	<b>0.004</b>
To make the knowledge meaningful	76.4	71.8	74.7	67.6	0.559
It enthuses me	37.2	45.2	41.4	50.0	0.264
To find out about the latest thinking	42.4	33.9	31.9	38.2	0.143
The time of day is convenient for me	29.8	32.7	25.1	5.9	<b>0.006</b>
To make sure I learn the fundamentals	74.9	76.7	71.7	82.4	0.472
To work on problems	58.6	56.7	49.7	50.0	0.279
To find out the 'real world' applications	57.1	59.5	49.7	52.9	0.193
To get exam tips	89.0	89.7	90.1	91.2	0.977

The findings from Table 4 show that four of the listed 17 factors (reasons) influencing class attendance show significant differences between the different year level groups (values indicated in bold print). These included: ease with which to get to university ( $p=0.009$ ); easier to be in class than to learn it themselves ( $p=0.006$ ); convenience of the weekday ( $p=0.004$ ); and convenience of time of day ( $0.006$ ). Fourth year students seem to be the least concerned by the ease with which to get to the university (8.8%). First and fourth year students value the fact that being in class is easier than learning the work themselves (62.8% and 73.5%). First year students seem to prefer convenient weekdays, tapering down to second, third and fourth year levels. Fourth year students are the least worried about attending classes when the time of day is convenient to them (5.9%) with much higher percentages reported among the other year level groups (between 25.1% and 32.7%).

## Hypothesis 6

Hypothesis 6 compares two groups (Faculty of Law and Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences) on a variable measured on a nominal scale (yes and no) and were tested using the two-sample chi-square test for independency ( $\chi^2$ ). The hypothesis states that there is a significant difference between the degree of online support used in the respective faculties. Yates's correction for continuity was applied to obtain a modified chi-square statistic (Diamantopoulos and Schlegelmilch 1997, 177).

The chi-square test result shows a significant difference ( $p=0.000$ ) between the Faculty of Law and the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences in terms of providing class notes online. It indicated that 73.7 per cent of the respondents from the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences believe that online student support is offered by the faculty, with only 26.3 per cent of the students from the Faculty of Law reporting that student notes are available online. There is thus support for  $H_6$  and the null hypothesis is rejected.

## Hypothesis 7

From the findings of a study by Lundgren and Nantz (2003, 64) the availability and accessibility of course material on the web is seen as an adequate reason for students not to attend class. If this holds true for the South African study, one would expect higher class attendance from the students in the Faculty of Law, as opposed to the students in the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences (based on the findings from  $H_6$ ). Hypothesis 7 investigates differences between the students of the two faculties in terms of their lecture attendance and was tested using the two-sample t-test.

The t-test result does not show a significant difference ( $p=0.778$ ) between the lecture attendance of the students from the two faculties. Lecture attendance percentages of the two groups are almost identical with students from the Faculty of Law reporting to attend 81.3 per cent of classes opposed to students from the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences reporting to attend 81.7 per cent of the classes. The findings indicate that the null hypothesis cannot be rejected and there is thus no support for  $H_7$ . This result contradicts previous findings which suggest that online student support decreases lecture attendance.

## CONCLUSIONS AND EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

The research results indicate that students (both male and female) cite the main reasons to attend lectures to be to get information relevant to the exam (get exam tips, find out what they are suppose to learn and ensure that they do not miss any important information). These results conform to the findings of Browne and Race (in Dolnicar 2005, 105) where they determined that students attend lectures to acquire information that will assist them in preparation for examinations. These findings emphasise how most students do not have a holistic view on why one should attend classes, but rather a limited view on how to pass the next exam paper. This issue has been highlighted by Patel (2003, 275) who argued that a holistic approach should be followed where critical, confident, and independent students are developed who are capable of action in their professions and society generally. Another solution may be that university managers should promote individual teaching excellence and establish teaching awards to encourage innovative teaching, and in so doing, motivate students to attend classes for other reasons than only gaining information for the exam.

The inconsistencies in the findings of Howard and Henney (1998, 386) and Fritschner (2000, 346–347) raised questions concerning the differences between gender and lecture attendance. The demographics of respondents in this survey comprised of 467 females and 251 males. The various findings suggest that there is a considerable difference in the level of lecture attendance between female and male students – with females having higher attendance rates, as well as higher perceived quality of both lecturer and lectures. The gender differences suggest that it is important for lecturers to place emphasis on the way in which they present their lectures. One solution may be to strive towards collaborative learning involving both gender groups, especially males who view lecture/r quality lower than females.

Riffell and Sibley (2004, 4) revealed in their study that there is also a difference in the general lecture attendance rate between first, second and third year students. The results in this study indicated that there is a significant difference between the year level of students and their lecture attendance. Although the percentage of lectures attended by first year students (83.3%) and third year students (83.7%) were almost identical, there was a considerable difference when compared with the second year students (77.6%). The reason for the results indicating a significant difference between the first and third year students' lecture attendance levels in comparison to the second year students, may be two-fold: first year students may still be unfamiliar with the tertiary institution and are cautious not to miss important information; whereas third year students are close to finishing their qualification and thus attend classes to ensure that they gather all the necessary information to pass their final examinations. Second year students, however, may be more relaxed because they are in their intermediary year – thus not new to the system, or in the final stages of completion of their studies. They may also feel that they are in control of their studies with lots of time to catch up if necessary, and therefore place less emphasis on attending lectures. These findings may signal to lecturers that an extra effort should be made to get second year students involved and/or interactive in their subjects. One solution may be to involve industry partners in the classes or implement practical projects that will help students to focus on the end goal of their studies, namely to become a well-rounded individual and find employment.

Another result from this study is that the lecture attendance of the students from the two faculties is almost identical (81.3% and 81.7%). However, nearly 74 per cent of students in the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences indicated that they are provided with online lecture notes as support material, whereas only 26 per cent of the students from the Faculty of Law are provided with online lecture notes. Despite the availability (or non-availability) of online class notes, the average class attendance figure across all the faculty groups were consistent, as mentioned above. This suggests that the availability of online course material may be regarded by students as additional aids in assisting them to pass the subject they are enrolled for, and not something that necessarily replaces lecture information. This is in strong contrast with the findings of Lundgren and Nantz (2003, 64) who found that students viewed the availability of course material on the web as an adequate excuse not

to attend lectures. These findings may suggest that students are not only accepting the responsibility, but also realising the importance of attending lectures. Lecturers could also consider using the web for more than only providing support. They could consider active participation (such as discussion groups or self-assessment) as part of the learning experience, instead of only posting study guides and class notes online.

The overall research findings can provide lecturers with an information base to establish how effective management of the abovementioned factors can contribute to the classroom situation, thus resulting in a better learning experience. The results may not only be utilised to enable and enhance the learning experience of South African students, but lecturers will also be able to know what students desire in a well-structured class meeting. This may in effect increase the satisfaction level of students in terms of their total learning experience.

This study should be able to provide tertiary institutions with some information to assist them in increasing lecture attendance among undergraduate students, in which both lecturer and student will benefit from the exchange process. Effectively managing the conditions present in a classroom or lecture hall can be seen as a critical factor to enable and enhance the learning experience of students at undergraduate level.

## **LIMITATIONS**

The main purpose of the study was to determine the factors that students provide for both attending and not attending lectures. However, the fact that only those students were surveyed that were present at specific lectures, somewhat contradicts the efforts to determine what reasons those students that do not usually attend lectures, may have provided to substantiate their view of lecture attendance. South Africa has a diverse culture, and therefore the impact of different language and culture groups may also be considered as a factor that can influence lecture attendance. The confidence in the results could therefore be strengthened by increasing the sample size and gathering information from students that are representative of all faculties.

## **FUTURE RESEARCH**

The results indicated that there is a stronger tendency for females to attend lectures. Future researchers may consider the impact that participation in the lecture as well as the impact of student expectation as a construct that influences lecture attendance, may have as a contributing factor to this relationship. Although the research provided extensive evidence that there is a significant difference between the year levels of students and their lecture attendance, future insight may be generated by researching why a considerable difference exists between first and second year students, as well as second and third year students.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This article is based on research surveys conducted by Mr. H.J. Pretorius, Mr. F.A. Welthagen, Mr. R. van Rooijen and Mr. H. Harris as partial fulfilment of their research methodology course for the B.Com. (Hons.) in Marketing Management.

## REFERENCES

- Bishop, P. E. 2001. *Classroom interaction*. Available from: <http://faculty.valenciac.edu/~pbishop/lrb/clssrm-interact.pdf>. Accessed on 19 April 2006.
- Buckley, M. R., M. M. Novicevic, J. R. B. Halbesleben and M. Harvey. 2004. Course management and students' expectations: theory-based considerations. *The International Journal of Educational Management* 18 (2): 138–144.
- Devadoss, S. and J. Foltz. 1996. Evaluation of factors influencing student class attendance and performance. *American Agricultural Economics Association* 78 (5): 199–507.
- Diamantopoulos, A. and B. B. Schlegelmilch. 2000. *Taking the fear out of data analysis: a step-by-step approach*. London: Business Press.
- Dolnicar, S. 2005. Should we still lecture or just post examination questions on the web?: The nature of the shift towards pragmatism in undergraduate lecture attendance. *Quality in Higher Education* 11 (2): 103–115.
- Fassinger, P. A. 1995. Understanding classroom interaction. *Journal of Higher Education* 66 (1): 82–96.
- Friedman, P., J. McMomb and F. Rodriguez. 1999. Why students do and do not attend classes. *The Scholarship of Teaching* February: 1–27.
- Fritschner, L. M. 2000. Inside the undergraduate college classroom. *The Journal of Higher Education* 71 (3): 342–362.
- Greasley, A. and D. Bennet. 2004. A virtual learning environment for operations management. *International Journal of Operations & Production Management* 24 (10): 974–993.
- Hill, Y., L. Lomas and J. MacGregor. 2003. Students' perceptions of quality in higher education. *Quality Assurance in Education* 11 (1): 15–20.
- Howard, J. R. and A. L. Henney. 1998. Student participation and instructor gender in the mix-age college classroom. *Journal of Higher Education* 69 (4): 384–406.
- Kotzé, T. G. and P. J. Du Plessis. 2003. Students as 'co-producers' of education: A proposed model of student socialisation and participation at tertiary institutions. *Quality Assurance in Education* 11 (4): 186–201.
- Launius, R. and H. Margaret. 1997. College student attendance: Attitudes and academic performance. *College Student Journal* 1 (31): 86–93.
- LeBlanc, P. H. 2005. *The relationship between attendance and grades in the college classroom*. Department of Communication: University of Texas at San Antonio, 1–19. Available at: [www.yahoo.com/http://communication.utsa.edu/leblanc/articles/art31.pdf#search='motivation%20of%20undergraduate%20students%20to%20attend%20classes'](http://www.yahoo.com/http://communication.utsa.edu/leblanc/articles/art31.pdf#search='motivation%20of%20undergraduate%20students%20to%20attend%20classes'). Accessed on 5 April 2006.
- Lundgren, T. D. and K. S. Nantz. 2003. Student attitudes toward internet courses: a longitudinal study. *Journal of Computer Information Systems* 43 (3): 61–66.

- Patel, N. V. 2003. A holistic approach to learning and teaching interaction: factors in the development of critical learners. *The International Journal of Educational Management* 17 (6): 272–284.
- Riffel, S. K. and D. F. Sibley. Can hybrid course formats increase attendance in undergraduate environmental science courses. Available at: <http://www.lon-capa.org/papers/E03-16.pdf>. Accessed on 18 April 2006.
- Schwartz, P. N. 1997. If you build it, would they come to class? *Human Ecology Forum* 25 (4): 2.
- Van Walbeek, C. 2004. Does lecture attendance matter? Some observations from a first-year economics course at the University of Cape Town. *South African Journal of Economics* 72 (4): 861–883.
- Wilson, K. L. and A. Lizzio. 1997. The development, validation and application of the course experience questionnaire. *Studies in Higher Education* 22 (1): 33–54.