

Scholarship of Teaching & Learning (SOTL): Learning Challenges at LUMS

Project title	Understanding Absenteeism at LUMS
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Reporting period	May 2025- May 2026
Policy audience	VC Council
Decision requested	Policy revision / Further study

4.28 sessions missed / course (avg.)	47.7% report drop after midterms	70% cluster: attend regularly	14 pp attendance decline, first → last session
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Survey 1: N=393 · Panel data: N=1166 students, 26,430 observations · Post-midterm survey: N=444

1. *Executive summary*

A significant and measurable share of LUMS undergraduates reduce in-person attendance during the second half of semester, with the sharpest declines occurring after midterms. Daily panel data across 26,430 session-level observations record an overall absence rate of 14.65%, while a follow-up survey of 444 students finds that 47.7% report attending classes less frequently after midterms. Across both studies, students consistently identify burnout, deadline pile-up, fatigue, assignment pressure, and exam preparation as the dominant drivers of attendance decline.

Attendance begins near 89% early in semester and falls to approximately 69% by the end of semester (Figure 1). The evidence suggests that students increasingly make strategic attendance decisions under conditions of workload compression and

competing academic demands, particularly when lecture material is available through slides, recordings, notes, or other learning resources.

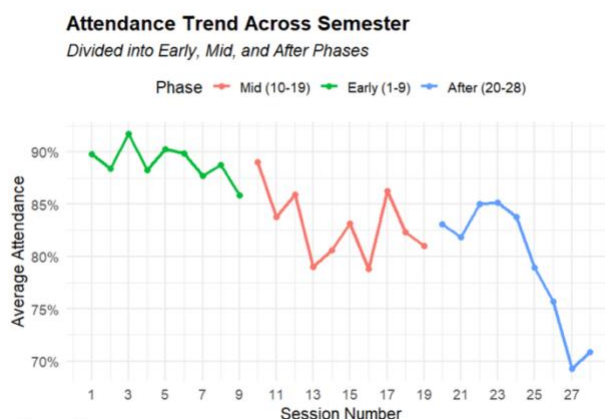


Figure 1

The findings do not support a simple narrative of student disengagement, nor do they establish strong institution-wide causal effects of attendance on grades.

Rather, the evidence points toward a broader challenge involving workload structure, assessment design, and the perceived academic value of in-person classroom participation.

The brief therefore recommends a phased institutional response focused on workload coordination, assessment review, attendance-risk monitoring, and proactive wellbeing support rather than institution-wide mandatory attendance policies. Additional faculty consultation and future research on classroom-based learning outcomes are necessary before stronger attendance-linked interventions are considered.

2. *Why this issue matters now*

The findings raise important questions about workload structure, assessment design, and the role of in-person instruction within increasingly resource-rich learning environments. Students appear to make strategic attendance decisions based on competing academic demands and the perceived value of classroom participation relative to recordings, notes, slides, AI-assisted study tools, and self-study. The institutional concern is therefore not attendance in isolation, but whether current course structures sufficiently support meaningful classroom-based learning and sustainable workload distribution.

Study 1 identifies a modest but statistically significant relationship between absenteeism and academic vulnerability. Students with CGPA below 3.0 report substantially higher absenteeism, averaging 5.28 missed sessions per course compared with approximately 4.0 sessions among students above the 3.0 threshold ($r = -0.14$, $p = 0.005$). The strongest differences emerge around the CGPA 3.0 threshold rather than across the full grade distribution, suggesting that absenteeism may be most relevant for academically vulnerable students.

The largest attendance declines occur during the second half of semester and are concentrated around periods of intensified workload pressure. Study 2 shows that students begin skipping classes primarily when burnout, deadline pile-up, fatigue, and exam preparation make attendance feel less urgent than completing assessments or self-study. More than half of respondents reported occasionally skipping classes to manage workload demands.

Four institutional pressures converge:

Student progression: students below CGPA 3.0 miss substantially more classes than their peers, suggesting that attendance decline may compound academic vulnerability for at-risk students.

Assessment overload: survey evidence strongly links attendance decline to workload compression and continuous assessment burden. In Study 2, 47.7% of respondents reported attending classes less frequently after midterms, while more than half reported occasionally skipping classes to manage assignments, projects, quizzes, or exam preparation. Burnout, fatigue, deadline pile-up, and assessment pressure emerged as the most frequently cited reasons for absenteeism during the second half of semester.

Perceived classroom value: students continue to describe lectures as academically useful but increasingly reduce attendance when classroom participation appears to provide limited additional value relative to available learning materials and competing academic demands. Study 1 found that students who believed attendance was unnecessary or replaceable through slides, recordings, or self-study reported significantly higher absenteeism. Qualitative responses across both studies repeatedly referenced recordings, notes, online resources, and self-study as substitutes for lecture attendance under high workload conditions.

Cultural contagion: 65% of post-midterm survey respondents report that their peers are also attending classes less regularly after midterms. While students do not necessarily describe peer influence as direct pressure, the findings suggest that attendance behavior is shaped by evolving social norms within the academic environment. As selective attendance becomes more visible and widespread, students may increasingly perceive reduced attendance as academically acceptable or strategically rational under high workload conditions.

3. *Intervention and method*

Study 1:

A mixed-methods study combining a 30-item Likert-scale survey (N=393 undergraduates across all four schools), panel attendance records for 1,166 students across 24 courses, open-ended qualitative responses, and two causal inference sub-studies. Analyses included exploratory factor analysis, OLS regression, k-means clustering, mixed-effects panel models, and propensity score matching. The Fall 2025 semester was selected as a representative, disruption-free term.

Study 2:

A second, 444-response survey was administered after midterm results in the Spring 2026 semester to diagnose second-half attendance decline specifically. Questions covered attendance change, motivation, skip triggers, peer behavior, and support preferences. Results are descriptive and triangulate Study 1 rather than constituting independent causal evidence. A parallel faculty survey is currently in design.

The post-midterm survey was designed specifically to test whether the exploratory findings generalized to the second half of semester and to identify the mechanisms driving attendance decline. Results strongly validated the earlier findings on workload pressure, burnout and selective attendance. The survey additionally clarified that students continue to value lectures academically but increasingly make strategic

attendance decisions based on workload compression and whether classroom activities provide value beyond online materials.

Attendance varies significantly across the schools. SSE students miss significantly more classes than any other school with mean missed sessions at 5.35 vs 3.09 for MGHSS.

School	Drop rate*
SBASSE	58%
SDSB	46%
MGSHSS	40%
SAHSOL	33%

* Post-midterm survey (N=444). SSE panel: 300-level courses only.

4. Key findings

Finding 1: Post-midterm burnout drives the second-half collapse

Study 1 found that institutional and behavioral factors were among the strongest predictors of absenteeism. The belief that attendance is unnecessary showed one of the highest correlations with actual absence behavior, while students who believed attendance was important consistently reported fewer absences. Qualitative responses revealed that “online materials” were among the dominant themes explaining changing attendance behavior, especially among seniors.

Study 2 confirmed and clarified the mechanism behind this shift. Students increasingly reported relying on recordings, online materials, AI tools, and self-study as substitutes for physical attendance, particularly after midterms when workload pressure intensifies. Students who preferred selective attendance or online substitution were significantly more likely to report declining attendance. Together, the findings suggest that attendance is increasingly evaluated through a cost-benefit lens rather than treated as academically essential by default.

Finding 2: Students still attend when classroom activities provide unique in-person value

Study 1 found that institutional and behavioral factors were among the strongest correlates of absenteeism. Students who viewed attendance as unnecessary or less important consistently reported higher absence levels, while students who viewed attendance as important for grades, accountability, and professional development reported substantially fewer absences. Qualitative responses repeatedly emphasized slides, recordings, online materials, and self-study as reasons students selectively skip classes.

Study 2 clarified this dynamic further. Students consistently reported higher attendance in courses where participation mattered, where instructors were engaging, or where live activities could not easily be replicated through recordings or slides. Importantly, most respondents still described lectures as academically useful even while reducing attendance after midterms. This suggests that the problem is not rejection of learning itself, but declining perceived marginal value of physical attendance under conditions of high workload and readily available online substitutes.

5. *Policy implications*

Immediately actionable — evidence is sufficiently strong:

- Deadline pile-up during the second half of semester is a major driver of attendance decline and a design failure that falls within direct institutional control. It is the top situational skip trigger and does not require a policy debate to fix.
- Attendance decline appears closely tied to whether students perceive classroom participation as educationally valuable relative to available alternative learning resources. Recordings and AI are here to stay; what must change is whether in-class time delivers something irreplaceable. Strengthening the quality and uniqueness of in-person learning experiences may therefore be more effective than attendance enforcement alone.

Requires pilot or further consultation before full adoption:

- Institution-wide mandatory attendance policies are not currently supported by the evidence base. While absenteeism is associated with some indicators of academic vulnerability, the present studies do not establish strong institution-wide causal effects of attendance on grades or learning outcomes. Additional faculty consultation and classroom-level learning evidence are necessary before any attendance-linked policy changes are considered.
- Attendance-risk monitoring systems should be framed as student-support and early-intervention tools rather than compliance mechanisms. Pilot implementation and evaluation are recommended before wider institutional rollout.
- Future interventions should prioritize evidence linking specific pedagogical approaches and classroom practices to improved learning outcomes rather than attendance alone.
- Peer accountability structures: peer influence is the largest differentiator between high- and low-absenteeism clusters, but no evidence yet exists on which specific peer-based interventions work at LUMS.

6. *Recommendations*

	Recommendation	Action	Owner	Timing
R1	Stagger post-midterm deadlines	Require academic offices and course coordinators to distribute major assessments more evenly across the second half of semester. Establish soft caps on overlapping high-stakes deadlines and require department-level review for exceptions.	Provost / Deans	Immediate

R2	Targeted attendance-risk monitoring with OSA/ OAI	Use existing attendance and LMS data to identify sharp post-midterm attendance declines across courses and programs. Develop early-alert reporting systems for courses with persistent second-half attendance collapse.	Deans / OSA, OAI and LLI	Next Semester
R3	Review and cap excessive assessment instruments	Conduct department-level reviews of courses with unusually high numbers of quizzes, assignments, or graded assessment components. Develop institutional guidance encouraging streamlined assessment structures and soft caps on continuous assessment instruments where workload burden is contributing to burnout and attendance decline.	Provost/ Deans/ LLI	Next Semester
R4	Deploy proactive wellbeing support before finals	Advance scheduling of mental health outreach, assignment extension windows, and academic counselling to 2–3 weeks before final examinations. Attendance data confirm this is when the steepest decline occurs across all schools.	Student Affairs	Next Semester

7. *Implementation considerations*

Cost and staffing	R1 and R3 primarily require institutional coordination, departmental review processes, and academic planning rather than major new financial resources. R2 depends on the integration and analysis of existing attendance and LMS data and may require dedicated support from OSA/OAI for monitoring and reporting. R4 relies largely on earlier deployment and coordination of existing student wellbeing resources rather than new programme creation.
Governance owner	The Provost's Office coordinates implementation across schools and departments. School Deans and Department Chairs oversee deadline coordination and assessment review processes under R1 and R3. OSA/OAI supports attendance-risk monitoring and reporting under R2. Student Affairs oversees the implementation of proactive wellbeing support under R4.
Key dependencies	Effective implementation of R1 and R3 depends on coordination across instructors and departments rather than isolated course-level changes. Attendance-risk monitoring under R2 requires reliable attendance reporting practices and institutional agreement on thresholds for identifying concerning attendance decline. Wellbeing interventions under R4 depend on early communication and coordination between academic offices, counselling services, and faculty.

Principal risks	(a) Deadline redistribution may face resistance if instructors perceive coordination requirements as limiting course autonomy. (b) Attendance-risk monitoring may be viewed as punitive unless clearly framed as an early-support and student-success intervention. (c) Reducing excessive assessment instruments without redesigning assessment strategy may unintentionally weaken feedback opportunities or learning scaffolding. (d) Wellbeing support deployed too late in the semester may have limited impact once burnout and workload accumulation have already intensified. (e) Students may continue substituting recordings, notes, and AI tools for attendance unless workload pressure and assessment incentives are addressed simultaneously.
Indicators of success	Reduction in overlapping high-stakes deadlines during the second half of semester; reduced rates of post-midterm attendance decline; fewer courses with excessive continuous assessment loads; increased use of early-support referrals through OSA/OAI monitoring systems; improved student-reported workload manageability and wellbeing during the post-midterm period; and improved attendance consistency across semesters.
Evidence gaps	Faculty perspectives on assessment pacing, workload coordination, and attendance expectations have not yet been systematically collected. Additional evidence is needed on how different assessment structures influence both attendance and learning outcomes across disciplines. Future evaluation should also assess whether workload coordination and wellbeing interventions produce sustained improvements beyond a single semester.