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## Reasons for missing classes in college; the role of personality traits

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### Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate the reasons for missing classes as well as the relationship between students' personality traits and tendency to miss classes for different reasons. The first part of the study describes the development of a self-report measure of reasons for missing classes in college. Reasons included not being in the mood, personal issues, health issues, lecture issues and no negative consequences. Results showed that personality traits, especially conscientiousness, play significant role in students' tendency to skip classes. Since previous research have shown positive relationship between class attendance and college grades, policies aimed at increasing attendance might be worth considering.

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### 1. Introduction

When saying that 80% of success is showing up, Woody Allen probably did not consider showing up at classes but nevertheless, he was right. Research investigating the relationship between class attendance and college grades suggest that class attendance is an important determinant of grades (e.g. Aden, Yahye, and Dahir, 2013; Clump, Bauer and Whiteleather 2003). This relationship has been found across a number of subject areas, such as: Psychology (Chenneville and Jordan, 2008; Launius 1997), Sociology (Day 1994), Economics (Cohn and Johnson 2006; Durden and Ellis, 1995), Biology (Gatherer and Manning 1998) and Business (Rodgers, 2002). A meta-analysis of the relationship between class attendance and college grades (Crede, Roch and Kieszczynka, 2010)

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revealed that class attendance is better predictor of college grades than any other known predictor of academic performance, including scores on standardized admissions tests such as the SAT, high school GPA, study habits, and study skills. Even more, class attendances is likely to be beneficial for learning irrespective of the specific teaching methods and strategies (Bligh, 1998).

In spite of the importance of attending class, students do miss them often and for a variety of reasons. It seems that the most frequently reason cited by students was boredom or general lack of interest in attending class (Launius, 1997; Van Blerkom, 1992). Boredom is followed by illness, and interference with other course work or social life, including family emergencies and other „unavoidable circumstances“.

Some students believe that since they pay for classes, they should be the ones to decide whether or not to attend classes, and should not be penalized for failing to show up (Maizel, 2006). Some students even suggest that they can learn more from not going to class (Schoenbrum, 2007). They believe that instead of wasting time being bored and distracted in classes, they can sit down on their own, focus, and learn the material. Lot of students believe that the importance of attendance to academic success should be linked to receiving credit for attending class and their attendance rates drop if they do not receive some credit (Moore, 2003).

However, establishing causality between lecture attendance and grades is difficult. Ryan, Delaney and Harmon (2010) suggest that empirical models of higher-education outcomes may be biased if they do not include measures of individual differences. They find that higher levels of future-orientation and conscientiousness, are important determinants of lecture attendance and study time (measured as hours of study) – „in fact the impact of these measures on the outcomes are often more significant than other variables such as course or institutional choice, or parental background“ (p. 15).

The aim of this study was to investigate the reasons for missing classes as well as the relationship between students' personality traits and tendency to miss classes for different reasons. The more we know about the causes of absenteeism, the more we will be able to prevent them.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. The first study

#### *Development of Reasons for missing classes scale*

The first stage in developing the Reasons for missing classes scale was to create a list of items that represented a wide range of possible reasons. College students (N=50) were asked to write down their answers to the following question: "Why would you skip class?"

In the initial stage over 70 items were collected covering a variety of reasons. Some of these items were identical or had very similar meaning and could be replaced by a single item. The research team shortened the list to 30 items.

The 30 items were administered to 258 college students at University of Zagreb. Participants rated each item on 4 point scale (1 – will come for sure to 4 – will not come for sure). They participated voluntarily and anonymously during the regular course in psychology.

Items were factor analysed, using principal-components analysis with oblimin rotation. The analysis yielded 7 factors with eigenvalues exceeding 1, accounting for 62.4% of the total variance. Following the Scree test criterion (Cattell, 1978) and interpretability of factors, the factor analysis for the first five factors was repeated. Items with loadings lower than .35 on these factors, or with loading on several factors, were discarded.

A second principal components analysis with oblimin rotation was then performed for a total of 21 items. The final solution included five factors accounting for 58.9 % of the total variance. After inspection of item contents factors were named as follows: not being in the mood (39.8% of total variance), no negative consequences (7.95%), personal issues (7.28 %), health issues (5.73%) and boring lecture (5.11%). Cronbach's alpha coefficients of reliability were 0.75, 0.79, 0.74, 0.70 and 0.78 respectively. Table 1 presents the rotated factor loadings and the percentage of the total variance accounted for by these five factors for all participants.

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