

Plain Language Statement

School of Biomedical Sciences, Department of Anatomy and Physiology, Faculty of Medicine Dentistry and Health Sciences



Project: Does Physical Activity Improve First Year Student Engagement, Sense of Belonging and Academic Performance Stage 1

Project Supervisor: Associate Professor Yossi Rathner
Tel: +61 3 3 90356474 Email: joseph.rathner@unimelb.edu.au

Additional Researchers

Dr Makhala Khammy Email: mmkhammy@unimelb.edu.au

Dr Keit Loi Email: joon.loi@unimelb.edu.au

Bachelor Biomedicine (Honours) Courtney Nicholls

Email: SocialEngaged-SoTL@unimelb.edu.au

Introduction

Thank you for your interest in participating in this research project. The following few pages will provide you with further information about the project, so that you can decide if you would like to take part in this research.

Please take the time to read this information carefully. You may ask questions about anything you don't understand or want to know more about.

Your participation is voluntary. If you don't wish to take part, you don't have to. If you begin participating, you can also stop at any time.

What is this research about?

We are inviting you to participate in a research study about factors that influence your transition into university life and academic success. As a first-year student, your experiences and well-being are important to us.

In this first stage of our study, we are asking you to complete a survey at the beginning of the semester. This survey will ask about your mental health well-being, sense of belonging to the university, and your general level of physical activity. We will ask you to complete this same survey again at the end of the semester.

With your permission, we will compare your survey responses with your university entrance score (ATAR or equivalent) and your end-of-semester Weighted Average Mark (WAM). This will help us understand how factors like sense of belonging, mental health, and physical activity might relate to your academic performance.

Your participation in this stage involves only completing the surveys. There are no other interventions or activities required. The information you provide will help us better understand what factors contribute to student success and may inform future strategies to support students like you.

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and all information you provide will be kept confidential.

What will I be asked to do?

Should you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

1. Complete an online survey at the beginning of the semester. This survey includes questions about:

- Your demographic information (age, biological sex, gender, course details, living circumstances, employment and social activities)
- Your physical activity levels
- Your sense of belonging at the university
- Your mental wellbeing
- Your university experiences

The survey is expected to take approximately 20-25 minutes to complete.

2. Complete the same survey again at the end of the semester.

3. Provide consent for us to access your ATAR (or equivalent University Entrance score) and your Weighted Average Mark (WAM) for Semester 1.

4. If you're interested in participating in Stage 2 of the project, you'll also be asked to complete the 2020-Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire-General (2020-PAR-Q+). This questionnaire helps determine your eligibility for the next stage of the study. If you don't wish to continue to Stage 2, you won't need to complete this questionnaire.

As compensation for your time, you will receive a \$15 Electronic Gift Card for each survey you complete (one at the beginning of the semester and one at the end). To receive this gift card, you will need to provide the researchers your email address.

Your participation is voluntary, and you can choose to withdraw from the study at any time. All information you provide will be kept confidential and used only for research purposes.

What are the possible benefits?

Potential benefits for you as a participant:

1. Personal insight: By completing the surveys, you'll have an opportunity to reflect on your physical activity levels, sense of belonging, and overall well-being. This self-reflection may increase your awareness of these aspects of your university life.

2. Contribution to research: Your participation will help us better understand the factors that influence student transition, engagement, and academic success at university.

3. If you choose to participate in Stage 2 of the study (should you be eligible):

- You'll receive a cardiovascular fitness check, providing you with information about your general physical fitness level.

- If assigned to the Physical Activity Group, you'll have access to free, twice-weekly BodyPump classes for the semester.
- If assigned to the Social Activity Group, you'll have opportunities for structured peer interaction, which may help in building friendships and reducing social isolation.

Potential benefits for society:

1. Improved student support: This research aims to identify effective interventions that universities can implement to better support students' transition into university life and promote academic success.
2. Evidence-based strategies: The findings from this study may inform the development of evidence-based strategies to enhance student well-being, sense of belonging, and academic performance in higher education settings.
3. Broader understanding: This research will contribute to the broader understanding of how physical activity, social engagement, and sense of belonging impact student success, potentially influencing educational policies and practices beyond our university.
4. Long-term societal impact: By identifying ways to improve student transition and success, this research may contribute to better educational outcomes, potentially leading to a more educated and well-adjusted workforce in the future.

What are the possible risks?

The risks of harm in this study (Stage 1) are negligible. The surveys we're using are derived from validated and standardized instruments that have been routinely deployed to similar cohorts of students with no adverse outcomes. There is no physical risk of harm due to participating in the survey.

However, we want to be transparent about any potential concerns:

1. Emotional reflection: Some survey questions about your mental well-being, sense of belonging, or physical activity levels may prompt personal reflection.

Mitigation: The researchers are not qualified mental health practitioners, and these instruments are not designed for clinical diagnosis. If you experience any distress while participating, please inform the researchers. They will provide you with contact information for the University of Melbourne's Counselling and Psychological Services, where you can access professional support if needed.

2. Privacy concerns: While extremely unlikely, there is always a minimal risk associated with sharing personal information.

Mitigation: All data will be de-identified and stored securely. Only authorized researchers will have access to the data. We will not publish any information that could identify you individually.

3. Academic performance data: We will access your ATAR (or equivalent) and WAM.

Context: This data is routinely available to academic staff in their roles as instructors. While personal, it is not considered sensitive information. The University has robust

policies governing student data access and privacy. For research purposes, this data will be de-identified, becoming numerical values without individual identifiers.

Assurance: This information will be used solely for research, kept strictly confidential, and will not affect your academic standing in any way.

Remember, your participation is entirely voluntary, and you can withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. If you have any concerns, please don't hesitate to contact the research team for more information.

Do I have to take part?

No. Participation is completely voluntary. You are able to withdraw at any time.

If you choose to withdraw from the study:

- You can do so without providing any reason.
- There will be no negative consequences for your withdrawal.
- Your decision to withdraw will not impact any subject grade or assessment of your academic performance, as this study is not part of any subject expectations.
- If you withdraw before the end of the study, you can request that any data already collected from you be destroyed and not used in the analysis.
- However, if you withdraw after the data has been de-identified and analysed, it may not be possible to remove your specific data from the study results.

Remember, this research activity is entirely separate from your coursework. Your participation or non-participation will not affect your grades or academic standing in any way.

Will I hear about the results of this project?

Upon request we can share any published manuscript with research participants.

What will happen to information about me?

The information you provide will be strictly confidential and subject to legal requirements. Initially, your survey responses will be linked to your academic records using your Student ID number by a member of the research team that has no teaching responsibilities at the University of Melbourne. However, once this linking process is complete, all identifying information, including your Student ID, will be removed from the dataset used for analysis in this research project. The research team will not have access to any identifying information in the context of analysing the data for this study.

The de-identified data will be stored in password-protected files on the secure University drive, accessible only to the named researchers. The data you provide will be destroyed 5 years after the completion of the project. Study findings might be compared to a future iteration of the study. If this happens, we will compare cohort data and not track individual participants' responses. Only aggregate and de-identified data will be reported in any research reports or summary of results.

Funding support for this project.

This project has received funding from an University of Melbourne Department of Anatomy and Physiology Flagship Grant awarded to Associate Professor Joseph Rathner.

Where can I get further information?

If you would like more information about the project, please contact the researchers; Associate Professor Yossi Rathner, joseph.rathner@unimelb.edu.au.

Or

The Research Team, SocialEngaged-SoTL@unimelb.edu.au

Who can I contact if I have any concerns about the project?

This project has human research ethics approval from The University of Melbourne (Human Ethics Reference Number: 2025-32100-63127-2). If you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of this research project, which you do not wish to discuss with the research team, you should contact the Research Integrity Administrator, Office of Research Ethics and Integrity, University of Melbourne, VIC 3010.

Tel: +61 3 8344 1376 or Email: research-integrity@unimelb.edu.au. All complaints will be treated confidentially. In any correspondence please provide the name of the research team and/or the name or ethics ID number of the research project.