

Plain Language Statement

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



Project: Physical Activity and Academic Probation

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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 all Bachelor of Biomedicine (B-BMED) students who attended the Course Academic Progress Committee (CAPC) in the second half of 2024 to participate in this research study. We are interested in understanding how factors related to your social life and activities, such as mental wellbeing, sense of belonging to the University, physical activity levels, and class attendance, may impact your academic performance, and how these factors may change over time.

Through an online survey, we will ask you to reflect on your mental wellbeing, sense of belonging to the University community, physical activity habits, and class engagement and attendance. We will ask you to complete the survey at the beginning and end of the semester. For participants who remain enrolled at the University, we may conduct a follow-up survey in 12 months to assess the sustainable impact of any interventions on your wellbeing and academic performance.

Some of you may have been invited to participate in the 'Get Moving' initiative, which offers free access to MU Sport facilities and support for regular exercise. If you are part of this program, we will also ask questions about your experience with 'Get Moving,' such as your satisfaction, attendance, any barriers or incentives that impacted your participation, and the impact of the program on your attitude to your studies.

To analyse the relationship between these factors and academic performance, we will ask for your permission to link your survey responses to your academic results using your student ID. However, we will remove all identifiers from the data prior to any analysis being performed to ensure your confidentiality and anonymity.

We are testing the hypothesis that mental wellbeing, sense of belonging, physical activity, and class engagement can significantly impact academic performance. Understanding these relationships can help us develop more effective strategies to support student success, particularly for those facing academic challenges.

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. 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
 - To compensate you for your time, you will receive a \$15 Electronic Gift card for completing each part of the survey (this survey and a 12-month follow-up survey as applicable).

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

2. If you completed the Get Moving program, you will be asked additional questions in the end-of-semester survey – the estimate time commitment is 30-35 minutes.
3. Provide consent for us to access your ATAR (or equivalent University Entrance score), your subject marks for Semester 1, and your University of Melbourne student email address. This information will be used to analyse the relationship between the factors explored in the survey and your academic performance. Your email address will allow us to remain in communication with you during the study.
4. If you are a participant in the 'Get Moving' programme, we will ask for your consent to access and use your MU Sport attendance records collected as part of that programme for the purposes of this research study.

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:

Personal Benefits:

- **Self-reflection:** 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.
- **Contribution to research:** Your participation will help us better understand the factors that influence student engagement and academic success at university.

Potential Benefits for Society:

- **Improved student support:** This research aims to identify effective interventions that universities can implement to better support students who are struggling with university life and promote academic success.
- **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.
- **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.
- **Long-term societal impact:** By identifying ways to improve student 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 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. Throughout the study period (up to 12 months):

- Your email address will be retained to contact you for follow-up surveys.
- Your Student ID will be used to link your survey responses with your academic records (including ATAR) and gym attendance data.
- While your Student ID allows for data linking, it does not directly identify you.

- Data will be de-identified (using Student IDs) for ongoing analysis throughout the study.
- Once data is aggregated for analysis, it may not be possible to remove your individual data from that analysis.

After the 12-month follow-up, when all data collection is complete:

- Your email address will be deleted.
- Student IDs will be removed from the dataset used for final analysis, making it fully de-identified.

If you choose to withdraw from the study:

- Before any analysis: All your data can be removed upon request.
- After data has been aggregated for analysis: It may not be possible to remove your data from completed analyses, but no further use of your individual data will occur.
- After the 12-month follow-up: It will not be possible to remove your data as it will be fully anonymized.

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.

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.

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

This project has human research ethics approval from The University of Melbourne 2025-32230-63277. 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.