

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 2

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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?

This research is about investigating whether regular group activities can improve your university experience and academic performance as a first-year student. We're particularly interested in comparing the effects of structured physical activity with social group activities on your sense of belonging, well-being, and academic outcomes.

By participating in this stage of the study, you'll be helping us understand how universities can better support students in their transition to university life. We want to see if engaging in regular group activities - either physical or social - can enhance your sense of connection to the university, improve your overall well-being, and potentially boost your academic performance.

Your involvement will contribute to developing evidence-based strategies that universities can use to help future students succeed in their academic journey.

What will I be asked to do?

Should you agree to participate in Stage 2 of this study, you will be randomly assigned to one of two groups: a social activity group or an exercise group. Your participation will involve:

1. Initial Assessment:

- Complete the 1-mile Rockport Walk test to measure your physical fitness.
- Provide anthropometric data (biological sex, gender, height, and body weight) for calculating physical fitness scores.
- Provide your name and university email address for identification purposes.

2. Group Activities (for 10 weeks):

- Social Activity Group: Attend two 30-45 minute sessions per week of structured social activities such as team quizzes, board games, card games, and jigsaws.
- Exercise Group: Participate in two 30-45 minute BodyPump™ group exercise classes per week. (Note: Participants who are not ready for physical activity based on their responses to the PAR-Q+ will be excluded from this group.)
- Your attendance will be recorded at each session as part of our research data.

3. Final Assessment:

- Repeat the 1-mile Rockport Walk test.
- Complete the same surveys from Stage 1 (mental health wellbeing, sense of belonging, and General Physical Activity Questionnaire).

Your total time commitment will be approximately 1-1.5 hours per week for 10 weeks, plus about 1 hour each for the initial and final assessments.

Compensation:

To compensate for your time, you will receive:

- A \$75 electronic gift card if you complete at least 75% of the attendance requirement.
- An additional \$25 electronic gift card upon completion of the second fitness assessment (1-mile Rockport Walk test).

Please note that these payments are to compensate for your time and are not inducements to participate. Payments can only be made if we have your email address.

Data Collection and Privacy:

We will collect your university email address for identification purposes. Attendance records will be maintained throughout the study as a crucial part of our research data, allowing us to evaluate the programme's success. All data collected, including attendance records, will be kept confidential and secure, and will only be used for research purposes.

Important Notes:

- Your group assignment is random.
- The timing of activities will be based on participant and instructor availability.
- Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty.

What are the possible benefits?

Potential benefits for you as a participant:

1. **Social Interaction:** You'll have the opportunity to engage in regular, structured group activities with other first-year students. This may help you build new friendships and expand your social network at the university.
2. **Stress Relief:** Participating in regular group activities, whether social or physical, may help reduce stress and provide a break from academic pressures.
3. **Time Management:** Committing to regular scheduled activities may help you develop better time management skills, which could benefit your overall university experience.
4. **Personal Insight:** Through the surveys and activities, you'll have opportunities for self-reflection on your well-being, sense of belonging, and engagement with university life.
5. **Fitness Assessment:** You'll receive a cardiovascular fitness check at the beginning and end of the study, providing you with information about your general physical fitness level.
6. **Structured Activity:** You'll have access to free, twice-weekly structured group sessions throughout the semester, which may help establish routine in your university schedule.

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 group activities, 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.

Remember, while we anticipate these benefits, we cannot guarantee that you will personally experience them. Your participation contributes to our understanding of student experiences and helps us develop better support systems for future students.

What are the possible risks?

1. Social Activity Programme:

- There are minimal risks associated with the social activities.
- Some participants may initially feel anxious about meeting and engaging with new people.

To minimize these risks:

- Participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without consequences.
- Researchers will monitor for signs of discomfort and check on participants' wellbeing.
- Support services information will be provided.

2. Physical Activity Programme:

- While physical activity is generally safe, there are some potential risks:

- a) Delayed onset muscle soreness (DOMS)
- b) Minor injuries such as bruises, cuts, or mild strains
- c) Dehydration
- d) Dizziness, nausea, or fainting (rarely)
- e) In very rare cases, more severe musculoskeletal injuries

To minimize these risks:

- You will be screened for physical activity readiness using the PAR-Q+ questionnaire.
- Sessions will be led by trained, licensed instructors with first aid certification.
- Proper warm-up and cool-down exercises will be included.
- Activities will be tailored to participants' fitness levels.
- You will be guided on proper form and technique.
- You'll be advised to stay hydrated and inform instructors of any discomfort.
- University facilities and equipment meeting safety standards will be used.

In case of any adverse events, immediate first aid will be provided, and you will be directed to appropriate medical services if necessary. All incidents will be documented and reported to the ethics committee.

Remember, your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. If you have any concerns, please don't hesitate to contact the research team.

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.

Please note, however, compensation for your time commitment is only available after you complete 75% of the activity.

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.