

‘Show up’: Is that the recipe for success?

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Abstract

Students are most likely to achieve in an enabling program when they are fully present and strongly engaged. Student non-attendance in class is a major concern for enabling educators at institutions of higher learning. Failure by students to regularly attend face-to-face on campus classes has potential to hinder the establishment and maintenance of a dynamic and engaged learning environment as well as negatively affect individual student performance. Preliminary findings from an online survey identified a strong statistical relationship between high attendance rates and passing grades and a correlational between low attendance rates and fail grades (Seary, James & Conradie, 2014). Additional research investigating the student’s perceptions of the value of attending face-to-face classes at CQUniversity’s Skills for Tertiary Education Preparatory Studies Program (STEPS) have been further supported by feedback gathered from focus groups and personal interviews. The student voice points to a diverse range of factors influencing the decision made by internal STEPS students to attend or not attend face-to-face classes. Employing the student voice, this paper identifies the elements most beneficial for students who attend classes, and highlights factors that hinder attendance. Additionally, it offers suggestions to address these factors in the quest for establishing a learning environment that more effectively encourages and facilitates optimal attendance at scheduled on campus, face-to-face STEPS classes.

Introduction

The growing trend towards lower attendance rates at face-to-face, on campus classes has been identified by enabling educators at CQUniversity as a major concern in the light of the importance placed on class attendance as a vital component to a quality education. This paper reports the findings of a two-stage investigation conducted into attendance by CQUniversity’s STEPS students at face-to-face, on campus classes. The research project aimed to ascertain best practice strategies that may ensure optimum attendance at scheduled classes. The paper enlists the student voice to identify factors that hinder or encourage class attendance and to suggest avenues to address low attendance levels.

Contextual background

CQUniversity's STEPS enabling program has been equipping students with the skills, knowledge and confidence needed to succeed in undergraduate degree studies for a period of 30 years. As a Centrelink approved, tuition-free program, available on 11 CQUniversity campuses across four Australian states and via Distance education, STEPS is available to students aged 18 years and older who are Australian and New Zealand citizens, permanent residents or holders of humanitarian visas. Applicants are expected to have completed the equivalent of a Year 10 education, or show a propensity to study successfully at the tertiary level. Students can choose to study in all three terms of the academic calendar year. On campus, face-to-face classes are offered in Terms 1 and 2, with study by Distance education available across all three academic terms.

Participation in the program depends on an applicant's online testing of basic literacy, numeracy and computing skills, alongside an individual interview to ascertain readiness for study and to establish a Study Plan for the duration of study, be it one term of 12 weeks or up to six terms, the equivalent of a two year period. The duration of study is dependent on the entry level skill a student possesses, in conjunction with a pre-determined number of courses deemed necessary for any one diploma or degree program of study and the mode of study, either internal or distance. Upon successful completion of STEPS, students gain entry to CQUniversity diploma and degree programs through the standard direct entry application process. Entry to CQUniversity degree programs is based on a GPA of four or better and successful completion of the core and elective courses deemed essential for the program of choice through consultation by Head of Program with the relevant Higher Education School within CQUniversity.

Theoretical Framework

Although there is a vast array of research into attendance at the undergraduate level (Arulampalam, Naylor & Smith, 2012; Fazey & Fazey, 2001; Fjortoft, 2005; Friedman, Rodriguez & McComb, 2001; Gump, 2005; Jessup-Anger, 2011 ; Massingham & Herrington, 2006; Romer, 1993 ; Stewart, Stott & Nuttall, 2011), within the area of enabling programs, there is very limited data on students' conceptions of face to face teaching and the growing problem of low attendance at face-to-face, on-campus classes. Massingham and Herrington (2006) claim the majority of students will attend classes only if they perceive 'value' in doing so and that this 'value' is based largely on the quality of the teaching practice and delivery. They also pose the question as to why educators continue to believe students with competing life commitments will want to attend classes if universities provide course material online. Friedman, Rodriguez and McComb (2001) claim that students would skip class if they felt that their attendance was superfluous and this was increasingly evident if the course content was available from another source.

Research conducted by Friedman et al. (2001) into why students do or do not attend university identified minimal differences in absentee rates between gender, and that age and class standing was also insignificant. However, they discovered that where there was a policy in place that involved checking for and penalising absences, attendance was improved. They state that 'when teachers do not assess attendance and do not provide lively, meaningful instruction, absences increase' (2001. p.7). Additionally, Friedman et al. (2001, p. 7) suggest the primary attendance motivator is internal, 'a sense of responsibility to be present'.

Research suggests that attendance has a direct correlation to student performance (Gump, 2006) and when at a high level has a positive effect on performance and achievement levels (Durden & Ellis, 1995; Gatherer & Manning, 1998; Grabe & Christopherson, 2008; Massingham & Herrington, 2006; Stewart, Stott, & Nuttall, 2011; Thatcher, Fridjhon, & Cockcroft, 2007). Massingham and Herrington (2006) found that satisfactory to frequent attendees were more than twice as likely to be in the higher percentile of performers compared to poor attendees who were more likely to be low level performers. Research by Friedman et al. (2001) substantiates that higher levels of attendance are associated with a higher grade point average. Recent research centred on attendance rates for enabling students at face-to-face, on campus classes by Seary, James and Conradie (2014, p. 9) identified a strong statistical relationship between high attendance rates and passing grades and a correlational between low attendance rates and fail grades. Elements identified as most vital to student engagement positioned lecturer support as the most highly valued, with course content and lecturer teaching styles as equally important (Seary, James & Conradie, 2014).

Methodology

In an attempt to gain access to, and make sense of the shared experiences of the participants, a highly qualitative approach was used in order to validate and explicate the findings. A phenomenological approach underpinned the process as a powerful methodology for investigating the personal experiences of the participants. It is characterised by its unique inquiry method as it portrays the phenomena from both personal and contextual perspective of those who are sharing their experiences. The goal with phenomenology is to understand and find commonalities in meaning, skills, practices and experiences but with an appreciation that for each person, their experiences are moulded by the relationship they have with the world (van Manen, 1990). By employing a phenomenological approach to underpin interviews, participants were encouraged to share their personal experiences and relate it to their personal beliefs, backgrounds and cultural situations.

Participants

The participant group included STEPS students enrolled in the two year period, Term 1, 2012 to Term 1, 2014. A bulk email was sent to students inviting them to participate in one of two focus groups in order to discuss their experiences within a face to face classroom and their perceptions of the importance of attending scheduled classes. Ten students attended the focus group sessions, each lasting one hour. A subsequent email was sent to 20 students from Term 1, 2014 who identified in the categories of low or non-attendance via an online survey, to ascertain their willingness to be interviewed individually.

Data Collection

The data that informed this paper was gathered in three stages using a mixed methodology approach. The first stage of the research project saw the interrogation of attendance rolls kept for the two year period being considered; the second, an online survey which established a number of themes relating to reasons why students did not attend scheduled on campus classes. The third stage of the research project saw data collected through two focus groups and two individual interviews and it is this stage that provides the data for the paper. Information gathered from the initial survey (Seary, James and Conradie, 2014) guided the questions for the focus groups with the express aim to gather rich data around low or non-attendance. Guided inquiry was used for the focus groups and individual interviews in order to ensure the students had ample opportunity to share their thoughts, yet allow the interviewer to keep the responses on track. All focus groups and personal interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder and transcribed verbatim.

Limitations of the study

Not unexpectedly, only two students of the 20 who were identified as having very low attendance rates, responded to the offer to take part in an individual interview. As such, this is identified as a limitation of the study as there is no clear identification for this target group of issues or factors that contributed to them not attending class. However, valuable information, which effectively informs a future strategy for improving class attendance, was gained from the focus group interviews where students who attended had less than desirable attendance, and the two individual interviews with students who also presented with low attendance rates.

Analysis

Thematic analysis which involves the search for common threads that extend across the interviews conducted and provides a detailed and nuanced account of the data was used to analyse the data. The process of thematic analysis attempts to understand the underlying messages behind the social and cultural phenomena, and not just the word or stories being shared. This allowed the researchers to understand the perceptions of the participants alongside their actual experiences (Boystzis, 1998; Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012; Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013). Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six step guide to

thematic analysis, the transcripts were initially read and then re-read to gain an overall appreciation for the stories being relayed. The transcripts were coded to allow familiarity with the context behind the comment and anecdotal comments made by the interviewees. Basic themes were identified and the data allocated to the matching themes. A thematic map was created and the key themes were reviewed and redefined in order to ensure the themes reflected the true nature of the responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Findings

Thematic analysis was effective in articulating and identifying aspects that relate directly to the phenomenon of attendance, and also teased out the students perceptions of the value of attendance and reasons for lower levels of attendance. The first theme to be identified were the reasons for non-attendance. The four key categories that became evidence included: health, financial situation, academic ability and availability of online course resources. The second major theme revolved around the benefits of attending class and the three key categories included: peer support, social connectedness, and student motivation. The final theme spoke to student's perceptions of why classmates did not attend class, with the three key categories including: non-engagement, age, and accountability. The view students held with regards the quality of teaching and the learning environment featured prominently and positively in the final theme.

Reasons for internal enrolment and high level attendance

There are a number of reasons why students chose to attend STEPS as internal students. Those not working and in a more secure financial position reported they were able to commit to more consistent attendance. One student shared, *I no longer work so that gave me every day to be able to attend.* Some students balancing work and study preferred internal classes as they felt this mode of attendance would help to motivate them. Another student who felt the need to further develop his knowledge claimed, *I had the time....I had an enquiring mind....it was a thirst for knowledge.* Invariably, many mentioned the need to develop study skills in a supportive environment before progressing to the undergraduate arena. *I took long service to be here.... I felt it better to be here and learn as much as I could face-to-face before I have to do it on my own at home.* One student, in recognising the value of attending because of the support provided, shared that *the face to face contact for STEPS students is very important because this is when we are all very fragile and we are still trying to learn who we are and gain confidence.* Fear of the unknown and the thought that having face-to-face guidance would help alleviate this was clearly evident. Students relayed that they felt a *sense of rightness* very quickly after the in depth orientation days and they began to find their own identity as students as the term progressed. *I was really concerned about feeling intimidated in class. I think by the third day, there was absolutely no concerns whatsoever. I felt right at home.* One student found attendance vital in order to gain the depth of knowledge from each class. *I was too scared to not come because you would invariably miss something.* Another stated attendance was *important because it gave me*

the interaction I craved. If you've got questions or you don't quite understand, you can ask and it helps you to clarify that you are on the right track. It was evident that students valued the one-on-one opportunity to interact with the lecturers and receive immediate feedback or guidance. Some students shared that they were receiving government benefits and to fulfil the requirements, they had to enrol in full-time study so the internal mode was attractive. Another student managing Asperger's Syndrome was recommended to attend STEPS as an internal student by a psychologist in order to keep his mind active and improve his social connectedness.

Students with high levels of attendance identified the benefits they gained through attending scheduled classes. The common threads can be explained under three key areas: **peer support, social connectedness, and motivation.** The 'peer' aspect (peer teaching, peer interaction, peer sharing and peer support) featured very strongly through the transcripts. There was value to be found in the sharing of ideas and the students could see they were *learning from other people* and *most people were quite happy to help*. One student shared that *peer teaching was very helpful* and she found that her fellow student *made things sound so easy*. Peer contributions helped students to feel they were not alone and this contributed to a sense of connectedness with each other.

Developing relationships was critical to social connectedness. As one student shared, *it takes time to get to know people...you have to start by having conversations*. Another identified that with the range of ages within the classes, it is vital that both the younger and older generation are willing to develop relationships and not just migrate to their own age group. As the relationships developed and the sense of social connectedness strengthened, students felt this contributed to them feeling motivated to attend class and, in turn, to develop a routine. One student shared that it gave her a purpose for attending. *What I noticed is the ones that don't attend regularly don't develop that connection. When they do attend, they always feel like the odd one out and they are missing out.* The flipped classroom style of teaching was noted as being an effective as it encouraged peer interaction and the students enjoyed the group activities. One student shared, *I like a group discussion where everyone is throwing in ideas; this has been very helpful for me personally*. Even students who described themselves as introverts appreciated the benefits of group work. *As an introvert, I can still get into a group and be a part of something.* Additionally, connectedness was also attributed to past STEPS students who were accessible on campus and were supportive, acting informally as mentors.

Elements that contribute to non-attendance

There were four elements identified as contributors to STEPS students' inability to attend on campus, face-to-face classes and these included: health, financial situation, academic ability and availability of online course resources.

Health

Health was mentioned in various forms from personal sickness, family sickness and/or mental stress and illness. Personal health issues impacted on individual student's ability to attend classes. One student shared that she did not know whether she could attend from day to day as it was dependent on how she felt when she woke up. *Because I haven't been well, I've missed classes and then I found the course harder so I have put more into it and this has a kick back on my health.* This was further supported by other students who relayed that the main reason they did not attend class was that they were sick. Some parents acknowledged that if their children were sick, that would inhibit them from attending class. One student shared, *I have a son who is doing STEPS at the same time and he has not been able to attend because of a very serious back operation. He has struggled with keeping up and he's doing as much as he can. The fact that he hasn't been attending class has contributed to his struggle to keep up.* As the primary carer, this mother found that this also impacted on her ability to attend regularly.

Stress and mental illnesses were highlighted as factors that contributed to student absenteeism. The correlation of incidents of stress causing non-attendance was strong later in the term when assessments were looming and students were feeling overwhelmed. Students relayed that they had to make a decision whether attending class would be as beneficial as staying home and ensuring they completed assessments. Students who identified with high levels of anxiety and prone to panic attacks were more inclined to not attend classes. They shared that they were fighting an internal battle trying to overcome their anxiety, but worry and stress just fuelled their situation and contributed to their inability to 'push through' and attend classes.

Financial situation

The next theme related to the associated financial strain associated with study. Many students balance work commitments alongside study. One student shared, *I carry a lot on my plate as a single parent having to work and study as well, but it's my choice that I've made.* Another shared that a younger girl in her class had difficulty attending due to work commitments. This was quite a common scenario with students trying to balance work with study. For some, they were able to organise work around study, but there were students who would be called into work unexpectedly and would accept work over attending class because of the threat of being dismissed from the job that supported their family and/or themselves. One student relayed that she tried to be a regular attendee but the cost of travel due to the distance from university, negatively impacted her. *I can only come in a couple days a week because it's not financially viable to travel in every day.*

Academic ability

The third key theme was a student's academic ability and this manifested in a number of ways from students falling behind in their study, to their attitude towards the effort required, with others feeling a sense of failure by not achieving well in assessments. One

student entered the program knowing her academic ability was not strong; however, she was fully committed and had a high level of attendance. Despite substantial effort expended on her assessments and sound results for most of the term, she failed the final assessment in one term of study. *When it came back with a fail, it was disheartening and upsetting. I sort of stopped coming to uni altogether.* Some students shared that the pace at which some courses are taught can be disorientating and overwhelming and if students fall behind in their understanding, they can begin to doubt themselves and lose confidence and this contributes to losing the motivation to attend. *If it gets beyond you and it gets so hard, you just think, look I'm just so hopeless. I feel like I'm really stupid.*

The participants also shared what they had witnessed with their cohort of students. Some students made a subconscious decision to not attend as they thought it was too easy and they could easily catch up in their own time. *People that I've met either don't attend because at the start things are quite easy and they don't need to be here to do it. I don't think they understand the amount of work and the commitment that is required. It's not until the last four to five weeks they realise there is a lot of work to get done in a short period of time.*

Availability of online course resources

Some students found the decision to not attend was balanced with the availability of online resources and therefore, they were not concerned about not attending class and thus falling behind. One student openly conveyed using the learning management system, Moodle, as an avenue to catch-up with what was missed in class.

Student's perceptions of non-attendance: Non-engagement, age and accountability

Non-engagement was attributed to non-attendance. Through not attending, students were limiting their ability to develop relationships and a sense of connectedness, in-turn reducing the opportunity to find their identity as a student. The more classes missed, the harder students found it was to 'fit in'. One student suggested that maybe students *don't realise the time commitment they have to make or have the emotion or personal readiness to commit to the program.* Non-engagement was also mentioned in relation to students being 'off task'. Some students shared their sense of frustration with students who were not engaging with the content. *I often found myself being the one to turn around and say 'can we actually get back to what we are supposed to be talking about?'* Another student shared frustration when what some students were talking about was *completely irrelevant to what we are there to learn.* Social media was also identified as a distraction causing non-engagement. A number of students shared their frustration when students were being notably distracted by social media. *Many students would visibly be looking at their phones throughout the classes sending texts or checking Facebook instead of concentrating on what was being taught. It's as though they don't know how to switch off from that influence.* Disruptive students were a cause for annoyance by a number of students. *There are some*

young ones in our classes that really were disruptive. One shared that a small group would sit at the back of the class and they would talk and disrupt the class. They were not trying to learn, and this student felt he could use his time better by not necessarily going into that class and having to deal with that sort of distraction. However, one participant felt that at times, some students were very critical of their cohort and shared we need to be more understanding of where others are coming from and not make judgements based on what we don't know. She shared her perception that I've found in one of our classes where some students were doing very well that they tend to be very judgemental of others.

Age was a factor that was regarded as having an influence on the decision making to attend scheduled classes; however, this appears to be very dependent on the particular class group experienced by the participants in the research. In one particular group, older students shared a sense of frustration with the attitude displayed in class by younger students, with some choosing not to attend regularly because of their potential to disrupt classes. *They have too much flexibility. They don't take it seriously enough. They lack discipline and they consider the flexibility to be acceptable.* The older students showed concern regarding the attitudes and the personal motivation of the younger students; however, they attributed it to the different generational attitudes. *Younger people have a different attitude to my generation. They come in tired because they've been playing computer games until late at night. They don't seem to realise they have to give something up to make the time to come in to do STEPS.* One student suggested that the younger students were not emotionally ready to contribute within an adult environment. *It's a huge culture shock, they are not used to having older people in the class because it is very obvious...you've got a class of 30 people and you've got half that are putting up their hands and asking questions and the others, generally younger students switch off. They are texting under the desk.*

Contrary to this, a number of participants shared that they had not experienced any negativity relating to the age gap within their allocated group. *I have had a different experience with my class. We had a lot of younger ones and they were all very interested in doing the class.* Another student found the young ones in her group *were friendly and respectful and all seemed to join in well.* She hadn't experienced the negative aspect of what members of the other group had relayed regarding the younger students in the group. *Our group is extremely friendly and we are all there for each other. We've got quite a few young ones that are really respectful and they attend well.* One student suggested that maybe the reason the younger students fall behind is *because they don't know how to communicate well or they feel embarrassed about asking for help.*

One student, who identified as the 'older' generation, indicated age was factor in his decision to aim for regular attendance as he believed *the brain's ability to process information reduces with age and it takes longer for some older students to process the necessary information.* He shared his STEPS experience as a time when his *brain was rewiring. New neurons were being formed, new pathways developing, but that took time.*

This student believed that *older people need more time than the younger people and cannot afford to miss any classes where the teacher is there 'on tap' to help.*

Accountability as a factor influencing students' decision to attend scheduled classes can be considered from two standpoints. Positive accountability can be seen where students made an informed decision to not attend class in order to ensure they are completing tasks that carry weight. *I carry a lot on my plate as a single parent having to work and having to study as well but when I can't attend, it's my choice I've made. I'm not going to come in here acting like a victim.* One student shared how he was using his time more efficiently by not going to class. *I enjoy the classes but I find I get more work done on my own at home than I would do here.* If assessment items are looming, students shared that they found it hard to focus on other courses. One student shared, *even if I'd gone to class, I would not have learned a single thing because my mind would have shut down and it would have caused more frustration.*

From a negative viewpoint, the student voice spoke to the attitude taken/behaviour displayed by some students who appeared to either enrol in the program for Centrelink purposes with no intention to attend regularly or who did not seem to expend sufficient effort in their study to succeed. Students mentioned that *structure, discipline and organisation* were lacking in some students and that they needed to be accountable for their actions. *There should be a point that they have to show accountability.* They noticed that attendance reduced from the first week with much higher levels on non-attendance near the end of the term. However, students indicated it may be beyond the control of the teaching staff as stated, *I don't see there is much that you can do. It is up to the people who are not attending to want to be there. What you are offering is what you are offering.* Participants indicated they become frustrated with those students who did not attend. *Some are just lazy and didn't attend regularly. Some only signed up because the program is Centrelink approved. They said they'd rather be doing other things than coming to class and they just didn't realise how far behind they were getting. Some will realise and come back to class or the others just drop out.*

Teaching approaches

All students who participated in the research project held lecturers in high regard. They valued and appreciated the knowledge and dedication of their lecturers and found that the class environment was engaging and valuable. Furthermore, they did not connect any particular classes to lower attendances as reduced numbers flowed across all classes. However, in relation to attendance, the students highlighted that some lecturers seem to take low attendance personally. *I can understand the lecturer's point of view where they want to know why those people aren't attending. They kind of take it to heart and take it personally.* One student straight forwardly stated *we've given our time to be here, so why are we sitting here wasting time talking about people who aren't even here. The lecturer is there for the people who've attended so let's forget about them and get on with what we*

are here to do. Students stated that they believe the responsibility to attend class falls to the students. The view of one student was *if they can't attend, then it is their responsibility to catch up or talk to the lecturer if they are having problems. I think the lecturer just has to simply accept it.* One student showed displeasure that he had been attending regularly and felt it unfair that the non-attendees were afforded additional support at a later date, when they had not been attending on a regular basis.

Discussion

It is clear that quality teaching practices which include engaging approaches and ongoing support are vital to engage students and encourage attendance at scheduled face-to-face classes. Previous research undertaken by Seary, James and Conradie (2014, p. 9) identified that lecturer support, course content and teaching approaches were the most vital aspects influencing student engagement within the classroom. This aligns to Massingham and Herrington's (2006) claim that students are looking for the 'value' component of attendance which is based largely on the teaching practices employed and the way the content is delivered.

Also, of major importance, is assisting students to see the benefit of attending class but ensuring that when they do attend, they reap the benefits they seek from the class and not feel that their time is wasted. This supports Friedman, Rodriguez and McComb's (2001) claim that if students felt their attendance was superfluous, they were more tempted to miss class and catch up using the online resources available. This highlights that teaching practices need to ensure students are engaged and different learning styles are accommodated.

Reduced conversations and negative talk about non-attendance by lecturers was seen as desirable and this points to the adoption of a strategy whereby the concentration is on quickly ascertaining the absences for any particular class and proceeding with the class with no further reference to those not in attendance.

The students posting strong attendance rates attributed that to the connectedness they had with other students, in particular, in classes employing group participation and peer interaction. Additionally, connectedness was attributed to the involvement of past STEPS students who were supportive and informally mentored them. This points to the sense of involving past students more regularly within formalised classes; however, it was noted that mentoring has to be positive, reassuring, encouraging, supportive and devoid of negativity.

There was a strong encouragement from students that leniency around absences owing to unexpected work or family commitments would be appreciated by those genuinely unable to attend when it was a choice between university and work that supported them and their family or a particular unexpected family commitment that needed attention. The value of truly knowing each and every student's personal situation as it relates to the expectations of

the program points to the importance of students feeling comfortable sharing the factors that are negatively impacting their attendance with key individuals who can assist and make reasonable adjustments to the set expectations where possible.

Social media and the ease of access to technologies is a cultural issue that is increasingly being highlighted both positively and negatively by teaching staff and students. Frustration with student's resistance to 'switching off' their mobile was evident in the findings as students viewed this as contributing to non-engagement by these students. Keller (2011, as cited in Gikas & Grant, 2013, p. 24) characterised university students "as digitally obsessed, even addicted" and further explained that most slept next to their mobile devices. In their research, Gikas and Grant (2013) make reference to 'blurring of the lines' where students use technology devices to access content and course resources, but also find it difficult to switch off as it becomes a part of their 'identity', and this behaviour has become habitual, automatic, and distracting (McCoy, 2013).

Research into the use of digital devices for non-class related purposes is growing (Fang, 2009; Rubinkam, 2010; Wei & Wang, 2010; Wei, Wang and Klausner, 2012; McCoy, 2013) and a similar thread is woven through the findings that students have a harder time learning new things when their brains are distracted by any form of digital technology. Ophir, Nass, Wagner and Posner (2009) note that it is normal for people in society to consume more than one content stream at the same time; however, Thomas (2009) states that the human mind is not really built for processing multiple streams of information. Therefore, STEPS educators need to actively encourage those students 'addicted to social media' to engage more appropriately with the technology whilst in class so as to reduce the tension that may arise between students and reduce the potentially negative implications on class attendance.

Conclusion

In an effort to devise strategies to establish a learning environment that more effectively results in optimal student attendance, the factors that either encouraged or hindered students from attending class will inform the planning for future terms of study by CQUniversity's STEPS team of educators. The student voice points to the importance of educators keeping a number of factors utmost in mind when considering strategies that will encourage a higher level of attendance across the entire cohort in any particular term when internal classes are offered. Most obvious is the importance of developing an inclusive, supportive, safe and secure learning environment in which healthy relationships have a chance of developing and where negative 'habits of mind' have a chance of being challenged, broken down and re-sculptured into the habits, routines and mindsets that are considered the essential elements of a successful student at the tertiary level. By adopting a lenient approach to absenteeism owing to unexpected and unavoidable work and family commitments and instances of financial hardship, continuing to concentrate on quality course design and teaching practices that are engaging and purposeful, enlisting greater

involvement by past STEPS students and concentrating attention on those students in attendance rather than those absent, students enrolled internally may be more inclined to 'show up' for and engage more consistently in scheduled on campus, face-to-face classes.

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