Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to set out the attendance requirements for Institute of Health and Management (IHM) students studying online courses.

Scope

This policy applies to all students enrolled in an ongoing course of study that is delivered fully online or through any form of distance education that does not involve students’ presence at a designated physical location.

Responsibility

Implementation of this policy is the responsibility of course coordinators. Attendance monitoring is governed by the Teaching and Learning Committee, who provide key attendance data to the Quality Standards and Compliance Committee.

Definitions

Attendance

Where IHM delivers units of study fully online, students do not attend lectures or tutorials at a physical location. Therefore, a broader definition of attendance is required in order to account for interaction occurring through a variety of electronic means. As such, attendance is defined as bilateral or multilateral interaction involving or observed by the academic staff allocated to a unit of study and, more specifically, participation in activities that have been specifically identified as involving such interaction while being integral to the teaching and learning activities of a unit of study.
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Attendance Activity

An activity specified in the course document, which has been identified by teaching staff as contributing to attendance and added to the Attendance Criteria Table for a unit of study.

Forms of attendance

The following are examples of activities that may be considered forms of attendance in the context of on-line course delivery:

Participation in an online discussion forum moderated by teaching staff
Every unit of study provided by IHM will have at least one online discussion forum moderated by the Contract Academic or Course Coordinator. Primarily these will be run within the eLearning platform and teaching staff will initiate some topic threads to stimulate conversation. Conversations and comments will be recorded against the login credentials of each student and Course Coordinators will add these to attendance records.

Participation in discussions through social media
Some units of study may incorporate the use of social media. When this is the case, joining the social media page or group for the unit of study will be a requirement of undertaking the unit. The Course Coordinator will record any screen names used by students and will record attendance and participation.

Participation in Virtual Classroom Activities
Every unit of study will incorporate some interaction through the virtual classroom environment that is incorporated into the eLearning platform.

Participation in workshop activities
Workshop activities create the opportunity for peer review through the eLearning platform. It involves students uploading and reviewing each other’s writing.

Principles

Maintaining interactivity
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The primary purpose of attendance is to ensure that students benefit from social and communicative aspects of teaching and learning. Bilateral or multilateral communication is therefore an essential attribute for any activity that is to be considered to contribute to attendance.

Working relationships between students and staff

For Lecturers to teach effectively, it is important that they interact with their students. This allows them to identify their students’ individual needs, ensure that they can verify that students’ academic development is genuine and provide personalised support, not only when students are struggling, but whenever there is an opportunity for improvement. Therefore, the inclusion of teaching staff in an activity, whether or not they actively participate in the activity itself, is an essential attribute that will be required of all activities that contribute to attendance. That staff member may not necessarily actively participate in the activity, but will have the ability to observe the activity and make comments, either generally or to specific participants.

Linear progression through the course of study

Linear progression through course materials will be used to ensure that students participate in some activities before progressing to others. Because students will have access to assignment sheets and unit guides from the beginning of the unit, they will still be able to get started on key tasks early in the program.

Maintaining flexibility

Flexibility is one of the key strengths of online distance education as a mode of course delivery. Therefore, IHM will not impose attendance requirements that negate this strength. Attendance requirements will allow students the option of participating in a variety of ways and each form of participation will be considered a form of attendance.

Attendance as a tool for teaching and learning
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Attendance activities exist in order to enhance the teaching and learning process. Most attendance activities are not allocated any marks for the determination of academic grades, but are tracked in order to encourage students to maintain regular contact with each other and with teaching staff and to help identify instances in which this is not occurring in order to take remedial action such as contacting the student to offer assistance and encourage greater participation. Because attendance is seen as a part of the teaching and learning process, it will be academic staff actively engaged in the scholarship of teaching and learning who determine and monitor attendance and they will do so on a way that is unique to each unit of study and which is reviewed and improved regularly based on evidence and feedback.

Supplementary attendance

Where a student has had regular communication with IHM staff, supplementary attendance points will be allocated up to a maximum determined prior to the commencement of the teaching period in accordance with the procedure for Identifying and Communicating Attendance Activities. Supplementary attendance may be added to participation in regular attendance activities at the discretion of Contract Academics or Course Coordinators if it is seen in a given context as representing a significant form of participating for an individual student that would influence the outcome of normal band allocation.

Attendance bands

The level of attendance for students can be tracked in bands. The band into which a student falls in any given week of a unit of study can be calculated based on figure 1.

Figure 1: Calculation of attendance

\[
\text{PO} \times \frac{100}{\text{PTD}} = \text{Attendance}
\]

Where:
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PO = Points Obtained by the student through activities undertaken up until the end of the previous week of study. This figure includes any supplementary attendance points added;
PTD = Points a student could potentially have obtained if they had participated in all attendance activities up until the end of the previous week of study and;
Attendance is expressed as a percentage

Using this calculation, a student’s attendance at the end of any week of study can be quantified and the attendance band in which they fall can be determined based on figure 2.

Figure 2: Attendance bands and responses

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Attendance</th>
<th>Band</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Teaching response recommended</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>≥70%</td>
<td>Optimal Attendance</td>
<td>The student is making the most of learning opportunities and contributing significantly to interactive teaching and learning</td>
<td>Acknowledge the student’s high level of participation with praise and thank them for their contributions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 – 69%</td>
<td>Satisfactory attendance</td>
<td>The student is participating actively in activities on a regular basis</td>
<td>Acknowledge instances where the student is participating and mention the benefits of further opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≤49%</td>
<td>Problematic attendance</td>
<td>Student is not participating actively in the process of teaching and learning</td>
<td>Take active steps to improve the student’s participation such as contacting them by telephone and offering assistance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Verification of identity
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In order to verify attendance online, new technologies such as keystroke biometrics will be investigated and utilised to ensure that the identity of the student is authenticated.

Procedures

Procedure for ensuring and monitoring participation in an online unit of study

1. Course coordinator and Contract Academic allocate attendance points to each form of attendance identified for a unit of study in accordance with the procedure for Identifying and Communicating Attendance Requirements;

2. Students are given a minimum attendance target (see definitions) for the unit of study, which is expressed in the form of a point score. They are also given an additional target for optimum attendance which is an aspirational target;

3. At the end of each week, students will need to have completed a percentage of the available attendance activities in order to unlock content from the following week. This will be arranged automatically using the features of the eLearning platform;

4. Students may exceed the attendance target by participating in additional, optional activities for each week;

5. If a student has not reached the minimum attendance target by two days into the following week, the Contact Academic or Course Coordinator will contact them to discuss whether they require assistance;

6. If a student has a good reason for delays in completing certain weeks of study or if the locking of content is restricting their ability to progress, they may ask their Contact Academic or Course Coordinator to unlock content for them

Identifying and communicating attendance activities
The identification and communication of attendance activities takes place prior to the commencement of the first study period in which units of study are run and is reviewed subsequently in accordance with the following procedure:

1. Course Coordinator and Contract Academic discuss the unit guide and curriculum, identify the teaching and learning activities they will need to run and divide the attendance points for the unit between those activities in accordance with the following criteria:
   a. Interaction involved between students and teaching staff;
   b. Interaction involved among students and able to be observed or recorded by teaching staff;
   c. Potential complexity and relevance of the interaction involved;
   d. Duration of the interaction involved;

2. The Contract Academic and Course Coordinator determine the maximum number of supplementary attendance points to be allocated for the unit;

3. The Course Coordinator completes and signs the Attendance Criteria Table;

4. Based on the attendance criteria table, the LMS Administrator and Contract Academic, working in close collaboration, add the activities to the LMS, allocating points for each attendance activity and setting progress conditions for the release of each week’s content;

5. The Contract Academic writes an overview of attendance, including the attendance criteria table and a set of simple guidelines for students and sends it to each student. A copy is also added to the course documents shared on the LMS;

6. The criteria are revised by the course coordinator after each subsequent teaching period and adjustments are made in order to optimise the benefits to teaching and learning;

7. The Teaching and Learning Committee conduct an annual evidence based review of attendance and recommend any changes to this policy or to the allocation of attendance criteria for courses.
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Recording and addressing attendance rates

1. Course Coordinators will monitor attendance for each student and record the student’s attendance as a percentage at the end of each week of a unit of study;

2. Data on attendance will be shared between Course Coordinators and Contact Academics and Course Coordinators will notify Contact Academics if a student moves from one attendance band to another (see Figure 2) to allow them to adjust their approach to teaching;

3. Course coordinators will compile an annual report on attendance using the data recorded and submit it to the Teaching and Learning Committee who will report significant findings to the Academic Board via the chair

Supplementary Information

Related policies/procedures: Not applicable

Benchmarking: Not applicable

Supporting research and analysis:


Grabe, M 2005, 'Voluntary use of online lecture notes: correlates of note use and note use as an alternative to class attendance', Computers & Education, vol. 44, no. 4, pp. 409-21

Kinlaw, CR, Dunlap, LL & D’Angelo, JA 2012, 'Relations between faculty use of online academic resources and student class attendance', Computers & Education, vol. 59, no. 2, pp. 167-72
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Related documents: Not applicable
Related legislation: Not applicable
Guidelines: Not applicable

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