

Bond University

Bond Law Review

Volume 37

Issue 2

2025

The End of Law Lectures? Not Yet...

Melanie Jackson

Bond University

Nickolas James

Bond University

Jessica Schaffer

Bond University

Tonya Roberts

Bond University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://blr.scholasticahq.com/>



© Copyright the authors.

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivative 4.0 International Licence](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

THE END OF LAW LECTURES? NOT YET...

MELANIE JACKSON,* NICKOLAS JAMES,* JESSICA SCHAFER,* TONYA ROBERTS*

Abstract

This article examines claims of declining student attendance at law lectures and evaluates the contemporary relevance of the synchronous lecture. The authors discuss the benefits of lectures, analyse the reasons for low student attendance, and investigate student perceptions regarding the value of synchronous lectures versus asynchronous learning options such as lecture recordings. The study includes a review of the literature on the value of lecture attendance, an analysis of lecture attendance data, a survey of student preferences, and a summary of focus groups with students. Students identified value in lectures due to their structured delivery, motivational impact, opportunities for interaction, and alignment with assessment preparation. Ultimately, the authors conclude that abolishing law lectures is not advisable as law students continue to find value in having access to both synchronous and asynchronous learning options.

I Introduction

If you ask any law academic, they are likely to agree that law lecture attendance has declined in recent years. Almost every academic has a heartbreaking story about preparing to deliver a large class and showing up to a room with only a handful of law students ... or even no students at all. This is consistent with anecdotal evidence about lecture attendance from across the university sector.¹

Conversations with law academics within our own faculty at Bond University revealed a range of anecdotal perspectives on the issue of declining lecture attendance. Some colleagues believe the main problem lies in the nature and quality of the student experience during synchronous lectures, suggesting that lectures should be made more engaging and interactive. Others attribute the decline to the ready availability of asynchronous lecture recordings and propose limiting access to these recordings. Some emphasise the benefits of recordings in supporting student access, convenience, and learning. Some advocate for a return to a 'low-tech' approach, requiring students to attend all

* Faculty of Law, Bond University

¹ See, eg, John Ross, 'What Is Lost When Academics Teach to Empty Lecture Halls?', *Times Higher Education* (Blog Post, 23 September 2022) <<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/what-lost-when-academics-teach-empty-lecture-halls>>.

classes in person. Others argue that synchronous lectures should be abolished entirely and replaced with asynchronous learning options such as instructional videos and self-directed online resources.

It is the final option above that provides the starting point for this paper: should synchronous law lectures be abolished?² In reflecting upon this question and presenting a scholarly, evidence-based response, we draw upon the existing literature as well as the results of a Bond University investigation into law student preferences regarding lecture attendance. We begin by identifying the benefits of the traditional lecture, and consider the various reasons offered by commentators for declining levels of lecture attendance. We then present the results of the investigation undertaken at Bond University, focussing upon the results of student surveys and student focus groups. We conclude with our answer to the initial question regarding the ongoing viability of synchronous large group teaching: is it time to abolish the law lecture?

II The Persistence of the Lecture

In this section, we reflect upon recognised benefits of lecture attendance and the reasons why the lecture has, for centuries, played such an important role in the law student learning experience. The university lecture has deep roots in legal education. From medieval law faculties to contemporary Australian law schools, lectures have familiarised students with the law itself, its underlying theories and principles, and its wider contexts. Lectures have synthesised complex and sometimes inconsistent legal sources, modelled legal reasoning, and, when done well, facilitated skills development and professional identity formation.

For many years, the lecture was the primary method of instruction within universities.³ The lecture can be traced back to the medieval universities of Europe (such as the University of Bologna, established in 1088, and the University of Paris, established around 1150). Initially, academics would read from authoritative texts – often in Latin – while students took notes, a method known as ‘lectio’. This method was essential in an era when books were scarce and expensive. As universities expanded and printed texts became more readily available, the nature of the lecture began to change. By the 18th and 19th centuries, lectures had become more interactive, with academics not only reading from texts but also providing commentary and explanations and engaging in discussions with students.⁴

² ‘Adelaide University to Ditch In-Person Lectures’, *Campus Review* (Blog Post, 28 August 2025) <<https://www.campusreview.com.au/2024/09/adelaide-university-to-ditch-in-person-lectures/>>.

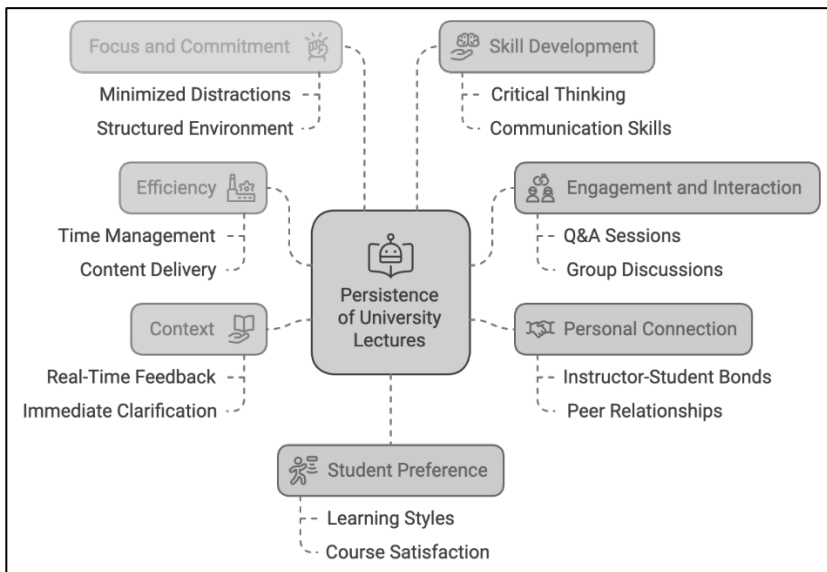
³ Teresa Brawner Bevis, *A World History of Higher Education Exchange: The Legacy of American Scholarship* (Springer, 2019) 35–53.

⁴ David Sugarman, ‘A Hatred of Disorder: Legal Science, Liberalism and Imperialism’ in Peter Fitzpatrick (ed), *Dangerous Supplements: Resistance and Renewal in Jurisprudence* (Pluto Press, 1991) 34.

In the late 20th century, academics began to supplement their oral presentations with a variety of additional learning materials including reading lists (and, in law, case lists) and written notes, and later PowerPoint slides and online materials. It became more common for lectures to be recorded, initially as audio recordings and later as video recordings, giving students the option of relying upon asynchronous recordings instead of attending lectures in person.⁵

Despite the contemporary proliferation of online learning resources and alternative ways of delivering content and interacting with students, the university lecture has persisted as a common learning activity for several reasons. A chart summarising these commonly cited advantages of lectures is presented as Figure 1.⁶

Figure 1. The advantages of lectures.



The first reason, *focus and commitment*, relates specifically to in-person lectures. In-person lectures provide a space and a time for the student to focus upon their learning. While it is of course possible for

⁵ Helen E Larkin, "‘But They Won’t Come to Lectures...’: The Impact of Audio Recorded Lectures on Student Experience and Attendance" (2010) 26(2) *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology* 238.

⁶ This chart was developed by the authors to synthesise perspectives from academic literature and academic experience. Each advantage listed has been discussed in legal and educational literature. See, eg, Natalie Skead et al, 'If You Record, They Will Not Come – But Does It Really Matter: Student Attendance and Lecture Recording at an Australian Law School' (2020) 54(3) *The Law Teacher* 349; Phil Race, *The Lecturer’s Toolkit: A Practical Guide to Assessment, Learning and Teaching* (Taylor & Francis Group, 5th ed, 2020); Emily Nordmann and Peter McGeorge, 'Lecture Capture in Higher Education: Time to Learn from the Learners' (Research Paper, School of Psychology, University of Aberdeen, 2018) <<https://eprints.gla.ac.uk/196696/>>.

students to be distracted by their peers and their electronic devices, there are likely to be fewer distractions when sitting in a lecture theatre than studying elsewhere. Additionally, the fact that the student must make the effort to physically travel to the classroom contributes to the student being in a frame of mind where they are, at least for the period of the class, committed to focusing on their studies.

The second reason is *skill development*. Lectures frequently serve as a structured environment for developing transferable skills that underpin both academic success and professional competence. For example, attending lectures provides students with opportunities to develop their active listening skills, which are essential for legal practice where precision and comprehension are critical.⁷ Lecture attendance can develop students' note-taking skills; note-taking during lectures has been shown to support deeper learning by requiring students to identify, summarise, and organise key ideas in real time, and this process promotes metacognitive awareness and aids long-term recall.⁸ Lecture attendance also develops students' self-directed learning skills: the lecturer can signal core concepts and provide a framework for subsequent independent study.⁹ In Australian law schools, lectures can support development of the practical legal skills identified in the Threshold Learning Outcomes (TLOs) for Law, including legal reasoning and oral communication; when lecturers explicitly model legal analysis and problem-solving, and demonstrate high-level oral presentation and advocacy skills, they contribute to the development by students of TLO-aligned skills that are then consolidated in tutorials and assessments.¹⁰

The third reason is *efficiency*. Lectures enable institutions to deliver complex material to large cohorts in a consistent and cost-effective manner, a factor of particular importance in resource-constrained universities.¹¹ This scalability also allows universities to accommodate fluctuations in enrolments without proportionally increasing staffing or infrastructure costs.¹² From a pedagogical perspective, lectures provide

⁷ Shaista Saiyad et al, 'Teaching and Learning through Large and Small Groups' (2018) 8 (Special Issue) *Journal of Research in Medical Education & Ethics* 24. Research shows that structured listening during lectures enhances cognitive processing and retention compared to passive reading alone: Emily Nordmann et al, 'Turn Up, Tune In, Don't Drop Out: The Relationship between Lecture Attendance, Use of Lecture Recordings, and Achievement at Different Levels of Study' (2019) 77 *Higher Education* 1065.

⁸ Annie Piolat, Thierry Olive and Ronald T Kellogg, 'Cognitive Effort during Note Taking' (2005) 19(3) *Applied Cognitive Psychology* 291, 297.

⁹ John B Biggs and Catherine Tang, *Teaching for Quality Learning at University: What the Student Does* (McGraw-Hill, 4th ed, 2011).

¹⁰ Anna Huggins, 'Incremental and Inevitable: Contextualising the Threshold Learning Outcomes for Law' (2015) 38(1) *University of New South Wales Law Journal* 264, 264.

¹¹ Lynne Taylor et al, 'Improving the Effectiveness of Large Class Teaching in Law Degrees' [2013] (1) *New Zealand Law Review* 100.

¹² John Kenny, 'Efficiency and Effectiveness in Higher Education: Who Is Accountable for What?' (2008) 50(1) *Australian Universities' Review* 11.

a platform for introducing foundational concepts to all students simultaneously, ensuring curricular coherence and reducing duplication of effort across multiple small classes.¹³ While critics argue that efficiency should not override engagement, the reality is that large-group teaching remains a practical necessity in many law schools.

The fourth reason is the opportunity for real-time *engagement and interaction* between students and the academic. In lectures, students can easily ask questions and receive immediate feedback. (While some evidence suggests students rarely ask questions in lectures, the potential to ask questions during a lecture is viewed as beneficial by students.)¹⁴ Lectures also allow the academic to modify their teaching in response to instantaneous student feedback, adapting their delivery based on the audience's needs, clarifying complex concepts and adjusting the pace of instruction.¹⁵

Fifthly, lectures facilitate academics adding *context* to the material that might not be possible with textbooks. The academics can share anecdotes, historical background, and real-world applications that enrich the learning experience. They can expose students to the most recent developments in the field, and to the ongoing workings of a scholarly mind.¹⁶ As an expert in the subject matter, academics can illustrate to students how an expert approaches the topic.¹⁷

The sixth reason is the opportunity for *personal connection* between the student and the academic, and between the student and their peers. Lecture attendance introduces a personal dimension to learning. Academics can convey their enthusiasm and passion for the subject matter, which in turn facilitates learning and motivates students. They can enthuse and encourage students by their presence in real space and time.¹⁸ Lectures also allow academics to model scholarly behaviour to students.¹⁹ Lectures add to the 'university experience', increase social interaction and increase a sense of community amongst students.²⁰ Not only does the lecture allow students to build relationships with peers, it also 'transforms the act of learning into a shared experience that can facilitate a shared communal understanding amongst students.'²¹ Lectures can give students a common focus, and lecturers can help

¹³ Biggs and Tang (n 9) 136.

¹⁴ Vanessa Gysbers et al, 'Why Do Students Still Bother Coming to Lectures, When Everything Is Available Online?' (2011) 19(2) *International Journal of Innovation in Science and Mathematics Education* 20, 27.

¹⁵ Sarah French and Gregor Kennedy, 'Reassessing the Value of University Lectures' (2017) 22(6) *Teaching in Higher Education* 639, 649.

¹⁶ Biggs and Tang (n 9) 138.

¹⁷ French and Kennedy (n 15) 649.

¹⁸ Ibid 647.

¹⁹ Ibid 649.

²⁰ Gysbers et al (n 14) 35.

²¹ French and Kennedy (n 15) 650.

excite and energise students through the power of tone, emphasis and expression.²²

Finally, lectures are often consistent with *student preferences*. Evidence suggests that university students, and specifically law students, often prefer lectures to other forms of delivery.²³ Lectures are seen as offering benefits beyond content delivery. Students report that attending live sessions helps them stay motivated, maintain a study routine, and feel connected to their peers and lecturers. Real-time interaction allows for clarification of complex material and fosters a sense of academic community. These findings align with broader literature on engagement and active learning in higher education.²⁴

III ‘Why Won’t They Come to Class?’

Despite the preferences of students and the clear benefits of lecture attendance, it appears that overall lecture attendance has declined significantly in recent years, and many students now prefer to engage with the subject content asynchronously rather than synchronously. In this section we consider why this might be the case.

For much of the history of the lecture, students attended lectures in person. Consistent with developments in higher education generally, technology eventually permitted law schools to embrace distance learning, and many students began to engage with the subject content asynchronously via written materials, audio recordings and, later, video recordings. The emergence of the Internet made synchronous online lectures feasible, as well as facilitating the speedy distribution of asynchronous learning resources.

The embracing of alternatives to in-person lectures was accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, in-person lecture attendance had already been dwindling in most universities. Student expectations around large group teaching had already changed. Students were looking for inspiration, excitement, and enlightenment in their classes, and not merely information.²⁵ If a lecture was not interactive, it was seen as a passive learning experience by students,²⁶ and they were less likely to make the effort to attend, instead relying on asynchronous options. The pandemic, of course, forced most students to rely on alternatives to in-person lecture attendance — but many already were doing this. And following the pandemic, many students

²² Race (n 6) 172.

²³ See generally Lillian Corbin, Kylie Burns and April Chrzanowski, ‘If You Teach It, Will They Come: Law Students, Class Attendance and Student Engagement’ (2010) 20(1) *Legal Education Review* 13; Gysbers et al (n 14).

²⁴ See, eg, Nordmann et al (n 7); Fiona McGaughey et al, ‘What Have We Here: The Relationship between Law Student Attendance and Wellbeing’ (2019) 45(3) *Monash University Law Review* 695; Race (n 6).

²⁵ Race (n 6) 167.

²⁶ Saiyad et al (n 7) 25.

struggled to adjust to returning to the classroom after many semesters of engaging online or asynchronously and resisted this return.²⁷ (The impact of the pandemic is explored in more detail below.)

Responding to declining lecture attendance by making synchronous law lectures more appealing has proven to be a challenge. Many law schools in Australia claim to be committed to small class sizes and student-focused learning, and they have been doing so for some time.²⁸ However, the actual shift to active learning techniques and interactive lectures has not been easy. In 2004, Keyes and Johnstone observed that law academics are often reluctant to make changes to their teaching methods due to fear of increased workloads and insufficient resources,²⁹ and because they are less engaged with educational literature and its implications for teaching practices.³⁰ Law lectures therefore remained didactic and largely teacher-focused, and the student experience of learning was not taken seriously.³¹

In their 2010 paper, Corbin et al examined the methods used by law students to learn and what motivated students to attend or skip lectures.³² They found that the most common reasons offered by law students for non-attendance at synchronous lectures were completing assessment tasks and commitments to other courses, followed by work and family commitments. Students also identified lecturer teaching style and class timetabling (for example, preferring not to come to campus for one class on one day) as reasons for non-attendance.³³ However, when students were asked if they would prefer an alternative to lectures, they indicated a strong preference for retaining lectures over other forms of delivery.³⁴ This is consistent with research from other disciplines: in 2011, for example, Gyspers et al found that science and math students were angry and upset at the prospect of ending in-person lectures.³⁵

²⁷ Wells Advisory, *Forward Impact of COVID-19 on Australian Higher Education* (Report, Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, October 2021) <<https://www.teqsa.gov.au/sites/default/files/forward-impact-of-covid-19-on-australian-higher-education-report.pdf>>; Tom Williams, 'Class Attendance Plummets Post-Covid', *Times Higher Education* (Blog Post, 24 October 2022) <<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/class-attendance-plummets-post-covid>>; Istijanto and Christabella Chelsea Nathalie, 'Factors Influencing Student Engagement and Intention to Attend Lectures' (2024) 11(1) *Cogent Education* 1.

²⁸ Mary Keyes and Richard Johnstone, 'Changing Legal Education: Rhetoric, Reality, and Prospects for the Future' (2004) 26(4) *Sydney Law Review* 537, 552. See more recently Elizabeth Shi, Paul Myers and Freeman Zhong, 'Interteaching: An Alternative Format of Instruction for Law Classes' (2018) 11 *Journal of the Australasian Law Association* 58.

²⁹ Keyes and Johnstone (n 28) 555.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid* 540.

³² Corbin, Burns and Chrzanowski (n 23) 14.

³³ *Ibid* 31.

³⁴ *Ibid* 34.

³⁵ Gysbers et al (n 14).

In 2017, Do completed a study at Curtin Law School exploring law academics' perceptions regarding the effects of asynchronous lecture recordings on lecture attendance and learning.³⁶ Almost all law academics who had been lecturing before lecture recordings were introduced perceived that the availability of lecture recordings had caused a decline in student attendance at in-person lectures.³⁷ However, the study concluded that while the availability of lecture recordings was *a* factor in reduced attendance at lectures, it was not *the* leading factor in why students fail to attend.³⁸

In 2020, Skead et al carried out a large-scale study examining the impact of the availability of lecture recordings on law student attendance at the University of Western Australia. The study investigated the motivations for student attendance at in-person classes.³⁹ Trends in the lecture attendance data gathered by Skead et al were highly consistent with Corbin's earlier study. Lecture attendance was highest in week one of a semester and then dipped halfway through the semester, rising again at the very end of the semester.⁴⁰ However, the reasons for non-attendance at lectures did not align with previous studies. The most common reason for non-attendance identified by Skead et al was the fact that lectures were recorded. Work commitments were a close second. The timing of lectures and having assessments due were also common reasons for not attending.⁴¹ The most important reason students offered for attending class was the fact that their participation in class was being assessed (participation grades). Students were also motivated to attend class if assessment tasks were being discussed, if the content covered in class was assessable, and if they had other classes on the same day. Students ranked these reasons as more important than the class not being recorded.⁴² Thus, while lecture recordings were a reason for missing class, the key *motivating* factors encouraging student attendance were participation grades and guidance around assessment.⁴³ 76% of participants also said they were more likely to attend lectures if they found their lecturer engaging.⁴⁴

As noted earlier, lecture attendance habits were significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019–21. A 2021 TEQSA-commissioned report claimed that COVID-19 accelerated pre-existing trends toward blended and online learning in Australian higher

³⁶ Christina Do, 'The Effect of Lecture Recordings on Lecture Attendance: Law Academics' Misconceptions and Law Students' Reality' (2017) 10 *Journal of the Australasian Law Teachers Association* 41.

³⁷ *Ibid* 47.

³⁸ *Ibid* 43.

³⁹ Skead et al (n 6).

⁴⁰ *Ibid* 355.

⁴¹ *Ibid* 359.

⁴² *Ibid* 360.

⁴³ *Ibid*.

⁴⁴ *Ibid* 364.

education. The pandemic forced institutions to pivot rapidly to remote delivery, which subsequently evolved into hybrid models combining online and face-to-face components. The report suggested that the pandemic permanently altered expectations around lecture attendance, with online access now embedded as a norm, creating uncertainty about the future of traditional in-person lectures.⁴⁵

In his 2022 article, Williams reported that global lecture attendance had significantly declined since the easing of COVID-19 restrictions. A *Times Higher Education* survey found that 76% of academics observed lower in-person attendance compared to pre-pandemic levels, with many students citing convenience, health concerns, and competing commitments such as paid work as reasons for staying away. Engagement among those who did attend was also reduced. The ready availability of recorded lectures contributed to a cultural shift, with students viewing lectures as on-demand content rather than interactive experiences. Academics suggested strategies such as making attendance compulsory or enhancing the in-class experience to reverse this trend, but many acknowledged that the pandemic had fundamentally changed student expectations around flexibility and campus presence.⁴⁶

A 2024 paper by Istijanto and Nathalie investigated post-pandemic factors affecting students' willingness to attend in-person lectures. Based on a survey of 292 students who transitioned from online back to in-person learning, the research identified six key drivers of engagement: learning effectiveness, social interaction, campus life experience, physical wellness, technological learning, and environmental consciousness. Interestingly, flexibility and efficiency, often associated with online learning, did not positively influence engagement. The study concluded that strong engagement significantly predicts students' intention to attend lectures, suggesting that universities must focus on enhancing the quality of the on-campus experience rather than relying solely on structural incentives.⁴⁷

It is clear from these studies that students continue to value the lecture, even if they do not always attend. There does not appear to be a single overwhelming reason why they frequently prefer not to attend class. Common themes regarding student attendance across the studies include assessment deadlines, work, timetabling and logistics. Likewise, there does not appear to be a single factor motivating student attendance at lectures. There is evidence that law students are motivated to attend lectures when assessments are being discussed or if they are being assessed, but each study attributes different weightings to the factors motivating attendance.

⁴⁵ TEQSA (n 27).

⁴⁶ Williams (n 27).

⁴⁷ Istijanto and Nathalie (n 27) 10–11.

The Bond University team therefore decided to conduct its own research into the preferences of law students regarding lecture attendance.

IV The Bond Law Project

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Faculty of Law at Bond University had favoured a traditional approach to law subject delivery. Most law subjects included a two-hour in-person lecture each week, and a one-hour tutorial. Attendance at the lecture was not mandated, and students had the option of watching a recording of the lecture rather than attending in person. On the other hand, in-person tutorial attendance was mandated, and class participation was assessed. In the second semester of 2020 (commencing in May), the COVID-19 pandemic prompted a shift to online lectures and tutorials for the entire semester. In the following semester, in-person attendance resumed at Bond University for those students able to come to campus. However, many interstate and international students remained unable to attend classes in person. The Faculty shifted to a hybrid model where lectures included both students attending in-person and students attending online, and students had the option of attending in-person tutorials or online tutorials. At the commencement of 2023, the University discontinued online classes in most subjects and returned to the pre-COVID status quo: in-person lectures with the option of watching lecture recordings, and in-person tutorials with class participation assessed.

In 2023–24, researchers within the Faculty of Law conducted an investigation into law lecture attendance, including student practices and preferences regarding lecture attendance. This was prompted by widespread concerns expressed by lecturers about low levels of in-person lecture attendance.⁴⁸ In-person attendance levels were already decreasing at Bond prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Post-pandemic, they appeared to have worsened.

The overall objectives of the research project were (1) a critical evaluation of the benefits and costs of in-person lectures, and (2) the identification of alternative learning options that could replace the traditional in-person lecture in some or all subjects. The researchers began with a series of reflection questions. Is the synchronous lecture a vestige of a time when the verbal monologue was the best way to convey complex information in an engaging way, or does the lecture still have an important place in the curriculum? Can asynchronous

⁴⁸ Concerns about declining in-person lecture attendance were identified through multiple internal channels, including discussions at staff meetings and Teaching and Learning Group meetings, and in lecturer responses to student feedback surveys. These sources collectively indicated that low attendance was a persistent issue warranting further investigation.

online delivery methods such as videos and self-directed online learning materials replace the in-person lecture entirely? Should the Faculty's approach to this challenge be consistent or can it vary by program, subject, and/or semester?

The researchers also identified a range of possible outcomes of the project.

- Maintain the status quo.
- Retain in-person lectures but make in-person attendance mandatory and/or no longer provide recordings.
- Continue to record lectures but limit access to lecture recordings in some way.
- Discontinue in-person lectures and deliver lectures online only.
- Replace lectures with video recordings or some other technology-based asynchronous method of conveying information.
- Discontinue lectures entirely and increase the number of hours spent in tutorials.

The researchers took into account several important considerations. The focus of the project would be upon the form of delivery of the subject content, and not upon the range of possible approaches to student interaction and engagement within the classroom. The project should take into consideration the existing scholarly literature on the issue of lectures and lecture attendance. It was deemed important to maintain the quality of the student experience during any period of trialling alternative models and avoid the student perception that they were being treated as 'test subjects' and receiving a lesser quality experience. It was also considered important to take into account the views and interests of both academics and students in the design of any alternative to in-person lectures.

The research team also acknowledged that the quality of the learning outcomes in any given subject is impacted not only by the nature of the lecture experience but also by other factors such as the teaching style of lecturers, the timetable (ie the time of day and the venue for the class), whether the subject is compulsory or elective, and so on. The team recognised that in developing an alternative approach, they would need to consider the relevant University policies, the many administrative requirements and timelines regarding timetabling and forms of delivery, and the impact of any change upon academic workloads and the resource implications for the Faculty.

The researchers adopted a five-step approach:

1. Conduct a review of the relevant academic literature. (This review informs the first part of this paper.)

2. Monitor in-person lecture attendance within the Faculty for two semesters.
3. Administer a survey of law students about their preferences regarding lecture attendance.
4. Identify a viable alternative to in-person lectures.
5. Conduct student focus groups to get feedback on the alternative model.

V Lecture Attendance Records

In Semesters 1 and 2 of 2023, the coordinators of the 17 compulsory subjects in Bond University's Bachelor of Laws (LLB) and Juris Doctor (JD) programs were asked to keep records of the number of students who attended lectures in person each week. The number of students attending the lectures in each subject each week was compared with the total number of students enrolled in the subject to determine the proportion of students who attended lectures across the twelve weeks of the semester.

Overall, student attendance was generally highest at the beginning of the semester and tended to decline as the semester progressed. This trend was consistent across many subjects and semesters. However, there were significant variations within specific subjects and weeks due to events, scheduling conflicts, assessment deadlines, and other factors.

A pattern of decreasing attendance over the semester was observed in several subjects in Semester 1.

- *Administrative Law* (LAWS 11/75-317) exemplified the declining attendance trend. Starting with a 48% average attendance in Week 1, the numbers progressively decreased each week, reaching a low of 28% by Week 12.
- *Civil Dispute Resolution* (LAWS 11/75-325) also showed a strong overall decline. Attendance began at 48% in Week 1 and steadily decreased, reaching a low point of 17% by Week 12.
- *Constitutional Law* (LAWS11/75-216), despite some fluctuations, exhibited a significant drop in attendance. Beginning at 48% in Week 1, the rate fell to 20% by Week 5 and ultimately plummeted to 8% in Week 12.
- *Corporate Law* (LAWS11/75-310) witnessed a sharp decline in attendance, particularly after Week 3. Starting with 56% in Week 1, the rate fell to 47% in Week 3, and then further declined to 15% by Week 12.
- *Evidence* (LAWS11/75-318) saw a consistent downward trend in attendance, starting at 52% in Week 1 and gradually decreasing to 30% by Week 7. Although the rate fluctuated slightly in subsequent

weeks, it remained significantly lower than at the beginning of the semester, ending at 30% in Week 12.

Several subjects in Semester 2 exhibited a similarly notable downward trend in student attendance as the semester went on.

- *Contract Law A* (LAWS11/75-201) attendance started at 62% in Week 2 (Week 1 data was not recorded), fell to 40% by Week 4, and further declined to a low of 15% in Week 6. Although attendance saw some improvements in the later weeks, it remained considerably lower than at the beginning of the semester, ending at 40% in Week 12.
- *Contract Law B* (LAWS11/75-217) experienced a similar, though less drastic, downward trend. Beginning with 54% attendance in Week 1, it gradually decreased to 27% in Week 8. While there were slight increases in some subsequent weeks, the final attendance in Week 12 was 43%, marking a noticeable drop from the start of the semester.
- *Corporate Law* (LAWS11/25-310) showed a significant and consistent decline in attendance across the semester. Starting at 47% in Week 2 (Week 1 data was not recorded), the attendance rate dropped to 21% by Week 4, and further to 12% in Week 11.
- *Legal Profession* (LAWS11/75-326) had a gradual yet persistent decline in attendance. Starting at 30% in Week 1, attendance reached a peak of 35% in Week 2 before gradually decreasing to 11% by Week 8. While there were minor fluctuations in later weeks, the final attendance rate in Week 12 was only 12%.
- *Property Law B* (LAWS11/75-218) attendance started at 44% in Week 2 (Week 1 data was not recorded) and fell to 20% by Week 4. A slight recovery followed, but attendance continued to decline, reaching a low of 18% in Week 9. Despite a final week increase, the overall trend indicated a significant decline in attendance throughout the semester.

While many subjects experienced declining attendance, certain subjects in both semesters demonstrated strong and relatively consistent attendance levels or only minor decreases in attendance throughout the semester.

- *Contract Law B* (LAWS11/75-217) in Semester 1 stood out for maintaining a relatively stable attendance rate. Starting at 44% in Week 1, it peaked at 54% in Week 2 and remained relatively consistent, even showing slight increases in some weeks.

- *Foundations of Private Law* (LAWS11/75-107) in Semester 1 demonstrated a remarkable average attendance rate of 51% across the semester, despite experiencing some fluctuations. Notably, attendance dipped in Week 7 due to an assignment deadline but quickly recovered in subsequent weeks.
- *Legal Foundations A* (LAWS11-105) in Semester 1 also displayed relatively strong and consistent attendance. Starting at 81% in Week 1, the rate remained above 70% for the first six weeks. While attendance dipped slightly in the following weeks, it stabilized around 58-59%.
- *Legal Foundations B* (LAWS11/75-106/BCDP02-106) had high attendance initially, starting at 91% in Week 1 and remaining above 70% for the first three weeks. While the rate declined to 50% by Week 7, it stabilized in the later weeks and ended at 58%.
- *Administrative Law* (LAWS11/75-317) in Semester 2 showed a slight decline in attendance overall, but with a notable increase in the final week. Starting at 56% in Week 1, attendance reached its lowest point at 25% in Week 5. However, it steadily increased in subsequent weeks, culminating in 50% attendance in Week 12.
- *Equity* (LAWS11/75-313) in Semester 2 demonstrated a degree of consistency in attendance. Beginning at 57% in Week 1, the rate fluctuated within a relatively narrow range, never falling below 30%. The final attendance in Week 12 was 34%.
- *Property Law A* (LAWS11/75-204) exhibited a fluctuating but ultimately positive attendance trend. Beginning at 60% in Week 1, attendance dipped to 30% in Weeks 3 and 4 but recovered to 41% by Week 5. While attendance fluctuated in subsequent weeks, the final week saw a substantial increase to 52%.

These latter examples challenged the overall trend of declining attendance and highlight that some subjects maintained or even increased student attendance throughout the semester. Many of the subjects with lower levels of decline were subjects taken earlier in the program, suggesting that attendance levels may decline across the program as well as across the semester.

Some of the subject coordinators offered their views regarding the reasons for poor attendance.⁴⁹

- *Scheduling conflicts*: In Semester 1, the *Corporate Law* coordinator noted that attendance dropped from week 4 onwards because ‘a good chunk of [the] class had a conflict with an elective that

⁴⁹ These views were obtained via an email inviting lecturers to submit brief reflections when providing data about lecture attendance. Excerpts reproduced in this section are included with the lecturers’ consent.

required in-person attendance (*Family Law*)'. In Semester 2, the *Evidence* coordinator explained that attendance was between 10–20 students per week because the lecture, held at 8–10am on Wednesday mornings, 'clashed for a number of students with a compulsory attendance *Canadian Constitutional Law* seminar'.

- *Assessment due dates*: In Semester 1, the *Foundations of Private Law* coordinator explained that attendance in Week 7 was lower because an assignment was due the same day. In Semester 2, the *Equity* coordinator explained that attendance dropped in Week 7 because an assignment was due, and that 'about 8 students [were] on clerkships from [Week] 7–10 or so'. In the same semester, the *Property Law A* coordinator noted that Week 8 attendance was impacted by an assignment due date.
- *Holidays*: In Semester 1, the *Constitutional Law* coordinator noted that Week 2 attendance was lower due to the Australia Day holiday. In the same semester, the *Contract Law B* coordinator explained that there was no attendance in Week 12 because of Easter.
- *Guest lecturers*: In Semester 1, the *Legal Profession* coordinator noted a small attendance increase in Week 8 when a guest lecturer from Brisbane attended, because the coordinator had emphasised the lecture's importance.
- *Skills assessments*: In Semester 1, the *Civil Dispute Resolution* coordinator explained that there was no lecture in Week 8 because of skills assessments. In the same semester, the *Legal Profession* coordinator explained that there was no lecture in Week 9 because of skills assessments.
- *Student events*: In Semester 1, the *Contract Law A* coordinator noted lower attendance in Week 8 due to a student event.
- *Weather*: In Semester 1, the *Foundations of Private Law* coordinator suggested that attendance was lower in Week 11 because it was raining.

In all subjects, the undergraduate students and the postgraduate students attended lectures together and the subject coordinators did not distinguish between them when recording attendance.⁵⁰ However, the coordinator for the subject *Foundations of Public and Criminal Law* (Semester 1) did offer some direct observations on undergraduate and postgraduate attendance patterns:

⁵⁰ Where undergraduate and postgraduate students attend together, learning outcomes and assessment standards are differentiated to align with AQF Levels 7 and 9, consistent with the HES Framework: Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015: Contextual Overview* (Overview, 1 January 2017) <<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED606470.pdf>>.

- Postgraduate students in the subject exhibited high attendance during the first half of the semester, averaging 23 students per lecture out of a class of 27. While attendance declined as the semester progressed, it remained in the high teens/low twenties.
- Conversely, undergraduate students in the same subject displayed poor attendance from the beginning of the semester. The highest recorded undergraduate attendance was 24 students (out of 31) in Week 2, but numbers quickly dropped into the teens and remained low throughout the semester.

This specific example indicates some variation may exist between undergraduate and postgraduate cohorts.

VI Survey

In 2023, the Faculty of Law conducted a survey of law students regarding their perceptions and expectations of large group teaching.

A Methodology

Undergraduate and postgraduate students who were enrolled during Semester 1 of 2023 in one or more of the 17 compulsory law subjects in the LLB and JD programs were invited to complete a survey regarding their perceptions and expectations of large group teaching. Students were invited to participate with no obligation to do so.

The survey was designed to explore the factors that encourage or discourage students from attending lectures in person, using a mixed-methods approach. Mixed-methods approaches are widely endorsed in educational research for their ability to combine the generalisability of quantitative data with the contextual richness of qualitative insights.⁵¹ Closed-ended questions with structured response options were included to enable statistical analysis and comparability across respondents. These options were informed by prior studies on lecture attendance and engagement.⁵² To complement this, open-ended questions were incorporated to allow participants to elaborate on their experiences and motivations in their own words, a strategy recommended for enhancing validity and uncovering unanticipated themes.⁵³ A copy of the full survey instrument is provided in Appendix A.

The survey was open from the beginning of Week 12 to the end of Week 13 of Semester 1, 2023 (Monday 3 April to Friday 14 April 2023).

⁵¹ John W Creswell and Vicki L Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research* (SAGE Publications, 3rd ed, 2018).

⁵² Corbin, Burns and Chrzanowski (n 23); Skead et al (n 6).

⁵³ Gloria Fraser, 'Open-Ended Survey Questions' in John E Edlund and Austin Lee Nichols (eds), *The Cambridge Handbook of Research Methods and Statistics for the Social and Behavioural Sciences* (Cambridge University Press, 2024) 547.

Students were invited to participate in the anonymous, 10-minute survey via email. The online link was also made available on the front page of each of the 17 compulsory subjects' websites on the University's learning management system, iLearn. Students could only submit responses from one IP address.

B *Participants*

The total sample pool was approximately 750 students. This is a calculation based on total enrolment numbers and accounting for part-time and full-time students following the prescribed program subject sequence plan. The survey gathered responses from 121 students or approximately 16% of the total sample pool.⁵⁴

The following demographics of students who completed the survey are noteworthy.

- Approximately 60% of respondents were undergraduate students.
- 63% of respondents were domestic students, the majority from Queensland.
- Over 90% of respondents were enrolled full-time.
- Almost 70% of respondents commenced their studies in the previous year, and 81% commenced their studies during the pandemic.
- 63% of respondents were aged between 18–24 years and 97% were aged 29 or younger.

The typical respondent was a young, full-time undergraduate, from Australia, who began studying during the pandemic. As noted earlier, Bond University adopted online classes mid-way through 2021 and discontinued online classes in Semester 1 of 2023, therefore most participants had recently experienced online synchronous classes.⁵⁵

The survey was approved by the Bond University Human Research Ethics Committee.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Results should be viewed with caution, keeping in mind the margin of error is 8% at a confidence level of 95%. Thus, for example, we can be 95% confident a result of 50% could fall within the range of 42% to 58% (calculation using Survey Monkey <https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/margin-of-error-calculator/>). Further, the sample size for the survey component is relatively small and may limit generalisability.

⁵⁵ While demographic data was collected it was not analysed in detail due to ethical constraints. Future studies could explore how factors such as age, enrolment status, and background influence attendance behaviours.

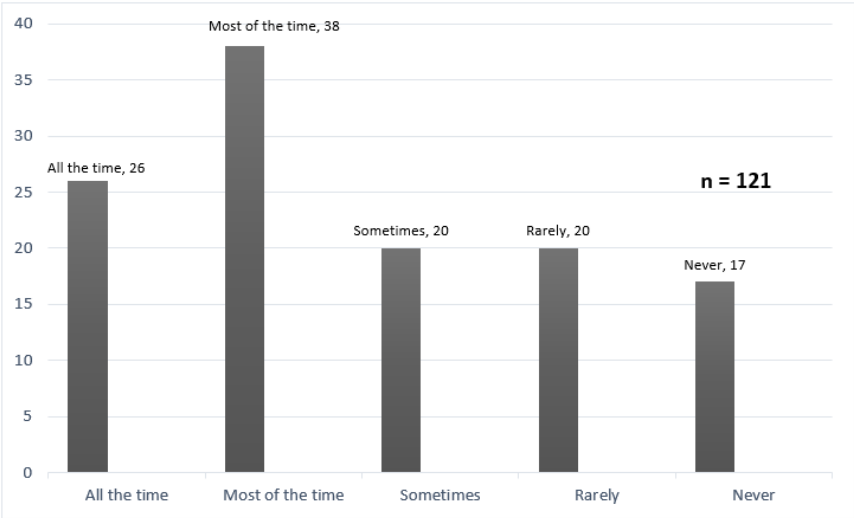
⁵⁶ Ethics Application Number TR00064.

C Results

1 Why do students attend lectures?

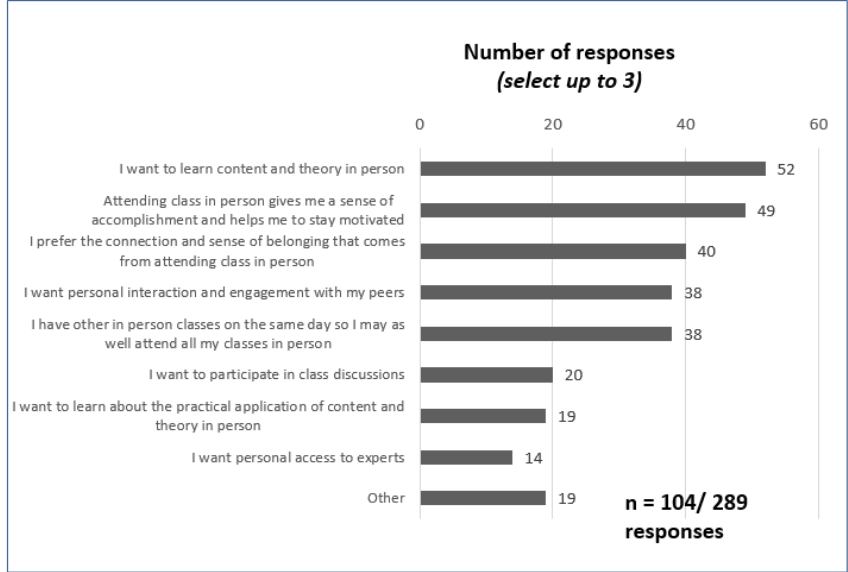
The survey asked students to think specifically about the January 2023 semester and identify (1) how often they attended lectures and (2) what they considered to be the top contributing factors that influenced their attendance. The questionnaire offered a set list of factors, and participants were asked to select the top three reasons why they attended lectures. The list of factors was formulated based on the literature on student lecture attendance discussed earlier. Tables 1, 2, and 3 below set out the responses to these questions.

Table 1. How often students attend lectures.



One-fifth of students ‘always’ attended lectures in person. Combined with those who identified as ‘mostly’ attending in person, just over half of respondents stated that they regularly chose to attend lectures in person.

Table 2. Reasons for attending in person.



Of the 104 respondents who had attended lectures in person (even if rarely), the top three reasons they gave for attending were: wanting to learn in person; to stay motivated and for a sense of accomplishment; and for connection and belonging.⁵⁷ Some students provided additional qualitative responses:

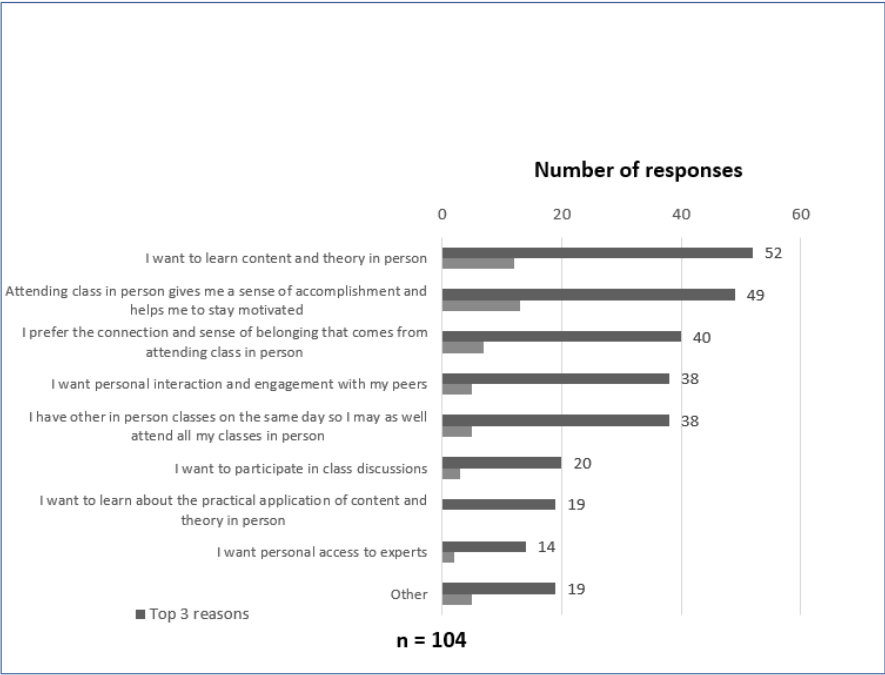
- ‘Depending on the prof determines which classes I prefer to attend in person. If I enjoy the teacher’s lecture style and I make a point of attending in person’.
- ‘If the prof isn’t interesting or engaging, I find I get easily distracted in class and would prefer to stream the lecture’.
- ‘I attend if there is a participation grade’.
- ‘It stops me from falling behind’.
- ‘I didn’t want to be marked down despite feeling like it reduced my engagement’.
- ‘Far less distractions when attending in person compared to doing it at home’.

⁵⁷ The survey instrument included some double-barrelled questions (eg items combining ‘sense of accomplishment’ and ‘motivation’), which may have introduced ambiguity in interpreting responses. While these items were informed by themes in the literature, they limit the precision of our findings because it is unclear which component respondents prioritised. Future research should separate such constructs into distinct questions to improve clarity and validity.

The strong sense of belonging and wanting to interact and engage with peers align with the findings from existing scholarship. Engaging with peers and attending lectures is part of the university experience,⁵⁸ and this sense of belonging has likely been enhanced in the post-pandemic era. Interestingly, having direct access to experts was considered the least important reason by the students.

Students were also asked to rank the three reasons they selected from Table 2 from most to least relevant. Table 3 below outlines the responses. The two lines in Table 3 distinguish between the frequency with which each reason was selected as one of the respondent’s top three reasons for attending lectures (upper line) and the frequency with which that same reason was ranked as the single most important reason (lower line). This comparison highlights not only the breadth of reasons students consider relevant but also the relative weight they assign to each when forced to prioritise.

Table 3. Top three reasons for attending in person v most relevant reason.



When comparing the range of reasons for attending lectures in person against the single most relevant reason, staying motivated/gaining a sense of accomplishment was considered more relevant as was wanting to learn content and theory in person and personal interaction with peers.

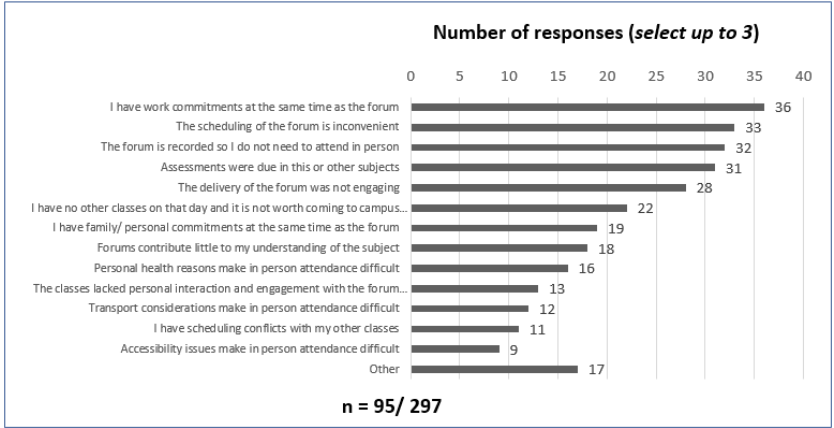
⁵⁸ Gysbers et al (n 14) 35.

The results of this study differ in some ways from previous studies. Do’s study, for example, found the most significant contributing factors that influence student to attend lectures to be (1) acquiring knowledge, (2) risk of the lecture not being recorded and (3) engaging lecturers.⁵⁹

2 Why do students not attend lectures?

Students were asked to identify their three top reasons for not attending lectures in person.

Table 4. Top three reasons for not attending in person.



Out of the 95 responses from participants who had not attended lectures in person (either occasionally or more often), the top reasons they gave for non-attendance were work commitment clashes, inconvenient scheduling, relying on the recording, and assessments due in other subjects. Reasons relating to the quality of the lecture itself were cited less often, though of note, 28 students felt the delivery of the lecture was not engaging and 13 mentioned a lack of personal interaction/engagement with peers or the presenter.

The ‘other’ responses frequently referred to the students’ preference for learning at their own pace:

‘I prefer taking more time thinking and understanding one point on my own. [I]t’s hard for me to understand the point before the lecturer jumps to the next one’.

‘[I] can pause, rewind, and watch lectures on different speeds - easier to take notes.’

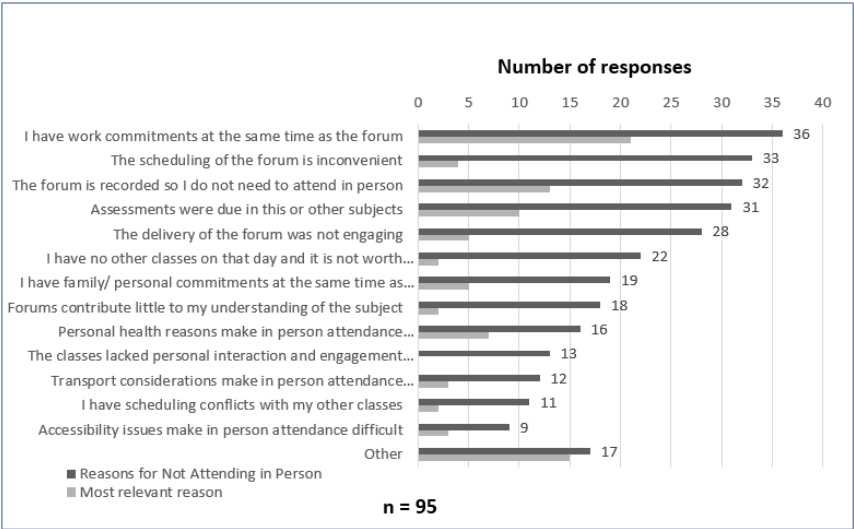
⁵⁹ Do (n 36) 50.

‘Even though I would attend forums, I still needed to go back and listen to the recording so I could get the full picture of what I just learnt.’

Thus, while work commitments, timetabling and class recordings were the leading reasons for not attending class, the results also show a significant number of students who prefer to use class recordings for the learning benefits such as note taking, delivery at a slower pace, and consolidation of learning.

Participants were then asked to rank the three reasons they selected from Table 4 from most to least relevant.

Table 5. Top three reasons for not attending in person v most relevant reason.



When comparing the range of reasons for not attending lectures in person against the most relevant reason, work commitments remained the key issue, but scheduling inconvenience dropped in importance. The ability to access class recordings rose to the second most relevant reason for missing a lecture.

Results for this question align with previous studies. As noted earlier, Skead et al found that the most common reason for law student non-attendance at lectures was that they were recorded. Work commitments were a close second. The timing of lectures and having assessments due were also common reasons for not attending.⁶⁰ The findings also align with Do’s study in which the top three contributing factors that influenced non-attendance in lectures were (1) assessment deadlines, (2) work commitments or clerkships, and (3) transport issues or parking.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Skead et al (n 6) 359.

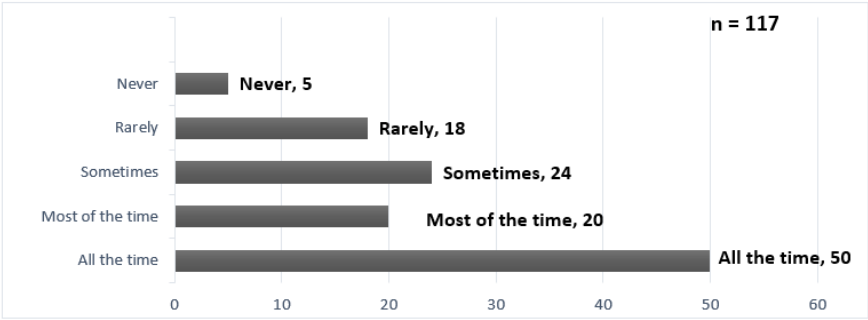
⁶¹ Do (n 36) 48.

The results show that scheduling and timetabling issues, work commitments and assessment deadlines strongly influence student attendance. A study conducted by Gyspers reported logistics as the main reason for non-attendance at lectures, including reasons such as early morning lectures, travel time and work commitments.⁶² It has also been commonly claimed that a key reason students miss in-person lectures is financial. Financial pressures and changes to their financial situation mean many students work during term times, contributing to poor attendance.⁶³

3 *How often do students access class recordings and why?*

The survey asked participants how frequently they accessed class recordings in the first semester of 2023 and the reasons they accessed the recordings. The results are shown in Table 6 below.

Table 6. How frequently students access recordings.

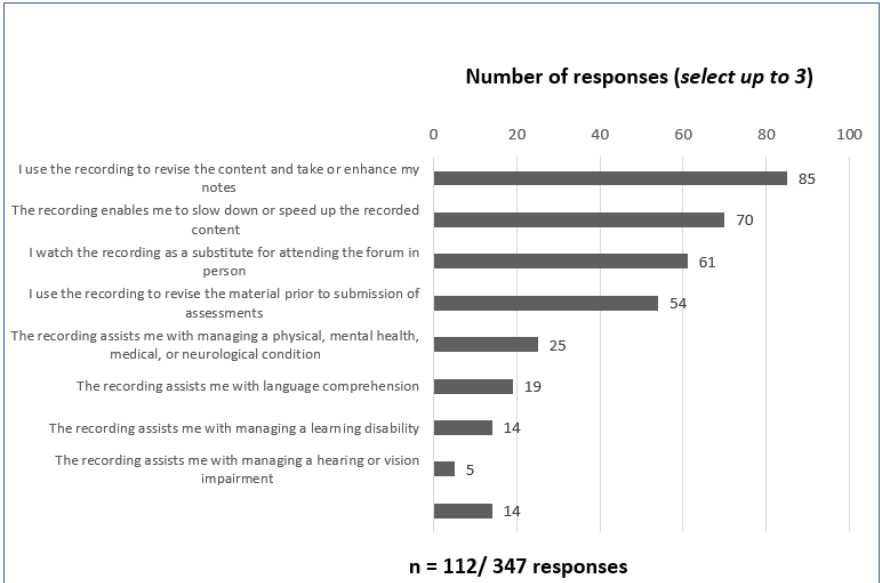


112 out of 117 students accessed class recordings in the January 2023 semester. Three-fifths of students (60%) accessed recordings ‘all’ or ‘most’ of the time. The remainder of the students were split between those who ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ accessed recordings and those who ‘sometimes’ accessed them. It is clear from the survey results that law students rely heavily on class recordings.

Students were also asked to provide their top three reasons for accessing class recordings. The results are presented below in Table 7.

⁶² Gyspers et al (n 14) 25.
⁶³ Oyegoke Teslim Bukoye and Anjali Shegunshi, ‘Impact of Engaging Teaching Model (ETM) on Students’ Attendance’ (2016) 3(1) *Cogent Education* 1221191:1–13, 2.

Table 7. Top three reasons for accessing class recordings.



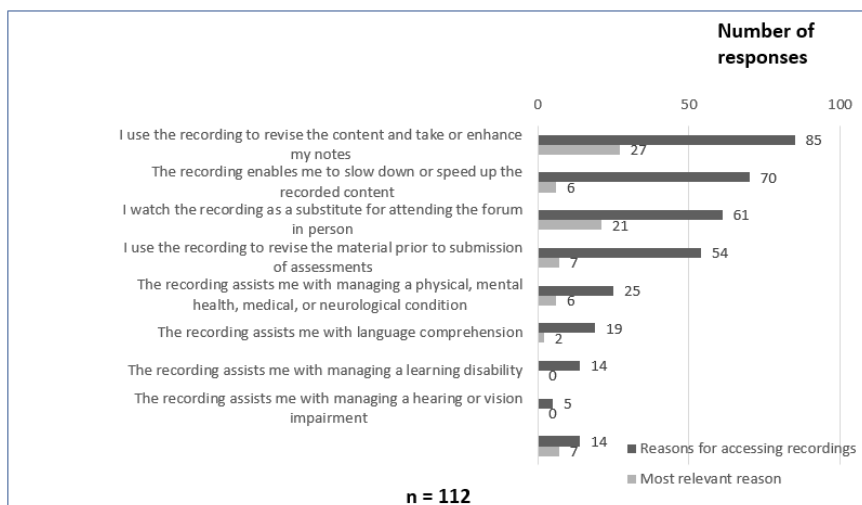
Of the 112 respondents who did access lecture recordings (even if rarely), the top four reasons they gave were to revise content and take/enhance notes, alter the speed of playback, as a substitute for in-person attendance, and for assessment revision. This coincides with the reasons some students gave for not attending classes in person. There is a strong preference amongst students to access lecture recordings as it allows them to control the pace of delivery and rewatch content for improved notetaking and revision purposes.

Students who provided ‘other’ reasons for using recordings indicated that teaching style, impact on engagement, assessment, inability to attend in person and staying on task were additional reasons for accessing recordings:

- ‘I have dyslexia so it is pretty challenging for me to keep up in class.’
- ‘I use recordings to watch lectures that I cannot attend in person because of my work schedule.’
- ‘I relisten to the recordings before finals.’
- ‘If you can't attend a forum for some reason it is extremely valuable to have the recording.’
- ‘I use the recordings to watch back the classes as I cannot attend a lot of the time due to work.’

Participants were then asked to rank the reasons they selected in Table 7 from most to least relevant.

Table 8. Top three reasons for accessing recordings v most relevant reason.



When comparing the range of reasons for accessing recordings with the most relevant reason, enhancing notetaking remained the most important reason. Using the recording as a substitute for attendance rose to second place and altering the playback speed fell to third place alongside preparation for assessment. The results demonstrate that although not the leading reason, a large proportion of law students are using recordings as a substitute for in-person attendance.

These results align with existing literature on the use of lecture recordings by law students. For example, Do's study examined the reasons why law students accessed lecture recordings and found that revising difficult concepts, the ability to pause or rewind the lecture, and the ability to change the speed of the lecture were the most influential factors.⁶⁴ Clearly, adjusting the pace of the lecture delivery to take effective notes is a key reason why some students choose to access recordings over attending in person. This also aligns with existing literature on lecture delivery methods. Race, for example, argues that one significant problem with lecture delivery is students' ability to keep up with the pace. Students need to be able to summarise the session, which means making sense of the session and making decisions about the relative importance of different things.⁶⁵ (Race also points out that the fact that students may appear busy writing notes

⁶⁴ Do (n 36) 51; Nordmann et al (n 7); Greg Preston et al, 'Web-Based Lecture Technologies: Highlighting the Changing Nature of Teaching and Learning' (2010) 26(6) *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology* 717.

⁶⁵ Race (n 6) 188. While notetaking is often cited as a benefit of live lectures, its effectiveness varies. Fast-paced delivery, lack of scaffolding, and cognitive overload can hinder meaningful note-making. Some students prefer recordings to pause, rewind, and take structured notes at their own pace.

furiously in a lecture does not mean that deep learning is occurring during the session. In fact, Race argues this furious notetaking is a waste of students' time as it has no direct learning payoff.⁶⁶

Attending lectures in person may also be less effective for students with language or learning disabilities. Scholars such as Gysbers et al argue in favour of the use of web-based lecture technologies ('WBLTs') such as lecture recordings to assist students from diverse backgrounds with study strategies.⁶⁷ In a large scale study conducted by Nordmann et al at the University of Aberdeen, the results indicated that non-native speakers show a greater tendency to use recordings and achieve a higher level of academic performance in doing so.⁶⁸ Such students also benefit from having lecture materials provided in advance as it provides more time to digest information and can allow for more class time to be spent on activities that promote deeper learning.⁶⁹

WBLTs such as lecture capturing and podcasts are not without limitations. Race argues that the term 'lecture capture' is problematic because you can't 'capture' a large in-person session. He argues that, at best, it tends to be a 'ghost' of the session and often only records the lecturer and not the audience.⁷⁰ There are also problems with lecture recordings regarding inclusivity. Most recorded lectures do not offer subtitles or other inclusive practices to assist disadvantaged students and are a 'one size fits all' approach.⁷¹ Of course, not all lecture recordings are problematic in this way; one solution is to edit the recording after the session and add linking captions and subtitles and make other useful edits before releasing the recording to students.⁷²

4 *Students' Learning Preferences*

The Faculty wished to better understand students' attitudes towards lectures and to gauge student preferences regarding certain teaching and learning initiatives. Given that many students choose not to attend lectures regularly in person, the survey asked participants a series of questions on topics such as mandatory lecture attendance and the Faculty's use of class recordings. Students were asked how strongly they agreed with the following statements:

'I believe that in-person forum attendance should be mandatory for all students.'

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Gysbers et al (n 14) 21.

⁶⁸ Nordmann et al (n 7) 1080.

⁶⁹ Dandan Shen and Chiung-Sui Chang, 'Implementation of the Flipped Classroom Approach for Promoting College Students' Deeper Learning' (2023) 71(3) *Educational Technology Research and Development* 1323.

⁷⁰ Race (n 6) 173.

⁷¹ Ibid 174.

⁷² Ibid 176.

‘Access to recordings is critical for my learning.’

Unsurprisingly, 82% of participants disagreed with the first statement (58% strongly disagreed). Only 6% of students agreed that in-person attendance should be mandatory.

The responses to the second statement showed that access to recordings was very important to students. 89% of the participants agreed that access to recording is critical to their learning (77% strongly agreed and 12% agreed). Only 6% of students disagreed with the statement. The results can be viewed in Tables 9 and 10 below.

Table 9. Views regarding mandatory lecture attendance.

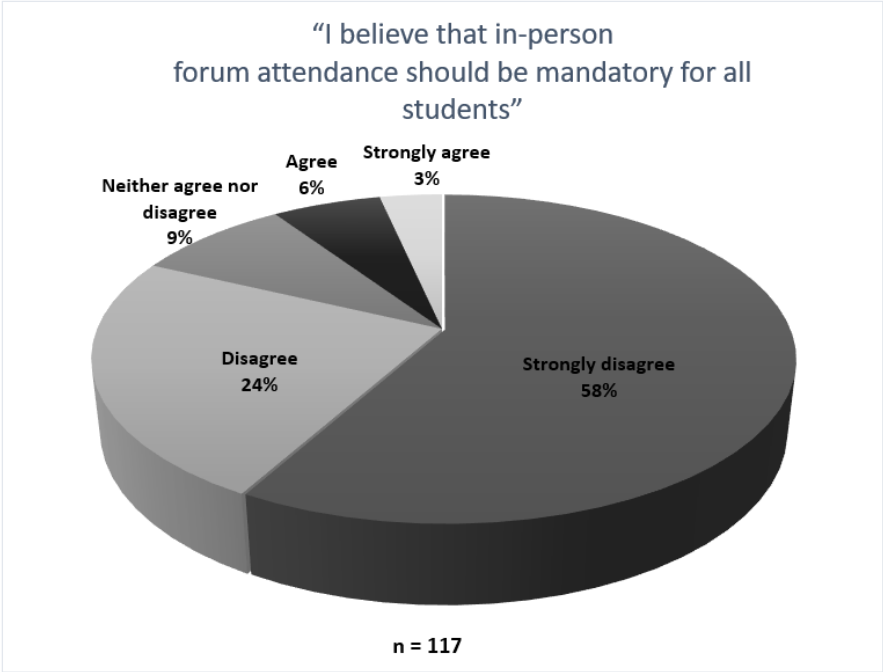
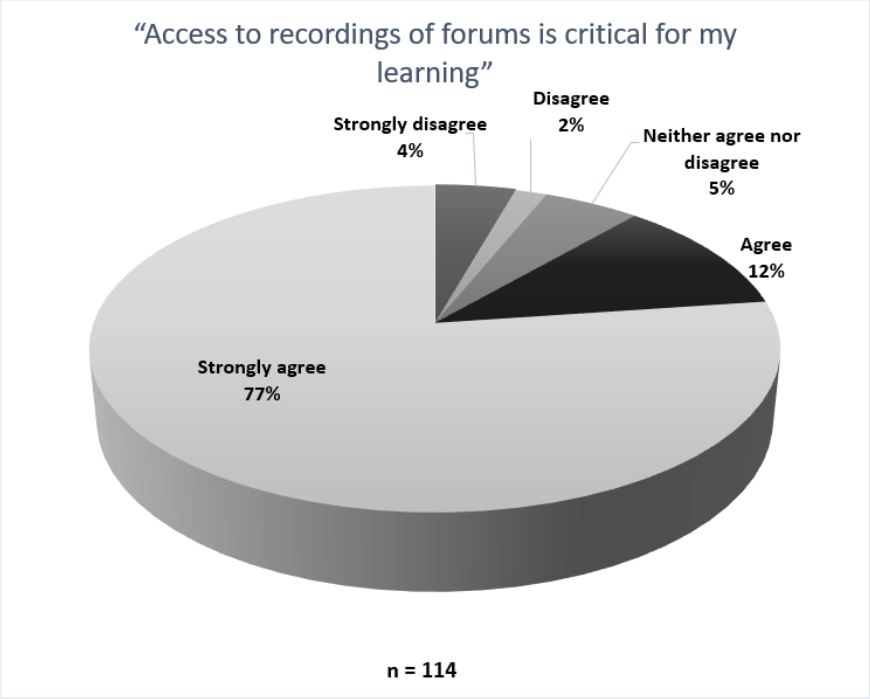
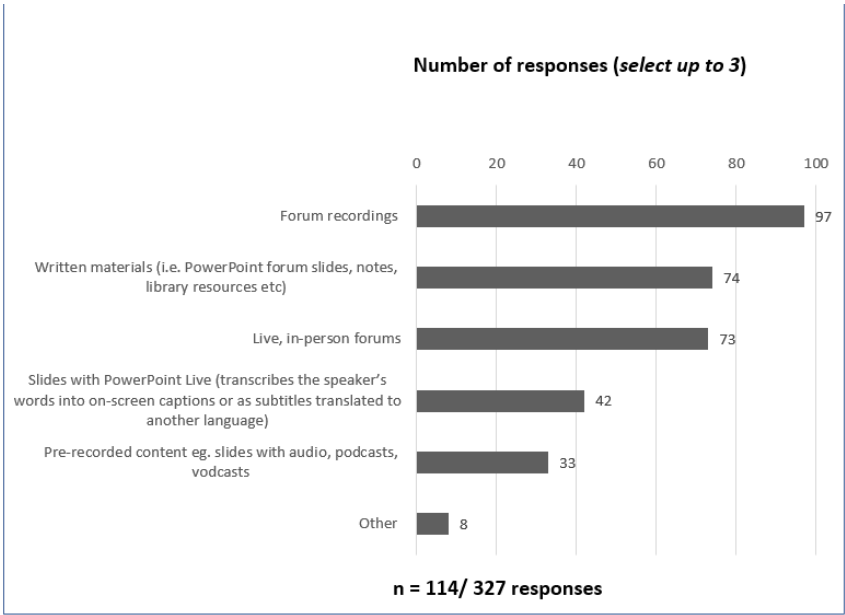


Table 10. Views regarding access to lecture recordings.



Participants were asked to select up to three preferred methods for engaging with subject content. Table 11 shows the results.

Table 11. Preferred methods for engaging with subject content.



These results show that the majority of students prefer to engage with subject content using class recordings. Interestingly, the second most preferred method for engaging with the subject content was engaging with other asynchronous materials provided by academics (PowerPoint slides, readings and library resources), and even though many students did not or could not attend class, engaging via in-person lectures was a close third.

The results align with previous studies, which suggest that law students do value in-person delivery, even if they cannot always attend in person. A study conducted by Corbin found students indicated a strong preference for retaining physical lectures over any other form of delivery.⁷³ Similarly, Gyspers' study found that students were angry and upset at the prospect of ending in-person lectures.⁷⁴

Studies have shown improved performance in knowledge-based assessment in students who supplement in-person lectures with recordings.⁷⁵ The fact that 89% of students said that recordings were

⁷³ Corbin, Burns and Chrzanowski (n 23) 34.
⁷⁴ Gyspers et al (n 14).
⁷⁵ Andrew Williams, Elisa Birch and Phil Hancock, 'The Impact of Online Lecture Recordings on Student Performance' (2012) 28(2) *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology* 199; Nynke Bos et al, 'The Use of Recorded Lectures in Education and the Impact on Lecture Attendance and Exam Performance' (2016) 47(5) *British Journal of Educational Technology* 906; Jinhui Zhang et al, 'Assessing the Impact of Recorded Lectures on Learning Effectiveness' (2022) 8 *International Conference on Higher Education Advances* 199.

critical to their learning suggests that recordings are having a positive impact on their learning experience.

D *Summary of Findings*

According to the survey results, a little over half of law students chose to attend lectures in person, primarily to stay motivated, gain a sense of accomplishment, and to connect with their peers and the lecturer. Those who did not attend lectures did so not by choice but because attendance would have imposed significant costs, such as time away from paid work, clashes with assessment deadlines or other classes, additional travel and transport expenses, or challenges related to health and accessibility. Being able to access the lecture content without attending in person is therefore critical for students who rely on lecture recordings as a replacement for attendance, particularly for those where attendance comes at a 'cost' or when attendance is not possible. Further, the numbers also indicate half the students who accessed the recordings also attended lectures in person, indicating the recordings provide additional value even when a student has attended the lecture in-person.

There was overwhelming support for the continuation of optional lecture attendance and mandatory lecture recordings. Students felt very strongly that attendance at lectures should not be enforced. Students prefer both class recordings and in-person attendance as a means of engaging with subject content. This does not suggest that recordings should replace in-person attendance; students value the connection and sense of belonging from attending lectures in person and as a means of staying committed to their studies. These findings suggest that retaining opportunities for connection and value-added experiences from attendance in person would clearly be welcomed by students.

VII *Alternative Delivery Options*

Given the diversity of views amongst students regarding the value of in-person lectures, the challenge for the Faculty was to identify a viable alternative. It was recognised immediately that replacing lectures with an alternative teaching model in all subjects would be unsatisfactory for most students. Instead, the intent was to identify an alternative model that could be trialled in one or more subjects, allowing the Faculty to seek the views of both academics and students on the viability of a specific alternative teaching model.

In identifying a viable alternative, the Faculty was obliged to work within several constraints.

1. The alternative model must be, and must be seen to be, as pedagogically effective as the lectures it is replacing. As explained

- earlier, it would be inappropriate and unfair to subject students to a learning experience known or suspected to be less effective than the traditional lecture.
2. The alternative model could not add to the teaching load of the academics responsible for delivering the subject. If any such increase was to be borne by the academic, it would be unfair, and if the cost of the increase was to be borne by the Faculty in the form of an increase in staffing resources allocated to subject delivery, it would not be financially viable.

These constraints were challenging in ways that were not always obvious. Replacing the traditional weekly two-hour lecture and one hour tutorial with a weekly two-hour tutorial may at first appear to be a reduction in the teaching workload of the academic coordinating the subject, but for larger classes this would actually result in an overall increase in the number of hours of teaching. Assuming a class size of 60 and a tutorial class size of no more than 12 (which is the case at Bond), the comparison is as follows:

	Lecture hours per week	Tutorial hours per week	Total teaching hours per week
Current approach: 2L + 1T	2 hours	1 hour x 5 classes = 5 hours	7 hours
New approach: 2T	0 hours	2 hours x 5 classes = 10 hours	10 hours

The only way to make such an approach financially viable would be to increase the size of the tutorials, which would reduce the quality of the student learning experience. In addition to the extra hours in the classroom, the academic would also be responsible for developing alternative learning activities (such as videos) to deliver content to students.

The research team eventually identified the most viable alternative model as one where content is delivered asynchronously and accompanied by one synchronous class per week with potentially larger enrolments than 12 per class. The next step was to ascertain the views of the students about this alternative.

VIII Focus Groups

Focus groups were selected as the primary method for exploring student views on alternative delivery options because they enable the collection of rich, contextualised data through interactive discussion. Unlike

individual interviews, focus groups allow participants to build on each other's ideas, generating insights that might not emerge in isolation.⁷⁶ This group dynamic is particularly valuable in educational research, where shared experiences can stimulate reflection and reveal nuanced perspectives on teaching and learning practices.⁷⁷ Focus groups are also recognised as an efficient means of capturing diverse viewpoints within a relatively short timeframe.⁷⁸ When carefully moderated, they provide a safe environment for participants to articulate their preferences and concerns, thereby empowering student voices in institutional decision-making.⁷⁹

The Faculty sought to recruit 40–60 law students for the focus groups, in four categories:

- 10 to 15 LLB students who had completed up to 120cp of Law subjects;⁸⁰
- 10 to 15 LLB students who had completed at least 120cp of Law subjects;
- 10 to 15 JD students who had completed up to 120cp of Law subjects; and
- 10 to 15 JD students who had completed at least 120cp of Law subjects.

Students had to be over the age of 18 to participate. The focus groups were approved by the Bond University Human Research Ethics Committee.⁸¹ Emails seeking focus group participants were sent to students by the Faculty's Learning and Teaching team, the Executive Dean and the Law Students' Association.

A Methodology

The focus groups took place during Weeks 8 and 9 of the January 2024 semester. They were held on campus and in person. The meetings were recorded and transcribed by a research assistant. An experienced facilitator moderated the focus group discussion using the following question guide.

⁷⁶ Rosanna L Breen, 'A Practical Guide to Focus-Group Research' (2006) 30(3) *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 463.

⁷⁷ Sarah Lee, 'Focus Groups in Education: A Researcher's Guide', *Number Analytics* (Blog Post, 24 May 2025) <<https://www.numberanalytics.com/blog/focus-groups-education-researchers-guide>>.

⁷⁸ Jessica Bourne and Naomi Winstone, 'Empowering Students' Voices: The Use of Activity-Oriented Focus Groups in Higher Education Research' (2021) 44(4) *International Journal of Research & Method in Education* 352.

⁷⁹ 'Focus Groups', *Imperial College London* (Research Methods Resource, 2023) <<https://www.imperial.ac.uk/education-research/resources/educational-research-methods/methods/focus-groups>>.

⁸⁰ At Bond University, one subject is typically 10 credit points.

⁸¹ Ethics Application Number TR00069.

1. What do you think of the current approach to delivering compulsory LLB and JD subjects, ie weekly two-hour lectures / forums and weekly one-hour tutorials?
2. Do you think the Faculty should explore an alternative approach to delivery of those subjects? Why or why not?
3. What do you think about an alternative approach being used in some compulsory subjects, where content is delivered asynchronously (ie worked through at your own pace) and accompanied by one synchronous class (ie direct interaction between instructors and students) per week?
 - a. How should the asynchronous content be delivered: videos, modules, or other?
 - b. How long should the weekly classes be: 2 hours or 3 hours or other?
 - c. How many students should attend the weekly classes: 20 or 30 or other?
 - d. Should the weekly classes be in person, online, or both?
 - e. How should the class time be used?
 - f. What style of teaching would be best for this approach?
4. What other suggestions or feedback do you have?

B *Participants*

Out of a total sample pool of approximately 750 students, 19 students chose to participate in the focus groups. All participants were enrolled full-time. They represented a mix of undergraduate students (9) and postgraduate students (10); and domestic students (11) and international students (8). While the total number of recruits in the focus groups was significantly lower than the Faculty's target of 40-60 students, this does suggest that students are not concerned with low levels of lecture attendance, nor are they motivated to seek alternative forms of delivery. These assumptions align with the data collected from the focus group participants.

C *Results*

The focus group discussion provided valuable insights into student preferences. A summary of those insights is provided below.

1 *Lectures and seminars*

- *Value of lectures:* Most students expressed a strong desire to retain traditional lectures in all subjects. Those who generally attend do so unless they are busy with assignments. Those who do not attend prefer to listen to recordings at their own pace, allowing them to speed up or slow down the playback and pause to take notes. Some

students find that if the PowerPoint slides from the lecture are detailed enough, they will read from the slides rather than engage with the lecture recording. However, there is a consensus among both students who regularly attend lectures and those who do not that they prefer to retain the option to attend in-person lectures.

- *Support for ESL students*: English as a Second Language (ESL) students reported that recordings let them control the pace of content delivery and they can replay the delivery of complex material. Students also expressed a desire for all recordings to have subtitles.
- *Accessibility*: Some students expressed a reluctance to attend both mandatory and non-mandatory classes when they live far from campus, especially if they are only enrolled in one class that day.
- *Class duration*: Students did not favour classes longer than two hours if they are didactic in nature, as they tend to reach saturation around 90 minutes.
- *Connection with lecturers*: Students repeatedly emphasised the significance of direct interaction with lecturers, viewing it as a cornerstone of their learning experience. In-person lectures provide opportunities for informal, spontaneous exchanges before and after class, moments that often lead to clarification of complex concepts, guidance on assessment expectations, and personalised feedback. These interactions foster a sense of approachability and trust, which research links to increased student motivation and engagement.⁸² The perceived disconnect between students and lecturers in fully online or asynchronous environments was a recurring concern. Removing in-person lectures, students argued, risks exacerbating feelings of isolation and reducing opportunities for relationship-building, which are critical for academic persistence and wellbeing.⁸³ This aligns with studies showing that lecturer immediacy behaviours such as eye contact, tone, and responsiveness positively influence student satisfaction and learning outcomes.⁸⁴ Interestingly, some students noted that lower levels of student attendance can enhance these benefits for those present, as smaller groups allow for more personalised interaction and active participation.⁸⁵

⁸² Race (n 6).

⁸³ McGaughey et al (n 24).

⁸⁴ Joan Gorham, 'The Relationship between Verbal Teacher Immediacy Behaviors and Student Learning' (1988) 37(1) *Communication Education* 40; Jason D Baker, 'Perceptions of Immediacy, Cohesiveness, and Learning in Online Courses' (2010) 4(1) *Christian Perspectives in Education* 4.

⁸⁵ This observation is consistent with literature on small-group dynamics, which suggests that reduced group size can increase student confidence and willingness to engage: Stephen D Brookfield and Stephen Preskill, *The Discussion Book: 50 Great Ways to Get People Talking* (Jossey-Bass, 2016).

- *Seminars*: No students expressed a desire for seminar-style learning as an alternative teaching method.
- *Interactive lectures*: Students reported that they find interactive lectures, including those involving guest speakers, problem-solving, and analogies, to be more engaging and easier to absorb. They emphasised the importance of the lecturer acting as an intermediary between the content and the students, as a means of encouraging attendance.

2 *Self-directed materials*

- *Modules*: Some students, particularly those who do not currently attend lectures, saw the utility in self-directed online learning materials ('modules') as a replacement for lectures. However, they noted that if lectures were improved, for example by becoming more interactive or by including more demonstrations of the application of the law to a scenario, the need for modules might be reduced. Others wanted modules to be provided as a supplement to lectures, providing foundational content so that the lecture could function as a precursor to the tutorial by working through a problem-based scenario. However, some students, especially early in their studies, did not want self-directed modules at all as they thought it would be easy to fall behind.
- *Quizzes*: All students expressed a desire for lecturers to include quizzes in their teaching to assess student understanding of subject content. Students were adamant that quizzes should be formative only and used as a measure to help lecturers identify areas where students require more clarification.

3 *Tutorials*

- *Usefulness*: All students agreed that tutorials are the most useful learning tool and should be retained in all subjects. They appreciated the small class size. Students noted they feel more confident speaking in smaller groups and agreed that they get the most value from small group learning. There was hesitancy to increase tutorial sizes above 10–12 students.
- *Duration*: Opinions on the duration of tutorials varied, with some groups suggesting they should be longer (1.5 hours), while others felt that one hour was sufficient. However, all noted that tutorials often contain too much information and often feel rushed, with too much content compressed into the final minutes. This can limit opportunities for meaningful discussion and feedback. Some students suggested that tutorials should prioritise depth over breadth, focusing on fewer problems but exploring them in greater

detail. This approach would allow students to practise legal reasoning and receive targeted feedback, critical for skill development and confidence building.

- *Consistency and fairness:* Students were concerned that different educators within the same subject may focus on different content. Students wanted consistency and fairness in how tutorials are delivered and tutorial participation is assessed. They wanted answer guides or subject guides and for these to be reviewed in lectures. Some students were concerned that their tutorial grades did not reflect the level of preparation undertaken or that there were inconsistencies in grading.
- *Flexibility:* While many students preferred in-person tutorials, they also wanted the flexibility to attend online if they are sick, have work commitments or clinical legal placements.
- *Competitiveness and marks:* There was a consensus that tutorials are competitive rather than collaborative. Students suggested allowing them to choose tutorials that count towards their marks and for tutors to engage students more through collaborative methods and the submission of written work.

The focus groups made it very clear that the current approach to subject delivery – lectures with non-mandatory attendance and recordings, and small group teaching in tutorials – was by far the preferred option out of those presented. The strong preference for traditional lectures, particularly those that are interactive and engaging, suggests that any move towards alternative teaching methods should be approached cautiously, and at most, be integrated as supplementary rather than a replacement. The desire for consistency and fairness in tutorials, along with the need for flexibility, indicates that students value a structured yet adaptable learning environment. Addressing these concerns could lead to a more effective and satisfying educational experience for law students, more so than experimentation with alternative delivery modes.

IX Conclusions

In-person lectures with less than 100% attendance are less a reflection of the quality of the teaching and more an indication of the benefits of lecture recordings and the challenges faced by many students in coming to campus. Many students are obliged to work to afford to study, or have other competing obligations, and these students do not want to miss out on important subject content. Synchronous lectures and asynchronous learning options should be acknowledged as complementary learning tools rather than as rivals.

Law schools can acknowledge and address these issues through flexible scheduling. The range of delivery methods should include both

synchronous methods such as live classes and asynchronous methods such as recordings and other materials. Delivery should be flexible, offering students a choice of attendance options. Law schools must create an inclusive learning environment that meets the diverse needs of learners or risk increasing learner disengagement.

Rather than aspiring to full attendance at lectures – and despairing when that is not achieved – academics should be encouraged to focus on meeting the diverse needs of their students. This would include adding value to the in-person lecture for those who do choose to attend. Sustained and unchanging low-level activity, such as sitting and listening passively to a lecture, lowers student concentration levels. Short rest breaks can restore concentration levels and consolidation methods at the end of a lecture can lead to better and lasting retention of content. Engaging students in a variety of interactive activities during the lecture can add a real benefit to the student learning experience – and positively impact student attendance levels.

The results of this study indicate a lack of appetite amongst Bond University law students for changes to how compulsory subjects are delivered. The current model appears to suit a range of student learning preferences: in-person, interactive lectures where attendance is encouraged but not mandated; the ready availability of high-quality lecture recordings; and interactive, small class tutorials. Scheduling constraints will continue to affect lecture attendance irrespective of the lecture or lecturer, but the students themselves are not concerned by a lack of student attendance at lectures, and some may even prefer it.

Academics can be reassured that in most subjects, approximately one third of their students will regularly attend lectures, one third will rarely, if ever attend, and one third will sometimes attend depending on the extent to which the classes are both engaging and accessible. Low lecture attendance does not necessarily reflect the quality of the teaching. Rather, a broad range of factors, many of which are outside the control of the academic, impact student attendance. Academics should be encouraged to reflect upon the reasons lectures endure, particularly the benefits of engagement, connection, context and the development of interpersonal skills that are at risk in an increasingly remote, online world. Academics are best advised to undertake efforts to ensure a good quality learning experience for those students who do attend lectures and to maximise the experience of those watching the recordings. The quality of an academic's teaching should be measured not by the number of students in the lecture theatre but by the quality of the learning experience of all students in the course, including those who attend and those who do not.

The answer to the question posed at the commencement of this paper is, therefore, 'no'. The time to abolish the law lecture has not yet arrived.

*APPENDIX A*FORUMS: LAW STUDENT PREFERENCES AND PRACTICES
FACULTY OF LAW SURVEY

Thank you for taking the time to complete this Faculty of Law survey.

Your responses will assist the Faculty to understand student preferences and practices with respect to forums;* specifically, student expectations of and motivations for attending forums and accessing forum recordings in compulsory law subjects.

Taking part in this survey is optional. It will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

You can stop at any point by clicking 'Exit this survey' on the top right part of the page.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can stop at any point by clicking 'Exit this survey' on the top right part of the page. However, once you have answered the final question and clicked SUBMIT it will not be possible to withdraw or alter the answer you have provided as we will have no way of identifying which response was yours.

Your responses will remain anonymous in accordance with the Bond University Privacy Policy, which can be found [here](#).

Ethics approval has been given by the Bond University Human Ethics Committee (see ID: TR00064).

If you have any questions about the survey, please contact LawLT@bond.edu.au. If you have any concerns about the conduct of the research, please contact BUHREC at ethics@bond.edu.au.

*Prior to 2023 'forums' were called 'lectures' at Bond University.

Demographic Questions

- 1) Please select the program you are currently enrolled in.
 - ☐ LLB
 - ☐ JD
 - ☐ Diploma of Legal Studies
 - ☐ Other [free text]

- 2) Please choose one of the options below.
 - ☐ I am a domestic student from Queensland
 - ☐ I am a domestic interstate student
 - ☐ I am an international student
 - ☐ I prefer not to say

- 3) Please select your enrolment status.
 - ☐ I am enrolled at Bond full-time
 - ☐ I am enrolled at Bond part-time

- 4) Please select your age group.
 - ☐ <18
 - ☐ 18- 24
 - ☐ 25 - 29
 - ☐ 30 - 39
 - ☐ 40 and over
 - ☐ I prefer not to say

- 5) When did you commence your current program of study?
Year
Semester

Attendance

- 6) Thinking specifically about the January 2023 semester at Bond (231), how frequently did you attend forums in person (i.e. you physically attended the class for most or all of the class time, rather than participating remotely or watching a recording of the class)?
- ☐ All the time
 - ☐ Most of the time
 - ☐ Sometimes
 - ☐ Rarely
 - ☐ Never [please go to Question 9]
- 7) Please select up to three reasons why you **attended forums** in person in 231.
- ☐ I want to learn content and theory in person
 - ☐ I want to participate in class discussions
 - ☐ I want to learn about the practical application of content and theory in person
 - ☐ I want personal interaction and engagement with my peers
 - ☐ I prefer the connection and sense of belonging that comes from attending class in person
 - ☐ Attending class in person gives me a sense of accomplishment and helps me to stay motivated
 - ☐ I want personal access to experts
 - ☐ I have other in person classes on the same day so I may as well attend all my classes in person
 - ☐ Other (please explain below)
-
- [free text]
- 8) Please rank the reasons you selected for in-person forum attendance from 1 to 3, where 1 is the **most** relevant and 3 is the **least** relevant.
- 9) Please select up to three reasons why you **did not attend** forums in person in 231.
- ☐ The forum is recorded so I do not need to attend in person
 - ☐ Forums contribute little to my understanding of the subject
 - ☐ The scheduling of the forum is inconvenient
 - ☐ Assessments were due in this or other subjects
 - ☐ I have scheduling conflicts with my other classes
 - ☐ I have no other classes on that day and it is not worth coming to campus for only one class
 - ☐ I have work commitments at the same time as the forum

- ☐ I have family/ personal commitments at the same time as the forum
 - ☐ Transport considerations make in person attendance difficult
 - ☐ Accessibility issues make in person attendance difficult
 - ☐ Personal health reasons make in person attendance difficult
 - ☐ The delivery of the forum was not engaging
 - ☐ The classes lacked personal interaction and engagement with the forum presenter and/or my peers
 - ☐ Other (please explain below)
- 10) Please **rank** the reasons you selected for **not attending forums in person** from 1 to 3, where 1 is the most relevant and 3 is the least relevant.
- 11) How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
“I believe that in-person forum attendance should be mandatory for all students.”
- ☐ Strongly disagree
 - ☐ Disagree
 - ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
 - ☐ Agree
 - ☐ Strongly agree

Recording of Forums

- 12) Thinking specifically about the January 2023 semester at Bond, how frequently did you access recordings of forums?
- ☐ All the time
 - ☐ Most of the time
 - ☐ Sometimes
 - ☐ Rarely
 - ☐ Never [please go to Question 15]
- 13) Please select up to three reasons why you **accessed recordings of forums**.
- ☐ I use the recording to revise the content and take or enhance my notes
 - ☐ I use the recording to revise the material prior to submission of assessments
 - ☐ I watch the recording as a substitute for attending the forum in person
 - ☐ The recording assists me with language comprehension

- ☐ The recording assists me with managing a physical, mental health, medical, or neurological condition
- ☐ The recording assists me with managing a hearing or vision impairment
- ☐ The recording enables me to slow down or speed up the recorded content
- ☐ The recording assists me with managing a learning disability
- ☐ Other (please explain below)
_____ [free text]

14) Please **rank** the reasons you selected for **accessing recordings of forums** from 1 to 3, where 1 is the most relevant and 3 is the least relevant.

15) How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

“Access to recordings of forums is critical for my learning”

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

16) Please select your top three preferred methods for engaging with the subject content.

- ☐ Live, in-person forums
- ☐ Forum recordings
- ☐ Pre-recorded content eg. slides with audio, podcasts, vodcasts
- ☐ Slides with PowerPoint Live (transcribes the speaker’s words into on-screen captions or as subtitles translated to another language)
- ☐ Written materials (i.e. PowerPoint forum slides, notes, library resources etc)
- ☐ Other (please explain below)
_____ [free text]

17) Please rank your preferred methods for engaging with the subject content from 1 to 3, where 1 is the **most preferred** method and 3 is the **least preferred** method.

We thank you for your time spent taking this survey.
Your response has been recorded.