

# Understanding Undergraduate Absenteeism at a South African University



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# Presentation Outline

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Introduction

Literature Review

Methodology

Discussion

# Introduction

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An absent student is ‘one who, once registered for a course, does not attend classes regularly’

- (Triado-Ivern et al (2013))

Van Blerkdom (1992) found that whilst student attendance started off high, by the end of the semester classes tended to be less than half full.

‘Why aren’t they here?’ Moore (2008)

# Literature Review

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Absenteeism is a universal and age-old problem

Studies on the effect of university class attendance on academic performance:

- Most find a strong (inverse) statistical relationship between absenteeism and academic performance.

(Romer, 1993; Devadoss & Foltz, 1997; Gump, 2006; Moore, 2008; Broucek, 2008; Massingham & Herrington, 2006; Landin & Perez, 2015)

Also (Ajiboye & Tella, 2006; Thatcher et al, 2007; Schmulian & Coetzee, 2011)

- Few attempts made to establish the causal relationship between the two variables

‘Class attendance is no guarantee that learning will take place’

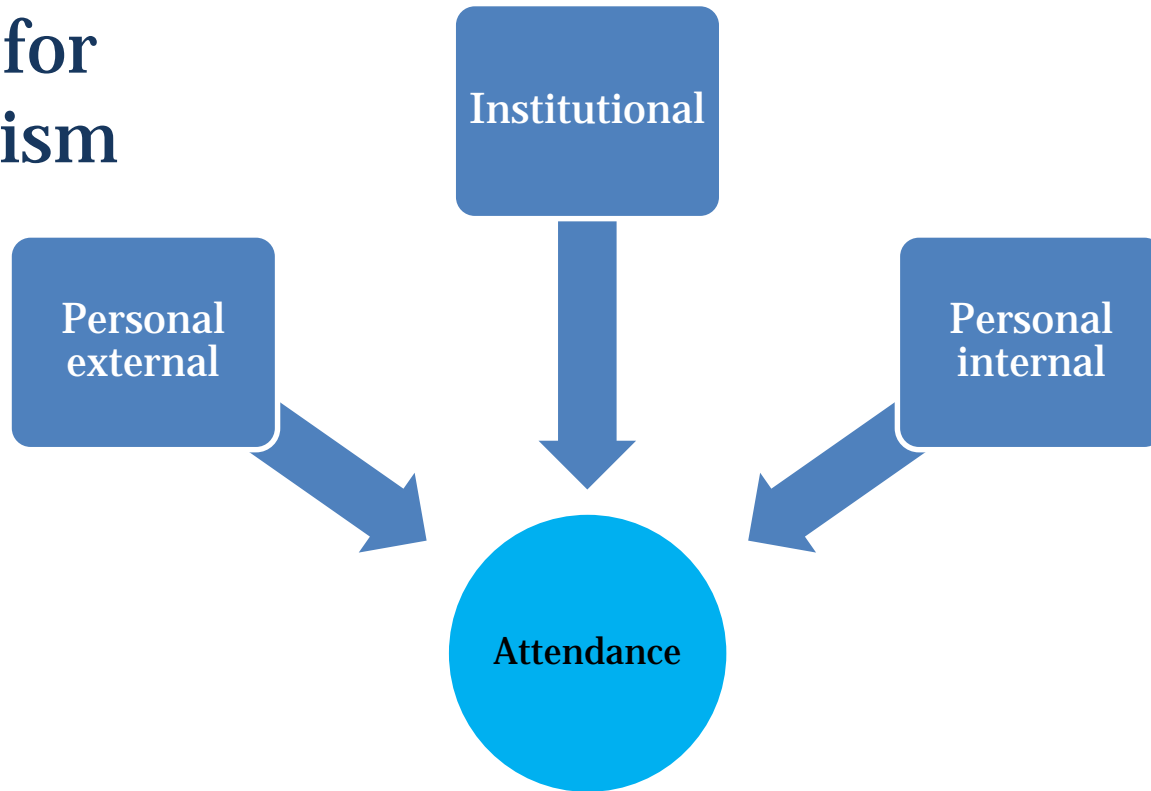
Barlow & Fleischer, 2011



# Organising the literature

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## Reasons for absenteeism



# Literature Review

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- Institutional reasons – university facilities, lecturing style and quality, modules.

(Romer, 1993; Massingham & Herrington, 2006; Lopez-Bonilla, 2015)

- Personal external factors – health & socio-economic circumstances

(Young et al, 2010; Fayombo et al, 2012; Scheckle, 2014)

- Personal internal factors – student attitudes and motivation.  
(Trout, 1997; Hassel & Lourey, 2005; Moore et al, 2008)

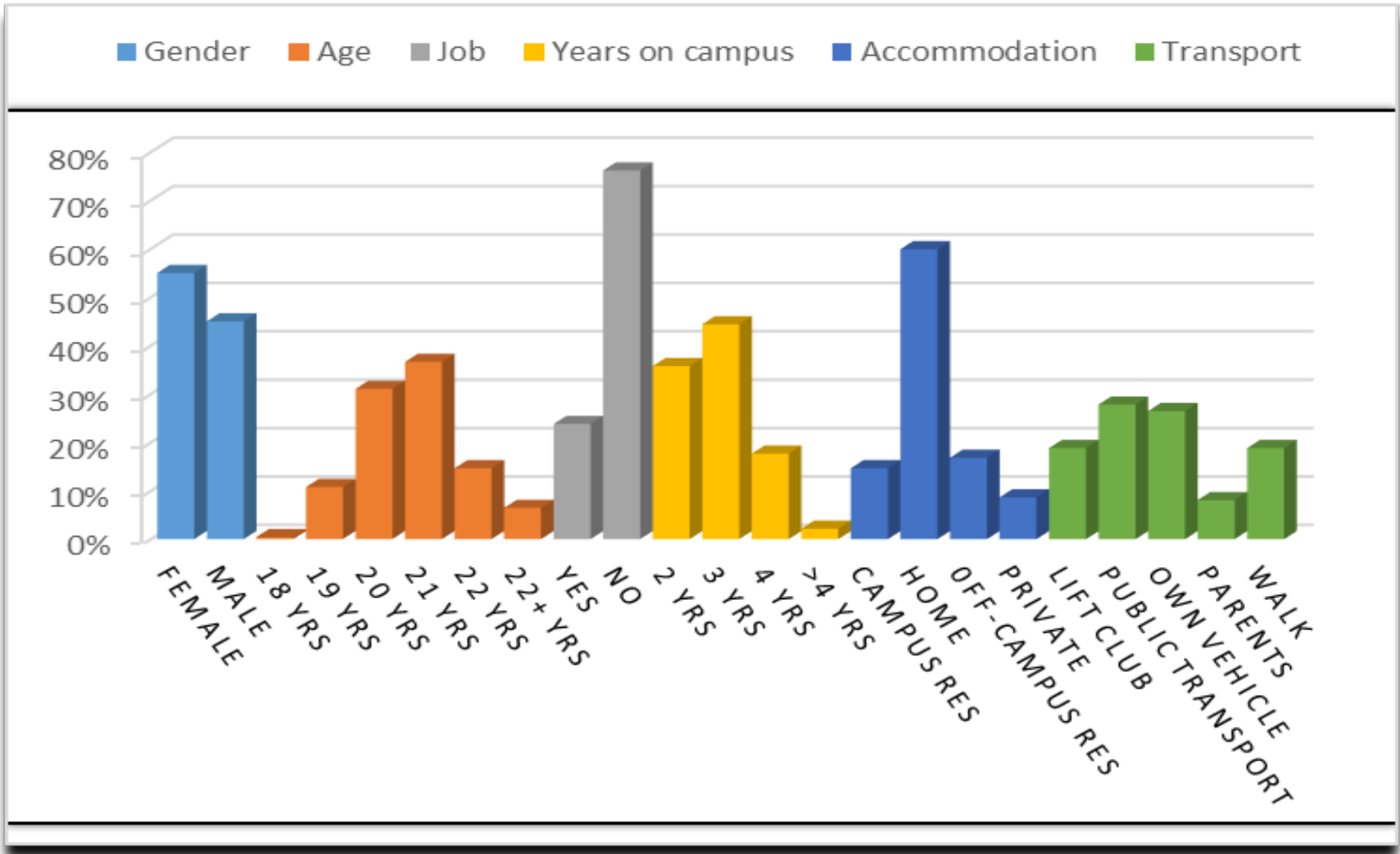
# Methodology

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- Population and sample
- Data collection via Survey: Questionnaire and Focus groups
- Interpretative paradigm: mixed method research

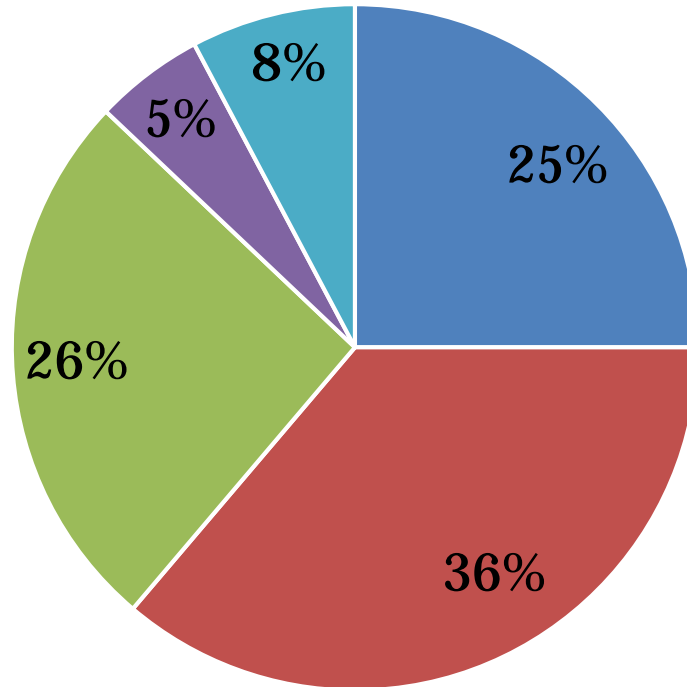
Some descriptive stats and the Focus Group findings.....

# Respondent Information





# Class attendance



■ **Most/all**

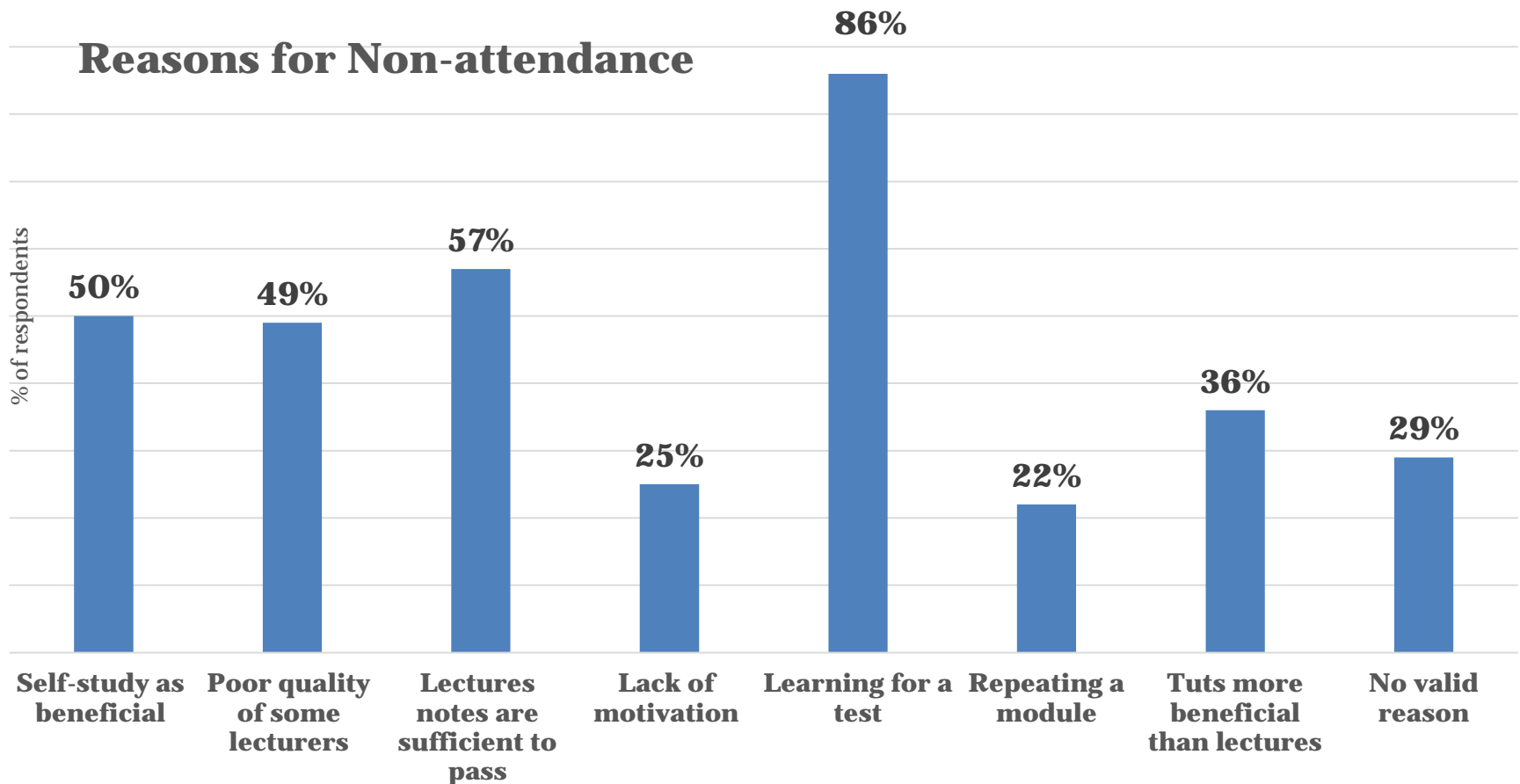
■ **Approx 75%**

■ **Approx half**

■ **Less than half**

■ **Very few/none**

# % of respondents who agree that they miss class for each reason



# Open-ended question and Focus Group findings

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## ○ Institutional reasons

- Lecturers
- Modules
  - Timetabling
  - Tests and workload
  - Technology

## ○ Personal external reasons

- Transport
- Finances
  - Weather
  - Health and family issues

## ○ Personal internal reasons

- Freedom
- Motivation
  - Relationships , Networking and Peer pressure



# In closing

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Multiple reasons provided for missing lectures

- Institutional factors
- Personal External factors:
  - No evidence to support my initial ‘gut-feel’
- Personal internal factors
  - Millennials?

Suggestions