

## Students' Reluctance to Attend Office Hours: Reasons and Suggested Solutions

Sabah A. Abdul-Wahab,\* Nahed M. Salem,  
Sultan Qaboos University, Sultanate of Oman

Kaan Yetilmezsoy,  
Yildiz Technical University, Turkey

& Sulaiman O. Fadlallah  
Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand

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**Abstract:** This paper focuses on investigating students' reasons for their reluctance to attend faculty members' office hours. Study participants included 500 male and female students from the Colleges of Engineering (n = 248) and Arts and Social Sciences (CASS) (n = 252) at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU). The study followed a descriptive-analytical approach, and a questionnaire was utilized to collect people's views. The results of the study indicate that the rates of SQU students' attendance to office hours were low, and some students (11.2%) do not attend at all as they consider these office hours a waste of time. The main reasons behind the students' lack of interest in office hours were busy student timetables, conflicts between faculty office hours and students' timetables, and easier and faster ways of getting information than visiting faculty members. Additional reasons were related to faculty members' personalities and their discouraging attitudes toward attending office hours. The researchers recommend that SQU adopt a new strategy for encouraging faculty members to hold office hours, familiarizing students with the importance of office hours and assigning part of a course's grades to meeting with faculty members' office hours.

**Keywords:** Office hours, students' reluctance, faculty members, Sultan Qaboos University.

### الساعات المكتبية وعزوف الطلبة عن حضورها: الأسباب والحلول

صباح أحمد عبد الوهاب\* وناهد محمد سالم

جامعة السلطان قابوس، سلطنة عمان

خان يتمزسوي وسليمان عمر فضل الله

جامعة يلدز التقنية، تركيا جامعة أوكلاند للتكنولوجيا، نيوزلندا

**مستخلص:** هدفت الدراسة الحالية إلى تقصي الأسباب المؤدية إلى عزوف الطلبة عن حضور الساعات المكتبية لعضو هيئة التدريس، وذلك من وجهة نظر الطلبة أنفسهم. وتألّف مجتمع الدراسة من طلبة كليتي الهندسة والآداب بجامعة السلطان قابوس بعدّهما يمثلان الكليات العلمية والأدبية وقد تكونت عينة الدراسة من 500 طالب وطالبة. واعتمدت الدراسة المنهج الوصفي التحليلي لملاءمته لطبيعة هذه الدراسة واستخدمت الاستبانة أداة لجمع آراء عينة الدراسة. وأشارت نتائج الدراسة إلى أن معدلات حضور الطلبة للساعات المكتبية متدنية بل إن بعض الطلبة الذين تصل نسبتهم إلى (11.2%) لا يحضرونها إطلاقاً ولا يرون جدوى منها. وكانت أهم الأسباب التي تجعلهم لا يلتزمون بحضورها هي: ازدحام الجدول الدراسي وتكثّل الأعباء الدراسية، وتعارض وقت الساعات المكتبية مع الجدول الدراسي، ولجوء الطلبة لوسائل أخرى لحل مشكلاتهم الدراسية، بالإضافة إلى أسباب أخرى ترجع لشخصية عضو هيئة التدريس وعدم تشجيعه الطلبة على حضورها؛ وبناء على ذلك أوصت الدراسة بضرورة أن تتبنى الجامعة استراتيجية جديدة لترغيب عضو هيئة التدريس في الساعات المكتبية، وتوعية الطالب بأهميتها لهم، وتخصيص جزء من درجات نشاط الطلبة في المقرر الدراسي بما يكافئ مدى التزام الطلبة بحضور الساعات المكتبية المخصصة لهم.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الساعات المكتبية، عزوف الطلبة، أعضاء هيئة التدريس، جامعة السلطان قابوس

\*[sabah1@squ.edu.om](mailto:sabah1@squ.edu.om)

The human connection between faculty members and students is considered one of the most important parts of the educational process, and its success mainly depends on good connections and communication between faculty members and students. Office hours are one way by which faculty members build a positive relationship with students. By dealing with each student individually and directly, this student-faculty member interaction benefits both parties and strengthens communication between them. Educational institutions require that faculty members allocate a specific number of hours per week to meet with students to assist them and answer their questions. Starting from the first week of the semester, faculty members should set their office hours and publically post timetables for students' reference.

In educational institutions, office hours are considered one of the best practices applied to increase the interaction between faculty members and students, thus deepening the communication and spirit of friendship between the two parties (Dika, 2012). To achieve this end, faculty members invest time in holding office hours. Office hours can help faculty members identify students' recurrent learning problems and address them early. Through this mirror, students reflect upon faculty members their struggles. Accordingly, faculty members can do what is necessary to help students overcome the obstacles that hinder their studies (Jaasma & Koper, 1999). However, students often do not take advantage of office hours, despite faculty members' efforts (Cotton & Wilson, 2006; Terenzini, Springer, Pascarella, & Nora, 1995).

Although faculty members set office hours for the service of students, the importance of these hours should not be overlooked for faculty members as well. Office hours provide faculty members with the opportunity to answer students' questions, thereby

strengthening the communication between them. Through these office hours, a faculty member can learn students' interests, concerns, and understanding of the course content (Anderson & Carta-Falsa, 2002; Griffin et al., 2014).

Previous studies have presented best practices to increase students' use of office hours and maximize their benefits. These studies also have shed light on reasons why students do not take advantage of office hours and have drawn conclusions that can be used to enhance student attendance at office hours (Anderson & Carta-Falsa, 2002; Clark, Walker, & Keith, 2002). Guerrero and Rod (2013) explored the connection between student attendance at office hours and their academic performance in political science courses. The research spanned eight political science courses over four years, and the researchers recorded the number of times students presented for office hours and their levels of achievement in the courses. The results of the study indicated a positive correlation between students' academic performance and the frequency with which they attended office hours.

At the Rochester Institute of Technology, the results of a study of students in mechanical engineering showed a positive correlation between office hour attendance rates and high levels of course understanding, requesting assistance well before deadlines for assignments, and the lack of time for visits. However, the study did not support the hypothesis that students attending more office hours would perform better in their studies (Schertzer et al., 2014).

Schertzer et al. (2014) examined the impact of office hours on student performance metrics, including students' final grade grades and theoretical understanding assessed through multiple-choice exam questions. The results indicated that the adoption of the office hours' system

based on grades led to higher participation rates by a wide range of students. It was noted that high office hour attendance rates had a positive impact on student performance in open-ended exam questions but a low impact on student performance in multiple-choice questions.

Robinson, Culver, Schertzer, Landschoot and Hensel (2014) conducted a study to understand the reasons for low attendance rates to faculty members' office hours. In an attempt to improve students' participation and enhance their attendance of office hours, the number of office hours held by teaching assistants (TAs) was increased. The expectation was that students would feel more comfortable asking for help from TAs than faculty members; however, attendance at office hours did not improve. In an effort to better understand this trend, the investigators prepared a questionnaire to study why students prefer not to attend office hours. In particular, the impact of social norms was examined, the extent to which students perceived their understanding of subjects, and therefore their needs for additional assistance, as well as other means of accessing information such as the Internet, social networks and cooperation among students in answering their questions. The study was conducted in six semesters in six classes ( $n = 300$  students) comprising their engineering science core curriculum, including statics, mechanics of materials, dynamics, thermodynamics, fluid mechanics and heat transfer. Several factors were found to be positively associated with lower attendance rates at office hours. First, students felt that their sense of understanding of the subject was good and there was no need for additional assistance. Second, the students indicated procrastinating, leaving insufficient time to seek help before homework was due. Finally, students who spent less time studying

were less likely to attend office hours. However, the data of this study did not support the hypothesis that students who attended more office hours performed better. Therefore, the researchers called for further studies to shed more light on behaviors that enhance students' academic performance and increase their tendency to use office hours.

Griffin et al. (2014) contended that the factors affecting student decisions to use office hours were largely beyond the control of faculty members. They also pointed out that students' feelings of fear prevented them from taking advantage of office hours and should not be overlooked or underestimated. Most faculty members find it difficult to understand students' fears of faculty members, but such fear may be seated in the fact that faculty members are familiar with the curriculum and have deep experience with the course subject. In addition, faculty members evaluate student work, but students feel that faculty members' assessments also touch students' personalities. The study recommended disseminating information about the culture and benefits of office hours. These hours are more useful for students if students discover these benefits themselves. For example, alternatives that increase the chances of students discovering the importance of office hours are the use of local office hours, which are determined according to need, or focusing only on a specific topic which students must understand. In such an approach, the faculty members designate office hours to be used only to answer questions related to a certain subject. The study also recommended that faculty members set office hours that are comfortable for students according to their preferences. A faculty member also might consider holding office hours in places other than his office, for example, in places where students tend to gather and feel comfortable.

Smith, Chen, Berndtson, Burson and Griffin (2017) conducted a study to examine students' perceptions of office hours at mid-Atlantic public research university, by administrating a survey to capture students' perceptions of the aspects affecting their using of office hours. The study covered a group of undergraduate students (18 years and above). The analysis of the responses shows that only one-third of the students use office hours at least once every semester, and about two-thirds of the students have never used office hours. Also, the study represented a qualitative analysis from 724 comments answering to two open-ended questions: the first question was asking about the factors that encourage the student to use office hours, and the second question was asking for additional comments regarding the topic of the office hours. The purpose behind rising these questions was to understand the reasons why student don't use office hours and how to encourage them to use office hours more. The study concluded that it is important for institutions to do more to help the students to understand the value of interacting with faculty and to develop a relationship between the students and those who teach them.

Located in Muscat, the capital city of the Sultanate of Oman, Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) was the first public university in the Sultanate. Commencing in 1982 and began enrolling students in 1986, SQU started with 557 students but currently has around 15,000 students enrolled in different disciplines including Engineering, Arts and Social Sciences, Medicine, Education, Agriculture, Science, Commerce and Economics, and Law. With this rapid increase in the number of students, SQU has proven to be committed to its mission to excel in teaching and learning, research and innovation, and community service by promoting the principles of scientific analysis and creative thinking in a collegial and stimulating environment.

To continue improving SQU's educational process and assuring its quality, one must focus on the two most important human poles in the educational process - faculty members and students. As mentioned earlier, office hours represent one form of communication and interaction between students and faculty members. During office hours, students can discuss with faculty the points that the lecture did not touch upon or explore issues with understanding and studying the course. However, with that being said, it has been observed anecdotally that SQU students do not visit faculty members during office hours. This initiated the following question: What are the key reasons that SQU students are reluctant to attend office hours?

In this regard, this study aims to empirically explore SQU students' participation in office hours, and their reasons for not taking advantage of them. The study focuses on students' reluctance to attend office hours, but the study's aim is to directly identify reasons why students avoid attending office hours. The objectives of the study are as follows: (a) to identify the frequency with which students at SQU attend faculty members' office hours; (b) to identify reasons why students take advantage of office hours; (c) to identify statistical differences between students' proclivity toward attending office hours by gender, academic year, and level of educational achievement; and (d) to suggest recommendations for faculty members to improve students' attendance of office hours.

By identifying the reasons for students' reluctance to attend office hours, the researchers hoped to help decision makers at SQU and other regional universities identify the reasons that students avoid office hours and take practical measures to stimulate awareness of their benefit to both students and faculty. The ultimate aim is to provide solutions to address the problem of students' reluctance to

attend office hour. In the end, this study will contribute positively to enriching the literature. To the best of the authors' knowledge, this study is the first to investigate the problem of students' reluctance to attend office hours; thus, the present research will provide useful background information to other research on the same subject.

## Methodology

### Problem of the research, its objectives and questions/hypotheses

#### Research questions

The aforementioned main research question of the study lead to further questions listed as follows:

1. What is the frequency with which SQU students attend faculty members' office hours?
2. What reasons do SQU students give for avoiding faculty members' office hours?
3. What statistical differences exist between students of different colleges when it comes to students attending office hours?
4. What statistical differences exist between students of different genders when it comes to students attending office hours?
5. What statistical differences exist between students of different academic years when it comes to students attending office hours?
6. What statistical differences exist between students at different levels of academic achievement when it comes to students attending office hours?
7. What statistical differences exist between students on academic probation, those who are not on probation, and those who have been on academic probation when it comes to students attending office hours?

### Research purpose/hypothesis

To answer the stated research questions, the following examinations were undertaken:

1. *t*-test: Assessment of students' reluctance to attend office hours due to the variable of college of study (Engineering, CASS).
2. *t*-test: Assessment of students' reluctance to attend office hours due to gender (males and females).
3. Analysis of variance (ANOVA): Assessment of students' reluctance to attend office hours due to the variable of academic year (first, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and above).
4. ANOVA: Assessment of students' reluctance to attend office hours due to the variable of academic attainment (excellence, good, good, acceptable, and under academic probation).
5. ANOVA: Assessment of students' reluctance to attend office hours due to the variable of academic probation (under academic probation, not under academic probation, and previously under academic probation).

### Research variables

This study included the following independent and dependent variables:

#### Independent variables

- College (two levels) - College of Engineering and College of Arts and Social Sciences (CASS).
- Gender (two levels) - male and female.
- Academic year - six levels (first through sixth year).
- Levels of academic achievement (five levels) - excellent, very

good, good, acceptable, and under academic observation.

- Academic observation (three levels) - under academic observation, not under academic observation, and previously under academic observation.

**Dependent variable:** Responses of the students to answer questions related to reasons for their reluctance to attend office hours.

**Research tools**

The researchers designed a questionnaire to collect data. To construct the questionnaire, open-ended questions were asked within a sample of students from the Colleges of Engineering and CASS. The students were asked, in addition to the question on how frequent they attend their faculty members' office hours, to note barriers to attending office hours from their points of view. The researchers then created a first draft of the survey tool, which was then presented to a group of specialized arbitrators to express an opinion regarding the appropriateness of the paragraphs and their formulation. The questionnaire in its final form presented 27 reasons that students might avoid office hours followed by an "other" option in which students could pencil in reasons not included in the questionnaire. The researchers designed the questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale, with five indicating very high correspondence, four indicating high correspondence, three indicating a neutral stance, two indicating a low correspondence, and one indicating very low correspondence. The study participants, included 500 male and female students from the Colleges of Engineering (248 students) and Arts and Social Sciences (CASS) (252 students).

**Research sample**

Tables 1-5 show the distribution of the randomly selected study sample ( $n = 500$ ) according to the variables defined

by the study. Table 1 shows the balance between the number of students in both Engineering (49.6%) and CASS (50.4%), while Table 2 shows the balance between the number of female (59.0%) and male students (41.0%). This split produced results that represent the views of both genders. Table 3 shows that the distribution of students was concentrated in the fourth (38.0%), third (22.8%), fifth (18.6%) and second years (10.4%) of study. Students in these years have experience with the university's education system and should be less intimidated by faculty members than first-year students.

**Table 1**  
**Study Sample Distribution Based on College**

| College     | Number of students | Percentage (%) |
|-------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Engineering | 248                | 49.6           |
| Arts        | 252                | 50.4           |
| Total       | 500                | 100            |

**Table 2**  
**Study Sample Distribution Based on Gender**

| Gender | Number of students | Percentage (%) |
|--------|--------------------|----------------|
| Male   | 205                | 41.0           |
| Female | 295                | 59.0           |
| Total  | 500                | 100            |

**Table 3**  
**Study Sample Distribution Based on Academic Year**

| Academic year  | Number of students | Percentage (%) |
|----------------|--------------------|----------------|
| First          | 8                  | 1.60           |
| Second         | 52                 | 10.4           |
| Third          | 114                | 22.8           |
| Fourth         | 190                | 38.0           |
| Fifth          | 93                 | 18.6           |
| Sixth          | 9                  | 1.80           |
| Overall        | 466                | 93.2           |
| Missing values | 34                 | 6.80           |
| Total          | 500                | 100            |

Table 4 shows the study sample's distribution according to their academic standing. The students with a very good rating represented the highest percentage (38.6%), followed by the students who scored well (36.4%). Together they represented more than

75% of the study population. These are natural ratios as most students' grades fall in the middle of a grading curve, while others garner grades of excellence (8.6%) and acceptable (4.2%), and the lowest-achieving students are held under academic observation (2.2%). Thus, the study sample represented all levels of student achievement at SQU. Table 5 shows that the percentage of students under academic probation (3.2%) and the percentage of students who have passed academic probation (4.4%) make up just under 10% of the total community of the study. The number of students who did not fall under academic probation totalled 90.8%. This balance reflects the views of different students on office hours.

**Table 4**  
**Study Sample Distribution Based on Academic Grading**

| Academic grading         | Number of students | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Excellent                | 43                 | 8.60           |
| Very good                | 193                | 38.6           |
| Good                     | 182                | 36.4           |
| Satisfactory             | 21                 | 4.20           |
| Under academic probation | 11                 | 2.20           |
| Overall                  | 450                | 90.0           |
| Missing values           | 50                 | 10.0           |
| Total                    | 500                | 100            |

**Table 5**  
**Study Sample Distribution Based on Academic Probation**

| Academic probation                  | Number of students | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Under academic probation            | 16                 | 3.2            |
| Not under academic probation        | 454                | 90.8           |
| Previously under academic probation | 22                 | 4.40           |
| Overall                             | 492                | 98.4           |
| Missing values                      | 8                  | 1.60           |
| Total                               | 500                | 100            |

### Statistical process

The collected data were analyzed through Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 22 (IBM Corp.,

Armonk, New York, USA). Recurrences, arithmetic mean, and level of significance of students' responses were extracted. The statistical differences between the variables (total, gender, academic year, academic achievement, academic observation, and student frequency of the faculty office) were determined by applying an analysis of variance (ANOVA) test or a *t*-test with an alpha ( $\alpha$ ) set at a 95% confidence level ( $p = 0.05$ ) in all analyses.

## Results and discussion

### Research Question 1: "What is the frequency with which SQU students attend faculty members' office hours?"

Table 6 shows that 42.8% of students rarely attended office hours, while 11.2% indicated that they never attended office hours. In total, 54.0% of all students indicated rarely or never visiting faculty members' offices during office hours.

**Table 6**  
**Students' Frequency of Attendance to Office Hours**

| Frequency of attendance | Number of students | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Never                   | 56                 | 11.2           |
| Rarely                  | 214                | 42.8           |
| Occasionally            | 210                | 42.0           |
| Always                  | 15                 | 3.0            |
| Overall                 | 495                | 99.0           |
| Missing values          | 5                  | 1.0            |
| Total                   | 500                | 100            |

In contrast, 3.0% of students indicated that they always attended office hours. This figure is considered very low. In total, 11.2% indicated that they sometimes attended office hours. These percentages indicate irregular attendance, showing very weak student-faculty interaction. In other words, SQU students were found not to take advantage of the time allocated to boost their achievement at university, and both faculty members and students failed to benefit from interactions during office hours. If students do not take advantage of office hours, then faculty members do not have an avenue by

which they can gauge students' understanding of classroom lectures. Furthermore, without gauging students' understanding, faculty members miss out on opportunities to modify their approaches, ultimately disadvantaging students' learning experiences. Guerrero and Rod (2013) stated that the reluctance of students to take advantage of office hours weakens the link between faculty members and students. The second question considers the reasons that students do not attend office hours.

**Research Question 2: What reasons do SQU students give for avoiding faculty members' office hours?**

The research instrument presented 27 possible reasons that students might avoid office hours. Table 7 shows the frequency of students' answers according to their importance from the students' points of view. This table shows that the reluctance of students to attend office hours may be due to the subject studied, students' schedule conflicts or lack of time for visits, and personalities of faculty members and the extent to which they encourage student visits during office hours. Additional reasons for not attending office hours were due to the character and habits of students and their courage to speak one-on-one with faculty members. Students most frequently explained avoidance of office hours being due to scheduling conflicts. This area is out of the control of the faculty member as students' schedules are created through a system dictated by the university. For instance, a student may, in one day, be scheduled to attend more than four lectures, and the time between lectures might not exceed ten minutes, making it impossible for that student to attend to office hours. For this reason, there should be coordination of schedules so that vacancies in faculty members' schedules correspond to the free time available in students' schedules.

An additional reason that students do not attend office hours is the students'

study habits. Postponing studying class materials until just before the test time was the seventh most common reason that students could not take advantage of office hours (28.8%). This finding is consistent with a study by Robinson, Culver, Schertzer, Landschoot and Hensel (2014), which noted that procrastination is one of the most common reasons that students do not attend office hours-because of delays in beginning studying for exams, students do not have enough time to visit a faculty member's office for help. Procrastination resulted in students finding means other than faculty members to solve their problems (36.6%), including adopting collective studying (25.6%).

Conflicts with faculty members' personalities were also noted as contributors to students avoiding office hours. Students' dissatisfaction with faculty members was noted in 32.0%. A study by Griffin et al. (2014) found that a student's positive impression of a faculty member was an important factor that contributed positively to a student attending office hours. Faculty members not complying with office hours (25.8%) was the eleventh most frequently given reason for students not attending office hours, followed closely by a student feeling that there was a barrier between him and the faculty member (25.6%). This last finding indicates that there may be a lack of mutual understanding between the two parties.

A failure of a faculty member to provide sufficient assistance to a student was found in 23.2% of the sample. Faculty members' personalities affect students' impressions of them, and these impressions thereby affect the method by which students interact with faculty members.



**Table 7**  
**Reasons for Students' Reluctance to Attend Office Hours, Sorted in Descending Order**

| Ranking based on importance from students' perspectives | Cause number according to questionnaire | Cause  | Very strongly agree (%) | Strongly agree (%) | Moderately agree (%) | Slightly agree (%) | Disagree (%) | Total percentage (%) |
|---|---|--|-------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------|--------------|----------------------|
| 1   | 7                                       | Overloaded student timetable   | 47.6                    | 29.4               | 14.8                 | 6.2                | 2.0          | 100.0                |
| 2   | 9                                       | Insufficient office hours or office hours' conflict with the student timetable                                   | 39.4                    | 27.2               | 22.8                 | 8.6                | 2.0          | 100.0                |
| 3   | 14                                      | Student resorts to easier and faster alternatives of getting information instead of visiting the faculty member  | 36.6                    | 32.6               | 21.8                 | 6.0                | 2.2          | 99.2                 |
| 4   | 15                                      | Faculty member is not friendly   | 32.8                    | 24.6               | 22.8                 | 13.8               | 5.2          | 99.2                 |
| 5   | 16                                      | Student is not comfortable speaking with the faculty member  | 32.0                    | 30.0               | 23.2                 | 9.6                | 3.6          | 99.0                 |
| 6   | 24                                      | Student gets the desired information from the faculty member during or after the lecture                         | 29.4                    | 35.2               | 22.8                 | 9.2                | 2.4          | 99.0                 |
| 7   | 12                                      | Shortage of time for visiting the faculty member due to procrastination until exam day.                          | 28.8                    | 32.2               | 24.4                 | 9.8                | 3.8          | 99.0                 |
| 8   | 21                                      | Student is put off by faculty member's personality.  | 26.8                    | 30.2               | 26.0                 | 12.2               | 3.8          | 99.1                 |
| 9   | 8                                       | Faculty member has a lack of commitment to office hours  | 25.8                    | 28.4               | 22.0                 | 15.2               | 8.2          | 99.6                 |
| 10  | 26                                      | Student opts to participate in study groups and/or work collaboratively with other students to answer questions. | 25.6                    | 29.8               | 25.6                 | 13.0               | 5.2          | 99.2                 |
| 11  | 10                                      | Student perceives a barrier or a weakness between him/her and the faculty member                                 | 25.6                    | 29.0               | 27.0                 | 12.2               | 6.2          | 100.0                |
| 12  | 19                                      | Student dissatisfaction with the faculty member's teaching performance and usefulness of his/her office hours    | 23.6                    | 25.8               | 29.8                 | 13.4               | 6.0          | 98.6                 |
| 13  | 22                                      | Disliking and avoiding the course  | 23.4                    | 30.2               | 23.0                 | 16.8               | 6.0          | 99.4                 |
| 14  | 20                                      | Failure of faculty member to provide adequate assistance to the student  | 23.2                    | 26.4               | 28.6                 | 14.6               | 6.2          | 99.0                 |
| 14  | 4                                       | Student discouraged from attending office hours by the faculty   | 22.6                    | 23.6               | 26.0                 | 17.0               | 10.4         | 99.6                 |

**Table 7**  
**Reasons for Students' Reluctance to Attend Office Hours, Sorted in Descending Order**

| Ranking based on importance from students' perspectives | Cause number according to questionnaire | Cause   | Very strongly agree (%) | Strongly agree (%) | Moderately agree (%) | Slightly agree (%) | Disagree (%) | Total percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|-------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------|--------------|----------------------|
|   |   | member  |                         |                    |                      |                    |              |                      |
| 16  | 6                                       | Student's visit to the faculty member is not mandatory  | 21.4                    | 28.0               | 27.0                 | 12.6               | 10.6         | 99.4                 |
| 17  | 27                                      | Student's concern about hearing from classmates that he/she flatters the faculty member                   | 21.0                    | 17.4               | 20.6                 | 15.8               | 24.8         | 99.6                 |
| 18  | 25                                      | Student's laziness to visit the faculty member's office   | 19.6                    | 24.4               | 28.6                 | 19.2               | 7.6          | 99.4                 |
| 19  | 13                                      | Language barrier and lack of proficiency in English   | 18.4                    | 29.0               | 26.2                 | 14.8               | 10.6         | 99.0                 |
| 20  | 5                                       | Student's lack of awareness of the importance of office hours   | 16.2                    | 27.8               | 31.8                 | 15.2               | 8.6          | 99.6                 |
| 21  | 2                                       | Ease of course material   | 15.6                    | 25.0               | 30.6                 | 16.4               | 12.0         | 99.6                 |
| 22  | 23                                      | Student's lack of courage and motivation to visit the faculty member                                      | 15.0                    | 28.6               | 27.4                 | 19.6               | 8.0          | 98.6                 |
| 23  | 17                                      | Student's decision to rely on himself/herself   | 15.0                    | 25.6               | 31.8                 | 21.8               | 5.2          | 99.4                 |
| 24  | 11                                      | Student is unwelcome by the faculty member at office hours  | 14.8                    | 25.4               | 31.2                 | 14.8               | 12.6         | 98.8                 |
| 25  | 18                                      | Student does not want to bother the faculty member  | 11.4                    | 18.8               | 27.2                 | 22.8               | 18.8         | 99.0                 |
| 26  | 3                                       | Student does not understand the course material at all  | 11.2                    | 12.4               | 23.8                 | 24.0               | 28.2         | 99.6                 |
| 27  | 1                                       | Student's fear and shyness to reveal to the faculty member that he is not familiar with the subject area. | 7.8                     | 14.8               | 32.0                 | 19.6               | 25.8         | 100.0                |

If an instructor is friendly towards their students, the faculty member will engender confidence in his students. SQU sets standards and foundations to build relationships between students and faculty to create mutual respect. However, there should be programs to create awareness and guidance to the parties to clarify this relationship and encourage support.

Students' personalities had a lower impact than those of faculty members,

and were concentrated in several areas, foremost among which was the student's concern that he would be flattered by the faculty member (21.0%), followed by students being lazy about going to the office of the faculty member (19.6%). Students' fear of showing weakness to faculty members (7.8%) were the least of the reasons. However, the importance of this reason, which is sometimes a hidden cause and not disclosed by many students, cannot be underestimated. Faculty members often

do not think that the reluctance of the student to attend office hours is due to fear. Some students feel that attending office hours reveals to faculty members a poor understanding of material and an insufficient performance of duties, and this reflection might be reflected in the faculty member's assessment of them. In the study of Griffin et al. (2014), the researchers suggested that students' fear factor made them refrain from attending office hours.

In addition to the reasons presented by the questionnaire, 18 students (3.6% of 500) wrote in other reasons for their reluctance to attend office hours, most of which focused on faculty members. Some faculty members make it clear that they do not hold office hours as they find them burdensome in addition to their other obligations, which include teaching, scientific research, extra work assigned by the department, and service on college and university committees. The addition of office hours to this mix makes the faculty member feel overloaded. One solution might be to assign specific office hours to a teacher or training supervisor in the department to communicate with students and help collect queries that would then be answered by the faculty member. Such an action may increase the number of students attending office hours. Although one would expect such an approach to be successful, it does not confirm success for all cases (Robinson, Culver, Schertzer, Landschoot, & Hensel, 2014). Other reasons written in by students are a lack of commitment of the faculty member to office hours. The questionnaire forwarded a similar reason, and it received a high degree of approval (28.4%), meaning that the absence of a faculty member during office hours frustrates students, causing them to lose confidence in the faculty member and underscoring the importance of these hours. Another reason students added to the questionnaire is faculty members not

announcing their office hours on office doors and faculty members acting brusquely (intentionally or unintentionally) toward students. A faculty member may be busy with work or have to leave a student meeting quickly, which can lead to disappointment on the student's face.

### **Research Question 3: What statistical differences exist between students of different colleges when it comes to students attending office hours?**

The null hypothesis of this question was that there were no statistical significant differences at the level of significance ( $p < \alpha = 0.05$ ) between the average scores of students' reasons for attending office hours due to different colleges.

To answer this question, a *t*-test was used. The results of this test (See Table 8 in Appendix) indicate the emergence of statistically significant differences due to the reluctance of students to attend office hours in the College of Engineering and CASS. Most of these reasons are more supported by College of Engineering students than CASS students, which gives the impression that there are greater problems with College of Engineering students taking advantage of office hours. It was found that College of Engineering students are more likely to avoid faculty members' office hours than CASS students for the following reasons:

1. Engineering students are afraid to show weakness in front of a faculty member and may feel ashamed that they are not familiar with the scientific material.
2. In comparison to faculty members of the CASS, engineering faculty may sometimes treat students less kindly. Perhaps as a result of their humanitarian studies, CASS faculty may be more aware of the importance of friendliness between instructors and students. Griffin et al. (2014) emphasized the

- importance of an understanding of the fear factor among students that prevents them from taking advantage of office hours.
3. Engineering students may lack understanding of the material, and it is expected that this lack of understanding may make students more reluctant to attend office hours to increase their understanding of the study material, even though such an aim is one of the main purposes of office hours. The College of Engineering students see things to the contrary. Their lack of understanding makes them reluctant to visit the faculty member. This reluctance can be explained by the fact that some faculty members clearly indicate that the scientific material is easy and clear, which makes students ashamed to disclose their lack of understanding. This finding is in agreement with those of Griffin et al. (2014), who said that students are embarrassed to seek help if a faculty member points to the ease and clarity of the course.
  4. Engineering students' schedules may be overloaded, preventing them from attending office hours or office hours may be insufficient to accommodate all students. Another possibility is that students may procrastinate before test time, meaning that they run out time to review faculty members. This finding suggests that engineering students may struggle with the weight of the course material and is consistent with the findings of a study of students in mechanical engineering courses where researchers found a relationship between low attendance rates for school hours, limited study time, and lack of time to seek assistance (Schertzer et al., 2014).
  5. Engineering students may fail to attend office hours because they opt instead to study collectively, cooperating with one another to answer their questions. Students may also resort to other faster, easier means to get the course's information. Here, students referred to the benefits using the Internet and social networking sites where many scientific topics are presented or through which they can communicate with other students to find answers to their scientific problems and their inquiries on their courses. The results of a study by Robinson, Culver, Schertzer, Landschoot and Hensel (2014) indicated that students use the Internet or social networking sites to help them obtain information they need.
  6. Engineering students also indicated factors related to faculty members' personalities and classroom approaches impeded their motivation to take advantage of office hours. Students' lack of satisfaction with faculty members and perceptions of faculty members not providing adequate assistance to students were off-putting. In addition, faculty members perceived as having abrasive personalities caused students to avoid office hours. This finding suggests that faculty members have a great responsibility to remove barriers between them and their students. Griffin et al. (2014) believed that a good impression and useful information given by a faculty member can have a positive effect on increasing student attendance and use of office hours, thus enhancing student interaction with the course instructor.

**Research Question 4: What statistical differences exist between students of different genders when it comes to students attending office hours?**

The null hypothesis of this question was that there were no statistically significant difference between males and females when it comes to attending office hours. To answer this question and validate its hypothesis, a *t*-test was used, which in turn showed statistically significant differences between males and females (See Table 9 in Appendix). Males fear showing academic weakness and unfamiliarity with scientific material in front of faculty members. Male students also indicated a feeling of a barrier or weak relationships between them and faculty members. Males have problems that may affect their actions, including the feeling that faculty members do not show friendliness or act welcoming. Males in the current study indicated that faculty members seem more cooperative with and welcoming toward females. Other reasons given by male students for avoiding office hours were their lack of awareness of the presence of office hours and a lack of understanding of the importance of office hours. Therefore, the university should remain vigilant about spreading the culture of office hours and their importance to students and faculty members.

On the other hand, females were more likely to avoid office hours due to overloaded schedules, insufficient office hours, or office hours being inconsistent with their schedules. In addition, females indicated that they more often found answers to their questions during or after a faculty member's lecture. It was also noted that females are more interested in studying and follow-up. Therefore, they find that they do not need to attend office hours but get their questions answered by faculty members immediately after the lecture.

**Research Question 5: What statistical differences exist between students of different academic years when it comes to attending office hours?**

The null hypothesis of this question was that there was no statistically significant difference in avoidance of office hours between students in different academic years. To answer this question, an ANOVA was used and showed statistically significant differences due to the variable of the academic year in five areas (See Table 10 in Appendix). To find the area of significant difference, the Scheffe post hoc test was performed. The analysis showed that sixth-year students were more likely to avoid office hours due to procrastination (mean = 4.33), followed by first-year students (mean = 4.13) and fifth-year students (mean = 4.01). The frequency of student visits, where 4 = frequent visits and 1 = never visits were 3.70, 3.62, and 3.60, respectively, for third-, fourth-, and second-year students. Robinson, Culver, Schertzer, Landschoot and Hensel (2014) indicated a positive correlation between low attendance rates and student procrastination. The language barrier and the lack of proficiency of some students in English were more frequent reasons for avoiding office hours in first-year students (mean = 4.38), followed by third- (3.43), second- (3.38), fifth- (3.32), and fourth-year students (3.12). At SQU, students may be required to speak in English with faculty members or teachers may speak languages other than Arabic. If a student cannot express himself, communication may be hampered. The language factor may be one that affects SQU's first-year students who do not have the courage to express what they want in English and fear making errors in front of faculty members.

**Research Question 6: What statistical differences exist between students at different levels of academic achievement when it comes to students attending office hours?**

The null hypothesis of this question is that there are no statistically significant differences at the level of significance ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) between students attending office hours and their levels of academic achievement. To answer this question, an ANOVA was used and showed that there were statistically significant differences in students attending office hours based on levels of educational achievement (See Table 11 in Appendix). A Scheffé's post hoc test showed a statistically significant difference in students with a poor grade, perhaps due to their lack of understanding of the material at all or their weakness of mastery in the sciences. This finding perhaps reflects their lack of interest in and inability to understand the material. Their reluctance to attend office hours may stem from their fear of showing weakness to the instructor of the course. These students are followed by those with an excellent grade (3.30). These students indicated that their lack of understanding of the material makes them not review with the instructor of the course.

**Research Question 7: What statistical differences exist between students on academic probation, those who are not on probation, and those who have been on academic probation when it comes to students attending office hours?**

The hypothesis of this question was that there were no statistically significant differences at the level of significance ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) among students' reasons for avoiding attending office hours according to whether or not students are under academic observation. To answer this question an ANOVA was used. The post-hoc Scheffé's method showed that students under academic observation were more likely to be convinced to avoid office hours (mean = 2.94) (See

Table 12 in Appendix). This finding may be explained by the possibility that these students are sensitive to faculty members who may be intimidating. Students who had previously been under academic observation (mean = 2.41) were less likely to avoid office hours because of the impact of office hours on helping them to get off of academic probation. Indeed, some students who are under observation and have a desire to get off of academic probation frequent the office of the instructor of the course in order to help them and find ways to get out of academic probation. Students who have not previously been under academic observation supported this reason at an average of 2.54. Hence, the fifth hypothesis of the seventh question was achieved by a large percentage, where there were no significant differences in 26 reasons, which means the agreement of students on all the reasons included in the questionnaire in the reasons for their reluctance to attend office hours.

### Conclusion

In summary, it can be concluded that the main reasons behind the students' lack of interest in office hours were busy student timetables, conflicts between faculty office hours and students' timetables, and easier and faster ways of getting information than visiting faculty members. Additional reasons were related to faculty members' personalities and their discouraging attitudes toward attending office hours.

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that SQU adopts new strategies to encourage faculty members to maintain regular office hours that benefit students. University faculty should prepare lectures for students that engender respect instead of fear as it is essential that students come to recognize the importance of dealing positively with faculty members, so that they can draw maximum benefit from the university's learning opportunities. In addition, college administrators and the

SQU Department of Guidance should, at the beginning of each semester, deliver required programs aimed at raising student and faculty awareness of the benefits of office hours. In addition, SQU should hold seminars on office hours to allow faculty and students to discuss their importance and provide a forum in which both parties make suggestions so that office hours are productive for all involved.

The university should take a new approach for scheduling office hours. Tables should be used to determine a time that best fits within each faculty member's non-teaching hours. It also may be possible to allocate one day a week to office hours for each faculty member. Alternatively, office hours might be scheduled late in the school day after students have finished classes or early in the morning before classes have begun. It may also be beneficial for faculty members to allocate a portion of a course's graded requirements to attending office hours and discussing the subject at hand. These approaches will make every student keen to attend office hours.

To help faculty members modify the way they deal with students, faculty must be trained to conceptualize students as individuals who represent the future of the country. Such a mindset might help faculty members deal with students more effectively and with sincere feelings. Such a change would engender confidence between faculty members and students.

Finally, the use of modern methods of communication between students and faculty members, such as social networking sites or WhatsApp, would help improve the atmosphere of the university. Not only would communication between students and faculty members become more convenient, but the speed of communication would be improved.

The interpretation and dissemination of the results of this study is limited by a sample chosen from students of the Colleges of Engineering and Arts and Social Sciences. More research is needed in examining other samples from other SQU colleges.

#### **Declaration of conflicting interests**

The authors certify that they have no conflict of interest concerning the subject matter or materials discussed in the manuscript.

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## Appendix

**Table 8**  
**Causes for Students' Reluctance to Attend Office Hours Based on College**

| Cause number according to questionnaire | Cause  | Mean        |      | <i>t</i> -value | Degree of freedom ( <i>df</i> ) | <i>p</i> -value <sup>a</sup> |
|---|--|-------------|------|-----------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
|   |  | Engineering | Arts |                 |                                 |                              |
| 1                                       | Student's fear and shyness to reveal to the faculty member that he is not familiar with the subject area               | 2.73        | 2.45 | 2.56            | 498                             | 0.011                        |
| 3                                       | Student does not understand the course material at all   | 2.87        | 2.22 | 5.60            | 496                             | 0.000                        |
| 6                                       | Student's visit to the faculty member is not mandatory   | 3.26        | 3.49 | -2.14           | 495                             | 0.033                        |
| 7                                       | Overloaded student timetable   | 4.25        | 4.04 | 2.41            | 498                             | 0.016                        |
| 9                                       | Insufficient office hours or office hours conflict with the student's timetable  | 4.04        | 3.83 | 2.30            | 498                             | 0.022                        |
| 12                                      | Student's shortage of time for visiting the faculty member due to procrastination until exam day.                      | 4.02        | 3.44 | 6.07            | 493                             | 0.000                        |
| 14                                      | Students resort to other easier and faster alternatives for getting information instead of visiting the faculty member | 4.19        | 3.74 | 5.03            | 494                             | 0.000                        |
| 18                                      | Student does not want to bother the faculty member   | 2.63        | 2.99 | -3.17           | 493                             | 0.002                        |
| 19                                      | Student dissatisfaction with the faculty member's teaching performance and usefulness of his/her office hours          | 3.70        | 3.26 | 4.21            | 491                             | 0.000                        |
| 20                                      | Failure of faculty member to provide adequate assistance to the student  | 3.57        | 3.36 | 2.01            | 493                             | 0.045                        |
| 21                                      | Student is put off by faculty member's personality.  | 3.78        | 3.51 | 2.75            | 493                             | 0.006                        |
| 22                                      | Student dislikes and avoids the course.  | 3.59        | 3.38 | 1.98            | 495                             | 0.049                        |
| 24                                      | Student gets the desired information from the faculty member during or after the lecture                               | 3.70        | 3.92 | -2.38           | 493                             | 0.018                        |
| 26                                      | Student opts to participate in study groups and/or work collaboratively with other students to answer questions.       | 3.69        | 3.48 | 2.02            | 494                             | 0.043                        |

<sup>a</sup>*p*-values < 0.05 were considered significant

**Table 9**  
**Causes for Students' Reluctance to Attend Office Hours Based on Gender**

| Cause number according to questionnaire | Cause  | Mean |        | <i>t</i> -value | Degree of freedom ( <i>df</i> ) | <i>p</i> -value <sup>a</sup> |
|---|--|------|--------|-----------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
|   |  | Male | Female |                 |                                 |                              |
| 1                                       | Student's fear and shyness of revealing to the faculty member that he is not familiar with the subject area. | 2.88 | 2.39   | 4.48            | 498                             | 0.00                         |
| 3                                       | Student does not understand the course material  | 2.57 | 2.40   | 2.88            | 496                             | 0.004                        |

**Table 9**  
**Causes for Students' Reluctance to Attend Office Hours Based on Gender**

| Cause number according to questionnaire | Cause   | Mean |        | <i>t</i> -value | Degree of freedom ( <i>df</i> ) | <i>p</i> -value <sup>a</sup> |
|---|---|------|--------|-----------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
|   |   | Male | Female |                 |                                 |                              |
| 5                                       | Student's lack of awareness of the importance of office hours   | 3.50 | 3.13   | 3.52            | 496                             | 0.000                        |
| 7                                       | Overloaded student timetable  | 4.03 | 4.22   | -2.02           | 498                             | 0.044                        |
| 9                                       | Insufficient office hours or office hours conflict with the student's timetable                                 | 3.78 | 4.04   | -2.69           | 498                             | 0.007                        |
| 10                                      | Student feels the presence of a barrier and weakness of the relationship between him/her and the faculty member | 3.71 | 3.45   | 2.42            | 498                             | 0.016                        |
| 24                                      | Student gets the desired information from the faculty member during or after the lecture                        | 3.55 | 3.99   | -4.69           | 493                             | 0.000                        |

<sup>a</sup>*p*-values < 0.05 were considered significant

**Table 10**  
**Causes for Students' Reluctance to Attend Office Hours Based on Academic Year**

| Cause number according to questionnaire | Cause  | Sum of squares | Degree of freedom ( <i>df</i> ) | <i>F</i> -value | <i>p</i> -value <sup>a</sup> |
|---|--|----------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|
| 12                                      | Students' shortage of time for visiting faculty members due to procrastination until exam day.                         | 15.113         | 5,461                           | 2.552           | 0.027                        |
| 13                                      | Language barrier and lack of proficiency in English  | 18.921         | 5,460                           | 2.507           | 0.030                        |
| 14                                      | Students resort to other easier and faster alternatives for getting information instead of visiting the faculty member | 15.926         | 5,461                           | 3.131           | 0.009                        |
| 19                                      | Student dissatisfaction with the faculty member's teaching performance and usefulness of his/her office hours          | 15.061         | 5,458                           | 2.238           | 0.050                        |
| 21                                      | Student is put off by the faculty member's personality   | 19.077         | 5,460                           | 3.078           | 0.010                        |

<sup>a</sup>*p*-values < 0.05 were considered significant

**Table 11**  
**Causes for Students' Reluctance to Attend Office Hours Based on Academic Standing**

| Cause number according to questionnaire | Cause   | Sum of squares | Degree of freedom ( <i>df</i> ) | <i>F</i> -value | <i>p</i> -value <sup>a</sup> |
|---|---|----------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|
| 3                                       | Student does not understand the course material | 20.773         | 4,447                           | 2.944           | 0.020                        |

<sup>a</sup>*p*-values < 0.05 were considered significant

**Table 12**  
**Causes of Students' Reluctance to Attend Office Hours Based on Academic Probation**

| Cause number according to questionnaire | Cause   | Sum of squares | Degree of freedom ( <i>df</i> ) | <i>F</i> -value | <i>p</i> -value <sup>a</sup> |
|---|---|----------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|
| 4                                       | Students discouraged from attending office hours by faculty members | 9.855          | 2,489                           | 3.034           | 0.049                        |

<sup>a</sup>*p*-values < 0.05 were considered significant