

Making the Most Out of Office Hours

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Teaching and Learning Services

Why Have Office Hours?

Office hours can be frustrating. We're required to have them, but they often go unattended. We're going to unpack office hours a little and then look at approaches that you might want to use to increase student use of this valuable part of the week.

First things first, let's remember that office hours have been around, largely unchanged since before email. If you had a question for your instructor then, you had two choices: pick up the phone or knock on their door. Today, many things can be dealt with via email, so it's no wonder that we don't see some students. They just don't need to come in.

Should we give up on office hours then? Probably not. Research does show that office-hour visits have a positive impact on academic performance (for example see Guerrero & Rod, 2013). Some of the reasons that students may come to office hours include:

- They have a problem with something like a concept, assignment, or understanding their grade on an assessment.
- They are really interested in a concept or even a career path.
- They want support in expanding an idea for an assignment.
- Their classmate's notes just aren't adequate to help them make up for a missed class.
- They want to build a relationship for future study or recommendation.

You can help students realize the benefits of office hours and the best way to use them by providing them with some guidelines like the ones found here: <https://students.ubc.ca/ubclife/approach-office-hours>.

Students may be intimidated by office hours: Are they inadequate for not understanding? Are they interrupting you? Do they really need the help? (Barbacar, Gomez, & Rodriguez, 2018)



Resources

Barbacar, D., Gomez, E., & Rodriguez, A. (2018). Chemistry student attitudes and utilization of office hours. *CUNY Academic Works*. https://academicworks.cuny.edu/ny_pubs/324/

Guerrero, M. & Rod, A. B. (2013). Engaging in office hours: A study of student-faculty interaction and academic performance. *Journal of Political Science Education*, 9(4). <https://doi.org/10.1080/15512169.2013.835554>

Khanum, M. K. (2019). How to approach office hours. *UBC Life Blog*. <https://students.ubc.ca/ubclife/approach-office-hours>

Li, L. & Pitts, J.P. (2009). Does it really matter? Using virtual office hours to enhance student-faculty interaction. *Journal of Information Systems Education*, 20(2), 175-185. <https://www.learntechlib.org/p/105681/>



OFFICE OF TEACHING AND
LEARNING SERVICES

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Strategies to Encourage Attendance

Discuss the purpose and value of office hours in class.

You can do this on the first day, but also mention it throughout the semester. Saying things like “This might be something that you want to come talk about in my office hours” can help let students know that it’s okay if they want to come see you.

Hold some of your hours in a neutral location.

Some instructors meet students in public seating areas around campus. While this doesn’t create privacy for a confidential discussion (although neither does a shared sessional office), it can help to make students feel more comfortable than they would going into your office.

Schedule a “course centre.”

Create a regular booking for an unused classroom on campus and let your students know that they can come and work there. You’ll be around if they have questions, but they can also come and discuss things with each other, or just use the quiet space for the hour.

Make booking a meeting easy.

It can be discouraging if you’re emailing back and forth with a student in order to figure out a meeting time. Using a third-party app like Calendly (<https://calendly.com/>) can let students book meetings easily and they show up in your regular calendar. You can also set restrictions on how much advance notice you need on the meeting, the length of the meeting, and automatically include the location or allow the student to pick from some pre-set options.

Hold office hours immediately after class.

This isn’t always feasible but when possible, it can help with uptake.

Hold online office hours.

Students might not be around campus when you’re holding your hours so why not give them a chance to meet virtually. Li and Pitts (2009) found that having a virtual option increased student satisfaction. You can use the chat or video tool in Collaborate to conduct the meetings, which also allows you to share screens and record what you’re doing, or you can use another tool like Google Meet.

