Fit to Practice or Flatlining on Compliance? The impact of email marketing on student engagement with clinical compliance requirements.

REBECCA LEVER [1]
Southern Cross University, Queensland, Australia

Abstract

Work-integrated learning (WIL) is essential for preparing health graduates and sustaining Australia's future workforce, yet low compliance with Fit to Practice (FTP) requirements threatens to disrupt clinical placements. This study investigates whether a customised email marketing campaign can improve student engagement with FTP obligations in the Faculty of Health (FOH) at Southern Cross University (SCU). Drawing on a 2024 dataset, the research employed a quantitative design using descriptive and inferential statistics. Following the implementation of the email marketing campaign, compliance rates increased to 82.5%, with 10.96% of students granted extensions and only 6.54% remaining non-compliant. While demographic factors such as age and generation showed no significant association with FTP status, academic performance emerged as a stronger predictor and year level also correlated significantly. Findings support the efficacy of personalised, strategically timed email campaigns in improving engagement, aligning with literature that emphasises customisation and optimisation as critical drivers of digital marketing success. The research underscores the value of targeted communication strategies in mitigating placement cancellations and recommends continued investment in email marketing to enhance compliance and safeguard WIL viability.

Keywords: compliance, email marketing, student engagement, work-integrated learning.

Introduction

Work-integrated learning (WIL) is strategically important in providing authentic clinical experiences for students, meeting accreditation requirements, and securing the future national health workforce. Over 16% of all students studying for a non-school qualification are in a health discipline, amounting to over 350,000 students who require multiple clinical placements (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2023). Universities Australia (UA, 2022), the peak body for the higher education sector, has invariably called for increased WIL opportunities to expand Australia's health workforce. Modelling reveals a need for over 300,000 additional workers by 2026 and a projected shortfall of 85,000 nurses alone (UA, 2022). Before attending placement, students must be deemed "fit to practice" (FTP) by satisfying discipline-specific vaccination requirements, verification checks and mandatory training obligations. Nursing, Midwifery and some allied health programs, such as

[1] Corresponding author: rebecca.lever@scu.edu.au

Occupational Therapy and Speech Pathology, are subject to the most extensive compliance requirements at SCU, (see Table 1). However, many students find the FTP process problematic, either missing their deadline or disengaging entirely. This has led to considerable placement cancellation costs and reputational damage for universities, workforce issues for placement providers, and course progression disruptions for students and ultimately threatens the sustainability and feasibility of WIL delivery.

Table 1

SCU-mandated Fit to Practice requirements for Nursing and Midwifery.

FTP Type	**Check**
Verification checks	National Police Certificate
	Working with Children Check
	WIL Statement
Vaccinations	Measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR)
	Diphtheria, tetanus and acellular pertussis (dTPa)
	Varicella
	Hepatitis B
	Influenza
Training courses	First Aid
	Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR)
	Hand Hygiene

Note. Source: Adapted from SCU n.d.

This study is situated within the Faculty's WIL Unit, which oversees approximately 5,000 clinical placements annually across multiple health disciplines. SCU has invested significant resources in ensuring students gain clinical experience. Industry partnerships have been built, robust governance developed, and an administrative workforce, has been established to placements. Yet consistently low compliance rates by established deadlines compelled the faculty to implement a practice-based operational intervention in 2024 to improve engagement with the FTP process (see Appendix A). Using marketing tactics such as personalisation, optimisation, and refining the cadence of send times, the campaign aimed to exploit email as one of the most effective, pervasive and cost-efficient communication channels

within higher education (Dawkins, 2019). This study contributes to WIL practice scholarship by examining how targeted operational interventions can enhance student compliance with mandatory pre-placement requirements. Using a 2024 dataset of student FTP compliance at the established deadline, the research investigates the extent to which a customised email campaign can positively impact FTP completion rates for students enrolled in WIL units at SCU.

Literature Review

A literature review was conducted across peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings and trade publications issued between 2017-2024.

Student Engagement with Fitness to Practice

Assessing fitness to enter professional practice is a major task for universities, and the pressure to streamline to gain management-driven efficiencies and competitive advantage has necessitated the transition to a highly systemised process with tight timeframes (O'Connell et al., 2023). A study of student and clinical staff observations found that difficulties obtaining vaccination evidence, confusion over placement databases and the complexity of state health department requirements led students to disengage with FTP (Miller-Rosser et al., 2022). This is echoed by Rollins and Venville (2023), whose study on field education placements found that the breadth of regulatory and accreditation mandates substantially impacted students' ability to meet requirements. The literature presents students as overwhelmed and unable to navigate new systems and processes, leading to high anxiety and reduced confidence (Miller-Rosser et al., 2022; Rollins & Venville, 2023). Indeed, Rollins and Venville (2023, p.10) argue that the term 'fit to practice' is evidence of a power imbalance where some students are deemed "more suitable, more ready, and more deserving than others". While literature suggests that responsibility for compliance rests on the student, historically low FTP rates are a testament to a dysfunctional system that has resulted in universities grappling to resolve student disengagement (Miller-Rosser et al., 2022; Rollins & Venville, 2023).

Email as Marketing Tool

Researchers champion email as one of the most pervasive tools for targeted messaging and building lasting audience relationships (Nobile & Cantoni, 2023; Sams et al., 2023). It is eulogised as a "critical outreach tool" (Chen et al., 2023, p.400), "one of the cornerstones of digital marketing" (Páramo, 2022, p.20), an "important staple" (Thomas et al., 2022, p.377), and an "indispensable instrument" (Rabab'ah et al., 2024, p.12). Research points to the high return on investment (ROI), its broad audience reach and potential to provide real-time measurement of quantifiable impact as evidence of its efficacy (Chen et al., 2023; Dawkins, 2019; Nobile & Cantoni, 2023). However, Dawkins (2019) notes that email opening rates pose a significant challenge to marketers. Kumar and Salo's (2018, p.535) work investigates the psychology of human attentiveness, arguing that digital saturation has led to a "scarcity of attention". This is supported by Paulo et al. (2022), who found that increasing competition for attention led to persistently poor email click-to-open rates (CTOR) of between 25-41%. The

prevailing theme within the literature is how digital marketers ensure emails stand out in a crowded market (Defau et al., 2023; Kumar & Salo, 2018; Thomas et al., 2022).

Effectiveness of Email in Higher Education

Dawkins (2019) examined the use of mass email across 19 Australian universities and laments the lack of strategy compared to industry. This opinion is shared by Sams et al. (2023), who argue that email campaigns in American institutions are singularly focussed on pushing information to, rather than engaging with, students. Yet regardless of how well universities exploit email marketing, Gilani's (2024) quantitative study across 10 UK institutions revealed that email consistently emerged as the channel students most frequently checked for university information, despite social media diversions. While Miller-Rosser et al. (2022) caution against the assumption that most students are digital natives, much of the literature presumes university students to be Generation X and Z who naturally adopt and master multiple online technologies (Agarwal et al., 2022; Munsch, 2021). Yet Munsch's (2021, p.22) qualitative study defined students as "distracted multi-taskers", adept at avoiding messaging designed to influence behaviour. Agarwal et al. (2022) further suggest that students will decide whether to engage with an email based on their perception of how much intellectual effort is required to read and act.

Customisation of Messages

The benefits of customisation are discussed widely across the literature, with tailored messaging no longer a 'nice to have' but an 'expectation' of audiences (Nobile & Cantoni, 2023; Páramo, 2022). Along with bespoke learning opportunities and individualised support services, studies within the university context have shown that students also expect personalised communication (Purcarea, 2023; Sams et al., 2023). A seminal study by Sahni et al. (2018) emerged from the field of behavioural marketing to reveal that including the recipient's name in the subject line increased CTOR by 20%. Subsequent studies have found that recipients react positively to seeing their name, triggering a cue to open and engage with the email, at virtually no cost to the sender (Filipczak-Białkowska, 2017; Paulo et al., 2022). Another study of over 660 emails saw improved performance metrics for personalised messages that gave the organisation a more "human tone" (Nobile & Cantoni, 2023, p.6). However, there is literature that disputes Sahni et al.'s (2018) findings, positing instead that this tactic is now common practice among marketers and has decreased impact (Defau & Zauner, 2023; Nobile & Cantoni, 2023). Recent research points to other approaches to attract attention, including using language that communicates a sense of urgency and promotes a fear of missing out (Rabab'ah et al., 2024; Sams et al., 2023).

Other Marketing Tactics

Messages sent by someone who is immediately recognisable due to their reputation, position, expertise or credentials can improve metrics, provoke action and sway opinions (Defau et al., 2023; Paulo et al., 2022; Munsch, 2021; Rabab'ah et al., 2024). The importance

of layout is emphasised in studies that found copy should be personalised, but concise, key information placed in the top third of the page, enough white space provided around links, and always optimised for mobile devices (Chen et al., 2023; Dawkins, 2019; Kumar & Salo, 2018). There have also been multiple studies that identified emails with emojis and colours in the subject line require more cognitive effort to ignore, although researchers concede that the impact on CTOR may wane if overexploited (Dawkins, 2019; Filipczak-Białkowska, 2017; Páramo, 2022). The cadence of emails – down to the day of the week and time of day – has been forensically investigated within the marketing industry and across academic literature (Chen et al., 2023; Paulo et al., 2022; Thomas et al., 2022). The increasing scope of marketing tactics and the economic opportunities available to organisations that execute successful campaigns has also generated increasing research on performance measurement to provide insight into ROI, understanding of audience preferences and informed decision-making (Dawkins, 2019; Defau et al., 2023; Páramo, 2022; Purcarea, 2023).

Research Design

Research Purpose and Method

This research aims to explore the impact of a new email marketing campaign on student compliance and make inferences across variables (Saunders & Lewis, 2017). The decision to use a quantitative research method was based on the strength of this approach in objectivity, statistical reliability, and generalisation, to validate future decision-making and investment of resources (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Email campaign

The Customer Relationship Management system Microsoft Dynamics 365 provided the WIL Unit with access to comprehensive and contextual student information that allowed for granular data segmentation by discipline, course, and year level and enabled opportunities for categorisation by FTP status. The campaign comprised a scheduled sequence of weekly emails commencing 12 weeks prior to the FTP deadline (see Appendix A) with content tailored to each student's progress, and dynamic insertion of unit-specific information and deadlines. This represented a deliberate shift away from previous ad hoc practices that relied on repeated, individualised follow-up by staff.

Subject lines were concise, typically five to seven words, and incorporated actionable verbs or the student's preferred name to attract attention, while avoiding language associated with spam filters. Messaging was intentionally clear and directive, with prominent calls to action outlining required tasks, deadlines and consequences of non-compliance, alongside information about available support pathways. Emails were concise and optimised for readability, with sufficient white space and clearly separated clickable links to support engagement across devices. Messages were scheduled early in the week between 9.00am and 12.00pm, aligning with business hours and staff availability to respond to student enquiries and in step with best practice industry standards as outlined in Figures 1 and 2. Basic engagement

metrics were available, with the campaign achieving an average email open rate of 78.75% across courses. More detailed metrics, such as click-through rates, were not captured due to CRM system limitations.

Figure 1

Optimal email send days.

Figure 2

Optimal email send times.

Note. Adapted from *The ultimate list of email marketing stats for 2023,* by HubSpot, 2023.

Data Source

Despite the suitability of a survey to answer this research question, university students provide low survey response rates of 20-30%, which Fass-Holmes (2022, p.56) posits is likely due to "survey fatigue". However, the benefits of using secondary data stored in Sonia – a placement database used to record compliance – were clear. The data was already collected, quality-controlled by specialists, easily exported, and permission had been granted. This project was conducted as a low-risk operational evaluation within an administrative context and, as such, formal human research ethics approval was not sought. All data were de-identified prior to analysis, securely stored, and analysed and reported in aggregate form only, with no identifiable student information accessed or disclosed.

The dataset was captured at the unit FTP deadline and comprised entirely nominal data. Age, Grade Point Average (GPA) and year level variables were exported from the student system (TechnologyOne Student Management) and added to the dataset before analysis to allow for higher levels of measurement. These variables seen in Table 2, were included to explore associations between FTP compliance and digital literacy (age), self-regulation (GPA), and familiarity with university systems (year level).

Table 2

Variables in the 2024 dataset.

Variable	**Observation**
Demographic	Gender – Female / Male / Unspecified
	Age
	Generation – Boomer / Generation X / Millennial / Generation Y
	Campus – Coffs Harbour / Gold Coast / Lismore / Online
	Liability – Commonwealth Supported Place (CSP) / fee-paying / international onshore
	Award – undergraduate / postgraduate
	Course and unit (see Table 3)
FTP	FTP status – True / Extension / False
	FTP %
	Vaccinations – MMR / dTPa / Varicella / Hepatitis B / Influenza
	Training courses – First Aid / CPR / Hand Hygiene

Variable	Observation
	Approved extension to the deadline – True / Extension / False

Furthermore, the FTP percentage variable was constructed by recoding multiple nominal compliance indicators into a single composite measure representing the proportion of completed FTP requirements at the deadline. Partial denotes students who had met some, but not all, FTP requirements and had an approved extension in place for at least one outstanding item. As the data were captured at a single deadline point, the analysis is cross-sectional, and any association with the email campaign is inferred rather than directly measured over time.

Sample

A census of the eligible population was used to select all students who were part of the new email campaign and whose compliance was verified in the standard FTP process. Of the 3,541 students enrolled in a WIL unit in 2024, 2,692 were included in the sample. Students from Social Work and Community Welfare were excluded due to their omission from the new email campaign. The sample represented 31 units across 16 courses (see Table 3).

Table 3

Courses and associated unit(s) included in the sample.

Course	Code	Unit
Bachelor of Biomedical Science	BBioMedSci	BIOL3002
Bachelor of Clinical Exercise Physiology	BClinExPhys	HLTH3015
Bachelor of Clinical Science (Osteopathy)	BClinSci(OstSt)	OSTP2004 / OSTP2010 / OSTP3004
Bachelor of Exercise Science and Psychology	BExScPsychSc	SPRT3001
Bachelor of Health Science (Health and Lifestyle)	BHSc(HlthLifest)	NATM3005 / NATM2004
Bachelor of Midwifery	BMid	MIDW1006 / MIDW2015 / MIDW3008

Course	Code	Unit
Bachelor of Nursing	BN	NURS2004 / NURS2005 / NURS2014 / NURS2018 / NURS3009 / NURS3010
Bachelor of Occupational Therapy	BOccThy	OCCU2014 / OCCU2015
Bachelor of Speech Pathology	BSpPath	SPCH1004 / SPCH2016 / SPCH3010
Graduate Certificate in Diabetes Education Management	GradCertDEM	PBHL6001
Master of Integrative Medicine	MIntegrativeMe	HLTH6006
Master of Nursing	MN	NURS5013
Master of Naturopathic Medicine	MNatMed	NATM5010 / NATM6007 / NATM6009
Master of Osteopathic Medicine	MOstMed	OSTP6004
Master of Professional Psychology	MProfPsych	PSYC6007
Shared Unit		PBHL3001

Data Analysis

A descriptive analysis was performed using frequency distributions and measures of central tendency to understand the data distribution and estimate the centre. Inferential statistics were used to draw conclusions and make predictions about the larger student population based on the sample (Saunders & Lewis, 2017). A Chi-Square Test of Independence with a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ was performed to determine whether FTP status was related to categorical variables such as gender, generation, liability category, course, award and year level. A Spearman rank correlation test was performed to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between the ratio variables of FTP percentage and GPA and age.

Limitations

The data source was collected for a different purpose, has no psychometric variables and therefore offers no opportunity to analyse student opinions. The study is limited to one Faculty at one regional university, and the sample was selective. The study did not include causal analysis such as regression, which would have assisted in identifying the underlying causes of non-compliance. As a result, while improved FTP compliance was observed in the

year of the email campaign, causality cannot be definitively attributed to the campaign, and other unmeasured factors may have contributed to the outcomes.

Results

Findings from the analysis of the quantitative dataset are organised by variable and presented in order of significance to the research question.

Aggregate FTP

82.50% of students were assessed as compliant by their FTP deadline. 10.96% of students had partially met requirements with an approved extension in place, while 6.54% were not compliant by the due date (see Figure 3). When examining compliance rates, the majority of students across eight demographic variables were compliant (see Table 4).

Figure 3

Students by FTP status.

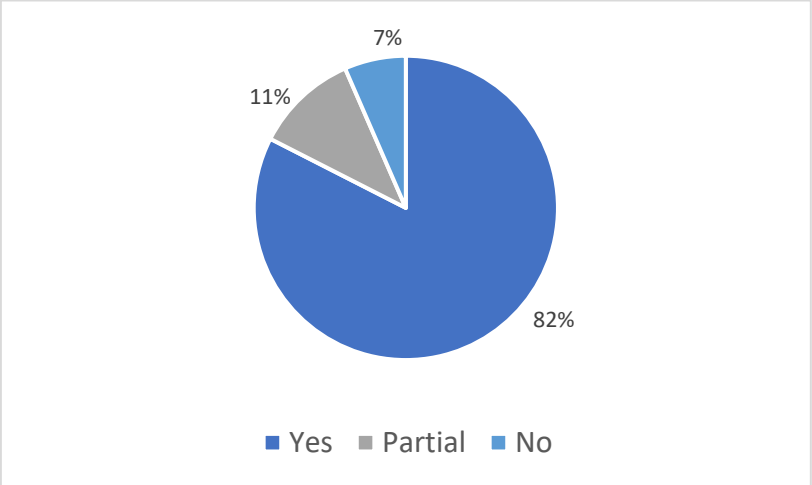


Table 4

Variables where compliance numbers are higher than non-compliance (excluding course).

Variable	Observation	Student Totals		
		Yes	Partial	No
Gender	Female	1895	242	152
	Male	326	53	24
Generation	Boomer	20	0	2
	Generation X	179	35	17
	Generation Z	1246	147	103
	Millennials	776	113	54
Campus	Coffs Harbour	346	49	21

Variable	Observation	Student Totals		
		Yes	Partial	No
	Gold Coast	1521	188	134
	Lismore	246	34	16
	Online	108	24	5
Liability	Commonwealth Supported Place	1923	230	154
	Australian Fee Paying	14	7	2
	International	281	58	20
Award	Undergraduate	2000	234	166
	Postgraduate	221	61	10
Year Level	First Year	497	226	107
	Second Year	978	52	47
	Third Year	704	17	21
	Fourth Year	42	0	1
GPA bands	0-3.99	233	39	47
	4-4.99	691	86	64
	5-5.99	997	135	49
	6-6.99	297	34	9
	7	1	1	

As indicated in Table 5, although there were units where the number of compliant observations was lower than that of non- or partially compliant totals, this was limited to four from 31 units included in the sample.

Table 5

FTP status by course and unit.

Variable	Observation	Year	Yes	Partial	No
Course					
BBioMedSci	BIOL3	3	22	1	1
BClinExPhys	HLTH3	3	21		1
BClinSci(OstSt)	OSTP2A	2	1	3	
	OSTP2B	2	26	23	9
	OSTP3	3	39	1	2
BExScPsychSc	SPRT3	3	28		1
BHSc(HlthLifest)	NATM3	3	2	7	3
	NATM2	2	2	1	
BMid	MIDW1	1	7	4	2
	MIDW2	2	4	1	
	MIDW3	3	3	1	1

Variable	Observation	Year	Yes	Partial	No
BN	NURS1	1	89	99	46
	NURS2A	2	374	33	32
	NURS2B	2	26	1	7
	NURS2C	2	374	33	32
	NURS3A	3	319	8	11
	NURS3B	3	77		
BOccThy	OCCU2A	2	68	29	2
	OCCU2B	2	113	11	5
BSpPath	SPCH1	1	93	5	2
	SPCH2	2	25	5	
	SPCH3	3	40		3
GradCertDEM	PBHL6	2	32		2
MIntegrativeMe	HLTH6	2	31	2	
MN	NURS5	1	168		1
MNatMed	NATM5	1	93	14	3
	NATM6A	2	14	7	2
	NATM6B	2	47	3	4
MOstMed	OSTP6	2	33		1
MProfPsych	PSYC6	2	21		
Undergraduate Shared Unit	PBHL3	3	29	3	3

FTP and Age Group

FTP and Age

A frequency distribution for compliant students by age was produced using five class intervals aligned to the generational boundaries (see Table 6) identified by Dimmock (2019). These are further discussed in Appendix B. This distribution revealed that the highest number (55.65%) of observations were within the age range of 19-27 years, and the vast majority (90.59%) were between 19-43 years old. Non-compliant data showed little variance to the compliant distribution. An almost identical percentage (55.68%) of students fell in the same age range as most compliant students, and there were only small percentage point differences between compliant and non-compliant students in the remaining age ranges (see Table 7).

Table 6

Frequency distribution for compliant students by age.

Upper Limits	Frequency	Percentage
18	10	0.45%
27	1236	55.65%
43	776	34.94%
59	179	8.06%
73	20	0.90%

Table 7

Frequency distribution for non-compliant students by age.

Upper Limit	Frequency	Percentage
18	5	2.84%
27	98	55.68%
43	54	30.68%
59	17	9.66%
73	2	1.14%

Ages plotted on a histogram (Figures 4, 5 and 6) showed a non-normal data distribution for each compliance status with right-skewed data clusters.

Figure 4

Distribution of compliant students by age.

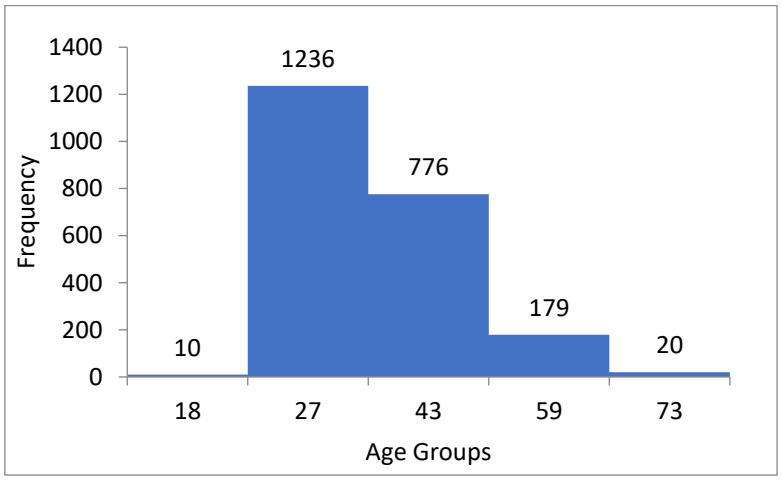


Figure 5

Distribution of non-compliant students by age.

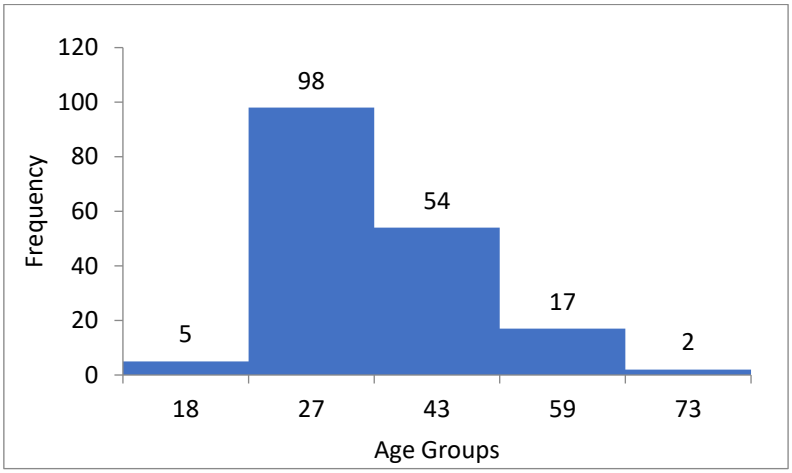
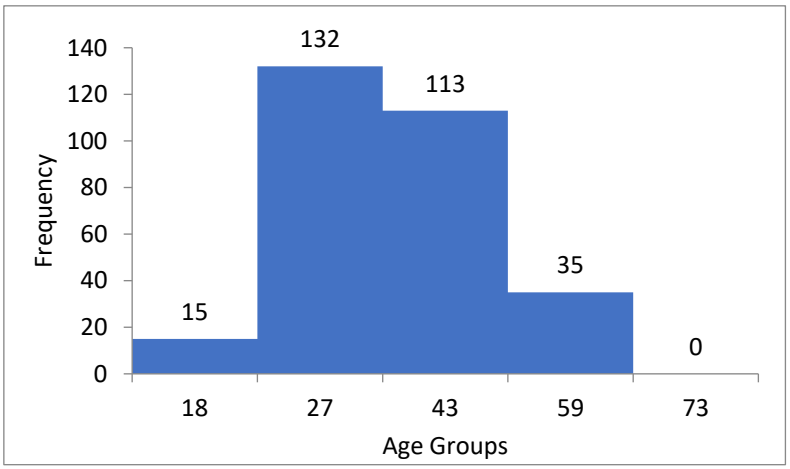


Figure 6

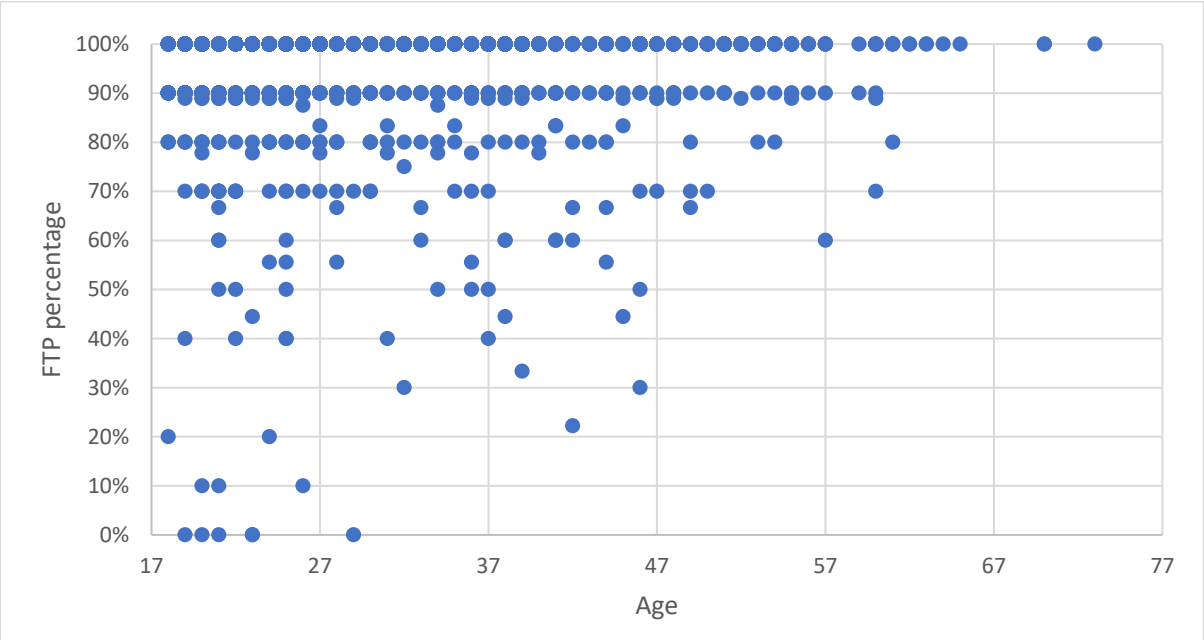
Distribution of partially compliant students by age.



The median was therefore considered the best measure of central tendency for the non-normal distributions of data, which was 26, 25 and 28 years old for compliant, non-compliant and partially compliant students. To visualise whether there was a relationship between the two continuous variables, a scatterplot was created (Figure 7). Although the data points are spread out, a trend in the data still exists, showing that the FTP percentage decreased as student age increased. Therefore, a weak negative correlation exists between the two variables. A Spearman's rank-order correlation was used to measure the degree of association between these two variables, as this non-parametric test does not assume a normal distribution of the data (Saunders & Lewis, 2017). A one-tailed test revealed a very weak negative correlation between FTP percentage and student age, which was not statistically significant ($r(2690) = -0.021$, $p = 0.142$).

Figure 7

FTP percentage and age.

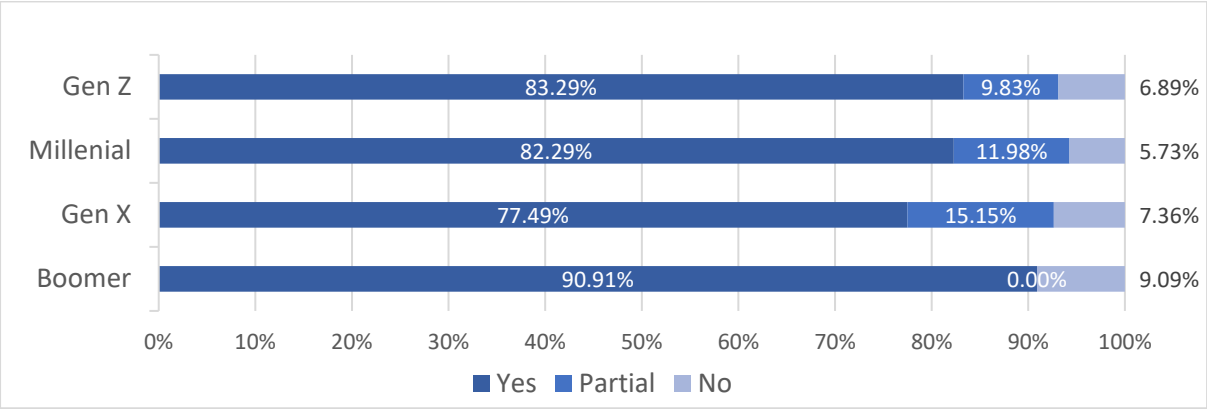


FTP and Generation

According to generational definitions posited by the Pew Research Centre (see Appendix B), an analysis of the data did not yield clear findings. Boomers had the highest compliance rate at 90.91% yet conversely, the largest non-compliance rate at just over 9%. As seen in Figure 8, Generation X had the lowest compliance rate (77.49%), with 7.36% missing the compliance deadline. Millennials had the second-lowest compliance rates (82.29%) and the lowest non-compliance numbers at 5.73%. Generation Y had the second-highest compliance rates (83.29%) and the second-lowest number of non-compliant students by the deadline (6.89%). A Chi-Square Test of Independence was performed to determine whether the association between the categorical variables of generation and compliance was comparable with the results obtained from correlation testing. This revealed no significant association between generation and FTP status (chi-square = 11.463, df = 6, p = 0.071).

Figure 8

FTP status by generation.



FTP and GPA

Table 8 shows a frequency distribution of compliance status by GPA using classifications defined by SCU and further explained in Appendix C. This distribution revealed that the highest number (44.95%) of observations were within the GPA range 5-5.99, and over three-quarters of observations had a GPA of between 4-5.99. The highest number (37.87%) of non-compliant students had a lower GPA (4-4.99) than the largest compliant cohort (see Table 9). Compared to the 76.1% of compliant students who had a GPA in 4-5.99 bracket, just over two-thirds of non-compliant students were in this range. The total number of non-compliant students with a GPA below 3.99 was also 17.35 percentage points higher than the compliant cohort.

Table 8

Frequency distribution for compliant students by GPA.

Upper Limits	Frequency	Percentage
2.99	37	1.67%
3.99	195	8.79%
4.99	691	31.15%
5.99	997	44.95%
6.99	297	13.39%
7	1	0.05%

Table 9

Frequency distribution for non-compliant students by GPA.

Upper Limits	Frequency	Percentage
2.99	28	16.57%
3.99	19	11.24%
4.99	64	37.87%
5.99	49	28.99%
6.99	9	5.33%

Histograms (Figures 9, 10 and 11) showed non-normal data distribution for each FTP status. Distributions for students who were compliant by the deadline or had an extension in place were left-skewed, and the non-compliant distribution was bimodal. The median GPA across the sample was 5.00 and 5.05, 4.32 and 4.99 for compliant, non-compliant and partially compliant students.

Figure 9

Distribution of compliant students by GPA.

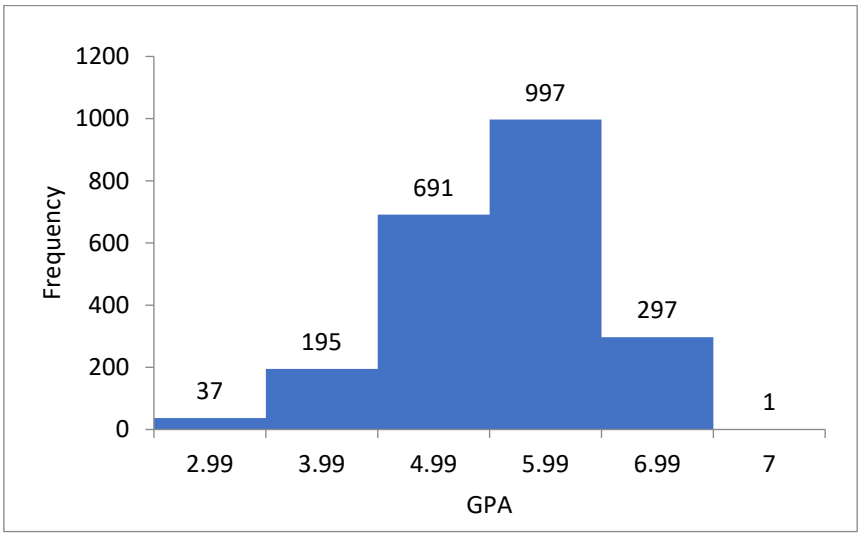


Figure 10

Distribution of non-compliant students by GPA.

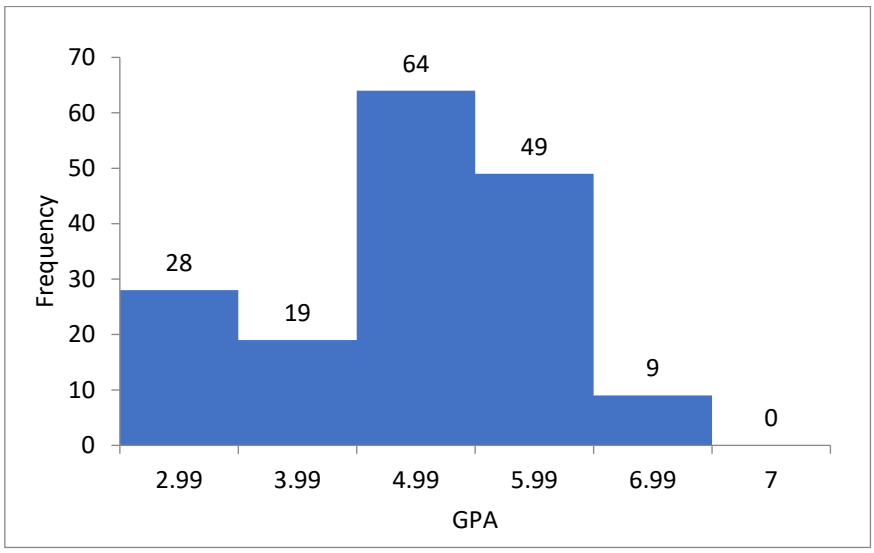
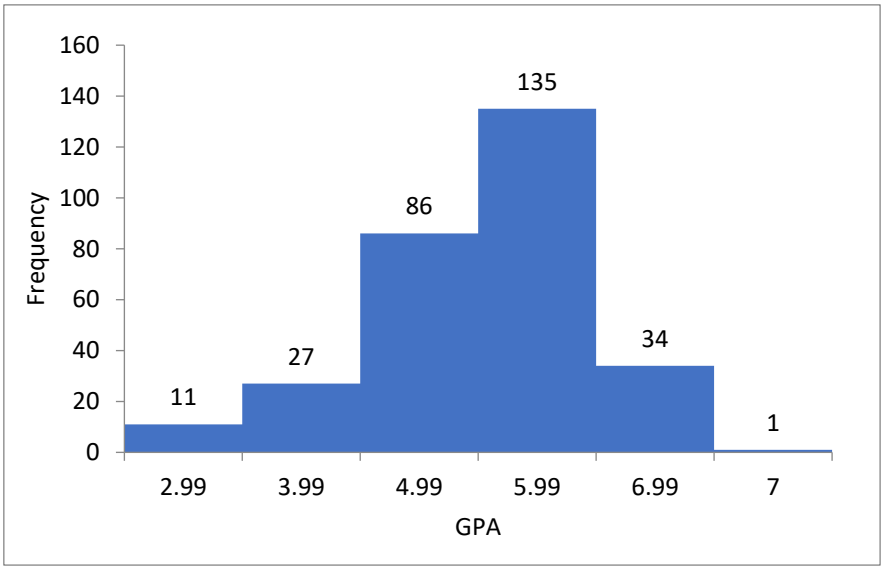


Figure 11

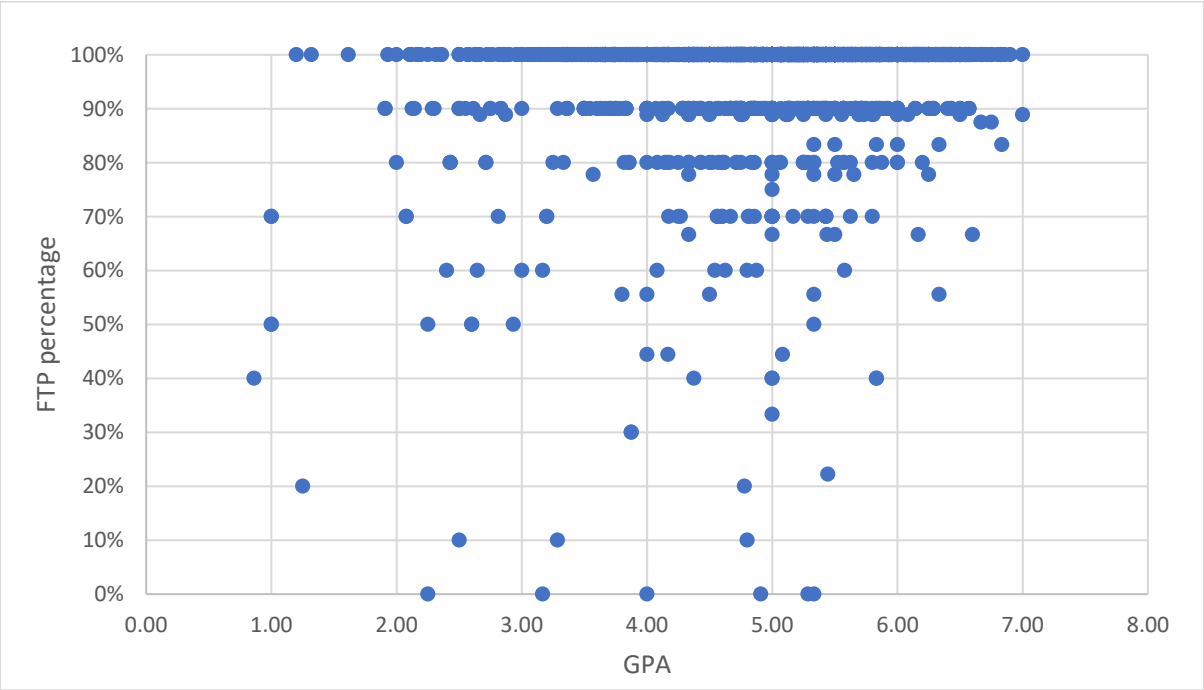
Distribution of partially compliant students by GPA.



A scatterplot (Figure 12) was created to determine if a relationship between a student's GPA and ability to meet the FTP deadline existed. While the data is relatively scattered, the values tend to rise together and indicate a positive, albeit very weak, association suggesting that GPA explains only a small proportion of variance in compliance behaviour. A Spearman's rank-order correlation was performed to further understand the relationship between these two variables, ($r(2681) = 0.097$, $p = 0.000$). Given a p-value lower than alpha (0.05), this result indicates a weak correlation that is unlikely to have occurred by chance.

Figure 12

FTP percentage and GPA.

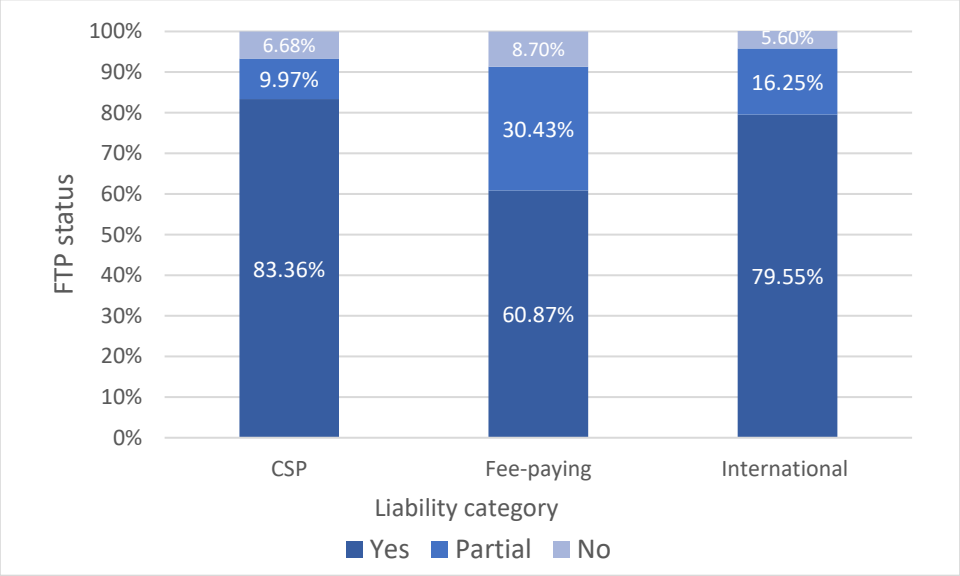


FTP and Liability Category

Students were classified into three fee liability categories: domestic CSP and fee-paying, and international (see Figure 13). CSP students had the highest compliance rate at 83.36%, closely followed by international students (79.55%), leaving domestic fee-paying students with the smallest percentage of students (60.87%) who met the deadline. Fee-paying postgraduates also had the largest non-compliance rate of all three groups at almost 9% and over 30% of the cohort sought an extension to the deadline, more than three times that of CSP and almost twice that of international students. A Chi-Square Test of Independence was performed to test the independence of these two variables, and the results revealed a statistically significant relationship (chi-square 21.827, df = 6, p = 0.000).

Figure 13

FTP status by fee liability category.

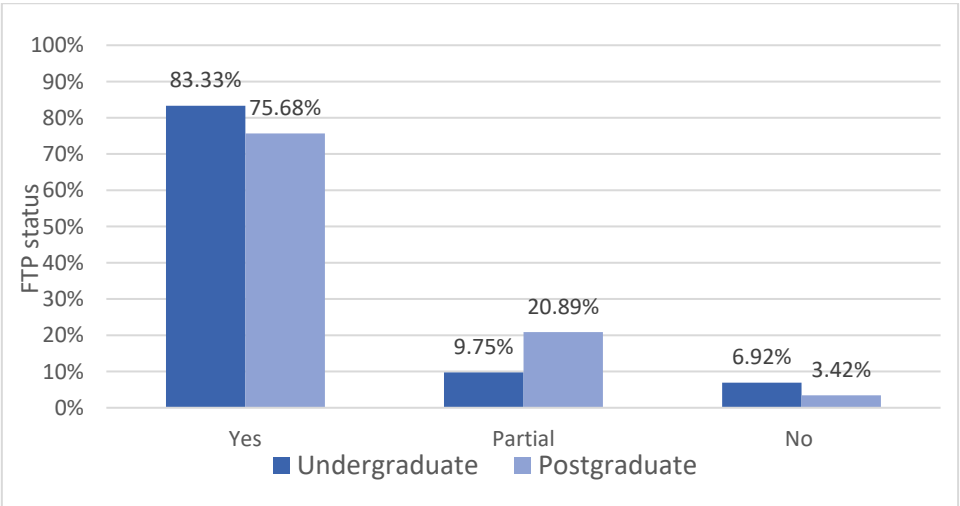


FTP and Award

Undergraduate students had higher compliance rates (83.33%) than postgraduate students (75.68%), yet Bachelor students also had double the percentage of non-compliance (6.92%). Less than 10% of undergraduates were considered partially compliant and approved for an extension compared with 20.89% of postgraduate students (see Figure 14). Chi-Square Test of Independence results (chi-square 36.184, df = 2, p = 0.000) showed a statistically significant difference between the observed frequencies and those that would be expected if FTP status and award were unrelated.

Figure 14

FTP status by award

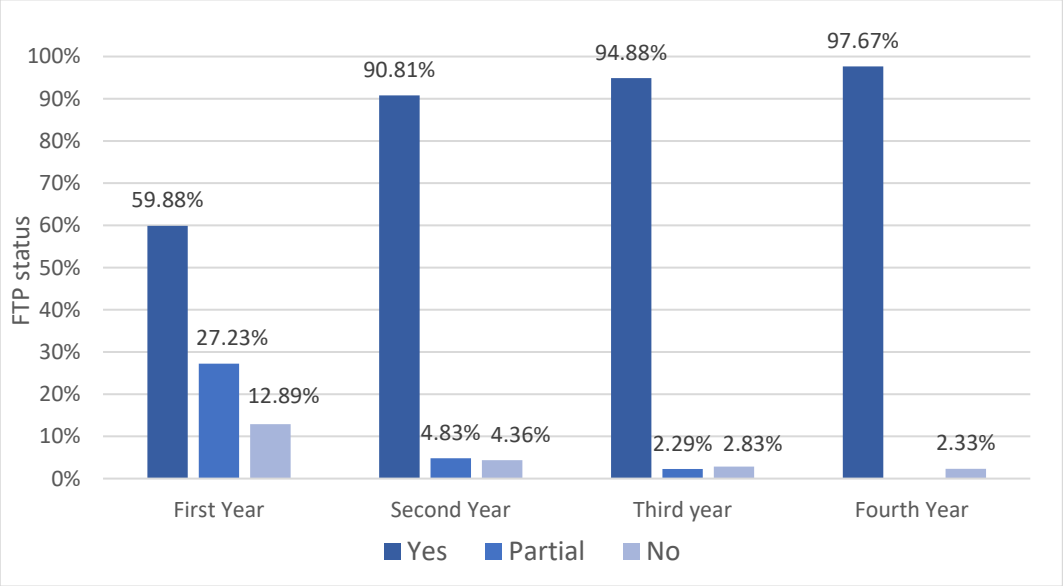


FTP and Year Level

As seen in Figure 15, first-year students had the lowest compliance rates at less than 60%, with all other year levels recording over 90%. The first-year cohort also had much larger numbers of students who were considered partially (27.23%) or non-compliant (12.89%) by the deadline. Results from a Chi-Square Test of Independence (chi-square 444.290, df = 6, p = 0.000) showed a statistically significant relationship between the variables of FTP status and year level.

Figure 15

FTP status by year level.

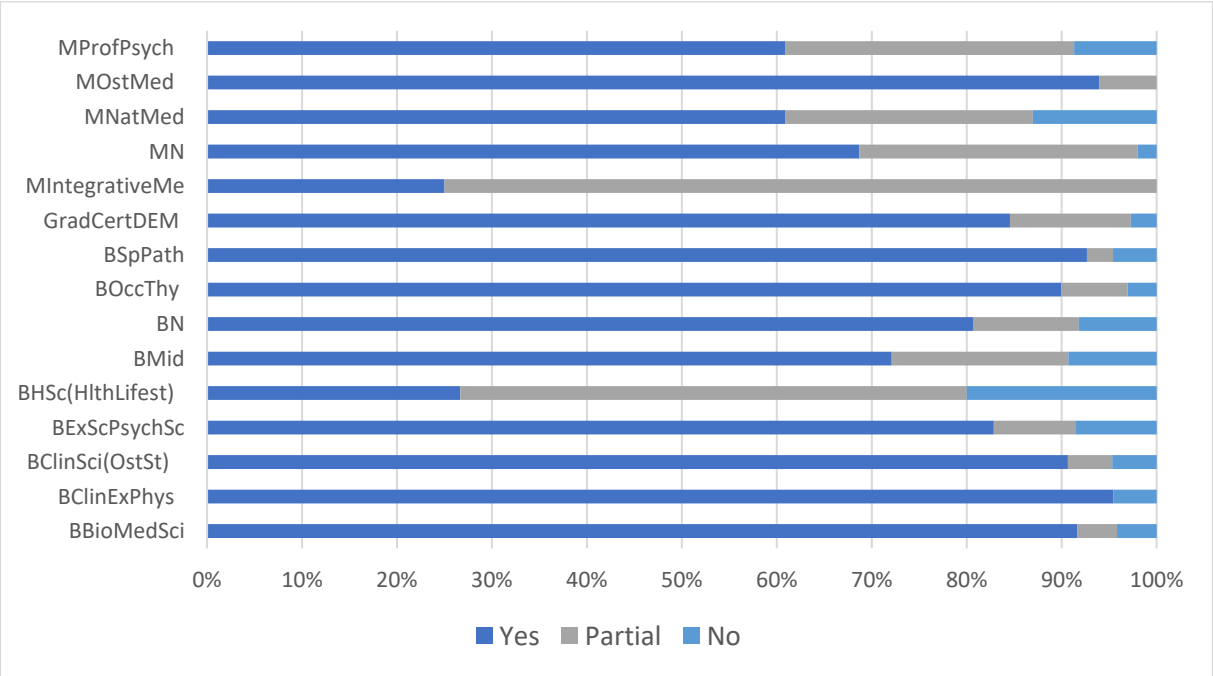


FTP and Course

In five courses, over 90% of students met the FTP deadline and all but one were in an Allied Health discipline (see Figure 16). Bachelor of Clinical Exercise Physiology (95.45%) had the highest compliance rate, followed by Master of Osteopathic Medicine (93.94%), and Bachelors of Speech Pathology (92.66%), Biomedical Science (91.67%) and Clinical Science (Osteopathy) (90.65%). Two courses within the naturopathic discipline, Bachelor of Health Science (Lifestyle) and Master of Naturopathic Medicine, had the lowest compliance and highest non-compliance rates overall. Postgraduate courses had the highest number of students with extensions, including cohorts in Integrative Medicine (75.00%), Psychology (30.43%), Naturopathic Medicine (26.09%) and Nursing (29.29%). A Chi-Square Test of Independence was performed to evaluate the relationship between FTP status and course. The relationship between these variables was significant, (chi-square 189.047, df = 30, p = 0.000).

Figure 16

FTP status by course

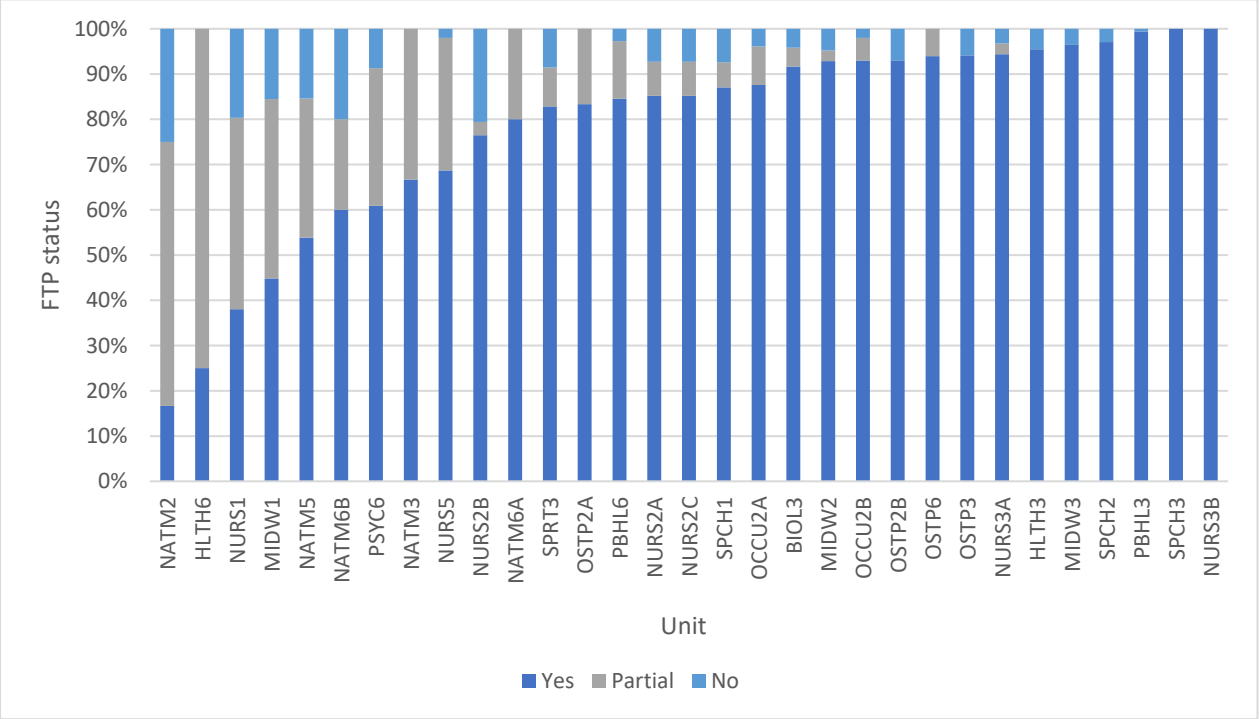


FTP and Unit

Of the 31 units included in the sample, a third-year Nursing unit and fourth-year Speech Pathology unit had FTP rates of 100%. Figure 17 indicates that 11 units had over 90% compliance, and another eight units had more than 80% of students assessed FTP by the deadline. Further, less than half of students across four units (HLTH6, MIDW1, NATM2, NURS1) met requirements, with first-year Naturopathic Medicine unit NATM2 having the lowest at just 16.67% compliant. This unit also had the highest number of non-compliant students, with exactly a quarter of all students failing to meet the deadline. Most units (25) had non-compliance rates below 10%, yet the remaining six units across Midwifery, Nursing and Naturopathic Medicine had non-compliance rates of more than 15% (MIDW1, NATM2, NATM5, NATM6, NURS1, NURS2B). There were no students with approved extensions across eight units, 11 units with under 10% of the cohort and two Naturopathic Medicine outliers (HLTH6 and NATM2) with 58.33% and 75.00% respectively. A Chi-Square Test of Independence revealed a statistically significant relationship (chi-square 79.081, df = 60, p = 0.000).

Figure 17

FTP status by unit.



Discussion

FTP Aggregate

This research aims to determine the extent to which a customised email marketing campaign impacted compliance rates. In line with literature that argues optimised, personalised, and scheduled emails with specific CTAs increase student engagement (Chen et al., 2023; Dawkins, 2019; Kumar & Salo, 2018), the results indicate a positive impact on 2024 compliance. FTP compliance at the deadline was 82.5% in the year of the email campaign and students across gender, generation, campus, liability, award and year level were in the majority assessed FTP. These results provide some assurance that the campaign can be associated with contributing to improved outcomes and that email, while perhaps overshadowed by newer social media channels, remains a valuable tool in the higher education context for its audience reach and measurable impact (Chen et al., 2023; Dawkins, 2019; Nobile & Cantoni, 2023).

FTP and Age

A dichotomy exists across much of the literature in describing Millennials and Generation Z. They are presented as either digital natives adept at navigating the multi-media landscape (Agarwal et al., 2022; Munsch, 2021) or as anxious, lacking in confidence and unable to manage complex systems (Miller-Rosser et al., 2022; Rollins & Venville, 2023). Yet, despite predictions that generational cohort would be a key determinant of the impact of email,

the analysis does not support this theory. There was also little variance between compliant and non-compliant distributions for age, and further testing revealed a slight correlation that was not statistically significant. Regardless, the high compliance rates across all generations and ages contradict the claims of Agarwal et al. (2022) that students are less likely to engage with an email that requires intellectual effort. These results should be considered when deciding whether curating different messages or using alternate marketing channels to appeal to specific generations is worth the investment of resources.

FTP and GPA

Data analysis supports the link between GPA and FTP, where students less likely to be overwhelmed by the demands of university life are better equipped to deal with the compliance process (Miller-Rosser et al., 2022; Rollins & Venville, 2023). Frequency distributions showed that compliant students had higher GPAs than non-compliant students, and testing revealed a statistically significant correlation between the two variables. Therefore, the data allow inferences about the broader student population and predictions that students with lower GPAs would benefit from more tailored and scaffolded support during the FTP process.

FTP and University Experience

Interestingly, while the literature demonstrates a correlation between university experience and ease in navigating the FTP process (Miller-Rosser et al., 2022), this was only evident when analysing year level, where compliance rates increased with experience. When examining the award, undergraduate students had higher compliance rates than their postgraduate counterparts. While this may seem anomalous, the data contribute to a better understanding of how higher education experience within the same course impacts FTP and challenges assumptions that postgraduate students will be better prepared.

FTP and Discipline

Correlations were also found between FTP status and course and unit, providing new insight into a potential relationship between student disengagement and discipline. While only two of 16 courses and four of 31 units had less than half the total students who were not FTP by the deadline – and most of these students had an approved extension – several priority groups emerged where non-compliance and approved extensions were more prevalent. Nursing students accounted for the largest proportion of partially compliant and non-compliant cases, which builds on the research of Miller-Rosser et al. (2022) that student nurses struggle to meet the complexities of state health department requirements. This has not only a significant operational impact but also, more broadly, has wide-ranging consequences for future workforce planning. Lower compliance rates were also observed among students enrolled in the Naturopathic Medicine discipline, where partial and non-compliance exceeded levels seen in most other courses.

Future Recommendations

While acknowledging the difficulty of collecting primary data from disengaged students, there is a need for further research that gathers student opinions and preferences through descriptive surveys or interviews. This would provide an opportunity to better understand the reasons a student may disengage with the FTP process and what may be done to improve compliance rates, particularly in disciplines where numbers are problematic. Furthermore, while this study examines email marketing, observational studies on student usage patterns of alternate marketing channels for university information in the Australian context are needed to determine the efficacy of a more comprehensive approach. Finally, measurement of CTA metrics and the implementation of A/B testing is also required to gain better insight into the performance of customised emails and interrogate results to make informed changes across subject lines, send times, and email templates.

Conclusion

Low compliance rates pose a significant risk to the viability of student clinical placements, which are crucial to the security of Australia's health workforce pipeline. However, the findings suggest that the introduction of a customised email marketing campaign was associated with improved engagement with the FTP process. Using secondary administrative data captured at the unit deadline, this study found that the majority of FOH students across demographic variables were compliant by their FTP deadline. These results are aligned with the literature that advocates the value of customised email campaigns to engage broad audiences and encourage CTA. The research also reveals correlations between a student's compliance status and their age, GPA, liability category, university experience and discipline, which allows for conclusions to be drawn about the larger student population. This not only supports future decision-making and resource investment related to email marketing within the SCU context, but more broadly across the national WIL landscape. For WIL practitioners, the practical implication is that structured, personalised email sequences can function as foundational administrative support, particularly when complemented by targeted assistance for cohorts at higher risk of missing compliance deadlines.

References

Agarwal, N., Mitiku, T., & Lu, W. (2022). Disconnectedness in a connected world: Why people ignore messages and calls. *Aslib Journal of Information Management, 74*(4), 650–672. http://doi.10.1108/AJIM-05-2021-0150

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2023). *Education and work, Australia*. Australian Bureau of Statistics. https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/education-and-work-australia/may-2023

Berenson, M., Levine, D., Szabat, K., Watson, J., Jayne, N., & O'Brien, M. (2018). *Basic business statistics: Concepts and applications* (5th ed.). Pearson Education.

Cadiz, D., Truxillo, D., & Fraccaroli, F. (2015). What are the benefits of focusing on generation-based differences and at what cost? *Industrial and Organizational Psychology, 8*(3), 356–362. https://doi.org/10.1017/iop.2015.49

Chen, Y., Vankov, E., Baltrunas, L., Donovan, P., Mehta, A., Schroeder, B., & Herman, M. (2023, September 14). Contextual multi-armed bandit for email layout recommendation [Conference presentation]. *Proceedings of the 17th ACM Conference on Recommender Systems*. https://doi.org/10.1145/3604915.3608878

Creswell, J., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods* (5th ed.). Sage.

Dawkins, R. (2019). Mass email at university: Current literature and tactics for future use. *Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning, 34*(3), 273–289. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680513.2018.1556090

Defau, L., Zauner, A., & Sycik, A. (2023). How to improve the performance of email marketing campaigns? A field experiment using the authority principle to improve email performance. *Review of Marketing Science, 21*(1), 187–194. https://doi.org/10.1515/roms-2022-0095

Defau, L., & Zauner, A. (2023). Personalized subject lines in email marketing. *Marketing Letters, 34*(4), 727–733. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11002-023-09701-7

Dimock, M. (2019). *Defining generations: Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins*. Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/

Fass-Holmes, B. (2022). Survey fatigue: What is its role in undergraduates' survey participation and response rates? *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Education, 11*(1), 56.

Filipczak-Białkowska, A. (2017). Strategies for organising the attention of receivers in e-mail marketing. *Acta Universitatis Lodziensis Folia Litteraria Polonica, 43*(5), 157–169. https://doi.org/10.18778/1505-9057.43.11

Gilani, D. (2024). Student attitudes and preferences towards communications from their university – A meta-analysis of student communications research within UK higher

education institutions. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management, 46*(3), 274–290. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2024.2344234

HubSpot. (2023). *The Best Time to Send an Email [2023 Research]*. https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/best-time-to-send-email?hubs_content=blog.hubspot.com%2Fsearch&hubs_content-cta=the20best20time20to20send20an20email205b202320research5d&q=send+times&from_search_result=true

Kumar, A., & Salo, J. (2018). Effects of link placements in email newsletters on their click-through rate. *Journal of Marketing Communications, 24*(5), 535–548. https://doi.org/10.1080/13527266.2016.1147485

Miller-Rosser, K., Fielden, J., & Colgrave, J. (2022). Issues with health student pre-placement clinical compliance: A mixed methods study. *Australian Journal of Clinical Education, 11*(2), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.53300/001c.38067

Munsch, A. (2021). Millennial and Generation Z digital marketing communication and advertising effectiveness: A qualitative exploration. *Journal of Global Scholars of Marketing Science, 31*(1), 10–29. https://doi.org/10.1080/21639159.2020.1808812

Nobile, T., & Cantoni, L. (2023). Personalisation (in)effectiveness in email marketing. *Digital Business, 3*(2), Article 100058. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.digbus.2023.100058

O'Connell, B., Stupans, I., & Jollands, M. (2023). A new sustainable change theoretical framework for the professional disciplines. *Higher Education Quarterly, 77*(2), 311–326. https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12402

Páramo, Á. (2022). Modelling e-mail marketing effectiveness – An approach based on the theory of hierarchy-of-effects. *Tec Empresarial Journal, 17*(1), 14–26. https://doi.org/10.1229/tecempresarialjournal.v17i1.37

Parry, E., & Urwin, P. (2011). Generational differences in work values: A review of theory and evidence. *International Journal of Management Reviews, 13*(1), 79–96. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2370.2010.00285.x

Paulo, M., Miguéis, V., & Pereira, I. (2022). Leveraging email marketing: Using the subject line to anticipate the open rate. *Expert Systems with Applications, 207*, Article 117974. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eswa.2022.117974

Purcarea, I. (2023). The importance of digital marketing for higher education in improving the educational value chain. *Journal of Information Systems & Operations Management, 17*(2), 176–192.

Rabab'ah, G., Yagi, S., Alghazo, S., & Malkawi, R. (2024). Persuasive strategies in email marketing: An analysis of appeal and influence in business communication. *Journal of Intercultural Communication, 24*(2), 12–25.

Rollins, W., & Venville, A. (2023). Fit, suitable or ready? In R. Egan, N. Hill, & W. Rollins (Eds.), *Challenges, opportunities, and innovations in social work field education* (pp. 94–103). Routledge.

Sahni, N., Wheeler, C., & Chintagunta, P. (2018). Personalization in email marketing: The role of noninformative advertising content. *Marketing Science*, 37(2), 236–258. https://doi.org/10.1287/mksc.2017.1066

Sams, D., Rickard, M., & Evans, K. (2023). Examining the effectiveness of marketing practices of a nonprofit institution of higher education: Internal service provider. *Atlantic Marketing Journal*, 12(1), 12–28.

Saunders, M., & Lewis, P. (2017). *Doing research in business and management: An essential guide to planning your project* (2nd ed.). Pearson Education.

Southern Cross University. (n.d.). *Work integrated learning*. Southern Cross University. https://www.scu.edu.au/about/leadership/executive/academic-portfolio-office-apo/work-integrated-learning/

Thomas, J., Chen, C., & Iacobucci, D. (2022). Email marketing as a tool for strategic persuasion. *Journal of Interactive Marketing, 57*(3), 377–392. https://doi.org/10.1177/10949968221095552

Universities Australia. (2022). *More clinical placements needed to meet health workforce demands*. Universities Australia. https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au

1. Appendices

Appendix A: A practice-based operational intervention

Timeframe	Cohort	Status	Content	Call to action
Admission	First-year students	Admitted to Health course with placement in degree	• Welcome to Faculty • Course Progression • Introduction to WIL and resources	• Review course progression to ensure correct enrolment • Familiarise with compliance requirements and placement cycle • Seek assistance – Client Services
First teaching term (Monday of Week 2 in T1, T3 or T5)	First-year students	Admitted to a Health course that has placement in first year	• Details on compliance • Deadline and consequence • How to use Sonia • NSW process (where relevant) • Helpful resources	• Log into Sonia and familiarise • Add deadline to calendar • Start working towards compliance • Seek assistance – WIL
12 weeks prior to FTP deadline	All year levels	• Admitted to a Health course • Predicted to enrol in a placement unit this year	• Reminder re compliance • Deadline and consequence • How to use Sonia • NSW process (where relevant)	• Log into Sonia and review outstanding checks • Continue to work towards compliance • Upload outstanding documentation • Seek assistance – WIL
6 weeks prior to FTP deadline	All year levels	• Admitted to a Health course • Predicted to enrol in a placement unit this year	• Final reminder to submit compliance • Next steps of the process	• Log into Sonia and review outstanding checks • Upload outstanding documentation immediately • Submit AVA where relevant • Seek compliance assistance – WIL • Seek course progression assistance – Client Services
4 weeks prior to FTP deadline	All year levels	• Admitted to a Health course • Predicted to enrol in a placement unit this year	• Final reminder to submit compliance	• Submit AVA where relevant • Seek compliance assistance – WIL • Seek course progression assistance – Client Services

Timeframe	Cohort	Status	Content	Call to action
2 weeks prior to FTP deadline 1 week prior to FTP deadline	All year levels	• Enrolled in a placement unit • Has outstanding checks	• Reminder re outstanding check	• Log into Sonia and review outstanding checks • Upload outstanding documentation immediately
Passed deadline	All year levels	• Enrolled in placement unit • Has outstanding checks • Has been allocated to placement	• Deadline has passed • Placement is cancelled	• Student should withdraw/be withdrawn • Enrol into the unit when next available • Seek course progression assistance – Client Services

Appendix B: Generation definition

While consideration of generations and their inherent differences have had a strong theoretical grounding since the 1950s, the parameters that bound each group are contested across the literature (Dimmock, 2019; Parry & Unwin, 2011). There is agreement that, apart from the birth year, generations are connected by shared experiences, however this is most often viewed through United States-centric lens (Cadiz et al., 2015). Acknowledging this, the definition of generation groups used for this research is from the Pew Research Center, whose work has focused for many years on documenting differences in values and attitudes across demographic groups and is outlined below (Dimmock, 2019).

Figure B1.

Generation definitions.

Generation	Birth years
Baby Boomers	1946-1964
Generation X	1965-1980
Millennials	1981-1996
Generation Z	1997-2012

Note. Adapted from *Defining generations: Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins,* by Dimock, M, 2019 (https://www.pewresearch.org). Copyright by Pew Research Center 2019.

Appendix C: Grades and Grade Point Average

Grade points at SCU are assigned to a graded unit as outlined in Table C1 below.

Table C1.

Grade descriptions and points at SCU.

Grade description	Grade point
High Distinction	7
Distinction	6
Credit	5
Pass	4
Fail / Absent Fail / Withdrawn Fail	0
Withdrawn	N/A – not used in GPA calculation

Note. Adapted from "Final Grades" by SCU, n.d. (http://www.scu.edu.au/current-students/student-administration/final-grades/_. Copyright SCU n.d. Adapted with permission.

Credit points are awarded for the successful completion of each unit at SCU, usually 12 credit points per single-weighted unit.

The formula to calculate a GPA is:

- GPA = Sum of (Grade Point × Credit Points) ÷ Sum of (Credit Points)

Work Integrated Learning in Practice

About the Journal

WIL in Practice exists to disseminate good practice and learnings in work integrated learning (WIL), forming a valuable resource for NAFEA members and the broader WIL community. Publishing research and other suitable publications from academics, administrators and others whose interests align with the practice and administration of WIL, the journal will add to, and enhance, the existing body of knowledge that currently exists about WIL in all its various forms.

Early-career and emerging researchers and writers are also encouraged to submit their work. WIL in Practice provides an outlet for professionals to publish in a variety of formats.

WIL in Practice is supported by the National Association of Field Experience Administrators Inc. (NAFEA). WIL in Practice aims to be a high-quality and internationally recognised journal, publishing research and other suitable manuscripts from academics, administrators and the broader community whose interests align with the practice and administration of WIL. The journal will:

- Provide a welcoming, supportive and educative environment for authors at all levels to publish quality work
- Meaningfully contribute to the distribution of knowledge and professional development of WIL practitioners and researchers
- Publish at least once annually
- Take no action or inaction that is contrary to the values or directions of the NAFEA Executive Management Committee
- Operate in accordance with all laws and relevant policies.
- WIL in Practice is proudly supported by the National Association of Field Experience Administrators Inc. (NAFEA).