

# Exam Scheduling Preferences and Their Impact on Student Well-Being and Performance: A Call for Objective Evaluation and Supportive Interventions [Letter]

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## Dear editor

We read with great interest the paper by Funkhouser and Blenda on student preferences for examination scheduling.<sup>1</sup> The study provided valuable insights into how examination scheduling impacted students' well-being and academic performance.

We note that the study outcomes measured were self-reported perceptions of academic performance and wellbeing. However, it would be intriguing to explore an objective study outcome of exam results for those students with examination schedules aligned with their preferences compared with those schedules not aligned with preferences. For instance, Kraakevik et al highlighted that students with flexible exam timing performed better than students with fixed exam timing.<sup>2</sup>

Devising an examination schedule can be logistically challenging with a wide array of subjects and a need to ensure there is fairness and standardisation in the examination process. Gushgari et al acknowledge this challenge and outline various approaches and models to approach examination timetabling.<sup>3</sup> In Funkhouser and Blenda's article, we note that 95% of surveyed students on a 47% turnout expressed a preference for examination scheduling on Fridays. Holding examinations primarily on Fridays might be logistically challenging as it would restrict available examination dates. Furthermore, it is difficult to provide an examination schedule that would meet the preferences of all students.<sup>1</sup>

Meeting the preferences of all students is likely to be challenging and the study indicated a gap in self-reported academic performance and wellbeing based on examination scheduling preferences. Thus, it may be important to identify how we might instead provide better support to students who struggle with a mismatch between exam scheduling and their preferences. In a randomized study by Broda et al, low cost and relatively simple "light-touch" interventions focused around growth-mindset and belonging were significantly able to reduce attainment gaps for students from disadvantaged backgrounds compared with other students.<sup>4</sup>

In summary, the article presents the important role that exam scheduling plays in students' overall well-being and academic performance. We highlight that it would be useful to compare objective examination outcomes as well as self-reported academic performance. We also posit that given the logistical challenges of devising both a fair and bespoke exam scheduling system, that it may be perhaps better to focus instead on harnessing student support interventions to bridge gaps in wellbeing and outcomes due to examination scheduling.

## Disclosure

The authors report no conflicts of interest in this communication.

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