"Office Hours are Kind of Weird": Reclaiming a Resource to Foster Student-Faculty Interaction

Margaret Smith, PhD
Managing Editor, *Contexts*

Yujie Chen, PhD
Post-doctoral Fellow, School of Journalism and Communication
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Rachel Berndtson, PhD
Assistant Director of Academic Programs, Department of Geographical Sciences
University of Maryland, College Park

Kristen M. Burson, PhD
AvH Postdoctoral Research Fellow
Fritz-Haber Institute of the Max Plank Society
Berlin, Germany

Whitney Griffin, PhD
Lecturer, Department of Horticultural Sciences
Texas A&M University

Office hours reserve time and space for student-faculty interaction, a benchmark for engaging students in educationally purposive activities. Our study finds a mismatch between the institutionally intended purpose of office hours and student perceptions of office hours. We examine student perceptions of office hours with results from a survey administered at a public research institution. We conclude that it is necessary for institutions — large public research institutions, particularly – to do more to demonstrate to students the value for interacting with faculty and to consistently support the development of relationships between undergraduates and those who teach them.

Student-faculty interaction plays a key role in the collegiate experience. From the perspective of many U.S. higher education administrators and faculty, office hours represent institutional commitment to student-faculty interaction: interaction which research roundly regards as a best practice in undergraduate education (Boyer, 1990; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2010). Research consistently finds that high quality student-faculty interactions are highly correlated with student retention, persistence, and academic achievement (Kuh et al., 2010; Tinto, 1997) as well as students' confidence in their intellectual abilities (Cole, 2007, 2008) and their aspirations for further study (Hurtado et al., 2011). In theory, office hours make space for such positive student-faculty interactions.

Office hours remain an institutional policy on most U.S. campuses. Higher education institutions in Taiwan and mainland China, for example, have also started to implement office hours to promote student-faculty interactions and enhance effective student learning (Hong & Hu, 2012; Hong, Hu, & Yang, 2010). But the

resource itself is useless if few students actually *use* it. Instructors lament lonely office hours, and empirical research echoes their anecdotes (Fusani, 1994; Li & Pitts, 2009).

Underuse of office hours thus undermines a real and important site for the kinds of interactions that can facilitate student success. Do students see such potential in office hours? Do their understandings of office hours shape how they use them? Contemporary college students have a plethora of digital spaces for making contact with faculty. At many U.S. institutions—particularly at large research institutions—office hours are the lone site where student-faculty interaction is consistently accessible to all students. Do students see a reason for working with fixed times and locations when they have options for communicating at any time?

We pursue these questions in a survey-based study that explores student perceptions of office hours at a large U.S. research institution. We examine what these perceptions can tell us about student-faculty interaction in the current social and political climate of U.S. higher education.

Our study finds a mismatch between the institutional intention for office hours and student perceptions of them, a mismatch that gives rise to an underuse of office hours. Our results demonstrate that students are most likely to perceive office hours as the last resort they can turn to when an academic crisis (e.g., an anticipated failing score) is on the horizon, rather than as an institutional resource that may be regularly used for a broader set of fruitful interactions with faculty members. To correct this mismatch between students' perception of office hours and institutional intention, we argue that students need explicit guidance about what office hours are intended to do: they need accessible models of what office hours can offer and how to make use of this resource.

Along this line, when students and faculty have increasingly adapted to more instantaneous communications, we also suggest that office hours as a location-fixed practice should be reimagined. What is more important is that institutions need to demonstrate how interactions with faculty, either face-to-face or facilitated by new communication technologies, matter for student success. A large body of research indicates that when institutions show students what success looks like and how to get there, more students can succeed in college (Cotten & Wilson, 2006; Kuh et al., 2010). We suggest here that showing students how effective interaction with faculty can pave the way for their success is an important step forward.

Literature Review

Office hours became a standard offering in U.S. undergraduate academic life when scholarly and political dialogues erupted about undergraduates' intellectual and social development and patterns of student persistence toward degrees (cf. Astin, 1984; Boyer, 1987, 1990; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1983). The most renowned summary of these dialogues came from Arthur Chickering and Zelda Gamson (1987), who distilled the research into *Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education*. First among these was interaction between students and faculty:

> Frequent student-faculty contact in and out of classes is the most important factor in student motivation and involvement. Faculty concern helps students get through rough times and keep on working. Knowing a few faculty

members well enhances students' intellectual commitment and encourages them to think about their own values and future plans (p. 3).

Chickering and Gamson's (1987) insights continue to be substantiated in empirical studies (Dika, 2012; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Pascarella & Terrenzini, 2005). Institutions intend office hours as a site for these vital interactions. Scholars found that factors that impact student-faculty interaction include disciplinary culture (Gamson, 1967) and pedagogical styles (Cox, McIntosh, Terenzini, Reason, & Quaye, 2010; Wilson, Woods, & Gaff, 1974). Students' and faculty's identities matter greatly, too, particularly when students seek out-of-class contact with faculty (Cole 2007; Dika, 2012; Layne, 2012).

Pascarella (1980) observed, however, that in the early days of student-faculty interaction studies, scholars presumed that interaction between students and faculty was good and that more would be better without establishing this empirically. The inquiry considering how college affects students correlated student-faculty interaction, as an independent variable, with desired outcomes of higher education including intellectual development, persistence toward degree, and academic achievement (Astin, 1984; Endo & Harpel, 1982; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005).

Researchers and institutions have increasingly focused on evidence-based practices shown to foster student success (Cole, 2007; Dika, 2012; Harper & Quaye, 2009; Kuh, 1991). Such research finds that student-faculty interaction is a core component of student engagement — the degree to which institutions support their students' participation in educationally purposive activities (Harper & Quaye, 2009; Kuh, 2003).

The widespread use of digital technologies has sparked scholarly interest in examining whether they would facilitate student-faculty interaction. The results so far, however, have been mixed. Cifuentes and Lent (2011) found that digital interaction fosters face-to-face interactions, but Li and Pitts (2009) reached an opposite conclusion.

While benefits of student-faculty interaction outside the classroom are well-documented, they are not always apparent to students. Cotten and Wilson (2006) find that many students do not seek faculty interaction because they fail to recognize a need to do so (beyond the difficulty with a course), and they suggest that faculty *actively* and *consistently* encourage students to approach them. Freeman and Wash (2013) draw on brain-based teaching and learning research to show that active and ongoing encouragement reduces stress, resulting in more effective learning.

Institutions mandate office hours to reserve space and time for student-faculty interaction. But underutilization of this resource prompts the question of how students actually understand office hours. To examine this, we designed a survey to explore students' perspectives of office hours. Specifically, we asked students how they understood office hours and what potential benefits and drawbacks they associated with office hours. We interpreted our data against the context that institutions and faculty both intend and assume office hours to be a resource.

Method

The authors designed a survey to capture students' perceptions of factors influencing their use of office hours. Data were collected from undergraduate students (18 years of age and older) at a large, mid-Atlantic public research university in spring 2013. The survey contained 17 items, including yes/no/not applicable, multiple choice, five-point Likert, and open-ended questions. The variables included students' demographic information; their class standing and majors; their perceived class size; the structure and format of the course; students' perception of faculty's approachability, availability, and responsiveness; and the usefulness of the faculty's feedback and so on. Partially completed and non-undergraduate student responses were removed from the data set. Of 625 valid responses, only one-third described using office hours at least once per semester; two-thirds self-reported as never using office hours. Students' self-reported class standings were well-distributed: 18 percent freshman, 26 percent sophomore, 29 percent junior, and 27 percent senior. Respondents' self-reported racial identities are representative of the undergraduate student body of the university—66 percent White, 11 percent African American, 15 percent Asian American, and 7 percent Hispanic.

Our quantitative analysis showed that factors commonly believed to be important for the use of office hours, like instructor approachability or that students are commuting or working full-time, did not matter for students' self-reported use of office hours (Griffin et al., 2014). This study presents the qualitative analysis from 724 comments in response to two open-ended questions: 1) *What would make you more likely to use office hours?* and 2) *Please share any additional comments*. Our goal is to better understand what prevents students from utilizing office hours and how to motivate them to use office hours more often. In order to develop a valid coding scheme for these data, a set of 100 randomly selected responses were openly coded by three authors to identify salient themes. A series of codes were created, expanded, defined, and refined to describe those common themes. When a decision needed to be made regarding assigning one general code or two or more specific sub-codes, coders agreed to preserve as much details as possible. Using this agreed-upon codebook, five authors thematically coded all responses.[1]

Results

1. How do we use Office Hours?

Faced with the question, "What would make you more likely to use office hours?" undergraduates most frequently responded ($N = 415$, 57%) with variations on an appeal of their own: *How would I use office hours? How should I use office hours? I don't really know what office hours are for.* Or, as one response candidly put it: "Office hours are kind of weird." There are two distinct but related frustrations expressed in this category of responses: first, the claim of a lack of knowledge about the purpose of

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[1] Inter-rater reliability for this coding scheme was .97. In statistical analysis, inter-rater reliability is a measurement of the agreement among different raters.

office hours; second, a recognition that office hours may have some potential as a resource, but a potential that the respondent is uncertain of how to capitalize.

Invoking uncertainty about the purpose of office hours may be a way of justifying non-attendance. Uncertainty may also prevent the student from imagining a single possible situation in which s/he would use office hours in the future. For instance, one student writes: "Having something to go to office hours for? I have no idea what I would go to office hours for." The vague term "something" is used to substitute all possible activities which could have occurred during office hours, including assignment-oriented consultation and general interactions with the faculty member. Ending the sentence with a question mark also shows the student's uncertainty about using office hours even when s/he may have "something" in mind. Similar concerns about having no purposes of going also manifest in other students' requests for instructors to "[take] time to say what kinds of things people go to office hours for" and explain "why office hours will help me."

Different from those who have scant knowledge of why faculty offer office hours, many other students in our study recognize office hours as a potential academic resource, but they express their struggle with how to take advantage of this resource. Typical responses are:

> Student A: "If I didn't feel like I had to go only when I couldn't find the answer to my questions on my own."

> Student B: "If I had questions that did not have simple answers which could be communicated over email."

> Student C: "I feel that any questions I have can be answered through email."

> Student D: "I don't go to office hours because I ask questions in class when I do not understand things. [Any] class where questions cannot be asked in class usually has a discussion section where I can ask question. I can also look in the textbook or search the internet for answers. I would like to have informal discussion about related material with my professors but never know how to start the conversation so I don't try."

These students do see a purpose for office hours. They perceive office hours as occasions to raise specific questions. If they can find answers by themselves or through other means, such as email communication, discussion section, textbook, or via the internet, they choose not to visit faculty. Their perceptions of office hours as no more than Q & A sessions outside classroom limit their ability to think of how else office hours can be used. According to this narrow understanding of office hours, students are *supposed* to bring questions to office hours. They feel discouraged to attend office hours if they do not have specific questions or if they wish to do things other than asking questions.

Students' difficulties to conceive a scenario of utilizing office hours and their vague and limited understanding of what they can do with office hours reveal a gap between institutional design and students' perceptions of office hours. The types of

student-faculty interactions that foster desired outcomes of higher education both encompass and extend beyond questions about specific course material; they may include, for example, mentorship, discussion of a students' future plans and career trajectory, fostering student persistence, or, as student D suggests, discussion of related material. If institutions provided students explicit guidance for how to think about student-faculty interaction, and how to use office hours as an opportunity for student-faculty interaction, student D, for one, might be willing to "try" to start the conversation with the professor. And students who say "I just don't always know what questions to ask at office hours" would probably not be deterred from visiting faculty.

Not knowing how to make use of office hours may also lead students to consider office hours as a last resort in the learning process, which they prefer not to turn to unless they have tried almost everything else. Reserving office hours for special occasions—occasions often framed as "emergencies" ($N = 268$, 37%)—is another salient symptom of the mismatch between students' perceptions and institutional design of office hours.

1.1 Emergency. Responses coded as 'office hours are for emergencies' were characterized by the inclusion of stress words (e.g., crisis, struggle, difficulty, fail, etc.) and/or descriptions of a desperate situation, conveying a sense of urgency surrounding a situation (or possible situation) that was specific and circumstantial. These responses are distinct in their urgent tone and directed purpose as compared to a more speculative, general statement such as "if I needed more help in the class." For instance:

> Student E: "I have not reached any serious crises for this course so personally, I have not felt the need for office hours, especially since we meet 5 times a week. Out of those 5 days two of those days is discussion, where I feel like if I have questions, I can ask at that time. My lack of participation in office hours may also be because [the professor] explains things pretty well and [the TA] can clear up anything minor concepts I don't understand."

> Student F: "If I was completely lost in all the concepts covered in lecture and/or discussion/lab."

> Student G: "If I was doing very, very, very bad in the class and there was no way for me to improve. Or if I needed to get grade changes on any previous exams. Most likely, though, never really going to use office hours."

Students see these emergency situations as a compelling reason to attend office hours and provide a distinct answer to the question "how can we use office hours as a resource?" Yet the majority of these comments indicate the emergency situation as the *exclusive* reason that the student would attend office hours and, even then, the situation must be dire to compel the student to attend. These students perceive office hours as fulfilling only a single purpose, that of addressing emergency situations, instead of multi-purpose. While these emergency situations could lead to increased student-faculty interaction, the student perceptions of how office hours can be utilized

presented here are woefully narrow in scope when compared to the institutional intention of fostering student-faculty interaction.

For other students, even an emergency situation is not sufficient impetus to utilize office hours. This student, for example, is failing the course but indicates that office hours are not worth his/her effort unless other incentives (extra credit) are given:

> Student H: "I know professors would not want to do this, but sometimes students don't want to help themselves and they might need an incentive to go to office hours. If there was like a 1-5 point (almost insignificant) extra credit given when attending office hours it might help. Currently I am failing organic chemistry, and I have never seen the professor outside of the lectures, nor do I plan on it. If there were extra credit points involved I would probably force myself to visit him, then it might just break the ice and I could get into the habit of doing it."

The emphasis on offering "extra credit" for the office hour visit reflects this student's misconception of the office hour not as a regular campus resource that s/he can utilize to reverse the tendency of failing the course and get help from the professor directly[2] but, instead, as a place where an icebreaker is needed and the "habit" of regular use requires extra impetus to build. Like students E, F, and G, the student seems to acknowledge office hours as a resource for receiving help from the instructor for course-related problems, but even 'emergency' status does not appear to convince student H that office hours are worth his/her effort.

2. "I can just Email," or (Physical) Office Hours are not Worth the Effort

The notion that paying a visit to faculty's office hours is "not worth the effort," is a second major theme that emerged from our analysis. This theme is the result of several codes on office hour push and pull factors, including perceptions of inconvenience surrounding office hour time and location ($N = 225$, 31%), a preference for virtual over in-person communication ($N = 41$), and a troubling desire to be wooed to office hours by "treats" ($N = 26$).

The theme of "not worth the effort" is based on two codes surrounding opinions of convenience. Students indicate enhanced convenience through virtual communication, as well as inconvenience based on times and locations of in-person office hours. Many students report that in-person interaction through office hours is a last resort, and they would *only* attend if instructors were not responsive through email. A quantitative analyses found the vast majority of students (94%) reported that instructors were "responsive" (as opposed to "not responsive" or "not available") via email (Griffin et al., 2014). Therefore, students can rely on email as a consistent communication mechanism. Our data additionally show that students questioned the necessity of in-person office hours, based on the perception that virtual communication

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[2] Authors thank the anonymous reviewer for bringing up this point.

is more convenient for all parties involved. For example, in response to the question, "What would make you more likely to use office hours?", a student answers:

> Student I: "I haven't needed them. The professor has been easily available over the phone or email. Which is easier for everyone. So, nothing, I guess."

Like this student, many assume that email is the preferred mode of communication both for themselves and their professors (Thirty-three students answered similarly in response to the question "What would make you more likely to use office hours?"). The perception that email is a more convenient, and therefore preferred, method of communication testifies to broader transformations digital technologies have brought to social interactions in general. As the Millennials

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constitute a majority of the college student body, the strict rule of physical attendance for office hours seem to run counter to the norms students have for social interactions. A study done by Pew Research Center in 2012 showed that 96% of those ages 18-29 are internet users, 84% use social networking sites, and 97% have cell phones (Anderson & Rainie, 2012). The social environment in which Millennials grow up makes them the earliest and quickest adopters of connected technologies and always-on lifestyle. Some scholars are deeply worried about current younger generation's immersion into asynchronous communications such as emails and messages, and their corresponding flight away from real time conversations (Turkle, 2011). However, Turkle's tendency to give privileges to in-person, real time conversation may fall into the fallacy of seeing the digital world and real world as discrete when they are actually increasingly interconnected (Jurgenson, 2011).

It is not our intention to draw broad generalizations about the impact of digital technologies on student-faculty interaction. However, the historical practice of office hours—come-and-visit in person—is dated. It is made obsolete by the pervasiveness of more convenient and instantaneous ways of communication. While the definition needs to be updated to incorporate more diverse ways of contacting faculty, we do not argue for a dismissal of office hours altogether. On the contrary, it is necessary to reinforce the core value embodied by the original design of office hours, namely, to enhance student-faculty interactions. To implement office hours in a more connected world, we suggest that the emphasis should be put on enhancing student-faculty interactions regardless of means, either in-person consultation or brief communications via digital tools. How to maintain quality student-faculty interaction in this increasingly connected world is a challenge facing faculty and institutions.

Understanding of office hours as physical visits has led many students to complain about time and location inconvenience for scheduling a visit. That is our third code under "not worth the effort". Email is understood as the most convenient and preferred communication mechanism; the effort of going in-person to office hours is not. For example, a student who is dissatisfied with his/her instructor's responsiveness to email reports:

Student J: "I wish more professors were responsive via e-mail. Office hours are not always a viable communication method at all times."

Inconvenience surrounding office hour time and location is the most frequently appearing ($N = 225$) subcode in analysis. Students largely interpret the times and locations at which office hours are held as inconvenient, and in some cases express this interpretation with resentment. Some students make specific time and location requests, while others generally suggest additional or extended times and different locations. For example, when asked what would make him/her more likely to attend office hours, a student generally suggests:

Student K: "Maybe if office hours were not during times that I have class, if I lived closer, or if I did not have to work full time."

In some cases, a tone of resentment underlies perceptions of office hour inconvenience. For example, in response to what would make him/her more likely to attend office hours a student reports:

Student L: "If I had more time in the day to spend *going out of my way to do this*. I also am usually able to figure things out by myself with a little bit of practice."
[emphasis added]

A second student describes his/her attempts at interaction through office hours, but expresses frustration and resentment. The student ultimately determines that attending office hours is simply not worth the effort:

Student M: "My professor is always bombarded by students all day. She is hardly available because she forces us to think in an applied way, causing a bottleneck of people not understanding the material. I would much rather spend my time figuring it out on my own than going to speak with the professor because the wait time is so long."

The resentment surrounding perceived inconvenience of office hours suggests that more than a few students see a physical visit to office hours impeding rather than fostering student-faculty interaction.

3. Approachability

While for some students resentment about the perceived inconvenience of office hours diminishes office hour use, others view office hours as impeding student-faculty interactions due to interpersonal factors and instructor approachability. Scholars have not reached a consensus regarding the role played by faculty's approachability in fostering student-faculty interaction. Some quantitative analyses showed that instructor approachability was not a significant factor (Griffin et al., 2014). Bippus, Kearney, Plax, and Brooks (2003) reported that perceptions of instructor out-of-class approachability derived from observations of in-class behaviors are less influential than those instructors' specific invitations to engage in out-of-class

communication. Our study had a total of 135 responses related to instructor approachability derived from two codes: "expectations" and "interpersonal." In considering that some students may share the above quoted perception that office hours impede student-faculty interaction, we included the expression of awkwardness or judgment for being unprepared or incompetent in anticipation of office hour visits into the category of "expectations"; characteristics of the faculty (i.e., approachability, friendliness or unfriendliness, and attitude) fall into the category of "interpersonal." Within the code "I like office hours," five responses fall into the theme of approachability; unfortunately, this represents a minority within the set of students who chose to comment on the theme of approachability.

"Office hours are dependent solely on the approachability of the professor…"

We find that instructors' lack of encouragement (or even active discouragement) of office hour visits prevents students from taking advantage of interacting with faculty; this is even more so the case for the students who may draw comparison to other instructors who offer invitation, or at least are neutral about office hours visits. For instance, answering "what would make you more likely to attend office hours?":

> Student N: "If the professor didn't say to me when I approached him 'I don't have time to help you. You can't just come to me with questions that take a long time to explain. That's considered private tutoring'. I use all of my other teachers' office hours but this professor has specifically shut me down."

> Student O: "Office hours are dependent solely on the approachability of the professor. Some professors make you feel like a burden for coming to office hours and interrupting their work. Or they make you feel stupid for asking some questions or being concerned with your grade."

Another student did not express such dissatisfaction toward the instructor's condescending attitude but found "seeing a professor alone to introduce ideas and express concerns can be very intimidating" and believed he/she needed "more personal confidence." These students decided not to use the resource of office hours because they assumed that they were "burden" to the instructor and their visits were "interrupting" instructor's work.

On the other hand, among five total responses where students expressed willingness to visit the instructor or satisfaction with their office hours experience, they mentioned "being comfortable" in office hours and that the instructor "has been really amazing and has tried to actively engage the class." In these cases, instructor approachability had a positive effect on office hour attendance.

Cox et al. (2010) asserted that inherent instructor characteristics, such as the tone of voice, accents, and facial appearance, play a greater role in student perceptions of approachability than pedagogical methods or style. Limits to instructor approachability that stem primarily from perceptions of being condescending, rude, or a know-it-all are likely more correlated to demeanor and behavior than pedagogical methods. Polite attitudes and friendly gestures are changeable attributes for the instructor as compared to such inherent characteristics as race and gender. Along this

line, we would argue that efforts on the part of individual instructors and institutions are imperative to foster nurturing and encouraging environments for students, particularly when it comes to one-on-one interactions in office hours. Institutional environments play an important role in their "inhabitants" demeanor (Hallett, 2007). Universities can work to ensure support for instructors by recognizing the value of sound student-faculty interaction and promoting a friendly and nurturing teaching environment.

Conclusions

Two qualifications should be specified before we make our recommendations. First, we ought to acknowledge that faculty and students may have different evaluations of office hours to begin with. Faculty may give more credit to office hour visits than students because students seeking a career in academia may be more interested in school and interacting with faculty than those who choose non-academic careers. Along this line, how faculty relate to students regarding office hour visits is a critical topic for faculty as well as higher education institutions to consider. Secondly, our study addresses a contemporary under-utilization of office hours. Indeed, because of the absence of the longitudinal data on how students on our campus use office hours historically, there is no knowing if a two-thirds non-use rate is normal or not. Our study has revealed students' willingness to use office hours yet, at the same time, revealed a certain degree of frustration because they do not know how to make the most of the office hour.

Given the mismatch between institutional intentions for office hours — as a platform for highly valued student-faculty interactions — and student perceptions of them, we call for more guidance for the students explaining why interaction with faculty during office hours is useful and how to realize it. We also suggest that the concept and practice of office hours need to be brought more up-to-date by embracing diverse means of student-faculty communications.

Nonetheless, students, whether they are interested in interacting with faculty out of class or not, can benefit greatly from *active* and *consistent* interaction with faculty (Cotten & Wilson, 2006). Office hours are a great channel to achieve this student-faculty engagement. Educational institutions outside North America, including those in Taiwan and mainland China, have started to see the value of robust student-faculty interactions afforded by office hours. These places where office hours were not placed in the higher education system are beginning to institutionalize the resource (Hong & Hu, 2012). We recommend that faculty and higher education institutions take the following concrete steps to encourage students to utilize office hours as a resource:

- In order to address students' question "How should I use office hours?", faculty and higher education institutions need to make it explicit what students might get out of office hours, and especially as it relates to use beyond assignment-oriented questions. This may include, for example, informal conversations about the broader field of study, consulting faculty with career advice, seeking recommendation letters for jobs and further education, helping students develop persistence, discussion of research opportunities, and other forms of productive and purposeful

student-faculty interactions. Higher education institutions need to help students understand the benefits and value of interacting with faculty, not only for their subject-specific knowledge and degree completion but also for their long-term fulfillment and even success after graduation. Institutions can provide fresh college students detailed guidance on how to use office hours to interact with faculty, and highlight narratives of high-quality interactions that have emerged from office hour use. Knowledge of the value of office hours would serve to mitigate student perceptions that office hours are "not worth the effort" or are "for emergencies only".

- Administrators also need to create nurturing classroom environments by promoting friendly and dedicated attitudes toward teaching among faculty. Universities should support the time that students and faculty spend together such that students' perceptions of instructor approachability ultimately serve to promote rather than deter office hour use.

- Instructors should openly and proactively promote office hours in class. As most of the college courses now have a webpage on the university course management platform, instructors may consider placing their availability in a prominent place on the course page. Instructors can also repeatedly remind students verbally of their availability and extend invitations to visit office hours. Doing these things, in addition to the standard practice of putting office hours on the syllabus and mentioning it once or twice throughout the semester, can send an encouraging message to students about instructor approachability and availability during office hours.

- Both higher education institutions and instructors need to update their notion of office hour visits and embrace new digital technologies for teaching and learning to facilitate student-faculty interaction. The increase of more interactive communication tools may have made the idea of office hours as pure face-to-face interactions obsolete for students, a challenge that may be best addressed by extending the notion of office hours to include virtual interactions between faculty and students. Because the primary benefit of office hours comes not from a student's physical presence in the faculty member's office, but rather from the time and space that office hours create for constructive student-faculty engagement, digital platforms (e.g. chat rooms, video chat, online whiteboards, social media, etc.) may be used to retain that 'time and space' while ameliorating student perceptions that office hours occur in inconvenient locations. Furthermore, an instructor's efforts to embrace the communication technologies familiar to students are gestures which welcome students to engage with faculty outside the classroom. This is by no means to suggest that digital technologies are the silver bullet. Ultimately, no single tactical approach can address all students and, therefore, digital technologies should be seen as one tool rather than a stand-alone solution in addressing under-use of office hours.

Creating an opportunity for student-faculty interaction alone does not guarantee its use, by either students or faculty (Cox et al., 2010). Our current study focuses on perceptions of office hours from students' points of view. But faculty perceptions of office hours are just as crucial for learning more about what it takes to engage students in high quality interaction with faculty. One possible study would be finding out successful techniques from faculty who have attracted and motivated more students to visit their office hours.

Future studies may investigate more rigorously how faculty perceptions shape students' office hour use and what we can learn from student's positive experience of office hour visit. How new technologies impact the notion and practice of office hours will be another direction for future studies.

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Margaret Smith has a PhD in sociology from the University of Maryland, College Park. She is currently the managing editor for <u>Contexts</u>, a quarterly magazine that makes cutting-edge social research accessible to general readers and a publication of American Sociological Association.

Yujie Chen has a PhD in American Studies from the University of Maryland, College Park. She currently works as a post-doctoral fellow at the School of Journalism and Communication in the Chinese University of Hong Kong. She is specialized in studying social and cultural implication of the information and communication technologies.

Rachel Berndtson has a PhD in geographical sciences from the University of Maryland, College Park. She is now the Assistant Director of Academic Programs of the Department of Geographical Sciences in the University of Maryland, College Park. She is deeply interested in pedagogies and teaching practice.

Kristen M. Burson has a PhD in Physics from the University of Maryland, College Park. She used to work as visiting assistant professor at the Gettysburg College and a postdoctoral fellow at the Fritz-Haber Institute of the Max Plank Society in Germany. Her research interest includes science teaching and learning.

After spending a year in the industry, Dr. Whitney Griffin returns to the University to pursue a career in academia. She has a PhD in plant science and currently teaching at the Department of Horticultural Sciences in the Texas A&M University.