University Student Survey (November 2020)

“What could the university do to better support online learning?”

There were 3,472 students who completed the survey; 2,187 or 63% answered this question. Answers were coded into one of 10 categories, described below.

Summary:

Student responses focused on both the mechanics of teaching online, as well as the interpersonal challenges inherent in online education. With respect to the mechanics, students asked for more consistency in what platforms were being used, struggling with having to learn to use a variety of new platforms (e.g. Zoom, BBB, Teams, Skype). Many seemed to prefer a blended approach, favouring a combination of online lectures and live class discussion. They urged profs to stay away from 3 hour online lectures and suggested shorter lecture formats. And apparently using Power Point for lecture recordings (which a number of us did, because it is fairly easy) is not a great choice if they can’t see your face on the screen.

With respect to accessibility, students asked for more access to online software, as well as library resources, although not all students were aware of what was already available to them, free of charge. They asked for subtitles on all recorded lectures and suggested that the PMC should start paying notetakers, to improve the quality of the notes. There was also a demand for more online seminars with respect to learning in an online environment. While there are online resources available through CSAS, I’m not sure how many of them are specifically focused on time management or study tips for an online learning environment.

The most frequent suggestions for improvement centered on making and sustaining connections in an online environment. Students were looking for more time with their professors and classmates – in-class discussion, or even one on one meetings. They asked for more feedback on quizzes and exams and wanted to make sure that they had the opportunity to review their graded coursework. They asked for more opportunities to provide feedback about their courses and asked that professors check in with students who they haven’t heard from in a while. They wanted to be able to talk to a person in their dept for academic advising, rather than communicating solely by email.

The feeling of disconnection also leads to a greater need for reminders and reinforcement from professors -they asked for clear deadlines and expectations and, in some cases, (this came up quite often) more training for professors so they felt more confident in an online environment. Many students are struggling with staying motivated and report having a tough time focusing and being productive. At the same time as they craved more structure and clear deadlines, they also asked for greater flexibility from professors with respect to due dates and exams. More mental health supports, including both online tools and access to counsellors were requested, as well as more online social events for students. Finally, many of these connection issues were felt particularly acutely by international students who were struggling with synchronous classes and 3-hour exam times, when they lived in different time zones. One student, living in Malaysia, has to cope with a 16 hour time difference and described switching their sleep/wake cycle, in order to be ‘awake’ to write a 3 hour exam, scheduled in the middle of the night in their time zone.

Student responses, grouped by category:

1. **Flexibility (36%)** *In teaching structure; due dates; blended lecture with activities and group discussion; open book exams ; appropriate workload for online learning e.g. online exams* 
   1. Greater facilitation of class discussion as well as more opportunity for live feedback with the professor.
   2. Encourage professors to use a blended model (three hours of synchronous instruction for each class, requiring active participation and several hours of advance readings is a very heavy workload - would prefer to use some class time for exercises).
   3. More flexibility for due dates and access to academic sources
   4. **Workload is too heavy**
   5. I hope can find a way about the test time because sometimes I have a test around 4.am in my country but is 4pm in Ottawa’s time. It is a little hard for me to complete a test very well. Because sometimes I feel really tired to do the test around this time
   6. Time difference makes attending meetings difficult for international students. Especially at a postgraduate level these differences should be taken into account.
2. **Connection/communication (13%)**: *more opportunity to interact with TAs and professors; academic advising; administration*
   1. Provide frequent feedback. Reassure everyone that we are all in this together and learning through the online systems together. Invite students to participate in zoom calls to reflect on challenges or successes
   2. **Set up times for test and assignment feedback in the course outline**.
   3. Reduce professors' workloads so they have more time to dedicate to their students. Without in-person classes, it's difficult to get the level of interaction I need with my professor to succeed in the course.
   4. More opportunities for students to provide feedback about specific courses and the online structure of said courses
   5. **If a student is not participating or engaging in the class have a TA or faculty member check in on the student.**
   6. Check in on students and modify classes if needed
   7. Provide faculty with methods to encourage class discussion outside of class without the professor. Professor Barbara Leckie encouraged the FYSM 1004B to meet in small groups so that we could talk to our classmates and this helped me meet someone that I can talk to
   8. Make it so you can review your quiz answers!
   9. **Have social events for students online**
   10. **Feeling disconnected**
3. **Consistency (11%)**: *among teaching platforms and class structure* 
   1. Require that all courses have live lectures, no recorded lectures.
   2. Training the profs on learning environments so there is consistency
   3. more consistency among Instructors and method of delivery, organization of materials
   4. Better methods of delivery. PowerPoints with professors talking over it is frustrating. I'd rather it be in a lecture format.
   5. Standardize the programs professors use. I don't want to have Adobe connect, Big Blue Button, Zoom, Skype, whatever. Use ONLY one.
   6. Everyone hates big blue button
   7. Ask instructors to chunk daily lectures into constituents (i.e 15-20min), rather than a single 2-hour lecture (I've found it to be much more relieving, allowing for more breaks/processing time.)
   8. Possibly enforce profs to provide a recording of themselves while they talk over the slides they prepare. One of my profs records herself speaking and places the view of her in a box at the top right of the screen which is very engaging.
   9. Please do not allow professors to do voice overs over power points. There are reasons these classes are having such high dropout rates. It is impossible to concentrate and extremely low-grade education for a 1000 dollar class.
   10. Some of my profs just talk over their slides (so you can’t see their face). I don’t like this. I want to see my prof, see her/his expressions so that it seems more real and not like you’re listening to a radio while staring at some slides.
   11. Have courses fit a standard format for online learning (even if it’s just how culearn is presented, as some were very messy and cluttered)
   12. Scrap the use of my cu portfolio
   13. Allow for more courses to be UNS/SAT or lower the needed CPGA for programs
4. **Accessibility (10%)**: *for various accommodations; access to statistical programs; library resources; resources available in print;*
   1. More online access to **Library resources**
   2. **Provide more softwares** (such as SPSS and R statistical softwares, adobe) as these should be easily accessible to students in my opinion. Also technology tutorials (such as how to use zoom and all its features, as well as workshops for various statistical
   3. Some books in the library dont have digital version. I wish every book had it so that we could have remote access to them.
   4. Make all pre-recorded lectures include subtitles.
   5. start paying for volunteer notetakers. Many of the volunteer notetakers I have had had confusing, poorly organized notes. Maybe if they're was a monetary incentive, there would be better notes.
   6. **Offer some online workshops on skills such as time management and study tips in regards to online learning since it is different from in class time management and studying.**
   7. Online seminars on how to manage remaining focused in smaller spaces. Since I have ADHD, it can be difficult remaining on task in my small apartment. Some techniques on how to manage this would go a long way.
   8. Support for trans people and navigating pronouns on zoom!
5. **Training (8%)**: *more training for professors related to online learning*
   1. **Provide the instructors who are less familiar with delivering online courses some additional training or support staff to help them get set up and deliver their course more easily online.**
   2. Provide professors with professional Zoom accounts. The students and the professor have to keep rebooting Zoom after it times out. Also, providing professors with the necessary technology (internet, computers etc) to more effectively communicate live with
   3. More contact with professors to see if they are following guidelines and the students feel comfortable.
6. **Tuition (7%)**: *anyone who has requested lower tuition for online learning*
   1. Provide subsidies for costs associated with online learning - i.e. internet, headphones etc.
   2. More technology funding
   3. Reduce the price for textbooks when they are in an electronic version
   4. **Lower tuition**
7. **Mental health (4%)**: *more support for those struggling; online tools; counselling*
8. **Guidelines (4%)**: *Clearer content, due dates, information about using online software for students*
   1. Integrate the platforms that teachers want to use into one intuitive place. Craig Bennell did this well in his police psychology class over the summer - clear outlines, all on cu learn. You hit start and it took you through everything you were supposed to do
   2. Communicate more visibly about the software that is available for free to students of the university. My professor had to tell us over email about our ability to get the Microsoft Office Suite for free as students.
   3. It would be nice, if the school app could be updated to give us updates or reminders when new assignments or projects are coming up.
   4. **I think that professors should send out reminders when things are due** because it does get quite confusing with everything being online. I also think that professors should take into account that it is a lot more difficult for some to complete work online
   5. **Professors need to provide more seamless culearn pages** that don’t bury due dates, zoom passwords, and quizzes at the end of a page or in folders. I am begging professors to stop assigning things without a due date and to update their syllabi
9. **Technology (2%)**: *clearer information about using online software for students; best testing options for online learning; more support for tech issues;*
   1. Some of my assignments have been issued as PDFs. These are a pain to edit and it's hard to fill in my answers. I'd prefer Word or if a PDF is required, have it set up as a form
   2. Have all the login information and all the different websites such as ?mycarleton on?, culearn, carleton connect etc etc etc in one spot, with details (bullet form perhaps) for what each one does would be great.
   3. Better technological support for staff
   4. Changing the examination protocols. we should be able to go back to a question if we remembered the right one, the time limit should not be an hour and 15 minutes for 90 questions.
   5. In some courses the online quizzes won't allow you to go back and check your answers, this makes an already stressful quiz even more stressful as the time limit is very tight; so if this could be adjusted it would relieve a lot of stress. Be more lenient
   6. Give my instructors quality microphones (please)
10. **Continue online learning post covid (1%)**