Improving Students' Remote Learning Experience

UW College of Education COVID-19 Impacts Survey, Spring 2020

In addition to spring 2020 mid- and end-quarter course evaluation data and data from the ASUW/GPSS student survey on the impacts of COVID-19, AXDD researchers later received data from a survey conducted by the College of Education (CoE). This four-page report addresses questions on the survey that add more to what we know about students' experiences and the kinds of instructional practices that students find supportive for remote/online learning.

College of Education Survey

In spring 2020, the College of Education distributed a survey to its undergraduate and graduate students. The survey asked students about their experiences during a quarter where courses were taught remotely.

In total, there were 355 attempted responses with an average 81% completion rate. Seventy-five percent of respondents (268) completed the survey in its entirety. Of the 355 attempted responses, 41% (145) respondents identified themselves as undergraduate students; 40% (143) identified themselves as master students; and 18% (64) identified themselves as doctoral students.

The survey included a number of questions asking about students' course load, workload, and their time online; responses are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Spring Quarter Circumstances for All Respondents (N=355)

Question	Mean	Min	Max
Number of hours spent completing course readings	9.2	0	50
Number of hours spent completing course assignments and other activities	12.2	0	50
Percentage of hours on required synchronous activities	21%	0%	90%
Percentage of hours on required asynchronous activities	40%	0%	100%
Number of CoE credits taken in spring 2020	10.5 credits	0	20
Number of Non-CoE credits taken in spring 2020	4.7 credits	0	18

Supportive Instructional Practices for Remote Learning

AXDD researchers conducted a qualitative analysis of student responses to the survey question, **"What is something your instructor(s) has done that helps you with learning via remote/online instruction?"** There were 241 write-in responses from College of Education students to this question. Of these 241 responses, 40 (17%) were from doctoral students, 106 (44%) were from masters degree students, and 95 (39%) were from undergraduate students.

Analysis

The research team reviewed all responses and generated a coding scheme of 18 codes (see Table 2). These 18 codes were focused on action-oriented pedagogical strategies instructors employed during the shift to remote teaching and learning during the spring 2020 quarter.

Table 2. Code Descriptions

Code	Description: Response describes...
Acknowledge	Instructor directly acknowledged COVID-19 pandemic, or created space/time in class for students to discuss their emotions/feelings about living during a pandemic
Breakout Rooms/ Small Groups	Instructor used breakout rooms or small groups during class time or offline for coursework support
Canvas Usability	Student mentioned Canvas course site is well organized, which directly/indirectly helped their learning
Class Breaks	Instructor provided timed breaks during class to give students a break from Zoom/screen time, or instructor limited Zoom time overall to minimize screen/Zoom burnout
Expectations	Instructor was clear about course expectations
Flexible Attendance	Instructor had flexible attendance policies, which allowed students to attend class synchronously or asynchronously
Flexible Coursework	Instructor made changes to coursework compared to previous offerings, or adapted throughout the quarter from what was on the syllabus
Flexible Due Dates	Instructor provided an option for flexible due dates, or was accommodating when student requested flexible due dates
Flexible Grading	Instructor offered grade/point flexibility, or was accommodating when student requested flexible grade/point assignment
Google Tools	Instructors used Google tools to facilitate learning
Instructor Learning	Instructor told class he/she was learning as well and created flexibility with their curriculum development timeline

Office Hours	Instructor held office hours during class time or provided flexible office hours outside of schedule class hours
Personal Connection	Instructor checked in with students on a personal level, or created a space that allowed students and instructor to connect on a personal level
Slide Deck / Extra Resources	Instructor prepared slide presentations, notes, etc. for lectures and shared these resources with students to help students in their work
Readings	Instructor provided scaffolding activity or tool to help students with reading assignments
Recordings	Instructor pre-recorded lectures or recorded class to allow for asynchronous learning; mentioned Panopto or Zoom lecture recordings
Response Time	Instructor provided timely responses to emails, discussion posts, and other forms of communication
Zoom Tools	Instructor used a variety of features in Zoom for teaching

Findings

Results from the qualitative analysis are listed in Table 3.

The most common instructional practice respondents reported as supportive was the provision of **recorded lecture material**, either pre-recorded outside of class, or recorded during synchronous class sessions for students to view asynchronously. The latter was coupled with **flexible attendance policies** so that students who found it difficult to attend class sessions when scheduled could "attend" at another time.

Table 3. Number and Percent of Responses by Code

Code	Count	Percentage
Acknowledge	10	4%
Breakout Rooms/ Small Groups	37	15%
Canvas Usability	28	12%
Class Breaks	14	6%
Expectations	30	12%
Flexible Attendance	29	12%
Flexible Coursework	15	6%
Flexible Due Dates	25	10%
Flexible Grading	2	1%

Google Tools	10	4%
Instructor Learning	6	3%
Office Hours	28	12%
Personal Connection	26	11%
Slide Deck / Extra Resources	29	12%
Readings	8	3%
Recordings	45	19%
Response Time	36	15%
Zoom Tools	21	9%

Also frequently cited was the use of **small group work** for course work **and/or breakout meeting rooms** in Zoom. Students identified small group breakout rooms as a helpful strategy to "break up" passive learning in Zoom. They also reported that the rooms were more conducive to discussion than the whole class setting in Zoom.

Respondents also highlighted the importance of Canvas usability, pointing out that **well-organized Canvas pages** allowed remote learning to unfold more smoothly and helped alleviate the stress of unclear expectations or excess searching for materials and resources.

Students also found **clear instructor expectations** very valuable. As the shift to remote learning required both students and instructors to adapt, being on the same page helped alleviate the stress of uncertainty during the quarter.

Along with clear expectations, students appreciated instructors who shared their **slide decks, presentation notes**, or other resources, such as **summaries** of important points in material covered. These resources, as well as **reading guides or scaffolded reading activities**, helped students focus on what they needed to learn at a time when they were often distracted by events or competing responsibilities.

Respondents appreciated instructors who offered **flexible due dates** to accommodate student needs. Students mentioned **flexible grading policies** less often, which suggests that there may have been less of a change in grading standards, at least as students were aware. Flexible due dates helped students produce work to the best of their abilities without the pressure of a set deadline.

Instructors' **timely responses** to student communications, extra **office hours** in Zoom or office hours offered during class time, and instructors' efforts to personally connect with students were practices that helped students trust that their instructors were there for them in uncertain times. Students emphasized the importance of instructor access for clarifying questions or feedback on

assignments, and appreciated instructors **checking in** with individual students or the whole class to see how they were doing. **Weekly emails** from instructors, **discussion board engagement**, and Zoom office hours all helped students feel supported and connected to their instructors, which elevated the course experience.