

Examining the Experience of Undergraduate Students During the COVID19-Driven Transition to Online Learning



Lina Carpenter & Lindsey Richland

School of Education
Science of Learning Lab

COVID-19 led to rapid, chaotic transition to remote socialization and activities, as well as increased levels of stress and depression.^{1,2} In spring 2020, undergraduate students were forced to make large adjustments in both personal and academic contexts in a short period of time, yielding the possibility of compounding stressors. Given that socialization has been shown to mitigate stress for college students, decreased socialization may undermine students' cognitive functions.³ Additionally, given that classes will continue to be conducted online, it is important to examine the perceived advantages and disadvantages for undergraduates⁴ to ensure online education is both effective and supportive for undergrads in a time of crisis.

RQ: What are some characteristics of undergraduates' experiences of the rapid transition to online instruction across the first quarter of the pandemic?

PARTICIPANTS & MEASURES

Participants (N=19)

- University of California Irvine, Spring 2019
- Recruited from two anthropology courses
- Female (n=12), Latinx (n=7) 1st gen (n=12)

Procedure & Measures

- Initial Online Learning Survey
 - Demographic and situational reports
 - Positive and negative ratings of environment, online learning, and impacts
 - Free response prompts related to ratings
- Weekly Course Surveys
 - Course module(s) and measures of task-based enjoyment/stress, and attention
 - Attention/comprehension scales

METHODOLOGY & METHODS

Approach

- Phenomenological, multiple-method
- Inductive approach to identify characteristics of students' experiences

Analysis

- Generated individual profiles to examine longitudinal trends and compare written responses to reported scores
- Identified themes and illuminating quotes

EMERGING THEMES

Online Learning

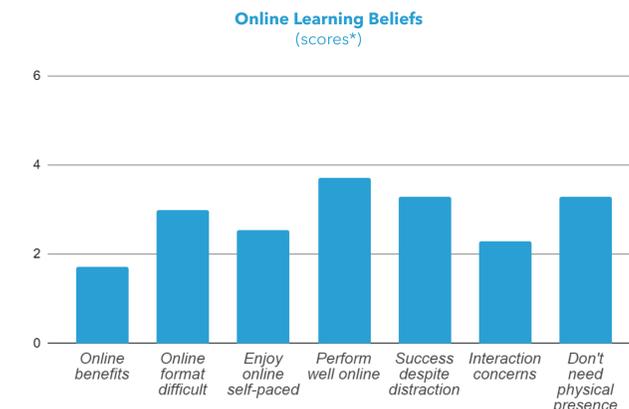
- Autonomy and online learning
- Changes in learning interactions
- Distractions/disruptions while studying

Non-Academic

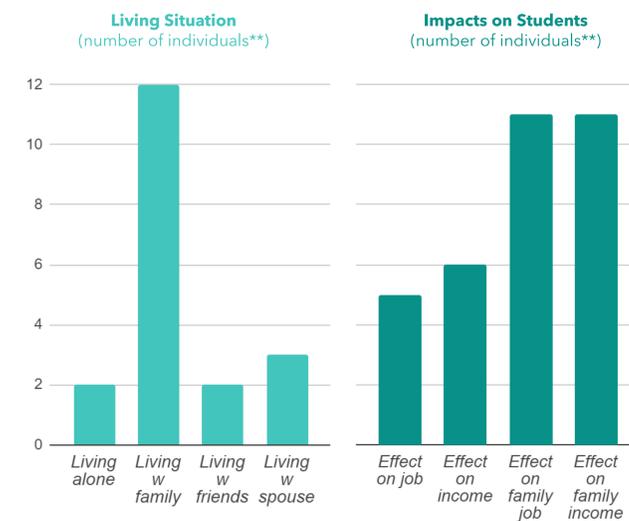
- Living at home with family members
- Current and future financial concerns
- Future employment concerns

Mixed Reports

- Mixed positive/negative ratings of environment and online learning
- Low scores of impact but written responses indicate distress or concern



*Likert scale ranging 0-6; "completely disagree" to "completely agree"



**some individuals indicated multiple selections

THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Online Learning: Autonomy. Students were positive about being able to learn at their own pace and not worry about attendance.

"I like the idea of having more time on my hands to complete my assignments"

"...because attendance has posed an issue for me in the past, [having classes online] prevents that from negatively impacting my grade"

Online Learning: Interactions. Though average concern scores were low, written responses expressed concern about the changes in class interactions and context.

"It is very hard for me to be engaged in lectures/zoom meetings."

"Because I am naturally extremely introverted it is hard for me to make connections with people without being "forced" [into] a social situation."

Online Learning: Distractions. Difficulty focusing and space were prevalent concerns.

"It is a lot more difficult for me to stay focused when I'm not in class in person because, since I'm already on my laptop, it is very easy to open another tab or notification."

"It is difficult to find a place and time at home that is solely designated for the benefit of my concentration in studying and doing homework."

Non-Academic: Living at Home. Students generally regarded living at home as a positive, but some reported additional distractions or pressure.

"Being with my family motivates me to do well in the courses I am taking and even teach them a little of what I have been learning."

"I don't want to slack off and be a negative example for my younger siblings that are also doing school remotely, as elementary and high school students. I also am now not the sole caretaker of the house, so I'm less distracted by household chores."

Non-Academic: Financial Concerns. Though the degree and type of financial concern varied amongst responses, no students had positive or optimistic responses about financial prospects or wealth.

"Both of my parents are not working and my older sister as well."

"I am fine for the next month or two but if this keeps going [I'm] not sure what will happen. Especially if I [don't] get that unemployment check"

Non-Academic: Future Employment. Students were all pessimistic, to varying degrees, about future job prospects; Year 4 and 5 students were particularly concerned.

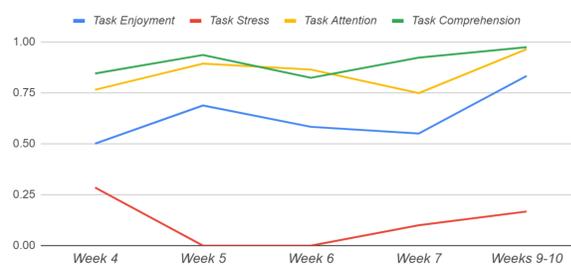
"I think getting a job will be nearly impossible"

"Of all of my worries about [COVID], finding a job is the one that absolutely terrifies me."

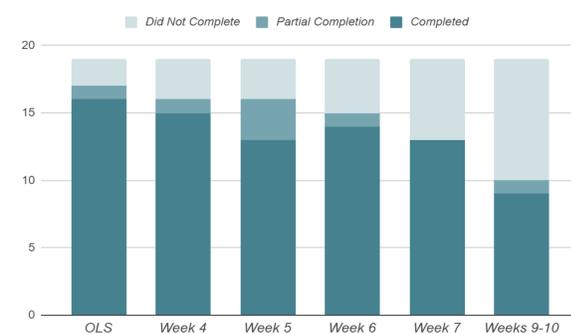
Weekly Trends for Lower-Division Course (Careers in Anthropology)



Weekly Trends for Upper-Division Course (Native Americans & Standing Rock)



Completion Rates of Asynchronous Activity for All Participants



SURVEY TRENDS

- Generally, task enjoyment, attention, and comprehension increased slightly over the quarter; both courses had similar trends
- Student response rate dips but task enjoyment, attention, and comprehension are higher
- Average task stress was higher for lower-division students than upper-division students
- On average, students in both courses showed decreased stress over time

CONCLUSIONS & DISCUSSION

Although students appreciated the self-paced nature of online learning, they consistently reported distractions were a concern. Academic and economic disruption was significant. Task stress generally decreased over the quarter, suggesting students may acclimate over time. This sample may reflect non-random sampling – this is a small set of students who opted to participate in the study and who completed more than two asynchronous activities. Further analysis with larger samples is required to examine the interactions between social supports, living situations, and learning outcomes in this time of crisis.

[1] Salari, N., Hossainian-Far, A., Jalali, R. et al. Prevalence of stress, anxiety, depression among the general population during the COVID-19 pandemic: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Global Health* 16, 57 (2020).
 [2] Son C, Hegde S, Smith A, Wang X, Sasangohar F. Effects of COVID-19 on College Students' Mental Health in the United States: Interview Survey Study. *J Med Internet Res* 2020;22(9):e21279
 [3] Chao, R.C.-L. (2012). Managing Perceived Stress Among College Students: The Roles of Social Support and Dysfunctional Coping. *Journal of College Counseling*, 15: 5-21. doi:10.1002/j.2161-1882.2012.00002.x
 [4] Mukhtar, K., Javed, K., Arooj, M., & Sethi, A. (2020). Advantages, Limitations and Recommendations for online learning during COVID-19 pandemic era. *Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences*, 36(COVID19-S4), S27-S31. https://doi.org/10.12669/pjms.36.COVID19-S4.2785