

Student and Instructor Online Experience

Fall 2020 Survey Results - Working Document

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Submitted by Learning and Teaching Support and Innovation



**University
of Victoria**



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Executive Summary

Overview

A survey was conducted with UVic students and instructors to better understand their experiences of learning and teaching within a predominantly online environment. The student survey was open between November 6-19, 2020 with the instructor survey occurring between October 29-November 18, 2020. The response was substantial with 5242 students (4744 undergraduate and 498 graduate), and 217 instructors participating (includes 113 faculty, 57 sessionals, 27 TAs plus instructional staff). All responses were anonymous and confidential.

The student survey was comprised of both quantitative and qualitative components, with the instructor survey focused entirely on open-ended questions. The completion rate for the surveys was high with approximately 80% of students and 90% of instructors completing all open-ended questions. The surveys were analyzed separately. After reading and reviewing the qualitative data, a coding process was undertaken. All data were coded and themes identified.

Student quantitative findings

Overall, 5242 students responded (4744 undergraduate and 498 graduate), with 28.5% (1496) being new undergraduate students, 62% (3248) returning undergraduates, 5.3% (277) new graduates, and 4.2% (221) returning graduates. The survey showed strong representation across identified student groups. Students were given the option to self-identify and the results show:

- 11.6% International students
- 4.0% Indigenous students
- 2.4% Registered with the Centre for Accessible Learning (CAL)
- 2.4% identified as English as an Additional Language (EAL)

Workload was identified in the student group as being extremely heavy or somewhat heavy. Students spent an average of 8-10 hours a week studying per course (including lectures). Students identified 44.7% always having study space, with 43.1% sometimes having study space, which was consistently shown between undergraduate and graduate groups.

The survey asked students what barriers to accessibility in an online environment they experienced. Across the groups, the numbers were similar, showing the most prevalent barriers were difficulty navigating online course materials; insufficient time on projects, assignments and tests (undergraduate students); confusion accessing and using course materials; and confusion using new technologies. Students requested additional supports in connecting with others; accessing academic support resources; and mental health and wellness resources.

Instructor findings

Overall, there were 217 quantitative faculty/instructor responses (113 faculty and 57 sessionals) with adequate representation across faculties.

Convergent Themes from the Student and Instructor Survey

Analysis of the qualitative data was conducted separately in the student and instructor survey, however, it revealed a convergence between instructor and student survey responses. Within the analytic process five themes were identified. These themes are not mutually exclusive and intersect in significant ways. It is also important to note that while the themes identified significant concerns, there were also descriptions of effective learning and teaching practices and these strategies which were incorporated into the recommendations from the study.

- Workload
- Adapting to online
- Course quality
- Engagement
- Mental and physical health & wellbeing

Pandemic Context

The pandemic context is the underlying backdrop for the five themes. It is hard to overstate the profound task that instructors and students have had over the past months. Transitioning to the online environment has included the need to introduce new learning technologies (including a new LMS), adapting to learning and teaching online (which is fundamentally different than face-to-face), and for some, broader economic, housing, family, or care-giving challenges. While some managed well over the recent months, the pandemic context was evident throughout the data with many describing one of their most challenging years.

Recommendations

For many instructors and students, the Fall 2020 term was their first experience with online learning and teaching. Not surprisingly, turning quickly to online instruction during a pandemic posed many challenges. Instructors and students alike, have learned from this first-hand experience this fall, and it is anticipated that they will proceed into spring term with a new set of knowledge and skills as well as greater confidence in how to approach online learning and teaching.

The findings from both surveys, including the quantitative components of the student survey, point to seven recommendations. The first four recommendations are instructor-focused strategies. The last three recommendations focus on broad university strategies that culminate in creating a more robust communication and navigation strategy for students and instructors. The recommendations include many suggestions and strategies made by respondents themselves in their qualitative responses, many of which are already being used by instructors.

- 1. Clear, concise and consistent communications and expectations** – include a clearly identified course syllabus, provide an orientation to course and course site, provide a weekly overview and expectations, integrate regular opportunities for student feedback, maintain a continued and predictable presence in the course, provide a clear communication pathway, and set course workload expectations.
- 2. Focus on the essentials** – keep course content as streamlined as possible, be sure that assessments promote learning and not create excessive workload, consider assessing engagement rather than participation alone.
- 3. Course structure and organization** – use Brightspace template whenever possible, organize course by week or key concepts/topics, provide a weekly update for students, remain within scheduled time for synchronous sessions, identify assessments in course syllabus.
- 4. Accessibility and flexibility** – use universal design principles, consider accessibility and flexibility when designing assessments, approach student questions and concerns with compassion.
- 5. Engagement, interaction and connection** – encourage students to maintain a presence in the course, deliberately create opportunities for informal and formal connections, foster contact between TA and students, encourage students to take advantage of university resources.
- 6. Mental and physical health and wellbeing** – suggest students take regular breaks and intermittent physical activity, build connections between students, encourage students to reach out for support, acknowledge challenges with students and let them know resources are available.
- 7. Navigation and access to resources and supports** – guide students to Learn Anywhere portal, encourage students seek support such as Academic Advising, Counselling, Centre for Accessible Learning and others.

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Quantitative Findings

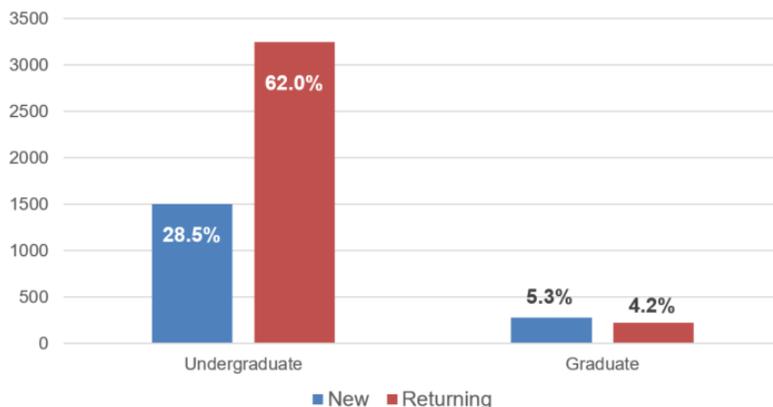
Overview of survey respondents

Overall, there were 5242 student quantitative (4744 undergraduate and 498 graduate), and 217 quantitative faculty/instructor responses (113 faculty and 57 sessionals). The surveys were split between the two audiences: students, and faculty/instructors. We have further split student findings into undergraduates and graduates.

[See Appendix A: Student and Instructor Survey Questions](#) for the exact questions asked.

Student Identification

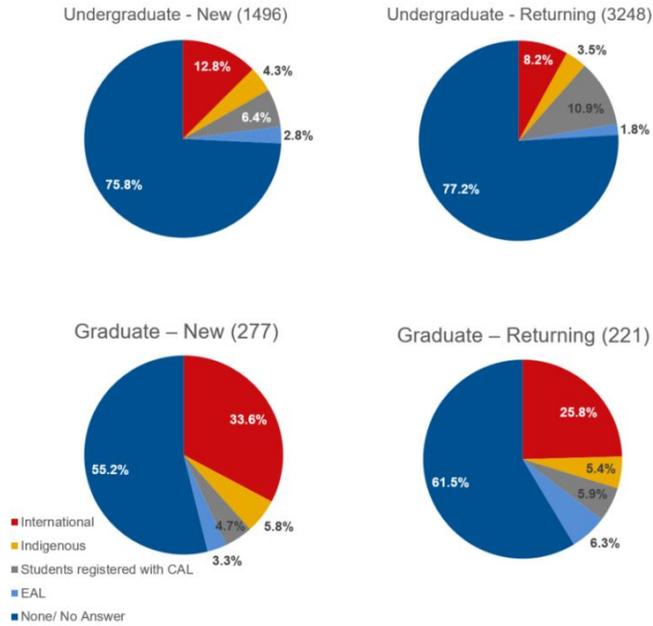
Are you a new or returning student?



The survey found strong representation across identified groups. Out of the 5242 students:

- 11.6% identified as international students (457 undergraduate students and 150 graduate students)
- 4.0% identified as Indigenous students (179 undergraduate students and 28 graduate students)
- 2.4% are registered with the Centre for Accessible Learning (CAL) (450 undergraduate students and 26 graduate students)
- 2.4% identified as English as an additional language (101 undergraduate, 23 graduate)

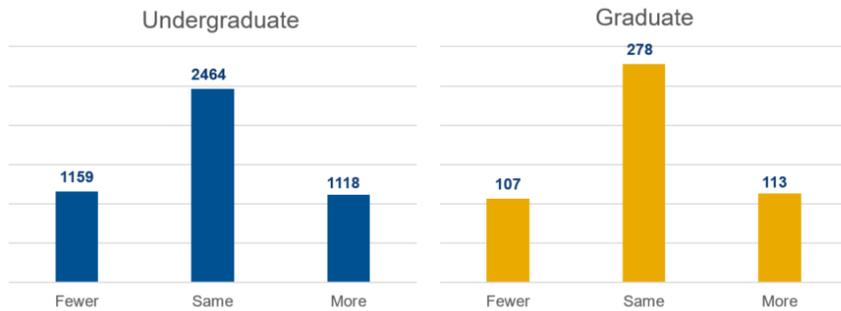
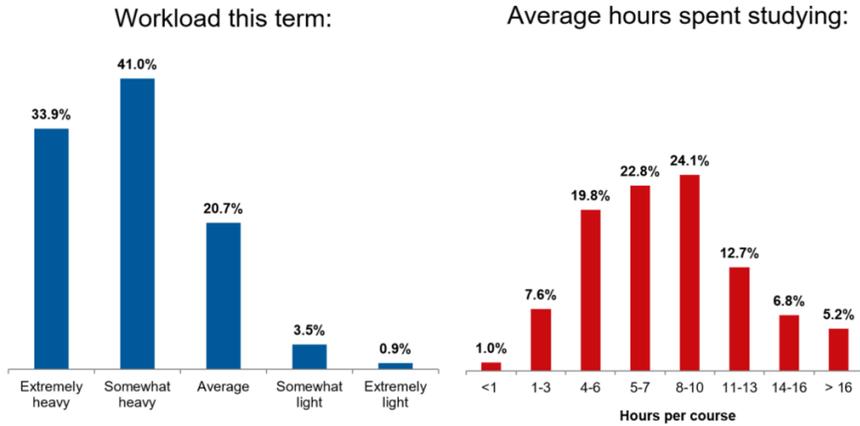
Do you identify as the following?



What Faculty or Division do you belong to?

Faculty	Undergraduate	Graduate
Faculty of Education	4.4%	13.5%
Faculty of Engineering	13.1%	11.2%
Faculty of Fine Arts	6.5%	3.2%
Faculty of Human and Social Development	5.9%	14.9%
Faculty of Humanities	11.0%	8.6%
Faculty of Law	1.7%	6.0%
Faculty of Science	19.7%	12.9%
Faculty of Social Science	26.9%	10.7%
Peter B Gustavson, School of Business	5.9%	5.2%
Division of Continuing Studies	0.5%	1.2%
Division of Medical Sciences	0.1%	1.2%
Interdisciplinary	0.3%	1.8%
Not yet declared	2.4%	0%
Other	1.8%	9.6%
Totals	4744	498

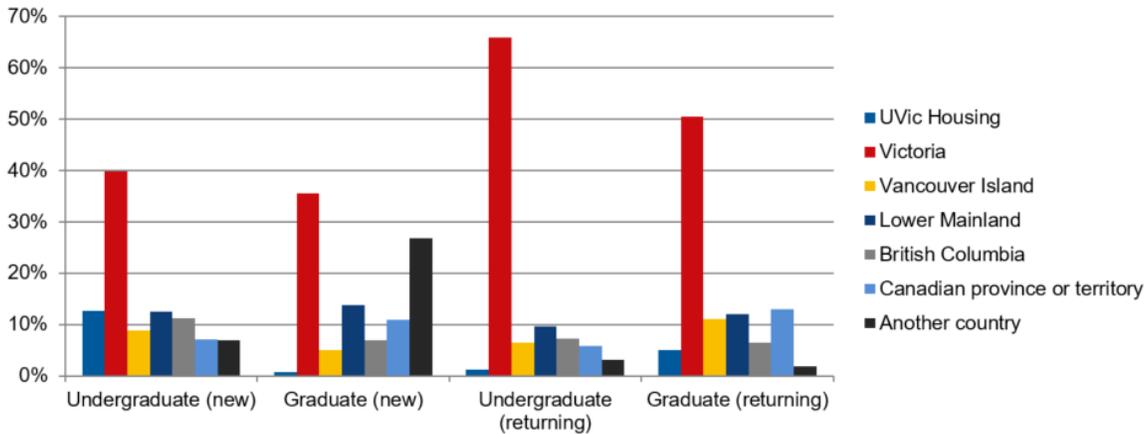
Workload



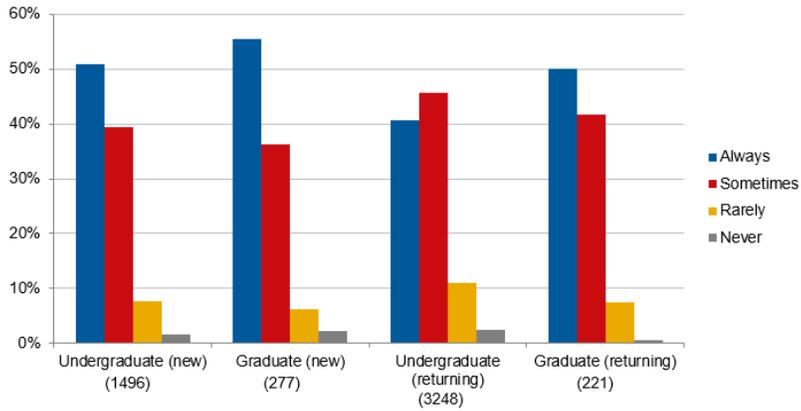
Living and Access to Study Space

Location

Where are you living in the Fall term?



Adequate study space



Technologies

Have sufficient access to a computer or mobile device

- 88.6% always
- 10.6% sometimes

Primary device for completing studies

- 85.8% laptop
- 12.3% desktop
- 91.4% have access to a webcam

Have reliable internet access

- 57% always
- 40.9% sometimes
- 78.6% have high-speed internet access

Learning online – what barriers to accessibility have you experienced?

Undergraduate Students

Category	New (1496)	Returning (3248)
Difficulty navigating online course materials	61.9%	69.6%
Insufficient time - projects, assignments, tests	51.5%	53.6%
Confusion accessing/use course materials	48.9%	54.4%
Confusion using new learning technologies	43.1%	55.2%
Lack of a quiet or private place to study	34.1%	50.6%
Course materials not provided in an accessible format	22.7%	27.8%
Distractions from friends or classmates during class	19.1%	23.1%
Difficulty accessing supports - academic accommodation	18.0%	15.4%
Lack of access to assistive technologies	12.7%	12.9%
Difficulty attending class schedule - shared technology	9.9%	14.9%
Lack of closed captioning	9.5%	13.3%
Difficulty attending class schedule - time zone differences	7.7%	5.9%

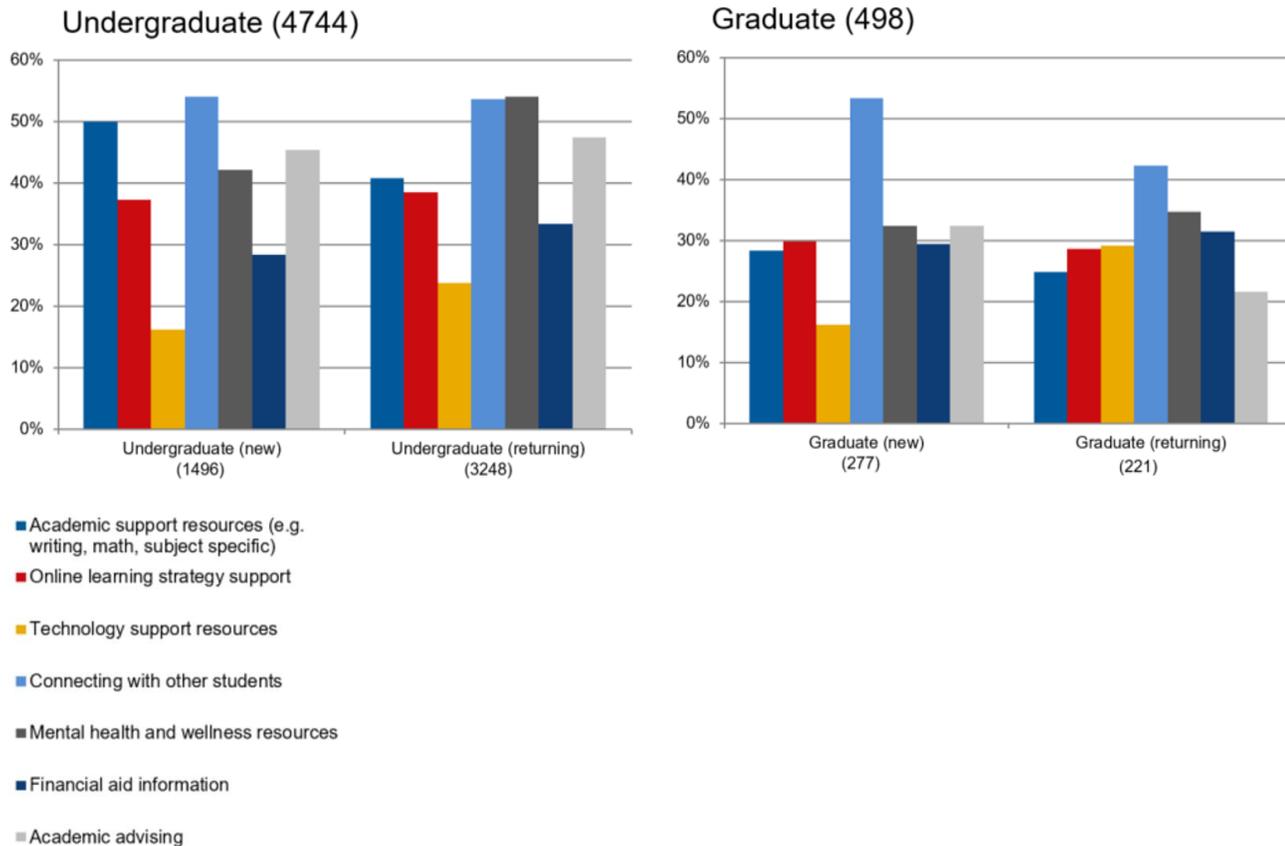
Graduate Students

Category	New (277)	Returning (221)
Difficulty navigating online course materials	40.1%	42.3%
Confusion using new learning technologies	32.0%	40.9%
Lack of a quiet or private place to study	30.5%	42.7%
Insufficient time - projects, assignments, tests	29.0%	20.7%
Difficulty attending class schedule - time zone differences	26.1%	8.9%
Confusion accessing/use course materials	22.8%	25.8%
Course materials not provided in an accessible format	11.0%	10.3%
Distractions from friends or classmates during class	8.8%	8.0%
Difficulty attending class schedule - shared technology	7.4%	15.5%
Lack of closed captioning	4.4%	4.7%
Difficulty accessing supports - academic accommodation	4.0%	9.4%
Lack of access to assistive technologies	1.8%	6.1%

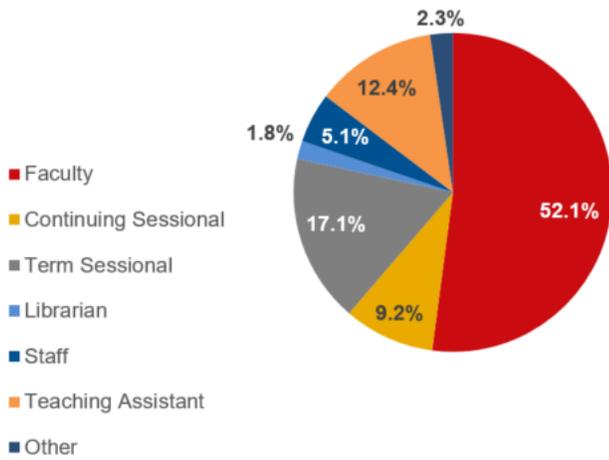
How do you currently seek information about learning online?

Category	%	#
Figure things out on my own	94.2%	4875
Contact the Computer Helpdesk for technology support	6.4%	333
Ask my instructor or TA	38.7%	2002
Ask another student	59.1%	3060
Ask family/friends	32.5%	1683
Attend workshops/webinars	5.7%	297
Access UVic's web resources (uvic.ca)	19.9%	1031
Access Learn Anywhere	4.2%	215
Access "Help" in Brightspace	11.4%	588
Access library resources	11.9%	614
Prefer not to answer	0.5%	27
Other (please specify)	3.1%	158

In what areas do you need additional support?



Instructor Identification



FACULTY

Faculty of Education	12.4%	27
Faculty of Engineering	6.5%	14
Faculty of Fine Arts	7.4%	16
Faculty of Human and Social Development	11.5%	25
Faculty of Humanities	17.5%	38
Faculty of Law	3.7%	8
Faculty of Science	16.1%	35
Faculty of Social Science	18.4%	40
Peter B Gustavson, School of Business	3.2%	7
Division of Continuing Studies	0.5%	1
Division of Medical Sciences	0.5%	1
UVic Libraries	1.8%	4
Other	0.5%	1
TOTAL	52.1%	217

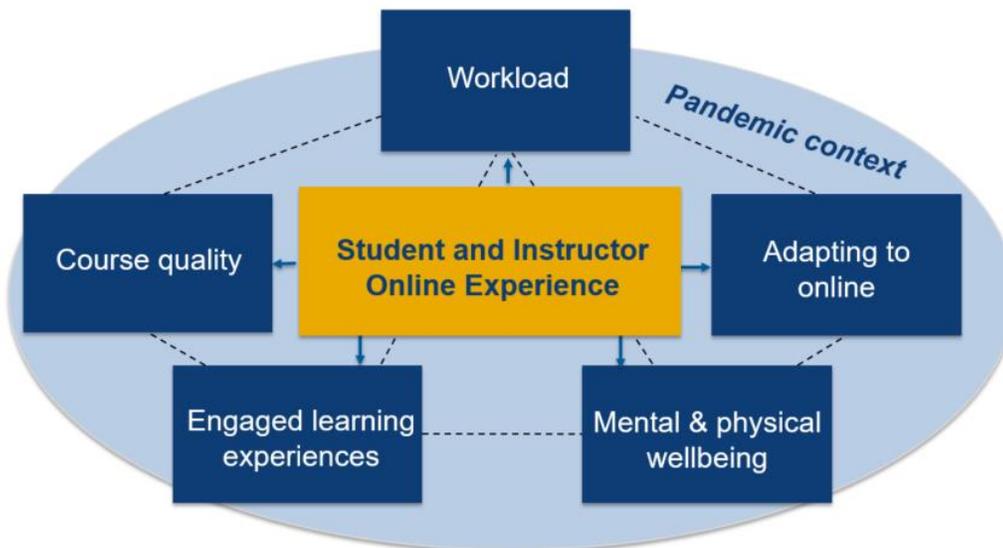
Please note: a further sub-analysis of student groups will be added as it becomes available.

Qualitative Findings

Convergent Themes

Overall, there were 5242 student qualitative responses (4744 undergraduate and 498 graduate), and 217 qualitative instructor responses (113 faculty, 57 sessionals and 27 TAs plus instructional staff). Qualitative [questions are included in Appendix A](#), questions 3-6.

Analysis of the qualitative data was conducted separately in the student and instructor survey, however, it revealed a convergence between instructor and student survey responses. Within the analytic process five themes were identified. These themes are not mutually exclusive and intersect in significant ways. It is also important to note that while the themes identified significant concerns, there were also descriptions of effective learning and teaching practices and these strategies which were incorporated into the recommendations from the study.



Workload

Volume and Time | Assessments and Expectations

Theme Description

Moving to the online environment, both students and instructors report being overwhelmed and fatigued by the sheer volume and magnitude of work. The volume of information (emails, posts, reading, and overall time spent online) is described as being exhausting. More time than usual is required to prepare online classes and materials, to participate in the course, and to review and revise materials and assessment completion.

Students also describe workload to be a challenge in terms of the number readings in place of lectures and of assessment activities (assignments, tests/exams, posts, etc.). In parallel, instructors have challenges grading ongoing assessments and some find grading in the online environment a challenge. For many (students and instructors), the expectations are perceived as being unrealistic and not sustainable.

Examples of Comments:

<i>Student</i>	<i>Instructor</i>
<p>Volume and Time</p> <p><i>“The midterm week was extremely heavy”</i></p> <p><i>“...struggling to stay on top of course readings and assignments while figuring out online software”</i></p> <p><i>“Professors are assigning WAY too much work & more pre-recorded lectures than we have time for in our weekly time slots”</i></p> <p><i>“Labs take an extra long time because you do not have a TA there to ask questions, and if you ask a question on the forum, it can take days for it to be answered”</i></p> <p>Assessments and Expectations</p> <p><i>“Balancing extra assignments that 'make up' for fewer lectures. Assignments are difficult to balance and require more hours put into them than lectures in order to receive intended marks”</i></p> <p><i>“Some professors feeling the need to do more than 3 hours of lecture a week...sometimes doing as much as 6”</i></p> <p><i>“All of my classes require online participation... (for example) I need to post on average 8 forums that contain substance and course material... separate from my small and large assignments as well”</i></p>	<p>Volume and Time</p> <p><i>“Managing the massive workload with more assessments, more emails, more meetings online has been devastating for my research productivity”</i></p> <p><i>“Despite the support, the workload is immense. In trying to ensure we can reach students at many different points of engagement, I end up covering the material in 4 different ways... it's exhausting and I'm burnt out”</i></p> <p><i>“spent much more time than usual developing the online course so that it would be engaging and compelling for students”</i></p> <p><i>“I am overworked due to the online switch, and the rest of the world and of my job has not change yet I have to spend twice as much time on forums, online classes, zoom meetings, emails, grading, class prep, etc.”</i></p> <p>Assessments and Expectations</p> <p><i>“A large increase in the amount of time to prepare good online lecture material and good on-line (open) assessment/exam questions”</i></p> <p><i>“I'm utilizing online technologies so much that the TAs assigned to me are using most of their labour hours managing online communities and answering emails... there are no hours remaining to help me mark exams, meaning my exams are now M/C, T/F sorts of questions, which is not ideal.”</i></p> <p><i>“Given that 50% of my students are located abroad, I basically was "forced" to create pre-recorded videos. It takes forever, especially the editing step”</i></p>

Adapting to Online Learning

New Environment and Technologies | Learning Curve and Preparation Time | Connectivity

Theme Description

Participants describe the challenges of learning new technologies, experiencing a steep learning curve to the online format, fundamental differences from in-person teaching and learning, and having online fatigue from excess screen time. While overall there was a recognition of the value of new technologies available to support the transition, learning the technologies dramatically increases the amount of preparation required. These issues were sometimes conflated with connectivity, hardware and/or software difficulties. Some struggled with having adequate work or study space and many described a sense of isolation even when connectivity was achieved.

Other students and instructors described their experiences in a different way. They liked using Brightspace, not having to commute, having more control over their schedules, and all the new technology options. Some described the online environment as conducive to more flexibly managing their time, and described themselves as more focused and enjoying the term.

Examples of Comments

Student	Instructor
New Environment and Technologies	New Environment and Technologies
<i>"[It's a challenge] Staying focused online"</i>	<i>"Navigating a technology challenge in real-time. It would sometime take days for [support] to respond to an urgent question which was challenging in large classes. (This improved over the term & when I got ...support it was excellent)"</i>
<i>"When school is online it feels optional"</i>	<i>"I would have expected that rooms and equipment for different ways of teaching would be provided to us"</i>
<i>"I miss my cohort and in class instruction"</i>	Learning Curve and Preparation Time
<i>"It's very hard to ask questions as the online zoom classes are an intimidating space and you can't always just privately ask the teacher post-class"</i>	<i>"I'm finding the new LMS really hard to navigate. The quiz tool doesn't do things I need it to, and it's hard to set up groups so I can manage my TAs"</i>
<i>"All classes blend together. Because the environment is the same, it is hard to differentiate which course was teaching which material"</i>	Connectivity
<i>"Differences in time zone is also a bit challenging"</i>	<i>"Computer hardware that is not up to the task of streaming/recording video"</i>
<i>"It makes me sad breakout rooms just aren't the same, most kids leave their cameras off and hardly talk"</i>	<i>"Sorting technical steps to achieve desired outcomes on Brightspace and other platforms - Kaltura, etc. System still seems to be very slow and occasionally unstable, especially Kaltura and UVic VPN"</i>
Learning Curve and Preparation Time	
<i>"Spending so much time at the computer every day"</i>	
<i>"Screen exhaustion. No separation in my study/home life. Lack of motivation"</i>	
<i>"figuring out how to use the different learning tools different teachers assign"</i>	
Connectivity	
<i>"My lap top can't deal with all the technologies"</i>	
<i>"Zoom disconnecting in the middle of class"</i>	
<i>"My internet is not always reliable"</i>	

Course Quality

Impacted by Transition to Online | Course Structure and Organization | Accessibility | Assessments | Clear and Timely Communication

Theme Description

The transition to online has impacted both the quality of instruction and of course offerings. Instructors who have been confident teaching face-to-face report struggling to teach effectively in the online environment. Students describe high variability of quality among courses, influencing their ability to learn effectively. Courses structured with well-defined course concepts, engagement strategies, and delivered in an effective format provide positive learning experiences. However, many students also report difficulty finding basic course content and materials, synchronous course sessions, evaluations and assessments.

Accessibility requirements for those students with academic accommodations, from both the student and instructor perspective, were described as challenging. For students, previous accommodations did not translate smoothly to the online environment. For instructors, necessary additional supports need to be in place for those with academic accommodations when teaching in an online context (i.e. timed exams and managing the volume of accommodations in larger classes).

Examples of Comments

<i>Student</i>	<i>Instructor</i>
<p>Course Structure and Organization</p> <p><i>“My instructors [are] not providing enough help or instructions on assignments”</i></p> <p><i>“Some teachers are totally unprepared and shift class lecture time into more readings”</i></p> <p><i>“Lack of criteria and understanding for projects. There has been zero project examples with very vague guidelines”</i></p> <p><i>“Missing assignments deadlines because each prof puts the assignments in different places and don't make use of the calendars”</i></p> <p><i>“I have to take tests on days I don't have that particular class, I have tests and lectures during reading week, my "asynchronous courses" have specific times and days to attend which clashes with my synchronous courses”</i></p> <p>Supports/Resources</p> <p><i>“Little support resources when encountering problems or wanting to ask questions. What could be small issue becomes a larger problem when trying to work through using internet resources”</i></p> <p><i>“It is difficult to find ANY study space on campus...NO WHERE would allow me to use the building space”</i></p> <p><i>“The library is closed during my class times...I work during the day and really need to use the library at night but it is closed for no reason”</i></p>	<p>Supports/Resources</p> <p><i>“Changing/conflicting recommendations on best practices for online teaching from the school/faculty...and senior admin offices”</i></p> <p><i>“Not enough support/information about the possible ways students can cheat and how to mitigate this - seems there are some well-informed units/faculties but this has not been shared”</i></p> <p><i>“Information/guidance has arrived, in many cases, weeks after it was useful for the Fall term”</i></p> <p><i>“I've been seeing large classes with little support ... in terms of technology or supports given to [those] who are doing instruction”</i></p> <p><i>“Lack of easy access to the library”</i></p> <p>Accessibility</p> <p><i>“Taking on the administration of (academic accommodation) exams has also been non-trivial as I am teaching four large classes this semester”</i></p> <p><i>“It is more challenging to differentiate instruction with learners with various learning needs”</i></p> <p><i>“There are many downloads onto faculty, for example [supporting students who require academic accommodation”]</i></p>

"[not enough help for my different courses]" "Having trouble with finding a co-op"

Accessibility

"the prof was unwilling to provide me with accommodations in terms of testing format despite being with CAL"

"Lack of closed captioning/poor audio quality for lectures and labs- had to drop courses because of this."

"Not getting my CAL accommodations on my first exam... was rough."

"Difficulty accessing therapy and academic accommodations"

Assessments

"Having too little time to complete tests, and tests being much more difficult because they are open book"

"Tests have been unfair and much harder than in previous years because of teachers trying to negate cheating"

"Some of the online evaluations were too small... a quiz worth 8 marks accounts for 8% of my final grade. It is very difficult to get a good score in an evaluation so small"

"tests that require both hand writing, scanning, and online questions are awful. There's not enough time."

Assessments

"Assessing students online and avoiding cheating"

"MC quizzes for midterms too easy for students even doubling question count--> ~90% marks; Long-answer exams are more pedagogically successful; but, the marking load is too high"

"it would be great if Brightspace was more streamlined for the grade release. There seems to be five different places that I need to go to in order to release grades. Ideally it can just be one button that once pressed, the students get all feedback"

Engaged Learning Experiences

Critical to Online Learning | Presence and Opportunities to Connect | Clear Consistent Communication

Theme Description

Engagement and connection in the learning process are essential in the face-to-face environment, and even more critical to online learning. Student and instructor respondents described repeatedly, the value and importance of engaged learning in an online course. Students described losing the physical presence of the instructor, whereas instructors shared frustration of not being able to connect better with students. Students also described missing opportunities to connect with other students. There was also an appreciation for the support and community provided during this transition and some felt that supports were available.

The importance of clear, timely, and consistent communication was an unwavering request from students. This included both informal opportunities for dialogue (such as instructor availability for a few minutes before or after a synchronous Zoom session) and formal opportunities (such as assignment instructions or an instructor regularly engaging in discussion posts).

Examples of Comments

Student	Instructor
<p>Presence and Opportunities to Connect</p> <p><i>“Miss being associated with campus...hard to make new connections with people...can’t find anyone to study with”</i></p> <p><i>“No sense of community or real teamwork or relationship building”</i></p> <p><i>“Feeling really disconnected from other students/peers at UVic...more of a feeling of homeschool where you are all on your own”</i></p> <p><i>“One of my classmates made a Facebook site for the class which has been really great”</i></p> <p><i>“I met a lot of people around the world, that was amazing!”</i></p> <p><i>“I’ve been able to communicate with students in my class and talk about assignments, material and thing I don’t understand”</i></p> <p><i>“Teacher was flexible and open minded as well as understanding of situations that may cause difficulty in getting assignments completed in a specific way or for a specific deadline.”</i></p> <p><i>“The professors have been very supportive”</i></p> <p>Clear Consistent Communication</p> <p><i>“lack of clear directions from instructors”</i></p> <p><i>“My instructors not providing enough help or instructions on assignments”</i></p>	<p>Presence and Opportunities to Connect</p> <p><i>“They are overwhelmed with the online “content” and all the tricks to try to get them to participate - the result has been a general disconnection.”</i></p> <p><i>“... general disconnection. I myself am disconnected; I don't feel like I'm really "teaching", but only managing a website.”</i></p> <p><i>“Participation of students through other means like discussion posts, forums.”</i></p> <p><i>“Students who've visited Zoom office hours seem to be having a significantly more positive experience; they're just badly struggling with the sense of isolation, without that.”</i></p> <p><i>“Students have been fairly engaged in tutorial discussions, and have enjoyed interactive features on zoom (polls, whiteboard, breakout rooms)”</i></p> <p><i>“I have been tasked with “moderating” Zoom classes, which has allowed me more interface with students than I have had as a TA in other grading-focused positions. Being able to see their names written on the Zoom screen has allowed me to remember them more easily and I've worked really hard to give students a more personalized experience this term.”</i></p> <p><i>“in a seminar class, choice to reduce time spent in oral discussion has meant strong engagement in text format that has been satisfying for everyone -students are managing to engage with the materials online in a way that is reasonably comparable to in person instruction -</i></p>

"teachers are not understanding of learning online while during a pandemic and are not helpful when students are suffering"

"... professors have not been very supportive in my experience... they just expect us to figure it out. My one professor even told us from the start that he would not be responding to emails and if you needed to contact him you have to speak up in front of the entire class"

"My professors are understanding and kind. I have been able to communicate my difficulties with them."

opportunity for guest participation that I might not have sought out otherwise"

"Creating community among students. I get the sense that many students are feeling isolated"

"Student engagement is a real problem, of course. Too many students vanish in the online setting, don't use office hours, don't ask in class, etc."

"This semester just feels awful, both in terms of being isolated from colleagues, students, and the UVic community, and feeling as though I put in tons of effort for things to not go well."

"Appreciative students, remarkably helpful colleagues, supportive university staff and the excellent tech support available"

"I feel a lot of goodwill from the students, upper administration, and my colleagues. I feel very much like we are all in this together"

"overall student participation and engagement are low. While classes remain on zoom, students demonstrate fatigue, and many now choose to not turn on their videos. While I respect that choice and their right to do so, it does make it difficult to gauge who is present and engaged and who is not"

Clear Consistent Communication

"No feedback from students in class about what they understand/ do not understand; no opportunity to engage with individuals"

"The willingness of my immediate colleagues to help each other and the good nature of the students"

"The instructors I work with have been excellent at communicating"

"I've been able to form connections with my students despite being remote, and being able to support them / be understanding about the challenges they're facing with online learning has been very rewarding."

Mental and Physical Health & Wellbeing

Awareness and Compassion | Access and Knowledge of Existing Resources | Additional Resources

Theme Description

Concerns about the mental and physical health and well-being of students and instructors permeated the participant responses. Participants voiced a need for increased awareness and compassion for the isolation and mental health challenges that are being experienced in the online environment. Some respondents did express some positive experiences with online learning during a pandemic. Both students and instructors expressed a need for supports, including easy and timely access for existing resources, and recommendations for further supports. The results highlight the need to remind all that in these unusual times, people are stressed/anxious and needing easy access to a wide range of resources and supports.

Examples of Comments

<i>Student</i>	<i>Instructor</i>
<p>Awareness and Compassion</p> <p><i>"I am worried about getting sick because I know I will not be able to keep up and I don't feel as if there is any accommodation for falling behind or needing to take a couple days off"</i></p> <p><i>"Higher stress causing me to have more flare ups for my disability, resulting in greater pain, and an inability to attend my one in person class"</i></p> <p><i>"My family (children and I) had to leave our home and find new housing as a student"</i></p> <p><i>"Family problems that I'm now in the centre of because I can't afford to move out yet, depression, anxiety, the isolation of online school"</i></p> <p><i>"As someone who has ADHD, it's difficult to focus sometimes even during the best of times. I have found that it is even more difficult to focus, since I'm not in an academic setting, which makes it even easier to get distracted or to zone out due to mental fatigue."</i></p> <p><i>"I am also able to support those in my family during the pandemic because I am no longer living in Victoria"</i></p> <p><i>"Unable to work - financial Difficulty"</i></p> <p><i>"Having a good space at home that I can work in"</i></p> <p><i>"It's nice to have some time with my family and friends at home during these uncertain times" Finding it much harder to establish a school-life balance when my school work and classes are all done at home."</i></p> <p><i>"My sleep schedule has been way better...it has drastically improved my mental health"</i></p>	<p>Awareness and Compassion</p> <p><i>"I am working evening and weekends. I am burnt out -not much gas in the tank"</i></p> <p><i>"Zoom fatigue is crushing, both for the students and for me, and yet Zoom appears to be the only way to establish community and a feeling of engagement in the course"</i></p> <p><i>"I never hear from my colleagues, so it feels like I am self-employed and trying teach online for the first time all on my own. There is also a lot of focus on student mental health, but no focus on faculty mental health. But faculty support students, and if we are struggling ourselves, it's hard to be a good mentor and role model for them."</i></p> <p><i>"I'm having a good term teaching asynchronously. I found I like making video lectures, and I have never enjoyed office hours so much"</i></p> <p><i>"Flexible schedule, all materials are available online, new ways of teaching"</i></p> <p><i>"Not commuting to/from campus has resulted in better management of my time overall, and ability to spread this more efficiently among teaching/service related tasks."</i></p> <p>Access and Knowledge of Existing Resources</p> <p><i>"There are a lot of options to choose from - it's nice to have choice! I feel very supported by my department. I appreciate all the workshops offered to help us navigate all the new technologies/options - I've learned a lot."</i></p> <p>Additional Resources</p> <p><i>"Talk about instructors mental health - name and own the challenges."</i></p>

"I am more focused this term and I am able to work on aspects of myself without the distraction of being away from home"

"Less socially anxious- used to become exhausted for having to go into class in person from all the stimulation..."

Access and Knowledge of Existing Resources

"I also had trouble accessing the mental health . . . the health section on the website has a broken link and needs updating, when you can get to it."

"Inability to access a quiet/safe workspace. Difficulty affording the costs of living."

"Reaching out to counsellors and instructors for help"

"Mental health resources for students not in crisis!... Methods to connect with other students...the lack of connection has arguably been the main factor that has caused so many students' mental health to deteriorate this term...needs to do more to prioritize students' mental health, especially while we are online, because right now your students feel abandoned, unmotivated, and mentally broken"

"Maybe some clear homepage shortcuts for fin[ancial] aid, easy access academic advising, and for academic tutoring, since lots of students struggling with the disconnection in online learning."

"I had trouble accessing mental health services"

"Make actual psychiatrists more accessible"

"Difficulty accessing therapy and academic accommodations"

Additional Resources

"Hard to find a weekly scheduled counsellor . . . and I think it is very important that UVic puts more resources into this area especially during these uncertain times."

Pandemic Context

The pandemic context is the underlying backdrop for the five themes. It is hard to overstate the profound task that instructors and students have had over the past months. Transitioning to the online environment has included the need to introduce new learning technologies (including a new LMS), adapting to learning and teaching online (which is fundamentally different than face-to-face), and for some, broader economic, housing, family, or care-giving challenges. While some managed well over the recent months, the pandemic context was evident throughout the data with many describing one of their most challenging years.

Recommendations and Resources

For many instructors and students, the Fall 2020 term was their first experience with online learning and teaching. Not surprisingly, turning quickly to online instruction during a pandemic posed many challenges and those are evident in the findings. It is also important to recognize that instructors and students alike, having learned from this first-hand experience this fall, will proceed into spring term with a new set of knowledge and greater confidence in how to approach online learning and teaching.

The seven recommendations are drawn directly from the findings of both the student and instructor surveys (ie. suggestions for improvement and support). The first four recommendations are instructor-focused strategies. Acknowledging that the online environment has impacted workload, these recommendations are intended to make learning and teaching more manageable for both students and instructors. The last three recommendations focus on broad university strategies that culminate in creating a more robust communication and navigation strategy for students and instructors.

1. Clear, concise and consistent communications and expectations

The importance of clear, timely, consistent communication was an unwavering request from students.

- a) A **clearly identified course syllabus** is required for every course. Students need to know up front what the expectations are for the course, including any synchronous commitments. Other strategies are included in our guidelines:
 - [See syllabus guidelines in the Spring 2021 Guide](#)
- b) Include **clear expectations of all assessment components** (i.e., weighting and priorities) and delivery methods of the assessments (synchronous, asynchronous, etc.) within the syllabus.
- c) Set **course workload expectations** recognizing that your course is just one of 4-5 courses being taken. Students can expect to spend approximately 8 – 10 hour per course per week.
- d) Provide students with an **orientation to the course** and course site within the first week of term. Instructors can request to have a Learning Technology Assistant attend the class and support the orientation and/or provide a Brightspace orientation at the same time.
 - [Request support using our TIL Request Form](#)
- e) Review all **letters for students with academic accommodations** at the start of the course to identify and plan for necessary supports.
 - [Submit an accommodation request to have LTSI set up and discuss options for online accommodation](#)
- f) Survey your class early in the term to identify additional **accessibility issues** including alternate time zones, access to technology and challenges in having an uninterrupted space to engage in synchronous sessions.
- g) Provide a **weekly overview of expectations** in the course as a guideline for students.
- h) Integrate regular opportunities for student feedback in the course by adding a **mid-course feedback survey**.
 - [How to add a mid-course feedback survey to your course >](#)
- i) Maintain a **continued and predictable presence** in the course so students are assured they have a regularly available avenue to connect with the instructor.

2. Focus on the essentials

This is critical to managing both your and your students' workload. Be selective in the activities you choose to incorporate into the course. It is important to reduce any peripheral content, learning activities or assessments, keeping in mind that focusing on essentials needs to be balanced with meaningful engagement.

- a) Keep courses as **streamlined** as possible – focusing on core learning outcomes, critical readings, and essential assessments, while retaining meaningful opportunities for student engagement.
 - [How to streamline your course](#)
- b) **Review your final assessments** keeping in mind that the formal exam period in April is shorter due to the delayed start of term. Wherever possible **use alternative exam formats** (e.g. flexible start times, multi-day open book) to reduce the likelihood of students having multiple timed exams on one day.
- c) **Create a culture of academic integrity** by reviewing with students at the beginning of the course, and intermittently throughout, your expectations and University standards for academic integrity. Remind students of the expectation that all students abide by UVic Academic Integrity regulations by integrating a pledge into all online exams and assessment activities. If you plan to use Zoom invigilation or Respondus, notify your students in advance, preferably in the syllabus.
 - [Review: effective teaching and assessment practices to promote academic integrity](#)
- d) **Provide more than adequate time for students to complete any assessments**, including exams, recognizing that students often find the online exam environment stressful and some students may experience technical difficulties. Exams should provide a fair opportunity for students to demonstrate learning.
- e) **Assessments** should be **distributed across the term** but not create excessive workload. Feedback focused on the beginning part of term will promote learning.
 - [Read Taylor's Assessment Model \(2008\)](#)
- f) **Consider assessing engagement** rather than participation alone.

3. Course structure and organization

Students benefit from consistent course structure and a well-organized course.

- a) Consider using the **fully customizable Brightspace template**, a pre-stocked resource that includes specific tools (feedback surveys, quiz formats etc.)
 - [Access the Brightspace template](#)
- b) Organize your course by **weeks or key concepts/topics** as opposed to delivery format (lectures, readings or videos).
- c) Provide a **weekly update** for students to recap the past week and highlight upcoming important activities or assessments.
 - [How to post weekly updates or introductions in Brightspace using announcements or activity feed](#)
- d) Remain within the scheduled time for synchronous sessions (50 minutes for one-hour time slot and 80 minutes for 1.5-hour time slot). **Synchronous sessions are to be scheduled only as they appear in the timetable.** Instructors may require asynchronous activities in place of synchronous sessions that require relatively the same time commitment.
- e) Recognize that students and instructors alike require unscheduled time. Respect the Reading Break closure.

4. Accessibility and flexibility

Accessibility and flexibility are important factors within the online environment. Students have varying needs (access, time zones, living situations) especially within the pandemic context. It is also important to address the requirements for students with approved academic accommodations.

- a) To maximize accessibility and flexibility, **use the principles of universal design for learning (UDL)** in your course. These include such strategies as: flexible exam start times, alternate forms of assessment, multimedia approaches and offering options for how students can demonstrate their knowledge. Providing flexibility enables a greater level of accessibility for all students.
 - [Read Key Questions to Consider When Planning Lessons \(CAST\)](#)
 - [Read the Universal Design for Learning Guidelines \(CAST\)](#)
- a) Closed captioning is automatically provided for all posted videos through Kaltura. Allow students to **access and review videos throughout the course** to enhance their learning.
- b) When **designing assessments**, review for accessibility and flexibility. Carefully consider the range of accessibility barriers that students may experience in the context of the pandemic.
- c) Make course materials and **resources available** for the full length of the term wherever possible. Use start/end date restrictions only in situations where absolutely necessary.
- d) **Seek supports from the Centre for Accessible Learning (CAL) and LTSI** for specific questions on accommodation requirements for students with approved academic accommodations. UVic has recently added two Learning Experience Designers – Accessibility to augment supports for instructors in addressing the needs of students with academic accommodations.
 - ➔ [Request instructor support for exam accommodation](#)
- e) Ensure International **students living in different time zones can access office hours** by providing an alternative when necessary. Wherever possible, provide course materials asynchronously as needed.
- f) Students and instructors alike point to the importance of **approaching student questions and concerns with compassion**, recognizing students and instructors may be facing a variety of challenges related to the pandemic.

5. Engagement, interaction and connection

Creating a learning community within your course is critical to success in online learning. Students report needing to connect informally and formally with instructors and with other students in their courses.

- a) Encourage students to **maintain a presence in the course** (video, chat, other forms of communication), recognizing that some students may not be able to or are uncomfortable with keeping their cameras on.
- b) Promote a respectful class culture by setting class expectations for engagement and participation.
- c) Include **opportunities for students to interact** with one another within the context of the course (synchronous or asynchronous activities and discussion). Encourage students to set up study groups to facilitate connections beyond the class.
- d) Intentionally **create opportunities for formal and informal contact** where students can interact with you as an instructor (formal: office hours, discussion posts; informal: being available on zoom just before and after the session).
- e) Foster **contact between your TA and students** as appropriate.
- f) Encourage students to take advantage of other **university resources** which can also help students build a sense of connection and community.
 - [Promote Learn Anywhere as a portal for student resources](#)

6. Mental and physical health and wellbeing

Mental and physical health and wellbeing are widely reported as being negatively impacted by the pandemic environment. This is reflected in the findings from the student and instructor surveys. Often students seem unaware of

the range of resources that are available. There are small but important strategies you can incorporate into your course to support student wellbeing.

- a) Build **virtual connections between students**, remembering that some students may be living in different time zones – reducing social isolation is key during this time.
 - [Explore online communities on Learn Anywhere](#)
- b) Start and stop any synchronous sessions on time, and encourage **students take regular breaks from the online environment** to reduce fatigue.
 - [Read: Five ways to alleviate burnout and stress during uncertain times](#)
- c) Remind students to get up and move between classes – **intermittent physical activity** is important to their mental and physical health. Even stepping outside for a few short minutes can make a substantial difference for students.
 - [Vikes Active Living guide](#)
- d) Encourage students to **take breaks from schoolwork** to enjoy other fun activities and connect virtually with their peers in a non-academic setting.
- e) Openly **acknowledge the importance of mental health** and the social isolation challenges that may be occurring within the context of the pandemic.
- f) Encourage students to **reach out and access resources** if they need support, reminding them they don't need to be in a crisis to seek help. Access Support Connect is a resource for students to access mental health support 24/7 and is available worldwide, regardless of time zone or location. It is also a good resource for instructors seeking advice on supporting students' mental health.
 - [Access Support Connect: Free 24/7 online mental health support](#)
- g) Instructors may also be experiencing mental health challenges. The Employee & Family Assistance Program (EFAP) is available for all Uvic instructors, staff and dependents.
 - [Learn more about the EFAP program](#)

7. Navigation and access to resources and supports

This recommendation relates directly to ensuring that communications are clear, consistent, coordinated and foster improved navigation. Many of the resources requested by students and instructors in the survey responses already exist. This leads us to recognize that the primary challenges is increasing awareness of the available resources and being able to locate the right resources at the right time.

- a) The primary resource for student supports is **Learn Anywhere** where students can access a full range of resources including:
 - [Academic Advising](#)
 - [Counselling and Mental Health Supports](#)
 - [Academic Supports](#)
 - [Learning Strategies](#)
 - [Student Communities](#)
- b) Instructors can access supports and a wide range of resources through **Teach Anywhere** such as:
 - [Instructor Help page](#)
 - [Get Hand-on Brightspace help](#)
 - [Spring 2021 Instructor Quick Guide](#)

Appendix A: Student and Instructor Survey Questions

Student Questions

1. Are you a new or returning UVic student? Please select the option that best describes your status as a student in the 2020 fall term.
2. What is your current course load?
3. Do you identify as any of the following groups (select all that apply): International student; Indigenous student; student registered with the Centre for Accessible Learning (CAL); student with English as an additional language (EAL)
4. What faculty or division do you belong to?
5. Relative to the other terms, the workload this term was: extremely heavy; somewhat heavy; average; somewhat light; extremely light
6. Including lectures, the average number of hours spent study per course in a week was: less than an hour; 1-3 hours; 4-6 hours; 5-7 hours; 8-10 hours; 11-13 hours; 14-16 hours; more than 16 hours
7. Where are you living in the fall term? (Uvic housing; in Victoria; Vancouver Island; Lower Mainland; British Columbia; in Canada; in another country)
8. Do you have sufficient access to a computer or mobile device, when you need it, to complete your studies? (always; sometimes; rarely; never; prefer not to answer)
9. What is your primary device for completing your studies? (desktop computer; laptop computer; tablet; smart phone; prefer not to answer)
10. Do you have access to a webcam? (yes; no; not sure; prefer to not answer)
11. Do you have reliable internet access (always; sometimes; rarely; never; prefer not to answer)
12. Is your internet access high-speed (e.g., suitable for streaming video)? (yes; no; not sure; prefer not to answer)
13. Do you have adequate study space? (always; sometimes; rarely; never; prefer not to answer)
14. Accessibility is important to learning. During this term, what barriers to accessibility have you experienced? (select all that apply):
 - a. Difficulty attending class meetings as scheduled due to family or others needing to use shared technology
 - b. Difficulty attending class meetings as scheduled due to time zone differences
 - c. Lack of a quiet or private place to study
 - d. Confusion about how to access or use course materials
 - e. Confusion about how to use new learning technologies (Brightspace, Zoom, Teams)
 - f. Difficulty navigating or finding course materials in the online environment
 - g. Insufficient time provided for projects, assignments and tests
 - h. Distractions from friends or classmates during class
 - i. Course materials not provided in an accessible format
 - j. Lack of access to assistive technologies
 - k. Lack of closed captioning
 - l. Difficulty accessing supports for an academic accommodation
15. Learning online requires developing new skills. How do you currently seek information about learning online? (Check all that apply)
 - a. Figure things out on my own
 - b. Contact the Computer Helpdesk for technology support
 - c. Ask my instructor or TA
 - d. Ask another student
 - e. Ask family/friends

- f. Attend workshops/webinars
 - g. Access UVic's web resources (uvic.ca)
 - h. Access Learn Anywhere
 - i. Access "Help" in Brightspace
 - j. Access library resources
16. In which of the following areas would you like to see additional supports? (Check all that apply)
- a. Academic support resources (e.g. writing, math, subject specific)
 - b. Online learning strategy support
 - c. Technology support resources
 - d. Connecting with other students
 - e. Mental health and wellness resources
 - f. Financial aid information
 - g. Academic advising
17. What has been going well for you this term?
18. What are the main challenges or difficulties you have encountered this term?
19. What suggestions do you have for improving the overall student experience?
20. What suggestions do you have for faculty/instructors to improve your learning experience?

Faculty/Instructor Questions

- 1. Please tell us who you are: faculty; continuing sessional; term sessional; librarian; staff (senior lab instructor, support etc.); teaching assistant; other
- 2. What faculty or division do you belong to?
- 3. What has been going well for you in your teaching this term?
- 4. What challenges or difficulties have you encountered in teaching this term?
- 5. What ideas or suggestions do you have regarding how instructors can be better supported in their teaching next term?
- 6. What ideas or suggestions do you have regarding how students can be better supported to succeed next term?

Note: the student questionnaire was designed to complement a broader national survey in which UVic is participating therefore the questions in the UVic questionnaire were limited in scope.