

UNDERREPRESENTED COLLEGE STUDENTS' TRANSITION TO REMOTE LEARNING: A QUALITATIVE STUDY



THE UNIVERSITY OF
CHICAGO

Diversity & Inclusion

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STUDY BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The COVID-19 outbreak has drastically impacted higher education across the country and around the world. The first spike in COVID-19 cases in the United States happened in mid-March 2020, just before the University of Chicago's Winter Quarter final examinations. Some instructors opted to change their exams, moving to remote or optional assessments. Others did not. The traditional week-long spring break was extended an additional week and the University transitioned to remote learning. All courses during Spring Quarter were held remotely through Zoom, and asynchronous activities, recorded lectures, and new forms of assessments were created. Remote learning had repercussions for student housing, campus activities, research continuation, and many other facets of student life. Student life was further affected at the end of May as students were preparing for Spring Quarter finals, when George Floyd was killed and nationwide protests erupted.

As the University transitioned to remote learning, a team in the Office of the Provost designed a study to understand the experiences of students who might be disproportionately affected by this cascade of unexpected events (e.g., first-generation, low-income, international, students of color). While many universities, including our own, conducted quantitative surveys, this project aimed to provide a voice for participants whose experiences may be lost in the context of large-scale quantitative surveys.

Through qualitative research, we sought to understand the feelings, values, and perceptions that underlie the experience of remote learning. Instead of offering a numerical description of this moment, we hoped to help students describe the full complexity of their academic interactions in this time, and to understand the contexts and environments students were responding to. Qualitative techniques offer a depth of understanding that can be difficult to obtain from a survey, and help participants freely disclose their experiences, thoughts, and feelings in ways that are meaningful to them, as opposed to reacting to questions that may be pre-determined by researchers' assumptions. By nature, qualitative research samples are often small in order to focus on depth of analysis.

Participants were referred by student-facing offices including the Office for International Affairs, the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs, the Center for College Student Success, the College Advisors, UChicago Student Wellness, the Odyssey Scholars program, and the Registrar. After each interview, the interviewee was asked to recommend others to interview. Interviews were conducted by six people affiliated with the Office of the Provost. Interviews examined the contexts, resources, challenges, and opportunities that undergraduates faced with the sudden transition to remote learning. In our conversations, students were asked to reflect on their remote learning environments, their learning activities and classroom experiences, their psychological wellbeing, and their sense of belonging at the University. Interviews were mostly an hour to an hour and a half long, with participants receiving a gift card at the end of the interview.

From mid-May to late June 2020, the team conducted in-depth interviews with 34 undergraduate students. The research team coded and synthesized interview findings to shed light on best practices in the areas of (1) faculty instruction; (2) student routines and learning environments; (3) student mental health and wellbeing; (4) student belonging, social connections, and activities; and (5) University communications and policies.

INSTRUCTION

Modes of Online Instruction

Lecture-based courses

More successful lecture-based courses provided structure during breakout rooms and modified assignments to increase student engagement. Students largely felt that lecture classes could be conducted fairly successfully online, though some noted that instructor familiarity with their new tech platforms went a long way towards helping or hindering the transition. When instructors could seamlessly navigate the tech features of new remote learning platforms, students could focus on the material being shared, instead of their own discomfort. Beyond ease with the features of Zoom or other online learning technology, instructors created structure by using small group break-outs with focus and intention.

Helpful suggestions include: (1) Providing discussion questions before students meet. Cold calling makes it hard for many students to formulate a response and assert themselves in a Zoom environment. (2) Giving students worksheets to complete with peers. This increases engagement and accountability. (3) Helping students connect outside class as this increases their processing of new information. One biology class encouraged digital meet-ups outside class to complete assignments, such as group presentations on a research study. A group of physics students watched recorded lectures together and asked questions of one another. (4) Using PowerPoint to elaborate on ideas introduced during the sessions and providing multiple ways to understand course content. Most students appreciated the use of slides and opportunities to connect with instructors or TAs via office hours.

Discussions and seminars

Students found that seminar courses and discussion sections suffered from the move online. Engagement is hard to recreate online and feels different from the intimacy generated in an in-person seminar. More fundamentally, students highlighted the importance of relationships to learning: the relationships they make both with their professors and with their classmates. For remote learning to be valuable, the question of how to foster meaningful relationships in online classes must be engaged. Instructors contribute the most to the creation of this dynamic, and their ability to initiate, navigate, and moderate these discussions is key. Offices hours and TAs can provide bridges for students to make stronger connection to their coursework.

Students found it difficult to remain motivated to participate in Zoom discussions. Barriers included poor connectivity, classmates' cameras that were off, and a lack of class protocol for engaging via Zoom. While students understand the reasons for these barriers, they still negatively impact student learning and motivation. Some cited discussion sections and breakout rooms that were dominated by majority voices, particularly by male students, as a motivation drain. Most found that larger classes inhibit good discussion.

Other helpful suggestions include: (1) Learning how to take turns in a Zoom session. Many students reported issues with knowing when to speak up or how to look for people whose microphones were on. Students learned to adjust as the quarter continued, but many would have benefitted from direct instructions from faculty regarding how to engage in a Zoom discussion. (2) Using the raised hand function or chat for questions helped. Students appreciate knowing their instructor's preference for discussions, and consistency in applying it. (3) Building in comprehension breaks. It seems useful to pause class at particular intervals to respond to questions or offer clarification. Zoom makes students hesitant to interrupt, so proactively offering question breaks can lower that barrier.

Synchronous vs. asynchronous classes

Recorded lectures (whether pre-recorded or taped during a live class) were helpful for students. Some hope that recorded lectures will still be offered after the return to in-person learning. Recorded lectures offer flexibility. They provide a lot of substance in a limited amount of time; help students return to topics of extra review; and give options when students have to miss live classes or experience technical difficulties in session. Students mentioned using speed up, slow down, and pause features when viewing recordings.

Two disadvantages of recorded lectures were the inability to immediately clarify concepts via questions and the perception among students that recorded lectures create more work. The latter was particularly true for students who had to watch pre-recorded lectures for their courses but still had to meet synchronously during regular class periods. In these courses, there was a feeling that student workload had doubled.

Reflection questions for instructors

- Knowing that students need support becoming fully engaged with remote learning, what strategies can you employ to build connections to the material?
- How can you monitor for full and equitable participation of all students in discussions and breakout sessions?
- How can you assess your own use of technology to ensure that you're using these platforms to support student engagement, participation, and inclusion?
- How can instructors and student-facing staff leverage pre-recorded content in teaching and programming?
- Knowing that students both appreciate recorded lectures and asynchronous activities and feel these modes might "double their work," how might you think about balancing synchronous and asynchronous material?

Student comments

"Something that's been sort of like a pro and con situation is pre-recorded lectures, just because it's nice to have the lectures recorded, but then you spend as much time in class discussing it, so then your class is actually a lot longer than it would have been in-person."

—Second-year student

"Lectures, if they're recorded, Zoom is perfect and better. Seminars, even if they are recorded, you can't really match that level of engagement because there's something about being at a round table in person that motivates you differently."

—Third-year student

"[The situation with my professor] was good because not only was he available via email, but he was one person that was open to scheduling office hours individually depending on how our schedules worked."

—Second-year international student

Assessments, Assignments, and Amount of Work

Overwhelming quarter

Students felt that the amount of work assigned during Spring Quarter was overwhelming, given the change in learning modality, the global health crisis, and a racially tense milieu. The reality of transitioning to a new mode of learning created fatigue for students. Several students felt that the amount of work assigned to them increased. This was amplified by the challenges of adjusting to new modes of completing and submitting assignments. Heavy reading assignments were difficult in this context, as students battled with increased noise and distractions. Several students dropped courses or class levels as a result of heavy workloads. Despite being overwhelmed, some students emphasized that the work became more manageable as they got accustomed to it and developed new regimens to structure their day.

Stress of “business as usual” assessments

Some faculty went on with final assessments as if it were an ordinary quarter, creating stress for students. In particular, students pointed out lack of flexibility and lack of acknowledgement of the difficulties different subpopulations were experiencing, particularly during the transition off campus and during the wave of anti-Black violence at the end of Spring Quarter. Students felt that the administration should have given clearer guidelines on how to conduct finals, instead of allowing each department to choose a different approach.

Students felt demoralized by instructors who did not recognize how the pandemic would impact their learning. Students were concerned about their abilities to perform if something were to happen to a family member or if they had other responsibilities outside school. While some faculty members intentionally reduced workload and increased asynchronous workflows, others did not. Importantly, students were afraid to ask for alternative arrangements from instructors when issues did occur, particularly if those instructors seemed closed to being flexible with other students.

Novel ways of assessing learning

Students appreciated efforts to adjust, be flexible, and find new ways of assessing learning. Optional final exams, project-based assessments, and open discussion with the class about the mode of assessing were all cited as positive examples of instructor flexibility. Many noted that offering mini-tests or regular assignments in the place of a major exam at the end of the course helped students adapt to the circumstances. Making final papers and exams optional seemed to help students decide to engage with their learning, to stay involved, and submit final assignments instead of checking out. This was especially important for Black students at the end of Spring Quarter. Some noted that their instructors tried to adjust assignments as well, opting for discussion and video formats, making recordings available for a problem set, and using assignments to get people involved and engaged in the class despite not having an in-person component.

Other helpful suggestions include: (1) In order to help students overcome barriers due to time zones and limited communication cues, projects should be well structured with clear deliverables and outcomes. (2) Recorded lectures that included short quizzes offered helpful ways of understanding material and getting immediate feedback. Students also wanted time to ask specific questions of instructors or TAs.

Reflection questions for instructors

- What types of assessments and assignments work well in a remote format?
- How does one maintain rigor in assessments while being flexible with the mode of assessing?
- Engaging in remote learning takes more initiative and personal stamina from students. How can you design course material that takes into account the extra effort expended to be present and engaged for online courses?
- What student concerns should faculty and staff be most attentive to during these times?

Student comments

“People were just so overwhelmed because we’d have quizzes, readings, videos, and you have to prepare for all that.”

—First-year international student

“Some of [the instructors] make very, very flexible systems of grading and you know, various mechanisms to accommodate different needs. So, like, I was appreciating that.”

—Second-year international student

“I think that my econ professor did a really good job in not assigning a final. Instead, he made us have two really big projects that we usually had like four days to complete.”

—Second-year student

Instructor Impact

Care and concern

The importance of the care that instructors show their students was a recurring theme throughout the interviews. “Care” manifests as attention to the personal, social, and psychological wellness of students. Care can also show up in the adjustments instructors make to their coursework to accommodate the student difficulties and stresses. Students felt that most educators cared for their students but added that sometimes instructors do not know how to show it. There were also examples of instructors who were not flexible with requirements, as when a professor stated that Internet connectivity issues would not be accepted as a reason for missing class. In these instances, students felt disengaged from their coursework, were less likely to ask instructors for needed help or project extensions, and in some cases caused students to drop the class altogether.

Positive learning experiences were marked by care and empathy. Instructors who understood and proactively articulated the challenges of working from home—including family responsibilities, new distractions, and limited WiFi—and who provided different ways for students to participate and demonstrate their learning—were greatly appreciated by students and mentioned by name in numerous interviews.

Students do not always feel able to share their limitations with instructors proactively, and often choose to stay silent instead, limiting engagement with courses. Demonstration of care reduced student anxiety about doing the wrong thing in class and led to greater learning and interest in their coursework. This demonstration seemed to work best when it was repeated multiple times across multiple channels (mentioned in the course syllabus, shared verbally in class and office hours settings, etc.). Students experienced a great sense of self-efficacy in their work when they felt instructors understood and respected the context in which they were learning.

Flexibility

Students appreciated different types of flexibility and accommodation provided by instructors. Flexibility includes changes instructors made to their mode of instruction. Although partly motivated by the shift to online learning, students appreciated willingness to record lectures, provide synchronous and asynchronous course activities, create more opportunities to see students during office hours or schedule office hours around a student’s schedule, and extend more effort to reach out to students.

Flexibility also includes changes to and reduction in readings and requirements, especially as professors adjusted to the physical and mental toll of the pandemic. Another aspect of instructor flexibility included grading and deadlines, as some professors made final exams optional or provided extensions to students who needed them. Lastly, professors became flexible around specific student concerns, as with international students struggling with different time zones. When instructors adjusted their requirements, particularly around synchronous sessions or assessments, students felt more cared for and more engaged.

Instructor differences

Some students highlighted the differences in the response, care, and flexibility offered by instructors. One thing that students found confusing at best and problematic at worst was the variation with which different professors and programs managed their courses. Many felt that inconsistencies across courses (e.g., whether finals will be optional, whether they can take courses pass/fail, etc.) have been disappointing and difficult to navigate.

Reflection questions for instructors

- How can you challenge students academically and exhibit care personally? How do you provide encouragement such that you support students' academic performance?
- In what ways can you be flexible with students, and what are the circumstances that merit such flexibility?
- How can you provide a collegial and consistent response to students in need of support?

Student comments

"I think the fact that [course policies on pass/fail] were so varied wasn't that fair."

—Second-year student

"The professor I think really cared about making this [remote learning situation] work, but also the material, I think he was personally really invested in."

—First-year student

"When [classes are] online, [professors] don't really talk at the students, they're talking into the void then the students happen to hear it. It's not really the same interaction that you're having. I miss that."

—Second-year student

STUDENT ROUTINES AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Physical learning spaces

The set-up of students' physical learning spaces contributed to their ability to stay motivated for an entire school day. As students moved off-campus, the difficulties of optimizing their new spaces for learning became central. Particularly important were the ergonomics of the desk, chair, and study area, as well as making sure they got opportunities to stretch and get outside. The physical pain of spending a day at tiny desks or reading on beds caused difficulty and distraction. Others talked about missing the ability to access a variety of physical spaces to cue themselves to re-focus, shift study tasks, or manage their time effectively.

Recommendations: While each student will have different needs, assessing and facilitating a “minimum requirement” for a remote learning environment might be helpful. Among those requirements seem to be non-shared space to work, appropriate furniture, and reliable Internet connectivity. In addition to technology grants, consider ergonomic grants for students who can't afford a desk or office chair.

Learning routines and time management

Students missed the routines, structures, and habits that helped organize their day. Many students felt lost without their normal routine. It took time to get back on track, particularly when so many outside factors caused students to lose focus. Chief among these time management challenges were the fatigue of shifting to remote work, difficulty finding the right windows of time to work so that energy would be high, scheduling schoolwork around family and sleep schedules, maximizing use of Internet during times bandwidth would be strong, and the effort of creating new habits.

Time management is crucial, although devising an effective system has been a process of trial-and-error. Watching recorded lectures can take more time than an in-person class, and scheduling time to watch these lectures—on top of other schoolwork—became a time management struggle. When assignments piled up, particularly when several classes gave out weekly mini-assignments, students made trade-offs between doing assignments and attending class. The difficulties of setting and sticking to a firm schedule affected students' confidence and sense of self-efficacy as learners.

Challenges for international students

The move online challenged international students, who have to attend to time zone differences and navigate changes to US foreign policy. International students have had to figure out for themselves whether to ask for alternate times for their classes or simply deal with the problem of “time shifting” on their own. For these students, sleep is often the first thing to suffer. Students talked about scheduling sleep into their calendars to make sure they didn't miss it. Some students in other countries had to manage the trade-off between living in their own time zone versus living in Chicago time. Others had family members who would wake them up in the middle of the night, even as these family members were themselves laborers.

Technology

The technology grant for computers and WiFi was cited multiple times as a key support during the transition to remote learning. Through this grant, students were able to access laptops, modems, and WiFi relayers. Without this grant, several respondents said they would not have been able to complete their schoolwork during Spring Quarter. Impressions of the University's learning technology systems varied, but generally speaking, students were able to download and navigate required tech platforms. Still, tech problems, including WiFi speed, were nearly universal. The impact of these issues could either be lessened or exacerbated by instructor understanding of students' realities. Outside technology (like Slack, Discord, text platforms, etc.) was frequently cited as helpful in scheduling and completing group projects, communicating with peers outside of class, and communicating with peers for social reasons.

Reflection questions for instructors

- What can be suggested to students regarding physical learning spaces, routines, and time management?
- How might you provide better support to help students manage their time?
- What challenges continue to affect international students? How are you attentive to these unique challenges?
- How can you lessen student anxiety that technical difficulties will count against them in academic or co-curricular settings?

Student comments

"I think [my family members] have a pretty set routine now. I think it's changed as we figured out what we could do and what we couldn't do, and what would be better."

—Third-year student working from family home

"My parents, they would not use the Internet during our schooling time, so it wouldn't like, [...] override."

—Third-year student working from family home

"I was considering flipping my sleep schedule so I would be on Chicago time, which is what one of my friends in Singapore did. She completely flipped and I don't know how she did it."

—First-year international student working abroad

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Distractions

Personal worries and concerns about COVID-19 distracted students from academic activities. Like so many people, students were concerned for the wellbeing of their families, friends, and themselves. Some felt anger towards others' lack of safety practices. Many were confused about contradictory news regarding the pandemic, and some felt physically unsafe during this period, particularly BIPOC students during the national civil unrest. Students returning to their family homes reported distractions born of competing work and school schedules, financial factors, family responsibilities, and other concerns.

Distractions impacted students' capacity to work and study. The changes happening in society and difficulties of being in a global pandemic created difficulties focusing on the task of simply studying. Beyond that, not having a separation between work and life while at home, and being unable to carve out physically distinct spaces for study, contributed to the feelings of perpetual distraction.

Negative feelings

Students were lonely, less motivated, and often discomfited during this period. Due to physical distancing guidelines, some students spent long periods of time alone. Although some felt physically safe in their homes, many experienced loneliness and depression. For some, the inability to go outside contributed to these feelings, while for others, it was the fact that the student was unable to physically connect with others.

Students were overwhelmed by the ever-changing nature of the pandemic. The feeling of overwhelm was strongest during the first weeks of the pandemic and during the civil unrest, as students—particularly those in our sample who identified as BIPOC and/or first-generation—felt a personal stake in these national conversations. Although students found ways of coping, they still acknowledged how these feelings affected their work and academic progress.

From a practical perspective, others felt physical discomfort from being in front of their computers for most of the day. Because much of the work that needs to be done happens in front of the computer (reading papers, attending classes, writing research, and so on), many experienced headaches, backaches, and eyestrain as well as physical discomfort, stress, and pain.

Students do not always consider turning to University-wide mental health resources. While students reported trying to feel better by focusing on family, friends, new activities, and even coursework, they occasionally expressed skepticism about the mental health resources offered by the University. Others preferred to turn to their friends for support, as opposed to virtual wellbeing resources, stating that even though they knew the University offered counseling and other programs, they would prefer to talk to people close to them who they felt would better understand the pressures of the moment instead of offering more surface level care.

Adjusting to life in a pandemic

Students learned to adjust their work habits and routines in order to live with the reality of social restrictions. Some students learned how to handle negative emotions, do daily tasks like grocery shopping that follow physical distancing protocols, and keep themselves motivated by creating goals, using personal willpower, calling on their faith, and being connected with others during this period.

Although students acknowledged being tired, demotivated, and stressed (i.e., physically, emotionally, and mentally exhausted), they were able to cope with the situation some weeks after the transition to remote learning. While some were able to adjust after three weeks of online courses, others took more time. Adjustments were different for different people: some adjusted their schedules and routines to set aside time for different tasks, others adjusted their perspective about the opportunities that the new mode of instruction may provide students.

Reflection questions for instructors

- Think about your position at the University. What abilities do you have to impact student wellbeing from this position?
- How can you check in with the wellbeing of students close to you? What questions may help prompt a response?
- How can you help students connect to institutional wellbeing resources?
- What adjustments have certain students made that might be beneficial for other students to know? What adjustments have you made in the past that may be helpful in this context?

Student comments

“Talking to other people and knowing I’m not alone in this, I’m not the only one having a hard time, was super helpful.”

—Second-year international student

“So, I think one of the beautiful things about this pandemic has been just the support that friends are willing to show for each other. Despite the challenges that we face, it’s really this generosity that comes to the surface that keeps me motivated, at least.”

—Second-year student

“So now I just feel very lonely, like very not able to like depend on anyone. So that’s definitely a feeling there.”

—Fourth-year student

STUDENT BELONGING, SOCIAL CONNECTIONS, AND ACTIVITIES

Changes and challenges

Students missed opportunities to interact casually, to make new friends, and to find a sense of unity and camaraderie with peers. They depend on each other to push their thinking and provide breaks from academic work. Difficulties staying active in registered student organizations (RSOs), including “Zoom fatigue” and needing to be in-person to fulfill the group’s mission, left students feeling not only disappointment from missed opportunities, but concern around how future student leaders would be set up for success, a key focus of Spring Quarter.

Students missed last-minute meet-ups and serendipitous encounters, which made up a significant part of their daily social life at UChicago. From bumping into friends walking across campus to sitting down with others over meals, the absence of constant casual interactions contributes to a sense of loneliness and a loss of community. Many students spoke not only about missing social interactions, but about missing the opportunity to become friends with peers before and after classes. These relationships led to study groups, a deeper engagement in classes, and a camaraderie that students felt is not being built over Zoom.

Clubs and campus jobs

While many communities decreased meetings and activities in the Spring Quarter, some RSOs and departments found ways to keep people connected. Maintaining regular meetings and customs online (such as being able to watch a friend’s presentation) contributed to a sense of connection. Working together to support each other through initiatives such as UChicago Mutual Aid has given students a feeling of pride and togetherness in the absence of traditional community. However, there was a great amount of heterogeneity in the experience of student clubs and organizations. Some were thriving and making creative solutions to this situation while others were no longer as active as before the pandemic.

Student on-campus jobs took on new formations. Some students did their work remotely. Others did different work than before, and still others were paid even though they did not continue to work. Flexibility on the part of students and managers helped them adapt to new situations. It is worth noting that some students also had to take other jobs to help out in their homes. Our focus in this study was the campus experience, but the need to financially support themselves and, in some instances, their families, impacted students ability to focus on academic pursuits.

Civic engagement

Students described feeling trapped between an academic world where they were expected to finish exams and the world outside the academy, where larger issues consumed their attention. After the remote learning announcement, many students quickly organized to get food, housing, and money to their peers and advocated for UChicago service staff members to be paid when students left campus. At home and abroad, students actively grappled with their role in addressing contemporary public health and civil rights crises. While many voiced a desire to participate in anti-racist protests, several explained they were unable to engage because of immunocompromised family members. Finding other ways to engage, such as partnering with RSOs to support

the Black Lives Matter movement and raising money for bail funds, enabled them to make their own contribution. Students in particular felt their Black peers were doing a lot of work outside the classroom on civic issues and were grateful to instructors who acknowledged this work with more flexible class policies.

Reflection questions for instructors

- How does the University support students' social connections through the changes experienced during the pandemic? How can instructors create moments for students to get to know each other and foster community?
- What assistance should be provided to RSOs and student-interfacing jobs to stabilize them as a form of student social support?
- How can instructors support and grow students' civic engagement?

Student comments

"I really miss just the spontaneous kind of conversations and [...] connections you have with people, or that it's not planned."

—Second-year student

"At first, I agreed just to do [virtual club activities] and feel like I was part of the club, because I feel like I wasn't talking to people too much. But then they invited some seniors who had graduated, and we got to see everybody in one place, so I was really grateful that I did it."

—Second-year student

"I haven't been able to go to any protests because my sister is immunocompromised, so even though I would. But I've mainly seen my role as like educating my family."

—Third-year student working from family home

COMMUNICATIONS AND POLICIES

Timeliness

Students wished that decisions were made earlier, particularly during the transition to remote learning. This concern has been particularly salient for international students who had to make plans regarding where to spend their Spring Quarter. Students compared the University's response to peer institutions who announced their decisions earlier and felt that the University's communications were not as timely.

Consistency

Students hoped for a more consistent message, particularly as related to pass/fail and optional finals that some instructors and departments offered. The differences between programs and instructors caused confusion and challenges, particularly as some students were ill-equipped to continue with requirements as all the events of late spring were unfolding. Thus, students were hoping that there was greater consistency regarding the announcements and for the options open to all students.

Tensions

Tensions between students and UCPD left students feeling frustrated and unheard by the University. The student interviews took place during a time of extensive media coverage of national civil unrest, along with on-campus protests about UCPD. Almost a quarter of interviewees mentioned being distracted from their studies because of these issues. These students voiced their concerns regarding police brutality and hoped the University would take a stronger stance in rethinking its relationships with the Chicago Police Department and the University of Chicago Police Department. Several students mentioned that they were in fear for themselves, and for their families and friends. One student mentioned skin color as a reason of being afraid of police and wanting to avoid them as much as possible given the wave of police brutality and past interactions they'd had.

Reflection questions for instructors

- What factors affect the timeliness of decisions and communications?
- How do you create a consistent message while still respecting the rights of individual instructors, programs, and offices to make case-specific decisions?

Student comments

"I think the lateness in responses of the University—in just different departments [...] trying to figure things out—has heavily impacted some of the individual decisions [of students]."

—Second-year international student

"I feel like a lot of people were talking about a universal pass/fail, I didn't like it at first, but I got halfway into the quarter and I was just like, this isn't reflective of anyone's ability to learn, and it's just reflective of the support structures you have."

—Fourth-year student

STUDENT RESPONDENT DATA

Year in The College (Spring Quarter 2020)	
First Year	21%
Second Year	38%
Third Year	32%
Fourth Year	9%
Odyssey Scholars	65%
Gender Identity	
Female	74%
Male	24%
Gender Queer / Gender Non-Conforming / Non-Binary Person	3%
Sexual Orientation	
Heterosexual or straight	65%
Bisexual	21%
Lesbian / Gay	6%
Prefer not to say	9%
International Students	29%
Race / Ethnicity	
Multiracial (Two or more categories selected)	21%
Hispanic or Latino	18%
Black, African American, Caribbean, or African	18%
East Asian (Japanese, Korean, Chinese, or other East Asian groups)	15%
White or European American	12%
South Asian (Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani, or other South Asian groups)	9%
Middle Eastern	6%
Southeast Asian (Burmese, Cambodian, Indonesian, Filipino, Laotian, or other Southeast Asian groups)	3%

During this study, the research team collected personal information about participants for the purposes of this research. The information may include participants' names, demographic information, and answers to the interview or survey questions. This information was kept internal to the research team and was not shared outside those personnel.

The study results were used by the research team until the completion of this study. All research-related records will be retained for at least three years, though information identifying individual participants was separated from study results and destroyed. Research data will be retained indefinitely per University policy.

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Diversity & Inclusion