



UA Student Online/Remote Classroom Experience & Learning Survey Results from Week 3 - September 2020

In partnership with the [Office of Instruction & Assessment](#), main campus students were surveyed in early September to better understand what aspects of the online/remote classroom experience support learning, how the University of Arizona can further strengthen those efforts, and identify areas for improvement.

This report summarizes key findings from the survey sent to main campus enrolled undergraduate and graduate/professional students (n=37,608). The survey received 5,285 responses for an overall response rate of 14%. Select questions in the assessment were benchmarked against the spring 2020 student survey¹. A methods overview follows the report. Questions can be directed to AssessmentResearch@arizona.edu.

Course Modalities

A majority of students reported all their classes were exclusively delivered online/remotely.



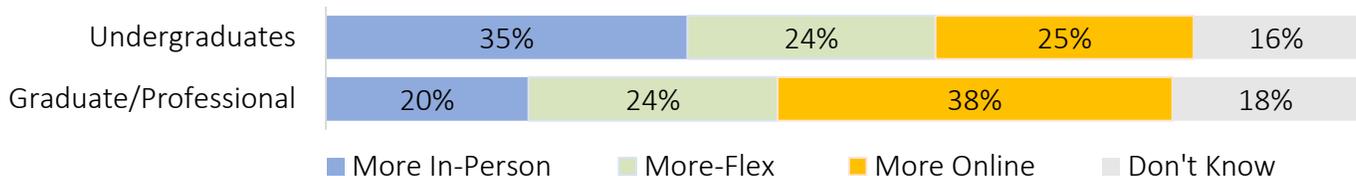
At the time of the survey during week 3, the University of Arizona was in Stage 1 of re-entry, with all course modalities delivered remotely except essential in-person and outdoor classes.

82% of undergraduates and 84% of graduate/professional students reported all their courses were delivered remotely/online as of early September. Less than 1% were entirely in-person and 99% reported having at least one course online.

Self-reported Course Delivery as of Week 3	Undergraduate (n=4,100)	Graduate/Professional (n=1,185)
All are online/remote	82%	84%
Some online/remote	18%	16%
All in-person	<1%	<1%

Undergraduates favor more in-person courses in spring 2021, whereas graduate/professional students prefer more online course.

Preference for Spring 2021 Course Modalities



Nearly 6 out of 10 (59%) undergraduates preferred more spring classes offered with in-person instruction including fully in-person (35%) and flex-hybrid (24%) modalities. Among graduate and professional students, 44% sought more classes with in-person instruction including fully in-person (20%) and flex-hybrid (24%). A majority of graduate/professional students indicated preference for more online course modalities.

¹ COVID-19 Health and Wellness and Online Classroom Experiences Student Needs Survey (May 2020).

Online Course Components that Support Student Learning

Well organized D2L sites and accessible materials are key to supporting online classroom learning.



Students were asked to select course components that effectively supported their current online learning with the opportunity to add open-ended comments and recommendations for improvement (see Appendix).

3 out of 4 students indicated an **organized D2L site** and **accessible online course materials** supported their remote learning experience.

Clear expectations, timely communication, and relevant course materials were also selected by more than half of students. 62% of graduate/professional students indicated **interacting with course instructors** supported learning, compared to 53% of undergraduates. Working with classmates had less broad-based utility, with only 39% of undergraduates and 44% of graduate/professional students selecting as a useful course component.

Course Components Effectively Supporting Online Learning (Select all that apply)	Undergraduates	Graduates/Prof.
Well organized D2L site	78%	79%
Course materials are accessible	74%	79%
Clear expectations on what is required to be successful	69%	69%
Clear and timely communication when course changes occur	65%	64%
Course materials are relevant	60%	65%
Interaction with course instructor	53%	62%
Interaction and collaboration with other students	39%	44%

Lack of consistency and organization on online platforms is challenging.

In open-ended comments, many students expressed frustration about how to access materials, identify important information, and keep track of assignment due dates with instructors using different formats to organize their courses. Use of additional platforms beyond D2L increased confusion, with concern over added costs for supplemental software or platforms. Many students expressed frustration that paid "required" resources were never being used and turned out to be supplementary or outdated.

Recommendations for improvement included: a master calendar for all assignments across courses, standardized structured for all D2L pages, and clarity on required materials directly tied to course elements.

“Each teacher should have a concise way of organizing their D2L site. Each class of mine has been very different in where assignments, quizzes, and materials are and that has made it extremely confusing for me as a student to try and organize my learning from home.” - Freshman

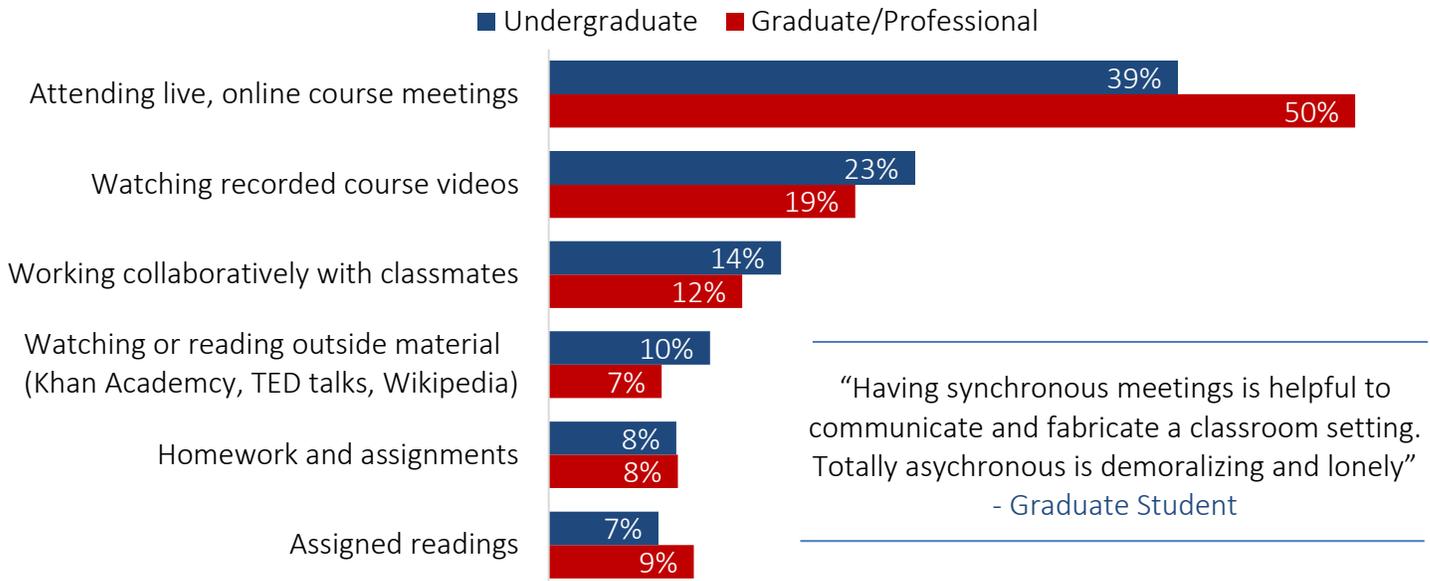
Live online meetings and recorded videos were the top ranked online activities to support learning.



Students were asked to rank classroom activities from most helpful to least helpful in the online learning environment. Recognizing students have diverse learning styles, there was a preference for **live online** and **recorded videos** compared to less interactive components such as assigned readings and homework assignments, results that are consistent with spring 2020.

The top ranked course activity was **attending live, online course meetings** for undergraduates (39%) and graduate/professional students (50%), followed by **recorded course videos** (23% and 19%, respectively).

Ranked Activity as "Most Helpful" to Support Online/Remote Learning



Instructor Accessibility and Course Expectations

A majority of students agree instructors are accessible and supportive under current conditions.



82% of undergraduates and 91% of graduate/professional students agree their instructors are accessible. 73% of undergraduates and 88% of graduate/professional students feel supported by their instructors (% agree or strongly agree).

First-generation undergraduate students felt less supported (69% vs. 75%) and rated their instructors as less accessible (79% vs 84%) than continuing generation students². There were no significant differences by gender, race/ethnicity, residency, or Pell recipient status.

Most students understand the course expectations and grade policies for fall 2020, yet 20% of undergraduate and 12% of graduate/professional students remain unclear on these expectations. Eight out of ten students reported they understand what is expected of them to be successful in the course and how their courses will be graded, with the same or higher rates of understanding among new freshman and transfer students. About nine out of ten graduate/professional students understand expectations and course grading.

² Pearson’s chi-square p<(.05)

Level of Agreement % Agree or Strongly Agree	Undergraduates	Graduates/Prof.
My instructors are accessible under current conditions.	82%	91%
I feel supported by my instructors.	73%	88%
I know what is expected of me to be successful.	79%	88%
I understand how my courses will be graded.	80%	88%

Effectively Interacting with Instructors Online

Class announcements and feedback on work are more useful than drop-in virtual office hours or discussion boards.



Students evaluated the utility of various communication mediums used to interact with instructors online. Consistent with spring 2020 results, students preferred regular class announcements from D2L or email with 81% of undergraduates and 76% of graduate and professional students rating as very or somewhat effective³. The vast majority of students also used these strategies.

Over half of students (57% undergraduate and 56% graduate) also found feedback on assignments to be an effective way to engage with course instructors. Virtual drop-in hours were only used by about half of students, with one-third saying these meetings are effective.

Use of discussion boards was high among undergraduates (82% of students reported use), but 50% of undergraduates found them ineffective. Graduate students were split, with about a third of students reporting discussion boards are effective (31%), not effective (35%), and not used (34%).

Undergraduate Responses	Effective	Not effective	Not Used
Virtual drop-in hours	28%	21%	51%
Discussion boards	32%	50%	18%
Feedback on assignments	57%	27%	16%
Regular class announcements (D2L or email)	81%	16%	3%

Graduate/Professional Responses	Effective	Not effective	Not Used
Virtual drop-in hours	33%	14%	55%
Discussion boards	31%	35%	34%
Feedback on assignments	56%	20%	24%
Regular class announcements (D2L or email)	76%	18%	6%

³ Effective includes “very or somewhat effective” and Not Effective includes: “a little effective or not very effective”

Online/Remote Learning Challenges

Lack of reliable internet and access to technology continue to impede learning online.



1 in 3 students reported they faced limited internet access, and 2 in 10 reported barriers due to lack of technology or software access that reduced their ability to perform in remote classes, rates which were comparable to spring 2020.

Nearly half of students also reported health-related stress was an impediment to engagement in remote courses (49% of undergraduates and 48% of graduate/professional students).

Remote Learning Barriers Fall 2020	Undergraduate	Graduates/Prof
Limited internet access	35%	32%
Lack of access to appropriate technology/software	22%	22%
Know at least 1 UA student without reliable internet/tech access	29%	36%
Health-related stress (mine, family member's, roommate's)	49%	48%

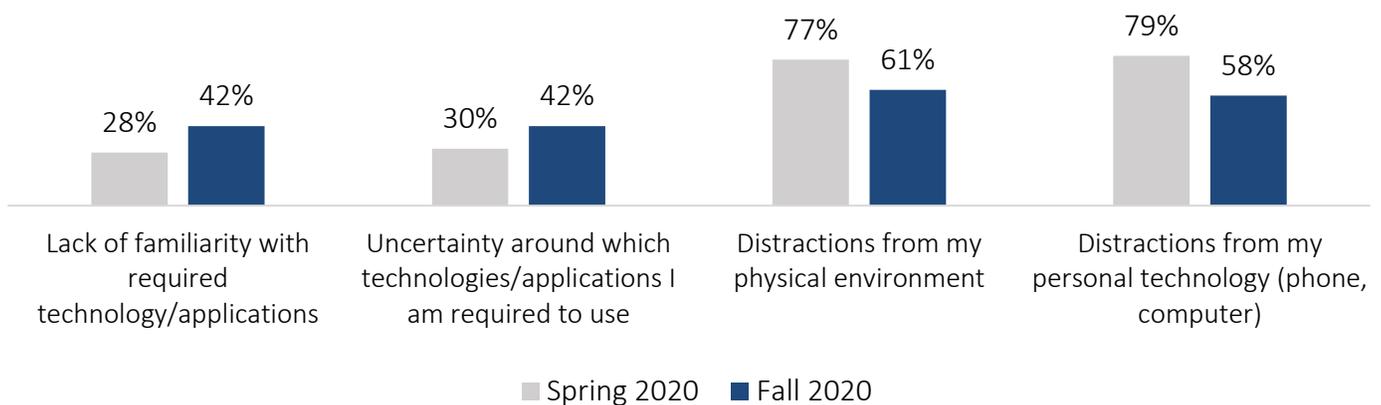
While lower rates than in the spring, over half of students continue to face personal distractions in online/remote learning.

Fewer students report personal distractions in fall 2020, which reflects more time to prepare for successful remote learning compared to the swift pivot online in spring 2020.

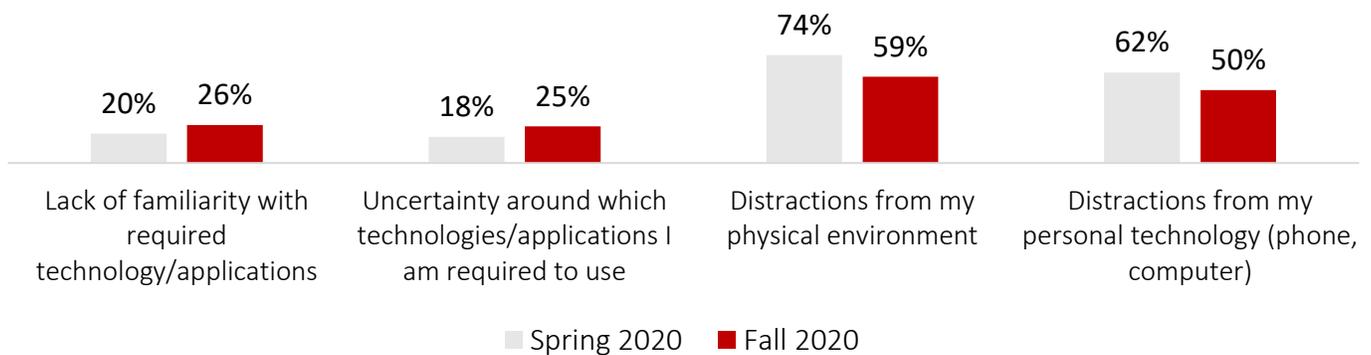
Nevertheless, 61% of undergraduates and 59% of graduate/professional students face physical-environment distractions that current impact their ability to learn remotely, whereas personal-technology distractions disrupt 58% of undergraduate and 50% of graduate/professional studying remotely in the fall.

53% of undergraduates and **44%** of graduate/professional students would use on-campus socially distanced study hall spaces, if available

Undergraduate Challenges to Online/Remote Learning | Spring vs. Fall



Graduate/Professional Challenges to Online/Remote Learning | Spring vs. Fall



Compared to spring, challenges related to technology have increased slightly.

42% of undergraduates cited challenges related to uncertainty or unfamiliarity with required technologies, compared to 28% and 30% in the spring. Slight increases were also noted among graduate and professional students. Faculty have integrated additional online learning platforms to improve remote delivery which now present new challenges for students to master. These were noted in the open-ended comments about accessing multiple online platforms across different courses (see Appendix).

“The whole interface moving between calendar, content, assignments, etc could be more streamlined so that each class is similar. Also every class is using 5-6 different sites, Discord, Zoom, Gradescope, Microsoft Teams, d2L, the e-textbooks, WebAssign, Piazza, separate class websites. It's too much. It needs to be streamlined.” - Junior

Feelings of isolation and loneliness continue to impact students, with a greater degree from spring.

In addition to environmental and technological stressors, students’ emotional well-being impacts their ability to effectively engage in learning online.

In September, 36% of undergraduates reported feeling isolated or lonely most or almost all the time in the past two weeks, up slightly from 31% surveyed in May.

The rate among graduate and professional students also slightly increased, with 28% of graduate and professional students reporting feeling isolated or lonely most or all of the time in the past two weeks, compared to 24% in spring.

Methods Overview: The Fall 2020 UA Student Online/Remote Classroom Experience and Learning Survey was sent to all enrolled main campus undergraduate and graduate/professional students (n = 37,608) between September 4 to 13. The overall response rate was 14%, with a breakdown of 13.3% for undergraduates (n=4,100) and 17.5% among graduate/professional students (n=1,185). Students were asked to provide feedback on their experience with campus instruction during the first three weeks of fall 2020. Surveys with <25% completed responses were eliminated from the analyses. Data were weighted to match university demographics by gender, class standing, and race/ethnicity for undergraduates and gender and international student status for graduate/professional students. A number of questions from the Spring 2020 COVID-19 Health and Wellness Online Classroom Experiences Student Needs Survey were included for benchmarking between spring semester and fall term.

Appendix | Recommendations for Improvement of Course Components

Students were offered the opportunity to provide feedback for improvement on seven course components for learning online. Around 1,300 students offered comments related to course components, most of which expressed a desire for greater consistency, clarity, and a streamlined approach to online learning.

Course Components Effectively Supporting Online Learning	Key Themes and Recommendations in Student Comments
Well organized D2L site	Need for master calendar and streamlined content and layout in D2L. Use fewer websites/platforms beyond D2L. Keep content current. Request for training on how to use D2L effectively for faculty and students.
Course materials are accessible	Barriers accessing content due to confusing D2L layout, lack of physical access to materials (library/bookstore shortages, not all books online), technology issues with supplemental websites/programs, cost burden for additional platforms. Frustrated when course lecture/materials not always updated and available. Live Zoom courses difficult without reliable internet. Suggest lecture recordings and slides available for download.
Clear expectations on what is required to be successful	Lack of consistency challenging as is uncertainty about modalities/phasing, especially for first year students. Need for standardization and consolidation of important content across UA. Desire to know if Pass/Fail option will remain for fall. Need for timely grading of assignments to track progress. Request for integrated and comprehensive calendar.
Clear and timely communication when course changes occur	Too many emails, unclear subject lines make it difficult to discern substance/importance. Automatic D2L notifications make it difficult to discern when course content changes are important vs. trivial. Students want clear notification when syllabus is changed. Frustration about last-minute notices with <24 hours to act.
Course materials are relevant	Keep syllabi/content up to date and provide calendar. Offer more clarity about required vs. optional content. Reduce use of external platforms that add cost and increase confusion. Avoid 'busy work' and clearly align course materials with assignments,
Interaction with course instructor	Instructors seem distant/absent, especially in courses with pre-recorded content. Questions via Zoom are chaotic in large classes and not all questions answered in Q&A. Recommend using discussion boards for questions so all students can view, and more students feel comfortable asking. Frustration when instructors are ill-prepared for online. Timely responses/upload of content important. More office hours at varying times with smaller groups.
Interaction and collaboration with other students	Online collaboration is inadequate, frustrating, awkward, and unproductive. Some find Zoom rooms helpful to fill in gaps, others cite difficulties due to inconsistent participation. Desire to return to in-person classes or social distanced study groups.

Select Recommendations for Improvement of Course Components

"There is little consistency in how different instructors set up the classes. Establish clearer guidelines so that tabs like "assignments" and "quizzes" are being used consistently throughout the University." - New Transfer

"I feel like instructors are overcompensating assigning 2-3 50+ page readings per week. It's unattainable." - Senior

"I have so many Zooms that are wasting time because the instructor is unable to work technology, breakout rooms don't work, and the lectures are written by hand via the instructor writing with their finger on the screen so it is illegible and I receive no knowledge from being "taught" that way. Considering the cost of tuition I am extremely frustrated and disappointed." - Junior

"Highlighting which materials are actually necessary because I spent money on books that ended up not even being required." - Junior

"Some instructors are unwilling to get rid of policies, assignments, and the like that do not fit the new course modality. Understanding that things CANNOT work the same way as an in-person synchronous course would be helpful." - Graduate Student

"Some teachers do this [interaction with instructor] incredibly well but half of my current professors are impossible to reach. They will take too long to respond or never do, too many students needing office hours to make them helpful, and in some cases not enough explanation of material." - Junior

"More online/free resources (the pandemic has changed some students' financial situations, and I wish more teachers recognized that)" - Freshman

"Zoom just isn't a good way to interact, especially since most people don't have the equipment to have clear audio and many turn off their video. Also I'm not tech savvy or big on interacting with others anyway." - Senior

"This feels super manufactured. Breakout rooms are my least favorite part of classes. It feels like responding to a discussion board post but on zoom." - Senior

"Professors had all summer to figure out Zoom and D2L communication. The majority of my professors have no working knowledge of Zoom, leading to frequent disconnects, issues, and delays. Some remark it is their first time using video conference tech." - Graduate Student

"I have felt confused most of the time when there have been changes or updates. I would prefer professors would instead post on D2L about what there is to be expected now. During lecture I am usually taking notes and I can tend to miss what kind of changes are." - Sophomore

"Between full tuition and unstable job circumstances it is very difficult to pay for extra materials. Only course materials that are pertinent to success in the course should be encouraged. Ideally they should have free access too. Tuition is already a struggle for most students having to pay just to turn in homework is a little ridiculous." - Junior

"All professors should be required to upload slides shown in class because not everyone has great connection and availability to zoom in order to see them once and remember it." - Junior