

Student Experience of Virtual Delivery Survey
Summary Report

Prepared by Brenna Clarke Gray
Coordinator, Educational Technologies
Learning Technology and Innovation

18 December 2020

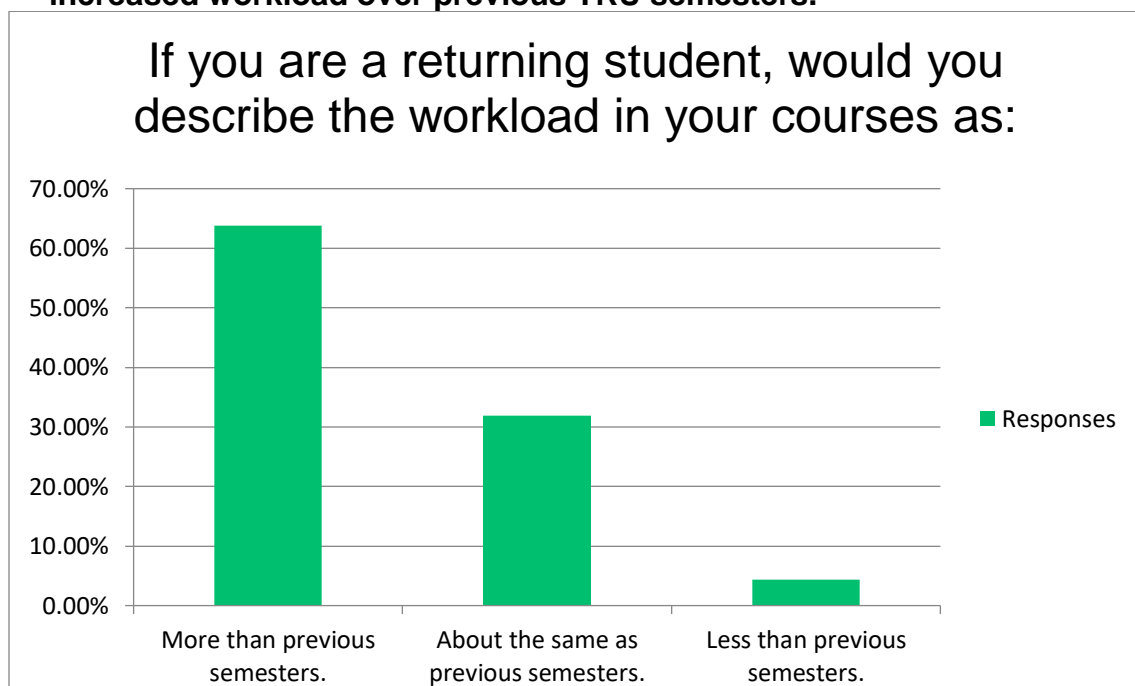
Survey Overview

This survey was conducted via Survey Monkey and was open to TRU students for response from November 2 – December 2, 2020. The survey asked six questions, half of which were open-ended, long-form response questions. In total, **570 students responded**. Our thanks to Student Life (Krista Stoetsz and Alicia Ashcroft) and TRUSU for helping to distribute the survey, as well as to CELT (Carolyn Hoessler) for feedback on the first draft of the questions and IPE (Dana Prymark) for assistance with Survey Monkey. This survey follows a similar request for student feedback following the March 2020 transition to virtual delivery; please see the previous report for details. In general, this survey finds similar common issues to the previous iteration, but with a 4-fold higher response rate and more open-ended questions, we have been able to assess the experience of virtual delivery in more detail.

Survey Results (High Level)

Because the raw data includes private information as well as disclosures related to specific course experiences, we have elected not to release it at this time. Please find below a high-level overview of the responses.

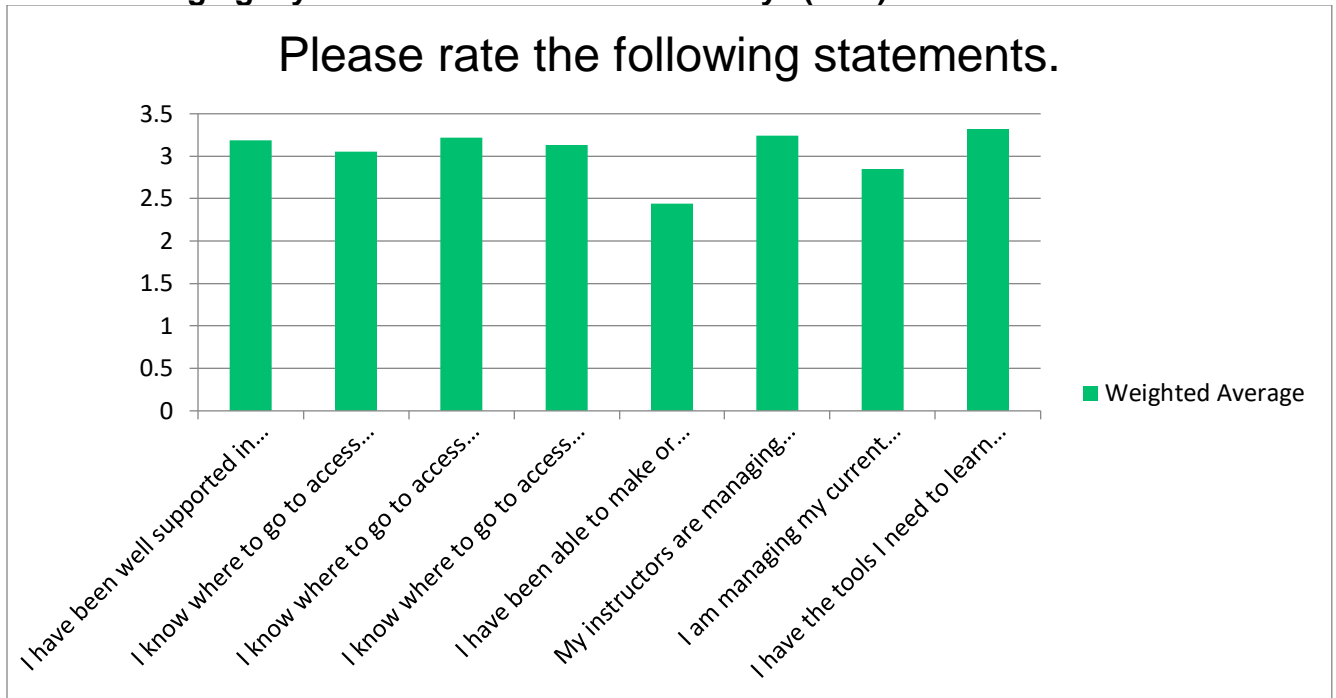
1. “If you are a returning student, would you describe your current workload as (a) more than previous semesters, (b) about the same as previous semesters, (c) less than previous semesters.” **64% of student respondents report an increased workload over previous TRU semesters.**



2. Students were asked to rate a series of statements on a scale from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.” Those statements were:
 - a. I have been well supported in my learning in Fall 2020.
 - b. I know where to go to access technical support.

- c. I know where to go to access learning resources and support.
- d. I know where to go to access financial or emotional resources and support.
- e. I have been able to make or maintain social connections this semester.
- f. My instructors are managing the transition successfully.
- g. I am managing my current workload successfully.
- h. I have the tools I need to learn remotely.

Students disagreed more than agreed in only two areas: “I have been able to make or maintain social connections this semester” (57%) and “I am managing my current workload successfully” (42%).

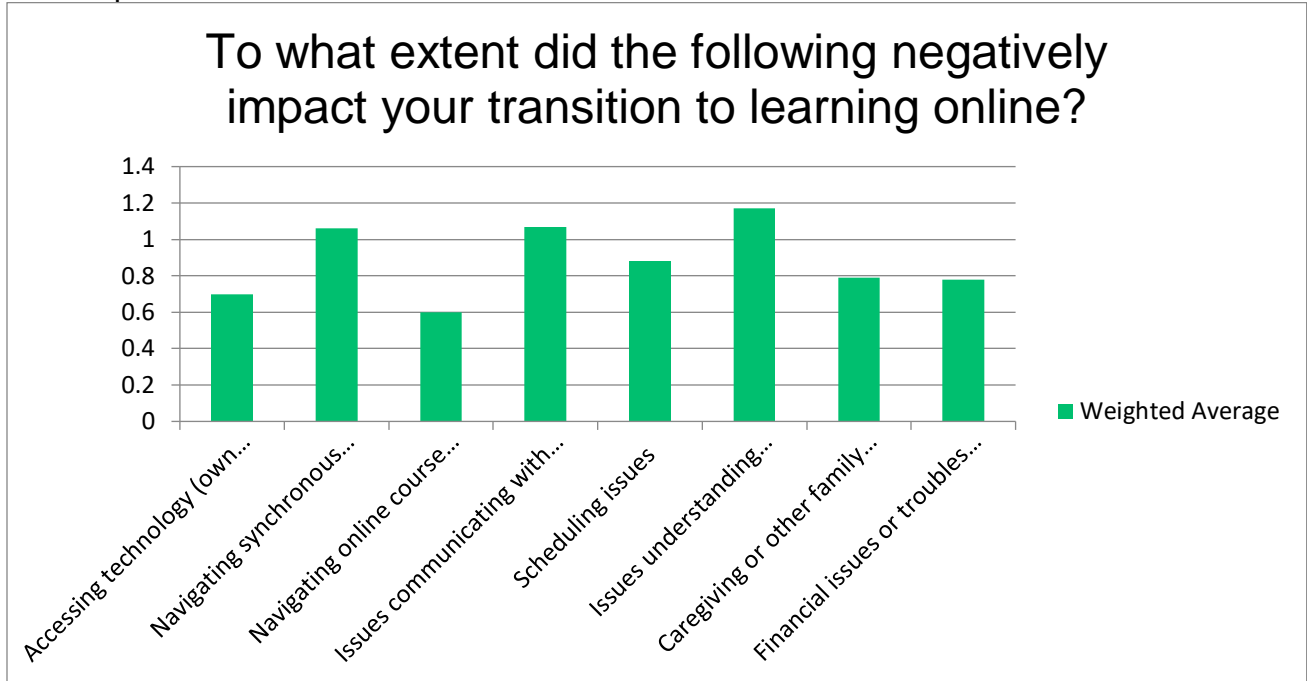


3. Students were asked, “To what extent did the following negatively impact your transition to learning online” and were given a series of statements to rate on a scale from “no negative impact” to “severe negative impact.” Those statements were:

- a. Accessing technology (own device, internet connection, etc)
- b. Navigating synchronous meeting technology (BBB, or other platforms)
- c. Navigating online course platforms (using Moodle, or other platforms)
- d. Issues communicating with instructors
- e. Scheduling issues
- f. Issues understanding course or program expectations
- g. Caregiving or other family issues
- h. Financial issues or troubles meeting basic needs

Students reported major-to-severe negative impact in only three areas: “Issues understanding course or program expectations” (33%); “Issues communicating with instructors” (31%); and “Navigating synchronous meeting technology” (24%). This question also included an “other” option, but

the responses to that section are well-captured by the subsequent long-form questions.



4. Students were asked, “What is one strategy an instructor has used to support your learning this semester.” This open-ended question solicited a range of feedback, but most frequently in the following six areas.

Course was offered asynchronously/with asynchronous options.	27%
Instructor stayed in frequent/predictable contact.	24%
Instructor was flexible with deadlines, assignments.	13%
Course was offered synchronously/with synchronous options.	10%
Instructor offered a clear and predictable course structure.	6%
Instructor used small group discussions/breakout groups.	5%

The feedback for this question suggests that students appreciate a mix of asynchronous content delivery with synchronous opportunities for discussion and communication; comments express frustration both with logging in for three-hour sessions where an instructor reads a PowerPoint aloud, and also feeling that they are “teaching themselves.” Students repeatedly express a strong preference for instructors who communicate frequently, and for well-organized Moodle shells with predictable weekly structures and to-do lists. Students express a preference for instructors who reflect an understanding of the unique circumstance of this term in addressing deadlines, etc.

5. Students were asked, “If you could communicate one thing to your instructors right now, what would it be?” This open-ended question solicited a range of feedback, but most frequently in the following six areas.

Request that instructors reduce workload.	18%
Request that instructors respect student time.	18%

Request that instructors respond to emails and provide feedback.	15%
Expressions of gratitude and understanding.	14%
Expressions of stress, anxiety, and overwhelm.	7%
Request that instructors choose consistent platforms and approaches to courses, particularly within programs.	5%

The feedback for this question suggests that students are feeling overwhelmed and are having difficulty managing the current workload. They feel that instructors don't have a good understanding of how long it takes to complete tasks outside of class time, and report lectures (both synchronous and asynchronous) extending past scheduled time. Students would also like to have more direct content with instructors. In this section, many comments suggest navigating multiple platforms and multiple different approaches to using Moodle is an added stressor for students.

6. Students were asked, "What is one suggestion you have about virtual delivery in the winter term." This open-ended question solicited a range of feedback, but most frequently in the following six areas. (There were more "noise" responses to this question than the other two, including requests for face-to-face instruction, tuition reimbursements, and expressions of general unhappiness.)

More pre-recorded content.	16%
More live sessions.	14%
Fewer and lower stakes assessments.	9%
Allow for rest, breaks, and awareness of other classes.	8%
More explicit structure or guidelines.	7%
Improved response times for email and feedback.	6%

The feedback for this question suggests that students are mixed in their preferences for course delivery, which suggests the benefit of relying of asynchronous tools for content delivery and using live sessions to connect with students. In this section, students report being asked to submit work or attend class on Remembrance Day and other holidays, and express anxiety about whether they will truly get a Reading Break. They also report instructors not allowing breaks in three-hour synchronous sessions, and synchronous sessions frequently running long. A desire for instructors to be aware of students' need to balance and limit screen time is expressed here. And again, students express a preference for more contact with instructors and clearer expectations.

Analysis

Overall, students report relatively high levels of satisfaction with asynchronous tools for course delivery, like Moodle, and an understanding of the growing pains we have all experienced through this transition. For example, while students have struggled with synchronous tools, the long-form comments demonstrate an awareness that BigBlueButton is much more stable now, and that the troubles of September have been addressed. Students report generally good awareness of available support resources and a sense that instructors are doing their best to manage a difficult situation. Where

instructors are present for students, and where courses are clearly laid out with a predictable and explicit weekly schedule, students are largely satisfied.

However, overall, students are overwhelmed, and they find the workload of our virtual delivery courses hard to manage. Their sense of overwhelm seems to be underscored by several factors:

- Many assignments per class, more than in a typical term, multiplied across their courseload. In particular, students report that weekly discussion posts – sometimes 3-5 in a single class – are burdensome.
- A heavier reading load than they are used to, perhaps not because more is being assigned, but because they are being held accountable for more reading.
- More and longer lectures. Students report synchronous lectures running long and asynchronous lectures adding up to more than the scheduled class time. They also report that video lectures take longer to watch, especially if they are not captioned, as they try to take detailed notes.
- Synchronous components held outside of class time. Students report frustration at being asked to attend course components during time they have allocated for other courses or for work.
- Lack of contact and feedback. As students are overwhelmed, so too are instructors; students report that feedback on assignments is slow to arrive, and this makes further assignments more stressful. They also report a desire for more consistent communication.
- Punitive classroom policies, like very short windows to write exams or strict penalties for late assignments.
- Lack of course structure. Students report needing a more clear and predictable approach to each week, and express gratitude to those instructors who have highly detailed weekly plans and checklists for students to follow.
- Multiple course platforms. Students in particular report frustration with “add-on” courseware services external to Moodle or unsupported tools used by faculty. Students also express a desire for a more uniform approach to how faculty use Moodle.

Recommendations

It has been our advice at LT&I since the initial pivot in March that instructors scale back their courses and assignments to allow students to focus on the critical components for success. By starting with learning outcomes and working backwards to content, instructors can streamline their offerings. We also recommend scaling back high-stakes assignments in favour of offering students the opportunity to reflect on their learning. We also know that instructor presence is a critical component of learning online; establishing a communication policy, and sticking to it, helps students feel a sense of belonging. Using Kaltura to deliver video lecture content – and keeping videos under ten minutes, and using the captioning feature – can also help to establish presence. Moving lecture content to asynchronous delivery means that videoconferencing tools like BigBlueButton can be used for what they were designed for: making connections across distance. Balancing these tools to achieve maximum satisfaction for all learners takes time, but with this feedback from students, the path is much clearer.