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## COVID-19: Impact on Business Students' Transition from Face-to-Face to Online Instructional Delivery

Beverly A. Bryant  
*North Carolina Central University*

Cynthia R. Mayo  
*Delaware State University*

Keisha M. Williams  
*North Carolina Central University*

Danielle Colbert-Lewis  
*North Carolina Central University*

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### Cover Page Footnote

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## **COVID-19: Impact on Business Students' Transition from Face-to-Face to Online Instructional Delivery**

Dr. Beverly Bryant  
North Carolina Central University Durham, NC 27707, USA  
bbryant@nccu.edu

Keisha Williams  
North Carolina Central University Durham, NC 27707, USA  
kmark3@nccu.edu

Dr. Cynthia Mayo  
Reynolds Community College Richmond, VA 23288  
cmayo@reynolds.edu

Danielle Colbert Lewis  
North Carolina Central University Durham, NC 27707, USA  
dcolbert@nccu.edu

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### **Abstract**

*The COVID-19 pandemic has shaken the world to its proverbial core with institutions for higher learning caught in the crosshairs. Consequently, every facet of higher education has been indelibly affected. Traditional classroom instruction immediately changed, and a nontraditional delivery method emerged inclusive of both hybrid and online instruction. This delivery method was new to many students as all instruction shifted from face-to-face to virtual. To mitigate the spread of the virus, immediate action was required and campuses had to determine the probability of closing. This was a challenge for many reasons, some students did not have the resources to attend classes virtually. Many students had housing on campus that had been paid for the entire semester and were not prepared to suddenly switch to a new way of instruction and learning. Students depended on work-study on campus and library and computer resources to facilitate their course success. Administrators and educators realized that change is the constant we live within, and understood the need for strategies that were adaptive, agile, and would continue to meet the needs of all students. This change also signaled the need for innovative, contingent, and servant leadership strategies by administrators, faculty, and staff that reduced uncertainty and promoted care and stability for the students. This research paper aims to identify and share the experiences of business students enrolled in two institutions of higher education in meeting this challenge. It will also reveal how students dealt with the sudden transition from traditional learning environments to fully online and hybrid instruction. The complexity was intensified by the need to ensure that faculty members were prepared to give instruction virtually. Many were thrust into e-learning training which by most standards is a great way to demonstrate continuous improvement efforts, a major accreditation mandate for business schools. A Likert-scale survey was administered seeking responses to the processes of curriculum delivery; impact, problems, and issues experienced to the immediate shift to online instruction. Perceptions of support from faculty, advisors, administrators, and methods utilized to establish a sense of urgency to meet the*

*educational needs of the students during COVID 19 were also assessed. Two-hundred and seventy-four students consented to complete the survey. Survey results provide benchmark experiences and challenges that business students encountered while completing their academic semesters. The results will assist business schools in developing best practices for virtual instruction, communication, and student engagement plans and strategies for facilitating student and faculty success during current waves of the pandemic and new pandemics of the future.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) has led most educational systems to require an emergency lockdown to limit the spread of the virus. This has led to the interruption of institutional operations, including the delivery of education. While some colleges and universities offered online programs and courses, in March of 2020, most institutions of higher education shifted to 100% online instruction. The shift was immediate-- a week after the recommended shutdowns of the federal government. The sudden transition from on-campus learning to distance learning was challenging for both students and faculty. The shift required specific, detailed, and intense preparation in a short amount of time. This was a challenge as some students did not have the resources to attend classes virtually. This change also signaled the need for innovative, contingent, and servant leadership strategies by administrators, faculty, and staff that reduced uncertainty and promoted care and stability for the students.

This paper will illustrate the challenges students experienced during the covid crisis and the requisite changes that must be made to shift from the “normal modes of education “to the new normal.” The process of delivering education during a global pandemic requires a sense of urgency to act in a way that ensures safety to all, including immediately closing the building and swiftly developing new ways to implement operational and instructional plans. Additionally, faculty had to communicate the curriculum content, assess the capacity building, manage students' stress, manage student engagement, and motivation, design student assessments, while, anticipating challenges and planning for how to overcome them. From the findings outlaid in this report administrators, faculty, and staff of colleges and universities will be given tools and techniques to support their inactions of processes that will ensure seamless integration into new ways of learning considering these circumstances.

The purpose of this research was to identify and assess current challenges students faced at the beginning of the pandemic-induced transition from online to face-to-face courses. More specifically, the study addressed the following questions that were developed and structured in a Likert survey format:

RQ1: What were the major educational challenges students experienced due to COVID -19 Pandemic?

RQ2: As a result of the online mandate, did students feel engaged and were provided informative information?

RQ3: What family issues impacted students' educational experiences due to COVID-19?

RQ4: To what extent did students experience challenges with classroom instruction?

RQ5: What environmental factors impacted student success?RQ6: What was the financial impact on the student and their families due to COVID-19?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A quantitative study of over 5,200 college students during March 27-29, 2020 by Carnegie Dartlet revealed that four in five students saw their schools as trustworthy sources of COVID 19 information; 4 four in 5 five students reported having to make large or drastic life changes to accommodate the current COVID-19 situation, fifty percent (50%) of students said COVID -19 won't stop them from attending college under any circumstance, and that plurality of students did not feel comfortable taking classes online (Ochander, 2020).

Another study by the National Bureau of Economics entitled “The Impact of COVID-19 on Student experiences and expectations: Evidence from a Survey” reported that from a sample of 1,500 students at a large public institution, as a result of COVID-19: 13% of students have delayed graduation, 40% lost a job, internship, or a job offer, 29% expect to earn less at age 35, one-quarter of students increased their study time by more than 4 hours per week, and one quarter decreased their study time by 5 hours per week (Aucejo, J.F., et al, 2020).

In April of 2020, Best Colleges commissioned YOUGO to conduct a survey on: “Students Stressed Out Due to Coronavirus,” a sample of 745 was surveyed, Seventy-eight percent of households with high school or college students reported educational disruptions from COVID-19. Over 8 in 10 students experiencing these disruptions reported increased stress. Almost 44% of students worry about their ability to enroll or stay enrolled in college. This same worry is shared disproportionately among respondents identifying as black, Hispanic, or other. Although nearly 35% of respondents reported that campus closures and the shift to online learning increased student anxiety, the majority (69%) of students experiencing disruptions believed schools are providing enough support throughout the transition process. (Johnson, 2020).

Over 1,500 students from 21 colleges and universities across the United States were surveyed regarding the student experiences during the pandemic pivot in June of 2020. The study reported that students generally understood institutional policies related to the pandemic, but they wanted additional communication and support from financial aid and academic advising departments. In many cases, the most significant challenges that students faced during the spring semester were those they faced long before the pandemic, including balancing school, work, and home responsibilities. Unexpectedly having to pivot to online learning and finding quiet space to complete work also proved especially difficult. The study also reported that students found collaborative, technical, and specialized assignments to be the most difficult to complete. Assignments that were completed most frequently were ones with which they experienced the least difficulty. Other experiences included: Students lacked a sense of belonging and connection to others at their institution. While they felt somewhat connected to their instructors, few reported feeling very connected to other students. Additional concerns were regarding physical and mental health—especially amongst historically underserved and marginalized student groups—were present for approximately half of the students surveyed even while they reported high levels of awareness of how to be safe during the pandemic. Roughly one in three students reported some concern regarding their food or housing security. Those who reported the greatest concerns were, unfortunately, relatively less likely to know where to go to find emergency aid resources. The study indicated that approximately three-quarters of non-graduating students were highly likely to re-enroll in the fall semester, though many indicated uncertainties about how their timeline for graduating might be affected by the pandemic (Blankstein, et al, 2020).

A survey by the Healthy Minds Network for Research on Adolescent and Young Adult Mental Health and the American College Health Association garnered results from 18,764 students on 14 campuses regarding how the pandemic hurt students' mental health. The study reported that 66 percent of students reported that the pandemic has caused them more financial stress -- "a known predictor of student mental health," according to the report on the survey results -- and 35.7 percent say they've moved to a new living situation as a result of the pandemic. Prevalence of depression among college students increased since the pandemic caused the closure of campuses this spring compared to fall 2019, while the prevalence of substance abuse decreased. A higher proportion of students -- 30.5 percent compared to 21.9 percent the prior fall -- reported that their mental health negatively affected their academic performance on at least six days during the prior four weeks. About 15 percent of students reported having a probable case of COVID-19, though less than 1 percent of students said the diagnosis was confirmed with a test. Among students who reported having confirmed or probable cases, 5.5 percent describe their symptoms as severe, 35.1 percent as moderate, 55.3 percent as mild, and 4.1 percent said they were asymptomatic (Redden, 2020).

The study also reported that students expressed high levels of concerns about how long the pandemic will last. About a quarter of students -- 25.8 percent -- say they are "very" or "extremely" concerned about contracting the virus, while 64.4 percent say they are "very" or "extremely" concerned about a person they care about contracting COVID-19. Five and a half percent of students reported experiencing discriminatory or hostile behavior based on their race or ethnicity as a result of the pandemic, and 41 percent reported witnessing discriminatory behavior online or in person. The vast majority of students -- 84 percent -- say public health agencies are their most trusted source of information about the pandemic. About 60 percent say they have been "very closely" following recommendations for hygiene practices, and about 70 percent say they have been "very closely" following recommendations for physical and social distancing. Of the 41.8 percent of students who attempted to seek mental health care during the pandemic, 23.3 percent said it had been "much more difficult" to access care, and 36.8 percent said it was "somewhat more difficult." About 69 percent of students said their campus administration has been supportive during the pandemic, and about 78 percent said their professors have been supportive (Redden, 2020).

To see how their institution and students fared during the COVID-19 pandemic and the transition to online instruction, this study from Georgia Gwinnett College (GCC) analyzed data from student surveys, 15 instructor reflections, and grade distributions (Villanueva, O., et. al, 2020). The classes utilized for this data were Chemistry 1 and 2. The survey for students used a Likert scale (1-5 scale). Challenges for students that received the highest score were "Distractions in your residence" (3.5), and the lowest score was "Participating in asynchronous" instruction (2.4) and "Participating in synchronous instruction" (2.6). The authors articulated that the transition to online instruction during the COVID-19 in the Spring semester was challenging for students. Also, distractions outside of the classroom, such as access to technology, campus closure, and access to the library, impacted students. Instructors' reflections stated that flexibility and adaptability were paramount during this time of transition (Villanueva et al., 2020)

Instructors' highlighted flexibility in technology platforms and student assessment and due dates for students during this period. Instructors reflected upon engagement and teaching strategies used

in the classroom (i.e., flipped classroom) and technology accessibility issues (Villanueva, O., et. al, 2020). The authors recommended campuses provide students and instructors with access to technology. Furthermore, the authors recommended for instructors to effectively teach to get online training and course design for students to effectively learn in the online environment (Villanueva et al., 2020).

## **LEARNING THEORIES**

A review of learning theories serves to assist in the development of questions for the survey. A review of the Transformative Learning Theory, David Kolb's Theory of Experiential Learning, and Self-Determination Theories emerged as the basis for delivering classroom instruction. The Transformative Learning Theory was the disorienting dilemma, found because of COVID-19, in that expectations and views of the delivery of education changed. The immediate shift from the norm to the abnormal meant there was going to be learner struggles, which would result in conflicts as the learner moved to a new transformative learning process (Mezirow, 1991).

David Kolb's theory projects that the development of new experiences occurs where knowledge is created through some transformation of experience (Kolb, 1984, p. 38). The focus is on experiential learning and the learner's internal cognitive processes. The four stages of the process involve:

1. Concrete Experience – a situation has occurred; a new experience has been introduced.
2. Reflective Observation of the New Experience – identifying whether there are inconsistencies between what is being observed and the new experience.
3. Abstract Conceptualization- there is a rise to a new idea and innovation because the person has learned from their experience.
4. Active Experimentation - the student can then apply the learning to the new environment around them.

The Self-Determination Theory focuses on the motivation behind what makes students learn without external influence and interference (Ryan, R. M., et al. (2000). However, in instances, as reflected through the isolation of many students during COVID-19, these needs are becoming more difficult to be met. The sense of connection to other learners who are experienced in face-to-face learning has some effect on what and how the students learn. Students who present to have more success in virtual learning situations are those who have a strong demonstration of autonomy and competence and relatedness which are the three human basic needs that need to be met before self-determination occurs (Ryan, R. M., et al. (2000).

## **METHODOLOGY**

A 24-item online survey link was emailed to business and hospitality students at a public four-year university and business students at a two-year public community college during April, May, and June 2020. The survey comprised of 21 Likert-scale questions about student experiences during the spring and summer semesters during the pandemic. To preserve participants' anonymity, only three demographic questions were asked and one open-ended question for further thoughts and experiences encountered by the students. Four Hundred and Three (403) students were surveyed

and 274 responses were received representing a 68% response rate. This paper focuses on participants' responses to Likert-scale questions about their challenges, engagement, support from the faculty and universities, effects on family, classroom instruction, environmental and financial impacts due to the pandemic. The data presented in this paper is descriptive along with a discussion of online best practices that address challenges students experienced during the pandemic.

## **RESULTS AND FINDINGS:**

A study of 274 college students from a four-year public university and a two-year public community college were surveyed using a digital link between April and June of 2020 to determine the impact of COVID 19 and the shift to online learning. Thirty-nine (39.9 %) were male and 59.4% females. Most of the students were Black or African American while 18.3 % were white, 7% Hispanic or Latino 2.9% American Indian or Alaska Native, 2.9% Asian, and 2.2% multi-cultural. Forty-five percent (45%) were seniors, 29.7% Juniors, and 6.6 freshman classification. Fifty-eight percent (58%) of the courses were taught asynchronous with no scheduled meetings, while 42 percent of the courses were taught synchronously with live scheduled meetings online. A summary of the research questions and results is as follows:

### **RQ1: What were the major educational challenges students experienced due to COVID -19 Pandemic?**

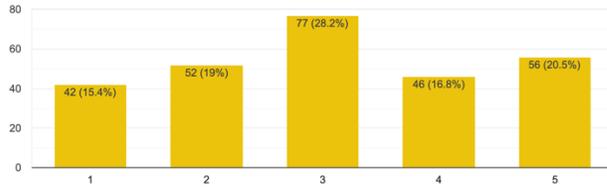
Sixty-three percent (63%) of the student expressed that they were familiar with online classes and thus was familiar with online instruction. Twenty-nine percent (29%) expressed that they were frustrated with the change and found it very challenging to complete. Twenty-one percent (21%) indicated that they were not familiar with online delivery in that all their classes were face-to-face. Nine percent (9%) reported not having the resources to manage online classes. Forty-one percent (41%) of the students felt stressed regarding the transition, while 35% of the students did not feel stressed at all and 25% did not comment. Only 12.5 percent of the students indicated that the coronavirus impacted their ability to stay enrolled while 88% indicated that the virus did not impact them. Students responded to the question of loss of campus-based services and its impact to include Fifty percent (50%) loss of the computer laboratory, loss of internship (40%), loss of work-study (28%), loss of access health services ((24%), loss of a safe living environment (15%) and loss of access to food 12%)

### **RQ2: As a result of the online mandate, did students feel engaged in learning and supported during the course, and communicated helpful information regarding COVID 19?**

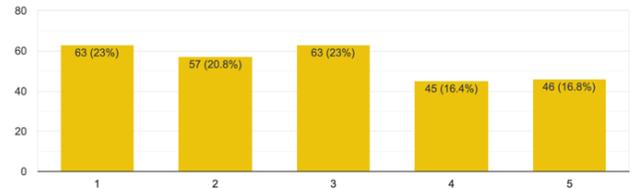
Thirty-eight percent (38%) of the students felt the online courses were engaging and informative while 34% disagreed and 28% indicated no effect. Of the 274 respondents, 33% felt involved with other students and the professor while taking online classes, 44% disagreed and did not feel involved and another 23% indicated no effect. Most of the students (60%) were comfortable taking online classes while 14% were not comfortable and 26% indicated there was no effect. Fifty-six percent of the students felt supported by their professors and the University, while 19% disagreed that they were supported and the remaining 25% felt no impact. Students expressed five ways that instructors provided support during the courses (1) professors extended the time of assignments due (63.1%), (2) provided encouraging words to the class (56.2%), (3) professors operated with empathy regarding expressed student challenges (49%), (4) 47% of the professors re-opened examinations and (5) 39% accepted late assignments. Sixty-nine percent of the students participating in the Inside Higher Education (July 13 2020) survey indicated that their campus

administration had been supportive during the pandemic and 78 % said their professors have been supportive.

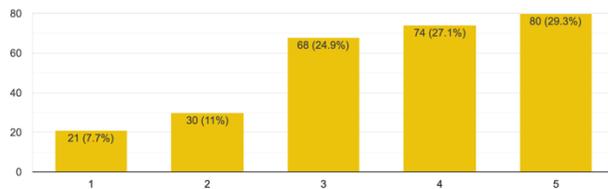
I felt that the online course was engaging (I felt involved) and informative.  
273 responses



I felt involved with other students and the professor while taking my classes online.  
274 responses



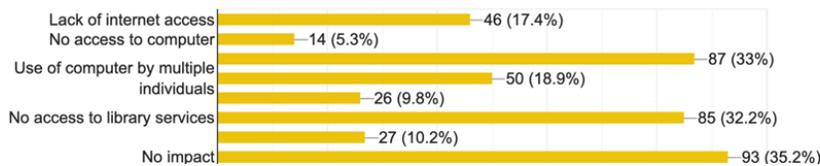
Did you feel support from your professors and the university?  
273 responses



**RQ3: What family issues changed student educational experiences due to COVID 19?**

The respondents identified 4-four areas of their educational experience that impacted their ability to be successful. Use of computers by multiple individuals in the house (33%), no access to library services (32.2%), lack of internet (17.4%), no access to the internet (5.3%) while 35.2 % of the respondents indicated no impact on their success.

What, if any environmental and family situations impacted your ability to be successful during the Covid 19? (Check all that apply)  
264 responses



**RQ4: What experiences did students express concerning the transition to online classroom instruction?**

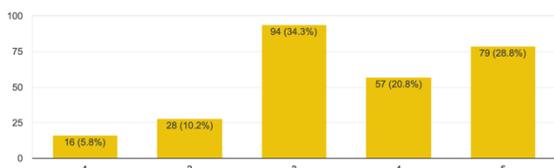
When asked if they enjoyed taking online courses and had no problems, 50% of the students agreed they enjoyed taking online courses while 16% disagreed that they enjoyed taking online and 34% indicated no effect. Forty-six percent of the students agreed that the learning process was uninterrupted despite the transition from face-to-face to online, while 33% of the students disagreed that learning was uninterrupted, 31 % indicated there was no effect.

During COVID 19 in spring and summer 2020, Fifty percent (50%) of the students indicated that they spent more hours completing course work with online classes, 36% spent more time searching for content to complete course work, 22% spent less time completing course work and 18 percent had no impact at all regarding studying and completing assignments. The study by Blankstein,

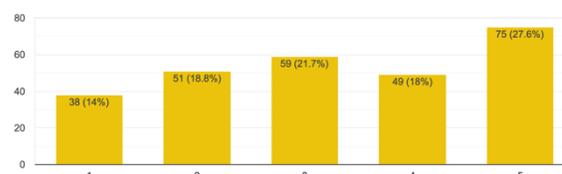
Frederick and Wolff-Eisenburg (2020) also reported that one-quarter of students increased their study time by more than 4 hours while one-quarter decreased their study time by 5 hours per week.

Forty-seven percent (47%) of the students indicated that they were highly satisfied with the quality of communications the University provided during COVID 19 and the preparations for a safe return for fall 2020. Twenty-two percent of the students were not satisfied with the communications received and 30% of the students were neutral.

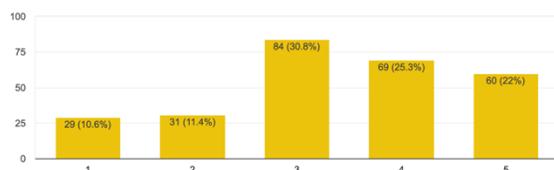
I enjoyed taking online courses.  
274 responses



I feel that the learning process was uninterrupted despite the transition from face to face to online.  
272 responses



Has the school or university provided enough quality communications concerning the COVID 19 preparations for safe return to make you feel satisfied in considering returning in Fall 2020?  
273 responses

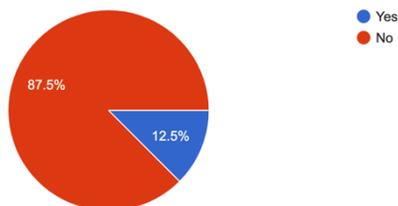


### RQ5: What environmental factors impacted student success?

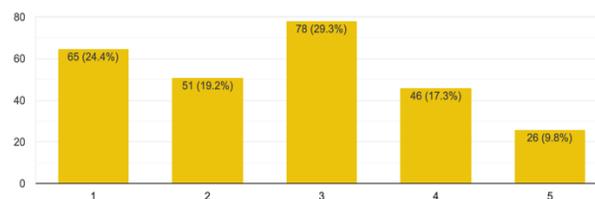
Eighty-eight percent 87.5% of the respondents indicated that the coronavirus did not impact their ability to stay enrolled in school while 12.5% reported that the coronavirus impacted their enrollment. When asked if COVID had changed their perceptions of health-related safety for returning to campus, 24.4% responded far less safe, 19.2% slightly safe another 17.3% of the respondents indicated slightly safe, 9.8% safe and 29.3% reported no change in their perceptions of health-related safety in returning to school.

When asked what your overall school performance during Covid-19 transition to online delivery was, 26% of the students indicated that their performance was outstanding, 33% reported their performance as excellent, 28% good, while 7% of the students reported fair, and 3% poor.

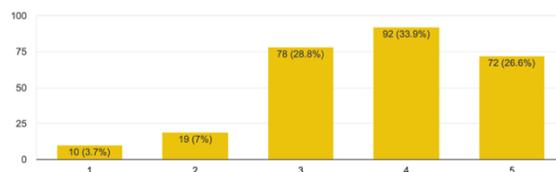
Did the Coronavirus impact your ability to stay enrolled in the semester?  
272 responses



Has COVID changed your perceptions of health related safety for returning to Campus?  
266 responses

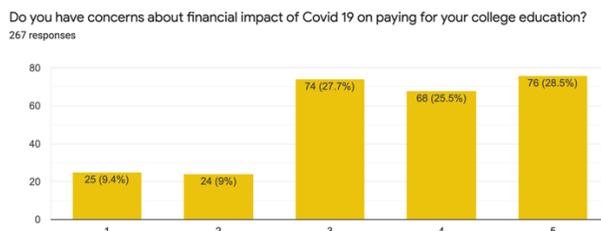
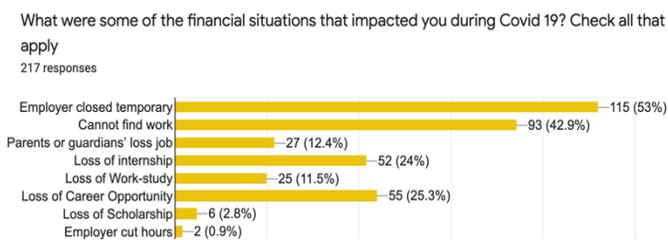


What was your overall school performance during the COVID 19 stop out and transition to online delivery?  
271 responses

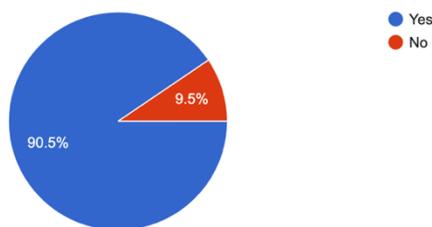


**RQ6: What was the financial impact on the student and their family due to COVID?**

Fifty-three percent of the reported that employers closing their business temporarily impacted their situation, 43% could not find work, 25.3 indicated they lost a career opportunity, 24% lost an internship opportunity, 12.4% reported that their parents or guardians were unemployed, and 11.5% loss their internship. When asked if respondents had concerns about the financial impact of COVID-19 on paying for their college education, 54% was far more concerned while 18.4% was far less concerned, and 27.7 % was not concerned. Ninety percent of the respondents indicated they would return in fall 2020 while 9.5% indicated they would not return. A study of 5200 college students by Carnegie Darlet indicated that 50% of students said COVID 19 will not stop them from attending college under any circumstance (Ochander, 2020).



Will you return to the University in Fall 2020?  
274 responses



The literature reviewed on the effects of Covid-19 on student engagement focused primarily on students in STEM concentrations, our study considered the impact on business majors (Villanueva et. al, 2020). While the population differed, it appears that business students found a similar ability to quickly adapt to online technology as those in other fields of study. This is particularly true for students with some online experiences than students who had not had prior online experience.

**DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

The COVID-19: Impact on business Students Transition from Face to Face to Online Instructional Delivery survey results from 274 students from two institutions of higher education indicated that in general students were able to adapt to the new normal of course delivery. Many of the students were able to complete their studies with few challenges, while some did not have the resources to access the internet. Some students indicated that they enjoyed taking online classes; they received encouragement from professors; students spent more time completing course assignments. Online courses normally dictate that the professor spends more time planning an online course and the students must spend more time completing the assignments.

A few of the participants had no access to a computer, no access to library services and they had to share a computer with multiple individuals. Many of the students indicated that COVID-19 did impact their ability to stay enrolled during the semester. Ninety percent (90%) indicated they will return to school in fall 2021. Twelve percent (12%) indicated that they will not return due to the COVID-19 impact.

While a majority of the students answered the survey questions neutrally there is strong evidence that students had to make adjustments to how they were to approach their education to accommodate the new learning environment. This is demonstrated through the declining classroom attendance, lack of active class participation, and the number of students who decided to take their class with their cameras off. There were also instances of grade inflations as evidence through the move to pass/fail options after the Spring 2020 semester "...students, who already have extra burdens and greater needs, were given, during a pandemic, less trust, less time, and additional obstacles to accessing the more flexible grading systems... (Tanenbaum, 2020).

All in all, information pertaining to the pandemic, infection rates, available vaccinations, vary daily—as does direction from the Center for Disease Control (CDC). While CDC direction at this point centers around K-12 teachers and students returning to class process (Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools through Phased Mitigation, 2021), universities must take note and make plans for how reintegration will affect their faculty, staff, and students.

#### **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

This study's findings were limited to two institutions of higher education located in Virginia and North Carolina. 274 students completed the survey. The results are related to the purposeful populations studied and are therefore generalizable only to the population. Additional surveying on student impacts will be conducted with students from schools of business to test any variation in responses. Discussions will be had with faculty and staff on how these findings will strengthen teaching pedagogy for student engagement both inside and outside of the classroom.

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

While students had challenges, it did not discourage their desire to attend. However, many institutions, included the ones featured in this report recognized a dip in enrollment between the Fall and Spring indicating that some students opted to take a break from studies. While most of the students reported neutral responses to the survey, they ranked university and faculty responsiveness as high. We are curious to know now that students have been in these circumstances for a year whether they fully embrace online education or if they are ready to return to face-to-face learning. Notwithstanding future circumstances that threaten to shift the delivery of instruction in the future, it will benefit schools of businesses to fully embrace online instruction such that students are guaranteed adequate instruction and seamless degree progression.

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