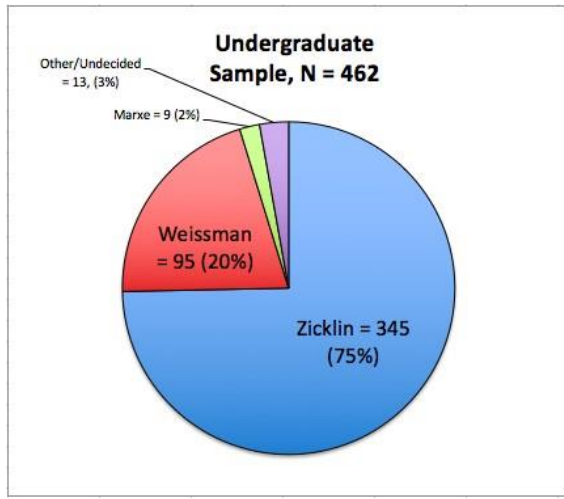


CTL COVID-19 Student Experience Survey



Background:

Our survey was conducted after the spring, summer, and fall 2020 semesters and was distributed to undergraduate and graduate students from all schools at Baruch College. The questions addressed the following: how students define flexible learning; concerns about technology; faculty communication; student engagement; what students want faculty to know about their current circumstances; and preferred course formats. Most respondents were undergraduates from Zicklin and Weissman (data shown below), so we focused our analysis on those populations. Within that, most students were in their 1st or 2nd years. Our insights here are largely gleaned from the fall 2020 survey.

Four important themes emerged from the responses we received...

Theme 1: Communication

Our questions:

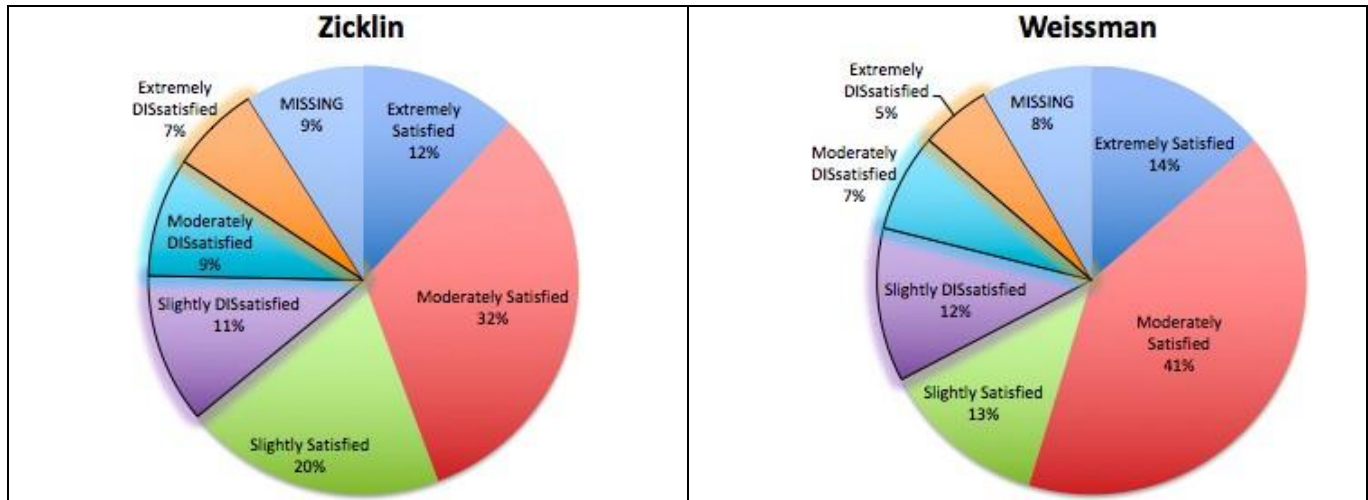
“How did your professors communicate with you about course information and expectations?”

“On average, how satisfied are you with how well your professors communicated with you about course information and expectations?”

“On average, how effective were your professors at communicating with you about course information and expectations?”

“What is at least one thing that your professors could do to improve communication with students?”

Most students were at least somewhat satisfied with the ways faculty were communicating with them (data shown below), though satisfaction rates declined between summer and fall. A substantial subset of students did not feel that communication was effective enough to be able to follow what was going on in class.



Students' quotes about improving communication:

Better, quicker, more emailing

“More emailing, sending out announcements instead of saying something once in class...”

“Actually respond to emails in a timely matter...”

Requests for “understanding” in professors’ communications

“Communication from professors that they understand students can be deteriorating and facing depression...”

“Understanding students’ struggles and needs without dismissing their concerns...”

Better clarity and organization in communication

“Asynchronous classes need to have top notch communication to be effective. I felt very detached from the class and the college...”

“Give more detailed explanations both in class and emails. Be more receptive to questions regarding the curriculum...”

Actionable suggestions for better communication

- Establish your “email response” timeline.
- Consider setting up a regular & organized communication schedule
- Save time to show students your “human side” in any communications
- Send regular reminders about due dates and deadlines
- Provide feedback (in class, via email, by post on your course site)
- Actively promote chances for 1:1 meetings (office hours; other kinds of check-ins)

Theme 2: In-session engagement

Our questions:

“Describe at least one way that your professors have successfully kept you engaged throughout the process of Distance Learning in your current online course(s). By ‘engaged,’ we mean that you feel a sense of investment in the topic, and/or in keeping up with the reading/assignments, and/or in staying connected to the other students.”

“What is at least one thing that your professors could do to improve student engagement in future online classes?”

Most students report that synchronous sessions were key to keeping them engaged in a course.

Students’ quotes about improving in-session engagement:

Providing moments of interactivity

“...use mixed-mediums to deliver lectures. For example, supplementary videos or breakout activities.”

“As much as some people hate group work, I think it should be encouraged since we are not meeting in person.”

Encouraging questions

“Keep lectures on the shorter side so there is time to discuss any confusions we may have.”

Making course content relatable

“...remind the students how the course material relates to their professional lives.”

Actionable suggestions for better in-session engagement:

- Have full-class and/or small group discussion every session
- Use breakout rooms strategically
- Explicitly encourage participation every time, or consider offering incentives
- Devote time every session to student questions
- Consider whether there are current events or relevant contemporary issues you can introduce

Theme 3: Flexible learning

Our question:

"For me, the idea of learning flexibly right now means... (Choose all that apply):

- Having flexible deadlines for homework and other assignments.
- Having different types of assignments to work on.
- Having the option of alternative assignments to complete if the planned assignment won't work for me.
- Being able to choose the order in which I complete some assignments or course tasks.
- Never having to be online for a full video class session in the regular class time slot."

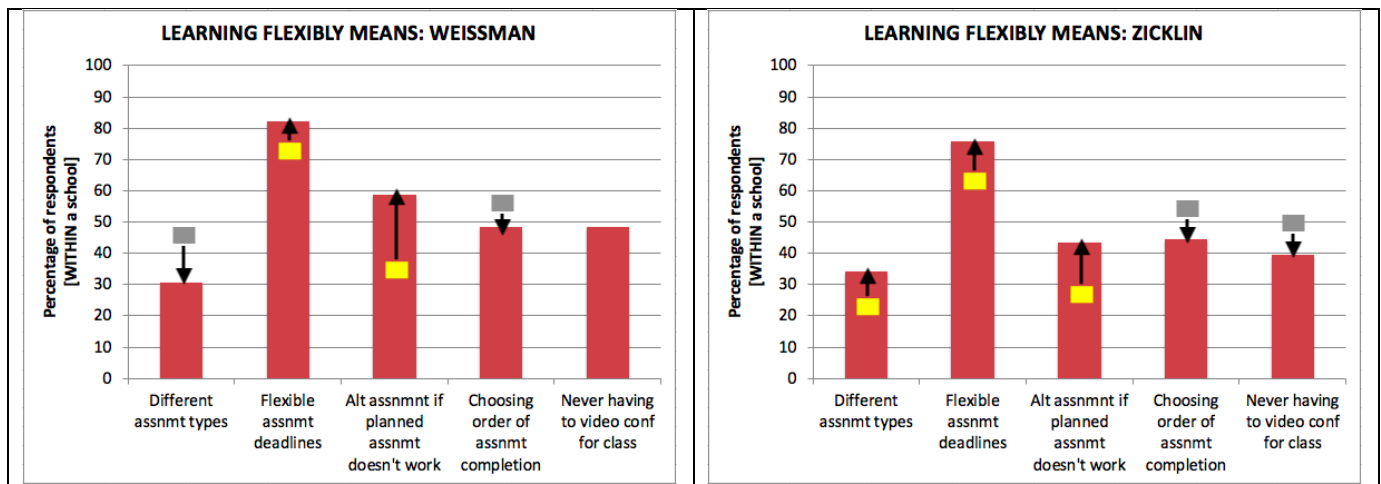


Figure Caption: Percentage of students identifying what ‘flexible learning’ meant to them. Students were free to choose as many descriptors of ‘flexible learning’ as was applicable to them. Although there was a great degree in variability in students’ perceptions, the ‘flexible assignment dates’ descriptor was selected the most by both schools. Yellow boxes and upward pointing arrows indicate an increase in the percentage of students choosing a given descriptor in Fall 2020 compared to Summer II 2020, where arrow length indexes the actual magnitude of the increase. Gray boxes and downward pointing arrows indicate a decrease in preference across the two semesters. The absence of a box / arrow indicates stability in preference from the Summer II session to the Fall semester.

Students’ quotes about flexible learning:

“One of my professors gave us a variety of options for homework every week and we chose what worked for us.”

“A few things that have been awesome are pre-recorded lectures that I can watch on my own time and rewind [and] flexible class meeting days/times...”

“We had multiple opportunities to redo our quizzes and assignments... We also used Blackboard for group discussions so it was easy for students to form virtual study groups and help each other on homework problems. We had different assignments including Excel projects which helped me... improve my skill set. The Professor... was very understanding of any issues that may have occurred due to technology and was flexible.”

Actionable suggestions for flexible learning:

- Keep deadlines fluid and/or have a lenient late-work policy
- Provide opportunities to make up missed work, such as alternative assignments
- Consider letting students choose the order of assignments
- Consider not requiring synchronous engagement with lecture
- Provide recordings, slides, or transcripts of all synchronous sessions
- Hold office hours for additional help (students seem to prefer live)

Theme 4: Understanding

Our question:

“Life has become more complicated and difficult for many people in the Baruch community. Is there anything you think would be helpful for faculty to understand about your reality and how it impacts how you are learning?”

Summary

Documents

Phrases

This corpus has 1 document with 9,633 total words and 1,597 unique word forms. Created about 15 minutes ago.

Vocabulary Density: 0.166

Average Words Per Sentence: 21.9

Most **frequent words** in the corpus: **students** (114); **time** (69); **professors** (64); **work** (55); **online** (51)

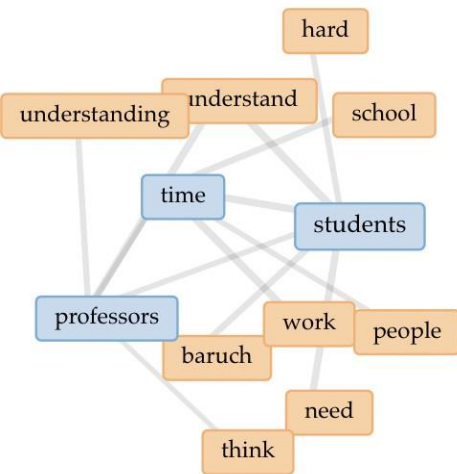


Figure Caption: The two images above are from an analysis of the current question in *Voyant*, <https://voyant-tools.org/>, an open-source natural language-processing suite of tools, which includes a document summary (top image), a frequent word analysis and a collocates graph (bottom image). The summary shows that the term “students” came up 114 times in the various responses to this question, “time” came up 69 times, and “professors” 64 times. Meanwhile, “understand” came up 42 times and “understanding” 19 times. The related term “realize” came up 3 times and “take into account” once, adding up to a total of 65 times for the same concept. By contrast, the term “flexible,” which came up more often than “understand” in the spring, and as often in the summer, is far behind with 13 mentions for the fall 2020 semester.

The ‘collocates’ graph shows a network of higher-frequency words that appear in relation with one another, where keywords are featured in blue and collocates (words in proximity) in red, plus lines connecting the two. “Understand” and “understanding” are most closely related to “professors,” “time” and “students.” The other keywords are Baruch,” “work,” “people,” “think,” “need” and “hard.”

Common characteristics of understanding (i.e., awareness of student issues)

Types of responses that are consistent with national trends

(e.g., <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0890856720319882>)

- lack of focus and/or mental health struggles due to COVID-19-related stress/grief/trauma
- dissatisfaction with online learning and/or being at home

Types of responses relating to issues disproportionately affecting the CUNY population

(e.g., <https://www1.cuny.edu/mu/forum/2020/10/16/cuny-plans-expansion-of-mental-health-services-to-address-escalating-need-of-students-struggling-with-effects-of-pandemic/>)

- unreliable wi-fi (due to large/shared households)
- insufficient privacy
- lack of time due to need to work outside the home/act as a caretaker

Students' quotes about understanding:

“People have jobs (part-time and full-time) that they may not have had before, traveling to and from work is more time-consuming and difficult, people may have to care for siblings, grandparents, and other family members more than before, money is extremely tight...It's hard, so be flexible with us.”

“...Baruch honestly thinks that we are able to function normally without considering our situation. Our families could have died from COVID, or we could be suffering from depression or anxiety... I never would have thought my mental health would be this bad... Learning this semester has not been the same as we are missing out on our once-in-a-lifetime college experience.”

“...We've lost friends and family. My family and I have lost jobs. My mental state is rapidly deteriorating, I'm worried about making ends meet. It seems like all understanding about the current situation went out the window this semester despite the pandemic being worse than it's ever been. Also give us some time to adjust!!! I have professors on Zoom, Slack, Notion, Blogs, Blackboard Collaborate Ultra, Teams, Hangouts, Piazza, etc. They only have to master their chosen method. Please understand that.”

Procedural suggestions for demonstrating understanding:

- Consider reducing overall workload
- Have more flexible or lenient standards/deadlines
- Replace some assignments with ones that are easier/less stressful to execute in a virtual setting

- Feel free to ask students to turn on their cameras if possible, but be transparent that it cannot be required or linked to the attendance grade (The same goes for transparency about not being able to require online proctoring or attendance at live sessions.)
- Offer ways for students to safely and easily ask questions in and out of class

Affective suggestions for demonstrating understanding:

- Acknowledge the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic
- Try to build community in the class by reaching out to individual students, being available for conversations outside class, and/or ensuring students are in regular touch with you/each other
- Stay for 5-10 mins past the conclusion of class, and/or arrive 5-10 mins early for questions
- Survey or poll students about progress in the class, or ways you/the college could be helpful
- Share links to, and raise awareness of, virtual resources (e.g. [Writing Center](#), [BCTC](#), [Student Academic Consulting Center](#) [SACC], [Tools for Clear Speech](#) [TfCS], [Student Disability Services](#), and the [Counseling Center](#))

Looking ahead: post-COVID course format preferences:

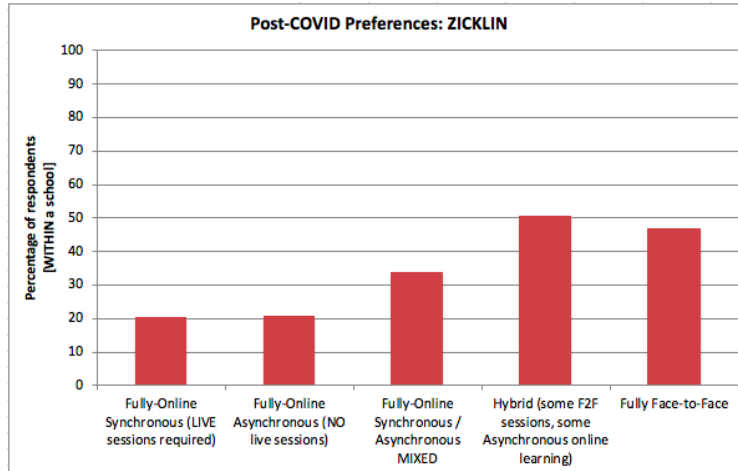
Our questions:

“Looking towards the future, when it becomes safe to resume in-person learning (i.e., face-to-face classes on campus), what are your preferred course formats? Please select your top three (3) preferences:

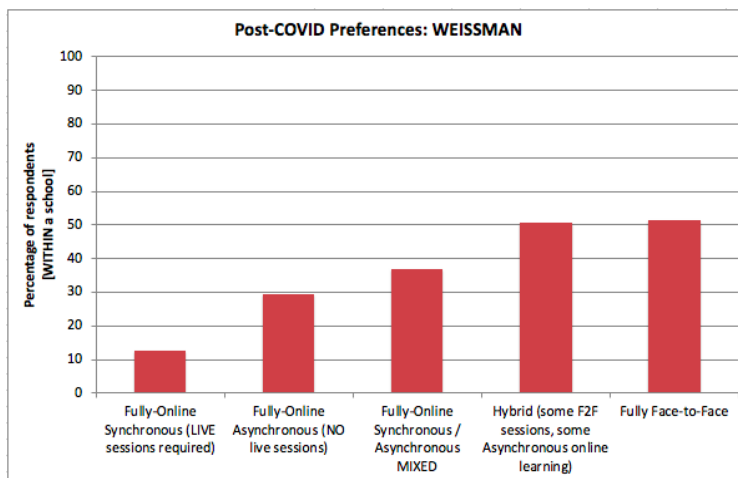
- Fully online, synchronous (live sessions required)
- Fully online, asynchronous (no live sessions)
- Fully online, synchronous/asynchronous mix (some live sessions and some asynchronous learning)
- Hybrid (some face-to-face sessions, some asynchronous online learning)
- Fully face-to-face”

“Why did you choose the course formats that you chose in the previous question? (For example, has the experience of the pandemic changed your preferences? Has it changed your working conditions? Have you discovered that you enjoy online learning? etc.)”

Zicklin: N=345



Weissman: N=95



Students preferred hybrid and face-to-face formats over fully online courses (data shown above). When asked to explain their preferences they tended to express themselves as “for” or “against” online learning. Students who preferred online learning cited flexibility, convenience and safety. Students who preferred face-to-face cited bad online experiences, work-home separation, human connection and access to on-campus facilities.

Final thoughts:

- Students’ needs are extremely varied and are changing over time.
- Some dissatisfaction across all themes remains a constant.
- Students request regular, predictable communication across several platforms.
- Students appreciate flexibility, particularly in deadlines, assignment choices and order, and formats of engagement (synchronous/asynchronous).

- Engagement for students often means synchronous sessions, interactive elements (such as polls and breakout rooms), class and small-group discussion, and group work.
- Understanding--both affective (allow for discussion of the current situation) and procedural (err on the side of leniency)--goes a long way towards making things work.

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