Student to Student Academic Stress Report: Findings from a Mid-April Survey
Dr. Sarah Beth Kaufman and Rachel Kaufman (no relation)
April 24, 2020

On April 3, Rachel Kaufman contacted her advisor, Dr. Sarah Beth Kaufman, looking for advice about how to communicate with Academic Affairs the extent to which students were experiencing stress in the transition to remote learning. As she wrote in an email:

I am grappling with a concern for Trinity students and our ability to keep up with status-quo rigorous standards. As online school commences, students have been concerned and stressed beyond our control … expectations of some professors have not changed and students do not know what to do, as their abilities to learn have been severely impacted.

In a telephone conversation, Dr. Kaufman suggested they work to get an accurate feeling for the student body as a whole, through the use of a google survey. Together they brainstormed about how to get it to students, deciding eventually that the best course of action would be to ask the SGA (Student Government Association) to send it to the student body.

Rachel drafted the survey, shared it with SGA and members of Academic Affairs for feedback, and Dr. Kaufman made some suggestions for change. Rachel then worked with SGA to send it to all Trinity undergraduate students via email on April 10. To assure anonymity, student emails were not collected upon response, but only used to verify one-time access to the poll.

330 students responded in the first 30 minutes. Both Rachel and Dr. Kaufman tracked responses, each thinking of ways to increase responses and representativeness. By April 16, responses totaled over 1100 students, nearing 50% of the undergraduate student body, and Rachel closed the survey. Dr. Kaufman introduced Rachel to qualitative data analysis, employing a standard (if not older) technique using excel and categorical coding, not having access to qualitative data analysis programs available on campus. Together they wrote up a report to share with stakeholders as quickly as possible, in the tradition of “quick and dirty” data gathering and dissemination in times of crisis. Though imperfect, the survey findings contain some important insights into the well-being of the undergraduate student body.

The Survey
The survey was composed of two identifying questions, plus six quantitative and four qualitative questions, paraphrased here and discussed in detail below. Students were asked:

1. To identify their field of study
2. To identify their class year
3. How they are feeling taking virtual classes.
4. How they are balancing current workload.
5. Whether they are able to focus in the new environment.
6. Whether they are concerned that online learning will negatively impact their GPAs.
7. Whether the pass/fail options were helpful.
8. Whether they wanted other options in relation to pass/fail.
9. Whether professors were accommodating.
10. To make suggestions to reduce course burden.
11. To give examples of professors being flexible or supportive.
12. What they would like the administration to know, regarding academic stress.

The first two questions asked students to identify their field of study on the one hand, and class year on the other. The respondents’ distribution was fairly close to the total Trinity student population. According to the most recent Trinity University Fact Book, there were 2480 undergraduate students in the 2018-2019 class. The poll reflects a relatively similar distribution as shown in Table 1, with a slight over-representation of second-year students, and a slight underrepresentation of first-year students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Study</th>
<th>Total Trinity Undergraduates (n = 2480)</th>
<th>Poll Respondents (n =1116)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Year</td>
<td>28.3 (702)</td>
<td>25.4 (283)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>26.5 (657)</td>
<td>29.9 (334)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>21.8 (541)</td>
<td>22 (245)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>22.8 (565)</td>
<td>22.6 (252)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As for respondents’ field of study, the poll also attracted a fairly representative sample of the undergraduate population as a whole, as shown in Table 2. According to the Trinity University Fact Book, approximately 30% of Trinity undergraduates major in STEM fields, with approximately 20, 22 and 23% respectively graduating with humanities, social sciences, and business majors. The poll’s respondents overrepresent STEM majors, with humanities and social science majors slightly underrepresented, with the addition of 4.7% of students who reported being undecided in their field of study.

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Table 2. Field of Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Total Trinity Undergraduates (n = 2480)</th>
<th>Poll Respondents (n =1116)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STEM</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>37.3 (416)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>17.6 (196)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Science</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>18.9 (211)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>21.6 (241)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>4.7 (52)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to these identifying questions, students were asked a series of six “multiple choice” questions to assess their relative level of stress around the transition to virtual learning. These are detailed next.

In all, 1116 out of approximately 2480 undergraduate Trinity students responded to the quantitative survey questions, approximately 45% of the total undergraduate population. As is common, a lesser number responded to the qualitative write-in questions. We describe the findings in detail below.

I. Quantitative Findings

First, students were asked “How are you feeling with taking virtual classes?” Available responses were a) very stressed; b) somewhat stressed; c) it depends; d) slightly stressed; e) not stressed; or f) other. As shown in Table 3, the vast majority of students - a full 80% - chose either “very” or “somewhat” stressed. Fewer than 20% chose “it depends” or “slight stress,” while only 2.6% reported no stress at all.

Table 3. Stress Related to Virtual Classwork

How are you feeling with taking virtual classes?
1,114 responses

- Very stressed: 36.6%
- Somewhat stressed: 43.4%
- It depends: 11%
- Slightly stressed: 4.7%
- Not stressed: 2.6%
- I've been very stressed only because I...: 0.8%
- I am not enrolled this semester: 0.8%
- Some classes are going better than ot...: 0.8%
Second, students were asked to reflect on their ability to focus on schoolwork in their new environments. The responses are shown in Table 4. When asked to what extent they were able to focus, 58.7% chose “very little” or “not much at all.” Nearly one third (31.4%) reported being “somewhat” able to focus, with only 8.1%, or 90 students, reporting that they could focus “most of the time.” Half a percent, or 6 students, said that they could focus “completely.”

Table 4. Focus in New Environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ability to Focus</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very little</td>
<td>37.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not much at all</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of the time</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to reporting overwhelming inability to focus in the new environment, approximately three quarters of respondents (830) said that they were balancing their current workload “worse than the beginning of the semester,” as shown on Table 5. In contrast, 6%, or 67 students reported “better” balance, and about 20%, or 217 students, said they were balancing workload about the same.

Table 5. Workload Balance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Balance</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Better than the beginning of the semester</td>
<td>74.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The same as the beginning of the semester</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worse than the beginning of the semester</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Along with the ability to balance their workload as a result of switching to online learning, respondents were also polled asking if they were concerned their GPA could be negatively impacted by online learning. Of available responses seen in Table 6, 34.1%, or 381 students, were “very concerned,” another 28.2%, 315 students, were “concerned,” an additional 19.2%, or 213 students, were “somewhat concerned,” and 102 students were slightly concerned. Only 8.8%, 98 respondents, of the 1,116 said they were “not really concerned.”

Table 6. Concern for GPA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Are you concerned this semester due to online learning could potentially negatively impact your GPA?</th>
<th>1,116 responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very concerned</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerned</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat concerned</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly concerned</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not really concerned</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m taking classes from studying abroad...</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat concerned. Would be very...</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students were also asked “would the extension of a pass/fail deadline be beneficial to you?” Of 1,080 responses 44.9%, or 485 students, said “yes” the extension would be beneficial to them, as shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Extension of Pass/Fail Deadline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Would the extension of a pass/fail deadline be beneficial to you?</th>
<th>1,080 responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>55.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>44.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Respondents were then asked “Thinking across all of your classes, do you feel as though your professors are being accommodating?” As shown in Table 8, possible responses included; a) very accommodating; b) accommodating; c) somewhat accommodating; d) slightly accommodating; or e) not very accommodating.

Table 8. Faculty Support

Thinking across all of your classes, do you feel as though your professors are being accommodating?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very accommodating</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
<td>364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodating</td>
<td>34.8%</td>
<td>393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat accommodating</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly accommodating</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very accommodating</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 1,115 students who responded, 54.8%, or 611 students, reported their professors were either “very accommodating” or “accommodating.”. 32.6% (364 students) said their professors were “somewhat accommodating,” 8.3%, (93 students), answered “slightly accommodating,” and 4.2% (47 students) responded “not very accommodating.”

From this set of responses, a picture emerges of a student body with significant stress related to virtual learning (almost 98%), difficulty with focus in their new environments, concerned with the impact of the semester on their GPA, but feeling relatively supported by their professors.

II. Qualitative Findings

By including qualitative measures in the survey, the poll gives more detail to the above findings. Fewer students wrote in answers than responded to multiple choice questions, as is typical with social science research, but almost 3000 write-in answers were received nonetheless.

The survey included four questions that asked respondents to write in answers. These were:

1. Were the options presented to you for pass/fail helpful? What could have made this a more helpful option?
2. When thinking about current course expectations, what suggestions do you have to reduce the burden on students?
3. Are there any professors you would like to give a shout-out to for being flexible? What are they doing to be supportive?
4. Is there anything regarding academic stress you would like the administration to know?

Over 700 students wrote in answers to questions 1, 2, and 3, with more than 500 students answering question 4. In total, the written portion of the survey depicts a student body that is grateful for the flexibility and lowered expectations of some of their faculty, and simultaneously distressed that they are not able to live up to their own and others’ expectations of the academic semester.

This contradiction was demonstrated by respondents’ answers to the question about the pass/fail option. 204 respondents said that the option to take classes pass/fail was helpful, but more than half of these also explained that the option as originally presented was inapplicable to their particular case or were not allowed by their departments and/or the Pathways curriculum.

I couldn't tell whether to do pass/fail or not because I didn't know if it would negatively impact me in the long run. Additionally, I was worried that if I did pass/fail then I would regret it in the future since I am still figuring out what majors/minors I want to pursue.

Because the classes I am taking contribute to my majors/minors, the pass/fail option truly didn't apply to me since the suggestion was to only go pass/fail on classes that aren't for your major. I know that there was the option to reach out to the department chair and ask if they will take a class as pass/fail that is part of the major, but that seemed to only be an option for those who were truly desperate.

330 students said the pass/fail option was not helpful to them. In addition to some of the concerns above, 70 expressed confusion as to the workings of the pass/fail option.

I don't think there was enough information, a lot of people were confused about whether their classes could be taken pass/fail or not. I also think we should have been given more time to decide, I was still stressed trying to figure out Zoom and what the semester was going to look like and wasn't really thinking about pass fail yet! Also I have had two professors change their syllabus after the end of the pass fail deadline. There should have been a requirement that professors had to let us know the plan for the rest of the semester before the deadline was up b/c I would have liked to know that before making a decision!!

While the options presented to do pass/fail were relatively helpful (the expectations were made clear), some more guidance and advice on how this decision would impact me would have helped.

I wish that the deadline for pass/fail would be much later. I’m concerned about getting sick or having a family member get sick in the future and I would be unable to switch. I
didn’t switch because I felt fine but I’m worried things will change. Also, it’s really hard to know where my grade is standing in some of my classes.

A similar coupling of gratitude and distress presented itself in the students’ answers to the other three qualitative questions on the survey. First, 630 students expressed gratitude to professors for being flexible, kind, and supportive. Although some respondents focused on one aspect of this or another, the qualities of kindness and flexibility often seemed intertwined. For example, some students marveled at their professors’ creativity in the shift to on-line learning, from video production to physics, theatre, language-learning, and more:

Dr. Patrick Keating had to change our narrative video production class to a screenwriting class basically overnight. He made all of our quizzes open book and completely changed the syllabus to be more about script writing than production. I was worried that the class would be destroyed, but I feel like I am still learning a lot, while also not feeling too stressed about it. Dr. Keating is one of the most organized and helpful professors at Trinity.

Professor Saeger [is] hands down most amazing woman who is creating an interactive environment for us to learn Spanish on zoom.

Dr. Gonzalez-Fuentes … is so kind and helpful. Props to him because he had to re-work a majority of our syllabus since most of the projects involved taking surveys and performing research in the public.

Dr. Jalalzai has done a fantastic job of adjusting our course for these new circumstances, and I feel confident I know exactly what is expected of us in our Introduction to the Qur’an course. She has made sure that all of her lectures are recorded and on tLearn with plenty of time for us to review them and come up with discussion questions, and our new discussion board has been a great way to facilitate class participation so it is accessible for everyone.

Dr. Ugolini is doing a great job at making his classes feel as if they were almost no different than they would be in person.

Dr. Nathan Stith has truly gone above and beyond throughout this whole process. Before we started classes again, he reached out several times to make sure that everyone was okay. He also led a practice zoom session during the extended spring break to let us practice the zoom, which was so considerate and let us get comfortable with Zoom. He has maintained the same quality in his class, and stays so motivated and enthusiastic. He has been extremely accommodating with funny Wi-Fi connections, and is always good about emailing out the zoom recording in case we need it. In addition, he has a designated note taker for the days that we miss classes, so that we can get notes if need be. He definitely deserves to be recognized.
Other students wrote about non-academic help that their professors provided. Respondents commented particularly on professors taking time to ask students about their particular situations, providing a listening ear, and prioritizing student health:

Dr. Hazleton is doing an amazing job of checking on all of his students!! He’s so understanding in what we can accomplish and that many of us have difficult home lives and situations right now. He’s offered to support his students in any way possible and listened to us on how we should manage our class for the rest of this semester.

Dr. Ochoa, Dr. Liu, and Dr. Jacob Tingle have been amazing offering loads of support and flexibility. Simply letting us know they’re there for you is the best they can do at the moment and they’re all over that!

Professor Bartlett and Professor Rowe have been incredibly understanding and are making amazing efforts to ease student’s worry and stress and to check in on them. They spent a class period just checking in with everyone and it made me feel very at ease.

Dr. Tam has been so accommodating with identifying obstacles students might be facing with all of this and has really stressed the priority of health during this time.

Dr. Santos in the English department has been incredible at communicating and making sure we are okay. She sent out a really heartfelt email asking how we are doing and what she can do to help. Dr. Spener in sociology and Dr. Porter in Creative Writing have also been very understanding in reassuring us that grades aren’t something to worry about too much for this semester. It’s about communicating, listening, and responding appropriately.

Interestingly, many faculty who received multiple, detailed “shout outs” were recognized for providing both emotional and academic support. Students recognized such professors as “patient and encouraging,” “not trying to force the situation,” “available,” and “understanding.” This led to students feeling like their faculty want them to succeed.

Dr. Erin Sumner in the Human Communication department ... created multiple polls for students to decide how they would like their new learning environment to be. For example, if we’d like to meet through zoom everyday or just a few days of the week, or if we’d like to stick to the original syllabus or make some changes, etc. Dr. Sumner was very understanding of the unfortunate circumstances we are currently in. For example, Dr. Sumner replaced some of the biggest assignments we had with more smaller assignments so that we had multiple chances to earn points for class. Also, she has given us a day off of zoom class every week to work on any assignments we weren’t able to complete that week. Therefore, she gives us class time to complete assignments which is
extremely helpful! Thank you Dr. Sumner for being so understanding and kind to your students.

Dr. Benjamin Eldon Stevens- he sent all of his students an encouraging and sympathetic email hours after the school announced it was closing, and after that kept in regular contact with all of his students leading up to the start of online courses, sending surveys to gage who all had access to internet and how his teaching could best for the needs of all of his students. He has set up multiple communication platforms for his students, so they stay connected outside of class, and has found other accessible ways to encourage group work and community during his classes over Google Drive.

Can I give the Music Department a shout-out? Several faculty members have reminded me about their support and have been so flexible with shifting things to an online platform. They’re not trying to force the situation into expectations of normalcy, but have instead taken this situation with an open mind. Their support has created a much needed positive atmosphere that still fosters learning and collaboration.

Dr. Jennifer Mathews- she was in constant contact with all of the Sociology and Anthropology students after the shut down, and provided us with information about campus operations after the shutdown before the details were widely known by other students. In class, she has made huge efforts to make her material accessible to students with access to different technologies, by recording lectures over her class PowerPoints, and also making them into YouTube videos in order to ensure that they are available to everyone. She has also worked hard to make sure that everyone has access to the class readings by uploading them all as PDFs on her TLEARN website. Outside of classes, she has made extreme efforts to make herself available through one-on-one Zoom meetings, where she is often in back-to-back sessions for 6 or more hours a day.

Dr. Tahir Naqvi- he has also made extensive efforts to make himself available to students outside of class by providing his phone number to students for office hour consultations, and by recording his synchronized sessions to make them available to students who are unable to attend classes. Dr. Naqvi has been extremely patient and encouraging about work and due dates in his class.

Dr. Orrin Shindell has continued to be available for homework and class help through office hours and extra review sessions. He is doing the best he can to teach physics online and his efforts have really helped everyone understand the material. I really appreciate him for maintaining normalcy through the quarantine and being there to help and guide us.

Dr. Delwiche - He changed our projects so they would be more relevant to the situation we are living in, he always checks in and asks how we're doing, he extended the deadline to one of our projects that was due right after spring break because of everything that was
going on, he created a channel where we can talk as a class about issues or concerns/thoughts we have even if they are not class related, just to have a space where we can share ideas.

Dr. Erickson has literally been so amazing. She altered the entire course so that its interactive and engaging. And she understands that this is a hard time for us. I couldn't thank her enough.

Turek, Kramer, Barnett from History, and Jalalzai from religion. They are all working with students as they need to, and accommodating the needs of each student where they can. They have been very clear about what is expected, and that they are willing to help in any way they can. They’ve been forgiving with deadlines and understanding with the shift to technology, and are here to support students as academics and as genuinely good people.

Angela Tarango has been an absolute angel. She checks in with her students, shows us her cats, and gives us encouraging words of positivity. She has adjusted her course incredibly well. She has even maintained a level of normalcy through her lectures that allow for the feeling of stability. Dr. Tarango has been transparent when no one was giving out answers, and is just all-around lovely.

Dr. Lyons, Dr. Johnson, Dr. Milligan, and Dr. Bullock. They are being flexible with late grades, patient with students, and Dr. Milligan even gave us a class off just so we could catch up. The Biology professors are being very kind and during office hours they always offer to make it a private meeting if you have anything personal to talk about. It has made this a lot easier. They have also been reassuring in letting us know that even though the course is online, it is not going to be any harder. They really want us to succeed. All of the professors I listed have shown that kind of support and it has made this a lot easier.

Dr. Kroeger completely re-worked the Oceanography syllabus so that everyone could get a decent grade, and he made a lot of the assignments much shorter and easier. I really, really appreciate what he's done--I feel much better about the rest of the class. Even though it's a large intro class, I feel like he really cares about us and our success.

Some of these themes of care and flexibility appeared in mirror-image in the responses to the questions about reducing student burden. When asked “what suggestions do you have to reduce the burden on students?” 790 students responded. Of these, **700 students explicitly asked for a reduction in workload or more lenient grading.** These requests were couched in eloquent, and sometime heart-breaking explanations of the burden students were experiencing:

It's really ok to cut down some assignments or requirements!! We have more time now (some of us) but not necessarily more brain space. Also it’s super hard to focus or feel
like schoolwork is important when people are dying, and we’re gonna get the learning done we can, so please be kind. Schoolwork isn’t a good distraction, especially when it’s required. And looking at screens and books for so long gets exhausting, honestly.

Enact a ... moratorium on new content and new assessments and simply allow the students to finish up their final projects and papers for the semester. I know for me personally, I have enough energy and focus in the day to go to class or do some school work - not both. Classes drain me and when I'm attending them everyday and they are still handing out new assignments, I can only hope to do them last minute or wait until the weekend. It's exhausting and the work needs to stop before students break. I, and I'm sure many of my peers, are drowning and to just keep pressing on like we are valiant and dutiful students is not only unrealistic but a joke and harmful to our need to process, heal, and exist.

I think that professors need to be given the "OK" from administration that they should be making the lives of their students easier, and this should be done through lightening workloads, making assignments "easier" in the sense that they do not add unnecessary stress, etc. Students simply DO NOT function at the same capacity at home as they do on campus, and some professors ... do not understand this. There should be no reason that students have to worry about the health of themselves, their families, and the world at large, while also trying to go to class. Grades should be the least of our students' concern in this uncertain time period, and professors need to be encouraged to accept this fact and be lenient with grading and supportive and encouraging toward students.

Be more understanding that working from home is a lot harder than expected. I am juggling a lot more home life responsibilities, and I'm struggling to simply find a place to study.

Understanding that being home (typically with parents) means that we are under different restrictions, and our time has to be ordered differently.

I think course work should be reduced during situations like these. I am a very motivated student, but living inside all the time, in my house, during a pandemic has stripped me of all motivation. I am trying to work as hard as I can, but the university must understand what this type of situations do to our mental and physical health. Me and others I know have difficult home lives that provide more distractions than support. Me and many of my friends are feeling our depressive states are getting worse. It is so difficult to get work done in these sort of conditions, but the course-load I am receiving is business as usual and ignoring the fact that students are suffering because of it.

The university and professors need to understand the burden that this pandemic has taken on students mental health. It is hard to exist day to day with my normal academic stress on top of trying to be there for immediate and extended family and friends. My
academics are taking up so much of my day I do not feel like I can adequately do anything because I’m so concerned about keeping my grades up. The university shouldn't be saying "We understand that this is hard for you" because their actions have proved that they do not understand. Professors should have been required to lessen the work load and have all classes primarily reading and discussion based. The essays, projects, and presentations need to cease and the university should understand that it is okay for them to be a little less academically rigorous because we are all dealing with so much. Students are unemployed, parents are losing their jobs, people are back in home environments that might be toxic and we are just supposed to pretend that our academics are the most important thing above a pandemic and our loved ones???

I feel as though the course requirements and workload have not lessened at all. This is a very stressful time, and everyone has a hundred other things to deal with. I understand that Trinity is a very prestigious institution, but as a result, a large portion of the student body puts a lot of pressure on themselves to perform well in school. This change is hard, and I feel like it would be helpful if we could implement some changes that would allow us to worry less about our GPA.

As a whole, students ask administration and faculty to give them a break because they are tired, worried about their families and the world around them, and unable to focus in the ways that they had on campus. Of particular note was concern for peers who were not in safe homes, and unable or unwilling to communicate this to their faculty. As one student said:

What students are going through right now is entirely traumatic and stressful. I have seen LGBTQIA+ students go back to unaccepting homes and even had to house a friend for a week because they were outed and kicked out. Given these circumstances, students do not have the time nor the energy to worry about classes...it's just another thing on their plate.

In addition to these more general concerns, more than 80 students mentioned timed, on-line exams in particular as straining due to lack of privacy, wifi connectivity, and extra obligations:

Time tests are incredibly hard to do. In some home environments it is already hard enough to get a quiet area to concentrate for classes, but allowing for only a few hours to take an exam is very difficult.

Professors should … increase time limits to exams. I can’t handle the workload with double the distractions and responsibilities to my home life. It’s overwhelming.

Give a tiny bit extra time for tests and quizzes. I know I’m not the only student struggling to get my parents to understand that I’m busy. They interrupt my testing quite frequently even though I communicate with them that I will be testing.
Tests should not be timed. It is stressful to make everyone else in the house (who cannot leave because of quarantine) be quiet for an hour and half for every test. My WiFi is also not very reliable and I had it fail on me right before a scheduled test.

Although I understand that tests and previously scheduled exams can’t be eliminated, I think it’s wrong to make students take tests during class time and through zoom because students have different environments at home where they might not be able to concentrate well or have distractions not under their control. When this happens, the time constraint of having to finish a test/exam during the class period and with no possible time extension is extremely stressful and unfair.

Solutions

Many students posed solutions, which ranged from the very general to the very specific. Students asked that professors figure out how to reduce their work loads rather than their learning. One wished that faculty could:

Be lenient with deadlines, but not the quality of coursework ... if deadlines can be extended and adjusted well, then the quality of work will go up because students feel less overwhelmed and can complete work when they feel ready for it.

Many echoed this desire for flexible deadlines. Others asked for a general slowing down. As one student said:

I believe that classes should go slower. Students have lost the ability to efficiently work together with their peers and with professors. This inhibits our ability to quickly process new topics discussed in class. A slower pace will ensure that topics are thoroughly discussed and will give students more time to work with their peers and professors to understand the material.

Others suggested that professors eliminate group work and presentations, shift from few high-stake assignments to more lower-stake ones, create extra credit opportunities, and make sure that students are not required to show up for class at any given time, but can watch recorded classes.

To administrators, students also requested larger-scale changes, from mandated that all classes become pass/fail, to canceling finals, extending the semester into the summer months, changing the grading scale university-wise, and protecting final grades by preventing professors from dropping them below midterm averages.