

# CTL COVID-19 Student Experience Survey

## Survey Goals

The Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) at Baruch College wanted to understand what does and does not work for Baruch students in the online learning format. Our survey was made available to undergraduate and graduate students in spring and summer 2020 (all summer sessions), and is currently available to fall 2020 students. Respondents provided non-identifying information about their status at Baruch and answered questions on a range of topics about their experience transitioning to Distance Learning (see Appendix for survey questions). For this report we focus primarily on undergraduates.

## Sample Characteristics

The survey instrument was distributed to Baruch College students primarily through an email transmission from Baruch's Office of Student Affairs. Some members of Baruch's CTL also forwarded the survey link directly to small clusters of students, and the Baruch Undergraduate Student Government promoted the survey on its social media. In all iterations the survey was open for about 2 weeks. Also in all iterations students from Zicklin represent the largest group of respondents, and undergraduate students significantly outnumbered graduate students.

## Spring 2020 Impressions

Post-spring 2020 our aim was to quickly parse the information we gathered in order to launch faculty development over the summer. The following represents a summary of our initial impressions:

The approaches that students saw as ensuring a successful transition to distance learning ran the gamut from the practical and organizational to the psychosocial, and include:

- a balance between sustained synchronous interaction and some asynchronous ways of engaging in the course
- flexibility in deadlines and alternative assignments
- consistent and reliable communication to keep them engaged and prepared to learn
- instructors displaying the affective qualities of “understanding,” “empathy” and “leniency”

Flexible learning was primarily defined as a desire to have flexible *deadlines*. In addition, for undergrads, preference also leaned towards never having to be online for videoconferencing, and being able to choose the *order* in which assignments could be

completed. Graduate students preferred flexibility in the *kinds* of assignments that they were asked to complete.

Concerns about technology and distance learning seemed to revolve MOST around not having a reliable Internet connection OR a private space at home to connect and around data privacy. Nearly half of the full respondent sample was concerned about these three things.

Regarding instructor communication, students reported that instructors used email the MOST, but made updates to the syllabus the LEAST. Some students (eight undergraduate, one graduate) reported receiving NO communication whatsoever from at least one of their instructors during the COVID-19 transition period to online learning.

## Summer 2020 Impressions

There was a high rate of response for summer 2020, with the majority of responses coming from undergraduates. Because of this we decided to focus on the data from undergraduates only, and specifically from students self-identifying as pursuing majors within Zicklin and Weissman. Again, there were more respondents from Zicklin than from Weissman. Our analysis looked at each school separately.

For both Zicklin and Weissman students the most important element of “flexible learning” was having flexible deadlines for assignments. When asked to indicate their concerns about distance learning, many students across schools said they had “no concerns.” For those who indicated concerns, these were widely distributed across the seven options. (See Appendix for the question and available options.) This suggests to us that all of these are concerns that should be taken into account by faculty and administrators.

With respect from communication from instructors, only 6.3% of Weissman students and 10.6% of Zicklin students indicated they were dissatisfied. A similar percentage of students also felt that faculty communication effectively conveyed what they needed to do to succeed in the course. Despite the high level of satisfaction with communication, students had a variety of suggestions for how faculty could improve. Many of these related to responding more quickly to student emails, and also being clearer in general.

On the topic of engagement in the course, Zicklin students reported that summer faculty engaged them more with asynchronous than synchronous content. Discussion boards and assignments were most frequently cited. It is important to note that this question didn’t separate positive and negative opinions. Several students said that their instructor was engaging them by assigning lots of assignments, but they did not like this approach. Weissman students also reported that faculty engaged them more with asynchronous than synchronous content—to a slightly greater degree than Zicklin students. Also interesting, more students wrote in a response that fell into the “other” category. A smaller percentage of Weissman than Zicklin students indicated they were not engaged.

Suggestions for improvement from Zicklin students fell into many categories. The three with the most suggestions were synchronous learning approaches, asynchronous learning approaches, and communication. Students had universally positive suggestions about asynchronous learning (i.e. they were for more use of asynchronous methods such as discussion boards.) One simple, actionable suggestion that links both asynchronous and synchronous learning that came up more than once was providing materials for the live sessions in advance so that students can prepare/follow along. Students were mostly positive about synchronous learning as well; the one negative comment argued for lessening the emphasis on live attendance.

In Weissman, the top three areas for improvement that students cited most were synchronous learning approaches, course content, and workload/deadlines. As with Zicklin students, Weissman students were generally positive about synchronous learning. Course content suggestions included providing content in more than one medium and slowing down content delivery. A large percentage of the Weissman students who responded to this question wrote in suggestions that fall into the “other” category. One simple, actionable suggestion from this group of responses was cutting back on the overall amount of lecturing in the course.

When asked what they want faculty “to understand about [their] reality and how it impacts how [they] are learning,” most Zicklin students responded to this question by saying that remote learning was appropriate at the moment and they would appreciate the situation staying the same until the pandemic stabilizes. Slightly fewer yet still a significant percentage stated that remote learning was simply not working for them given their living circumstances. One actionable suggestion was adding more evening classes to accommodate working students. For Zicklin, the three top comment areas had to do with establishing more flexible policies and deadlines/lightening the class workload; generally treating the students with more understanding and empathy; and creating more options having to do with asynchronous learning. A few students commented on improving the approaches to synchronous learning by focusing on interactivity, especially in-class discussions. One comment had to do with providing more multimedia resources to help with better absorption of class content. Several students wrote in with financial concerns, suggesting that tuition be reduced.

Weissman students had similar concerns to Zicklin’s, though more of them commented on the need to continue with remote learning than on the long-term unworkability of the solution. The top two suggestions were establishing more flexible deadlines/easing up on course workload and a general need for empathy given the students’ difficult home and work situations.

## Appendix: COVID-19 Student Experience Survey Questions (SP 20)

### 1. “Choose all that apply” (i.e., Frequency-based) queries:

- a. How are your professors communicating with you about course information and expectations?
- b. For me, the idea of learning flexibly right now means...
- c. My top three concerns about technology and Distance Learning are...

### 2. “Open-ended” (i.e., Qualitative) queries:

- a. What is at least one thing that your professors could do to improve communication with students?
- b. Describe at least one way that your professors have successfully kept you engaged throughout this new transition to Distance Learning.
- c. What is at least one thing that your professors could do to improve student engagement in future online classes?
- d. Think about a class where your professor has done a good job with online teaching (either this semester or previous semesters). Name 3 specific things your professor did well.
- e. 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?

### 3. “Scale-based” (i.e., Quantitative) queries:

- a. How satisfied are you with how well your professors are communicating with you about course information and expectations?
  - i. SCALE: 1 = extremely satisfied -to- 6 = extremely dissatisfied
- b. Select the statement that is most true for you about how effectively professors are communicating with you about course information and expectations.
  - i. SCALE:
    - 1 = In ALL my classes I know what I'm supposed to be doing
    - 5 = I have NO IDEA what I'm supposed to be doing