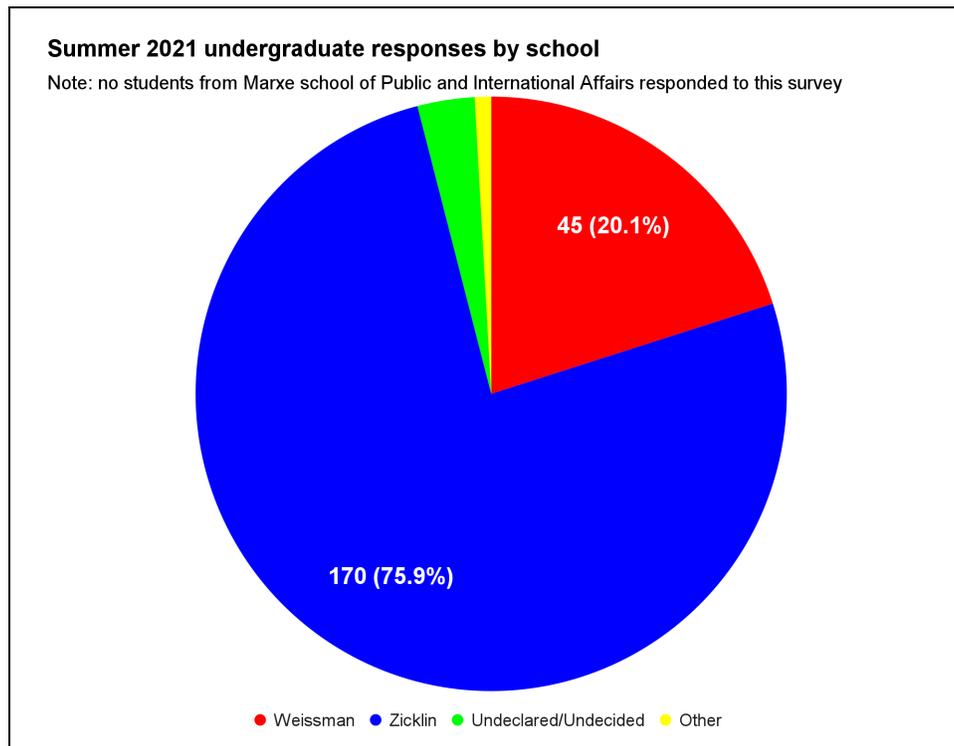


CTL COVID-19 Student Experience Survey (Summer 2021)

Background:

In summer 2021, as in every previous semester since its inception in spring 2020, the Student Experience Survey was distributed to undergraduate and graduate students in all schools at Baruch. Students were free to respond or not; there were no incentives for completing the survey or consequences for not doing so. Our questions addressed: how students define flexible learning; faculty communication; student engagement; what students want faculty to know about their current circumstances; and preferred course formats. Most summer 2021 respondents were undergraduates in Zicklin and Weissman (full- and part-time). The distribution is shown below (overall sample size = 224). What follows are our thoughts about the summer 2021 undergraduate responses, arranged by theme, but first prefaced with a positive note highlighting students' experiences. The sample size for each chart may vary by question. Consider also the unique nature of summer sessions, which meet for longer class periods over a shorter span of time.



*This chart includes both full-time (n = 195) and part-time (n = 25) undergraduate students.

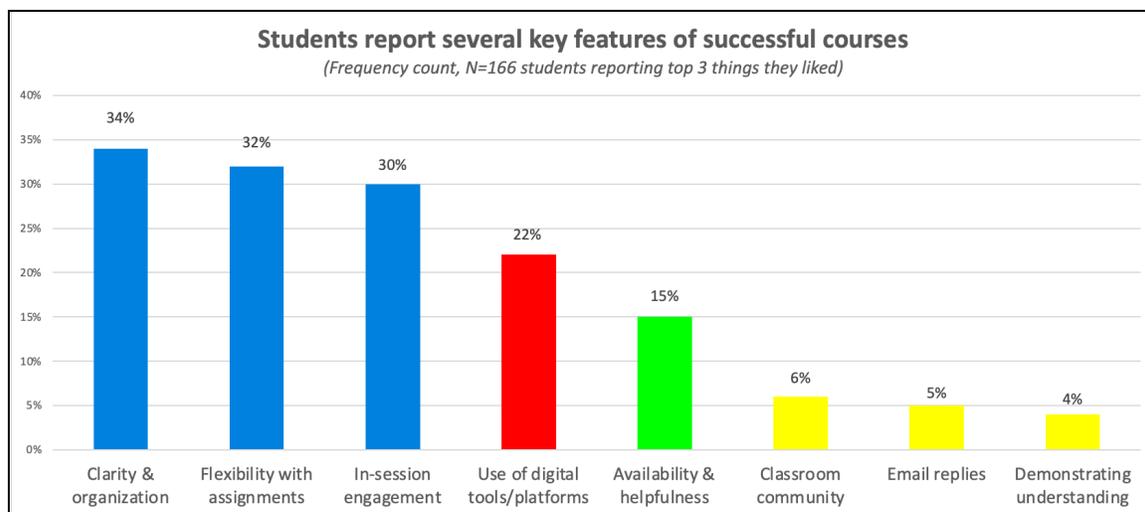
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Preface: Highlighting Some Positive Trends

To begin, we'd like to point out positive remarks that students took the time to voice in this iteration of the survey. The question below and the responses it generated crystallize some major trends in students' positive experiences with online learning.

Question: "PAUSE FOR A MOMENT NOW to think about a class where your professor has done a good job with online teaching (either this semester or in previous semesters). Name 3 specific things your professor did well. For example: Did your professor introduce a useful digital tool or platform? Did they give an assignment that was especially interesting or fun? Did they offer a variety of ways to participate in class? Did they foster a sense of community?"

Students had abundant—often effusive—praise for instructors who were especially adept at conducting their online courses in a way that was 1) clear and organized, 2) featured flexibility around assignments and 3) promoted engaging synchronous sessions as well as asynchronous engagement, especially discussion boards. Mentioned with lesser, yet still notable frequency were professors who used their digital platform well and/or introduced new tools, and were helpful/available. A number of students also brought up the importance of creating a classroom community, sending prompt email replies and demonstrating understanding and empathy for their situation for the success of a class.



*The top things important for a course going well, according to undergraduates across all schools (N = 166): clarity and organization (34%), flexibility with assignments (32%), in-session engagement (30%), use of digital tools/platforms (22%), availability and helpfulness (15%), classroom community (6%), email replies (5%) and demonstrating understanding (4%). In this chart, and other column charts in this document, same color groupings denote similar percentages of answers.

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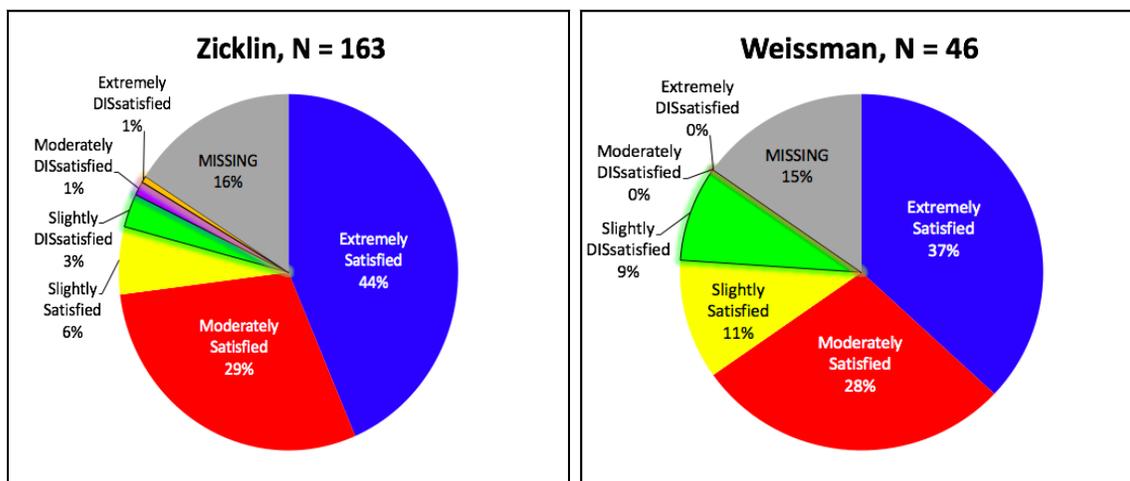
As can be seen in the figure above, several major themes emerged from students' responses to our survey items—which ranged in format from closed-ended items (e.g., rankings, Likert scale items, and multiple-response-type queries) to open-ended questions that sought to get at the nuance of the student population's lived experiences.

Theme 1: Communication

Our questions:

Question 1: “On average, how satisfied are you with how well your professors communicated with you about course information and expectations?”

Results: Per the pie charts shown below (data split by school), more than ¾ of the undergraduate population were at least “slightly satisfied” with the ways faculty were communicating with them (combination of BLUE, RED, and YELLOW pieces). Importantly, this same high degree of satisfaction was also seen in the spring 2021 data, although the rates in summer 2021 were slightly more pronounced, numerically.



*These charts include both full- and part-time undergraduate students.

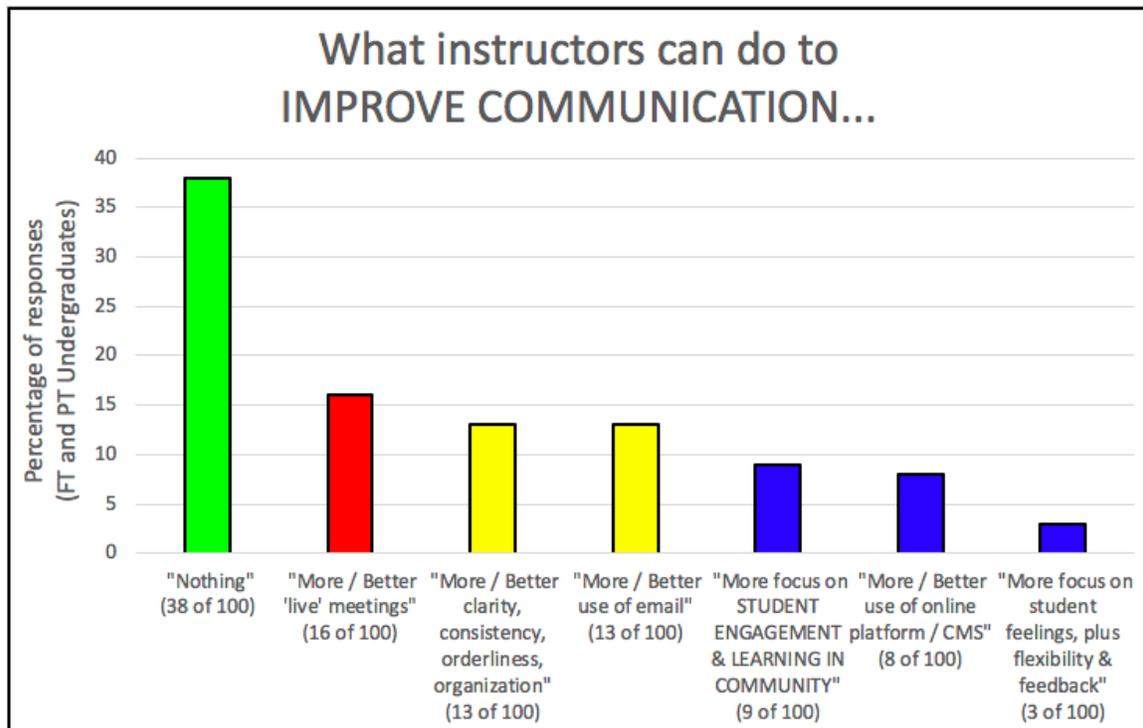
Question 2: “What is at least one thing that your professors could do to improve communication with students?”

Results: Despite a continuing increase in satisfaction with instructor communication (a trend that has seen steady growth since spring 2020), respondents still provided good suggestions on how instructors might improve communication. Each response to this open-ended (ie., qualitative) question was placed into one of several mutually independent categories and then tallied to generate frequencies.

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Contrary to spring 2021, the most frequent suggestion was a request for *more/better live meetings*, including holding regular office hours on Zoom (see RED bar below). This was followed by an urge for communication that was more *consistent, clear and organized*, and an equal desire for *quicker and more abundant* communications from instructors, especially via email (see YELLOW bars below). These latter two suggestions were similar in magnitude (percentage-wise) to student promptings in Spring 2021.

Finally, other notable suggestions included focusing more on *student engagement* (which had been the most frequent request just a few months earlier, in spring 2021), as well as *improved use of online platforms*, and increased value placed on *flexibility, feedback and student feelings* (see BLUE bars below). Juxtaposed to the good range of responses here, in the highest percentage observed yet from our student experience survey, 38% of students indicated that “nothing” was needed to improve communication (see GREEN bar below).



*This chart features frequencies from full- and part-time undergraduates from all schools.

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Students' quotes about improving communication:

Better clarity and consistency (i.e., organization) in communication

"Be clearer about what will be on the tests. Summer classes are very intense and trying to read 3-4 chapters a week with no direction makes it hard for us to do well in the tests. Also, the allowed time for a test is constricting if there are short essay questions."

"Provide better class notes and powerpoints to review for exams. Also should have recorded the classes so we could go back to them."

Increasing communications that promote student engagement and learning in community

"I believe my professors should allow students to express their questions or concerns about the material. There is one professor that is very rude and does not allow students to speak up when they have questions about the material, quizzes, homework, etc."

"Repeat and share information through emails, Blackboard as well as live sessions."

Actionable suggestions for better communication:

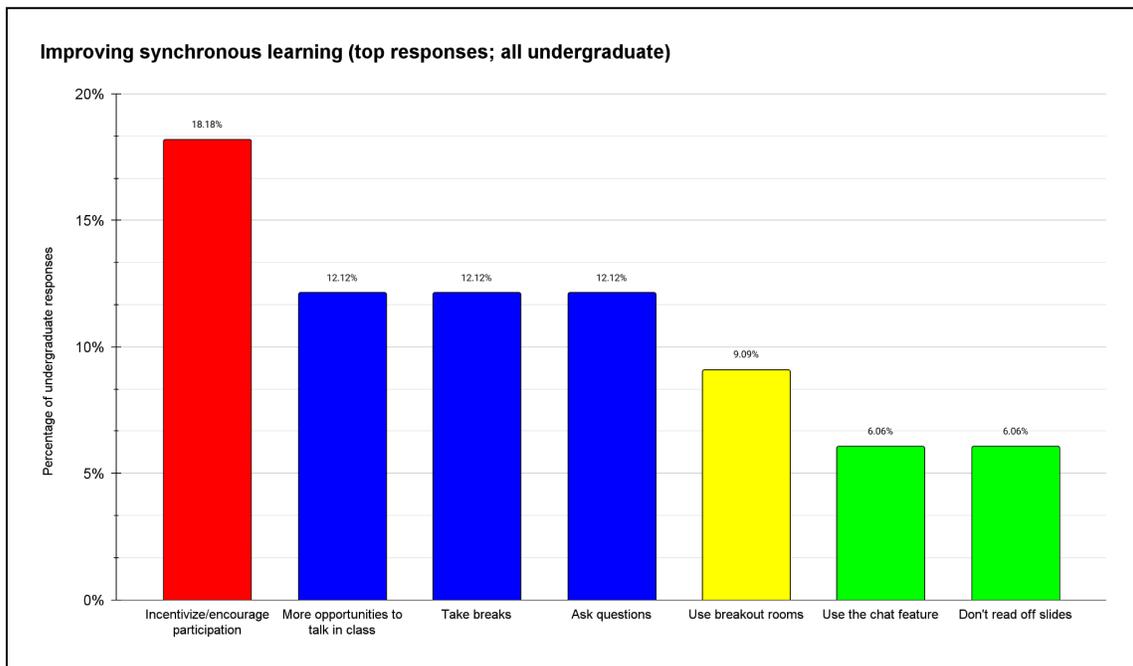
- Provide multiple copies of instructions about where and how to access class materials and homework (e.g. email AND Blackboard/Blogs@Baruch course site)
- Set up a discussion board and/or channel on a digital communication platform such as Microsoft Teams, Slack or Discord where students can ask each other and the professor questions about class policies, deadlines, etc.
- Communicate with students on a regular basis—post weekly announcements, provide regular feedback, and solicit questions about issues that need clarification
- Schedule regular check-ins and 1:1 meetings for office hours as well as “open time” for informal drop-ins; log in to class 10 mins earlier and stay 10 mins later so you can answer any questions
- Create a personalized email signature that includes expectations for the timeframe of your response and updates for any eventualities

Theme 2: In-session engagement

Our questions:

Question 1: “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.”

Question 2: “What is at least one thing that your professors could do to improve student engagement in future online classes?”



*This chart features the top suggestions undergraduates had for improving synchronous learning. Color groupings indicate that the percentage of the responses is the same.

Results: As in previous iterations of the survey, undergraduates reported that faculty engaged them most through synchronous online sessions. When asked for suggestions to improve engagement, students focused on opportunities to participate in synchronous sessions. While this has been a recurring theme in our responses, it is notable that this cohort wanted faculty to be *explicit* about encouraging and/or incentivizing participation.

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The next most popular request was for more opportunities to talk in class (e.g. breakout rooms and group discussion). Also interesting is that some students suggested breaks to encourage engagement. This may be because these responses are from the summer session, in which classes meet more frequently per week than during the regular session, and for longer periods. Notably, a number of students also reported that their professor's careful introduction of a new digital tool or platform has helped connect them to the class.

Students' quotes about improving in-session engagement:

Explicit participation expectations

"Making the students fulfill a certain amount of participation each week. For example, in a smaller class, professors can make it so the students have to fulfill a certain amount of participation to receive the credit such as answering at least 1 or 2 questions per week."

"Requiring all students to respond to a question using the chat function on Zoom (for smaller classes) encourages participation with less pressure than it takes to speak and use cameras."

"All the classes that require participation did an excellent job of engaging students."

Opportunities to talk in class

"I think just allowing students to speak up during the lectures would be a great improvement..."

"In my [class], I would have wanted to have more discussions between students about [the] reading we have completed."

"Make sure all students' voices are heard throughout each class meeting."

Give students a break

"Have a 5-7 minute break after every hour of classes so that students can combat 'zoom fatigue'."

"3-hour online courses could provide a small break in between."

"Always have consistent break times."

Actionable suggestions for stronger in-session engagement:

- If participation in online synchronous sessions is important to you, make that explicit. When you do, be clear about what participation means in *your* course. Don't assume that students will automatically know, or that your expectations are the same as those of other faculty. Do you want students to ask at least 1 question per session? Do you want them to use the chat? Something else? Tell them, write it on your syllabus, and/or include it on your course site.
- Make participation easier by offering students multiple ways to engage over the course of each session. These might include a combination of full class discussion, breakout rooms, a robust chat stream, polling/surveys, or learning games using online tools (like [Kahoot!](#)).
- Periodically ask your students questions. Whether you are asking them to define terms, contribute examples, synthesize concepts, or tell you if they're following your lecture, students want to be asked questions. However, try to avoid just asking if students have "any questions." Some students reported that they sometimes got confused in a way that made it hard for them to formulate questions in the face of such an open-ended invitation.
- Consider whether breaks are right for your class. Whether you're teaching 3-hour sessions (or longer) or just want to change your approach to regular-length classes, think about incorporating breaks. This can range from a one-minute pause in the session to stretch or sip a beverage to a longer break in the action for students to grab a snack, use the restroom, make a phone call—just like they would during an on-campus class.
- Be intentional about breakout rooms. While breakout rooms can be a place for unstructured small group conversations, giving some structure can increase their effectiveness. When students express dissatisfaction with breakout rooms, they talk about times when no real conversation took place. To head this off, send students into breakout rooms with purpose. Ask them to take on roles (such as timekeeper or notetaker), task them to report back conclusions or key points from their conversation, give them a document to complete collaboratively (using Google Docs or similar), or something to produce (a text, graphic, example, or counterexample).

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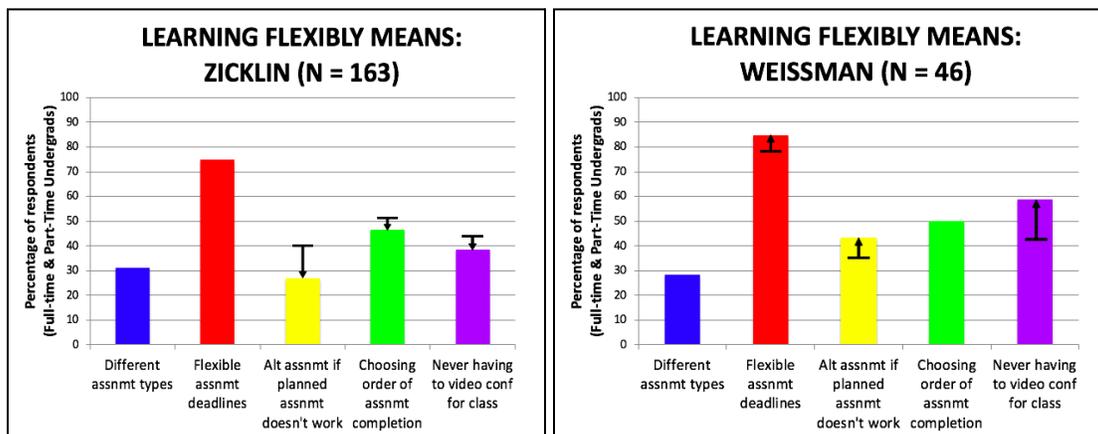
Theme 3: Flexible learning

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."

Results: There remains high variability in undergraduate students' perceptions about what flexible learning means to them. Nonetheless, as with spring 2021 and even fall 2020, the *'flexible assignment dates'* descriptor continued to be selected the most by both schools. Moreover, this preference increased even further among Weissman undergrads in summer 2021. Interestingly, compared to spring 2021, Zicklin students in the summer were less interested in *'having alternative assignments'* and *'never having to video-conference'*, while Weissman students were more interested in these things.



*Percentage of Zicklin (N = 163) and Weissman (N = 46) students (FT and PT undergraduates are combined) identifying what 'flexible learning' meant to them. Students were free to choose as many of the five descriptors of 'flexible learning' as was applicable to them (X axis). Upward-pointing arrows indicate an increase in the percentage of students choosing a given descriptor in the summer 2021 sessions compared to spring 2021. Downward pointing arrows indicate a decrease. Arrow lengths index the actual magnitude in change across the two semesters. The absence of an arrow indicates relative stability in perception from spring 2021 to summer 2021.

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Students' quotes about flexible learning:

On the various examples 'flexibility' that students are valuing at this time:

"One of my professors gave us a way to attend the class synchronously or asynchronously at any point. There was [an] alternate assignment available if you couldn't attend for the day so if I was missed I wouldn't be marked off and gave me [a] sense of assurance."

"I had a professor during the spring semester that was willing to go the extra mile for students [who] weren't clear on material. [This professor] would gear assignments towards those who didn't share the same major background [as] others. Was literally available 24/7 for questions and concerns or extra help."

"Accommodated students by giving flexible deadlines. Offered various kinds of material in different formats (powerpoints, videos, texts, etc.) so that students could choose the learning style that works best for them. Did not have unrealistic expectations for students in terms of the workload and understood the hardships of online learning."

"The classes were more interactive and fun. Professors are a bit more flexible on deadlines and homeworks."

Actionable suggestions for flexible learning:

- Keep deadlines fluid and/or have a lenient but clear 'late work' policy for the whole class.
- Consider crafting multiple ways for students to complete the same assignment.
- Consider fashioning assignments in ways that allow students of differing backgrounds to voice their unique perspectives on the topic at hand.
- Consider not requiring synchronous engagement, but rather record lectures / make lecture slides available and/or vary between synchronous and asynchronous class sessions.
- Provide recordings or transcripts of all synchronous sessions.
- Consider working with students to collectively decide how to define flexibility in your course.

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Theme 4: Organization

There is no question in the survey specifically addressing organization; however, it emerged as an important theme in the responses to other questions beginning in spring 2021. In the summer 2021 survey, the largest number of responses about “3 specific things your professor did well” referenced *clarity and organization* in the way a successful course was run. This included factors such as the makeup of the course site, clearly articulated expectations regarding assignments, and an overall predictable rhythm to the semester.

Students’ quotes about organization:

“They made the course very clear, had video sessions recorded—not required to attend but posted on Blackboard, and opened assignments with deadlines but allowed for you to move to the next assignment if one was finished early.”

“[They provided] weekly reminders of the assignment due this week and the following week. It was a list of assignments in a calendar. Very well organized”

“Outlined the lesson plan precisely and neatly. Provided online instruction in an orderly manner and with high standards.”

“Organized and facilitated homework and provided answers to any questions we had to offer.”

Actionable suggestions for improving organization:

- Be explicit and detailed about expectations for your course from the beginning. This allows your students to make plans about how they will incorporate participation and assignments for your course into their overall schedule.
- Consider providing weekly reminders for students about homework and other assignments. These might come in the form of weekly emails, announcements on your course site, or something else.
- Make sure your course site is easy to navigate. Organize materials by type, date, or another way that makes sense for your course. Explain to your students how the site is organized early on, and consider including a site map in your syllabus or “important documents” folder in case students need help finding something.

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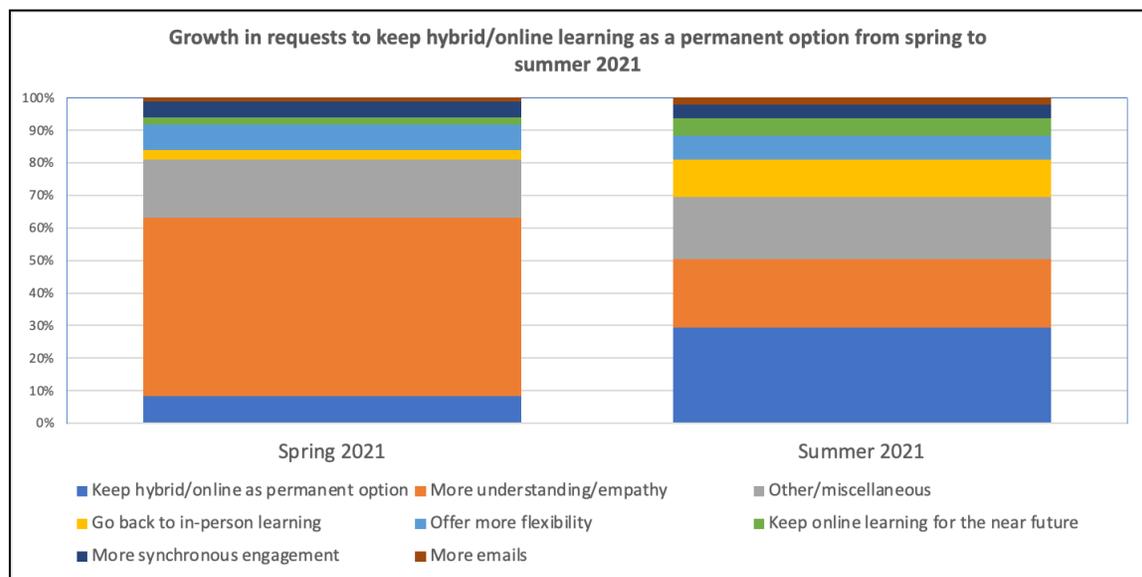
- Consider starting class sessions by sharing a lesson plan or session outline. This gives students a roadmap for the day and also gives them a chance to prepare for specific activities (for example, they might want to grab a headset, straighten up their environment, or print out a reading).
- If you make schedule or syllabus changes, let students know as soon as possible. Provide a revised schedule or syllabus, as appropriate to help students stay on track with the changes.
- Post recordings of the lecture as well as class/lecture notes online (this is the top request from students regarding class material organization).

Theme 5: What Students Wish Instructors Knew

Our question:

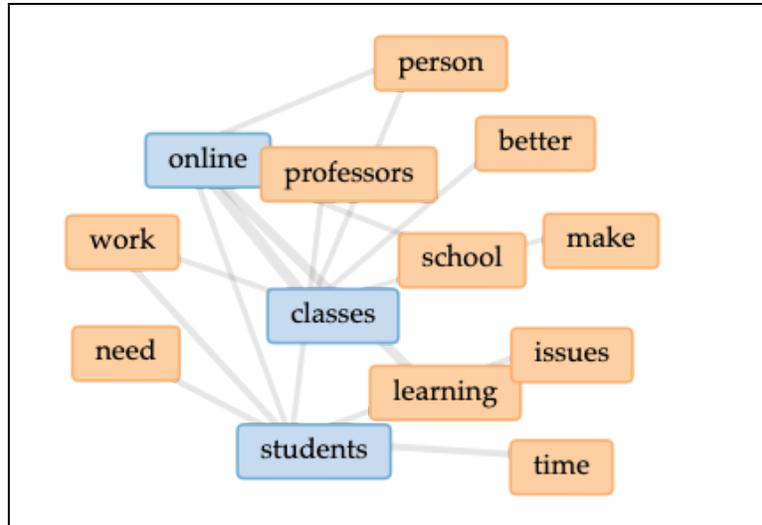
“Life has become more complicated and difficult for many people in the Baruch community. Is there anything you think would be helpful for faculty to understand about your reality and how it impacts how you are learning?”

Students say these changes would most affect/improve the way they are learning:



*Between spring 2021 and summer 2021 the percentage of students across all schools who requested keeping hybrid/online learning as a permanent option (dark blue bars) rose dramatically.

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*The image and text above are from an analysis of the question using [Voyant Tools](#). The most **frequent words** in the corpus were **students** (48); **online** (41); **classes** (38); **time** (28); **work** (24).

Results: This question, which we have asked since spring 2020, is usually tackled by half of the survey participants (the current sample, 95 students, is 43% of respondents). While students cite a number of matters of concern, most of these have to do with their expectations from faculty: a plea for empathy and understanding, and an emerging demand for faculty to embrace hybrid/instructional modes, which may mark a new normal.

The responses that emphasize the need for understanding from professors follow national trends at secondary institutions, as reported in polls since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ Most polls testify to an inability to focus due to trauma and/or anxiety, with a number reporting the loss of lives of family and community members.²

¹ Copeland, W.E., McGinnis, E., Bai, Y., Adams, Z., Nardone, H., Devadanam, V., Rettew, & J., Hudziak, J.J. (2021). Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on college student mental health and wellness. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*. 60(1), 134-141.e2. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2020.08.466>; CUNY plans expansion of mental health services to address escalating need of students struggling with effects of pandemic. (2020, October 16) *City University of New York homepage*. Retrieved April 8, 2021 from <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/>.

² According to the above study, a third of CUNY students report having lost a loved one to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021. See “CUNY Student Experience with Online Learning One Year Later,” CUNY IT Conference Virtual Event, December 2-3, 2021, and the associated article preprint Manze, M., Lattanzio, A., Larsen, J., Keegan, J, Freudenberg, N, Jones, H., *The primacy of meeting public university students’ “CTL COVID-19 Student Experience Survey (Summer 2021)”* compiled by Pamela Thielman, Katherine Tsan and Ron Whiteman for the [Baruch College \(CUNY\) Center for Teaching and Learning](#) is licensed under [Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International — CC BY-SA 4.0](#)

Responses relating to issues that disproportionately affect the CUNY population cite hardships around combining work and school, a necessity due to socioeconomic factors; and a lack of privacy inside the home.³ Students ask for instructors' sensitivity to their situations and challenges, affirming the impossibility of having classes run the same way—in terms of affect as much as logistics—as they did prior to the pandemic.

Students' quotes about what they wish their instructors knew:

"Students are suffering very much the same as adults. Students have to worry about not only their health but [also] work and possibly financial issues. As much as many students would like to solely focus on just school there are other factors that affect us."

"Everyone has different circumstances. Some understanding would be appreciated."

"We need mental breaks just as a professor would."

"The deprivation of social contact I've had for over a year now, as a result of the nationwide shutdown, has exacerbated my depression."

Procedural and affective suggestions for demonstrating understanding:

- Try to build a shared sense of community and understanding in the class by:
 - setting up opportunities to connect which are not tied to academic content such as icebreakers and study pauses for free-form conversations and sharing.
 - emailing students who may be struggling/disconnected in class.
 - soliciting input from students about how to best meet their needs at the current moment through in-class surveys and polls.
 - being available for conversations outside of class time, e.g. by setting up an open coffee hour.
- Acknowledge possible changes in the students' situation that could be affecting their learning and, if appropriate, share your own experiences.

essential needs during the COVID-19 pandemic: a new higher education priority, MedRxiv: The Pre-Print Server for Health Sciences," <https://doi.org/10.1101/2021.11.11.21266220>.

³ Jones HE, Manze M, Ngo V, Lamberson P, Freudenberg N. (2021). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on college students' health and financial stability in New York City: Findings from a population-based sample of City University of New York (CUNY) students. *Journal of Urban Health*.

<https://doi-org.remote.baruch.cuny.edu/10.1007/s11524-020-00506-x>.

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- Each term, a number of our students express mental health concerns and request easier access to counseling and helpful resources. Share links to, and raise awareness of, virtual and on-campus student support resources (in particular, the [Baruch College Counseling Center](#), but also the [Writing Center](#), [BCTC](#), [Student Academic Consulting Center](#), [Tools for Clear Speech](#) and [Student Disability Services](#).)

Data from this survey question suggest that beyond a strong desire for empathy and understanding, there is also a growing demand from the student body for more flexible modes of learning, in particular hybrid learning, to meet students’ diverse needs. The percentage of students who mention this in response to this open-ended question has risen from 18% in spring 2021 to 30% by the end of summer 2021 (albeit sample sizes differed in the two surveys with summer being smaller—and also the last fully-remote semester). Constraints on the students’ schedules, “time”, and “timing”—some of the top words in the responses as demonstrated by the visualization above—help explain this result. It remains to be seen whether this will be a permanent shift in preferences at Baruch. The section that follows presents a closer look at students’ post-COVID format preferences.

Speaking out in favor of keeping hybrid/remote options:

“COVID has changed the way we live. So expecting everyone to come to in person class in the fall is unrealistic. I would like to have the option to do both.”

“Learning online helps me retain knowledge better because more study materials have been provided by professors through Blackboard.”

“COVID has had a huge economic impact on some families. The online learning gives students a chance to pursue a degree while providing for their families and spending time with them more often. Despite all the negativity COVID has brought, it has enabled many students to tackle the issues of everyday life more efficiently.”

Looking ahead: post-COVID course format preferences:

Our questions:

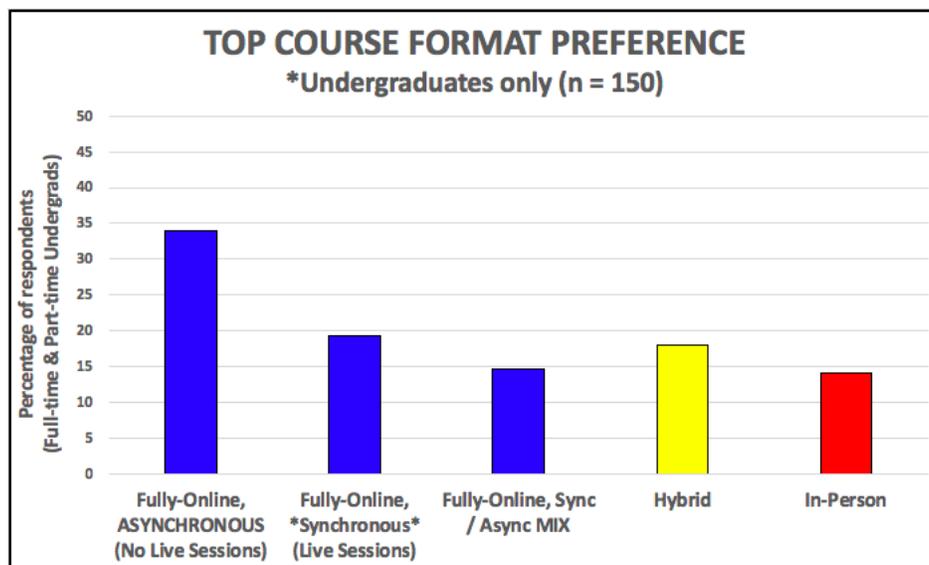
Question 1: “It is currently the point of view of NYC and CUNY that it is now becoming more safe to resume some in-person learning (i.e., face-to-face classes) on campus. With that point of view stated - and with the assumption that Baruch will aim to take the utmost precautions for personal health and safety on campus - we would like to ask you what YOUR personal preferences are for course formats. (Please respond by using the *rank order* technique for *each* option below.)”

- ❖ Fully-online, asynchronous (no live class sessions)
- ❖ Fully-online, synchronous (live class sessions required)
- ❖ Fully-online, synchronous/asynchronous mix (some live class sessions and some asynchronous learning)
- ❖ Hybrid (some face-to-face class sessions, some asynchronous online learning)
- ❖ Fully face-to-face (i.e., in person class sessions on campus)

Question 2: “Why did you choose to rank the course formats in the way that you did for the previous question? For example, has your work schedule necessitated new preferences? Perhaps you have discovered that you enjoy online learning? Perhaps you strongly wish to get back to in-person learning? Please briefly explain.”

Results: At the conclusion of the summer 2021 session, 68% of undergraduates (102 of 150) preferred *as their top choice* some type of fully-online learning as they moved into the fall 2021 semester. (See BLUE bars in the figure featured below.) This was a marked increase from just three months prior when at the conclusion of the spring 2021 semester, 52% of students favored online over hybrid and in-person learning. For this 68%, as the rationale for their preference, they primarily voiced concerns over “health and safety” (e.g., COVID) and “schedule flexibility” (e.g., work, health challenges), and many felt as though they learned better in an online environment (e.g., a happy medium of self-pacing plus presence of professor support).

On the other hand, only 18% of undergraduates (27 of 150; down from 22% in spring 2021) preferred hybrid learning *as their top choice* for fall 2021. (See YELLOW bar featured below.) The essence of reasoning here was a wish to slowly *ease back* into in-person learning, given continued health and safety concerns about COVID. Some also preferred hybrid for the utility of online learning for *some* aspects of their classes but the value of in-person meetings for *other* aspects. Finally, just 14% of undergrads who responded to this question (21 of 150; down from 26% in spring 2021) preferred in-person learning. (See RED bar below.) Their interest was in regaining the benefits of being able to interact more directly with other students and engaging with professors, and learning in a more authentic academic environment.



Students’ quotes about their course format preferences:

Offering a rationale for preferring the fully-online course format (~68%)

“First, although many people have been vaccinated, including myself, I still want to take more precautions, especially [since] the virus keeps changing (like Delta). We have to have a healthy body to study. Also, some financial problems might arise if someone gets sick in [my] family. Second, online learning is really good for people who work, especially the asynchronous sessions. I can keep my full-time job while I can still be a full-time student. It just depends on [a] student’s time management skills if it’s [an] online course.”

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“I enjoy online learning more. It gives me the flexibility to work certain hours and to take breaks when doing a hard assignment. I suffer from ADHD, and it’s helpful for me to be able to walk around my house or even the park when I need to take a break. Taking away online classes would be a huge detriment to my mental health and to my grades.”

“Solely asynchronous learning tends to make it difficult for me to keep up with class material, but synchronous class sessions provide flexibility of location with the added benefit of professional guidance.”

“First I am still not convinced that COVID is over. So, I am not ready for in-person yet. Also online learning provides lots of flexibility thanks to the technology and the professors who are available by emails and [Z]ooms and always willing to help.”

“I’ll be working full-time and in school full-time and online school is the only way to do that without being completely burnt out. I thrive in online learning and am doing better in school than ever before.”

“I was able to work more often, complete and understand assignments at my own pace, and stay in the comfort of my home.”

Describing the reasoning for wanting to take hybrid classes (~18%)

“During COVID, I added a second research internship so I have more demands on my time and I appreciate the flexibility of hybrid courses, but still have better learning outcomes with some face-to-face lectures.”

“I would like to have some classes in person. However, for my safety it’s best that I go in person a certain amount of time and [be] online [the rest of the time].”

Explaining why in-person courses are preferential (~14%)

“I have learned that I am terrible at online learning, I need the class atmosphere and in-person interaction with my professors and classmates to be invested in the class. Or else I get distracted and lazy.”

“Learning in a physical environment is extremely important for not only retaining information but also connecting with students and teachers. The technology barrier prevents this.”

Final thoughts:

This is the second summer that we have surveyed the impact of COVID-19 on our student population. As with the first assessment, the summer 2021 survey results suggest that students taking classes in the summer sessions (I, II, and/or III) have a unique experience. This is because summer classes meet for a shorter period (between 5 and 11 weeks, depending on session), for longer class periods (generally 3 hours), and/or more frequently (up to 4 times per week) than during the regular academic year. These summer responses differed from the previous summer responses in that here students were able to anticipate the end of the fully-online learning mandate, with the at least partial return to campus in fall 2021.

As in previous post-survey reports, we encourage readers to consider our findings and suggestions in context. Circumstances remain in flux for many students, so we want to remind instructors to be flexible and adaptable in how they think about and apply the insights offered in this report.

Throughout the semesters we have run this survey (every school term starting in spring 2020) several key take-aways have emerged pertaining to the themes of instructor ‘communication’, ‘organization’, and ‘understanding’, as well as ‘learning flexibility’ and ‘in-session engagement’. As much as these themes appear to be of regular interest to students, there is also evidence that viewpoints on these matters are shifting, semester by semester—and also that new ones are emerging about the future of learning at Baruch. Here we offer some final thoughts on our current findings...

- While a small subset of respondents continues to register some dissatisfaction with the way their professors are communicating with them (5-9%), in summer ‘21 there was substantially *less* dissatisfaction than ever before. In fact, 44% of students reported having *no concerns* (i.e., ‘extremely high’ satisfaction) about how instructors communicated with them, and a good number of respondents left rather positive testimonies about individual faculty in this regard. Still, the urge remains high for instructors to demonstrate greater clarity, consistency, and organization in their communication, especially via email. Moreover, there is also an increased plea for instructors to improve the quality and quantity of communication in the various ‘live meeting’ elements of their online classes.

- In general, the short summer 2021 term produced much satisfactory teaching—as evidenced by many responses where students reported knowing what they were doing in class and having had positive experiences with engagement and communication (this trend is consistent with our previous observations about the summer 2020 term which also produced many responses testifying to an intense yet rewarding time). This summer, a number of faculty were singled out in particular for their success in leading synchronous sessions and introducing useful digital platforms and tools.
- Increased engagement during synchronous learning sessions continues to be important to students, according to their responses. Increasing student engagement may be as simple as making participation expectations very clear from the beginning, or taking breaks to allow students to rest and return to the course content with more focus. It is also vital to give students a chance to speak and ask questions during each online session.
- Flexibility in the online classroom continues to be on the minds of students—and as with previous semesters’ data from the student experience survey, the current student sample continued to care mostly about having *flexible deadlines* for their work. While some instructors may be concerned that such “flexibility” might be synonymous with giving in to students’ demands or foregoing rules, instead, introducing some flexibility into the academic environment can create a greater sense of accessibility and therefore a richer learning experience for a wider range of students. Interestingly, the data from summer 2021 indicate that Zicklin and Weissman students might have some diverging opinions on what constitutes flexibility. Thus, beyond generally instituting planned “wiggle room” for various deadlines, instructors might consider *working with students* to collectively decide the ways in which flexibility might manifest in the context of a specific course.
- While the requests for empathy/understanding were less frequent than in previous iterations of the survey, a number of students still discussed how the challenges of the current time have affected their learning and emphasized the need for their faculty to show understanding of what they—and all of us—are going through. A willingness to check in with our students, to gauge their feelings, and to express affirmation of the specific situation they are in and/or the difficulties they might be experiencing may seem like an incremental change in the running of a course, yet it is one that plays a crucial role in the way students experience our teaching.

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- Organization may be especially important during the summer session, because of the unusual schedule. In addition to creating a clear course schedule, and/or a neat, organized course site, communicating throughout the semester helps keep students on track. This may mean weekly emails about assignments, revising documents to reflect schedule or assignment changes, or sharing an agenda at the beginning of each class session.
- Compared to previous findings from this survey instrument, as of the conclusion of the summer 2021 session, there was a marked *increase* in the preference for various forms of remote learning. The most popular was for *asynchronous* fully-online learning—and when combined with additional student preferences for both *synchronous* and *mixed forms* of online learning, this all accounted for 68% of the “top choice” ratings for course formats. According to the long-form responses, students’ rationale here seemed to stem from persistent concerns about COVID, both for their sake *and* for their families. Apart from this of-the-moment sentiment, though, many students also reported finding it preferable (and in many cases, quite necessary) to lean on the “flexibility” (e.g., for work, family care, finances, time management) that being enrolled in online courses afforded them. In fact, *a significant number of undergraduates expressed a desire to keep fully-online (and, to a lesser extent, hybrid) course options as a permanent feature of their educational experience at Baruch.* In line with this, the preference for in-person learning in this data set was only at 14%, a marked trend downward from 26% in spring 2021.

CTL staff members Seth Graves, Allison Lehr Samuels, Hamad Sindhi, Pamela Thielman, Katherine Tsan, and Ron Whiteman contributed to the design of the survey instrument. Pamela Thielman, Katherine Tsan, and Ron Whiteman performed data analysis and wrote up the findings.

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