

STUDENT FEEDBACK ON ONLINE SUMMER COURSES

OFFICE OF ASSESSMENT

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Introduction

In the summer of 2019, the Office of Assessment sent an anonymous survey to 651 undergraduate students who were enrolled in at least one of 77 online summer courses taught by 52 faculty at SCU. The Office of Assessment sent a survey to students after completion of their summer online classes held during Sessions 1, 2 and/or Session 3A. Sessions 1 and 2 were held over five weeks, and Session 3A was offered over three-weeks. The survey asked students for their feedback on different components of the online course they took and their motivations for taking online courses. The same survey was also administered in 2015. Many of the items were taken or adapted from The Blended Learning Student Survey by Long Island University and The Blended Learning Toolkit, a project of the University of Central Florida (UCF) and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) with funding from the Next Generation Learning Challenges (NGLC).

In 2019, survey responses were received from 234 students. This report summarizes the survey results.

Affiliation of students

While the SCU Summer Program is open to students from other institutions, 99% of the surveyed students who took an online class were full-time SCU students. The majority of students (53%) were taking only one online class at SCU this summer, 33% were taking two, and 14% were taking three or more online classes. Most students (62%) who took an online class had never taken one for credit before; 17% of students had taken one, 9% of students had taken two, 5% of students had taken three, and 6% of students had taken four or more online classes for credit in the past. Of the students who took the survey, 1% were incoming first-year students¹, 25% were rising sophomores, 31% were rising juniors, and 43% were rising seniors. Fifty-five percent self-identified as female; 39% as male; and 6% chose not to respond.

Students' experiences with online learning

Students were asked about their interactions with others in the online environment, ways in which the course components facilitated learning, and their overall perceptions of the course. Students were asked to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with statements within each of these themes on a five-point scale. They had the opportunity to check "N/A" if a certain component (e.g., online testing) was not included in their course. The results show that students generally responded very positively about the components of the course. Responses from 2015 are also included for comparison.

As can be seen in Table 1, students felt their online course offered them opportunities to interact with other students, and with the professor. Students surveyed in 2019 responded even more affirmatively about the course opportunities for interaction and communication than did students sampled in 2015.

Table 1. Student perceptions of interaction/communication in online courses (percent)

¹ Only incoming first-year students who are student-athletes are allowed to enroll in summer courses.

Interaction/Communication	Year	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I was able to share ideas with other students on a regular basis	2015	11%	14%	40%	35%
	2019	7%	8%	40%	46%
Sharing and discussion in the online environment worked well	2015	9%	9%	44%	38%
	2019	8%	9%	35%	49%
The course offered ample opportunities for interaction and communication from student to student	2015	9%	15%	47%	29%
	2019	9%	10%	43%	38%
The course offered ample opportunities for interaction and communication from student to instructor	2015	6%	18%	39%	37%
	2019	8%	10%	33%	49%
The course offered ample opportunities for interaction and communication from instructor to student	2015	7%	15%	38%	40%
	2019	5%	10%	32%	53%
The technology used in this class allowed me to participate at least as fully as I would have done in a classroom-only class	2015	13%	18%	39%	30%
	2019	15%	8%	32%	44%

Students were also generally positive about the ways in which the structure of the course facilitated learning. Students in 2019 also responded more positively about their learning than did students surveyed in 2015.

Table 2. Student perceptions of learning in online courses (percent)

Learning	Year	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I clearly understood the components and structure of the course	2015	6%	9%	48%	37%
	2019	7%	8%	35%	50%
Online learning modules helped me understand the course material	2015	7%	11%	45%	37%
	2019	8%	8%	37%	48%
Online testing was a good way to evaluate my understanding of the material	2015	12%	26%	40%	22%
	2019	12%	10%	39%	38%
Watching recorded lectures helped my understanding of the material in this course	2015	12%	22%	40%	26%
	2019	11%	14%	36%	38%
Online assignments or activities were helpful in understanding the course content	2015	5%	11%	42%	42%
	2019	8%	5%	37%	50%
The online components of this course worked well to promote learning	2015	6%	12%	46%	36%
	2019	11%	4%	37%	47%

Students report high levels of satisfaction with their online course; as noted above, students in 2019 report higher levels of satisfaction compared with their peers in 2015.

Table 3. Student satisfaction with online courses (percent)

General Satisfaction	Year	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I would take another online course at SCU in the future	2015	9%	14%	35%	42%
	2019	5%	8%	30%	57%
I would recommend taking online courses to a friend	2015	8%	13%	36%	43%
	2019	7%	8%	30%	56%
Overall, I am satisfied with this online course	2015	9%	8%	39%	44%
	2019	8%	7%	33%	53%
The time I spent online would have been better spent in a face-to-face class	2015	29%	35%	20%	16%
	2019	37%	32%	16%	15%

Students were also asked about how helpful certain elements of their online course were for their learning. Their responses reinforce the importance of developing quality online learning components and students' ability to work at their own pace in the online experience. (See Tables 4-6.)

Table 4. Student perceptions of helpfulness of elements related to interaction/communication (percent)

Interaction/Communication	Year	Not at all helpful/ slightly helpful	Moderately helpful	Very helpful	Extremely helpful
Online interaction with students (e.g., discussion board, chats, e-mails)	2015	22%	30%	29%	19%
	2019	15%	30%	24%	31%
Online interaction with faculty (e.g., discussion board, chats, e-mails)	2015	16%	22%	33%	29%
	2019	10%	23%	28%	39%

Table 5. Student perceptions of helpfulness of elements related to learning (percent)

Learning	Year	Not at all helpful/ slightly helpful	Moderately helpful	Very helpful	Extremely helpful
Online material (e.g., demonstrations, videos and simulations, links to relevant websites)	2015	8%	18%	37%	37%
	2019	6%	18%	27%	49%
Ability to review online presentations multiple times	2015	6%	17%	25%	52%
	2019	5%	13%	32%	50%
Online examinations	2015	19%	22%	32%	27%
	2019	12%	19%	37%	32%

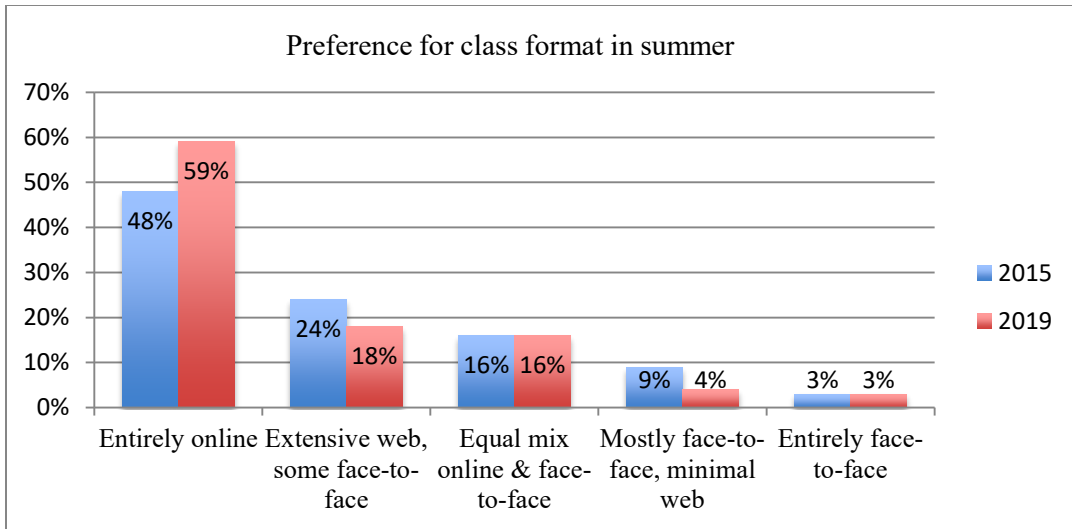
Table 6. Student perceptions of helpfulness of elements related to flexibility (percent)

Flexibility	Year	Not at all helpful/ slightly helpful	Moderately helpful	Very helpful	Extremely helpful
Ability to work at my own pace	2015	6%	20%	25%	49%
	2019	6%	12%	25%	57%
Flexibility of being able to complete assignments any place/ any time	2015	7%	10%	26%	57%
	2019	4%	9%	25%	61%

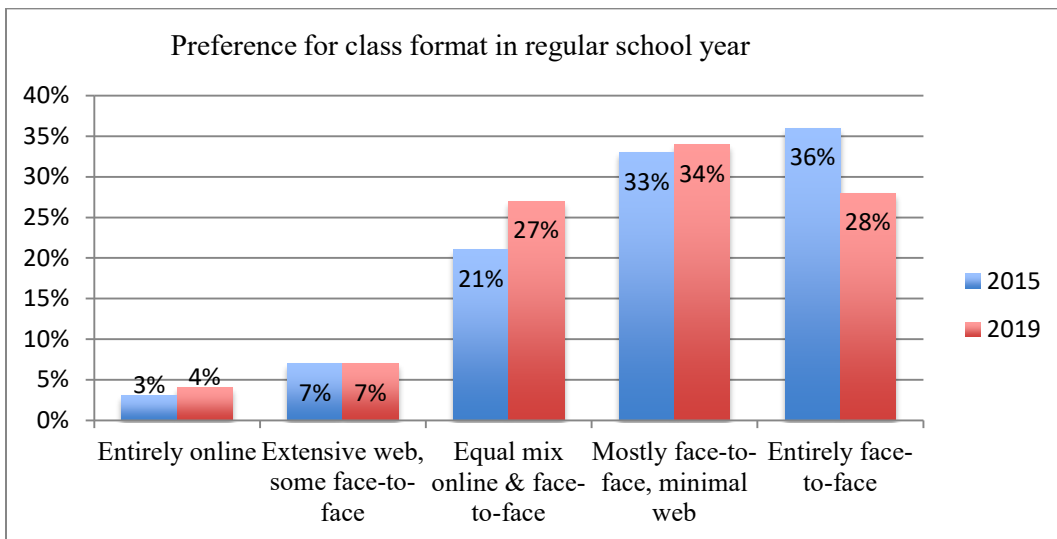
When teaching online, it can be especially important to schedule in opportunities for students to provide feedback on the course materials. Students were asked whether they had such opportunities to give the instructor feedback. Twenty percent said that they were not given that opportunity, 44% said that they had one or two opportunities to give feedback, and 37% said they were given a number of opportunities to give feedback.

Preferences for online/hybrid formats

It is interesting to learn more about students' preferences for online/hybrid courses versus face-to-face courses. Students were asked first which class format they preferred for courses taken during the summer. As the figure below indicates most prefer entirely online or a predominantly online course with some face-to-face contact. The percentage of students who preferred entirely online courses was greater (by 11%) than in 2015. In future iterations of the survey, it would be helpful to know if the students who prefer some face-to-face contact are within driving distance of SCU during the summer and are available to come to campus.



Students responded differently when asked about which class format they preferred for courses taken during the regular school year, showing a much stronger preference for entirely or predominantly face-to-face courses.



Students were also asked about their interest in taking a class during the regular academic year that blended online learning with face-to-face instruction (meeting, for example one day a week face-to-face and the other day online). Forty-three percent of students said they would be very interested in this, 30% said that they would be somewhat interested, 20% were not very interested or not interested at all, and 7% stated that they were unsure.

In Their Own Words: Student responses to open-ended questions

Open-ended questions were included in the survey providing students the opportunity to expand upon their experiences. Student responses to the open-ended questions were examined and the results are presented in the following sections.

Why students take online courses

One of the open-ended questions asked students *why* they chose to take an online class. Over half (52%) of the students stated that a key reason was to fulfill a requirement either for their major or the university core. A number of students (31%) took an online class because it offered more flexibility in the summer or during the school year. The professor or the class material itself was of specific interest to 6% of students. The opportunity to graduate early were important factors for 4% of students surveyed. Another 4% used the online classes as a means of having something to do during the summer. Additional reasons for taking an online class included strengthening transfer applications and preparing for future exams.

What was especially effective?

The students were also asked what was particularly effective in the online class. Of the students who responded, 18% of the student responses praised the professors for their clear communication with the class. Specifically, 15% of responses appreciated the feedback between professor and student, with one student commenting that their professor “was extremely available and listened to feedback regarding course materials.” Another remarked, “Communication was encouraged so much that it almost felt like an in-class experience which I really enjoyed.” Many others mentioned the “teacher’s feedback,” “teaching style,” and the “interaction with the professor.”

In addition, 23% of comments noted that the lectures, tests/quizzes, and other class materials provided by the professor were valuable, and 10% of comments addressed the organization of the class and website. One student noted, “The organization was key. The modules were really well organized and planned out, and each assignment and its respective due date were always abundantly clear, which made for time management to be easy!” And for one student, “The professor showed us some great online resources (particularly videos) that were extremely helpful in helping us understand the material.”

The flexibility of online courses and the opportunity for students to work at their own pace and schedule was mentioned in 21% of comments. One student noted, “The flexibility it allowed – I could work when I wanted to and get ahead to a certain degree, I could complete the work from anywhere, I could also review lectures/videos several times to make sure I understood the material.” Others appreciated how online classes were “very easy to manage while working and being occupied with other life tasks.”

The discussion and communication among peers were also important (receiving 18% of mentions). One student commented, “I thought the discussion was useful because it required everyone to interact with one another virtually which, in my opinion, eliminates the aspect of students being reserved in the classroom.” Another pointed to the benefits of peer-to-peer learning through discussion, “I liked how you could always go back and read classmates responses, which allowed me to see different views on a matter and help me to go back and look at the evidence that goes along with the new views.” Many viewed discussion forums as an easy way to communicate and appreciated discussion boards for review and preparation for assignments.

What was less effective?

Although communication was praised in many student comments, it also emerged in responses to the question of what was less effective in their online course. In fact, the most common response was limited communication with both the professor and other classmates, with 28% of comments mentioning this as a weakness in the online class. One student pointed out that “It’s difficult because everyone is doing assignments at different times so leaving comments is difficult and even harder to respond to those.” Another commented, “The lack of face-to-face instruction and reminders

sometimes led to misunderstanding or missed assignments.” And another student wrote, “Discussions did not feel like ideas were being argued/modeled.” Furthermore, 8% of students mentioned the challenges of coordinating a group project online. One student commented, “Group projects were very difficult due to time zone changes and schedules.”

In addition, there were a number of comments (9%) about the course organization and the difficulty in navigating and getting material for the course. For example, one noted, “It was tough to grasp the organizational structure. There was a lot going on in the modules and there were a lot of due dates to keep track of.” And several others noted the confusion they had regarding the format of the class and the professor’s expectations, “The fact that it was entirely online made it difficult at times to understand what I had to do and what exactly the teacher’s expectations for each assignment were.”

Finally, 23% of comments addressed lectures, quizzes/tests or other class materials provided by the professor. One student commented, “Some video lectures were not as necessary as others or spent an imbalanced amount of time covering additional information rather than on the most difficult topics.” Or, “Online testing felt very restrictive and I don’t know how much I absorbed by watching recording of class lectures.” A small number of student comments asked for more lectures and or shorter readings.

Would students have preferred to take their course as a face-to-face course?

Students were also asked if they would have preferred to take their class in a face-to-face setting, rather than online. The majority of students (67%) stated that they preferred the online format. Of these students, 25% mentioned that this was particularly true in the summer because of the flexibility offered by online classes. Another 6% mentioned how they learned a lot through this online format. However, there were many students 27% who responded that they would have preferred taking it as a face-to-face class. Of these, 13% felt they would have had better communication among themselves, their classmates, and their professor. A few students (10%) mentioned they prefer a face-to-face class, but were okay with and appreciated the convenience of the online format. One student noted, “I would have liked some face to face time with instructor. However, the online format fits easily into a hectic schedule and still provides a rich learning experience.” Finally, 6% of students said it didn’t matter to them whether the course was online or face-to-face.

Conclusion

Of the students who responded to the survey, most reported being very satisfied with their experiences in their online courses. Additionally, the survey results affirm that summer courses fill a valuable role in affording many students more flexibility and opportunity in achieving their goals toward completing their academic programs and the Core curriculum, and providing them with more opportunities to explore additional courses.

The faculty member’s work and preparation involved in transforming a face-to-face course into an effective online course is clearly an essential piece of the students’ positive experiences. Students expressed appreciation for a well-organized course that allowed them to find course materials easily and know what to anticipate in readings, assignments, exams, and participation throughout the five-week course time frame. Opportunities for timely communication with faculty are especially important to clarify questions about assignments or readings, and for students to receive feedback on their work. Students also appreciate learning with and from peers through discussion forums and opportunities for peer feedback, although in some classes, this was less successfully implemented. This area, as well as the effectiveness of some of the online lectures and testing, seem to be the biggest areas for SCU to target development and improvement opportunities.

Student comments help us see that the faculty member plays an instrumental role in creating an environment that helps establish a sense of community and engaged learning, even in an online environment. For over a dozen years, mandatory training has been in place to help faculty prepare to teach their first online course at the SCU. The training program was redesigned and brought in-house in 2015 when the University created a new position to support faculty teaching online – the Online/Blended Learning Specialist. Approximately 60% of the 2019 summer online faculty completed the University’s in-house *Course Redesign Seminar*. Additionally, to better support faculty continuing to teach in the summer online program, *Online Course Refresh* workshops were developed by Academic Technology to share best practices and provide faculty more tools to improve community, student engagement, and foster a culture of continuous improvement. These 2018 and 2019 workshops have been completed by 32% of the summer 2019 faculty. As SCU considers ways to further support faculty who have redesigned courses for online or hybrid teaching, Academic Technology and the Collaborative for Teaching Innovation continue to build on current efforts to support a community of faculty teaching online, e.g., quarterly lunches to facilitate peer support, new workshops, and faculty CAFEs or Forums. Such opportunities offer faculty valuable ideas about how to manage the communication flow between themselves and students, how to design and manage discussion boards to elicit engaging discussions, and how to construct online course elements, including the overall course design and online lectures. Efforts are ongoing to facilitate further faculty networks or groups.

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