Supporting Students During COVID-19: Listening to Student Voices

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COVID Review Overview

1. Teaching and Learning
   i. Survey undergraduate students (FAS)
   ii. Survey faculty (university wide)
   iii. Thought exchanges UG students, graduate students, UG and Grad Chairs, and Heads (FAS)
   iv. Thoughtexchange Educational Developers
   v. Environmental scan of teaching resources, practises, supports and services, and policies and procedures
   vi. Tableau metrics (FAS)
COVID Review Overview

1. Mental Health and Remote Learning Environment
   a. Partnership with UFLOURISH Survey for UG and Grad students
   b. Developed UFLOURISH for Staff and Faculty
   c. Thought exchange FAS Departmental Managers

2. Organizational
   a. Thought exchange with Heads (FAS)
   b. Interviews leadership
Undergraduate & Graduate Thought Exchange
Thought Exchange Question

“How could Queen’s University better support you as an undergraduate (or graduate) student during the COVID-19 pandemic?”
Thought Exchange Process

Electronic Invitation
- Representative sample of undergraduate and graduate students

Thought Exchange
- Exchange open for 13 days
- Sharing and rating of thoughts

Data Analysis
- Themes generated by artificial intelligence
- Themes reviewed and refined
# Thought Exchange Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Undergraduate Sample</th>
<th>Graduate Sample</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>317 Participants</td>
<td>350 Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>289 Thoughts</td>
<td>383 Thoughts</td>
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<tr>
<td>6,992 Ratings</td>
<td>11,665 Ratings</td>
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Undergraduate Thought Exchange Results
Undergraduate Sample Demographics

Student Type
- 91% domestic students
- 9% international students

Level of Study
- 15% First Year
- 25% Second Year
- 32% Third Year
- 28% Fourth Year and above

Compared to last year, how much time are you spending on remote coursework?
To what extent do you feel you can manage the academic requirements this term?

To what extent have you been able to access the academic support and community support you need?

- Academic Support:
  - Not at all/Slightly well: 60%
  - Moderately well: 25%
  - Very/Extremely well: 15%

- Community Support:
  - Not at all/Somewhat easily: 73%
  - Moderately easily: 18%
  - Very/Extremely easily: 9%
Average Rating by Theme (Undergraduate)

- **Online Learning Requires Significantly More Time**: 4.6
- **Make Course Delivery More Consistent**: 4.5
- **Reduce Assignments and Readings**: 4.4
- **Provide Clarity and Flexibility in Courses**: 4.4
- **Support Students’ Mental Health**: 4.3
- **Lower Tuition and Student Fees**: 4.3
- **Mitigate Risks of Extended Screen Time**: 4.3
- **Improve Use of ONQ and Other Technologies**: 4.2
- **Increase Access to Workspace/Resources**: 4.1
- **Provide More Synchronous Learning**: 4.0
- ** Foster Student Connections**: 4.0
- **Improve Communication to Students**: 3.8
- **Improve Quality of Online Learning**: 3.7
Theme: Online Learning Requires Significantly More Time

I find that we are given a lot of work to do, each course gives about 8-12 hours of work a week and I am taking 5 courses so I feel very overwhelmed. Students are spending too much time on school work and not enough time on well-being.

The amount of course work seems to be much greater than it normally would have been. The school should lessen the amount of coursework. This is crucial because students are staring at a computer screen for hours on end. It’s deteriorating our mental health.
Theme: Make Course Delivery More Consistent

Queen's should be structuring/standardizing their course delivery online (to the extent possible) so that we don't have to search OnQ for materials. Only one of my courses uses the calendar function of OnQ so that students know exactly what is expected each week, and all courses should use that.

Have a standard for easily accessible scheduling for each and every course as, occasionally, a due date or assignment will be very difficult to find. It is frustrating to think you are completely done your work only to find there was something you missed because it was somewhere you didn't check.
Theme: Reduce Assignments and Readings

There is way too much work assigned for each course. Myself and friends have so many assignments, quizzes, tests and discussion posts per class! Due to this we don't have enough time to fully comprehend all material because we are rushing to move on. Essentially we aren't learning anymore.

I think having less assigned content in every course would greatly help my experience. I believe that Queen's profs are assignment too much work for the average student to handle, and this has taken an extreme toll on my mental health.
Theme: Provide Clarity and Flexibility in Courses

Standardized Flexibility on Due Dates These are difficult times financially and for those already sick or struggling going into this pandemic. Be more flexible.

Assignment instructions need to be more clear. There are no opportunities in classes without lectures for the professors to explain the assignments. A rubric and a paragraph explaining is not good enough. Also we cannot be expected to look search through the syllabus for missing details.
Theme: Support Students’ Mental Health

**Students are drained** We don’t have the physical boundaries for different activities as before (ex. campus for lectures, library for studying) - everything is done @ home.

**Without extracurriculars running, it feels like I have nothing to balance out all the work. I'm constantly stressed with no outlet** My mental health is being impacted because everything I would have done after a calm day is unavailable and I spend all day looking at screens.
Implications

● Students are overwhelmed managing remote learning

● Demands of remote learning is detrimental to students’ mental health

● Students want more access to workspace, mental health support, opportunities to connect, and increased financial aid
Implications

Queen’s can support undergraduate students by:

● Reducing coursework
● Providing financial aid
● Improving students’ online learning experience through consistent and flexible delivery
● Improving communication
● Promoting community and increasing access to mental health support
Graduate Thought Exchange Results
Demographics and Survey Questions

Student Type
- 84% domestic students
- 16% international students

Level of Study
- 48% Master’s
- 52% Doctorate

Programs Not Represented
- Biochemistry; Fine Arts; French Studies; Languages, Literature, and Cultures

How disruptive has COVID-19 been?

- Research: 83% at least somewhat, 17% not at all or N/A
- Finances: 76% at least somewhat, 24% not at all or N/A
- Mental health: 95% at least somewhat, 5% not at all or N/A
- Ability to stay in/finish school: 74% at least somewhat, 26% not at all or N/A
- Long term academic/job prospects: 88% at least somewhat, 12% not at all or N/A
Theme: Lower Tuition/Student Costs or Raise Funding

I don't understand why tuition and student fees can't be adjusted. We are not on campus, have mostly online or no classes, and cannot use most of the things the student fees cover, yet we are expected to pay.

4.7 ★
Ranked #2 of 371

Reduce Tuition or raise funding levels. Financial strain is high; there are extra costs associated with the pandemic, and the federal government dropped the ball for students.

4.7 ★
Ranked #3 of 371
Theme: Extended Time/Funding Due to COVID Disruptions

Extending degree-completion schedules. For many of us, research got interrupted. The financial burden that awaits us if we don't complete our degrees on time is not fair.

4.6 ★
Ranked #4 of 371

Extensions to complete degree without ongoing tuition fees for those who are finished PhD coursework and working on dissertations. My research (archival) has been sidelined for months by the pandemic. Paying tuition for extra years when I am past my funding period is onerous.

4.6 ★
Ranked #9 of 371
Theme: Improve Communication with Graduate Students

Engage in actual meaningful dialogue with graduate students. Why is this coming OVER SIX MONTHS into the pandemic? Countless letters from diverse student groups were met with an identical dismissal repose from the principal and provost.

Be more transparent about COVID related decisions. For example, why have graduate students been paying for facilities that have been closed since March (e.g., ARC)?
Theme: Support Students’ Mental Health

More accountability in acknowledging how the pandemic has impacted graduate student mental health, thereby impacting their work. Comments made by administrators have alluded to not understanding why some peoples' progress might be impacted, which demonstrates a lack of empathy.

Invest in mental health resources for students. Mental health resources provided by the university are inaccessible and inadequate.
Implications

- Financial strain/uncertainty about research negatively affecting mental health
- Students don’t feel their concerns are being heard/addressed
- Would like greater access to workspace/resources
Implications Cont’d

Queen’s can support graduate students by:

- Lowering student costs (i.e., tuition, fees) or increase funding
- Improve accessibility to mental health support
- Provide transparent, timely, and consistent communication
- Increase access to campus workspace/resources
- Adjusting undergraduate workload
Comparisons between Undergraduate and Graduate Students
Key Differences in Students’ Experience

Undergraduate:
- classes
- work
- course
- time
- learning
- assignments
- readings
- organized
- online
- health
- help
- content
- spaces
- support
- year
- load
- lectures
- professors
- help
- screen
- costs
- week
- time
- mental
- pay
- tuition
- courses
- on
- home
- study
- organized

Graduate:
- financial
- services
- resources
- pandemic
- provide
- fees
- reduce
- pay
- tuition
- access
- funding
- lab
- learning
- open
- library
- support
- university
- office
- classes
- graduate
- mental
- international
- health
- queen’s
- queen
- work
- research
- job
- home
- books
- space
- online
- courses
- time
- complete
- courses
- lab
What are the next actionable steps for departments and the Faculty to support undergraduate and graduate students?