Continuous Improvement Review Process for COVID Response

Supporting Students During COVID-19: Listening to Student Voices

Dr. Wendy Craig
Samuel Kim, M.Sc.
Jordan Herbison, M.Sc.
COVID Review Overview

1. Teaching and Learning
   i. Survey undergraduate students (FAS)
   ii. Survey faculty (university wide)
   iii. ThoughtExchanges 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
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. ThoughtExchange FAS Departmental Managers

2. Organizational
   a. ThoughtExchange with Heads (FAS)
ThoughtExchange Question

“How could Queen’s University better support you as an undergraduate or graduate student during the COVID-19 pandemic?”
ThoughtExchange 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
ThoughtExchange Participants

Undergraduate Sample
- 317 Participants
- 289 Thoughts
- 6,992 Ratings

Graduate Sample
- 350 Participants
- 383 Thoughts
- 11,665 Ratings
Undergraduate ThoughtExchange 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?

- Less than last year
- About the same
- More than last year
- N/A
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?
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.

4.7 ★★★★★ (34 votes) Ranked #1 of 278

4.7 ★★★★★ (34 votes) Ranked #2 of 278
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 and 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.
Summary For Undergraduate Students

- 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
- Students want timely communication regarding response to COVID to ensure course and living arrangements
Graduate ThoughtExchange 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?

![Bar chart showing the disruptive impact of COVID-19 on various aspects of university life.](chart.png)
Frequency of Thoughts by Theme (Graduate)

- Lower Tuition/Student Costs or Raise Funding: 110
- Increase Access to Workspace/Resources: 43
- Improve Communication with Graduate Students: 40
- Support Students’ Mental Health: 32
- Extend Time/Funding Due to COVID Disruptions: 28
- Foster Student Connection: 22
- Feedback on Distance Learning - Student: 17
- Help Students Adapt to Work-from-Home Mandate: 14
- Increase Access to Library Resources: 14
- Increase Professional Development Opportunities: 13
- Reinstall Support for International Students: 12
- Return to In-Person Education: 10
- Feedback on Distance Learning - TA/TF: 6
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.

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.
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.

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.
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 and potential extended time in the program
- Stress and finances are negatively affecting mental health
- Students don’t feel their concerns are being heard/addressed
- Would like greater access to workspace/resources
- Students would like more connection to the Queen’s community
Comparisons between Undergraduate and Graduate Students
Undergraduate and Graduate Thought Exchange Comparison

- Lower Tuition and Student Fees
- Support Students’ Mental Health
- Increase Access to Workspace/Resources
- Improve Communication to Students
- Foster Student Connections
- Online Learning Requires Significantly More Time
- Make Course Delivery More Consistent
- Reduce Assignments and Readings
- Provide Clarity and Flexibility in Courses
- Mitigate Risks of Extended Screen Time
- Improve Use of OnQ and Other Technologies
- Provide More Synchronous Learning
- Improve Quality of Online Learning
- Extended Time/Funding Due to COVID Disruption
- Help Students Adapt to Work-from-Home Mandate
- Reinstate Support for International Students
- Increase Professional Development Opportunities
- Increase Access to Library Resources
- Feedback on Distance Learning - TA/TF
- Feedback on Distance Learning - Student
- Return to In-Person Education
Common Themes Among Students

Five themes to be similarly important and relevant for both UG and Graduate students:

- Lower Tuition/Fees
- Support Students’ Mental Health
- Increase access to workspace/resources
- Improve communication to students
- Foster student connections
Key Differences in Students’ Experience

Undergraduate

- classes
- work
- lectures
- support
- online
- course
- time
- learning
- assignments
- readings
- organized
- spending
- access
- spaces
- health
- help
- content
- professors
- hours
- pros
- mental
- pay

Graduate

- health
- mental
- international
- classes
- office
- graduate
-ARC
- fees
- reduce
- pandemic
- services
- provide
- financial
- job
- home
- research
- resources
- books
- space
- funding
- access
- courses
- time
- complete
- support
- university
- open
- library
- lab
- learning
Differences in Themes Among Students

- Undergraduates expressed thoughts on addressing the demands and quality of online, remote learning.
- Graduate students expressed thoughts on the need for the school to support their graduate research through improving access to resources and financial support.
Next Steps

- FAS is creating an action plan with concrete next steps, metrics, and timelines to address concerns in short term and long term

- Monitoring and assessing progress on proposed actions will continue

- A webpage will be created where progress can be viewed
Take Home Messages

● We are in this together

● These are challenging times for all and we recognize that!

● Committed to supporting and are responding with concrete actions

● Grateful for the work you do every day

● Critical learning to help us in time of COVID but also opportunity to understand what we do well and how we can do better moving forward
Thank you for making a difference by sharing your thoughts