DISTANCE/ONLINE TEACHING EXPERIENCE
INSTRUCTOR SURVEY
January 2021

Office of the Vice-Provost Academic Affairs in collaboration with the Teaching and Learning Support Service (TLSS)
Executive Summary
To gain a better understanding of the online teaching and learning experience to further enhance instructional and learning supports, surveys were administered to instructors and students at the end of the fall 2020 term. This summary report presents the findings from the instructor survey sent at the end of November 2020, garnering a 50% response rate (n=1,020).

Transition Experience
- For 62% of instructors, it was their first experience teaching a full course online.
- 76% had clear expectations regarding online instruction, and 75% shared that they feel prepared to teach online again in the winter 2021 term.
- By a margin of 10%, more APTPUO members than APUO members indicated: 1) clearly understanding expectations relating to online learning; 2) feeling adequately supported; 3) having access to the tools and resources needed to teach online; and 4) feeling prepared to teach online in the winter 2021 term.

Educational Technology
- Zoom was the most used platform by 90% of respondents, followed by Microsoft Teams (60%) and Adobe Connect (23%).
- Screen sharing, chat and synchronous video sessions (with instructor and students on screen) were the most used platform features by over 70% of instructors. These were equally deemed as easy to use by over 90% of instructors.

Challenges Experienced
- 75% of respondents shared that engaging students was the most challenging task that they experienced, followed by designing effective learning activities (61%).
- It should be noted that this is a shift compared to the challenges reported in May 2020, which were predominantly technological in nature: selecting the best technological tools (by 54% of instructors), followed by setting up exams (41%), and dealing with issues of technology not working as planned (40%).
- APUO members indicated a level of challenge across experiences at about 5-20% higher than APTPUO members.

Supports Used
- Over 70% indicated using TLSS how-to guides and webinars. Of these users, over 85% shared that these supports were at least somewhat helpful.
- Respondents reported a significant preference for remote support options such as e-mail, instructional video clips, webinars, short online guides.
- The most sought-after training/resource was identified as strategies for engaging students in online learning by 73% of respondents.
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Acknowledgements

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**Context**

In response to the physical distancing measures put in place in mid-March 2020 due to the COVID-19 outbreak, numerous changes to course modality and instructional practices have taken place. To follow-up on surveys administered in June 2020 with the goal of learning from recent experiences, and to continue to enhance instructional supports, the University Ottawa sought the input of all professors/instructors having taught during the fall 2020 term. The following document is a summary report of the main findings of this survey. It should be noted that 1,020 responses were received from across all faculties, which represented nearly 50% of the instructors who taught in the fall term. Survey invitations were sent to instructors in the language of preference based on their HR profile. Respondents could choose to switch and submit the survey in the language of their choice.

**Distance/Online Teaching Experience**

Overall, 62% of responding instructors shared that the transition to distance/online instruction was their first experience teaching a full course in this modality. 27% of respondents had 1-5 years of experience teaching distance/online courses and 10% had over 6 years of experience.

Figure 1 indicates the distribution of respondents by faculty. Civil Law had the most instructors for whom this was their first experience (86%) and Education had the least (30%). 71% of responding APUO members (n=487) reported teaching online for the first time, compared to 55% of responding APTPUO members (n=413).

*Figure 1. Instructors Teaching Remotely for the First Time (by Faculty)*

![Bar Chart](chart.png)
To gauge the level of readiness of instructors for distance/online instruction, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with five statements. Figure 2 outlines the percentage of instructors who selected either strongly agree or agree. Between 70-90% of respondents from the Faculties of Education and Engineering agreed with the five statements compared to between 50-75% of instructors from the Faculties of Medicine and Science. It should be noted that overall, levels of agreement across faculties have increased 10-30% from similar data collected from an instructor survey administered in June 2020.

Figure 2. Percentage of Instructors in Agreement (by Faculty)

- I have a clear understanding of expectations regarding distance/online instruction.
- I now have access to the tools and resources I need to teach in a distance/online modality.
- I currently feel supported in regards to the instructional aspects of my role.
- Since mid-March I have followed training or used educational resources that have helped me to transition to distance/online instruction.
- I feel good about my capacity to teach my courses in a distance/online modality in the winter term.
While no notable differences were observed between respondents in English \((n=634)\) and those in French \((n=384)\), Figure 3 outlines differences in responses between APTPUO members and APUO members. It should be noted that overall, levels of agreement for APUO members have increased 25-40% from similar data collected in June 2020. An increase of 5-25% was also observed for APTPUO members.

**Figure 3. Percentage of Instructors in Agreement (by Membership)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>APUO</th>
<th>APTPUO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I now have access to the tools and resources I need to teach in a distance/online modality.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a clear understanding of expectations regarding distance/online instruction.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I feel good about my capacity to teach my courses in a distance/online modality in the winter term.</td>
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<td>Since mid-March I have followed training or used educational resources that have helped me to transition to distance/online instruction.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I currently feel supported in regards to the instructional aspects of my role.</td>
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**Educational Technology Used**

To gain a better understanding of the types of tools and features that instructors chose to support their online course instruction, several questions asked instructors to identify the web conferencing platforms and features used and the extent that these met their needs, were easy to use, and helped facilitate student learning. Figure 4 outlines the web conferencing platforms most used by instructors (>10%). Tools specified as “Other” or for which there was <10% use included: WebEx, YouTube Live and WhatsApp. Zoom was the most used platform across all respondents at 90%, followed by Microsoft Teams (60%) and Adobe Connect (23%). When asked the extent to which these web conferencing platforms met most or all of their needs, users of Zoom scored this platform highest at 79%, followed by Microsoft Teams (30%) and Adobe Connect (30%).
Some variations of platform usage were noted across faculties (Figure 5). For instance, the most used platform in Engineering, by a margin of 14%, was Microsoft Teams. Faculties of Heath Science, Medicine and the Telfer School of Management were equally high users of the Microsoft Teams platform. No notable differences were observed between APUO and APTPUO members or by respondent language.
Figure 6 outlines the most used web conferencing features as well as the level of agreement regarding their ease of use and perceived ability to help student learning. Screen sharing, chat and synchronous video sessions (with instructor and students on screen) were the most used features by over 70% of instructors. While at least 70% of respondents listed all features as easy to use, those features with over 90% agreement were also screen sharing, chat and synchronous video sessions, in addition to document sharing. In terms of most helpful to student learning, screen sharing and document sharing were identified by over 85% of responding instructors. No notable differences were observed between APUO and APTPUO members or by respondent language.

**Figure 6. Web Conferencing Features Used**

![Bar chart showing the level of agreement for various web conferencing features.](chart)

When asked about Virtual Campus (the Brightspace platform), just over 80% of responding instructors were using at least one feature. Most respondents, however, indicated using the virtual campus primarily as a repository for course material/content. Other than the Virtual Campus and web conferencing platforms, respondents noted the use of several other online technologies or features in their courses. Figure 7 outlines the most used technologies with “instructor made” videos at 41%, followed by YouTube videos (31%) and PPT voice-over recordings (25%). Items listed under “Other” included Slack, Padlet and Perusall.
Concern about student engagement in online class sessions was among the top themes emerging from the survey data. When asked about instructional approaches used online and the extent to which instructors perceived a strong or moderate level of student engagement, pre-recorded video lectures, quizzes and paired/group work were the three most used instructional approaches. Those that were perceived to generate the strongest level of engagement by over 90% of respondents were quizzes, paired/group work, student presentations and guest speakers (see Figure 8). These results represent a jump of about 10% across all approaches compared to reported usage in June 2020. Further, data reveal a 25% increase in the use of pair and small group work as well as the use of polling and brainstorming tools as part of online courses.

In terms of variations of usage, APTPUO members reported using approaches such as journaling, simulations and peer-evaluation at about 10% more than APUO members. The only faculty that stood out was Education using quizzes fewest and reporting a use of paired/group work, discussion boards, journaling, and collective writing via blogs and wikis over 20% more than other faculties.
When asked the extent to which teaching in a distance/online modality changed the nature of, timing and frequency of course assessments and assignments, over 560 instructors had comments to share. The following themes emerged as the most frequently mentioned.

1. **The nature of what is being assessed has changed. (n=215)**

   “It forced stronger planning for intentional learning situations that coincide with the role of assessment. I integrated more formative assessment as opposed to more assignments to ensure that the learning was intentional.”
2. Switching larger assessments and assignments to more frequent smaller ones. \( (n=167) \)

“I had to come up with very specific criteria for participation. I did not give large tests (no midterm or final exam) and instead used a number of small quizzes and assignments to create the final grade and enhance learning.”

3. No change in the nature/timing/frequency of course assessments/assignments. \((n=152)\)

“I knew that the suggestions for adding innumerable mini-assignments and not having summative evaluations would not work in a university context. My students have told me that they are happy that my evaluations have stayed the same - in both size and length.”

4. Change in the timing of course assessments and assignments. \((n=76)\)

« Les évaluations ne sont plus synchrones. Je donne également plus de temps aux étudiants pour la production des travaux. »

Challenges Experienced

When asked to identify the level of challenge associated with a series of experiences lived during the instruction of their online courses in the fall 2020 term (using a Likert scale), responding instructors indicated that engaging students and designing effective learning activities were the most challenging tasks that they experienced. Figure 9 highlights, from most to least, the experiences that respondents identified as either moderately challenging or very challenging. Also represented in the figure below are differences in the level of challenge noted between APUO and APTPUO member respondents. Across the listed challenges, 5-20% more APUO members indicated these as moderate to significant challenges than APTPUO members. Responses were relatively consistent across faculties with a notable exception being the Faculties of Engineering and Science where respondents shared setting up exams/tests, troubleshooting issues during exams and issues with plagiarism/cheating among the top challenges. Another significant challenge that was not listed in the figure below, but that was frequently listed by respondents, was the amount of time necessary to prepare their online courses.
Figure 9. Most Significant Challenges Experienced (by Membership)

Figure 10 presents, in decreasing order of use, the measures that responding instructors put in place to prevent plagiarism and cheating in their online courses. The most common methods reported by over 60% of respondents were including a statement regarding academic integrity in the course syllabus and openly discussing issues of academic integrity in class or as part of the course. Compared to other faculties, considerably more respondents from the Faculty of Engineering reported using timed online assessments, randomized questions on exams and
integrating an academic integrity statement for students to attest to when submitting assignments. Also, about 50% of respondents from the Faculties of Education, Arts and Social Science indicated developing individualized assignments.

**Figure 10. Most Commonly Used Measures to Prevent Plagiarism and Cheating**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Statement regarding academic integrity expectations in the course syllabus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussed academic integrity in class or as part of the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed individualized assignments (e.g. presentations, projects)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timed online assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randomized questions on quizzes or exams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offered different versions of the same test/assignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic integrity statement that students had to attested to when submitting assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not used any specific measures to prevent plagiarism and cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used exam proctoring software</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used “Turnitin” or other comparable plagiarism detection software</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Workload**

When asked to describe the workload related to their instructional responsibilities this term, as compared to the fall term of 2019 (or a term with an equivalent teaching load), 84% of instructors indicated that it was more – 40% indicating that the workload was more than twice as much. Figure 11 highlights that a slightly higher proportion of APUO members reported their workload as greater, compared to APTPUO members. While quite close overall, workloads were noted as greatest by respondents in the Faculty of Medicine, with 97% reporting this as higher than the fall 2019 term.
Supports Used

In terms of the services, resources and supports used during the transition to distance/online instruction, over 70% of responding instructors indicated using TLSS how-to guides and participating in TLSS webinars. Nearly all other supports listed were reported as used by over 50% of respondents. All users of the supports and resources listed in Figure 12 were identified by 75-95% of respondents as at least somewhat helpful to them. Figure 12 also outlines the level of awareness of the listed supports – all but the teaching continuity and teaching remotely webpages were known by over 80% of respondents. No notable differences emerged across APUO and APTPUO members or language of respondents.
When asked about the likelihood of using specific services, training or resources to support future distance/online instruction, there was a significant preference for forms of remote support such as short instructional video clips, e-mail, and short online guides (see Figure 13). APTPUO members indicated a greater interest in all topics by a margin of 10-25% over APUO members, in particular for webinars and workshops. Several notable differences between respondents of the survey in French and in English are equally captured in Figure 13.

Respondents from the Faculty of Education clearly stood out as those most interested and likely to use the diversity of services and resources listed below, in particular 80% of respondents from Education noted a strong likelihood of using instructional video clips.
With regards to resource or training related topics, responding instructors shared that the greatest level of interest rests with learning more about strategies for engaging students in online learning (see Figure 14). This was followed by an interest in designing evaluations and assignments as well as setting up/facilitating group work in online courses.

Differences in responses from APTPUO and APUO members as well as by language of survey response were observed, particularly regarding interest in topics related to the Virtual Campus and use of Adobe Connect. The most significant faculty level difference was a standout preference in the topic of ensuring accessibility in online course development by respondents from the Faculty of Education.
Figure 14. Topics of Interest for Future Resources and Training (by Language and Membership)

- Strategies for engaging students in online learning
- Design of evaluations and assignments for online courses
- Setting up and facilitating group work online
- Recording and editing videos for online content
- Ensuring accessibility in online course development
- Using Zoom
- Grading features in virtual campus (Brightspace)
- Setting up a distance / online exam
- Basics of Virtual Campus (Brightspace)
- Class Progress feature in virtual campus (Brightspace)
- Using Microsoft Teams
- Using Adobe Connect

Languages: English, French, APUO, APTPUO
Opportunities Emerging from Online Instructional Experiences

In the spirit of looking for opportunities, instructors were asked what benefits from their distance/online teaching experiences might carry over to future instructional contexts. Below is a summary of the most frequently emerging themes from the 404 respondents to this question.

1. **The materials produced can be re-used for future courses. (n=126)**
   
   “All content created (and there was a lot! videos/application assignments/practice problem sets) will be reused. I will continue to use an online booking system for office hours and possibly continue to offer online office hours once in person resumes.”

2. **Offering synchronous & asynchronous modalities to increase flexibility/efficiency. (n=69)**
   
   “Un tout petit nombre de collègues offrent déjà des cours en format hybride : la théorie se fait en auto-apprentissage et les cours en présentiel servent à des activités d’application. Comme j’ai maintenant pratiquement toute la matière de base en vidéos préenregistrés, je songe sérieusement continuer avec une formule hybride après la pandémie. Les étudiants semblent bien profiter de cette approche.”

3. **Nothing, as the cons of online teaching and learning outweigh the pros. (n=50)**
   
   “None. Students are performing poorly and asking me questions that indicate that they are not paying attention when watching my videos/lectures. So I’m convinced that this is not the way to learn what I teach, though I’m sure it would work better for other subjects.”

4. **Use of web Brightspace and online tools to supplement learning. (n=49)**
   
   “I will definitely keep using video recording, One Note and quizzes. A lot of the tools used will be retained when back to full in-class teaching. The most important feature missing from online is the enforcement of the integrity of the examinations, that can be drastically improved when in class.”

5. **Continuing the use of renewed methods of student evaluation/assessment. (n=32)**
   
   “I have removed exams for evaluation and replaced them with frequent quizzes and timed in-class exercises. This appears to help to engage students and I will carry this approach over (at least partially) after the pandemic.”

Other themes included: Continued recording of live sessions, continued training with educational technology, continuing to offer virtual office hours as a way of connecting with students.
Summary of Themes across Open-Ended Comments

When asked to elaborate and comment on their teaching and learning experiences, 419 instructors had much to share. Below is a summary of the most frequently emerging themes along with several representative excerpts.

1. **Need for better support with technological tools and online transition. (n=88)**

   “I did not feel supported by the university during this time. While courses and webinars are somewhat useful, I found myself without the tools that I needed to deliver online material effectively (good quality microphone, webcam, software etc.).”

   “Online teaching requires familiarization with new technology and pedagogical strategies - both can be learned by professors if you provide them with adequate time (e.g. as done elsewhere: teach a 3-credit course but count it as 6 credit for workload) and if you provide them with IT + pedagogically trained support staff who actually supports instructors: e.g. adapts set-up in Brightspace from syllabus, sets up online exams, suggests targeted remote instruction learning tools. These are specialized skills which would be a welcome support for instructors IF they were provided (and not expected to be acquired by instructors). It often seems as if uOttawa has never heard of the division of labour but expects instructors to do everything themselves.”

2. **Online instruction is more time-consuming with a significant increase in workload. (n=71)**

   “It is an outrageous amount of work and depressing. I am honestly at the point of throwing my hands up and walking away... No support from my unit. [...]”

   « Il faut absolument que l'Université reconnaîsse que l'enseignement à distance représente une charge de travail largement supérieure à l'enseignement en présentiel. Il faut que cela soit pris en compte dans le calcul de la charge d'enseignement des profs. Il faut aussi que les profs aient accès à davantage d'assistants d'enseignement, car la majorité des activités chronophages pourraient aisément être prises en charge par des TA. [...] »

3. **Online teaching and learning is not optimal and provides lower quality education. (n=67)**

   « Les étudiants apprennent beaucoup moins par enseignement en ligne. Pour être assimilés, les contenus doivent être schématisés, ce qui va à l'encontre du niveau universitaire. L'enseignement en ligne, même quand le contenu est approfondi par des activités programmées ne remplace pas ce que les étudiants peuvent apprendre d'un contact direct avec le prof, entre autre parce que la spontanéité, les digressions utiles, et l'adaptation aux besoin de la classe en temps réel en sont éliminés. [...] Ma conclusion est que l'enseignement en ligne ne peut être une solution à long terme, ni en temps de pandémie, et encore moins en général. Un diplôme qui aurait été fait au 2/3 en ligne ne vaudrait presque rien à mon avis. »
4. **High stress and psychological strain experienced by instructors and students. (n=61)**

« Le contexte de la pandémie n'a vraiment pas facilité la tâche, ni aux profs, ni aux étudiants, et il est très lourd psychologiquement. Beaucoup de collègues et moi-même sommes fatigués psychologiquement. Je regrette un certain manque de considération de la part de l'Université dans ce domaine, qui s'est, il me semble, peu préoccupée du bien-être de ses employés. »

5. **The need for regulations to support online learning & netiquette related resources. (n=54)**

« L'université doit absolument développer un code de conduite pour les étudiants dans le cadre de cours en ligne. La distance et la possibilité de cacher leurs identités autorisent des débordements importants et exposent les professeurs à des abus terribles, sans recours. L'université doit trouver un moyen d'empêcher les étudiants de faire circuler les images et vidéos captées lors des cours en ligne. »

“I found it very hard to engage students who didn't turn on their cameras in Zoom. In future I would like students to have to sign a special form (through SASS?) in order to get permission NOT to use their cameras. I think that this has to be the exception not the rule.”

6. **This was an overall positive experience. (n=47)**

“My students have been positive and supportive and I feel that the TLSS is more supportive during the pandemic, which is respectful.”

“I enjoyed teaching online! Yes, there were some challenges with familiarizing with some of the tools and technology, but overall it was a pleasant experience.”

“There have been some advantages to online teaching; I now have a far more diverse student group. Inter-generational learning has been an unanticipated outcome.”