DISTANCE/ONLINE TEACHING EXPERIENCE
INSTRUCTOR SURVEY
Winter 2021

Office of the Vice-Provost Academic Affairs in collaboration with the Teaching and Learning Support Service (TLSS)
Executive Summary

Stemming from the findings of surveys administered in May and in late-November 2020, the University sought the continued input of instructors, students and TAs to gain a better understanding of the online teaching and learning experience to further enhance instructional and learning supports. This report presents a summary of findings from an instructor survey sent in early May 2021, obtaining a 47% response rate (n=984).

Transition Experience

- 78% of respondents had clear expectations regarding online instruction and 62% felt supported in regards to the instructional aspects of their roles.
- 83% shared that they feel prepared to teach online again in upcoming terms. A jump of nearly 10% from fall 2020.
- By a margin of about 10%, more APTPUO members than APUO members indicated: 1) feeling adequately supported and 2) feeling prepared to teach online in upcoming terms.

Educational Technology

- Zoom was the most used platform by 91% of respondents, followed by Microsoft Teams (47%) and Adobe Connect (10%). A drop of 10% for the latter two platforms since fall.
- Screen sharing, synchronous video sessions, and chat were the most used platform features by over 70% of instructors. These were equally deemed as easy to use by over 90% of instructors.

Instructional Approaches

- Among the approaches perceived to generate the strongest level of student engagement were quizzes, paired/group work, student presentations, and flexible evaluations.

Challenges Experienced

- 78% of respondents shared that the lack of in-person contact with students was the most challenging aspect of their experience, followed by engaging students at 70%.
- APUO members indicated a level of challenge across experiences at about 5-15% higher than APTPUO members.
- Overall, a 5-15% decrease in reported challenges was observed as compared to the fall 2020 term. A notable exception is an increase of 5% related to plagiarism and cheating.

Supports Used

- Over 50% indicated using TLSS how-to guides and webinars (down 20% from the fall). 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.
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Acknowledgements

This survey was coordinated by the Office of the Vice-Provost Academic Affairs in collaboration with the Teaching and Learning Support Service. Particular thanks go to the Office of Institutional Research and Planning for administering the survey and for their expertise and support with each step of the process. Thanks also go to the Vice-Deans and student service administrators who reviewed early drafts of the survey.
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 and late-November 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 winter 2021 term. The following document is a summary report of the main findings of this survey. It should be noted that 984 responses were received from across all faculties, which represented nearly 47% of the instructors who taught in the winter 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.

Readiness for Distance/Online Instruction
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 1 outlines the percentage of instructors who selected either strongly agree or agree over the last three academic terms. The most significant jump in readiness across the five statements was between the end of the spring 2020 term (which immediately followed the urgent transition to distance/online learning) and the end of the fall 2020 term.

Figure 1. Perceived Readiness of Instructors Across the 2020-2021 Academic Year

I had access to the tools and resources I need to teach in a distance/online modality.

I feel good about my capacity to teach courses in a distance/online modality in the upcoming term.

I had a clear understanding of expectations regarding distance/online instruction.

I have followed training or used educational resources this term that have helped me to transition to distance/online instruction.

I felt supported in regards to the instructional aspects of my role.
Figure 2 outlines the percentage of instructors who strongly agree or agree with the statements below across faculties. No major distinctions emerged regarding access to tools and clarity of expectations. Notable was that only 45-55% of instructors from the Faculties of Social Sciences, Science and Law (Civil section) felt supported in regards to the instructional aspects of their role, compared to approx. 75% of instructors from the Faculty of Education and Telfer. Also, instructors from the Faculties of Medicine and Science felt less good about their capacity to teaching online in the upcoming terms, by about 10% less than the institutional average.

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

- I had access to the tools and resources I need to teach in a distance/online modality.
- I had a clear understanding of expectations regarding distance/online instruction.
- I feel good about my capacity to teach courses in a distance/online modality in the spring-summer and/or fall term.
- Since fall 2020 I have followed training or used educational resources that have helped me to transition to distance/online instruction.
- I felt supported in regards to the instructional aspects of my role.
Figure 3 outlines differences between APUO members and APTPUO members. It should be noted that overall, levels of agreement for APUO members have increased 25-40% from initial data collected in June 2020. An increase of 10-25% was observed for APTPUO members. APTPUO members agreed that they felt good about their capacity to teach online by a margin of 13% over APUO members. Similarly, about 10% more survey respondents in French (n=370) indicated agreement with feeling good about their capacity to teaching online in the upcoming terms, as compared to respondents in English (n=614).

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

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: YouTube Live, Google Meet and WhatsApp. Zoom was the most used platform across all respondents at 91%, followed by Microsoft Teams (47%) and Adobe Connect (10%).
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 99%, followed by Microsoft Teams (82%) and Adobe Connect (73%). These results denote a jump from the fall 2020 term of 20% for Zoom, 30% for Microsoft Teams, and 40% for Adobe Connect. This may be indicative of instructors becoming more familiar with the features in each platform following 2-3 terms of usage.

**Figure 4. Web Conferencing Platforms Used and Needs Met**

Some variations of platform usage were noted across faculties (Figure 5). For instance, over 60% of instructors at Telfer and the Faculties of Engineering and Education reported using Microsoft Teams for at least one course. In terms of differences by language of survey response, Adobe Connect was reported as used by 14% of French respondents, compared to only 7% of English respondents. Similarly, 7% more APTPUO members used Adobe Connect compared to APUO members.

**Figure 5. Web Conferencing Platforms Used (by Faculty)**
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, synchronous video sessions (with instructor and students on screen), and chat 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 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. While slight increases in feature utilization were observed when compared to surveys from previous terms, no significant changes were noted.

**Figure 6. Web Conferencing Features Used**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Use</th>
<th>Easy to use</th>
<th>Helped facilitate student learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Screen share</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synchronous video (instruct. &amp; students cam)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chat</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synchronous session recording/video posting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Breakout groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Document sharing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Synchronous video (just the instruc. cam)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polling/quizzing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Whiteboard</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Annotation tools</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synchronous audio</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
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 as “instructor made” videos at 40%, followed by YouTube videos (34%) and PPT voice-over recordings (28%). No notable changes were observed from past surveys.

**Figure 7. Other Online Technologies Used**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technology</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Virtual Campus – Brightspace (for course material)</td>
<td>80+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual Campus – Brightspace (as a course...</td>
<td>80+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video recordings made by you</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube videos</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PowerPoint voice-over recordings</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google Docs</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio recordings made by you</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microsoft Teams (for course material)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant response/brainstorming tools</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal website</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Instructional Approaches**

Concern about student engagement in online class sessions continued to be 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, flexible assessment/assignment deadlines, pre-recorded video lectures, and paired/group work were the three most used approaches. Those that were perceived to generate the strongest level of engagement by over 90% of respondents were quizzes, paired/group work, student presentations, guest speakers, poling tools, and flexible evaluations and deadlines (see Figure 8). While reported usage remains similar to results from the survey at the end of the fall 2020 term, perceived student engagement appears to have increased slightly.
In terms of variations of usage, APTPUO members reported using approaches such as flexible modes of evaluation and peer-evaluation at about 10-15% 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, flexible evaluations, social media, portfolios and collective writing via blogs and wikis over 20-30% more than other faculties.

**Figure 8. Instructional Approaches Used to Engage Students**
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 517 instructors had comments to share. The following themes emerged as the most frequently mentioned.

1. **No change in the nature/timing/frequency of course assessments/assignments.** \((n=141)\)

   “It has not changed them. I did not listen to the advice given by the university about changing my assessments [adding more micro-assessments] - to the delight of students.”

2. **More frequent smaller assessments and assignments that are worth less.** \((n=65)\)

   “Number of assignments has increased as I add variety to student learning activities --- usually short formative assignments, but more of them.”

   “Things changed significantly. Added a few more minor assignments (between 5% and 10%), added weekly quizzes (12 in total, worth 25% - a lot of extra work), changed final written exam to final take-home project worth 20% rather than 25%.”

3. **Increased flexibility, understanding, and accommodation with regards to due dates/deadlines.** \((n=61)\)

   “I have welcomed flexible due dates (with some restrictions) and the creative ways that are now possible (or students are more interested in) through online modalities.”

4. **Changes implemented for an online modality resulted in an increase in workload.** \((n=38)\)

   “It required a whole restructuring of courses and required more time to put in for design, teaching, responses, modifications. Students seem overwhelmed and expect "high school treatment" which is unacceptable. Profs. have to manage learning activities, assessments and lectures while not overwhelming students with assignments and this is challenging as one has to have appropriate assessments and serious ones.”

5. **Fewer assessments and assignments.** \((n=33)\)

   “I used fewer assessments to lower stress, but then designed them to still assess the course material. It worked well and I did feel I had a solid sense of how much the students had learned. More assessments mean more engagement, but this worked fine under the circumstances.”

   « J’ai combiné les RA de deux travaux en créant un seul travail; j’ai donné des options de travaux; j’ai éliminé les travaux de groupe sommatifs. »

**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 winter 2021 term (using a Likert scale), responding instructors indicated that the lack of in-person contact with students and engaging students as the most challenging aspects of their winter instructional experience. 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, 5-15% 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 (by a margin of 15-25% over the respondent average). Overall, these results indicate a 5-15% decrease in reported challenges as compared to the fall 2020 term. A notable exception is an increase of 5% related to plagiarism and cheating.

**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 method reported by 70% of respondents was including a statement regarding academic integrity in the course syllabus, followed by openly discussing issues of academic integrity in class or as part of the course at 64%. 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. Overall, these results are very similar to those observed in the fall 2020 term.

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

- Statement regarding academic integrity expectations in the syllabus
- Discussed academic integrity in class or as part of the course
- Developed individualized assignments (e.g. essays, presentations, projects)
- Randomized questions on quizzes or exams
- Timed online assessments
- Offered different versions of the same test/assignment
- Academic integrity statement that students had to attest to when submitting assignments
- Not used any specific measures to prevent plagiarism and cheating
- Used exam proctoring software (e.g. Respondus)
- Used “Turnitin” or other comparable plagiarism detection software
Workload
When asked to describe the workload related to their instructional responsibilities during the winter 2021 term, as compared to a pre-pandemic winter term (or a term with an equivalent pre-pandemic teaching load), 77% of all responding instructors indicated that it was more – 30% indicating that the workload was more than twice as much. Figure 11 breaks down responses for the specific groupings (APUO and APTPUO) and indicates that a higher proportion of APUO members reported their instructional workload as greater, compared to APTPUO members. While quite close overall, workloads were noted as greatest by respondents in the Faculties of Arts and Engineering, with approx. 85% reporting this as higher than an equivalent pre-pandemic term. Overall, a decrease of 10% was observed in respondents stating that the workload was more than twice as much, compared to reported workload in the fall 2020 term.

**Figure 11. Instructional Workload in Winter 2021 compared to pre-pandemic term**

![Graph showing workload comparison between APUO and APTPUO members]

Supports Used
In terms of the services, resources and supports used during the transition to distance/online instruction, over 50% of responding instructors indicated using TLSS how-to guides, participating in TLSS webinars and using Brightspace support or video clips. Nearly all other supports listed were reported as used by 40-50% of respondents. All users of the supports and resources listed in Figure 12 were identified by at least 80% 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 instruction, there was a significant preference for forms of remote support such as email, short online guides, short instructional video clips, and webinars (see Figure 13). APTPUO members indicated a greater interest in all topics by a margin of 10-15% over APUO members, in particular for webinars. 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 a diversity of services and resources listed below by a margin of 15-30%. Overall, these results indicated a 15-20% increase in likelihood of using specific services/resources as compared to reports from fall 2020.
With regards to resource or training related topics, responding instructors shared that the greatest level of interest remains with supporting student mental health and with learning more about strategies for engaging students in online learning (see Figure 14).

Differences in responses from APTPUO and APUO members as well as by language of survey response were observed and are captured in Figure 14. Notable differences at the faculty level included greater interest by respondents from the Faculty of Education in the topics of Setting up and facilitating group work online and Using Microsoft Teams. Overall, a 10% increase was observed from fall 2020 results.
Figure 14. Topics of Interest for Future Resources and Training (by Language and Membership)

- Supporting student mental health
- Strategies for engaging students in online learning
- Design of evaluations and assignments for online courses
- Grading features in virtual campus (Brightspace)
- Setting up and facilitating group work online
- Recording and editing videos for online content
- Adopting a universal design approach for an inclusive online course
- The design of a bi-modal course
- Assessment of learning in a bi-modal course
- Class Progress feature in virtual campus (Brightspace)
- Preventing and working through issues of incivility
- Using Zoom
- Setting up a distance / online exam
- Basics of Virtual Campus (Brightspace)
- Using Microsoft Teams
- Using Adobe Connect

English | French | APUO | APTPUO
0% | 10% | 20% | 30% | 40% | 50% | 60% | 70% | 80% | 90%
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 343 respondents to this question.

1. **Instructional materials produced can be re-used for future courses.** ($n=131$)
   
   « Les vidéos crées pour un module en ligne pourraient être réutilisé dans de futurs cours. »

2. **More creativity in the teaching method/delivery to facilitate active learning and engagement.** ($n=77$)

   “Being creative about delivering content, assignment design and engaging students. Thinking about teaching differently has helped me grow as a teacher.”

   “The variety in created content and approach may help support diversity in student needs. It supports creativity in an array of problem-solving circumstances.”

3. **No benefits from distance/online teaching experiences to carry over.** ($n=48$)

   “I will not use any. My students did not have the proper experience that they needed. It was quite challenging. It is also quite tiring on students’ side.

   « Je trouve que l’enseignement en ligne pose un problème par rapport à la motivation et aux résultats d’apprentissage des étudiants. J’espère que cet épisode d’enseignement en ligne était ponctuel et provisoire et qu’on retournera dans les salles de classe bientôt. »

4. **Reusing and integrating a repository of newly designed learning activities.** ($n=38$)

   “A library of actual learning and discussion exercises. Overall re-orientation of synchronous sessions to active learning and discussion.”

   “Created more pre-class active learning activities which prepared students better for in-class active learning.”

5. **Reusing a repository of newly designed assessments.** ($n=34$)

   “Open book online exam and quiz contents can be reused.”

   « Certaines questions d’examen/quiz montées dans le Campus Virtuel (fonction questionnaire) pourront être réutilisées. »
Summary of Themes across Open-Ended Comments

When asked to elaborate and comment on their teaching and learning experiences, 344 instructors had much to share. Below is a summary of the most frequently emerging themes along with several representative excerpts.

1. **Overall negative experience and preference for a F2F modality. (n=68)**

   “Online teaching and remote learning is a joke. The up third of the class can make this work, the rest cannot. The level of cheating that I have become aware of over the past year makes any claim about the rigor of the program and the value of a degree from our institution a farce. Please don’t fool yourselves into thinking that this is in any way a comparable alternative to in-person education. Throwing an endless amount of online resources, tools and supports, will not replace the most important aspect of education - the live interaction among students and instructors and the real-time discussion of ideas.”

   “Hopefully we return to in-person teaching as soon as possible and do not continue to pursue inferior online options unless absolutely necessary.”

2. **Overall positive experience and growth as an instructor. (n=62)**

   “Virtual learning is the future trend. Overall students are getting used to it. It is a great opportunity for students to: 1) work and attend class; 2) easy if they have family with kids and not have to leave home to be in class; 3) students from across the globe can study with ease remotely; 4) decrease on travel time - can/is an issue with students; 5) getting an additional experience to what they will encounter when going into the workforce-companies are engaging more and more in remote offices. Students should have the option to enroll in online classes - it helps them in the short and long run. U of Ottawa also opens (increase enrollment=$) it’s doors to a multi-cultural student population so that students across the world study (remotely) and be part of the U of O community!”

   “Although in-person is obviously preferred, I had a very positive experience teaching online this year and found innovative ways to engage students.”

3. **The need to address workload and burnout. (n=42)**

   “Workload was significantly more than prepandemic. Teaching assistant hours were not sufficient. Everyone struggled, but professors were the ones who had to pull through and meet expectations with minimum resources and this can lead to burnout.”

   “Recognition of the effects of this transition on workloads moving forward is crucial. This is not sustainable unless changes are made in how workloads are determined and assigned. I fear that the added stresses, and general disconnect between students and faculty, associated with online learning will lead to disenchantment of students and faculty alike.”
4. Experiencing technological issues and the need for additional, accessible, and user-friendly technological/IT support. (n=38)

« Pour ce qui est du Service informatique... Ce service s’est carrément détérioré depuis le début de la pandémie. Si j’ai bien compris, on a choisi de réduire le nombre de postes, ce que je trouve tout à fait curieux en pleine pandémie où nous dépendons encore plus sur l'appui des techniciens et des techniciennes en informatique. Aussi, toutes ces nouvelles mesures de sécurité sont un irritant pour ce qui est de l’enseignement en ligne. Est-ce vraiment nécessaire? »

« Pour le SGA : Simplifier le carnet de note. Services techniques : trop de différents départements qui rend le processus d'accès à des réponses et solutions très long. De plus, il y avait une réduction des effectifs ce qui est un non-sens lorsque l'enseignement était en ligne. »

5. Difficulty teaching students with their cameras turned off. (n=36)

“The policy which allows students to opt out of turning on their cameras works at counter purposes to engagement strategies. Further it seems not all are following this policy. Faculty of Arts insisted that we could not require cameras to be on. Teaching to a black screen is detrimental to pedagogical efforts and is harmful to a teacher’s mental health. This policy makes teaching online unsupportable.”

“Although I teach synchronous classes where students are encouraged to have their cameras on, most of the students do not do it. I find this very frustrating, and it diminishes the educational experience, especially in arts and social science courses where controversial and sensitive content is addressed and where discussions are key. Not being able to see students' reactions, their body language is stressful. I would like to see a university policy stating that professors are able to request (not only encourage) that students have their cameras on.”