TRANSITION TO DISTANCE/ONLINE LEARNING:
INSTRUCTOR SURVEY
May 2020

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

In response to the COVID-19 outbreak, University of Ottawa courses transitioned to distance/online instruction in March 2020. To gain a better understanding of this transition experience and plans for spring/summer courses, a survey was sent to 2160 professors in mid-May garnering a 48% response rate.

Transition Experience

- For 66%, it was their first experience with distance/online instruction.
- 62% feel prepared to transition to distance/online instruction for the fall 2020 semester.
- 23-31% more APTPUO members, than APUO members, indicated: 1) having previous experience that helped with the transition online; 2) clearly understanding expectations relating to the transition; 3) feeling adequately supported during the transition; 4) having access to the tools and resources needed to transition; and 5) feeling prepared to transition fall courses to a distance/online modality.

Educational Technology

- 67% used Zoom. When asked what educational technology the University should continue, or begin, to support, Zoom was ranked highest (66%), followed by Microsoft Teams (40%) and Adobe Connect (34%).
- 60% used synchronous video calls. 85% of these users shared that it was easy to use and 74% indicated that it helped facilitate student learning.

Challenges Experienced

- 54% of respondents shared that selecting the best technological tools or features was the most challenging task they experienced, followed by setting up exams (41%), and dealing with issues of technology not working as planned (40%).
- English survey respondents indicated living challenging experiences more than French respondents.
- APUO members indicated a level of challenge across experiences at about 4-16% higher than APTPUO members.

Supports Used

- Over 50% indicated using TLSS how-to guides, webinars, instructional video clips, the TLSS website and Virtual Campus (Brightspace) e-mail or phone support.
  - 60-95% of users 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 and phone/web conferencing support.
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Acknowledgements
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Context

In response to the physical distancing measures put in place in mid-March 2020, numerous changes to course modality and instructional practices took place in very short order. To learn from these experiences, and to further enhance instructional supports, such as the availability of online technologies, how-to guides, and training options, the University Ottawa sought the input of all professors having taught during the winter 2020 semester and those who had just begun teaching in the spring/summer 2020 semester. The following document is a summary report of the main findings of this survey. It should be noted that responses were received from across all faculties and represented 48% of the 2160 professors who taught in the aforementioned semesters. Survey invitations were sent to professors 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.

Transition Experience

Overall, 66% of responding professors shared that the transition to distance/online instruction was their first experience teaching in this modality. 22% of respondents had 1-5 years experience teaching distance/online courses and 12% had over 6 years experience.

Figure 1 indicates the distribution of respondents by faculty. Civil Law had the most professors for whom this was their first experience (88%) and St-Paul had the least (19%).

Figure 1. Professors Teaching Remotely for the First Time (by Faculty)
To gauge the level of readiness of professors who transitioned from face-to-face to distance/online learning, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with five statements. Figure 2 outlines the percentage of professors who selected either strongly agree or agree. Between 75-90% of professors from St-Paul and the Faculty of Education agreed with the statements compared to between 33-59% of professors from the Faculties of Medicine and Social Sciences. It should be noted that overall, 539 professors (62% of respondents) indicated that they felt prepared to transition to distance/online instruction for the fall semester.

**Figure 2. Percentage of Professors in Agreement (by Faculty)**
While no notable differences were observed between respondents in English (n=550) and those in French (n=321), Figure 3 outlines differences in responses between APTPUO members (n=274) and APUO members (n=427). Levels of agreement with the statements are between 23-31% greater for APTPUO members.

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

- I had previous training and/or experience that helped me to transition to distance and/or online learning.
- I had a clear understanding of expectations relating to the transition to distance and/or online learning.
- I felt adequately supported during the transition to distance and/or online learning.
- I had access to the tools and resources I needed to transition to distance and/or online learning.
- I feel prepared to transition to distance and/or online learning should it be needed in the fall semester.

Educational Technology Used

To gain a better understanding of the types of tools and features that professors chose to support their instructional transition to a distance/online learning modality, several questions asked professors to identify the tools/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 professors (>10%) and the extent to which these tools met most or all of their needs. Tools specified as “Other” or for which there was <10% use included: WebEx, YouTube Live, Echo 360, WhatsApp, FaceTime and Jitsi. By a margin of 31%, Zoom was the most used platform. The ranking of the platforms in Figure 4 is largely consistent across faculties with the notable exception of respondents from the Faculty of Education and St. Paul who ranked Adobe Connect 2nd after Zoom at 57% and 67% respectively. No notable differences were observed between APUO and APTPUO members or by respondent language.
Figure 4. Web Conferencing Platforms Used

Figure 5 indicates the most used web conferencing features as well as level of agreement regarding their ease of use and perceived ability to help student learning. Synchronous video calling, where both instructor and student cameras are live, was used in 60% of courses followed by screen sharing and chat features.

Figure 5. Web Conferencing Features Used
When asked about Virtual Campus (the Brightspace platform), 80% of responding professors were using at least one feature. Popular features included file uploads (78%), assignments (67%), announcements (66%), and grades (59%). Lesser used features were surveys (8%), rubrics (11%), groups (17%), and discussions (33%). Faculties making the greatest use of Virtual Campus features were the Faculty of Engineering, Telfer and the Faculty of Health Sciences. Faculties using these features the least were Common and Civil Law and the Faculty of Arts. No notable differences were observed between APUO and APTPUO members or by respondent language.

Other than the Virtual Campus and web conferencing platforms, respondents noted the use of several other online technologies or features in their courses. Figure 6 outlines the most used technologies with YouTube videos being the most used at 34%. Items listed under “Other” included SurveyMonkey, Slack, Padlet and Top Hat Monocle.

**Figure 6. Other Online Technologies Used**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Online Technology</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YouTube videos</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PowerPoint voice-over recordings</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video recordings made by the instructor</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google Docs</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio recordings made by the instructor</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal website</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student response tools (e.g. Socrative, Kahoot)</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked what educational technology the University of Ottawa should continue, or begin, to support, responding professors indicated Zoom (66%) at the top of the list, followed by Microsoft Teams (40%) and Adobe Connect (34%). Rankings were consistent across faculties with the exception of respondents from the Faculty of Education and St-Paul placing Adobe Connect second on their list. No notable differences were observed between APUO and APTPUO members or by respondent language. The most frequently mentioned technology under “Other” was Camtasia.

**Instructional Approaches**

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 professors perceived a strong level of student engagement, quizzes, short videos and student presentations were the most used and the approaches which were perceived to generate the strongest level of engagement (see Figure 7). Other approaches
mentioned by survey respondents which were used by less than 10% of the total included: online treasure hunts, online breakout groups, and case studies.

**Figure 7. Instructional Approaches Used to Engage Students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Approach</th>
<th>Net use</th>
<th>Strong student engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quizzes</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short video recorded lectures</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student presentations (streamed or recorded)</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion boards</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paired or small group work</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student responses via polling/voting tools</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer-evaluation</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guest speakers</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media (e.g. twitter, facebook)</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journaling activity</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective writing via blogs or wikis</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

About half of professors having been awarded funds, or followed training, related to the Blended Learning Initiative (BLI) indicated that their experience with blended learning had greatly helped them in terms of knowledge and comfort level with the terminology of online learning and related tools as well as the utility and functions of Virtual Campus (Brightspace).

Of respondents indicating that they had previously participated in training and taught in the CRX Active Learning Classrooms (ALCs) a third indicated that they were able to adapt and replicate certain group activities for online instruction. A quarter of these instructors equally shared that experience in the ALCs allowed them to become familiar with online educational tools that benefited them when transitioning to completely online instruction.
Challenges Experienced

When asked to identify the level of challenge associated with a series of experiences lived during the transition to distance/online learning (using a Likert scale), responding professors indicated that selecting the best technological tools or features was by far the most challenging task they experienced. Figure 8 highlights, from most to least, the experiences that respondents identified as either challenging or very challenging. Also represented in the figure below are differences in the level of challenge noted between English and French respondents as well as between APUO and APTPUO respondents. When filtering by language, English respondents indicated living challenging (or very challenging) experiences 3-19% more than French respondents. Filtering by professor membership, those affiliated with the APUO indicated a level of challenge across experiences at about 4-16% higher than APTPUO members did. Also of note, was that professors for which it was their first time largely lived the same challenges (and level of challenge) as those who had taught in a distance/online modality before. Other significant challenges that are not listed below, but that were experienced by about 10% of respondents include: student cheating, amount of preparation time needed to teach online, quality of the internet connection and lack of time.

Figure 8. Most Significant Challenges Experienced (by Language and Membership)
Supports Used

In terms of the services, resources and supports used during the transition to distance/online instruction, over 50% of responding professors indicated using, or participating in, TLSS how-to guides, webinars, instructional video clips, the TLSS website and Virtual Campus e-mail or phone support. For these, and all other listed supports and resources, between 60-95% of respondents shared that they were at least somewhat helpful to them. Figure 9 outlines the most used resources and the percentage of respondents identifying them as helpful by professor membership. APTPUO members reported using TLSS services between 10-15% more than APUO members. Equally, about 15% more APTPUO members, than APUO members, reported TLSS services as being at least somewhat helpful to them. Other notable observations were that English survey respondents reported using TLSS consultation 12% more than French respondents. While no major differences between faculties emerged, it was clear that among the largest users of supports were the Faculties of Education and Health Sciences, and among the least were St-Paul, Common Law and the Faculty of Medicine. In respondent comments there was considerable mention of difficulty getting through to Brightspace support.

Figure 9. Support Services and Resources Used and Percentage of Professors Identifying Support as Helpful (by Membership)
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 e-mail, instructional video clips, webinars, short online guides and phone/web conferencing support (see Figure 10). APTPUO members indicated a greater interest in webinars (>10%) than APUO members, however, shared an equal level of interest in e-mail/phone support and use of short online guides and videos. Respondents from the Faculty of Health Sciences and Telfer were most likely to use webinars and phone/e-mail support at 80% and 75% respectively. Whereas respondents from St-Paul and the Faculty of Medicine were least likely to use these same services at about 60%. Open-ended comments made by respondents regarding support services largely included the need for more live individualized support (even if done remotely), and interest in more discipline specific pedagogical support.

**Figure 10. Likelihood of Using a Specific Service or Resource**

With regards to resource or training related topics, responding professors shared the greatest level of interest in themes that supported engaging and accessible online student learning experiences (see Figure 11). Differences in responses from APTPUO and APUO members were observed, particularly regarding interest in topics related to the Virtual Campus and Adobe Connect web conferencing. The most significant faculty level difference was a standout preference in the topic of setting up distance/online exams by respondents from the Faculties of Engineering (83%) and Science (78%), and a preference by those from the Faculty of Education for topics about facilitating group work online (83%). Other topics of interest frequently brought up by respondents were dealing with issues of academic integrity online, and sessions showcasing varied educational technology options with discussion of pedagogical pros and cons.
Summary of Themes across Open-Ended Comments

When asked to elaborate and comment on their recent experiences transitioning to distance/online instruction, over half of respondents had much to share. Below is a summary of the most frequently emerging themes along with several representative excerpts.

1. **The transition felt chaotic and rushed and many instructors were overwhelmed**

   “This has been a very difficult transition. It is very difficult to engage with students without seeing their body language and expressions (when their cameras are off to speed-up the Internet connection) or hearing their voices (when on mute to avoid interruptions). I also found that the amount of student emails I managed significantly increased. While my workload increased, the time available to work decreased. Online/distance learning ought to be used exceptionally and not become a staple in the future.”

2. **Concern regarding cheating and how to offer exams online**

   “I have not had an issue with delivering my online course component. The only challenging issue for me is cheating. I would like to see serious investment from uOttawa on anti-cheating measures because the current measures are poorly implemented.”

3. **A need for more individualized technical and pedagogical support**

   « Il est essentiel de nous fournir du soutien technique en nous donnant accès à une personne-ressource que l’on peut consulter de vive voix. »
« L'accès à une personne-ressource est vital - recevoir des pages et des pages d'information devenait un peu décourageant. »

4. **Given the circumstances, the University/Faculties/TLSS dealt with the crisis well**

“I believe that the university management has put significant efforts and resources to make the transition as smooth as possible. It was very successful, however the time has come to focus on and adopt one specific technology for distance learning. That, I believe, will contribute to a better utilization of the resources, and in the same time make the distance learning a well-structured and organized activity. Further, if it is not done yet, I think the university should develop regulations, guidelines, and procedures for different learning activities such as assessment, labs, attendance... tailored for distance learning.”

5. **Eagerness to learn more and be better prepared for online learning.**

“I am eager to learn how to continue teaching students in the most up to date platform possible so that their experiences are positive, instructive and accessible.”

“This is a critical time for everyone so let us be flexible and adaptive to new online technologies and the environment we surround.”

“It has been a very rewarding experience. It is important to embrace what technology has to offer. Combining this with solid pedagogy is the way of the future.”

6. **Concern for students' level of engagement, morale and overall experience**

“Student morale was a big factor in the transition. Dealing with the emotional impact it had on students was a factor in maintaining course cohesion and continuity. Also, accessibility to tech options for students was a factor, as not all students had equal access.”

“Student trust and buy-in is essential! They need to be able to trust that you can do the job - if they don't, they won't engage. I think it's also important not to overcomplicate things - to keep everything streamlined, clear, simple, and in as few places as possible.”