



Fall 2020 Pulse Survey on Technology - Survey Results

Introduction

This report provides a brief overview of the results of the Fall 2020 Pulse Survey on Technology, which UW-Whitewater administered to students enrolled in the Fall 2020 semester on both UW-Whitewater campuses. With a response rate exceeding 21% of the survey population, the results of the survey provide helpful insights into how students are coping with the impact of the COVID-19 on instruction modalities at UW-Whitewater.

Survey Design and Administration

The Survey on Technology contained eight (8) substantive questions related to the student experience using technology to navigate their coursework during the Fall 2020 semester. Six (6) of the questions in the survey were multiple choice questions. Two (2) of the questions asked students to provide a text response. Demographic information was not requested of respondents; instead, demographic variables were associated with the panel used to invite the students through a personalized email to participate in the survey.

The survey was administered by the Office of Institutional Research and Planning (IRP) to a survey population of approximately 11,340 students identified by the Registrar's office as currently enrolled at either the Whitewater or Rock County campuses as of the beginning of October 2020. This included just over 9,700 students with undergraduate status (approximately 700 of which were primarily enrolled on the Rock County campus), and approximately 1,460 students with graduate student status. Of the population surveyed, 15% were identified as underrepresented minority (URM) students, while 17.5% were identified as having received a Federal Pell Grant (a marker of low-income status) when they began their academic career at UW-Whitewater. Additionally, 34.9% of the survey population self-identified as first-generation college students.

Initial invitations were sent on 12 October 2020. The survey was open to respondents for one week (until 19 October 2020), during which time two reminder emails were sent to non-responders in the survey population. Overall, 2,612 students started the survey and 2,411 students from the survey population completed the survey, resulting in a 21.3% response rate. The undergraduate student response rate was 21.9% while the graduate student response rate was 17.7%. The vast majority of the respondents are primarily active on the Whitewater campus, with only 12.7% of the survey population associated with the Rock Campus completing the survey. Among the undergraduate respondents, first-year were slightly overrepresented, accounting for 24.2% of respondents (while only representing 21.0% of the survey population); in comparison, graduate students were underrepresented, accounting for 11.1% of respondents (while representing 12.4% of the survey population).

With regard to demographics, 16.5% of all respondents were identified as URM students, while approximately 18.9% of undergraduate respondents were identified as receiving a Federal Pell Grant when they began their

academic career at UW-Whitewater.¹ Additionally, 20.3% of undergraduate respondents self-identified as first-generation college students. Eighteen (18) international students completed the survey, representing just under a quarter of the survey population with international student status. These demographic factors should be taken into account when interpreting the survey results.

Findings

Undergraduates

In the survey, the respondents were asked a series of questions designed to measure the academic challenges they faced related to the extensive use of technology in classroom this semester. The first question asked respondents to indicate the extent to which face technological challenges this semester. Amongst undergraduate respondents, 39% indicated that they were having difficulty accessing reliable internet service, while 38% indicated that instructor discomfort or lack of familiarity with required technology was a challenge.²

The second question asks students to identify which learning/educational issues have been challenging this semester. Just over 55% of undergraduate respondents reported difficulty focusing or paying attention to remote instruction, while approximately half indicated that they found it difficult to maintain the personal motivation to complete coursework. In addition, over 40% of undergraduate respondents indicated that feeling connected to instructors and unclear expectations around coursework were a challenge this semester. Just under forty percent of respondents expressed a personal preference for face-to-face instruction.

The third question asks students to indicate the nature of their concerns regarding coursework this fall. Half of undergraduate respondents reported concerns regarding their grades and performance in class, while 45% had concerns about their inability connect with classmates. Just over 40% of respondents indicated that they were not able to communicate with instructors to the extent that they desired. In contrast, only a quarter indicated that they had difficulty hearing their instructor in hybrid class situations, and only about 20% had concerns about completing hands-on work.

The fourth question asks students to identify technology-related accessibility issues. Just over half of respondents indicated that they had no issues. Of those who did have issues, almost one-third of respondents indicated that timed tests were an issue, while just under a quarter indicated that materials and activities that should be in Canvas were not available to them.

The fifth question asks students whether they have faced challenges access student support services during the semester. Over eighty percent responded that they had not faced any challenges. Of the services that students indicated they did find challenging to access, the top three were tutoring services, career services and academic advising. Less than 4% of respondents indicated that they had difficulty accessing counseling or health care services.

The final question asks students about their participation in face-to-face instruction. One-quarter of respondents indicated that they were not enrolled in any face-to-face classes this semester. Of those enrolled in any face-to-face instruction, almost 30% responded that they attended all of their face-to-face classes in person each week,

¹ It is important to note that data on Pell Grant eligibility for first-time first-year students and first-time transfer students was not available when this survey was administered. This data usually becomes available 9 months after students enroll.

² Instructor discomfort with technology is also frequently mentioned in the text based question responses.

and only 12% indicated that they did not attend any of their face-to-face classes in person each week, with the remaining 33% indicating that they attended some or most of their face-to-face classes in person each week.

Underrepresented Minority (URM) Undergraduate Students

The responses of undergraduate URM respondents varied in several ways from the population as a whole. With regard to the first question, almost twice as many URM respondents indicated that they found it challenging to access a reliable digital device for classwork (8.9% compared with 5.0% of the general undergraduate population). With regard to the second question, the top challenge for URM respondents was personal motivation to complete coursework (with 56.1% indicating this is a challenge, compared with 51.3% of the general undergraduate population). In addition, more undergraduate URM respondents indicated that they had issues with class participation in synchronous classes (32.9% compared with 27.2%) and that they faced challenges related to competing class meetings and schedules (20.2 % compared with 13.6% of the general undergraduate population).

With regard to the third questions, URM respondents generally expressed more concerns regarding their coursework than the general undergraduate population. In particular, URM respondents were more concerned about their grades than the general undergraduate population (55.7% compared with 50.7%) and almost a quarter of URM respondents were also concerned that the completion of their program and/or graduation might be delayed (compared with 15.5% of general undergrad population).

Similarly, URM respondents generally expressed more concerns regarding accessibility issues than the general undergraduate population. While approximately the same number of URM respondents indicated that they did not have any technology-related accessibility issues, of those who did, more URM students expressed concerns about timed test, courses being held asynchronously, and courses not using technology tools in ways that supported individual learning.

Likewise, more URM respondents indicate that they faced challenges accessing student support services than the general undergraduate population. In particular, URM students indicated that they faced challenges accessing financial aid services, tutoring services, counseling services, academic advising and career services.

Lastly, 28 % of URM respondents indicated that they were not enrolled in any face-to-face classes this semester. Of those respondents who did have face-to-face classes, fewer indicated that they attend all of these classes in person each week (19% compared with 29% of the general undergraduate population).

Pell Grant Recipient Respondents

Similarly to URM respondents, the responses of Pell Grant recipients (a.k.a. students who were eligible to receive a Pell Grant in their first year at UW-Whitewater) varied in several ways from the population as a whole. With regard to the first question, Pell Grant recipient respondents expressed more discomfort or lack of familiarity with required technologies (21.9% compared with 19.2% of the general undergraduate population). More notably, approximately five percent more Pell Grant recipient respondents indicated that they faced challenges accessing a reliable digital device (10.1%), accessing specialized software for classes (17.8%) and accessing reliable communication software (17.2%) compared with the general undergraduate population.

With regard to the second question, more Pell Grant recipient respondents indicated that they faced learning/educational challenges in all of the listed categories, in comparison with general undergraduate population. Specifically, a greater number of Pell Grant recipient respondents indicated that they faced challenges related to competing class meeting and schedules (19.1% compared with 13.6% of the general

undergraduate population). Additionally, more Pell Grant recipient respondents indicated a personal preference for face-to-face learning (46.4% compared with 39.7% of the general undergraduate population).

Similarly to the second question, more Pell Grant recipient respondents indicated that they had experience concerns with coursework in response to the third question than the general undergraduate population. While concerns about grades and performing well in class was also the top concern of Pell Grant recipient respondents, ten percent (10%) more of these respondents indicates this was a concern (compared with the general undergraduate population). Similarly, almost nine percent (9%) more Pell Grant recipient respondents indicated they were concerned that the situation this fall might delay graduation. More of the Pell Grant recipient respondents also responded that they had difficulty hearing instructors and difficulty completing hands-on work.

With regard to the fourth questions, more Pell Grant recipient respondents indicated that they had technology-based accessibility issues in all of the listed response categories. In fact, these respondents were over ten percent less likely to indicate that they had not experienced any issues, in comparison with the general undergraduate population. Similarly, with regard to the fifth question, more Pell Grant recipient respondents indicated that they faced challenges accessing student support services than the general undergraduate population. Of particular interest, more Pell Grant recipient respondents faced challenges accessing financial aid services (6.3% compared with 3.8% of the general undergraduate population), tutoring services (7.8% compared with 5.5%) and academic advising (6.6% compared with 4.7%). These respondents also indicated that they faced challenges accessing counseling services and health care services to a slightly higher extent.

Lastly, more Pell Grant recipient respondents indicated that they were not enrolled in any face-to-face classes (29% compared with 25% of the general undergraduate population). Of those respondents who were enrolled in face-to-face classes, fewer Pell Grant recipient respondents indicated that they attended all of these classes (23% compared with 29% of the general undergraduate population).

First-Generation College students

Given that First-Gen respondents represents a large minority of the undergraduate respondent population, the responses of this population varied less, in comparison with the URM respondent population and the Pell Grant recipient respondent population. That said, there were some notable differences in the responses of First-Gen students. For example, in response to the first question, more First-Gen respondents indicated that they faced technological issues associated with their own discomfort and/or lack of familiarity with required technologies (22.3% compared with 19.2% of the general undergraduate population). With regard to the second question, more First-Gen respondents faced learning challenges associated with participation in synchronous classes (30.5% compared with 27.2% of the general undergraduate population).

Similarly to URM and Pell Grant recipient respondents, more First-Gen respondents were concerned that the coursework this semester might result in possible graduation and program completion delays (19.1% compared with 15.5% of the general undergraduate population), as described in the third question. With regard to the fourth question on technology-related accessibility issues, more First-Gen respondents had issues with classes only being held synchronously (23.0 % compared with 20.9% of the general undergraduate population) and with courses not using technology tools in a way that support learning (16.6% compared with 14.1% of the general undergraduate population). In terms of student support service accessibility in the fifth question, slightly more First-Gen respondents indicated that they faced challenges accessing tutoring services (6.6%), academic advising (5.8%) and career services (5.8%) than the general undergraduate population. Finally, while approximately the same percentage of First-Gen respondents were not enrolled in any face-to-face classes as the general

undergraduate population, fewer of the respondents in this category (26%) who had face-to-face classes indicated that they attended all of these face-to-face classes in person each week.

Graduate students

Not surprisingly, significantly fewer graduate student respondents indicated that they faced the challenges examined in the survey when compared with the undergraduate population. For example, 61.5% of graduate students responded that they had not had any technological issues this semester, and 56.4% of graduate students responded that they had not experienced any learning or educational issues. In addition, almost three times as many graduate student respondents indicated that they did not have any concerns with their coursework this semester than in the undergraduate population. Similarly, very few (less than 25% of all graduate student respondents) indicated that they had technology-related accessibility issues this semester. When graduate student respondents do indicate that they experienced issues, they do so at a much lower frequency in all categories.

The most notable results from graduate student respondents related to their responses to the fifth question regarding student support services. The top three services that graduate student respondents indicated that they faced challenges in accessing were financial aid services, counseling services and library services. Lastly, almost two-thirds (62%) of graduate student respondents indicated that they were not enrolled in any face-to-face courses this semester. Of those enrolled in face-to-face courses, only 22% indicated that they attended all face-to-face classes in person each week.

Rock County students

With a lower than average response rate of only 12.7% and a respondent population of 89, the Rock County Campus undergraduate respondents provided less information than other populations with regard to the technology and learning challenges they face this semester. Generally speaking, more Rock County Campus undergraduate respondents indicated that they had not experienced issues related to technology, learning, coursework, or accessibility than the general undergraduate population. In addition, when issues were cited, fewer Rock County Campus undergraduate respondents selected each issue type than the undergraduate population as a whole. One exception was the relatively high number of Rock County Campus undergraduate respondents who indicated, in response to the fourth question on accessibility, that they found that course materials and activities were not in Canvas (27.2% compared with 23.4% of the general undergraduate population). In addition, slightly fewer Rock County Campus undergraduate respondents were not enrolled in any face-to-face classes (22% compared with 25% of the general undergraduate population). However, more Rock County Campus undergraduate respondents who did have face-to-face classes indicated that they attend all of these classes in person (39% compared with 29% of the general undergraduate population).

Conclusion

Survey results suggest that access to reliable internet connection remains a concern for nearly 40% of UW-Whitewater undergraduate students. Moreover, the data suggests that URM and Pell Grant recipient respondents are experiencing more challenges this semester in comparison with the general undergraduate populations – especially when it comes to accessing reliable personal devices to use to complete their coursework. Responses from graduate students and Rock County campus undergraduates suggest that the impact of technological changes in the classroom this semester has not been as problematic as it has been for the undergraduate population as a whole. However, the slightly lower than expected rates of participating by graduate students and students at the Rock County campus should be taken into consideration when interpreting these results.