

Report on Fall 2020 Student Survey (September)

The first fall 2020 Student Survey was administered in the window of September 8-11 during the third week of the fall semester with the stated goal of providing an optional opportunity for students to provide feedback on their experiences of the first 2-3 weeks of the fall semester. 1,951 students participated in the survey (1,424 Undergraduate; 518 Graduate; 8 Certificate and 1 Missing).

The report is divided into two parts. Part 1 provides a brief overview of the characteristics of survey respondents, followed by descriptive summaries of student responses to each of the survey items across 6 areas: pledge to protect; overall classroom experiences; communications in Virtual/SMUFlex courses; quality of learning experiences in Virtual/SMUFlex courses; university communications; and university services. Part 2 provides a synthesis of all open-ended responses students provided within each of these same 6 areas.

There are two appendices with this report. Appendix A provides information on characteristics of student respondents (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, school affiliation, undergraduate/graduate level, DASS, international, first-year status, etc.). Appendix B provides a summary of particular groups of students who expressed greater concern (more than 5% than other groups on the item "I have many concerns about this area that need to be addressed.")

PART 1: Descriptive Statistics of Survey Responses

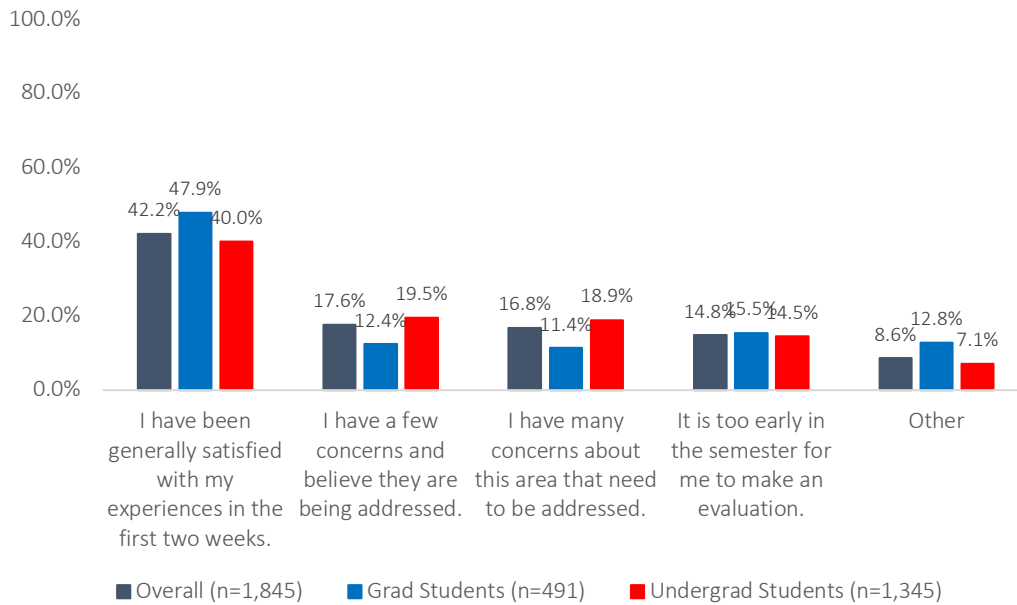
- 20.8% of all undergraduates participated in the survey.
- 9.3% of all graduate students participated in the survey.
- 76.6% students who started the survey completed it (1,494 of 1,951)
- Undergraduates and graduates were roughly equally likely to complete the survey.

Survey participants were disproportionately undergraduate students, women, enrolled in honors programs, and on-campus residents. The survey "under-sampled" graduate students, international students, and students who live off-campus.

1. Pledge to Protect

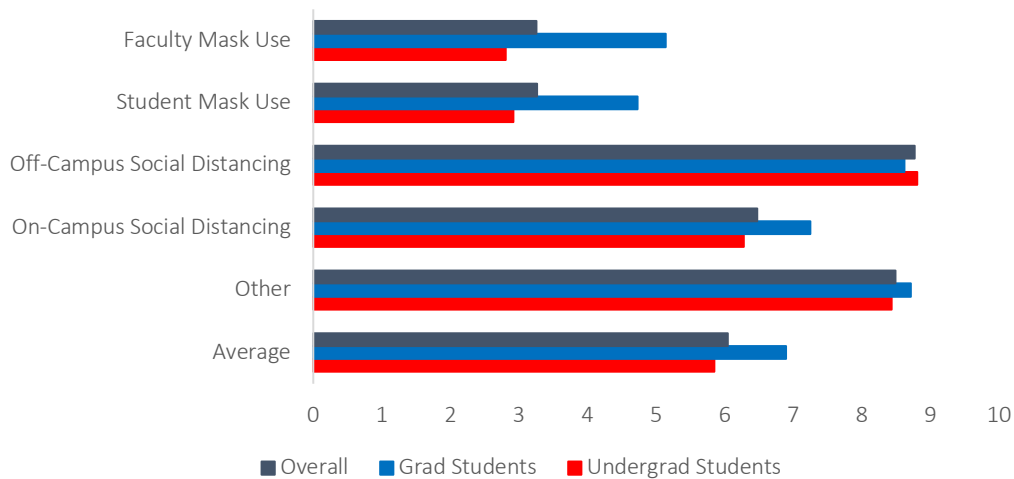
The table below provides results for the following question on the Pledge to Protect:

How have members of the SMU community (students, faculty, and staff) upheld the values of the SMU CAN Pledge to Protect (commitment to social distancing, wearing masks, and maintaining a safe campus)?



The table below provides results from a branching question that was only administered if students selected the option, "I have many concerns about this area that need to be addressed."

Average Level of Concern by Area for Students Reporting "Many Concerns" (1-10 Scale)



Key Takeaways on the Pledge to Protect

- Overall, roughly 4 in 10 students (42.2%) report being generally satisfied with the SMU Community upholding the principles of Pledge to Protect.
 - Graduate students are more likely to report being generally satisfied with the SMU Community upholding the principles of Pledge to Protect than undergraduates (47.9% vs. 40.0%).
- Approximately 1 in 6 students (16.8%) report having “many concerns” in terms of the Pledge to Protect.
 - Undergraduate students are more likely to report having many concerns related to Pledge to Protect than graduate students (18.9% vs. 11.4%).

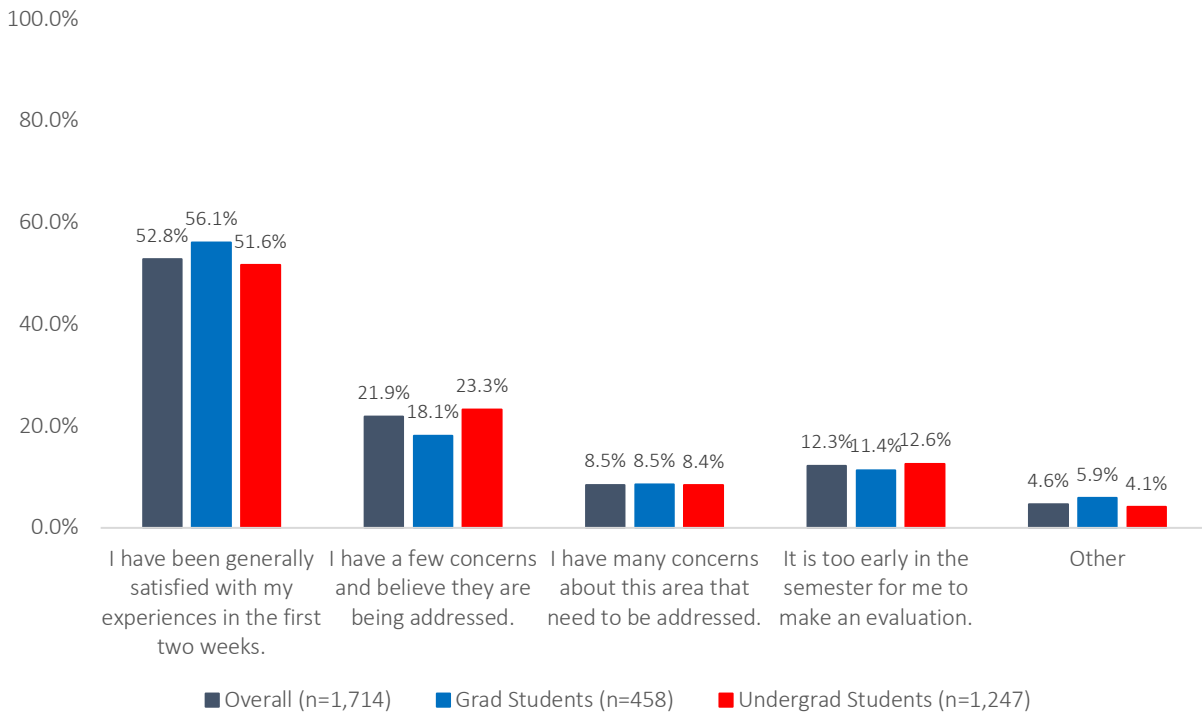
Of students with many concerns regarding the Pledge to Protect (16.8% overall):

- Levels of concern were particularly high for off-campus social distancing, followed by on-campus social distancing.
- Concerns about faculty mask use were just as high as concerns about student mask use.
- Graduate students were particularly likely to be concerned with faculty and student mask use.

2. Overall Classroom Experience

How has the overall experience in the classroom been (regardless of modality) in the first two weeks?

Note: In the several questions that follow, you will also have the opportunity to provide feedback on specific types of classes (VIRTUAL and SMUFlex).

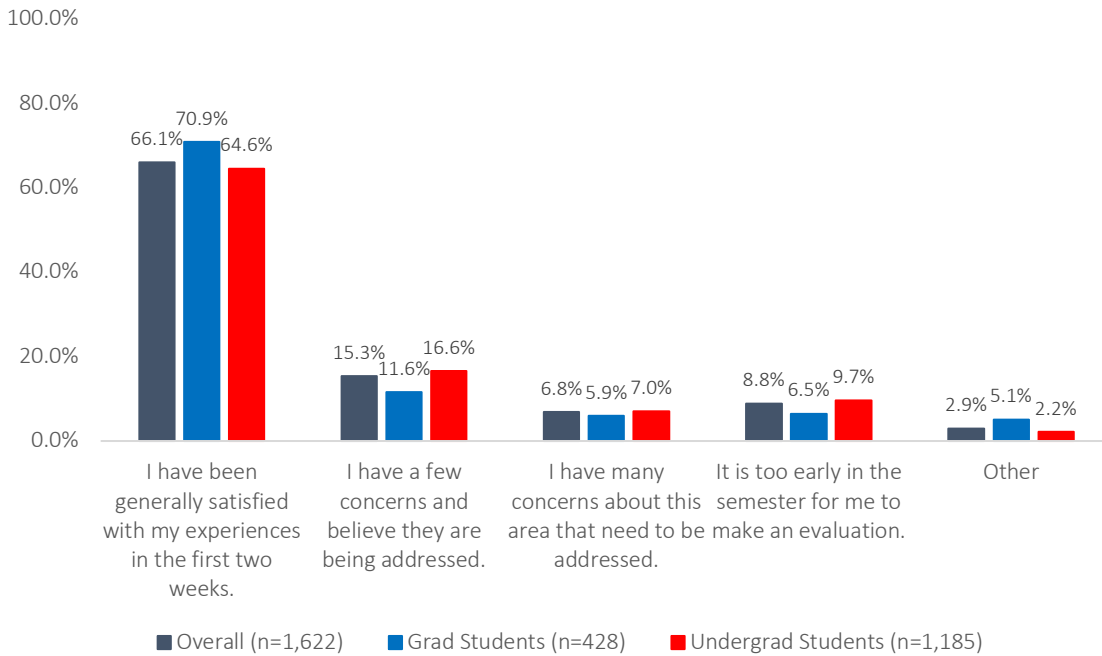


Key Takeaways on Overall Classroom Experience

- Overall, just over half of the students (52.8%) report being generally satisfied their overall classroom experience.
 - Graduate students are slightly more likely to report being generally satisfied with their classroom experience than undergraduates (56.1% vs. 51.6%).
- Around 1 in 12 students (8.5%) report having “many concerns” with their overall classroom experience.

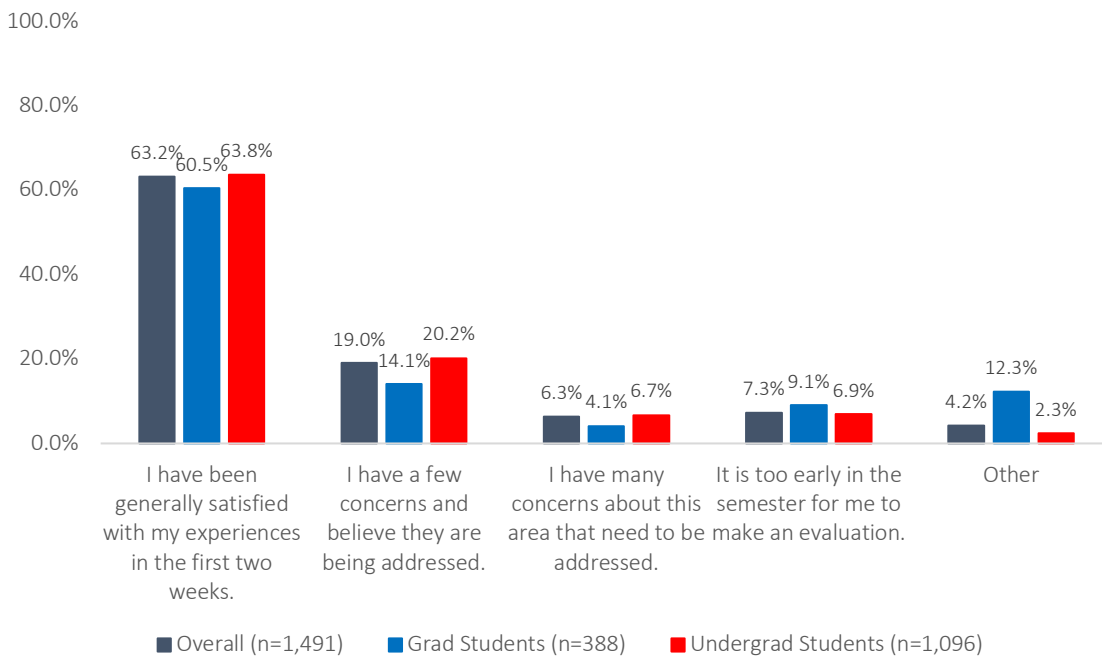
3a. Communication – Virtual Courses

VIRTUAL courses only: How has communication from your Instructors been during the first two weeks of your VIRTUAL courses (those with no in-person component)?



3b. Communication – SMUFlex Courses

SMUFlex only: How has communication from your instructors been during the first two weeks of your SMUFlex courses (those with a red/blue rotation schedule)?

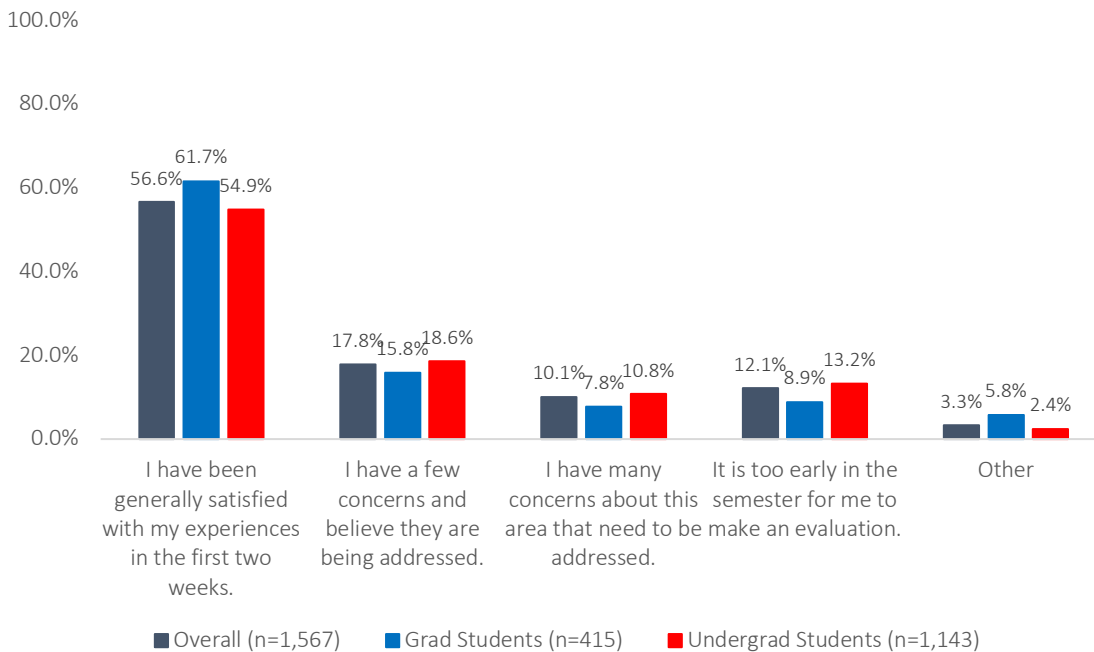


Key Takeaways on Communication within SMUFlex and Virtual Courses

- Overall, nearly two-thirds of students (66.1%) report being generally satisfied with instructor communication for virtual courses, slightly higher than the 63.2% who report being generally satisfied with communication for SMUFlex courses.
 - Graduate students are slightly more likely to report being generally satisfied with instructor communication than undergraduates for both virtual courses, but less satisfied with communication for SMUFlex classes.
- Students are slightly more likely to report having many concerns with instructor communication in virtual courses than SMUFlex courses (6.8% vs. 6.3%).

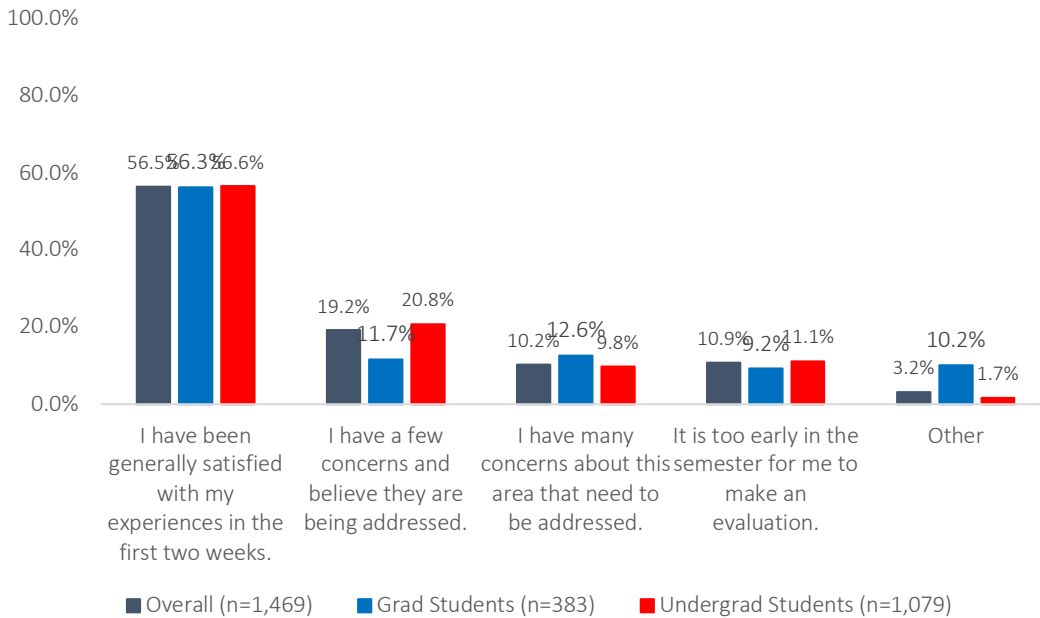
4a. Quality of Learning Experiences – Virtual Courses

VIRTUAL courses only: How has the quality of learning experiences been (student engagement, attendance, participation, etc.) in your VIRTUAL courses?



4b. Quality of Learning Experiences – SMUFlex Courses

SMUFlex only: How has the quality of the learning experience been (student engagement, participation, attendance, etc.) in your SMUFlex courses?

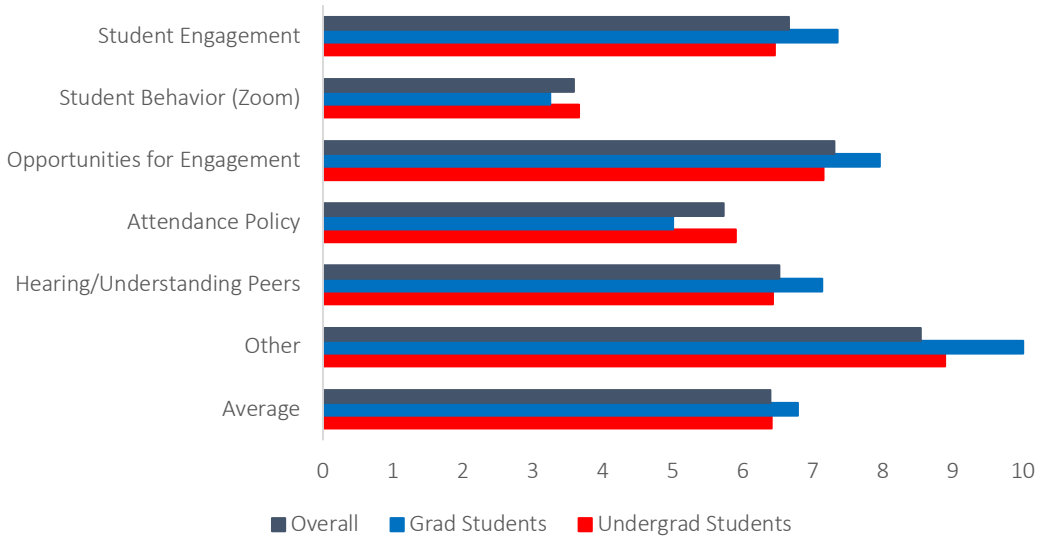


Key Takeaways on Quality of Learning Experiences in Virtual and SMUFlex courses

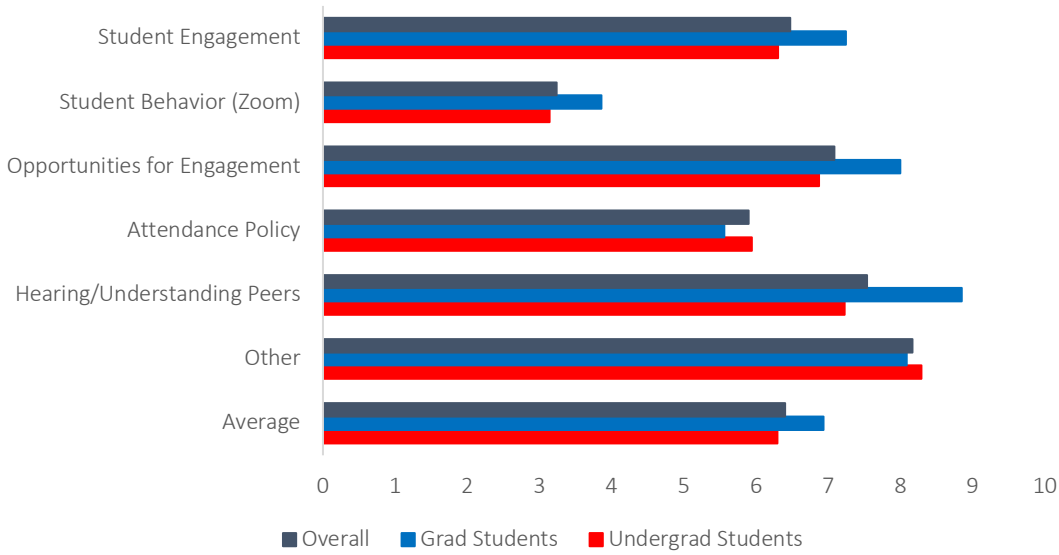
- Overall, just over half of the students report being generally satisfied with the quality of their learning experiences. Satisfaction with the quality of learning experiences did not vary by course modality – 56.6% for virtual and 56.5% for SMUFlex.
 - Graduate students are more likely to report being generally satisfied with their virtual courses (61.7% vs. 56.3%), while undergraduates are slightly more likely to report being generally satisfied with their SMUFlex courses (56.6% vs. 54.9%).
- Around 1 in 10 students report having many concerns with the quality of learning experiences, a proportion that did not vary by modality.
 - Undergraduate students were more likely to report many concerns with virtual courses than graduate students (10.8% vs. 7.8%)
 - Graduate students were more likely to report many concerns with SMUFlex courses than undergraduate students (12.6% vs. 9.8%).

The two tables on page 8 provide results from a branching question that was only administered if students selected the option, “I have many concerns about this area that need to be addressed.”

Average Level of Concern by Area for Students Reporting "Many Concerns" (1-10 Scale) - Virtual Learning



Average Level of Concern by Area for Students Reporting "Many Concerns" (1-10 Scale) - SMUFlex Learning



Key Takeaways on the Branching Question about Quality of Learning Experiences in Virtual and SMUFlex courses

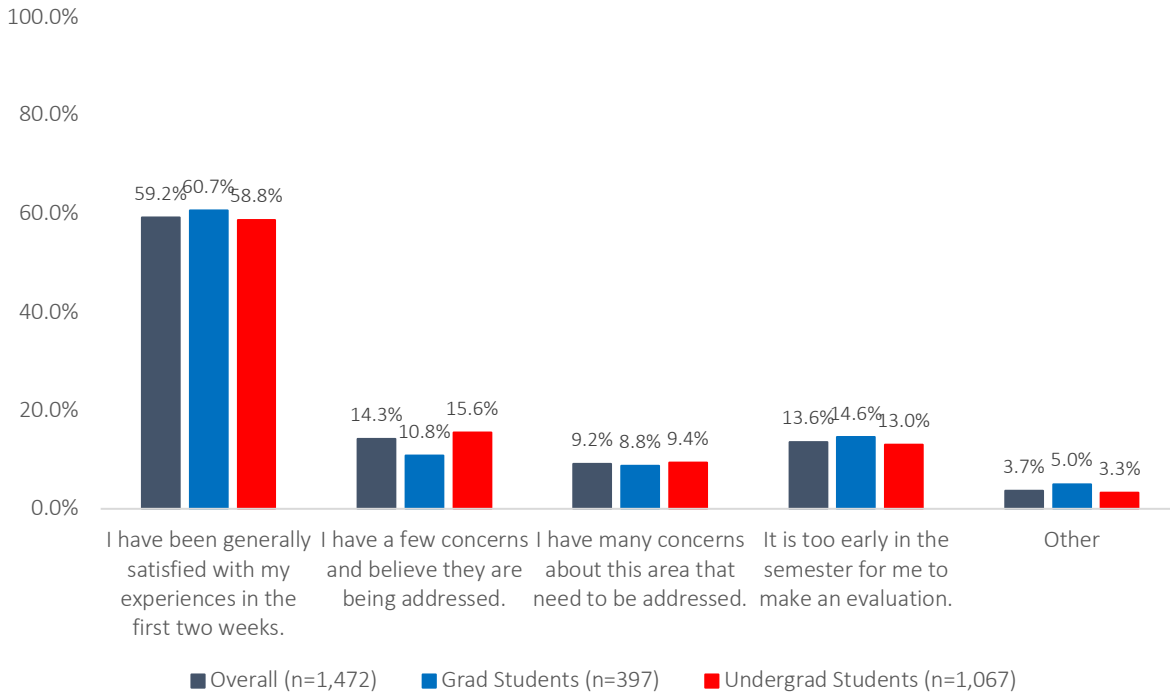
Of students with many concerns regarding the Quality of Learning Experiences (roughly 10% of respondents for both modalities):

- Overall levels of concern with learning experiences were roughly equivalent for virtual and SMUFlex courses (6.39 vs. 6.40).
 - Graduate students reported higher levels of concern overall than undergraduate students in both modalities.
- Overall, the area with the highest level of concern for virtual learning was opportunities for engagement.
 - Graduate students reported higher levels of concern re opportunities for engagement than undergraduates. However, for graduate students, concerns about opportunities for engagement were higher in SMUFlex courses than virtual courses.
- Overall, the area with the highest level of concern for SMUFlex learning was hearing/understanding peers.
 - Students reported higher levels of concern with hearing and understanding peers in SMUFlex courses than virtual courses (7.54 vs. 6.52).

5. University Communication

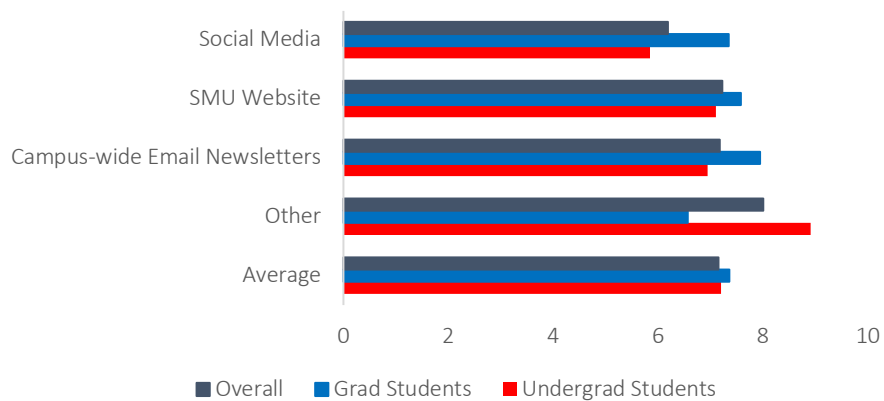
The table below provides results from a question about university communications:

How useful have university-wide communications been, as provided through newsletters, webpages, and social media campaigns?



The following table provides results from a branching question that was only administered if students selected the option, "I have many concerns about this area that need to be addressed."

Average Level of Concern by Area for Students Reporting "Many Concerns" (1-10 Scale) - Communication



Key Takeaways on University Communications

- Overall, roughly 6 in 10 students (59.2%) report being generally satisfied with University communications.
- Just under 1 in 10 students (9.2%) report having many concerns regarding University communications.
- There was little variation across degree level in terms of satisfaction with University communications.

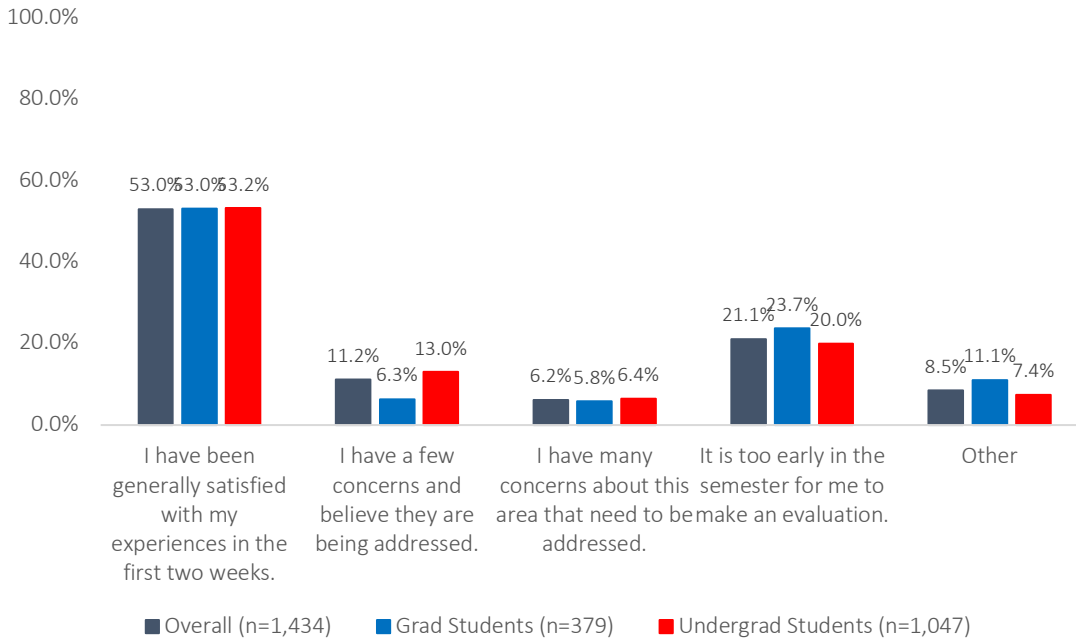
Of students with many concerns regarding University communications (9.2% overall):

- Levels of concern were slightly higher overall for the SMU Website and Campus-wide Email Newsletters than for Social Media.
- Graduate students had higher levels of concern with all forms of communication than undergraduates.

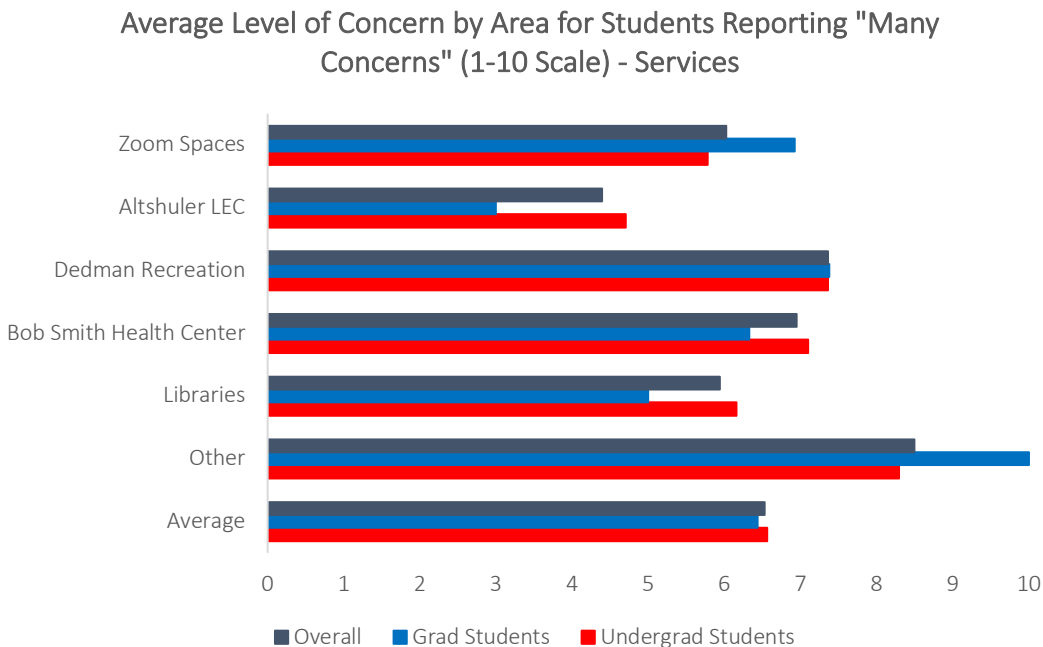
6. University Services

The table below provides results from a question about university services:

How has access to university services such as Zoom Spaces, the libraries, Dr. Bob Smith Health Center, and Dedman Recreation Center been handled in the first two weeks?



The following table provides results from a branching question that was only administered if students selected the option, "I have many concerns about this area that need to be addressed."



Key Takeaways on University Services

- Overall, just over half of students (53.0%) report being generally satisfied with University services.
- Approximately only 6 in 100 students (6.2%) report having many concerns regarding University services.
- There was little variation across degree level in terms of satisfaction with University services.

Of students with many concerns regarding University services (6.2% overall):

- Levels of concern were highest overall for Dedman Recreation (7.36) and the Bob Smith Health Center (6.95) and lowest for Altshuler LEC (4.39).
- Graduate students had lower levels of concern with all services than undergraduates, with the exception of Dedman, which was roughly equivalent.

PART 2: Summary of Fall 2020 Student Survey Open-Ended Responses

Pledge to Protect

Students expressed a wide range of opinions in the text responses to questions related to the Pledge to Protect, but a few common concerns emerged: many students are concerned that their fellow students are not following social distancing guidelines in off-campus spaces, including restaurants, bars, and parties. Some students have concerns about the dining halls and the challenges of maintaining social distancing measures there. Some expressed concerns about other students not wearing masks around campus properly. One frustration that was voiced by several students was the difficulty of finding common spaces to study on campus, given restrictions on gatherings in the residence halls. One repeated recommendation was additional COVID-19 testing and easier access to testing.

Some additional observations include the following:

- Strong opinions on both sides about Greek life—many students blaming Greek houses, and some defending them and saying they were getting a bad rap
- A good portion of responses (mostly undergraduate) expressing frustration with restrictions, saying that they are not necessary
- Words of encouragement, expressing the feeling that faculty and staff (and fellow students) are doing their best
- Another repeated concern is the availability of cleaning products, that they are running out certain places on campus
- Graduate students seemed to have different opinions and concerns from undergraduates: they were more in favor of restrictions, but also their responses were more positive about SMU's responses. They also commonly expressed concerns about undergraduate behavior and undergraduate off-campus partying.

Students' Overall Classroom Experience

In general, students reported a positive overall classroom experience during the first two weeks of the semester. Only 9% reported concerns that need addressing. Another 4.6% (N=85) of students opted to write-in their concerns, expressing the following:

- **Technology concerns** including poor sound quality, particularly due to professors moving around classrooms that were not equipped with label microphones or with as many classroom mics; professors with insufficient trouble-shooting skills; and inconsistent Canvas platforms across courses and professors.
- **Increased student workload**, which is seen as increasing student stress. A sub-set of few students mentioned they felt they were assigned a larger workload.
- **General concerns with SMU Flex** including attendance policies that should allow for virtual attendance if a student is unwell, and lack of student engagement online. A few students recommended either face-to-face or online offerings in lieu of SMUFlex due to the incessant technology issues and student disengagement. Another student mentioned there are not enough face-to-face course offerings.
- **Concerns about the cleanliness** of classrooms, student safety, and enforcement of in-class mask wearing. One student suggested a “more low key” method for informing professors about Covid-19 exposure and taking classes online “whenever needed.”
- **International students.** Although not widely reported, at least one student mentioned that they were thrilled to engage with the various online platforms, but thought it was inequitable due to many of their international peers being less able to do so, as some countries restrict many platforms.

Overall *Virtual* Classroom Experience

About 3% (N=49) responded to the write- in option and expressed the following opinions:

- Many of these students commented that they appreciated their professors who are doing the best they can.
- Technology concerns were primarily based on sound issues
- There is some reduced student engagement, participation, and morale.
- Desire to return to fully face-to-face instruction.

Students’ Virtual Learning Experiences & Recommendations

Undergraduates primarily reported the following:

- Learning experience could improve with clearer, yet “more relaxed” attendance policies.
- Regarding camera usage, some students mentioned that it should be required, as it increases their engagement as well as that of their peers. Other students mention that having the camera on shouldn’t inform attendance measures. One student expressed that signing into Zoom and participation should be sufficient for counting their attendance.
- A few students mentioned their concerns with the cost of their courses, given their classroom experience has changed.
- Several students mentioned an issue with sound while using Zoom. If they were attending via Zoom, they were unable to clearly hear their in-person classmates or the professor if s/he walks around.
- Students noticed that professors are noticeably more technologically savvy than Spring 2020 and are working hard to engage students, some of whom are disengaged and unmotivated.
- Students noted that the Zoom sessions are more engaging when the student cameras are on (including professors providing clear options for neutral virtual backdrops), coupled with a visual (e.g., presentation), and the use of Zoom chat for posing questions is an effective way to keep students engaged.

Graduate students primarily reported the following:

- Engagement: Some students mention the use of Canvas discussion platform to increase student engagement with one another. Another student indicated the usage of this unnecessarily increases student workload. Several students mentioned that Zoom breakout rooms are quite helpful for facilitating classroom discussion and increasing student participation.
- Virtual courses were reported as effective and efficient when professors are prepared, energetic, accommodating, and understanding. Professors have experienced a few technical challenges but are working to address them.
- Students are unable to hear professors who walk about the class.

Overall SMUFlex Classroom Experiences

40 students who responded to the write-in option expressed the following:

Undergraduate students describe the online days as less engaging as the face-to-face days; they point to irregular face-to-face attendance on the part of their peers; they report reduced motivation to attend on face-to-face days; and they report a misunderstanding of attendance policies and request for clarity.

Students' SMU Flex Learning Experiences & Recommendations

Undergraduates primarily reported the following:

- Zoom students are rarely engaged and attending to class activities/discussions. Professors should make a conscientious effort to keep them engaged.
- Spending hours on Zoom due to back to back classes or long classes is exhausting.
- Incessant issues with Zoom sound. Unable to hear professor or students who are in class. A few students recommend increasing number of microphones in classrooms.
- In person classes are more engaging and of higher quality than remote classes.
- Appreciation for professors.
- Canvas issues with Zoom sound. Unable to consistently hear professor
- Professors should utilize the full functionality of Zoom (chat, raise hand feature, breakout rooms, reaction features, visual presentation, etc). Provide professors with strategies on how to best facilitate online courses
- Provide students tips on how to maximize the Zoom features, especially their microphone.

Communications & Operations

The frequency of reporting issues was not high, but some specific situations were reported.

- Concerns about too many emails, confusing, and contradictory communications
- Critique of communications about COVID
- Concerns about viability/fairness of modality issues
- WiFi issues
- Canvas is not used enough
- Whiteboard visibility issues
- Audio/comprehension issues
- Attendance policy issues
- Getting to back-to-back classes on-time
- Student-to-student relating issues

Additional issues that more than one student respondent highlighted included:

- Need for more social media communication
- Highlight calendar of events/club opportunities
- Communicate to the students about suspensions/sanctions/actions taken

Key Takeaways on Participation and Completion of the Survey

- To increase student participation in the survey, incentives might be considered.
- Graduate students were particularly unlikely to participate in the survey. The mechanism for sending the survey to graduate students might shift to School/College-level delivery. Targeted outreach to graduate students-- or designing a survey specifically for graduate students-- may increase interest in participation to counter the perception that surveys are “for” undergrads.
- There was some lack of completion among participants who started the survey.
 - May suggest survey was too long; it might have been unclear to participants how long the survey was; or the survey contained too many open-ended questions.
- Survey participants were disproportionately undergraduates, women, enrolled in honors programs, and on-campus residents.
- The survey “under-sampled” graduate students, international students, and students who live off-campus.

Appendix A: Descriptive Characteristics of Students Who Completed the Survey

	Respondents	
	N	%
Remote	381	19.5%
Female	1,181	60.5%
DASS	152	7.8%
International	90	4.6%
Level		
Not Specified	1	0.1%
Certification	8	0.4%
Graduate	518	26.6%
Undergraduate	1,424	73.0%
Race/Ethnicity		
AI/AN	3	0.2%
Asian	177	9.1%
Black	90	4.6%
Hispanic	239	12.3%
"Non-Resident Alien"	105	5.4%
Unknown	18	0.9%
Two or More	89	4.6%
White	1,230	63.0%
School		
EHD	41	2.1%
GCOX	166	8.5%
GR	184	9.4%
HART	20	1.0%
LAW	84	4.3%
RSGS	3	0.2%
THEO	26	1.3%
UG	1,427	73.1%
Admission Type		
FYR	1,223	62.7%
FYT	46	2.4%
NEW	525	26.9%
TRN	157	8.0%
Total	1,951	

Appendix B: Summary of Groups who Expressed Greater than 5% of Concern Within Specific Items

Student groups listed in below had at least 5% more respondents who responded with “I have many concerns about this area that need to be addressed.”

Question	Student Groups
How have members of the SMU community (students, faculty, and staff) upheld the values of the SMU CAN Pledge to Protect (commitment to social distancing, wearing masks, and maintaining a safe campus)?	Rotunda scholars, on-campus residence, Pell eligible, and minority students have more concerns compared to students in the reference group.
How has the overall experience in the classroom been (regardless of modality) in the first two weeks?	International and off-campus residence students have more concerns compared to students in the reference group.
VIRTUAL courses only: How has communication from your Instructors been during the first two weeks of your VIRTUAL courses (those with no in-person component)?	Greek students have more concerns compared to students in the reference group.
VIRTUAL courses only: How has the quality of learning experiences been (student engagement, attendance, participation, etc.) in your VIRTUAL courses?	International, Greek, and off-campus residence students have more concerns compared to students in the reference group.
SMUFlex only: How has communication from your instructors been during the first two weeks of your SMUFlex courses (those with a red/blue rotation schedule)?	Athletes have more concerns compared to students in the reference group.
SMUFlex only: How has the quality of the learning experience been (student engagement, participation, attendance, etc.) in your SMUFlex courses?	Athletes and Rotunda scholars have more concerns compared to students in the reference group.
How useful have university-wide communications been, as provided through newsletters, webpages, and social media campaigns?	Rotunda scholars have more concerns compared to students in the reference group.
How has access to university services such as Zoom Spaces, the libraries, Dr. Bob Smith Health Center, and Dedman Recreation Center been handled in the first two weeks?	No unique differences.

