

## Summary of Faculty Feedback Survey (End-of-Term Fall 2020)

All full-time and part-time faculty were invited to participate in an optional, end-of-term survey during a one-week window from December 11-18. The survey consisted of four open-ended items designed to elicit feedback about experiences across the fall semester. A total of 484 full-time and part-time faculty responded to the survey, with representation from all areas: Cox School of Business: 60 (37%), Dedman School of Humanities and Sciences: 184 (50%), Perkins School of Law: 24 (25%), Guildhall: 7 (50%), Lyle School of Engineering: 53 (36%), Meadows School of the Arts: 88 (41%), Perkins School of Theology: 11 (34%), the Simmons School of Education and Human Development: 53 (39%), and Other: 4 (33%). Unlike the September and October surveys, no information about part-time or full-time status, teaching modality, or home department was collected. All raw data associated with each School/College was shared on December 18<sup>th</sup> with their respective deans and associate deans, and an email was sent to all chairs informing them that those responses would be shared with them by their deans' offices in order to support their efforts in planning during the winter break.

### 1. What worked for you this semester?

- New learning
- Experiences with technology/IT support
- Flexibility

### 2. What did not work as well for you (and please include ideas for improvement for Spring)?

- Attendance expectations
- Low student engagement
- Online assessment difficulties/exam proctoring
- Lack of flexibility
- Lack of break
- Pedagogical concerns
- Technology concerns
- High time investment

### 3. What would you like to have communicated to students for the spring semester?

- Encourage/respect/concern
- Vigilance in navigating COVID
- Proactive engagement
- Requests for professionalism/personal accountability

### 4. What would you want to make sure we consider in options for addressing stressors, both in term of current ideas and in terms of parameters?

- Attendance ideas
- Ideas for alternative spring break
- Emphasis on continued communication
- Pedagogical ideas and flexibility

The more detailed summary below is organized into topics that were mentioned consistently (at least five times) in response to each of the four questions. The survey is not designed to make claims about overall faculty sentiment and does not imply that the frequency of comments around a particular topic should carry greater weight than other viewpoints. The survey is intended as formative feedback to the SMU community to offer a high-level snapshot of views from the faculty who chose to provide responses. Each topic described below is illustrated with two representative quotes within that topic.

## **1. What worked for you this semester?**

New learning. A number of faculty described their experiences with the fall semester as offering opportunities to explore new approaches to teaching. Comments often pointed to the additional training provided by CTE and OIT, as well as the ongoing support of colleagues. Many responses described specific strategies they used to navigate teaching in the new modalities.

“I think the additional training over the summer helped me to use more of the resources in Canvas. I feel more proficient at tasks such as constructing quizzes and exams, using the Gradebook, and using tools such as breakout rooms.”

“I made a conscious effort to mix things up in class with various tools -- breakout rooms, polls, power points, short breaks, etc. I also left my room open for 15 minutes after class to field questions or just to talk to my students about life.”

Experiences with technology/IT support. A large number of responses pointed to the learning curve associated with Zoom and Canvas as largely positive. A smaller number of responses (see next question) had the opposite experience, so this topic seems to be specific to the experiences faculty had when teaching in specific rooms, as the type of technology support differed across buildings and rooms.

“IT did a great job with the tech in the classrooms. I had very few issues. In rooms with overhead mics (all rooms ought to have this, I think), the remote students had no problem hearing me or the other students in the classroom. The tech made it possible to facilitate discussion.”

“Canvas. It's the only LMS I have used as an instructor, so it's hard for me to say it's the best-ever, but I do think it was essential in not only surviving but, I think, thriving this semester.”

Flexibility. Many responses pointed to the importance of flexibility of teaching modalities. There was endorsement from faculty who appreciated the flexibility of teaching remotely, as well as a balanced number of faculty who valued the ability to teach on campus.

“SMU Flex: getting to teach a combination of online and in person. Timely help from OIT. . . was critical. I appreciated the Red/blue designation as a way to reduce the number of students in the classroom.”

“The decisions, while University wide, were also allowed to be tempered by what worked best for each department and their disciplines. The ability to teach online and off campus was imperative in my discipline.”

## 2. What did not work as well for you (and please include ideas for improvement for Spring)?

Attendance expectations. A large number of survey responses indicated that student attendance was one of the major challenges of the fall semester. In Virtual classes, student attendance was unclear without cameras on, and in SMUFlex classes, the fall attendance policy appeared to create ambiguity about the degree that faculty could hold students accountable for coming in person. (Note. This was an ongoing topic all semester, and as a result, new attendance options, developed for spring 2021 with the support of the academic leadership team and Faculty Senate input, were shared with all faculty in this [email from the Provost](#) on January 21).

“The policy of no penalty for missed class was sensible, but it may have given my students license to check out altogether. There needs to be better norms for what it means to participate in class, even when you are not physically present.”

“We need an actual attendance policy that enables flexibility for students with symptoms/exposure but requires the others to actually attend in person, even when it's more ‘convenient’ for them to Zoom.”

Low student engagement. Another area which generated a substantial number of responses highlighted the difficulties in engaging students during instruction. The way in which engagement manifested differed depending on modality, but the theme was recurrent across both types.

“There is also a real struggle managing students across time zones. Finally, there is a struggle with students keeping the video on during class and participating via Zoom in general.

“It is so much harder to get and keep all students engaged and participating during class. The students who participate via Zoom consistently tell me how difficult it is to concentrate online and the students in class, while generally engaged with the lecture, seemed to be less likely to participate in conversation than they do when the entire cohort is in the classroom.”

Online assessment difficulties/exam proctoring. Many faculty described the shift to online assessment as challenging and expressed concerns with the potential challenges for academic integrity (Note. As with attendance, this was an ongoing topic across the fall and has generated several approaches taken to mitigate the concerns, [summarized here](#), and solutions will continue to be explored in the spring.)

“I am still not comfortable with giving un-proctored quizzes and the final exam because of the many ways that students can cheat. The only way to prevent cheating is to have exams proctored.”

“While it got better as the semester went along, the LockDown browser presented problems with every test administration.”

Lack of flexibility. As a counterpoint to the flexibility in teaching modalities that many faculty cited in responding to the first question, other faculty described the opposite experience and expressed frustration that the choice of modality was not flexible for them or their students.

“Conversion of the Canvas course to online/hyflex. While it worked ok, it consumed a lot of faculty time to set up/maintain, often didn't improve student understanding/following of the content, and did not have the flexibility to work with the kind of content we provide.”

“Undergraduate and graduate student populations are not the same. Residential graduate students are not a norm, but rather commuting is the norm for mature adult learners. Distance learning is a better option for the majority of graduate/professional students.”

Lack of break. Several faculty mentioned the challenges associated with the lack of a fall break.

“The lack of break days during the semester. My only solution would be to add break days.”

“We need some days off throughout the term--a random Wednesday or Tuesday.”

Pedagogical concerns. The comments in this topic area were not concentrated around a particular pedagogical area; rather, they ranged from concerns about differences in faculty-student ratios to challenges in operationalizing high-quality instructional strategies within the constraints of the new teaching modalities.

“Some departments are delivering classes with four students while Cox classes routinely exceed 70. The university needs to look [into] resource allocation and make adjustments.”

“The summer training was immensely helpful in many ways, but it was largely geared toward asynchronous instruction, and most of our students clearly expect a synchronous experience. A properly designed virtual, asynchronous course takes 6 to 9 months to develop.”

Technology concerns. As a follow-on to the large number of faculty whose experiences with technology were positive, some faculty faced classroom technology challenges that raised concerns about the experiences they and their students were having in light of technology constraints. (Note. In order to provide a better experience, especially with the more frequent concerns related to audio, the University invested a large amount of additional funding that enabled OIT to make significant improvements across teaching spaces with the most need over the winter break. A total of 52 DTEN audio/video devices have been installed which offer faculty improved audio and video connectivity between in-person and remote students. There are 1,339 courses in DTEN rooms and 38,576 students enrolled in those courses. In smaller rooms, there are 20 more Owl conferencing devices to help improve experiences across discussion-based courses. There are 231 courses scheduled in rooms with Owls and 2,856 students enrolled in those courses. As these new technologies have been added, each school’s embedded technology directors have spearheaded renewed training and information sessions about these new technologies.)

“It would be better for remote learners if they could hear in-person questions and comments.”

“Flex teaching in general kept me glued to one corner of [the] room by the laptop, which felt restricting.”

High time investment. Many faculty pointed to the time required for teaching during the fall semester, due both to the preparation work of the summer as well as to the continual time commitment required for ongoing preparation and for finding alternative ways to engage students and navigate the new technologies.

“This means I work more hours. I am more flexible about availability and office hours for students. It means that I have had to rely on my family for patience and support.”

“Extensive time commitment to complete the online teaching certification and advanced Canvas course by the deadlines was a huge additional commitment of time and effort to do it right and implement it into my courses, doubling the hours worked for each class. It was important to do, but a big ask for no additional compensation.”

### **3. What would you like to have communicated to students for the spring semester?**

Encouragement, respect, and concern. Many comments focused on encouragement and morale.

“You are wonderful! Keep up your good work and contact me as soon as you encounter any difficulties. I am willing to work with you, but I need to know what the issues are ahead of time. Stay safe, be well, and do good! I believe in you.”

“I would commend them for doing a terrific job of helping to keep the spread of COVID to a minimum. I would also let them know that we respect and admire them for continuing to put everything they have into their college experience, in spite of very challenging times. Last, I would encourage them to hang in there. Light at the end of the tunnel is in view.”

Vigilance in navigating COVID. Several comments focused on the importance that students stay aware of the importance on maintaining a safe environment.

“In general, I think we need to keep stressing the importance of health and thinking about the larger community.”

“Should you test positive, or any other situation with Covid-19, you MUST contact your instructors, provide proper documentation and provide a time line for your return to class that is documented, backed by science, and agreed upon by all your instructors.”

Proactive engagement. A large number of comments offered suggestions to students on how to be more proactive with their learning and their communications.

“Go to class and touch base with your professors just to let us know how you are doing-- academically and personally.”

“Realize that COVID requires even more initiative and organization than regular semester lay learning. Your professors will do everything they can to bridge the gap, but the best success is when students make the effort to engage and overcome our current conditions.”

Requests for professionalism/personal accountability. The topic of professionalism in the classroom was frequently cited to include expectations about at-home learning (camera use, appropriate dress, adequate learning environment), professional communications, and personal accountability.

“While on Zoom, you are still in a classroom. Classroom etiquette applies to 1) Dress 2) Presence 3) Language, etc.

“This is still a class. You are still responsible for showing up and doing the work as you would in any other semester. I am willing to be flexible and lenient in light of how unusual these circumstances are, but you're still a student, and there are still learning goals that you need to accomplish by doing the things set out in the course syllabus.”

### **4. As we work across the Faculty Senate and the academic leadership team to consider options for the term ahead, what would you want to make sure we consider in this process, both in term of ideas and in terms of parameters?**

Attendance ideas. The concerns about attendance appeared here with a number of solutions offered, most of which have been adopted during the winter break with the new attendance options made available to faculty for the spring term.

“Trust the faculty and give them the flexibility to decide what works best for them and their particular classes/student populations. Give us options and resources, yes, but let us decide on policies/practices to use/implement them.”

“We absolutely need an enforceable attendance policy. Students take advantage of the online learning possibility.”

Ideas for alternative spring break. Sentiments were divided over the decision not to have a spring break, with responses to this survey fairly evenly distributed into faculty who agreed with the decision and faculty who preferred to have official breaks built into the semester. Among the comments were a variety of ideas for how to approach the spring semester, in light of the absence of a formal spring break.

“We should have campus activities for the students to participate safely to have some form of relief during the period that would have been spring break.”

“I believe that there should be days of reflection built into courses, where students have reduced workload or no homework, and when they are given space to engage in personal reflection on their mental health, learning and coping strategies.

“How about some pop-up stress reduction (safe) activities for students, faculty, and staff. Could there be outdoor dog petting, boulevard games, or movies? Perhaps online games with prizes?”

Emphasis on continued communication. Several comments emphasized the importance of continued communication. While a small number of responses indicated that the influx of email communications has been overwhelming, other faculty indicated that the frequency of communication was useful. There were several ideas for how to continue the communication, including the Friday updates, emails, on the website, and across physical locations on campus.

“It is important that we have opportunities to talk and listen to one another during the spring semester just as in other semesters.”

“I think it would be helpful to display links to <https://smu.campuswell.com> more prominently and in more locations on the SMU website, as well as in email communications for students (and faculty).”

Pedagogical ideas and flexibility. Many faculty forwarded concrete suggestions for approaches they could take in the classroom context to help address the concerns about stressors related to academic learning. Comments also pointed to the importance of maintaining flexibility, not only in deadlines and for the addition of “mini-breaks,” but also for encouraging faculty to work at the department level to make decisions about instruction and to have the flexibility to enact those decisions within the context of overarching, university-wide policies.

“Some strategies are already underway in my courses, such as flexible consultations and project deadlines, eliciting student feedback, and checking on how students are doing with the stresses of the pandemic as well as academic pressures. I would like to look more into pedagogical strategies for reducing stress, particularly for international students.”

“Mid-semester feedback would be especially useful to help address whether adjustments need to be made before the stresses of the semester start to impact students' grades.”