The Remote Learning Experience
One year later, how are students holding up?

An IRB-approved survey of 3,244 students, administered from February 1st – 14th, 2021 to understand the remote learning experience was distributed via Canvas, Penn State Go, email, and Penn State news and social media. Report by Alex Serpi (alex.serpi@psu.edu) and Jenay Robert (principal investigator, jrr296@psu.edu).

Who responded to the survey?
Of the students that responded to the survey . . .

- Commonwealth campus: 39%
- University Park campus: 61%
- Undergraduate: 89%
- Graduate: 9%
- Enrolled in 72+ credits: 87%

Where are students this semester?
94% of students are in the Eastern Standard time zone.

- 0 - 4 hours behind
- 1 - 3 hours behind
- 3 - 6 hours behind
- 6 - 10 hours behind
- 10 - 15 hours behind

What difficulties are students facing?
The majority of respondents reported struggling in six key areas. Students were asked to what degree they were struggling in the following areas: 0 (not struggling) to “10” (greatest struggle they can imagine). For example, despite respondents having technology issues, they considered it to be a relatively small issue compared to work/life balance.

- Work/Life Balance
- Personal Life
- Academics
- Finances
- Extracurriculars
- Technology

Technical Challenges
Many students face difficulties completing certain types of coursework due to lack of internet, shared internet bandwidth, or underpowered devices. One way to help is to ensure content is available both on and offline.

Coursework challenges:
- Personal time/energy
- Remote assessments
- Digital replacements for F2F
- Instructors responding to email
- Access to course materials
- Instructors responding to Canvas

Remote study challenges:
- Work/life balance
- Quiet study space
- Ergonomic study space
- Access to internet
- Troubleshooting tech issues
- Caring for others

General concerns:
- Overall well-being
- Engagement
- Learning Assessment
- Communication
- Completing coursework

Pros of Remote Learning:
- Flexibility
- Comfortable environment
- Able to rewatch tricky concepts
- Better sleep
- Time to eat
- More tech savvy
- Better time management
- Less test anxiety
- Easy to ask questions
- More interaction in class
- Save time commuting
- No rush between classes
- Understanding instructors
- More available content
- Attend classes at other campuses

Cons of Remote Learning:
- Loneliness
- Isolation
- Missing labs
- Keeping fit
- Headaches
- Low motivation
- Mental health decline
- Poor communication
- Difficulty meeting people
- Expensive coursework
- Pressure to cheat
- Dated tech like Flash player
- Hard to focus
- Zoom fatigue

Ways to Support Students
Several questions asked how students want to receive course content and other information. In the open responses, respondents asked for consistency and organization within virtual spaces like Canvas.

Virtual solutions were the best ways to share visual content.

- Annotation over slides
- Virtual whiteboard
- Webcam on whiteboard
- Document camera
- Webcam on blackboard

Pros of Remote Learning:
- Class recordings
- Speed control
- Closed captioning
- Audio transcripts
- Screen magnifier
- Screen reader
- Line out connection

Cons of Remote Learning:
- Emails from instructors
- Canvas messages from instructors
- Canvas general announcements
- Emails from dept. or college
- Penn State Go

Students prefer flexible content that they control when and how to access.