# NATIONAL ONLINE LEARNING SURVEY

May 2020

HANOVER RESEARCH

# INTRODUCTION

In the wake of COVID-19, higher education institutions faced a daunting new set of challenges stemming from the transition to online classes. To assist colleges and universities in making a successful transition across the spring, Hanover Research conducted a survey of more than 26,000 college and university stakeholders – including students, their parents, and faculty and staff - on their perceptions of and preparedness for online learning. The survey explored stakeholders' prior experience with online courses, the impact of moving to an online environment, desired features for online classes, and concerns regarding COVID-19. This report presents the aggregated results from the survey.

Although they capture the needs of a past moment, these results remain troublingly current. While colleges and universities across the country are considering whether to reopen campus in the fall, they must prepare for possible hybrid or fully online scenarios. As such, institutions need to understand key stakeholders' preparedness for online learning and potential pain points in continuing with online classes. Access to this information can help institutions ensure a smoother semester for students and staff, as well as better prepare for what the future may hold in Higher Education.

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# KEY FINDINGS

1. **Despite prior experience with virtual courses, students feel less comfortable with online learning than faculty.**

   - Recommendation: Continue to support faculty while further addressing students' specific concerns with online learning (including access to required devices and recorded lectures/Q&A).

2. **Parents and undergraduate students are the most likely to report a negative impact of transitioning to virtual classrooms, as well as being most concerned about the quality of online instruction.**

   - Recommendation: Implement <u>best practices in online learning</u> and clearly communicate these efforts to stakeholders to regain their confidence.

3. **Students feel less motivated and less engaged in online courses, and faculty want more guidance on how to engage students in a virtual environment.**

   - Recommendation: Promote student-centered processes and foster student autonomy to boost their motivation and engagement levels. Example activities include online discussions, student presentations, group projects, chat rooms, and active message boards.

4. **Students and faculty consider access to devices as well as both recorded and live lectures to be most critical to online learning, yet institutional support for these key components has not been very effective.**

   - Recommendation: Provide loaner devices to students and staff who may require them as well as structured guidance to faculty on delivering and capturing online lectures.

5. **Besides academic performance, students are concerned about mental and emotional health.**

   - Recommendation: Ensure adequate student access to mental and emotional health resources. Coordinate virtual gatherings or activities to ease the hardship inflicted by social isolation.
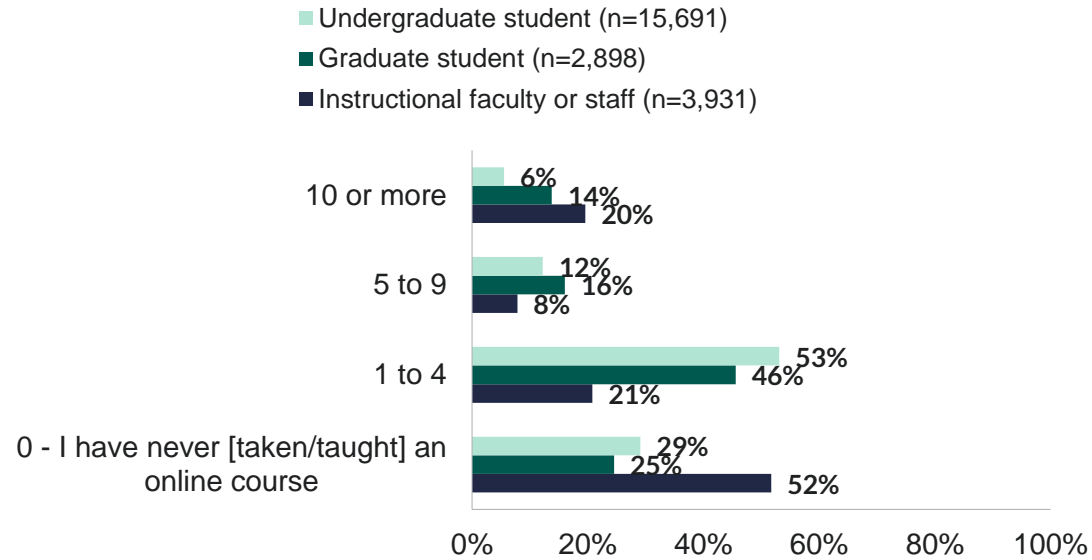
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# READINESS FOR AND IMPACT OF ONLINE LEARNING

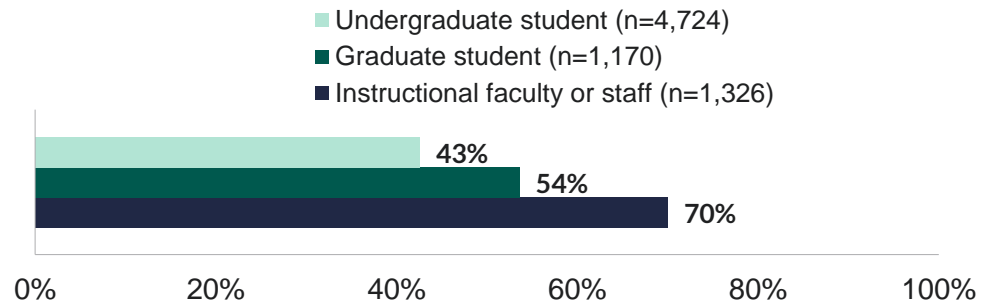# DESPITE HAVING MORE EXPERIENCE, STUDENTS ARE LESS COMFORTABLE WITH ONLINE LEARNING THAN FACULTY.

**Students are more familiar with online learning than faculty are.** Specifically, the majority of undergraduate (71%) and graduate (75%) students had taken online courses prior to this academic term, while more than half (52%) of faculty had never taught an online course.

**However, prior experience does not directly translate into comfort with a virtual classroom.** While more than half of faculty members had not previously taught an online course, over two-thirds (70%) feel comfortable with teaching online. By contrast, only about half of undergraduate (43%) and graduate (54%) students feel comfortable taking online courses.

**Before this academic term, how many online courses have you [taken/taught]?**

- Undergraduate student (n=15,691)
- Graduate student (n=2,898)
- Instructional faculty or staff (n=3,931)

10 or more
- 6%
- 14%
- 20%

5 to 9
- 12%
- 16%
- 8%

1 to 4
- 53%
- 46%
- 21%

0 - I have never [taken/taught] an online course
- 29%
- 25%
- 52%

**How comfortable do you feel [taking/teaching] courses online?**
*% Somewhat or Very Comfortable*

- Undergraduate student (n=4,724)
- Graduate student (n=1,170)
- Instructional faculty or staff (n=1,326)
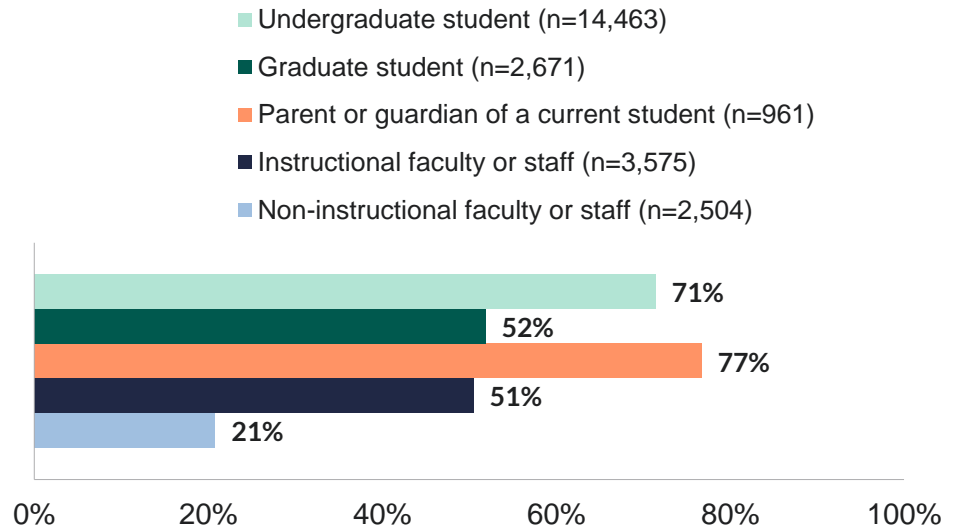
- 43%
- 54%
- 70%

# INDEED, THE TRANSITION TO VIRTUAL CLASSES MOST ADVERSELY AFFECTS UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS.

**Large majorities of both parents (77%) and undergraduate students (71%) report that a temporary transition to online classes will have a negative effect on them/their child.** By comparison, approximately half of graduate students (52%) and instructional staff (51%) indicate they would be negatively affected by this transition.

**This effect is, in large part, related to suspicion that students are poorly prepared for online learning.** Less than half of instructional faculty (37%), non-instructional personnel (43%), and undergraduate students (42%) feel that students are prepared to participate in online courses (see slide 7). Undergraduate students are also unlikely to report feeling engaged in a virtual environment (23%), while more than three-quarters (78%) report feeling less motivated in such environments.

**How [would/does] a temporary transition to online classes affect [you/your child]?**
*Somewhat or Very Negative Effect*

- Undergraduate student (n=14,463)
- Graduate student (n=2,671)
- Parent or guardian of a current student (n=961)
- Instructional faculty or staff (n=3,575)
- Non-instructional faculty or staff (n=2,504)

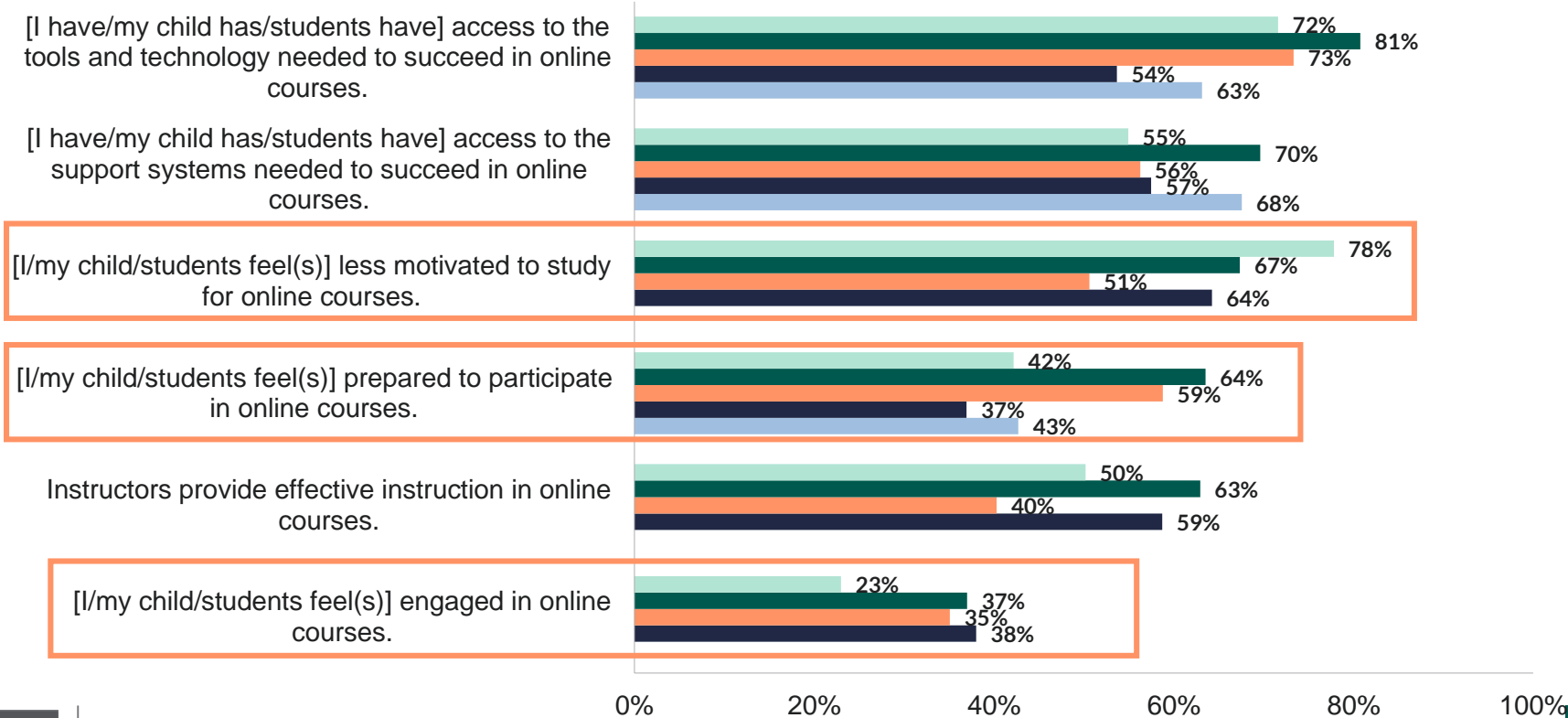| | |
|---|---|
| Undergraduate student | 71% |
| Graduate student | 52% |
| Parent or guardian | 77% |
| Instructional faculty or staff | 51% |
| Non-instructional faculty or staff | 21% |

# MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT ARE THE MAIN BARRIERS TO ONLINE LEARNING, ESPECIALLY AT THE UNDERGRADUATE LEVEL.

**Please rate the extent to which you disagree or agree with the following statements:**
*% Somewhat or Strongly Agree*

- ■ Undergraduate student (n=13,770-15,157)
- ■ Graduate student (n=2,034-2,793)
- ■ Parent or guardian of a current student (n=839-973)
- ■ Instructional faculty or staff (n=2,659-3,463)
- ■ Non-instructional faculty or staff (n=1,979-2,112)

**[I have/my child has/students have] access to the tools and technology needed to succeed in online courses.**
- 72%
- 81%
- 73%
- 54%
- 63%

**[I have/my child has/students have] access to the support systems needed to succeed in online courses.**
- 55%
- 70%
- 56%
- 57%
- 68%

**[I/my child/students feel(s)] less motivated to study for online courses.**
- 78%
- 67%
- 51%
- 64%

**[I/my child/students feel(s)] prepared to participate in online courses.**
- 42%
- 64%
- 59%
- 37%
- 43%

**Instructors provide effective instruction in online courses.**
- 50%
- 63%
- 40%
- 59%

**[I/my child/students feel(s)] engaged in online courses.**
- 23%
- 37%
- 35%
- 38%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

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# ALTERNATIVELY, INSTRUCTIONAL STAFF GENERALLY FEEL PREPARED FOR ONLINE TEACHING.

**Over three-quarters of teaching staff agree that they have access to the tools and technology (79%) and support systems (78%) needed to successfully teach online courses.** Perhaps as a result of this support, more than two-thirds report feeling prepared to teach online courses (70%).

**Please rate the extent to which you disagree or agree with the following statements:**
**(Instructional Staff Only)**
*% Somewhat or Strongly Agree*

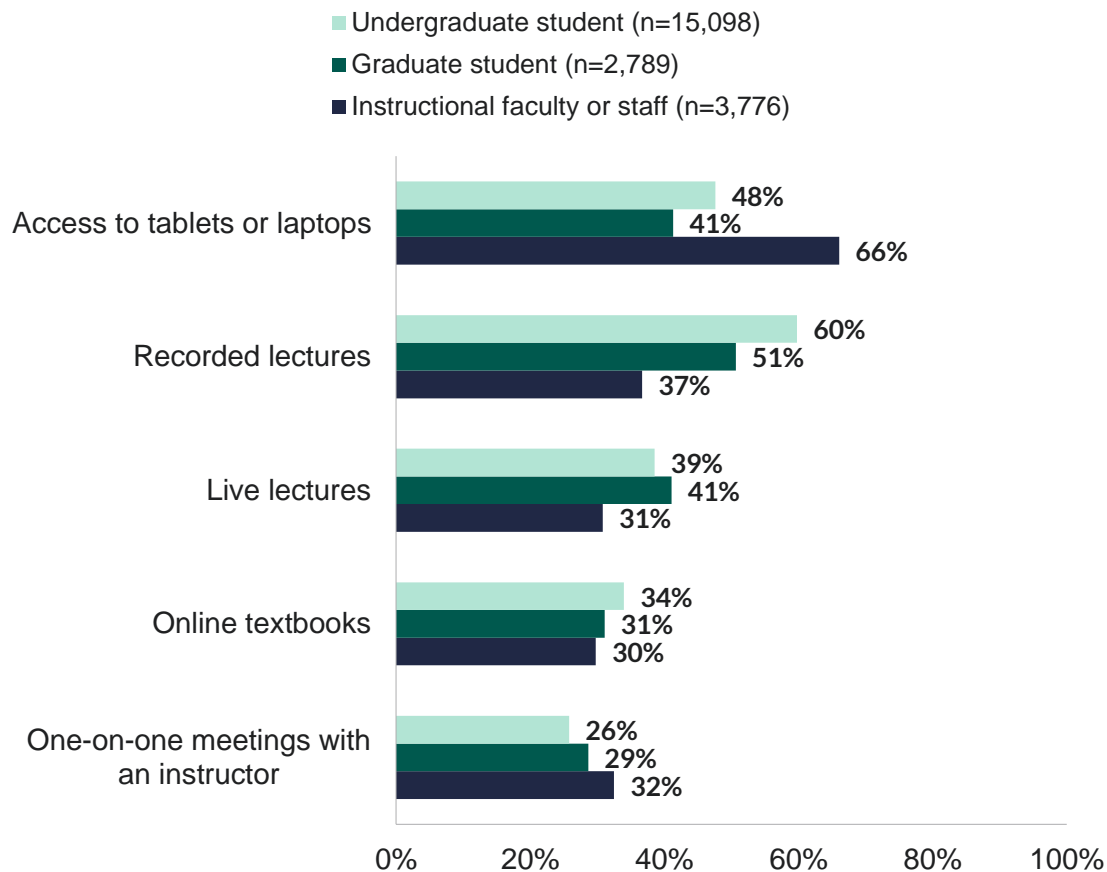| Statement | % |
|---|---|
| I have access to the tools and technology needed to successfully teach online courses. (n=3,704) | 79% |
| I have access to the support systems needed to successfully teach online courses. (n=3,677) | 78% |
| I feel prepared to teach online courses. (n=3,698) | 70% |
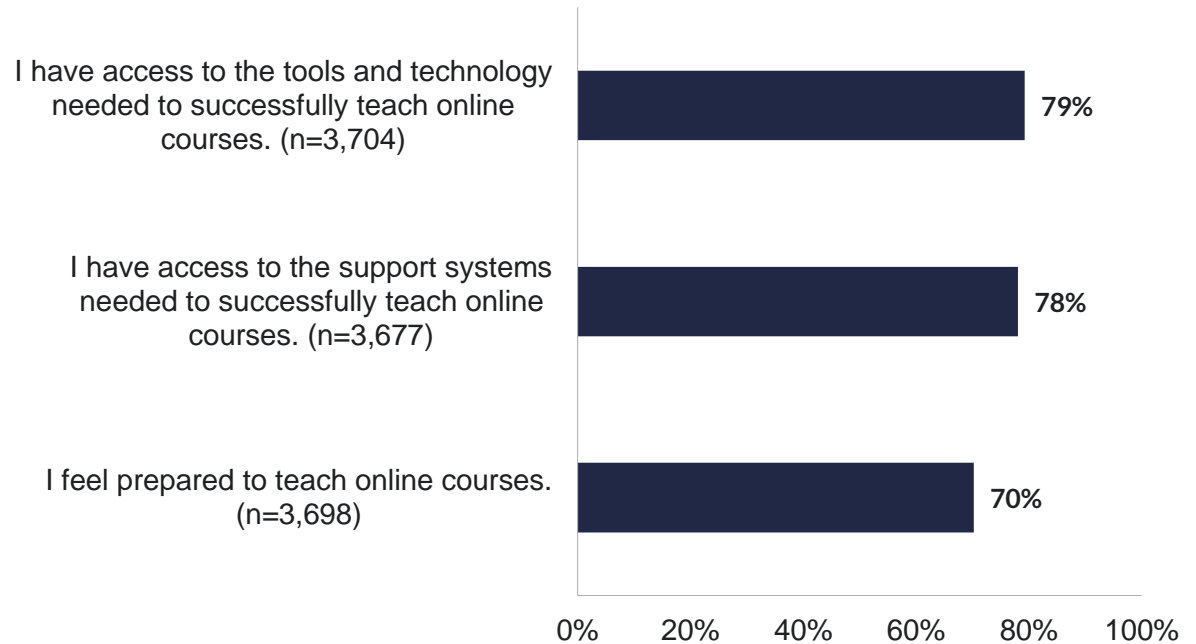
# DESIRED FEATURES AND UNMET NEEDS

# ACCESS TO DEVICES AND RECORDED LECTURES ARE THE MOST CRITICAL FEATURES TO SUCCESSFUL ONLINE LEARNING.

Generally, students and faculty agree on the most critical features for online learning, with some nuanced differences.

**About two-thirds (66%) of faculty deem device access the most important feature, while undergraduate (60%) and graduate (51%) students place higher importance on having recorded lectures.** To a lesser extent, live lectures, online textbooks, and one-on-one meetings with instructors are considered critical to successful online learning by students and faculty alike.

**Which of the following features are the most critical to successful online learning? Please select up to five.**
*Top Five Features*

- Undergraduate student (n=15,098)
- Graduate student (n=2,789)
- Instructional faculty or staff (n=3,776)

**Access to tablets or laptops**
- 48%
- 41%
- 66%

**Recorded lectures**
- 60%
- 51%
- 37%

**Live lectures**
- 39%
- 41%
- 31%

**Online textbooks**
- 34%
- 31%
- 30%

**One-on-one meetings with an instructor**
- 26%
- 29%
- 32%

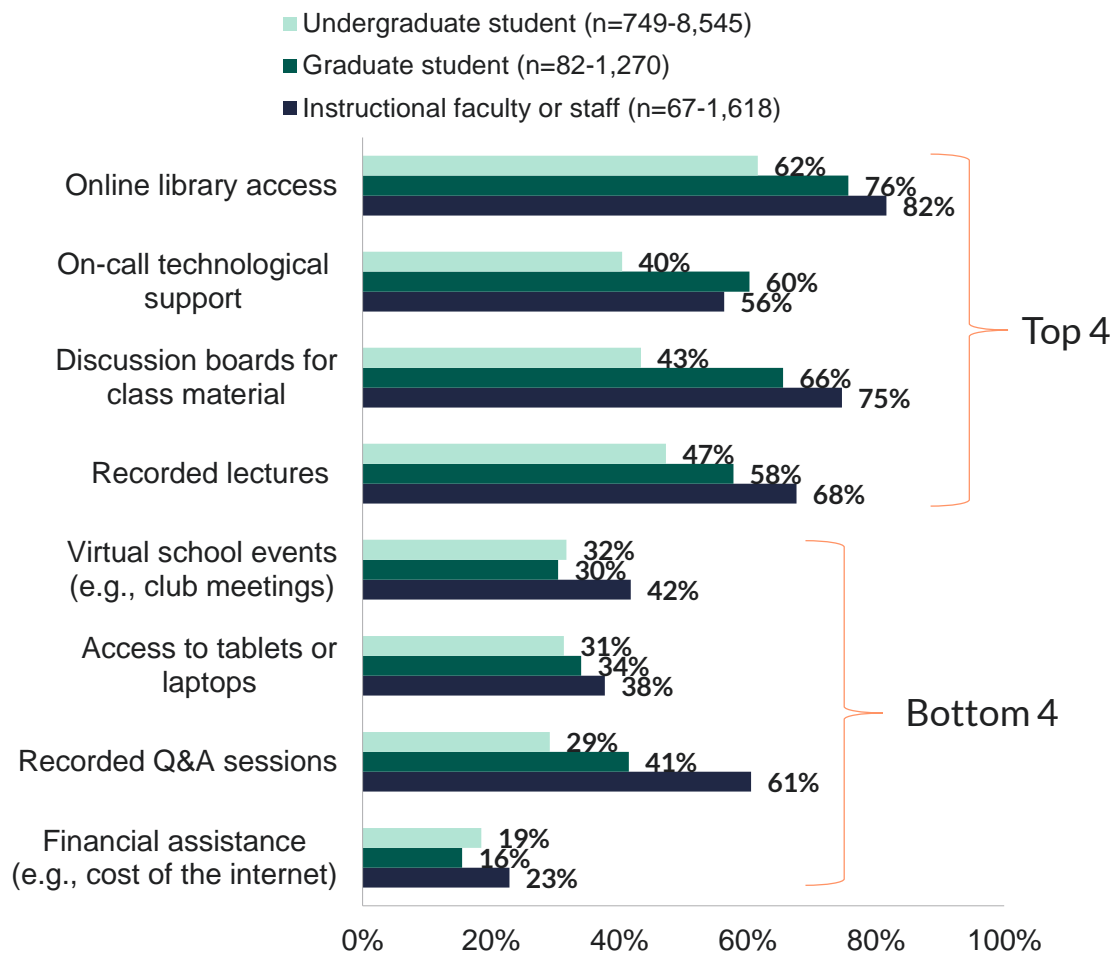0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

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Note:  Only the top five features, selected as most critical by the largest percentage of respondents, are included here. Respondents were asked about 18 features total. Percentages within each stakeholder group sum to more than 100 because respondents could select multiple options.

# THERE IS ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT IN INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT FOR VIRTUAL CLASSROOMS.

**Although access to devices is deemed by stakeholders to be critical to successful learning in an online environment, institutional support may be inadequate.** Only about a third of undergraduate students (31%), graduate students (34%), and faculty (38%) consider their school to be effective at providing access to tablets or laptops. Respondents also perceive institutions to be least effective at providing financial assistance, though it is not a top consideration.

**Faculty are more likely than students to feel that their school is effective at providing recorded lectures and Q&A sessions.** Reconciling this gap may bolster students' confidence in online learning.

### How effective is your school at providing the following online class component[s]?
*Very or Extremely Effective*

- Undergraduate student (n=749-8,545)
- Graduate student (n=82-1,270)
- Instructional faculty or staff (n=67-1,618)

**Online library access**
- 62%
- 76%
- 82%

**On-call technological support**
- 40%
- 60%
- 56%

**Discussion boards for class material**
- 43%
- 66%
- 75%

**Recorded lectures**
- 47%
- 58%
- 68%

Top 4

**Virtual school events (e.g., club meetings)**
- 32%
- 30%
- 42%

**Access to tablets or laptops**
- 31%
- 34%
- 38%

**Recorded Q&A sessions**
- 29%
- 41%
- 61%

**Financial assistance (e.g., cost of the internet)**
- 19%
- 16%
- 23%

Bottom 4

0%  20%  40%  60%  80%  100%

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# FACULTY NEED MORE GUIDANCE ON ENGAGING STUDENTS IN A VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT.

**Faculty generally feel good about the technological components of the shift to online learning.** Most faculty members feel their institution has been effective in delivering on-call technological support, providing training on using online platforms, and allowing faculty to take equipment home.

**However, pedagogical supports are more likely to be lacking.** Less than half of instructional personnel received effective best practices guidance on delivering courses online, and less than one in three received effective advice on how to engage students from a distance. As noted above, students also highlighted a need for better engagement in online courses, suggesting that colleges and universities must tackle this issue across multiple stakeholder groups.

### Effectiveness at Providing Faculty with the Most Critical Supports to Deliver Classes Online
*Top Five Supports*

■ Most Critical Supports (n=3,727)
■ Very or Extremely Effective (n=1,209-1,573)

| Support | Most Critical | Very/Extremely Effective |
|---|---|---|
| On-call technological support | 47% | 58% |
| Advice on how to engage students from a distance | 42% | 31% |
| Allowing faculty and staff to take necessary materials and equipment home | 42% | 51% |
| Instructions on how to use the online platform | 39% | 59% |
| Best practices guidance | 36% | 42% |

Q1: Which of the following supports are the most critical to your success in delivering classes online? Please select up to five.
Q2: How effective is [School] at providing the following online course component[s]?

Note: These questions were only seen by instructional staff. This figure presents the results for only the top five supports, selected as most critical by the largest percentage of respondents. Respondents were asked about 14 supports total.

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# COVID-19 CONCERNS

# STAKEHOLDERS ARE CONCERNED EQUALLY ABOUT THE IMPACT OF COVID-19, BUT DIFFER ON THE SPECIFIC ISSUES.

Despite the pandemic, physical health is not a top concern among stakeholders, suggesting that higher ed providers reacted appropriately to shield students and faculty from damage to their health. **Instead, almost three-quarters (73%) of parents worry about the quality of online instruction, as do two-thirds (66%) of undergraduate students.** Undergraduate students also are disproportionately concerned about falling behind in coursework (68%), likely due to their perceived lack of readiness to participate in online classes (51%). Additionally, students at all levels worry about their mental and emotional health, as well as social isolation.

| | Undergraduate Student (n=14,949) | Graduate Student (n=2,761) | Parent or Guardian (n=954) | Instructional staff (n=3,696) | Non-Instructional Staff (n=2,581) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Quality of online course instruction** | 66% | 49% | 73% | 52% | 20% |
| **Falling behind in coursework** | 68% | 48% | 43% | 13% | 8% |
| **Mental and emotional health** | 56% | 52% | 43% | 33% | 41% |
| **Social isolation** | 50% | 47% | 50% | 33% | 35% |
| **Readiness to participate in online courses** | 51% | 31% | 29% | 23% | 9% |
| **Job security** | 34% | 41% | 14% | 39% | 61% |
| **Physical health** | 35% | 37% | 17% | 29% | 36% |
| **Missing important events (e.g., graduation)** | 39% | 33% | 38% | 17% | 20% |

Q: In light of COVID-19, are you concerned about any of the following issues as they relate to [you/you and your child]? Please select all that apply.
Note: This table presents the results for the top eight concerns by all stakeholders. Respondents were asked about 14 issues total.

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# APPENDIX

# SURVEY OVERVIEW

## KEY OBJECTIVES

- Evaluate the impact that transitioning to online learning due to COVID-19 has had on students, faculty, and staff at higher education institutions in the United States.

- Understand levels of preparedness for online learning among students, faculty, and staff at higher education institutions in the United States.

- Identify the areas in which students, faculty, and staff feel supported by their college/university as they transition to online learning, as well as those areas where they feel less supported.

## SURVEY ADMINISTRATION & SURVEY SAMPLE

- The survey was administered online in April and May of 2020.

- Respondents include faculty, staff, students, and parents of students from 33 colleges and universities across the United States[1].

- The analysis includes a total of 26,985 respondents following data cleaning, including 15,734 undergraduate students, 2,914 graduate students, 1,018 parents, 3,958 instructional staff, and 2,858 non-instructional staff.

- Results are segmented by stakeholder group throughout this report. However, please note that some questions were not seen by all stakeholder groups.

## RESPONDENT QUALIFICATIONS

- Must be a current undergraduate or graduate student, a parent of a current undergraduate or graduate student, or a faculty or staff member at a higher education institution.

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[1] Two university systems administered the survey to multiple colleges/campuses. Responses come from a total of 23 unique university systems.