

A photograph of a large, multi-story brick building with a central tower and a clock face, likely a Rutgers University building. The building is illuminated from within, and the sky is a mix of blue and orange, suggesting dusk or dawn. The building is framed by dark, ornate wrought-iron gates in the foreground. The text 'RUTGERS' is overlaid in the top right corner in a white, serif font.

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School of Communication
and Information

Digital Inequality & Remote Learning Experiences Among RU Undergraduates

Amy Jordan & Vikki Katz | August 21 2020

- Online survey of undergraduates learning remotely at universities across the U.S. and abroad ($N \approx 3,600$)
 - Rutgers-New Brunswick subsample: **$N = 1,281$**
- Convenience sample, distributed among faculty networks at Rutgers for broad representation
- Duration: April 21 to May 15, 2020
 - Caveat: Survey was taken when semester had not been completed for most and stay-at-home orders were in place

About the Sample

- 98% were full-time students
- Half were SC&I majors (our home school)
- 44% had never taken an online class before
- 94% had not completed their semester at the time of the survey

RU Sample Key Demographics

Age	86% between 18 & 21 (modal age 19)
Female	57%
Race/ethnicity	White (47%), Hispanic (15%), Black (9%), Indian (9%), Chinese (6%)
Living arrangement prior to campus shutdown	Dorms/university housing (50%), off campus (27%), at home/with family (22%)
Year in school	Freshman (30%), Sophomores (32%), Juniors (26%), Seniors (12%)
Financial circumstances	Loans to pay for school (57%) Needs-based scholarships (23%) Financially insecure families (28%)

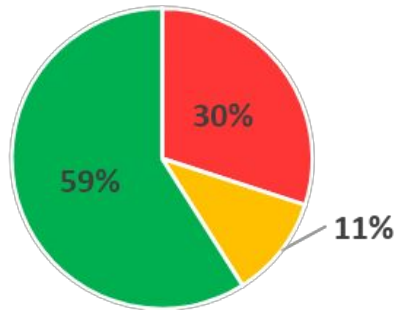
Presentation Overview

- 1. Concerns about Remote Continuation**
- 2. Digital Equity Challenges/Learning Challenges**
- 3. Perceived Learning Opportunities**
- 4. Recommendations for a remote Fall 2020**

Student Perspectives on Remote Fall in April/May

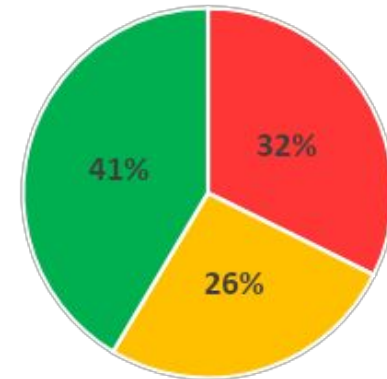
If your university had to remain in remote instruction for the fall...

❓ would it make you **reconsider** remaining in college?



■ Reconsider ■ Neutral ■ Continue

❓ do you feel it would be **worth** remaining in college/continuing to take classes?



■ Not Worth It ■ Neutral ■ Worth It

Digital Equity Challenges

Assistance

Trouble figuring out new programs **35%**

Broadband

Internet connection too slow, used by too many people **51%**

Connectivity

Developing

Slow or in poor working condition **26%**

Digital Equity Challenges to Keep in Mind: Quotes from Rutgers Students

[I've] been kicked out due to **connection issues** and not ...able to join [again], therefore losing content and credit for attending class

My computer is broken and I have not been able to access my classwork as often as I need to maintain my grades. I am worried I won't graduate

My professor includes certain questions that require **file uploads**...[but] I couldn't figure out how to do it from my laptop, so **I had to switch to my phone to take the exam**. The screen was much smaller and it was harder to see the problems, and whenever I'd switch to a different question, the previous problems would reload and delete my picture. I wasted about 20 minutes of my exam trying to figure out how to successfully upload all of my pictures.

Perceived Learning Challenges

Need for Connection & Clear Expectations

- “I am unable to communicate with my professors (52%) and TAs (38%) as much as I would like”
- “I have trouble keeping track of deadlines and due dates now that we do not meet in person” (67%)
- “I have trouble understanding what is being expected of me in this new learning environment” (60%)

Overwhelmed by Work & Trouble Concentrating

- “I am dealing with a higher workload than I expected” (61%)
- “I have trouble concentrating at home because of interruptions from children or other family members” (70%)

Perceived Learning Opportunities

Less Anxiety

- Able to work at my own pace (56%)
- Less worried about exposure to COVID than when attending class on campus (61%)

My professors generally post their lectures online rather than over video calls, so I can watch them at my own pace.

Time to Prioritize

- No extra-curricular activities; more time to focus on schoolwork (39%)
- No commute, so more time and money (48%)
- Opportunity to spend time with loved ones (71%)

I noticed I always feel better, happier, and more motivated when I have online classes in real time with Zoom.

ABCDs

- **Assist faculty to better assist students**
 - Clear, consistent directives for faculty to ensure improved student experience
e.g., Library access, textbook purchases, workload requirements
 - **Train the instructors.** Incentivize completion of relevant modules to ensure high-quality remote teaching with a stipend AND a certificate of completion.
- **Broadband Connectivity:** Ensure students have consistent affordable or free WiFi by providing hotspots or leveraging relationships with NJ ISPs
- **Devices:** Assume that our most vulnerable students will struggle with their devices. Provide RU laptops and tech support free of charge.

A young woman with long dark hair, wearing a blue sweater, is looking at a laptop screen with a frustrated or stressed expression. Her hands are near the screen, and her face shows signs of concern or confusion.

Left To Their Own Devices

How college students manage remote learning during the COVID19 pandemic & how faculty can improve it

How To Make Remote Learning Better? Listen to Students

- 1.** Presume your students are under-connected
- 2.** Less is more: Helping students manage information overload
- 3.** How to create student community
- 4.** Encourage students to develop new learning rituals & routines
- 5.** Develop evaluations that feel fair

Recommendations from Students

Streamline communication with faculty

- SMS-based interaction possibilities?
- Avoid inbox flooding—all course information/deadlines in a centralized location

Standardize platforms and programs to reduce learning curve for students

- Discontinue Sakai so that all courses are on Canvas
- Ensure that all Canvas modalities are visible on phone and tablet, not only laptop
- **Ensure adequate training and ongoing assistance on all learning platforms—especially for freshmen and transfers**
- Many video conferencing services seem unreliable, especially with larger class sizes

Online testing issues

- Time limits, surveillance, upload issues, are performance barriers across test platforms. Students think different test questions/strategies would resolve these problems.

Keeping students motivated, engaged, and part of a learning community

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Thank you for your time

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