

# The Impact of COVID - 19 on the Student Experience

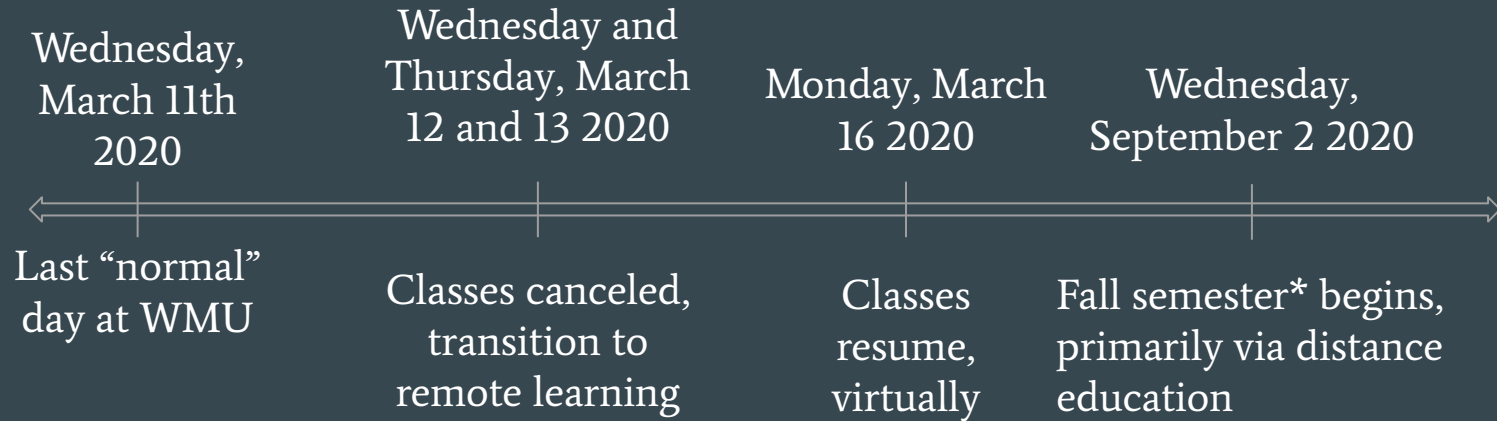
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A WMU Student Survey and Study  
*Henry Thiry's Lee Honors College Thesis*

# Agenda

- Background/timeline
- Survey implementation
- Results overview
- Literature review
- Data deep-dive
- University support
- Future work/moving forward
- Limitations and conclusion
- Q&A

# Background



\*Semester that survey data refers to

# Survey Implementation

- Courses moving online, loss of social connection, and changes in parents'/family members' lives have impacted students
  - I desired to understand how this impact manifested itself
- I deployed a survey, already used at over 20 other colleges and universities, at WMU
  - Survey originally created by the Student Experience in Research University (SERU) and modified for WMU
- I administered the survey to 1,000 randomly selected undergraduate and graduate students via Qualtrics over a four week period, at the end of the Fall 2020 semester and into early Spring 2021
  - N = 94

# Results Overview

- Student responses vary widely
- Overall, students are supportive of WMU's response to COVID - 19
- Students feel like they belong at WMU
- Many students had trouble paying for school, housing, and food
- Mental health/stability were a large concern for students
- COVID - 19 will delay graduation, but students don't plan to stop attending

# Literature Review

- Overall increase in stress and anxiety (Hegde et al. 2020)
  - Stressed about others becoming sick, compounding anxiety
- Can't sleep, can't concentrate, can't see others (Hegde et al. 2020)
- Students seek support, but sometimes in unhealthy ways (Hegde et al. 2020)
- Young people especially susceptible to long term trauma (U.S. News and World Report)
- Anxiety because students' future rides in limbo: jobs, internships and graduation (Araya et al. 2020)
  - Students forced to live with parents/family

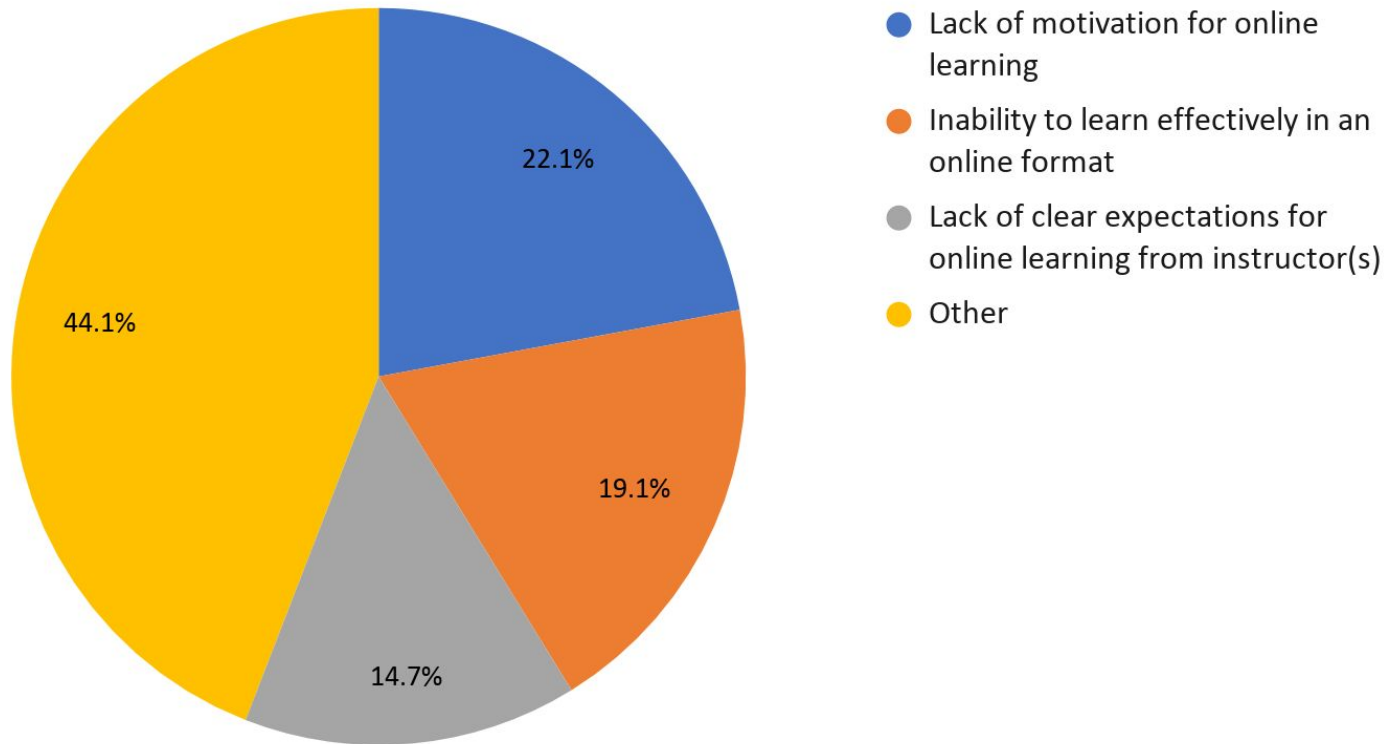
# Literature Review Cont.

- Wealthy students better able to transition to remote education (Economic Policy Institute 2020)
  - Others often unable to access technology needed
- Some students have become more dissatisfied with online education, increasing absenteeism and burnout (Economic Policy Institute 2020)
  - Almost 40% of colleges reported being primarily online for Fall 2020 (The Chronicle of Higher Education)
- Students are asking, “is college still valuable (enough)?” (The Chronicle of Higher Education)
- Students forced to work in high-risk jobs during the pandemic (Third Way)
  - Hospitality industry especially risky, vaccine only recently (Monday, April 5th) available to all in MI

	<b>Very dissatisfied</b>	<b>Dissatisfied</b>	<b>Satisfied</b>	<b>Very satisfied</b>
Support you received from instructors to successfully learn online	6.7%	26.7%	60%	6.7%
The overall quality of your courses that were moved online	13.3%	28%	48%	10.7%
Satisfaction with Western Michigan University's overall response to the COVID-19 pandemic	8%	28%	53.3%	10.7%
	<b>Not at all well</b>	<b>Slightly well</b>	<b>Well</b>	<b>Very well</b>
How well were you able to adapt to the new online instruction implemented by Western Michigan University in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?	15.3%	32.9%	38.8%	12.9%

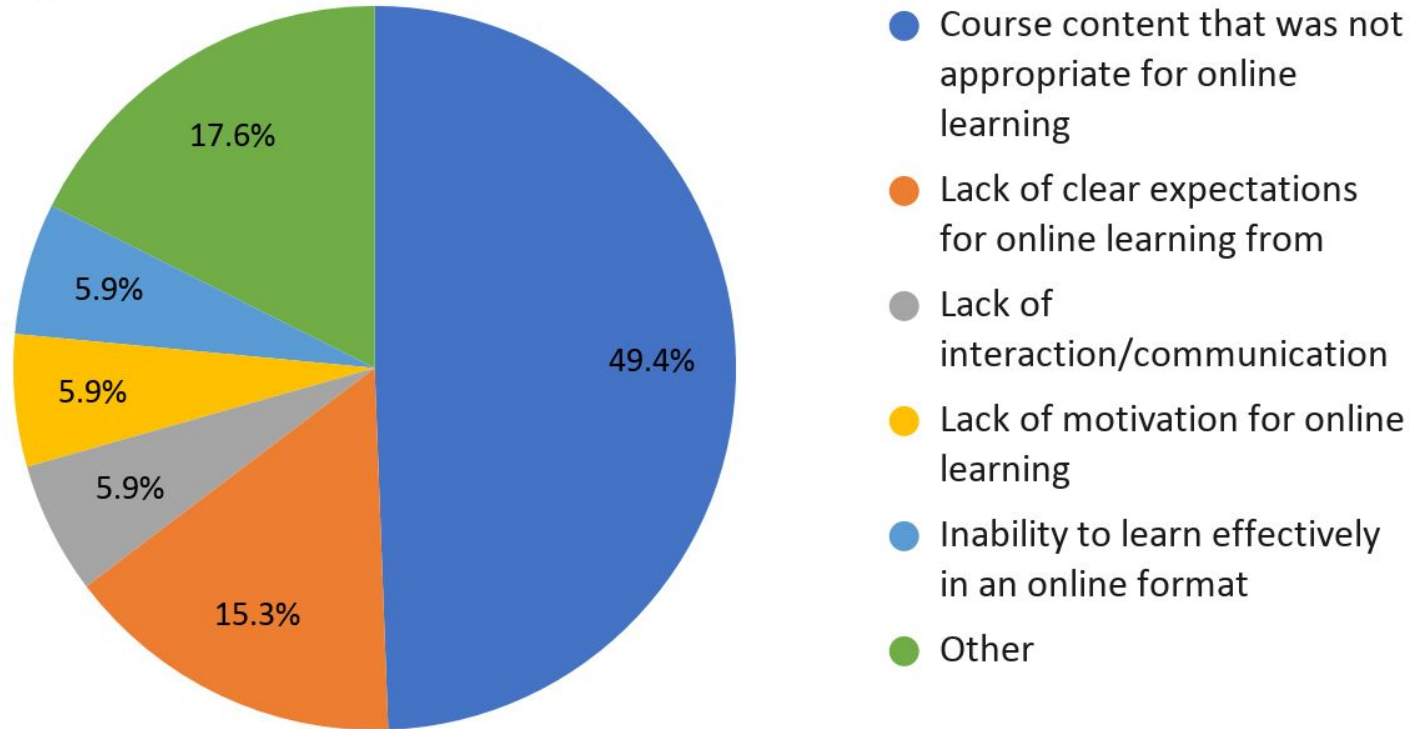


Figure 2



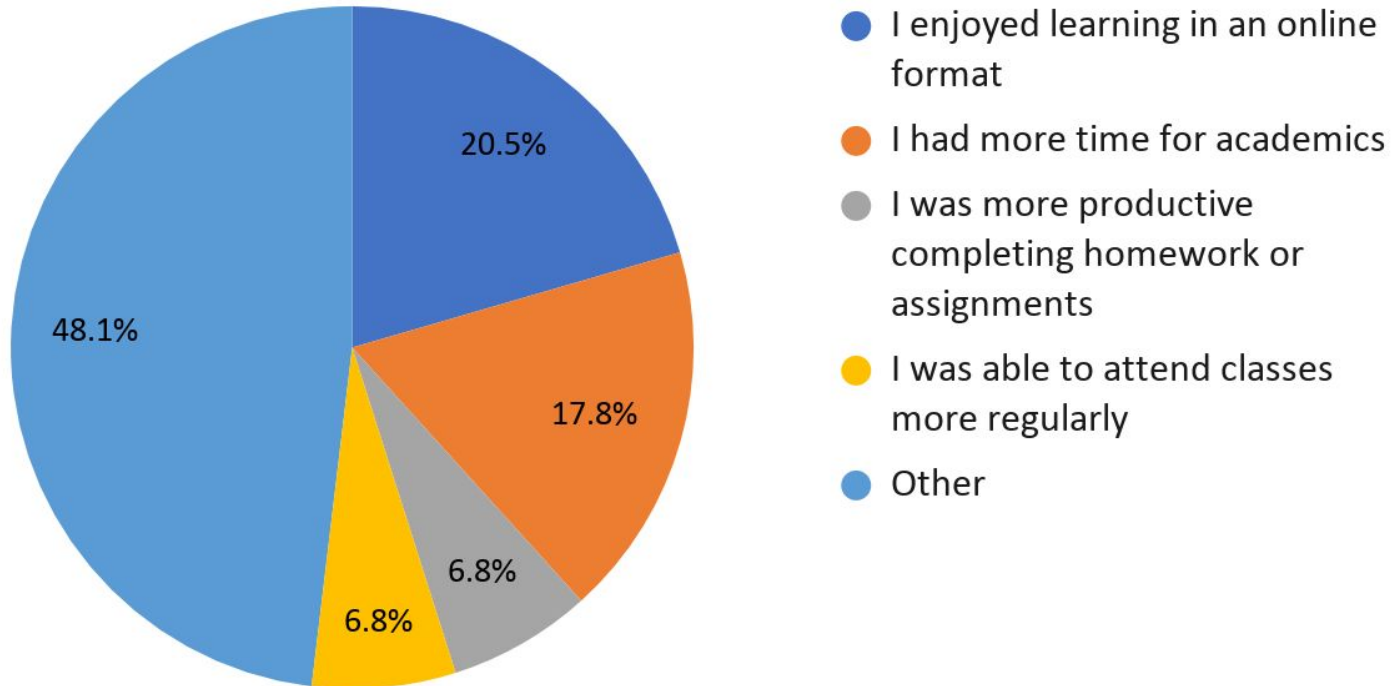
Which obstacle was the most challenging to your successful transition to online learning during the COVID-19

Figure 3



Obstacle to your successful transition to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Figure 4



Positive experiences associated with your online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?

	<b>Never true</b>	<b>Sometimes true</b>		<b>Often true</b>
I was worried whether my food would run out before I got money to buy more	79.7%	13.5%	+	6.8%
The food that I bought just didn't last, and I didn't have money to get more	86.5%	5.4%	+	8.1%
I worried I would not have enough money to cover the cost of my housing	68.9%	17.6%	+	13.5%
I was unable to pay all of the cost of my housing on time	87.7%	6.8%	+	5.5%

	<b>Not at all difficult</b>	<b>Slightly difficult</b>	<b>Difficult</b>	<b>Very difficult</b>	<b>Extremely difficult</b>
How difficult was it to pay for your education in fall 2020 at Western Michigan University?	32.5%	35%	12.5%	15%	5%
	<b>Less difficult</b>	<b>About the same</b>	<b>More difficult</b>		
Compared to pre-pandemic semesters, how difficult was paying for your education in fall 2020?	3.03%	60.61%	36.36%		

<b>Over the last two weeks, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems?</b>	<b>Not at all</b>	<b>Several days</b>	<b>More than half the days</b>	<b>Nearly every day</b>
Little interest or pleasure in doing things.	24%	44%	14.7%	17.3%
Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless	32%	41.3%	13.3%	13.3%
Feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge	10.7%	41.3%	21.3%	26.7%
Not being able to stop worrying	22.7%	33.3%	24%	20%

	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
I feel valued as an individual at Western Michigan University	8.1%	9.5%	8.1%	36.5%	32.4%	5.4%
I feel that I belong at Western Michigan University	4.1%	6.8%	6.8%	33.8%	39.2%	9.5%
I feel that Western Michigan University supported me during the COVID-19 pandemic	12.2%	12.2%	18.9%	32.4%	20.3%	4.1%

# University Support

- Students understood that decisions were out of WMU's control
  - Kalamazoo County Health Department spoke directly to students through the Western Student Association
- WMU offered a number of outlets to receive mental health support
  - WellTrack app, Virtual counseling and telemedicine
- All stakeholders have a critical role to play in the revival of colleges and universities everywhere
  - What role should/do universities play in the lives of students?



# Future work

- Focus on health equity and access
  - Students must be able to access mental health care
- Invest heavily in the Invisible Need Project
  - Food insecurity amongst college students has been an issue, even before the pandemic
- Consider a more equitable distribution of financial assistance (messaging)
- Introduce well-being initiatives, intertwined with classes, especially those delivered online
- Understand why students feel as though they belong

# Limitations and Conclusion

- Small response rate, 250 responses were desired
  - Unable to make conclusions about specific subgroups
- Survey was not sent to students who dropped out before the Fall 2020 semester
  
- Students struggled in paying for food, housing, and school
  - This was likely an issue, to some extent, before the pandemic
- Students felt supported by WMU and their instructors
- Mental health was and continues to be the largest concern
  - Experts extremely concerned that this will manifest itself as trauma throughout life

Q&A