

Research Brief: *COVID-19 Student Survey Preliminary Results*

In response to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis and Mt. San Antonio College's (Mt. SAC) move to a remote learning experience, the Office of Research and Institutional Effectiveness (RIE) and the Office of Instruction began planning a series of surveys to gather relevant feedback from the campus community including students, faculty, and staff.

The first phase of this research was the creation and distribution of the *COVID-19 Student Survey*. The survey was influenced by a series of discussions throughout April 2020 that included input from Academic Senate and Student Services leadership. The following research brief provides highlights from the main sections of the survey and provides recommendations based on an initial analysis of the results. A more comprehensive analysis will be shared out with the campus community in the summer.

Methodology and Limitations

The student survey consisted of 42 total items, including multiple choice and open-ended questions. The survey was delivered to all spring 2020 credit students' Mt. SAC email accounts on April 23, 2020 and was closed on May 18, 2020. A total of 27,763 students received an invitation to complete the survey and 2,421 responses were collected for a response rate of 8.7%. The most relevant limitation with online surveys is respondents' access to technology to complete the survey. Students who are unable to reliably access the internet and their Mt. SAC email accounts would have been less likely to respond to the survey. Therefore results may be over reporting access to online learning and under reporting other issues.

Key Findings

Technology Issues. While a large majority of respondents indicated that a computer, laptop or tablet was available to them in order to access their online content (94.0%), many still struggled with the use of technology for their courses. The two most common technological issues students encountered were their instructors' (38.7%) and their own (29.1%) discomfort or lack of familiarity with the required technologies or applications. Other common issues were a lack of access to reliable internet (25.9%), unclear expectations of which applications they were required to use (23.5%), and trouble finding adequate digital replacements for face-to-face collaboration (22.5%). In open ended comments, students mentioned consistent connectivity issues with Zoom and Canvas, and described how they were unable to access supporting hardware, such as printers and scanners, and software, such as Microsoft Word and Excel.

Learning Experience Issues. In a series of questions related to their learning experience, students indicated that they were having trouble maintaining sufficient levels of time and effort to complete their schoolwork. Only 17.0% of students indicated that they were able to keep a regular schedule and 42.9% had issues finding time to participate in their classes. A slight majority of students expressed difficulties with online learning; for example, 53.7% had trouble focusing or paying attention to remote instruction or activities, and another 53.5% indicated that they had a personal preference for face-to-face learning. In total, about 57% of respondents indicated they had issues completing their course assignments in a timely matter.

In open-ended responses, students elaborated on these issues:

- *It is difficult for people who are working to have time to do the [course] work... People [at work] are calling out sick, there's no coverage, we are dealing with the public. It is mentally draining to not be able to work by a schedule and have Zoom meeting... [faculty] are not accommodating to everyone because not everyone has the free time to be available.*
- *I don't have a space in my house [that] I can use for learning, studying and homework without constantly being interrupted by my four children of different ages at different times.*
- *I'm an avid visual and hands-on learner and I can't teach myself... it scares me because this is my last semester before I transfer, and I can't afford not to pass.*
- *Looking at the laptop for hours is kind [of] exhausting, it makes my productivity lessen at the end of the day...it makes it tougher to do lab assignments as I have to figure it out myself...*

Financial, housing and mental health issues. A key part of the student survey focused on issues outside the classroom, and was heavily influenced by the Hope Center COVID-19 survey. Responses in this section indicated that students were encountering significant financial, housing and health barriers to learning. Of students who had a job prior to the COVID-19 crisis, 39.0% lost their job, and another, 36.3% had their hours and/or pay reduced. 35.0% of students indicated that in the last 30 days, the food they bought did not last and that they did not have the money to get more. Relatedly, 36.5% of students had to cut the size of their meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food.

As such, 79.2% of students indicated they were moderately or highly concerned with their mental and physical health, 75.1% were concerned with the effects of a lower income, and 74.0% were concerned with issues related to social isolation.

Students commented that:

- *It's very hard to focus and concentrate on school-related work when I'm worried about many other things like no income coming in for my family, eventually running out of money to buy basics, the pandemic and the suffering of those worse off than me and my family...and not being able to go out to have human contact. It's also very hard for me to [learn] online, I signed up for face to face classes for a reason.*
- *I am constantly living in fear and anxiety...my professors are not patient with the course material. It's very fast paced, and I lack resources, so I have to try to do everything on my phone. By the time I get to finally catch up, the material has been locked and they've moved on, so I fail the modules and quizzes. The fear and anxiety is overwhelming and I can't work under this pressure. I am forced to worry about my rent, bills and food. About my survival.*

Questions related to housing revealed that 9.6% of respondents only had a temporary place to stay and 2.7% indicated they had to sleep in an outdoor location in the last 30 days. About 11% of respondents indicated that they have felt physically and emotionally unsafe at home; with 61.4% of these students indicating issues with verbal abuse and 63.4% with emotional abuse.

Awareness of Mt. SAC Covid-19 Resources. To assess the effectiveness of the college's messaging, students were asked to identify their awareness of various services and resources the college has made available to students. Large majorities of students indicated an awareness of the excused withdrawal and Pass/No Pass options related to COVID-19 (86.8%), online counseling (77.3%), online tutoring (75.8%) and the Mountie Fresh Food Pantry (73.8%). But only 58.7% of students were aware of Mt. SAC's mental health services and only 52.9%

were aware of the Mountie Fresh Basic Needs Resources, which provides food resources, housing referrals and case-management support for students.

What has gone well? The final question of the survey asked students to elaborate on what has gone well during this time. In general, the theme of these comments indicated positive feelings for flexible faculty, and instances when they were able to connect with other students.

Some representative comments include:

- *A couple of my professors have been very understanding, they make themselves available for one-on-one or smaller group sessions, they answer emails as fast as they can, and their deadlines have been flexible, as well as not requiring that we attend all Zoom meetings as our home life sometimes doesn't permit it.*
- *Academically, my professors expressing their compassion and understanding has gone the best during this difficult time. It's nice to know that they are trying as hard as possible to stay connected and make class as interesting as possible on Zoom. Also, their ability to be more lenient during this time is super helpful because of the stress and anxiety that I have been feeling lately.*
- *Hearing from my professors in emails, Canvas messages, and watching videos they post has been nice.*
- *I feel that some of my friends in class have supported me and made a WhatsApp group just to keep up with the class.*

Opportunities for Improvement

An initial review of the data collected from the Covid-19 Student Survey indicated that many students are struggling with their course workload and learning in an online environment. These issues are compounded by stressors brought on by financial hardships and the worries about their mental and physical health.

These results present the following opportunities for Mt. SAC as it continues to support students during the COVID-19 crisis and the move to a remote learning environment:

Opportunity #1: Increase awareness and use of mental health services and the Mountie Fresh Basic Resources for students. In both multiple-choice responses and in open ended comments, large numbers of respondents indicated they were dealing with issues related to their mental health brought on by the crisis. Yet only 58.7% of students were aware of mental health services at Mt. SAC, and of those, only 3.4% had used these services. Similarly, with a significant number of respondents indicating housing and food insecurity, additional communications about the Mountie Fresh Basic Resources may prove helpful.

Opportunity #2: Encourage faculty to be more flexible with deadlines and scheduling. Students indicated that they were having trouble maintaining consistent schedules and adjusting to distance learning. In comments students identified "inconsiderate" faculty as a barrier, and "considerate" faculty as what has gone the best in the current circumstances. Results indicate that faculty who can find ways to maintain course rigor while allowing for flexibility in their deadlines will help encourage student success.

Opportunity #3: Continue to support students by creating engaging online learning environments. A majority of respondents preferred face-to-face learning and indicated that they felt disconnected or isolated in the current environment. As such, providing faculty with the proper tools and training to provide an engaging online environment that includes significant student-to-student interaction is key. Additionally, students also commented that they appreciated faculty who were responsive to their questions, concerns, and requests for additional support.