Was it What You Expected? The Impact of COVID-19 on First-Year College Students

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Abstract

Fall 2020, COVID-19 restrictions in place on most college campuses may have resulted in the reality of college life not aligning with student expectations. This survey study, conducted at a university in the Midwest, sought to determine the perceptions of first-year college students regarding whether there was a misalignment with their prior expectations and in which areas these misalignments existed, if they did exist. At this university, the COVID-19 restrictions resulted in changes in the delivery formats of courses, and restrictions of social gatherings and on-campus activities. In addition, academic resources such as tutoring, writing center assistance, and study groups were unavailable or curtailed in scope and operating times. This study focused on student perceptions of the impact of course delivery, academics, and social opportunities. The majority of the first-year students in this study reported they were unsure if the restrictions impacted their expectations of what college would be like academically but did report their belief that blended/hybrid courses better supported their learning than either synchronous or asynchronous courses. The largest factor impacting the misalignment of prior student expectations and the Fall 2020 college campus reality was linked to social activities and interactions with 60% of participants listing this as an area where the Fall 2020 college experiences did not meet their expectations.

Keywords: *COVID-19 college expectations, first-year college COVID-19 experiences, COVID-19 impact on college students*

Introduction

As spring draws near on a high school campus, transitioning students look forward to graduation and enacting plans for their futures. Those who plan to attend college increasingly anticipate what they think college life will be like. Discussions of majors, classes, dorm room life, and more control over their social lives are topics they may examine. However, for students who began their college tenure during the COVID-19 pandemic, much of what they may have imagined did not transpire or did not transpire in alignment with their expectations. Courses were often converted to online, students could not gather in large numbers, social distancing was required, and masking became the norm. These students entered a college environment minus many of the elements they were excitedly looking forward to and minus interactions they thought they would have as more

than 1,300 colleges and universities across the nation canceled in-person classes (National Conference of State Legislature, 2020). It stands to reason that these factors, which were fundamentally altered by the circumstances of the pandemic, affected student impressions and feelings of their first immersion into college life. What cannot be assumed is the scope and depth of impact of these factors and whether they will have lasting effects.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this survey study was to investigate the perceptions of students attending a midwestern university for their first semester in Fall 2020. This was the first semester students were physically on campus following the pandemic campus closing of Spring 2020. The questionnaire survey focused on course delivery, future academic decisions, social experiences, and expectations of this group. Knowledge of student perceptions of these key components may help colleges and universities better meet the needs of this group of students as they move forward in their education.

Review of Literature

Students always have expectations of what university classes and university life will be. They usually think about it, talk about it, and maybe even fantasize about it (Balloo, 2018; Briggs, 2006). They wonder how they will be assessed, what their professors will be like, how much time they will have to spend studying, how many papers they will have to write, and how much autonomy they will have (Brinkworth, et al., 2009; Surgenor, 2013). Of course, students vary greatly in their personal circumstances, and their expectations of college life and the subsequent academic demands vary along with them, but regardless, expectations exist in some form.

These expectations may not always match the reality of college courses. Research by Brinkworth, et al. (2009) found evidence that students' expectations may not be aligned with what the university and professors intend or are able to provide. If expectations do not match those of the university, student experience may be negatively impacted. Unmet expectations may affect student academic performance, attendance, dropout risk, and their overall satisfaction with the university (Lobo & Gurney, 2014).

The above studies reflect the concerns of student expectations not being met while attending a university during, what is assumed, fairly normal times. During Spring 2020, education was anything but normal due to the abrupt change to online instruction because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Courses at the researchers' university were transitioned to online in either synchronous, asynchronous, or blended/hybrid formats, and the Zoom web conferencing platform became a common method of communicating "face to face." This transition was done midway through Spring 2020 on a short time frame and was the first time many faculty had contemplated teaching online. One benefit of this half-semester was that it did allow faculty to gain experience and receive training to better prepare for online teaching for the first-year students arriving for the fall semester.

Along with online learning, first-year students encountered other issues that may not have met their expectations of what their first semester of college would be like. Du (2016) considers peer mentoring, relationships with faculty, and quality of interaction as key components in first-year students' satisfaction with college life. These factors were greatly impacted by the COVID-19 safety precautions in place on many university and college campuses. Rather than having the

college experience they had imagined, students dealt with the reality of masking, quarantines, and restricted group activities and gatherings.

Güner (2021) examined the emotional mood of first-year students who were beginning their university education with distance learning because of COVID-19. The emotions of the students were categorized into four sub-themes as "emotion of shock, unfamiliarity to the systems, emotion of curiosity, and future anxiety" (p. 155). Students expressed curiosity about the efficiency of lessons, the exams, and the evaluation system. According to Güner (2021), these first-year undergraduate students "could not experience the excitement of starting the university face-to-face education like other undergraduate students, and instead of this excitement, they experienced sadness, anxiety, and bitterness that could be called shock emotions" (p. 156).

Hunter (2006) describes the first-year experience as underpinning the "entire undergraduate experience" (p. 7) and laments that administrators and professors overlook the most important resource— the students themselves—when developing strategies, methodologies, and identifying pertinent information to improve first-year student learning and subsequent success.

This study surveys students in a first-year program immediately following the Fall 2020 semester which was the first full semester students dealt with COVID-19 restrictions and academia's attempts at limiting student exposure through online formats such as synchronous online, asynchronous online, and blended/hybrid options for learning.

Methodology

Research Design

This study utilized a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design. "A cross-sectional survey is one in which data are collected from selected individuals at a single point in time. Cross-sectional designs are effective for providing a snapshot of the current behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs in a population" (Mills & Gay, 2019, p. 202).

Site of Study

This study took place at a 4-year public institution in the Midwest. There are approximately 23,500 students enrolled, of which over 19,000 are undergraduates and about 4,000 are graduate students. Approximately 9,000 of the students are males and over 14,000 are females. This institution is located in a metropolitan area with a population of slightly over 167,000 people.

Participants

The participants in this study were all first-year college students enrolled in an introduction to college life foundations course designed to orient new students to college life, provide strategies for time management and study habits, and familiarize new students with university policies, Title IX, and campus resources available to them.

While there were approximately 2,215 students enrolled in the first-year foundations of college life course across the university, not all sections of this course utilized the three delivery formats of synchronous, asynchronous, and blended/hybrid examined in this study. Researchers

utilized convenience sampling to recruit the participants from the researchers' classes where students were exposed to the three different delivery formats. This identifies a potential sample size of 120 students who could have responded to the survey.

There were 44 valid responses to the survey, of which 36 (82%) were female and four (9%) were male. One participant (2%) was non-binary/third gender, and three (7%) chose not to respond to this question. The majority of the participants were in the age range of 18-21. All the participants stated they were familiar with at least one of the learning management systems listed on the survey, indicating they had some level of experience with an online learning environment.

The ethnicity of the participants varied. Eighty-six percent ($n=38$) were White; 5% ($n=2$) were Black, and 2% ($n=1$) were Hispanic/Latinx. None of the participants identified as Asian or Native American. Three participants (7%) chose the "Prefer not to answer" option.

Procedures

A 43-question survey (see Appendix A) which included the informed consent, was developed in Qualtrics® and distributed to 120 students. Of that number, there were 44 valid responses netting a response rate of 37%. The three researchers sent the link to the Qualtrics survey to their classes through the campus email system. The survey responses were collected for two weeks, then a reminder email was sent out to the participants, and data was collected for an additional two weeks. An analysis of the data is presented in the Results section.

Ethical considerations were followed throughout the study. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (IRB-FY2019-662) was received prior to recruiting participants; the distribution of informed consent forms and the survey; and before any data was collected.

Participation in the study was completely voluntary. The informed consent (see Appendix B) was embedded as the first page of the survey, and students had to agree before they could access the questionnaire. A participant could withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

The privacy and confidentiality of the participants were maintained throughout the study as well. No names, student numbers, or any other identifying information was requested on the survey in order to maintain the anonymity of the participants. Any data displayed is presented in aggregate and no individual responses are identifiable.

The data collected was stored in the cloud on a password-protected Qualtrics account accessible only to the researchers. There are no known risks to the participants.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the 44 valid responses to the survey were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The demographic data provided by the participants was presented above. The data collected from the remainder of the survey is presented in detail in the following Results section.

Results

This study examined the perceptions of first-year college students attending university for the first-time during Fall 2020 following the Spring 2020 COVID-19 campus closing. The following questions guided the research in determining the perceptions of these first-year students regarding course delivery, future academic decisions, social experiences, and expectations of this group. The research questions are as follows:

1. Did course delivery formats impact student learning during COVID-19 restrictions of Fall 2020?

2. Were student academic expectations affected by the restrictions of COVID-19 during Fall 2020?

3. Were student social expectations affected by the restrictions of COVID-19 during Fall 2020?
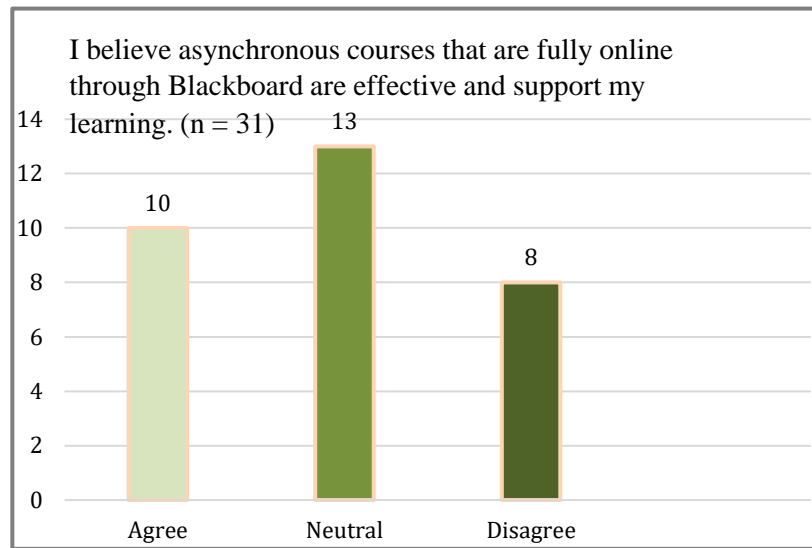
Research Question 1:

Did course delivery formats impact student learning during COVID-19 restrictions of Fall 2020?

Questions 14–26 of the survey asked students about their previous experience with learning management systems before attending university, and all participants *indicated* they had previous experience with at least one of the learning management systems listed. This suggests they had some level of experience with online learning or a blended/hybrid environment.

Asynchronous

Forty students answered the question, "Did you participate in at least one course during Fall 2020 at this university, that was fully online and managed through Blackboard?" The 31 students who responded "yes", answered the follow-up question giving their opinion of the effectiveness of asynchronous courses supporting their learning. It was determined that 78% (n=31) participated in at least one asynchronous course during Fall 2020 that was fully online and managed through the Learning Management System (LMS) of Blackboard. Twenty-three percent (n=9) of students did not participate in an asynchronous course. Asynchronous courses are defined by Abisado et al., (2020), as courses where students do not attend class or participate in class activities at a set time. In Figure 1, 32% (n=10) of students who responded reported they felt these classes effectively supported their learning while 26% (n=8) felt they were not supported. The largest number of students, 42% (n=13), were neutral on whether asynchronous classes were effective or not effective in supporting their learning.
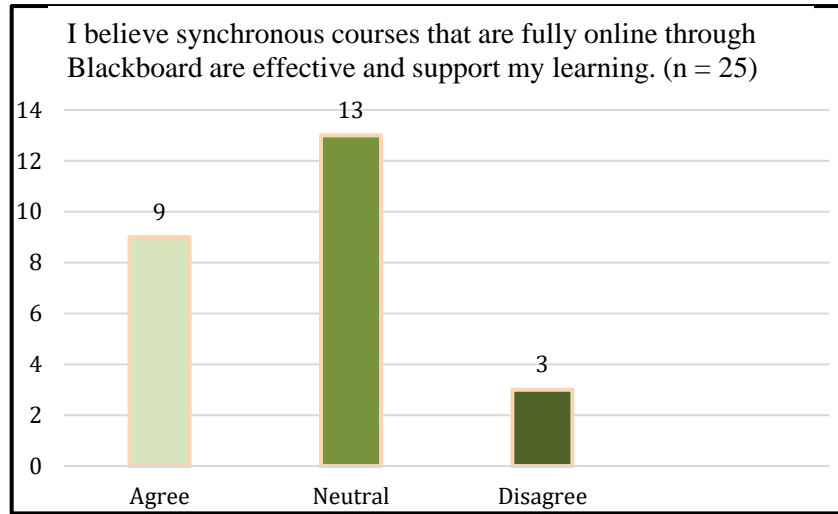
Figure 1*: Asynchronous Courses—Blackboard Course*

I believe asynchronous courses that are fully online through Blackboard are effective and support my learning. (n = 31)

Response	Count
Agree	10
Neutral	13
Disagree	8

Synchronous

Synchronous courses are defined by Olt (2018) as online courses where students and instructors attend the course at the same time but from different places. In this study, attendance was usually through ZOOM, Collaborate, or another online conferencing platform.

Twenty-five of the participants (62.5%) in the study reported they had at least one course conducted in this format. Of the 25 participants who had at least one synchronous class, 36% (*n*=9) felt effectively supported in their learning with this format. This finding, in Figure 2, was similar to the responses of those participants who reported asynchronous classes were effective in supporting their learning. The percentage which showed a noticeable difference was among students who said they were not supported in their learning. Twelve percent (*n*=3) said they did not feel supported in synchronous classes while 26% (*n*=11) said they did not feel supported in asynchronous classes. Similar to the findings on asynchronous classes, the largest number of students, 52% (*n*=13), reported they were neutral on whether synchronous classes supported their learning.
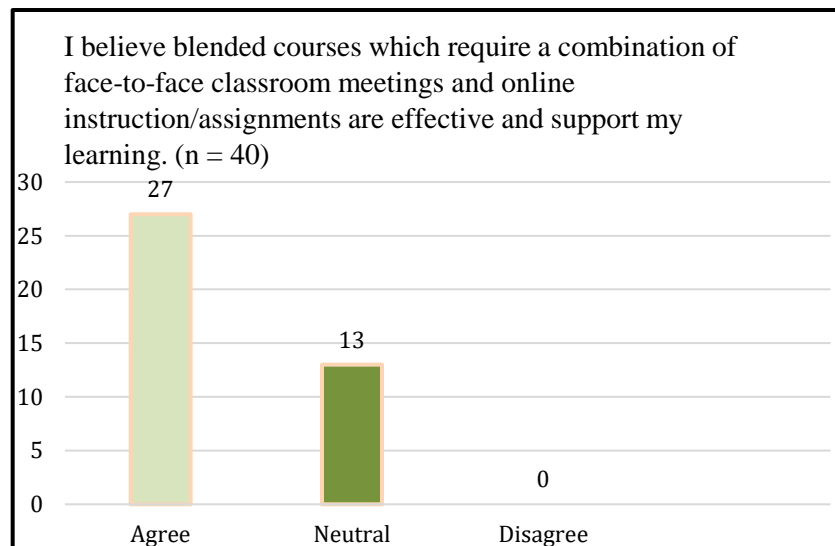
Figure 2: *Synchronous Courses Through Zoom, Collaborate, or Another Online Conferencing Platform*

I believe synchronous courses that are fully online through Blackboard are effective and support my learning. (n = 25)

Agree: 9
Neutral: 13
Disagree: 3

Blended/Hybrid

The survey also asked students about courses offered in a blended/hybrid format. This format is defined by Singh et al., (2021) as a course which meets part of the time in a face-to-face classroom environment and part of the time virtually/online either synchronously or asynchronously. In Figure 3, 100% (n=40) of students reported having at least one course that was blended/hybrid, and 68% (n=27) felt supported in their learning when taking courses in this format. Thirty-three percent (n=13) of students were neutral on whether blended/hybrid courses effectively supported their learning. The largest difference in a comparison of the three course formats described in the survey was that no students reported they felt they were not effectively supported when using the blended/hybrid course format.

Figure 3*: Blended/Hybrid Courses—Asynchronous and Synchronous*

I believe blended courses which require a combination of face-to-face classroom meetings and online instruction/assignments are effective and support my learning. (n = 40)

Agree: 27
Neutral: 13
Disagree: 0

Perceptions of Course Delivery

Additionally, students were surveyed for their perceptions on the impact of course delivery systems on their learning. Students were asked about using a learning management system to navigate course content and whether online classes and ZOOM conferencing were as effective as face-to-face courses in supporting their academic success shown in Table 1. Students also addressed whether class schedules for the different learning formats were confusing and if the required technology was a hindrance. Lastly, students responded on how likely they were to include online courses in their future college plans.

Table 1*: Student Perceptions of the Impact of Course Delivery Formats on Learning*

Survey Questions	Strongly Agree or Somewhat Agree	Neither	Strongly Disagree or Somewhat Disagree
21. My previous experience in using a learning management system like Google Classroom, Canvas, or Moodle helped me be prepared to navigate course content through XXX Blackboard. (*n*=40)	28 (70%)	6 (15%)	6 (15%)
22. I believe having classes on Blackboard (online) is as effective as face-to-face classes in helping me access content and achieve academic success. (*n*=39)	8 (20%)	7 (18%)	24 (62%)
23. I believe having classes on Zoom is as effective as face-to-face classes in helping me access content and achieve academic success. (*n*=38)	12 (32%)	7 (18%)	19 (50%)
24. I am confused about all the different class schedules for online, in-person, and blended. (*n*=38)	14 (37%)	5 (13%)	19 (50%)
25. I believe the technology requirements to access course content make it harder for me to succeed in college. (*n*=38)	5 (13%)	16 (42%)	17 (45%)
26. Due to the experiences of Fall 2020, I am more likely to include fully online courses in my college plans. (*n*=39)	16 (41%)	5 (13%)	18 (46%)

Research Question 2:

Were student academic expectations affected by the restrictions of COVID-19 during Fall 2020?

        Questions 27-32 (shown in Table 2) explored whether students felt COVID-19 restrictions experienced during Fall 2020 impacted their ability to meet their academic expectations. Students answered questions on whether restricted activity on campus inhibited their ability to interact with study groups and seek additional academic support. Restrictions also lead to student difficulties in focusing and concentrating on their studies, thus leading some students to feel psychological stress which further impacted their learning. In addition, the majority of students who answered this question reported the experiences of Fall 2020 did not influence their decisions regarding the number of credit hours they would take in the future and a similar number indicated the restrictions were also not a factor in their actions regarding their living situations. Interestingly, students, as a group, did not largely favor one-course modality over another for future classes.

Table 2: *Student Perceptions of the Impact of COVID-19 Restrictions on Academic Expectations*

Survey Questions	Agree Strongly or Agree Somewhat	Neither	Disagree Strongly or Disagree Somewhat
27. Concerns about COVID-19 made it difficult for me to focus and concentrate on my studies. (*n*=38)	17 (45%)	6 (16%)	15(39%)
28. Due to COVID-19, I did not participate in study groups or other academic support opportunities. (*n*=37)	18 (49%)	5 (13%)	14 (38%)
29. Due to COVID-19, I experienced psychological stress that affected my learning. (*n*=39)	24 (61%)	8 (21%)	7 (18%)
30. My experiences during Fall 2020 influenced my decision to take. . . (n=39) More credit hours. 2 (5%) Fewer credit hours. 3 (8%) Had no impact on my decisions about the number of credit hours to take. 34 (87%)			
31. My experiences Fall 2020 influenced my decision to. . . (n=39) Take more face-to-face courses. 11 (28%) Take more blended courses. 8 (21%) Take more fully online courses. 9 (23%) Had no impact on my decision. 11 (28%)			
32. My experiences Fall 2020 caused me to. . .(n=39) Move home and take all online classes. 2 (5%)			

Move to off-campus housing/commute to campus. 5 (13%)
Had no impact on my decision. 32 (82%)

Research Question 3:

Were student social expectations affected by the restrictions of COVID-19 during Fall 2020?

Questions 33-40 (shown in Table 3) surveyed student opinions on whether the COVID-19 restrictions of Fall 2020 changed their social expectations of attending college. Questions explored attendance of social events and feelings of isolation due, in part, to difficulty in making friends and interacting with roommates. These circumstances led to difficulty in developing a sense of college community and caused most students responding to this question to feel psychological stress.

Not all social interactions were negatively impacted. Participation in Greek life was not as adversely affected by COVID-19 as general social interactions. Additionally, concerns about COVID-19 constraints on students' economic situations were tenuous for most of the students who answered the survey question.

Table 3: *Student Perceptions of the Impact of COVID-19 Restrictions on Social Expectations*

Survey Questions	Agree or Strongly Agree	Neither	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
33. Due to COVID-19, I did not attend as many social events or join as many organizations as I thought I would in college. (*n=37*)	26 (70%)	1 (3%)	10 (27%)
34. My decision to participate or not participate in Greek life was influenced by COVID-19. (*n=34*)	8 (23%)	6 (18%)	20 (59%)
35. Due to COVID-19, I often felt isolated and lonely on campus. (*n=37*)	20 (54%)	7 (19%)	10 (27%)
36. I believe COVID-19 made it more difficult to make friends. (*n=38*)	29 (76%)	5 (13%)	4 (11%)
37. I believe I do not have the connections I expected with my roommates/ suitemates due to COVID-19 and social distancing. (*n=35*)	14 (40%)	8 (23%)	13 (37%)
38. Due to COVID-19, I did not feel the sense of community on this campus that I had expected. (*n=38*)	24 (63%)	9 (24%)	5 (13%)

39. COVID-19 had an economic impact on my situation that required me to work part-time or full-time. (*n=34*)	10 (29%)	8 (24%)	16 (47%)
40. Due to COVID-19, I experienced psychological stress that affected my desire to socialize. (*n=36*)	21 (58%)	8 (22%)	7 (20%)

Questions 41 and 42 (shown in Table 4) directly surveyed students on whether they perceived that the COVID-19 restrictions changed expectations of their college experience. With regard to academics, it did appear the restrictions in place during Fall 2020 were a factor in changing expectations for some students as 27% (*n=10*) felt there was an impact. A large number of students, 54% (*n=20*), seemed unsure whether the restrictions altered their expectations of their academic performance. Only 19% (*n=7*) felt the restrictions were not a definite cause for a change in their academic expectations. Very different responses from academic expectations were noted with regard to the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on expectations of the social aspects of college life. A majority of students, 60% (*n=20*), felt the restrictions in place during Fall 2020 had a definite impact on changing their expectations of what college social life would be. It was definitely not what they expected. Only one-third of the students who responded to this question, 33% (*n=11*), felt the restrictions might not be responsible for changing their social expectations, with 6% (*n=2*) relaying that their expectations of social life in college did not change as a result of the COVID-19 restrictions.

Table 4: *Responses About Expectation Related to First Semester College Experiences*

	Probably not			Probably yes			
	Definitely not		Might not;		Definitely yes		
Survey Questions	0	1	2	3	4	5	Total
41. Academically, when thinking about courses, instruction, learning experiences, how much was college what you expected? (*N=37*)	4 (11%)	6 (16%)	8 (22%)	12 (32%)	5 (14%)	2 (5%)	37
42. Socially, when thinking about college life, how much was the social aspect of college what you expected? (*N=33*)	10 (30%)	10 (30%)	6 (18%)	5 (15%)	1 (3%)	1 (3%)	33

Note. 0 -1: Definitely not; 1-2: Probably not; 2-3: Might not; 3-4: Probably yes; 4-5: Definitely yes

Discussion

All students have expectations of what life and studies will be like when they enter college. However, for students entering college for the first time in Fall 2020, many of these expectations

were unmet. Classes were offered online in a synchronous, asynchronous, or blended/hybrid for-mat. Masking requirements were in place; quarantine plans were enacted; activities typically thought of as college staples did not take place; and opportunities to work with groups of potential friends were limited or non-existent. The researchers in this study explored to what degree first-year college students' expectations were met and whether the restrictions in place during their first semester on a college campus impacted their decisions with regard to taking future online courses, whether their academic learning was diminished, and if curtailed socialization experiences ad-versely impacted their college expectations.

Findings

The last question of the survey asked students to answer an open-ended prompt regarding their overall impression of their first-semester college experiences. Research Question 1 focused on course delivery formats. Student responses showed that Learning Management Systems and course modalities were prominent concerns for students with regard to their academic performance and success. Students also seemed to connect the online modalities of courses with the topic of academic success, which was related to Research Question 2. Students varied on their feelings of proficiency with online courses (see Appendix C). For example, one student felt they saw a "drastic change" in their academics when taking online courses but was not certain this could be attributed solely to COVID-19 restrictions. Negative outcomes of online courses were also reflected in one student's comments about blended courses being confusing because of problems accessing infor-mation and assignments through the learning management system. Another student voiced their frustration when they shared, "I think it was harder to make myself focus and study because I was constantly in my room, looking at a computer screen, and I could easily not do work and sit on my phone because my professor wasn't there to make it harder not to." Not all student comments were negative. One student "actually liked" the restrictions on class size and felt blended classes helped them adjust to college while another student felt they were now better able to be successful with online courses and will continue to take online courses in the future. A quote from one student conveyed that academic success was not only a function of the course modality. This student shared that, "The success of an online course depends on how communicative and clear the pro-fessor is."

The restrictions on socialization were a key source of dissatisfaction for most students as reflected in the analysis of responses of Research Question 3. Data reflected that many students felt isolated and psychologically stressed during the Fall 2020 semester. Their sense of isolation is apparent in comments such as "I could not do much or go out because of COVID and that was disappointing. I did not make many friends due to COVID and I was not expecting it to be so hard to make friends and socialize." Another expressed this feeling as "It was very overwhelming and not what I expected due to COVID. It was harder to get myself out there and make new friends and get involved. It stressed me out." However, many students were able to have some degree of socialization regardless of the restrictions in place. One student felt the events held on campus helped them to feel their "college experience was not hindered." This attitude of making things work was also reflected in the student quote of, "It wasn't as I thought it would be, but I have made friends and gotten involved on campus." Another student felt the semester did not have as many social activities but "overall was good." One student characterized their feelings on the semester by sharing, "I was a little disappointed but I also understand the circumstances. I just wish COVID

wouldn't have happened my freshman year." This disappointment was very evident in the statement of one student who said, "I was really lonely. It sucked."

Limitations

Approximately 2,215 students were enrolled in the foundations of college life course at this university. However, study participants were chosen from the researchers' classes as the researchers knew these students had been exposed to the three course delivery formats discussed in this study. Of the 120 possible participants from the researchers' classes, 44 responses were received netting a 37% response rate. It will be the responsibility of the reader to determine if these findings are generalizable to their students' experiences and course design

Future Research

This study explored the possibility of changes in the expectations of first-year college students due to the COVID-19 restrictions present during Fall 2020. Future research would benefit from a longitudinal study of this group of students to determine the success rate in completing a college degree while ascertaining if factors that surfaced in this study continued throughout the remaining college experience.

Also, results from this study indicated students were experiencing high stress due to COVID-19. Future research is necessary to determine the most effective means for colleges to address the social and emotional needs of students

Conclusion

Masking, social distancing, online courses, and few social activities were part of college life for students on campus during Fall 2020. This study explored the perceptions of first-year college students with regard to whether their expectations of college life were changed during the Fall 2020 environment of COVID-19 restrictions. During the semester selected for the study, academics contained some element of online instruction, perhaps navigating multiple courses online, and for some students, an increased responsibility for their own learning which may have been a new experience. The survey used in this study revealed that blended/hybrid courses appeared to best support student academic learning when compared to synchronous and asynchronous courses. Adjusting to online learning was not the only factor first-year students had to contend with when they arrived on campus. Activities that normally welcomed first-year students were canceled or held with social distancing, organizational and athletic social activities were canceled, and students could not gather in large groups. This led to dissatisfaction among most students and was reported as the major factor which affected their expectations of college life. Knowledge of this group of students' perceptions of a misalignment of their college expectations, and the reality that greeted them in Fall 2020, may help colleges address instruction that takes into account student feelings of success with certain course modalities and may highlight the value of social opportunities with regard to student satisfaction. Increased student satisfaction may well lead to increased retention for colleges and increased numbers of students reaching degree completion

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Appendix A

COVID-19 and First-year University Students Survey

Demographic Data
1. Year in a college or university? First-year Transfer student
2. First-generation college student Yes No
3. Age: 16-17 18-19 20-21 22-23 24-25 26 or older
4. Gender: Male Female Non-binary/third gender Prefer not to answer Other _____
5. Residency: [state] resident Out of State, not a [state] resident Resident of a country outside the United States or a US territory
6. Ethnicity: Black White Hispanic/Latinx Asian Native American Prefer not to answer Other _____
7. Is English your first/native language? Yes No
8. Housing status, Fall 2020? Live on-campus Live off-campus

9.   Work status during Fall 2020? Not employed Working 20 hours or less weekly Working over 20 hours weekly
10. Did you have a declared major in Fall 2020? Yes No
11. What major did you declare? _____
12. In your [course], were you in a section primarily for students in your same major? Yes No Not sure
13. How many total dual-enrollment credits and/or credits from other colleges or universities did you transfer to [institution]? 0, none 1 to 3 10 to 9 10 to 15 16 or more
14. Have you had experience with any of these learning management system before coming to [institution] (Mark all that apply)? Canvas Blackboard Google Classroom Moodle Schoology Other (please list) _____
For the purposes of this study **Asynchronous** means the course is non-traditional and students do not attend class or participate in class activities at a set time. Participation in the course is at a time the student selects. **Synchronous** means learning takes place virtually and not in a traditional classroom. You attend at least one-course session each week, at the same time as your **instructor** and **classmates**. Attendance is usually through Zoom, Collaborate, or another online meeting platform. **Blended/Hybrid** means the course met part of the time in a face-to-face classroom environment and part of the time virtually/online either synchronously or asynchronously.

Asynchronous--Blackboard Course

15. Did you participate in at least one course during **Fall 2020** at [institution] that was fully online and managed through Blackboard?
Yes
No

16. I believe asynchronous courses that are fully online and managed through Blackboard are effective and support my learning.
Agree
Neutral-Neither agree or disagree
Disagree

Synchronous Courses through Zoom, Collaborate, or another online meeting platform

17. Did you participate in at least one course **Fall 2020 at** [institution] which required synchronous meetings in real-time through a platform such a Zoom?
Yes
No

18. I believe synchronous courses that require meetings in real-time through a platform such as Zoom, are effective and support my learning.
Agree
Neutral- Neither agree or disagree
Disagree

Blended/Hybrid Courses--Asynchronous and Synchronous

19. Did you participate in at least one course **Fall 2020** at [institution] which required some combination of face-to-face classroom meetings and online instruction/assignments?
Yes
No

20. I believe blended courses which required some combination of face-to-face classroom meetings and online instruction/assignments are effective and support my learning.
Agree
Neutral- Neither agree nor disagree
Disagree

SA=Strongly Agree; A=Agree; N=Neither Agree nor Disagree; D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree					
Survey Questions	SA	A	N	D	SD
21. My previous experience in using a learning management system like Google Classroom, Canvas, or Moodle helped me be prepared to navigate course content through XXX Blackboard.					
22. I believe having classes on Blackboard (online) is as effective as face-to-face classes in helping me access content and achieve academic success.					
23. I believe having classes on Zoom is as effective as face-to-face classes in helping me access content and achieve academic success.					
24. I am confused about all the different class schedules among online, in-person, and blended.					
25. I believe the technology requirements to access course content, make it harder for me to succeed in college.					
26. Due to the experiences Fall 2020 I am more likely to include fully online courses in my college plans.					
27. Concerns about COVID-19 made it difficult for me to focus and concentrate on my studies.					
28. Due to COVID-19, I did not participate in study groups or other academic support opportunities.					
29. Due to COVID-19, I experienced psychological stress that affected my learning.					

30.   My experiences during Fall 2020 influenced my decision to take. . .
Fewer credit hours
More credit hours
Had no impact on my decisions about the number of credit hours to take

31.   My experiences Fall 2020 influenced my decision to. . .
Take more face-to-face courses
Take more blended course
Take more fully online courses
Had no impact on my decision

32.   My experiences Fall 2020 caused me to. . .
Move home and take all online classes
Move to off-campus housing/commute to campus
Had no impact on my decision

Social (Greek life, roommate, make friends, get to know classmates)

Strongly Agree; Agree; Neutral Neither Agree nor Disagree;
Disagree; Strongly Disagree; Not Applicable

Survey Questions	SA	A	N	D	SD	N/A
33. Due to COVID-19, I did not attend as many social events or join as many organizations as I thought I would in college.						
34. My decision to participate or not participate in Greek life was influenced by COVID-19.						
35. Due to COVID-19, I often felt isolated and lonely on campus.						
36. I believe COVID-19 made it more difficult to make friends.						
37. I believe I do not have the connections I expected with my roommates/ suitemates due to COVID-19 and social distancing.						

38. Due to COVID-19, I did not feel the sense of community on this campus that I had expected.					
39. COVID-19 had an economic impact on my situation that required me to work part-time or full-time.					
40. Due to COVID-19, I experienced psychological stress that affected my desire to socialize.					

Was your first-semester college experience what you expected? (drag the bar to show your answer)

(1)   Definitely not; (2) Probably not; (3) Might or might not; (4) Probably yes; (5) Definitely yes

Survey Questions	1	2	3	4	5
41. Academically, when thinking about courses, instruction, learning experiences, how much was college what you expected?					
42. Socially, when thinking about college life, how much was the social aspect of college what you expected?		`			

<u>Open-ended Question</u>
43.   What is your overall impression of your first semester college experiences (please type your answer)?

Appendix B

Informed Consent

You are being invited to participate in a research project by completing this anonymous survey about "**Was It What You Expected? The impact of COVID-19 on first-year college students.**" The purpose of this study is to determine if COVID-19 had an impact on the college experience of first-year university students. This study is being conducted by [researchers] at [institution].

There are no known risks if you decide to participate in this study. There are no costs to you for participating in this study. The information you provide will form the basis for future research and may be used in scholarly publications. The short survey will take about 10 minutes to complete. The information collected may not benefit you directly, but the information gathered in this study should provide more general benefits to educators and students.

This survey is anonymous. We do not ask for your name on this survey. No one will know whether or not you participated in the study. Individuals from the Institutional Review Board may inspect these records. Should the data be published, it will be used in aggregate; individual participants cannot be identified.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you are free to decline to answer any particular question you do not wish to answer for any reason. If you decide not to complete this survey after you begin, simply stop taking this survey. If you are willing to complete the survey, your assistance would be greatly appreciated. By completing this survey, you are voluntarily agreeing to participate.

If you have questions regarding the research, you may contact [researchers' contact information].

If you are willing to participate in the research, please click on the next button at the bottom of the page to begin. Thank you for your time and cooperation – it is greatly appreciated.

Appendix C

Student Responses to the Open-ended Question

Question 43. What is your overall impression of your first-semester college experiences?

1. The events that were held around campus really helped me feel like my college experience was not hindered.
2. disappointing
3. Very okay, glad I got through it and made the best of it!
4. I actually really liked how covid-19 restrictions on class size and blended classes helped me adjust to college. I didn't think I would join many organizations not because of covid-19, but because I was shy. I liked how my blended classes gave me a touch of what I would experience, and I appreciated it greatly.
5. It was fine. The success of an online course depends on how communicative and clear the professor is. My biggest source of stress was other students being careless about masking, particularly when walking in large crowds outside.
6. didn't like it
7. It was not as exciting as I wanted it to be.
8. Not as many social activities as expected but overall good
9. I could not do much or go out because of COVID and that was disappointing. I did not make many friends due to COVID and I was not expecting it to be so hard to make friends and socialize. Overall, it was not an ideal first semester of college but there's nothing I can do about it.
10. I don't want to blame it completely on COVID, but I could see a drastic change in my academics in the classes I had completely online. All together I believe XXX is doing their best to keep us safe!
11. It wasn't as I thought it would be, but I have made friends and gotten involved on campus.
12. It is what it is. I didn't ask for a pandemic to screw up my life but I got what I got.
13. Having to do blended courses was definitely confusing because it's hard to access information and assignments on blackboard. I feel like it was hard to meet new people because of covid.
14. I had to be a lot more self-reliant than what I was anticipating, due to the fact that I was either teaching myself all of the material or at least half of it
15. The workload for my classes were manageable but the pandemic made me feel lonely and made it hard to make friends.
16. Neutral - I have had lots of fun but also been very stressed and overwhelmed.
17. It was okay. I have nothing to compare it to so i dont really know if it was better or worse than "normal."
18. It was very overwhelming and not what I expected due to COIVD. It was harder to get myself out there and make new friends and get involved. It stressed me out.
19. I enjoyed college my first year but I definitely feel like I missed out on the real experience and wish I could have done it at a different time.
20. It was different than what I thought it was going to be like. Yet very little of that had to do with Covid.
21. I was a little disappointed but I also understand the circumstances. I just wish COVID wouldn't have happened my freshman year.
22. I loved it!

23. College is very stressful but my professors are very good about helping me when I need it.
24. I was really lonely. It sucked.
25. It was not what I expected at all. Obviously the pandemic played a huge role in it, but it definitely taught me how to take online courses and how I will continue to take online courses.
26. It was still fun, I just felt like I learned less because of the online classes. I think it was harder to make myself focus and study because I was constantly in my room, looking at a computer screen, and I could easily not do work and sit on my phone because my professor wasn't there to make it harder not to.
27. I hope when covid is over my experience will improve.
28. I have learned that I must find a balance in order to succeed as well as have fun!
29. It was alright, I just wish I could have made more friends