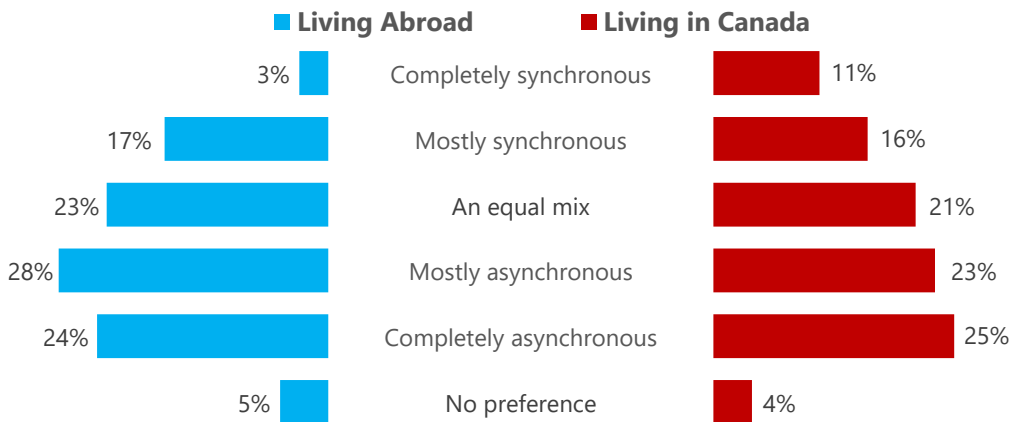


Preferences for Asynchronous versus Synchronous Delivery



*140 students were outside of Canada

"Asynchronous learning allowed for greater flexibility to manage other courses and life. Synchronous learning to some degree helped me feel more connected to my classmates and professors and engage better with the material... I largely prefer asynchronous for the flexibility but synchronous learning definitely helps stay engaged and focused."

KPU Student, Summer 2020

What Students Appreciated about Remote Learning in Summer 2020

Students have many positive things to say about their remote learning experience. When it worked well, it was often due to the efforts of faculty, which is captured in the words of one student: *"Empathetic professors who understand individual circumstances regarding COVID, and don't judge harshly if we do poorly. Instead, they have an encouraging attitude and guide us to success."* Flexibility of remote learning was valued by many students.

What Students Like About Asynchronous Delivery:

- Can study at their own pace and gain a deeper understanding
- Can take more courses since no schedule conflicts and campus doesn't matter
- Easier to balance school with work and family responsibilities
- Can do course work when it's quiet at home

Synchronous Activities are Useful For:

- Interacting with classmates
- Engaging with the instructor during the lecture
- One-on-one help in 'office hours' and tutoring

Online Resources Students Value:

- Recorded lectures that students can watch anytime, and repeat if needed
- Voice-over Power Points they can review anytime
- Course materials easily accessible online
- Course materials well organized on Moodle
- Online to-do lists and calendars

Students Appreciate Instructors For:

- Being kind and understanding
- Putting in extra time to make remote learning a positive experience
- Flexible deadlines to reduce stress due to technical issues
- Listening to student needs regarding online formats
- Timely responses to their emails
- Timely feedback on assignments

Benefits of Remote Delivery:

- Felt safer during the pandemic
- Able to take courses when not in Canada
- Online discussions and presentations less stressful than talking in class
- More time for studies since they don't have to travel to campus
- Remote learning often more accommodating for students with disabilities

Students' Suggestions for Improving Remote Learning

Many students enjoyed their remote learning experience, but it did not always go smoothly. There were some technical issues early in the term that took time to get sorted out. Remote learning was a new experience for most students, and instructors had limited time to prepare for the summer. Here are students' suggestions on how KPU can improve remote learning for the future.

Factors Students Want Us to Keep in Mind:

Most KPU students work, and often work full-time in the summer. With the pandemic, financial issues are more common so students may take whatever work they can find and not be able to turn down a shift. Home may not provide a quiet place to study as other family members may also be spending a lot of time at home. About 10% of KPU students have children living at home and may have additional child-care responsibilities due to the pandemic. Students living outside Canada also have time zone differences to deal with. All these factors mean that students may have limited flexibility about when they can focus on their studies.

Although some students love remote learning, others found it very challenging and want to return to face-to-face instruction as soon as possible. Most of the students outside Canada are new to KPU, and may find starting university this way even more challenging than those in Canada. **As students pointed out, many of their best experiences were when their instructors were empathetic and understanding** of these extra challenges.

Students' Workload:

Online learning can increase workloads with online forums, discussion, weekly assignments and readings, in addition to watching online lectures. Some students feel they are doing more work now than they did with face-to-face instruction. This may be a consequence of some instructors increasing the number of assignments to help students stay on track, but instead students feel the workload is more than they can keep up with and would like the volume of work to be reduced back to a similar level as before. Many students took more courses than they usually do in the summer. There may have been many factors influencing this, but some pointed out that it was made possible because there were no schedule or campus conflicts. Although students were happy for the increased access to courses, the increased course load may have had some unexpected impacts. One example is screen fatigue, given the amount of work that is done on the screen. Flexibility with deadlines, and ensuring students have lots of advance notice can help reduce workload-related stress.



Assignments and Exams:

Students would like to know about assignments as early as possible so they can plan accordingly. This gives them more flexibility and allows them to balance schoolwork with other responsibilities. One challenge with asynchronous delivery is that students may be at different places in the course. This can make keeping track of assignments and deadlines more difficult, especially with an increased number of assignments. Some students suggested a calendar or notification system in Moodle or elsewhere would help them keep track. Group projects are common at KPU but students point out that they are difficult to do in a remote learning environment as it is more challenging to connect with classmates and ensure everyone is making an equal contribution. Hence, many requested that group projects not be assigned for courses with remote delivery. Another common request is for more timely feedback on assignments. Sometimes the method of submitting assignments creates unintentional challenges for students. They may not have access to scanners, for instance. There seems to be unintentional consequences of methods used to combat cheating on exams, resulting in harder exams, or lack of time to complete the exams. Students suggested that exams should have increased time limits, be replaced with alternatives, or that better proctoring be done. Based on the survey, however, we know that proctoring capabilities would be limited by student webcam access (15% had no access, 16% had limited access).

Mode of Instruction:

Although most students prefer some form of asynchronous delivery, they still want a lecture or similar format where the content is explained, which could be in the form of a recorded video. They don't want to be left to review the assigned material only on their own, they want instructors to guide them. Recorded lectures that students can revisit as often as they need are ideal for many students. This makes it possible for them to study when it's quiet at home, and avoid conflicts with work, family responsibilities and other courses. They would prefer to have the recorded lectures available earlier in the term so they can work at their own pace. A week to review each video class and do the assigned work and readings would be helpful. Many would also like a limited number of synchronous activities to help them feel more engaged.

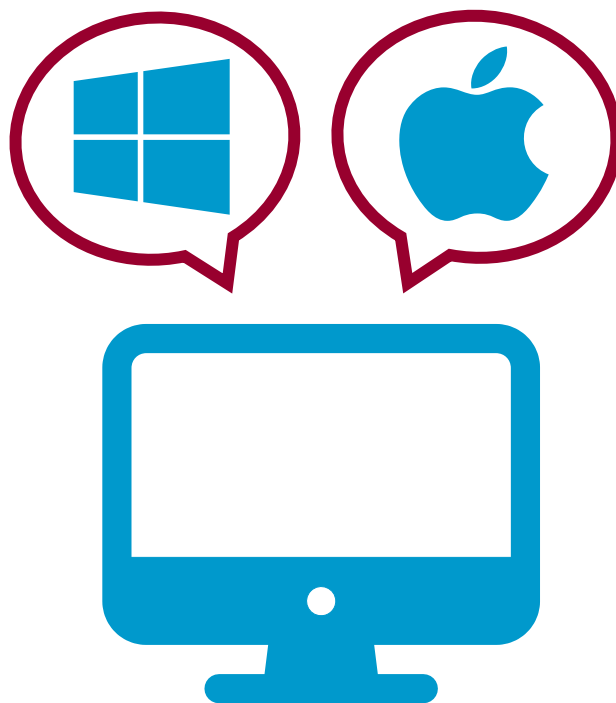
Communication and Engagement:

Students desire to be more connected to both their peers and instructors. Suggestions from students include: holding online office hours at scheduled times in addition to providing timely responses to emails; asking students for feedback about remote delivery in order to adapt to their needs; and facilitating connection with other students. Students would also like to have clear information about the structure of the course provided at the beginning of the term.

Technology:

Some instructors are better at using technology, and some technology worked better than others. Providing instructors with information on best practices on the use of Moodle, Big Blue Button and other technology may reduce the technology problems. Many students suggest that Moodle should be mandatory and that when Moodle is optimally organized, learning is made easier. Some also suggested that Big Blue Button be mandatory for synchronous activity, such as small group discussion and virtual office hours.

They also want to ensure technology works as intended, and is compatible with all operating systems. Those providing technological support should know how to troubleshoot the technology and course-specific software, and training for students on how to use the software would also be useful.



Learning Resources:

Most students want resources, including textbooks and library materials, to be available electronically. Some suggested that ensuring textbook lists are made available well in advance of the start of term allows students time to order the books online.

Students also preferred to access their course materials and quizzes through Moodle rather than other platforms that they must pay extra for.

Services:

Some students requested access to online services such as counselling and tutoring, not aware that these services are available online. Others wanted to be able to go to campus for these services. This suggests a need for improved communication about the services that are available remotely, and how to access them.