

Course Outcomes and the 2020 Student and Faculty Surveys

“Closing the Confidence Gap”

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In May 2021, the CTE sponsored two surveys: one for students and one for faculty, both concerning the remote-learning experience in the spring semester.

Results (Selected)

From the **student survey**, we learned that:

- the vast majority of students found their instructors responsive, communicative, and clear and that they felt they had access to the support services they needed to learn effectively in a remote environment.
- two-thirds reported they had a safe, distraction-free environment away from campus in which to pursue their remote learning.
- a plurality (47%) of students prefer a blend of synchronous and asynchronous activities, over either a fully synchronous virtual experience (17%) or a fully asynchronous virtual experience (34%)
- Compared to face-to-face learning, the biggest challenges of remote learning include a
 - feeling disconnected from faculty and peers;
 - lack of self-motivation to keep on top of work without the structure of regular class meetings
 - lack of real-time feedback
 - unclear communication
- fewer than 40% of students said they expected to achieve the learning outcomes they would have achieved in person; just over 70% said the technology employed for remote delivery helped them achieve their learning outcomes.

I have highlighted the final bullet point here, because it touches on a finding from the **faculty survey**. It reported that, of all the aspects of fall 2021 preparations, the one the most (87%) respondents feel most confident in is their “ability to prioritize and articulate course outcomes suitable to a blended or remote environment.”

A Confidence Gap

So, we have a divergence between faculty confidence and student confidence related to aspects of achieving course outcomes. In what follows, I’d like to offer two approaches to closing that “confidence gap”: A rhetorical approach and a pedagogical approach.

- *Rhetorical Approach*
 - We sometimes take for granted that, having been introduced to the course goals at the beginning of the semester, students remain mindful of them and of their progress toward them throughout the semester. In fact, they often do not, focusing instead on immediate, urgent, short-term tasks rather than maintaining a holistic view of their progress throughout the course.
 - To address this problem, consider **explicitly linking assignments and activities to particular outcomes**, both in the syllabus/schedule of readings and assignments *and* in your remarks to your students.
 - Offer frequent feedback to students on their progress toward the stated learning outcomes *using the language of your stated course outcomes* in your feedback.
 - Remind the class repeatedly—verbally and in writing—of the course outcomes and how you see their over-all development toward them progressing.
- *Pedagogical Approach*
 - Consider revisions or additions to course outcomes themselves.
 - For example, perhaps emphasize that the skills or knowledges the course fosters are to be practiced or mastered in *both face-to-face and virtual environments*.
 - Another possibility is to make *proficiency in virtual interactions and collaboration* an outcome all on its own. After all, it's clear that there will be no return to a pre-pandemic “normal” in our social and work lives.
 - A third possibility is to include developing the flexibility, agility, and self-motivation necessary to adapt to disruptions as a non-cognitive outcome in your course.
 - And this note: Including these outcomes also means *teaching* them. Because the Drake Mission emphasizes “collaborative learning among students, faculty, and staff,” you yourself don't need to have mastered the skills you wish students develop. Instead, you can invite students to develop those skills along with you, acknowledging that all of us can get better *collaboratively* at using technology to our advantage, gaining digital proficiencies, acquiring new professional skills, and responding effectively to the unexpected.

Those of us who have come to think of ourselves as effective instructors primarily because of our disciplinary expertise will need to make some adjustments to that way of thinking if we are to encourage a truly collaborative approach to learning these new skills and practicing these new habits of mind. Doing so will mean embracing a certain degree of vulnerability; inviting students to engage with us frankly and honestly about their learning experience; acknowledging our own need to improve; and moving forward without the crutch of credentialed mastery.

Please also consult the “Communicating Expectations” item on the [CTE's resource page for Teaching Remotely](#) for more insights into how to calibrate expectations and outcomes to the blended and virtual environments.

If you have further questions about these findings or the advice offered above, please contact me at: teaching.excellence@drake.edu