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# COVID-19 and Your Campus

Impacts on Teaching & Learning  
and Institutional Effectiveness

A survey of higher education  
professionals to understand  
the effects of COVID-19  
disruption on mission-critical  
processes in Spring 2020  
and anticipated changes for  
Fall 2020 and beyond



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# Executive summary

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## **Ensuring student success is central to the mission of higher education in the 21st century.**

When the 2019-2020 academic year began, a large majority of higher education institutions considered student learning assessment a significant priority, with institutions working to ensure student success through programs and initiatives that touch every aspect of the student experience. They worked to understand their progress toward this mission through assessment, self-study for accreditation, course evaluation and surveys, faculty review processes, and catalog and curriculum management.

COVID-19 closed higher education campuses in March 2020, creating extraordinary challenges for students, faculty, and staff. Students left campus, in-person instruction switched to remote learning nearly overnight, and institutions faced previously unknown challenges, such as finding ways to provide internet access to students whose homes didn't have sufficient internet resources to support remote learning.

Much of what happened between March and May 2020 falls in the category of emergency response. As the initial shock fades, campuses are evaluating the impact of the crisis and asking: What has changed? And what comes next?

# Executive summary

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To better understand the new realities facing institutions, Watermark sought insight from higher education professionals regarding the impact COVID-19 is having on current and planned service to students. Conducted in May 2020, the survey focused on the effects on current and planned teaching and learning, as well as mission-critical processes such as assessment, student feedback, faculty activity reporting and reviews, and catalog and curriculum management.

Survey respondents shed light on the impacts of the pandemic, and also suggested practices and technologies institutions can apply in the new, COVID-altered landscape to support mission-critical processes that inform decisions and drive improvements in teaching and learning.

These findings are presented in the spirit of collaboration as we work together to effectively advance the mission of higher education: ensuring students receive the highest quality instruction and services, and ultimately go out into the world with the essential skills and specific knowledge needed for fulfilling work and meaningful engagement in society.



# Executive summary

## OVERVIEW

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This national survey was conducted using EvaluationKIT by Watermark and includes responses from 858 higher education professionals representing 706 institutions across the spectrum of higher education. The respondents provided a broad range of insights that inform actionable conclusions and highlight important opportunities for further research.

## Actionable issues surfaced

1. **Increased prioritization** of assessing student learning and focusing on outcomes
2. **Value of student feedback** in understanding current experience and opportunities for improvement
3. **Impacts on faculty** teaching, research, service, and review cycles
4. **Use of technology** to ensure continuity of campus processes

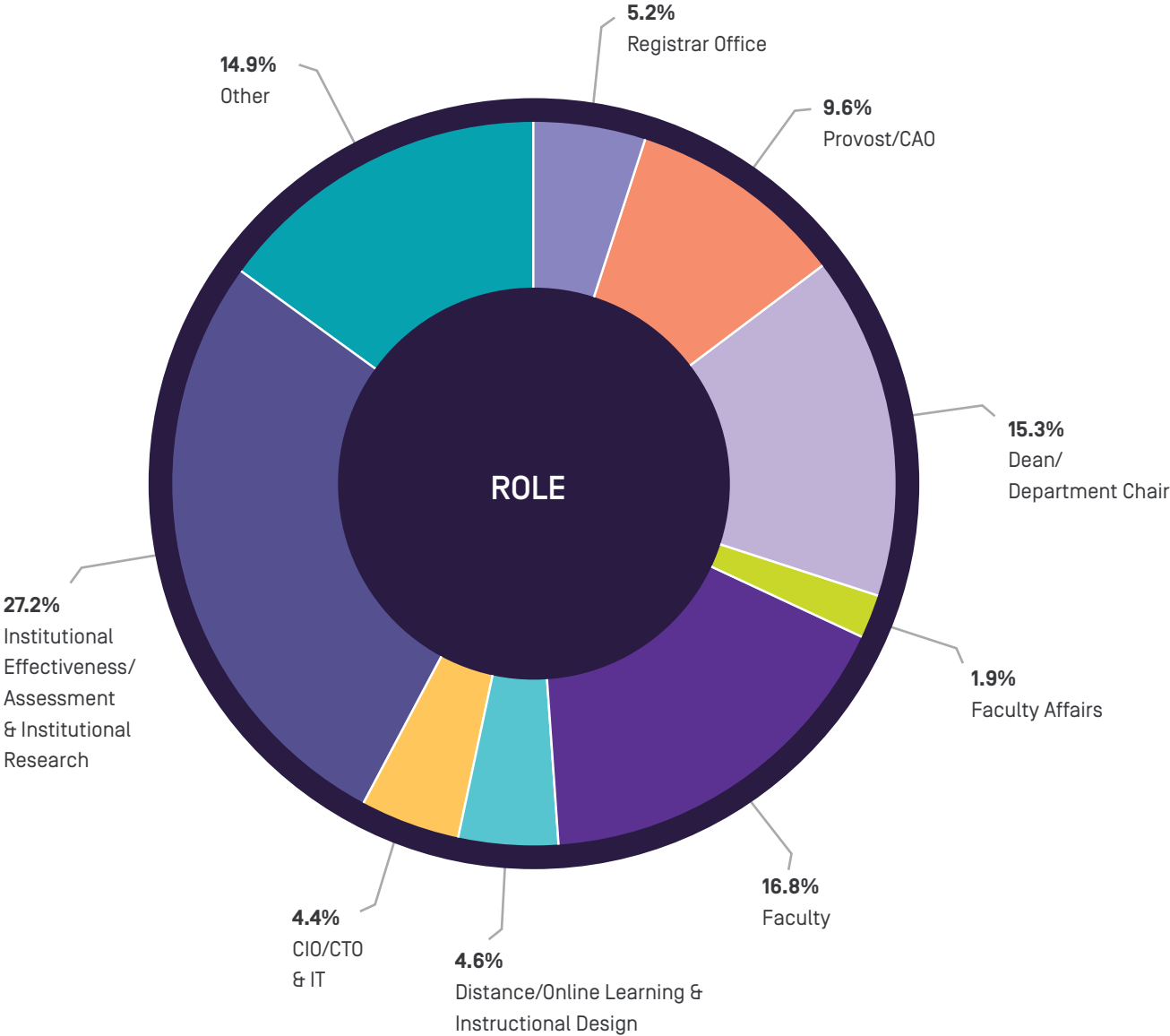
## Areas to watch

1. Decisions about returning to in-person instruction, remaining online, or attempting a hybrid approach for Fall 2020
2. Innovations in course evaluation and surveying to gain greater insight into the student experience as conditions evolve
3. Effects of ongoing disruption and possible enrollment changes and budget cuts on faculty teaching, research, and service, and the implications for review processes
4. Opportunities to streamline manual processes through digital solutions

# Executive summary

## DEMOGRAPHICS

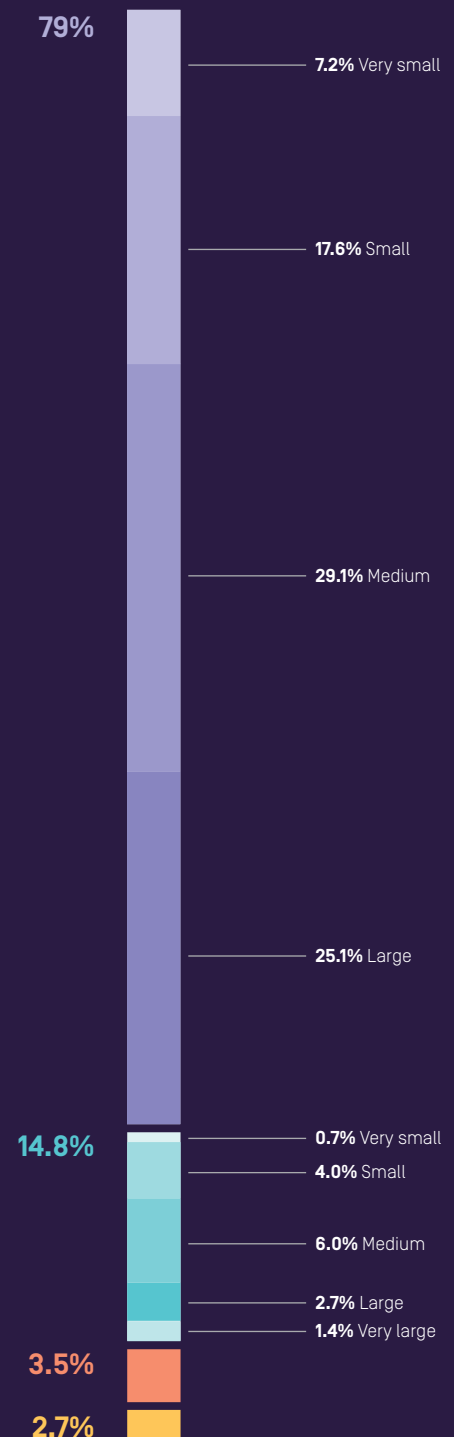
858 respondents provided insight across a variety of roles, including faculty, provosts and deans, and staff involved in the work of assessment, faculty reviews, course evaluation, and curriculum and catalog management.



# Executive summary

## INSTITUTION TYPES

The 858 respondents represented 706 different institutions, representing a wide range of enrollment sizes across 2- and 4-year institutions.



# Executive summary

## ONLINE LANDSCAPE

Only 7.5% of the 706 institutions represented in the survey reported having 50%+ students online before COVID-19.

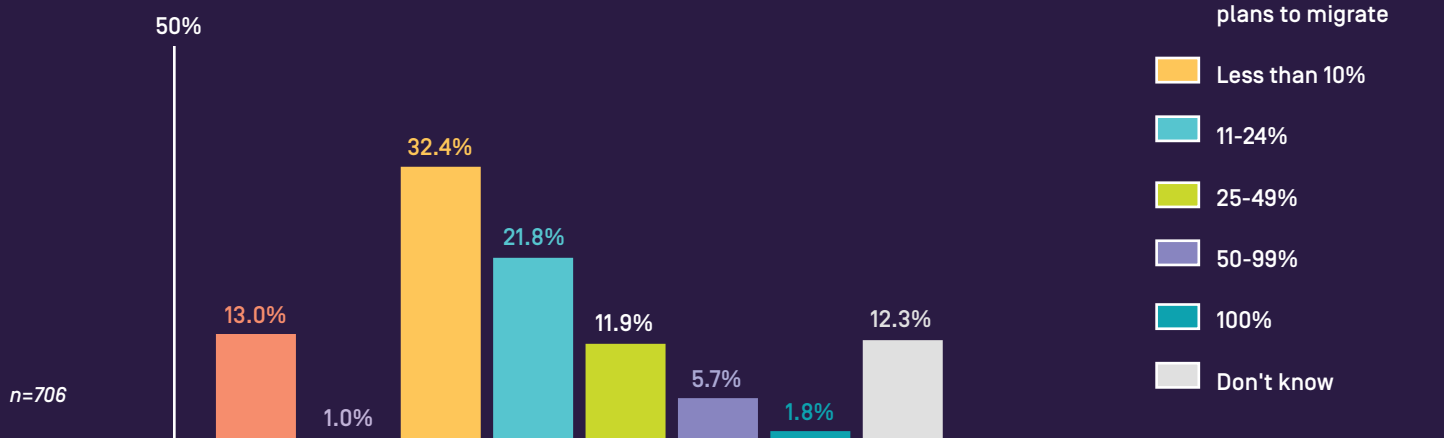
In the wake of COVID-19, 47% of responding institutions reported moving all or 90%+ of their students from in-person instruction to remote learning, accomplishing this massive shift on a timeline ranging from the length of spring break to, as one respondent noted, “within 72 hours.”

The extraordinary work done by faculty and staff to convert face-to-face courses to remote learning in this emergency made something abundantly clear, as noted by one survey respondent: “What used to be thought of as teaching and learning models which would come in 5-10 years, are now needed immediately.” Support for instructors, instructional designers, and other staff involved in reimagining courses for Fall 2020 and beyond will be critical going forward.



What used to be thought of as teaching and learning models which would come in 5-10 years, are now needed immediately.”

Before COVID-19, how many of your students were fully online?





# Executive summary

## TAKEAWAYS

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COVID-19 has created significant disruption at most responding institutions, but some report that they are taking advantage of this opportunity to:

- ▶ Convert mission-critical campus processes from manual to digital to ensure continuity and facilitate the work
- ▶ Increase focus on learning outcomes and evaluate these through direct measures such as student artifacts
- ▶ Use assessment and course evaluation to better understand student experiences and support their success
- ▶ Support faculty as they participate in professional development to prepare for future online instruction, participate in service to the institution through assessment and committee work, and complete activity reporting and review processes
- ▶ Minimize the administrative burden on faculty participating in these important processes so they can focus on teaching and learning

“

It's interesting and heartening to see a greater awareness of our students' needs and ensuring that we are building structures and being responsive not to who we think our students are and how they operate, but who they really are and what they really need.”

**Natasha Jankowski**

*Executive Director*

*National Institute of Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA)*



# Student learning assessment

**At the start of the 2019-2020 academic year**, 88.2% of respondents reported “some” to “very significant prioritization” of student learning assessment at their institutions. In the wake of COVID-19 disruption, faculty, staff, and leadership responded with an approach that focused on students’ most urgent needs, which necessarily displaced many pre-COVID priorities. In the abrupt shift to emergency remote instruction, 17% of respondents reported that their institutions temporarily reduced institutional prioritization of student learning assessment. Many respondents reported that the increased focus on service to students continues and “responsibilities shift almost daily, even as we try to move from reacting to emergent issues to anticipating upcoming issues.”

In the wake of COVID-19, 70.0% of respondents reported the same or increased prioritization of student learning assessment for Spring 2020, reflecting the importance of learning from student experiences and outcomes in Spring 2020. Yet respondents at many institutions struggled to find “ways to efficiently collect assessment data in the virtual environment, determining the impact the transition has to overall student achievement of educational outcomes.” Others reported that “there was more reliance on systems that were set in place to track, gather, and report student learning outcomes assessment data.”

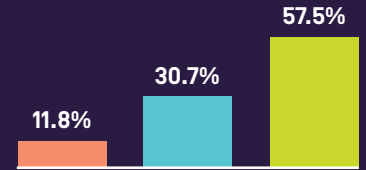
Those with robust assessment systems reported confidence in their ability to maintain student learning assessment despite COVID-related disruption in Spring 2020:



**Faculty needed to transition** to online learning and some required support, but all of our key measures were already in [an assessment management system]. This made the transition seamless.”

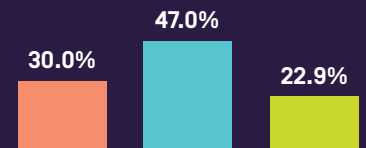
## FALL 2019

How did your institution prioritize student learning assessment?



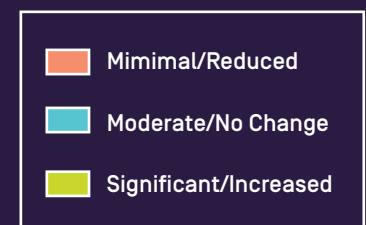
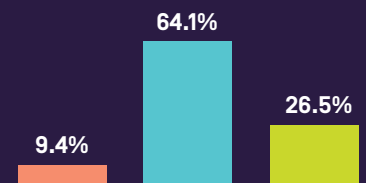
## SPRING 2020

Has COVID-19 changed the current prioritization of student learning assessment at your institution?



## FALL 2020

Has COVID-19 impacted the planned prioritization of student learning assessment at your institution?



# Student learning assessment

FALL 2020

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Reflecting the growing importance of student learning assessment to understand the effects of current changes, 90.6% of respondents expect the same or an increase in prioritization of student learning assessment at their institution for Fall 2020. They report the need to find “ways to efficiently collect assessment data in the virtual environment, determining the impact the transition has to overall student achievement of educational outcomes,” and “help faculty with assessment of learning outcomes in an online environment so they can be effective.”

Respondents wish to enable “faculty engagement in student learning outcomes assessment — making data collection, analysis, and reporting more efficient and meaningful for those directly responsible.”

Respondents report plans to increase their use of digital systems, with 52.0% reporting plans to use ePortfolios in Fall 2020, and 63.3% planning to use assessment management systems.

The effects of COVID-19 on Fall 2020 are already coming into focus, with survey respondents anticipating complexities in interpreting results and data from Spring 2020, and faculty expecting they will be called on to “[deal] with the fallout of students being unsuccessful in the spring semester.” Refitting courses for a fully online learning experience as well as building new online courses will offer new opportunities to establish clear learning outcomes and design courses and materials around these, ensuring students have a clear understanding of expectations, whether Fall 2020 is face-to-face, online, or a combination of modalities.

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**90.6%**

of respondents expect the same or an increase in prioritization of student learning assessment at their institution for Fall 2020

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**52.0%**

report plans to use ePortfolios in Fall 2020

**63.3%**

plan to use assessment management systems

# Student learning assessment

FALL 2020

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Respondents shared that they will continue to rely on a wide range of indirect measures to assess learning, including:

- ▶ **48.7%** will rely on exit interviews
- ▶ **53.3%** will rely on standardized tests
- ▶ **87.6%** will rely on locally developed exams & quizzes
- ▶ **70.5%** will rely on surveys
- ▶ **75.7%** will rely on observations of field work, internships, and clinical placements

Importantly, respondents also indicated plans to increase use of best practices such as direct measures (e.g., student artifacts) to assess learning. Specifically, respondents reported that:

- ▶ **96.7%** will rely on student papers and assignments
- ▶ **94.8%** will rely on rubrics
- ▶ **87.4%** will rely on capstone projects

Respondents noted that Spring 2020's rapid turn toward digital systems has revealed important advantages:

- ▶ "Fully online learning means easier access to artifacts."
- ▶ "Honestly it may be easier to collect this information next year because most assessment will take place electronically, so there will be assessment artifacts in online systems."

Respondents indicated that they believe this heightened prioritization of assessment in Fall 2020 will serve students by providing the institution with insight into the efficacy of learning within the new and emerging online spaces Fall 2020 will bring.



# Student learning assessment

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

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### Increase focus on assessment to gain insight

Both the disruption and innovation in Spring 2020 offer an important opportunity for institutions to gain greater insights into student learning. Institutions should continue to prioritize the assessment of student learning to better understand what and how students are learning in order to identify areas where further support is needed, and where improvements can be made.

Survey respondents indicated that they are “pre-planning for key assessment to be addressed remotely, even for traditionally face-to-face course sections.” Respondents expect their institutions to “help faculty with assessment of learning outcomes in an online environment so that they can be effective” in delivering to students going forward.

### Focus on learning outcomes

Institutions should ensure that learning outcomes are clearly defined, that courses and curricula are designed around them, and that students have clear visibility into outcomes so they know what is expected of them and what they can expect from the course. Syllabi and other course materials play a valuable role in ensuring that outcomes are continually reinforced.

### Identify opportunities to expand best practices, including use of direct measures

Institutions should also consider how to increase application of best practices by using direct measures to assess student learning. With all student artifacts collected through an LMS or assessment system rather than in-person, institutions have greater opportunity to use digital tools to assess direct measures of student learning at scale.

# Student learning assessment

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

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### Ease assessment efforts with technology to save time and streamline processes

According to the 2020 Inside Higher Ed Chief Academic Officer Survey, CAOs perceive that faculty members think of assessment efforts as burdensome, with 79 percent of CAOs agreeing that faculty members at their college view assessment efforts as requiring a lot of work on their part.<sup>1</sup> Survey respondents see the need for a greater commitment to meaningful assessment while also recognizing the need to implement technology to make assessment more manageable for faculty:

- ▶ “The implementation of [an assessment management system] for education programs at our institution left us extremely prepared to weather COVID-19. My staff was able to transition seamlessly to working at home and we were all able to continue with not only data collection, but everyday processes with minimal adjustments.”
- ▶ “In the fall of 2019, we had transitioned to a digital portfolio platform for much easier assessment... We were in the process of implementing that for 2019-2020 when campus closed to COVID-19, so we will be able to build from that for 2020-2021.”

Institutions should consider ways to streamline the assessment of learning in order to minimize the administrative burden on faculty. Many institutions are looking to adopt assessment technology, including 52% of institutions that report planning to use ePortfolios, and 63.3% that report plans to use assessment management technology, as indicated previously. A digital system should systematically capture data and artifacts, reduce administrative burden for faculty, and organize evidence for high-stakes reporting, including accreditation.

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## 79.0%

of CAOs agree that faculty members view assessment efforts as requiring a lot of work on their part

1 Inside Higher Ed  
*2020 Survey of College  
and University Chief  
Academic Officers*

# Student learning assessment

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

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### Assessment in support of self-study

A greater commitment to meaningful assessment will benefit current and future students while also providing rich evidence of academic quality for accreditation efforts. This will be particularly important as institutions face questions on how well they have navigated the transition to remote learning.

Institutions with assessment management technology in place report being better positioned to support self-study: “We have our HLC Year 4 Assurance Argument review due June 7, 2021.

We are focused on working on our report to show that we are continuing on the path that we reported in our 2017 Reaffirmation Report. We have done well with our faculty/staff adjusting their courses, projects, assessments, and activities to meet the challenges of the distance learning required by COVID-19. We have plenty of good evidence to provide in support of our report case. None of our assessments administered within [our assessment management system] changed due to COVID-19.”



One of the big priorities coming from this is [discovering] what worked well and what didn't work so well, and how can we use that information going forward. We're going to have a new normal and we don't know exactly what that's going to look like. We want to use that information to create what we're thinking are going to be hybrid classes for the fall.”

**Tracey Floto**

*Executive Director of Assessment and Accreditation  
Trine University*



# Accreditation

**Survey respondents reported significant** and increasing concern regarding accreditation, with 33.8% of respondents reporting more concern than before COVID-19 regarding collecting evidence for accreditation reports.

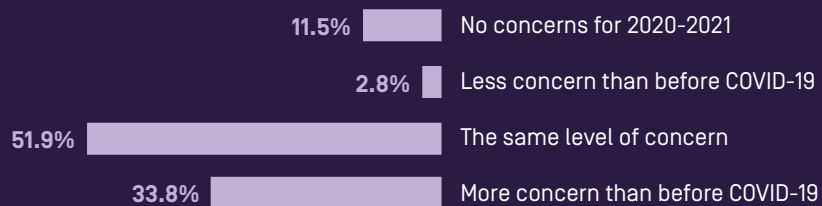
- ▶ Just 19.6% of respondents reported that their institutions were able to maintain their pre-COVID evidence collection practices for Spring 2020.

Though accreditors have signaled a certain amount of flexibility due to COVID-19, an April 2020 survey by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) reported that 80% of responding accreditors are “requiring that institutions or programs continue to meet our standards, even as they operate remotely.”<sup>2</sup>

2 [Survey of CHEA- and USDE-Recognized Accrediting Organizations: Meeting the Challenge of COVID-19](#), April 2020

Survey respondents expressed the belief that while accreditors understand the complexities of Spring 2020, they can’t simply discount it, and will expect to understand both what was planned for Spring 2020 and what actually occurred. As one respondent noted: “I think there will be more flexibility for Spring 2020 as the changes came upon us so quickly. But saying that no learning outcomes assessment was done at all in Spring 2020 due to COVID-19 is not going to be a good choice for institutions to make. I believe that we must show where we made the effort where it was feasible.”

**What degree of concern do you have regarding collecting evidence for accreditation reports?**



n=746



# Accreditation

## CHALLENGE: COLLECTING ASSESSMENT DATA FOR SELF-STUDY

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Respondents indicated that the current primary challenges for accreditation center around collecting and analyzing artifacts to provide the supporting evidence for the self-study narrative:

- ▶ “We still have all of the same reporting/research/assessment responsibilities. Things just need to be adapted to the current environment.”
- ▶ “I am concerned that redirected attention to different operational models will slow down our efforts to gather assessment in our general education program, which is vital to our HLC accreditation.”
- ▶ “[We are responding to] increased regional accreditation requirements for relocation of instruction and distance learning waivers... Increased assessment responsibilities to assure educational quality through assessment.”
- ▶ “We are preparing for HLC accreditation visit in Spring 2021. In the rapid shift to remote teaching, we empowered faculty and instructors to reconsider which learning outcomes could successfully and rapidly be addressed through remote methods. I am concerned that for the upcoming fall semester, instructors who are considering changes to their course formats (mostly face-to-face to hybrid) will struggle with how to achieve some of their key learning outcomes through online methods.”



# Accreditation

## CHALLENGE: FIELD EXPERIENCE

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Respondents reported that their institutions struggled to complete field experiences amid COVID-19 closures. This is consistent with the findings of a recent American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) report:

“With most K-12 school buildings closed, 76 percent of colleges of education surveyed by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education report<sup>3</sup> that they are working with schools to find online alternatives for some clinical placements that education students usually complete in person,” EdSurge recently reported<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> [AACTE Member Survey on Coronavirus Impact and Response](#), April 29, 2020

<sup>4</sup> [Pandemic May \(Finally\) Push Online Education Into Teacher Prep Programs](#), EdSurge, May 28, 2020

Survey respondents reflected on this challenge:

- ▶ “Many of our assessment indicators were tied to field-based experiences and activities as part of our CAEP accreditation. We are reviewing assessments to ensure we are able to gather the information required for accreditation while working remotely or displaced from P-12 environments.”
- ▶ “[We are] changing field experiences to an online format... Ensuring accreditation responsibilities are met including tracking student progress in teacher education.”
- ▶ “My duties changed in terms of problem solving data collection in a partial semester. Much of our data is collected during clinical experiences and teacher candidates were unable to complete these experiences which directly impacted the data needed for accreditation.”



# Accreditation

## CHALLENGE: SUPPORTING SELF-STUDY AND EVIDENCE GATHERING

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### Paper-based accreditation reporting

Respondents at institutions without a digital system in place expressed concerns about their institution's ability to "close the loop" and report evidence to support self-study:

- ▶ "I am concerned that it will be hard to produce evidence of seeking improvement when a significant number of faculty have expressed the increased difficulty of collecting assessment data. In other words, there will likely be a large assessment gap in several academic programs."
- ▶ "Fall will be our first semester of evidence contributing to our SACSCOC Fifth Year Interim report. That is unnerving, considering we will still be in emergency operations mode with most classes being fully online. I am also concerned about getting the document written, as all parties involved are unable to meet face to face to review the necessary documents (which are not digital)."
- ▶ "We have not been able to communicate as a group to make sure that documentation for HLC is in order."



# Accreditation

## CHALLENGE: SUPPORTING SELF-STUDY AND EVIDENCE GATHERING

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### Software-supported accreditation reporting

Many respondents reported that their institution is working on accreditation reporting due within the next year. Having technology in place to support self-study and evidence collection gave respondents confidence in their institution's ability to successfully report to an accreditor, as reflected by these respondents:

- ▶ “Faculty needed to transition to online learning and some required support, but all of our key measures were already in [an assessment management system]. This made the transition seamless.”
- ▶ “We are in the year prior to reaffirmation. Luckily, all our academic program assessment is already online, and we have embedded assessment processes in our institutional culture. We will review our documentation closely for reaffirmation. Some processes may be slowed, but we are on track.”
- ▶ “In the fall of 2019, we had transitioned to a digital platform that allows for much easier assessment to be done. We were in the process of implementing that for 2019-2020 when campus closed for COVID-19, so we will be able to build from that for 2020-2021.”



# Accreditation

## KEY TAKEAWAY

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### Support self-study and evidence collection with technology

Some respondents acknowledged that their institutions lag behind best practices in capturing and reporting on learning outcomes assessment to “close the loop” and improve student outcomes: “I continue to be concerned that we collect only minimal data intended to satisfy SACSCOC standards rather than robust data truly intended to assess student learning and inform pedagogical practices.”

At a number of institutions, respondents reported that COVID-19 increased the importance “for programs to be sure students are learning what they are supposed to, regardless of modality. Assessment, particularly formative assessment throughout the life of a course, is going to become critical — and I’m just not sure we’ll have the staffing levels or culture... to give this the attention it needs.” It has also revealed how, as one respondent put it, “woefully behind we are and how far we have to go before our pending 2020-2021 self-study and visit.”

However, as seen above, institutions with digital solutions in place report greater confidence in their ability to assess student learning and provide evidence to support accreditation reporting. Institutions can use this moment to foster a student-focused culture of true student learning assessment by providing digital tools that streamline data collection and facilitate collaboration, making it easier to gain the insights needed to inform decisions as well as comply with increasingly complex accreditation requirements.



We’ve learned a lot, in a very short time, about how technology can assist us. Now it’s like, ‘Oh, you know what? We can do this.’ We don’t have to wait for [‘someday.’](#)”

**Susan Brooks**

*Assistant Professor of Teaching in Education and Team Leader for the Intervention Specialist Program  
University of Findlay*

# Course evaluation & student surveys

**Participating institutions** in the survey indicated that 87.4% place a high priority on using student feedback to provide insight into the curriculum and student experience for institutional improvement, and for the documentation and reporting for accreditation. However, COVID-19 impacted Spring 2020 course evaluation at 51.0% of the institutions surveyed.

Notably, 95.3% of surveyed institutions proceeded with course evaluation even under these difficult circumstances.

Looking ahead, 46.0% of surveyed institutions are considering or planning to:

Increase the frequency by which they ask students for feedback through current designed/implemented [surveys](#) [not course evaluations]

Add new [surveys](#) of students to Summer 2020 and Fall 2020 survey schedules

Add further course evaluations such as [mid-point course evaluations](#)

“**We were leaning toward additional questions** that would reveal or result in actionable items so that the university could actually provide the resources... if [students] have broadband, if they're on Wi-Fi, what sort of device they have, do they have a laptop.”

**Robyn Marschke**

Director of Institutional Research

University of Colorado - Colorado Springs

## Reasons for modifying Spring 2020 evaluations

**61.5%**

Concerns about the context and use of responses gathered during COVID-19

**47.2%**

Concerns about how COVID-19 may alter the data collection

**20.1%**

Using a paper-based or other method that wasn't feasible during COVID-19

**7.3%**

Didn't have time or capacity to conduct course evaluations given COVID-19 restraints

**24.1%**

Other / I don't know

n=299

# Course evaluation & student surveys

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These decisions reinforce the critical value of continuing to secure actionable student feedback. As many institutions move to increase the frequency and improve their means of capturing student feedback moving forward, these institutions will be equipped with deeper, up-to-the-moment insights to improve student retention, persistence, and completion.

Importantly, respondents indicate both the importance and the need to use Spring 2020 course evaluation results within longitudinal/trend analysis. However, respondents are wisely and creatively working on how to do so with appropriate consideration of the context and impact of COVID-19. For example, one institution is planning to add “disclaimers into annual assessment reports and program reviews that Spr2020 took place during a global pandemic.”



Rather than asking about the individual teachers, we are asking an overall teaching question, which is ‘I am satisfied with the communications received from my teachers.’ We are also asking about their satisfaction with their teaching during this period.”

**Pam Jones**

*Coordinator*

*Surveys & Credit Arrangements*

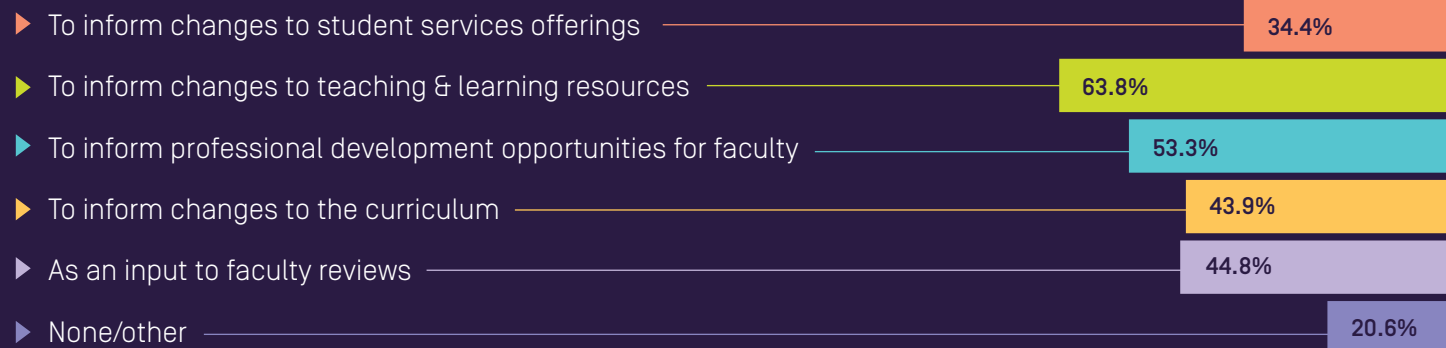
*Swinburne University of Technology (AU)*

# Course evaluation & student surveys

## Use of Spring 2020 student evaluations of teaching in faculty reviews

While most institutions continued to collect student feedback, less than half [44.8%] planned to use Spring 2020 course evaluation data in faculty review processes.

### PLANNED USE OF SPRING 2020 COURSE EVALUATION RESULTS



n=640

100%

“ **We don't want faculty** to think that we can adequately and reasonably assess the work they've done to modify their course to online instruction with one [survey](#). I think what we really want to do is use this to glean information from students on how to plan for the summer and potentially the fall being online.”

**Christa Smith**

Academic Effectiveness Analyst  
Washburn University



# Course evaluation & student surveys

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

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### Treat Spring 2020 results differently

Many responding institutions recognized the need to treat Spring 2020 course evaluation results with care. Response rates have been impacted by COVID-19 disruption, as have the courses students are evaluating. While the evaluations conducted this term are measuring a completely different experience for both students and faculty, the continuity of the evaluation process is important to maintain the quality and effectiveness of the learning experience.

Take special care with any longitudinal views incorporating Spring 2020 results. Consideration within the long-term trends will be particularly important for the 59.5% of institutions that are planning to return to pre-COVID course evaluation plans for Summer/Fall 2020 and beyond.

### Increase frequency of student feedback

Respondents indicated plans at some institutions to expand opportunities for students to provide feedback for Summer/Fall 2020:

- ▶ **12.7%** of respondents reported that they may/will increase the frequency of existing student surveys
- ▶ **21.3%** of respondents reported that they may/will add new surveys to the schedule
- ▶ **7.8%** of respondents reported that they may/will add further course evaluations such as mid-point course evaluations

Additional course evaluations and surveys offer important opportunities to learn how students are adapting, understand the challenges they face, and determine the effectiveness of course delivery and develop plans to improve learning experiences and outcomes going forward.



# Course evaluation & student surveys

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

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### Use online course evaluation to improve response rates

Maintaining communication with students is crucial to understanding their experience of Spring 2020 and the disruption caused by COVID-19. This will remain important as institutions anticipate changes or disruptions to Summer and Fall 2020.

Course evaluation and surveying technology ensure that institutions can maintain communication with students whether they are on campus or learning remotely. Institutions should consider implementing technology that integrates with the LMS for easy access and allows students to provide feedback on their preferred device to ensure a timely and accurate understanding of their current experience as well as outcomes.



[Our course evaluation system] allows respondents to complete surveys quickly and easily with their preferred device, usually their mobile phone. Our analytics show that nearly 50% of students use this method to complete their survey. When you tie that in with the learning management system, you... get the responses because it's all in the system where they're already working."

**Pam Jones**

*Coordinator*

*Surveys & Credit Arrangements*

*Swinburne University of Technology (AU)*



# Faculty activity & review

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**The importance of faculty** teaching, research, and service remained central even as COVID-19 created a forced transition to remote instruction and committee work. In addition to a new workload for faculty of transitioning face-to-face courses to remote delivery and establishing new methods of connecting with students, the abrupt closure of campuses had important implications for research and service, as well as the tenure clock.

## Research impacts

The impact of COVID-19 on faculty research is widespread, with 83.0% of respondents indicating that research initiatives on their campus have been disrupted to some degree. The level of disruption varied widely, based on the specific research endeavor:

- ▶ “Bench science lab is closed... Individual scholarly activity continues, but the burden of suddenly converting face-to-face programs and courses into online courses has consumed faculty time to a great extent.”
- ▶ “Approximately 73% of tenured/tenure-track faculty reported making less progress than usual on their scholarly work during the Spring 2020 semester; 13% made no progress at all. Many were unable to access student research assistants, laboratories, and other on-campus resources (like their offices). Moving forward, we hope to open critical resources this summer and into the fall to enable faculty to conduct research that they cannot do in a remote situation.”
- ▶ “Faculty are not allowed on campus until fall, thus summer research is at a standstill. Faculty could not travel since mid-March. Grant writing is continuing.”
- ▶ “Research continuation was a top priority at our institution. If possible, people involved in research projects continued to do so in their labs and using equipment if they were able to do so safely. Funding for new projects was still made a priority.”

# Faculty activity & review

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- ▶ “Labs are closed. Human subject and school-based research disrupted.”
- ▶ “Due to anticipated budget cuts, some courses previously taught by adjunct faculty will need to be taught by full-time faculty. The increased course loads and reduction of course releases will also inhibit some research initiatives going forward.”

The particularities of each initiative will likely determine whether and when research can resume, with field research projects such as studying bats in the wild able to continue as social distance is built into the nature of the project, while bench science and research involving live subjects are more likely to be impacted for a longer period of time. Importantly, COVID itself has opened many new avenues of research:

“ It's largely lab-based and travel-based research where our faculty are struggling and are probably going to be struggling for a while unfortunately. We have found that there are plenty of faculty who've also found new research streams out of the pandemic. We have some faculty who've already started engaging in scholarly work on what it means to be a faculty member in this situation and what it means to their teaching. So while [COVID disruption] will close some doors for people, it's opened some other doors for some others.”

**Susan Powers**

*Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs  
Indiana State University*



# Faculty activity & review

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## Service impacts

More than half (56.0%) of respondents reported that expectations regarding committee work or other types of institutional, college/school, or departmental service were impacted by COVID-19, but those impacts varied widely:

- ▶ “Faculty were not expected to continue their committee work unless it would have a direct impact on student success for students currently enrolled. The focus and priority was on helping the current students to continue and finish the semester and/or graduate on time.”
- ▶ “All committees and working groups were impacted — some were indefinitely pushed back, and many were created to respond to the crisis.”
- ▶ “It was argued that the sudden transition to online instruction more than covered the college service requirements for this semester.”
- ▶ “A smaller faculty due to hiring freeze means all faculty will need to increase their commitment to campus-wide committees and service.”
- ▶ “Some service may be eliminated (service learning, club support) in favor of core business service (advising, recruitment).”
- ▶ “With fewer students expected, budgets have been upended and release-time is being rethought... It all appears to depend on fall enrollment.”
- ▶ “Faculty have been heavily involved in decisions about how/ if to move instruction to fully online/remote modes, therefore requiring participation in additional meetings. Other forms of service did not change.”

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**56.0%**  
respondents reported  
that faculty service  
to the institution was  
impacted by COVID-19

# Faculty activity & review

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Responding to a crisis has created new opportunities for service to the institution, whether in the form of crisis management, peer-to-peer training on tools for online instruction, strategic planning for Fall 2020, providing additional support to students, and more:

“**We can see this seeding some things** that may ultimately make the institution stronger and more responsive. There are almost no conversations these days on our campus that don't have significant meaning. It's a very dense time in terms of taking in information, analyzing it, trying to make sense out of it because the stakes are really high. We are taking a lot away from the level of commitment that our faculty, that our staff, our administrators and our students have shown, and trying to apply that resilience to how we build something moving forward.”

## Faculty reviews and extending the tenure clock

Just over half (56.1%) of survey respondents reported their institutions had completed 2019-2020 faculty review processes or were proceeding as planned prior to COVID-19. The remainder were considering and/or implementing modifications to requirements, timelines, and content of their 2019-2020 reviews.

While the completion and/or capacity of these 2019-2020 systems were able to generally withstand effects from COVID-19, two-thirds of respondents reported that their institutions' 2020-2021 faculty review process could be impacted by COVID-19. Of the respondents from tenure-granting institutions, 41.4% had already altered their tenure deadlines and timeframes as a result of COVID-19 and/or were in the process of considering and implementing any alterations. Very few (8.0%) had determined when 2019-2020 tenure reviews would resume. COVID-19 continues to present challenges in proceeding with and completing 2019-2020 tenure reviews.

Some respondents indicate that their institutions are taking advantage of the challenging COVID-19 environment to reconsider their faculty review processes and technologies.

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**41.4%**  
had already altered  
their tenure deadlines  
and timeframes as a  
result of COVID-19



# Faculty activity & review

## Challenges to 2019-2020 Tenure Review

n=302

9.9%

Getting the right participants access to the right materials

17.5%

Managing tenure review processes online

13.2%

Supporting committee involvement in the process

19.5%

Responding to the impact of COVID-19 on tenure considerations

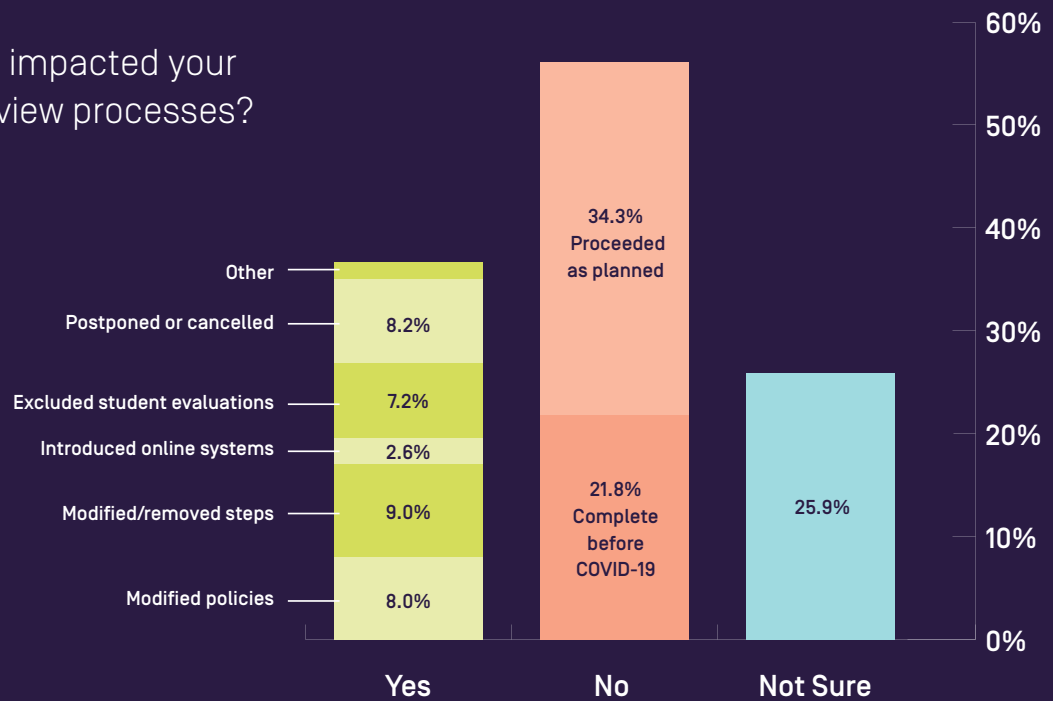
16.6%

Clarifying expectations for participants

23.2%

Keeping the process on-track relative to original deadlines

Has COVID-19 impacted your 2019-2020 review processes?



n=499

# Faculty activity & review

## TAKEAWAY

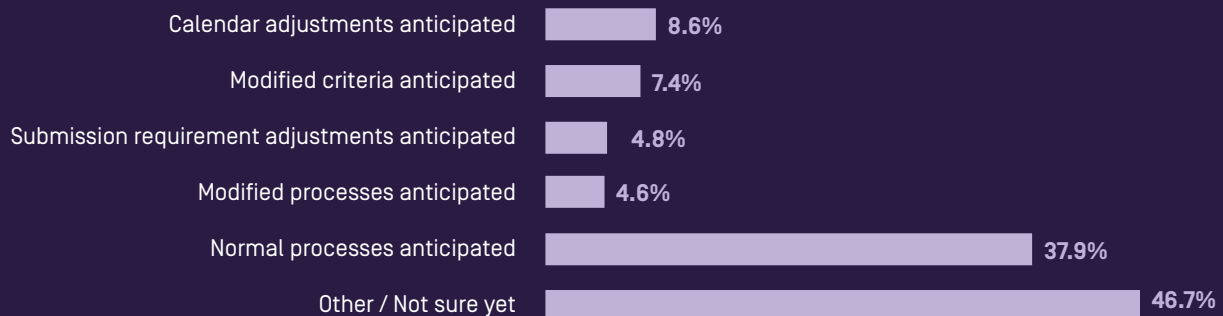
Institutions should consider the impact of COVID-19 on timelines, sequence of steps, criteria, and required materials. Respondents reflected on the benefits of a robust online system for faculty review processes to provide continuity, a collaborative space, and documentation capacity for these processes. A digital solution also reduces the administrative burden on faculty who participate in these processes, whether as a reviewee or a reviewer. These benefits take on increased value during disruption like COVID-19, when face-to-face meetings and paper-based review of materials aren't possible.

“ We started using [a faculty activity reporting system] about a year ago and it's going really well. Each college has some staff members and they were managing a lot of these dossiers and telling faculty they need to make copies of this, and this has to be there, and it has to be in a particular template format, and just a lot of procedural technicalities. [Going] electronic really takes out a lot of that noise. It turns out that it's actually saving a lot of heartache.”

**Robyn Marschke**

*Director of Institutional Research  
University of Colorado - Colorado Springs*

### COVID-19 IMPACT ON PLANNED 2020-2021 FACULTY REVIEW



n=499



# Curriculum, catalog, & syllabus management

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## **Of particular impact to the offices of Provost and Registrar,**

COVID-19 continues to have an emerging impact on the policies and process of institutions.

### Grading and transfer-in policy

Nearly two-thirds (63.3%) of respondents indicated that COVID-19 has led them to consider and/or implement changes to grading policies for Spring 2020. Given the changes in grading at many institutions, 40.1% of institutions have or are considering reevaluation and adaptation to policies for transfer-in of external credits.

### **TAKEAWAY**

As institutions consider implementing new/adapted transfer-in policies, care should be taken to document both the decision-making process as well as the policies resulting from the process. This will not only provide the institution with documentation for regulatory bodies as to this specific change, but also provide a framework for the institution to make revisions to these policies in response to future disruption. It may also be useful to consider a software solution to facilitate change processes. This serves two purposes: eliminating the need for in-person communication and capturing the documentation needed for accreditation and other accountability reporting. This has the added benefit of eliminating the need to store paper records.

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Nearly **two-thirds** of respondents indicated that COVID-19 has led them to consider and/or implement changes to grading policies for Spring 2020.



# Curriculum, catalog, & syllabus management

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## Catalog

A quarter (25%) of respondents reported that their institutions had previously completed their 2020 catalog publication, and only 1.5% of respondents anticipated a significant delay due to COVID-19. However, it is important to note that nearly one-third (28.1%) were still determining the impact of COVID-19 on their 2020 catalog publication schedule. All (100%) of the responding institutions that are currently making their catalog available to students exclusively via print copy reported they are “very likely” to adopt a digital catalog solution for 2020-2021.

## TAKEAWAY

Digital catalog solutions and delivery will be key to serving students in the future, providing more adaptability and flexibility in service to the student as well as clearer processes for catalog production and documentation for regulatory compliance. This is particularly valuable for ensuring catalog production when the workplace is disrupted as it has been in Spring 2020, in anticipation of possible COVID-related disruptions in Fall 2020 and beyond.

Perhaps more importantly in this era of uncertainty, a digital catalog solution allows real-time updates to online catalogs, ensuring the ability to keep students informed of crisis-related changes.



If you're like me, normally you think of the catalog as the Bible: 'We launched it in August and there are no changes.' That's definitely not the case for the spring term. We began to adjust policies as we added a lot of experimental courses in the middle of the term that we previously would have never touched in the catalog.”

**Rodney Parks**

*University Registrar and  
Assistant Vice President  
Elon University*



# Curriculum, catalog, & syllabus management

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## Curriculum review and revision

COVID-19 did not appear to have a major impact on 2019-2020 curriculum review and revision, with 69.6% of responding institutions reporting no change and another 12.1% indicating only extensions of deadlines for submission/approval of curriculum review and revisions. However, 43.3% of institutions report experiencing COVID-related challenges in accomplishing this, with 20.0% of respondents reporting difficulty engaging process participants digitally, and 26.3% reporting difficulty keeping the process on track relative to deadlines.

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**43.3%**  
of institutions report  
experiencing COVID-  
related challenges  
with curriculum  
review and revision

## TAKEAWAY

Institutions should consider how curriculum review processes can proceed within remote work environments. A digital curriculum management solution can provide virtual meeting spaces and document faculty-led decision-making, a more urgent need as faculty navigate the changes and additions to the curriculum prompted by preparing for multiple instructional scenarios for Fall 2020. In addition, a digital solution captures critical evidence for accreditation and external requirements as well as internal continuity and sustainability as department chair positions rotate and new faculty are hired.



# Curriculum, catalog, & syllabus management

## Syllabi

The syllabus has traditionally been viewed as something of a contractual agreement between student and instructor. As such, it is a document that generally does not undergo major changes throughout a term. The role of the syllabus to communicate and reinforce the learning outcomes for a given course, providing students with a clear understanding of expectations, has become even more important during COVID-related disruption.

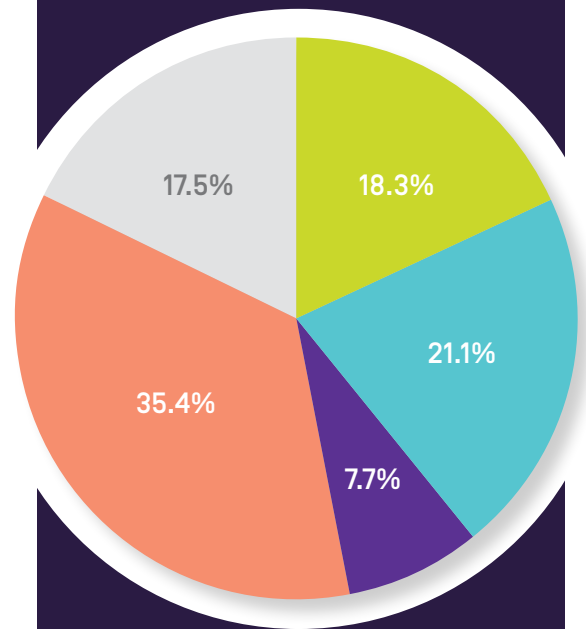
However, COVID also fundamentally challenged the nature of the syllabus as a rigid contract, illuminating the need for more flexibility to respond to a changing educational landscape. As a result, 41.7% of respondents cited an urgent need for within-term alterations to syllabi.

### TAKEAWAY

#### Establish new policies and tools for updating syllabi

To proceed with best practices and to comply with accreditation, institutions should consider and develop policy and processes for identifying in-term syllabi change needs, developing and implementing the changes, and documenting both the process and the results. A dedicated syllabus management system can help to standardize the process of updating policies across relevant syllabi, ensure syllabi are distributed to students in a consistent fashion, and systematically capture multiple versions of syllabi to support accreditation reporting.

Has COVID-19 required your institution to update syllabi for any Spring 2020 courses?



- Yes, for all courses
- Yes, but just for courses originally offered in-person
- Yes, but just for some courses originally offered in-person or online
- No
- I don't know

n=480

# Conclusion

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**The road ahead for higher education is complicated by the uncertainties surrounding COVID-19.** Will institutions be open for face-to-face instruction in Fall 2020? Can hybrid models of instruction keep students safe on campus? Will the pandemic require a continuation of fully remote instruction? And what are the implications for faculty and staff? While grappling with these essential questions, institutions must also sustain the critical campus processes that ensure student success and institutional effectiveness: assessment, self-study for accreditation, course evaluation and surveys, faculty review processes, and catalog and curriculum management.

Survey respondents shared insights into the effects of COVID-19 on these mission-critical processes in Spring 2020, as well as their understanding of how the pandemic will affect their institutions in Fall 2020 — and likely beyond. Their responses point to some clear opportunities for higher education in the months ahead. Institutions can work to achieve the intrinsically linked goals of student success and institutional effectiveness by:

- ▶ Increasing prioritization of assessing student learning, particularly focusing on outcomes
- ▶ Gaining a greater understanding of the student experience and opportunities for improvement via increased student feedback
- ▶ Supporting teaching, research, and service in challenging times, and recognizing those challenges in the tenure review process
- ▶ Adopting and/or making greater use of digital solutions on campus to sustain mission-critical processes

# Conclusion

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**Since COVID-19 abruptly closed campuses in March 2020**, higher education has shown its extraordinary strengths in abundance through collegiality and collaboration. Across webinars, listservs, articles, blog posts, podcasts, and other forums, higher education professionals have generously shared information and supported each other through the move to emergency remote instruction, while also working to understand the impacts on teaching and learning, and their implications for a future that's hard to predict.

We are particularly grateful to all who shared their experiences of Spring 2020 and expectations for Fall 2020 and beyond through this survey. We hope that these findings provide actionable insights that help institutions support student success and sustain mission-critical processes despite the ongoing challenges presented by the pandemic.



# Action Plan

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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**It's a challenging time for higher education** — and will likely remain so for the foreseeable future. These key action items can ensure that institutions are able to sustain the critical campus processes that ensure student success and institutional effectiveness: assessment, self-study for accreditation, course evaluation and surveys, faculty review processes, and catalog and curriculum management.

### Assessment

Increase the focus on assessment and core learning outcomes, and evaluate these through direct measures, such as student artifacts, when possible

### Key actions

- ▶ Pre-plan for key assessments to be sure they can be addressed remotely, even if instruction is typically in-person
- ▶ Clearly define learning outcomes, and return to them when considering necessary changes to courses and curricula
- ▶ Ensure that students have clear visibility into outcomes and expectations through course materials and syllabi
- ▶ Consider ways to increase the use of direct measures of learning in assessment, for example by collecting student artifacts digitally
- ▶ Support these efforts with digital systems to more easily capture and analyze evidence and ensure continuity of processes in remote environments

# Action Plan

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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### Accreditation

Maintain focus on self-study to support regional and programmatic accreditation requirements

### Key actions

- ▶ Nurture a culture of self-reflection based on evidence to support decision making, and use digital tools to maintain progress in a remote environment
- ▶ Ensure continuity of robust assessment to support self-study, while providing flexibility on items such as the number of outcomes assessed, measures employed, and submission timelines
- ▶ Capture a wide range of evidence of student learning, including field experience and other measures of clinical practice when in-person experience is not possible
- ▶ Consider adopting a digital system to facilitate collaboration on the self-study narrative and store evidence in support of the narrative



# Action Plan

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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### Course evaluation & student surveys

Expand the use of course evaluation and student surveys to better understand student experiences in a changed learning environment

### Key actions

- ▶ Use Spring 2020 course evaluation results to understand students' experience of learning in trying circumstances
- ▶ Add questions to surveys to identify emerging student needs, including technology gaps and required support services
- ▶ Add questions about learning outcomes to course evaluations to better understand student perceptions of outcome achievement
- ▶ Refrain from using Spring 2020 course evaluation results to inform faculty reviews — or make them optional for faculty to include
- ▶ Use care when using Spring 2020 course evaluation results in longitudinal views — this is an asterisk semester
- ▶ Consider using an online course evaluation system to increase response rates and ensure students can use their preferred technology to participate

# Action Plan

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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### Faculty activity & review

Adapt campus policy, including the tenure clock, in response to the implications of the pandemic on faculty research and service.

### Key actions

- ▶ Provide support to faculty whose research has been disrupted, as well as those who have found new areas of study on the effects of the pandemic
- ▶ Address the necessary shift in service to the institution caused by the rapid transition to emergency remote teaching, and the changes anticipated for instruction in Fall 2020 and beyond
- ▶ Adjust the tenure clock to correct for the impact of COVID-19 on faculty's ability to achieve expected milestones
- ▶ Explore technology to support faculty activity reporting and maintain continuity of review processes in a remote environment

# Action Plan

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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### Curriculum, catalog, & syllabus management

Address the impact of COVID-19 on policies and processes for the offices of Provost and Registrar

### Key actions

- ▶ Adjust grading and transfer-in policies in light of COVID-19, and document changes for accreditation reporting
- ▶ Digitize the course catalog to ensure that it's easily accessible and that updates can be reflected as they happen
- ▶ Consider using technology to support curriculum review processes and syllabus creation and changes
- ▶ Capture review processes and prior versions of syllabi in a central repository for accreditation reporting

### Educational intelligence

Adopt and integrate software on campus to support mission-critical processes with data to inform decision making, provide evidence for accreditation, and ensure student success

### Key actions

- ▶ Minimize the administrative burden on faculty and staff participating in processes that are essential to the institution so they can focus on teaching and learning
- ▶ Provide digital tools that support collaborative processes when faculty and staff can't meet face to face
- ▶ Capture needed data in a central repository to support reflection, decision making, and self-study for accreditation
- ▶ Use data to better understand student and faculty experiences, and support their success

# Our Thanks for Your Contributions

As with many things in higher education, this survey and report are the result of collaboration with many professionals who shared their insights and expertise. We especially wish to thank these contributors.

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