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COVID19 Student Survey Spring 2020: Challenges & Student Recommendations

Research Brief # 208

College of the Canyons

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COLLEGE OF THE CANYONS

Table of Contents

Table of Figures

Tables

Introduction & Background

In assessing impact of the shift to remote/online operations, the office of Institutional Research, Planning and Institutional Effectiveness administered a student survey to examine experiences and needs of students in light of this drastic change in college operations and instruction. One vital component of the survey was to allow for students to provide, in their own words, their challenges and recommendations of ways the institution could better assist them. These open-ended questions allowed for a richer and more holistic assessment of the specific challenges that students face both during the transition to remote/online operations as well as within their personal lives during COVID in Spring 2020. Where possible results presented in this report are compared and contrasted to results from the *Statewide COVID-19 Impact Surveys of Students* conducted by the California Community College Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) in partnership with the Research & Planning Group (RP) across the State of California with 50,000 Community College student respondents.

Method

Survey Instrument

The online survey included opportunities for students to identify where they were experiencing challenges and recommendations for how the institution and specific departments therein could better meet student needs:

- Open-ended **question 30**: "If social distancing requirements remain and instruction is still remote/online in the fall, how can the college help you succeed in remote learning?"
- Closed-response **question 32**: "Please select which of the following is currently a challenge in your experience with remote online learning?"
    o Too many distractions to study at home
    o Social isolation
    o Access mental health
    o I lost my employment or had my hours cut at work.
    o I'm sick or helping others who are sick
    o I'm worried about getting enough food
    o I need childcare
    o My housing situation is not stable or I have lost housing
    o I need a healthcare provider or health insurance
    o I do not have a safe place to live and/or do school work
- Open-ended **question 33**: "What are some additional challenges?"
- Open-ended **question 34**: "In what ways can the college or college departments better help you during this time."

A total of 3,714 students (99%) of total survey respondents (*N* = 3,739) provided responses to any combination of one/several/or all of the above questions. These open-ended responses were coded into themes. In some cases, one open-ended response could have been coded into multiple themes as some responses discussed multiple topics/concerns. Where applicable, disaggregation by ethnicity and/or familiarity with online coursework prior to Spring 2020 are assessed.

Results

If Instruction is Still Remote in the Fall How Can the College Help You Succeed?

A total of 1,208 (32%) of the 3,739 total survey respondents provided responses to the specific open-ended question regarding ways the college could help them succeed if remote learning/instruction remained online in fall 2020. The top three themes to emerge from coding in response to this question are provided in descending order by frequency: Improved

communications and access to student services (n = 244), Course workload/grading (n = 211), Provide instructors more online training (n = 205). Rates of responses are provided in (*See Figure 1*).

*Figure 1. Open-Ended Responses for How College Can Help*
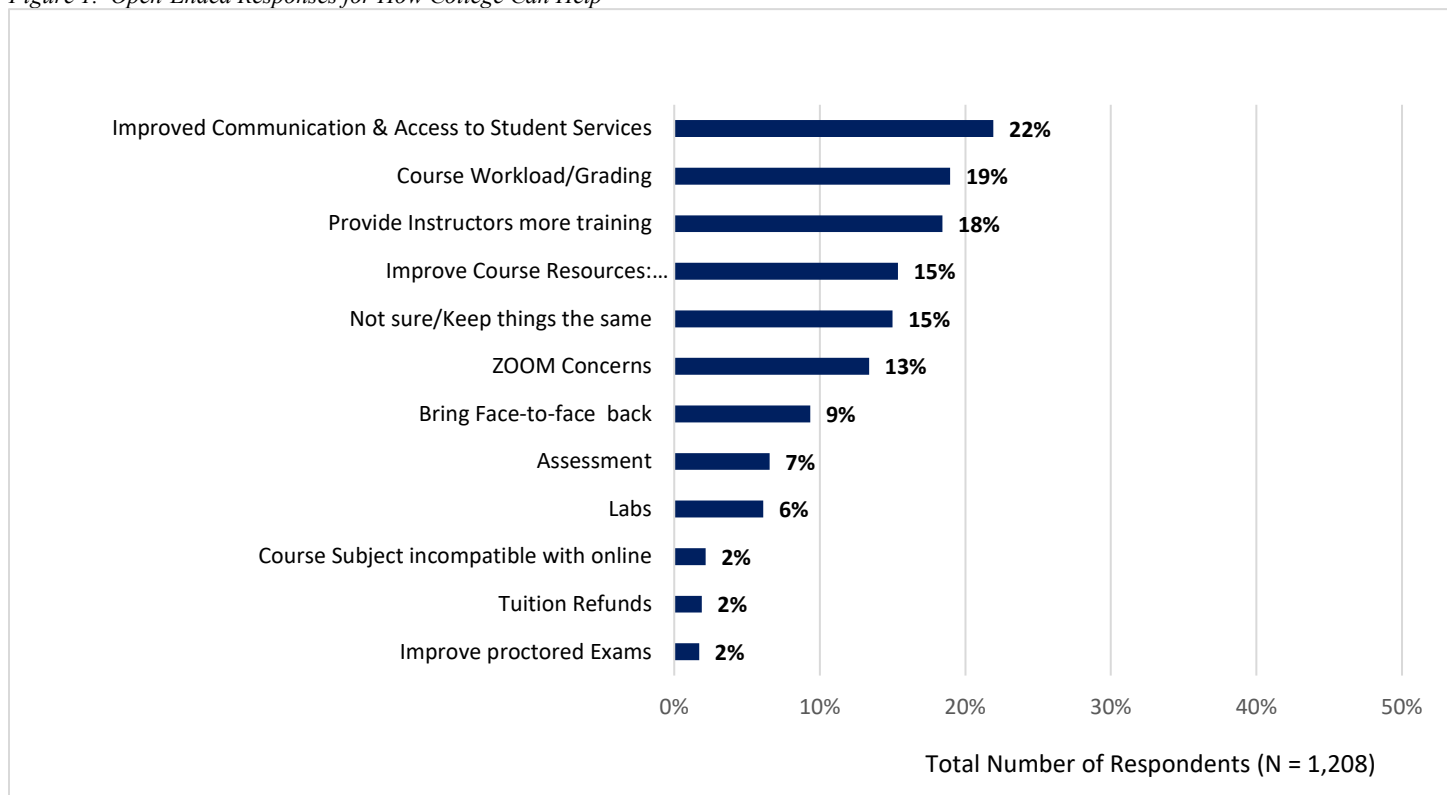
Examples of responses for each of the top 3 challenges are listed below.

1. **Improved communication & access to student services**: "I'm hoping that TLC can help a student more than 30 mins because I needed help on my English essay and it wasn't enough time."

2. **Workload/Grading**: "I believe making the teachers a little more lenient with grading would help. The main problem is math classes. Math classes are based purely on tests and many people are having a hard time learning the new math."

3. **Provide instructors more training**: "Work closer with teachers for best learning. Some of my teachers are just posting quizzes and tests no lectures…or anything" and "Watch professors and help them make online classes more doable if they've never done an online class, as some professors struggle with moving classes to online, especially classes with labs."

Current Challenges in Remote Online Learning

A total of 2,475 (66%) of the total survey respondents provided responses for their current challenges in remote online learning. Of the selected forced-choice responses provided in question 32 the top three challenges selected in descending order by frequency are as follows: too many distractions (n = 1,772), social isolation (n = 1,344), lost employment or had hours cut (n = 753), (*See Figure 2*).

*Figure 2. Selected Challenges in Remote Learning Spring 2020*
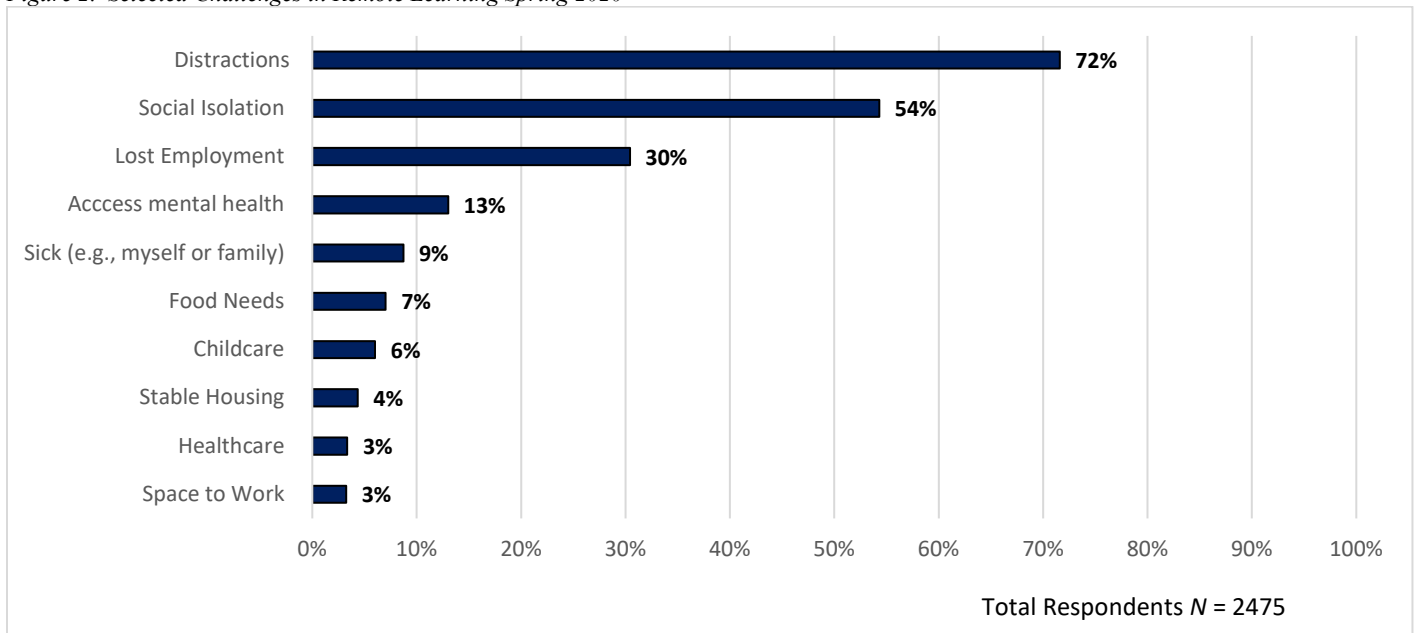
The top two challenges selected among our survey respondents echo responses reported by the CCCCO and RP group statewide COVID survey. Within their report students indicated several learning/educational challenges transitioning to online learning. Challenges pertaining to distractions and social isolation emerged as some of the top concerns statewide (*See Table 1*).

Table 1. CCCO Statewide COVID Impact Survey Top Challenges

Challenge	% of Respondents
1. Home environment harder to learn in	55%
2. Difficulty focusing/paying attention	52%
3. Preference for face-to-face learning	52%
4. Difficulty learning online	43%
5. Lack of interaction/connection with other students	41%
6. Feeling isolated in an online learning environment	40%

From among the top three challenges listed by College of the Canyons respondents, disaggregation by ethnicity, and familiarity with online course work prior to Spring 2020 was completed. There was some disproportionality on the basis of race/ethnicity (*See Figure 3*). Only Race/Ethnicities with over-representation as compared to the overall rate are shown.

Figure 3. Disproportionate Representation of Top 3 Challenges by Race/Ethnicity
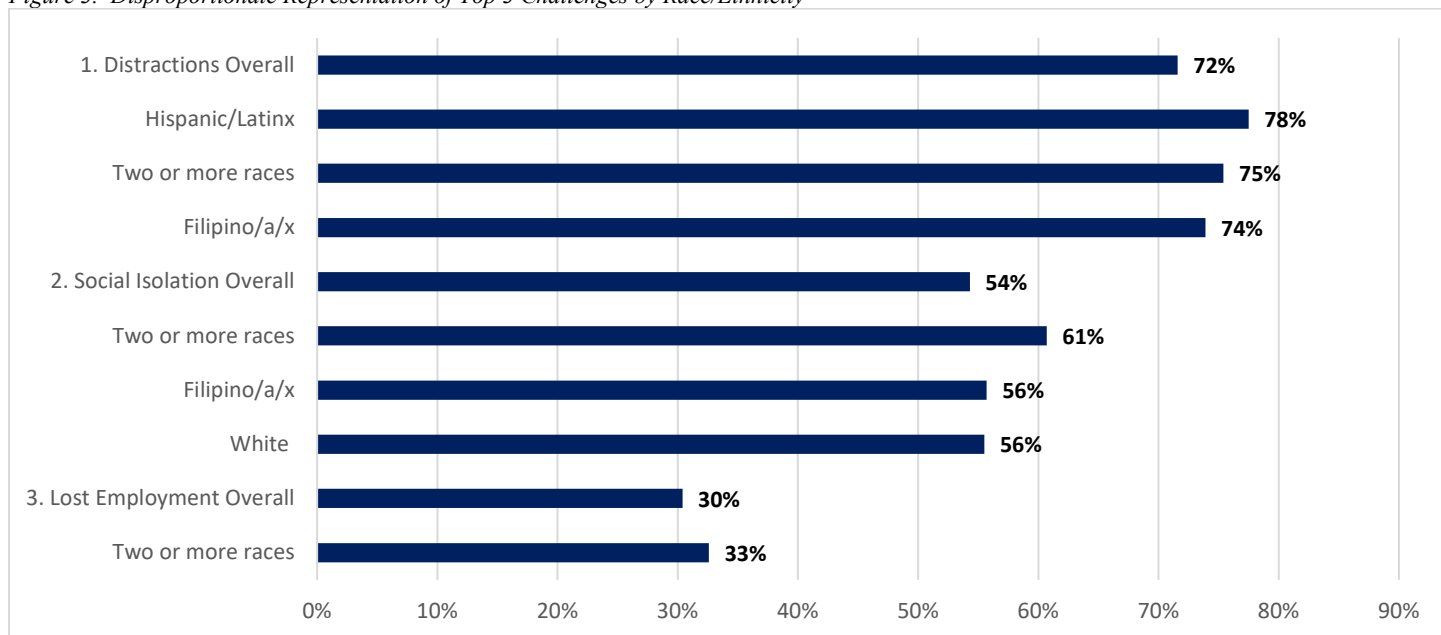
Ethnicities whose response size was less than 20 respondents were not included in *Figure 3*. Distractions were disproportionately over-reported among Hispanic/Latinx, two or more races, and Filipino/a/x identifying students. "Social isolation" was disproportionately over-reported among two or more races, Filipino/a/x, and White respondents, and "loss of employment" was disproportionately over-reported among two or more races identifying respondents (*Figure 3*). There was no disproportionate representation when disaggregated by previous familiarity with online course-work vs. those who had only ever taken face-to-face courses.
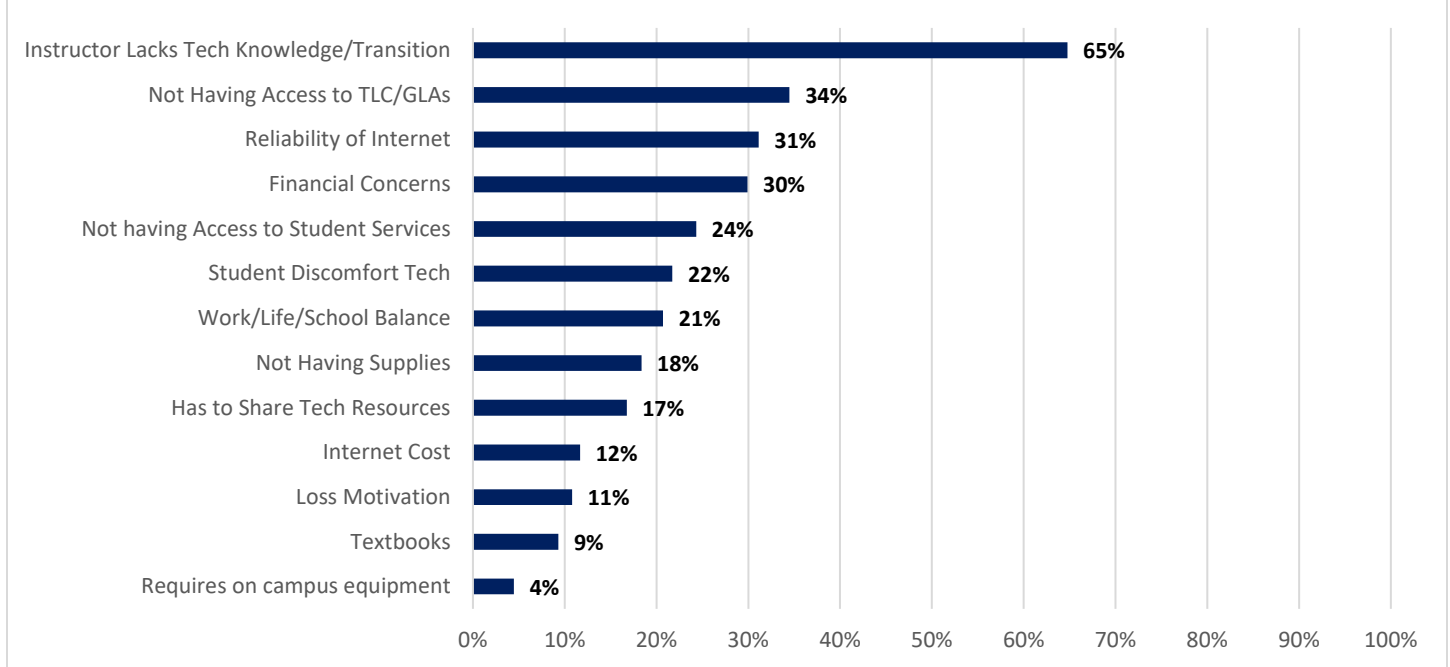
Additional Challenges

A total of 806 survey respondents (22%) of total survey respondents provided open-ended answers to additional challenges they may be facing. Of the coded responses the top three themes that emerged in descending order by frequency are as follows: Instructor lack technological knowledge (n = 522), Not having access to TLC/GLAs (n = 278), Reliability of internet (n = 251) (*See Figure 4*).

Examples of response for each of the top 3 challenges are listed below.

1. **Instructor lack of familiarity with technology**: "The teachers are not good enough with technology currently in order to be doing an online class effectively. They are too worried about cheating that they aren't teaching their information properly and effectively."

2. **Not having access to TLC/GLAs**: "Doing all work from home without access to TLC/tutoring is proving impossible in terms of focus and absorbing the material."

3. **Reliability of internet**: "I cannot access secure WiFi at home around midday everyday" and "slow internets speeds and having to resort to going to public WiFi areas which are already limited as it is."

Figure 4. Additional Challenges Reported in Remote Learning

Of those who provided open-ended responses for additional challenges, disaggregation by ethnicity and prior modality experience (face-to-face, online only, hybrid) was conducted. Ethnicities listed in *Figure 5* were the only subgroups whose rate of reported challenge was greater than the overall rate. Ethnicities whose size was less than 20 respondents or were less than the overall rate were not included. Disproportionate over-representation for Instructor lacked technological knowledge originated from respondents who were Asian, multiracial, and/or whose prior modality experience was only Face-to-Face. Filipino/a/x, Black/African-American, and Hispanic/Latinx were more likely to report a challenge for being unable to Access the TLC/GLAs as well as more problems with Internet reliability (*See Figure 5*).

Figure 5 Additional Challenges Disaggregated by Race/Ethnicity & Modality
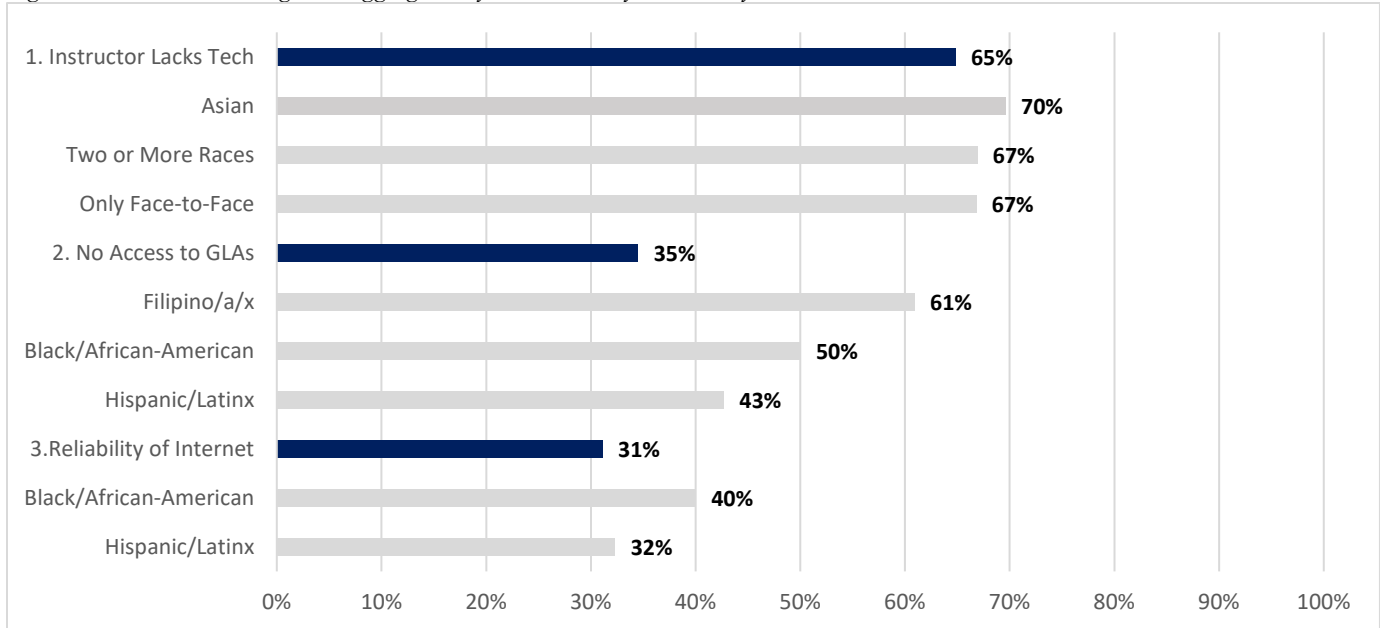
How Can College Departments Better Help You At This Time?

A total of 732 (20% of total survey respondents) provided an answer to this question. Of the coded responses the top three themes that emerged in descending order by frequency are as follows: More access to Services (n = 128), Ask professors to be accommodating (n = 113), Improve communication with students (n = 112) (*See Figure 6*). Some themes overlap from responses provided to open-ended questions asked prior.

Figure 6. How Can the College Better Help
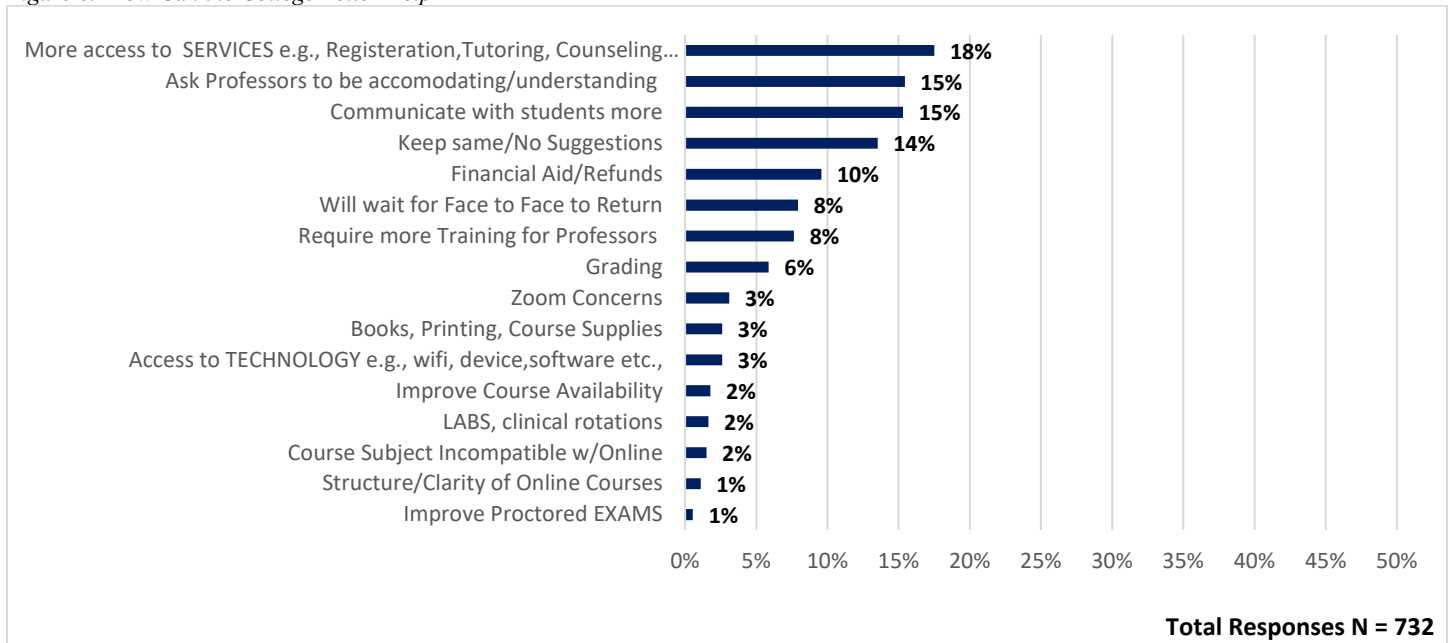
Examples of response for each of the top 3 challenges to this question are listed below:

1. **More access to services**: "Make more appointments available for students to speak with staff about educational plans and graduation questions."

2. **Ask professors to be accommodating**: "Tell instructors/professors to show a little more empathy and understanding of the current situation."

3. **Improve communication with students**: "Phone contact. All issues/questions/problems cannot be solved through email."

Summary Points & Recommendations

Based on the results of the COVID19 student survey items related to challenges and student recommendations, the following are recommended.

- Recommendations from students most popularly centered on the institution providing more access to student services, providing better communication with students during this time,

asking professors to be more empathetic and accommodating during this time, and more financial aid support.

- **Any considerations to address the above top challenges and recommendations could assist traditionally disproportionately impacted groups as they were even more likely to report these challenges.**

- The institution can ensure students from historically underrepresented groups in academia, receive communication and information about extra support services. Several patterns for challenges to academic success emerged that echo both state level findings and those illustrated in prior research briefs (RB#s 202-207). Specifically, students report challenges due to distractions, social isolation, and loss of employment. These were disproportionately reported as challenges by students from Black/African-American, Hispanic/Latinx, Filipino/a/x, and two or more racial backgrounds.

References

California Community College Chancellor's Office & Research & Planning Group Administered (Spring 2020). *Statewide COVID-19 Impact Surveys of Students* https://www.cccco.edu/-/media/CCCCO-Website/Files/statewide-covid-survey-results-final-20201211.pdf

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