

# Preliminary Findings on Graduate Student Experiences Related to COVID-19

## Introduction

This report provides a preliminary overview of UCLA graduate and professional student responses to the COVID-19 crisis and the shift to remote instruction and research beginning at the end of Winter quarter 2020. Data analyzed in this report come from *early responses* to the 2020 UCLA Graduate and Professional Student Survey (GPSS). The survey is normally administered every three years; in 2020, the survey contained items assessing student experiences related to the COVID-19 pandemic. GPSS administration began in May 2020, and the current data represent responses that had been received by June 2020. At the time this dataset was compiled, the survey had received 2,101 responses. Given the urgency of university and departmental needs, preliminary data is being shared in order to aid administrative decision-making.

Open-ended responses to the following items are presented in this report: *How concerned are you on the possible effects of COVID-19 on your learning in the following ways?: Other learning concerns [open-ended]* (392 responses), *How concerned are you on the possible effects of COVID-19 on you in the following ways?: Other [open-ended]* (212 responses), and *Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience during the COVID-19 pandemic?* (612 responses). The total number of responses to these items was 1,216. Because codes and themes remained consistent across all three items, they were analyzed together for expediency of reporting. However, any numbers reported in the findings represent the total number of *responses*, which may include repeated instances across respondents (i.e., one respondent may have mentioned financial concerns in response to both Questions 2 and 3, which would be counted as two responses).

## Findings

### Financial Concerns

Graduate students were overwhelmingly concerned about **finances** as a result of COVID-19. Two hundred twenty-two responses mentioned financial hardship, making it by far the most prevalent concern reported.

“Financial concerns are a huge issue right now. Not sure why we are paying professional and/or campus fees when we are not actively using the campus/equipment/facilities. These should be partially reimbursed.”

“I have had to purchase office supplies for which I don't have the funds to cover. It would be helpful to have a fund in place to buy needed items. Small things add up on a stipend that is already very tight. I am worried about my computer failing. If campus was open I would be able to use a computer in the lab, but with campus closed I am concerned that my computer will fail. If this happens I won't be able to afford a new one.”

“Again - you don't pay a living wage - so how are we supposed to have a savings to support us through this time when we may lose our employment?”

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"Funding!!! My PhD studies are covered by a stipend that decreases over time. I need to obtain external funding through fellowships, grants, etc, to cover my living costs. If this external funding dries up (as it already has since the pandemic started), I don't know if I will be able to stay in my program."

"Financially, I've been hit very hard. I've lost my summer internship which amounts to roughly \$20k in salary, 12 weeks of housing, and valuable work experience."

"I have had to re-locate to a new housing arrangement due to living with a roommate who will not respect social distancing and therefore puts my physical safety at risk each and every day. This new housing arrangement will cost me \$400/month more, given that it is a single-occupant place, and will significantly drain from my living stipend that I am paid as a graduate student. I typically work two other part-time jobs (walking dogs, house sits) to help make ends meet, neither of which are safe to do so in COVID state. The financial insecurities due to COVID are very real and scary for me."

One hundred fourteen responses reported frustration or anger at the lack of reduction in **tuition**—given the reduced opportunities in online classes—and **fees (particularly professional fees)**.

"As a Master's student, I specifically chose to apply to the in-person master's program, as the difference between in-person learning and online learning is vastly different. Now that we are forced to do online learning, I believe tuition should be reduced, since the learning experience has been stripped of many of its qualities. For instance, many of the lectures are simply pre-recorded lectures from past years online courses, allowing for no direct interaction with the Professor during lecture. Furthermore, class projects that were originally designed to give Graduate Students practical experience have been modified or completely cancelled from the course curriculum due to lack of resources. For these reasons and more I feel strongly that the quality of learning has been severely degraded and I believe it is not fair to continue to charge us the same rate as if everything was normal."

"As an individual who is part of a cohort-based learning platform, it is extremely difficult to put forth the full tuition when I am not getting the full experience. I am one of the only people in my family that is privileged to work from home, but I am concerned about paying full tuition for fall quarter without the full cohort, interactive experience."

"I feel taken advantage of with having to pay the same tuition for a significantly reduced experience. It is definitely leaving a bad impression on me as a soon to be graduate and alumni."

"I don't understand why our tuition is not reduced. I am architecture major and pay \$10k extra as professional fee for using the wood shop and digital shops such as laser cutters and 3d printers. Why should I pay for it while I don't have access to it!? It's one of my biggest question during the pandemic."

Students expressed frustration about the **cost of rent in UCLA student housing**. They felt it was inappropriate for university rent to make up such a large portion of student income, and were particularly angry about recent rent increases that contrasted with government measures to aid renters.

"Campus housing raised rent despite a statewide rent freeze."

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"It has severely limited my income, making it impossible to afford rent in University Housing. Meanwhile, the cost of housing is going to go up this summer despite the fact that several graduate student taught classes have been cancelled (including mine). I find it ridiculous that we are being asked to pay more than we were prior to the pandemic, and that the university thinks that \$200 will cover the additional expense of working from home and increased rent."

"We need increased pay for COLA and lower rent. School is the easy stuff. Housing is in the purview of Student Affairs. My rent has increase \$400 a month over the last five years. My pay has not increase at the same rate."

Many graduate students worried about graduating into an uncertain **job market**.

"I am quite insecure about the future even after the pandemic. Though everyone at UCLA (especially Anderson School of Management) is very accomodating, there are lots of insecurities related to job after graduation. Also, it feels that we lost months of our time on campus, which could have helped to create our network i.e. one of the major goals of coming to business school."

"I don't know if there are going to be jobs for me when I'm done with my PhD. Can the UC system work nationally with other public university systems to bargain collectively to increase the number of stable jobs with benefits (instead of the current tenure track bloodbath?) Else, I don't see the point of seeing my program through if the tenure track market is ever-shrinking."

In addition, 25 responses expressed concern about the loss of **internship** opportunities amidst COVID-19 restrictions.

"As an MSW student with a field requirement, I am most concerned about losing the opportunity to do my 2nd year internship in person. This 2nd-year field experience is really critical in my development as a social worker and as a foundation for my future career."

"I was planning on undertaking two internships in Turkey this summer, one of which has already been cancelled and the second which is most likely going to be cancelled. These internships were going to give me valuable hands-on experience and I am concerned that missing out on these opportunities will be a major setback in terms of my professional development."

"Our program typically requires internship experience, vital to developing a portfolio of treatments for later career advances as well as learning about how to work in the field, and internships have been canceled and the treatment portions of our classes have been removed. This could have negative consequences in my job applications in the years to come."

Amidst the loss of internship opportunities, other students were concerned about a reduction of **on-campus jobs** for graduate students impacting their abilities to support themselves.

"I am concerned about the availability of GSR positions for Fall 2020 and beyond given the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on university resources."

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"I wish there were more resources for student employees at UCLA. I work at the gym (typically about 18 hours per week), so since it has been closed I have taken a huge hit to my income. It is also stressful that my program does not have any clear answers about the fall (i.e. remote class/internship placement) so I do not know if I should break my lease or continue paying rent (even though I am quarantining somewhere else). I feel like we need answers so that we can plan accordingly."

## Research Progress and Laboratory/Field/Clinical Experience

Students expressed worry about not having access to **labs and facilities**, or being unable to complete **clinical training or fieldwork**. Seventy-eight responses in total addressed this concern.

"I am a fourth year dental student at the UCLA School of Dentistry. As a fourth year, we usually have zero online classes incorporated into our Spring Quarter curriculum. The Spring Quarter is primarily focused on clinic. With the clinic being closed, we are not able to complete our requirements required to get our license. Instead we are completing them virtually. Although I am happy to be given the chance to graduate virtually, I believe that I am not getting the hands-on education I am paying \$15,000 a quarter for. I am not going to be as prepared as I would have been prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is only fair for our school to allow fourth years to come back and get the clinical education we paid for in the late summer when the clinic reopens. As of now our school is not giving us that opportunity and is failing to prepare us for a career in dentistry."

"I have not been able to continue wet lab research activities, which is directly impacting my doctoral studies."

"As a film directing student, I don't have access to all the film facilities."

"I cannot do ethnographic fieldwork because of COVID-19 related closures, travel, health, and safety concerns. My project is 100% ethnography based and it is unreasonable to ask graduate students in this position to figure something else out to move forward with our projects."

"I lost opportunities to have hands on clinical experience. The suturing lab class used to be included for my nurse practitioner program before covid19. The NP program no longer offers the suturing lab which is very essential part of NP skills. We had to pay out of pocket for other online suturing classes. It is so unfair for students paying over \$400 out of pocket to gain suturing skills. Instead of telling students to take the other online suturing classes, the school should offer us the suturing class virtually."

An additional 42 responses mentioned other concerns about their **academic research**. Students feared their research was suffering or stalled, either due to inability to conduct their current research (due to in-person closures) or their work taking a back seat to other responsibilities, such as added TA responsibilities or family obligations. Still others mentioned different concerns about their thesis or dissertation, such as the increased difficulty of reaching or convening with committee members.

"Adhering to my dissertation plan while being unable to collect data as my data collection is in schools."

"The extra work I have to do to design an online class during this time has been seriously delaying my progress on my research."

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"Having access to all faculty members in scheduling my dissertation defense."

## Concerns Related to Learning or Classwork

Seventy responses highlighted the loss of **interacting with other students** as hindering their intellectual and professional growth.

"As a student in an Executive program, I found much value in learning from my colleagues through class dialogue, time during breaks, etc. That is all but lost now."

"As a graduate student I learn so much from my peers, and also get so much support from them for my personal/emotional needs but also my academic/research needs. One of the main benefits of staying near campus was convening with them."

"I attended UCLA because of the cohort model, but I feel like that was lost due to the situation."

In addition, 17 responses mentioned the loss of **interacting with faculty** as an added hindrance.

"Especially for my program, I think the relationships we build with key professors is invaluable. I would normally try to do this with a coffee meeting or a lunch meeting and the pandemic has made it really difficult to create the bonds I would expect."

"As a professional school student my concern is with getting enough clinical experience and time with clinical faculty."

"Overall, I am concerned about losing out on the face-to-face time with faculty I have really been looking forward to working with. There simply is no replacement for that."

Related to the above concerns, 21 responses described concerns about the lack of **networking** opportunities, which many considered vital to their academic and professional development.

"This has affected the access to networking opportunities and events that were key reasons to study at UCLA."

"Being isolated when going to school is not an ideal way of learning. I feel like I am missing out on the graduate student experience being able to take advantage of network opportunities, interacting with other students and staff, as well as taking advantage of performing research or doing an internship alongside colleagues where learning occurs."

Many responses (82) described a reduction in **learning quality** in classes due to the online environment.

"Subpar teaching by instructors or profs who do not know how or are struggling with adapting to online teaching. I just paid over \$4K for a class of virtual book reports. I guess I am just paying for the name on the degree at this point."

"Despite what the administration says, remote learning is far inferior to the on campus experience. Class engagement is much worse and I find myself not learning nearly as much as I would hope. Frankly, I do not feel that tuition is worth the cost at this point."

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A number of responses (58) cited the lack of an appropriate **study space** as detrimental to their progress and learning. Many lived with roommates who were all trying to juggle teaching, meeting, study, and even instrumental practice schedules; others lived in small spaces with several family members; many graduate students complained that not having a desk or other furnishings hindered their ability to study for long periods of time. A few stated they were struggling with expenses after needing to purchase furniture or supplies to create a study environment for themselves.

“I share a small apartment with 2 other students and it has been very hard to focus with having all of us dialing in to classes at different times of the day, taking calls while others are in class, etc.”

“It is very difficult to do well in courses, particularly on timed exams online when I do not have a designated study/work space, internet connectivity varies and added stress in this setting due to uploading documents etc.”

“Everyone has different home and family dynamics; unfortunately for many, these home environments are not conducive to learning. In addition, I did have a family member contract COVID-19. While the rest of my family was asymptomatic, this did create a bit of turbulence in the functioning of our daily lives.”

“I don't have proper space to teach. I don't have a private living space. I don't have A/C. I don't have a white board. I can't read full length books on the computer.”

Students expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that they felt many faculty were not only failing to demonstrate leniency, but demonstrated **expectations for increased productivity** due to an assumption that students had more time during the period of lockdown.

“It's been a rough transition with moving onto online classes especially as professors have chosen to increase the workload thinking that most students have more time. However, it's been way more challenging because of the need to take care of home members and not have a space to work on school.”

“I am finding that many PIs are reacting terribly to the COVID19 situation. They are putting way too much pressure on their students to still be super productive and are not giving students the space to adjust to new plans/new restrictions. In many cases, the PIs are taking out their own stress on their workers and guising it as 'mentorship' when in reality they are just being over-controlling and in some cases outright abusive. I wonder if its possible for deans or department heads to communicate what appropriate/inappropriate leadership looks like during this time. Or maybe even require PIs participate in a session on this topic.”

“Some professors have piled on the workload assuming that we have the same or elevated level of productivity because we are at home at all the time. This is simply not the case and should be re-evaluated as a teaching strategy. If anything, a modification of workload would be more appropriate recognizing the additional challenges that come for many people learning remotely - not to mention the additional mental, emotional and physical energy that gets expended on basic survival needs during this pandemic.”

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Students worried about the impact of COVID-19 on their **time to degree**, with 31 responses citing these concerns.

“Qualifying exams: my academic process may be severely affected if I can't do them in time. My advisor, who is supposed to help me with this, does not have time for this because of family issues related to COVID.”

“My board examination might be postponed until later months due to the impact of COVID. In addition, new grad RN programs are being pushed back or canceled altogether.”

“I am unable to make meaningful progress toward my degree during remote instruction. This will attenuate my time to degree and increase my tuition debt burden. I am seriously considering moving to another country where the government has more effectively managed the pandemic to finish my degree.”

A number of students found it difficult to go without **campus resources**, including software, services (such as certain counseling, advising, or administrative offices) and physical resources (such as access to printers). Many worried about difficulty completing research without access to **library** books and archives.

“I've had trouble accessing a printer which I need sometimes - public libraries are closed, I don't own a printer, and even the UPS discontinued printing services. I'd like to be able to access printing services.”

“It's very difficult to access admin staff such as people in charge of financial aid. My financial aid is completely up in the air and I can't get a single person to help me.”

“Not having access to the library is a pretty big interruption, as I work on texts from South American in the 1930's. Right now I am making do with what I already have, but I anticipate needing to get additional texts as I move on to the next chapter of the dissertation.”

“The libraries closed are a huge problem for those of us writing our dissertations. How are we supposed to complete research when so much material is unavailable? Everything takes a lot longer now and since I am an international student my NRT is not waived anymore. If I cannot finish over the summer, my only option will be to be on filing fee, but then I will lose access to online library resources and health insurance, so how would I finish? This is causing me a lot of stress!!!”

Graduate students' learning experiences were impacted by **technology difficulties**, either on their end or their professors'.

“Internet WiFi in graduate housing is somewhat slow in my place.”

“Zoom is slowly killing my personal computer and I can't afford a new one.”

“Some profs are adapting to the tech beautifully, others can't seem to figure out how raise hands works in zoom, or polls, or mute all. Assuming they had a basic tech training, I expect profs to up their game. We pay quite a bit to be here and should not miss out because folks fail to adapt.”

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A few responses felt that faculty members generally **did not understand or did not support students** at a time when they needed it.

“Just the total lack of realistic support I feel from faculty. It seemed like they were more concerned about protecting tenure clocks than students when this started, which says a lot.”

“There is not enough guidance from the department on how to give graduate students more of a break besides telling advisors to be 'flexible'. Different faculty in the department seem to be interpreting that in different ways, creating uneven expectations among the graduate students.”

Ten responses expressed frustration over attempting to complete **group projects** during remote learning.

“Overall MBA is very project based, but being remote - group meetings have become a 30-min, 'how quickly can we attack this problem and divide up the work'. Zoom calls are not an effective way to get to know your classmates, or to brain storm different approaches. On top of this, class has started to feel very transactional. A large part of the grade is participation - which I generally love. Yet, the hand raise feature creates this line of hands waiting – where I feel I have to keep my hand raised the entire class, and respond to whatever I happen to be called on. So essentially - it makes all classes feel like cold calling.”

“1) There are SO MANY group work projects in my program. Group Work is difficult with everyone located in different time zones, it should be reduced or eliminated - or restructured, to allow for successful studying. So far, it's been extremely stressful, with people dropping classes out of the blue and leaving half of the groups stranded, and etc. 2) Participation over zoom is difficult and the grades for participation should be significantly reduced! Sometimes there's construction outside, sometimes the internet slows down. I'm sure there are better ways to evaluate students than whether they manage to say some comment to class material over Zoom.”

A few responses expressed frustration with online **exams**, as well as disappointment with **grading** decisions during the spring quarter.

“There is an extra layer of stress with timed exams in an online setting where internet connectivity and uploading documents can be a large issue.”

“UCLA graduate programs should have moved to a campus-wide satisfactory/unsatisfactory grading system this quarter. COVID-19 is forcing some students to take a course S/U simply because they cannot complete all of the coursework. Allowing some students to take courses for grades while leaving others to take S/U simply penalizes those students who, for myriad reasons, may be less able to adapt to the demands of this crisis.”

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## Difficulties at Home or in Personal Lives

Fifty-seven responses cited the difficulty of juggling **family responsibilities** at home, especially when young dependents were involved. Students worried about their ability to work and felt that they were falling behind their classmates who were not responsible for dependent care.

"I'm concerned that there's no way to protect parenting students from being viewed as unprofessional or not serious when they are interrupted by their children (for instance, during a zoom class). TA evaluations of parenting TAs are bound to see biased, insensitive and probably sexist comments. How do we not only support and protection parenting students but also how do we ensure they aren't unfairly discriminated against for competitive fellowships and awards."

"An extended family member died of COVID about two weeks ago. Dealing with grief while: 2) staying at home in these small UCLA apartments with multiple children, 2) trying to facilitate some kind of continued education for my kids, 3) working as a teaching assistance and managing students' stress, and 4) trying to do my research is basically impossible."

"Institutions such as UCLA need to recognize that the COVID pandemic is affecting students differently and that women students with dependents at home who are affected by school closures (and/or also taking care of parents) are in a dramatically different situation than many others."

In addition to the daily stress of attending to increased family responsibilities in their own household, 34 responses touched on the stress of worrying about the **well-being of their extended family members**, many of whom lived far from Los Angeles. An additional 11 responses discussed the mental health effects of being **isolated from family** for an indefinite period of time.

"I have lost two close family members just ten days apart. With high stress of not having known about losing my father in law and sister in law, it has been emotionally, physically, and mentally exhausting. The additional stress of my parents living in New Jersey and my mom working as a nurse in NYC, and the knowing that my parents are high risk have been extremely difficult. This pandemic has hit the East coast more severely than Los Angeles and has affected me directly in a tremendous way."

"It's hard being an out of state student and not being able to go home and see my family due to safety concerns. So that makes it hard to focus solely on school sometimes. That, and not being able to access spaces I would usually go to study. I also miss not being able to interact normally with my friends as they are the only "family" I have here."

## Administrative Challenges

In the spring and summer, students found it **difficult to plan** for fall quarter and beyond – particularly in regards to housing and lease agreements – without knowing whether they would need to attend classes in person.

"I am not in grad student housing but I know a lot of my friends have been struggling to come up with a fair resolution with them. I'm in law school and the law school has not committed to having in person or entirely online classes yet, and the housing department is making people sign leases even though we

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don't yet know if we'll have in person classes. That seems entirely unfair and shows that UCLA is not committed to the wellbeing of its students during this crisis."

"I have found it very difficult to make future plans for the Fall 2020 semester. I am waiting to hear back about funding I applied for, but that decision will not be made until after June due to COVID-19 and will depend on whether the Fall 2020 semester is remote. If I do not receive that funding, I may declare non-attendance in the fall in order to work. However, I will not be able to apply to jobs until mid-summer because I will not know until then whether I will be in school."

Students also expressed frustration with **housing** decisions that left them unable to maintain their leases and needing to apartment-hunt during the pandemic, or caused financial burden due to shifting policies.

"I left LA to conduct research in Houston during week 10 of the [winter] quarter, not yet aware of how the COVID-19 circumstances would rapidly shift. I have been unable to safely return to LA, but was forced to continue paying rent for my UCLA graduate housing apartment. I ended up selling (with the help of a friend) all of my belongings in order to have my apartment vacated, because I was told that my apartment would be reassigned to a student on the housing waitlist. Yet, I have been confirmed for the same apartment type/location for the 2020-2021 academic year, and I can safely assume that I will be reassigned to the same apartment I had previously occupied. I recognize that mine is likely a unique situation, but I would have appreciated having been given greater flexibility in these circumstances, so I could have returned to my apartment as I'd left it. The process of selling my belongings and remotely vacating an apartment I'd planned to live in for the remainder of my time at UCLA added extra, unnecessary stress to an already uncertain time."

"I'm shocked and hurt that UCLA has not been there for me in the ways that I needed it to be. For instance, being told that I will have to move out of my graduate student apartment in September (given that my three years of eligibility are up and that absolutely no exceptions are being made in light of COVID-19) was AWFUL. Is there truly not room for me? Even though so many students canceled their leases? And we aren't even sure that Fall classes won't be online such that incoming students might not even be arriving in person? Apartment-shopping is anxiety-provoking enough without having to worry about contracting COVID-19 because UCLA decided that I should be homeless in September. Moreover, given that my partner has been out of work and that our savings are depleting exponentially to cover our basic expenses (because goodness knows that UCLA does not pay me enough to support myself, let alone my family), we might not have any choice but to leave Los Angeles."

"UCLA Housing's policy of disallowing roommate preferences from this year on means being forced to live with strangers whom you don't know and can't trust, which is difficult during regular times but is dangerous during health scares. I can't control my health when my roommate is going out and brings strangers by. And I have no options for escaping because UCLA funding is so terrible that I can't afford to move out of UCLA housing or into a UCLA one-bedroom."

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**Communication** with the university was an issue in 26 responses. Students felt that critical information was not being communicated, or at times was lost in what they felt were too many emails early in the pandemic.

“I've received mixed communications and frankly incompetent response to issues experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic from UCLA. It has been extremely difficult to get a hold of any actual person over the phone or otherwise to get issues resolved. Please increase support and service during this time.”

“Even though it might seem to be a transparent approach, sending the student body assuring letters with hollow promise actually introduced uncertainty and fear among us. e-newsletters from different administrative divisions flooded our inbox with trivial information related to pandemic. It was not until our own department stepped up and organized a survival guide did we finally get a good grip of reality. I'd say the whole university is pretty uncoordinated even after two months of campus closure.”

“There needs to be more transparency in where student funding is going. If it's being rerouted to pay faculty for overtime working on creating online education, that's fine; however, so far my classmates and I have consistently reached out about where our money is going and either been ignored or given vague answers that don't answer our questions. We still don't understand why we're paying fees for campus gym, etc. when those facilities are closed.”

**International students** faced unique difficulties, particularly in navigating visa issues.

“Extremely concerned about the graduation, filing fee, and most importantly OPT/work visa applications as an international student. Plus with federal inclination to severely limit alien hires, I feel that I'll likely end up having to go home after completing my studies. My internship for this summer already got cancelled, something I was relying heavily on for experience, income, and to be able to continue working, learning, and contributing to the local society.”

“As an international student, there is a HUGE concern regarding the OPT timelines when we are graduating at a moment where there are NO jobs. The university NEEDS to look into deferring the OPT period so that international students, who make up a MAJORITY of your BUDGET, are getting the education and benefits they PAID FOR.”

## Mental and Physical Health

A large number of responses focused on the negative impact of COVID-19 on students' **mental health** (70) and overall levels of **stress** (23).

“I am very concerned about my mental health. I already have anxiety and depression, both of which have worsened during the shutdown. I am also struggling to find motivation to complete my coursework and am worried that I am falling behind in my studies.”

“Mental wellness - I opt to not see my parents because I volunteer at the COVID testing drive thru clinics. I miss them so very much. It makes me sad a little sometimes to look forward to the weekend only to have it be the same as my weekdays.”

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“I’m just exhausted from coronavirus-related things. I’m still passionate about my research but sometimes reading the news and worrying takes up a lot of time. I’m completely separated from loved ones.”

“I am so confused and overthinking right now. I think I need someone to talk to, to help me think right.”

A few respondents also worried about increased difficulty accessing mental health services at **CAPS**.

“I can’t continue with my therapist at CAPS because I am in a different state than CA due to relocation because of COVID.”

A number of responses discussed the increased difficulty **focusing** (40) and finding **motivation** in an isolated learning environment.

“I have not been able to concentrate on lectures as my mind wanders and my attention span has diminished. I find that I am missing a lot of material and feel a disconnect between my teachers and my classes. Online learning is very difficult and I am really struggling.”

“As a grad student, my productivity is gauged by my research advisor. I’m worried that their expectations remain the same as they’ve been prior to the stay at home order (or have increased since then based on their view of my availability now). However, I find it very hard to concentrate and dedicate time to cognitively difficult tasks.”

“Online learning makes it very difficult to stay motivated. Most students I have talked to are suffering from some form of depression, and it is really hard to see the light at the end of the tunnel for this one.”

“Concerned with feeling engaged and excited enough about learning - I really miss in person classes. I really struggling feeling motivated for online classes. They’re more exhausting and stressful and uninteresting compared to classroom settings.”

Graduate students (70 responses) felt their **physical health** was also suffering. Some had become ill, others complained about the lack of exercise they were getting, and many felt that constant screen time had a negative effect on their physical health overall – including problems with eyesight, back pain, and migraines.

“Burnout from so much screen-time. Meetings, coursework, clinical work and mentoring activities are all online and I find myself more tired during days when these activities happen all at once, more-so than when they occurred in person.”

“Being isolated and living in a small studio apartment with limited movement, has made me be in low physical activity and now I’ve been experienced the most horrible and sometimes unbearable lower back pains I’ve ever experienced in my entire life.”

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## Difficulty as Teaching Assistants

Graduate students are in the unique position of often being both students and teachers. Forty-two responses talked about the **challenges of serving as a TA**, facing their own difficulties as both a learner and instructor, but also providing additional support for students who relied on them more heavily than ever.

“I am concerned about my students’ ability to learn. I have been TAing over 60 students this quarter and have also had to balance/provide emotional support/liason for them and between them and the professor.”

“Teaching is taking up a lot more time and effort as students are going through their own significant challenges during the global pandemic and as a TA I am their main interface with the university so must support and reassure them. While not receiving much support or reassurance myself.”

“As both a TA and a student taking classes, I can say that teaching a class online is challenging but learning material online is challenging. Both are challenging because of a lack of face to face interaction that facilitates interactive learning. There's only so much that I can teach through an online platform and there's only so much I can learn through an online platform. I can't just stop by my professor's office hours to get quick edits on a HW assignment nor can my students do the same for me. It now takes more time to provide feedback and edits to assignments.”

## Positive Responses

Finally, though most responses reflected the difficulties of adjusting to COVID-19 circumstances, 41 expressed appreciation for **UCLA’s response** and that of certain **faculty members**, who they acknowledged were doing all they could given the situation.

“As someone whose partner is classified as 'vulnerable' and whose family are in the UK I have appreciated where UCLA faculty and staff have been accommodating in updating course materials, deadlines and deliverables to be flexible so that if issues arise I can support my family and still deliver on the academic requirements.”

“I appreciated how quickly UCLA reacted to the pandemic and was able to transition everything so seamlessly to online learning. I also appreciated that unlike many businesses and other academic institutions out there, UCLA made an early and definite decision to stay remote until the Fall quarter. Though this might have felt like a very conservative decision to some, I personally felt that having a very clear expectation of when school would start up again made it very easy for me to plan the rest of my life during this time of uncertainty. Some of my friends attended schools that kept extending dates week by week, and this made the process extremely stressful due to the uncertainty.”

“I want to greatly thank UCLA Leadership for taking the necessary steps (and right on time) in moving to online learning, increasing sanitation and cleaning around campus, and shutting down the labs to protect the students/staff and their families.”

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## Recommendations

Based on the above findings, we recommend the university provide clear, open channels of communication with graduate students regarding finances and student housing rent increases. Students felt that lack of clear communication from administrators increased their frustrations regarding financial hardships.

Given the unexpected delays many students have faced in their academic progress, whether due to closed facilities, reduced clinical hours, or an unexpected increase in familial obligations, we encourage departments to consider allowing flexibility, even on a case-by-case basis, in terms of expectations for productivity or time to degree. Many students worried that their overall degree completion, qualifying exams, or other milestones would be affected by factors outside of their control.

Departments are also asked to consider providing additional virtual networking opportunities for students. While scheduled virtual events cannot replace day-to-day interactions with fellow students and faculty, providing a variety of opportunities of different types may help alleviate the loss students currently experience.

Finally, we encourage departments to provide additional TA training on virtual learning, and to evaluate the work that TAs are asked to do during remote instruction. Many TAs find themselves acting as intermediaries between their students and class professors and bear the burden of providing emotional and learning support for students above and beyond what is expected during a typical quarter, while struggling to manage heightened stress and workloads themselves.

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