The Power of Choice: Why Online Classes Matter to Students

That's a problem because when students can't get to class, they often can't complete their degree on time. And when low income students are not able to graduate in their scheduled time frame, it may mean the end of the road for their college dream because enrolling for an extra semester or two is not financially feasible. So as higher-ed institutions seek to improve graduation rates, online classes will play a key role in ensuring students are able to complete their academic goals.

Two students recently shared these experiences with us in an episode of CSUCI's [HumanizED podcast](). These student conversations revealed powerful stories that piqued our interest. So we dug deeper and asked students to voice their opinion about the value of online classes in the form of online voice comments. Twenty-seven students who had taken at least one online class responded. The consensus? Students want, and in many cases need, more online courses in order to complete their degree.

"I found out there was one last class I needed to graduate," one student said. "Without this 'online' class I wouldn't graduate next semester." Additionally, the students said online courses alleviate hidden expenses for students, including money spent on gas and parking.

These students, however, also explained that online courses alone are not the solution, as many have faced difficulties enrolling in online courses that fill up quickly. They said that having a choice around where they take a class could allow them the time they need to both support their families and their learning goals. A [recent study]() backs their experiences up, and found that students who enroll in a mix of face-to-face and online classes are more likely to progress than students enrolled in either all in-person or all online classes.

Students at CSUCI also told us that their online courses provided them with engaging activities and collaborative projects through asynchronous group conversations using platforms such as Zoom or VoiceThread within Canvas. Group activities, audio-video discussions, and multiple methods of communicating with the instructor created opportunities to interact with their instructor and peers, students said, and increased their sense of belonging.

"[It's amazing you can communicate with your teachers a lot better [online] than you can in person, or you don't have that shyness," another student said.

[Click here to listen to all of the student comments.]()

Providing students with a choice is critical in an educational environment that expects students to graduate on-time, alongside working full-time and caring for families. Focusing on student choice shifts mindsets about planning for the integration of online courses into the student experience. Promoting the growth of online courses in a purposeful, campus-wide, multi-program effort can increase the availability of classes to meet student needs for flexibility and access, while supporting graduation initiatives.