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COVID-19 & The Future of Learning: A Report from the Front Line A Research Proposal

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The Future has arrived

COVID-19 has dramatically affected the current, and potentially future, learning environment for university students. Universities are in uncharted territory, and it is unclear if the online learning platforms now in place are temporary or will be used widely in the future. Also unknown are what kind of changes will need to be integrated into new learning models for the post-COVID world and how these will open up potential new markets and sources of revenue for universities.

The research proposed here is designed to help universities better understand today's learning environment and, most importantly, what their own students - compared to Canadian and international students in general - are open to in terms of the future structure of the learning environment.

The threats and opportunities universities face have prompted The Strategic Counsel and Higher Education Strategy Associates to once again partner to offer our combined experience for this important initiative.



Approach

Issues to be covered include:

- Overall engagement/satisfaction – how well is the university doing?
- Overall academic experience: teaching, learning, interactions with faculty/staff
- Digging into specific aspects of the digital student experience:
 - Student experiences with online classes — what is working and what is challenging;
 - Identification of elements that could be improved;
 - Identification of what students miss about in-person/classroom instruction and what they don't miss;
 - What types of courses, if any, could remain online and what types should be delivered in-person; and
 - Identification of types of student and types of programs students are willing to consider remote delivery as an option.
- Impact on Work Integrated Learning: How is it being delivered, if at all?
 - Can it be effectively delivered in a digital environment? Are students able to extract the skills that they would gain in an in-person environment? What do students believe makes it effective in the digital environment?
- Other elements of the student experience:
 - Experience of accessing supports online;
 - What students think about student supports/want to use them in different ways?; and
 - Identification of supports that could continue to be delivered online and those that should revert to in-person when possible.



Approach

Panel survey of university students

We anticipate a two stage research process. This first stage would involve a large online panel and screening for current undergraduate and graduate and professional students attending a Canadian university. This would provide one set of norms for making comparisons of the responses of students from participating universities to compare their own students against.

The details are below:

- An online panel would be used to screen for students currently attending a Canadian university (target n=1500).
- Students would be sent an invitation to participate in the survey.
- A standard 40-question, 12 – 15 minute questionnaire would be used.
- Given the different situations of undergraduates from those in graduate and professional programs, somewhat different questions would be asked each group.
- For those universities not including their own students in the reporting, a separate report of the panel results only would be available.

Using student lists from participating universities

The second stage of the process would be to engage with students from participating universities:

- Each participating university would provide TSC with the email addresses of its students or TSC would send a link to a university for them to send out the invitation themselves.
- Students engaged could be undergraduates only or also include those in graduate and professional programs.
- The same standard 40 item question, 12 -15 minute questionnaire would be used, but again adapted for undergrads and grads.
- Results from all participating universities would be combined to create a set of norms (if possible, university responses would be filtered by type of university). This would provide a second set of norms in addition to those created from the panel.
- Each participating university's responses would be compared against the norms.
- Participating universities would have access only to their own results, not the responses for other universities.
- For an additional fee, universities would also be able to add additional, custom questions for their own students to the end of the survey.



Reporting

Analysis will look at results by:

- Type of university.
- Undergraduate year of study.
- Students in graduate/professional programs and type of program.
- Faculty, type of program.
- Residential and largely commuter universities.
- Programs with labs and limited labs.
- Students living at home and students living away from home, including in residence.
- International students currently in Canada and not in Canada.

Reporting will include:

Panel survey results of Canadian university students

- A full analytical report of the results with general conclusions and recommendations.
- The panel portion of this option would not include international students.

Using student lists from participating universities

- Universities that choose to include their students in the survey would receive a full analytical custom report comparing the normative panel and norms from participating universities with results from their own students.
- The report would also include responses of their own international students against any norms generated from the surveys of international students of participating universities.
- Reporting would analyse separately undergraduates and students in graduate and professional programs.
- Tailored conclusions and recommendations.

Timing and Costs

Timing

It is our intention to launch either option ASAP. Our tentative timelines are as follows:

- Launch and promotion of the initiative: weeks of October 12 – October 26
- Discussions with universities re: the concept and questions to include: week of October 19 – November 2
- Launch of survey: week of November 9
- Analysis: week of November 23
- Reporting: week of November 30
- Webinar discussing results: TBD

Costs

Report of the panel findings only

- \$5,000, including a full analytical report.

Report including student responses from participating universities

- \$7,500 for a full custom report comparing a participating university's undergraduate results against the norms, and including international students.
- \$9,000 for a full custom report, with the addition of those in graduate and professional programs, compared against the norms and including international students.

If you are interested in participating in this research or would like more details, please contact:

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