

What Will It Take for Students to Feel Safe to Return to Campus at Portland State University?

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Executive Summary

As part of a Faculty Senate, Educational Policy Committee (EPC) approved effort, a survey was sent out to all students currently enrolled at Portland State University during October and November of Fall term 2020. We received 3,940 responses from a total of 21,593 students enrolled at PSU during fall term 2020 (an 18.2% response rate) with 3,048 complete responses. The survey asked questions about student attitudes toward online education at PSU including:

- What course elements do students feel work well with various education modes – online, remote, hybrid, remote hybrid, and face to face?
- What aspects of courses do students feel could be improved (for each delivery method)?
- What course delivery method do students prefer?

The 2020 survey was based on a similar survey conducted in 2018 so that student attitudes could be measured over time. One question in our 2020 survey stood out as potentially providing timely information to support University decision makers in determining when students should return to campus. Specifically, the question asks “What conditions need to be in place before you would feel safe returning to campus?”

The results showed that while a small percentage (12.1%) of students would feel comfortable coming back to campus right now (without any added precautions), the majority of students would like to see a variety of safety measures and preconditions to be in place prior to returning to in person classrooms.

In terms of actions PSU could take, the survey showed that students would like to see the following safety measures:

- Mandatory Mask wearing (59.4%)
- Special Cleaning Protocols between Classes (54.2%)
- Social Distancing in the classroom (56.6%)
- Temperature screening at the doors of classrooms (38.0%)

As a precondition to returning to in person classes, the majority of students (52.5%) would like to see local infection rates reduced to levels prescribed by Governor Kate Brown for safe opening. Furthermore, many students would like to have a vaccine in place prior to returning to campus (39.7%). Yet, there is a good portion of students who are not sure if they will feel safe returning to campus any time in the near future and would like to complete their education online (22.0%).

There were significant differences in student feelings around safety based on gender, ethnicity/race, part-time vs full-time enrollment, student age, driving distance from campus and instructional unit. These demographics were analyzed and are part of the full report. We also looked at patterns of responses given by students. If you have any questions, please contact – David Raffo (raffod@pdx.edu) and David Gerbing (gerbing@pdx.edu) in the School of Business.