

STUDENT AND FACULTY NEEDS FOR SUCCESS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: FOLLOW-UP STUDY REPORT BRIEF

RACHEL MADSEN, SUGUANYA SUMITHRAN, LISA MCMANUS, JESSICA MACDONALD,
CARRIE BARTEK

(AUGUST 2022)

BACKGROUND

The purpose of this study was to follow-up on the Madsen, Bartek & Sumithran (2021) study documenting the transformational change that occurred in instruction, services, and student outcomes during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as to provide a “check-in” with students and faculty about the barriers they faced in completing or teaching their courses in Fall 2021. Statistical analyses were conducted on student success rates¹, withdrawal rates², and equity gaps for the Fall 2021 semester as compared to Fall 2020. In Fall 2021, surveys were also administered to students and faculty to gain insights into challenges experienced and to identify how the college can better support them going forward. This executive summary provides an overview of the key findings from the statistical analyses and survey research, along with conclusions and recommendations based on the findings.

FINDINGS

- **Total Course enrollment:** How does total course enrollment in Fall 2021 compare to Fall 2020? To Fall 2019?
 - **The proportion of traditional seats increased and online seats declined but a majority of seats were still online:** Traditional (seated) instruction resumed in Fall 2021, increasing from 1% of total capacity in Fall 2020 to 21% in Fall 2021. The proportion of online instruction capacity reduced from 88% in Fall 2020 to

¹ Success Rate: Percentage of A, B, C, S, and P grades out of all grades including withdrawals but excluding AU, X, SR, and NA.

² Withdrawal Rate: Percentage of W, WP, WE (special COVID-19 withdrawal grade), and WF grades out of all grades excluding AU, X, SR, and NA.

62% in Fall 2021 but was still elevated compared to Fall 2019, when online course enrollments were about one-third of total course enrollments. About 60% of student services remained virtual in the 2021-2022 academic year.

- **Enrollment declined:** After initially holding steady between Fall 2019 and Fall 2020, total course enrollment declined 4.3 percentage points, which is still less than the steep rate of decline nationally.³ Proportionally, the highest declines were among White/Caucasian females and White/Caucasian non-Pell recipients. While WTCC enrollment declines may be associated with COVID-19, they may also be associated with Wake County's strong economic recovery and dropping unemployment rates after the initial onset of the pandemic.
- **Online Student Success Rates, Withdrawal Rates, and Equity Gaps:**
 - How do student success and withdrawal rates in Fall 2021 compare to Fall 2020? To Fall 2019?
 - **After improving between Fall 2019 and Fall 2020, overall online student success rates declined from 70% to 68% and withdrawal rates rose from 18% to 19% in Fall 2021, similar to pre-pandemic levels.** The only demographic group experiencing continued improvement in both success and withdrawal rates between Fall 2020 and Fall 2021 were White/Caucasian males. The steepest declines in success rates were among White/Caucasian Pell recipients.
 - How do equity gaps in Fall 2021 compare to Fall 2020? To Fall 2019?
 - **Equity gaps continued to narrow for Black/African American females, Black/African American Pell Recipients, and Hispanic/Latinx females, but widened for Hispanic/Latinx males, Black/African American males, and Hispanic/Latinx Pell recipients.**

³ From Fall 2019 to Fall 2020, community colleges have experienced nearly an 11% decline in enrollment (Brock, 2021).

Group	Success Rate % point changes (2020FA to 2021FA)	Success Equity Gaps % point changes (2020FA to 2021FA)	Withdrawal % point changes (2020FA to 2021FA)	Withdrawal Equity Gaps % point changes (2020FA to 2021FA)
Black/African American Females	Declined by 3	Narrowed by 1.3	Increased by 1	Narrowed by 1.5
Black/African American Males	Declined by 2	Widened by 1.7	Remained constant	Narrowed by 0.5
Black/African American Pell Recipients	Declined by 3	Narrowed by 0.3	Increased by 1	Narrowed by 0.7
Black/African American Non-Pell Recipients	Declined by 2	NA	Increased by 1	NA
Hispanic/Latinx Females	Declined by 3	Narrowed by 1.8	Remained constant	Narrowed by 1.2
Hispanic/Latinx Males	Declined by 3	Widened by 3.8	Increased by 1	Widened by 3.4
Hispanic/Latinx Pell Recipients	Declined by 3	Widened by 3.9	Increased by 2	Widened by 2.8
Hispanic/Latinx Non-Pell Recipients	Declined by 2	NA	Remained constant	NA
White/Caucasian Females	Declined by 3	NA	Increased by 2	NA
White/Caucasian Males	Increased by 1	NA	Declined by 1	NA
White/Caucasian Pell Recipients	Declined by 5	Widened by 2.5	Increased by 1	Widened by 0.9
White/Caucasian Non-Pell Recipient	Remained constant	NA	Remained constant	NA

- **Barriers students faced in Fall 2021:** What did students believe were the biggest barriers they faced in Fall 2021 that would impede their ability to succeed in their courses that semester?
 - Despite doubling emergency federal financial aid and shifting about 40% of instruction and services from online to hybrid and traditional modalities in Fall 2021, students in Fall 2021 faced barriers that may be associated with the declines in the student success in online courses in Fall 2021:
 1. **Personal/Family issues:** Females in all three major racial-ethnic groups, more than males, reported personal or family health issues and childcare issues as barriers to their success.

2. **Work obligations:** White/Caucasian females and Hispanic/Latinx females, in particular, indicated that work obligations impeded their success.
 3. **Getting what they need from support services:** Hispanic/Latinx Pell recipients and Black/African American males, in particular, reported experiencing barriers in getting what they needed from support services.
 4. **Financial cost burden:** Students in each of the historically minoritized groups reported experiencing financial cost burden at considerably higher rates.
 5. **Changing course modalities mid-semester:** Students cited mid-semester changes from seated to online as an impediment to successfully completing their courses.
- **Barriers faculty faced in Fall 2021:** What did faculty believe were the biggest barriers they faced in Fall 2021 that would impede their ability to teach their courses that semester?
 - Curriculum faculty were more likely to identify institutional, rather than personal, barriers, in the ability to teach their courses during Fall 2021. These included:
 1. Getting compensated adequately (56%)
 2. Clear communication about COVID-19 policies/procedures (45%)
 3. Changing from seated to online instruction mid semester (45%)
 4. Personal or family health issues (34%)
 5. Work obligations (28%)

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Enrollment:** More research is needed to be able to untangle the effects of Wake County economic factors on enrollment trends and among demographic groups during the pandemic. However, given that enrollment declines in Fall 2021 occurred as the COVID-19 pandemic continued *and* are closely associated with regional economic recovery, the college may want to focus future recruitment and marketing efforts on emphasizing flexible scheduling and course modalities as well as upskilling to higher wage jobs.
- **Student Success:** Given the Fall 2021 declines in online student success to pre-pandemic levels as compared to Fall 2020, despite doubling emergency federal aid and moving more services to traditional and hybrid modalities, faculty and staff should



consider what they might do to replicate the Fall 2020 instruction and services to address the barriers students cited as impeding their success. Based on the data collected in this study, these might include:

- Expand online instruction and services to proportions more closely replicating Fall 2020, as appropriate for specific programs and services.
- Provide maximum flexibility in instruction and services in courses, at the same levels as Fall 2020. This flexibility is especially important for females who are navigating personal, family health, and childcare issues, as well as juggling work obligations.
- Strategically target academic and student supports to Hispanic/Latinx Pell recipients and Black/African American males to ensure they are getting what they need to succeed. Target success coaching to these groups to continue the trend of closing equity gaps that was started with the pandemic. Develop communication mechanisms to these students to ensure they can easily find the resources and support services they need, including academic, financial, wellness, advising, and others.
- While more research is needed on the impact of emergency federal financial aid on student success at the student-level, the college should consider strategically targeting emergency federal financial aid to historically minoritized students and White/Caucasian Pell recipients.
- **Faculty Success:** While the pandemic placed a strain on all faculty and staff, faculty in particular felt overextended and the effect of institutional barriers that impeded their teaching in Fall 2021. Some of the actions that can be taken in the future to prevent these barriers:
 - Create a college-wide classroom contingency plan to provide protocols and approved instruction options for faculty should social distancing be necessary in the future.
 - Continue to advocate at the state level for community college faculty pay raises.
 - Provide retention bonuses to faculty on an annual basis.



FURTHER READING

Full report:

Madsen, R., Sumithran, S., Bartek, C., McManus, L., MacDonald, J. (2022). Student and faculty needs for success during the COVID-19 pandemic: Follow-up Study. Wake Technical Community College.

Research brief template courtesy of: Dr. Steven Turner, Research Brief Prototype, Practice-Research-Policy Exchange, ATD, February, 2022.

