Teaching in a Pandemic: COVID-19 and Faculty Work at San Francisco State University

Executive Summary

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, San Francisco State University suspended classroom instruction on Tuesday, March 10, 2020. Faculty were granted four working days (March 10 to March 15) to convert their face-to-face classes to remote instruction. Since Monday, March 16, all instruction at SF State has been conducted remotely. Conducted between March 24 and April 14, 2020, the survey garnered 657 faculty responses, representing more than a third tenure line and lecturer faculty at SF State.

In general, the survey finds a faculty overwhelmed and exhausted by the COVID-19 crisis. Few faculty report COVID-19 infections, but most are feeling overwhelmed by health worries, school and daycare closures, work stress, and concerns about their students. One unique feature of the current crisis is the way that it collapses and re-arranges the distinctions between personal and professional life. Remote instruction, for instance, combined with new family responsibilities has transformed homes into places where we work, supervise children and dependents, shelter in place, and carry on our usual domestic life - - all of this as rules and guidelines for managing the social spread of the pandemic change weekly. Our survey focused especially on how these conditions are affecting faculty's ability to carry out their commitments to teaching and learning.

What the survey finds:
In order to transition to and sustain remote instruction, **faculty workload has increased substantially**. Ninety-seven percent (97%) of faculty say that remote instruction has required more labor than classroom instruction with two-thirds (66%) of faculty saying that remote

instruction requires "a lot of additional labor." The university granted four working days to transition to remote instruction, but most faculty reported spending between 40 and 60 additional work hours to make this transition. This additional labor included: redesigning and planning courses for digital media; learning and practicing new digital modes of instruction; adjusting and fine-tuning pedagogies; adopting new roles; and, balancing family and professional duties. "My workload has doubled," one respondent stated, "because not only am I spending half my time transferring/synthesizing my notes on PowerPoint slides, the other half is spent recording the lectures, updating iLearn pages, and grading for five classes." Less quantifiable but equally important, faculty reported new demands on their emotional labor as they worked to coach, encourage, and support their students. Faculty agree that sustaining remote instruction will involve ongoing investments of more labor time.

University support for remote instruction is not adequate. Half of SFSU faculty were not satisfied with the university's IT support. Over seventy-five percent (75%) report that they lacked essential resources - - software, equipment, coaching - - to continue to be effective "remote" teachers. A fifth of faculty cite internet connectivity as a barrier to teaching effectiveness. Many faculty reported that they had been forced to purchase their own equipment and other resources to continue their work. Faculty also stated that new family responsibilities posed a significant barrier to these increased new work demands.

Faculty are concerned with the academic quality of remote instruction. Two-thirds of faculty do not believe that remote instruction offers the same educational value as classroom teaching and learning. Eighty-six percent (86%) of faculty report significant attrition rates for students in their classes, with a third of faculty reporting that less than half of their students were participating in their classes. "Students lack motivation," one respondent noted, "many have lost their jobs and also have kids at home." Over half of faculty (55%) believe that students are **not** satisfied with remote instruction - - only twenty percent (20%) of respondents were confident or somewhat confident that students were satisfied with their online classes.

What is to be done?

Obviously, some factors affecting SF State's abrupt transition to remote instruction are beyond the university's control. However, based on our survey, if the university aims to maintain quality higher education through remote instruction, it should:

- *Recognize that new teaching and learning modalities require more time and labor*. Redesigning and rethinking courses for online teaching, transferring materials and practices into digital media, learning new tools, coaching students through new ways of learning - - these and other new activities require more labor time. Smaller course sections, stipends, assigned time, and increased WTUs (weighted teaching units) individually or in combination will begin to address the exorbitant increases in faculty labor time created by remote instruction.

- *Supply faculty with all resources necessary to teach as effectively as possible*. This includes material resources (such as enhanced internet connectivity, software, digitization, equipment, etc.) as well as stronger technical support and coaching. Faculty either know or are learning what they need to teach effectively; decisions about support should be directed by faculty.

- *Re-organize faculty work to meet new configurations of professional and personal responsibilities*. Faculty who must now care for at-home dependents cannot be expected to also meet the usual requirements of pedagogical, scholarly, and service productivity. Faculty cannot easily manage spaces that were designed for domestic life but now must also serve as offices, classrooms, and advising centers. The university should use reassigned time to ease these burdens for all faculty, including lecturer faculty.

- *Take better care of students*. SFSU faculty members are famous for their commitment to their students, many of whom are first-generation college-goers and/or come from under-served communities of color, ethnicity, and class. Remote instruction cannot substitute for the campus and classroom-based connections central to our students' development and success. In this exceptional moment, faculty cannot be the sole support for our students. Effective teaching and learning will depend on the university doing more to reach out to students to address their concerns, to provide food, housing, and financial support, to address their mental health needs, to mitigate digital divides, and to develop new modes of community and caring.

About the survey. Concerned with the effects of this radical transformation of teaching and learning, the SFSU Chapter of the California Faculty Association surveyed faculty about the university's shift to "remote instruction." The survey was conducted between March 24 and April 14, 2020. The survey asked faculty to respond to 27 questions, most related directly to the faculty's ability to transition to and sustain remote instruction but several related to faculty well-being, university communication, and the union's response to remote instruction.

Over one-third of SFSU faculty (657 out of approximately 1800 tenure/tenure track and lecturer faculty) responded to the survey. Fifty-two percent (52%) of respondents who reported their position were tenure/tenure track faculty; forty-eight percent (48%) were lecturer faculty. About sixty percent (60%) of respondents identified their college; faculty in the College of Science and Engineering, the College of Liberal and Creative Arts, and the College of Ethnic Studies were the highest responders.

SFSU CFA members involved in designing, creating, distributing, and analyzing the survey include: Brad Erickson, Lecturer Faculty, School of Humanities and Liberal Studies; Veronica Sovero, Professor, Economics; Oscar Jerome Stewart, Asst. Professor, Center for Ethical and

Sustainable Business Management; Larry Hanley, Professor, English; Blanc Missé, Asst. Professor, Modern Languages; Jordan Nielsen, Librariank, J. Paul Leonard Library.

For more information about the survey, contact Larry Hanley at cfa_sf@calfac.org

Survey Results

## I. **Personal and Household Welfare**
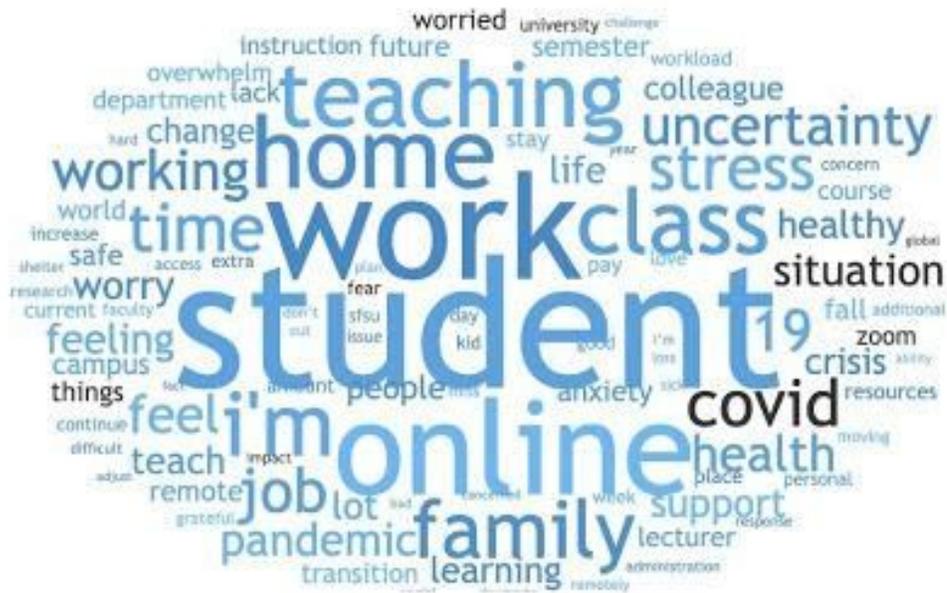
Key Terms in Faculty Text Responses

The disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic affect the whole person, not just "instructors"or "students." We wanted to find out how people were experiencing the crisis and its combination of health concerns, social isolation, abrupt and fundamental transformations in work. We asked faculty to rate their overall feeling from "bad" to "good" on a scale of 1 to 5. We also asked respondents to describe how they were doing. Faculty (lecturer faculty, TT, and tenured faculty alike) are **exhausted**. Qualitative comments described stress from: (1) the increased workload of moving courses online suddenly (often while juggling simultaneously sudden homeschooling), (2) to feelings of job insecurity, (3) to the university pressures to maintain productivity, (4) to the increased need to provide student support, to financial hardship, to the general stress and anxiety of living through a pandemic. A sense of the forces overwhelming faculty can be can be gleaned from one respondent's litany: "*I cannot do my job because my daycare was closed; forget about my book deadline; I could request a temporary leave of absence, but that doesn't work for professors because how would their students complete the semester if I bailed for 3 weeks*?" **Faculty are struggling and feel unsupported**.

Roughly half of respondents indicated feeling **varying levels of negative emotions** directly related to remote instruction. These faculty found the university's sudden move to online instruction difficult because of the time it takes to move a course online, the resources required
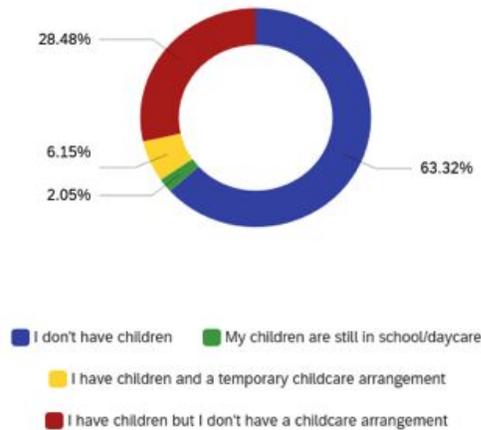
to do so, and the fear of this move's long-term implication for face-to-face instruction. As one respondent describes: "*While I appreciate the several days we had to prepare for teaching continuity in our transition away from face-to-face teaching, I'm frustrated at how difficult that has been and how little recognition has been given to the additional uncompensated labor required to learn entirely new systems and change our established classes halfway through the semester. The effect has been particularly intense for lecturer faculty, which yet again exacerbates existing divides.*" **Uncertainty** also plays a role in these negative feelings: "*Worried about my job for the Fall,*" one faculty member notes, *"Worried about my health coverage*." Many of these faculty also point to the administration's **pressure for normalcy** as a stressor. In pandemic times, it is difficult to separate health worries, family responsibilities, and work duties: "*I'm so tired and overwhelmed right now,*" says one respondent. *There's just too much going on in my day-to-day life, outside of work, for me to possibly be normal and functional as a teacher or researcher right now."*

As is evident from the word cloud above, faculty also expressed **tremendous concern for students**. Roughly a quarter of the respondents expressed this concern. One respondent reported: "*I'm also VERY concerned about student equity related to their access to technology for remote instruction... also concerned about their well-being in general. I've worked to build an open and safe place for students and lecturers in my area… and don't want to lose it….*" Another adds: *"[M]y students are overworked, many are in noisy, distracting home environments, and some do not have laptops of their own to "Zoom in," whereas before they would just come to class."* As we'll see in the section on "Academic Quality," these concerns play a role in faculty judging their own effectiveness, and these judgments in turn contribute to more general anxiety.

4.93%

95.07%

- No. We're healthy for the moment   - All Others
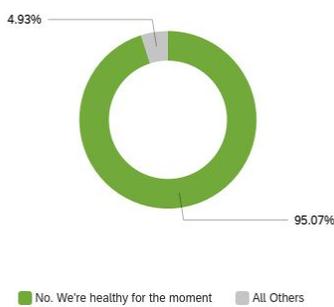
Most faculty (95%) report that neither they nor a household member has been infected by COVID-19. Forty-one percent (41%) of faculty, however, report a household member who is over 65, immuno-suppressed, or possesses underlying health conditions. Given the increase in infection and hospital rates since the survey dates, we should expect the small number (5%) reporting COVID-19 infections in their household to have increased.

While most respondents don't have children, over a third (36%) do have children in their households. **Over a quarter of respondents report that - - due to school and daycare closures - - they lack any childcare arrangement.** In addition to teaching remotely, these faculty now have an additional job - - home schooling and/or tending children. It is unclear how faculty with children can adequately balance these extra responsibilities with their professional duties.

28.48%

6.15%

2.05%

63.32%

- ■ I don't have children
- ■ My children are still in school/daycare
- ■ I have children and a temporary childcare arrangement
- ■ I have children but I don't have a childcare arrangement

Over ninety percent (90%) of respondents report that they are food and housing secure. Around eight percent (8%) state that they are not certain that they will remain housing or food secure for the rest of the semester. If enrollments decline and the university budget suffers in Fall 2020, we can expect to see this number grow larger.

In sum, the COVID-19 crisis has generated unprecedented levels of stress. The overlapping sources of worry can be debilitating, especially for faculty trying to maintain "instructional continuity" and care for their students. The university must recognize that **"remote instruction" is more than technology**; it is embedded within a whole new context that challenges and confuses professional and personal life.
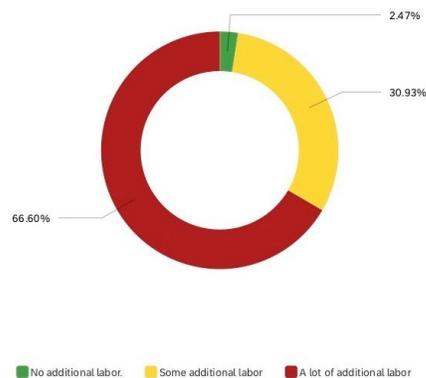
II.   Remote Instruction

Remote instruction and faculty labor

Shifting from classroom-instruction to online teaching requires: reflection on learning outcomes and course objectives; creating and piloting new instructional activities and assessment measures; redesigning syllabi; communicating these changes to students; guiding and coaching students through new media, applications, and activities. For faculty and students, this shift also involves the speedy acquisition and practice of new skills and knowledges - - from setting up sites for sharing documents to mastering Zoom and other synchronous platforms. **Especially for instructors new to online teaching and learning, all of this adds up to increased labor and time**.

As the CFA survey documents, faculty are working longer to meet the increased demands of remote instruction. Less than 3% of faculty report that remote instruction requires no additional labor. **More than 97% of faculty report an increase in workload, with two-thirds (66%) of faculty stating that converting to remote instruction requires " a lot of additional labor."**

Q39 - Converting my class from face-to-face instruction to distance learning or telehealth has required:

2.47%

30.93%

66.60%

■ No additional labor.   ■ Some additional labor   ■ A lot of additional labor

To get a better sense of the actual amounts and nature of the time required to convert to online learning, we asked: "The university granted four working-days to fully convert face-to-face instruction to remote instruction. If your class was designed to be taught in a classroom, can you give us a rough estimate of the additional time you have spent transitioning to online teaching?" Faculty responses indicate the enormous amounts of extra time devoted to this initial conversion, but they also point to new kinds of skills, labor, and roles involved in the conversion and to factors that complicate the conversion to online education.

Faculty estimated extra work time in a variety of ways. Some reported that quantifying workload increase was impossible since they were overwhelmed by the task of online conversion. Others relied on more absolute standards; while some faculty reported spending 10 to 20 hours converting their classes, **most faculty said they spent anywhere between 40 and 60 hours in addition to the four days allotted by the university and in excess of their usual workload.** Some reported extra work time at around 80 hours. Faculty also measured their extra work time in terms of additional hours per day and week; these estimates ranged from 3 to 5 additional hours per day and from 6 to 10 hours per week, with some faculty reporting an additional 20 hours more work time per week.. Others estimated using multiples: "My workload has doubled," one respondent stated, "because not only am I spending half my time transferring/synthesizing my notes on PowerPoint slides, the other half is spent recording the lectures, updating iLearn pages, and grading for five classes." Even with the four days granted by the university for online conversion, many faculty reported working through the spring recess. As one faculty member noted: "I spent the entire spring break developing new materials and assignments for one class." **Almost all faculty reported workloads well in excess of their normal**.

What kind of extra work are faculty performing in the conversion to remote instruction? For most, **in addition to redesigning and planning, much of their time was dedicated to learning and practicing new digital modes of instruction**. As one respondent described: "Every single day since March 11, I have been doing 2-6 hours of work to make my courses work online. I have to record lectures which takes more work than walking into a room and just teaching. I have to create feedback loops that happen naturally in classrooms, I have to spend extra time reaching out to students that I can just see and interact with face-to-face." Another says: " . . . I had to revise my course schedule, many of my assignments, revise my power point presentations and create new ones, change my assignments that required outside observations to alternative ones, create new assignments for my students in my internship class, and take a Zoom workshop and practice. I also had to calm my anxiety about teaching remotely."

In addition to the extra time required to acquire and practice new skills, respondents noted challenges to their usual teaching practices: "The most difficult is to be the grader, the lecturer, the technical person working with the ilearn platform and getting to know how to use all the apps, etc, re-structuring the semester because it is not the same anymore, making this for SEVERAL classes all the time - it is EXHAUSTING." Online instruction requires faculty to rethink and remake a more conventional pedagogical pattern of preparation, lecturing, and evaluation in favor of more-time consuming activities like constant feedback and communication. Given the new demands on their teaching, others noted a re-balancing of faculty roles: ". . . let's not forget that many of us still had ongoing research projects," one respondent wrote, "and we were trying to figure out the implications for that work, including relationships to funders and student employees. Plus, the ongoing service work." In short, **faculty are working overtime not only to translate their materials to new media, they are also required to face the challenge of "converting" their pedagogies and negotiate ongoing professional and service demands**.

Students are also confronting the COVID-19 crisis and this experience creates additional work challenges for faculty. Faculty note that students must often be coached in new digital media: "I've been having to put extra time each week to practice using zoom, breakout session, timing, . . . the students' learning curve to using zoom was difficult." Simply maintaining student involvement in online learning requires extra labor. "We have to work a little bit more every week. Trying to contact students that are not attending zoom classes or are not motivated." In addition, faculty find themselves engaged in work beyond simply teaching. As one respondent notes: "Many of my students are in crisis. I am spending a day each week transitioning to online teaching, but I am also providing other types of resources as an academic adviser." **Coaching students through online learning is one thing; coaching them through a pandemic is a whole, new role for faculty**. One respondent reports that students "are dealing and struggling with so many things [related to COVID-19]. They share [that] they cannot concentrate, forget they are in school, are frightened . . .and so on." Another simply states: " . . . the level of distraction and emergency among our students has been detrimental to sustaining normal instruction." As one respondent noted, faculty now have to do a tremendous amount of

emotional labor as teachers, family members, and community members. This additional emotional labor is "extremely draining" and prevents them from "teaching at a high level."
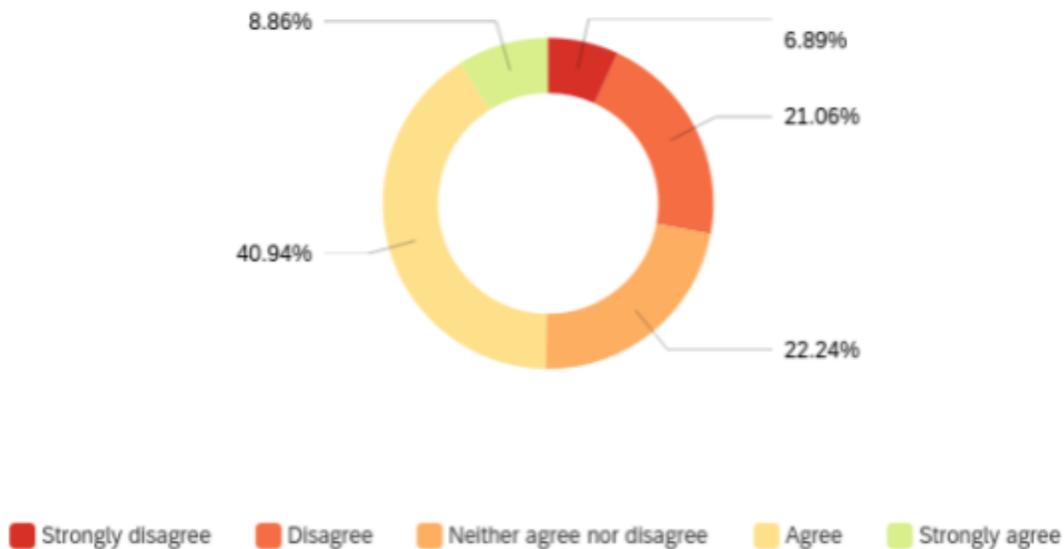
Faculty also report that working from home poses its own complications and challenges to teaching online. New modes of instruction may pose new issues of access for teachers: "I am typing out what students need to know which takes too much time as I'm disabled and only type with my right hand." Faculty are worried about their own health and security. Asked to calculate extra work demands, one respondent simply notes: "During those first few days, I wasn't spending time prepping my class. I was spending time talking to family, communicating with roommates, and preparing for shelter-in-place. I have spent a total of 5-6 work days setting up my classes." In the COVID-19 crisis, personal and work demands can easily pile up: "This [time granted by the university for online conversion] was a time when I was sick with flu-like symptoms (could have been Covid-19 but was not able to get tested), and I was not able to use those days, along with having to transition to full-time care for my son, who requires a high level of supervision at his age." **The extra burdens imposed by the transition to remote instruction can and should often not be calculated simply in terms of extra hours or teaching tasks.**

Finally, as many faculty noted, the extra work and time required by online conversion and remote instruction exceed any one-time measure. Many faculty report that they are still "scrambling," or "transitioning," or "struggling to make it work." One respondent refers to the "constant work" involved in online instruction. A majority note that the extra labor required by remote instruction is ongoing. One colleague states: "Every single day since March 11 I have been doing 2-6 hours of work to make my courses work online." Another says that evaluating extra work time "keeps changing based on student participation." A faculty member echoes this refrain: "I am constantly revising and working on the curriculum as I go." Another instructor reports spending an additional "approximately 40 hours since mid-March" on online conversion then adds: "And we have 7 more weeks of the semester to go." University administration should recognize that a four day period for conversion to remote instruction hardly accounts for the extra burdens of this transition. **Teaching remotely under current conditions involves regular, ongoing, and excessive amounts of extra faculty time and labor.**

Support for remote instruction.

Faculty are divided about IT department support during the conversion to remote instruction and after the conversion. When we asked - - "Overall, how satisfied are you with support from your IT department during this period" (Q15), less than half of faculty (45%) indicated they were either very satisfied or extremely satisfied. Over half of faculty reported that they were somewhat satisfied, slightly satisfied, or not satisfied at all (55%). When asked to respond to the statement "I have the adequate material and technological resources and training to ensure student learning" (Q37), less than fifty percent (50%) of the faculty agreed. Almost twenty-eight
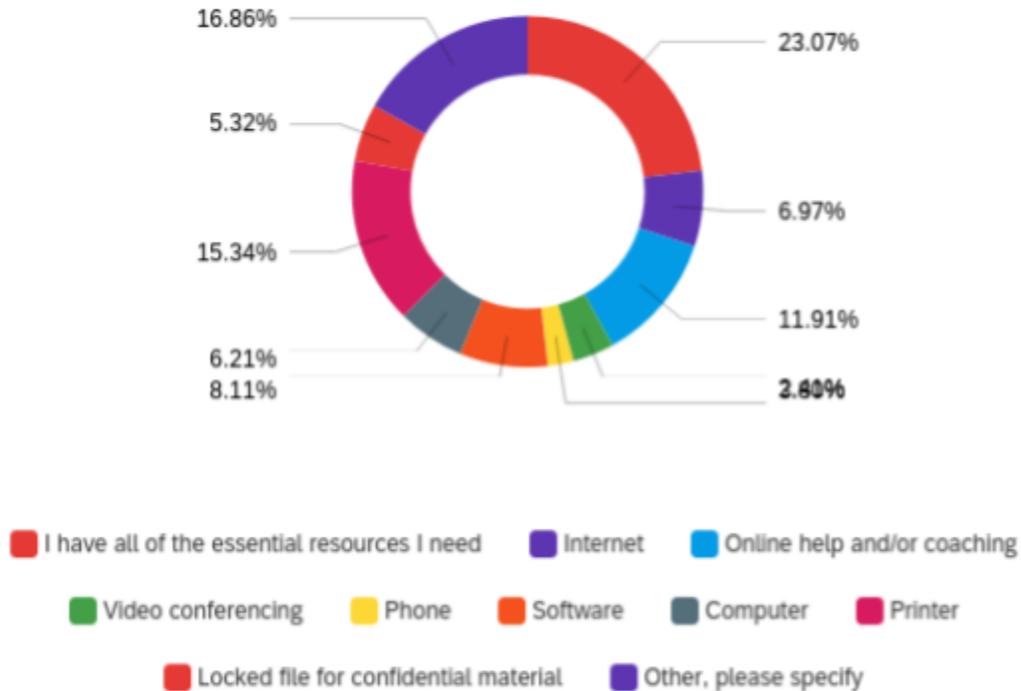
percent (28%) of faculty disagreed with this statement outright.

8.86%

6.89%

21.06%

40.94%

22.24%

■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree

Q37. I have the adequate material and technological resources and training to ensure student learning.

Over seventy-five percent (75%) of respondents said they lacked the essential resources needed to continue to be effective in their work. Twelve percent (12%) of respondents indicated a need for online coaching, and forty-three percent (43%) indicated a need for software, equipment, or other technological support. Faculty who chose "other" on the survey indicated the need for many other resources essential to their work. Several faculty noted the need for adequate space to teach and meet privately with students. The need for child care was identified over and over again by faculty, as school and daycare closures make it even more challenging for faculty to teach effectively. Faculty who teach lab or studio courses noted the difficulty in teaching those courses online, especially since specialized lab equipment and materials (e.g., paint, ceramics, etc.) are unavailable. Another recurring theme is the need for ergonomic furniture (e.g., chairs, desks, etc.), specialized software and equipment (e.g., good quality microphones, cameras, scanners, etc.), and the need for hard drive space/cloud storage in order to store confidential student information and content created for online courses (e.g.,)

narrated powerpoint slides, video tutorials, etc.).

Legend:
- I have all of the essential resources I need
- Internet
- Online help and/or coaching
- Video conferencing
- Phone
- Software
- Computer
- Printer
- Locked file for confidential material
- Other, please specify

Chart values: 16.86%, 5.32%, 15.34%, 6.21%, 8.11%, 23.07%, 6.97%, 11.91%, 2.60%

Q17. What resources that do you **not** currently have are the most essential for you to continue to be effective in your work?

Only thirteen percent (13%) of faculty said there are no barriers to maintaining instructional continuity. The biggest concern highlighted by faculty was connectivity issues, with more than twenty percent (20%) of respondents saying their internet connectivity at home is not the same quality as on campus. Almost eighteen percent (18%) of respondents indicated the lack of specific software, equipment, or the technical skills necessary to do their normal workload. A significant number of faculty also indicated a lack of private space and/or time as barriers to maintaining instructional continuity.

12.91%
13.68%
7.55%
5.03%
4.70%
20.24%
18.82%
17.07%

■ Connectivity at home is not the same speed or quality as at work

■ I have family (kids, parents etc.) at home and limited private space to conduct my normal workload

■ I have family (kids, parents etc.) at home and limited time to conduct my normal workload

■ I don't have a personal computer or my personal computer is not adequate

■ I can't access specific software from home to do my normal work (please specify)

■ I don't have the technical skills to conduct my normal workload   ■ Other: Please specify

■ There are no barriers to me maintaining instructional continuity

Q14: Are there any barriers that might compromise your efforts to maintain instructional continuity?

Given the rapid transition to remote instruction, and the immediate need for many of these resources, faculty reported that they have already purchased equipment, furniture, and/or software in order to continue their work from home. **The university is required to reimburse faculty for these expenses and needs to make a clearer effort to inform faculty of this requirement.**

In addition to requiring much greater amounts of faculty labor time, remote instruction imposes new technological and material burdens onto faculty. The university must supply the basic infrastructure for this new work and new workplaces, including adequate connectivity, software, and equipment like microphones and ergonomic furniture. Material support, however is not enough: online education, for instance, requires faculty to adopt new software and applications; these new tools in turn require training and support. **To ensure that faculty can effectively teach via remote instruction, the university will have to greatly increase its supports for faculty.**

Student learning and teaching effectiveness.

The survey raises important questions about the academic quality of remote instruction for SF State students and faculty. Most faculty believe they are not and cannot provide students with an educational experience comparable to classroom instruction. Remote instruction appears to

be discouraging student engagement. And, many faculty fear that students are as disatisfied as they are with the current state of online teaching and learning.
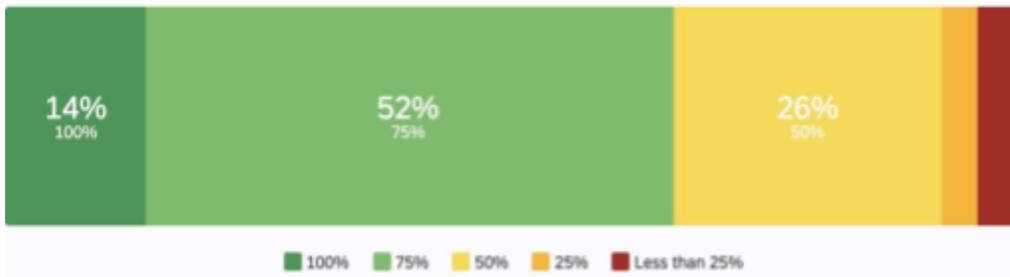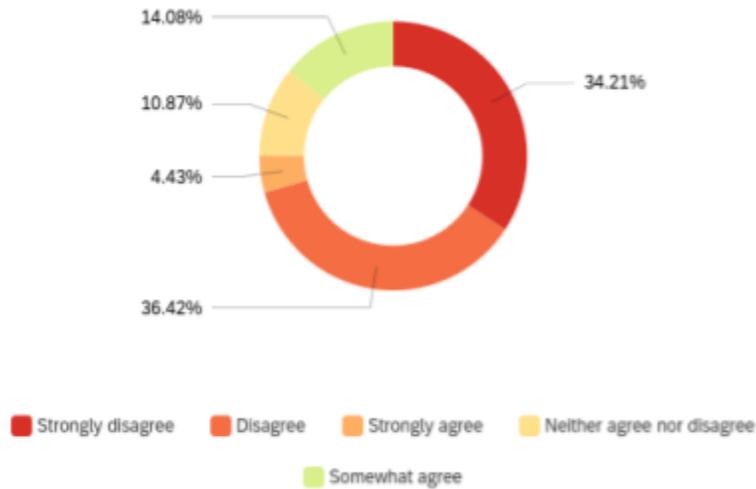

Q20. Roughly what proportion of your students have been able to regularly attend online instruction and stay engaged with your course(s) since March 16 [the beginning of online teaching]?

It is critical to remember that remote instruction involves students who are also weathering health, work, and personal challenges. These challenges can severely compromise students' abilities to participate in online learning. We asked faculty: "Roughly what proportion of your students have been able to regularly attend online instruction and stay engaged with your course(s) since March 16 [the beginning of online teaching]?" The answers were startling. Only a little over ten-percent of faculty reported that all of their students have been able to regularly attend and participate in their only course. Half of faculty surveyed said that about three-quarters of their students were keeping up with the course. About a third of faculty reported extremely high student attrition rates - - more than 50% of students disappearing from their classrooms. In regular classroom instruction, attendance levels below 75% would be considered very problematic. **Based on our survey, student participation in online learning is in crisis.**

In their comments, faculty noted that students are facing tremendous challenges of their own, including emotional, technological, and financial challenges. These make it difficult for them to engage in coursework. "Students lack motivation," one respondent noted, "many have lost their jobs and also have kids at home." Many students may not have the technology required to support online learning, and many students are struggling with reduced/expanded work hours, child care issues, and managing their own health. Students have not been prepared to take online courses. Given these factors, **faculty are concerned that the digital divide may especially complicate the university's remote instruction efforts**.

Faculty are not convinced that online learning offers an adequate substitute for classroom instruction.   Only eighteen percent (18%) of faculty reported that they were "confident that remote teaching offers the same educational value as classroom instruction" [Q38]. An overwhelming seventy percent (70%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. We also asked: "If your course was designed to be taught face-to-face, how much of your course do you believe you will be able to translate into online teaching without working overtime?" [Q18] Only eight percent (8%) of respondents indicated that their face-to-face class or service can be easily taught or conducted online. More than two-thirds of respondents indicated that fifty percent (50%) or less of their face-to-face instruction or service can be easily

14.08%

34.21%

10.87%

4.43%

36.42%

■ Strongly disagree   ■ Disagree   ■ Strongly agree   □ Neither agree nor disagree

□ Somewhat agree

Q38. I'm confident that remote teaching offers the same educational value as classroom instruction.

taught or conducted online. Fifty-five percent (55%) of faculty believe students are **not** satisfied with remote instruction [Q21]. Only twenty percent (20%) were either confident or somewhat confident that students were satisfied with online learning.

Many of the factors affecting faculty perception of the effectiveness of remote instruction are beyond the control of the university: the rapid transition from classroom to online teaching; the ongoing efforts by faculty and students to adapt to online teaching; students' lack of equipment, space, and digital literacies; and, perhaps most importantly, student and faculty lives overwhelmed by the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Effective teaching and student learning are the center of the university's mission and work. SF State administration can and must do more to sustain this core relationship by better supporting faculty and students..