

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN THE POST COVID ERA: Series XVIII



School Name: UC Berkeley
Year: Senior
Major: Mechanical Engineering
GPA: 3.7

Q: What does your current school day look like?

I kind of just wake up and do my usual morning routine and then I just go straight to my Zoom classes and I take a few intermittent breaks I guess. I just try to proceed like a normal school day but without the transportation time.

Q: Right now how are your Zoom classes formatted?

My Zoom classes are kind of just like, the teachers will talk and mark their iPad, they'll write directly on the lecture notes and people will try to ask questions in the chat but the teacher won't really see them, making it kind of difficult. Sometimes people start asking more questions than they normally would since they can just type it in. The teacher seems to be moving a little bit slower because they're bombarded with so many questions that they normally wouldn't have, like my classes in person, people wouldn't ask questions ever.

Q: Do you find your classes understandable and engaging or in-person more so?

Definitely in-person more so. Some of my professors are definitely a lot older and have less of a grasp on how to use technology effectively. I have this one professor, he spent our entire first class trying to set up Zoom and how to find his files, how to write on them, and how to connect to his iPad. It was like a whole process and it kind of slows everything down. It makes things a little more convoluted when he tries to go through the lesson because he's trying to process everyone's questions at the same time and trying to talk to the TAs for tech support if things go wrong.

Q: With these older professors, has it been difficult with how the Zoom lectures go?

It's definitely not just one. It kind of depends on the department because I study engineering and lots of teachers are a little more tech-savvy, but once you venture out of the engineering department, I see that you run into more issues.



Q: How is it like for you taking such an intense course online?

For me, the lectures aren't really that much different than they were in person because the professors would record their lectures even when we were doing in-person classes. So in that regard, things have stayed relatively normal. But when it comes to labs, they're still requiring us to take a lab section. However, when it comes to learning how to use these machine shops or anything like that, it becomes impossible. They want us to watch these videos to learn how to do it, but I don't think that it really applies in the same way that they think it's going to. I'm not going to watch a video on how to use all these tools like 3D printers and laser cutters and then go right into doing it myself.

Q: Wow, so they want you to learn about all these tools but it's not like you have them in person to actually practice with. How is that like for you?

It feels like a major disadvantage that I'm going to have relative to my peers who got to take these courses in person because I'm not going to be able to use all these machines even if I did take the same exact course work. They are trying to remedy this situation a little bit, like in one of my classes they're mailing me a lab kit that I can build circuits with at home but other than that, the rest of the labs are pretty much useless honestly.

Q: So other than the one class where they are mailing you those tools, are there any other things professors or counselors are doing to help you out?

I know they're trying to offer a little more office hours or more free tutoring but I don't know if this will really substitute the things that are lacking.

Q: Is there anything you want to see specifically implemented to help you out?

Well, one thing that I'm starting to see students do this semester versus last semester is making communities where students can talk to each other. What I found super useful starting this semester is making Facebook groups and messenger group chats on Discord in order to connect with other students so we can all do homework together and kind of create that sense of group study that we had pre-COVID. That's really valuable.

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Q: And have you been able to meet new classmates this way?

Yeah, actually it's been pretty useful to meet new people.

Q: Would you say the people in these groups are freely engaging or does it feel a little forced?

It feels a little forced because we're all just trying to learn how to do this situation. It's not like a normal organic friendship or acquaintanceship for me. People will type in the Zoom chat 'hey here's my email if anyone wants to study together' so it's less of who you connect to on a personal level and it's more whoever contacts you.

Q: Have you been assigned any homework or projects yet?

Yeah, I've been assigned some homework.

Q: Would you say it's more or about the same as when you were in-person?

So far it's kind of hard to say because I just started school, but relative to the past semester, it seems about the same for the first two weeks of school. A little bit more but I might just be the class.

Q: I know some people find online classes a bit intimidating, are you at all worried?

It is definitely a worry of mine, especially for my classes. I have one class where the lectures are pre-recorded and posted so you don't have to be there live or anything. It's really easy to just put it off so now I feel like all my lectures can lead to the worst form of procrastination.

Q: So with your pre-recorded lectures, do you feel at all that you're teaching yourself as opposed to your professors teaching you?

Honestly I kind of feel the same because I did watch a lot of pre-recorded lectures last semester, so it kind of feels the same to me. But I kind of like that feeling of doing things by myself.

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