

Final Report:
“The Relationship Between Remote Learning and
College Students”

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Executive Summary

Significance of Topic and Overall Purpose

My topic of remote learning and college students is significant because due to the COVID-19 pandemic, remote learning is becoming more prevalent and its effectiveness needs to be evaluated in order for student and university success. Through my research on this topic, I have completed secondary and an online survey. This topic is important because there has not been much research or evaluation of the different modes of remote learning and what needs to be changed for future use. The overall purpose of this research is to help Auburn University and its students evaluate and evolve the remote learning education experience to help make it as effective and valuable as possible. On a larger scale, this study can help other colleges follow in Auburn's footsteps.

Major Findings in Secondary Research

The most significant part of my secondary research is that there is an extreme lack of research on remote learning. While this is expected due to the quick shift society made into a remote lifestyle, it is concerning that remote learning is especially understudied. Most research on remote learning is centered around universities rather than students. However, similar research that studies online learning dive into student success. Through this research, I found that self-confidence, efficiency, and proper tools are capable of breeding a positive learning environment online, however not all students naturally hold those abilities. Thus, I led into my own research about how an average student who has been in a traditional learning environment most of their life evaluates a remote learning environment.

Major Findings in Survey Report

My survey report researched the two types of remote learning at Auburn University, synchronous (Zoom) and asynchronous (Pannopto), overall confidence in ability to participate in remote learning, and overall value of a remote learning education. My research shows that students are much less likely to participate in class and feel significantly less connected to class culture in an asynchronous environment. Similarly, only 4.5% of participants feel extremely confident in their ability to participate in remote learning. 45.5% of participants find the value of their education to be extremely lower and they are worried about the value of their education.

Overall Implications

The overall goal of the research is to evaluate remote learning and seek areas for improvement that will benefit students and their education.

Secondary Research Report

How do college students at Auburn University perceive the various remote learning options and their effectiveness?

Introduction

With the rise of COVID-19, Auburn University students along with college students across the nation have been shifted from traditional modes of social, face to face, and interactive learning to remote learning. Due to the abrupt and necessary shift, there are many unknowns of the effects remote learning holds on the value of education and students. Studying student reactions to their remote learning experiences holds a great value to the future of education. Because it is truly unknown when it will be safe for students to return to the classroom in a traditional manner, it is important to know what adaptations and changes need to be made to remote learning to make it the most effective it can be. In order for remote learning to be as effective and valuable to students as possible, student engagement and connection with their peers must be questioned. Auburn University offers two modes of remote learning, synchronous and asynchronous. Synchronous learning is remote, but live screen time with students and professors via Zoom. Asynchronous learning is remote as well, but prerecorded lectures watched on a student's own time via Pannopto. In order to study students' perceptions of remote learning and their effectiveness, synchronous and asynchronous will be surveyed and studied separately.

Key-Publics

Although many colleges are offering remote learning, this study is specific to current Auburn University students participating in remote learning, synchronous or asynchronous. Auburn University students are experiencing the same forms of remote learning via Zoom and Pannopto which will make results more accurate. The key publics are 19-22-year-old male and female students who have completed one previous semester of traditional learning at Auburn University, and are currently partaking in remote learning at Auburn University. Before March 16, 2020, this publics was participating in traditional, interactive, face to face learning either at Auburn University. In order to compare the effectiveness of remote learning and traditional learning, this publics must have had at least one semester of traditional learning at Auburn University previous to March 16, 2020. This publics has used technology in their education throughout their academic career but have never been fully enrolled online until mid-semester when Auburn University made the shift. While COVID-19 has brought a plethora of hardships and unknowns for a large portion of students, many of them are still choosing to participate in school.

Background Research

As the COVID-19 progressed many months past the original expectation, educators had to start to make a plan moving forward with remote learning options. Likewise, university students had to decide if they were returning to campus or not. Throughout the journey of planning during the unknown, Auburn and other universities who were hinting at a full return to campus were faced with many critics. Critics believe that universities were

keen on reopening for their own financial gain and fear of financial loss. William G. Tierney at the Inside Higher Ed claimed, "College presidents are unsure about what to do with their campuses in the fall, and uncertainty breeds anxiety. No one has a crystal ball, but with what we know, what should happen on the nation's campuses in the fall is increasingly clear. The option of students returning to campus in the fall is not viable, regardless of the economic implications" (Tierney). Criticism referring to the motives behind reopening universities serves as an example of what injustices students are facing with returning to school in a remote setting. The focus of many conversations surrounding returning to campus revolved around financial gains and losses, social distancing, and testing policies. The focus was not ever solely on benefitting students and the effectiveness of their education.

When Auburn University first transitioned to remote learning on March 16, 2020, it was expected for faculty and students to have a slight struggle. Many faculty were told before spring break to prepare to teach courses remotely. Therefore Auburn University decided to "expand the use of Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory grading for Spring Semester 2020 as follows. Faculty will assign A-F letter grades as normal for Spring 2020 courses. After final grades are posted, students will have the opportunity to convert, on a course-by-course basis, each letter grade to an SP, SS, or UU" (Auburn). While this was helpful for students who found remote learning and the quick transition to be challenging, it raises a question of how well the university expect students to perform. Since many students decided to lean on the option of Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory grading, they may not have properly learned how to perform as a remote student. Throughout the summer faculty were able to learn how to use synchronous and asynchronous options, but students were not given tips on how to succeed in this type of environment, which they had merely been thrown into.

Remote and online learning are not a new concept. There are many students who choose to fully learn online throughout their academic career. Many academia have studied the differences between traditional learning and online learning. The text, "*Internet and Higher Education*" explores the differences of face-to-face and online learning brings to light how many times the desire to learn online roots from personal factors. Anthony R. Artino Jr. states "Results indicated that students who preferred to take future courses in an online format (as opposed to face-to-face) also reported greater confidence in their ability to learn online (self-efficacy) and greater satisfaction with their recent online learning experience" (Artino). Self-confidence, efficiency, and proper tools are capable of breeding a positive learning environment that students find of value. Giving students the confidence to exceed in their online courses may be the new future of learning due to COVID-19.

Research Questions

So, how do college students at Auburn University perceive the various remote learning options and their effectiveness? Students were not fully aware of how to succeed in the remote learning environment thus lacking confidence and the university was facing other challenges such as financial status and health guidelines. Self-confidence, efficiency, and proper tools are the ingredients to a successful remote learning

environment, so it is essential to measure how strongly Auburn students feel in those areas and how to fill the gaps. By studying how Auburn students are perceiving to remote learning, it will allow for an observation of relationships students have with their remote education, peers, and professors. Furthermore, those observations will allow for remote learning to be changed, adapted, or kept the same order to strengthen or remain the quality of those relationships.

Justification

The value and effectiveness of remote learning needs to be studied at Auburn University as it may be the way students are going to be participating in class for more than just one semester. All studies and research done on remote learning at Auburn need to be used as tools to make new adaptations and plans. Having students act as the publics for this study is crucial to using the findings as a call to action. This online survey will allow for the necessary call to action. By making the survey online it will be user friendly, easy to complete, and can reach the desired publics. On a larger scale, Auburn can help other universities and even secondary schools strengthen the relationship between remote learning and students.

Survey Report

Overview and Purpose

The primary objective of my survey was to see how Auburn University students perceived the effectiveness of the remote learning options provided to them during COVID-19. The secondary objective of my survey was to see how students behave differently in participation and how connected they felt to their peers during remote

learning. My third objective of my survey was to see if these students felt as though the overall quality and value of their remote education was similar to a traditional classroom if it differed as well as measure their confidence in their ability to participate in remote learning. On a wider scale, my overall goal and objective was to complete research that can help my peers as well as Auburn University instructors to help further understand remote learning, and how it may be improved to benefit students. A survey was the best method to achieve those objectives because it allows for students to respond to the questions that meet my objectives but puts it into a scale of data that is easy to interpret results. Additionally, being able to send out a survey to my exact publics, Auburn University students who are participating in remote learning but have also participated in a semester at Auburn doing traditional learning. To achieve my objectives, I made my survey user friendly (short, can be completed on mobile device, easy to read), and sent it out to various peers I have met throughout my years at Auburn.

Sampling and Data Collection Procedures

Due to my research focusing on remote learning at only Auburn University, my population of interest was Auburn sophomores-seniors which are ages 19-22. This population was desired because they have completed traditional learning at Auburn University. By having the experience of a traditional learning environment, they were able to compare remote learning with more accuracy than a student who had not experienced a traditional learning environment. I used a convenience sampling method and sent it out in every GroupMe I am in. Those GroupMe chats included sorority sisters, other tenants in my apartment, and previous peers I was in courses with. Along with sending my survey on the GroupMe platform, I also sent it to close friends via text message and encouraged them to pass the survey along to their peers. This sample is appropriate because everyone I sampled was in my age range, sophomore to senior, and I was able to reach both male and females. I started data collection on November 1 2020 and stopped collection on November 15 2020. My sample size goal was 100 participants however I received feedback from 110 participants and used the surplus of eight in my result analysis. I used a Likert five-point scale in the survey to help participants best portray their feedback. The use of a Likert scale was most similar to an open feedback response but confined answers into more accurate data than open ended responses would. The survey took place through a Qualtrics link that most participants filled out on their phones. I told participants that the survey would not take more than 5 minutes, and according to my reports it took most participants about 3 minutes to complete.

Description of Participants

Out of my 110 participants, all of them fell into my desired demographic of ages 19-22 and I was able to reach both males and females. This age range was desired for my research because they have all experienced both a traditional learning environment at Auburn University and remote learning provided by Auburn University. My participants were 70.4% female and 39.6% male. Within my range of 19-22-year-old participants,

18.5% were 19 years old, 22.2% were 20 years old, 37.9% were 21 years old, and 21.3% were 22 years old.

Results

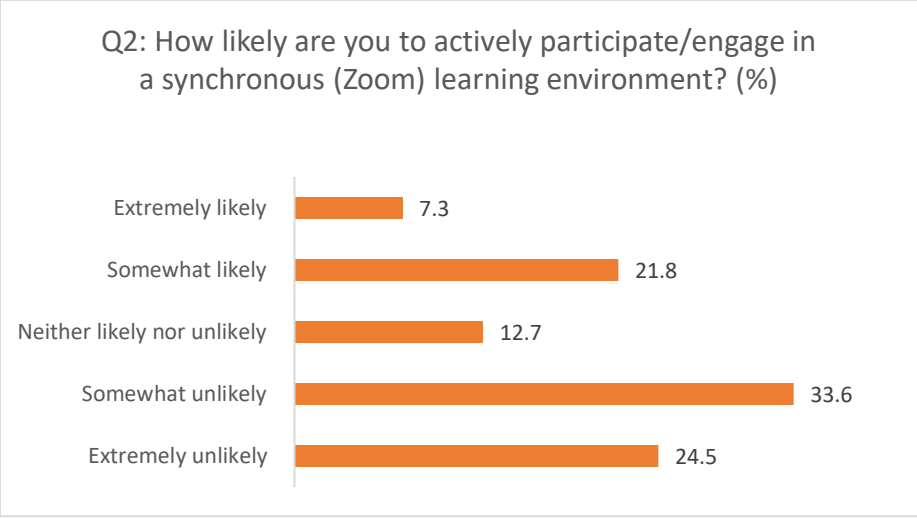
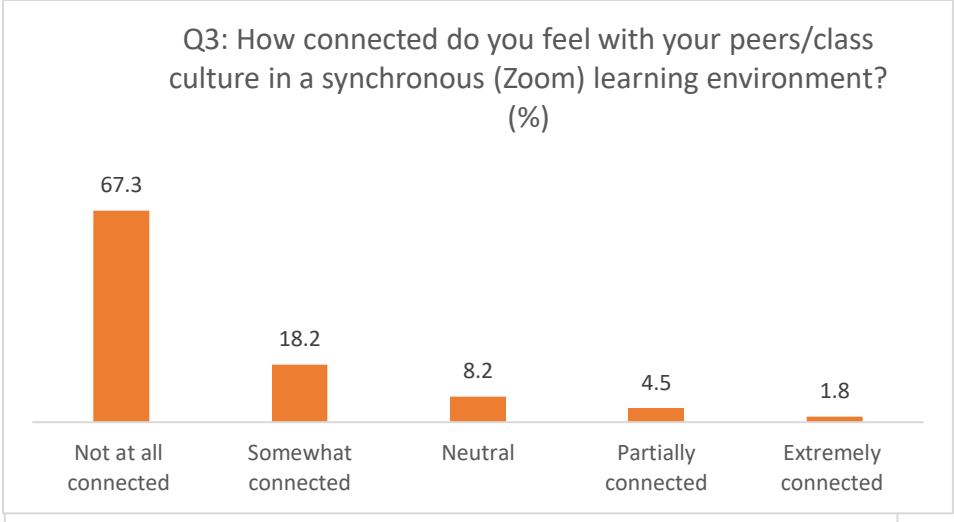
My survey was organized to first approach the effectiveness, likeliness to actively participate, and connection to peers and class culture for a synchronous (Zoom) learning environment. Then, approach the effectiveness, likeliness to actively participate, and connection to peers and class culture for an asynchronous (Pannopto) learning environment. After addressing both types of remote learning, my survey compares the value of education between remote and traditional face-to-face learning. Lastly, my survey asks for the overall confidence in participants ability to participate in remote learning at Auburn University. At the very end of my survey, I asked for each participant's gender and age for my demographics.

The first three questions of my survey all address synchronous (Zoom) learning. Question one asked "How effective do you find a synchronous (Zoom) learning environment?". I used a five-point Likert scale with the options; not effective at all, slightly effective, moderately effective, very effective, and extremely effective. The majority of my participants chose "moderately effective". The second highest response was "slightly effective". Only 2.7% of participants found a synchronous (Zoom) learning environment to be "extremely effective". Out of the 17.3% of participants who selected "not effective at all", 10.9% of them were males.

Question two asked, "How likely are you to actively participate/engage in a synchronous (Zoom) learning environment?". I continued my use of the five-point Likert scale with the options; extremely unlikely, somewhat likely, neither likely nor unlikely, somewhat likely, and extremely likely. The most popular answer with 33.6% of participants was "somewhat unlikely". The second most popular answer with 24.5% of participants was "extremely unlikely". However close behind with 21.8% of participants was "somewhat likely". Only 7.3% of participants said they were likely to actively participate/engage in a synchronous (Zoom) environment.

Question three asked, "How connected do you feel with your peers/class culture in a synchronous (Zoom) learning environment?". The options on my five-point Likert scale were; not at all connected, somewhat connected, neutral, partially connected, and extremely connected. The majority of my participants, 67.3%, selected "not at all connected". Likewise, only 1.8% of participants felt they were "extremely connected" a synchronous (Zoom) environment. The 1.8% represents 2 participants and they were both females.

(See all Q1-Q3 charts below & next page)



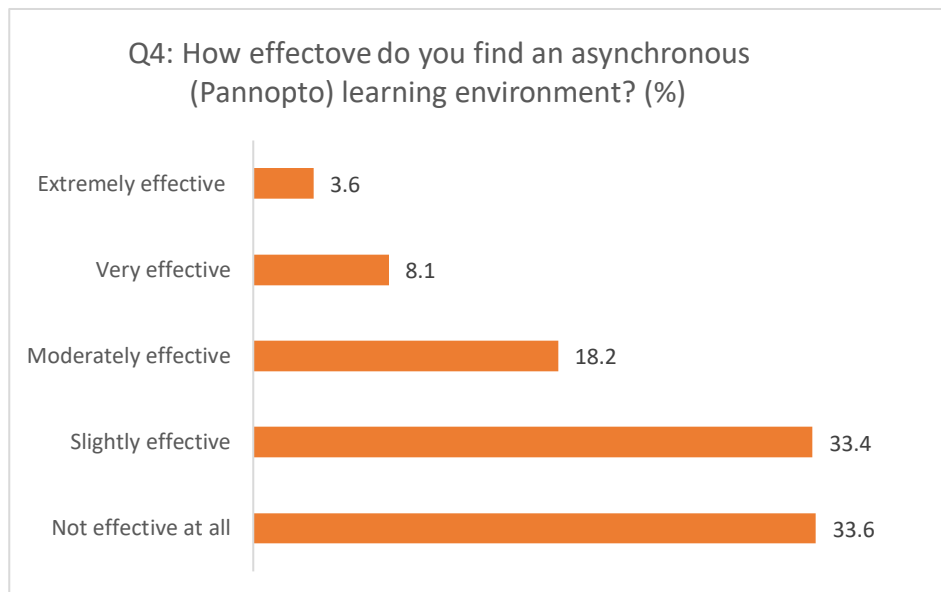
For questions 4-6 my survey addresses an asynchronous (Pannopto) learning environment. Question four asks, “How effective do you find an asynchronous (Pannopto) learning environment?”. Using the five-point Likert scale the options were; not effective at all, slightly effective, moderately effective, very effective, and extremely

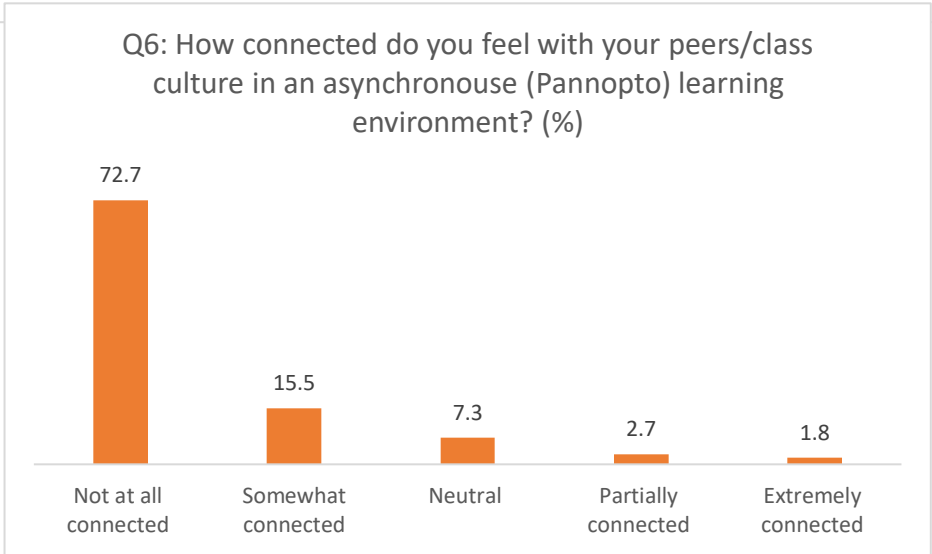
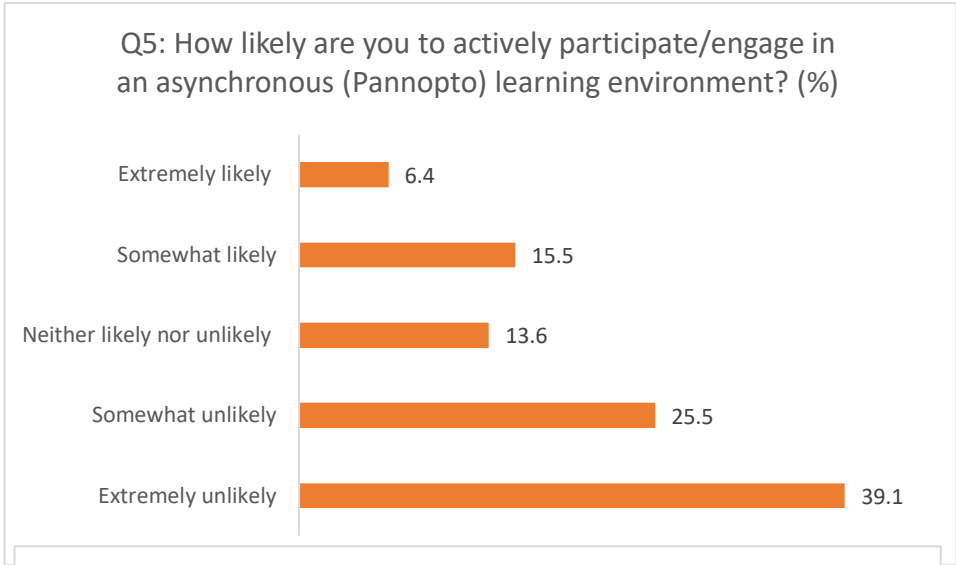
effective. The majority of participants, 33.6%, selected “not effective at all”. However, close behind at 33.4% was the answer “slightly effective”. Only 3.6% of participants selected “extremely effective”. 18.2% of participants selected “moderately effective”

Question five asks, “How likely are you to actively participate/engage in an asynchronous learning environment?”. The answer options were; extremely unlikely, somewhat unlikely, neither likely nor unlikely, somewhat likely, and extremely likely. The most popular answers were “extremely unlikely” with 39.1% of participants and “somewhat unlikely” with 25.5% of participants. Only 6.4% of participants said they were “extremely likely” to participate in an asynchronous (Pannopto) environment and out of those 7 participants 4 were female and 3 were male.

Question six asks, “How connected do you feel with your peers/class culture in an asynchronous (Pannopto) learning environment?”. Continuing the use of the five-point Likert scale the options were; not at all connected, somewhat connected, neutral, partially connected, and extremely connected. A 72.7% majority of participants selected “not at all connected”. The contrasting option, “extremely connected” was only selected by 1.8% of participants.

(See all Q4-Q6 charts on following page)





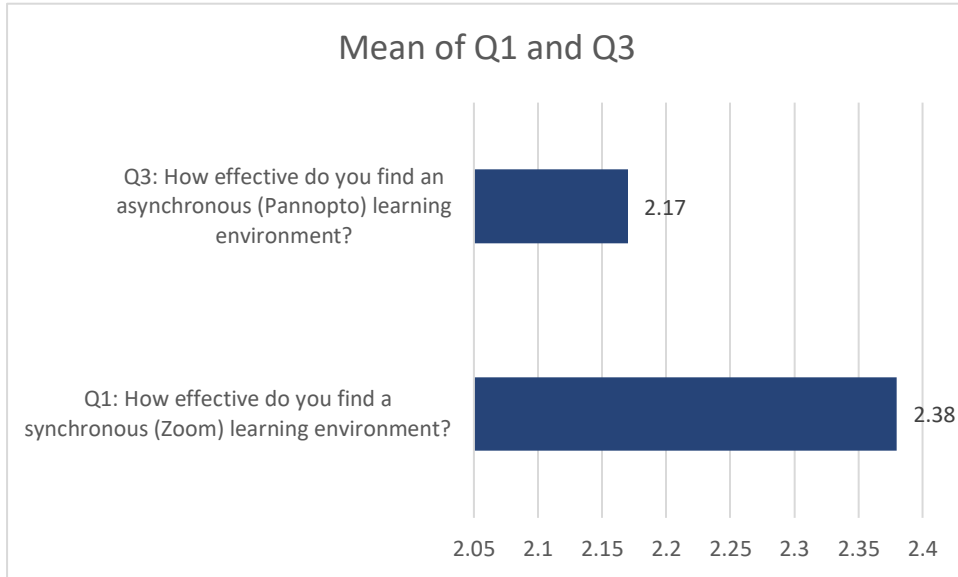
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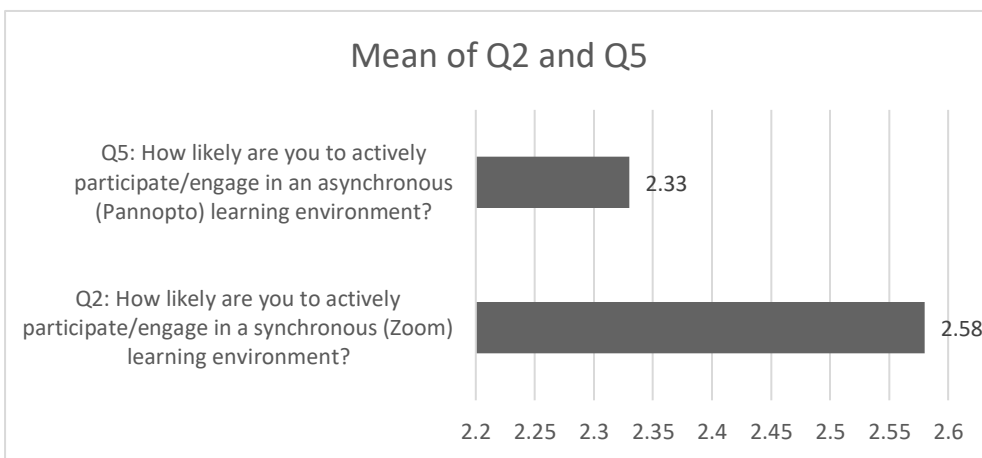
for both synchronous and asynchronous learning. Therefore, to interpret results to find out the effectiveness, likeliness to actively participate, and connection to peers and class culture for remote learning I compared each corresponding question for both modes (synchronous/asynchronous).

To measure the effectiveness of both modes of remote learning, I compared the means of Q1 and Q3. The mean for Q1 2.38 and for Q3 was 2.17. Although the numbers are very similar, it shows that my participants find a synchronous remote learning style to be slightly more effective than an asynchronous one. From this data I can predict that students find higher effectiveness in synchronous learning because they are “live” in the class and are able to ask questions and it is more similar to a traditional face-to-face environment. However, participants that did not find synchronous learning to be more effective most likely prefer to attend class on their own time rather than a scheduled Zoom meeting. I can also predict that students find the effectiveness to be lower in an asynchronous because watching a recording without being able to ask questions or be

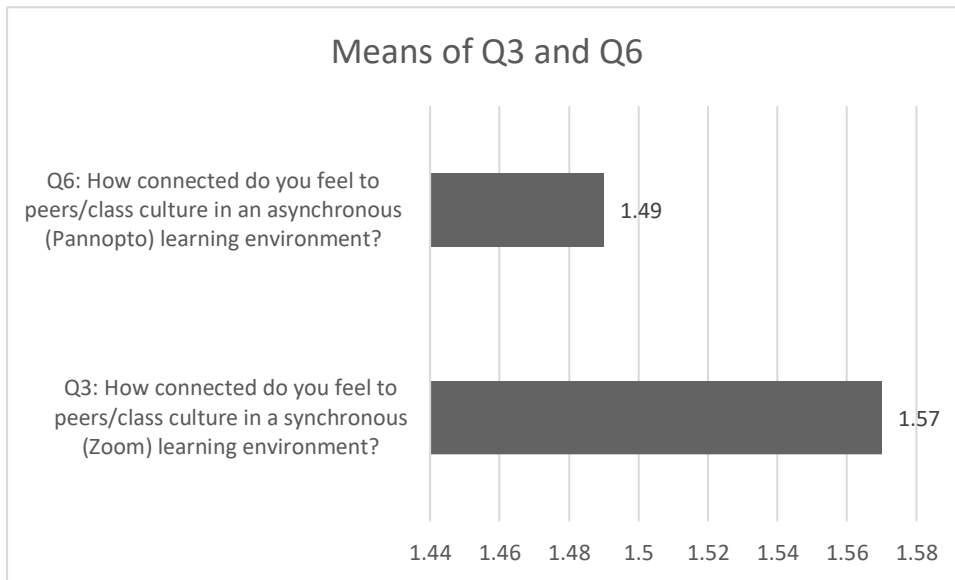
in a traditional environment that they are used to. Contrastingly, I think students who did find asynchronous learning more effective most likely prefer being able to pause or rewind recorded lectures as well as watching them on their own time. However overall, neither options are one hundred percent effective.



To measure the likeliness to actively participate/engage for both modes of remote learning I compared the means of Q2 and Q5. The mean for Q2 was 2.58 and the mean for Q5 was 2.33. This shows that participants are more likely to actively participate/engage in a synchronous environment than an asynchronous environment. From this data I can infer that students feel more inclined to participate in a synchronous environment because it is more interactive than an asynchronous environment.



To measure the connection to peers/class culture I compared the means of Q3 and Q6. The mean of Q3 was 1.57 and the mean of Q2 was 1.49. This data shows that students feel more connected in a synchronous environment. However, since the means are relatively low, it shows that neither synchronous nor asynchronous learning environments hold much connection between peers.



To observe the overall value of remote learning I asked on my survey, “Do you feel as though the value of your education is lower with remote learning (synchronous and asynchronous) than it is with traditional face-to-face learning?”. The options on my five-point Likert scale were; no value is exactly the same, the value is slightly lower but not noticeable different, neutral, yes the value is lower but I still find some value, and yes the value is extremely lower and I am worried about the value of my education. 45.5% of participants responded, “yes the value is extremely lower and I am worried about the value of my education”. Similarly, 42.7% of participants responded, “yes the value is lower but I still find some value”. Zero participants responded, “no the value is exactly the same”.

Lastly, I asked participants, “Overall, how would you rate your confidence in your ability to participate in remote learning?”. The options on my five-point Likert scale were; not confident at all, slightly confident, neither confident nor unconfident, somewhat confident, and extremely confident. Half of participants responded with, “slightly confident” while a 22.7% of participants responded with “somewhat confident. Only 4.5% of participants feel “extremely confident” in their ability to participate in remote learning.

Implications and Recommendations for Communication Strategies

My findings imply that remote learning options at Auburn University need to be reviewed and renovated. While some elements of synchronous and asynchronous environments

cannot be necessarily renovated, the results of my survey show that students at Auburn University do not find either mode to be very effective, they do not feel connected to one another and their class culture, they are not likely to participate and engage, they do not find the same value in their education, and they do not feel extremely confident in their ability to participate in remote courses. Although my data shows all of the stated, Auburn University tuition remains the same for a completely different student experience than it was before COVID-19. While the safety of all students and faculty is the main purpose for remote learning, there is a gap of care for students' education. The findings in this survey are a call to action for Auburn University to either renovate their current remote learning options or explore new remote learning options. Auburn University has yet to ask students for feedback about their remote learning experience, by starting off with a survey a conversation can be started about what needs to change and how they can better cater students' educational needs.

Conclusion

In conclusion, throughout the semester I have been gathering research and questioning remote learning to help make remote learning more effective and valuable to students. I started off with a broad question, "How do college students at Auburn University perceive the various remote learning options and their effectiveness." After I formed this question, I was able to go further in the research process and set goals for my research.

From my secondary report, I was able to conclude that remote learning is under-researched. I was also able to conclude that most research about a remote lifestyle during COVID-19, is centered around universities, primary schools, and workplaces rather than the student experience. For what studies have been done about online learning, I was able to conclude that online learning is not best suit for every student unless they naturally obtain confidence and self-efficiency and proper tools from their school/university.

My survey report, with a total of 110 participants, led me to more detailed findings such as lack of confidence, connection to peers and class culture, participation, and

effectiveness. So while students are being forced into remote learning, many of them do not find it to be the best environment, especially when it is totally asynchronous.

From conducting this research process, I am able to conclude that remote learning at Auburn University is not the most effective nor valuable it could be. And as a remote lifestyle is here to stay with COVID-19, it is important for a remote learning environment to be as effective and valuable as possible.

Appendix: Survey

My name is Audrey Pick and I am a Public Relations Research student at Auburn University. I have been studying the effects of remote learning and have conducted this survey for Auburn Students.

The survey should only take about 5 minutes, would you like to participate?

Please pick an answer 1-5.

How effective do you find a synchronous (zoom) learning environment?

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| (1) Not effective at all | (2) Slightly effective | (3) Moderately effective | (4) Very effective | (5) Extremely effective |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |



Please pick an answer 1-5.

How likely are you to actively participate/engage in a synchronous (zoom) learning environment?

- (1) Extremely unlikely (2) Somewhat unlikely (3) Neither likely nor unlikely (4) Somewhat likely (5) Extremely likely
-



Please pick an answer 1-5.

How connected do you feel with your peers/class culture in a synchronous (zoom) learning environment

- 1) Not at all connected (2) Somewhat connected (3) Neutral (4) Partially connected (5) Extremely connected
-



Please pick an answer 1-5.

How effective do you find a asynchronous (Pannopto) learning environment?

- (1) Not effective at all (2) Slightly effective (3) Moderately effective (4) Very effective (5) Extremely effective
-



Please pick an answer 1-5.

How likely are you to actively participate/engage in a asynchronous (Pannopto) learning environment? (Ex: reaching out during office hours)

- (1) Extremely unlikely (2) Somewhat unlikely (3) Neither likely nor unlikely (4) Somewhat likely (5) Extremely likely
-



Please pick an answer 1-5.

How connected do you feel with your peers/class culture in a asynchronous (Pannopto) learning environment? (Ex: reaching out to peers to discuss class materials)

- (1) Not at all connected (2) Somewhat connected (3) Neutral (4) Partially connected (5) Extremely connected
-



Please pick an answer 1-5.

Do you feel as though the value of your education is lower with remote learning (synchronous/asynchronous) than it is with traditional face to face learning?

- (1) No the value is exactly the same (2) The value is slightly lower but not noticeably different (3) Neutral (4) Yes the value is lower but I still find some value (5) Yes the value is extremely lower and I am worried about the value of my education
-



Please pick an answer 1-5.

Overall, how would you rate your confidence in your ability to participate in synchronous and asynchronous courses at Auburn University?

- (1) Not confident at all
- (2) Slightly confident
- (3) Neither confident nor unconfident
- (4) Somewhat confident
- (5) Extremely confident



For demographic purposes, what gender are you?

- Male
- Female
- Other



For demographic purposes, how old are you?



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