



# COVID-19 Impacts on Faculty, Staff, and Students During Spring 2020

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## Background and Context for Surveys

The APU Community demonstrated remarkable flexibility and adaptability to regional and national changes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic during the Spring 2020 semester. Within a two-week period in mid-March, the APU Community made an extraordinary conversion in campus operations in Azusa, at the Regional Campuses, and around the world. These included:

**COVID-19 APU Emergency Operations Center activated.** A unit of the Critical Incident Response Team worked closely with the President's Cabinet, governmental entities, and public health agencies to coordinate all campus responses.

**On-campus course delivery moved to online delivery.** This phenomenal effort from the faculty enabled the university to uphold its academic mission in the midst of flux and maintain commitment to quality and student learning. Faculty with years of experience in online delivery leaned in to their expertise, providing their courses with quality. The intense collaboration of the Deans, Department and Program Chairs, and Faculty in making this transition was inspiring.

**Students shifted to a new paradigm of online learning.** APU students demonstrated flexibility, adapting to an abrupt change in their learning environment. Students in Ecuador and South Africa, despite incredible international hurdles, returned home safely.

**Residential students, who could, safely went home.** Students with need, were housed and cared for on the Azusa campus by the Student Affairs team and Student Health Center.

**Staff effectively managed university operations.** Individuals began working from home, where appropriate. "Essential" employees remained "in place" to ensure location-based university operations remained active. IMT also played a critical role in the COVID-19 response by supporting distance learning and virtual orientations.

During the seven weeks off campus, communication connections were built and maintained through diverse means, including Google and Zoom conferencing. APU President Paul Ferguson engaged regularly with hundreds of faculty, students, staff, parents, alumni, and friends of the University to ensure communication continued. The President and President's Cabinet developed and implemented a strategic and tactical communication plan that provided information and guidance over the period through 86 separate communications. The Division of Student Affairs developed online programming to support student spiritual formation and ongoing student engagement, the Office of the Provost provided consistent guidance for faculty support and development and maintained individual connections with all undergraduate and professional students through a call campaign, the Office of Human Resources provided employee instruction and guidance, and Enrollment Management offered more than 50 online events to maintain continued engagement with prospective students.

A primary goal during this time was promoting the health and welfare of the APU Community while continuing to provide quality education and student care, and maintaining fiscal discipline. APU enhanced the employment experience through creative work-at-home strategies in compliance with public health mandates, donation of accrued vacation, and re-deployment of workers to projects of higher need. APU also implemented stringent cost-control actions, including a hiring freeze and tight control of expenditures. The federal relief dollars from the CARES Act (about \$6M for APU) greatly assisted the University and APU students.

COVID-19 brought about unexpected change and challenge for the Division of Academic Affairs, including the transition to online learning and work from home to comply with local, state, and national governmental and public health directives. Faculty adapted all of their spring courses to an online format in just three days. The Office of the Provost provided regular and timely training for faculty as well as resources needed to thrive as instructors as APU transitioned to an online environment. In collaboration with the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment, faculty received a number of in-person and online training opportunities to effectively leverage all of the resources and tools offered in the Canvas Learning Management System. During this time, the Academic Success Center made 3-4 phone calls to all undergraduate students to ensure that they were receiving the academic support needed in their new online learning environments. Schools and Colleges engaged in calling campaigns to all graduate students as well. The institution's fiscal/community care strategy included the opportunity for the APU Community to demonstrate compassion in response to a general call for those with significant accrued vacation to donate those days to their colleagues who may have need or take those days to reduce fiscal challenges to the budget. These strategies enabled APU to implement a limited, 5-day furlough, affirming the deep commitment to balancing strong fiscal management with preserving community continuity and care.

## Survey Results

Three complementary surveys were administered to faculty, staff, and students to assess the Spring 2020 semester experience amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. These surveys yielded a strong response: 303 (42%), 322 (61%), and 1,292 (20%) responses from faculty, staff, and students, respectively. The following summarizes key findings from these surveys as well as some of the strategies being enacted as a response.

The unexpected and unprecedented shift to remote learning/work from home in the Spring 2020 semester as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic presented challenges (Table 1). Even still, the community also identified pleasant surprises in the midst of the disruption (Table 1).

Pleasant Surprises	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decreased commute</li> <li>• More control of schedule/time management/flexibility</li> <li>• Increased creativity in teaching approaches</li> <li>• Ease and benefits of Canvas and Zoom</li> <li>• Adaptability of students and faculty to transition to remote learning platforms</li> <li>• More introverted students had increased voice in remote platform</li> <li>• Increased independence of students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased work hours</li> <li>• Balancing work and home life</li> <li>• Enhancing experiential course material for remote delivery</li> <li>• Maintaining personal connections</li> <li>• Zoom fatigue</li> <li>• Technological issues</li> <li>• Coordinating resources for work from home</li> <li>• Community engagement</li> <li>• Time differences and synchronous schedules</li> <li>• Essential work/furlough</li> </ul>

Table 1: Pleasant Surprises and Challenges Identified During the Transition to Remote Learning/Work from Home in Spring 2020

Faculty, staff, and student responses revealed greater than 90% satisfaction/agreement with the decisions made by APU in response to state and national governmental and public health guidelines (Figures 1, 2). In addition, greater than 75% of respondents indicated that sufficient support was provided to transition to work from home/remote learning (Figures 1, 2). While varied perspectives were presented on University communications, on average, the majority of respondents were in agreement (Figures 1, 2). Qualitative comments on communication indicated that there is room for improvement on the flow of information from upper administration down through departments (Table 2). The Office of the President has developed an Integrated Strategic Communications Working Group to enhance the internal communication strategy for the University (Table 2).

### % Responses Indicating Satisfaction/Agreement

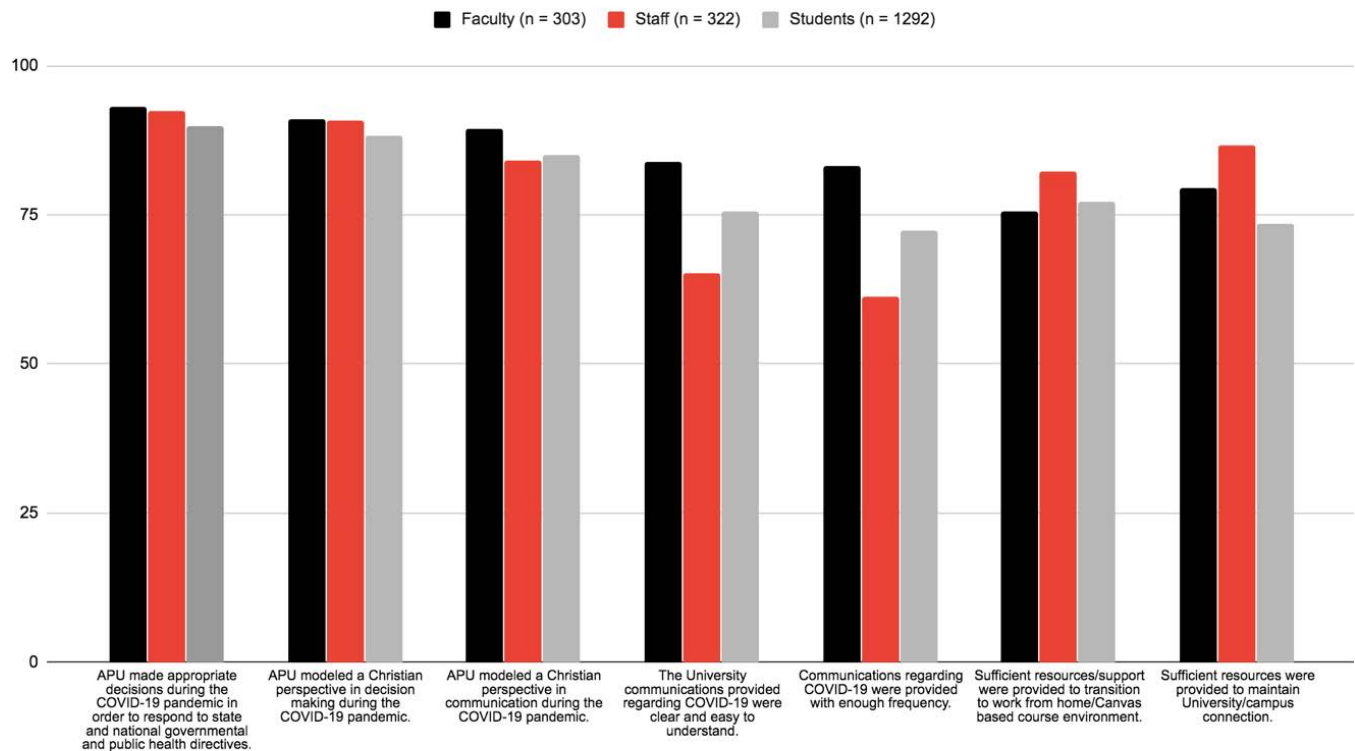


Figure 1: % of Faculty, Staff, and Student Responses Indicating Satisfaction/Agreement with Statements Pertaining to Decision Making, Communication, Resources, and Campus Connection

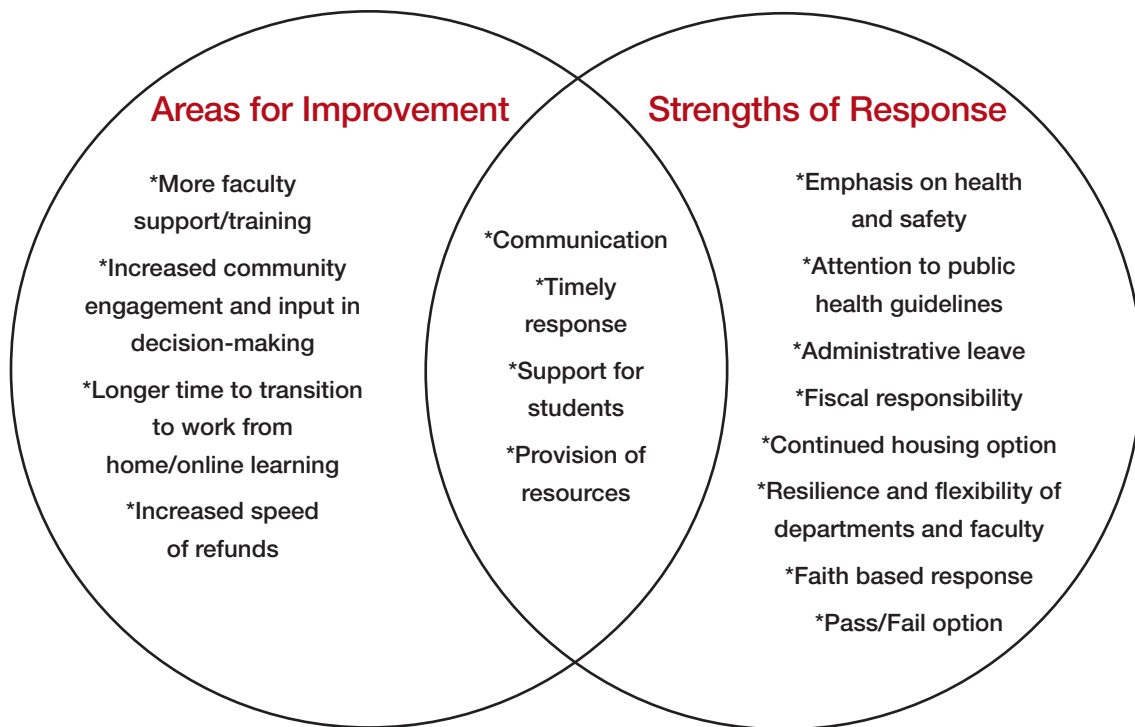


Figure 2: Reflections from Faculty, Staff, and Students Regarding the Greatest Strengths of the COVID-19 Response and Areas of Improvement

Faculty and students thoughtfully considered and reflected upon the remote learning experience during Spring 2020. Not surprisingly, lecture, didactic, and independent study courses translated well to remote learning. Courses emphasizing hands-on and experiential learning required more creativity (Table 2). While survey results indicated a preference for face-to-face learning, the value of remote learning was recognized and appreciated to maintain educational continuity during the pandemic (Table 2). In fact, survey results indicated a desire to continue remote learning for the Fall 2020 semester in order to prioritize health and safety given the rising COVID-19 cases in California. Students had very positive comments regarding the efforts put forth by faculty to maintain a consistent learning experience (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Faculty Characteristics that Improved Student Learning Experience

<b>Category of Feedback</b>	<b>Community Response/Desires</b>	<b>Strategy</b>
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal communication strategy</li> <li>• Consistent relay of information from upper administration to departments</li> <li>• Advanced notice for faculty/staff</li> <li>• Increased frequency/regular schedule of communication</li> <li>• Enhanced detail</li> <li>• Integrate messages from multiple areas</li> <li>• Forums where Q&amp;A can take place</li> </ul>	<p>Integrated Strategic Communications Working Group created by Office of President. Strategies include, but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Timeline of coordinated communications from varied divisions</li> <li>• Preview for faculty/staff</li> <li>• All student communications sent to faculty/staff</li> <li>• More communication of Return to Campus plans for Spring 2021</li> </ul> <p>Senior Advisor to the President and Chief of Staff will serve as liaison to Student Government, Staff Council, and Faculty Senate.</p>
Diversity and Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey regarding campus climate around issues of equity and justice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Campus Climate Survey will be conducted.</li> <li>• Emphasis on diversity, equity, and justice enhanced in Strategic Plan.</li> <li>• Submission of CIC Netvue Grant for Reframing the Institutional Saga supports research on issues of diversity and equity.</li> </ul>
Return to Campus for Fall 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• While face-to-face experience is preferred, value of remote learning is recognized during pandemic.</li> <li>• Didactic, lecture, and independent study courses translated well, with more creativity required for courses with hands on or experiential learning.</li> <li>• Significant concern expressed regarding safety of return in Fall 2020 given current number of COVID-19 cases in California.</li> </ul>	<p>Fall 2020 semester will continue as remote learning experience with anticipated return to campus in Spring 2021</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• APU announced transition to remote learning on July 22, 2020.</li> <li>• State and county guidelines confirmed the requirement of remote learning on July 29.</li> <li>• Investments in technology and training made in order to continue to provide an enhanced remote learning experience.</li> <li>• Training in programs essential to pandemic recovery are permitted to have face-to-face learning.</li> </ul>

Table 2: Overarching Suggestions and Emerging Strategies

## Moving Forward

In mid-July, due to the resurgence of COVID-19 infections and hospitalizations, California Governor Newsom reissued closure orders for inside businesses and mandated no in-person learning for K-12 schools in counties on the State Monitoring List. At this time, all counties served by APU are located in counties on the state list. Therefore, President Ferguson informed the APU Community that, based upon the current COVID-19 surge and concern for the health and safety of students, staff, and faculty, APU would resume remote learning for Fall 2020. Recent guidelines from the state and county have affirmed this decision to pivot to remote learning.

The survey data collected and highlighted here offered insights to improve the Fall 2020 remote learning and work-from-home environment. Additional technological and training support was provided to continue to enhance the remote learning experience (Table 2). In addition, Town Halls and President's Round Tables have been introduced to increase community connection and engagement and promote clear communication. These conversations draw together faculty, staff, and students to address pressing issues, provide pertinent information, and encourage ongoing dialogue.

Pending continued decline in COVID-19 incidence rates in Los Angeles County and approval from public health agency partners, APU is hopeful of reopening in Spring 2021. This will occur with the full support of and value for the ongoing Return to Campus strategies and initiatives, including the donor-funded COVID-19 Testing Center in the APU Student Health Center.