



LEARNING EXPERIENCES
ASSESSMENT AND PLANNING

BLENDED LEARNING ASSESSMENT SURVEY REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Spring 2022, Simon Fraser University (SFU) launched a pilot of blended courses to support flexible education. At SFU, blended courses have at least one quarter and no more than three quarters of student learning integral to the course occurring in the online environment, replacing in-person instruction. In doing so, blended courses aim to provide not only connection and contexts but also flexibility for students in how and when they learn. As a part of this pilot, a total of 31 blended courses were offered in Spring 2022.

The Blended Learning Assessment (BLA) survey was initiated to gather feedback about this new course format from students, teaching assistants (TAs), and instructors. The BLA survey was implemented in two steps. Before the start of the Spring 2022 term, a pre-course survey was deployed (January 4 – 10th) to target the instructors' experiences in preparing to teach a blended course. At the end of the term, post-course surveys were deployed (April 27 – May 15th) for students, TAs, and instructors. Our response rates were 15% for students (n=182), 30% for TAs (n=6), and 74% for instructors (n=17).

In addition, SETC responses to the open-comment question, “Did you have any further comments” are analyzed and included in this report.

It is important to note that all courses were taught remotely during the first two weeks of Spring 2022. This decision was made in order to slow the spread of COVID-19.

The results section of this report has four main sections: blended course components (i.e., information about how the in-person and online components were conducted, benefits and challenges of a blended model), instructor experience, student experience and TA experience.

MAIN FINDINGS:

Key benefits highlighted by all of the stakeholders:

- The ability to retain aspects of remote learning (i.e. lectures that can be replayed) whilst incorporating face-to-face interactions.

Blended course components

- Instructors selected particular aspects of the course to be in-person to foster student-instructor and student-student interactions, academic integrity, and providing immediate feedback. Online components were selected if they were suitable for individual study and having a lasting record of the activity or material.
- All groups (instructors, students, and TAs) cited the key benefit of a blended course model is that it increases flexibility.

- Instructors cited students getting behind on their work as a key challenge. Similarly, students also noted that keeping up with the course work was their largest challenge.

Instructors

- 91% of instructors had a positive experience teaching the blended course.
- Over half of the instructors (63%) would try to teach a blended course in the future. Meanwhile, one-third of them (31%) reported that course format is not an important consideration.
- Instructors most frequently used CEE resources to prepare for their blended courses, with the CEE website (75%) and consultations with CEE staff (63%) being particularly popular.
- Over two-thirds agreed that they had spent a significant amount of time preparing online media. But, they also indicated that it was an up-front investment and that this time would not be needed in the future.
- 65% of instructors were able to gauge their students' progress throughout the course. Some instructors pointed to the decrease in direct contact hours with student as making it difficult to determine how well their students were understanding the course. Other instructors found new remote tools for measuring student progress (i.e., HP5).
- The largest challenge instructors cited was the ability to adapt materials or activities during the semester in response to student learning needs.

Students

- About 80% of students reported having a positive learning experience in blended courses (no differences were observed between sexes and residency status).
- 47% of students indicated that they would be interested in taking another blended course, while 42% felt that the course format would not be an important factor in their enrollment decision.
- Compared to students with positive learning experiences, those with negative learning experiences reported more difficulties with:
 - interacting with other students
 - seeing connections between in-person and online components
 - the process of submitting the assessments
- Online media (i.e., instructor videos, links) was cited by students as the most helpful component and 90% of courses contained this element.

- Students found that keeping up with the course, perceptions of a high workload, and decreased contact with the instructor and other students were their biggest challenges.

TAs

- TAs largely relied on the course instructor (83%) for guidance in how to teach in a blended course.
- TAs reported mixed thoughts about their workload. On one hand, the majority of respondents spent the same amount of time on the course as the assigned base units. At the same time, some TAs reported an increased workload (primarily due to an increase in email communications from students) as their largest challenge.

CONTENTS

RESPONDENT PROFILE	6
RESULTS 1. Blended course formats, benefits and challenges	8
1.1 Blended course format	8
1.2 Benefits of blended learning courses	9
1.3 Challenges of blended learning courses	10
2. Instructor experience	13
2.1 Overall experience	13
2.2 Preparing for the course	15
2.3 Instructor time	15
2.4 Comparison between blended and non-blended courses.....	18
2.5 Changes in the course throughout the semester	20
2.6 Instructor confidence before and after teaching a blended course	20
3. Student Experience	21
3.1 Overall Experience	21
3.2 Aspects of the experience	22
3.3 Workload.....	25
3.4 Components students found most useful.....	25
3.5 Changes in the course throughout the semester	26
4. TA experience.....	26
SUMMARY.....	27

RESPONDENT PROFILE

Instructors

- The overall response rate for the pre-course survey is 70% and 74% for the post-course survey (Total invited = 23).
- Instructor rank of respondents to the post-course survey:
 - 12% Professor
 - 12% Associate professor
 - 18% Assistant professor
 - 47% Lecturer
 - 12% Sessional instructor/LT assistant

Table 1. Instructor Response Profile

Course Faculty	Pre-course respondents	Post-course respondents
Arts and Social Science	13 (81%)	14 (82%)
Communication, Art, and Technology	1 (6%)	1 (6%)
Science	2 (13%)	2 (12%)
Total	16 (100%)	17 (100%)

Students

- The overall response rate is 15% (Total invited = 1,226).
- 92% Domestic and 8% International students
- 82% Female and 18% Male students

Table 2: Student Response Profile

Course Faculty	Number of respondents
Arts and Social Science	163 (90%)
Communication, Art, and Technology	14 (8%)
Science	5 (3%)
Total	182 (100%)

TAs

- The overall response rate is 30% (Total invited = 20).
- All respondents had prior TA experience in at least one course.

Table 3: TA Response Profile

Course Faculty	Number of respondents
Arts and Social Sciences	5 (83%)
Communication, Art, and Technology	1 (17%)
Total	6 (100%)

RESULTS

1. BLENDED COURSE FORMATS, BENEFITS, AND CHALLENGES

This section of the report summarizes data about the way in which the in-person and online components blended together, including how instructors spend their time and which components students found most helpful.

1.1 BLENDED COURSE FORMAT

Before the course began, Instructors were asked to provide information about which aspects of the course were going to be offered online and which were going to be offered in-person and also the rationale for the decision.

Instructors noted that they attempted to foster student-instructor and student-student interactions during the in-person aspects of their course. Other considerations included providing students with immediate feedback on their learning and preserving academic integrity for assessments.

The top five in-person aspects of the course

- Discussion; 52%
- Tutorials or workshops; 52%
- Office hours (1x1 or group); 48%
- Midterms/exams; 43%
- Quizzes; 33%

On the other hand, instructors selected aspects of the course that were suitable for individual study and offered a lasting record of the activity or material (i.e., discussion board comments).

The top five online aspects of the course

- Office hours (1x1 or group); 90%
- Learning resources (e.g., readings, videos, applications, website links); 90%
- Assignments; 67%
- Asynchronous lecture (video recording); 62%
- Online Discussion or activity (e.g., Canvas forum); 43%

Blended courses at SFU is defined as having at least one quarter and no more than three quarters of student learning integral to the course occurring in the asynchronous online environment, replacing in-person instruction. From instructor post-course reports, only 2 courses may not have followed this definition.

Table 4: Asynchronous contact hours in Blended Courses

% Online	Total contact hours	Number of courses
71%	7	3
66%	3	3
50%	4	5
33%	3	6
24%	4	1
20%	5	1
16%	6	1

1.2 BENEFITS OF BLENDED LEARNING COURSES

Instructors

Instructors also discussed how designing a blended learning course brought about **pedagogical benefits and improvement**, citing that they were able to:

- Employ a greater degree of **creativity** when designing the course.
- Adapt their teaching style to accommodate more varied **learning styles** (i.e. visual, auditory) than they previously had.
- Use new **tools and methods** in their teaching.

“After 9-10 years of teaching multiple sections of this course, it is energizing for me to re-think and design delivery of the course in new ways...I hope to deliver all courses that I teach in the blended model.”

Students

A large portion of students who answered the question “*What were the benefits for you of taking a blended course, compared to a non-blended course (fully in-person or fully online)?*” cited the flexibility that it provided them as a significant benefit to this form of learning.

Students cited that the increased **flexibility**:

- allowed them to save time and money on their **commute** to campus
- enabled them to set their own **schedule**, which could in turn allow them to take other courses
- permitted them to participate in classes remotely if they were feeling **physically or mentally unwell**
- enhanced **accessibility** for neurodivergent students

Students also discussed the benefits of **retaining some of the valuable aspects of remote learning** (i.e. schedule flexibility, being able to refer back to recorded videos), while being able to have in-person interactions and discussions to complement their remote experiences.

“I loved being able to watch lectures at my own pace and on my own time rather than being ‘forced’ to attend lectures at a specific time and not pay attention. Having in person tutorials allowed me to interact with other students in my class as opposed to working on Zoom where nobody interacts with each other.”

These sentiments were echoed in SETC comments, with students expressing their appreciation for:

- short lecture videos
- variety in learning activities (readings, video documentaries, discussion posts)
- organized, highly navigable Canvas pages with accessible learning materials

TAs

When answering the question “*What were the benefits of being a TA in a blended course?*”, **TAs** echoed students in their enjoyment of the **flexibility** of blended learning. They highlighted their appreciation for not having to commute to campus to take part in in-person lectures.

1.3 CHALLENGES OF BLENDED LEARNING COURSES

Instructors

While instructors discussed being able to gauge student progress as a benefit to the blended

learning model, they also cited that **managing student performance** and ensuring they completed the required work was a challenge. Additionally, some discussed the downsides of having **less face-to-face contact** time with students.

“Making sure they watch the lectures. (Just like trying to get students to go to class.) I used H5P questions, but found that the >50% of the students scrubbed to the questions and used trial and error until they got a right answer. That's a bit discouraging, so I will be using in-class quizzes moving forward.”

“The major challenge was lack of contact with students. I missed the real time questions that are part of a F2F lecture class and I also missed the after the lecture questions and interactions with students.”

Instructors also discussed how the blended learning modality could make it more difficult to **adapt lectures or activities** to the learning needs of students in the course.

“Adapting on the fly was very challenging in this format - I used the weekly discussion board posts as one way of meeting this challenge and I also sent out weekly announcements that at times addressed issues that arose during the course, but there isn't the same capacity as you have in a F2F class for changing a lecture in the moment because a question comes up that shifts where you want to put your focus.”

Students

When speaking to the challenges of blended learning, students primarily discussed how they **connected** with others (i.e. instructors, TAs, peers) in the course. They cited that blended learning created challenges in:

- Socializing and **developing supportive relationships with peers** in their class.
- The amount of time they had to **interact with the course instructors** face-to-face.
- The ways that they **accessed extra help or support** (i.e. differing student preferences for modality of office hours (offered in-person or remotely), timing for email responses).

“A challenge would be not being able to socialize with my classmates and rely on one another for help when needed. The tutorial did not allow for socializing as the entire session was usually taken up by the TA talking, so you couldn't talk or get to know the person sitting next to you.”

Students also discussed the difficulties they faced in **staying on track** with course materials. Some students highlighted the challenges in paying attention to asynchronous remote learning materials, and expressed that fully in-person lectures were better able to hold their attention.

“Sometimes it was hard to pay attention due to external distractions at home.”

“Harder to focus at home on lectures rather than if it were in person, and also don’t feel as connected to the professor which also disincentivizes learning.”

It is worth noting that instructors and TAs also highlighted the difficulties students had keeping up-to-date with the material and coming to classes prepared. Student SETC responses echoed these sentiments with an added emphasis on workload, with some students citing that the amount of work required (i.e. readings, assignments) was larger than they typically experienced.

In SETC comments, students also discussed some of the challenges of the blended model pertaining to learning activities and resources. These challenges included:

- Limited ability to practice speaking skills (language courses)
- Textbooks that did not offer clear outlines of important topics
- Assessed student participation via Slack screenshots
- Learning resources being released online without enough time for students to complete readings, activities, etc. before an in-person session

“While the hybrid model is a good idea in principle, sometimes the textbook wasn’t good at introducing new grammar concepts. I think it would have been beneficial to go over some of the harder ones in class. I also wish we had more opportunities to discuss and speak amongst ourselves in Italian in a slightly less structured way.”

The **logistics** behind the blended-learning delivery model also posed challenges to students. These difficulties included:

- Having **issues with WiFi** or digital platforms required for remote course components
- Finding **quiet spaces** to participate in remote activities
- **Commuting to campus** for in person activities
- Dealing with **shifting schedules** for synchronous or in-person components, making it difficult to work the blended course into the wider schedules of courses a student is taking

TAs

The main challenge discussed by **TAs** was the **increased workload** they associated with the blended learning delivery modality. Largely, this increased workload was attributed to a significant increase in the **volume of emails** they received from students.

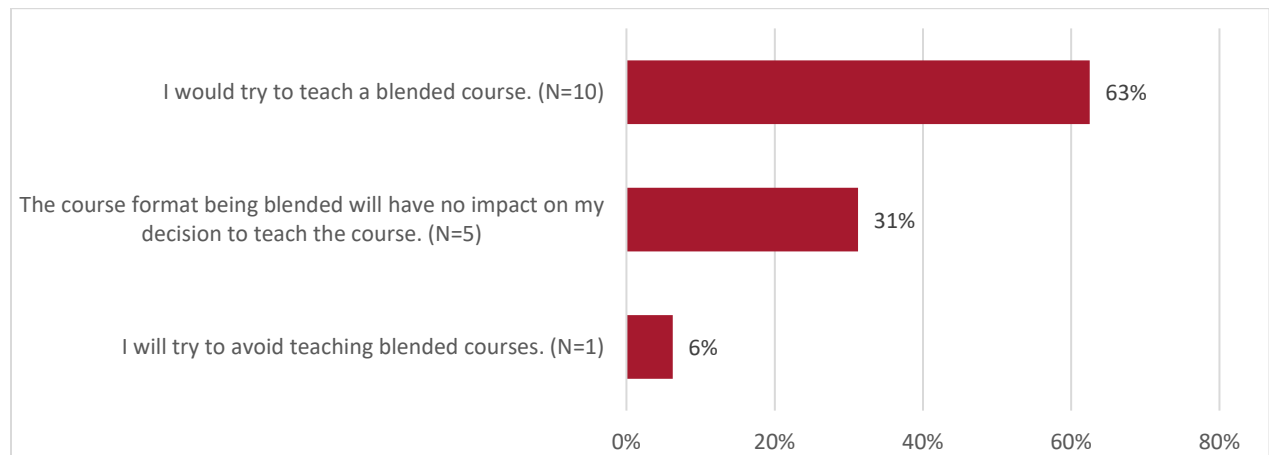
“Students also often communicated with me via email instead of attending office hours or asking questions in tutorials. I find emails very time consuming to write and respond to; I much prefer answering questions and giving feedback on ideas in-person.”

2. INSTRUCTOR EXPERIENCE

2.1 OVERALL EXPERIENCE

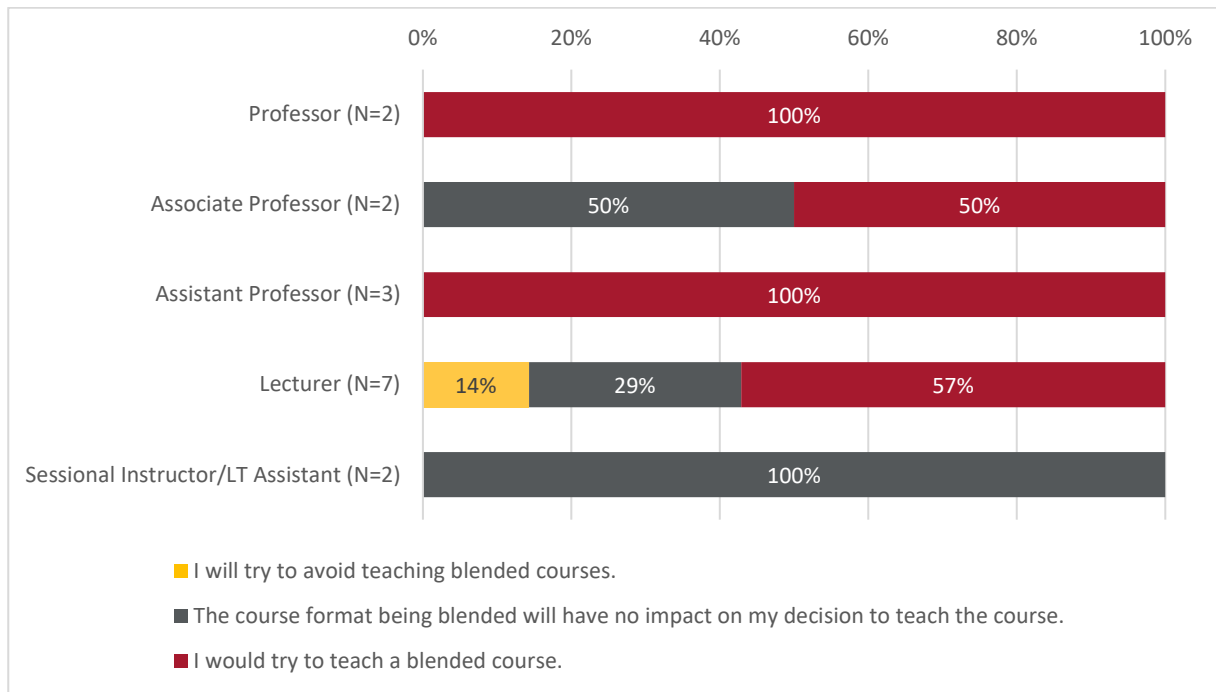
Over half of the instructors (63%) would try to teach a blended course. Meanwhile, one-third of them (31%) reported that a blended course format will have no impact.

Fig. 1: Overall Instructor Experience



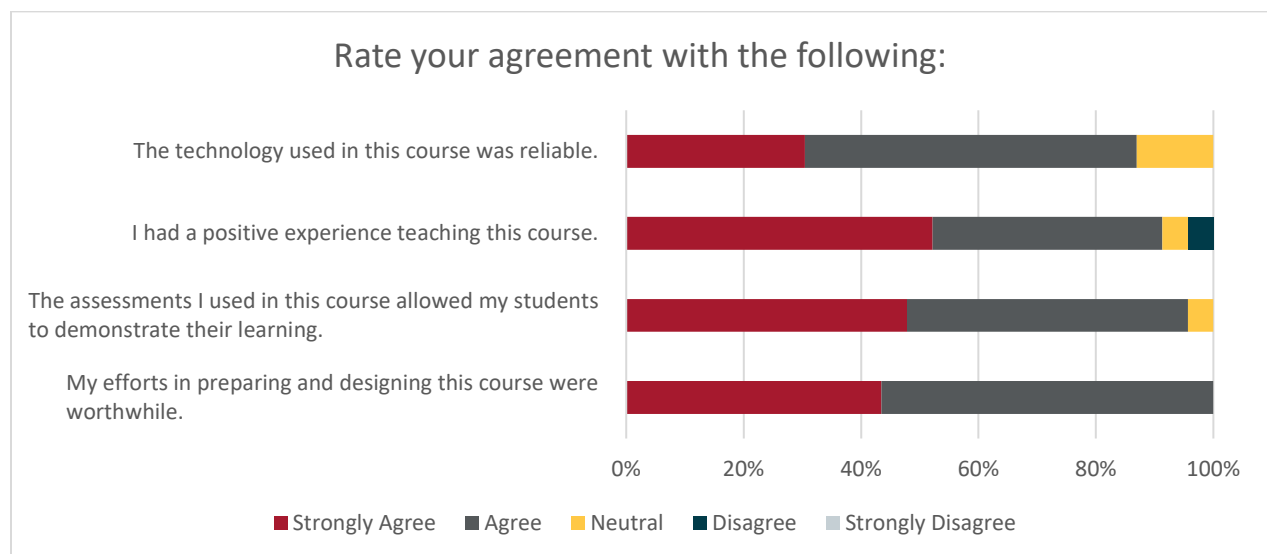
A summary by instructor rank is provided below with the caution that these are very small numbers, and thus no conclusions should be drawn at this point. While all the professors and assistant professors answered they would try to teach a blended course, only about half of the lecturers (57%) and associate professors (50%) prefer to teach a blended course. 14% of the lecturers will try to avoid blended courses. For the sessional instructor/LT assistant, the blended course format did not have an impact on their decision.

Fig. 2: Breakdown of overall Instructor experience by Rank



All of the respondents indicated agreement with the statement, “My efforts in preparing and designing the course had been worthwhile.” Furthermore, 91% of instructors had a positive experience teaching the blended course. However, 13% of instructor did not agree that the technology in the course was reliable.

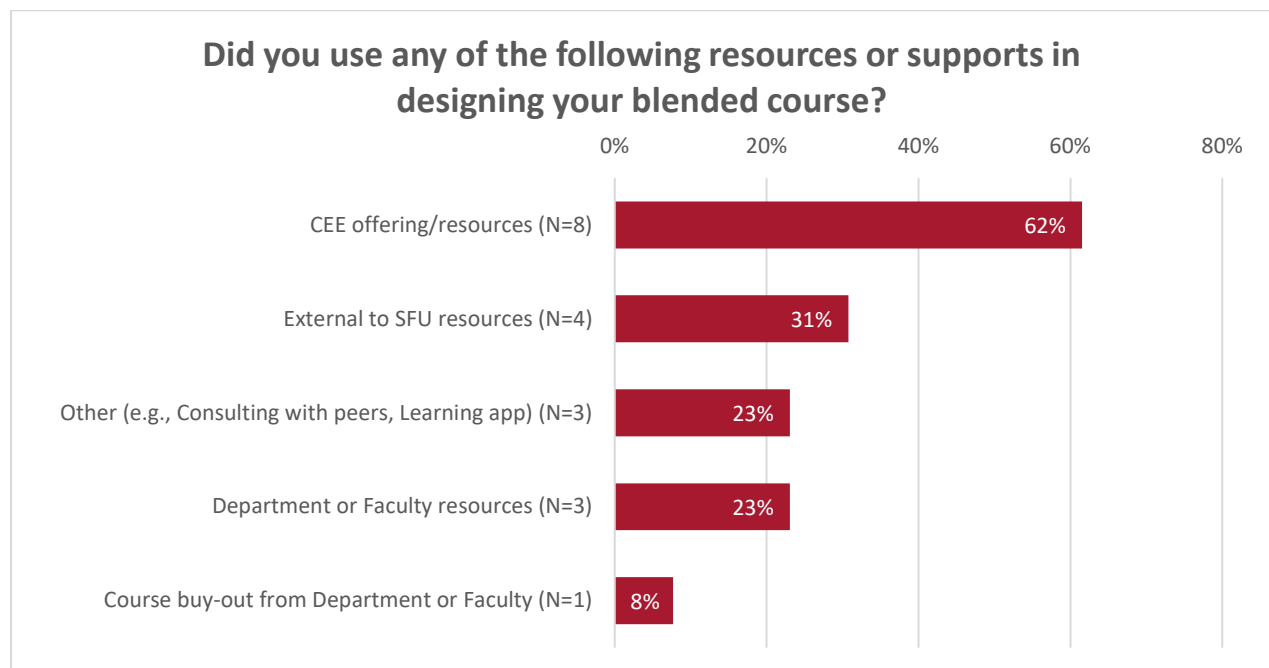
Fig. 3: Instructor Agreement regarding Teaching Experience



2.2 PREPARING FOR THE COURSE

Respondents most frequently used CEE offering/resources (62%). Among the instructors choosing CEE offering/resources, most of them accessed the CEE website (75%) and individual consultations with CEE staff (63%). About one-third of the instructors used a 10-week long blended learning design course.

Fig. 4: Instructor use of resources in designing Blended Courses



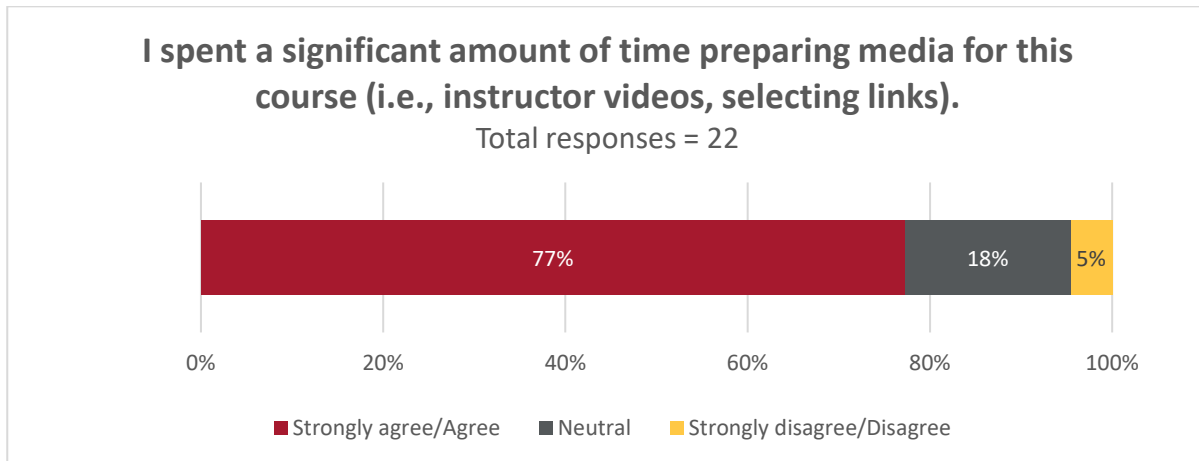
2.3 INSTRUCTOR TIME

Instructors spent varying degrees of time preparing media for their blended courses. Among the instructors, over two-thirds agreed that they spent a significant amount of time preparing online media. Instructors were also asked about the typical number of hours in preparing other course components. In general, instructors spent more time preparing online than in-person components.

When speaking of their time commitments qualitatively, instructors indicated that while there was a large amount of preparation work to design the course, this up-front investment of time

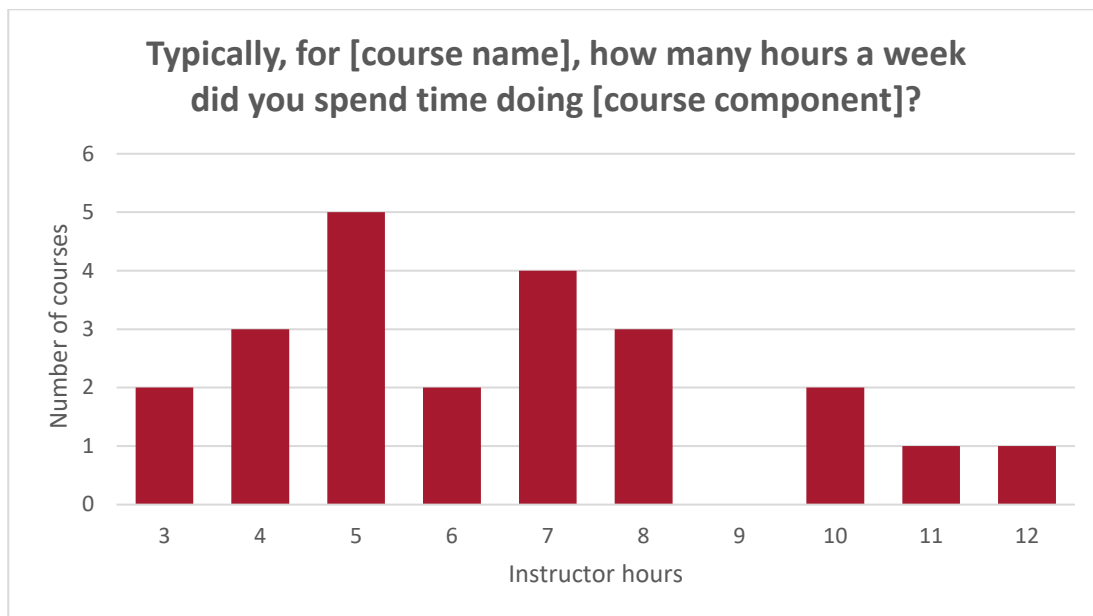
would not need to be repeated should they run the course in a blended format again due to already having a bank of video or online resources to use.

Fig. 5: Time spent by Instructors preparing Blended Courses



On average, instructors spend 6.5 hours a week on their course; with 4 instructors spending upwards of 10+ hours. Those who spent 10+ hours on the course, mostly facilitated online activities (i.e., responding to posts).

Fig. 6: Time spent by Instructors on Blended Courses weekly



Also, on average, instructors spent almost half of their time (47%) on in-person components. Instructors for three courses spent no time in-person with their students.

Table 5: Time spent on in-person components

Percentage of time in-person	Number of courses	
1-20%	1	4%
21-40%	3	13%
41-60%	7	30%
61-80%	9	39%
81-100%	0	0%
No in-person contact	3	13%

Instructors were further asked to describe the in-person and online split for the following three activities: lecture, facilitation of activities (i.e., discussion, group work), and office hours.

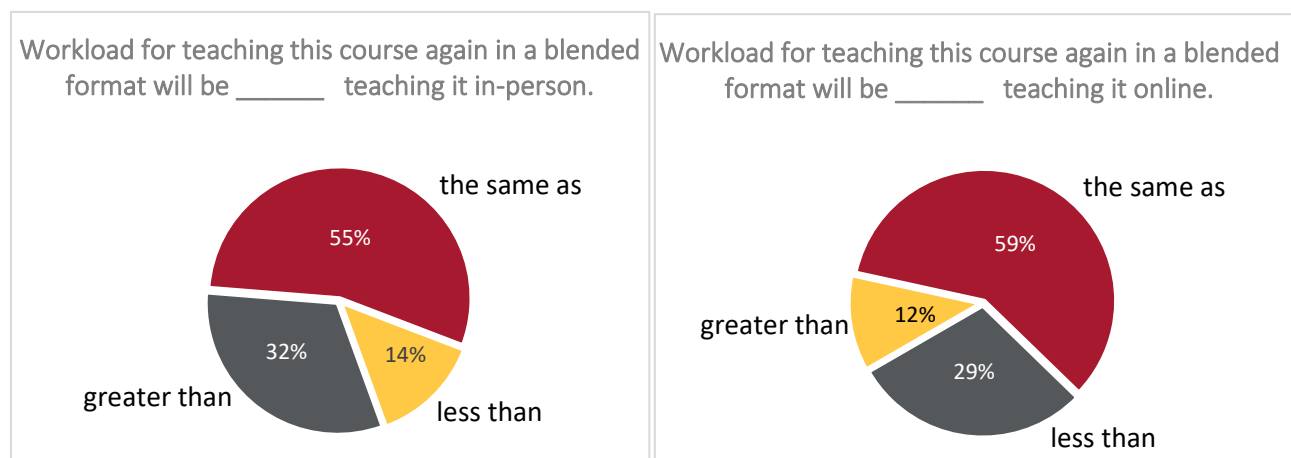
Table 6: Breakdown of course activities based on mode of delivery

		# of courses	% courses
Lecture	Both in-person and online real-time lectures	2	11%
	In-person instruction only	10	56%
	Online instruction only	1	6%
	No in-person or online instruction	5	28%
Facilitation of activities	Online facilitation only	8	40%
	Both in-person and online facilitation	12	60%
Office hours	Both in-person and online office hours	7	33%
	In-person office hours only	2	10%
	Online office hours only	11	52%
	No office hours	1	5%

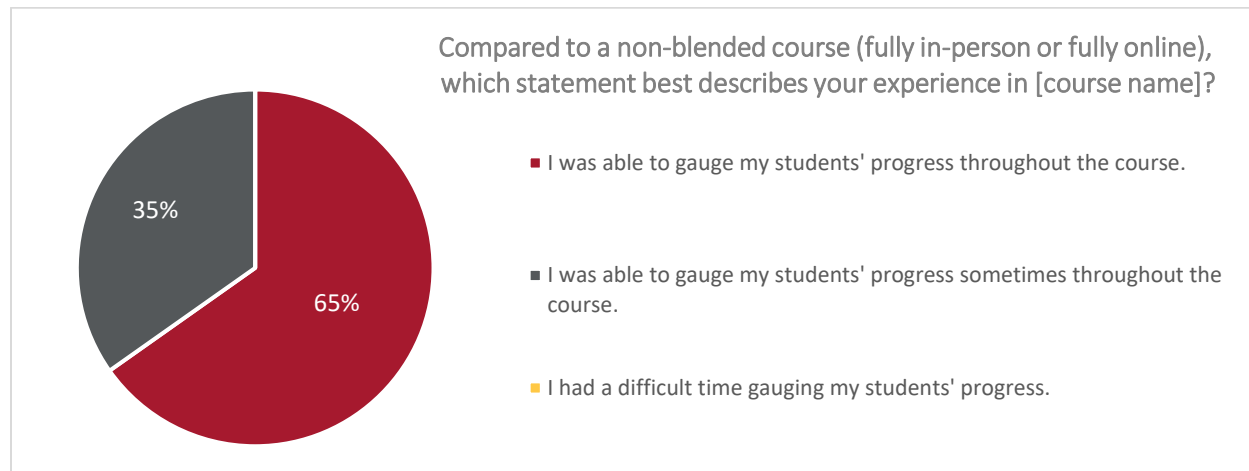
2.4 COMPARISON BETWEEN BLENDED AND NON-BLENDED COURSES

About half of instructors responded that teaching the blended course they had just taught again would be the same amount of work as teaching it blended, fully in-person, or fully online. However, more instructors thought that teaching the same course again in a blended format be less work fully online (29%) than fully in-person (14%).

Fig. 7: Comparison of teaching workload of blended courses with that of non-blended courses



When asked to compare their experience teaching a blended course with a non-blended course (fully in-person or fully online), 65% of respondents felt they were able to gauge their students' progress throughout the course.

Fig. 8: Blended Course teaching experience compared to a Non-Blended Course

Note: None of the instructors selected “I had a difficult time gauging my student’s progress.”

When instructors talked about the benefits of blended learning, some discussed the ability to gauge student progress in a way that they had not been able to before.

“The...activities gave me an insight into the working patterns and thinking modalities of students, which I don’t always have in face-to-face classes (some students are very quiet). I feel like I was able to follow them better in their progress.”

Instructors were also asked how they were able to gauge their students’ progress throughout the course. The top strategies are listed below.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>➤ Face-to-face strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation levels in in-person activities • In-person assessments • Meetings or office hour appointments with individual students | <p>➤ Remote strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tracking participation in online forum discussions • Looking at homework exercises submitted online • Asking students to submit self-assessments • Using learning applications such as H5P interactive slides |
|---|---|

Instructors noted that students who regularly attended in-person activities were easier to track than those who were only present for online activities. For some instructors, remote tools allowed them to keep track of student engagement and tailor their teaching.

“Students had two weekly online assignments linked to lectures and tutorials – I read every post and then did a weekly discussion board post in response to what students had written.”

2.5 CHANGES IN THE COURSE THROUGHOUT THE SEMESTER

About half of instructors (55%) selected “yes” when asked if they had made changes to the course (i.e., instructional strategies, lesson plans, assessment adjustments) during the term. Instructors most frequently discussed changes that they made to the remote components of their class and assessments. Changes to remote components were largely enacted to create more opportunities for students to engage with the course material and ensure that they remained 'on track' with learning objectives for the course. Changes they made to the remote component included:

- creating more discussion boards on Canvas
- adding in online activities and assignments
- making changes to recorded lectures

Changes to assessments were also discussed by the respondents, with the format, grading and modality of assessment exercises all being elements that were changed over the course of delivery. Some of these changes included adjusting participation grades or adding in graded activities to ensure students were staying on top of their work.

2.6 INSTRUCTOR CONFIDENCE BEFORE AND AFTER TEACHING A BLENDED COURSE

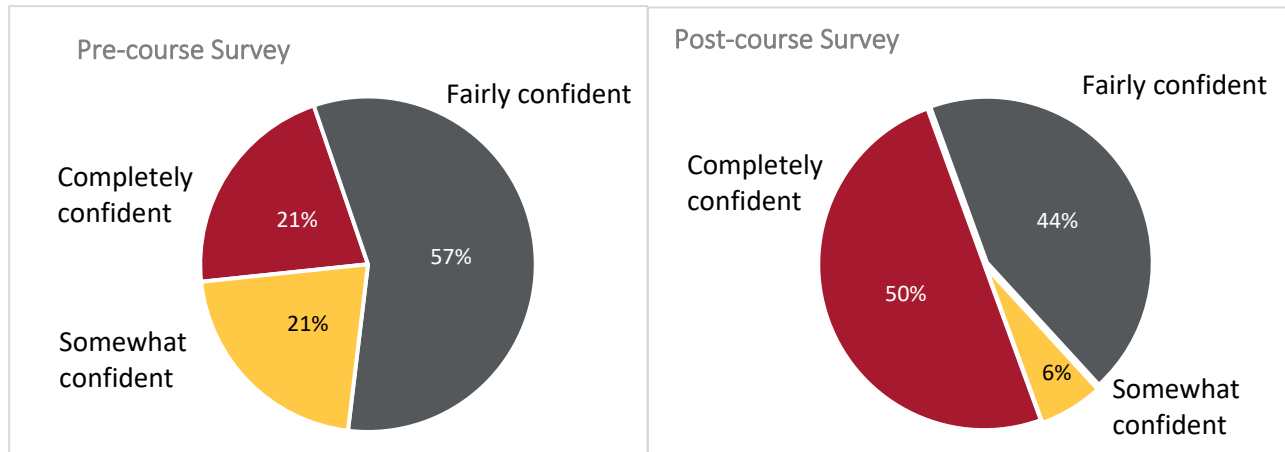
Instructors were asked the following question on both the pre-course and the post-course surveys, with slightly different wording to accommodate for the fact they having just taught a blended course.

How confident are you with teaching a blended course(s)?

- Completely confident
- Fairly confident
- Somewhat confident
- Slightly confident
- Not confident at all

As a group, the confidence in teaching a blended course grew from before they had taught the blended course to after. For example, only 21% of them were completely confident before the course, while 50% selected “completely confident” after the course.

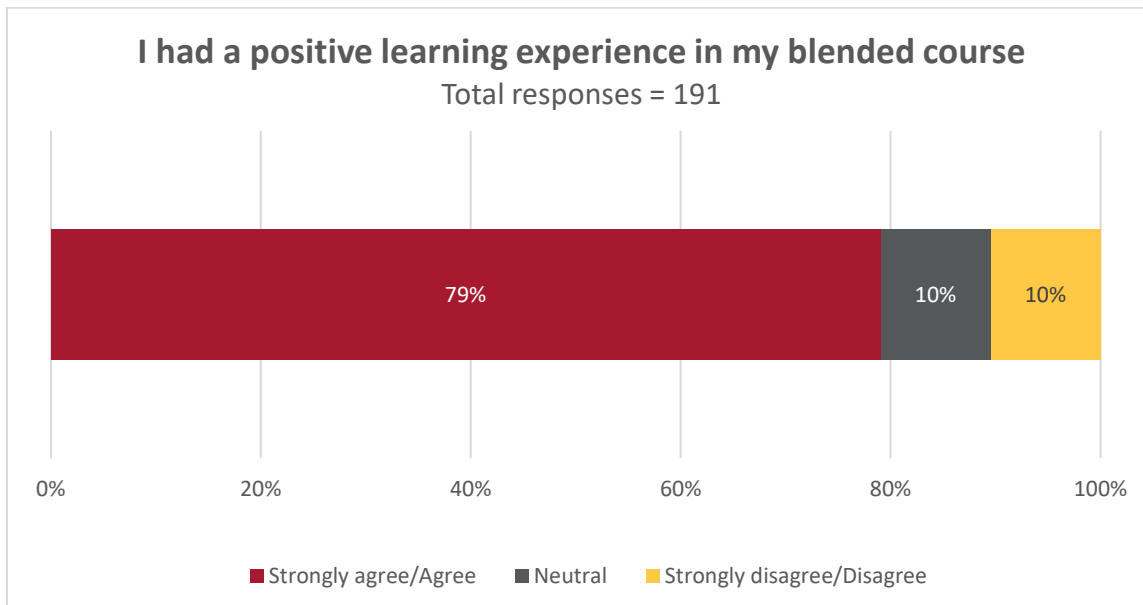
Fig. 9: Instructor confidence teaching Blended Courses before and after teaching the course



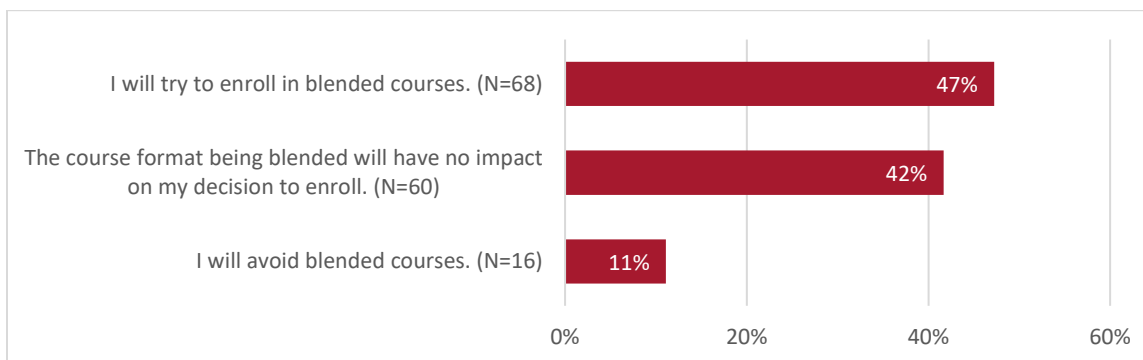
3. STUDENT EXPERIENCE

3.1 OVERALL EXPERIENCE

Of the responses, about 80% answered that they had a positive experience in the blended courses, whereas 10% disagreed, indicating a negative learning experience. Students had similar levels of positive learning experiences across student sex and residency status.

Fig. 10: Overall Student Experience

About half of students (47%) responded that they will try to enroll in another blended courses. A similar number of students (42%) of students reported that the blended course format will have no impact on their decision. The preference for blended courses did not vary much between student sex and residency status.

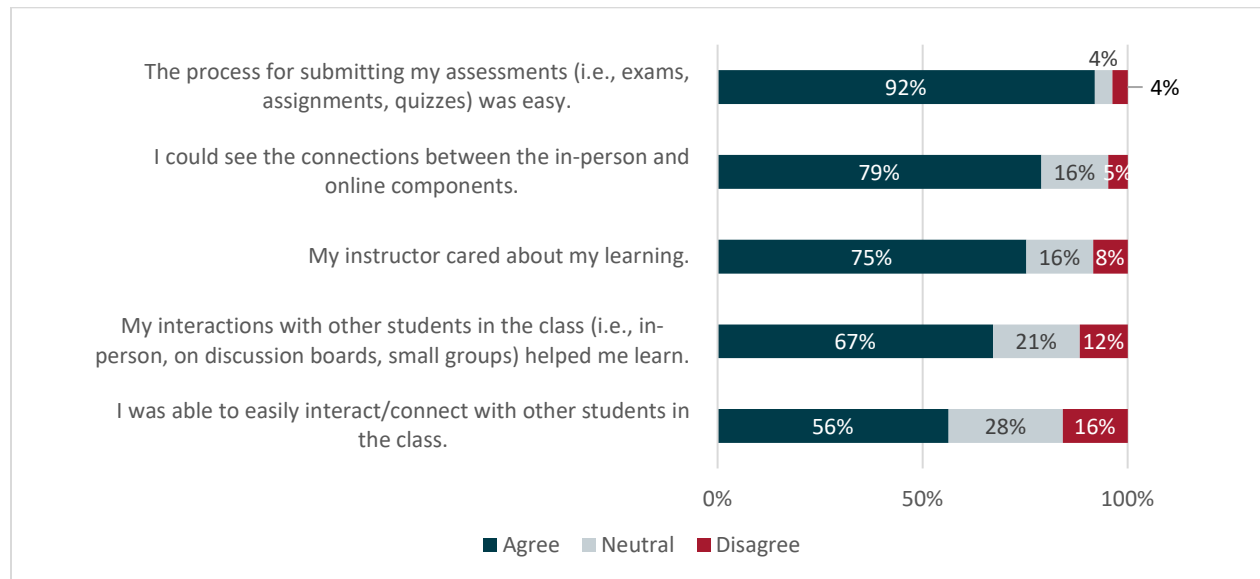
Fig. 11: Student Preference for Blended Courses after taking a blended course

3.2 ASPECTS OF THE EXPERIENCE

Ninety-two percent of students agreed that the process for submitting assessments was easy, while almost 80% could see the connections between the in-person and online components.

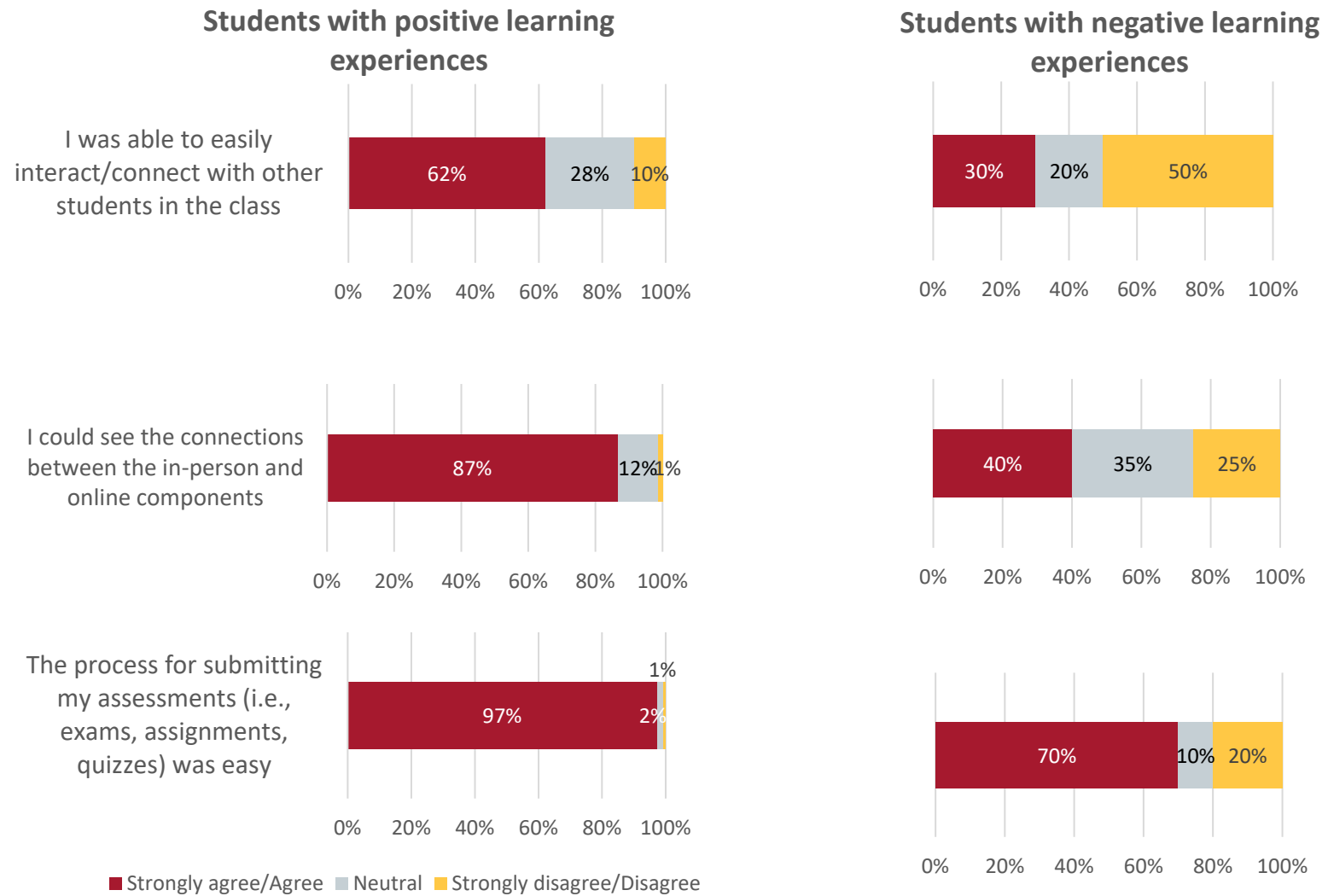
However, 16% of students found it not easy to interact/connect with other students and 12% did not learn from their interactions from other students in the class.

Fig. 12: Breakdown of the student learning experience based on aspects of the course



Compared to students having positive learning experiences, those with negative experiences reported more difficulties in the blended courses. Of those, 50% disagreed that they were able to easily interact/connect with other students in the class, which is five times more than their counterparts (10% disagreement). They were also more likely to report difficulties in seeing the connections between the in-person and online components (25% disagreement) as well as the process of submitting their assessments (20% disagreement), compared to their counterparts.

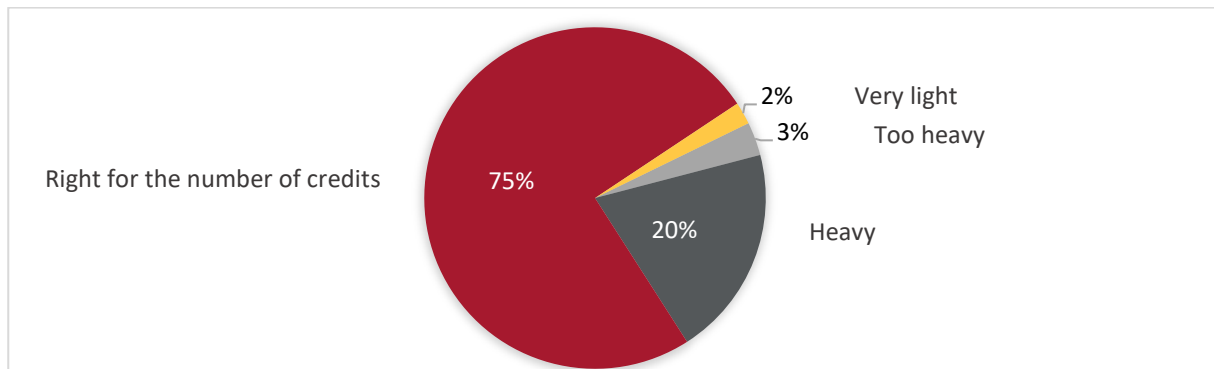
Fig. 13: Comparison of students that had positive learning experiences with those that had negative learning experiences



3.3 WORKLOAD

Three out of four students found the workload of the course was right for the number of credits.

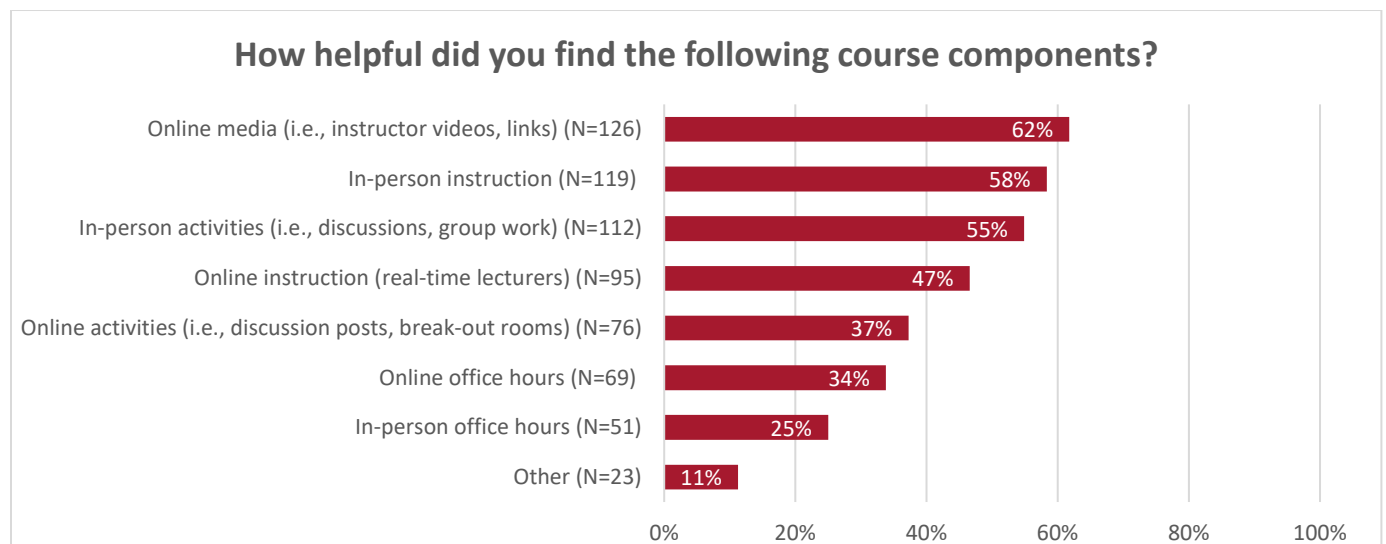
Fig. 14: Student experience with course workload



3.4 COMPONENTS STUDENTS FOUND MOST USEFUL

From the student perspective, online media (62%) was cited as the most helpful course component, followed by in-person instruction (58%) and in-person activities (55%).

Fig. 15: Course components students found most useful



3.5 CHANGES IN THE COURSE THROUGHOUT THE SEMESTER

Forty-four percent of student respondents reported that their instructor had made a change to the course during the semester. Students largely discussed changes to the **delivery modality** of the course as well as changes to **assessments**.

Students felt positive about the changes in delivery modality because they were enacted due to the surge in COVID-19 infections. For example, changes to attendance policies were made to make them optional instead of mandatory.

“Initially tutorials were to be mandatory, but due to COVID 19 the professor reconsidered and gave us the option of having attendance mandatory or not. I felt that this was a very supportive decision for the students.”

Students also felt positive about deadline extensions because the instructor came across as understanding pandemic stress. Similarly, changes to the assessment format (i.e., take-home exams instead of in-person, alternations to grading criteria). were often thought of as positive. However, some students were frustrated with all of the changes.

“The instructor changed the grading criteria – I felt glad because the class was very difficult and most people were doing very poorly in the class.”

“Evaluation methods were modified throughout the course, which was frustrating for me to not have a clear idea of what was expected and when.”

4. TA EXPERIENCE

This survey had 6 TA respondents, and as such, percentage break-downs will not be provided in this report. Instead, the information is summarized to avoid issues of generalizability.

Overall

- No general trend could be observed regarding whether the TAs had a positive experience in the course, if technology was reliable, and if the course instructor provided enough guidance.
- The majority of respondents spent the same amount of time on the course as the assigned base units.
- The majority of respondents were “completely confident” about being a TA for another blended course.
- The minority agreed that the online components helped their students learn.

TA Duties:

- The in-person duties included: lab and tutorial supervision and exam invigilation.
- The online duties included: lectures, attendance at planning meetings, and assessment preparation.
- The following duties were done both in-person and online: office hours, facilitating discussion, and providing feedback

Resources

- The majority of TAs reported using and finding the course instructor and the Department/Faculty resources helpful.
- CEE-related resources (CEE website, CEE TA/TM Day) were used less frequently, but all TAs who used them also found them helpful.

SUMMARY

There appears to be some congruities between how instructors structured the blended courses, how they spent their time, and the course components that students found most useful.

- Online media was cited by students as the most helpful component and 90% of courses contained this element.
- 58% of students found in-person instruction helpful for their learning, and 56% of instructors conducted all of their instruction in-person.
- 55% of students found in-person activities helpful and 53% of courses had a Discussion, Tutorial or workshop component.

But, there are also a few areas of incongruity:

- 47% of students found online instruction (synchronous lecturers) to be helpful. However, this component is not allowed within the definition of a blended course, and, as such, very few instructors provided it.
- 25% of students found in-person office hours helpful, however, 50% of blended courses only offered office hours online.

With this understanding of how students, TAs, and instructors experienced the blended learning pilot, there are clear benefits to the blended learning model. There are also areas where we need to deepen our knowledge of what's happening. In Fall 2022, we are planning to continue the BLA survey for further monitoring and evaluation of blended learning courses at SFU. In

doing so, we will continue to provide a better idea of what areas require more work and which areas are functioning well.