

SUNY Cortland Fall 2020

Community Advocacy Project Student Survey

Written by Tabitha Rice

HIS 499- Research Experience in History

Supervised by Dr. Gigi Peterson

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Vignette

I remember April 8th, 2018 quite fondly as my first day feeling like a Cortland Red Dragon. It was my senior year of High School and I had traveled early in the morning to go to Accepted Students Day with my parents and friend who would become my roommate for two years. As I sat in the Park Center Alumni Arena, I dreamed of what I would accomplish in my next season of life. I was excited and proud to join a legacy of excellence. Although the tours and activities/club fair/majors fair were enthralling, my most vivid memory was of the speeches given by the then President of SGA and by President Bitterbaum. The SGA President said how jealous she was of each and every one of us sitting in those bleachers. She said that her journey was over but ours was just beginning. She implored us to never waste a second and to stand in our own light. She told us to take every opportunity to be our best selves and lift one another up while doing it. President Bitterbaum then spoke and delivered a wonderful speech about the SUNY Cortland community and its dedication to following the college's mission statement and vision, to be a college of opportunity, to help students to grow as engaged citizens with a strong social conscience fostered by outstanding teaching, scholarship and service. He then said my favorite line of the day which was "Red Dragons, hold the door open." This quote has stuck with me throughout my time at SUNY Cortland. I find myself approaching each day, month, semester asking myself, "how can I best leverage my time here to hold the door open for the ones to come after me?" I saw this survey as a way to hold the door open for my fellow Red Dragons as well as the ones to come.

- Tabitha Rice

Who, What, Why?

COVID-19 has impacted all areas of modern life including education. Although we are all feeling the effects of the virus students have taken a particularly hard hit in what is arguably one of the most important times in their lives. In Fall 2020, a group of students from SUNY Cortland's AED 315 course (which will be referred to as the CAP group for the rest of the report) came together to construct a student survey for their Community Advocacy Project.

The CAP group was made up from Raquel Berman, Amanda Bloom, Brian Dillon, James Hatcliffe, Francesca Strojan, and Tabitha Rice. The CAP group was also fortunate enough to have help from Dr. Peterson and the History Department at SUNY Cortland. The History Department was also planning on creating a student survey. The History Department was a great help in distributing the survey to the History/History SST majors at SUNY Cortland as well as provide support and guidance in the formation of the survey.

The group began the project with the intentions of giving students a platform to share their experiences in the Fall 2020 semester. This was integral to the project because the CAP group wanted it to be a survey made primarily by students, for students. As a group we had open discussions over Zoom calls to talk about the semester and where each of our struggles, frustrations, and anxieties lay. The diversity in experiences aided the creation of the survey since each CAP student brought their own unique perspective.

Each CAP member had different motivations for moving forward with the CAP which effected the creation of the questions and end goals of what the survey should be used for. Some group members wanted to see the data on the mental health area of the survey to advocate for more staff in Counseling Services. Other group members wanted to construct a recommendation

for administration regarding the Spring 2021 semester. James Hatcliffe wrote “It is important to us that the information was taken into consideration by the administration to effectively help students during this school year.”¹ All of these motivations revolved around the students at SUNY Cortland and wanting to advocate for the student communities’ experiences.

Once the survey was created the CAP group sent it to the History Department to be put on the major email and then began distributing it to fellow SUNY Cortland students. The survey was over Google Forms which was very accessible and not time-consuming. We received an overwhelming response of 157 responses which was far more than anyone in the group expected. Most of the group only expected our AED class to fill the survey out so to receive such an overwhelming response was very encouraging. It was very clear that students wanted to be heard and were willing to spend a couple minutes of their time to share their experiences.

Survey Analysis

Before analyzing the CAP/HIS survey results it’s important to discuss what was included and what was excluded. As a group we felt it best to allow students to be anonymous and not have to list their name or email addresses. We didn’t ask students for any personal identifiers which in hindsight could have been very helpful when analyzing the data and constructing student profiles. In hindsight we also wish that we had asked about whether a student was living on or off campus. This would have given us greater insight into how many on-campus students were struggling with dorm life or off-campus students struggling with off-campus housing that may not have been conducive to online/hybrid learning.

Question 1

The first question of the survey was “Does your fall schedule include some in-person/hybrid classes or were all your classes online from the start?”² The rationale of starting the survey with this question was to help construct a student profile when reading the student’s other responses. A student who had a hybrid/in-person schedule from the start will have encountered certain difficulties or had unique experiences that an all-online student might not have had and vice versa.

This question was also a two-option answer question so there is little explanation to be had in its intricacies. 81.5% or 128 students that participated in the survey had a Fall 2020 schedule of either fully in-person or hybrid classes.³ 18.5% or 29 students were fully online from the beginning of the Fall 2020 semester.⁴ This gives the results a disproportionate slant towards students who had all in-person or hybrid schedules. Although this slant is there, it does match the school’s population at large of having a smaller fully online population.⁵

Question 2

Question Two read “Spring Semester: Would you prefer an all online schedule?”⁶ Question Two was formulated to assess how students wished to move forward with the upcoming Spring 2021 semester. This question was the most controversial when it came to student responses. Although not exact it seemed that there were three equal thirds of factions within the responses.

One faction making up 33.1% or 52 students said that they would prefer a 100% online Spring 2021 semester.⁷ Additionally, the SUNY Cortland Student Survey claims that 42.2% of

students would prefer a 100% online Spring 2021 semester.⁸ As a CAP group we decided to include a comment section underneath this question to have a better understanding of the students' responses and what their reasonings were. One student who preferred a fully online schedule said, "I simply don't feel confident on having in-person classes next semester but it all goes down to how our nation can handle this pandemic, and if the situation improves in N.Y."⁹ CAP group member James Hatcliffe was assigned to analyze Question Two and thought that

*"For students who believed that we should stay all online next semester the main ideas they had were, students want to feel as safe as possible and feel that going back to the classroom would compromise their safety, students feel that the online learning system works well for them, students are nervous for the cold and flu season which would increase student sickness even higher and students would like to save money by staying home while it is still an option."*¹⁰

All these concerns were distributed throughout the survey and marked very real worries from students. Health and safety were a common theme throughout the survey which correlates with the College-wide survey. According to SUNY Cortland's Student Survey given Fall 2020 33.2% of students strongly agreed that "personal health concerns" were an obstacle to their learning experience that semester. That statistic is then risen even higher to 57.7% if the group that responded with "agree" is included.¹¹ Additionally in the College's Student Survey 844 students cited "personal health concerns" as contributing to their stress.¹²

Another faction of students for Question Two of the CAP/HIS survey were those who said they would not prefer an all-online schedule (45.2% or 71 students).¹³ Given a similar question the SUNY Cortland survey cited 33.5% of students saying that they would prefer in-person (including hybrid) classes for Spring 2021.¹⁴ This group's main concerns were due to

connectivity with professors and the lack of interaction. One student claimed “I was much more motivated when I actually had a reason to leave my room.”¹⁵ Another student said “I am more focused when I am in class and found that I grew a stronger relationship with my professors from being in class in-person. I hope in spring semester we can access to in-persons and keep them until the end of the year.”¹⁶ Dissatisfaction with online learning was another theme that was represented in the CAP survey and College’s survey. According to the College’s survey 48.2% of students disagreed or strongly disagreed that “academic instruction in fully online courses” were effective.¹⁷

The third and final faction of Question Two were the “Maybe” group. This group holds the most diversity in reasoning of the three. There were some students who simply didn’t have an opinion on the matter and didn’t care if classes were in-person or online. Others stated that they were in favor of personal discretion. One student said “I’d like to return to campus if possible, but only if the curriculum allows it. The safety and well-being of faculty and higher-risk people is much more important than my preference however, so I only hope that everyone picks an option that makes them feel the safest and most comfortable.”¹⁸

Question 3

Question Three’s goal was to have a better understanding of what students wanted for the Spring 2021 semester. Since some of the CAP group members wanted to use the data to create a recommendation to the school, this question fit in perfectly. The question read “For online classes scheduled for twice a week, would you prefer to meet with the class synchronously once a week, with asynchronous work for the other day?”¹⁹ The reason that we phrased this question

in this way is because we knew that COVID would continue to be a concern and having all in-person classes for every student wasn't safe or a realistic option. Online learning will be present for the foreseeable future, so the CAP group set out to understand what the best learning structure for SUNY Cortland students was.

The majority response for this question was yes (52.2% of students).²⁰ This question was a departure from many of the others simply because there was a clear majority in favor of one style of learning. The English Department also distributed a similar Student Survey and for the same question 61% of students wanted a mix of synchronous and asynchronous class days.²¹ We also decided to include a comment area for this question since students could choose the same response but want completely different outcomes. For example, a student might select “no” because they want an entirely asynchronous schedule or because they want an entirely synchronous schedule. Those that said if they had an online class would prefer one day of lecture and the other day be asynchronous had similar reasonings. One student said,

“This semester I found that with my class that’s asynchronous and my class that I only meet with once a week I have A’s in. The work load for these classes and how it’s been designed really helped me, not only to stay on top of my work, but also I never found myself feeling stressed about these classes, which says a lot because I have been stressed out about every little thing else this semester.”²²

The benefits of better time management and flexibility were seen throughout most of the comments.

The “no” responses were different from each other in that they could be split into three factions. One faction wanted online classes to be completely synchronous. A student wrote, “It is

much easier to communicate when there is more in class time.”²³ This sentiment was shared by many students. There was a concern that class time and the learning experience is already strained from being on a virtual format and that cutting the time from seeing the professor and receiving direct instruction would further hinder their education. The same data findings can be seen in SUNY Cortland’s Student Survey where 73.0% of students agreed or strongly agreed that “lack of engagement with my professors” had been an obstacle to their learning during Fall 2020.²⁴ On the other side, there were students who answered “no” due to not wanting online classes at all. Simply put one student said, “all in person if possible.”²⁵ Additionally, there was a student who wanted online classes to be completely asynchronous with no formal class lecture time.²⁶

Those that responded with “maybe” also had a variety of reasonings. Students wrote “Whatever works best for [the] teacher.”²⁷, “Not sure, I’ve enjoyed having one asynchronous class to help me schedule my workload.”²⁸, and “Depends on the class.”²⁹ This neutral stance was shared by 22.3% of students.³⁰ One possible recommendation to be made from these responses is following the one synchronous and one asynchronous weekly schedule however offer review or open WebEx hours during class time on the asynchronous day.

Question 4

Question Four discussed where students felt safe on campus and included a comment section for students to explain their reasoning.³¹ One important aspect to note with this question is that the survey never asked where a student was living during the Fall 2020 semester. With that being said, the percentages of feeling safe in the dorms or on campus in general may not be

the best representation of the data; however, the comment section gives excellent insight into students and how safe they felt at SUNY Cortland.

Question Four yielded the most time-consuming data to analyze, due to some students answering that they weren't on campus but still including other campus areas in their response. To combat the possibility of those responses shaping inaccurate data, I went through every response that listed that the student was not on campus and subtracted it from the general collection of data, to get a better interpretation of the responses. After doing this I found that 72% of students felt safe in their in-person classes, 43.3% felt safe in their residence halls, and 56.1% of students felt safe in "other campus spaces" which included areas like the library and study spaces.³²

The most concerning data category of the responses was the lack of comfort in "other campus spaces." Unlike the residence halls and arguably the in-person classes (which would exclude students with all online classes), the area of other campus spaces is shared by all students. Buildings like the library and Corey Union are accessible for all students to use as study spaces as well as locations to take online classes. There were many students during Fall 2020 who used campus locations like those stated previously to access the internet so they could attend class or due to a lack of turnaround time between an in-person and online class where they couldn't make it to their residence within the limited amount of time. Due to this demand it is concerning that only 56.1% of students felt safe in these locations. One student also discussed not feeling safe in certain campus spaces due to students and those from the outside community not wearing masks.

"I don't live in the dorms but there was plenty of times when I was walking to my car that students would be coming out of their residence or bringing food back to their rooms with

masks off or around their chin not covering their face. There were also times that people from the community were on campus like middle schoolers riding through campus on their bikes without masks or Mom's walking with strollers without masks. There were also a couple times I saw dog walkers without masks walking on Neubig Rd. As a student I felt uncomfortable that there were people from the community on campus where students were.”³³

The survey also received many insightful comments on dorm life during the Fall 2020 semester. Some students talked about how they felt that due to the amount of common areas and shared spaces, and that it was difficult to know if everything had been properly sanitized and wiped down. One student wrote “I didn’t feel safe in the residence halls because there are so many communal spaces and I felt as if they weren't thoroughly cleaned.”³⁴ Another student wrote “Somewhat safe in classrooms and less than somewhat safe in the residence hall I am in. It's an issue where people don't care to properly sanitize, follow directions, wear their masks, and read signs.”³⁵ The most disturbing comment about dorm life was “There was a COVID case in my resident hall, but the person who had it didn’t report to the school. She spread it to another student. Other than that it was good.”³⁶ On the other hand there were also students who felt safe in all campus spaces. Students wrote “I am a healthy 19 year old, I feel safe everywhere I go”³⁷ and “I have felt very safe during in-person classes as we were very spread out from one another, masks being required and having cleaning supplies available to clean my space before and after using it.”³⁸

Question 5

Question Five was constructed by the CAP group as a general response question. Early in the process of brainstorming questions for the survey, the CAP group discovered that there were too many topics to cover while trying to keep the survey brief. Question Five provided a space where students could discuss a variety of topics and how their experiences effected their Fall 2020 semester at large. The responses covered topics like “Webex reliability and functionality; academic calendar, without complete days off; tutoring availability; support from faculty; or other issues.”³⁹

Regarding WebEx reliability and functionality, the general experience was one of frustration. Student 127 wrote,

“If I had a dollar for every time I got logged off of a webex meeting due to the internet, or missed out on a lecture due to issues with the webex page not allowing me to log on, or missed parts of the lecture due to constant buffering because of the horrible wifi on campus I could pay my semester bill without having to break it down into the monthly payment plan.”⁴⁰

Internet and WebEx reliability was not just an on-campus student problem but also posed issues for off-campus students. During a typical semester at SUNY Cortland, students’ technology use was far less than what it was in Fall 2020. Many students, especially after classes went online for the rest of the semester, needed technology (computers and WebEx) for practically everything related to class (unless the student had a physical textbook).

Even before the semester began there were concerns from students whose off-campus housing didn’t have sufficient Wi-Fi. In my case, internet access was a priority going into the semester. I lived with seven other girls in an off-campus house. Our Wi-Fi would not support

video calls and would shut down on us frequently. When we contacted our landlord, we were told that we had the best Wi-Fi available to us and that we would have to work around each other's schedules by not all taking class at the same time. When a repair man came to the house, he informed us that our landlord purchased an internet plan suitable for 2-3 people, not eight girls taking online courses. The entire semester including the time where we were shut down, I relied on the campus internet to attend classes and complete work.

Students also discussed the Fall 2020 calendar and how not having a break until Thanksgiving impacted their semester. One student wrote, "The academic calendar without days off has been challenging. With no real breaks, it feels like every day is the same and homework is never ending. I think that if we go the whole spring semester without a break, people will be more likely to burn out."⁴¹ After the proposed Spring 2021 schedule was released without breaks many students grew concerned. Mental health concerns and stress were extremely present during the Fall 2020 semester. The SUNY Cortland student survey cited that 86.0% of students claimed that "managing stress" had been an obstacle to their learning experience.⁴² Student 113 wrote, "With classes being online, there should be more breaks, like fall break, spring break, etc. It is not healthy for students to be doing so much work all the time without a chance to recharge and catch up. we need mental health days."⁴³ Another student wrote, "Students need breaks for mental health reasons. The people who party are going to party whether there are breaks or not. The rest of the people suffer for something that is not being avoided anyway."⁴⁴

Question 6

Similar to Question Five, Question Six was created as another space for students to write about their concerns and experiences in other areas of student life. These areas included “campus communications (clarity, timeliness, transparency, etc.); inclusion of student voices/concerns in decision-making; technology access; testing and tracing for COVID-19; dining facilities; dorm life; supports (such as mental health counseling, tutoring, wellness resources); and on-campus employment.”⁴⁵

One area that received a lot of commentary was about administration. CAP group member Francesca Strojan contributed analysis for Question Six and wrote that there were “25 comments specifically on the college’s lack of transparency and communication.”⁴⁶ One student wrote, “I feel administration is not transparent, they keep us in the dark frequently”⁴⁷ and “the transparency is lacking, we as a school body found out on the news before through the school that we were extending another 2 weeks. This is completely unfair. I also feel as if they are ‘keeping the campus open’ just so they don’t have to give back money to their students.”⁴⁸ Several students also commented on the lack of feeling recognized by administration and that they felt their voices were being ignored and not listened to. Although this group is not the majority of students, their concern over transparency and communication is shared by many. According to the SUNY Cortland Student Survey, 41.7% of students disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that “communication from the campus regarding COVID” was effective.⁴⁹ Students also called for more inclusion during the decision-making process. One student wrote,

“I don’t feel like student’s voices are being heard. I don’t believe that we are being heard as stakeholders in our own education which isn’t right. Even the student forum that was held felt unproductive. The campus survey that was sent out hours before felt like a last-

ditch effort to make it seem like they wanted our input. During the forum students brought up very relevant issues and were given little answers or a push-off statement that it wasn't up to them it was the SUNY system (which is false considering the SUNY system left many things up to individual campuses).”⁵⁰

Before the Fall 2020 semester began, students were concerned over a multitude of issues that they thought should have been resolved before students stepped foot on campus. One of these issues was what the COVID testing protocol was going to be. Many students were distressed at the fact that students did not need to be tested before arriving on campus. It was also troubling that there was no set testing protocol during the semester until an email was sent by Frederick Pierce on September 11th stating that pool testing would begin September 16th.⁵¹ Even with the addition of pool testing students were still concerned since the weekly goal for testing was only 500 students.⁵² That only represented 16.7% of the student population expected to live on campus.⁵³

Another area that students commented on was the dining halls and food options. Dining halls are where students have the opportunity to mingle and get to know one another. Eating with others is a large part of social life on campus so coming into the Fall 2020 semester there was a major concern over how the college would follow COVID guidelines while still supporting student's social health. SUNY Cortland mandated rules like only one student per table at the dining halls and the option of carry-out containers so students could eat their food outside or in their dorm rooms. Not being able to sit with others even at the social distancing length was frustrating and one student wrote “Should've been able to sit with a few people especially our roommates.”⁵⁴

However, seating wasn't the only issue that students had with the dining halls. Many students discussed the lack of appetizing meals and the smaller portion sizes. Student 115 wrote, "the dining halls were the most difficult experience in my part, I often try to get as much as I can but struggle to get back into my hall with both food and drink in hand. Neubig was convenient enough to provide paper bags yet Bistro didn't..."⁵⁵ Another student wrote, "Not having good food to eat, especially during this time makes what is already a difficult time that much harder."⁵⁶ Portion size is a difficult topic to handle since everyone has their own dietary needs and restrictions, however, there was not much leeway when it came to how much food a student was allowed to ask for. During a typical semester, students are allowed to ask for a double serving of a certain dish with the knowledge that if they want more, they are allowed to get seconds or even thirds if they want. During the Fall 2020 semester, if a student was getting their food and not sitting in the dining halls (which was all students with a meal plan after the campus was put on pause and then 100% online for the duration of the semester) students could only get a set amount of food unless they wanted to stand in line again (which according to some students could take over an hour long wait). Many students complained that they weren't allowed to ask for an additional portion of food. This frustrated many students since one set portion size isn't nutritionally appropriate for every student.

Dorm life was another point of contention for many students. Like all other aspects of Cortland life, dorming was impacted by COVID-19 and the new rules and guidelines put in place to protect students. One of the guidelines put in place to protect students was to only allow residents into their own building. Students were not allowed to go inside other buildings for any reason. One student said, "I honestly found that it has been very hard to make friends. Dorm life is not normal and without being able to go into other dorms, your options are limited."⁵⁷

However not all students followed this rule as seen in the next student's comment, "The staff in the residence halls do not take it seriously and there are a lot of people for different residence halls going into ones they don't belong in, and the RA's don't do anything about it."⁵⁸ Student 149 also offered an impactful statement about the residence halls.

"One of the major issues that I've seen, was the Administration's decision to restrict students from going to other dorms. Like the gym situation, this was also ineffective because many students from various dorms found ways to see each other in off campus settings. The point is, students will find ways around these rules so that they can hang out with their friends in other buildings; one solution for this that I have come up with, is a visitor sign-in in the dorm lobbies. A student could visit dorms as long as they sign in with their C#, name, dorm hall and room number, and phone number. This would make it easier to contact trace someone who was either exposed to the virus or may have the virus itself."⁵⁹

One point that student 149 addressed that showed up frequently was how if students weren't allowed to see each other in their dorms, that many found a way of meeting up in other locations. During the first week of classes especially there were mass groups of students walking around campus or to downtown Cortland. In these groups there were quite a few students that were either wearing their mask improperly or not at all which defeated the purpose of the social distancing rules SUNY Cortland put into place. Another troubling occurrence was during the first week of September when a picture from an off-campus party began to spread around campus and was reported to administration. This photo showed students extremely close together without masks on. Frederick Pierce, the Director of Communications for SUNY Cortland did release an email on September 4th acknowledging that they had received student reports and were

actively investigating it.⁶⁰ Although this was seen positively by many students that the school was investigating parties, there was still a lack of clarity in the results of the college's findings.

Mental health was another large concern of students during the Fall 2020 semester. Mental health resources are available on campus, however many students wrote how there wasn't enough availability. One student simply put, "NOT NEARLY ENOUGH MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELORS EVER AVAILABLE."⁶¹ Counselors were in high demand during the Fall 2020 semester; however, the lack of counselors has been a problem even before the COVID-19 era. Student 95 wrote, "Pre-Covid I went to the Counseling Services to make an appt (this was in mid-February so only 3-4 weeks in) and the earliest appt I could get was three weeks later! That is not okay and there needs to be more Counselors hired."⁶² As stated before, the SUNY Cortland student survey cited that 86.0% of students claimed that "managing stress" had been an obstacle to their learning experience.⁶³ Not only is this statistic startling but it also brings up the concern over if there truly are enough resources on campus for students? Even if there were enough resources for everyone, Student 60 brings up an excellent point that "mental health counseling is hard to do in [my] room, when roommates are around."⁶⁴ This is very troubling when one considers how students may forgo talking with a counselor due to embarrassment of being around roommates and not feeling as though they can go to a space and express their emotions and inner thoughts. Students have experienced more burnout than ever during the Fall 2020 semester. Student 57 provided this emotional and insightful comment,

*"SUNY Cortland must do a better job. Students' mental health can no longer take it. Many of us are very stressed out and over-worked mentally and physically with the lack of breaks and the many assignments given from professors. We aren't doing well, we all want to drop out, we need your help."*⁶⁵

Question 7

Question Seven was constructed to discuss how students felt about administration during the Fall 2020 semester, due to student concerns within the CAP group and to help formulate recommendations to administration. CAP group member Brian articulated it best that, “Our goal was not to bash the school as some expected but was more about creating a comprehensive list of both critiques of the current systems and [to] allow for what worked well to be shown.”⁶⁶ The question read “How do you think the administration has been doing with communication and decision-making this semester? What are they doing well? What could they do better?”⁶⁷

“46 out of those 84 responses (just over half of the number of total responses from students) addressed poor communication and decision-making from the SUNY Cortland Administration during the Fall 2020 semester.”⁶⁸ Poor communication and decision-making was cited by many students and shows how students have high expectations of the college to communicate effectively and with timeliness. Students have called for an increase in communication like Student 95.

“Administration needs to communicate with students more. They did a good job in the summer and then now with the twice a week update but for most of the semester they should have done more. As students we need updates on what's going on and the lack of communication has negatively impacted us. I have emailed administration about issues and they would sometimes only respond to part of my questions and ignore the rest. I wish there was more transparency and timeliness to their communications.”⁶⁹

Although there were some positive comments like “The administration's communication is sufficient,”⁷⁰ the vast majority did not feel that administration communicated with the students as much as they should have. There were also students who felt that the college did try to keep students up to date and were timely, however, their emails lacked in clarity as stated by Student 26, “I feel like there was a lot of ambiguity during this semester. The emails we would receive were not direct and when we would ask our RAs, they were just as confused as us. I hope going forward the administration could be more direct if there's good news or bad.”⁷¹

Recommendations

Many recommendations were put forward by students regarding how to best improve student experiences during the Spring 2021 semester. Throughout the collection of data in the CAP survey as well as being a student myself, there were many informed suggestions and ideas that students had but felt like they had no where to go with them. They felt as though there was no platform known to them where they could express their ideas directly to administration and to the decision-makers of the Spring 2021 semester. Although these recommendations come from places of good intentions and the best will, I know that there is no “one-size-fits-all” solution to the Spring 2021 semester as well as the semesters in the future. SUNY Cortland is a diverse campus with diverse needs for its students so the solutions to COVID-era problems will have to be creative and flexible.

Recommendation 1

One recommendation for the Spring 2021 semester is to include study days. The first spring semester calendar did not include a spring break which brought many students to advocate for rest days. Due to an SGA resolution and Faculty Senate support, two break days were approved and are set for Tuesday, March 9th, and Wednesday April 14th. Although two days is great it is only a start. It is clear that the SUNY Chancellor will not approve of break days on Mondays and Fridays, however that leaves room for an additional break day on a Thursday. I propose that February 25th be made into a break day. This would compliment the other break days in that each month would include one rest day for students. This is the only location that truly makes sense for a break day given that any date in May would be too close to finals and March and April already have their own break days.

During a typical semester there are five days off which leaves two additional days unaccounted for. I suggest that these two days be given to the professors to use at their discretion. If it is a class that typically meets three days out of the week then the professor allots two days off. If the class typically meets for two days or less during a week then they may give one break day of their choosing. Giving professors the power to choose break days was included in the original Spring 2021 plan when there were no uniform break days so it would be an attainable inclusion.

Recommendation 2

To meet students needs of being heard and having a platform to send their concerns to, SUNY Cortland should implement more student surveys. Using the infrastructure already available through the different academic departments, the college can collect data from students

regarding how their semester is going/went, to look for what as a college they are doing well at and what they can improve upon. The CAP Survey as well as the SUNY Cortland Student Survey could be used halfway through a semester as well as at the end of the semester to collect student data. The infrastructure and materials are available so it would be a reasonable and effective way that the college can be more inclusive to students.

Recommendation 3

Student inclusivity and stakeholderhood were major concerns during the Fall 2020 semester. One way to improve moving forward into the Spring 2021 semester is to create a committee of students, faculty, staff, and administrators. This would give students a platform to speak directly with the rest of the campus community regarding pertinent student issues. If surveys the surveys from Recommendation 2 are implemented, this new committee would be able to utilize the given data to make informed decisions about upcoming semesters or new regulations needing to be implemented on campus.

Recommendation 4

COVID-19 has created many obstacles to communication across campus. One way that this was combatted was through online forums. Although not all the students' concerns were met, the student forums held over WebEx were effective in their goal to give students a platform to air their grievances and speak directly to administration. These forums also were attended by professors which gave diversity and perspective to the attendees. The Spring 2021 semester should include these forums once a month. Consistency is key and holding these forums shows

that administration cares about their student/faculty/staff communities. Looking farther into the future, when members of the SUNY Cortland community are able to meet in-person again these forums should continue (the Function Room would be an excellent location).

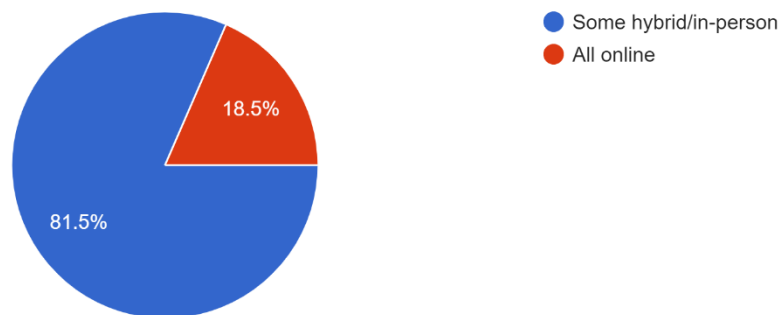
Appendix

Note: Appendices A-G are from the CAP Student Survey. Appendices H-L are from the SUNY Cortland Fall 2020 Student Survey. Appendices M-N are from the English Department Student Survey.

Appendix A: *Generated from data from the CAP Student Survey*

1. Does your fall schedule include some in-person/hybrid classes or were all your classes online from the start?

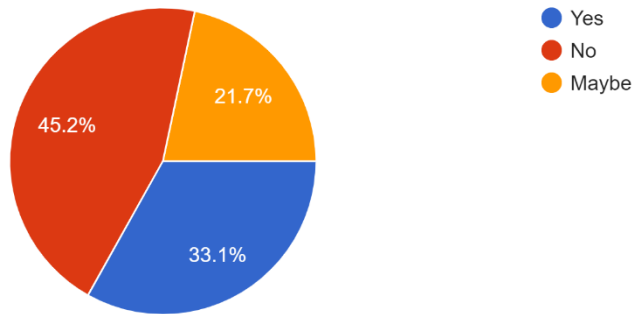
157 responses



Appendix B: *Generated from data from the CAP Student Survey*

2. Spring Semester: Would you prefer an all online schedule?

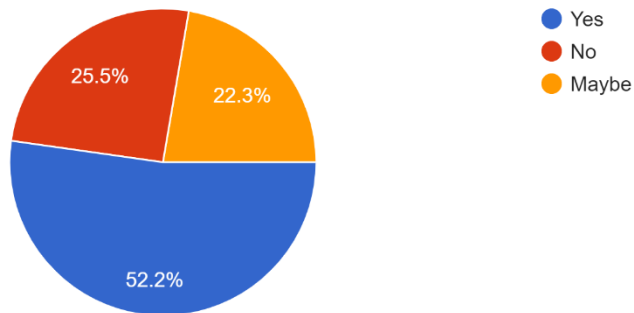
157 responses



Appendix C: *Generated from data from the CAP Student Survey*

3. For online classes scheduled for twice a week, would you prefer to meet with the class synchronously once a week, with asynchronous work for the other day?

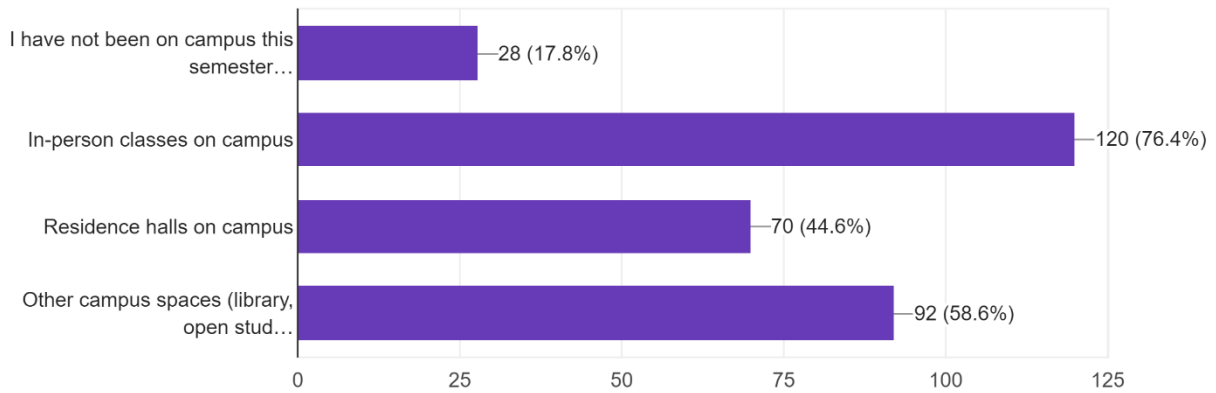
157 responses



Appendix D: *Generated from data from the CAP Student Survey*

4. Do you feel/have you felt safe in the following environments? Note all that apply.

157 responses



Appendix E: *Question in the CAP Student Survey*

5. Academics generally: Please comment on experiences or concerns, such as: Webex reliability and functionality; academic calendar, without complete days off; tutoring availability; support from faculty; or other issues

Appendix F: *Question in the CAP Student Survey*

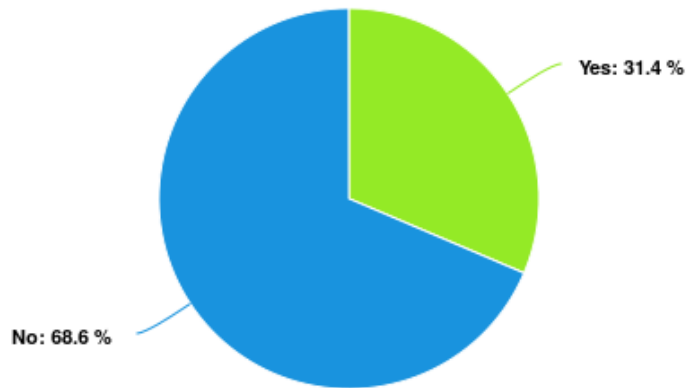
6. Student life/school administration. Please comment on experiences or concerns in any of these areas: campus communications (clarity, timeliness, transparency, etc.); inclusion of student voices/concerns in decision-making; technology access; testing and tracing for COVID-19; dining facilities; dorm life; supports (such as mental health counseling, tutoring, wellness resources); on-campus employment

Appendix G: *Question in the CAP Student Survey*

7. How do you think the administration has been doing with communication and decision-making this semester? What are they doing well? What could they do better?

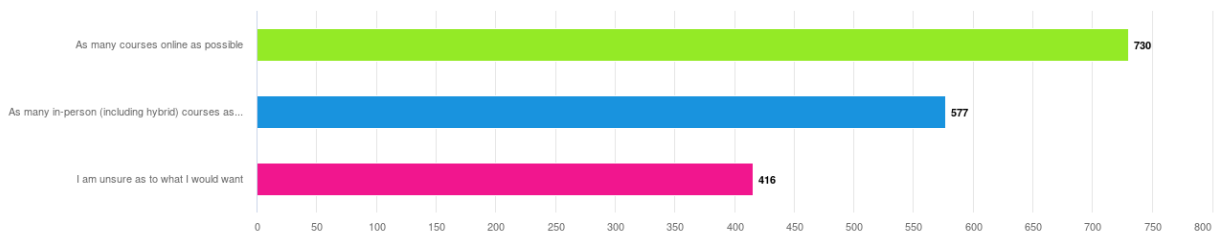
Appendix H: *From the SUNY Cortland Fall 2020 Student Survey*

I have a fully online schedule



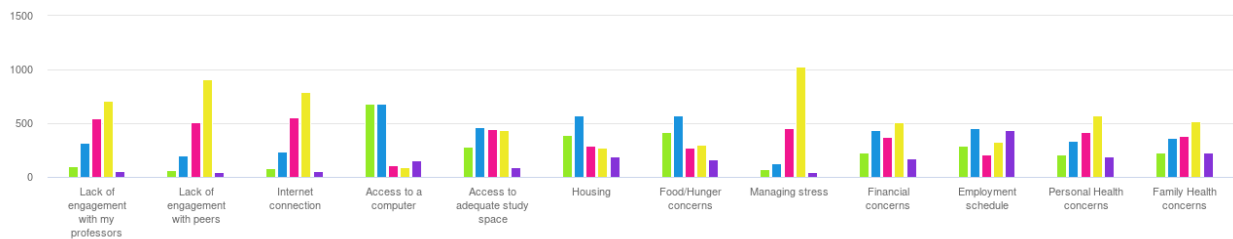
Appendix I: *From the SUNY Cortland Fall 2020 Student Survey*

Assuming that COVID social distancing will continue into spring 2021 for classes, what would be your preference for your spring schedule



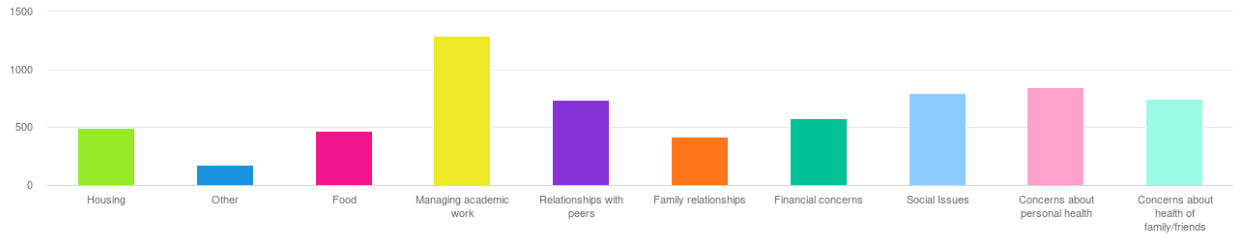
Appendix J: *From the SUNY Cortland Fall 2020 Student Survey*

The following have been an obstacle to my learning this semester



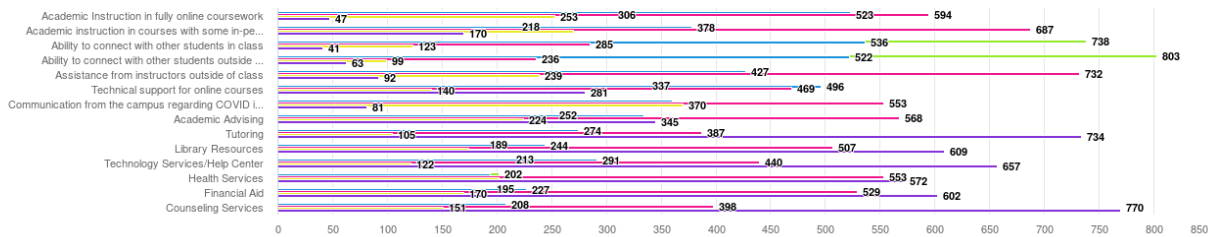
Appendix K: *From the SUNY Cortland Fall 2020 Student Survey*

What is contributing to that stress?



Appendix L: *From the SUNY Cortland Fall 2020 Student Survey*

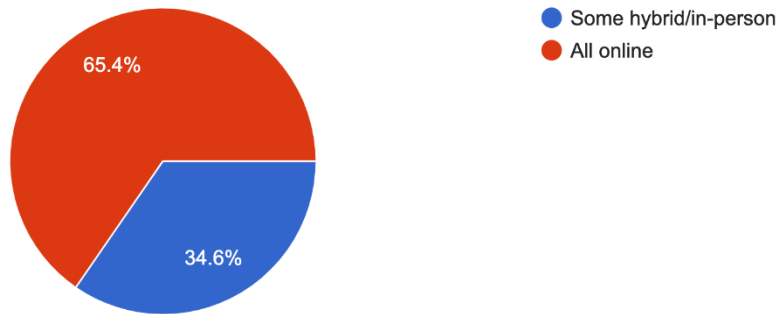
From my perspective, the following have been effective this semester



Appendix M: *Generated from data from the English Department Student Survey*

Are you taking some in-person/hybrid classes or are you all online?

78 responses



Appendix N: *Generated from data from the English Department Student Survey*

If you have online classes, do you prefer to meet with the class synchronously every week (e.g. T/Th meet in WebEx with the rest of the class at the scheduled time)

77 responses



Appendix O

SUNY Cortland addresses recent spike in COVID-19

Frederic Pierce <Frederic.Pierce@cortland.edu>

Fri 9/11/2020 8:15 PM

To: Immediate Notices Faculty Staff <ImmediateNoticesFacultyStaff@cortland.edu>; Immediate Notices Students <ImmediateNoticesStudents@cortland.edu>

Cc: Rosales, Leo <Leo.Rosales@suny.edu>; lperfetti@cortland-co.org <lperfetti@cortland-co.org>

The following message is being sent on behalf of President Erik J. Bitterbaum:

To the SUNY Cortland community,

Over the last several days, the number of SUNY Cortland students testing positive for COVID-19 has spiked from six to 34 cases. Dozens of students are in precautionary quarantine, both on campus and off.

The accelerating trend forced us to pause athletic practices, limit Greek activities, and stress, once again, how critically important it is to follow university guidelines on gatherings, face coverings and physical distancing.

Next week, we hope to add more tools to our effort against the pandemic.

If SUNY approves our plan, SUNY Cortland will begin two different surveillance testing programs that will allow us to better assess the COVID-19 threat to our community and target our efforts to stop the virus' spread.

Through a partnership with SUNY Upstate Medical University, we plan to begin pool testing groups of asymptomatic students and employees on Wednesday, Sept. 16. Our goal is to test 500 students every week.

The pool testing will be mandatory for students. Faculty and staff are strongly encouraged to volunteer. Selected students will receive a scheduled time to go to Park Center Alumni Ice Arena, where a saliva sample will be taken. Employees interested in pool testing should complete a brief [survey](#) indicating their interest.

In addition to the pool testing, next week we will also begin weekly wastewater testing for COVID-19. Samples from seven different locations will enable the university to narrow further testing to particular buildings or areas of campus.

Additional information about our testing is available online in a [more detailed version of this message](#).

The changing situation makes it more important than ever for all members of our community to take this threat seriously. For information on safe practices during the pandemic, please review the SUNY Cortland's [Fall 2020 Guide](#).

If you see people acting unsafely, please let us know. The most effective and efficient way is to complete an online [SUNY Cortland incident report](#), providing as many details as you can. I urge you all to keep track of the quickly changing situation by frequently checking SUNY Cortland's [COVID-19 dashboard](#), which is updated daily.

I believe we are currently at a crossroads. The direction the virus takes at SUNY Cortland over the next couple of weeks may well determine the health of our community, the fate of the fall semester and possibly the lives of people we hold dear.

Please help us move things in the right direction.

All the best,

Erik J. Bitterbaum

President Bitterbaum: University seeks information about off-campus gatherings

Frederic Pierce <Frederic.Pierce@cortland.edu>

Fri 9/4/2020 6:17 PM

To: **Immediate Notices Students** <ImmediateNoticesStudents@cortland.edu>; **Immediate Notices Faculty Staff** <ImmediateNoticesFacultyStaff@cortland.edu>

The following update about SUNY Cortland's campus restart is being sent on behalf of President Erik J. Bitterbaum:

To our students, faculty and staff,

Before this strange semester began, I asked for your help. And most of you, with very few exceptions, have risen to the challenge. As the first week of the fall 2020 semester comes to an end, I am proud to report that physical distancing and face coverings have been the norm on campus. The majority of you have adapted to new rules and new ways of doing things.

For this, I thank you. Unfortunately, there is more to do.

Although the vast majority of our community understands the serious threat we are facing from COVID-19 and are willing to make the adjustments needed to keep people safe, a small number of students apparently still do not grasp it, or simply do not care. We have received reports of off-campus house parties, of unreasonable gatherings of tightly grouped students without masks, acting as if these are normal times. All of these reports are being actively investigated.

Make no mistake, "normal" college behavior now has the ability to close down our campus and make many people ill. A single party like the one I just described is thought to have sparked the outbreak that shut SUNY Oneonta down and sent their students home this week, as more than 400 students tested positive for the virus.

Oneonta has roughly the same number of students as SUNY Cortland. As of today, we have had only four positive cases, but that success can be undone quickly by thoughtless or selfish actions.

We have already placed four students on interim suspension for repeated violations of COVID-19 rules, and are more than willing to take similar action against any students involved in potentially dangerous activity. Please understand, students who choose not to follow these safety measures during normal times are considered rule-breakers. Now, in the midst of a global pandemic, those same violators have become serious threats to the health of our community and the success of the fall semester.

So, I am asking for your help. We cannot take action against organizers or participants in unsafe gatherings unless we can identify them and have enough detailed information to prove our case. If you have information about gatherings that violate COVID-19-related guidelines, please share it by completing a [SUNY Cortland incident report](#). We will protect your confidentiality. The more specific information we have about allegations, the more likely it is we will be able act to protect the campus community. Those violating the rules are jeopardizing their health, the health of others and their education at SUNY Cortland.

I mentioned that we have had four students test positive for COVID-19 since the start of the semester. This number is going to change. To keep students, families, faculty, staff and Cortland community members up to dated on the situation, we have created a [COVID-19 Dashboard](#) accessible from our Restart Website. The dashboard will be updated regularly, and will give the number of SUNY Cortland community members who are currently positive, the total number since the start of the semester and the number of people in quarantine and isolation. As a remainder, quarantine is a precautionary measure used for people at high risk for the virus and isolation is for people who tested positive.

In addition to the testing of at-risk individuals currently done by Student Health Services, we hope to soon announce our participation in a pool surveillance testing program with SUNY Upstate Medical Center. This will enhance our ability to quickly spot potential outbreaks and follow up with targeted testing. It will not, however, lessen the importance of daily online screen surveys. These should continue to be done daily by all students, whether they are on campus or off campus.

I'd like to conclude by thanking all of you once again. Our only path to a healthy and successful fall semester is to continue the spirit of cooperation and caring that marked this past week.

All the best,

Erik J. Bitterbaum

¹ Hatcliffe, James, Fall 2020

² Appendix A

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Appendix H, Appendix M

⁶ Appendix B

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Appendix I

⁹ Student Response 115

¹⁰ Hatcliffe, James, Fall 2020.

¹¹ Appendix J

¹² Appendix K

¹³ Appendix B

¹⁴ Appendix I

¹⁵ Student Response 48

¹⁶ Student Response 26

¹⁷ Appendix L

¹⁸ Student Response 6

¹⁹ Appendix C

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Appendix N

²² Student Response 127

²³ Student Response 41

²⁴ Appendix J

²⁵ Student Response 21

²⁶ Student Response 40

²⁷ Student Response 3

²⁸ Student Response 15

²⁹ Student Response 49

³⁰ Appendix C

³¹ Appendix D

³² Ibid.

³³ Student Response 95

³⁴ Student Response 126

³⁵ Student Response 100

³⁶ Student Response 46

³⁷ Student Response 8

³⁸ Student Response 57

³⁹ Appendix E

⁴⁰ Student Response 127

⁴¹ Student Response 90

⁴² Appendix J

⁴³ Student Response 113

⁴⁴ Student Response 98

⁴⁵ Appendix F

⁴⁶ Strojan, Francesca, Fall 2020.

⁴⁷ Student Response 49

⁴⁸ Student Response 80

⁴⁹ Appendix L

⁵⁰ Student Response 95

⁵¹ Appendix O

⁵² Appendix O

⁵³ Smith, Kevin L. "SUNY Cortland Reports Stable Enrollment." Cortland Standard, August 15, 2020. <https://cortlandstandard.net/2020/08/15/suny-cortland-reports-stable-enrollment/>.

- ⁵⁴ Student Response 117
- ⁵⁵ Student Response 115
- ⁵⁶ Student Response 97
- ⁵⁷ Student Response 90
- ⁵⁸ Student Response 126
- ⁵⁹ Student Response 149
- ⁶⁰ Appendix P
- ⁶¹ Student Response 54
- ⁶² Student Response 95
- ⁶³ Appendix J
- ⁶⁴ Student Response 60
- ⁶⁵ Student Response 57
- ⁶⁶ Dillon, Brian, Fall 2020.
- ⁶⁷ Appendix G
- ⁶⁸ Dillon, Brian
- ⁶⁹ Student Response 95
- ⁷⁰ Student Response 116
- ⁷¹ Student Response 26