

Brandeis Transition to Emergency Remote Learning Survey Report

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Overview

The transition to Emergency Remote Learning was a challenging experience for faculty, staff and students. As we monitor the public health concerns of COVID-19, it is clear that we all must be able to offer and/or pivot to online learning experiences in Fall 2020. To better understand the teaching and learning experiences of students, faculty and Teaching Assistants, an electronic survey was sent on May 28 and closed on May 31. For students, 1,219 responded out of a total student population of 5,256 for a response rate of 23.2%. Of 505 faculty who were sent the survey, and 233 responded for a response rate of 46.1%. For Teaching Assistants, 111 of 617 responded for a response rate of 18%.

At Brandeis, we often refer to ourselves as a community. One of the most striking results of the survey is how the community came together in crisis. Students were asked in their survey to name a staff or faculty member who did an outstanding job supporting them. In total, 605 faculty and staff members were named. Faculty spoke about the support that they received from colleagues and their departments. Acts of kindness were held up over and over again across all of the survey results. While the survey respondents were literally across the globe as they answered these questions, it was clear that as disjointed and uncertain this last spring semester was, we remain One Brandeis.

Undergraduate and Graduate Students

The student survey (like the faculty and staff survey) began with a number of 5-point Likert scale questions from Not at All Concerned to Extremely Concerned followed by several open-ended questions. In the analysis of the quantitative data, the information is presented in in two categories: 1) questions that are concerns for all students and 2) questions that may disproportionately affect our most vulnerable populations (i.e. first-generation students, low-income students, students of color, and international students with limited financial resources.) Answers are organized from highest to lowest for answers that indicated “Extremely Concerned.”

Because of the need for the quick analysis of data, the student results are not divided by school or by level (undergraduate and graduate students). Further analysis by population will need to be done in the future.

	Not at All Concerned	Slightly Concerned	Somewhat Concerned	Quite a Bit Concerned	Extremely Concerned
Responses that Reflect the Experiences of All Students					
My motivation (1212)	6%	9%	13%	27%	45%
My ability to learn as much through a remote environment (compared to in-person instruction) (1210)	5%	8%	17%	30%	40%
My ability to focus on coursework (1213)	5%	9%	19%	32%	35%
How this situation would impact my grades (1211)	10%	14%	18%	25%	33%
Staying connected to resources (academic advising, student affairs, library services, etc.) (1212)	16%	18%	23%	22%	21%
Staying connected with friends from Brandeis (1208)	13%	17%	25%	25%	20%
Faculty expectations (1212)	10%	20%	31%	24%	16%
Responses that Disproportionately Indicate the Challenges that our Most Vulnerable Students are Facing					
Balancing my responsibilities as a student with other responsibilities (1211)	12%	16%	21%	21%	29%
My family's health (1213)	18%	17%	21%	20%	24%
Financial aid (1210)	39%	16%	13%	14%	17%
My health (1212)	25%	24%	21%	16%	14%
Access to a stable internet connection (1208)	36%	29%	15%	13%	7%
Having a roof over my head (1211)	77%	8%	5%	5%	5%
Computer/laptop access (1212)	72%	14%	7%	5%	3%
Access to food (1211)	73%	12%	6%	5%	3%

72% of respondents indicated that they were either quite a bit concerned or extremely concerned with their own level of motivation for an online learning environment. 70% of respondents were either quite a bit concerned or extremely concerned with their ability to learn as much in an online learning environment compared to an in-person learning environment. 67% reported these same level of concerns with regards to their ability to focus on coursework. While students were worried about their grades, their ability to stay connected to on campus resources, and faculty expectations, these questions were areas of fewest concerns.

We know that COVID-19 disproportionately affects communities of color, low-income communities, and communities with increased residential density. While we did not divide the data into who would be considered a vulnerable population, we do believe that some questions demonstrate what the very real challenges faced by both undergraduate and graduate students who are members of these

communities. For all respondents, 50% of all respondents indicated that they were either quite a bit concerned or extremely concerned with balancing their responsibilities as a student with other responsibilities. 44% of all respondents indicated that they were either quite a bit concerned or extremely concerned with their family's health. (The advising notes from TYP, Posse, and SSSP indicate that many students in these cohorts experienced one or more deaths of family members from COVID-19).

Our graduate students also struggled with the transition to online learning, not only in their classroom experiences but in trying to maintain stability in their personal lives and academic trajectories. As campus closed, many graduate students lost their jobs, and they struggled to pay rent and purchase groceries, even with the assistance of the emergency fund. Students who were conducting research for their Masters's papers or doctoral dissertations described how their research was negatively affected. PhD students who were on stipends said that they lost valuable time that they did not know if they would be able to make up, and they asked if their stipends could be extended by a year.

We assume that having a stable internet connection is a greater concern for our vulnerable populations and our international populations. 20% of student respondents indicated that they were either quite a bit concerned or extremely concerned with having a stable internet connection. 10% of respondents indicated these same levels of concern for having a roof over their head, while 8% indicated this level of concern for having enough food to eat. At times, percentages make us blind to the lived experiences of our students. For our student respondents, 121 were afraid of or experienced homelessness, and 97 were afraid of or experienced food insecurity. As an institution that values social justice, we must be aware of not simply the percentages but how many students were struggling with these issues while trying to complete their academic coursework.

What have you appreciated most about Brandeis' response to COVID-19?

Students were asked, "What have you appreciated most about Brandeis' response to COVID-19?" Students were overwhelmingly positive with relatively few negative comments. The areas that were most highlighted included:

1. The Pass/Fail Policy. Many students expressed gratitude at being given flexibility in their grading options. Others recognized that faculty changed their expectations given the pivot to Emergency Remote Learning. One student said: "*Brandeis has taken the students' desires and needs in mind and has implemented useful policies to ease the transition into online learning. I really appreciate that, for example the pass and fail option wasn't mandatory and universal. This really gave students a chance to take command in a time of uncertainty.*" Another student commented, "*I most appreciated when the pass fail option was expanded to include courses for your major or minor or university requirements. I didn't end up actually needing to cover my grades in the end, but when that was announced I felt so relieved. I've worked very hard for 7 semesters to earn my current*

gpa, and I was worried about losing my graduation status (magna cum laude) because some of my classes became so much harder to be successful and learn in over Zoom.

2. Faculty Flexibility. Many students stated that their faculty were not only thinking of them as students but as individuals in a particular moment of time. Faculty flexibility made students feel valued, part of a community, and helped to lower their academic stress. One student wrote that they appreciated, *“The understanding, support, patience and flexibility of the faculty and staff in my department. The pandemic has had a detrimental effect on my previously existing mental health issues, which caused some deadlines to be missed and some graduation plans to change but everyone was super helpful and non-judgmental, which was invaluable in these difficult times.”* Another student noted, *“My teachers have been extremely accommodating and understanding of everything that has been happening, and [they] have adjusted schedule and requirements of courses to best fit student needs while still teaching us.”*
3. Emergency Funds and/or Paying Work Study Students. Students recognized that the University was investing them, so they could be successful. Even students who did not receive funds stated that Brandeis’ willingness to engage in this type of support was important to demonstrating who we are as an institution. One student shared: *“I am thankful for the emergency funding who gave me a laptop to work with. I am very grateful, I pray one day I will be able to return the favor.”* Another student said, *“I also appreciate the fact that through the emergency fund, students like me were able to pay for their house rent for a few months following our on-campus job being affected.”*
4. Allowing Students to Stay On-Campus. Both international and students from difficult family situations were grateful to the university that it had allowed them to stay in residence. Many comments noted the practices of other institutions which required all students to move out within a two-day period or the complete restriction of students from living on campus. One student wrote, *“I am really appreciative of how Brandeis responded to the students who weren’t able to return to their homes whether it was in another country, but to students who have difficult home situations that would not benefit their academic performance.”* Another said, *“I truly appreciate that Brandeis allowed some of us who don’t have anywhere to go at that moment to stay on campus. Otherwise, I would be straight up homeless.”*
5. Communication and Transparency. Students praised the university for being transparent and for communicating well. While some students would have preferred shorter, more direct communications, the overall sentiment was that Brandeis was being transparent as it made decisions. One student said: Another student wrote: *“I appreciate the constant reminder that the student body are in this together, and how our resilience is encouraging courage and a unique community. That felt good to*

hear.” Another student shared: *“I appreciated the constant email updates from [the] Provost and President (although overwhelming at times)—in the beginning, real-time updates were great.”*

What part of Brandeis’ response to COVID-19 has caused you the most stress or concern?

Students were asked, “What part of Brandeis’ response to COVID-19 had caused you the most stress?” In a number of instances, areas that had garnered praise such as communication and transparency were also areas for criticism (i.e.- why did the move out deadline change, why were there so many emails, why didn’t you give students more time to move out, why did you not adopt a universal pass option). Again, several themes emerged.

- 1) Students are Anxious about Fall 2020. Many, many students commented on a feeling of uncertainty about not knowing about the fall and the challenges of online learning. One student wrote, *“While this is not your fault and I understand that you need to take time making decisions, the wait/uncertainty about next semester [Fall 2020] is very uncertain.”* Another student said, *“Uncertainty. I am constantly stressed about the idea that my senior year (2020-2021) could be ruined. If Brandeis is unable to open in August, please consider opening later. I am also super stressed about what I will do if classes continue online in the Fall. I do not want to pay such an exorbitant amount of money for online classes because the quality of learning is not the same, and I honestly would take the semester off if it is online.”*
- 2) Concerns about Tuition and Financial Aid for 2020. A number of students raised concerns about tuition and financial aid for Spring 2020 and Fall 2020. One student shared that they were disappointed at *“having to pay the same amount for courses which are inevitably lower quality because they are not in person.”* Another student wrote, *“Brandeis is already an extremely expensive school for my family, and if classes are online next semester, I don’t believe that it is worth the cost. I was already a midyear student, and I feel that the cost of this education was not reflected in my first semester at Brandeis. I also live in California, and I find that unless I am on campus, it is extremely difficult to get helpful information. Brandeis resources are extremely inaccessible remotely.”*
- 3) Differences in Faculty Expectations. Students noted changing expectations, the difficulties of on-line testing, more limited access to office hours, and that some classes “seemed to disappear” once they were in an online format. One student shared, *“Some professors actually increased the workload instead of lessening it.”* Another student said their major cause of concern was *“the inconsistency among classes. While some professors exhibited a great understanding of the situation and adjusted the course load accordingly, some professors seemed to care less and that made some of the classes really challenging toward the end.”*

- 4) Difficulties Learning in an Online Environment. Many students found online instruction difficult. First-generation students described not having a place to work at home and/or being expected to take on family responsibilities. Graduate students cited a lack of childcare as impacting their ability to work on their dissertation. One student wrote, *“I just could not concentrate on my class work. All my motivation gone. I think that has to do more with me not Brandeis.”* Another student said, *“My motivation to push myself in my academics. The lack of immersion in a study environment has definitely affected my performance. Also, it’s difficult to facilitate a collaborative environment online.”* A third student shared, *“Despite the fact that I think the transition to remote classes was as smooth as it could be, taking class online is definitely challenging. I think making this transition was the right thing to do, but it was stressful organizing my time at home and focusing on studying effectively.”* A fourth student said, *“It was challenging when professors didn’t make courses asynchronous I have other responsibilities when I am not on campus and sometimes it is hard to balance those with online classes that I need to be at a specific time, especially since there is a time difference.”*
- 5) Challenges for Teaching in Specific Academic Disciplines. Theater Arts, Music, Studio Arts, and lab-based science courses were all a challenge for students. One student said, *“I’m a theater arts major. The faculty have tried valiantly, but it is nearly impossible to do our work remotely (both course work and theses).”* Another student shared, *“I was concerned about losing the opportunity to work in my lab. The research I was performing in my neuroscience lab was important to me for determining a future career, developing my resume, and simply for exploring something I enjoyed. Losing this opportunity was my biggest concern.”*

Is there a faculty member who did an exemplary job in moving an in-person course to an Emergency Online Instruction? What did they do to make the transition so successful?

Students were asked to list faculty if “there was a faculty member who did an exemplary job moving an in-person course to an Emergency Online Instruction?” and “What did they do to make the transition so successful?” Many students said that they were grateful that their faculty inquired about their well-being, provided flexibility on deadlines, and understood how difficult the transition was for students. The below is a curated list of student feedback. When a student only said the name of a faculty member or provided a short clip for an answer “very reasonable with expectations” or “moving courses was seamless,” the information is not included below. Therefore, it is important to know that many more faculty than the ones named in these examples were described as exemplary. These examples are limited to highlighting effective teaching techniques and fall into several highlighted themes.

- 1) Caring about and Supporting Students. A very large number of students remarked on how particular faculty cared about student personal well-being and how students themselves were faring in response to crisis. *“WGS professor Keridwen Luis did an amazing job! She checked in with us daily about our mental health and how we were doing during this traumatic time. She*

often made attempts to check in with individual students and give support and resources to those who needed it.” Another student shared, “Sabine von Mering knew zoom already and did a great job facilitating break out rooms and meaningful zoom discussions while also making sure that every student in the class was doing okay wherever they were. She knew who was at Brandeis or where students were living during the crisis and checked in at every class. She made herself readily available for assistance and made sure we knew which deadlines were flexible and how to adapt to the crisis.”

- 2) Effective Communication. Many students commented on how well certain faculty communicated with them on academic modifications such as course changes and feedback. One student commented, *“Professors Siri Suh and Sharon Reif were effective on keeping up the constant reminders of course work dues, and both were really considerate for the students lack of motivation.”* Another student wrote, *“I think Professor Miara, bio 15b did an awesome job. She quickly informed students about what her game plan was, so it was clear from the beginning. She also changed her syllabus and had constant communication with students about expectations. I felt that although we did not have live lectures the video recordings were informative, and easy to have access to even with different time zones.”*
- 3) Speed of Transition. Several students remarked on the speed at which faculty moved their courses online effectively. *“My biostats professor, Dr. Piasta, did an amazing job at transitioning to online learning. He actually readjusted how the course was structured in such a short amount of time that enhanced our learning and allowed us to benefit from the course in a meaningful way. Instead of simply making exams open notes and things untuned he actually adjusted the course with new assignments so that we can have the same level of learning as we would have if we remained in-person.”*
- 4) Adaptations and Modifications. Several students commented that particular faculty teaching classes that require specialized software, in-person components, and/or hands-on activities or experiences modified their classes well in the switch to online learning. One student wrote, *“Professor James Ji, who taught GIS Methods, had to completely restructure the rest of the course due to the majority of students lacking access to the GIS software we were using for most of the year. Despite this, the class went smoothly, and we incorporated current topics into our research and lectures – making COVID-19's geospatial implications a major focus.”* Another student stated, *“Professor Susan Dibble did a great job with classes too because she taught me movement/dance in theatre, and movement in general is limited when online, but she did a good job getting us stretching and active and dancing during this pandemic, which did a good job for everyone's mental and physical health.”*

- 5) Reasonable Expectations. Many students mentioned how appreciative they were of their faculty's expectations during the move to online learning. *"All my professors have been extremely accommodating. They pushed back many of their deadlines and were very flexible with how or when we submitted work the first few weeks as we were adjusting to virtual learning."*
- 6) Curriculum and Pedagogy Modification. Many students commented on the ability of certain faculty to modify assignments, exams and adapt different pedagogical tools to the online classroom. It is important to note that whereas some students appreciated asynchronous online moves, others preferred when faculty continued to offer live lectures, and while others appreciated a flexible format. This personal preference may indicate a need to provide flexible options for students going forward. One student wrote, *"Professor Wright. She gave us extra time as well as open notes on the exam and was very understanding and supportive, while always lecturing on time and together with students (rather than prerecording)."* Another student countered, *"My Organic Chemistry professor, Stephanie Murray, did a good thing in that she pre-recorded the lectures for students to watch with questions associated that could be answered with the lecture on Echo360"*, while still another stated *"General Chemistry Professor Dr. Novack did an amazing job of making live and recorded lectures that still maintained the element of doing example work on an application that she could broadcast over zoom. She also instructed the SI leaders to hold office hours and review sessions regularly."*
- 7) Flexibility. Many students were very appreciative of how thoughtful and flexible certain faculty were during the move to online learning. *"Rachel Kramer-Theodorou in the Education department! Extremely flexible with due dates and course planning, sought continuous feedback from students with respect to how her transition was going, and then listened to said feedback and edited her coursework accordingly. Her class was all about how to best attend to student needs, and she really practiced what she preached!"*
- 8) Importance of Student Feedback and Involvement in the Process. Many students appreciated how certain faculty asked for feedback and preferences from students as they adjusted to the online format, and used the student feedback to modify assignments, expectations and course delivery mechanisms. One student wrote, *"Antonella Di Lillo. She had 3 classes this semester ~300 students. She worked harder than anyone I observed during this time to help her students manage, but still get the most out of all of her classes. She practiced online lectures with her TAs, she changed office hours, assignments, exams, and course structure where necessary to best facilitate learning in this new environment. She took feedback, and continually searched for ways to make the most out of this situation rather than just survive it."* Another student commented, *"Professor Pegaret Pichler. Professor Pichler managed to sustain high demands in her class. It was the smoothest transition to online learning I had. She actively asked for feedback on her instruction and consistently improved her online teaching skills and methods in each class. She incorporated quizzes, advanced whiteboard techniques, and made sure we could hear her well and ask questions as needed. She gave us a full learning experience online."*

Faculty

The faculty survey also began with a set of questions using a 5-point Likert Scale with a range from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. These were followed by open ended questions.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I have been able to reasonably adapt my course(s) to a remote modality (232)	0%	4%	9%	60%	27%
I have been able to adapt my course(s) in a way that allows students to access and utilize course materials (lectures, readings, assignments, etc.) (231)	1%	3%	6%	55%	36%
I have been able to adapt to my course(s) in a way that encourages students to remain engaged with me (231)	1%	8%	23%	52%	16%
I have been able to adapt my course(s) in a way that encourages students to remain engaged with each other (230)	5%	28%	35%	23%	9%
I sought feedback from students about how the course was going (229)	1%	3%	14%	46%	36%
I believe my students received the same quality learning experience in an online format as in an in-person format (232)	23%	35%	19%	18%	6%

87% of faculty participants agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “I have been able to reasonably adapt my course(s) to a remote modality. 91% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “I have been able to adapt my course(s) in a way that allows students to access and utilize course materials (lectures, readings, assignments, etc.)”

Faculty indicated that they were able to maintain a connection with their students, but they were less able to connect students with each other. 68% of faculty participants agreed or strongly agreed that “I have been able to adapt to my course(s) in a way that encourages students to remain engaged with me” while 9% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. 31% of faculty participants agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “I have been able to adapt my course(s) in a way that encourages students to remain engaged with each other” while 33% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and another 35% neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement.

An overwhelming number of faculty do not believe that the online experience is as good as an in-person format. For the statement, “I believe my students received the same quality learning experience in an online format as in an in-person format,” 23% of faculty respondents strongly disagreed, 35% disagreed, 19% neither agreed nor disagreed, 18% agreed, and 6% strongly agreed

What have you appreciated most about Brandeis’ response to COVID-19?

Just as students were asked what they appreciated most about Brandeis’ response to COvid-19, faculty were asked the same questions. Seven themes emerged.

- 1) The University prioritized safety. This theme was repeated throughout the survey. As one faculty member stated it, “*I appreciated that the university took a quick step to protect their students, faculty and staff.*” Another stated the appreciated the “*fast and decisive action early on.*”
- 2) Concern about student well-being, particularly those with financial and/or housing needs. One faculty member wrote about the importance of “*financial support to students who needed it, [including the recognition of students’ differing degrees of access to quiet study spaces, productive work environments, control over one’s schedule, etc.]*” Another faculty shared, “*As a faculty member who came from a first-gen and impoverished background, I have appreciated the extra sensitivity administrators, staff, fellow faculty and fellow students have shown to the needs of first gen students.*” Yet a third faculty said, “*The administration was more compassionate toward the student body than most universities.*” The community meetings with President Liebowitz, Provost Lynch, and EVP Uretsky were also praised for their transparency.
- 3) Communication that was transparent, open, adaptive, and supportive. One faculty member said they appreciated the “*reasoned, thoughtful leadership. When other schools seemed to panic or ignore what was going on, Brandeis had a considered, data informed policy that changed every week because it had to.*” Another faculty member stated, “*I really appreciated how clear, direct, and compassionate Provost Lynch’s communications with the community were.*” Dean Hodgson was regularly praised for her newsletter which was described as “*calm, insightful, and humorous.*” Deans Grady, Weil, Bui, and Ziner were also praised.
- 4) Strong technology support from IT and librarians. Faculty appreciated “*lots of tech support as needed*” and another noted “*Zoom works quite well and smoothly.*” Another faculty member praised “*the work of library and technical services folks to*

make sure many resources are made available to my students.” Another faculty said, “The librarians who digitalized course content and made films available on Latte! They saved my course!”

- 5) Strong support from the CTL. One faculty member wrote, *“I really appreciate the training and resources that leaders in the Brandeis community were able to put together to help in the transition to teaching online. I feel like Brandeis (or, at least the program I work with) has been more transparent and more invested in making sure that professors have the training and resources they need than other institutions.”* Another said, *“I appreciate the availability of support in terms of using LATTE and Zoom to teach effectively, and also the wealth of resources about how we could best support our students both academically and emotionally.”* Faculty praised Latte functionality and Kanopy.
- 6) Flexibility. Faculty expressed appreciation for the relaxation of the rules for incompletes, that they could give letter grades to students, that students had pass/fail options, that Brandeis did not opt for a universal pass model, the extension to the academic calendar, and the one-year tenure track extension. One faculty member said, *“I really appreciated the understanding that came from Brandeis (the Dean of AS, the President, the CTL, and everyone who communicated with faculty) about how tough the transition was. I was grateful that it was assumed that we were doing our best to make our classes the best they could be, given the circumstances (we certainly were trying our best! Making mistakes, of course, but trying our best). I think my experience with the Brandeis administration helped me better understand my students this semester: my students wanted me to know that they were trying hard to do their best work even though they were running into some obstacles, which is exactly what I wanted the Brandeis administration to know about me this semester.”*

What part of Brandeis’ response to COVID-19 has caused you the most stress or concern?

Like students and TAs, faculty expressed uncertainty in general because of the pandemic. One faculty member wrote, *“Uncertainty is the hardest part of this process, but it is endemic to what is happening. It is not Brandeis specific. I am very worried about the forthcoming financial shortfalls and their impact on students, faculty, staff, and everything.”* Many wish that a plan for a fall could have already been established while simultaneously recognizing the reasons for not deciding too early. While many faculty appreciated the communication strategy, some faculty found the volume and length of the communications to be overwhelming. A number of faculty commented on the CTL, tech support, library support and advising staff being overloaded and understaffed.

- 1) Students Disappearing/Loss of Connection with Students. One faculty shared, *“It appears at this point (with a few days left before grades are due) that multiple students in each of my classes found it impossible to complete enough assignments to complete enough assignments to earn a passing grade for the term, this despite extensive individual correspondence with them offering flexibility with deadlines, enlisting the assistance of the academic advising support staff, etc. Some of these students*

were already having learning difficulties when Covid hit, but I felt like we'd managed to come up with suitable accommodations to meet their needs in the face to face format that I couldn't replicate over distance and online. Other economically strapped students simply haven't been able to perform due to family and financial stresses (e.g. needing to undertake full time jobs, lacking wifi at home, providing support for frontline workers at home, etc.)"

- 2) Students Mental Health Well Being. Another faculty said, I am "worrying about if students have the resources they need at home has also been stressful. The most advanced students, the thesis students—they seem to have taken the biggest hit. And the international students...stressful." Another faculty member said, "I have had a number of students who disappeared at various points because they were overwhelmed, because of mental health concerns, or because they were traveling back to home countries and needed to be in quarantine."
- 3) Constantly Changing Schedule/Need to Pivot Quickly. Faculty stated that multiple changes to the academic calendar were difficult. One faculty shared, "The most difficult week was by far that week in March when we thought small classes would still be on campus but then suddenly everything was online. Students were moving across the globe, yet we still had class, albeit in different formats. Nobody's fault, it was just difficult." Another faculty member noted, "The transition to online teaching with only days of notice with no break was extremely difficult. It would have made the transition so much less stressful, and allowed me time to adapt my plans to the new format in a more considered way, had Brandeis taken at least a week's recess in between.
- 4) Lab Closings. Faculty who had to shut down their research labs described it as stressful, particularly when they were doing so in addition to transitioning to Remote Emergency Learning. Faculty who were teaching lab courses also struggled to provide skills in an online forum noting "there is really no replacement for hands-on experiences in the laboratory. A third faculty said, "My lab course requires microscopes for a final analysis project. This couldn't translate to an online format.
- 5) Heightened Expectations for Time Spent on Teaching. One faculty said, "Considering a hybrid model is causing me intense concern. I'm not sure how all students are going to have the same learning experience if some are online and some are physically present." Another faculty member said, "No matter what we do, it's never enough. We're constantly being told to reach out to students and other Brandeis members, more, more, more."

Is there a teaching technique that you used that was particularly effective when classes were moved to an online format? Is this a technique you would use when Brandeis returns to online instruction?

Many faculty discussed the need for recorded lectures, sharing screens, combining lecture and discussion, breakout rooms, and the use of chat and polls. While the following list of examples is long, it captures some of the many creative techniques that Brandeis faculty used this spring.

Engagement Strategies

- Not quite teaching, but at the beginning of class I started doing a "lightning round question" that was often just a fun thing for everyone to think of and put into chat. This felt like it helped me feel in touch with the students and helped us have a sense of togetherness to start off each class with. I started it to try to counter the trend in the first days of everyone just seeming so checked out. It genuinely seemed to help -- but in person I wouldn't need it (though maybe I could use it for an occasionally thing, if I need to liven up the group?)
- I connected students to each other and me by asking them to send in photos of themselves where they were at that time. They sent funny photos, dog/cat photos, joke photos about themselves, etc. I compiled them into a ppt slide show, and they loved it!
- I find that I get more interaction during ZOOM if I don't use the hand raise button. I just ask students, to wait until I complete a sentence, to say excuse me, and proceed with the question. This works well for me. Having students watch a video lecture prior to class allows for more Q&A in class and allows us to explore some short problems/cases together in class with a more informed perspective (flipping).
- Moving online encouraged me to increase the amount of explicit student presentations to keep them engaged. I already had them as part of my class once a week but opening each class with them seemed to work well even as it reduced the amount I could cover.
- Well, I had to call on people more. And that brought the shy students more into the class, particularly since I always tried to lower the stakes when I called on people and made it clear I was just working down the whole list.
- Forming students into 3-4 person teams and assigning team projects outside and inside class. Assigning TAs to specific teams. I will do this in the future.
- I began a "participation leaderboard" after we moved to online instruction to help keep students engaged. They could receive different levels of points for activities like asking questions in class, sending me feedback via email on other student's presentations based on course content, or sending me an article that they found that illustrated concepts we discussed in class. Each week I posted rankings and scores, with a reward of bonus points for the top 3 finishers at the end of the semester. This was an extremely effective method to get students to engage both during class and with the concepts in between classes. I

received feedback from several students about how beneficial and fun this activity was - and I observed better engagement from several students than I had seen during in-class instruction. I will use this activity again during in-person learning.

- At the beginning of each class I gave a 5-10-minute quiz. I didn't collect the quizzes but went over the answers with them. It seemed to give feedback to the students about how they are doing.
- I had the students turn in notes during some lectures and presentations. This was mainly so I could make sure they were engaged. However, it did give me more insight into what they were getting from the material being presented.

Student Connection and Communication

- Constant communication with the students has been key. Students were initially scattered due to the uncertainty but providing a detailed operational document on the weekend before the first day of online classes has helped them a lot.
- Holding a lot of personal Zoom office hours. In a way it made the faculty and students much closer to each other, "visit" each other homes, learn more about their lives, their background, challenges and future, beyond the course content. Including inspirational talks in class, regarding life meaning, leadership, how to deal with challenges, how to live with a vision, and other topics which are not usually part of the course materials, but I know were very helpful for the students at this time. Follow up and "nudging" students to make sure they are not falling behind.
- Being human. Arriving early to class and greeting/talking to each individual student (something I normally do in person). Being self-deprecating as needed, particularly when technology is not working. Understanding that students are human and that online is not the best format for a lot of students, even students who normally do not struggle.
- We started each class with a check-in question of the day, which helped keep some sense of community going. I also actually got better participation in zoom office hours than in person office hours-- not sure if that was because they found them easier to "attend" or because they didn't have more exciting things to do, but I may offer that as any option even when we are back on campus.
- I gave students some input and provided opportunities for them to share the formats and expectations that are feasible for them when working remotely. Not all students are similarly situated, and it was important for me to reflect the recognition that student constraints and home environments vary. In my seminar class we engaged in a democratic process to make arrangements that allowed students to fully participate in the course remotely, providing a range of opportunities for students to demonstrate their understanding of course material. In my larger lecture and the seminar, I regularly sought student feedback about how the course was going. I already use a feedback process to gather student input throughout the semester when teaching in-person.

Technology

- Using electronic whiteboard to annotate pdf materials during the live class worked well, since I could post not only the class video, but the annotated handouts themselves on LATTE for students to review.
- During the online format, I continued to use asynchronous tools that we had also used in the face-to-face course, such as VoiceThread, Edpuzzle, Google Forms and Docs, Flipgrid, LATTE features, etc. However, I also incorporated some new tools, such as Adobe Spark, Extempore, Screencast-o-matic, and Quizizz.
- I divided my lecture topics into short videos that I tried to make really, clear...I am committed to continuing to use videos to supplement in-person instruction. In fact, this has been something I have toyed with for several years - so I was not starting completely from scratch - but this was the first time I have really used it. In the future, it could be used for a more blended classroom, for a flipped classroom, or for working through common student difficulties/questions. I am going to work on improving the quality of my videos over the summer.
- In my experiential EL94 class students presented their final project on ZOOM. I found this to be a very effective method for students' presentations and potentially similar presentations could be scheduled when we return to in-person instructions.
- Google Classroom was a fabulous platform for film production course. Students were able to share big film working files with each other, something that LATTE can't do. We were also able to create collective writing documents during critique sessions and share resources in a more user-friendly platform.
- Using Zoom to include a colleague at another institution as a guest speaker.
- Perusall for collaborative text annotation worked well, and I will use it when we're back on campus to promote more active, collaborative reading comprehension and analysis.
- Everything I have now includes sketchfab.
- Several students mentioned it was helpful to be able to go back and review points in my lectures using the recordings. I'd been hesitant to record lectures because I want the students to come to class and participate, but I may continue recording when we return to in-person instruction and motivate attendance more another way if it becomes an issue. I also think the open-book exams with a relatively long time allowed to complete them were a better test of the students' understanding than in-class exams.
- I used a tablet to draw on and annotate lecture handouts that included data from scientific papers. I then distributed the annotated handouts to the students after the class sessions. They liked being able to follow along and it allowed me to show

more raw data from papers. A major challenge for the students is that it was difficult to take notes at the same time they watched the lectures if they only had a single device.

- I normally use a great deal of visual material in class - short video clips embedded in PowerPoint lectures, longer clips assigned in conjunction with paired readings - to spur discussion and keep my presentations livelier. This remained one of the most reliable ways to engage students remotely. The pivot online generated a need to seek out additional video sources for use this spring. I'll certainly tap those resources again in the future, whether in a face to face or online format.
- Online homework submission of handwritten homework. I do not like to use online homework modules such as mastering physics, however, having students submit homework electronically makes organization and grading very easy. Using the LATTE assignment submission tool allowed me to assign written homework with the benefit of digital organization.
- Students shared with me that breakout rooms on Zoom and collaborative writing on Google documents were very effective. I may use more online collaborative writing platforms in-person. I already and frequently execute small group work.
- I was pleasantly surprised at the effectiveness of online discussion forums in Latte. Most online discussions in this era seem to devolve into thought bubbles and ad hominem attacks and so I had long resisted including them in my class. But when students know one another in the real world, and know that their professor is watching, they treat one another with respect and take great time and care with their posts. As a result, some of the forum discussions we had this past semester surpassed what I believe we would have otherwise achieved with off-the-cuff, face to face conversations in the classroom.
- Power point slides, screen sharing, prepared videos, and/or interactive computer programming become more common tools in an online format. This has good and bad aspects as it can transform the class into a show with students' passive, instead of a discussion with students active.
- I used more quizzes on Latte and videos that I will probably keep in my larger course. In my small seminar, I simply maintained the discussion-based learning via Zoom and it functioned reasonably well.
- Providing different type of techniques such a video, sample Q&As, practice quizzes, annotated PowerPoint & email questions.
- I learned to create screencasts for lecture material and for instruction on things like how to run statistical analyses and create figures. I will absolutely use this technique moving forward.
- Using the ZOOM capability of breaking the class into small groups to discuss a topic and then come back for read-outs and class discussion. Once we return to on-campus instruction, I plan to devote 1-2 classes per semester to online teaching so we can use this ZOOM function.
- Students integrated polling into paper presentations - made for engaging presentations. one low-stakes project was modified for remote work and allowed for students to work together to share their ideas. It helped them to connect and reflect on the work and reduced the number of projects to report back during class.

- Echo 360 has been a life saver. I will use it if we are in a hybrid model or fully online. I already used it for lecture capture but have now been using more of the features that I didn't use in person (polling, analytics of lecture viewing, discussion). I don't know that I would still use these components if we were full time in person just because I don't want students on their phone/tablet/laptop during lecture and they would need to be in order to use polling in lecture.
- I was able to get much more input from my classes during class exercises, which I use a lot. Using group chat in Zoom, I would have students message me privately with their solutions to a exercise shared during class and I would give instant feedback indicating that a student was correct or that they did something wrong in their derivation. Under normal class circumstances, a few students can answer early and others who are not as quick stay silent.

Teaching Assistants (TAs)

The questions in the TA survey mirrored those in the faculty survey. Results from this section are briefer than from the other sections, in part because of a lower response rate, and in part because many of the TA's answered the questions from the perspective of a student, not the perspective of being a Teaching Assistant.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I have been able to reasonably adapt to being a TA for my course(s) to a remote modality (110)	0%	4%	7%	57%	32%
I have been able to adapt to being a TA for my course(s) in a way that allows students to access and utilize course materials (lectures, readings, assignments, etc.) (110)	1%	2%	7%	59%	31%
I have been able to adapt to being a TA for my course(s) in a way that encourages students to remain engaged with me (110)	10%	15%	20%	34%	21%
I have been able to adapt to being a TA for my course(s) in a way that encourages students to remain engaged with each other (110)	12%	19%	37%	15%	16%
As a TA, I sought feedback from students about how the course was going (110)	4%	13%	19%	48%	16%
As a TA, I believe my students received the same quality learning experience in an online format as in an in-person format (110)	23%	25%	20%	20%	12%

89% of TA respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were able to reasonably adapt to being a TA for my course(s) to a remote modality. 90% of TA respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were able to adapt to being a TA for my course in a way that allows students to access and utilize course materials (lectures, readings, assignments, etc.)

TAs expressed concern about maintaining engagement both between the TA and the students as well as the ability of students to maintain engagement with each other. 65% of TA respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement I have been able to adapt to being a TA for my course(s) in a way that encourages students to remain engaged with each other, while 25% of TA respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. 31% of TA respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were able to adapt to being a TA for my course(s) in a way that encourages students to remain engaged with each other, while another 31% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

TAs also expressed concern that the quality of online instruction compared to in-person instruction. For the statement, As a TA, I believe my students received the same quality learning experience in an online format as in an in-person format, 32% agreed or strongly agreed, 20% were neutral, and 48% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

What have you appreciated most about Brandeis' response to COVID-19?

When asked what Brandeis did well, TAs echoed the same major themes as what was indicated in the student survey. They valued the pass/fail policy, faculty flexibility, the emergency fund and/or payment for work student students, allowing students to stay on campus and the transparency with regard to communication and decision making. TA's also highlighted the help that IT provided in order to make the transition.

What part of Brandeis' response to COVID-19 has caused you the most stress or concern?

TA's also expressed concerns, particularly with faculty willingness to continue to teach in the online environment. One TA said, *There were emails with resources available, but there was little guidance from the university other than pointing out some offices. Many faculty were stressed and non-responsive that was more hindering to the teaching than university resources for TA's.* Another TA commented, *Older faculty had a lot of difficulty adjusting, and it was frustrating. Some of them really had to be hand held to understand the technology, though it is really not that difficult.*

In the Covid-19 working group meetings, we have heard from students about faculty expecting the TAs to teach the entire class once it was moved online. Graduate students who served as TAs expressed concern that their workload increased substantially, particularly

when they were paired with faculty who did not feel comfortable in an online environment. One TA wrote, “*Quality control. Some professors are not teaching the student as he/she [is] supposed to. A one module course only met for six hours the entire semester.*”

TA’s also noted a lack of student engagement. One TA shared, “*Online learning does not seem to be as effective as in-person learning. I found that the students were distracted (in part by the circumstances, in part by the introduction of technology). Especially when the cameras/mics were off, students were able to tune out and contributions became nearly non-existent.*” Another TA said, “*Student engagement (online lecture attendance, office hours attendance, etc.) dropped off considerably.*” An increased lack of engagement was noted by students themselves, advising staff at the undergraduate and graduate level, and faculty.

Graduate students also raised questions about the impact on their research and funding. One TA said, “*As a PhD candidate who was in the middle of their fieldwork and about to run out of funding, I was most concerned about my ability to pay for rent, bills, and groceries. This is especially true for the summer, where many of the jobs graduate students use as supplemental income (bartender, server, summer camp, etc.) are either not possible or very hard to come by. We also can’t apply for unemployment because we receive a stipend as a form of payment. In addition, I also lost out on valuable funded research time that I will never get back because of the ban on face to face research. This has seriously disrupted the progress of my dissertation and as funding runs out, I am concerned I will not be able to finish. I feel that a lot of these challenges have not been named or meaningfully addressed at an institutional level.*”

Is there a teaching technique that you used and/or that you observed of the faculty member who was teaching the course that was particularly effective when classes were moved to an online format? Is this a technique you would use when Brandeis returns to online instruction?

Responses included break our rooms, releasing questions and answers for general questions in a blog format, using the chat option to keep students engaged, cold calling on students to ensure engagement, recorded power point lectures, and having students use the screen share option.

Other ideas included:

- Starting off the online semester by asking students how to best engage in the class. Frequent breakups in zoom meeting time. Asking students to show faces during zoom class. (i.e.—require the video to be on). Interactive things like breakout rooms, having students click on documents and fill them out/answer questions on them, using student polls.
- In-class assignments and discussions at every session where students were sent into breakout rooms to read a piece and share their findings to the group in a short period of time, or get together and discuss current projects or assignments where the

teacher would visit each room and follow up on developments. Recordings available after each class was very helpful to go back and review lecture.

- Weekly google forms had to fill out after watching all the lectures.
- I thought it was helpful to use quizzes about lecture material.
- The instructor tucked hints about the material for upcoming exams into the latter part of his prerecorded (asynchronous) lectures. This worked to reward those students who took the time to view the entire lecture.
- Regular smaller meetings on zoom, collaboration through Google doc, reading and analyzing with Perusall worked well for us. With more time we might have prepared exercises and assignments via Voicethread. The various functions on Latte also made it easier to create meaningful exercises for the students. Keeping things engaging with small online LATTE tool exercises (online flashcards, mini "quizzes" etc.)
- Discussion boards were very effective and engaging. Having students contribute to each other's responses created great conversations. This would be easy for students who have limited access to internet or location issue to have time to participate in a timely manner.
- Latte forums as a way of students showing participation if they had to be absent and can see this being useful for in-person instruction.
- Take home exams seemed to alleviate the stress levels of a lot of the students. They had more time to think about and understand what they were being asked.