

Examining First-Year Student Retention During COVID-19

**FYE, IR, CEETL
Collaborative Research**

**San Francisco State University
Summer 2020**

Purpose

The purpose of the study was to examine first-year student retention during COVID-19.

The following were also outcomes of this study:

- Check-in with students and show them that SF State cares;
- Gather experiences around the COVID-19 disruption;
- Assess needs and offer support to our students in preparation for the fall 2020 semester.

Methodology

- Survey administered during Summer 2020
- Data were collected through Qualtrics
- Mixed-methodology approach
- Population: Fall 2019 first-year student cohort ($n = 3,694$)
- Data were collected through a telephone survey with the assistance of 52 SF State student interns.

Methodology

The telephone survey instrument was 11 items in length as was intended to measure to following five areas:

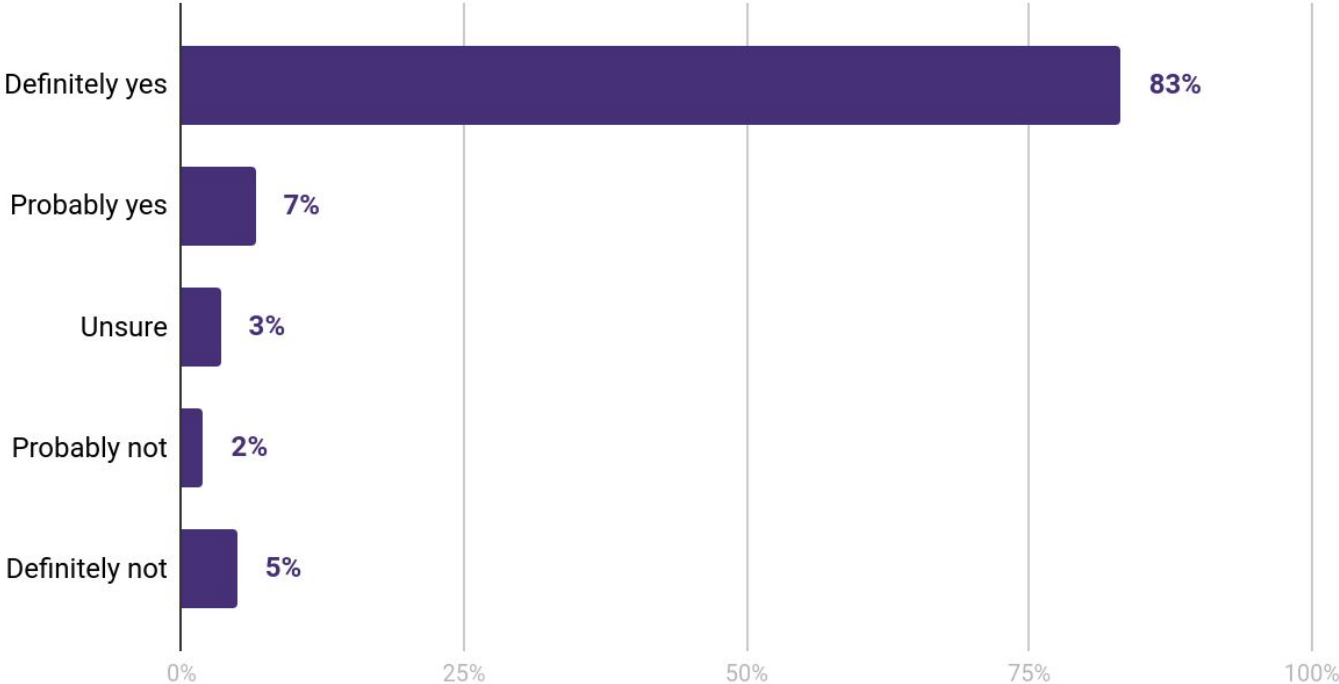
1. Intent to return in Fall 2020;
2. Identify **why** students are not planning to return in Fall 2020;
3. Learn about first-year student experiences during the pandemic;
4. Identify areas of student worries;
5. Assess resources that students have access to for remote learning.

Results

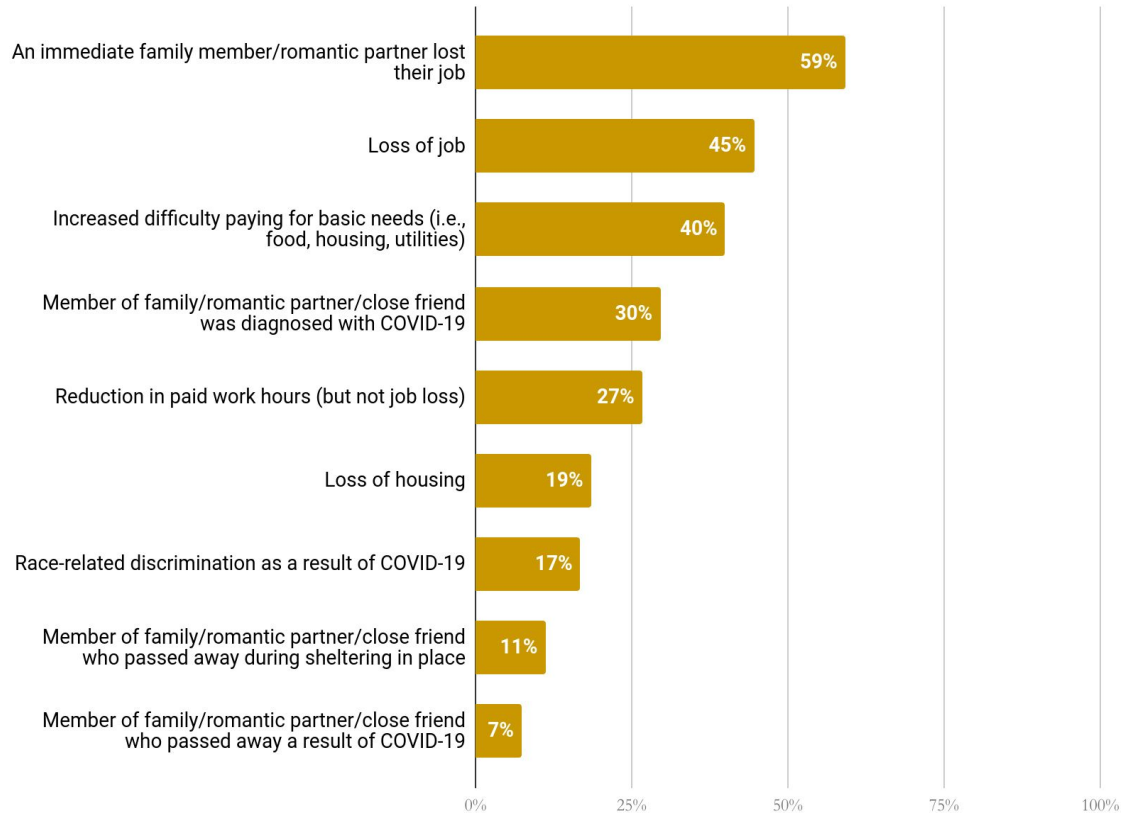
Response Rate: 35%

Do you plan to return to SF State in the Fall?

The majority of respondents are definitely planning to return to SF State in fall 2020. (n = 1,297).



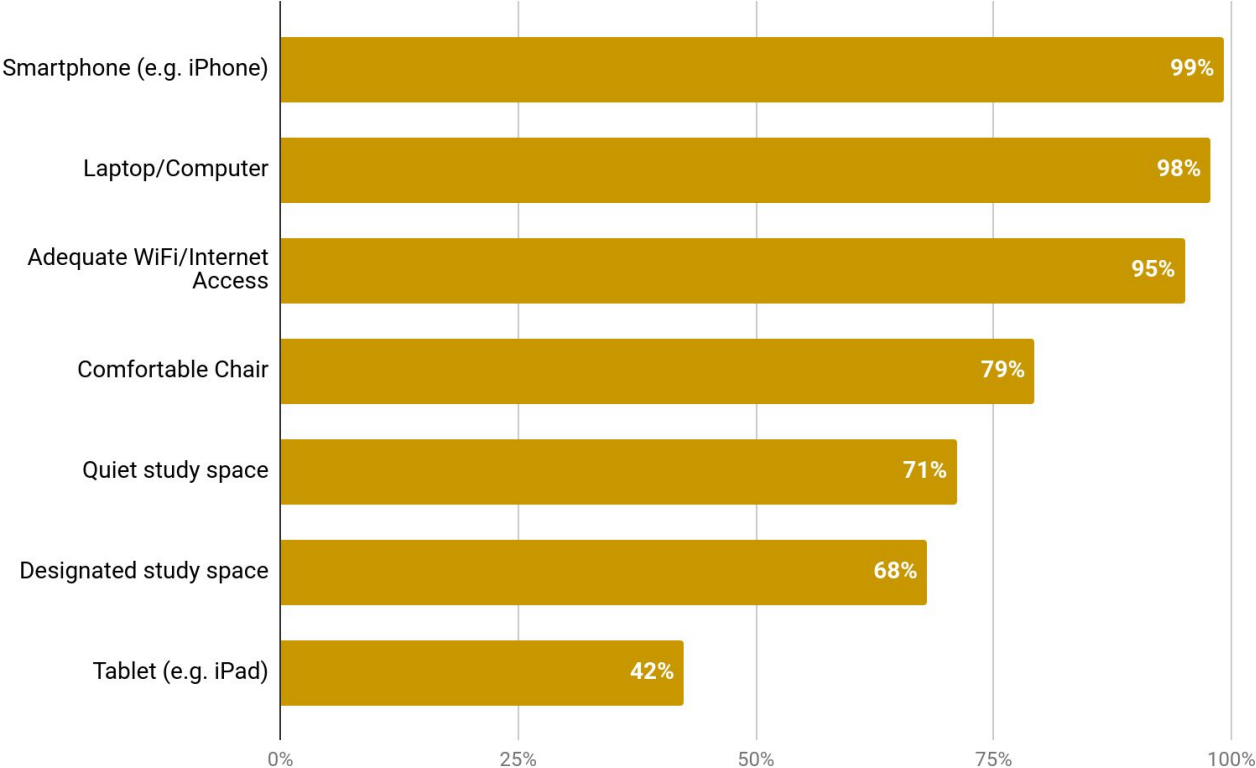
As a result of COVID-19, did you experience any of the following? (check all that apply)



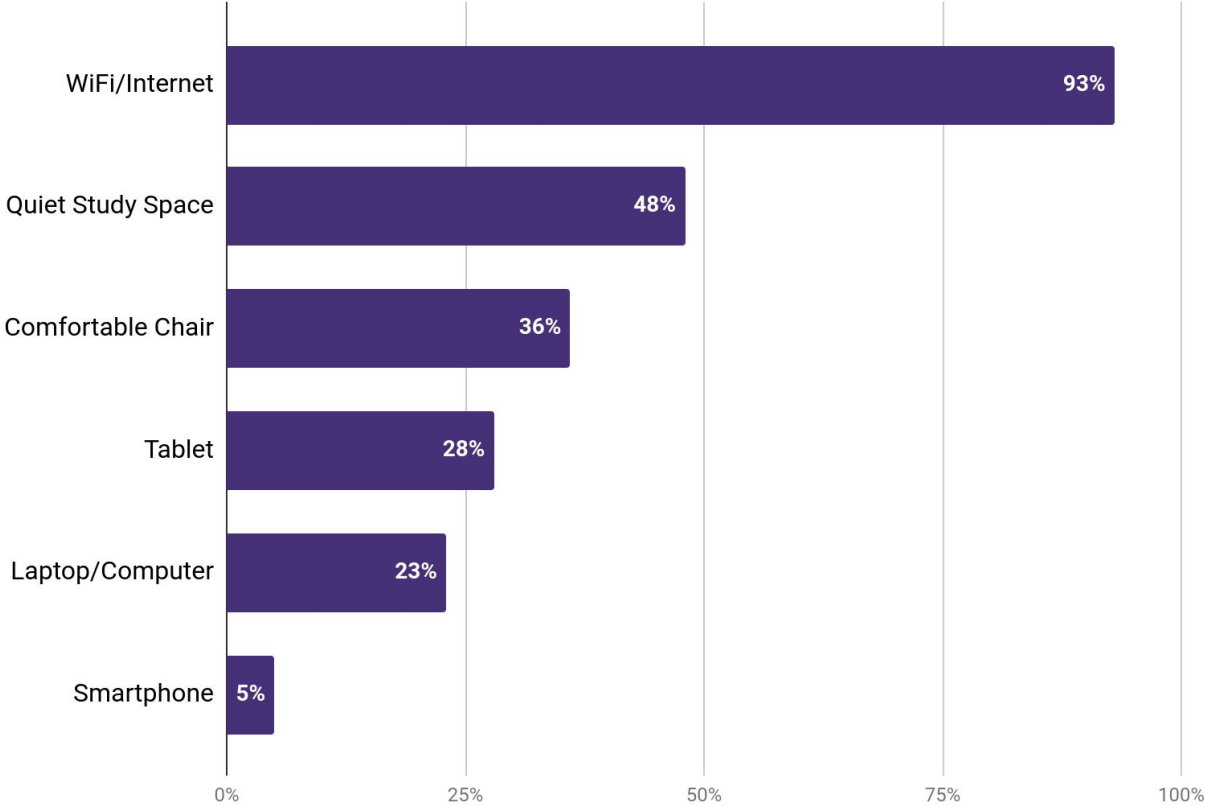
How much do you worry about the following?
 (1 = rarely, 2 = sometimes, 3 = frequently)

Worry Scale	n	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Deviation
Being academically successful in online classes.	1,232	1	3	2.46	0.679
Juggling family expectations, school, work, and other responsibilities.	1,237	1	3	2.35	0.736
Being directly affected by COVID-19.	1,234	1	3	2.18	0.754
Paying your bills (e.g., tuition, loans, rent, internet access, medical, etc.).	1,233	1	3	1.94	0.787
Maintaining friendships and social networks.	1,239	1	3	1.88	0.765
Accessing technology (e.g., wifi, computers, etc.) needed for your online classes.	1,231	1	3	1.51	0.717
Having access to basic needs (e.g., food, healthcare, a place to live, etc.).	1,227	1	3	1.46	0.684

Do you have access to the following supports for learning?

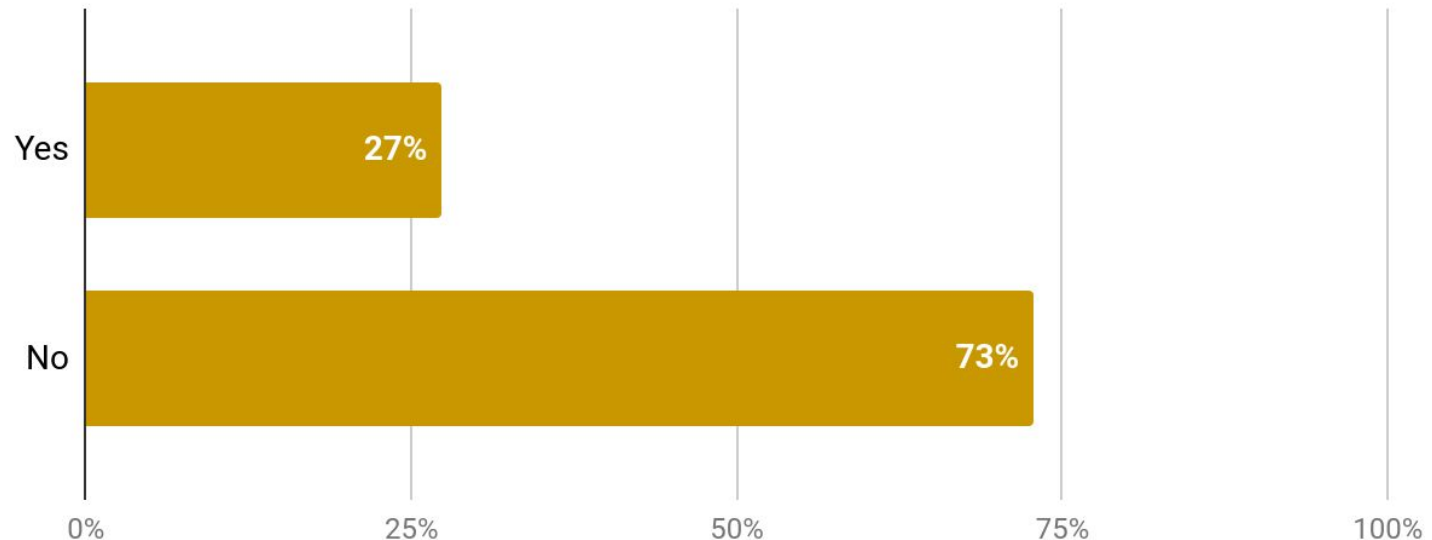


Do you share the following supports?



Of the student respondents who said they are unsure, probably not, or definitely not planning to re-enroll at SF State in Fall 2020, we asked them if they would like to speak with an advisor.

A total of 36 students (27%), who previously reported that they did not plan to re-enroll at SF State in fall 2020 asked to speak with an advisor following the prompt (n = 132).



Themes & Quotes

What would help you to be most successful in your online classes in Fall 2020?

- 1. More frequent communication about course expectations from Faculty (e.g., deadlines, email alerts, reminders)**
- 2. Faculty understanding & flexibility in assignments, deadlines & grading**
- 3. More frequent interactions with Faculty (i.e. regular, frequent & extra office hours)**
- 4. Faculty tailoring structure of lectures based on class needs (i.e. active learning; asynchronous v. synchronous)**
- 5. Quality & availability of support services & resources**

Quotes

“Better communication from teachers from the start of the semester, set deadlines and schedules offered to students at the beginning of the semester, and more alerts via email from the teachers.”

“I've had to work more and more consistently, so flexibility with class times/work. Flexibility with assignments and deadlines. I work until midnight so it can be hard to meet an 11:59 deadline. I have so many responsibilities.”

“Constant support from different offices. Have easy access to resources available to students to support their learning. Have a wide array of availability and office hours. Offices must have phone numbers available for students to talk to advisors/representatives on the spot.”

Why are you unsure about re-enrolling in SFSU in the Fall?

1. Financial reasons
2. Preference for in-person classes
3. Gap semester
4. Personal/family issues
5. Uncertainty

Quotes

“There is a lot of difficulty paying for tuition, and I am uncertain about online classes. I feel like there is just a lot going on right now.”

“Maybe taking classes at community college instead to save money and because online instruction is taking place in the fall.”

“He may come back but he personally did not like everything that went on Zoom. He says he **STRONGLY** disliked doing classes on zoom. He was only able to pass three of his classes and the whole learning environment for him was just a complete mess. So he is planning to work instead until SF state returns back to normal operations. He also mentioned how Zoom had a lot of issues and there were just a lot of technical issues. He failed to understand the material due to the dramatic change. Which led him to making his decision to take a gap semester and wait for normal operations to come back.”

Why are you definitely/probably not returning in the Fall?

1. Financial reasons
2. Transferring to Community College
3. Gap semester
4. Preference for in-person classes
5. Transferring to another 4-year University

Quotes

“I am going to go to a community college to finish your second year. It is financially motivated, I wanted to save some money, I wanted to avoid some debt.”

“Because everything will be online and remote. Tuition is too expensive and I can just go to my cc.”

“Harder to learn online than in person. Will take a break until classes start in person.”

“I'm not returning for Fall but will return in Spring semester.”

“She is transferring out of SFSU.”

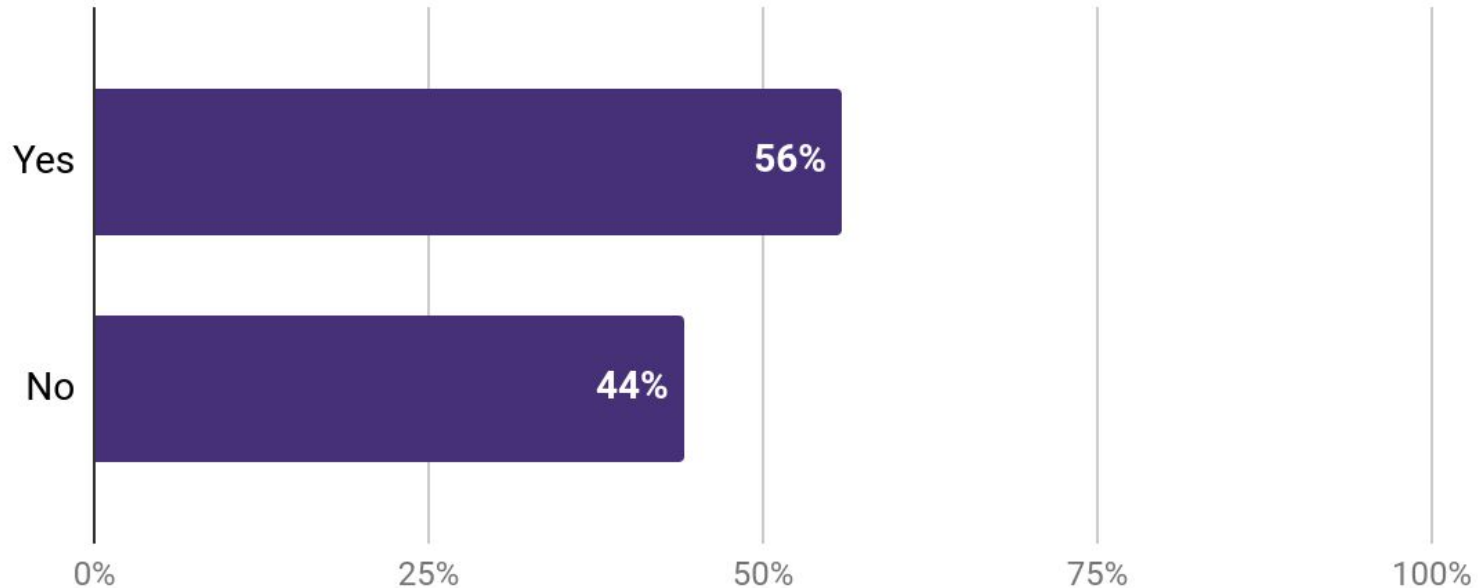
“Transferring to UC.”

Intervention

- **Resource packet:**
 - Coping resources for students compiled by SFSU Counseling and Psychological Services in late July 2020
- **Follow-up phone calls:**
 - Advisors - Kimberly Altura, Associate Dean, Undergraduate Education
 - The Basic Needs Office - Jewlee Gardner, Assistant Director of Basic Needs

Based on your responses above, can we forward your name and email to someone who can provide you support?

Over half of student respondents (56%) requested follow-up support (n = 1,246).



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