May 7, 2020

COVID-19 IMPACTS ON STUDENT LEARNING AND EQUITY

Centre for Human Rights, Equity & Inclusion

YORK U
UNIVERSITÉ
UNIVERSITY

PURPOSE

To provide information regarding the Inequitable impact of the COVID 19 pandemic on students and how this might impact student learning, particularly within the context of online/remote learning (including but not limited to issues of access, impacts of home environments on participation in for a like Zoom, etc.).

OVERVIEW

This short report will provide information and resources related to:

1. COVID-19 Impacts on Students and Learning

    1.1. Digital divide
    1.2. Zoom fatigue
    1.3. Mental health
    1.4. Online Safety/Privacy
    1.5. Limitations on access to supports and services

2. Differential Impacts on Students from Equity-Seeking Communities

    a. Brief perspectives on impacts on students from equity-seeking communities

    b. Key York Resources
        i. Student Accessibility Services
        ii. Teaching Commons

3. Additional Resources

1. COVID-19 IMPACTS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Introduction

As campuses around the country grapple with the impact of COVID-19, an increasing number of institutions have decided to move all classes online. Remote teaching presents a number of challenges for faculty, including the logistics--both pedagogical and technological--of how to transition course lectures, discussions, and lab or studio learning experiences online.

1.1. Digital Divide

COVID-19 has brought about a greater awareness of the digital educational divide among students who have access to technological tools, and those students who have limited or unreliable options for accessing these tools.

Common concerns are:

- Access to computer/laptop - Affordability and single-user requirements
- Internet service – Rural communities are being affected at greater levels, as they experience poorer internet service and unreliable connectivity (limits on bandwidth)
- Understanding of technology – gaining familiarity with Zoom and other online platforms)

1.2. Zoom Fatigue

The constant requirement for students to be tuned in and engaged in online learning, via video conferencing platforms is taking a new kind of toll on their well-being. Students may experience "Zoom fatigue," a term coined from the video-conferencing platform, but referring, by and large to a number of platforms. This fatigue results from various factors, including overall "screen time", ergonomically-appropriate seating, the amount and length of virtual meetings they participate in, their ability to access virtual tools, maintaining focus on various speakers, feeling compelled to contribute their own ideas, and maintaining facial impressions to demonstrate their engagement in the main subject and alternate conversations.

1.3. Mental Health

With an already growing number of students coping with mental health challenges, COVID-19 has brought about a wave of concern for levels of depression, anxiety and other mental health conditions.

1.4. Online Safety/Privacy

The Centre for Human Rights, Equity and Inclusion has responded to inquiries about the scope of harassment protection under the *Ontario Human Rights Code* and has developed a helpful resource for staff and faculty. Harassment, whether in-person, off-campus or online is a violation of human rights.

In addition, if a student is experierning harassment from another York community member, there are processes available under the Office of Student and Community Relations (OSCR).

The pivot to online learning platforms has increased the risk of exposure to online hacking and security breaches of private/personal information. This has also led to a heightened alert among Information Technology teams, at York for example, to immediately identify and respond to issues that arise. However, students may not have the same level of protection and capacity to immediately correct potential threats on their devices.

1.5 Limitations on access to supports and services

The experience of COVID-19 has widened gaps in access across the world. Access to healthcare, essential services, sanitation, and other key need like education, water, and food have all been impacted by the pandemic.

The provincial government has provided resources to address some of these limitations, many of which impact post-secondary students across the province, including those at York. Some of the supports outlined include: finances, children and youth, emergency shelters, and mental health and addictions.

The Federal Governement is also providing resources through the Canada Emergency Student Benefit (CERB) and other resources under its broad economic response plan.

2. DIFFERENTIAL IMPACTS ON STUDENTS FROM EQUITY-SEEKING COMMUNITIES

a. Brief perspectives on impacts on students from equity-seeking communities

The impacts of COVID-19 affect all students, but not necessarily equally; many students[1] who are members of equity-seeking communities have been impacted disproportionately by the pandemic.

Racialized, Indigenous, those in the LGBTQ community, people with disabilities, those who are poor, low income, or subject to additional social and economic displacement are hit hardest by natural or human-made disasters and other societal ills. These issues are no less true now and are certainly amplified[2] by of the novel coronavirus pandemic.

At York, in-person classes have pivoted to online spaces and methods. In this context, access and equity can look very different in online teaching contexts, and become increasingly complicated when/if students are no longer on-campus.

When considering learning impacts on students from equity seeking communities, it is important to identify those communities which might be most affected. It's also critical to note that people with multiple intersecting identities may be the most vulnerable.

- First Nations, Inuit and Métis students
- East Asian and other racialized students, particularly those who have been displaced and forced to return to their home countries, and those who have been targeted by racist epithets and sentiments related to the origin of the virus (e.g. negative impacts of the use of the term "Chinese Virus")
- International and domestic students who have no alternative but to live on campus for a range of reasons
- Students in precarious employment
- Students experiencing poverty, living in shelters, who are street-involved or at risk of homelessness
- Female students and their children facing domestic violence and/or child abuse

---

[1] See also "COVID-19 and Human Rigths: We are All in this Together" for global statistics regarding school scholures as of April 19, 2020. At page 5.

[2] See also "Using Intersectionaility to Understand Who is Most at Risk of COVID-19" for further psercpticves related to broadening the scope of impacts analysis by employing an intersectional lens.

- Single parents
- LGBTQ2+ students
- Mature students
- Students with disabilities, mental health needs and/or addictions
- First-Generation students

b) Key York Resources

Perspectives on how students from equity-seeking communities are impacted by COVID-19 are being developed as the impacts evolve, but no comprehensive account of those impacts is available for the York community.

However, at this stage, two key York-community specific resources have been identified:

1. Student Accessibility Services

2. Teaching Commons

1. Student Accessibility Services

Overview

Student Accessibility Services provides academic accommodation and support to students with disabilities in accordance with the Ontario Human Rights Commission's Policy on accessible education for students with disabilities and York University Senate Policy on Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities.

Student Accessibility Services provides support to:
- Students with temporary or permanent disabilities.
- Students enrolled in full-time or part-time studies at York's Keele campus.
- Students registered in undergraduate or graduate studies.
- Students enrolled in the School of Continuing Studies.

Survey on COVID-19 Impacts on Students with disabilities (APPENDIX A)

Attached as APPENDIX A is an April 16th SAS survey designed to identify opportunities to further support students as they finished exams, transitioned to summer on-line learning, and how to enhance accessiblibility in the context of remote services.

Although the survey results are broader in scope than learning impacts, this survey does provide critical information related to learning impacts, including Assistive Technology Supports with Remote Platforms (e.g. Moodle), needs for a small increase in time to their exam/test accommodations, on-line environment challenges (i.e. excessive screen reading, frustration with doing exams online with no previous experience).

2. Teaching Commons

The Teaching Commons at York provides some effective resources for York community members on how to mobilize and sustain effective online teaching and learning.

Some key resource highlights include:

- Transition to Online (challenges of online learning)
- Course Continuity
- BOLD Institute (Blended and Online Learning Development)
- Workshops (e.g. Learn how to use Prezi for your tutorials; Teaching with technology and in an online environment. How to navigate challenges)

3. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

York Resources

York Univerisy's Response to COVID-19
- Information and Updates, including Academic Information
- https://coronavirus.info.yorku.ca/

Centre for Human Rights, Equity and Inclusion
- E.g. Online Harassment Guide, Complaints Service and REDI Series Workshops
- https://rights.info.yorku.ca/

Office of Student Community Relations (OSCR)
- OSCR supports students impacted by critical incidents, facing personal crises or multiple complex issues
- https://oscr.students.yorku.ca/

Teaching Commons
- https://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/

Student Accessibility Services
- Student Accessibility Services provides academic accommodation and support to students with disabilities
- https://accessibility.students.yorku.ca/

Secretariat Policies
- https://secretariat-policies.info.yorku.ca/

Resources for Indigenous Students
- The Centre for Aboriginal Student Services (CASS)
- https://aboriginal.info.yorku.ca

Important information for Students Re: COVID-19
- Student Communications
- https://coronavirus.info.yorku.ca/category/students/

Student Relief Fund
- $250,000 COVID-19 Research Fund

Resources at other Academic Institutions/Organizations

Canada

- Univeristy Affairs: [Updates for Candian Univerisites](#)
- Toronto District School Board: [Update on Remote Learning - Message from the Director of Education](#)

United States

- University of California: [Equity and Inclusion During COVID-19](#)
- Rice University: [Inclusion Equity and Access While Teaching Remotely](#)
- Center for First Generation Student Success: [A Resource: Impacts of COVID-19 on First-Generation Students Experienced Across Institutions of Higher Education](#)