

San Francisco State University - Summer 2021 First Year Experience Remote Internship  
***First-Year Experiences During Remote Learning and Assessing Student Needs for Fall 2021***

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The Summer 2021 Remote Internship was a collaboration with First-Year Experience (FYE) and Institutional Research (IR) to create a summer student research internship examining first-year student experiences during the pandemic and assessing student needs as we transition into fall 2021.

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## Key Findings

- The purpose of the study was to examine first-year student retention and remote learning experiences during the pandemic and to assess needs for fall 2021. This included the following:
    - Check-in with first-year students and show them that SF State cares;
    - Gather information about students:
      - First-Year experiences during remote learning;
      - Student plans for the upcoming fall 2021 semester;
      - Concerns they may have as a rising second-year student;
    - Offer support and assess needs to better prepare the campus for fall 2021.
  - The population of interest was the entire fall 2020 first-year student cohort (n = 2,719).
  - Data were collected through telephone surveys administered on Qualtrics.
  - Data collection was possible with the assistance of seven (7) student interns, two (2) peer mentors, and two (2) graduate assistants during summer 2021.
  - The survey instrument was 20 items in length and was intended to measure to following five areas:
    1. First-year student experiences during the remote learning;
    2. Intent to return in fall 2021;
    3. Why students are not planning to return in fall 2021 (where applicable);
    4. Student plans and concerns about the upcoming fall semester;
    5. Identity and follow-up with students who would like academic advising and/or support.
  - The survey yielded a total response rate of **34%**.
  - A total of **86%** of student respondents indicated that they definitely plan to take classes at SF State in the upcoming fall 2021 semester.
  - The majority of students who plan to return have registered for fall 2021 classes (83%) and only 26% reported a need for academic advising assistance.
  - Student respondents who plan to return are enrolled in either online courses only (40%) or a mixture of all formats (37%). Only about 5% of student respondents reported that they will be enrolled in all face-to-face classes.
  - The majority of student respondents who plan to return reported having all the classes they wanted for their fall semester (68%).
  - Positive experience students noted during the remote 2020-2021 academic year included: supportive professors, supportive staff and programs, a peer online community, and the benefits of online learning.
  - Students respondents who felt a lack of support reported the following reasons: difficulty communicating with professors, a lack of social connection, inability to access resources, and difficulty navigating online learning.
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- Student respondents favored synchronous courses (40%). Only 22% of respondents preferred face-to-face courses.
  - Over half of student respondents (54%) “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they found community at SF State in an online modality.
  - Moving forward, returning students prefer either a mixture of all formats (35%) or face-to-face classes only (33%). About 21% reported a preference for hybrid courses (face-to-face and online).
  - About half of the returning students prefer to attend social student events in-person, while about 38% would prefer both in-person and virtual events in fall.
  - Most returning students plan on coming to campus Mondays-Thursdays:
    - Monday/Wednesday mornings (21%)
    - Tuesday/Thursday mornings (19%)
    - Monday/Wednesday afternoons (16%)
    - Tuesday/Thursday afternoons (16%)
  - Returning students reported multiple reasons for wanting to come to campus in the fall: classes (13%), library (12%), academic advising (10%), social/club events (10%), tutoring/ academic support (10%), bookstore (9%), Mashouf Wellness Center (8%), student health center (7%), mental health support (7%), basic needs (6%), and housing (6%).
  - Students respondents who plan to return in the fall reported the following concerns: transitioning back to campus and being academically successful, housing, COVID-19 protocols, financial aid, and building community.
  - Students who do **not** plan to return to SF State in fall of 2021 noted that they are not returning due to: financial reasons, transferring to community college, and personal/family issues. Most of them reported that their plans are to transfer to another school and/or work.
  - Students who reported they were “unsure” about returning to SF State in fall 2021, were due to the following reasons: transferring to community college or another university, financial reasons, and personal reasons.
  - Intervention employed: The Undergraduate Advising Center (UAC), Enrollment Management, New Student Programs, Tutoring and Academic Support Center (TASC), and Office of Student Financial Aid followed-up with students who requested additional support or resources.
  - Major recommendations: 1) Support students as they transition to campus especially in the areas of getting acquainted to the campus, understanding how to be academically successful face-to-face while building connection & community with students; 2) Provide support and information around housing, COVID-19 protocols, and student financial aid.

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## Introduction

Prior to the pandemic, the first-year freshmen cohort retention rate at San Francisco State University typically hovered around 80% ([ir.sfsu.edu/content/student-outcome](http://ir.sfsu.edu/content/student-outcome)). This data suggested that one in five students depart from the university before they begin their second year. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, first-year students who entered in fall 2020 took their entire first-year coursework through an online modality. One full year of online learning highlighted the need to survey our fall 2020 first-year students to examine their online experience and their expectations for the upcoming fall 2021 semester. The First-Year Experience team (FYE) sought to conduct this research in summer 2021.

In the hopes of collecting rich feedback from first-year students and ensuring that they felt supported by the university, a telephone survey methodology was utilized. Previous research indicates a notably higher response rate in telephone surveys in comparison with online surveys among undergraduate students (Woo, Kim, & Couper, 2015; Lee, Kim, Couper, & Woo, 2019). Past studies conducted with First-Year Experience and Institutional Research showed high response rates utilizing telephone survey methodology. A study previously conducted on fall 2017 first-year students, who departed from San Francisco State University prior to the start of their second year, showed significantly higher response rates to the telephone outreach (85%) compared with the online outreach (15%) (Yoo, Shindledecker, Trudell, Brosnan, & Nauk, 2020). Last year's telephone survey study examining first-year student retention during COVID-19 also yielded a high response rate of 35 % (Yoo, Shindledecker, Kang, Paredes Centeno, & Dariotis, 2020).

Although telephone surveys can increase response rates, its methodology has its limitations. One limitation is reaching targeted respondents. Some first-year students provided their cell phone number, while others provided their parent's cell or landline. This made it challenging to reach first-year students. Another limitation of telephone survey methodology is caller ID. Student interns used Google Voice to call first-year students. Although interns used a San Francisco area code number, an unknown caller ID may have contributed to non-responses. However, the researchers believed that leaving voicemails helped increase the number of student responses. Leaving a voicemail can increase the likelihood that the respondent will answer the phone on the next call attempt (Kempf & Remington, 2007).

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## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine first-year student retention and remote learning experience during the pandemic and assess needs for fall 2021. The following were also outcomes of this study:

- Check-in with first-year students and show them that SF State cares;
- Gather information about students:
  - First-Year experiences during remote learning;
  - Student plans for the upcoming fall 2021 semester;
  - Listen to concerns students may have as a rising second-year student;
- Offer support to students and assess needs to better prepare the campus for fall 2021.

The study was an opportunity to conduct check-ins with our first-year students (i.e., rising second year students) during the pandemic. We sought to examine the following: 1) First-year student remote experiences (e.g., successes and struggles), 2) Assess intent to return to SF State in fall 2021, 3) Identify student plans and concerns about the upcoming semester, 4) Assess campus resources students plan to utilize in the fall, and 5) Follow-up with students who may need assistance with advising and/or other support services.

First Year Experience peer mentors and student interns from the Summer 2021 First-Year Experience Remote Internship were trained to conduct telephone surveys through Google Voice and to understand the needs of first-year students as related to remote learning. They completed training and certifications in the California State University Data Security and [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act](#) and [CITI Human Research Social/Behavioral Research](#).

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## Methodology

The study was approved for exemption by the SF State, Institutional Review Board (IRB). Once approved, the telephone survey was administered during the summer 2021 term, from June 1, 2021 through June 30, 2021 through the Qualtrics Survey Platform. A qualitative and quantitative mixed methods approach was utilized for this survey. A total population sampling method was selected, as we reached out to the entire fall 2020 first-year student cohort (n = 2,719). Data were collected through the assistance of SF State FYE student interns, FYE peer mentors, and graduate assistants. The survey instrument was 20 items in length and was intended to measure the following five areas:

1. First-year student experiences during remote learning;
2. Intent to return in fall 2021;
3. Why students are not planning to return in fall 2021 (where applicable);
4. Student plans and concerns about the upcoming fall semester;
  - Types of course modalities students will be enrolling in;
  - Days and times students plan to visit campus;
  - Resources students plan to utilize when visiting campus.
5. Identity and follow-up with students who would like academic advising and/or support.

An email informing students that we would be calling them was sent in June 2021. Three phone calls per student were made to connect with students. Students who did not respond to our telephone survey were sent an email to participate online.

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## Results

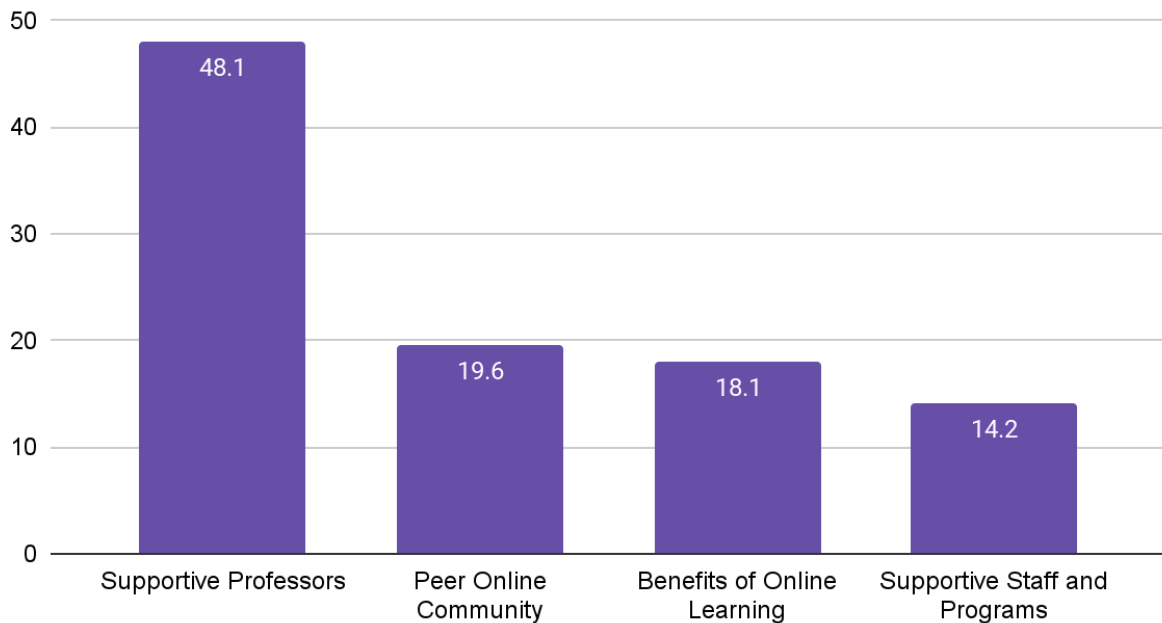
### Response Rate

Responses were obtained from 925 students (survey response rate:  $925/2,719 = 34\%$ ). We met our target of a 30% response rate, which allows us to better generalize our results to the overall first-year student population. The section below includes frequency charts for responses to the quantitative items and key themes from the open-ended qualitative data.

### First-year student experiences during the remote learning

All students who completed the survey were first asked, “*What aspect about being a first-year student at SF State was positive for you?*” Top themes that emerged are presented below (n = 951):

#### Positive Aspects of First Year



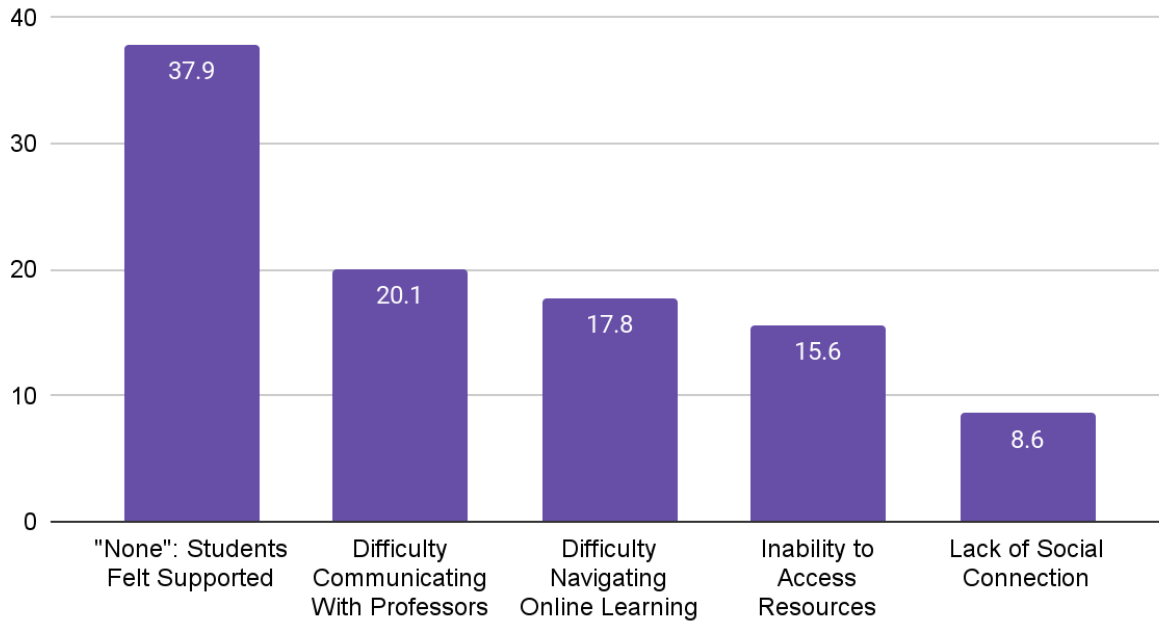
**Finding:** The majority of responses were focused on the supportive interactions that students had with professors, followed by the peer online community they developed through their classes and other activities, the benefits of online learning, and the supportive staff and programs including METRO and first-year academic advisors. For further details on these themes, please see quotes in the open-ended comment section.



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All students who chose to complete the survey were asked the following question: “*When we look back at this year, in what areas did you feel a lack of support?*” The top themes that emerged are presented below (n = 901):

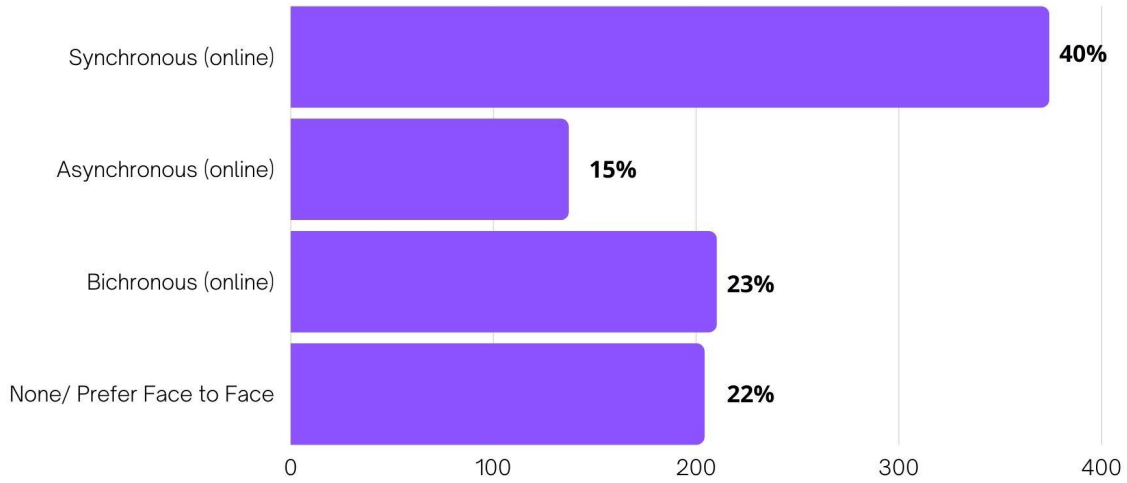
### Areas With a Lack of Support



**Finding:** The majority of student responses indicated that they did **not** experience a lack of support and for the most part, felt supported. The areas where students could have used more support were communicating with professors, navigating online learning, better access to resources, and connecting with other students. *For further details on these themes, please see quotes in the open-ended comment section.*

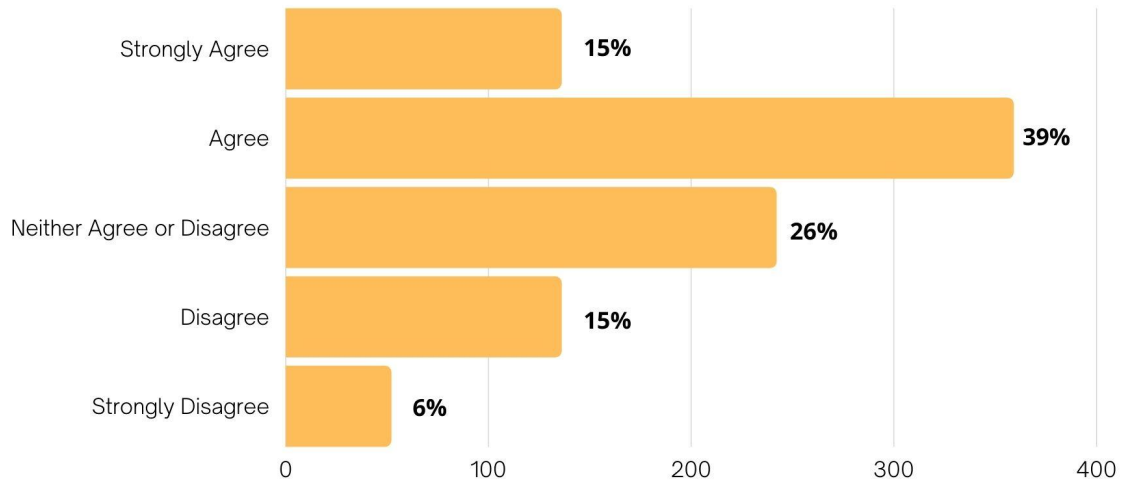
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What was your favorite online modality during this last academic year (2020-2021)?



**Finding:** The majority of student respondents favored synchronous courses (40%) during the last academic year (2020-2021). About 22 % of student respondents preferred face-to-face instruction.

Please rate your agreement with the following item: I found community at SF State in a virtual modality.

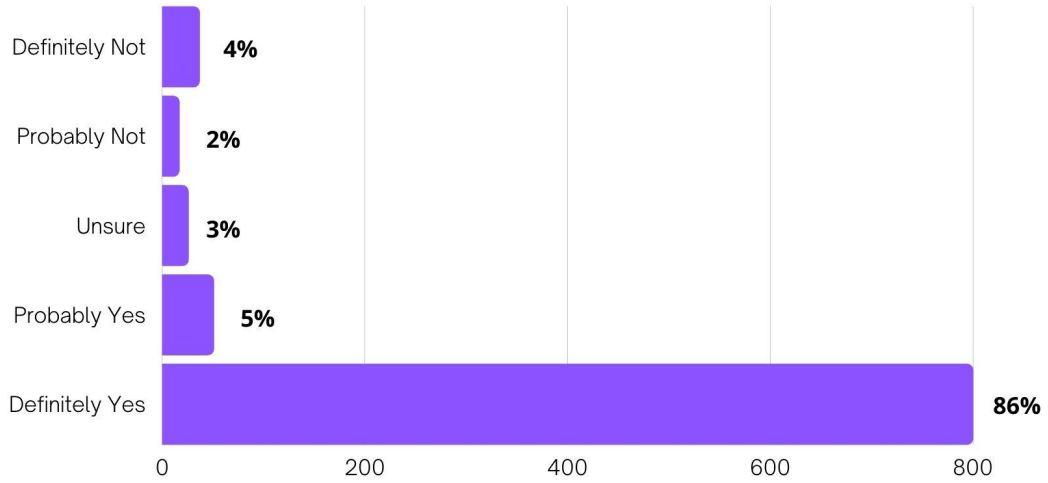


**Finding:** Over half of the student respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they found community at SF State in a virtual modality (54%).

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### Intent to return in fall 2021

Do you plan on taking classes at SF State in fall 2021?



**Finding:** A total of **86%** of student respondents indicated that they definitely plan on taking classes at SF State in the upcoming fall 2021 semester.

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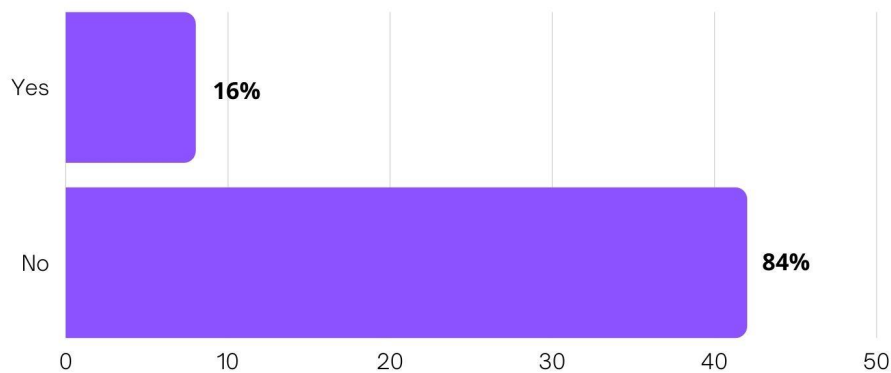
For students who indicated that they were “**Definitely not**” or “**Probably not**” returning to SF State in fall 2021, the following question was asked:

- *Why will you probably or definitely not be returning in fall 2021?* The top responses to this question included: 1) Financial Reasons, 2) Transferring to Community College, and 3) Personal/Family Issues.
- *If you are not taking classes this fall 2021, what are your plans?* The top responses to this question included: 1) Transferring to Community College, 2) Working, 3) Transferring to Another University

Of the students who reported that they were **not** planning to re-enroll at SF State in fall 2021, they were prompted with the following script:

“We hope you will consider enrolling in fall 2021. Our academic advisors are ready to support students who are thinking about not returning to school in the fall and help them explore their options. They can also help you enroll for fall classes if you decide to return.”

Afterwards, students were asked: Would you like to speak with an academic advisor?



**Follow-up:** A total of 16% of students expressed an interest in support. Advisors followed-up with students who expressed interest.

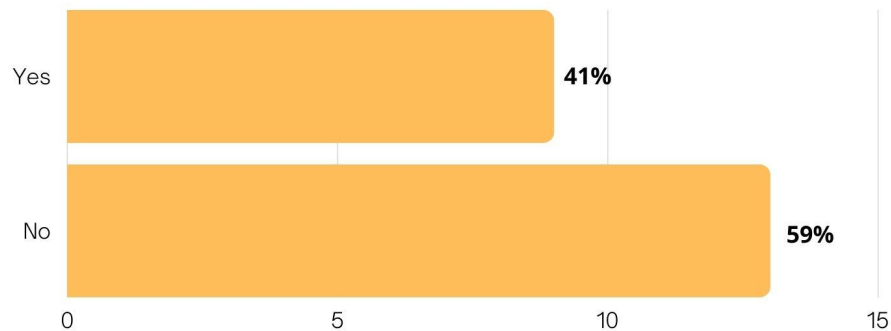
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For students who responded that they were “**unsure**” about returning to SF State in fall 2021, the following question was asked: “*Why are you uncertain about returning to SF State in fall 2021?*” The top responses were: 1) Transferring to Community College or Another University, 2) Financial Reasons, and 3) Personal Reasons.

Of the students who reported that they were **unsure** about re-enrolling at SF State in fall 2021, they were prompted with the following script:

“We hope you will consider enrolling for fall 2021. SF State is providing support for faculty around online teaching as well as additional resources to support student learning online. Additionally, our academic advisors are ready to support students who are unsure about returning to school in the fall and help them enroll for fall classes.”

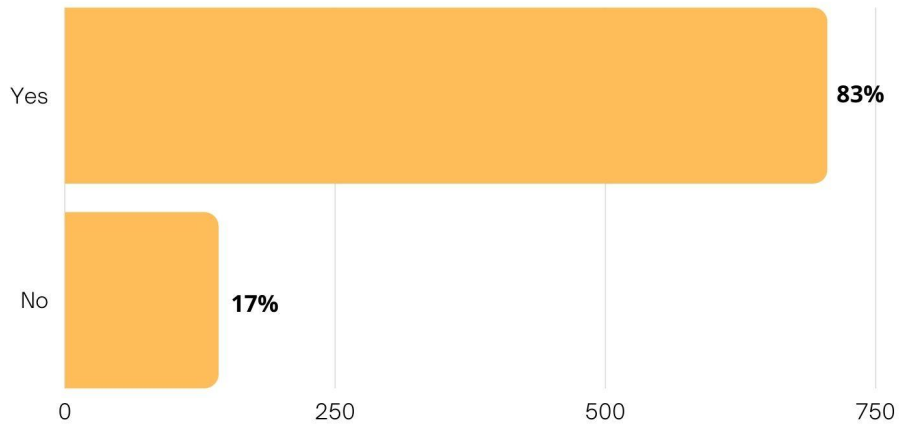
Afterwards, students were asked: Would you like to speak with an academic advisor?



**Follow-up:** A total of 41% of students expressed an interest in support. Advisors followed-up with students who expressed interest.

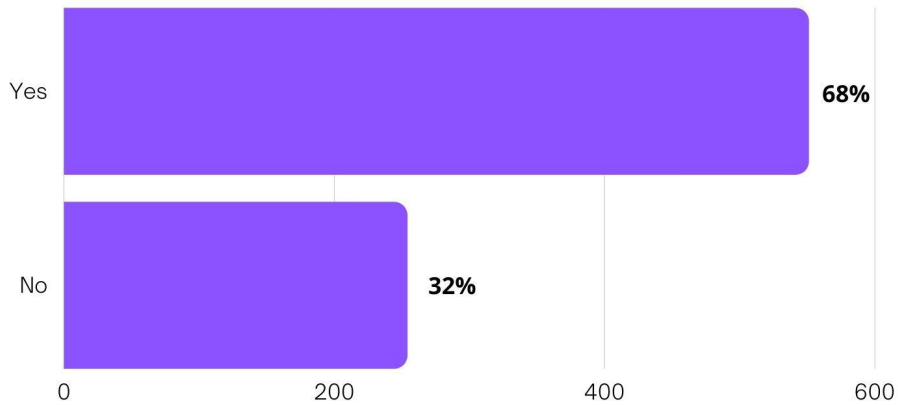
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Have you already registered for classes for fall 2021 at SF State?



**Finding:** The majority of students who plan to return have registered for fall 2021 classes (83%).

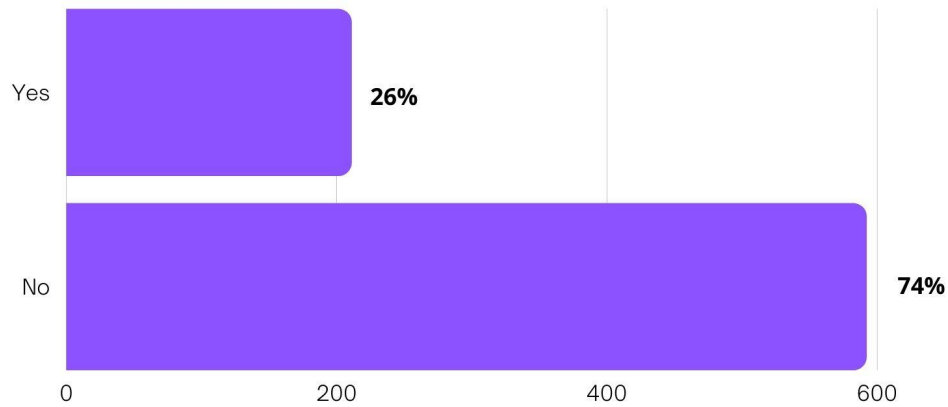
Did you get all the classes you wanted for your second year?



**Finding:** The majority of student respondents who plan to return reported enrolling in all the classes they wanted for their fall semester as a second year student (68%).

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[If NOT registered] Do you need academic advising assistance for help with planning your classes? [If registered] Do you need academic advising assistance for other needs (e.g. changing majors, planning for classes)?

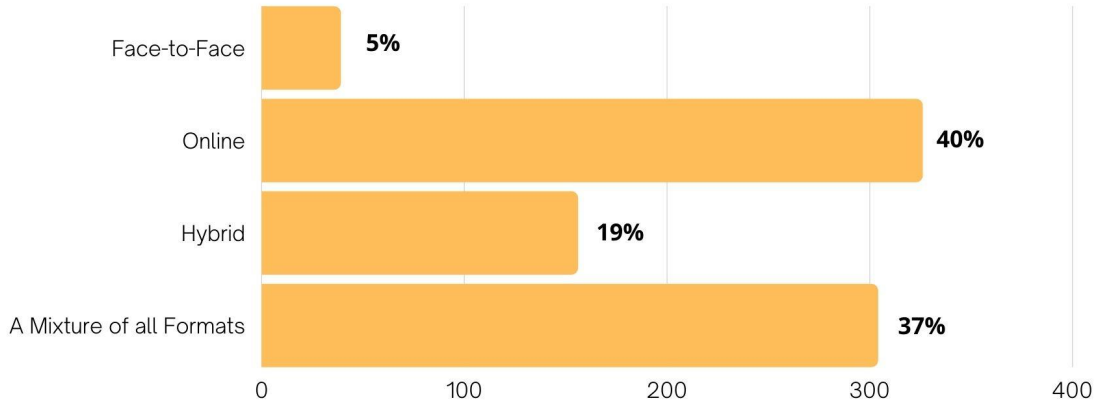


**Finding:** Only 26% of students who plan to return reported a need for academic advising assistance.

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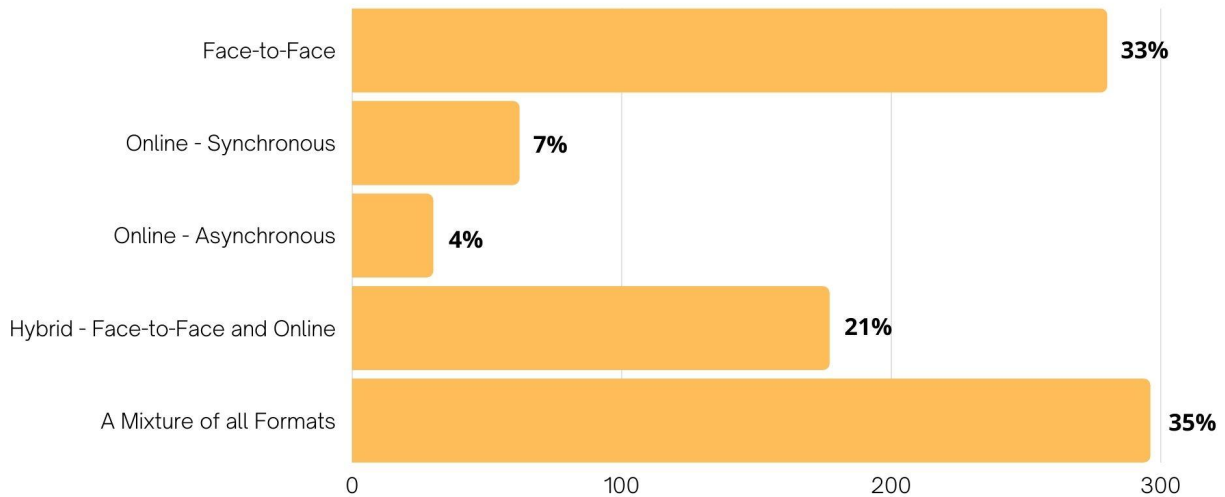
## Student Plans and Concerns for fall 2021

In fall 2021 will you be taking your classes:



**Finding:** Student respondents who plan to return are enrolled in either online courses only (40%) or a mixture of all formats (37%). Only about 5% of student respondents reported that they will be enrolled fully in face-to-face classes.

Moving forward, would you prefer classes:

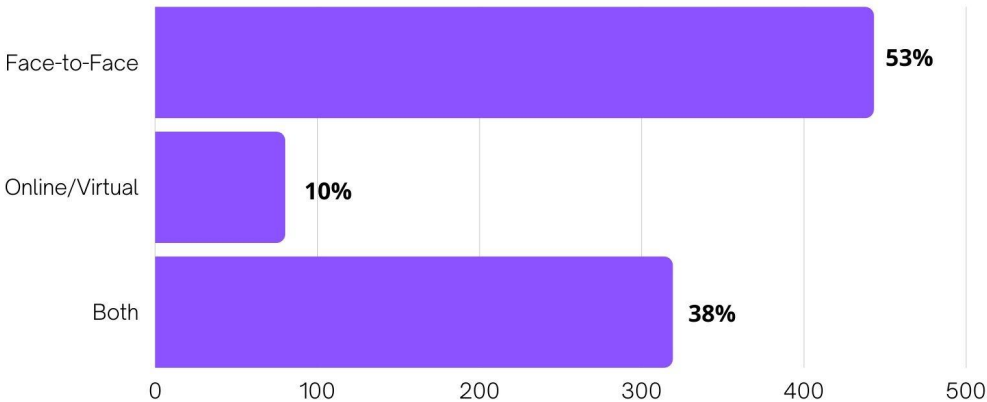


**Finding:** Moving forward, returning student respondents prefer either a mixture of all formats (35%) or face-to-face classes (33%). About 21% reported a preference for hybrid courses (face-to-face and online).



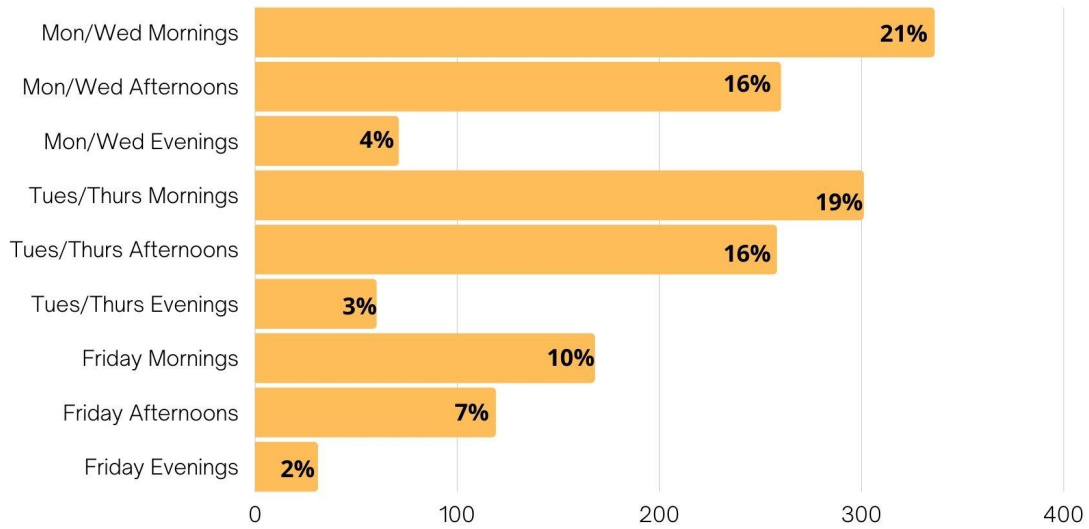
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In fall 2021, would you prefer to attend social student events that are:



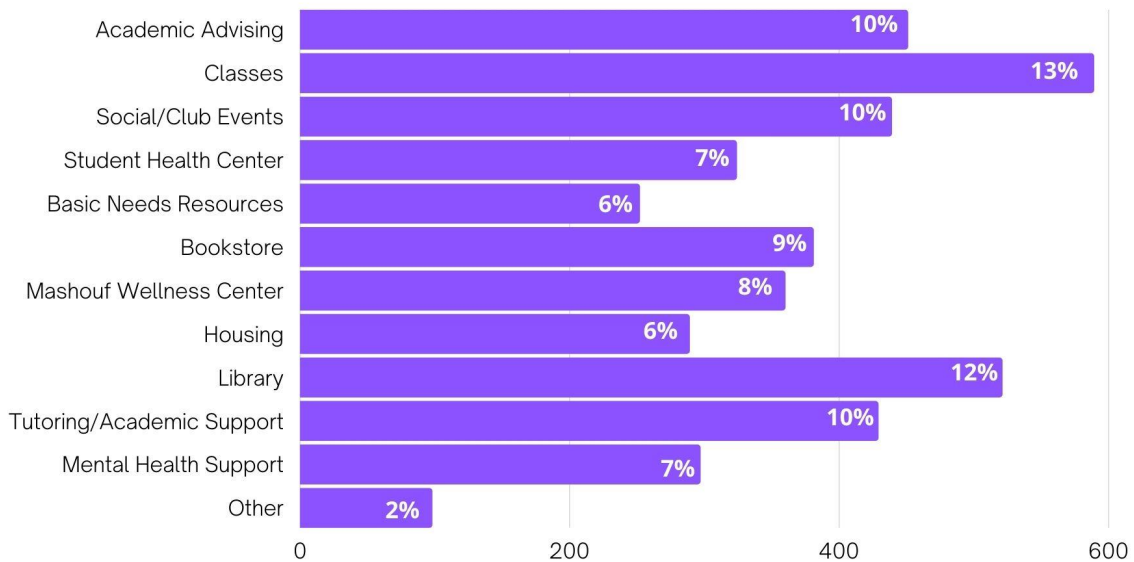
**Finding:** About half of the returning students prefer to attend social student events in-person, while about 38% would prefer both in-person and virtual events in fall 2021.

If you are coming to campus in the fall, what days and times do you think you will be on-campus for classes? Check all that apply:



**Finding:** Most returning students plan on coming to campus Mondays-Thursdays: Monday/ Wednesday mornings (21%), Tuesday/ Thursday mornings (19%), Monday/ Wednesday afternoons (16%), and Tuesday/ Thursday afternoons (16%).

If you are coming onto campus, what are reasons you will be coming to campus? Check all that apply:

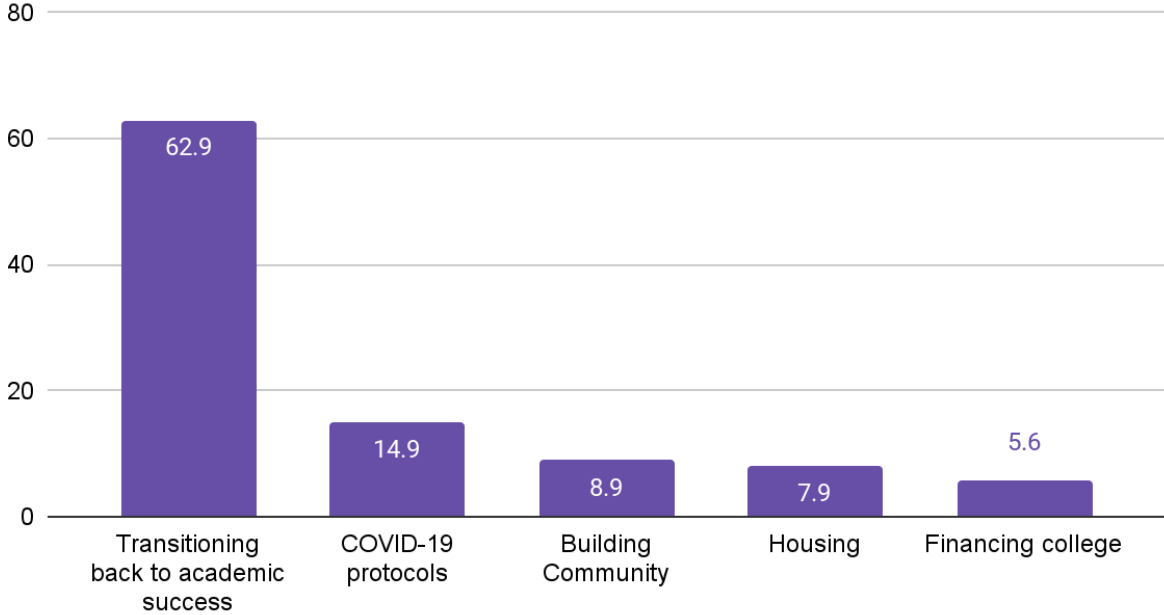


**Finding:** Returning students reported the multiple reasons for coming to campus in the fall. Reasons include: classes (13%), library (12%), academic advising (10%), social/club events (10%), tutoring/ academic support (10%), bookstore (9%), the Mashouf Wellness Center (8%), student health center (7%), mental health support (7%), basic needs (6%), and housing (6%).

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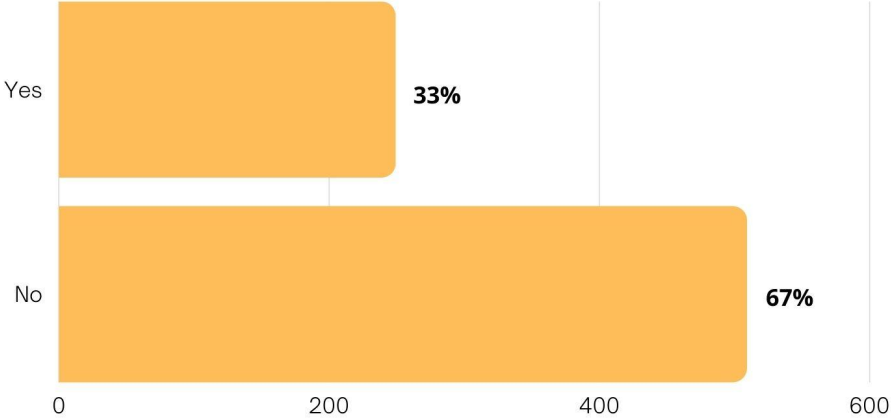
Student respondents who are returning to SF State in the fall, were asked, “As you enter your second year at SF State, what are some concerns that you have?” (See Qualitative Results below for reported responses).

### Top concerns for Fall 2021



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Students were then asked, “Would you like some support on any of these concerns? Can we share your name and email with someone at San Francisco State University?”



**Finding:** A total of 33% of students expressed an interest in support. Various campus offices and programs followed-up with students who needed support.

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## Qualitative Results

### Open-Ended Question #1:

#### What aspect about being a first-year student at SF State was positive for you?

All students who completed the survey were first asked, “*What aspect about being a first-year student at SF State was positive for you?*”

Key themes that emerged from this question including the following:

- 1) Supportive Professors (457) = 48.1%
  - 2) Peer Online Community (186) = 19.6%
  - 3) Benefits of Online Learning (173) = 18.1%
  - 4) Supportive Staff and Programs (135) = 14.2%
- n = 951**

Example comments of the key themes are presented below:

#### Theme 1: Supportive Professors

- “The communication with the professors in my classes was really great; they always gave announcements and reminders.”
- “I would say that with everything that went on with COVID, the professors all year were very lenient and they understood everyone's situation and what was going on. Having that understanding was a really good aspect of my first year.”
- “I had a positive experience as a first year student. My teachers on Zoom were great! They were very flexible and understanding when it came to late assignments and having cameras on. I was nervous about the online experience, but having supportive teachers made it easier to learn online.”
- “It was a positive experience. At first, it was stressful, but the zoom classes helped me have a routine. All the teachers were flexible and understanding because they understood the pandemic and online learning. They let us turn in late homework and fewer assignments.”
- “The support of the professors I had. They knew that it was going to be different than in-person and they were really supportive [with] that.”

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## **Theme 2: Peer Online Community**

- “The only thing that comes to mind is that I made a couple friends in classes.”
- “Actually being able to connect with my classmates more, because it was a lot easier to get to know people over the camera, since I am usually really shy in person, so it was easier for me to connect.”
- “One thing that I found really cool was that even though we couldn't be in person and I couldn't get to know my classmates, we found a lot of ways to stay connected through group chats on various social media platforms. It was really great to have support.”
- “I liked that every one of the students [was] still able to talk and make new friends.”
- “The community, just because I was able to meet a group of friends that I still talk to, and so that was the greatest thing so far.”

## **Theme 3: Benefits of Online Learning**

- “I mean I like that I didn't have to commute from where I live, I also liked that I could immediately wake up and not have to get out of bed to go to class and I like that I could stay in my pajamas.”
- “Flexibility of classes was really big, and less cost of materials since everything was online. I also felt that classes were easier, but that might just be me.”
- “Overall, it was pretty positive. I really enjoyed it because I was concerned about housing as a first-year student. Being online allowed me to be home and save up money. The financial stress was relieved. I only took two synchronous classes and I really enjoyed it.”
- “I liked online learning in particular because it gave me flexibility to work and go to school at the same time. it wasn't as hard as I believed it would be. I wasn't able to experience the campus but it was great overall.”
- “I got to stay home a bit longer to be with family and understand the whole system of college instead of having to jump into the system too fast.”

## **Theme 4: Supportive Staff and Programs**

- “The Metro and EOP program was really helpful. They were very supportive with first generation students, they made me feel very comfortable over zoom.”
- “My first-year was not bad because my academic advisor and my teachers were really responsive! They were really nice and willing to help me out with online classes and questions that I had.”
- “I believe that what I mostly took away from the first year is that we were given a lot of help. As a first generation college student, it was really hard to find resources without family help, so knowing that the university had resources and were ready to give them out, especially during online learning, was really helpful.”
- “The school did a really good job at keeping everyone in the loop with everything going on. A lot of programs reached out, even if I didn't sign up. There were a lot of resources to help everyone get through COVID.”

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- “All the resources that were available for me as a first-generation student [were] huge. This year I had the Metro program and that was huge because I was terrified in high school and they were so helpful.”

### **Open-Ended Question #2:**

#### **When we look back at this year, in what areas did you feel a lack of support?**

All students who chose to complete the survey were initially prompted with the following question: “*When we look back at this year, in what areas did you feel a lack of support?*”

The top key themes that emerged from this question including the following:

- 1) “None”: Students Felt Supported (343) = 37.9%
- 2) Difficulty Communicating With Professors (182) = 20.1%
- 3) Difficulty Navigating Online Learning (162) = 17.8%
- 4) Inability to Access Resources (141) = 15.6%
- 5) Lack of Social Connection (78) = 8.6%

**n = 906**

Example comments of the key themes are presented below:

#### **Theme 1: “None”: Students Felt Supported**

- “No, I felt supported by teachers, tutors, and advisors, especially because I am part of the Metro program.”
- “No, all of my teachers did really well with checking in with us and responding to emails.”
- “I don't think there were areas where I felt a lack of support.”
- “I felt like I had a lot of support. Talked to counselors to help. Am in Metro, signed up in [the] first year which helps academically (classes, requirements, to help out students, first year[s] especially).”
- “I did not feel like there was a lack of support in anything for me because the counselors always helped me with everything and the professors as well.”

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## **Theme 2: Difficulty Communicating With Professors**

- “Most students, including myself, felt a lack of support in the online area because we went from in-person learning to online learning abruptly. There was support [from professors] but I don't think there was enough support to help students succeed. A lot of my professors offered extensive office hours which was helpful, but a lot of students were reserved.”
- “Sometimes communicating to teachers is hard because they wouldn't respond on time. And when it came to instructions for assignments, it wasn't clear.”
- “I think there was a lack of support with some of my teachers because some of them did offer help, but it was limited help, and I think a lot of students couldn't come to the office hour times they laid out because of work or other circumstances.”
- “I think the communication from teachers. If I had questions I can't really experience your freshman year like you wanted to. My teachers weren't as helpful as I wanted them to be.”
- “I felt that there was a lack of communication between the professors and the students. I understand that classes were over zoom, so it made it hard, but it was something that there was a lack of.”

## **Theme 3: Difficulty Navigating Online Learning**

- “Motivation-wise, but I feel like that was all on me. I had counselors I could go to, but I didn't reach out and I didn't have motivation to do work because it was all on screen.”
- “I feel like because everything was online it was much harder. Communication was hard and turning things in was difficult because things didn't always work.”
- “Online learning was really difficult, and I lost motivation.”
- “I don't really like iLearn as a program. I struggled finding my grades, and it felt hard to keep up with that.”
- “Ilearn at first was confusing to navigate and there was no one to teach me how to use it and I had to figure it out on my own.”



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#### **Theme 4: Inability to Access Resources**

- “It was hard to really get a hold of someone, because every time I called, it would either be a really long hold, or a waiting room. And the websites made it difficult for me to navigate. I was at home and I had no one to help me out, and I didn’t know anyone from the school.”
- “I had to find out on my own where to get help on which courses I should sign up for, which entirely depended on my major. Information was hard to find and I had to do research on my own.”
- “I think getting in contact with personnel and staff from SFSU was an aspect that was kind of lacking, because it was hard to get in contact with some people without being on campus and having an in-person interaction.”
- “I would say everything's harder because it's online so it was hard to reach out for resources like tutoring and stuff.”
- “Just the advisors, I know they're there but their help is really vague and I don't know where to go for assistance. My questions for them aren't always answered.”

#### **Theme 5: Lack of Social Connection**

- “The first thing that comes to mind would have to be getting students together to meet, and that’s obvious, because clubs and student orgs haven’t been very great in reaching out during the pandemic with online structures. In the classroom setting, you also miss out, since people have screens that are black and there aren’t many opportunities to connect.”
- “Mainly between interactions with my classmates - certain times we were able to interact but in lab assignments some people weren't able to participate as much as others. I'm not sure if it was something they were going through but sometimes they weren't actively participating. Because of that I wasn't able to make as many close friendships as I would have liked to my first year of college.”
- “Missing communal/in-person aspect.”
- “Because it was online, I felt like I didn't get to know my peers. It didn't feel like it was a social classroom environment.”
- “I don't know, I can't think of anything right now besides connecting to other students. I used to have a lot of team-building in high school amongst peers, but we just didn't have that this year because we were online.”

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### Open-Ended Question #3:

**As you enter your second year at SF State, what are some concerns that you have?**

For students who responded that they were “**Definitely Yes**” or “**Probably Yes**” returning to SF State in fall 2021, the following question was asked: “*As you enter your second year at SF State, what are some concerns that you have?*”

Key themes emerged from this question included the following

- 1) Transitioning back to campus and being academically successful: 381 = 62.9%
  - 2) COVID-19 Protocols: 89 = 14.7%
  - 3) Building Community: 54 = 8.9%
  - 4) Housing: 48 = 7.9%
  - 5) Financial Aid: 34 = 5.6%
- n = 606**

#### **Theme 1: Transitioning Back and Being Academically Successful**

- “My only concern is failing my classes because it is hard to learn online. I live in SoCal and I would not be able to move to SF to use the resources.”
- “Being able to pass my classes because I know the ones that I am taking in the fall Semester are supposed to be hard: Psychology, Biology, Basic English. I heard psychology is hard and I have never done Bio.”
- “Just trying to keep up with grades and not just fall off or slack a lot in the second year.”
- “If anything, probably just if I can keep up with my classes as a sophomore in college. Hopefully I can keep up with my work and everything.”
- “I'd say just keeping up with my professors and in general with classes and assignments. Understanding each class and getting ready for upper division courses.”

#### **Theme 2: COVID-19 Protocols**

- “Covid related: if we have to follow guidelines and such. They are lifting mask requirements so I'm worried about that.”
- “I suppose one [concern] would be identifying a clear health policy in relation to masks, etc. I want to readily know what I need to have on campus, or if it is on a person to person basis.”
- “What are the COVID protocols going to be?”
- “I am worried about my own safety and [the] safety of others because of COVID.”
- “Concerned that it will be hard to make friends and find community after COVID.”

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### **Theme 3: Building Community**

- “It's my first time being away from home, so getting involved in a new environment and making friends is kind of daunting.”
- “Finding community via online learning and seeing if professors can help me excel.”
- “My social life because I was not able to get to know any students.”
- “I think getting to know the community on campus and trying to figure out social activities and clubs. I want to see if I can do that, but it has been hard online.”
- “Building a better community with the students. This is [a] concern because the class will be online and not many people like to contribute online.”

### **Theme 4: Housing**

- “The biggest concern is waiting to hear back from housing because I applied for housing in April. I really am waiting to hear back because I feel like I am in limbo right now. I may have to move to the city and look for housing off-campus and I really am concerned about that.”
- “Just with housing. Whether or not I have gotten in and if there is space for me. I've emailed them about whether I've gotten in or not and they didn't send me a clear response.”
- “I applied for housing and I am concerned because they have not reached out to me yet.”
- “I'm just concerned about getting there because I was not chosen for student housing so I have to live at home (about an hour and a half away). I know I'll just have to drive to school but I've never driven in SF so I'm just super anxious about that.”
- “My housing application was denied but I have in person classes so that's an issue.”

### **Theme 5: Financial Aid**

- “The only concern I would have is financial aid. They are really strict when it comes to what you earn, and depending on what you've earned, they only care about what you made in a particular year. So my parents have different financial circumstances this year than last year, and my financial aid is drastically different this year because of that.”
- “I'm concerned about financial aid but I was told that it would take a while for it to transfer in so I'm just waiting.”
- “I'm struggling a lot with financial aid/affording to be with SFSU so I have to do a lot online right now but that's even a struggle because I still have to pay for classes.”
- “Financial aid because we had a lot of disputes over the year and they took away a lot of money from me.”
- “Financial aid- last year I let them know my EFC wasn't realistic since my parents don't support me and I've been talking to them but my parents claim me as a dependent so there's nothing I can do.”

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## Open-Ended Question #4:

### Why will you probably or definitely not be returning in fall 2021?

For students who responded that they were “**Definitely not**” or “**Probably not**” returning to SF State in fall 2021, the following question was asked: *Why will you probably or definitely not be returning in fall 2021?*

Key themes emerged from this question: 1) Financial Reasons, 2) Transferring to Community College, and 3) Personal/Family Issues.

Example comments of the key themes are presented below:

#### Theme 1: Financial Reasons

- “Finances are not able to pay for tuition. Gonna go to community college instead because it is cheaper.”
- “Mainly just because I started working so I didn't really have enough time for the school part and it wasn't really helping me much.”
- “Staying home to save money & work more. Adapted to online and actually enjoyed it.”
- “Because of issues with financial aid (I will be returning in the spring).”
- “It just isn't working out: money and just the living situation, the dormitory, financial aspect.”

#### Theme 2: Transferring to Community College

- “I'm actually going to city college, so I'll be taking a semester off before returning to SF State.”
- “Doing community college for the fall, SMC is Saint Monica College. Maybe [I] can return back to SFSU when [I] get credits.”
- “I am going to a city college instead. I am an art history major, and SF State was just not the best program for that major for me. Hopefully I can transfer to a UC from the city college where I will be attending.”
- “Finances are not able to pay for tuition. Gonna go to community college instead because it is cheaper.”
- “I really want to go to a UC. I decided I want to enroll in the community college and hopefully go to UCLA! I really want to go there. I have talked to the advisors at SFSU and they were extremely supportive of my decision and they helped me figure out how to transfer to a community college.”

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**Theme 3: Personal/Family Issues**

- “Not returning for personal reasons in my life. Really that is it.”
- “I have some other family related things. But I will take winter classes and spring classes next year.”
- “Since there was a quarantine and with some family issues, I skipped the spring semester and needed some time to get things situated.”
- “Family issues.”

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## Open-Ended Question #5:

### If you are not taking classes this fall 2021, what are your plans?

For students who responded that they were “**Definitely not**” or “**Probably not**” returning to SF State in fall 2021, the following question was asked: *If you are not taking classes this fall 2021, what are your plans?*

Key themes emerged from this question: 1) Transferring to Community College, 2) Working, and 3) Transferring to Another University

Example comments of the key themes are presented below:

#### Theme 1: Transferring to Community College

- “Most likely a community college, probably CCSF.”
- “Taking classes at community college then transferring credits.”
- “Transferring to a community college. [I] already talked to a counselor at a community college about this.”
- “My plans are to have a semester and then go to community college for the next spring.”
- “I decided to do community college because it was easier.”

#### Theme 2: Working

- “My plan is [to] continue working and if I find a college I want to go to when online goes away then I might but it really just depends.”
- “I have a full time job. I had a part time job but now it's full time.”
- “Just looking for a job to make some income.”
- “I am working right now at Golden Gate Park and doing a second job on the side too.”
- “Currently working in a nursing home, [which] takes a lot of time and energy.”

#### Theme 3: Transferring to Another University

- “I have been accepted to the University of North Texas and will finish my Bachelor's there.”
- “After community college, I want to transfer to another university or trade school in STEM, specifically radiology.”
- “I am transferring to another college: Unitech college.”
- “I'll be in culinary school.”

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## Open-Ended Question #6:

### Why are you uncertain about returning to SF State in fall 2021?

For students who responded that they were “**unsure**” about returning to SF State in fall 2021, the following question was asked: “*Why are you uncertain about returning to SF State in fall 2021?*”

Key themes emerged from this question: 1) Transferring to Community College or Another University, 2) Financial Reasons, and 3) Personal Reasons.

Example comments of the key themes are presented below:

#### **Theme 1: Transferring to Community College or Another University**

- “I plan on going to city college to get a cheaper [education] and then come [back to] SFSU.”
- “Because right now I am living in San Jose and I am not sure with online classes or if I should go to a community college.”
- “Online learning was pretty rough. I am not sure if the university and where it is located works for me. I don't know if I want to continue with SFSU or if I should transfer to another university.”
- “Possible transfer of universities.”
- “Transferring to a different program, as well as working.”

#### **Theme 2: Financial Reasons**

- “Financial Aid, I wasn't given any grants, only offered loans. I was in the process of appealing but it looks like cc is looking better for me right now.”
- “I'm on academic probation because I fell off last semester. I'm not sure how to apply for FAFSA again and don't know how to get back the credits I failed, but I don't [want to] pay tuition and so I need financial aid and am really unsure of everything.”
- “I may not be able to pay for SFSU. I do not want to take out loans.”

#### **Theme 3: Personal Reasons**

- “I might take a gap year.”
- “Because my first year didn't go too good grade wise and I have to talk to an academic advisor about my situation and see what will happen then.”
- “My first year I really struggled because it was online and honestly that is not something I can really do. I slacked off and combined with stuff in my personal life, I just don't know.”
- “Not having the motivation to continue and keep grades high.”

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## **Intervention**

In the survey, we were able to identify multiple areas of student concern regarding the upcoming fall 2021 semester. Thus, we wanted to connect these students with various support services on campus that would help address their concerns. Those who requested support generally had similar queries, allowing us to categorize their concerns based on various offices on campus who could provide support.

We were able to catalogue the majority of students' concerns into the following offices, who were then given a master list of emails for students who were seeking outreach from the campus: Academic Advising, Enrollment Management, Financial Aid, New Student Programs, and Tutoring Services (TASC). These offices then followed up with students from their list regarding their concerns.

## **Recommendations**

### **Supporting Students in their Transition to Campus**

A major concern expressed by rising sophomores was adjusting to this next transition as they returned to SF State this fall. Based on this study, the following are recommendations for ways to support students in their transition to campus:

- Continually support students as they transition to campus especially in the areas of getting acquainted to the campus;
- Help students understand how to be academically successful in face-to-face and hybrid formats;
- Build connection & community with and among students;
- Provide support and information around COVID-19 protocols and financing college/financial aid, and housing.



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## Appendix A - Acknowledgements

The Summer 2021 First-Year Experience Remote Internship is grateful for the contributions of numerous members of the San Francisco State community. Their efforts and collegial support have made it possible for us to administer a thoughtful survey that included as many fall 2020 first-year students as possible.

### Remote Internship Survey Team:

**Grace Yoo**  
FYE Faculty Director  
[gracey@sfsu.edu](mailto:gracey@sfsu.edu)

**Emily Shindlecker**  
Senior Research Analyst  
[eshindle@sfsu.edu](mailto:eshindle@sfsu.edu)

**FYE Graduate Research Assistants:** Nina Moskowitz & Betsy Paredes

**FYE Peer Mentors:** Betsy Paredes Centeno, Jason Pichardo-Hernandez, Sonia Getz

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**FYE Student Interns:** Alena Wong, Annika Ponciano, Emri Bullock, Katrina Rosello-Duenas, Meliza Matute, Rosalie Zip, and Waylen Hum.

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## Appendix B - Survey Instrument

Q1. Intern Name (drop-down)

Q2. Student ID Number

Q3. What aspect about being a first-year student at SF State was positive for you?

Q4. When we look back at this year, in what areas did you feel a lack of support?

Q5. What was your favorite online modality during this last academic year (2020-2021)?

- Synchronous (online)
- Asynchronous (online)
- Bichronous (online)
- None/Prefer Face to Face class

Q6. Please rate your agreement with the following item:

I found community at SF State in a virtual modality.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q7. Do you plan on taking classes at SF State in fall 2021?

- Definitely Yes
- Probably Yes
- Unsure
- Probably Not
- Definitely Not

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Q8A. If a student responds: “Definitely Yes” or “Probably Yes” above, the following question was asked: Have you already registered for classes for fall 2021 at SF State?

- Yes
- No

Q8B. If a student responds: “Unsure” above, the following question was asked: Why are you uncertain about returning to SF State in fall 2021?

Q8C. If a student responds: “Probably Not” or “Definitely Not” above, the following question was asked: Why will you probably or definitely not be returning in fall 2021?

Q9. [If NOT registered] Do you need academic advising assistance for help with planning your classes? [If registered] Do you need academic advising assistance for other needs (e.g. changing majors, planning for classes)?

- Yes
- No

Q10. In fall 2021 will you be taking your classes:

- Face-to-face
- Online
- Hybrid
- A mixture of all formats

Q11. Did you get all the classes you wanted for your second year?

- Yes
- No

Q12. Moving forward, would you prefer classes:

- Face-to-Face
- Online - Synchronous
- Online - Asynchronous
- Hybrid (Face-to-face and online)
- A mixture of all formats

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Q13. In fall 2021, would you prefer to attend social student events that are:

- Face-to-Face
- Online/Virtual
- Both

Q14. If you are coming to campus in the fall, what days and times do you think you will be on-campus for classes (Check all that apply)?

- Monday/Wednesday mornings
- Monday/Wednesday afternoons
- Monday/Wednesday evenings
- Tuesday/Thursday mornings
- Tuesday/Thursday afternoons
- Tuesday/Thursday evenings
- Friday mornings
- Friday afternoons
- Friday evenings

Q15. If you are coming onto campus, what are reasons you will be coming to campus (check all that apply):

- Academic Advising
- Basic Needs Resources
- Book Store
- Classes
- Housing
- Library (Study time)
- Mashouf Wellness Center
- Mental Health Support
- Social/Club events
- Student Health Center
- Tutoring/Academic Support
- Other (please specify):

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Q16. As you enter your second year at SF State, what are some concerns that you have?

Q17. Would you like some support on any of these concerns? Can we share your name and email with someone at San Francisco State University?

- Yes
- No

Q18. We hope you will consider enrolling for fall 2021. SF State is providing support for faculty around online teaching as well as additional resources to support student learning online. Additionally, our academic advisors are ready to support students who are unsure about returning to school in the fall and help them enroll for fall classes.

Would you like to speak with an academic advisor?

- Yes
- No

Q19. If you are not taking classes at SF State this fall 2021, what are your plans?

Q20. We hope you will consider enrolling for fall 2021. Our academic advisors are ready to support students who are thinking about not returning to school in the fall and help them explore their options. They can also help you enroll for fall classes if you decide to return.

Would you like to speak with an academic advisor?

- Yes
- No