

Fall 2020 Student Feedback Survey Report

Tufts Community Union Senate

June 21, 2020



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Introduction

Tufts University was forced to begin making unprecedented plans and decisions about how the University could function upon the onset of the Coronavirus Pandemic. On June 10th, 2020 TCU Senate released the “Fall 2020 Student Feedback Survey” to ask students what they thought did and did not go well during the start of the crisis in Spring 2020, fears and concerns they had about the upcoming Fall 2020 semester, and to understand what aspects of student life were most crucial to conserve for the Fall 2020 semester. The survey was distributed by TCU Senate through student channels to various parts of the Tufts community and was closed for responses as of June 19th, 2020. The results of the survey are meant to prioritize impacts on student life in decision making in the COVID-19 era. The survey will be distributed to: the University President, Provost, the Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences, the Dean of Undergraduate Studies in the School of Arts and Sciences, the Dean of the School of Engineering, the Dean of Undergraduate Studies in the School of Engineering, the Executive Vice President of University Administration, the Director of Campus Life, the Director of the Department of Health Promotion and Prevention, the Director of Residential Life and Learning, the Chair of the Education Policy Committee, the Tufts Archives, and to current Tufts students.

The survey took feedback from rising Sophomores, Juniors, and Seniors, 70% of whom lived on campus in Spring 2020, and 61% of whom will be traveling to Tufts from outside of Massachusetts if they return to campus in the Fall. The respondents matched proportions of the undergraduate schools’ populations, though SMFA students were slightly underrepresented (2% of respondents, as opposed to about 5% in the undergraduate population). 42% of respondents receive financial aid from Tufts, also on par with the percentage of overall undergraduate students on financial aid. The 1,360 responses that this survey received can reliably represent trends in concerns, ideas, and expectations Tufts students broadly have regarding the upcoming Fall 2020 semester amidst the Coronavirus pandemic.

The overarching takeaways from the survey are that:

- 1) Every aspect of student life at Tufts is impacted by the need for community, which is threatened by COVID-19.
- 2) Students share anxiety around uncertainty that COVID-19 has created with regard to money, public health and safety, consistency of other students’ compliance to COVID-19 policies on campus, and more.

3) University supply of resources (Personal Protective Equipment, frequent testing, physical space, finances, etc.) to make students feel safe on campus will be crucial to a successful Fall 2020 semester.

Academics

Students remain concerned about their academic wellbeing and continue to face barriers to academic success during the upcoming Fall 2020 semester. Students reported great difficulty in successfully completing all of their academic goals during the Spring 2020 semester as a result of remote learning. The following section is based on data from the 1,243 survey respondents who were on-campus during the Spring 2020 semester.

Over 75% of respondents who were on-campus during the Spring 2020 semester rated their ability to achieve academic goals as Fair, Poor, or Very Poor. When asked to indicate which factors contributed to their inability to achieve all of their academic goals, students overwhelmingly cited challenges that will remain during the Fall 2020 semester. Over 80% of respondents indicated that work-life balance due to missing extracurricular activities and lack of community due to social distancing guidelines. Over 75% of respondents also indicated that the ability to collaborate with fellow students and the necessity of in-person instruction from their professors were major barriers to their ability to successfully complete their coursework during the Spring 2020 semester. The aforementioned factors that diminished students' ability to succeed in their courses will remain problems during the Fall 2020 semester. Necessary health-driven guidelines restricting club activity and person-to-person social contact will continue to diminish community and work-life balance. In-person instruction and the ability to collaborate with other students will be inconsistent as a result of classroom availability, students inevitably forced to quarantine due to Covid exposure or contraction, and other personal health and safety concerns during this evolving semester. Furthermore, over 70% of respondents indicated that they rely "significantly" or "almost entirely" on campus study spaces to complete their coursework and that inconsistent access to these facilities would have a significant impact on their academic work. Given that study spaces are anticipating a reduction in capacity, this will continue to disrupt students' ability to accomplish their academic goals. In terms of mitigating these challenges, 63% of respondents indicated that the Exceptional Pass/Fail policy was helpful to them in some way. An overwhelming majority of respondents, over 93%, indicated that Tufts should either continue offering Exceptional/Pass Fail or switch to Universal Pass/Fail for the Fall 2020 semester. Only 6% of respondents believed that Tufts should return to its standard grading policies in light of the changes anticipated in the Fall.

Recommendations: Based on the persistent nature of the challenges presented by Covid-19 as they relate to academics at Tufts, we recommend that Tufts extend the Exceptional Pass/Fail

grading policy through the Fall 2020 semester. Students and professors alike face unprecedented challenges which mean that traditional standards of academic assessment can no longer be uniformly applied. Just as students understand that professors cannot offer a standard academic experience as a result of challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic, exceptional educational policy must also understand that students cannot produce standard academic work in the current circumstances. In addition to the extension of Exceptional Pass/Fail, we recommend that professors be more generally lenient with deadlines standards for assessment to accommodate students during this challenging time.

Study and Gathering Spaces

Campus spaces are crucial for community and individual students' lives at Tufts. For studying, most respondents use Tisch, Ginn and the Lily Music Libraries 3-4 times per week, for 2 or more hours at a time. The SMFA library is used significantly less, respondents use it only a few times each month more than any other frequency, and usually for less than an hour at a time. Respondents use the Campus Center mostly (in order) to: socialize (30%), study (24%), and eat (23%). Most students spend 1-2 hours in the campus center at a time. In the Tisch Gym, 32% of students exercise at spontaneous hours, and the majority of students, 67%, go for 1-2 hours at a time. Cardio equipment is used more than any other facility in the gym (52%, second being free-weights at 27%). 54% of the students that would need or want to do art in the Fall will not have space in their place of residence to do so.

Comment trends around study and gathering spaces show that spaces outside of individual rooms are crucial for many students' study and socializing habits. Many students also discussed how the availability of space to study, gym space to exercise, and studio art space to do art affects their work efficiency and mental health. Additional spaces that were mentioned in comments that students want to continue using are the Science and Engineering Complex, and practice rooms in Granoff. Finally, many students expressed the fear of having to work individually all the time due to social distancing policies.

Recommendations: Ensure other study spaces and gathering are available via outside spaces, outside heaters, picnic tables. In the winter, outdoor spaces could be covered and heated to expand the space available to students for studying, socializing, and gathering generally. Tisch Gym hours could be extended to accommodate students' need for the space.

Financial Aid

According to the survey, 11% of students will have a difficult time accessing financial aid documents for the upcoming school year. 14% of respondents are somewhat unlikely or unlikely

to be able to pay their off-campus housing expenses. Many students have concerns that their Expected Family contribution (EFC) will change due to unforeseen circumstances related to COVID-19 and thus students will not be able to afford tuition. Comment trends noted that many students relied on financial aid refunds to pay for off-campus housing and are concerned if they will not receive it. Furthermore, on-campus students relying on financial aid are worried about funding for off-campus housing if students are forced to move off-campus.

Furthermore, many students who hope to receive their financial aid package soon are worried about changes to financial situations after financial aid packages are issued and financial aid EFC being based on last year's earnings, rather than the real needs of their situation today. Lastly, students have concerns on how Tufts will allocate tuition fairly given the possible differences between learning spaces.¹

Recommendations: Tufts University Financial Aid department ensures their 100% of demonstrated need commitment to students and takes into account unforeseen circumstances due to COVID-19. Furthermore, Tufts should be willing to work with students when their need extends past their regular EFC.

Employment

Overall, many students have concerns over the impact of campus restrictions next semester on their on or off campus jobs. According to the survey, 69% of students who do have a job say that the income they receive is either 'extremely important' or 'pretty important' to their financial situation, meaning that they rely either completely or heavily on their job's income. 36% of students who are planning to work in the fall are unsure if their job is going to be available; jobs that students are concerned about include the telefund, Teaching Assistant positions, Residential Assistant positions, research assistants, working at Tisch Library and the Rez, etc. Of the students who commented on the issue, there is a consistent pattern of students who ask that Tufts prioritize work study students and low income students for potential job openings in the fall. Additionally, of students whose majors require work experience outside of Tufts, 62% say that they 'might' be able to complete this requirement before graduation and believe that an appropriate accommodation to this situation is that Tufts faculty puts an emphasis on helping students find work experience remotely.

Recommendations: Students who rely on work-study jobs or have an estimated family contribution (EFC) under \$7,000 receive their funding through the year, just as Tufts did in

¹ This summary and recommendation are based off of all but three questions that represented unusable data due to a flaw in the survey logic. However, this summary is based on data that is consistent with the number of responses and reliability of the rest of the survey.

March. Subsequently, if working hours are limited due to social distancing policies and the number of people allowed in a work space, we must ensure students are paid for the hours they work and the hours they are inhibited from working. Work schedules should be more flexible to accommodate class schedules.

Food

40% of students said a take-out system would discourage them from enrolling in a meal plan. Many stated concerns that the cost of the meal plan would not be worth it for various reasons, but mainly that a take-out system would take away communal eating and lose convenience of buffet style dining. 64% of students said they would still eat on-campus if dining halls were closed while 27% of students said they would eat off-campus. 86% of students said they would always or almost always wear a mask and gloves in the dining hall if asked to do so. Around 44% of students said they would eat in a common lounge/room with multiple (2 or more) other people.

Recommendations: Tufts currently has policies that mandate meal plan minimums for first and second year students. To make alternative food options more accessible to these students, Tufts should change the mandatory meal plan requirement to optional. Tufts could generate revenue and support small (minority-owned) businesses, by partnering with more off campus options that already (or potentially could) accept JumboCash or having food trucks or temporary pop-up shops. Both options could reduce health risks to Tufts dining workers, and serve more diverse foods to students, faculty, and staff. Dining workers could also staff food trucks across campus to reduce cluttering of students in dining halls. With that in mind, dining workers could choose teams that they get to work with so that 1) they do not have to be cluttered in the dining hall, and 2) cross paths with fewer people to protect their own health and that of their families. Lastly, Tufts needs to mandate dining hall capacity limits to protect the health of Tufts dining workers, including students.

Housing and Travel

5% of students are uncertain about their housing situation for either the fall or spring semesters. 14% of students are somewhat unlikely or unlikely to afford rent for their off-campus housing. Comment trends include concerns from students with uncertain living arrangements for the fall would like more support from residential life in securing on-campus or off-campus housing.

The biggest factors that could inhibit students from getting to Tufts for the Fall of 2020, in order, include: fear of travel due to anxiety about COVID-19 exposure (29%), closure of airports (25%), and the inability to return home after getting to campus (23%). Other travel concerns are

related to travel once on campus. The SMFA and Davis Square shuttles are used on a monthly basis by 92% of students. While 7% of students use the shuttles daily, 36% use them a few times a week. About 83% of students travel to off-campus locations around Boston for school, work, or leisure a few times every month or even every week, with only 5% of students doing so daily.

Comment trends show that students are concerned with their ability to safely travel to off-campus locations such as Davis and the SMFA for classes. Students are also worried about COVID exposure from other students going off campus, and how the university may or may not regulate and communicate around that concern.

Recommendation: Students should be supported in their search for housing and receive notice on rent as soon as possible. Furthermore, Tufts should specify clear standards and expectations for students who are participating in any off-campus travel.

Campus Life

Clubs and student organizations are going to be prime loci of community building and student engagement in the Fall of 2020. The potential necessity of online meetings is discouraging to many students. 47% of respondents said that their clubs will likely not meet online, or that if they do, they will not want to participate in online organization. 20% of student organizations will need support to attend virtual competitions, while 45% will likely need to look to alternatives on campus to competitions with other schools because their competitions cannot go online. For recruiting, 72% of respondents said that club outreach, General Interest Meetings, and the like could ideally be done in person and following social distancing guidelines. This response is in line with the majority, 53%, of respondents advocated for club fairs for first-years to also happen in person. Respondents indicated that the most important aspect of performance to be preserved in an online broadcast is that the performance happen live so that students can support their friends and be a part of a community. The survey showed that the Crafts Center is most used for the materials it offers, which means that the community the Crafts Center provides is transferable to wherever the materials can be taken. Lastly, the survey suggested that the Group of 6 Centers are most necessary for ensuring marginalized students have a physically secure and supportive space on campus, and for the social-emotional and supportive community they create. Of the students that regularly spend time in the centers, close to 50% only attend for big events, 30% use the centers regularly to see friends, do work, and hang out, and 20% go more regularly for other Center programming.

Comment trends indicate four main themes. First, that student organizations are the most prominent way Tufts cultivates community. More than any other sections, in comments on campus life and student organizations, students explained that without “X club,” their time at

Tufts would not be worth it. Second, there is a general concern that the Group of 6 Centers will be under-supported or under-prioritized in the coming semester. Finally, that parties and social gatherings will still happen in the Fall and that there needs to be communication about how to do that safely, and what the consequences are for such practices for public health.

Recommendations: Club fair and introductions to student life for first-years should be in person, following social distancing guidelines. Performances that are streamed to larger audiences to watch should be streamed live and synchronously. The Group of 6 Centers must remain physically open, potentially given more funding to address the ways COVID-19 has specifically impacted the communities they represent, and maximize their space to serve the most students as possible (potentially extending hours, access to other larger buildings for programming, etc.). Overall, the TCU Treasury and other offices around campus should prioritize spending on student groups to preserve community to the fullest extent possible amidst COVID-19. Finally, there should be clear guidelines given to club leaders about how to best accommodate their organizations, and how to meet in person as frequently as possible.

Student Events, Community, and Social Life

According to the survey, when socializing together students enjoy (in order): hanging out with friends generally, eating a meal, attending a student organization's meeting, or playing a sport, and prefer outdoor or open spaces. Additionally, students are engaged in a wide range of activities that they view as essential to their university experience for which arrangements need to be made to either support or replace to the farthest extent possible. 26% of respondents party and/or hang out in on campus houses and events, 20% of students spend their free time partying/hanging out with friends in off-campus houses, 17% of students spend their time in Medford or Somerville, and 16% go into Boston.

When asked which virtual events they would attend, 22% would attend speaker series, and 37% of students said that they would attend a cooking, workout, or art class. There was a noticeable comment trend that was adverse to attending any online events.

63% of students said that they would "mostly" maintain social distance and comply with all COVID-19 related guidelines with exceptions and 24% said that they would always comply with regulations.

Recommendations: Students should have frequent and accessible PPE and testing, especially those who spend a majority of their time off-campus. There should be clear and realistic expectations and guidelines given to students about how to travel off-campus when necessary, safely. Student events should be organized and held with clear room capacities.

Health

The survey took a look at whether students would have access to personal protective equipment such as masks, gloves, hand sanitizing equipment etc. According to the survey, almost 58% were sure that they would have PPE as needed. 3% said they had no access and 39% that they had limited access but may not suffice for how much is anticipated. If Health Services is the primary location for all illness treatments' on campus, 42% of students said they would not go to Health Services for non-COVID related issues out of exposure-anxiety. Many students have some underlying health issues like asthma that put them at higher risk. The main concern for most students is that while they will follow social distancing norms they understand that staying healthy is a community effort and everyone must continue to practice these norms. Comment trends indicate that many students fear that not everyone will follow social distancing norms and this will put them at risk. Many people are also expressing that the University should provide personal protective equipment and that this should be something almost like Jumbo Condom Circus, and that people off campus should also have access to this.

Recommendations: Health services cannot be the only place to go for illnesses, and if it is separate entrances for COVID-19 related patients and other patients. Community members need to work together to create an environment where individuals are honest about their risk of COVID-19.

Athletics

According to the survey, athletics is a positive, and even integral, aspect to many students on campus. Of students competing at any level (varsity, club, or intramural), 75% of athletes say that athletics is either 'extremely important' or 'pretty important' to their life at Tufts. When asked about the most important part of being on a team, the overwhelming majority (72%) of athletes say that it is the friends and community that their sport brings. In the comment section, there was a repeated pattern of athletes, particularly varsity athletes who dedicate ~30-40 hours per week to their sport, who are considering not returning in the fall if they cannot play their sport. It is clear that sports have a massive impact on improving students' mental health and helping with their academic success, and many students have voiced that they will be willing to adhere to any regulations in order to practice and play their sport. Additionally, there are concerns about the use of the gym for non-athletes and the ability to travel to off campus practice locations such as the Malden River for the crew team.

Recommendations: More outdoor athletic fields and spaces should be available to students, regardless of athletic team status. In the winter, covers could be put on fields and outdoor spaces to expand campus capacities for exercise, health and wellness.

Conclusion

25% of all rising Sophomores, Juniors and Seniors responded to this survey. The survey consisted of 86 questions, many of which were short answers, and required true time and energy to fill out. The high response rate given the length of the survey and that the survey was distributed through student and not official university channels, shows the student body's sincere desire to be included in communication and decision making around COVID-19 and beyond. The content of student responses and their sheer number show that students care about preserving the Tufts community, and want to work together to make a Tufts experience worth coming back to in the Fall of 2020. As a community, we are entering a year of adversity and challenge, but each uncertainty represents an opportunity for growth, progress, and collaboration between university decision-makers and community members.