



BROWN

June 18, 2020

BROWN UNIVERSITY

Key Findings:

Undergraduate Student Preferences Survey on 2020-21 Academic Year Scenarios

On May 6, 2020, Brown University President Christina H. Paxson outlined in a letter to the campus community three 2020-21 academic year scenarios for which the University is planning, given the continued impact of COVID-19 on the health and safety of individuals and on college and university operations across the nation. These included:

1. A scenario in which Brown is able to follow its normal academic calendar, welcoming all students back to campus in Fall 2020 — an optimistic scenario that is largely dependent on broader progress in testing and treatment.
2. A scenario in which the University offers three semesters of instruction and arranges for undergraduates to be on campus for two of these semesters, thus providing an environment with fewer students on campus at any one time.
3. A scenario in which health conditions are such that the Fall 2020 semester must be conducted remotely, with a decision about Spring 2021 to be made in the middle of the fall semester.

President Paxson noted that there could be various modifications under any on-campus scenario — reduction in class sizes, hybrid online and in-person learning with livestreamed lectures and smaller group discussion sessions, etc. — depending on containment of novel coronavirus. And even for the on-campus scenarios, Brown is planning for delivering education remotely for students who are unable to return to campus because of travel restrictions or health conditions.

Following the president's message, the University developed a survey of first-year and returning undergraduate students to collect information about the choices they would most likely make under each of the scenarios under consideration. The intent was to gather information to guide and refine Brown's plans for the fall in conjunction with a wide variety of additional factors, data points and considerations — ranging from input from graduate students (who were surveyed independently) and faculty, to the evolution of the pandemic itself, to the availability of COVID-19 diagnostic tests. Student preferences will serve as one factor in the complex effort to develop solutions that protect the health and safety of students, faculty, staff and the extended community, while maximizing teaching, learning and research operations to the greatest extent possible.

The survey was voluntary and confidential, and answers from respondents did not commit them to any future choices. An invitation to complete the survey was sent to returning Brown students on May 17 and 4,475 of those students (84%) responded. An invitation was sent to incoming first-year students on May 20 and 1,234 of those students (70%) responded.

The following sections of this document include key findings and noteworthy data points from the undergraduate survey. Brown's planning remains underway, and the University expects to make a decision on fall semester operations by July 15.

Key Finding: Most students prefer on-campus experiences

Background: For each of the scenarios under consideration, students were asked about whether — based on the academic calendar, teaching and learning format, and plans for protecting student health and safety — they would be likely to remain enrolled or would instead request a leave of absence (for returning students) or a gap year (for first-year students).

Asked about **Scenario 1**, in which Brown is able to follow its normal academic calendar and welcome all students back to campus in the fall, most students would plan to return to campus:

- 84% of returning students said they would come to campus, 3% would request a leave and 12% don't know
- 93% of incoming first-year students would come to campus, 3% would request a gap year and 4% don't know

For students who are unable to return to campus due to travel restrictions or health reasons:

- 50% of returning students would complete the semester remotely with the other half likely to request a leave or unsure of their plans
- 47% of incoming first-year students would complete the semester remotely, 25% would request a gap year and 27% don't know

Asked about **Scenario 3**, in which health conditions are such that the fall semester has to be conducted remotely:

- 47% of returning students said they would complete the fall semester remotely
- 60% of incoming first-year students said they would complete the fall semester remotely

Key Finding: Most students prefer a fall / spring option in the three-semester scenario

Background: Students were asked about their preferences and likely plans for **Scenario 2**, in which the University offers three semesters of instruction and arranges for undergraduates to be on campus for two of these semesters.

First-, second- and third-year students were asked to identify their first- and second-choice semester combinations. All overwhelmingly expressed a first-choice preference of fall and spring semesters: 85% of first-year students, 87% of sophomores and 90% of juniors.

In each case, a spring and summer combination was the second-choice favorite — for 45% of first-year students, 49% of sophomores and 49% of juniors — but the fall and summer combination followed closely, with 42% of first-year students, 36% of sophomores and 33% of juniors expressing a second choice preference for this option.

For each combination of semesters that might be offered, students were asked if they would enroll in person, enroll remotely or request a leave. Preferences among first-, second- and third-year for the three semester combinations are included in the tables below:

	Likely plans, if offered the Fall / Spring option			
	Take both semesters in person	Take first semester in person, second remotely	Take first semester remotely, second in person	None — would request a leave / gap year
First-years	89%	0%	7%	4%
Sophomores	87%	1%	8%	4%
Juniors	86%	1%	8%	5%

	Likely plans, if offered the Fall / Summer option			
	Take both semesters in person	Take first semester in person, second remotely	Take first semester remotely, second in person	None — would request a leave / gap year
First-years	67%	15%	9%	9%
Sophomores	53%	23%	8%	16%
Juniors	43%	22%	8%	27%

	Likely plans, if offered the Spring / Summer option			
	Take both semesters in person	Take first semester in person, second remotely	Take first semester remotely, second in person	None — would request a leave / gap year
First-years	78%	13%	2%	7%
Sophomores	66%	19%	3%	12%
Juniors	54%	20%	2%	24%

Seniors were asked about each semester separately. Most would expect to enroll in the fall and spring semesters and complete all graduation requirements before the summer.

In this scenario, for each semester I would likely...	Fall	Spring	Summer
Enroll and come to campus	80%	87%	15%
Enroll and attend remotely	8%	4%	4%
Request a leave of absence	12%	5%	8%
N/A — I will have graduated	n/a	4%	73%

Key Finding: Most students are in favor of randomized COVID-19 testing

Background: For scenarios with an on-campus component, Brown is planning for surveillance testing for COVID-19. Each week, the University would randomly select several hundred students for testing, which would be done at no cost to students. The results of testing for individual students would be protected by applicable laws. The results of the sampling would make it possible to monitor changes in the rate of infection on campus.

- 60% of students believe that it is extremely important to conduct random testing and 28% said that it is very important; 10% believe that random testing is somewhat important and just 2% believe that it is not important.

- 95% of students expressed a willingness to be tested if asked; 1% said they would not be willing, and 4% said they are unsure.

Key Finding: Most students are in favor of technology-enabled contact tracing

Background: The University and the State of Rhode Island are developing contact tracing technology that would let students know if they had been in close contact with someone who tests positive for COVID-19, and also track who students have been in contact with, should they test positive. Using this technology would require installation of a mobile app, which would store information on where students go. Information would be kept confidential and would be used only for contact tracing.

- 47% of students believe that it is extremely important to make this technology available to all students, faculty and staff and 29% said that it is very important; 18% believe that contact tracing technology is somewhat important and just 6% believe that it is not important.
- 78% of students expressed a willingness to install contact tracing technology on their mobile devices; 7% said they would not be willing, and 15% said they are unsure.

Comments from Students

Survey respondents were invited to share open-ended feedback in the survey, and more than 1,800 students provided comments. Most were questions, concerns and insights on the following key topics:

- plans for protecting the health and safety of students, faculty, staff and members of the extended community
- remote teaching and learning formats and instructional tools
- cost of attendance
- plans for residential arrangements for students who live on campus and for events and gatherings
- strategies for assisting community members in managing evolving travel restrictions
- the impact of academic year scenarios on summer employment, research and internship opportunities

Next Steps

Multiple ad hoc administrative committees are providing oversight on ongoing issues arising from the global novel coronavirus pandemic and developing recommendations as their work is guided by a set of principles. Among those are:

- an Academic Continuity Group, which is developing plans for reopening research laboratories and libraries, and implementing changes in the academic calendar, curriculum and modes of teaching that will enable Brown to continue to provide a high-quality academic experience for all students
- a Healthy Fall 2020 Task Force, a group of scholars, administrators and students who will make recommendations on the public health measures that will be in place throughout the duration of the pandemic

In those groups and others, Brown's planning remains underway, and the University expects to make a decision on fall semester operations by July 15.