

University Relations/Enrollment Management

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5-2021

## Type of Research: Students and Fall 2021

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**TYPE OF RESEARCH:**

Students and Fall 2021

April 2021

## Background

WVU's Coronavirus Task Force is working on finalizing plans for fall 2021. However, before doing so they wanted input from students, faculty, employees and parents on proposed plans and scenarios, as well as their decision to encourage, rather than require the COVID-19 vaccine.

## Methodology

Four separate online surveys were developed and posted in eNews and uNews. The survey elicited responses from over 2,000 students, over 300 faculty members, over 700 employees and more than 400 parents.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Students feel they have paid a price for renewed freedom this fall. Most students desire a fall semester that promises in-person classes, activities and athletic events, opportunities to meet new friends, the ability to use the Rec Center and an opportunity for comradery. In hopes that things might “normalize” this fall, most students acknowledged abiding by WVU’s health and safety protocols the past year. However, they witnessed some students who disregarded rules and exhibited risky behavior. Thus, since WVU will encourage rather than require the COVID-19 vaccine, they do not expect these students to get vaccinated. This is a cause for concern.
- They argue that non-compliance can lead to an increase in spread, which can ultimately cause an uptick in numbers in the campus community, the inability to reach herd immunity, unpredictability in teaching methods and pose a risk to those who are or live with those who are immunocompromised or have not yet received the vaccine. Many are anxious thinking about whether students sitting next to them in class would be immunized or not.
- That said, they argue that students who choose not to be vaccinated should not be allowed to attend in-person classes, among other things. However, those who choose not to receive the vaccine, including students who feel its long-term effects are unknown, women who are pregnant, those who feel the pandemic is a hoax or those who feel they don’t need it, should not be discriminated against. Those who are immunocompromised also feel they should be given a choice in the way they take their classes because of their potential exposure to COVID from those who opted not to get the vaccine.

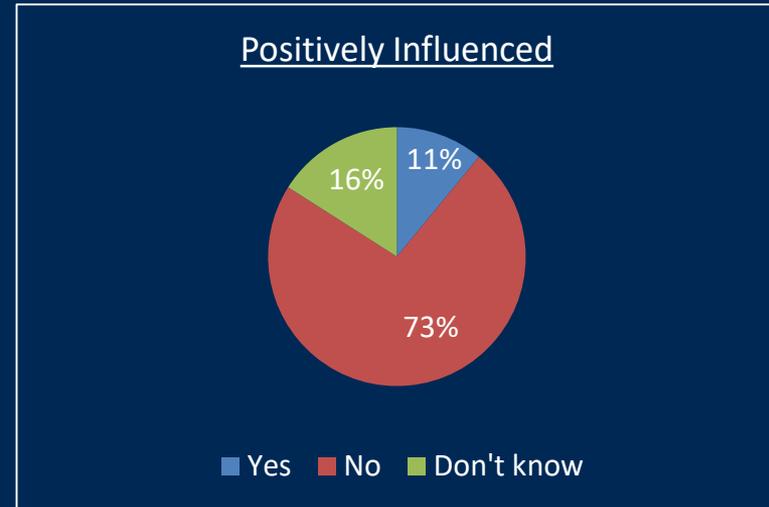
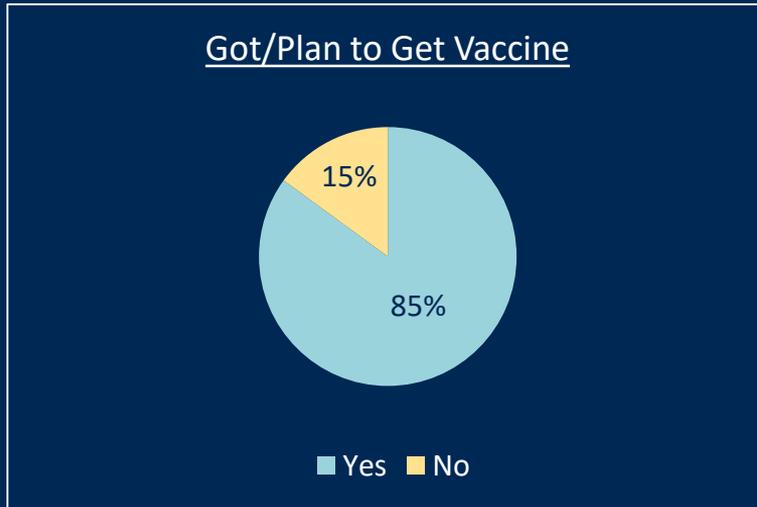
## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Most, though not an overwhelming majority of students, indicated they would feel comfortable given multiple scenarios on campus and in the classroom. Those they feel least comfortable with are:
  - Classrooms at 100% capacity
  - Eating at dining halls at full capacity
  - Riding in buses at full capacity
  - Riding the PRT while following safety guidelines
- They also mentioned the need for the University to give students adequate breaks, as well as improved mental health resources.



## IN FAVOR OF VACCINE REQUIREMENT

All but 15% have gotten or plan to get the COVID-19 vaccine before the fall semester. Those who don't plan to do so were told that fully vaccinated students may not have to undergo surveillance testing and may not be required to quarantine after in-state or out-of-state travel. Knowing this, 11% of students said they are more likely to get the vaccine; 16% are undecided.



Q. Have you gotten or are you planning to get the COVID-19 vaccine before the start of the fall semester? Q. Students who are fully vaccinated before the fall semester may not have to undergo surveillance testing and may not be required to quarantine after in-state or out-of-state travel. Does knowing this make you more likely to get the COVID-19 vaccine?

## CONCERNS ABOUT ENCOURAGING, NOT MANDATING

About three in 10 (29%) are concerned that the University is encouraging rather than requiring all faculty, staff and students to get the COVID-19 vaccine prior to the fall semester. The thought of this evoked repeated responses of “worry,” “risky,” “unsafe,” “vulnerable” and “concerned.” Some of those students who decide against getting the vaccine for personal reasons do not want to be discriminated against. Students feel:

- They will have anxiety in the classroom about who has gotten it and who has not and are thus, not in favor of 100% capacity classrooms
- Other vaccines are required so why not this one
- Students who won't get it will continue to exhibit risky behaviors which will greatly contribute to the spread of the virus
- Those who have gotten the vaccine can still get COVID-19
- Those with underlying health conditions will be put at risk
- Many other colleges are moving in the direction of requiring the vaccine
- Unvaccinated can put the lives of immunocompromised people whom some students live with at risk
- Requiring it would allow the campus community to feel safer
- WVU will be unlikely to reach herd immunity if the vaccine is not required
- More students vaccinated equals a safer campus and the chance of a campus shutdown are lower.
- Unvaccinated students should have limited access to opportunities (e.g. in-person classes, events, etc.)

Q. At this time, WVU will strongly encourage all faculty, staff and students to get the COVID-19 vaccine prior to the fall semester, but it will not be required. Does this give you cause for concern?

## IN FAVOR OF VACCINE REQUIREMENT: VERBATIMS

*“By only encouraging the vaccine, the University is allowing the level of safety I have tried to maintain by getting the vaccine to be jeopardized by students who either REFUSE to get the vaccine or are too negligent to get it. Many students already fail to wear masks properly and the school/town hasn’t stopped the ongoing parties on frat row and other areas on campus. They will continue to spread the virus and put those of us who do get vaccinated at risk.”*

*“Considering that the virus is very contagious and that there continues to be more and more new variants, it is not enough to just "encourage" WVU students, faculty, and staff to get the vaccine. Similar to requiring other vaccinations in order to perform job duties or attend the university, the COVID-19 vaccine should be no exception. In fact, due to the severity of disease caused by COVID-19, this vaccine especially should be required. The data show that the vaccines that have been approved are safe and effective. The risks that vaccines are not "safe" or will cause other health issues are extremely low - it's riskier and not fair to others who have received the vaccine for some to be able to opt out. Vaccines save lives, period.”*

*“Failure to require the vaccine puts others at risk, especially those with autoimmune issues, and allows opportunities for new variants to develop which could lead to the current vaccine no longer being effective. Failure to require implies that the science is not sound and gives credence to conspiracy theories and misinformation.”*

*“For one, with people getting the vaccine a lot of people think the pandemic is over. When in reality you can still get the virus. You won’t die from it but you can still feel so bad that you want to die. So, the people that don’t get it might start being careless about keeping others safe.”*

## IN FAVOR OF VACCINE REQUIREMENT: VERBATIMS

*“I do not want to be unable to attend events that WVU offers because I do not have a vaccine. I am wary of the science that shows infertility and stems cells of aborted children in certain vaccines. I do not support that kind of science as it religiously goes against my religious values. Additionally, I have had COVID and had no symptoms. That said, I have antibodies making me at lower risk for severe infection. It should not be encouraged because it shames students who make their own stances and see the science that shows there is a 99.98% survival rate.”*

*“I don't want other people making choices for me and my loved ones who may be at risk. Those who do not wish to or cannot vaccinate should be required to follow all social distancing protocols.”*

*“I feel like getting vaccinated is a big choice and I have already had COVID-19 and it did not affect me and none of my close friends got it who I would share drinks with. It should not be something required; if people want it to feel safer then have every right but I will not be getting the vaccine.”*

*“I think that getting the vaccine should be encouraged but not strongly encouraged. There are many people on campus that have concerns about getting the vaccine, especially considering that the vaccine that WVU administered to many students actually DID cause health complications. I do not think that getting a vaccine that has only been developed and tested for two years should be a choice forced upon students. I feel that many students have valid concerns regarding the vaccine that should be listened to. I personally am choosing to get the vaccine, but I also respect those who decide to wait.”*

## IN FAVOR OF VACCINE REQUIREMENT: VERBATIMS

*“While requiring the vaccine might be a daunting thought for the administration at WVU, the students safety should be put first. Many students, including myself, have felt unsafe this entire school year because of the risky behavior other students chose to still involve themselves in during the pandemic. If WVU wants to take their students safety seriously, the requirement to be vaccinated will discourage those who do not believe in it to not come back and put the entire campus community at risk. As a student that has followed the guidelines all year, I really don't want to continue feeling left out of the college experience because people don't want to do their part and get vaccinated. I have done everything WVU has asked of me through and through and I don't think that I should have to continue making those sacrifices when COVID-19 never ends because of students that attend this university that never took the pandemic seriously in the first place.”*

*“The vaccine should be required. COVID-19 has been politicized in a way unlike any other disease. If people refuse to get the vaccination for political reasons and not health reasons they are endangering their community and by not having it.”*

*“I think it should be required, in order to guarantee the safest environment for all students and faculty. If it is not required, then there is still a significant risk for having in person classes. This pandemic is not over, and will not be over until the virus is eradicated.”*

## AGAINST VACCINE REQUIREMENT: VERBATIMS

*“I actually support encouraging the vaccine rather than requiring. The vaccine is only FDA emergency approved and I personally am not comfortable with putting something that was forced out so quickly in my body. We do not know the long term effects (1 year etc.) and that terrifies me.”*

*“I am concerned that the university says encouraging but will turn to requiring it. Many people, including myself even though I got the vaccine, are hesitant or do not want to get the vaccine because of personal reasons or because it was developed fast. Also people are not taking the vaccine or COVID seriously.”*

*“I do feel that since it is still for emergency use, there are many unknowns that I am not willing to risk. I have already gotten COVID-19. so I do not see a reason to increase the chances of me feeling ill and missing courses I pay for, for something I will not get again, based off what we currently know about it. My concern with it is the shaming those who cannot get the vaccine due to health issues or those who will be penalized for not wanting to put their bodies in jeopardy due to unknowns. Since the vaccine does not prevent COVID, only lowers the symptoms you may get and feeling sick for a few days is a very common side effect, why should I put myself in this scenario when I have already had COVID. I see no point and backwards logic in saying things can go back to "normal" once people get vaccinated because the vaccine does not stop COVID. It would not be a one time thing.”*

*“The vaccine is not FDA approved. The vaccine DOES NOT prevent you from getting it or spreading it. It’s no more effective than the flu vaccine. The side effects far outweigh the benefits of getting a vaccine that’s not going to prevent spread. It SHOULD not be required, or recommended. It’s no ones business what students get it and which ones do not. It’s discrimination if you punish the students who choose not to get it. Some people can’t get it because of their current health status.”*

## LEARNING PREFERENCES



Students preferences for learning, with "1" being most preferred are as follows

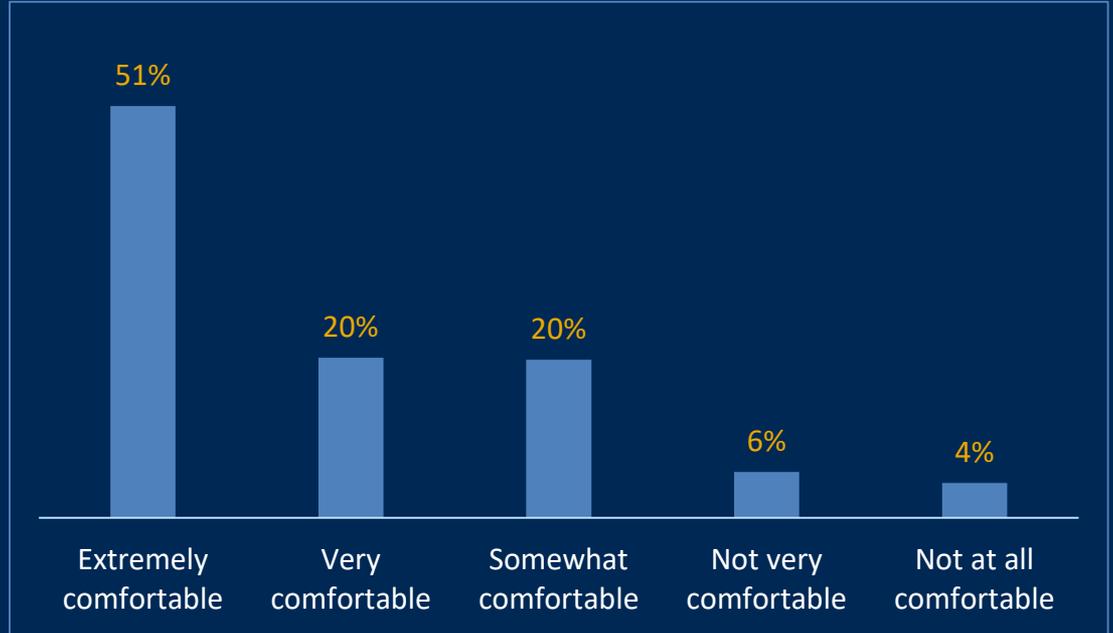
- 1. In-person**
- 2. Hybrid synchronous**
- 3. Hybrid asynchronous**
- 4. Remote synchronous**
- 5. Remote asynchronous**

Q. Based on your experiences this semester, please rank the type of class you prefer in the fall (Use the drag and drop feature, where "1" is most preferred and "5" is least preferred.)



## COMFORT LEVEL RE IN-PERSON CLASSES

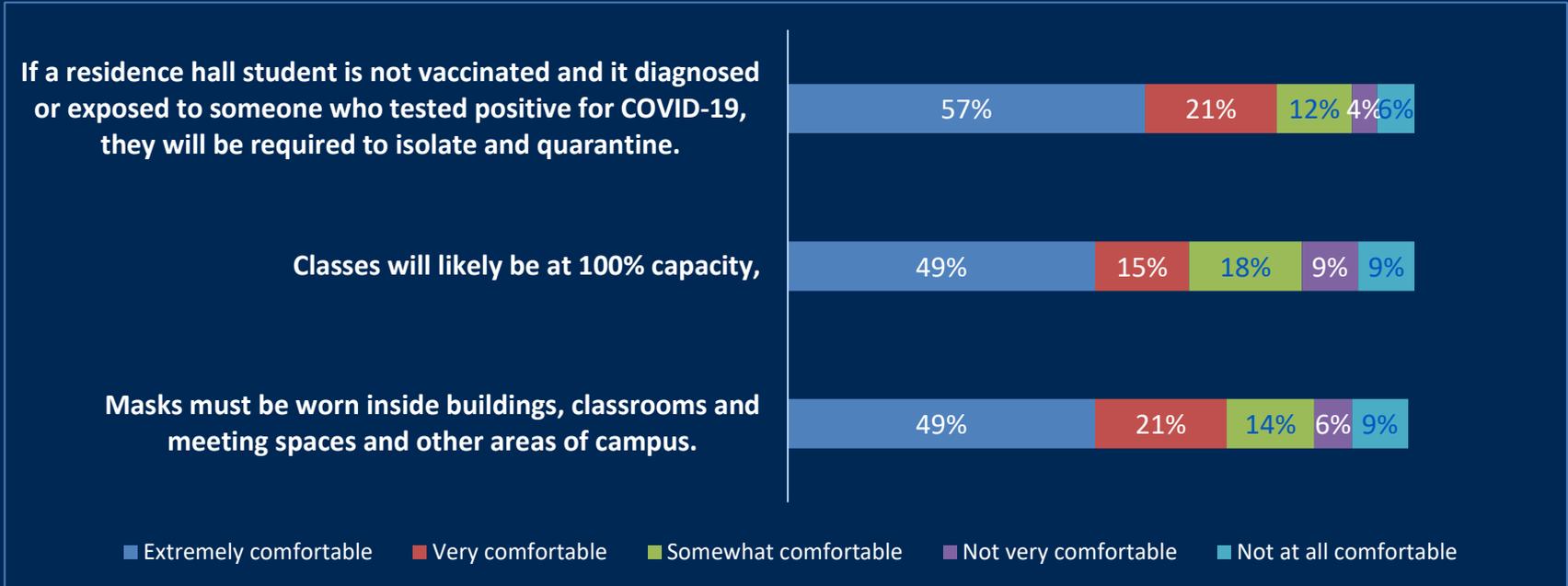
About seven in 10 (71%) feel extremely or very comfortable with WVU's decision to hold in-person classes this fall. Another 20% feel somewhat comfortable; 10% have some level of discomfort regarding this decision.



Q. Overall, how comfortable do you feel about WVU's decision to hold in-person classes this fall?

## COMFORT LEVEL OTHER SCENARIOS

Close to 80% are extremely/very comfortable knowing If a residence hall student is not vaccinated and is diagnosed or exposed to someone who tested positive for COVID-19, they will be required to isolate and quarantine. Fewer (70%) feel the same way about masks being required to be worn in various areas, and 64% feel extremely/very comfortable knowing classes will likely be at 100% capacity.



Q. We're finalizing health and safety protocols for the fall term. How comfortable do you feel about being on campus if the following protocols are in place?

## COMFORT LEVEL RE OTHER SCENARIOS

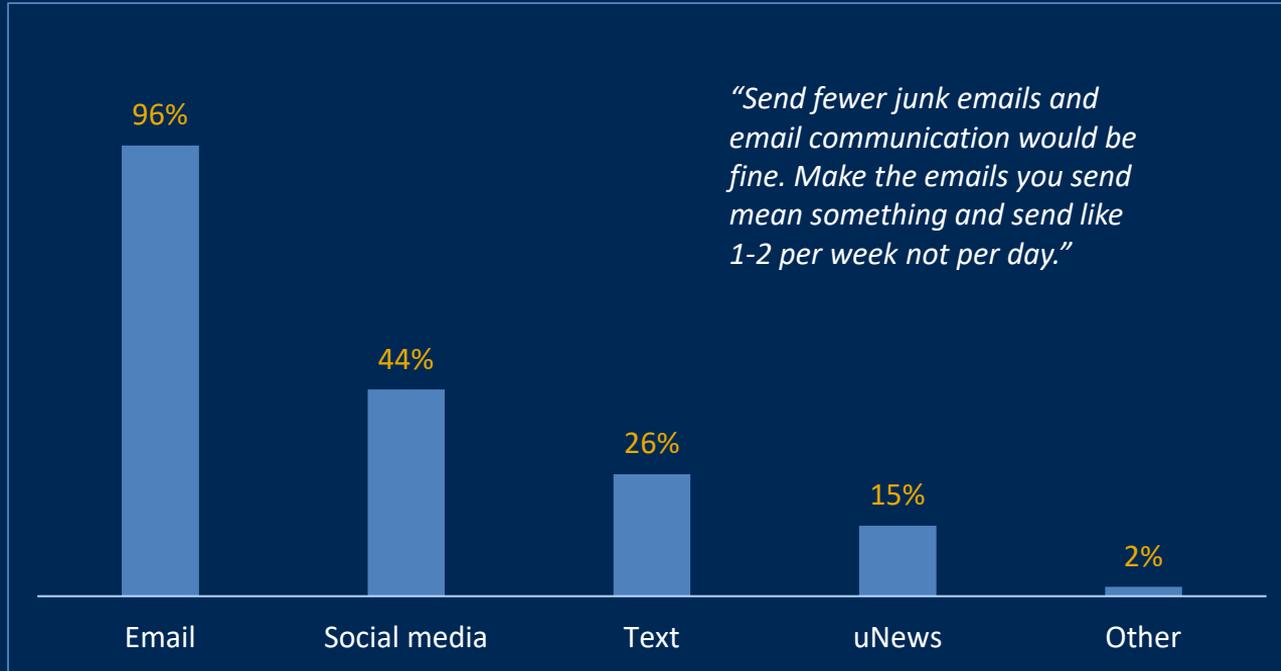
When presented with 10 possible scenarios, between 59% and 74% of students indicated they feel extremely or very comfortable in those situations.



Q. Here are some additional changes being considered for fall 2021. How comfortable do you feel being in these situations?

## PREFERENCE FOR NEWS

All but 4% want WVU to email them regarding changes and updates concerning the fall semester. Over four in 10 (44%) also prefer social media. Another 26% and 15% want to be informed via text and uNews, respectively.



Q. Please check all the ways you'd like to hear from the University regarding changes and updates concerning the fall semester. (check all that apply)

## IDEAS FOR ENGAGING STUDENTS

When giving their recommendations as to how WVU can give them a more engaging experience this fall, many reiterated what has already been discussed throughout this report.

### Classes

- Allow those who have anxiety about returning to a less than safe classroom environment the flexible to take classes another way
- Don't take classes back to 100% capacity immediately because it doesn't allow for social distancing.
- Lift the mask mandate
- Do not return to online classes
- Hold professors to standards discussed in the fall. Have them be more flexible.
- Classes that are required for your major that are specialized should not be taught online
- Encourage or require faculty to provide supplemental materials for individuals who are not comfortable attending in-person classes
- Give students appropriate breaks

Q. We welcome any ideas you have as to what WVU can do to provide you with a more engaging experience this fall. If you do not have any suggestions, please type "NA" in the text box.

## IDEAS FOR ENGAGING STUDENTS

Additional ideas include...

### Other areas

- Improve mental health resources
- Allow student orgs to meet in person without capacity requirements
- Allow students to have breaks
- Bring back everything!
- Enforce and/or eliminate the mask policy
- Extend traditional freshman experiences to sophomores
- Have FallFest
- Allow guests in residence halls
- Open the Rec Center, which will help improve mental health
- Utilize hand sanitizing stations at bus stops
- Establish consistent protocols in all areas of campus

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## IDEAS FOR ENGAGING STUDENTS: VERBATIMS

Verbatims include:

*“I hope that WVU will begin to take the mental stress caused by this pandemic seriously, and either change some of the current policies in place (for example, I wasn’t able to get any extensions for even homework when I had to go to both my uncle’s and grandfather’s funerals which caused me immense stress on top of the pandemic), and take the students’ requests and suggestions seriously.”*

*“I simply do not trust that students are going to follow safety guidelines on the PRT. I have personally been shoved out of line so that someone bigger and younger could push their way onto the PRT. It is madness at Towers and Engineering, I would rather walk than ride the PRT in a normal situation. If WVU is going to open the PRT I think there needs to be more cars running, and someone on the platform during busy times to ensure that students are not over-crowding the platform and the cars. Past experience shows that students cannot be trusted.”*

*“If WVU requires vaccines then I feel like the full student experience as it is presented under normal circumstances will be perfectly engaging. I truly do feel that requiring vaccines is the only way to go since even though things can be mostly normal if vaccines aren't required, requiring them will simplify things and make everyone safer. Additionally, the mental health of students should be as prioritized as their physical health in the coming semester. The Carruth center should be funded more, students should get more days off than they did this year, and professors should be required to excuse students from work if they are suffering from a mental health crisis.”*

## IDEAS FOR ENGAGING STUDENTS: VERBATIMS

*“GIVE US BREAKS. Your students are struggling mentally right now because you put us in school and gave us two "mental health" days that really weren't breaks. Ensure that your students have time off to recharge and catch up on their course work. Don't pretend you're giving them breaks and call them "mental health days" when in reality there is work due. Bring back fall break and maybe include dispersed breaks into the schedule, especially for spring semester too! Ensure that there is a dead week so that your students can adequately study for finals. This semester, we are juggling going to class and having to study for finals in every class.”*

*“Have more services dedicated to student mental health besides just the Carruth Center. The dance program needs a certified sport psychologist and a certified Physical therapist brought on board to help dance students with issues regarding physical and mental well being. Like any other athletic team or organization here on campus, besides intramural and club sports, the dance program needs funding and resources just as much as other sports programs.”*

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*“I would say please give international students the chance to complete their degree if their I-20 got expired because it was very hard to work from home during the past 12-14 months specially for someone who has a child at home.”*

## IDEAS FOR ENGAGING STUDENTS: VERBATIMS

*Let student organizations meet in-person. Still encourage professors to be flexible and understanding. Many professors continued to be strict and unwavering despite the pandemic's challenges. All professors should be required to either record their lessons or let students Zoom into class so they won't miss any information. Fairmont State employed a similar policy, and it's worth looking into.*

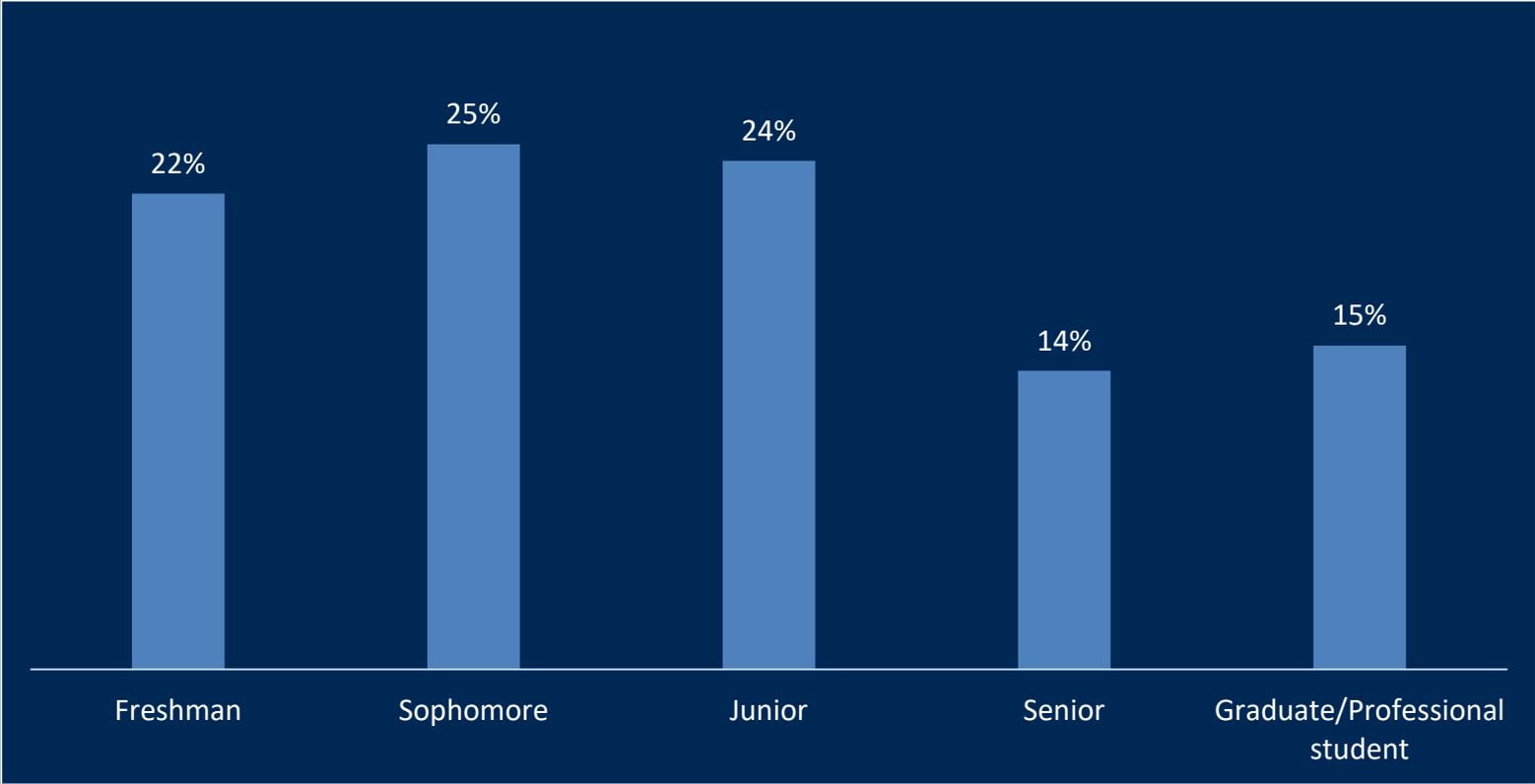
*Many of my asynchronous courses do not provide enough resources or supplementary materials for students to be successful/learn as much as they'd like. Professors should be required to provide some sort of detailed lecture, such as a voiceover PowerPoint or even detailed notes. We are expected to learn all the material from a textbook, which is not reflective of many students' learning style.*

*Nursing majors are suffering. I just wish the instructors could understand how much we actually have to do. They just tell us that we need to manage our time better and write everything down in a planner. I have everything wrote down in a planner and if I'm not doing an assignment or studying for nursing I feel guilty. Life sucks.. I don't even have time to call and talk to my family on the phone. My poor husband thinks I hate him because I can't make time for him. I really think the university needs to think about the students life. The school of nursing sets us up for failure why is it always that our nursing exams are on the same day and our finals are on the same day. How are we supposed to do good?*

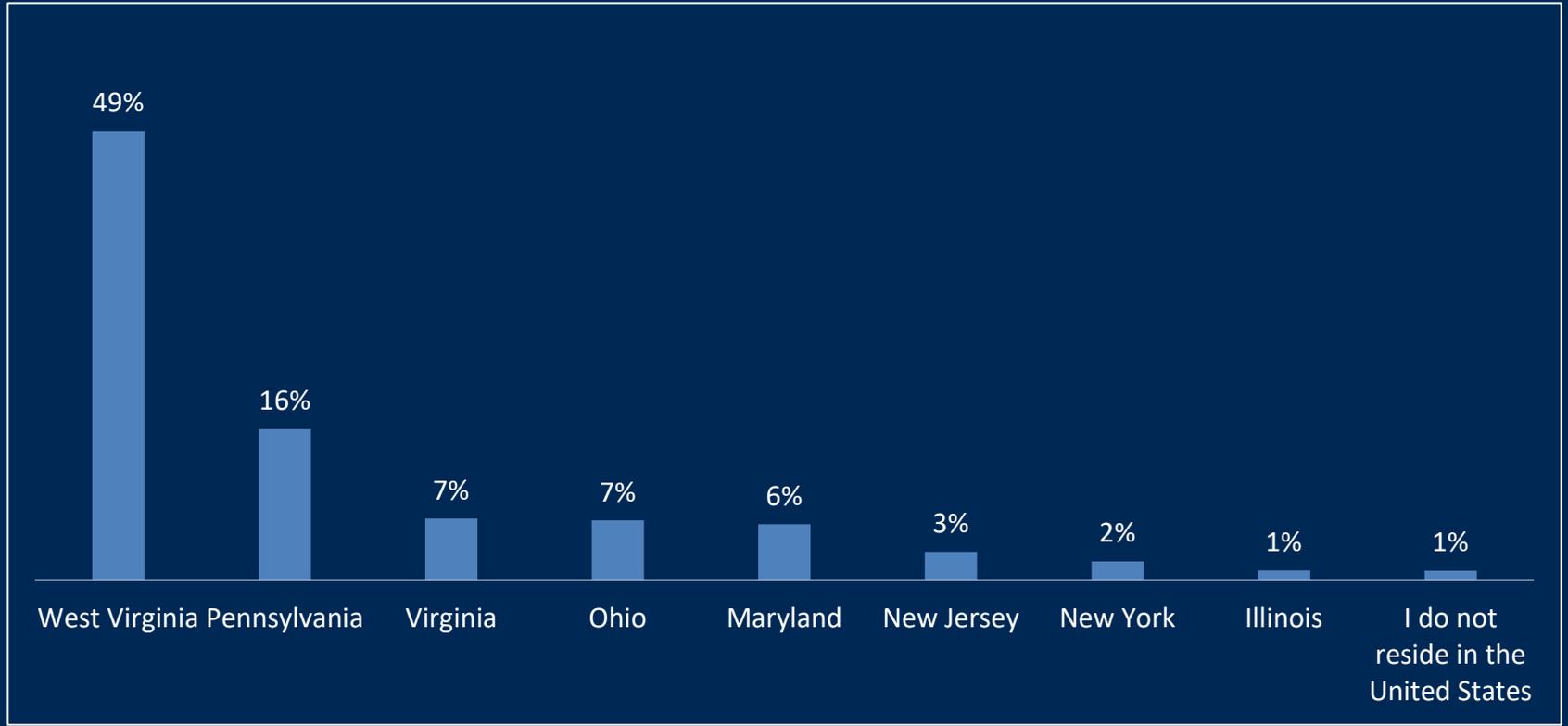
*I think what works the best are online pre videos that students watch before coming to class, to give them the basic information and prime them for in class material. This worked well with my synchronous bio 219 class in the fall and I hope it is something that will be implemented when we return to in person classes.*



CLASS STATUS



## HOME STATE



Only those states that had at least 1% of total survey respondents are noted.