Priorities Survey for Online Learners

JWU College of Online Education – April 2021

Recap of Results

JWU’s College of Online Education administered the Ruffalo Noel Levitz Priorities Survey for Online Learners (PSOL) in April 2021, following previous administrations in April 2018, April 2017 and May 2016. The college did not administer the survey during spring of 2019 or 2020, as the conversion to semesters and 8-week/16-week courses was taking place during this time. The PSOL provides an opportunity for an online institution to examine the priorities of its online students as a unique group. The PSOL has been administered by more than 150 institutions and completed by over 103,000 students in the past three years. The PSOL asks students to respond to 26 statements about online learning with both a level of importance and a level of satisfaction. In addition, COE has defined four additional customized items for the survey, bringing the total items to 30. The data from the survey provides the basis to identify the things that matter to COE’s online students and how satisfied these students are with them. With this information, COE can target the specific areas most important to its students to enhance both satisfaction and retention.

Further, by administering the survey repeatedly, progress in increasing student satisfaction can be objectively measured and documented. While the April 2017 survey results demonstrated an increase in student satisfaction across all of the items in the survey compared to the May 2016 survey results, the April 2018 survey results compared to the April 2017 show small declines of .01 to 0.24 points on the 7-point Likert scale for 22 of 30 items, and small increases in the remaining 8 items. For the 2021 administration, we see increases in the satisfaction scores across 26 of the 30 survey items, a marked improvement over 2018. A total of 12 of the items in the 2021 administration show satisfaction scores that are higher than the comparison group at a statistically significant level.

Survey Population

The link to the PSOL instrument was sent on April 5, 2021, to all 2,158 COE online students actively registered in the Spring 2021 term. The survey closed on Friday, April 23, 2021. A total of 661 students (31%) completed the survey, a response rate above the typical range for PSOL administrations of 20% to 25%, and at 31%, four percentage points higher than the 2018 response rate of 27%, and seven percentage points higher than the 2016 and 2017 response rates of 24%. The demographics of the 661 responding students were compared with the historical demographics of COE active students and found to align strongly.

Comparison Group and Custom Comparison Group

In addition to providing insight into the satisfaction of COE’s online students, the PSOL results also compare COE results to those of a comparison group of participating institutions over the past four years. That group encompasses approximately 103,000 students from 150 U.S. institutions, including both public and private college and universities offering online education. In addition, this year the college was able to identify a custom group of 9 comparison institutions for specific comparison to COE’s results.
Scoring Scale for Items
The PSOL uses a 7-point Likert scale for the 30 importance/satisfaction items, with 1 being the lowest importance or satisfaction level and 7 being the highest importance or satisfaction level. Three additional Summary Satisfaction questions also use a 7-point Likert scale with 1 being the lowest possible response and 7 being the highest.

Demographic Items
The PSOL includes 13 standard demographic items. As noted above, the demographics of the 661 respondents to the survey were compared with the historical demographics of COE’s full online population and found to be very similar. As in years past, female responders (71.2% v. 70.0% of population) and Graduate students (37.2% v. 34.0% of population) were slightly more likely to respond to the survey and were thus slightly over-represented.

Survey Results
There are 26 standard items rated for importance and satisfaction on the PSOL, as well as the four custom items added by COE. COE’s scores on the 26 items are compared year to year and are also compared to those of the comparison group institutions. The items on the PSOL have been analyzed statistically and conceptually to form five comprehensive scales that are titled Institutional Perceptions, Academic Services, Instructional Services, Enrollment Services, and Student Services. Strengths and Challenges are derived from examining the gaps between the institution’s importance and satisfaction scores.

Strengths
Strengths are items with high importance and high satisfaction, including items above the mid-point in importance (top half) and in the upper 25% of all satisfaction scores. COE results cite five strengths, listed in descending order of importance below.

1. Registration for online courses is convenient (Item 18).
2. This institution responds quickly when I request information (Item 10).
3. My program advisor is accessible by telephone and email (Item 2).
4. Billing and payment procedures are convenient for me (Item 23).
5. This institution has a good reputation (Item 1).

Four of the strengths cited for the 2021 administration of the survey are the same as the strengths cited in the 2018 administration, although the ranked order changed somewhat. The fourth strength listed is new for 2021. COE’s 2021 results show higher satisfaction scores than the 2018 national comparison group in four of the five strengths (2, 3, 4 and 5). The score on Item 18 regarding Registration is lower than the comparison group (6.29 vs. 6.52), reflecting increased COE student dissatisfaction with online course registration, although still coming in as a COE strength when compared to other institutions.

Challenges
Challenges are items with high importance and low satisfaction or a large performance gap, including items above the mid-point in importance (top half) and in the lower 25% of all satisfaction scores, or items above the mid-point in importance (top half) and in the top 25% of all performance gap scores. COE results cite five challenges, listed in descending order of importance below. This is compared to eight challenges in the 2018 administration of the survey.

1. Instructional materials are appropriate for program content (Item 3).
2. The quality of online instruction is excellent (Item 20).
3. Faculty provide timely feedback about student progress (Item 4).
4. Custom Item: Faculty provide feedback I can use to improve my learning (Item 28).
5. There are sufficient offerings within my program of study (Item 14).

All of the five challenges identified were also listed as challenges in the April 2018 survey. COE staff will develop an Action Plan to address each of the five Challenges identified in the survey with the goal of increasing student satisfaction in these areas. Success with these goals will be assessed through the Spring 2022 administration of the PSOL.

**Satisfaction on 26 Items**
Another assessment through the PSOL is the comparison of the satisfaction scores of the institution’s online students on the 26 items to the satisfaction scores of the comparison group students. Overall, COE’s results on the PSOL survey indicate that COE’s online students perceive the online education provided by COE in ways that are very similar to and often better than the perceptions of students in the comparison group institutions. For the Spring 2021 administration, 12 of the 26 items (46%) had satisfaction scores that reflected no statistically significant differences from the comparison group. More importantly, another 12 of the 26 items had statistically significant positive variances with the comparison group. Altogether, 24 of the 26 items (92.3%) were statistically higher or showed no statistically significant differences in student satisfaction. This is a very meaningful improvement from the 2018 results.

In the 2021 survey, twelve (12) of the 26 items (46%) had satisfaction scores that represented statistically significant increases/differences in satisfaction scores compared to the national comparison group. In the 2018 there were six (6) such items and in the 2017 survey there were nine (9) such items. These are items where COE performs better than the national comparison group in a statistically significant manner. Items with statistically significant increases against the Comparison Group in 2021, listed in descending order from highest variance with comparison group to lowest, include:

- Item 2-My program advisor is accessible by telephone and email (+0.35)
- Item 14- I receive timely information on the availability of financial aid (+0.34)
- Item 5-My program advisor helps me work toward career goals (+0.31)
- Item 15-Channels are available for providing timely responses to student complaints (+0.25)
- Item 10-This institution responds quickly when I request information (+0.25)
- Item 22-I am aware of whom to contact for questions about programs and services (+0.22)
- Item 1-This institution has a good reputation (+0.22)
- Item 25-Faculty are responsive to student needs (+0.21)
- Item 24-Tutoring services are readily available for online courses (+0.18)
- Item 17-Assessment and evaluation procedures are clear and reasonable (+0.17)
- Item 26-The bookstore provides timely service to students (+0.14)
- Item 7-Program Requirements are clear and reasonable (+0.13)

In April 2021, just two items had a statistically significant difference that is negative and significant: Item 8–Student-to-student collaborations are valuable to me (-0.28 significant at .001), and Item 18–Registration for online courses is convenient (-0.11 significant at .05). These same two items were noted in the 2018 administration.

**Summary Questions on Satisfaction**
There are three Summary Questions on the PSOL (not part of the 26 scale items) that indicate overall student satisfaction. While COE’s satisfaction on all three of the summary questions for 2021 is higher than that of the 2021 comparison group, overall COE’s scores on the first of the three questions (#1)
increased from 5.20 to 5.25, and the other two questions declined very minimally, by .04 points for question #2 and .01 points for question #3.

1. So far, how has your college experience met your expectations?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>2018 COE</th>
<th>2018 CompGrp</th>
<th>2021 COE</th>
<th>2021 CompGrp</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What I expected or better</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worse than expected</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average numeric score</td>
<td>5.20</td>
<td>5.19</td>
<td>5.25</td>
<td>5.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Rate your overall satisfaction with your experience here thus far?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>COE</th>
<th>2018 CompGrp</th>
<th>2021 COE</th>
<th>2021 CompGrp</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat satisfied or higher</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral or dissatisfied</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average numeric score</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>5.84</td>
<td>5.84</td>
<td>5.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. All in all, if you had to do it over again, would you enroll here again?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>COE</th>
<th>2018 CompGrp</th>
<th>2021 COE</th>
<th>2021 CompGrp</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maybe yes or higher</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know or no</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average numeric score</td>
<td>5.93</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>5.92</td>
<td>5.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Five Scale Items
The five scale items defined by the PSOL are described below:
- **Institutional Perceptions**: assesses how students perceive the institution.
- **Enrollment Services**: assesses the processes and services related to enrolling students in the online program, including financial aid, registration and payment procedures.
- **Instructional Services**: measures students’ academic experience, the instructional materials, the faculty/student interactions, evaluation procedures, and the quality of instruction.
- **Academic Services**: assess the services students utilize to achieve their academic goals, including advising, course offerings, technical assistance, online library resources and tutoring services.
- **Student Services**: measures the quality of student programs and services, including responses to student requests, online career services, and the bookstore.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>2018 COE Satisfaction</th>
<th>2021 COE Satisfaction</th>
<th>Comparison Group 2021</th>
<th>Mean Diff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment Services</td>
<td>6.08</td>
<td>6.17</td>
<td>6.08</td>
<td>0.09*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Services</td>
<td>6.08</td>
<td>6.17</td>
<td>6.02</td>
<td>0.15***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Services</td>
<td>6.01</td>
<td>6.16</td>
<td>5.95</td>
<td>0.21***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Perceptions</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>6.06</td>
<td>5.94</td>
<td>0.12*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Services</td>
<td>5.86</td>
<td>5.95</td>
<td>5.91</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in the chart above, COE’s satisfaction scores for 2021 on the five scale items increased across the board compared to the April 2018 survey results, indicating increased satisfaction in the 2021 results. The differences between COE’s 2021 results for each scale compared to the comparison group shows that COE outperformed the comparison group in a statistically significant way in four of the five scales, a big improvement after decreasing slightly in four of the five scales from the 2017 to the 2018 administration.