FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN CHILE IN TIMES OF COVID-19

As the pandemic turned instruction entirely remote in several countries, students are presented with the issues of having to re(construct) what these different institutions (university, family) look like, their boundaries, and physical spaces. The transformation to remote education poses extra challenges not only to instructors, but also to students, especially those who are newcomers and have not been exposed to university experiences before. Therefore, in order to better understand first-year university students' experiences during the pandemic and provide the necessary aid and support for them to succeed in their academic programs, we used school-wide survey data to analyze the experiences of 240 first-year students in one public university in Chile. Using a thematic analysis, we found that these students were mostly concerned about issues derived from remote emergency modality, workload, assessment, empathy, flexibility, and community. This study has important implications not only to inform online instruction during times of restricted (or no) access to in-person classes but also to inform policy concerning university-wide and nation-wide conditions that need to be met to serve all students.

Keywords: online emergency education, experiences, college, first-year students

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic brought many changes to our lifestyles which range from social distancing, employment insecurity/loss, fear of contracting virus, among other threats to our regular way of conducting our lives (Caballero-Domínguez & Campo-Arias, 2020; Javed, Sarwer, Soto, & Mashwani, 2020; Sheraton et al., 2020). In the context of Higher Education (HE), the institutions had to adapt in order to keep their students, faculty, and staff safe. The change in the mode of instruction was one of the most important changes. Before the pandemic, Chile had a very low rate of students who attended full online programs (Cea et al., 2020), and therefore, the novelty of this new method of teaching presented several challenges that are interesting to study.

In addition to the changes and challenges that came about with the pandemic, since October 2019, Chile has been experiencing a social awakening that took the shape of massive demonstrations that were brutally re-

pressed by armed police and the military forces. These demonstrations began on October 18th with a group of high-school students who refused to pay the subway fare to protest against the last increase. But this was just the tip of the iceberg: the underlying reason was the deep social inequality that has been dividing the country propelled by the neoliberal model that the Pinochet dictatorship imposed and that has been prevalent even after returning to democracy. Protests lasted for months and interfered with the regular lives of everybody in the country (Gaete et al., 2020). Hundreds were wounded and mutilated and thousands were sent to jail, many of whom were university students (Gaete et al., 2020; Garcés Durán, 2020). Thus, the pandemic worsened the lives of the Chilean population already caught up in a state of social unrest, economic instability, and uncertainty.

In this paper, we aim to better understand some of the issues that first-year university students in one public university in Chile are facing during the pandemic, and the instructional challenges that come with it.

By doing so, we hope to add to the literature on important issues that should be considered when emergency shifts in instruction are implemented, and thus, promote informed changes which hopefully will allow us to better serve our students.

Literature Review

It is a fact that around the world online education has increased in the past decades, mostly due to communication technology advances and economic incentives, especially for universities, to offer online programs (Palvia et al., 2018). When compared to other regions, Latin America, in general, is positioned only before Africa when considering the region's digital ecosystem (Cáceres-Muñoz, Jiménez Hernández, & Martín-Sánchez, 2020). More specifically, in Chile, online education has increased only marginally in the past 5 years: While countries like the U.S. and Brazil have between 15% and 20% of their total enrollment covered by online programs, Chile only has about 3% of its programs offered online (Martínez, 2019). Another important aspect in terms of online education is accreditation. In Chile, 91.4% of universities are accredited, and while about 65% of the total national number of regular programs have received accreditation, only 16% of the online programs have this status (Martínez, 2019).

Concerning access to basic technology in Chile, a nationwide survey showed that half of the students surveyed have only occasional or no access to a computer, and only 23% had access to a tablet or personal digital assistant (PDA) (Educación 2020, 2020). Furthermore, 80% of the students reported not having access to an environment appropriate for concentrating.

Online Emergency Education in Chile

As will be later explained, this study focuses on emergency remote teaching, which differs greatly from programs such as the aforementioned, which were planned and organized from their conception to be delivered online. In this short literature review, we will address some of the recent studies that have analyzed how this emergency remote teaching prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted education in Chile.

Cáceres-Muñoz et al. (2020) carried out an international study (sampling 23 countries from three continents, including Chile) that analyzed the socio-educational consequences of school closings. The authors analyzed informant perceptions using the following seven categories:

a) execution timings;

b) democratic aspects of the educational measures adopted;

c) curricular, didactic, and methodological adaption;

d) infrastructure and resources adequate for distance learning;

e) perceptions about faculty;

f) perceptions about families; and

g) alternative proposals.

In their study, the authors stress that the consequences of COVID-19 directly affect the right to education; they explain that having a right to education, includes not only access to education, which now is mostly online, but also a right to quality education (Cáceres-Muñoz et al., 2020).

Given that online instruction was implemented as an emergency measure due to the pandemic, there was little to no preparation in most educational establishments to tackle it. This was the case for other countries as well (Díez Gutiérrez & Gajardo Espinoza, 2020; Rupnow, Ladue, James, & Bergan-Roller, 2020). This lack of preparation provoked that already existing inequities in Chile, such as the already existing educational access gap and the quality gap, became wider and more noticeable. Arriagada (2020) explains that in order to be better prepared to transition to emergency online modes of education, there need to be strong educational policies implemented at the short, medium, and long term. Among these necessary policies, the author posits that curricula for teacher education needs to be revisited, stressing the need to develop techno-pedagogical knowledge that allows for more flexible curricular processes.

In a similar vein, Murillo & Duk (2020) also discuss how the pandemic has helped widen educational gaps already existing in the country, in particular in relation to inclusion of students with special needs. The authors explain that these students have seen themselves confined at home and without the palliative measures that education officials have implemented to adjust to the pandemic. Further, and aligned to Arriagada

(2020), the authors caution about the lack of teacher preparation concerning virtual environments. They posit that only a minority of professors in Chile, and in general in the Latin American region, know how to design and implement curricula for a virtual environment.

Given this lack of preparation for situations like the COVID-19 pandemic currently affecting the country, Muñoz & Cartes (2020) propose the implementation of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (Díez Villoria & Sánchez Fuentes, 2015) that would promote a more flexible and equitable teaching-learning process. Basically, the UDL would provide the tools to address diversity in the classroom, support adaptation to different learning styles and rhythms, and increase the types of educational materials provided to students. The authors posit that UDL is a real methodological alternative for teachers, suitable to the requirements the pandemic has imposed in the educational arena.

Finally, Cea et al. (2020) focused on understanding the challenges brought by the pandemic from the instructors' perspective. Preliminary results from a large-scale study carried out with 785 instructors in a Chilean university by Cea et al. (2020) show that one major issue reported by instructors has been that students turn off their cameras and microphones when attending online classes. Though they explain this could be partly due to connectivity issues, they state that students also find these rarely interactive lectures to be a waste of time, especially when the material can be available in other formats. Instructors usually just replicate what they did during their face-to-face instruction, which adds to the fact that they are unfamiliar with the technology they need to use, and thus, unprepared to tackle technology issues as they arise (Cea et al., 2020; Muñoz Vidal & Cartes Arévalo, 2020). The authors also mentioned that this sudden shift to online instruction has evidenced the need to move from teacher-centered to student-centered instruction. Even though this change has been implemented in certain institutions, the challenges brought by the pandemic have made this issue even more salient. Another factor that has proven problematic, particularly for first-year college students, has been that students have not had the chance to get to know their classmates more than by name. Lessons were cancelled before students had any face-to-face lessons which are essential to establish their social network. Finally, Cea et al. (2020) draw attention to how the socio-economic impact that the pandemic has had on students and their families (e.g., loss of employment, debt increase) can further complicate students' access to technology and overall wellbeing. In turn, the latter will further compromise underserved students' educational development.

Recent U.S. and International Studies

Before the pandemic, a survey from the World Health Organization with data from 21 countries showed that one out of five college stu-

dents surveyed had reported experiencing at least one mental health disorder. Thus, it is not surprising that in recent studies that have looked at university students' experience during COVID-19, one of the most reported issues that higher education students have mentioned relates to mental health. Studies have shown that students report feeling anxious (Islam, Barna, Raihan, Khan, & Hossain, 2020; Peloso et al., 2020; Zhai & Du, 2020), stressed, angry (Shanahan et al., 2020), less efficient in overcoming problems (Marelli et al., 2020), and depressed (Islam et al., 2020; Zhai & Du, 2020) during the pandemic.

Among the stressors mentioned were fear that their family members and themselves would contract the disease (Peloso et al., 2020; Zhai & Du, 2020), and lifestyle and economic disruptions (Blankstein, Frederick, & Wolff-Eisenberg, 2020; Shanahan et al., 2020). Among academic concerns, studies showed low enjoyment and difficulty coping with the distance learning modality (Blankstein et al., 2020; Peloso et al., 2020). Further, students who were enrolled in programs that included clinical material and professional training reported feeling concerned that their learning in these aspects would be impaired (Peloso et al., 2020).

Theoretical Framework

University Experiences

We conceptualize university experience from a sociocultural perspective (Vygotsky, 1978), expanding from (Abarca Millán, 2020). We believe personal characteristics (the intellectual and affective processes) and situational characteristics are indivisible (van Compernolle, 2019; Zinchenko, 2009). Thus, we conceptualize students' experiences as "a unified phenomenon with a host of factors, including human relations of different kinds (i.e., academic, social, familial)" (Abarca Millán, 2020, p. 30) that can take place not only inside but also outside the institution (eg., the family, the university).

Emergency Remote Teaching

It is important to distinguish the specific characteristics of online instruction that are the result of a health emergency contrasted to a well-planned and carefully prepared online course delivery. Thus, we use the term emergency remote teaching (ERT) drawing from Hodges et al. (2020), and we define it as "a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances" (Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust, & Bond, 2020). Further, based on this conceptualization, ERT involves certain pedagogical solutions that might be used for face-to-face, blended or hybrid courses, given that it is expected to return to that

format when the emergency period has finished. Therefore, in this mode of instruction, the intent is to create a temporary access to instruction and instructional support that is easily implemented and available during crisis.

Methodology

Research Questions

It seemed relevant to identify what topics were the most prevalent in the online experience of the freshmen students who answered the survey. These topics would shed light on what they were thinking and feeling regarding this new classroom environment which, evidently, added a new area of difficulty to their lives during the pandemic. In this way, this study was guided by the following research questions:

a) What are the most salient themes students discussed when asked to provide their professors with advice or suggestions for the rest of the academic year?

b) What are the main challenges and positive aspects of the experiences that they report?

Participants and Context

This study was carried out with data from a public traditional university in Chile which enrolls more than 40,000 students per year. This university is among the most prestigious in the country and has been ranked among the top ten universities in Latin America (Times Higher Education, 2020).

We focused on the experiences of first-year students as this would be these students' first encounter with the university. Their way to become part of this new academic community of practice lacked the possibility to interact in person with peers, professors, and staff. Therefore, most doubts had to be solved remotely because academic communication was done either in class or via e-mail. The same happened with working or studying in groups. These are situations which add to what is already known about students' high levels of stress and anxiety during their first year of university (García-Ros, Pérez-González, Pérez-Blasco, & Natividad, 2012)

These circumstances added more tension to an already stressed group of students who had to finish their senior year of high school after the social awakening that Chile experienced on October 18, 2019 (Gaete et al., 2020; Garcés Durán, 2020). Demonstrations lasted for months and caused the country's university entrance test date to be postponed twice. On March 3rd, Chile had its first reported COVID-19 case. From then on, there was a series of measures adopted to prevent the spread of the virus. One of those was the interruption of all face-to-face contact in schools and

universities. This university, as most HE institutions, chose to postpone the beginning of their academic activities in order to reorganize, learn, and adapt to this new teaching and learning situation; They decided to hold all academic activities using emergency remote teaching via Zoom. Additionally, there were different initiatives led by the Undergraduate Studies Provost to help the whole academic community adapt to this situation. Different websites and help desks were created to aid both professors and students. Social media were used to communicate with students, and a class that was intended to help freshmen understand and thrive in their first year at the university was transformed into an online course that was available until May. Professors were encouraged to take workshops and to schedule one-on-one meetings to learn about the teaching platform and to make a more thorough use of the educational platforms that help with the administration of each class. At the same time, there was a series of documents produced by the Academic Provost office team intended to provide administrative and academic guidelines to ease the transition into online lessons. The first week of online classes was only devoted to getting in touch with students in each class and asking if they had connectivity issues. Academically speaking, university authorities suggested focusing only on teaching core content and to make adjustments reducing course objectives and course load.

Additionally, the university created a program to provide tablets and free internet connection to students who required it. Considering that about 50% of the students in the researched school come from low income families (equivalent to 177 dollars per person per month) (Díaz-Romero, 2019) -15% more than in the rest of the university- several of them requested this help. In spite of this, there was a strike led by students requesting more technological help and a decrease in academic workload, study weeks without lessons, and fewer class modules per week. The strike lasted, depending on the program, from a few days to five weeks.

In this preliminary analysis, we focused on one of the 19 schools within the university. From this smaller sample, we decided to focus on all first-year students who attended the six undergraduate programs offered by the School of Philosophies and Humanities. As shown in Table 1, the majority of these students are female, that is, about 68 percent identify as female.

Table 1

Number of Students who Completed the Survey Per Program and Gender

Programs	Female	Male	Total
International studies	18	1	19
Philosophy	14	24	38
History	22	19	41
Linguistics and Literature	36	7	43
English linguistics and literature	21	10	31
Education	23	3	26
Total (%)	134 (67.7%)	64 (32.3%)	198 (100%)

This trend is true for most of the programs within the school, with the exception of philosophy, where there are more males than females, and in history, where there is a more equal distribution in terms of gender. Table 2 below shows the number of students enrolled in each of the programs who answered the survey in terms of the establishment they graduated from before entering university.

Table 2

Number of Students who Completed the Survey Per Graduation Establishment and Program

Type of Establishment	Int'l studies	Phil.	History	Ling. & Lit.	Eng Ling & Lit	Education (K-8)	Total	% of grand total
Municipal	1	1	7	7	4	5	25	12.63%
Municipal emblematic	0	3	5	1	3	2	14	7.07%
Private	3	10	4	6	2	1	26	13.13%
Private subsidized	8	13	12	15	11	10	69	34.85%
No info.	7	11	13	14	11	8	64	32.32%
Total	19	38	41	43	31	26	198	100%

Following Table 2, most students came from private state-subsidized high schools, and only about 20 percent of the students came from municipal or municipal emblematic establishments. This distinction is relevant given the great educational inequality that exists in Chile, depending on the type of establishment students attend. Several studies have shown

that private establishments consistently achieve better academic results than municipal ones (Bravo, Contreras, & Sanhueza, 1999; Mizala & Romaguera, 1998, 2002) -with the exception of municipal emblematic high schools, which are known for their academic rigor and high educational achievement (Centro de Estudios Mineduc, 2020).

Data

For this study, we used school-wide survey data that was collected during the 5th and the 22nd of June 2020. From these surveys, which were distributed online, we used demographic information and responses to one of three open-ended questions answered by first-year undergraduate students who were attending one school in this university. The one open-ended question, included in our analysis, asked students to provide advice to their instructors on what to improve during this emergency remote teaching period. We chose this question because we felt the data would allow us to see the main patterns in terms of issues that needed to be quickly dealt with in order to improve students' experience in this out-of-the-ordinary academic environment. Table 3 below shows the percentage of students who answered the survey and the question we analyzed based on the total number of enrolled students.

Table 3

Percentage of Students in the Sample Based on Total Number of Enrolled Students.

n enrolled	n survey completed	% of total n enrolled	n of Q1 answered	% of total n enrolled
426	298	69.95	136	31.92

As shown in Table 3, from a total of 426 enrolled first-year students in six different programs in the Humanities School at this university, 198 students completed the survey (answered all required questions), and 136 answered question one (that was optional).

Table 4

Number of Students in the Sample by Program and Survey Completion

Program	Survey completed			Q1 answered		
	n of enrolled	n	% of total enrolled	n	% of total enrolled	% of total survey completed
Philosophy	63	38	52.4	33	52.4	86.8
English Ling. & Lit.	78	31	24.4	19	24.4	61.3
Ling. & Lit.	101	43	23.8	24	23.8	55.8
History	92	41	30.4	28	30.4	68.3
Pedagogy (k-8)	44	26	54.5	24	54.5	92.3
Int'l studies	48	19	16.7	8	16.7	42.1
Average	71.0	33	33.7	22.7	33.7	67.8
Total	426	198	46	136	31.9	68.7

Following Table 4, most programs have a somewhat similar survey return rate (about 30 students per program) based on total number of enrolled students, with an average rate of survey completion in all programs of about 34% percent. Further, from all students who took the survey, about 68 percent answered the question we analyzed in depth for this study.

Analysis

We analyzed the data from the open-ended question systematically using a thematic analysis (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2014), which helped us identify and describe the implicit and explicit ideas that were present in the data. To this end, we started with an open coding that revealed the main categories in relation to the different aspects that students referred to in their comments. Then, an axial coding revealed the connections between categories. These connections allowed us to create three overarching categories that applied to all students' comments; thus, students included advice in relation to (a) academic aspects; (b) social aspects, and (c) a third category that encompassed all comments that could not be categorized as advice to instructors to improve their teaching.

Based on the above, we defined academic aspects as issues that directly related to students' academic program, its curriculum and implementation. In this category we included issues raised by students that related to methodology, class continuity, evaluations and assignments, classroom culture, time management, and academic support. In relation to the social/personal aspects of the instructors in relation to their students, we defined these as issues in relation to instructors socio-emotional skills and

the way these affected or influenced student-teacher relationships. In this second category, we included issues that related to the creation and maintenance of an academic, democratic community that talked about signs of empathy displayed by instructors, motivation to teach, patience, honesty, and need for psychological help for professors and students. Finally, the last category we created included statements that instead of providing advice, expressed appreciation, provided motivational words, or expressed sympathy for the work the instructors were doing. (For more details on coding and coding categories, please refer to the Appendix). It is important to mention that we coded students' comments with multiple codes depending on the issues referenced and, when students were emphatic and repeated certain issues in their comments, we duplicated codes, thus, accounting for students emphasizing specific aspects in a way that could later be translated in the frequency for that code.

Once we had agreed on the main codes and their definitions, we each coded a section of data independently to check for inter-rater reliability, reaching 88 percent agreement. We then discussed our differences, refined the codes, and reached 100 percent agreement. After we finished coding, we created frequency tables for the most important codes in each major category. We then compared and contrasted data within and across programs.

Findings

Based on our analysis of the data described and following tables 5, 6, and 7 below, preliminary findings suggest that students are mostly concerned with academic aspects, which constituted almost 60 percent of the total of 293 coded instances.

Table 5

Number of Coded Instances of Advice by Type and Program

		Academic		Social/personal		No-advice	
Program	Total n	n	%	n	%	n	%
Philosophy	69	37	53.6	20	29.0	12	17.4
English Ling. & Lit.	40	24	60.0	12	30.0	4	10.0
Ling. & Lit.	63	41	65.1	20	31.7	2	3.2
History	57	32	56.1	19	33.3	6	10.5
Education (K-8)	50	28	56.0	20	40.0	2	4.0
Int'l studies	14	7	50.0	6	42.9	1	7.1
Average	48.8	28.2	56.8	16.2	34.5	4.5	8.7
Total	293	169		97		27	

Table 6

Number of Students Based on Main Types of Coded Answers.

		Academic		Social/personal		No-advice	
Program	Total n of students	n	%	n	%	n	%
Philosophy	38	22	57.9	15	39.5	7	18.4
English linguistics	31	16	51.6	10	32.3	4	12.9
Hispanic linguistics	43	18	41.9	13	30.2	1	2.3
History	41	22	53.7	16	39.0	5	12.2
Pedagogy (K-8)	26	18	69.2	14	53.8	2	7.7
Inr'l studies	19	6	31.6	5	26.3	1	5.3
Total	198	102	51.5	73	36.9	20	10.1

"Total n of students" is based on the total number who answered the survey.

Table 7

Number of Academic Coded Instances by Sub-Code and Program

	Int'l studies	Philosophy	History	Ling. & Lit.	English Ling. & Lit	Education (K-8)	Total
Academic support	0	5	1	1	4	0	11
Class continuity	0	2	0	3	1	0	6
Evaluation & assign.	3	10	16	10	12	11	62
Methodology	4	18	13	21	7	14	77
Classroom culture	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
Time management	0	0	2	6	0	3	11
Total	7	37	32	41	24	28	169

These findings came as no surprise to us. However, given the detail of coding we used for this analysis, we were able to have a much better idea of the specific academic aspects that needed to be addressed. The second most important aspect was the social/personal (34%), with almost

a third of the total number of coded instances. Finally, instances coded as no-advice constituted almost 9% of the total.

Upon further analysis, we found that most of the suggestions made by students focused on either the way in which classes were taught and on the amount of content and type of evaluations.

Social/Personal Issues

Table 8 below shows that in the suggestions related to social or personal issues, the most common concept is empathy.

Table 8

Number of Social/Personal Coded Instances by Sub-Code and Program

Sub-codes	Int'l studies	Philosophy	History	Ling. & Lit.	English Ling. & Lit	Education (K-8)	Total
Community	3	3	5	4	4	3	22
Empathy	3	12	12	11	6	14	58
Honesty	0	1	0	0	0	1	2
Motivation	0	0	1	2	0	0	3
Patience	0	2	0	1	0	2	5
Mental health (st)	0	1	1	2	1	0	5
Mental health (instruct)	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Total	6	19	19	20	12	20	96

Empathy was conceived as issues raised by students that related to the instructors' ability to acknowledge and empathize with students' current conditions that had impacted their homes and wellbeing, and as a result, students' ability to tackle academic requirements. A total of 56 students included comments that aligned with this category.

No-Advice

Table 9

Number of No-Advice Coded Instances by Sub-Code and Program

Sub-codes	Int'l studies	Philosophy	History	Ling. & Lit.	English Ling. & Lit	Education (K-8)	Total
Appreciation	1	5	3	1	0	2	12
Empathy	0	2	2	0	1	0	5
Encourage-ment	0	5	1	1	3	0	10
Total	1	12	6	2	4	2	27

Table 9 shows that most of these statements focused on expressing students' appreciation for the work and attitude their professors had expressed, and "appreciation" is the most frequent one (12 out of 27 instances). Appreciation was conceived as statements made by students that expressed gratitude to their instructors' performance in class, and a total of 15 students spread across programs included comments that aligned with this category.

Discussion

Our first research question intended to identify the most salient themes students discussed when asked to provide their professors with advice or suggestions for the rest of the academic year. As mentioned, three main themes were identified as the ones that concerned students the most: methodology, evaluation, and empathy.

Academically, the students' focus is on the way classes are carried out by their instructors. Several of them asked instructors to adapt their lessons considering both the online aspect and the way they presented content. That entailed more student participation and less teacher-centered lessons in the virtual classroom. In the excerpt below,[1] the student was asking for different methodologies and ways to learn the content of the class. This suggestion included the need to interact with other classmates to learn, but also to get to know each other from a social point of view.

> Yo creo que mi consejo es que diversifiquen la forma de entregar contenido para que sea más dinámico, se den más instancias de participación y de conocernos con actividades en grupo, en que tengamos que interactuar. No solo quedarse en el ppt o en el texto, sino lograr otro tipo de cosas para que la interacción sea mayor.

[I think that my advice is to diversify the way they teach content so that it is more dynamic, it provides more opportunities for participation and getting to know each other through group activities where we have to interact. Do not just resort to a PowerPoint presentation or the reading materials, but use other types of things so that interaction increases.]

Other students suggested that instructors add other resources to teach beyond the lecture type. For example, one student mentioned: "La utilización de mayor material al momento de la clase como uso de algún tipo de pizarra virtual o video, esto es debido a que hay clases en las que solo se habla y responde preguntas." [The use of more tools during class time, such as the use of some kind of virtual board or a video, this (request) is due to the fact that there are lessons in which people talk and answer questions]. From this, we could deduce that the request also points to a change in roles in the classroom where students can participate more actively.

These suggestions related to interaction in the classroom and instances to become acquainted with each other appear to be a suggestion to create a community that could go beyond the boundaries of the classroom. The spaces where socialization usually are found outside the classroom, but in this case, this is not possible, so, class time is seen as a resource to get to know their classmates. Moreover, this university experience with only the academic aspect is only a fragment of the usual university experience of a first-year student (Author, 2020; van Compernolle, 2019; Zinchenko, 2009).

Conversely, there was no mention of classroom culture across disciplines. This could be due to the nature of the participants who, because of their socio-economic origin, are first-generation university students and are not acquainted with the university culture at all (Flanagan Borquez, 2017). So, they can only ask for what was part of their previous school experience in these circumstances.

Moreover, students also asked instructors to make sure that they were learning by including formative evaluations and providing a space in their lessons to talk to the students about their own progress. For example, one student expressed:

"Que hagan un seguimiento general de cómo van los contenidos y si estos están siendo aprendidos o no."

[Do a general follow up to assess if the content is actually learned by the students or not].

In terms of evaluation, students asked for a decrease in workload reflected in fewer readings to complete and a request to employ alternative ways to evaluate their knowledge. On this, for instance, one student requested:

> "Reducir la carga académica. Dejar el material que ocupan disponible luego del horario de clase. Dentro de lo posible ocupar pruebas de diagnóstico en vez de exámenes con nota."

> [Reduce the academic workload. Leave the materials that they (professors) use available after class. Where possible, use diagnostic tests instead of graded exams.]

While another student stated:

> Más trabajos con retroalimentación o actividades cortas para hacer en el momento y aplicar lo aprendido.

> [More written assignments with instructors' feedback or short activities to do in class to apply what has been learned.]

Thus, in these excerpts we see the importance of modifying and diversifying assessments and ensuring availability of resources.

Formative evaluations allow students to have unbiased information about of their academic progress. This information can help them direct their study and could influence their final performance (Boud, 2017). These freshmen students come from a very different educational reality and do not know how they are going to be evaluated or are concerned about their performance in this new environment (Flanagan Borquez, 2017). A formative type of evaluation would allow them to know more about what is required in their classes and it would provide a concrete way to dissipate the stress about what they have to do to pass the class.

The third salient theme was empathy, included in the Social/Personal overarching theme. Students asked instructors to consider the pandemic and all its consequences when planning, teaching, and evaluating their progress. While it is expected to experience more stress as a first-year student at university (García-Ros et al., 2012), there is more tension in these students due to the pandemic in the same way as it has been reported in other countries (Islam et al., 2020; Javed et al., 2020; Marelli et al., 2020). Students are presenting their academic reality as something that is influenced by their general vulnerability and the specific situation they are experiencing at the moment (Abarca Millán, 2020). Some examples of this type of advice are presented below:

> Les diría que fueran más empáticos, ya que muchos de nosotros no podemos acceder a clases a veces, o tenemos problemas en nuestras casas, etc.

> [I would tell them to be more empathetic, since many of us cannot have access to their lessons sometimes, or have problems at home, etc.]

> Que se tenga en cuenta que las condiciones y el ambiente son complejos en esta pandemia. Por lo que si se quiere tener un buen aprendizaje tengan más empatía. No todos tenemos el privilegio

de cumplir con toda la carga académica en tiempos de pandemia.

[The complex general conditions and the environment should be taken into account. Therefore, if what is intended is proper learning, have more empathy. Not all of us have the privilege to complete our academic workload during the times of the pandemic.]

This general request represents a deeper concern related to the probability of failing their classes. This is the first time these students are facing the requirements of HE, and they bring their family situations, their economic status, and their mental health to the discussion as a supporting argument for suggesting the reduction of academic workload and more flexibility during these times. These aspects are in line with the concepts presented by several authors that describe the university experience as challenging, but also that includes the students' entire context, not only the academic one (Author, 2020; Javed et al., 2020; van Compernolle, 2019; Zinchenko, 2009). It is also important to mention that empathy was the most common word encountered in students' responses university wide. This suggests that it was in everyone's mind to ask their professor to consider the general and specific contexts they were experiencing when making academic choices. This is in line with what other authors have mentioned in terms of mental health issues that students are facing (Marelli et al., 2020) as well as the plea for compassion from their professors (Gelles, Lord, Hoople, Chen, & Mejia, 2020).

Additionally, even though they were less frequent, it seemed relevant to present some of the answers that were not suggestions, but mostly words of encouragement and appreciation to the work that their professors had done. For example, one student said:

La verdad es que no se puede decir mucho más que sigan como lo están haciendo, ya que estos tiempos han sido muy complicados como para exigir demasiado.

[The truth is that not much can be asked for. Just keep on doing things as they are, as these times have been complicated enough to demand more.]

Another student stated:

Podría decir que ojalá mantengan esa disposición y empatía que tienen con nosotrxs, porque realmente ese tipo de apoyo es sumamente importante, además de ser necesario para podernos sentir resguardados académicamente.

[I could say that I hope they keep the disposition and empathy they have with us, because that type of support is really important, besides it is necessary for us to feel academically sheltered.]

These statements seem to reflect that students are showing their empathy towards their teachers by recognizing their positive attitude and

the effort made in each class. This is also seen in other studies that highlight compassion from teachers as a form of encouragement for students (Gelles et al., 2020). Thus, it seems logical that these students ask for the same type of treatment. This also presents an understanding of the possible realities that their professors are experiencing that might influence their own performance in class such as mental health issues just as other studies have mentioned (e.g., Marelli et al., 2020). The words of encouragement appeal to a future where all academic activities will be taken up as they were planned, and everybody will be able to continue with the curriculum as planned.

The second research question focused on the main challenges and positive aspects of the experiences that these students reported. First of all, emergency remote teaching in the context of the pandemic modified the entire experience for every student. The change included the impossibility to have access to learning spaces such as classrooms, libraries, computer labs, or internet connection on campus. The lack of access to these resources, in light of the socio-economic composition of the student body must be an added burden to keep up with their schoolwork (Flanagan Borquez, 2017). As face-to-face contact with peers and instructors was impossible, the idea of being part of a community and learn about its cultural practices was challenged. This lack of community ties made the entire experience a solitary one for these first-year students who ask for participation in the classroom and to use the online time with their professors not only to cover content, but also to get to know each other. As an example, one student stated:

> Que se den clases para hablar con nosotres, hacer comunidad y dialogar en conjunto las metodologías. Además de que se dé el trabajo de hacer evaluaciones formativas

> [Use some lessons to talk with us, create community and talk as a group about methodologies. Besides, make the effort to create formative evaluations.]

The other challenges are the teaching and evaluation methodologies that, according to what students suggest, seem to be mostly teacher-centered and less focused on the learning process and more on the product. As mentioned previously, there is a difference between online teaching and emergency remote instruction. The intent of the latter is only to provide access to instruction and instructional support to students while there is confinement due to the effects of the pandemic. In spite of all the efforts made by the university to train professors how to use these platforms, due to the emergency and the fact that many were less acquainted with technology, many instructors resorted to the same methodology they use in face-to-face classes: lectures with Q&A. These practices restrict participation and make students feel less in control of their own learning, and the pandemic has revealed an issue that goes beyond the limits of the pandem-

ic and emergency remote instruction.

The same concern applies to the request for transparency in their evaluations. Several students asked to know what would be evaluated. They also wanted to know about their progress through formative evaluations or short evaluations where they would get feedback from their professors. For example, one student mentioned: "Poder realizar más actividades formativas para saber si estamos entendiendo correctamente o destinar una clase para repasar, antes de trabajos o evaluaciones." [Be able to have more formative activities to know if we understand correctly and have a class to review (the material) before assignments or evaluations.]

This context is stressful for everyone, so even though many instructors may be willing to think about their practices, it is a challenge to ask them to modify methodologies they consider efficient and have been using for years. Training to use new platforms requires more than just a few weeks and professors are suffering from the stress of the pandemic, too. The survey also showed a more positive aspect that included students' gratitude and encouragement towards their professors. Students' statements in that respect presented an experience where students felt understood and not alone.

One theme that appeared in relation to the social and personal challenging aspects was mental health. According to a Chilean journal edited by the Association of Physicians, one in five people in Chile has suffered from one psychiatric illness during the last year (Cofré, 2019). Moreover, this constitutes the second cause of death in young people in the country.

To the social and health situation already mentioned, the new academic environment and the inability to deal with their academic workload and the types and nature of their evaluations added another layer to these students' mental health issues. When the concept is mentioned, there is a suggestion to consider it as a factor in order to make academic choices. For instance, one student stated:

> Intentar clases más dinámicas y más evaluaciones sin nota pero con retroalimentación, asegurarse de que estamos aprendiendo y cuidando de esa forma nuestra salud mental.

> [Try to teach more dynamically and (administer) more evaluations without a grade, but with feedback, make sure we are learning and, in that way, taking care of our mental health.]

In sum, students' main concerns are derived from the remote emergency modality in relation to academic workload, assessment, flexibility, mental health issues, and empathy from their professors. These topics require going beyond the information in the surveys, creating other opportunities to discuss the concerns of both students and professors about adaptation to the new situation, and acknowledging the changing needs expressed by these students in their first year of university studies.

Implications

This study has important implications not only to inform online instruction during times of restricted (or no) access to in-person classes but also to inform policy concerning university-wide and nation-wide conditions that need to be met to serve all students. In other words, if this type of online teaching continues, considering what the students reported, their mental health and access to internet should be considered when implementing new aid measures. Additionally, it would be necessary to adapt course content, teaching methodologies, and assessment and evaluation strategies in order to formally acknowledge challenges in this form of interaction. These actions would prevent the increase in the educational gap reported by Murillo & Duk (2020) and would provide proper training to instructors who are not properly acquainted with virtual environments Arriagada (2020).

Limitations and Further Research

One of the limitations we identify in this exploratory stage of our research project is that we only focused on first-year students. As this was an exploratory analysis, we decided to only focus on first-year students' responses to a single open-ended question, but future research should look into the experiences of students from different cohorts within the same programs in order to better understand the needs of students at different stages of their university journeys.

Additionally, it would be relevant to look into other aspects of the data, such as the relationship between some socio-economic factors and their university experience. If correlations between these factors were found, it would allow for a more targeted and student-specific approach to address the challenges that students would likely face in these situations. We also believe it would be important to compare and contrast this demographic information to data recently gathered after new teacher training was provided and modifications were made to teaching platforms at the university in order to assess the effectiveness of the measures taken so far, and to assess whether certain issues persist and/or have increased or decreased in relevance based on student reporting.

Further, our research only used data from a school-wide survey, and even though it allowed for participants to answer open-ended questions which provided very important data, more detailed qualitative data was not collected. We believe future research should also aim at collecting more detailed information from participants through interviews or focus groups.

Finally, we believe it would be very interesting to also include information about the experiences of instructors to have a more holistic understanding of the main issues. For example, it would be pertinent to

identify the strategies that professors employed to deal with the situation at hand and also how, from their perspectives, this affected their plans and class objectives.

Endnote

1   All excerpts were transcribed and translated by the authors (both of which hold degrees in English Linguistics and are native Spanish speakers).

Appendix

Code	Description
Academic aspects	Issues that directly relate to students' academic program, its curriculum and implementation
Methodology	Issues related to the set of overarching principles that structure and guide instructors' classes
1. Class format	Issues related to the way the class is structured, how content will be delivered, activities included, etc.
2. Class preparation	Issues related to how well-prepared the instructor is to deliver the class
3. Self-evaluation	Issues related to instructor's self-assessment based on class overall development
4. Clarity and consciousness	Issues related to how clear and concise course contents are being presented by the instructor
5. Feedback and rapport	Issues related to instructor's ability to create rapport with students and take into consideration feedback from students in relation to the course
6. Interaction	Issues related to student-teacher interaction online, on and off class time
7. Flexibility	Issues related to the degree in which instructors are able to adapt their teaching methodology considering students' special circumstances
8. Planning	Issues related to instructors' preparedness to teach course content, including organization of course content and time allotment for course activities
9. Engagement	Issues related to instructors' ability to encourage student participation and engagement in class activities
10. Individual/group activities	Issues concerning the inclusion of class activities that are individual and in groups.
11. Online-class teacher training	Issues concerning the instructors' preparedness to teach in an online context

Class continuity	Issues pertaining to the lack or existence of interruptions in the regular flow of academic activities in the semester, including the frequency and continuity of sessions.
Evaluations and assignment	Issues concerning the timing, content, periodicity, and number of evaluations and assignments included in the course
1. Workload	Issues related to amount of work that students are required to tackle towards completion of the course, including number and difficulty of readings, assignments, and evaluations.
2. Deadlines	Issues concerning the amount of time instructors give students to complete and/or prepare for evaluations and assignments
3. Transparency	Issues relating to the transparency of expectations and evaluation criteria of evaluations and assignments
4. Flexibility	Issues relating to the type of evaluations, their length, and deadlines considered for the course
5. Formative/summative	Issues pertaining to the different types of evaluations proposed for a class and their importance and impact in the learning process
Classroom culture	Issues related to the way teachers and students are expected to behave/participate in the university culture
Time management	Issues related to the way time is used in class in terms of class frequency, punctuality, time to rest during classes, and their duration.
1. Frequency	Issues related to the number of sessions a class meets during the week
2. Punctuality	Issues related to the adherence of times to begin and end classes
3. Breaks	Issues related to the presence or absence of breaks during class time
4. Length of classes	Issues related to the duration of classes
Academic support	Issues concerning the way instructors make themselves available to students to provide academic support as well as the timeliness of this availability
1. Office hours	Issues pertaining to instructors' availability to meet with students outside of the class period
2. Academic resources	Issues related to availability of tools to aid students in their academic process as well as the possibility to have access to them promptly

a. Availability	Issues related to the possibility to have access to different academic resources that can help students in their learning process
b. Promptness	Issues concerning the access to academic resources in a timely manner
Social/personal aspects	Issues concerning instructors' socio-emotional skills and the way these affect/influence student-teacher relationship
Community	Issues concerning the creation and sustaining of a healthy and democratic academic community in the course
1. Dialogue	Issues concerning the instructors' ability to initiate, maintain, and encourage student-instructor dialogues that allow the discussion of students' concerns to be heard and duly considered
2. Agreement	Issues relating to the instructors' ability and willingness to reach agreements with the students based on their expressed needs and concerns in course-related aspects
3. Safe spaces	Issues concerning the instructors' ability to create, maintain, and foster safe spaces in the virtual classroom and platforms where students can express their needs and concerns
Empathy	Issues related to the instructors' ability to acknowledge and empathize with students' current conditions that have impacted their homes and wellbeing and, as a result, students' ability to tackle academic requirements
Motivation	Issues relating to the instructors' motivation to teach and persevere despite pandemic-related challenges that might have affected the courses they teach
Patience	Issues relating to the instructors' ability to show and remain calm and composed despite pandemic-related challenges that might have affected the courses they teach
Honesty	Issues related to the instructors' ability to create a class environment where both students and instructors would feel comfortable sharing pandemic-related concerns that could affect their academic performance
Psychological help for professors	Issues related to the instructors' need for professional help due to the pandemic to support their mental well-being

Student mental health	Issues related to the students' need for professional help to the pandemic to support their mental well-being
No-advice	Statements, that instead of providing advice, express appreciation, provide motivating words, or express sympathy for the work done
Appreciation	Statements that express gratitude to their instructors (for the work carried out by their instructors)
Encouragement	Statements that provide motivating words to instructors to continue with the work that has been done
Empathy	Statement that show compassion for the situation that the instructors are going through

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Rosa Bahamondes Rivera is an assistant professor at the University of Chile in Santiago, Chile.

Erika Abarca Millán is a faculty member at Point Park University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.