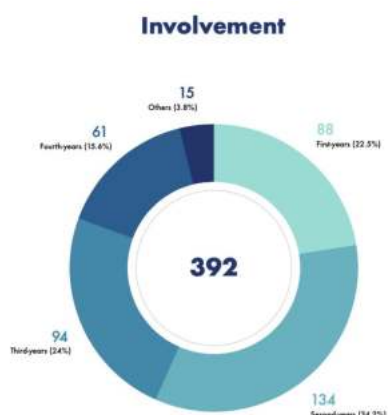


# Covid-19 Responsibility Action Plan Report

By Alexi Canzoneri-Vanture and Akshat Tiwari

**Executive Summary:** Our survey/petition gathered almost 400 responses. The respondents were predominantly students, but a smaller number of parents and alumni also responded. These members of our community supported us in requesting three things from administration - normal access to leaves/deferrals, a petition process for on-campus residence for vulnerable students, and greater

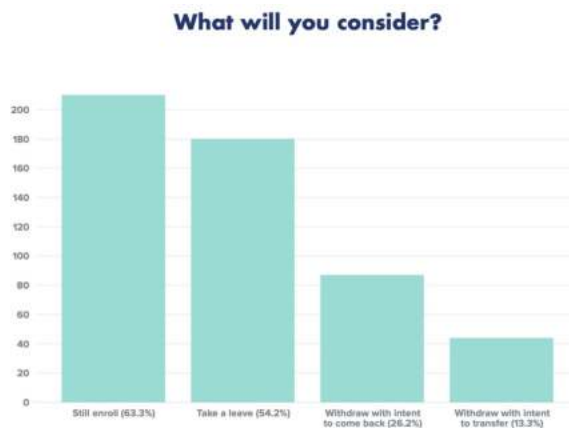


transparency/clarity in communication from administration as well as increased inclusion of student voices in the decision making process. Based on our results we have several main findings. First, large amounts of students are considering taking a leave/withdrawing. However, from our data we can predict that the majority of students will not withdraw if the option to take a leave of absence is given. Secondly, students are most concerned with a degradation of academic quality, absence of a normally-interactive student community in the next semester, and lack of student voices in the decision making process. Thirdly, overall student opinion is that the school is being too conservative in their approach, and that students would prefer a plan where all students are on campus, or at least students are not forced to shuffle on and off of

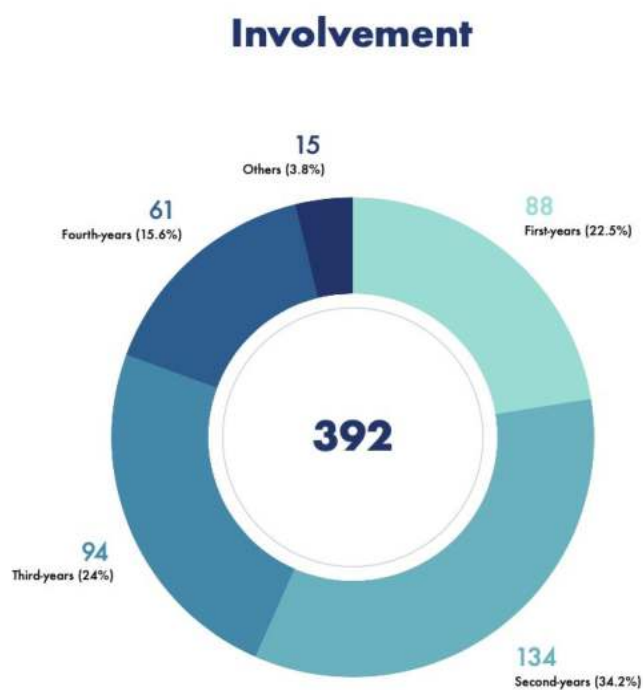
campus. Student expectations for the following semester appear high (in many cases they expect more time on campus than the school appears ready to afford them), and many students (especially the ones who are paying more) are willing to take time off.

As a result of this we believe the school can expect a significant drop in enrollment next semester, and a more significant drop in tuition money paid to the college. However, many students feel that they could be persuaded to take online classes if tuition was significantly decreased. Overall, many students seem to feel that rotating on and off campus would be too disruptive to their stability during this time and many people seem to be convinced that online classes are incompatible with Grinnell's style of pedagogy (a problem made worse by student's

experience with online classes this past semester, although I am sure we all know that a sudden and unplanned shift to distance learning was bound to bring sub-optimal results). Based on our own personal convictions and our data we believe that an increase in quality and quantity of communication and collaboration between administration and students will help regain student trust, boost enrollment, and assist in the development of a more efficient and enhanced plan for our fall semester. Thank you.



**Demographics of responders:** Between the time we started collecting data using surveymonkey.com, and the time this report was written (6/3-6/6), we collected 393 responses including 358 students, 25 parents, 9 alums, and 1 grandparent. Out of these respondents, all but 25 agreed with the requests we outlined (1. More transparency, communication, and student involvement 2. Access to leaves/deferrals, 3. A petition system in place to prioritize vulnerable students and address equity concerns) and 19 of these people simply skipped. We gathered responses from 88 first-years (or parents of first-years), 134 second-years, 94 third-years, 61 fourth-years and 15 “Others”. The survey saw an 87% completion rate. On average the survey/petition was completed in around 5 minutes.



Commentary: What we believe we see here (something that is generally reflected in personal communications with our peers) is unanimous support for more student involvement and the inclusion of student voices in a real and open way in the decision-making process. As expected, we also see a near-universal concern for the well-being of the members of our most vulnerable community members, a concern we are sure our administration will rise to address. We also see support for normal student access to leaves/deferrals.

**Question 5:** *How much of a concern are the items below regarding the college’s plans for next year (1 to 5, with 1 being no concern and 5 being major concern) - 337 responses*

\*\* Note: There is a more complete version of this data in the appendix, including a breakdown of this data by class year in the appendix.

Concern	Weighted average
Ability to pay for fall semester	2.71

Quality of academics in online environment/changed campus environment	4.60
Reduced access to on-campus resources	4.15
Home environment undermining personal academic success	3.53
Inability to return to campus due to travel restrictions	2.20
Exclusion of student, parent, and faculty voices from decision making	4.29
Lack of access to leaves/deferrals	3.23
Personal health concerns related to COVID-19	2.54
Less interactive student community	4.37

By a significant margin, the three largest concerns were quality of academics in an online environment/changed campus environment, less interactive student community, and exclusion of student, parent, and faculty voices from decision making (although this last point is somewhat redundant). However, with the exception of personal health concerns related to COVID-19, inability to return to campus due to travel restriction (understandable, as 80% of our campus is domestic), and ability to pay for fall semester large the rest of the concerns were ranked fairly highly. At this point, we would like to encourage you to examine this question's full data in the appendix, as it is more revealing than the simple averages.

Commentary:

- The importance that seems to be put on the value of the quality of academics and the student community we believe reflects the large premium that students at Grinnell place on a liberal arts education as defined by its community-driven, close-knit discussion-based approach. We believe that this reflects an overall sentiment that it will be hard for an online Grinnell experience to at all replicate an in-person experience because it is impossible to replicate that same closeness in both academic terms and community terms without students on campus. Additionally, the concerns about academics reflect very real anxieties about the specifics of certain courses/majors that are more hands-on (the arts, lab science, for example). The responses to the question "reduced access to on-campus resources" further expands upon these points. We think large parts of this anxiety are due to the perceived lack of success of online distance learning this past semester.
- The inclusion of the concern "exclusion of student, parent, and faculty voices from decision making" is somewhat redundant, as is very obviously a concern based on the number of signatures we have collected. To strengthen the point we are making about communication we would like to bring up the importance of trust in this whole process, and the effect that unclear communication and limited transparency can have on this trust. To a degree the success that our college enjoys next semester in implementing whatever plan it may come up with will be a factor of community buy-in, buy-in that is not only determined by the actual plan itself but also by the way that that plan is communicated/marketed. We believe that by communicating in the way the college has done insofar, the trust between the community and college leadership has been

damaged. This presence of this trust contributes to two key factors affecting student/community buy-in - the assumption of benevolence and the assumption of competency. If either of these things is eroded, regardless of the plan that is enacted, enrollment will drop.

- Another point of interest in the responses to these questions is the low priority put on personal health concerns related to COVID-19. This can be attributed to either the very real knowledge that COVID-19 is far less severe for most young people, or the recklessness of young people whose brains have not yet fully developed. Regardless, the responses to this question beget a conversation regarding the best practices in terms of enforcing social distancing rules on campus as well as what those practices should be. We think that there needs to be a very real conversation about to what degree certain policies may be enforceable (such as scurries, specifically ones that the college choose) as many students seem unwilling to follow certain policies and or believe that certain policies may undermine the value that they would get from living on campus (See sections on questions 6 and 8). If students cannot be expected to follow certain guidelines should the school try to create enforceable rules that will create more of a positive impact, or would this point to a larger truth that perhaps it is not reasonable to have students on campus at all (unless of course, they truly NEED to be there). We would point to the degree of social distancing that students who stayed on campus or in the surrounding town have exercised in order to support this point.
- There is a relatively low average of students that express concern over leave of absence/deferral policy. This in conjunction with the answers of questions 7-9 seems to not point to the conclusion that leaves/deferrals are not important to the study body but rather that there is an assumption that existing policy will remain in place. We also, to a degree, hold the assumption that policy will not change. Although, we are skeptical (especially about deferrals) and see the making of a point regarding deferrals/leaves as more of a safety measure both for the student body and the college's sake.
- We were surprised that the average response to “inability to pay for fall semester” was so low when we personally know several people who are in the process of leaving Grinnell because they can no longer pay. Our impression here is that many of the people who are not high-income are supported by the college's generous financial aid and assume they would continue to be so even if a source of income failed (parents lost a job/business), and that the people whose families are high income enjoy a greater degree of economic stability during this hard time.

**Question 6:** *Please use this space to expand upon concerns stated above, or add concerns of your own. It is important for us to provide our own detailed individual concerns in order to create a platform with the most impact. - 134 responses*

\*\* Note: As this is a qualitative question, reducing these answers to a set of numbers is by definition reducing them. We would highly recommend reading through these comments to more fully understand them and provide depth and humanity to the people who left these comments. Keep in mind many of these comments were short, and only contained one or two of many questions/concerns that the student likely has.

In order to present a succinct summary of the findings that this question provides we coded the responses into a set of categories. Here are the results:

Concern	Number and percent
Communication concerns (School has not been clear and transparent, hearing and including us)	40 (29.8%)
Community based concerns (Friends, town, sports, extracurriculars)	38 (28.4%)
General academic concerns (Everything from “online classes are bad” to “I need me labs to be ready for pre med”)	31 (23.1%)
People who take issue with the idea of rotating students on and off campus in some way (most are completely against it)	29 (21.6%)
People who don’t like the idea of limiting number of people on campus	18 (13.4%)
People with equity/fairness of use concerns	17 (12.6%)
People who were unwilling to pay full or any tuition for what they viewed as a reduced experience	17 (12.6%)
People with concerns about home environment hindering academic success	15 (12%)
People with concerns regarding their ability to leave/defer	14 (10.4%)
Travel concerns (afraid of travelling back and forth due to COVID-19, problems with international travel)	13 (9.7%)
Worried about not being able to pay	13 (9.7%)
General criticism of administration (not elaborated on)	10 (7.5%)
Specific criticism of scurry plan	7 (5.2%)
Worried about having students on campus at all/student safety	4 (3%)

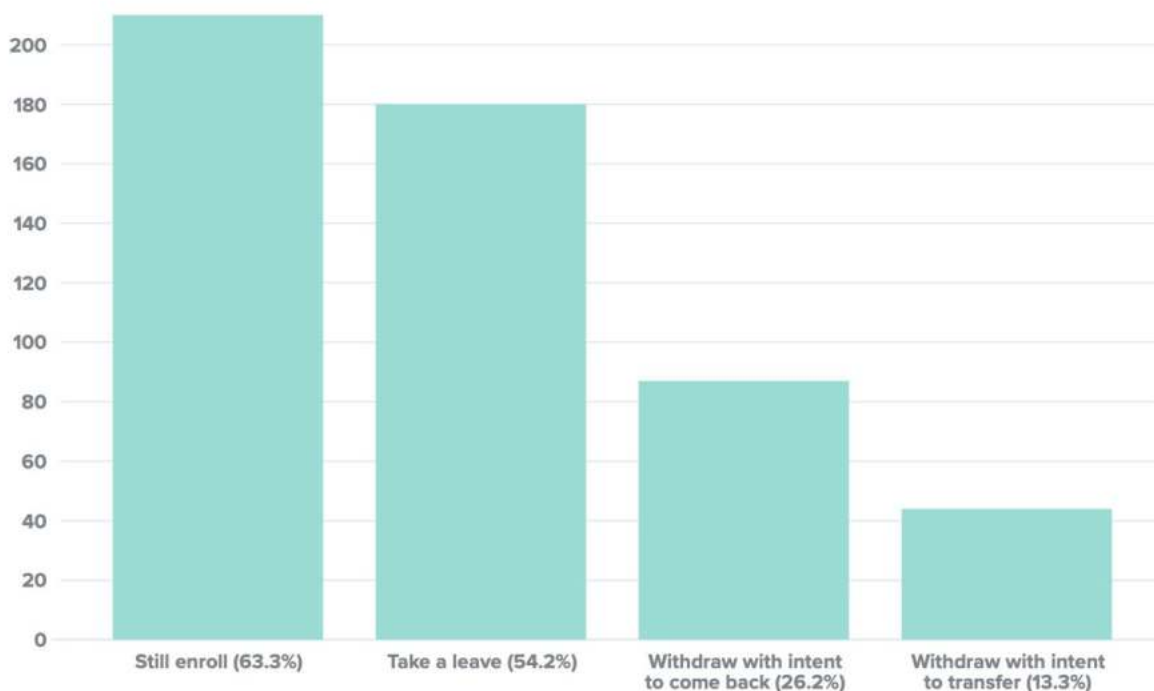
Commentary:

Overall people do not seem to like the idea of rotating on and off of campus. People are worried that it is not worth their money and time, or that it is simply too disruptive to their lives to travel cross country during a pandemic to spend around 7 weeks and then have to move out. Additionally, reading the comments the vast majority seems to believe that online courses have been and will continue to be academically inferior and in direct conflict with the pedagogy style that made them choose Grinnell. Students also seem to believe that the lack of an immersive on-campus experience undermines the value of Grinnell as they would be unable to do things like join clubs and extracurriculars, play sports, go to in-person office hours, have study sessions and most importantly meet new friends and experience personal development. Moreover there are very salient concerns regarding who will get to go on to campus, and that prioritizing students based on things like major and class is an impossibly subjective and unfair way to give and deny students access to an on-campus experience. Additionally, many feel that without the full campus community, student life will be negatively affected. Furthermore, many students have general concerns about equity and their home environment hindering or even completely preventing them from continuing in their education. Students generally have concerns regarding cost and convenience of travel, as well as concerns regarding their ability to pay for the following semester (for international students, these concerns are often related to the cost of international travel). For the reasons outlined above, many people seem unwilling to pay for an online experience (be it partially or completely online) at all or unwilling to pay unless there is a significant decrease in tuition. A relatively small percentage of people commented on leaves/deferral concerns specifically, perhaps because of the amount of times this is addressed in other places in this petition/survey. The student body also seems to have concerns about the scurry/family plan in terms of enforceability and student welfare. Throughout all of these comments (and also throughout pretty much every single personal communication I have had with other students) there is a sense of frustration with administrative stonewalling. Many students believe it is irresponsible, malevolent, unreasonable, or undermining their ability to make decisions regarding their futures. We would point to this frustration as evidence that the trust needed to make the college's plan work is being eroded/ has been eroded. Finally, we would point to the very small proportion of people who criticized the administration for potentially not protecting student health. Many of these comments expressed a concern that perhaps no students should be allowed on campus, or only students that NEED to be on campus should be allowed to be there. Overall, even in these comments there was a commentary that the administration seemed to be picking a middle of the road approach that would neither properly protect students nor offer students a satisfactory student experience. Overall, it seems that students believe that "Grinnell is being far more conservative than necessary about the fall term". Although it may be easy to dismiss these concerns, we would caution the administration against doing so due to the answers to our next couple of questions, as many seem to be considering taking a leave or withdrawing. There were also a smattering of comments regarding off-campus housing. Inserting our own commentary here alongside other student voices, it seems possibly problematic to have 500 students on campus, and then 500 students living in the town of Grinnell that the college cannot keep an eye on. Additionally, for the 1/3 of the student body left out in a situation like this, the semester could be quite frustrating. We would highly recommend reading through the specific responses we have gathered.

**Question 7:** If the following semester is happening in a format you find less than acceptable would you consider: (332 responses) (Check all that apply)

\*\*Note: see appendix for a class-year breakdown of this data

## What will you consider?



Large percentages of students report they would consider still enrolling or taking a leave in the event of a semester they deem unsatisfactory, with sizable minorities reporting intent to withdraw.

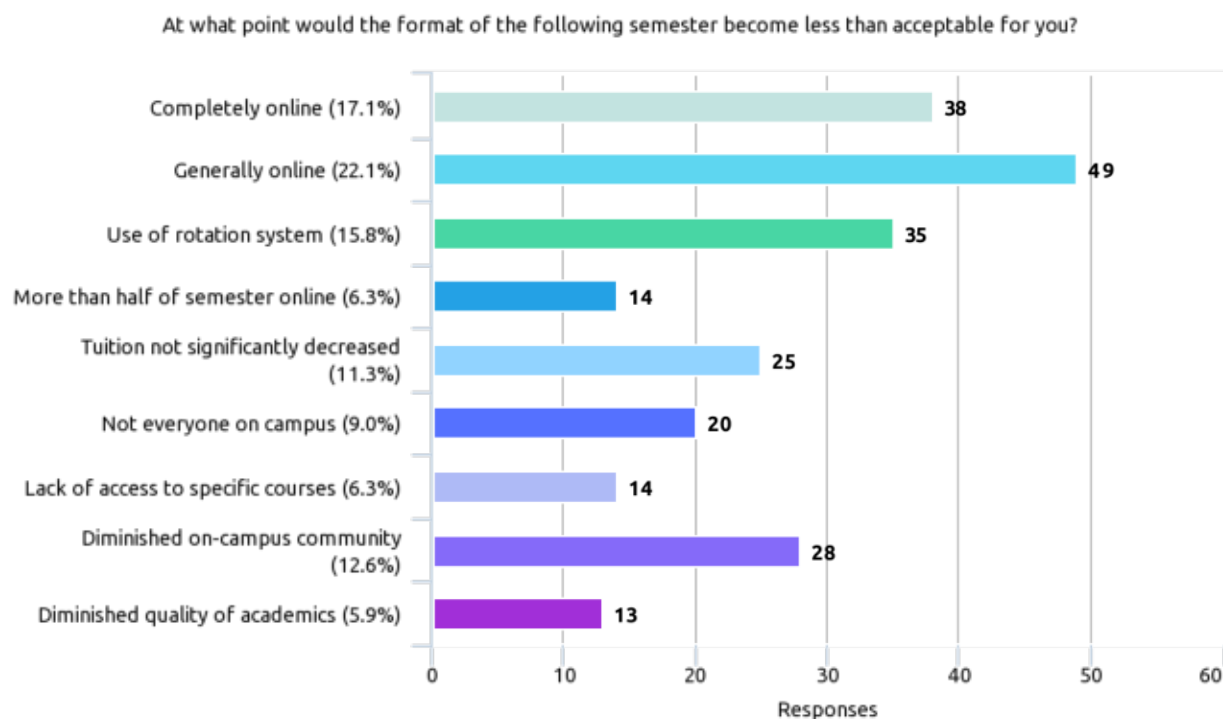
### Commentary:

Before the contents of this question are addressed, it is important to consider the format and context of this question. The question asks “would you consider”, not what will you do. Additionally, in this question there is no context trigger asking the participant to consider that in this situation the college is limiting leaves/deferrals (although perhaps a minority of participants assumed this). Perhaps the largest statistic here isn’t even included in the above graph. 36.7% of participants state that they would not even consider enrolling if they do not deem the format of next semester acceptable. This taken in the context of

the other data presented in this graph suggests that in the case where many students are unhappy with the format of the coming semester, enrollment could seriously drop as many people take leaves or withdraw. These results strike us as dramatic, especially so when one takes into account the comments left by students regarding their preferences for next semester ( see the following question in particular). If many students were to spend more than 8 semesters at Grinnell and take a leave, or disenroll, the college would face many unique challenges. Will there be enough work to go around for all the professors (Will some have to be furloughed)? How will the administration deal with the coming years where there are a larger number of students than normal in attendance? What kind of financial ramifications would this have, and would this affect the schools endowment/its ability to provide the kind of financial aid that attracts many students to Grinnell. Overall this also suggests that people are more than willing to put their education temporarily on a hold, especially when paying for a private college like Grinnell. We would also add that the students paying the most will also be the most heavily incentivized to take a leave or withdraw, and because of that overrepresentation (which is reflected in the answers to our other questions, in particular question 9), a decrease in enrollment would likely be coupled with an even greater decrease in revenue gained from tuition/fees. We would also point out the trend that as class year increases, so does willingness to continue to enroll (but by a surprisingly small margin). Across the board people seem to be willing to take leaves and withdraw. We would encourage the reader to check out the year by year breakdown of the data in the appendix.

### Question 8: At what point would the format of the following semester become less than acceptable for you? (222 responses)

\*\* Many peoples answers to this question are significantly vague (i.e they just wrote online), so coding was somewhat tricky. However, the large majority of these responses fit firmly into only one or sometimes two categories. We would once again highly recommend reading through these responses, as coding these qualitative remarks to quantitative numbers necessarily reduces them.





**Perhaps the most obvious but also the most important thing we can say here is that many of these requirements build on each other.** For example, in order to have diminished on-campus community be a designated requirement, there must be an assumption that the student for it is a requirement believes they will be on campus. Most of the generally online responses were more or less saying that any extended use of distance learning would be unacceptable (although some other responses were lumped in with this group, for example if 75%+ of the year was not in person). The people who were more or less okay with all online classes stipulated that this would require significantly decreased tuition, although many people said any amount of distance learning would require this. The “not everyone on campus” group consisted of people who simply wanted everyone on campus for the community’s sake, and people who believed that significant equity concerns would arise if this was not the case. Most of the “lack of access to specific courses” responses were about lab courses or STEM courses. The vast majority of the diminished on-campus community comments were in regards to restrictions like scurries, something similar, or the loss of an athlete’s season.

Commentary:

A significant portion of respondents feel that at the point where the semester was completely online they would not wish to enroll. Among the minority that, according to these responses, seem to be okay with completely online courses there seems to be an expectation that tuition will be decreased and or that online classes will be conducted in a more palatable and efficient way than the previous semester. Science students seem very worried about their access to the lab portions of their science courses. This makes sense, as lab skills and research opportunities are a core part of the kind of science education that Grinnell offers. A personal comment (Alexi Canzoneri-Vanture) here as a bio major: virtual labs taught me nothing (probably worse for high level classes), and I cannot imagine my bio-150 class without its capstone research project which I imagine could only be conducted on campus. Another thing I would point out in these responses is the low percentage (5.9%) of the responses that really even addressed the quality of academics online as a deciding factor, instead of the presence and length of online classes. I could see these responses being in part a result of the way this question was asked, but I believe that these responses reflect an opinion that is widely but not completely shared among the student body: online classes are not and cannot be comparable to in-person learning. We believe (although we do not necessarily have data to show this) that students know that online classes will be significantly better than they were this last semester, but we think that overall the quick and not always graceful transition to online classes may have scared many students away from considering online classes at Grinnell as a viable option. It seems like a large portion of students may be okay with a rotation system (see the percentage reporting they find any amount of on-campus time acceptable, 17.1%, and more than half the semester online is unacceptable, 6.3%), but a large proportion is also not (15.8%). It is also worth considering that because of travel restrictions or costs of international travel many internationals may be forced to take the entire semester online, which few students appear to find acceptable. Additionally a large proportion of students do not seem willing to take online courses at all, or at least for anything close to a long period of time (22.1%). If we are to assume that the college’s current plan is having a rotational system where there are 500 students on campus at a time who rotate, social interaction is limited by scurries, and there are no sports, (which very much sounds like it may be the college’s current plan) then we would estimate that around 47.6% of the respondents would deem the following semester less than

acceptable, whatever that means in terms of the choices they will make (We got this number by summing the percentages for generally online, use of rotation system, not everyone on campus, and diminished on-campus community and multiplied for 0.8 to account for overlap). Also from this data, we see a worry that many students may not be able to have an on-campus experience at all, which would be a deal-breaker. If the school is allowing 500 students to access on-campus resources at a time, and there are 1500+ students and people with equity concerns need to be let on campus, how is the school to make sure that there is a rotation of all students who want to be on campus in the two quarters that the school will have in each semester? If this was to force a segment of students to take classes completely online, how would that then affect their enrollment? We believe that the responses to this question need to be contextualized in terms of the answers we received to question 7. Are the relatively high numbers of people who would report considering withdrawing or taking a leave a result of these seemingly high expectations for next semester, or would these relatively high expectations lead us to expect an even more dramatic drop in enrollment than one could potentially predict using the results from number 7? Is it once again the students paying the most who have the highest expectations in terms of on-campus experience or tuition reductions? How would these high expectations tie into these groups possible willingness to disenroll.

**Question 9:** Would you consider withdrawing if the college limited your ability to defer/take leaves of absence? How would this decision affect your opinion of the college?

\*\*See appendix for full answers

-> Because of our conversation with administration on 6/8 we are under the impression that the college plans to allow for deferrals/leaves in the normal manner. Because of this, we have decided to forego analysis of this data as we do not think it would contribute to the conversation surrounding policy creation. The answers to this question will continue to be available in the appendix.

A statement on our data: Because of the manner this data was collected in, it is subject to a range of biases (self-selection bias, snowball sampling). Also, because of the messaging we used (it was a petition, bringing up several concerns about the administration), the context in which this data was collected may have biased it. This data should not be taken as completely representative of the opinions of the student population. However, because we received a relatively high number of responses we believe that this data should be seen as a reflection, albeit a distorted one, of overall student opinion.

Closing remarks and acknowledgements: We would like to thank SGA, the many other members of our community whose names are not attached who informed us and helped us in the creation of this report, the administrators who spent their time meeting with us and reviewing our data, and most of all every respondent. We sincerely hope that the data/comments presented in this report can better equip our college in making a plan that is the best for both itself and the student body. We also hope that this project and its results help facilitate further cooperation and communication between the student body and administration. Thank you for reading.

Appendix: [Link](#)