To: Dr. Erika Patterson

From: Amy McCoan

Date: February 20, 2023

Subject: Proposal for increasing the number of online classes and labs offered at the University of British Columbia

Introduction:

The University of British Columbia (UBC) campus lies on the western peninsula of Point Grey; this geographical location is not central to Vancouver. Living outside of downtown Vancouver means, on average, travel times to campus take one to two hours one way. Studying while commuting is not always possible; for example, while driving or if one is required to stand in transit instead of sitting. This travel duration can be up to four hours of valuable time away from studying, work, or spare time. Furthermore, since the COVID pandemic, inflation has driven up gas prices, the cost of living, and tuition. Students who don’t have financial support from family or the government must work to support themselves.

Both factors (commuting time and work) severely limit this cohort of students from successfully attending in-person classes. These restrictions lead to taking fewer in-person classes which lead to prolonged graduation due to the limited classes offered online, and feelings of frustration and overwhelm that contribute to decreased mental health and lower grades.

Intended Audience:

UBC administrators who are responsible for the decision-making of how classes are structured and offered.

Statement of Problem:

There is currently a lack of online lectures and labs on offer from UBC. The lack of flexibility in the UBC class schedule results in students prolonging their graduation because they must attend campus and multiple costly tuition payments. The lack of time and money often results in stress, overwhelm, and frustration. These feelings can contribute to lower grade percent averages (GPAs), decreased mental health, and increased class failure rates.

Job opportunities also become limited when students must commute to in-person classes. Students who are traveling over two hours a day to get to in-person classes and or who have part-time jobs are at a marked disadvantage. The time it takes to get to class could instead be spent studying, taking more classes, or working.

Proposed Solution:

* One possible solution to this problem is to offer more online classes.
* The other is to split large classes (100-200 students in size) into both an online format with a criterion (commuting over two hours or working more than 25 hours/week) and an in-person format. This solution would provide both a “campus experience” to those who desire it and the opportunity to attend classes for students off campus.

The COVID pandemic forced UBC to offer only online lectures and labs, thus laying the foundation to facilitate this proposal. By offering students more time to focus on their studies, they will be able to get higher GPAs and feel greater satisfaction, and UBC will obtain higher graduation rates and university ranking.

For this proposal, I will only investigate the classes in the Department of Psychology; assessing the entire university is too large in scale.

Scope:

To assess the feasibility of offering more online opportunities for students, I plan to pursue these six areas of inquiry:

* How great is the demand for increasing the availability of online classes?
* Would students take more classes if they did not have to commute?
* Would students graduate faster if they could take more online lectures?
* What is the cost of creating more online lectures and labs?
* Do students who commute or work value or desire an on-campus experience?
* Do students feel like they’d get higher grades and more life satisfaction from taking online classes and not commuting?

Methods:

The primary method will be to create and distribute a survey to examine and evaluate the student experience. The survey will be published on the website, Reddit (specifically in a UBC subreddit), and I will ask the permission of my PYSC 309, 365, and ENGL 301 professors to distribute them on the class Canvas/Piazza. I will contact Dr. Geoffrey Hall, the Head of the Department of Psychology at UBC, and enquire about the cost of offering more online/hybrid classes.

Secondary methods for this proposal include my own research of the psychology department. I will count the UBC PSYC classes offered in the fall, winter, and summer terms and determine how many lectures are offered in-person versus online to evaluate how many could be added online.

Qualifications:

I have been working on my second degree at the UBC Vancouver campus since 2021. As I live in Squamish, my travel time averages about four hours a day to get to campus, two hours of which are driving. I also work full-time shift work. Shift work has made attending classes hard if they are not online or asynchronous. My commute and job have restricted the time available for studying, which has lowered my grades, led to chronic stress, and decreased mental health. The lack of flexibility in class choice means that my four-year degree could take six to seven years to complete. I have spoken to others who are in similar positions and feel frustrated with their situation. The insight and understanding I have into this scenario provide me the opportunity to complete a feasibility analysis.

Conclusion:

The success of UBC relies on students’ obtaining degrees and high GPAs. UBC only offers a limited selection of classes online or in hybrid formats. The university expects most classes and labs to be attended on campus. The abundance of in-person classes caters to students living on campus or under an hour away and largely neglects a whole cohort of students. By completing the six areas of inquiry, I can determine the feasibility of including more online lectures. With your approval, I will begin research at once.