
STUDENT PERCEPTION OF PREPAREDNESS IN THE MIDST OF COVID-19: A SNAPSHOT FROM FIRST YEAR CHEMISTRY STUDENTS

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The transition from high school to tertiary education can present many challenges for students. First year students must navigate new formal curricular, societal norms, physical environments, and support networks. An important factor for a successful transition from secondary to tertiary education is student preparedness. This transition period was thrown on its head due to the global challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic presented in 2020. The aim of this research was to identify and examine the perceptions of preparedness of first-year chemistry students, and if these perceptions were significantly impacted by COVID-19. Surveys were deployed to a first-year chemistry cohort at both the start and the end of semester, and follow up focus groups conducted after the conclusion of the semester. Results indicate that students' perceptions of preparedness for studying chemistry increased over the course of the semester, however for studying at university in general the perception of preparedness decreased. The absence of in-person laboratory practicals was found to be a great concern for students, along with factors previously found to impact students' perceptions. Reflections and findings of the students' experiences will be presented from the first semester of 2020 delivered online through emergency remote teaching and learning.

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