

With the advent of remote learning and online education, there has been significant research conducted in the field in recent months. Researchers are working hard to understand how online learning affects students, and how the education system can best adapt to the needs of individual students. One area that we have specifically wanted to address is social anxiety associated with this new online learning platform. With education now based on video conferencing, we want to understand how this may disenfranchise students from interacting with their peers and instructors and how we can guide them to proper academic activity.

A very interesting project that has come about in recent months is a scale to measure students' social anxiety when interacting in online learning environments. Observers take in 23 separate variables that fit into three subcategories. These subcategories are named negative evaluation, somatic symptoms, and avoidance of interaction. With these metrics, the researchers claim they can accurately and reliably assess the social anxiety of individual students. This would be greatly beneficial to teachers so that they can identify and adapt a student's learning experience based on their needs.

Another interesting finding from our initial research was that the major differentiator between students who take well to the new virtual classroom and those who don't is age. Researchers couldn't find major differences in transitional success to online learning from a variety of demographic splits. Instead, the major factor to influence a student's success in an online classroom was age. Younger students tended to have a more difficult time adjusting to the online classroom environment. Older students found the process simpler and more fluid.

We found that social engagement provides substantial educational benefits. Research done on massive open online courses (MOOCs) shows that social events and student engagement result in benefits such as higher creative potential, stronger sense of belonging, and improved academic achievement. Also, studies show that online social networking allows students to find groups and a sense of belonging within their university, factors that tend to improve academic outcomes. It is interesting to note that several platforms exist to try to combat the loneliness that comes from remote work and collaboration, but there are still many open questions regarding the best ways to foster interaction, increase productivity, or reduce social awkwardness in online educational environments.

For our project, we are looking into collaborative working environments, tutoring and virtual educational help, and successful ways to engage students. We may need to decide whether we wish to focus on both university and grade-school students, depending on what we learn from the first set of interviews and our needfinding. We will focus on social anxiety and the dynamics of online classrooms and other educational settings, such as office hours and tutoring sessions.