Students Entering College Fall 2021: What Colleges & Universities Should Know

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Banner photo courtesy of University of Minnesota - Duluth

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Our Focus Today

- **Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) - student survey data & open-ended comments**
- **Entering "New" Students**
  Mostly traditional age; completed high school in 2021
- **COVID-19 specific results**
- **Implications for institution preparation & action**

Thank you for being here!

- Thank you for your interest in this topic!
- And for thinking with us about how to use information from entering students to guide actions to support their success.
- Thanks in advance for all you do for students.

Who's in the Zoom Today?

- ❑ BCSSE 2021 participating institution
- ❑ BCSSE past participating institution
- ❑ Administrative leader
- ❑ Center for Teaching & Learning/Faculty Development director
- ❑ Faculty member
- ❑ Student affairs professional
- ❑ HE policymaker/state leader
- ❑ Curious onlooker

The Challenge

We have all seen the headlines. . . read the stories. . . and experienced this crisis first-hand

A 'Breaking Point' in Campus Mental Health
The Chronicle of Higher Education, July 15, 2021

New Mental Health Investments, Ongoing Uncertainties
Inside Higher Ed, Aug 5, 2021

COVID-19 left college students depressed and anxious
USA Today, May 27, 2021

Why a focus on mental health is essential for students returning to school in the fall, experts say
ABCNews, July 5, 2021

What's the Headline at Your Campus?

CHAT!

Mental Health Concerns High

Hybrid-Shmibrid

Vaccines Required!

A Cluster Has Been Identified

Students Partying Like Its 2019

What are Entering Students Saying?

It feels like COVID stole a year of my life progress and makes me feel like I'm in a place where I don't have resources to progress at the pace I want.

It was difficult to maintain focus and motivation while being online because everyb started slackin even the teach

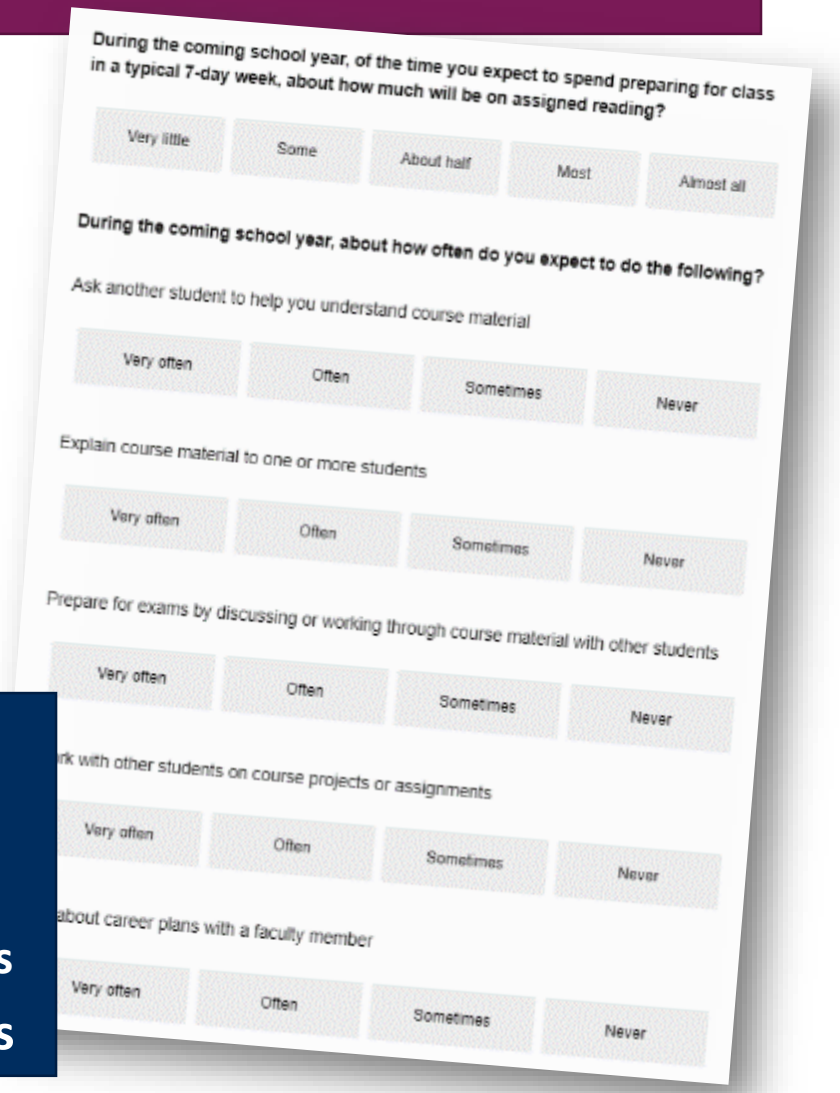
I have not been able grasp the sudden change occurring in my academic career. I was a junior in high school the last time I was in a class room; now I am a university student.

I am constantly getting brain fog and forgetting things.

Covid-19 opened my mind. I just wanted to play soccer, now I want to study and play.

Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE)

- BCSSE measures prior academic & co-curricular experiences, expectations & beliefs about participation in educationally purposeful activities during the upcoming year
- Administered annually at 4-year colleges & universities in US & Canada
- BCSSE 2021
  - 110 institutions
  - As of Aug 25: 76,350 BCSSE respondents



BCSSE

Est. 2007

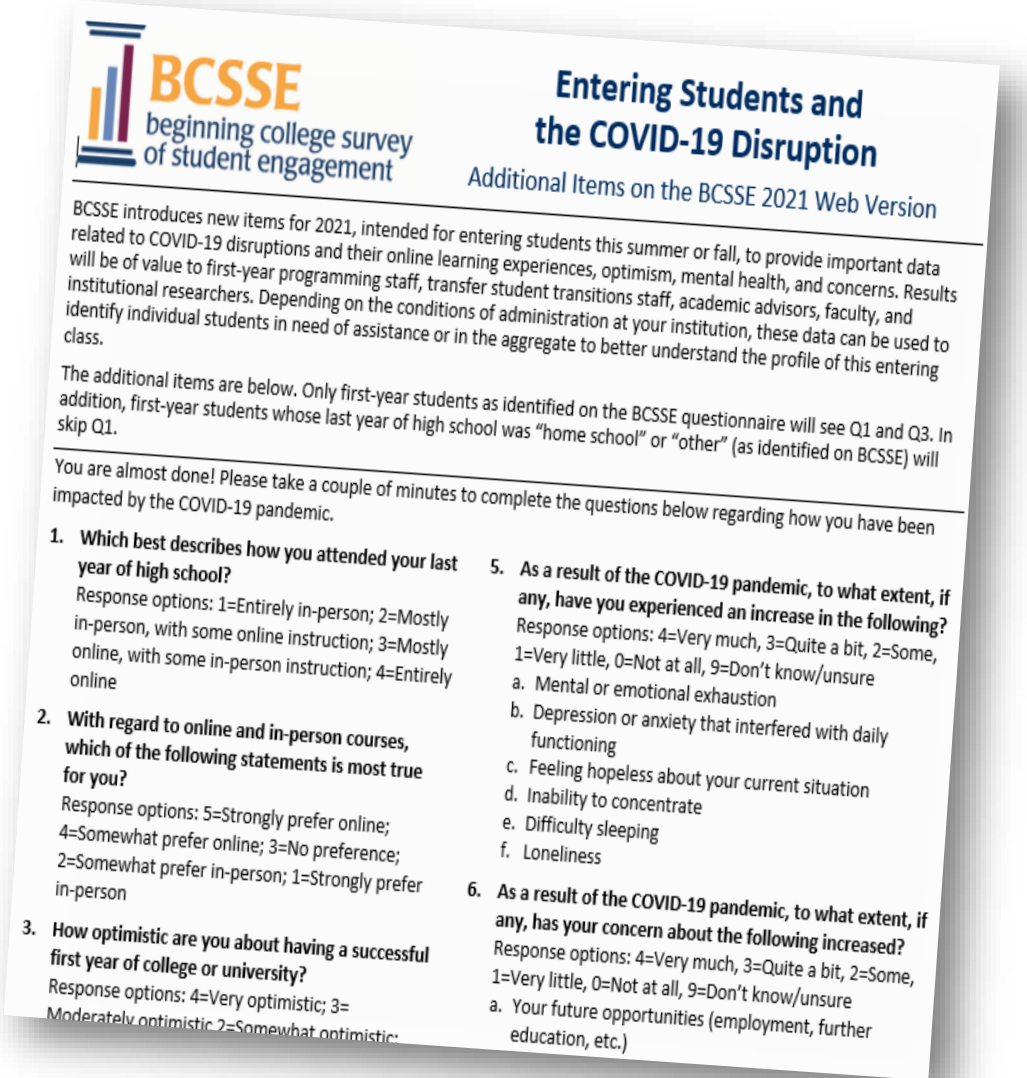
540 institutions

1 M+ students

Entering Students and the COVID-19 Disruption

Added short COVID-19 item set – questions about the disruption, and students' learning experiences, optimism about the first college year, mental & emotional health, and personal concerns – to BCSSE 2021

See the BCSSE website for survey instruments



BCSSE beginning college survey of student engagement

Entering Students and the COVID-19 Disruption

Additional Items on the BCSSE 2021 Web Version

BCSSE introduces new items for 2021, intended for entering students this summer or fall, to provide important data related to COVID-19 disruptions and their online learning experiences, optimism, mental health, and concerns. Results will be of value to first-year programming staff, transfer student transitions staff, academic advisors, faculty, and institutional researchers. Depending on the conditions of administration at your institution, these data can be used to identify individual students in need of assistance or in the aggregate to better understand the profile of this entering class.

The additional items are below. Only first-year students as identified on the BCSSE questionnaire will see Q1 and Q3. In addition, first-year students whose last year of high school was "home school" or "other" (as identified on BCSSE) will skip Q1.

You are almost done! Please take a couple of minutes to complete the questions below regarding how you have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. **Which best describes how you attended your last year of high school?**
   Response options: 1=Entirely in-person; 2=Mostly in-person, with some online instruction; 3=Mostly online, with some in-person instruction; 4=Entirely online

2. **With regard to online and in-person courses, which of the following statements is most true for you?**
   Response options: 5=Strongly prefer online; 4=Somewhat prefer online; 3=No preference; 2=Somewhat prefer in-person; 1=Strongly prefer in-person

3. **How optimistic are you about having a successful first year of college or university?**
   Response options: 4=Very optimistic; 3=Moderately optimistic 2=Somewhat optimistic;

5. **As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, to what extent, if any, have you experienced an increase in the following?**
   Response options: 4=Very much, 3=Quite a bit, 2=Some, 1=Very little, 0=Not at all, 9=Don't know/unsure
   a. Mental or emotional exhaustion
   b. Depression or anxiety that interfered with daily functioning
   c. Feeling hopeless about your current situation
   d. Inability to concentrate
   e. Difficulty sleeping
   f. Loneliness

6. **As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, to what extent, if any, has your concern about the following increased?**
   Response options: 4=Very much, 3=Quite a bit, 2=Some, 1=Very little, 0=Not at all, 9=Don't know/unsure
   a. Your future opportunities (employment, further education, etc.)

BCSSE 2021 Results In the News

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BCSSE

Optimism and Weariness: Students Entering College in Fall 2021 are Mentally Exhausted, but Eager for a Campus Experience

Most students entering college in fall 2021 had a disrupted high school experience. Following a distressing senior year, these students will soon enter college. Results from the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) offer insight into entering students' high school experiences and their expectations for the coming year.

Read More about Optimism and Weariness

INSIDE HIGHER ED

Incoming Freshmen Are Mentally Exhausted

A new survey finds that incoming first-year students suffer from increased levels of depression, loneliness and hopelessness.

By Maria Carrasco // August 17, 2021

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

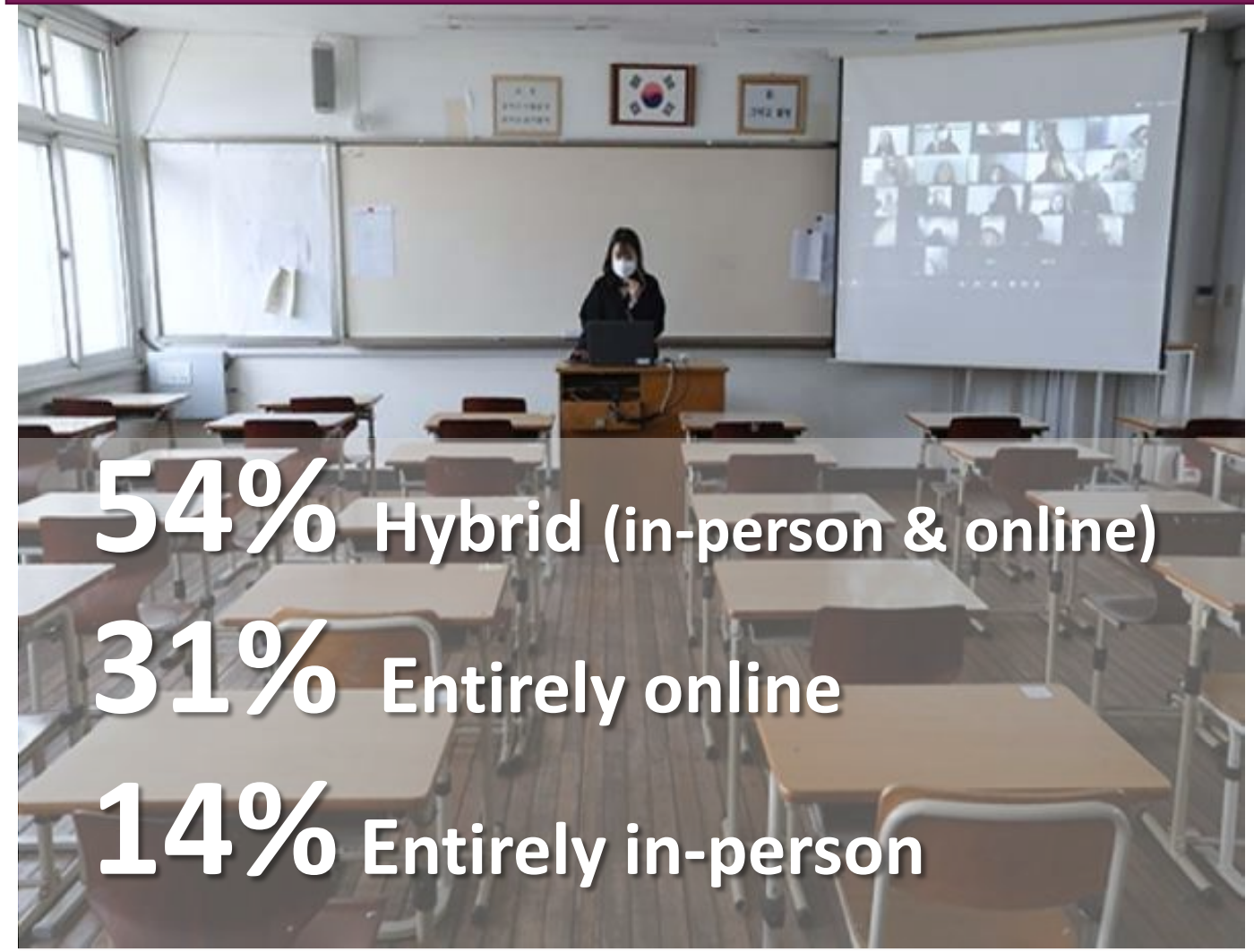
Exhausted but Optimistic: a Portrait of This Year's Incoming Freshmen

By Audrey Williams June | AUGUST 23, 2021

Questions YOU Asked Us to Address

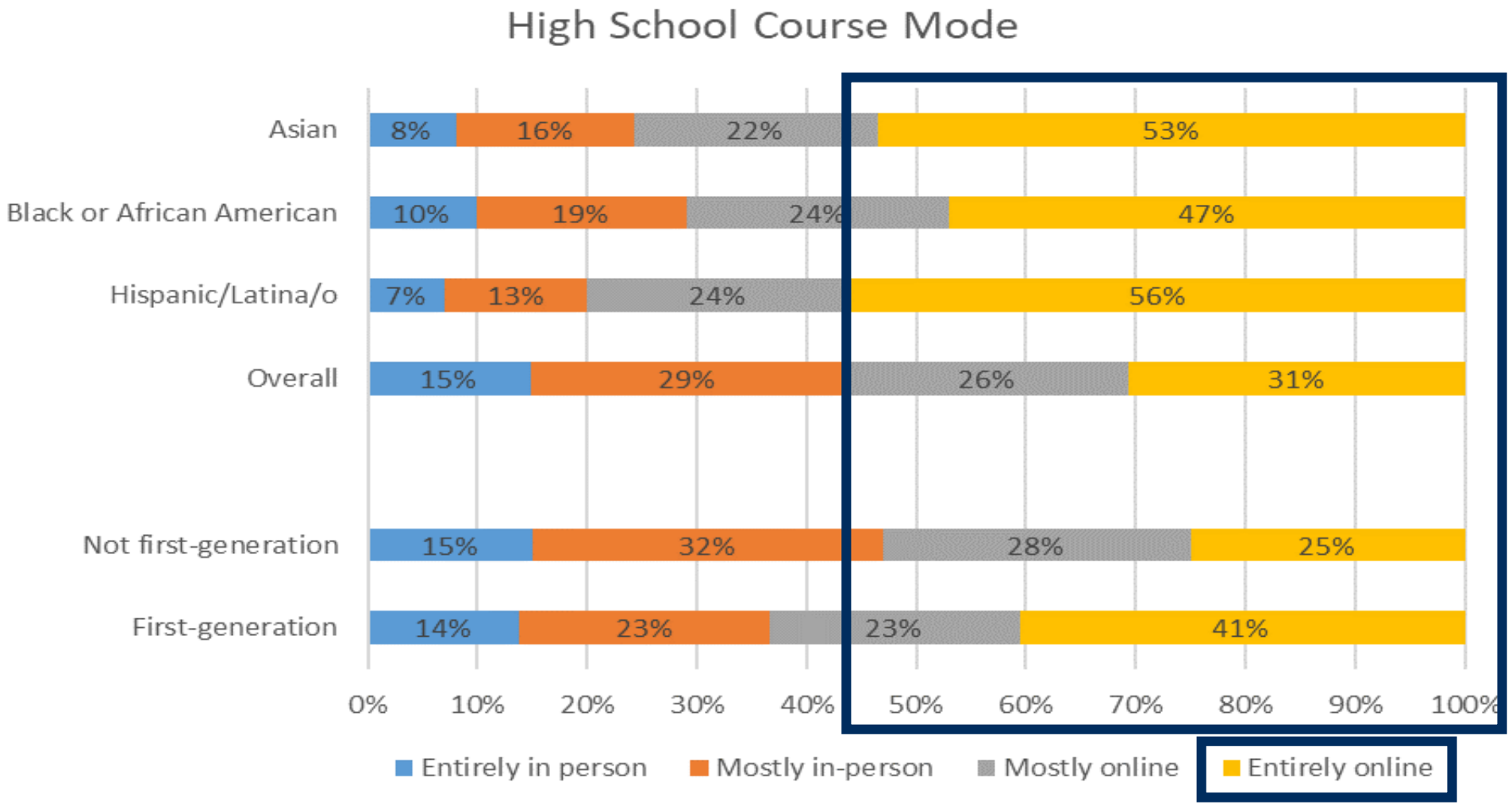
- What are students concerns about starting college in-person?
- What percent plan to work while studying?
- How committed are they to higher education in light of the pandemic?
- How should exhaustion and eagerness be factored in retention/forecasting conversations?
- What variables predict or explain variation in academic help seeking behavior?
- Equity gaps--are we talking mostly about economics or are other factors of equal/similar weight?
- How can first gen students be supported and empowered without fac/staff resorting to deficit mindset?
- How are students from low income backgrounds the same or different than overall?
- What can we do?
- Need ideas about how to best engage new students
- What are the most effective short term changes we can make to support our students?
- How are institutions using the BCSSE data to help students entering fall 2021?
- Should colleges & universities invest more human resources in mental health counseling?
- What are some ways to creatively assess how students are faring throughout the semester?
- How/what can librarians do to help incoming freshmen (and sophomores!)?
- How can we support without being intrusive?
- How we can we help students safely engage with peers?
- Will universities need to invest more in supplemental instruction in the next few years?

High School Course Mode



Variation by racial/ethnic identity and First-Generation status – specifically for % "entirely online"

Racial/Ethnic Difference in Course Mode



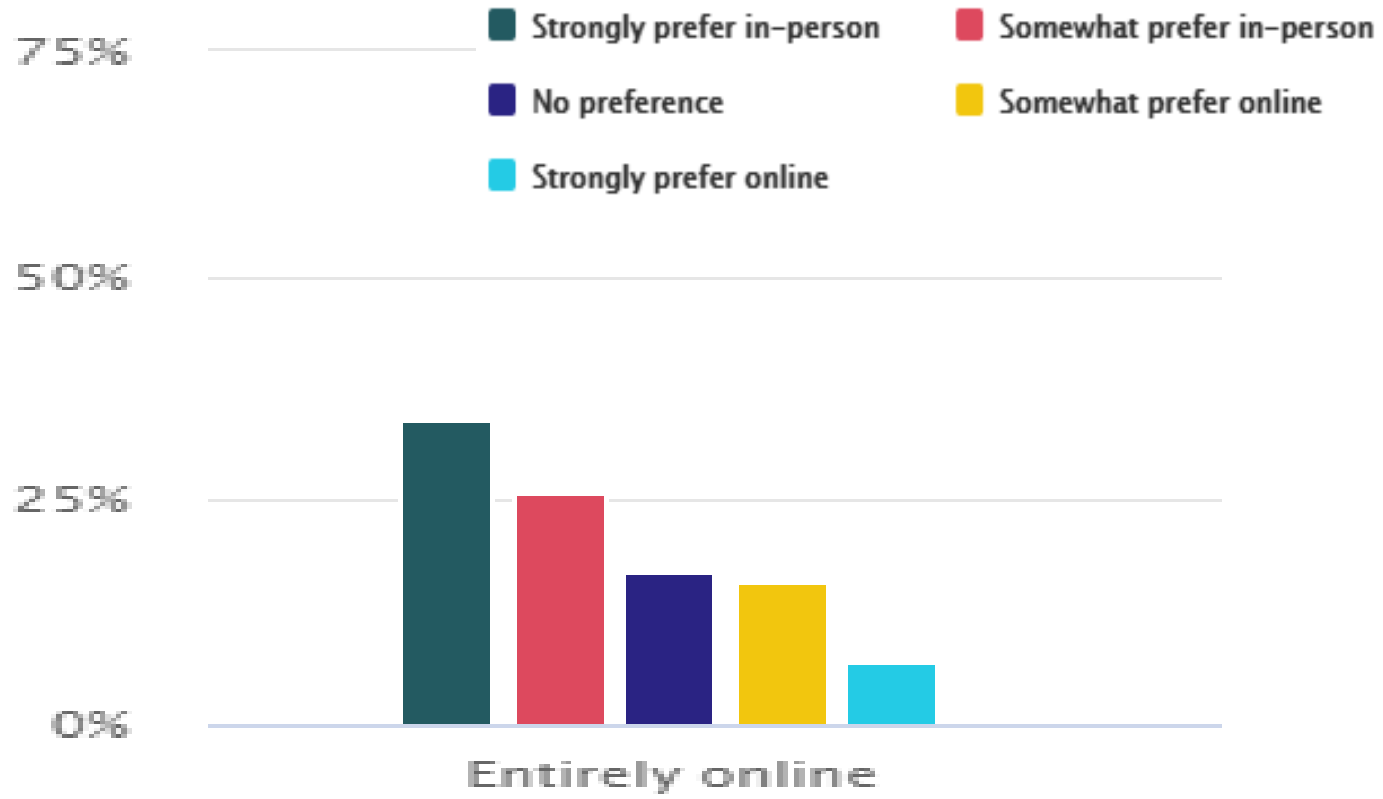
About half of Black or African American, Hispanic or Latina/o, and Asian students; and 41% of first-generation; experienced entirely online instruction

Students Preferences for Course Mode

>50%

of entering students “strongly” preferred in-person instruction

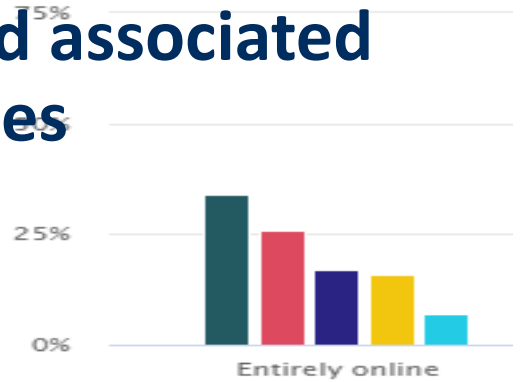
But, if HS was entirely online…



Interpretations & Implications: Course Mode

Difference between the overall result and among racial identity groups and first-generation status suggests the need to provide tailored outreach and resources to diverse groups of students

HS course mode and associated preferences



In-person in HS strongly carries forward to college preference; Entirely online students less so

Suggests need for institutions to be sensitive to students experiences AND preferences

How Might You Respond to Course Mode?

- **Help faculty and learning support services discuss – *how should students prepare for what THEIR college is offering*?**
- **Offer students flex/options in instructional mode**
- **Check-in with students about a course mode effect, communicate the challenge of transition and where to get help**

CHAT!

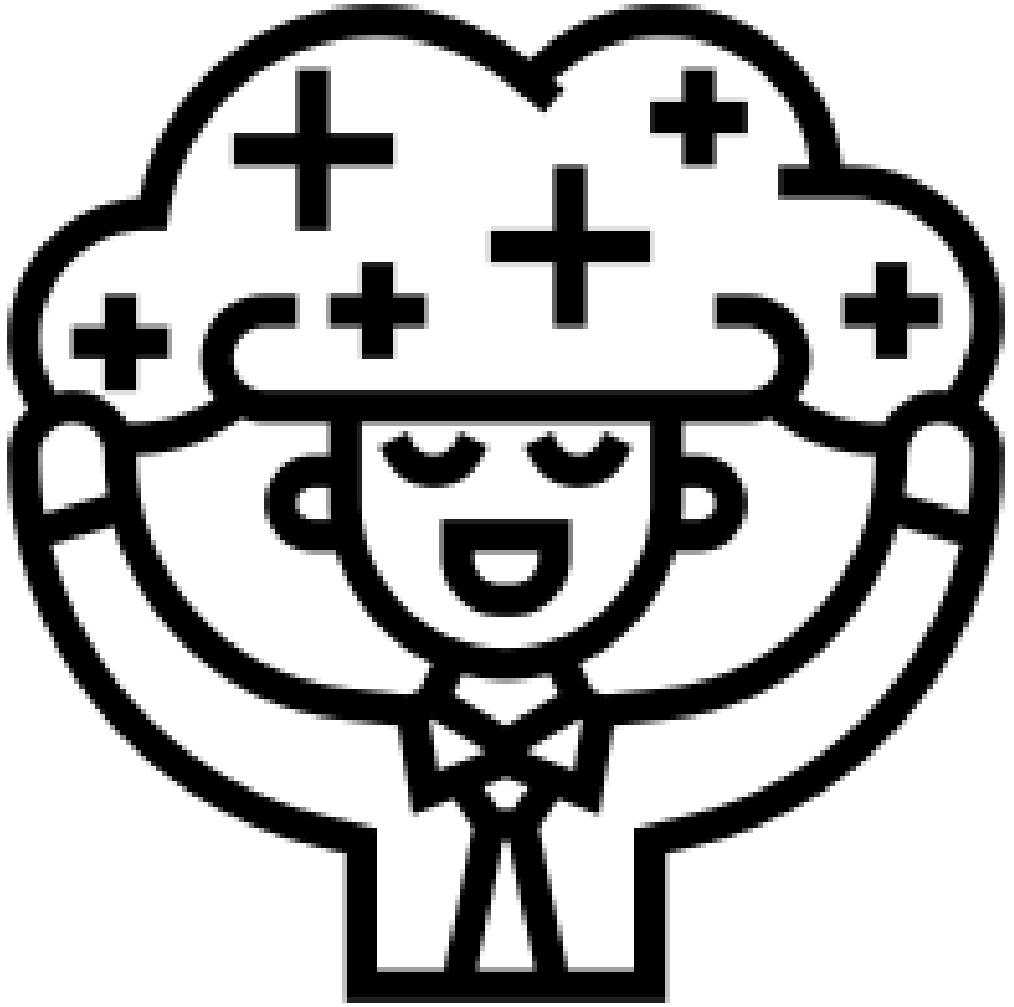
Montana State University:

Student Success Advisors used BCSSE data to personally contact new students who commented about their high school learning experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Advisors offered support and scheduled services for students prior to their campus arrival.

Student Attitudes about First College Year

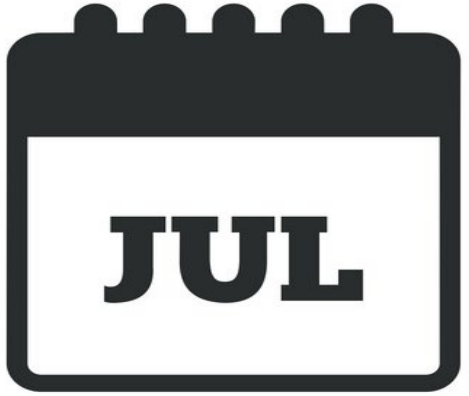
85% entering students optimistic* about having a successful first year



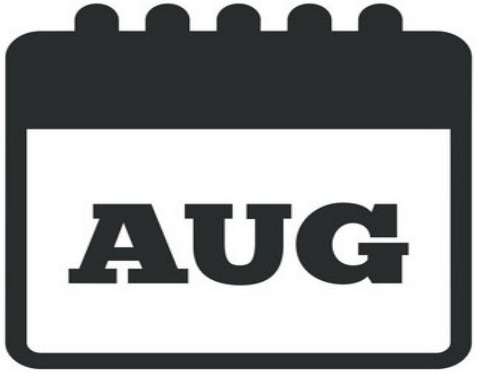
(*Very optimistic + moderately optimistic)

Drop in Student Attitudes About First College Year

58% "very optimistic"



41% "very optimistic"



Students may need assurances about their institutions' plans for ensuring health & safety; and realistic expectations for the quality of their college experience

Comments Reflecting Optimism

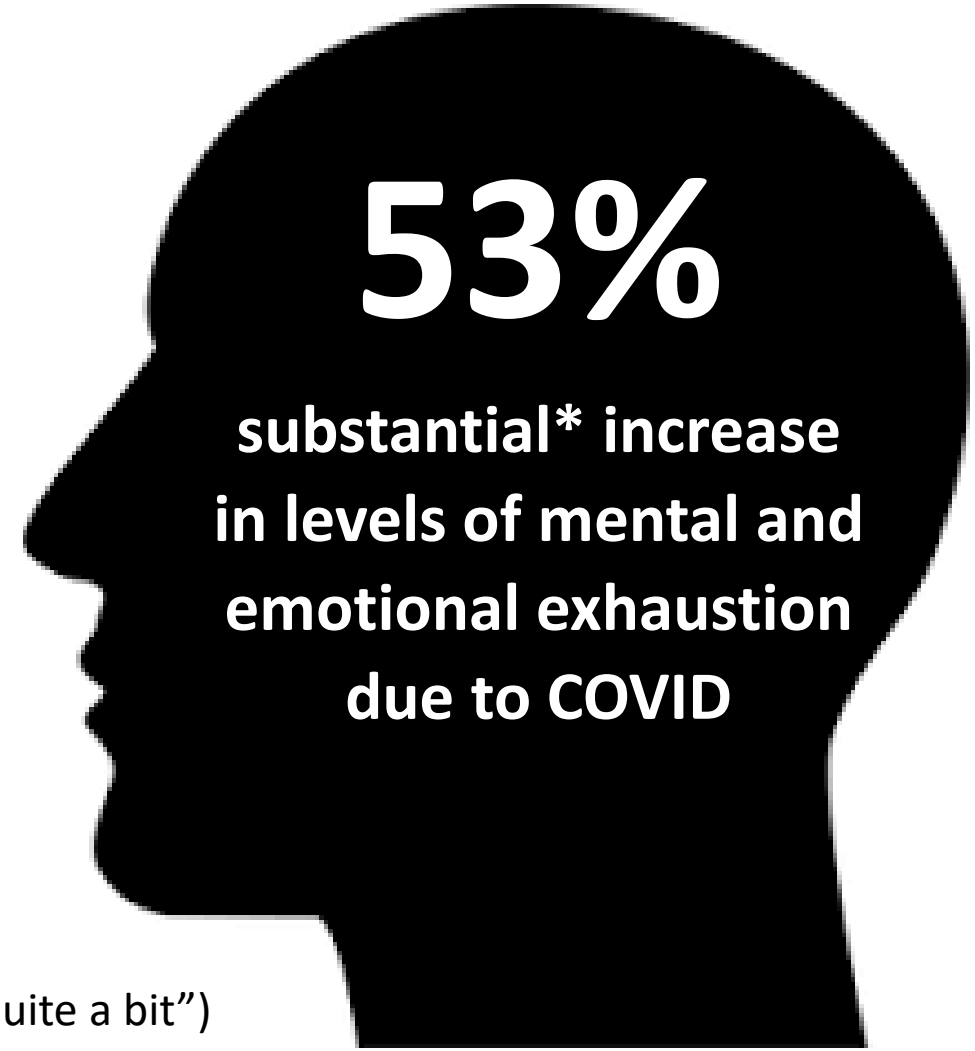
- *“It was tough being lonely and everyone was discouraging...things may look up though. I'm clinging to hope.”*
- *“I plan on being the best version of myself that I can be and I hope that UNIVERSITY is where I can pull this off. Thank you for the opportunity”*
- *“I am looking for a fresh start in the "Sunshine State" in an elite Florida college with a great atmosphere and chance to succeed. I will not take this experience for granted.”*
- *“I’m excited for this next chapter of my life!”*
- *“Thank you for giving me the option to tell my experience during the pandemic. It was a really hard time for me and it felt good getting it off my chest”*

What Ideas do you have to Build on Optimism?

- Encourage students to envision and enact their “next chapter”
- Invite reflection on their pandemic experience
- Foster appreciation for opportunities, “Don’t take this for granted”
- Be straightforward about reality, expectations

Mental and Emotional Health

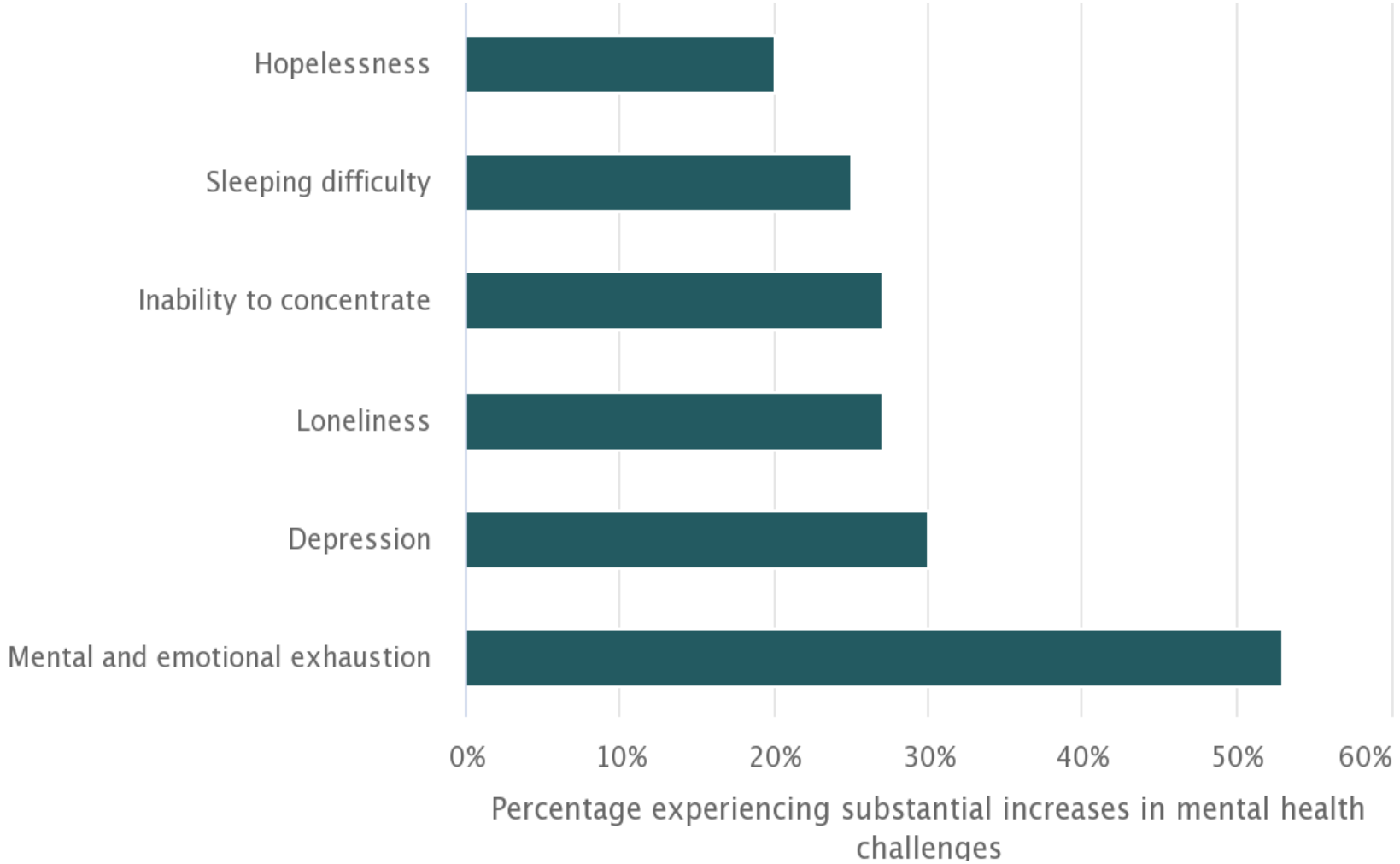
How has the COVID pandemic impacted students mental and emotional health?



(substantial = “very much” or “quite a bit”)

Mental and Emotional Health

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, to what extent, if any, has your concern about the following <u>increased</u>?



Mental and Emotional Health

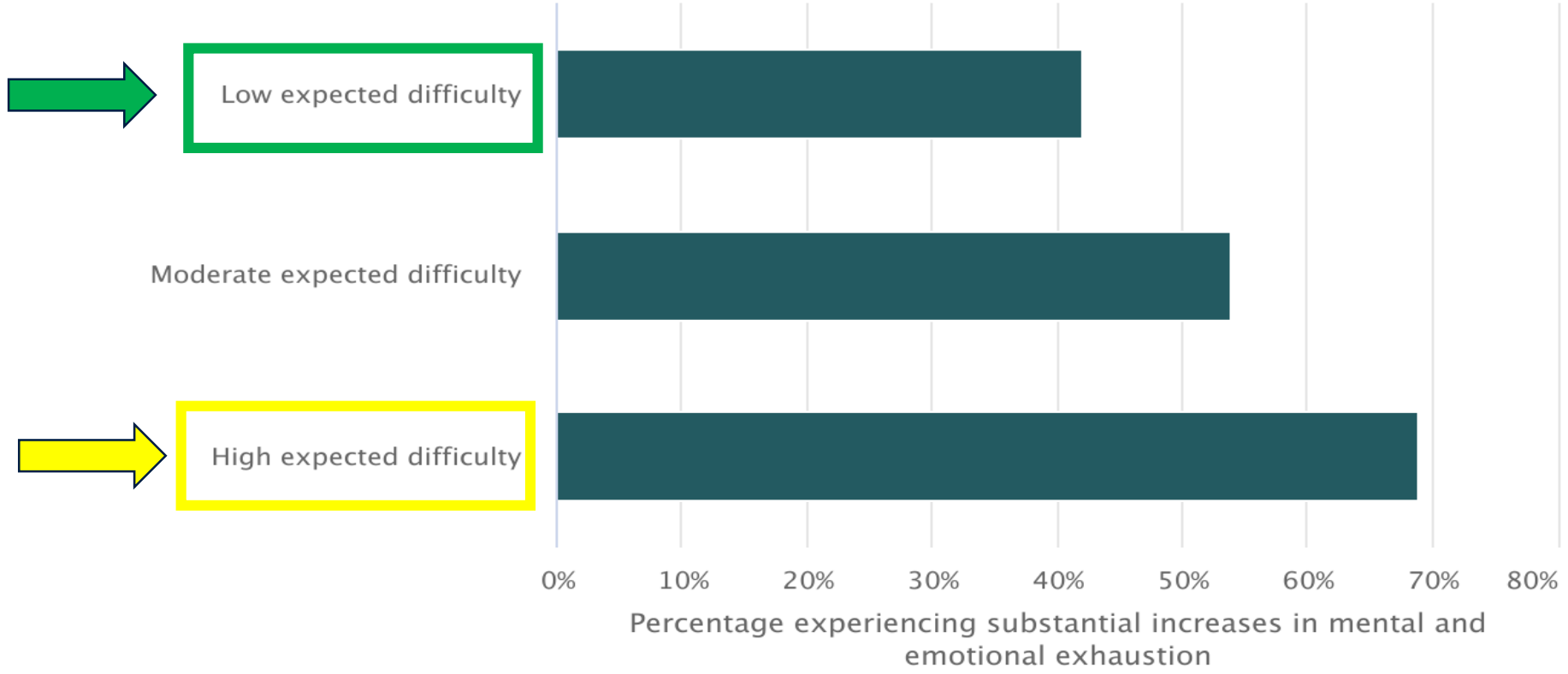
The toll of the pandemic on students' mental health

I can hardly bear to think back to lockdown- it ruined my mental and emotional health and I have a hard time focusing now... it just hurts

About eight family members of mine died due to COVID-19 and I have struggled to see an upside. Yet attending college would be a great way to honor their wishes.

Mental and Emotional Health

Mental and emotional exhaustion appears to be linked with expectations of academic difficulty



Mental and Emotional Health

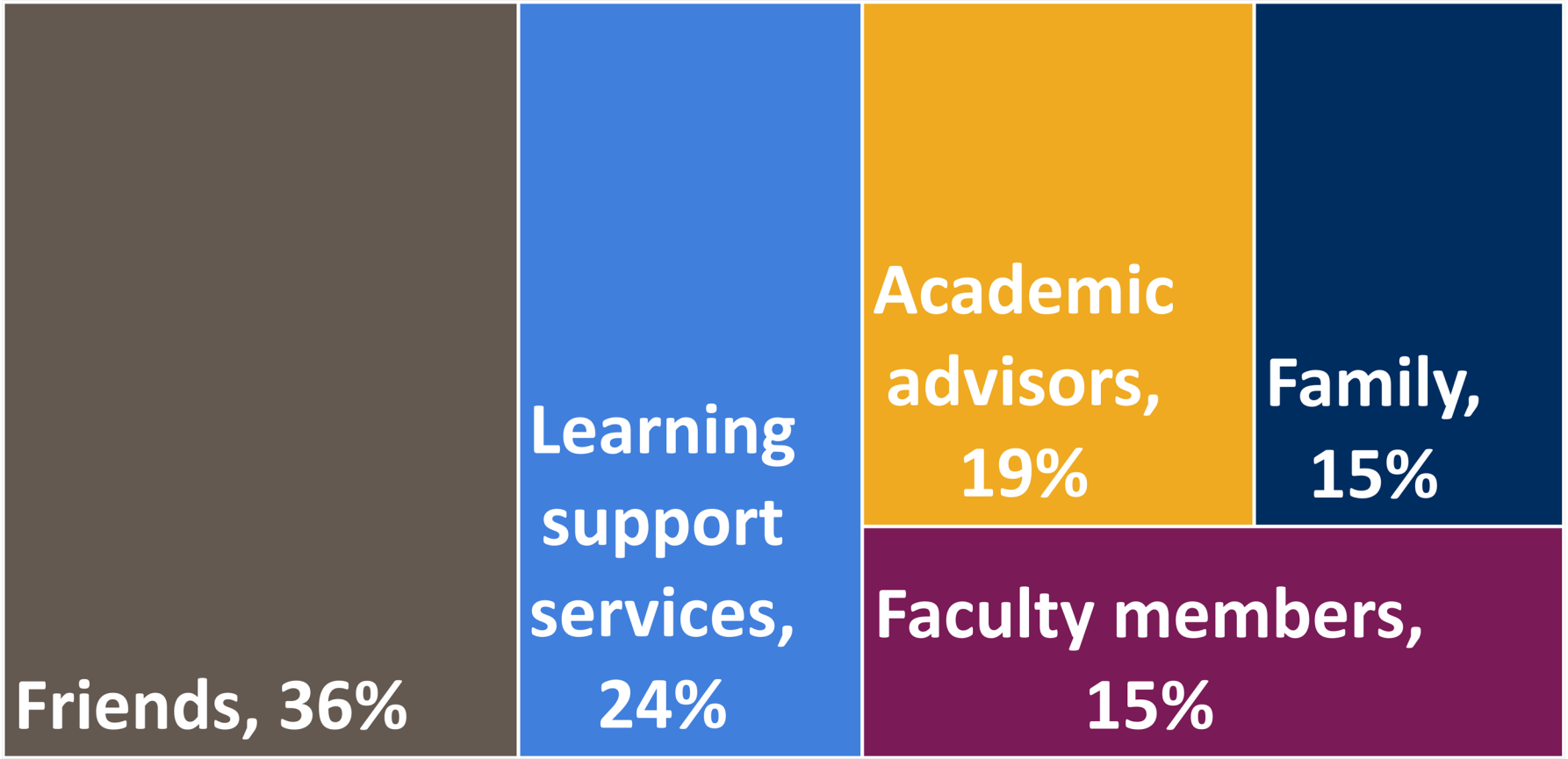
Combination of mental & emotional exhaustion and expected academic difficulty strongly suggests an imperative to implement widespread and early check-ins by faculty, academic advisors, and student life staff to offer the support and—if necessary—intervention to help students' first college year be successful

Mental and Emotional Health

1 of 10

entering students are substantially mentally/ emotionally exhausted AND expecting high academic difficulty

Where do they expect to seek academic help the most?
(% very often)



Entering Students' Concerns

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, to what extent, if any, has your concern about the following increased? 4=Very much, 3=Quite a bit, 2=Some, 1=Very little, 0=Not at all, 9=Don't know/unsure

Ranked Most to Least Substantial* Concern

Future opportunities	3
Ability to socialize	2
Ability to pay bills	5
Having enough food	7
Your health & safety	4
Friends' or family's health & safety	1
Inadequate medical care	6

Substantial = Very much + Quite a bit

Concern about Paying Bills

Focusing on the 12% who indicate "substantial" (VM or QAB) concern about paying bills

41% expect to work 16+ hrs. per week

58% are first-generation

63% expect it to be very difficult paying for college

91% plan to graduate from the institution

Implications for Mental & Emotional Concerns

- Everyone on campus can “check-in” with students, but be systematic
- Expand counseling, peer support
- Offer special RA, peer, faculty, librarian training to help students process
- Acknowledge student worries about friends & family health
- Be on top of student finance questions, and gentle about paying fees

CHAT!

Leveraging BCSSE at Montana State University: Some Pandemic Learning Lessons & Plans

We seek to understand the differences between “habits” and “hopes.”

With pandemic learning many existing patterns and habits have been disrupted.

We are developing assertive navigational plans and programs to support student success.

Our goal is to help mange gaps and accentuate growth.

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY

MONTANA
STATE UNIVERSITY

Avila University (Kansas City, MO)

In anticipation of new challenges…

- Doing a "Second Year Re-Orientation" prior to classes beginning
- Second Year parents are part of First Year Parent Orientation
- Counseling position was not full-time, but is now
- COVID funds used to offer continued financial assistance to low-income students
- Hiring a part-time financial literacy position
- Continue to offer counseling remotely as well as in-person
- Continue to provide remote access to in-person classes when a student is in quarantine

AVILA UNIVERSITY

Be Inspired.

How Are Colleges & Universities Responding?

- Safety - requiring vaccines, masks, outdoor space
- Planning for mixed mode - hybrid, online, in-person
- More welcoming messages, events
- Helping students thrive through trauma
- Encouraging faculty to create “warm syllabi”
- Offering academic bootcamps to “make-up”/“level-up” learning
- Frequent check-ins with new students & families
- Deploying more student life supports (counseling, peer mentors)
- Creating safe, fun, more social events

Register for NSSE 2022!

- To learn more about these new students' 2021-22 experience
- Registration for NSSE & FSSE 2022 is Open!
- Deadline to register: Oct 1.

Thanks so much for joining us!

Jim Cole & Jillian Kinzie
National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)
Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research

nsse.indiana.edu

NSSE national survey of student engagement