

RESILIENT LATINOS: EDUCATIONAL PATHWAYS AND CAREERS IN THE AGE OF COVID-19

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RESILIENT LATINOS: EDUCATIONAL PATHWAYS AND CAREERS IN THE AGE OF COVID-19

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Acknowledgments

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Executive Summary

This report attempts to understand Latino undergraduate students' experiences and educational trajectories during the COVID-19 pandemic that forced colleges and universities to provide online education to students. The results of this survey provide valuable insights into the experiences of Latinx students during the COVID-19 pandemic and seek to 1) better understand Latino students' experiences, perceptions, interests, and needs about their education and 2) better understand how Latino undergraduate students at a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) navigate the COVID-19 pandemic.

For this report, the terms *Latina/o* and *Latinx* are used interchangeably to denote gendered and gender-neutral individuals who trace their ancestry to Latin America.

This report is part of a mixed-method research project involving an opportunity sample survey and a project-based learning case study where participants shared their pandemic experiences via ArcGIS Story Maps (click [here](#) for the results).

The results highlight that despite the challenges that Latina/o/Latinx students face in access to technology, internet connectivity, academic performance levels, as well as economic, physical, and mental health issues, including job losses, food insecurity, illnesses, and deaths among family members, students scored high in self-efficacy and resilience. Given the diverse educational environment and younger generations' views toward their race/ethnicity and gender identification, socioeconomic status rather than ethnicity or gender had the most substantial influence on students' success. Family support in this context proved to be an effective support mechanism that students relied upon to be successful.

More than one-third of students indicated that they are going to pursue a graduate degree. In contrast, almost half indicated that they would be inclined, and around one in five students said that they would not seek a graduate degree. Financial considerations were the main reason why Latina/o students did not consider advancing their education.

Key Findings

- The top three challenges that students encounter in completing their degree during the COVID-19 pandemic are balancing the demands from work and school, lack of financial support, and balancing the demands from family and school.
- Social class rather than ethnicity or gender has the most substantial influence on students' success.
- More than half of the students (69%) plan to get the COVID-19 vaccine when available to them.
- Most students had access to internet services and electronic devices, and most students believe they have the required or sufficient access to technology to succeed in their academic work.
- Remote classes are more challenging/stressful than face-to-face classes for more than half of the respondents.
- More than half of the students have never experienced hostile interactions or racist experiences, academic/intellectual bias from their instructors or peers/classmates in the remote learning environment.
- More than half of the students are satisfied with classes, with professors, students, and advising.
- Approximately one-fifth of students had a COVID-19 infection.
- Students relied the most on family, members of their household, and partners for support and help during the pandemic.
- More than half of students have access to health services and food security, and almost two-fifths of students had good physical health.
- Approximately two-fifths of students experienced mental health issues for ten or more days in the previous month.
- Among students who had mental health issues for at least one day in the previous month, most did not seek out mental health services.
- Students worry about paying for regular necessities during the next year and paying for school during the following semesters.
- Student's experiences, responsibilities, chores/activities related to the COVID-19 physically, mentally, and academically impact students.
- Students feel isolated.
- Despite experiencing multiple challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, students are resilient and have high self-efficacy.

BACKGROUND

Survey Administration

The present report utilizes an opportunity sample consisting of self-identified Latinx undergraduate students (18+ years of age) enrolled at the University of Houston during the 2021 spring semester. Given that the survey was sent via email and required access to technology to be completed, we acknowledge that the current findings may not be generalizable to all Latino/Hispanic undergraduate students, particularly students who experience technology inadequacy. A total of 588 students responded to the study, for an overall 55% completion rate out of 1077 surveys started.

Demographics

Among survey respondents, 55% traced their Hispanic/Latino heritage to Mexico, 13% to Spain, 7% to El Salvador, and other Latin American countries, including Colombia, Honduras, and Venezuela. Regarding race, 65% of respondents identified as White, 2% as Black or African American, 8% as American Indian or Alaska Native, 1% as Asian, and 21% as some other race. Among students that reported "some other race," some participants reported that although they have been told they are considered "White," they do not identify with that race, other students reported being bi-racial, while others have a stronger identity as Hispanic/Latinx rather than with their race indicating the fluidity of the concept of race.

Around two-thirds of students were women (64.7%), while 31.8% were men, and the rest identified as transgender, queer, non-conforming, bi-curious, questioning, or uncertain. Seventy-eight percent of respondents were born in the continental U.S and Puerto Rico., while 21% of students were born in another country. Among foreign-born students, 27% are legal permanent residents, 29% are naturalized U.S. citizens, and 42% something else. In terms of their parent's country of birth, 66% of students' parents were born outside of the U.S., 17% of students had only one parent born in the U.S., and 16% had parents born in the U.S.

Two-thirds (66%) of students who participated in the survey speak Spanish and English at home, and 62% reported speaking Spanish very well. The majority of respondents (90.4%) lived off-campus during the academic year. Most respondents' mothers (55%) and fathers (60%) have a high school diploma or less education. Among respondents, 88% reported that their parents value their education.

Fifty-four percent of students worked during the COVID-19 pandemic, with 31% working from 11-20 hours, 26% worked between 21 to 30 hours, and 33% more than 30 hours. Twenty-one percent of participants reported that the overall number of work-hours during the COVID-19 pandemic increased, 29% reported their work-hours decreased, and 48% reported that their work hours remained the same. In terms of family income, 7.3% had an income of up to \$15K, 61.4% had a household income between \$15K to \$64K, and 31.3% a family income of more than \$65K.

CHALLENGES

“I had cover in March/April 2020, it took me a couple of months to get back to normal. My job ended so I found a new one but this one also has failed due to cover and we will be closing down. I've been able to stretch my resources to make ends meet but I'm exhausted physically and emotionally. I worked full time so reading and keeping up with classwork was extremely challenging.”

Table 1 below shows the most chosen challenges students face when completing their degrees (students were allowed to select more than one option). We grouped these challenges into three broad categories. Overall, most students said that balancing the demands from work, school, and family was the most salient challenge, followed by a clear indication of students' lack of adequate academic preparation in high school and financial support.

A recent report by CMAS illustrates the correlation between racial and ethnic diversity in the Houston region and school districts' underperformance in terms of academic achievement, as well as the correlation between the minority percentage of a school district and the number of students on free or reduced lunch, living in poverty, and with a single parent mom (Johnson and Ortega, 2021).

Table 1. What challenges do you encounter in completing your degree?

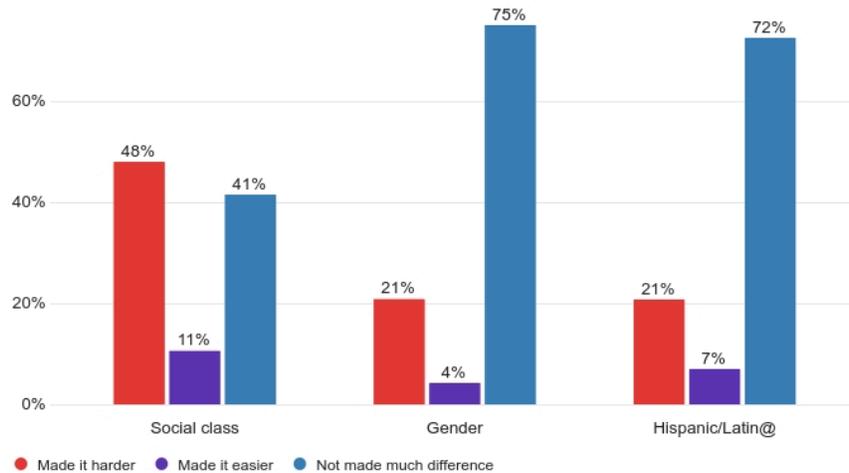
Grouped Challenge	Percentages of Responses
Balancing demands from work, school, and family	94%
Secondary education deficits (e.g., lack of adequate preparation in critical thinking, reading, writing, etc.)	92%
Lack of financial support	46%

Even though Latino students and other minority students, experienced financial instability during the COVID-19 pandemic, only 18% of students have had to leave school due to a lack of financial

resources. The national overall dropout rate for undergraduate students is 40%, while in 4-year institutions, 21% of Hispanic students dropped college (Miller, 2019).

When asked about students' gender and ethnicity impact on their ability to succeed, we did not find a pronounced impact on their potential to grow as a student. However, social class had the most detrimental effect on students' success, a worrisome indicator given that the Latinx population in Greater Houston, a nine-county metropolitan area (Harris, Montgomery, Liberty, Chambers, Galveston, Brazoria, Fort Bend, Waller, and Austin counties) comprises approximately 37% of the total and youngest population in the region and could negatively impact Latinx educational attainment in comparison to other demographic groups (Sanchez-Soto 2020).

Figure 1. Do you think your social class, gender, and race or ethnicity have made it more challenging or made it easier for you to succeed as a student?



INFORMATION ON COVID-19

Almost seven out of ten students who participated in the survey (69%) plan to get the vaccine when available to them (Figure 2). COVID-19 vaccine acceptability among respondents may be higher than other subgroups of college students, as preliminary findings suggest high levels of vaccine hesitancy among college students (Sharma, Davis, Wilkerson, 2021). The main difference may be that most of the surveyed students lived with their parents or relatives (77%), prompting students to get vaccinated to protect their parents or other relatives living in the same household. Regarding trust and handling the COVID-19 outbreak, the top three most trusted subgroups and organizations were health care providers (70%), scientists (65%), and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (45%) (Figure 3).

Figure 2. When the vaccine to prevent COVID-19 is available to you, would you...

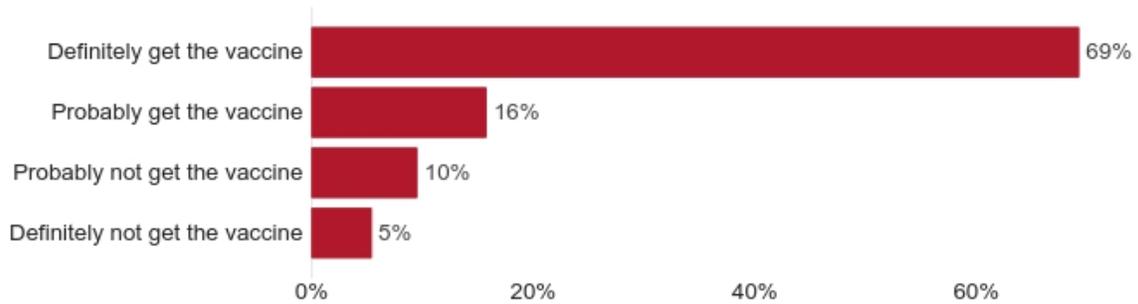
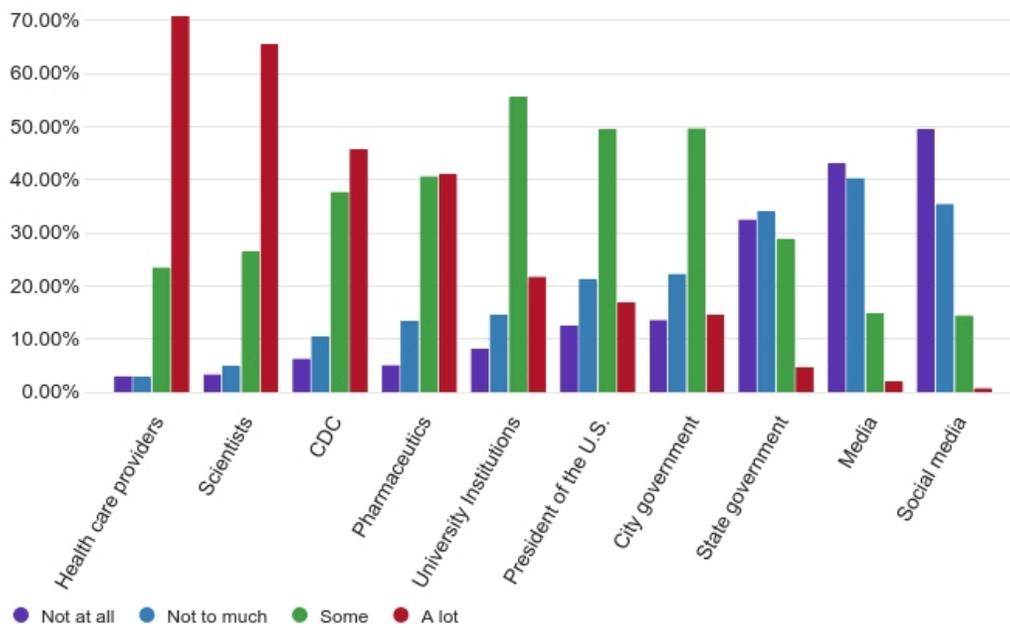


Figure 3. How much do you trust the following people and organizations to do the right thing to best handle the current COVID-19 outbreak?



ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY

Regarding access to technology, most students had access to internet services (98%) (Figure 4) and to electronic devices such as cell phones (98%) and laptops (97%) (Figure 5). Only 2% of students did not have internet services (Figure 4), and all surveyed students have access to electronic devices at home (Figure 5). The sample of participants survey may differ from other subgroups of Hispanic college students

“The environment in my home has been supportive and caring. My parents have looked after me and made sure I have everything I need. I work and do school from home with the adequate resources I need to be successful.”

across the nation, as on a national level, higher rates of inadequate technology are observed among Hispanic college students (23%-28%) in comparison to their White counterparts (12%-17%) (Jaggard et al., 2021). Most of the students (89%) believe they have the required or sufficient access to technology to succeed in their academic work (Figure 6), which is consistent with data that suggest college students who have adequate access to internet service and electronic devices experience less difficulty in remote learning (Jaggard et al., 2021). Furthermore, 35% of students use technology ten or more times per day for online learning (Figure 7).

The University of Houston implemented an aggressive campaign to ensure that all students had the necessary tools to attend their classes remotely.

Figure 4. Regarding internet services at home, select the option that applies to you.

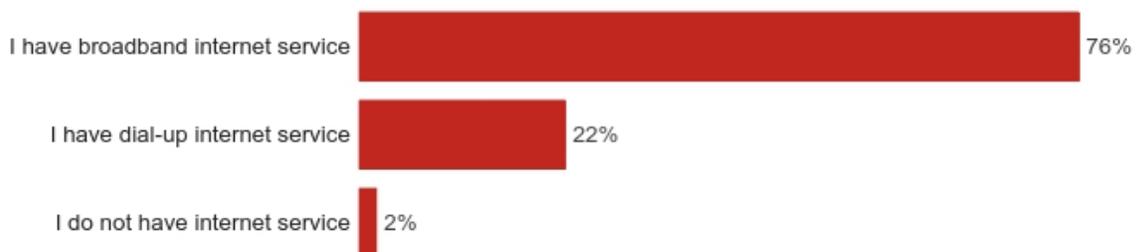


Figure 5. Regarding access to an electronic device at home, select ALL that apply to you.

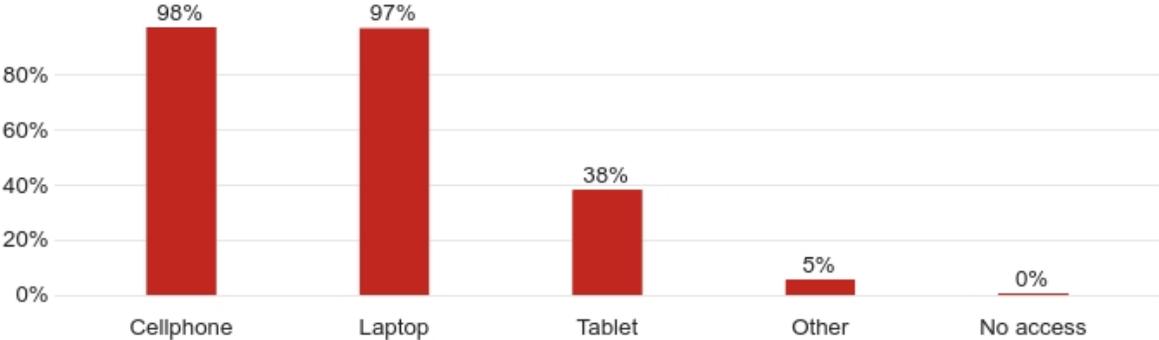
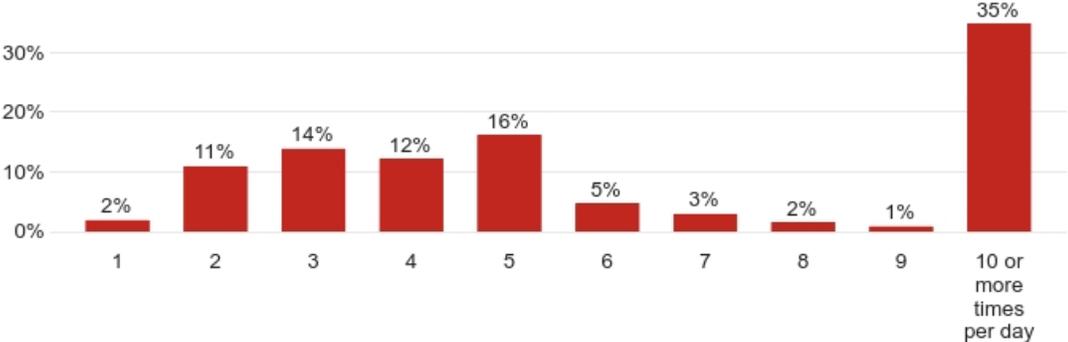


Figure 6. Do you think the required or sufficient access to the technology to succeed in your academic work?



Figure 7. How many times per day do you require the use of technology for your remote classes?



LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

Most of the surveyed students lived with their parents or relatives (77%) (Figure 8) and have comfortable living arrangements (74%) (Figure 9). More than half of the students (67%) complete schoolwork in their bedrooms (Figure 10), and 73% have a designated workspace (Figure 11). Living in a multigenerational household may increase students' graduation prospects provided family and financial household stability (Ratcliff, 2015).

Figure 8. Which of the following options best describes your household?

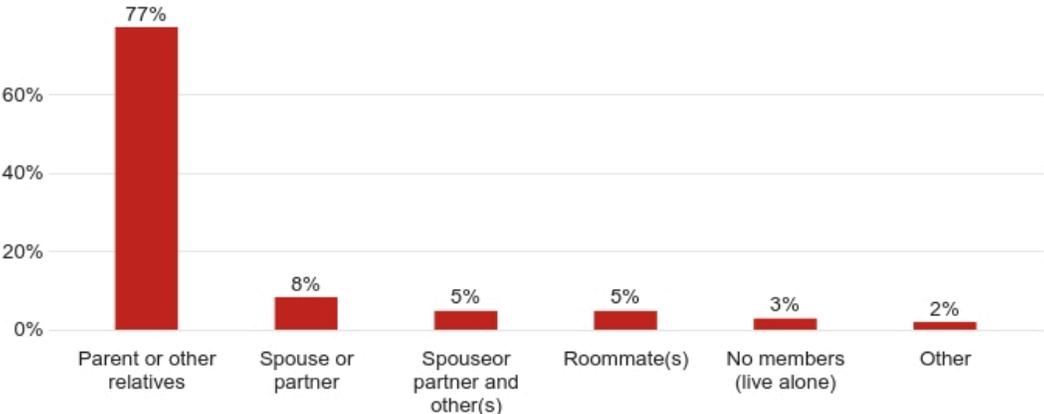


Figure 9. How comfortable are your living arrangements?

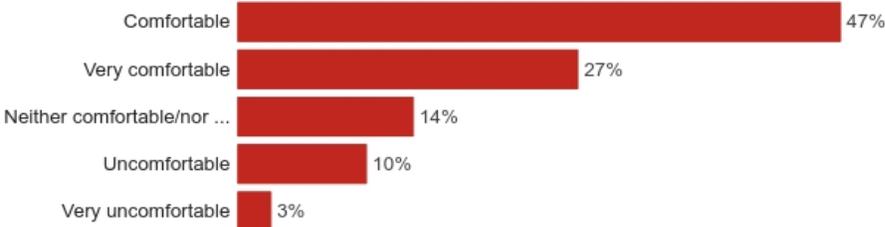
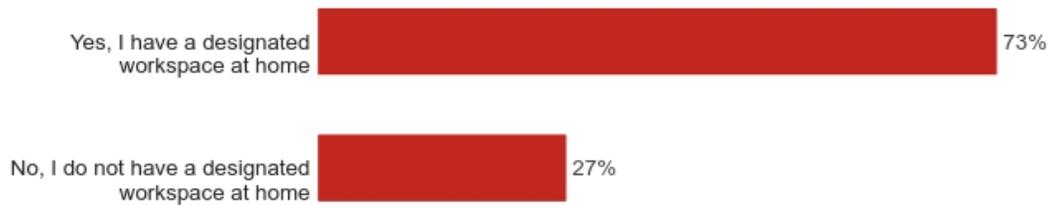


Figure 10. Where do you do most of your schoolwork?



Figure 11. Do you have a designated workspace or study area in your home (e.g., a desk in a space without distractions) to attend online classes, study, and/or complete your schoolwork?



“I had my own room where I could focus. Now my aunt and cousin have moved in my room and have no space nor a quiet place to retreat to in order to destress.”

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES DURING REMOTE LEARNING

“I live with my parents and my room isn’t big enough to have a desk so I do most of my work in the living room. Because my house isn’t that big it’s hard to get any alone/quiet time so it’s pretty hectic and I can’t focus”

Overall, more than half of respondents (56%) agreed that remote classes have been more challenging/stressful than face-to-face classes (Figure 12). This finding is consistent with previous research that suggests that the typical student experiences more challenges in online distance education compared to in-person courses (Xu & Jaggars, 2014). Students' treatment and experiences

about race and ethnic issues were not negatively affected by the transition to remote learning (Figure 13). In addition, almost half of students (47%) never experienced feelings of inferiority due to the way they speak in class, and more than half of participants (66%) never felt inferior due to their internet connection (Figure 14a). More than half of the students never experienced hostile interactions (Figure 14b) or racist conversations/jokes (Figure 14c) in their remote learning environment. Lastly, most students never experienced academic/intellectual bias from their instructors (68%) or from their peers/classmates (63%) in their remote classes (Figure 14d). More than half of students are satisfied with classes (61%), with professors in their major (71%), with professors in other classes (59%), with advising (56%), with other students (55%), and with communication with professors and teaching assistants (TAs) (57%) (Figure 15).

Figure 12. Remote classes are more challenging and/or stressful than face-to-face classes.

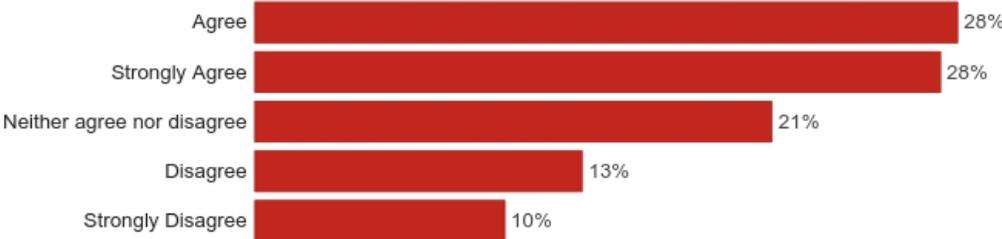


Figure 13. Indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements.

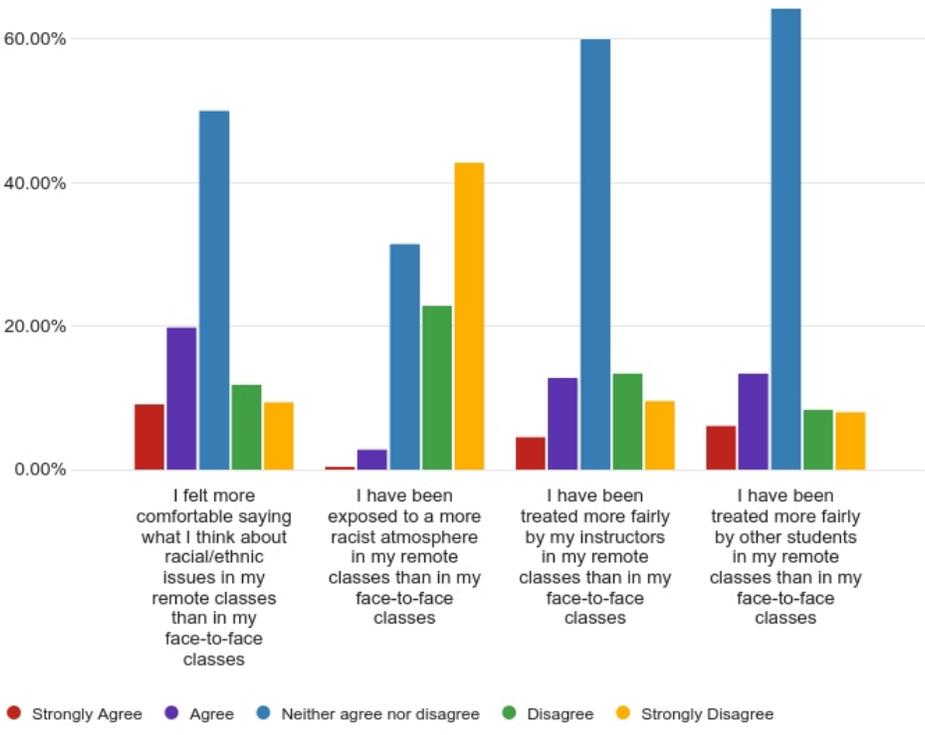


Figure 14a. Indicate how often you experienced the following statements.

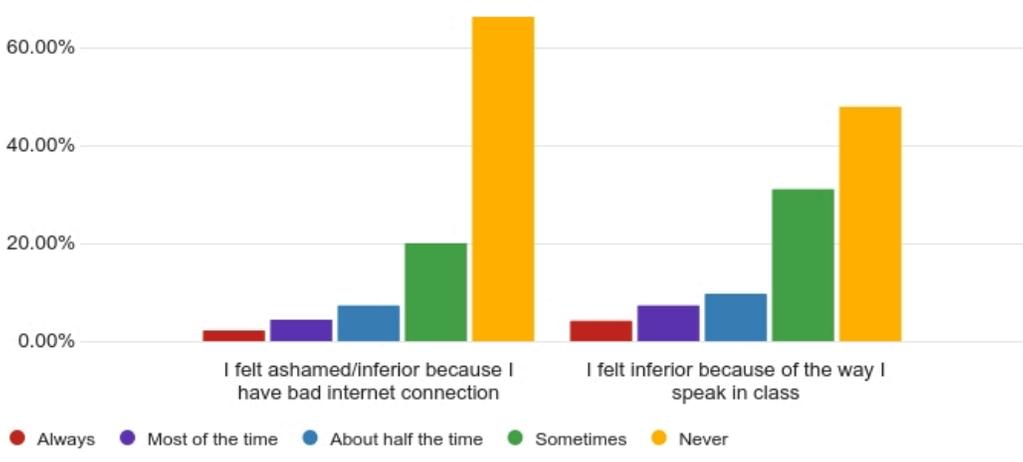


Figure 14b. Indicate how often you experienced the following statements.

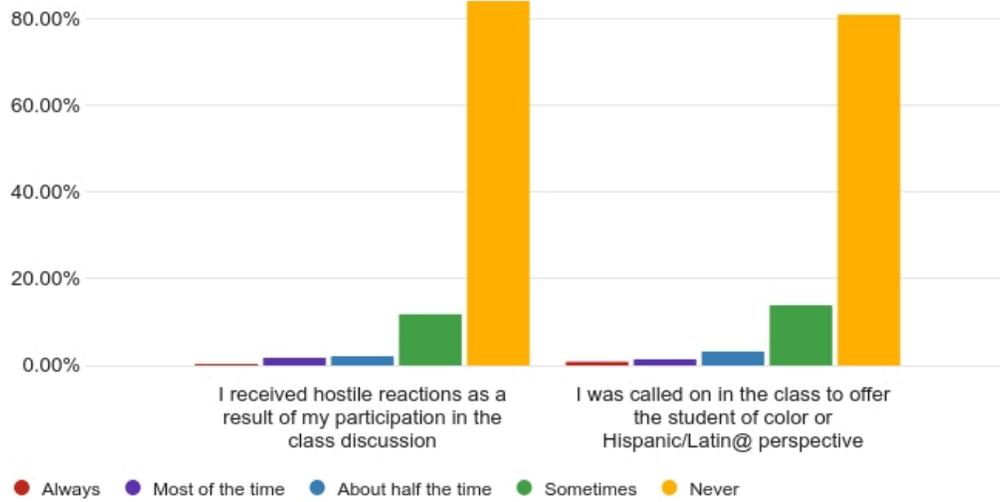


Figure 14c. Indicate how often you experienced the following statements.

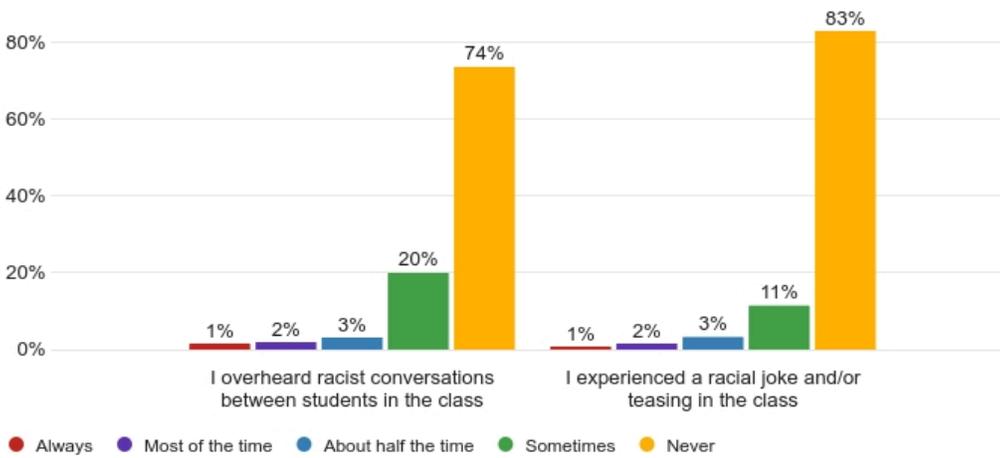


Figure 14d. In comparison to your face-to-face classes, how often did you perceive others in your remote classes to have an inaccurate and potentially biased perception of your academic/intellectual ability?

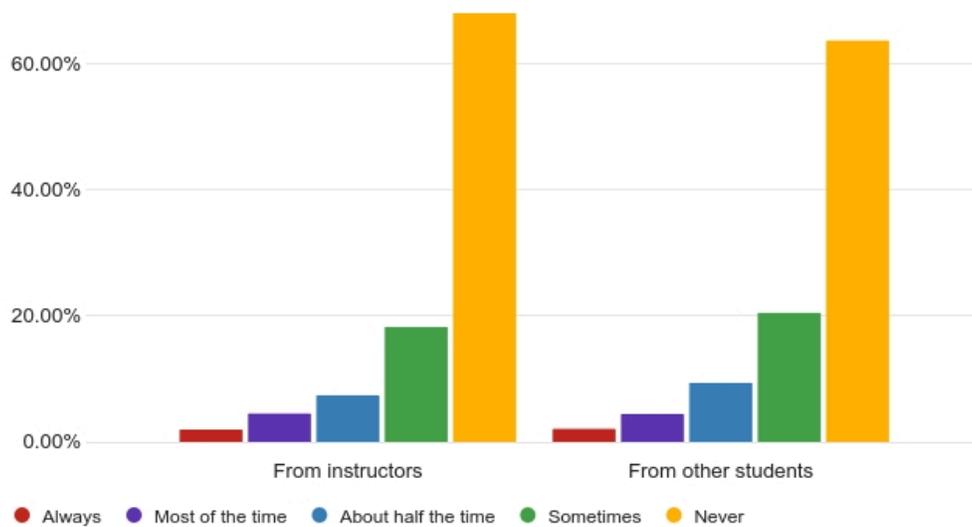
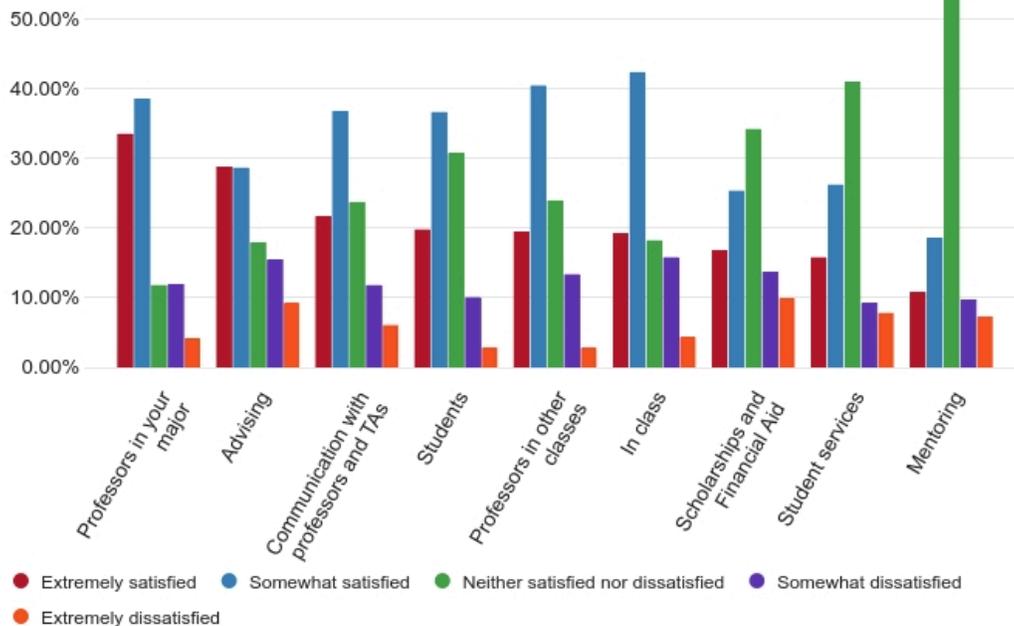


Figure 15. Rate the quality of your experience at UH in the following categories during the remote teaching period.



WELLBEING DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

“Working from home, having classes at home and being isolated has had a huge mental toll”

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic were particularly felt within the African American and Latino communities. Thus, survey participants were not exempt from experiencing the adverse effects of the pandemic.

Twenty-three percent of surveyed students confirmed a COVID-19 infection through testing (Figure 16). Results from a survey of more than 1,900 colleges and universities indicated that in 2021, more than 1,000 cases were reported in at least 50 colleges (The New York Times, 2021). Furthermore, 28% of students have had someone close to them die from COVID-19, and 43% have had someone close to them hospitalized with COVID-19 symptoms (Figure 17). In addition, more than half (54%) have a supervisor or coworker who has experienced a COVID-19 infection (Figure 17).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, students have relied a great deal upon family (37%), members of their household (34%), and partners for support and help (27%) (Figure 18).

More than half of students have access to health services (70%) (Figure 19) and food security (66%) (Figure 20). Data shows that Hispanic university students report higher food insecurity due to the COVID-19 pandemic in comparison to their White counterparts, with 36% of Hispanic students having difficulty affording food (Safier, 2020). Forty-three percent of surveyed students experienced good physical health in the previous 30 days (Figure 21). However, 41% of students reported experiencing mental health issues ten or more times during the past 30 days (Figure 22). Among students that had at least one day in which their mental health was not good, the majority did not seek out mental health services (86%) (Figure 23).

Figure 16. Did you personally experience a COVID-19 infection?

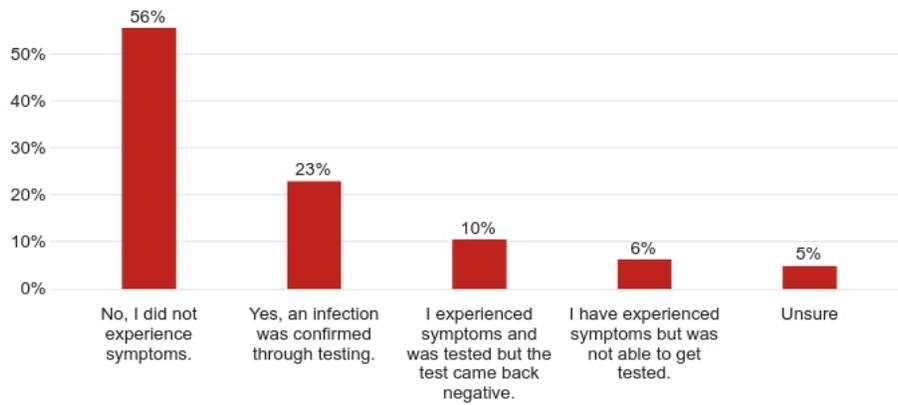


Figure 17. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

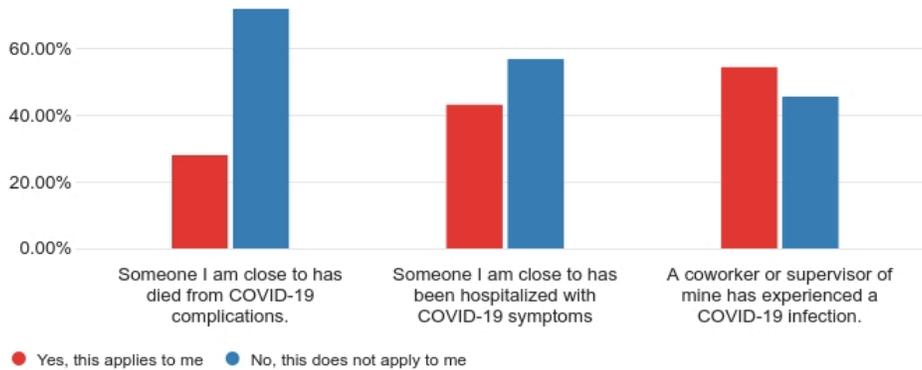


Figure 18. Who have you relied upon for support and help during the COVID-19 pandemic?

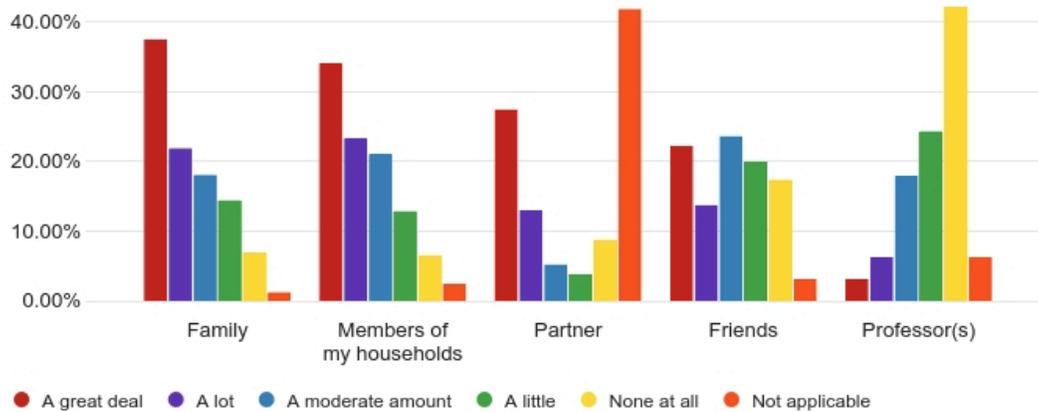


Figure 19. Do you and your family have adequate access to health services if you should need them?

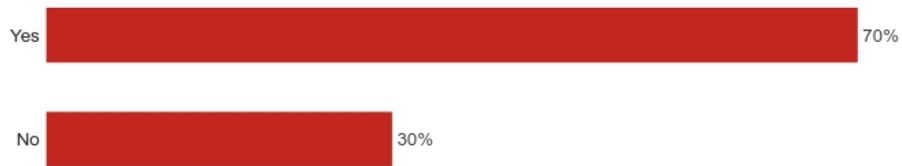


Figure 20. Have you and your family had enough food to eat during COVID-19?

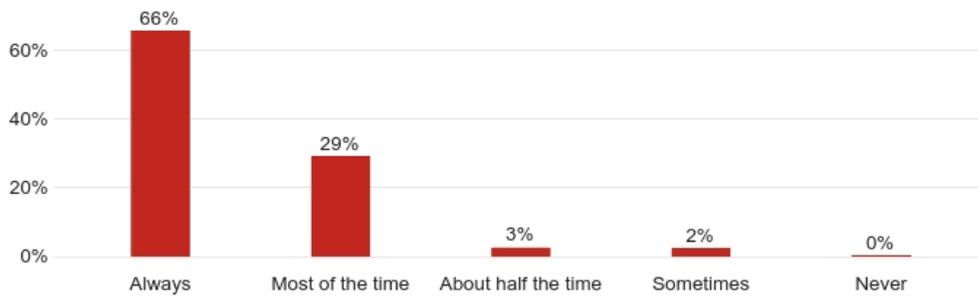


Figure 21. Now thinking about your physical health, which includes physical illness and injury, how many days during the past 30 days was your physical health not good?

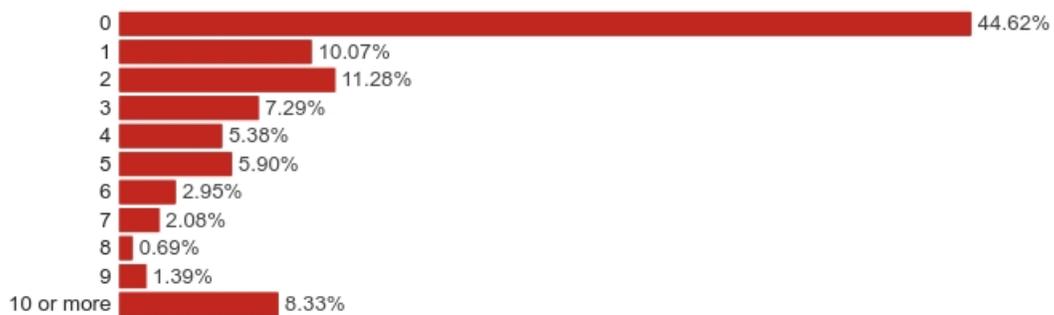


Figure 22. Now thinking about your mental health, which includes stress, depression, and problems with emotions, how many days during the past 30 days was your mental health not good?

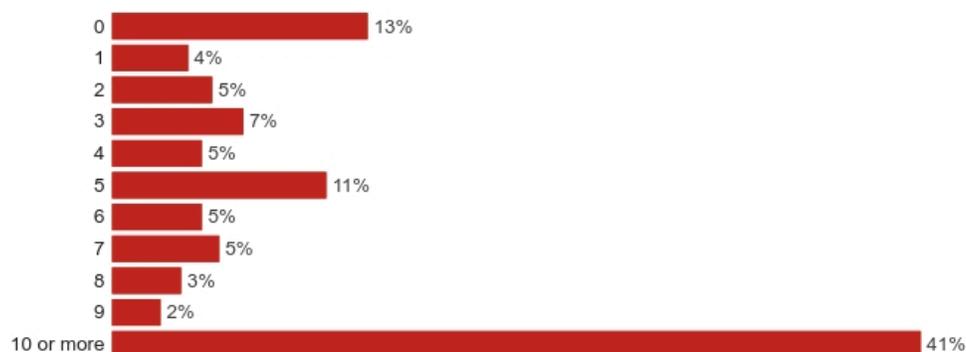


Figure 23. Did you seek and/or receive mental health care services?



Regarding worries associated with COVID-19, almost half of the participants (46%) agreed or strongly agreed that they are worried about paying for regular necessities during the next year (Figure 24a). In addition, more than half of the participants (61%) agreed or strongly agreed that they are worried about paying for school during the following semesters (Figure 24a). Data shows that Hispanic students are more likely than White students to accumulate more debt to deal with the COVID-19 crisis (Safier, 2020).

Overall, more than half of the participants either agree or strongly agree that experiences and responsibilities reduce the effort they can give to education (56%) and make them too tired to complete course work (61%) (Figure 24b). Almost half of the students (49%) agreed to some extent that activities and chores associated with COVID-19 reduce the amount of sleep required to perform well on courses (Figure 24b). In addition, more than half of the students have experienced stress during the pandemic that causes more distractions from their academic work (69%) and feel nervous, anxious, irritable, or on edge (65%) (Figure 24c).

Results are concerning given that research shows that undergraduate students who report experiencing additional stress such as academic difficulties and daily challenges during the pandemic show higher mental health issues.

“The environment in my house is great but sometimes I feel isolated but overall I really enjoy staying at home because I feel like I learn more in an online setting.”

Sixty-one percent of students have felt isolated (Figure 24c). Research shows that young adults might be at greater risk of the adverse psychological effects of social isolation and loneliness due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Beam & Kim, 2020). Students maintain contact with others primarily through text (92%), phone (79%), and

social media (73%) (Figure 25). Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic impacts students in different ways, including academically, financially, and psychologically.

Figure 24a. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

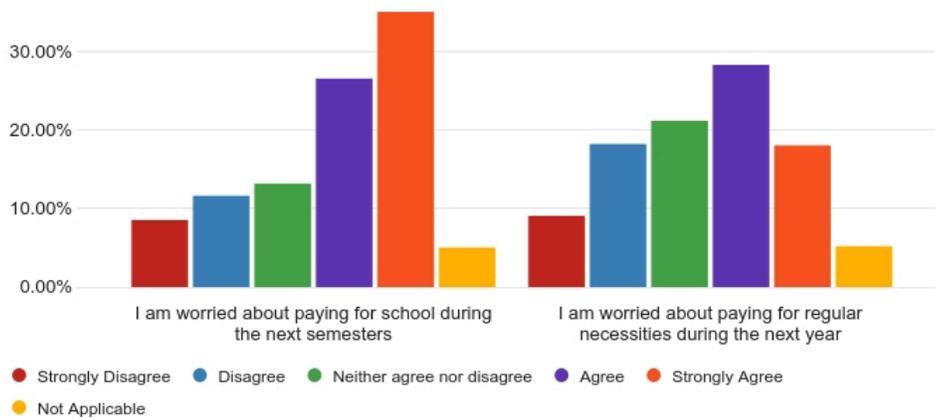


Figure 24b. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

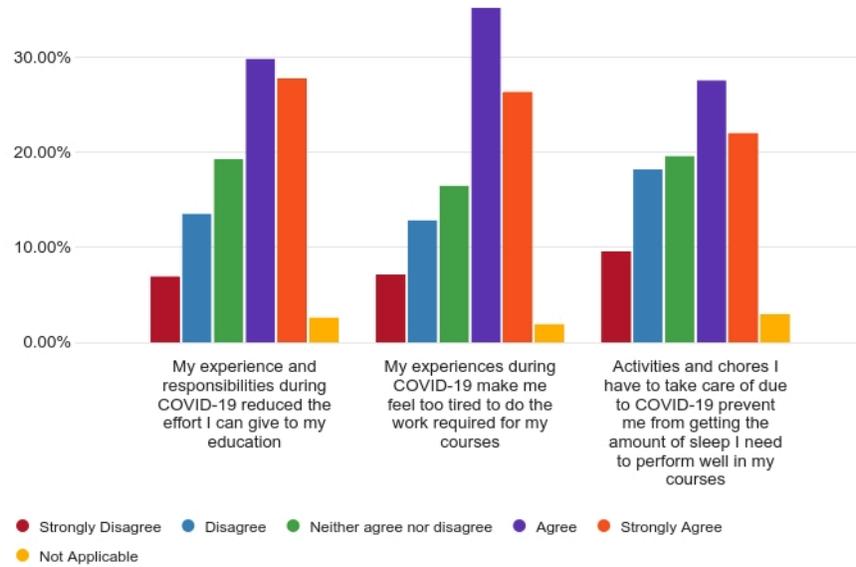


Figure 24c. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements

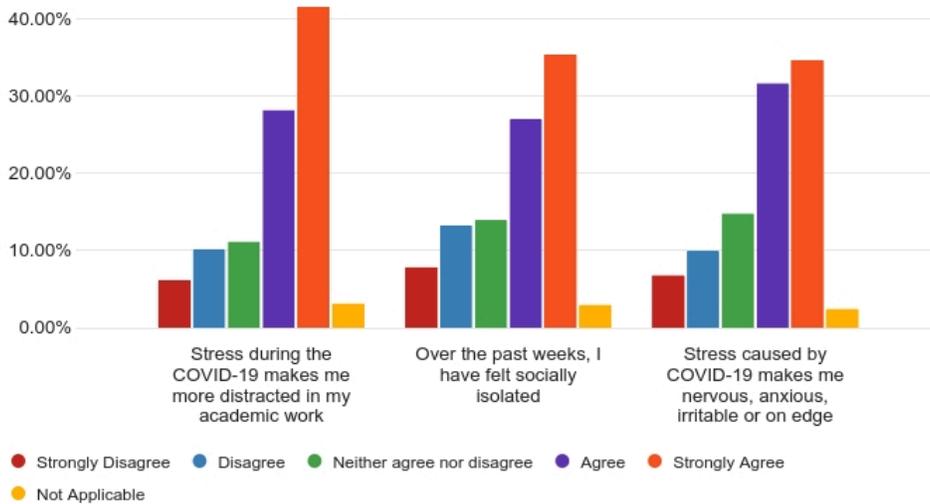
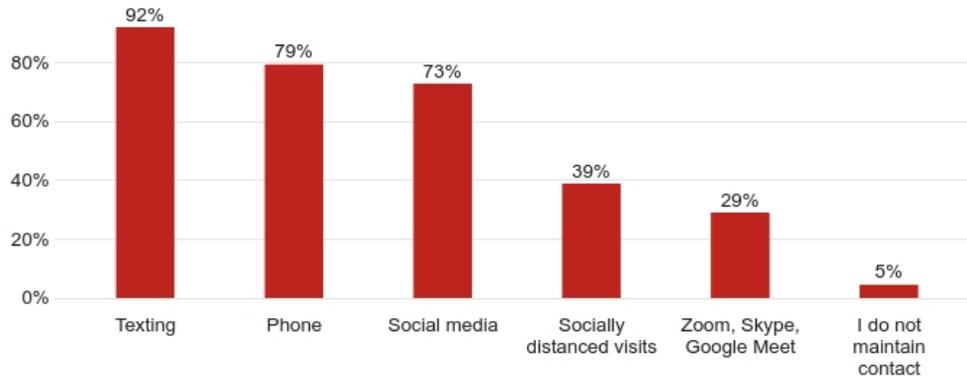


Figure 25. How do you maintain contact with friends/family/partners who do are not living with you?



Note: Percentage of responses reported. Students were allowed to select all that applied.

SELF-EFFICACY & RESILIENCE

“We have a lot of stressful moments at home with my family, especially when we all had Covid, but we have been blessed to have each other, have happiness, support each other...”

Although the students surveyed experienced challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, participants have self-efficacy, generally defined as individuals' beliefs in their abilities to perform specific behaviors (Mejia-Smith & Gushue, 2016, p. 145) (Figure 26). Self-efficacy is an important psychosocial characteristic of the sample of participants of this study, given that it is one of the strongest predictors of academic achievement (Sheu et al., 2010). Among Latina/o students, self-efficacy is positively associated with academic performance across grade levels, including higher education (Manzano-Sanchez et al., 2018). Overall, Latina/o students who report higher self-efficacy have better academic performance (Manzano-Sanchez et al., 2018). Results show that surveyed participants believe in their capacities to achieve specific goals, which may help them persist even during challenging times.

Surveyed students have resilience, generally defined as the capacity to recover from stressful situations (Smith et al., 2008). However, 29% agreed to have a hard time making it through stressful events, and 27% disagreed with coming through difficult times with little trouble (Figure 27). Resilience is an important characteristic, given that it influences the success of post-secondary students (Warren & Hale, 2020). For example, research shows that college students with increased resilience obtain higher grades in comparison to their less resilient counterparts (Strayhorn & Terrell, 2010). In addition, resilience is particularly important to the academic achievement of

underrepresented ethnic minority students (Strayhorn & Terrell, 2010). Overall, results highlight the resilience of the surveyed participants despite the setbacks experienced due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 26. Indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements.

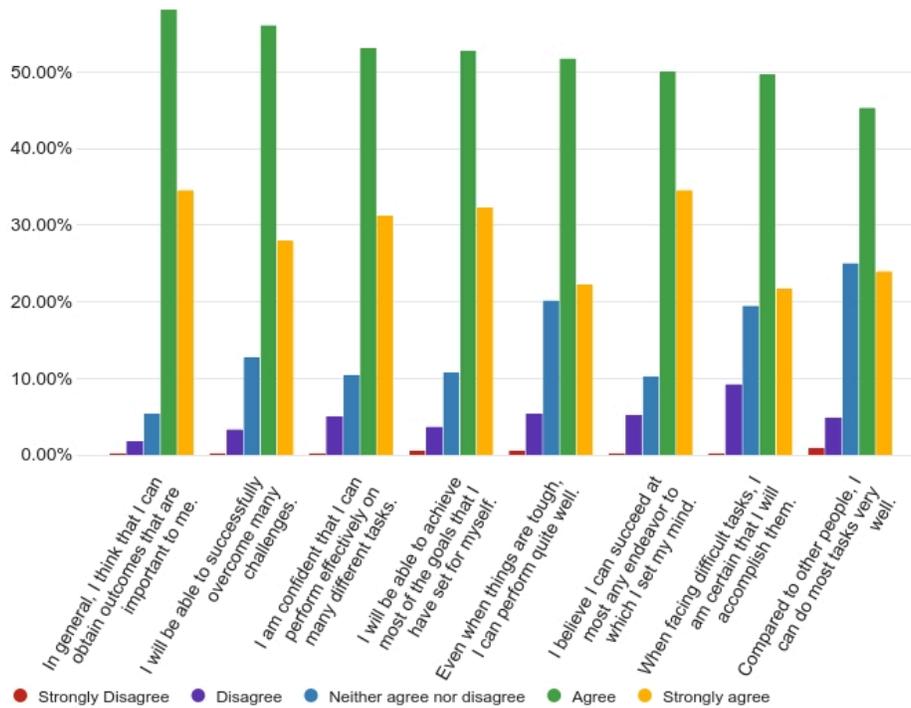
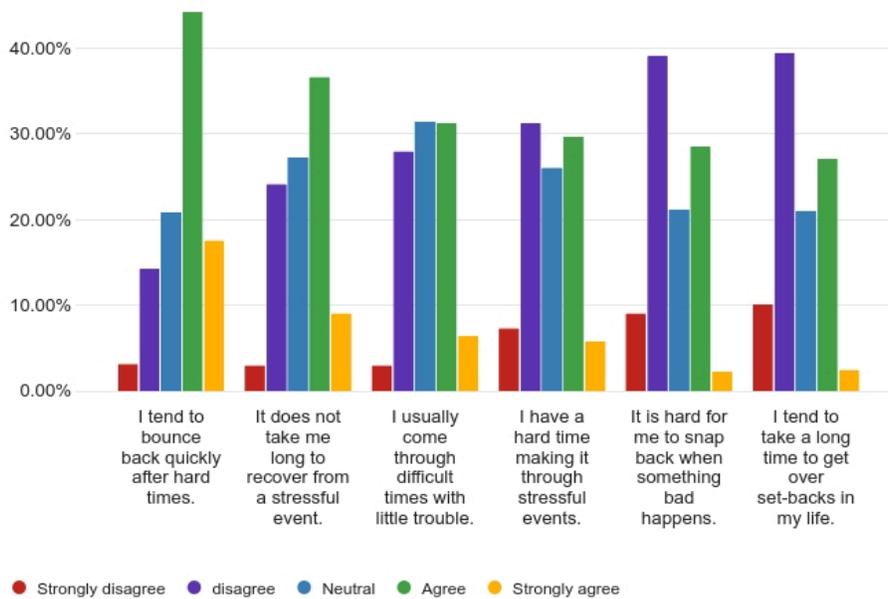


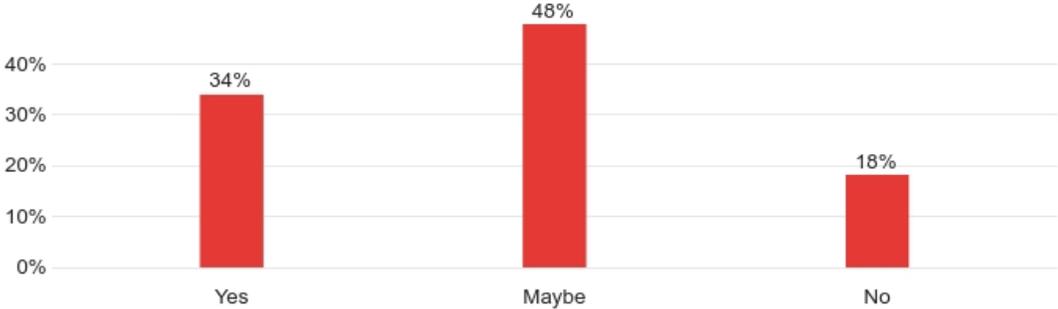
Figure 27. Please respond to each item by marking one box per row.



EDUCATIONAL PATHWAY

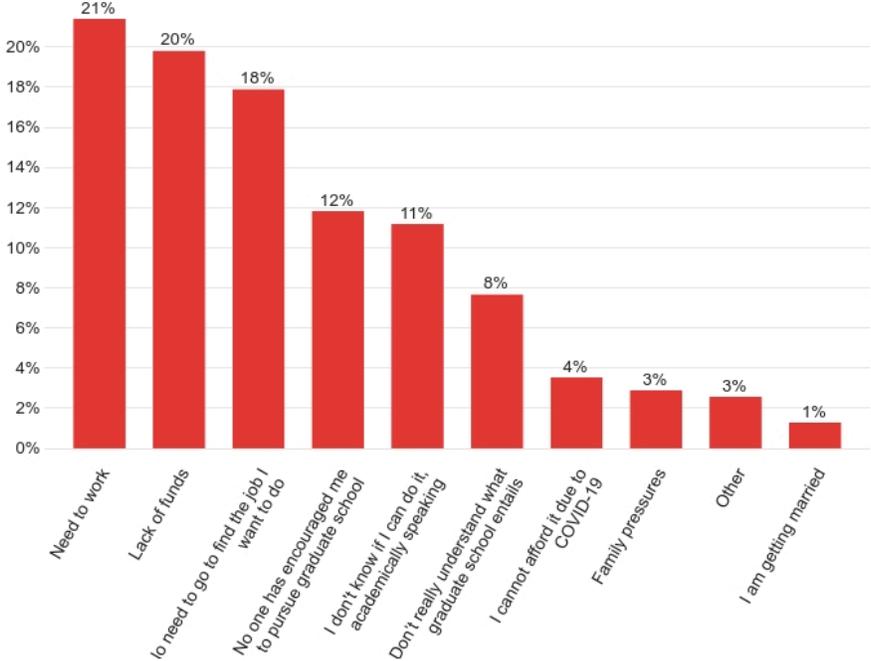
Eighty-two percent of those students who participated in the survey indicated that they plan or consider attending graduate school after graduation (Figure 28).

Figure 28. Are you planning to attend graduate school after earning your degree?



The main reasons that students gave for not considering attending graduate school were primarily financial or work-related. Twenty-one percent indicated that they need to work, followed by 20% who lack funds and 18% who do not need graduate education to find the job they want. Only 4%, as the percentage of choices, indicated that they could not afford it due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 29).

Figure 29. Why are you not considering attending graduate school?



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