

“MY DEPRESSION REALLY INCREASED”; HOW THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC
EFFECTED TEXAS STATE STUDENTS’ HEALTH AND ACADEMIC
PERFORMANCE

by

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HONORS THESIS

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family, who encouraged me to write an Honor's Thesis, and without whom I wouldn't be here today.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Hagelman for helping me at every stage of the Honor's Thesis process. From formulating my research question, survey design, IRB application, and data analysis, Dr. Hagelman was there for me every step of the way. Thank you for always asking the right questions and giving sage advice along the way. I could not have done it without you.

I would also like to thank Dr. Galloway for being an instrumental part of this research project. She ensured that my survey would be anonymous, taking on the role of distributing my survey to the Honors College. Thank you for making this process very smooth and for offering to help. I am very grateful for your expertise and your support during this process.

Thank you to the Honors College for providing me with this wonderful opportunity. I am so thankful that I get to perform this kind of independent research during my undergraduate academic career. This experience will help prepare me for my future studies, and I would like to thank all of the Honors College faculty and staff for providing a quality research and learning experience.

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the health, both mental and physical, and the academic performance of Texas State University Honors College students. The current studies in this area indicate that student mental health sharply declined during the COVID-19 pandemic, as indicated by reports of increased anxiety, depression, loneliness, and stress. Research also points to confusion surrounding use of online learning platforms, leading to stress about grades and assignments. This study used an online Qualtrics survey distributed via email to all Honors College students. The majority of the questions collected qualitative data that was analyzed for patterns and common responses. The survey results showed that over 79% of students reported changes to their mental health during the pandemic, with only 3 students citing a positive change. Coping strategies and helpful organizations were also investigated, as well as student GPA, future plans, and graduation date. While the pandemic was proven to have a negative impact on respondent mental health, more research must be done in order to be able to draw widespread conclusions. Further research must follow to thoroughly investigate the pandemic's effect on student academic performance and physical health.

I: COVID-19, STUDENT HEALTH, AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the world in immeasurable ways, affecting people across the globe. COVID-19 is a strain of the novel coronavirus that originated in Wuhan, China in December, 2019. “By January 20, 2020 the first confirmed case was identified in the United States in Washington State, and the first death was reported on February 29,” (Copeland et al. 134). Positive cases began rapidly increasing in February and March of 2020, leading to the first lockdown in mid-March 2020.

One group that has been affected by the pandemic and lockdown is students, specifically college and university students. With the COVID-19 pandemic came quarantine, isolation, and the rise of online learning. Students were forced to learn from their own bedrooms, and school was changed completely. Since the COVID-19 arrived in the United States in January 2020, the effects of the pandemic on student mental health and academic performance are just starting to be investigated in great detail. There is ample research available on emotional stressors for university students prior to the current pandemic and there are some emergent results from early research that has been conducted on these issues and these papers form the knowledge base for this research study. However, more research is needed as the effects of the pandemic on university student learning and progress. The purpose of this research is to further explore the coping mechanisms and planning disruptions that students attending Texas State University’s Honors College experience during the early period of the lockdown and as a result of the ongoing changes that have been integrated into learning settings and technologies.

First, earlier research shows that the COVID-19 pandemic effected the mental health of students across the globe. Several surveys and studies show that students experienced increased anxiety, depression, and confusion during the pandemic due to loss of routine and isolation (Grubic et al. 517). According to “Student mental health in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic: A call for further research and immediate solutions,” a scholarly article from 2020, “one survey by YoungMinds reported that 83% of young respondents agreed that the pandemic worsened pre-existing mental health conditions, mainly due to school closures, loss of routine, and restricted social connections,” (Grubic et. al 517). With universities being forced online by the pandemic, students were stuck at home feeling isolated, bored, and depressed.

Anxiety was one of the most studied mental health concerns for students during the COVID-19 pandemic. As discusses in a study by Copeland et al., 24% of students began experiencing anxiety about the outbreak of COVID-19 in China before the virus ever arrived in the United States (134-135). The same study states that natural disasters, such as Hurricane Katrina, posed similar levels of psychological threat to students as the pandemic’s onset (Copeland et al. 135). Displacement from university housing, uncertainty about the future, and lack of adult supervision also increased student anxiety and feelings of stress during this time.

In addition to the mental health of students suffering during the COVID-19 pandemic, the academic progress and success of students was also at risk. Universities were forced to teach online either using synchronous or asynchronous methods. One of the main concerns about online learning was students feeling overwhelmed or overloaded by their workloads. According to a study by Al-Kumaim et al., “when students were

asked to mention the sources of overload they encounter when dealing with online courses during COVID19, (71.4%) they refer to the dealing with many online tasks as main source of overload feeling, whereas almost (20%) of the students consider receiving too much information from the online learning platforms as another source for them feeling overloaded,” (149). Teachers were pressured to finish their syllabi by the end of the semester, forcing students to quickly adapt to online teaching methods while being rushed to complete their coursework.

Adjusting to online coursework was another challenge for students during this time. As shown by Al-Kumaim et al., the majority of students before the pandemic (76%), spent 5 hours or less on their computers daily (150). During the pandemic, 62.6% of students reported an increase of time spend on their computers daily, between 6-10 hours per day (150). Even though this additional time spend online during the pandemic was a necessity to complete coursework, it increased stress, sleeplessness, and associated costs buying more internet access (Al-Kumaim et al. 151). Additionally, increased time spend online was shown to increase domestic workload on other housemates or family members (Al-Kumaim et al. 151). Increasing computer time via online learning can also cause stress and some of the mental health concerns previously discussed.

In addition to the new online learning format promoted adding to by the pandemic increasing stress and computer time among students, it also effected student academic performance. Students were required to use sometimes new online technologies and many students have never utilized these platforms before. According to a study by Owusu-Fordjour et al. regarding university students in Ghana, “(73.8%) respondents disagreed to having receive an orientation from their teachers before the school

closedown,” (95). Lack of knowledge on how to use online learning platforms was a great obstacle for students to overcome. However, another study done on university students in the United Kingdom presents contradictory findings; the study states that students are technologically literate and that they adapted to using online learning platforms with ease. As stated by Limniou et al., “The implication of these findings was that teachers could provide students minimum guidance on the use of technologies, but they would be more focused on the transformation of teaching and learning with digital technologies involving either redesign of learning experience or creation of new learning experiences promoting critical thinking,” (11). While students could use the online learning platforms with relative ease, they required more creative and inventive lessons to hold their attention and facilitate learning.

Another key component of academic performance and online learning is distraction. With students completing their coursework at home, intrusion from housemates, social media, and online messaging can draw the students’ attention away from their studies. A study on British college students shows that, “undergraduate students who had been more exposed to activities unrelated to learning (i.e., checking social media and exchanging messages with friends and family) presented low academic performance,” (Limniou et al. 10). When students are not in class face-to-face, accountability is lost, so they are more likely to become distracted and use other programs on their computers.

There is a need for future research into the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on student health and academic performance. First, little research was done on American college and university students. As shown in the differences between the Ghanaian and

British studies, students in various parts of the world do not respond to online learning the same way. A need to research the effects of the pandemic on American student learning has arose. Additionally, actual academic performance indicators, such as GPA, were not studied. Many of the studies focus on the current effects of the pandemic, and do not discuss how this pandemic influences student future plans. This may be because American students were not studied in this regard, or that the COVID-19 pandemic is a fairly new phenomenon, and the effects are not fully realized. While the mental health consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have been studied on students, the coping methods to deal with these issues have not been discussed. This study aims to discover the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on Texas State University student mental health, academic performance, future plans, as well as the coping strategies employed by these students.

METHODS

Subject Selection

Texas State University sits atop a hill in San Marcos, Texas, a small city in Hays County. Texas State is comprised of a diverse student population, with 59.8% of students identifying as female, and 40.2% as male (Texas State University 3). The student population exhibits strong racial diversity as well, with 39% of students reporting as Hispanic, 11% as African American, 2.7 % Asian, and 43% White (Texas State University 4). Texas State University was designated as a Hispanic Serving Institution in 2011 due to the student body being over 25% Hispanic.

This diverse campus was selected as the study area for this research study, as students were all impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in some way. All students were forced to adapt to quarantine conditions and online learning, as well as the mental health challenges that came with these changes. As previously mentioned in the introduction, American universities, and specifically universities in Texas, had not been studied in the context of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on student health and performance. For these reasons, Texas State University was chosen as the ideal setting for this type of socio-behavioral research.

To further narrow down the target respondents, the Texas State Honors College was selected as the study population. The Honors College was chosen for this study because Honors students may have a higher probability responding to a study done by a fellow Honors student. The affiliation with the same college and the principle that students may be more inclined to help one of their own was the driving force behind the selection of Honors College students. The demographics of the Honors College can be interpolated from the demographics of the larger university, meaning that that the racial and gender makeup of the Honors College should be representative of the larger university. In this way, the Honors College serves as a microcosm of the university as a whole. Additionally, students in the Honors College have diverse interests, majors, extracurricular activities, and organizational involvement, similar to students across the university. The Honors College is serving as a sample of Texas State University because of higher response rate among Honors students.

Data Collection

The method of data collection for this study was an online survey distributed to Honors students via email. Qualtrics, an online survey platform, provided by Texas State University, was used to create the survey and collect the results in an Excel file. The survey was sent to Dr. Galloway, who then forwarded it to all of the students in the Honors College. This was done in order to keep the anonymity of the participants by not giving the researcher access to their email addresses or names. Additionally, the Qualtrics survey was set to not collect any identifiable data, including IP addresses. The survey would be completely anonymous. In addition to the data collection being anonymous, the informed consent statement was written as the first question of the survey. Students would either continue with the survey if they agree to the consent statement or would not complete the survey if they disagreed. The survey was distributed to Honors students on September 27, 2021 and was open for eight days, before closing on October 4, 2021.

Survey Instrument

The survey was originally constructed by the researcher and was designed to collect both qualitative and quantitative data about the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on Texas State University students. The instrument was a fifteen-question survey that took approximately five minutes to complete. Excluding the first question, which was the informed consent agreement, there were eight multiple choice questions, one free-response question, and four multiple choice questions with space to elaborate on the answer. There were four demographic questions, asking students to identify their gender, major, classification, and if live on campus. The full survey instrument is listed in the Appendix as Item II.

Analysis Methods

The data was then compiled in a Microsoft Excel workbook for review. The data was inspected for patterns and trends, though it was not subjected to any statistical tests. The responses were visualized in tables and charts to get a better understanding of the findings. Additionally, the qualitative data was inspected for common answers and phrases, noting which answers appeared the most frequently. Some responses were directly quoted in this report, though the respondents remain completely anonymous.

RESULTS

Demographics

The survey returned 149 responses in eight days, with the first part of the survey collecting demographic information. The classification of students breaks out into the majority of the students being upperclassmen; 58 seniors and 43 juniors responded to the survey, totaling 67.79 % of the total respondents.

Table I: Classification of Student Respondents

#	Field	Choice Count
1	Freshman	16.11% 24
2	Sophomore	16.11% 24
3	Junior	28.86% 43
4	Senior	38.93% 58

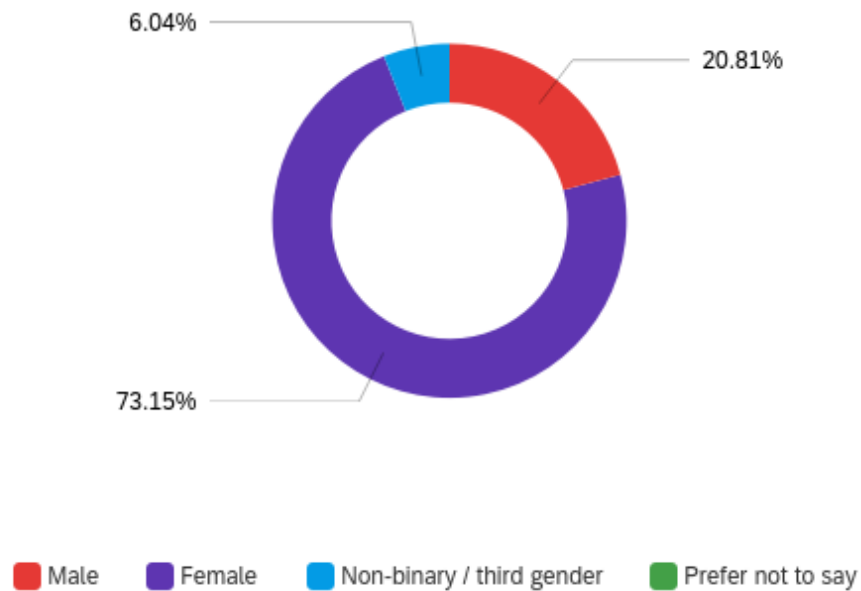
149

Showing rows 1 - 5 of 5

Additionally, data was collected on the gender of the respondents. The vast majority of the students who responded to the survey (73.15%) identified as female, while 20.81% identified as male and 6.04% identified as third gender or non-binary.

While it was an option on the survey to “Prefer not to say” the participants’ gender identification, nobody chose this option.

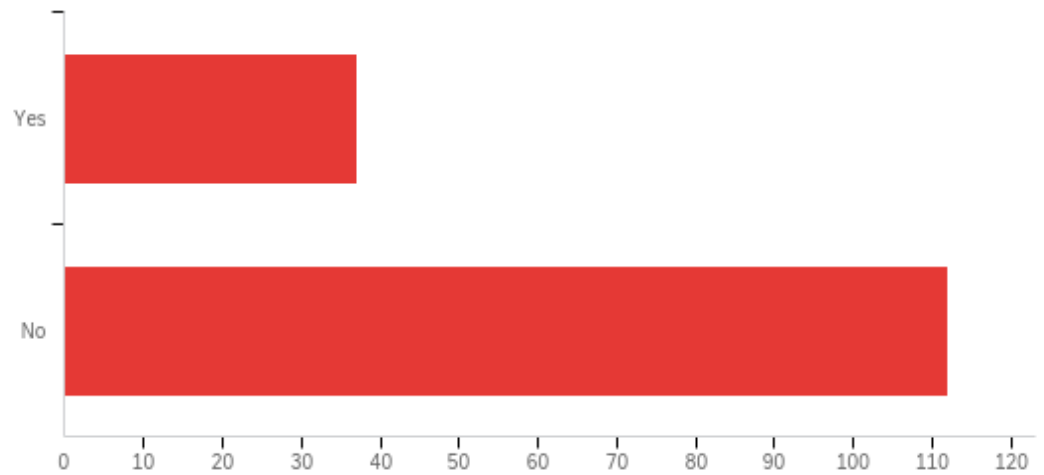
Figure I: Gender Demographics of Respondents



The survey then asked participants to share their majors. There was an enormous diversity of majors reported, but the three most popular majors were biology, psychology, and anthropology. 25 students reported majoring in biology, 18 were psychology students, and 7 were anthropology students.

The next question then asked if participants live on the Texas State University campus. 24.87% of respondents, or a total of 37 students reported living on campus, while the remaining 112 students (75.17%) reported not living on campus.

Figure 2: Respondents Reporting if They Live on Campus



The last demographic question asked was regarding the percentage of classes that students were taking online for the Fall 2021 semester. 58.39% of students reported taking 0-20% of their classes online, while only 7.38 % of students reported taking 80-100% of their classes online. This demonstrates that students took the majority of their classes in an in-person format during the Fall 2021 semester.

Table 2: Percentage of Respondents Classes Held Online for Fall 2021 Semester

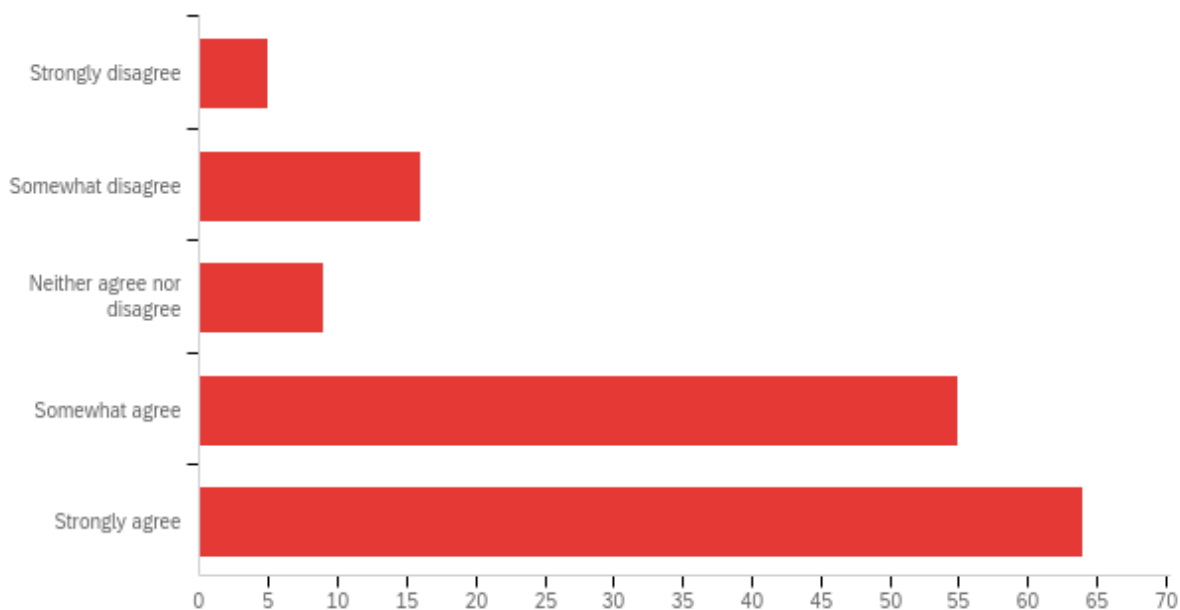
#	Field	Choice Count
1	0-20%	58.39% 87
2	20-40%	18.12% 27
3	40-60%	8.72% 13
4	60-80%	7.38% 11
5	80-100%	7.38% 11
		149

Showing rows 1 - 6 of 6

Graduation and Future Plans

This section of the survey focused on the academic performance of students during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the student plans after graduation. The first question in this section asked if students have had more difficulty concentrating on their schoolwork since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Participants were asked to rank their agreement with this statement on a Likert Scale, from strongly disagree to strongly agree. 65 students responded that they strongly agree that they have had more difficulty concentrating on their schoolwork since the COVID-19 pandemic began. An additional 55 students responded that they somewhat agree to this statement. In total, 119 students, or 79.9%, responded with some agreement that they have had more difficulty concentrating on their schoolwork since the pandemic began.

Figure 3: Difficulty Concentrating on Schoolwork Since the Pandemic Began



Continuing with the same theme, the next question aimed to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic affected student academic performance, measured by GPA. 52

(35%) students reported that their GPA has decreased since the pandemic began, 79 (59%) indicated that their GPA has remained the same, and 17 (11%) indicated that their GPA has increased. The survey also wanted to understand the effect of the pandemic on student graduation and whether or not the pandemic has caused students to have to delay graduation. The vast majority of students indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic has not caused them to have to push back their graduation date. 116, or 77.85% of respondents said that the pandemic did not cause them to have to push back their graduation date, and 8.05% of students were unsure.

Table 3: Graduation Delay Due to the Pandemic

#	Field	Choice Count	
1	Yes	14.09%	21
2	Unsure	8.05%	12
3	No	77.85%	116
			149

Showing rows 1 - 4 of 4

The students that indicated that they would need to delay their graduation were then asked how many additional semesters it will take them to graduate. While only 21 students indicated that they would need to delay their graduation, 26 students responded to the question asking how many additional semesters they would need to graduate. This is a discrepancy in the data that could be explained by students who responded as “unsure” to the previous question answering that they need an additional semester to graduate. Of the students who indicated they will need more time to graduate, 50% said that they will only need one additional semester, and 26.92% will need two additional

semesters. Only two students indicated that they would need four or more additional semesters to graduate.

Table 4: Additional Semesters Needed to Graduate

#	Field	Choice Count
1	1	50.00% 13
2	2	26.92% 7
3	3	15.38% 4
4	4 or more	7.69% 2

26

Showing rows 1 - 5 of 5

After the survey attempts to understand the effects of the pandemic on student graduation, it then asks if the pandemic has had any influence on students' future career plans. If students indicate that the pandemic has had an effect on their long-term career plans, it asks them to explain how specifically their plans have been affected. 98 students or 67% of respondents indicated that their career plans were not affected by the pandemic, while 48 students, or approximately 33% of respondents indicated their plans were affected. Of the 33% of students whose plans changed due to the pandemic, several themes emerged in their written responses detailing specifically how their plans changed.

The first major theme shown in these responses was that the pandemic prompted students to re-evaluate their majors and career plans. Many students indicated discovering new career interests and deciding to change their majors. An anonymous respondent said, "I changed majors because I didn't think I'd have any success in a post-COVID world as an art major." The second theme shown by students who responded that the pandemic effected their long-term career plans is that they felt that there were less internship or job opportunities available post-COVID. One of these students voiced their concerns about

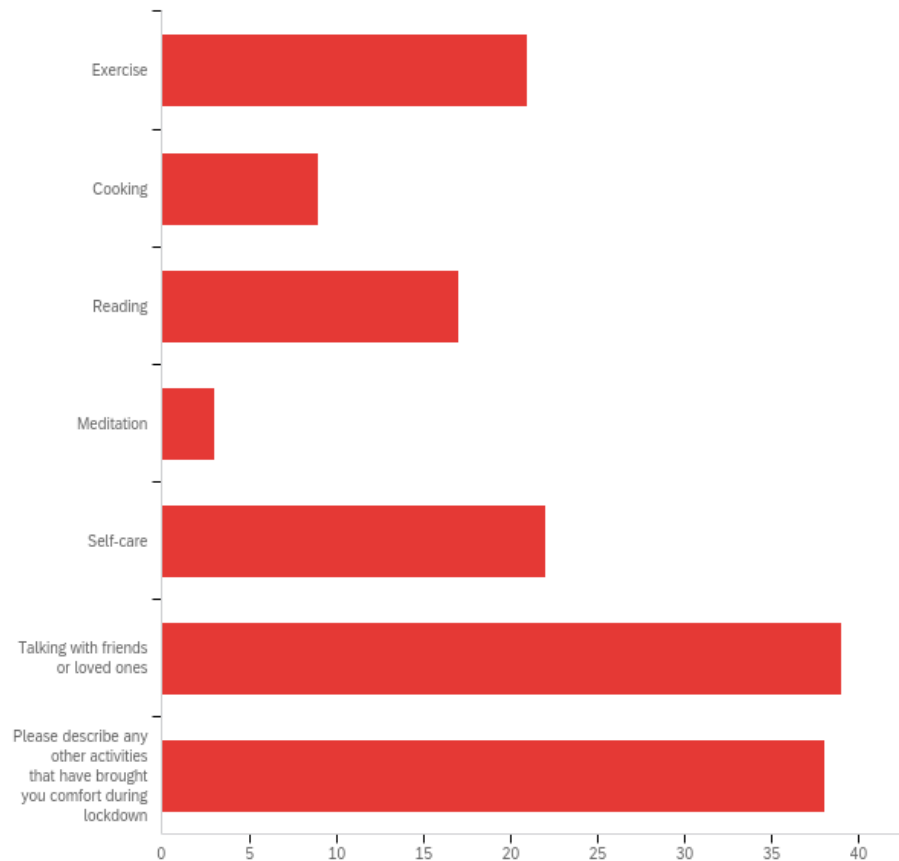
the job market; “I am unsure if I will be able to find a job right after graduating grad school. If I cannot find an internship, then I will not be able to complete my graduate degree and I will have to decide a different graduate degree.” Lastly, the uncertainty of the pandemic has also left students feeling lost and confused about their futures after college. Students expressed anxieties about their plans after graduation and many were unsure about what their next steps are. One student sums up these concerns; “I feel lost. I don’t know what I want to do. And with the pandemic I feel that my options are limited.”

Coping Strategies

The next section of the survey was comprised of questions to understand student coping strategies and comforting behaviors used during the pandemic. The question asked for participants to select which activity had been the most comforting to them during the pandemic. They could also choose to write in their own responses if the choices did not describe their preferences. The greatest number of students, 39 or (26.17%), indicated that talking with friends and loved ones has brought them the most

comfort during the pandemic, while 38 students (25.50%) opted to write in their own

Figure 4: Coping Strategies



answers. Of the students that described their personal coping strategies/ activities, a few answers became very prominent. Music and art, spending time outside, and video games were the most popular coping strategies written in by students. The least popular coping strategy listed in the survey was meditation, with only three participants selecting this response. Many also indicated that several of the answer choices applied to them or selected more than one response.

The survey then aimed to discover if students had developed any new hobbies or interests during the pandemic. 83 students, or 55.70%, indicated that they had developed new hobbies during the pandemic, and 66 students (44.30%) said that they had not. The question then asked the students who indicated that they had developed new hobbies to

specify which new activities they had taken up. The most popular new hobbies that students described were gardening, exercise, crafting/ art, and reading. Crafting/ art was the most popular new hobby adopted by students, with 29 students saying they have taken up creative pursuits during the pandemic. Some of the art hobbies mentioned were embroidery, painting, and pottery.

The next question then aimed to understand the effects of the pandemic on student mental and physical health. The question asked if students have experienced any changes in their physical and mental health that they attribute to the COVID-19 pandemic, and if they did experience changes, they were asked to share what they were feeling. 118 students, or 79.19% of total respondents said that the pandemic has had an effect on their mental or physical health. Many of these students elected to share what specific changes to their health they were experiencing. The most common changes that students experienced were increased anxiety and depression, weight loss or gain, and feeling isolated/ lonely. One anonymous student summed up this sentiment about their mental health during the pandemic; “Decreased exercise, gained weight, increased anxiety. Often feel bored or like things don’t matter.” While the vast majority of students cited the pandemic as a cause of declining mental health, three students noted that they experienced positive benefits such as more exercise causing improved physical health.

The last question of the survey asked what person or organization was most helpful to the participants during the pandemic. This was a free-response question, so there were no multiple-choice answers. The most frequent responses were for most helpful people were family members (71 students), friends or roommates (53 students), and student organizations such as fraternities and sororities and religious groups (15

students). Only two students cited Texas State University as the organization that helped them the most during the pandemic.

DISCUSSION

The results indicate that respondents to this survey mostly maintained their academic performance during the pandemic, though their mental and physical health was negatively affected. These respondents reported that while they did have more trouble concentrating on schoolwork since the pandemic (79%), their GPAs remained the same and most of their career plans were not impacted. However, student mental health did take a toll during the COVID-19 lockdown and ensuing months after the lockdown. Students turned to friends and family, as well as music, art, video games, and the outdoors to cope with the stress of the pandemic. The majority of respondents discovered a new hobby or interest, with gardening, exercise, crafting, and reading being the most popular new hobbies. These activities and coping strategies were used to cope with the stress, uncertainty, depression, and anxiety experienced by students during the lockdown and pandemic. Over 79% of respondents reported changes in their mental and physical health (most changes were perceived as negative by students). Weight fluctuation, poor mental health, and isolation were all reported as changes brought on by the pandemic. Students were able to maintain their grades and career paths during this time, though their mental health and physical health suffered.

Interpretations

There were several patterns noticed in the results. First, the majority of students (59%) reported that their GPA remained the same during the pandemic as it was pre-pandemic. 78% of students also reported that the pandemic did not cause them to delay

graduation, while 67% did not report any changes to their career plans during this time. These results indicate that the majority of respondents maintained their academic performance during the pandemic and were still on track for an on-time graduation. These results are not necessary indicative of the entire student body of Texas State University. Honors College students may be more academically motivated than the general student body, so the academic performance of the Texas State University student body during the pandemic may differ from that of the Honors students.

Another pattern identified in the results is the prevalence of students using coping strategies to deal with the stress of the COVID-19 pandemic. 26% found the most comfort in talking with loved ones during the time, while others turned to more creative pursuits, such as music and art, as well as exercise and video games. Many students (58%) developed new hobbies during the pandemic, and these hobbies may have also served as coping strategies. The most popular new hobby was crafting, followed by exercise, reading, and gardening. These results suggest that students turned to creative exploits to cope with the pandemic, as well as finding comfort in other people.

The last major finding of this study is that the pandemic negatively affected student physical and mental health. While 79% of students reported a change to physical and mental health, the vast majority of these qualitative responses indicated a perceived negative change. Students reported increased levels of anxiety, uncertainty, depression, loneliness, and weight fluctuation during the pandemic. Only three students reported a positive change to their health during this time.

Implications

The results build on existing evidence of decreased student mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic. The literature proved that students experienced heightened anxiety, stress, and depression during the tumultuous pandemic. This research falls in line with the current literature while confirming that Texas State University students are struggling or struggled with mental health challenges. When students were asked what person or organization was most helpful to them during the pandemic, only two respondents cited Texas State University. This indeed shows that students did not turn to university resources during the COVID-19 pandemic, even when they were struggling with mental health issues and the university offers mental health resources. A practical implication of this finding is to encourage Texas State University to make its mental health resources more accessible and widely-known by the student body. However, fifteen students noted that Texas State-based student groups were the most helpful to them, including Greek organizations, religious groups, and other clubs. This indicates that students feel more supported by student organizations than the university itself, so outreach to students may be better served via student groups.

In comparison, the relationship between the COVID-19 pandemic and student academic performance is still relatively unclear. The data suggests that there is no relationship between the pandemic and student academic performance, as student GPA remained the same, graduation plans were unchanged, and future plans were widely unaffected. Since there was little previous research in this area, this data contributes to a clearer understanding of student academic performance during the pandemic. However, Honors students were surveyed, so their academic inclinations may differ from the student body as a whole. Due to the lack of previous research and the inconclusive nature

of this study, no conclusions can be drawn about the effect of the pandemic on student academic performance

Limitations

The generalizability of the results is limited by the relatively small sample size, as well as the use of Honors College students as the study group. With 149 participants, it is hard to generalize across an entire university of almost 40,000 students. Additionally, the use of Honors College students may limit the ability to generalize across the entire student body. As mentioned before, Honors College students may be more academically motivated than the average Texas State student, so the results about academic performance during the pandemic cannot be generalized across the entire student body. It is beyond the scope of this study to draw conclusions about how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the academic performance or health of entire student body at Texas State University or university students in general. While the data shows that the vast majority of Honors College students did experience changes to their mental and physical health during the COVID-19 pandemic, with most of the changes perceived as negative, the sample size is too small and the Honors College may differ from the general student body too much to draw conclusions about the university as a whole.

Recommendations

Future studies need to take into account the effect of the pandemic on student physical health. While this study aimed to understand the relationship between the COVID-19 pandemic and student health, both mental and physical, many students chose to only discuss their mental health. A study that examines physical health factors such as

BMI and weight could be useful for this purpose. Additionally, a more detailed survey instrument focusing solely on physical health changes could be used to assess student perceptions of their physical health if actual health measurements are too invasive.

Furthermore, more research is needed to establish a correlation between the COVID-19 pandemic and student academic performance. While the vast majority of respondents stated that their mental health was negatively impacted by the pandemic, there appeared to be little connection between the pandemic and student academic performance. Most students stated that their grades remained the same, as did their graduation timeline and future plans. However, the students surveyed were members of the Honors College. Honors College students may be more academically-motivated, as shown by their membership in the Honors College, than students enrolled in the rest of the university. A study should be done to assess the academic performance of the entirety of the student body at Texas State University.

Lastly, more research must be done in universities across the world to understand the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on all aspects of student life and well-being. COVID-19 is a new, recently-emerged disease, so little is known about its societal affects. While there appears to be a negative correlation between the pandemic and student mental health (of the students surveyed), it is not possible to generalize these findings across larger scales, such as to other universities or to university students and general. Students at various universities need to be surveyed on how the pandemic affected student mental health and academic performance in order to draw concrete conclusions.

CONCLUSIONS

This research aimed to understand the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the health (mental and physical) and academic performance of Texas State University Honors College students. Based on a qualitative analysis of survey results, it can be concluded that the respondent's mental health suffered during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, there was no clear correlation between the COVID-19 pandemic and student academic performance or physical health. Based on these conclusions, future studies should address the gaps in this research, focusing on discovering how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced student physical health and academic performance. Additionally, this study makes evident the need for increased awareness of the mental health resources available at Texas State University, as well as encouraging students to use these resources.

APPENDIX SECTION

I. IRB APPROVAL FORM



In future correspondence please refer to 7816

September 20, 2021

Henrietta Krellenstein
Texas State University
601 University Dr.
San Marcos, TX 78666

Dear Henrietta:

Scale document down

Your application titled, *'The Impacts of COVID-19 on Student Life and Health'* was reviewed by the Texas State University IRB and approved. It was determined there are: (1) research procedures consistent with a sound research design and they did not expose the subjects to unnecessary risk; (2) benefits to subjects are considered along with the importance of the topic and that outcomes are reasonable; (3) selection of subjects are equitable; and (4) the purposes of the research and the research setting are amenable to subjects' welfare and produced desired outcomes; indications of coercion or prejudice are absent, and participation is clearly voluntary.

In addition, the IRB found you will orient participants as follows: (1) signed informed consent is not required as participation will imply consent; (2) Provision is made for collecting, using and storing data in a manner that protects the safety and privacy of the subjects and the confidentiality of the data; (3) Appropriate safeguards are included to protect the rights and welfare of the subjects; (4) Participants will not receive compensation for participation in this project.

**This project was approved at the Exempt Review Level
This project does not involve in person research activities with participants**

Check the IRB website frequently for guidance on how to protect participants. It is the expectation that all researchers follow current federal and state guidelines. Approved research activities did not indicate face-to-face research with human subjects.

The institution is not responsible for any actions regarding this protocol before approval. If you expand the project at a later date to use other instruments, please re-apply. Copies of your request for human subject's review, your application, and this approval are maintained in the Office of Research Integrity and Compliance.

Report any changes to this approved protocol to this office. Notify the IRB of any unanticipated events, serious adverse events, and breach of confidentiality within 3 days.

Sincerely,

Monica Gonzales
IRB Compliance Specialist
Research Integrity and Compliance
Texas State University

Cc: Dr. Ronald Hagelman

OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND SPONSORED PROGRAMS
601 University Drive | JCK #489 | San Marcos, Texas 78666-4616
Phone 512.245.2314 | fax 512.245.3847 | WWW.TXSTATE.EDU

This letter is an electronic communication from Texas State University-San Marcos, a member of The Texas State University System.

II. SURVEY INSTRUMENT

1. Henrietta Krellenstein, an undergraduate student in the Honors College at Texas State University, is conducting a research study to determine the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on student academic success and social health. You are being asked to complete this survey because you are a member of the Texas State University Honors College. Participation is voluntary. The survey will take approximately 5 minutes or less to complete. You must be at least 18 years old to take this survey. This study involves no foreseeable serious risks. We ask that you try to answer all questions; however, if there are any items that make you uncomfortable or that you would prefer to skip, please leave the answer blank. Your responses are anonymous. Possible benefits from this study are helping a fellow Honors student complete her Honor's thesis and understanding the effects of the pandemic on the student population. Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. The members of the research team and the Texas State University Office of Research Integrity and Compliance (RIC) may access the data. The RIC monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants. Your name will not be used in any written reports or publications which result from this research. Data will be kept for three years (per federal regulations) after the study is completed and then destroyed. If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact Henrietta Krellenstein or her faculty advisor: Henrietta Krellenstein, Undergraduate student Ron Hagelman III, Professor Honors College Geography Department (914) 334-0477 (512) 245-8847 hjk22@txstate.edu rh46@txstate.edu This project 7816 was approved by the Texas State IRB on September 20, 2021. Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and/or research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB chair, Dr. Denise Gobert 512-716-2652 – (dgobert@txstate.edu) or to Monica Gonzales, IRB Regulatory Manager 512-245-2334 - (meg201@txstate.edu). If you would prefer not to participate, please do not fill out a survey. If you consent to participate, please select yes below and continue with the survey.

A. Yes

2. What is your classification?

- A. Freshman
- B. Sophomore
- C. Junior
- D. Senior

3. What is your major?

4. What is your gender?

- A. Male
- B. Female
- C. Non-binary/ third gender
- D. Prefer not to say

5. Do you currently live on campus?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
6. What percentage of your classes are held online?
 - A. 0-20%
 - B. 20-40%
 - C. 40-60%
 - D. 60-80%
 - E. 80-100%
7. Since the COVID-19 lockdown began, I have had more difficulty focusing on my schoolwork.
 - A. Strongly disagree
 - B. Somewhat disagree
 - C. Neither agree nor disagree
 - D. Somewhat agree
 - E. Strongly agree
8. Based on your own assessment, how has the COVID-19 lockdown affected your GPA?
 - A. Decreased my GPA
 - B. My GPA has remained the same
 - C. Increased my GPA
9. Have you had to postpone your graduation date due to the pandemic?
 - A. Yes
 - B. Unsure
 - C. No
10. If you answered yes to the previous question, how many additional semesters do you estimate it will take you to graduate?
 - A. 1
 - B. 2
 - C. 3
 - D. 4 or more
11. Has the pandemic affected your long-term career plan? If yes, please specify how.
 - A. No
 - B. Yes
12. Which activities have been the most comforting to you since lockdown began?
 - A. Exercise
 - B. Cooking
 - C. Reading

- D. Mediation
- E. Self-care
- F. Talking with friends or loved ones
- G. Please describe any other activities that have brought you comfort during lockdown

13. Have you developed any new hobbies/ interests as a result of lockdown, and if yes, please specify which hobbies/ interests?

- A. No
- B. Yes

14. Have you experienced any changes in your physical and/or mental health that you attribute to the COVID-19 pandemic or lockdown? If yes, and you are willing to share, please specify the changes that you have experienced.

- A. No
- B. Yes

15. What person or organization has been the most helpful to you since lockdown began?

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