

University of Arizona

Student Mental Health and Wellbeing During COVID-19

In early May, 2,352 undergraduate students enrolled on Tucson's main campus completed The COVID-19 Health and Wellness and Online Classroom Experiences Student Needs Survey (7% response rate). This report, by Campus Health Service, presents findings related to students' mental health and wellbeing as a result of COVID-19 disruptions.

This report aims to highlight students' experiences and unique struggles at this time, with the ultimate goal of informing the work of student support professionals, administrators, faculty and staff across the university of how this pandemic has affected our student population. The insights below will be important in guiding programming and support for students during this time.

Questions about this analysis can be directed to Lauren Pring, MPH (pring@email.arizona.edu).

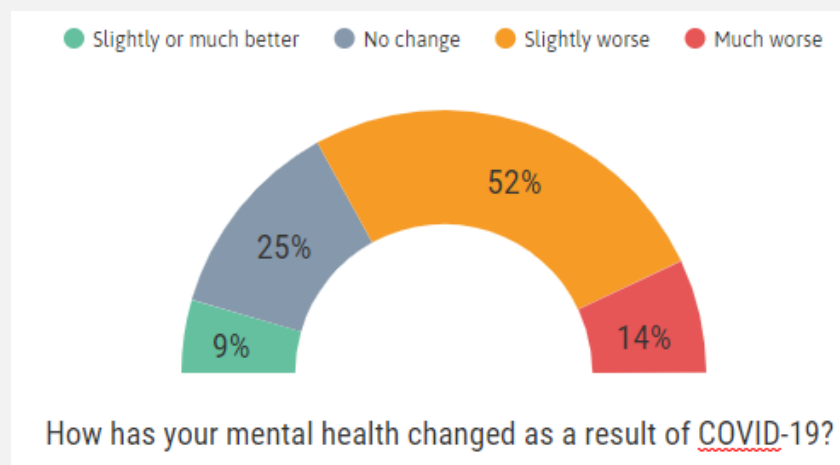
UA Students are Experiencing Substantial Mental Health Effects of COVID-19

The majority (66%) of students report that their mental health has worsened as a result of COVID-19, and nearly one in 6 students (14%) said that it has significantly worsened.

Though we don't know status of mental wellbeing of individual survey respondents prior to this, the 2019 Campus Health and Wellness Survey* found that 56% of UA undergrads said anxiety or depression made it difficult to go to class, work, study, or get along with other people. The mental wellbeing of UA students is an important concern on its own, but it also

appears to affect academic success.

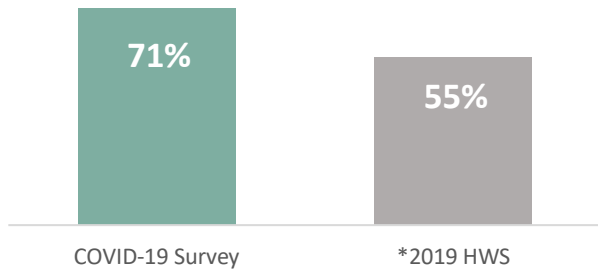
37% of students who said their mental wellbeing was worsened due to COVID-19 had to **make some change to their academic plans** (compared with 19% whose mental wellbeing was not worsened)



“ [I] already had depression and anxiety, greatly increased stress from school has exacerbated it. [I] had to defer [my] graduate project until next year. ”

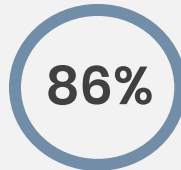
*University of Arizona Campus Health Service. (2019). Health and Wellness Survey Aggregate Report for Public Use - Weighted Undergraduate Report. Retrieved from <https://www.health.arizona.edu/weve-got-data>.

Experienced more than average or tremendous stress due to COVID-19



*2019 Health and Wellness Survey for comparison (question reads 'In the past school year')

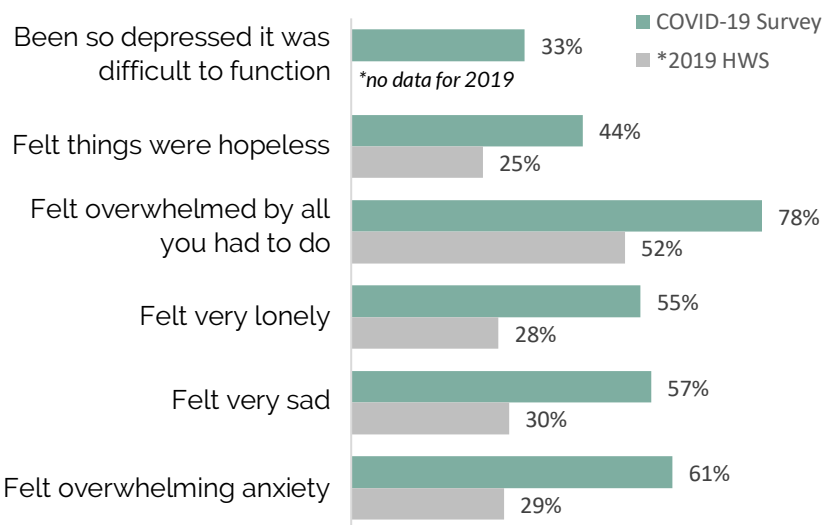
Students have been experiencing heightened stress during the COVID-19 pandemic. Almost three quarters of students have experienced more than average or tremendous stress due to COVID-19. Of those whose mental health has worsened, **one in four students have experienced tremendous stress** (compared with 4% of those whose mental health has not worsened).



of students whose mental health worsened during COVID-19 experienced more than average or tremendous stress (p<0.000)

Students report substantially elevated symptoms of mental health issues in the 30 days prior to completing this survey, compared with data from the 2019 Health and Wellness Survey. Most students have experienced one or more symptom, with feelings of overwhelm, anxiety, sadness and loneliness being the most prevalent.

Over half of students report feeling very lonely, and 31% felt isolated or lonely most or all of the time.



89%

Of undergraduate students report having **one or more symptoms of depression or anxiety** in the past 30 days

31%

Of undergraduate students report feeling **isolated or lonely most or all of the time** in the past 2 weeks

“ **Physically, I am safe and fine. Mentally and emotionally, I have really been struggling. I almost had 2 panic attacks for the first time in my life.** ”

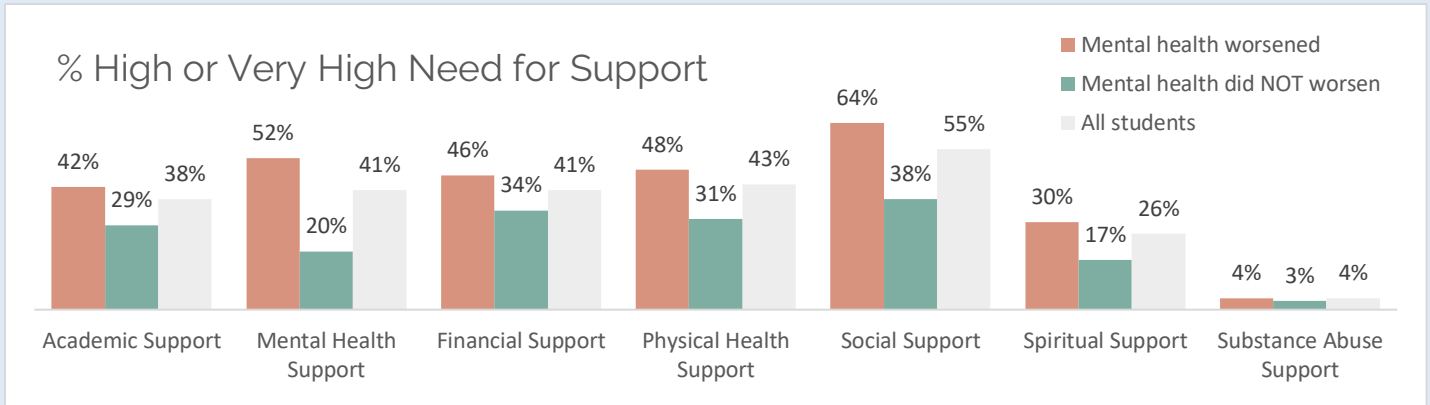
While **international students** were less likely to report most symptoms of anxiety or depression, they were more likely to report that the symptoms they experienced were more severe:

37% report feeling **so depressed it was difficult to function**

15% report engaging in **self-harm** (p<0.00) (compared with 4% of domestic students)

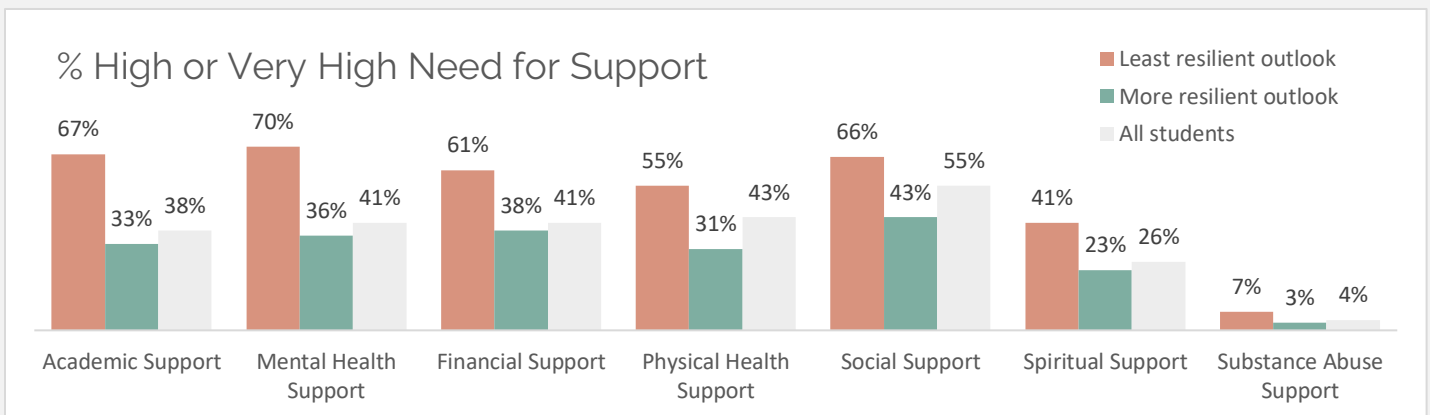
Students struggling with mental health have greater support needs

For those whose mental health worsened due to COVID-19, needs for all categories of support were higher than the comparison category ($p < 0.00$). The highest need remained social support, followed by mental health support. The need for mental health services becomes even higher among those who had both worsened mental health symptoms and who are isolated or lonely most or all of the time.

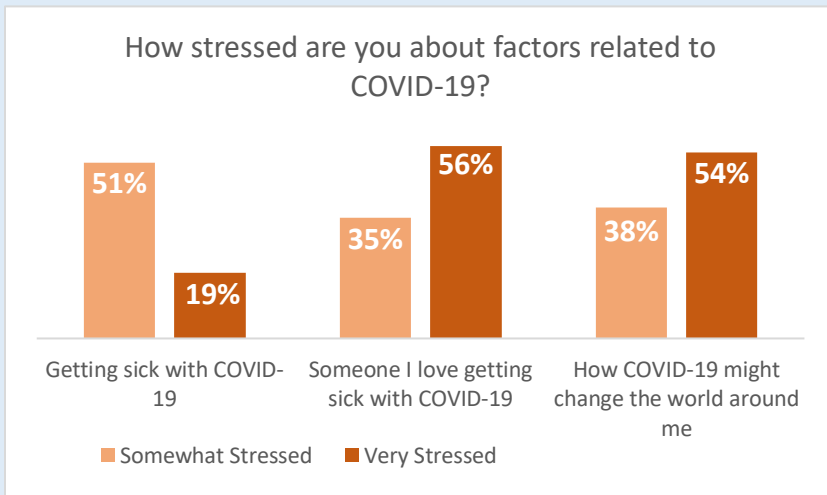


Students with lower resilience have greatest support needs

A proxy measure for resilience was developed by members of the Campus Health ‘Stronger Than’ resilience initiative, which asked students how they were handling the situation. The least resilient outlook was “I don’t know how I’m going to get through this”. Those who marked the least resilient outlook (13% of respondents) had significantly higher support needs than those with a more resilient outlook ($p < 0.00$). Mental health support became the #1 need for these students, followed by academic support and social support. **This further suggests that resilience, mental health, and academic success are closely linked.**



Health-related stressors of COVID-19 are impacting students wellbeing



Stresses directly related to COVID-19 are also having a substantial effect on student wellness. Fewer students report high stress over getting sick, but more than half are very stressed about someone they love getting sick. Health-related stress has also reduced students' ability to perform in class during the pandemic.

52% 

of undergraduates said that **health related stress** (theirs or a loved one's) reduced their ability to perform in remote classes

Many students are managing impacts of COVID-19 on life circumstances

Part of the context in which students' mental health is being affected by the pandemic are the life circumstances that they are newly having to manage on top of school and/or work obligations. More than half of students had to relocate and move in with someone else, while at the same time 8% were quarantining alone/isolated. Nearly 1 in 5 students were laid off as a result of COVID-19, and 21% had their hours cut. Financial impacts have affected most students, with 17% unable to pay for rent, bills or food, another 5% who are 'really struggling' financially, and 46% who report being stressed financially though they can make ends meet. 1 in 5 students also report having been hungry but not eating because there was not enough money for food. Students with a disability, students of color, and Pell recipients reported significantly more financial distress than their peers ($p < 0.000$).

Financial



Unable to pay for necessary things like rent, bills, or food

Employment



Were laid off as a result of COVID-19

Food Insecurity



Have been hungry but did not eat because there was no money for food

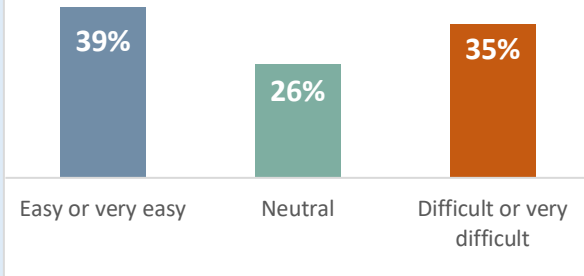
Housing



Had to move in with family, a partner, or new roommates

Students have mixed experiences accessing mental health resources

How easy or difficult has it been to access mental health resources or providers during this time?*



*Among those who had experienced symptoms of anxiety or depression in the past 30 days

Across all students, the most significant barrier to utilizing services was comfort using zoom or phone for virtual mental health visits, followed closely by financial barriers. Pell recipients had significantly higher financial barriers ($p < 0.000$) and LGBTQ+ students had significantly higher barriers of confidentiality ($p < 0.0000$).

While the need for mental health services seems clear, students report mixed experiences with accessing services. The highest proportion of students report easy or very easy access, but only slightly less found it difficult or very difficult. Those who reported that they **felt less connected to the UA campus community** reported significantly higher difficulty accessing services (37% vs 22%, $p < 0.000$). Students with a less resilient outlook reported the highest difficulty (50% vs 31%, $p < 0.000$). Students who reported having used UA Counseling & Psych Services virtual visits during the pandemic had the **easiest** time accessing resources (66% vs 35%, $p < 0.000$).

	All Undergrad	LGBTQ+	Pell Recipients
Financial barriers	58%	64%	71%
Technology barriers	11%	9%	11%
Uncomfortable using zoom or phone	61%	60%	54%
Confidentiality (no space to talk to provider)	52%	55%	47%

Students are underutilizing UA resources for mental health and wellbeing

While students have higher mental health need right now, help seeking appears to be quite low, with 80% of students reporting they had not used any UA resources for mental health support (including CAPS, LMCs, websites, etc.). While we don't know about external utilization, only 10% of students reported using non-CAPS counseling in the last year on the 2019 Health and Wellness survey, suggesting most students aren't connected with outside services.

Despite this, CAPS visits during between 3/16 – 5/25 have only been down 20% compared with the same period last year, as CAPS made virtual visits available beginning in mid-March. This suggests that, in addition to the barriers mentioned above, students' confusion about their ability to access campus resources while not on campus may be the reason visits are slightly down.

90% of students with symptoms of anxiety or depression **did not report using any UA resources** for mental or emotional health during COVID-19

However...

45% of students with symptoms have **high or very high need** for support related to **mental or emotional health**

Self-care has been challenging for students during quarantine

In addition to low help seeking for mental health issues, students are also struggling with engaging in self-care practices for mental wellbeing. Students struggled most with maintaining a routine and getting enough physical activity.

Students who reported that their mental health worsened due to COVID-19 reported significantly more difficulties engaging in self-care across all categories (* $p < 0.000$). This suggests the students who might need to engage in self-care the most are having the hardest time doing so, which also may be a cyclical relationship.

Difficulty:	All Undergrads	MH Worsened
Maintaining a routine	70%	78%*
Getting enough physical activity	73%	77%*
Staying connected with others	60%	68%*
Managing time on social media	55%	58%*
Managing news intake	30%	36%*
Getting healthy amount of sleep	55%	61%*
Eating well	59%	64%*
Doing activities that I enjoy	58%	65%*
Has not been challenging	4%	2%*

Students who are less connected to the UA community are struggling more

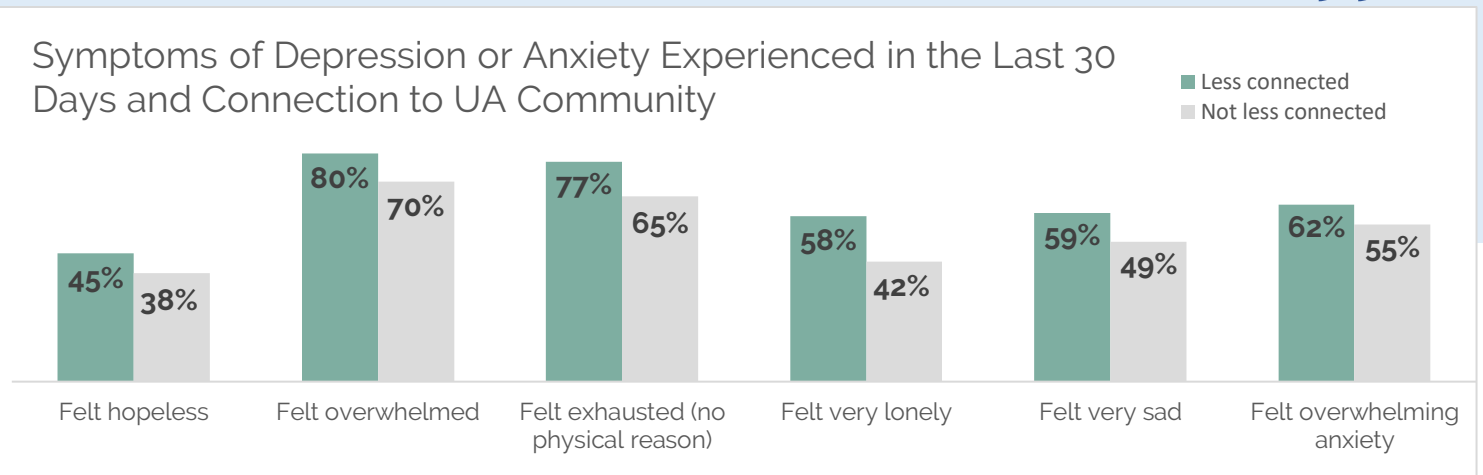
Connection to the UA campus community seems to be an important indicator of mental health and wellbeing. Most students (81%) report feeling less or much less connected to the UA campus community since COVID-19. Compared with those students who do not feel less connected, they were more likely to experience all categories of mental health symptoms.



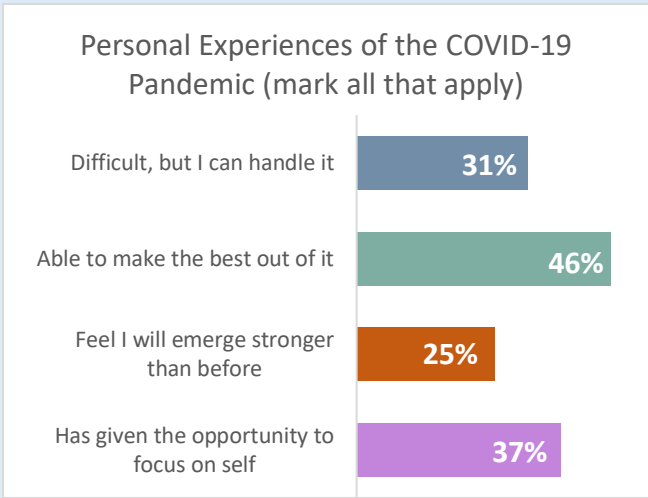
I miss in-person campus events, classes, and Greek Life more than I ever thought possible. Having to be away from campus has caused tremendous stress and depression, and I feel so nervous and anxious each day with the fear of what will change come the fall.



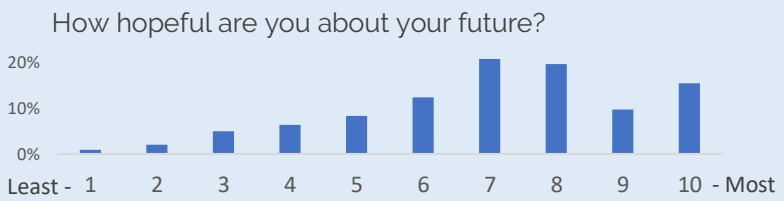
Symptoms of Depression or Anxiety Experienced in the Last 30 Days and Connection to UA Community



Despite challenges, many students are hopeful and resilient

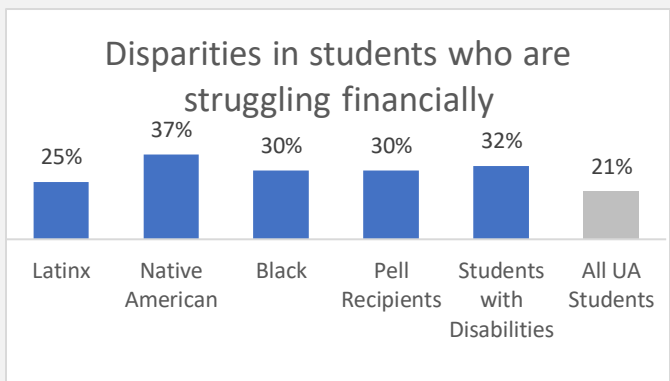
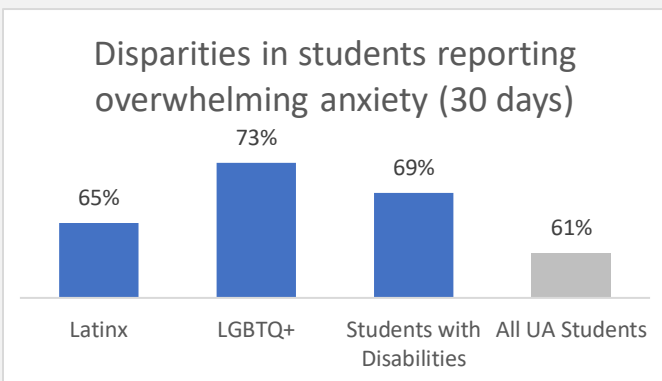


Although this survey reveals that students are struggling during this unique and uncertain time, many students are indicating a resilient outlook. Almost half of the students reported that they are able to make the best out of this situation, and a quarter feel they will emerge stronger than before. 45% of students indicated a high (8-10) degree of hopefulness on a 10 point scale.



Disparities in student experiences need our attention

Sub-reports will be developed for units on campus working with diverse students to highlight the specific needs of each population, but this survey found some disparities in experiences across multiple populations. Given UA's commitment to diversity, populations that are more vulnerable should be given particular attention. This report is only a beginning to hearing from students about what their needs are. The below are only some highlights of disparities noted in this survey, and more depth will be explored in sub-reports in partnership with cultural centers and relevant initiatives.



Key Recommendations

Students need support now more than ever. Given the link between students' mental wellbeing and academic success, mental health support is crucial in getting our students through this crisis.



CONNECT most vulnerable students with needed resources



PROMOTE adaptive and creative opportunities for socializing



ENCOURAGE help seeking for mental health among students



NURTURE resilience in students through education and compassion



ASSIST students in navigating resources to match support needs



EDUCATE students about CAPS resources and immediate availability

About the Survey: The COVID-19 Health and Wellness and Online Classroom Experiences Student Needs Survey was developed in collaboration between Campus Health Service, the Office of Instruction and Assessment, and UA Assessment and Research. The initial design was completed through a Student Success and Retention Innovation Creative Inquiries grant, in which a team of CAPS and College of Public Health staff are investigating the relationship between mental health treatment, resilience, and academic success. The survey was refined and finalized in collaboration with a range of campus partners. Contact Lauren Pring (pring@arizona.edu), Evaluation Specialist within Campus Health Service, for survey-related questions.

Methods: The anonymous survey was administered by email between 5/7/2020 and 5/18/2020 to all enrolled students. Students were invited to sign up to win one of ten \$50 digital gift cards to the UA Bookstore as an incentive. Surveys with <25% completed responses were eliminated from the data which were weighted to match UA demographics on gender and class standing.