Impact of COVID-19 on McGill Students

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Overview

The SSMU conducted this survey of student experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and online learning during the Fall 2020 semester. The survey ran from November-December 2020, and had 393 responses from McGill students.[1]

Overall, students' responses indicate that they have largely adapted to online learning. Participants suggested that, for the large part, they were satisfied with online learning, and able to meet their academic needs. For a small minority of students, however, online learning has been extremely hard on them and their academic journey. In particular, one student stated that they dropped out of McGill due to the shift to online learning.

Classes and Academic Impact

Students responded positively to the overall quality of online courses. A majority of students (63%) responded that they were either slightly, moderately, or extremely satisfied with the quality of their online courses. However, students indicated that a number of them were experiencing burnout (86.5%) or Zoom fatigue (87%).

In terms of the impact on grades, 42% (166) of respondents answered that their grades had stayed the same in the Fall 2020 semester. 29.2% (113) of respondents reported that their grades had decreased slightly. 12.6% (49) of students answered that their

grades had improved slightly, whereas 4.9% (19) of respondents' grades had improved significantly. However, for 10.3% (40) of respondents, their grades had decreased significantly.

Financial Impact

COVID-19 has had varying impacts on students' finances. A plurality of participants (45%) indicated that their financial situation had been unaffected by COVID-19. However, 36% of respondents answered that they now had less money as a result of the pandemic. As well, 41% (141) of respondents were not able to find work from May-August 2020.[2] Of those who worked, the most common response was part time work unrelated to their degree program (71 responses). 80.41% of respondents have not taken on unexpected debt due to the COVID-19 pandemic. 12.98% of respondents had taken on either a new line of credit or more student loans.

Impact of Home Life

As noted above, the vast majority of survey participants (84%) answered that they had a "safe and secure environment that [allowed] for academic success". Respondents were presented with a list of possible triggers for stress or anxiety and asked to check all that applied to them. 84% (331) reported that they were stressed or anxious due to "increased feelings of social isolation". Similarly, 85% (336) of respondents reported feeling stressed

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1. 87% of participants were undergraduate.

2. As students could check more than one option, the response rate on this particular question was 405.

or anxious due to "increased feelings of being unproductive/directionless".

Overall Perspective

51.9% of respondents indicated that they were either "slightly", "moderately", or "extremely" satisfied with McGill's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a plurality (29.7%, or 117) saying "moderately" satisfied.

Conclusions

Students, faculty, and staff have proven themselves to be incredibly resilient and adaptable in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift to online learning. This data tells a story of students who are burnt out and fatigued - yet who are also able to continue on their academic trajectories in the midst of incredibly difficult circumstances.

Introduction

The 2020-21 COVID-19 pandemic has had a dramatic impact on higher learning across the globe. Previously untested pedagogies became every day as schools found solutions that allowed for remote learning.

McGill is no exception. Beginning on March 13th, 2020, the university was forced to adapt to this new reality for the foreseeable future. The remainder of the Winter 2020 semester was subsequently taught online, as were the Fall 2020 and Winter 2021 semesters. This sudden shift to remote learning, combined with the stress and anxiety of living under lockdown, has had a profound impact on McGill students and their well-being.

This survey offers a snapshot of the impact of the pandemic and the shift to remote learning on McGill students in November-December 2020. Its aim is to provide student leaders and advocates, McGill administration and staff with information concerning the impacts and perspective of students in this precarious time.

Overall, the results suggest that the majority of students have adapted to the new realities of online learning and social distancing. However, they reported high rates of burnout and fatigue, and are anxious to return to conventional ways of learning.

Methodology

The survey questions were initially drafted in the summer of 2020.[3] They were revised and approved in November 2020. The survey itself was hosted on Qualtrics between November 24th and December 13th, 2020. Survey participants were entered in a draw to win one of 10 Visa gift cards. Partial responses were not recorded.

In total, there were 393 participants. This represents approximately 1% of McGill's student population. Participants were sought via faculty association listservs, the McGill What's New newsletter, and word of mouth via the Student Senate Caucus.

During this time, there were active conversations on campus regarding the need for campus policies to be modified to accommodate student needs during the pandemic. This was reflected in the responses garnered by the survey. In particular, some responses called for an extended winter break. This was approved by the McGill Senate on December 2, 2020 after a student petition garnered 8,000 signatures in support of the initiative.[4] As well, some participants called for an extension to the relaxed Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory (S/U) policy that had been introduced in Winter 2020.[5] An additional S/U policy for the Fall 2020 and Winter 2021 semesters was approved by a special meeting of the McGill Senate on December 15, 2021.[6]

 3. The author gratefully acknowledges the work of Ayo Ogunremi in drafting the questions, and Brooklyn Frizzle for their feedback and support throughout the process.

 4. See McGill Senate, "McGill University Senate: Minutes" (2 December 2020) online: McGill University <https://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/final_senate_minutes_dec._2_2020.pdf> at 6.

 5. See email from Fabrice Labeau Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning) to all McGill students and staff, "Coronavirus (COVID-19) update—March 20, 2020" (20 March 2020); See also Eve Cable, "McGill's mixed communication regarding the S/U option was quick, but not careful" (23 May 2020) online: McGill Tribune <http://www.mcgilltribune.com/opinion/mcgills-mixed-communications-regarding-the-s-u-option-was-quick-but-not-careful/>.

6. See McGill Senate, "McGill University Senate: Minutes" (15 December 2020) online: McGill University <https://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/final_senate_minutes_dec._15_2020.pdf> at 3. An extended S/U policy was initially introduced to the McGill Senate on December 2, 2020, but was rejected by the Steering Committee: McGill Senate, "McGill University Senate: Minutes" (2 December 2020) online: McGill University <https://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/final_senate_minutes._dec._2_2020.pdf> at 9.

Results

Part 1: Demographics

The vast majority of survey participants were undergraduate students (342, or 87%). As well, the vast majority were in their first three years of study, with a narrow plurality of participants in their first year(Figure 1).

Participants were instructed to answer with the number of years that they had been McGill students in their current degree program. For instance, if they entered as a U0 student in 2019-2020, the correct answer is "2". If they were a U1 student in 2020-2021, the correct answer is "1". This way eliminates any confusion between students in different faculties.[7] A plurality of students were in the Faculty of Arts (31.6%), with the next most represented faculty being Law.

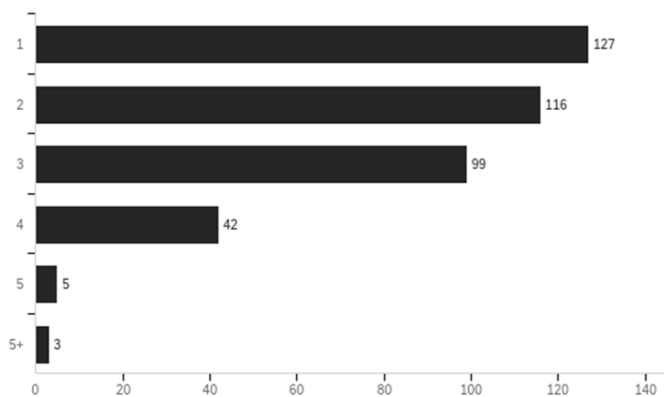**Figure 1: Question 2: What year are you?**

Figure 2: Question 3: Participants by Faculty or School where they have taken the majority of their classes

Faculty or School	Percentage	Number
Agricultural and Environmental Sciences	1.5%	6
Arts	31.6%	124
Continuing Studies	0.5%	2
Dentistry	0.8%	3
Education	3.3%	13
Engineering	5.6%	22
Law	16.3%	64
Management	4.9%	19
Medicine and Health Sciences	13.3%	52
Music	1.8%	7
School of Environment	0.5%	2
School of Nursing	0.5%	2
School of Physical and Occupational Therapy	6.1%	24
School of Social Work	0.3%	1
School of Architecture	0%	0
Science	13%	51
TOTAL:	100%	392

7. For instance, the Faculty of Law does not have U0 students - rather, students in their first year of study are "1Ls". The same nomenclature applies to Medicine and Dentistry students as well. This has presented issues in other SSMU surveys in the past.

8. Percentages have been rounded to one decimal point and may not total 100.

Figure 3: Question 4: Do you self-identify with an equity-seeking group? Check all that apply.

Equity Seeking Group	Percentage	Number
Self-identify as a woman	72.5%	285
Self-identify as Indigenous (First Nations, Inuit, and/or Métis)	1.2%	5
Self-identify as a person with a disability (NOTE: It is not required that you be registered with the Office of Students with Disabilities)	9.2%	36
Self-identify as a member of the LGBTQ2+ community	23.9%	94
Self-identify as a member of a racialized group	21.8%	86
Prefer not to say	3.6%	14
I do not identify as being a part of an equity-seeking group	12.2%	48
TOTAL:[9]	144%	568

The vast majority of respondents identified as a member of an equity-seeking group, with only 12.2% responding that they did not identify as such. The majority of respondents (72.5%) self-identified as women.

Respondents were asked to identify their tuition residency. The majority of respondents were from Quebec (217, or 55.22%). 95% of respondents were enrolled in full-time studies, with the remaining enrolled in part-time studies.

The vast majority of respondents were living in the Greater Montreal Area during the Fall 2020 semester (74.23% or 291), with another 4.08% (16) living in McGill Residence. 76.02% (298) said that they planned to be in the Greater Montreal Area for the Winter 2021 semester, with 5% (20) planning on being in McGill Residence.

Figure 4: Question 5: What is your tuition residency?

Tuition Residency	Percentage	Number
Quebec	55.2%	217
Non-Quebec Canadian	26.7%	105
Francophonie	4.3%	17
International	13.7%	54
TOTAL:[10]	100%	393

9. Note that the total number is more than 393 because students could check more than one option. Percentage is of the number of respondents (393).

10. Note that the total number is more than 393 because students could check more than one option. Percentage is of the number of respondents (393).

Part 2: Classes and Academic Impact

Respondents indicated that their courses were delivered in a variety of ways in the Fall 2020 semester. 95% (375) participants responded that their classes were delivered via live lectures. Of those surveyed, the least common response was one-on-one correspondence with the instructor.

Figure 5: Question 9: How were your classes conducted in Fall 2020? Please check all that apply.

Course Delivery	Percentage	Number
Live lectures through online video-conferencing (eg Zoom, MS Teams, Google Meet)	95.4%	375
Pre-recorded lectures through online video-conferencing	73%	287
One-on-one correspondence with instructor (e-mail, video conference, or other)	25.7%	101
Uploaded slides/documents on MyCourses, take-home test, etc.	57.8%	227
TOTAL: [11]	251%	990

Figure 6: Question 10: Overall, how satisfied were you with the quality of your online courses?
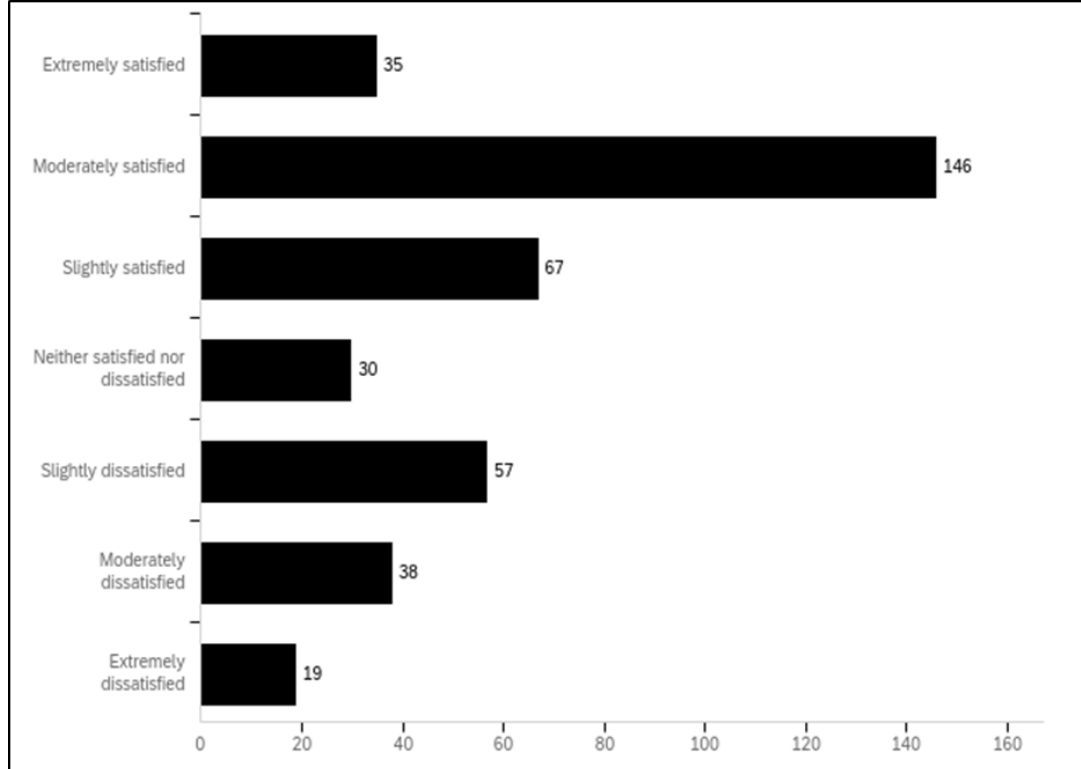
11. Note that the total number is more than 393 because students could check more than one option. Percentage is of the number of respondents (393).

Students responded positively to the overall quality of online courses. A majority of students (63%) responded that they were either slightly, moderately, or extremely satisfied with the quality of their online courses. As well, a majority of students found that that the adapted forms of assessment were accurate in assessing their knowledge of a course, with 72% responding either moderately, very, or extremely accurately.

In discussing why they gave this rating, students communicated a range of experiences and concerns around online pedagogies. While some felt that their assessments were accurate, others felt that certain forms (such as group projects) did not translate well to virtual learning. Others felt that professors had assigned too many assessments, which was overwhelming. This led one respondent to voice concerns around academic integrity:

> *"I think the intentions of professors and faculty towards creating low-stakes assessments was good, but the execution was very poor. Some professors [...] openly admitted to making assessments more difficult because they believe that students who have access to softwares could cheat. Instead of giving students breathing room and the benefit of the doubt, I think professors have assumed the worst of students, as if they are going to take advantage of this one term. Most students care more about their mental health than their grades, but that is not supported by the ways in which the assessment systems have been set up."*

Some students were especially appreciative of open-book exams, as they felt that it forced them to engage and apply the material, as opposed to merely memorizing it: "Most of the major assessments I experienced were projects or open book tests with questions that tested your ability to apply what you learned in class."

However, students expressed that they were often left with unclear or vague instructions, without the opportunity to clarify the professor's expectations:

> *"Some assignment instructions/expectations were unclear. Extra effort needs to be dedicated to explaining assignment expectations, especially with pre-recorded lectures in order to give students an opportunity to ask questions."*

> *"We kept on having tests weekly for multiple classes at the same time. It was a very heavy load and the lectures were longer than usual. Without live sessions, it was very hard to get our emails answered especially that some teachers did not even respond. Some classes did not have TAs which made it worse. "*

Respondents were then presented with a list of possible difficulties experienced by students when learning online. Respondents were invited to check all that applied to them. The vast majority of students reported feeling burnt out (86.5%, or 340) and

Figure 7: Question 13: Did you struggle with any of the following during the transition to remote learning? (Please check all that apply)

Faculty or School	Number	Percentage
Having adequate wifi to access class materials. This includes lectures, documents, uploading tests, etc.	128	32.5%
Having adequate technology and hardware (i.e. laptop) to access class materials. This includes lectures, documents, uploading tests, etc.	49	12.4%
Completing studies while caring for a dependent	21	5.3%
Completing studies while working, either full-time or part-time	113	28.8%
Accessing information from the University about the changes to your learning environment	86	21.9%
Feeling burnt out	340	86.5%
Experiencing Zoom Fatigue	343	87.3%
Seeking clarification or academic support from a professor or teaching assistant	152	38.7%
Having difficulty securing supporting documents for accommodations (OSD, leave of absence, etc)	23	5.9%
Having Issues with submitting assignments, or fair grading practices	102	26%

experiencing Zoom fatigue (87%, or 343). The next most common answers were "seeking clarification or academic support from a professor or teaching assistant" (38.6%, or 152) and "having adequate wifi to access class materials" (32.5%, or 128).

Respondents were then asked what worked best for them when learning online. The majority of responses spoke of the flexibility of online learning and pre-recorded lectures. Students valued being able to make their own schedule and listen to the recordings as it worked for them, though it took more discipline and planning on their part:

> "Having a daily schedule that fit[s] with my live classes, patience on both the students and teachers parts, reasonable requests from teachers for remote projects and assignments… "

> "I really liked the flexibility of the courses. We had pre-recorded lectures and we could listen [to] them at our convenience."

However, others greatly valued the interaction with their professors in live lectures: "Engaged professors that knew how to draw students into a discussion and who were able to give specific, constructive feedback on how to improve on future assignments."

Other participants said they were glad to skip the commute into downtown, with one saying that it saved them 45 minutes each way. Others spoke to changing their spaces to work for them, such as buying an ergonomic chair and monitor, or moving their desk to be next to the window.

Respondents were then asked to identify what did not work for them when learning online. Participants pointed to the isolation of being socially distanced and the excessive amount of screen time. Some strongly disliked pre-recorded lectures, as they exacerbated the amount of time that students had to spend online:

> *"The fact of being alone really did not work. My parents work all day, and I am [an] only child at home, it really does not help for [studies]. I lost a lot of cognitive abilities, in the sense that I had (against my will) difficulty focusing, more time was needed in order to understand class concepts, I felt lost during group projects. I honestly don't feel like I have learnt anything this semester. Remote learning is a disaster, especially for programs like mine that highly rely on human interactions and in class demonstrations. Some profs either read the course knowledge instead of delivering a course. It takes a lot longer to finish a recording than what was needed in person."*

> *"Most teachers had videos equivalent to normal class time, which does not take into account the inevitable extra time it takes to watch a video rather than a live lecture. There were classes which gave extra lectures, which were mandatory, and some classes which were simply too long to watch each video."*

Others mentioned time zone issues as being a barrier. Finally, many pointed to small, frequent assignments contributing to stress, while not being worth much of their mark:

> *"The work was A LOT. I know adjusting from high school to university is a jump, but the amount of work and assignments I had to do was astronomical even considering the circumstances."*

> *"Having so many, few, hard little projects, that counted for very little (0.2-4%). Stacking [projects] and exams. Unfair exam grading, expecting students to scan and upload documents within the exam time (very stressful when you don't have good wifi). No accomodation whatsoever for the added stress of living in a COVID world."*

Respondents then described that changes they wanted implemented for the Winter 2021 semester. Some indicated that they would like to have more varied learning experience - instead of only having lectures on Zoom, integrating group work, in-person gatherings (if possible), and/or problem testing in class. Others spoke to reducing the workload of students in recognition of mental health concerns and burnout.

76.3% (300) of respondents indicated that the shift to remote instruction has had no effect on the length of their degree program. 16% (23) respondents indicated that they expected to complete their degree ahead of schedule. However, 16% (63) indicated that their degree programs would take longer, and one respondent had left McGill. Overall, 79.3% of respondents indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic had no effect on the length of their degree programs.

23% (92) of respondents indicated that they had considered taking a leave of absence from McGill for the Fall 2020 semester due to the shift to remote learning. 6.6% (26) respondents indicated that they considered taking a leave of absence due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The vast majority of the remaining respondents (67.6%, or 266) indicated that they had not considered taking a leave of absence.[12]

When asked why they decided to stay at McGill for the Fall 2020 semester, students responded that they either did not have anything else to do, or were worried about the ramifications of delaying their degrees. Others pointed to administrative barriers that made it difficult for students to take a leave of absence. Students would lose scholarships, for instance, if they took a leave of absence. Some faculties also made it difficult for students to take a semester off. For some, school was simply a better alternative than what was available:

> *"I'm not sure. In hindsight I think I should have taken a leave of absence. But doing so would have meant being home 24/7 with an infant and zero social interaction. I didn't think my mental health could handle that."*

42% (166) of respondents answered that their grades had stayed the same in the Fall 2020 semester. 29.2% (113) of respondents reported that their grades had decreased slightly. 12.6% (49) of students answered that their grades had improved slightly, whereas 4.9% (19) of respondents' grades had improved significantly. However, for 10.3% (40) of respondents, their grades had decreased significantly.[13]

12. 2.2% (9) indicated that they considered taking a leave of absence due to other factors.

13. See question 21. Response rate on this particular question was 387.

Part 3: Financial Impact

COVID-19 has had a substantial financial impact on the global economy, particularly for students. Many were left in a precarious position in March 2020 as job offers were abruptly recalled. This section of the survey sought to tell a story about the financial landscape of McGill students in the midst of a global financial collapse.

Respondents indicated a variety of ways of funding their degree programs. The majority of respondents (66%, or 260) had family contributions. 32.8% (129) worked part time, while another third (32%, or 126) were funding their degree through scholarships and student aid.

Almost half (45%, or 176) of respondents indicated that their financial situation was unaffected by the COVID-19 pandemic. 36% (142) respondents stated that they now had less money. For 7.25% (28) of respondents, they now had more money.[14] 80.41% of respondents have not taken on unexpected debt due to the COVID-19 pandemic. 12.98% of respondents had taken on either new lines of credit or more student loans.

In terms of the financial impact of the first wave of the pandemic, 41% (141) of respondents were not able to find work from May-August 2020.[15] Of those who worked, the most common response was part time work unrelated to their degree program (71 responses). 41 respondents were in full time work related to their degree program. A further 38 were able to secure part time work related to their degree program, whereas 21 respondents worked in unpaid internships related to their degree program. Of the students who were in jobs unrelated to their degree program, 57 were employed full time and 71 were employed part time. A majority (55%) of respondents had taken advantage of government-provided COVID aid.[16]

In terms of future financial planning, 26.85% (105) of respondents said that they were unsure if they were applying for jobs for Summer 2021. 32.43% (127) of participants said that they would be applying for full time work related to their degree program.[17]

14. 10.4% of respondents (40) indicated that they preferred not to say.

15. See question 24. A note that this question did not specify that "work" meant a contract of any length. Therefore, it is possible that respondents responded "no" if they had not secured a four-month contract, but instead worked for part of the summer. As students could check more than one option, the response rate on this particular question was 405.

Part 4: Student Life and Home Life

This section of the survey sought to ask about the personal impacts of COVID-19 and remote learning on students. 84% (331) of respondents were in a "safe and secure environment that [allowed] for academic success". 3% (13) of respondents stated that they were not, and a further 4% (16) were precariously housed.[18] A number of participants stated that they were living at home with their parents, with one specifying that they moved home for their mental health. Many cited noise concerns as being detrimental to their academic success.

Respondents were presented with a list of possible triggers for stress or anxiety and asked to check all that applied to them. 84% (331) reported that they were stressed or anxious due to "increased feelings of social isolation". Similarly, 85% (336) of respondents reported feeling stressed or anxious due to "increased feelings of being unproductive/directionless".

The vast majority of respondents were not worried about facing racial discrimination because of the COVID-19 pandemic (ranging from 71%-87% "Not worried" in all three categories). Of the respondents who responded that they were "extremely worried", the most common answer was in finding employment (5.17%, or 20 responses, versus 1.82% or 7 for "in finding housing" and 3.9% or 15 for "in general").

Figure 8: Question 30: Are you experiencing increased levels of stress or anxiety due to any of the following:

Response	Number	Percentage
Difficulty accessing mental health services (on- or off-campus)	113	28.8%
Increased feelings of social isolation	331	84.2%
Too many communications from professors	112	28.5%
Financial strain due to COVID-19	104	26.5%
Increased feelings of being unproductive/directionless	336	85.5%
None of these	21	5.3%
No, at the OSD:	3	1.5%
Blank:	8	4%

18. 1.78% (7) of students stated that they preferred not to say, whereas 6.6% (28) were not sure.

McGill Residences: Of those surveyed, only 16 respondents lived in McGill residences. Of that, 2 had left McGill residence midway through the Fall 2020 semester. One respondent stated that they left because they came to residence to meet friends, but because of COVID restrictions it was not worth it to stay.

Of the respondents who were in residence, 81% (13) were staying in residence for the Winter 2021 semester. When asked why, students responded that it was a good learning environment, that it was easier than breaking the lease and finding somewhere else, and that it was still enjoyable despite the restrictions.

Finally, of the respondents living in residence, the majority (62.5%, or 10) felt that the measures taken were "moderately adequate" or "extremely adequate". Of those remaining, 3 felt that the handling was "moderately inadequate".

Given their experience, what is the overall impression of students of McGill's handling of the pandemic and the shift to online learning? 51.9% of respondents indicated that they were either "slightly", "moderately", or "extremely" satisfied with McGill's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a plurality (29.7%, or 117) saying "moderately" satisfied.

Figure 9: Question 37: Overall, how satisfied have you been with McGill's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Response	Number	Percentage
Difficulty accessing mental health services (on- or off-campus)	113	28.8%
Increased feelings of social isolation	331	84.2%
Too many communications from professors	112	28.5%
Financial strain due to COVID-19	104	26.5%
Increased feelings of being unproductive/directionless	336	85.5%
None of these	21	5.3%
No, at the OSD:	3	1.5%
Blank:	8	4%

When asked what has worked in McGill's handling of the pandemic, students spoke of consistent communications from central McGill and their professors, and the availability of the study hubs in the libraries. Library services were also cited as being a great support and resource for students. Finally, others spoke of the extended S/U policy that was implemented in Winter 2019.[19]

> "Early decision to switch online in Fall 2020, made in May 2020 gave lots of time to prepare and make decisions. Library digitization is extremely well done. Very excited for full switch to digital course-packs (which should have happened regardless of pandemic). Generally understanding academic support. Teachers seem to be learning with students and taking concerns seriously. Lots of accommodations."

> "They're very understanding when it comes to grades, and McGill has done everything it can to make us feel welcome and comfortable through online versions

19. As noted above, at the time of the survey, the McGill Senate had not passed the extended S/U policy for Fall 2020 and Winter 2021.

of everything that would have been at school."

"Updating the students on priorities and what actions the university could be doing. My professors and instructors in my department have been very helpful, accommodating, and understanding with the issues I have been having throughout the semester."

In terms of what could be improved, students also said that there were too many communications from central McGill, and that the messages got confusing at times. They also spoke of the need for McGill to be more understanding of the mental health needs of students. This includes offering S/U options (as was a prominent discussion on campus at the time) and a longer winter break. Participants also called for more consistent regulations over what professors can and cannot do in classes:

"More control over professors, and the way they handle their classrooms. Having a longer winter break…, or longer reading week. Being more transparent with cases which occur on campus. Provide more, actual resources for students' mental health. Provide financial support, or reduce the cost for tuition due to most services being closed, or limited."

"The lack of [S/U] options this semester has had disproportionate effects on certains students. Students who have children, like me, have lives that are 100% unpredictable - our childcare could fall through at any given moment. McGIll did not have a centralized response to those of us who commute to school and have children at the school daycares, and now had to commute double each day since we don't have anywhere to study on campus. The lack of [S/U] options meant that I had to take part time courses, and that my grades will be much lower this semester because, for example, my daughter is home waiting for a COVID test right now, which meant I had to get an extension on a paper...the accommodations they've provided can't come close to fixing the inequity."

In terms of what SSMU could do to improve its response, students did not seem to be aware of the advocacy work done by the SSMU Executives or Senators. The general impression was that the SSMU had not taken any specific actions to advocate for students in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was recommended that SSMU support mutual aid funds and racialized students.

Analysis

Academic integrity concerns: Concerns surrounding student cheating and plagiarism have been a conversation at McGill and across other campuses. Students raised concerns that their colleagues were not being honest, for instance messaging each other during exams. These concerns are not restricted to McGill - a number of universities have experienced higher levels of cheating and plagiarism.[20]

Whether the pandemic has had a substantial impact on academic integrity at McGill remains to be seen. The 2019-2020 Annual Report of the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures notes that "In part due to the COVID-19 pandemic and mainly remote course delivery, the distribution of cases has shifted towards more academic cases and less non-academic cases", with 243 cases of academic misconduct in 2019-2020 - an increase from 201 in 2018-2019.[21] However, when presenting to the Senate, Interim Dean of Students Glenn Zabowski stressed that year-to-year fluctuations were normal, and that data from the 2020-2021 school year would be required before coming to any conclusions.[22]

Controversy over pre-recorded lectures: As noted above, pre-recorded lectures were preferred by some students because of the flexibility that they allowed in student schedules. However, others found them to be unengaging, and preferred live lectures as they offered opportunities for students to ask questions and engage with their classmates.

Mental health impacts: Consistently, students reported that regardless of their academic success (or, at least, being able to maintain their pre-COVID academic progress), isolation and disconnection has had a substantial impact on their mental health and well-being. This is consistent with other research. In Quebec, the mental health toll of the pandemic has been particularly hard on young people. A study of the impact of the pandemic on young Montrealers by the Quebec government found that 45% of respondents aged 18-29 considered the pandemic as having a significant impact on their mental health.[23] Additionally, a study conducted in Fall 2020 commissioned by the Quebec Student Union found that 51% of students' mental health had worsened during the Fall 2020 semester.[24] The most common reasons cited, consistent with the results of this survey, were workload, isolation, and online instruction.[25]

20. See e.g. Sheena Rossiter, "Cheating becoming an unexpected COVID-19 side effect for universities Social Sharing" (21 June 2020) online: CBC News <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/cheating-becoming-an-unexpected-covid-19-side-effect-for-universities-1.5620442>.

21. McGill University Office of the Dean of Students, "Annual Report of the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (2019-20)", being Appendix A to Memorandum to McGill University Senate RE: Annual Report of the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures(2019-20) (18 November 2020) online: McGill University <https://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/10_d20-21_code_student_discipline_report.pdf> at 4.

22. See McGill Senate, "McGill University Senate: Minutes" (18 November 2020) online: McGill University <https://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/final_senate_minutes_dec._2_2020.pdf> at 15.

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Conclusions

Students, faculty, and staff have proven themselves to be incredibly resilient and adaptable in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift to online learning. This data tells a story of students who are burnt out and fatigued - yet who are also able to continue on their academic trajectories in the midst of incredibly difficult circumstances.

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Appendix A: Survey Questions

Purpose:

The purpose of this survey is to better understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and financial crisis on McGill University students. By filling out this survey and sharing your experiences, you will help SSMU to better understand the challenges you are facing. This in turn will help us to effectively advocate to governmental and university administration on your behalf. We commit to using this data to take action and best represent you.

Please note the following:
*   Information collected is anonymous and confidential.
*   It will take approximately 15 minutes to complete this survey.
*   This survey has not been approved by McGill Research Ethics Board. Research conducted by SSMU University Affairs is not affiliated with McGill University in any way.

Compensation:

If you complete the survey, you will be put into a draw to win one of 10 $20 prepaid Visa cards.

Use of the data:

The data from this survey, in its raw form, will be used to write a report on the impacts of COVID-19 on students at McGill University. This report may be used to inform student advocacy, SSMU statements, or other materials produced by the SSMU.

Content warning:

This survey asks questions about the COVID-19 pandemic and your financial situation. If you feel uncomfortable, triggered, or anxious at any time, feel free to leave the survey. We encourage you to reach out to mental health resources on campus, including:
*   McGill Nightline: https://nightline.ssmu.ca/
*   McGill Wellness Hub: https://www.mcgill.ca/wellness-hub/, including your Local Wellness Advisor.
*   Keep.meSAFE: Through MySSP app (Mobile app, iOS and Android) (60+ languages, 24/7)

Contact:

If you have any questions or concerns about the survey, its contents, or the use of its information, please contact Adrienne Tessier at srrac@ssmu.ca

Part 1: Demographics

1. What category of student are you?
        a. Undergraduate
        b. Graduate
        c. Post-graduate

2. What year are you? (NOTE: This corresponds to years spent at McGill in your current degree program - eg if you entered McGill in 2019-2020 as a U0, please say 2. If you entered McGill in 2020-2021 as U1, please say 1)
        a.1
        b.2
        c. 3
        d. 4
        e. 5
        f. 5+

3. Which faculty or school are you enrolled in?
        a. Agricultural and Environmental Sciences
        b. Arts
        c. Continuing Studies
        d. Dentistry
        e. Education
        f. Engineering
        g. Law
        h. Management
        i. Medicine and Health Sciences
        j. Music
        k. School of Environment
        l. School of Nursing
        m. School of Physical and Occupational Therapy
        n. School of Social Work
        o. School or Architecture
        p. Science

4. Do you self-identify with an equity-seeking group? Check all that apply.
      a. Self-identify as a woman
      b. Self-identify as Indigenous (First Nations, Inuit, and/or Métis)
      c. Self-identify as a person with a disability (NOTE: It is not required that you be registered with the Office of Students with Disabilities)
      d. Self-identify as a member of the LGBTQ2+ community
      e. Self-identify as a member of a racialized group
      f. Prefer not to say
      g. I do not identify as being a part of an equity-seeking group

5. What is your tuition residency?
      a. Quebec
      b. Rest of Canada
      c. Francophonie
      d. International

6. Did you reside in the Greater Montreal Area during the Fall 2020 semester?
      a. Yes, in McGill residence
      b. Yes
      c. No

7. Do you plan to stay in the Greater Montreal Area for the Winter 2021 semester?
      a. Yes, in McGill residence
      b. Yes
      c. No

Part 2: Classes and Academic Impact

8. What is your academic status for the Fall 2020 semester?
      a. Enrolled in full-time studies
      b. Enrolled in part-time studies
      c. Co-op term
      d. Enrolled at another university as an exchange student

9. How were your classes conducted in Fall 2020? Please check all that apply
      a. Live lectures through online video-conferencing (eg Zoom, MS Teams, Google Meet)
      b. Pre-recorded lectures through online video-conferencing
      c. One-on-one correspondence with instructor (e-mail, video conference, or other)
      d. Uploaded slides/documents on MyCourses, take-home test, etc.

10. Overall, how satisfied were you with the quality of your online courses?
      a. Extremely satisfied
      b. Moderately satisfied
      c. Slightly satisfied
      d. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
      e. Slightly dissatisfied
      f. Moderately dissatisfied
      g. Extremely dissatisfied

11. Rate how accurately the adapted assessment style of course assignments (term papers, presentations, final exams, etc.) assess(ed) your knowledge of course material?
      a. Extremely accurately
      b. Very accurately
      c. Moderately accurately
      d. Slightly accurately
      e. Not accurately at all
      f. Too varied to say

12. Please describe why you gave this rating.

13. Did you struggle with any of the following during the transition to remote learning? (Please check all that apply)
      a. Having adequate wifi to access class materials. This includes lectures, documents, uploading tests, etc.
      b. Having adequate technology and hardware (i.e. laptop) to access class materials. This includes lectures, documents, uploading tests, etc.
      c. Completing studies while caring for a dependent
      d. Completing studies while working, either full-time or part-time
      e. Accessing information from the University about the changes to your learning environment
      f. Feeling burnt out
      g. Experiencing Zoom fatigue
      h. Seeking clarification or academic support from a professor or teaching assistant
      i. Having difficulty securing supporting documents for accommodations (OSD, leave of absence, etc)
      j. Having Issues with submitting assignments, or fair grading practices

14. Please describe what worked best for you when learning online.

15. Please describe what did not work for you when learning online.

16. Describe what changes you want implemented in the Winter 2021 semester.

17. Do you intend to prolong, postpone, or abandon the completion of your program as a result of the shift to remote learning?
      a. Yes, prolong completion (i.e. my degree will take longer).
      b. Yes, postpone completion (i.e. I took the semester off).
      c. Yes, abandon completion (i.e. I left McGill)
      d. No, I intend to complete my degree program ahead of schedule
      e. No, the shift to remote instruction has no effect on the length of my degree program

18. Do you intend to prolong, postpone, or abandon the completion of your program as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, independent of the shift to remote learning?
      a. Yes, prolong completion (i.e. my degree will take longer).
      b. Yes, postpone completion (i.e. I took the semester off).
      c. Yes, abandon completion (i.e. I left McGill).
      d. No, I intend to complete my degree program ahead of schedule
      e. No, the COVID-19 pandemic had no effect on the length of my degree program

19. Did you consider taking a leave of absence from McGill for the Fall 2020 semester?
      a. Yes, due to the shift to remote learning
      b. Yes, due to the COVID-19 pandemic
      c. Yes, due to other factors
      d. No.

20. (IF YES) Please describe why you decided to stay at McGill for the Fall 2020 semester.

21. In general, during the Fall 2020 semester my grades have:
      a. Improved significantly
      b. Improved slightly
      c. Stayed the same
      d. Decreased slightly
      e. Decreased significantly

Part 3: Financial Impact
22. Prior to COVID-19, how were you funding your degree? Check all that apply.
      a. Family contributions
      b. Full time work
      c. Grants (other than the Canada Student Grant - for example SSHRC or NSERC)

d. Part time work
e. Private lines of credit
f. Public student loans
g. Scholarships and student aid
h. Prefer not to say

23. Has COVID-19 affected your financial situation?
a. Yes, I now have more money
b. Yes, I now have less money
c. No, my financial situation was unaffected
d. Prefer not to say

24. Were you able to secure work between May-August 2020? Check all that apply.
a. Yes, full time work related to my degree program
b. Yes, full time work unrelated to my degree program
c. Yes, part time work related to my degree program
d. Yes, part time work unrelated to my degree program
e. Yes, unpaid internship related to my degree program
f. No.
g.Prefer not to say.

25. Are you, or have you been eligible for government assistance related to COVID-19 (CERB, CESB, or other aid)?
a. Yes
b. No
c. Prefer not to say

26. Have you taken on unexpected debt (ie a new line of credit, or more student loans) due to the COVID-19 pandemic?
a. Yes
b. No
c. Prefer not to say

27. For Summer 2021:
a. I do not know if I will be applying for jobs
b. I have already secured full time employment related to my degree program
c. I will be applying for full time employment related to my degree program
d. I will be applying for full time employment unrelated to my degree program
e. I will be applying for part time employment unrelated to my degree program
f. Prefer not to say

Part 4: Student Life and Home Life

28. Are you currently living in a safe and secure environment that allows for academic success?
>   a. Yes
>   b. No
>   c. Precariously housed
>   d. Prefer not to say
>   e. Not sure

29. If you feel comfortable, please describe your current housing situation.

30. Are you experiencing increased levels of stress or anxiety due to any of the following:
>   a. Difficulty accessing mental health services (on- or off-campus)
>   b. Increased feelings of social isolation
>   c. Too many communications from professors
>   d. Financial strain due to COVID-19
>   e. Increased feelings of being unproductive/directionless
>   f. None of these

31. To what extent are you worried about facing racial discrimination because of the COVID-19 pandemic?

32. Are you currently living in McGill Residence for the Fall 2020 semester?
>   a. Yes
>   b. No, but I left McGill Residence partway through the Fall 2020 semester
>   c. No

33. IF YES on #32) Will you be staying in residence for the Winter 2021 semester?
>   a. Yes
>   b. No

34. (IF YES on #32) Why or why not?
35. (IF No, but I left McGill Residence partway through the Fall 2020 semester) Why did you decide to leave McGill Residence?

36. (IF YES OR No, but I left McGill Residence partway through the Fall 2020 semester on #32) Do you feel that McGill is taking adequate measures against COVID-19 in Residences?

37. (All respondents) Do you feel that McGill is taking adequate measures against COVID-19 in Residences?
        a. Extremely adequate
        b. Moderately adequate
        c. Slightly adequate
        d. Neither adequate nor inadequate
        e. Slightly inadequate
        f. Moderately inadequate
        g. Extremely inadequate

Part 5: Overall Perspective on McGill's Handling of the COVID-19 Pandemic
38. Overall, how satisfied have you been with McGill's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic?
        a. Extremely satisfied
        b. Moderately satisfied
        c. Slightly satisfied
        d. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
        e. Slightly dissatisfied
        f. Moderately dissatisfied
        g. Extremely dissatisfied

39.   What has worked in McGill's response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

40.   What could be improved about McGill's response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

41.   What has worked in SSMU's response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

42.   What could be improved about SSMU's response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

43.   Are there any final comments that you wish to share?