



Fall 2020 Student COVID Impact Survey

Prepared by: Institutional Research and Planning



Summary of key results

Eighty-three per cent of students said they found it more challenging to learn online compared to classroom-based instruction. Only 6% of students said they found it less challenging to learn online than in a traditional classroom setting.

Forty-nine per cent of students would prefer to have their online courses taught with a hybrid of synchronous and asynchronous delivery.

Students found their online courses were most likely to provide clearly stated grading policies and were least likely to provide clear expectations for their interactions with other students.

Three activities were more likely to be included in all or most of students' online courses: live sessions with their instructor and other students (66%); coursework that challenged them to enhance their knowledge, skills, and abilities (62%); and frequent quizzes or short assignments that checked their understanding of subject matter (49%).

In their online courses, 58% of students said they were not very or not at all comfortable taking proctored exams online or using learning support services.

In their online courses, students felt more comfortable participating in online discussion boards than participating in live course discussions (63% compared with 52%).

More than 80% of students thought their instructors had to at least some extent remained positive, caring and considerate of students in light of the pandemic; but were overall least likely to say their instructors had had reasonable expectations of students.

The most important ways student thought their instructors supported them this fall included making recordings of lectures (live or pre-recorded) available (60%); being understanding and flexible given the COVID-19 situation (46%); making course materials and other resources available on Blackboard (38%); and clearly communicating course expectations, including expectations for assignments and exams (37%).

Fifty-seven per cent of students said the study space where they live has been sufficient for their needs this fall, and 43% said they were concerned about having access to appropriate study space for the winter term.

When asked to evaluate their overall online learning experience this fall, 32% of students rated their experience as excellent or good.

COVID-19 most interfered with students' plans to participate in on-campus social activities and access campus services that support their well-being. The pandemic least interfered with students' ability to pay for their university and living expenses and their ability to access MRU's Library resources.

As a result of the pandemic, most students said they had experienced a substantial increase in their concerns about their ability to socialize (65%), their future opportunities (60%), and the health and safety of their family or friends (53%).

Less than 1% of respondents said they had not experienced any negative mental health changes due to the COVID-19 situation. At least three in four students said they had experienced a substantial increase in their mental or emotional exhaustion or an increased inability to concentrate due to the pandemic.

Sixty-five per cent of students said they are spending more time on their academic work than they did before the pandemic, and 87% said they are spending less time socializing.

Although at least eight in 10 students think that Mount Royal has kept students safe and healthy during the pandemic, only 26% of students agreed they feel connected to MRU.

Of the 85% of students who plan on taking courses at MRU in Winter 2021, at least seven in 10 said they were concerned about paying fees for services they cannot use (80%), doing well on tests and assignments (77%), decreased quality of education/learning (74%), and staying motivated to do their academic work (72%).

Of the 10% of students who said they were unsure about their plans or not planning to register for winter courses, four main factors were contributing to students' decision: their concerns about courses being held online (83%), their experience at MRU during the pandemic (75%), paying full tuition for online courses (72%), and their mental health (69%).

Background and methodology

In October 2020, Provost's Council engaged the Office of Institutional Research and Planning to survey students to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted them academically and personally.

In developing the questionnaire, Mount Royal licenced and adapted two topical modules from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE): Experiences with Online Learning and Coping with COVID. In addition to the NSSE modules, the questionnaire included items about students' academic intentions for Winter 2021 and demographics questions.

A random sample of 4,000 students enrolled in fall courses were invited to participate in the survey from November 6 to November 20.* Three recruitment emails were sent to students requesting their feedback. Students who completed the survey were entered into a small draw prize for one of five \$25 cash prizes.

Of the students invited to participate in the survey, 1,670 students fully or partially completed the survey, yielding a 42% response rate and $\pm 2.2\%$ margin of error, 19 times out of 20. Mandatory responses were not required for most survey items. As a result, the number of students who answered each survey item varies.

Representation and response rate of students invited to participate in the survey

Faculty	Invited	% population	# responded	% responses	Response rate
Arts	941	24%	409	24%	43%
Business and Communication	1,128	28%	488	29%	43%
Health, Community and Education	908	23%	410	25%	45%
Science and Technology	576	14%	228	14%	40%
Learner access programs**	447	11%	135	8%	30%
MRU	4,000	100%	1,670	100%	42%

*Students in academic upgrading, FLE generating Continuing Education programs, and English language instruction courses were not surveyed.

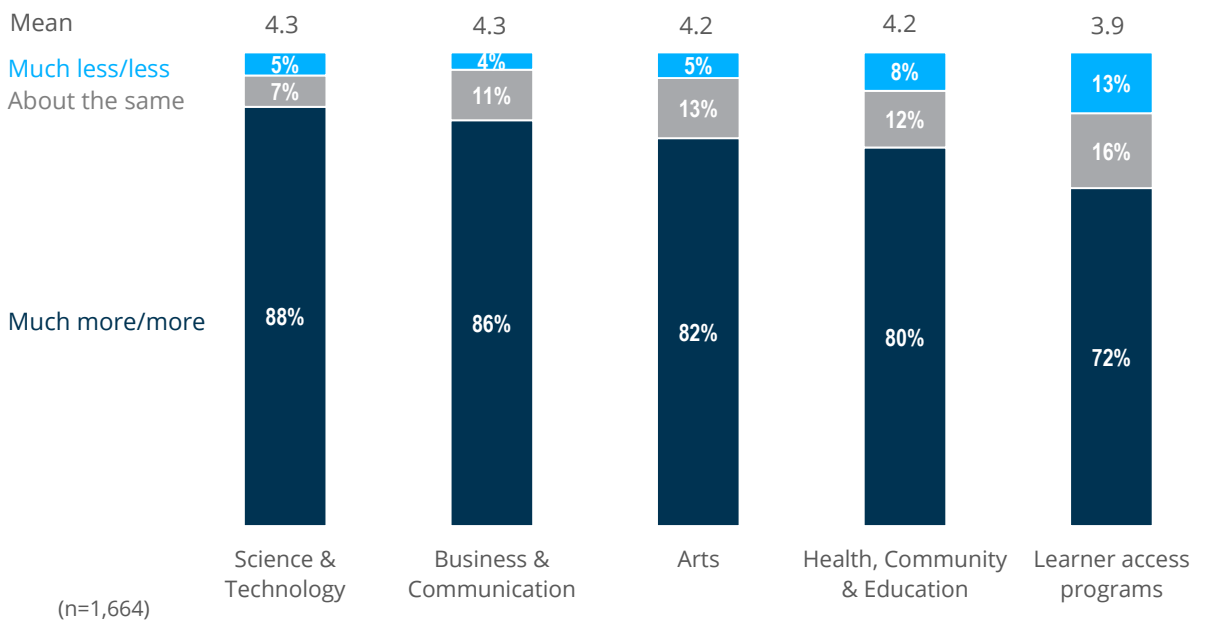
**Learner access programs includes students in Open Studies and University Entrance Option programs and unclassified students.

About four in five students said they found it more challenging to learn in an online environment than classroom-based instruction.

Institutionally, 83% of fall students said they found it more challenging to learn online compared to classroom-based instruction. Only 11% of students said learning online was about as challenging as learning in a traditional classroom setting, and 6% said learning online was less challenging than classroom-based instruction.

Across faculties, at least seven in 10 students said they found it more challenging to learn online compared to classroom-based instruction. However, at the program level, Bachelor of Science students were more likely to say they found it difficult to learn online than students in other programs (91% compared with 81%).

Students in learner access programs were least likely say they found it more challenging to learn online than classroom-based instruction.*



Regardless of how their instructors chose to teach their fall courses, 49% of students said they would prefer hybrid delivery.

This fall, a similar proportion of students said their courses were typically taught using hybrid delivery (36%) or were a mixture of synchronous, asynchronous, and/or hybrid delivery (39%). Less than one in 10 students (6%) said their courses were typically delivered asynchronously.

*Learner access programs includes students in Open Studies and University Entrance Option programs and unclassified students.

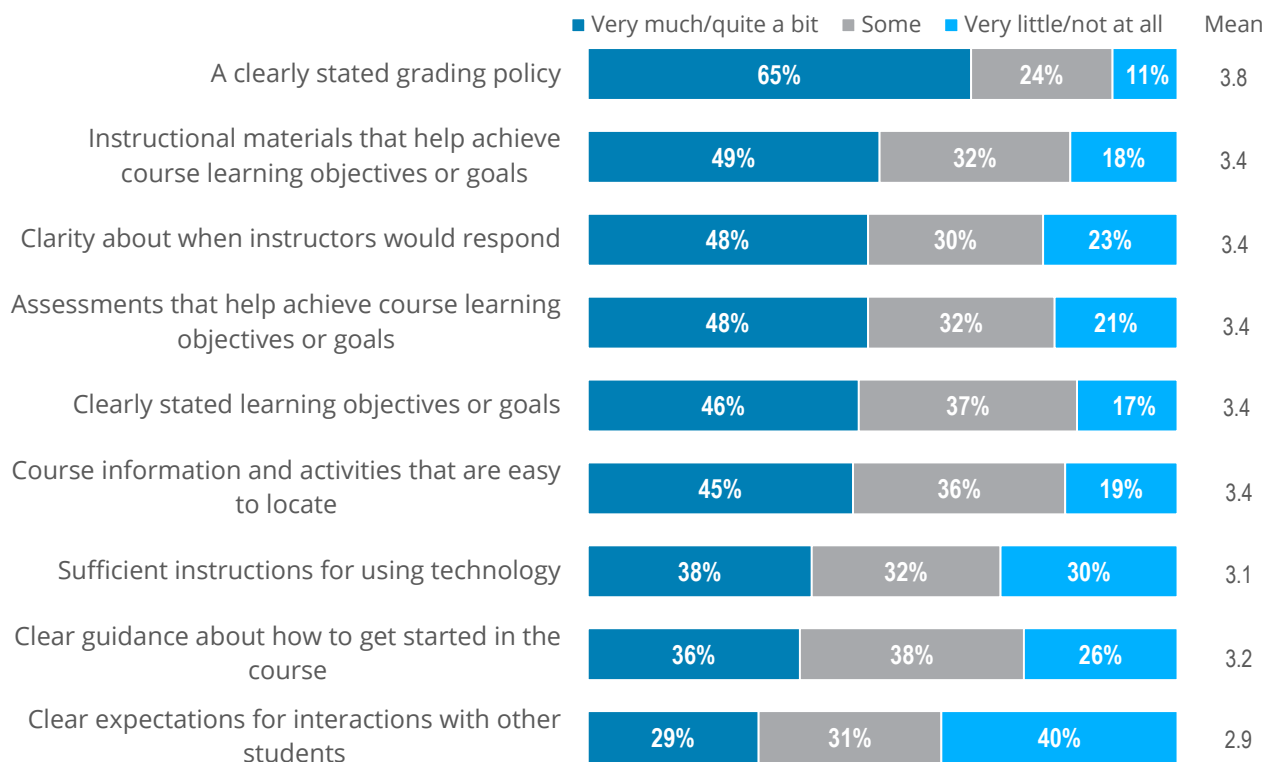
This fall, students were most likely to say their courses provided clearly stated grading policies, with about two in three students who said their courses provided this very much or quite a bit.

While students found their courses were most likely to provide clearly stated grading policies, at least four in five students said their courses provided the following to at least some extent:

- Clearly stated learning objectives or goals (83%),
- Instructional materials (readings, videos, etc.) that help achieve course learning objectives or goals (81%),
- Course information and activities that are easy to locate (81%), and
- Assessments (quizzes, projects, assignments, exams, etc.) that help achieve course learning objectives or goals (80%).

Students in Science and Technology were less likely to say their courses provided at least some clarity about when their instructors would respond to them than other students (72% vs. 78%). Compared with other students, Business and Communication students were less likely to say their courses provided clear expectations for their interactions with other students to at least some extent (56% vs. 62%).

Students said that their online courses were least likely to provide sufficient instructions for using technology, clear guidance for getting started in the course, or clear expectations for their interactions with other students.



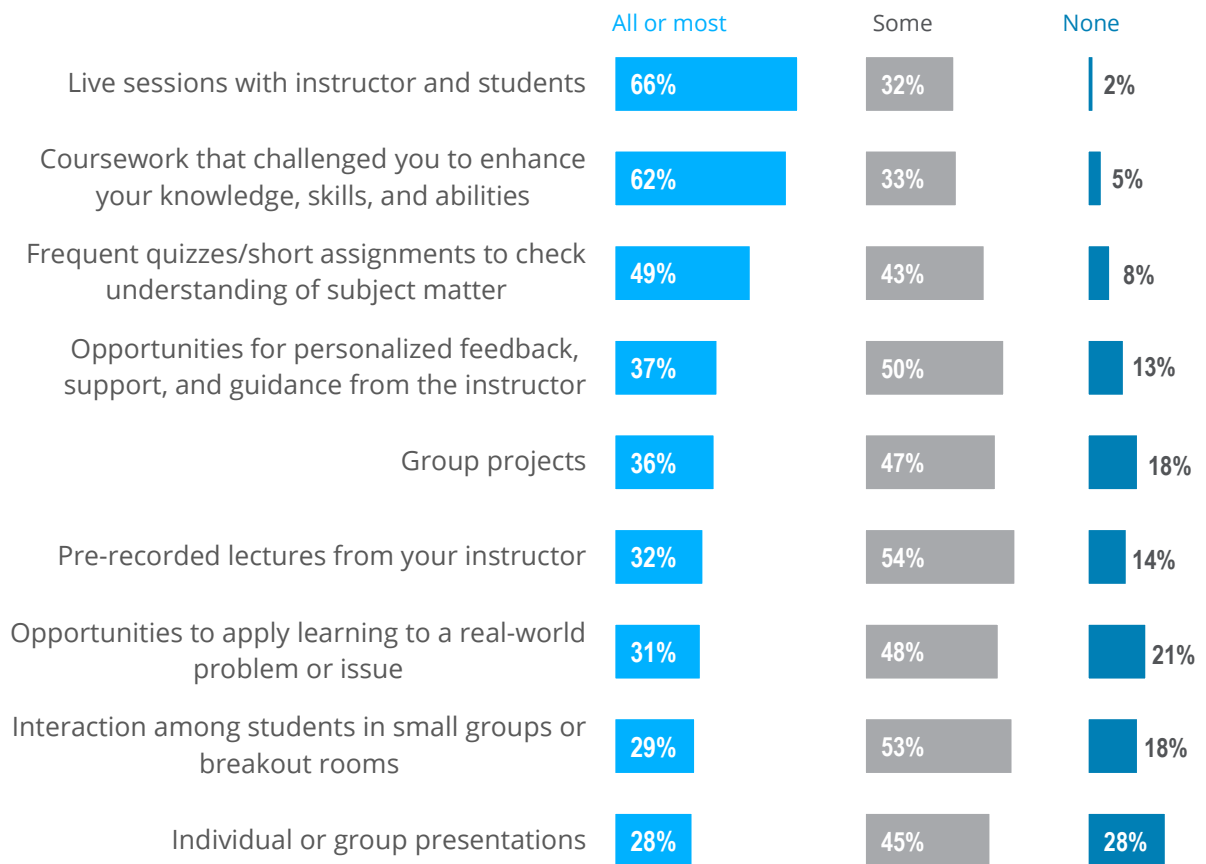
(n≈1,658)

Only 2% of students said that none of their online courses had live sessions with their instructor and other students.

Students were asked about how many of their online courses included nine different activities. Responses showed that three of these activities were more likely to be included in all or most of students' courses: live sessions with their instructor and other students (66%); coursework that challenged them to enhance their knowledge, skills, and abilities (62%); and frequent quizzes or short assignments that checked their understanding of subject matter (49%).

Among the students whose courses had group projects (82%) or individual or group presentations (72%), most found it challenging to do these activities in an online environment. Of the students whose courses had group projects, 66% said they found it challenging to get work done in an online environment. Slightly more than half of the students who had class presentations said it was challenging to do in an online environment (55%).

About one in five students said that none of their courses included interactions among students in small groups or breakout rooms, group projects, or opportunities to apply their learning to a real-world problem or issue.



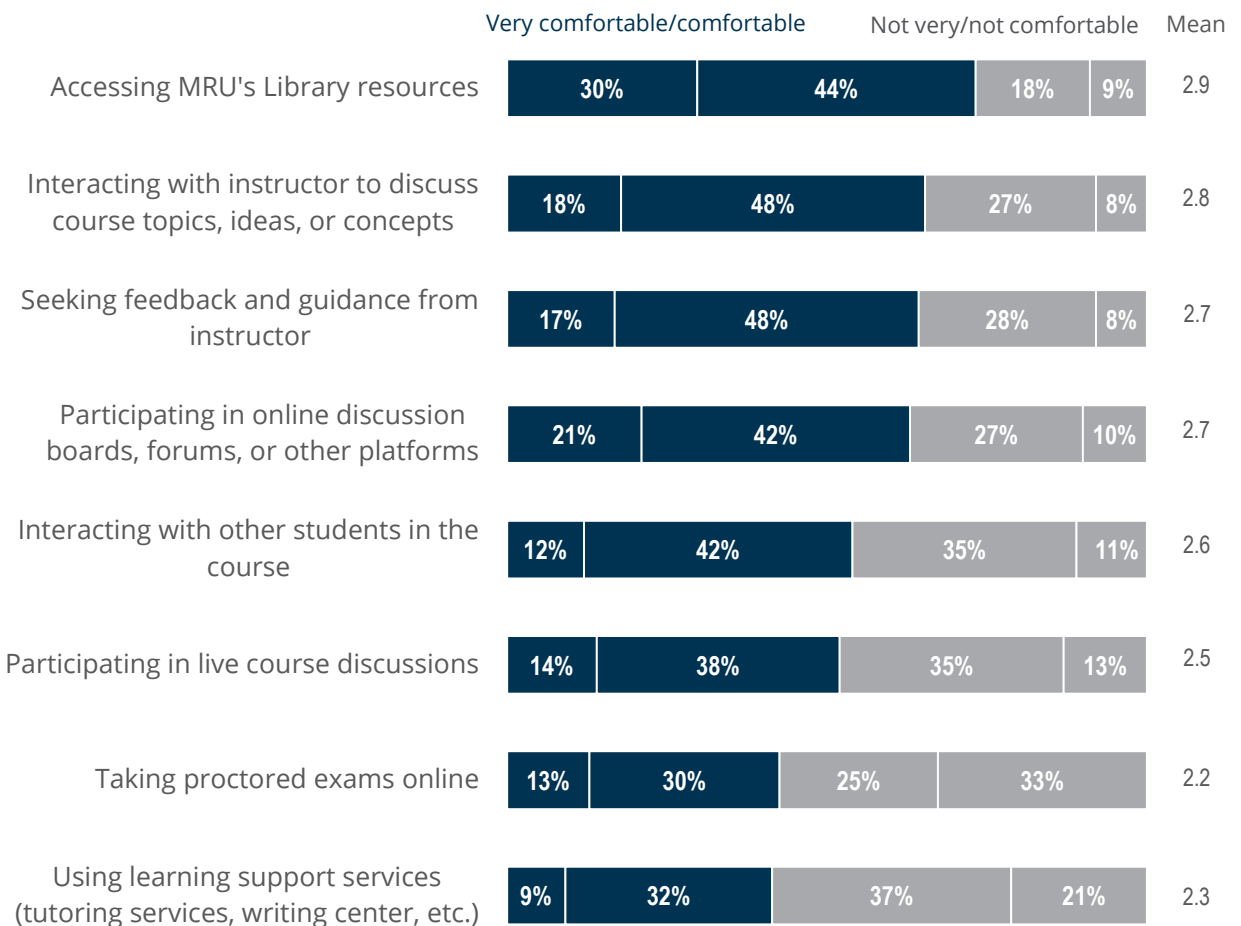
(n≈1,562)

In Fall 2020, nearly six in 10 students said they were not very or not at all comfortable using learning support services or taking proctored exams online.

In their online courses, students were most comfortable accessing MRU's Library resources (74%). Most students also felt comfortable interacting with their instructors. Two in three students said they felt comfortable discussing course topics, ideas, or concepts with their instructors (66%), and 65% said they felt comfortable seeking feedback or guidance from their instructors.

In the fall, students were overall least comfortable taking proctored exams online. However, students' comfort varied by faculty. While 30% of Science and Technology students said they felt comfortable taking proctored exams online, 50% of Arts students and 57% of students in learner access programs said they felt comfortable taking exams online.

In their online courses, students felt more comfortable participating in online discussion boards than participating in live course discussions.



(n≈1,477)

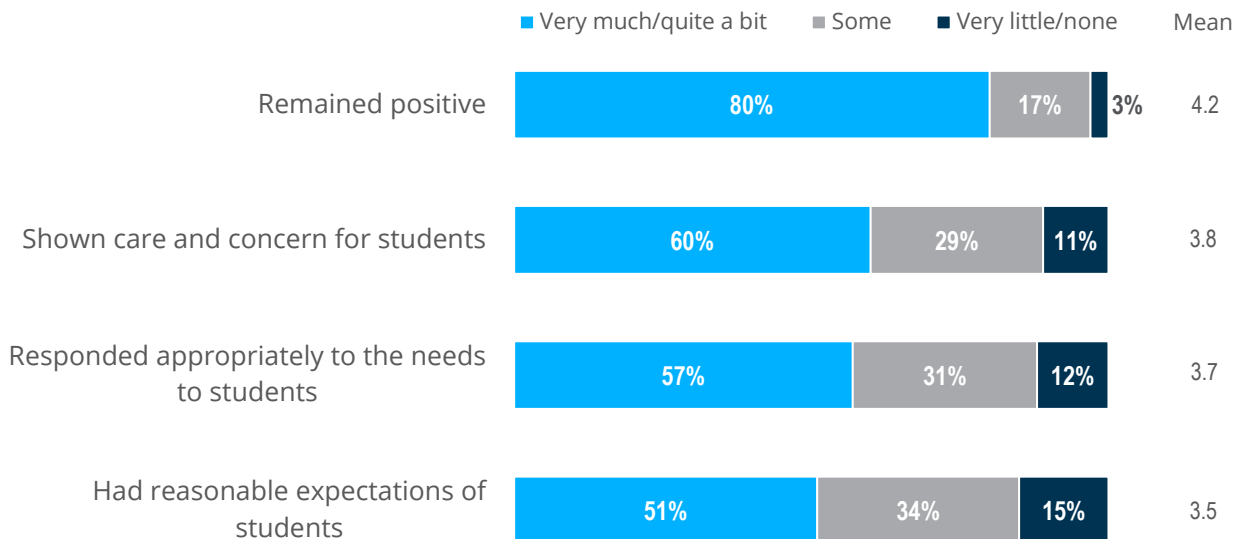
A strong majority of students thought that their instructors had remained positive in light of the pandemic.

Most students said their instructors had shown sensitivity to them as people during the pandemic and had done their best to remain positive to at least some extent. However, while most students thought their instructors had had reasonable expectations of them, they found their instructors were least supportive in this area.

By faculty, students' perception that their instructors had had reasonable expectations of them in light of the pandemic very much or quite a bit varied:

- Arts students were most likely to say their instructors had had reasonable expectations of them (72% very much/quite a bit).
- More than half of the students in learner access programs said their instructors had had reasonable expectations of students (57% very much/quite a bit).
- Slightly less than half of Science and Technology students said they thought their instructors had had reasonable expectations of them (46% very much/quite a bit).
- Business and Communications students were least likely to say their instructors had had reasonable expectations of them than other students (42% very much/quite a bit).

More than 80% of students thought that their instructors had to at least some extent remained positive, caring and considerate of students in light of the pandemic.



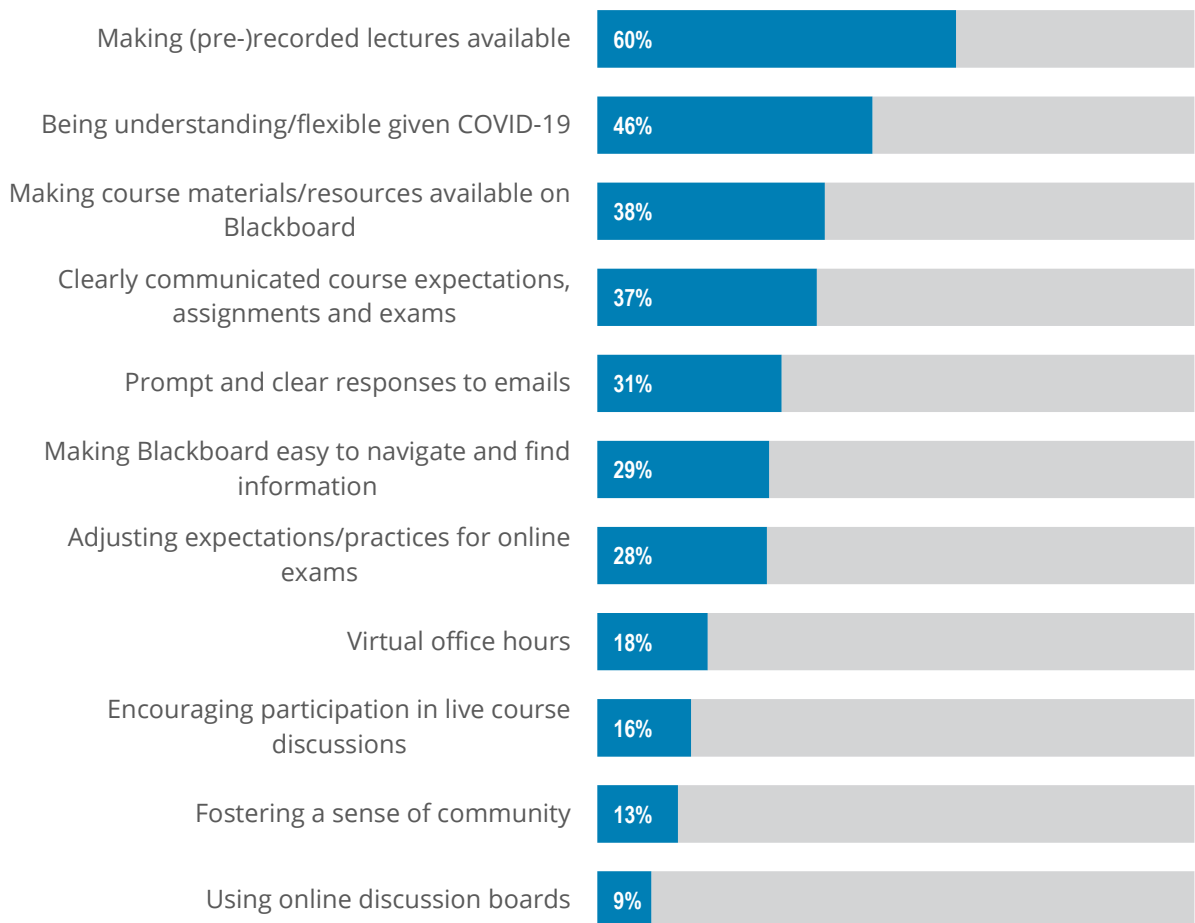
(n≈1,315)

Three in five students said the most important way their instructors had supported them in the fall was by making pre-recorded or recordings of live lectures available to them.

The four most important ways students said their instructors supported had them in Fall 2020 included:

- Making recordings of lectures (live or pre-recorded) available (60%);
- Being understanding and flexible given the COVID-19 situation (46%);
- Making course materials and other resources available on Blackboard (38%); and
- Clearly communicating course expectations, including expectations for assignments and exams (37%).

More students said their instructors providing prompt and clear responses to emails was important in supporting them than virtual office hours in their fall courses.



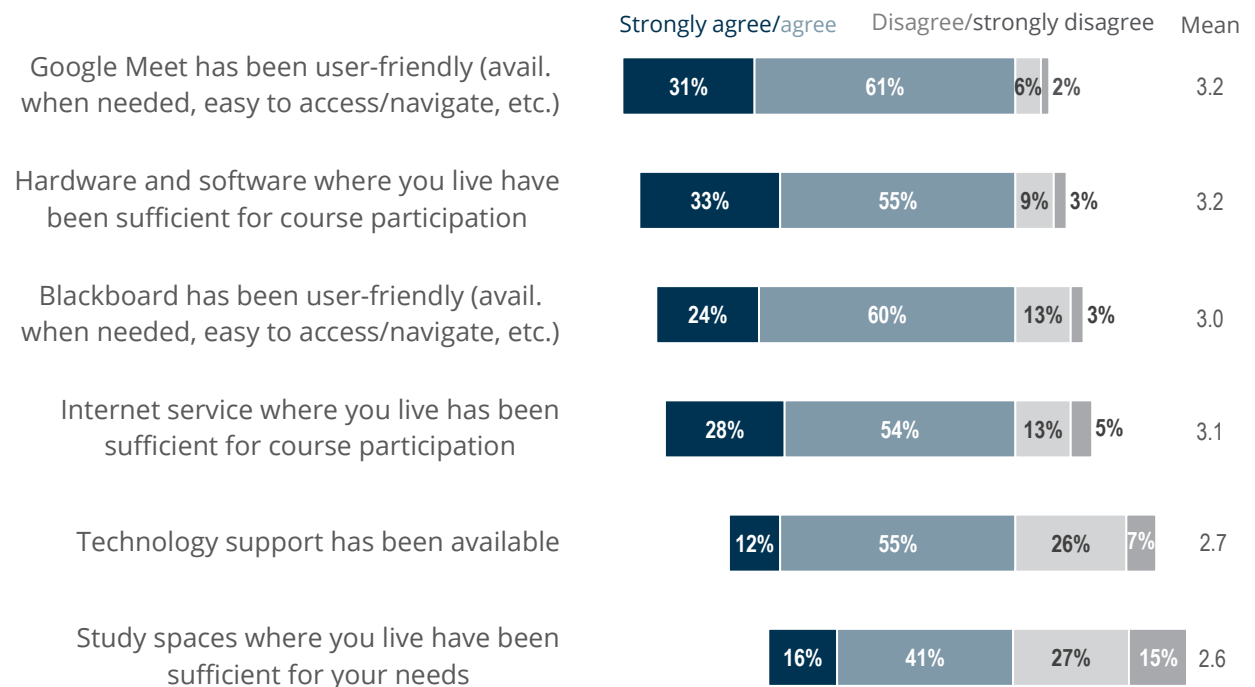
(n=1,423)

Ninety-two per cent of students agreed that Google Meet has been user-friendly.

Most students agreed that they had the technical resources at home to learn online this fall and that Google Meet and Blackboard were user-friendly. The at-home resource least available to students was study space, with 57% who agreed that the study spaces where they live have been sufficient to meet their needs.

While 80% of Business and Communications students agreed that Blackboard was user-friendly, they were less likely to agree with this statement than students in other faculties, where 86% of students agreed.

Technology support and study space were the resources least available to students when learning online.



(n=1,403)

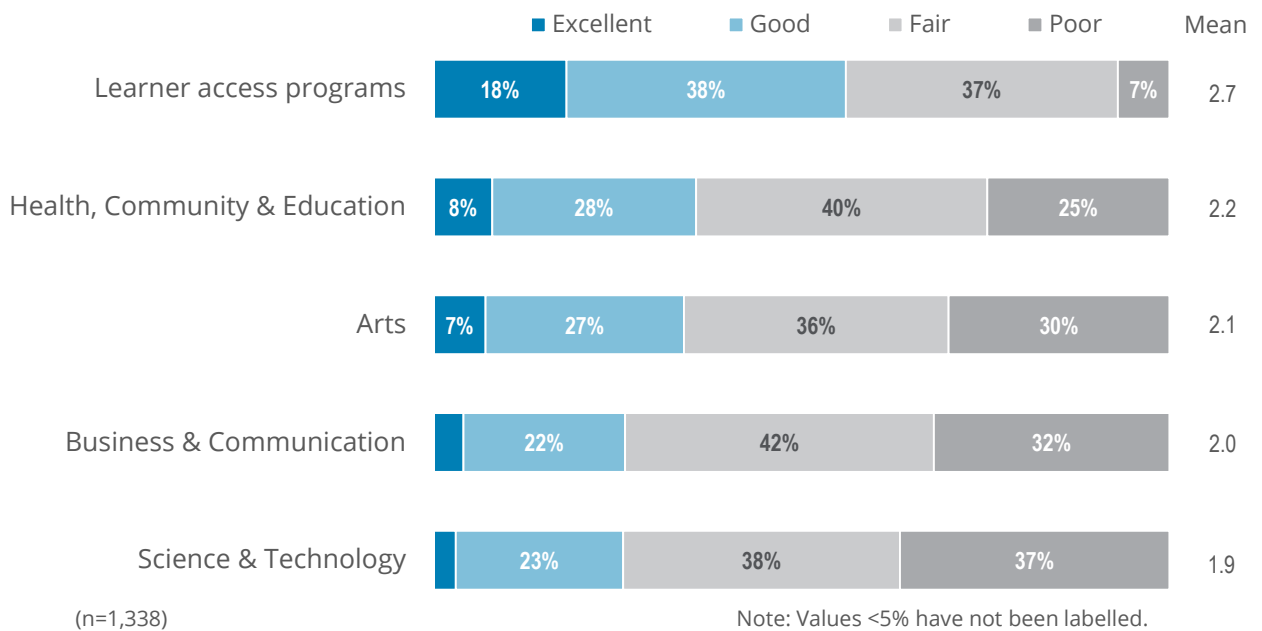
Institutionally, about one in three students rated their overall online learning experience as excellent or good in Fall 2020.

When asked to rate their overall online learning experience in the fall, 32% of students rated their experience as excellent or good. Only 6% of students rated their experience as excellent.

Although students' perception of their overall online learning experience was generally negative, students in learner access programs were mostly positive about their online learning experience, with 56% who rated their experience as excellent or good.

By faculty, Business and Communication and Science and Technology students were most critical of their online learning experience. In both faculties, about one in four students rated their experience as excellent or good compared with about one in three students outside of their faculty.

Students in Business and Communication and Science and Technology were more negative in evaluating their fall online learning experience than other students.



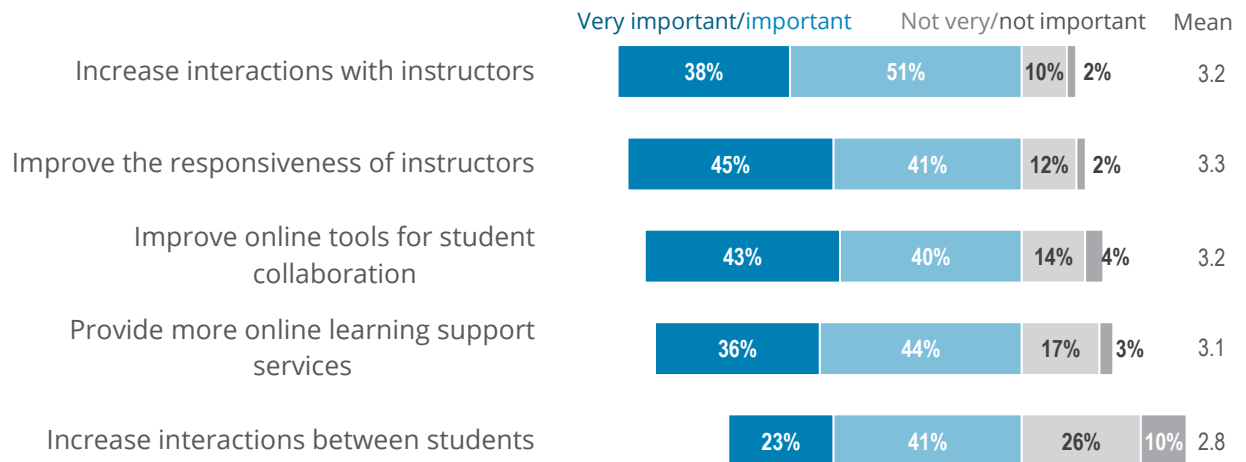
Nearly nine in 10 students said increased interactions with their instructors would improve their online course-taking experience.

When asked how important it was for Mount Royal to improve their online course-taking experience in five areas, at least 80% of students said it was very important or important for Mount Royal to:

- Increase their interactions with instructors (89%),
- Improve the responsiveness of instructors (86%),
- Improve online tools for student collaboration (83%), and
- Provide more online learning support services (80%).

While of the least importance institutionally, students in Health, Community and Education were more likely than other students to say that increasing interactions between students would improve their online course-taking experience (74% vs. 62%).

Increasing interactions between students was considerably less important to students than increasing interactions with their instructors.



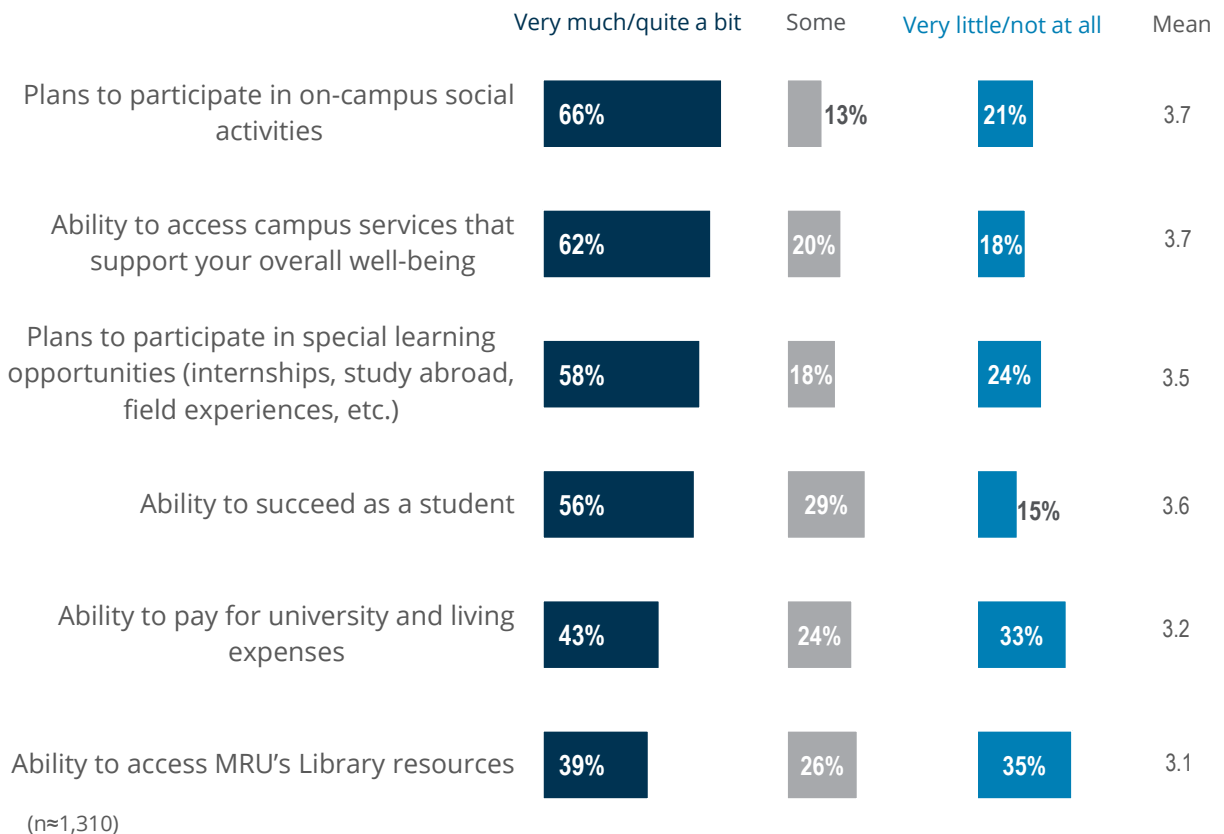
(n≈1,461)

In Fall 2020, COVID-19 most interfered with students' plans to participate in on-campus social activities and access campus well-being support services.

More than six in 10 students said the pandemic had substantially interfered with their plans to participate in activities that required them to be on campus in the fall: participating in on-campus social activities and accessing campus services that support their well-being (e.g., recreation, health services).

Overall, the third area students said the pandemic had most impacted them this fall was in their ability to succeed as a student. To some extent, students' perceived success seems to be tied to their ability to be on campus and learn in a classroom environment. Students who said they found it more challenging to learn online than by classroom-based instruction (see page 5) were also more likely to say their ability to succeed as a student had been substantially impacted compared with students who did not find it as challenging to learn online (65% vs. 13%).

The pandemic was least likely to have interfered with students' ability to pay for their university and living expenses and their ability to access MRU's Library resources.



Note: 'Substantially' is a rating of very much/quite a bit.

Two in three students said their concern about their ability to socialize has increased substantially due to the COVID-19 pandemic.*

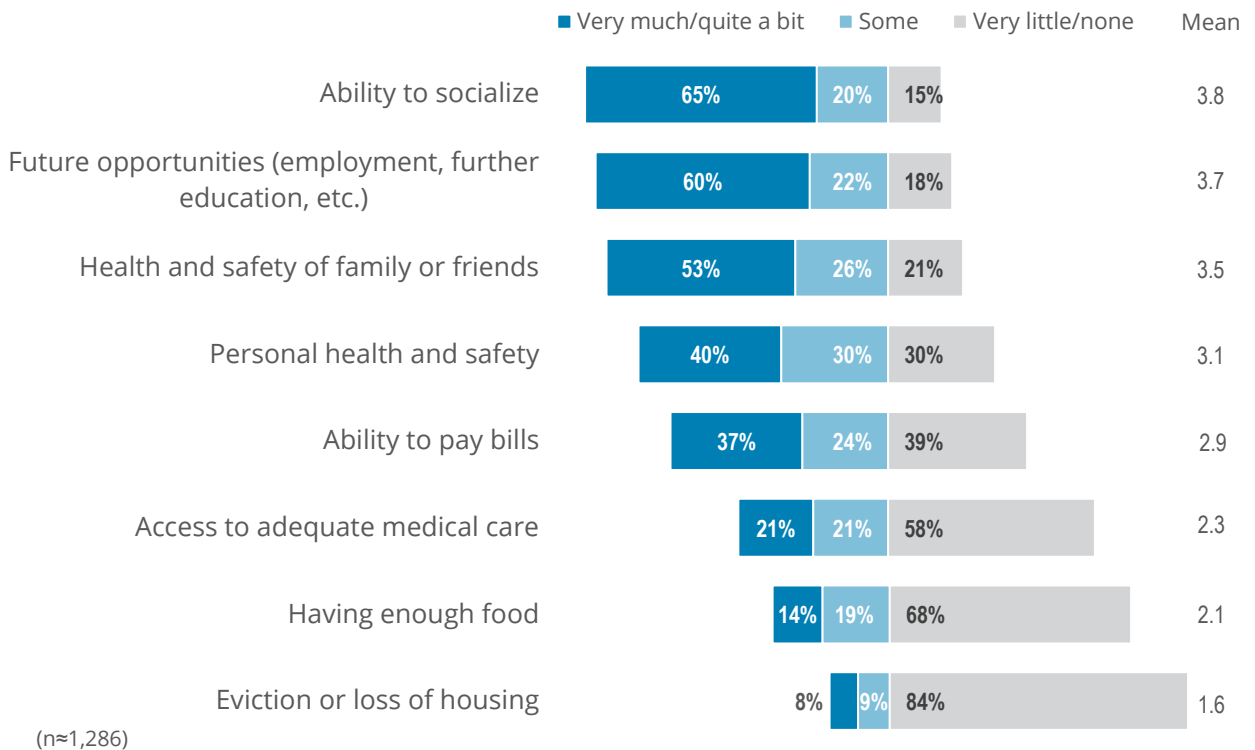
Due to the pandemic, at least one in two students said their concerns about their ability to socialize, their future opportunities, and their family or friends' health and safety had increased substantially.

Generally, students were less likely to say the pandemic had caused them increased concern in three areas, where more than half of respondents said they had experienced very little or no increase in their concerns about:

- Having access to adequate medical care,
- Having enough food, and
- Eviction or loss of housing.

Although a primary concern for most students, students in Health, Community and Education were less likely to say their concerns about their future opportunities had increased substantially than students in other faculties (53% compared with 62%).

As a result of COVID-19, more students reported increased concerns about the health and safety of their family or friends than their own health and safety.



Note: 'Substantially' is a rating of very much/quite a bit.

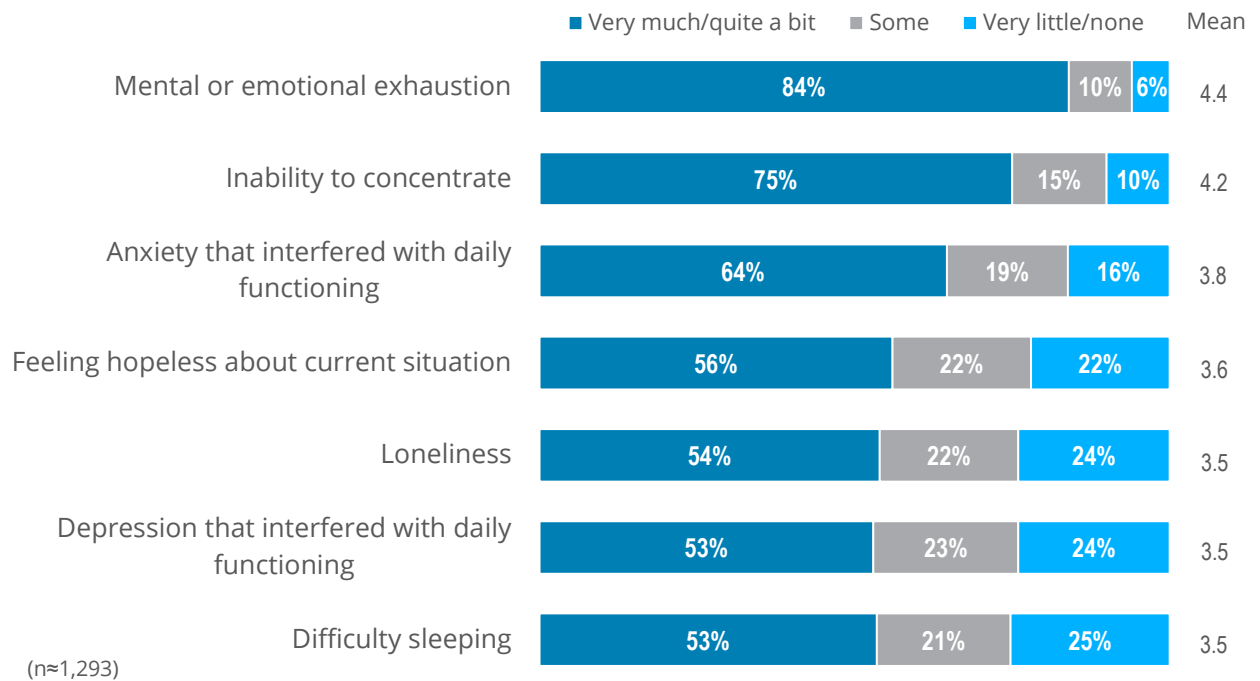
The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted nearly all students' mental health to some extent.

As a result of the pandemic, the most pronounced differences students noticed in their mental health were increased mental or emotional exhaustion and an increased inability to concentrate.

Across all seven survey items about mental health, at least one in two students said they had experienced increased mental health impacts. Less than 1% of respondents said they had not experienced any mental health changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Compared with other students, Arts students were on average more likely to report increased mental or emotional exhaustion, depression or anxiety that interfered with daily functioning, and an inability to concentrate due to the COVID-19 situation.

Due to the pandemic, 84% of students said they had experienced increased mental or emotional exhaustion, with 66% who said this exhaustion had increased very much.

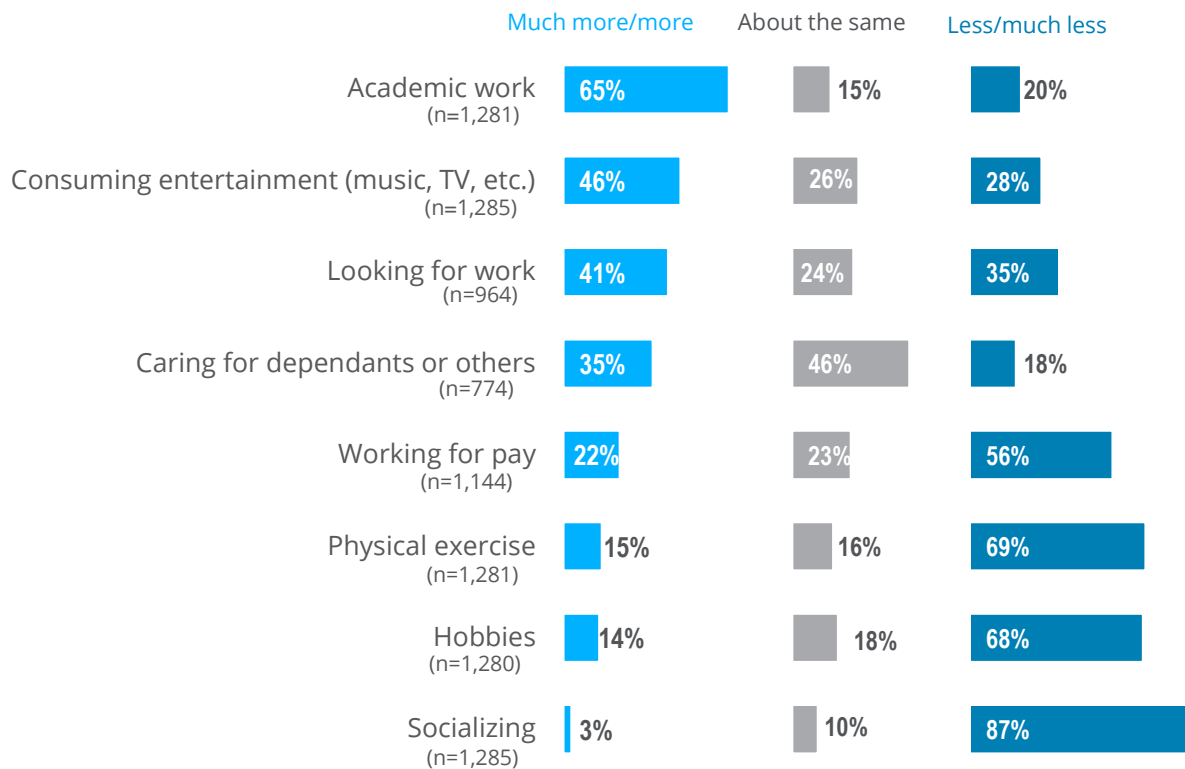


Two-thirds of students said they were spending more time on their academic work than they did before the pandemic.

Changes to students' time allocation since the pandemic seem to be related to where certain activities typically occur. Activities that can be done at home seem to be where students now spend more time than before the pandemic (i.e., academic work and consuming entertainment). However, activities that are more likely to require students to leave their homes are where students now spend less time than before the pandemic: working for pay (56%), physical exercise (69%), hobbies (68%), and socializing (87%).

Although spending time on academic work was where time allocation increased the most for all students, Science and Technology students were more likely to spend more time on their academic work than other students (72% vs. 64%).

Nearly nine in 10 students said they spend less time socializing than before the COVID-19 pandemic, with 47% who said they were spending much less time socializing.

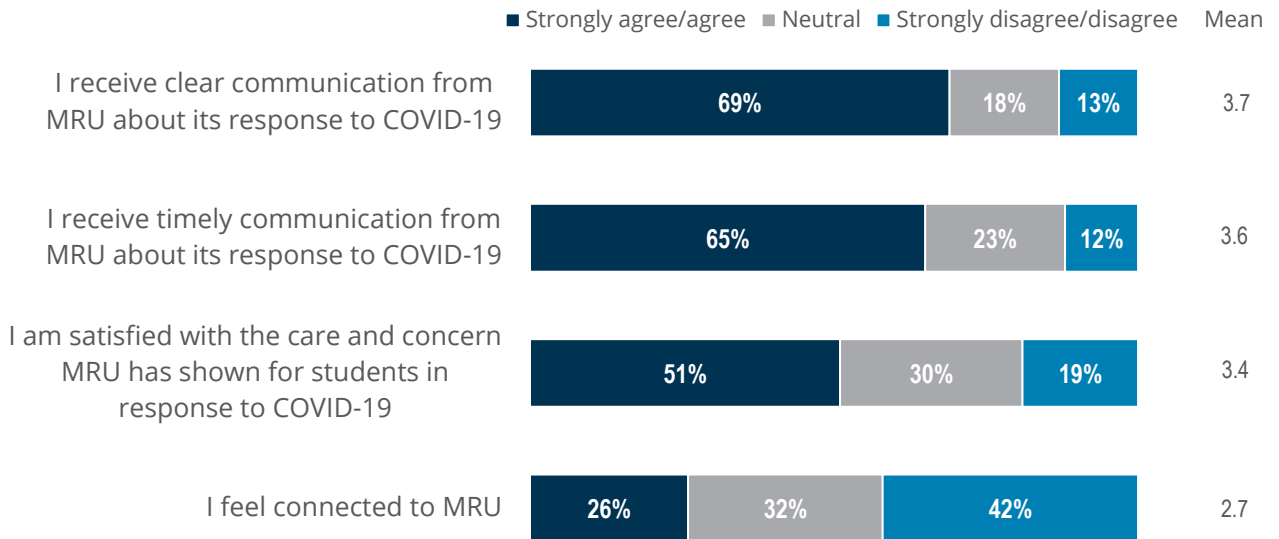


Note: Respondents had the option to answer not applicable (N/A) for the above items. There are strong indications of respondent error for some items, where respondents should have selected N/A but instead chose a countable response. Survey items most likely impacted by respondent error include caring for dependants or others, working for pay, and looking for work. Results should be interpreted conservatively for these items.

One in two students agreed they were satisfied with the care and concern MRU has shown for students in response to COVID.

While most students agreed they receive clear and timely communication from MRU about its response to the pandemic, their sense of connection with the University is overall low. Only 26% of students agreed they feel connected to MRU.

One in four students agreed they feel connect to Mount Royal.



(n≈1,282)

A strong majority of students think Mount Royal is keeping students safe and healthy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although most students did not feel connected to Mount Royal, 95% of students said they thought Mount Royal had kept students safe and healthy to at least some extent.



81%

of students said Mount Royal has kept students safe and healthy during the pandemic very much or quite a bit.

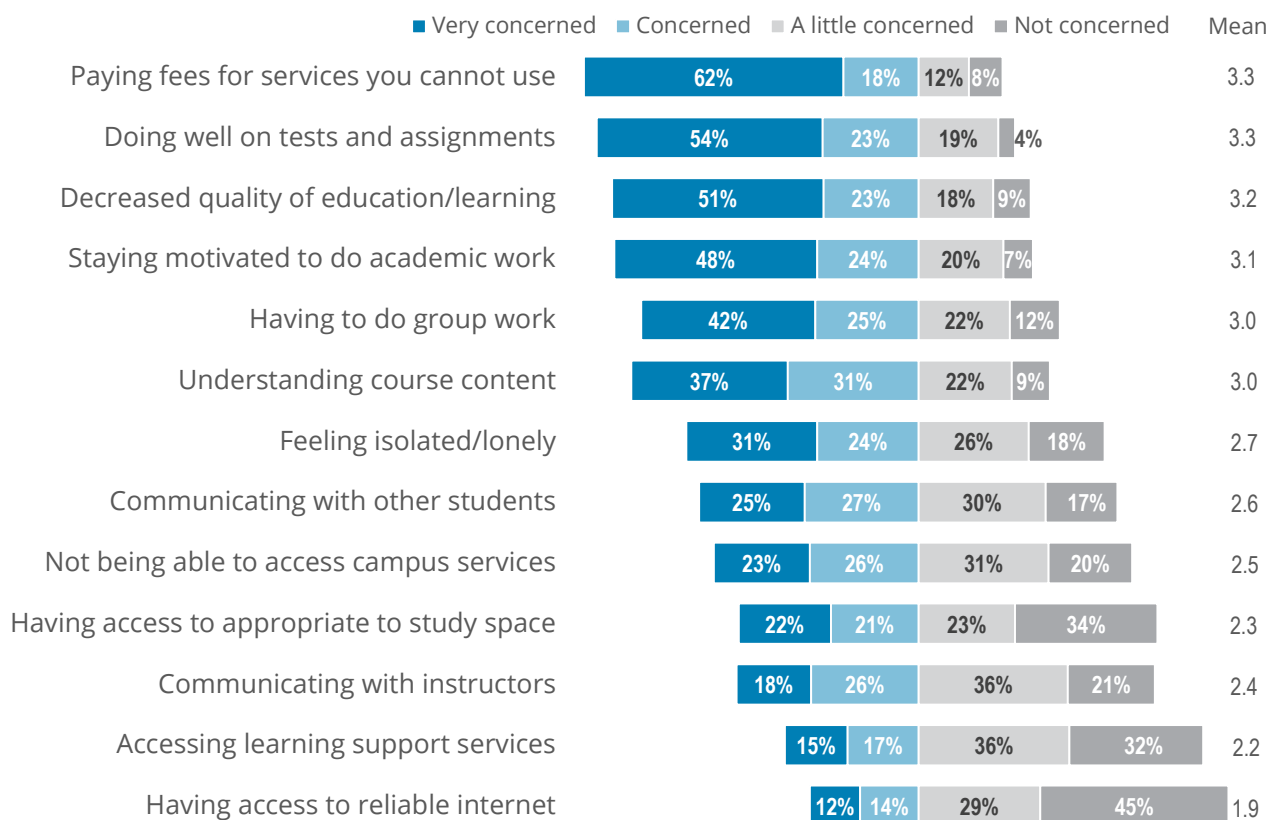
Image source: srip at Flaticon.com

Among the 85% of students who planned on registering for winter, 72% said they planned to take the same number of classes as they would have if their courses were on campus, and 20% said they planned to take fewer courses.*

When asked what they were most concerned about for the Winter 2021 semester, at least seven in 10 students said they were concerned about paying fees for services they cannot use (80%), doing well on tests and assignments (77%), decreased quality of education/learning (74%), and staying motivated to do their academic work (72%).

Compared with other students, students in Science and Technology were more likely to say there were concerned about doing well on tests and assignments (84% vs. 76%) and understanding course content (80% vs. 67%).

For Winter 2021, students are more concerned about communicating with other students than communicating with their instructors.



(n≈1,087)

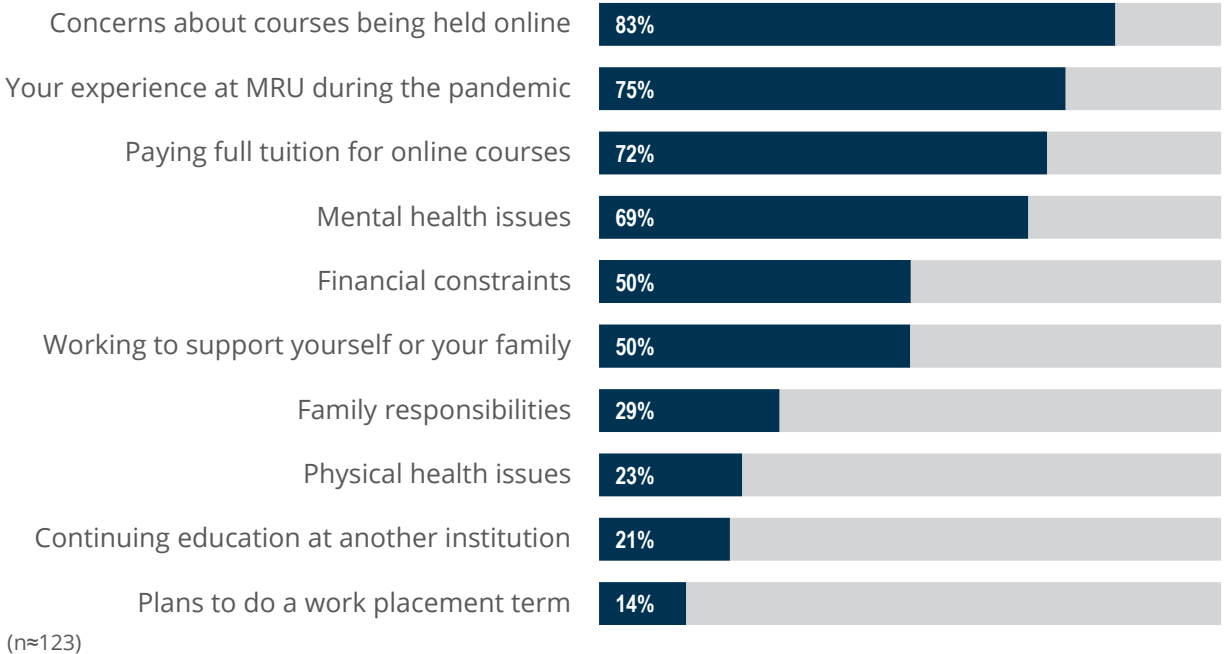
*Six per cent of respondents said they would be graduating before Winter 2021, and another 10% were either not planning on registering or were unsure of their plans.

Among the 10% of students who said they were unsure or did not plan to register for winter, 80% were unsure of their plans.

Of the students who said they were unsure about their plans for Winter 2021 or were not planning on registering, 83% said their concerns about courses being held online was a factor in their decision. Other key factors impacting students' decisions about the winter term included their experience at MRU during the pandemic (75%), paying full tuition for online courses (72%), and their mental health (69%).

Business and Communication students were more likely than other students to say their concerns about courses being held online (100% compared with 76%) and their experience at MRU during the pandemic (94% compared with 68%) were factors in their decision not to register for Winter 2021.

Nearly seven in 10 students said their mental health was a factor in their decision to not return to MRU in Winter 2021.



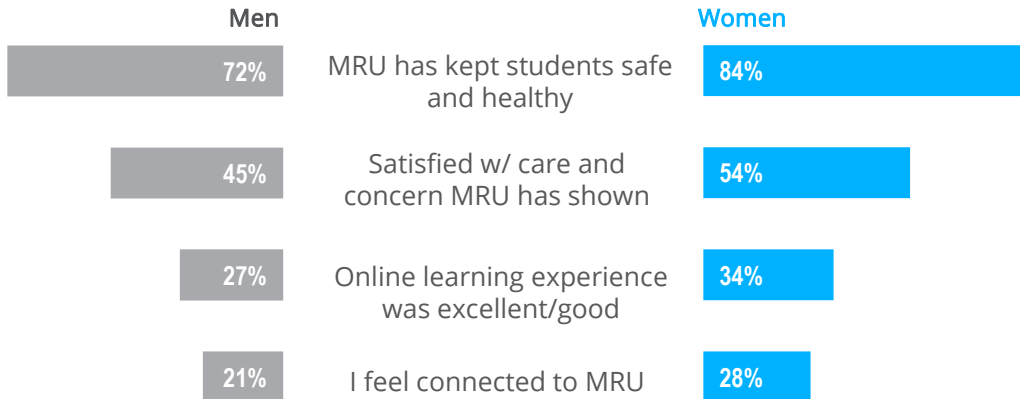
Appendix A: Results by selected student demographics

The following section looks at key results for students who self-identified as belonging to one of five demographic groups. Each group has traditionally experienced social, economic or academic barriers to participation: women, LGB2sQ+ people, visible minorities, Indigenous people, and disabled people.

Although some demographics are collected institutionally, results are based on respondents' answers to the survey's demographic questions. For each demographic question, students had the option to select the 'Prefer not to answer' or skip past the question.

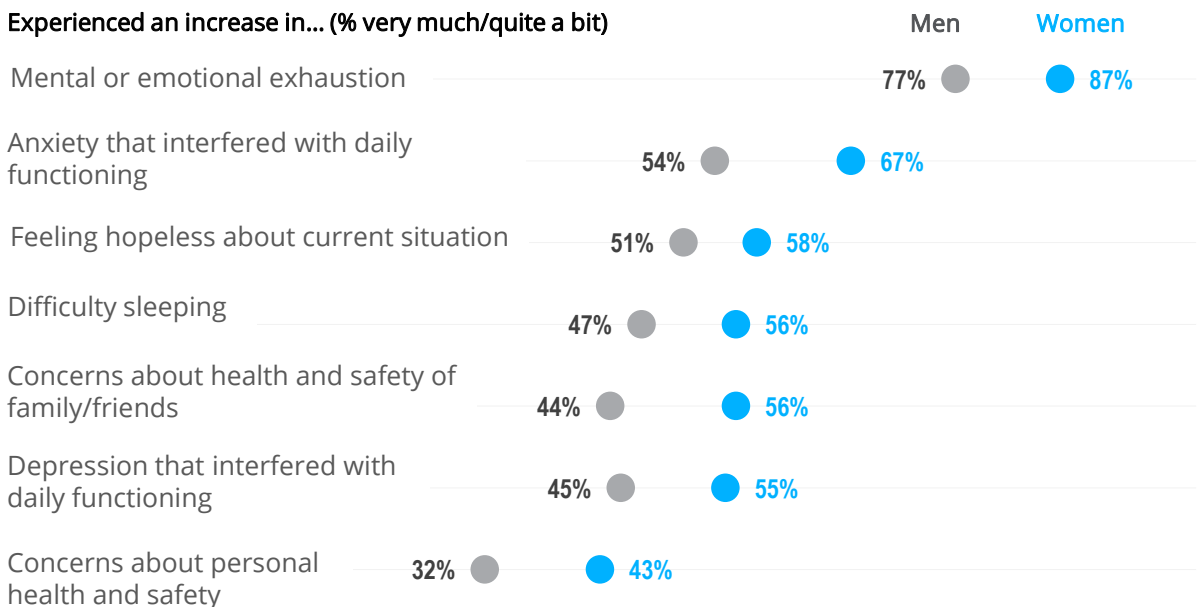
Students who identified as women were more overall more positive about their experience at MRU in the fall but tended to struggle more when coping with the personal impacts of COVID-19 than men.*

For survey items that asked students to reflect on their overall experience or perception of MRU in Fall 2020, women were more positive when evaluating these items than men.



Women overall experienced more personal challenges when coping with the COVID-19 situation than men.**

Experienced an increase in... (% very much/quite a bit)

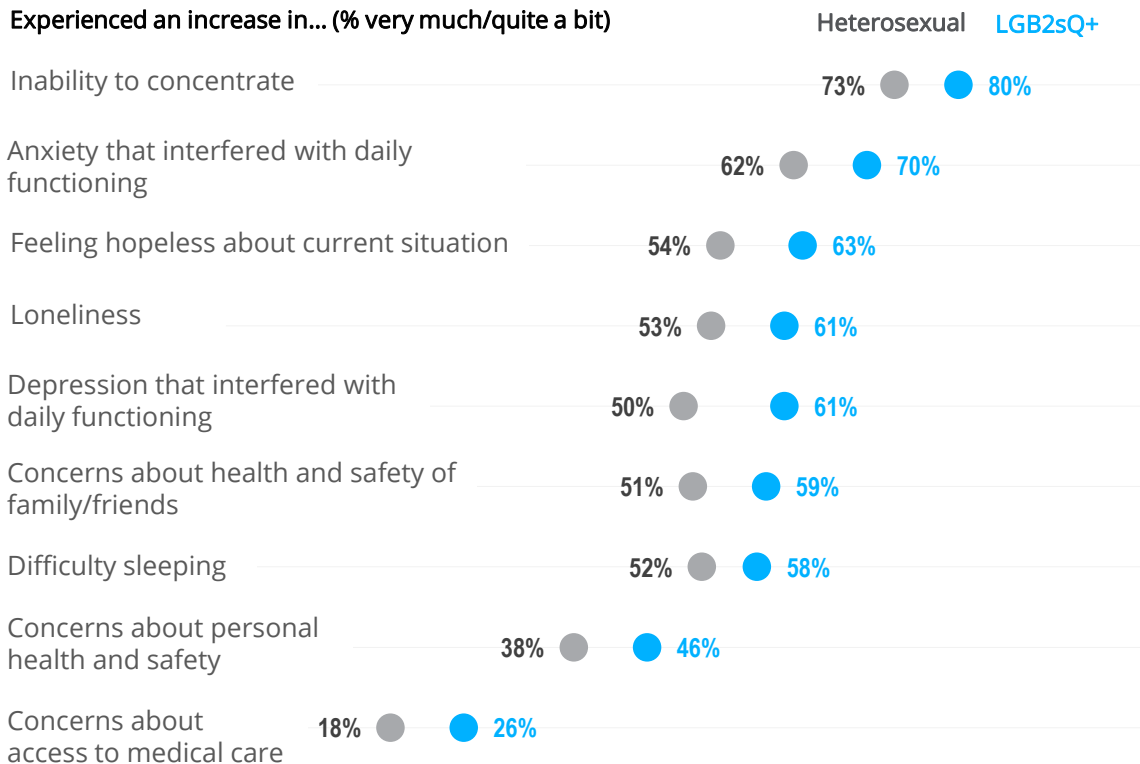


*869 (70%) respondents identified as being a woman.

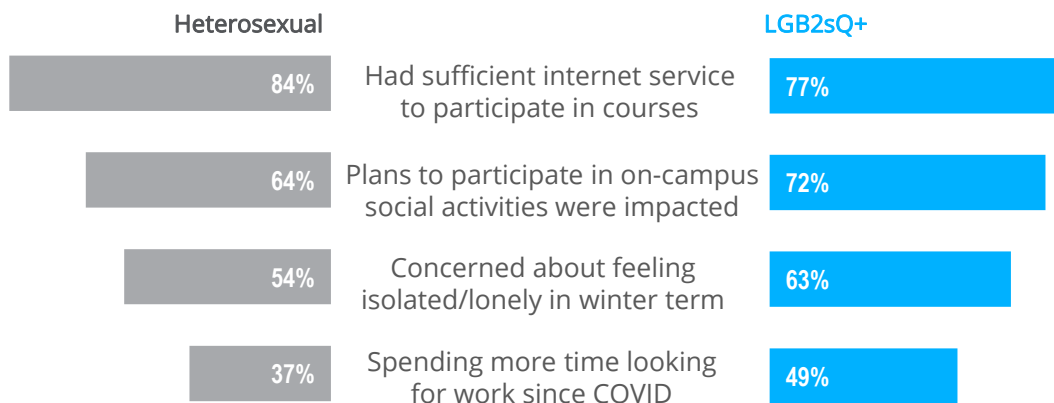
**For the Winter 2021 semester, women who planned on registering for courses were more likely to say they were concerned about feeling isolated or lonely than men (57% compared with 50%).

Compared to heterosexual students, LGB2sQ+ students were more likely to have experienced personal challenges when coping with the COVID-19 situation.*

LGB2sQ+ students experienced more negative impacts on their mental health and increased concerns due to the COVID-19 pandemic than heterosexual students.



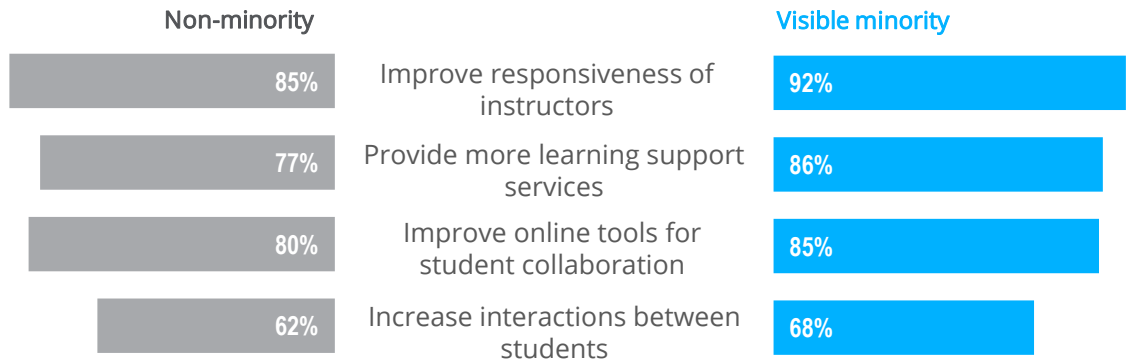
LGB2sQ+ students were more likely to say the pandemic had interfered with their plans to participate in on-campus social activities than heterosexual students, and were more concerned about feeling lonely/isolated in the winter term.



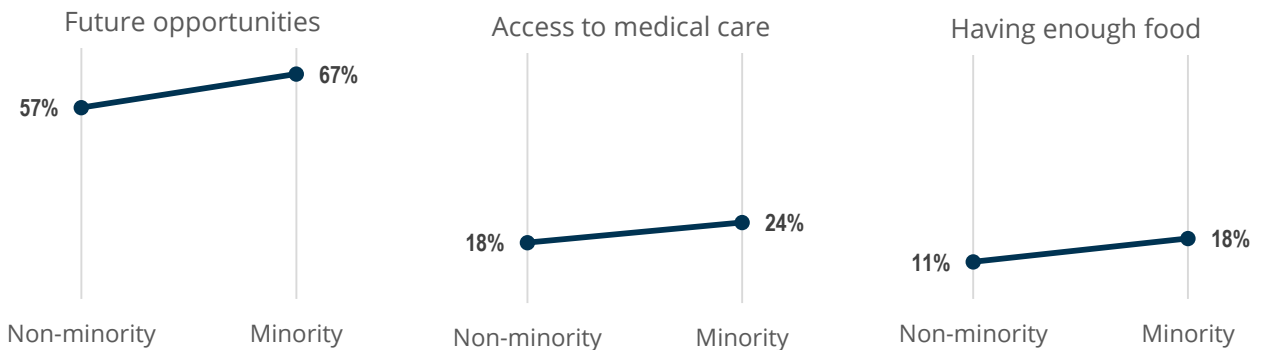
*317 (27%) respondents identified as LGB2sQ+.

Students who identified as a visible minority had more academic improvements and concerns than non-minority students.*

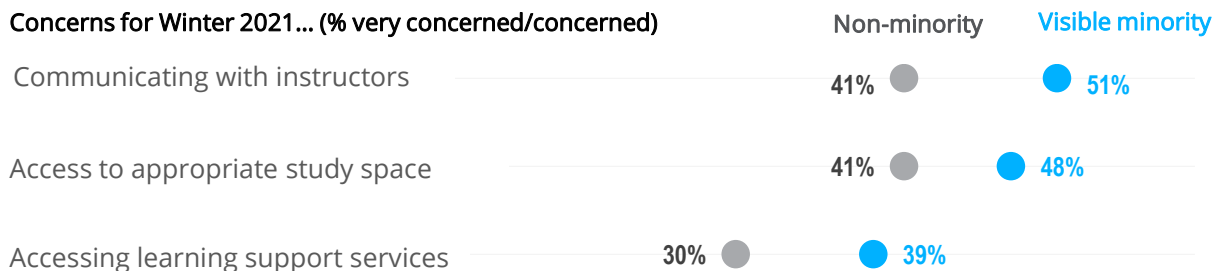
Visible minority students thought it was more important for MRU to make improvements to their online learning experience in than non-minority students.



In three areas, visible minority students were more likely to say their concerns had increased substantially as a result of the pandemic than non-minority students.



For Winter 2021, visible minority students were more concerned about accessing academic supports and study space than non-visible minority students.

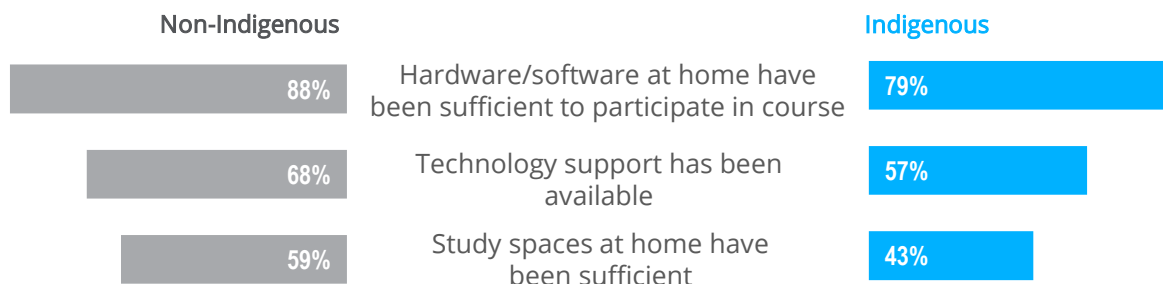


*337 (28%) respondents identified as a member of a visible minority.

Note: 'Substantially' is a rating of very much/quite a bit.

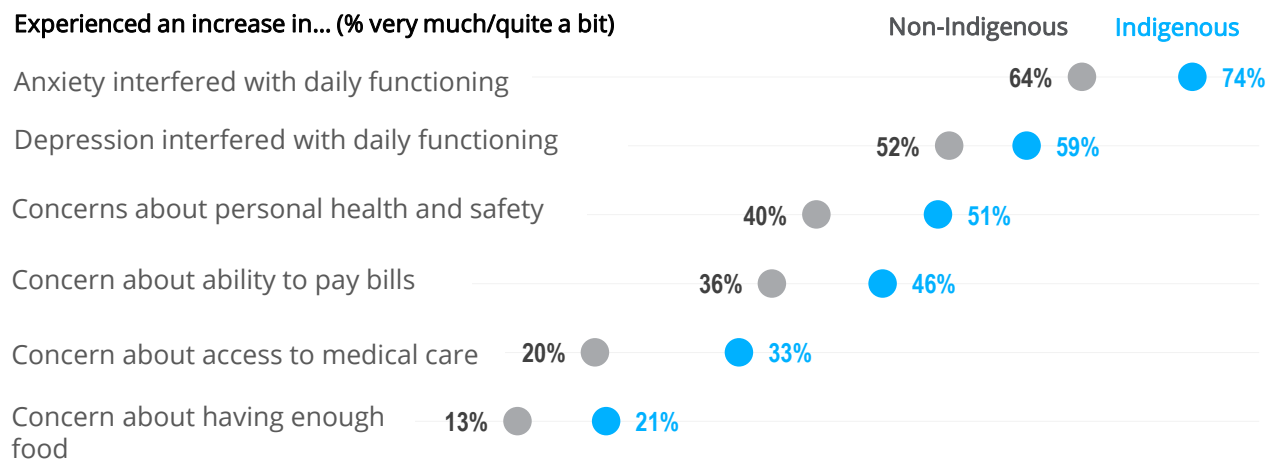
In the fall, Indigenous students were less likely to feel comfortable discussing course topics, ideas, or concepts with their instructors than non-Indigenous students (52% vs.68%).

Indigenous students experienced more barriers with technology and study space this fall than non-Indigenous students.



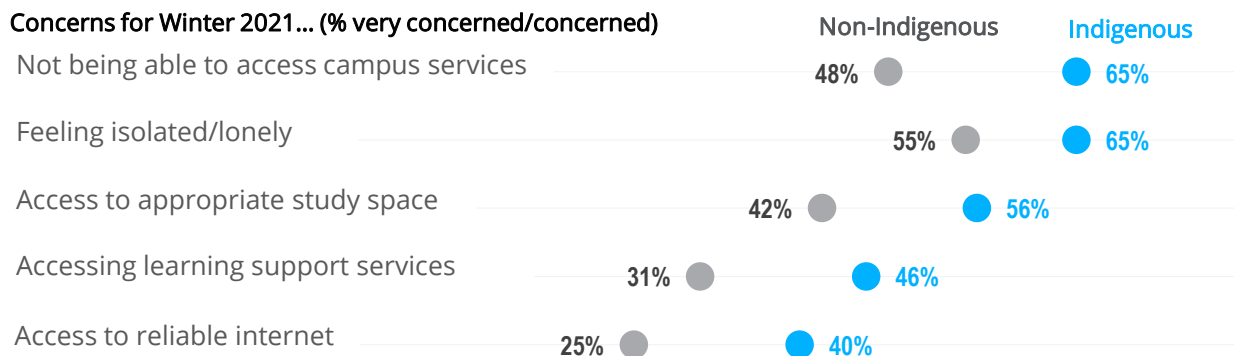
Indigenous students experienced more negative impacts on their mental health and increased concerns as a result of the pandemic than non-Indigenous students.

Experienced an increase in... (% very much/quite a bit)



Indigenous students had more concerns about studying at home in the winter than non-Indigenous students.

Concerns for Winter 2021... (% very concerned/concerned)

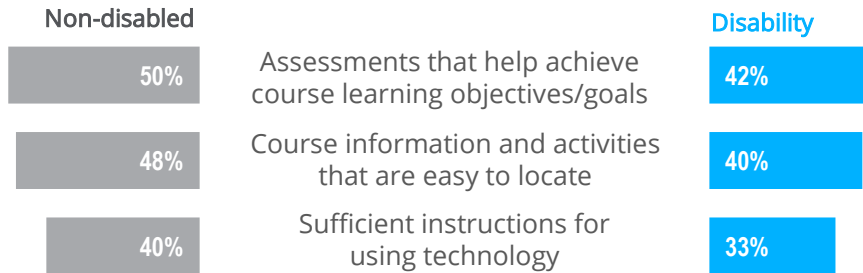


*69 (6%) respondents self-identified as Indigenous.

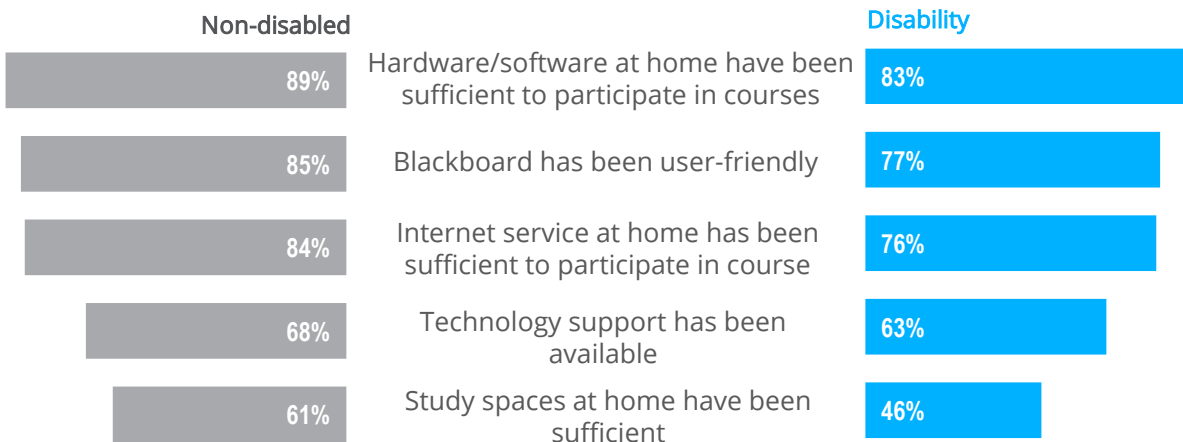
Students who identified as living with a disability were less likely to rate their overall online learning experience at MRU as excellent or good than non-disabled students (24% compared with 34%).*

Students with a disability thought their online courses provided less clarity and support than non-disabled students.

Extent courses provided... (% very much/quite a bit)

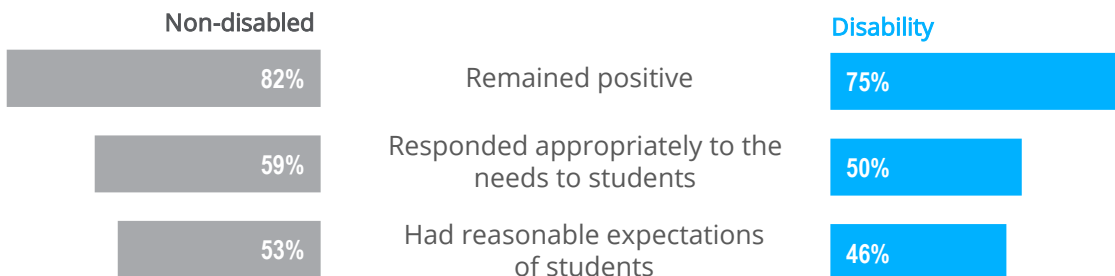


Students with a disability experienced more barriers with technology and accessing study space this fall than non-disabled students.



In light of the pandemic, students with a disability did not think their instructors were as supportive as non-disabled students.

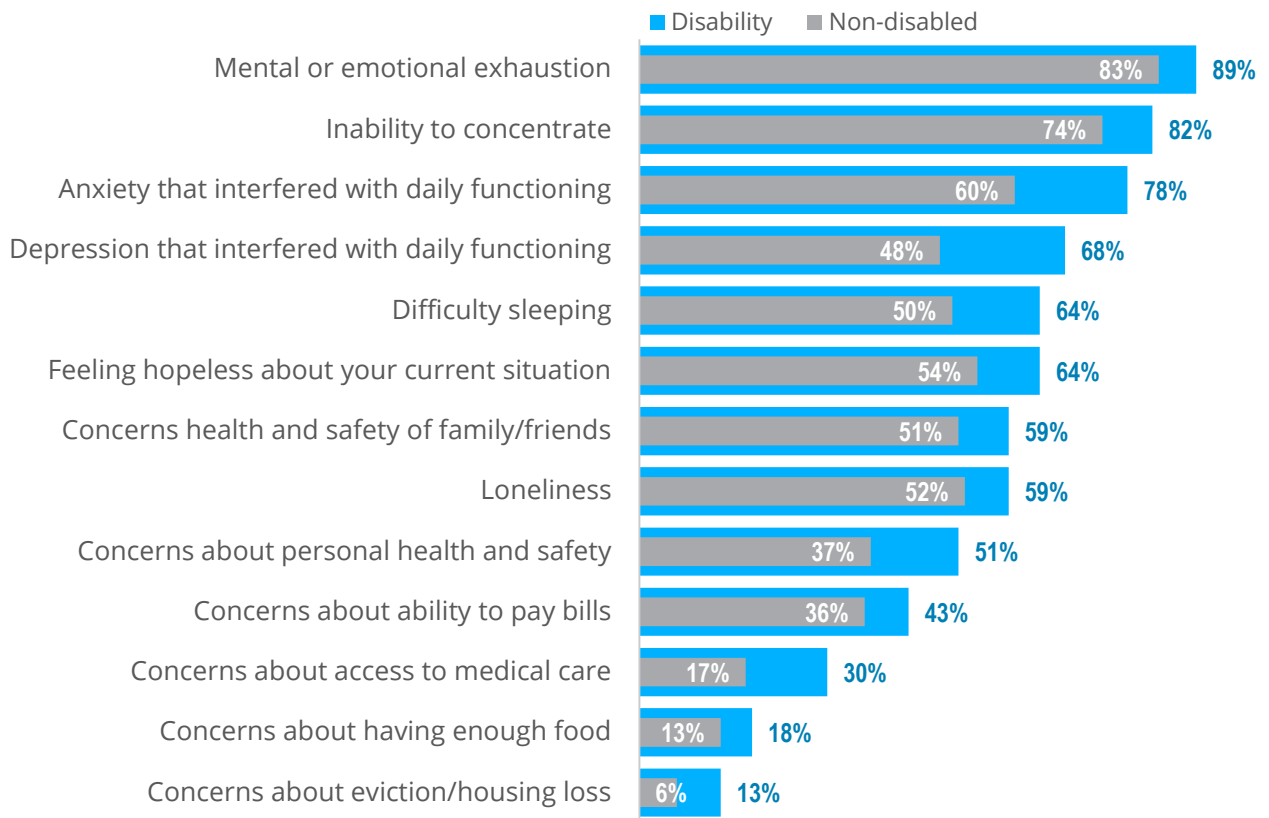
Extent instructors have... (% very much/quite a bit)



*219 (18%) respondents identified as living with a disability.

Overall, students with a disability experienced more negative impacts on their mental health and increased concerns as a result of the pandemic than non-disabled students.

Experienced an increase in... (% very much/quite a bit)



Students with a disability were much more concerned about having to do group work and having access to appropriate study space in the winter than non-disabled students.

Concerns for Winter 2021... (% very concerned/concerned)

