



# COVID-19 Pandemic Brief

2021 Results from the Multi-  
Institutional Study of Leadership

Center for the Study of Student Life

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THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY  
OFFICE OF STUDENT LIFE

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL) is an international survey that investigates the extent to which the university environment contributes to student leadership development and the preparation of global citizens. This brief report uses data from the 2021 MSL dataset to examine questions pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on students' basic needs, education, finances, career, family and involvement. Nearly half of respondents reported taking classes completely online at the time of this survey (March 2021).

## KEY FINDINGS

### During the COVID-19 pandemic...

- Over half of respondents expressed concern related to their ability to meet routine financial obligations (**50.7%**) and maintain sustainable employment (**61.3%**)
- **44.0%** of respondents expressed concern about their ability to continue their education; **58.9%** expressed concerns about their ability to pay for their future education
- **24.1%** of respondents expressed concerns related to sufficient access to food and **25.4%** expressed concern about sustainable access to housing
- **20.0%** of respondents reported having a family member or close friend that contracted COVID-19 and required hospitalization
- **12.1%** of respondents reported that a family member or close friend passed away from COVID-19.
- Over two-thirds of respondents (**70.9%**) reported that they had difficulty learning effectively online
- Almost half of the respondents (**48.3%**) reported a lack of access to instructors
- **82.0%** of respondents reported a lack of interaction and communication with other students
- **82.7%** of respondents reported that an inability to participate in campus activities was an obstacle to a successful transition to the current educational context

## INTRODUCTION

The Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL) is an online survey that was conducted to measure the environmental factors of the college experiences that contribute to student leadership development and, in turn, contribute to the preparation of engaged citizens. The MSL was administered online during March 2021. This report summarizes questions related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on a variety of topics. This module was added to the survey instrument for the 2021 administration. The questions asked respondents about the impact of the pandemic on their ability to meet basic needs, their experience with academic support and their learning and involvement.

In 2021, the survey was administered to a random sample of 4,000 undergraduate students on The Ohio State University's Columbus campus. Because Latinx and international students were underrepresented in the 2018 administration of the MSL, these groups were oversampled in 2021. A total of 715 students from the random sample and Latinx and international student oversamples responded for a response rate of 15.4%. For self-reported demographics, see Appendix A.

## FINDINGS

The following tables and figures summarize findings related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students at The Ohio State University.

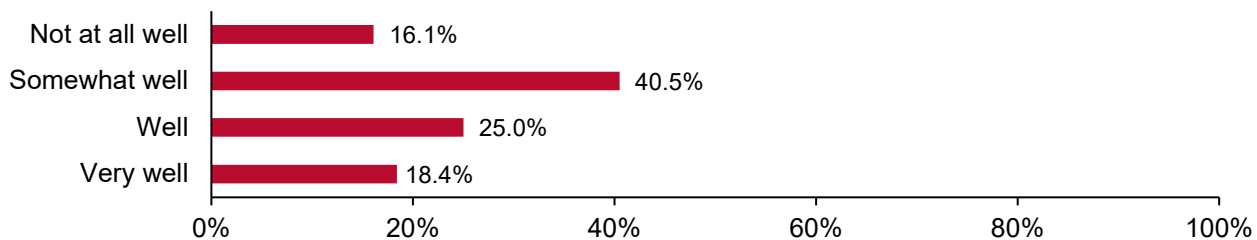


## MODES OF EDUCATION

The following tables summarize the primary modes of class instruction of survey respondents during the autumn 2020 semester (left) and spring 2021 semester (right).

In Fall 2020, what was your primary mode of class instruction? (n = 523)		What is your current mode of class instruction? (n = 523)	
Completely online	39.6%	Completely online	49.3%
Online most of the time	45.1%	Online most of the time	35.6%
About half online and half in-person	9.0%	About half online and half in-person	13.4%
In-person most of the time	1.9%	In-person most of the time	1.1%
Completely in-person	1.5%	Completely in-person	0.4%
I did not take classes in Fall 2020	2.9%	I am not currently taking classes	0.2%

### Due to changes during the COVID-19 pandemic, how well have you adapted to your current educational context? (n = 523)



## BASIC NEEDS AND SUCCESS ESSENTIALS

The fulfillment of basic needs is critical to leadership development, student success and the development of engaged citizens. To measure the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the basic needs of students, the MSL survey instrument asked respondents about their level of concern related to housing, food, education, medical care and employment.

### Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, how concerned are you about... (n = 522)

	Not at all concerned	Somewhat concerned	Concerned	Very Concerned	Not applicable
Sufficient access to food	75.9%	16.3%	5.7%	2.1%	0.0%
Sustainable access to housing	74.5%	15.5%	5.9%	4.0%	0.0%
Ability to meet routine financial obligations (e.g., utility bills, car loan)	49.2%	28.5%	13.6%	8.6%	0.0%
Adequate medical care	63.0%	23.9%	10.2%	2.9%	0.0%
Sustainable employment for self	38.7%	25.5%	18.4%	15.7%	1.7%
Sustainable employment for a parent/guardian	55.2%	19.6%	14.3%	8.9%	1.9%
Ability to continue your education	56.0%	20.5%	12.0%	10.3%	1.2%
Ability to pay for your education in the future	41.1%	24.4%	14.1%	19.6%	0.8%



**Which of the following factors, if any, were an obstacle to successful transition to the current educational context during the COVID-19 pandemic? (*n* = 523)**

	Yes	No
Loss of wages from employment	39.3%	60.7%
Loss or reduction of scholarship or grant aid	13.7%	86.3%
Loss or reduction of income of other family members	66.5%	33.5%
Loss or reduction of insurance coverage	7.7%	92.3%
A family member or close friend passed away from COVID-19	12.1%	87.9%
A family member or close friend contracted COVID-19 requiring hospitalization and eventually recovered	20.0%	80.0%
I contracted COVID-19 requiring hospitalization	1.9%	98.1%

## ACADEMIC SUPPORT AND LEARNING

The following table summarizes factors that respondents indicated made a transition to the new educational context difficult.

**Which of the following factors, if any, were an obstacle to successful transition to the current educational context during the COVID-19 pandemic? (*n* = 522)**

	Yes	No
Course content was not appropriate for online learning	55.2%	44.8%
Lack of access to your instructor(s)	48.3%	51.7%
Lack of access to academic advising	30.5%	69.5%
Inability to learn effectively in an online format	70.9%	29.1%
Inability to access learning support services	27.1%	72.9%
Lack of access to technology necessary for online learning	22.5%	77.5%
Lack of access to an appropriate study space or distracting home environment	60.7%	39.3%
Loss or cancellation of an expected internship or co-op	24.4%	75.6%

## INVOLVEMENT AND COMMUNITY

Although survey respondents noted difficulties related to online learning and their basic needs, a lack of in-person interaction and the inability to participate in campus activities were the most commonly reported obstacles to a successful transition to the educational context of the pandemic. The table below summarizes obstacles to a successful transition related to involvement and community.

**Which of the following factors, if any, were an obstacle to successful transition to the current educational context during the COVID-19 pandemic? (*n* = 523)**

	Yes	No
Lack of interaction/communication with other students	82.0%	18.0%
Inability to participate in campus activities that I would normally engage in (e.g., student groups, recreation activities, lecture series)	82.7%	17.3%



## APPENDIX A: STUDENT SELF-REPORTED DEMOGRAPHICS

	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Gender Identity</b>		
Man	160	31.0%
Woman	341	66.1%
Transgender/Gender Non-Conforming	15	2.9%
<b>Racial/Ethnic Identity</b>		
White	322	62.6%
Black	27	5.3%
Asian	59	11.5%
Latinx	23	4.5%
Other race/ethnicity	26	5.1%
Multiracial/ethnic	57	11.1%
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>		
Heterosexual	378	73.3%
LGBQ+	134	26.0%
Preferred response not listed	4	0.8%
<b>First-Generation College Student</b>		
Continuing-generation college student	440	84.8%
First-generation college student	72	13.9%
Don't know	7	1.3%
<b>Citizenship/Generation Status</b>		
Second-generation or higher	377	72.6%
First-generation U.S.-born	78	15.0%
Foreign-born (naturalized/permanent resident)	25	4.8%
International student	39	7.5%
<b>Disability Status</b>		
No disability	432	83.7%
Has disability	84	16.3%
<b>Political Affiliation</b>		
Liberal	277	50.6%
Moderate	191	34.9%
Conservative	79	14.4%

*Note.* A number of respondents did not complete demographic items; subtotals within each demographic category are less than the overall reported number of respondents for each year. Students in the Latinx and international student oversample did not all respond to the demographic items.

