

Junior and Senior Students' Well-Being during the COVID-19 Pandemic

This report was written by the Campus Assessment Working Group (CAWG) ACES subcommittee. The 2021 University of Maryland Student Survey (UMSS 21) was administered online from March 22 - April 9, 2021, to juniors and seniors enrolled in Professional Writing courses. This report summarizes initial findings on students' general well-being in Spring 2021, about a year into the COVID-19 pandemic.

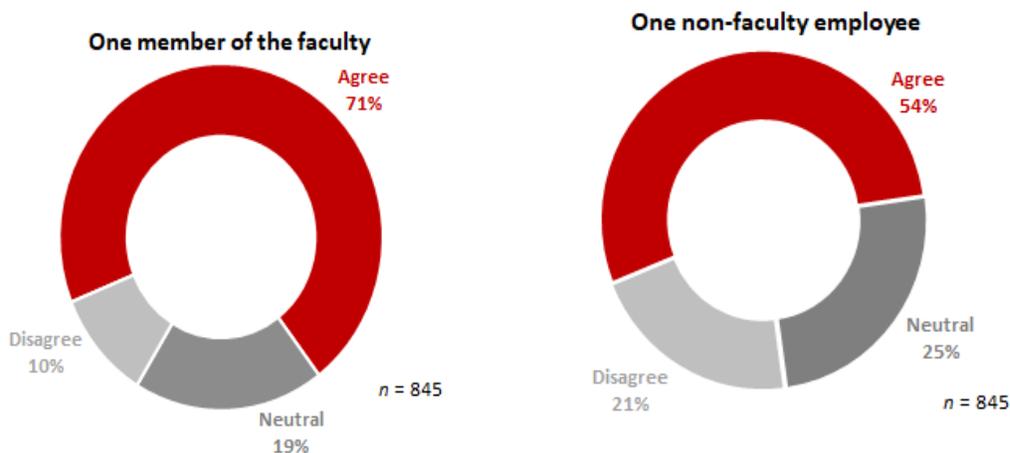
In the Spring 2021 semester, 884 students completed the survey (24% of all students enrolled in these courses), and 99.5% had been at the University of Maryland for more than one semester. The distribution of respondents by race/ethnicity was similar to that of the UMD population. However, a chi-square test revealed that the sample gender distribution was significantly different from the population—students identified as female in the university's Student Information System records were overrepresented (57% of respondents compared to 48% of the population)¹.

Overall, respondents generally agreed that there was a faculty or non-faculty employee who cared about their well-being.

- In Spring 2021, 71% of respondents strongly agreed/agreed that at least one faculty member cared about their well-being, and 54% felt the same about a non-faculty employee (Figure 1).

Question to Consider:

How can the university further increase connection among students and faculty/staff in the post-pandemic era?



¹ The university records reflect current reporting guidelines and only include male and female as options.

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Figure 1. Percent distribution of respondents' agreement with items about university employees caring for their well-being, UMSS21.

Generally, respondents felt connected to campus and were happy with the number of friends they made at UMD.

- Respondents felt that they belonged to UMD (72% strongly agree/agree) and were happy with the number of friends they have made at UMD so far (64% strongly agree/agree; Figure 2).
- However, about one in 10 respondents strongly agreed/agreed they feel out of place (12%), and 9% strongly agreed/agreed they do not fit in (Figure 2).

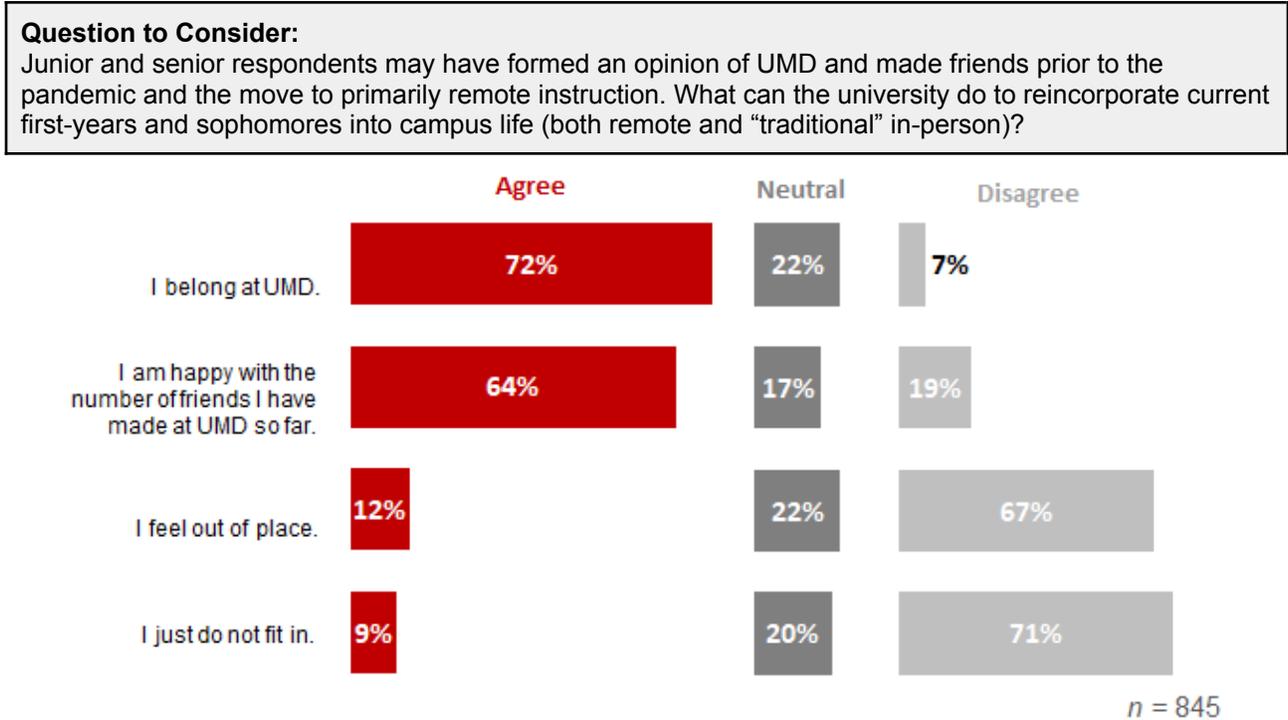


Figure 2. Percent distribution of respondents' agreement about their connection to campus, UMSS21. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

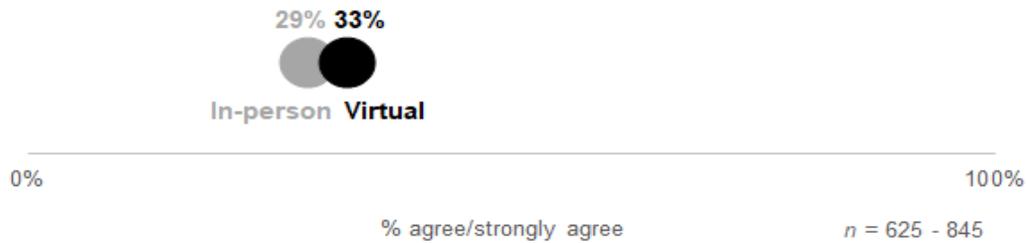
As expected, there was limited participation with social activities in Spring 2021. Still, respondents were interested in participating in more in-person activities.

- Some respondents liked the online and in-person activities that UMD offered this past spring: about a third said there were university-sponsored activities they liked, both in-person (29%) and online (33%) (Figure 3).
- Respondents said they wanted to be more involved in social activities, especially in-person. Only 42% of respondents agreed/strongly agreed they were as involved in virtual social activities as they wanted to be, and 33% said the same of in-person activities (Figure 4).

Questions to Consider:

- How can the university offer both in-person and virtual activities to appeal to all students?
- Does the lack of activities that students like influence participation rates?

There are university-sponsored in-person and virtual activities that I like.



Note: Respondents who selected "not applicable" to the item about in-person activities are excluded from the figure.

Figure 3. Percent of respondents who agreed/strongly agreed with liking virtual and in-person programming.

I am as involved in university-sponsored in-person and virtual social activities as I want to be.



Note: Respondents who selected "not applicable" to the item about in-person activities are excluded from the figure.

Figure 4. Percent of respondents who agreed/strongly agreed with engagement in virtual and in-person programming, UMSS21.

Conclusions

The data presented here represent parts of juniors' and seniors' experiences during an extraordinarily challenging year. As the campus returns to a more traditional format in Fall 2021, the university might consider what lessons we learned that could be carried forward. Some students benefited from the different learning environments and settings for interacting with each other, faculty, and staff. At the same time, these survey data do not necessarily capture the quality of these interactions. The traditional higher education experience at a residential college will continue after the pandemic. How can we take what we have learned about the different ways students, faculty, and staff interact, however, and apply those lessons to undergraduate education at UMD?"