



ISSUE PAPER FOR CACB CONFERENCE 2022

NAME OF ISSUE: Impacts of Covid-19 on Architecture Student Wellness

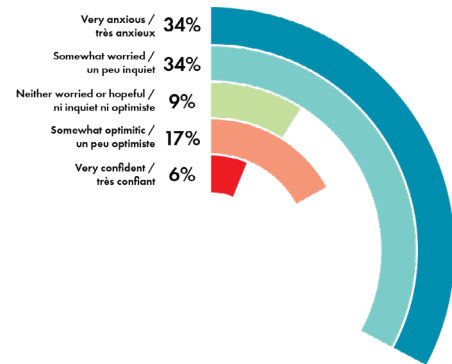
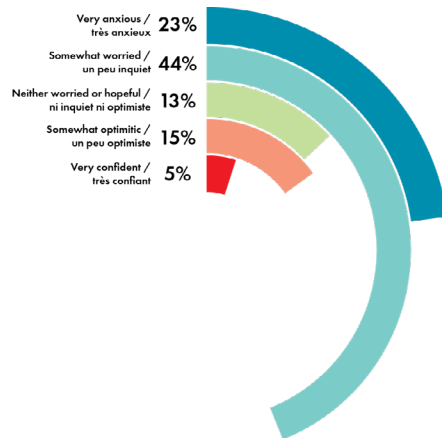
ISSUE DESCRIPTION: The Canadian Architecture Students Association (CASA) circulated a wellness survey/ check-in, in 2020 and 2021. This survey acted as a method of understanding how architecture students across Canada had been affected by on-line learning during the global covid-19 pandemic.

CONTEXT: The following summaries have been produced by CASA representatives to help outline the trend in responses received from students, touching on topics about physical and mental wellbeing, major concerns throughout the Covid-19 Pandemic, what students were looking forward to, as well as a follow up question from the 2021 survey which inquired what students' experience had been with on-line learning.

RELEVANCE: Throughout the Covid-19 Pandemic architecture students across Canada faced unprecedented challenges to their architectural education. Discussing and developing a heightened awareness of the actual conditions and impacts that students experienced in an ever-changing educational environment will provide insight into future institutional approaches.

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HOW STUDENTS WERE FEELING



HOW ARE YOU FEELING? / COMMENT VOUS SENTEZ-VOUS?

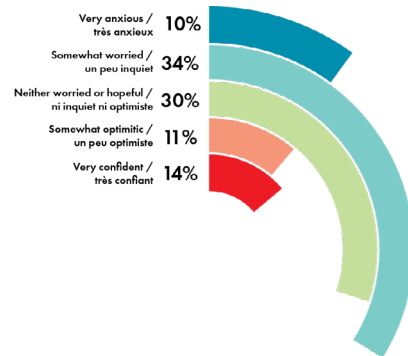
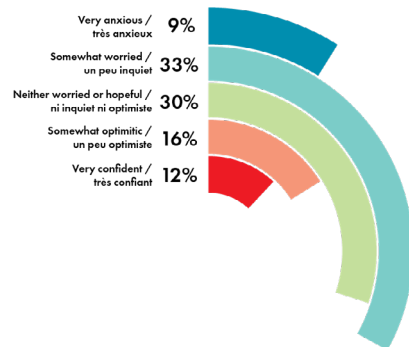
2020 | 276 RESPONSES/ RÉPONSES

Mentally | Mentalement

HOW ARE YOU FEELING? / COMMENT VOUS SENTEZ-VOUS?

2021 | 93 RESPONSES/ RÉPONSES

Mentally | Mentalement



HOW ARE YOU FEELING? / COMMENT VOUS SENTEZ-VOUS?

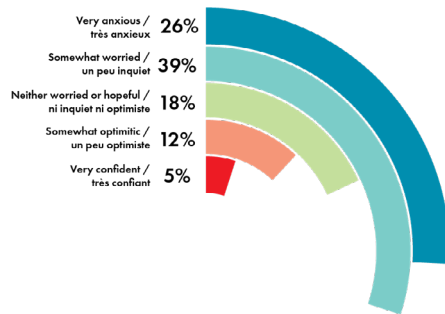
2020 | 276 RESPONSES/ RÉPONSES

Physically | Physiquement

HOW ARE YOU FEELING? / COMMENT VOUS SENTEZ-VOUS?

2021 | 93 RESPONSES/ RÉPONSES

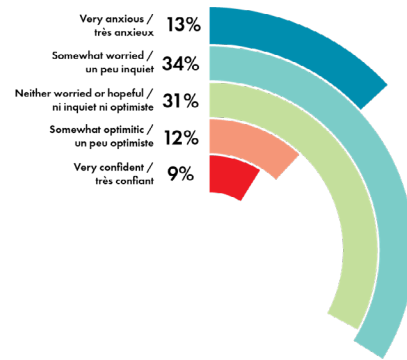
Physically | Physiquement



HOW ARE YOU FEELING? / COMMENT VOUS SENTEZ-VOUS?

2020 | 276 RESPONSES/ RÉPONSES

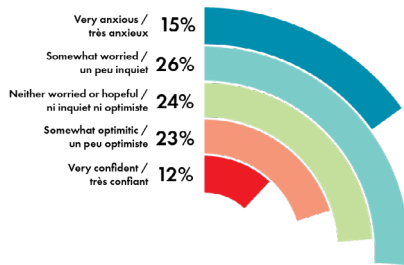
Financially | Financièrement



HOW ARE YOU FEELING? / COMMENT VOUS SENTEZ-VOUS?

2021 | 93 RESPONSES/ RÉPONSES

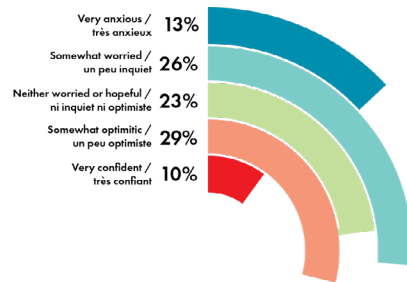
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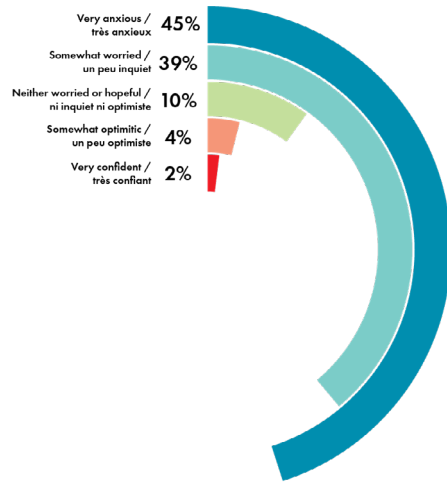
About your school's response to COVID-19 | Par rapport à la réponse de votre université envers la pandémie de la COVID-19



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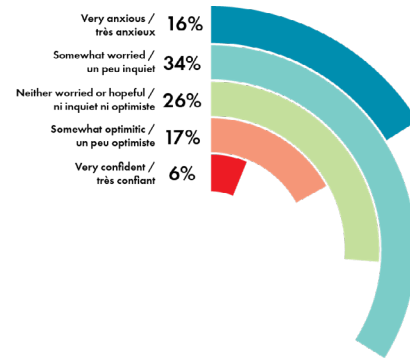
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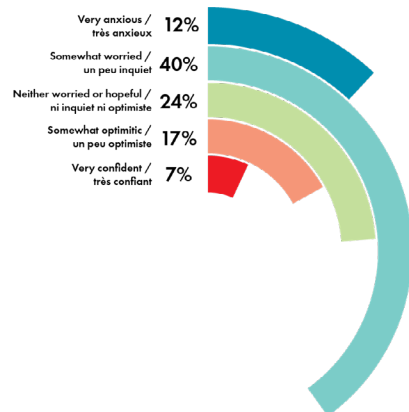
About professional opportunities | Par rapport aux opportunités professionnelles



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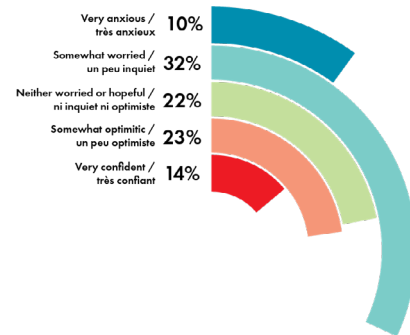
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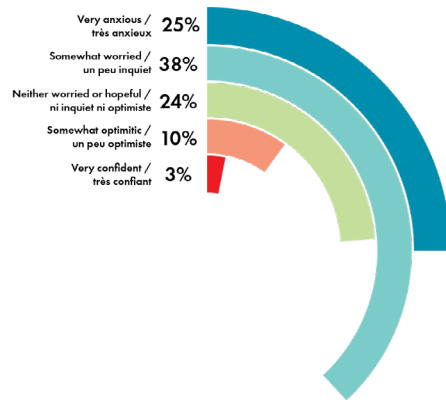
About your family, friends and peers | Par rapport à votre famille, vos amis, vos pairs



HOW ARE YOU FEELING? / COMMENT VOUS SENTEZ-VOUS?

2021 | 93 RESPONSES/ RÉPONSES

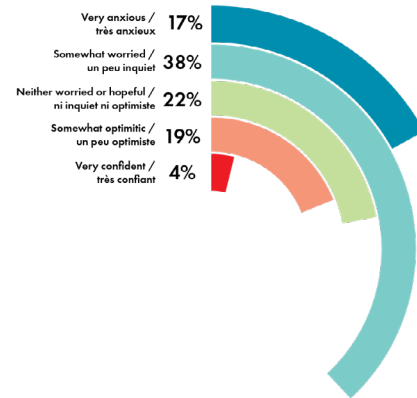
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**HOW ARE YOU FEELING? /
 COMMENT VOUS SENTEZ-VOUS?**

2020 | 276 RESPONSES/ RÉPONSES

About social activities (in & out of school) | Par rapport aux événements sociaux (incluant ceux organisés à l'interne et à l'externe)



**HOW ARE YOU FEELING? /
 COMMENT VOUS SENTEZ-VOUS?**

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About social activities (in & out of school) | Par rapport aux événements sociaux (incluant ceux organisés à l'interne et à l'externe)

MAJOR CONCERNS

2020 Responses

COVID-19 pandemic has been a global serious issue that has adversely impacted humanity. This Wellness Survey was aimed to investigate its impact on students' lives and learning circumstances. The Wellness Survey results 2020 summarized below, highlight these student concerns.

With universities immediately shutting down, and classes and studios moving on-line, many students expressed great abhorrence towards the modified methods of delivery of education. Due to complete lock-down, they complained of no access to library services and physical archives, workshops/ wood shop, model making resources as well as no amendments to the curriculum accommodating such constraints . Seemingly increased workload by lack of resources, with no hands-on studio exposure resulted in an overwhelming experience for the students. Further to these issues, students also communicated about the universities' lack of flexibility with deadlines, that there was no time given for adjusting into the new set up, nor was there any consideration given for differences in time zones, time management for the new pattern and/or the additional workload, resulting in a demoralizing atmosphere for students. Other commonly cited issues were cancellation of international tours or sessions, no foreign exchange study opportunities, no hands-on experience, no wi-fi access, or even a proper workspace. Understandably, these resulted in the assignment grades going down. Decreased quality of education not only prompted fee structure related disagreements between the students and the institution, but it also translated to rapidly worsening mental health.

During the global lock-down, a severe drop in the economy was observed, along with which, graduate and summer co-ops reduced significantly. The lack of jobs severely limited career building opportunities. Combined with the reduced work positions, there was also high competition, making many students grow anxious of not being able to generate funds to pay for school and medication. A general opinion was that there hadn't been a point in opting for a co-op program, and there being no co-op opportunity (local or international) in certain cases even meant losing an entire year.

Some students enrolled in a co-op program claimed that they felt out of place in the time schedule of the program in comparison to those students who managed to secure a job and didn't get laid off. For the newly graduated, unemployment gave them a feeling of being cut off from their own field because of such events happening right after graduating.

Another ambiguous area impacted was the student housing amenities. With not enough clarity on mandatory focus on on-line studies, developing and maintaining plans over student housing would amount to an unnecessary waste of money and food.

With an on-line study schedule taking shape, issues raised were that such infrastructure was introduced without any training, resulting in a student experience that was "uninspiring" and "demotivating", especially

because in-person collaboration (as in studio classes) had been cut out completely. Some feedback even mentioned that the overall semester organizing was rather confusing, that in turn led to more anxiety and lower productivity.

With the virus manifesting itself globally, and impacting every known sphere of operation, it has brought with it hitherto unknown problems, and uncertainty. The mental & physical health issues faced, no contact with loved ones (isolation and quarantining), plus the new norm of coping with on-line classes can undeniably be exhausting. And of course, with its unknown quality, questions would always be asked whether it's going to get any better or will people continue to live with a strange fear towards each other.

2021 Responses

Much like 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic left a large number of students struggling even in 2021. Students especially faced financial and mental health challenges that put their education in jeopardy. They had to overcome huge changes to their lives and learning environment, have new living arrangements that made learning difficult, and often lacked the resources necessary to even log into class on-line. If 2020 presented completely unknown challenges, the continuation of the pandemic into 2021 posed further coping issues to the students. The constantly mutating variants, continuous spikes in cases, people growing weary of lock-downs, discomfort of on-line school continuing for another year, all these factors continued to play on the minds of the students.

Adding to the pressures, there was always a suspicion that once in-person classes resumed, there were possibilities that cases would increase, causing yet another spike, that such uncertainty would ultimately overwhelm the institution - since the wavering steps of schools reopening and then maybe, re-shutting would be tiresome and a logistical nightmare. Moreover, Covid-19 being such a volatile and evolving pandemic, the introduction of new variants would keep everyone on their watch, resulting in fatigue and exhaustion. The survey also focused on scenarios where hybrid methods of teaching were not adopted by many schools yet. Students found working and/or studying remotely to be a very uneasy arrangement and one which they couldn't adjust to comfortably. In the cases where students did acclimatize to on-line learning, the next time off-line classes get commenced, it would again affect their equilibrium.

Furthermore, the continuing malady of not having co-op opportunities or student exchange programs, only went on to exacerbate the problem. From the mental and physical challenges mentioned above, even the financial issues faced were unrelenting in their pressure. Scenarios of unemployment, economic crises, deflated markets, all coupled with individual loss of earnings and lack of well-being put the question around fee expenses and rental charges.

Finally, students' performance and abilities took a severe beating due to the pandemic factors. Not being accorded opportunities to connect on a personal or professional level, made them doubt their own strengths and characteristics. Isolation, depression and a cocooned living quarters demotivated many. Monotonous situations due to lack of in-person supervision often led to low concentration, distraction

and instances of “zoning out”. Many new students also were left feeling helpless as they had only recently moved into a new city/country for their academic future, and there, they were made to face uncertainties relating to housing, food, finances and also alternate between on-line and off-line classes. Students who drifted out like this cited such scenarios to be the cause of them losing out their daily rhythm, falling behind in their duties and a general lack of interest / attention to studies. Guidance, mentoring, support from faculty would have been a great antidote to these issues; although there were instances of such support, largely, to the surveyed, it felt that the professors did not take enough steps to help out despite noticing the increasing “all nighters” hence deterioration of physical and mental health.

WHAT WERE STUDENTS LOOKING FORWARD TO:

With the abrupt upheaval of all normality at the onset of the Covid-19 Pandemic, many student responses centered around gaining more certainty in their day-to-day lives, as well as being able to return home to friends and family. There was hope that the pandemic would end, and students could return back to their regular scheduled programming.

With the early uncertainty around course delivery over, overwhelmingly students were most looking forward to returning to in person learning. Survey participants described the studio environment as a place for communal collaboration, an engaging and inspiring atmosphere, as well as a workspace for their own creative output. The prospect of being in proximity of classmates and peers was looked forward to as an opportunity to network as well as foster a community of like-minded individuals. Students wished not only to meet their classmates and reunite with their studio friends, but also expressed their interest in having face-to-face interaction with their faculty and staff members. The anticipation for returning to in-person learning meant developing a sense of community that had been difficult to replicate in a virtual environment. Returning to studio and in person learning was referred to as receiving the high quality education that tuition is meant to be paying for.

Students who had reached the end of their architectural educational journey were looking forward to their graduation, some looked forward to being done with architecture school all together, and others were hopeful that they would be able to secure internships and/or co-op opportunities in the summer months. Many students who were looking for industry employment during their education noted that it was required to offset the burden of tuition and living costs.

Many respondents were optimistic in the sense that they were enthusiastic about some of the positive aspects that the global pandemic might influence such as; a shift in society where the environment is better respected, addressing challenges with communication in architecture school and practice, the ability to attend virtual lectures globally, the development of on-line resources, potential for hybrid work environments, new opportunities for time management and the flexibility with physical and mental health days.

EXPERIENCE WITH ONLINE LEARNING:

2021 Responses (Question introduced in 2021 Survey)

Adopting a form of learning different from the traditional method of education can presume both advantageous and disadvantageous to a student's academic success and personal growth. After analyzing the responses from the CASA-ACEA Check-in 2021 results, there were a greater number of individuals who experienced a negative outcome from remote learning—pertaining to the outlook of educational experiences and personal situations which may have affected an individual's academics.

Completing the studio through the medium of zoom for a long duration of time acquired an overwhelming effect on students' ability to focus and concentrate. Such a position would rather tire and drain students' energy, resulting in their experience to feel “exhausting” and “boring”.

Through remote learning, the importance of communication skills and enthusiasm were over elaborated as they determined the outcome of how and if a student would efficiently obtain information. Although students felt as if most of their professors were well equipped and adapted to switching to remote learning, students feel as if their quality of learning has declined, further attributing to why classes may feel tedious and uninspiring. As some students strongly expressed their detest for on-line learning, some students enjoyed working in their own cultivated environment, while others felt such a method of education was possible though not enjoyable.

Environment and location of study were taken into consideration with regards to the student's role with academic success. Pertaining to students' responses, environment and access to personal and public space significantly affected proper access to classes and individual work ethic. The barrier of communication not only affected the ability for students to develop relationships between their peers and professors, but such barriers also possessed difficulties for students to stay engaged. A majority of students believed it was difficult to retain information remotely—a cause and result of the feeling of amotivation, exhaustion and stress. As many students disclosed how grades were not the primary issue of concern as they were not extensively affected, some students felt as if they weren't able to perform to the best of their abilities. Periodically, students consistently expressed concern for their mental health. With difficulties to retain information remotely, the feeling of amotivation, exhaustion and stress were further accumulated throughout their duration of study. Some students felt that there were no social activities to partake in within the program, increasing the feeling of disconnection between students and their peers and professors. Such disengagement to social engagements have been detrimental to the mental health of students. As some students expressed how remote learning affected their performance, they found comfort in being in the environment of a home since there were no distractions from peers when completing individual tasks. However, conversely some students emphasized the significance in differentiating a live/work environment and how remote learning deprived students of the ability to make such distinction. In particular, it is hard to differentiate and separate the stress and difficulties associated within an individual's school life and personal life, making it harder for individuals to attend to certain priorities.