



Being a Student at Rutgers-Camden during the COVID-19 Pandemic:

A report on the findings from the SERU Consortium's survey on the effect of COVID-19 on Rutgers undergraduate and graduate students, including their transition to remote instruction, financial status, health and wellbeing, sense of belonging and engagement, and future enrollment.

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Executive Summary

Introduction

- Rutgers participated along with other public research universities through the Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) Consortium in a special survey to assess the impact of COVID-19 on the student experience.
- The survey included questions about students' educational experience, satisfaction with institutional response to the COVID-19 pandemic, financial concerns, health and wellbeing, belonging and engagement, future plans, and demographics.
- The survey was administered for 4 weeks (May 26-June 24, 2020) to all degree-seeking undergraduate and graduate students enrolled at Rutgers during Spring 2020.
- Response rates*:

Campus	Ugrad	Grad	Total
Camden	21.2%	17.8%	20.4%

*Includes partial responses.

- The results in this report are for Rutgers University only, and present Rutgers-Camden findings.

Institutional Response

- RU-C students were overwhelmingly satisfied with the University's overall response to the COVID-19 pandemic. 82.5% of undergraduate students and 76.3% of graduate/professional students rated the University's overall response satisfactory or very satisfactory.
- Students were also prompted to provide suggestions on what Rutgers could have reasonably done to improve their experience during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the following recommendations emerged around online learning, central administration, and financial support:

Online Learning

- Consistent use of software utilized by professors across their courses
- Clear course expectations between faculty and students in an online learning environment
- Flexibility in course structure (synchronous vs. asynchronous) and assignment deadlines
- Improve communication and digital presence of faculty

Central Administration

- Improve communication from university leaders with more transparency in their decision making
- More lead time in decisions that would require actions by the students. For example, many students living on campus felt rushed to move out of housing with very little time to make arrangements

Financial Support

- Larger refunds for tuition and student fees during Spring 2020
- Access to adequate amounts of emergency funding to help cover their needs

Educational Experience

- Most respondents took courses for credit at Rutgers during the COVID-19 pandemic, but online courses were a new experience for about one-fifth of undergraduates and one-third of graduate students at RU-C.
- Graduate students were a little better in adapting to online instruction.
- While students did indicate problems and not all were satisfied, many students were satisfied with the quality of instruction and support provided.
- Positives of online instruction included the alleviation of some stress and increased time for academics.
- 86% of students reported at least one obstacle in the transition to online learning. Reported obstacles were related to concerns about lack of engagement and practical issues related to study space.

Graduate Experience (asked only of graduate/professional students)

- RU-C graduate students were satisfied with their advisor's support during COVID-19, but felt less supported in seeking funding to financially support their education and preparing for their career or the job market.
- Lack of an appropriate study space and the need to provide additional care for oneself or a family member were the top obstacles to progress towards their degree.

Financial Concerns

- Undergraduate students reported higher levels of concern about their ability to pay for their education this fall at Rutgers.
- Job and wage loss of respondent or family member and unexpected increases in expenses appear to be the most prominent financial hardships experienced during the pandemic.

Student Health and Wellbeing

- RU-C students' mental and physical health, wellbeing, and safety were negatively impacted by the pandemic.
- Undergraduates were more likely than graduate students to experience physical/emotional abuse where they were living during the pandemic.
- Undergraduate students were more likely than graduate students to report concerns about food running out (33.6% vs. 25.7%). About one in three students reported concerns about the ability to cover the cost of housing.
- 28.3% of undergraduates and 30.7% of graduate students reported clinically significant major depressive disorder symptoms, and 32.8% of undergraduates and 40.4% of graduate students reported clinically significant generalized anxiety disorder symptoms (based on PHQ-2 and GAD-2).

Student Health and Wellbeing - Rutgers Add-on Questions

- Rutgers included additional questions on the survey regarding food and housing security and utilization of student support services.
- Some RU-C students reported cutting or skipping the size of meals because there wasn't enough money for food.
- Graduate students were slightly more likely than undergraduates to report the place they were living was temporary.
- Student activities and library resources were among the most utilized student support services.

Belonging and Engagement

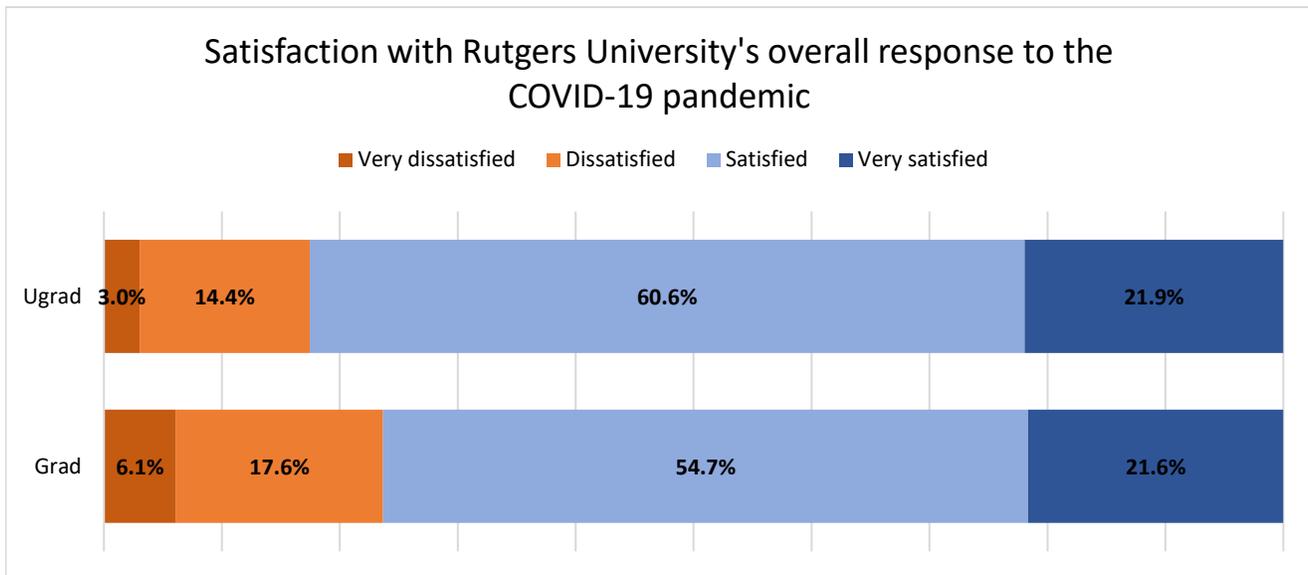
- RU-C undergraduate and graduate students reported similar levels of belonging at Rutgers.
- 90.3% of undergraduates and 87.0% of graduate students felt supported by Rutgers during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- RU-C students also supported their communities during the pandemic by checking in with friends and family, making donations, and helping others obtain food or other necessities.

Future Plans

- Most RU-C students will re-enroll in the fall (unless graduating) with less than 1% stating definitely that they will not return.
- Financial constraints is the main consideration for not returning this fall (among those unsure or not returning).
- Beyond Fall 2020, there is much more uncertainty about returning to Rutgers among those that are unsure or not returning.
- Approximately half of graduating undergraduates reported no employment offer.

Institutional Response

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Central Administration

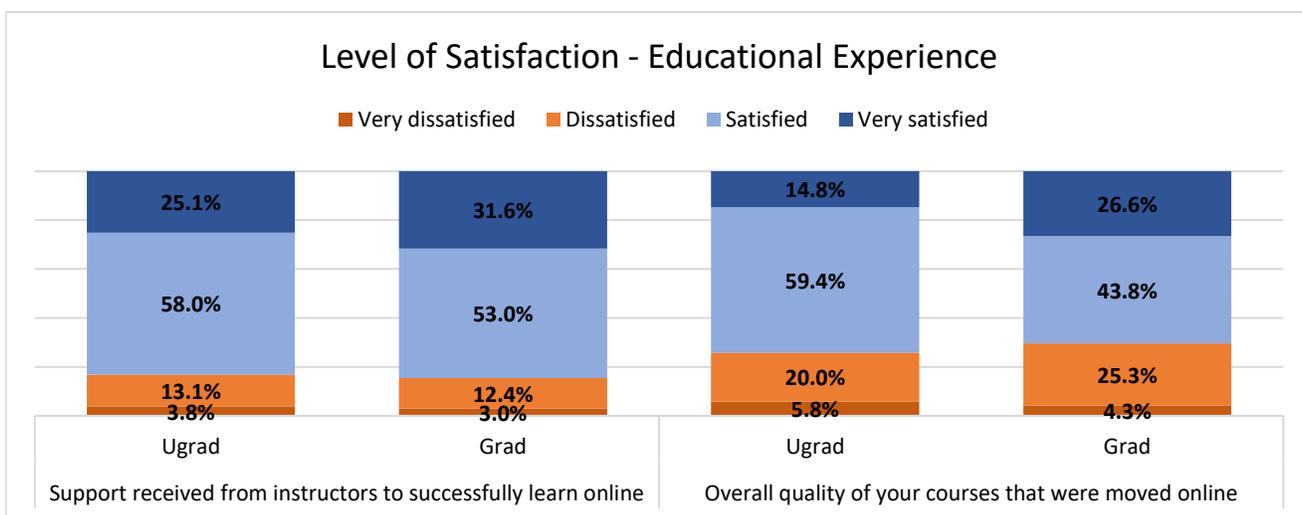
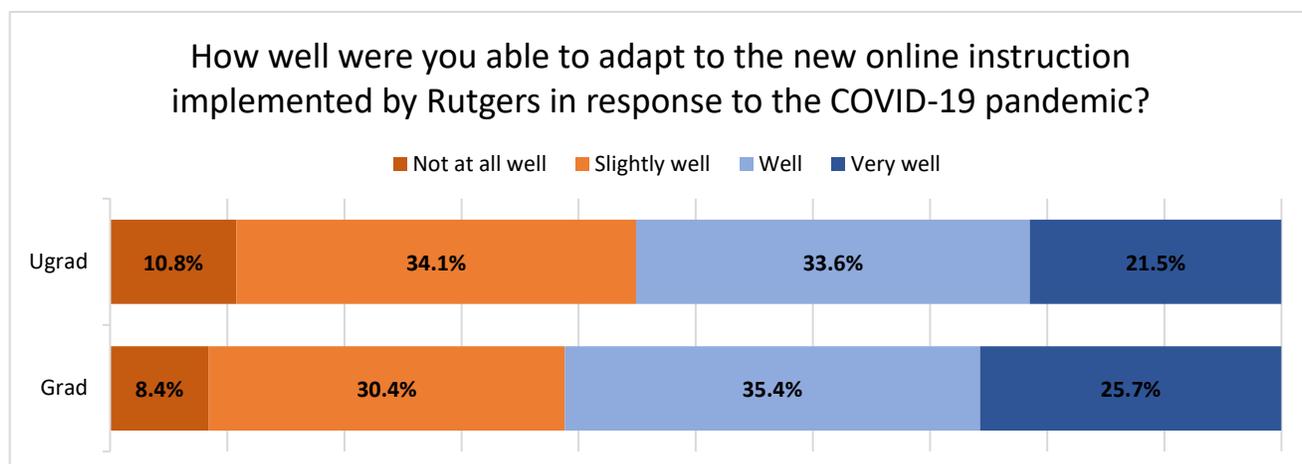
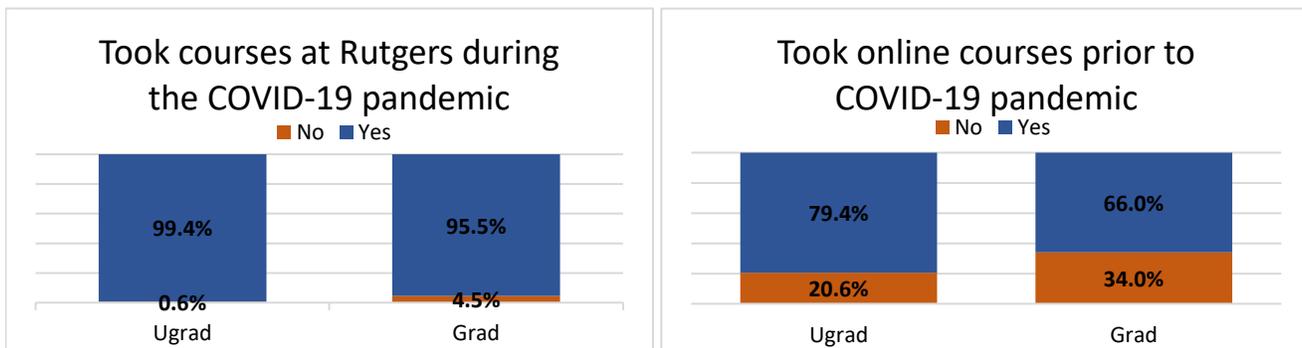
- Improve communication from university leaders with more transparency in their decision making
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Financial Support

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Educational Experience

Most respondents took courses for credit at Rutgers during the COVID-19 pandemic, but online courses were a new experience for about one-fifth of undergraduates and one-third of graduate students at RU-C. Graduate students were a little better in adapting to online instruction. While students did indicate problems and not all were satisfied, many students were satisfied with the quality of instruction and support provided. Positives of online instruction included the alleviation of some stress and increased time for academics. 86% of students reported at least one obstacle in the transition to online learning. Reported obstacles were related to concerns about lack of engagement and practical issues related to study space.



Positive experiences associated with online learning during COVID-19 pandemic	Ugrad	Grad
I enjoy learning in an online format	28.6%	26.0%
I had more time for academics	40.4%	32.6%
I was able to attend classes more regularly	13.4%	9.7%
I was able to prepare more for classes	27.8%	21.6%
I was more productive completing homework or assignments	26.9%	14.1%
I had better access to faculty members	7.5%	4.4%
I felt more comfortable participating in class discussions	28.8%	13.7%
I felt more connected to faculty members	8.1%	4.8%
I felt more connected to academic support staff	5.4%	3.5%
I felt more connected to other students	7.1%	4.8%
I felt less stressed about my studies	31.4%	32.6%
Other	4.2%	7.0%
None of the above	21.7%	25.6%

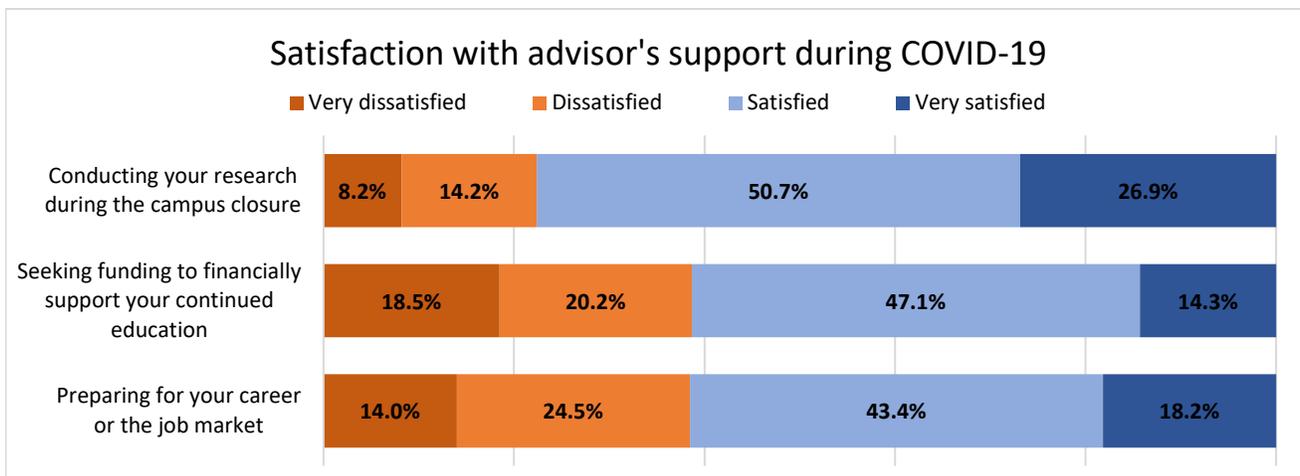
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Obstacles to successful transition to online learning during COVID-19 pandemic	Ugrad	Grad
Course content that is not appropriate for online learning	32.8%	20.9%
Lack of clear expectations for online learning from instructor(s)	34.1%	24.4%
Lack of access to your instructor(s)	26.5%	17.5%
Lack of access to academic advising	15.9%	12.8%
Inability to learn effectively in an online format	45.1%	41.0%
Inability to access the learning support services	11.3%	6.0%
Lack of interaction/communication with other students	44.1%	50.0%
Lack of motivation for online learning	54.2%	52.1%
Lack of access to technology necessary for online learning (e.g., computer hardware,	13.5%	9.8%
Lack of familiarity with technical tools necessary for online learning	13.0%	10.3%
Inability to attend classes at their scheduled online meeting time	18.1%	11.1%
Lack of access to an appropriate study space or distracting home environment	44.1%	47.4%
Instances of bullying or harassment in your online classes	0.6%	0.4%
Other	9.7%	10.7%
None of the above	13.5%	14.5%

*Check all that apply item. Percentages will not sum to 100%.

Graduate Experience (asked only of graduate/professional students)

RU-C graduate students were satisfied with their advisor's support during COVID-19, but felt less supported in seeking funding to financially support their education and preparing for their career or the job market. Lack of an appropriate study space and the need to provide additional care for oneself or a family member were the top obstacles to progress towards their degree.

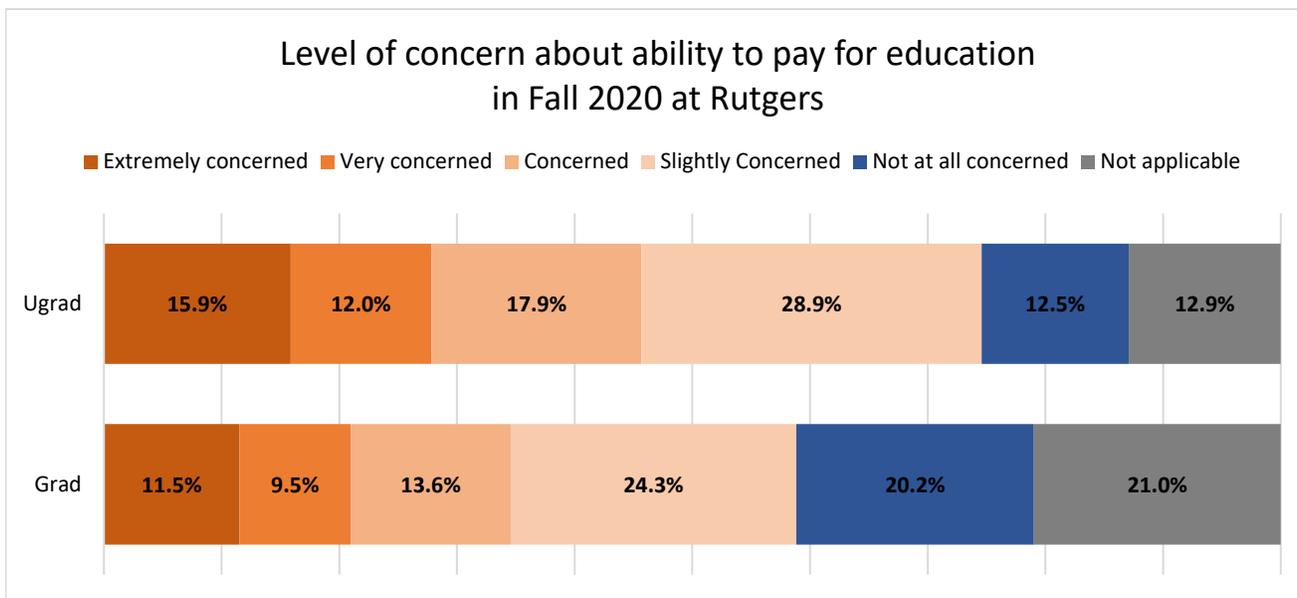


Obstacles to progress towards your graduate/professional degree during COVID-19	%
Inability to schedule qualifying events (e.g., postponed qualifying exams, dissertation defense, licensure examinations)	7.5%
Inability to conduct research (e.g., lab closure, limitation to research with human subjects, lack of access to library or physical spaces, etc.)	17.8%
Inability to fulfill required clinical rotation, residency, or internship hours	5.4%
Inadequate access to quality advising	14.1%
Inadequate access to faculty	18.7%
Lack of access to administrative services (e.g., delayed paperwork for qualifying events)	8.3%
Increased teaching workload associated with transitioning to online teaching	12.9%
Increased research workload	7.1%
Increased hours worked or obtained another job	16.2%
Inability to attend professional conferences	18.7%
Lack of access to an appropriate study space or distracting home environment	46.9%
Need to provide additional care for yourself or a family member	28.2%
Other	6.2%
None of the above	19.5%

*Check all that apply item. Percentages will not sum to 100%.

Financial Concerns

Undergraduate students reported higher levels of concern about their ability to pay for their education this fall at Rutgers. Job and wage loss of respondent or family member and unexpected increases in expenses appear to be the most prominent financial hardships experienced during the pandemic.

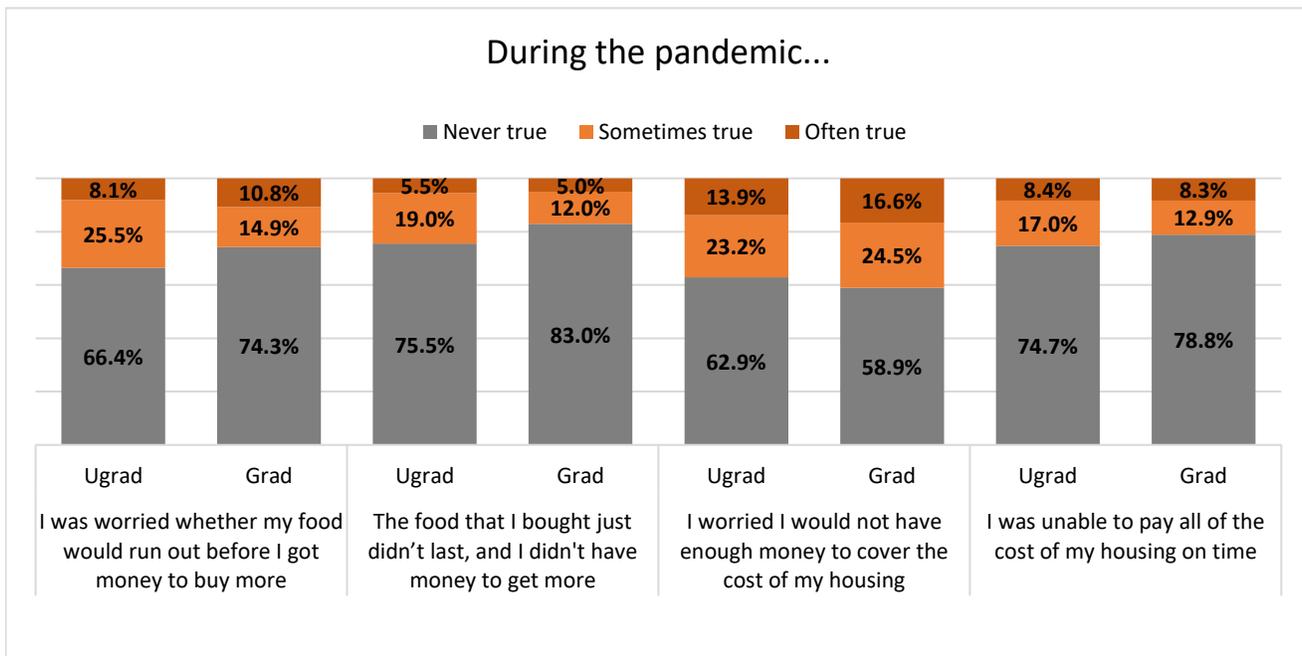
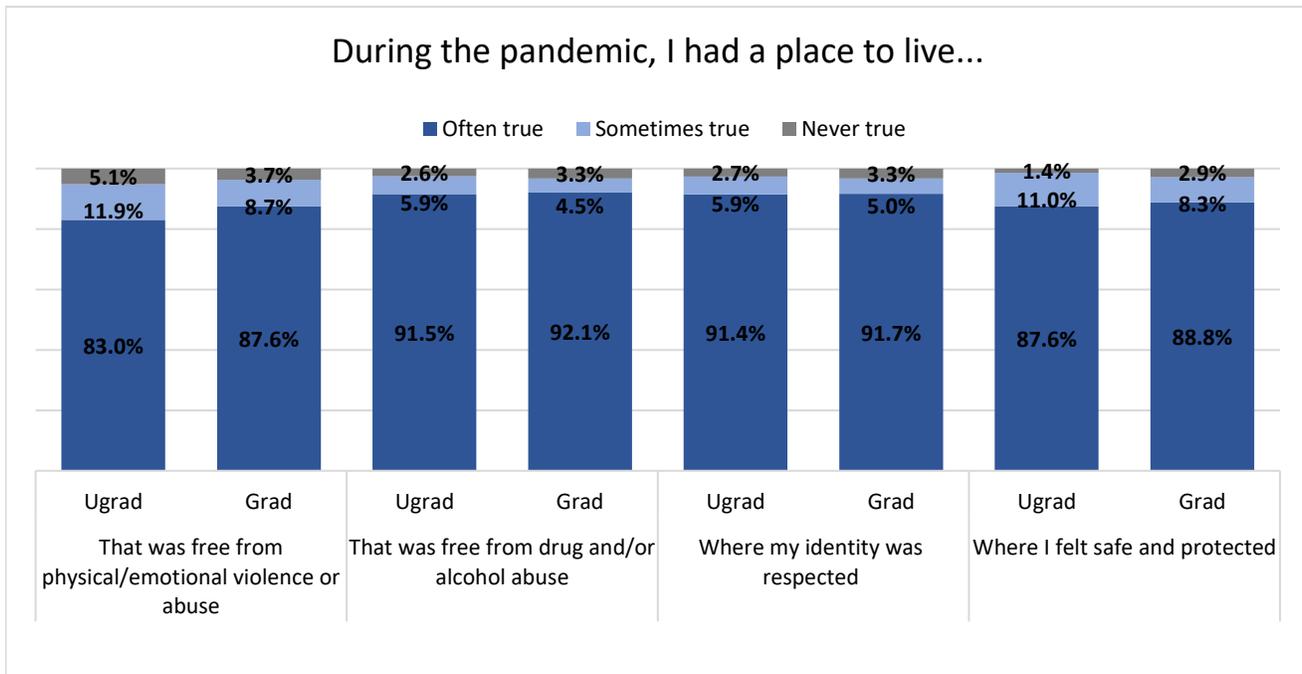


Financial hardships experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic	Ugrad	Grad
Unexpected increases in spending for technology (e.g., hardware or software)	19.4%	22.6%
Loss of wages from on-campus employment	10.9%	3.4%
Loss of wages from off-campus employment (including internship wages)	35.6%	32.8%
Loss or reduction of a scholarship	3.1%	3.4%
Loss or reduction of grant aid (federal or state)	5.7%	2.1%
Loss or reduction of student loan aid	3.1%	1.3%
Loss or reduction of insurance coverage	3.2%	3.4%
Loss or cancellation of an expected job or internship offer	21.7%	20.0%
Unexpected increases in living expenses (e.g., moving expenses, inability to cancel housing contract or lease on- or off-campus)	21.5%	23.4%
Loss or reduction of income of other family members	44.2%	33.2%
Other	5.1%	6.0%
None of the above	22.5%	30.2%

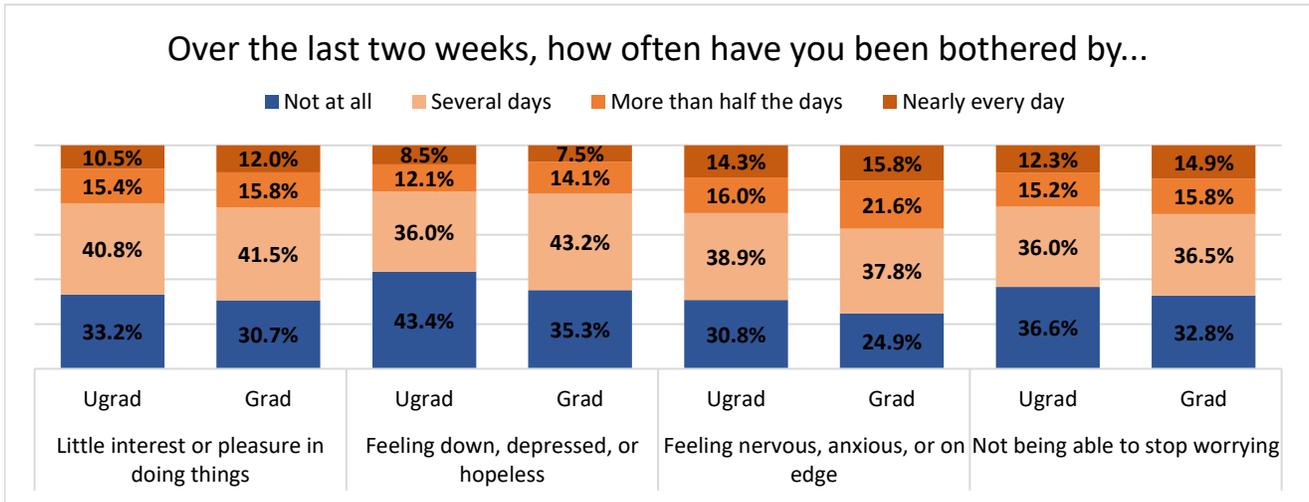
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Student Health and Wellbeing

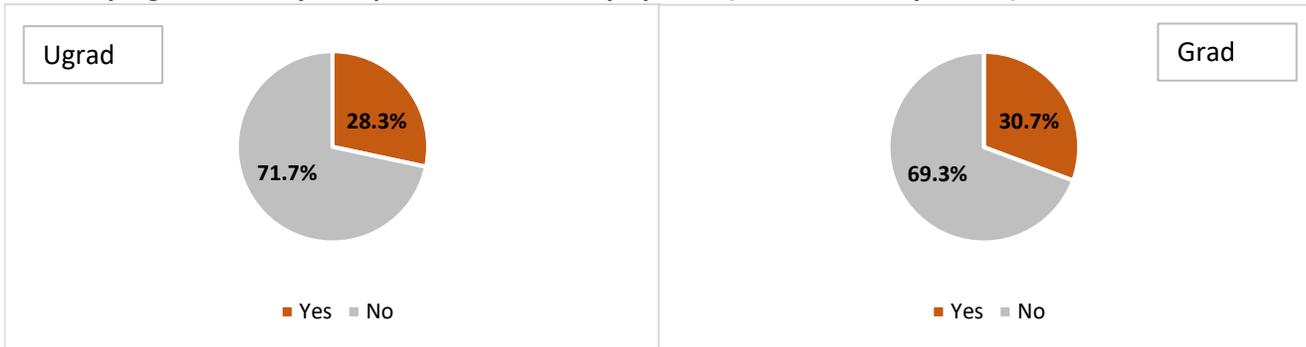
RU-C students' mental and physical health, wellbeing, and safety were negatively impacted by the pandemic. Undergraduates were more likely than graduate students to experience physical/emotional abuse where they were living during the pandemic. Undergraduate students were more likely than graduate students to report concerns about food running out (33.6% vs. 25.7%). About one in three students reported concerns about the ability to cover the cost of housing.



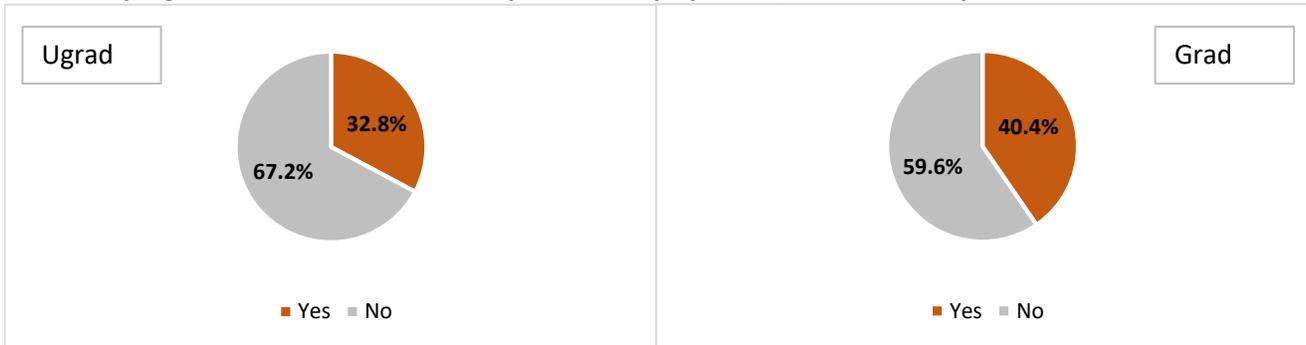
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Clinically Significant Major Depressive Disorder Symptoms (as measured by PHQ-2)



Clinically Significant Generalized Anxiety Disorder Symptoms (as measured by GAD-2)



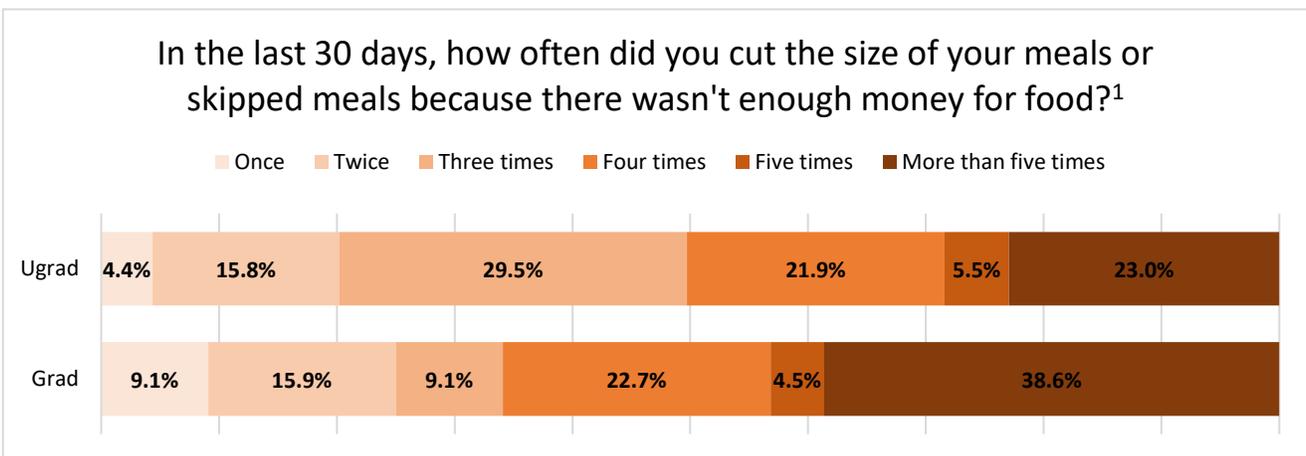
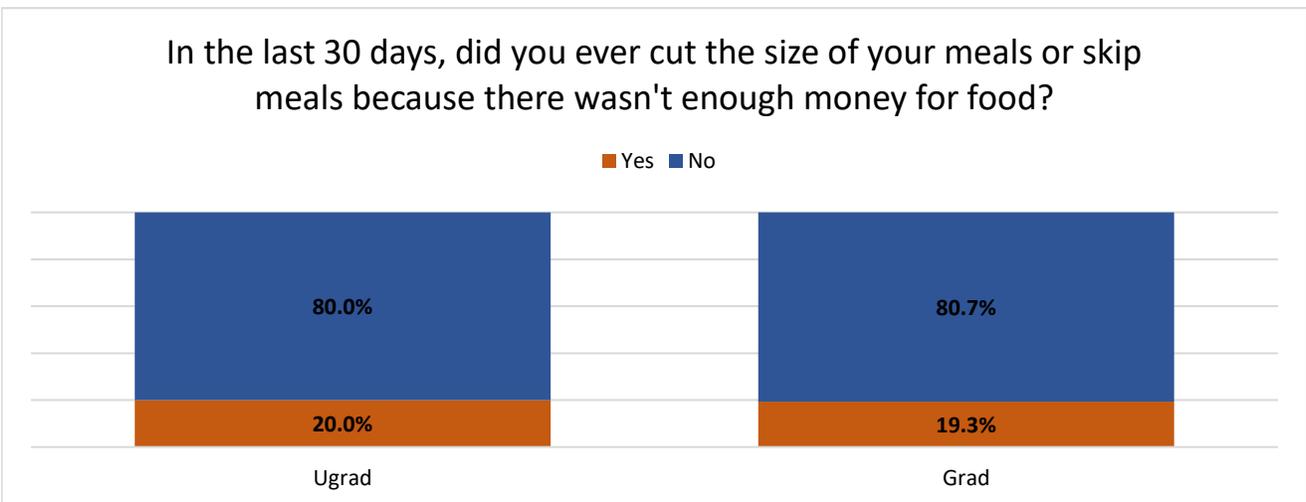
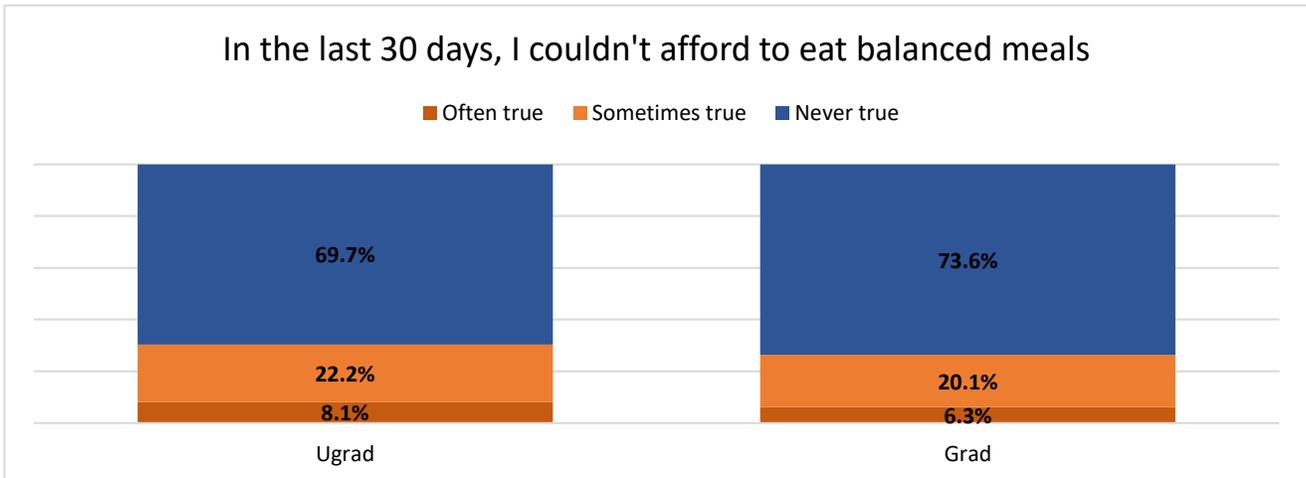
About the GAD-2 and PHQ-2 Measures:

Patient Health Questionnaire-2 (PHQ-2) inquires about the frequency of depressed mood and anhedonia over the past two weeks. The PHQ-2 includes the first two items of the PHQ-9, and is used to screen for depression in a "first-step" approach. If the score is 3 or higher, major depressive disorder is likely. For more information visit <https://www.hiv.uw.edu/page/mental-health-screening/phq-2>.

Generalized Anxiety Disorder 2-item (GAD-2) is a very brief and easy to perform initial screening tool for generalized anxiety disorder. If the score is 3 or higher, general anxiety disorder is likely. For more information visit <https://www.hiv.uw.edu/page/mental-health-screening/gad-2>.

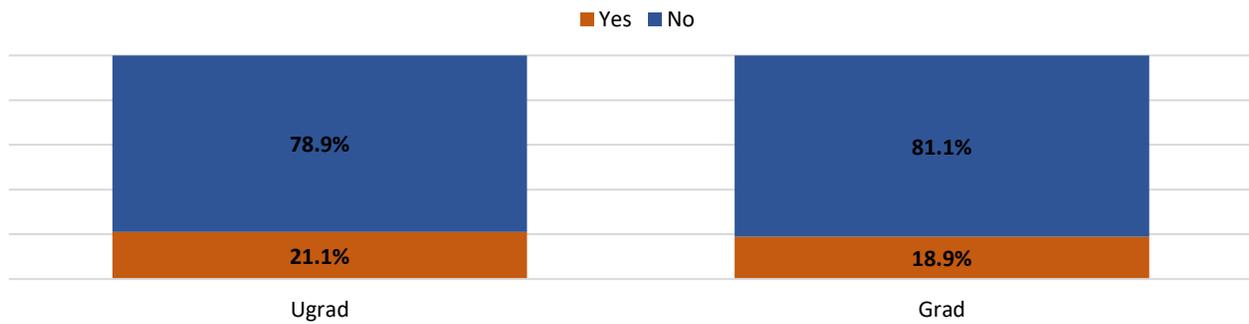
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Rutgers included additional questions on the survey regarding food and housing security and utilization of student support services. Some RU-C students reported cutting or skipping the size of meals because there wasn't enough money for food. Graduate students were slightly more likely than undergraduates to report the place they were living was temporary. Student activities and library resources were among the most utilized student support services.

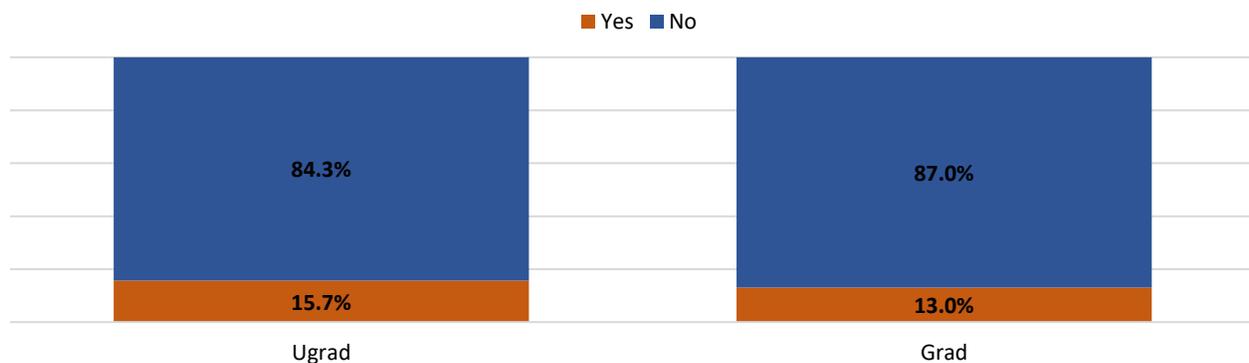


1. If "Yes" was selected to previous question.

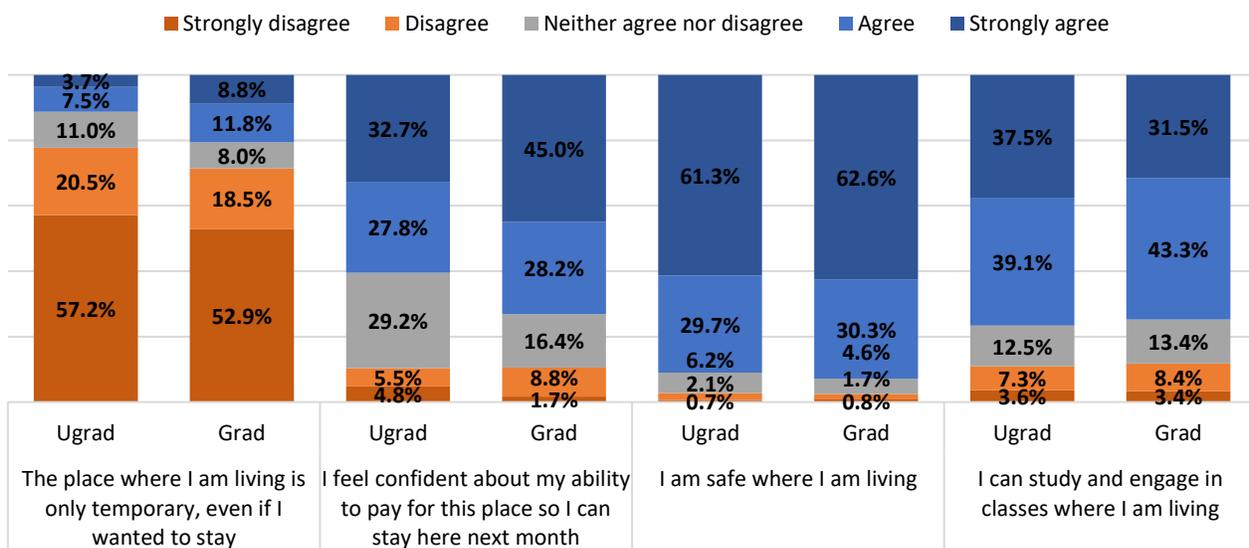
In the last 30 days, did you eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food?



In the last 30 days, were you ever hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?



Extent to which you agree with the following statements about where you are currently living

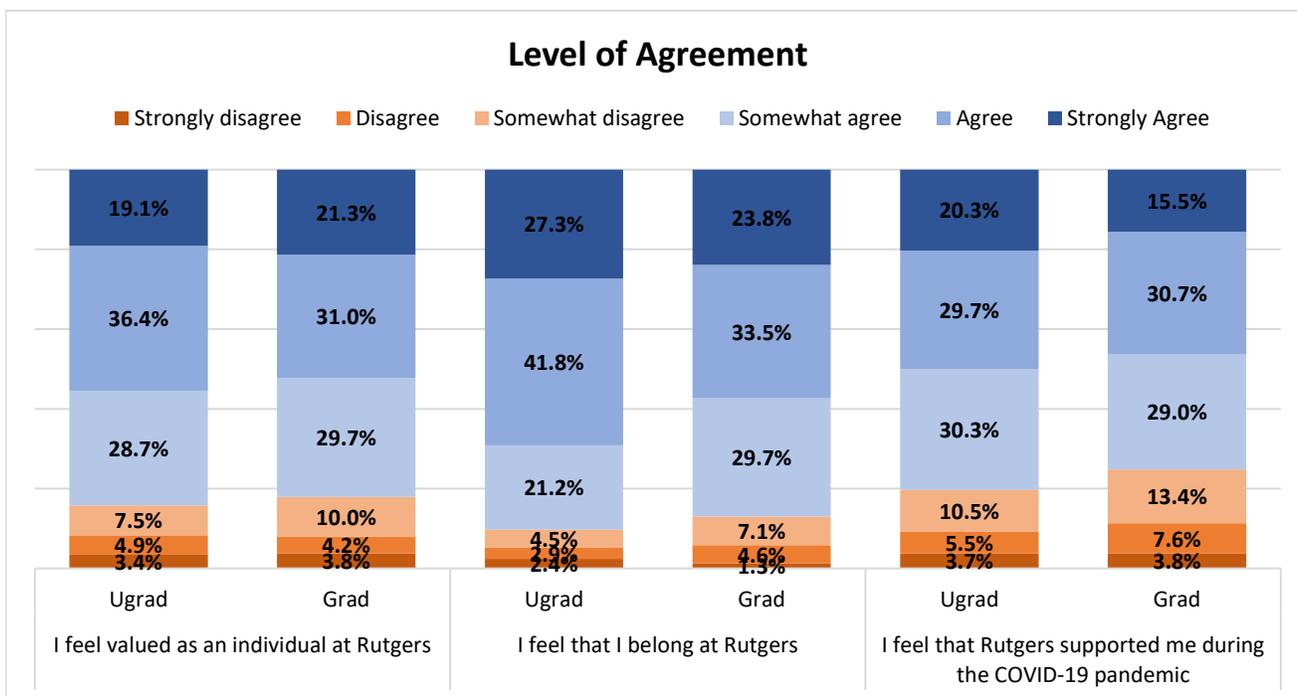


Student support services used during the COVID-19 pandemic	Ugrad	Grad
Counseling and mental health services	15.0%	11.9%
Physical health services (e.g., e-appointments for medical care)	6.4%	3.7%
Student activities and events (e.g., student club/organization or group meetings, online trivia nights, online voting for student officers)	20.0%	25.7%
Residence life communications and programming	3.3%	0.9%
Academic writing services, peer mentoring, and tutoring	10.6%	9.2%
Library resources and research assistance	36.2%	45.0%
Disability support services and advocacy	4.4%	3.7%
International student and scholar services	3.1%	10.1%
Off-campus and commuter student support (e.g., assistance with landlords, assistance finding housing)	2.9%	1.8%
Recreation and wellness (e.g., online fitness classes, intramural sports, outdoor resources)	12.1%	9.2%
Legal support services (e.g., assisting with tenant landlord legal obligations or other legal cases)	0.0%	0.9%
Food security, dining services, and nutritional resources (e.g., food pantry pick-up or delivery, dining services take-out orders)	10.2%	7.3%
Relationship Violence/Sexual Assault services (e.g. services that address gender-based violence, harassment, stalking)	1.0%	0.0%
Greek Life services	4.0%	0.9%
Student services and support for students who are parents	3.7%	0.0%
Informational technological assistance (e.g., installing software remotely, assisting with password reset)	6.9%	6.4%
Conflict resolution services	1.2%	0.9%
Bias response referrals (e.g., reporting tools for discriminatory actions or hate speech)	0.4%	0.0%
Student code of conduct, academic integrity, disciplinary, or scholastic dishonesty services	6.4%	2.8%

*Check all that apply item. Percentages will not sum to 100%.

Belonging and Engagement

RU-C undergraduate and graduate students reported similar levels of belonging at Rutgers. 90.3% of undergraduates and 87.0% of graduate students felt supported by Rutgers during the COVID-19 pandemic. RU-C students also supported their communities during the pandemic by checking in with friends and family, making donations, and helping others obtain food or other necessities.



During the COVID-19 pandemic, our students supported their community by...	Ugrad	Grad
Checking in with friends and/or family	93.2%	95.0%
Volunteering with community groups	7.6%	13.9%
Volunteering in a medical facility or hospital setting	5.7%	3.4%
Helping others obtain food or other necessities	33.8%	43.3%
Making a donation (e.g., money, supplies, blood)	28.4%	47.1%
Engaging in academic research on COVID-19	11.0%	8.0%
Other	6.1%	7.6%
None of the above	3.5%	3.4%

*Check all that apply item. Percentages will not sum to 100%.

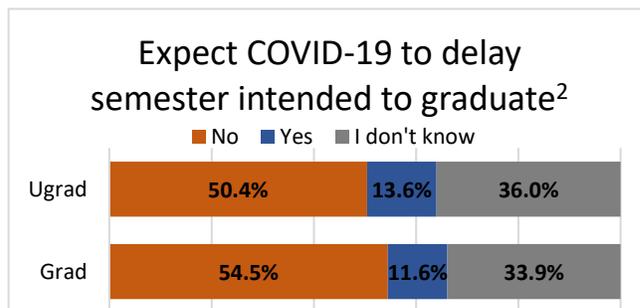
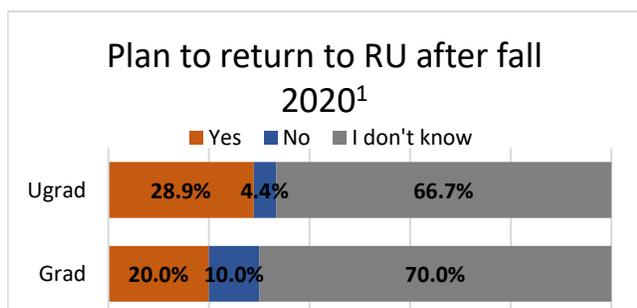
Future Plans

Most RU-C students will re-enroll in the fall (unless graduating) with less than 1% stating definitely that they will not return. Financial constraints is the main consideration for not returning this fall (among those unsure or not returning). Beyond Fall 2020, there is much more uncertainty about returning to Rutgers among those that are unsure or not returning. Approximately half of graduating undergraduates reported no employment offer.

Continuing at RU in fall 2020	Ugrad	Grad
Yes	82.1%	74.9%
No, because I'm graduating before fall 2020	13.0%	20.9%
No, for other reasons	0.4%	0.8%
I don't know	4.5%	3.3%

Factors contributing to decision not to continue at Rutgers in fall 2020 ¹	Ugrad	Grad
Financial constraints	56.5%	70.0%
Continuing education at a different institution	17.4%	0.0%
Working to support your family or yourself	41.3%	20.0%
Family caregiving responsibilities	23.9%	20.0%
Physical health issues	4.3%	10.0%
Mental health issues	10.9%	20.0%
Your experience at Rutgers during the COVID-19 pandemic	34.8%	30.0%
Concerns that all Rutgers classes will continue to be held online	37.0%	40.0%
Immigration issues	2.2%	0.0%
Travel restrictions	4.3%	0.0%
Concerns about it being safe to study in the U.S. because of the COVID-19 pandemic	28.3%	20.0%
Other	19.6%	20.0%

*Check all that apply item. Percentages will not sum to 100%.



Postgraduation plans for those graduating before fall 2020 ³	Ugrad	Grad
I accepted or recently began a position full-time	6.6%	34.0%
I accepted or recently began a position part-time	0.8%	2.0%
I am negotiating an offer of employment with one or more specific organizations	5.0%	2.0%
I accepted or recently began an internship, postdoc, residency, or other training	0.8%	2.0%
I am seeking a position but currently have no offer of employment	47.9%	22.0%
I am returning to or continuing in my pregraduation employment	9.1%	22.0%
I plan to enroll in a full-time graduate/professional degree program	14.0%	4.0%
I plan to take additional coursework (e.g., to prepare for a graduate/professional program, pursue a new degree or certificate)	5.8%	0.0%
I do not currently have plans to work or study	3.3%	2.0%
Other	6.6%	10.0%

1. If "No, for other reasons" or "I don't know" was selected.
2. If "Yes", "No, for other reasons", or "I don't know" was selected.
3. If "No, because I'm graduating before fall 2020" was selected.

Demographics

Race/Ethnicity	Ugrad	Grad
African American	19.4%	12.9%
Asian	13.9%	4.4%
Hispanic	19.9%	10.5%
White	36.1%	56.0%
Two or More	3.4%	2.0%
Nonresident alien	4.3%	10.9%
Unknown	1.8%	3.2%
Other	1.1%	0.0%

*Other includes American Indian/Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander.

What is your current gender identity?	Ugrad	Grad
Man	25.8%	35.1%
Woman	72.6%	62.3%
Nonbinary	0.6%	1.3%
Prefer to self-describe	0.1%	0.4%
Prefer not to answer	0.9%	0.8%

Do you consider yourself to be transgender?	Ugrad	Grad
No	98.7%	97.9%
Yes	0.3%	0.4%
Prefer not to answer	1.0%	1.7%

Do you consider yourself to be...	Ugrad	Grad
Heterosexual or straight	81.9%	79.7%
Gay or lesbian	3.0%	4.6%
Bisexual	6.4%	5.9%
Queer	0.9%	1.7%
Questioning	0.8%	0.8%
Asexual	0.3%	0.8%
Pansexual	1.7%	0.8%
Prefer to self-describe	0.5%	0.0%
Prefer not to answer	4.4%	5.5%

First-Generation College Student (defined as Bachelor's degree or higher)	Ugrad	Grad
Yes	56.7%	34.3%
No	40.5%	64.4%
Unknown	2.8%	1.3%

Which best describes your social class when you were growing up?	Ugrad	Grad
Low-income or poor	16.9%	13.0%
Working-class	35.8%	23.5%
Middle-class	39.8%	40.3%
Upper-middle or professional middle	6.9%	22.3%
Wealthy	0.4%	0.8%

Where did you live before the COVID-19 pandemic?	Ugrad	Grad
Campus residence hall or campus-owned apartment/house	17.2%	5.9%
Sorority/fraternity or co-op student housing	0.3%	0.0%
Off-campus apartment or house	78.5%	89.1%
No stable residence/Homeless	0.2%	0.4%
Other	3.8%	4.6%

Did you relocate during the COVID-19 pandemic?	Ugrad	Grad
Yes, to a location within the same state	18.8%	79.4%
Yes, to a different state	3.4%	9.2%
Yes, to a different country	0.8%	9.2%
No	76.3%	0.8%
Other	0.8%	1.3%

Were you responsible for caring for children during the COVID-19 pandemic?	Ugrad	Grad
No	75.7%	77.3%
Yes	24.3%	22.7%

Were you responsible for caring for other adults (age 18 and over) during the COVID-19 pandemic?	Ugrad	Grad
No	76.6%	74.9%
Yes	23.4%	25.1%

Do you have any conditions or disabilities that significantly affect your experience as a student at Rutgers, including how you learn or perform academically, interact with others, or access the campus?	Ugrad	Grad
Physical disability or condition (e.g., mobility limitation, sensory condition)	2.3%	3.4%
Learning disability or condition (e.g., dyslexia, speech disorder)	2.6%	1.3%
Neurodevelopmental/cognitive disability or condition (e.g., autism, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, brain injury)	4.7%	3.9%
Emotional or mental health concern or condition (e.g., depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder)	23.5%	21.0%
Other disability or condition	2.1%	2.6%
Prefer not to say	6.8%	8.2%
None of the above	64.5%	65.7%

*Check all that apply item. Percentages will not sum to 100%.

Undergraduate and graduate students were presented different lists for this question.

Please indicate which of the following was true about your experience during the COVID-19 pandemic:	
Undergraduate Students	%
Had paid employment (including internships) at Rutgers	9.9%
Had paid employment (including internships) outside of Rutgers	29.0%
Assisted faculty in research	3.3%
Assisted faculty in teaching	0.3%
Received COVID-19 emergency grants/funding	43.0%
None of the above	34.0%
Graduate Students	%
Worked on my thesis/dissertation	17.6%
Defended my thesis/dissertation	3.4%
Had an internship	18.5%
Had a residency	1.7%
Worked in a research lab, as a university researcher, or as a research assistant	6.7%
Taught classes at the university or was a teaching assistant	10.1%
Had other paid employment at Rutgers	13.0%
Had paid employment outside of Rutgers	35.3%

*Check all that apply item. Percentages will not sum to 100%.