

2020 SERU COVID-19 Student Experience Survey

Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington
Comments Report

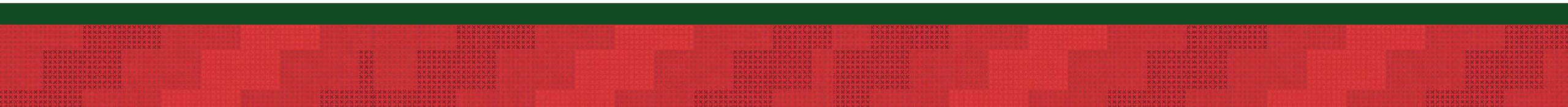


Table of Contents

Report Section	Page
• Comments Background	3
• Student Voice	5
• Taught Students	15
• Research Students	18
• International Students	20
• Future Plans	23
• Student Life	26

The background features a large white circle in the center. Surrounding it are various geometric elements: a dark green circle in the top-left, a teal circle in the top-right, a large dark grey circle in the top-right, a purple circle in the top-right, a teal circle in the bottom-right, a teal circle in the bottom-left, a purple circle in the bottom-left, and a purple circle in the bottom-left. Horizontal stripes in dark green, grey, and gold are also present.

COMMENTS BACKGROUND

Overall survey responses are analysed in the 2020 SERU COVID-19 Student Experience Survey – Topline Report. This supplementary document provides additional insight on the open text comments provided by students.

Students provided a wide range of comments often discussing multiple topics or issues.

Over 4,000 open text comments were collected from respondents. Most open text questions were part of a list of response choices and designated as ‘Other, please specify:’

The final survey question was an open-ended prompt that received nearly half of all comments from student respondents.

These comments have been reviewed and categorised into key themes to provide a high level summary of the qualitative data.





STUDENT VOICE

Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experience during the COVID-19 pandemic?

353 of 1,863 individuals responded with an opinion/statement that was an opt-out, not informative or did not contribute to understanding the student experience. 1,510 remaining responses were categorised into high-level themes to better analyse the qualitative data.

The results of this open-ended question has been split into nine high-level categories over the next few pages.

- Response to COVID-19, communication and the University shutdown period
- High workload
- Health and Wellbeing
- Online transition and experience
- Adapting routines, family and work
- University staff and lecturers
- International students
- Postgraduate students
- Other student suggestions

Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experience during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Response to COVID-19, communication and the University shutdown period

COVID-19

Students wrote that they were disappointed with the response to COVID-19 and the way that this was handled. Examples of these responses are summarised into:

- Not being prepared and not shutting down the university early enough.
- The way that many of the decisions and statements were communicated and handled.
 - Charging halls and the handling of the accommodation.
 - Prioritising new students and committing to assist new students rather than their current students.

Communication

Students wrote that they were unhappy with the communication from the university and staff for this trimester. Most of the responses focused on the miscommunication and unclear communication of information and overwhelming number of emails. Furthermore, a subset of the responses was directed at the lecturer/staff's inability to respond to emails or communicate effectively the expectations of assignments and lectures.

Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experience during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Response to COVID-19, communication and the University shutdown period

University shutdown

The response to the university shutdown period for a month was met with criticism with individuals stating that they were not happy with how this was handled. Responses could be broadly classified as:

- The university should have been more prepared to go online earlier so that the 'break' wasn't as long.
- Students were stressed and wanted something to distract themselves from the lockdown and COVID-19.
- The shutdown meant that the trimester was compressed and did not provide students with a break once it resumed.

Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experience during the COVID-19 pandemic?

High workload and Health and Wellbeing

High Workload

Individuals made comments on the high workload that they were presented with during the COVID-19 lockdown and trimester. The comments were related to either:

- Having to complete “bigger” assignments and/or more assignments often in a short duration of time.
- The transition of courses online and not being adapted to reduce the hours.
- The compression of the course into 9 weeks straight.

Health and Wellbeing

Students wrote responses related to health and wellbeing with an overall trend stating that they were stressed; had depression, anxiety or other mental health conditions; and were concerned about their own health related to COVID-19; while a smaller portion stated that this period allowed them to reflect on or improve their health and wellbeing in a positive manner.

Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experience during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Online transition and experience

Online Transition and Experience

11% of students commented on their bad online experience while 8% stated that they had a good online experience. Many of the negative comments were related to:

- Attending in person lectures, accessing facilities and campus (including the library and student health), and having discussions, tutorials, or labs in person.
- They felt that they were not getting the same quality of teaching online.
- Academic content and/or delivery was not great, specifically pre-recorded lectures were not stimulating or engaging.
- Went hand in hand with the High Workload, therefore constantly attending lectures and completing assignments.

Students' online experience was closely related to the transition of lectures/courses online. Within those, one in three of the responses were positive about the transition.

Many of the positive online experience comments were related to better accessibility and flexibility of working online; ability to work during students' productive hours rather than a forced schedule; no more commuting; and decreased anxiety/mental health from in person lectures.

Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experience during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Adapting routines, family and work

Adapting Routines, Family and Work

Students described that they found it incredibly difficult to adjust to a new routine during the COVID-19 lockdown. This was found to disrupt and negatively affect their ability to perform or complete work to a high standard. Students were struggling to motivate themselves to complete work throughout this trimester, particularly during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Individuals also wrote about taking care of children or elders which greatly impacted their ability to complete work. Some students were also greatly affected by their concern about their family's health as they were in foreign countries. Finally, a handful of students were suffering a bereavement at the time of the COVID-19 lockdown.

Individuals were working or essential workers during the COVID-19 lockdown. These students found it incredibly stressful trying to juggle the stress of work and study during this time due to the increased risk of COVID-19. Many were negatively impacted by their inability to attend live-streamed lectures or tutorials and felt that they were unable to make the most of their tuition because of this.

Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experience during the COVID-19 pandemic?

University staff and lecturers and **International students**

University Staff and Lecturers

Overall, the response to university staff was very positive. Responses were often thanking specific lecturers, teaching staff, and tutors, as well as staff at Student Health. Their positivity and ability to reach out, support, or assist in arranging extensions was recognised and commended.

However, the University's leadership and a Faculty received some negative responses about staff and lecturers.

International Students

International students stated that they wanted more support (moving countries, visa applications).

International students stated that they were disappointed that they were often excluded from university responses, the teaching quality of courses, accessibility to scheduled lectures, and the online experience in comparison to the amount of money that they were having to pay.

Many would like their tuition fees to be subsidised either for the current or future trimesters.

Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experience during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Postgraduate students

Postgraduate Students

Postgraduate students were not happy with the response and communication to COVID-19. They felt that they were excluded and overlooked from many decisions and responses by the university, with many wanting more support. These individuals, particularly the PhD's felt that they had poor communication regarding retrospective suspensions, extensions, and financial support.

Postgraduate students indicated they are stressed and that their research has been negatively affected, whether it be their ability to perform and conduct experiments, the cancelling of field trips, or the lack of motivation to work from home and write their thesis.

Overall, postgraduate students recommend a blanket 1-month extension to mitigate the impact that they suffered and time they lost for research during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experience during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Other student suggestions

Other Student Suggestions

Students want the university to give a 5-point grade increase. These students feel that they are being unfairly disadvantaged to the other students and universities which may impact their future study or career opportunities.

Students would like to receive financial compensation or a reduction in tuition fees either for the current or future trimesters. Without access to facilities/campus and losing the student experience, as well as labs and field work, many believe that they should not have to pay the full, normal fees.



TAUGHT STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Which of the following academic factors, if any, were an obstacle to your successful transition to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?

“Other, please specify:”

647 students selected ‘Other’ and provided a text response (12.3% of the total respondents).

- 358 commented on **academic issues** being an obstacle.
 - Students noted there was an **increased amount of content**; made remarks on the **poor use of technology by lecturers** (i.e., Blackboard, Zoom, etc); discussed the effect of the **change in style** transitioning from in-person to online courses; and commented on issues with **course scheduling** (i.e., timing of course resources being uploaded, overlap of assignments, changes to course times).
- 102 commented on obstacles due to **limited access to resources and technology**.
 - Students listed multiple factors affecting their academic progress, including **unavailable materials**, **no access to campus**, **issues with the internet**, **hardware issues**, and **no access to labs**.
- 77 provided comments on obstacles related to their **health and wellbeing**.
- 67 discussed issues with the **University management**.
 - Students focused on issues with **communication from the University**, with half commenting on the lack of communication, while the other half discussed unclear messaging, multiple conflicting messages, and late notifications.

Taught students

Which of the following academic factors, if any, were positive experiences associated with your online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?

“Other, please specify:”

275 students selected ‘Other’ and provided a text response (5.3% of the total respondents).

- 112 commented on the **flexibility of online courses** and **accessing materials** as positive.
- 59 stated they no longer needed to **commute to class**, often citing time and money as additional benefits.
- 53 were positive regarding the **availability of recorded lectures**, particularly providing them with flexibility to learn when it suits them and the opportunity to rewind, pause, take better notes, and re-engage with teaching.

Taught students



RESEARCH STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Which of the following factors, if any, have been an obstacle to your progress towards your postgraduate/professional degree during the COVID-19 pandemic?

“Other, please specify:”

80 students selected ‘Other’ and provided a text response (13.4% of the total respondents).

- 17 stated that **academic delays** were the main obstacle in their progress.
- 15 discussed the **impact of family care**, such as children or other family members, on their progress.
- 15 remarked that their **health and wellbeing** was impacted and in turn affected their progress.
- 14 commented on the **increased stress** they were dealing with while working on their degree.
- 11 shared concerns about **limits to or issues with technology** that have impacted their progress.
- 9 listed issues with their **financial situation** as an obstacle to their progress.

Research students



INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Which of the following factors, if any, have been a concern for you during the COVID-19 pandemic? “Other, please specify:”

58 students selected ‘Other’ and provided a text response (5.7% of the total respondents).

- 14 listed **travel** as a concern, particularly relating to travel between New Zealand and other countries.
- 11 discussed **financial concerns**.
- 9 brought up the **cost of tuition fees** as a concern.
- 8 commented on their **health and wellbeing**.
- 6 highlighted **family** as an area of concern.

International students

Which of the following aspects of your immigration status, if any, have been stressful for you during the COVID-19 pandemic?

“Other, please specify:”

32 students selected ‘Other’ and provided a text response (3.1% of the total respondents).

- 14 stated they have had **visa concerns**.
- 9 had concerns about **travel**, including flights and restrictions on entering New Zealand.
- 6 brought up **academic concerns**.
- 4 discussed their concerns with **working under their current status**.

International students



FUTURE PLANS

Which of the following best represents your postgraduation plans? “Other, please specify:”

26 students selected ‘Other’ and provided a text response (7.1% of the total respondents).

- 15 discussed **being employed** as their next step.
- 5 are still **looking for work**.
- 4 stated they would be **completing studies**.
- 3 had plans for **postgraduate studies**.

Students completing their degree before trimester 2

What factors are contributing to your decision not to continue at Victoria University of Wellington in trimester 2?

“Other, please specify:”

119 students selected ‘Other’ and provided a text response (22.7% of the total respondents).

- 21 had been **on exchange** and would not be returning.
- 15 had **completed their course or degree in trimester 1**.
- 13 discussed **personal circumstances** with an additional 10 (8.4%) stating they weren’t returning due to other **work commitments**.
- 12 stated they were not returning because of the **trimester 1 delivery of courses**.

Students not planning to continue in trimester 2



**STUDENT
LIFE**

In which of the following ways, if any, have you supported your community during the COVID-19 pandemic?

“Other, please specify:”

321 students selected ‘Other’ and provided a text response (5.1% of the total respondents).

- 194 stated that they **worked as an essential worker**.
- 64 commented on their **support within the health and wellbeing field**, including work at a hospital or emotional support for others.

Which of the following financial hardships, if any, have you experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic?

“Other, please specify:”

290 students selected ‘Other’ and provided a text response (4.6% of the total respondents).

- 58 commented on the **costs of accommodation**, particularly where it was wholly or partially unoccupied.
- 39 stated they had additional **expenses to cover flights**, whether leaving or returning to New Zealand.
- 34 were unemployed and discussed the **difficulties of finding employment** during and after lockdown.
- 33 talked about the **cost of course fees** often in regards to the change in style and limitation of going online.
- 32 mentioned that they experienced a **loss of salary** due to decreased work hours.

Where did you live before the COVID-19 pandemic? “Other, please specify:”

196 students selected ‘Other’ and provided a text response (3.1% of the total respondents).

- 47 stated they were living **with family** before the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 44 were living **overseas**.
- 31 provided answers of ‘**home**’ that were difficult to further define.
- 29 discussed that they were **renting** before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Where did you live before the COVID-19 pandemic? “Other, please specify:”

45 students selected ‘Other’ and provided a text response (0.7% of the total respondents).

- 13 had moved **out of town**.
- 9 said they **did not relocate**.
- 8 relocated **overseas**.
- 5 had moved into a **hall of residence**.



Capital Thinking. Globally Minded