



# Financial, Mental, and Physical Impacts of the Pandemic

UASU Perks surveys, August 2021, n1=3080, n2=2506, n3=2385

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## Key Findings

### Student Finances (n=3080 undergraduates)

*Note: Faculties in red face major exceptional tuition increases next year; all other faculties will see a 7% increase.*

- 23% expected high or very high financial strain during Fall 2021. Faculties of concern: **Law, Medicine and Dentistry**, Open Studies, Augustana, Education, Native Studies. Students of concern: disabled students, first-generation students, Indigenous students, East Asian students.
- 39% reported their financial situation as worse or much worse due to the pandemic. Faculties of concern: Education, KSR, **Law**, Augustana, **Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences**. Students of concern: women and gender minorities, Black students, Indigenous students, first-generation students, LGBTQ2S+ students, and disabled students. 28% of identifiable disabled students chose 'much worse,' 4x the average rate.
- 31% did not (not at all + not really) feel like they have access to emergency financial support/aid if they need it. Students of concern: **Law, Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences**, Open Studies, disabled students, non-binary students, South Asian students, first-generation students.
- 59% (not at all + not really) felt they were not aware of on-campus resources that can provide information on financial aid. Students of concern: CSJ, Nursing, Black students, non-binary students.
- Common factors impacting ability to come back to school on campus: rent, parking, food insecurity, tuition increases, recent debts, dependents, employment.

### Mental Health (n=2506 undergraduates)

- 50% reported serious mental health impacts from the pandemic (36% 'a lot' + 14% 'more than anything I've ever been through'). Students of concern: ALES, CSJ, Augustana, Law, Open Studies, disabled students, LGBTQ2S+ students, Indigenous students, women and gender minorities, Southeast Asian students.
- 32% expected to definitely or probably need additional assistance to sustain a healthy mental state during Fall 2021. Students of concern: Arts, Augustana, CSJ, Law, Native Studies, Open Studies, women and gender minorities, Indigenous students, Black students.
- 18% probably or definitely felt like they did not have access to on-campus services that support mental health, if needed. Students of concern: CSJ, Law, Nursing, LGBTQ2S+ students, disabled students.
- Common responses focused on anxiety, burnout, and isolation.



### Physical Health (n=2385 undergraduates)

- 46% felt somewhat or much less healthy than before the pandemic. Faculties of concern: Native Studies, Open Studies, Law, Augustana, and Arts. Disparities by gender and especially by disability.
- 4% have had COVID-19; another 6% were unsure. Education and Native Studies students were especially likely to have had COVID-19, as were disabled, Indigenous, and non-LGBTQ2S+ students. Men appeared less likely than women to get tested.
- Common health concerns about returning to campus included confined spaces, vaccine refusers, preexisting conditions/risk factors among students and loved ones, concern whether the University would enforce safety policies, and deterioration of mental health.
- 95% have had at least one COVID-19 vaccination shot; 1% said they do not plan to get vaccinated; 3% preferred not to answer the question. (This was as of mid-to-late August, before major vaccine promotion efforts and restrictions.)
- 19% struggled to consistently afford and get access to the food they need. During the pandemic, 9% had skipped meals at least once a week due to the cost of food.
- Law, Augustana, Native Studies, and Open Studies were the most likely faculties to see food insecurity.
- Food insecurity was very high among LGBTQ2S+ students, disabled students, Indigenous students, non-binary students, Southeast Asian students, and first-generation students.

## Platform and Sample

### UASU Perks

UASU Perks ([perks.uasu.ca](https://perks.uasu.ca)) is a gamification platform. UAlberta students earn points for activities like checking in at events, participating in a donor-backed vaccination promotion contest, or taking small surveys. Students can redeem points for real-world goods (e.g. branded socks or mugs).

> Convenience sample collected through UASU Perks, a gamified student engagement platform.

> Primarily undergraduate students, distributed across faculties and years of study.

### Survey Overview

This report covers three concurrent surveys about the mental, physical, and financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on UAlberta undergraduates.

A small amount (~5%) of respondents identified as alumni or graduate students and were removed. 3,147 unique respondents were either identifiable undergraduates or unlabelled (likely ~95% undergraduates).

SURVEY	DISTRIBUTION	UNDERGRADUATE RESPONDENTS
Student Finances	August 13-30, 2021	3080
Mental Health	August 16-30, 2021	2506
Physical Health	August 18-30, 2021	2385

> Focus on undergraduates.

> Student Finances: n=3080.

> Mental Health: n=2506.

> Physical Health: n=2385.

Research Analyst Onose Iteboje (BA'22 Economics) took the lead in designing these surveys and analyzing the data.

By collating the data with other anonymized Perks surveys, we were able to cross-tabulate for basic demographics for around 800-1200 respondents in each of the three surveys: race, gender, disability, LGBTQ2S+ identity, Indigenous identity, and first-generation student status. These cross-tabulations, marked with a tilde (~), gave us a sense of potential problem areas in terms of inequitable impacts.

> Partial cross-tabulations with other linked datasets gives a general idea of demographics of concern.



## Student Finances (n=3080 undergraduates)

*How financially independent have you been during the pandemic?*

- I support myself financially: 15%
- My partner and I support each other: 6%
- I work to support myself, but I've needed some support from family: 25%
- I've been financially dependent on family: 49%
- Prefer not to say: 6%

> During the pandemic, 74% had been at least partially dependent on parents/family, not counting partners.

Anticipated financial strain during Fall 2021:

- I don't expect much financial strain this semester: 23%
- I expect some financial strain: 49%
- I expect a lot of financial strain: 21%
- I don't know whether I'll be able to afford to finish the semester: 2.3% (70 respondents)
- Prefer not to say: 4%

> 2% didn't know whether they would be able to afford to finish the semester.

> 72% anticipated financial strain during Fall 2021.

Faculties most likely to expect 'a lot' of financial strain: Augustana (30%), Education (25%), Native Studies (50%), Open Studies (40%).

Students most likely to be unsure whether they can afford to finish the semester: Law (6%), Medicine and Dentistry (4%), Open Studies (5%), disabled students (~8%), first-generation students (~5%), Indigenous students (~4%), East Asian students (~3%).

*Has the pandemic impacted your finances?*

- It's somehow made my financial situation better: 10%
- Not really, I've been lucky: 43%
- It's made my financial situation worse: 32%
- It's made my financial situation MUCH worse: 7%
- Prefer not to say: 9%

> 7% reported that the pandemic made their financial situation much worse.

Faculties most likely to report their financial situation as worse: Education (40%), KSR (35%), Law (39%).



Faculties most likely to report their financial situation as *much* worse: Augustana (16%), Law (13%), Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences (14%).

'Much worse' respondents varied significantly by demographic: ~5% of men, ~7% of women, ~17% of non-binary students, ~13% of first-generation students, ~9% of LGBTQ2S+ students, ~14% of Indigenous students, ~8% of Black students, and ~28% of disabled students.

*Do you feel like you have access to emergency financial support/aid if you need it?*

- Not at all: 7%
- Not really: 24%
- Yes, somewhat: 42%
- Yes, for sure: 21%
- Prefer not to say: 6%

> 7% felt like they did not have access to emergency financial support if needed.

'Not at all' responses were basically stable across faculties, except for Open Studies (15%).

'Not really' responses were basically stable across faculties, except for Law (32%) and Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences (34%).

Perceived lack of access ('not at all') was higher for disabled students (~16%), non-binary students (~17%), South Asian students (~12%), and first-generation students (~10%).

*Are you aware of on-campus resources that can provide information on financial aid?*

- Not at all: 21%
- Not really: 38%
- Yes, somewhat: 30%
- Yes, for sure: 9%
- Prefer not to say: 2%

> 21% reported no awareness of on-campus financial aid information resources.

Faculties of concern: CSJ (29% not at all), Nursing (28% not at all).



'Not at all' responses were especially common for Black students (~24%) and non-binary students (~30%).

*Are there any financial factors that affect your ability to come back to school on campus?*

- Common themes included rent, public transportation, parking, food insecurity, increased tuition, debt incurred during the pandemic, dependents, job opportunities, and unemployment.

## Mental Health (n=2506 undergraduates)

*Has your mental health been negatively impacted during the pandemic?*

- Not at all, I've been lucky: 10%
- A little: 38%
- A lot: 36%
- More than anything I've ever been through: 14%
- Prefer not to say: 2%

> 14% reported the pandemic had negatively impacted their mental health 'more than anything I've ever been through.'

'More than anything' responses were highest in ALES (19%), CSJ (19%), Augustana (18%), Law (29%), and Open Studies (25%). Demographics of concern: disabled students (~20%), LGBTQ2S+ students (~19%), Southeast Asian students (~17%), Indigenous students (~17%), and women and gender minorities (~16-17% vs. ~11% of men).

*During [Fall 2021], do you expect to need additional assistance to sustain a healthy mental state?*

- Yes, definitely: 11%
- Yes, probably: 21%
- Maybe: 32%
- Probably not: 29%
- Definitely not: 5%
- Prefer not to say: 2%

> 1 in 3 expected to need mental health assistance during Fall 2021.

'Yes, definitely' responses were highest in Arts (14%), Augustana (14%), CSJ (22%), Law (23%), Native Studies (29%), and Open Studies (20%).



A severe gender disparity presented itself: women were more than twice as likely as men (~12% vs. ~5%) to select 'yes, definitely.' Black students (~24%) and Indigenous students (~17%) were especially likely to select 'yes, definitely,' suggesting a strong intersection with gender that is worth further study with more rigorous methods.

*Do you feel like you have access to on-campus services that support mental health, if needed?*

- Yes, definitely: 11%
- Yes, probably: 35%
- Maybe: 33%
- Probably not: 14%
- Definitely not: 4%
- Prefer not to say: 3%

> 1 in 4 probably/definitely did not feel like they had access to on-campus mental health support.

'Probably/definitely not' responses were highest in CSJ (24%), Law (23%), and Nursing (31%).

'Definitely not' responses were very high among LGBTQ2S+ students (~9%), disabled students (~10%), and non-binary students (~15%).

*If you want to tell us a bit more about whether and how the pandemic has impacted your mental health, go ahead.*

- Common responses focused on deterioration of mental health, anxiety, burnout, and isolation.

## Physical Health (n=2385 undergraduates)

*Compared to your health before the pandemic, how healthy do you feel right now?*

- Much healthier: 6%
- Somewhat healthier: 17%
- About the same: 29%
- Somewhat less healthy: 30%
- Much less healthy: 16%
- Prefer not to say: 2%

> 46% felt somewhat or much less healthy than before the pandemic.

Most likely faculties to feel much less healthy: Native Studies (29%), Open Studies (20%), Law (19%), Augustana (19%), Arts





(18%). Disabled students were twice as likely to feel much less healthy (~30%). Women were more likely than men (~15% vs. ~12%) to feel much less healthy.

*Have you had COVID-19?*

- Yes: 4% (106 respondents)
- No: 88%
- Unsure: 6% (146 respondents)
- Prefer not to say: 2%

> 4% had COVID-19, and 6% were unsure.

Most likely faculties to have had COVID-19: Education (6%), Native Studies (7%).

Likely demographics to have had COVID-19: Disabled students (~6.1% vs. ~3.5% of non-disabled students); non-LGBTQ2S+ students (~3.7% vs. ~2.6% of LGBTQ2S+ students); women (~4.6% vs. ~2.0% of men); Indigenous students (~6.4% vs. ~3.5% of settlers; ~8.3% in another partial dataset's cross-tabulation).

Likely demographics to be unsure whether they have had COVID-19: Indigenous students (~10.6% vs. ~5.9% of settlers); men (~7.7% vs. ~5.6% of women). On balance, we suggest that men and women have probably caught COVID-19 at comparable rates, but men have been far less likely to get tested.

*Do you have any health concerns about coming back to campus this upcoming semester?*

Common themes emerged:

- Physically distancing with people in smaller spaces like classrooms and hallways.
- People refusing to get vaccinated and putting others at risk.
- General concerns about catching or spreading COVID-19, e.g. immunocompromised or high-risk students or family members.
- General concerns about getting in shape and eating healthy food.



- Concern about whether the University will enforce safety policies.
- Deterioration of mental health.
- Among the students who appeared to have no issues coming back to campus, a fair number expressed lack of concern about safety regulations.

*Have you had at least one COVID-19 vaccination shot?*

- Yes: 95%
- No, and I plan to get vaccinated: 2%
- No, and I don't plan to get vaccinated: 1%
- Prefer not to say: 3%

> The vast majority of respondents were vaccinated.

This was as of mid-to-late August, before major vaccine promotion efforts and restrictions.

Most likely large faculty to opt out of the question or say they did NOT plan to get vaccinated: Business (~5%). Least likely: Education (~2%).

> Business students were somewhat more likely to appear vaccine hesitant.

*Do you feel like you're able to consistently afford and get access to the food you need?*

- Yes, always: 50%
- Yes, usually: 28%
- More or less: 15%
- Not really: 4% (96 respondents)
- Never: 0% (11 respondents)

> 19% struggled to consistently get access to the food they need.

Most likely faculties to be food insecure, i.e. answer 'more or less,' 'not really,' or 'never': Law (26%), Native Studies (36%), Open Studies (30%).

*During the pandemic, have you skipped meals due to the cost of food?*

- No: 75%
- Yes, once or twice a month: 12%
- Yes, once or twice a week: 6% (137 respondents)
- Yes, more than twice a week: 3% (69 respondents)
- Prefer not to say: 5%

> 9% (and 17% of financially independent respondents) skipped meals at least once a week due to the cost of food.



Most likely faculties to skip meals at least once a week due to the cost of food: Augustana (14%), Law (13%), Open Studies (25%).

Combining answers from the past two questions, we created a 'FOODINSEC' binary variable that classified as food insecure anyone who answered 'more or less,' 'not really,' or 'never' to the first question and/or skipped meals at least once a week due to the cost of food. 22% of respondents were labelled FOODINSEC. That rose to ~30% for LGBTQ2S+ students, ~44% for disabled students, ~32% for Indigenous students, ~50% for non-binary students, ~36% for first-generation students, and ~29% for Southeast Asian students.

> Food insecurity was high across several key demographics.



## Appendix A: Selected Faculty Risk Profiles

### Augustana (n1(*finance*)=77, n2(*mental*)=69, n3(*physical*)=68)

- High anticipated financial strain during Fall 2021.
- Likely to experience food insecurity.
- High mental health impacts from pandemic.
- Worsened financial situation due to pandemic.
- Likely to feel less healthy than before the pandemic.

### Campus Saint-Jean (n1=58, n2=56, n3=52)

- Unlikely to feel aware of resources with information on financial support.
- High mental health impacts from pandemic.
- Likely to expect to need mental health support.
- Unlikely to feel like they have access to on-campus mental health support.

### Education (n1=158, n2=144, n3=142)

- Worsened financial situation due to pandemic.
- High anticipated financial strain during Fall 2021.
- More likely to have had COVID-19.

### Law (n1=31, n2=28, n3=27)

- High anticipated financial strain during Fall 2021.
- Worsened financial situation due to pandemic.
- Unlikely to feel like they have access to emergency financial support.
- High mental health impacts from pandemic.
- Likely to expect to need mental health support.
- Unlikely to feel like they have access to on-campus mental health support.
- Likely to feel less healthy than before the pandemic.
- Likely to experience food insecurity.

### Native Studies (n1=14, n2=14, n3=14)

- High anticipated financial strain during Fall 2021.
- Likely to experience food insecurity.
- Likely to feel less healthy than before the pandemic.
- More likely to have had COVID-19.
- Likely to expect to need mental health support.

### Nursing (n1=74, n2=72, n3=68)

- Unlikely to feel aware of resources with information on financial support.
- Unlikely to feel like they have access to on-campus mental health support.



**Open Studies (n1=20, n2=17, n3=17)**

- High anticipated financial strain during Fall 2021.
- Unlikely to feel like they have access to emergency financial support.
- High mental health impacts from pandemic.
- Likely to expect to need mental health support.
- Likely to feel less healthy than before the pandemic.
- Likely to experience food insecurity.

**Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences (n1=28, n2=27, n3=28)**

- Worsened financial situation due to pandemic.
- Unlikely to feel like they have access to emergency financial support.



## Appendix B: Selected Demographic Risk Profiles

As noted above, 800-1200 respondents could be cross-tabulated with recent Perks surveys that included demographic questions. These results *suggest* but do not always *prove*.

### Disabled Students

- High anticipated financial strain during Fall 2021.
- Severely worsened financial situation due to pandemic.
- Unlikely to feel like they have access to emergency financial support.
- High mental health impacts from pandemic.
- Unlikely to feel like they have access to on-campus mental health support.
- Likely to feel less healthy than before the pandemic.
- More likely to have had COVID-19.
- Likely to experience food insecurity.

### First-generation Students

- High anticipated financial strain during Fall 2021.
- Worsened financial situation due to pandemic.
- Unlikely to feel like they have access to emergency financial support.
- Likely to experience food insecurity.

### Gender Minorities

- Worsened financial situation due to pandemic.
- Unlikely to feel like they have access to emergency financial support.
- Unlikely to feel aware of resources with information on financial support.
- High mental health impacts from pandemic.
- Likely to expect to need mental health support.
- Unlikely to feel like they have access to on-campus mental health support.
- Likely to experience food insecurity.

### Black Students

- Worsened financial situation due to pandemic.
- Unlikely to feel aware of resources with information on financial support.
- Likely to expect to need mental health support.

### Indigenous Students

- High anticipated financial strain during Fall 2021.
- Worsened financial situation due to pandemic.
- High mental health impacts from pandemic.
- Likely to expect to need mental health support.
- More likely to have had COVID-19.
- Likely to experience food insecurity.