

A3 - Formative Study Results

Tutorial Letter: B

Group Number: 05

Group Name: Cool Health Guides

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Formative Research Results

Demographic

We had 10 participants in total, 3 male, and 7 female, and they enrolled in the University of Toronto in different years - (2017: 2, 2019: 3, 2020: 3, 2021: 2). The majority of them were in Statistics specialist (4 students) and management (4 students) programs. There were also students in molecular biology, computer science, mathematics major, psychology minor, and English minor. In terms of the year of study, three were in the second year, five in third, one in fourth, and one in fifth. Eight of our participants remained in the same residence during the pandemic, while two needed to relocate for online learning. Due to their living situation, our participants had varied feelings, ranging from uncomfortable to very pleased. For those who have negative experiences, they commented that they had “irregular meals causing stomach ache” and another commented they “can’t see the sun every day causing increased anxiety”. On the other hand, participants commented that they “have roommates to cook and study together” and another said they were “very pleased” with the current living situation. The rest of the participants belong to the category of “No change”.

Mental health

For our participants’ current mental health circumstances, their circumstances varied from positive to negative. One unique response was that the participant was “aware of mental health, going better than ever, and sought out resources to help with mental health”. When comparing with previous psychological states, 5 of the participants mentioned their state remained the same, 4 saw a worsening of their mental health, and one said their state was better since they prefer being alone. In particular, one participant mentioned that COVID-19 made pre-existing challenges worse by increasing feelings of isolation. Our participants mentioned 3 main categories of struggles during the pandemic: mandatory quarantine, academic challenges and social interaction barriers. Feeling emotionally trapped, sadness, apathy, and experiencing the same emotions to a more extreme degree were some responses that were revealed when we discussed unusual emotions during the pandemic. One participant brought up their experience of feeling increased levels of sadness when encountering people getting COVID-19 and suffering.

Social networking

We had a diverse variety of responses regarding the connection to previous social circles. One participant noted that their “super big social network condensed to a smaller stronger one”. We also learned that our participants felt that it was harder to stay connected due to lack of in-person contact. Even in an isolated time, most of our participants still manage to make new friends through group work in courses, online communities, and naturally met people through shared interests. For those that did not manage to make new friends during the pandemic, they indicated that since most courses were taken online, they did not really have chances to meet new people. 60% of the participants felt more isolated during the pandemic, whereas the rest 40% did not notice any change. During the pandemic, our participants were involved in an

assortment of extra-curricular activities, such as Data Science and Statistics Society, Women in Computer Science, Statistics & Mathematics, The Association of Mathematical and Computer Science Students, and Badminton club. And some of them had a very interesting opinion on the club they wanted to be involved in like: Dance After Drinking club and other no knowledge of existing clubs.

Academics

Many of our participants perceived a conspicuous negative change in their study habits during the pandemic. Particularly, they referred to they experienced a lack of motivation, and an increased tendency to procrastinate on studying and watching lecture recordings. A number of the students noticed the pandemic had an effect on their grades. For those who believe their grades have improved, they belong to a program that would benefit from an open book exam. The other portion of participants noticed a decrease in their grades, with one noting that their grades went from above average to below average. Some participants found it difficult to adopt the online learning style, with one instance of a participant being unable to finish their exam due to a technical issue. One participant said that the online learning environment disrupted their ability to focus in class, since it was much easier to get distracted if their camera was not on. Others had a smoother transition to online learning, since they were familiar with technology and had the experience of learning independently. Our participants proposed various benefits of distinct learning models. Hybrid was preferred by most for the flexibility it offers, while others pointed out that in-person learning provides opportunities to “make new friends and discuss challenging questions with them”. The overall opinion on the online learning atmosphere was that it is boring, lonely, hard to concentrate and the interesting level depends on the professor.

Recommendations

Our team learned about multiple useful tools during the interview, with the tools that stand out and are applicable to the majority of students being to-do lists and reminders, which allow one to keep on top of their daily tasks. By using this tool, the participants experienced reduced anxiety, but noted that they would prefer better alarms. Another participant nominated Spotify as their favourite tool as it allowed them to connect to others from sharing playlists and through common musical interests. Spotify also allowed them to curate playlists to elevate their mood. Although some participants think the University of Toronto’s services are hard to find, others were able to describe their experiences with various services to our team. Toronto Pan Am Sports Centre was a popular service that our participants used to help improve their physical and mental health. However, the participant also wished there would be a space for relaxation after exercise. A number of our participants also mentioned that they had visited the Academic Advising & Career Centre to seek help regarding their academic and career choices. They also pointed out the pain point of the booking system and long wait times. One participant also thinks the school is lacking a mental health support during finals season, and believes it would help mitigate stress during this time.

Appendix 1 - Yuxin raw interview note

Participant 1

- 2020
- Management
- 2nd year
- Yeah, with family -> looking for a house around the school
- China
- Uncomfortable, irregular meal causing stomach ache
- Happy, but can not tell who the classmate is, and they think that's mean
- Before covid 19 was happy, so it's consistent
- Yes, because of covid 19 have to take courses online. Having difficulties understanding what the professor talks
- No
- Not really good, but not cause by covid 19 is the distance between friends
- No new friends, as a student meeting new friends usually takes place at school and P1 can't do this anymore.
- As usual, more enjoy the isolation
- No, dance after drinking club
- Yes, can't concentrate since nobody is watching.
- No.
- No need to adjust, P1 is on the internet every day
- Hybrid, there are benefits of both. In-person lectures for concentration. Exams, quizzes, and office hours could be online. Can look at notes and more convenient.
- Boring and lonely.
- Yeah, google translate and chrome
- P1 use google translate to translate the academic paper. This saves a lot of time. Class post more papers online. Translated texts are hard to understand.
- P1 uses chrome to create live captions for lectures. Sometimes it is not correct, has delayed and gone disappeared
- No impact on mental health

- Instead of text P1 wishes the live caption would translate as it transcribes
- Panam, add more restaurants. Should have a place for relaxing after exercise.

Participant 2

- 2019
- Management and accounting
- 3rd year
- Yes, student residence -> hosing around the school
- China and Toronto
- Bad, living in half-basement, can't see the sun everyday cause extra pressure to P2
- Bad
- No difference, always bad. - Always have negative thoughts. P2 thinks her life is rotten.
- Every time when P2 woke up. The heavy workload has been making her anxious.
- No
- No, due to distance
- Yes, made some friends online
- As usual
- No
- No, don't like social
- Yes, P2 hates the study more. P2's procrastination problem is very serious, she would leave the lecture recordings until the last minute to watch.
- Yes, more people cheat on their exams and P2 changes from above average to below average
- P2 didn't finish her final exam due to a technical issue. Still have not adapted to the technical issue.
- in-person, P2 think in-person she could make some new friends and discuss the challenging questions with them.
- The online learning atmosphere is bad. P2 felt awkward every time opened up zoom video.

- Recording tools to record the lecture.
- Yes, the output recording makes the desktop messy and the number of them makes P2 anxious.
- Advantage: convenient and come with the computer. Disadvantage: it always includes the environmental sound around the computer. Can't control the playback speed.
- Upload the video onto the cloud and adopt the function of youtube.
- Online doctor
- No. P2 tried, but the university services are hard to find.
- Also have tried the service for resolving the technical issues, but was not being replied to, except the auto-reply.
- No services or resources that P2 feels the university is lacking.

Participant 3

- 2021
- Management
- 2nd year
- No, not in Toronto when covid broke out
- China and Tronto
- Living standard was high in China and now is average.
- Constantly as normal, but frustrated and stressed sometimes.
- Not as stable as before
- Not as freedom and was not able to go out for relaxation
- Going out became uneasy
- No
- Yes, everything is as normal
- Yes, going to an in-person class and meeting new people.
- As usual
- No extra-curricular
- K-pop club
- From hand write note-taking to iPad
- No effect
- No changes to adapt online learning

- In hybrid mode, P3 thinks it will make her day more flexible
- Same as in person
- No tool
- No preference
- School library and printer
- No lacking

Participant 4

- 2017
- Molecular biology
- 3rd year
- No, relocate
- Toronto
- Fine, nothing particular
- Less social, feel much better
- Better
- Prefer being alone and taking an online class
- No struggle
- Sadness, when encountering people getting Covid and suffer
- As usual, nothing changed much
- Yes, meet classmates online and meet co-workers
- More isolated
- No extra-curricular activities
- Dance club
- Yeah, usually study constantly but now is last minute
- Yes, it's getting better
- no adaption
- online learning. Don't need to meet people face to face, adjust your own time to study.
- Casual
- No tools
- Maybe a tool that could help with procrastination
- Family doctor
- Nice and professional, but don't want to see them face to face. And sometimes doesn't feel that they care about your health. Maybe an online platform

Participant 5

- 2019
- Machine learning
- 3rd year
- No
- Toronto
- Feel good, have roommates cook and study together
- last year felt depressed due Work term, but now feel good
- Felt better with an in-person class. More energetic, now lost energy and less active
- Yes, quarantine for 30 day
- Don't wanna do anything but just lay down
- Last year no, don't usually talk to them. Feeling tired when social
- Made new friends with the roommates and connected with people don't know before
- Isolated
- Work-study program
- Archery club
- Yes, first-year study a lot and effective, then tried of study and tried to do things last minute.
- Read Quercus before the start, plan for work
- Affected grade, better before
- Have to separate the academic life and personal life by planning the day
- In-person and hybrid are good, more active and more involved in class
- Bad atmosphere, need to concentrate in order to learn
- Calendar and to-do list
- Recording things to do and the due date for class
- Yes, feel more organized and stopped P5's anxiety
- Disadvantage: sometimes still forget
- Maybe a better way to inform
- Career advising center and coop office
- Add more time slots, usually have to book two days ahead.

Participant 6

- 2021
- Management

- 2nd year
- No
- Toronto
- Pretty good
- As usual
- no change
- Quarantine
- No
- No, less frequently hang out with friends
- No. most courses are taken online, so no chance to meet the new friends
- As usual
- No
- Badminton
- More lazy, procrastination
- Yes, my grade improved. The course became easy to study, and some courses become open books. Was able to go back to the recording, when there is a part P6 doesn't understand
- No
- online learning
- More comfortable
- Mask
- Hard to breath
- Re sanitized automatically
- No services
- All you can eat cafeteria

Participant 7

1. Demographic
 - a. Sept 2020
 - b. Stats
 - c. Year2 going to year3
 - d. No, I live at home
 - e. Very pleased, I live ~20 mins away from the school
2. Mental health
 - a. I am aware of my mental health and how it is doing more than ever. I've actively sought out resources to bolster and learn about my mental health over the pandemic.
 - b. It is better that I can recognize what I feel and have ways to address it.

- Worse in that I think I hit a mental low during this pandemic.
- i. But I don't believe that the pandemic is the main contributor.
 - c. Yea
 - d. Maybe I experienced the same emotions I always did to a more extreme degree, or I learned how to put a label on what I feel.
3. Social networking
- a. Yes
 - b. Yes: via online apps/ communities
 - c. About average, tho maybe I would say more isolated on a different day.
 - d. No, I have heard nothing about the extra-curricular at UTSC, I don't know what clubs exist
4. Academics
- a. In the first year, I had a bad period in my mental health, studying was affected greatly. My study habits were lackadaisical. In the second year, specifically the winter term, I had my best year as a student. I was on top of coursework and was motivated to do well.
 - b. I had to adjust to doing most learning from home, I think that may have lowered my marks a bit.
 - c. I like some courses online and some in person. Depends on the course and instructor.
 - d. I don't have an ideal workspace at home, but it is a lot comfier to go to school in my own bedroom.
5. Recommendations
- a. York town family services is a service
 - b. that offers free counselling with licensed therapists and social workers. I found myself using their service a lot and I think it helped tremendously.

- c. I went to academic counselling a few times to discuss academic decisions. I helped somewhat, 5/10.
- i. I can't think of an improvement, maybe I went to the wrong service for the problem/issue I had

Participant 8

- 2020
- Computer science
- 3rd year
- No
- Toronto
- Live a normal life, but with a mask
- In pretty good mental health
- Feeling isolated, but pretty much the same
- At beginning of the pandemic, hard the concentrate
- No, don't remember
- Yes, chat online. Didn't change much
- Yes, just naturally meet a new friend
- At being yes, but not now
- Badminton, coop job, and amac
- No change
- No change
- No
- Online, subtitle
- It's okay, depends on the prof
- No
- Cheatsheet for all course
- No
- Mental health help group during final.

Appendix 1 - Farin raw interview notes

Participant 1

1. Demographic

- a. Sept 2019
- b. Stats + psych minor
- c. fourth
- d. No
- i. home
- e. No change

2. Mental health

- a. After pandemic, it went downhill
 - Last fall it was at the worst point
 - Doing better now after therapy
- b.
- i. First year was already bad
 - Plummeted through covid + quarantine
 - Feels out of touch
 - Isolated
 - COVID made it worse basically
- c. April 2020-halfway through 2021 was the worst period of time
- d. Process feelings
 - Going through therapy
 - Shame
 - Apathy
 - Guilt for life decisions

3. Social networking

- a. Always well liked before
 - Had far reaching social circle before
 - did not really make an effort to connect to others during the COVID
 - Strengthened high school friends ships
 - Super big social network condensed to smaller strong one
- b. Yes
- i.
 - Class friends
 - Group projects
 - Whatsapp group chats
- c. More isolated during this time
- d. No

I.

- Cheerleading
- Frosh planning
- Data science association

4. Academics

- a. Hard fall
 - Lack of trying
 - Less motivated basically
 - Summer of 2020 electives helped w GPA
 - Downhill
 - Barely passing
 - Negative impact basically
- b. Yes
 - not around people
 - Not around other students
 - Easier to stay focussed when you are in class
 - Open book - care a little less
 - Downhill
 - Learn the skills you need to succeed
- c. Started off bad
 - So much easier to get distracted no camera
 - Learned to communicate better through necessity
 - Individual skills
- I.
 - In person : learning
 - Online : convenience
 - Hybrid?
- d. Suitable for learning but goofs off

5. Recommendations

- a.
 - Quizlet
 - Flashcards
 - Goodnotes for notes
 - Digital notes
 - Social: not really
 - Regular social media
 - Imessage, facetime
 - Increased time on ig, tiktok

i. Yes:

- LinkedIn did not help mental health negative impact
- helped me feel connected but superficially
- Spotify + music helped connect to others
 - Song recommendations
- Goodreads is helpful to connect to hobbies
 - Really entertaining
- Helped you connect to others deeply
- Feels more personal + connects

ii. Quizlet + goodreads are pretty good

- Folders on spotify
- Likes organisations
- Work best when you have flexibility
- Customizable enough + set rules
- Good reads rating system + bookshelves
- Set structure but you are allowed to play around

b. Yes

ii.

- Went to health and wellness the day before lockdown the day when it was announced
- Very short meeting w/ counsellor
- Positive interactions
- Tools of techniques
- Did end up going to therapy
- Positive experience

Participant 2

1. Demographic

- a. 2017
- b. Stats spec + math major + minor english
- c. 5th year
- d. No
- i. Home
- e. Pretty good

2. Mental health

a. Exhausted

- Burned out cuz of sudden switch

b. Stress about post before

- COVID made it accelerated that stress
- Couldn't really ask questions to profs
- Lot more stressful cuz of post
- By the time pandemic hit, made it to post
- Stress levels kind of stayed the same

c.

- Social aspect
- Not being able to meet people and friends
- Feel like they lost the ability to socialize

d. Trapped in one place

- Physically in home
- Physically + mentally + emotionally trapped

3. Social networking

a.

- Still maintained relationship with them
- Taked everyday
- Watn able to connect in person
- Still maintained close relationship

b. Yes

i. Through courses

c. More isolated

d. Yes

ii. Yes: If so, which ones?

- 2 clubs
- Data science + stats society
- WICSM
- Research right now

4. Academics

a. Yes, lazier

b. Yes

- Go to school - lot more motivated
- See other people working and get motivated

- Seeing other students working hard motivates me to work hard too
- c. Most of pandemic - forced myself to get up even if it's asynchronous
 - Became lazier
 - Still tried
 - i. Hybrid - in-person lectures with recorded component would be nice
- d. Pretty good
 - Tried to keep away distractions
 - Put away distractions

5. Recommendations

A.

- Reminders to get work done
- Created schedules
 - Used social media apps for communicating with apps
- i.
 - Schedules: gave structure to week so that i don't fall behind in courses
 - Gave sense of feeling productivity
 - zoom/teams good to contact
 - Teams might have benefited from a blackboard/whiteboard
- b. A lot of questions were for co - op office
 - Contacted co op office + booked appointments
 - Answered a lot of questions that I had about co op work term
- ii. Takes a while to reply
 - Maybe a more efficient system could be implemented ...
 - Figure out a way to reply quicker