



CAMPUS ASSESSMENT WORKING GROUP

First-year students' well-being by race and ethnicity

This report, written by the Campus Assessment Working Group (CAWG) Beginnings subcommittee, discusses first-year students' well-being by race and ethnicity in Fall 2021. The 2021 Beginning Student Survey (BSS) was administered online to new, first-time undergraduates (including Freshmen Connection) in select courses from October 18 - October 29, 2021.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this cohort began their college career with vastly different high school experiences (e.g., remote) compared to previous student cohorts. A previous memo looked at students' well-being overall compared to Fall 2019. This report looks at students' well-being by race and ethnicity, focusing on Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic, International, Multiracial, and White students, and provides a longitudinal comparison to first-year student responses before the pandemic in Fall 2019. As the campus transitioned back to being fully in-person in Fall 2021, these findings and comparisons provide insight into the unique experiences of the Fall 2021 cohort, especially as the campus works to meet different students' needs to help them succeed.

In general, despite the challenges of the pandemic, responses to the 2021 survey were similar to 2019 (see Figure 1). Most respondents rated themselves as fine or excellent to the questions on well-being. This report focuses on those respondents who responded with "poor" to these items to identify groups that may need more support.

First-year respondents struggled with stress and health similar to before the pandemic in 2019.

Rate yourself on each of the following for this semester:

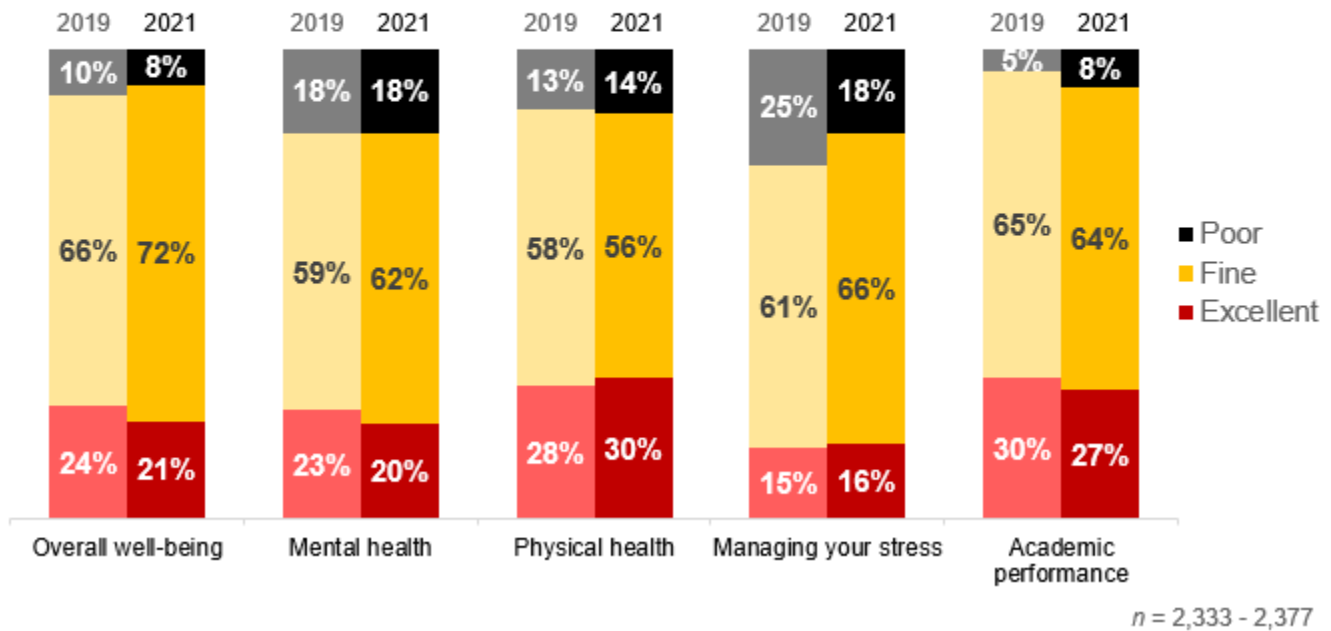


Figure 1. Responses to items on students' well-being, BSS19 and BSS21.

1 The BSS survey was administered in ENGL101, UNIV100, GEMS100, BSCV181, HNUH100, IDEA101, and TLPL288D. During the Fall 2021 semester, 2,396 (39%) out of 6,107 new undergraduates completed the survey. The distribution of respondents by race/ethnicity mirrored that of the population. Female students were slightly over-represented (55% of respondents compared to 53% of the population). In this report, we highlight differences of around 10 percentage points or more. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

2 The number of respondents who were indigenous was too small to include. Respondents whose race/ethnicity is unknown are also not discussed.

As in 2019, a concerning percentage of the incoming class of 2021 struggled with their well-being.

- Overall, responses in 2021 were similar to 2019. Twenty-one percent indicated their overall well-being was excellent in 2021 and 8% said it was poor, similar to 2019 (24% excellent and 10% poor; see Figure 2).
- Fifteen percent of Black or African American respondents said their overall well-being was poor in 2021, compared to 6% of White respondents (see Figure 2). Conversely, 14% of Black or African American respondents said “excellent,” compared to 25% of White respondents (not pictured).
- Thirteen percent of Multiracial respondents (respondents reporting two or more races) and 9% of Hispanic respondents said their overall well-being was poor in 2021.

Rate yourself on each of the following for this semester | % Poor

Overall well-being

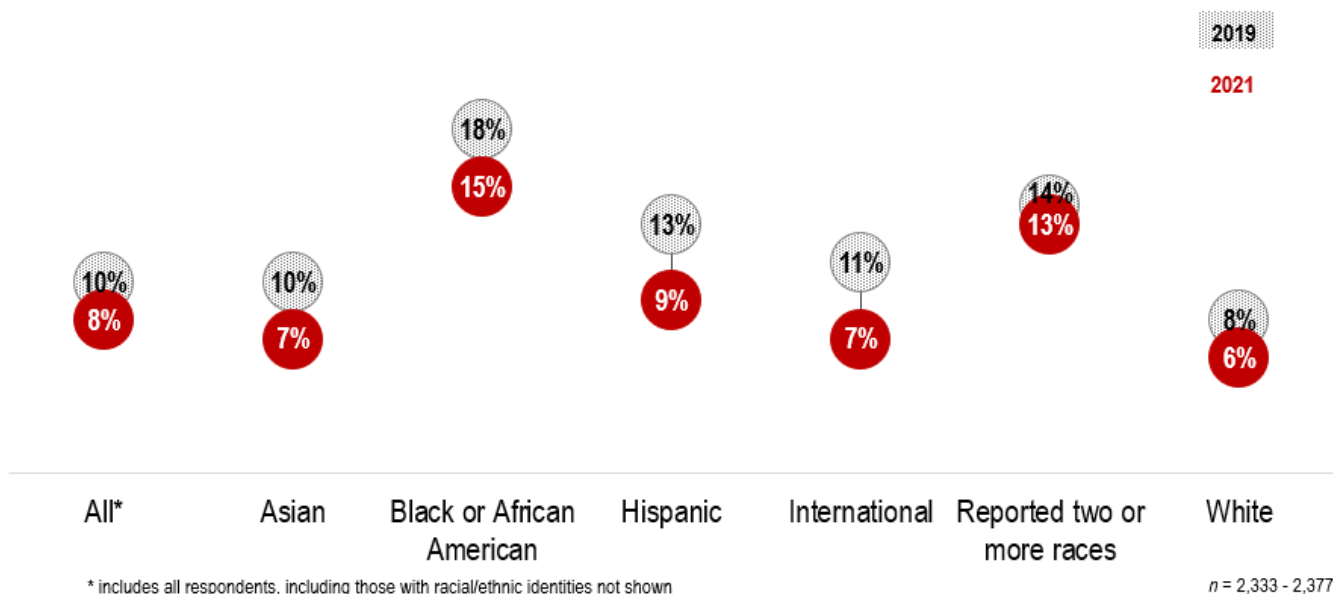


Figure 2. BSS longitudinal items on overall well-being in Fall 2019 (gray pattern) and Fall 2021 (red).

Similar percentages of respondents said their mental and physical health was poor in 2019 and 2021, and differences between racial/ethnic groups were also similar.

Mental health

- The percent of respondents who indicated their mental health was excellent increased slightly for most racial/ethnic groups (not pictured).
- Similar to 2019, international respondents had the largest percent who said “excellent” (36%; not pictured).
- As in 2019, over one-quarter (28%) of Black or African American respondents rated their mental health as poor -- over 10 percentage points higher than Asian and White respondents (18% and 16%, respectively; see Figure 3).

Physical health

- Fewer than one in five respondents indicated their physical health was poor (see the “All” category in Figure 3).
- Twenty-two percent of Black or African American respondents and 20% of Hispanic respondents reported poor physical health in 2021, compared to 11% of White respondents.

Rate yourself on each of the following for this semester | % Poor

Mental health

Physical health

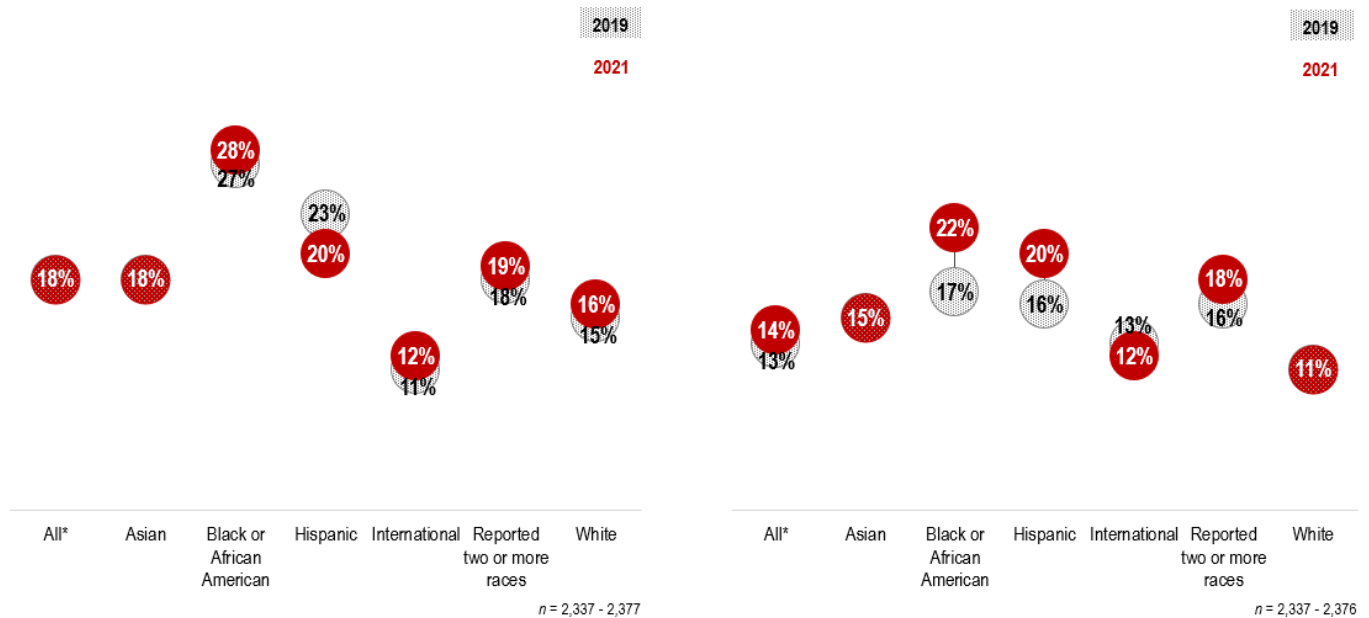


Figure 3. BSS longitudinal items on mental and physical health in Fall 2019 (gray pattern) and Fall 2021 (red).

Fewer respondents had difficulty managing their stress in 2021 compared to 2019, though their perceptions of their academic performance were similar.

Managing your stress

- Fewer respondents said their ability to manage stress was poor in 2021 than in 2019 (18% in 2021 vs. 25% in 2019; see the “All” category in Figure 4).
- As in 2019, White respondents responded with “excellent” and “fine” at a higher rate (87%) than Asian (80%), Hispanic (77%), and Black or African American respondents (72%; not pictured).
- Fewer Black or African American respondents said “poor” in 2021 than in 2019, but the number remains high: 28% in 2021 and 42% in 2019.

Academic performance

- The majority of respondents said their academic performance was fine or excellent, regardless of race/ethnicity (not pictured).
- More Asian, Black or African American, and Hispanic respondents rated their academic performance as poor compared to White respondents (11% of Asian and Hispanic, 12% of Black or African American respondents vs. 5% of White respondents; see Figure 4).
- Compared to 2019, fewer Hispanic respondents said their academic performance was excellent: 20% rated their academic performance as excellent in 2021, down from 32% in 2019 (not pictured).

This report was written by the Campus Assessment Working Group (CAWG) Beginnings subgroup: Joann Prosser, Chair, Resident Life; Leigh Dunewood, Libraries; Jamie Edwards, Institutional Research, Planning & Assessment (IRPA); Danielle Glazer, IRPA; Melissa Hyre, Letters & Sciences; Lindsay Inge Carpenter, Libraries; Alia Lancaster, Academic Technology Experience; Alice Mitchell, Counseling Center; Nick Orban, Enrollment Management; Nicole Roop, School of Engineering; Alan Socha, IRPA; Imani Spence, Libraries; Sophie Tullier, Stamp Student Union; Abigail Williams-Yee, School of Business. For more information, to view past reports, or to join a CAWG subgroup, visit <http://ter.ps/CAWG>.

Rate yourself on each of the following for this semester | % Poor

Managing your stress

Academic performance

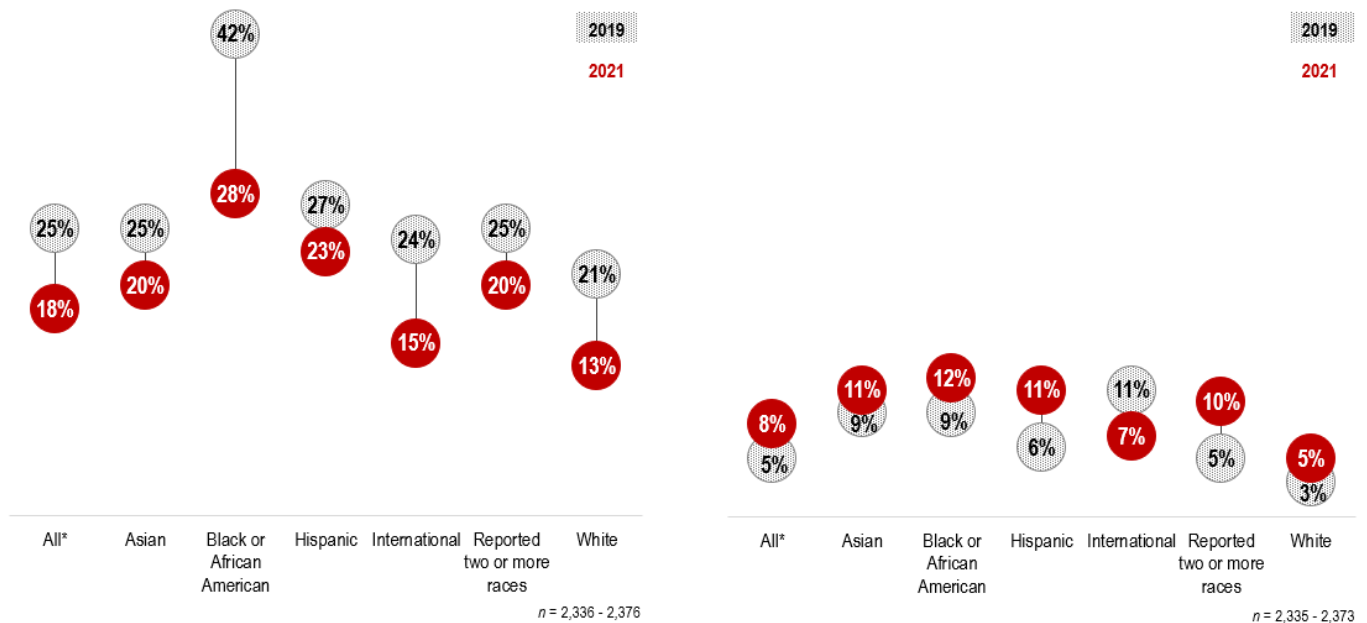


Figure 4. BSS longitudinal items on managing stress and academic performance in Fall 2019 (gray pattern) and Fall 2021 (red).

Conclusion

Overall, the majority of respondents rated their overall well-being and its subcomponents as fine or excellent in 2021, with similar patterns to first-year respondents in 2019. Most of this report focuses on the respondents who selected “poor,” in order to explore where students may need more support. There was an improvement in how respondents perceived their stress management. The proportion of respondents who said “poor” to managing their stress dropped from 25% to 18%, and the improvements held across racial-ethnic groups. However, Black or African American and Hispanic respondents still had higher proportions reporting “poor” than other respondents in managing stress, mental health, and overall well-being, and the overall proportion of respondents reporting “poor” for stress management (18%) and mental health (18%) is still concerning. These data can help inform plans to support students in all aspects of their well-being.

Moving Forward:

- How did the pandemic impact how students perceive what’s stressful (e.g., living through a pandemic)?
- As we use survey data to inform our work with students, it is critical to consider whose voices are missing. Students struggling with mental health issues may not be attending classes and may not be part of our sample. Alternatively, respondents may feel uncomfortable self-disclosing their personal struggles. Given enough of these instances, mental health results might be skewed in a positive direction. For fuller examinations of student well-being, it would be helpful to seek multiple sources of information.
- A useful rule to interpreting survey data involves “context” before “content” - a careful consideration of the situational and temporal factors that may influence respondents’ survey responses. For example, the BSS is administered during the first 8-10 weeks of students’ first semester - how might the timing influence responses? Whether students have taken midterms or completed a major course assignment might influence their self-perceptions of their academic performance. Alternatively, whether students have found their niche or struggle with home sickness would influence their self-perceptions of their social transition.
- Context is especially critical when making longitudinal comparisons. As stated previously, COVID-19 influenced the Fall 2021 cohort’s perceptions of their first semester experiences. Careful consideration of high school experiences related to COVID-19 is important when interpreting the survey results. For example, how would the high school virtual learning environment experienced by the incoming Fall 2021 cohort influence students’ social expectations and resilience?