

NSF RAPID: Graduate Student Experiences of Support and Stress During the COVID-19 Pandemic

December 2020

Since March 2020, COVID-19 has rapidly upended graduate students' learning, research, teaching, and well-being. We surveyed and conducted focus groups with graduate students pursuing varied degrees across fields of study to find out about their experiences of disruption, mental health, support from institutions, and educational and career plans.



About **3500** graduate students



12 U.S. public institutions



Survey: June–July 2020



Focus groups: August 2020

Mental Health



- 33%** had moderate or higher levels of anxiety
- 35%** had moderate or higher levels of depression
- 32%** had symptoms of PTSD
- 67%** scored low on well-being

"...COVID just amplifies everything. I struggled with mental health and anxiety all the time, but I can manage that during normal circumstances." –Ph.D. student

Institutional Mental & Physical Health Support

39%

felt supported by **school, college, and university administrators**

71%

felt supported by **advisors/ major professors**

"I have amazing faculty that I feel like so fortunate. All of my professors in the spring were just really compassionate about the situation...the university hasn't done much." –Ph.D. student

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https://www.montana.edu/covid19_rapid/

Economic Insecurity



worried about housing

worried about running out of food

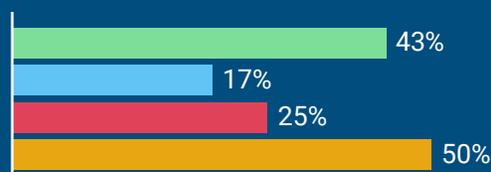
Black Lives Matter & COVID-19

Students who have lost someone close to them due to COVID-19:

- 9%** of Black student respondents
- 9%** of American Indian respondents
- 3%** of other respondents

"It's kind of complicated in terms of my interactions with faculty during the Black Lives Matter movement, I've faced some pretty intense racism regarding really simple attempts to just get a more diverse representative sample within [my] program. So this is a weird moment for me, where I'm feeling like a great deal of support to do a lot of COVID related research and look at that, and then an entirely different perspective with regards to diversity and equity in the program." – Ph.D. student

Educational & Career Plans



- expected or were unsure of degree completion delays
- planned to change their career goals
- those in STEM fields pessimistic about the conditions for pursuing their current career goals
- those in humanities fields pessimistic about the conditions for pursuing their current career goals