

Examining the Impact of Covid-19 on the College Students' Experience

Intellectual Merit

The Covid-19 pandemic has altered higher education as universities began closing their campuses in late March 2020 and started shifting courses from traditional face-to-face lectures to online or hybrid learning experiences. Traditionally, students attend college to meet other students, learn new information through their courses, apply what they have learned in various settings, and experience the campus' social life. Covid-19 has forced the college students' experience to change for the last two semesters and for the near future. Students have had to adjust their daily activities, modify their social interactions, and adapt to a new learning environment. The new learning environment consists of a majority of courses moving online, while limiting face-to-face interactions to small groups for certain courses. This change can be more challenging, as professors may not teach as effectively and may be more difficult to access in a virtual environment. Although most resources supporting students are still available, they may not be as accessible as they were before the pandemic. These factors may lead to students having to delay their anticipated graduation dates. In addition, college students have had to modify their social interactions. Therefore, it is important to examine how Covid-19 has affected students' social and life interactions as this may be connected to their mental health. According to a recent study, students living alone have experienced an increased level of anxiety since the start of the pandemic (Cao et al., 2020). Balancing school, social, and work responsibilities has always been challenging for many college students. Sprung and Rogers (2020) found that students who reported lower satisfaction with their work-life balance also reported higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms. Today's college students may be experiencing more challenges balancing these responsibilities as they attempt to also cope with the global pandemic.

There have been a few preliminary studies conducted that examined how the Covid-19 pandemic has affected college students. For example, Arsitovnik (2020) found that in North America, 55% of college students reported experiencing an increased study workload. Therefore, it is important to study how students' work-life balance has been affected since this can also affect one's mental health.

After receiving IRB approval from Minnesota State University, Mankato, an online survey consisting of approximately 50 questions will be distributed to undergraduate and graduate students. Participants will be recruited through Sona Systems, which is an online research participation system used by several departments that allows students to participate in research opportunities. Before completing the online survey, participants will be presented with a consent form that will review the potential risks and benefits of the study as well as inform the individual that participation is voluntary. If the participant consents, they will be presented the survey to complete. The survey was developed through Qualtrics, a survey development tool used to create online surveys. The survey consists of five sections, including demographics, daily activities/routines, social life/interactions, work/life balance, and school/learning experience. Each of the main sections focuses on the effect that Covid-19 has had on a participant's life prior to the pandemic, at the beginning of the pandemic, and within the last two weeks of the pandemic. Open-ended questions are provided at the end of each section to learn about what may have helped participants be successful in coping with the pandemic.

Broad Impact

The purpose of the study is to examine the impact Covid-19 has had on college students' experiences. We hope to learn more about how Covid-19 has affected the experiences of undergraduate and graduate students. By learning more about challenges students are currently

facing and strategies they are implementing to cope, colleges may be able to make changes that lead to improved student success. This may include the introduction of additional resources, such as access to mental health supports. By identifying the social changes students have experienced due to Covid-19, we could identify strategies that could increase the chances of students completing their degrees. We plan to resolve our project by presenting our findings at the Undergraduate Research Symposium and the National Conference on Undergraduate Research in the Spring.

Personal Impact

As an undergraduate student, the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the college experience are a particularly relevant topic. In particular, I am interested in examining how various factors, such as students' living arrangements and personal relationships, may have been impacted by the pandemic. I am also motivated to study this topic because of their relation to my career aspirations and goals. After earning my bachelor's degree, I intend to pursue a career in school psychology, which involves working with students of various ages. This study will allow me the opportunity to gain experience in conducting research with students and will help to prepare me for research opportunities I might encounter in my graduate education. Furthermore, studying this topic will be beneficial in the work I currently do as a Learning Community Coordinator, in which I hold a leadership position helping students in their transition to college. Learning more about how the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted the college experience will allow me to better serve and support the first-year college students that I currently work with. For these reasons, I believe this project will help me to achieve my goals and better serve the students I support now and the students I will support in my future endeavors.

References

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