



Canadian Campus  
Wellbeing Survey

Bien-être sur les  
campus canadiens

## Changes to the Canadian Campus Wellbeing Survey due to COVID-19

### Technical Report Series

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[www.ccws-becc.ca](http://www.ccws-becc.ca)

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## Introduction

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization characterized the COVID-19 virus outbreak as a global pandemic (World Health Organization, 2020). Canada introduced numerous public health measures, such as physical distancing, limiting community and social gatherings, and maintaining telework arrangements where possible (Government of Canada, 2020). In response to public health guidelines, most public universities in Canada suspended in-person classes and transitioned to online learning (University Affairs, 2020). Changes to everyday life may impact wellbeing, with an early report suggesting declines in self-perceived mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic (Findlay & Arim, 2020). This reinforces the need for assessing wellness in Canadian post-secondary students, and also presents an opportunity to investigate factors related to COVID-19 that impact student wellbeing. Additionally, the timeline for post-secondary institutions fully returning to in-person teaching is currently unknown, making it important to phrase questionnaire items in a way that is relevant to all students, whether learning in-person on campus or online. This document outlines changes made to the CCWS in order to ensure data collected is relevant to capturing student wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Methods

### Primary considerations for selecting measures

The CCWS team sought to identify measures that were actionable and of interest to the post-secondary institutions (PSIs) taking part, relatively short, and relevant to student wellbeing in the long term (i.e., not just during the COVID-19 pandemic) so that the measures could be used to observe changes across multiple years.

### Identifying content areas

A general search for COVID-19 and pandemic-related questionnaires for students was conducted to identify potential items or measures, including contacting a colleague with knowledge of surveys for this population. Potential measures and items were reviewed using the considerations above. The CCWS team concluded that the existing COVID-19 items used in other surveys would be less relevant long term or assessed satisfaction rather than wellness.

Considering the social and emotional impacts that the COVID-19 restrictions might have, measures related to isolation, loneliness, and social provisions and networks that could affect wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic were also identified. The CCWS team felt that these measures would be more relevant in the long term, while still providing informative and actionable data during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, some measures were designed for different populations (e.g., older adults) or were not used in population-level surveys. Several potential measures were presented to the CCWS Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) to gauge acceptability and applicability. These included the Three-Item Loneliness Scale (Hughes et al., 2004) that was also adopted by the National College Health Assessment, the five-item Social Provisions measure used by the Canadian Community Health Survey (Statistics Canada, 2019),

the Interpersonal Support Evaluation List – Short Form (Cohen & Hoberman, 1983; Payne et al., 2012), and the Lubben Social Network Scale (Lubben et al., 2006).

### Stakeholder consultation

The CCWS team met with PSIs from a region participating during the COVID-19 pandemic to discuss additional questions that might be of value. Topics of interest included social aspects of mental health, such as isolation and connectedness with friends, faculty, and staff. These interests informed later consultation with the CCWS TAC, who were asked to give feedback on the measures identified by the CCWS team.

After discussing topics of interest with representatives from the participating region, and potential measures with the TAC, the CCWS team proposed the addition of both the Three-Item Loneliness Scale (Hughes et al., 2004) and the five-item Social Provisions measure (Statistics Canada, 2019) to the TAC. Both measures have the potential to provide relevant and actionable data during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, produce results that would be comparable to other population-level survey data, and were relatively short (minimize additional time to complete the survey). There was consensus amongst the TAC to add both measures to the CCWS starting in the Fall 2020 deployment.

### CCWS content review

The CCWS team also aimed to ensure that the phrasing of the CCWS was relevant to students regardless of whether they attended their PSI online or in-person. Existing content was reviewed by three team members (KW, KW, and GF) independently to identify whether items were relevant to students who were attending the PSI online. Consensus on specific items was reached through discussion.

Items with phrasing specific to in-person learning were identified and adapted when it was believed that this would not change the meaning. For example, some phrasing was changed from “on campus” to “at my institution”. See Appendix A for changes to survey content.

### Discussion

Through stakeholder consultation two measures were identified to be included in the CCWS: the Three-Item Loneliness Scale (Hughes et al., 2004) and five-item Social Provisions measure (Statistics Canada, 2019). The addition of measures that relate to COVID-19 will allow for better assessment of wellbeing and identification of areas where PSIs may support their students. The phrasing of questions used in the CCWS is applicable to students who attend their PSI virtually or in-person. The impact of the inclusion of the new measures on time to complete the modified CCWS will be reported in the future.

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## Appendix A – Changes to survey content

### Student Experience

This section will ask you about your experiences and opinions about your post-secondary institution.

Based on your experience at your institution, please rate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I feel that I belong <del>on campus</del> <b>at my institution</b> .						
At my institution, I am respected regardless of my personal characteristics, identity or background (e.g., gender, ethnicity, international status, disability, etc.).						
My institution is a respectful environment.						
My institution values diversity.						
At my institution, I feel that students' mental and emotional wellbeing is a priority.						
I feel that the <del>campus</del> <b>climate at my institution</b> encourages free and open discussion about mental and emotional health.						
At my institution, the administration is listening to the concerns of students when it comes to mental health and wellbeing.						
I have a group, community, or social circle at <del>school</del> <b>my institution</b> where I feel I belong (feel at home, known, connected to, support in my identity).						

### Mental Health Assets

This section will ask you about your overall wellbeing.

The next questions are about your current relationships with friends, family members, co-workers, community members, and so on. Please indicate to what extent each statement describes your current relationships with other people.

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>I don't know</i>
I have close relationships that provide me with a sense of emotional security and wellbeing.					
There is someone I could talk to about important decisions in my life.					
I have relationships where my competence and skill are recognized.					

I feel part of a group of people who share my attitudes and beliefs.					
There are people I can count on in an emergency.					

## Mental Health Deficits

This section will ask you about potential sources of stress for you, and your feelings.

Please indicate the degree to which the following factors pose, or have posed, an obstacle to your academic progress:

	A major obstacle	A minor obstacle	Not an obstacle
(i) Financial pressures or work obligations			
(ii) Personal or family problems			
(iii) Your academic performance at your post-secondary institution			
(iv) Course availability/scheduling			
(v) Lack of good academic advising			
(vi) Difficulties with academic workload			
(vii) Language/cultural barriers			
(viii) Difficulties associated with a disability or chronic health condition			
ix) Concerns about the COVID-19 pandemic			
x) Shift to online classes			

The next questions are about how you feel about different aspects of your life. For each one, select how often you feel that way.

	Hardly ever	Some of the time	Often
How often do you feel that you lack companionship?			
How often do you feel left out?			
How often do you feel isolated from others?			

## Health Service Utilization/Help Seeking

This section will ask you about your knowledge and opinions about health services available on- and off-campus.

**How much do you agree with the following statements?**

If I needed to seek professional help for my mental or emotional health, I would know where to go on campus access campus-based resources (online or in-person).

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

I feel comfortable seeking support for **mental** health issues online.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

If I needed to seek professional help for my physical health, I would know where to ~~go on~~  
~~campus~~ access campus-based resources (online or in-person).

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not applicable

There is a good support system ~~on campus~~ at my institution for students going through difficult times.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- I don't know

Are you aware of mental health outreach efforts ~~on your campus~~ at your institution (such as educational programs, awareness events, anti-stigma campaigns, screening days)?

- Yes
- No

## Physical Health/Health Behaviours

This section will ask you about your sleep habits and other activities.

### Sedentary Behaviour

The following questions are about activities you did in the **last 7 days while sitting, reclining or lying down**. Do not count the time you spent in bed sleeping or napping.

On a typical **weekday** in the past week, how much time did you spend sitting, reclining or lying down and ...

(i) Watching TV or using a computer, tablet or smartphone **during your free time?**

- Include time spent texting, watching DVDs, videos, playing computer games, Xbox, PlayStation, iPod, YouTube, Facebook or other social networking tools, emailing and using the Internet.

- Do not include time spent on a computer **for** work or at school.

For example: If you typically used your computer for 6.5 hours on the weekdays, you will need to insert 6 in the hour box and 30 in the minute box.

- # hours per day (0-24 hrs)
- # minutes per day (0-59 mins)

## Demographics

This section will ask you some questions about your background and identity. By learning more about students' backgrounds and identities, we are able to gain a broader understanding of student experience from a variety of perspectives. *Your responses will be kept confidential. Results will be grouped without identifying individual students. No part of your responses to this survey will become part of your student record.*

Are you currently living in the province/territory (e.g. Ontario; Alberta) where your institution is located?

- Yes
- No
- I prefer not to answer

Is your living situation different than planned as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?

- Yes
- No
- I prefer not to answer

Where do you currently live?

- University or college residence
- Other on-campus housing
- Off-campus **with family** (e.g., parents, spouse, children)
- Off-campus alone
- Off campus **with friends or roommates**
- I do not have stable housing (e.g., couch-surfing, living in a vehicle, facing eviction)
- I prefer not to answer

→ If answered off-campus, no stable housing, or prefer not to answer to above:

How do you commute to campus? *Select the mode of transport you use most often.*

- Vehicle (alone)

- Vehicle (with others/carpool)
- Walk
- Bicycle
- Public transit
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- Not applicable (e.g., distance ed., co-op, [classes online](#))

How long is your commute to campus (one-way)?

- 0-30 minutes
- 31-60 minutes
- Over 60 minutes
- [Not applicable](#)