Covid-19 Survey Faculty of Sustainability – Results Students

Survey round #1: March and Juli/August 2020

Survey round #2: March/April 2021

1. CHALLENGES

Due to Covid-19, the students experience various challenges both in university context and privately:

Challenges studying:

- Difficulty finding a suitable place to study and study (own room too small, no privacy, library closed, etc.)
- Very high screen time
- Lack of interaction with other students and teachers
- Technical challenges (poor internet connection, incompatible devices, etc.)
- Motivation problems

Challenges private:

- By far the most frequently mentioned: Loneliness and strongly reduced social contacts
- Financial difficulties and loss of job
- Responsibility for caring for relatives, which takes time and energy
- No clear separation between work/study and free time
- General insecurity and worry about other people and the development of the pandemic
- No change from everyday life, switching off is not possible
- Hopelessness that the situation will improve soon
- Psychological problems/illnesses
- Difficult housing situation and no possibility to move out
- Lack of exercise

Differences to the beginning of the pandemic:

- Getting used to the situation (less fear, more serenity)
- Loss of hope in politics, disappointment
- Lack of motivation and frustration has increased
- Reduction of social contacts
- Decline of mental and physical health
- More stress
- Longing for excitement has increased

2. EFFECTS

Resulting from the situation and the challenges mentioned above, students reported the following effects the pandemic has on them:

Effects on studying and career:

- By far the most frequently mentioned: Less concentration and motivation for online studies
- Lower performance, it takes longer to complete tasks
- The quality of one's own performance and examinations seems to decline, many also expect lower grades
- No more fun in studying
- Desire to complete studies as quickly as possible
- Thoughts of dropping out or continuing studies at a later date
- Postponing the final thesis because data collection is currently not possible

- Positive effects: Writing thesis without distractions, more time for studies because of loss of part-time job, opportunities to attend other modules; working at own pace
- Possible delay in starting the Master's programme and lower job entry opportunities in the short term

Effects private:

- Activities generally require more energy and time
- Strong impact on mental health: many report high pressure, stress and anxiety, some also report depression
- Physical health is also affected: headaches, muscle tension, worsened eyesight
- Some did not report negative effects or positively highlighted that new perspectives and ideas are generated by the pandemic

3. STRATEGIES

In order to deal with these effects, different strategies were mentioned:

Strategies studying:

- Take fewer courses
- Lower your own expectations of performance and accept potentially lower grades
- Set up a comfortable workplace
- Create suitable places to learn (leave your own home)
- Study in groups, discussing study content with fellow students

Strategies private:

- Acceptance of the situation
- Staying in touch and spending time with family, friends, flatmates and fellow students
- Yoga and meditation
- Self-care
- Sports, physical activity and spending more time outside
- Active time management (screen-free times, fixed end of work/study time)
- Seek professional help (psychological support)
- Consume less news
- Actively reflecting on the pandemic and the situation (e.g. by keeping a diary, talking to others, research approach, etc.).
- Some, however, have no coping strategies, react with repression of feelings

4. SUPPORT FROM THE UNIVERSITY

Based on the situation between March and Juli/August 2020 students experienced the following support from Leuphana University and the Faculty of Sustainability:

- Quick change to online teaching
- Sometimes explicitly mentioned positively: Learning material (e.g. videos) and chosen online formats
- Willingness of staff to help with problems (e.g. library, administration, etc.)
- Communication and updates by e-mail (though sometimes very late)
- After reopening: provision of workstations, library, printers (though also criticism that they were closed for so long)
- Some say they did not get any support

Based on the situation in March/April 2021 students experienced the following support from Leuphana University and the Faculty of Sustainability:

- Extension of the standard period of study
- Mentoring Environmental Sciences
- Events about mental health
- Online formats for writing together: "Zeit zum Schreiben!" organized by the Writing Center
- Online formats to meet other students, e.g. from university institutions or initiatives (partly not used because students do not want to spend even more time in front of their laptops)

The following were rated as positive:

- Information emails from the university
- Effort that was put into the digital teaching offer
- Partial facilitation of online exams
- Partial support from teaching staff for BAFöG extension applications
- Employers at the university are understanding for the situation of student assistants

Criticism:

- Too high workload
- Professors are increasingly less considerate of students' situation
- Information is partly not available in English
- 7/16 students state that they receive no or hardly any support

5. SUGGESTIONS AND WISHES FOR THE UNIVERSITY

Referring to March/April 2021, students had the following suggestions and wishes for further support by the university and faculty:

University level:

- Comprehensive change to face-to-face courses as soon as possible (change model is not perceived as helpful)
- Workplaces at the university (library, seminar rooms)
- Reduce tuition fees
- Further extension of the standard period of study
- Better, less short-term communication and updates
- Mentioned several times: offering psychological help and events on mental health, soft skill counselling (e.g. time management, stress resilience)
- Students would like the university to be more politically active and advocate for students' interests

Faculty and module level:

- Greater understanding and empathy for the situation and challenges of students
- Adjustment of grading scale
- More flexibility on the part of teachers, e.g. changing the date of exams, taking feedback more into account
- Reduction of workload
- Specific suggestions for online teaching:
    - Design online courses in an appealing way, use online tools sensibly, do not simply transfer face-to-face formats to online teaching
    - Videos instead of Zoom lectures, more Moodle courses
    - Instead of online events, offer outdoor events if necessary
    - Wish for uniform rules for all modules, e.g. no (perceived) camera obligation (sometimes perceived as distracting and causes stress)
    - Limit events to 1.5h, no 8h block seminars online
    - Lecturers should consistently schedule and observe breaks
    - Offer the possibility for students to ask the lecturer questions after online lectures
    - Check whether someone is recording online lectures with external software

- Specific suggestions for examinations:
    - More flexibility in examinations, e.g. offer other examination formats than written examinations, offer the option of taking examinations alone (not as group work).
    - More technology time for online exams

Administration Level:

- Consistent provision of all information in English
- FAQ page of the student service
- Clearly communicate responsibilities

Contact details, additional quotes and all results can also be found here.