

The [National College Health Assessment](#) (NCHA) survey is used in higher education institutions in the United States to assess students' habits, perceptions, and behaviors and covers several physical and mental health domains. To understand the health of their students, SF State conducted the NCHA survey in February 2021, which has been implemented in the past, generally in two year intervals. The goal of conducting the NCHA is to enable the campus to use data to plan effectively, implement and evaluate health, wellness, and basic needs programs, and target outreach and education efforts to students. This data brief describes findings from the initial analysis and covers general health and wellbeing, food insecurity, mental health, academic barriers, and the impact of COVID-19.

Methods

In February 2021, the web-based NCHA survey and consent form was sent to 10,000 randomly selected students compiled by SF State's Institutional Research. Two thousand three hundred fifty-one students (23.5% of the sample) completed the NCHA survey, resulting in a sample that was well representative of the campus population (See Table 1). Representation was checked to include various student identifiers such as gender identity, ethnicity, historically underrepresented students, first-year and transfer status, Pell Eligibility, first generation, and disability status. There was a slight overrepresentation of females (7.5%), upper-division students (Juniors: 4.3%; Seniors: 1.5%), and transfer students, with a slight underrepresentation of males (-8.0%), Latinx (-1.8%), multiple ethnicities (-1.5%), freshman starters, lower division (Freshman: -1.1%; Sophomores: -2.9%), and graduate students (-1.7%). The standard survey data was results broken down by gender identity and allowed for comparison to the national sample of all respondents.

In addition, SF State was able to match SF State's NCHA results with student academic records and reviewed them in aggregate to allow for analysis of the association between student success variables and health metrics.

SF State students report being healthy however, they face similar challenges to students in the national sample in many key areas

- 85% of students reported being in good to excellent physical health.
- Students feel that SF State prioritizes their health and well-being, specifically our transgender and gender non-conforming students (70.0%) compared to the national sample (38.0%).
- Students reported feeling safe on campus (53.5%) and in the surrounding community (33.2%) during the day, but reported feeling unsafe at night on campus (14.0%) and in the surrounding community (11.0%).
- SF State students feel less safe on our campus than the national sample (53.5% vs. 71.7%).

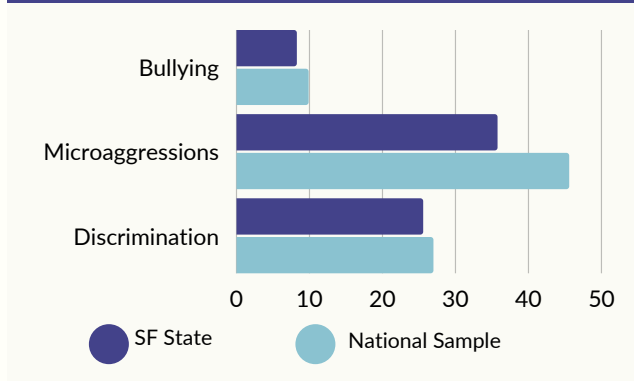
PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS THAT FEEL THEIR HEALTH AND WELL-BEING ARE PRIORITIZED ON THEIR CAMPUS



SF State transgender and gender nonconforming students feel like they belong and that their health and wellbeing is a priority

- Transgender and gender non-conforming students consistently report lower levels of psychological harm from stressors such as bullying and microaggressions than the national sample (Bullying: 8.2% vs 9.8%; Microaggressions: 35.7% vs 45.5%).
- Transgender and gender non-conforming students reported being less anxious (52% vs 54.8%), depressed (44.9% vs 51.1%), and stressed (10.1% vs 10.6%) than the national sample.

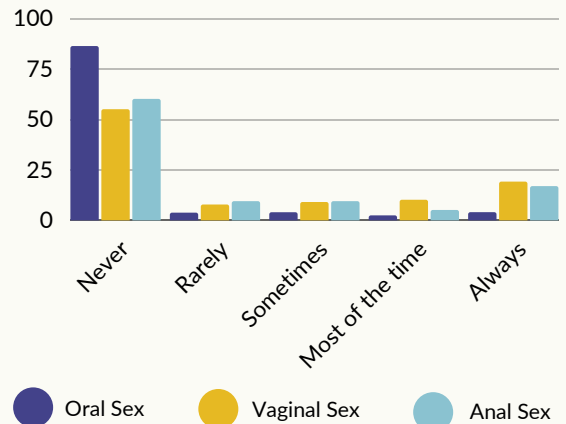
PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS THAT REPORT STRESS FROM PSYCHOLOGICAL HARM



SF State students engage in disease prevention but not enough of it

- More than half (65.7%) of students are active or highly active adults getting the recommended amount of aerobic and strength building activities per week.
- SF State students reported eating high levels of fruits and vegetables, putting them on par with national data (Fruits: 23.9% vs 21.2%; Vegetables: 39.5% vs 35.7%).
- More than half of SF State students who engage in vaginal intercourse (55%) and anal intercourse (60%) never use a condom or protective barrier.

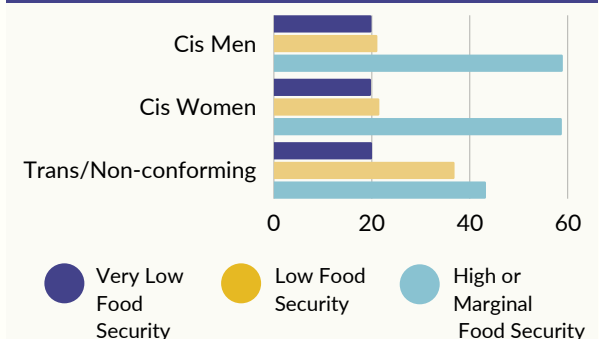
PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS THAT USE A CONDOM OR PROTECTIVE BARRIER DURING SEX



SF State students experience food insecurity

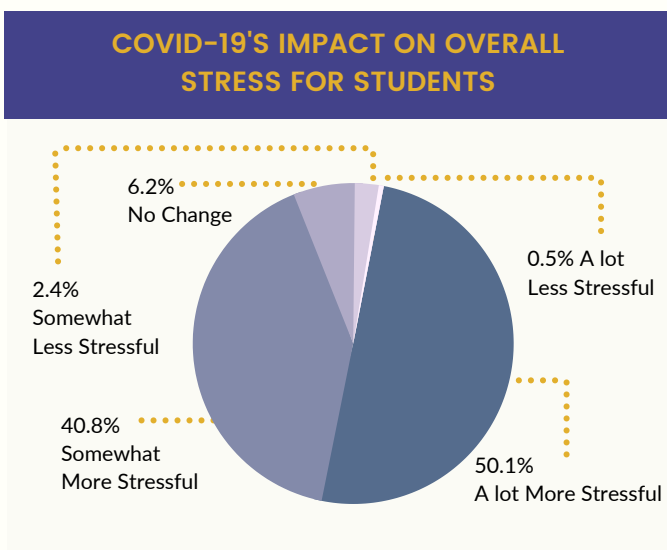
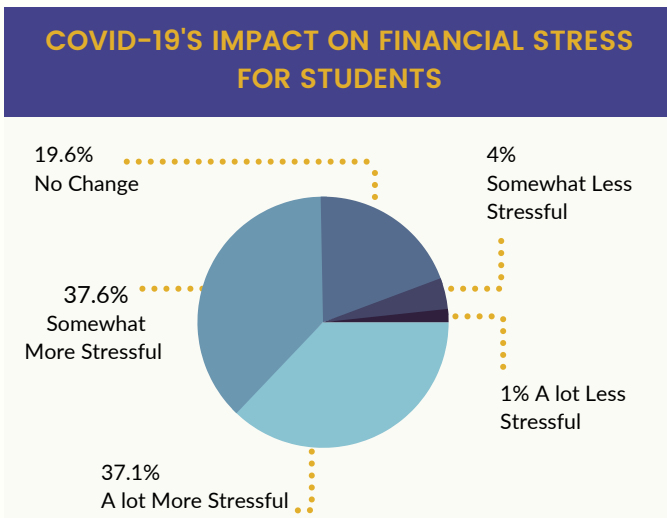
- SF State students' prevalence of experiencing any food insecurity is 41.8% compared to the 41.6% CSU average from a 2018 cross-sectional study.
- By February 2021, many students had moved home because of COVID-19, however, the prevalence remained at about 41%.
- Transgender and gender non-conforming students have a higher prevalence of food insecurity (56.8%) compared to Cisgender Men (41.1%) and Cisgender Women (41.3%).
- SF State students with a higher prevalence of food insecurity have lower GPAs by 0.30 points.

PREVALENCE OF FOOD INSECURITY IN SF STATE STUDENTS



A large number of students are deeply affected by the COVID-19 pandemic

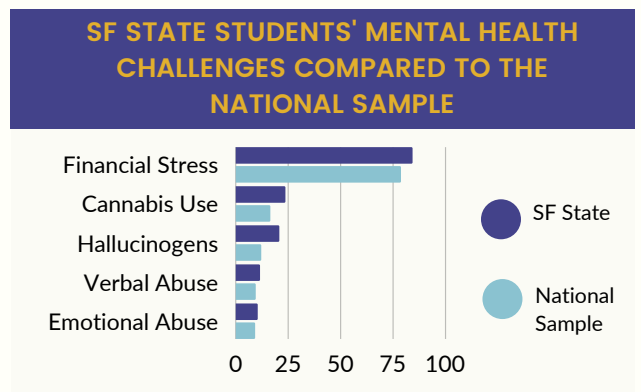
- In February 2021, 22% of students reported having a family member or someone close to them die of COVID-19.
- 28% of students reported having a family member or someone close to them coping with long-term symptoms of COVID-19.
- 16% of SF State students reported having COVID-19
- 18% of students reported having been subjected to discriminatory or hostile behavior or exchanges towards others due to their race/ethnicity (or what someone thought was their race/ethnicity).
- 75% of students reported that their financial situation had become more stressful during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Mental health is the primary health challenge facing SF State students

SF State students reported similar levels of mental health issues as those in the national sample.

- SF State students were more stressed about finances (84%) than the national sample (78.5%).
- Students engaged in less binge drinking (40.1% vs 47.9%), and abstained more from drinking (24.6% vs 21.4%) than the national sample; however, report higher recent cannabis use (23.4% vs 16.3%) and use of hallucinogens (20.5% vs 12%) than the national sample.
- Students experienced verbal and emotional abuse at higher levels than the national sample (Verbal abuse: 11.3% vs 9.3%; Emotional abuse: 10.2% vs 9%).
- Students reported that they get enough sleep to feel rested on less than three days a week and 56% of students reported getting only 6 or 7 hours of sleep a night.
- 25% of students reported being diagnosed with anxiety and 20% of students reported being diagnosed with depression by a healthcare provider.
- 53% of students reported feeling lonely.
- In the past year, 30% of students considered suicide at least once and 2% of students reported that they will likely try to commit suicide someday.
- 80% of students reported that they would consider seeking help from a mental health professional if they had a personal problem that was really bothering them.



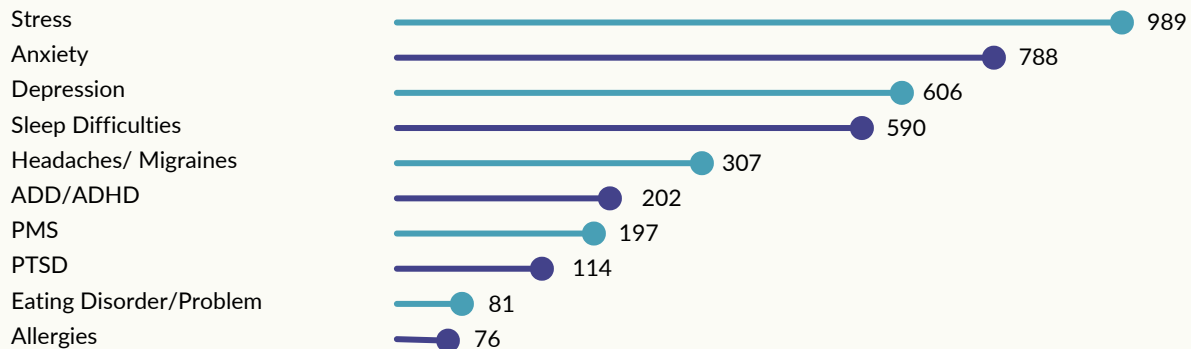
Mental health challenges and related issues impede student academic success

- Students reported that stress, anxiety, depression, sleep difficulties, and headaches/migraines were the top 5 issues affecting their academics.
- Students reported that stress, anxiety, and depression were the top 3 issues that delayed their progress towards a degree.
- Students reported moderate or high rates of distress with academics, finances, and death of a loved one compared to the national sample (Academics: 88.9% vs 89.6%; Finances: 84% vs 78.5%; Death of a loved one: 82.3% vs 77.1%).
- There is a negative relationship between stressors and lower academic performance as represented by GPA.

TOP CHALLENGES THAT IMPACT SF STATE STUDENTS



TOP MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES THAT IMPACT SF STATE STUDENTS ACADEMICS AND PROGRESSION TOWARDS A DEGREE



Implications

Health and well-being impact students' academic success (El Ansari & Stock, 2010; Ruthig, Marrone, Hladkyj, & Robinson-Epp, 2011). This NCHA data clearly highlights areas where they are faring better and where they are struggling. The findings, especially for transgender students' mental health, financial strain, and COVID-19 impacts, reflect the unique times we are in and also the collective impact of the University's efforts to provide an inclusive campus for all students.

In order to be successful in our mission as a university and reach the goals of Graduation Initiative 2025, both Student and Academic Affairs must implement strategies to promote student wellness. SF State faculty, staff, and students all have a role to play in ensuring students are healthy. Together the SF State community can foster a culture of health on our campus – in the classroom; in university policies and processes; and in the built environment. Key steps forward should include:

- Make promotion of a culture of health a priority for Academic and Student Affairs and a key piece of the new University Strategic Plan and Academic Master Plan. Engage students, faculty, and staff in discussions and strategy development about how best to address student mental health challenges, in particular, both inside and outside the classroom.
- De-stigmatize students experiencing health challenges and accessing resources in all communications, engagement, and teaching.
- Acknowledge the impact of health, in particular mental health, on academic success and retention. Develop a better understanding of the impact of student mental health on teaching and academic programs. Consider an institutionalized cross cabinet working group specifically focused on mental health promotion and response.
- Review how areas of impact for students (financial stress, academic stress, the impact of COVID-19) are exacerbated by University policies and procedures and explore possible remedies.
- Find ways to institutionalize the integration of [health resources](#) and academic information. Front load these resources for students on department websites, iLearn, syllabi, and other spaces where students engage with the university. Discuss health resources openly during key points in the academic calendar, such as the first week, mid-term, and approaching finals.
- Provide professional development support, time, and resources for building the health promotion skills of staff and faculty. Academic Affairs and administrative units should engage [Health Promotion & Wellness](#), [Center for Equity in Teaching & Learning](#), and [Division of Equity and Community Inclusion](#) for assistance in providing faculty and staff with training and resources. Make this professional development a part of all new faculty onboarding, lecturer, or tenure requirements.

For more information and additional data or reports visit [Gator Health](#).

References

- El Ansari, W., & Stock, C. (2010). Is the health and wellbeing of university students associated with their academic performance? Cross-sectional findings from the United Kingdom. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 7(2), 509–527. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph7020509>
- Ruthig, J. C., Marrone, S., Hladkyj, S., & Robinson-Epp, N. (2011). Changes in college student health: Implications for academic performance. *Journal of College Student Development*, 52(3), 307-320. <http://jpllnet.sfsu.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/changes-college-student-health-implications/docview/873114057/se-2?accountid=13802>

Table 1: NCHA Demographics

Variables	Spring 2021 Population		Spring 2021 Responses	
	#	%	#	%
Total	24,211	100.0%	2,358	100.0%
Sex				
Female	13,793	57.0%	1,521	64.5%
Male	10,384	42.9%	823	34.9%
Non-Binary	34	0.1%	14	0.6%
Ethnicity				
Latinx	8,307	34.3%	7,666	32.5%
Asian	6,158	25.4%	618	26.2%
White	4,366	18.0%	431	18.3%
International	1,589	6.6%	171	7.3%
Black/ African American	1,373	5.7%	139	5.9%
Two or More	1,293	5.3%	90	3.8%
Unknown	949	3.9%	94	4.0%
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	132	0.5%	38	1.6%
Native American/ Alaskan Native	44	0.2%	11	0.5%
Disability Status				
Reported Disability	1,405	5.8%	171	7.3%
No Disability	22,806	94.2%	2,187	92.7%
Age				
Mean Age	24.36		25.70	
Graduate Level				
Undergraduate	21,153	87.4%	2,101	89.1%
Graduate	3,058	12.6%	257	10.9%

Table 1 continued: NCHA Demographics

Variables	Spring 2021 Population		Spring 2021 Responses	
	#	%	#	%
Student Level				
Freshman	2,643	10.9%	232	9.8%
Sophomore	3,012	12.4%	224	9.5%
Junior	6,990	28.9%	781	33.1%
Senior	8,508	35.1%	864	36.6%
Grad w/ BA	3,058	12.6%	257	10.9%
EOP				
Not Enrolled in EOP	21,599	82.2%	2,082	88.3%
Enrolled in EOP	2,612	10.8%	276	11.7%