

# Returning to a New Normal: Examining Student's Perceptions and Experiences of Campus Reopening during COVID-19

Cara Tonn, Anne Dumadag, MPH, Hira Nadeem, MPH, Brenda Berumen-Flucker, MPH, Priyanka Patel, MPH, & Hadiza Galadima, Ph.D.

Old Dominion University, School of Community and Environmental Health

## Introduction

Existing research on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students' mental health and academic success reports adverse effects during the early stages of the pandemic due to the abrupt campus closures. However, with the relaxation of some restrictions, college students are allowed to return to in-person learning amid new policies. Few data exist regarding the mental health of college students during campus reopening. This study aims to explore students' perceptions on several topics related to the pandemic and how campus reopening and a "return to a new normal" may impact this vulnerable population's mental health.

## Objectives

- Evaluate the mental health impact on the reopening of campus and a return to a "new normal."
- To investigate students' perceptions and experiences of campus reopening and returning to the "new normal."

## Methodology

### Study Population

- Old Dominion University (ODU) students aged 18 years or older who are enrolled in Spring 2022.

### Study Design & Sampling

- A cross-sectional survey was used. The sample was selected using a stratified random sampling method to represent the gender distribution of 43% male and 57% female of the total enrollment at ODU.

### Variables

- The survey, administered through Qualtrics Survey software, includes questions to capture demographic characteristics, self-reported use of mental health services, and questions assessing students' experiences and perceptions of ODU campus reopening events and policies over four weeks.

### Statistical Analysis

- Descriptive statistics using frequency and percent were used to summarize the students' characteristics.
- Bivariate analyses were conducted using Chi-square & Fisher Exact tests.
- Multivariable penalized logistic regression was used to identify factors associated with MHS use during campus reopening.
- SAS Studio was used analysis, and the significance level was set at  $p < 0.05$ .

## Results

### Sample Characteristics

- A total of 236 students completed the survey: Response rate = 23%
- 54.66% are between the ages of 18-24, about 77% of the respondents are undergraduate students, 56.36% of those students identify as Caucasian, 70.76% are employed, and 77.55% live outside the family home (Table 1).

### Bivariate Analysis

Statistically significant association between self-reported use of MHS during campus reopening and Student status ( $p=0.0314$ ) and MHS use pre-pandemic, during the pandemic, and intention to use in the next 30 days ( $p < 0.001$ ). (Table 2).

## Results (Cont.)

### Multivariate Analysis

Respondents' self-reported use of mental health services shows a statistically significant relationship between using mental health services prior to the pandemic and mental health services during campus reopening:  $OR=7.33$ ,  $95\%CI=(2.54, 21.13)$ (Table 3).

### Students' Perceptions of MHS Use and Campus Reopening Policies

- There is a greater increase in MHS use during the pandemic than pre-pandemic: 19.57% vs. 13.92% (Figure 1).
- While 56.72% of students surveyed did not take online classes prior to the pandemic, 40.52% felt they learned the same way when taking in-person classes, and 58.40% of students reported positive experiences when asked about receiving support from ODU during the pandemic (Figure 2).

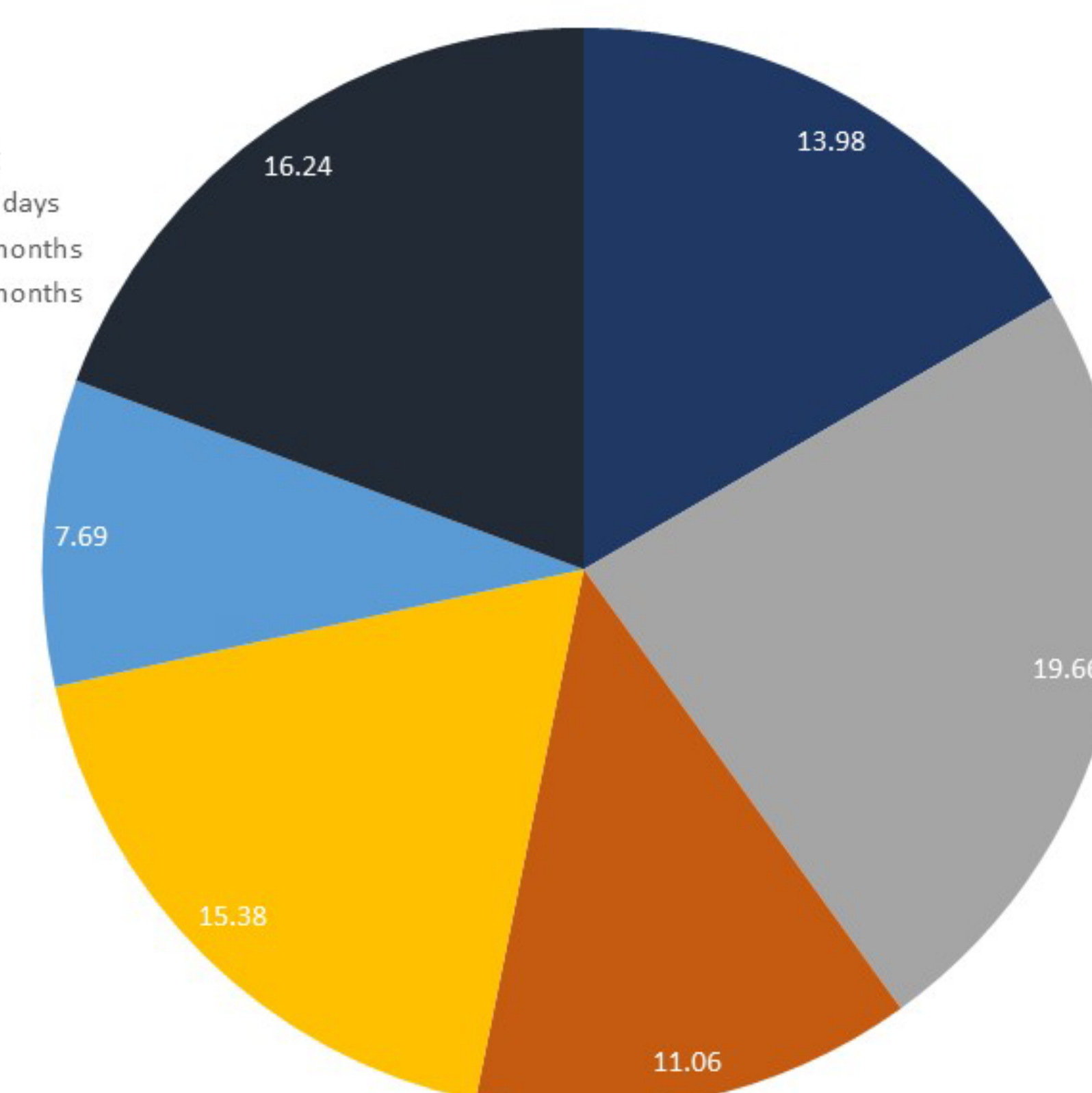
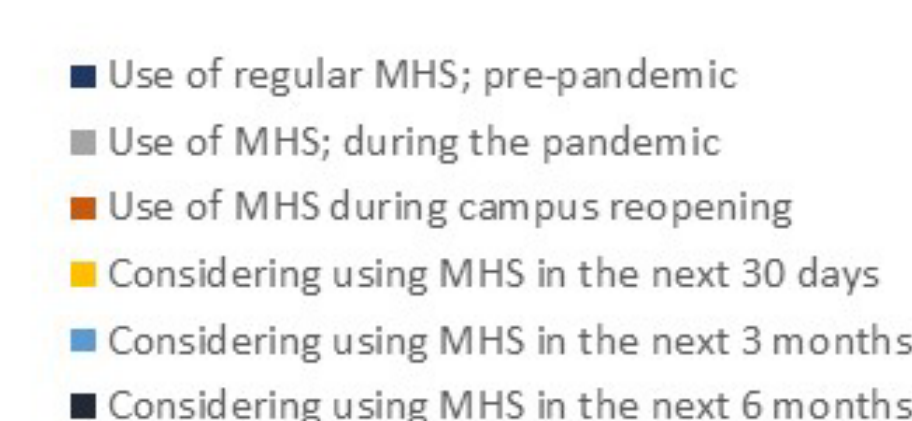
Table 1: Sample Characteristics

Selected Characteristics	n	%
<b>Age Group</b>		
18-24	129	54.66
25-34	71	30.08
35-44	21	8.9
45 and older	15	6.36
<b>Race</b>		
Asian	17	7.2
Black or African American	53	22.46
Caucasian	135	56.36
Two or more races	11	4.66
Other/Prefer not to say	22	9.32
<b>Class Standing</b>		
Undergraduate	184	77.97
Graduate	52	22.03
<b>Employment Status</b>		
Employed	167	70.76
Not employed	69	29.24
<b>Living Arrangement</b>		
Live outside family home	183	77.55
Live in family home	53	22.46

Table 2: Use of MHS during Re-opening

Selected Characteristics	Yes (%)	No (%)	P-value
<b>Age group</b>			0.2349
18-24	14 (53.85%)	115 (55.02%)	
25-34	11 (42.31%)	59 (28.23%)	
35-44	1 (3.85%)	20 (9.57%)	
45 and older	0 (0%)	15 (7.18%)	
<b>Student Status</b>			0.0314
Full-time	25 (96.15%)	163 (86.70%)	
Part-time	1 (3.85%)	45 (21.63%)	
<b>Discipline Area</b>			0.3693
Hard	12 (46.15%)	73 (37.06%)	
Soft	14 (53.85%)	124 (62.94%)	
<b>Class Standing</b>			0.2603
Undergraduate	18 (69.23%)	165 (78.95%)	
Graduate (Masters & Doctoral)	8 (30.77%)	44 (21.05%)	
<b>MHS Use</b>			
Pre-Pandemic (Yes)	11 (42.31%)	22 (10.53%)	0.0001
During Pandemic (Yes)	19 (73.08%)	27 (13.04%)	<.0001
Next 30 days	17 (70.83%)	19 (9.09%)	<.0001

Figure 1: Percentage of students who reported use or intention to use mental health services

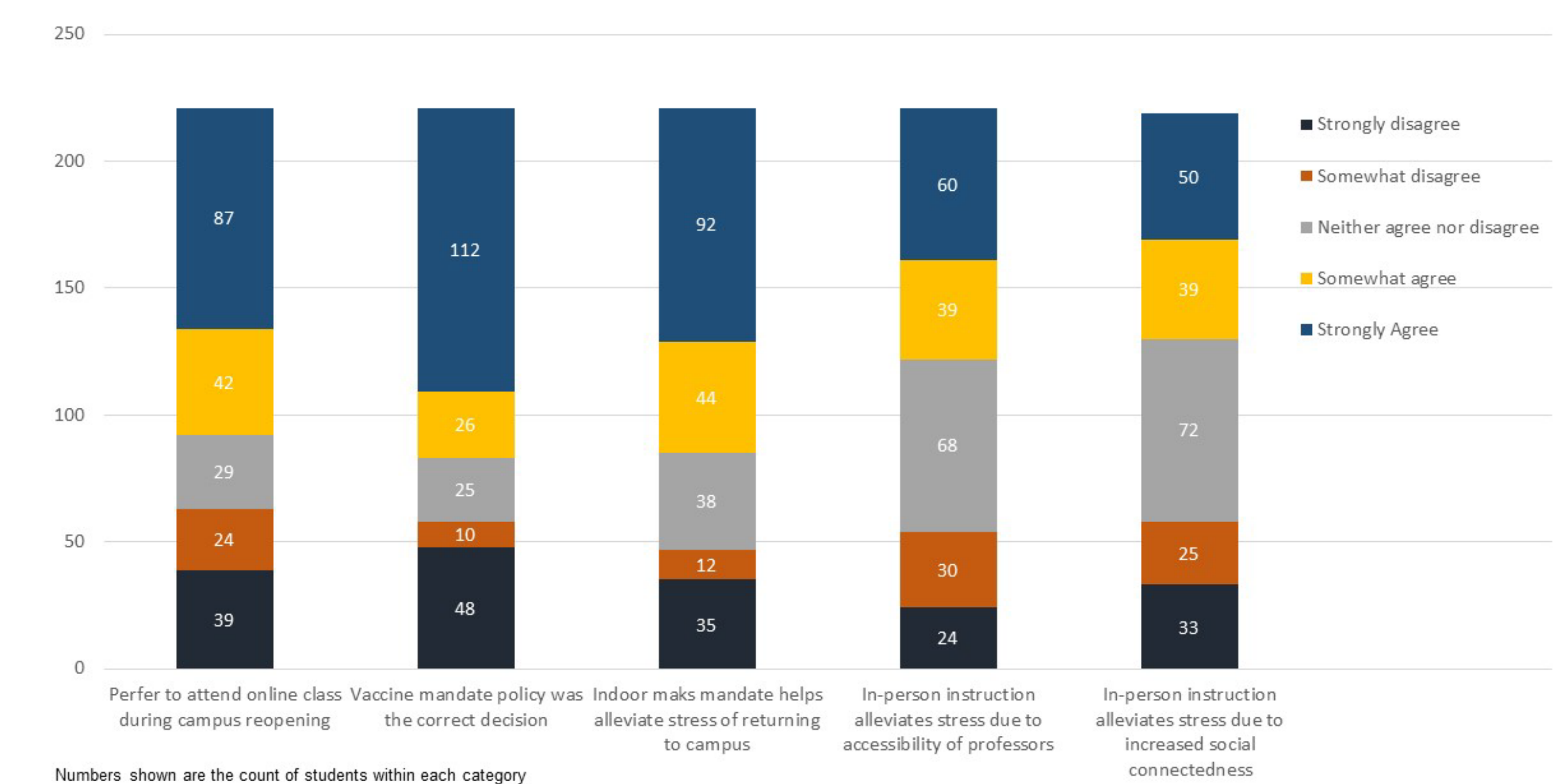


## Results (Cont.)

Table 3: Results of the Multivariate Analysis for Predicting MHS Use During Re-opening

Selected Characteristics	Odds Ratio (95% CI)
Full-time Student vs. Part-time Student	0.29 (0.51-1.62)
Hard vs. Soft Disciplines	1.34 (0.51-3.53)
Undergraduate vs. Graduate	1.59 (0.53-4.76)
Male Vs. Female	0.48 (0.16-1.49)
Employed vs. Unemployed Statuses	0.82 (0.29-2.28)
MHS pre-pandemic vs MHS during campus reopening	7.33 (2.54-21.10)

Figure 2: Student's perceptions of campus re-opening policies



## Discussion

- Given these findings, study authors suggest increased consideration of students' mental health status as a facilitator of learning and a need for further evaluation of in-person versus online learning to restructure higher education courses to best meet the needs of students.
- Future studies should consider expanding to additional college campuses and further explore the mental health impact of campus reopening on students and students' perceptions and experiences of campus reopening events.

## References

- Commonwealth of Virginia. Governor Northam Orders Statewide Closure of Certain Non-essential Businesses, K-12 Schools. Published March 23, 2020. Accessed March 19, 2022. <https://www.governor.virginia.gov/newsroom/all-releases/2020/march/headline-855292-en.html>
- Cao W, Fang Z, Hou G et al. The psychological impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on college students in China. *Psychiatry Res Neuroimaging*. 2020;287(112934),1-5. doi: [10.1016/j.psychres.2020.112934](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2020.112934)
- Fruehwirth JC, Biswas S, Perreira KM. The COVID-19 pandemic and the mental health of first-year college students: examining the effect of COVID-19 stressors using longitudinal data. *PLoS One*. 2021;16(3), e0247999. doi: [10.1371/journal.pone.0247999](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0247999)
- Son C, Hedge S, Smith A, et al. Effects of COVID-19 on college students' mental health in the United States: interview survey data. *J Med Internet Res*. 2020;22(9), e21279. doi: [10.2196/21279](https://doi.org/10.2196/21279)
- Wang X, Hedge S, Son C, et al. Investigating mental health of US college students during the COVID-19 pandemic: cross-sectional survey study. *J Med Internet Res*. 2020;22(9),e22817. doi: [10.2196/22817](https://doi.org/10.2196/22817)