

USC WELL-BEING COLLECTIVE

# STUDENT WELL-BEING DATA UPDATE

Preparing for Fall 2021



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# SUMMARY and HIGHLIGHTS

How will students be “showing up” this fall? In the midst of an ongoing global pandemic and a racial reckoning in the United States, there is widespread agreement that this is a start to an academic year unlike any other in recent history. While much remains uncertain about the Fall of 2021, the USC Student Health Office for Health Promotion Strategy - Backbone for the USC Well-being Collective - gathered and analyzed quantitative and qualitative data to help address this question. This update provides an overview of the spring 2021 USC Well-being Collective [Key Performance Indicators](#), key outcomes from the fall 2020 Healthy Minds Study, and findings from student focus groups conducted in spring 2021.

When compared to pre-pandemic data, students are returning to campus in Fall 2021 with a lower sense of belonging and perception of being treated fairly and equitably outside the classroom. Interestingly, positive mental health increased at the start of the pandemic, then declined sharply in Fall of 2020, and has since rebounded to pre-pandemic levels. Over the same time period, scores on standard screener instruments indicate that there may be more mental illness in the form of anxiety and depression. At-risk drinking and sexual assault dropped significantly, underscoring the role of campus policies and built environments in perpetuating these previously higher outcomes. In focus groups on the return to campus, students reported both excitement and support for a cautious reopening with continued public health measures. Of particular note, students expressed a need for mental health support to be prioritized by faculty, staff and other students, as well as specialized attention and resources for students who have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

These findings paint a nuanced picture of USC student wellbeing and suggest that we collectively focus our attention on fostering a strong sense of belonging in and out of the classroom, and connecting students who may be struggling to appropriate resources. We encourage our partners to recognize the common, communal and unique traumas of the past year and consider sharing a restorative approach to supporting students.

For example, faculty and staff can start by recognizing that students’ academic success is impacted by their sense of connection to faculty and staff within the university. Further, faculty and staff should be aware that historically marginalized students face additional and unique challenges due to racism, xenophobia, homophobia, and other structural inequities. In alignment with the university's [unifying values](#) of wellbeing and diversity, equity, and inclusion, we can all take a proactive approach in recognizing our contribution to a healthy and inclusive university culture. Additional recommendations are provided at the end of this report and include newly created resources for faculty and staff.

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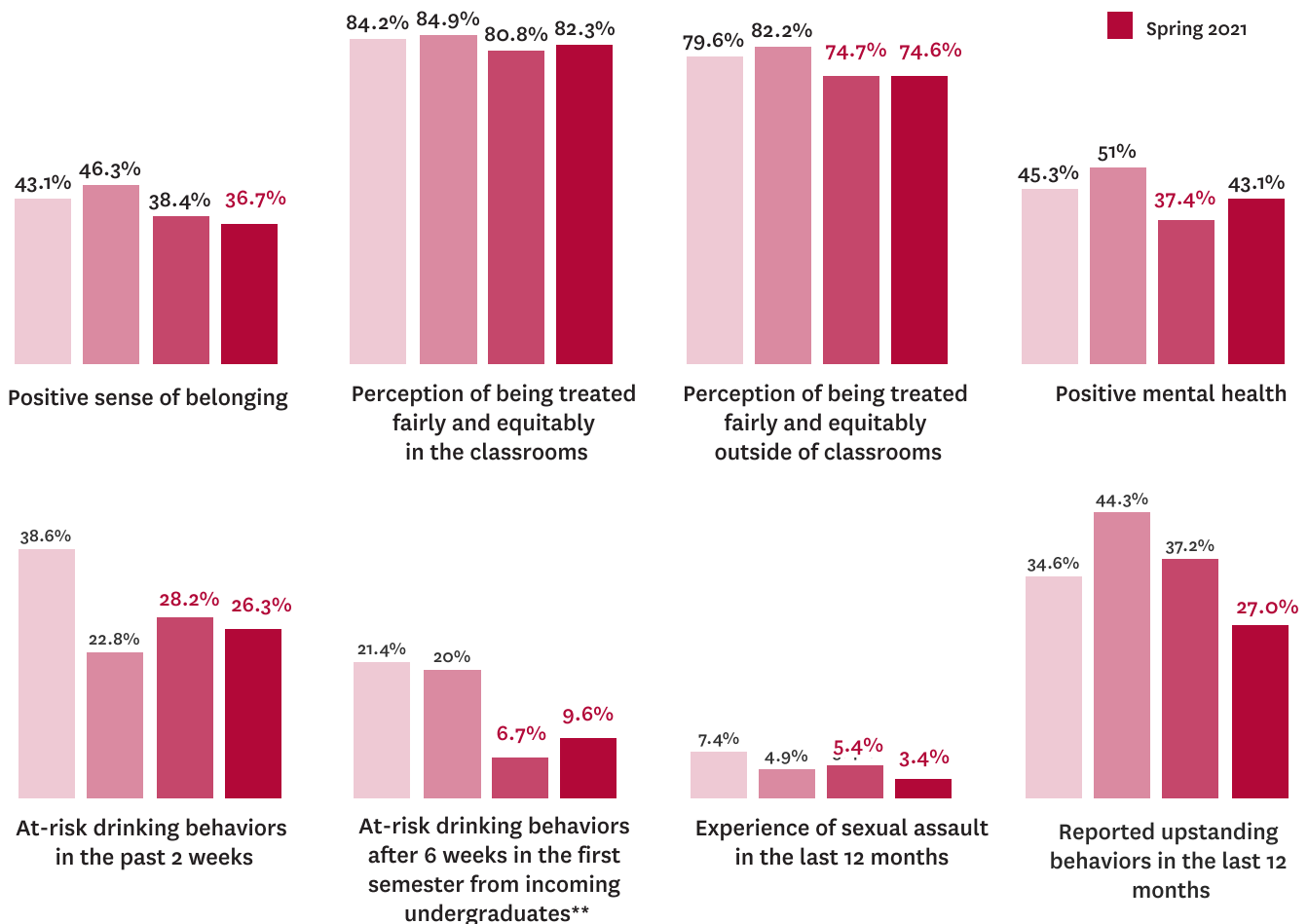
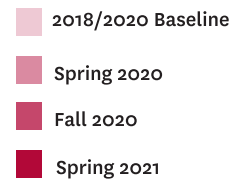
# STUDENT WELLBEING

## KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS:

### Trends from 2018 - 2020

The chart below highlights trends of the **8 Student Wellbeing Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)**. These KPIs are used by the USC Well-being Collective to measure progress towards achieving the common agenda of strengthening a culture driven by student wellbeing.

- **2018/2019 Baseline** - USC Healthy Minds Study (Spring 2018, N=4,560; Fall 2018, N=3,070) & AlcoholEdu for College 2018/2019 (N=6,199).
- **Spring 2020** - USC Student Well-being Index Survey (N=7,735) & AlcoholEdu for College 2019/2020 (N=5,588).
- **Fall 2020** - USC Healthy Minds Study (N=5,994) & AlcoholEdu for College (N=4,575).
- **Spring 2021** - USC Student Well-being Index Survey (N=6,072) & AlcoholEdu for College (N=1,167).



\*Red numbers refers to values from Fall 2020 or Spring 2021 academic year that are lower than the corresponding values from 2018/2019 Baseline based on 95% CI.

\*\*For this KPI, data are from AlcoholEdu for College surveys from the 2018/2019 academic year, 2019/2020 academic year, Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 respectively.

For **Key Performance Indicator Definitions and References**, visit page 2 of the [USC Well-being Collective Key Performance Indicators Update](#).

For **95% Confidence Intervals** of each data point, refer to the [Student Wellbeing Key Performance Indicators: Trends from 2018-2020](#) document.

# HEALTHY MINDS STUDY

## Changes from 2018 to 2020

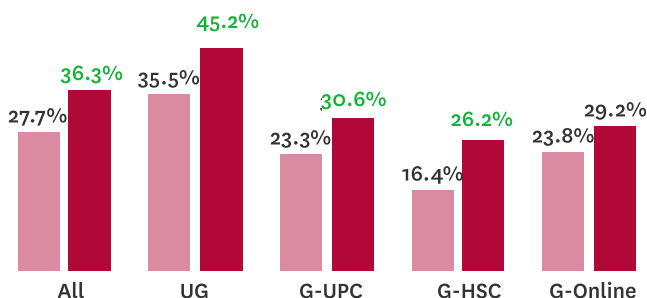
Administered in 2018 and 2020, the Healthy Minds Study (HMS) provides a detailed picture of mental health and related issues in college student populations. This document provides an overview of select findings from 2018 and 2020. Data below are disaggregated by undergraduate (UG), graduate at UPC (G-UPC), graduate at HSC (G-HSC) and graduate online (G-Online). The full [Healthy Minds Study Data Report](#) is available online.

### Impacts of COVID-19 on Students\*\*

- **22.2%** of students had a loved one, close family member, or friend who **experienced significant illness** due to COVID-19.
- More than **one in three Black/African American** and **Latinx** students had someone close to them experience significant illness because of COVID-19, and **female** and **first generation** students were also disproportionately affected.
- **7.0%** of students also **grieved** the loss of a loved one, close family member, or friend due to COVID-19.
- **20.7%** of students **reported their financial situation to be a lot more stressful** since the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **24.7%** of Asian, Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islands students reported to have **experienced discriminatory or hostile behaviors** related to COVID-19 because of their race/ethnicity.

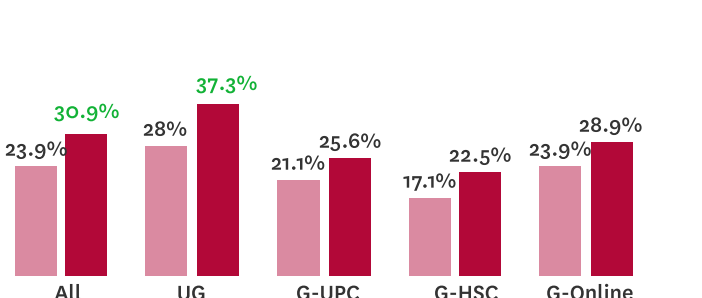
### Any Depression (moderate to severe)

Any depression (score of 10+) is measured using the PHQ-9 screener (Spitzer, Kroenke, Williams, & Lowe, 2006).



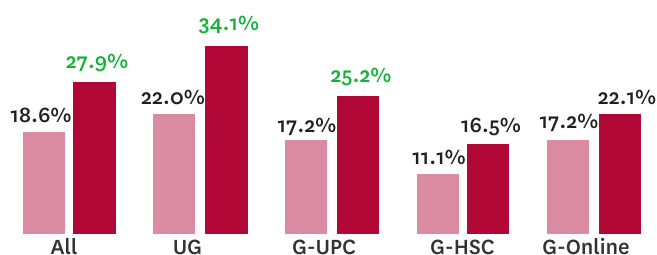
### Any Anxiety (moderate to severe)

Any anxiety (score of 10+) is measured using the GAD-7 screener (Spitzer, Kroenke, Williams, & Lowe, 2006).



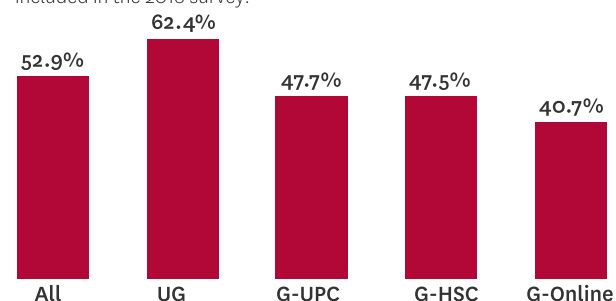
### Academic Impairment (6 or more days)

In the past 4 weeks, how many days have you felt that emotional or mental difficulties have hurt your academic performance?



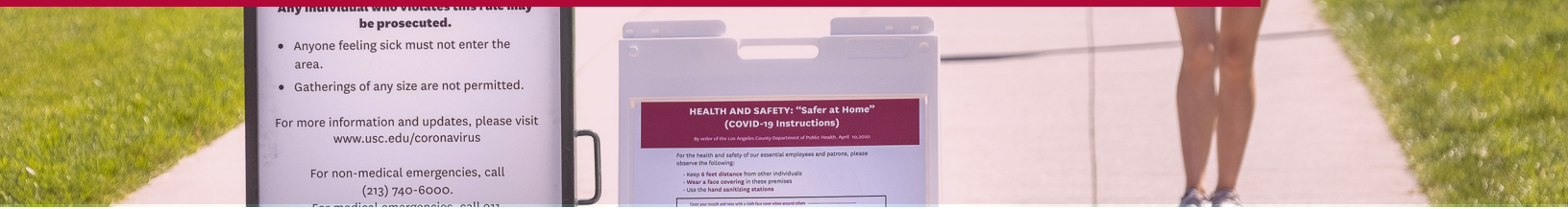
### Loneliness (Fall 2020 only)

Loneliness (score of 6-9) is measured using the UCLA three-item Loneliness Scale (Hughes, Waite, Hawkey, & Cacioppo, 2004). This measure was not included in the 2018 survey.





# COVID-19: RETURN TO CAMPUS FOCUS GROUP EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



In spring 2021, a research team from the USC Student Health Office for Health Promotion Strategy conducted eight focus groups via Zoom. This document presents an overview of major findings; for detailed methodology and analysis, see the [full report](#).

## Goals

- Provide a platform for students to share their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, and their needs and concerns for a safe and inclusive return to campus
- Share these data with administrators at USC to help inform decision-making processes for students' return to campus in the fall of 2021

## Major Findings

**While students are excited to return to campus, many expressed support for a cautious reopening with continued public health measures in place.**

- Students described mixed feelings of excitement and anxiety with the return to campus. While they missed the positive energy of campus life and the intimacy of in-person gatherings, many expressed anxiety that their peers would not comply with public health guidelines. Students also voiced concern about the safety of the community surrounding USC.
- Focus group participants highlighted the importance of a variety of safety measures, including vaccination, weekly testing, contact tracing, mask wearing, and social distancing. While students were generally supportive of USC-initiated safety policies and procedures, there were numerous concerns voiced regarding the clarity of COVID-related communications from the university.

**Students need additional mental health support as they transition back to campus and cope with the past years' traumatic events.**

- Students described feelings of increased sadness and loneliness during the online semester. Many indicated a need to raise awareness of and access to campus mental health resources. Others highlighted the importance of co-creating mental health policies with students, as well as the need for faculty to support students and adhere to teaching practices and policies in support of personal health and communal wellbeing.

**Specialized attention and resources are needed to support students who have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and who face uncertainty and additional challenge with the return to campus.**

- The student groups identified include students facing financial difficulty, incoming second-year students, international students, and students with disabilities. Focus group participants advocated for the university to recognize the impact of the pandemic on these groups, and provide appropriate and tailored support.





# RECOMMENDATIONS and RESOURCES

These resources can help **faculty and staff** support students as they return to campus, promote an inclusive and safe learning environment, and **create a culture driven by student wellbeing.**

Refer faculty, staff and students to **Campus Resources:**  
[Campus Care and Support Resources](#) website  
[Cardinal Folder](#): Emergency Response  
[Gold Folder](#): Supporting Student Well-being

Review and share **wise-practices** with faculty:

[Resilience through Challenges: A Mental Health Guide for Leading Classroom Practice](#)  
How to navigate [Challenging Discussions](#)

Request a **Gatekeeper Training**:

[JED You Can Help: Recognizing and Responding to Distress in Students](#)

Affirm **student identities and sense of belonging**:

[Student Equity and Inclusion Programs](#)

Connect students to **USC Student Health - Counseling and Mental Health Services**:

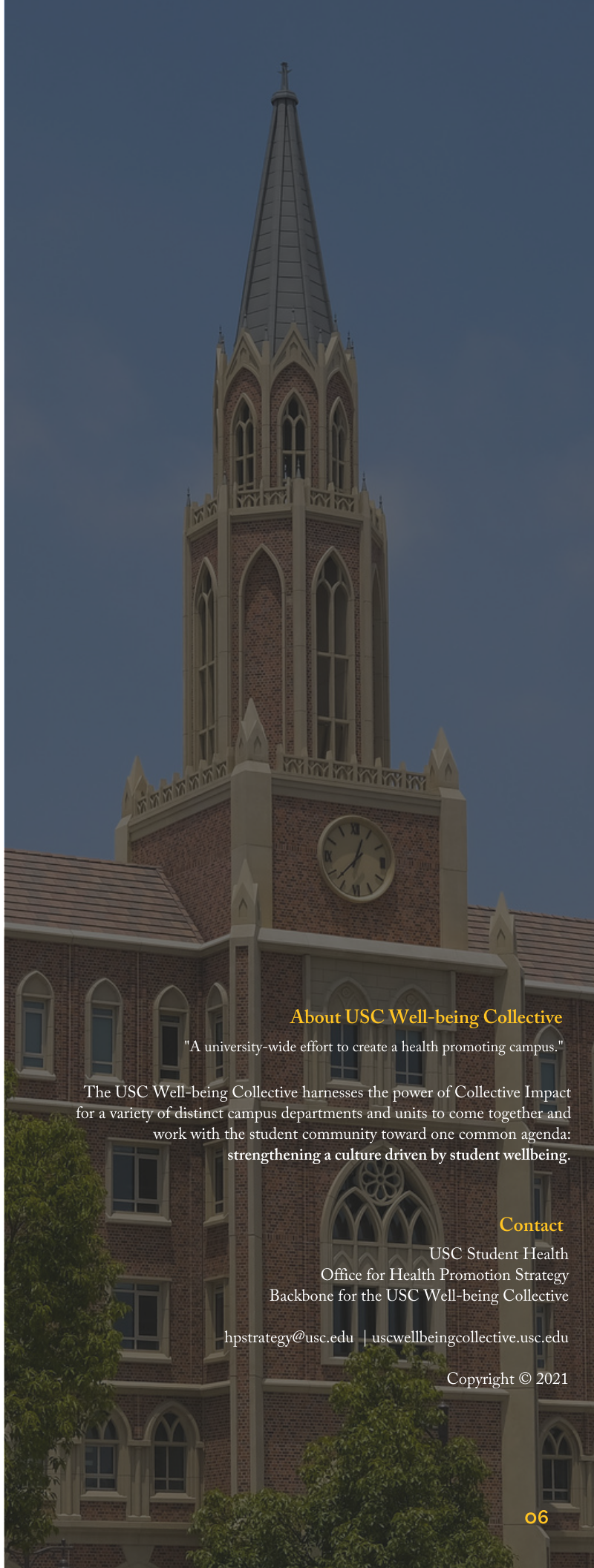
[University Mental Health Services: A Guide for USC Students](#)  
[BIPOC Mental Health](#) microsite  
[Embedded Counselors](#) for various student communities

Receive support for **Work-Life Balance**:

[Center for Work and Family Life](#) (for faculty and staff)







### About USC Well-being Collective

"A university-wide effort to create a health promoting campus."

The USC Well-being Collective harnesses the power of Collective Impact for a variety of distinct campus departments and units to come together and work with the student community toward one common agenda: strengthening a culture driven by student wellbeing.

### Contact

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