

The College Experience During the Pandemic: The Student Perspective

During the COVID-19 pandemic, sudden changes in college instruction, student services, and campus life may have affected the academic integration, mental health, and academic success of many young people despite the support measures that were in place.

To find out how students felt about their studies during the pandemic, in late fall 2021, the **Comité interordres de la relève étudiante (CIRÉ)** conducted a non-probability survey of **1,098 college students** in **13 administrative regions of Québec**.

Factors other than the pandemic context may help explain the results obtained.



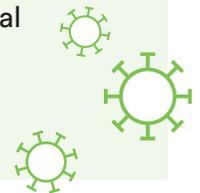
Among survey respondents, analysis of responses from a subsample of **614** students who graduated from high school and started college **during the pandemic** (in fall 2020 or 2021) revealed that:

64 % found this transition **very** or **somewhat difficult**;

48 % would have liked **more psychological support** during their first year of college;

36 % of those studying in an **urban area** (out of **352 students**) reported experiencing academic difficulties regularly or very often, compared to **26 %** of those studying in a **manufacturing** or **resource region** (out of **262 students**);

52 % of **women** wished they had received more psychological support during their first year of study compared to **36 %** of **men**.



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There is, however, a sense of **improvement in the college experience** between the cohort that entered college in fall 2020 and the cohort that entered in 2021.

For example, the 2020 cohort appears to have found the transition to this level of education more difficult, with **71%** finding it **very** or **somewhat difficult**, compared to **59%** of the next cohort.

Also, individuals in the 2021 cohort were more likely to respond that their institution had put in place means to **foster a sense of belonging** to their college community during the pandemic.

These differences may be explained in part by the particular characteristics of the fall 2020 school year, which many students had to do **remotely**.



Of the **1,098 people** who responded to the survey, across all cohorts:

49% feel that distance learning has **not** been beneficial to them and **94%** do **not** want it to continue exclusively;

46% believe that distance education should be maintained, provided it is **combined** with face-to-face instruction;

College education appears to have been more difficult for groups who were studying in a **large urban centre** or who entered college in the **fall of 2020**;

While the perception of the means put in place by institutions to foster a sense of belonging to the college community appears to be more positive for the 2021 cohort than for the 2020 cohort, the perception of **men** seems to be **less positive** than that of **women**. Indeed, **32%** of men (out of **303**) responded that their institution had not implemented such means, compared to **24%** of the **765** women. **Men were also less satisfied than women with their college education**, with only **42%** saying they were satisfied or very satisfied compared to **53%** of **women**.



In conclusion, the **CIRÉ** highlights the need for support at the college level and invites reflection on the resilience of the school system.