



From: USC Student Health - Office for Health Promotion Strategy,
Backbone for the USC Well-being Collective

Title: Student Wellbeing Forum: Summary of Notes

BACKGROUND/PURPOSE

On April 21, 2021, Community Health Organizers hosted a virtual forum for students to voice their opinions and concerns on important wellbeing topics. The forum was well-attended with over 80 students participating in this discussion. Due to the large number of attendees, the forum was divided into three smaller breakout rooms where a student Community Health Organizer facilitated the discussion. Below is the summary of main themes.

Participant Breakdown:

	Count	Percent*
Undergraduate	60	74%
Graduate	21	26%
International	9	11%
Domestic	72	89%

15 academic schools and divisions were represented, including Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences (37 students), Viterbi School of Engineering (21), Keck School of Medicine (8), Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism (5), Price School of Public Policy (4), Rossier School of Education (4), Chan - Division of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy (2), School of Cinematic Arts (2), Herman Ostrow School of Dentistry (1), Leonard Davis School of Gerontology (1), Roski School of Art and Design (1), School of Dramatic Arts (1), School of Pharmacy (1), and Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work (1).

*Sums of category percentages may exceed 100.00% due to participants' ability to select multiple responses



Student Community's Strengths and Challenges

This forum allowed students to express community strengths and challenges. Students frequently communicated that there were online resources available, including recorded lectures and telehealth. Among other strengths was the flexibility of virtual classes. Students expressed that the virtual setting enabled them to spend more time at home and with family and with their own wellness goals. However, a few individuals mentioned they are unsure if the University's focus on wellbeing will last. Furthermore, students expressed that professors have generally been mindful and understanding. They detail there is more openness with professors and repeated flexibility regarding grading and adjustments to assignments. Students have also expressed that establishing boundaries has been much simpler amidst the pandemic and online setting. Students also revealed community challenges they encountered. Online resources, or lack thereof, have been a challenge. Students described that professors frequently forgot to record lectures. This posed a great learning challenge, especially for students who could not attend class virtually. Others mentioned challenges of being comfortable with being alone. This virtual setting has resulted in feelings of loneliness among many. However, others expressed that time alone has made them establish a strong sense of self. Finally, students stated that it has been difficult to shift priorities away from academics.

Involving Students in Decision-Making Processes

The forum participants were asked to vocalize ways USC decision-makers should involve students. Students expressed that they would like to continue to receive emails with surveys. Students explained that surveys should be short and accessible on all platforms, as this would enable more students to respond. Moreover, USC decision-makers could continue to involve students' voices through different channels such as Annenberg Media or USG. Lastly, students expressed that community forums and discussions in class could promote more involvement.

Student Wellbeing Priority Areas

Participants had the opportunity to name wellbeing topics they considered a priority. The most cited priority area was mental health. Moreover, students mentioned stress as a big concern, specifically how the stress of this pandemic will most likely persist even with a return to 'normalcy.' Some students even cited faculty/academics as a large source of stress that needs to be addressed. Others described the anxiety they will face with returning to social settings. Furthermore, participants cited student burnout as another mental health concern.

Another priority area was academic concerns. Students asked to ensure the University maintains academic accessibility through recorded lectures. They also want the University to continue its academic flexibility, with specific concerns faculty might be too heavy with workloads as we transition back to in-person classes. This is a concern because participants mentioned that the student body has grown accustomed to take-home exams and increased flexibility from faculty.



Financial equity and inclusion was another wellbeing priority area mentioned in the forum. Students asked for increased financial transparency and support to make USC more affordable. Students specifically mentioned concerns for students experiencing homelessness and/or students in foster care systems. Furthermore, participants discussed financial support during the pandemic and increasing financial inclusivity of registered student organizations (RSOs).

Another priority area was safely transitioning back to in person. Students stressed the importance of adequate communication from the University regarding safety policies and updates. They also emphasized the need to enforce the mask mandate, while others mentioned requiring vaccination of all students who return to campus and integrating the local USC community in the University's vaccination efforts. Some participants had concerns over USC Housing transitioning back to double-occupancy. Others discussed increased support for current first-year students transitioning to in-person campus. Overall, students cited a need to prioritize safety.

Other priority areas included racial equity and inclusion along with sexual assault/sexual harassment (SA/SH). Students were concerned about ways in which they could hold faculty and staff accountable for racist/hostile events. Furthermore, they asked for the University community to continue conversations about race and privilege and increase the diversity of races/ethnicities represented in class subjects offered. Additionally, students mentioned concerns over rising SA/SH incidents with a return to in-person campus.

Policies to Support Student Wellbeing

Participants had the opportunity to share policies the University should implement to support their wellbeing. Students mentioned increasing mental health resources, offering mental health training for students, and continuing Wellness Days in conjunction with Spring Break. Regarding faculty, students asked for standardizing faculty's treatment of students, improving their teaching methods, supporting them to recruit more students of color, and breaking down the barrier between faculty and students. Students also expressed support for increasing USC's financial aid and support for students with disabilities through Disability Services and Programs (DSP).

Regarding a transition to in person, students stressed the necessity of allowing students the option to stay online. However, for those who choose to return, students asked for safe opportunities for student social interaction such as Welcome Week or school/department-wide competitions. Students also mentioned the need for specific support for international students. Moreover, participants supported yearly SA/SH training for students.

Students also discussed increasing visibility of USC's current resources such as the cultural centers and mental health resources through Student Health. They also asked for continued advertisement of resources and events through student emails and a consolidated list of all major campus resources. Furthermore, participants mentioned increased support for student leaders. While some discussed the importance of providing trainings for RSO leaders, others were concerned over mandating those trainings to avoid overwhelming student leaders. Moreover, students asked for student-leader networking opportunities.