

***NCAA Student-Athlete  
COVID-19 Well-being  
Survey***

## METHODOLOGY

The NCAA Student-Athlete COVID-19 Well-being Survey was an online survey intended to examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on student-athletes' current physical and mental well-being. The survey was designed by NCAA Research in collaboration with the NCAA Sport Science Institute and the three national SAAC governing bodies. It was a 10-minute confidential survey administered online through QuestionPro survey software, designed to be taken via cellphone, tablet or computer.

The survey opened April 10, 2020 and closed May 1, 2020. A snowball sampling technique was used. National SAAC representatives forwarded the link through conference and campus SAACs to student-athletes. Conference SAAC liaisons were also made aware of the survey and encouraged student-athletes to participate.

37,658 student-athletes representing all NCAA-member conferences completed the survey. We estimate that 6% of men's sport and 13% of women's sport student-athletes completed the survey. Response rates varied widely by conference and sport; women and white student-athletes were overrepresented in the sample. See additional slide deck materials for a detailed look at response rates by conference, sport and race.





## MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS

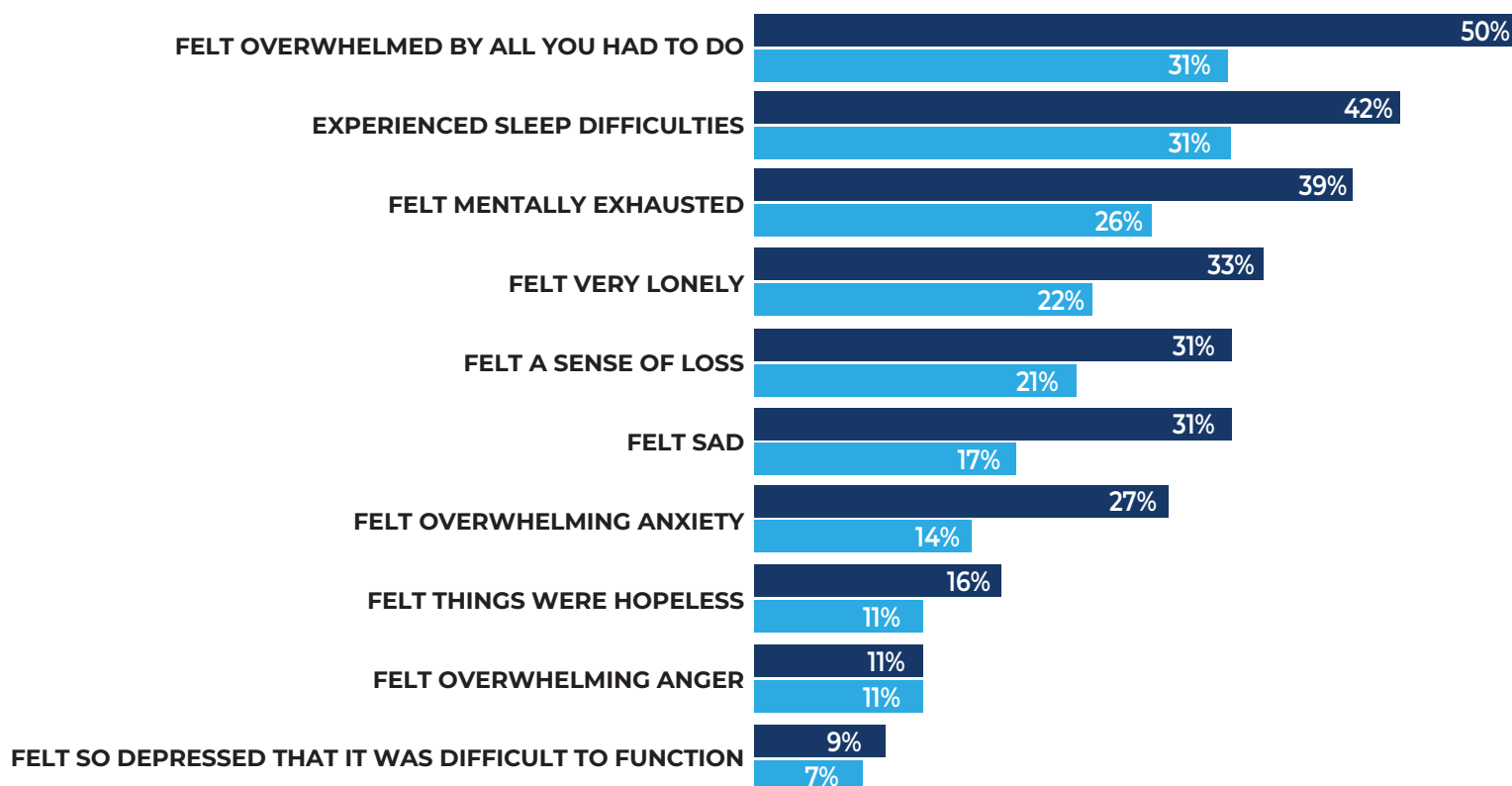
A majority of student-athletes surveyed reported experiencing high rates of mental distress since the outset of the pandemic. Over a third reported experiencing sleep difficulties, more than a quarter reported feeling sadness and a sense of loss, and 1 in 12 reported feeling so depressed it has been difficult to function, “constantly” or “most every day” (see table below). Mental health concerns were highest among respondents of color, those whose families are facing economic hardship, and those living alone. Additionally, college seniors reported a sense of loss at 1.5 times the rate of underclassmen. In most instances, the rates of mental health concerns experienced within the last month were 150% to 250% higher than historically reported by NCAA student-athletes in the American College Health Association’s National College Health Assessment.

### Mental Health Concerns During COVID-19 Pandemic

(Percent of Participants Who Endorsed “Constantly” or “Most Every Day”)

Women

Men



## CURRENT LIVING ENVIRONMENT

Nearly 80% of student-athletes surveyed are currently living away from campus and with parents, family or a significant other. Nine percent are living with teammates or other friends, 4% are living alone and 3% remain in campus housing. Nine out of ten student-athletes reported being in a stable housing situation and having access to enough food to meet their daily needs. While 80% reported knowing how to access a medical provider for physical health needs, 60% of men and 55% of women reported that they know how to access mental health support in their area.

Racial disparities were reported in housing and food stability and access to medical care, with white student-athletes indicating higher levels of agreement on all items as compared with participants of color. Of note, 75% of Black male student-athletes surveyed, compared with 92% of white males in the sample, responded that they have access to enough food, and 61% reported that healthy food options are readily available to them, as compared with 81% of white male participants.



Photo courtesy of UCLA Athletics, April 2020



## BARRIERS TO ATHLETICS TRAINING

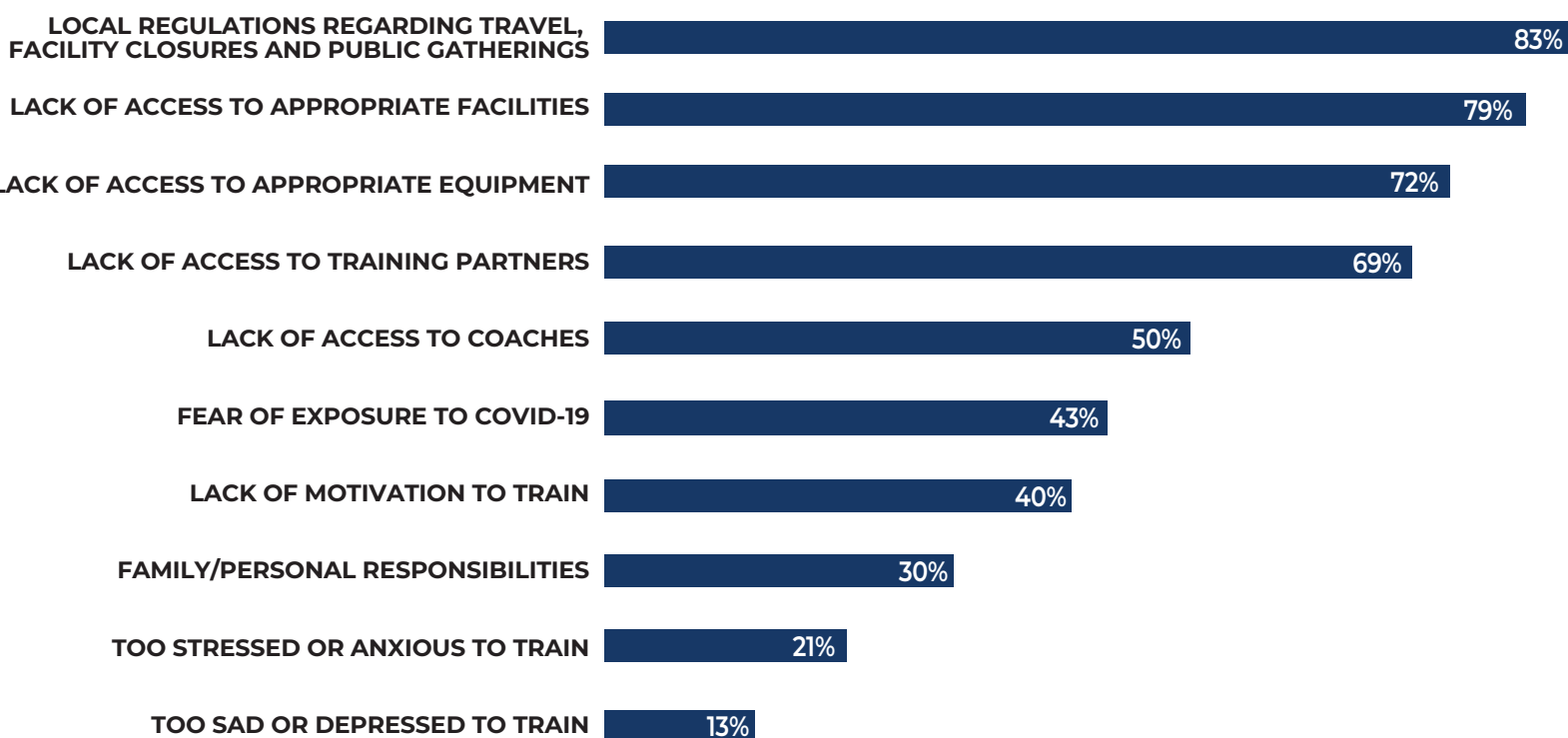
When asked about barriers to athletics training, 4 in 5 student-athletes surveyed indicated that both local regulations and a lack of access to appropriate facilities were barriers. In addition to structural barriers, participants also reported that emotional barriers were impacting their ability to train, including a fear of exposure to COVID-19 (43%), lack of motivation (40%), feelings of stress or anxiety (21%), and sadness or depression (13%).

Black and Latinx student-athletes in the sample were more likely to agree that a fear of exposure to COVID-19 is a barrier to training (50% and 53%, respectively) than white student-athletes surveyed (41%). Additionally, Black and Latinx participants were more likely to cite family or personal responsibilities as a barrier to training (both 40%) as compared with white student-athletes (27%) and those in other racial categories (34%).

### Barriers to Training

(Percent who "Agree" or "Strongly Agree")

All Participants



## **IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON ACADEMICS**

Ninety-nine percent of respondents indicated that their coursework had been moved online as a result of the pandemic. Over 70% of participants indicated feeling positive about their ability to pass their courses this semester, with a quarter feeling somewhat positive or somewhat negative, and less than 5% feeling negative. However, fewer student-athlete respondents indicated feeling positive about their ability to keep up with classes this semester (51%). In the open-ended comment section, some student-athletes indicated that they were struggling with the online format, some shared that faculty had increased their assignment load as a result of moving online, and others reported struggling to connect with faculty, academic support staff or tutors when they had questions about the course material.



## MAINTAINING ATHLETICS CONNECTIONS

Nearly 90% of student-athletes surveyed reported communicating with teammates multiple times per week, and 60% were communicating with teammates daily. Coaches have been in frequent communication with responding student-athletes--56% of participants reported their coaches were reaching out to them multiple times a week, while a quarter connected with their coach once a week.

Reports of coach and teammate communication were similar across divisions, while the reported rate of communication with academic advisors and athletics staff was highest in Division I. Generally, the more frequently participants communicated with teammates and athletics staff, the more likely they were to report feeling positive about such communication.

Eighty-two percent of respondents reported feeling positive or very positive about the support they were receiving from their coaches during this time, as compared with 64%, 61% and 37% feeling positive about support from their athletics department, university and the NCAA, respectively.

In open-ended questions, student-athletes were asked to share what coaches and athletics departments were doing well to provide support at this time. Response themes included maintaining team connections through coach-hosted online meetings, providing training workouts on a regular basis, sending out motivational messages via social media, hosting town halls for all student-athletes, and providing one-on-one check-ins regarding academics and mental well-being. For example, a Division II women's track and field student-athlete wrote, **"My coach is still giving modified workouts, encouraging notes, and constantly checking in to see how we are doing mentally, spiritually, and physically (in that order)."** A Division I men's tennis student-athlete shared the following example, **"Our AD is personally calling every spring sport senior to check in and see how they are doing, and what plans they have for the 2020-2021 year."** Some respondents also noted how meaningful it was to have coaches and athletics staff ask about their family's health and well-being, and not that of only the athlete.

Similar across divisions, 81% of respondents who are eligible and not graduating indicated that it is very likely they'll return to their current college team, while 16% reported it somewhat likely and 3% noted it's not likely at all. Respondents who identified as men's sport participants, seniors, not receiving athletics aid and international student-athletes expressed the greatest uncertainty about their return to the team.





## THE NCAA'S DECISION TO CANCEL CHAMPIONSHIPS

A majority of participants (55%) reported that the NCAA communicated COVID-19 developments in a timely fashion. While a majority of winter and spring sport participants reported that the NCAA's decision to cancel championships was important to their safety, rates were lower among men than women. Additionally, winter sport participants were less likely to report that they perceived this decision as fair (43%), as compared to spring sport participants (61%).



## DESIRED RESOURCES

The student-athletes surveyed indicated strong interest in receiving a range of educational resources during this time. In terms of resources specific to their training and physical well-being, participants indicated they would generally look to coaches as their primary source for information. They would also turn to coaches to help maintain social connections (most likely among their teammates). Many reported they would look to their athletics department in terms of academic support (highest in Division I), career planning and financial assistance resources. While most seemed to be interested in local, institution-specific resources, the respondents were most likely to seek resources from the NCAA providing information about COVID-19 and updates specific to their sport.

An open-ended question asked respondents how the NCAA could provide support during this time. The most common theme was a request for information about the fall semester and return to play. As one noted,

**“It would really help my mental health if the NCAA updated student-athletes about what they are thinking for next year’s athletics. I understand that at this point no one knows if we will be able to go to campuses in the fall, but it would help me plan better and relieve a ton of (most of) my mental stress and anxiety if I knew the NCAA was considering accommodations for fall athletes.”** -Division III, women’s field hockey

Other common themes included requests for information about modifications or available waivers regarding academic and athletic eligibility, career assistance in terms of networking or resume building to support those struggling to secure a job or summer internship and requests for financial aid.

### Desired Source for Educational Resources

Note: Sorted lowest to highest percent reporting “not interested” | All Participants

	Coaches	Athletics Dept.	NCAA	Not Interested
Maintaining my level of physical fitness	72%	18%	6%	5%
Training for my sport while physically distant	78%	10%	7%	5%
COVID-19 information and updates for my sport	32%	17%	44%	7%
Eating healthy	40%	33%	14%	13%
Academic support resources	27%	50%	9%	14%
Mental health	36%	35%	14%	15%
Social health	50%	22%	12%	15%
Career planning resources	23%	48%	13%	17%
Financial assistance resources	18%	34%	30%	18%
Accessing health care	15%	39%	21%	25%

