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# Student life in Covid-19 times – a longitudinal study

*A study of student life at BI  
Norwegian Business school – campus  
Bergen in 2020 and 2021.*

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## Introduction

This study is on how business school students at BI Norwegian Business School – campus Bergen have lived and studied through the pandemic of 2020 and 2021. We have surveyed the students twice – the first time in May 2020, when we were about two months into the pandemic – and then again in January 2021 – when the pandemic had been running in our daily lives for ten months. The survey was conducted online to all students at the campus. We analyse the same cohort of students, i.e., year 1 and 2 in 2020, and therefore are year 2 and 3 in 2021. Consequently, we can see if there have been any developments in the same cohort of students' parameters. The sample size for 2020 was 369 and for 2021 259. A chi-square test of the samples shows no significant differences in sample composition between males and females. For the two surveys, there are 40% males and 60% females. The response rate for both studies is around 22% of all students enrolled at the campus. The study is only Bachelor students.

## How much has life changed? Getting used to it.

Our first question to the students was how much their daily lives have changed due to Covid-19. We measured this on a scale from 1-4 where 1=very little and four is very much.

The results show a mean value of 3,20 for 2020 and 3,05 for 2021, a statistically significant reduction. From this, we can conclude that Covid, on average, had a strong influence on daily life and that it seems that students over time have got more used to it. The initial drama has been replaced by a changed everyday life – a new intermediate normal - that is not as bad as expected, but still quite serious. 39% said that their daily life was severely affected in 2020 and 32% in 2021. This result is a slight improvement.





## Elements of the typical day – no significant change – but low scores

The following table shows elements of the students' daily life. The scale here is 1= awful to 5= Very well. We cover eleven different aspects, and we have found small changes in most of them positively. A few have had a significant difference, and those are marked with an asterisk\* in the table. We find that lecturing in numerical subjects have improved, and also supervision with a lecturer. We see a decrease in administrative contact and the extracurricular activities among students. The overall picture, however, is that student satisfaction is relatively low. Only three of the elements get a score over the middle value.

	Survey	
	2020	2021
	Mean	Mean
Lectures in "number subjects" such as math or similar.	2,75	2,95*
Lectures in "reading subjects" - as organisation studies or similar	3,14	3,26
Group work with fellow students	2,51	2,55
Supervision with lecturer	2,46	2,83*
Contact with lecturer	2,63	2,78
To get answers to questions from BI's administration	3,57*	3,31
Extracurricular contact with fellow students	3,01*	2,28
Exam preparation	2,86	3,02
Own organisation of everyday study	2,94	2,99
Getting started in the morning	2,80	2,69
Work discipline throughout the day	2,75	2,83



## Working conditions are good

The following table shows that the working conditions are quite good for the students. 48% say that they have good or very good working conditions for their studies, and there has been no change in this from 2020 to 2021. Nevertheless, near 20% of students do not have good study environment.

		Survey	
		2020	2021
		Column N %	Column N %
What kind of working conditions do you have where you are now for studies and exam preparations?	Very bad	4,1%	4,6%
	Bad	15,0%	12,4%
	So so	33,6%	34,4%
	Good	33,9%	35,1%
	Very good	13,4%	13,5%

## Exam preparations have improved

The prospects of a digital exam were quite daunting in May 2020. But it seems that there has been an improvement here now that there has been a run-through once. Students are better prepared.

		Survey	
		2020	2021
		Column N %	Column N %
Now that the situation is as it is with all exams digitally. How well prepared are you for the exam compared to how you would be at a school exam?	Less prepared	60,0%	41,7%
	As normal	30,5%	33,6%
	Better prepared	6,5%	22,0%
	Do not know	3,0%	2,7%

The proportion of students being better prepared has grown from 6,5% in 2020 to 22% in 2021, showing that there has been a real improvement in exam preparation. This is an encouraging result and says something about the adaptability of the students to a new situation.



### There are some worries

The following table shows how some of the more personal matters have changed, some for the better and a few for the worse. The scale here is 1=To a small degree to 5= To a large degree. The question was: What are you worried about?

	Survey	
	2020	2021
	Mean	Mean
Own finances	2,39	2,44
Living conditions	2,08*	1,86
If I get a job after graduation	2,74	3,43*
If the part-time job is thereafter the crisis	2,53	2,38
Sports and exercise	2,91	3,19*
If there will be a graduation ceremony	1,69	2,39*
If I get the opportunity to study next year	2,54*	2,28
To be able to travel where I want	3,30	3,60*
Opportunity for internship	2,80	3,07
Possibility of exchange	2,92	3,07
If I can afford to study further	2,06	2,21
Other more personal matters	2,63	3,11*

The table shows a few significant differences from 2020 to 2021. First and foremost, the wish to travel, job worries and sports and exercises. Some personal matters of a private nature also seem to have grown. There are some minor changes in the other elements, but the main worry is how the future life will be, emphasising travel and job prospects. Since the students now have moved closer to graduation we see a rise in the work related elements.



### More of this, please

This question is how they want digital deliveries to be. On a scale from 1=does not suit me, to 5=Suits me very well, the students are asked to rank the following elements:

	Survey	
	2020	2021
	Mean	Mean
All lectures delivered digitally as a webinar	2,76	3,14*
Videos that I can watch when it suits me	3,84	4,28*
Contact lecturer by email	3,26	3,44*
Contact with lecturer in chat	3,51	3,71*
Contact with the lecturer during digital office hours	3,37	3,55*
Get on campus in small groups	3,90	3,73

The table shows a digital delivery preference, and especially the video recordings are much appreciated. The students have learnt to use digital tools and deliveries, which seems to fit the situation well. For all, except for one element, there are significant differences from 2020 to 2021.



### To Zoom or not to Zoom

There has been a considerable debate among academics on the interaction via Zoom. Some seem to enjoy it – others hate it. One experience is that the zoom activity will vary with class size. In smaller classes, it is easier to have student participation with sound and camera. In large classes, 30 students or more, the wish to stay anonymous is higher. The scale here is 1= Does not suit me, to 5=Suits me very well. There are reservations about participation with sound and camera, but they want to participate in the chat. There are reservations towards breakout-rooms as well. They want videos of webinars – and this refers to a general wish of flexibility in the learning. Repetition for note-taking is something that is sometimes mentioned as an advantage with digital delivery.

	Survey	
	2020	2021
	Mean	Mean
To participate with sound	2,62	2,59
To participate with video	2,40	2,53
That the lecture is recorded	4,09	4,39*
To join the chat with questions and answers	3,95	4,07
To participate in group work (breakout rooms) with video and audio	2,98*	2,64
Having a picture and sound turned off to be able to do other things while I am at a lecture	3,11*	2,79
To be able to participate anonymously	3,58*	3,26

There seems to be an underlying wish to stay anonymous – but again – this is a challenge that can be overcome with better planning. Many lecturers have found that breakout rooms are a challenge.





## Where does the Covid-19 news come from? Social media are important

Information about the development of Covid-19 is an essential factor in the students' daily life. They get the news from various sources, primarily through the online newspapers – like VG.

This table shows the primary sources of information for this:

		Survey	
		2020	2021
		Column N %	Column N %
Covid news sources	News about Covid-19 - online newspapers	87%	89%
	TV	49%	47%
	Social Media	39%	45%
	Contact with others	30%	32%
	Radio or podcast	7%	8%
	Other media	5%	4%
	Do not know	0%	1%

The primary sources of news on the Covid-19 situation are the online newspapers, and we can see that the media sources have been stable from 2020 to 2021. However, we see a slight growth in students using social media, but this is not statistically significant. However, it is a signal that there has been an increase in personal and social interaction



## The things I miss the most

The following word cloud gives a good illustration of what the students miss. They miss meeting up and being able to stay personal in touch with their fellow students. Friends and social life have been suffering here.





## Study hours have not changed

We have also included a question on how many hours per day that the students put in. Here is the result:

		Survey	
		2020	2021
		Column N %	Column N %
Do you have an estimate of how many hours you study per day?	Under 1 hour	7%	6%
	1-2 hours	17%	17%
	2-3 hours	22%	27%
	3-4 hours	22%	22%
	4-5 hours	17%	16%
	More than 5 hours	15%	13%

More than 50% of the students say they put in more than 3 hours per day. There is a slight increase in the 2-3 hours group – otherwise, the changes are tiny. The prolonged Covid-19 period has not affected study hours negatively in a big way. From other sources, we know that many students have part-time jobs and that they fit their studies and employment together as well as they can.



### Living with uncertainty – not too much

We asked the students to come up with an estimate of how it is to live with uncertainty. We wanted them to use a visual pointer to fix a point on a scale from 0=No uncertainty to 100=max uncertainty. We found that the results were somewhere in the middle without much variation over time. And the variation in the score (Standard Deviation) was almost identical too.

	Survey			
	2020		2021	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
To what extent do you manage to live with a situation characterised by uncertainty? Give a score by dragging this switch to the left or right.	57,3	26.3	54,6	27.8

The average score went from 57 to 55, and this is not much change. The students can accept some uncertainty, but not very much.



## Tired of parents? More students living on their own – but not alone

		Survey	
		2020	2021
		Column N %	Column N %
Where are you now in the corona crisis?	Other (please specify)	4%	7%
	In own dormitory / apartment	29%	39%
	In collective	10%	30%
	At parents	57%	24%
Do you live with someone?	Yes	89%	89%
	no	11%	11%

This is the first table where we can observe more drastic changes in behaviour. While 57% of students had moved in with their parents in May 2020, we now find that only 24% live with their parents in 2021. More students have moved into collectives and their own places. And we see that the same proportion of students live with someone else. It seems that prolonged pandemic leads to a wish for more independence.

### Conclusion

We can conclude that the pandemic has had a significant influence on the students' daily lives, but they have largely found their way through the unusual times. They seem to have adapted quite well to the situation and are patiently waiting for better times. They miss coming to campus, the social life, travel and their friends. At the same time, they keep on studying and see advantages in digital delivery. They want flexibility overall.

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