



SRC FINANCIAL WELLBEING SURVEY

Investigating student financial wellbeing while
undertaking studies at Griffith



SRC Financial Wellbeing Survey

An overview of key findings are outlined below, with demographic details and further detailed information provided from page 5 onwards. This survey identified a number of significant themes which encompassed student responses:

- Financial Stress (Wellbeing)
- Program-Specific Financial Stressors
- Accommodation and Food Security
- Griffith Support Services

Financial Wellbeing

- 55% of students reported feeling stress or worry about meeting their basic financial commitments due to a shortage of money.
- While the majority of students reported feeling financially stressed, 62% of students said they feel they have some control over their weekly expenses, budget and cash flow.
- Common themes of significant expenses included:
 - Medical Bills
 - Rent/Moving costs
 - Car expenses
 - Financially supporting family members/partners who lost their job
 - Purchasing laptop/technology to support online learning during 2020

Program-specific Financial Stressors

- Students identified a number of program-specific stressors, however the overwhelming majority of students identified undertaking placement as a significant cause of their financial stress.
- Students commonly referred to the following aspects of their placements which contributed to their feelings of financial stress:
 - Loss of income due to reducing their working hours to accommodate placements which require the equivalent of full-time working hours during 6-12 week periods.
 - Travel expenses including public transport, parking and fuel with some students also forced to pay for Ubers/taxis due to a lack of public transport to their placement location. Students identified safety concerns as a large factor for paying Uber fares as their placement/s finished late at night. One student reported spending up to \$100 on Uber fares due to lack of public transport to their placement location.
 - Partners, family members and friends sharing the financial pressure of the student not being able to work standard hours to accommodate their placement.
- Students reported feeling overworked, exhausted and fatigued from having to work around their placement for additional money which impacted on their learning and academic performance for that trimester.
- Further, film, visual art, and music students noted the significant cost of technical equipment for the completion of their program as a considerable financial burden imposed on students.

- This correlated with 63% of students reporting they are unable to afford to purchase textbooks or other education-related materials (e.g. software subscriptions) at some point, often, or always during their program.

Accommodation and Food Security

- 36% of students reported not being able to afford nutritionally-balanced meals.
- 34% of students reported decreasing the size of their meals OR skipping meals because they didn't have enough money to purchase food.
- While the majority of students reported changes in their living circumstances at least once within the previous 12 months, a significant portion of students reporting moving between 2-5 times within the past 12 months due to a number of factors:
 - Moving to Brisbane to commence studies at Griffith and uncertainty with COVID requiring them to move back home
 - Loss of income due to COVID meaning they were unable to afford rent
 - Unsafe living circumstances with family or housemates (e.g. domestic violence, harassment from housemates)
 - Difficulties with their landlord/property manager
 - General uncertainty and financial pressures due to COVID

Griffith Support Services

- Students identified a number of different services and/or resources that the University (or student associations) could provide to assist students in managing their financial wellbeing during their studies. These included:
 - Financial literacy and budgeting workshops
 - Grocery Voucher Scheme
 - Discounted student prices for campus food
 - Supporting student access to essential program equipment (e.g. communal film equipment, free university textbook exchange)
 - Scholarship and/or bursary for students completing their placement to support their financial wellbeing
 - Financial Adviser/Counsellor who can provide personalised support/advice about their financial situation (e.g. providing advice on applying for Centrelink).

Where do we go from here?

In response to these findings, it is clear that students require further support in managing their financial stress and associated program-specific stressors including placements, purchasing of essential equipment, and food and housing security. The SRC and GUPSA provided a Grocery Voucher Bursary Scheme during 2020 for undergraduate and postgraduate students experiencing financial hardship, and the SRC Student Board recently approved an extension to this scheme for Trimester 2 2021. The SRC have also partnered with the Fruitbox Student Fresh Program for a trial at our Nathan and Gold Coast Campuses in delivering fresh produce to students at an affordable price.

Further, SRC Advocacy facilitated a Financial Wellbeing 101 online workshop with The Broke Generation to provide information on financial literacy and saving strategies. Advocacy have partnered with The Broke Generation to deliver a series of financial wellbeing workshops throughout Trimester 2 2021. At Nathan campus, the SRC have continued to provide \$5 discount vouchers to food trucks for students during Trimester 1 2021 and coffee vouchers/meal deals for students across Southbank, Mt Gravatt, Nathan and Logan campuses.

The SRC Student Representatives recognise that as the student representative body for Brisbane campuses, have responsibility in advocating that student voices and needs are acknowledged and addressed by the University. This is of particular importance in 2021 where students face unprecedented challenges caused by COVID and structural changes within the University.

For further information regarding these findings, please contact SRC Advocacy at advocacy@griffith.edu.au

Demographic Information & Student Comments

203 students completed the survey, however particular questions were skipped by students resulting in certain questions having lower responses than others. Once this was identified early on, all questions were updated to require a response from students.

Level of study:

Approximately 91% of respondents were completing an undergraduate program (i.e. Bachelors). Approximately 9% were completing some type of postgraduate program (i.e. Graduate Certificate, Master, Higher Degree Research).

The majority of students completing the survey were currently in their second year (33%) or third year (33%) of study at Griffith. Students enrolled in their first year at Griffith comprised 22% of respondents, while fourth year and fifth year students comprised 11% and 1% of respondents respectively.

The majority of students were enrolled full time (91%) and identified as domestic (84%). International students comprised 16% of student responses. 59% of students were from Nathan campus, followed by Mt Gravatt (14%) and Logan (13%).

In terms of students' main source of income, 49% of students have casual/part-time/full-time work as their primary income., while 21% of reported Youth Allowance as their primary source of income.

Figure 1. Student responses per campus

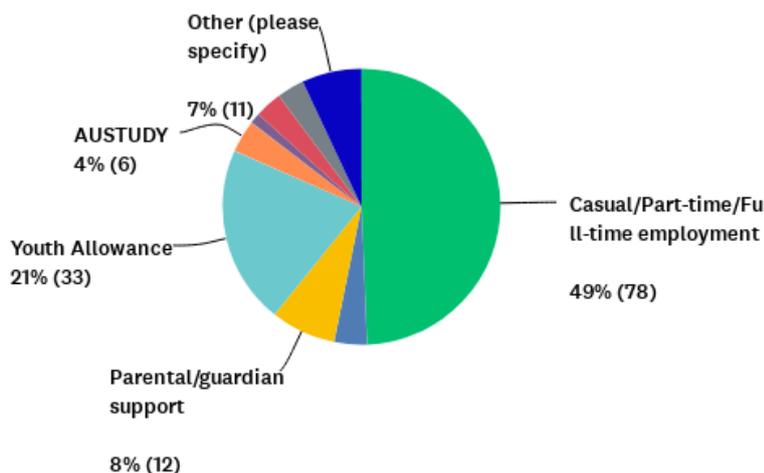
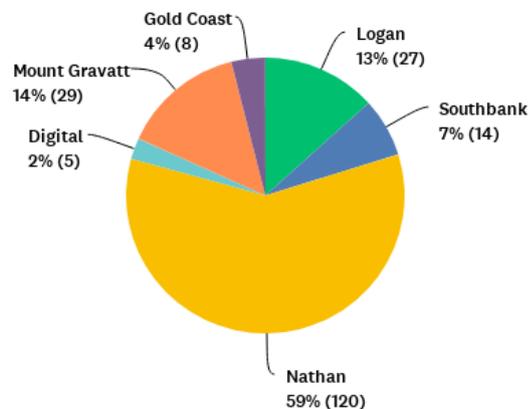


Figure 2. Student sources of income

Financial Wellbeing

55% of students advised they stress or worry about meeting their basic financial commitments due to a shortage of money. While the majority of students advised they were experiencing some form of financial stress, **62%** of students reported having some control over their weekly expenses, cash flow, and budget.

54% of students advised that their financial circumstances has changed due to COVID-19, with students identifying a number of significant expenses which have caused them (or their families) to experience financial stress or anxiety.

Student responses encompassing these significant expense themes:

- *Yes, my car broke down. My computer has also broken, but I cannot afford a new one. My doctor has strongly recommended I see a gastroenterologist and dietician but cannot afford the specialist consultation/medication, and am also overdue to go to the dentist but cannot afford it.*
- *Trying to cope with university full time at home as well as having the kids at home meant that my mum and dad had less time for their work which caused financial stress and anxiety for the family (not knowing when things might resume to normal).*
- *Laptop and other digital support for university and online schooling for my siblings*
- *Yes, my mum work days has been reduce and we are living paycheck to paycheck. Its difficult for me to obtain work due to my study and because of COVID which makes it harder to look for work.*
- *Paying for everything during covid when I was not working. I had family issues where I ended up having to leave home and live in my car and didn't receive much support*
- *Once I was told I was getting less hours at work, I experienced anxiety so intense that I was getting pains in my chest and had to be examined at the hospital.*
- *Car accident, supporting family in India under financial duress.*
- *Yes, I moved into an apartment with a friend from university. The cost of furnishing the apartment and paying the bond put me into financial stress.*
- *Yes, daily expenses as well as large expenses such as car registration are difficult if not impossible with Austudy as your main source of income.*
- *I had to buy a laptop to benefit my studies at University.*

Program-Specific Financial Stressors

Students identified undertaking a placement as a major program-specific financial stressors. Placements are generally defined as an activity primarily required by the University as part of their program which involves undertaking a period of practical learning with an organisation which is not Griffith. The length, position and intensity of the placement in relation to a student's program can vary across disciplines and may be required at multiple instances throughout a student's academic career.

Comments from students regarding the financial pressure of undertaking placements:

- *During clinical placement I had to spend lots at least \$100 on Uber rides because there was no public transportation to the facility at the hours I started in the morning.*

- 1000 hours of placement (social work) is a lot. It's caused me to change jobs twice, because of having to take such an extensive period of time off.
- Yes, I just completed my 6 week bachelor of education placement - in this time I had no compensation and worked 9 hours shifts on weekends. This left me feeling completely drained and exhausted as otherwise I had no income while 'working for free' on placement
- Travelling back to uni may be difficult because I have no car and train tickets are 100+ each way. I managed to find work through a family friend in my hometown and if my degree goes back to only in person instead of blended I don't think I'll be able to find work in the city. Really hoping assessments/ tutorials continue being online otherwise I don't know what I'm going to do.
- Placements when I could not really work. And being an international student during covid as nobody wanted anything to do with us (not even the govt).
- Placement, vaccinations, doctors appointments, uniforms/lab coats & nursing kit
- Yes, within the Bachelor of Education, you must complete compulsory placement for x amount of weeks and during this time it is very difficult to pick up work (you can work on the weekends but then you find you have no time to rest since you are at a school with a full time load). Especially now since I am on my fourth year placement, I am at a school picking up a full time load of school work - not getting paid for it - and find that even a 5 hour shift on a weekend depletes my energy. I wish that during this placement we could be provided with a small amount of money for the work we do since we are unable to work during our time at placement.
- Not me personally, but my partner on nursing placement was an extremely stressful financial burden on both of us

Additionally, film, visual art and music students noted the purchasing of equipment necessary for the completion of their program as causing significant financial burden with one student noting they withdrew from a class due to not being able to afford the necessary computer software:

- Visual art requires new materials and resources to be bought such as staple guns, paint canvas, which is not cheap.
- Being able to care for my instrument
- Spanish class required us to pay for a program so I had to drop out as I wouldn't be able to afford it
- Funding our own films for every subject at the film school.

Accommodation & Food Security

Comments from students regarding their accommodation and food security:

- Moved out of home in brisbane to uni on the gold coast
- 2 times. Felt uncomfortable with flat mates.
- My living situation has changed approximately 3 times. My parents were planning to change houses but couldn't due to the uncertainty of COVID. I moved in with my partner due to financial situations and convenience.
- Yes, i was kicked out of my house, i lived from my car and couch surfed for a while. I stayed at a air bnb and privately rented a room

- I moved once due to concerns about potential violence from another housemate which the landlord did not resolve to my satisfaction.
- I have moved three times, the first was moving back with my parents in South Australia when COVID first began. When I moved back to Queensland I stayed with a close friend during semester two, intending to graduate by the end of the year. Due to injury I extended my degree and found a housemate to move in with at the start of the year.
- 4 times Moved to new rental, Due to partner losing job, had to break lease and move back to Cairns with family, moved back to Brisbane as our friends offered for us to stay with them to find jobs and housing, moved to current rental
- 4 times: 1. Living in a share house, left because of covid 2. Went home to live with my parents during quarantine, left to return to study 3. Lived with 1 new housemate in a share house, left because the landlords decided they didn't like us asking for simple maintenance and kicked us out 4. Moved to a new place with the same housemates
- I was living at home, had to leave home due to unsafe living circumstance, moved in with my on and off partner, lived out of my car when we weren't together, lived at friends, moved back home, was still unsafe, moved into a family owned house that was vacant
- Had to live on the Sunshine Coast for a month due to placements
- 1. Moved from dormitories to private rental 2. returned from overseas 3. moved in with my father 4. Moved due to end of lease 5. Moved due to DV Currently on my own.
- Had to break lease and sleep at my boyfriends for 6 months because I couldn't afford rent or food without any jobs. Finally managed to rent a cheap room but it had no window which was impacting me greatly as there was no ventilation or natural light in the room at all. Had to take out a loan to pay a bond to move into a bigger room but am now struggling to pay the weekly \$209 of rent.

Griffith Support Services

Student responses regarding Griffith Support Services:

- It would be cool if there's online sessions apart from COVID to assist students with managing money. Also helping them with budgeting.
- More grocery bursaries - not only to just students who have been very heavily impacted
- More discounts on the food outlets at University because they're already so expensive
- Financial Planning, Budgeting, Cost Friendly Healthy Meals, Tax Advice and Crisis Contacts for Students at risk of Homelessness.
- Courses on where to get support from, details about how to best deal with Centrelink depending on your situation, as well as emails whenever new support initiatives from the University begin.
- Financial advice workshops, outlining online resources that can help creating budgets (ASICS moneysmart, etc.)
- I can't name anything new, however, I think constantly creating an open, judgement free dialogue to those experiencing financial difficulty always makes a difference. I think if there are ways to ask for help anonymously would be great. Regardless of well intentions from the school, going through something like this can be really embarrassing and sometimes even when someone needs support or guidance, they don't ask for help because they don't want to be seen as a charity case.

- A councillor. Someone to help you get employed so you have a steady income.
- No interest textbook loans would help a lot, I have often found it impossible to purchase required textbooks for many of my classes, due to the fact that they often cost the equivalent of my grocery budget for 3 weeks (per book). More assistance to health students who have extensive pracs - I have seen other universities giving out food cards (Woolworths etc) to students who cannot work due to being on placement
- In terms of the Griffith film school, helping with some of the budget of the films. Last year I spent \$500 of my own money on the assessment film and this year it's looking like it'll be \$1000.
- Smaller bursaries to more students. In my first three years at uni, I received no financial support even though I was eligible and applied for scholarships. I do well academically, my parents are poor, I'm first in family, and have to support myself financially. Yet, up until 2020 I received no support from the university