



**Student Experiences during Fall 2020:  
Institutional Response to COVID-19**

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## Survey Administration Details

The purpose of this survey was to better understand students' experiences following Pitzer College's remote teaching, learning, and working environment as a result of COVID-19 in Fall 2020. The survey was jointly developed by the Dean of Faculty and the Director of the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, and was sent to 921 degree-seeking students at Pitzer College on December 17, 2020. Pitzer students who were enrolled in Pitzer's remote format during fall semester 2020 received a customized link via Qualtrics during the initial launch. Reminder emails (with survey links) were sent weekly to students whose responses had not been recorded as complete. The survey closed on January 11, 2021 with 227 completed surveys (Response Rate: 24.6%) and 57 surveys that were partially completed.

**The survey covered a range of topics. The results reported in this summary are focused on student experiences during the institution's response and changes brought on by COVID-19.**

## Description of the Sample

Demographic information on the sample of respondents is presented in this section. Overall, the sample of respondents was fairly representative of Pitzer's overall student population. Additional details follow below:

- Approximately 67% of respondents identified as women, 32% as men, and 1% as gender non-binary/other.
- Approximately 45% of respondents identified as domestic students of color; more specific breakdown is shown below.

Race/Ethnicity	Percentage of Respondents
American Indian or Alaskan Native	1.8%
Asian, Pacific Islander, Native Hawaiian	13.7%
Hispanic/Latinx	16.5%
Black or African American	4.2%
Two or More Races	8.8%
White	41.5%
International/Non-Resident Alien	10.0%
Unknown	3.5%

- Approximately 14% of respondents identified as first-generation college students whereas 86% had at least one parent/guardian who had earned a minimum of a baccalaureate degree.
- Approximately 34% of respondents received some form of financial aid (e.g., institutional, federal, state, other) while 66% reported that they did not receive any financial aid. Financial aid recipients are slightly overrepresented in this sample of respondents.
  - Approximately 14% of respondents were considered eligible for a Pell Grant compared to 86% who were not.
- Below is the distribution of respondents by class standing/year:

Class Year	Percentage of Respondents
First-Year	29.9%
Sophomore	29.9%
Junior	21.8%
Senior	18.4%

## Student Experiences with Pitzer's Response to COVID-19 in Fall 2020

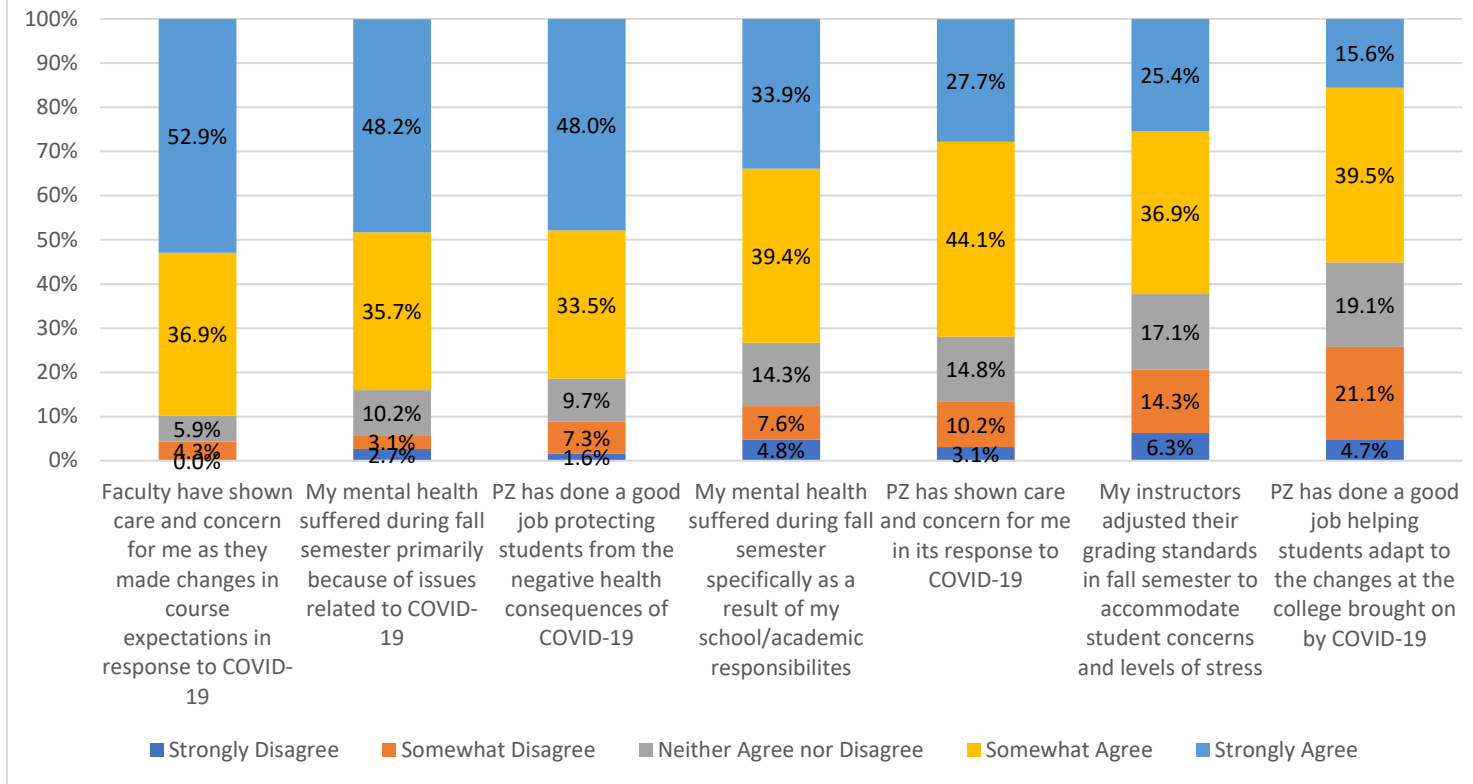
Students were provided the opportunity to share their perceptions regarding their experiences with a remote learning environment for the fall 2020 semester. A range of questions were asked spanning academic and non-academic matters, different forms of support, and various stressors that students may be experiencing as a result of the remote learning environment brought on by COVID-19.

### Perceptions Regarding the Remote Teaching, Learning, and Working Environment

In general, respondents reported that the College had demonstrated concern for the safety and well-being of students and provided helpful support during the remote teaching, learning and working environment in the fall 2020 semester. Respondents generally agreed that the College had done a good job of protecting students, assisting students to adapt to the changes that occurred, and fostered a sense of care and concern. More specifically:

- 90% of respondents agreed that faculty showed care and concern in making changes to their course expectations
- 84% of respondents agreed that their mental health suffered in fall 2020 semester due to COVID-19 related issues
- 82% of respondents agreed that Pitzer did a good job of protecting students from the negative health consequences of COVID-19
- 73% of respondents agreed that their mental health suffered during fall 2020 semester due to their school/academic responsibilities
- 72% of respondents agreed that Pitzer has shown care and concern for them in Pitzer's response to COVID-19
- 62% of respondents agree that faculty adjusted their grading standards in fall 2020 semester to accommodate students' concerns and their level of stress
- 55% of respondents agreed that Pitzer has done a good job in helping students adapt to the changes that were brought on by COVID-19

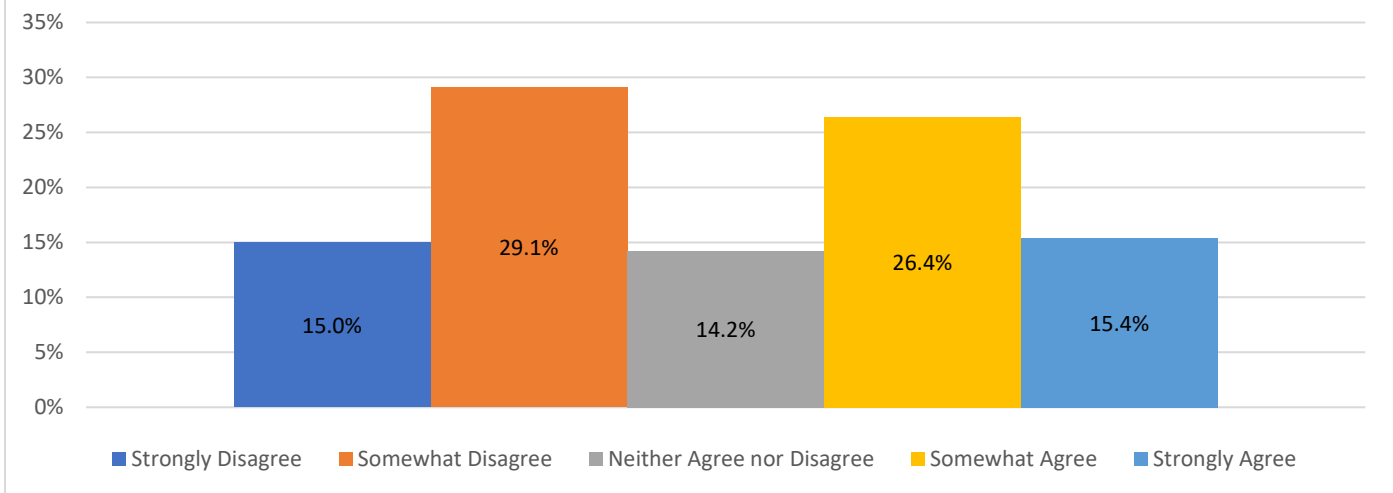
## Perceptions of Pitzer's Overall Response to COVID-19



It is important to note that, while the survey questions were framed using general references to “the College”, these results highlight the efforts of Pitzer’s staff and faculty to be responsive, empathetic and supportive in addressing the students’ needs in the midst of a global pandemic.

The results were mixed in relation to respondents’ knowledge of who to contact at Pitzer regarding how changes that were being made might impact their educational plans. While 42% of respondents strongly/somewhat agreed that they knew who to contact, 44% of respondents strongly/somewhat disagreed (See graph below). Among the areas that respondents referenced most frequently in their open-ended comments were how: safety protocols (e.g., social distancing, testing, contact tracing, quarantine, isolation, etc.) may impact campus life and the student experience if the on-campus, residential format were to resume in Fall 2020; course requirements (e.g., lab, studio art) and educational objectives (e.g., social justice praxis, community engagement) would be impacted if future courses were only offered in a remote format, and; access to courses and resources for off-campus majors (and others) would be impacted by safety protocols. To provide further context, at the time that the survey was administered in June/July 2020, an announcement had not been made regarding the College’s plans for Fall 2020 (e.g., on-campus residential, remote learning, hybrid) and/or safety protocols that may be put in place for the safety and well-being of the campus community.

## Knowledge of Who to Contact at Pitzer with Questions about the Impact of Changes on Educational Plans

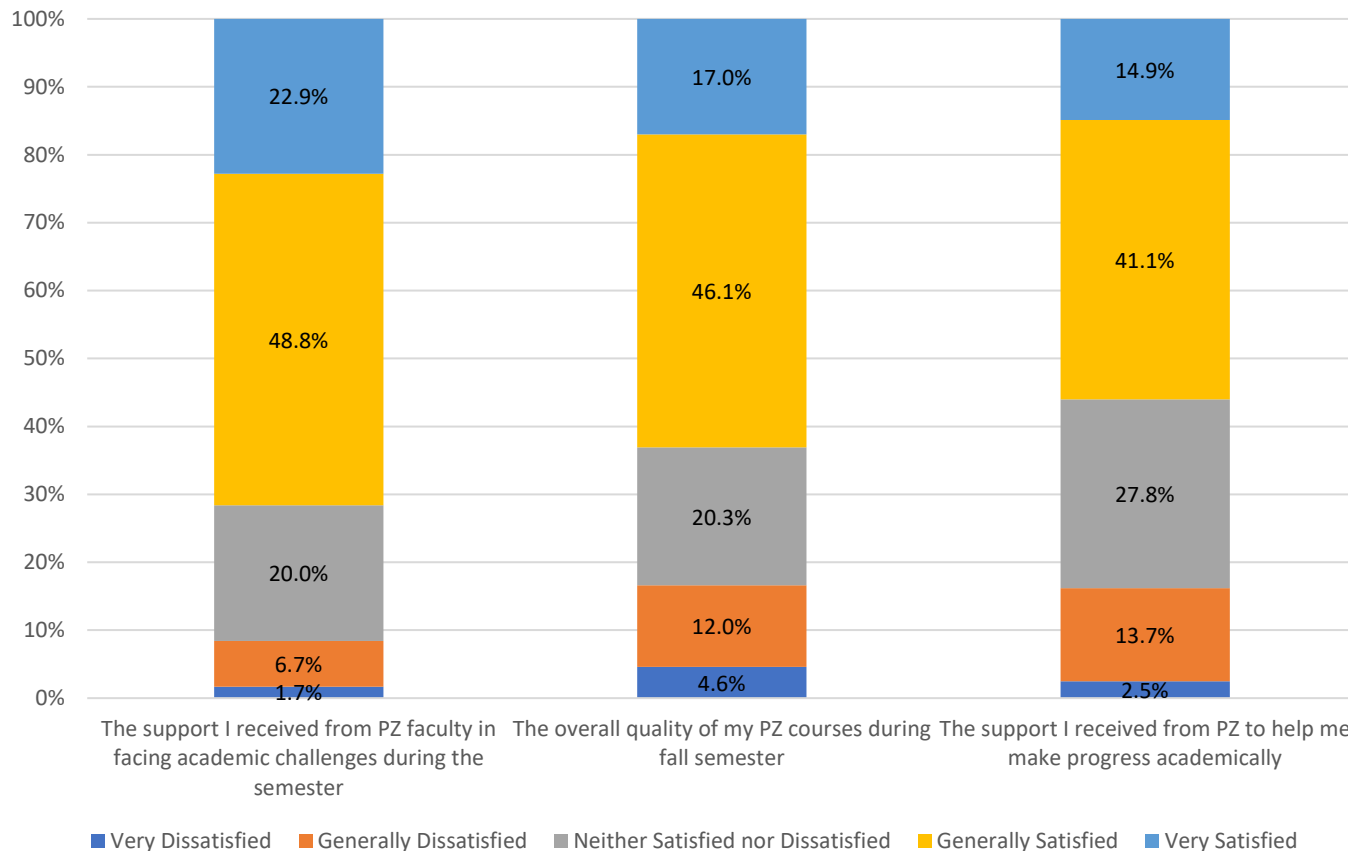


### Support for Students during the transition

Due to the challenges brought on by COVID-19, the fall 2020 semester resulted in a remote teaching and learning environment. Students were forced to experience an entire semester in a new online modality, as a result of the global pandemic. Students were asked to report their satisfaction related to support they received for academic and non-academic matters related to this new online modality. Academic matters include the support students received from Pitzer faculty, the overall quality of their courses, and the support they received from Pitzer college.

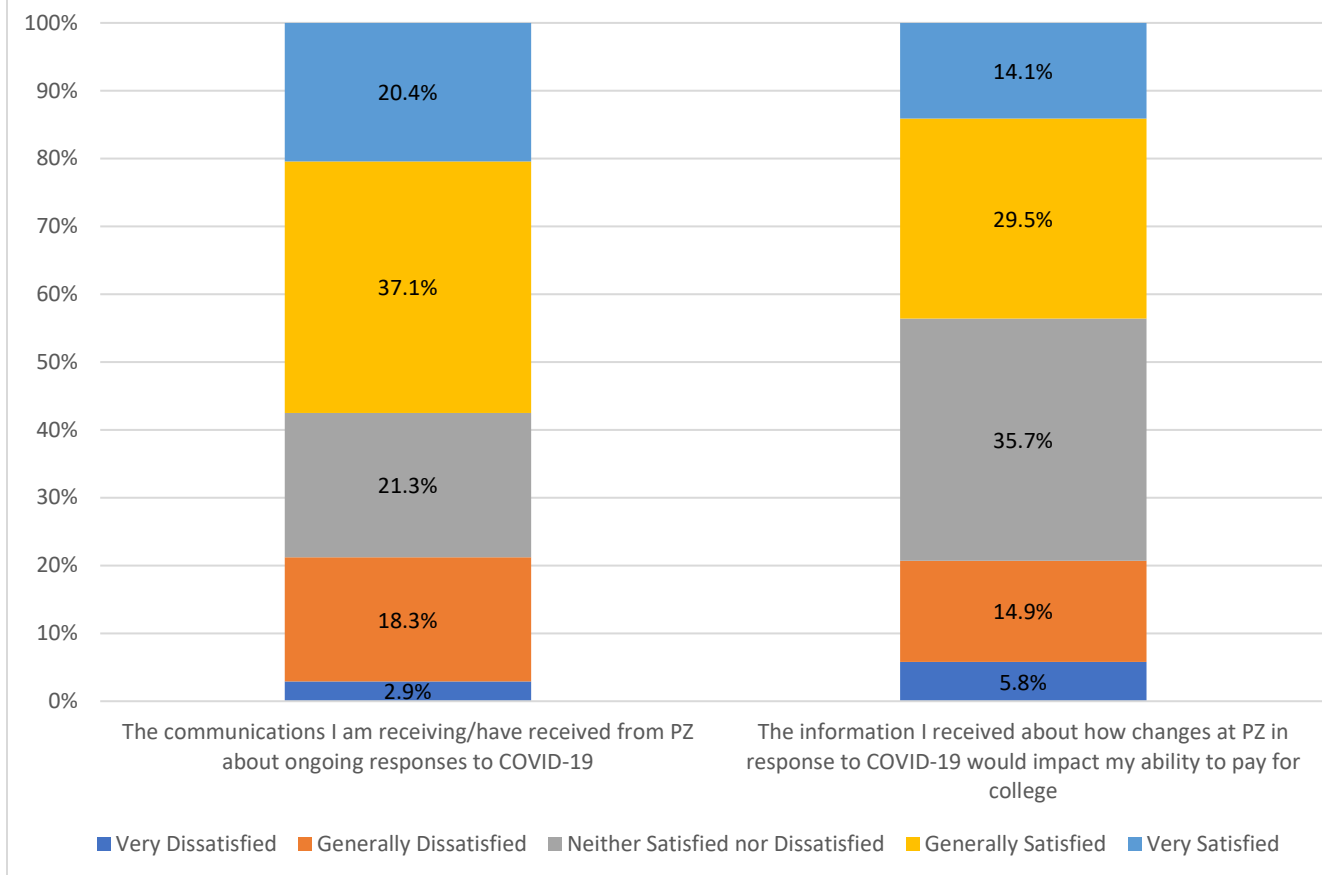
Across all areas, students reported the highest level of satisfaction with the support they received from faculty in facing academic challenges during the fall 2020 semester. Approximately 72% of respondents were generally or very satisfied with the support they received from faculty. Approximately 63% of respondents were generally or very satisfied with the overall quality of their fall 2020 courses. Approximately 56% of respondents were generally or very satisfied with the support they received from Pitzer college. Overall, the majority of respondents indicated that they were generally or very satisfied with the support they received from faculty and Pitzer college as well as the quality of their courses. A more detailed distribution of the responses is presented in the graph below.

### Student Satisfaction: Support Related to Academic Matters



Non-academic matters for which students were provided support include communication about the College’s responses to COVID-19 and information regarding how changes may impact students’ ability to pay their cost of attendance. The majority of respondents were generally or very satisfied with the communication they received about ongoing responses to COVID-19 (57.5%). In contrast, 43.6% of respondents were generally or very satisfied with the information that they received about how changes might impact their ability to pay for the cost of attendance compared to 35.7% who were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

## Student Satisfaction: Support Related to Non-Academic Matters



Students were provided an open-ended question to share insights regarding what they appreciated most about Pitzer College’s response to COVID-19 in fall 2020. Among the themes that surfaced from the comments provided were:

- Supporting students during the transition – Respondents acknowledged and expressed appreciation for different types of support (e.g., care and concern, housing, financial, moving) to adapt to the remote learning environment in a short period of time. Staff and faculty exhibited care and concern for the safety and well-being of students. Financial support for students (e.g., housing refunds, travel expenses, CARES Act), providing consideration to students that might be experiencing housing insecurity, and the storage of student property appear to have been helpful, under the circumstances.
- Faculty were responsive and flexible – Respondents lauded faculty members for their efforts to adapt their courses to the online modality and for their flexibility in helping students to complete their courses. There appeared to be a recognition of the effort invested by faculty to make course materials and instruction available through a remote learning platform. Respondents reported feeling supported and benefitting from interactions with faculty via personal check-ins.
- Satisfaction with the grading policy change – The grading policy that was approved for Spring 2020 seemed to have broad support. Respondents appeared to view the policy change as a means to: alleviate stress; account for the lack of familiarity with remote learning, and; ensure that equity issues did not result in disparate outcomes for minoritized students (e.g., race/ethnicity, first-generation, socio-economic, etc.). There was a smaller group of respondents that voiced concerns that the grading policy may obfuscate their academic accomplishments and/or penalize them as they pursued graduate school admission.



- Communication from Pitzer about changes and the future – Respondents expressed appreciation for the information that was shared by Pitzer’s leadership, Student Senate, the COVID-19 Task Force, and in general. There appeared to be a recognition that circumstances were both evolving and outside of Pitzer’s control, though the uncertainty and timing of messages were referred to as creating anxiety and frustration.

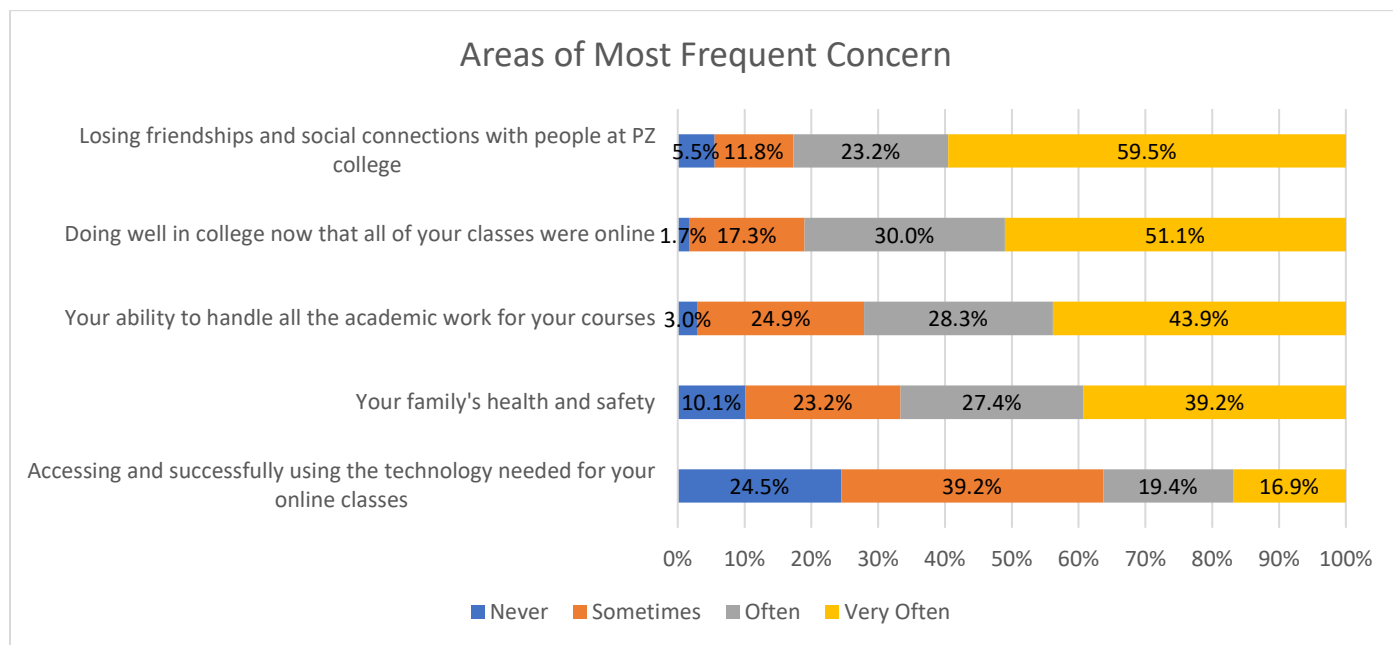
### Stressors Experienced by Students during the Transition

The online format of fall 2020 semester, which was brought by COVID-19, presented an array of personal, social, and academic stressors for students. Students were provided the opportunity to estimate the frequency with which they experienced these stressors and/or worries. Notably, approximately nine out of ten respondents reported being worried about losing connections at Pitzer, doing well in their courses, and their family’s health and safety. More specifically:

- 83% of respondents indicated they were often or very often worried about losing friendships and social connections at Pitzer
- 81% of respondents were often or very often worried about doing well in college as all courses were delivered in an online modality
- 72% of respondents reported being often or very often worried about their ability to handle all the academic work for their courses
- 67% of respondents reported being often or very often worried about their family’s health and safety

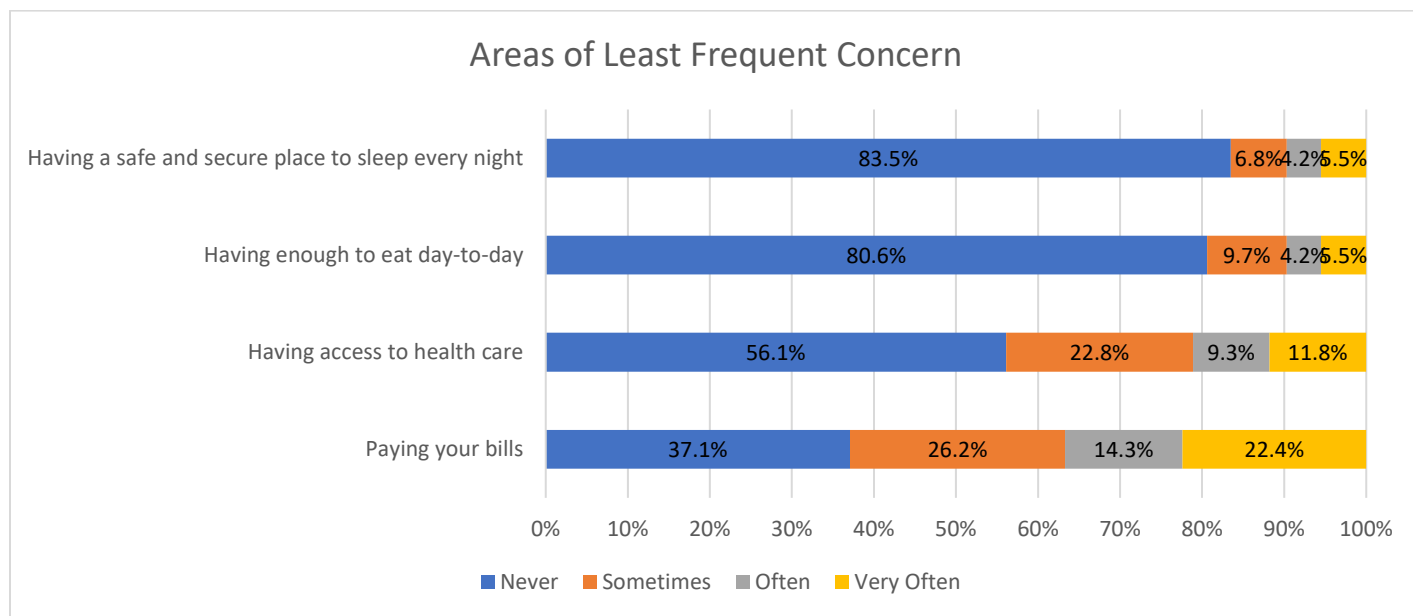
Seven out of ten respondents indicated that they worried about access to and use of technology related to the delivery of courses online. While only 36% of respondents worried often or very often, an additional 39% reported worrying sometimes (See graph below). What remains unclear is the extent to which these results reflect students having limited access to technological resources compared to training that might be helpful to orient and build skills with remote learning platforms among end-users.

The graph below shows the distribution of respondents across the areas of most frequent worry and concern.



In contrast, access to health care, food and housing insecurity, and bills appeared to be of less frequent concern for respondents. Eight out of ten respondents indicated that they were never worried/concerned about having enough to eat or a safe and secure place to sleep every night. Five out of ten respondents reported that they never worried about having access to health care. While 37% of respondents were never worried about paying their bills, 63% reported being worried (Sometimes, Often, or Very Often), with approximately one out of three respondents being worried often or very often (See graph below).

The graph below shows the distribution of respondents across the areas of least frequent worry and concern.



Students had the opportunity, through an open-ended question, to share their insights about what caused them the most stress and/or concern during Pitzer’s response to COVID-19. A perceived lack of communication from Pitzer was the single most frequently cited stressor, by a large margin. Upon further investigation, it appears that respondents were concerned about perceived delays in receiving information, a lack of detail or substance in messaging, and a lack of clarity about plans for Fall 2020. There appeared to be a widely held perception that the 4C’s were providing more timely and clear messaging to their students about decisions that were being made, and that Pitzer was “late” in making decisions and/or disclosing information about moving out of the dorms and anticipated plans for Fall 2020. Several respondents cited the uncertainty about Fall 2020 (as a result of the global pandemic) and perceived limitations related to remote learning as creating anxiety or worry. A notable group of respondents expressed concerns about not returning to the on-campus residential experience in Fall 2020, or that safety protocols (e.g., social distancing, testing, quarantining, isolation) would likely diminish the “Pitzer Experience” (e.g., taking courses across colleges, community gatherings, social life, etc.) if, and when, a return to the residential experience was initiated. In contrast, a number of respondents offered a counter narrative expressing concerns about whether proposed safety protocols would be adequately enforced and/or adhered to by students to create a safe environment for the Fall 2020 semester to proceed to completion.

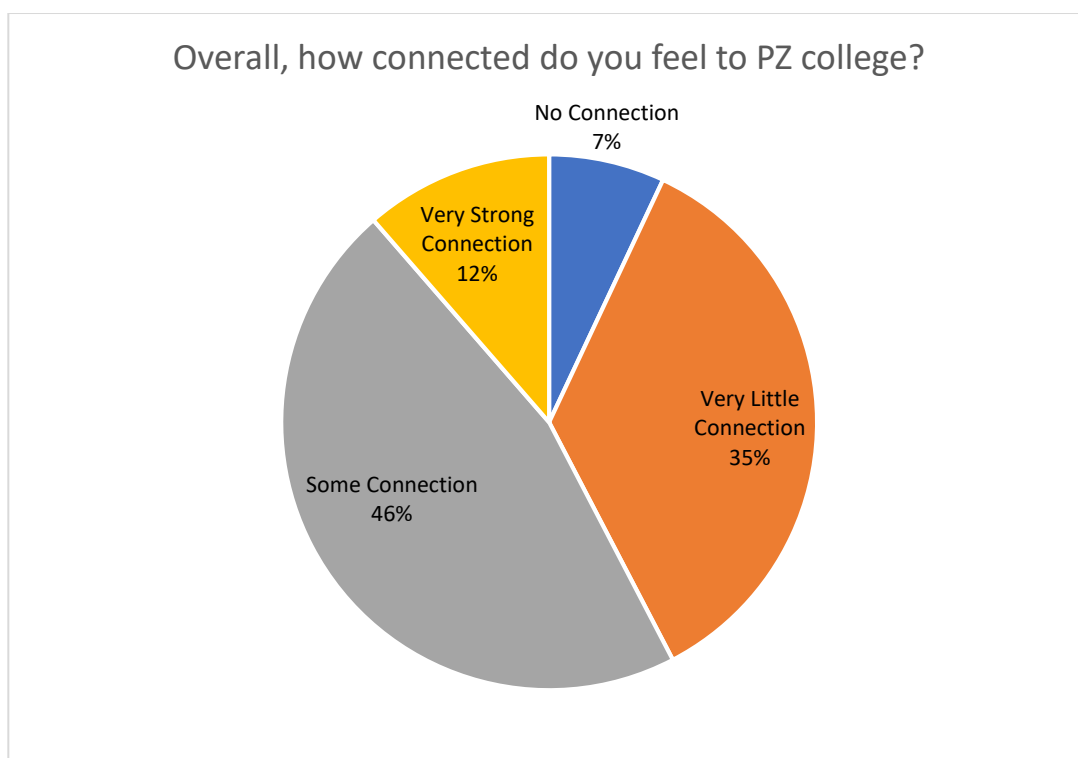
In reviewing the 1,231 open ended comments (across five questions), it is important to note that respondents appeared to convey a sense of “loss” associated with having been deprived of the opportunity to complete the Spring 2020 semester and a dubious outlook for Fall 2020. Many respondents acknowledged that the circumstances related to the global pandemic were, and remain, outside of Pitzer’s control, though there were expressions of anxiety, uncertainty, frustration, and feeling conflicted about the implications for returning to campus safely and the

impact on campus life and their learning. In some instances, it appeared that respondents were looking to Pitzer to return or restore what was “lost” in Spring 2020 by announcing a return to the status quo, on-campus, residential experience in Fall 2020. On the other hand, there were many respondents that cited the increasing number of infections in hot spots across the country, including California, and doubts about the extent to which a safe return to campus could be facilitated in the near-term. Based on the responses presented, it appears that respondents, not unlike the public, are trying to make sense of the information related to COVID-19 being published through government and media sources.

### Looking Ahead

The evidence gathered through this survey, and ongoing data collection efforts, is compelling and clear: The value of “community” is deeply rooted in the ethos and experience of students, faculty, and staff at Pitzer College. Respondents to this survey repeatedly referenced gathering with their peers, faculty, and staff at Pitzer and the other Claremont Colleges as being an important and necessary component of their undergraduate learning experience. When asked to indicate how connected they felt to Pitzer College following the fall 2020 semester:

- 12% of respondents indicated they felt a very strong connection
- 46% of respondents reported they felt some connection
- 35% of respondents felt very little or no connection



The survey provided two open-ended questions for students to share the factors they were considering in making a decision to enroll in Fall 2020 and concerns about returning to Pitzer. Based on thematic coding of the 254

responses received for each respective question<sup>1</sup>, the factor and concern that appeared most frequently was the extent to which there would be some level of in-person, on-campus activity in Fall 2020. However, a substantial proportion of respondents were considering the safety protocols that would be put in place to mitigate health risks associated with the spread of COVID-19 if students returned to campus. Many respondents expressed reservations about how social distancing, quarantining, and other safety measures would impact campus life (e.g., social, taking courses at the 4Cs, access to dining halls, etc.), whether their peers would adhere to the safety protocols, the potential for feeling isolated, and the potential for an outbreak resulting in a similar evacuation of campus to what occurred in Spring 2020. Layered within these factors were references to whether tuition and fees would be reduced to account for what respondents perceived to be less, or restricted, access to the resources and experiences that they are accustomed to. When taken in total, it appears that a substantial number of respondents were conflicted about the amount of tuition and fees they would be charged in relation to the perceived value of their learning experience in a more restrictive on-campus or remote learning environment.

The College's response to COVID-19 was an unprecedented, and yet necessary, disruption for students, faculty, and staff, given the emerging public health threat in Spring 2020. Despite the disruptive effect of the transition, the evidence seems to suggest that, given the circumstances, the support, assistance, care and concern that were provided were helpful to students in adapting to changes in their living arrangements and course modalities to finish out the Spring 2020 semester. Nonetheless, it also appears that any delays in returning and/or alterations to the on-campus, residential experience due to COVID-19 will likely present challenges as they will fundamentally represent a paradigm shift in how the community of students, faculty, and staff approach teaching, learning, and working together. Based on the evidence, it will be important to:

1. Provide students information regarding who to contact with questions about how changes at Pitzer will impact their:
  - a. (a) educational plans (e.g., access to labs/studies, community engagement, off-campus majors, intercollegiate resources, etc.) and;
  - b. (b) cost of attendance and ability to pay for college (e.g., Financial Aid, campus jobs).
2. Enhance the overall quality of curricular and cocurricular learning experiences in a more restrictive on-campus (e.g., safety protocols) and/or remote environment.

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<sup>1</sup> There were 508 total responses across both questions. These were not forced response questions, so respondents may have responded to one or both. The factors and concerns intersected across both questions, so a synthesis of the thematic coding is presented in this report.