

# Student Academic Concerns Report

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## Introduction

On Friday, October 30th, 2020, the 60th Administration of the Howard University Student Association (HUSA) released a survey to the student body via social media (Twitter, Instagram, GroupMe, etc.). The purpose of this survey was to gauge the immediate academic concerns of the student body. While HUSA advocates on behalf of our graduate and undergraduate peers it is absolutely essential that we come prepared to present accurate data to administrators that demonstrate the difficulties we are all facing. We encouraged all students to participate and to share this survey with friends and classmates to ensure we have as much data as possible to present to Howard University's administration. All submissions were anonymous; the only personal data collected is in regards to classification, student status, and college/school enrollment. Questions were separated into the following advocacy topics: demographics, academic concerns, the Board of Trustees and administration communication, COVID-19 impact, a pass/fail grading system, and mental health days/ spring break. These topics were selected because they are reflective of the immediate needs of the student body. From October 30th to November 4th, this survey received over 1500 responses. The report on the raw data is over 100 pages, so this report will be a snapshot of the data.

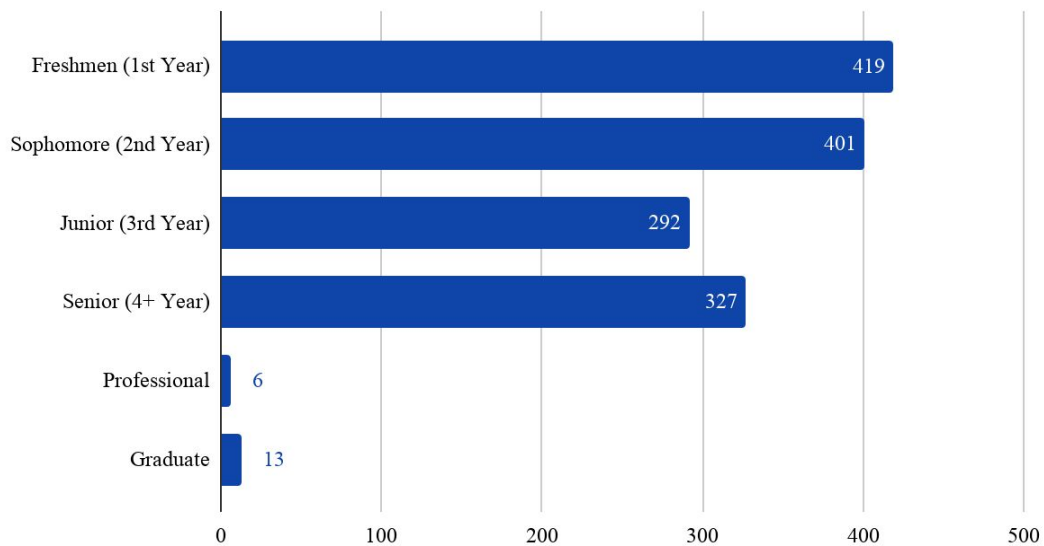
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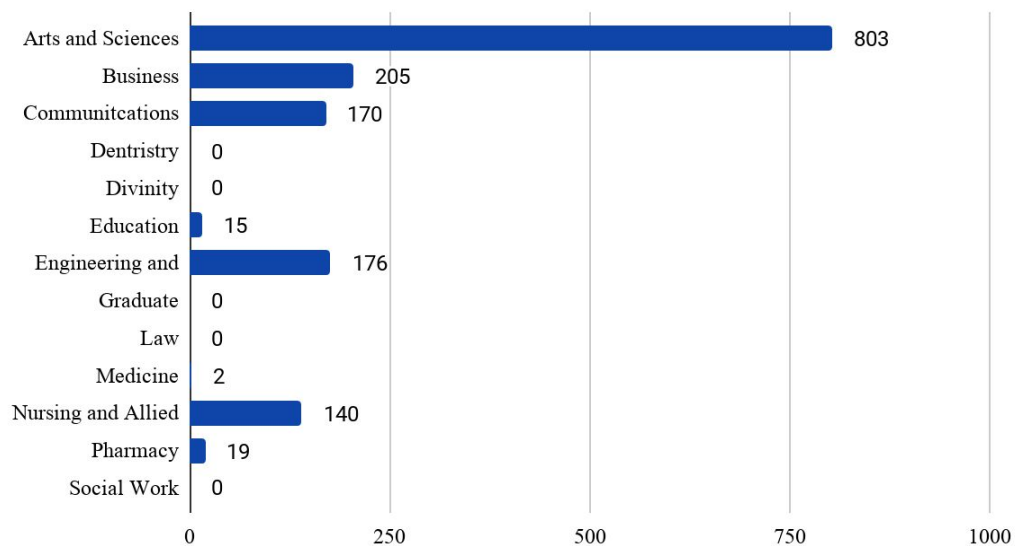
## Demographics

In this section, we asked students 5 questions: classification, college or school, transfer student status, first-generation student status, and how many credits they are taking this semester. Though every question in this survey was optional, the vast majority of students answered these five questions, giving us a baseline for the type of students filling out the survey.

### Classification

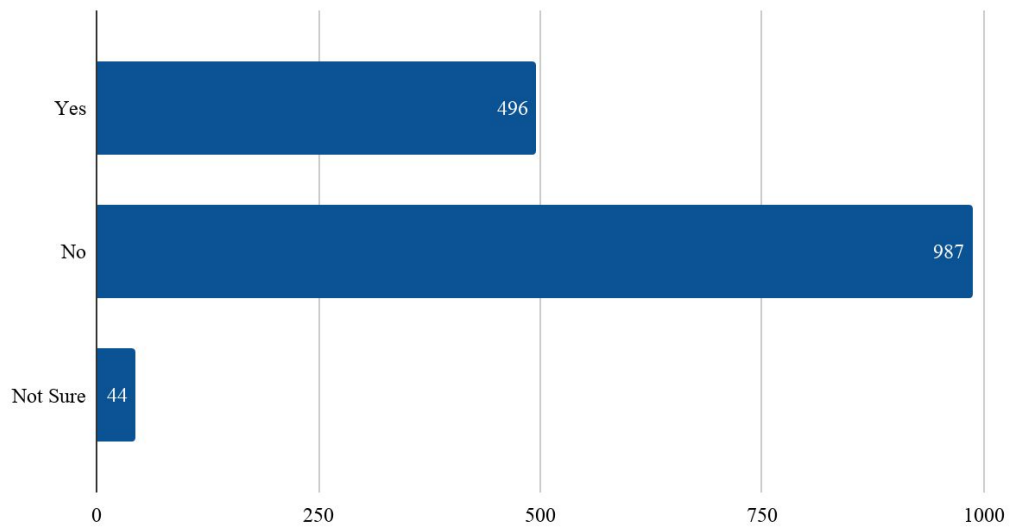


### School or College

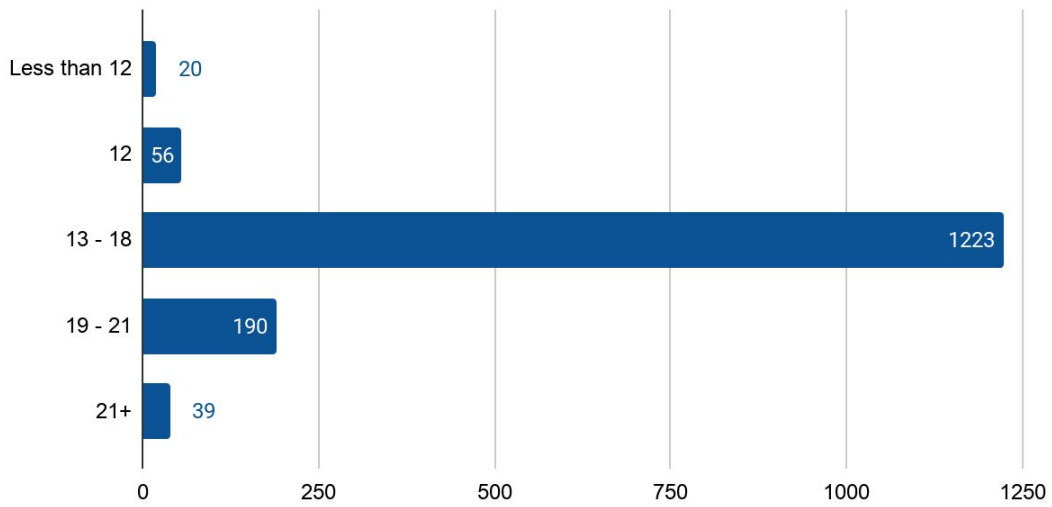


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### Are you a First-Generation Student



### How many credits are you currently enrolled in for the 2020 Fall Semester?



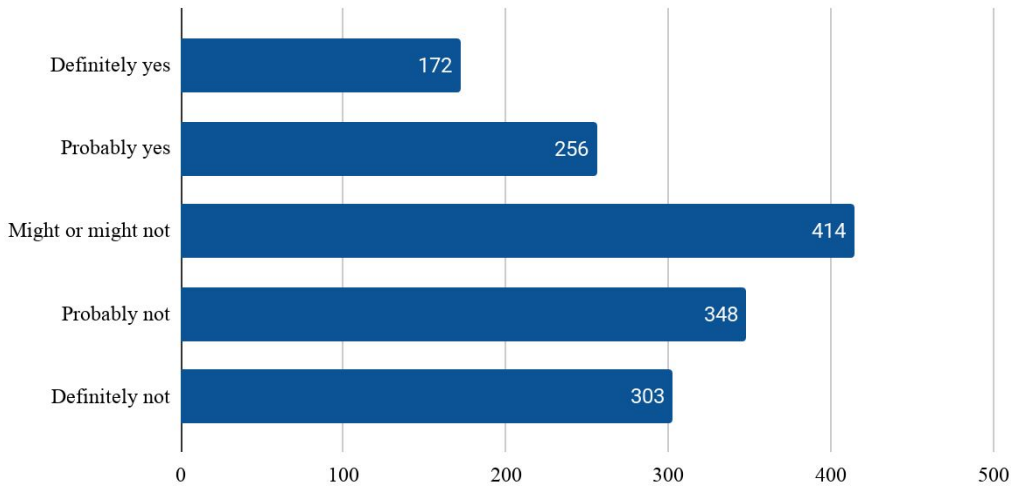
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## Academic Concerns

In this section, we asked students four questions about their current academic experience. The first two questions were intended to collect information about professor misconduct and impact on learning. The final two asked about students' scholarship status and whether they considered dropping out of the university.

The first two questions gathered hundreds of responses detailing students' difficulties learning and communicating with professors in the current virtual learning environment. These responses will be included in a second document and will include course identification numbers, professors' names, and details of the students' issues. There is no way to accurately and concisely describe the responses to these questions. One must read the responses for oneself.

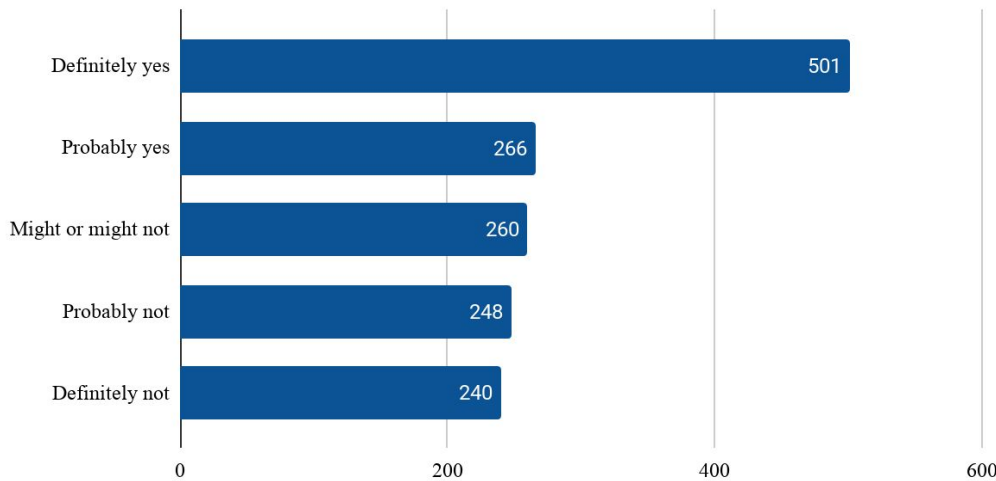
Are you in jeopardy of losing your scholarship due to your academic performance this semester?



When asked if they were in jeopardy of losing their scholarship, 28% of students answered definitely yes or probably yes, an

additional 28% answered might or might not, and 42% answered probably not or definitely not. This data indicates that over a quarter of students surveyed believed they were in jeopardy of losing their scholarship this semester. Over a quarter of students surveyed were also unsure of their scholarship status.

Have you seriously considered dropping out of Howard University during this pandemic?



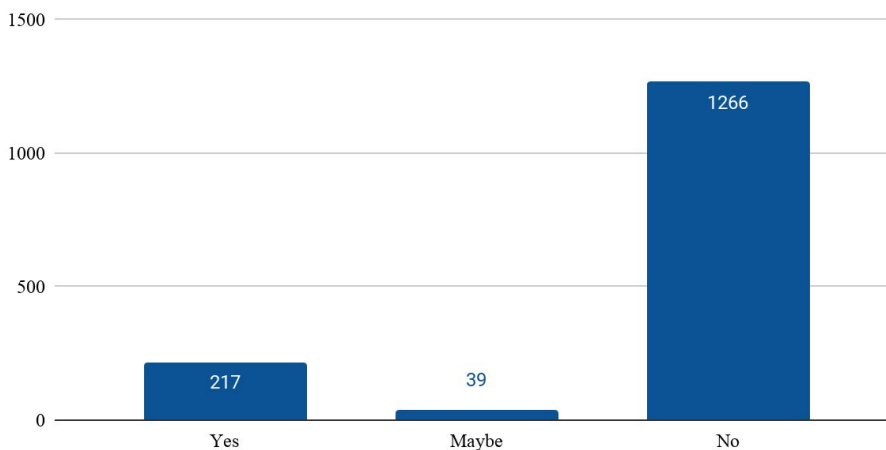
When asked if they seriously considered dropping out of the university due to the pandemic, half (50%) of all respondents answered either

definitely or probably yes, 17% answered might or might not, and 31% answered either probably not or definitely not. This data indicates that half of the students survey seriously considered completely withdrawing from the university because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

### Board of Trustees and Administration Communication

In this section, students were asked if they were aware that there are no undergraduate or graduate student representation or faculty representation currently on the Board of Trustees, if they believed there should be student and faculty representation on the Board of Trustees, and how they rated the President, Board of Trustees, and HUSA’s communication with students.

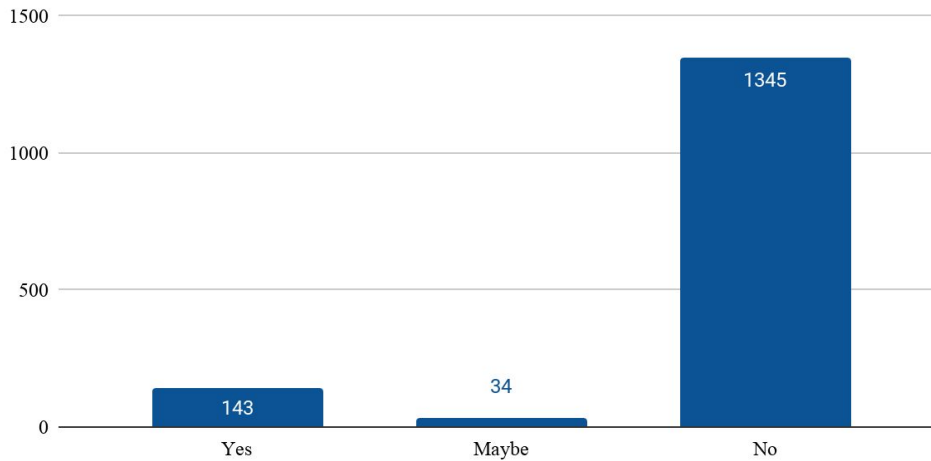
Are you aware that the Howard University Board of Trustees currently has no undergraduate or graduate student trustee representation?



When asked if they were aware that the Howard Board of Trustees currently has no undergraduate or graduate student trustee

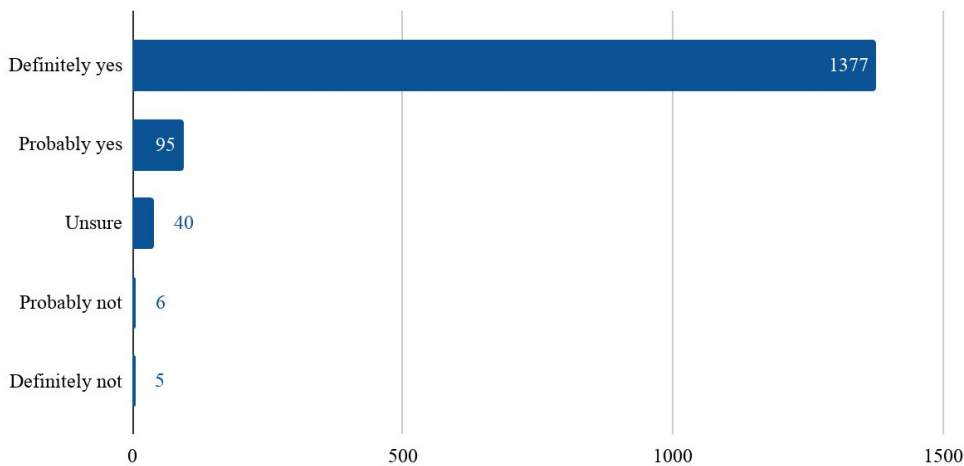
representation, 83% of students answered no, 14% answered yes, and 2% answered maybe. This indicates that an overwhelming majority of students surveyed were unaware that there was currently no student representation on the board of trustees at the time they took the survey. This is despite the fact that the student body elected both graduate and undergraduate trustees.

Are you aware that Howard Board of Trustees currently has no faculty trustee representation?



Similar results were found when students were asked if they were aware that the Board of Trustees currently lacks faculty representation as well, with 88% of students answering no.

Do you believe that the Howard University Board of Trustees should have student and faculty representation?

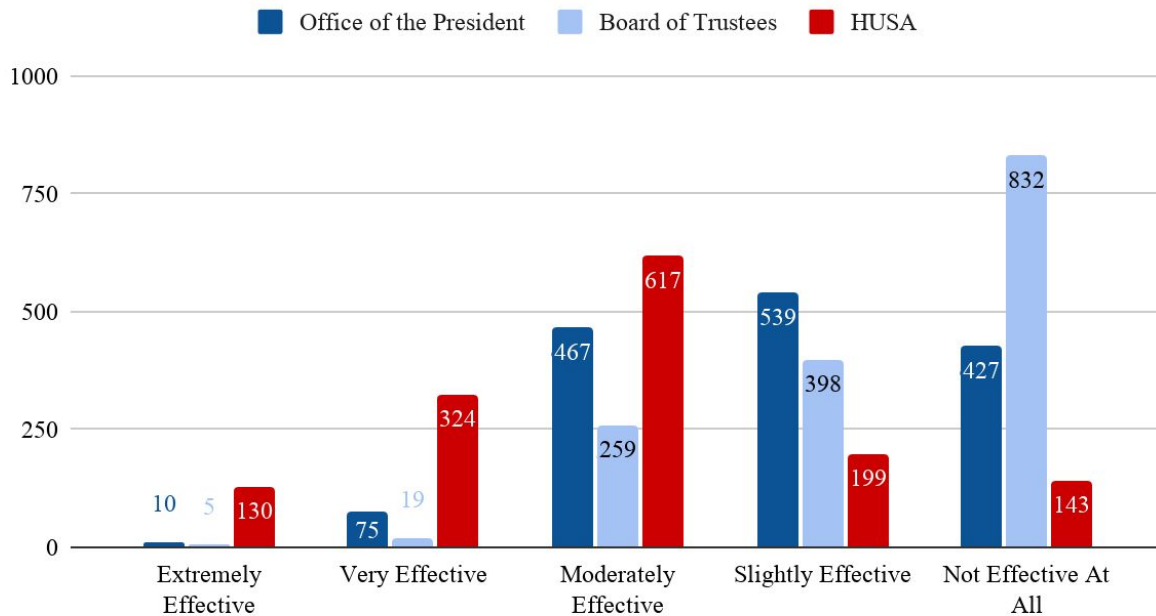


When asked if the Board of Trustees should have student and faculty representation, 97% of students answered either definitely or probably yes. This indicates widespread

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support for student and faculty representation at the highest levels of university administration.

## How would you rate this office's communication with students?



When asked how students would rate the Office of the President’s communication with students, respondents overwhelmingly answered not effective at all or slightly effective, with 35% and 30% respectively. This indicates that a majority of students are dissatisfied with the Office of the President’s communication with the student body.

When asked how students would rate the Board of Trustees’ communication with students, respondents overwhelmingly answered not effective at all, with 55% of respondents indicating this. This indicates that a majority of students are dissatisfied with the Board of Trustees’ communication with the student body.

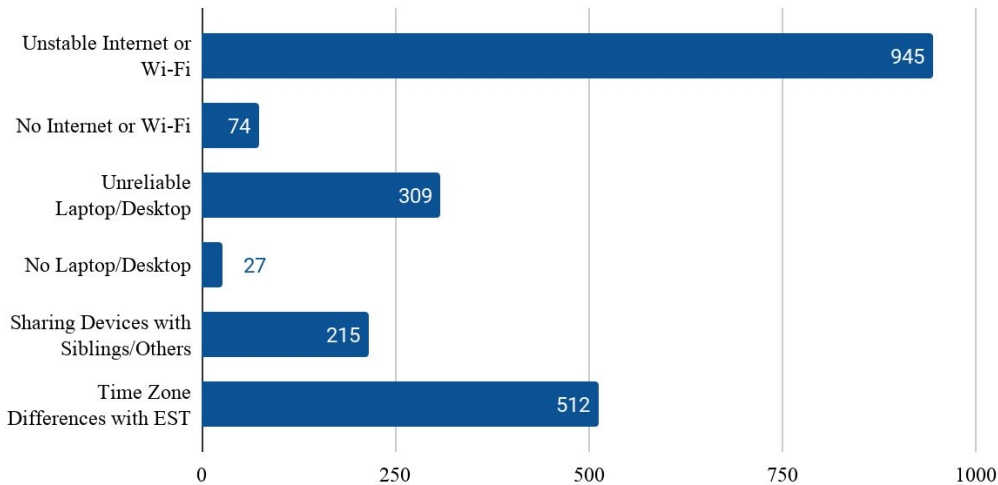
When asked how students would rate HUSA’s communication with students, 30% of respondents answered either extremely or very effective, 40% answered moderately effective, 20% answered slightly effective, and 10% answered not effective at all. This indicates that HUSA’s communication with the student body is moderately effective and has room for improvement. However, overall, students feel HUSA is better at communicating than both the Office of the President and the Board of Trustees.

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## COVID-19 Impact

In this section, we asked students seven questions about how the current COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the students' academic lives. We asked about technological issues, workload, personal coronavirus impact, and the HEART Grant. When asking about the HEART Grant, we first asked students if they qualified. If they did they were directed to questions about their EPay accounts, if they were of how the grant would be distributed, and what would have been the most beneficial allocation of the grant money.

Which, if any, of the following technological difficulties are impacting your learning?

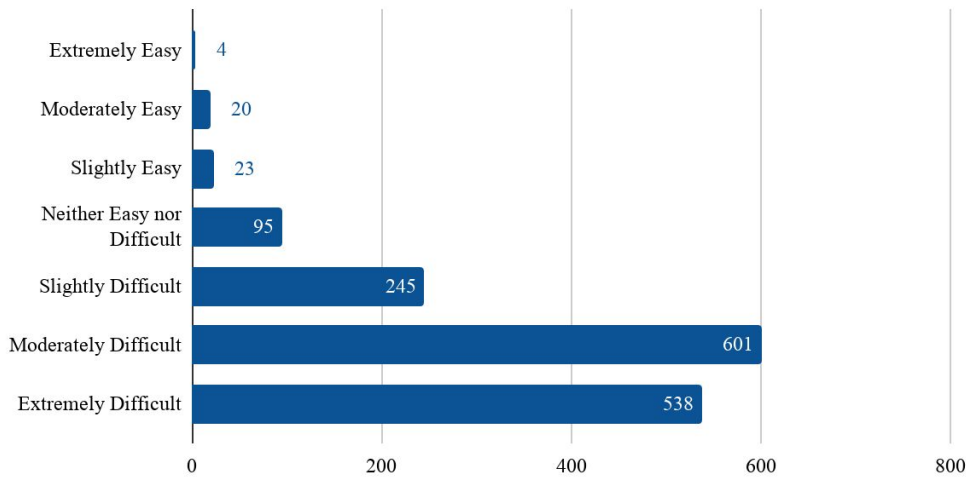


Students were asked if they experienced any of a number of technological issues impacting their learning. The options were unstable

internet or Wi-Fi, no internet or Wi-Fi, unreliable laptop/desktop, no laptop/desktop, sharing devices with siblings/ other, and time zone differences. Students were instructed to select all that apply. Unstable internet or Wi-Fi received the most responses at 45%, 25% reported time zone differences, 14% reported unreliable laptop/desktop, 10% reported having to share devices, 3% reported no internet or Wi-Fi, and 1% responded no laptop/desktop. As the university continues to be in an entirely virtual environment for the foreseeable future, these concerns will only become more pressing to students who experience technological issues.



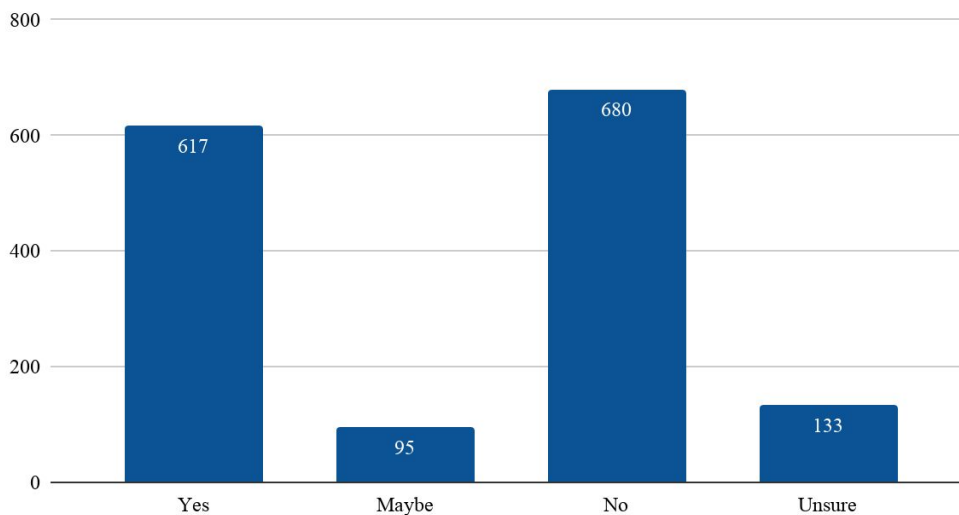
How would you consider the overall workload of your classes this semester?



When asked how they consider the overall workload of their classes this semester, a majority of students reported their workload as being either slightly,

moderately, or extremely difficult, at 16%, 39%, and 35% respectively. This totals to 90% of students reporting that their workload is at some level of difficulty this semester.

Have you or anyone in your family contracted the coronavirus?

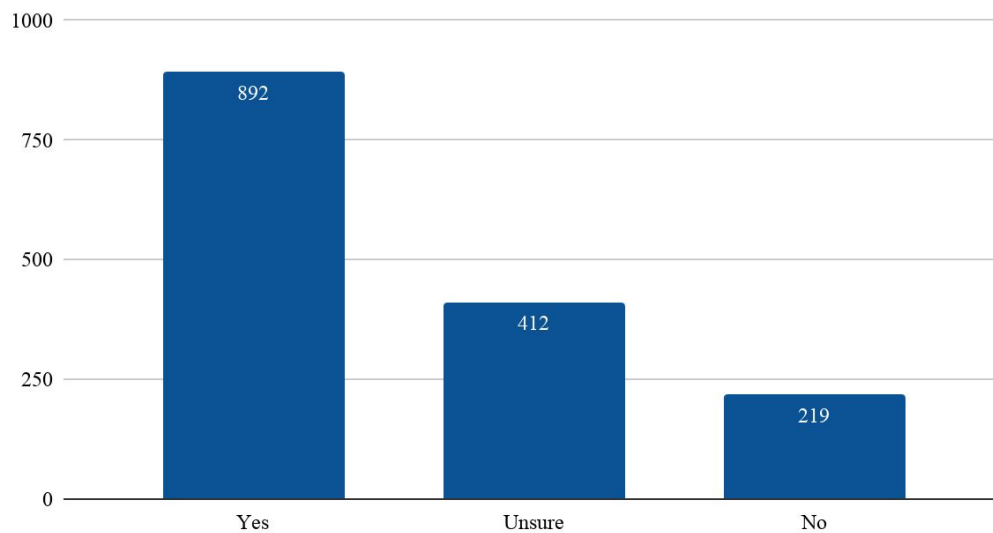


When asked if they or anyone in their family had contracted the coronavirus, 41% of students said yes, 44% said no 9% said they were unsure and 6% said maybe.

This indicates that a plurality of students has either contracted coronavirus themselves or has had a family member contract the virus.

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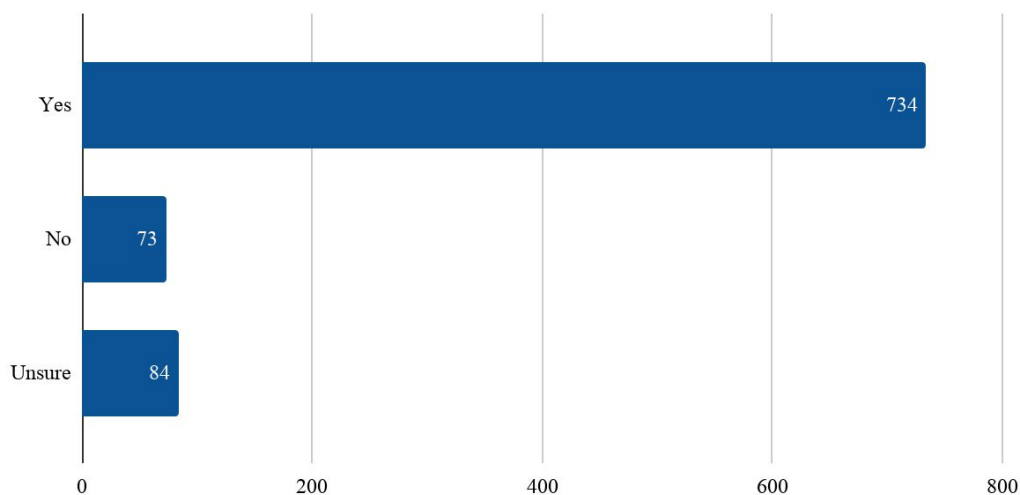
### Did you qualify for the HEART Grant from the University?



The HEART Grant was created to help ease the financial burden on students and their families during this uncertain time, and a large number of

students qualified for it. If a student qualified for the HEART Grant, they were asked three additional questions. If they did not, they moved on to the next section. When asked if they qualified for the HEART Grant, 59% of students responded yes, 27% were unsure, and 14% said no.

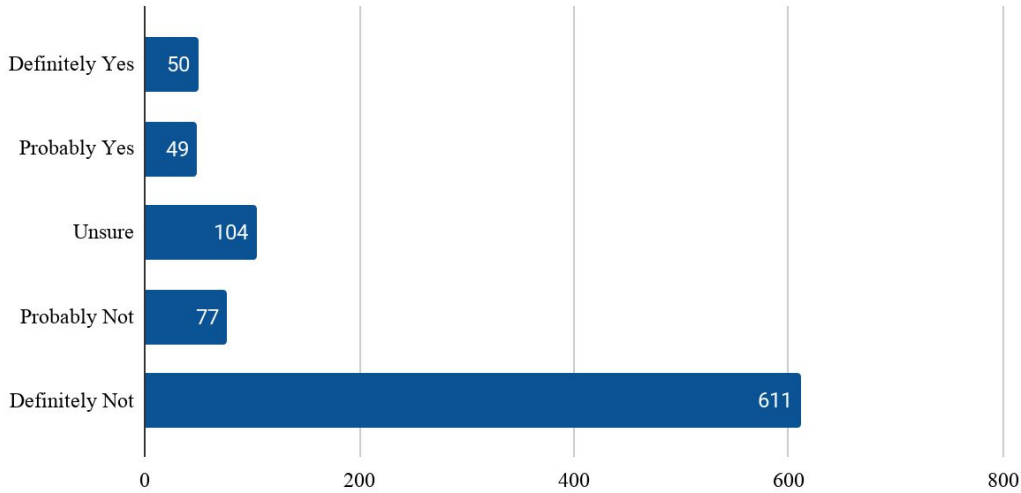
### Does your EPay Account reflect you having received the HEART Grant?



Of the students that qualified for the HEART Grant, 82% said that their EPay Account updated to reflect having received the

grant, 8% said their accounts had not been updated, and 10% were unsure.

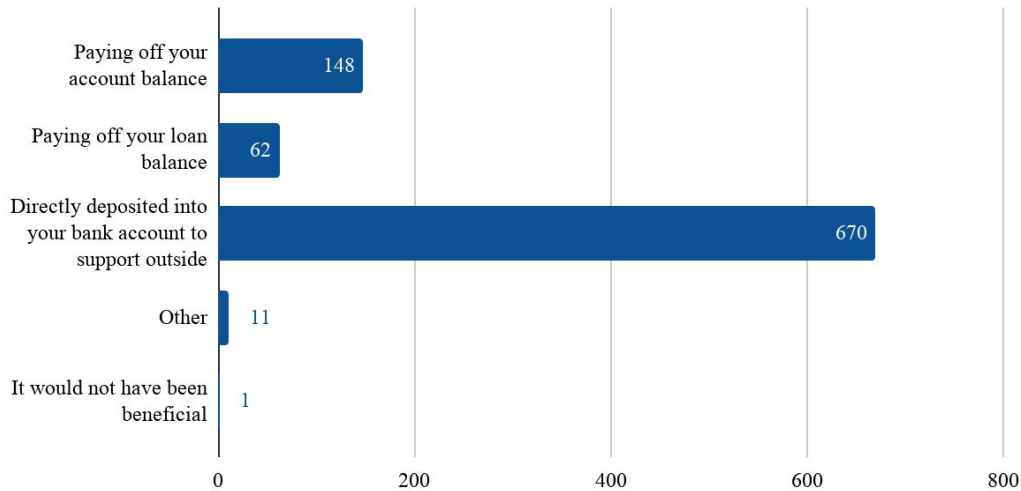
Were you aware that the HEART Grant money would be directed to student loans?



When asked if they were aware HEART Grant money would be directed toward student loans, students

overwhelmingly responded definitely not. Most students were unaware that the HEART Grant would be applied to student loans. We asked this question because it is an issue that recently arose on social media.

What would have been the most beneficial allocation for HEART Grant money?



When asked what would have been the most beneficial allocation for the HEART Grant money, 75% of students responded that a direct deposit in

their bank account to support outside expenses. This indicates that the HEART Grant would

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have been most beneficial to students if it had been distributed in a similar manner to the CARES Act funds.

### **Pass/Fail Grading System for the Fall 2020 Semester**

In this section, students were asked three questions regarding their grades and policy preferences for a pass/fail grading system.

As of October 30th, 2020, 74% students were unaware of their current grade in at least one of their courses. Of those students that said they were unaware of at least one of their grades, 26% were unaware of their grades in 1 course, 31% reported 2, 23% reported 3, 9% reported 4, and 10% reported 5 or more courses for which they were unaware of the grade.

Finally, asked students to rank their preferred policies for a pass/fail grading system. The choices provided were universal pass/fail with no exception, opt-in pass/fail, opt-in letter grades, opt-in pass/fail for a limited number of courses, letter grades with scholarship protections, and letter grades with no exceptions. The preferred order is as follows:

1. Opt-In Pass/Fail
2. Opt-In Letter Grades
3. Opt-In Pass/Fail for a Limited Number of Courses
4. Letter Grades with Scholarship Protections
5. Universal Pass/Fail Without Exceptions
6. Letter Grades Without Exceptions

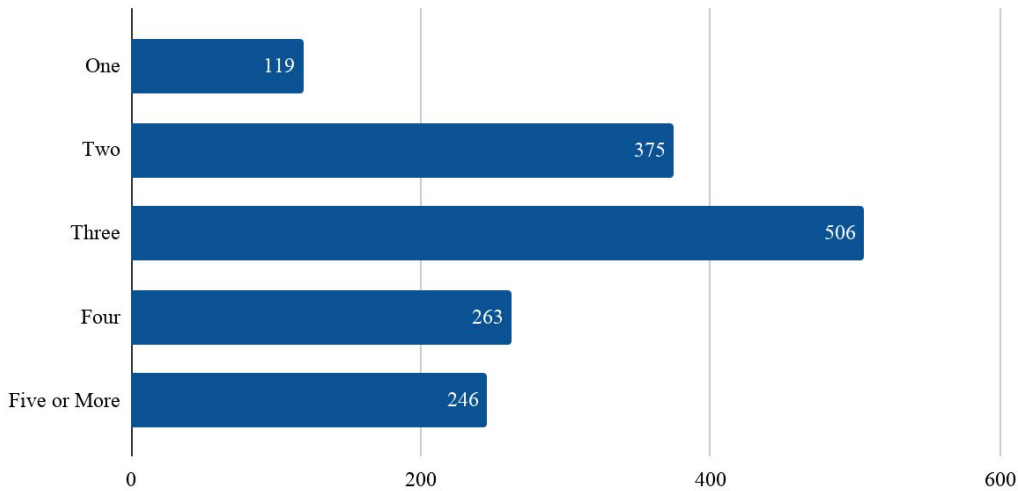
This indicates an overwhelming support of a pass/fail grading system for the fall semester. The top three preferred policies all have some forms of a pass/fail grading system. This also indicates that students are in favor of some type of protections for their GPAs and scholarships during this time.

### **Mental Health Days and Spring Break**

In this section, we asked students four questions about mental health days and spring break. The first three questions were asked to gauge students' responsibilities outside of academics. This includes family obligations, work, student organization, volunteering, etc. We also asked

students if they are currently considered an essential worker and their employment status. The final question in this section asked students to rank their preferred policy surrounding spring break and mental health days for the Spring 2021 semester.

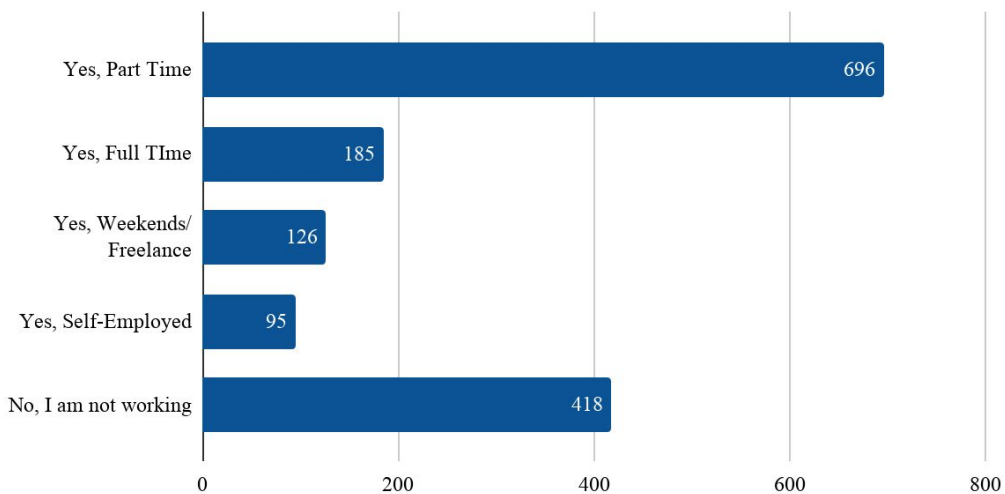
### How many obligations do you currently have in addition to academics?



When asked how many obligations they have outside of academics, students on average answered three obligations or more. According to our

previous question on how many credits students are enrolled in this semester, the majority of students are taking a full-time course load of 12 or more credit hours. These two data points when considered together indicate that most students' time is split between academics and other obligations. In the following questions, we asked if students were working and if they were considered an essential worker.

### In addition to being a student, are you currently working, remotely or otherwise?



When asked if they were working in addition to being a student, 73% of students answered yes, with 46% survey

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respondents working part-time. This data further indicates that academics do not receive students' full attention, even during the pandemic. Furthermore, an additional 32% of survey respondents indicated they were considered essential workers, meaning their job is considered part of the essential services that keep life moving during these uncertain times.

In the final part of this section, we asked students to rank their policy preferences surrounding mental health days and spring break during the Spring 2021 semester. They were given the following choices: a full week of spring break and additional mental health days throughout the semester, a full week of spring break even if it means starting the spring semester earlier than stated on the calendar, a full week of spring break unless it means starting the spring semester earlier than stated on the calendar, replace spring break with at least five (5) mental health days on Mondays or Fridays throughout the semester, incorporating 2-3 mental health days into the calendar and starting the semester on the date indicated on the academic calendar, and no spring break or mental health days. The preferred order is as follows:

1. Full week of spring break and additional mental health days throughout the semester
2. Full week of spring break, even if it means starting the spring semester earlier than stated on the academic calendar and not having mental health days
3. Full week of spring break unless it means starting the spring semester earlier than stated on the academic calendar
4. Replace the full week of spring break with at least five (5) Mental Health Days on Mondays or Fridays throughout the semester
5. Incorporating 2-3 mental health days into the academic calendar and starting the semester at the date currently stated on the academic calendar
6. No spring break, No mental health days

This indicates that the overwhelming majority of students are in favor of the university incorporating some mental health days into the semester, with most students in favor of a full week of spring break. However, additional information will need to be given to the student body about how the calendar needed to be changed concerning Spring Break and classroom hours needed for accreditation.

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## **HUSA's Recommendation**

The student body has spoken and has made it clear through their responses to these questions that are feeling a general lack of morale, energy, and faith in administration to represent their interests. These feelings are part of a much larger issue: burn-out.

During the onset of this pandemic, the university implemented a pass/fail grading system for undergraduate students, citing that we are not operating in a business as usual environment. We are still in that same environment, and now - eight months into the pandemic and on the far side of turbulent summer and election season - the students, faculty, and staff are more impacted by the ongoing pandemic and its social, political, and economic consequences. We all know someone who has gotten sick; many of us know someone who passed away. Our families and friends have lost jobs, family businesses, and homes. We are still not operating in a business as usual environment. If Howard University were to implement pass/fail for the Fall 2020 semester, they would not be alone. Other universities in the Washington, DC area have implemented a pass/fail grading system for the Fall 2020 semester - namely [American University](#), [George Washington University](#), and [Georgetown University](#).

Furthermore, over 2000 students have now signed a petition begging the university to implement a pass/fail grading system. This, of course, is their only way to communicate with administration because their democratically elected representative to the Board of Trustees has yet to be appointed. The same factors that convinced the university to implement pass/fail in spring have only been magnified. These concerns have only been magnified as the university recently announced the cancellation of spring break for the spring 2021 semester. However, because there is currently no faculty or student representation to the Board of Trustees, the student body has only a few avenues of advocacy, namely petitions and HUSA.

Based on the data, the student body has spoken. Therefore, the Howard University Student Association is formally requesting the university implement a pass/fail grading system for the 2020 fall semester and to reinstate spring break or include an equivalent number of mental health days in the calendar. We are also recommending appointing both student and faculty trustees to the Board of Trustees so that the student body and the faculty have a voice in the governance of the university.