

The Mental Wellbeing of Architecture Students

2022 Survey Summary

Prepared July 2024

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Foreword

The Student Organised Network for Architecture (SONA) is the student body within the Australian Institute of Architects. SONA aims to bring students together to do more; advancing students interests in architectural education and in the profession. SONA represents a broad range of student experiences and aims to capture these through engaging, listening and reacting to their concerns.

Mental Health and Wellbeing has been on SONA's radar for the last 8 years, with the Wellbeing Survey run in 2016, with subsequent survey's every 2 years. In recent years, members of the architectural education community have become more aware of the impacts of architectural education on the mental health and wellbeing of architecture students. This project, conducted by architecture students, presents the results of analyzing the findings of the survey along with further research into mental health to understand the factors influencing student mental wellbeing.

This project aims to communicate the current state of the Mental Wellbeing of Architecture students to the profession and encourage proactive and constructive discourse on how we can holistically work together to minimize the effect of these influencing factors. We recognize that is this is a problem that requires input from everyone; students, graduates, practicing professionals, academics and retired professionals in understanding this issue further and finding potential solutions. SONA along with organisations like the Wellbeing of Architects Project, the Association of Architecture School of Australasia (AASA), the Australian Institute of Architects, Association of Consulting Architects (ACA) and Parlour are working towards creating cultural change through research, policy and advocacy, facilitating discussion and creating toolkits and guidelines.

Please share this project amongst your community and reach out to us if you have any further thoughts on what we have presented here.

Thank you sincerely for your time in considering these thoughts and ideas.

Warm Regards, Nicole Mesquita-Mendes

SONA President (2022)

Executive Summary

This report aims to provide a summary of the data collected. The survey asked students about 4 key areas that impact their health and wellbeing:

- Motivations, Influences and Expectation of Study
 Architecture
- Stressors while Studying
- The Health and Wellbeing services available at their university
- Their experience working in the Studio

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of the of 2022 SONA Mental Wellbeing Survey is as follows. Initially key influencing factors on the health and wellbeing of architecture students were identified through workshops with SONA representatives, the analysis of the 2022 SONA Survey and a literature review. To ensure the survey's validity and neutrality, Leanne Nansen, a professional survey writer from Expedite Admin was engaged to structure and write the survey. The survey included a combination of multiple-choice questions, scales and free text responses. Data collection took place over a two-week period from March 21 to April 5, 2023. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, yielding 529 responses. Participation was encouraged through the offer to enter the draw to win 3 x \$150 gift cards. We acknowledge that there is a large proportion of students that haven't participated in the survey, potentially those whose voices need to be heard the most and we hope that through these discussion they feel more comfortable to engage in future surveys. The analysis of the 2O22 SONA Wellbeing Survey can be summarised with the following: (1) What is the current state of Mental Wellbeing for Students? (2) What are the influencing factors on the Mental Wellbeing of Students? (3) What Actions can we take?

KEY FINDINGS

The key findings of the report are: (1) 55% of students are feeling stressed or very stressed. (2) 88% of moderately or largely stressed by high workloads and deadlines. (3) There are barriers to accessing wellbeing support with 43% of students that are very stressed would not access wellbeing support. (4) 91% of Students have a positive studio experience, and value high quality feedback, dedicated studio spaces and collaboration. (5) 58% of students feel that their course has either not met or only somewhat met their expectations, with many asking for more practical experience and software training.

OUTCOMES

Following this survey, SONA has committed to the following outcomes:

Supporting Students:

- Fostering a student community across the built environment
- Promoting ongoing discourse about student health and wellbeing
- Forming a Studio Culture Checklist
- Developing future surveys
- Continuously listening to students

Enabling Change:

- Developing actions for students, universities, and the profession to enhance health and wellbeing
- Creating the Vice President Advocacy role on the national SONA executive team
- Providing support for SONA reps to present to their local Chapter Councils
- Empowering SONA reps to advocate for change within their universities

Collaborating with Other Organisations:

- Partner with the Wellbeing of Architects initiative and work with the Association of Architecture Schools of Australasia to work towards improvements in mental health support for students.
- Allocating resources to support health and wellbeing within SONA

Mental health is about wellness rather than illness.



Mental health is about being cognitively, emotionally and socially healthy – the way we think, feel and develop relationships – and not merely the absence of a mental health condition.¹

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices.²

A focus on mental health will contribute to the prevention of mental health conditions, and support people who have experienced these conditions to get as well as they can and lead full and contributing lives. The benefits of mental health wellness:³

- A state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential.
- can cope with the normal stresses of life.
- can work productively and fruitfully.
- is able to make a contribution to her or his community.
- increased learning, creativity and productivity, more pro-social behavior and positive social relationships, and with improved physical health and life expectancy.

It should be noted that we recognize that there are a large number of broader socio-economic factors that could impact the mental health of students. This project discusses mental health within the context of the architectural profession and its education.

Sources:

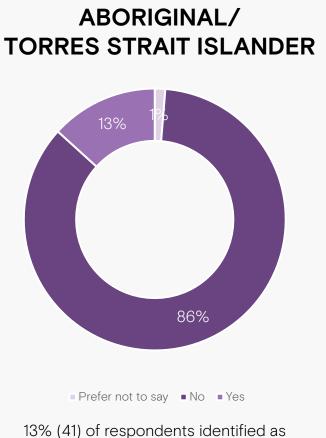
- . "What are mental health difficulties and when to seek help," Headspace.org, Last reviewed June 25, 2020, https://headspace.org.au/young-people/what-is-mental-health/.
- 2. "What is mental health?," Mentalhealth.gov, Last updated August 25, 2020, https://www.mentalhealth.gov/basics/what-is-mental-health.
- 3. "What is mental health," Beyond Blue, Last accessed September 22, 2021, https://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/what-is-mental-health



AGE LOCATION GENDER 3% 6% 55% 56% 23% ■ 36+ ■ 30-35 ■ 25-29 ■ 18-24 ■ less than 18 years old Prefer not to say Non-binary Man or male Woman or female ■ VIC ■ NSW = QLD ■ WA ■ ACT ■ SA ■ TAS ■ Online

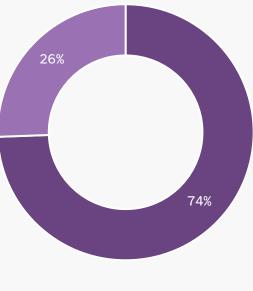
The largest group of respondents by age where 18–24-year old's (172; 56%).

The largest group of respondents by gender were female (170; 55%); followed by males (121; 39%). Most respondents (126; 41%) are located or are attending Universities located in Victoria and Queensland.



Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

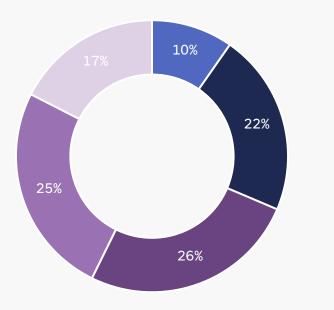
DOMESTIC/ INTERNATION



Domestic International

74% (230) of respondents were domestic students. 77% spoke English as their primary language.

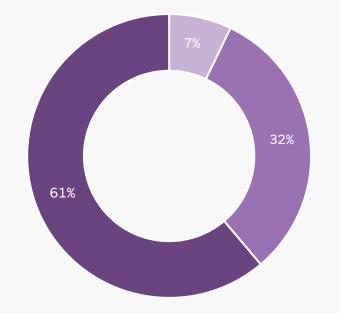
YEAR OF STUDY



2nd Year (Masters)1st Year (Masters)3rd year (Bachelors)

2nd Year (Bachelors) = 1st Year (Bachelors)

METHOD OF STUDY



Remote (online)
Hybrid
On Campus

DEGREE

The majority of respondents are studying **Architecture (243, 80%).** Other fields of study included Interior Architecture/Design (6%), Construction Management (3%), (Engineering (3%), Building Surveying Building (2%), Arts (Urban Design) (1%) and Building Design (1%).

68% of

Masters

respondents were

in their Bachelors,

with 32% in their

61% (189) attended

campus, with 32%

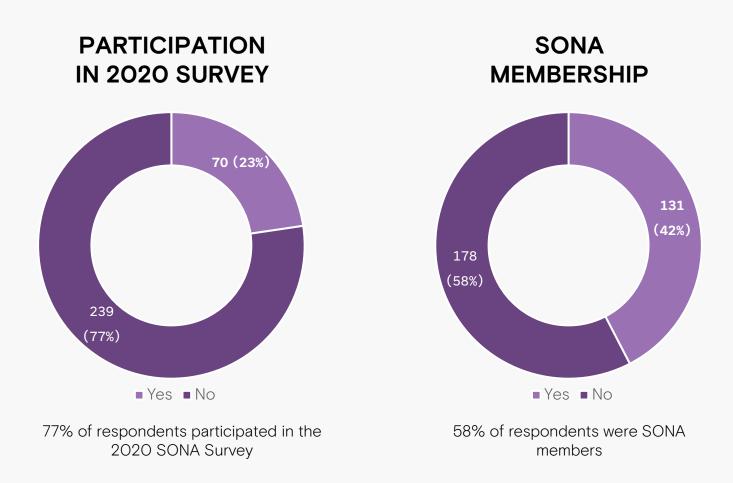
(98) attending in a

hybrid format and

7% (22) attending

university on

online.

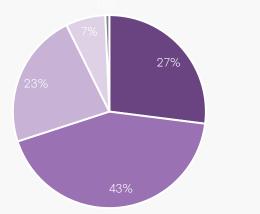


Stressors while Studying

From 2020 to 2022, there has been a decrease in the level of stress from 70% to 55% of students that feel stressed or very stressed.

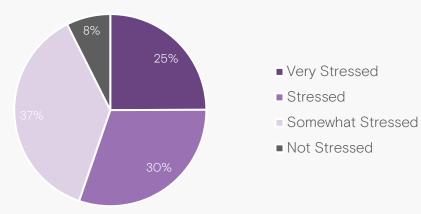
This may have been an implication of COVID-19, changes in architectural education post COVID-19 or shifting culture around mental wellbeing in Architecture

Overall, how stressed would you say you felt whilst studying in 2020? (N=300)



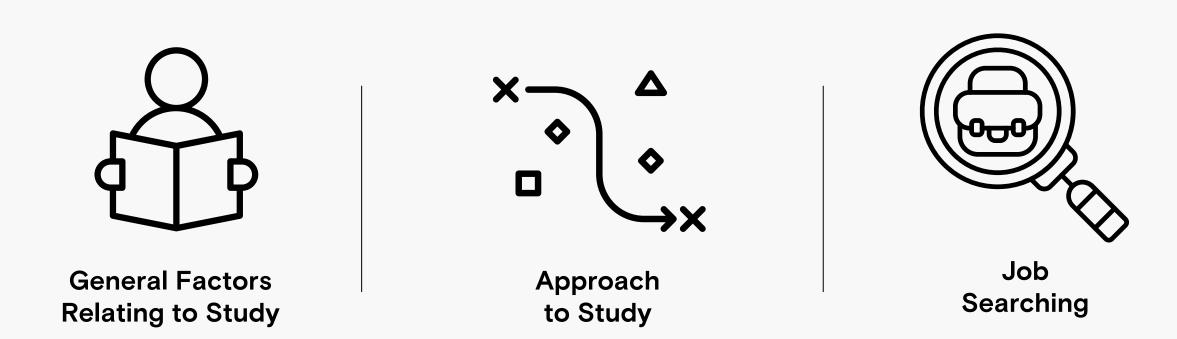
Very stressed
Stressed
Moderate
Somewhat stressed
Not stressed

Overall, how stressed would you say you felt whilst studying in 2022? (N=445)



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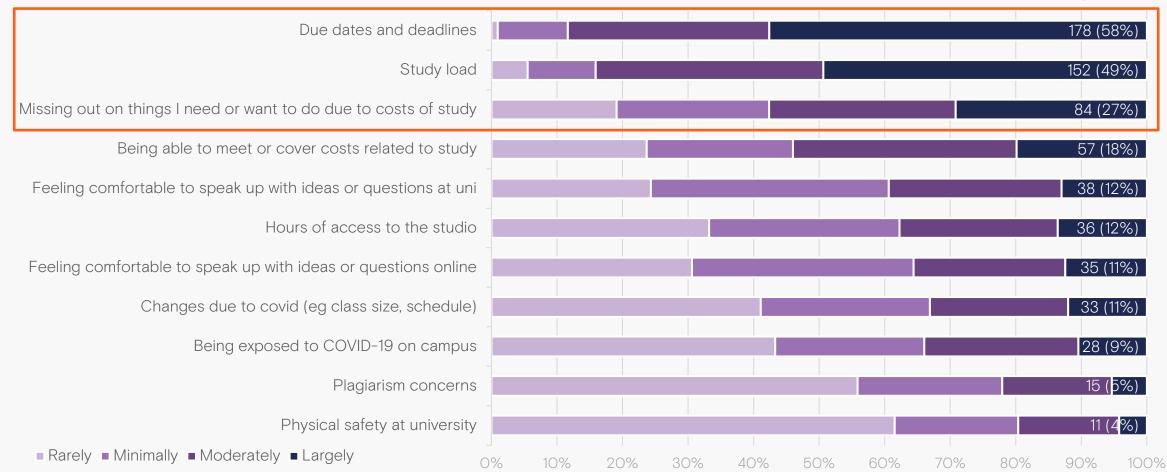
We asked students about three types of stress:



General Factors Impacting Level of Stress

How much did the following factors contribute to your level of stress?

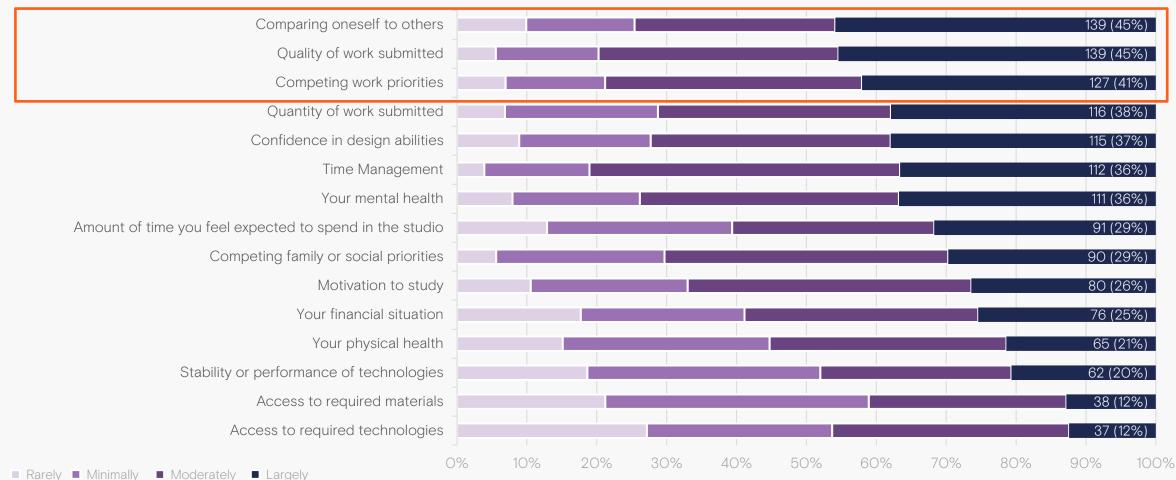
% of respondents



Approach to Study and Impact on Level of Stress

How much did the following factors contribute to your level of stress?

% of respondents

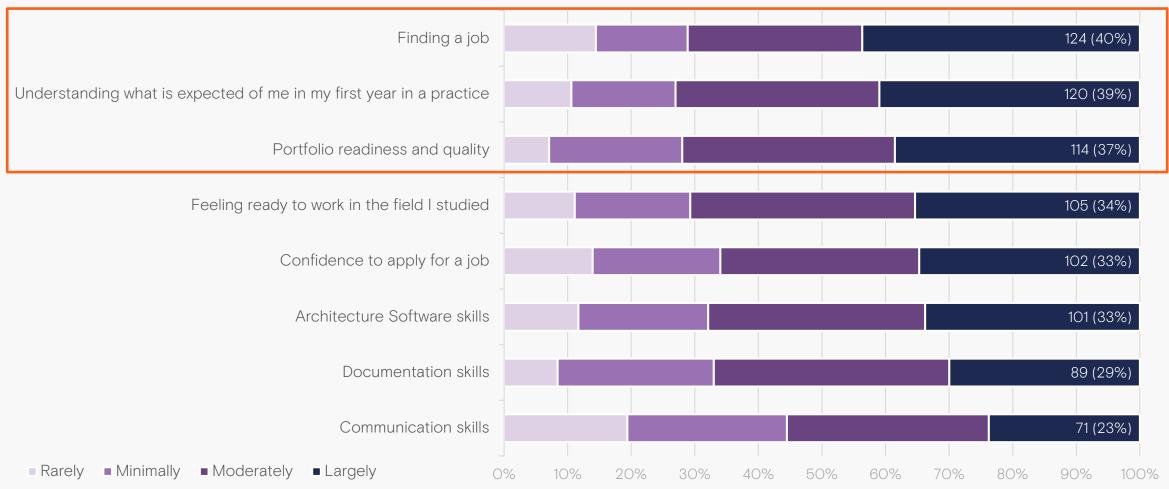


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Job Searching and Impact on Level of Stress

How much did the following factors contribute to your level of stress?

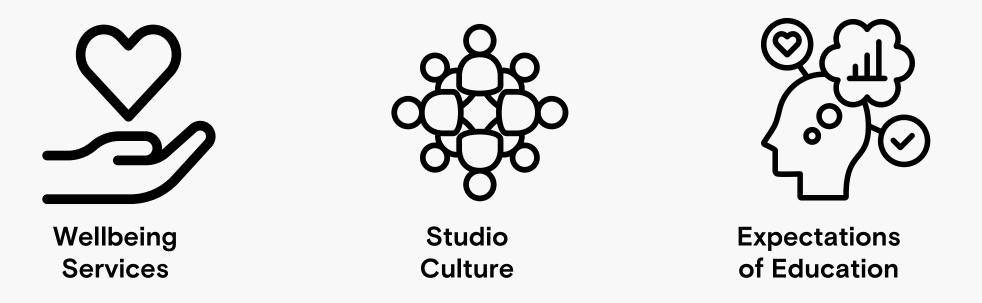
% of respondents



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Key Influencing Factors on Stress

This report looks at how the following factors influence stress:



Other factors that may have an impact on stress and require further investigation are: cost of living, lack of sleep, poor diet and lack of socializing outside of architecture

University Wellbeing Services

Which of the following services do you know to exist at or through your university? (N=391)

Emergency accommodation acces Clinical Medical support or service Clinical Mental Health support or service Health and wellness workshop Health and wellness self-assessment tool On campus health and wellness centre or hul Online health and wellness service Time management and study planning suppor Student feedback forums or survey University organized social events, groups, or club Social groups or club Peer support program Aware of and have or would use Mentoring program Restaurants and food outlet Aware of but would not use Gym facilitie Unaware of but would use Kitchen facilitie Unaware of but would not use

ess	38 (12%)	72 (23%)	107	(35%)	92 (30%)		
es	100 (32%)		80 (26%	b) 8	33 (27%)	46 (15%)	
es	106 (34%)		88 (28	3%)	73 (24%)	42 (14%)	
ps	62 (20%)		89 (29%)	97 (31%)		61 (20%)	
ols	70 (23%)		91 (29%)	97 (31%)		51 (17%)	
ub	100 (32%)		102 (33%	6)	67 (22%)	40 (13%)	
es	82 (27%)		109 (35%)	1	73 (24%)	45 (15%)	
ort	68 (22%)		105 (34%)	102	(33%)	34 (119	6)
eys	167 (54%)			76 (25	%)	51 (17%)	15 (5%)
bs	149 (48%)			98 (32%)	1	41 (13%)	21 (7%)
bs	139 (45%)			113 (37%)	1	41 (13%)	16 (5%
ms	81 (26%)		109 (35%)	1	86 (28%)	33 (119	%)
ms	88 (28%)		107 (35%)	1	92 (30%)	2	22 (7%)
ets	190 (61%)			1	65 (21%)	37 (12%)	17 (6%
ies	83 (27%)		145 (47%)	1	54 (17	%) 27	(9%)
ies	147 (48%)			76 (25%)	56 (18%)) 30 (1	10%)
0	%	20	9% 40)% 60)% 81	0%	100%

Aware of and Would Use

Which of the following services do you know to exist at or through your university? (N=391)

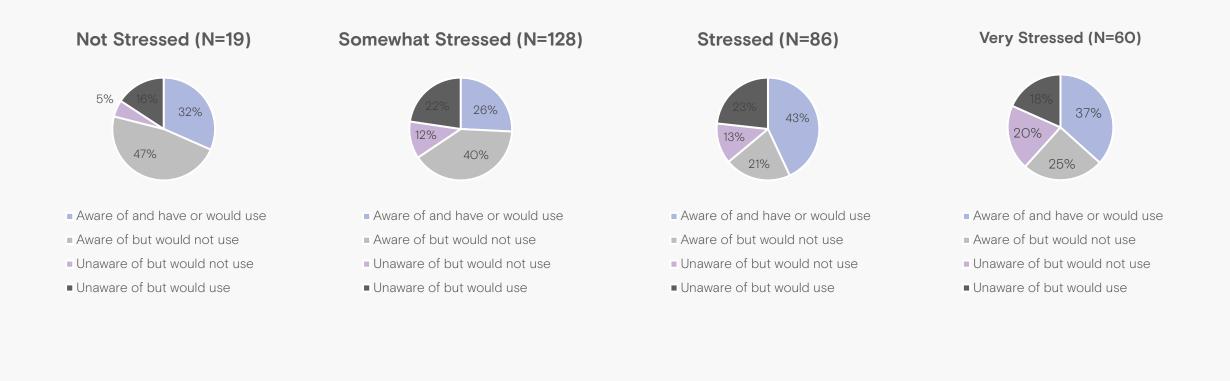
Restaurants and food outlets	3									190 (61%)
Student feedback forums or surveys	;									167 (54%)
University organized social events, groups, or clubs	;									149 (48%)
Kitchen facilities	5									147 (48%)
Social groups or clubs	3									139 (45%)
Clinical Mental Health support or services	;									106 (34%)
Clinical Medical support or services	5									100 (32%)
On campus health and wellness centre or hub)									100 (32%)
Mentoring programs	5									88 (28%)
Gym facilities	;									83 (27%)
Online health and wellness services	;									82 (27%)
Peer support programs	;									81 (26%)
Health and wellness self-assessment tools	;									70 (23%)
Time management and study planning support										68 (22%)
Health and wellness workshops	5									62 (20%)
Emergency accommodation access	5									38 (12%)
	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90% 100%

Unaware of and Would Use

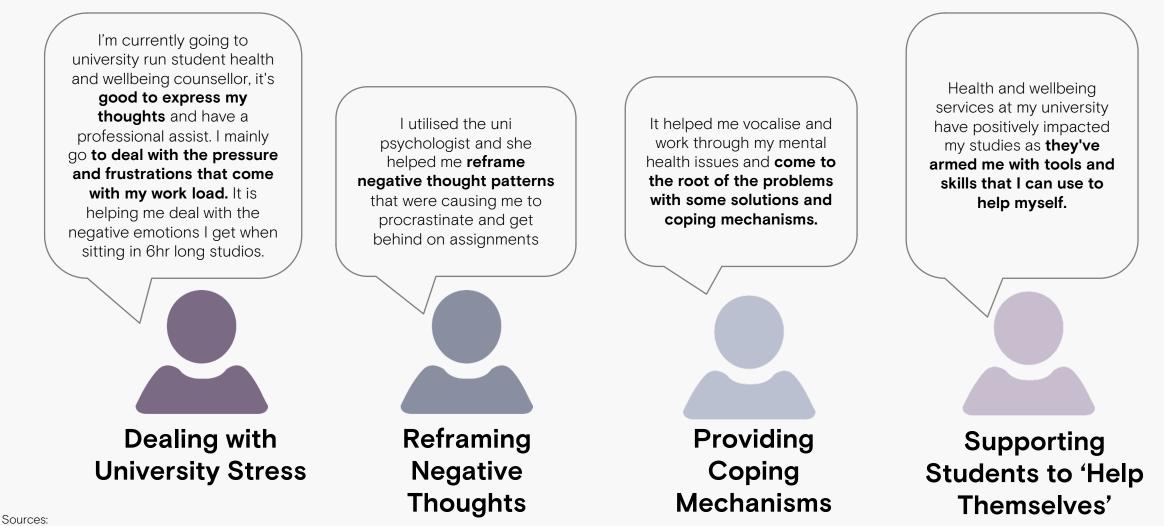
Which of the follow	ing services do yo	u know to exist at or t	through your univers	sity? (N=391)

Emergency accommodation access									107 (35%)
Time management and study planning support									102 (33%)
Health and wellness workshops									97 (31%)
Health and wellness self-assessment tools									97 (31%)
Mentoring programs									92 (30%)
Peer support programs									86 (28%)
Clinical Medical support or services									83 (27%)
Clinical Mental Health support or services									73 (24%)
Online health and wellness services									73 (24%)
On campus health and wellness centre or hub									67 (22%)
Kitchen facilities									56 (18%)
Gym facilities									54 (17%)
Student feedback forums or surveys									51 (17%)
University organized social events, groups, or clubs									41 (13%)
Social groups or clubs									41 (13%)
Restaurants and food outlets									37 (12%)
0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90% 100%

Clinical Mental Health Support Services are being used by students of all levels of stress.



Students have experienced benefits of accessing mental health support.



SONA Student Health & Wellbeing 2022 Survey: Q31 o you have an example of how using a health and wellbeing service at your university positively impacted your study?

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There are barriers to accessing Mental Health Support

Of those that are stressed and very stressed there are respectively **33% and 43% would not use** Clinical Mental Health Support or Services.

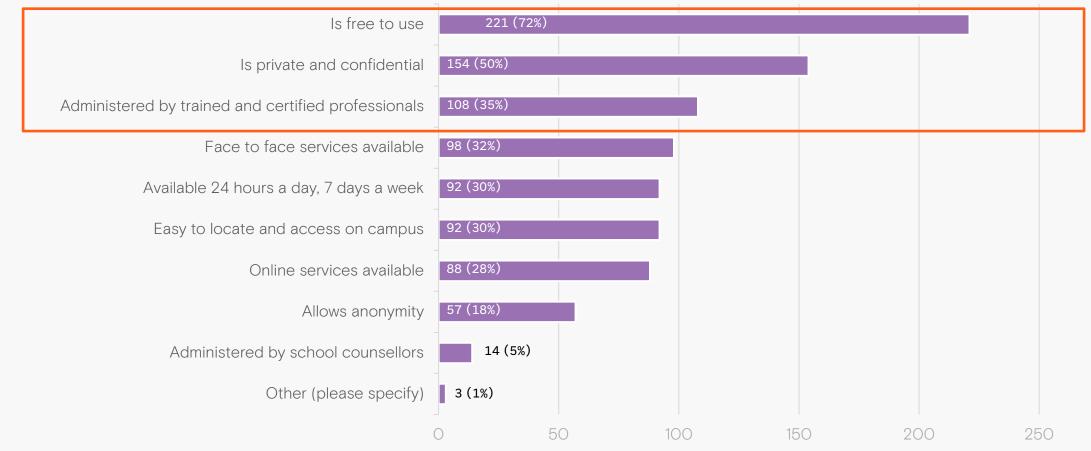
Of those that are stressed and very stressed there are respectively **23% and 18% who are unaware of but would use** Clinical Mental Health Support or Services.



SONA Student Health & Wellbeing 2022 Survey: Q: What do you feel is missing or could be done better in terms of student heath and well-being at your university?

Students want clinical mental health support that is free, confidential and administered by a profession

Which of the following would encourage you to use clinical mental health support? (N=309) (Select your top 3)



2 Studio Culture

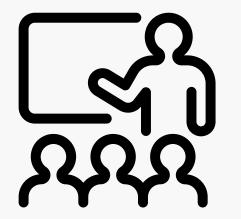


Studio culture is a contributing factor to students' mental health¹

Studio is a valuable part of architectural education. It is a social environment which enables students to collaborate, review, support and present their work.



Studio culture is impacted by three key factors.



Tutors/Lectures



Physical Space

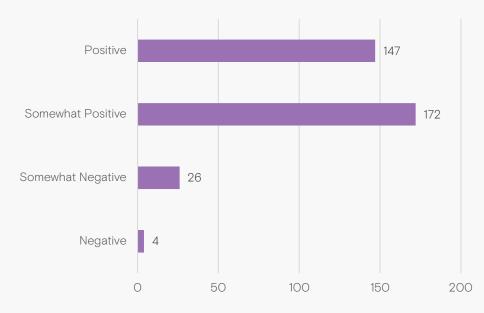


Atmosphere

Most Students have a Positive Experience in the Studio.

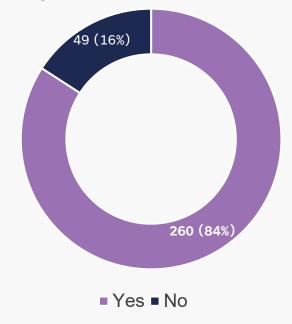
91% of students have a positive experience in the studio

Has your time in the studio environment been? (N=349)



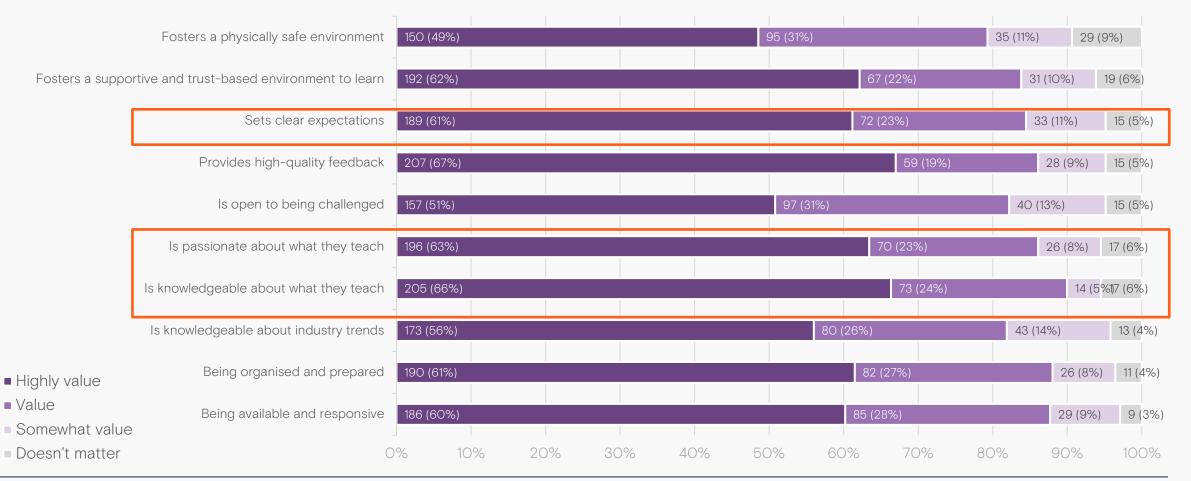
84% of students feeling a sense of belonging in their class/course

Do you feel a sense of belonging in your class/course? (N=309)



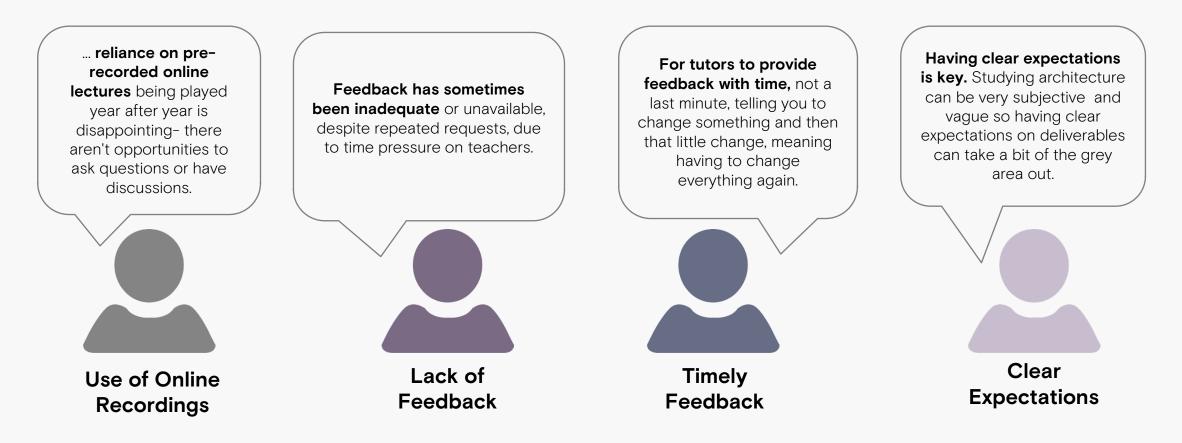
Students valued a tutor that were passionate, knowledgeable, set clear expectations and gave timely, high quality feedback.

Q. Thinking about learning in a studio environment, what do you value most from Tutors or those leading the studio?



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Q. Thinking about studio tutors/leads, what else could be provided or done better to improve your success and outcomes?



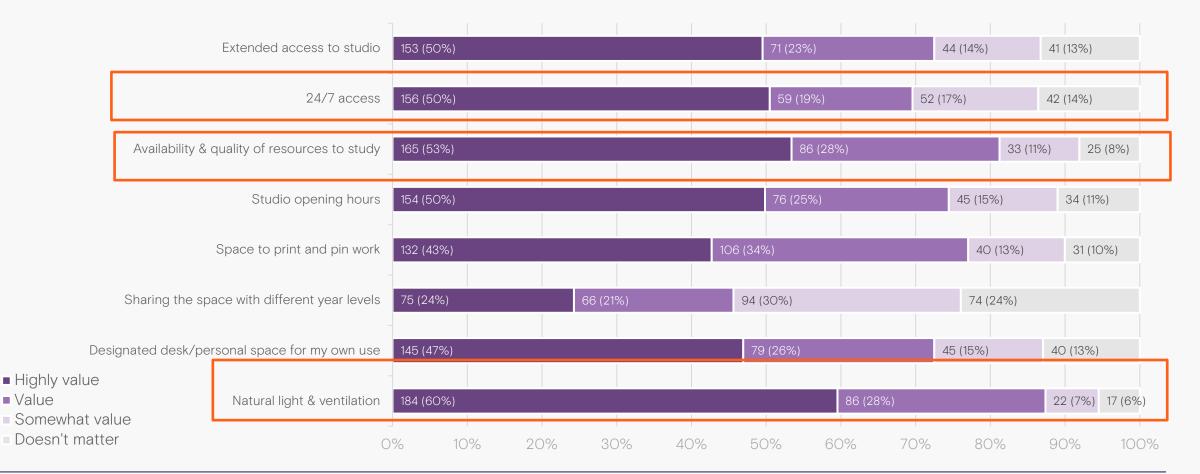
Sources:

SONA Student Health & Wellbeing 2022 Survey: Q47: Thinking about your studio tutors/leads, what else could be provided or done better to improve your success and outcomes? SONA Student Health & Wellbeing 2022 Survey: Q51: Thinking about feedback, what else could be provided or done better to improve your success and outcomes?

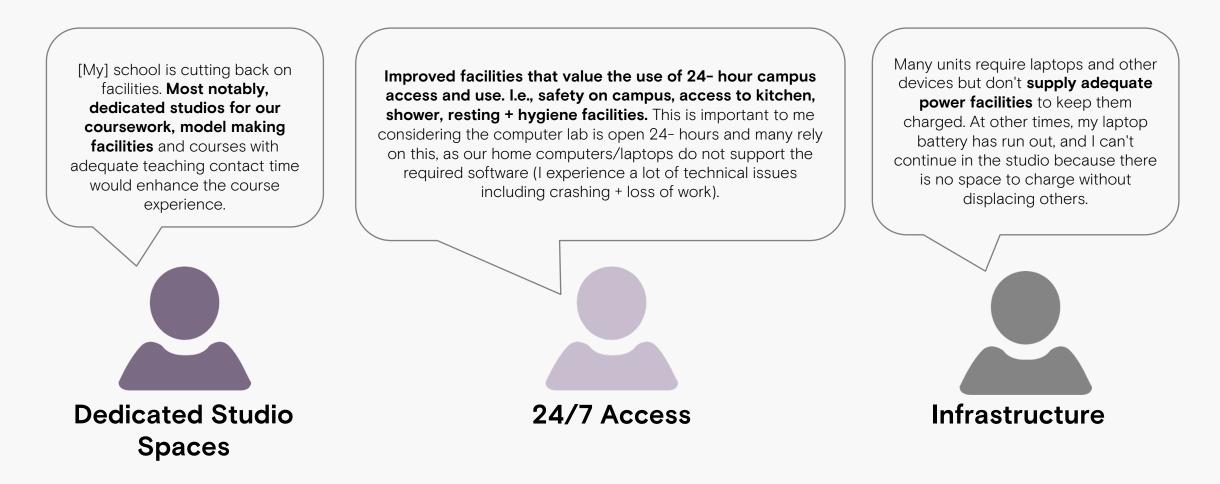
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In their physical space, student valued natural light and ventilation, 24 hour access and the availability to the resources required to complete their study.

Thinking about learning in a studio environment, what do you value most from in/from the physical space?

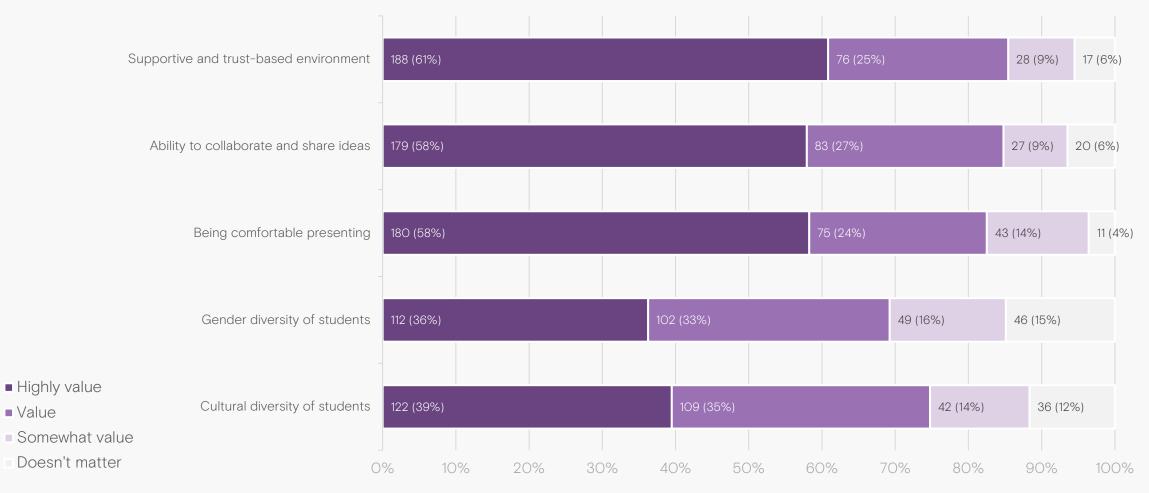


Q. Thinking about physical space, what else could be provided or done better to improve your success and outcomes?



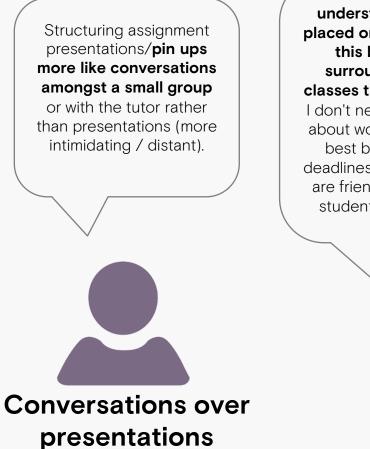
Students valued a supportive trust-based environment that allowed them to collaborate and share, utilising small groups, supported by teachers and approaching criticism with kindness.

Q. Thinking about learning in a studio environment, what do you value most when it comes to atmosphere?



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Q. Thinking about atmosphere, what else could be provided or done better to improve your success and outcomes?



Some teachers are really understanding of the workload placed on students and they show this by removing pressure surrounding deadlines in the classes they lead. This is so helpful. I don't need to be made to feel bad about work I know might not be my best because I had conflicting deadlines or work etc. Teachers that are friendly and respectful of their students as people are the best teachers!

Encourage respect and sharing of ideas without anything being labelled "wrong". Reassure students that if they take a risk with an idea and it doesn't turn out super well that this won't result in them failing the class. I was quite happy presenting until I had one class where a tutor ripped into me time and time again. This destroyed my confidence presenting. I don't think that sort of behaviour is constructive. Tutors should treat students with respect and **approach criticisms with kindness and the purpose of being constructive not destructive and attacking**.

Teacher Support

Creating a Safe Space for Sharing

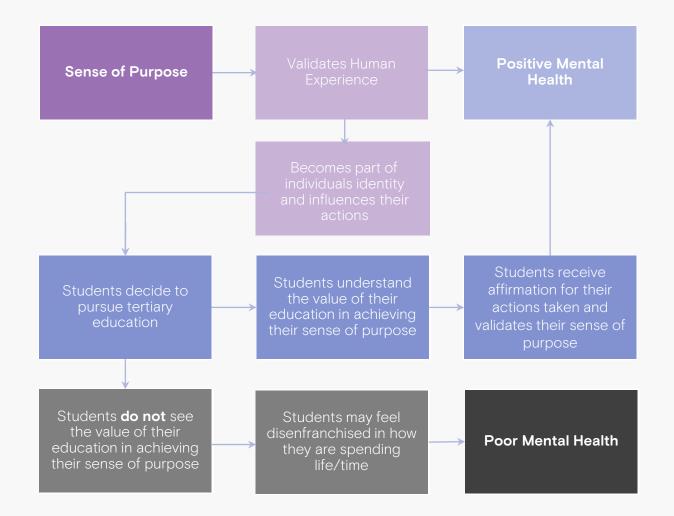
Constructive Feedback

Sources:

SONA Student Health & Wellbeing 2022 Survey: Q53: Thinking about atmosphere, what else could be provided or done better to improve your success and outcomes? SONA Student Health & Wellbeing 2022 Survey: Q38: Tell us anything else that could enhance your experiences with faculty / university teaching staff?

Expectations of Study

The perceived Value of Education assists in affirming an individual's sense of purpose¹.



Sources:

1. 'Meaning and Positive Psychology,' Reach Out Australia, ReachOut.com, 2021, https://schools.au.reachout.com/articles/meaning-and-positive-psychology

Student expectations of their course may not have been met.

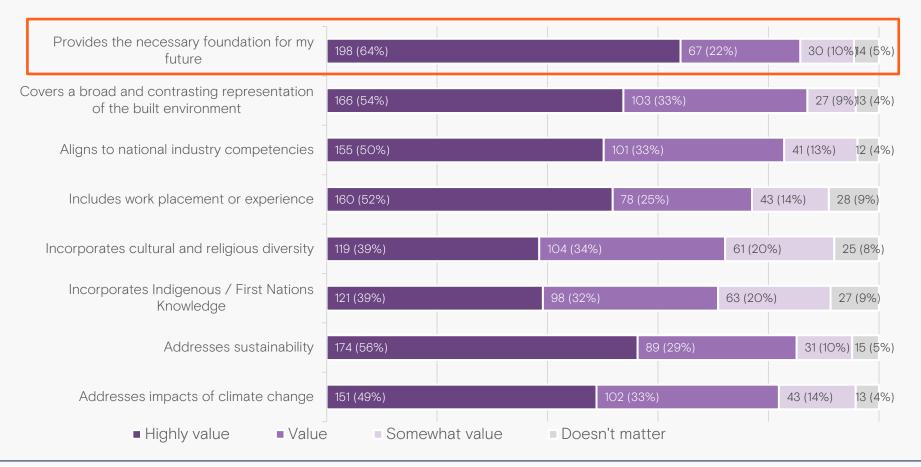
Has your experience of studying your chosen course met your expectations? (N=363) Exceeded 40 Met 111 Feeling like these expectations 183 Somewhat met 29 Not Met 50 100 150 0 200

58% of students feel that their course has either not met or only somewhat met their expectations.

aren't being met, may impact students' sense of purpose and mental health.

Students want to be prepared for their future in Architecture.

Thinking about the course you study, what do you value in a course/area of study? (N=309)



Seeking Employment Post-Graduation, Many Students Do Not Feel Prepared.

I thought there would be greater focus on preparing for practice throughout

Students expect a greater focus on practice

The disconnect between the industry and architecture study is real. "I don't feel like I know what is expected of me in the work force. I feel like when I start working I will not have gained enough knowledge and understanding through my degree

The degree in no form prepares students for the working environment

"A part of me wants to quit because I feel so underprepared for the industry."

Students don't know what is expected of them in practice Students don't feel prepared for practice

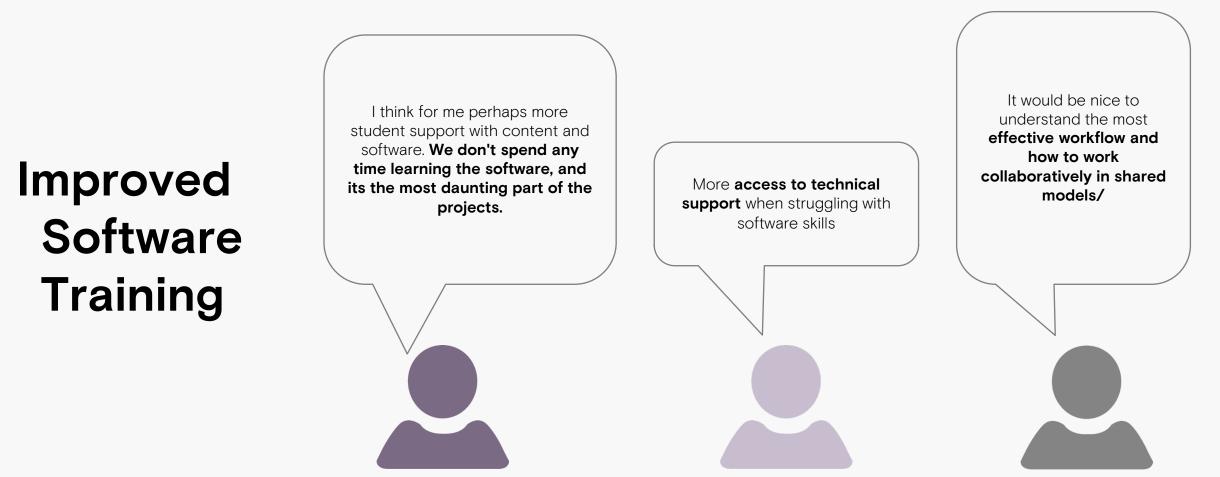
Students contemplate leaving Architecture

The course feels like it creates a foundation in mostly speculative and conceptual design. Design skills are learnt but some industry standard softwares such as Revit are not really covered at all. This creates a feeling of inadequacy to apply for jobs because of missing a skill.

Sources: SONA Student Health & Wellbeing 2022 Survey: Q36: If your expectations were not met, how and why so?

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Q. Tell us anything else that could enhance your experiences studying your course.



Q. Tell us anything else that could enhance your experiences studying your course.



Should students be feeling this way?

Students should be comforted by the fact that:

- It's completely normal to feel overwhelmed by how much there is to know (architecture is about lifelong learning).
- 2. The purpose of university projects are to explore, test and learn, so all that matters is trying your best.
- 3. Communicating how you're feeling and what support you need to your network is the first step to getting support!

"Students go to university with the expectation that it will bolster their prospects in life and opportunities to get a well-paying job. It is not an unreasonable expectation, but it risks overshadowing the other functions of education, namely nurturing well-rounded, passionate and worldly citizens....In the face of concerns about employability, we should not simply submit to the demands of the market, aka, 'the real world'. We cannot as a discipline lose the widespread desire to work towards the social good".

- Keefer Dunn

Recommendations

Students are stressed due to high workloads

What action can we take?



Feedback and Continuous Improvement

Support students in sharing their experiences to continually adapt to the changing needs of the student population.



Policy Implementation

Consideration of policies around flexible deadlines, curriculum that considers student workload and mental health.

1	

Integrate Wellbeing into the Curriculum

Ooffer workshops and seminars that teach stress management, mindfulness, and healthy work habits.

There are barriers to accessing wellbeing support

What action can we take?



Increase Accessibility

Offer mental health services that are free, confidential and administered by a professional



Increase visibility and ability of services (targeted campaigns, normalize discussions about mental health, promote a culture of openness)



Equip faculty and staff with the training to recognise the signs of mental distress and the knowledge of how to refer students to the appropriate resources

3.

When it comes to studio environments, students value high quality feedback, clear expectations, dedicated studio spaces and an environment that supports collaboration

What action can we take?

Peedback Training

Ensure tutors and staff are trained to provide timely, productive and constructive feedback



Appropriate Infrastructure

Ensure suitable work environments and infrastructure that provide the resources required to complete the course



Implement buddy systems to support younger students and establish expectations for appropriate studio behaviour

Students do not feel prepared for practice

What action can we take?



Connections Practice

Offer opportunities for mentoring and internships that provide students with a better understanding and more realistic expectations of what practice might be like.



Clarity of Expectations

Improve communication around the purpose of assessment and how they relate to AACA competency standards



Provide reassurance that is university is just the start of the learning experience and students do not need to know everything when they graduate.

Where to Next?

This document presented the key findings of the 2022 SONA Survey, offering actionable recommendations to enhance the wellbeing of architecture students in Australia. While SONA remains committed to advocating for student wellbeing, the complexity of this issue requires a collaborative effort. Students, universities, and the profession must work together to create a sustainable culture of support, ensuring not only the health of current students but also the future vitality and resilience of the architecture profession. Through open dialogue, collaboration and innovation, we can ensure that students don't just survive their educational journeys but thrive.

SONA welcomes any collaborations. Please feel free to contact us at: sona@architecture.com.au

1. Dissemination Of Survey Results

SONA Awareness Campaign sharing the results and recommendations of the 2022 SONA Wellbeing Survey.

2. Collaborations With Stakeholders

SONA will continue to collaborate with Universities, Students and the Profession to support student wellbeing.

3. Developing Resources For Students

The survey results will be utilised to develop a Studio Culture Checklist that encourages students to reflect on and create shared expectations around studio culture.

4. Creating A Continuous Feedback Loop

SONA will conduct follow up surveys to measure the impacts of actions and continue refining strategies to improve student wellbeing.

Mental Wellbeing Resources

Guides to Wellbeing in Architecture: https://parlour.org.au/mental-wellbeing/O-guides-to-wellbeing-in-architecture-practice/

Lifeline: https://www.lifeline.org.au/

Beyond Blue: https://www.beyondblue.org.au/

The Architect's Mental Wellbeing Forum Toolkit: https://aca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Architects-Mental-Wellbeing-Toolkit-Australian-version-5.pdf

Wellbeing of Architects: https://thewellbeingofarchitects.org.au/resources

Guides to Wellbeing in Architecture Practice: https://parlour.org.au/mental-wellbeing/O-guides-to-wellbeing-in-architecture-practice/

Headspace: https://www.headspace.com/covid-19

Heads Up: <u>https://www.headsup.org.au/</u>

R U OK? Day: https://www.ruok.org.au/

Open your World: <u>https://www.wellbeingsa.sa.gov.au/</u>

Your Local GP (for Medicare funded referrals to specialists)

Your University Counselling Services (Most universities offer this for free)

Contributors

SONA President 2022, Nicole Mesquita-Mendes

SONA President 2024, Blake Hillebrand

SONA Vice President for Advocacy 2024, Liam Leblond

SONA Vice President 2023, Aremel Tibayan

Expedite, Leanne Nansen

Australian Institute of Architects National Membership Programs Officer, Madelynn Jenkins

Australian Institute of Architects National Membership Services Manager, Claudia McCarthy

SONA Representatives, 2022, 2023, 2024

About SONA

SONA is the Student Organised Network for Architecture

The SONA Committee represent the interests of and advocate on behalf of student members of the Australian Institute of Architects.

W: https://www.architecture.com.au/sona Instagram: @sona_australia

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