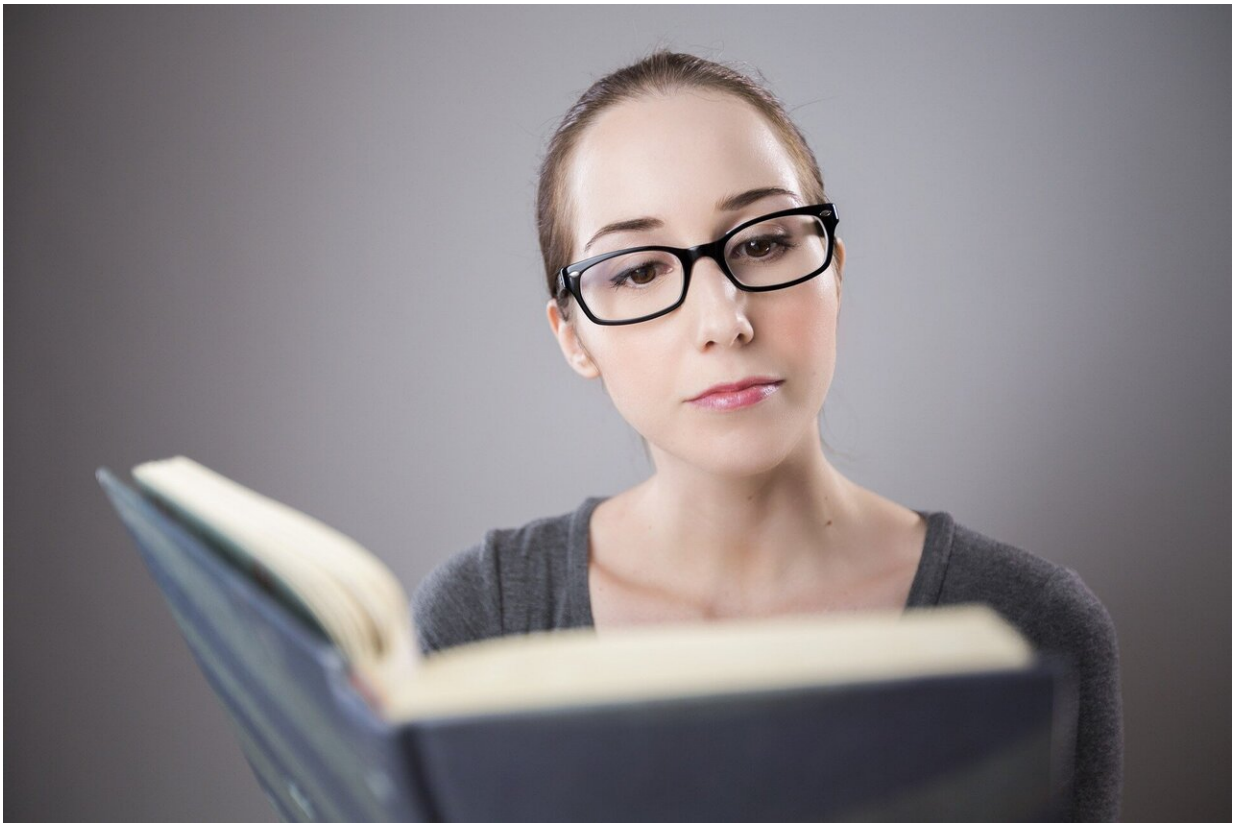


# Pandemic did not weaken student trust in higher education overall

September 20 2022

---



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Despite major COVID-19 disruptions, a survey study involving more than 8,300 students at 29 colleges and universities revealed that most maintained their trust in their institutions, at least in the early pandemic

months.

In the study, published in the journal *American Behavioral Scientist*, the researchers found steady [trust](#) among many student demographics including white and Hispanic students even as the pandemic started moving many campuses online. There were notable exceptions, however, with trust falling among Black students and students whose parents had not attended college.

"There is a tension between ensuring campus safety on the one hand and being mindful of the vulnerabilities that students may have on the other," said lead author Shannon Calderone, an assistant professor of educational leadership at Washington State University Tri-Cities campus. "We can learn from these experiences, but on the whole, many institutions were responsive in terms of making decisions and acting on them."

The survey answers did not reveal the reasons why some students lost trust, but the researchers noted that the decreases tended to occur among groups who already had some distrust in [higher education](#). For students from [lower-income households](#), the pandemic also meant they were likely sent back to homes without key resources such as high-speed internet that more advantaged students had.

"A couple of reasons might explain these differences and one is the students' historical relationships with their institutions," said Calderone. "Also, the more vulnerable students tend to be, the more that may have also shifted trust—especially when substantial changes were taking place in a very short period of time, that vulnerability could be exacerbated."

For this study, Calderone and co-author Kevin Fosnacht from Indiana University, Bloomington, analyzed [student](#) answers to a special set of trust questions added to the National Survey of Student Engagement.

The survey period spanned from February 2020 to May 2020 just as pandemic measures started impacting campuses nationwide.

Among the positive results, students with disabilities showed an increase in trust at the start of the [pandemic](#).

"This suggests that institutions were pretty responsive in creating environments through this transition that would allow students with disabilities to be successful," Calderone said.

While the overall results showed steady or increasing trust among students, the researchers emphasized a need for college and university leaders to communicate well with [students](#) of all backgrounds to better understand and address their needs.

"Unfortunately, we're bound to have something like this happen again, so one big lesson from this is to really be thinking about how we bring other voices into the dialogue around decision making," Calderone said.

**More information:** Shannon M. Calderone et al, Student Trust in Higher Education Institutions: How the Pandemic Influenced Undergraduate Trust, *American Behavioral Scientist* (2022). [DOI: 10.1177/00027642221118263](#)

Provided by Washington State University

Citation: Pandemic did not weaken student trust in higher education overall (2022, September 20) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-09-pandemic-weaken-student-higher.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private

study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.