

This report discusses student mental health difficulties that may be uncomfortable or distressing. If you find this upsetting, you can seek support and formal health care from qualified professionals at university or through national mental health services. A list of [helpful resources and contacts](#) can be found at the end of this report.

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Sharing the Student Perspective

This report presents the expressed perspectives and experiences of Australian visual art undergraduate students. These students were participants in the Visual Arts Wellbeing (VAW) research project.

About the Research

In 2018 and 2019, over two hundred Australian visual art undergraduate students participated in the VAW research project. By responding to survey and/or interview questions, these students shared their opinions about resilience, mental health and how the Australian university experience influences student wellbeing. Their participation in this research (conducted to meet the requirements of the Doctor of Philosophy award) has contributed valuable knowledge for the future development of evidence-based interventions.

Visual art students are the primary stewards of their wellbeing. Furthermore, these students are the experts of their university experience and providers of valuable insights that can inform positive change within higher education and the creative industries. To emphasise students' individual voices and unique experiences, this report exclusively presents a collection of participants' comments about wellbeing and the university experience.

What Questions were Students Asked?

Some examples of survey and interview questions are listed below. You can find a full list of these questions in the researcher's [thesis](#).

- How does your own experience at university influence how you take care of yourself?
- Do you spend much time worrying about what people at university and the broader art community think of you and your art? If so, what do you worry about?
- How do the staff at university support you and/or other art students?

Acknowledgments

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Table of Contents

Participant Demographics.....	6
<i>A Diversity of Participant Opinions on:</i>	
<i>The University Experience</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>University Communities.....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Academic and Professional Staff</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>Creative Art Learning.....</i>	<i>47</i>
<i>Time and Work.....</i>	<i>73</i>
For More Information.....	102
Helpful Resources and Contacts.....	104



247 visual art students participated in the online survey, and 29 participated in the interviews.

Survey Participants



Gender

- 201** Female
- 36** Male
- 3** Prefer not to say
- 7** Prefer to self-describe
Self-descriptions included agender (1), androgynous/queer (1), ftm male (1), gender fluid (1), and non-binary (3).

Location (Australia)

- 15** ACT
- 47** NSW
- 68** QLD
- 30** SA
- 26** TAS
- 44** VIC
- 17** WA

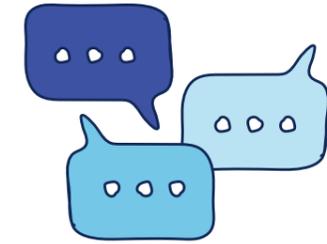
Age Groups

- 3** 15-17 years old
- 170** 18-24 years old
- 43** 25-34 years old
- 12** 35-44 years old
- 10** 45-54 years old
- 8** 55-64 years old
- 1** 65-74 years old

Disciplines

- 103** Design (including graphic, game, and interactive design)
- 100** Ceramics, drawing, painting, printmaking, textiles, and fashion.
- 35** Different new media (including film and animation)

Interview Participants



Gender

- 20** Female
- 8** Male
- 1** Non-binary

Age Groups

- 13** 18-24 years old
- 10** 25-34 years old
- 1** 35-44 years old
- 4** 45-54 years old
- 1** 55-64 years old

Location (Australia)

- 0** ACT
- 4** NSW
- 16** QLD
- 1** SA
- 1** TAS
- 5** VIC
- 2** WA

Disciplines

- 12** Design (including graphic, game, and interactive design)
- 10** Ceramics, drawing, painting, printmaking, textiles, and fashion.
- 7** Different new media (including film and animation)



This report loosely groups participant comments into different topics, to allow a range of stories to emerge about wellbeing and the university experience. These categories include relationships with staff and peers, creative learning, time management, the creative workforce, and students' futures after graduation.

**In the following sections,
there is no analysis or
research interpretation, just
a representation of diverse
student voices.**



Student perspectives on:

THE UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE

I know universities already talk about — especially in art school they definitely do talk about mental health. It's a very, very prominent issue with art students.

Because the [uni] I go to is all about creatives and all the lecturers are creative ... everyone's very understanding of mental health. It's more of a focus here than I think would happen at other universities.

I've found university to be mostly positive.

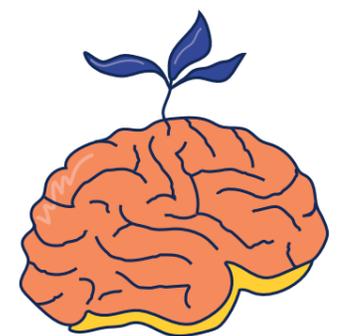
I didn't actually expect to enjoy it so much. But because there is so much creative freedom — I genuinely am passionate about it.

But the main thing [the degree] gave me was just a sense of dignity ...

... the degree was really just helping me to stay grounded and keep a routine.

I often get stressed out because of university, whether it be the workload, or getting used to different aspects of uni life.

Mental health and physical health is starting to become a major issue around all aspects of the university.





Taking a closer look at how

UNIVERSITY COMMUNITIES

can influence students' wellbeing

I do think a lot and I think a lot about other people.

We have this culture about being open to different people, where they came from, what their stories are. I think everyone is just conscious and careful about what they say.

I think the fact that we're more empathetic and we're helping each other out, I feel like we support each other and I think that's a much more healthy, more positive environment for our mental health.

Art school is one of the places I feel most understood and appreciated.

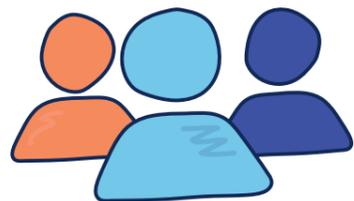
Like, everyone's pretty supportive because it's a small cohort.

... it is very 'pop in and pop out' compared to other study I have done in the past.

Everyone seems so critical and political when it comes to HOW to make art and what art really is.

My main concern is the art community seems very insular and ideological. Anybody who doesn't conform to either of those are therefore left out.

I think there's a lot of pressure to be liked because people always tell you that you can make important contacts at uni. But also a lot of people I study with are older than I am and I often feel like they know that I don't know what I'm doing or saying because I'm not very intelligent.



I nearly dropped out in the first few months because I felt alone.

At my age of 26 it has been difficult to make friends in the industry. My fellow students are either much older or straight out of school. I feel a generational gap and that I don't fit in with them.

Artists are pretty much isolated and alone and within their thoughts ...

... and [it] can be lonely at uni, which makes your personal life even harder when you don't have many [friends] outside of uni.

But for some of my co-students who are full-time, when they're working part-time and living in shared houses, for them to find a balance and a sense of wellbeing and to be able to maintain positive mental health seems, to me, to be a massive challenge, you know? I just think there's a lot of pressure on them.

A Diversity of Student Opinions on: Student Peers

It's scary to put yourself out there and when you're surrounded by people who, in your opinion, are doing much more amazing things with the skills they have it's easy to get trapped in that bubble of self-doubt.

I haven't found myself needing additional support in my degree, however I do know that friends in the degree have struggled with stress and feeling overworked and not knowing how to reach out.

I feel like being around such creative people makes me feel a lot less confident in my work.

I'm confident in my art abilities but I don't like others putting themselves down because of my abilities.

I think not having experienced that failure or success in the past can really impact their ability to do their best, going forward.

Especially within my younger peers, with just a bit of criticism from their professors they kind of shut down.

I have been bullied, slandered, and socially ostracised by other students for standing up for my rights... The things people have said about me behind my back have been horrific. It is not a nice industry to be involved with.

The social high school stuff. Basically back to bullying 101. You've got chatter, groups, cliques. Talking to other people, making up stuff. Toxic place.

A Diversity of Student Opinions on: Student Peers

... it is an absolutely strange dichotomy between needing to be closer and interacting but then when you're given an opportunity like **groupwork**, it becomes difficult.

Because I want to do really well and there are a lot of students who just want to get through it.

I know life's not fair and all that jazz, but I feel like if you're putting in all of this time and effort and money into a degree, what you get out of it should be more representative of your abilities than what you can get from certain group assignments.

There isn't that much exposure for them in terms of getting to work with people from other backgrounds. As you can imagine, people kind of gravitate towards their own ...

Well, for starters, there's this misconception that art students have it 'easy', or that doing art as a major is an 'easy option'. I found this a lot with my classmates ...

A Diversity of Student Opinions on: Student Peers

Looking at interacting with people, that gets easier as you get to know people more. I think it took 18 months, half-way through second year we formed a really close group.

This group of kids that I'm with, oh my God, they're just, they're great. They're absolutely amazing. They just do things. If they know somebody is struggling with something or they can't be there, they'll pick things up and they'll bring them in and help them.

But some people outreached for help. There was a guy, for example, and he knew what he wanted to do and his group partner wasn't super great, so he reached out and was like, "Can you give me a hand?" and I was like, "Yeah, yeah, I can give you a hand for sure." And we brainstormed the problem and it was really good ...

We are contributing something to the world and you've got to think about it like that.

After a while, we sort of realised, maybe we should just make one group where we can all put our questions and everyone can kind of answer each other. It kind of turned from a uni group to just like a friendship Facebook group.



Taking a closer look at how

ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL STAFF

can influence students' wellbeing

I believe I am more confident in social settings ... due to the encouraging environment created in class by our teachers.

They're all pretty understanding. Their goal is to get us through.

I've definitely had staff members who have been the complete opposite, but the amount of tutors and lecturers who I've been exposed to who genuinely are there to help you. And they make that known.

They've always got our backs and they've kind of been living and being artists and trying to make it work, despite everything, for a number of years. So I think they're really supportive of us.

The Department Head who was also my teacher, at one stage when I was having problems with the equity team not following up ... she got in the middle of it and started emailing them they've [the staff have] really been quite thoughtful and quite helpful.

They notice these things and just made me feel like what I do and what I give back has value. I think it's really important, for me to feel good about myself even if I am away from home.

It's a really nice break because you are really stressing all the time, obviously, but having someone who is an academic and they can just up and chat to you. It makes you feel like someone believes in you, I guess. That was really cool.

They don't really speak to us like we're below them, either.

A Diversity of Student Opinions on: **Academic and Professional Staff**

... if you put the effort in, the staff are really helpful and will actually stretch the rules a bit to help you out as much as they can.

If you haven't put the effort in and they're being critical of your work, then that's kind of on you.

They'll be more than happy to help you if you approach them, but they are not going to approach you. I mean, it's not really their job, but yeah, I don't know.

I know that they lost a heap of staff recently ... that sort of filters down.

And if you have teachers that are anxious about their future professional career because of this continual churning of staff, I think that does have an impact. There needs to be – if they're anxious about their job, of course you're gonna pick up on that and you're gonna be anxious about your coursework.

So, it's a strange thing, they're getting more and more students, less and less class time, less and less teachers. If I was driving university I would be a little bit worried about what my brand reputation is going to be like at the end of that.

Having centralised administration means that the people making important decisions about our department have absolutely no discipline-specific understanding of what resources we need in order to work, and often provide us with architecture and resources that act against our best interests. This also relates to human resources; our technicians are already under a lot of pressure, often with five students all asking for help at once in a heavy industrial workspace.

Some of my classes have had 100+ students with only 1 teacher, so trying to get any personal feedback or time with them is super hard.



... I think the teacher plays a huge role in whether the overall environment is positive or negative.

A lot of [teachers] are coming in from industry ... if you were to aspire to teaching in a certain area then I feel like being mindful of the mental health of your students is a very important part of their education.

I feel like teachers, specifically tutors, don't always keep in mind what may be happening in their students' lives.

I find it most difficult when I am struggling with my mental health to explain the situation to my tutors out of fear of being accused of making excuses.

My biggest concern last semester was with a lecturer who was treating me quite poorly. Not being in one of her classes this semester has done wonders for my emotional wellbeing.

I can't count the times I emailed a teacher apologising for an assessment being late because of mental health and the teacher replying with a response that didn't warrant any care factor.

A Diversity of Student Opinions on: Academic and Professional Staff

Teachers/professors are very biased towards what they like in the design and creative world.

It's mostly the teachers' opinions I worry about the most, as they have a great impact on my grade and how I view my work. I've had teachers who were amazing at providing constructive feedback and others who were constantly negative and inconsistent in what they say. And I can't really help but take what they say to heart.

And then she eventually asked, "Why do you paint?" I said, "Because I love it, I love the process." And she's like "Well if you love the process you might as well be painting in your garage at home instead of studying at uni. So why are you here?" ... and she is very intimidating, so I sort of really didn't give a good answer ... [the teachers' feedback] just made me, um, sort of rethink everything, which is I think ultimately it was really good.

I guess because that's what helps me grow — that sort of very harsh criticism. But at the same time, I think it still does make people very anxious. Which is ultimately a bad thing.

I felt a bit like a child being told off by a parent, I still don't think it was very professional to call someone out so aggressively in front of the class, that makes you feel stupid ... It's a weird thing, I know it was worth it, but was there a different way? Maybe, I'm not sure.

I feel that it's quite undue effort to get that support [during my degree].

... there isn't as much support for our campus as there is to some of the other, larger campuses that are much more advertised by the university, I should say.

Student Wellbeing at my university is swamped and understaffed; it can take months of waiting before seeing anyone, and even then there's no guarantee they'll be equipped to help you. That's why I had to seek therapy privately, despite the financial burden.

Last time I went to see a uni counsellor they told me to "Suck it up buttercup." Which made me more upset and wasted an hour of my time which I could have spent elsewhere.

The university was fantastic, when I realised that I was struggling the Student Hub and everything were fantastic.

The college has a counsellor and there's a big sign out the front to let everyone know when she's available, and she's great. They also offer mindfulness sessions.

There are support services easily available, and staff are friendly and approachable, flexible/ accommodating if a student is having difficulties.

I've been a student mentor and even in your mentor training they really emphasize that if you feel that a student is having trouble coping that you should refer them to the counselling service.





Taking a closer look at the way

CREATIVE ART LEARNING

can influence students' wellbeing

I think the degree itself has been fantastic for my mental health.

It is creatively and intellectually stimulating, and it has given me a direction and focus and purpose. It also gives me positive feedback about my abilities.

... for this degree, it's a lot of self-discovery as well.

So, I feel like everything I've learnt to do with art, I've sort of [incorporated] into the rest of my life it's just switched my mindset. Like, I'm definitely a lot happier this year than I have been in previous years.

... it's a lot easier to do your work when you're in a positive mindset.

A Diversity of Student Opinions on: Students' Creative Arts Degrees

I'm seeing the world in such a different way. I would look at the posters and I always analyse them. I was like, "Wow, I'm actually doing this naturally and it's such a natural thing to do that it makes me happy. I feel great."

You don't go home and sleep. It's like, you go home and you do more art and you think about art, and you do stuff on your journal and you work on your laptop or whatever. It's just not a great deal of separation between what we do as part of a discipline and what we do as part of our everyday life.

... I do have something good in me that I can share with other people and I feel that I want to do that with design.

I feel disengaged by the constant theory work and lack of skill building.

I was expecting to do more art.

I personally think that art theory should be a **compulsory** unit because it's all about developing a language to talk and write about art, and the philosophical and historical ideas that underpin it the more informed we are as an arts community, the more knowledge we can offer one another, and the further we can develop as artists — both individually and collectively.

I wish we could just focus on my major, I feel then I'd be able to produce work that's up to my standards and actually showcases my abilities.

I feel like I'm not informed enough to go into, say, graphic design or illustration or photography. Because I've only done one course in it.

You're sort of everywhere and you don't pick your major until your second year. Even then, it was quite sporadic. You never really — well I didn't develop these close peer groups where you could get together and provide useful peer critiques on each other's work.

...I explored everything that I could, and in the first year you do everything, you do sculpture, jewellery, printmaking, and I discovered that I really love jewellery, I love sculpture.

It's a good degree in the sense that you **don't** get too deep into one discipline. You're exposed to multiple layers.



A Diversity of Student Opinions on: Art as a Therapeutic Aid

It's used as therapy, which is important, and I think it's a very valuable tool. But I just feel that it's like a post action or a band-aid solution and what I want to change the narrative of then, is [how] people see art as therapy.

It's like being in the zone when you play sport you can just do it effortlessly. It's such a good feeling ...

I think sometimes when I [create ceramics], I just live in another world. And [in] this world, there's no annoyance, there's no angry and there are no negative emotions. There're only peaceful and happy [emotions] ... But when I finish all of my creation I will return back to the real world.

I make what I love.

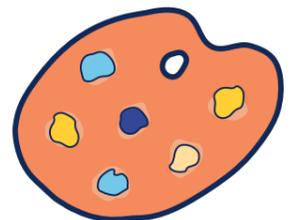
**My work
is my
meditation.
My safe
place.**

A Diversity of Student Opinions on: Art as a Therapeutic Aid

I think it's just a way for me to express emotions and get out what I'm feeling. That also scares me a bit, because it allows me to focus on it and if I can focus on it, having the mental issues I have, I start to only focus on them.

I feel it is not enough to simply enjoy the making of the work. I feel that other people don't respect that.

If people are just thinking about art as self-help and therapy, I guess, why not just be a Sunday painter and do something else as a serious career.



I'd say that university life is really stressful for everyone else no matter what degree you're doing.

I had a degree in healthcare [it] was just mainly collecting all the information, try to memorise it as much as possible and then vomit it out We [art students] would, I suppose, stress a lot more than other students. We have to learn new software, and at the same time, make our project happen. Yeah, I think [that's] what reality is, when you're working.

We have to do theory but it's not stuffed down our throats, like, "This is what you need to learn, this is what you need to know." They [other students] have more pressure than us. But we, as creatives, sometimes get creative blocks. That generally does put more stress on us in a different way.

Especially in comparison with ICT where you know what you have to do to receive the result that you want. Whereas in the arts it's like, "Work around this and try and do it." I find that a bit confusing.

**... everytime
you create
something,
you actually
need to
think outside
the box.**

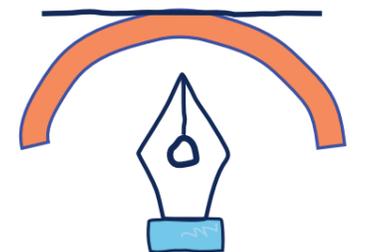
I guess the correlation would be within arts there's not necessarily always a right or wrong, whereas in [other] fields there is ...

You don't realise it — you're not actually doing exams — but I think it's even harder because you've got be in that space of being creative and then figure out what you want to do and get it down and battle software.

Because it's a design degree, there's a lot of leeway with how we can take on the project and how we see things. So it makes me worry.

But sometimes [grades] can also be up to personal preference.

I think that it is hard not to think of other people's opinion when studying and making art because throughout art school your pass or fail, or the chance of getting an exhibition, is entirely subject to someone else's opinion.



It's hard to separate yourself from your work. Your lecturers and tutors always say when they are critiquing your work that they do need to give you constructive criticism, that it's not a criticism of you as a person, but it is very hard to be able to just suck that up and go forward and make changes or whatever you need to do. It's the only type, like I've done a science degree ... you just hand in your assignments or do your exam, [my science degree was] not anywhere near as **personal** and also, it's not anywhere near as **subjective**.

... the work you're putting so much effort into is going to be compared to someone else's ... So it's a lot of pressure.

Comparing's fine but [not] when you obsess over the comparing, especially if you're making a game similar to someone. And you're like, "Wow, the mechanics are way better." It kind of slows you down even more from being able to progress.

I'm a second-year student and I just don't feel like I've done anything mind blowing. I hate showing my work because of this, and I lose sleep over trying to figure out how I can be the best.

... I know deep down that everyone has different paths and progress at different stages but sometimes I can't help but feel like I'm failing, like I'm falling behind.

Will they say something that destroys me emotionally.

I've always been incredibly aware that people won't always like my work, and while I like receiving feedback, when it turns even slightly negative I never really know how to react. I worry that everyone will have this negative opinion but only some are blunt enough to actually tell me.

It feels like there are expectations that I can never fulfil. I am hesitant to share anything I've designed because I think people will not like it and point out mistakes that make me look like an idiot.

The things I create have a lot of my insecurities and traumas at the forefront, so when people view the finished piece I get self conscious. I try to convince myself I don't care if other people like my art and that institutionalized, academic art is stupid, but at the same time I am cripplingly insecure about my abilities and my worth as an artist and a human being.

[I'm] very fearful of judgement and it causes me great anxiety.

I'm a perfectionist which makes satisfaction difficult, particularly when perfection is unattainable and my work never reaches a concrete destination.

... I feel universities don't really value art or creative visual fields.

But, I guess, for us, we've just got this underlying frustration about that because so much of the university is just channelled into filling the campus with beanbags and hammocks and shit while they won't even fix the leaks in our roof or give us a working sink.

I worry that people think less of me and that I'm not intelligent because I'm pursuing a creative career.

Art is the only thing that has ever made any sense to me, but I'm constantly having to defend my decision to pursue it academically. I'm often dismissed as not a 'real' student because I'm 'just' studying art.

She [my friend's Mum] was legit, like, "You can work at Maccas or push trolleys and still be more successful in your future than you are by pursuing this art degree."

I have noticed one good stereotype though, which is that art students are the most openminded and liberal (in the sense of accepting, open to diverse people and opinions, not in terms of the political party) people. And that seems to be very true. We would often have discussions about artist ethics, diversity in art, and reading historical artists through modern points of view, and it was both interesting and respectful.

There's such a variety of people, of cultures and everything like that. So, there's no 'normal', there're so many individuals. That sort of perception or stereotyping of artists and the arts industry is probably diminishing.



Taking a closer look at the way

TIME AND WORK

can influence students' wellbeing

... if there's something that happens outside of their university life that effects [students], it does bleed in unfortunately to their work.

[I] just had a new child, I've got my first kid, moved house, bought a house, all that sort of stuff. So, more so outside stresses have added to the stress [of my degree].

Sometimes I do worry about not making deadline since I am doing three jobs plus full-time study.

But I suppose, working and full-time uni and my dad is quite sick, there is a lot going on constantly.

But I'm stressed because I am doing a full-time degree and also working, and that's my fault.

A Diversity of Student Opinions on: Time Pressures

I've been doing a couple of extra-curricular programs on the side. I've got a job and I've been volunteering and — there's been just so much on my plate.

In a full-time course, while working weekends it is hard to actually focus on my mental health — so if I do get a day off for once I am hit with very negative mental health all at once and get overwhelmed.

I'm lucky enough to be able to dedicate the necessary time and effort to complete a full-time course whereas I see a lot of students who also juggle full-time jobs. More times than not, something's got to give and it's often the student that suffers.

I've also found that in art projects, they always go wrong at some point, and I almost never finish them on time.

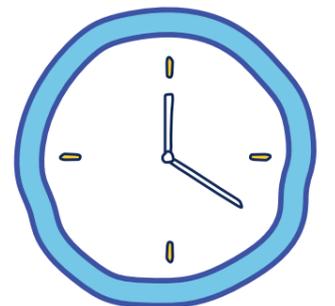
It takes a while for me to get my head around something ...

So, design software, I just absolutely love. But it does take a lot more [time].

You need time to build your concept, you need time to make models, you need time to design a space. So, it's not something that you can just do in one night, otherwise it's not going to be very good.

This sometimes can be my downfall, particularly at uni: you can't be a perfectionist at every single task. Because you don't have the time.

I used to be full-time but then I noticed that it started to affect my grades a little bit. So I went to part-time [study].



A Diversity of Student Opinions on: Time Pressures

And I guess personal wellbeing drops off when you're really under the pump with university. Definitely.

They'll say, "It's the weekend" and I'll go, "Well, I don't have a weekend." At midnight on Sunday, as you know, you've got to submit it [assessment], you've got to get it done.

I work a casual job and I say that I can't work, and they say, "Why not?" and I say, "Because I need to study." And they're like, "You have other days to study." But they just don't understand the time that design students need.

I would say, when things get a bit hectic I tend to not look after myself. I put my health aside a bit, I don't really sleep well and I eat terribly and I get really stressed and like, have panic attacks ...

I have adjusted my university workload to suit my current health physical and mental. This affects Austudy though so has to be managed carefully or the reduction in stress from reducing the uni workload is just replaced by financial stress of having to work.

I have chronic depression and anxiety and sometimes can't physically get out of bed which causes me to fall behind ... It gets very overwhelming to force myself to get up every day, and when it gets too bad and I can't do it anymore, I often have a class that can't be missed and end up beating myself up inside for missing it.

That gave me some relief, knowing that it's a common thing to not make every class, and if you miss one, the lectures are available online so it's not a big deal.

Time management is such a huge thing for everyone.

So, for my exams I'll break down what I need to study into topics and then I'll set one topic per day and I'll just block it out. That way, I know whether I'm ahead or behind in schedule and that way it's not so overwhelming because I break things down to bite-sized chunks.

Things that help: working on assignments or projects regularly and often, not leaving things 'til the last minute.

I try to avoid doing uni and work on the same days as much as possible just because I really need to be in the mindset for one ...

I just write down my due dates on the day that they're due. I just cross off every day. It's just a visual indicator of how close everything's coming. I have [my planner] right beside my computer so I'm always looking at it. It's in my face all the time.

And I saw her timetable and just thought, “Oh fuck. This is what being good looks like and I’m no way near it.”

To me, an hour is 30 minutes. So, to me that’s not enough time! And then I feel bad if I haven’t utilised those hours effectively. That’s one of my downfalls. I expect to be in a certain place, and then I try and study and I get easily distracted ...

I leave everything to the last minute and there’re lots of tears and yelling and screaming and frustration and then I pull it all together and hand it all in! Isn’t that what artists do?

I did all of this literally the day before, and I was beyond stressed getting it done. Like, the kind of stressed where you’re so overwhelmed, you almost can’t feel stressed anymore, you just keep going and hope it doesn’t catch up to you.

But they do offer workshops [about] time management and stuff. I just haven’t really gone to any. That’s something I should do.

All-nighters are usually the consequence of procrastinating through reading and online video watching.

I think motivation’s [a] big sort of a hurdle for a lot of people to get over.

It's also harder as a mature aged person as many arts jobs are so basic and entry level. I'm over-qualified for these positions (former corporate career) but struggle to get work that will allow me to transfer my skills into relevant experience in this industry. I feel like giving up but I gave up so much to change careers and study for six years. I teach at the university as a casual but employment is so precarious you cannot live on the money you earn. **I worry about my financial future.**

A Diversity of Student Opinions on: Money

It's hard to get sufficient financial help and living circumstances are also hard to come by that are actually affordable for domestic students. I always wonder how much better I could have done with my art if I had the money to experiment further. I always feel restricted because of this which plays on my mental health.

I was really struggling last year, financially.

Our department is also under-funded, and we're often forced to source our own materials and equipment, or to pay additional fees out of pocket (not covered by HECS) to keep our studios supplied. The additional financial burden means that students are often struggling to juggle work and study, because they're trying to cover not only the cost of living, but the ridiculous amount of money it takes to purchase necessary materials. Most students work two jobs in addition to studying full-time. This is despite still paying top dollar for our course fees ...

I am unemployed and have no money - and I am constantly expected to have a lot of extra money (for programs, a computer, printing, etc).



Yes, I worry about people in my degree, and myself, not getting the most out of their education due to cuts.

[I worry that] I am wasting my time and money. That this has all been for nothing. That I haven't learnt enough.

[I worry about] whether I will get a career out of my art or if it is pointless and I will have to always work another job and do this as a hobby.

I worry more about financial struggles I'm currently facing as my skills and talent does not give me a comfortable enough life.

Ever since my uni discontinued my degree and I am left trying to finish the rest of my course I've been feeling like my degree is useless ...

A fair amount of time adds up; there's always a voice in the back of your head questioning your validity and place in the art world.

I think that people could be more aware of the pressures placed on art students. There's a lot of pressure to be naturally talented, or to make it big online or through commissions, when in reality that almost never happens. There's also a stereotype that art degrees are 'useless' as the art job market is very small.

I'm exhausted just at the thought of spending the rest of my life defending my right to make art.

And you're never really sure what you're doing. Whether what you're doing is good enough.

One of the things that gives me the most stress is the steps after university, and the fact that the uni does not provide us with any real-world experience.

Because what you do in university is always going to be wildly different to what you're doing in practice.

There're very few opportunities for artists, I think. Which sort of drives a lot of negative emotions [and] you can get caught up in it because you're in this constant comparison to how well everyone else is doing, as a sort of a benchmark to where you should be at.

I'm very worried that I will never be good enough to find a job in my field. I think that the lack of funding for and emphasis on art education in Australia, specifically in terms of technical skill, is lacking. In turn, we are at a huge disadvantage to compete on a global scale with kids who have been learning to draw technically since they could walk.

I think the biggest difference would be just the field in general. The art world is incredibly competitive.

I guess the influence of social media and being able to see other people's art and how successful they are can sometimes add pressure ... but at the same time it is also inspiring to see how successful artists/designers can be and the possibilities.



A Diversity of Student Opinions on: Preparing for the Future

Between the programming classes and the classes that I have for design and getting jobs in those fields ... they'll be looking for a portfolio. Which I won't have because I don't have any design courses anymore.

I just don't really get that transition of finishing study and then finding a job. I'm a bit terrified of that. I don't really know what that's going to be like. So I definitely want someone to tell me!

I think for me I'm extremely sensitive [about] the future and you could say I'm very vulnerability.

I don't know what kind of job this degree will create ... Which is not good in a way. Because when you don't have a goal you really — it's really, really hard to get you through. Because you don't know where you're going and [if] what you're studying will equip you ...

**I think
you've got, to
some extent,
just get off
your butt and
go do it. Go
and apply
for jobs and
do everything
you need
to do.**

So being realistic [with your goals is] probably going to be important to ensure, you know, continued mental health and wellbeing.

We have a built-in graphic design studio at our campus ... So I'm working with real-world clients and getting that fast-paced experience and whatnot.

They booked speakers who are in the industry and explained how they got their jobs and how they put their foot on the door. It's a step-by-step process which I think was very valuable.

I had an internship in third year, [the] end of third year for eight weeks ... they helped me immensely.

... we have alumni mentoring programs at uni.

I've been doing some work experience this semester and I have been a little bit, a little bit stressed out. Just feeling like I put a little bit too much on my plate.



For more information

You can find detailed information about the research methodology, analysis, findings (that present participants' wellbeing profiles), and identified areas for positive change by reading research publications and the researcher's thesis. To encourage active engagement with the thesis, it has been designed as an interactive PDF document. You can access the thesis, research publications and additional short reports via the research website: <https://www.wellartist.org/resources>.

Report #2 (the Sequel)

This is the first of two reports, and the sequel *Visual Art Student Perspectives on Resilience and Enhancing Wellbeing at University*, similarly presents student perspectives that were drawn from the research. The second report focusses on students' coping strategies and their views on positive change to benefit Australian visual art students' wellbeing. To access the second report, [click here](#).



The Visual Arts Wellbeing Project

A Wellbeing Needs Assessment of Visual Art Students in Australian Universities.

A Doctor of Philosophy Thesis by Eileen Siddins
Bachelor of New Media Arts (Hons Class II)
College of Arts, Society and Education
James Cook University, Townsville
Submitted 23 February 2021



To download the thesis, [click here](#). To download a short report summarising the Visual Arts Wellbeing research project, [click here](#).

Helpful Resources and Contacts

Australia

[Beyond Blue](#)
[Black Dog Institute](#)
[Headspace](#)
[Lifeline](#)
[ReachOut](#)
[RUOK](#)
[Suicide Call Back Service](#)
[SANE](#)

[Orygen](#)
[Enhancing Student Wellbeing](#)
[Mission Australia](#)
[Everymind](#)
[Mentally Healthy](#)
[Never Not Creative](#)
[TANK Mental Health Report](#)
[AGDA](#)
[AIGA](#)
[NAVA](#)
[Arts Wellbeing Collective](#)
[AAWE](#)
[Arts Hub](#)

[Moodgym](#)
[Insight Timer](#)
[Smiling Minds](#)

International

[Student Minds](#) (UK)
[Students Against Depression](#) (UK)
[Nightline](#)(UK)

[Youthline](#) (New Zealand)
[Lifeline](#) (New Zealand)

[Crisis Text Line](#) (USA, Canada, UK)
[Active Minds](#) (USA)
[NAMI](#) (USA)

[Youthspace](#) (Canada)
[Jack.org](#) (Canada)
[Healthy Campuses](#) (Canada)
[Hope For Wellness Helpline](#) (Canada)

[Centro de Valorização da Vida](#) (Brazil)
[Shanghai Mental Health Centre](#) (China)
[Teléfono de la Esperanza](#) (Spain)
[Fil santé jeunes](#) (France)
[Telefonseelsorge](#) (Germany)
[Livslinien](#) (Denmark)

Disclaimer

The information provided in this report is not professional healthcare advice. This report presents varied student comments to demonstrate the diversity of students' opinions about mental health topics. Their opinions should not be used for diagnosis or treatment of yours or any other person's mental health difficulties. Please do not ignore medical advice, delay asking questions, or hesitate to seek assistance from a qualified healthcare professional if you need help.



