

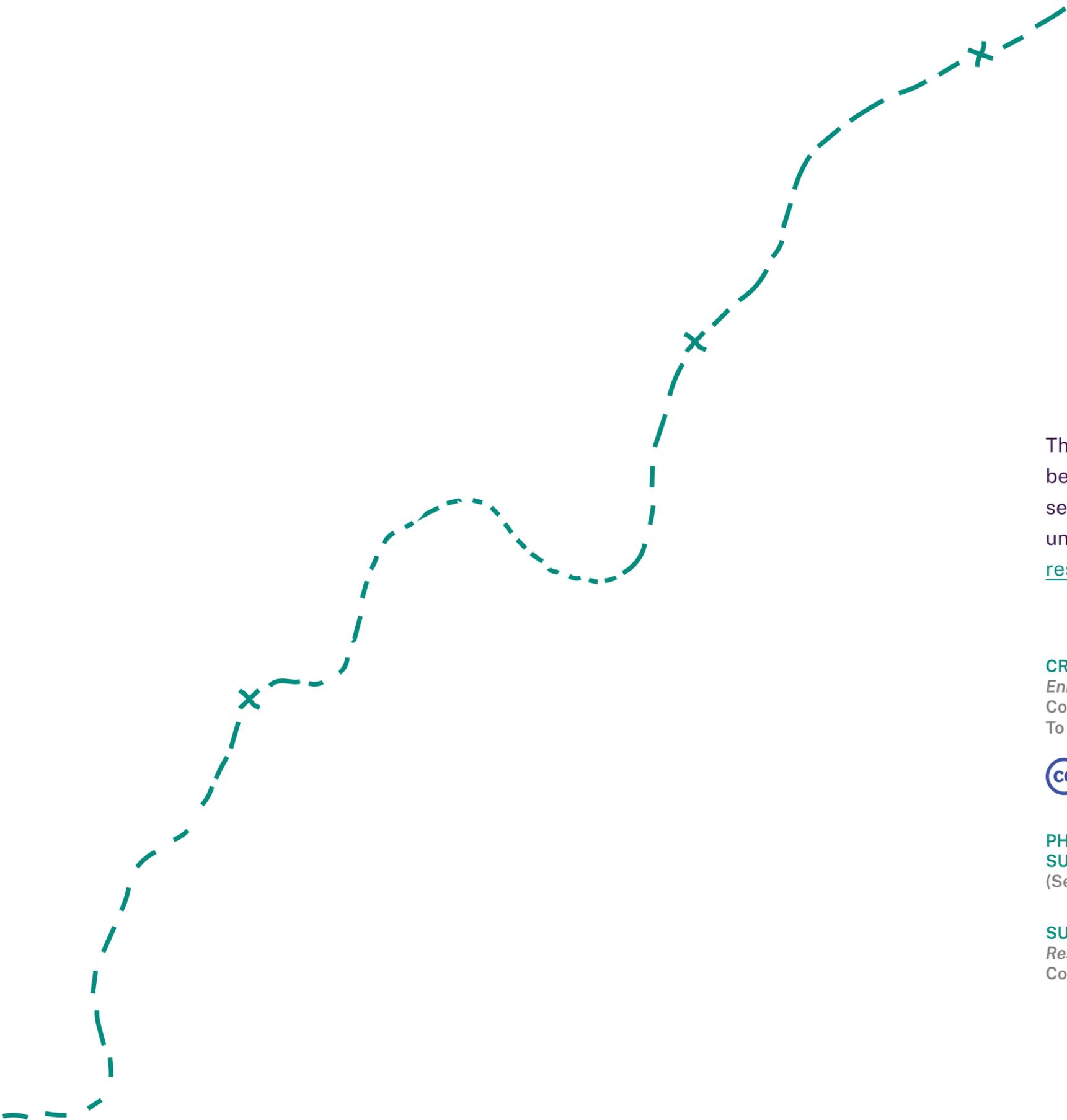


REPORT #2

*Visual Art Student Perspectives on*

# RESILIENCE AND ENHANCING WELLBEING AT UNIVERSITY





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.

**CREATIVE COMMONS LICENSE:** *Visual Art Student Perspectives on Resilience and Enhancing Wellbeing at University* is licensed by Eileen Siddins under a Creative Commons–Attribution-Non-Commercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0). To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>



**PHD RESEARCHER AND DESIGNER:** Eileen Siddins  
**SUPERVISOR TEAM:** Professor Ryan Daniel (Primary), Professor Margaret Carter (Secondary), Doctor Beryl Buckby (External).

**SUGGESTED CITATION:** Siddins, E. (2021). *Visual Art Student Perspectives on Resilience and Enhancing Wellbeing at University*, Unpublished manuscript, James Cook University, Townsville, Australia.

# Sharing the Student Perspective

Like Report #1, *Visual Art Perspectives on Wellbeing and the University Experience*, this sequel report represents the voices of visual art undergraduate students who participated in the Visual Arts Wellbeing (VAW) research project. In this report, the students' views on resilience and enhancing wellbeing during students' university degrees are presented.

## About the Research

Over two hundred Australian visual art students participated in the VAW research project. This research was conducted during 2018 and 2019 to develop a wellbeing needs assessment of the student participants. These students responded to online survey and/or interview questions about their wellbeing and ways to enhance students' wellbeing within university contexts.

## Acknowledgments

The researcher gratefully acknowledges the many art students, artists, academics, and mental health professionals who contributed to the VAW research project. This research was funded by the Commonwealth of Australia through the Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship at James Cook University.

## What Questions were Students Asked?

To emphasise students' individual voices and unique experiences, this report exclusively presents a collection of the participants' comments about resilience and ways to benefit students' wellbeing. These comments were in response to survey and interview questions like the examples listed below. You can find a full list of questions in the researcher's [thesis](#).

- What does wellbeing and resilience mean to you?
- How do you manage when things get tough at university?
- How do you think your degree could be changed to support your mental health and wellbeing?
- What else do you need at university to support you?

## Table of Contents

Participant Demographics .....	6
<i>A Diversity of Participant Opinions on:</i>	
<i>Resilience</i> .....	12
<i>Coping Strategies</i> .....	19
<i>Positive Changes at University</i> .....	51
<i>Curricula and Student Interactions</i> .....	77
For More Information .....	104
Helpful Resources and Contacts .....	106



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

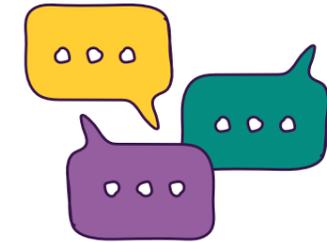
## Age Groups

- 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)
- 35** Different new media (including film and animation)
- 100** Ceramics, drawing, painting, printmaking, textiles, and fashion

# 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)
- 7** Different new media (including film and animation)
- 10** Ceramics, drawing, painting, printmaking, textiles, and fashion



This report sorts participant comments into loose categories about students' resilience and proposed wellbeing-framed transformation. These categories include students' coping strategies, and positive ways to change visual art degrees so they can support students' wellbeing.

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



*Student perspectives on*

# RESILIENCE

*and coping with university challenges*

**A Diversity of Student Opinions on: Resilience**

So that may be the definition of resilience. You know, do you give yourself reasons to keep going?

Also I think resilience is responsibility. Not only for the personal work, for family and some friends who really care about me.

Resilience means to me that even though you're at a kind of a low point, where it might be hard to do things you can kind of swallow or build back up to that level where you can complete those easily.

It kind of effects people in different ways. Resilience depends on your wellbeing as well.

[Wellbeing and resilience are] both extremely important because [of] the industry that I'm heading into ...

**I definitely learnt and struggled with resilience over time. I'm getting a better grasp on it now — how to deal with certain situations.**



I think I definitely need to learn how to cope with stress a bit better because it's not really something that ever goes away. There's always going to be stressful things in life. I'm gradually coming to an understanding of the things that affect me. Like, how my diet effects concentration, things like that. I'm gradually making connections on how my brain works. I think looking after yourself is kind of getting an understanding of how your health works and how these things can affect you in positive and negative ways. Then you make those changes to make you feel better. So I think this is sort of the time where I'm learning how I work and how I can look after myself in the future.

**I have the knowledge and life experience to challenge my thoughts when I go into self-doubt and thoughts about being ‘not good enough’.**

I’m pretty open about the fact that I’ve had issues with anxiety and depression, because I think it’s more important to be out there about it than hiding it. Often there are lots of other people around that are having similar issues and it’s good to be open about it.

I went through something traumatic and my counsellor said that she could hear a lot of resilience in me. In a way I kind of get it now, the resilience part. You keep going despite what’s happening behind – inside your head and [when] things are out of your control but you still try to do something that is in your control.

I have not been very well lately, physically and mentally. So I understand the importance of being well to be able to excel.



*Taking a closer look at*

# STUDENTS' COPING STRATEGIES



## Please note

The information provided in this section presents varied student comments to demonstrate the diversity of students' coping strategies. Some of these strategies are considered helpful but some are not. These comments should not be considered professional healthcare advice. Please do not use this information for diagnosis or treatment of yours or any other person's wellbeing difficulties.



**That “Oh,  
I’m getting  
further and  
further  
behind” —  
some people  
will use it  
as a burning  
force to come  
back even  
stronger.**

At the end of the day, if I am content in what I do or I am happy with what I produce, why should it matter what other people think. Yes, sometimes it does hurt when you work so hard on something and then have someone say they don’t like it, but that’s life. So no, I do not worry over other peoples’ opinions, I just do what I am capable of.

She’s learnt to focus on the more positive things in life, I guess. And not necessarily discount the negative things, but just to focus on what’s important instead of dwelling on the unimportant things.

And some may [get offended] because there’s a lot of ego invested into that artwork. I’ve long realised from my own growth, I need to put that ego aside.

So it was just sort of keeping that end-goal in mind and persevering.

... just stepping back from whatever the issue of the day is and just reminding yourself of the big picture.

So it’s that balance between having expectations that not everything’s gonna be perfect, but doing the best you can to ensure the best outcome.

**A Diversity of Student Opinions on: Cognitive and Behavioural Coping**

... saying “I can do it” is encouraging, but it doesn’t acknowledge the possibility of failure. And with my anxiety, I need to acknowledge the possibility that I might not finish the project, or I might not get as high a mark as I would want. Whereas “F\*ck it” is more like, “Just do it, it doesn’t matter anymore just get it done, get something to hand in, even if you fail, having something is better than nothing”. It’s kind of weird, but I find it really does help.

**I power through the panic! Because the only thing keeping me from completely freezing is the fear of failure.**

Well, it wasn’t really a decision for me. I wasn’t going to stop. I was already halfway through the year — I wasn’t just going to quit. But that’s different for everyone I guess.

I had thoughts like “I shouldn’t be studying, I should go back to work. Why am I doing this?” But I think every time — I don’t know, I’m just like, “Okay, I’ll give it another try”.

I do come home a bit stressed and say, “That’s alright, keep going, it’s just assessment.”

**Just bear it, and carry on. Once done, have a self-care two-day break.**

## **A Diversity of Student Opinions on: Behavioural Coping**

Lately, I've gotten into meditation which helps, I used to drink a lot before but that was causing more problems than fixing things so I rearranged some habits.

Maybe Dr. Glass of Wine.

I do however smoke and drink occasionally and self harm which are coping methods for me.

And then on a day where I'm procrastinating, I might binge eat and drink as much coffee as I can get my hands on.

In the past, I would turn towards drugs (marijuana, amphetamines, LSD, alcohol, tobacco), thinking it was helping me to feel good in stressful times. I understand now how those substances really put you down in times of struggle rather than perk you up. Now when I'm finding it tough, I go into the studio and make work, or go for a walk, write about my feelings and make more work. It helps a lot to put that negative energy into something beautiful.

**As a whole  
I've been  
trying to be  
healthier  
with how I  
deal with  
university  
stress.**

**So, I found by doing that, that's the closest I've actually come to looking after myself, I think. Is just being prepared to ask for those extensions.**

I had to take a semester off for my mental health. It's really improved it [my creativity] by seeing it's not the end of the world ...

Yeah, I don't know, I think having a sleep is one of my pick-me-ups.

I usually just continue to do the work but at a slower pace. Sometimes I take a break and watch a new show or play a new game to get some new inspiration.

I will do my best to list out what I need to get done and when it needs to get done by. Sometimes this is not achievable with my mental state however, and [I] will need to give myself time to think the situation through and cope, cry, sleep etc.

For me, having a deadline or a due date evokes a greater effort and ultimately a greater outcome I believe.

**I love exercising because I can exert a lot of frustration, energy and focus on something else for a little while and then tend back to my university studies.**

Yeah, I think exercise and eating well is really impactful on my mental health. So, I think it's very important to do those things that I often forget to do.



# I use [the] Headspace app a lot.

I think meditation helps.

But in terms of stress and dealing with mental health, I also know that I can reach out to helplines and organisations specifically for that. I haven't actually done that before. I've come pretty close to reaching out — to Beyond Blue I think it was. But I'd probably do that if I have to, if I really felt that I needed to.

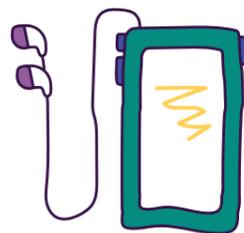
I pray often for calm and courage to face what life throws at me.

Listening to music, cuddling my dogs or husband, going for walks outdoors, and meditation as well as utilising ACT ...

Mindfulness meditation. Breathing exercises. Remedial massages. Walking/yoga. Dedicated time off (to watch TV, read, etc). Supplements (vitamin, mineral, herbal) from a naturopath for stress support. Healthy diet, no drugs/alcohol. Good sleep routine — some late nights of frantic making before final reviews, mixed with the stress of a good review, and I take a week or so to recover.

I'm on medication for anxiety and previously to beginning art school had lowered my dose. During stressful time at uni I have had to go back to my GP and have my dose increased.

To be honest, I scroll Instagram a lot looking for answers. It sounds so silly to type, but I often feel like it helps to make contact with the community I have for myself there - with artists making art about mental health topics.



**Design is  
where I go to  
when I'm in a  
bad place.**

When the anxiety is really high and, you know, I've locked myself in my room and my skin looks terrible, I just take a minute to breathe, I bust my guitar out, and just calm down. And once my head's in a better place, I get back to it.

For me, my art is an outlet for how I'm feeling or what I'm thinking, you could say it was a method of self-support or coping. I feel like it helps me to relax and switch off sometimes.



## A Diversity of Student Opinions on: **Social Coping**

I also find it really helpful, talking to friends and peers about things that bother me. Sometimes, it probably sounds like I'm complaining to them but I did read somewhere that complaining about the tiniest things help you release stress. I think that works for me.

I kind of have enough support behind me and enough mental drive to believe, yes, it [my art] is valuable. To make it worthwhile.

Morning smokos with everyone else in my year group, getting political and squatting in the studios for solidarity, fighting neoliberalism, visiting my friend's share house every week to cook food together and have a fire, spending time in the studio at uni and sharing nachos and chocolate, generally by being in the same boat as my fellow art students and having a lot of love for one another. Sometimes I see a psych but I don't have much money or time so my community is my support group.

**Often connecting with peers, talking and relating to them, helps to quieten the comparison that goes on internally between people. Instead you can enjoy the success of your peer's achievements, rather than question why you aren't as 'good' as them.**

**My family rally around and pick up the slack. It's extremely difficult studying and being a parent.**

Family sometimes helps by providing meals. My mother is a constant support.

I can just have a little rant with my partner and just get it all out. I think that can be good in a way but it can go on for too long when it's suddenly not so healthy and you feel all of this negative energy. It'd just be better to take a different approach I think.

I admitted myself to hospital actually, because I thought that was the quickest and easiest way to deal with it.

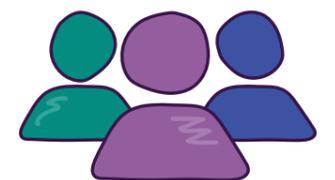
Also, in my case, it's about having access to the right doctors and psychiatrists, things like that.

I see a psychologist every 3-4 weeks and he's amazing. It all really depends on where I'm at when I go and visit him though, as I tend to have emotional amnesia and forget to address the big dark stuff if I'm in a happy place.

... I would go to the lecturer and if that still doesn't help, I go see the counsellor or the Head of Department or something.

Uni teachers are pretty understanding and try to arrange things so I can submit assignments on time.

... [I] talk to close friends instead and tutors I really trust.



**I think one of the strong things about me is that I know that I can reach out to people so I'm not really afraid in that respect and I know that having a psychologist is rewarding in a way.**

Sometimes I just really don't wanna be a burden on them though. Silly anxious brain for even thinking that!

I tend to shut myself off a bit, only communicating with family and when I need to, until I hit a kind of breaking point then it helps to talk.

I enjoy spending time on my own and often feel overwhelmed and exhausted if I have to spend too much time interacting with others.

I think that to cope better, I should talk to my teachers more.

## ***A Diversity of Student Opinions on: Help-seeking Difficulties***

I want to achieve high so I can work towards postgraduate study. I think it could be that my depression has an OCD side effect, because I work hard to hide my physical and mental state, maybe to prove that I am worthy ... even though I don't believe it myself.

I ignore my work and watch YouTube and listen to podcasts in my bed whilst playing Legend of Zelda so that no parts of my mind are free to consciously stress about work, but subconsciously I am panicking so I end up with this pit in my stomach and just getting really anxious. I'll also probably cry on my bathroom floor or something. I'll complain about it but not make any active changes to help myself.

**I kinda don't [cope]. It snowballs, getting worse. Sometimes I don't face it, don't go to class etc. Just avoid it. Then I get an extension but get it done the second time 'round.**

**But generally, people don't like to talk about their problems unless they really know you and feel comfortable with you.**

As a student myself, I know that there are plenty of mental health services that the university provides that are optional. I don't go to any of them. I know, myself and many of my friends are just too damn lazy. We're not gonna — we'd rather get food.

There are plenty of resources available, I personally need to take action ... which is difficult when I have no energy.

It is up to them to seek help, because a lecturer can't know what everyone's wellbeing is all at the one time.

**A Diversity of Student Opinions on: Help-seeking Difficulties**

They [the mental health support team] didn't have much time for me and thought a single phone call would be enough. I haven't yet found a doctor that I think genuinely understands my situation ... I tried the free content on the app Headspace but I don't have money for the monthly subscription and forget to use it.

This isn't specific to my degree, but I know there's a long wait list to see a counsellor at my university.

Inclusivity is something I've been having ongoing conversations with various uni staff about. I feel the support service is actually providing a barrier to the students it is meant to assist through lack of follow up and follow through, poor communication processes, lack of timely information, and lack of access on my campus.

I don't really rely on the university for support. I feel they mostly want my fees and staff are already busy.

**I didn't know there were counsellors until late 2nd year.**

**A Diversity of Student Opinions on: Help seeking**

I honestly don't think there is anything wrong with my degree, support is available, I just think it's not necessarily what I need. My issues stem more from mental habits I unknowingly learned as a child/teenager. I need to learn new habits over the top of these ones and maybe find some new friends too!

**I just think it comes down to having an openness — to explore different pathways as they open to you and having a commitment to receiving ongoing support, whatever that may be ...  
If you're in a position to manage your condition.**



**A Diversity of Student Opinions on: Change to Benefit Student Wellbeing**

Yeah, I don't know, I really don't know what could be done differently and I feel that it's a flaw in our culture that we don't want to talk about these things or accept these things. I think there would need to be some sort of cultural or social change ...

I don't think there is anything they can do to help, apart from having counsellors available I think it's really just a problem that's too complicated and too abstract for some poorly funded university program involving yoga or some shit to ever solve.

**I have had ongoing health problems so I think the issue is probably more me than a lack of support.**

... the degree was really just helping me to stay grounded and keep a routine. . Perhaps there could be more avenues for people struggling, or more openness about mental illness, however I haven't felt that I wasn't supported at uni.

It'd be good if it was more socially acceptable to acknowledge when anxiety and other mental health issues are particularly prominent in one's life, for them to be acknowledged as potentially just as debilitating as a physical health issue.

**A Diversity of Student Opinions on: Change to Benefit Student Wellbeing**

The only way things will get better is if the university stop trying to treat our degrees like business exploits ... The fact that I can come out of my undergrad degree and be up against a bunch of masters students who have never studied art before in their lives but still end up with a higher qualification in my discipline is a fucking joke and it makes me sad. Stop devaluing arts through universities. Stop devaluing education to increase profits. Stop pulling 4.2 million dollars of funding out of the humanities ... If you want art students to have healthy self-esteem and value what they do, don't systematically undermine everything we do.

Include some of the obvious expenses in the course fees (I have to HECS mine cause 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).

Just government funding. Government funding would be good. That's not really on the plate at the moment.

**Well, for a start it would be nice if [my uni] would recognise the ripple effect of cutting the Creative Arts degree completely!**

I have lost respect and faith in the institute completely. There is no support whatsoever, as our teaching staff are also affected and they can only do so much. I have paid a lot of money to attend uni, and I am not getting the services I paid for. Creative Arts is necessary (in society, education, our culture)!!!! Cutting degrees like this will show the lack of creativity in our community in future years.

I would also like some more acknowledgment that the art campus exists, and that an art major is a legit major?

**I think  
resilience  
training is  
very, very  
necessary.**

If there was a unit that [was] designed to explain mental health issues within the context of visual art. Not the typical high school mental health class that listed out the symptoms in a clinical and detached manner. If it were something creatives could relate to and create art about to express themselves.

I think we need to understand our bodies more, like, the limitations. You know, how much stress we can take before we break and we have to understand ourselves I think. That's very important, so we don't overwork ourselves. Also, it's really important to talk to someone when you're not in the right place, mentally or physically.

They felt like it [a creative process class] didn't really contribute to the degree. They didn't think it would be useful when we finish study ... I guess it was probably more of a 'healing you' kind of subject. We were talking about how you feel and the way you think.

**... develop a more approachable and safer learning and working environment that encourages students to discuss the topic of mental health and wellbeing.**

Orientation should be one part of [talking about mental wellbeing]. But particularly in the first year, there should be a course that you go to once a week that is about your mental wellbeing. You go to animation in the morning, art or something in the afternoon and an hour or two that is just about your mental health, your ability to cope. And maybe they could take a break from focussing on the difficult aspects of the course [and] give you the skills that could help with the workload, help with the pressure. And then you run through some of those scenarios on a more regular basis.



Things like  
cognitive  
behavioural  
therapy  
or even  
acceptance  
and  
commitment  
therapy come  
to mind ...

... I mean I'm not a psychiatrist or anything, of course. But just maybe examples of other artists that perhaps had really bad critiques when they were starting out, what happened and how their work evolved ... It's all about being able to seek comments and evolve your work but still be confident in what you're doing.

Universities could offer elective units that promote using art and creativity to de-stress, and focus on creating art for wellbeing rather than for academic purposes. These units could compliment the more academic and demanding core art units.

Some sort of technique to help with feeling valid and questioning yourself and the degree, because that worry and anxiety was present throughout the entire first year of my degree.

**A Diversity of Student Opinions on: Wellbeing-framed Learning**

When to procrastinate and when not to procrastinate. I feel like being able to have some sort of awareness day or an activity every week that's just open for that sort of thing ... to say, "Hey, are you bad at time management? Well, here you go! There are these classes happening and maybe you can attend these things to form some support group."

I think just more time to talk through stressful situations. Time management is my worst and that is what stresses me out the most.

**... how to find ways to de-stress and just know that you don't have to put so much pressure on yourself to get things done.**

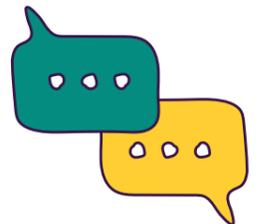
We actually had a session called Wicked Problems where we were able to put up our work and if we had one major problem that we needed answered or looked at what would it be? It was fantastic, I actually got solutions to some things that I was struggling with. Yep, that works well.

# Even having some classes with industry leaders themselves coming in and having a look around.

Because mental health and mental wellbeing, and even that resilience we spoke about before – these people [members of the industry] have been through what you’ve been through so they can give you some practical advice to work on. You know, like, “Don’t focus on that, look at this” and those sort of things. I think it would give real-life examples of people who have faced probably the same struggles and potential pitfalls and wellbeing issues that you would be facing. They would know where you’re coming from a little bit more.

I feel like sometimes students will be feeling certain ways and they’re not sure why ... To have someone come in and explain those things to them a bit more and how it relates to their study and their time at university, definitely.

Invited guests who can talk about creative confidence and how to overcome general negativity and anxiety I think may help. Especially for first years.



**But I didn't really get any information on the industry. So I think if they found some people to come in and talk more about how you get into the industry and stuff like that, in the earlier stages, that would be helpful.**

... what an average day looks like for them. How they think they achieve success on an average day-to-day basis. How they organise themselves, what it's like to — say if you're working in a graphic design company — what's the process of going from an interview with the client to delivering the final product.

We've been getting a few lectures from people who have been through the course and are out working in the real world. So they've had that time and opportunity to reflect upon that study time. Having that kind of feedback from someone who isn't necessarily in a position of authority in the university might be helpful and probably someone that they would listen to a bit more than the tutor.

Something like [industry nights] for art, or even just [to] kind of go around to some businesses that do art stuff like graphic design and marketing and little galleries and stuff like that — where they showcase their stuff.

**A Diversity of Student Opinions on: Industry Preparation**

... just told us more about the actual career paths that are possible with the degree that we're studying. Especially with trends and everything. They are always shifting.

100% we need to be addressed and reassured on how to make it in the industry because it's nothing like all the others and we're constantly told by society we're never going to make it, we need to be told we can and how to actually do so. It would be such a great confidence boost.

Their sense of loss of purpose after graduation is huge. I think there should be a focus at the end of the degree in what's next, how to initiate the next stage, instead of all eyes on the extreme stress of getting across the graduating exhibition line.

I don't feel prepared for the workplace. I feel a bit ripped off that I've put in the money and effort to go to university, to get little applicable skills and knowledge about the industry.

**It'd definitely help to have more regular internships .... the more you do, the more time you spend in an actual studio or whatever it is — you'll build up experience and you'll see what the real world's like. That's invaluable.**

**I think that the degree needs to incorporate [a] more professional development and career development focus. Like teach us [how] to write a grant proposal. Talk honestly about careers in the arts. Don't keep building the facade to make money on more students going through the doors. Truth is, partly the reason it doesn't is because most of the staff who are artists are struggling themselves (they are my colleagues so I know this to be true). They are trying to figure it out with little guidance themselves. There are no easy answers and the government's continued stripping out of arts funding at every level makes the playing field even harder to negotiate.**

**Perhaps a support service or counselling service purely for the visual arts field, or just someone we can talk to without judgment.**

I think it would be nice to have reiterated that, I guess, support services are available ... They won't necessarily go to it immediately, but if you keep — not nagging them, but just reminding them that they are available that one day they might say "Oh, well maybe I'll go and see them."

Perhaps promotion for these services could come in the form of social media advertising that provides a link to where they can obtain help on the university's website?

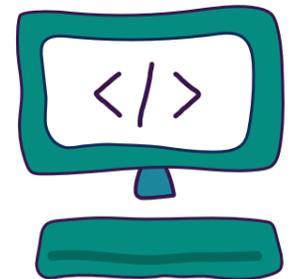
There is the opportunity for them to take into consideration when there are extenuating circumstances surrounding mental health issues. Whether that is an ongoing issue due to an issue that is external from university life and study.



**Actually offering classes that teach you the programmes you're expected to use (that would reduce my stress).**

I think more training needs to be offered in computer skills. This could be additional to the lectures and tutorials and on a voluntary basis as every student is at a different level. A self-paced class with help available if required.

A lot of my current course content is self-directed learning which can be tough because I lack motivation and organisation. It would be more helpful to go through the content in class together so things get done on time (this seems to make more sense too given the money I pay for my education).



**A check-in day a few weeks before an assignment is due; essentially a one-on-one with the tutor to see if you're on track to relieve some stress.**

So far, that [a check-in day] probably wouldn't work for me because there's always time, there's always about two weeks before our assessment's due, where the lectures are there to give us feedback.

# Also, more understanding from staff, and employers of what it's actually like to be a uni student at this time.

More understanding from course convenors that mental health problems can't just be wished away.

Perhaps some more training in how to more respectfully deal with students and not belittling someone because they're younger than you or experiencing things a different way.

Teachers should stop pretending they are better than students and the power structures should be acknowledged more.

I know that almost everyone experiences anxiety in some form so reassurance is quite necessary ...

I know that the university has psychologists but it would help to know that teachers know what's going on. Like last semester it was my first time back at uni and I produced something that my tutor liked and they said 'I'm expecting you to be great.' I went home having a panic attack because I got in my head about it and was like "Now I have to be perfect because that's what they're expecting from me and anything less than a High Distinction will crush me and disappoint everyone."



**I think if more out-of-class help was available I wouldn't be as far behind.**

More opportunities for one-to-one contact with teachers/tutors.

To save from nepotism, because like I said it's [grading is] quite subjective, so if you've got more than one person there you often get slightly different views and then they can agree together on what the mark should be. And what's happened is because there are less and less people at uni, because they are trying to cut down on costs all the time, I've noticed as I was going through my bachelor's degree that they actually stopped that, they only had one person [grading assessment].

I would really like there to be some more student/teacher interactions, and preferably smaller classes sizes (or a smaller teacher/student ratio).

**Emails are so inadequate for talking about many concerns/stresses etc.**

# A lot of the assignments aren't organised and change all of the time ...

In terms of just the bare basics of what you need for an assignment task sheet, clear criteria sheets that lists all the levels of success so you kind of grade yourself as you go — I definitely think those things should be provided straight up.

So, probably clearer explanations [from educators] of what you want, especially week to week.

Having more than one teacher assess the work is therefore a very good way of avoiding bias due to personality clashes or preference for a particular type of work. Having other students attend the critique and provide support and alternative feedback sometimes works well.

More structure and direction in the curriculum.

I believe there should be [a] balance or options for how to present assessment so that people can work to their strengths.



# Not suddenly finding out about criteria for marking such a subjective subject AT the assessment or AFTERWARDS.

The poor level of program organisation was particularly annoying and added a level of frustration that was very unhelpful. I find that there is a general belief that artists are disorganised because of their creativity, so poor administration is laughed off. I see no good reason why the two can't coexist.

I'd probably say only have relevant materials in courses.

With regards to big assignments, I find it easier when they're broken up into parts a, b, c and so on – that way there is less stress to me and it's easier for me to keep on top of my workload. It would be easier if tutors would consider when they're giving out due dates and that we may have two or three other assignments due on the same day. By incorporating these little changes it would mean students would have less stress and could focus a little more on their work and social life which helps with their mental health.

Making it easier to find out how to enroll/etc. rather than having to track down a number of people and rely basically on blind luck and timing.

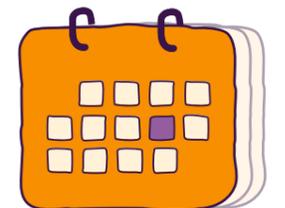
... I think just more information about majors, for example.

**It's go, go, go 100% no breaks (full-time) for 13 weeks and then nothing for a few months when you're on break. It doesn't make sense. I think the uni semesters should be much more spread out so it's less stressful and nerve-wracking to get everything done ...**

Review the curriculum and make sure that it isn't asking too much – for example, semesters are being shortened but the workload remains the same.

Timetabling can affect performance in class (three back-to-back 2hr tutorials, for example).

Everything we've done has been rushed and of poor quality.



**A Diversity of Student Opinions on: Changing Timetables and Workloads**

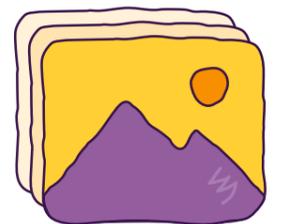
But I think the additional stress and the strain that it puts on us students, to have to get on campus that late in the day or early in the day adds to everything else that we do.

Most of the stress relating to the course comes from having to travel for 3 hours to and from campus each day just to make contact hours.

**I'd like  
more of an  
option to do  
the work  
from home.**

I've thought a little bit about that, I think some more hands-on practical experience. There is quite a bit of theory and I understand that theory has its place. But I'll go to some of the classes and I'll have my drawing [equipment] and we'll spend the whole three hours just doing the lectures. It drives me insane. I just want to draw, just show me how to do that.

**I know it is expected of art students [to create a portfolio], but I just wish I had some sort of outcome from my coursework that I could put in my portfolio ...**



**I think that's what I feel is missing from art schools and uni. It's that peer group, it really isn't there.**

I think that fostering a little bit more of that inclusive environment in terms of setting up smaller groups and having them work together over an extended period, I think you'd start to see that you'd have peer support that you could rely on.

... some of the student clubs or associations do run yoga or meditation or different things like that. But again, most of those things for us are located at the other campus.

Perhaps more events that are specific to my degree where students can interact and have more sense of community. Or a space for us to unwind and connect beyond our studies.

Camps or getaways for the class, paid by students who wish to go. Opportunities to discuss worries in a group setting.

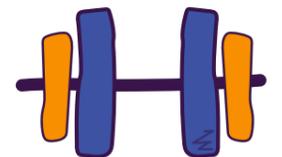
**I personally am going to install a swing set close by in the hope it helps me – and others – ground myself and feel content.**

There was a table set up that had a puzzle, I just ended up sitting [and] doing that for an hour and a half, so that was quite nice.

Also maybe a week of activities that is fun and relaxing to recharge our creative juices would be good. Instead of always focusing on deadlines to meet.

I think every few weeks/monthly there should be a mental health day where we can do our own thing and not come in.

Free exercise. HOW CAN UNIVERSITY NOT OFFER FREE GYM MEMBERSHIPS WE PAY SO MUCH MONEY. I desperately want to exercise for my mental health and confidence but I can't afford it and am not motivated once I am home.



## **A Diversity of Student Opinions on: Group Work and Assignments**

But also, even group assignments. Maybe just trying to create things as an entire class or as big groups. Trying to, you know, think together and work together would help that.

... more group activities where the staff pick the groups, not the students.

# But I think there might be some more consideration and clarification when it comes to group assessment.

(I understand that having a chance to work as a group is very good, since it helps the students to develop their soft skills and hard skills a substantial amount within [a] comparatively short time. I just think there are some considerations and clarification might be needed when it comes to the unfair or insurmountable circumstances). It's just my opinion.

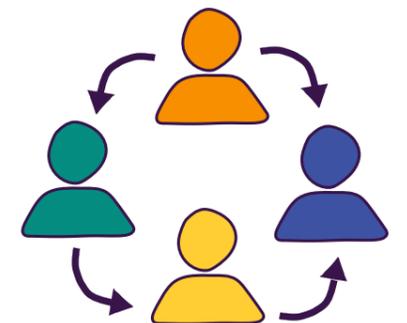
It's [my group collaboration tool I've designed is] an online application where university students can collaborate and there's a teamwork contract part [that] I've added to it.

# I think students need to be more honest at the end of semester feedback.

Most of my — I won't say complaints, but most of the issues I've run into aren't really from individual subjects. It kind of comes back to how they work together. Or what the degree states [that] it's preparing you for. I don't really have a channel to give that feedback without going straight to the course convenor and I don't want to seem like I'm trying to start trouble or anything.

Maybe in the last week for 30 minutes, just have a circle and everyone goes through how they're feeling about the course. Because by the end of it [the semester] you kind of have a good sense of should be changed for the benefit of other students that will come through.

I think perhaps someone to talk to or know there is someone available to discuss the above relevant queries [survey short response [questions](#)] with.

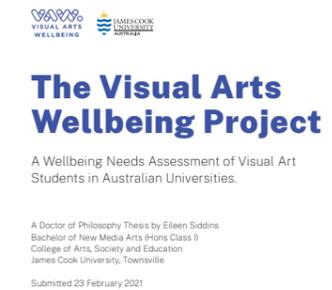


# For more information

You can find detailed information about the research methodology, analysis, mixed 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 find the thesis, research publications and additional short reports via the research website: <https://www.wellartist.org/resources>.

## Report #1

This is the second of two reports, and the first report, *Visual Art Student Perspectives on Wellbeing and the University Experience*, similarly presents student comments from the research. The first report focusses on how visual art students' complex and diverse university experiences influenced their wellbeing. To access the first report, [click here](#).



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.



