

Abstract

In February 2019, the University of Southern Denmark (SDU) conducted the study environment survey for all full-time students for the seventh time. The purpose of the survey is to provide a snapshot of how the students assess their study environment, so that SDU is able to create the best possible surroundings for the students. The questionnaire was sent to nearly 20,000 full-time students, of which 9,763 completed the questionnaire, which corresponds to a response rate of 48.8 percent. The questionnaire contained a total of seven themes where the students were asked to provide a summarised assessment of which of the themes had the greatest importance and impact for an improved study environment. The first priority was *teaching and subject knowledge*. The subsequent themes were *student satisfaction*, *physical surroundings*, *social and academic communities*. The abstract will outline key examples from each theme. Each theme also serves as seven separate chapters in the report and in this way acts as the structuring element. Initially however, some general trends will be established across the themes.

General trends

In the first question, the students were asked to rate the general study environment at SDU on a scale from 0 to 10. This year's survey illustrates the highest score measured since the survey began, with an average of 7.2. For comparison, the average was 6.9 and 7.1 for 2015 and 2017, respectively. A slight increase or retention of the high level from 2017 was seen across the faculties. The students spend an average of 30.05 hours per week on their studies, which is an increase from 28.8 hours per week in 2017. The students stay on campus for 16.85 hours of the 30.05 hours per week. However, there is a huge gap between the amount of time spent across the faculties; students at the Faculty of Engineering spend 36 hours per week and students at the Faculty of Humanities an average of 26 hours per week. Compared to 2015, the students use approx. two and a half hours more on study per week and stay an hour and 20 minutes more on campus, which is particularly expressed by the increased time spent at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

The survey also shows that 23 percent experience stress on a daily basis, 13 percent have considered stopping their course of study and 12 percent experience loneliness. These perspectives will be explored below.

Academic and social communities

The questions related to this theme were rated from 60 percent to 85 percent on the positive scale at SDU level. The positive scale covers the proportion of students who have said that they agree or strongly agree with the statements under this theme. 62 percent of the students answered by saying that there is a good opportunity to encounter other students at SDU, and 85 percent answered by saying that they know a fellow student who they can contact outside of class to discuss a study assignment. The students generally attribute great importance to the social community. Consideration should therefore be given to prioritising this area, as it has a major bearing on student satisfaction and thus whether the students complete their studies. This is clarified by the answers to the questions about whether there is a satisfactory range of social events and the extent to which the study has contributed to the feeling that the student is part of a social community. Both of these were the lowest under this theme, with either a decrease or stagnated level compared to the survey in 2017. Study groups were named as being an important part of the student's social life. The students propose that study groups are created at the start of the 1st semester to ensure the social aspect of the course of study. The survey shows that 72 percent of the students are in a study group, which is an increase of 4 percentage points compared to 2017. It also shows 7 percent

who are not part of a group but would like to be, which is one percentage point less compared to 2017.

When comparing various background variables, it is the delayed variables in particular that give a low rating in this theme. Overall, male students rated higher than female students, Danish students higher than foreign students, bachelor's programme students higher than graduate students, students living on campus higher than students who commute, younger students higher than older students, 1st priority higher and higher prerequisites for admission (grading) higher.

Student satisfaction

There is, generally speaking, a high level of student satisfaction among students at SDU. 85% said that they agree or strongly agree when asked if they enjoyed studying at SDU. Positive responses for feeling satisfied while studying at SDU was as high as 92%. But not all of the students are satisfied, which is why, in this chapter, we focus on those who are compared to those who are not. Approx. 12% of the students' said that they experienced loneliness. The group with low student satisfaction has 50 percent more students who consider themselves lonely. Students who indicated that they are lonely also rate higher in their response to experiencing stress on a daily basis (35 percentage points) and considerations of stopping their course of study (31 percentage points), compared with students who did not indicate that they are lonely. Loneliness is thereby a significant factor in relation to student satisfaction.

23% of the students experience profuse symptoms of stress on a daily basis, which is an increase of one percentage point compared to 2017. Particularly the experience of having to perform, uncertainty with regard to academic expectations and heavy pressure in exam situations were rated as being significant causes for experiencing stress. The proportion of students who experience stress in relation to their study activities begins to rise shortly before 40 hours of study activity per week.

The most frequently reported consequence of stress is withdrawing from social activities. This is followed by considerations to drop out of the course of study, consult a doctor and delay the course of study. Students who experience stress on a daily basis differ from the majority of the group who are not stressed on a daily basis by the fact that they consider leaving the course of study (20 percentage points more), are less satisfied, are not in a study group and do not rate social and academic relations so highly. The survey also shows that females indicate that they are stressed more often than men.

Thirteen percent of students have considered dropping out of their studies at SDU. Students who fail to thrive at SDU differ particularly in the social areas – they feel less confident at SDU, more lonely, less satisfied with events and opportunities for establishing communities, and the proportion of students affected by stress on a daily basis is greater. Development since 2015 shows very little deterioration, which may be considered as stagnation.

Information and Communication

The questions in this chapter were rated from 38% to 70% on the positive scale (SDU level). The lowest rating was for the statement regarding the ability to find desired information on SDU's website. The highest rating was for the library's web information and access to materials. The remaining questions in the information and communication theme were rated closer together at SDU level (from 57% to 62% positive responses). A decrease of three percentage points was seen for the question regarding whether the students find information about relevant social activities satisfactory. A decrease of three percentage points was also seen in connection with the question regarding the possibility of satisfactory counselling.

IT conditions

The questions in this chapter were rated from 74% to 92% on the positive scale (SDU level).

The experience concerning SDU's e-mail system scores highly and was deemed as being very satisfactory, while Blackboard is rated as the lowest at 74%. The remaining questions were rated between 83% to 91% on the positive scale. Experience of the e-mail system increased by six percent compared to 2017. Development since 2017 shows a general increase, with the exception of the assessment of Blackboard and self-service, which have both fallen by four percentage points.

Physical conditions

The questions in this chapter were rated from 59% to 91% on the positive scale (SDU level). There is great variation at SDU level as well as internally at faculty level. Auditoriums and toilets were rated lowest (with a positive proportion of responses at 59% and 60% respectively), while the library came out on top (91%). Ratings for other premises and common areas were between 63% and 80%. Development since 2017 shows that there was both an increase and a decline. The most significant decline can be seen in the evaluation of auditoriums, which were rated at four percentage points lower. This is also reflected by the fact that the students' overall evaluation of classrooms was one percentage point lower compared to 2017. The biggest high jumpers continue to be study and computer areas.

Aesthetic conditions

The questions within this theme were rated from 49% to 59% on the positive scale (SDU level) and were generally rated slightly lower since the survey was conducted in 2017. The statement regarding whether the outdoor areas are a pleasant place to be took the top spot, while the remaining evaluations were relatively close to the 50%. The lowest rating was in connection with the question regarding facilities for holding breaks and socialising.

When comparing various background variables, the most positive variables are the same as those under the physical conditions, apart from the fact that the ratings are lower in general: Therefore, students with foreign citizenship, young students and those who were admitted via round 2 provided the most positive responses to aesthetic conditions. As pointed out, there was a decline in the theme, where in particular, the rating for whether the outdoor areas are a pleasant place to be has fallen by three percentage points.

Laboratories and workshops

The questions in this chapter were rated from 71 % to 90 % on the positive scale (SDU level). The questions related to security during teaching and exercises were rated highest, while the introduction to laboratory or workshop work was rated at approx. 77%. The question regarding being able to respond to a hazardous situation in the laboratory/workshop was rated at 71%. Development since 2017 points towards a positive trend, as an increase can be seen in all themes apart from the question regarding the introduction to laboratory or workshop work. There has been an increase of approx. two percentage points for the remaining questions.