

Resilience and Coping: Themes for Submission

The hope is for submissions to be personal reflections and representations of your individual experiences of mental health, and that the process of creating your artwork may in itself be helpful and healing. Each of the themes selected were derived from research, some of which is summarised below each theme for those who are interested in learning more.

Theme 1: Resilience and sources of hope through adversity

- Hope is a powerful aspiration that allows people to imagine and experience promising futures. It helps sustain people's mental wellbeing, which exists on a spectrum just like your physical health. As we continue to transition out of a period of intense pandemic-driven stress, attending to the realities of mental health challenges is critical. However, it is likewise important to acknowledge and celebrate moments of positive mental health, periods of coping, and times of simply getting through the day. You may reflect on the sources of hope, comfort, consistency, motivation, strength, and/or joy that have helped you get through and survive uncertain times or adverse experiences. (Your submission can be related to the pandemic, but does not have to be.)
- **Research Background**
 - The term "resilience" is open to many different interpretations depending on an individual's field of study. There is no singularly agreed upon definition ([Herrman et al., 2011](#); [Southwick et al., 2014](#)).
 - Resilience suggests that coping is rooted in an individual's ability to overcome obstacles, but structural factors like access to resources and the disproportionate burden of distress experienced by marginalized groups plays a large role in emotional well-being (Southwick et al. 2014, Ungar 2012).
 - In university students, positive mental health and coping are related to positive affect, optimism, social support, self-esteem, and life satisfaction ([Martínez-Martí & Ruch, 2017](#)).
 - Many campus initiatives at McMaster seek to expand the coping resources students have at their disposal, including the use of trained therapy dogs on campus during times of stress (exam periods, etc...) ([Dell et al., 2015](#)).
 - In 2020, Rand et al. found that hope was a predictor of subjective well-being and academic success among college students ([Rand et al., 2020](#)).
 - Less than 50% of students reported feeling optimistic about the future "all of the time" or "often" according to the McMaster Branch of the Canadian Campus Wellbeing Survey ([Canadian Campus Wellbeing Survey - McMaster Okanagan Committee](#))

Theme 2: A sense of connection and community

- The pandemic has unfortunately created barriers for many students seeking to connect with their campus and personal communities. As we look towards the future promotion of student well-being, submissions to this theme can reflect upon how communities and the support they provide contribute to positive mental health. You may choose to consider many types of communities (e.g., friends, peers, families, colleagues, clubs, neighbourhoods, etc...) that exist within your lives as students. We particularly encourage artistic explorations of connection within equity-seeking communities.
- **Research background:**
 - Sense of community is defined by a sense of belonging, emotional connection, and mutual need fulfillment ([Mannarini, 2021](#))
 - [The Canadian Campus Wellbeing Survey \(2019\)](#) conducted at McMaster University found that a sense of connection and a sense of belonging on campus act as protective factors for students.
 - [The National College Health Assessment \(2019\)](#) revealed that 71.1% of McMaster undergraduate respondents felt loneliness prior to the pandemic.
 - The Canadian arm of the World Mental Health International College Survey Initiative (2020) is currently collecting data on how the pandemic impacts these trends.

Theme 3: The diversity of student identity & the process of self-discovery

- This theme addresses how our mental health is tied to our sense of individual identity. The more we understand and accept ourselves for who we are, the better it usually is for our mental wellness. We welcome submissions that address the journey of your personal self-discovery and the formation of identities, including but not limited to: finding independence, uncovering passions, changing life trajectories, making relationships, and exploring self-expression. Submissions may also reflect on how this journey has impacted your mental health, directly or indirectly. In particular, we invite submissions exploring the ways that intersectionality – the variable and overlapping social identities (e.g. race, gender identity, sexuality) that people occupy – has played a role in our students’ journeys. Submissions to this theme should relate to the time of personal discovery that coincides with being in university.
- **Research background:**
 - Studies have shown that individuals with a more mature sense of identity have better psychological well-being ([Hardy et al., 2012](#))
 - Fewer than 50% of students reported feeling good about themselves “all of the time” or “often” according to the McMaster Branch of the Canadian Campus Wellbeing Survey (Canadian Campus Wellbeing Survey - McMaster Okanagan Committee)
 - The percentage of individuals with low self-rated mental health tends to be higher in equity-seeking populations. For example, it is 1.5 times greater among Indigenous people than among non-Indigenous people, and 3.1 times greater among bisexual people than among heterosexual people ([Public Health Agency of Canada. Key Health Inequalities in Canada: A National Portrait. Ottawa: Public Health Agency of Canada; 2018.](#)).

- For more information on intersectionality, see Crenshaw (1991) for a theoretical discussion on intersectionality and how it can impact health and well-being