



InterVarsity Research: Christian Student Attitudes Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic

Prepared by Pinkston, July 2021

InterVarsity Christian Fellowship is one of the largest college campus ministries in the United States, and they focus on serving and ministering to students and faculty. InterVarsity has more than 1,100 student and faculty chapters on 770 campuses, ranging from Ivy League to community colleges. Faith and fellowship contribute to healthy and successful college experiences for young people, and InterVarsity is deeply committed to supporting students in their faith.

Like all colleges and faith-based ministries, InterVarsity drastically changed the way it supported Gen Z students and faculty during the global COVID-19 pandemic. The ministry pivoted from in-person gatherings, support groups, and mentoring to digital meetings and checkups. While the transition was difficult, InterVarsity's staff and students adapted and many even thrived, despite the challenges.

This research report serves to provide analysis and offer notable takeaways from survey research commissioned by Pinkston. Interviews for this research were conducted between May 3 - June 3, 2021, from a sample of current InterVarsity Christian Fellowship students on 127 college campuses to assess students' well-being and attitudes amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key Findings

Limited social interactions and a lack of community as a result of the pandemic have led to a decline in the mental and physical health of Gen Zers and college students across the country.

More than half of students surveyed state that one of the greatest challenges they've faced over the past 18 months includes loneliness or isolation (58%). In addition, almost half (47%) of students say that their mental and emotional health has been negatively impacted as a result of the pandemic. Of the students experiencing health declines, 71% contributed this to isolation, lack of community, and/or a lack of social interactions.

College students are looking for more resources to better understand scripture and to know how to pray.

The discipleship resources that students feel they need the most are related to studying Scripture (60%) and prayer (52%). In addition to these traditional discipleship resources, nearly half (47%) of students are looking for resources to provide guidance on dating and marriage.

Social issues such as racial justice and climate change are the most important to students.

The three most important social issues to students today are racial justice (39%), climate change (29%) and foster care/adoption/orphan care (28%).

Question-by-Question Findings

Question 1: The majority (69%) of students became Christians before high school.

When did you become a follower of Jesus Christ?	Percentage	Count
Before high school	68.76%	217
During high school	20.57%	65
During college	10.76%	34

Question 2: The overwhelming majority (95%) of students say that church involvement is important to them.

How important is church involvement to you? (Attending Sunday services, church-hosted Bible studies, etc.)	Percentage	Count
Very important	64.56%	204
Somewhat important	30.06%	95
Not very important	4.11%	13
Not at all important	0.32%	1
Don't know/not sure	0.95%	3

Question 3: The majority (71%) of students say that belonging to a Christian fellowship on their campus has been one of the most helpful components of cultivating Christian faith while in college. The majority (59%) of students also say that reading and studying the Bible has been one of the most helpful components.

Which of the following components have been most helpful in cultivating your Christian faith while in college? (Select up to three)	Percentage (of responses)	Count (descending)
Belonging to a Christian fellowship on my campus	71.20%	225
Reading/studying the Bible	59.49%	188
Guidance from a more mature Christian in my life (mentor, pastor, chaplain, campus minister, etc.)	40.51%	128
Prayer	39.56%	125
Church participation	25.95%	82
Sharing my faith with someone	18.04%	57
Listening to podcasts or videos of sermons	11.39%	36
Involvement or encouragement from my family	9.49%	30
Other, please specify:	2.85%	9

Question 4: Almost half (47%) of students say that their mental and emotional health has been negatively impacted as a result of the pandemic. 42% of students say that their mental and emotional health has either been positively impacted (13%) or unaffected (29%) by the pandemic.

How has your mental and emotional health been impacted as a result of the COVID pandemic?	Percentage	Count
My mental and emotional health has been positively impacted.	12.97%	41
My mental and emotional health has been negatively impacted.	46.52%	147
My mental and emotional health has not been significantly impacted.	28.80%	91
Don't know/not sure	11.71%	37

Question 5: When students were asked in an open-ended format to share what has been the biggest contributing factor to the decline in their mental and emotional health, 71% cited isolation and/or a lack of community/social interaction.

Question 6: Top ways that involvement in a Christian community has positively impacted students' lives:

1. I have a deeper understanding of God's love for me (66%).
2. I have a greater appreciation for the friends in my community (65%).
3. I have grown as a leader (60%).
4. I am more likely to share my faith with others (59%).

How has your involvement in a Christian fellowship/community on campus positively impacted your life? (Select all that apply)	Percentage (of responses)	Count (descending)
I have a deeper understanding of God's love for me.	65.51%	207
I have a greater appreciation for the friends in my community.	64.56%	204
I have grown as a leader.	60.44%	191
I am more likely to share my faith with others.	58.54%	185
I have increased how often I read and study Scripture.	50.95%	161
I pray more.	50.63%	160
I am more likely to live according to Scripture.	48.42%	153
I am more likely to consider how my career after college contributes to God's mission.	48.10%	152
I am more likely to stay engaged in a church after I graduate.	46.84%	148
I have greater concern for the well-being of my campus community.	44.30%	140
I have grown in my knowledge for the biblical basis for ethnic reconciliation and justice.	43.04%	136
I am better at integrating my faith and my studies.	41.46%	131
None of these	2.22%	7

Question 7: The greatest challenges that students have faced in the last 18 months are most likely to be:

1. Keeping up with my schoolwork/academics (59%)
2. Loneliness or isolation (58%)
3. Decline in overall mental health (36%)

What is the greatest challenge that you have faced in the last 18 months? (Select up to three)	Percentage (of responses)	Count (descending)
Keeping up with my schoolwork/academics	59.18%	187
Loneliness or isolation	57.59%	182
Decline in overall mental health	35.76%	113
Fear about the direction of the country	31.96%	101
Loss of a loved one	14.87%	47
Caring for family members	13.92%	44
Financial hardship (for myself or my family)	12.03%	38
Other	9.49%	30
Racial trauma	6.96%	22

Question 8: Most students say that their college campus either has a "very" (25%) or "moderately" (38%) welcoming and supportive attitude toward Evangelical Christians.

How would you describe your college campus's attitude toward Evangelical Christians?	Percentage	Count
Extremely welcoming and supportive	12.34%	39
Very welcoming and supportive	25.32%	80
Moderately welcoming and supportive	37.66%	119
Slightly welcoming and supportive	20.25%	64
Not at all welcoming and supportive	4.43%	14

Question 9: The large majority (85%) of students surveyed intend to continue participation in a Christian campus group next school year.

Do you intend to participate in a Christian campus group next school year?	Percentage	Count
Yes	85.44%	270
No	5.38%	17
Don't know/not sure	9.18%	29

Question 10: The most desired discipleship resources that students feel they need the most include:

1. Scripture study (60%)
2. Prayer (52%)
3. Relationships (dating and marriage) (47%)

What topics for discipleship resources do you personally need the most? (Select up to three)	Percentage (of responses)	Count (descending)
Scripture study	59.81%	189
Prayer	52.22%	165
Relationships (dating, marriage)	47.15%	149
Evangelism	34.49%	109
Understanding my vocation	30.38%	96
Human Sexuality / Gender identity	22.15%	70
Racial injustice	20.25%	64

Question 11: The three most important social issues to students today include:

1. Racial justice (39%)
2. Climate change (29%)
3. Foster care/adoption/orphan care (28%)

Which of the following social issues are most important to you? (Select up to three)	Percentage (of responses)	Count (descending)
Racial justice	38.61%	122
Climate change	29.11%	92
Foster care, adoption, or orphan care	28.16%	89
Reducing abortion	26.27%	83
Religious tolerance/freedom	25.63%	81
Police reform / Criminal justice reform	23.73%	75
Global poverty	20.89%	66
Healthcare	20.89%	66
Poverty in America	19.62%	62
Economic inequality	17.41%	55
Jobs and economy	13.92%	44
Immigration	10.13%	32
Refugee resettlement	8.23%	26

Survey Methodology: Respondents were surveyed during the 2021 college spring semester using an online research panel method across a combination of computer, mobile and tablet devices. Survey questions were administered in English. Data points in this document should not be used to develop conclusions at a demographic level due to the fact that the sample size of this research is only 316 respondents. The data are only statistically significant when viewing the whole survey sample. Demographics: 34% male 65% female. 10% were born outside the United States. 62% White, 18% Asian American, 7% African American, 5% Latino/Hispanic, 5% Multiracial, 1% Mideastern. This should not be used to develop conclusions at a demographic level due to the sample size.