The Power of Resilience: Understanding Student Well-Being through Self

Determination Theory

James Hilber

S4659651

Department of Psychology, University of Groningen

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Supervisor: Dr. Laura Ballato

Second Evaluator: Dr. Simon Dalley

In collaboration with: Dominyka Buiko, Zohra Buring, Lenno Düßler, Mohamed Farah, and

Terézia Kucárová

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Abstract

The present study aims to conceptualise student well-being in academia through the lens of the student perspective and focus on how exam periods and personal resilience levels aid students in coping with stress. We conducted semi-structured interviews with twelve undergraduate psychology students from the University of Groningen. Using a deductive as well as inductive qualitative research approach, the data were analysed using thematic analysis and value-coding. Our study identified key elements of student well-being such as balance, competence, content, and mental and physical health and further indicated that exam periods have a significant impact on students' well-being. Secondly, as exam periods significantly influenced students' level of competence, a major part of student well-being, we looked at several coping strategies employed by students. Students who considered themselves as more resilient utilised successful coping strategies such as motivational techniques, active problem-solving, and emotional regulation to manage stress. The study underscores the importance of systemic interventions to promote resilience and enhance well-being among students, providing a foundation for future research and practical applications in higher education.

Keywords: well-being, university, students, exam period, self determination theory, resilience, academic stress, coping mechanisms

The Conceptualisation of Student Well-Being in Academia

Academia demands dedication. An air of persistent pressure to publish relevant research or to excel at exams hovers over professors and pupils alike, creating an environment that often incentivises them to prioritise academic success over academic well-being. While the former serves as the end-all for much of academia, the latter is sometimes discreetly discarded, leading a considerable number of students and staff to be exposed to stress, burnout, anxiety, and depression (Halat et al., 2023; Eisenberg et al., 2013; Larcombe et al., 2012). For students, this pressure intensifies considerably during exam periods as poor sleep quality reportedly soars to 98%, leading to elevated levels of stress, significantly higher anxiety, altered nutritional habits, and consequently decreased well-being (Koloi et al., 2023; Kalkan et al., 2021). Tragically, poor well-being is linked to worse academic outcomes (Stallman, 2010) potentially trapping students in a vicious cycle of performance anxiety and low well-being. Looking beyond this rather ominous picture, several studies report that an increase in well-being leads to enhanced academic performance and better job prospects (Cárdenas et al., 2022; Sieunarine et al., 2020; Stanton et al., 2016). Considering this, it is in the interest of the university to create a supportive environment that promotes student well-being.

Despite high school offering a set of unique hardships to teenagers, they are still largely sheltered under the protective wing of their parents. This rapidly changes when these young adults enter university and face a plethora of novel challenges such as loneliness, financial strain, and performance pressure (Stallman, 2017; Deasy et al., 2016; Dopmeijer et al., 2022). As students experience this rapid change within the greater context of their emerging adulthood, a period known for its major psychological changes, their mental well-being is persistently vulnerable (Fujita & Diener, 2005). Regrettably, these increased levels of stress usually do not return to pre-university levels once the student graduates (Bewick et

al., 2010; Cooke et al., 2006). More specifically, Stallmann (2017) reports that the prevalence of mental health problems for university students sits at 19.2%, with a staggering 67.4% exhibiting subsyndromal symptoms. These concerning findings are only a drop in an ocean, filled with academic journals addressing the numerous issues surrounding student well-being. However, to design and assess interventions aimed at improving well-being, a unified understanding of this occasionally obscure concept is vital (Kiltz et al., 2020).

Despite the frequent use of the term "well-being" in public as well as academic discourse, a decisive definition has yet to be determined. Historically, the general definition of well-being largely centred around the absence of disease, yet as our understanding of health developed, the definition of well-being expanded to encompass the broader dimensions of physical, mental and social prosperity (WHO, 1948). While the WHO definition of well-being has been largely recognised and accepted, the concept of student well-being remains less clearly defined and understood. While academics agree that the term is a multidimensional concept (Danker et al. 2019), agreement on how to define these dimensions has yet to be reached. Hossain, O'Neill, and Strnadová (2023) conducted an extensive review on the conceptualization of student well-being, highlighting that the term has been defined in various ways, frequently using different terminology to explain the same concept. Despite a lack of clear consensus, several aspects of student well-being are frequently mentioned in academic journals, such as, but not limited to, an absence of depression and anxiety (Auerbach et al., 2018), a presence of life satisfaction (Liu et al., 2016), school engagement (Thorsteinsen & Vittersø, 2018), and learning and positive relationships (Holfve-Sabel, 2014).

Emerging in the late 20th century the school of positive psychology spearheaded a new expansion to our understanding of well-being by emphasising the optimal functioning of people, groups and institutions (Gable & Haidt, 2005). For the first time, an institution was

directly linked to the well-being of an individual, making it particularly relevant for our research. At around the same time, Ryan and Deci (2000) expanded on this definition by adding three distinct psychological needs – competence, autonomy, and relatedness – with their so-called Self Determination Theory (SDT). Autonomy is defined as the need to feel in control of one's behaviour, competence as the need to perceive one's abilities as adequate to achieve goals and relatedness as the need to interact and connect with others (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Ryan and Deci (2000) emphasise the link between the satisfaction of these basic psychological needs and the experience of well-being, highlighting that their fulfilment enhances intrinsic motivation and overall psychological health (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). Within the framework of SDT, a basic need is defined as an energising state that fosters health and well-being when met but leads to pathology and ill-being when unmet (Hull, 1943). According to SDT, these needs must be fulfilled throughout the lifespan to sustain an ongoing sense of integrity and well-being (Ryan & Frederick, 1997; Waterman, 1993). Several studies have underscored the integral role of competence, autonomy, and relatedness within the academic setting. For instance, Deci et al. (1991) found that students who perceived their learning environment as supportive of their autonomy and competence demonstrated higher levels of intrinsic motivation and better psychological outcomes. Additionally, Vansteenkiste, Niemiec, and Soenens (2010) emphasised the role of relatedness in fostering a sense of belonging and engagement in academic activities. Ryan and Deci (2000) affirm that the environment we find ourselves in has a direct impact on how easy or difficult it will be to achieve the three psychological needs. An overall positive, encouraging and just about precisely challenging environment will facilitate our strive, whereas an overall negative, overly strenuous, or even outright toxic environment will accomplish the opposite. In the context of academia, the environment that students find themselves in fluctuates regularly. While the beginning of a new term might be seen as an

opportunity to start anew and provide a positive environment, this commonly changes in the following weeks when deadlines mount and exams invariably approach. Due to this rapidly changing environment, students frequently find themselves facing adversity and a challenge to their autonomy, relatedness, and especially competence.

Competence is defined as the "state of having sufficient knowledge, judgement, skill, or strength" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). As students are, by virtue of their title, meant to study, it is often exams, designed to periodically test if students have sufficient knowledge or skill, that significantly influences their feelings of competence. While students are generally confirmed in their perceived levels of competence when exams go well, or better than expected, they are just as often crushed when they fare worse than anticipated or even fail their tests. The cyclical nature of academic progress means that most students will, at some point, experience disappointment with their results, facing grades that fall short of their expectations. As reported by McKenna (2016) this common occurrence of underperformance or even failure can significantly undermine a student's perceived competence and overall well-being. All students cope differently with such setbacks, with some managing to bounce back quickly while others may struggle to regain their confidence and motivation. Students who cope better with such setbacks often consider themselves to be more resilient.

Resilience, defined as the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties, plays a crucial role in how students handle academic challenges (Smith et al., 2018). Those who exhibit higher levels of resilience are better equipped to manage stress, maintain motivation, and continue striving towards their goals despite setbacks. Resilience can have a tremendously positive effect on a student's academic life as it supports them in navigating the cyclical progression of their studies while also preparing them to face future obstacles with greater confidence (Johnson & Howe, 2017). Notwithstanding the groundbreaking work done by Deci and Ryan (2000), their original paper introducing SDT, despite stressing that the

environment plays a crucial role in well-being, it barely addresses how individuals cope with potential setbacks. As previously alluded to, within the context of academia the environment fluctuates routinely, and it thus becomes necessary to consider this inconsistency when addressing the student experience.

Exam periods are highly disruptive for students as they challenge their competence and regularly result in a perceived decline. However, as a student's resilience can mitigate the negative emotions associated with such decline in perceived competence, it becomes crucial to assess how more resilient students handle exam stress. This may lead to a better understanding of how students can actively address their coping mechanisms and aid those who perceive themselves to be less resilient to benefit from the same coping strategies as their more resilient peers. With this in mind, this paper seeks to understand how students who consider themselves more resilient apply several coping mechanisms different to students who report struggling more in the academic environment.

To gain a thorough understanding of student well-being and how exam periods, levels of competence and resilience interact this study aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ 1 How do students conceptualise well-being (in academia)?

RQ 2 How do exam periods affect students' levels of competence?

RQ 3 What coping strategies do highly resilient students use to mitigate the negative effects of exam stress?

In our study, we employed a qualitative approach to thoroughly capture and understand the nuanced opinions of our participants.

Method

Participants

For our study, we collected a convenience sample of 12 students who are currently enrolled in the BSc. of Psychology at the University of Groningen. Each team member recruited two participants, ensuring that neither the interviewer nor the participant knew of each other before conducting the interviews. This step was important to ensure confidentiality of the participants. The decision to recruit 12 participants was grounded in the seminal work of Guest and colleagues (2006), which demonstrated that saturation, the point at which no new information (codes or themes) emerges, is frequently reached within the initial 12 interviews. Our participants (Table 1) consisted of six males, five females, and one participant who identified differently. Our twelve participants ranged in age from 20 to 28 years old, representing diverse nationalities, including seven from Germany, three from Romania, one from the Netherlands and one from Luxembourg. Ensuring a comprehensive representation of experiences across various stages of the academic curriculum, we included five participants who were enrolled in the second year, three in the third year, and four participants who were in their fourth year of the three-year bachelor's program.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Participants		Distribution	
		n	%
Gender	Male	6	50
	Female	5	42
	Other	1	8
Nationality	Dutch	1	8
	German	7	58
	Luxembourgish	1	8
	Romanian	3	25

Participants		Distribution	
		n	%
Age	20	2	17
	21	4	33
	22	3	25
	23	2	17
	28	1	8
Currently enrolled in	Year 2	5	42
	Year 3	3	25
	Year 4	4	33

Procedure and Materials

Prior to starting data collection, the Ethics Committee from the Psychology Department approved the planned methods of the research, as well as the suggested ways of ensuring anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. After the recruitment, participants received information about the research, a demographics questionnaire (see Appendix A), and the informed consent form (see Appendix B). Each participant was then assigned a number to prevent being identifiable by their personal information to others. Finally, each participant was randomly assigned to one of the interviewers.

The qualitative research entailed conducting semi-structured interviews of 45 to 60 minutes that followed the structure of the script (see Appendix C). Preceding the data collection, the research team conducted pilot interviews. This measure was crucial to ensure that the interviewers had sufficient skills to conduct the interviews and that each member had practice with the script. The script (see Appendix C) was tailored to the pre-defined research questions of each researcher. It consisted of 15 questions with sub-questions that participants answered during the interviews. Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) served as a framework for building the script used to interview the subjects on their subjective experiences. The experiences of interest were students' conceptualization of well-being in

academia and factors contributing to it. All identifiable personal information was anonymized. Once the interviews were recorded and transcribed, the recordings were deleted. Each participant then received the transcript of their interview to confirm the use of their input, with a possibility to exclude parts of the interview or to withdraw from the study completely.

Data Analysis

Our data analysis adhered to the thematic analysis approach, where the main focus lies in generating initial codes, followed by searching for themes and patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To understand the role SDT has in well-being in academia, together with the underlying values and beliefs of the interviewed subjects, we have further employed the value-coding approach (Miles et al., 2013). The coding process was conducted utilizing the digital software designed for the analysis of qualitative data "Atlas.ti Scientific Software Development GmbH". Our analysis was both deductive and inductive, as the aim was to identify and generate new patterns and themes to understand student's conceptualization of well-being, with the use of the lens of SDT.

Coding procedure

Initially, all team members individually transcribed two interviews and subsequently coded half of a transcript independently using open coding. As described by Williams and Moser (2019), the multi-stage coding approach helps researchers first identify distinct concepts and themes that can be categorized before attaching concrete interpretive labels. This first step was designed to improve the researchers' grasp of the topic and procedure and to uncover initial interesting findings.

In a second step, two interviews were collaboratively coded and used to create a preliminary codebook. Each segment of the transcript was discussed with the group and interpretations were compared to work towards a consensus on the most suitable codes and

categories later used by each researcher in their independent analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thirdly, researchers paired up and coded two transcripts per pair according to the previously established codebook. During this process, each member coded both assigned documents individually before finalizing the codes in a collaborative session with their partner. After coding the first six interviews through the aforementioned process, the team got together to review the codes and adjust the codebook accordingly. To ensure inter-coder reliability and establish a final codebook (see Appendix D) each member proceeded to analyze a further two interviews with the established codes. In a final step, the members gathered in a joint session to discuss and agree on any last adjustments.

Results

The following section will present all relevant results found in our research to best answer three research questions. First, we will explore the participant's understanding of well-being in both general and academic contexts. Secondly, we will examine how the student's perceived levels of competence are impacted by exam periods and how this influences their well-being. Thirdly, we will evaluate which coping mechanisms more resilient students use to cope with exam stress.

RQ1: How do Students Conceptualise Well-Being in Academia?

Given the subjective and decisively ambiguous nature of well-being, it is imperative to first establish a common understanding of the term before attempting to place it into the context of any theoretical framework. To achieve such common ground, we asked our participants to articulate their understanding of well-being at the start of each interview. The subsequent paragraphs will showcase their responses and attempt to seek a shared perspective.

General Conceptualization of Well-Being

When asked to define their understanding of well-being, participants most frequently referred to ideas that our research team categorised as balance, content, and mental and physical health. The latter, though two separate entities, were virtually ubiquitously mentioned in tandem, demonstrating their inseparable link. Consequently, I have decided to keep them together for the sake of transparency.

Balance. Of these concepts, the idea of balance was noted most frequently by our participants. Most typically, students mentioned balance as a state of harmony between short-term pleasure and long-term satisfaction. While it was important for our participants to enjoy the present moment, they equally valued future achievements and goals. Participant 8 noted:

> *"Um, I would say that well-being for me includes some sort of, like, not constant, but some sort of balance. And like, it's not something that is very short in comparison to, for example, happiness, but that's something that's some sort of sense of contentment or, yeah, like balance in life over a longer time." (Participant 8)*

This sentiment reflects a common theme in our findings, where a long-term perspective on balance contributes significantly to overall well-being. The comfort of knowing what one needs to do to move forward in life and to balance long-term goals with immediate pleasure are highlighted by the following comment: *"I feel like I'm doing what I want to do. It doesn't necessarily imply enjoying the moment right now, because doing university work that kind of sucks, but it also contributes to my well-being because I know I want to do this actually" (P6).* While this statement underscores that achieving long-term well-being may require us to sacrifice pleasure in the short term, a separate remark suggests that a practice of acceptance in the short term will contribute to well-being in the long term. Participant 9 stoically notes: *"I think just being in a state of peace and acceptance and taking things as they come to you. And even if you are stressed, let's say you're still able to, like manage those feelings and let them happen" (P9).* This sentiment of *"letting [feelings]*

happen" by accepting and cherishing the present moment for what it is, is central to the second most frequent category found in students' perception of well-being, namely content.

Content. The ambiguous nature of the term well-being partly stems from the platitude of quasi-synonyms that are commonly understood to have a similar meaning. Our participants routinely mentioned words such as content, happiness, wellness, acceptance or being at ease and feeling relaxed. In our analysis, we combined these sentiments under the general notion of being content. When asked to explain what well-being meant to them, Participant 2 proposes that *"[well-being] is just general content and pursuit of happiness" (P2)* while later adding that *"well-being is being able to develop yourself" (P2)*. Understanding the importance of being able to enjoy the present, Participant 7 defines well-being as *"being content with where you are in your life right now" (P7)*. Participant 11 follows this sentiment closely by reaffirming that well-being includes *"being at ease, being kind of relaxed and […] functioning well" (P11)*. Highlighting the difficulty of defining well-being without invariably resorting to the use of synonyms Participant 4 concluded: *"Happiness, fulfilment, wellness, achievement, that … it's actually hard to define, but I will say that those are the pillars and if those are all good, at least, as good as possible, then I think I would say there is wellbeing, for me" (P4)*.

Mental and Physical health. Lastly, participants routinely mentioned mental and physical health as key components of well-being. Our participants defined physical health as being physically healthy and functioning well with no major health complaints and mental health as being free from mental disorders that hinder mental, emotional, psychological, and social well-being and functioning. Being well, both physically and mentally, appeared to be the foundation of all further interpretations of well-being. Participant 4 asserts the centrality of mental and physical well-being stating that *"I would define [well-being] for myself as a sense of like, health first of all, like both physical and mental" (P4)*. Participant 11 echoed this

sentiment, emphasising the importance of a dualistic approach to well-being: *"Okay, so there are two broad components to it, I would say, like a physical and a mental one. Physiological and psychological components" (P11)*. With these definitions in mind, we now move on to the academic conceptualization of well-being. For the sake of brevity, mental and physical health are not repeated.

Table 1

Participants' Conceptualization of (academic) well-being

Conceptualization	Definition	Example
Balance	Experiencing a balance between several aspects of their lives, including mental and physical health, and work-life balance among others.	"Well-being for me means that I have a good balance between multiple different things."
Content	Feeling content, being at ease, feeling comfortable.	"I guess just being content with where you are in your life right now. Having the feeling like you can do, okay, in the future, like you don't have to excel necessarily, but just the feeling of being fine for the future."
Mental Health	Being free from mental disorders that hinder mental, emotional, psychological, and social well-being and functioning.	"There are two broad components to it, I would say, like a physical and a mental one [...] being at ease, being kind of relaxed, and a low stress level."
Physical Health	Being physically healthy and functioning.	"There are two broad components to it, I would say, like a physical and a mental one [...] functioning well, and yeah, just not having any major complaints."

| Competence | Being able to do the things one would like to do and/or have academic achievements. | "I do think a sense of achievement is very important. I'd like to also be knowledgeable, which, to me, is honestly more important than, for example, a grade." |

Note.

Academic Conceptualization of Well-Being

The general and academic conceptualizations of well-being understandably overlap significantly. There is no academic well-being without there first being general well-being. Thus, the categories we established for general well-being still apply in the academic context. Nonetheless, there were some noticeable differences in how participants conceptualised well-being in the academic context. While balance remained a large part, content became less important, and competence increased in significance. Mental and physical health remained necessary prerequisites for any future well-being.

Balance. While balance was perceived as a central part of both general and academic well-being, when talking about academia participants primarily referred to a balance between the hedonistic and momentary pleasures being a university student provides and their future career prospects. With studying being the primary, if not sole, focus of most students' lives, it is often a challenge for many to balance a demanding academic life, personal downtime and financial stability. For some of our participants receiving financial support from their parents was crucial in maintaining this equilibrium. Participant 4 mentions: *"I have support from my parents, so I don't necessarily have to work. […] I can, if I need it, I can focus on my studies" (P4).* To be able to focus on university allows students to do better in their exams which ultimately opens more vocational doors for them. Consequently, a balance between short-term pleasures and long-term career prospects was voiced by most participants: *"I think that well-being for me means that I have a good balance between multiple different things.*

Good balance between things that actually bring me forward in life, and also things that are fun." (P1).

Competence. Academia enhances competence, and in return, competence enhances academia. Inevitably intertwined, both academia and competence are ubiquitous parts of student life, and it comes as no surprise that our participants believed that this symbiotic pairing inevitably influences well-being. Or, aptly put: *"I love academic validation" (P4).* Universally, our participants viewed studying at the university as their primary objective. Therefore, excelling at university was seen as essential for achieving their main goal. For most, doing well at university meant earning good grades and gaining new knowledge, which led to increased levels of competence. However, when students either received bad grades or did not feel like they were learning anything new their competence decreased.

> *"A lot, yeah, actually thought about this one a lot. Because in my exchange, I felt like non-competent, like, so bad, because I did nothing, like nothing. That showed, you know, I mean, if I, for example, read a book, but don't talk about this book then I don't feel I learned something." (P5)*

With competence and well-being being so closely related, it is often a lack of the former that results in a decrease in the latter. As grades and therefore exams are primarily responsible for a student's levels of competence, exam periods regularly influence competence levels and thus well-being.

RQ2 How Exam Periods Affect Levels of Competence?

Students receive academic validation, or a lack thereof, predominantly through grades. As we have already established, grades are closely connected to feelings of competence which, in turn, influence student well-being. Thus, exam periods can be a source of validation and heightened well-being just as much as they can be a source of doubt and

distress. The following paragraphs will detail how exam periods influence student well-being and why the weight they carry fluctuates.

How Exams Impact Students' Levels of Stress

   All our participants reported some levels of stress during exam periods. However, the emotions experienced by students upon receiving their grades, whether positive or negative, largely depended on how those grades compared to their expectations.

Stress. When asking our participants how they felt exam periods were affecting their feelings of competence they echoed a sense of urgency: *"I think overall, of course, like right before the exams, there's this feeling of being very stressed, and kind of needing to get all of the content in" (P8).* Speaking about the negative consequences these elevated levels of stress have, Participant 8 further states:

> *"I'm feeling like, not very competent, and then I feel like I need to compensate for that, for like, working even more, and like, not taking care of myself anymore, like, I mean, that's like a bit over exaggerated, but like, cancelling all like, fun hobbies, and not cooking well, and stuff like those kind of things, because then I only focus on getting, like trying to get to a sense of competence." (P8)*

   An additional grievance associated with the intense and stressful period leading up to exams was voiced by Participant 11. Due to the increased need to study some students regularly isolate themselves to focus entirely on their studies: *"I'm in the library a lot. And I know other students, they sometimes learn in groups, but I haven't found a good one yet. So, I was always like studying for myself." (P11).* While exams themselves have a direct impact on student stress levels, secondary issues such as a lack of personal care and loneliness may exacerbate negative emotions connected to stress. Due to the periodic planning of exams at universities throughout the Netherlands, most students enjoy a relatively quiet period of roughly 8 weeks during the term before cramming as much material as they can absorb right

before exams begin. Naturally, some students prepare well in advance and do not experience the same last-minute stress as others, nevertheless, all exams are taken within a short time frame, no matter the antecedent study period. Consequently, regardless of how well, or how well in advance students may have prepared for exams, stress levels inevitably rise at the end of each term. Ultimately, regardless of the stress students experience when studying for exams, the grades they receive have a substantial influence on their feelings of competence. When students receive a better-than-expected grade, they feel competent, but when they receive a worse-than-expected result, they do not.

Passing Exams. Not despite, but precisely because of the strenuous nature of exams and the need to dedicate significant time and energy to them, they allow students to feel a sense of personal triumph and satisfaction if they go as they had hoped: *"Well, passing exams is definitely a source of achievement" (P6).* Passing an exam not only allows students to be proud of their achievements but also reaffirms their place at the university: "*But it definitely makes you feel competent in a way like, hey, I fit into the system of university, I can do this" (P6).* Feelings of competence that resulted from being reassured of one's place at the university also served as a motivator to continue studying and eventually graduate. Although passing an exam generally raises a student's feeling of competence, this process does not happen in isolation:

> *"I feel a lot more competent during exam times. Then also after exam times when the grade is coming in, like today for example I've got a good grade and I was like, nice, okay. Also, unfortunately, this automatic, downward upward comparison, in the standard, makes you feel more competent, for me at least." (P5)*

This statement implies that while passing an exam undoubtedly enhances a student's well-being, the extent to which it does so is more complex. However, before examining the

varying impacts of exams, we will first explore the detrimental effects failing exams has on students' sense of competence.

Failing Exams. Our participants mentioned negative emotions connected to exams much more frequently than they mentioned positive emotions. When directly asked how exam periods affected their levels of competence, Participant 2 promptly declared *"It impacts them, I think negatively" (P2).* This rather broad statement was reiterated by Participant 7 stating *"[exams] make me feel really stupid" (P7).* These rather strong and immediate negative associations with exams highlight the significant negative impact stressful exam periods may have on students. Speaking explicitly about failing an exam and how that impacted their feeling of competence, Participant 11 admitted: *"Yes, definitely. Because I failed one exam. I was like, oh, like, that made me, that was, like, the first exam that I failed ever. I was like, oh, damn, crap. And then I felt a little bit, like, not competent." (P11).* Participants regularly mentioned how failing exams negatively impacted their levels of competence: *"I feel like I really know the material and then I get a really bad grade, but it somehow feels like I'm not competent" (P3).* Exams can have both positive and negative impacts on students' feelings of competence. Numerous participants noted that not all exams are created equal, with some having a greater effect on perceived competence than others. The following paragraph will elaborate on the factors identified by our participants that contribute to some exams being more equal than others.

Why Some Exams Impact Competence Levels More Than Others

We have already established that exams evoke a wide range of feelings regarding students' perception of their levels of competence. Yet, specifically when speaking about competence, not all exams were perceived as equally influential. Our participants regularly mentioned how some exams were more representative of their competence than others. The

structure of the exam as well as the preparation strategies used by students greatly determined the extent to which the exam influenced their feelings of competence.

When exams don't matter. Voicing their occasional frustration with how exams were structured, our participants perceived some exams to be either too difficult, too easy, or poorly designed to test the student's expertise on the relevant topics. It must be noted that the number of exams that fell into either one of these categories was much lower than that of those who did not. Lamenting exams they took during the harsh COVID restrictions Participant 2 commented: *"So then, uh, sometimes you had to like open a book, uh, exams online. Um, and yeah, then you look things up because you're allowed to, um, and then you get a high grade. Yeah. [Sarcastically] Wow" (P2).* Given the unexpected and sudden surge of COVID restrictions nationwide, our participants did not blame the university directly for what they felt were poorly designed exams. The nature of online exams and their perceived insufficiency to test knowledge properly and fairly regularly left students frustrated *"And I think when I felt at least competent was my first year COVID, everything's online. You just feel like you're not even doing the study. So, when you get a grade, you don't care because, um, it kind of feels like you don't deserve that grade." (P2).* Although students will generally be more satisfied with a higher than a lower grade, it is evident from our participants' grievances that this is not the case across the board. Some students felt like certain exams did not measure their abilities appropriately. Speaking about the multiple-choice format that is most frequently used for exams in psychology:

> *"I think I would even feel different if we had a different mode of examination, like writing some essays or having some participation grades. We just, literally, you tick a box on a computer for like, 30 minutes. And then that was it. And then based on that it's judged whether you pass or not." (P6)*

Despite some students voicing their clear frustration with the multiple-choice format, few discussed how precisely they failed to accurately measure the student's knowledge:

"So, for me, it's more important that I have the feeling that I understand the subject, rather than that I have a good grade. Which is one of the reasons why for example, I'm not a big fan of the multiple-choice exams, [...] from a more personal point of view, I just think it's like, sometimes I personally noticed that I understand the subject better if I study for written exams. And if I study for a multiple choice exam, I just learn it and then I forget it afterwards. In other words, I have to really understand it if you write an essay about it." (P4)

Other participants were vaguer in describing how exams failed to live up to student's expectations. Participant 1 simply claimed that *"the exam was, in my opinion, shit" (P1)* when speaking about an exam they thought they had failed unjustly. Participant 3 was visibly upset about another exam they had perceived as unfair, contending that it *"wasn't really up to me to have a good performance" (P3)*. While these criticisms largely address the design of exams or perceived lack thereof, participants also addressed several ways in which their behaviour determined how much an exam could influence their competence. Exams for which students had studied little for, did not leave a lasting impression on them. *"Usually when I don't get like an eight or nine, then I know, it's just because I studied for one day. And I, it doesn't shake me too much in my feeling of competence" (P12)*.

When exams matter. Our participants widely conceded that academic validation mattered a great deal to them. While receiving good grades was seen as encouraging, several students highlighted that their primary source of competence was not a high grade but the feeling that a course had given them new insights.

"In my exchange, I felt like not competent, like, so bad, because I did nothing, like nothing. That showed, you know, if I, for example, read a book, but don't talk about

this book then I don't feel I learned something. But then like you, you learn a lot, or

you read a lot, and then you apply it, you get a good grade, and it also somehow

reflects that you actually learn something, and you maybe hold on to it." (P5)

The desire to obtain a deeper understanding of course literature than the minimum

amount required to pass was echoed by Participant 6:

"The first thought for me is also being well educated. I don't necessarily think grades

are like the main contributor to what is competence within, it is about how

autonomous can I also achieve some work. Like, I don't think a great example is

purely based on a book where you just read it and remember a lot of facts that make

you a competent psychologist." (P6)

Despite the clear positive and negative influence exams have on student's levels of

competence they are not solely to blame for how much they impact them. As we interviewed

our participants, it soon became evident that they each had different coping mechanisms

when it came to dealing with exam stress. The following and final research question will

explore the various coping strategies employed by students who viewed themselves as

resilient and how those helped them to counteract the negative impact exam stress had on

their feelings of competence and well-being.

RQ 3 Coping Strategies Highly Resilient Students Use to Mitigate the Negative Effects

of Exam Stress

Some of our participants perceived themselves to be more resilient than the average

student, while others admitted to regularly facing difficulties in stress coping. These more

resilient students employed several coping mechanisms such as Motivational Strategies,

Problem-Solving Strategies, and Emotional Regulation Strategies.

Motivational Strategies. Participants who thought of themselves as resilient students

often viewed setbacks, such as poor grades, not as failures but as powerful motivators to improve in the future. In other words, an initial setback allowed these students to reevaluate their situation and charge forward with even more determination when the next exam cycle inevitably approached: *"When I get a bad grade, that's a big motivator for me...it's like a rush, almost like a dopamine rush" (P2).* These students did not dwell on the negative emotions they experienced after receiving a bad grade, but decidedly moved on after a brief period of reassessment: *"So I take this feedback...I hate myself then for a few days, but then I take this hatred into something positive like this, this drive off like, oh, no, no, I got a bad grade, now I have to do way more" (P5).* For all the motivation these students harness from negative grades, they still allow themselves to feel the negative emotions that accompany them, albeit only temporarily. It is key to note that our participants repeatedly emphasised the strong conviction they had in their abilities. To maintain a positive outlook and fuel motivation after a disappointing grade it is vital for students to have faith in their ability to do better: *"I have a lot of trust in myself that if I put in a lot of work, I will get the results" (P6).* More resilient students habitually differentiated between who they were and what they did. When exams did not go as planned, they did not believe that their character was to blame but rather their actions.

> *"Like, I know sometimes the lack of competence, like, I hear that from my friends. Like, I doubt too. I think, oh, shit, how am I going to manage? But I don't tell myself, 'oh, my gosh, I think I'm not competent enough to do this', or even worse, like, "I'm stupid" or something like that." (P11)*

Active Problem-Solving. Although it was common for more resilient students to find motivation in bad results and trust their ability, it was the action that followed these feelings that allowed them to overcome negative emotions. These students actively sought solutions and took concrete actions to address the challenges they were facing: *"I think generally, um,*

when something bad happens, um, after like a moment of shock and of letting it out and so on, I'm also usually always already thinking, okay, what to do after that situation" (P8). It is vital to note that these students do not advocate for simply ignoring negative emotions resulting from a bad grade. Rather, they recommend allowing these emotions limited space to grow before decisively moving on.

> *"I don't go into shrimp mode and then just stay for three days in my bed. I'm like, oh, shit, it doesn't make any sense. Yeah, it drives me, like, this panic of, oh, shit, I need to study more."* (P8)

Accepting the negative emotions that come with failing an exam while decisively emphasising the need to act Participant 4 affirms: *"If I fail something, yes, of course, it's annoying, but it's mostly like my reaction usually is just you have to sit down, study more and then for the next time you just get it done"* (P4). Speaking about their strategies to admit their emotions, while making sure to not linger for too long, Participant 7 reflects on their reaction to receiving negative feedback:

> *"I let myself just sit with the bad feeling just for a tiny bit, because they're usually valid feelings. And I don't just want to bury them, because at some point, you will just explode if you do that. So I let myself sit a bit and then I reflect on what they said. I might also talk to some other friends about it. And then, once I feel like I have the mental energy to actually deal with it, that's when I try to actually take action against whatever the stressor was like either talking to the person who caused the issue or trying to figure out a better way to study for an exam that I failed or something like that."* (P7)

Emotion Regulation. To effectively cope with the negative emotions associated with exams several of our participants reported simply accepting what has happened. By acknowledging

that they cannot change what has already happened to them, they free themselves from the strains laid upon them.

> *"I think these things just happen and, and my opinion, that's my goal on this, is that it doesn't really make sense to dwell on your problems, dwell on the things that happened and rather just go on and do things that you can change, things that you can still change." (P2)*

To prevent their negative emotions from spiralling out of control, resilient students shared that they would see the inevitable emotional turbulence during exam periods as temporary. Participant 9 stoically reports: *"Just having the faith that is going to be fine because it will be if you just keep working on it" (P9)*. Similarly, Participant 4 stresses the ephemeral nature of exams: *"I won't be stressed about it because at the end of the day, it's just an exam" (P4)*. As stated earlier, although exams are important milestones in a student's journey, they do not encompass the whole of their academic experience.

> *"So, I think over the years, I've grown to accept the fact that bad things can happen. I have bad reactions to bad things. But that is just human. And, yeah, I have a lot of friends who do it the same way. So I feel like I shouldn't blame myself for being upset because I'm not choosing to be upset." (P7)*

Our participants reported several ways of dealing with exam stress such as using bad grades as a motivator, having faith in their ability to do better, allowing negative emotions to happen, making a plan and acting decisively on it, and accepting the present knowing that it will pass. The following discussion section will put their answers into the larger literary and academic framework of resilience in the academic context.

Discussion

The main aim of this study was to gain an insight into the conceptualisation of student well-being within the context of academia, how exam periods influence students' levels of

competence and how resilience plays a role in coping with the emotions thereof. The analysis was conducted within the theoretical framework of Self Determination Theory which has competence as one of its key components (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Additionally, the concept of resilience was factored in. Through this research, our team sought to contribute to the conceptualisation of well-being specifically in the academic context, as well as provide an overview of how students may successfully cope with the pressures of exam periods. The following section will reflect on the results of the research and provide more context and interpretation of the outcome.

RQ1. For the conceptualisation of well-being and especially student well-being, we found that our participants most frequently defined the former as consisting of balance, content and mental and physical health while the latter was seen as including balance, competence and mental and physical health. As presented by Kiltz (2024), the conceptualisation of student well-being is far from definite and includes several individual as well as contextual factors. While the understanding of well-being we identified through our participants' answers has, per se, not been mentioned in any other study, their conceptualisation of the term broadly aligns with the academic consensus. Within the context of academia, the importance of feeling competent as a factor for well-being became increasingly evident. With this perspective, the second research question examined how exams influence students' competence and how this is mirrored in their well-being.

RQ2. Here we inquired how exams influenced our participants' feelings of competence. The variety in their answers led us to investigate why certain exams seemed to have a more significant effect than others. While passing exams is an inherent part of studying at a university, unfortunately for many students, so is failing them. This ties to the fact that all our participants reported some level of exam stress during their studies. As we were coding the interviews we realised, much to our dismay, that the negative aspects of exams were

mentioned significantly more often than positive ones. The stress our participants reportedly experienced led to a temporary shift in balance between academia and their personal lives, which led some students to focus solely on their upcoming exams to the detriment of much else. Early adulthood is an immensely stressful period marked by major physiological and psychological changes (Fujita & Diener, 2005). As those who opt to go to university will depart from their childhood home, leave most of their friends behind, and need to navigate an entirely new environment with the least financial security they ever had (Chiang et al., 2019; Matud et al., 2020). With several studies suggesting that these compounding effects lead to worse mental health in students' future lives, it becomes detrimental for research to focus on how these issues might be mitigated (Liu et al., 2019). Additionally, we briefly analysed why some exams affect students' perceived competence more than others. In doing so, we found that our participants were more likely to be influenced by exams when they were fair, moderately challenging and gave the student the feeling that they had learned something new. Considering the substantial variety in stress levels our participants reported, coupled with the several challenges university students face, it becomes clear that the issue of student well-being is incredibly nuanced and challenging to discern.

RQ3. For our final research question, we asked each of our participants if they thought of themselves as resilient students and followed up with questions about their coping mechanisms. As the omnipresent stress students experience at university is amplified during exam periods, we inquired how our participants bounced back from setbacks related to their grades. The complex interplay of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and their relationship to rewards has been widely discussed in psychological literature for decades (Lin et al., 2003). Several studies have found that extrinsic reward leads to a decrease in intrinsic motivation, yet this effect is less pronounced in college students than children (Deci et al., 1999). Although psychological research generally finds that punishments, such as bad grades, are

more likely to lower intrinsic motivation, much like extrinsic rewards, our participants frequently mentioned using bad grades as a motivator to do better next time (Butler & Winne, 1985). This underscores that qualitative research can reveal insights that quantitative research may overlook. Furthermore, our participants emphasised the need to actively search for solutions and implement them. The devastating impact of rumination on well-being is well-established in the scientific literature (Watkins & Roberts, 2020) and it comes as no surprise that our participants echoed this idea continuously. Our resilient students had faith in their ability to do better and were thus not disproportionately shaken by a bad grade. Believing themselves to be the masters of their fate and the captains of their souls, these students did not surrender themselves to external forces but rather focused on how they could improve future outcomes through their own actions. This high internal locus of control has been well-established in psychological literature and is linked to greater personal responsibility, proactive behaviours, and improved outcomes in various domains such as academic performance, mental health, and job satisfaction (Rotter, 1966; Findley & Cooper, 1983). Lastly, our participants emphasised the importance of accepting what has already transpired, recognizing that they cannot change past events. This mindset aligns with the timeless wisdom of Stoic philosophy, which emphasises focusing on what is within one's control, as well as with modern therapeutic approaches like ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy), both of which are deeply rooted in Greek philosophy. This enduring wisdom empowered our participants to navigate exam periods with greater resilience and fostered a deeper sense of inner peace and emotional balance.

Implications. Due to the ambiguous nature of the term "well-being", quantitative research understandably struggles to clearly define and measure it in a consistent and universally accepted manner (Voukelatou et al., 2021). For this reason, the need for qualitative research becomes increasingly vital as it can capture the comprehensive picture of well-being more

extensively. Our research contributes to the understanding of well-being within the academic context, highlighting the intricate interplay between competence, resilience, and coping strategies during exam periods. One of the key insights gained is the pivotal role of resilience in mediating the negative impacts of exam stress on perceived competence and overall well-being. While previous literature has extensively discussed the importance of competence and resilience individually, our study offers a nuanced perspective on how resilient students specifically employ coping mechanisms, such as motivational strategies, active problem-solving, and emotional regulation, to navigate academic pressures effectively. As all students inevitably face exam periods, fostering their ability to bounce back from the stressors they will experience will allow students to thrive not only academically but also personally.

Strengths and Limitations. Our research boasts several strengths. Given the obscure nature of the concept of well-being, it is often qualitative research such as ours that allows various aspects of the idea to come to light. With our approach, we granted the participants unrestrained freedom to voice their thoughts and allowed the complexity of their minds to shine through. It is said that love cannot be measured with a ruler, and despite extensive research on human emotions, it is evident that the truth of well-being equally lies beyond mere metrics. However, certain limitations should be taken into consideration when reviewing the results of our study. Firstly, the entirety of the research was performed by undergraduate students who did not receive any formal training in qualitative methods, leaving them more prone to errors than students who did. Despite their mighty efforts, they will inevitably have made some blunders along the way. Secondly, although we took great care to recruit participants who were unfamiliar with us and our work, our selective sample of undergraduate psychology students at the University of Groningen makes it difficult to generalise our findings. Additionally, all participants agreed to partake in our lengthy study with no monetary reward making it possible that they were disproportionately interested in

the topic of student well-being and thus not representative of the entire student body. Thirdly, the coding procedure was a subjective effort we undertook knowing which research questions we would need them to answer for us.

Conclusion

University is tough. From leaving the place they have called home all their lives for the first time, to navigating an entirely new social sphere, to adjusting to a new and often deprived financial situation and to do all that while successfully passing exams designed to test the limits of their knowledge is no simple task. This paper has provided a glimpse into the minds of 12 young students going through this most precarious of times and offered the reader an understanding of how they conceptualise their well-being. Furthermore, we explored how these 12 individuals deal with high-intensity stress periods and learned that they employ several coping strategies. Their answers provide a potential foundation upon which future research could build intervention strategies to aid students in their constant struggle with well-being within academia. Future research may test more meticulously how resilience and coping strategies differ amongst students and how the more beneficial ways of dealing with stress, such as those we touched upon in this paper, may be beneficial to students. It is precisely because of the difficulties that many students face during their university years that they go on to become the doctors, engineers, mathematicians, psychologists, professors, scientists, and much more that shape the world towards a better future. It would be a tragedy if their contributions to the well-being of entire generations comes at the cost of their own.

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    June, 1946; signed on 22 July 1946 by the representatives of 61 States (Official

    Records of the World Health Organization, no. 2, p. 100) and entered into force on 7
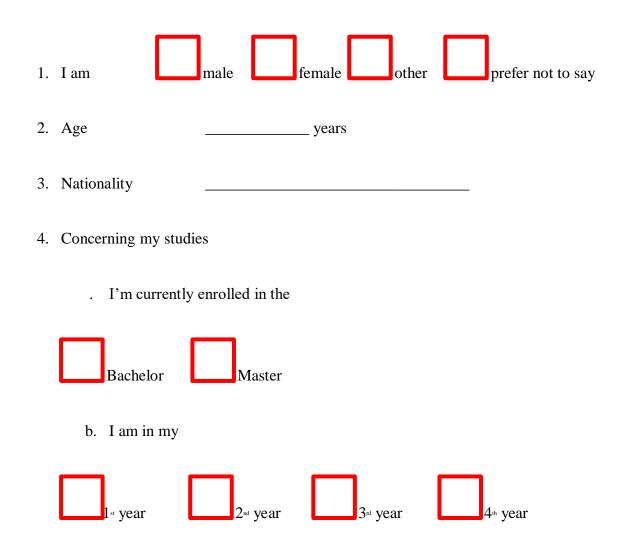
    April 1948.

Appendix A

Demographics Questionnaire

Demographic Questionnaire Study: Understanding Well-being in Academia through Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Participant _____ (filled out by the researcher)

We kindly request some brief socio-demographic information from you as a participant. This information will assist us in understanding your responses within context.

1. I am ☐ male ☐ female ☐ other ☐ prefer not to say

2. Age _____ years

3. Nationality _____

4. Concerning my studies

   . I'm currently enrolled in the

   ☐ Bachelor ☐ Master

   b. I am in my

   ☐ 1st year ☐ 2nd year ☐ 3rd year ☐ 4th year

If you have any further questions concerning the interview study, do not hesitate to ask. Again, thank you very much for participating in our study and helping us get better insights into well-being at the university.

Contact: L.Ballato@rug.nl   Bachelor Thesis Project
University of Groningen   Well-being in Academia

Appendix B

Informed Consent

Informed Consent for Interview Study within the Project: Understanding Well-being in Academia through Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

April 2024

I, [Participant's Name], hereby consent to participate in the current research conducted by [Researcher's Name], a student at the University of Groningen. Contact: [Researcher's Contact Information]

I have agreed to participate in the study "Understanding Well-being in Academia through Self-Determination Theory (SDT)," understanding that my participation is entirely voluntary. I acknowledge that my data will be kept confidential. I reserve the right to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty and to request that my responses not be used. The researcher is responsible for the secure storage of the data.

I will have the opportunity to review a summary of my interview and indicate whether I wish particular parts not to be considered in the analysis. The data will be only used for educational purposes and will not be published.

 I read and understood the information form, which provides more detailed information about the research.

Date: [Participant's Date]

Signature Participant:

Date: [Researcher's Date]

Signature Researcher:

Contact: Dr Laura Ballato
l.ballato@rug.nl
University of Groningen

Appendix C

Script

Q nr.	**Conceptualization of Well-Being**
1	In general, what does well-being mean to you? (When you hear "well-being" – what comes to mind?)
	Self-Determination-Theory

	Now let's move on to Self-determination-theory.
	 Self-Determination Theory, or SDT, is a psychological theory of motivation that explains how people strive for growth, connection, and well-being. At its core, SDT suggests that everyone has three basic, innate needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness.
	     ☐ Autonomy is about feeling in control of your own actions and decisions.
	     ☐ Competence involves feeling skilled and capable in what you do.
	     ☐ And relatedness is about having meaningful connections with others.
	 According to SDT, fulfilling these three needs is essential for psychological health, motivation, and happiness.
	 For the questions that follow, please try your best to stay within the framework of academia and the three psychological needs of SDT competence, relatedness and autonomy.
	 Do you have any questions about SDT?

2	What is autonomy within academia for you?
	When you look back at your studies, were there certain periods during which you felt more or less autonomous? ☐ How was this need (not)met in your first year compared to now?
	What importance did autonomy play over the course of your studies?
3	What makes you feel competent within academia?

	When you look back at your studies, were there certain periods during which you felt more or less competent?
	     ☐ How was this need (not)met in your first year compared to now?
	     ☐ How do exam periods impact your feelings of competence?
	     ☐ How do you feel your personal level of resilience, your ability to bounce back, influences your feelings of competence?

	What importance did competence play over the course of your studies?
4	What is relatedness within academia for you?
	When you look back at your studies, were there certain periods during which you felt more or less relatedness?

	☐ How was this need (not)met in your first year compared to now? How has your relationships influenced your persistence in academia? ☐ Can you describe a time when you felt a sense of belonging in academia? ☐ Have there been any experiences where your relationships posed difficulties or distractions during your studies? *(In case they have answered this earlier can be omitted)*
	What importance did relatedness play over the course of your studies?
Values and Identity	
5	What does an important decision look like to you?
	What do you prioritize when making important decisions during your study years? ☐ Did it change through the years of study? If so, how?
6	What motivates you within academia? ☐ Why?
7	How did you choose your third-year courses? *(For first and second year students: how* will you *choose…?)*
8	What does it mean for you to be a student?
9	In what ways do you think your student identity influences your overall well-being in academia? *(If the student is unsure what is meant with student identity, refer them to their answer to the previous question, as this captures their student identity.)* (Identity: How you see and express yourself)
10	How easily do you bounce back from a stressor such as not passing an exam within your academic life? ☐ How do you feel this has impacted your sense of well-being within academia?
Influencing well-being	
11	Think of a moment where you had the feeling your well-being was fulfilled. ☐ How did your perception of being a student contribute to feeling well-being in that very moment? ☐ Were there some other <u>internal</u> factors that contributed to that feeling of fulfilled well-being?
Who is responsible for student well-being	
12	Who do you think is responsible for student well-being? *(Ask this open question first, before asking specifically about themselves or university. If they already talk more about one or the other, let them, don't redirect them into talking about one thing first.)*

13	To what extent are you responsible for your own well-being in academia?
	What are the actions you have taken to enhance your experience of well-being? (*If the student does not really know what to say, remind them of the three needs.*) ◻ What motivated you to take this initiative?
	Are there any behaviors that you wanted to implement, but have not done so so far? ◻ Why?
14	To what extent is university responsible for student well-being?
	What is the university doing right now to foster student's basic psychological needs? *(If the student does not really know what to say, remind them of the three needs)*
	What do you think the university can do to further enhance student's basic psychological needs? (*If the student does not really know what to say, remind them of the three needs*)
	What were you missing from the university with regards to fostering the three needs in your first year?
15	Is there anything else that we haven't talked about yet that you think influences your well-being?
	Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix D

Codebook

Conceptualization Well-Being

Category	Code	Description	Example
Well-Being	CONC WB: Balance	Experiencing a balance between several aspects of their lives, including mental and physical health, and work-life balance among others.	"So general well being includes, like, many different well beings that are, in a way, more stable, like, the balance is quite stable"
	CONC WB: Competence	Being able to do the things one would like to do and/or have academic achievements	"Well, I do think a sense of achievement is very important. For me. It's yeah, it's, I like to feel like I've achieved something I'd like to also be knowledgeable about that, which, to me is honestly more important than, for example, a grade."
	CONC WB: Content	Feeling content, being at ease, feeling comfortable	"I guess just being content with where you are in your life right now. And like having the feeling like you can do, okay, in the future, like you don't have to excel necessarily, but just the feeling of being fine for the future."
	CONC WB: Mental health	Being free from mental disorders that hinder mental, emotional, psychological, and social well-being and functioning	"I guess physical and mental health kind of? Yeah, are like the two main things that are necessary for wellbeing for me. Yeah."
	CONC WB: Physical health	Being physically healthy and functioning	"Okay, so there are two broad components to it, I would say, like a physical and a mental one. Physiological and psychological component."
	CONC WB: Positive experiences	Having positive experiences and pursuing happiness	"Overall, I think, for me, it's always a state of balance, where I feel like I kind of am on top of everything that I want to do. just like being content with what I do, and then having positive experiences, I would say. "
	CONC WB: Relatedness	Interacting with other people, having friends and feeling supported.	"And you're surrounded by people who support you and you feel loved by it's also really important."
Autonomy	CONC AUTO: Being in control	Being in control of your own actions and choices	"I feel like it is quite important because you want to feel like you have control of your studies, right? You want to feel like this is what you want to do and what you chose to do"
	CONC AUTO: Decision-making	Making decisions how to study, prepare for an exam, or how to engage with the material.	"And like, the less I can choose which materials to use, the less autonomy I feel like I have, somehow"

Category	Code	Description	Example
	CONC AUTO: Freedom	Having the freedom to do what you would like in your studies, like participating in extracurricular activities etc.	"You choose your own path, and you feel the freedom"
	CONC AUTO: Independence	Feeling like you can do something by yourself, without needing support from others	"Yeah, and to not need, like to rely on someone else. Like of course, you need the professor to like in the lecture and everything, like provide you with the materials and then that you don't need additional or great additional amounts of help like a tutor outside of that you can with the help from the professor and like the normal materials, develop your own grasp material without additional offset."
Competence	CONC COMP: Comparison to others	Comparing own achievements, skills, grades, etc. to those of other people.	"I would compare myself maybe to glimpses of what I would see, how other people would deal with the situation"
	CONC COMP: Deeper understanding	Being able to go beyond the passive receiving of information from courses, to being able to have deeper discussions about the material.	"Seeing what you think about things and just being like very engaged in the academic world"
	CONC COMP: Effort	Putting genuine effort into your studies and trying to complete courses successfully.	"I think a competence that I have is I know how much I can do and what is enough. And I can really just put enough effort into it. So there's something that is satisfying for me."
	CONC COMP: Extracurricular activities	Participating in activities (academic and not) outside of the normal curriculum..	"I think that grades are probably the biggest source of feeling of competence and from academia. But like for me, probably also being in the Honors College just because obviously, you need to have certain grades to get in and you obviously also need to apply and then get accepted and do more things next to all the other things you already have to do."
	CONC COMP: Grades	Understanding competence in connection to grades	"Yeah, I guess I mean, the framework of grades, for example, and it's already contributing to feeling competent... "
	CONC COMP: Having the resources	Having resources available that allow the student to live up to their full potential.	"It helps me when there's a thorough proper syllabus, and when the, when the people around me like my mentor, my teacher, as well is willing to put in the effort to help me and to give me like the space and the time and the effort that to make the sessions well."
	CONC COMP: Learning	Being able to successfully study and retain the information gained during one's studies.	"I felt like non competent, like, so bad, because I did nothing like nothing. That showed off, you know, I only mean, if I, for example, read a book, but don't talk about this book. And I don't feel I learned something."

Category	Code	Description	Example
	CONC COMP: Personalized feedback	Receiving personalised feedback from a professor or teaching assistant.	"If you have like smaller courses, and then you get feedback, that's actually really good. And then you see, okay, I can improve here. I'm already doing good here, but maybe I can improve."
	CONC COMP: Resilience	Being able to bounce back from setbacks such as bad grades.	"If I would feel less resilient, I would feel less competent. Um, Yeah, I guess it made me it made my feeling of competence more stable."
	CONC COMP: Self-development	Enhancing one's academic and personal skills.	"I definitely also had a learning curve on how to approach them and how to interpret certain things. So kind of as a scientist. I think I've definitely gained some skills that helped me navigate in the academic sphere."
	CONC COMP: Self-efficacy	Knowing what one is capable of doing and believing that one is able to live up to that level of skill.	"I think a competence that I have is I know how much I can do and what is enough. And I can really just put enough effort into it. So there's something that is satisfying for me."
Relatedness	CONC RELA: Belonging	A sense of connection with and feeling that one fits in the group.	"Relatedness is for me, once feeling related with my fellow students, feeling of belonging, maybe also developing the identity of being a psychology student."
	CONC RELA: Having things in common	Sharing common fate, similar interests, opinions, and having similar worldviews.	"And so I would say that that's part of relatedness that you like are working together with others. But I also think in lectures for example, it can be when you because oftentimes lectures, a bit more interactive that you can see that other people share your point of views or have similar ideas and thoughts about things as you do."
	CONC RELA: Connections fellow students	Having peers to exchange ideas with, learn from, and study with. these peers also be friends who support each other.	"...Ask my friends if they understood something that I might not have understood. Exchange notes, like things that people will use to study for exams and everything like that. So it helped with having a support system, but also to help with the studies because you have someone there going through the same exact thing. "
	CONC RELA: Connections teachers	Being able to approach, talk to the teachers, asking them questions about the content.	"...and then probably also having connections to researchers having connections to, to lectures having, feeling like I can approach them and ask questions. Just probably the opposite of just feeling alone and feeling ostracized."
	CONC RELA: Content of classes	Having a sense that the content of the class is interesting and meaningful. Sparking a curiousity to learn more about the subject.	"The content, actually, the content, because when I read the content, meaning also, it's really interesting, and I liked it a lot. But the negative part of it is sometimes the extrinsic motivation, I would love to engage way more"

Category	Code	Description	Example
	CONC RELA: Having friends	Fostering meaningful connections with friends within and outside academia that one could relate to and connect over positive and negative experiences.	"I think for me, mainly, this means having, having friends, having people that understand me that go through the same things I'm going through right now. And being able to connect to them, talk to them."
	CONC RELA: Familiarity	Being acquainted with people in the lectures, faculty and having the comfort of recognizing the place.	"I also think lectures help if there are people, a lot of people showing up. It's nice to be in this big group and then have your own little group that you always sit with, but you recognize all the faces and it's comfortable."
	CONC RELA: Empathy	Ability to understand and share the feelings, thoughts and experiences of another person.	"I'm in the Red Cross, in a committee, and we wanted to do like a party thing and we wanted to like the donations to go to mental health (...) I think we already like, quite like a bunch of like just more human people, if that makes sense."
	CONC RELA: Physical presence	Attending university in person, having face-to-face interactions as opposed to online education and communication.	"Like at this point, I'm in Heyman's like every day and I'm meeting my friends here and I'm having meetings and I'm kind of connected to a lot of people because of the activities I'm doing within academia. So then I think both on a like very kind of physical hands on way that really, really, really helps with my sense of belonging for compared to the beginning where I was just at home, but never really at uni."
	CONC RELA: Studying with other people	Having people one could study with to stay connected and motivated.	"Having friends in your, that you can study with, um, or just chill with think, um, it really helps me. It really, like I need social pressure to study as well."
	CONC RELA: Support	Having supportive others within and outside of academia to help deal with setbacks, persevere; engaging in the mutual aid with others in the pursuit of current goals.	"Ask my friends if they understood something that I might not have understood. Exchange notes, like things that people will use to study for exams and everything like that. So it helped with having a support system, but also to help with the studies because you have someone there going through the same exact thing."

Influencing Factors Well-Being

Category	Code	Description	Example
Internal factors		Things about the participant more internally that affects their well-being (in academia)	

Category	Code	Description	Example
	INT F: Achievement oriented	Being hardworking, goal-oriented and/or aiming for high grades	"It's really important, like I don't know this is like a belief that has been instilled in me by my parents for so long. It's just like okay, work is the most important thing. You need to work you need to earn you need to like just be a hardworking person. "
	INT F: Attitude / mindset	Participant's perception that mindset one adopts can shape one's perceptions, attitudes, and reactions to life events, and thus affects one's overall well-being	"I'm a bit of an over thinker, and then I'm having sometimes those kind of downward spirals, where I think, just because this doesn't work well right now, or I'm so stressed, how will I ever get out of this acute phase of stress? And then I'm also kind of thinking five steps ahead and then like in a negative direction. "
	INT F: Comparing self to others	Participant's tendency to compare themselves to other people	"Yeah, because I thought that everybody else had already their groups and their people and stuff, and then I was a bit like, I don't know, like, not the odd one out, but like, like, I did know some people, but I wasn't so close friends with them that I thought, okay, or I thought, okay, they're in person friends already, and I kind of need to join in and stuff, and in the end it worked. But also, like, at first I remember that was very intimidating as well."
	INT F: Confidence / self-efficacy	Participant's general sense of confidence and self-efficacy, their perception of their ability to succeed in a given situation	"But there was definitely a moment where I trusted myself and had self-confidence that I can actually do it. And that felt really good. And trusting then I had a lot of motivation for the next block and kind of carried that momentum. to actually staying on top this time and not pushing it to the end again."
	INT F: Mental health	Mental health (problems) including e.g., depression, ADHD.	I think, so, my ADHD diagnosis is something that made me insecure through, and still does, makes me insecure throughout life, because you kind of get a stamp, like, you're less capable than the rest of the people. So that really bothered me in the beginning, because you start a new thing, you start new studies, you start new things every year, even though it's one bachelor's. And then you're like, okay, so this is different for me than for other people, but what does that mean for me? Does that mean that I cannot do this, maybe? But I really got over that now, I think. I think that will start again when I do a master's.
	INT F: Openness to experience	Participant's openness to experience, learning and sense of curiosity	"Openness for experiences. Yeah, those experiences then contributed to the well-being. And yeah, being curious also. It's kind of the same, they both play into that, like having new experiences"
External factors		External factors affecting well-being in academia	

Category	Code	Description	Example
	EXT F: Online education	Participants perception that online eduction had a critical role in their well-being in academia	"And I think when I felt at least competent was my first year COVID, everything's online. You just feel like you're not even doing the study. So when you get a grade, you don't care because, um, it kind of feels like you don't deserve that grade."
	EXT F: Parents	Participants perception that parents had a critical role in their well-being in academia	"I just saved myself the money of renting and stayed at home which was the right decision in my opinion for me"
	EXT F: Weather	Participants' perception that weather influences their well-being in academia	"the weather that's definitely, also a very important factor, obviously"
	EXT F: Workload Outside Degree	Particpants perception that a workload outside their psychology degree had a critical role in their well-being in academia	"Because I, for me, I'm working right now. Quite a lot, probably more than I should. But then doing honours College, everything, that's not really possible."

BPN Fulfillment

Category	Code	Description	Example
Autonomy	BPN: AUTO: Fulfilled	Expression of an experience/situation within their studies in which their need for autonomy was met.	"Yeah, I think that especially now, like in my third and fourth year, where I could actually choose subjects and so on, that also played a big role because, um, I could do what I was interested in and I could also try out different subjects and so on. So I think I really enjoyed that. So then I think that was good."
	BPN: AUTO: Not fulfilled	Expression of an experience/situation within their studies in which their need for autonomy was not met, either being too low or too high.	"But I would have still preferred if I didn't have to repeat statistics this many times. And this whole thing caused like a study delay, and then it affected like the whole rest of my studies, and it made it quite chaotic. So I, yeah, I really didn't like that part. I would have liked to choose to study that life on myself if I really wanted it, right."
Competence	BPN: COMP: Fulfilled	Expression of an experience/situation within their studies in which their need for competence was met.	"My feeling of competence was quite high during the whole first year. And that was definitely getting more in the first weeks. Like when I started, I thought, okay, well, I'm not sure if I'm going to pass all these

Category	Code	Description	Example
			courses, and it's going to be so hard. And then, after the first exams, I thought, okay, well, I'm fine. Alright."
	BPN: COMP: Not fulfilled	Expression of an experience/situation within their studies in which their need for competence was not met.	"When you study for something, and then you feel okay, it was alright. But then you get the results back and it was just not right at all. So I think that was definitely one of my low points in terms of competence."
Relatedness	BPN: RELA: Fulfilled	Expression of an experience/situation within their studies in which their need for relatedness was met.	"I think it's not hard for me to fit in or to at least have the feeling that I belong, and I think that also makes me feel very safe and secure "
	BPN: RELA: Not Fulfilled	Expression of an experience/situation within their studies in which their need for relatedness was not met.	"I didn't have any bond within my academic skills mentor group in the first year, like none. I wouldn't even recognize over half of the people that were in there. Uh, even though it's really meant to be a learning community, right? Like you're meant to be kind of like a friend group, support each other. So it was really lonely."

Importance of BPN

Code	Description	Example
Importance autonomy	Personal evaluation of the need for autonomy in academia to be of high or low importance	"I would say it's quite important for me, just because that, again, makes it way more interesting for me if I have autonomy, that makes sense, if I don't have autonomy, I feel like a lot of times it feels forced and then I get bored by the tasks."
Importance competence	Personal evaluation of the need for competence in academia to be of high or low importance	"Relatedness I think, from a social aspect is very important to me, but from an academic life perspective, not so important, I don't really link it to the concept of my academic self."
Importance relatedness	Personal evaluation of the need for relatedness in academia to be of high or low importance	"It's something I think about a lot, because I compare myself a lot to other people and friends. And if I don't feel competent in my studies, I start spiraling."

Aspects Linked to Students' Identities

Code	Description	Example
IDENTIY	Aspects that are linked to students' identities	
ID: COMM HIGH	Showing a high commitment to plans and decisions	"Yeah. I mean, I would like to do therapy. So I would choose my courses according to that."
ID: COMM LOW	Showing a low commitment to plans and decisions or not having concrete plans	"But overall, I think I just chose it based on what sounds interesting in a moment. One course I chose just for the vibes because all of my friends took it"
ID: EXPL HIGH	Demonstrating a high level of curiosity and a strong tendency to explore in one's decisions and actions.	"I'm just here to kind of maximize the whole experience but also really, like, I took my time going to university (...) I'm here because I want to learn stuff here because I want to see what's out there and I think there's kind of motivation"
ID: EXPL LOW	Demonstrating a low level of curiosity and a weak tendency to explore in one's decisions and actions.	"Then I did forensics, sexology, CBT, also just because I wanted to really dive into it. And yeah, so I didn't even look at the other courses."
ID: Student	Identifying as a student and acknowledging that this conceptualization influences other aspects of their lives	"I have like a positive image of being a student. Like, it's not like I think being a student is a burden or something. So like, overall, I think it's cool learning experience. I think that does, like positively influence my academic well being."
ID: Belonging	feeling accepted, valued, and connected to a group or community	"And then like, giving the presentation about it felt like really good. And everyone was like, That was so good. And then I felt like okay, maybe this is something that I that I do like belong to also."
ID: Being student relates to WB	Explicitly mentioning how being a student influences well-being	"Being a student gives me a good feeling, a good place in life right now."
ID: Development	Expressing that one developed mentally	"hink coming from where I came from, anxious little first year girl, I'm just really proud of myself for everything that I've done."

Aspects Linked to Students' Values

Code	Description	Example
VALUE: Achievement	Valuing ambition and personal success by striving for competence and social recognition	"I feel like it's also a lot about proving people you're competent, which is a shame. Yeah, but it's qualities you need. In order to get this bachelor, masters to go do a PhD. It's really important."

Code	Description	Example
VALUE: Hedonism	Prioritising enjoyment and instant gratification; demonstrating a tendency towards pleasure-seeking	"I would never say no to a social gathering, and also the first two years were hedonistic, so always like seeking fun and immediate pleasure over the future orientation and maybe like reaching a long term goal."
VALUE: Knowledge	Perceiving knowledge, learning, and acquiring skills as intrinsically motivating	"I love learning new things. I love, it's really exciting to me to come as close to a truth as possible, even though that also doesn't exist, you know? Being so close to the newest developments really excites me and motivates me. I like knowledge."
VALUE: Relationships	Perceiving belongingness, connections as important; being mindful of others' needs and personal impact on others	"I focus a lot on my boyfriend, because we plan to have a future together. So I try to, like consider how what I choose might affect him. Because if we plan on actually living together later, I don't know what but if we want to keep this relationship going, I can't be selfish in my decisions because somebody else also is going to be affected by it."
VALUE: Security	Inclination towards safer and more familiar options and/ or predetermined path and structure	"But like freedom is good in theory, but for me, I feel like it gives me too many options and it's so scary."
VALUE: Self-Direction	Placing a high importance on freedom, exploration, independent choices and actions	"I really don't like when I don't have the feeling that I can do what I want to do. I don't know, I really feel like I want to work to be able to do what I feel like, in a way that makes sense. Like, I want to have the freedom to choose my next step."
VALUE: Self-Transcendence	Striving for a positive change for something larger than just oneself, contributing to the enhancement of others' welfare	"I really need to like feel like just find something meaningful to my life that I can use. I dedicate myself to and will help people and help myself."
VALUE: Stimulation	Preference for novelty, challenge, as well as displaying oppenness to experience	"Openness for experiences. Yeah, those experiences then contributed to the well-being. And yeah, being curious also. It's kind of the same, they both play into that, like having new experiences and also the, I don't know how to call it, the need for change. It's something that's not going good. I'm like, okay, I need to change something. I want to change something."

Aspects Linked to Students' Resilience

Code	Description	Example
Motivational strategies	Students use bad grades as a motivator to do better	"When I get a bad grade, that's a big motivator for me...it's like a rush, almost like a dopamine rush"

Code	Description	Example
Active problem solving	Students act on their willingness to change	"I think generally, um, when something bad happens, um, after like a moment of shock and of letting it out and so on, I'm also usually always already thinking, okay, what to do after that situation"
Emotional regulation	Students are not overly emotional about setbacks and remain calm	"Just having the faith that is going to be fine because it will be if you just keep working on it"

Factors Influencing Relatedness in Academia

Category	Code	Description	Example
RELA HIGH		Positively affecting relatedness.	
	RELA HIGH: Connection to others	Feeling connected to other people.	"I think it's really important to feel like you're not alone. I think if I felt very lonely, I don't know if I could have made it through this degree, because I think it's so important to have friends that you can just complain to, um, and that are going through the same thing as you."
	RELA HIGH Institution	This can be interpreted as the university, faculty or current year of study(i.e first, second year etc.)	"Like first, I just had the student assistant job for like a year and then beginning of last year I started the teaching job...but like I'm creating, creating and changing education like on a kind of daily basis with my jobs and I think that also really really helped me helped with my sense of belonging and also kind of forming that identity"
	RELA HIGH:Support network	Having a support network, such as family, friends, and/or a partner	"Well, I think it's important I think the support I received like that was important. And I do think that definitely, being here being like present physically at the university at the student life like going to the lectures in person, that's also in a sense, part of connectedness."
RELA LESS		Negatively affecting relatedness.	
	RELA LESS: (Lack of) Connection to others	Feel disconnected from other people.	"I think it's like almost impossible to do it without having people around you. And of course it's about psychology, but I want to compare to [Censored second Bachelor study] because like, I feel a lot less related to the people there, they're younger."
	RELA LESS: Exam period	The exam season	"When it's exam phase? Less, because I'm in the library a lot. And I know other students, they sometimes learn in groups, but I haven't found a good one yet. So I was always like studying for myself. Yeah, so on that period, I feel less."

Category	Code	Description	Example
	RELA LESS: Practical groups	Assigned groups in the practical courses for the bachelors	"...Everything when we had to, like contribute something ourselves, we pretty much had to do it individually. So there wasn't really a lot of relatedness. And it was just me and this paper that I had to write for my academic skills or something."
	RELA LESS: Unsure about future	Uncertainty about the future	"...Sometimes I felt like everyone was so sure of like, what they're doing in their study. And, like, already, like, a lot of people have plans, what they're going to do in their masters. And even after in this, like, very clear vision of what they want to do with the bachelor. And for me, I was always like, yeah, I don't really know."

Types of Connections in Academia Described by Participants

Connections	Description	Quote
Fellow students	Having peers to exchange ideas with, learn from, and study with. These peers can also be friends who support each other.	"It helped with having a support system, but also to help with the studies because you have someone there going through the same exact thing."
Teachers	Being able to approach, talk to the teachers, asking them questions about the content of courses.	"Also having connections to researchers, having connections to lecturers, feeling like I can approach them and ask questions."
Content of classes	Having a sense that the content of the class is interesting and meaningful, sparking a curiosity to learn more about the subject.	"The content, because when I read the content, meaning also, it's really interesting, and I liked it a lot."
University/faculty	Feeling like one belongs with the university, within the faculty and the university buildings.	"I am having the sense of belonging to my uni and having the sense of belonging to my faculty"

Influence of Relationships on Well-Being

Code	Description	Example
RELATIONSHIPS affect negatively	Relationships had a negative impact on their wellbeing	"I don't think anything crazy like even now, um, three weeks ago, actually, I broke up with my boyfriend, who I had, like, for a very longtime. So throughout my entire study period, so that kind of, you know, I feel like at the moment changes a lot all of the sudden. Um, but and that of course like I see that it puts a lot of stress on my body and myability to focus and so on."
RELATIONSHIPS affect positively	Relationships had a positive impact on their wellbeing	"...I also have friends that are like, very determined, and I think that can also, like has definitely also motivated me to do more and like seeing how passionate they are about the stuff also made me like a bit more excited, I guess about the study. So yeah, I think it has helped me."
RELATIONSHIPS no affect	Relationships had no impact on their wellbeing	"Yeah. Not really, like it's all stable."

Responsibility of, Acts by, and Wishes for University Observed by Participants to Foster Student Well-Being

Category	Code	Description	Example
RESP UNI:		What is the university responsible for regarding student well-being?	
	RESP UNI: Basis of social safety	Providing an environment that prioritized social safety, limits discrimination and takes student well-being into account.	"I think a big factor is overall the university plays a big part in how they design a programme, how they, the professor's they hire the environment that you created. Is it more of a hostile environment? is it caring environment?"
	RESP UNI: Good quality of education	Providing good quality of education, including organization of courses as well as hiring capable teachers.	"The education needs to be good by capable people. I think that's sometimes difficult because not everybody within academia wants to teach. But I think good education gives students feel the competence, give students the motivation because they see a competent person, it's inspiring"
	RESP UNI: WB Resources	Providing well-being resources, including study advisors, student psychologists, and accomodations for disabilities.	"There should be student doctors, student psychologists, very important, mentors, very important, study advisors, those are base things that the university has to provide"

Category	Code	Description	Example
ACT UNI:		Acts by, or features of the university observed by participant to foster student well-being	
	ACT UNI: Autonomy	Fostering student autonomy	"So I think that is like the academic autonomy that the university does give, of course, more or less by default, by the way it's structured."
	ACT UNI: Competence	Fostering student competence	"With the competence, I mean, there's a lot of programs on like, external facility, study associations, all of that, that you can be a part of, and I think that can increase your competency. So I think there's a lot of university or more like slightly external organizations that are provided"
	ACT UNI: Relatedness	Fostering student relatedness	"I really do think that there is usually an attempt of the university to foster some more relatedness even within courses by encouraging course, group work. I like to create group projects within certain courses that people work together. It doesn't always work out to a very like to like the extent that many people want it to and not liking having to do all of the coursework, but I do think it's the attempt in this case, like on this sense that counts like and it is this an opportunity to meet new people like to get to know like other people, of course, that you maybe haven't known if you were like randomly assigned to like some small group project with Yeah, I think that's so think they're doing a lot."
	ACT UNI: Structure courses	Features of the structure or content of specific courses	"Because we did have like a lot of like, we did have some mentors that throughout the year, I think the first year was a lot of mentors, like for academic skills for the research part, for statistics"
	ACT UNI: Structure curriculum (large scale)	Features of the curriculum at a larger scale, degree wide	"Well, the fact that you get to choose first of all your degree that you've gone for, and then that you have some, ok here in the first two years less but in the third year more choice of subjects, electives. And that kind of stuff."
	ACT UNI: WB resources	Well-being resources that the university provides, including study advisors and student psychologists among others	"I mean, like I just said, they have therapists. I really liked the fact that they offer study advisors. Yeah. Cuz with the whole study delay thing I really appreciated having somebody to go to who could help me figure out what steps I have to take next, for me to actually be able to do what I want to do"
WISH UNI:		Aspects the participant thinks the university could improve on to foster student well-being	

Category	Code	Description	Example
	WISH UNI: Autonomy	Changes that would improve student autonomy	"Giving more freedom with like, projects and choosing courses earlier, or just, yeah, project stuff. I think that would help me a lot to feel happier in the studies."
	WISH UNI: Communication	Changes regarding the communication with / from the university to students	"but they should have had clear rules for every course, the same thing, because this was just confusing. And it was almost like, they didn't even explain why things change sometimes."
	WISH UNI: Competence	Changes that would improve student competence	"I remember within statistics three, they were like, if you failed two, you cannot pass, which is bullshit, I think, because there are so many reasons why students fail courses, which is, I think, almost most of the time, not related to if they were capable to do the course. I kind of believe if you get in university, you're capable. Maybe that's naive, I don't know. But I think saying that takes away a lot of feeling of competence of a student"
	WISH UNI: Assessment and grading	Changes regarding the mode of assessment, types of exams, grading and feedback on assignments.	"I don't think realistically, but just in some utopian thing, like, get rid of the multiple choice tests, just do essays, or open questions."
	WISH UNI: Financial	Changes that addressed students' financial situations.	"Increasing the number of student jobs because a lot of students need jobs, and a lot of students will be fit to do the job."
	WISH UNI: Pressure	Changes regarding the pressure on students, including workload and course prerequisites among others	"When I compare what my friends say, and what younger students say, there are a few classes that repeatedly share the same sentiment of this was way too much. It's too much reading and too many lectures. And I just don't understand but you don't get any extra help."
	WISH UNI: Relatedness	Changes that would improve student relatedness to each other and from teacher to student	"I would prefer if there was a bit more personal interaction, at least possible with not just the other students because that is possible but also to like the staff"
	WISH UNI: Structure courses	Changes regarding the structure of or setup within courses.	"I would say that some of the courses can probably be restructured. But I don't know if that will directly influence student wellbeing. In terms of being a bit less stressful, less workload, but still teaching somewhat of the same amount of material. I think there are probably ways to do that, which is obviously hard but not undoable."
	WISH UNI: Structure curriculum	Changes regarding the curriculum on a larger scale, including the length of study blocks among others.	"to do it like in the biology bachelor where you're like, have a course for a few weeks and then have an exam for that one course. That you're doing it one at a time because that would help me a lot personally, so so much to just focus on one thing at a time and I would have like, it's so

Category	Code	Description	Example
			straightforward, and it makes so much more sense that I didn't just have the exam and move on"
	WISH UNI: Understanding	Changes regarding the university's (and teacher's) understanding and empathy towards students, including force majeure circumstances, mental health, and feedback on courses.	"They don't care about the people with chronic illness, who can't show up to class, there's courses who require your mandatory participation, and just like one time, you can miss it, and they see like, Okay, if someone died, or if you're ill, but like, they, again, don't care about people, with chronic illness, no matter if it's mental or physical."
	WISH UNI: WB resources	Changes regarding the well-being resources that our university offers, including extra resources and the availability of those resources	"But I think, for example, it takes a while to get into the study advisors here. I think that's terrible. I think you should be able to make an appointment very quickly because it's already very anxiety-provoking to go there and that you have to wait for weeks."

Responsibility of, Acts by, and Wishes for the University Observed by Participants to Foster Student Well-Being

Category	Code	Description	Example
ACT OWN		Acts taken by the participant themselves to foster their student well-being.	
	ACT OWN AUTO	Fostering own autonomy.	"I kind of feel like I made a decision in my third year. I started in other studies, and I spread out my third year a little bit because I'm doing my thesis in my fourth year, which gave me even more autonomy and time to decide."
	ACT OWN COMP	Fostering own competence.	"I feel achieved or feel competent when I [...] present myself in meetings in a professional way, or the sessions [that I am teaching] go well."

Category	Code	Description	Example
	ACT OWN RELA	Fostering own relatedness.	"If I see somebody in a lecture and I think, oh, they seem cool, I actively try to talk to them."
	ACT OWN: Self-compassion	Treating yourself with kindness, understanding and support.	"Over the years, I've grown to accept the fact that bad things can happen. I have bad reactions to the bad things. But that is just human."
	ACT OWN: Checking in on yourself	Taking a moment to assess ones current mental, physical and emotional state.	"I think I'm good at detecting when I'm not doing so well, like just from a well being perspective. Um, and then usually also realize, okay, I need to find a solution for this. I need to calm down and to prioritize my well-being."
	ACT OWN: Taking responsibility	Taking responsibility for the outcomes of ones actions.	"I'm like, okay, I need to change something. I want to change something. This can't continue like this. Like, I'm having like a down phase. I can't get up to study. Okay, what do I need to change?"
	ACT OWN: Therapy	Seeking out professional psychological help.	"I did go to therapy at some point. So I did get a package of knowledge that I can use. And I know that somehow I have to do those things to be okay."
WISH OWN		Aspects the participant thinks they themselves could improve on to foster their student well-being.	
	WISH OWN: RELA	Action to increase sense of relatedness that the student wishes to take in the future	"Finding a study group would be something that I want to do."
	WISH OWN: COMP	Action to increase sense of competence that the student wishes to take in the future	"I would just like to stop the comparison, because I am my own person. And my success is independent of how well [my friends] do. Even if they do better, I still do good."
	WISH OWN: AUTO	Action to increase sense of autonomy that the student wishes to take in the future	"I want to get back in touch with my hobbies, just to stay anchored in my identity and develop it a bit more. I also need to put effort into something else [than school]."
	WISH OWN: Self-compassion	Wishing to be more compassionate towards oneself in the future	"I feel like there is still room for more acceptance towards my grades."
	Wish OWN: Work/Life balance	Wishing to have more balanced life in the future	"I am always saying that I want to have weekends off, I think that is a big thing."