

# INVESTIGATING THE SOCIAL CONNECTIONS MADE BY FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS DURING A SEMESTER OF ONLINE LEARNING

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**KEYWORDS:** Social connections, online learning, first-year students

## BACKGROUND

Social connections with peers and staff are important for student learning and academic success (Krause & Coates, 2008; Peacock, Cowan, Irvine & Williams, 2020). These connections are particularly important for first-year students who are new to university. With the rapid shift to online learning in 2020, many traditional avenues for making social connections were lost. This study investigated how and with whom social connections were made by first-year students, and if these connections correlated with academic success.

## METHODS

First-year students (n=145) studying biomedical science answered an open-ended question about how they made social connections during first semester 2020, and with whom. Their responses were coded using thematic analysis.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Most students (97%) made at least one connection with peers and/or staff. Students connected with peers only (61%), staff only (4%) or both peers and staff (32%). Some tools were more frequently reported for connecting with peers (social media) or staff (email). Zoom was useful for both types of connections. Students who connected with both peers and staff had the highest academic achievement. To facilitate more student-staff connections, staff should consider using social media, as students most frequently used this tool to make social connections.

## REFERENCES

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Proceedings of the Australian Conference on Science and Mathematics Education, 29 September - 1 October 2021, page 40, ISSN 2653-0481