



2017 ANNUAL SURVEY REPORT

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THIS IS YOUR SU

SERVICES. BUSINESSES. ADVOCACY. EVENTS.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Each year, the Students' Union surveys undergraduates to learn about their opinions, needs, successes, and struggles. 3,300 students across all fields of study provide candid, detailed feedback on student engagement, the university environment, and the academic experience. The SU uses this data to target and refine student services, events, and advocacy.

The student body has a wide variety of needs and interests. Populations of special interest – Indigenous students, students who parent, Campus Saint-Jean (CSJ) students, and international students – face unique challenges and opportunities, alone or through intersection. For example, Indigenous students are three times more likely than the general student body to be parents of dependent children. Meanwhile, CSJ students struggle to access mental health services, and are far more likely than the average student to rely on the Students' Union Building (SUB) for meeting or study space – despite the distance. These examples, and many more, paint a picture of a heterogeneous, dynamic student body.

By and large, students take a focused, grounded approach to their university experience. Skill and career development dominate their list of priorities for extracurricular activities. They rely on healthy coping mechanisms and place a very high premium on communication, both as a strategy for stress and as an essential skill. By and large, however, male students and international students struggle in these areas.

Physical space remains a concern. Many students isolated maintenance issues – such as power outlets, bathrooms, accessibility, and pedestrian routes in winter – as top priorities. Study space and communal areas also featured heavily. Whenever possible, students want to connect with their peers to build a 'home away from home' on campus.

This survey reveals a passionate, focused student body that values connection and belonging. Students engage with overwhelming stress in healthy ways and rely on communication to solve problems. Their concerns are grounded: affordable food, deferred maintenance, study space, and career-focused extracurricular activities. They prize authenticity and meaningful engagement, and they want to get as much value and fulfilment out of their university experience as possible. These universal desires bridge the islands that make up an incredibly diverse student body.



NOTES AND METHODOLOGY

- Verbatim survey questions are italicized.
- The SU distributed this annual survey in March 2017. A variety of stakeholders provided the questions. This model proved challenging. As a result, the report reflects an increased degree of structure compared to the format of the survey. Appropriate lessons will be applied to future annual surveys.
- As the survey achieved a 10% response rate and almost 3300 points of contact, the survey offers a reasonably representative cross-section of the student body. ‘Students’ and ‘respondents’ are used interchangeably.

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DEMOGRAPHICS



The survey approached demographics through a focus on student life and academic progress. At various points, this survey report pays special attention to populations of interest, including students who identified as parents of dependent children ('students who parent' throughout), international students, students at Campus Saint-Jean ('CSJ students' throughout), and students who identified as First Nations, Metis, or Inuit ('FNMI/Indigenous students' throughout).

POPULATIONS OF INTEREST

- International students: 178 respondents, 5.4%.
- FNMI/Indigenous students: 122, 3.7%.
- Students who parent: 88, 2.7%.
- CSJ students: 81, 2.5%.

For reference, the university has just over 5,000 international undergraduates, or around 15% of the undergraduate student body. This indicates a clear need to engage international students more strongly in future survey efforts.

Some intersections between populations of interest are especially noteworthy. For example, students who parent represented 10.7% of FNMI/Indigenous students, three times higher than the student body as a whole¹. This radical difference was high enough to reach a 95% confidence level of statistical significance despite the small sample sizes involved.

¹ Other perspectives put this proportion even higher. The U of A 2015 Aboriginal Student Success Survey indicated that 22% of Indigenous students on campus have children.

Age distribution saw interesting variation across populations of interest. FNMI/Indigenous students, for example, are more likely to be older than the broader student body. Conversely, CSJ students and international students are more likely to be younger. While students who parent naturally skew toward being older, many parents still fall within the 18-22 age range or even younger.

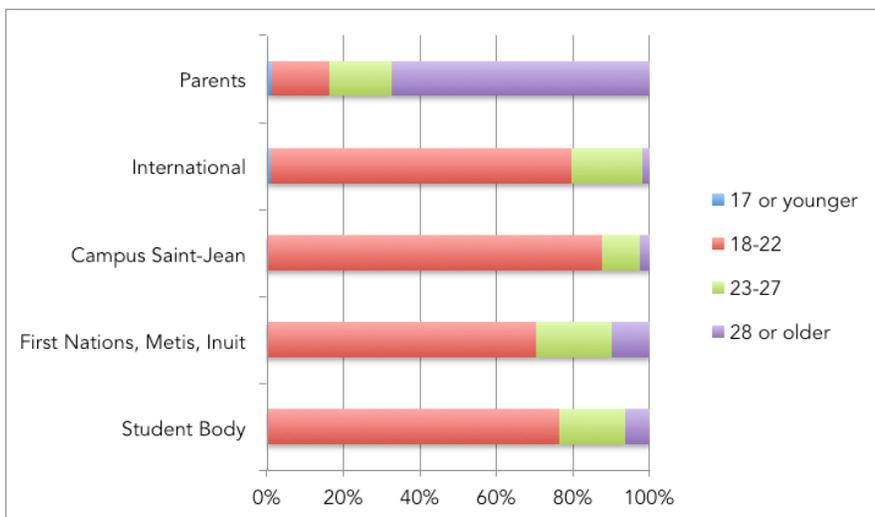


Figure 1: Age Distribution Across Populations of Interest



ACADEMIC DISTRIBUTION AND PERFORMANCE

The 2017 survey reached 3,298 points of contact, representing 10% of undergraduates across all disciplines and years of study. 25.5% declared themselves as first-year, 23.7% second-year, 24.3% third-year, 17.3% fourth-year, and 6.8% fifth-year or higher. These responses generally mirror proportions observed in the broader student population. 2.5% selected 'other.' Most short answers indicated edge cases, Open Studies, or participation in an after-degree program like a B.Ed.

Most faculties provided more than enough responses to get a reasonable sample. Smaller faculties' results are less generalizable; for one, the Faculty of Native Studies produced only 12 respondents. Some populations of interest had different faculty distributions than the broader student body. For example, FNMI/Indigenous respondents were more likely (14.8% versus 10.6% of the general population) to belong to the Faculty of Education.

How would you rate your academic performance? This question can be interpreted, in part, as an indicator of confidence versus desire for academic support, rather than as an objective overview of performance. In that light, it is clear that international and FNMI/Indigenous respondents were more likely to perceive themselves as struggling academically, and less likely to perceive themselves as excelling academically. By contrast to the student body as a whole, CSJ students were less likely to perceive themselves as struggling, more likely to report high grades, and far more willing to disclose their grades. Students who parent compared well with, and marginally outperformed, the broader student population, possibly for reasons of age.

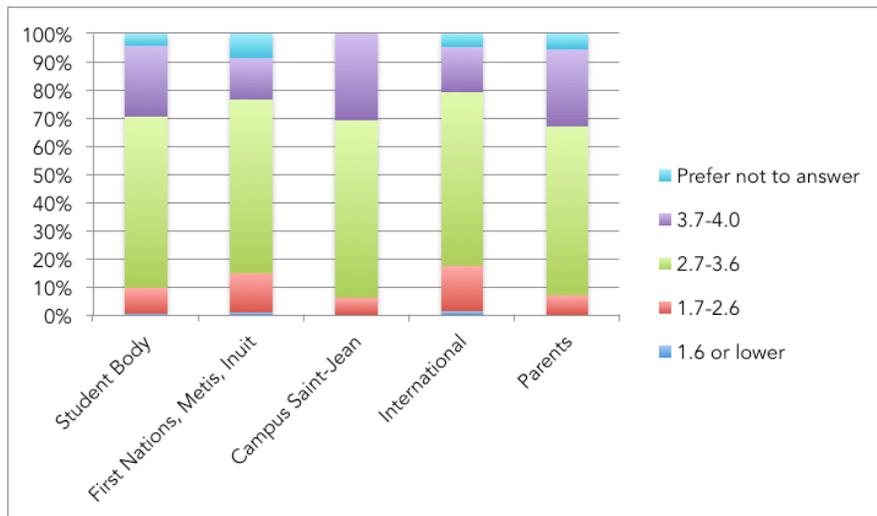


Figure 2: Academic Success Across Populations of Interest



Later in the survey, students were asked what they wish they had known earlier in their academic career to be successful. Many respondents opted for a candid approach. Some noteworthy responses:

"Ability to view old exams from previous years."

"About helpful resources like the centre for writers."

"Academic deadlines – i.e., most labs already have summer students selected by March."

"Adderall doesn't work."

"Being 'successful' is very subjective. One may see success as a 4.0 GPA and others may view success as self-growth with student involvement or expanding their network."

"Creativity is not valued in most classes. Memorization and regurgitation of material are far more valuable to most teachers."

"There are different paths for a masters and/or PhD, even with a learning disability."

"It's better to take a hard class you enjoy than an easy one that you hate."

"Learning to fail is good – learning that the world doesn't end when it happens is necessary."

"I wish I would've gone to a faculty advisor waaaaay earlier. But at the same time, even if you get advice, it's hard to use it."

"Free events held by Counselling and Clinical Services."

"Go to a senior, not an academic advisor."

"How easy it is to see a department advisor."

"How nice the advisors are in the science department. I was too nervous to meet with them."

"How to give a good presentation – formatting slides, etc."

"How to join groups that make it easier to build a resume that's relevant to my major."

"How to study. I had no idea what I was getting in to. Engineering at MacEwan is nice – they have a boot camp program to get the students' minds ready before the school year."

"I think I would have been more successful earlier on in my undergrad degree if I had found the Greek community sooner."

"Instructors actually do give a [expletive], you're not just a number."

"It's taken me two years to get to a point where I am beginning to find out what works for me in terms of studying and note-taking. I wish I had taken a note-taking or effective studying course on day one."



"We are attached to this idea that failure is simply not an option, but not everyone is suited to be a doctor, lawyer, engineer, or whatever. It's totally okay to withdraw from a course."

"You're suddenly going to be expected to be a job search expert, with no explicit training."

GENDER DISTRIBUTION

Two-thirds of survey respondents identified as female. This distribution is especially notable in the context of the Identity Matters report, which found that "Gender plays a more significant role than race in confidence to seek elected office...Gender and race, especially when combined, have a negative influence on serving in student representative capacity."²

Roughly three-dozen students identified as non-binary or provided usable information under the 'other' field. Notable answers included androgynous, gender-fluid, trans-feminine, and transgender man.

² Identity Matters! A Study of Undergraduate Involvement and Leadership in Student Government at UAlberta, UASU Department of Research and Political Affairs, September 2017, page 1.

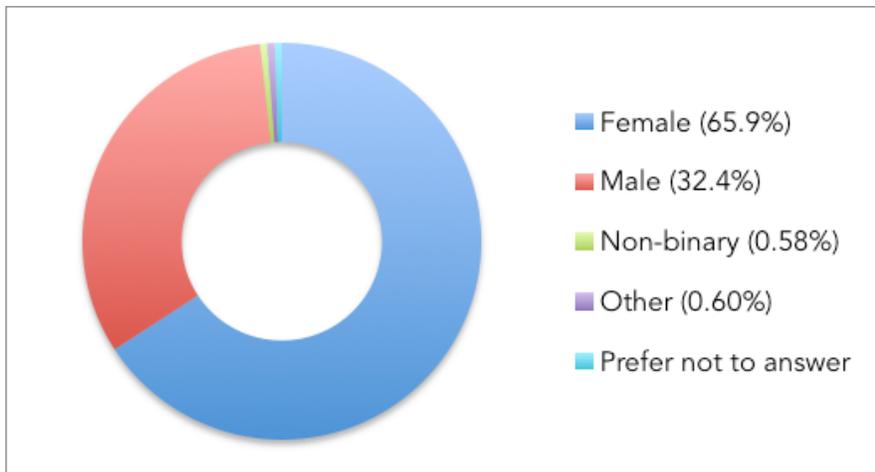


Figure 3: Respondents by Gender



EMPLOYMENT AND LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

How many hours a week do you spend on paid employment, while in study?

Roughly 49% of students indicated they performed at least some paid work each week. 25% of students worked at least 10 hours a week; 10% worked at least 20 hours a week.

Who do you live with? 12.3% of respondents lived alone. 30.2% lived with roommates. 57.5% lived with family, but these responses are not differentiated between, for example, living with a spouse versus living with parents. Notably, FNMI/Indigenous respondents were far less likely to live with family (37.7% vs. 57.5%) and almost twice as likely to live alone (21.3% vs. 12.3%). Despite the small sample size, FNMI respondents' increased likelihood of living alone was dramatic enough to reach a 95% confidence level of statistical significance.

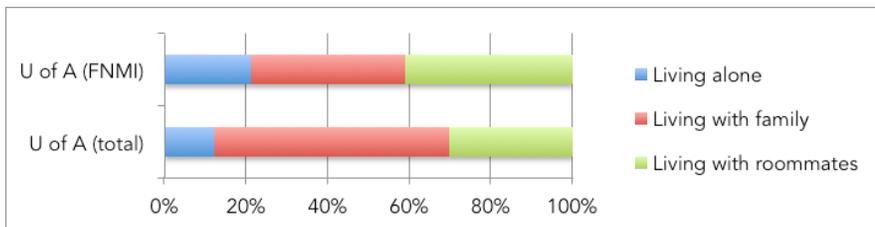


Figure 4: FNMI/Indigenous Student Living Arrangements

TRANSIT CHOICES

How do you travel to and from school? Please select the best option. Overwhelmingly (65%), respondents preferred to use public transit. The second most popular choice (17%) was walking – unsurprising, given the variety of residence options adjacent to campus. The only other common choice was driving alone (11%).

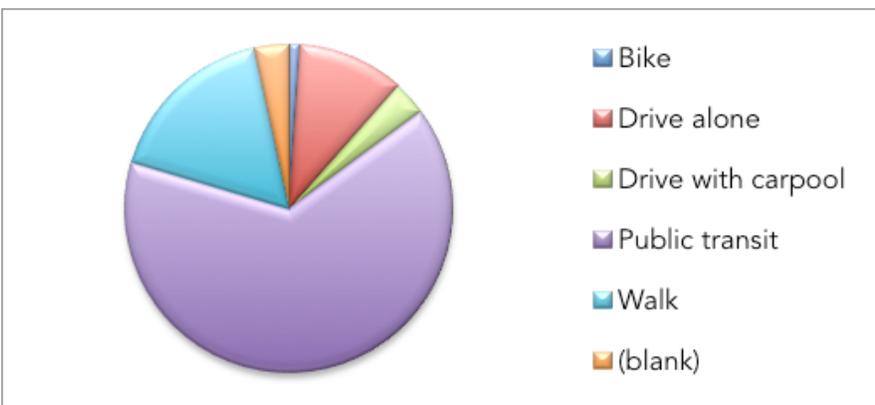


Figure 5: Transit Preferences (Entire Sample)



Two populations of interest (international students and students who parent) displayed radically different transit preferences. International students are radically more likely to walk (45% vs. 17%) and much less likely to use public transit (49% vs. 65%). This may be due to geographical factors, such as living closer to campus on average.

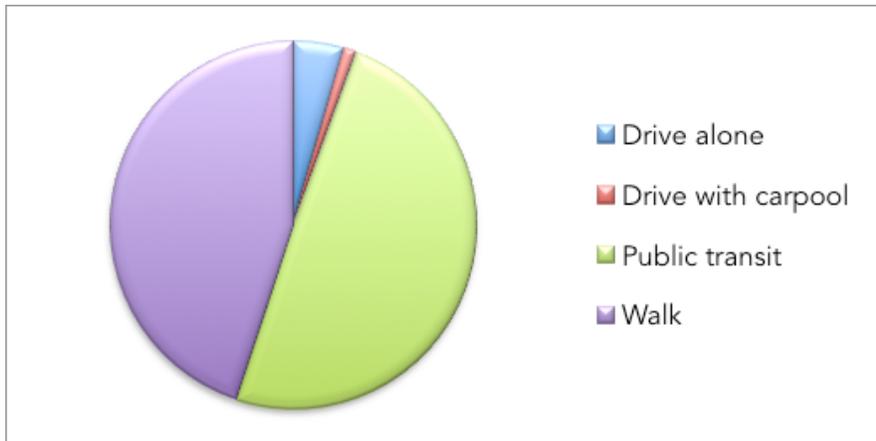


Figure 6: Transit Preferences (International Students)

Students who parent do not walk to campus, perhaps due to low availability of affordable family housing near campus. They are far more likely to drive (39% vs. 14%). They use public transit slightly less than the broader student population (59% vs. 65%).

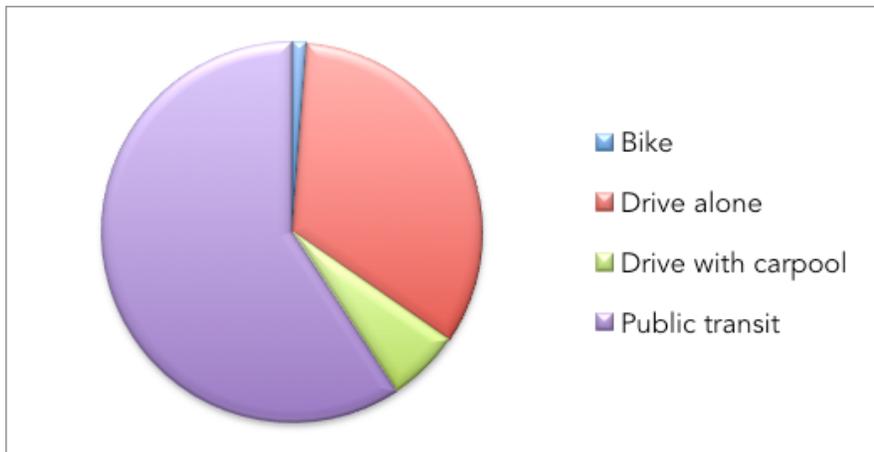


Figure 7: Transit Preferences (Students Who Parent)

STUDENT ELECTIONS AND INVOLVEMENT



UASU EXECUTIVE ELECTIONS

66% of respondents voted in the last Executive election. As the election did not see a 66% turnout of the student body, it is clear that the survey sample skews toward students who are already engaged with the SU, either in a positive or negative sense.

By year of study, respondents displayed an expected trend: higher levels of participation in the first two years, followed by a mild decrease.

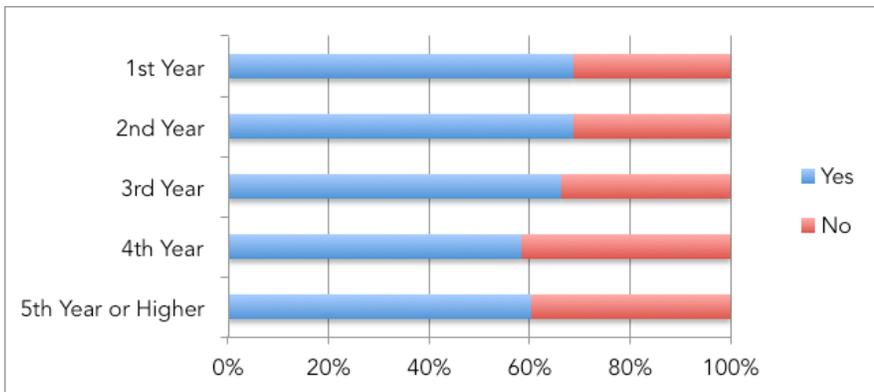


Figure 8: Election Participation by Year of Study

By faculty, students displayed broad but somewhat inconsistent engagement with SU Executive elections. Potential growth areas include the Faculties of Medicine and Dentistry; Kinesiology, Sport, and Recreation; and Law to a lesser extent. Pharmacy and Pharmacological Science, CSJ, and Business saw the highest engagement. Notably, the three largest faculties all had voting rates north of 65% within the sample.

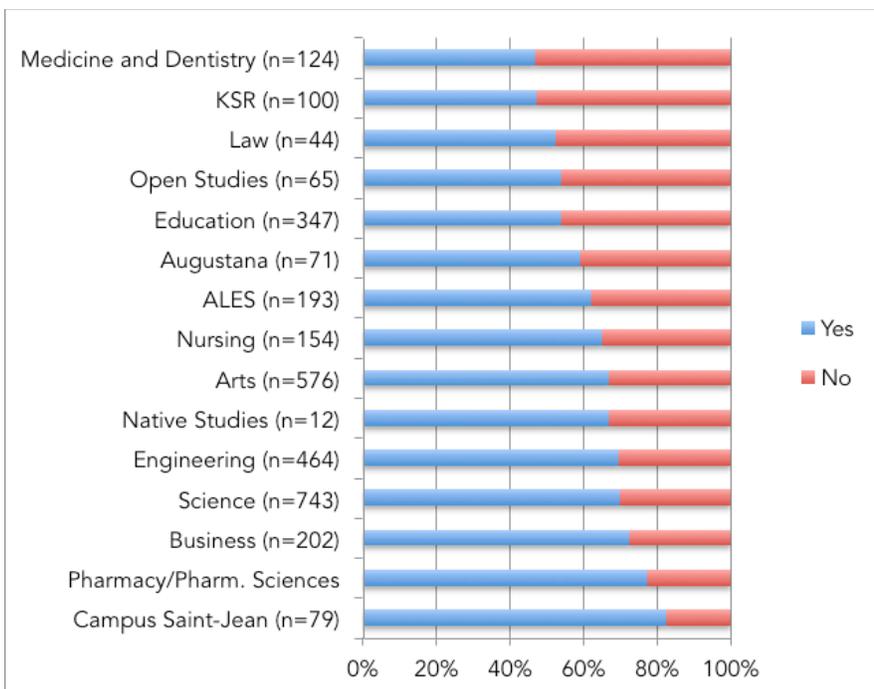


Figure 9: Voting Proportion by Faculty



How did you find out about the candidates? This question was open to interpretation: respondents were welcome to answer in terms of how they learned who the candidates were, what their platforms were, and any other level of detail.

By a gigantic margin, posters remained the most effective engagement tactic. The next four answers were relatively close: comparable amounts of students (around 800-1000) learned about the candidates via Facebook, class talks, banners, and the SU website. Third-tier tactics, reaching only 2-400 students or fewer, included candidate websites, election forum participation, one-on-one meetings and Reddit AMA (Ask Me Anything) events.

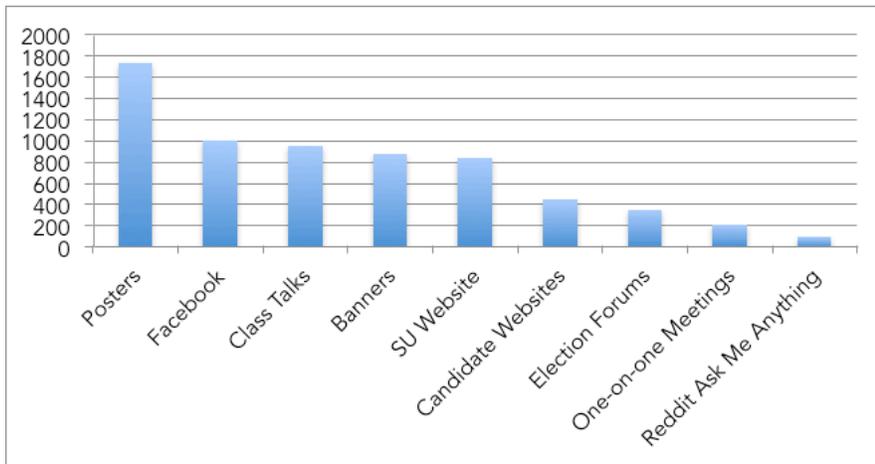


Figure 10: Campaign Tactics by Respondents Reached

Respondents who did not vote in the most recent UASU Executive election were asked why, as a combination multiple-choice and short-answer question.

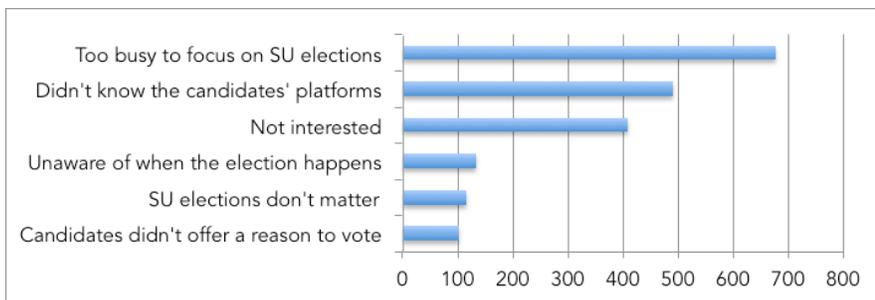


Figure 11: Reasons Respondents Did Not Vote (Multiple-Choice)



The short-answer 'other' option provided a range of feedback. Some representative or noteworthy responses:

"As an exchange student, I wasn't well informed about the school or the candidates."

"Candidates have minimal impact on my school experience."

"Didn't agree with any of the candidates."

"Did not know candidates well enough to judge whether they will stick to their platforms or not."

"Election should be held on more than one day. I forgot to vote."

"Graduating and did not feel it fair to vote for next year."

"I always did when I was completing my previous bachelor's degree, but I find the medical program is so much removed from the other programs on campus...I find I am not as engaged with the issues of the undergraduate population as I used to be, because of my program."

"I am on a co-op work term, so it's hard for me to keep track of school stuff, therefore missed the deadline."

"I have never seen any of the candidates do something on campus and then the first time I see them they say 'vote for me.'"

"I found it hard to find out easily where the polls were."

"I had a large workload and by the time I got around to voting it was closed. I really wanted to get my vote in though."

"I wanted to but there was nowhere near enough info for me to make an educated decision."

"Lots of candidates' platforms were not practical and unattainable."

"Need First Nations people involved. Need insight on our communities."

"Not on my radar - tacky posters pop up and an email reminder or two - no real attachment - no idea what they actually do."

"Tried to vote on both days and the website either crashed or wouldn't process my votes."

"The candidates all said very similar things. They also seemed to have a heavy focus on minorities [and] international students...which is fine but no-one seemed to mention anything that would actually affect my time here."



INVOLVEMENT ON CAMPUS

A variety of questions asked students how they prefer to get involved on campus, what opportunities are available to them, and what barriers or preferences keep them from getting involved.

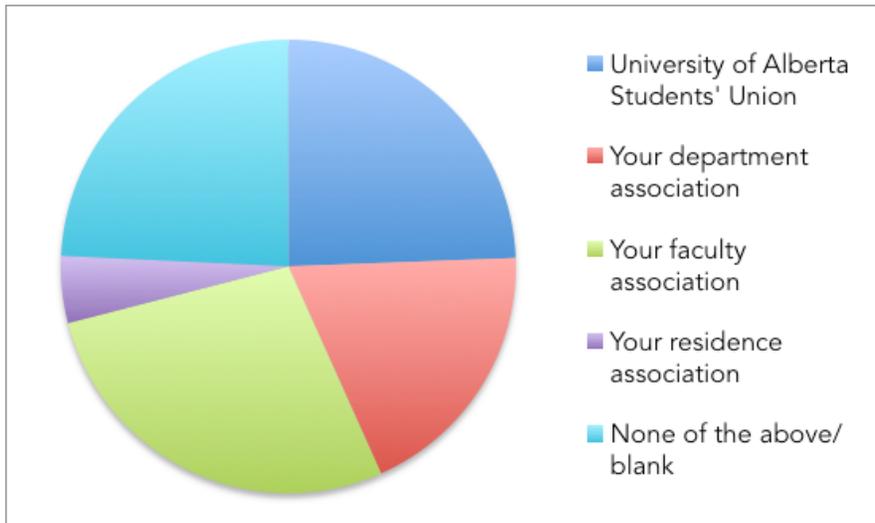


Figure 12: Which Student Representative Association Are You Most Familiar With?

Some groups were much more or less likely to favour the Students' Union as their first choice. Note that the lowest results tended to coincide with extremely high recognition of the appropriate faculty association. For reference, the average rate was 24%.

- Arts: 39%
- Business: 17%
- Engineering: 13%
- Law: 0%
- Medicine and Dentistry: 4%
- Native Studies: 8%
- Nursing: 8%
- Open Studies: 36%
- Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences: 6%
- KSR: 18%
- Science: 31%
- Male students: 21%
- International students: 21%



One-quarter of respondents selected 'none of the above' when asked about their familiarity with their student representation associations. Clearly, there is room for greater engagement at institutional, faculty, and department levels.

Some groups were much more likely to select 'none of the above' or leave the question blank. These students struggle to identify with any of their representative associations. For reference, the average rate was 24%.

- Arts: 27%
- Augustana: 43%
- Campus Saint-Jean: 31%
- Open Studies: 49%
- First-year students: 28%
- Students aged 28 or older: 33%
- Students who parent: 32%

Some groups were much more or less likely to recognize their faculty association as a priority. The baseline rate was 27.7%.

- ALES: 21%
- Arts: 11%
- Augustana: 20%
- Business: 46%
- Law: 73%
- Medicine and Dentistry: 64%
- Native Studies: 42%
- Nursing: 70%
- Open Studies: 11%
- Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences: 68%
- KSR: 47%
- Science: 17%

48.5% of respondents³ declared they were involved in campus activities, including but not limited to student groups, volunteering, professional associations, and campus rec. When asked what motivates them to get involved, they offered a wide range of responses.

³ Some groups indicated lower involvement rates: first-year students (41%) and students who parent (30%). Other groups of interest had unexceptional involvement rates.



Figure 13: Motivation to Get Involved on Campus

While students value fun involvement opportunities that help them meet new people, they are just as passionate about opportunities to gain skills and built their resumes. Over 1/3 of all students surveyed said that skill development was a primary reason they got involved on campus.

These answers varied somewhat within populations of interest. Notably, FNMI/Indigenous students tended to place a higher on skill development (ranked #2 at 37.7% vs. #4 at 34.7%) and on whether their friends are involved (25.4% vs. 18.1%).

When asked about barriers to involvement, the primary answers were time constraints (41.9% of respondents) and academic commitments. From there, however, responses grew more diverse and instructive. For example, 22.3% indicated that 'not knowing anyone' is a major deterrent. Students tended to shy away from traditional answers, such as family commitments, being too involved already, needing to work, or a lack of interesting opportunities (<15% each).

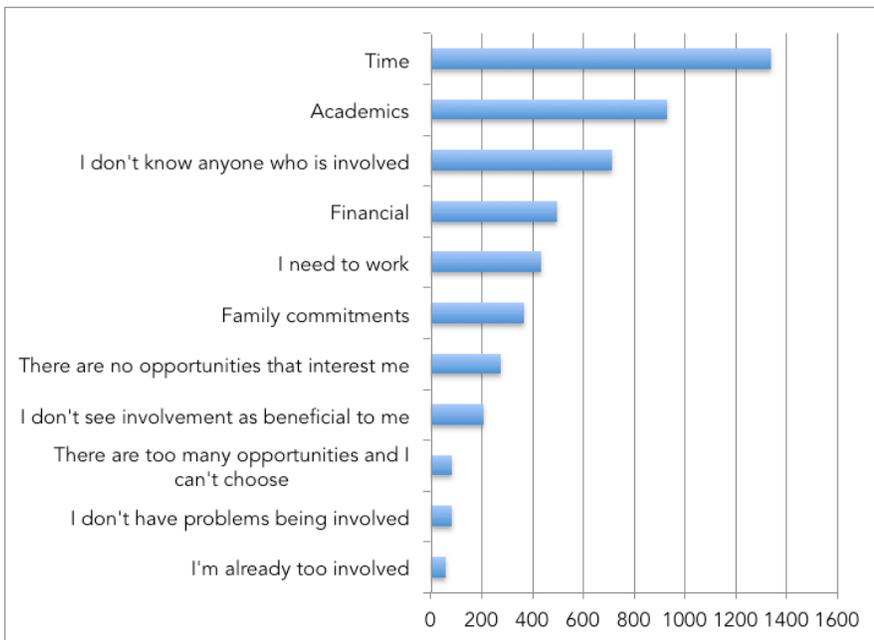


Figure 14: Barriers to Getting Involved on Campus

Additional noteworthy or representative responses:

"I volunteer at other organizations outside of U of A."

"Would consider on-campus opportunities if they were applicable to my career goals."

"Contacted student groups, but no-one replied."

"Depression and social anxiety."

"Don't know what they are/how to find them and get involved."

"Existing members are not welcoming or inclusive to new or interested members."

"Hard to find information, I would love to join something."

"I am physically unable to become involved."

"I was involved in previous years when I was here, trying to focus more on studies this time."

"Involved heavily in off-campus groups."

"Many groups are very selective in who is allowed to be involved in them."

"Personal health reasons."

"The clubs I did join were not open to newcomers."

"Transit from 1 hour away is too much for a volunteer opportunity, especially on



weekends when the buses run on shorter schedule.”

“Well out of the average age bracket for most.”

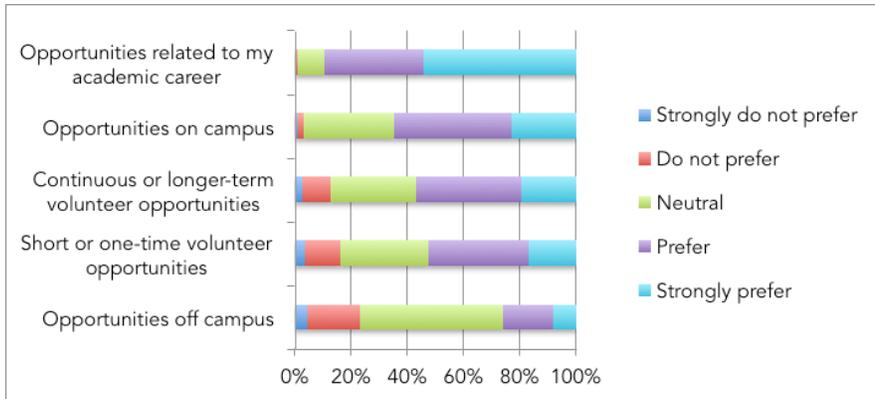


Figure 15: Preferences for Extracurricular Opportunities

Students were massively interested in engagement opportunities relevant to their academic career. Almost 80% of all survey participants, and roughly 90% of respondents to this particular question, selected this option as their first or second choice. Students seemed largely ambivalent toward other options, though on-campus opportunities beat off-campus options by a significant margin.

It seems clear that students value any involvement through student groups, volunteering, campus rec, and personal development activities – so long as all of those activities relate in some way to their academic careers.

In the vein of skill development and career focus, students were asked what ‘leadership skills’ they felt were most important for undergraduate students to gain by the end of their program. The question had a ‘choose all that apply’ format, making the results even more striking.

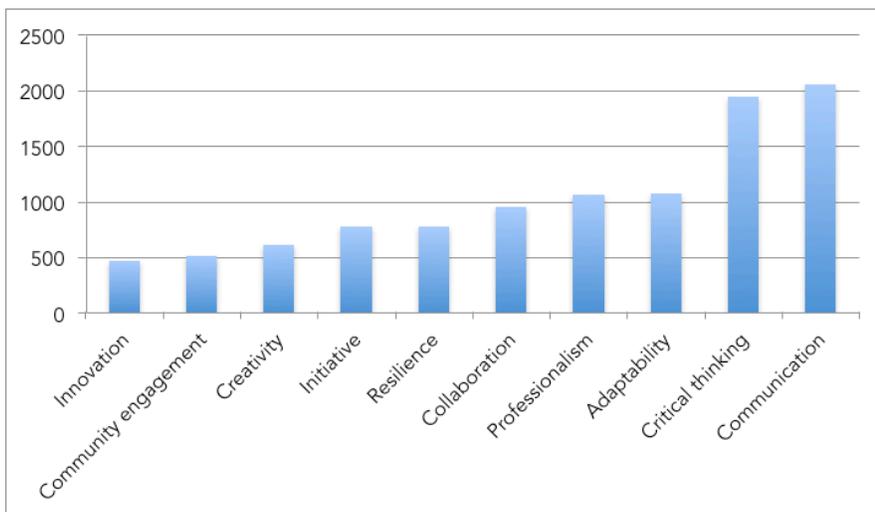


Figure 16: Priority Leadership Skills for Graduates



Innovation ranked dead last: under 15% of students named it as a priority in a 'choose all that apply' question. Only 19% chose creativity, and only 24% chose resilience.

Each faculty placed a different emphasis on innovation. Engineering, unsurprisingly, was at the top – but only 20% of Engineering students picked innovation as one of their choices. Native Studies students placed an unexpectedly high premium on innovation. Nursing, though middle-of-the-road at <10%, doubled the rock-bottom results of Medicine and Dentistry or Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Science (<5% each).

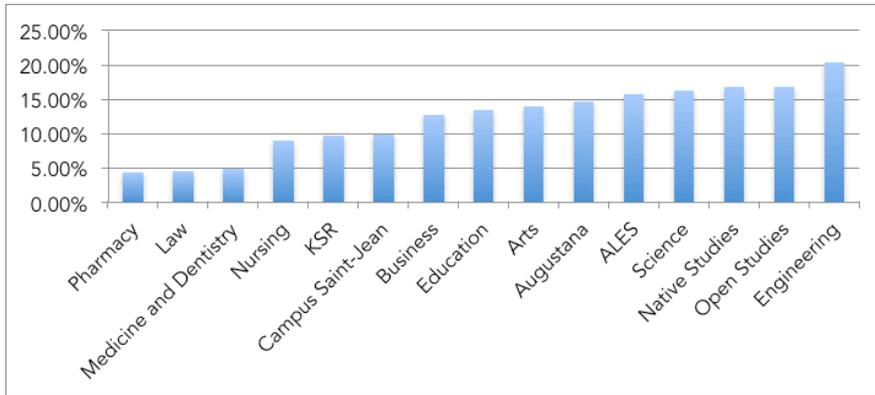


Figure 17: % of Respondents Selecting Innovation as a Priority, by Faculty



STUDENT SATISFACTION

Even after considering the more engaged character of self-selected survey participants, student satisfaction with the SU by role was overwhelmingly positive.

Responses fit several broad patterns. Dissatisfaction was minimal (<10% across all categories) while satisfaction was quite high, especially for the SU's roles as event organizer, service provider, and student advocate. In the SU's roles as business owner and building owner, satisfaction remained high (~3x higher than dissatisfaction) but neutral responses were significantly higher. Students may be ambivalent, or they could simply be unsure of what functions and businesses belong to the SU.

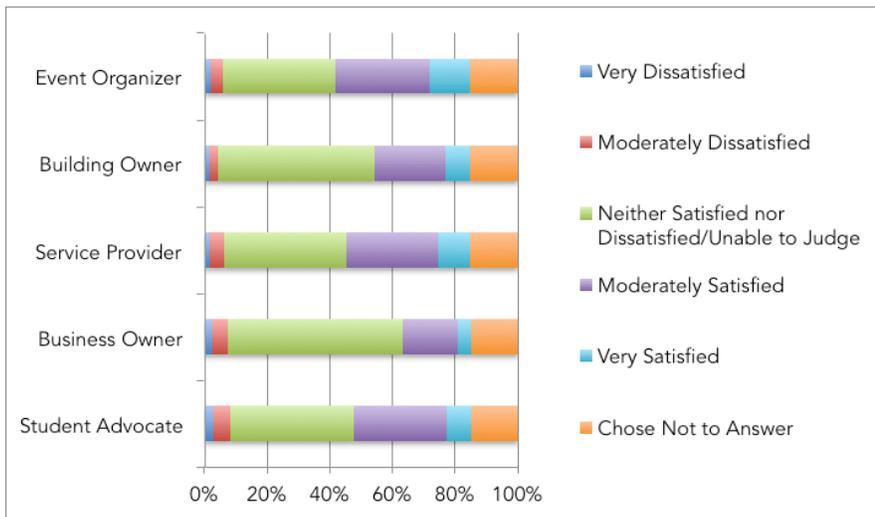


Figure 18: Satisfaction with the SU by Role

SU FACILITIES

Respondents valued the Students' Union Building (SUB) as a hub for food and school supplies. Three of the top five responses ('meet with friends,' 'study,' and 'meeting space') refer directly to student space. For context, there is no governmental funding stream for student space on campus, making student space a low priority for maintenance and improvement. Clearly, students prize multi-use, comfortable areas that welcome them and their activities.

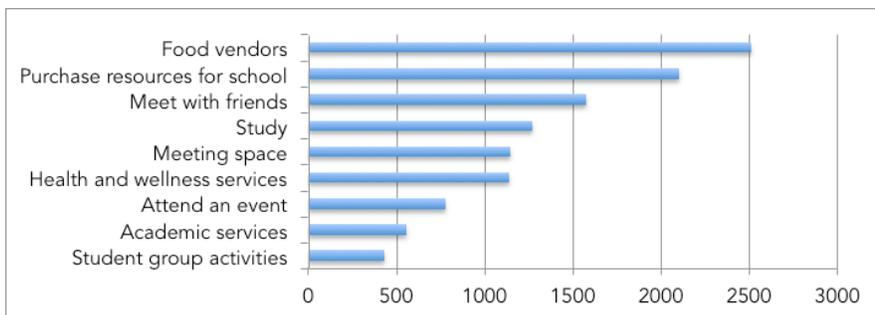


Figure 19: Reasons Students Visit the Students' Union Building (SUB)



Notably, CSJ students were much more likely (46% vs. 34%) to use the SUB for meeting space. CSJ students also were more likely (44% vs. 38%) to use the SUB for study purposes. A full 62% of CSJ students (compared to 76% of the student body) visited the SUB for food. When asked about the worst things or biggest difficulties about their out-of-classroom experience, several CSJ students noted lack of food options.

Please rank the following amenities in SUB by their value to you. By far the largest responses were 'U of A Bookstore,' with 1239 responses, and 'Food Court,' with 633 responses. To better represent data variation, the following chart excludes the bookstore and the food court.

SU BUSINESSES

Please rank the importance of the following when choosing a restaurant or bar. For context, the SU owns and operates both Dewey's and Room at the Top.

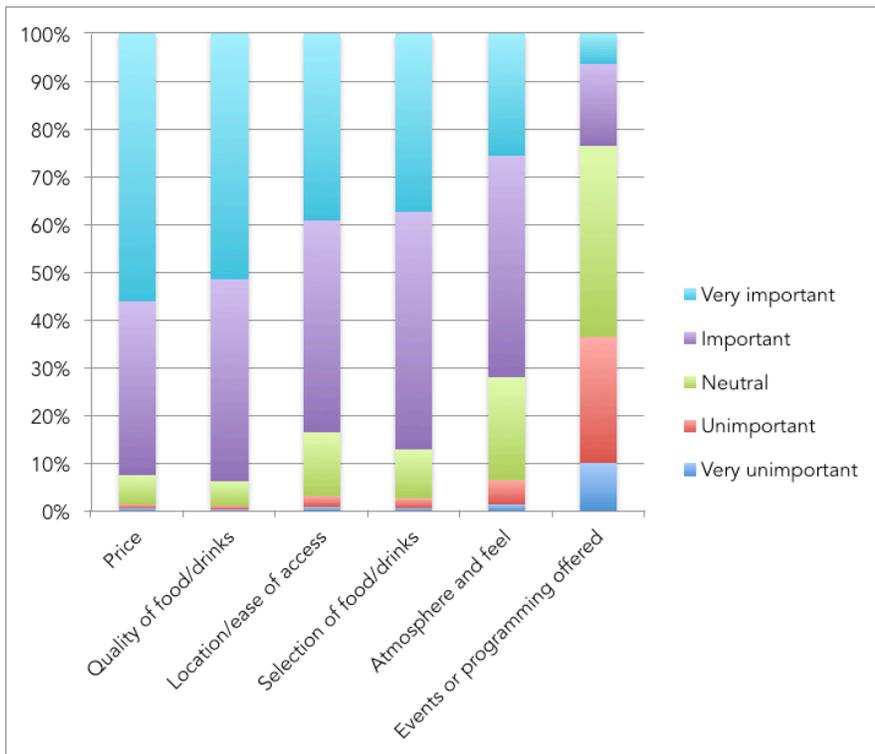


Figure 20: Priorities when Choosing a Restaurant or Bar

Respondents place a predictably high premium on price, with quality a close second.

Note that, despite the relative unpopularity of events or programming in the context of bars and restaurants, over 700 students labeled them as important or very important. Over 1200 were neutral toward events/programming, indicating an opportunity to gain ground through more impactful selections.



Which of the following food options would (or already do) interest you in the SUB?

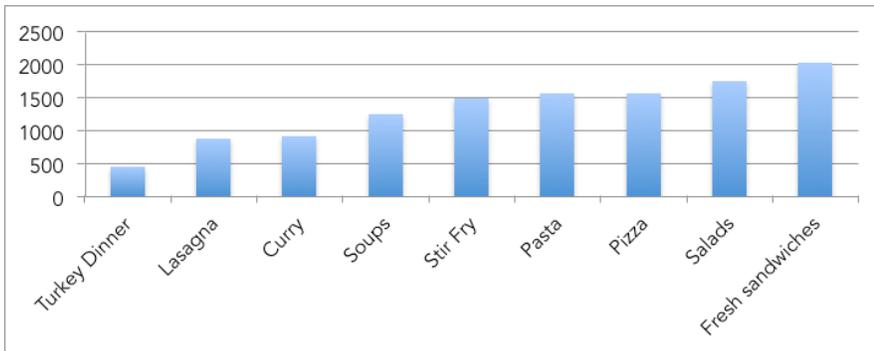


Figure 21: Food Options of Interest

In an optional short-answer question, over 50 students made a point of requesting more vegetarian or vegan options. Additional representative responses:

"Anything that is easy to eat and doesn't take too long."

"Breakfast options."

"Cheap burgers and fries."

"Chicken strips."

"Chinese, Mexican, Japanese, Vietnamese, Fijian, Ethiopian, British, other ethnic foods."

"DONAIR OH BABY."

"Gluten free! I am a celiac and it is frustratingly difficult to find food options on campus."

"Green onion cakes."

"Halal options."

"Smoothies."

"Vietnamese noodles."



SU EVENTS

What events do you attend? Why do you attend events? What events would you like to see on campus? The frontrunner events, by far, were Week of Welcome, Orientation, and Clubs Fair, though all events had a loyal core following. Overall, students were candid and responses varied widely.

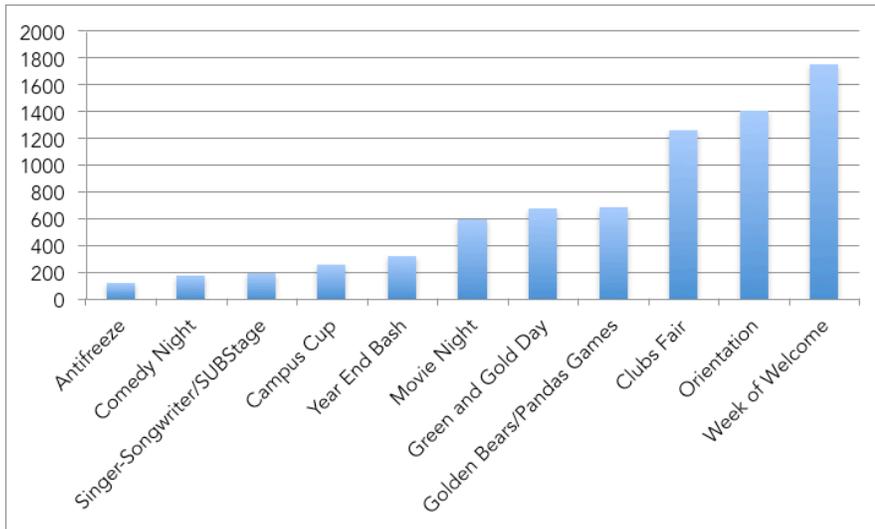


Figure 22: SU Event Attendance Preferences

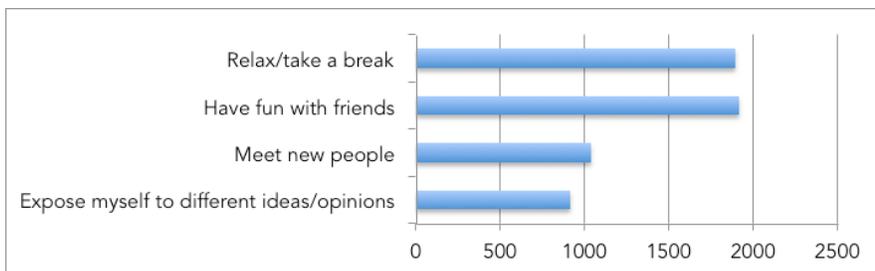


Figure 23: Motives for Event Attendance

An optional short answer component produced around 190 additional perspectives on motives for event attendance. Some representative or notable items:

"The atmosphere on campus is great at the start of the fall term. Although I work on campus full-time, I try to get out and walk around campus during Orientation and Week of Welcome because it is just an exciting time to be on campus!"

"Plenty of free things to be had/won."

"To get informed."

"To help my student group."



"I don't go because most of my friends are older, and we do not spend time on campus unless we are studying."

"Do something enjoyable where I can actually interact with people in a setting that isn't a bar."

Two questions asked students about their event preferences – what options they enjoy or would like to see. These questions gleaned around 3700 responses, a huge volume of information. Bold text indicates unexpectedly high interest.

"Take a break' events."

"A better year-end event."

"Fundraiser for something like the Stollery, maybe a carnival type idea."

"Massive water balloon fight in the Quad."

"Multicultural foods fair or event would be interesting."

"Tournament."

"Aboriginal activities."

"Supports for students with learning disabilities."

"Mini Heritage Days festival on campus."

"Scholarship information day."

"Activities that are easily accessible, in a location where a lot of people are, like in CCIS instead of SUB. Nobody has classes in SUB so I don't ever go there."

"Friend networking, such as 'speed friending,' where you don't have to join a club."

"Academic competitions."

"Activities for older/mature students."

"I'd like to see more events during the day rather than after 6, because I always miss events due to public transit limitations."

"All current events are satisfactory."

"Animals are good."

"Obstacle course/jungle gym in Quad or on campus."

"Anything at Augustana."

"More pancake breakfasts."

"Astronomy."



"Bigger career fairs."

"I'd like more serious events and discussions that cater to those of us who aren't 18."

"Board game nights."

"Bring in famous guest speakers."

"Campus Olympics."

"Mental health supports, not only during exam season."

"Clubs fair."

"Concerts, especially outdoor."

"Big school event dances, like high school. It would be a fun place to go on a weekend, especially if you don't want to drink."

"Drop-in sports."

"Free food festival."

"More comedy and dinner nights."

"Something that would allow us to express and demonstrate our own culture and language. Something that includes us."

"Events that bring disciplines together."

"More entrepreneurial and networking events oriented around the student body."

"Something for intellectuals and introverts."

"More outdoor games."

"A friendly activity competition between faculties, like a team-based event doing different activities or challenges."

"Personal development workshops."

"Career and opportunities for students. A lot of students don't know what grad school is or how to apply."

"Anything that doesn't involve alcohol/isn't 18+."

"Playing Oilers games on the projector in SUB."

"Small scale, quiet, more casual events."

"Anything language-related."

"Taste of UAlberta would be cool to see – it would bring people together and help celebrate diversity on campus."

"Something that teaches about Canadian culture and history."



"Something with French content."

"Stress relief."

"Volunteer opportunities."

"Artsy stuff – pottery making or painting."

"Winter activities."

"World record attempts."

"Yoga, meditation. Workshops on building resilience and communications skills."



MENTAL HEALTH

Students had strong feelings about mental and emotional health and associated resources. They spoke candidly about their coping strategies and the diverse reasons they choose not to seek help.

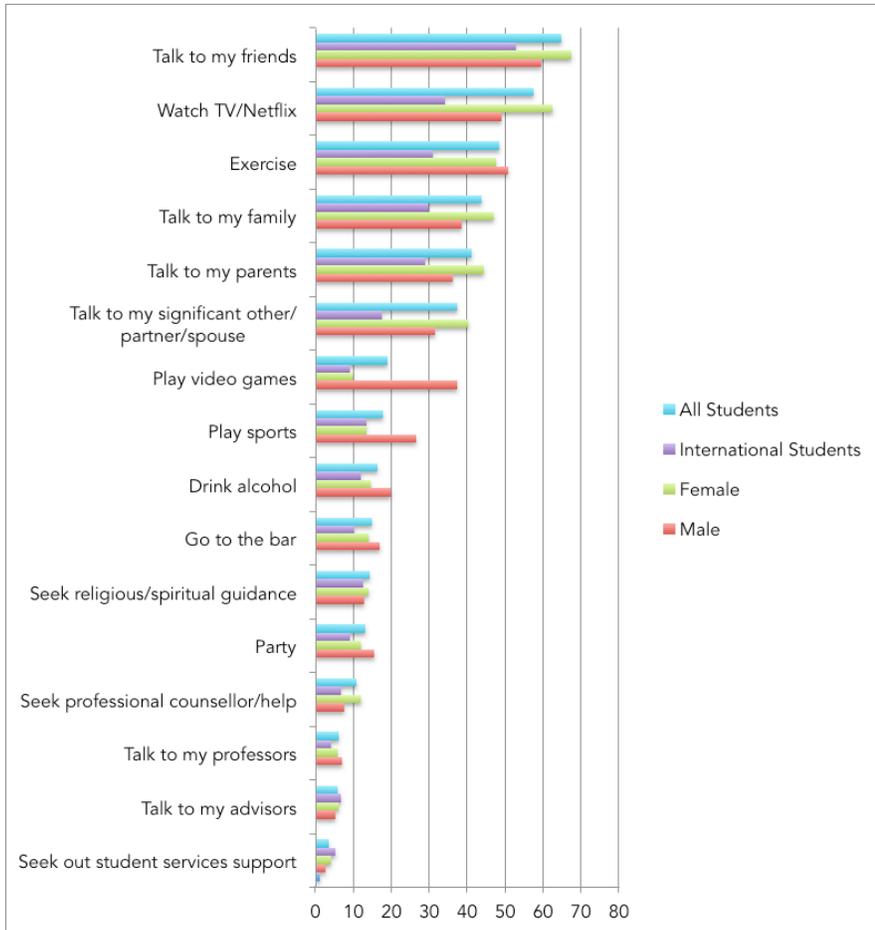


Figure 24: Preferred Coping Strategies for Feeling Stressed or Overwhelmed (Percent)

‘Stressed or overwhelmed’ cannot equate to a crisis situation, which perhaps explains why ‘seek professional help’ and ‘student services support’ are so low on the list. Even within students’ subjective interpretation of ‘stressed or overwhelmed,’ though, clear patterns emerge.

- By a landslide, students prize communication – with friends, family, parents, or a significant other – as their go-to coping strategy.
- Exercise also plays a major role in how students tackle stress.
- More than almost any other strategy, though, students watch TV or Netflix. This makes broadband Internet access a mental health issue, particularly in residence.
- Students are highly unlikely (~6% of respondents) to talk to their professors or advisors when overwhelmed.
- Alcohol consumption, visiting a bar, and partying are all relatively unpopular choices for stress management (~15% of respondents).



- Male students are 36% less likely than female students to seek professional help from a counsellor (7.6% versus 11.9%, a statistically significant result to 99% confidence). Male students are also 38% more likely (19.9% versus 14.4%, statistically significant) to use alcohol as a coping strategy when overwhelmed.

Students described additional strategies or reactions to overwhelming stress:

- “Again, we don’t have near as much access to mental health services [at CSJ]. For those who are extremely stressed, we wouldn’t likely take the bus over to main campus.”
- “Cry and not leave my bed. Skip class, or show up but take no notes.”
- “Get as much work out of the way as I can.”
- “Listen to ASMR YouTube videos, or follow meditation programs.”
- “Often end up in the hospital because of insufficient long-term care and resources for a chronic condition. Please put more funding into mental health support on campus. I don’t have familial support. I’ve been turned down by health services on campus multiple times despite seeking help.”
- “Often times I don’t have time to stop doing schoolwork to deal with stress or being overwhelmed.”
- “Pet/play with dogs.”
- “Quietly panic and isolate myself and unintentionally stop attending classes due to the cycle of anxiety.”
- “Read books as an escape.”
- “Spend all my money.”
- “Yoga and meditation.”

When asked whether they believe the university environment supports physical and mental health, over 50% of respondents declined to answer the question.

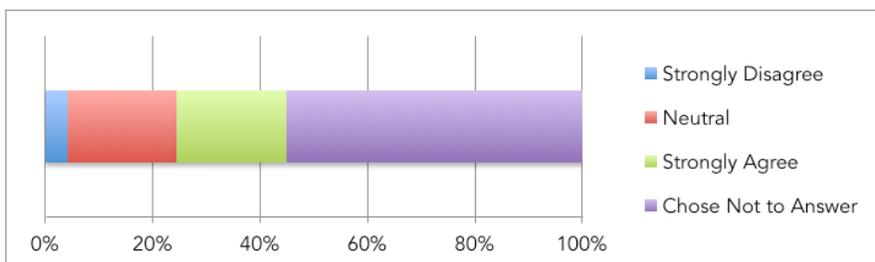


Figure 25: Does the University of Alberta Environment Support Positive Physical and Mental Health?



The Peer Support Centre (PSC) is an SU service that provides judgment-free support via trained volunteers. Only 7% of respondents had ever visited the PSC.⁴ However, among the students who might be most likely to need the PSC (students who knew it existed, required services, and opted to answer the question), that proportion rose to 27.5%.

4 Note that PSC use remained stable at 6-8% across virtually all faculties.

Some groups of students were more likely to seek help from the PSC, compared to the baseline (7%). An asterisk (*) denotes statistical significance at 95% confidence.

- Parents with dependent children (14%* or twice the base rate)
- Students who visit SUB for health and wellness services (13%*) or academic services (11%*)
- International students (12%*)
- Students who rated their academic performance at 1.7 to 2.6 (11%*)
- FNMI students (11%)
- Students 23 to 27 years old (10%*)
- Faculty of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences (10%)
- Students who indicated that they learned the most about SU elections by attending candidate forums (10%*)
- Fifth-year students (11%*)
- Students who are involved in campus activities, such as student groups, professional activities, campus rec, etc. (9%*)

Other groups were somewhat less likely to visit the PSC.

- Male students (4.6%*)
- Faculty of Business (~5%)
- Students who were too busy to vote (~5%)
- Students who were not interested in voting (~5%)
- First-year students (4.3%*)
- Faculty of Phys. Ed. and Recreation (now KSR) (1%*)
- Offsite populations like Campus Saint-Jean (1%*) and Augustana (~5%)

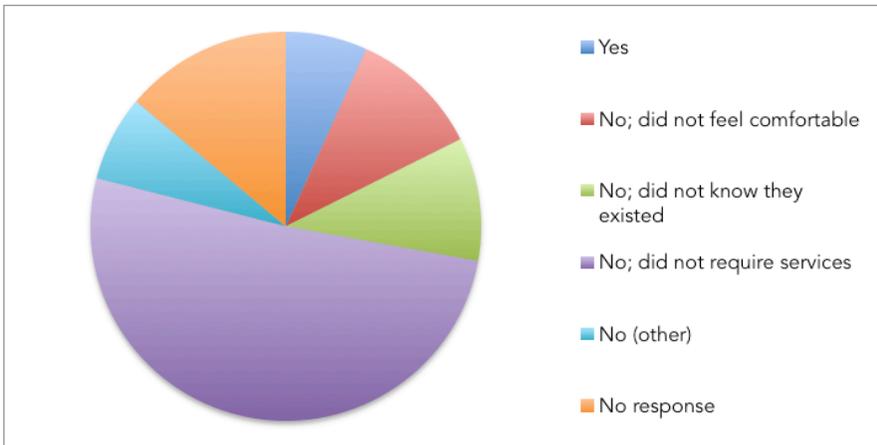


Figure 26: Have You Visited the Peer Support Centre?

The fraction of students that answered 'No (other)' was asked to elaborate. Some representative or noteworthy responses:

"Did not have time, did not know how to schedule an appointment or if I could just walk in, not sure how the whole process worked."

"I'm concerned about people seeing me access it."

"I don't want to take away resources from students that really need them. I am managing alright on my own so far."

"I feel like I have a really good support network."

"I have a bad reputation so I don't think they'd like me."

"Peer Support Centre is amazing but I wouldn't want to take up their time."

"I probably could benefit from a session but I am nervous about seeking help."

"I was going to go once but couldn't build up the courage."

"I would really like to go, but I am unsure when they are or what type of support they would give. It is unclear if I could just walk in or if I have to make an appointment."

"My faculty [Medicine and Dentistry] has their own similar service."

"Seems commercialized. I don't think they'd be genuinely interested in my concerns and problems, let alone for me to find solutions to them."

"Was never really on my mind. In the back of my mind I knew it was there, but it wasn't the first place I would think to go."

"We don't have a peer support centre at Augustana."

"We don't have one [at Campus Saint-Jean]. The trouble with having someone that attends CSJ is that we are such a small campus that we are nearly guaranteed to know them."

"Went right to a professional psychologist through Wellness Services."



Likewise, students who selected 'No (did not feel comfortable)' had the option to explain. Many decided to share their reasoning in a personal way.

"Was worried about being paired with someone I'm in classes with (am Psych major)."

"Because friends/people I know volunteer there."

"Because I don't know if my concerns are big enough."

"Because I don't know what to expect."

"Because I'm a very private person and only share my problems with a few people that I trust."

"Because self-reliance is important to me, so not only would I be personally ashamed to reach out for help in this (vaguely public) way, I feel that my image would probably also be changed for the worse if my friends or peers found out about me accessing these services."

"Because they probably can't help me."

"Do not want to cry in front of them."

"Family values dictate that getting help is wrong."

"I am an older student and felt that some of the volunteers may not be able to handle my out of school issues (i.e. marriage problems or infertility)."

"I am not a social person, I am an English language learner."

OUT-OF-CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE: THE BEST, THE WORST, AND FINAL ADVICE

Short-answer questions asked students about the best and worst aspects of the out-of-classroom experience at the University of Alberta, as well as advice to incoming students. The survey generated a largely balanced pool of responses: students proved just as interested in 'the best' as 'the worst.' Even many of the negative responses displayed useful insights and a mature perspective. These questions gleaned thousands of responses; this report presents a relative handful of the most significant or representative items.

Best aspects of the out-of-class experience

"A lot of diverse clubs/opportunities to try new things and meet new people."

"Ability to be involved in cross-discipline student groups."

"Access to the gym and health services, particularly that wait time at the Wellness Centre is minimal, especially compared to public clinics."



"All the free events on campus: LiveWell, puppy therapy, free movies, last day of class party."

"Allow you to personalize your academic experience, and if you want, allow you to stand out from others on job, research, or scholarship applications."

"Although it is a big campus, the spaces and the people can make it seem small. For all students, hopefully, it can be a home away from home."

"Atmosphere is inviting. You want to hang out on campus."

"Bean bag chairs in SUB."

"Being able to explore one's field of interest beyond the curriculum."

"Being able to hang out with friends. UAlberta needs more outdoor hanging-out locations though. (Botany Garden would be great.)"

"Convenient food, study, and workout facilities. You can get a lot done on campus without needing to travel elsewhere."

"Free food from SU events."

"Freedom: no-one tells me what to do, what to learn, etc."

"Get to meet different people and get off the campus (Science FUNdamentals was the best!)"

"Having so much of the course content online means we can study and work on academics wherever we are comfortable, even if that is off campus."

"Having the opportunity to learn certain skills that I would have never developed in the classroom, such as public speaking and learning to be adaptable."

"I did a walk with an Elder and it was really informative."

"I like the people at Cameron Library who give you bananas and apples and tell you 'it's going to be OK, finals aren't everything.'"

"It feels authentic. Might not be the best way to word it, but you're exposed to a plethora of people."

"Meeting professionals and developing your real-world skills that you can talk about in interviews."

"Seeing student-produced events (i.e. art gallery, theatre, sporting events.)"

"The opportunities for minority groups to share their culture/to be showcased in a positive way."

"Undergrad research opportunities."



Worst aspects of the out-of-class experience

"A lot of students can create traffic problems. It isn't always easy to get from one end of campus to the other between classes."

"A lot of the study areas are really hot, stuffy, and have poor Wi-Fi (older library spaces). Also food is unhealthy and expensive."

"Accessibility."

"At CSJ, we have a huge lack of services (mental health, sexual assault, you name it), especially those offered in French."

"BearsDen is often out of date and at least twice as slow as it should be. It's difficult to browse, information hidden in links after links."

"Because some of the classes are so big, it can be difficult to make long-lasting friendships."

"Budget cuts and out-of-pocket expenses."

"Campus is far from home and events are offered late at night."

"Competitiveness of volunteer opportunities that are crucial to career formation."

"Cost of food and the run-down Tory Building."

"Disgusting bathrooms."

"Domestic students unwilling to befriend international students."

"Drunk dudebros."

"Everything is shut down after peak class hours. It makes late nights feel isolating and unsupported."

"Experiences are sometimes inauthentic and are simply a means for the university to receive money from students instead of legitimately working to deliver a valuable experience."

"Figuring out which opportunities are actually relevant."

"Finding help and study groups for higher-level courses."

"Finding those quiet spaces. People aren't quiet, even in the [expletive] libraries."

"Getting access to health and mental health services."

"Getting around from class to class on the south side of campus (e.g. from VVC to Telus) outside in the winter - no indoor routes."

"Getting help from my faculty and CAPS."

"Getting involved in campus activities/groups. If one missed the groups day at the beginning of the term, it's hard to know all the activities on campus at one time."



"Having to pay for online programs (WebAssign, MyStatsLab, Mastering Physics) just to Google the answers anyways."

"Honestly our weather sucks – and because it does, in the dead of winter there are not as many activities the average student can take part in. It's a gloomy dark time and often people are left without a support."

"I lived in Lister for a number of years ... the U of A Residence Services is the biggest joke and the worst regulatory group I have ever seen. They do not listen to the Lister residents and treat them like children ... Considering how much Listerites are expected to pay for a meal plan, the quality of the food and its preparation is horrible ... There has been a HUGE retaliation from Listerites to this new food plan proposal, and this proposal has been shot down many times, and yet somehow it keeps being re-proposed ... Something has to be done." [Heavily edited for brevity.]

"If you are not involved with on-campus activities, they feel somewhat unwelcoming and cliquy – but that is kind of the nature of things."

"Isolation and lack of accessibility for isolated faculties. (We don't have an orientation that caters to being integrated with the rest of campus.)"

"It's a little too political and not all groups are equally supported by the U of A."

"Lack of power outlets."

"Making time for out-of-classroom activities (hard to do this when taking 5 courses), Location (e.g. if the activity is at Telus Centre instead of SUB/CAB/CCIS, I'm a lot less likely to go)."

"Many times, lineups are huge or my student group has to wait forever to find out if we can have an event in a select location."

"No real unity across campus like in McGill, Queen's, and other universities."

"No recognition of previous experience and diploma."

"Not having enough microwaves nearby or having microwaves that are always broken."

"Not sure if this is relevant but Bear Tracks has a terrible user interface, making browsing for courses/registering tedious and frustrating."

"Over-sensitivity/social media/poster issues that always seem to be occurring around campus. Overall lack of tolerance is probably the worst part."

"Restaurants are really bad as there aren't many vegan and healthy options. Even Chopped Leaf is not included in our meal plan."

"So many different events going on that my mind starts to treat them like junk mail."

"Some organizations can be difficult to get a foot in (i.e. peer counselling) unless you 'know someone.'"

"Sometimes it can be quite difficult to get involved.... I tried contacting research profes-



sors on the science research website. Only about ¼ even reply to my emails, and only 1 of them said they were interested.”

“The annual student group registration and student group event registration are the [expletive] longest, most over-complicated processes around. It deters student groups from hosting events.”

“The ENGG faculty is kicking the student project groups out of their rooms and aren’t giving a replacement.”

“The lack of guidance for such things as student groups. The process is so bureaucratic that it’s hard to know what’s what and who to contact.”

“The smell in the ETLC men’s bathrooms. (Honestly not kidding.)”

“Uncomfortable/inefficient use of space for study areas (not enough outlets, old chairs.)”

“You can literally attend and leave school without making any friends. It can be oddly easy.”

FINAL ADVICE

If you were talking to a new student, what would you tell them is the best way to feel comfortable or feel at home at the U of A? For the most part, students approached this question through a lens of group creation and finding friends. These points of contact line up with previous findings about how communication with friends is the most popular strategy for handling overwhelming stress. Students prize community and see it as integral to thriving in the university environment.

“It is a nice place to live and study, in French or English.”

“Academic commitments are important but so is getting involved with on-campus activities like joining your department association.”

“Avoid depressing buildings like CAB.”

“Be open-minded about talking to people. Generally everyone is nice but no-one wants to reach out.”

“Beanbag sofa at SUB.”

“If they’re FNMI, I’d tell them they might not ever feel at home but that it’s okay – to find good friends and to communicate with professors.”

“Do at least one thing that interests you, whether it’s a club, student group, volunteering, anything.”

“Do not try to make friends with Canadians because they are not interested. Everyone has their own group. International students are more open to making friends but...the language barrier will also stop you from making friends.”



"Don't be an adult student. Nothing about the U of A experience is welcoming to adult students."

"Don't go home right away after classes. Study in school but not in a secluded area (e.g. go to Cameron Library to feel motivated.) There, you'll feel like you're not alone because there are lots of people there who are just like you."

"Establish one friend on orientation. From there it is much easier/you are more confident to make other friends."

"Find a good group study location, e.g. ECHA rooms, DICE M8."

"Get involved with UASU events or another long-term volunteering opportunity to develop a network of peers and friends you can rely on for support."

"Go to RATT and Dewey for a pint with friends."

"The university is made up of a series of different microcosm communities. If there's something you're interested in or would like to do, it is out there somewhere!"

"I would tell them to join a choir... it felt like a very comfortable place, really gave a sense of community."

"Go to as many introductory student group events as possible, even if it means missing some classes, because being part of these groups is often far more valuable than attending a class."

"Join at least one extracurricular thing. It doesn't have to be a resume builder and it doesn't have to be an on-campus thing. It's just nice to be part of something that you don't get graded on and is a good way to find your social groups."

"Find a group that has the right feel. Just because a campus club/group seems popular, doesn't mean that it's the only one you can be a part of. Find your niche."