

Academic Support Services Survey — Year Over Year

December 2, 2022

Prepared for VPA Gurleen Kaur and VPSL

Joannie Fogue by Department of Research and
Advocacy



Overview

This is an exact repeat of [an August 2021 survey](#), using an identical sampling method and producing an equivalent sample size. This survey ran at the end of Fall 2021, while the other ran at the start of the Fall semester, concurrent with the [launch](#) of the Student Service Centre. Portions of this report can be considered a before/after picture that speaks to whether the SSC's centralized delivery/referral model has been working for students over the past four semesters.

After removing alumni, graduate students, and any student not confirmed to be a current undergraduate, this report's sample size is $n=941$, roughly one out of 37 UAlberta undergraduate students, equivalent to the August 2021 survey. The main difference between the samples is that the new survey had somewhat more first-year students (29% versus 23%), which may be a factor in some of the differences noted below.

The survey comprised three parallel questions in a 'choose all that apply' format. The questions asked whether respondents felt like they knew how to access various academic support services, whether they felt comfortable accessing them, and whether they had visited or accessed them before.

Key Findings

Academic Success Centre

- Proportion of students who feel they know how to access: 41% (slight increase).
- Proportion of students who feel comfortable accessing: 39% (stable).
- Proportion of students who have accessed: 17% (major increase).
- Very high usage, knowledge, and comfort among disabled students.
- Large gender imbalance: men much more likely to feel they know how to use this service and feel comfortable doing so.

UASU Tutor Registry

- Access knowledge: 18% (stable).
- Comfort: 22% (stable).
- Usage: 7% (major increase).
- Low comfort among disabled students.
- Some gender imbalance (men significantly more comfortable).

UASU Exam Registry

- Access knowledge: 29% (stable).
- Comfort: 33% (stable).
- Usage: 19% (major increase).
- Low comfort among disabled students.

Academic Advisors in Respondent's Faculty

- Access knowledge: 45% (major decrease).
- Comfort: 46% (major decrease).
- Usage: 32% (major increase).
- Men less likely to access this service.
- Disabled students much less likely than other students to feel knowledgeable/comfortable about this service, but much more likely to use it.
- Reduced knowledge is consistent across all years of study. Knowledge increases slowly by year of study. Reduced comfort is drastic in first-year students (45%, down from 60%).

Centre for Writers

- Access knowledge: 25% (major decrease).
- Comfort: 38% (slight decrease).
- Usage: 13% (major increase).
- Sharply reduced knowledge is consistent across second/third/fourth years of study.
- High knowledge/usage among disabled students.
- Men less likely to access this service.

Decima Robinson Support Centre (Science and Math)

- Access knowledge: 32% (stable).
- Comfort: 30% (significant decrease).
- Usage: 21% (major increase).
- Men much more likely to feel knowledgeable/comfortable about this service, and more likely to access it.
- Disabled students much less likely than other students to feel knowledgeable/comfortable about this service, and less likely to access it.

U of A Libraries Support/Workshops

- Access knowledge: 44% (major decrease).
- Comfort: 41% (major decrease).
- Usage: 22% (stable).
- Reduced comfort is drastic in first-year students (47%, down from 60%).
- Disabled students much less likely than other students to feel knowledgeable/comfortable about this service, though usage rates are consistent.

Accessibility Resources

- Access knowledge: 15% (stable).
- Comfort: 17% (slight decrease).
- Usage: 9% (significant increase).

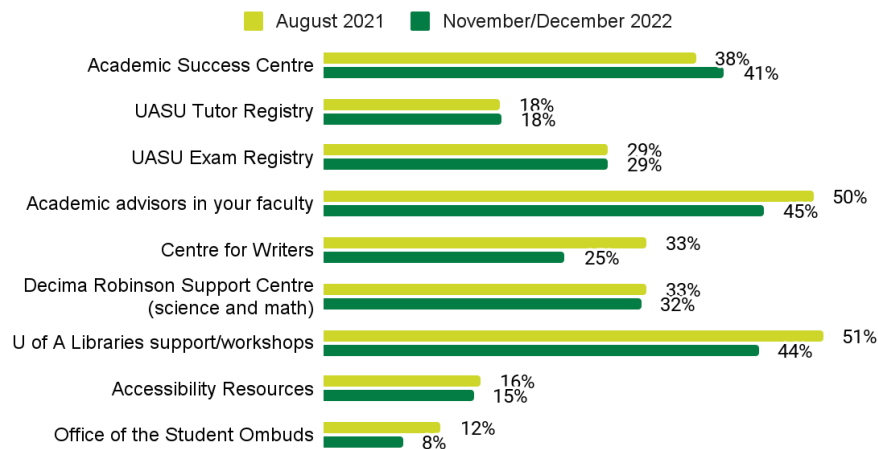
- Non-binary/gender-minority students much more likely to feel knowledgeable/comfortable about this service.
- Very high knowledge/comfort/uptake among disabled students.

Office of the Student Ombuds

- Access knowledge: 8% (major decrease).
- Comfort: 11% (major decrease).
- Usage: 5% (stable).
- Men more likely to feel knowledgeable/comfortable about this service and to actually use it.
- Disabled students much more likely than other students to feel knowledgeable about this service and actually use it.

Knowing How to Access Services

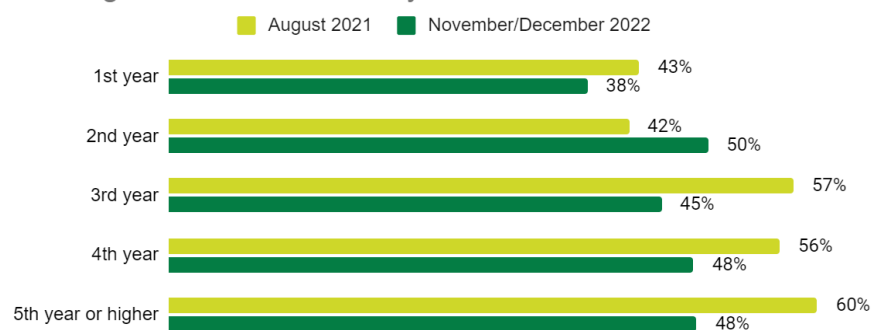
"Which academic support services do you feel like you know how to access? Choose all that apply."



Comparing year over year, students are slightly more likely to feel like they know how to access the Academic Success Centre. However, they are somewhat less likely to feel like they know how to access faculty academic advisors, the Centre for Writers, the Office of the Student Ombuds, or U of A Libraries support and workshops. The UASU academic services were unaffected.

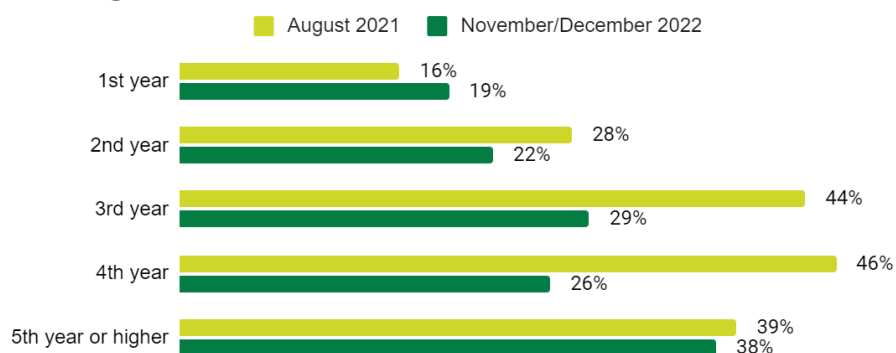
While some of these results may be linked to the moderately increased numbers of first-year students in this survey, we can evaluate and control for that by cross-tabulating by year of study. For example, it seems clear that reduced knowledge of how to access academic advisors is *not* a problem exclusive to first-year students, but is consistent across all years of study. Crucially, self-assessed knowledge only increases slowly by year of study, though one would expect increased experience to increase knowledge of how to access this vital resource.

Knowing how to access faculty academic advisors



Cross-tabulating by year of study gives a very different picture when looking at the Centre for Writers, another area where students were significantly less likely to know how to access it. This picture is healthier than the faculty academic advisor situation (a greater progression of increased knowledge by year of study) and less healthy in other ways (far lower likelihood of knowing how to access this service — compared both with other services and with August 2021).

Knowing how to access Centre for Writers

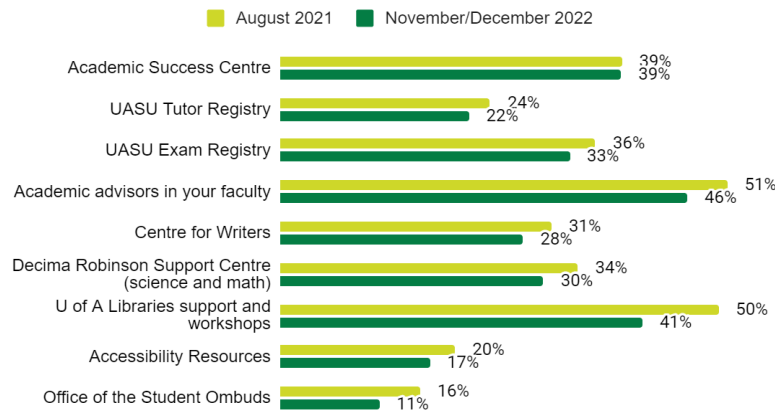


Comfort Accessing Services

This question saw a similar broad decline. Across the board, students are mildly or somewhat less comfortable accessing listed services. The largest impact was centred on faculty academic advisors and U of A Libraries support/workshops.

This broad decline appears to go hand in hand with the moderately higher numbers of first-year students in this survey. For example, when focusing on first-year students, comfort accessing U of A Libraries services fell from 60% to 47%, and comfort accessing faculty academic advisors fell from 60% to 45%.

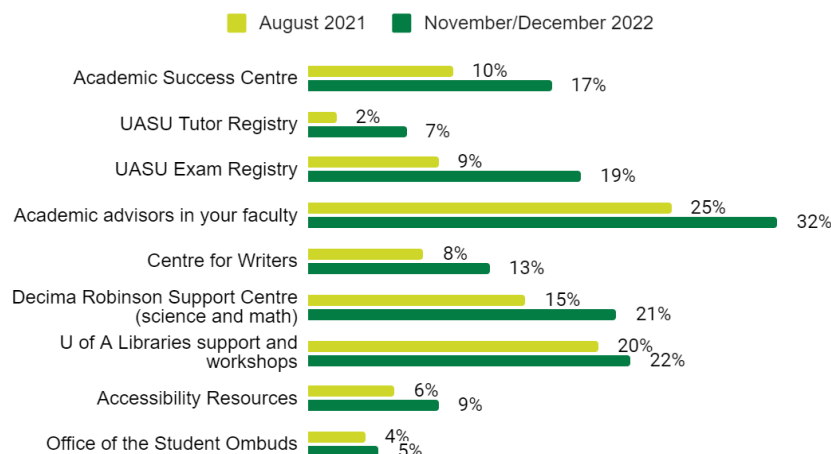
"Which academic support services would you feel comfortable accessing? Choose all that apply."



This broad decline may reflect a changing student body with varying experiences: note that, for thousands of students, Fall 2022 was their first fully-in-person academic semester. These results could indicate a generally lower likelihood of comfort about accessing *any* services, particularly among first-year students. There appears to be an increased need to educate first-year students about academic support services.

Actual Usage

"Which academic support services have you visited/accessed before? Choose all that apply."



Completely out of step with the reduced comfort levels, it appears that students are turning to the listed services far more often. That is, they are using the services more, despite being somewhat less likely to be comfortable with using them or to know how to access them. This survey indicates increased usage rates for all listed services. Note that the increase for the Ombuds and U of A Libraries resources are minimal enough that they may reflect statistical noise; these were, in the previous questions, services that saw notable reductions.

Demographic Factors

As with the August 2021 survey, this survey collected and cross-tabulated for year of study, faculty, gender, and disability. Apart from an overrepresentation of first-year students and a higher turnout of disabled and gender-minority students, the samples were consistent.

Gender:

- Women: 64.3%
- Men: 25.4%
- Non-binary or other gender identity: 6.0%
- Prefer not to say: 4.4%

These proportions were consistent with the August 2021 sample, except that non-binary/other gender identity respondents rose from 3%.

Disability: ("Do you consider yourself disabled?")

- Yes: 8.2% (up from 5% in August 2021)
- No: 85.3%
- Prefer not to say: 6.5% (consistent with August 2021)

Academic Success Centre

- Men were much more likely than other students to feel knowledgeable and comfortable about using this service.
- Disabled students were much more likely than other students to feel knowledgeable and comfortable about this service, and to actually use it.

UASU Tutor Registry

- Men were somewhat more likely than other students to feel knowledgeable and comfortable about using this service.
- Disabled students were somewhat less likely to use this service, and much less likely to feel comfortable.

UASU Exam Registry

- No gender imbalance noted.
- Disabled students were somewhat less likely to feel comfortable or to use this service.

Faculty Academic Advisors

- Men were less likely to use this service; no other gender imbalance noted.
- Disabled students were much less likely to feel knowledgeable and comfortable about this service, but much more likely to use it.

Centre for Writers

- Men were less likely to use this service; no other gender imbalance noted.

- Disabled students were more likely to feel knowledgeable about using this service, and to actually use it.

Decima Robinson Support Centre

- Men were much more likely to feel knowledgeable and comfortable about this service, and somewhat more likely to actually use it.
- Disabled students were much less likely to feel knowledgeable and comfortable about this service, and somewhat less likely to actually use it.

U of A Libraries Support/Workshops

- No gender imbalance noted.
- Disabled students were much less likely to feel knowledgeable and comfortable about this service, but equally likely to actually use it.

Accessibility Resources

- Non-binary/other gender identity students were much more likely to feel comfortable using this service and actually use it; men were somewhat less likely to actually use it; no other gender imbalance noted.
- Disabled students were far more likely to feel knowledgeable and comfortable about this service, and to actually use it.

Office of the Student Ombuds

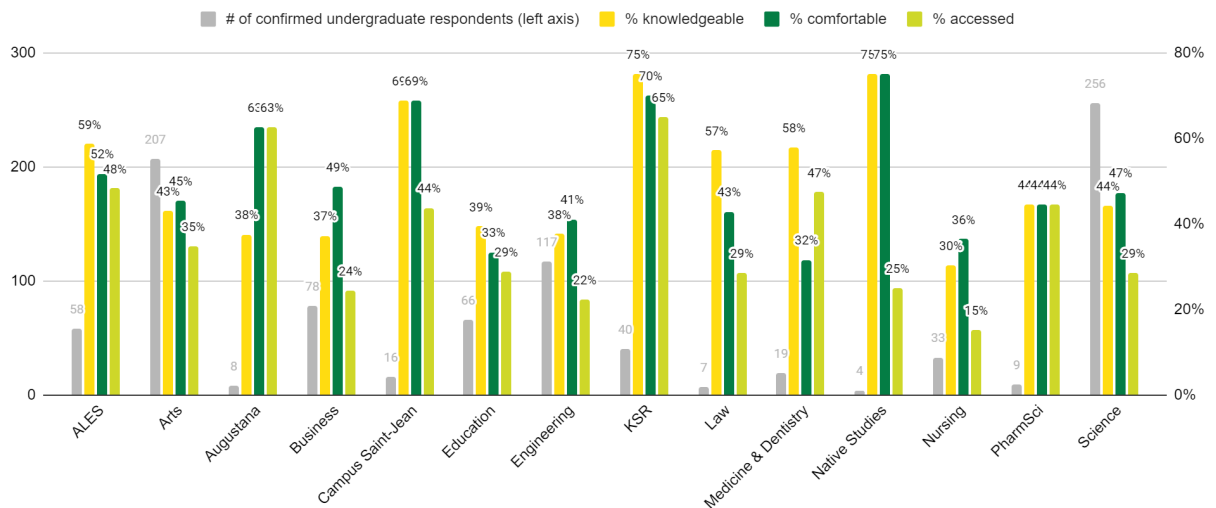
- Men were more likely to feel knowledgeable and comfortable about this service, and somewhat more likely to actually use it.
- Disabled students were more likely to feel knowledgeable about this service, and much more likely to actually use it.

Spotlight on Faculty Academic Advisors

Compared to the August 2021 survey, students are much more likely to visit their faculties' academic advisors, but much less likely to feel knowledgeable or comfortable about doing so. We also noted above that the new problems appear across years of study.

With the note that cross-tabulating by faculty means very small numbers may be involved, this section attempts to determine whether the noted challenges are concentrated in any particular faculties.

It seems clear that, with all appropriate caveats, problems related to *knowing how to access advisors* should be closely examined in Augustana, Business, Education, Engineering, and Nursing. Problems related to *feeling comfortable accessing advisors* should be closely examined in Education, Engineering, Medicine and Dentistry, and Nursing.



It is also worth noting that students in Augustana, Campus Saint-Jean, Native Studies, and KSR appear to be especially likely to feel comfortable accessing their faculties' academic advisors. Students in KSR, CSJ, and Native Studies were also very likely to feel knowledgeable about how to access advisors, and ALES, Medicine and Dentistry, and Law scored well on knowledge also.