

Survey Report: Harmful Experiences in Work-Integrated Learning

October 22, 2020

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Introduction

UAlberta undergraduates have access to a wide variety of valuable experiential and work-integrated learning opportunities through the Career Centre, Arts Work Experience, Community Service-Learning, practicum placements, clerkships, internships, and other mechanisms. Many of these placements are linked to course credit, professional accreditation, and program completion.

UAlberta students benefit from relatively robust policy protection and recourse in uncomfortable or harmful situations related to their education, such as sexual harassment/assault or discrimination. Work-integrated learning placements are a glaring exception. Supervisors and workplaces are not (and, for the most part, cannot be) accountable to UAlberta policy. However, they often hold power over the academic outcomes of student employees. Critical UAPPOL policies appear to be silent on the issue. This silence gives students no recourse, guidance, or protection.

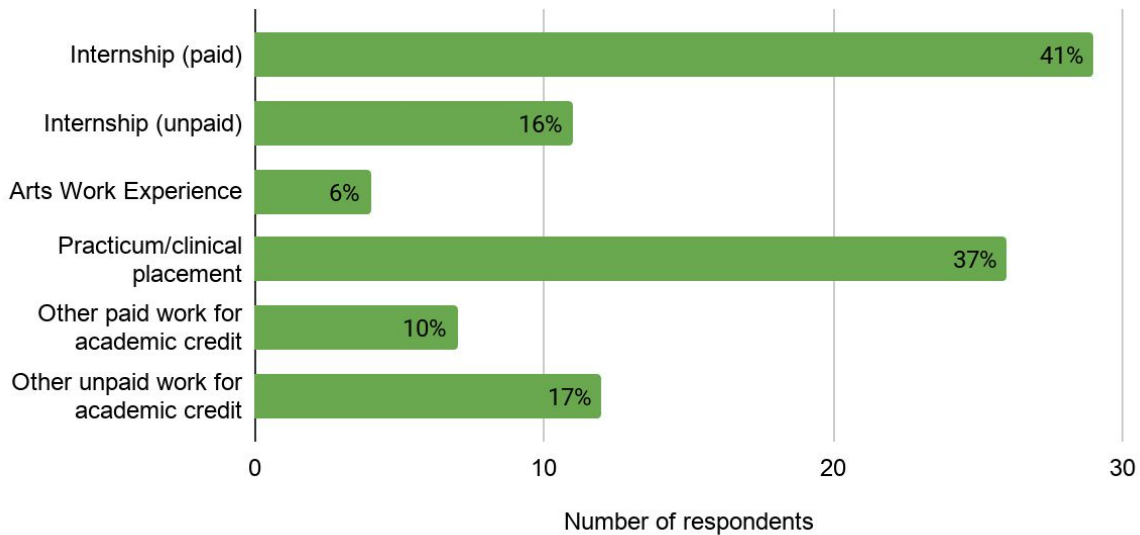
As part of a strategy to address these issues, UASU issued a brief survey on experiences in work-integrated learning. We distributed the survey through a newsletter, through social media, and through the Perks platform. We received responses from 70 students who had participated in work-integrated learning and who were willing to talk about their experiences.

- One out of four had experienced/witnessed discrimination based on protected grounds. Practicum and clinical placements were somewhat overrepresented.
- One out of ten had experienced/witnessed sexual harassment or even assault. (We believe this is underreported.)
- Virtually all respondents who had experienced/witnessed sexual harassment had also experienced/witnessed discrimination. This suggests an intersectional lens is vital to addressing both problems.
- One in three respondents had experienced/witnessed pressure to perform tasks unrelated to their job description. Practicum and clinical placements were overrepresented (one out of two respondents). The same overrepresentation (one out of two) held true for students who had experienced/witnessed discrimination. Students who had experienced/witnessed sexual harassment were even more likely (three out of five) to see pressure to perform out-of-scope tasks.

Our Respondents

Have you participated in any of the following experiences during your time at the UAlberta? (Choose all that apply.)

Bar labels = percent of respondents



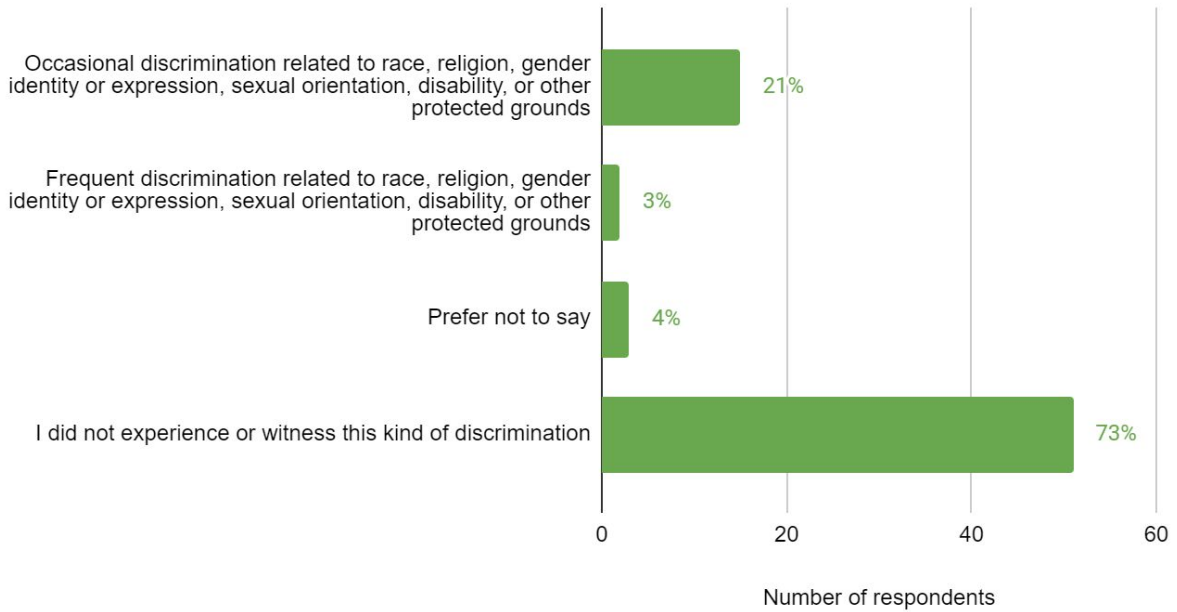
We collected data on gender, faculty, internationalization, and year of study. However, due to a technical error, a portion of this data was lost. We encourage the University to pursue comparable research through appropriate lenses.

Within the intact data, 79% of respondents were women or gender non-binary. 50% were fourth-year students or higher. Respondents came from the faculties of Science, Engineering, Nursing, Arts, ALES, Education, and KSR. All respondents were domestic students - not surprising, considering the limited opportunities for international students.

Discrimination

When participating in work-integrated learning opportunities, did you experience or witness any of the following? (Choose all that apply). Remember, all responses are anonymous.

Bar labels = percent of respondents



While the framing of our survey would naturally attract respondents who had negative experiences, we are still concerned that one out of four respondents had experienced or witnessed discrimination based on protected grounds. We also note that practicum and clinical placements were somewhat overrepresented.

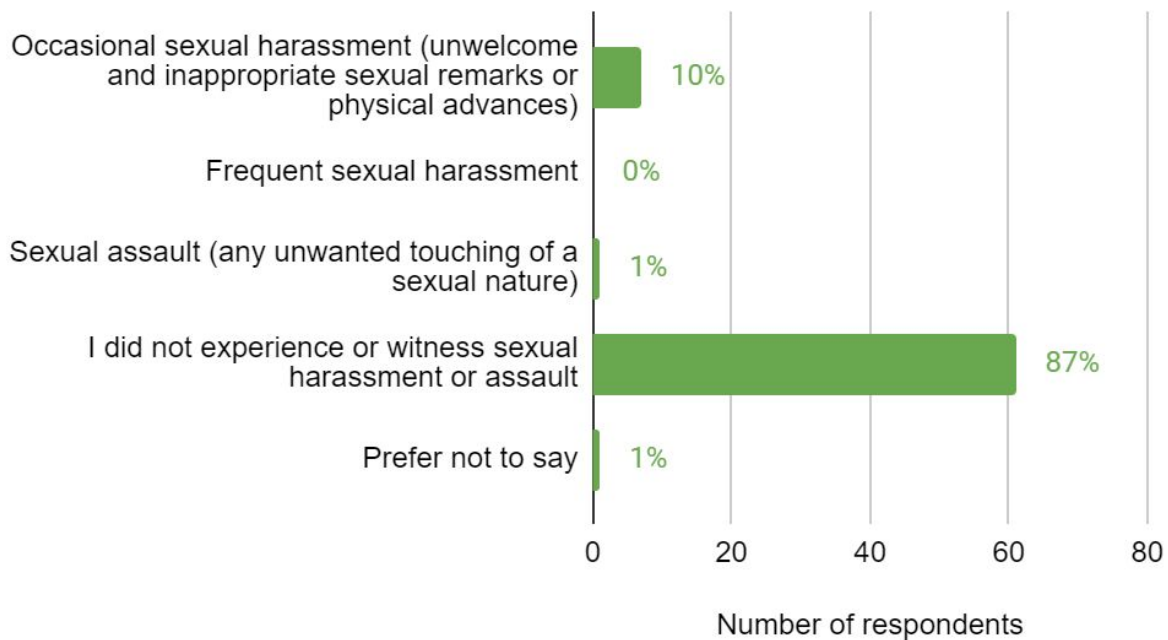
Sexual Harassment and Assault

We know that, in 2019 alone, 11% of women students across Canada was a survivor of sexual violence; one in twenty student survivors was assaulted by an instructor, supervisor, or other authority figure.¹ We also know that sexual violence is terminally underreported: 95% of survivors do not file police reports,² and reporting rates to University authorities are similarly bleak.

In that context, we believe the following chart - which shows one in ten WIL participants experiencing or witnessing sexual harassment or even assault - underrepresents the scope of the problem.

When participating in work-integrated learning opportunities, did you experience or witness any of the following? (Choose all that apply). Remember, all responses are anonymous.

Bar labels = percent of respondents



We also note that virtually all respondents who experienced or witnessed sexual harassment also experienced or witnessed discrimination based on protected grounds.

¹ Statistics Canada, 'One in ten women students sexually assaulted in a postsecondary setting,' September 2020

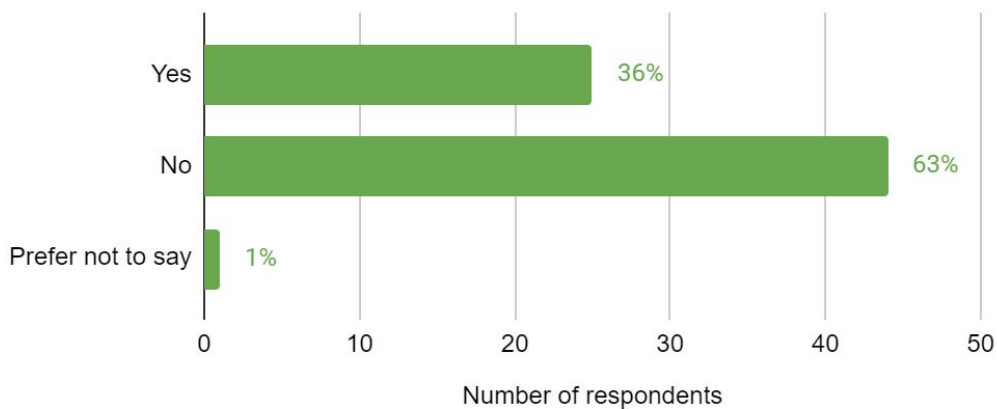
² Government of Alberta, 'Ending Sexual Violence in Alberta,' September 2020

Tasks Out of Scope

While entry-level positions do tend to include some general or flexible office tasks, pressure to perform tasks unrelated to one's job is a broad and concerning category that speaks to the quality of these opportunities.

When participating in work-integrated learning opportunities, did you experience or witness pressure to perform tasks unrelated to your (or another student's) job description?

Bar labels = percent of respondents



One out of three respondents had experienced or witnessed such pressure. Practicum and clinical placements were overrepresented (one out of two respondents). The same overrepresentation held true for students who had experienced or witnessed discrimination. Students who had experienced or witnessed sexual harassment were even more likely (three out of five).

Additionally, one respondent had experienced or witnessed pressure to break the law.