

Students' Union, University of Calgary

2021 SU Summer Advocacy Survey Report

November 2021

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Executive Summary

The Students' Union (SU) conducted a timely survey in the summer of 2021 to better understand more about undergraduate students, with a focus on impact of COVID-19. Results of this survey generally align with ongoing SU advocacy positions and will be used to inform future advocacy to university administration and government. Faculty-specific data was also provided to SU faculty representatives to help inform their advocacy to respective Deans and programming offices.

885 undergraduate students at the University of Calgary responded to the survey, representing a 3.6% response rate.

The survey received responses from each faculty, with common over- and under-representation trends consistent with other SU surveys, with the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Science seeing over-representation in particular. 8.4% of respondents were international students. The survey received higher respondent rates from sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) groups relative to the 2021 SU Annual Survey by approximately 1-2% of respondents each in various SOGI groups. 19.6% of respondents identified as Indigenous or as a member of a racialized minority. 83% of respondents lived in Calgary, but off campus.

30% of student respondents were working full time while 34% were working part time, and around 36% were unemployed this summer. 2.4% of respondents lost out on an educational/academic summer opportunity due to cancellation as a result of COVID-19, while 1.2% of respondents experienced the same loss of opportunity with paid employment due to COVID-19.

Only 44.7% of respondents were not concerned about their ability to pay their tuition and fees for the 2021-2022 academic year. 36% were concerned, and the remainder were unsure at the time of the survey.

72% of respondents enrolled in a normal amount of courses for them, despite the return to in-person learning. 10.9% enrolled in fewer courses as a result of in-person learning, while 1% of respondents were not returning as a student at all due to in-person learning. 5.2% enrolled in more classes as a result of the return to in-person learning.

36.1% of respondents disagreed and a further 23.4% strongly disagreed (a total of 59.5% of respondents in disagreement) that their anticipated tuition costs for Fall 2021 reflected the quality of education they expected to receive. 47.6% of respondents strongly disagreed with the idea that the quality of their education kept pace with increases to their tuition; a further 34.3% also disagreed (a total of 81.9% in disagreement).

The survey collected additional data pertaining to open educational resources, food security and the SU Campus Food Bank, the October 2021 Calgary Municipal Election, and other issues.

Introduction

The 2021 Summer Advocacy Survey was administered from August 6 to September 10, 2021. Questions were developed to inquire further into undergraduate's experience during the summer and students' feelings going into the Fall 2021 semester. Results reported demonstrate longitudinal trends and findings that are significant for understanding student satisfaction and engagement. Data from multiple questions may be cross tabulated to determine how different factors impact student satisfaction and help the SU to provide better programs and advocate effectively.

885 undergraduate students at the University of Calgary responded to the survey, representing a 3.6% response rate.

Methodology

Instrument

Questions for this survey were developed with the interests of both specific faculty representatives and the larger organization in mind. Specifically, ongoing COVID-19-related advocacy initiatives around accessing transit, the cost and quality of education, and access to technology were considered. Open-ended survey responses were summarized based on emerging themes. This method of coding responses enables the SU to track trends in unprompted, open-ended student responses to better understand important aspects of the student experience.

Administration of Survey

The survey was administered online and took approximately 10 minutes to complete. SU staff managed the survey and Qualtrics Survey Software was used to create the web-based questionnaire.

Communications

The online survey was open from August 6 to September 10, 2021. The traditional communications tactics used for SU surveys were executed by SU staff, as detailed below. In addition, SU elected officials were encouraged to promote the survey within their faculty via D2L, mailing lists, and classroom visits.

- **Email**
 - The email list was extracted from the SU internal list. The total number individuals on the SU contact list are unknown but this is known to be the most up-to-date student list.

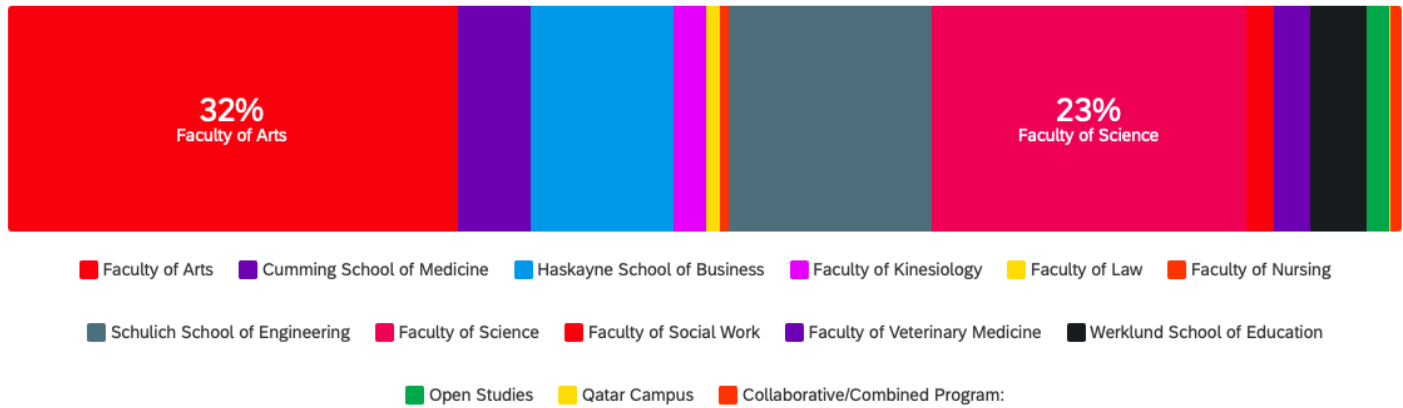
- Students received an initial email from the President's email account inviting them to participate in the survey and a subsequent reminder email.
- SU registered clubs received notice of the survey in the club's newsletter and through direct email to primary contacts on file for clubs.
- **Social Media**
 - The survey link was shared from SU accounts on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.
- **Print/Digital**
 - The SU Communications department produced posters and digital ads which were displayed in the MacEwan Building.
- **Website**
 - There was a prominent SU Survey link on the SU website (<http://www.su.ucalgary.ca/>) throughout the duration of the survey.

Ethical Considerations

All students were informed upon starting the survey that participation was voluntary and confidential. Respondents were free to withdraw at any time with no penalty. For privacy reasons, personal information (student names, email addresses, or other identifying information from open-ended responses) will not be shared. The survey data file will reside with Qualtrics Survey Software and the SU. The aggregate data, minus personal information, will be reserved for internal use by the SU. The SU did not go through the university ethics approval process as this survey was administered by the SU for internal use.

Student Demographics

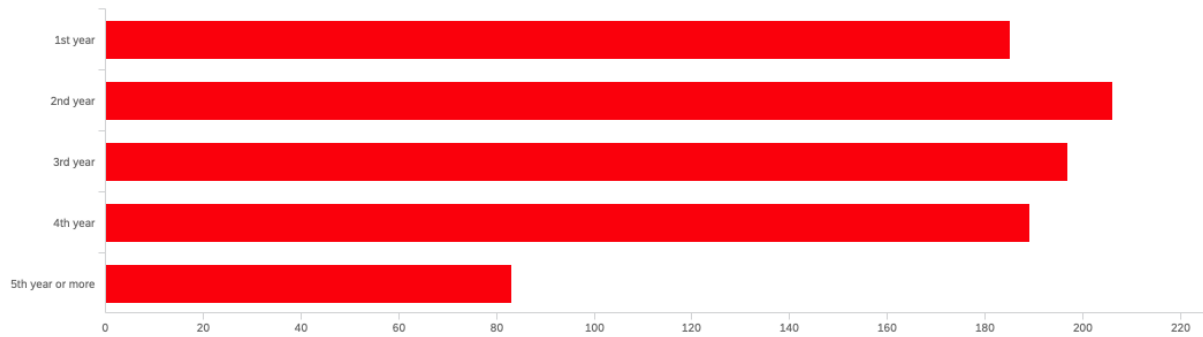
Faculty Representation



The majority of individuals who completed the survey resided from the two largest facilities on campus, Faculty of Arts and Faculty of Science. As shown in the graphic above the Faculty of Arts has a 32% representation in the survey and Faculty of Science with a 23% representation. The less represented faculties all sit under 5%, this included the Faculty of Law, Kinesiology, Nursing, Social Work, Education, Veterinary and the Cumming School of Medicine. This variation is to be expected as Faculty of Arts and Science hold most degree streams at the University of Calgary and the number of students enrolled in each is higher.

Compared to the 2020 Enrollment Data provided by [Office of Institutional Analysis](#), the Faculty of Arts is over-represented with a 32% survey response versus an approximate 28% of enrolment. Similarly, to the Faculty of Science where the 23% of student responses is greater than the 20% rate of enrollment. On the other hand, the rest of the faculties are unrepresented where their survey response rate is lower than their enrollment rates. However, this is consistent with previous years data and the variances continue to be statistically insignificant. Meaning all data collected in the survey is proportionally representative of the enrollment of students.

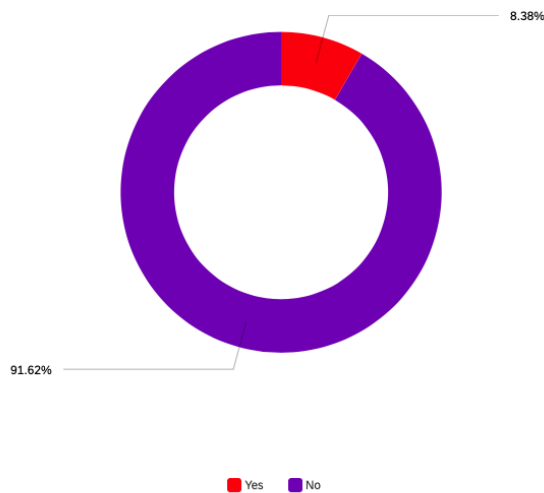
Representation by Year



Students who completed the survey ranged between different years of completing their degree. The majority of respondents, specifically 206, were currently in their second year of education. The lowest count of student’s respondents was said to be in their fifth year or more, sitting at only 83 students. This count makes up only 9% of all students who completed this survey. This low count can be accounted to the fact that out of students enrolled there are few students who are in their fifth year or more. Meaning those who take the survey will have a low sample size by default. Despite the percentage for this group being small, the range of students who are earlier in their degree is equal across the board and proportional to one another.

Percentage of International Students

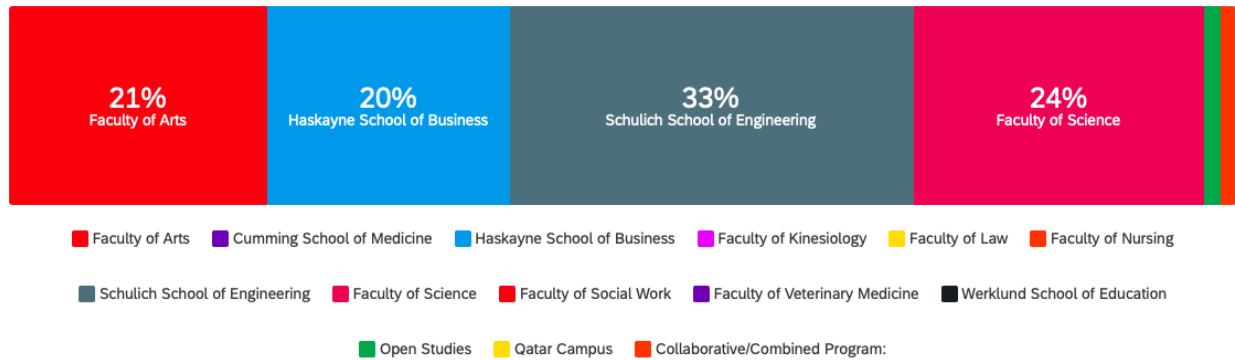
“Are you an international student?”



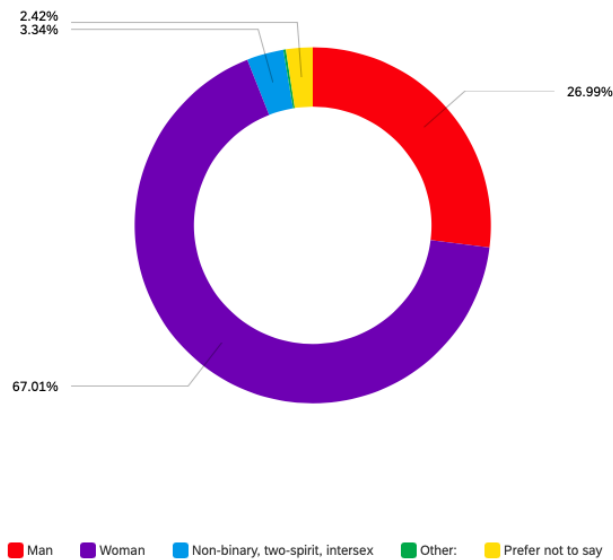
In previous years, the response rate of international students tended to vary although consistently made up a small percentage of responses. International students differ in responses compared to non-international students and that is present as we look at aspects such as living accommodations, course delivery options in the pandemic and more. They are a part of a unique demographic and provide different insight into mass student opinions.

This year there were very few international student responses, only 8.38%, therefore conclusions drawn on behalf of the international students is only representative of a small sample of individuals. The international students were made up of 26% first year students, 32% second year students, 30% third year students, 5% fourth year and 4% fifth year or more. The range across all faculties for international students is displayed in the figure below, with majority residing in Engineering or Science but even spread through Haskayne and Arts. Percentage of International Student Respondents by Faculty

Percentage of International Students by Faculty



Percentage of Respondents by Gender

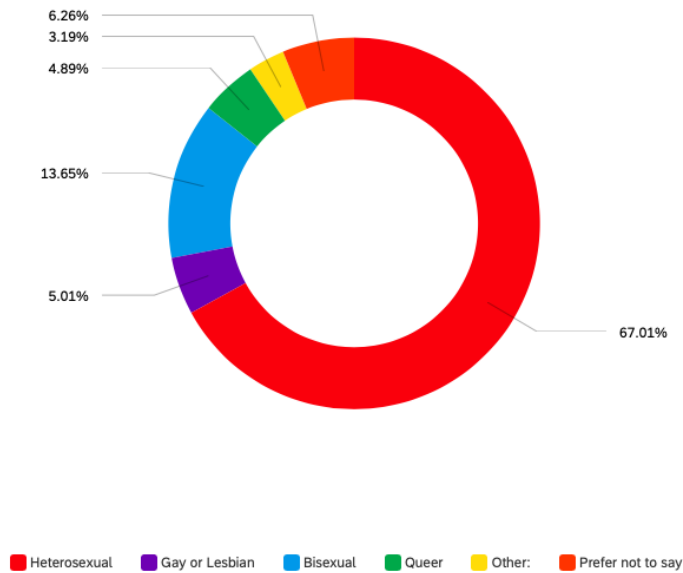


Those who identify as a Woman are overrepresented within the survey as they make up 67.01% of respondents; a trend consistent with SU surveys administered in previous years. Continuously through the Annual Survey the engagement level of Female-identifying individuals makes up majority of the respondents. Although, this percentage continues to decrease from

previous years where in last year's survey they made up 68.9% and the year before that were at 71.4%.

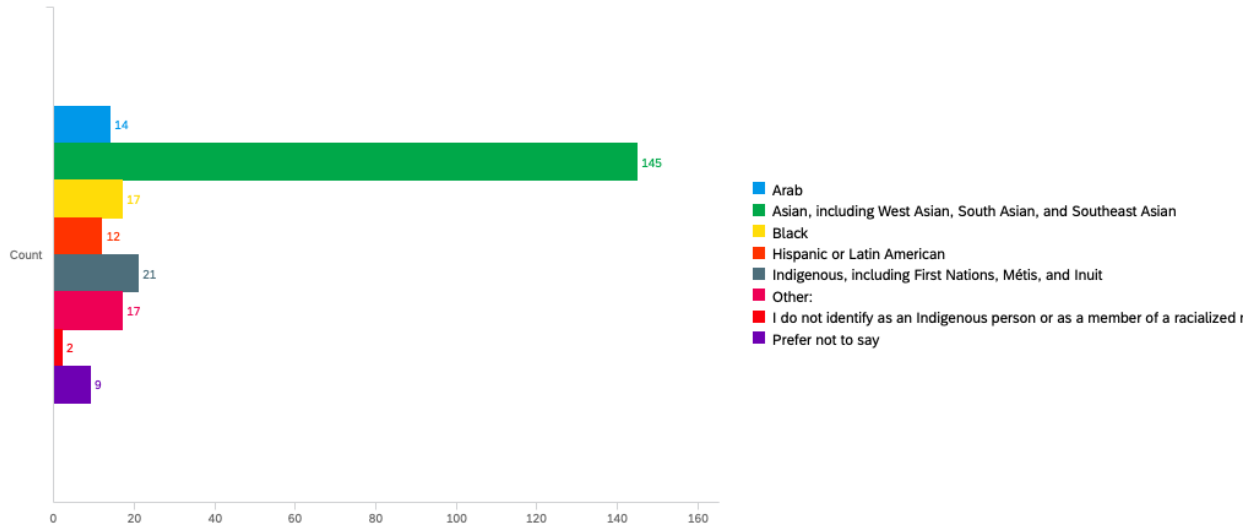
This decrease has been followed with an increase in those who identify as other genders such as Non-Binary, Two-Spirit, Intersex, and Other. In data from 2020, the percentages of these groups resided at 1.5% but increased by 1-2% in this year's survey. This is indicative of a larger group of individuals being represented in the survey and/or an increase in diversity amongst students.

Sexual Orientation



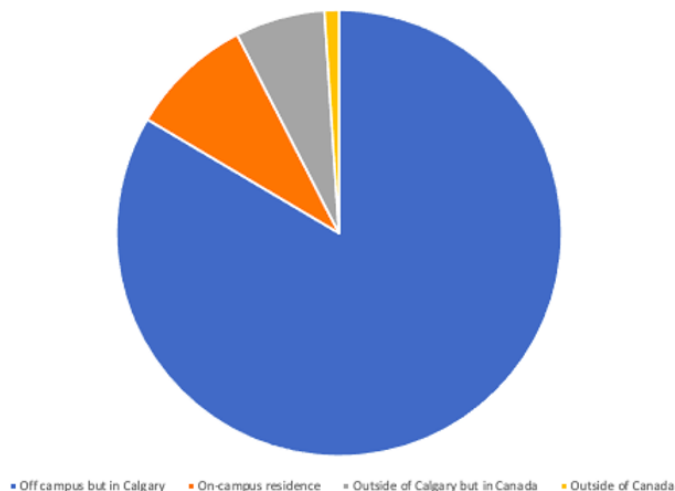
Another indicator of increased diversity amongst students is in their sexual orientation. Majority of respondents were heterosexual, specifically heterosexual white females who make up 48% of the responses in the survey. Although, the spread across other sexual orientation has increased since 2020 and diversity based on orientation continues to trend upwards.

Responses Based on Ethnicity



Diversity in our data set continues to be present as 19% of individuals identified as being a racialized minority. Out of that 19%, the figure above presents the different ethnicity groups that were included in our respondents. More than half (61%) of the respondents within this 19% were of Asian background and the rest of the ethnicity groups ranging within 3-7%.

Living Situation

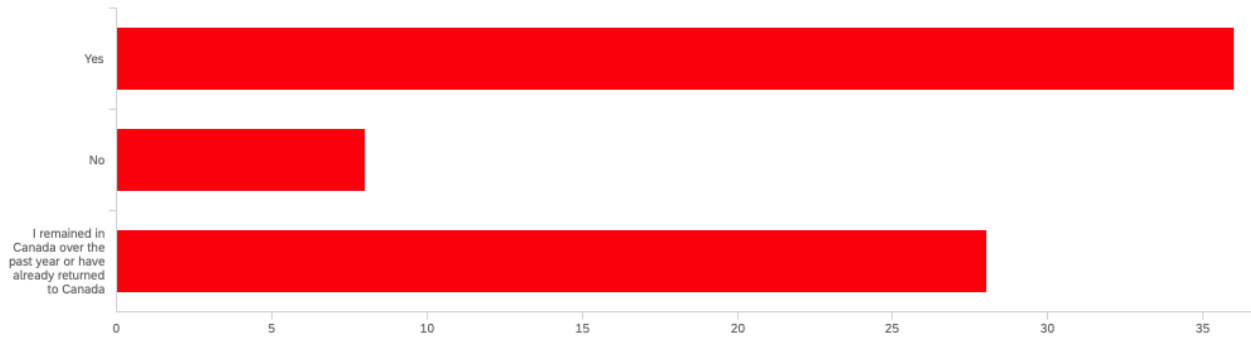


A large majority, 83%, of students who partook in the survey were individuals who were off campus but currently still residing in Calgary. This has been a trend in previous years as well and may be an indicator that majority of University of Calgary students are commuters. This

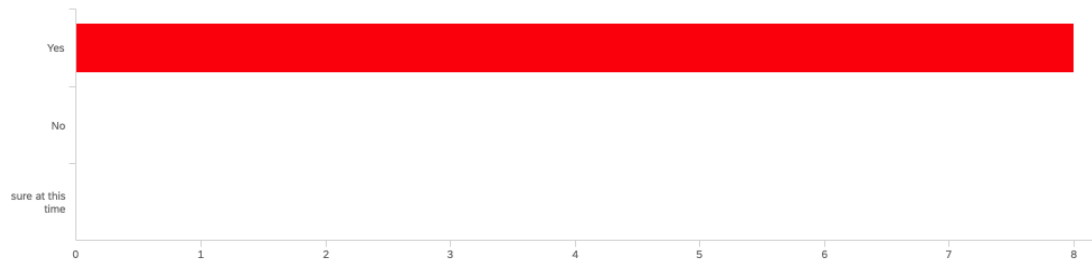
would explain any trends in transportation of students and opinions on campus living, as majority would not fall in this category.

International Students

“As an international student are you planning to return to Canada?”



“If no, will you be opting for online courses?”

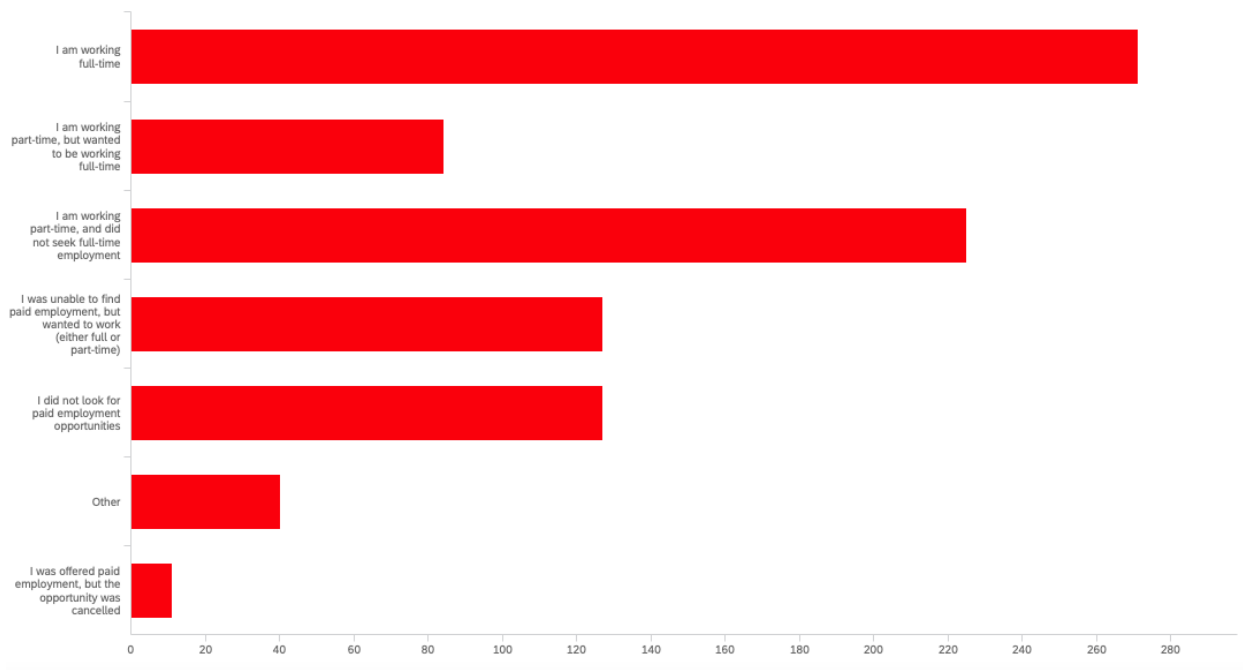


Of the individuals who are international students' 50% are planning to return to campus for the Fall term due to the campus plan to be fully reopened for this semester. 38% of international students on the other hand remained in Canada and the other 12% are not planning a return to campus. Out of the 12% of students not planning on returning to campus, all answered yes to completing online courses from their home country. This a hidden bonus of online delivery, as these students' education has become accessible, and they are able to continue completing their degree during this time.

Employment Rates

Looking into employment rates during the summer is important in getting an idea of how students are engaging in studies outside of academics, benefits of their education, contribution to the work force and predictions on their income. 30% of student respondents were working full time while 34% were working part time, and around 36% were unemployed this summer. This is an even distribution amongst all student respondents and one that is similar to last year's as both surveys were conducted during the pandemic. It is important to acknowledge the situation students were in this summer as unemployment rates raised in Canada as well as the difficulty for these students to find employment. The figure below presents a in depth distribution between the employment status of students in comparison to what the student wanted.

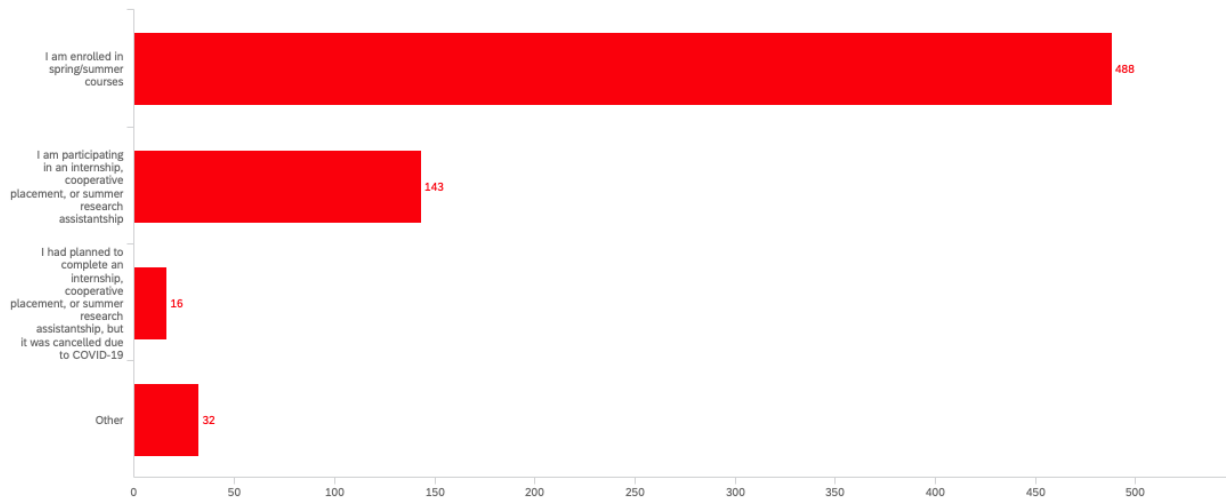
Respondents Employment Preferences



Out of the 34% of part time workers, 9% wanted to seek full time employment but was unable to and the other 25% did not seek full time employment. Out of those who were unemployed 14% were unable to find any employment regardless of wanting to work, 14% did not seek employment and the other 8% were students taking spring/summer courses, had their employment cancelled or due to personal reasons. A further look into the spread across those students who were unemployed is presented in the figure below.

Respondents Spring/Summer Plan

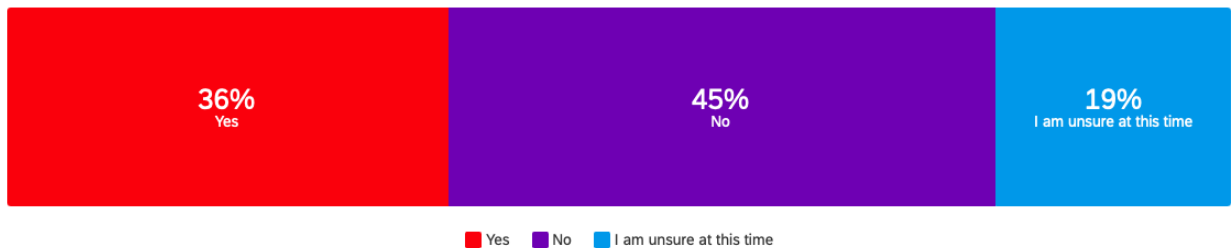
“Many students seek full- or part-time employment during the period of May to August each year. How would you best describe your situation for this spring/summer? Please select all that apply:”



Tuition Advocacy

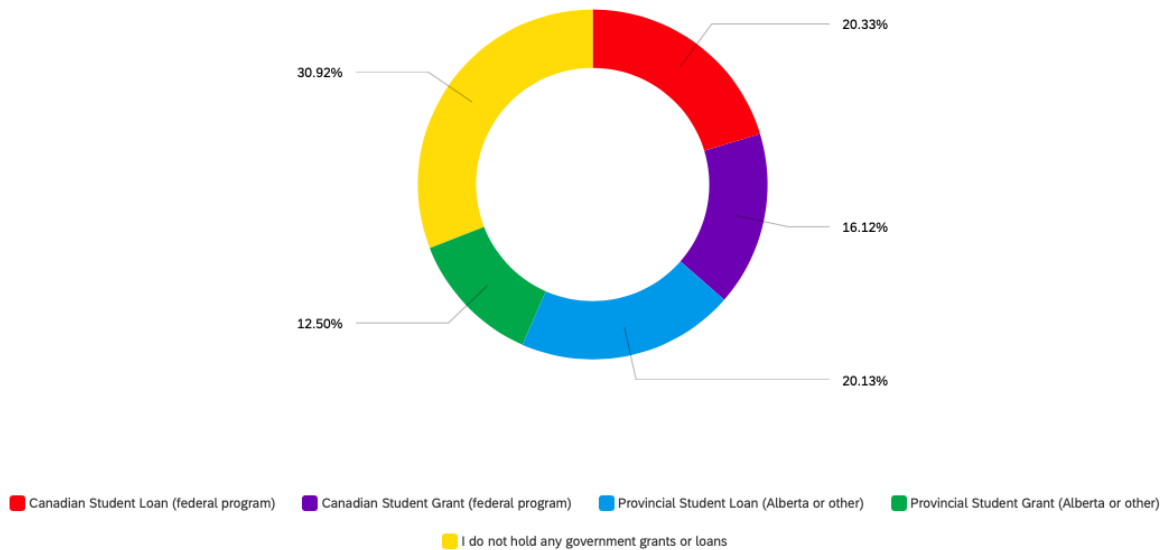
Concern on Paying Tuition Fees

“Are you concerned about your ability to pay your tuition and fees in the upcoming 2021-2022 academic year?”



With employment status of students varying, those who faced unemployment may struggle with paying off this year’s tuition fees. Inability to pay off tuition fees poses an issue for students, the university and all those involved in the institution. Fortunately, out of the student respondents 45% would describe themselves as not being concerned about paying off tuition fees and only 36% saying otherwise. Many of these students seek out monetary assistance to pay off the fees and the distribution of such is shown in the figure below.

Monetary Assistance

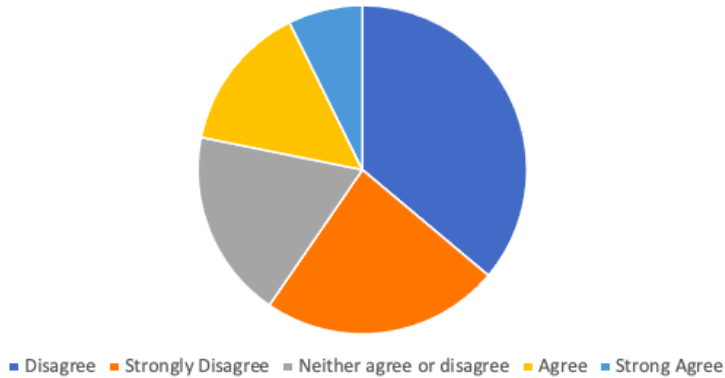


Most students are currently holding a various amount of grants and loans to pay off their tuition fees. The above graphic goes into detail over the percentage of students who hold each one, with only 30.92% of individuals not holding either one. Majority of students hold a loan through the provincial student loan program or the federal program while less students opt to for the grant system.

Tuition prices vary based on faculty, year of education, number of courses and many other factors. The upcoming 2021-2022 school year is the third year in a row the University of Calgary will be proposing an increase to undergraduate tuition.

Tuition Prices & Level of Education

Tuition Prices Match Level of Education

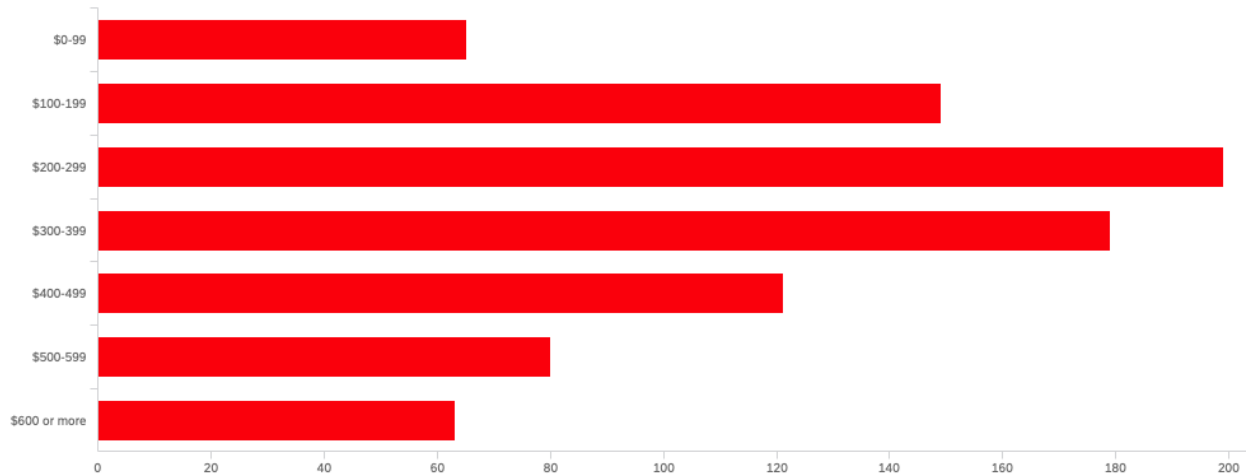


When asked about whether the tuition prices match the level of education they receive, students have less than favourable opinions. 36% of students disagree that the tuition price matches their level of education while 23% strongly disagree, 19% neither agree or disagree, 15% agree, and 7% strongly agree. The overwhelming number of students, 59%, who do not believe that the tuition prices match the educational level is only expected to worsen as the University of Calgary pushes for a greater increase in tuition.

Students are less than satisfied with their education provided and multiple students have voiced their opinion on the online course delivery being the cause of the dissatisfaction. Online course delivery does not provide the same educational beneficiaries as in person learning and many students believe the price of an online course should not be equivalent to as if it was in person. Students pay for the campus and class experience, two aspects that have been taken away from them in the past year.

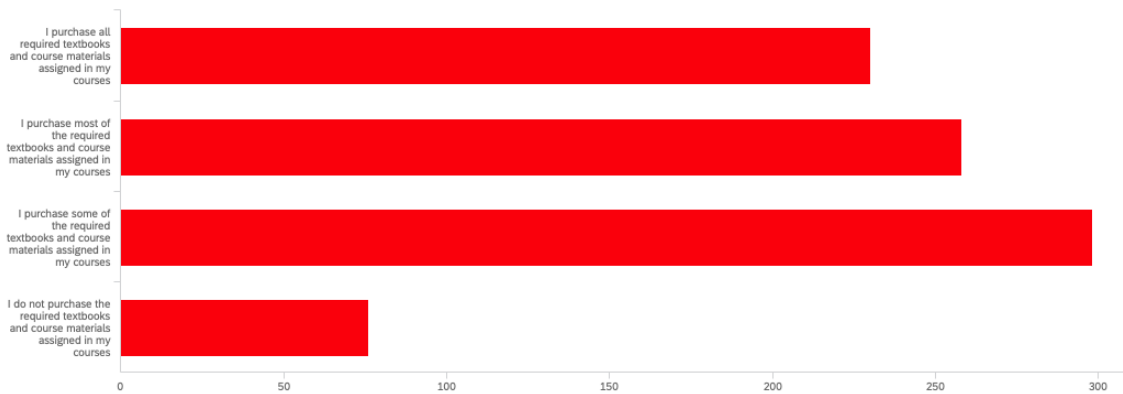
Textbook Fees

Money Spent on Textbooks Per One Semester



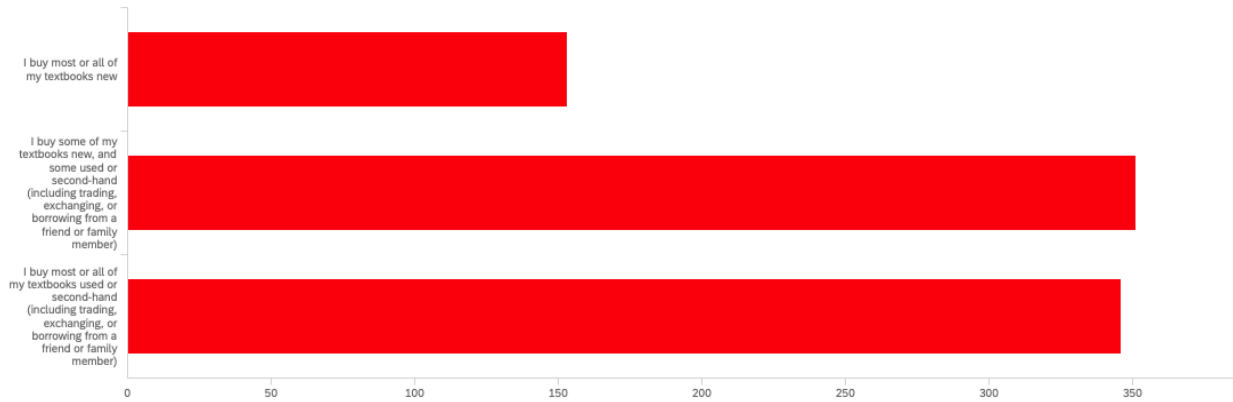
Majority of students have been said to spend between \$100 to \$499 dollars on textbooks per one semester. Specifically, 17% spending between \$100-\$199, 23% spending between \$200-\$299, 20% spending between \$300-\$399 and 14% spending between \$400-\$499.

Number of Textbooks Bought Per One Semester



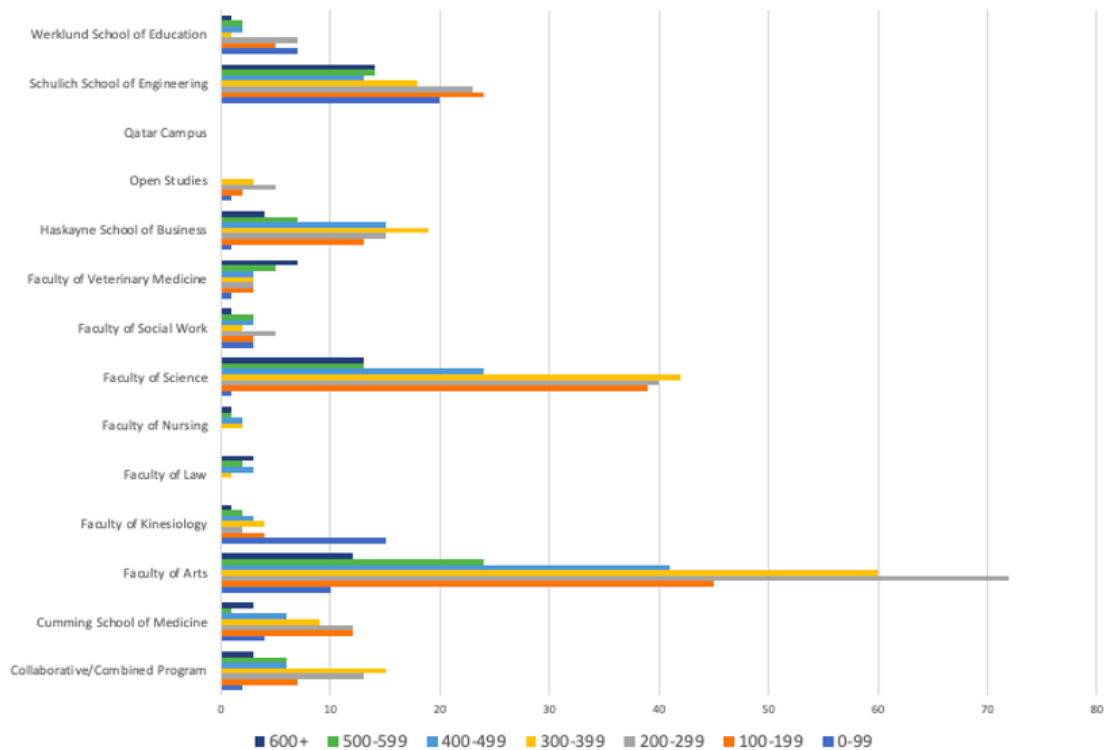
The price of textbooks continues rise and become increasingly difficult for students to pay for. This can indicate why multiple students are only buying a few of their textbooks per semester and opting out of purchasing the ones that are not required. Only 26.86% end up buying all their textbooks for the semester, 29.93% buy most of them, 34.57% only purchase some and 8.82% do not buy any.

Method of Obtaining Textbooks



Out of the money that students spend on textbooks, 18% are bought brand new, 40.71% are second hand and 41.29% is a mix of both. Students continue to purchase textbooks at a high price of up to 600 dollars and still majority are not brand new, rather second hand or a mix of both.

Money Spent on Textbooks per Faculty

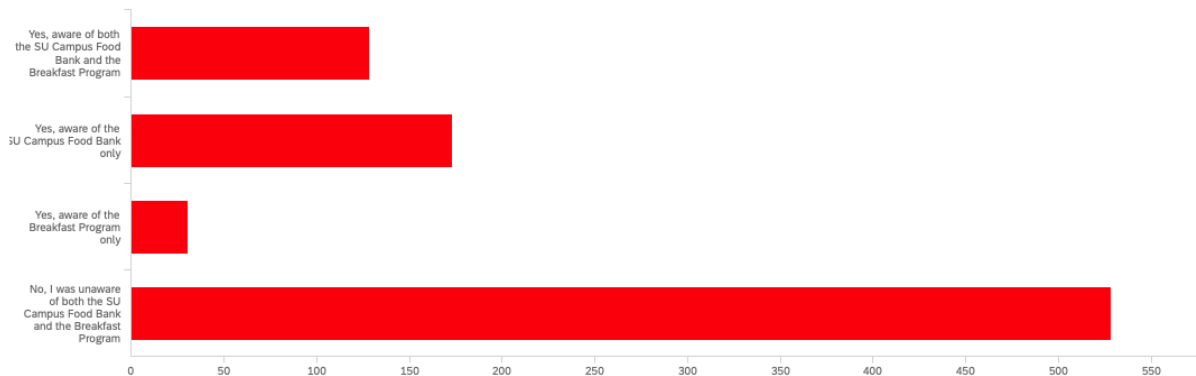


Based off faculty, majority of the expenses spent on textbooks come from the Faculty of Arts and Faculty of Science. There is a moderate amount of variation between faculties and how much money is spent on textbooks from each one, which is to be expected due to the variation of faculties represented in the respondents.

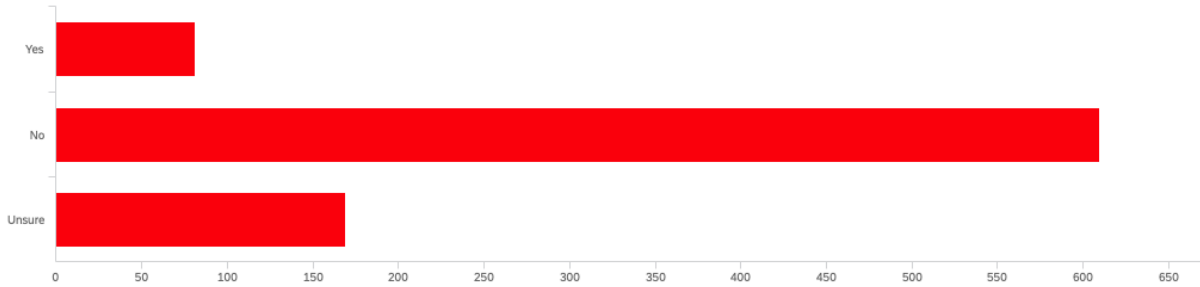
Food Insecurity

Amongst tuition, textbooks and the numerous other fees students must pay during the year, some students face monetary issues at home as well. Food insecurity has raised over the past year during the pandemic with more and more families facing struggles to supply their daily meals. The Student Union has created multiple programs such as the Food Bank and the Breakfast Program which provides students with accessible meal options throughout the year. The programs are helpful for all students and all students will be able to access them when they need. When questioned about these programs multiple students were unaware of them and/or have not used them. A majority being unaware of them could indicate the high levels of students not accessing the programs and participating in such.

Were you aware of the food security programs at the Student Union?

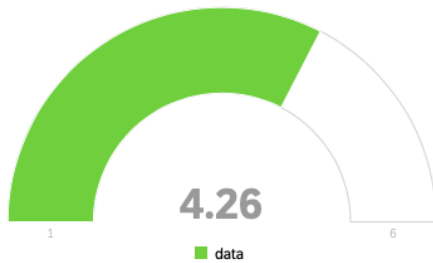


Have you ever accessed the food security programs at the Student Union?



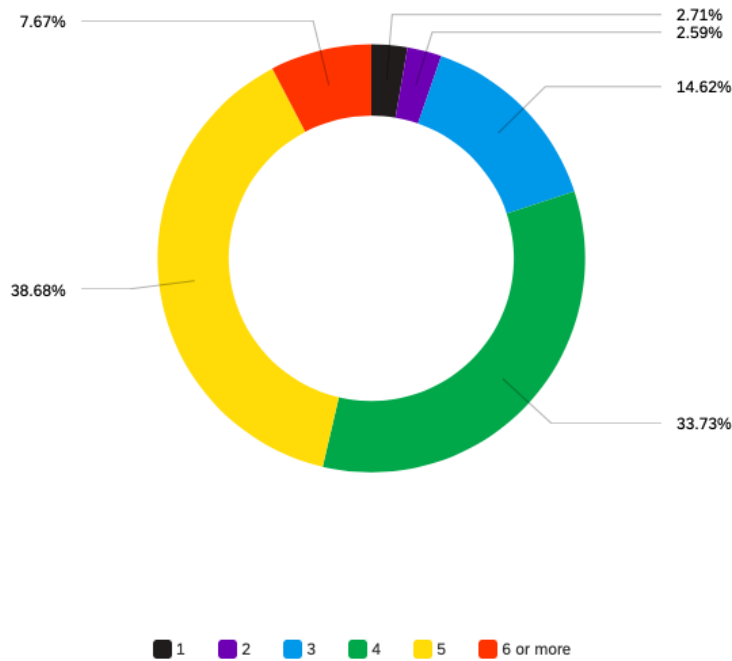
61.47% of respondents were unaware of both programs with only 9% stating otherwise. This statistic is worrisome when 49% of students have faced some form of food insecurity within the past year. 64% of students who faced this food insecurity were also not aware of the programs provided to them by the Student Union. This can explain why a significantly low level of individuals, 70.90%, have never accessed the programs. The distribution in the data surrounding food insecurity is significant and the variation is high. It is more than enough evidence to conclude that the Student Union’s food program is not receiving as much attention from the student body as it should.

Courses



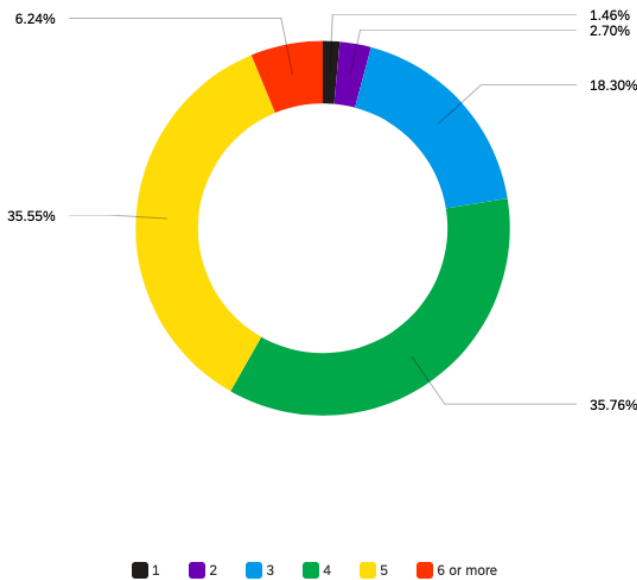
In one typical semester the mean of classes taken by a student is 4, which provides for a manageable workload for most students.

Number of Classes Per Semester



The division between the number of classes taken is heavily amounted in 4 or 5 classes, with the lowest percentage of individuals (2.71%) taking only 1 class.

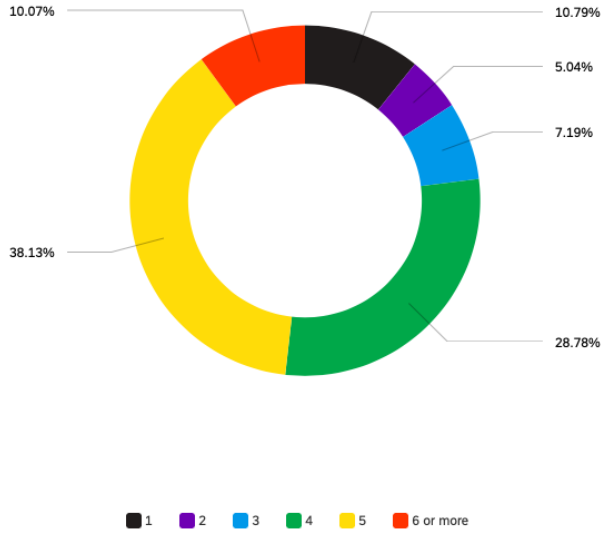
Courses Per Semester for Students Who Have Taken Spring & Summer Courses



There was a clear correlation present in our data between the number of courses an individual takes and what their summer activities consisted of. The division changed when

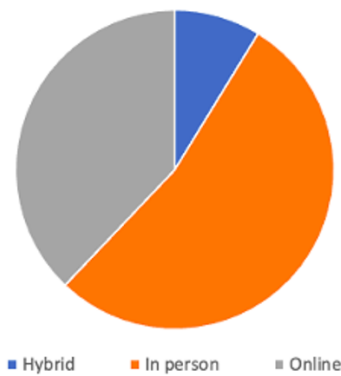
compared to students who took summer and/or spring courses, with 18% of those individuals taking 3 classes, 35% taking 4 and 35% taking 5.

Courses Per Semester for Students Who Partook in Cooperative Placements or Internships



It changed once again when compared to students who worked in an internship or cooperative placement over the summer, with only 7.19% taking 3 courses, 28% taking 4 and 38% taking 5. The percentage of students who ended up taking 6 or more courses also increased to 10% rather than the average of 7%.

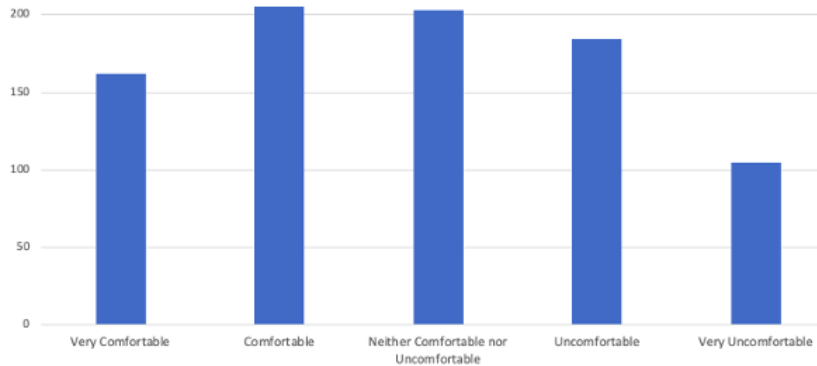
Delivery of Classes



Due to the pandemic and the current state of health Alberta is in, the return to campus plan has faced numerous changes and is adapting based on health regulations. This same though applies to the course delivery methods for the 2021 year. Majority, 53% of students have declared that their classes are set to be in person while the rest are 38% online and 9% hybrid of the two.

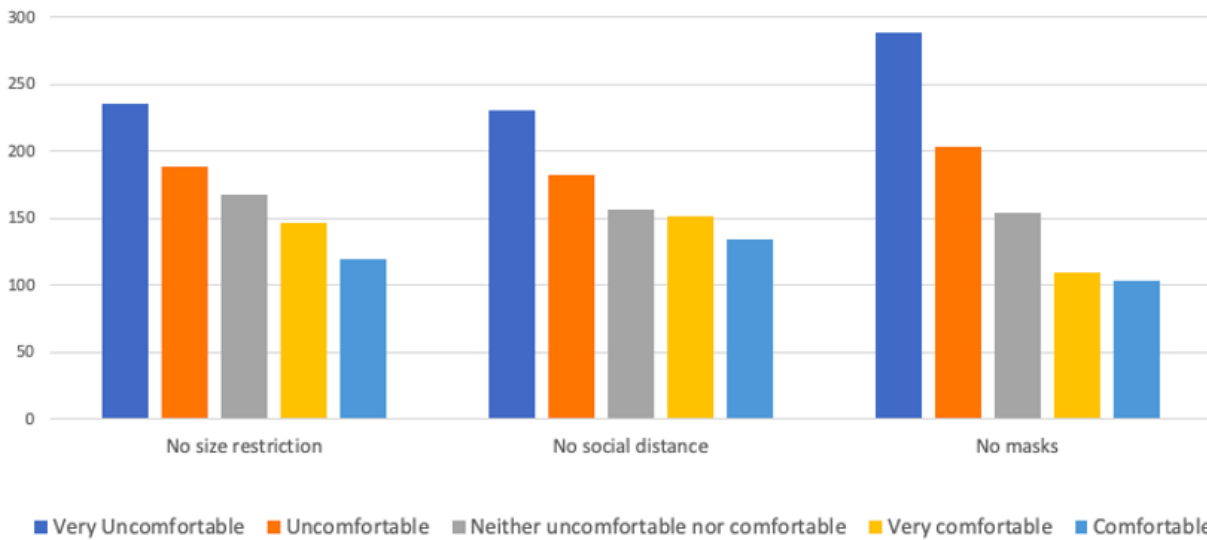
Not only has course delivering changed due to the state of health the province is in, but also the comfortability of the students. With Fall 2021 being the first semester for all students to return to campus the safety of the students is a top priority, especially ensuring they are comfortable at the university.

Comfort Level Returning to Campus



18% of student respondents stated that they were very comfortable returning to campus, 23% were comfortable, 23% were neither comfortable nor uncomfortable, 21% were uncomfortable and 12% were very uncomfortable returning to campus. Comfortability levels based on the health restrictions had variation between each and differed based on each provincial regulation.

Comfort Level Based on Restrictions



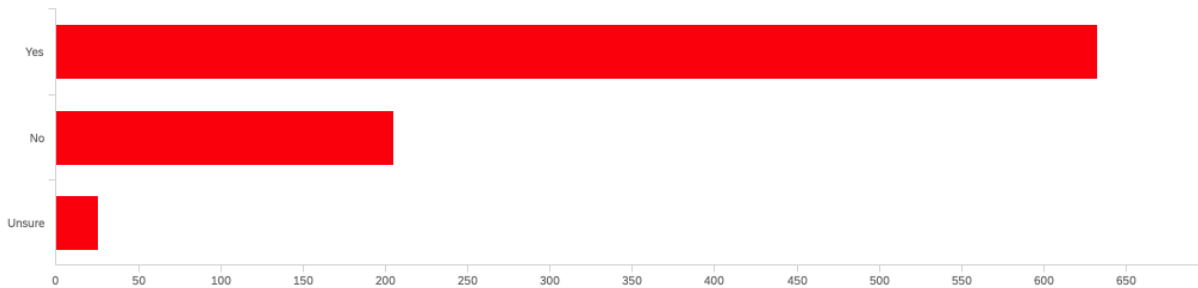
Comfortability was its lowest when no restrictions were put into place which is showed by the light blue bar in the figure above. Students reported to be very uncomfortable, as shown by the dark blue bar, about the return to campus if masks, social distancing, and size restrictions were not to be put into place.

Election

A Calgary municipal election will occur on Monday, October 18, 2021. This will be a large election with votes for mayor, city councillors, and school board trustee roles, as well as several anticipated ballot questions. Students are a large demographic expected and encouraged to vote in this municipal election, the graphics below represents how many students were aware of the election and who is planning on vote.

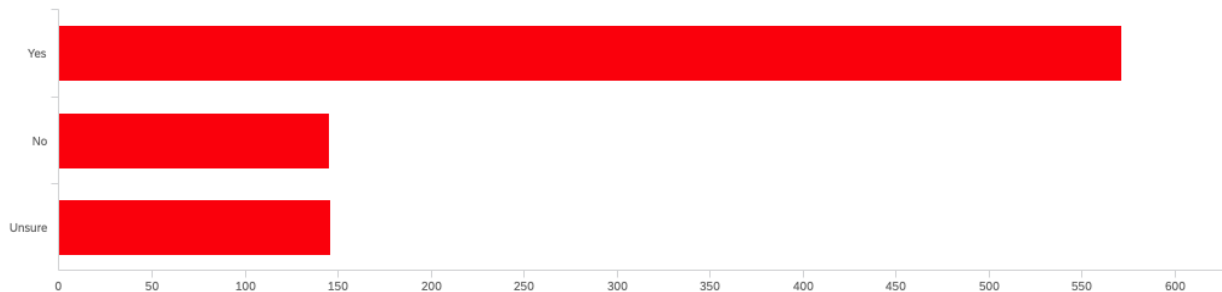
73.32% of students were aware of the municipal election, 23.78% were not aware and 2.90% were unsure.

Were you aware of this year's municipal election?

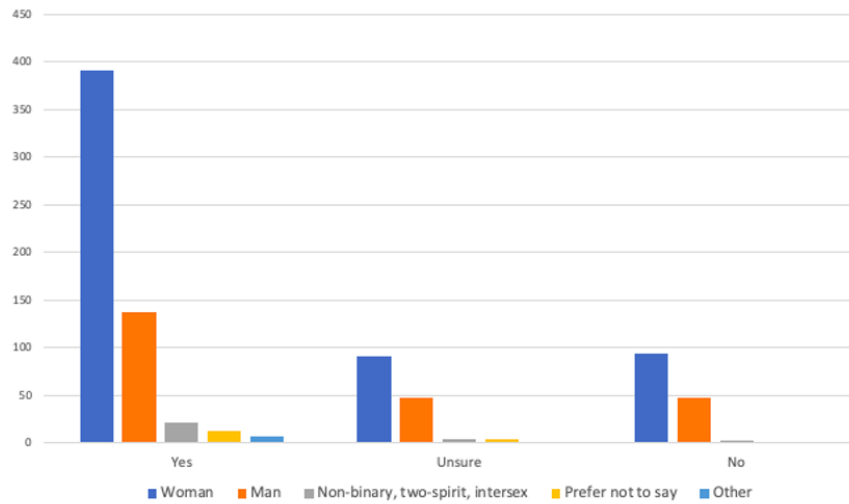


66.24% of students are indeed planning on voting in the municipal election, which is quite encouraging as political participation for students is significantly high

Are you planning to vote in this year's municipal election?

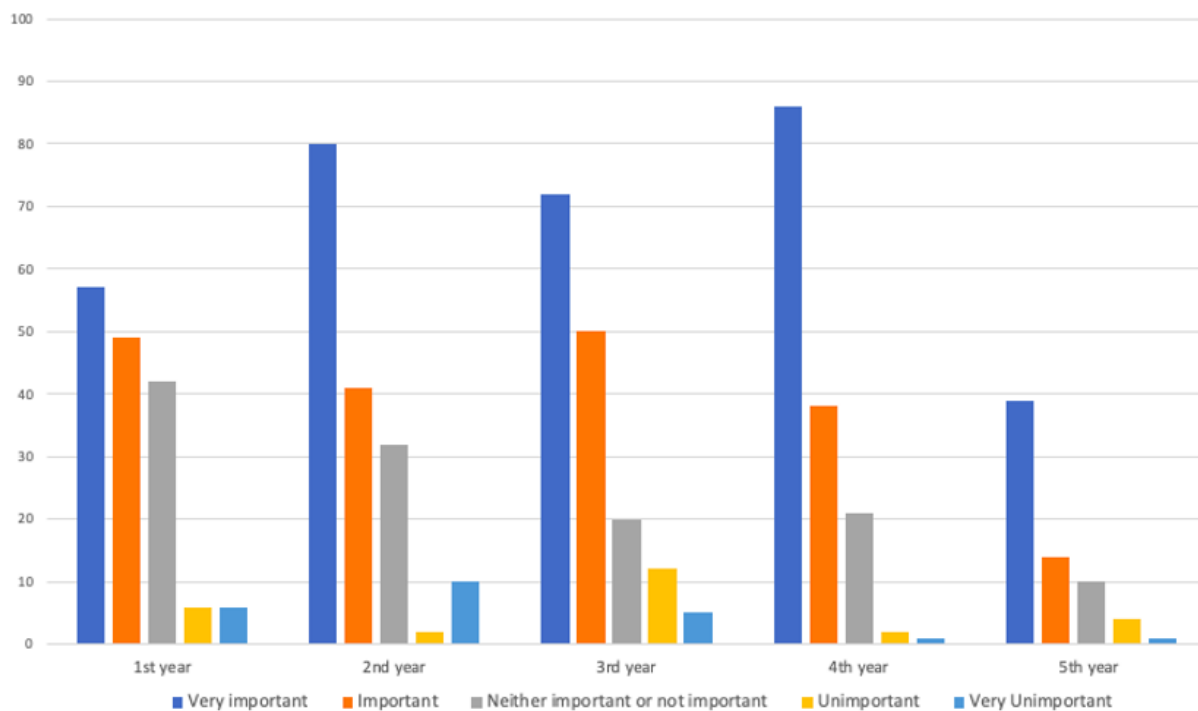


Voting Rate Based on Gender



With more inquiry into student voting, it is found that female-identifying students are most likely to be voting in this municipal election. A significant percent of female-identifying individuals (45%) has confidentially stated that they will be voting, whereas only 15% of male-identifying individuals will be voting and percentages only decrease through the rest of the genders.

Importance of Voting Station on Campus By Year of Student



The above graphic displays a breakdown of how important it is for students to have a voting station on campus. The Student Union has advocated for voting stations for all wards to

be located on campus for easily accessible voting, which is favourable by the students as well. Majority of students across all years of study find it either important or very important to have a voting station on campus, with less students thinking otherwise. The importance is somewhat less for first years although this could be because they are not of age to vote yet, usually meaning they are less interested.