2023 Summer Advocacy Survey Report

November 2023

Contents

Introduction

The Students' Union ran the 2023 Summer Advocacy Survey from August 21 to September 22, 2023. The survey received a total of 456 responses, of which 94% were undergraduate students at the University of Calgary. With a total enrolment of 28,327 students as of the Fall 2022 term, the Summer Advocacy Survey had a 1.6% response rate, and an 87% completion rate.

The survey was promoted to students via the SU's social media and emails to all undergraduate students, sent by the SU President.

Students were presented with 48 questions on topics including student employment, tuition, housing, food security, mental health and the wellness center, covid-19 and course work, the University of Calgary bookstore, UPass, academic concerns, mental health and the wellness center, Covid-19, the University of Calgary Bookstore, the Students' Union programming and services, and University consultation.
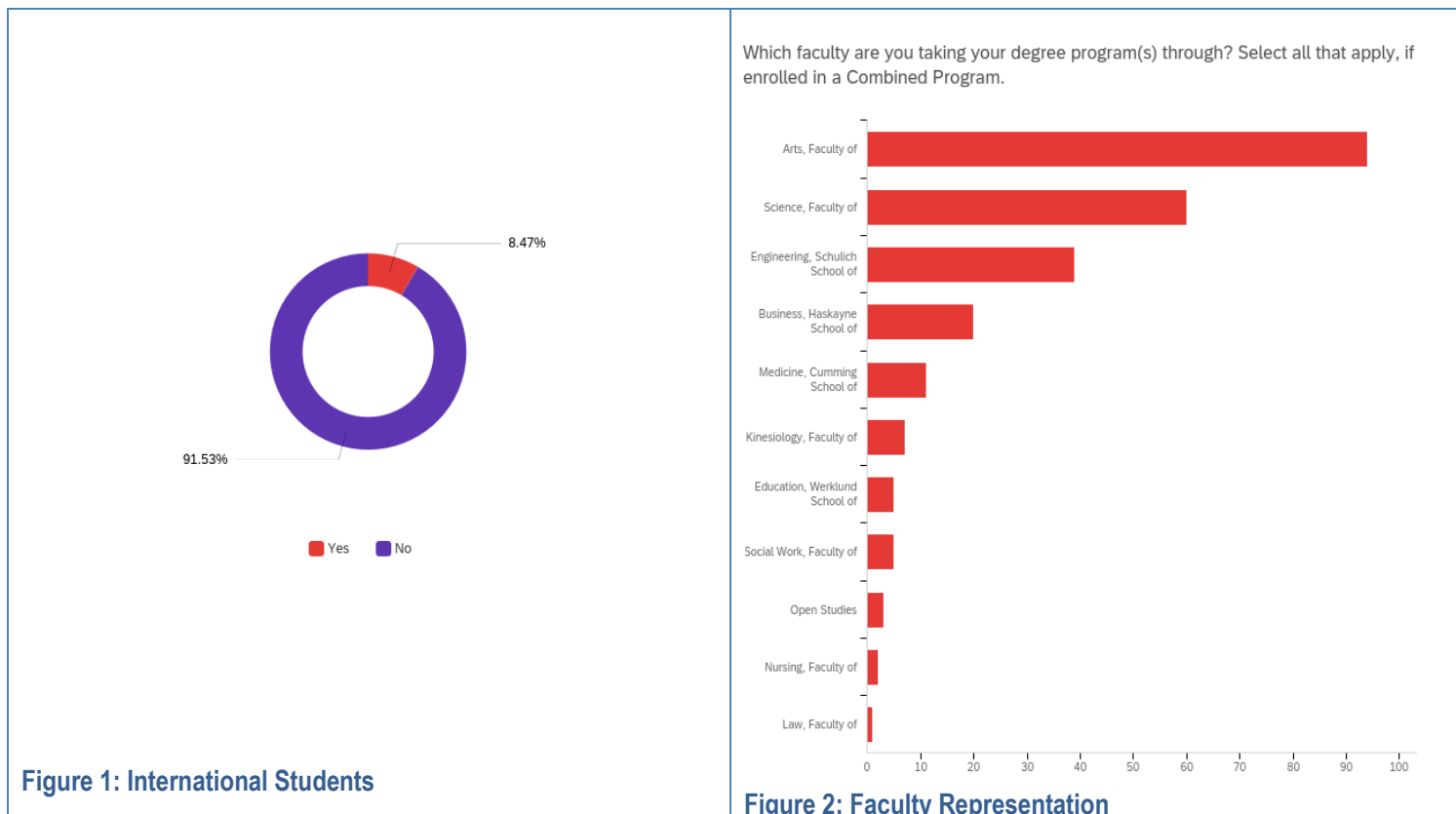
Additionally, the Students' Union collects demographic data from survey respondents to help meet the diverse needs of the student community and better identify sources of inequity, to guide the SU's advocacy and development of its programs and services.

Respondent Profile

The typical survey respondent is a domestic undergraduate student in their first (32.79% of respondents) or second (25.10%) year of program, enrolled in one of the University's largest faculties: Arts (38.06% of respondents), Science (24.29%), or Engineering (15.79%).

84% of respondents were between 18 to 24 years old, but the survey received responses in all age groups, ranging from 17 or under (6% of respondents) to 45 years or older (2%).

International students made up 8.47% of responses.

Figure 1: International Students

Which faculty are you taking your degree program(s) through? Select all that apply, if enrolled in a Combined Program.

Figure 2: Faculty Representation

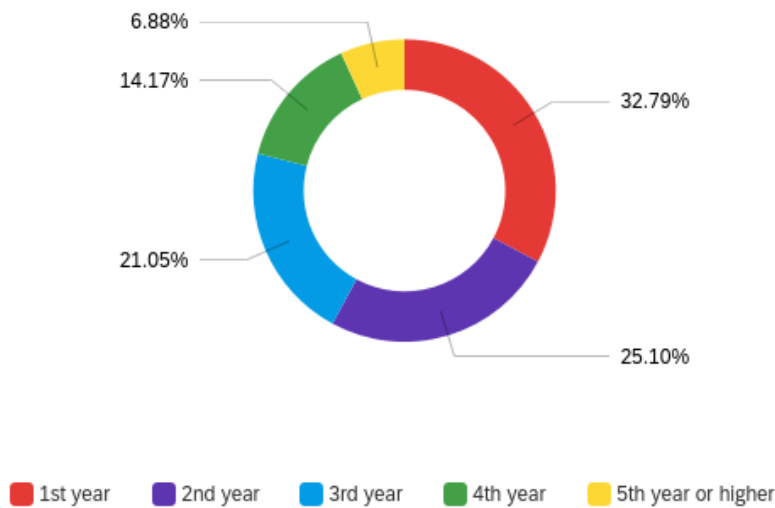What year of your undergraduate program are you currently enrolled in for the 2023-2024 academic year?

Figure 3: Year of Study

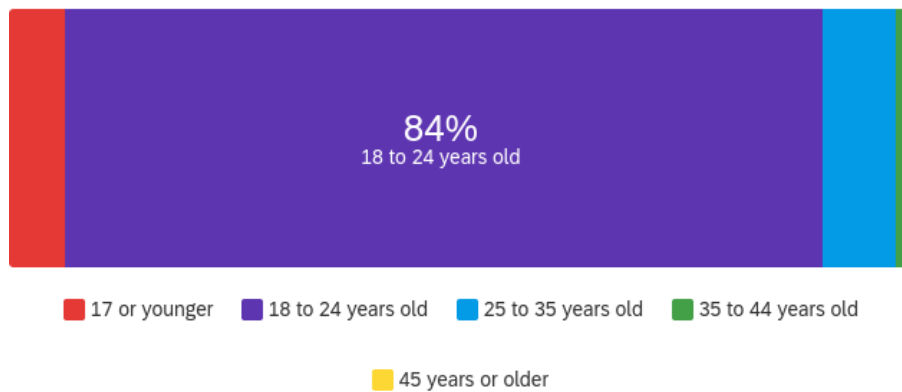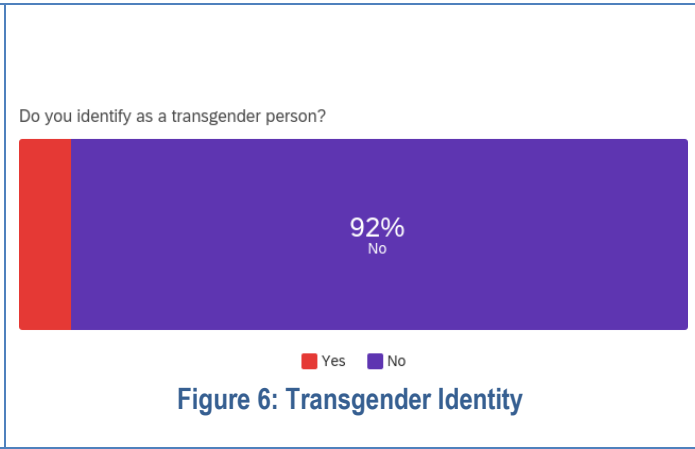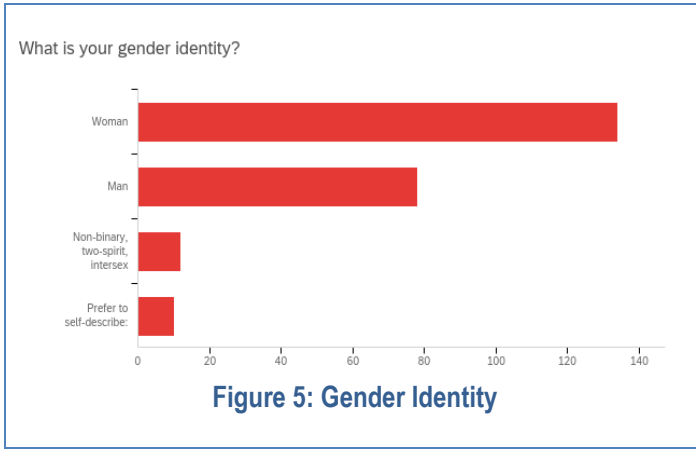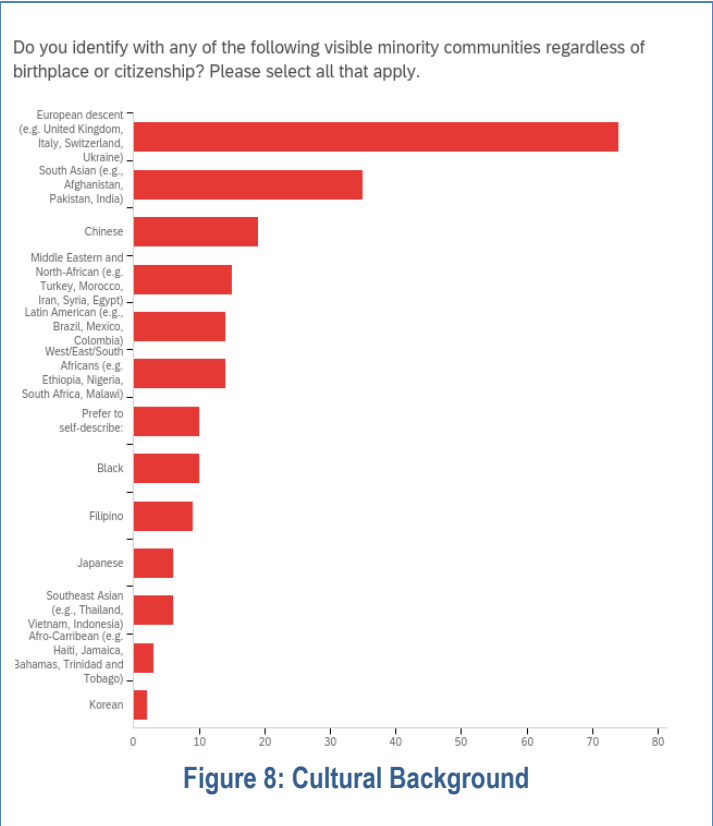What is your age?

84%
18 to 24 years old

Figure 4: Age

Among the survey participants, a significant majority were found to be in their first year (32.79%), second year (25.10%), or third year (21%).

The survey results provide information on the gender identity of respondents. Of the respondents, 92% identified themselves as non-transgender individuals, while 8% expressed that they identified as transgender. 57.26% of respondents identified as women, while 33.33% identified as men. Additionally, 5.13% identified as non-binary, two-spirit, or intersex, and 4.27% preferred to self-describe their gender. These results highlight a diverse range of gender identities among the surveyed individuals.

Figure 5: Gender Identity

What is your gender identity?

Figure 6: Transgender Identity

Do you identify as a transgender person?

92% No

■ Yes ■ No

Regarding sexual orientation, 65% of respondents identified as heterosexual, with the next largest portion of the respondents identifying as bisexual (15%). 8% identified as queer and 3% as gay or lesbian. A smaller portion preferred to describe their sexual orientation in their own terms.

Figure 7: Indigenous Identification

Do you identify as Indigenous, including First Nations, Metis, or Inuk (Inuit)?

96% No

■ Yes ■ No

Figure 8: Cultural Background

Do you identify with any of the following visible minority communities regardless of birthplace or citizenship? Please select all that apply.

Respondents were asked if they identify with any visible minority communities or if they were Indigenous (including First Nations, Métis, or Inuk). The survey results provide information on the diverse cultural backgrounds of respondents. The largest group identified as of European descent (34.10%), while South Asian (16.13%), Chinese (8.76%), and Middle Eastern and North-African (6.91%) backgrounds also had notable representation. Other cultural backgrounds, including Latin American, West/East/South African, and Afro-Caribbean, had varying percentages of respondents, ranging from 1.38% to 6.45%. Some individuals (4.61%) preferred to self-describe their cultural background, and a smaller percentage identified as Black (4.61%), Filipino (4.15%), Japanese (2.76%), Southeast Asian (2.76%), or Korean (0.92%). 4% of the respondents identify as Indigenous. These results highlight the rich diversity of cultural backgrounds among the surveyed individuals.

Respondents were asked about their religious affiliations. 47.91 of respondents identified as being atheist or having no religion, while other respondents identified with Christianity (25.12% of respondents), Islam (10.70%), Sikhism (3.26%) and other religious affiliations such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, and Traditional (North American Indigenous) spirituality etc., ranging from 0.47% to 1.86%. Additionally, 7.91% of respondents preferred to self-describe their religious beliefs. These findings reflect a diverse range of religious affiliations among the surveyed individuals.

27.44% of respondents identified as having a mental disability, under the Student Accommodation Policy's definition of disability. 7.91% identified as having a physical disability and 64.65% of respondents did not identify as having a disability.

Student Jobs and Experiential Learning

Respondents were asked to describe their employment situation during the period of May to August 2023:
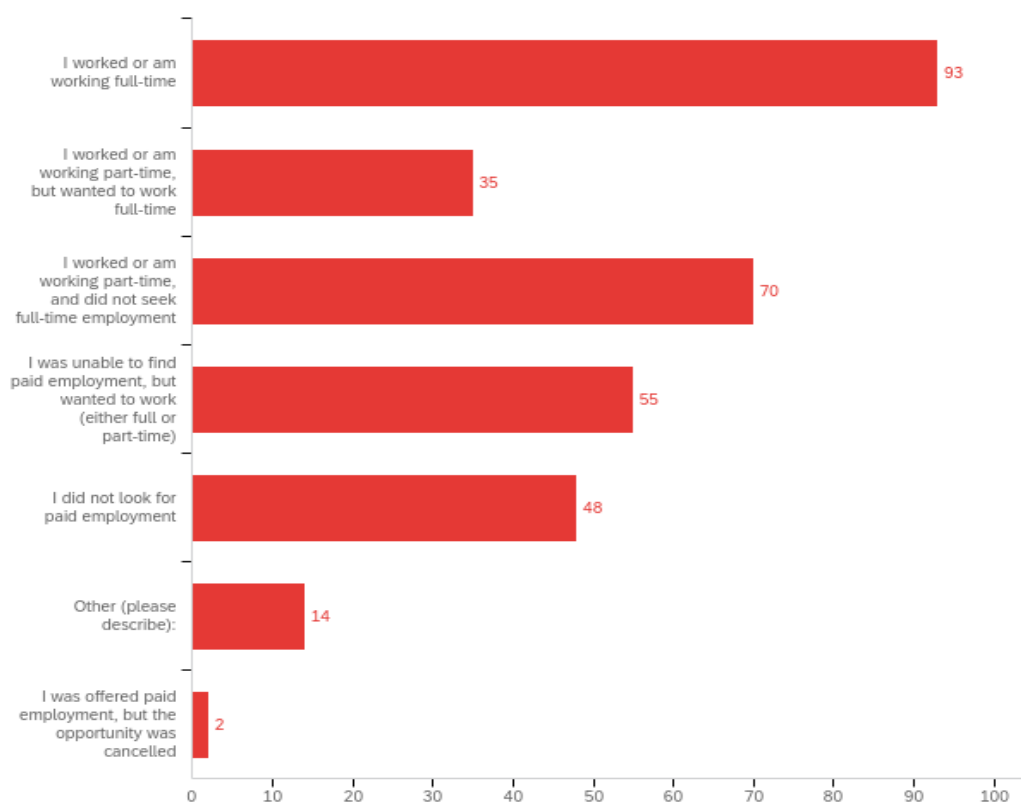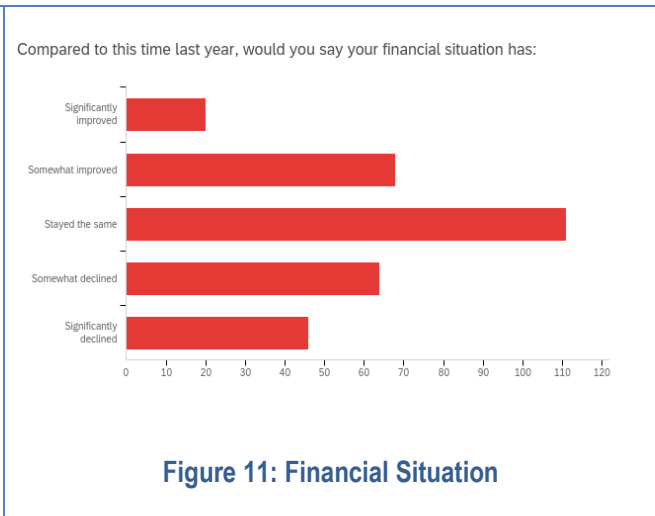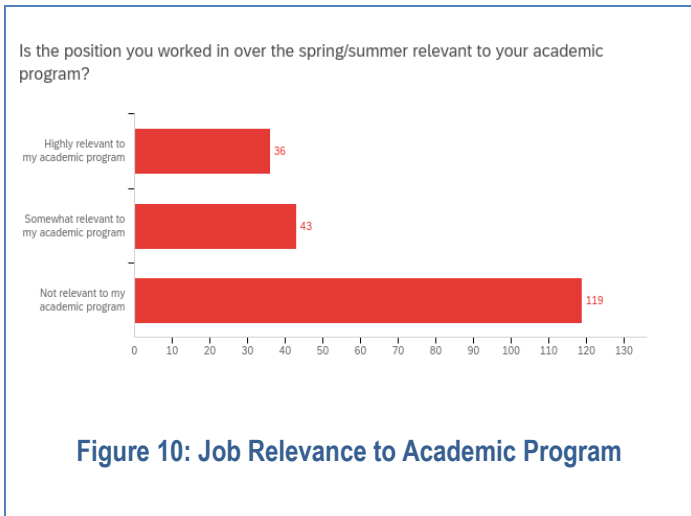

Figure 9: Employment Situation for Spring/Summer

The responses to the question about employment status between May and August among the participants varied significantly. The largest group, at 29.34%, worked full-time, while 11.04% worked part-time but wanted full-time employment. Another 22.08% worked part-time without actively seeking full-time positions, and 17.35% expressed a desire to work but faced employment challenges. Furthermore, 15.14% did not actively look for paid work. A small percentage, 4.42%, offered different employment descriptions, and 0.63% had job opportunities canceled. These responses reveal a diverse range of employment experiences amongst University of Calgary students.

Is the position you worked in over the spring/summer relevant to your academic program?

Figure 10: Job Relevance to Academic Program

Compared to this time last year, would you say your financial situation has:

Figure 11: Financial Situation

A majority (60.10%) of the 198 respondents in paid employment during the spring and summer terms were unable to find jobs relevant to their academic program. Around 18.18% of the 198 respondents found their jobs highly relevant to their academic program, while 21.72% of these respondents found it somewhat relevant.

When asked about their financial situation, the respondents provided a varied outlook. A small fraction, 6.47%, reported a significant improvement, while 22.01% noted a somewhat improved situation. The largest group, at 35.92%, indicated their financial situation remained stable. On the other hand, 20.71% reported a somewhat declined financial status, and 14.89% experienced a significant decline in their financial situation. These responses collectively reflect a diverse range of financial experiences among the surveyed individuals.

Tuition and Fees

Are you concerned about your ability to pay your tuition and fees for the 2023-2024 academic year?
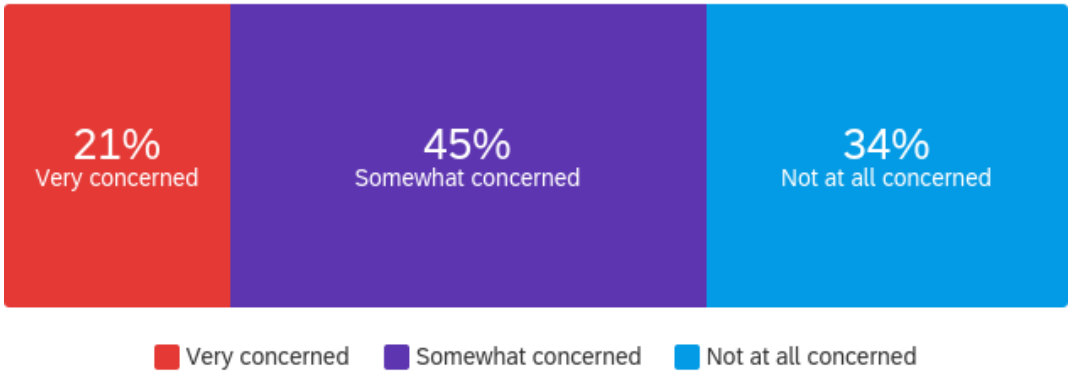

Figure 12: Concern on Tuition

66% of respondents expressed varying degrees of concern regarding their ability to pay tuition and fees for the 2023-2024 academic year.
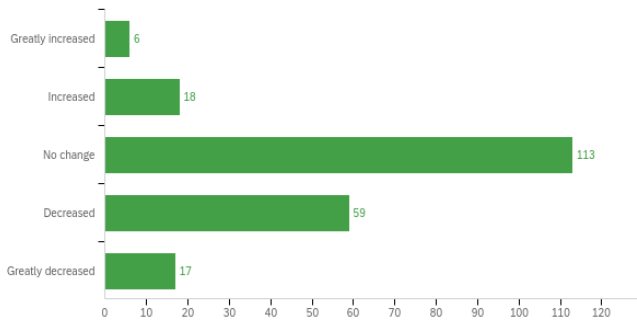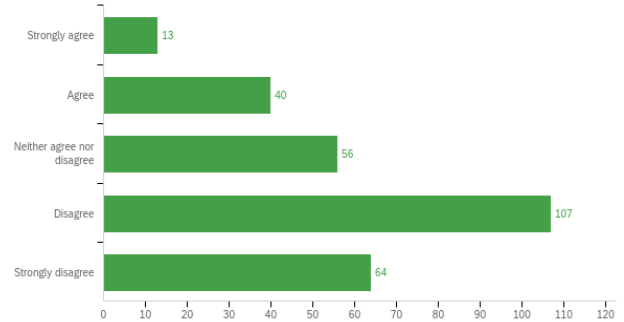
Figure 13: Quality of Education

Figure 14: Quality of Education Reflected by Tuition

When asked whether they felt the quality of their education had changed over the past year, 53.05% of respondents noted no change, while 8.45% reported an increase in educational quality and 2.82% mentioned a significant increase. On the other hand, 27.70% felt a decrease in educational quality, with 7.98% indicating a significant decrease. In response to the question regarding their agreement with the statement "I believe my tuition costs reflect the quality of education I receive," the survey participants showed a diverse range of opinions. Approximately 4.64% strongly agreed, 14.29% agreed, 20% neither agreed nor disagreed, 38.21% disagreed, and 22.86% strongly disagreed. These responses indicate a mix of perspectives on the relationship between tuition costs and the perceived quality of education received, with a significant portion expressing disagreement.
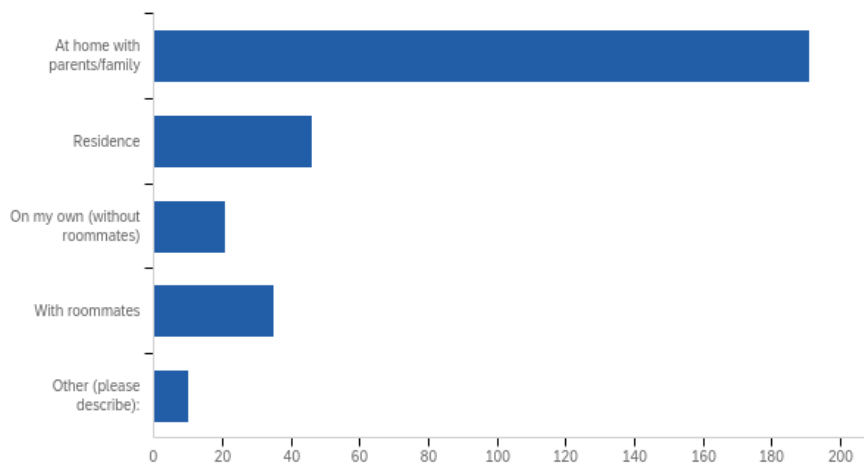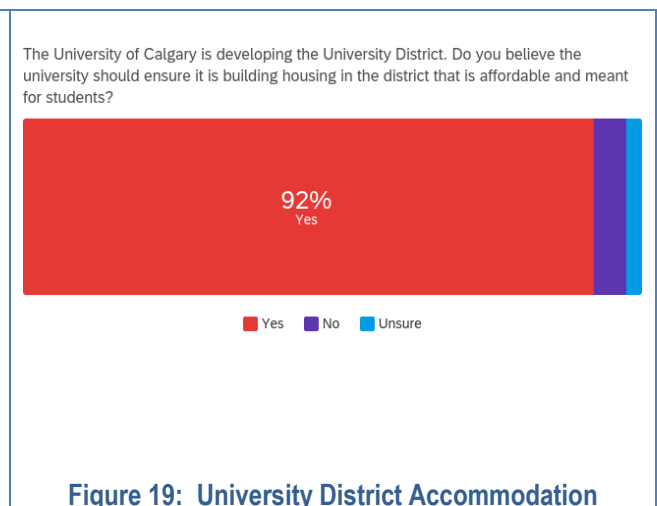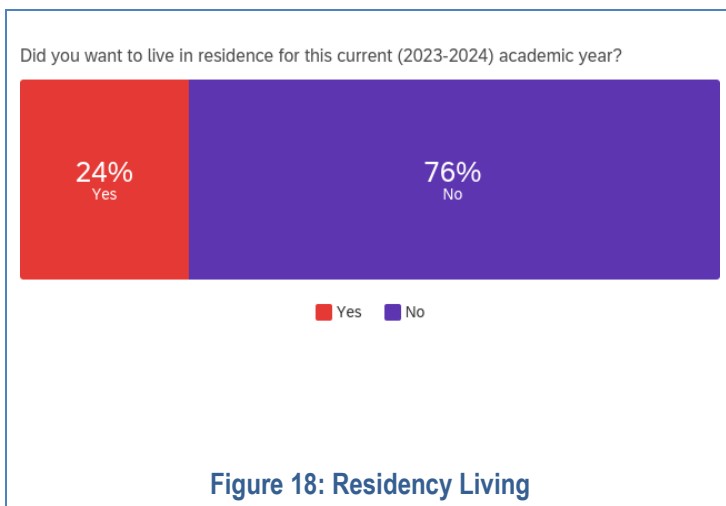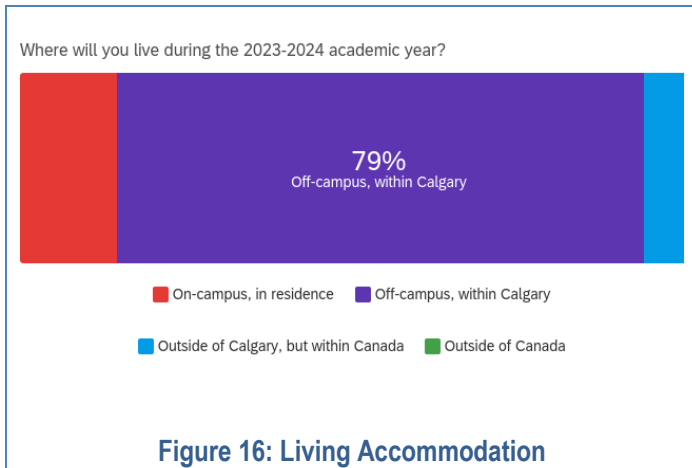
Housing

Figure 15: Living Arrangements

A majority (63.04%) of respondents live at home with parents or family, with the next largest portions of the respondents (15.18)% residing in their own place or (11.55%) sharing their residence with roommates. These statistics offer insight into the diverse living arrangements of the surveyed individuals, with the majority residing with their parents or family.

Where will you live during the 2023-2024 academic year?

79%
Off-campus, within Calgary

- On-campus, in residence
- Off-campus, within Calgary
- Outside of Calgary, but within Canada
- Outside of Canada

Figure 16: Living Accommodation

Do you feel safe in your living accommodation this year?

93%
Yes

- Yes
- No

Figure 17: Living Accommodation Safety

Did you want to live in residence for this current (2023-2024) academic year?

24%
Yes

76%
No

- Yes
- No

Figure 18: Residency Living

The University of Calgary is developing the University District. Do you believe the university should ensure it is building housing in the district that is affordable and meant for students?

92%
Yes

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Figure 19: University District Accommodation

Figures 16 - 19 asked a series of yes and no questions regarding housing. A significant majority (73%) reside off-campus within the city of Calgary and reported feeling secure in their current living accommodations (93%). 76% of respondents expressed a preference for not residing in university residences for the current academic year. Additionally, 92% of respondents agreed that the University should prioritize the development of affordable housing options within the University District, underscoring the importance of accessible housing for the student community.

When asked about the challenge of securing safe housing for the year, survey respondents had varying responses: 20.13% found it "very challenging," 5.61% reported it as "slightly challenging," and 3.96% mentioned it was "not challenging." However, the majority (70.30%) indicated that they did not rent housing, potentially due to other living arrangements or circumstances. This suggests that while a portion of respondents faced significant challenges, a significant number did not engage in the rental market.

Food Security

Do you experience barriers to accessing affordable, healthy and/or culturally appropriate groceries?
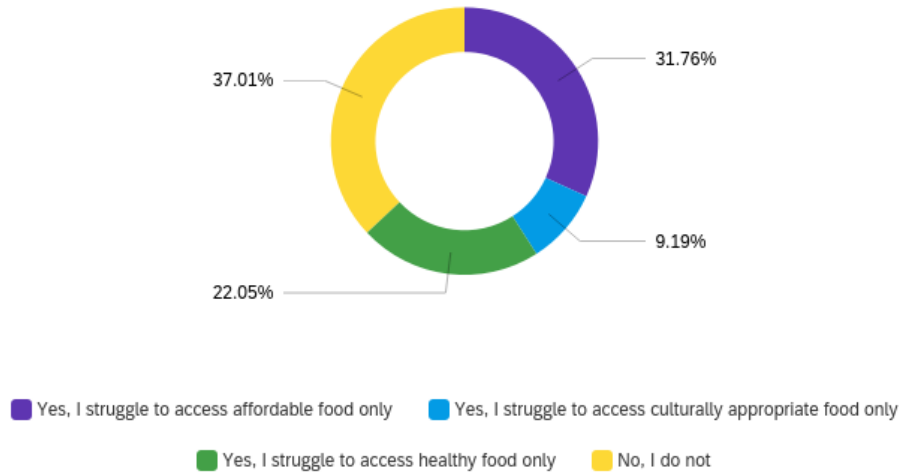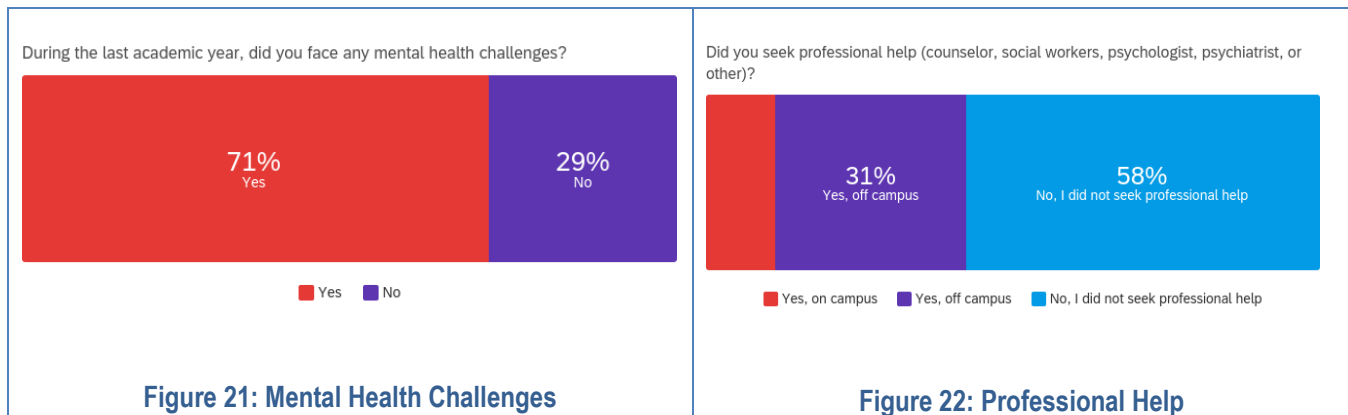

37.01%

31.76%

9.19%

22.05%

■ Yes, I struggle to access affordable food only   ■ Yes, I struggle to access culturally appropriate food only

■ Yes, I struggle to access healthy food only   ■ No, I do not

Figure 20: Barriers to Food Access

63% of respondents indicated some difficulty in accessing healthy, affordable, and culturally appropriate food, indicating a significant barrier to food accessibility on campus. When asked if their academic performance or ability had been negatively affected by barriers to food access, a majority (55.09) indicated that these barriers did not impact their academic performance. However, 44.91% of respondents reported being negatively impacted by barriers to food access on campus.

Mental Health and the SU Wellness Center

During the last academic year, did you face any mental health challenges?

71%
Yes

29%
No

■ Yes ■ No

Figure 21: Mental Health Challenges

Did you seek professional help (counselor, social workers, psychologist, psychiatrist, or other)?

31%
Yes, off campus

58%
No, I did not seek professional help

■ Yes, on campus ■ Yes, off campus ■ No, I did not seek professional help

Figure 22: Professional Help

A significant majority of students, totaling 71%, reported experiencing mental health challenges. However, within this group, only 11% actively sought professional help on campus, while the remaining 58% did not seek any form of assistance or support. When inquired about the reasons for not seeking professional help, the most common responses cited by respondents were lack of time (34.83%) and access to professional help not being necessary (31.34%).

Rate your level of agreement with the following statement: "Access to walk-in physician appointments on campus would improve my overall well-being."
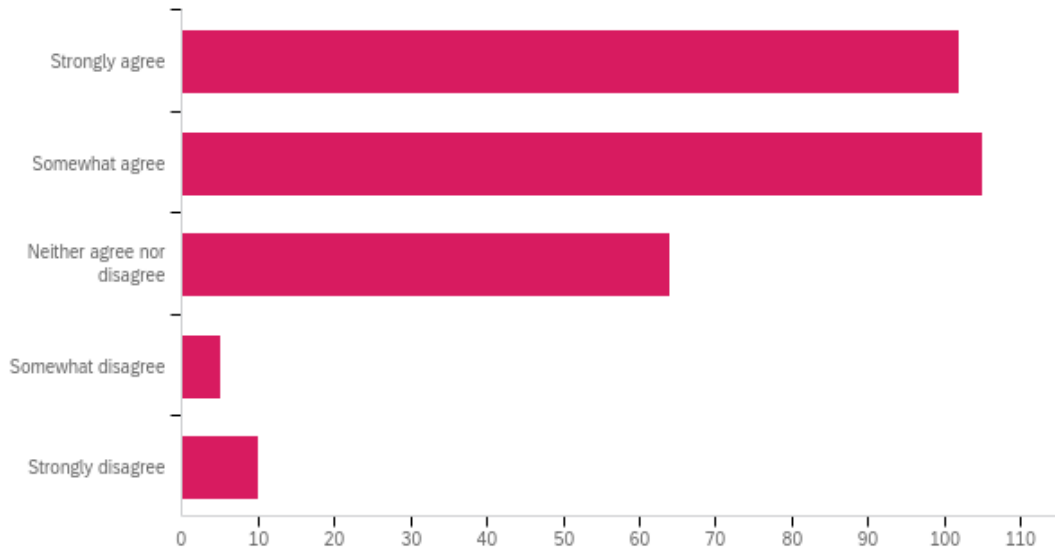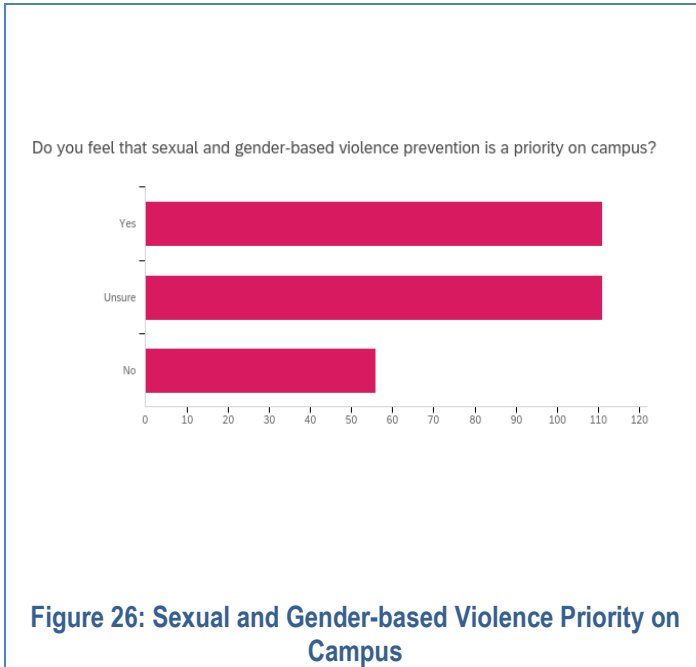

Figure 23: Improvement of Overall Well-Being by Access to Walk-in Physician Appointments

The survey results regarding the potential impact of walk-in physician appointments on campus indicate strong support for this idea. Most respondents (72.37%) indicated varied levels of agreement that access to walk-in physician appointments on campus would improve their well-being. This demonstrates a widespread positive sentiment toward the idea of enhancing well-being through convenient access to on-campus healthcare services.

Figure 24: Wait Times for Counsellor Appointments

Figure 25: Wait Times for Physician Appointments
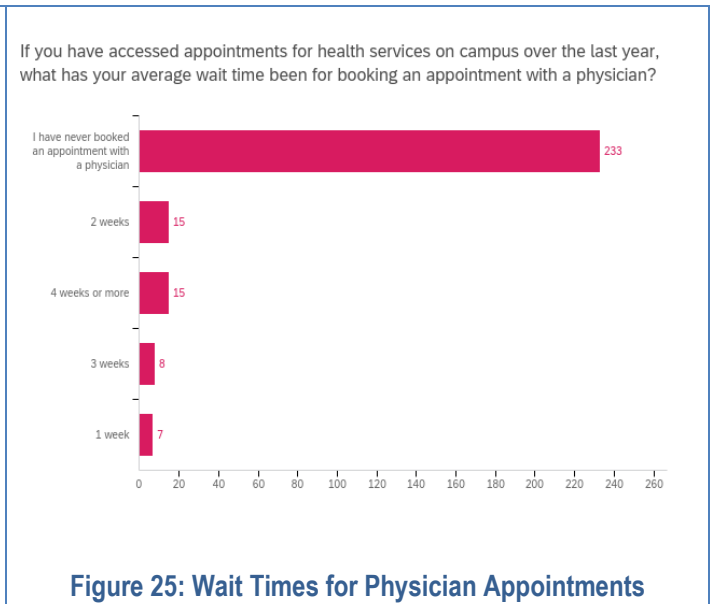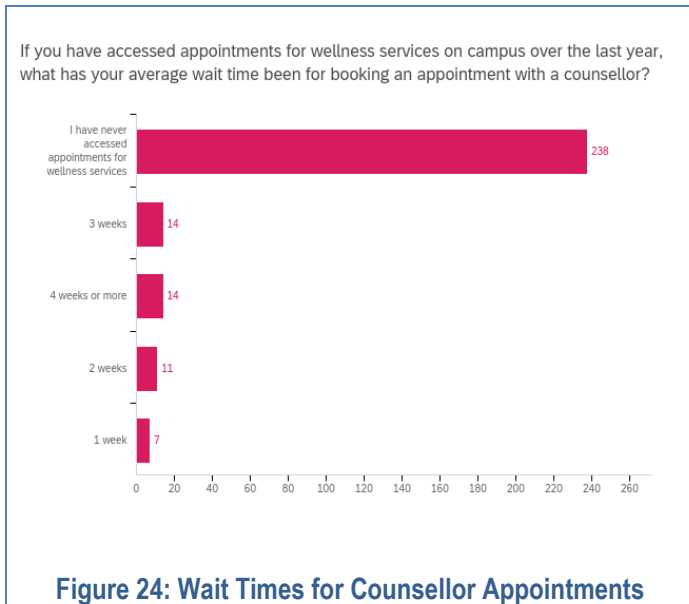
The survey participants were asked about their average wait time when accessing appointments for wellness services. Most respondents (83.80%) indicated that they have never accessed these appointments, suggesting infrequent use. Among respondents who have accessed this service, reported average wait times seem to span 3 to 4 weeks or more (9.86%) for counsellor appointments and 2 to 4 weeks or more (10.80%) for physician appointments. These findings provide insights into the utilization rates for wellness services and the timeframes individuals have experienced when seeking wellness services. These findings also provide further insight into why most respondents (69.06%) expressed neutrality about the quality of treatment received at the SU wellness center.

Figure 26: Sexual and Gender-based Violence Priority on Campus

Figure 27: Participation in Workshops on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Prevention at the University

Respondents' opinions on campus sexual and gender-based violence prevention is mixed, with 39.93% stating it is a priority, 39.93% unsure, and 20.14% not prioritizing it. Survey results also indicate that a small percentage of students have attended workshops on sexual and gender-based violence, with 46.74% interested in future attendance, while 39.86% showed no interest. These results demonstrate students' perception and engagement with the University's action and resources on sexual and gender-based violence prevention on campus is highly varied.
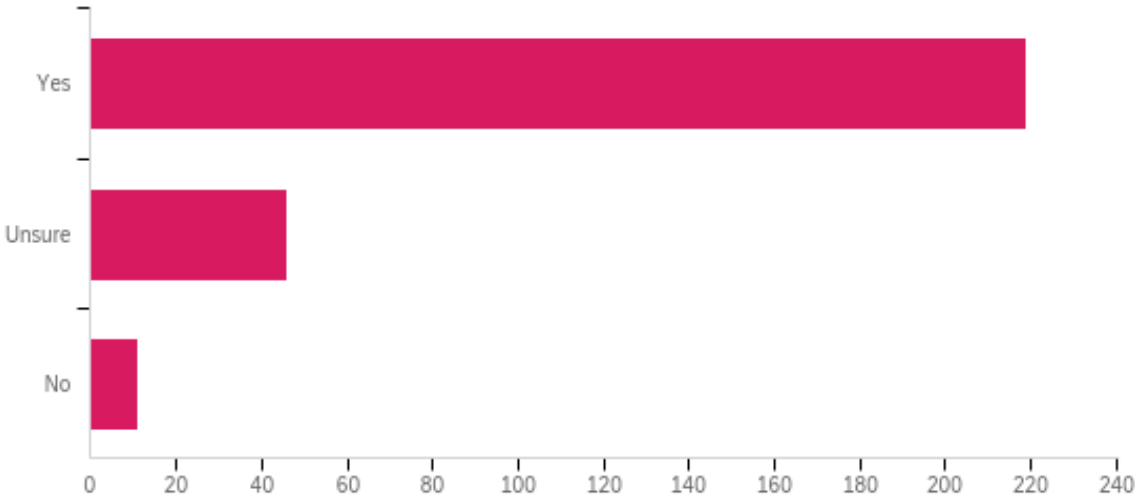
Figure 28: Safety on Campus

The survey results show that 79.35% of students feel safe on campus, with 3.99% feeling unsafe and 16.67% uncertain, indicating most respondents feel safe.

COVID-19 & Course Work

In any undergraduate credit course at the University of Calgary that you have taken, have you been assigned coursework that was due on or immediately following the Term Break (also called "reading week")? This includes assignments and exams assigned on the course outline.
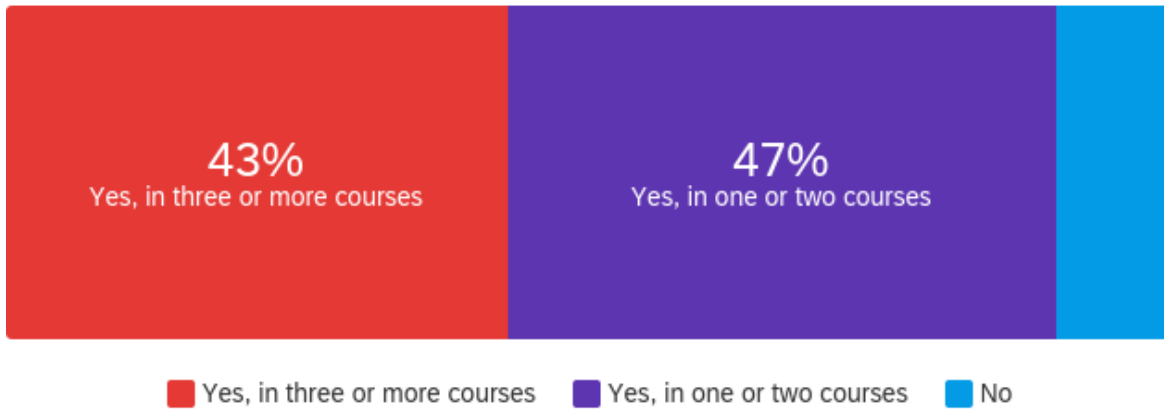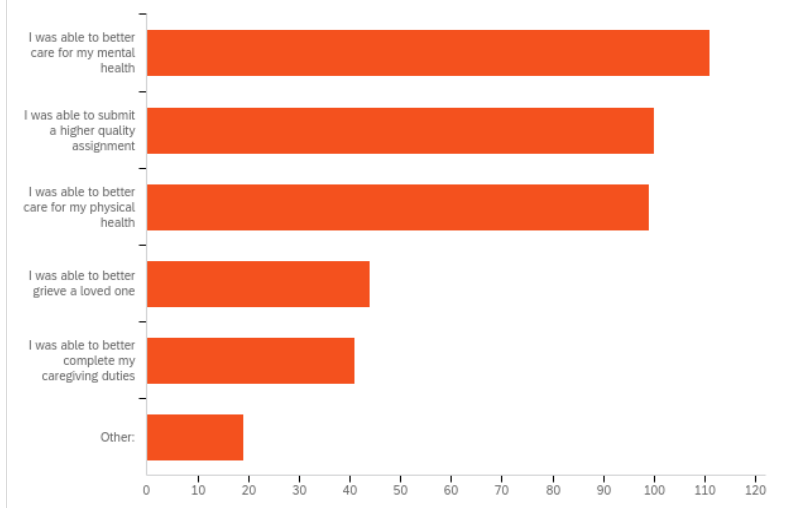

Figure 29: Course Work Deadlines during Term Break

The survey revealed that 47% of respondents receive coursework with due dates immediately following the term break in one or two of courses, while 43% experience this in three or more courses, indicating a common pattern among the majority.

The survey also found that not needing documentation for absence or extension improved mental health care for 26.81% of respondents, physical health care for 23.91% of respondents, and allowing 24.15% of respondents to turn in higher-quality assignments. Other benefits included accommodation for respondents to better undertake caregiving obligations (9.90%) or grieve for a loved one (10.63%). The policy also positively impacted the balance of personal and academic responsibilities for respondents (4.59%).

Figure 30: Benefits of Not Having to Provide Documentation

.

Figure 31: Comfortability of Communicating with Professors Without Need of Supporting Documentation
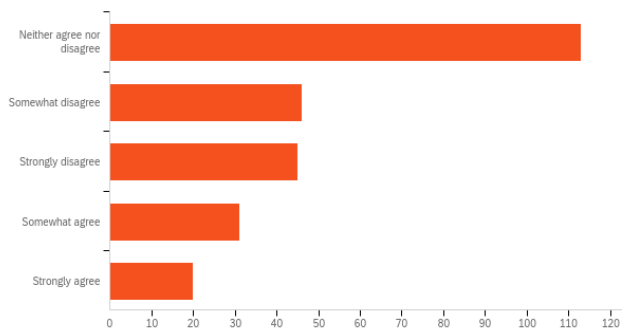

Figure 32: Meaningful Learning Experience and Success with Registrar Scheduled Final Exams

This survey found that 64.85% of respondents felt more comfortable communicating with professors without needing supporting documents, with 42.58% strongly agreeing and 22.27% somewhat agreeing. A significant proportion remained neutral, while 5.86% somewhat disagreed and 1.56% strongly disagreed. Most respondents felt more comfortable without supporting documents. These results highlight that a substantial number of students felt more comfortable when not required to provide supporting documents when communicating with their professors. The survey also revealed a significant number of respondents felt more meaningful learning experiences with registrar-scheduled final exams, with 44.31% neutral and 7.84% strongly agreeing. The findings show a diverse range of opinions among students.

Bookstore

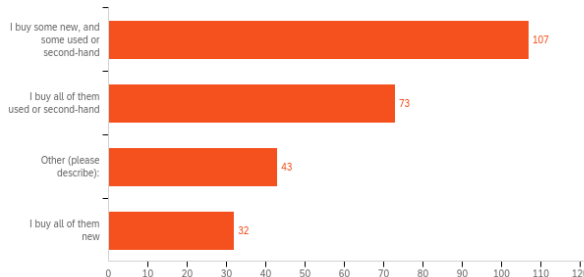**Figure 33: Purchasing Habits for Textbooks and Required Materials**

Figure 34: Method of Purchasing Textbooks and Required Materials

The survey revealed that students' approaches to acquiring textbooks and course materials vary. 38.67% of respondents reported purchasing some required academic materials, 29.30% most, 19.92% purchasing all, and 12.11% not purchasing any. About 12.55% of respondents bought all required academic materials new, while 41.96% combined new and used materials. 28.63% exclusively purchased used or second-hand materials. The results highlight a mix of preferences for new and used resources among students.

In one typical semester (e.g., the Fall term), how much would you expect to spend on textbooks and required course materials, if you purchased all textbooks and required course materials?
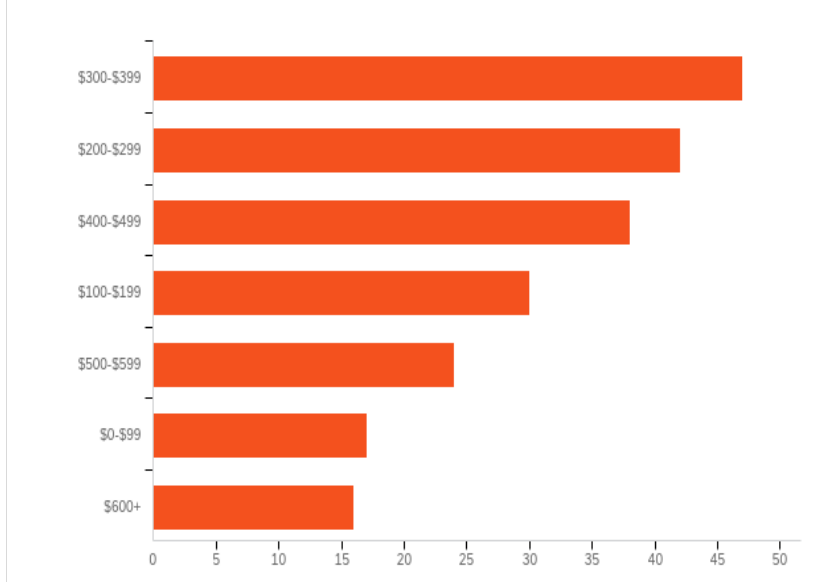
The survey findings show varying expectations among students regarding their spending on textbooks and required course materials. A range of responses includes 7.94% anticipating spending between $0 and $99, 14.02% expecting to spend between $100 and $199, and 19.63% planning to spend between $200 and $299. Additionally, 21.96% foresee expenses in the range of $300 to $399, while 17.76% expect to spend between $400 and $499. A smaller percentage, 11.21%, envisions costs between $500 and $599, and 7.48% anticipate spending $600 or more. These results highlight the varied financial expectations among students when it comes to acquiring textbooks and course materials.

Figure 35: Amount Spent on Textbooks and Required Materials

UPass

How often do you use Calgary Transit (e.g., the C-Train, city busses) for any purpose (classes, work, social activities) during the Fall and Winter semesters (September to April)?
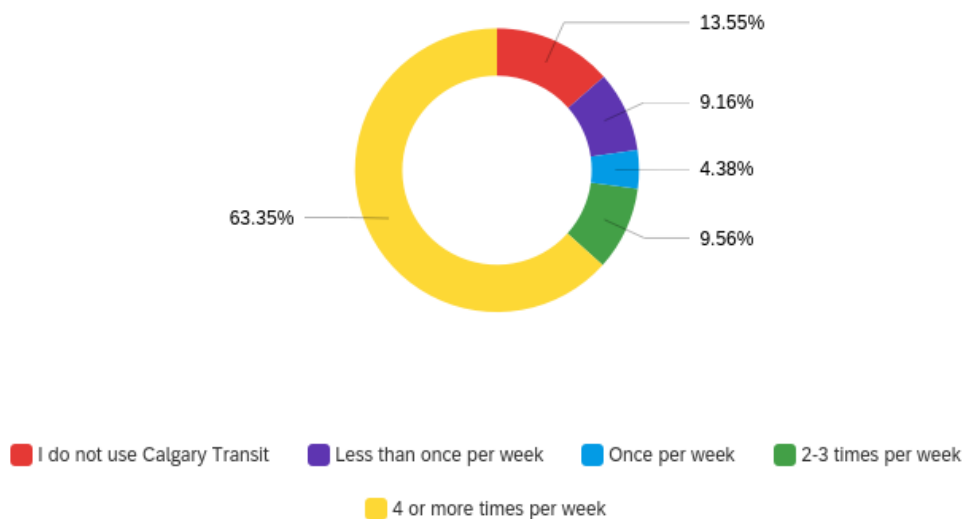

Figure 36: Calgary Transit Use

In response to questions about their utilization of Calgary Transit, a significant majority of 63% indicated that they rely on transit services four or more times each week. With 13% stating they do not use it at all and the rest falling within very occasional use.

Currently, all students pay for the UPass regardless of whether they make use of transit. Would you support a post-secondary monthly pass that allows students to opt-in, even if that pass may cost somewhat more than the current UPass?
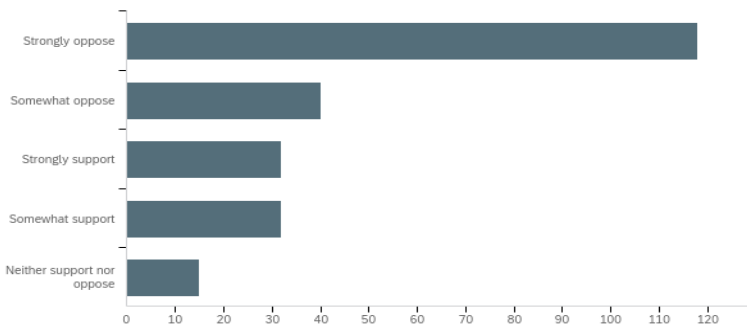
The survey results show a polarized opinion on a post-secondary monthly pass, with 49.79% strongly opposing it, 16.88% somewhat opposing it, 13.50% both strongly and somewhat supporting it, and 6.33% neither supporting nor opposing it. This reflects a wide range of opinions, with a significant portion strongly against the idea.

Figure 37: Support of a Post-Secondary Monthly Pass

SU Programs & Services

As students return to primarily on-campus learning after several disruptive years, the SU is looking to assess student needs to determine what type of new programming would be most beneficial for students in the long-term. Which of the following topics would most interest you for a new SU program? Select up to 2.
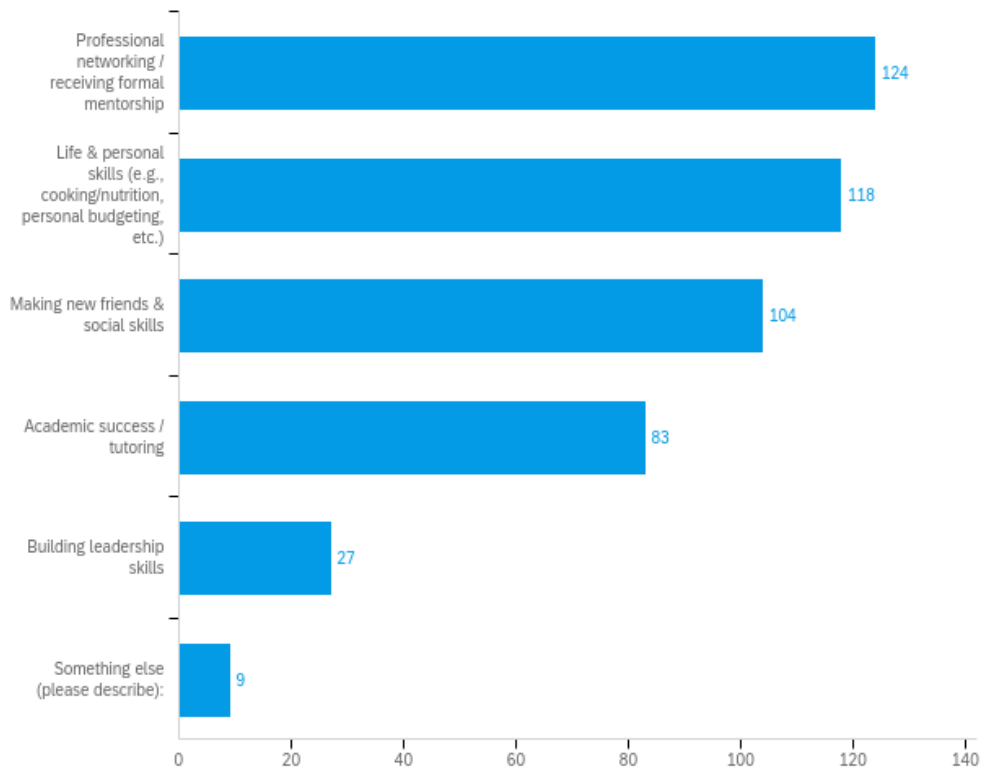

Figure 38: Topics for New SU Program

The survey results reveal the topics that are of greatest interest to people for a new Student Union (SU) program. The highest percentages of interest are in the areas of life and personal skills (25.38%) encompassing cooking, nutrition, and budgeting, as well as professional networking and formal mentorship (26.67%). Additionally, making new friends and improving social skills (22.37%) and academic success and tutoring (17.85%) are also topics of significant interest. A smaller percentage (5.81%) express interest in building leadership skills, while 1.94% have specific preferences that fall under "something else."

If the SU were to create a new program for the topic(s) you selected in the previous question, what would your preferred format for the program be as a participant?
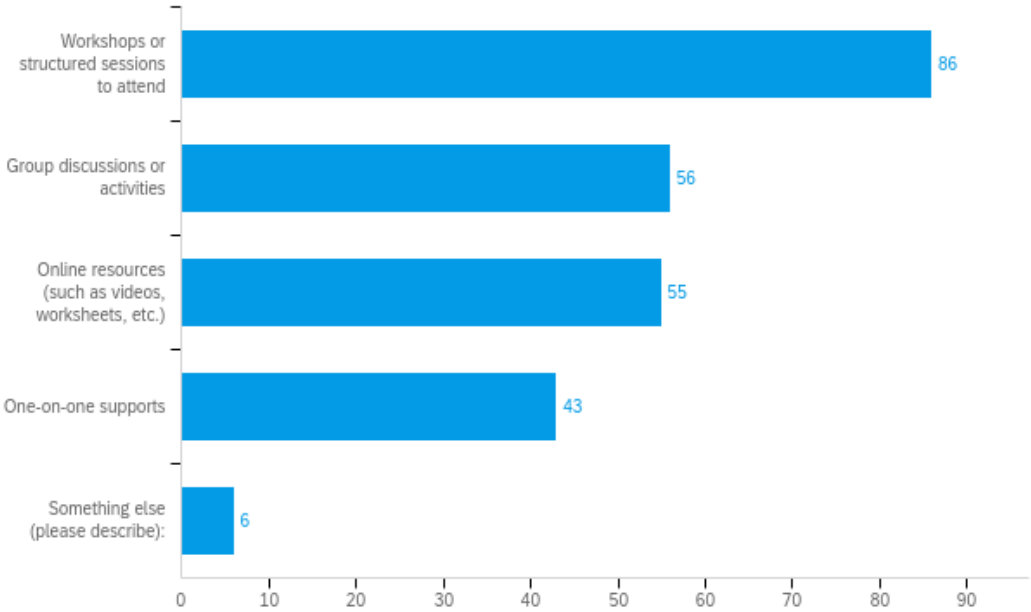

Figure 39: Delivery Format of New Programs

When asked about their preferred format for a new program on the topics they selected, the survey respondents showed diverse preferences. The highest percentage, 34.96%, favored workshops or structured sessions to attend. Additionally, 22.76% preferred group discussions or activities, and an equal 22.36% indicated a preference for online resources like videos and worksheets. One-on-one support was chosen by 17.48% of respondents, and 2.44% mentioned "something else" as their preferred format. These results illustrate a range of format preferences for potential new Student Union (SU) programs on selected topics.

University Consultation

Each year the university is meant to consult students on its proposed increases to tuition and fees. Which of the following methods of consultation by the university would be most meaningful to you? Please select your top three:
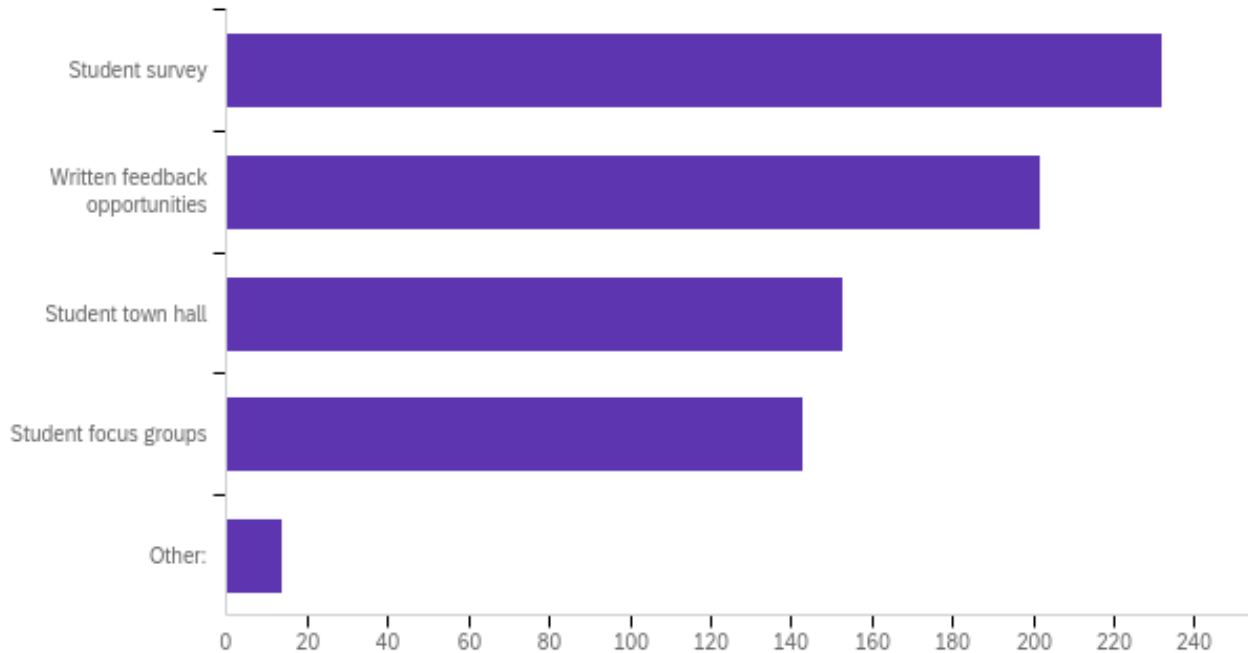

Figure 40: Meaningful Methods of Consultation

The survey results indicate a range of preferences regarding meaningful methods of consultation by the University. A significant portion, 31.18%, preferred student surveys, while 27.15% found written feedback opportunities meaningful. Additionally, 20.56% favored student town halls, and 19.22% preferred student focus groups. A smaller percentage (1.88%) mentioned "other" methods would be meaningful to them. These findings highlight the diversity of consultation methods that students find valuable when it comes to university engagement and feedback collection.