OUSA
Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance

Quality

RESULTS FROM THE 2020 ONTARIO UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT SURVEY

about OUSA

OUSA represents the interests of over 150,000 professional and undergraduate, full-time and part-time university students at eight institutions across Ontario. Our vision is for an accessible, affordable, accountable, and high quality post-secondary education in Ontario. To achieve this vision we've come together to develop solutions to challenges facing higher education, build broad consensus for our policy options, and lobby government to implement them.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA) represents over 150,000 full- and part-time undergraduate and professional students at eight member institutions across the province. Our advocacy principles are centred around actualizing an affordable, accessible, accountable, and high quality post-secondary system in Ontario. To do this, OUSA actively incorporates student voices, concerns, and perspectives in the development of our policy stances and uses evidence-based, student-driven recommendations to direct our advocacy initiatives.

To advance this work, OUSA conducts a biennial survey known as the Ontario Undergraduate Student Survey (OUSS), which was formerly known as the Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey. Results from the survey are used to support our policy advocacy work, and are disseminated according to three themes: affordability, accessibility, and quality. Data for this iteration of the OUSS was collected in November of 2020, with a total of 5,697 respondents across OUSA's eight member institutions. The current report focuses on the quality of education and shares student responses on their teaching and learning environments, course content, online learning, work-integrated learning, international student experiences and outcomes, civic engagement, and support services.

The top three policy initiatives that students cited as needing the most improvement at their university were tuition (47 percent), mental health support services (40 percent), and financial assistance (34 percent).

Generally, many students felt "somewhat" comfortable interacting with teaching staff and classmates (47 percent and 50 percent, respectively), although students from some marginalized groups were more likely to feel discriminated against in their courses. 57 percent felt

that their course and instructor feedback was not valued, a change in trends from previous years.

In addition to tuition, students spent an average of $563 on textbooks and course packs in the Fall of 2020, with 49 percent saying they had not bought all of their required materials. 50 percent were required to purchase additional software in order to complete mandatory tests, assignments, or exams.

Under the context of remote learning in the COVID-19 pandemic, students were generally dissatisfied with online learning (30 percent) and when asked if they would take an online course again upon a return to in-person learning, 53 percent said they would not. This is a change from the 2017 survey, where only 15 percent of students who had taken an online course said they would not do it again.

62 percent of students in our survey had never participated in work-integrated learning, however among those who had, 44 percent stated it had "significantly" improved their educational experience. Further, 82 percent of students who had participated in work-integrated learning were either very satisfied or satisfied with their experience, continuing with figures seen in previous years.

28 percent of international students said their institution did not meet their expectations, and one in four found their international student orientation to be "not that" or "not at all" useful. While many were satisfied with the University Health Insurance Plan (UHIP) for their health care coverage, almost two-thirds of international students (65 percent) also stated they would be interested in opting-in to the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) if it meant receiving more services. Additionally, when asked about their post-graduation plans, 57 percent wanted to apply for permanent residency and 54 percent wanted to work permanently in Canada.

23 percent of students responded "yes" when asked if their university's city actively engaged with students, a decrease from previous years of the survey. Conversely, 36 percent did not want to or plan to stay in their university's city for one year after graduation, mainly attributed to limited employment opportunities and distance from family.

Our results also revealed that among support services at institutions, mental health was frequently accessed by students but was also cited as one policy initiative needing the most improvement. 67 percent experienced a mental health challenge at some point during their degree and 91 percent expressed feelings of loneliness or isolation. Additionally, while many students did not access on-campus supports (71 percent), they also cited a level of difficulty in accessing those same supports (59 percent).

As students grapple with increasing tuition and limited financial aid, the quality of the post-secondary educational experience has become more pronounced than ever, especially as institutions consider reimagining their campuses and classrooms in a post-pandemic world. Students across Ontario deserve a high quality post-secondary experience whether that be through virtual, in-person, or hybrid models of learning and support. As will be highlighted in the report below, OUSA offers several recommendations to achieve this which will consequently provide an enriching educational experience for all students.

INTRODUCTION

Strengthening the quality of teaching and learning, as well as the broader university experience, has been a long-term strategic goal for OUSA. All willing and qualified students should be provided with a high quality education, experience, and support from their institution. For this to become a reality, decision-makers and stakeholders must look to empirical evidence to examine the successes and failures of the current system and propose meaningful solutions to concerns facing students today. In achieving the necessary improvements, OUSA runs a biennial survey entitled Ontario Undergraduate Student Survey (OUSS), formerly known as the Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey.

The OUSS began in 2009 with the goal of collecting data on student experiences, for relevant stakeholders, to help inform their efforts to improve post-secondary education in Ontario. Since then, OUSA has continued to survey our membership biennially as a means of gathering up-to-date information from across the province, to better inform our policy recommendations and advocacy.

The final report for our 2020 series focuses on the quality of post-secondary examining the quality of teaching and learning, the unique experiences of international students, how civic engagement opportunities contribute to the student experience, and the quality of support services available to students. It explores several broad themes, including online learning, work-integrated learning; experiences with course evaluations

and contract faculty; student mental health and employment; opportunities to engage with Indigenous content; and the experiences of international students. This report considers how each of these components impacts a student's overall experience.

The post-secondary sector has been rocked to its core over the past two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its subsequent lockdowns across the country, pushing all institutions to adapt to virtual learning. This shift has significantly disrupted the quality of post-secondary for all students, with many respondents from our survey questioning their decision to continue school during this time. Many of the findings have been shaped significantly by the global health pandemic, making this year's report unique in its findings.

The OUSS is an important part of OUSA's advocacy approach, which keeps student voices at the forefront of systemic change. The OUSS provides student and government leaders with data and reports that are essential to developing informed and meaningful solutions to issues in Ontario's post-secondary sector. OUSA uses this data to make informed policy recommendations aimed at improving the quality of post-secondary education for students across the province.

METHODOLOGY

The OUSS was conducted in November 2020, surveying students from OUSA's eight member schools (Brock University, Laurentian University, McMaster University, Queen's University, Trent University Durham GTA, the University of Waterloo, Western University, and Wilfrid Laurier University). This was the fifth iteration of this survey, formerly the Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey run in 2011, 2013, 2015, and 2017.1

While the OUSS is typically a biennial survey, the expected 2019 iteration was postponed until 2020 to capture significant changes to OSAP that were made in 2019. The delay also allowed for the questions and analysis to focus on and account for the experiences of students during COVID-19.

Research ethics board approval was granted at Laurentian University (#6020782), McMaster University (#2538), Queen's University (GEXT-064-20; TRAQ #6030378), Trent University Durham GTA (#26358), the University of Waterloo (#42334), and Wilfrid Laurier University (#6588). At Western University and Brock University the survey was run as a quality assurance study.

Participants & Recruitment

Survey participants were recruited using a non-random sampling method to capture a voluntary response sample. On November 2, 2020, email invitations containing a link to the survey were sent to all eligible students at each participating university. Where possible, these initial invitations were followed by three reminder emails, with a final email sent on November 26, the day before the survey closed. Email invitations and reminders were sent to students' university emails and were sent from their respective student association. Some student associations also shared invitations to participate on their social media channels. OUSA advertised

the survey on social media pages but did not provide any direct invitations or links to the survey to students.

If students decided to take part in the survey, they were directed to a detailed letter of information that explained the risks and benefits of participating, as well as the steps taken to keep students' identities and responses private and confidential. They were informed that responses would only be recorded after they clicked "submit" at the end of the survey, that they could skip any question or invalidate their responses by exiting the browser at any time, that survey responses would be anonymous, and that their participation was entirely voluntary.

To incentivize participation, respondents were invited to enter a draw for a chance to win one of ten $100 gift cards of their choice. Participants were asked to provide their email addresses on the final page of the survey if they were interested in entering the draw. All voluntarily submitted email addresses were stored separately from survey responses to maintain respondents' anonymity. Prizes were administered by CCI Research Inc. OUSA never had access to students' email addresses.

Survey Instrument

The survey questionnaire had 77 total parent questions and 107 total sub-questions, although not all respondents were asked every question. For example, students who responded that they were an international student in Canada on a visa were not asked questions related to domestic student financial assistance, and domestic students were not asked questions specific to international students.

The survey included several screening and demographic questions to allow for more targeted analyses based on institution, year of study, program of study, enrolment status, and demographic identification. Background information regarding the type of neighbourhood respondents grew up in was also explored to see if differences were found among students who grew up in rural, Northern, or urban communities or on First Nations Reserves.

While many questions remained the same from previous iterations to allow for longitudinal analysis, specific changes were made to account for contextual changes and to fill in gaps from previous survey instruments. For example, questions about student financial aid were added and/or amended to capture changed made to OSAP in 2019. Some questions were amended, removed, or added to reflect the fact that students were responding to the survey while attending university virtually due to COVID-19. Questions were also added to better understand student mental health and access to supports which was missing in previous versions.

The questionnaire was uploaded to a secure online web platform hosted by CCI Research Inc. The survey tool was available in English and an option to complete the survey over the phone was provided for students requiring accommodations or assistance. The online survey tool was designed in accordance with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines,[2] compatible with screen readers and that allows for respondents to view questions using larger sized fonts.

Data Analysis

All data were weighted by institutional enrolment to provide a more accurate representation of the OUSA membership at large. Data was analyzed using SPSS software which helped to organize responses and illustrate trends.

In addition to observing differences in descriptive statistics, statistical testing was used to compare means and the independence of selected variables from one another. A chi-square test for independence was

used to show the relationship between variables, and $p<0.05$ was used as the threshold for determining a statistically significant relationship. These data analysis techniques helped reveal meaningful patterns in the dataset.

Longitudinal analysis was also conducted on questions that remained the same from previous iterations of the survey. Trends were identified and notable contextual factors are discussed.

Limitations

The biggest limitation with this study is evident in the response rate. While the sample pool has not decreased in size from previous iterations of the survey, the response rate was significantly lower (5,697 respondents) compared to previous years (8,037 in 2017 and 9,197 in 2015). This decrease in participation rates can, in part, be attributed to survey fatigue – this survey was administered in the Fall of 2020 following and during a spike in data collection and feedback opportunities from a variety of stakeholders seeking student perspectives on the impact of COVID-19. Another factor that may have contributed to lower response rates was difficulty getting invitations to students due to barriers that delayed and/or prevented planned email blasts going out to all students.

In addition to a lower overall response rate, this study is also limited in its ability to provide a complete and accurate depiction of the experiences of Indigenous students. Due to a "history of abuse and colonialized methodology used to exploit Indigenous people…[and] a history of abuse through the collection of data from Indigenous people…students may be uncomfortable with participating in a [survey of this nature]."[3] Additionally, because the survey was only available in English, students whose first or preferred language is not English may have participated at lower rates.

There were also limitations in how questions about racial and religious identity were framed. Specifically, respondents were asked whether they identified as a racialized person prior to being asked more specific questions about their racial identity. We heard from a small number of respondents that they were concerned about this framing because while they selected that they were not a racialized person, they recognized that in many contexts they would be considered racialized. These concerns suggest that, although limited, there are some slight inaccuracies in the racial demographic results. Additionally, respondents were asked whether they wore a visible religious symbol or an item that identifies their religious affiliation or beliefs. The intention behind this framing was to explore the experiences of visibly religious students, however this means that the results of the survey do not provide information about the experiences of religious students who do not wear visible identifiers.

Low response rates overall and from specific demographic groups meant that many relationships could not be validated based on statistical significance. However, we chose to highlight notable trends, with a disclaimer where they were not statistically significant, to illustrate relationships that we felt to be important to understanding the experiences of the respondents in our sample.

Another limitation in this study, inherent in all survey research, lies in the nature of self-reported data: OUSA must rely on respondents to be honest, truthful, and forthcoming in their responses. However, while we trust that participants responded honestly, there is necessarily a risk that responses may be impacted by a misinterpretation of questions or measurement of responses, or by a social desirability bias that pushes respondents to skew their answers to match perceived desirability results.[4]

Additionally, as students were not required to answer every question, less insight is provided in certain areas where some students elected to provide no response. There was also some confusion about questions specific to campus climate given that some respondents only had experience with remote learning due to COVID-19 restrictions. Specifically, questions that asked about safety and comfort on-campus did not clearly define "campus" to include or exclude online spaces, which could have resulted in different interpretations of the question.

RESULTS

SURVEY PARTICIPATION

Over 5,500 undergraduate and professional students participated in the 2020 OUSS. Out of the total number of participants, 5,697 complete responses were gathered. Surveys were considered complete if the respondent answered at least 30 percent of the questions asked.

Results were weighted by institutional enrolment to ensure results would be representative of OUSA's membership. The weighted count and proportion of participants by institution is illustrated in the table below.

A large majority (94 percent) of respondents were completing a University Bachelor's Degree; 3 percent of respondents were completing a University Undergraduate Certificate or Diploma, 2 percent were completing a Professional Degree in Medicine, Dentistry, Veterinary Medicine, Law, or Optometry, and 1 percent were completing a credential "other" than the options listed. Respondents who selected they were completing a Master's or Doctorate Degree were disqualified and deemed ineligible as they did not meet the survey criteria to be either an undergraduate or professional student.

Participants were relatively evenly distributed across academic year: 25 percent were in their first year, 23 percent were in their second year, 25 percent were in their third year, and 23 percent were in their fourth year. Only 4 percent of respondents were in their fifth (or more) year of study. Notably, the 25 percent of respondents who indicated that they were in their first academic year would have only had the opportunity to study remotely due to COVID-19 restrictions.

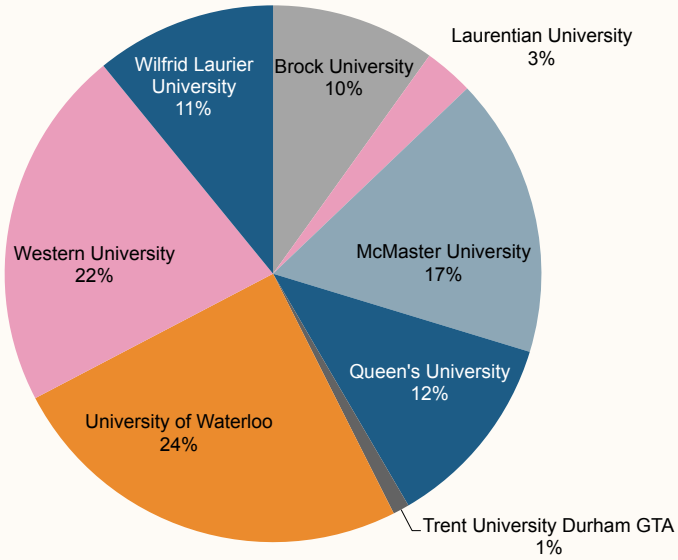
The top fields of study reported included: Health and Related Fields (19 percent); Physical and Life Sciences, and Technologies (13 percent); Social and Behavioural Sciences, and Law (12 percent); Business, Management, and Public Administration (11 percent); and Engineering, Architecture, and Related Technologies (10 percent). 8 percent of respondents selected "other" when asked about their field of study, and generally the responses given were specific subject areas that were fairly evenly distributed among the higher-level subject areas listed above. However, some respondents indicated that they were in a general program and had not yet chosen a specific program or they were in an interdisciplinary studies program.

A large majority (96 percent) of respondents were enrolled full-time. Of the 4 percent of respondents enrolled part-time, 32 percent selected "balancing work and school" as the most applicable reason they were enrolled part-time, and 22 percent selected "personal preference." 38 percent of respondents selected "other," and the top reasons given were being on a co-op or work term; disability, health, or mental health related reasons; only needing a few credits to complete their credentials; and COVID-19 related reasons.

Participant Demographics

When asked about their immigration status, a large majority (91 percent) of respondents indicated that they were Canadian citizens, and 2 percent said they were a permanent resident. 7 percent of respondents were international students in Canada on a visa. Of the international student respondents, 17 percent were living in China when they applied to study in

FIGURE 1: SURVEY PARTICIPATION BY UNIVERSITY, N=175



Canada, 15 percent were living in Canada already, and 11 percent were living in India.

79 percent of respondents were considered "traditionally-aged" students, and 20 percent were considered "mature students." As there are no standardized definitions for "traditionally-aged" or "mature" students, this classification stems from criteria used by OSAP for "independent students" based on the federal calculation, specifically whether a respondent had been out of high school for 4 or more years at the start of their study period.[5] Based on the common age for graduating high school (~17 years old), for the purpose of this survey, any respondent born before 1999 is considered a mature student.

Respondents were asked to select the highest post-secondary credential held by either their parent(s) or legal guardian(s) to determine whether they were a first-generation university student (i.e., a student whose parent(s) or legal guardian(s) do not have a Bachelor's degree or higher education certification): 31 percent of respondents were first-generation university students, while a majority (64 percent) were not considered first-generation university students.

17 percent of respondents were classified as low-income based on the most recently available data from Statistics Canada's Low-Income Measure (2019) for total income (before taxes).[6] Individual income was based on a 1-person household and family income was based on a 4-person household. Respondents who selected at least one of the following were asked questions about their individual income: they had been out of high school for 6 years or more at the start of their study period; they had worked full-time for at least 24 months in a row at the start of their study period; their parents were deceased; they were a child in extended society care or in the care of the Crown just prior to age 18; or they were receiving Continued Care and Support for Youth program allowance from their Children's Aid Society. Respondents who selected any of these options, whose estimated income before taxes was $25,000 or less, were considered low-income. Respondents who selected none of the listed criteria above were asked about their family's income. Respondents whose estimated combined income of their parent(s) or legal guardian(s) before taxes was $50,000 or less were considered low-income.

Respondents were also asked if they had any dependents. A large majority (94 percent) said they did not have dependents, and only 2 percent said they did have dependents. Of those who did have dependents, 74 percent had either 1 or 2 dependents, 12 percent had three dependents, 9 percent had four dependents, and 5 percent had 5 or more. The most common dependents were children under 12 years old (54 percent), followed by adults and seniors (35 percent), children over the age of 18 (18 percent), and children over the age of 12 (15 percent). A majority (59 percent) of respondents whose dependents were children under the age of 18 said their dependents were not in part- or full-time childcare, while 32 percent were in part- or full-time childcare, either on (5 percent) or off (27 percent) campus.

25 percent of respondents identified as Two Spirit or LGBTQ+ and 71 percent identified as cishetero (cisgendered and heterosexual). When asked to select the term that best described their gender identity, a large majority (96 percent) selected "cis-woman" (70 percent) or "cis-man" (26 percent); 1 percent selected "non-binary,," and 2 percent selected "prefer not to say." For respondents who selected "a gender identity not listed here," responses included "agender," as well as "female" and "male" (not specifying cis or trans). When asked to select the term that best described their sexual orientation, 74 percent selected "heterosexual/straight," 13 percent selected "bisexual," 2 percent selected "gay," 2 percent selected "questioning," 2 percent selected "pansexual," 1 percent selected "lesbian," and 1 percent selected "asexual." For respondents who selected "a sexual orientation not listed here," common responses included "demisexual" and "queer."

When asked if they identified as a "person of colour" or "racialized person," 58 percent said "no" and 39 percent said "yes." Those who answered "yes" were then able to specify by selecting a racial identity from a pre-

determined list. The most commonly selected responses were “East/Southeast Asian” (48 percent), followed by “South Asian” (33 percent), Black (9 percent), and “Multiracial, Mixed-Race, or Biracial” (7 percent). Respondents could also select “other” to specify any racial identities not listed, with common responses including African, Caribbean, West Indian or Indo-Caribbean, Indian, Central Asian, and White.

Respondents were asked if they identified (or had ancestry as) an Indigenous person, which included Status and non-Status First Nations, Métis, or Inuit. A small percentage (2 percent) of respondents did identify as an Indigenous person. Of respondents who identified as a “person of colour” or “racialized person,” 1 percent identified as Indigenous.

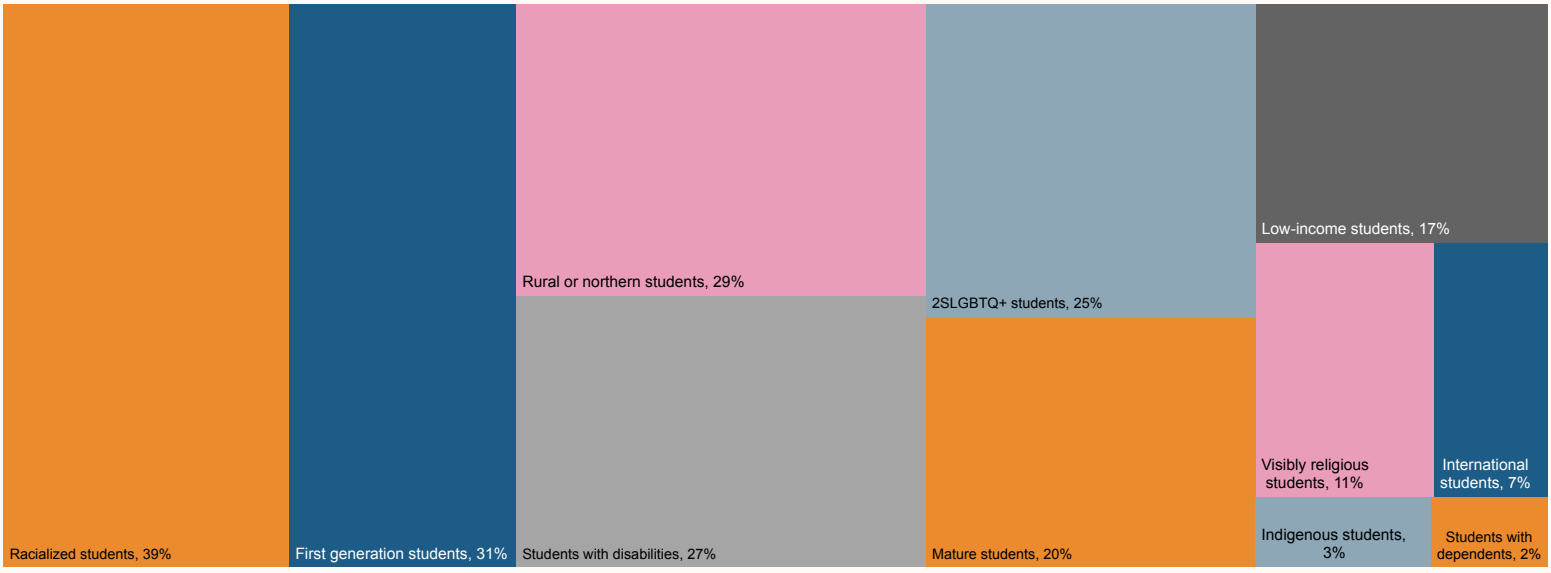
When asked if they wore a visible religious symbol or item that would identify their religious affiliation or beliefs, 11 percent said “yes” and 86 percent said “no.”

Respondents were provided with a list of disability types and asked to select any that they would describe themselves as having. 59 percent of respondents selected “no” to indicate that none of the disability types applied to them, and 27 percent selected one or more disability types from the list provided. Disability types were based on definitions from the National Educational Association of Disabled Students and included:[7] psychiatric disability, or disability resulting from a mental illness (selected by 40 percent of respondents who selected one or more disability type), visual impairment (selected by 26 percent), intellectual or learning disability, or a disability affecting the ability to learn tasks or process information (selected by 21 percent), physical disability, or disability affecting mobility or dexterity (selected by 5 percent), hearing impairment (selected by 5 percent), and neurological disability, or disability associated with damage to the nervous system (selected by 3 percent).

When asked to select any of the responses that best described the type of community they grew up in, the most commonly selected response was “urban community” (71 percent), followed by “rural community” (24 percent), “northern community” defined as one located in northern Ontario or other northern parts of Canada (5 percent), and First Nations Reserve (15 respondents). 4 percent of respondents selected “other” with the most common responses being “suburbs” or “suburban community,” specifying a country or city outside of Canada or Ontario, and “moved around a lot.”

Finally, 96 percent of respondents preferred to communicate or receive information in English. 29 respondents selected French, 2 respondents selected “I speak an Indigenous language,” and 5 respondents selected Sign Language. 1 percent of respondents selected “other,” with the most common responses being “Chinese” (as well as, more specifically, “Cantonese” and “Manda-

FIGURE 2: RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN

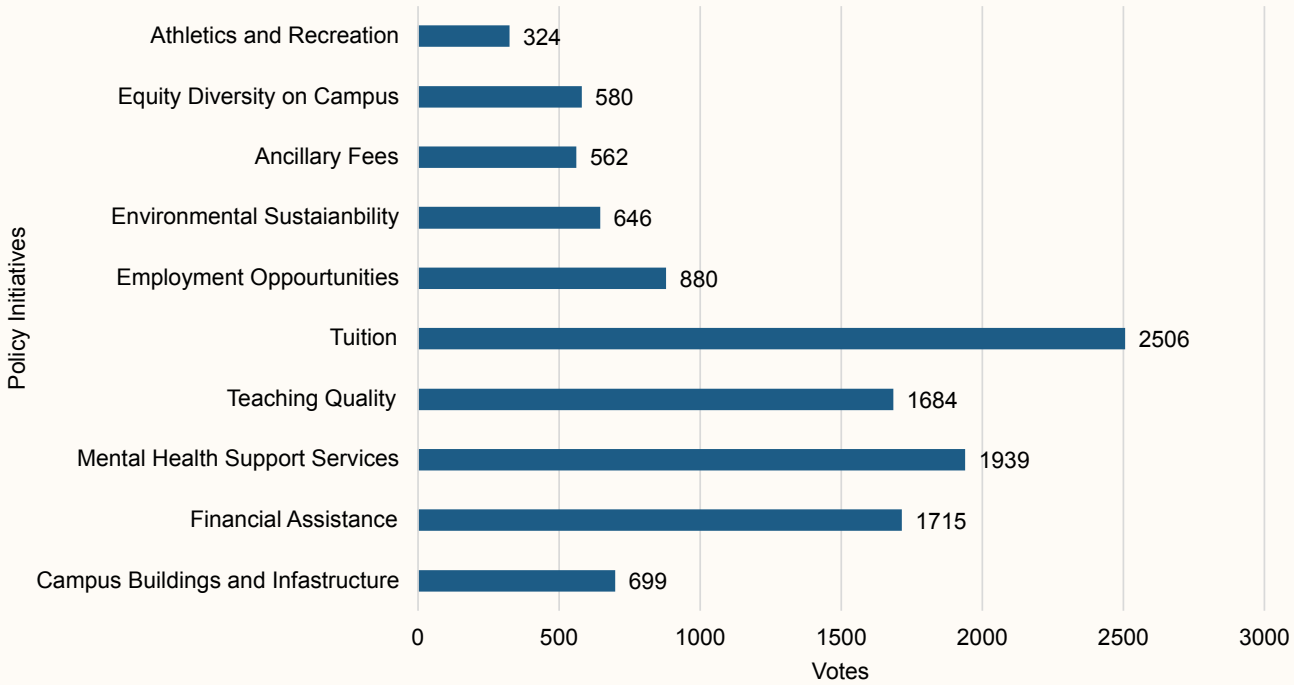


rin"), "Korean," and "Hindi." Less common responses included "Tamil," "Spanish," "Punjabi," and "Arabic."

QUALITY AS A PRIORITY

The quality of post-secondary education is arguably more important than ever as the province reshapes their approach to teaching and learning in the midst of a public health crisis. When students were asked what the top three policy initiatives that needed the most improvement at their university were, students cited tuition, mental health services, and teaching quality as the top three concerns. The chart below outlines the top ten policy initiatives that needed improvement. It should be noted that there were other initiatives that students commented on needing improvement, such as: academic support services, accessibility support services, physical and sexual health services, credit transfers, municipal relations, response to and prevention of sexual violence, transition, and orientation services, and other.

FIGURE 3: RESPONDENTS' TOP CHOICES FOR POLICY INITIATIVES THAT NEED IMPROVEMENT, N=5,697 [UNWEIGHTED]



TEACHING AND LEARNING

Learning Environment

Comfort in the Classroom

Respondents generally felt "somewhat" comfortable interacting with professors, instructors, and teaching assistants (47 percent), compared to 23 percent who felt "very" comfortable, 24 percent who felt "not very" comfortable, and 6 percent who felt "not at all" comfortable. Similarly, respondents were generally "somewhat" comfortable interacting with classmates (50 percent), compared to 26 percent who felt "very" comfortable, 20 percent who felt "not very" comfortable, and 5 percent who felt "not at all" comfortable.

While there were no statistically significant relationships between demographic groups and comfort interacting with professors, instructors, teaching assistants, and students, there were some notable trends.

A higher percentage of international student respondents said they felt "very" comfortable interacting with classmates (25 percent) compared to professors, instructors, and teaching assistants (16.7 percent), although they generally felt "somewhat" comfortable interacting with both (50 and 58.3 percent, respectively).

A higher percentage of mature students (35.3 percent) said they felt "very" comfortable interacting with professors, instructors, and teaching assistants compared to traditionally-aged students (19.3 percent), however both mature and traditionally-aged students mostly felt "somewhat" comfortable (47.1 and 47.4 percent, respectively). Mature students and traditionally-aged students said they felt similar levels of comfort interacting with classmates, primarily feeling "somewhat" comfortable (51.4 and 48.5 percent, respectively), followed by "very" comfortable (28.6 and 25 percent, respectively), "not very" comfortable (14.3 and 20.6 percent, respectively), and "not at all" comfortable (5.7 and 5.1 percent, respectively).

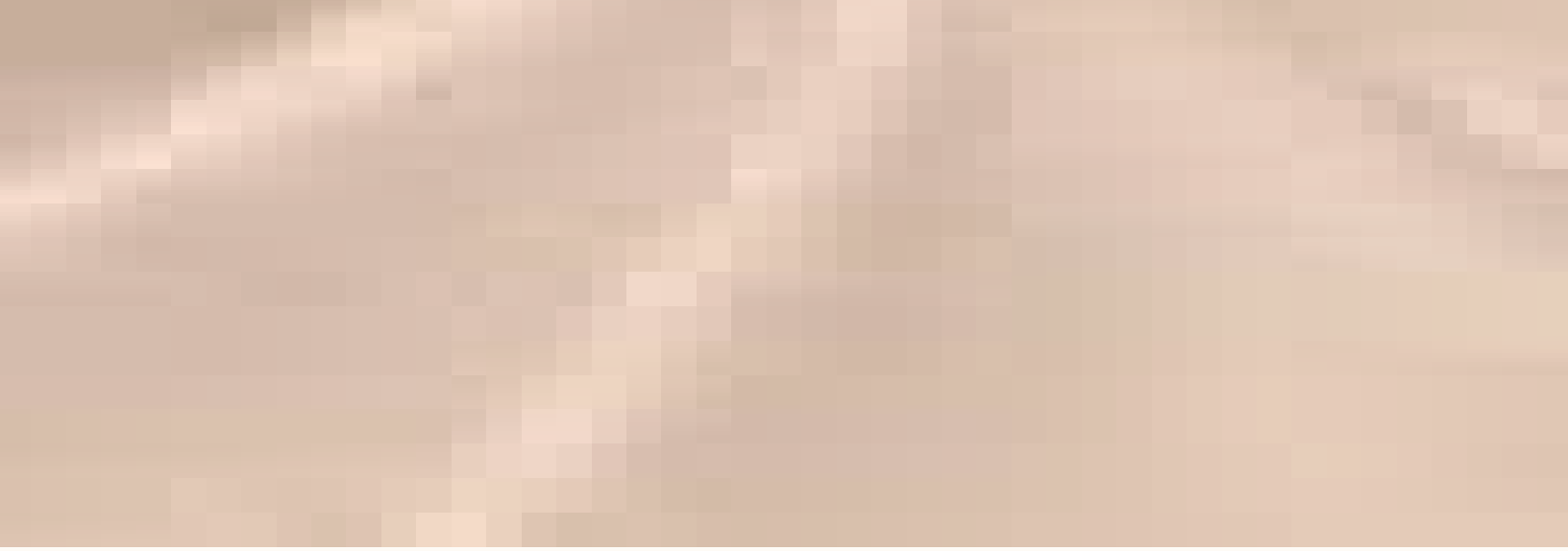
A lesser percentage of racialized students (16.7 percent) said they felt "very" comfortable interacting with professors, instructors, and teaching assistants compared to their non-racialized peers (27.3 percent), however both racialized and non-racialized students mostly felt "somewhat" comfortable (53 and 43.4 percent, respectively). Racialized and non-racialized students said they felt similar levels of comfort interacting with classmates, primarily feeling "somewhat" comfortable (53.8 and 47.4 percent, respectively), followed by "very" comfortable (24.6 and 26.8 percent, respectively), "not very" comfortable (16.9 and 20.6 percent, respectively), and "not at all" comfortable (4.6 and 5.2 percent, respectively).

A small number of Indigenous students answered the questions asking how comfortable they felt interacting with professors, instructors, teaching assistants, and classmates and responses were evenly distributed between "very," "somewhat" and "not very" comfortable (33.3 percent each).

Low-income students had similar levels of comfort interacting with professors, instructors, and teaching assistants, compared to respondents who were not low-income, overall respondent comfort levels, and feelings of comfort interacting with classmates, although slightly more low-income students felt "not very" comfortable: 43.3 percent felt "very" comfortable, 30 percent felt "not very comfortable, 20 percent felt "very" comfortable, and 6.7% felt "not at all" comfortable. When interacting with classmates, low-income students' feelings of comfort aligned with both students who were not low-income and general survey respondents across all rankings: 46.7 percent felt "somewhat" comfortable, 23.3 percent felt "very" comfortable, 23.3 percent felt "not very" comfortable, and 6.7 percent felt "not at all" comfortable.

First-generation students had similar levels of comfort interacting with professors, instructors, and teaching assistants, compared to respondents who were not first-generation, overall respondent comfort levels, and feelings of comfort interacting with classmates: 44.4 percent felt "somewhat" comfortable, 25.9% felt "not very" comfortable, 22.2 percent felt "very" comfortable, and 7.4 percent felt "not at all" comfortable. When interacting with classmates, first-generation students' feelings of comfort aligned with both students who were not first-generation and general survey respondents across all rankings: 50.9 percent felt "somewhat" comfortable, 21.8 percent felt "not very" comfortable, 20 percent felt "very" comfortable, and 7.3 percent felt "not at all" comfortable.

Students who grew up in rural or northern communities or on First Nations Reserves had similar levels of comfort interacting with professors, instructors, and teaching assistants, compared to respondents who grew up in urban centres, overall respondent comfort levels, and feelings of comfort interacting with classmates: 42.2 percent felt "somewhat" comfortable, 28.9% felt "not very" comfortable, 22.2 percent felt "very" comfortable, and 6.7 percent felt "not at all" comfortable. When interacting with classmates, students who grew up in rural or northern communities or on First Nations Reserves felt similar levels of comfort to both students



who grew up in urban centres and general survey respondents across all rankings: 46.7 percent felt "somewhat" comfortable, 24.4 percent felt "very" comfortable, 22.2 percent felt "not very" comfortable, and 6.7 percent felt "not at all" comfortable.

Students with disabilities had similar levels of comfort interacting with professors, instructors, and teaching assistants, compared to respondents who did not have a disability, overall respondent comfort levels, and feelings of comfort interacting with classmates: 45.8 percent felt "somewhat" comfortable, 25% felt "not very" comfortable, 20.8 percent felt "very" comfortable, and 8.3 percent felt "not at all" comfortable. When interacting with classmates, students with disabilities felt similar levels of comfort to both students who did not have a disability and general survey respondents across all rankings: 44.7 percent felt "somewhat" comfortable, 25.5 percent felt "not very" comfortable, 21.3 percent felt "very" comfortable, and 8.5 percent felt "not at all" comfortable.

A lesser percentage of Two Spirit and LGBTQ+ students (18.6 percent) said they felt "very" comfortable interacting with professors, instructors, and teaching assistants compared to their cishetero peers (2.4 percent), however both Two Spirit and LGBTQ+ and cishetero students mostly felt "somewhat" comfortable (48.8 and 47.2 percent, respectively). Two Spirit and LGBTQ+ and cishetero students said they felt similar levels of comfort interacting with classmates, primarily feeling "somewhat" comfortable (43.2 and 52 percent, respectively), followed by "not very" comfortable for Two Spirit and LGBTQ+ students (27.3 percent) and "very" comfortable for cishetero students (27.2 percent), "very" comfortable for Two Spirit and LGBTQ+ students (22.7 percent) and "not very" comfortable for cishetero students (16.8 percent), and "not at all" comfortable (6.8 and 4 percent, respectively).

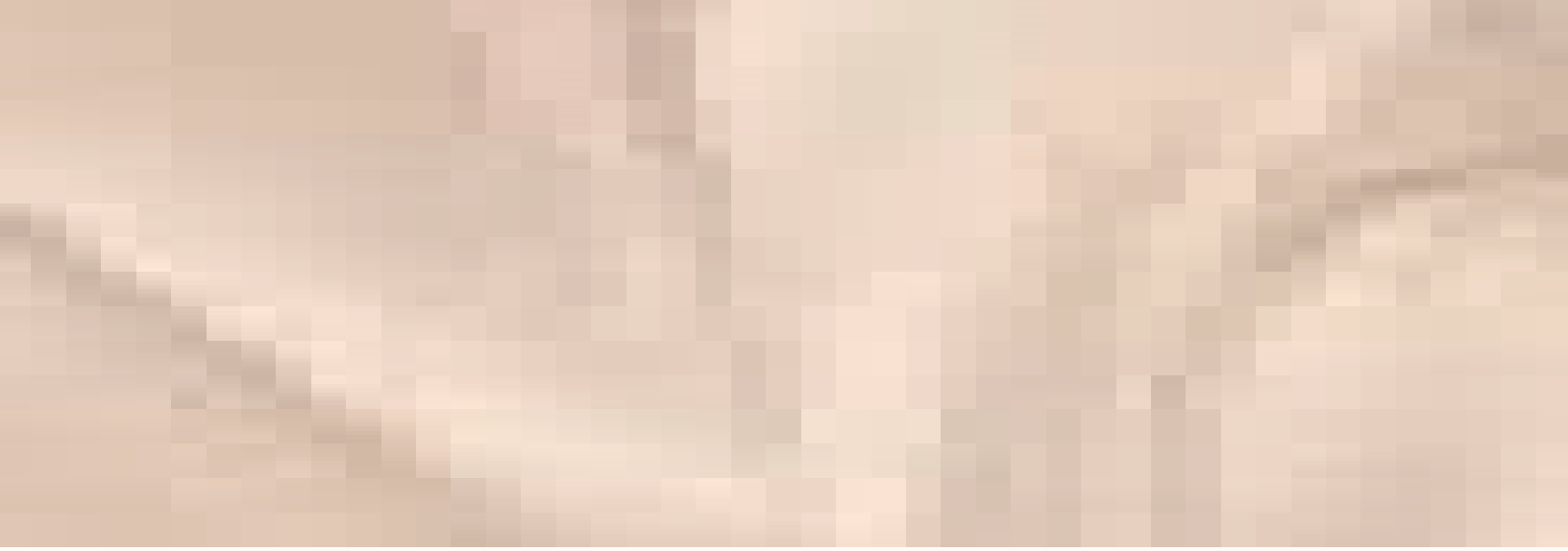
Discrimination in the Classroom

Respondents were asked whether they felt discriminated against in their course(s) based on their identity. A majority (83 percent) said "no," although 10 percent said "yes" and 7 percent "preferred not to say." Of the 10 percent of respondents who felt discriminated against in their courses based on their identity, the most commonly reported sources of discrimination were teaching staff (49 percent), classmates (47 percent), course work, including lectures and assignments (31 percent), and course materials, including textbooks and Open Educational Resources (30 percent).

While there were no statistically significant relationships between demographic groups and feeling discriminated in course(s) based on identity, there were some notable trends.

A similar percentage of Two Spirit and LGBTQ+ respondents said that they felt discriminated against in their course(s) based on their identity (11 percent) compared to cishetero respondents (9%). This trend was consistent for mature (9 percent) and traditionally-aged respondents (10 percent); respondents who grew up in rural or norther communities or on a First Nations Reserve (7 percent) and respondents who grew up in an urban centre (9 percent); first-generation respondents (9 percent) and respondents who were not first-generation (10 percent); and international (9 percent) and domestic (10 percent) respondents.

Few Indigenous respondents and respondents with dependents answered this question, and those that did



said they did not feel discriminated against or that they preferred not to say.

A higher percentage of students with disabilities (15 percent), low-income students (13 percent), and racialized students (15 percent) said they felt discriminated against in their course(s) based on their identity compared to students who did not have a disability (6 percent), were not low-income (9 percent), and were not racialized (6 percent).

Students who wear a visible religious symbol also reported feeling discriminated against in their courses at a higher percentage (16.7 percent) than those who do not (8.2 percent). Notably, not all students who practice or affiliate with a religion wear a visible symbol, and thus these percentages could potentially be higher.

Course and Instructor Evaluations

Overall, respondents were fairly split between whether they felt that the feedback they provided in course and teacher evaluations was valued by their university, with 43 percent saying they felt it was valued, and 57 percent saying they felt it was not valued. This is a slight shift from responses to the 2015 and 2017 iterations of this survey when 54 percent of respondents felt their feedback was valued, compared to 46 percent who did not feel their feedback was valued.[8]

While there were no statistically significant relationships between demographic groups and feeling like feedback provided in course and teacher evaluations was valued, there were some notable trends.

A higher percentage of both Two Spirit and LGBTQ+ and cishetero students felt that the feedback they provided in course and teacher evaluations was not valued by their university (64 and 54 percent, respectively) compared to those who thought their feedback was valued (34 and 45 percent). However, Two Spirit and LGBTQ+ respondents were less consistent with the general sample and demonstrated a larger difference between those who felt their feedback was valued and those who did not (30 percent) compared to cishetero respondents (9 percent).

A higher percentage of respondents with disabilities and respondents who did not have a disability felt that the feedback they provided in course and teacher evaluations was not valued by their university (64 and 53 percent, respectively) compared to those who thought their feedback was valued (36 and 46 percent). However, respondents with disabilities were less consistent with the general sample and demonstrated a larger difference between those who felt their feedback was valued and those who did not (28 percent) compared to cishetero respondents (7 percent).

A slightly higher percentage of first-generation respondents and respondents who were not first-generation felt that the feedback they provided in course and teacher evaluations was not valued by their university (52 and 60 percent, respectively) compared to those who thought their feedback was valued (48 and 40 percent). However, first-generation respondents were less consistent with the general sample and demonstrated a smaller difference between those who felt their feedback was valued and those who did not (4 percent) compared to respondents who were not first-generation (20 percent).

A slightly higher percentage of low-income respondents and respondents who were not low-income felt that the feedback they provided in course and teacher evaluations was not valued by their university (60 and 57 percent, respectively) compared to those who thought their feedback was valued (40 and 41 percent). This trend was consistent for students who grew up in rural or northern communities or on a First Nations Reserve, and students who grew up in urban centres who had slightly more respondents say that

they felt that their feedback was not valued (58 and 57 percent, respectively), compared to those who though their feedback was valued (42 and 43 percent); and racialized and non-racialized students who felt that their feedback was not valued (58 and 57 percent, respectively), compared to those who though their feedback was valued (41 and 42 percent).

Few Indigenous students responded to the question of whether they felt that the feedback they provided in course and teacher evaluations was valued by their university, however of those who did a majority said they did not feel their feedback was valued (67 percent), compared to 33 percent who did.

Both mature students and international students had a higher percentage of respondents who said that they felt that the feedback they provided in course and teacher evaluations was valued by their university (51 and 64 percent, respectively), compared to those who felt their feedback was not valued (49 and 59 percent).

This trend was reversed for traditionally-aged students and domestic students for whom a higher percentage of respondents felt that their feedback was not valued (59 and 57 percent, respectively), compared to those who felt their feedback was valued (40 percent).

Teaching Staff

A majority (55 percent) of respondents felt "somewhat" supported by their academic instructors (including professors, instructors, teaching assistants, etc.), and 18 percent felt "very supported." However, 27 percent of

respondents felt “not very” (21 percent) or “not at all” supported (6 percent).

While there were no statistically significant relationships between demographic groups and supported by academic instructors, there were some notable trends.

Two Spirit and LGBTQ+ and cishetero students responded similarly to how supported they felt by their academic instructors, with a majority feeling “somewhat” supported (55 and 54 percent, respectively), followed by “not very” supported (23 and 21 percent), “very” supported (16 and 18 percent), and “not at all” supported (7 and 6 percent). This was also the case for students who grew up in rural or northern communities, or on a First Nations Reserve, and those who grew up in urban centres: 53 and 56 percent, respectively, felt “somewhat” supported, followed by 22 and 20 percent who felt “not very” supported, 18 and 19 percent who felt “very” supported, and 7 and 5 percent who felt “not at all” supported. Similarly, first-generation students and students who were not first-generation primarily felt “somewhat” supported (52 and 55 percent, respectively), followed by “not very” supported (22 and 21 percent), “very” supported (19 and 18 percent), and “not at all” supported (7 and 5 percent). Students who wear a visible religious symbol also felt “very” supported at similar percentages to those who did not wear a visible religious symbol, at 16.7 percent and 17.8 percent, respectively. Conversely, slightly higher percentages of students who wear a visible religious symbol felt unsupported by their academic instructors than those who did not wear a visible religious symbol, with 27.8 percent of the former feeling “not very” supported and 21.3 percent of the latter feeling this way, while 11.1 percent of the former and 5.5 percent of the latter felt “not at all” supported.

Low-income students and students who were not low-income also responded similarly to how supported they felt by their academic instructors, with a majority feeling “somewhat” supported (52 and 54 percent, respectively), followed by “not very” supported (21 and 22 percent), “very” supported (17 and 20 percent), and “not at all” supported (7 and 5 percent). International and domestic students followed a similar pattern: 50 and 54 percent, respectively, felt “somewhat” supported, 25 and 21 percent felt “not very” supported, 17 and 18 percent felt “very” supported, and 8 and 6 percent felt “not at all” supported.

Although they follow a similar trend, there was slightly more of a distinction between students with disabilities and students who did not have a disability in terms of how supported they felt by their academic instructors. While a similar percentage of students with disabilities (55 percent) and students who did not have a disability (54 percent) felt somewhat” supported, students with disabilities responded that they felt “not very” (23 percent) or “not at all” (9 percent) supported at a slightly higher rate than students who did not have a disability (20 and 5 percent). However, students who did not have a disability responded that they felt “very” supported at a slightly higher rate than students with disabilities (19 and 13 percent, respectively). This was similar for racialized and non-racialized students: 55 and 54 percent felt “somewhat” supported, 23 and 19 percent felt “not very” supported, 15 and 20 percent felt “very” supported, and 5 and 6 percent felt “not at all” supported.

The most notable difference, however, was between mature and traditionally-aged students. A higher percentage of mature students said they felt “very” supported (29 percent) compared to traditionally-aged students (15 percent), and a lower percentage of mature students felt “somewhat” (47 percent) or “not very” (18 percent) supported, compared to traditionally-aged students (56 and 22 percent, respectively). However, the lowest percentage of both mature and traditionally-aged students selected “not at all” supported (6 percent).

Few Indigenous students responded to the question of how supported they felt by their academic instructors, however of those who did respond, the majority felt “somewhat” supported, followed by a mix of “not very” and “very” supported.

Respondents were asked about their experiences with full-time and part-time instructors. When asked to indicate whether the instructors they have had at university were employed full-time or part-time, 31 percent selected “full-time,” 28 percent selected “both,” and 1 percent selected “part-time.” Just under half (40 percent) of respondents said that they did not know the employment status of their instructors. This is a slight difference from 2015 and 2017 when 41 and 42 percent of respondents said they took courses with both fall-time and part-time instructors, and only 33 percent indicated they were unsure of the employment status of their instructors.[9]

Respondents who selected that they had both full-time and part-time instructors were asked to compare the availability, engagement, and teaching abilities of their part-time instructors to their full-time instructors. On each of these factors, a majority of respondents said that their part-time and full-time instructors were “the same”: 64 percent said their part-time instructors had

the same availability outside of class hours as their full-time instructors; 66 percent said the course content was as engaging in classes taught by part-time instructors; and 72 percent said their part-time instructors teaching abilities were as good as their full-time instructors. This is consistent with 2015 and 2017 iterations of the survey when a majority of respondents reported that they felt their part-time instructors' availability, engagement, and teaching abilities were the same as their full-time instructors.[10]

Respondents were asked to select the teaching styles that best supported their learning. The most commonly selected teaching style was lectures (72 percent), followed by active learning (65 percent), discussion-based learning (52 percent), and seminars (31 percent). However, when asked to identify the teaching styles used by instructors in their course(s), almost all (94 percent) of respondents selected lectures, followed by discussion-based learning (52 percent), seminars (23 percent), and active learning (23 percent).

Class Content

When respondents were asked if their institution offered a course that focused, in whole or in part, on Indigenous content, 51 percent said "yes," followed by 38 percent who said they were "not sure," and 11 percent who said "no." This is a shift from 2017 when 39 percent of respondents said they had not had a chance to take a course focused on Indigenous content and 10 percent said they were not sure.[11]

Of those who said yes, 41 percent said that they had taken a course focused on Indigenous content while attending post-secondary, compared to 59 percent who said they had not. For respondents who had taken a course focused on Indigenous content, a large majority said they were "moderately" (51 percent) or "very" (40 percent) engaged; and 9 percent said they were "not very" or "not at all" engaged. These students were also asked to select whether the classroom climate was positive, negative, or neither positive nor negative, when learning this content. A majority (66 percent) described the classroom climate as positive, followed by "neither positive nor negative" (29 percent), and negative (5 percent).

While there were no statistically significant relationships between demographic groups and whether a student took a course that focused on Indigenous content, there were some notable trends.

Two Spirit and LGBTQ+ students (26 percent) and students with disabilities (26 percent) responded that they had taken a course that focused on Indigenous content more frequently than cishetero (19 percent) and students who did not have a disability (19 percent). However, and a higher percentage of Two Spirit and LGBTQ+ students (33 percent) and students with disabilities (30 percent) responded that they had not taken a course that focused on Indigenous content compared to those who said they had, which was similar for cishetero students (30 percent) and students who did not have a disability (29 percent).

Mature students (23 percent), students who grew up in rural or northern communities, or on First Nations Reserves (21 percent), and first-generation students (20 percent) responded that they had taken a course focused on Indigenous content at similar rates to traditionally-aged students (20 percent), students who grew up in urban centres (21 percent), and students who were not first-generation (21 percent). Like other demographic groups, mature students (26 percent), students who grew up in rural or northern communities, or on First Nations Reserves (32 percent), and first-generation students (26 percent) responded that they had not taken a course that focused on Indigenous content at higher rates when compared to those that had. This was also true for traditionally-aged students

(31 percent), students who grew up in urban centres (30 percent), and students who were not first-generation (32 percent). Notably, however, students who grew up in rural or northern communities, or on a First Nations Reserve responded that they had not taken a course that focused on Indigenous content at similar rates to students who grew up in urban centres, compared to mature and traditionally-aged students, and first-generation and students who were not first-generation.

Smaller percentages of low-income (17 percent), racialized (15 percent), and international (9 percent) students responded that they had taken a course focused on Indigenous content when compared to students who were not low-income (23 percent), non-racialized students (25 percent), and domestic students (21 percent). However, low-income students (30 percent) and students who were not low-income (32 percent), racialized students (30 percent) and non-racialized students (30 percent), and international students (27 percent) and domestic students (30 percent) all responded that they had not taken a course that focused on Indigenous content more frequently than those who had, and at comparable rates to each other.

Finally, while only a small number of Indigenous students responded to this question, responses were equally split between having taken a course focused on Indigenous content and not having taken a course focused on Indigenous content, while a higher percentage of non-Indigenous students said they had not taken a course focused on Indigenous content (30 percent) compared to those that had (20 percent).

Learning Materials

In addition to tuition payments, respondents reported spending an average of $563 on textbooks and course packs in the Fall of 2020. When asked whether they bought all of their required textbooks and course packs, respondents were fairly evenly split, with 51 percent saying “yes” and 49 percent saying “no.”

While there were no statistically significant relationships between demographic groups and whether a student bought all of their required textbooks and course packs, there were some notable trends.

A smaller percentage of Two Spirit and LGBTQ+ students reported that they had purchased all of their required textbooks and courses (46 percent) when compared to those who had not (52 percent). This was the opposite for cishetero students who had a higher percentage of respondents report that they had pur-

chased all of their required textbooks and course packs (52 percent) when compared to those who had not (47 percent).

This was also true of mature students: 46 percent had purchased all of their required textbooks and course packs, while 54 percent had not, compared to traditionally-aged students of whom 52 percent had purchased all of their required textbooks and course packs, while 47 percent had not.

Similarly, a smaller percentage of students with disabilities reported that they had purchased all of their required textbooks and courses (47 percent) when compared to those who had not (53 percent). This was the opposite for students who did not have a disability who had a higher percentage of respondents report that they had purchased all of their required textbooks and course packs (53 percent) when compared to those who had not (46 percent).

Low-income students and students who were not low-income followed a similar response pattern. A smaller percentage of low-income students reported that they had purchased all of their required textbooks and courses (43 percent) when compared to those who had not (58 percent), while 52 percent of students who were not low-income purchased all of their required textbooks and course packs and 48 percent had not.

A smaller percentage of racialized students reported that they had purchased all of their required textbooks and courses (44 percent) when compared to those who had not (55 percent). This was the opposite for non-racialized who had a higher percentage of respondents report that they had purchased all of their required textbooks and course packs (55 percent) when compared to those who had not (44 percent).

While only a small number of Indigenous students responded to this question, a majority reported that they had purchased all of their required textbooks and course packs, while non-Indigenous students were fairly evenly split between those who had (50 percent) and those who had not (48 percent) purchased all of their required textbooks and course packs.

A higher percentage of students who grew up in rural or northern communities, or on First Nations Reserves reported that they had purchased all of their required textbooks and courses (57 percent) when compared to those who had not (41 percent). For students who grew up in urban centres, respondents were fairly evenly split between those who did purchase all of their required textbooks and course packs (48 percent) and those who had not (51 percent).

First-generation students (52 percent) and international students (50 percent) responded that they had purchased all of their required textbooks and course packs at similar rates to students who were not first-generation (49 percent) and domestic students (48 percent).

When asked if they were required to pay any fees to purchase additional software (even if bundled with a textbook) to complete mandatory tests, assignments, or examinations, 50 percent of respondents said they were required, 43 percent said they were not required, and 6 percent said they were unsure. Of those who said that they were required to purchase additional software, 45 percent had to purchase this software for 1 course, 28 percent for 2 courses, 17 percent for 3, 6 percent for 4, and 4 percent for 5 or more.

As a result of remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all respondents were assumed to have experience using online course materials. Overall respondents were generally satisfied (33 percent), neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (28 percent), or dissatisfied (26 percent) with the quality of their online course ma-

terials. 10 percent of respondents were very dissatisfied, and 3 percent were very satisfied.

While there were no statistically significant relationships between demographic groups and how satisfied respondents were with the quality of their online course materials, there were some notable trends.

A similar percentage of Two Spirit and LGBTQ+ (2 percent) and cishetero (3 percent) respondents reported that they were "very" satisfied with the quality of their online learning materials, comparable to the general population. A smaller percentage of Two Spirit and LGBTQ+ respondents reported being "satisfied" (30 percent) or "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied" (23 percent) when compared to cishetero students (35 and 30 percent, respectively). A greater percentage of Two Spirit and LGBTQ+ respondents reported being "dissatisfied" (32 percent) or "very "dissatisfied" (14 percent) when compared to cishetero respondents (24 and 8 percent, respectively).

International students were primarily "satisfied" (30 percent), "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied" (30 percent), or "dissatisfied" (30 percent), with fewer respondents (10 percent) being "very dissatisfied" and 0 percent reporting being "very satisfied." This was comparable to domestic students who were primarily "satisfied" (33 percent), "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied" (28 percent), or "dissatisfied" (26 percent), with fewer respondents (10 percent) being "very dissatisfied" and 3 percent reporting being "very satisfied."

A majority (56 percent) of respondents found their online course materials to be somewhat accessible, followed by 33 percent who found their materials to be very accessible, 10 percent who found them not very accessible, and 1 percent who said they were not at all accessible.

While there were no statistically significant relationships between demographic groups and how accessible they found their online course materials, there were some notable trends.

A smaller percentage of Two Spirit and LGBTQ+ respondents (25 percent) reported that they found their online course materials to be "very" accessible compared to cishetero respondents (36 percent). Although, a slightly greater percentage of Two Spirit and LGBTQ+ respondents found their online course materials to be "somewhat" (59 percent) or "not very" (16 percent) accessible compared to cishertero respondents (56 and 7 percent, respectively). Both Two Spirit and LGBTQ+ and cishetero students reported that their course materials were "not at all" accessible the least frequently (0 and 1 percent, respectively).

A greater percentage of mature students reported finding their course materials to be "very" accessible (43 percent) compared to traditionally-aged students (30 percent). A smaller percentage of mature students found their course materials to be "somewhat" accessible (48 percent) compared to traditionally-aged respondents (59 percent).

Similar percentages of students who grew up in rural or northern communities, or on a First Nations Reserve, and students who grew up in urban centres, found their course materials to be "very" (31 and 34 percent), "not very" (9 and 11 percent), and "not at all" (0 and 1 percent) accessible. A greater percentage of students who grew up in rural or northern communities, or on a First Nations Reserve found their course materials to be "somewhat" accessible (60 percent) compared to students who grew up in urban centres (54 percent).

A smaller percentage of students with disabilities (25 percent) found their online course materials to be "very" accessible compared to students without a disability (38 percent). Both disabled and non-disabled students said their online course materials were "somewhat" accessible most frequently (58 and 55 percent, respectively). Students with disabilities more frequently reported their online courses being "not very" (15 percent) and "not at all" (2 percent) accessible compared to students without disabilities (7 and 1 percent).

A similar percentage of first-generation students (54 percent) and students who were not first-generation (58 percent) reported that their online course materials were "somewhat" accessible, followed by "very" accessible (35 and 32 percent), "not very" accessible (9 and 10 percent), and "not at all" accessible (2 and 1 percent).

A similar percentage of low-income students (53 percent) and students who were not low-income (57 percent) reported that their online course materials were "somewhat" accessible, followed by "very" accessible (33 percent), "not very" accessible (13 and 9 percent), and "not at all" accessible (0 and 1 percent).

Although only a small number of Indigenous students responded to this question, respondents primarily reported that their online course materials were "somewhat" followed by "very" accessible. This was comparable to non-Indigenous students who found their

course materials to be “somewhat” (56 percent) followed by “very” (32 percent) accessible.

A greater percentage of racialized students reported finding their course materials to be “somewhat” accessible (60 percent) compared to non-racialized students (54 percent). A smaller percentage of racialized students found their course materials to be “very” accessible (29 percent) compared to non-racialized respondents (36 percent). Similar percentages of racialized and non-racialized respondents found their course materials to be “not very” (9 and 10 percent) and “not at all” (2 and 1 percent) accessible.

A similar percentage of international (55 percent) and domestic (56 percent) respondents reported that their online course materials were “somewhat” accessible, followed by “very” accessible (36 and 32 percent), “not very” accessible (9 percent), and “not at all” accessible (0 and 1 percent).

Respondents were also asked about their experiences with open educational resources (OERs), which are resources such as textbooks or other course materials that have no legal, financial, or technical barriers. When asked if they were able or required to use OERs for any of their courses, a majority (58 percent) of respondents said they didn’t know whether they were able or required to, 25 percent said that they were not able or required to, and 17 percent said that they were able or required to. Of those who were able or required to use OERs in their course(s), a majority (56 percent) found them to be “somewhat” useful when compared to textbooks and other learning materials, 28 percent found them to be “very” useful, 15 percent said they were “not very” useful, and 1 percent said they were “not at all” useful. Few respondents reported having “some” (14 percent) or “significant” (2 percent) difficulty accessing the OERs used in their course(s), compared to 45 percent who only had “minor” difficulty, and 39 percent who had “non” difficulty.

Online Learning

At the time this survey was conducted, all universities in Ontario were operating remotely, which for our purposes meant that all courses taken by respondents were primarily online. When asked to rate their level of satisfaction with their online course(s), respondents were generally dissatisfied (30 percent), satisfied (27 percent), or neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (27 percent). A majority of respondents (53 percent) said that when they are able to take in-person courses that they would not take a primarily online course again, 31 percent said maybe, and 16 percent said they would choose to take an online course again. This is a shift from 2017 when, of the 60 percent of respondents who had taken an online course, 49 percent said they would take one again, 36 percent said maybe, and 15 percent said they would not take an online course again.[12]

While no statistically significant relationships were identified between demographic groups and satisfaction with online courses, there were some notable patterns.

The majority of mature students reported being “satisfied” with online courses (34.3 percent) whereas the majority of traditionally-aged students of reported this (25.1 percent). On the contrary, there were more traditionally-aged students who reported being “dissatisfied” with online courses (31.1 percent) compared to mature students (25.7 percent). When asked if they would take an online course again upon the resumption of in-person courses, more mature students than traditionally-aged students identified “yes,” (25.7 percent and 12.6 percent respectively). The reverse was observed for those who responded “no,” with fewer of mature students than traditionally-aged students feeling this way (48.6 percent and 54.8 percent respectively).

There were no sizeable differences observed between racialized and non-racialized students in satisfaction with online learning. Once noteworthy distinction is the smaller percentage of racialized students who reported being “satisfied” with online learning (21.2 percent) compared to non-racialized students (30.3 percent). Similarly, students who wear a visible religious symbol reported feeling “satisfied” at a lower percentage than students who do not wear a religious symbol, at 17.6 percent ad 27.2 percent respectively.

Two Spirit and LGBTQ+ students reported feeling “satisfied” with online learning at a lower percentage than cishetero students, at 20.5 percent and 29.3 percent respectively. On the other hand, 36.4 percent of Two Spirit and LGBTQ+ students felt “dissatisfied” with online learning, slightly higher than the 28.5 percent of cishetero students who reported this.

Respondents who said that they would not take a primarily online course again were asked why they would not choose to take an online course again. This was an open text question and responses were coded based on the following 15 themes (ranked from the most commonly cited to the least commonly cited):

1. Hard to connect or work with other students
2. It isn't for me or doesn't work for my learning style
3. Increased difficulty/More work
4. Lack of personal connections (staff)/lack of interaction
5. Not motivating/not engaging/hard to focus
6. Other
7. Depressing/anxiety/mental health
8. Bad quality teaching/teachers unmotivated/not teaching
9. Am not learning as much/grades suffering
10. Too much reading or self-teaching
11. Poor communication, organization, or management
12. Requires discipline/ easy to forget or fall behind
13. Hard to ask questions, get help, or get feedback
14. Not worth the money
15. No comprehensible explanation

Respondents were also asked about the accessibility of their online course(s). The majority of respondents (58 percent) found their online course(s) to be "somewhat" accessible, followed by "very" accessible (30 percent), "not very" (10 percent) and "not at all" (1 percent) accessible. When asked if their professor, instructor, or teaching assistant provided them with an accommodation when they experienced accessibility concerns with their online course(s), 70 percent of respondents said they were not provided an accommodation, and 30 percent were provided an accommodation.

Work-Integrated Learning

38 percent of respondents have been involved in work-integrated learning (WIL) in some capacity; at the time of the survey, 20 percent were participating in WIL and 18 percent had previously participated in WIL. 62 percent of respondents reported that they had never participated in WIL, with 45 percent indicating they did not have an option to, while 17 percent had the option to. This data is similar to results seen in the 2015 and 2017 iterations of this survey, where 66 percent and 67 percent of students (respectively) had not participated in WIL in both years.[13]

While there was no statistically significant relationship between participation in WIL and field of study, there were some notable observations.

Most respondents in Physical and Life Sciences and Technologies, Social and Behavioural Sciences and Law, Health and Related Fields, and Humanities programs indicated no participation in WIL, and among these students, most of these students specifically did not have an option to engage in WIL. On the contrary, most respondents in Education indicated participation in WIL. Co-op work terms were the most popular type of WIL, with just under half of the sample reporting participation in these opportunities (47 percent), followed by paid internships (17 percent) and practicums (13 percent).

There is no statistically significant relationship between participation in WIL and specific post-secondary institutions. However, as found in the 2015 survey, most respondents who reported participation in WIL attended the University of Waterloo (51.5 percent).[14] Waterloo was the only school that had higher proportions of respondents in WIL, while other OUSA member schools had either even distribution among participation and non-participation in WIL, or a higher proportion of non-participation in WIL. In particular, McMaster University, Western University, Wilfrid Laurier University,

and Queen's University had more students indicating non-participation in WIL.

Among those who had participated in WIL in the past, 39 percent indicated that it had improved their educational experience, with 44 percent stating it had "significantly" improved their educational experience. Similarly, when asked about their satisfaction with their WIL, 82 percent were either very satisfied or satisfied with their WIL experience (44 percent and 38 percent, respectively). Once again, this data reflects similar results seen in the 2015 (84 percent) and 2017 (85 percent) surveys.[15] Among those who had the option to participate in WIL but did not, 24 percent stated they were not well-informed of the opportunities available, 20 percent indicated that did not have time for WIL, and 18 percent cited COVID-19 restrictions as preventing them from engaging in WIL.

There were no statistically significant relationships identified between demographic groups and participation in WIL; however there were some notable trends.

When looking at students with disabilities and participation in WIL, 31.9 percent of students with disabilities indicated participation in WIL, while students without disabilities reported participation in WIL at 39.6 percent. While both students with and without disabilities had more respondents indicate non-participation in WIL, there was a higher proportion of this among students with disabilities than students without disabilities (68 percent and 60.3 percent, respectively).

The written feedback provided in the survey by students on WIL expressed the need for more co-op opportunities, as many felt there was not enough supply of these jobs to meet student demand. Students also discussed broadening access to WIL, as they felt that institutions needed to place an increased focus on getting students practical experience to prepare them for job applications and the workforce.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Orientation & Transition

A majority of international student respondents (72 percent) reported that their institution met their expectations, while 28 percent said it did not meet their expectations.

International student respondents were asked if they had an opportunity to tour their institution before they made the decision to enroll. Half of all respondents said that they did not have this opportunity, while the other half did, either in person (33 percent) or virtually (18 percent).

International student respondents were asked if they had attended an orientation program for international students: 63 percent had attended an international student orientation program; 27 percent did not, although one was offered; 7 percent did not and were unsure if one was offered; and 3 percent said that there was no international student orientation program offered. This is consistent with responses to previous iterations of the survey which found that 55 percent (2015) and 64 percent had attended an international student orientation program and 28 percent (2015) and 26 percent (2017) did not attend an international student orientation program although one was offered.[16]

Of those who did attend an international student orientation program, 25 percent found it useful, 49 percent found it somewhat useful, and 25 percent found it not that useful or not at all useful. Similarly, in previous iterations of the survey, 28 percent (2015) and 25 percent (2017) found the international student orientation program they attended to be very useful, and 56 percent (2015) and 59 percent (2017) found it to be somewhat useful.[17]

Health Care

When asked about their satisfaction with the health insurance policies that are automatically applied to international students under the University Health Insurance Plan (UHIP), 44 percent were satisfied or very satisfied, 14 percent were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 8 percent were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, and 33 percent responded that they had never used it. This is consistent with the level of satisfaction reported in previous iterations of the survey. In 2015, 38 percent of international student respondents were satisfied with UHIP and 36 percent had never used it, and in 2017, 34 percent were satisfied, 27 percent were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 6 percent were dissatisfied, and 33 percent had never used it.[18]

When asked to explain why they were dissatisfied, a majority of respondents pointed to insufficient coverage and high cost, often raised as part of the same issue. A second theme that came up less frequently were administrative issues or barriers, followed by a small number of respondents who raised concerns about the quality of care they received from medical professionals.

International students were asked if they would be interested in opting-in to the same health insurance plan

that domestic, in-province students are under – the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) – if it meant receiving more services. 65 percent said that they would be interested in this opportunity, 5 percent said no, and 30 percent were unsure. Those who indicated that they would be interested in option-in to OHIP were then asked if they would still be interest even if it meant they would have to pay more than what they are currently paying through UHIP. 40 percent were still interested in opting-in, 33 percent changed their response to no, and 27 percent were unsure.

While 44% of international students were satisfied with UHIP, 65% also stated they would be interested in opting-in to OHIP if it meant receiving more services.

Post-Graduation Plans

When asked about their plans after they complete their current academic program, a majority of responses indicated that international student respondents were planning to remain in Canada: 57 percent planned to apply for permanent residency status; 54 percent wanted to work permanently in Canada; 43 percent planned to pursue a degree or qualification at another institution in Ontario; 26 percent planned to pursue a degree or qualification at the university they currently attended; and 24 percent planned to work in Canada, but ultimately return to their home country.

For international students who planned to leave Canada after completing their current academic program, the top reasons given were: career opportunities, or lack thereof (28.8 percent); family, friends, and Canada not being home (14 percent); academic reasons (13.6 percent); wanting to travel (10.1 percent); and COVID (8.4 percent). Career and family/friends continue to be the top two motivators for students deciding to leave Canada upon graduation as seen in 2015 (30 percent and 24 percent) and 2017 (29 percent and 22 percent).[19]

38 percent of international student respondents who received a loan, scholarship, or grant from a government or organization in their home country indicated that there was a requirement attached to the receipt of this funding that they return to their home country following the completion of their academic program.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

When students were asked if they felt their university's city actively engaged with students on municipal issues, 23 percent of respondents during this year's survey said "yes," a large decrease from 2015 (39 percent) and a slight decrease from 2017 (29 percent).20 36 percent responded "no," a slight increase from the 2015 iteration of the survey (31 percent) but the same percent as the 2017 survey.21 41 percent stated they did not know, a slight increase from the 2015 and 2017 surveys (29 percent and 35 percent, respectively).22 Just under half of respondents indicated they were satisfied with their city's engagement of post-secondary students (46 percent) while 39 percent were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

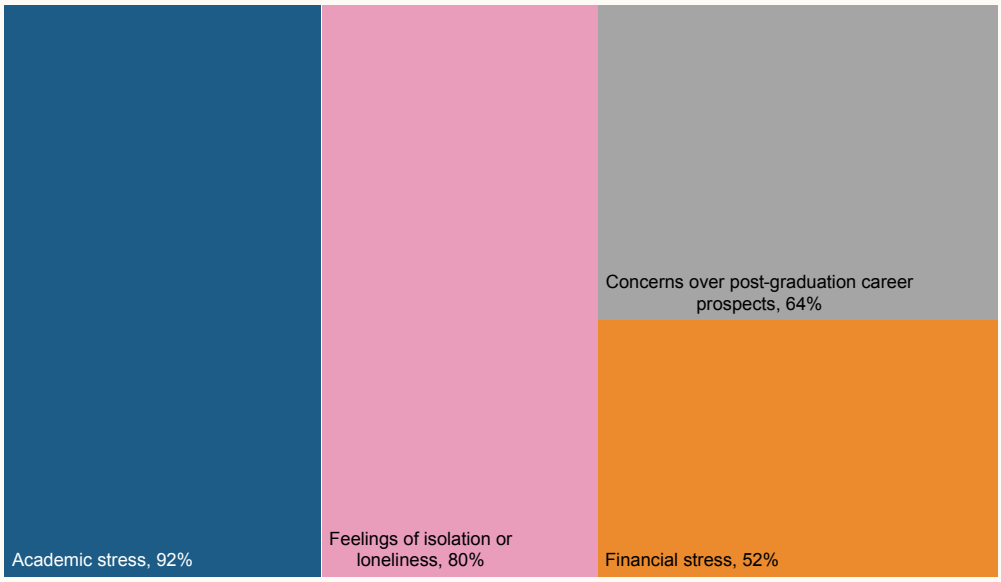
While most students were unsure about whether they were staying in the city their university is located in for one year after graduation, many said they did not plan to and did not want to (36 percent). A majority of these respondents cited employment (33 percent) followed by family (27 percent) as their primary factor in deciding not to stay. Among those did not plan on staying in their institutions' city but would have liked to, 33 percent gave employment as their biggest barrier in doing so.

SUPPORT SERVICES

Among the multitude of support services offered at post-secondary institutions, the top three accessed by students in our survey include academic advising/support (61 percent), health and wellness (46 percent), and orientation and transition (37 percent). From a list of institutional initiatives, the top three relating to support services that were identified as needing the most improvement included mental health support services (40 percent), academic support services (18 percent), and employment opportunities (17 percent). Given that mental health services would fall under health and wellness, mental health and academic services have overlap between being the most used support services and needing the most improvement

In particular, our analysis found a statistically significant relationship between students with disabilities and the kinds of support services they access. 59.6 percent of students with disabilities have accessed health and wellness services ($X^2(2)=6.153$, $p=.046$,

FIGURE 4: CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES



*Participants could select more than one response so percentages will not equal 100

V=.188) and 40.4 percent have used accessibility services ($X^2(2)=27.800$, p=.000, V=.399). Analysis conducted with other demographic population groups did not result in any statistically significant relationships.

Notably, 7 percent of respondents indicated that they accessed international student services through their institution, which is equal to the percentage of respondents who were international students. Only 1 percent of respondents accessed newcomer or settlement services in their communities, however it was unclear whether these respondents were international students or not.

59.6% of disabled students have accessed health and wellness services, and 40.4% have used accessibility services.

Employment

As stated, 17 percent of respondents believed that employment opportunities and supports could be improved at post-secondary institutions. While some of the feedback provided on this relates to WIL, many had concerns around improving employment search and post-graduation supports for students. Students discussed the limited number of job opportunities available on institutional job boards, the narrow academic scope that these jobs catered to, and the quality of jobs offered. In addition, many students want better career transition support, expressing a desire for advice and assistance in exploring their options post-graduation. COVID-19 was also mentioned as a factor contributing to the need for enhanced employment supports. Students also highlighted the fact that more needs to be done to increase access to employment opportunities for international students.

Mental Health

Continuing with trends from previous years, mental health continues to be a big concern for students. Unlike previous versions of this survey, this year's OUSS dedicated a specific section to mental health, gathering insights and perceptions from students on their mental health challenges, contributing factors, and access to mental health support services.

67 percent of respondents reported that they had experienced mental health concerns at some point during their post-secondary degree. When asked to identify contributing factors, 92 percent attributed this to academic stress, 80 percent reported feelings of isolation or loneliness, 64 percent cited concerns over post-graduation career prospects, and 52 percent identified stress related to financial concerns. Evidently, there are varying factors of a student's life that contribute to the mental health challenges they experience, and 80 percent believe that these challenges have affected their academic performance and/or career prospects.

An extremely significant majority of our respondents have experienced feelings of loneliness or isolation at some point during their degree, with 91 percent feeling this way "often," "sometimes," or "rarely." While there is no statistically significant relationship between feelings of loneliness and isolation and demographic groups, there are notable distinctions.

50 percent of Two Spirit and LGBTQ+ students reported feelings of loneliness and isolation "often," with this figure being 32.2 percent for cishetero students. Additionally, students who identified as wearing a visible religious symbol to indicate religious affiliation/beliefs had a higher percentage of "often" feeling lonely and

isolated at 41.2 percent whereas 36.8 percent of those who did not wear religious symbols felt this way. Since not all students who practice or affiliate with a religion necessarily wear a visible symbol, the percentage of religious students who report feeling lonely or isolated "often" could be higher. 38.5 percent of racialized students reported feelings of loneliness and isolation "often," a similar figure to non-racialized students where 36.7 percent reported this. Students with disabilities reported feelings of loneliness and isolation "often" at a higher percentage than non-disabled students at 51.1 percent and 31.1 percent respectively. 50 percent of Indigenous students reported feelings of loneliness and isolation "often" while 35.5 percent of non-Indigenous students reported this. Mature students identified feelings of loneliness and isolation "often" at similar percentages to their traditionally-aged peers, at 34.3 percent and 37.3 percent respectively.

67% of students reported experiencing a mental health concern at some point during their degree, and 91% have felt lonely or isolated.

Despite the concerning levels of mental health challenges, our data indicates that many students have not accessed support on-campus, in the community, or digitally/remotely. 71 percent of students have not accessed on-campus support, 70 percent have not accessed these services outside of campus, and 84 percent have not used online or phone-based resources (such as Good2Talk or Big White Wall). However, 59 percent of students in our survey did report a degree of difficulty in accessing on-campus supports, with 16 percent having "significant" difficulty and 43 percent having "some" difficulty.

Once again, while there were no statistically significant relationships between demographic groups and access to on-campus mental health support, there were some noteworthy patterns.

Two Spirit and LGBTQ+ students had a higher percentage of accessing on-campus mental health supports compared to cishetero students, at 41.9 percent and 19.3 percent respectively. Racialized students accessed mental health supports on-campus at a slightly higher percent (27.7 percent) than non-racialized students (23.5 percent). Mature students also accessed on-campus supports at a higher percentage than traditionally-aged students, with 37.1 percent of the mature students reporting this while 21.6 percent of traditionally-aged students reported this. Additionally, there was a large difference between students with and without disabilities who accessed on-campus mental health supports, at 42.6 percent and 16.6 percent respectively. Indigenous students also accessed on-campus mental health supports at a slightly higher percentage than non-Indigenous students, at 33.3 percent and 24 percent respectively. Students who wear a visible religious symbol reported accessing on-campus mental health support at a slightly lower percentage than those who do not wear a visible religious symbol, at 22.2 percent and 24.5 percent respectively.

When analyzing students' financial status as a barrier to accessing mental health services, no statistically significant relationships were found. Notably, slightly more low-income students accessed these services on-campus (30 percent) than non-low-income students (23.5 percent).

In response to questions around improving support services, students had various suggestions. Students believe that there needs to be increased availability of mental health services, both in number of sessions allotted to students per year and for more long-term counselling support. Students also addressed concerns around the lack of therapeutic interventions for specific issues, broadening methods for service delivery (for example, having services available through instant messaging, phone calls, and in-person), and improving the accessibility and quality mental health services. Respondents were also asked about what institutions could do to improve student mental health and a variety of suggestions were provided including hiring more counsellors to reduce wait times, expanding insurance coverage to include therapy, having more diverse mental health staff, and increasing awareness of how to access therapy. A majority of students pointed out that professors and teaching staff needed to be more understanding of student mental health and the various factors that contribute to student stress. Many respondents also felt that mental health service providers on-campus needed to be better trained, as many found their experiences with therapists were unhelpful. In addition, students felt that there needed to be a shift in campus culture given that the success-driven and high-performing environment fostered a competitive atmosphere and increased stress among students.

FIGURE 5: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO ACCESSED ON-CAMPUS MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS

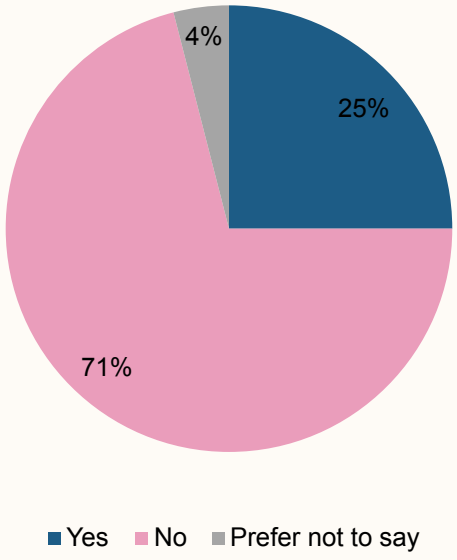
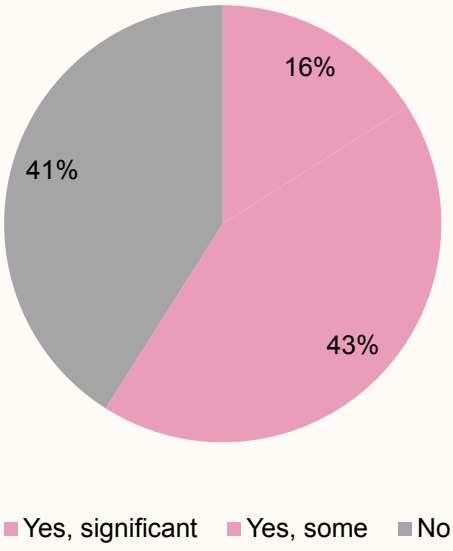


FIGURE 6: LEVELS OF DIFFICULTY IN ACCESSING ON-CAMPUS MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS



DISCUSSION

QUALITY AS A PRIORITY

The past few years for students in Ontario has been tumultuous, to say the least. Between a global public health crisis, transition to virtual learning, and social unrest, the university experience has shifted significantly for students. When discussing the quality of education at an institution, the focus is often on the number of distinguished faculty, the unique courses offered, and the reputation of the institution. However, our results illustrate that quality is so much more than the content being taught or the faculty who teaches students. When looking at the quality of post-secondary in Ontario, our results illustrate that students include their learning environment, orientation and transition to university, employment opportunities and so much more in assessing their overall satisfaction with what they have received.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Comfort in the Classroom

In ensuring students are engaged within the classroom, faculty and staff need to look beyond making course content unique and interesting. While this helps, our research shows that creating an inclusive environment where students feel comfortable to engage with course content and interact with their peers is incredibly important. Inclusive education can be defined as "education based on principles of acceptance and inclusion of all students and is fostered in areas such as curriculum development, physical surroundings, and the broader learning environment."[23] In expanding our understanding of accessible pedagogy and supporting innovative approaches to teaching and learning, post-secondary institutions need to move beyond the mindset that education is solely about the content being taught to students; there are several aspects that support and deter

a student's ability to engage and learn in a classroom and this assertion is supported by extensive research.

Researchers in Indonesia conducted a study to examine the factors that influence student learning and comfort in the classroom; the researchers found that the factors that influence learning comfort of students in the classroom include air circulation, quietness, cleanliness, adequate and supportive facilities, and peer attendance.[24] The physical and social environment that is created in a classroom is just as important as the content being taught by instructors. Our survey found that 47 percent of respondents only felt 'somewhat' comfortable interacting with professors, instructors, and teaching assistants; 30 percent of respondents either felt "not very" or "not at all" comfortable. As professors and instructors are the main intermediary between students and their education, it is concerning to see that many students do not feel entirely comfortable interacting with instructors. If students don't feel comfortable approaching faculty members, the likelihood of a student reaching out when needing support is unlikely. This finding emphasizes the need for the provincial government to develop and commit to an inclusive education strategy at the post-secondary level, with adequate consultations from faculty, institutions, and students. A similar strategy already exists in the province for grades 1 through 12. A strategy at the provincial level that looks at post-secondary education holistically, understanding the importance of student's comfort with their instructors, will benefit students' engagement and success in classrooms across the province.

Discrimination

The Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) says the following three elements are usually present in instances of discrimination: not individually assessing the unique merits, capacities, and circumstances of a person; making stereotypical assumptions based on a person's presumed traits; and having the impact of excluding persons, denying benefits and/or imposing burdens.[25] 10 percent of respondents indicated that they have felt discriminated against within their classroom, with the majority stating they have not been discriminated against. While the number of students reporting discrimination within classrooms is low, this does not mean that the issue is not prevalent.

"When I went to the school to talk about discrimination from a professor, no one would offer any bit part of a solution. They all said to simply speak with the professor, as if I had not tried that ready. Not even the dean would help me or accept any responsibility."

Many students are unaware of their school's internal protocol for reporting discrimination or may not feel comfortable coming forward, leading to skewed reports on the rates of discrimination at their university. A 2017 CBC News investigation found that several Canadian universities received few or no student complaints of racial discrimination between 2011 and 2015.[26] Given the rise in awareness surrounding Canada's mistreatment of minorities, students may not feel comfortable or trust that their institution will respond accordingly to their complaints. For example, in 2020 Black students at McMaster University, in partnership with Black Lives Matter Toronto, called upon McMaster to remove the presence of special constables and cut ties with Hamilton Police Services following a series of incidents of students being penalized for protesting against racism on campus.[27] The head of security at the time was a former police chief in Hamilton who popularized "street checks" also known as carding; carding is a policy adopted by several police departments that involves stopping, questioning, and documenting the activities of individuals when no particular offense is being investigated. This practice has disproportionately affected Black and Indigenous communities. Despite pleas from students, McMaster University failed to address the concerns raised from students. In instances such as this, where student pleas are either ignored or the proposed solution lacks student consultation, students' faith in their institution begins to dwindle. York University professor Enakishi Dua, who studies anti-racism, said "students want someone who can appreciate and understand them and help out with what they are dealing with."[28] In showing students that a university will take a strong stance against racism, sexual violence, and other forms of harassment, it is

imperative that they work on building trust with the student body. It is for this reason that OUSA believes that the provincial government should task the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) with conducting research on racism and use the findings to create best practices to inform institutional responses and policies to address discrimination on post-secondary campuses.

Course and Instructors Evaluations

Many schools across the province conduct course and instructor evaluations, which are marketed as an anonymous tool for students to provide constructive feedback on how to improve a course or the quality of teaching from an instructor. In theory, this is a great initiative by institutions to give students more agency in directing the quality of their course, but in practice it is unknown whether there is a tangible impact. Respondents were split when reporting whether or not they felt their feedback was valued by their university. There are a multitude of reasons why students may not feel their feedback is valued, one of which could be the permanency of appointment of professors. Also known as tenure, professors who are denoted with this status do not need to worry about losing their jobs due to the nature of their research as they are considered permanent faculty members. Professors can get tenure for a number of reasons; historically, it was used as a way to protect professors from losing their jobs for advocating for certain ideologies that contradicted the ideologies at religious institutions.[29] It is also seen as a celebration of achievement for a professor later in their career. While there are many benefits to tenure for instructors, students unfortunately do not reap any rewards for their promotions. One of the many critiques of tenure is that professors with tenure might feel less pressure to innovate their teaching and learning approaches. With the permanency of their job position, there is less incentive for professors to improve teaching methods, even when receiving negative student feedback. Going further, tenure can be very expensive. Megan McArdle, author for The Atlantic, provided the following example: "In accounting terms, hiring someone on a five-year contract at $80,000 is much less expensive than hiring them on a forty-year contract at $65,000. One is a liability of perhaps $350,000; the other, of millions."[30] In this example we can see that even if a tenured professor receives consistently negative student feedback, the liability in trying to fire said professor is incredibly high that most institutions would likely choose to keep the professor on rather than relieve them of their duties.

"There are a lot of professors, instructors, and assistant professors who are not very good at their jobs and even after negative course evaluations, they fail to improve their quality of teaching."

Another thing to consider is the efficacy of evaluations. There has been a number of studies investigating the effectiveness of instructor feedback, with the results showing a major concern. A study released in 2018 found a stark gender bias in student evaluations of teaching instructors; researchers stated that "Students tend to comment on a woman's appearance and personality far more often than men. Women are referred to as 'teacher' [as opposed to professor] more often than men, which indicates that students generally may have less professional respect for their female professors."[31] In addition, a new metastudy of more than 100 articles on student evaluations found that there is a larger equity bias at play as well. The study found that an instructor's race, ethnicity, accent, sexual orientation, or disability can significantly impact a students' evaluation of their professor.[32] While students seem to be divided on whether or not their feedback is valued, research suggests that the evaluation system as it stands is deeply flawed and frequently doesn't lead to significant change in teaching approaches by faculty. OUSA believes that the Ministry of Colleges and Universities could do more in supporting both students and instructors on this issue by specifically tasking HEQCO with developing standards for assessing the quality of evaluations of teaching. A new model needs to be introduced to protect instructors from marginalized backgrounds, while still ensuring that students have greater agency in the teaching and learning process within their courses.

Class Content

We are often made to believe that Canada's immoral history of racism and discrimination towards Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour is a narrative of the past, when in reality, historical racism has transitioned into systemic racism and discrimination. Of note, Indigenous students face racism and microaggressions in the classroom from other students, teachers, and at times through the course content being taught. For this reason, OUSA believes it is imperative that all students are taught and have access to courses that teach the history of Indigenous Peoples in Canada, of which the

instructors must have lived experience and identify as Indigenous. As discussed with OUSA's Indigenous Students Policy Paper, content and resources given to students has historically been passed down through a colonial lens. Curriculum isn't drafted with adequate Indigenous consultation and often lacks depth and nuance in discussing Canada's long historical mistreatment of Indigenous Peoples. As these institutions are founded on colonial grounds, and in working towards decolonization, institutions need to prioritize bringing in Indigenous faculty members to teach students about their history in Canada.

When asked if they had the opportunity to take such courses, we saw an increase from 2017, with 51 percent of students saying they are aware of courses offered by their institution that focused on Indigenous content. While it seems as though the offerings have increased, the awareness of and instances of discrimination against Indigenous students continues to prevail. One student commented that "The equity office at [University of Waterloo] is known to be powerless and the University has not responded appropriately to the equity requests of the Indigenous student association." Another student commented that all campus faculty should be required to take courses on empathy, racism, and Indigenous history, which should be taught by Indigenous Peoples. Post-secondary education is a key steppingstone for many young Ontarians to gain access to not only higher education, but opportunities that can influence them for the rest of their lives. The Centre for the Study of Living Standards suggests that addressing the Indigenous education gap and related employment rates could add $36.4 billion to Canada's GDP by 2031.[33] The renowned writer and philosopher George Santayana once said, "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." In advancing reconciliation and ensuring we do not make the same mistakes in the future, post-secondary institutions need to prioritize teaching students and faculty about the history of Indigenous Peoples in Canada, focusing on the wide array of lived experiences.

"Incorporate mandatory Indigenous education in elementary school rather than focusing so much on pioneers and colonization [...] after moving up north I was genuinely embarrassed at my lack of education on their history."

Learning Materials

One of the more concerning trends in our report, as discussed within the affordability report,[34] is the rising costs of textbooks and course materials. 49 percent of respondents indicated that they chose not to buy all of their required textbooks due to the price. This has been an ongoing issue for several years. Many students are turning to alternative and cheaper means to access learning materials. Several students at schools across the GTA report obtaining textbooks in a manner that qualifies as copyright infringement – downloading digital copies for free or at a reduced cost online.[35] This is incredibly concerning for two reasons, the first being the inaccessible nature of post-secondary for students. Gaining access to higher education is already difficult due to the high costs of tuition and the academic requirements that need to be met. Students should not have to be required to pay close to $1,000 per semester, depending on one's program, for required learning materials after spending thousands of dollars per semester to attend their institution. Secondly, this trend is also concerning as it puts low-income students at risk of legal action. Although there does not seem to be any record of Canadian publishers taking legal action against students for illegally downloading their text-

books, this is a path that they may choose to take in the future.

Online Learning

Generally, our study has found that students are dissatisfied with the state of online learning in the province. Our survey was administered at the onset of the pandemic, where all institutions were grappling to find a way to modify their courses to be taught remotely. It is expected that many students were dissatisfied with the quality of learning at the time, however a few findings stood out as notable. The majority of mature students reported being satisfied with online courses; as mature students are often taking courses part-time, have full-time jobs, or are responsible for dependents, the flexibility to take courses at home on their own time increases the accessibility for this group of students. However, younger students reported feeling dissatisfied with the learning environment. Students cited several reasons for this dissatisfaction, including difficulty to connect with peers, not conducive to their learning style, not as engaging, and difficulty accessing support from instructors.

As previously mentioned, post-secondary is not solely about the academic environment – a university is a place for young people to learn more about themselves, meet new friends, and learn new skills while living on their own. Many of these additional benefits to university have been taken away from students due to the pandemic, which significantly impacts how a student engages with their education. While there is evidence suggesting that online learning is not of lower quality than face-to-face learning, there have been emerging conversations around distinguishing between online learning and emergency remote delivery. Online learning is when a course has been designed to be taught online asynchronously; comparatively, emergency remote delivery is what has happened for many universities over the past year – courses that were designed to be in-person but have now shifted virtually, significantly modifying how students can engage with content, limiting the possibilities of various online tools, and preventing instructors from creating tailored content.[36] While online learning is of the same quality of in-person instruction, many courses are operating under an emergency remote delivery model, which impacts the quality of teaching students are receiving.

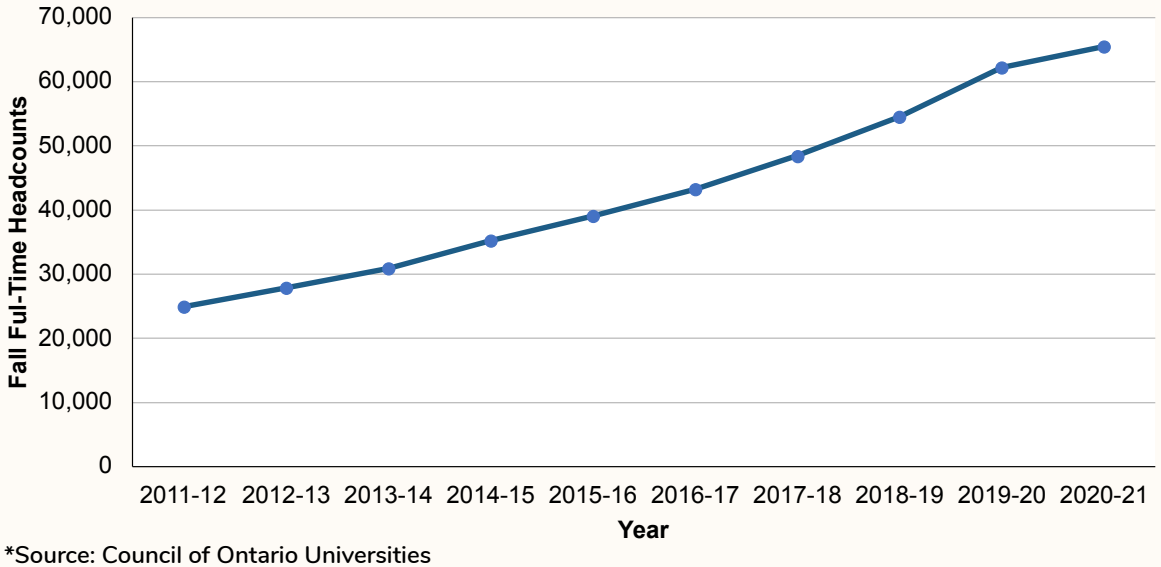
"I don't think I'm receiving a good education through the online program. I think some professors are not putting in any effort and I'm primarily teaching myself."

Work-Integrated Learning

Work-integrated learning (WIL), "such as cooperative education, field placements and internships," gives students the opportunity to connect what they learn in the classroom to the workplace.[37] 38 percent of our respondents reported that they have been involved in WIL, which is consistent with previous iterations of our survey. By gaining industry-specific applied knowledge, students who have had WIL opportunities feel more confident in their skills and are better prepared to enter the workforce. In a 2016 survey conducted by Abacus Data, 86 percent of student respondents who had WIL opportunities reported that they felt better prepared for the workforce because of their industry-specific knowledge and experience, compared to the 49 percent of students who did not receive WIL opportunities during their post-secondary education.[38] However, our survey also found that 45 percent of respondents indicated that they did not have the option to engage in work-integrated learning. This finding is likely the result of two factors: barriers to entry and lack of WIL opportunities in certain disciplines.

One of the respondents commented that they want their university "to have more apprentice programs and co-ops available to students and not have such a high GPA in order to get access to co-op opportunities. Co-op is a way for students to learn more about themselves and the career they want to pursue." The minimum requirements for co-op can be difficult for students to achieve, making their ability to acquire hands-on work experience significantly harder than their peers. For example, students enrolled in the Business program at Laurier need a 9.1 GPA out of 12 simply to be admitted into the co-op program, with the minimum GPA required for an interview being higher; the minimum GPA of students

FIGURE 7: ONTARIO UNDERGRADUATE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ENROLMENT



*Source: Council of Ontario Universities

in the co-op program was a 10.6.[39] Measurements like a GPA, and similar metrics used by institutions, are not indicative of a student's ability to preform well in a professional setting. As co-op is a skill development tool for students, the barrier to entry should be much lower, providing as many students as possible the opportunity to refine their skills and advance their career goals.

The second reason as to why students likely reported not having the ability to engage in WIL is the lack of opportunities in the arts and sciences. In 2012, HEQCO released a study surveying employers who provided WIL opportunities to post-secondary students. The results of this study indicated that employers providing these opportunities concentrated primarily on hiring business and engineering students, with less emphasis placed on general arts and science programs.[40]Additionally, programs such as the Student Work Placement Program exist to increase WIL opportunities for STEM students and do not currently exist for students in arts and humanities programs.[41]

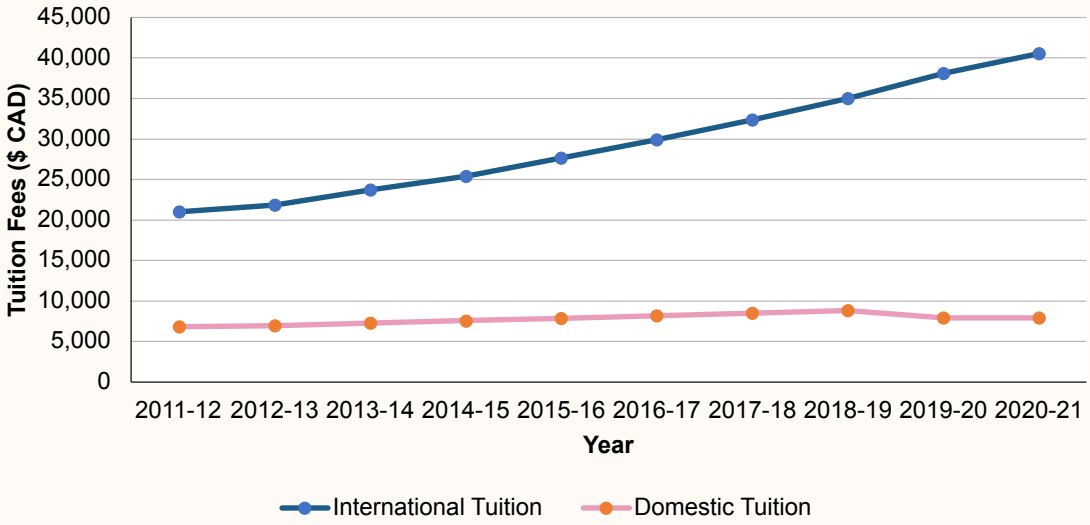
In effectively preparing students for the future workforce, all students should have the ability to engage in WIL opportunities, as this benefits not only students but employers as well. Recent studies show that employers are noticing a skills gap in newly hired graduates, as explained in a report from the Human Resources Professional Association. Their report found that 35 percent of employers do not feel that the individuals they hired over the previous year had been "adequately prepared" during their education and training. This is why OUSA believes that the provincial government should increase their investments towards the Career Ready Fund to incentivize employers to increase opportunities for disciplines and programs of study that currently lack work-integrated learning opportunities such as general arts and sciences. This will ensure more students have access to opportunities to develop their skills and advance their preparedness for the workforce.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

International interest to study in Canada has been increasing significantly over the past several years. National pre-pandemic trends of study permit applications were demonstrating annual increases and data on approved permits for 2021 indicate record breaking numbers, reaching almost 450,000, a 74.6 percent increase from 2020 as applications rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic.[42] For Ontario specifically, a survey by the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) found that 48 percent of international students in Canada were enrolled at post-secondary institutions in the province.[43] Their participation in post-secondary and society are greatly valued, however, they face disproportionate access and outcomes in several areas of higher education which consequently impact the experience of international students.

As enrolment numbers have been increasing, so too has international tuition.[44] Tuition framework regulations previously capped domestic tuition increases at 3 percent per year up until 2019, where the Ontario government implemented a 10 percent tuition reduction and subsequent tuition freeze. However, a lack of regulation to international tuition has seen fees continue to skyrocket and international students are feeling this financial pinch.[45] International student tuition has been deregulated in the province since 1996 when the provincial government discontinued institutional funding for international students.[46] Increases in tuition fees for international students is the result of the provincial government progressively reducing their investments into the post-secondary sector over the past two decades. One strategy many universities have turned to in dealing with the government's divestment of resources is turning to international tuition as a strategy to gen-

FIGURE 8: ONTARIO UNDERGRADUATE TUITION, INTERNATIONAL VERSUS DOMESTIC



*Source: Statistics Canada

erate revenue. International students are often seen as a guaranteed and low risk revenue source for institutions, making them a vulnerable target to take financial advantage of.

Aside from financial barriers, international students also face social, cultural, academic, and employment obstacles that interact together to influence the quality of their post-secondary education and experience. The following three subsections will review the specifics of these spheres, and offer insights from students in our survey.

Orientation and Transition

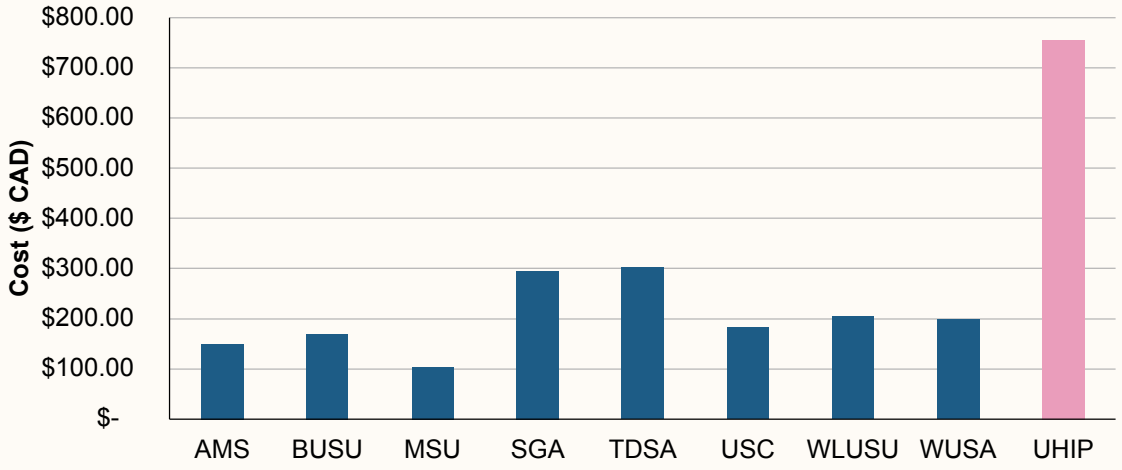
Orientation and transition into post-secondary for international students must consider the unique experiences these students face as they adjust not only to a new academic system, but a new country as well. According to a study by Dentakos et al., there are several factors that contribute to the international student experience, including: cross-cultural adjustment, academic adjustment, university perceptions, peer relationships, and gaining independence.[47] Numerous barriers or benefits can arise in any one of these factors that either negatively or positively impact the international student experience. A large majority of students in the Dentakos et al. survey identified academic challenges as being a "failure" in their academic adjustment, with many struggling to adapt to the competitive, high-demanding nature of university.[48] The study revealed that international students are typically motivated to assimilate to institutional culture rather than host country culture, and thus, a weak attachment to the institution can result in lower levels of adjustment. This signals the time-sensitive nature of orientation and transition processes for international students, as the supports and resources offered during this period may better facilitate a positive adjustment into university culture.

Given that one in four international students in our survey found their orientation to be unuseful, it is important that orientation and transition processes sufficiently meet the needs of international students; this is why OUSA recommends that HEQCO conduct research on best practices for international student orientations, and also establish a set of guidelines for institutions on information that international students must know before enrolling into post-secondary.

"The availability of orientation services must be informed to the students and there is not much support provided to international students to help them understand the lifestyle in Canada."

Almost 30 percent of our respondents reported that their institution did not meet their expectations, which raises questions about the factors that contributed to their decision to study in Canada over other countries. A study by the CBIE in 2018 found that the top three reasons for selecting Canada were positive perceptions of the education system, a non-discriminatory society, and a reputation as a safe nation.[49] Despite these initial incentives, the Dentakos et al. study found that these expectations sometimes fell short for international students as they transitioned to post-secondary - some students reported that safety levels were "no better" than that of their home country and that they anticipated "something better" of their university environments given the exorbitant fees they pay.[50] As such,

FIGURE 9: 2021-2022 COST OF STUDENT UNION HEALTH CARE PLANS VERSUS UHIP



*Costs for SGA and TDSA include Health and Dental

the measures in place to increase international student preparedness are critical to ease their transition and manage expectations for their academic and societal endeavours.

Health Care

The University Health Insurance Plan (UHIP) was established as a means to cover various health care costs for international students given their exclusion from the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP). UHIP members typically have to pay a premium for the academic year which poses an additional, non-academic mandatory cost in their post-secondary education and does not guarantee the same coverage as OHIP. For example, UHIP only covers prescription drugs provided in a hospital, and students shared that the plan "does not cover anything useful" or does "not cover as much as expected."[51] Even when examining the health care plans provided to students through their student unions, UHIP fees remain high, and unlike UHIP, students may be able to opt-out of student union health plans and be reimbursed for these fees.[52] There are also a reduced number of health care providers that accept UHIP plans, as one student mentioned, "...it's hard to find clinics covered by UHIP." Students also cited administrative barriers where "getting money from my claim was extremely hard" and that it "takes too long for claims to be cleared."

If not through UHIP, international students would need to access health care coverage through private plans or pay out-of-pocket. Given the widespread coverage provided through OHIP, many international students in our survey expressed an interest in having access to OHIP, even if it meant paying more. This finding highlights the gap in international student health care in Ontario and the need for changes to better address their needs. This is particularly important during the current public health crisis, where risk of infection and transmission have been high. Shockingly, one student in our survey reported paying $430 out-of-pocket for a COVID test. In providing international students with reliable and accessible health care, OUSA recommends that the provincial government allow international students to enroll in OHIP by paying a fair and affordable premium. Other provinces in the country, like Newfoundland and Labrador, Saskatchewan, and Alberta have opened eligibility of their local health plans to international students, allowing them to apply for coverage at no cost knowing that the tax revenue generated from their residence in that respective province offsets the cost of providing health insurance.[53]

International students bring a wealth of knowledge, skills, and experiences into the province that enhances the cultural mosaic of Ontario. Providing adequate and equitable health care is one way to respect their dignity and the diverse perspectives they bring, especially since international tuition fees are egregiously higher compared to their domestic counterparts, and fund much of institutional operating budgets. In addition, a primary motivator for international students to study abroad is their desire to eventually settle and live in Canada. Ensuring that they have access to quality health care is one measure to retain their participation in post-secondary education and facilitate their transition into permanent residency, where they will eventually contribute to the local economy and pay the taxes that fund OHIP.

Post-Graduation Plans

57 percent of international students in our survey intended to obtain permanent residency status, a finding which is also supported by external research. This is relatively consistent with a 2018 study by CBIE who found that 60 percent of international students intended to apply for permanent residency upon completion of their degree.[54] Reasons for staying in Canada from

our survey also aligned with findings from this same CBIE study, where 49 percent of respondents wanted to secure permanent employment in Canada, while 46 percent wanted to obtain another post-secondary credential at either their same institution or at another Canadian institution.[55]

Despite the desire to pursue further work and study opportunities in Canada, students in our survey cited reasons on why they would not stay, namely limited career opportunities. Therefore, one of their main motivators to remain in Canada (job prospects) also acts as a barrier. This could be attributed to restrictive employment practices that bar international students from obtaining pre-graduation work experience, which has been identified as a key indicator for successful post-graduation employment and earnings.[56] Those who want to apply for permanent residency must have previous Canadian work experience, totalling 1,560 hours in a 3 year period.[57] This may not be feasible for all international students since on- or off-campus jobs may not qualify students with study permits to work. In fact, before obtaining an undergraduate degree only 0.7 percent of international students had pre-graduation work experience compared to 5.8 percent of domestic students.[58] CBIE found that 56 percent of international students had difficulty finding work, with the most commonly cited challenge being the lack of work experience.[59] There are several explanations for this such as the ineligibility of international students to participate in government-sponsored student employment programs, like the Canada Summer Jobs program. They also face linguistic, cultural, and discriminatory obstacles that not only reduce their chances of securing in-study and summer employment, but also work-integrated learning positions that would build pre-graduation work experience.[60] The aforementioned CBIE study collected anecdotes from students who spoke about employer discrimination against international experience, cultural differences, and difficulty with professional networking.[61] OUSA advocates for government employment and immigration programs to become expansive in their offerings to international students, such as the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program.[62]

Thus, the expectation of settling in Canada because of more prosperous job opportunities may not be met to the extent that international students desire. This is applicable in the financial sense as well, as international students earn 21 percent less than domestic students in their first year after graduation (for an average annual income of $33,900), and earn 9 percent less five years after graduation.[63] It is important that international students looking to secure employment in Canada are given the necessary supports to do so, as they enrich and diversify the skills, perspectives, and experiences of the Canadian workforce.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Longitudinal analysis of our results showed that students decreasingly feel like their local institutional municipality engages with them. One reason for this could be that remote learning during the pandemic created more distance between students and their municipalities, and consequently, levels of engagement between the two were strained.

In the year following graduation, just over one-third of our respondents did not plan or want to stay in the city their university was located in and this was mainly attributed to minimal employment opportunities. OUSA member schools are located across various regions in Ontario, with populations ranging from 104,986 (Waterloo) to 546,917 (Hamilton).[64] The province has bigger cities which house many employment opportunities for students. While job prospects may be available in a student's respective institutional municipality, students are interested in acquiring jobs related to their academic field of study, which may not be widely available. One participant stated that, "...employment opportunities are very selective to certain industries" and another noted "I would like to see more connection[s] to job opportunities in my field." Moving to larger metropolitan areas that widen employment opportunities may be the only option for students to work in positions related to their field of study.

Notably, while not related to results from our survey, civic engagement was a salient issue for students during the 2021 federal election. The "Vote on Campus" program, which increases proximity of polling booths to students during the school year, was not delivered during the federal election in the Fall of 2021 making students feel disenfranchised. In fact, 12 percent of youth aged 18-24 cited "electoral process-related reasons" as their reason for not voting, the highest among all age groups.[65] Moving forward, it is important that all levels of government work to facilitate civic engagement with students whether or not they are living at home.

SUPPORT SERVICES

Employment

Given that post-secondary education serves as a means to develop prosperous careers, employment supports

are an important institutional service for students. As one student put it, "[Employment] is the main reason why students attend university...to get a job when they graduate." This is especially critical knowing that 64 percent of respondents in our survey attributed their mental health issues to concern over career prospects post-graduation. In general, youth employment was significantly disrupted during the COVID-19 pandemic, and it is anticipated this will cause long-term effects on young people. In Ontario, the unemployment rate for those between the ages of 15 and 24 went from 11.3 percent in February 2020 t0 29.5 percent in May 2020.[66] Depending on unemployment rates, Statistics Canada estimates that 2020 graduates could lose between $23,000 to $44,000 over the next five years.[67] This is extremely problematic knowing that many students will be using employment earnings to pay off student debt and our survey revealed that alleviating financial burden after graduation was a key motivator to getting a job quickly after finishing education. One student who chose employment services as a top area for intervention selected this because they "would like to escape post-secondary with as little debt as possible." While having an undergraduate degree could be perceived to act as a protective factor in securing employment, research shows that this was not the case during the COVID-19 pandemic, minimizing the educational efforts of students.[68] In particular, population groups who already face systemic barriers to workforce participation such as Indigenous, Black, and disabled students, were more likely to have paused their post-secondary education, further inhibiting their ability to attain sustainable employment.[69]

Overall, career and employment services at post-secondary institutions need to be adequately equipped to support students as they transition into a tough job market. In particular, students shared that the lack of jobs available in their field of study was worrisome and that some disciplines received more opportunities for employment than others. According to the Ontario University Graduate Survey for 2017 graduates, 28 percent were working in positions "not at all" related to their program of study six months after graduation and 24 percent two years after graduation.[70] Given the sentiments shared in our survey, this is concerning because students would like to see a fulfilling return on the financial and time investments they make into post-secondary education.

"I think the universities in Ontario need to do a better job of equipping their students to find jobs in their fields and looking into out of the box solutions to make connections and finding the best fit while they're STILL enrolled in school and not 6 months after their graduation."

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic made the prospect of post-graduation employment even more burdensome. One student stated that, "Employment opportunities for students are important now more than ever," with another adding that, "With jobs getting cut from the pandemic we need more help as students." Connected to this, many students cited the need for increased work-integrated learning as a way to build professional experience in their post-graduation job search, with one saying, "Especially during COVID-19 more is needed for university students to get valuable co-op and employment at locations which will help promote knowledge gain and innovation." It is clear that the effects of the pandemic on employment is a concern for students and that enhanced employment supports which increase the number of opportunities available, match students with positions related to their field of study, and increase job search resources will be beneficial for students during this transition.

Relatedly, many students also wrote about the exclusivity of employment positions, with some restricting their eligibility to those who receive OSAP and/or are Canadian citizens. This affects international students in particular, who are not eligible for OSAP and have not yet fulfilled requirements to apply for citizenship. As one student stated, "Even big scholarships and grants such as OSAP are only available to domestic students, and a lot of job opportunities are also reserved for students receiving OSAP. This leaves international students at a huge disadvantage." As previously mentioned, pre-graduation work experience is a predictive factor in attaining employment and thus, limiting opportunities via strict eligibility criteria only worsens this

issue for international students who ultimately want to settle in Canada.

Mental Health

It is widely known that post-secondary students struggle with their mental health given the multiple stressors and pressure they are under, not only due to personal circumstances but systemic and global ones as well. The development of mental health issues for post-secondary students result from various factors including but not limited to financial stressors, employment concerns, academic pressures, housing and food insecurity, and several forms of discrimination and trauma. The COVID-19 pandemic further worsened this issue by socially isolating students and disconnecting them from their support networks. In fact, a study by the Canadian Alliance for Student Associations found that in Ontario, almost 75 percent of students "strongly" or "somewhat" agreed that the pandemic caused them to experience mental health challenges for the first time.[71] Concerns raised from our study point to the fact that students need long-term, expansive solutions to improving their mental health services rather than standardized short-term supports. Between long wait times, insufficient interventions, and limited coverage, students are frustrated with the quality of mental health services they are receiving. Students want to see different therapeutic modalities employed to cater to a wide variety of mental health challenges, and want the coverage of therapy sessions to increase as many face a cap per semester/year. All of these reasons are why OUSA advocates for a "whole-of-community" approach to mental health, which involves collaboration between post-secondary institutions, government ministries, external/community providers, and student associations to have a distinct role in mental health care provision and eliminate potential for gaps in treatment.[72]

In general, accessing on-campus mental health supports was difficult for many students, which clearly shows the prevalence of barriers, whether they be administrative, logistical, financial, or personal. Several themes were noted from students' qualitative contributions that point to concerns around the low quantity of staff available and consequent long wait times, lack of promotion of services, and poor quality of services. One student mentioned "Waiting almost 2 months for an appointment sometimes takes you to term's end and is effectively useless for someone in crisis." While this student noted a 2 month wait time, others cited upwards of 3-6 months as a wait time for mental health services. It is evident that access to mental health services goes beyond the prevalence and availability of services, but also includes the effectiveness and satisfaction with the care received.

Our results revealed that marginalized student groups are more likely to access on-campus supports and have a higher percentage of feeling lonely or isolated. This is a particularly important finding as mental health services for these groups should consider students' intersecting identities and consequently provide care that integrates these considerations. Students want culturally-relevant, affirming, and inclusive care that does not ignore how systemic forces impact their worldview and lived experience with mental health. An Ontario-based study found that institutional supports are not conducive or sensitive to the diverse needs of students, and that many do not seek out support because of associated stigma, unavailability, and unfamiliarity with services.[73] One student, who suggested universities need more counsellors from diverse backgrounds, shared, "My friend really benefited from a counsellor who had experience [in] spiritual/naturopathic practices from their same cultural background." This emphasizes the importance of having staff who reflect the lived experiences of students, as this facilitates rapport building, helps build an effective therapeutic relationship, and guides the use of appropriate modalities which is consistent with external literature. A review of post-secondary mental health policies and frameworks across the country found that many called for "culturally-sensitive, student-focused models and creating population-specific services for specialized groups..."[74] Overall, this makes students feel more at ease in accessing services, with one respondent saying "Try to have different therapists of different backgrounds that students can relate to or feel comfortable talking to." OUSA believes that students deserve access to inclusive care that is responsive to diverse lived experiences and identities, and recommends that training be provided to on-campus practitioners to equip them with this skillset, along with increased funding to hire and retain diverse mental health care staff.

"Be more open to catering your mental health services to different cultures and various identities - mental health services should not be one-size-fits-all, but should be accommodating to all backgrounds."

The challenges faced by international students require particular attention because of unique circumstantial factors like educational affordability, culture shock, and distance from their usual support networks. External research has indicated an increasing trend of suicide attempts among international students, potentially attributed to higher stress levels (stemming from internalized or externalized expectations), astronomical tuition costs, limited employment opportunities, and lower uptake of mental health services.[75] In our survey, one international student spoke about how the quality of learning and "self-studying" nature of remote learning are not worth the high tuition fees being paid, further elaborating, "...they have increased the number of components to be submitted for every course and this is having a negative impact on my mental health. I am working part-time to sustain myself during a pandemic, I am teaching myself the course material and there are [an] increased number of assessments. It's really stressful." The culmination of these stressors for international students cannot be ignored when thinking about how to improve mental health services across the province.

"Mental health services specifically for international students. Currently, all mental health-related issues are just passed on to the international student services office and the people in those offices do not know how to handle such issues because they do not have the qualifications to do so and are not trained on how to deal with them."

Several respondents in our survey also cited a lack of understanding and empathy from teaching staff as a contributor to their mental health struggles. Students spoke about the need for greater flexibility in assignment deadlines and recognition of students' circumstances beyond academics. This was compounded by pressures related to the COVID-19 pandemic, where remote learning complicated students' ability to balance their various responsibilities. As one student summarized, "Professors should recognize the burdens students are facing due to the pandemic and should adjust accordingly (eg. flexible deadlines, additional support, etc) and should make an attempt to check in on their students. They should also be respectful and considerate when communicating with students." Interestingly, the competitive and success-driven culture embedded within university campuses was also noted by students as a source of stress contributing to their mental health issues. The pressure to perform academically well has resulted in students prioritizing their studies over their mental well-being. One student notes, "I think cultivating a culture on campus which is less focused on grades and more focused on a more wholistic *[sic]* model of education would improve student mental health." This suggests that while reactive mental health services need transformation, intervention is also needed at a proactive, systemic level to address institutional culture.

"I have found that the general culture makes it seem like if a student isn't completely overloading their schedule with courses, extracurriculars, jobs, volunteering, side projects and business ventures, then that student is falling behind. This push for competition against our peers, especially in the face of applying for co-ops, causes overwork and burnout, because students aren't able to afford enough attention to their mental health and well-being as they do to academic or work-related achievements. The competitive mindset and performance-based culture surrounding student success needs to change so students can focus more on their mental health."

CONCLUSION

Our results demonstrate that the quality of post-secondary education consists of much more than course content and instruction. Quality extends to many facets of post-secondary including comfort levels, Indigeneity in the classroom, work-integrated learning, and support services. It additionally includes external forces like civic engagement and community supports, all of which collectively interact with one another to produce a unique post-secondary experience for students.

Consequently, it is not surprising that improving the quality of this experience holds importance for students. Completing an undergraduate degree is often a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and thus, students want to ensure the holistic quality of their experience is rewarding and enjoyable. This includes the experience of international students who are not only engaging with the same processes as their domestic counterparts, but are also coping with cultural adjustment.

A high quality education is a core pillar of OUSA's advocacy and several improvements can be made to Ontario's post-secondary system that will move further towards achieving this goal. This includes being more cognizant of discrimination in the classroom and taking active steps to develop institutional policies using evidence-based best practices. Additionally, it includes increased investments into work-integrated learning opportunities for students across all disciplines and not just those that prepare students with more in-demand market-ready skills. More attention to international students' needs are also warranted, including orientation and health care services. Lastly, increasing the diversity of mental health staff and modalities, as well as providing cultural competency training can enhance the quality and efficacy of support services used by students.

The results disseminated through this series of reports, including the ones on affordability and accessibility, underscore the comprehensive policy interventions needed to improve the post-secondary experience in Ontario for all students. The OUSS adds a unique contribution to the provincial post-secondary research landscape due to its focus on student concerns, perspectives, insights, and recommendations. As the province seeks to further develop and strengthen the post-secondary sector, it is critical that student collaboration on these issues are incorporated, given that students are ultimately most impacted by this experience. OUSA hopes that these results are thoroughly examined and considered in the creation of post-secondary policy, further expanding the affordability, accessibility, and quality of post-secondary education in Ontario.

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