

CUSC

no 2

CANADIAN UNDERGRADUATE SURVEY CONSORTIUM

First-Year University Student Survey 2007

Introduction

This is the second booklet produced by the Canadian Undergraduate Survey Consortium (CUSC) to provide information about CUSC and the most recent CUSC survey.

CUSC history and overview

CUSC involves a group of universities that conducts annual surveys of Canadian undergraduate students. CUSC began in 1994 with a group of 8 universities and has grown to 34 universities in 2007. Historically, the CUSC survey was coordinated by the University of Manitoba and currently the CUSC survey and business matters are managed by a steering committee which contracts the research services of Prairie Research Associates.

The goal of CUSC is to better understand students' experiences at university and to provide benchmarks across time and against other universities. Some universities have 12 years of data to track their performance and many universities are using CUSC data along with other sources

of institutional research to assist in strategic planning, formulating student outcomes, setting benchmarks and evaluating programs and services.

This year's study presents the results of students surveyed during their first year of university in 2007. Previous surveys of first-year students were conducted in 2004 and 2001.

2007 Survey

This was the second year that universities could choose to administer the survey using either a paper-based or an on-line version of the questionnaire. More than 12,700 students completed the survey or 44 percent of those who were invited to participate. The results profile the typical 1st year Canadian undergraduate student -- how they are adapting to university, how they are financing their education, their motivation for attending university, why they choose their particular university and their experience during the first year of study.

Table 1: Categories of participating universities

Group 1 (n=16)	Group 2 (n=8)	Group 3 (n=10)
Brandon University University of British Columbia (Okanagan Campus) University College of Fraser Valley King's University College (AB) University of Lethbridge Mount Saint Vincent University University of New Brunswick (Saint John Campus) University of Northern British Columbia Nipissing University University of Ontario Institute of Technology Redeemer University Saint Mary's University Trent University Trinity Western University Wilfrid Laurier University University of Winnipeg	Brock University Carleton University University of New Brunswick (Fredericton Campus) University of Regina Ryerson University Simon Fraser University University of Windsor University of Victoria	University of Alberta University of British Columbia (Vancouver Campus) University of Calgary Concordia University Dalhousie University University of Manitoba McMaster University Université de Montréal University of Ottawa University of Saskatchewan

Group 1 consists of universities that offer primarily undergraduate studies and have smaller student populations.

Group 2 consists of universities that offer a wide range of undergraduate and graduate studies and tend to be of medium size in terms of student population.

Group 3 consists of universities that offer both undergraduate and graduate degrees, with most having professional schools as well. These tend to be the largest institutions in terms of student populations.

Profile of first-year students

- The typical first-year student is an 18-year-old female, studying in English and living with her parents.
- Among provinces represented in the 2007 survey, at least 86% of students are attending a university in their province of permanent residence.
- Most first-year students come from families where at least one parent had at least some post-secondary education, with 37% of students stating that both of their parents completed a post-secondary degree.
- Typically, students are majoring in Arts and Humanities, Social Science, or Business (although many other disciplines are represented).
- The vast majority of students started their university education right after completing high school or CEGEP and graduating with an A- average or higher. However, some students appear to have difficulty maintaining their pre-university grades, as less than half as many students expect an average grade of A- or higher by the end of their first year of university.

Personal profile

- As we have found in past surveys, female students outnumber male students by a ratio of about 2 to 1. This year is no exception.
- On average, 73% of students are 18 years of age or younger, with the youngest being 14. About 4% are 21 years of age or older, including one student who is 63. Students attending Group 2 universities report being 18 years of age or younger (81%) while there are 74% in Group 1 and 66% in Group 3 universities. On average, Group 2 students are half a year younger than those at other universities.
- About 74% of students report that their first language is English. The remaining students report that the first language they learned and still speak is French (7%) or another language (14%).
- Some 5% of students self-report as having a disability, e.g. learning (1%) or mental health (1%).
- Overall, 18% report being a member of a visible minority, for example Chinese (27%), Indo-Pakistani (15%), Arabian (9%), Black (8%), Southeast Asian (6%), or Latin American (5%).
- About 3% of students identify themselves as Aboriginal people.



Financing education

Most students appear to rely on multiple sources to help finance their university education, using 3 of 11 identified sources. The most common sources are family members, mainly parents (69%), personal financing sources, such as savings (53%) and earnings from summer work (50%). Students also rely on other sources, including university scholarships and bursaries (51%) and government loans or bursaries (31%).

The average amount received from all sources to help students finance their education is about \$10,000, the largest average single amount is in the form of loans, either from financial institutions (about \$6,600) or from government loans or bursaries (\$5,600). Within this, 19% report difficulty fulfilling the course load necessary to sustain their loan or bursary status.

On average, students receive about \$4,900 from parents and other relatives. Students with a university scholarship, award, or bursary receive on average about \$2,600. About 3 in 10 say they would have been unable to attend university without such financial assistance.

About 4 students in 10 report being currently employed, and another 1 student in 5 is seeking work. Most (81%) work 20 hours a week or less. The average employed student works 15 hours a week.

About 6 in 10 report that their job has at least some negative impact on their academic performance. The negative impact is moderate (16%) or significant/substantial (7%). The more hours per week they work, the more likely students are to report that their employment is having at least some negative impact on their academic performance.

Overall, 2 students in 3 are at least somewhat concerned about having sufficient funds to complete their university education, including 1 in 5 who are very concerned.

It may be surprising that just over 4 in 10 first-year students have at least one credit card, while most pay off their credit card(s) monthly, almost 1 in 10 reports carrying a balance on their card(s) at the time of the survey.

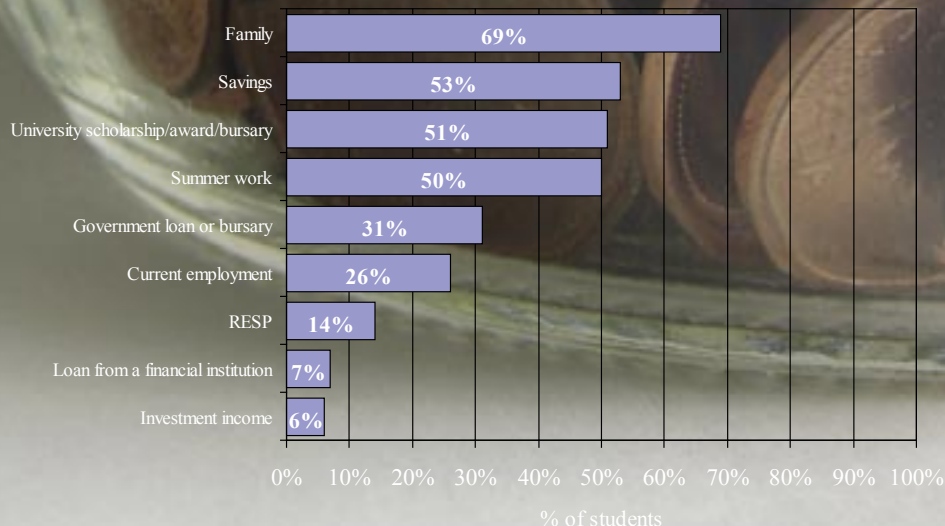


Figure 1. Sources used by students to finance their education

Motivation for attending and choice of university

We asked students to rate the importance of 10 reasons for deciding to attend university. Over half of the students rate five or more reasons as very important. Among the 10 reasons, future employment appears to be the main motivation for students to attend university. About two-thirds of students say that either preparing for a specific job or career (42%) or getting a good job (25%) is the single most important reason for going to university.

Students rated the importance of 24 different reasons for deciding to attend their current university. Of these, the top 3 reasons include: specific career-related programs (21%); wanted to live close to home (20%); and quality of academic programs (16%).

When selecting a university, about 6 students in 10 report applying to more than one institution. Of those who applied to more than one university, the average number was about three and some (12%) also applied to a college. A vast majority of first-year students (83%) report that they are attending their first choice of university.

About 1 student in 4 said they received direct contact from their university before they graduated from high school or CEGEP. For about 1 in 4 first-year students, campus visits and open houses (25%) were the most important factors influencing their decision, while for about 1 in 5, the most important contact was the university's web site (18%) or viewbooks, brochures or pamphlets (17%).

93% of the students surveyed report being somewhat or very satisfied with their university's handling of their application for admission, including 61% who are very satisfied.

Experience prior to class

About half of the students survey report receiving assistance from their university before or while first registering, with 94% report being at least somewhat satisfied, including 49% who are very satisfied.

Students often use multiple methods to register. For example, 91% of students registered on-line and many also registered in person (23%), by mail (17%) or by phone (12%). At least 8 students in 10 were satisfied with the registration process they experienced. Students also report that they were able to register mostly (35%) or completely (54%) in the courses they wanted.

About 2 students in 3 who participated in a university orientation program report being satisfied with various aspects of the program. Students are most satisfied with their orientation in terms of making them feel welcome to the university (94%) and providing information about campus life (86%). Fewer were satisfied with their orientation in terms of helping understand academic expectations (80%) or building confidence (75%).

University experience

Seven academic adjustments were rated by students; about 9 students in 10 report having at **least some success** with:

- understanding content and information presented in courses (including 44% who have had very much success),
- meeting academic demands (38% with very much success),
- choosing a program of studies that meet their objectives (51% with very much success), and
- performing adequately in written assignments (36% with very much success).

A majority of students report having the **least success** in terms of getting academic advice, with only 23% reporting very much success.

Most students also report having at least some success in adjusting to personal aspects of university life; at least 8 in 10 report having some or much success in:

- feeling as if they belong at university (including 47% who report very much success);
- making new friends (46% reporting very much success); and
- organizing time to complete academic work (28% reporting very much success).

Less than half report having success in becoming involved in campus activities (46%, with only 13% reporting very much success).

Students had the least success finding useful information and resources on careers and occupations. While almost 67% report having at least some success, just 19% say that they have had very much success in this regard.

Overall, students are **most satisfied** with the library (94% satisfied) and computer facilities (93%), and are **least satisfied** with parking facilities (61% satisfied) and food services (71%).

About 8 in 10 students or more agree that:

- professors are reasonably accessible outside class to help students (including 26% who strongly agree);
- generally [they] are satisfied with the quality of teaching [they] have received (22% strongly agree);
- most of [their] professors encourage students to participate in class discussion (21% strongly agree); and
- professors treat students as individuals, not just numbers (21% strongly agree).

More than 9 students in 10 agree that they are satisfied with their decision to attend their university, including about 4 students in 10 who strongly agree. For most, their experience at their university has met (67%) or exceeded (17%) their expectations.

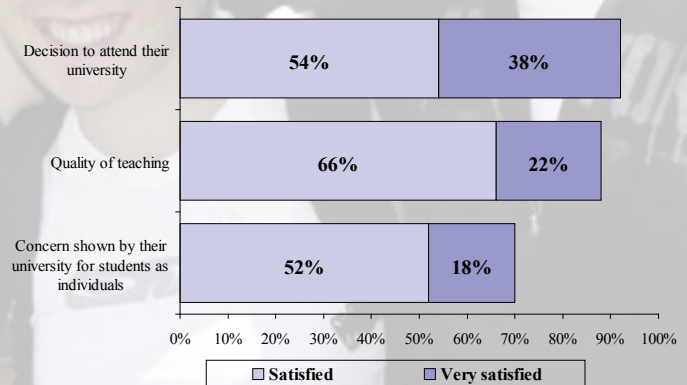


Figure 2. First-year students' level of satisfaction

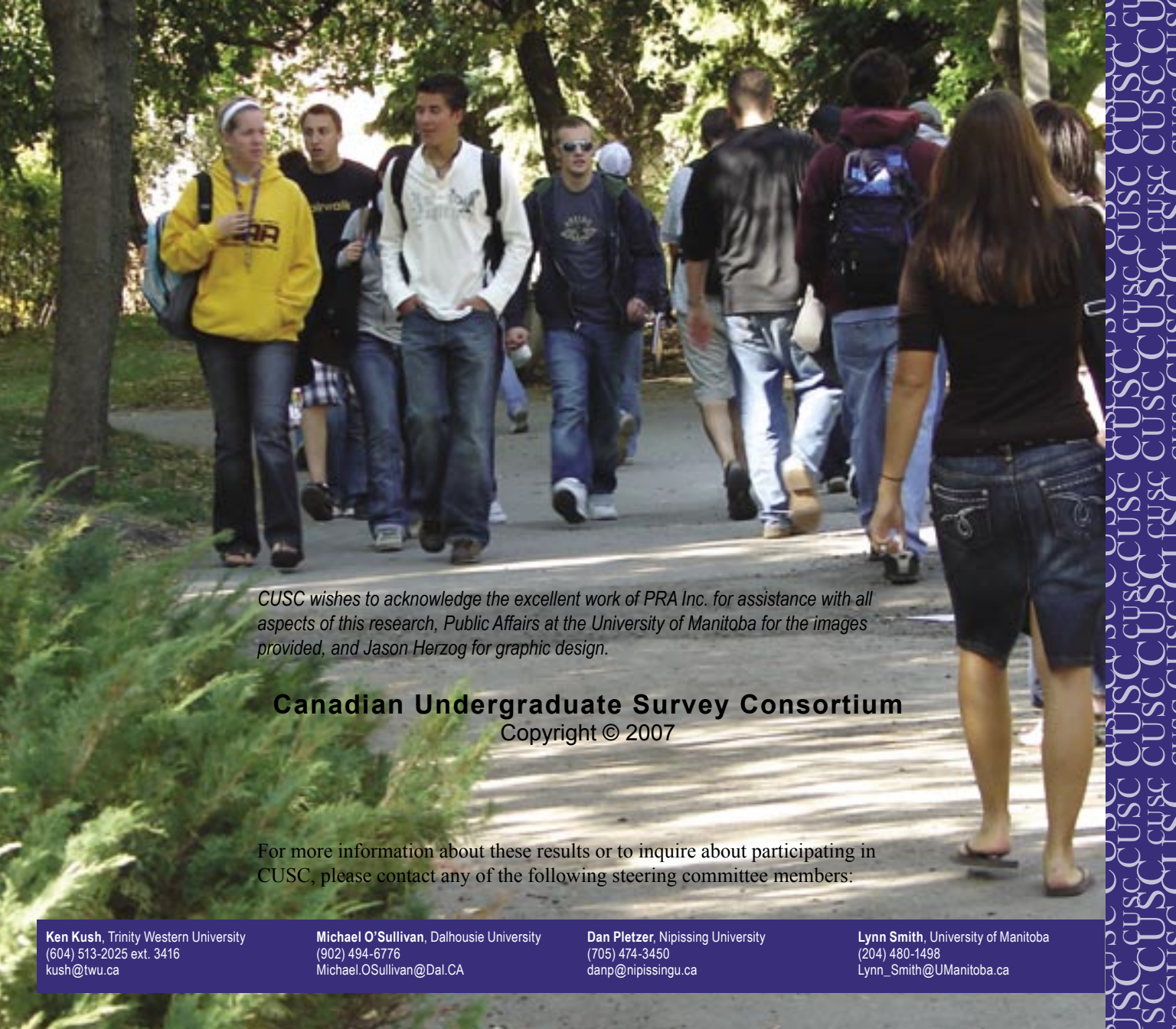
Conclusion

Generally, students at Canadian universities report having a positive experience in their first year of university. As such, these results reflect much of what we found in 2004 and 2001, the last two times such surveys were conducted with first-year university students. While there are areas that might be improved, most students report that their university fulfilled their expectations and that they are satisfied with their choice.

This year's study surveyed students who were in their first-year of undergraduate studies in 2006-2007. Since 1996, the survey has run in a three-year cycle, with different student populations targeted each year: first-year undergraduate students, all undergraduates, or graduating students. Table 2 shows the populations of students that CUSC has surveyed each year.

Table 2: Past CUSC surveys

Year	Sample	Number of participating universities
1994	All undergraduates	8
1996	All undergraduates	10
1997	Graduating students	9
1998	First-year students	19
1999	All undergraduates	23
2000	Graduating students	22
2001	First-year students	26
2002	All undergraduates	30
2003	Graduating students	26
2004	First-year students	27
2005	All undergraduates	28
2006	Graduating students	25
2007	First-year students	34



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