

SURVEY OF FIRST-YEAR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Summary of Major Findings

June, 1998

**Prepared for
The Canadian Undergraduate Survey Consortium**

James L. Walker, Ph.D.

**Walker Associates
22 Burgess Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3T 3S7
Phone/Fax: (204) 261-8601 Email: jlwalker@istar.ca**

SURVEY OF FIRST-YEAR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS:

Summary of Major Findings

INTRODUCTION

The *Survey of First-Year University Students* was co-ordinated by the Department of Housing and Student Life at the University of Manitoba and represents the fourth co-operative study of undergraduate education completed by The Canadian Undergraduate Survey Consortium. This year's survey focused on first-year students and was designed to examine student transitions to university and to provide feedback about first-year student reactions to university. The nineteen universities participating in the 1998 *Survey of First-Year University Students* included:

Acadia University
Brandon University
Carleton University
Concordia University
Dalhousie University
Laurentian University
McMaster University
Memorial University
Nipissing University
Queens University
Ryerson Polytechnic University
Simon Fraser University
St. Francis Xavier University
University of British Columbia
University of Lethbridge
University of Manitoba
University of Ottawa
University of Waterloo
Wilfrid Laurier University.

METHODOLOGY

Surveys were distributed by mail in mid January 1998 to randomly selected groups of first-year students. All surveys returned by April 20, 1998 were included in the database. Out of 10,876 mailed surveys, a total of 5,548 were returned for an overall response rate of 51.01%. (At individual universities, response rates ranged from a low of 36.3% to a high of 64.3%.) *The Survey of First-Year University Students* included 160 variables. In general, responses to all survey items were crosstabulated by university and responses to selected items were also crosstabulated by gender, age, and academic subject groups. Group differences were analysed for statistical significance using (primarily) analysis of variance techniques.

FINDINGS

Student Demographics

The final sample contained a larger proportion of females (63.6%) than males (36.4%). Student ages ranged from 16 to 66 with a mean age of 19.03 years as of September 1, 1997. (The median and modal ages were both 18 years.) There were no significant age differences between male and female respondents.

Eighty-seven percent of first-year students were from the same province as the university they were currently attending; about ten percent had permanent homes in other provinces; and about three percent were from a country other than Canada. Thirty-nine percent of first-year students in the survey were registered in a Bachelor of Arts degree program; thirty-seven percent were enrolled in a Bachelor of Science program; and the remaining twenty-four percent were enrolled in various other degree or diploma programs. The most frequently cited intended majors included Psychology, General Biology, and Computer Science. Intended majors were further coded into ten "subject groups" and the three most frequently cited groups included the Social Sciences, Biological Science and Arts & Humanities groups. The "other" category was also cited frequently across all students. (Over 49% of students in the "other" group indicated interest in a Computer Science major while 34.5% of students classified in the "other" subject group were undecided about their intended major.)

About 88% of all students indicated that when they registered last fall, they were taking a full course load while

Most frequently Cited Intended Majors

| <i>Major</i> | <i>Percent</i> |
|-------------------------------|----------------|
| Psychology..... | 7.00 |
| Biology (general)..... | 6.49 |
| Computer Science..... | 5.62 |
| Undecided..... | 5.45 |
| English..... | 4.63 |
| Other Business..... | 4.13 |
| Biochemistry..... | 3.34 |
| Accounting..... | 3.32 |
| Sociology/Anthropology..... | 3.30 |
| Other Biological Science..... | 2.97 |
| Other Engineering..... | 2.82 |
| Political Science..... | 2.52 |

83% of students were taking a full course load at the time the survey was completed. There was considerable variation between universities with the percentages of full-time students ranging from 56.7% to 97.8%. Students enrolled for a full course load were significantly younger than students who had not enrolled for a full course load. Nearly all first-year students said they planned to complete the current academic term.

For all students who reported their employment status, 29.2% were not currently employed but were seeking work; 36.9% were not employed and not seeking work; and 33.9% were currently employed. There was considerable variation between universities in the employment status of first-year students with across university employment ranging from a low of about 11% to a high of 57%. More males than females (31.3% vs. 28.1%) were not currently employed but were seeking work. Employed students worked an average of 16.3 hours per week. Across universities, average hours worked per week ranged from a low of 10.2 hours to a high of 26.6 hours. About 36% of students worked from ten to twenty hours per week; nearly 12% worked from 20 to 30 hours per week; and about 10% worked more than 30 hours per week. There was a moderate correlation ($r = .39$) between age and average hours worked per week with older students reporting more weekly employment hours. Gender differences were also significant with males working an average of 17.4 hours per week compared to an average of 15.7 hours per week for females.

Numbers of first-year students living in on-campus housing varied substantially between universities ranging from a low of five percent to a high of 93%. There were clear age differences associated with living arrangements. Students living with their parents were significantly younger than students living in rented or owned off-campus housing. Males and females also differed in their living arrangements with males being more likely to be living with their parents.

About 25% of all first-year students who were not currently living on-campus said they would choose to live there if given a chance, 51% said they would not choose to live on-campus, and 23% weren't sure what choice they would make. The percentage of students who would live on campus if given the choice varied substantially across universities ranging from a low of 9.3% to a high of 48%. Compared to males, females expressed more certainty that they would choose to *not* live on campus. Older students said they would be less likely to live on campus even if given the choice.

Somewhat more than one-third of first-year students were receiving a student loan or other government student assistance. Across universities, the percentages of students receiving a

student loan ranged from a low of 20% to a high of over 55%. About 17% of students receiving a student loan said they are having difficulties fulfilling the course load needed to keep their loans. Numbers of students reporting these difficulties ranged from a low of 8.2% to a high of 28% across universities. Older students were more likely to report these difficulties than younger students.

About thirty percent of all first-year students said they had received an entrance award. Percentages of first-year students receiving a scholarship or other university-sponsored financial award ranged from a low of 4.6% to a high of 66.5% across universities. More females than males received entrance scholarships/awards and students receiving these awards were younger than students who did not receive entrance awards.

First-year students expected to receive an average grade of “B” at the end of the academic year. Males expected higher mean grades than females and older students were more likely than younger students to expect either very good or relatively poor grades.

The average self-reported grade for high school/CEGEP was in the B+ to A- range, with females reporting significantly higher average high school/CEGEP grades than males. Older students reported lower high school/CEGEP grades.

Across all universities, from 2.2% to 30.4% of first-year students considered themselves to be members of a visible minority. Of these students, approximately seven percent identified themselves as Aboriginal; sixty-eight percent classified themselves as Asian; fourteen percent as Black; three percent as Hispanic; and about eight percent as belonging to another minority group.

About three percent of all first-year students classified themselves as a person with a disability. Students with a disability were significantly older than other students.

About three percent of all first-year students classified themselves as a person with a disability. Students with a disability were significantly older than other students.

The survey requested students to identify the occupations and educational backgrounds of their parents. About 29% of mothers and 21% of fathers had completed high school as their highest educational level; 27% of mothers and 29% of fathers had a university degree; 19% of mothers and 17% of fathers had a college or technical school certificate or diploma; and 7% of mothers and 12% of fathers had a post-secondary degree.

Professional, Homemaker, and Teacher/Professor occupational groups were the most frequently cited maternal occupations (by 49.4%). For fathers, the Professional, Business owner, and Administrator/Managerial/Executive occupations were cited most frequently (by 46%). Additional details about parental occupations are presented in the following table.

| Parental Occupations Ranked by Frequency | | | |
|---|----------------|--------------------------------|----------------|
| Maternal Occupations | | Paternal Occupations | |
| <i>Occupation</i> | <i>Percent</i> | <i>Occupation</i> | <i>Percent</i> |
| Professional | 18.03 | Professional | 19.69 |
| Homemaker | 17.27 | Business owner | 13.71 |
| Teacher/Professor | 14.06 | Administrator/Manager | 12.55 |
| Clerical (non-sales) | 12.77 | Semiskilled | 9.91 |
| Administrator/Manager | 8.05 | Teacher/Professor | 8.36 |
| Business owner | 5.46 | Skilled trades | 7.65 |
| Salesperson | 4.68 | Salesperson | 3.80 |
| Technician | 4.29 | Unskilled | 3.48 |
| Semiskilled trades | 3.70 | Politician/Civil servant | 3.30 |
| Unskilled | 3.68 | Technician | 3.01 |
| Politician/Civil servant | 1.92 | Farmer/rancher | 3.01 |
| Other | 1.82 | Other | 2.56 |
| Skilled trades | 1.53 | Police/Fireman | 2.52 |
| Unemployed | 0.98 | Consultant | 1.08 |
| Artist/Writer | 0.67 | Artist/Writer | 0.98 |
| Farmer/rancher | 0.35 | Military | 0.96 |
| Law enforcement | 0.25 | Clerical (non-sales) | 0.89 |
| Consultant | 0.12 | Clergy | 0.85 |
| Clergy | 0.12 | Unemployed | 0.73 |
| Military | 0.08 | Fisherman | 0.71 |
| Fisherman | 0.06 | Homemaker | 0.24 |

Student Decisions to Attend University

Nearly 28% of all students applied for admission to only one university; 19% applied to two universities; 43% applied to three universities; and about 10% submitted applications to more than three universities. There were marked differences between universities in student application patterns. At six universities, for example, fewer than ten percent of first-year students applied to only one university while at four universities from 70% to 87% of students applied to only one university. There was a tendency for older students to apply to more universities than younger differences but gender differences were not statistically significant.

Only about 13% of all first-year students also applied to a degree granting College, but there was substantial variation between universities. The percentages of students who also applied to a College ranged from 4.7% to 41% across universities.

A substantial majority of first-year students (83.8%) said they were now attending their first choice university. Across all universities, the percentages of students who said they were *not* now attending their first choice university ranged from a low of about 7% to a high of slightly more than 31%. These results were related to the number of applications submitted.. For example, only 8.6% of students who had applied to one university were not currently attending their first choice university; 17.1% of those who had applied to two universities were not currently attending their first choice university; 59.4% of students who had applied to three universities said they were not attending their first choice school; and 14.9% of those who had applied to more than three institutions were not currently attending their first choice university. Males were more likely than females to be *not* currently attending their first choice university.

Over one-third of all first year students were very concerned about not having sufficient funding to complete their university education. There were marked differences in degree of concern at different universities. At some universities, for example, about one-fourth to one-third of first-year students were very concerned about not having sufficient educational funding while at several other universities, nearly half of the students expressed similar levels of concern. Females expressed greater concerns about educational funding than males. Older students were more likely than younger students to either express no concern or very much concern about having sufficient educational funding.

The *Survey of First-Year University Students* included a series of items examining the importance of various reasons why students wanted to go to university. First-year students gave job-related issues the greatest importance. Across all students, for example, going to university in order to get a good job was given the highest importance ratings and this reason for going to university also occupied the highest (or a top) importance rank at each participating university. Wanting to go to university to prepare for a job or career and to obtain a degree for entry into the workforce occupied the second and third most

| Importance of Reasons for Going to University | |
|--|-------------------------|
| <i>Wanted to go to university to . . .</i> | <i>% Very Important</i> |
| Get a good job..... | 83.76 |
| Obtain a degree for entry to workforce..... | 75.19 |
| Prepare for a job/career | 74.23 |
| Get a good general education | 66.81 |
| Increase knowledge in an academic field..... | 65.22 |
| Discover career interests/plans | 54.35 |
| Develop critical thinking/reasoning ability..... | 52.06 |
| Make more money | 51.91 |
| Develop a broad base of flexible skills | 48.71 |
| Prepare for graduate/professional school | 40.82 |
| Obtain a degree for entry to postgrad program | 39.05 |
| Improve leadership skills | 28.55 |
| Become a more cultured person | 26.88 |
| Meet new friends..... | 21.50 |
| Meet parental expectations | 18.47 |
| Use time productively while unemployed | 15.01 |
| Meet expectations of present employer | 12.26 |

highly rated important reasons for attending university.

Students also rated general educational goals among the top one-third of most important reasons why they wanted to go to university. For example, for all students in the survey, going to university to get a good general education, and to increase knowledge in an academic field were among the top one-third of reasons receiving the highest importance ratings.

Reasons for going to university which had mid-levels of importance included developing a base of flexible skills, discovering career interests and plans, making more money, preparing for graduate or professional school, obtaining a degree for entry to a postgraduate program, and improving leadership skills.

Reasons for going to university that received the lowest importance rating included: to become a more cultured person; to meet new friends; to meet parental expectations; to use time productively while unemployed; and to meet expectations of present employers.

There was a high degree of similarity between universities in the relative importance students attached to reasons for wanting to go to university. For example, job-related issues were among the top most important factors at each university. Similarly, going to university to become a more cultured person, to meet parental expectations, to use time productively while unemployed, or to meet employer expectations were among the least important rated reasons at each university.

There were a number of statistically significant gender, age, and subject group differences in reasons for wanting to attend university. In general, with only one exception, females placed higher importance ratings than males on most of the reasons assessed in the survey for wanting to attend university. Interestingly, males gave higher mean importance ratings than females to only one reason for wanting to go to university-to make more money.

There were also a number of age differences that were significantly related to importance ratings of reasons why students wanted to go to university. In most of these differences, older students attached less importance to various reasons for attending university than younger students. Contrary to this trend, older students gave higher importance ratings than younger students to wanting to go to university to become a more cultured person. Older students were also more likely than younger students to say that going to university to use their time productively while unemployed was either not important or very important to them.

Survey results showed clearly that students intending to major in different academic disciplines differed significantly in the importance they attached to various reasons for wanting to attend university. Some differences of interest included:

- ✓ Students intending majors in the Professional group gave the highest mean importance ratings to wanting to go to university *to prepare for a job or career*, while students intending majors in the Arts & Humanities subject group gave the lowest mean importance ratings to this reason.
- ✓ Students with intended majors in the Social Science subject group gave the highest mean importance ratings *to getting a good general education* as an important reason for wanting to go to university. Students in Agriculture gave this reason the lowest importance ratings.
- ✓ Students in the Biological Science and Professional subject groups placed the highest importance on wanting to go to university *to prepare for graduate or professional school and to increase their knowledge in an academic field*.
- ✓ Business and Engineering students placed the highest importance ratings on going to university *to develop critical thinking and reasoning ability*. These students also placed the highest ratings on wanting to go to university to get a good job. (Arts & Humanities students placed the lowest ratings on the importance of wanting to go to university to get a good job.)
- ✓ Students intending majors in Business and Education rated the importance of wanting to go to university to obtain a university degree for entry into the workforce highest.
- ✓ Students in the Biological and Physical Science groups gave the highest importance ratings to wanting to go to *university to obtain a degree for entry into a postgraduate program*.
- ✓ Biological Science and Education students gave the highest importance to wanting *to discover career interests and develop career plans* as a reason for going to university.
- ✓ Business and Education students gave the highest importance ratings *to making more money* as a reason for wanting to go to university. Students intending majors in Education and the Arts & Humanities groups gave the lowest mean importance ratings to this reason for wanting to go to university.
- ✓ Agriculture and Business students gave the highest importance ratings to wanting to go to university *to meet expectations of present employer*.
- ✓ Arts & Humanities and Social Science students gave the highest importance ratings to wanting to attend university *to become a more cultured person*.
- ✓ Business students placed the highest importance on *improving leadership skills*.

- ✓ Business and Engineering students placed the highest importance on *meeting parental expectations* as a reason for wanting to attend university.

Student Decision to Attend Their Present University

For all students, the most important reasons cited for choosing a university included the quality of the academic program, the reputation of the university, specific career-related programs, and the size of the university. Reasons receiving the lowest importance ratings included special needs services, contact with a coach, and family tradition. There was a high degree of similarity across universities in the top-rated reasons for choosing a university including the reputation of the university, quality of academic programs and the presence of specific career-related programs.

A number of reasons for choosing a specific university had statistically significant gender differences. Consistent with other patterns of gender differences, in the majority of these instances, females gave higher importance ratings than males. There were, however, some exceptions where males gave higher importance ratings:

| Importance of Reasons for Selecting Current University | |
|---|-----------------------------|
| <i>Reason . . .</i> | <i>% Very Important</i> |
| Quality of academic programs..... | 58.73 |
| University has a good reputation..... | 54.00 |
| Specific career-related program..... | 51.34 |
| Size of university..... | 32.23 |
| Wanted to live close to home..... | 29.04 |
| Accessibility of the campus from my home..... | 26.05 |
| Offered financial assistance/scholarship..... | 19.32 |
| Availability of on-campus housing..... | 17.99 |
| Co-op program..... | 17.54 |
| Rich social life..... | 15.64 |
| Tuition fees..... | 14.84 |
| School spirit..... | 14.52 |
| Wanted to live away from home..... | 12.43 |
| Size of community..... | 10.95 |
| Parental desires..... | 8.59 |
| Computer facilities..... | 8.56 |
| Friends attending here..... | 6.08 |
| Contact with students from the university..... | 5.75 |
| Advice from counsellors/teachers..... | 5.56 |
| Student support services..... | 5.55 |
| Special needs services..... | 2.70 |
| Contact with a coach..... | 2.44 |
| Family tradition..... | 2.23 |

- ✓ Males placed higher importance on the accessibility of the campus from their home.
- ✓ Males placed higher importance on friends attending the same university.
- ✓ Males placed higher importance on contact with a coach.
- ✓ Males placed higher importance on computer facilities.
- ✓ Males placed higher importance on a co-op program.

Importance assigned to various reasons for selecting a university also showed some clear age-related differences:

- ✓ Older students rated the importance of living close to home as either not important or as very important while younger students rated this item as somewhat important.
- ✓ Older students rated the accessibility of the campus from their home as most important.
- ✓ Older students rated the offer of financial assistance or a scholarship as less important in their decision to select a university.
- ✓ Students who rated the reputation of the university as a very important factor in choosing their university were significantly younger than other students.
- ✓ Older students rated size of university as less important.
- ✓ Older students gave less importance to a “rich social life” as an important factor in selecting a university.
- ✓ Older students gave less importance than younger students did to school spirit.
- ✓ The size of community was also less important to older students.
- ✓ Younger students placed more importance on the availability of on-campus residence accommodations.
- ✓ Younger students placed more importance on the role of parental expectations in selecting a university.
- ✓ Younger students placed higher importance on friends attending the same university.
- ✓ Younger students placed more importance on the role of advice from counsellors or teachers.
- ✓ Younger students rated contact with a coach as a more important reason for selecting a university.
- ✓ Younger students also placed more importance than older students did on contact with students from the university.
- ✓ Younger students placed more importance on the availability of a co-op program.
- ✓ Older students placed more importance on student support services as a reason for choosing a university.
- ✓ Older students also attached more importance to the availability of special needs services.

Selected subject group differences in the importance of reasons for selecting a university were examined. Two differences of interest included:

- ✓ Students intending majors in the Biological Science, Engineering, and Business subject groups were most likely to give the highest importance ratings to quality of academic programs as an important reason for selecting a university.
- ✓ Students in the Education, Professional, Agriculture, and Engineering subject groups gave the highest importance ratings to the presence of a specific career-related program as a reason for selecting a university.

The Survey of First-Year University Students also asked students to rate the importance of various sources of information they may have considered when they were choosing a university. For all students, a campus visit was the source of information rated as most important when students chose the university they wished to attend. Campus visits received the first or second highest importance rating at fourteen of the universities participating in the survey.

| <i>Information . . .</i> | <i>% Very Important</i> |
|--|-------------------------|
| Campus visit..... | 40.56 |
| Brochures or pamphlets | 30.33 |
| Visit from university rep to high school/CEGEP | 25.53 |
| Maclean's magazine..... | 19.15 |
| Calls from faculty of the university..... | 16.59 |
| Meeting with admissions officer | 14.46 |
| Letters from university to high school/CEGEP | 13.14 |
| Calls from students of the university | 12.39 |
| World Wide Web | 11.24 |
| CD ROM | 4.05 |
| TV or radio ads..... | 3.26 |

All students rated brochures and pamphlets as the second-most-important source of information, and this source of information was generally rated among the top three most-important informational sources by students at most universities.

High school /CEGEP visits by university representatives also emerged as an important informational source. Ranked third-most-important source of information in the overall sample, visits by university representatives also occupied a spot in the top-rated informational sources at most universities.

Maclean's magazine also ranked near the top-third of most-important informational sources in the overall sample. Interestingly, the relative rank of Maclean's magazine as an information source varied substantially between universities, occupying a top rank at some universities and a rank in the bottom one-third of importance rankings at other institutions.

Sources of information occupying mid-importance ranks in the overall sample included Letters to high schools or CEGEPs, calls from university faculty, calls from university students, and meetings with admissions officers. Sources of information rated as least important included the World Wide Web, television or radio ads, and CD ROMs. Interestingly, the relative importance rank of the World Wide Web varied somewhat between universities, occupying a mid-importance ranking at some universities and a ranking in the bottom-third of importance ranks at other institutions.

Except for the importance of the World Wide Web and Maclean's magazine, females gave significantly higher importance ratings than males to each source of information assessed in the survey. There were also a number of age differences:

- ✓ Younger students placed more importance on a visit from a university representative to their high school or CEGEP.
- ✓ Older students placed either less importance or more importance on pamphlets or brochures than younger students did.
- ✓ Older students rated campus visits as less important sources of information.
- ✓ Older students rated letters from the university to high schools or CEGEPs as less important.
- ✓ Older students placed more importance than younger students did on meeting with university admissions officers on the campus.
- ✓ Younger students placed more importance on calls from faculty.
- ✓ Younger students placed more importance on the WWW as a source of information.
- ✓ Older students placed less importance on Maclean's magazine as a source of information.

In a survey item immediately following the items rating the importance of informational sources for choosing a university, students were asked to select the three informational sources that were most important to their decision to choose the university they decided to attend. Across all universities, the three sources of information cited most frequently as the most-important source of information when choosing a university were a campus visit, a visit from a university representative to high school or CEGEP, and brochures or pamphlets. A comparison of these results with previously presented ranked mean importance ratings suggested that the two approaches to identifying the most important information factors produced very similar results.

Student Reactions to Orientation

About 65% of all first-year students participated in an orientation program before or after arriving on campus in the fall of their first year at university. There were substantial differences between universities in orientation involvement rates ranging from a low of 43% of students at one university to a high of nearly 91% of first-year students at another university. Females were more likely to participate in orientation than males, and older students were less likely than younger students to attend an orientation program.

Over 72% of all students who attended an orientation program were satisfied or very satisfied with the help orientation provided adapting to their academic programs. Older students tended to express more satisfaction with this aspect of orientation than younger students. Over 80% of all students were also satisfied with the help provided by orientation with the personal and social transition to university. Most students (87.5%) were also satisfied with information about campus life provided by orientation. (Females were more pleased with this aspect of information than males.)

A large percentage of students (79%) were also satisfied with information about student services provided by orientation. Again, females expressed higher levels of satisfaction than males. Nearly two-thirds of all students felt that orientation had made them feel welcome at university.

A majority of students (57.3%) said that they had not participated in any initiation activities upon their arrival at university. Participation rates in initiation activities varied across universities ranging from a low of 9.6% at one university to a high of 77% at another institution. Older students were less likely than younger students to participate in initiation activities and slightly more females than males participated in some initiation activities.

Slightly less than 8% of students who indicated participation in initiation activities said that some of these initiation experiences had been personally degrading. Older students were less likely to report degrading initiation experiences than younger students.

Student Transition to University

The *Survey of First-Year University Students* contained 17 items that allowed students to rate the degree of success they experienced in making successful adjustments to university. Students reported the most success to finding their way around the campus and the least success with becoming involved in campus activities. Other adjustments which students rated in the top one-third of most successful transitions included:

- ✓ Adjusting to living here
- ✓ Making new friends with other students
- ✓ Choosing a program of studies
- ✓ Understanding course content and information
- ✓ Feeling as if I belong at university

Adjustments that students rated in the middle range of successful transitions included:

Meeting academic demands

- ✓ Performing adequately in courses requiring written assignments
- ✓ Using the library
- ✓ Performing adequately in courses requiring mathematical skills
- ✓ Finding help with questions or problems

Adjustments with the lowest mean success ratings included:

- ✓ Becoming excited about new things learned
- ✓ Finding affordable housing
- ✓ Organising time to complete academic work
- ✓ Getting academic advice
- ✓ Finding information about careers and occupations
- ✓ Becoming involved in campus activities

There were a number of interesting similarities and differences between universities in rankings of mean transition success scores. At every university but one, for example, students gave the highest mean success score to finding their way around the campus.

Another striking similarity across universities was the relatively low success ratings given to becoming involved in campus activities (in last place or close to last place at most universities) and finding useful information and resources on careers and occupations (close to last place at most universities).

Mean success scores for getting academic advice also held quite similar success rankings across universities with this transition being among the bottom three success ranks at most universities.

Although success scores for “adjusting to living here” occupied the second highest rank among all students, there was considerable variation in the ranking of this item across universities with the item being close to the top success rank at some and occupying a middle ranking at other universities.

Making new friends with other students also yielded success rankings that appeared to show inter-university differences. While this item was in the top three success rankings overall and also at a number of universities, at other universities students reported less success with this transition and the item occupied mid-success rankings among the seventeen items assessed in the survey.

Females reported higher levels of successful transitions than males for a number of areas including:

- ✓ Making new friends with other students
- ✓ Adjusting to living here
- ✓ Finding affordable housing
- ✓ Getting academic advice
- ✓ Performing adequately in written assignments
- ✓ Finding my way around the campus
- ✓ Using the library
- ✓ Finding help with questions or problems
- ✓ Becoming excited about new things learned
- ✓ Finding useful information and resources on careers

Males reported a more successful transition than females on only one item - performing adequately in courses requiring mathematical skills.

Survey findings also suggested a number of interesting relationships between age and successful transition to university. Some findings of interest included:

- ✓ Older students were more likely than younger students to report more success in meeting the academic demands of university.
- ✓ Younger students reported more success than older students in making new friends with other students.
- ✓ Younger students reported less success than older students did in becoming involved in campus activities.
- ✓ Students who reported success in adjusting to living in their new location were generally younger than students reporting less success with this adjustment.
- ✓ Older students reported less success in finding affordable housing.

- ✓ Older students were more likely than younger students to report either very little or very much success in choosing a program of studies to meet their objectives.
- ✓ Older students reported more success than younger students in getting academic advice.
- ✓ Older students reported more success in performing adequately in written assignments and less success in courses requiring mathematical skills.
- ✓ Older students generally reported more success in understanding content and information presented in courses.
- ✓ Older students were generally more likely than younger students to report less success in feeling as if they belong at university.
- ✓ Younger students reported more success in finding their way around the campus.
- ✓ Older students reported more success in finding help with questions or problems.
- ✓ Older students reported more success in becoming excited about the new things learned in courses.
- ✓ Students reporting very much success in organising their time to complete academic work were older than students reporting less success on this item.
- ✓ Older students reported either less or more success in finding useful information and resources about careers and occupations.

Selected subject group comparisons were also conducted on transitional success ratings. Some differences of interest included:

- ✓ Students with intended majors in the Professional and Arts & Humanities groups reported the highest mean success levels for meeting academic demands.
- ✓ Students in the Education, Professional, and Engineering groups had the highest success rates for choosing a program of studies to meet their objectives.
- ✓ Students in Education, Agriculture, and Arts & Humanities reported the most success in getting academic advice while the lowest rates of success were reported by students in Engineering, Business, and the “other” group.
- ✓ Students in Arts & Humanities reported the greatest success in performing adequately in written assignments.
- ✓ Students in Engineering and the Physical Science groups reported the highest success rates for performing adequately in courses requiring mathematical skills.
- ✓ Students in Arts & Humanities and the Social Science groups reported the most success in understanding content and information presented in courses. Engineering students reported the lowest success rates for this item.

- ✓ Students in Education, Arts & Humanities, and the Professional groups showed the highest success scores for feeling as if they belong at university.
- ✓ Students in Arts & Humanities had the highest success scores for using the library while students in the Physical Science group gave themselves the lowest rates of success for this item.
- ✓ Students in Education reported the highest success with finding help with questions or problems while the lowest rates of success on this item were reported by students intending majors in the Business subject group.
- ✓ Students in the Arts & Humanities and the Social Sciences had the greatest success in becoming excited about new things learned in courses while the lowest rates of success on this item were reported by Engineering students.
- ✓ Students in Agriculture, Education, and the Professional groups had the highest success in organising their time to complete academic work.
- ✓ Students in Education and the Professional groups had the highest success in finding useful information and resources on careers and occupations while the lowest level of success in this area was reported by students in the Physical Science group.

Student Perceptions of the University

The *Survey of First-Year Students* contained several blocks of items that measured student's satisfaction with aspects of the university, their professors, and their registration experience and this section summarises survey results from these variables.

Across all universities, students had the highest mean satisfaction scores with personal safety on campus and library facilities. By contrast, the lowest mean satisfaction scores were obtained for food services and parking facilities. Aspects of the university that were in the top one-third of highest satisfaction ratings included:

- ✓ Personal safety on campus
- ✓ Library facilities
- ✓ Athletic facilities
- ✓ University residences
- ✓ Computer services
- ✓ Campus medical services
- ✓ Average size of classes.

Aspects of the university that received satisfaction ratings in the middle one-third of scores included:

- ✓ Instructional facilities
- ✓ Social activities
- ✓ Services for women students
- ✓ Campus book stores
- ✓ Study skills/learning support services
- ✓ Services for International students
- ✓ Personal counselling services.

Those aspects of university receiving the lowest satisfaction ratings (in the lower one-third of ratings) included:

- ✓ Services for disabled students
- ✓ Co-op services
- ✓ University day care services
- ✓ Employment/placement services
- ✓ Concern shown by the university for students as individuals;
- ✓ Food services
- ✓ Parking facilities.

While the relative satisfaction rankings discussed above were based on mean satisfaction scores, the adjacent table presents percentages of students who were satisfied or very satisfied with each of these aspects of university experience.¹

Consistent with previously presented patterns of gender differences, females tended to generally have higher mean satisfaction scores on this series of items than males. This pattern of higher satisfaction ratings among females was

| Satisfaction with University Experience | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| <i>Aspect of University . . .</i> | <i>% Satisfied or Very Satisfied</i> |
| Personal safety on campus..... | 93.12 |
| Library facilities | 90.17 |
| Services for women students..... | 88.15 |
| Instructional facilities..... | 87.70 |
| Social activities | 87.22 |
| Athletic facilities | 87.03 |
| Study skills/learning services | 85.29 |
| University residences..... | 85.19 |
| Computer services | 85.17 |
| Average size of classes | 84.75 |
| Campus medical services | 84.66 |
| Services for international students..... | 83.03 |
| Campus book store(s)..... | 82.85 |
| Personal counselling services..... | 80.52 |
| Services for disabled students | 76.83 |
| Co-op services | 74.55 |
| University day care services | 73.69 |
| Employment/placement services | 66.66 |
| Concern shown by university | 65.57 |
| Food services..... | 61.44 |
| Parking facilities | 50.79 |

¹ Items had slightly different ranks dependent upon whether ranks were based on mean scores or percentages of students who were satisfied and very satisfied.

reversed on only one item in this series – personal safety on campus. On this item, females had significantly lower satisfaction scores than males.

There were also a number of statistically significant age differences on satisfaction scores including:

- ✓ Older students had a tendency to express more satisfaction than younger students did with concern shown by the university for them as individuals.
- ✓ Older students tended to be more dissatisfied than younger students with computer services.
- ✓ Older students were more dissatisfied than younger students with athletic facilities.
- ✓ Older students were more satisfied than younger students with parking facilities.
- ✓ Older students tended to be more dissatisfied with social activities than younger students.
- ✓ Older students were more likely to be dissatisfied with student employment/placement services.
- ✓ Older students were more likely to be dissatisfied with services for women students.
- ✓ Older students were more dissatisfied with study skills/learning support services than younger students.
- ✓ Older students were more likely to be dissatisfied with co-op services.

Selected comparison of satisfaction ratings between subject groups found that:

- ✓ Satisfaction with size of classes was highest in the Education and Arts & Humanities groups and lowest in Engineering and Biological Science groups.
- ✓ Overall satisfaction with instructional facilities was highest for Physical Science students and lowest for Engineering students.
- ✓ Education students expressed the greatest satisfaction with the concern shown by the university to them as individuals.

For seventeen aspects of university assessed in the survey, students were asked to select the “don’t know” response option if they have not personally used the service or facility. Student use of facilities/services was estimated by subtracting the percent of don’t know responses (e.g. percent who have not used service/facility) from 100% to yield an estimate of the percentage of students who have used the service or facility. Based on these estimated usage rates, over eighty percent of all first year students participating in the survey have used food services, computer services, library facilities and campus bookstores. About 67% participated in

university-based social activities and about 58% have used university athletic facilities. University residences have been used by about 46%, and 43.7% used parking facilities.

These results also suggest that about one-third of all students used study skills or learning support services and campus medical services. About one-fourth of first-year students indicated they used personal counselling services and about 20% indicated use of student employment/placement services. Only about 12% indicated use of services for women students or co-op services. Approximately six percent used services for disabled students and services for international students. University day care services had the lowest usage rate at 2.8% of first-year students.

In responses to a series of items measuring student attitudes toward their professors, nearly three-fourths (74.6%) of all students agreed that most of their professors encourage students to participate in class discussions. Variations in student responses to this survey item were marked, ranging from a low of 60% agreement with the item to a high of 88.1% agreement at another university. Older students were more likely than younger students to agree that their professors encourage classroom discussions. Subject group differences were also present with students in Arts & Humanities showing the strongest agreement and students in Engineering the lowest agreement that their professors encourage classroom discussions.

About 72% of all students agreed with the statement "At this university, professors treat students as individuals, not just numbers." Inter-university response variation on this item was also marked ranging from 61% to 94% agreement. Agreement was higher among females than males. Older students also showed more agreement than younger students. Agreement levels differed by subject group with Arts & Humanities students showing the strongest agreement and Engineering students having the lowest agreement.

A large percentage of all first-year students (89.2%) agreed with the statement that "Most of my professors are reasonably accessible outside of class to help students." Even though agreement levels were consistently high at all universities, inter-university differences were still statistically significant ranging from 82.7% to 94.1% agreement. Females agreed more with this statement than males. Students in Arts & Humanities had the highest agreement and students in Engineering and Agriculture the lowest agreement.

Students generally expressed a high level of satisfaction with the quality of teaching they have received at university. Across all universities, for example, 86.2% agreed with the statement, "Generally, I am satisfied with the quality of teaching I have received." Females had higher levels of agreement with this statement than males and older students agreed more

strongly with the statement than younger students. Students in Arts & Humanities had the highest satisfaction with quality of teaching and students in Engineering the lowest.

Students also expressed high levels of satisfaction with their decision to attend their present university. Over 91% of all students agreed with the statement “I am satisfied with my decision to attend this university.” Between-university differences were smaller than on many prior survey responses, but still statistically significant with agreement ranging from a low of 86% to a high of nearly 97% on this item. Satisfaction with decision to attend did not differ by gender or age, but students in Arts & Humanities and in Physical Science expressed the highest levels of satisfaction with their decision to attend and the lowest levels of satisfaction were expressed by students intending majors in Education and Agriculture.

The *Survey of First-Year University Students* asked students to indicate whom they talked to about their programs or courses before they first registered for courses. Over half of all students (51.2%) talked with other students about their program or courses before their first registration. About twenty percent of all students also reported talking with a course advisor or a faculty member prior to their registration, and another twenty percent of students said they did not talk with anyone before they registered. Seventeen percent of students talked with a career counsellor and thirteen percent spoke with admission staff before registering. Twelve percent also said they spoke with staff from the registrar’s office before registering and slightly more than eleven percent spoke with a peer student advisor. In last place, team coaches were consulted by about three percent of students.

Males were more likely than females to report not talking with anyone about their programs/courses, but other gender differences were not significant. There was also a tendency for older students to be more likely than younger students to have not talked with anyone prior to registration. Older students were also less likely to talk with a career counsellor before registration than younger students. Compared with younger students, older students were also less likely to have spoken with other students about their courses prior to registration. By contrast, older students were more likely than younger students to report talking with an admission’s officer prior to their first registration.

Students in Education were most likely to have talked with a faculty member about their courses prior to registration while students in Business and Agriculture were least likely to have talked with a faculty member.

The final section of the survey contained three items that investigated student experiences and reactions to their first registration at university. Student satisfaction with the help they received from the university in deciding on their programs and course selections was high across all universities. For all students, 81.6% were satisfied with the help received from the university. Between universities, satisfaction levels ranged from 71.4% to a high of 92.5%. Older students were more satisfied with help received in deciding on their program and course selections.

Satisfaction with the process of registration was also high across universities. Nearly 82% of all students expressed satisfaction with the process of registering for their courses when they first registered. Females were more satisfied with the process of their first registration than males. Students also tended to be satisfied with the extent to which they were able to register in their desired courses at their first registration (83.7% were satisfied).