

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The 2019 *First-Year Student Survey* marks the 25th cooperative study undertaken by the Canadian University Survey Consortium/Consortium canadien de recherche sur les étudiants universitaires (CUSC-CCREU). The 2019 survey involved 46 universities and over 18,000 first-year university students from across Canada.

Profile of first-year students

The demographic profile of first-year students shows the following:

- ▶ First-year students tend to be Canadian citizens (85%), 18 years or younger (77%), and female (65%). Many self-identify as a member of a visible minority (44%), while few self-identify as Indigenous (4%).
- ▶ About 24% self-identify as having a disability; among those with a disability, it is most often a mental health issue (14%). Although 24% self-identify with a disability, just 5% of all students say they have a disability that always impacts their daily activities.
- ▶ Many first-year students live in on-campus housing (40%), and among those who do not live in on-campus housing, 34% would like to if given the opportunity.
- ▶ Just 11% of first-year students are first-generation students – that is, neither parent had any post-secondary education. Conversely, 20% have at least one parent/guardian who completed a graduate degree.

Motivation for attending university

When asked to select the most important reason for why they decided to attend university, job-related reasons dominate, as they are the three most important reasons. These include *preparing for a specific job or career* (30%), *get a more fulfilling job than if they did not go to university* (15%), and *more likely to get a job with a degree* (12%). The highest non-job related reason was to *apply what they learn to make a positive difference in society* (11%).

Choosing a university

Overall, 75% of students applied to a university other than the one they are currently attending. On average, they applied to about two other universities. About 13% applied to a college or CEGEP in addition to their current university. Although many students applied elsewhere, 81% said they are attending their first choice.

Students said that, among the 18 aspects explored, the fact that *their university has the program they wanted to take* (29%) was the most important reason for selecting their university. This was more than double the next most selected reason – *the program had a co-op, practicum, or other work experience* (13%).

Among 19 sources of information, *their university's website* (51%), *a visit to campus open houses* (46%), and *parents* (45%) were most likely to be rated as important or very important. At the lower end, *the Globe and Mail Canadian University Report* (14%), *the university's Facebook site* (12%), and *contact with university athletic coaches* (8%) were least likely to be selected as important or very important.

Orientation and registration

About 69% of first-year students participated in orientation. Those who participated in orientation were most satisfied that orientation made them *feel welcome at their university* (91%) and least satisfied with orientation *building their confidence* (78%).

Overall, students appeared to be satisfied with registration, including 85% who were satisfied with *getting into all the courses they wanted* and 80% who were satisfied with the *process of registering for their courses*.

Expectations and experience

First-year students rated 15 experiences as to whether they exceeded, met, or fell below their expectations. Results seem to indicate that students are more likely to be surprised about the academic challenges of university (e.g., *time to put into their coursework* and *how demanding their courses are*) and cost-related aspects (e.g., *cost of going to university* and *debt to complete program*).

When asked to summarize their overall experiences to date, first-year students are slightly more likely to say their university experiences exceeded (21%) rather than fell short (13%) of their expectations. Another 66% said the university met their expectations.

Transition to university

More than 8 in 10 students said they have had some or very much success with aspects related to their transition to university. The one area that appears to be much lower than others is *becoming involved in campus activities* (50%).

Educational experiences

Students rated their satisfaction with various educational experiences:

- ▶ Most students reported having had positive experiences with professors. In fact, among 15 aspects of interaction with professors, only one received less than 70% agreement – *professors taking a personal interest in their academic progress* (54%). Among those 15 aspects, students say it is most important for professors to *communicate well in their teaching* (38% rated as most important).
- ▶ Overall, almost all students said they *were given the chance to evaluate the quality of teaching in their courses*, although just 57% said they were able to evaluate the teaching in all their courses.
- ▶ Among first-year students, almost 9 in 10 agreed that they are *generally satisfied with the quality of teaching they received*, including 16% who strongly agreed.

Commitment to completion

Several measures were used to gauge students' commitment to completing their programs at their universities.

- ▶ **Perceptions of effort.** Almost all students agreed that they are *willing to put a lot of effort into being successful at university* (95% agree or strongly agree), which is reflected in the fact that almost as many agreed that they *normally go to all of their classes* (90%). Although students may feel they can put in the effort, fewer agreed that they *can deal with stress* (71%) or *have good study habits* (65%).
- ▶ **Perceptions of university education.** Results show that at least 3 in 4 first-year students agreed with the survey's statements about their university education, including that *most of their courses are interesting* (83%), *their course load is manageable* (82%), *they are in the right program* (76%), and they had *adequate information about their program from the university before they enrolled* (76%).
- ▶ **Perceptions of finances.** About 7 in 10 students agreed that a *university degree is worth the cost* (68%) or that *they have the financial resources to complete their program* (71%).
- ▶ **Perceptions of persistence.** At the time of the survey, 88% of first-year students agreed that they *plan to come back to their university next year*, although slightly fewer *plan to complete their degree at their university* (83%). Just 10% *plan to transfer to another university next year*, while 9% *plan on going to college/CEGEP next year*.

Overall evaluation of student experiences

When rating their experiences at university, students indicated the following:

- ▶ Almost 3 in 4 first-year students said they are satisfied with the *concern shown by the university for them as an individual*, although just 8% are very satisfied.
- ▶ Over 9 in 10 first-year students are satisfied with *their decision to attend their university*, including 26% who are very satisfied.
- ▶ Overall, 33% of students are classified as promoters of their university, while 19% are detractors, resulting in a Net Promoter Score of 14%.

Goal development

The following bullets summarize information about students' goals, both for their current program and future career plans.

- ▶ Around 74% of first-year students said they had selected their major or discipline.
- ▶ At this early point in their university studies, students are equally likely to want to apply to a *professional program* (30%) as *graduate school* (33%), although many are unsure at this point.
- ▶ Overall, 33% of first-year students have a specific career in mind, while another 32% have several possible careers in mind. Despite many having a career (or two) in mind, just 20% said they know their career options very well.
- ▶ First-year students have taken few concrete steps to prepare for employment, as most steps involve gathering information from talking with *parents/family* (78%), *friends* (69%), or *professors* (25%). Among more concrete behaviours, 44% *have a resumé or CV*.

Satisfaction with facilities and services

Students indicated their use and satisfaction with several different facilities and services, which are categorized below.

- ▶ **General facilities and services.** Among those who used each general service or facility, students are satisfied. Among 13 areas, two have satisfaction ratings below 80%: *parking facilities* (53%) and *food services* (74%).
- ▶ **Academic services.** Among those who have used each academic service, students reported very high levels of satisfaction, ranging from 87% to 93%.
- ▶ **Special services.** Satisfaction with special services is also very high, with at least 82% of those who used them saying they are satisfied or very satisfied; however, use is lower among these services, with just 1% to 21% of students having used them.

Academic profile

Examining students' academic profiles shows that the majority are attending full-time (95%), began their post-secondary studies (92%) or studies at their current university (91%) this academic year, did not transfer from another institution (97%), and reported an average grade of B- or higher (78%).

Current employment

Overall, 36% of first-year students are currently employed, most often off campus. Among those who are currently employed, results show that the typical student works about 14 hours per week and about 43% said their employment has a negative impact on their academic performance.

Financing education

About 57% of first-year students reported they have at least one credit card. Among those students who have credit cards, 87% reported they pay off their balance each month. Among those with an outstanding balance, the typical student owes \$1,047.

Overall, 64% of first-year students said they have received a financial award from their university. Among those who received an award, 33% said they would not have been able to attend university without this financial assistance.