

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The 2016 *First-Year Student Survey* marks the 22nd cooperative study undertaken by the Canadian University Survey Consortium/Consortium canadien de recherche sur les étudiants universitaires (CUSC-CCREU). The 2016 survey involved 34 universities and almost 15,000 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 (88%), female (66%), and 18 years old (64%). Many self-identify as a member of a visible minority (40%), while few self-identify as Aboriginal (3%).
- ▶ About 22% self-identify as having a disability; among those with a disability, it is most often a mental health issue (12%).
- ▶ Many first-year students live in on-campus housing (40%), and among those who do not live in on-campus housing, 33% 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, *preparing for a specific job or career* (44%) was the most important reason. However, two other non-job related aspects land in the top five, and include *to apply what they learn to make a positive difference in society* (10%) and *to satisfy their intellectual curiosity* (7%).

Choosing a university

Overall, 76% of students applied to a university other than the one they are currently attending. On average, they applied to about two other universities. About 17% 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, *their university has the program they wanted to take* (33%), but also *wanting to live close to home* (16%) and *their program had a work experience program* (12%) were the most important reasons for selecting their university.

In terms of source of information, *visits to campus for an open house* (52%), *their university's website* (50%), and *parents* (46%) were the most important sources of information. At the lower end, *the university's Facebook site* (14%), *university's social media sites* (12%), and *contact with university athletic coaches* (8%) were not rated as being important relative to other aspects.

Orientation and registration

About 68% of first-year students participated in orientation. Among those who participated in orientation, most seemed to be satisfied with aspects related to orientation, and were most satisfied that orientation made them *feel welcome at their university* (93%) and least satisfied with orientation *building their confidence* (77%).

Overall, students seemed to be satisfied with registration, including 84% who were satisfied with *getting into all the courses they wanted* and 78% who were satisfied with the *process of registering for their courses*.

Expectations and experience

First-year students rated 17 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 (23%) rather than fell short (13%) of their expectations. Another 64% said the university met their expectations.

Transition to university

Students found success in many aspects, with many aspects having more than 8 in 10 students saying they have had some or very much success. The two areas where students have found less success are *finding career information* (17% very much) and *becoming involved in campus activities* (14% very much).

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 three areas (*professors take a personal interest in their academic progress*, *professors provide useful feedback on academic work*, and *professors provide prompt feedback on academic work*) received less than 70% agreement.
- ▶ Overall, almost all students said they *were given the chance to evaluate the quality of teaching in their courses*, although fewer than half (47%) 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 18% who strongly agreed.

Commitment to completion

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

- ▶ Almost all students agreed that they are *willing to put a lot of effort into being successful at university* (50% strongly agreed), which is reflected in the fact that almost as many agreed that they *normally go to all of their classes* (51% strongly agreed). Although students may feel they can put in the effort, about 7 in 10 agreed that they *can deal with stress*, but only 17% strongly agreed. Also, just 6 in 10 agreed that they have *good study habits*, and just 12% strongly agreed.
- ▶ 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* (25% strongly agreed), *their course load is manageable* (15% strongly agreed), *they had adequate information about their program from the university before they enrolled* (19% strongly agreed), and *they are in the right program* (32% strongly agreed).
- ▶ About 7 in 10 students agreed that a *university degree is worth the cost* (30% strongly agreed) or that *they have the financial resources to complete their program* (20% strongly agreed).
- ▶ At the time of the survey, 9 in 10 first-year students *plan to come back to their university next year* including 58% who strongly agreed. Slightly fewer (about 8 in 10) *plan to complete their degree at their university*, including 48% who strongly agreed. Just 9% *plan to transfer to another university next year*, while 5% *plan on going to college/CEGEP next year*.
- ▶ About 3 in 4 first-year students agreed that they *feel as if they belong at this university*, including 24% who strongly agreed.

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 6% are very satisfied.
- ▶ Over 9 in 10 first-year students are satisfied with *their decision to attend their university*, including 25% who are very satisfied.
- ▶ Overall, 95% of first-year students would *recommend their university to others*.

Goal development

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

- ▶ About 73% of first-year students said they had selected their major or discipline.
- ▶ At this early point in their university studies, students seem to be equally likely to want to apply to a *professional program* (29%) as *graduate school* (34%), although many seem to be unsure at this point.

- ▶ Overall, 31% 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 19% 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* (75%), *friends* (65%), or *professors* (23%). Among more concrete behaviours, 42% *have a resumé or CV*, while about 23% have *volunteered in their chosen field of employment*.

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* (71%).
- ▶ **Academic services.** Among those who have used each academic service, students reported very high levels of satisfaction, ranging from 86% to 92%.
- ▶ **Special services.** Satisfaction with special services is also very high, with at least 77% of those who used them saying they are satisfied or very satisfied with it. Interestingly, the special services that are used more frequently tend to be those that have a lower proportion of students satisfied, as *financial aid* and *personal counselling* are used most often.

Academic profile

Results show that the majority of first-year students are attending full-time (95%), began their post-secondary studies (83%) or studies at their current university (91%) in the current academic year (83%), did not transfer from another institution (94%), and reported an average grade of B- or higher (79%).

Current employment

Overall, 34% 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 60% of first-year students reported they have at least one credit card. Among those students who have credit cards, about 88% reported they pay off their balance each month and they carry an average balance of \$487.

Overall, 58% of first-year students said they have received a financial award from their university. Among those who received an award, 71% said they would not have been able to attend university without this financial assistance.