

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The 2015 *Graduating Student Survey* marks the 21st cooperative study undertaken by the Canadian University Survey Consortium/Consortium canadien de recherche sur les étudiants universitaires (CUSC-CCREU). The 2015 survey involved 36 universities and over 18,000 graduating university students from across Canada.

Profile of graduating students

The demographic profile of graduating students shows the following:

- ▶ Graduating students tend to be female (60%), about 24 years old, single (64%), and a Canadian citizen (89%). About 32% self-report as being a member of a visible minority, with another 4% self-identifying as being Aboriginal.
- ▶ About 17% self-identify as having a disability, most often mental health (8%). Among those with a disability, 31% require accommodation for their disability.
- ▶ The majority of students live independently, most often in rented housing (52%).
- ▶ Graduating students most commonly take public transportation (42%) to campus, although about 1 in 3 use a vehicle, more often driving alone (27%) than with others (5%).
- ▶ Just over 1 in 10 (13%) graduating students are first-generation students — that is, neither parent had any post-secondary education.

Academic history of graduating students

The typical student is studying full time (82%) with a B- to B + (54%) or A- or higher (34%) average.

Students report some issues with their post-secondary studies, as 36% have delayed completing their program, 22% have interrupted their studies for one or more terms, and 19% of students have transferred from another university.

Student activities

About 25% of graduating students have volunteered in the past year, on or off campus, spending about five hours per week (among those volunteering). Students spend about 32 hours per week on academic activities, divided fairly evenly between in class/lab time (14.5 hours) and outside class/lab time (17.9 hours). As might be expected, students with higher grades tend to spend more time on academic work outside of class than those with lower grades.

Current employment

About 59% of graduating students are employed, working about 18 hours per week. Among those who are employed, 42% say their work has at least somewhat of a negative impact on their academic performance.

Educational experiences

Students rated their satisfaction with various educational experiences, which included the following:

- ▶ Most students report having had positive experiences with professors. In fact, among 15 aspects of interaction with professors, only two areas (*professors take a personal interest in their academic progress* and *professors provide prompt feedback on academic work*) receive less than 70% agreement.
- ▶ Overall, almost all students say they *were given the chance to evaluate the quality of teaching in their courses*, including 71% who say they were able to evaluate the teaching in all their courses.
- ▶ Almost 9 in 10 agree that they are *generally satisfied with the quality of teaching they received*, including 21% who strongly agree. Those with higher grades tend to be more likely to agree with this statement.
- ▶ About 8 in 10 graduating students agree that *most university support staff are helpful* and 7 in 10 agree that *most teaching assistants in my academic program are helpful*.

Contribution to growth and development

Overall, students rated the contribution their university made to 29 skills, which were grouped into four categories (discussed below):

- ▶ **Communication skills.** Universities contributed most to students' growth and development for *writing clearly and correctly* (63% much or very much) and *speaking to small groups* (63%). They contributed least to *second or third language skills* (20%).
- ▶ **Analytical and learning skills** Among the eight analytical and learning skills, students indicated that universities contributed most to *ability to find and use information* (75%) and *thinking logically and analytically* (73%), and least to *mathematical skills* (32%).
- ▶ **Working skills.** Universities contributed most to students' ability to *work independently* (75%) and least to *entrepreneurial skills* (22%).
- ▶ **Life skills.** Among the 10 life skills, universities contributed most to the *ability to interact with people from backgrounds different than their own* (64%), *dealing successfully with obstacles to achieve an objective* (63%), *time management skills* (61%) and *persistence with difficult tasks* (60%). On the lower end, universities contributed least to *spirituality* (17%).

Among all 29 areas, students ranked the top three most important areas their university should be contributing. Results indicate that *thinking logically and analytically* (46%) is ranked in the top three by almost half of students, more than doubling the next most ranked area (*skills and knowledge for employment* and *time management skills* at 21% each).

Evaluation of student experiences

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

- ▶ Overall, the majority (59%) of students say that their experiences *met their expectations*, while 23% say their university experiences *exceeded their expectations*. Few (18%) say their experiences *fell short*.
- ▶ Almost 6 in 10 students say they are satisfied with the *concern shown by the university for them as an individual*, although just 10% are very satisfied.
- ▶ Almost 9 in 10 students are satisfied with *their decision to attend their university*, including 34% who are very satisfied.
- ▶ More than 8 in 10 say they are satisfied with the *overall quality of education at their university*, including 23% who are very satisfied.
- ▶ Although students are satisfied with the overall quality of their education, for many the value for the cost of their education may be an issue as about 2 in 3 agree that they *received good value for their money at their university*. This includes 15% who strongly agree.
- ▶ About 8 in 10 agree that they *feel as if they belong at this university*, including 24% who strongly agree.
- ▶ Overall, 88% of students would *recommend their university to others*.

Educational goals

About 38% of graduating students expect to apply to graduate school and 22% expect to apply to a professional school after graduating. Overall, 37% of graduating students have a specific career in mind, while another 38% have several possible careers. About 7 in 10 students say they know their career options at least fairly well, with 25% saying they know their options very well.

Almost all graduating students have taken at least one step to prepare for employment or a career after graduation, most often these steps are informal, such as *talking with friends* (78%), *parents* (77%), or *professors* (51%) about career options. Among more concrete behaviours, about 3 in 4 *have a resume or CV* (76%), while about half have *worked in their chosen field of employment* (45%).

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 provided a rating of the service, results show students are most satisfied with *library electronic resources* (39%), *campus medical services* (35%) *on-campus library* (35%), and *athletic facilities* (30%), and least satisfied with *food services* (11%) and *parking facilities* (6%).
- ▶ **Academic services.** Among those who have used the academic service, students report very high levels of satisfaction, ranging from 80% to 90% who report being satisfied or very satisfied. Even when only very satisfied responses are examined, results are very similar with proportions ranging from 26% to 30%.
- ▶ **Special services.** Satisfaction with special services is very high, with at least 79% of those who used the service saying there are satisfied or very satisfied with it. However, there are some noticeable differences among the proportion reporting they are very satisfied, ranging from 46% for *services for students with disabilities* to 20% for *employment services*.

Financing education and current employment

Several questions regarding how students finance their university education were asked.

- ▶ **Credit cards.** About 92% of graduating students have at least one credit card, and just 23% of those with a credit card do not pay off their balance each month. Among those who do not pay their balance, their average unpaid debt is \$2,224.
- ▶ **Debt.** About 50% of students report debt related to financing their university education, most often from *government student loans* (40%). The average debt among those reporting any debt is \$26,819, with 29% of all students reporting debt of \$20,000 or greater.
- ▶ **Financing.** On average students use about three sources to fund their education, most commonly *parents, family or spouse* (60%), with many also using earnings from *current* (49%) or *summer* (44%) *employment* and *government loans or bursaries* (41%). To fund their current academic year, the typical student requires just under \$15,800 from all sources.

Post-graduation education plans

Overall, 70% of students plan on taking further education, most commonly graduate school (53%). For some, debt plays a role in their decision about taking further education, as about 4 in 10 students say debt has some impact, either *discouraging them from taking more education* (23%), *preventing them from taking more education* (9%), or *encouraging them because they need more education to repay their debt* (8%).

Employment plans

Overall, 31% of students have employment arranged for work after graduating. Among those who have arranged work, 44% say it is strongly related to the *skills and knowledge they acquired* and 38% say it *required their specific degree*. On average, students expect to be earning about \$7,000 per month, although the median (\$3,000) is much lower.

Overall, over 8 in 10 graduating students who have employment arranged for after graduation are satisfied with the employment they have arranged, including 28% who are very satisfied.

Analyses reveal that students who are very satisfied are more likely to be working in jobs that are full time, permanent, new, strongly related to their skills and knowledge learned, and higher paying.