

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The 2014 *Middle-Years Student Survey* marks the 20th cooperative study undertaken by the Canadian University Survey Consortium/Consortium canadien de recherche sur les étudiants universitaires (CUSC-CCREU) and marks the first survey conducted of middle-years students, replacing the survey of all undergraduates in the three-year cycle of surveys. The 2014 survey was redesigned by CUSC-CCREU to fit with objectives for surveying middle-years students and was tested via focus groups with students prior to launch to assess students' understanding of questions.

The 2014 survey involved 28 universities and over 22,500 middle-years university students from across Canada. The 2014 survey yielded a 30% response rate.

Demographic profile of middle-years students

The profile of middle-years students shows the following:

- ▶ Middle-years students tend to be female (61%), 20 or younger (55%), single (67%), without children (94%), and a Canadian citizen (86%).
- ▶ About 37% self-report as a being a member of a visible minority, with another 4% self-identifying as being Aboriginal.
- ▶ About 15% self-identify as having a disability, most often mental health (7%). Among those with a disability, 35% require accommodation for their disability. Although there is virtually no difference by age for students self-reporting a disability, as students get older, they are more likely to report that their disability requires them to have accommodations.
- ▶ The majority of middle-years students live independently, either in rented housing (47%), in on-campus housing (9%), or in a home they personally own (7%).
- ▶ Middle-years students most commonly take public transportation (42%) to campus, although about 3 in 10 use a vehicle, more often driving alone (23%) than with others (6%). Many students also report walking to campus (22%).
- ▶ Just over 1 in 10 (13%) middle-years students are first-generation students. That is, neither parent had any post-secondary education. Visible minority students (17%) are more likely than non-minority (11%) students to be first-generation university students.

Academic profile of middle-years students

The typical middle-years student is studying full-time (81%) with a B- to B + (53%) or A- or higher (29%) average. Almost all (91%) middle-years students have chosen their major, although 37% have changed their major or discipline of study since starting their post-secondary education. In addition, 23% have transferred to their current university from another institution. The older a student is, the more likely they are to be studying part-time and transferred from other institution.

On average, students spend about 32 hours a week on their academic work, almost evenly split between time spent in class (15 hours per week, on average) and out of class (17 hours per week, on average). As might be expected, students with lower grades tend to spend fewer hours outside of class on their academic work, although they spend virtually equal hours in class to students with higher grades.

Financing education and current employment

Just over half (52%) of middle-years students are currently employed, with about 11% being employed on campus. The typical employed student works an average of 17 hours per week. Employment does seem to have some impact on students' education, as students are more likely to say their employment has a negative (45%) than positive (19%) impact on their academic performance, although 36% say it has no impact.

When assessing employment, results show several interesting relationships:

- ▶ Visible minority students are less likely than non-minority students to be employed, although the average hours worked is virtually the same among these groups.
- ▶ The hours students work is very similar by students' grades, yet those with lower grades are more likely to report that work has a negative impact on their academic performance.
- ▶ The older a student is, the more likely they are to be employed and the more hours they tend to work per week.

About 4 in 10 students report having student debt, with the most common debt being *government student loans* (33%). Among all middle-years students, the average education-related debt at the time of the survey is about \$8,822. When we consider only those who report having any debt, the average amount more than doubles to about \$21,125. There is some relationship between age and student debt, with those 25 to 29 typically reporting the highest levels of student debt.

When financing their current year, the most common source of funding for students is *parents, family, or spouse* (64%), with many also using *earnings from summer* (46%) or *current employment* (41%). On average, students require about \$16,059 to fund a single year of education.

As students get older, they are less likely to rely on some sources, such as *parents, family, or spouse; university scholarship, financial award, or bursary; or RESPs*. However, the average amount required to fund their education increases substantially, almost double when comparing the amount required for those 20 and younger (\$14,143) to those 30 and older (\$26,677).

About 85% of middle-years students report they have at least one credit card, including 29% who say they have two or more. Among those with an unpaid balance on their credit card(s), the average credit card debt students have is \$2,959. The older a student is, the more likely they are to have a credit card and the higher the average credit card balance they carry.

About 7 in 10 middle-years students agree that they *have the financial resources to complete their program*, including 24% who strongly agree. As students get older, they are more likely to disagree that they have the financial resources to complete their program.

About 2 in 3 students agree that *a university degree is worth the cost*, including 28% who strongly agree. Those who disagree report higher levels of debt than those who agree.

Satisfaction with university experiences

Students rated their satisfaction with various services, facilities, and staff, which included the following groupings:

- ▶ **General facilities and services.** Among those who provided a rating of the service, students are most satisfied with *library electronic resources* (32% very satisfied), *athletic facilities* (30%), and *campus medical services* (30%). On the other end, students are least satisfied with *food services* (11%) and *parking facilities* (5%).
- ▶ **Academic services.** Among those who have used the academic service, students report very high levels of satisfaction, ranging from 83% to 89% who report being satisfied or very satisfied. Even when only very satisfied responses are examined, results are very similar, with proportions ranging from 22% for *tutoring* to 26% for *academic advising*.
- ▶ **Special services.** Satisfaction with special services is very high, with at least 78% 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 43% for *services for students with disabilities* to 16% for *financial aid*.
- ▶ **Faculty.** Most students report having had positive experiences with university faculty, most often that *most of my professors treat students the same regardless of gender* (57% strongly agree), *most of my professors treat students the same regardless of race* (56%), and *most professors seem knowledgeable in their fields* (43%). On the lower end, students are less positive that *most professors provide useful feedback on my academic work* (12% strongly agree), *faculty take a personal interest in my academic progress* (11%), and *most professors provide prompt feedback on my academic work* (10%).
- ▶ **Staff.** About 9 in 10 middle-years students agree that *most university support staff are helpful* (24% strongly agree), and 8 in 10 agree that *most teaching assistants in my academic program are helpful* (18%).

University experiences

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

- ▶ Overall, almost all students say they *were given the chance to evaluate the quality of teaching in their courses*, including 65% who say they were able to evaluate the teaching in all their courses.
- ▶ Almost 9 in 10 agree that they *generally satisfied with the quality of teaching they received*, including 19% who strongly agree. Students with lower grades are less likely to strongly agree that they are satisfied with the quality of teaching.
- ▶ About 9 in 10 students agree that they are *willing to put a lot of effort into being successful at university* (50% strongly), which is reflected in the fact that almost as many agree that they *normally go to all of their classes* (52%). About 8 in 10 students agree that they *can deal with stress*, but only 26% strongly agree. Also, just 7 in 10 agree that they have *good study habits*, with just 18% strongly agreeing. Students with lower grades are less likely to agree with many of these statements.
- ▶ More than 8 in 10 students agree that *they are in the right program* (39% strongly), *most of their courses are interesting* (29%), or *their course load is manageable* (19%). The lower a student's grades, the less likely they are to agree that *they are in the right program for them*.
- ▶ Students involvement in campus activities (often or very often) ranged from 1 in 4 who *participated in student clubs* to fewer than 1 in 10 who *attended home games of university athletic teams, attended public lectures and guest speakers on campus, participated in student government, or attended campus cultural events*.
- ▶ About 1 in 4 students are involved in *community service or volunteer activities*, putting in about four hours per week on such activities.

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* (19% very much) and *speaking to small groups* (16%). They contributed least to *second or third language skills* (6% very much).
- ▶ **Analytical and learning skills** Among the eight analytical and learning skills, students indicated that universities contributed most to *ability to find and use information* (22% very much) and *thinking logically and analytically* (21%), and least to *mathematical skills* (10%).

- ▶ **Working skills.** Among seven working skills, about 7 in 10 say their university contributed much or very much to *working independently* (28% very much), while just 2 in 10 say their university contributed much or very much to *entrepreneurial skills* (4%).
- ▶ **Life skills.** The ten life skills vary in terms of students' perceptions of the contribution their university made to each. At the upper end, universities contributed most to the *ability to interact with people from backgrounds different than their own* (20% very much) and *dealing successfully with obstacles to achieve an objective* (14%). On the lower end, universities contributed least to *spirituality* (5% very much).

Key outcomes

Students rated several key outcomes, including the following:

- ▶ Overall, the majority (61%) of middle-years students say that their experiences *met their expectations*, while 23% say their university experiences *exceeded their expectations*. Few (16%) say their experiences *fell short*.
- ▶ Almost 7 in 10 middle-years students say they are satisfied with the *concern shown by the university for them as an individual*, although just 7% are very satisfied.
- ▶ Almost 9 in 10 middle-years students are satisfied with *their decision to attend their university*, including 24% who are very satisfied. As students' grades increase, the likelihood of being very satisfied with *their decision to attend their university* also increases.
- ▶ About 8 in 10 agree that they *feel as if they belong at this university*, including 18% who strongly agree.
- ▶ Overall, 91% of middle-years students would *recommend their university to others*.

Given that many middle-years students have positive experiences, it may not be surprising that 90% *plan to come back to this university next year* (57% who strongly agree) and 89% agree that they *plan to complete their degree at this university* (64%).

Post-graduation plans

Overall, 32% of middle-years students *intend to apply to graduate school*, and 26% *intend to apply to a professional program*. In terms of employment, 34% have a *specific career in mind*, and 21% say they *know their career options very well*.

Overall, 95% of middle-years students have taken at least one step to prepare for employment or career after graduation. Most commonly, their preparation might be considered casual — that is, they have *talked with parents or family about employment or their career* (76%) or *talked with friends about employment or their career* (76%).