

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Introduction**

The 2013 *First-Year Student Survey* marks the 19<sup>th</sup> cooperative study undertaken by the Canadian University Survey Consortium (CUSC). This year's study presents the results for students in their first year of university in 2013 and compares these results to surveys of first-year students conducted in 2010, 2007, 2004, and 2001.

The 2013 survey involved 35 universities from across Canada. To participate, universities provided PRA Inc. with first names and email addresses for first-year students. Overall, the response rate for the 2013 survey was 37%, producing a sample of 15,218 students.

### **Profile of first-year students**

As has been found in past CUSC surveys, the majority of first-year university students are female (about 2 to 1) and 18 years of age or younger (72%). About 36% self-report as being a member of a visible minority, which is the highest captured compared to any previous CUSC first-year student survey. Another 3% self-identify as being Aboriginal and 9% as having a disability.

In their first year of university, about half of the students (47%) continue to live with their parents (or some other relative or guardian), although many choose to live on campus (36%). Even among those who are not living on campus, there appears to be a strong desire to do so, as 29% of those who do not live on campus say they would if they had the opportunity.

About 7 students in 10 report that their father (72%) or mother (75%) had completed at least some post-secondary education. Slightly more than 1 in 10 students (14%) are first-generation students; that is, neither their father nor their mother took any post-secondary education.

Most students entered university directly from high school or CEGEP (80%). Many students are finding university more academically challenging than high school or CEGEP. While 7 students in 10 report an average grade of A- or higher in high school or CEGEP, slightly fewer than 4 in 10 expect such an average at the end of their first year of university. Typically, students expect an average grade of slightly lower than a B+ at the end of first-year university, while the average grade achieved in high school or CEGEP was an A-. With that being said, the self-reported university grades for first-year students have been increasing over time.

## Financing education and current employment

About 54% of students received a scholarship, financial award, or bursary for the 2012–13 academic year, and 29% of those students say they would not have been able to attend university without one.

Fewer than 4 in 10 students report being employed in the current academic year. Among employed students, the typical student works about 14 hours a week, with older students typically working more hours than younger ones. The proportion of students who report working and the average hours worked is lower in 2013 than in past CUSC surveys.

In terms of those who are employed, about 3 in 10 employed students report that their work has a negative impact on their academic performance, including 2% who say it has a very negative impact. Indeed, those for whom work has a negative impact work more than 16 hours per week on average, compared to about 13 hours a week for those who report their work has no impact or a positive impact.

## Reasons motivating attendance and choice of university

Among eight factors that may influence students' decisions to attend university, the most important reasons tend to be related to employment, specifically *to prepare for a specific job or career* (42%) or *to get a good job* (26%) are most often selected as the single most important reasons for attending university.

Among 17 reasons students identified for deciding to attend their current university, three reasons stand out as being the most important: *specific career-related programs* (23%), *the quality of academic programs* (18%), and *wanting to live close to home* (16%). These results seem to indicate that academic programming tends to outweigh personal and other reasons when selecting universities.

When selecting a university, about 70% report applying to more than one university, and 8% applied to a college as well. Although many students applied to more than one institution, 78% say the university they are attending was their first choice.

Overall, 45% of students say they received direct contact from their university before they graduated from high school or CEGEP, most of whom received such contact in Grade 12. When it comes to the types of contact that are most influential in students' decisions about which university to attend, two stand out as the most important: *campus visit or open house* (22%) and *word of mouth* (15%), followed closely by the *university's website* (12%). These results are positive for institutions, as they have the ability to control two of the three major influencers on students' decisions.

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## Experience prior to class

Prior to attending classes in the 2012–13 school year, students report the following experiences:

- ▶ More than 9 in 10 report being at least somewhat satisfied with their university's handling of their application for admission, including 63% who are very satisfied.
- ▶ About 45% of students report receiving assistance from their university with program or course selection prior to registering. Among those who received such assistance, more than 9 in 10 report being at least somewhat satisfied, including 53% who are very satisfied.
- ▶ Most students (91%) register online, although many register in person (23%), by mail (16%), or by phone (15%). Regardless of the method used, more than 8 in 10 students are satisfied with each method of registering.
- ▶ More than 9 in 10 students say they are satisfied with being able to get into all of the courses they wanted to, including 49% who say they are very satisfied.
- ▶ About 65% of students participated in orientation, with younger students being much more likely to have participated than older ones. The vast majority of students who attended orientations report being satisfied with various aspects of the session, most often *making them feel welcome to the university* (92%), and are least satisfied with how it *built their confidence* (76%).

## University experience

Students rated their success adjusting to 16 aspects of university life, which were grouped into the following categories:

- ▶ **Academic demands.** Students find the most success adjusting to *understanding content and information presented in courses* (51% very much success) and the least success *getting academic advice* (28%).
- ▶ **Personal.** Students find the most success *organizing their time to complete academic work* (36% very much success) and the least success *becoming involved in campus activities* (20%).
- ▶ **Practical.** Students have the most success *finding their way around the campus* (74% very much success). Conversely, they report the least success *finding useful information and resources on careers and occupations* (25%).

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

- ▶ **Academic facilities and services.** Students are satisfied with most of the aspects that fall under academic facilities and services, but are most likely to be very satisfied with the *average size of their classes* (48% very satisfied). Students are least satisfied with their *university's commitment to environmental sustainability*, which includes 36% who are very satisfied.
- ▶ **General facilities and services.** Among those who provided a rating of the service, students are most satisfied with *athletic facilities* (48% very satisfied). On the other end, students are least satisfied with *parking facilities* (20%) and *food services* (27%), which has been the case in all CUSC surveys of first-year students.
- ▶ **Special services.** Special services tend to be used by small proportions of students, and those who use them they report very high levels of satisfaction (86% to 90% report being satisfied with each special service).
- ▶ **Information technology services.** Satisfaction with information technology services is quite high, with about 9 in 10 satisfied with *university email* (50% very satisfied), *computer support services* (46%), and *online course management systems* (41%). The exception appears to be *on-campus Wi-Fi*, which fewer than 8 in 10 are satisfied with, including 39% very satisfied.
- ▶ **Faculty.** Most students report having had positive experiences with university faculty, most often that *most of their professors are reasonably accessible outside of class to help students* (30% strongly agree). At the lower end, about 8 in 10 agree that *most of their professors encourage students to participate in class discussions* (26% strongly agree) or *professors treat students as individuals, not just numbers* (26% strongly agree).

Given students' satisfaction with many aspects of their university experiences, it is not surprising that more than 9 students in 10 agree that they are satisfied with their decision to attend their university, including about 44% who strongly agree. For most, their experience at their university has *met* (63%) or *exceeded* (24%) their expectations, with few reporting that their experiences *fell short* (13%).

Although most are satisfied with their experiences, slightly fewer (87%) plan to return to their university for the following academic year. However, almost all of those who do not indicate that they plan to return (10%) are undecided, with just a few (3%) having decided not to return.