

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the 18<sup>th</sup> cooperative study undertaken by the Canadian University Survey Consortium (CUSC). Since 1996, the survey has run in a three-year cycle, with different student populations targeted each year. This year's study presents the results for graduating students, the last of which was conducted in 2009.

The current survey includes 37 participating universities and responses from over 15,000 students across Canada.

### Profile of graduating students

Examining the profile of students participating in the survey shows the following:

- ▶ The majority of graduating students are female, 22 and younger, single, and living independently. Academically, the majority are attending full-time, are in a program that takes four or more years to complete, and are graduating with an average grade of B+ or higher. Although students' programs typically take about four years, they have been studying for slightly longer (about one year), which is likely due to the fact that many students are studying part-time and have had to interrupt or delay their studies.
- ▶ Students represent a variety of disciplines, with about 2 in 5 in generalist (i.e., Social Science or Arts and Humanities) or professional (i.e., Business, Professional, Engineering, or Education) programs. About 1 in 5 students are in a science program (i.e., Biological or Physical sciences).
- ▶ About 16% of students are first-generation students; that is, neither their mother nor their father had any post-secondary education. Older students are more likely to be first-generation students.

### Experiences at university

Among 16 activities tested, several stand out as contributing most to students' growth and development. Most notably, *practicums, internships, co-ops, and work experiences related to their program* tend to contribute the most, with *classroom instruction* following slightly behind. *Online instruction* and *recommended readings* are viewed by students as contributing least to their growth and to development of the aspects tested.

### Extracurricular activities

Among 17 extracurricular activities tested to show the impact they had on students' growth and development, students are most likely to say that *participating in international study or exchanges* had the most impact on their growth and development. However, just 11% of students had experience with this aspect. *Interacting with other students* is the second highest rated aspect contributing to students' development (among the 17), and 97% have experience with it. The aspect that students think contributed the least was *attending home games of university athletic teams*.

## Use of and satisfaction with facilities and services

Among 19 different facilities and services at their universities, the vast majority of students are satisfied, as between 78% and 90% are satisfied with each. At the high end of this range is satisfaction with *library facilities* and *computer support services*.

## Skill growth and development

Students rated their universities' contribution to their development in 33 specific skills. These skills were further segmented into academic, communication, analytical and learning, working and knowledge, and personal and relationship skills.

- ▶ **Academic skills.** Among academic skills, only universities' contribution to *broad knowledge of my major field of study* (76%) has more than half of students who say their university contributed much or very much to their development. The fewest students rate universities as contributing much or very much to *mathematical skills* (28%) among the academic skills tested.
- ▶ **Communication skills.** Among four communication skills tested, students are most likely to say that the university contributed much or very much to their *written communication* (66%) skills. They are least likely rate their universities' contribution to *second or third language skills* (17%) as much or very much.
- ▶ **Analytical and learning skills.** Among seven analytical and learning skills, students are most likely to rate their university as contributing much or very much to their ability to *think logically and analytically* (71%). Students are least likely to say that their university contributed much or very much to *identifying and solving problems* (52%).
- ▶ **Working and knowledge skills.** Students are much more likely to rate positively their universities' contribution to *working independently* (73%), which is much higher than the other working and knowledge skills. Students are least likely to say their universities contributed much or very much to their *entrepreneurial skills* (18%).
- ▶ **Personal and relationship skills.** Among the nine areas classified as personal and relationship skills, *persistence with difficult tasks* (58%) and *time management skills* (56%) receiving the highest ratings. Students are least likely to say their universities contributed much or very much to their *spiritual development* (16%).

Among the 33 areas, students were asked to rate twenty of them in order to identify the three most important areas for a student's development. When compared to how universities are doing with students' development, *broad knowledge of their major field of study* was the area students thought universities contributed most to, and it was the second highest rated in terms of importance. Conversely, *appreciation of the arts* and *spiritual development* were areas students thought universities contributed least to, and students also rate them as less important factors for universities to concentrate on.

## Student satisfaction

Examining aspects of students' satisfaction show the following key results:

- ▶ Students are very positive about their interactions with faculty. The only exception is satisfaction that *most of their professors were knowledgeable of career opportunities in their field*, as 64% are satisfied (compared to 72% to 96% who are satisfied with other areas).
- ▶ Many students appear to be less satisfied with their university in terms of the concern shown by the institution for students as individuals. Fewer than 6 in 10 report being satisfied — including just 8% who are very satisfied — with the *concern their university showed for them as individuals*.
- ▶ Students are also positive about their education, as almost 9 students in 10 agree that *generally, they are satisfied with the quality of teaching they have received*, are satisfied *overall quality of education they received*, and are satisfied with *their decision to attend their university*.
- ▶ Although students are very positive about their educational experiences, about 2 students in 3 agree that they received *good value for their money*, while about 1 in 3 students disagree.

## Education financing and debt

Overall, about 6 in 10 students report having some debt from financing their education, with the typical student reporting \$14,453 in debt with 62% of this being accounted for by government student loans. When adjusted for inflation, students' total debt in 2000 was a reported \$14,547, which is on par with debt reported by students in 2012.

Among 11 sources students may use to finance their education, the most commonly used sources of funding are parents or other family members (59%) and personal savings (50%). On average, students required \$11,306 to finance their current year. Compared to 2003, the average amount students required to finance their education was substantially lower in 2012, when adjusted for inflation. In 2003, students needed about \$12,972 to finance their current year of university studies, which is about 15% higher than the amount students required in 2012.

Among the 6 in 10 students who are currently employed, students spend about 18 hours a week working on average. Students' work appears to have some negative impact on their academic performance, as about 3 in 10 say it does. Those who are most likely to have their academic performance negatively affected by their employment are those attending school full-time and working between 11 to 20 hours a week.

## Future education and employment

In their first year after graduating, about half plan on continuing their education. Students' decisions about whether to take further education after graduating are somewhat influenced by debt they have incurred, as 60% say their debt load has an impact on their decision about whether or not to take further education.

Just over 1 in 3 students have a job arranged once they graduate. These students report the following:

- ▶ Most say their job is permanent, a continuation of previous employment, does not require a degree, and is related to the knowledge and skills they acquired in their program.
- ▶ Over 8 in 10 are satisfied with the job they have secured.
- ▶ The average annual income students will receive is estimated to be \$33,567. Compared to previous years, the average reported annual salary is much lower. In fact, the reported salary is 17% lower than 2009, when students reported an average salary of \$39,226 (in 2012 dollars).

Slightly fewer than 6 students in 10 believe that there are at least some jobs available in their field of study, while 4 students in 10 think there are few jobs in their field of study. Students' perceptions of the job market have grown more negative over time. In 2000, 23% thought there were few or very few jobs available in their field of study compared to 38% in 2012.

Although students are more pessimistic about employment in their field of study, it does not appear to translate into students being proactive in preparing for employment. Among nine steps tested to determine how students are preparing for employment, only *creating a resume or CV* (81%) is reported by more than 2 in 3 students.