

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the 17<sup>th</sup> cooperative study undertaken by the *Canadian University Survey Consortium / Consortium canadien de recherche sur les étudiants universitaires* (CUSC/CCREU). Since 1996, the survey has run in a three-year cycle, with different student populations targeted each year: all undergraduates, first-year undergraduates, or graduating students. This year's study focuses on all undergraduate students and compares results to previous surveys conducted in 2008, 2005, and 2002.

The 2011 survey involved 25 universities and over 8,500 students, yielding a response rate of 35%.

### Personal profile of undergraduate students

In 2011, the typical undergraduate student is a 22-year-old, single, English-speaking female. In the study, female students outnumber males by about 2 to 1. About 1 in 10 students have children, 9 in 10 are Canadian citizens, 1 in 4 self-identify as a member of a visible minority, and 1 in 20 self-identify as Aboriginal.

Students are generally split between living with parents, guardians, or relatives, or living in rented accommodations (either on or off-campus). Where they live has some impact on their commute to campus, although, on average, students take about 25 minutes to get to campus. Many choose to take a vehicle to campus, either alone (34%) or in a car pool (11%), while some use public transportation (26%) or are close enough to walk (22%).

Just over 4 in 10 students report that at least one parent has completed some type of post-secondary education, while about 1 in 6 would be considered a first-generation student (that is, neither parent has taken any post-secondary education or training).

### Academic profile

Students are studying in a variety of disciplines, most commonly Arts and Humanities (19%), Business (16%), and Social Science (16%). About 9 in 10 students are studying full-time in English, with an average grade just below a B+. About 6 in 10 plan on completing post-secondary education beyond a bachelor's degree.

On average, students started their post-secondary studies almost four years ago, but started at their current institution about three years ago. This suggests that some students have studied elsewhere before coming to their current university. In addition, about 1 in 4 say they have interrupted their post-secondary education at some point.

Students spend approximately 32 hours per week on academics, evenly split between time spent in class (about 15 hours) and outside class (about 17 hours).

In their current year, more than 6 in 10 students have experience with more than one type of instruction. Most commonly, they have *classroom instruction with online supports* (81%) followed by *strictly classroom-based instruction* (62%), and *classroom and online instruction* (18%) or *online only* (18%). More than 8 in 10 are satisfied with each type of instruction, although 2 in 3 say *classroom instruction with online supports* is their preferred choice. It

appears that many universities over rely on *strictly classroom-based instruction*, as over 6 in 10 had experience with this type of instruction, but just 12% say it is their preferred choice.

### Preparing for a career

About 6 in 10 students have decided on a specific career field, which does not change much as students progress in their studies. What does change are students' perceptions of the availability of jobs in their chosen field. About 3 in 10 think there are many jobs available, but this decreases from 33% of first-year students to 22% by the time students reach their fourth year or more.

About 9 in 10 students report taking at least a step toward preparing for employment, most commonly having *created a resumé or CV* (58%) or *talked with a professor about employment or a career* (54%). Of the steps taken, they are least likely to *have a career mentor* (18%) or *created an e-portfolio* (11%). As students progress in their studies they are more likely to have taken many of these steps.

### Work and financing education

Almost 6 in 10 students are currently employed, working about 18 hours per week on average. However, for many, employment does not always have a negative impact on their academic performance. About 3 in 10 of those employed say their employment has had a positive impact on their performance, and is much higher among those who report working on campus. About 1 in 3 say their employment has had a negative impact, especially for those going to school full-time and working more than 20 hours per week. When academic work and employment are combined, the average student spends about 41 hours per week working or studying.

Almost 6 in 10 students report having at least some debt resulting from their university education with the most common source being government student loans (38%). On average, students with debt owe just over \$17,000, although 1 in 5 report owing more than \$20,000. As one would expect, as students progress in their studies, their debt level increases.

Of the twelve funding sources identified, on average, students use three to fund their current year of studies. The most common sources are *parents, family, or spouse* (58%), *earnings from summer work* (49%), and *personal savings* (48%). Students say they require just under \$12,000 a year in funding, although the sources that contribute most are not usually the ones students rely on most often. For example, *government student loans* (about \$7,700 a year) and *loans from financial institutions* (about \$6,600) provide the most to students, on average, whereas *personal savings* accounts for about \$2,600 per year.

About 3 in 4 report having a credit card, and almost 8 in 10 of those with at least one card report that they pay off their balance each month. Among those carrying a balance, students owe about \$3,700 on average.

About 3 in 4 students are concerned about having enough funds to complete their university education, including 26% who are very concerned. We find that the more sources students rely on for their education, the more concern they have about funding.

## Perceptions of university

In general, students tend to have a positive impression of most aspects of their university.

- ▶ About 4 students in 5 report being satisfied with the process of registering for courses, including 30% who are very satisfied.
- ▶ Slightly more than 7 students in 10 are satisfied with the availability of courses required for their program, including 21% who are very satisfied.
- ▶ Almost 9 students in 10 report being satisfied with their personal safety on campus, including 46% who are very satisfied.
- ▶ Between 7 and 9 in 10 students are satisfied with academic facilities and services, although less than half report being very satisfied with each. Student are most satisfied with the *average size of their class* (90% satisfied) and least satisfied with *study space* (72%).
- ▶ Of concern is that about half feel *they get the run around at their university*, although only 10% strongly agree. Conversely, the other half disagree, including 7% who strongly disagree.
- ▶ Among various other facilities and services tested, students think the areas that need the most improvement are *parking facilities* (39%) and *food services* (35%). Among more academic-related facilities and services, students think improvements are needed for *academic advising* (22%) and *library facilities* (22%).
- ▶ Among other areas in the university, students think *university spending on financial aid* (38%) needs the most improvement, followed by *work-study opportunities* (31%), *emphasis on teaching excellence* (28%), *work opportunities on campus* (27%), and *sense of community among students* (27%).

## Perceptions of faculty

Generally, students have very positive impressions of faculty, especially when it comes to areas related to academics. More than 9 students in 10 agree that they are satisfied with the quality of teaching they have received, including 31% who strongly agree.

- ▶ Students are most positive about *most of their professors are reasonably accessible outside of class to help students* (93% agree), *most of their professors encourage students to participate in class discussions* (92% agree), and *professors show sensitivity to racial issues* (92% agree).
- ▶ Students are least likely to agree with statements related to professors' personal interactions with students, *some professors have taken a personal interest in their academic progress* (67% agree) and *they feel free to turn to some of their professors for advice on personal matters* (59% agree).

## University experience

In general, the vast majority of students are not heavily involved in on-campus activities. Many students attend events occasionally, but no more than 23% of students report attending any of the seven activities tested often or very often.

Many students are often involved in community service or volunteer activities either on or off-campus. Over half say they spend some hours in a typical week involved in such activities, including 23% who say they do so often or very often. However, among those who take part in volunteer activities at least occasionally, on average, students devote about four hours a week to volunteering.

We asked students to rate their university's contribution to their development in 24 different areas.

- ▶ The highest proportion of students say their university contributed much or very much to their development of *thinking logically and analytically, identifying and solving problems, accessing information written, communication skills, and working independently*. In each case, about 6 in 10 say their university contributed much or very much to their development in these areas.
- ▶ Universities receive the lowest proportions for contributing to students' development of *second or third language skills* and *spiritual development*. In each case, about 2 in 10 say their university contributed much or very much to their development in these areas.

## Overall satisfaction

Overall, students are generally satisfied with their experience at university. In particular:

- ▶ More than 9 students in 10 agree that they are *satisfied with their decision to attend their university*, including 43% who strongly agree.
- ▶ Over 9 students in 10 are at least satisfied with *the overall quality of the education they have received at their university*. This includes 33% who are very satisfied.
- ▶ About 8 students in 10 agree that *they feel as if they are part of the university*, including 27% who strongly agree.
- ▶ About 3 students in 4 are satisfied or very satisfied with the *concern shown by the university for them as individuals*, including 26% who are very satisfied.

These high levels of satisfaction led 87% of non-graduating students to say they plan on *returning to their university to continue their studies in the next year and completing their degree at their university*. Among those who do not plan on completing their degree, for most, it does not mean they plan on dropping out of university, rather, the vast majority plan on transferring to another university.