

Province-wide Student Survey: Canadian University Survey Consortium Collaboration Group 2025

Institutional Researchers and Registrars Detailed Information Package

October 27, 2024

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1. Introduction

Advanced Education has identified significant information gaps related to the student experience, including the experiences of those students who begin a credential program but never complete a parchment, that have limited the development of evidence-based policy and the ability to monitor and evaluate new initiatives. Although many post-secondary institutions currently conduct their own student surveys, the survey design, timing of survey fielding, and questions in use are not aligned, so they cannot be used to produce a system-level picture of the student experience in Alberta.

After review and engagement with post-secondary representatives it was determined the best solution to meet these information needs is to work with Canadian University Survey Consortium (CUSC) to conduct a province-wide survey of Alberta students. Other surveys in widespread use across the system, such as the National Survey of Student Engagement, are not suitable for this purpose because of the difficulties of negotiating a data sharing agreement with the organization or other restrictions. The CUSC Board is supportive of the project and has been willing to make some adjustments to their surveys to meet the identified information needs.

a) New Cohort Analyses Using the Survey Data

An additional goal of this project is to use the data to provide insight into student pathways within the Alberta post-secondary system. Although administrative (enrolment) data can be used now to identify student pathways including completion rates, administrative data contains very little information about the experiences, characteristics and behaviours of the students (i.e. the demographic fields are limited to sex, age, immigration status and Indigenous status). If Alberta Student Numbers are added to the survey data, then, for example, survey responses could be linked to student administrative data allowing us to answer questions such as: (a) Do persistence rates correlate with access to financial resources, number of hours worked while studying, parents' educational background, or experience making the transition to university? (b) What are the characteristics of non-persisters? (c) What are the characteristics of students most likely to graduate 'on time' (e.g. in 4 years for a 4 year degree)?

This work could complement the analyses of persistence and completion correlates being done within institutional research offices and within Advanced Education by providing additional information about students who move between institutions. Potentially, working with the department of Education, we could also link to K-12 administrative data and investigate other questions in future that would relate to high school to post-secondary transition patterns.

Other ideas and research questions related to the rich dataset that this collaboration will provide are welcome.

2. How CUSC Works

CUSC is a not-for-profit corporation that supports the annual collection, management, analysis and dissemination of survey data. As a consortium arrangement, institutions join CUSC (as members or non-members) and, if members, sign a data sharing agreement in order to participate in surveys. CUSC has a contract with Prairie Research Associates (PRA) who will be managing the survey fielding process, emailing the invitation and reminders to your students, collecting the data, and generating data files and institutional reports. If you have questions or concerns about the survey procedures and timelines, please contact Linda Kupp, CUSC Projects Coordinator, at admin@cusc-ccre.ca.

The Province's only direct relationship with CUSC is to provide a grant to cover the costs of the Collaboration Group and determining the additional questions for the Alberta institutions. In terms of the data itself, the data sharing agreements are between the Province and the institutions, not between the Province and CUSC. For questions about the Province's role, data sharing agreements, and the additional questions for the Collaboration group, please contact Krishna Modupalli, Director of Foresight, Analytics and Research, Advanced Education, at krishna.modupalli@gov.ab.ca or at 587 590 0496.

3. The Collaboration Group

As per the CUSC procedures, a group of institutions which all ask the same additional questions form a Collaboration Group. A Collaboration Group allows for the addition of questions of common interest to the survey. In this case, the Collaboration Group is 'Alberta'.

The Alberta Collaboration Group will include institutions who are participating as non-members, and therefore do not sign CUSC's data licensing and membership agreement. This affects what data can be shared and received within the Collaboration Group. Following the standard CUSC procedures, member institutions within the Collaboration Group can receive the dataset for all of the member institutions within the group, but non-members' data would not be included and non-members cannot receive the Collaboration Group dataset. Consequently, the Province will act as a repository for the full Collaboration Group dataset, including non-member data, and will look at ways to share this information with the participating institutions.

4. Survey Questions

The survey instruments for the First Year, Middle Year and Graduating Year surveys are on CUSC's website, at the end of each of the [Master Reports](#). In 2025, the First Year survey will be used.

The underlying CUSC survey has had changes to questions on ethnicity, and additions of questions on gender identity and sexual orientation. There have been no changes to the changed and added questions for the Alberta Collaboration, with the exception of

There were no changes to the Alberta questions for the first-year students survey compared to the previous version (2022). See Appendix A for the embedded survey instrument.

5. Registrations Process

You can register online for the CUSC survey on their website. Registrants need to choose whether they are participating as members or non-members (see section 8 on Participation of Degree-Granting Universities vs. Other Institutions). If your institution chooses to participate as a member, you will be asked if the membership has already been paid or whether it is still to be invoiced – Alberta institutions should select that it has already been paid.

If you are making changes outside of the Collaboration group (additional questions just for your institution, omitted questions for non-member participants, portal links, customized invitation/reminder emails, custom or additional or printed reports), then you should answer the “when would you like to be billed” question with when you would like to be invoiced for these additional items. If you have no changes from the collaboration, then you must still provide an answer to the question of when to be billed, but the answer will not be used in by CUSC.

6. Sample Definition

Similar to last year, the sampling plan is to do a census of first year students who fit the CUSC Standard Sample definition or the Special Sample definition for the Collaboration Group.

Institutions will again need to create a crosswalk table that will allow you to add the Alberta Student Number (ASN) to the survey response file later in the process. So, institutions will need to provide CUSC’s survey contractor, Prairie Research Associates (PRA), with a dummy ID (not the student’s Alberta Student Number), and when the results of the survey are received from PRA, the institution will use the cross-walk of the dummy ID to the ASN and then send the survey response file to Advanced Education including the ASN. This will ensure that ASNs are not being sent to PRA and protect student privacy.

The CUSC Standard Sample is defined in their Procedures manual, as follows:

The standard sample for 2025 is restricted to first year undergraduate Bachelor students. To ensure that the standard samples from all institutions consist of similar students, please:

- *include only students who are enrolled in Winter 2025 AND were also enrolled in Fall 2024; students must only have recent post-secondary experience within the current academic year either at the same institution or at another institution;*
- *include only first year undergraduate students who graduated from high school or CEGEP within the last two years (i.e. only “immediate direct-entry” students from high school or CEGEP);*
- *include only students enrolled in first-entry (first-level) 3-year or 4-year or 5-year Bachelor’s programs (programs that students can enter directly from high school or CEGEP);*
- *include part-time and full-time students, students from in-province and out-of-province, Canadian and international students, and distance students as well as on-campus students;*

- **exclude** middle years, graduating, independent, special, Undeclared, Certificate, Diploma, and Continuing Education students.

It may not be possible to gauge first year students with 100 percent accuracy, but make your best estimate based on available information. At some institutions, first year is based on the number of credits completed.

The master Excel data file and master SPSS data file will contain responses only from students who were in standard samples and were at a CUSC-CCREU member institution. PRA will use only the responses from the standard samples in institution reports and the master report (see section 12. Reports).

CUSC-CCREU recommends that you keep a copy of your sample file. After September 30, 2025 PRA will destroy all records of student information (e.g. sample files). PRA will notify each institution, and copy the CUSC-CCREU Board, that their students' information has been destroyed.

Sample weighting

The Registration asks for the total number of students in Winter 2025 semester who fit the definition of the standard sample. If you're not sure of the actual number, provide an estimated number. When you have the final number, please email it to PRA borodenko@pra.ca. This information will be used to calculate weights for responses that will be provided in the data files and applied in analyses of the survey data.

Students who fit the definition of the CUSC Standard Sample above should be included in the Standard Sample.

For many institutions participating as non-members, who mainly have certificate and diploma students, most or all of your sample will be in the Special Sample. Students who do not fit the CUSC Standard Sample, but who fit the following definition for the Special Sample, should be included and marked as being in the Special Sample:

Include diploma or certificate students who meet the following definition in the Special Sample:

- *Either full-time or part-time students enrolled in a certificate program, including all day-time, evening and distance education students*
- *Either full-time or part-time students enrolled in the first year of a diploma program, including all day-time, evening and distance education students. Include any students in the first year of a collaborative program that is a diploma program, provided that they are in attendance at your institution at the time of the survey fielding.*

Include University Transfer (UT) students who meet the following definition in the Special Sample:

- *Either full-time or part-time students enrolled in the first year of a University Transfer program, including all day-time, evening and distance education students. Only include them in your special sample if they are attending at your institution at the time of the survey fielding (i.e. for UT students in their first year of studies who are attending at MacEwan, MacEwan should include those students in their Special Sample. UT students in their first year of studies at an institution and who are attending at that institution should be included in*

their sample).

Include students enrolled in a Bachelor's program who meet the following definition in the Special Sample:

- *2024 winter entry bachelors and applied bachelors students who are still attending in 2025 winter and are still in their first year of study, including all full-time, part-time, evening and distance education students (bachelors and applied bachelors students who were enrolled in fall 2024 and are still attending in 2025 winter should be in the standard sample)*
- *Bachelors students who are new to your institution, even if they have transfer credit and even if they have prior enrolments/registrations in continuing education programs/courses, academic upgrading programs/courses and or/open studies programs/courses. (New = have NOT BEEN enrolled, within the last 3 years, in a certificate, diploma, applied degree and/or bachelor program at your institution).*

The following groups of students should not be included in the samples.

Exclude all students from both the standard and special sample, regardless of their current credential type enrollment, who:

- Are in a single semester program.

Exclude all students from both the standard and special sample who:

- Are enrolled in non-credential programming, or in an apprenticeship, Masters or PhD program.

7. Adaptations of the Surveys for Different Credential Types and Institutions

The CUSC surveys were initially developed for students in bachelor's degree programs. However, the department has been working with CUSC to make some modifications to the survey instruments to make it feasible to use them for other undergraduate credentials.

Note that students in Masters and PhD programs are not included in the survey due to the differences in the nature of the programming. In addition, students in non-credential programs are not in scope.

Apprentices are also out of scope due to differences in the nature of the programming. Students at First Nations Colleges and Private Career Colleges are also out of scope at this time.

8. Participation of Degree Granting Universities vs. Other Institutions

Any Canadian university with degree granting authority may apply to become a member of CUSC by paying the annual membership fee, and signing and abiding by the Corporation's Data Licensing and Membership Agreement. Membership applications are reviewed and approved by the CUSC Board of Directors. The term of membership is annual from the first (1st) day of September and ends at the adjournment of the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of members in the subsequent year (about 14 months later).

The following Alberta institutions are eligible to become members at present:

- University of Alberta
- University of Calgary
- University of Lethbridge
- Athabasca University
- Concordia University of Edmonton
- The King’s University
- Burman University
- Ambrose University
- St. Mary’s University (Calgary)
- MacEwan University
- Mount Royal University
- Alberta University of the Arts

Other post-secondary institutions need to participate in the CUSC surveys as non-members. Non-member institutions are not required to sign the Data Licensing and Membership Agreement since they do not receive the master data file. (Non-member institutions receive response data files of responses only from their students. Their students’ responses will be excluded from master data files and master reports. See the section entitled [What Institutions will receive](#) for more details.)

Although the national master data file will exclude these institutions, the Collaboration Group and Collaboration Group reports will include both member and non-member institutions in Alberta.

The CUSC 2025 [Procedures Manual](#) will be available soon with more details on member and non-member participation.

9. Responsibilities and Timelines

Details of the CUSC procedures for 2025 will be available soon on the CUSC website in the CUSC 2025 [Procedures Manual](#). If you have questions or concerns specifically about the survey procedures and timelines, please contact Nicholas Borodenko at Prairie Research Associates in Winnipeg by email (borodenko@pra.ca), phone 204-594-2080 or toll-free 1-888-877-6744.

The schedule below is based on the 2025 CUSC guidelines.

Responsibility	Activity	Deadline
Institution	I.1 Begin research ethics review (if necessary at your institution)	As soon as possible
Institution	I.2a Current and former CUSC members: review your institution’s Data Licensing & Membership Agreement (DL&MA) as a reminder of your duties and responsibilities	By Friday, December 13, 2024

Institution	I.2b New CUSC members: complete Data Licensing & Membership Agreement (DL&MA) (see Appendix. Data Licensing & Membership Agreement); send	By Friday, May 31, 2025
Institution	I.3 Complete the online Registration at www.cusc-ccreu.ca "Taking Part"	By Friday, December 13, 2024
Institution	I.4 Non-members only: If chosen, send the list of CUSC-CCREU standard survey questions that your institution chooses to omit to PRA borodenko@pra.ca	At least four weeks prior to the start of your institution's survey
Institution	I.5 If your institution chooses to ask additional questions, send them for review and approval to admin@cusc-ccreu.ca	At least four weeks prior to the start of your institution's survey
Institution	I.6 If chosen, set up your collaboration group and send additional survey questions for review and approval to admin@cusc-ccreu.ca	At least four weeks prior to the earliest start date of all institutions in the collaboration
Institution	I.7 If your institution requires one, provide PRA borodenko@pra.ca with a confidentiality agreement to sign (see Appendix. Confidentiality Agreement with	At least two weeks prior to the start of your institution's survey
Institution	I.8 Provide PRA borodenko@pra.ca with invitation and reminder email messages	At least one week prior to the start of your institution's survey
Institution	I.9 Confirm white listing of IP addresses or steps taken to prevent your institution's email filters from blocking the invitation and reminders (see Institution email system and	At least one week prior to the start of your institution's survey
Institution	I.10 Send sample file to PRA borodenko@pra.ca after completing data quality checks (see Check sample file)	At least one week prior to the start of your institution's survey
Institution	I.11 Receive test email invitation and survey; test link and survey and check additional questions (if ordered); send confirmation or feedback to PRA	At least two business days prior to the start of your institution's survey
PRA	PRA.1 Send IP addresses for white listing to participating institutions (see Institution email system and white list)	By Thursday, January 2, 2025
PRA	PRA.2 Sign and return confidentiality agreement (if necessary)	At least one week prior to the start of the institution's survey
PRA	PRA.3 Send test email invitation to institution contact to test the survey link and check the survey questions	At least two business days prior to the start of the institution's survey
PRA	PRA.4 Send invitation email to students with a link to the survey	As early as Monday, January 6, 2025 and as late as Monday, March 24, 2025
PRA	PRA.5 Send website link to the institution to track daily responses	During Week 1
PRA	PRA.6 Send first reminder to non-respondents	Four to seven days after invitation email
PRA	PRA.7 Send second reminder to non-respondents	Eight to twelve days after invitation email

PRA	PRA.8 Send list of randomly drawn respondents' names and email addresses to the institution for distributing incentives (prizes)	By date requested by institution
	Survey closes	Sunday, April 6, 2025
PRA	PRA.9 Send list of participating institutions to each institution that ordered comparison reports	Monday, April 7, 2025
Institution	I.12 Choose institutions for comparison reports (if ordered); send list of at least 4 institutions to PRA borodenko@pra.ca	Tuesday, April 22, 2025
Institution	I.13 Payment due to CUSC-CCREU for membership (if chosen), survey results package and options ordered	Within 90 days of invoice date, and before end of June 2025
PRA	PRA.10 Clean and analyze data; write reports	By end of June 2025
PRA	PRA.11 Send notice to institutions that have paid that their survey results packages and options ordered are available on the FTP site	Early July 2025
PRA	PRA.12 Webinar with presentation of overall national survey results	Late August 2025
PRA	PRA.13 Delete all institutions' sample files	September 30, 2025
Province	Additional Collaboration Group analysis completed and shared with institutions	2025 - ongoing

10. Survey Fielding Period

The earliest the CUSC survey can be started is **Monday, January 6, 2025**; the latest the survey can be started is **Friday, March 24, 2025**. The survey closes for all institutions on **Sunday, April 6, 2025**. Within this fielding window, institutions have the flexibility to select dates that work for you and adjust to avoid overlap with other surveys.

11. Incentives

As for the past three years, The Province will again provide \$3,000 worth of prizes (six \$500 prizes) as response incentives. All Alberta student respondents will have an equal chance of being selected as a winner. Winners will be required to answer a skills-testing question. Prairie Research Associates (PRA), the contractor who is implementing the survey on behalf of CUSC) will randomly select the winners, notify them, purchase and distribute the prizes.

If your institution is planning to use other incentives, **in addition to those provided by the Province**, please indicate this on the Registration. The Collaboration Group's

incentives will be set up outside of the registration process.

12. Data Sharing Agreements with Advanced Education

Data sharing agreements, amended by all institutions, allow the Province to receive the data directly from PRA.

Institutions will still need to provide a crosswalk table with the Alberta Student Numbers of the survey respondents and the identifiers sent to PRA, and send that crosswalk table to the Province, so that it can be linked for analytical purposes.

Regarding the use of the data, The Province will serve as a repository for the Collaboration Group data, and as such will share tabulations and information products using the data with the Collaboration Group members.

13. What Institutions Will Receive

Member institutions will receive the master dataset under the CUSC data license terms. Only members that participate in the survey will receive master data files containing responses to closed-ended survey items from all participating member universities, the master report, data files of all responses from their students, their university's report, and any optional data and reports that they ordered (the costs for the optional data and reports are not covered by the Province).

Non-members will not receive master dataset, but will receive data files of all responses from their students and institutional reports.

14. Which Costs Are Covered

The Province will be covering the costs of:

- membership costs (or participation costs for non-member institutions),
- the administration of the online survey to cover the maximum sample size available based on the estimated number of first year students at your institutions, including distribution of the invitation email and four reminder emails (two more than the CUSC standard),
- and the survey results packages.

If your institution is already a member of CUSC and receives an invoice for membership fees, note that these invoices will be covered by Province. You can respond that it will be covered as part of the arrangements for the Alberta Collaboration Group.

The Province will cover the costs of a survey results package for member institutions that includes:

- data files of all responses from the students of that institution,
- an institutional long report on their results,
- master data files containing responses to closed-ended survey items from all participating member universities in a master Excel data file and master SPSS data file,
- banner tables in SPSS and html that compare results by institution group and by

- each participating university, and
- the master report for all participating member institutions.

The Province will also cover the costs of a survey results package for non-members that includes:

- data files of all responses from their students, and
- an institutional long report on their results.

The Province will continue to cover the costs of the additional questions for the Collaboration Group, and response incentives for the Collaboration Group. All of the reports referenced above are electronic copies only. Additional reports specific to the Collaboration Group will be prepared and disseminated by the department at no cost to institutions.

Some institutions may wish to order additional reports from the contractor working with CUSC. This is at your discretion - the costs of any additional reports desired by the institution are not being covered by the Province. The Province is also not paying for additional questions that an institution might want to add on its own. The Province is paying for electronic copies of reports only; institutions may purchase paper copies of reports if they wish, but these costs are not covered by the Province.

15. How Costs Will be Covered

The Province will issue a grant directly to CUSC to cover the costs of the survey, within the parameters described above, for Alberta post-secondary institutions. Institutions will only have to pay CUSC directly for the costs of any additional questions you wish to add to the survey, if you are ordering custom reports, paying for additional incentives for your institution, or ordering paper copies of reports.

16. Any Other Questions

If you have other questions regarding the Collaboration Group not covered in this document, please feel free to contact Krishna Modupalli at (587) 590-0496 or krishna.modupalli@gov.ab.ca.

Appendix A: Embedded Survey Instrument (double click to open)



2025 Survey of First Year Students

updated November 18, 2024

This survey is being completed by first-year students at approximately 30 Canadian universities. We want to learn more about our new students to help them make a successful transition to university.

If you cannot finish the survey in one sitting, you can close it and return to it using the link in the email we sent you. You will be returned to the page you were on when you closed. All of your responses are confidential.

shading	description
No shading	Question only in the First Year survey
	Question in all 3 surveys
	Question in the First Year Survey and the Middle Years Survey

Motivation

How important were each of the following possible reasons in your decision to go to university?

		Not important	Somewhat important	Important	Very important
motiv1	To prepare for a specific job or career	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
motiv2	To satisfy my intellectual curiosity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
motiv3	To earn more money than if I didn't go	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
motiv4	To get a broad education	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
motiv5	I am more likely to get a job with a degree	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
motiv6	The satisfaction of doing challenging academic work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
motiv7	To apply what I will learn to make a positive difference in society or my community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
motiv8	I didn't have anything better to do	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
motiv9	To get a more fulfilling job than I probably would if I didn't go	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
motiv10	To meet my family's expectations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
motiv11	Learning new things is exciting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
motiv12	Most of my friends are going	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
motiv13	To meet new people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
motiv14	The chance to participate in varsity athletics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
motiv15	To explore whether university is right for me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
motiv16	Other reason (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
motivtxt	_____				
motivtop	Which one was the most important to you? _____				