YOUR CITY SURVEY 2.0

INTRODUCTION

In 2011, the McMaster Students Union released its first Your City Survey, designed to gather feedback from students around their experiences within the broader McMaster and Hamilton community. This survey asked students about their perceptions of Hamilton, their challenges engaging with the City, and their beliefs around what makes a vibrant community for them to live. Upon receiving student responses to these questions, the MSU compiled the data into a report, detailing what McMaster students would like to see the MSU, McMaster, and City of Hamilton do to improve the surrounding community. This report can be located on the MSU website here: https://www.msumcmaster.ca/governance/bylaws-policies/msu-reports.

In 2015, the MSU decided to release a follow-up survey, the Your City Survey 2.0, to gather similar student feedback to compare the progress that has been made related to community engagement. This current survey was released to the McMaster student population, and garnered 484 student responses. The responses were notably more positive than those contained in the 2011 survey, and demonstrated that the perceptions students have of the City of Hamilton are gradually improving. In addition, there are still key areas of community engagement that can be improved to ensure the engagement and retention of McMaster students in the surrounding community.

It is worthwhile to mention in the context of this report that various community engagement initiatives continue to thrive in the wider Hamilton community. From the MSU specifically, services such as the Student Community Support Network (SCSN) and Creating Leadership Amongst Youth (CLAY) continue to work with Hamilton community members and residents on student initiatives. The MSU has also continued to lead Change Camp, a collaborative event between the City of Hamilton and three Hamilton post-secondary institutions, to develop feedback on the future of Hamilton’s development. McMaster University has also continued to make community engagement a strategic priority, chiefly through its Network for Community Campus Partnerships, which seeks to use research and collaboration to improve the integration of McMaster into the Hamilton community. Lastly, the City of Hamilton continues to work with the MSU and McMaster on various student retention, transit, and employment initiatives that are valuable to students.

This work is important to note in a report that delves into student views on their community and what they would like to see Hamilton work towards. The MSU is confident that these survey results will continue to illuminate the success our community is having in improving community engagement, while also showing areas of improvement that still remain.

For more information, or to reach out to learn more about these results or the MSU’s community engagement work, please visit www.msumcmaster.ca.

Sincerely,

Spencer Nestico-Semianiw
Vice-President (Education)

Saad Syed
External Affairs Commissioner

Alexia Olaizola
Community Engagement Coordinator
1. **On a scale of one to ten how much do you ‘value’ each of the following attributes in your ideal city? On a scale of One to Ten how well does Hamilton provide these attributes?**

<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A vibrant community where people are ‘out and about’ using public parks, trails and recreation areas, attending farmer’s markets and living in a healthy environment.</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>-46%</td>
<td>+1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A broad choice of places to work, professional job opportunities and an environment that is friendly to entrepreneurs.</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>-50%</td>
<td>+8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic local places to have dinner, meet for coffee, hear live music, or just hang out as well as the ability to attend art openings, theater, and cultural festivals.</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>-11%</td>
<td>+22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A community that offers life-long learning and values being ‘smart’.</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>-41%</td>
<td>+8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A community that’s easy to get around via public transit</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>-29%</td>
<td>+14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want a community where I can afford to live, work, and play.</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>-23%</td>
<td>+10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These questions were asked to gage the perception of students on Hamilton’s efforts as a city. Answers of 7+ were considered to be valued/perceived as highly desirable.

In all categories, there seems to have been improvement from the 2011 Your City Survey. The biggest improvement by far was in the “authentic local places to have dinner, meet for coffee…” category, with an increase of 22%. Though there was improvement in the “broad choice of places to work...” category, there is still a -50% difference in between what students would value in Hamilton and how well they perceive the city providing it. Similarly, the +8% improvement in the “…life long learning” category still leaves a -41% value-perception gap. The smallest improvement was in the “a vibrant community…” category, which maintains a large -46% value-perception difference. Overall, the improvement in opinion is promising, and we encourage the City of Hamilton to keep working to minimize the value-perception gaps in order to capitalize on areas that students see as high value and encourage graduate retention.
2. How did you come to form your opinion and perception of Hamilton?

This result is consistent with the 2011 results. Since many students base their perception of the city more from personal experience and from the experiences of friends, and less from the media, we encourage the City and the University to promote opportunities that are seen as valued (ie. see question 1) and that could contribute to the positive lived experience of students at McMaster.

3. Would you consider living in Hamilton or commuting to study or work after graduation?

Compared to the 2011 survey, there seems to have been a marked improvement in students’ attitudes regarding Hamilton as a viable option for their future. There is still a large percentage of students in the Maybe and No categories, so we encourage the city to continue working to increase graduate retention.
4. Do you feel that the city of Hamilton/McMaster University do a good job of providing and advertising opportunities for students to get involved in the city of Hamilton (such as co-ops, internships, volunteer placements, job shadows, etc)?

In both categories (McMaster and Hamilton) there has been some improvement, however based on this survey students still clearly believe that McMaster does a better job of advertising opportunities for students in Hamilton (>50% yes vs. >10% yes), and also that McMaster's efforts have improved more significantly in the past four years than the City of Hamilton. It remains worrying that a large amount of students believe that they have no basis to judge the city or the university’s efforts. We encourage the City of Hamilton and the university to continue looking for innovative ways to communicate opportunities to McMaster students.

5. Where do you want to find information and opportunities about living and working in Hamilton?

The most popular options for finding information are social media, shortly followed by in the student centre/on campus. We encourage those posting opportunities about living and working in Hamilton to focus on the media identified by students as popular.
6. On a scale of one to ten how aesthetically pleasing is the city of Hamilton?

In the 2015 survey results, we see a gradual shift of opinions, with more students ranking Hamilton as a 5-8 in aesthetics and fewer ranking it 1-4.

7. Before you graduate, which of the following would you like to experience in Hamilton?

* Note: “Live music venues” was not a 2011 category

Overall, based on the 2015 results, more students seem to be more interested in experiencing all Hamilton attractions. This likely indicates successful marketing of these attractions by the City or the university. We encourage the city and the university to continue promoting these experiences as a way to enhance the quality of student life in Hamilton.
8. What deters you from enhancing your cultural experience in the city?

The results from 2015 roughly parallel those we received in 2011. The two greatest deterrents are still marked as a lack of time and lack of awareness about opportunities. While it would be difficult to change university students’ busy schedules, the City should be actively working to remedy their lack of awareness regarding events and opportunities in Hamilton.

9. How important is the affordability of housing in your decision of what city you want to work in post-graduation?

As would be expected, students consider housing affordability very important in their decision of where they want to live and work after graduation. With house prices in Hamilton rising faster than any city in Canada¹, we encourage the City to monitor housing affordability given how important it could be to graduate retention. In addition, the fact that McMaster experiences a relatively high number of commuters, the fact that nearly half of all McMaster students rank housing affordability as important speaks to the impact this factor can have on student quality of life and their perceptions of the city.
HOUSING AND OFF-CAMPUS SAFETY QUESTIONS

10. What mode of transportation do you use to get to campus?

Because so many McMaster students live in student housing near or on-campus, it is not surprising that the majority of students who responded to this survey walk to campus. A significant amount of students also take the HSR. The low number of respondents who said they drive to campus may indicate a bias in the survey towards students who live near campus.

11. What rent do you currently pay for your student housing?

The majority of students who live in student housing around McMaster pay from $400-500 a month, with a few high outliers.
12. When renting a student house, what factors are most important to you?

According to this survey, the most important factors for students are location and price, closely followed by the landlord. Amenities, room size and bathrooms are also listed as important factors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amenities</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Room Size</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>441</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bathrooms</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landlord</td>
<td>377</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price</td>
<td>435</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13. Does your heating work reliably? Do you have air conditioning?

Though a majority of respondents reported that they have reliable heating, it is important to note that 13% of respondents do not have reliable heating through the winter months. In addition, it is also notable to observe the clear discrepancy in lack of air conditioning to lack of heating.
14. **What is the ratio of students to washrooms in your house?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ratio</th>
<th>1/8</th>
<th>1/7</th>
<th>1/6</th>
<th>1/5</th>
<th>1/4</th>
<th>2/7</th>
<th>1/3</th>
<th>3/8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% students with this ratio</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>59.7%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ratio</th>
<th>2/5</th>
<th>3/7</th>
<th>1/2</th>
<th>3/5</th>
<th>2/3</th>
<th>3/4</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% students with this ratio</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

59.7% of respondents have a 1:3 bathroom to student ratio, followed by 1:2 (19.7%), and 1:4 (13.6%). The ratios 1:8, 1:7, 1:6 and 1:5 are rather worrying and seem like they would lead to an unhygienic living situation except for in the best of cases.

![# Students per Bathroom to Student Ratio](chart.png)

15. **Is there a window in your bedroom?**

**Is there a window in your bedroom**

- yes: 97%
- no: 3%
It is a legal requirement that all bedrooms have windows, and so the fact that 11 respondents answered “no” to this question is a demonstration of the lack of bylaw enforcement that remains in student neighborhoods.

16. **How quickly does your landlord respond to your concerns?**

![Landlord Response Time Pie Chart]

It is a positive sign that the majority of landlords respond within a day or else within a few days. However, the 9 percent that take two weeks or more to respond, and even the 16% that take a full week to respond point to irresponsible landlords.

17. **How many people do you live with?**

![How Many People Do You Live With Bar Chart]

The majority of respondents live with 5 others, closely followed by 6 housemates. 3, 4 and 7 housemates were also popular responses.
18. Do you feel safe where you live?

It is encouraging that 79% of respondents indicated that overall they feel safe where they live. We encourage the City and the University to keep working to create a community where we don't have 21% of students feeling either somewhat or completely unsafe where they live.

19. What are your biggest safety concerns inside your house?

The respondents' greatest safety concern in their house is the risk of break-ins. More notable are the 25% who believe their house poses a danger because of mold or bad wiring, the 6% who fear their landlord, the 9% who fear their roommates and the 2% who do not have functional safety alarms (fire alarms, carbon monoxide, etc).
20. What are your biggest safety concerns outside your house?

Respondents’ biggest concerns outside of their homes include poor lighting, inaccessible sidewalks (especially in the winter), and vehicles. This is closely followed by 16% who believe that there is a lack of police.

CONCLUSION

This concludes the MSU’s Your City Survey 2.0 Report. These survey results contain a variety of positive developments for student perceptions of the Hamilton community, and continue to emphasize where the MSU, McMaster, and the City can still improve. Students are confident that by remaining at the forefront of these discussions, the broader community can evolve into a more inclusive, welcoming, and vibrant space for all inhabitants. For any questions regarding this report, please contact the Vice-President (Education) at vped@msu.admin.mcmaster.ca.