



REPORT

From the office of the...

SRA University Affairs Commissioner

TO: Members of the Student Representative Assembly
FROM: Meg Hsu, University Affairs Commissioner
SUBJECT: Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey (OPSSS) Data
DATE: Sunday, February 26, 2017

Hi Members of the SRA,

As part of my platform, I wanted to publish a report on the results from last year's Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey from the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA). Last year, UA assisted with running OUSA's biennial survey. We received an overwhelming amount of responses from McMaster students. I was able to get the McMaster-specific data from this survey. Please find attached an analysis and breakdown of the data results that we gained from the survey last year.

In this survey, we have covered a wide variety of post-secondary education topics. It is my hope that this report will help guide the MSU's advocacy efforts moving forward. In addition, this report gathers student feedback on a variety of important issues that can be better addressed by the university including work-integrated learning (WIL) which is a priority for the province this year and international students which we have addressed in our MSU International Students Policy.

This survey was highly detailed and provides us with a better understanding of how students are currently feeling on these topics. It also identifies areas of improvement that we should focus on in the upcoming years.

I want to extend a special thank you to all the authors. Thank you Eric, Alex, Katie, Andrew and Urszula for your contribution to this project! I hope you have gained a deeper understanding of the current issues McMaster students are facing.

Cheers,
Meg

INTRODUCTION

The Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey (OPSSS) is a biennial survey that was run in November 2015 by the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA). The survey received over 2,000 responses from McMaster students, making up 25% of the total responses. The following report outlines the results from McMaster students on various topics of their post-secondary education experiences.

The majority (57%) of students who responded identified as female. 25% of students identified as male and the remaining percentage did not indicate a gender. 58% of survey respondents were heterosexual, 2% were gay or lesbian, 2% were bisexual or pansexual and 7% identified with another sexual orientation that was not listed in the survey. 31% preferred not to indicate their sexual orientation on the survey.

The largest number of responses came from students born between 1994-1995 (31%) and between 1996-1997 (30%). The remaining population ranged between before 1960 to 1993 with a varied distribution across age groups.

The majority of respondents (69%) did not have any disabilities. 1% indicated they had a physical disability, 2% had an intellectual or learning disability, 7% had a disability resulting from mental illness, 3% had visual impairment and 1% had hearing impairment.

The most responses came from first year students, making 30% of the respondents. Second year students and fourth year students made up 21% of the responses and third year students made up 24%. Students who were in their fifth or more year made up 4% of the responses. Responses were gathered from students of all different programs with the largest portion of 21% from students in humanities and social science. 19% of students were from health sciences and medicine, 17% were studying engineering, architecture and related technologies, and 16% were studying physical and life sciences. With a wide spread across different programs, the results of the survey are evenly distributed. The remaining percentage make up students from all different programs. 95% of students who responded were completing a Bachelor's Degree and 3% were completing an Undergraduate Certificate or Diploma. The remaining percentage did not specify.

As the MSU represents all full-time undergraduate students, it is important to note that 97% of respondents, totaling 2277 students, were full-time students. The remaining 2% were part-time students.

The large proportion of students who responded to the survey are Canadian citizens with 2096 students making 90% of the respondents. 4% were permanent residents and 4% were international students. The remaining 2% did not identify their immigration status. The largest segment of students graduated high school in Ontario with 92%.

20% of respondents indicated they grew up in a rural community. 60% of respondents indicated they grew up in an urban community. 2% indicated they grew up in Northern Ontario. Less than 1% (6 respondents) grew up in a First Nations Reserve.

There was a wide range of educational experiences of the parents and legal guardians of respondents. The largest segment was 27% of respondents whose parents hold a University Bachelor's Degree. 17% of respondents have parents or legal guardians who have completed a college diploma as their highest post-secondary credential. 10% have completed high school as the highest level of education. 13% have parents and legal guardians who have completed a master's degree. With varying educational backgrounds, parents and legal guardians have a significant influence on the finances and cultural expectations of students in post-secondary

education. There was an even spread in the financial backgrounds of parents or legal guardians as depicted in Figure 1.

Combined Income Before Taxes of Parent(s) or Legal Guardian(s)	Count	Percent (%)
\$25,000 or less	149	6
\$25,001 to \$50,000	229	10
\$50,001 to \$75,000	252	11
\$75,001 to \$100,000	277	12
\$100,001 to \$125,000	201	9
Over \$125,000	354	15
Don't know	318	14
Not applicable	38	2
Prefer not to say	233	10
(Missing, did not answer)	286	12

Figure 1: Combined Estimated Income Before Taxes of Parent(s) or Legal Guardian(s) of Respondents in the 2015 OPSSS.

Some students (3%) responded they have dependents. Of this population, 38% indicated they had one dependent, 26% had two dependents and 16% had three dependents. 51% of the dependents were children under 12, 29% were children over 12, 21% were an adult aged child (18+) and 17% were adult or senior dependents. Students were surveyed on childcare for their dependents. 1% were in full-time or part-time childcare on campus with 21% off campus. 30% of dependents were not enrolled in any childcare.

The highly varied demographic information indicated in the results of the OPSSS reflect the incredibly diverse experiences and backgrounds of McMaster students. In future MSU advocacy efforts, it is important to keep these diverse needs in mind and consider the implications of the results of this survey.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Work-Integrated Learning (WIL)

25% (584) of respondents in the survey indicated they had participated in a work-integrated learning (WIL) opportunity in their undergraduate studies. Of this population, 83% were either very satisfied or satisfied with their work integrated learning experience. However, only 5% reported dissatisfaction with 11% selecting a neutral WIL experience. 19% of respondents were enrolled in a program where WIL was mandatory and offered. 37% of respondents were enrolled in a program with WIL but it is optional. However, 43% (1016 respondents) were not enrolled in a program that offered WIL in any form. Notably, 80% reported work-integrated learning to have improved their post-secondary education experience. Of this 80%, 41% of respondents indicated their experience was significantly improved and 47% of respondents

indicated their experience was improved. On the other hand, 9% of this population indicated there was no impact and 2% reported a degree of detrimental impact. Considering the results from the OPSSS, it is clear that the majority of students have benefited from WIL opportunities and were overall satisfied with their experience.

Online Learning

45% of McMaster respondents have taken a class that is primarily online. 31% of this population reported they will take an online course again, and 41% expressing uncertainty in whether they will take an online course again. While 37% expressed courses require no change in learning styles, 42% indicated interest in having courses use more active learning approaches. Students believe that the inclusion of discussion-based learning, seminars, problem-based learning, inquiry-based learning would significantly improve their online learning experience.

Quality of Teaching

While very few students (1%) at McMaster reported having only part time instructors, roughly a third of students who responded (722 or 31%) had both full-time and part-time instructors. Of these students most found their instructors to be equally (57%) or slightly less (25%) available. Additionally, these students overwhelmingly found instructors to be equally engaging (64%) and have similar teaching abilities (70%) when comparing between full and part time students. This trend is supported when considering 31% of students who filled out this question were unsure of the full-time status of their instructors. Overall this question indicates that student perceptions of full and part time instructors are very similar, with part time faculty potentially being perceived as less available.

Slightly more than half (52%) of participants feel that feedback they provided in their course is valued and well received by the university. 29% of students believe that there is a focus on research over teaching. 40% believe that there is equal emphasis but very few (only 7%) believe that there is a focus on teaching over research. This indicates that a large proportion of students believe that there is more of a focus on research.

Indigenous Content

Of total responses, only 2% were self-identified as Indigenous. Of those who self-identified, 29% indicated they had the opportunity to learn Indigenous course content in elementary school. 27% indicated they had the opportunity to take a course with significant Indigenous content in high school. Only 2% had the opportunity to take a course on Indigenous content in college but 22% had this opportunity in university. Finally, 7% were not given this opportunity to take a course with a focus on Aboriginal, Native, or Indigenous content.

LEARNING MATERIALS AND ANCILLARY FEES

The Learning Materials and Ancillary Fees portion of the survey focused on the costs of essential course materials for students, such as textbooks and software. The results of these questions were as expected although some of the numbers were shocking. It was found that students spent copious amounts of money on textbooks and course packs during the 2015-2016 school year with an average of \$531. A strong majority of participants, nearly 80%, answered this question which ranged from under \$50 to over \$1000, suggesting inconsistencies among faculties and their requirements.

The average of \$531 in textbooks over one school year implies that students purchase all the required textbooks and course packs for their classes. In contrast, 48% of students reported that they did not purchase all of the mandatory learning materials. While the causes are likely

variant, it is safe to presume that some students are not purchasing their required materials due to cost, especially because the average cost is so great.

On top of the cost of course textbooks, courses often require additional software in order to complete mandatory online assessments. Paid software was mandatory for 44% of students. Among these students, 43% had one course that required a software while 8% had more than four courses with mandatory software. Students are allocating so much money to textbooks and yet many are not purchasing all the textbooks that are mandatory for learning in the courses. In contrast, nearly the same amount of students who did not purchase all their textbooks were required to purchase a software in order to complete summative assignments and tests for their courses.

CREDIT TRANSFER

Credit transfer was an area of focus for OUSA in the past year. Of 1999 responses, 239 students (12%) stated that they had transferred credits between two different post-secondary institutions. Of these transfers, 82% of respondents indicated they transferred credits from one university to another, although a fair amount (21%) were from college to university. Only 2% of respondents indicated they transferred credits from university to college and only 1% indicated they transferred credits from college to college. However, this proportionally small number is representative of the low number of college respondents from the McMaster population.

The main benefit for transferring credits came from students who were enrolled in summer programs or online courses offered by other academic institutions. 47% of respondents mentioned this as their main purpose for credit transfers. Another reason for credit transfer was students who transferred between institutions with 40% of respondents indicating this as their main purpose. Most students transferred courses from other institutions within Ontario. The most popular response to why a student decided to transfer was because of a specific program that wasn't offered at their previous institution (15%), followed by wanting to enter a program they saw as better at another institution (11%). Only 20% were due to transfers earned on exchange. When applying for course transfer, 54% of students who had completed a transfer responded that all or nearly all of their courses were transferred successfully. By comparison, 14% of students reported that only about 20% of their credit transfers went through successfully, the second largest response pool. The remaining pools (0%, 40%, 60% and 80% of attempted course transfers were successful) were each selected by less than 10% of respondents. Evidently, there is a wide range of student experiences with credit transfers.

EMPLOYMENT

Student employment discusses the current landscape for students who are seeking job opportunities. On the topic of summer employment, the majority of students (52%) indicated that they had a job with 20% of students indicating that they worked more than one job. Only 10% of students noted they did not have summer employment. Among the students who worked a summer job, the majority (52%) indicated their main purpose of seeking a summer job was to pay for tuition to continue school. Students listed disposable income (25%) and networking opportunities (18%) as other reasons for seeking employment. 80% of students surveyed agree that internships should be paid.

Of the population that was employed, 62% of students were employed for 12-16 weeks with only 21% employed for 12-16 weeks and 16% worked less than 8 weeks. For students working at least one summer job, almost a quarter of students (24%) indicated they worked more than 40 hours a week, 38% indicated they worked 31-40 hours a week, 18% reported working 21-30 hours a week, and 19% reported working less than 20 hours.

Among students who were unemployed over the summer, 58% were looking for a job while the remaining 42% were not. Summer courses were indicated by 33% of these students as the

main reason they were not seeking employment. Other reasons like volunteering were also listed by 12% of the population. A small portion (5%) of respondents indicated they did not need to work as they had sufficient money.

Most notably, 54% of respondents reported they were earning an average of 15\$ an hour while the remaining 45% indicated they earned minimum wage. As of November 2016, it is important to note that the living wage in Hamilton is \$15.85 according to the Ontario Living Wage Network. If given the opportunity, 57% of students indicated they would be interested in working additional hours in the summer.

With regards to in-term employment, the majority of students (54%) responded that they were not working during school. Of the working population, 45% of students worked 10 or fewer hours a week and 39% worked between 11-20 hours a week. 52% of students earned an average of 17\$ an hour while 47% reported earning minimum wage, which is below the living wage in Hamilton. Two-thirds of respondents communicated that their part-time job was related to their field of study.

In regards to working and academic performance, 46% of students indicated that working while in school hurt their academic performance with 5% reporting it significantly hurt their performance. However, a significant amount of students (38%) reported that it had no effect on their academic performance.

Respondents were lastly asked if they would still work during school if they could afford tuition and living costs. Among the responses, 44% students indicated they would still work, 39% said they would not, and 17% said they did not know.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

As ancillary fees are consistently rising, students were asked what portion of the university operations should be placed on the back of students. These results were fairly spread equally for answers below 51%. 12% of students responded with 31-40% of respondents, 15% responded with 21-30%, 9% responded with 11-20% and 11% responded for up to 10%. However, 11% responded with 51-60% of the operations and 16% responded above 60% of the operations. Based on these results, the majority of students believe that students should not be responsible for the majority of funding university operations.

On the topic of student finances, 36% of respondents indicated they were very concerned about having enough money to complete their education. 37% of students were somewhat concerned. However, 16% were not that concerned and 11% were either not at all concerned. From this topic, it is clear that most students are struggling with their financial situation and feel significantly concerned about the financial liabilities that come with post-secondary education.

To alleviate the financial burdens of post-secondary education, most students turn to financial aid in various forms. Some students choose to apply for government loans. When students were asked to rate the ease of the application process for a government loan, 46% answered neither easy nor difficult. 37% indicated the process was easy and 10% indicated it was very easy. However, 14% answered it was a hard process and 4% responded it was very hard. While a large portion of students were satisfied with the application process, there is need for further clarification on the application process to make it more accessible to cater to low-income students. On average, students received \$7766 in financial loans from the government through OSAP and CLSP and \$2285 in government grants/bursaries with a range between \$100 to \$40,000.

Respondents who did not apply for government loans were asked why they chose not to apply. 40% indicated they did not think they would qualify for student loans and 33% indicated they did not need financial assistance. 12% responded that they did not want any debt and the remaining 21% responded with various answers from not knowing how to apply to not wanting debt from the government.

However, these do not always reflect the costs of post-secondary education. 5% of students had to take out a bank loan in order to supplement the amount they received from OSAP. On average, students received \$13,258 from the bank. Another form of financial aid that students seek in order to pay for tuition is RESP and Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP). On average, students received \$5919 from RESP and \$9667 from PSSSP. Students also received money from their family. 23% of students responded it was a loan and 71% of students responded it was a gift. On average, students received a loan of \$5268 from their family. Of the students who received a loan, 76% described it as interest-free, 16% will have to pay interest on the loan later, and 3% are currently paying interest to their family for the loan.

Most students seek further financial aid in the form of third-party awards, bursaries and scholarships. 61% of the respondents who received these indicated it was for their academic or extracurricular merits, 15% received them for financial need, and 22% received them for both. In total, the average amount received was \$2655 from all scholarships, awards and bursaries. From this, the average amount received for needs-based financial aid was \$1588 and merits-based financial aid was \$1720.

Students were surveyed on the total amount of debt accumulated over their undergraduate studies. On average, students accumulated government loans of \$17,951 (39% of respondents), family loans of \$9855 (11% of respondents), and \$2245 from credit cards (9% of respondents). Only 27% of respondents had not accumulated any debt. 28% of students anticipated this debt would be very difficult to repay, 16% indicated it would be somewhat difficult to pay, and 5% of students believed it would not be burdensome at all.

Finally, the majority of students (57%) were aware that a portion of their tuition can be received as a tax credit on their tax return with 36% were not. 20% of students claimed their tuition on their personal tax return and 27% had their tuition claimed on their guardian's tax return. The remaining 13% did not claim their tax credits on tax returns or did not know.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

International students were selected from the demographics section of the survey. A total of 97 respondents and 4% of total respondents were international students. From McMaster, the top three countries that international students came from were China, Nigeria and Pakistan. Students indicated their first language with the top three responses being Chinese, English and Mandarin. From this information, orientation programs should focus on addressing these language and cultural differences. The majority of respondents (51%) attended an orientation program. Of this population, 20% found the orientation program to be very useful, 69% found it somewhat useful and 10% found it not that useful. 26% of respondents did not attend an orientation program but it was offered. 18% of respondents did not attend and did not know if a program was offered. 6% of respondents responded they did not attend an orientation program and one was not offered. From these responses, students find orientation programs to be relatively useful but more promotion needs to be done to outreach to more international students.

International students have deregulated tuition increases year after year. 35% of students have found their tuition fees to be predictable while 27% of students have not. Notably, 44% of student have difficulty affording tuition whereas 56% do not have difficulty affording

tuition. There are limited opportunities for financial aid for international students. 91% of students have indicated they have not received money from a government or organization in their home country. Only 9% indicated they did receive financial aid from their home country. However, those who did receive money received an average of 13,375 CAD in loans, ranging from \$1,500 to \$40,000. Students who received scholarships or grants received an average of 5,500 CAD, ranging from \$500 to \$20,000.

The financial burden of post-secondary education for international students extends beyond tuition. International students in Ontario are required to enrol in a private health insurance plan like the university health insurance plan (UHIP). A large portion (39%) were satisfied with the private health insurance plan that they were enrolled in. 18% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and 5% were dissatisfied. However, 38% indicated they have never used their private health care plan.

Following their current academic program, students indicated a wide range of future plans. 25% are planning on pursuing another degree or qualification at the same university they are currently studying. 32% will pursue another degree or qualification at another institution in Ontario. 11% will pursue another degree or qualification at another Canadian institution outside Ontario. Finally, 4% plan to return to their home country to pursue another degree or qualification and 12% plan to pursue another degree or qualification in a country that is not Canada or their home country. Notably, many students are interested in working and remaining in Canada. A significant portion (38%) plan on working permanently in Canada. 31% will work in Canada before they return to their home country. 9% will work in a country other than Canada and their home country. The largest portion of survey respondents (39%) will apply for Permanent Resident Status in Canada. 21% will return to their home country. The remaining 9% were unclear of their future plans.