



SFU

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH AND PLANNING

Understanding Student Retention at SFU

Report #2

Why are Students Leaving SFU?

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October 30, 2007

PREFACE

Simon Fraser University admits approximately six thousand new undergraduate students each year;¹ however, roughly four thousand bachelor's degrees are conferred annually.² Two factors account for this difference: year over year increases in admission, and students leaving SFU prior to obtaining a credential. Although undergraduate enrolment has increased to approximately 25,000 over the last few years after being relatively stable at 20,000 from 1997/98 to 2001/02,³ approximately 30% of undergraduate students admitted to SFU leave the university without completing a credential. Within 16 terms of admission to SFU, roughly 22% of students leave voluntarily and 9.4% are required to withdraw.⁴

In the midst of a strong BC economy⁵ and a generally declining university-age population⁶, SFU faces increasing challenges in attracting and retaining its undergraduate students. The ways in which students leave and the reasons for their departure are multi-faceted and important issues for SFU to understand. To be successful in improving student retention and the student academic experience, we must identify and minimize the factors that contribute to student departure. To this end, Institutional Research and Planning (IRP) prepared this report, the second in the series, "Understanding Student Retention at SFU".

The report provides a synthesis of student perceptions and experiences that influence why they might leave SFU. Student retention reports produced to date are available on the Institutional Research and Planning web site at: <http://www.sfu.ca/irp/Students/index.html#retention>.

In this report, we focus on the characteristics of SFU students and explore how SFU students differ from their peers in Canadian universities with respect to demographic characteristics, satisfaction and success that may relate to student retention. The aim of this report is to help the University understand the areas that can benefit from programming to increase student retention. Programming recommendations may be university-wide or targeted toward specific demographic groups where they would be most advantageous.

¹ <http://www.sfu.ca/irp/enrollment/EnrollmentDashboard/documents/ug.enrol.report.1071.ewk3.pdf>

² <http://www.sfu.ca/irp/Students/documents/d33.pdf>

³ <http://www.sfu.ca/irp/enrollment/EnrollmentDashboard/documents/ug.enrol.report.1071.ewk3.pdf>

⁴ http://www.sfu.ca/irp/Students/documents/understanding_retention_rpt_1.pdf

⁵ http://www.bcbc.com/Documents/EC_20070717_Presentation_CIBCAdvisorForum.pdf

⁶ <http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/data/pop/pop/project/bctab6.pdf>

BACKGROUND

Over the last few years SFU has collected data through both internal surveys and collaborations with other BC universities or external agencies. Although these surveys were not specifically designed to determine which students leave or why students leave, some insights on these matters can be gained from the data collected. Comparisons can be made between the responses of SFU students and the responses of students at comparable BC or Canadian universities, or Canadian universities as a whole.⁷ The responses of SFU students over time can also be tracked – examination of these trends can be used to identify areas of improvement, stability or deterioration.

There are however limitations to using these surveys to make inferences about school leavers. In surveys of current students or graduates, leavers are not represented. Conversely, in surveys of leavers and graduates, respondents reflect back retrospectively on their experiences, and their impressions/memories may or may not accurately reflect actual experiences. Under ideal circumstances student responses would be tracked from admission through registration, enrolment, departure (either through graduation or leaving) and beyond. This longitudinal data would reduce the systematic error related to the students sampled in each survey which may account for some or all differences found. In the absence of this ideal data source, the issues identified in this report should be considered exploratory hypotheses that require further research before the extent to which they contribute to students leaving can be ascertained with more confidence.

THEORIES OF ACADEMIC ATTRITION

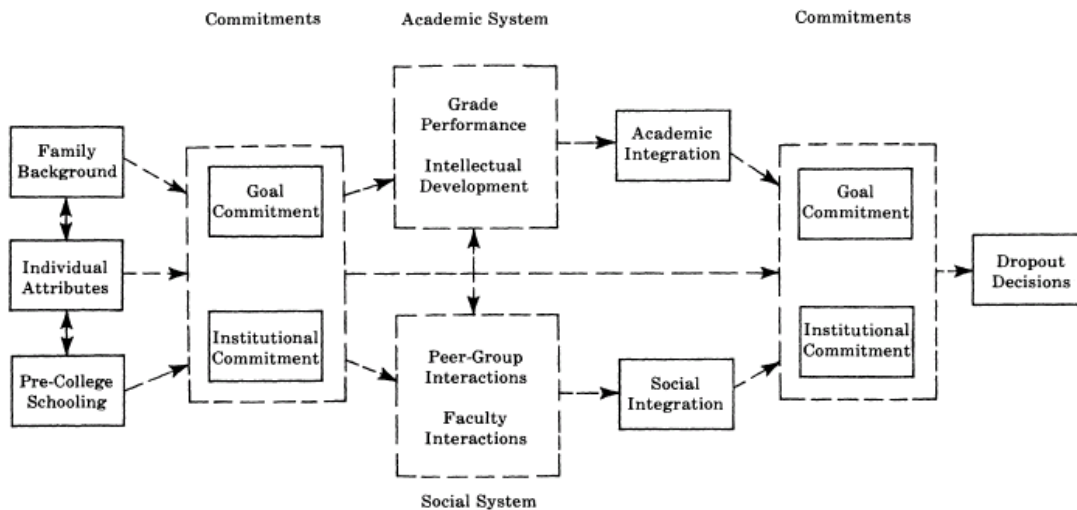
In 1975, Vincent Tinto introduced the Student Integration Model of student attrition⁸, a model that is still utilized⁹. As its name suggests, the model focuses on social integration as a key determinant of retention.

⁷ See definition of 'Comparable Canadian Universities' and 'Canadian Universities Overall' in Appendix endnotes.

⁸ Tinto V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: a theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research*, 45(1), 537-580.

⁹ Grayson, J. P. & Grayson, K. (2003). Research on retention and retention. Does money matter: Millennium Research Series, Number 6. The Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

Student Integration Model



However, this model has been criticized as being of limited efficacy for non-traditional students who:

- Are older than 24;
- Do not live in campus residences (i.e., commute);
- Are enrolled part-time;
- Are not greatly influenced by the social environment of the institution; and
- Are primarily concerned with university academic offerings (rather than social offerings).

These “non-traditional” characteristics (as outlined in the demographic characteristics section below) describe the majority of SFU students. As such, a better way to consider student attrition at SFU is through the Student Attrition Model proposed by Bean and Mertz (1985), in which the following variables directly and/or indirectly influence student dropout behaviour.¹⁰

*Background and Defining Variables: **

- *Age; **
- *Enrolment status; **
- *Residence; **
- *Educational goals;*
- *High school performance; **
- *Ethnicity; * and*
- *Gender. **

Academic Variables:

- *Study habits;*
- *Academic advising; **

¹⁰ Bean, J. P. & Mertz, B. S. (1985). A conceptual model of nontraditional undergraduate student attrition. *Review of Educational Research*, 55(4), 485-540.

- *Absenteeism;*
- *Major certainty; and*
- *Course availability.**

Environmental Variables:

- *Finances; **
- *Hours of employment;*
- *Outside encouragement;*
- *Family responsibilities; * and*
- *Opportunity to transfer.*

Psychological Outcomes:

- *Utility; **
- *Satisfaction; **
- *Goal Commitment; * and*
- *Stress.**

*Social Integration Variables**

- *Participation in extra-curricular activities; **
- *Peer friendships on campus; and**
- *Relationships with instructors outside of class.**

Academic Outcomes

- *GPA*

Intent to leave

* These variables are examined in this report.

Based on the readily available data in recent surveys, many of the elements from the Student Attrition Model (as denoted by *) are described for SFU students in this report. It is important to consider the different types of school leavers when examining the effects of individual, institutional or external characteristics because differential impacts are expected. The survey data utilized in this report typically do not allow for this distinction so any inferences must be made with caution.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

(see Appendix: page 5)

By analyzing the demographic characteristics of SFU students, a better understanding of the university clientele can be obtained. This information has implications for targeted programming, and in determining which comparisons to other universities are appropriate.

SFU students are more likely than students at comparable Canadian universities and Canadian universities overall to be/have:

- *Visible minorities;*
- *Living with parents/guardians;*

- Longer campus commute times; and
- Also applied to college.

These demographic differences have implications for both the backgrounds and expectations of students, which in turn influence student persistence at university.

COURSE AVAILABILITY

(see Appendix: page 6 – 7)

In order to graduate with a degree, students must complete a required number of course credits, both overall and within their area(s) of specialization. For graduation to occur in a timely manner, it is critical that registration for courses be possible, especially for compulsory courses. In both internal and external student surveys, course availability persists as a problem. Students at SFU indicate high levels of difficulty registering for desired courses. Though over 90% of students identify course availability as an important issue, less than 60% (and in one survey less than 50%) are satisfied in this area. Indeed over 50% of students typically indicate that difficulties with course registration will likely lead to additional time being required to fulfill graduation requirements.

“Offering more selection of courses. I struggled with finding upper division courses that interested me. I think the special topics courses are a very good idea. I also think that courses should be offered more often.” – CUSC 2006

“Simply offer more courses. Had more of a variety of courses been offered every semester, my degree would not have taken so long to complete.” – CUSC 2006

“More flexibility and availability of evening/weekend courses for 3rd and 4th year students.” – CUSC 2006

“Classes are only offered once and therefore fill up easily. My friends and family who attend other universities rarely have problems with enrolling in a class. At SFU on the other hand it seems like it is a regular part of registration.” – UGSS 2006

Students encountering difficulties with course availability are likely less satisfied as their ability to plan their programs of study is hindered. This in turn may influence student decisions to transfer to other institutions to complete their degrees. Problems with course availability also likely impact SFU’s reputation and ability to attract applicants. The issue of course availability has been discussed in detail (see: http://www.sfu.ca/irp/special_reports/index.html.)

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

(see Appendix: page 8-10)

Quality of education has multiple components, including the learning environment, interactions with instructors, course impressions, and skill/knowledge development. Students subjectively define and weight the components of quality education according to their own priorities. However, at SFU overall perceptions of academic satisfaction tend to be lower than those found at comparable universities and at Canadian universities overall. In several areas satisfaction hovers around 50%. These include: prompt feedback from professors, convenience of class scheduling, co-op opportunities, TA quality, level of faculty-student interaction, consistent fair grading, and professors taking a personal interest in academic progress.

"The professors were not always very helpful, and lacked general public speaking skills" – CUSC 2007

"Monitor teaching ability of faculty and take all those evaluation forms we fill out at the end of every semester seriously." – CUSC 2006

Low student satisfaction with the academic experience has implications for student willingness to continue their educational investments, especially as student costs rise.

SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND ENGAGEMENT

(see Appendix: page 11-12)

Students who are involved with the social aspects of university life are more likely to benefit from social-emotional connections to the university than their peers. These connections help develop interpersonal, practical, cognitive, and humanitarian competencies in addition to academic skills and knowledge.¹¹ A recent meta-analysis defined social involvement as: the extent to which students feel connected to the college environment; the quality of students' relationships with peers, faculty and others in the college; and the extent to which students are involved in campus activities. Based on a combined sample of 26,263 students, social involvement moderately correlated with retention with an estimated true correlation of 0.216.¹²

When compared to similar universities and Canadian universities as a whole, students from SFU indicate lower levels of: belonging, ability to make new friends/lasting friendships, becoming involved, and satisfaction with social activities. Correspondingly, student participation in social activities tends to be low.

"I'm enjoying the classes, but it's the people that make the experience." – CUSC 2007

¹¹ Kuh, G. D. (1995). The other curriculum: out-of-class experiences associated with student learning and personal development. *Journal of Higher Education*, 66(2), 123-155.

¹² Robbins, S.B., Lauver K., Le H., et al. (2004). Do psychosocial and study skill, factors predict college outcomes? A meta-analysis, *Psychological Bulletin*, 130 (2): 261-288.

“Need to make more of an effort to build a community among students themselves and students and faculty” – CUSC 2006

“A student union building for students to collect and socialize. The pubs, cafeteria, and cornerstone are mediocre at best.” – CUSC 2006

The relatively low level of SFU student social engagement implies that the university cannot, at present, rely much on student social-emotional connections to contribute to student retention.

STUDENT SERVICES

(see Appendix: page 13-14)

Student services are important to student outcomes, but are especially important for students encountering difficulties, or those with special needs. Compared to other Canadian universities, satisfaction with student services at SFU is lower in some areas, but higher in others. Student services with relatively low satisfaction rates include: food services, university daycare, and employment services (see Appendix). The most recommended areas for improvement in 2006 were: food services, parking facilities, and academic advising. On the other hand relatively high levels of satisfaction have been indicated for: computer facilities, bookstore, library, medical services, and athletic facilities. In general the proportion of the students who consider student services to be important is substantially higher than the proportion satisfied with the services.

In order for student services to have an optimal impact, students must initiate use of these services and students can initiate use only if they are aware of and receptive to use of services. Indeed, receptivity toward student services moderates the likelihood that at-risk students will leave an institution.¹³ Further, it is possible for a student to successfully graduate with only minimal use of student services. These features make it difficult to assess the impact of student services on the student population. Nonetheless, more detailed assessments and research in areas where SFU students have indicated lower levels of satisfaction may reveal a relationship between student services and student persistence or leaving behaviour.

“Since I’m just a 'new-bee', i don’t even know when and where to get academic advising. I tried going to general info desk but the lines are always so long, and by the time I’m in front, they say it’s their lunch break already, and by that time, it was time for my next class already.” – CUSC 2007

“Have mandatory career counselling so students begin university with the mind-set of exploring their interests, abilities, and values. Then plan how their education will relate to the world-of-work and what they would like to do after university. This would make the university experience grounded in practical reality, increase self-efficacy and motivation.” –CUSC 2006

¹³ Smith, J. S. (2004-05). The effects of student receptivity on college achievement and retention. *Journal of Student Retention*. 6(33), 273-288.

STRESS AND GOAL COMMITMENT

(see Appendix: page 15-16)

An undergraduate degree requires multiple years to complete. The actual duration required is often subject to external influences that can create stress or lower the commitment to education. These stresses are often beyond the control and sometimes the knowledge of the university.

Main reasons for leaving university in the Early Leavers Survey (2000) are:

- Academic;
- Financial;
- Personal; and
- Employment opportunities.

However, over one third of SFU graduating students (2006) have interrupted their studies at least once for employment, travel, financial or family reasons.

Using this information as a foundation, it may be useful to examine why students return from interrupted studies. These data may highlight strengths that our institution can build upon.

“Lower tuition fees so students could work less and concentrate more on their studies. Lower tuition fees would have indirectly enhanced my education experience exponentially” – CUSC 2006

“I feel as though I get more stressed out about being able to afford to attend school than I do over my actual schooling. – Tuition affordability 2007

GROUP DIFFERENCES

The previous sections of this report have examined areas where SFU students differ from students at other institutions that may impact retention. These overall differences are useful in developing university-wide programming. However, not all SFU students are equally successful and satisfied. There are individual as well as group differences. This section of the report examines where group differences occur as a function of demographic characteristics. The identification of group differences in satisfaction and success has implications for developing targeted programs to address retention.

The following key demographic characteristics were examined:¹⁴

1. Visible minority status;
2. Living arrangements (residence);
3. Gender;
4. Age;
5. Also applied to college;
6. Incoming GPA from high school (high school performance);

¹⁴ Student retention outcomes by age, gender, incoming GPA, course load, and international student status will also be examined in detail in report #3 of this series.

7. Full course load/Part-time/Full-time status (enrolment status);
8. Year of program;
9. Program of study; and
10. Debt load.

1. Visible Minority Status

(see Appendix: page 17)

SFU tends to have a high proportion of students that self-identify as visible minorities. First year visible minority students tend to be less socially integrated and less satisfied than their peers. However, by the time students graduate, visible minority student integration and satisfaction is comparable or higher than their non-visible minority counterparts on many issues.

2. Living Arrangements (Residence)

(See appendix: page 18)

Research suggests that social integration relates to living arrangements. Although social integration tends to be higher among students living in on-campus residences, the findings on social integration in commuter colleges have been mixed.^{15,16} At SFU most first year students live at home with their parents or guardians, with a much smaller group living in campus residences. In Fall 2007, SFU had 1,460 residence spaces for an undergraduate enrolment of 21,796 (i.e., space for 6.6% of undergraduate students or 12% of first year students). Based on survey data, first year students living off-campus students with parents/guardians tend to be less socially integrated and less satisfied. With respect to academic performance, the long-term impact of living in residence at SFU has been found to be minimal.¹⁷

"Because I do not live in residence, I miss out on all the 'college experiences' I may have had." – CUSC 2007

"In the residences, I feel like part of a really big family, and at class I actually feel like I'm succeeding." – CUSC 2007

By the time SFU students are graduating almost none live in campus residences, and type of residence tends to have only minimal impact on satisfaction and success.

3. Gender

(see Appendix: page 19)

¹⁵ Christie, N. G., & Dinham, S. M. (1991). Institutional and external influences on social integration in the freshman year. *Journal of Higher Education*, 62(4), 413-435.

¹⁶ Napoli A.R., & Wortman, P.M. (1998). Psychosocial factors related to retention and early departure of two-year community college students, *Research in Higher Education*, 39 (4): 419-455.

¹⁷ http://www.sfu.ca/irp/special_reports/documents/residence.2006.pdf

Universities in general and SFU specifically are attracting more females than males. In Canada in 2004-05, female students accounted for approximately 57% of undergraduate students (full-time and overall), a substantial increase from the 1970's when women accounted for approximately one in three full-time undergraduate students.¹⁸ The increase in female enrolment has been linked to labour market requirements and the greater benefits women experience from a university education economically as compared to men.¹⁹ At SFU female students over the last five years have accounted for 55-57% student enrolment, consistent with the national data.²⁰ In general, satisfaction and success of SFU students surveyed are comparable on many dimensions for both genders. However, when differences do emerge it is inconsistent whether males or females are more satisfied or successful.

4. Age

(see Appendix: page 20)

In recent years a greater emphasis has been placed on attracting students beyond those coming directly from high school. These students may be transfer students from university or college, or mature students. In general, students aged 30 and above are more satisfied than their younger peers on many issues. Although this group is quite different experientially from their peers, there may be opportunities to build on this success and expand more broadly some services or approaches offered to adult students.

5. Also applied to college

In comparison with similar universities and Canadian universities in general, a disproportionately high number of first year students at SFU also applied to college. On several outcomes of interests, students who had also applied to college differ from those that did not. However, no consistent pattern is evident likely due to the multiple reasons why students may be applying to SFU and colleges including:

- Student preference for college;
- Student uncertainty that SFU would make an offer of admission;
- Student uncertainty regarding academic goals; and
- The strong college system in BC.

6. Incoming High School GPA

High school GPA is often used as a predictor of retention; a recent meta-analysis indicates that high school GPA moderately correlates with retention with an estimated true correlation of 0.246 based on a combined sample of 5,551.²¹ For first year SFU students, many satisfaction/success outcomes do not have a clear relationship with incoming high school GPA. However, this is due at least in part to the restricted range of incoming GPA. Very few students have incoming GPAs of

¹⁸ <http://www40.statcan.ca/l01/cst01/educ53c.htm>

¹⁹ The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (2007). Trends in higher education: Volume 1 – Enrolment. http://www.aucc.ca/pdf/english/publications/trends_2007_e.pdf

²⁰ <http://www.sfu.ca/irp/links/documents/fingertip.pdf>

²¹ Robbins, S.B., Lauver K., Le H., et al. (2004). Do psychosocial and study skill, factors predict college outcomes? A meta-analysis, *Psychological Bulletin*, 130 (2): 261-288.

less than a B; at SFU approximately 10% of BC high school admission GPAs are B- or less. The value of incoming GPA is further reduced in the CUSC surveys as A and A+ students are grouped together.

9. Full Course Load and Enrolment Status

(see Appendix: page 21)

Students with a full course load (or full-time) tend to be more socially engaged and successful than their counterparts without a full course load (or part-time). This is consistent with research indicating that students who take more courses are more likely to persist.²² However, there are some exceptions to this trend, part-time students are more likely to establish lasting friendships and be more satisfied with the quality of education received.

10. Year of Program

(see Appendix: page 22)

Students tend to be similarly satisfied in each program year. However, first year students are often the most satisfied.

11. Program of Study

(see Appendix: page 23)

Satisfaction varies to some extent as a function of program of study. Further investigation in these areas would be useful with academic groupings more similar to the organization of SFU Faculties and departments than those used in the surveys.

12. Debt Load

(see Appendix: page 24)

Students with no debt were more likely to be satisfied than those with debt in some areas. However, no relationship between the amount of debt and satisfaction is self-evident. Comments made in the Tuition Affordability Survey (2007) indicate that debt is especially a concern for international students.

“Please reduce tuition fees for international students, the fee is too high, and we are not allowed to work here, which makes it worse.” –Tuition Affordability 2007

SFU STRENGTHS

(see Appendix: page 25-26)

It is important to recognize that the focus of this report is possible explanations for students leaving SFU. Given this focus, a detailed overview of areas where SFU is weak in comparison to other universities has been provided. Nonetheless, SFU has

²² Driscoll, A.K. (2007). Beyond access: How the first semester matter for community college students' aspirations and persistence. Policy Brief 07-2.

strengths that can also be built upon. SFU has recognized strengths in academic programming, student services, research, international programming, and athletics. For example, assessments of faculty are relatively high among graduating students. Satisfaction with some student services is higher than found in the comparison group and in Canadian universities overall.

"I thought university professors were very formal and strict but it turns out they are very accessible and available for help when needed." – CUSC 2007

"Most of the professors were very good and opened my eyes to things I hadn't previously thought of." – CUSC 2006

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. SFU has a unique and diverse demographic profile. Students may choose to persist through to degree completion or they may leave without a credential. The underlying reasons for their departure are multi-faceted and influenced by their demographic characteristics. Since students from different backgrounds and experiences achieve different outcomes in different ways, it is important to acknowledge that "broad brush stroke" solutions will not work for all groups. This report has identified a number of **different groups that might benefit from student retention programs** tailored to their specific needs, including:
 - Visible minority status;
 - Living arrangements;
 - Gender;
 - Enrolment status;
 - Year of program;
 - Program of study; and
 - Debt load.
2. For several years, SFU students have continued to experience difficulties registering for the courses they want and this has a demonstrated negative impact on their satisfaction and graduation time. While positive initial steps have already been taken to resolve SFU's **course availability problems**, the situation must be improved as quickly as possible to minimize any further negative impact on students. Recent steps have already been taken by IRP and the Associate VP, Academic to identify and resolve SFU's course availability problems (see Course Availability Report: http://www.sfu.ca/irp/special_reports/documents/course.availability.2007.pdf).
3. Student perceptions of the **learning environment and academic experience** tend to be lower at SFU than at comparable Canadian universities. This negatively impacts student willingness to continue their education at SFU. Any efforts to improve the academic experience for SFU students would likely benefit student retention.

4. Student **social integration and engagement** at SFU is relatively low. Given the anticipated student retention benefits of a more engaged student population, SFU should consider ways to increase awareness of social activities and opportunities to increase engagement of its students on campus. One commonly used method of monitoring and directing student engagement improvements in the university setting is to participate in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Unlike numerous other BC and Canadian Universities, SFU does not currently participate in NSSE, but may wish to consider participating in the near future.
5. **Student services satisfaction** is relatively low in some areas. More detailed assessments and research in the services areas receiving high importance ratings and low student satisfaction may reveal a relationship with student persistence or leaving behaviour.
6. **External influences**, most notably financial and personal stress, and employment opportunities have a profound impact on student retention. These stresses are often beyond the control of the university. However, administering exit surveys to non-returning students would help SFU better understand the extent to which students are faced with these stresses and interrupting their studies. Anything that SFU could do to help these students come back in future to complete their studies will ultimately benefit the student and the institution. Ensuring that services and resources are in place to facilitate the return of stopouts, and most importantly that students are aware of these resources at the time they consider leaving, would increase the likelihood of their return to SFU.
7. Regardless of the demand for university spaces in British Columbia, student retention and student satisfaction must be consistently **assessed and monitored** on an ongoing basis. Repeating this analysis and report several years from now would be relatively straightforward and beneficial to SFU since the surveys referenced in this report are administered on a recurring cycle.

In the three-report series on Understanding Student Retention at SFU, Institutional Research and Planning has provided evidence of the size and scope of student retention at SFU.²³ In this report, numerous reasons why students might be leaving early without a degree have been identified. These reports are part of the pre-planning stage to address student retention at SFU. Now it is up to SFU to acknowledge areas where improvements can be made, prioritize these areas, and develop programs and initiatives to increase student retention that will be monitored and evaluated. At the same time, SFU must recognize that student retention practices proven successful in other institutions, may not prove equally successful in our unique SFU environment.

²³ The third report, *How Does SFU Measure Up?*, will be released in November or December of 2007.



SFU

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INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH AND PLANNING

Understanding Student Retention at SFU

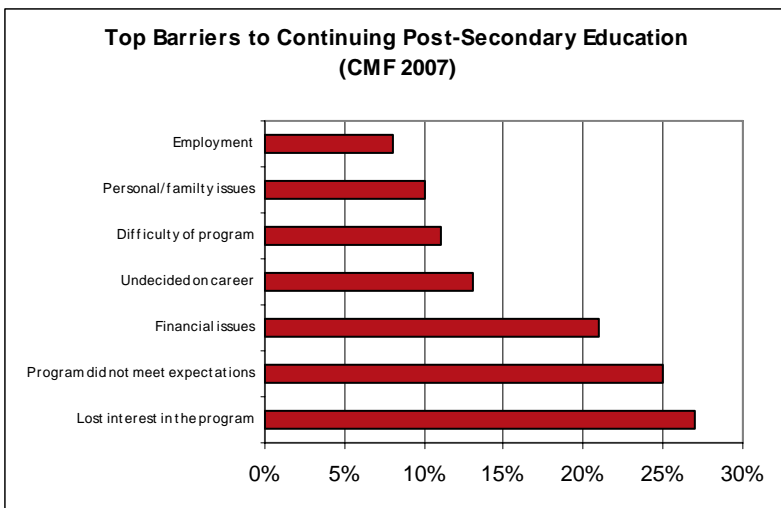
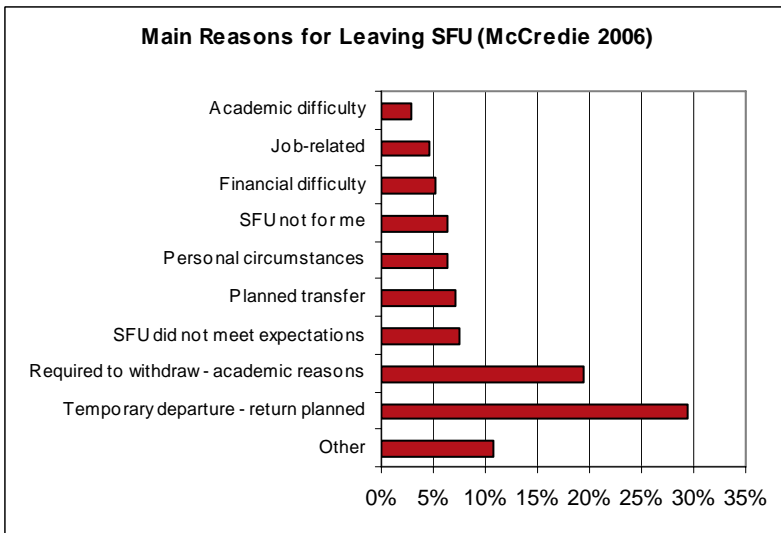
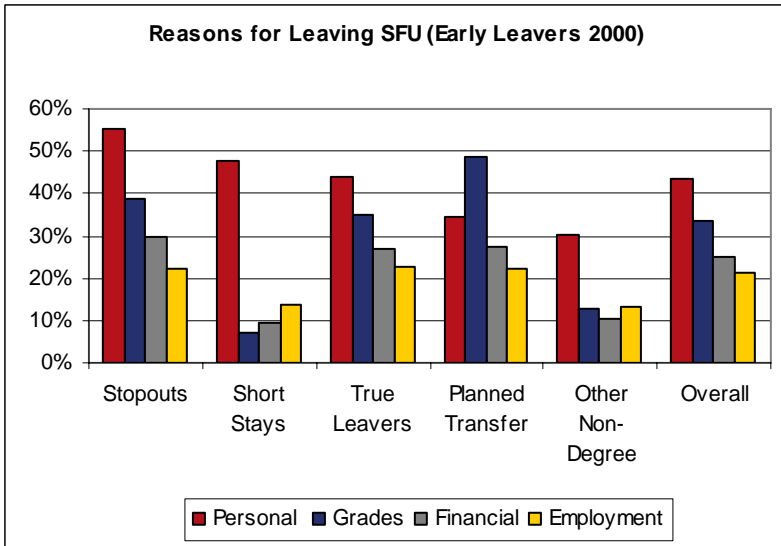
Report #2

Why are Students Leaving SFU?

Appendix

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October 30, 2007

Overview	4
Demographic Characteristics of SFU Students	5
Course Availability	6
Academic Experience	8
Social Integration and Engagement	11
Student Services	13
Stress and Goal Commitment	15
Group Differences	17
Visible Minority Status	17
Living Arrangements	18
Gender	19
Age	20
Full Course Load—Enrolment Status	21
Year of Program	22
Program of Study	23
Debt Load	24
Selection of SFU Strengths	25
Surveys Cited in the Report	27



Introduction:

The goal of this report is to provide possible explanations for students leaving SFU before completing a credential. A detailed overview of areas where SFU is weak in comparison to other universities has been provided. Nonetheless, SFU has strengths that can also be built upon (see page 25).

Under ideal circumstances, student attitudes and behaviour would be measured on a regular basis: upon admission, throughout enrolment, upon departure (either through graduation or leaving), and beyond. University leavers could then be compared to graduates at various points in their academic careers, to determine the risk factors for leaving university. These data are not available, therefore possible explanations for early departure are proposed based on surveys of SFU, BC and Canadian university students including:

- Current students;
- Graduates; and
- School leavers.

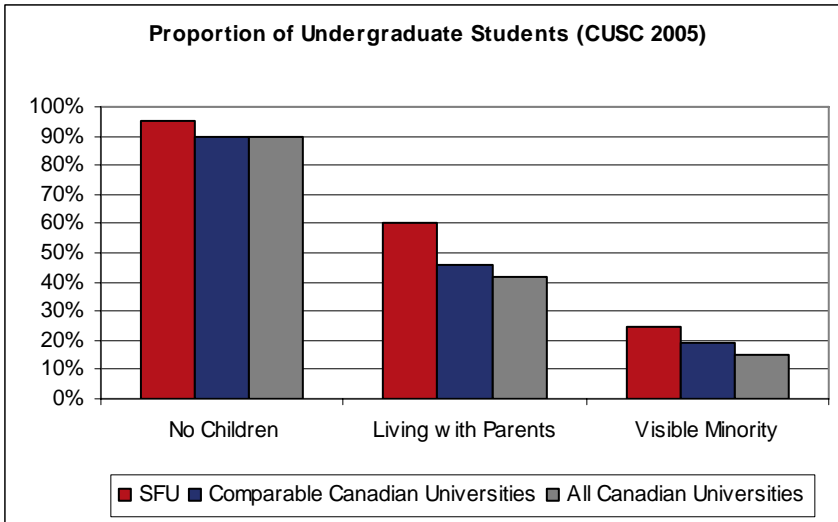
Topics in this Appendix:

Based on responses from these groups, several possible explanations for leaving SFU emerge.

- Demographic characteristics of SFU students;
- Course availability;
- Academic experience;
- Social integration and engagement;
- Student services; and
- Stress and goal commitment:
 - Employability;
 - Academic difficulties;
 - Personal/family responsibilities; and
 - Financial issues.

Barriers to Access and Persistence:

In a survey conducted by the Canada Millennium Foundation in 2005-06, of students in Grade 12 in 2002-03 in the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and New Brunswick, several interesting trends emerged regarding barriers to post-secondary education access and persistence. Of particular note, the most frequent reasons for not persisting in post secondary education were loss of interest and unmet expectations.

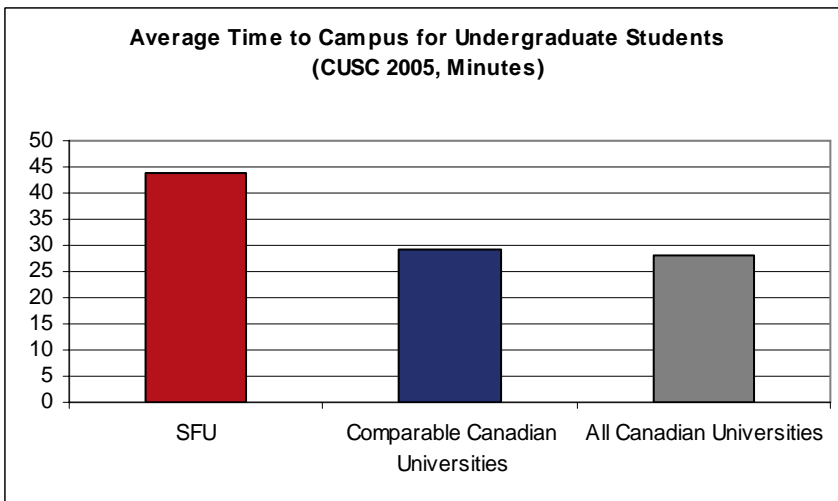


Demographic Profile:

The SFU student body differs significantly from those at comparable institutions*, and at Canadian universities in general on several demographic variables. Some of these demographic differences may account for differences in early leaver behaviour at SFU versus other institutions.

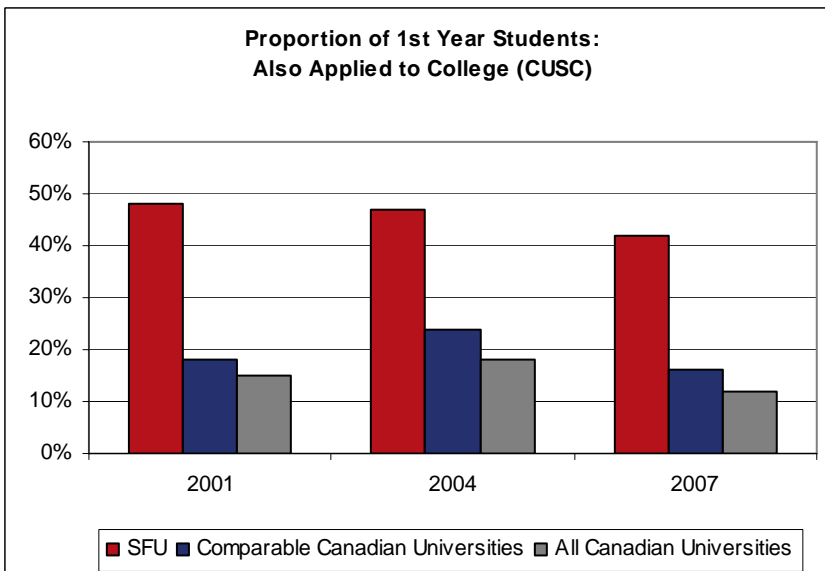
A higher proportion of SFU students:

- Self-identify as visible minorities;
- Live with their parents/guardians; and
- Have no children.



Commute Time:

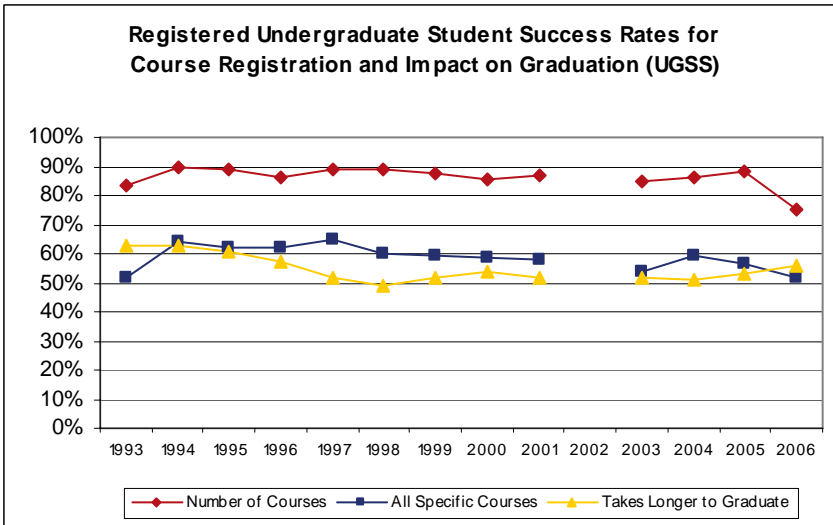
- The average commute time to campus is higher for SFU students; and
- Few SFU students live on campus.



Application Choices:

- A disproportionately high number of students at SFU also applied to college.

* Endnote #1

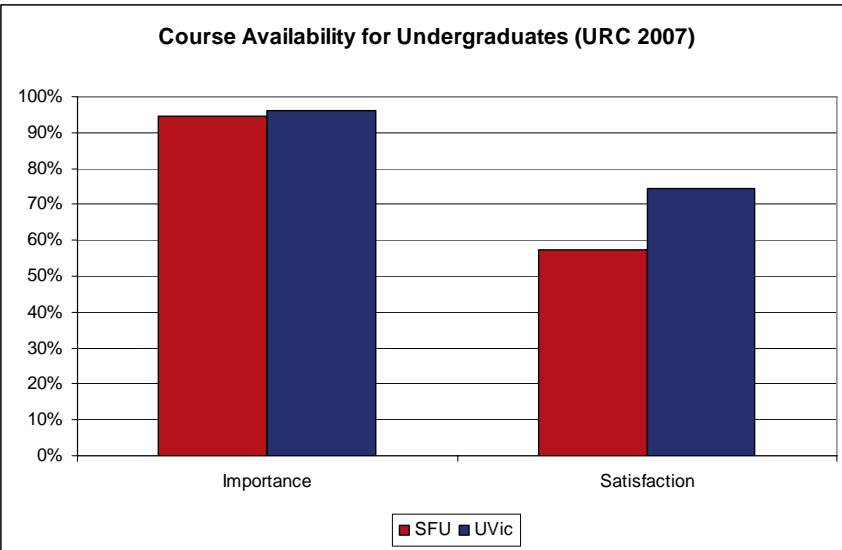


Trends:

Course availability is an issue of great concern for SFU students. This issue is not improving and impacts success in:

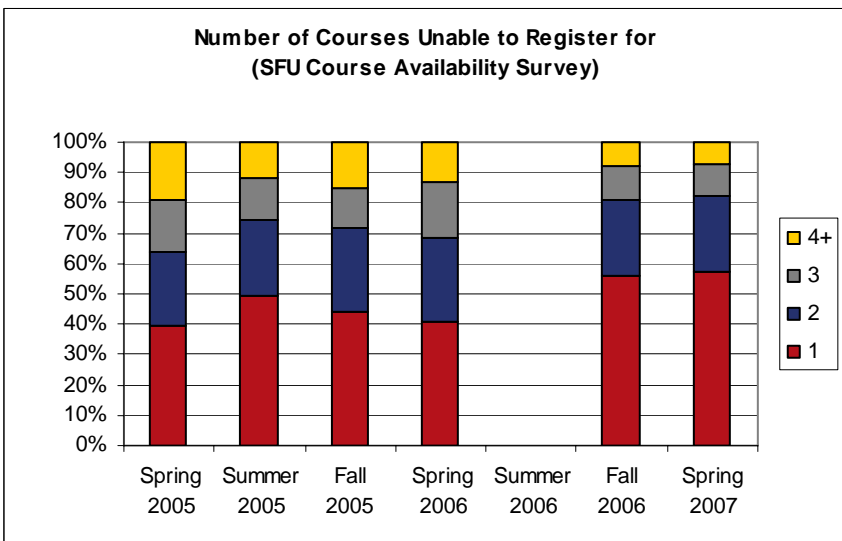
- Registering for the number of courses wanted;
- Registering for the specific courses wanted; and
- Time required to graduate.

See Course Availability Report: http://www.sfu.ca/irp/special_reports/documents/course.availability.2007.pdf for a comprehensive review and recommendations on this issue.



UVic Comparison:

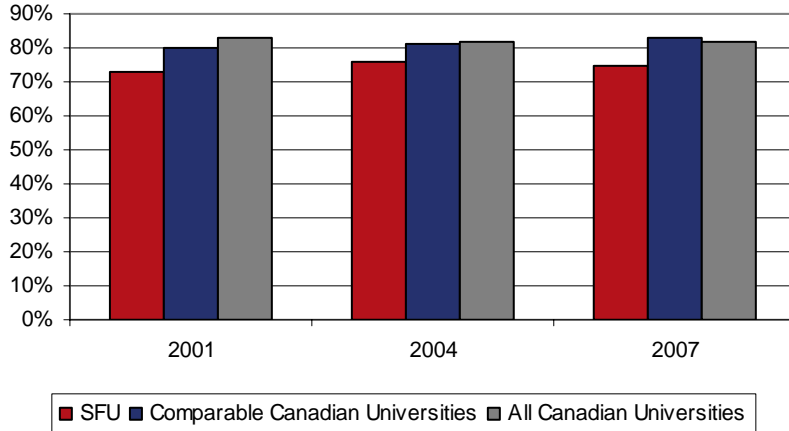
- Most SFU students indicate that course availability is very important; however, substantially fewer students are satisfied with this issue. This gap is much greater at SFU than found at UVic.



Number of Courses:

- Among those students unable to register for the courses they desire, typically it is for one or two courses .

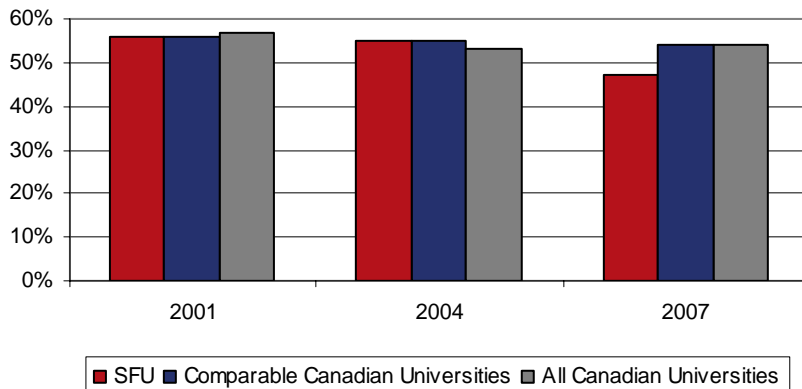
**Proportion of 1st Year Students:
Full Course Load at Time of Survey (CUSC)**



First Year Students:

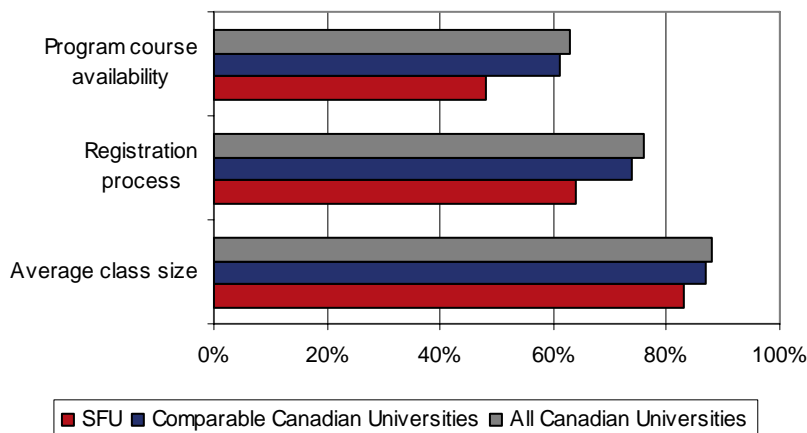
- First year SFU students are less likely than their peers at other Canadian Universities to have a full course load.

**Proportion of 1st Year Students:
Completely Able to Register for Courses Wanted (CUSC)**



- Approximately 50% of 1st year students successfully register for desired courses.
- Note the drop in SFU success in 2007 versus 2001 and 2004.

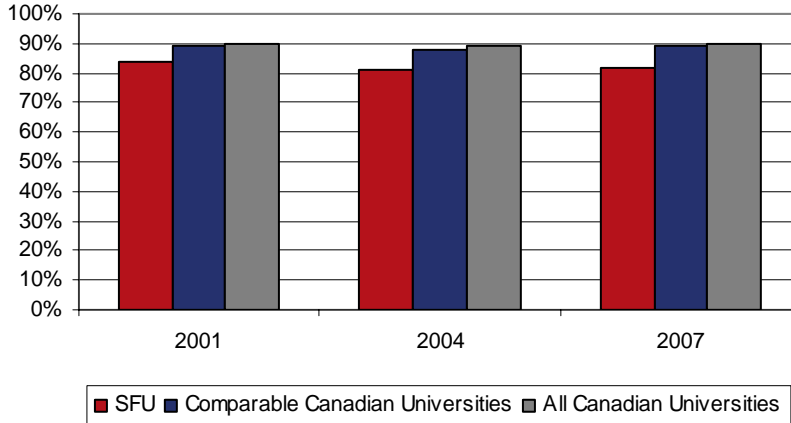
Undergraduate Student Satisfaction (CUSC 2005)



Satisfaction:

- Satisfaction with average class size, course availability and the registration process is lower at SFU than comparable Canadian universities and all Canadian universities.

Proportion of 1st Year Students Successful in Choosing Programs to Meet their Objectives (CUSC)

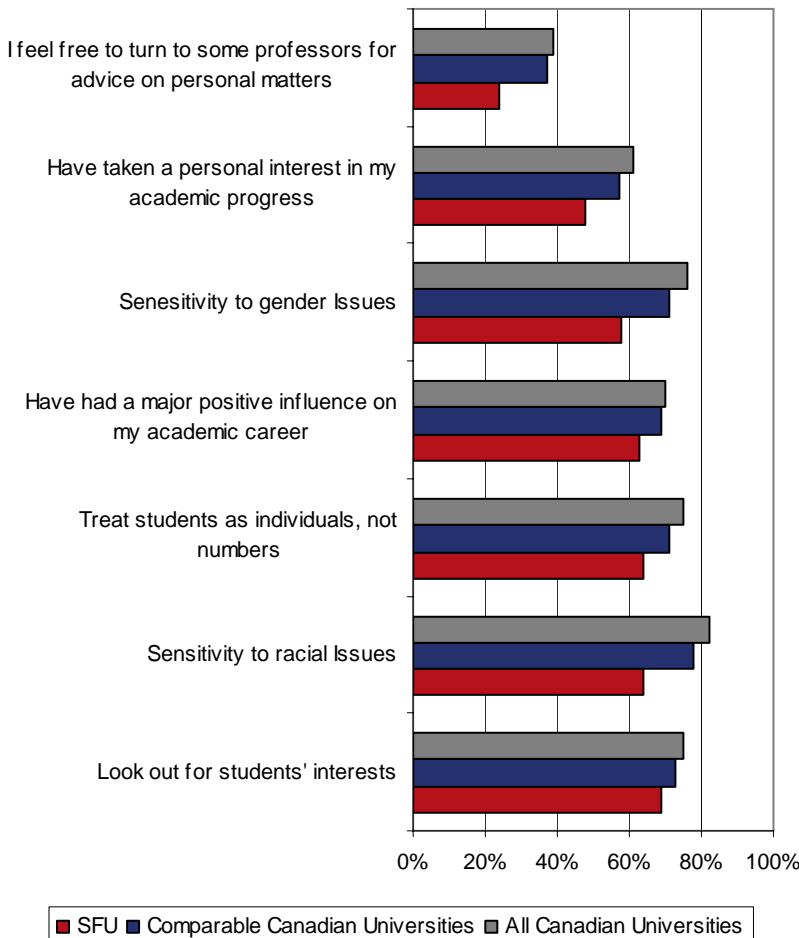


SFU students have relatively low levels of academic success/satisfaction in several areas.

Program Choice:

- SFU students are less successful in choosing programs that meet their objectives.

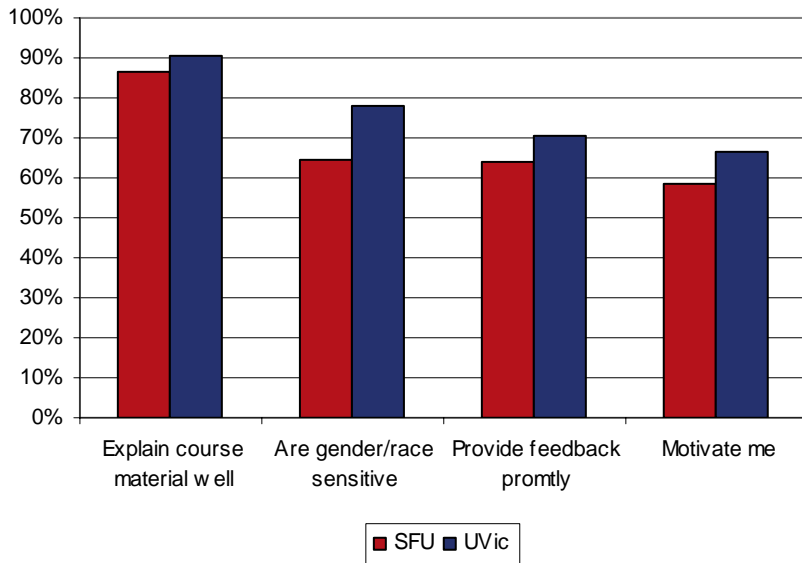
Undergraduate Student Perceptions of Professors (CUSC 2005)



Professors (2005):

- SFU students are less positive in their perceptions of professors.

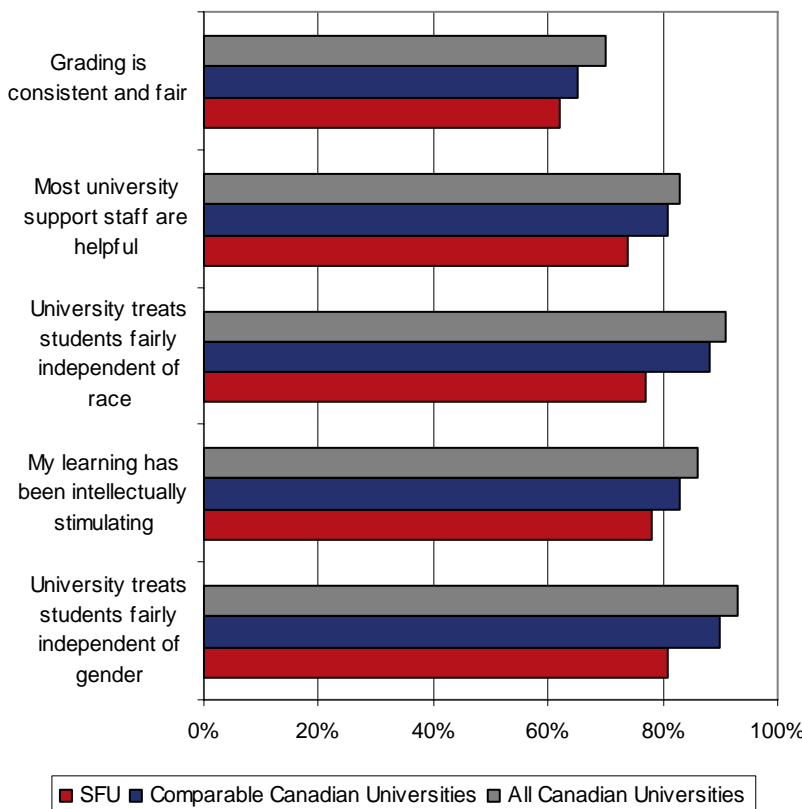
Undergraduate Satisfaction with Professors (URC 2007)



Professors (2007):

- SFU students are less satisfied with their professors than UVic students.

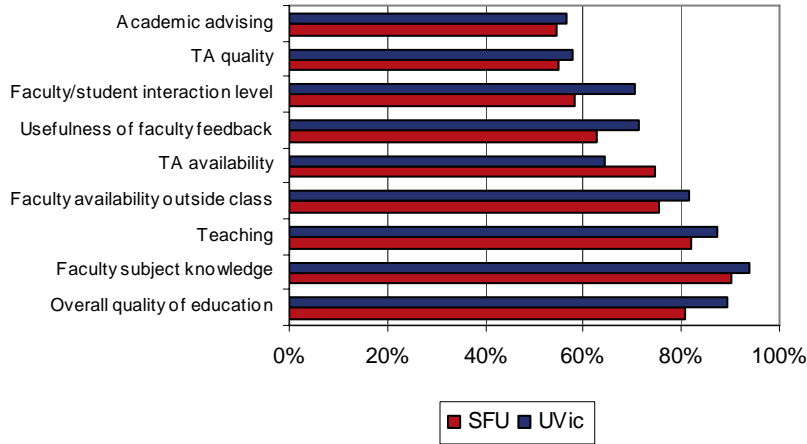
Undergraduate Student Perceptions of Learning Environment (CUSC 2005)



Learning Environment:

- SFU students are less positive about the learning environment in general.

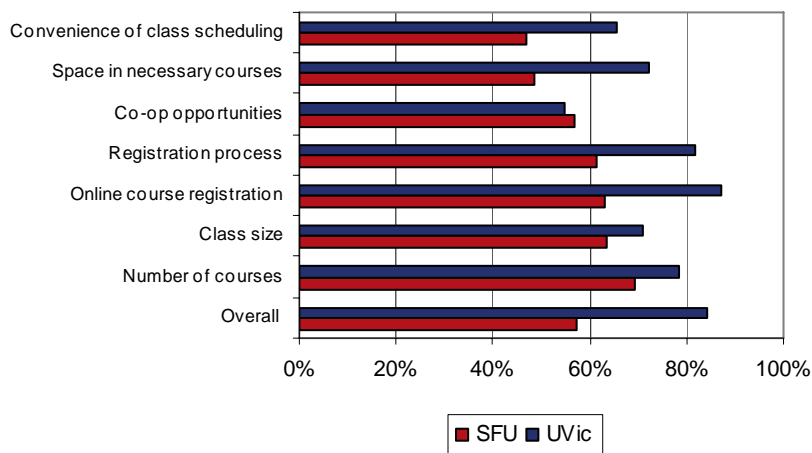
Undergraduate Satisfaction with Quality of Education (URC 2007)



Quality of Education:

- SFU students tend to be less satisfied regarding the quality of education received.

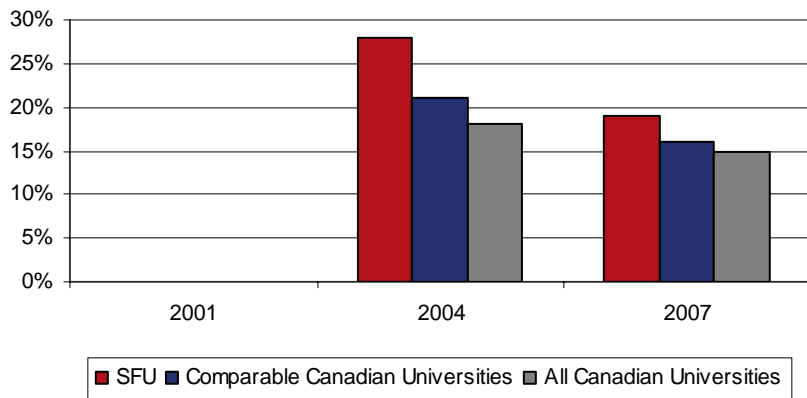
Course Satisfaction (URC 2007)



Course Satisfaction:

- SFU students tend to be less satisfied regarding their courses.

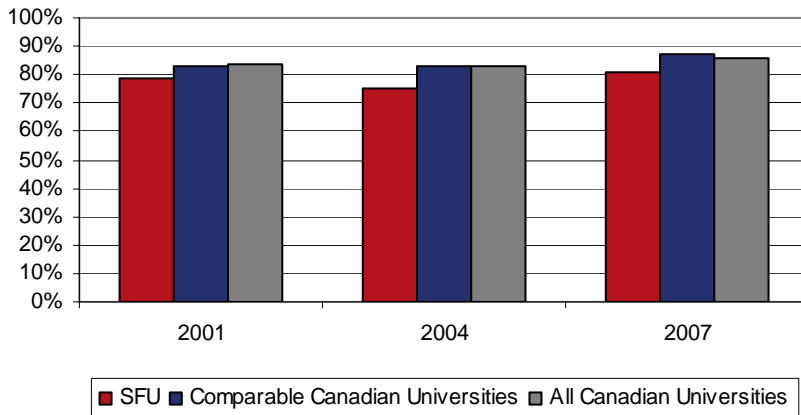
Proportion of 1st Year Students for whom the University Experience is *Falling Short of Expectations* (CUSC)



Expectations Falling Short:

Even in 1st year, many students indicate that their university experience is already falling short of their expectations.

Proportion of 1st Year Students Successful in Feeling like they Belong (CUSC)

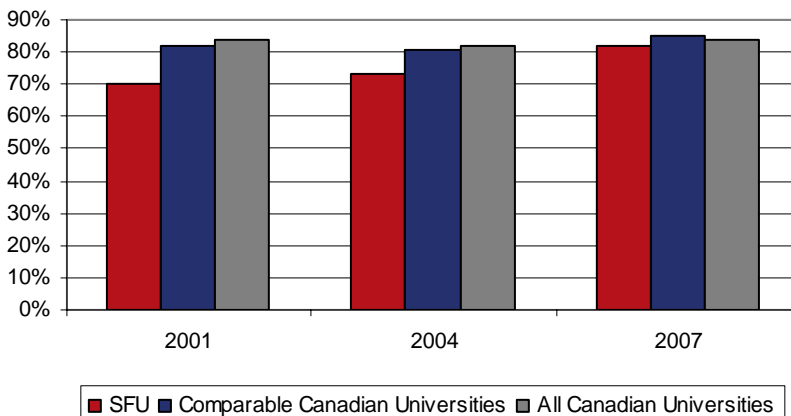


Social Integration:

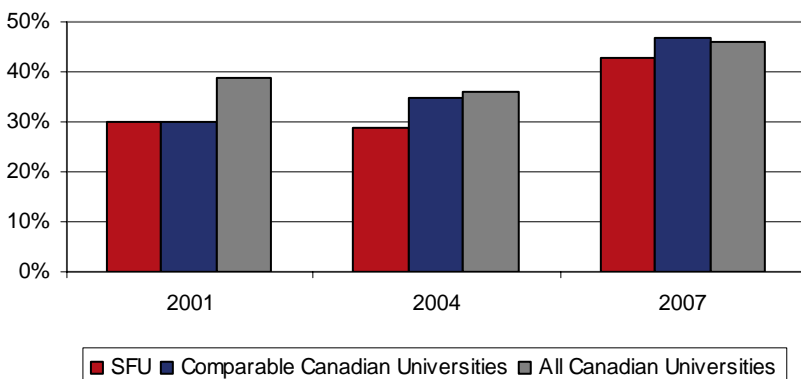
SFU students are typically not as socially engaged with university as students at comparable Canadian universities or Canadian universities overall, which has implications for personal success and satisfaction.

- First year students at SFU report less success than their peers in feeling: like they belong, making new friends, or becoming successfully involved.
- SFU student success in these areas over the last few years has increased.

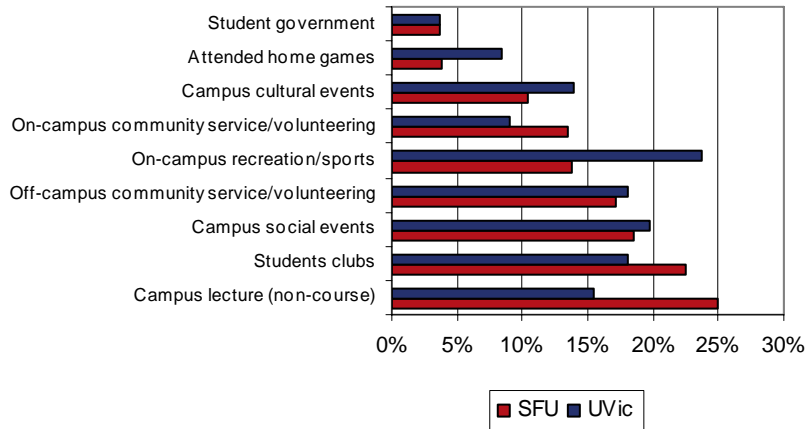
Proportion of 1st Year Students Successful in Making New Friends (CUSC)



Proportion of 1st Year Students Successful in Becoming Involved (CUSC)



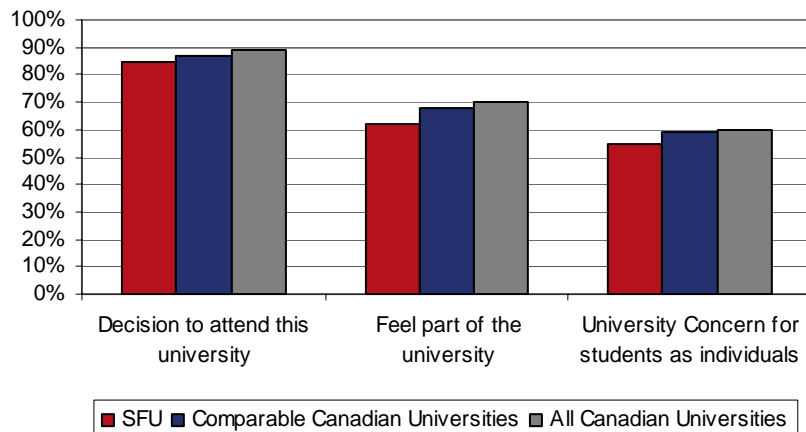
Social Engagement: Undergraduate Participation "Often" (URC 2007)



Student Engagement:

- Limited social engagement and integration is evident among SFU undergraduate students.

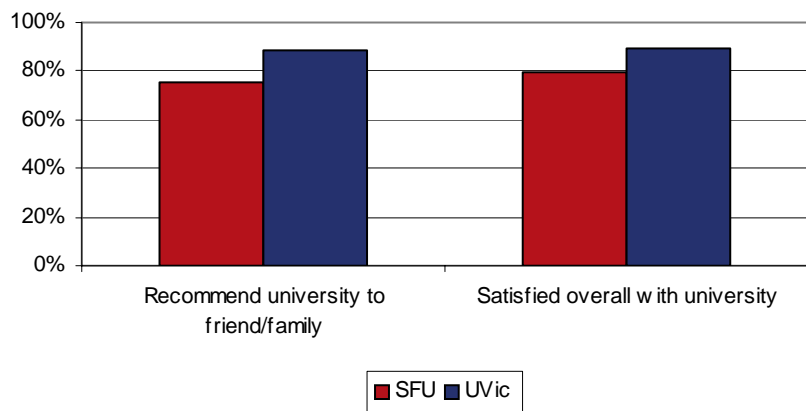
Overall Satisfaction of Undergraduate Students (CUSC 2005)



Satisfaction:

- Limited social integration has implications for overall satisfaction.

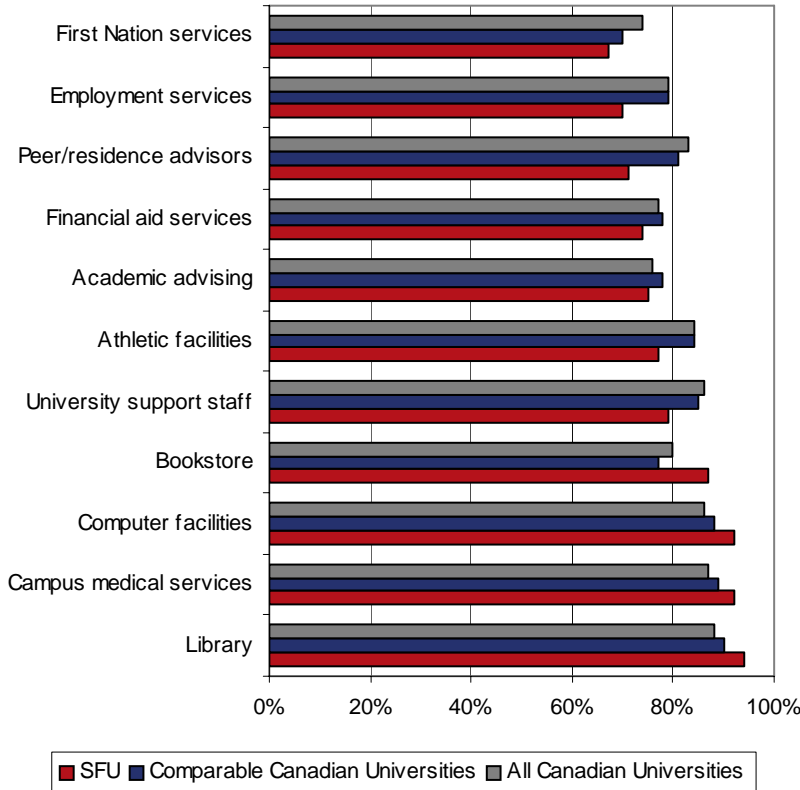
Overall Undergraduate Satisfaction with University (URC 2007)



Comparison to UVic:

- SFU students are less satisfied and less likely than UVic students to recommend the university to friends and family.

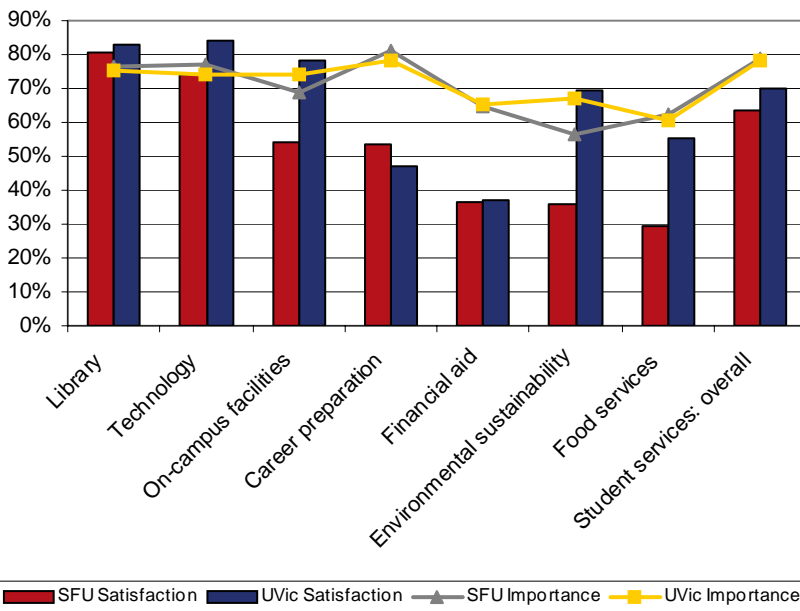
Student Services Satisfaction of Graduating Students (CUSC 2006)



Satisfaction of Graduates:

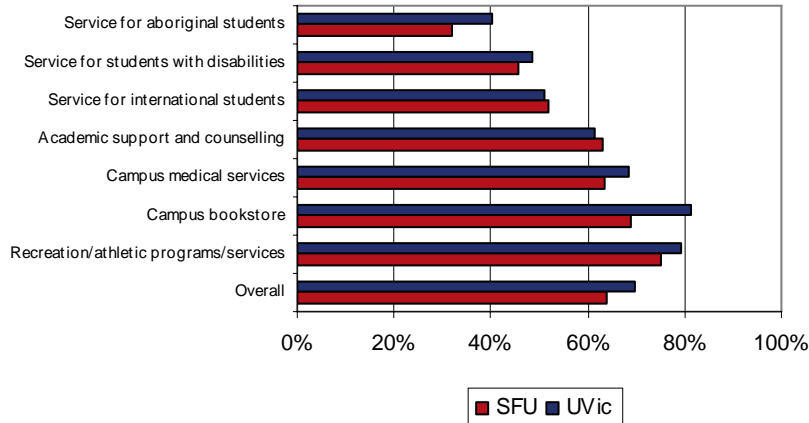
- Satisfaction with Student Services tends to be high for SFU students. However, there are areas of relative weakness in comparison to other Canadian institutions,

Students Services Satisfaction and Importance (URC 2007)



- The level of satisfaction with Student Services tends to be lower than the indicated importance of these services.

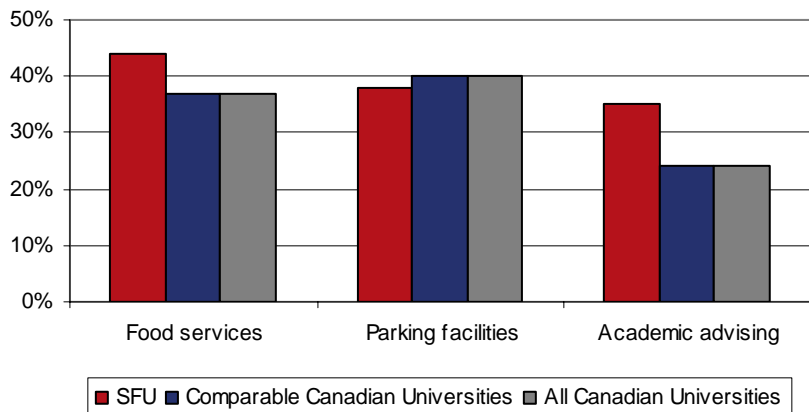
Undergraduate Student Satisfaction with Student Services (URC 2007)



Satisfaction:

- Satisfaction with services directed for specific student groups (i.e., international students, students with disabilities and Aboriginal students) tends to be lower than overall service satisfaction.

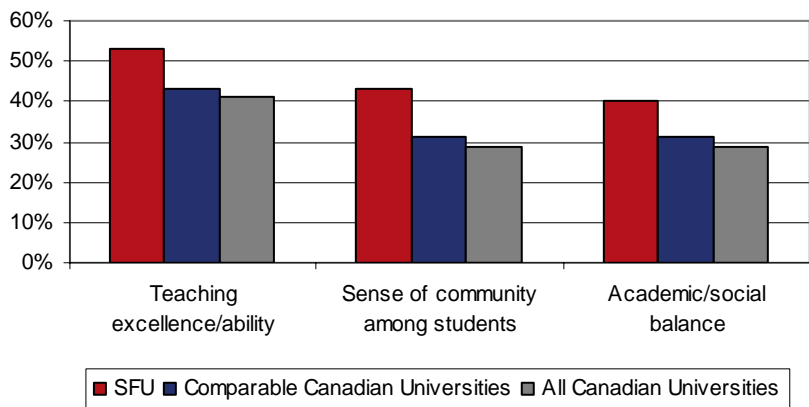
Top 3 Service Improvements Suggested by Undergraduate Students (CUSC 2005)



Suggested Improvements:

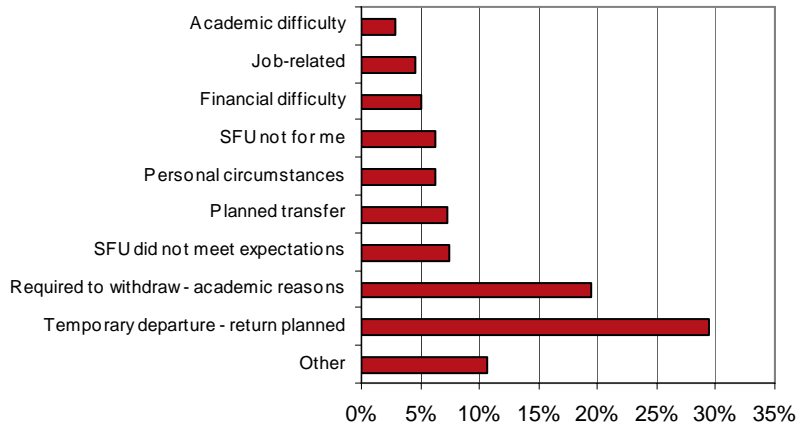
- The three student services cited most frequently for improvement at SFU are: food services, parking and academic advising.
- The top 3 suggested service improvements at Comparable Canadian Universities and All Canadian Universities were: parking facilities (40%, 40%), food services (37%, 37%), and campus bookstore (30%, 28%)

Top 3 Suggested Areas for Improvement by Undergraduate Students (CUSC 2005)



- Two of the 3 general service improvements recommended by SFU students relate to social aspects of the university.
- The top suggested service improvements at Comparable Canadian Universities were: Teaching excellence/ability (43%), University financial aid (34%), Academic/Social balance (31%), and Sense of community among students (31%).
- The top 3 suggested service improvements at All Canadian Universities were: teaching excellence/ability (41%), University financial aid (35%), and academic/social balance (29%)

Main Reasons for Leaving SFU (McCredie 2006)



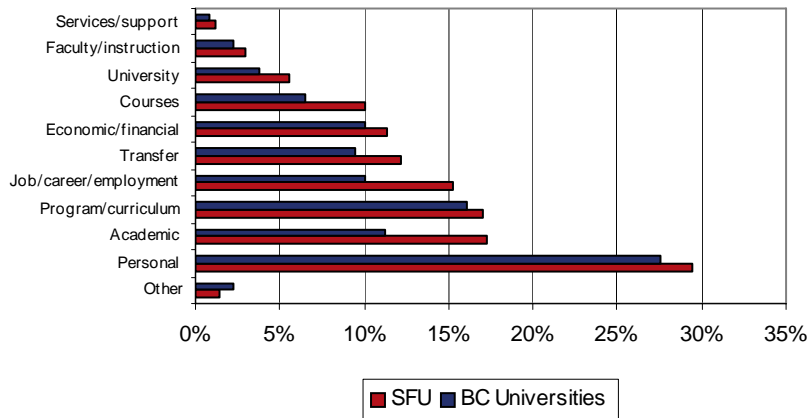
Main Reasons for Leaving (All Leavers):

An undergraduate degree requires multiple years to complete. The actual duration required is often subject to external influences that can create stress or lower the commitment to education beyond the control and sometimes knowledge of the university.

Main reasons for leaving university are:

- Academic;
- Financial;
- Personal; and
- Employment opportunities.

True Leavers' Reasons for Leaving University (Early Leavers 2000)



True leavers consist of all degree-focused students who did not initially plan to withdraw from university or transfer to another institution, and who had no expectation of returning to their university.

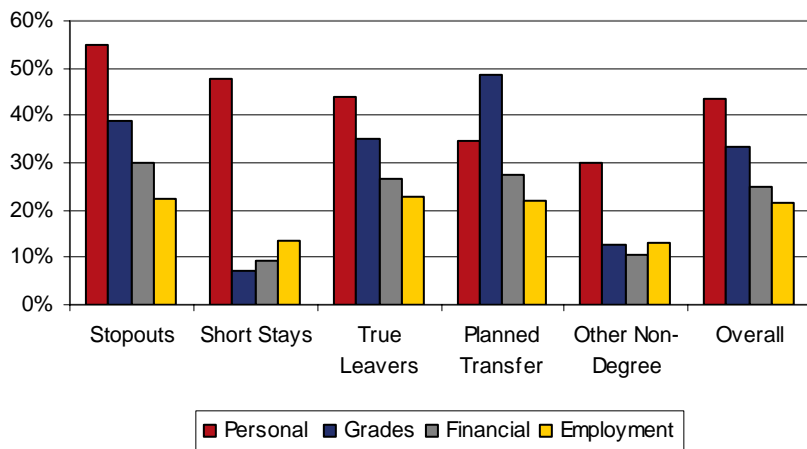
- See http://www.sfu.ca/irp/provincial/leavers/documents/uel_highlights2000.pdf for a brief overview on all types of school leavers in BC.

Reasons for Leaving (True Leavers):

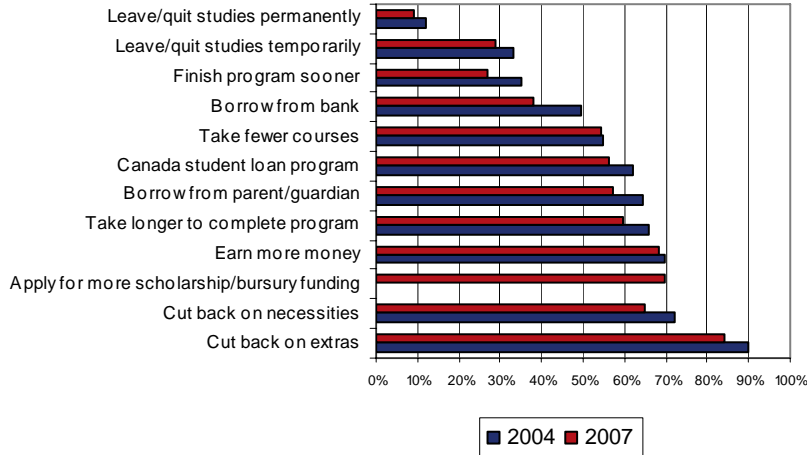
Main reasons for leaving university are:

- Personal;
- Academic;
- Program/curriculum; and
- Employment.

Reasons for Leaving SFU (Early Leavers 2000)



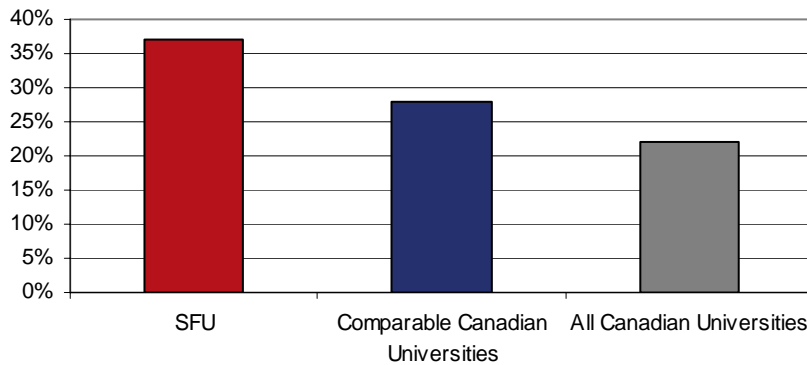
Likely Reactions to Increased Tuition by Undergraduate SFU Students (Tuition Affordability)



Tuition Affordability:

Tuition affordability may affect student decisions to either temporarily or permanently leave university.

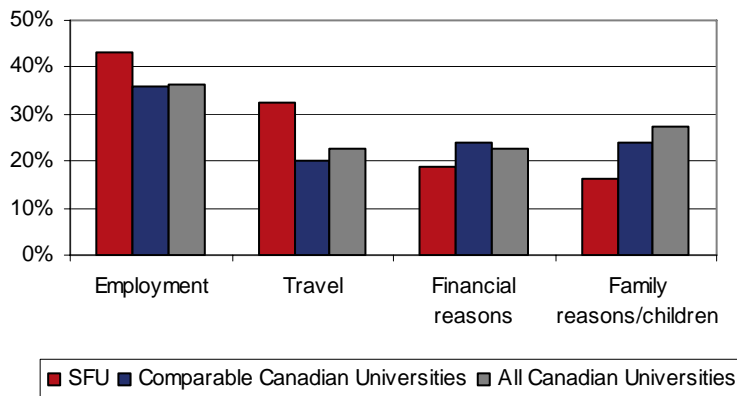
Proportion of Graduating Students that Interrupted Studies (CUSC 2006)



Stopouts:

SFU already has a relatively high rate of students who interrupt their studies* (i.e., temporarily leave university).

Main Reasons why Graduating Students Interrupted their Studies (CUSC 2006)

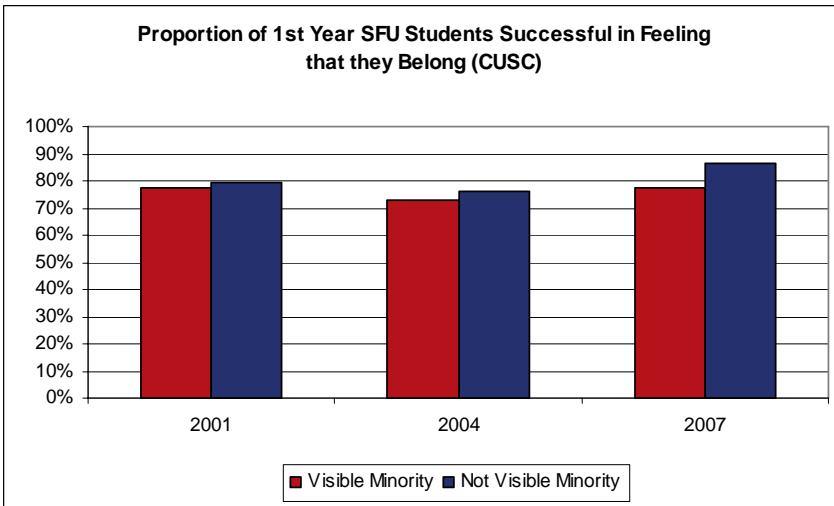


Main Reasons for Stopping Out:

The main reasons for interrupting studies are:

- Employment;
- Travel;
- Financial; and
- Family/children.

*Endnote #2

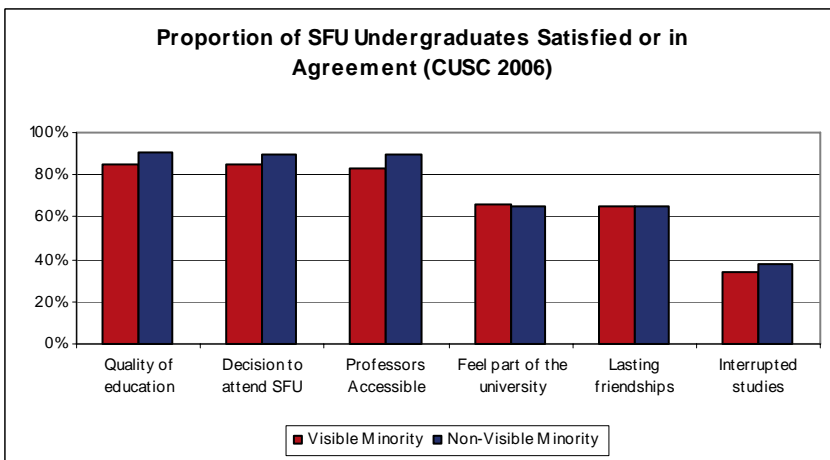


In comparison to comparable Canadian universities and Canadian universities in general, SFU tends to have a higher proportion of students that self-identify as visible minorities (see Demographics, page 5).

First Year Students:

Based on CUSC surveys of first-year students in 2001, 2004 and 2007, visible minority students tend to be:

- Less involved in campus activities;
- Less successful in feeling that they belong;
- Less satisfied with concern shown by the university to students as individuals;
- Less satisfied with the quality of teaching; and
- Less satisfied with the decision to attend SFU.

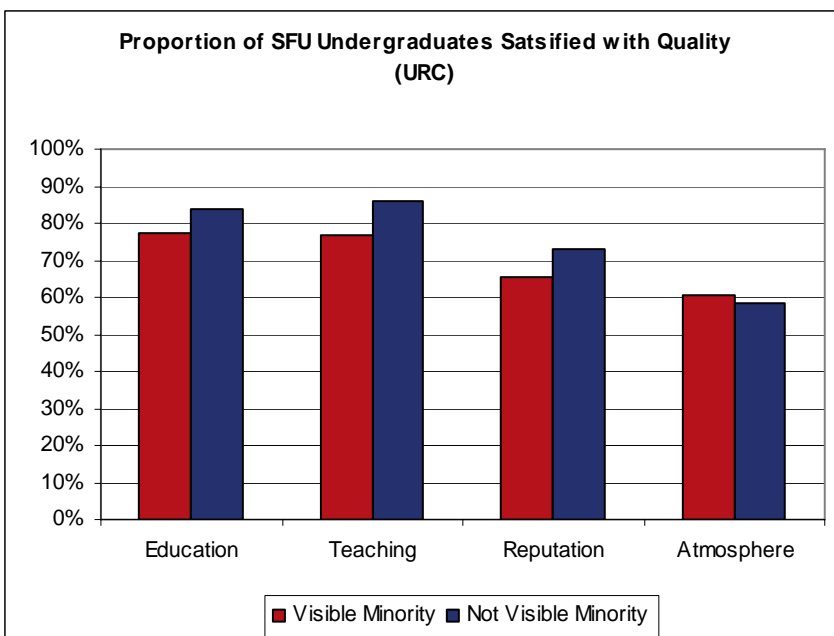


All Students:

The results are more mixed when the entire undergraduate community is considered.

Visible minority students are less satisfied with:

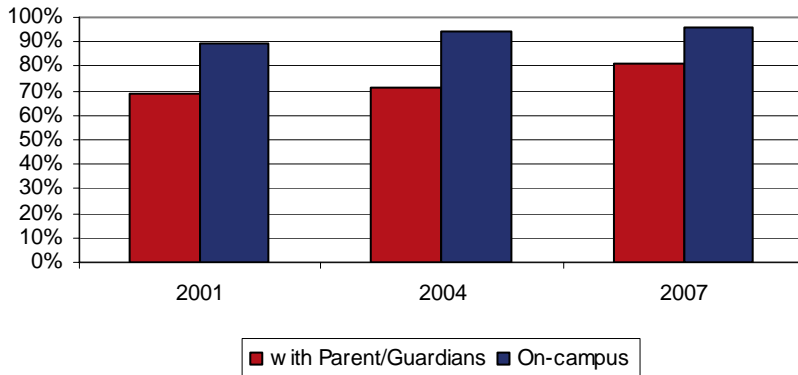
- Quality of teaching;
- Education; and
- University reputation.



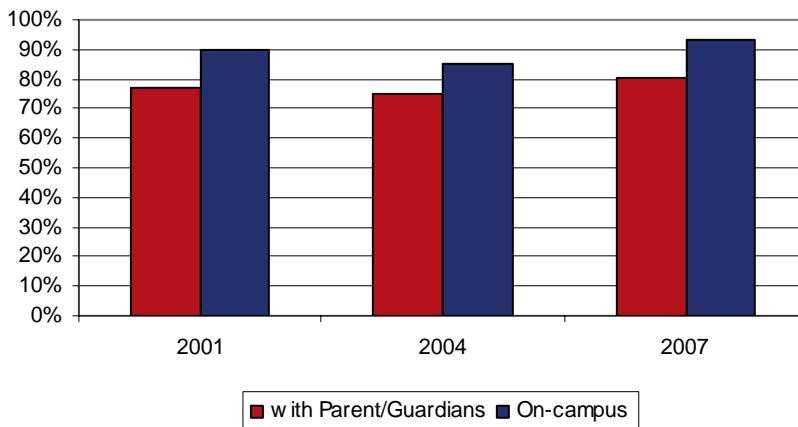
However, visible minority undergraduate students as a whole had comparable or higher satisfaction rates for:

- University atmosphere;
- Student services;
- Technology;
- Career preparation; and
- Financial assistance.

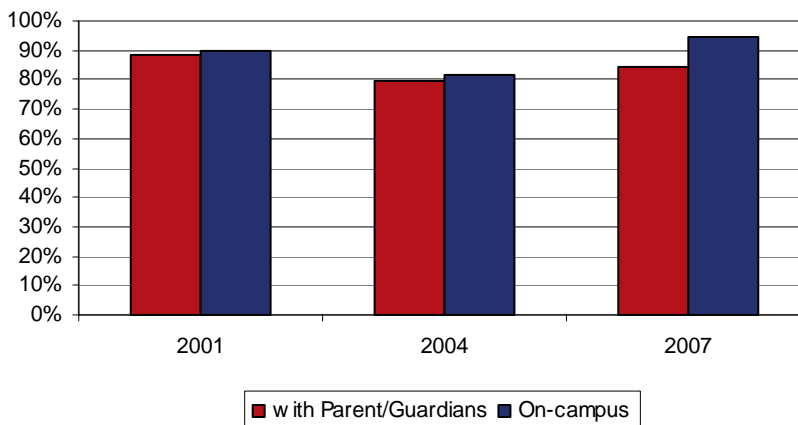
Proportion of 1st Year Students Successful in Making Friends by Living Arrangements (CUSC)



Proportion of 1st Year Students Successful in Feeling that they Belong by Living Arrangements (CUSC)



Proportion of 1st Year Students Satisfied with Quality of Teaching by Living Arrangements (CUSC)



Most first year students at SFU live with their parents/guardians; however, in comparison to Canadian universities as a whole, much fewer live in on-campus residences (few survey respondents indicated other living arrangement options). In Fall 2007, 727 residence spaces were designated for first year students, which represents approximately 12% of first year student enrolment.

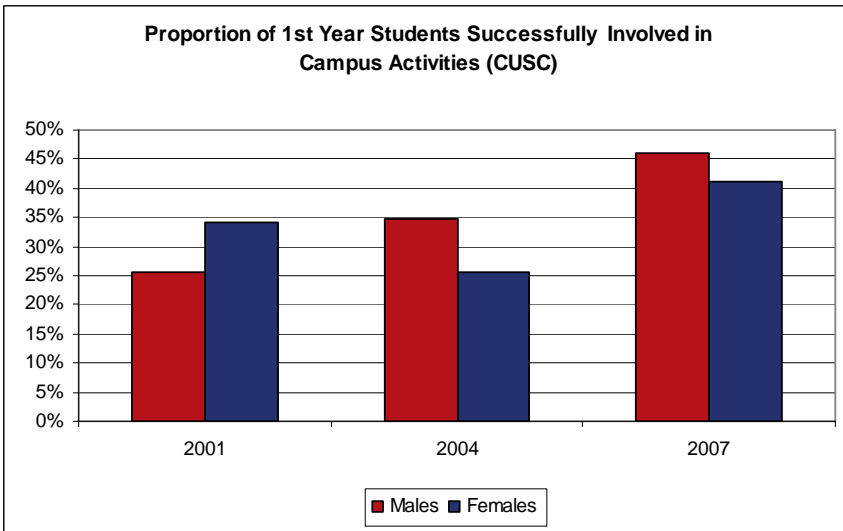
Residence Life:

Based on CUSC surveys of first-year students in 2001, 2004 and 2007, students living on-campus tend to be:

- More likely to participate in orientation;
- More successful in making new friends;
- More successful in feeling that they belong; and
- More satisfied with the quality of teaching.

However, the long-term impact on academic performance of living in residence at SFU has been found to be minimal. (see http://www.sfu.ca/irp/special_reports/documents/residence.2006.pdf)

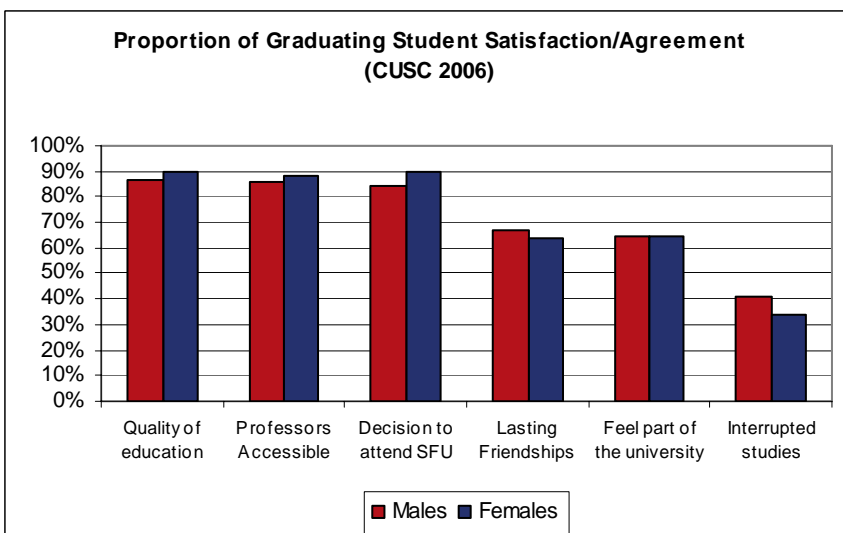
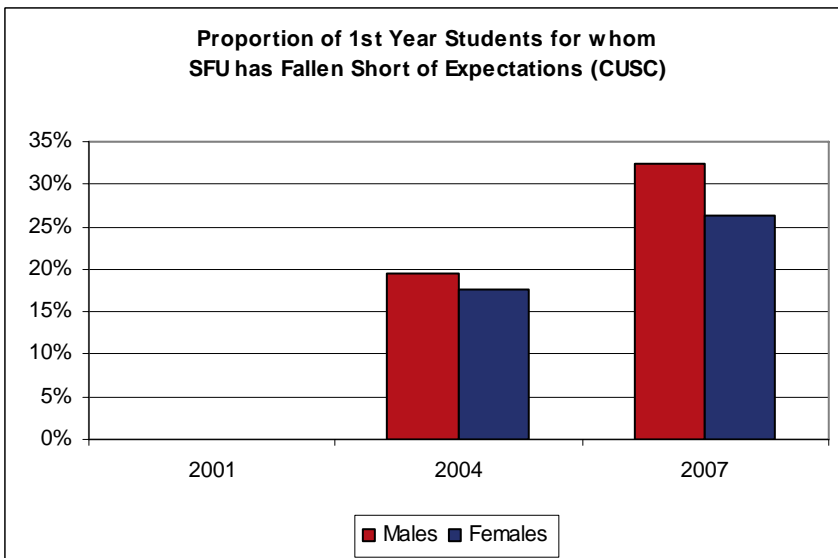
By the time students are graduating almost none are in campus residences (less than 1%, CUSC 2006). Satisfaction and success are comparable on many outcomes regardless of living arrangement (not shown). However, in one notable exception, students living alone and renting, who are older on average, are most likely to interrupt their studies relative to students living with their parents, living in shared accommodations and renting or living in their own home.



Universities in general and SFU specifically are attracting more female than male students.

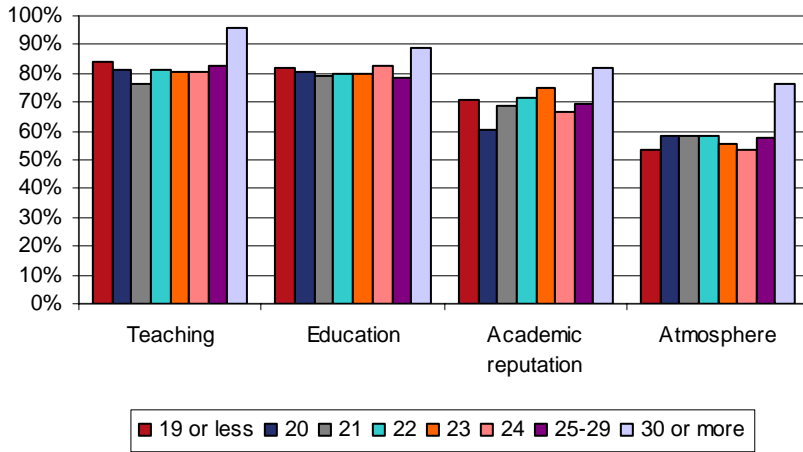
Satisfaction and success of first year SFU students surveyed in 2001, 2004 and 2007 are comparable between males and females on many dimensions. Areas with differences include:

- Successful involvement in campus activities;
- Proportionately more males indicating that SFU has fallen short of expectations; and
- Proportionately fewer males are successful in making new friends (not displayed).



The trend of the similar results for males and females is also evident in graduating students (CUSC 2006). However, male students were more likely than females to have interrupted their studies, and slightly more likely to indicate lasting friendships.

Proportion of SFU Graduates Satisfied with Quality by Age (URC 2007)



Age:

Students aged 30 and above are substantially more satisfied than younger students regarding the quality of many outcomes including:

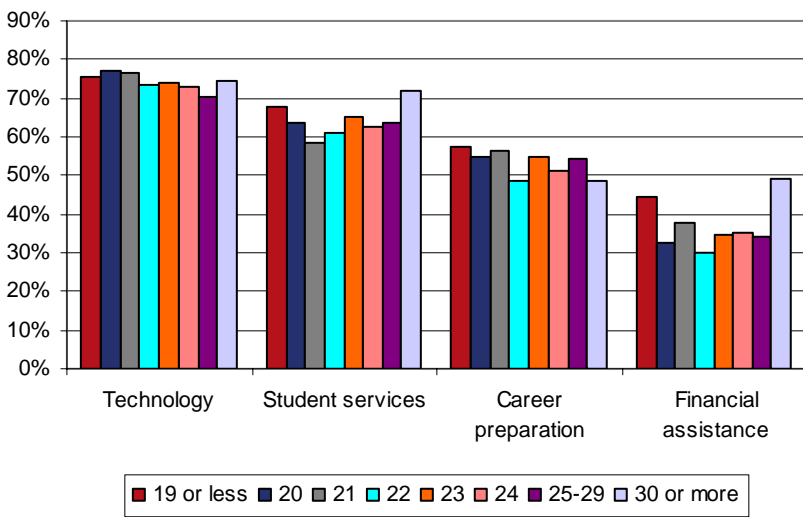
- Teaching;
- Education;
- University atmosphere;
- Academic reputation;
- Student services; and
- Financial assistance.

Two areas where students aged 30 and above have comparable rates of satisfaction are:

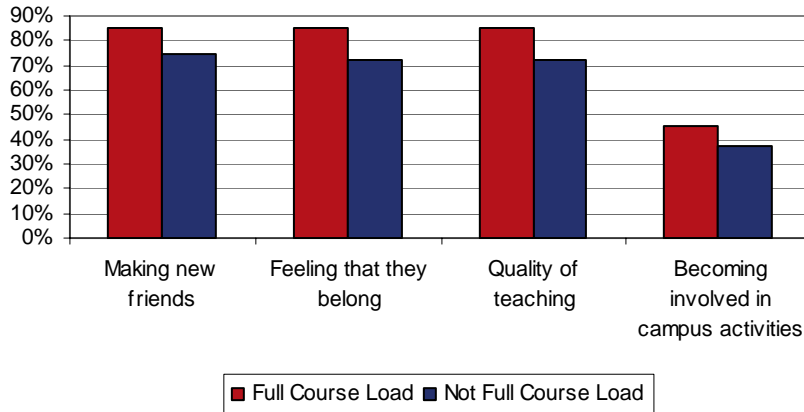
- Technology and
- Career preparation.

Note. Age is inferred from year of birth data (e.g., students born in 1987 are assumed to be 20 in 2007).

Proportion of SFU Students Satisfied with Quality by Age (URC 2007)



Proportion of 1st Year Student Success as a Function of Course Load (CUSC 2007)



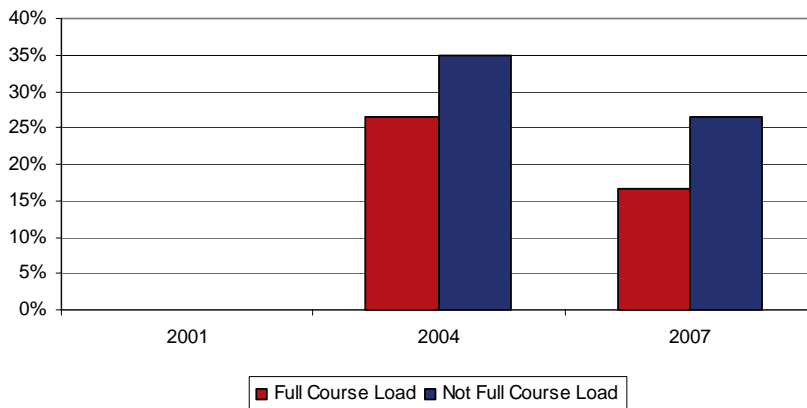
First Year Students:

On many outcomes 1st year students with a full course load are more satisfied/successful than their counterparts.

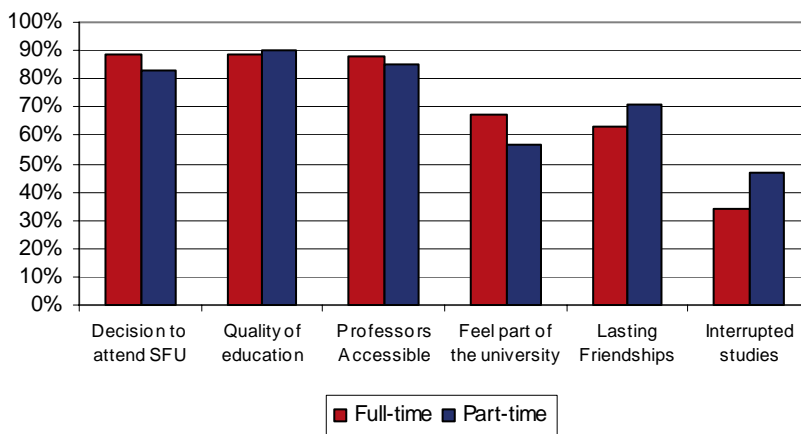
First year-full course load students are:

- More successful making new friends;
- More involved in campus activities;
- More likely to have a sense of belonging;
- More satisfied with their decision to attend SFU; and
- Less likely to indicate that SFU falls short of their expectations.

Proportion of 1st Year Students for which SFU has fallen short of expectations (CUSC)



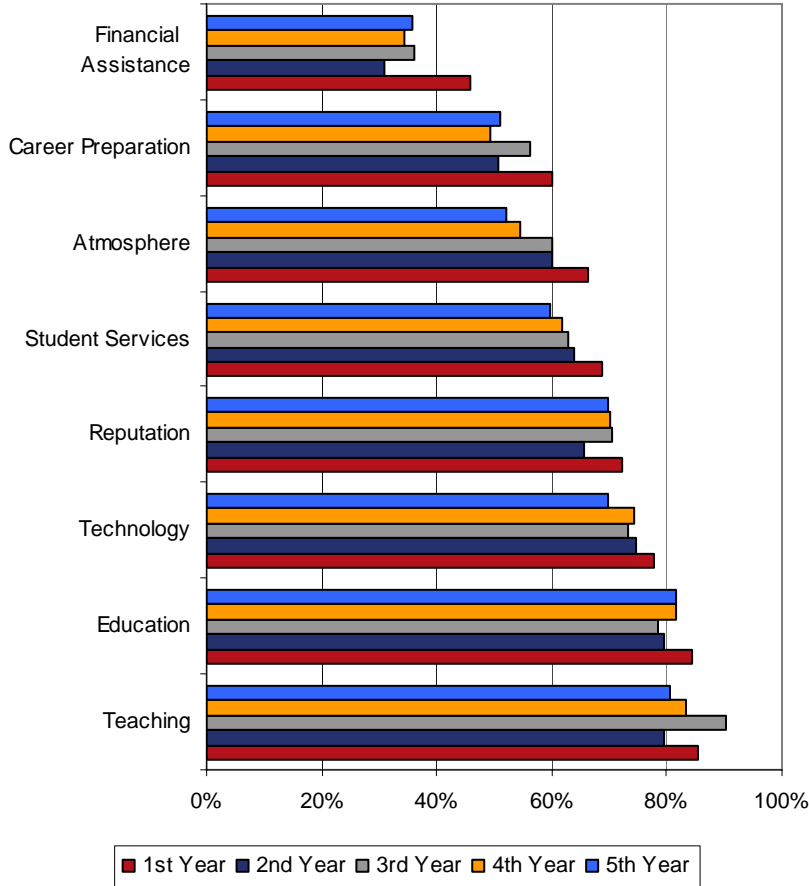
Proportion of Graduating Student Satisfaction/Agreement (CUSC 2006)



Graduating Students:

This trend continues with full-time graduating students being more satisfied than their part-time counterparts. However, two unexpected exceptions were found: quality of education and opportunities for lasting friendships were viewed more positively by part-time students.

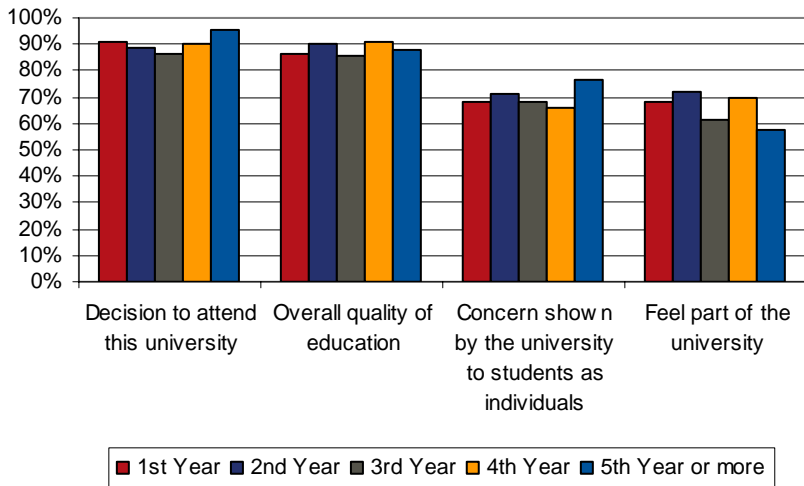
Proportion of SFU Undergraduates Satisfied with Quality (URC 2007)



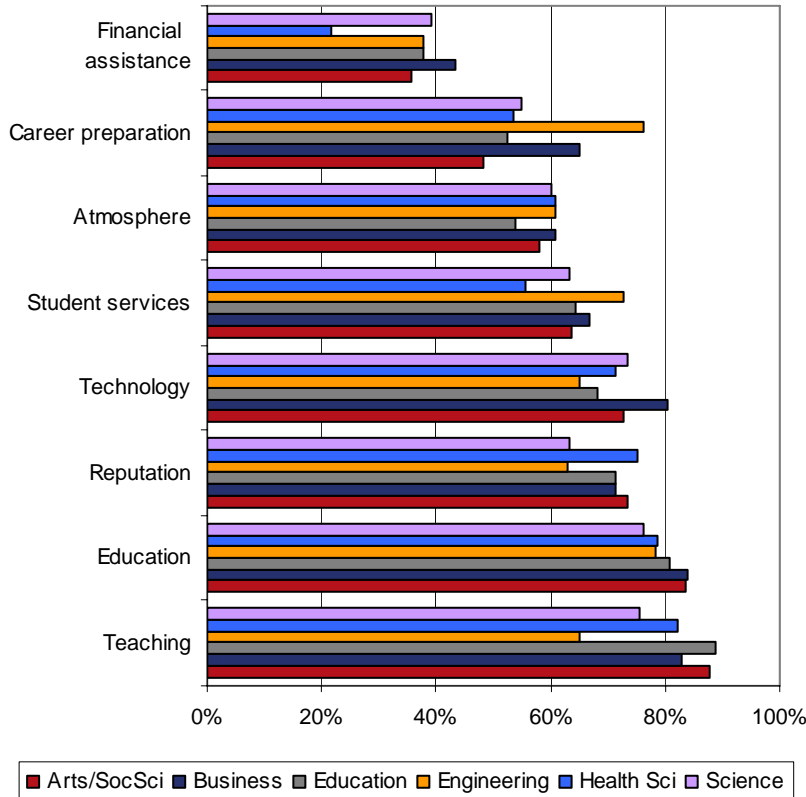
Students may have different expectations and needs depending on their academic year. It is therefore important to consider the extent to which these needs are being met.

Based on URC 2007 survey data, SFU students in 1st year tend to be slightly more satisfied than their peers on many issues and students in years 2 through 5 tend to be similarly satisfied. However, responses to the 2006 CUSC survey suggest similar rates in satisfaction in each year.

Proportion of SFU Undergraduates Satisfied with Quality (CUSC 2005)

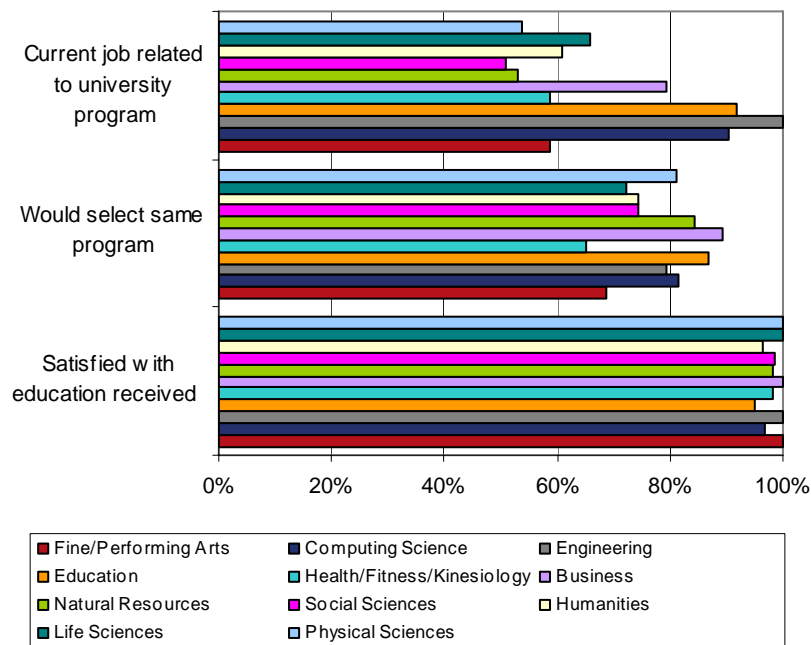


Proportion of SFU Students Satisfied with Quality (URC 2007)



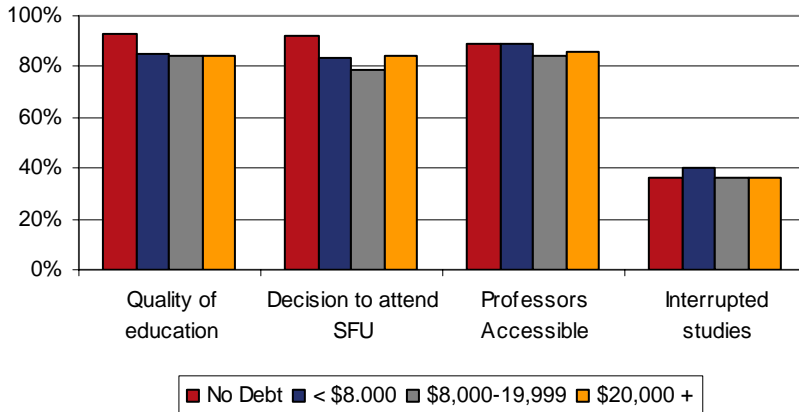
The expectations and needs of students may differ as a function of program of study. Based on data collected there is some variation in satisfaction as a function of the program groups defined by URC and BC Outcomes.

Proportion of SFU Graduates (BC Outcomes 2006)



Further investigation into program of study would be useful, along program or Faculty divisions more comparable to the organization of SFU.

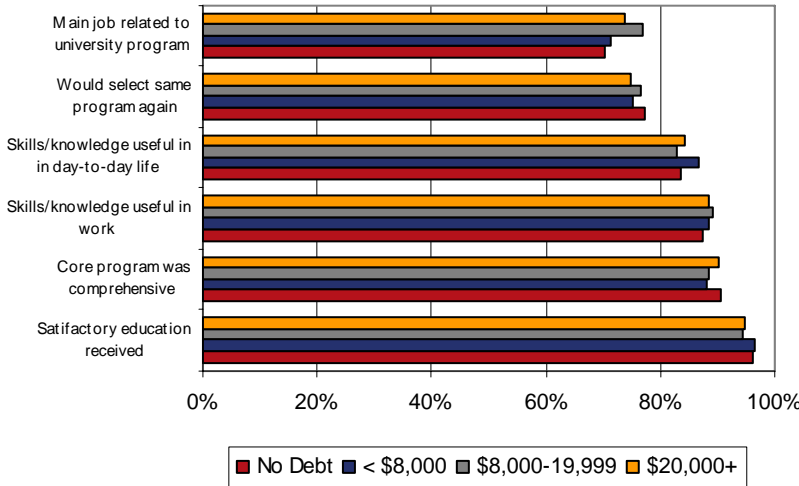
Proportion of Graduating Students Satisfaction/Agreement by Debt Load (CUSC 2006)



Satisfaction:

Based on data collected from the CUSC and BC Outcomes surveys, debt load has a minimal impact on satisfaction on most outcomes for graduating students or graduates looking back retrospectively two years later. However, students with no debt were more likely to be satisfied than students with debt in some areas.

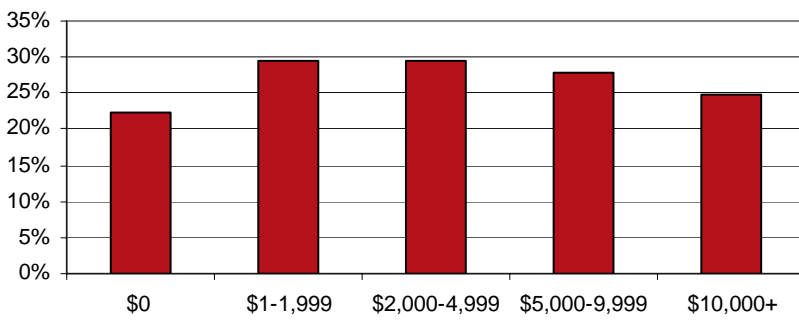
Impact of Debt on SFU 2000 Graduates in 2002 (BC Outcomes)



Average Annual Debt:

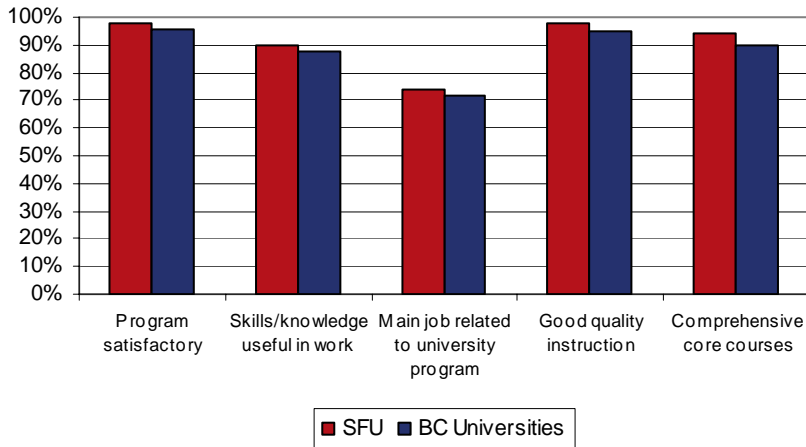
The 2007 Tuition Affordability Survey data suggest that average annual debt relates to interrupted studies, ultimate educational goals, and steps taken to manage educational/living expenses. (Not all these findings are displayed graphically.)

Proportion of SFU Students that have interrupted their studies as a function of average annual debt (Tuition Affordability 2007)



- Students with moderate average annual debt are more likely to interrupt their studies than students with no debt or high amounts of debt.
- Students with higher average annual debts are more likely to have a masters or doctoral degree as their ultimate goal relative to those with less debt.
- Student debt is positively correlated with living in shared accommodations and negatively correlated with living at home.
- Students with moderate average annual debt are more likely to work in the summer and/or academic year than those with no debt or high amounts of debt.

2000 Baccalaureate Graduate Views in 2002 (BC Outcomes)

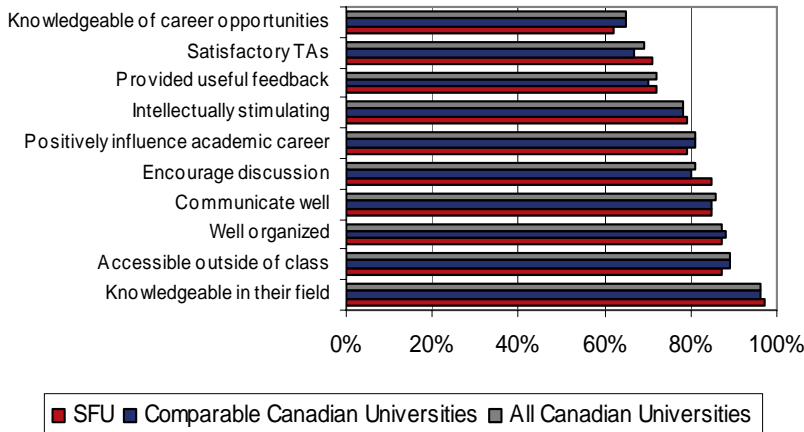


It is important to recognize that the focus of this report is to provide possible explanations for students leaving SFU. Given this focus, a detailed overview of areas where SFU is weak in comparison to other universities has been provided. Nonetheless, SFU has strengths that can also be built upon. This section provides a brief summary of some SFU strengths.

University Experience:

General impressions of the SFU experience tend to be similar and slightly more positive than found for BC graduates as a whole.

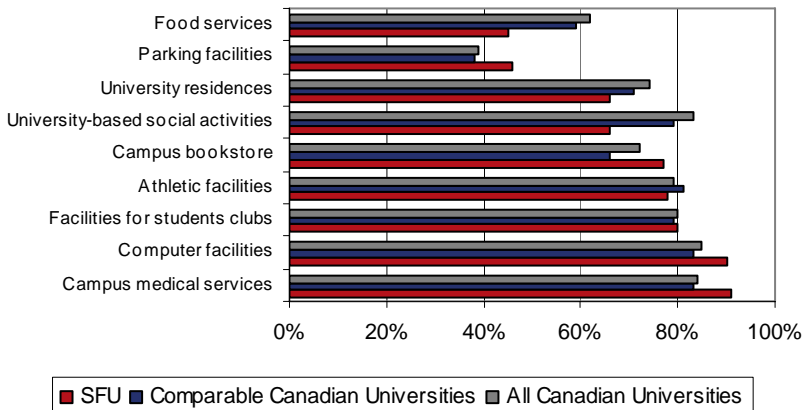
Assessment of Faculty by Graduating Students (CUSC 2006)



Faculty:

Faculty assessments are most positive among graduating students (CUSC 2006), though less positive among all students (CUSC 2005) and first-year students (CUSC2007).

Proportion of All Students Satisfied with facilities/services (CUSC 2005)



Student Services:

Satisfaction with some student services tends to be relatively strong.

See [President's Reports](#) and [SFU News](#) for more in depth descriptions of SFU strengths.

Academic Programs:

- Students can enter SFU programs or take individual classes beginning in fall (September), spring (January) or summer (May) and can choose from more than 100 programs and combine areas of study across six faculties to tailor a degree to their goals.
- Dual-degree programs and partnerships with universities around the world expand students' academic and cultural horizons.
- SFU's co-operative education program is one of the largest, most dynamic and diversified co-op programs in Canada.
- SFU's bachelor of general studies program in liberal and business studies can help students finish degrees on evening and on weekends.

Student Services:

- Among SFU's academic advisors is one who specializes in First Nations studies at SFU.
- The Student Learning Commons, a one-stop destination for academic support at each campus, offers services through the library at SFU's three campuses.
- New students — college-transfers, recent high school graduates or mature students — can enroll in free workshops aimed at smoothing their transition to higher education.
- Since 1989, SFU students have been helping their peers cope with personal, social, career and learning-related issues through a program called Peer Education.
- The SFU library was the first library in Canada to implement the "Ask Us Here" roving reference service, which successfully enhances interactive, chat, email, in-person and phone reference services.
- SFU awards almost 1,400 open undergraduate scholarships annually to qualified students, with no application required.
- SFU allocates \$5.3 million annually in bursaries to students with financial need and distributes more than \$850,000 annually in scholarships and awards to continuing students.

Athletics:

- With the SFU Clan, student athletes have opportunities to shine in both the Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS) league and the U.S.-based National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA). SFU has 12 varsity sports teams, which involve almost 300 student-athletes.
- The university's new multi-level fitness facility offers a large selection of cardio equipment and free weights. Students and staff are on hand to provide tours and equipment orientation.

Research:

- More than 30 SFU faculty members are fellows of the prestigious Royal Society of Canada fellows.
- In 2005-06, SFU faculty members and teams won more than \$59.7 million in research grants and contracts, in open competitions sponsored primarily by the Canadian and British Columbia governments.
- SFU's success rate of 90 percent in 2006 in the Discovery Grants competition of the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) was the highest of any university in the country.
- ReSearch Infosource, Canada's leading provider of research intelligence evaluation, named SFU the top comprehensive university in Canada for "publication effectiveness" in 2006.
- The Milken Institute, which ranks North American universities' ability to turn world-class research into licensing income and business startups, ranked SFU #1 in startups per million dollars of research expenditure in 2000-2004.
- SFU's success rate of 50 percent in the 2006 competition for standard research grants, awarded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), was the highest of the major universities in BC.

International:

- SFU has a vibrant and diverse student body with students from more than 100 countries. More than 50 students volunteer to provide transitional support to new international students through SFU's mentorship program.
- SFU International helps more than 500 students each year earn credits towards their degree while exploring the world and developing a truly global outlook.
- SFU students can access international exchange opportunities to more than 45 countries. These programs allow students to earn credits while studying one or two semesters at partner institutions.
- The university's more than 92,000 alumni are inspiring youth, inventing world firsts, awakening social consciousness and leading companies worldwide. These students of yesterday are helping the world cope with shifting economies, battle climate change, and resolve global health issues.

See <http://www.sfu.ca/facts/index.html> for more information.

BC Outcomes: http://www.tupc.bc.ca/student_outcomes/publications/graduate_outcomes/index.html

- BC University Student Outcomes – 2005 Survey of 2000 Baccalaureate Graduates (SFU n= 1628)
- BC University Student Outcomes – 2002 Survey of 2000 Baccalaureate Graduates (SFU n= 1992)

CMF: http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/images/Publications/070614_class_of_03_en.pdf

The Class of 2003 High School Follow-up Survey (June 2007). The Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation

Course Availability Survey: <http://www.sfu.ca/irp/courses/CourseFullTurnaway/index.html>

Spring 2004/05 (SFU n=2,179); Summer 2005/06 (SFU n=543); Fall 2005/06 (SFU n=1,013); Spring 2005/06 (SFU n=890); Fall 2006/07 (SFU n=1,715); Spring 2006/07 (SFU n=1,191)

CUSC 2001:

Canadian Undergraduate Survey Consortium First-Year University Students Survey: May 2001 (SFU n=251; Comparable Canadian Universities n=1,733; All Canadian Universities n=7,093)¹

CUSC 2004:

Canadian Undergraduate Survey Consortium First-Year University Students Survey: June 2004 (SFU n=460; Comparable n=2,934; All n=11,132)¹

CUSC 2005:

Canadian Undergraduate Survey Consortium Survey of Undergraduate University Students: June 2005 (SFU n=551; Comparable n=3,801; All n=12,783)¹

CUSC 2006:

Canadian Undergraduate Survey Consortium Graduating Students Survey: June 2006 (SFU n=582; Comparable n= 3,422; All n=10,464)¹

CUSC 2007:

Canadian Undergraduate Survey Consortium First-Year University Students Survey: June 2007 (SFU n=469; Comparable n=3,652, All n=12,648)¹

Early Leavers Survey 2000: The 2000 British Columbia Universities Early Leavers Survey (SFU n = 1830; BC n=5991)

McCredie 2006: Undergraduate Students Retention at Simon Fraser University: A 2005/2006 Case Study (SFU n= 544)

Tuition Affordability: <http://www.sfu.ca/irp/finance/tuitsurvey/index.html>

- 2002: First Year Students (SFU n=451)
- 2003: First Year Students (SFU n=339)
- 2004 (SFU n=3876)
- 2007 (SFU n=2658)

UGSS: <http://www.sfu.ca/irp/surveys/ugss/index.html>

SFU Undergraduate Student Surveys 1992 to 2006

URC 2007:

University Report Card – Undergraduate Students (SFU n=1601)

Endnotes:

1. CUSC Comparable Canadian universities are those that offer both undergraduate and graduate studies and tend to be of medium size in terms of student population (e.g., University of Victoria, Carleton University, University of Regina). All Canadian universities consist of small primarily undergraduate universities, large universities that offer undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs, as well as the comparable universities. Depending on participating universities, the specific institutions included in comparison groups vary slightly from year to year.
2. In the CUSC surveys the term 'interrupted studies' is interpreted by the respondents. In the 2007 Tuition Affordability survey, the term 'interrupted studies' is defined as: taking any time off school during post-secondary education, not including summer breaks or scheduled breaks in between co-operative education work terms/school terms. At SFU, interrupted studies is technically defined as taking any semester off (i.e., spring, summer or fall).