The Undergraduate Student Survey has been conducted at Simon Fraser University almost every Fall semester since 1992. These annual surveys provide us with essential feedback from our undergraduate students and this year’s survey addressed the following themes: Course Availability, Instructional Methods and Effectiveness, and Registration Process and Affordability. Highlights from the survey are provided here and a full report on the survey may be obtained from the Office of Analytical Studies’ web site: www.sfu.ca/analytical-studies/ugss/2004/2004.html.

This year, 26 undergraduate classes were selected for the survey and these were distributed across SFU’s five faculties as follows: eleven in Arts, seven in Applied Sciences, five in Business, two in Science and one in Education. A total of 1,093 surveys were completed in class, representing 68% of the unique registrants in those classes. Non-respondents were primarily absent from class.

**Course Availability**

- This Fall, 86% of students were able to register for the number of courses they wanted and 59% were able to register in all specific courses desired.
- Historical survey results show that course availability levels have been on the decline at SFU since 1997 when 89% of students were able to register for the number of courses they wanted and 65% of students were able to register for specific courses.
- With the 2004 levels, course availability is an improvement over 2003 levels (the lowest point since 1993).
- Students could not register for specific courses this Fall due to full classes (50%), class time conflicts (34%) and final exam conflicts (6%).
- In general, the lower the course level, the higher the level of satisfaction with course availability at that level.
- Over half (51%) of all students pursuing a degree are taking longer to complete than initially expected. Primary reasons for extended degree completion time are courses not offered in the desired semester (18%), changing program or area of specialization (17%), and full courses (13%).
- Since 1997, the ability to obtain the desired number of courses and the ability to obtain the specific courses desired has been declining. This decrease in course availability may be partly responsible for the proportion of students who are taking longer than expected to graduate. (See Figure A).

![Figure A](image-url)

**Instructional Methods**

- Similar to past years, students feel they learn more effectively¹ in seminars, small lectures and tutorials over other instructional formats.
- Group work is an important learning tool for students. They tend to work in groups more often in tutorials and completing course assignments than studying together for exams.

¹ Very or somewhat effectively.
Teaching Assistant and Course Instructor Effectiveness

- Students were asked to evaluate specific instructional traits of their TA's and course instructors.
- The most common trait possessed by all or most teaching assistants was “responsiveness to questions” (87%); the least common trait was the “ability to challenge you intellectually” (55%).
- The most common trait possessed by all or most course instructors was “interest in teaching” (90%); the least common trait was their ability to “develop or increase students’ interest in the subject” (60%).
- Generally, students are satisfied with the instruction provided by teaching assistants and course instructors at SFU. A significant proportion of students are either very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with their TA’s (81%) and with their course instructors (87%).

Workload Manageability

- Similar to previous years, most students (79%) find the workload in SFU courses to be manageable (11% very manageable and 69% somewhat manageable).
- The fewer courses a student registers for, the more manageable the workload.
- When asked for ALL reasons for their unmanageable workload, the top two reasons were: too much reading (78%) and too many course assignments (49%). When asked for the single MOST IMPORTANT reason, “too much reading” was cited most often.

Registration Process

- Students were asked if they would be interested in registering for courses one semester in advance, 64% of students indicated that they would be very interested or somewhat interested.
- When asked for ALL reasons for their interest in registering in advance, the top two reasons that students gave were to be able to plan for courses needed for program completion (80%) and being able to register before courses get full (74%). When asked for the single MOST IMPORTANT reason, being able to plan for courses needed for program completion was indicated most often.

Response to Rising Tuition Fees

- Students were asked to indicate all adjustments they have had to make in the current year as a response to rising tuition fees. The top three responses were to earn more money through employment, cut back on living expenses to afford the cost of tuition, and to ask for or borrow more money (See Figure B).

### Reaction to Rising Tuition Costs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Earn More Money Through Employment</td>
<td>51.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut back on living expenses</td>
<td>43.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask for or borrow more money</td>
<td>43.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan to finish sooner</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take fewer courses</td>
<td>23.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase time to finish</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enter the co-op program</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exit or avoid the co-op program</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take a cheaper program</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall Evaluation

- Students were asked to discuss any concerns with regard to their academic experience at SFU. A random sample of their comments is provided in the Undergraduate Student Survey Report of Findings: Fall 2004.
- The top three concerns this year are: tuition fees (14%), instruction/course instructors (12%), and course availability (11%).