**Highlights**

**Fall 2011 SFU Undergraduate Student Survey**

The Undergraduate Student Survey has been conducted at Simon Fraser University every Fall semester since 1992¹ (except in 2002.) This annual survey provides essential feedback on the academic experiences and concerns of our undergraduate students. Every year, students are asked about their experiences with course availability at SFU, as well as a range of other topics that change from year to year. The new topics for this year’s survey were teaching/curriculum, services, and student engagement.

A total of 6,953 undergraduate students participated in this year’s survey. This represents a response rate of 28.5%, which is very similar to last year’s response rate of 28.6%. Assuming that the sample is representative, proportions calculated on all respondents are accurate within ±1.2%, 19 times out of 20². The full report is available on the Institutional Research and Planning web-site: [http://www.sfu.ca/irp/surveys/ugss/index.html](http://www.sfu.ca/irp/surveys/ugss/index.html)

**General Experience**

- 89% of respondents are very/somewhat satisfied with their general SFU experience.
- When students were asked what single thing SFU could do to improve their experience here, the most common responses were:
  - improve facilities,
  - improve course availability, variety, and scheduling, and
  - improve student life.

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¹ It should be noted that a change in methodology, from in-class paper survey to online survey, was instituted in 2006. The paper surveys, administered to a random sample of classes, resulted in a “captive audience” and high response rates. In contrast, the online surveys, usually administered to the entire SFU undergraduate student population, result in larger samples but lower response rates, which could make the results less generalizable. Measures were taken to reduce potential biases resulting from a lower response rate.

² This margin of error applies to estimates based on the entire sample, assuming that the sample is representative.
When asked to compare their experience at SFU to their expectations when they first arrived:
  - 14% of respondents said that SFU has exceeded their expectations,
  - 67% said SFU has met their expectations, and
  - 19% indicated that SFU has failed to meet their expectations.

**Course Availability**

- In general, this year’s course availability results represent a step backwards from the Fall 2010 results.
- **NUMBER of Courses**: 77% of respondents were able to register in the number of courses they wanted this fall, a statistically significant decrease from last year’s rate of 81%.
- **SPECIFIC Courses**: 54% were able to register in all of the specific courses they wanted to take this term. This is on par with the 2009 rate, and is a statistically significant decrease from last year’s rate of 57%.
- **REQUIRED Courses**: 64% were able to register in all of the REQUIRED courses they wanted this term (vs. 67% last fall, a statistically significant decrease.) Registration difficulty was most often due to:
  - full classes,
  - scheduling conflicts,
  - courses not being offered this term,
  - insufficient travel time to get between courses offered at different campuses, and
  - inconvenient scheduling.
  - Respondents in the Faculty of Education were most successful in registering for all of the required courses they wanted to take, while those in Health Sciences and in Arts and Social Sciences were least successful. This is the same pattern as in Fall 2010.

- **Delayed Credential Completion**: 57% of respondents reported that they are taking longer than expected to complete their credential (the same as last year’s rate.)
  - 85% of students felt that it was important to finish within their expected timeframe.
  - Commonly cited reasons for delay include:
    - course availability issues (e.g. full courses, schedule conflicts, courses not offered, etc.; 66% of delayed respondents),
    - taking a reduced course load (50%), and
    - employment (40%).
Rates of delayed completion are highest in the Faculty of Health Sciences (64%) and lowest in the Faculty of Education (40%).

- **Trends:** Course availability has become generally more problematic over the past fifteen years.

**Trends in Course Availability and Delayed Degree Completion**

![Graph showing trends in course availability and delayed degree completion](image)

Note: Survey not administered in Fall 2002

- **Satisfaction with Course Availability:**
  - Satisfaction with course availability decreases as course level increases.
    - Satisfaction with the availability of 400-level courses is similar across Faculties, with the exception of being substantially higher among respondents in Education (EDUC) and Business (BUS), and lower among those in Health Sciences (HSCI).
  - Satisfaction with various aspects of course availability (scheduling of classes, available registration spots, etc.) is quite similar to last year, with the following exceptions:
    - satisfaction with course scheduling has increased by 4%, and
    - satisfaction with course frequency (how often each course is offered) has decreased by 9%.

**Satisfaction with Course Availability**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location of courses offered</th>
<th>Scheduling of classes</th>
<th>Available registration spots in courses</th>
<th>Variety of distance/online courses</th>
<th>How often each course is offered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100-Level Courses</td>
<td>200-Level Courses</td>
<td>300-Level Courses</td>
<td>400-Level Courses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% Very/Somewhat Satisfied
Teaching/Curriculum

- **Quality of Teaching**: 86% of respondents are satisfied with the overall quality of teaching at SFU.
- **W/Q/B Courses**: Just over half of respondents agree that these courses succeed in producing the benefits for which they were designed (59% agreement for “W” courses, 57% for “B” courses, and 56% for “Q” courses). This is a statistically significant improvement over last fall’s results.

![Percentage of Respondents who Agree that “W/Q/B” Courses are Beneficial](chart)

- **Use of Personal Technology in Class**:
  - 33% of respondents said the use of personal technology by other students has a positive effect on their in-class learning experience,
  - 30% said the advantages and disadvantages are roughly equal,
  - 20% said the effect is negative, and
  - 17% indicated that it has no effect on their in-class learning experience.

![What Effect does the Use of Personal Technology by Other Students Have on your In-Class Learning Experience?](chart)

- **Research with Faculty Members**: 15% of graduating respondents reported that they have worked within a faculty member’s research team, outside of coursework.
- **English Language Skills and Group Work**: Among respondents who have done group work at SFU, 93% reported that there are students in their groups who have difficulty with their English language communication skills. Of these:
  - 10% said the effect on their group work experience is mainly beneficial,
  - 27% said its advantages and disadvantages are roughly equal,
  - 51% said it is mainly harmful, and
  - 12% said it has no effect on their group work experience.
• **Student Learning Outcomes**: Students were asked what qualities/skills they thought an SFU graduate should have. Respondents indicated that critical thinking skills are the most important.

![Important Qualities/Skills/Experiences SFU Students should Have by the Time they Graduate (top 5)](chart)

- Critical thinking
- Ability to apply knowledge/methods
- Oral communication
- Team-work
- Solid foundation in their field

**Services**

- **Facilities**: 74% of respondents are satisfied with the quality of on-campus buildings and facilities (vs. 77% last year, a statistically significant change.)
  - When asked which building has the greatest need of updating, the top choices were:
    - Academic Quadrangle (AQ, selected by 48% of respondents),
    - Robert C. Brown Hall/Images Theatre (RCB/IMAGTH, 11%), and
    - West Mall Centre (WMC, 11%).

![AQ: Most Urgently Needed Update/Maintenance](chart)

- **Library and Student Learning Commons**: When asked what the Library could do to make it easier for students to bring their laptops to campus, the most popular replies were:
  - more electrical outlets (requested by 68% of applicable respondents),
  - more/improved carrells, seating and study spaces (65%), and
  - provide charging stations (58%).

- **Use of Campuses**: Students were asked which campus they regularly use to take classes, use the Library, access Student Services, use computer labs, and use study space.
  - The vast majority of respondents indicated that they do these activities at the Burnaby campus (~80-87%, depending on the activity), followed by the Surrey campus (17-26%), then the Vancouver campus (7-15%).
  - Some students regularly use multiple campuses for these activities:
    - 24% of respondents regularly take classes at multiple campuses,
    - 9% access Student Services at multiple campuses, and
    - 17% use the Library, computer labs, and study space at more than one campus.
General

- **Engagement at SFU**: Graduating students were asked about their participation in various activities at SFU, over the course of their studies here. Among respondents:
  - 19% had participated in co-op, and an additional 62% said that they would have liked to.
  - 7-11% had participated in field schools, international exchange/study abroad, and work-study. An additional 55-67% said they would have liked to participate in these programs.
  - 13% indicated that they were unaware of events in their department, program or Faculty in which they could have participated.

- **Engagement in the Community**: In the last year:
  - 40% of respondents engaged in civic activities in their local community,
  - 33% engaged in humanitarian efforts to help the needy, and
  - 15-20% engaged in environmental advocacy, social justice activities, and community service work that made use of their SFU education.
  - Among those who did engage in these activities, 21% did so in an international setting.
  - 34-55% indicated that they are not planning on engaging in these types of activities.

- **Employment**: 53% of respondents are currently employed or self-employed. Among these:
  - 10% work more than 30 hours per week in a paid job,
  - 31% work 16 – 30 hours per week, and
  - 58% work 15 hours or less per week.

- **Tuition for International Students**: International students were asked whether they would still have come to SFU if the tuition had been higher.
  - At an increase in tuition of $1,000 per year, 47% of international respondents indicated that they definitely would have come, 22% said that they would not have come, and 31% were unsure.
  - At an increase of $5,000 per year, 14% said that they definitely would have come, while 71% definitely would not have come to SFU, and 15% were unsure.

- **Student Goals**: Students were asked to indicate what they were hoping to get out of their SFU education. Respondents indicated that getting a good job had been their top priority.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When Students Decided to come to SFU, They were Hoping to ... (Top 5)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>get a good job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fulfill their desire for knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meet new friends and have a good time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>train for a specific career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learn new ways of looking at the world</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70%
Recommendations

• **Facilities:** While overall satisfaction with facilities is relatively high (74%), in the student comments, facilities were the most frequently cited improvement requested. Based on comments received, student satisfaction with facilities could be further improved by:
  
  o Continuing to make improvements to on-campus washrooms, as well as keeping the washrooms clean throughout the day, and in a good state of repair. Washrooms in the AQ were most frequently cited as being in need of updating or maintenance.
  o Increase lighting in lecture halls.
  o Continuing to add, expand, and make improvements to study areas.

• **Course Availability and Scheduling:** Student responses suggest the need for continued effort to:
  
  o Increase the frequency of required upper division courses.
  o Increase the seat capacity of courses that have been historically popular.
  o Schedule courses likely to be taken together at non-overlapping times (and at sufficiently spaced times, when they are offered on different campuses.)
  o Check that exam times for courses commonly taken together do not overlap, before releasing the exam schedule.

• **Student Life/Campus Community:** Students continue to request improvements to student life and the campus community, such as holding more student events on campus.

• **WQB Courses:** While students’ perception of the value of WQB courses has been rising for several years, the rigidity of the requirements seems to cause issues for some students. Respondents suggest that the requirements would be less cumbersome if there were more designated WQB courses, especially at the upper division level.

• **Policies and Services:** Some additional student suggestions over the last few years for improving their experience at SFU include:
  
  o Reducing wait times to see academic advisors.
  o Improving the registration priority system, and communicating the algorithm to students.
  o Increasing the English-language communication standards for incoming students.
  o Lowering tuition and fees, and/or improving financial aid.