Fall 2015 Undergraduate Student Survey: Highlights

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, the survey asks students about their experiences with course availability and credential completion at SFU, as well as a range of other topics that change from year to year. This year’s topics included teaching and curriculum and services, and university culture and environment.

A total of 7,878 students participated in this year’s survey, yielding an overall response rate of 31.3%. Highlights of the survey results are presented here. Statistics provided in this summary and in the full report are estimates based on survey respondents. Assuming that the sample is representative, proportions calculated on all respondents are accurate within ±1.0%², 19 times out of 20. The full report is available on the Institutional Research and Planning web-site:  http://www.sfu.ca/irp/surveys/ugss.html

General Experience

- 84% of respondents are 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 student life,
  - improve facilities, and
  - end the TSSU strike³ and stop withholding grades.

If SFU could do one thing to improve your experience here, what would it be? (Top 10 Suggestions)

---

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 Note that this margin of error does not control for multiple comparisons. Survey research should be considered exploratory, and definitive conclusions must be drawn with caution.

³ Students specifically mentioned the “TSSU Strike” in their responses to this question.
Course Availability

- **NUMBER of Courses:** 84% of respondents were able to register in the number of courses they wanted this fall. This is similar to last year’s rate.

- **SPECIFIC Courses:** 60% were able to register in all of the specific courses they wanted to take this term, slightly higher than last year’s rate of 58%, but not statistically significant.

- **REQUIRED Courses:** 68% were able to register in all of the required courses they wanted this term. This is similar to last year’s rate of 67%.
  - Registration difficulty in required courses was most often due to:
    - full classes,
    - scheduling conflicts,
    - courses not being offered this term, and
    - spaces being reserved for other students.

- **Satisfaction with Course Availability:**
  - Satisfaction decreases as course level increases, ranging from 81% satisfaction for courses numbered XX1 to 199, down to 63% for courses numbered 400 to 499.
    - Satisfaction with the availability of courses numbered 200 to 299 dropped from 80% last year to 77% this year. This is a statistically significant difference. The rest of the satisfaction rates also decreased, but are not statistically significant.
  - Satisfaction with available registration spots in courses (66%) is higher than last year, but this is not a statistically significant difference.
  - Satisfaction with other aspects of course availability is quite similar to last year:
    - 77% are satisfied with the location of courses,
    - 68% are satisfied with course scheduling,
    - 62% are satisfied with the variety of distance/online courses offered, and
    - 59% are satisfied with the frequency of course offerings.
Credential Completion Time

- **Expected Time to Completion:**
  o 16% of respondents expected to complete their credential in under four years,
  o 58% expected to complete in four years, and
  o 26% expected to complete in five or more years.
  o 82% of respondents thought that it was important that they complete their credential within the timeframe they expected.

- **Delayed Credential Completion:** 63% of respondents reported that they are taking longer than expected to complete their credential. This is similar to last year.
  o Commonly cited reasons for taking longer include:
    ▪ course availability issues - e.g. full courses, schedule conflicts, courses not offered, etc. (56%),
    ▪ taking a reduced course load (42%),
    ▪ participation in co-op (36%), and
    ▪ employment outside of co-op (36%).

Teaching and Curriculum

- **Quality of Teaching:** 85% of respondents are satisfied with the overall quality of teaching at SFU (compared to 87% last fall – not a statistically significant difference).
- **WQB Courses:** Just over half of this year’s respondents agreed that these courses produce the benefits for which they were designed (62% agreement for “W” courses, 61% for “Q” courses, and 66% for “B” courses).
• **Learning Resources:**
  - 67% of respondents think SFU should encourage the use of more digital learning resources (e.g. interactive assignments and tests, eTextbooks, wiki series, etc.)
  - When asked to rank a set of aspects of learning resources,
    - 49% of respondents ranked the quality of the information in the material as most important,
    - 43% ranked the low cost of the materials as most important,
    - 6% ranked ease of gaining access to or purchasing the materials as most important, and
    - 2% ranked “uses the latest technology” as most important.

• **Textbooks:**
  - 64% of respondents purchased at least one textbook from the SFU Bookstore, 62% did so from another location such as online or from another student, and 11-13% did so from the SFU Online Bookstore/eShop or directly from a publisher website.
  - 24% of respondents spent less than $100 on their textbooks this term,
  - 54% spent $100-$399 on their textbooks, and
  - 22% spent $400 or more on textbooks.

• **Academic Integrity:**
  - Most respondents learned about SFU’s academic integrity/cheating policies from their instructors (93%) and TAs/TMs (63%).
  - Over the past year, 12% of respondents suspected another SFU student of purchasing a paper to hand in as their own assignment, 14% suspected another student of cheating during a test/exam using technology (such as a cell phone, smart watch, graphing calculator, etc.), and 22% suspected another student of cheating during a test/exam using other means.

• **Research with Faculty Members:** 18% of respondents considered to be in fourth year or higher (based on credits completed and basis of admission) said that they have worked within a faculty member’s research team, outside of coursework.

**Language Skills**

- 89% of respondents speak some English at home, with 41% speaking only English at home.
- 59% speak at least one non-English language at home, and 11% speak no English at home.
- 49% of respondents speak more than one language at home.
- 60% of respondents said that English was the first language they learned as a child and still use.
- 90% of respondents speak English most often with their friends.

---

**All Languages Spoken at Home: Top 5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cantonese</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punjabi</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---
Services

- **Library (other than SLC):** 91% of respondents are satisfied.
  - 85% of respondents are satisfied with the physical space of the Burnaby Library,
  - 76% are satisfied with the physical space of the Surrey Library, and
  - 64% are satisfied with the physical space of the Vancouver Library.

- **Academic Advising:** 78% are satisfied, compared to 75% last year (a statistically significant difference).

- **Career Services, Work Integrated Learning, and Volunteer Services:** 62-64% are satisfied.

- **Student Learning Commons (SLC) Services:** 49-60% of respondents are satisfied with the learning strategies assistance, academic writing assistance, and English language support that the Student Learning Commons (SLC) offers.
  - Note that only 18-24% of respondents have used these services.

University Culture and Environment

- 58% of respondents feel that they are thriving\(^4\) as a university student this term.
- 57% are satisfied with the sense of community within their academic program.
- 42% are satisfied with the sense of community on campus as a whole.

![Percentage of Respondents Thriving this Term, by Student Faculty](chart.png)

Note: Students may be in more than one faculty.

General

- **Employment:**
  - 55% of respondents are currently employed or self-employed (compared to 53% last fall – not a statistically significant difference). Among these:
    - 11% work 30 hours or more per week in a paid job,
    - 22% work 20–29 hours per week, and
    - 42% work 10–19 hours per week.

- **First Generation Students:** 24% of respondents are first generation post-secondary students (i.e. their parents/guardians have not attended a post-secondary institution).

- **Attendance of Science Workshops/Events:** 13% of respondents had attended an on-campus Science workshop/event prior to applying to SFU, and 89% were satisfied with it.

---

\(^4\) Thriving was defined in the question as “getting the most out of your university experience, so that you are intellectually, socially, and psychologically engaged and enjoying the university experience.”
• **Engagement in the Community:**
  
  o **Local Community:**
    
    ▪ In the last year:
      o 68% have done volunteer work,
      o 39-49% have engaged in civic and humanitarian activities, and
      o 19-27% have engaged in social justice activities, environmental activities and community service work that made use of their SFU education.
    
  o **International Setting:**
    
    ▪ In the last year:
      o 13-14% have engaged in humanitarian activities and volunteer work, and
      o 5-8% have engaged in civic activities, social justice activities, environmental activities and community service work that made use of their SFU education.

**Recommendations**

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

• **Facilities:** Based on comments received, student satisfaction with facilities could be further improved by:
  
  o continuing to improve and increase the number of study spaces on campus (creating more group and quiet study areas, increasing the number of comfortable chairs and tables available, etc.),
  o continuing to repair and improve the washrooms,
  o improving the heating and cooling of SFU buildings, and
  o continuing to renovate and repair buildings, such as fixing the broken chairs and desks in classrooms and improving the lighting and amount of colour on campus.

• **Course Availability and Scheduling:** Student responses suggest the need for continued effort to:
  
  o increase the frequency of courses, especially required courses,
  o increase the number of evening and online courses, and
  o offer a wider variety of courses.

• **Policies and Services:** Some additional student suggestions over the last few years for improving their experience at SFU include:
  
  o providing more advertising about available services,
  o improving transportation service and parking availability,
  o increasing the amount of practical/hands-on experience in courses,
  o improving the English-language skills of instructors and TAs,
  o lowering tuition and fees, and/or improving financial aid,
  o continuing to improve food quality while keeping prices low,
  o improving access to wi-fi and power outlets,
  o continuing to improve the SFU website, enrollment system, and online course systems, and
  o improving academic advising.