Fall 2016 Undergraduate Student Survey: Highlights

The Undergraduate Student Survey has been conducted at Simon Fraser University every Fall semester since 1992\(^1\) (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, services, and university culture and environment.

A total of 7,181 students participated in this year’s survey, yielding an overall response rate of 28.3%. 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 website: http://www.sfu.ca/irp

General Experience

- 88% 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
  - improve course availability, variety, and scheduling.

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

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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.

\(^2\) 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.
Course Availability

- **NUMBER of Courses:** 85% of respondents were able to register in the number of courses they wanted this fall. This is the same as last year’s rate.

- **SPECIFIC Courses:** 59% were able to register in all of the specific courses they wanted to take this term, similar to last year’s rate.

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

### Satisfaction with Course Availability:

- Satisfaction with aspects of course availability is statistically higher than last year:
  - 79% are satisfied with the location of courses,
  - 71% are satisfied with course scheduling,
  - 69% are satisfied with available registration spots in courses, and
  - 65% are satisfied with the variety of distance/online courses offered.

- Satisfaction with course frequency (61%) is higher than last year, but not statistically different.
Credential Completion Times

- **Delayed Credential Completion**: 65% of respondents reported that they are taking longer than expected to complete their credential, which is a statistically significant difference compared to last year’s 63%.
  - Commonly cited reasons for taking longer include:
    - course availability issues - e.g. full courses, schedule conflicts, courses not offered, etc. (53%),
    - taking a reduced course load (41%),
    - employment outside of co-op (38%), and
    - participation in co-op (34%).

Teaching and Curriculum

- **Quality of Teaching**: 86% of respondents are satisfied with the overall quality of teaching at SFU (compared to 85% last fall – not a statistically significant difference).
- **Student Learning Outcomes**: Students were asked to select the top three qualities, skills, or experiences they think an SFU graduate should have. The top choices are displayed in the graph below. Among the top five selected skills:
  - 85% of respondents are satisfied that SFU is providing them with critical thinking skills,
  - 74% are satisfied that SFU is providing them with the ability to apply knowledge/methods learned,
  - 83% are satisfied that SFU is providing them with a solid foundation in their specific academic discipline,
  - 74% are satisfied that SFU is providing opportunities for “learning through experience,” and
  - 83% are satisfied that SFU is providing them with analytical problem-solving skills.

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

- **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

- 88% of respondents speak some English at home, with 40% speaking only English at home.
- 60% speak at least one non-English language at home, and 12% speak no English at home.
- 50% of respondents speak more than one language at home.
- 59% 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.

### Services

- **Registrar & Information Services:** 87% of respondents are satisfied.
- **Technology Services and Recreation:** 76-79% are satisfied.
- **Food Services:** 71% are satisfied.
- **Medical Services, International Services for Students, and Mental Health Support Services:** 48-60% of respondents are satisfied.
  - Note that only 31-41% of respondents have used these services.

### University Culture and Environment

- 71% of respondents agree that their instructors create classroom experiences (including online courses) that positively impact their well-being.
- 63% agree that SFU is a place that positively impacts their well-being.
- 63% agree that SFU is a place that supports their ability to cope with challenges and overcome them.
- 47% agree that it is easy to make meaningful social connections with others at SFU.

### General

- **Student Goals:** Students were asked to indicate what they were hoping to get out of their education when they decided to come to SFU. Students could select up to three choices, and the top choices are displayed in the graph below.
• Employment:
  o 55% of respondents are currently employed or self-employed, which is the same as last fall. Among these:
    ▪ 9% work 30 hours or more per week in a paid job,
    ▪ 22% work 20–29 hours per week, and
    ▪ 43% work 10–19 hours per week.

• First Generation Students: 22% of respondents are first generation post-secondary students (i.e. their parents/guardians have not attended a post-secondary institution).

• Engagement at SFU: Students were asked about their participation in various activities at SFU over the course of their education here. Among respondents:
  o 48% have participated in an SFU club, with an additional 24% planning to participate.
  o 38% have participated in a department, program, or faculty event.
    ▪ 13% indicated that they were unaware of such events.
  o 17-20% have participated in co-op, an SFU volunteer program, or a class project involving a community or business organization.
    ▪ 19-45% said they would like to participate in these experiences.
  o 9% have participated in student government, 15% indicated that they are interested in participating, and 63% said they are not interested in participating.
  o 3-7% have participated in work-study, international exchange/study abroad, or field schools.
    ▪ 17-34% said they were planning to participate in these programs.
    ▪ 30% of respondents indicated that they were not aware of field schools at SFU.

Recommendations

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

• Facilities: Based on comments received, student satisfaction with facilities could be further improved by:
  o continuing to increase the number of study spaces on campus, such as creating more group and quiet study areas,
  o improving the heating and cooling of SFU buildings,
  o cleaning the washrooms more frequently,
  o continuing to renovate and repair buildings, and
  o improving the amount of colour on campus.
• **Course Availability and Scheduling:** Student responses suggest the need for continued effort to:
  - increase the frequency of courses,
  - increase the number of course sections,
  - offer a wider variety of course times, specifically offer more evening and online courses, and
  - 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:
  - providing more advertising about available services,
  - improving transportation service and parking availability,
  - increasing the amount of practical/hands-on experience in courses,
  - improving the English-language skills of instructors and TAs,
  - lowering tuition and fees, and improving financial aid,
  - continuing to improve food quality while keeping prices low,
  - improving access to wi-fi and power outlets,
  - continuing to improve the SFU website, enrollment system, and online course systems, and
  - improving academic advising.