RSP Student Connectedness Survey

September 2023

This survey is informed by WUSA Annual Plan 2023-2024 **Operational Goal 1:** *Address gaps in student safety and find ways to build a stronger, more inclusive Waterloo community following the traumatic hate-motivated attack related to gender expression and gender identity on campus.*

In the Spring 2023 term, 799 undergraduate students signed up to participate in the Representative Survey Platform (RSP). In the following survey, 531 students participated, resulting in a response rate of approximately 66.46%. The goals of this survey were to learn how connected students feel to the University of Waterloo (UW) and the City of Waterloo at large, understand whether students view WUSA as contributing to this sense of connection, determine how this connection manifests in both an academic and social sense, and understand what can be done to make students feel more connected. The survey was available for students to participate in from July 3 to 14, 2023.

Key Findings

- Most students (43.3%) indicated that they feel somewhat connected to UW
- With an average ranking of 1.98, "making friends within my program" was the factor students believe most contributes to them feeling connected to UW
- 48% of students indicated that a contributing factor to them not feeling connected to the University of Waterloo was "not building any relationships with instructors or staff"
- When asked if they wished they felt more connected to UW, 73% of students said yes.
- 56.04% of students said that engaging with services and events offered by WUSA makes them feel somewhat more connected to the UW community.
- Most students (44.91%) said they feel somewhat connected to the City of Waterloo
- When asked if they wish they felt more connected to the City of Waterloo, students were split between "no, I'm fine with how connected I feel" (42.64%) and "yes, it would be nice to feel more connected" (42.08%).

University of Waterloo

Figure 1: Please select the answer that best describes how your academic experience at the University of Waterloo has been so far.
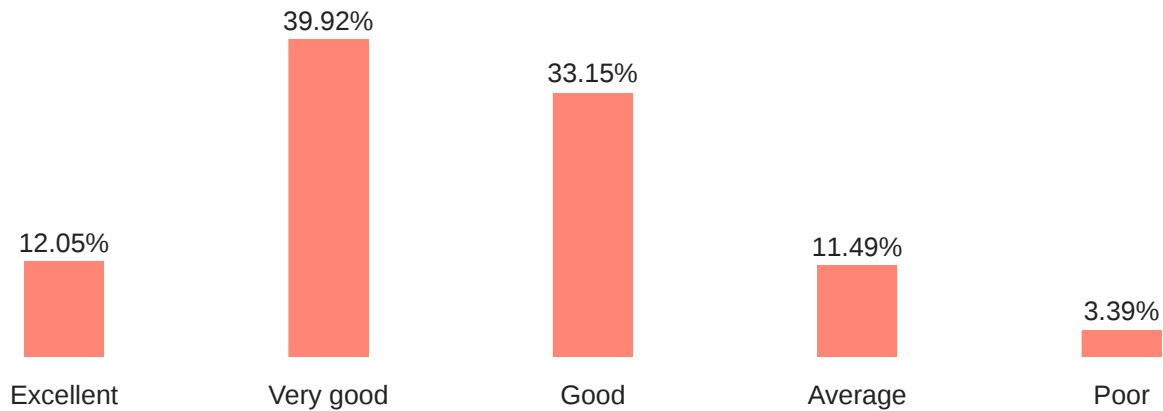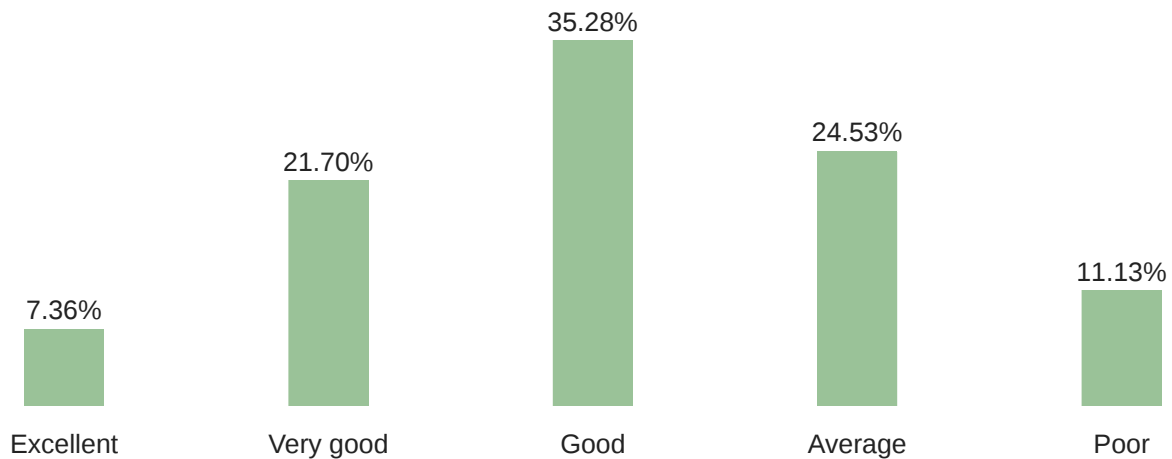

Figure 2: Please select the answer that best describes how your social experience at the University of Waterloo has been so far.

When asked about their academic experience, most students (39.92%) said very good, followed by 33.15% who said good. On the other hand, most students (35.28%) said good when it came to their social experience, followed by 24.53% who said average. It is also important to note that a higher percentage of students selected excellent for academic experience compared to social experience; and a higher percentage of students selected poor for social experience, compared to academic experience. Overall, this demonstrates that students appear to be more pleased with their academic experience compared to their social experience at UW.

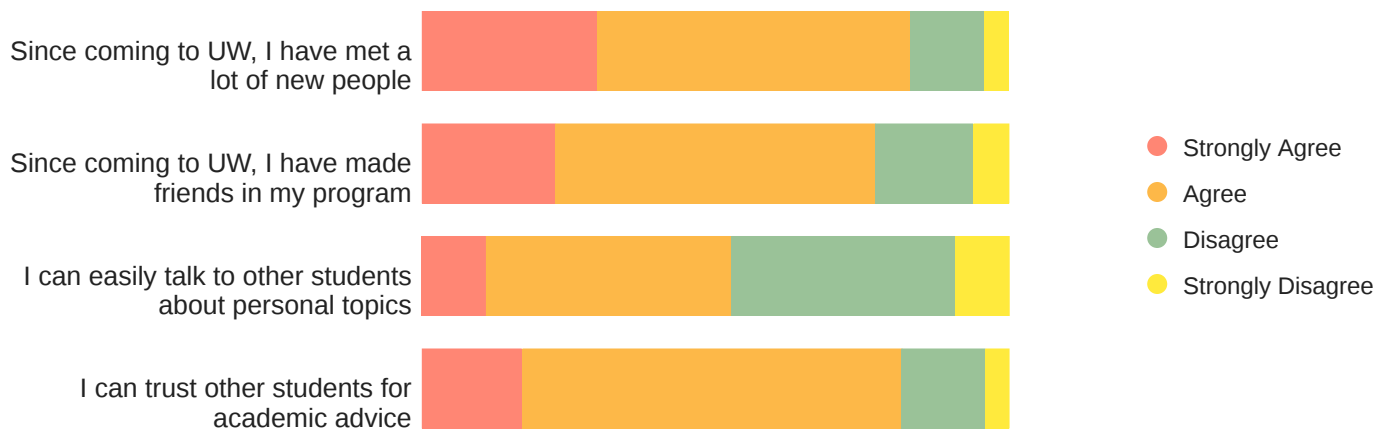**Figure 3: Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:**

Legend:
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Rows:
- Since coming to UW, I have met a lot of new people
- Since coming to UW, I have made friends in my program
- I can easily talk to other students about personal topics
- I can trust other students for academic advice

Figure 4: Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

Legend:
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Rows:
- I find that in-person classes make me feel connected to UW
- I feel comfortable asking instructors questions
- I receive academic support from instructors
- I feel comfortable asking university staff for help
- University staff demonstrate genuine concern and care for me
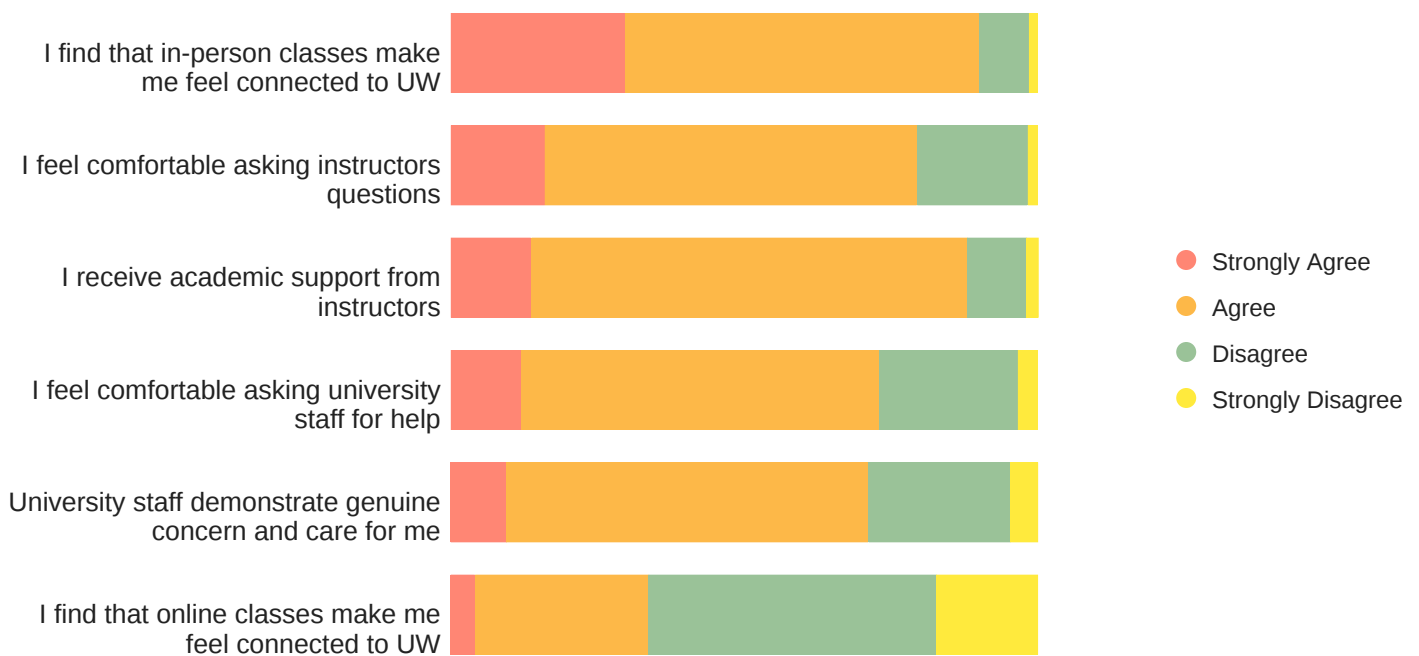- I find that online classes make me feel connected to UW

Figure 3 shows key indicators for social connectedness, to which most students agreed with. The statement with the highest percentage of "disagree" responses was "I can easily talk to other students about personal topics," with 38.48% of students selecting that option. On the other hand, Figure 4 is demonstrating some key indicators related to academic connectedness. The majority of students agreed with all statements, except for "I find that online classes make me feel more connected to UW" where most students (48.77%) disagreed. In addition, the statement: "I find that in-person classes make me feel connected to UW" had the highest percentage of students (30.66%) strongly agree with this statement.

Figure 5: In the last 6 months, how often have you connected with the following individuals:
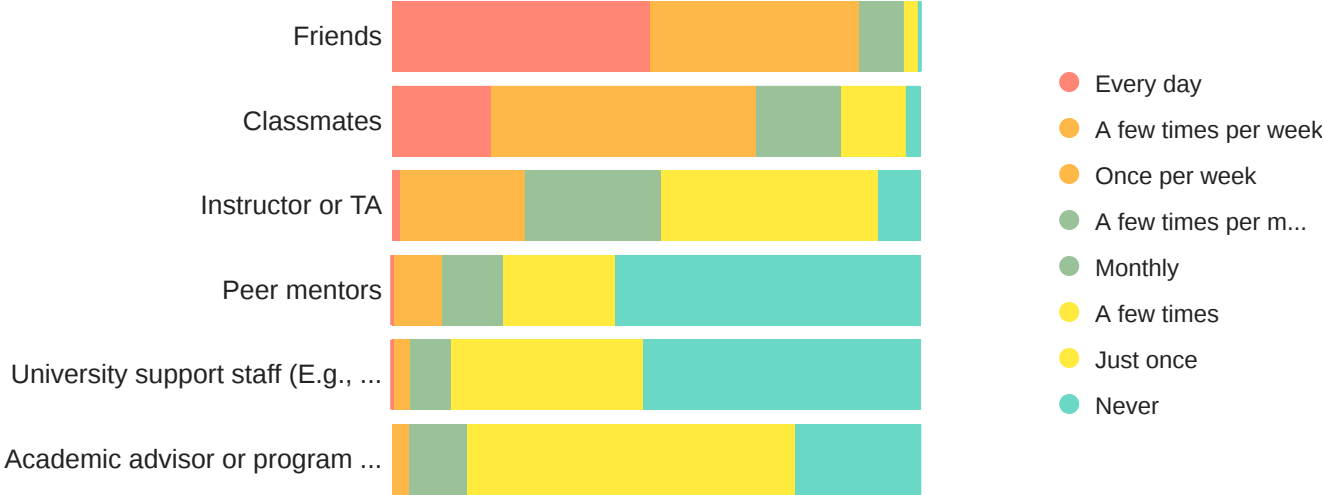

Figure 5 demonstrates that when it comes to how often students have connected with various individuals, friends and classmates are the two that most students connect with every day, at 48.78% and 18.68%, respectively. On the other hand, 57.84% of students indicated that they have never connected with peer mentors, which was selected more than university support staff (52.54%) and academic advisors or program coordinators (23.73%). Moreover, the most selected choices for the individuals students have connected with a few times were academic advisors or program coordinators (40.11%), instructor or TA (35.09%), and support staff (22.79%).

Figure 6: In the last 6 months, how often have you participated in the following:
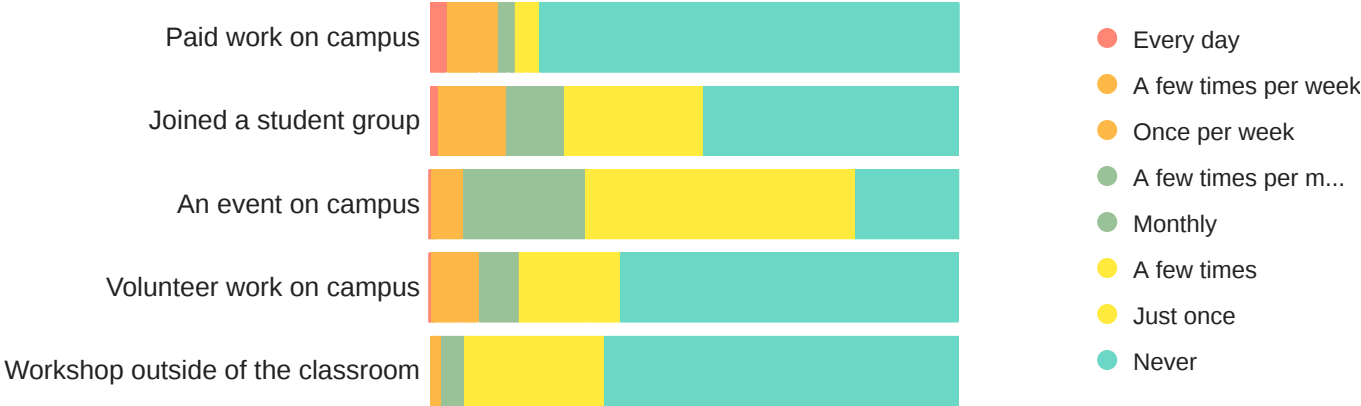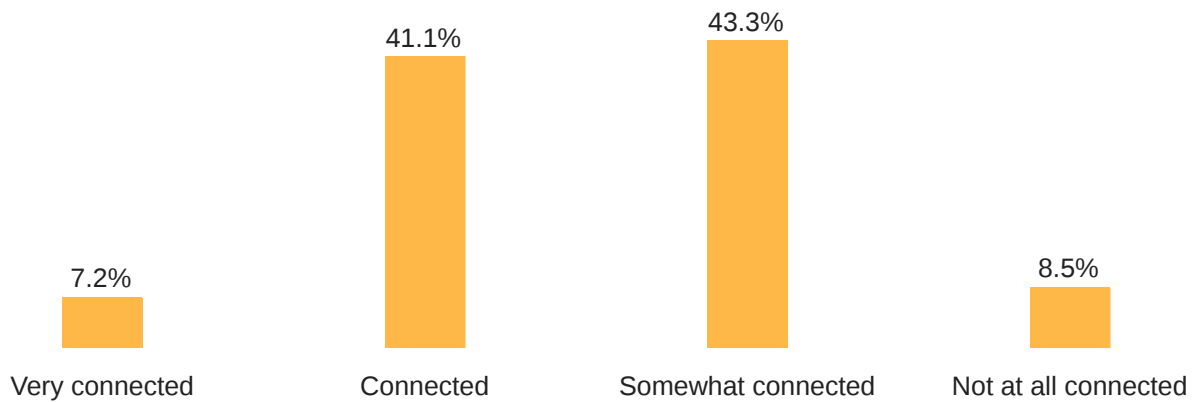
Figure 6 demonstrates that when it comes to how often students have participated in various activities, the majority of students selected never for paid work on campus (79.28%), workshop outside of the classroom (67.05%), and volunteer work on campus (64.03%). Additionally, students selected they have never participated in joining a student group or an event on campus, at 48.40% and 19.59% respectively. On the other hand, 41.62% of students have participated in an event on campus a few times, which was selected more than joined a student group (16.01%), workshop outside of the classroom (14.77%), and volunteer work on campus (12.62%).

From your perspective, what does it mean to feel a sense of connectedness to the University of Waterloo?

Note that participants were asked to consider the following definition before answering the question: *Connectedness is often defined as the perception of belonging; it is achieved when an individual experiences a sense of social relationship and integration*
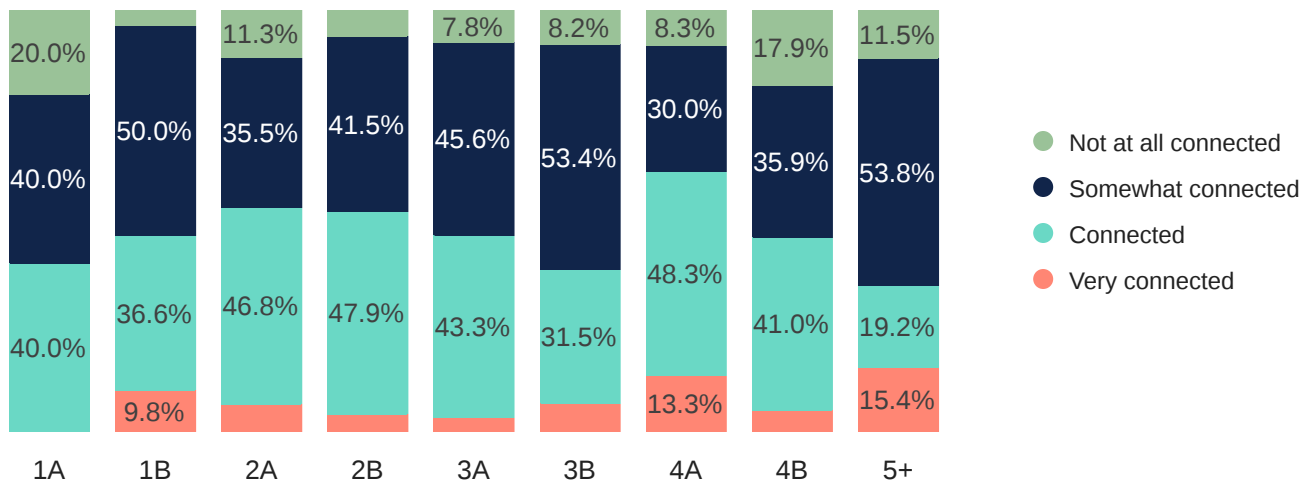
The most common theme mentioned by students was how feeling welcomed and having a sense of belonging at the University gives them a sense of connectedness. Students specifically mentioned that feeling respected, safe, and connected with peers and staff contributes to their sense of belonging on campus. When it comes to connecting with peers, students identified that having opportunities to engage with others through events enhances their feeling of connectedness. For example, one student mentioned: "…*having access to groups and events that can help you make friends and connect with others easily without feeling like you're 'forcing it' or that you're out of place*." This student interest in more opportunities to connect with others also aligns with another common theme students mentioned which was involvement in the University in general. Students mentioned being involved in services and clubs helps their sense of connectedness as it creates a network of peers and increases opportunities to receive support. This is different from events as it involves a longer-term, consistent opportunity for students to connect with their peers. As such, it may provide students with the opportunity for a deeper connection than events could provide. Providing more social events for students does present the setting for more friendships to be made outside of academics. In addition to social opportunities, students explained that receiving support both in and outside of academics was important to them. To students, receiving well-needed academic and personal support makes them feel valued as an individual by the University. As such, it is important that both the academic and social aspects of student life are balanced when considering how to make students feel connected to UW. To summarize, feeling connected with peers and staff, engaging in clubs and services, receiving both academic and personal support, and events tailored to a wider demographic contribute to students' sense of connectedness to the University of Waterloo.

Figure 7a: How connected do you feel to the University of Waterloo?

Most students (43.3%) indicated that they feel somewhat connected to the University of Waterloo; this was followed closely by 41.1% of students who indicated that they felt connected to the University of Waterloo. Figure 10 provides more context as to whether students care to change their current level of connection or not.

Figure 7b: Year of Study Breakdown

When level of connectedness is broken down by year of study, 4A and 5+ students had the highest percentage of students indicate they felt very connected to UW, although this percentage was still small (13.3% and 15.4%, respectively). On the other hand, 1A students (20%) and 4B students (17.9%) had the highest percentage of students indicate that they very not at all connected to UW. 1B students had the lowest percentage (3.6%) indicate that they felt not at all connected. As such, there appears to be no clear distinction between lower year and upper year students when it comes to their level of connection to UW.

Figure 8: Please use the drag and drop feature to rank which factors contribute most to your feeling connected to the University of Waterloo [1 = contributes most, 9 = contributes least].

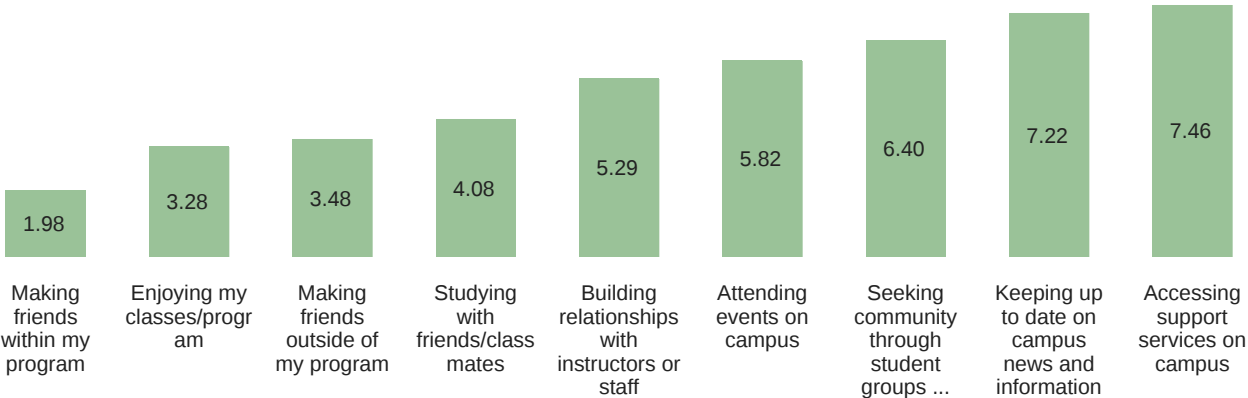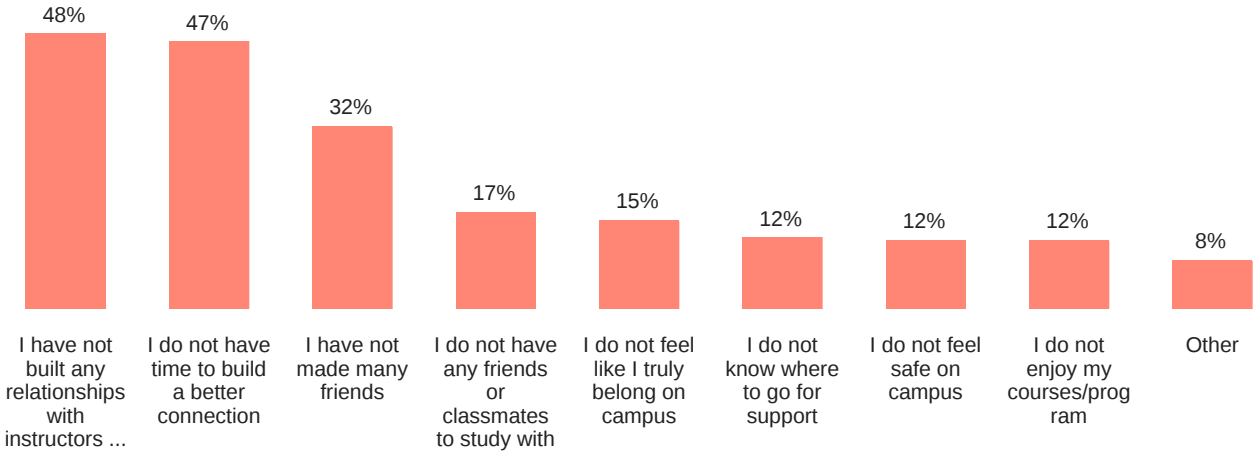| Making friends within my program	Enjoying my classes/program	Making friends outside of my program	Studying with friends/class mates	Building relationships with instructors or staff	Attending events on campus	Seeking community through student groups ...	Keeping up to date on campus news and information	Accessing support services on campus
1.98	3.28	3.48	4.08	5.29	5.82	6.40	7.22	7.46

Figure 8 demonstrates the average ranking for each factor. "Making friends within my program" had the lowest ranking (1.98) and therefore was believed to be the factor that contributes most to feeling connected to the University of Waterloo.
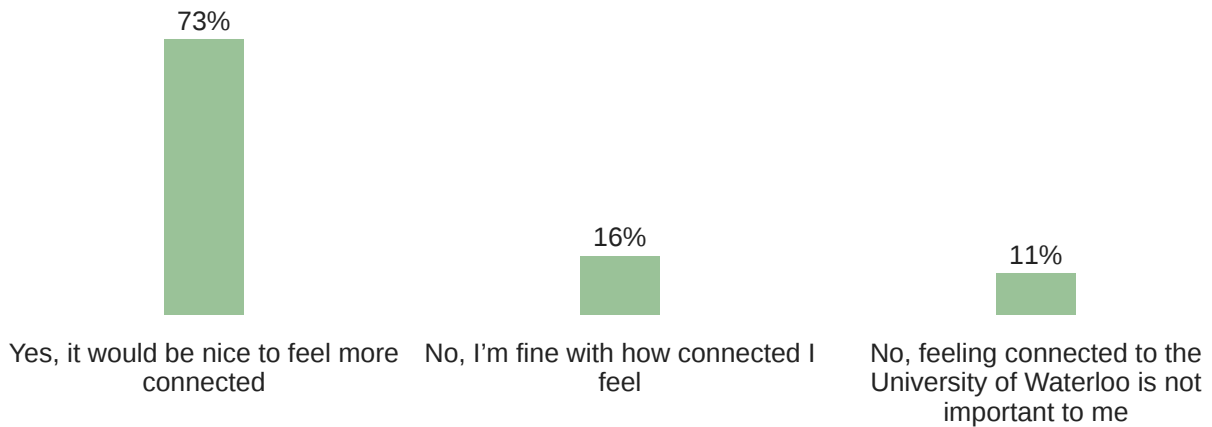
Figure 9: What contributes to you not feeling connected to the University of Waterloo?

I have not built any relationships with instructors ...	I do not have time to build a better connection	I have not made many friends	I do not have any friends or classmates to study with	I do not feel like I truly belong on campus	I do not know where to go for support	I do not feel safe on campus	I do not enjoy my courses/program	Other
48%	47%	32%	17%	15%	12%	12%	12%	8%

The students who selected 'Other' provided the following responses:

- The campus is not appealing
- The University's response to incidents
- Not joining student groups
- University does not value or emphasize connectedness

Figure 10: Do you wish you felt more connected to the University of Waterloo?

73%

16%

11%

Yes, it would be nice to feel more connected

No, I'm fine with how connected I feel

No, feeling connected to the University of Waterloo is not important to me

What would make you feel more connected to the University of Waterloo?

The most common themes expressed by students include the following:

- Making more friends at UW
- Having ways for different faculties to collaborate - like orientation
- More events that tailor to a diverse group of students
- Increasing student lounge spaces around campus
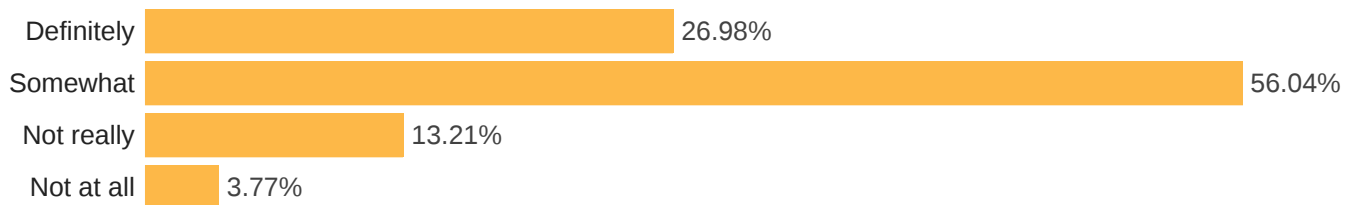- More events/trips held off-campus

Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association (WUSA)

What do you expect from your student association, WUSA?

The most common themes expressed by students include the following:

- More advertisement and awareness of clubs and groups available on campus
- Creating events tailored to a larger/more diverse group
- More opportunities to connect with others
- Advocating for students' best interests
- Transparency and more action

Figure 11: Do you think that engaging with services and events offered by WUSA makes you feel more connected to the University of Waterloo community?

Response	Percentage
Definitely	26.98%
Somewhat	56.04%
Not really	13.21%
Not at all	3.77%

What could WUSA do to make you feel more connected to the University of Waterloo community?

When asked this question, the most common themes expressed by students include the following:

- More events where students can meet more people
- More student job offerings
- Hosting more field trips
- Creative spaces on campus available to all students (e.g., music room, art room)
- Adding another club fair in the middle of the term

City of Waterloo

From your perspective, what does it mean to feel a sense of connectedness to the City of Waterloo?

When asked this question, the most common themes expressed by students include the following:

- Exploring the city, attractions, and local businesses
- Finding the hidden spots that they enjoy the most
- Having a sense of belonging and memorable experiences in the city
- Fitting into the community outside
- Knowing how to get around the city

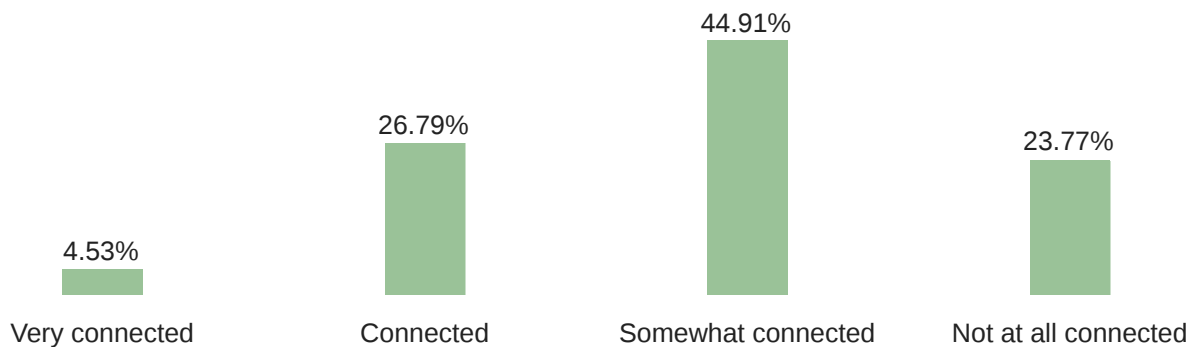**Figure 12: How connected do you feel to the City of Waterloo?**

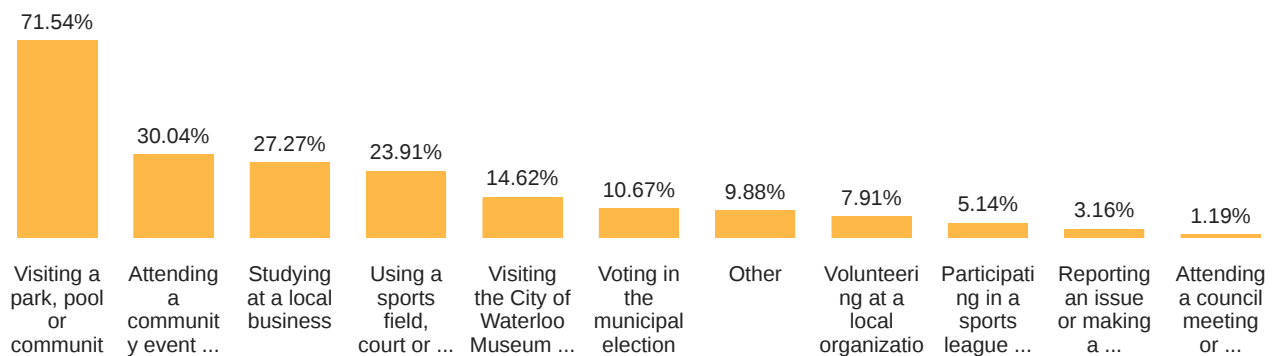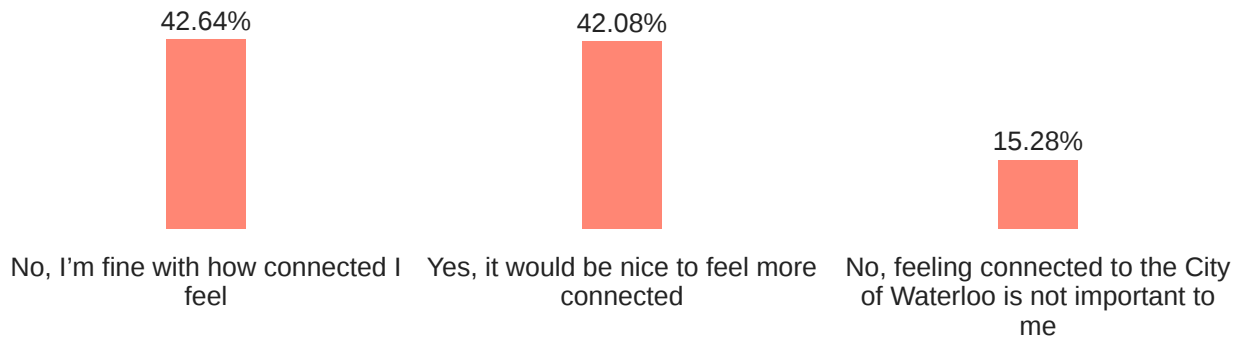**Figure 13: In the last year, I have engaged with the City of Waterloo by...**

Figure 14: Do you wish you felt more connected to the City of Waterloo?

42.64%
42.08%
15.28%

No, I'm fine with how connected I feel

Yes, it would be nice to feel more connected

No, feeling connected to the City of Waterloo is not important to me

What would make you feel more connected to the City of Waterloo?

When asked this question, students provided the following answers:

- Having events that help connect students to the city (e.g., trips to local spots, events at Waterloo Park, etc.)
- Knowing how to get involved in City of Waterloo
- Going out and exploring Waterloo
- More opportunities for volunteering
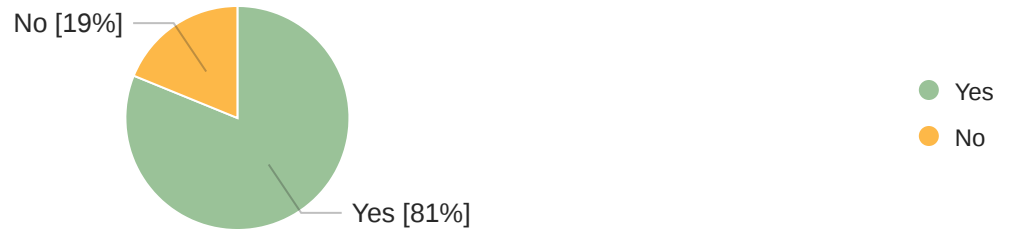- Better public transportation options around the KW region

Recommendations

- **Encourage and support stronger connections between staff and students on campus through increasing opportunities for in person engagement to demonstrate the value in creating relationships with students.** 52.54% of students have never connected with a university support staff. 48% of students indicated that a contributing factor to them not feeling connected to the University of Waterloo was "I have not built any relationships with instructors or staff"
- **Encourage departments and student societies to host more program-specific events and activities on campus.** "Making friends within my program" was the factor students believe most contributes to them feeling connected to UW.
- **Continue to find ways to make students feel more connected to UW by providing opportunities for events with diverse student groups, increase student lounge spaces and host more trip off campus to encourage relationship-building.** 73% of students wished they felt more connected to UW. These were the most common suggestions from students when asked.
- **Encourage professors to create in class experiences for students to interact with each other.** Making friends in my program contributes to students feeling connected coupled with students not "having build any relationships with instructors/not having time to build a better connection" could be resolved with in class opportunities for engagement.
- **WUSA should continue to prioritize connecting students to the UW community through events, job offerings, field trips and creative spaces on campus to foster opportunities of making new friends.** 56.04% of students said that engaging with services and events offered by WUSA makes them feel somewhat more connected to the University of Waterloo community. These were the most common suggestions for how WUSA could increase this connection.
- **WUSA should increase its relationships within the Region of Waterloo. WUSA should continue to facilitate a connection between students and the City of Waterloo by having more events that connect students to the city and more awareness of volunteer opportunities.** 42.08% of students said it would be nice to feel more connected to the City of Waterloo.

Demographics

Demographic information is collected from RSP participants when they sign up to participate. The demographic breakdown below includes only information from participants who completed this survey. This information can be used to contextualize the survey results.

Figure 15: Are you a co-op student?

No [19%]

Yes [81%]

- Yes
- No

As seen in Figure 15, 81% of students who responded to the survey identified as being enrolled in the co-op program. The IAP Student headcount data shows that the actual percentage of co-op students for the Spring 2023 term was 83%, meaning that we slightly under-selected co-op students in this survey.
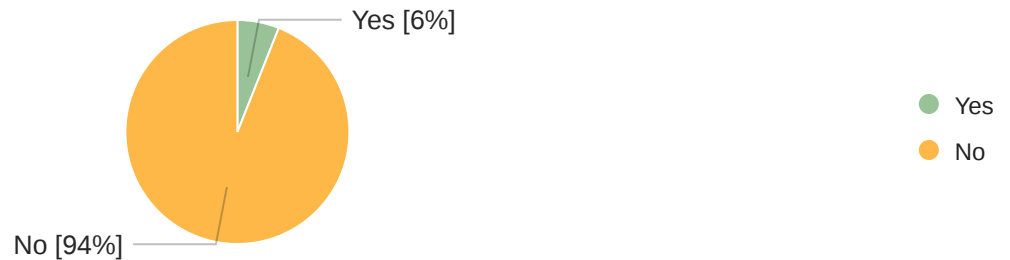
Figure 16: Do you identify as disabled?

Yes [6%]

No [94%]

- Yes
- No

Figure 17: Do you identify as racialized?

No [51%]

Yes [49%]

- Yes
- No

Figure 18: Which faculty are you in?

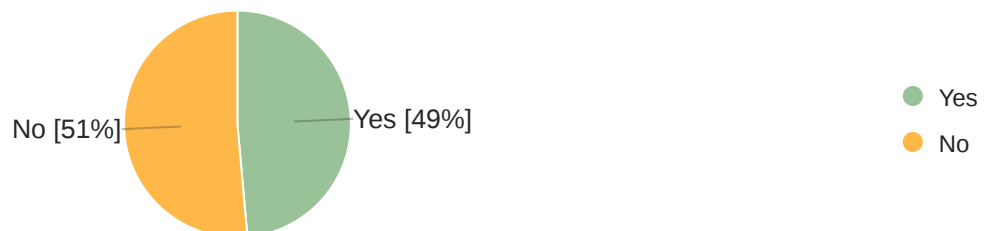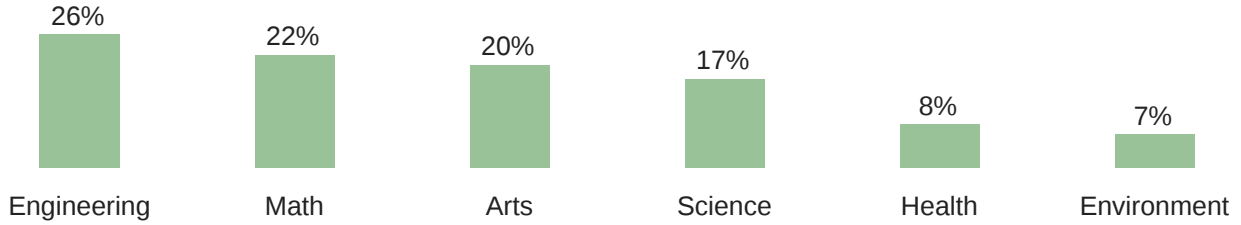| Engineering	Math	Arts	Science	Health	Environment
26%	22%	20%	17%	8%	7%

As seen in Figure 18:

- 26% of respondents are in the Engineering faculty

  - The IAP student headcount data shows that the actual percentage of Engineering students for the Spring 2023 term was 31%, meaning that we under selected engineering students in this survey.

- 22% of respondents are in the Math faculty

  - The actual percentage of Math students for the Spring 2023 term was 27%, meaning that we under selected math students in this survey.

- 20% of respondents are in the Arts faculty

  - The actual percentage of Arts students for the Spring 2023 term was 18%, meaning that we over selected arts students in this survey.

- 17% of respondents are in the Science faculty

  - The actual percentage of Science students for the Spring 2023 term was 13%, meaning that we over selected science students in this survey.

- 8% of respondents are in the Health faculty

  - The actual percentage of Health students for the Spring 2023 term was 6%, meaning that we slightly over selected Health students in this survey.

- 7% of respondents are in the Environment faculty

  - The actual percentage of Environment students for the Spring 2023 term was 5%, meaning that we slightly over selected environment students in this survey

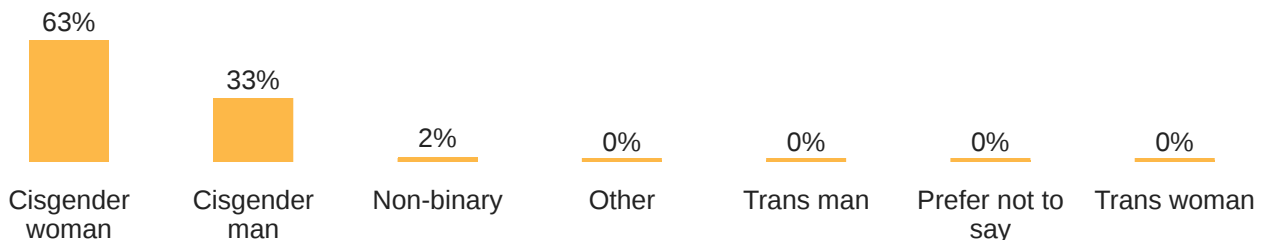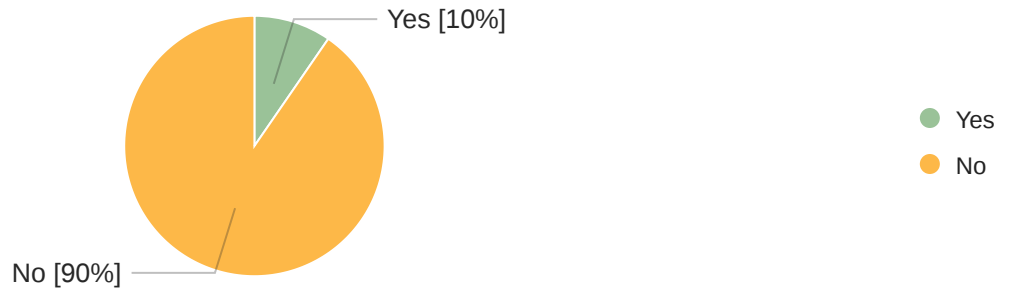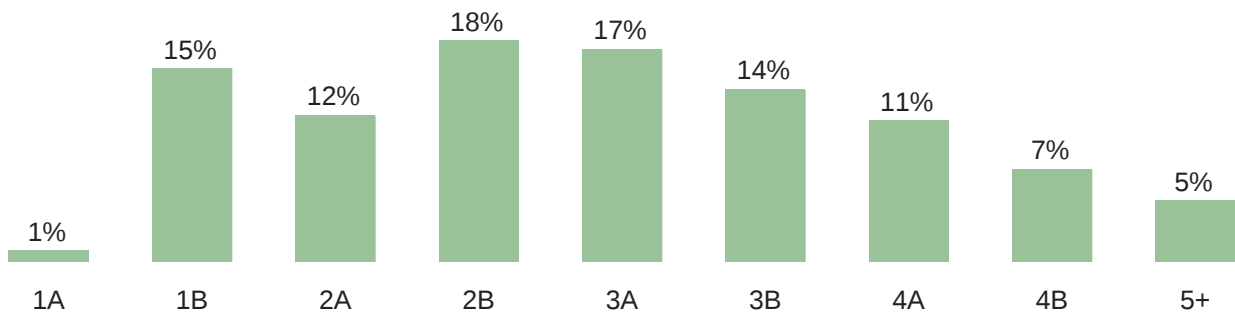**Figure 18: What is your gender identity?**

Cisgender woman	Cisgender man	Non-binary	Other	Trans man	Prefer not to say	Trans woman
63%	33%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Figure 19: Are you an international student?

Yes [10%]

○ Yes
○ No

No [90%]

As seen in Figure 20, 10% of students who responded to the survey identified as international students. The IAP student headcount data shows that the actual percentage of international students for the Spring 2023 term was 18%, meaning that we under selected international students in this survey.

Figure 21: What year of study are you in?

1A	1B	2A	2B	3A	3B	4A	4B	5+
1%	15%	12%	18%	17%	14%	11%	7%	5%

The IAP student headcount data shows that the actual percentage breakdown for year of study in 2023 is as follows:

- Study Year 1 = 10.52%
- Study Year 2 = 30.51%
- Study Year 3 = 34.85%
- Study Year 4 = 23.67%
- Study Year 5 = 0.45%

Therefore, according to the data in Figure 21, we over selected first year, second year students and fifth year students and under selected third year and fourth year students.

Appendix

University of Waterloo

1. **Please select the answer that best describes how your <u>academic</u> experience at the University of Waterloo has been so far.** **[MC – Select One]**
   a. Excellent
   b. Very good
   c. Good
   d. Average
   e. Poor

2. **Please select the answer that best describes how your <u>social</u> experience at the University of Waterloo has been so far.** **[MC – Select One]**
   a. Excellent
   b. Very good
   c. Good
   d. Average
   e. Poor

3. **Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:** **[Matrix with options for Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree]**
   a. Since coming to UW, I have met a lot of new people
   b. Since coming to UW, I have made friends in my program
   c. I can easily talk to other students about personal topics
   d. I can trust other students for academic advice

4. **Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:** **[Matrix with options for Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree]**
   a. I receive academic support from instructors
   b. I feel comfortable asking university staff for help
   c. University staff demonstrate genuine concern and care for me
   d. I feel comfortable asking instructors questions
   e. I find that in-person classes make me feel connected to UW
   f. I find that online classes make me feel connected to UW

5. **In the last 6 months, how often have you connected with the following individuals:** **[Matrix with options for every day, a few times per week, once per week, a few times per month, monthly, a few times, just once, never]**
   a. Friends
   b. Classmates
   c. Peer mentors
   d. Academic advisor or program coordinator
   e. Instructor or TA
   f. University support staff (E.g., Campus Wellness, Financial Aid Office)

6. **In the last 6 months, how often have you participated in the following:** **[Matrix with options for every day, a few times per week, once per week, a few times per month, monthly, a few times, just once, never]**
   a. Volunteer work on campus
   b. An event on campus
   c. Paid work on campus
   d. Workshop outside of the classroom

     e. Joined a student group

7. **Please consider the following definition:** *Connectedness is often defined as the perception of belonging; it is achieved when an individual experiences a sense of social relationship and integration.* **From your perspective, what does it mean to feel a sense of connectedness to the University of Waterloo?** [Textbox]

8. **How connected do you feel to the University of Waterloo?** [MC – Select One]
   a. Very connected
   b. Connected
   c. Somewhat connected
   d. Not at all connected

9. **Please rank which factors contribute most to your feeling connected to the University of Waterloo.** [Rank Order. 1 = contributes most, 9 = contributes least. Display if 8a, b, or c is selected]
   a. Making friends within my program
   b. Making friends outside of my program
   c. Enjoying my classes/program
   d. Studying with friends/classmates
   e. Building relationships with instructors or staff
   f. Accessing support services on campus
   g. Seeking community through student groups and services
   h. Keeping up to date on campus news and information
   i. Attending events on campus

10. **What contributes to you not feeling connected to the University of Waterloo?** [MC – Select all that apply – Display only if 8d is selected]
   a. I have not made many friends
   b. I do not enjoy my courses/program
   c. I do not have any friends or classmates to study with
   d. I have not built any relationships with instructors or staff
   e. I do not know where to go for support
   f. I do not feel like I truly belong on campus
   g. I do not feel safe on campus
   h. I do not have time to build a better connection
   i. Other [Textbox]

11. **Do you wish you felt more connected to the University of Waterloo?** [MC – Select one]
   a. Yes, it would be nice to feel more connected
   b. No, I'm fine with how connected I feel
   c. No, feeling connected to the University of Waterloo is not important to me

12. **What would make you feel more connected to the University of Waterloo?** [Textbox]

WUSA

13. **From your perspective, what do you expect from your student association, WUSA?** [Textbox]

14. **Do you think that engaging with services and events offered by WUSA makes you feel more connected to the University of Waterloo community?** [MC – Select one]

a. Definitely
b. Somewhat
c. Not really
d. Not at all

15. In the last 6 months, I have engaged with WUSA by... [MC – Select all that apply]
  a. Participating in a WUSA Club
  b. Voting in the WUSA General Election
  c. Following our social media account(s)
  d. Attending a WUSA Event
  e. Visiting a Student-Run Service
  f. Shopping at Flock Stop
  g. Visiting the Turnkey Desk (SLC)
  h. Working or volunteering there
  i. Using a study space in the SLC
  j. Other: [Text box]

16. What could WUSA do to make you feel more connected to the University of Waterloo community? [Textbox]

City of Waterloo

17. From your perspective, what does it mean to feel a sense of connectedness to the City of Waterloo? [Textbox]

18. How connected do you feel to the City of Waterloo? [MC – Select one]
  a. Very connected
  b. Connected
  c. Somewhat connected
  d. Not at all connected

19. In the last year, I have engaged with the City of Waterloo by... [MC – Select all that apply]
  a. Voting in the municipal election
  b. Participating in a sports league or leisure activity run by the city
  c. Visiting a park, pool or community centre
  d. Using a sports field, court or indoor track
  e. Volunteering at a local organization
  f. Attending a community event or festival
  g. Visiting the City of Waterloo Museum or public art installation
  h. Attending a council meeting or information session
  i. Reporting an issue or making a complaint
  j. Studying at a local business
  k. Other [Textbox]

20. What has prevented you from engaging with the City of Waterloo? [MC – Select all that apply]
  a. I'm not aware of how to get involved
  b. I'm not interested in getting involved
  c. I don't live in or near Waterloo
  d. I don't have time

e. I don't know anyone else involved with the city
f. Nothing has prevented me, I just don't want to

21. Do you wish you felt more connected to the City of Waterloo? [MC – Select one]
    a. Yes, it would be nice to feel more connected
    b. No, I'm fine with how connected I feel
    c. No, feeling connected to the City of Waterloo is not important to me

22. What would make you feel more connected to the City of Waterloo? [Text box]