Student Perception of Academic Success

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WATERLOO UNDERGRADUATE

WUSA

STUDENT ASSOCIATION

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Introduction

In the fall 2023 term, the Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association (WUSA) sent out a survey on the topic of Student Academic Success to University of Waterloo undergraduate students as part of the Representative Survey Platform. The survey was available for students to complete from November 13 to 24, 2023. The goals of this survey were to:

- Learn how students define academic success.
- Explore barriers students face to achieving academic success.
- Understand what students need to be successful in achieving academic success.

This survey received a total of 660 responses; 46 incomplete responses were removed, leaving 614 responses for analysis. With a total of 931 students signed up for the program in fall 2023, the survey had a response rate of 66%.

For an explanation of the statistical analysis used in this report, see Appendix A.

Note on Survey Design

Due to an error in survey design, respondents were asked to select their top four from a list of options in Q8, Q10, Q11, Q12 and Q22. Since they were required to select four options to continue the survey, this may have resulted in respondents selecting options even though not all were relevant to their experience. Questions where this question design was utilized are denoted using an asterisk (*) reference.

Key Findings

Feelings About Academic Success

- Most students associated a high GPA or good grades with academic success, although many also recognized that this ensures they develop the necessary skills for future endeavours. Moreover, students also mentioned that having a healthy work-life balance and time for extracurriculars is fundamental to their feelings of success.
- Most students either strongly agreed (58%) or agreed (36%) that achieving academic success was important to them (Figure 1).
- Most students indicated that maintaining an excellent (57%) or good (38%) academic standing was an indicator of achieving academic success (Figure 4).
- Most students are either very satisfied (18%) or satisfied (50%) with the level of academic success they have achieved (Figure 6).
    - First-year students are the least satisfied, with 8% selecting very satisfied and 46% selecting satisfied (Figure 7).
    - Fourth-year students are the most satisfied, with 27% selecting very satisfied and 54% selecting satisfied (Figure 7).
    - Environment students are the most satisfied with their level of academic success (Figure 8).
    - Math students are the least satisfied with their academic success (Figure 8).

Factors Impacting Academic Success

- 75% of students indicated that they used UW Flow to prepare for course selection, followed by 67% of students who indicated they refer to the undergraduate studies academic calendar (Figure 10).
- The tools and strategies that students have found most helpful in achieving academic success are attending class regularly (76%), completing practice question sets (64%), studying alone (64%), and taking

notes in class (50%) (Figure 11).

- 48% of students either strongly agreed or agreed that they rely on used and/or reduced cost textbooks to support their academic success (Figure 12).
- The academic factors that make it most difficult for students to succeed in their courses were teaching style (68%), difficult content (66%), unengaging instructor (60%), and unclear expectations (57%) (Figure 15).
- The personal factors that make it most difficult for students to succeed in their courses were balancing schoolwork and other responsibilities (86%), lack of motivation (78%), time management (73%), and mental health concerns (53%) (Figure 16).
- The aspects of courses that students struggle with the most were keeping up with readings/assignments workload (67%), studying for tests and exams (59%), balancing assignment deadlines (51%), and good exam prep strategies (47%) (Figure 17).
- When probed about hustle culture at the University of Waterloo , most students indicated that it impacted their productivity and motivation and the theme of struggling with work-life balance was also commonly mentioned in this context.

Supports for Academic Success

- Most respondents were either in touch with their advisor and found it helpful (46%) or knew how to get in touch but didn't need to (31%) (Figure 18).
- 56% of students either strongly agree or agree that they feel confident locating academic support resources on campus when needed. However, a notable portion of respondents chose neither agree nor disagree (28%) (Figure 19).
- Students are most aware of academic advisors (89%), instructor/TA office hours (89%), AccessAbility Services (56%), and the Student Success Office (56%) when it comes to academic support resources (Figure 22).
  - AccessAbility Services (13%), Library research support (12%), the Writing and Communication Center (10%), and the Student Success Office (8%) were notably accessed much less, especially when compared to the awareness of each of these services have (Figure 23).
  - See the full report for use of these services by faculty and year of study (Figure 24-30).
- Overall, most students found all of these academic support resources either very helpful or helpful. The exact breakdown for each service can be found in the full report (Figure 31-38).
- When respondents were asked what prevents them from accessing academic supports most respondents reported a lack of time (63%), not thinking they would help (42%), that service hours don't align with their availability (37%) (Figure 39).
- Most students (52%) would prefer hybrid academic support services (Figure 40).
- When asked what academic supports would most positively impact their academic success respondents selected understanding content (58%), learning better study habits (51%) and learning better time management (47%) (Figure 41).

Recommendations

1. WUSA should advocate for and explore opportunities for increased use of Open Educational Resources (OERs) for students.
2. WUSA should advocate to relevant stakeholders to develop programming and make other possible improvements to help students manage external challenges relating to teaching styles, unengaging professors, and unclear expectations in their courses.
3. WUSA should advocate to the Student Success Office and other relevant stakeholders to enhance programming with the goal of educating students about time management and studying skills as well as best practices for balancing school and other responsibilities.
4. WUSA and other relevant stakeholders should develop communication campaigns that emphasize the positive outcomes of accessing academic support resources.

5. WUSA should advocate to relevant stakeholders to develop hybrid options and extended hours for academic support services to enhance the accessibility of these services.
6. WUSA should develop an awareness campaign promoting work-life balance and the benefits of participating in extracurriculars as it impacts academic success.

To ensure that these recommendations are actioned on, we will be sharing this report with the following on campus stakeholders:

- Chris Read, Associate Provost, Students
- David DeVidi, Association Provost, Academics
- Student Success Office
- Campus Wellness
- AccessAbility Services
- The UW Library
- Centre for Teaching Excellence
- Writing and Communication Centre

Feelings About Academic Success

What does achieving academic success mean to you?

Respondents were asked to describe what academic success meant to them. The majority of respondents shared that it meant achieving a **high GPA** or **good grades** (n=244) overall. Many of the respondents further shared that achieving good grades and **doing well academically** (n=59) ensures that they can develop the necessary skills they would need in future endeavours, such as getting into **postgraduate programs** (n=10) or obtaining **co-ops/jobs** (n=47) in their related field. Students also shared that academic success means thoroughly **understanding course content** (n=128). They also stated that not only is the **retention of knowledge** (n=19) key but being able to **apply what they've learned** (n=47) from their courses in other settings, such as more advanced courses or co-op positions is important as well. Furthermore, students shared that maintaining a healthy **work-life balance** (n=29) can help one achieve academic success. Responses shared that being able to keep up with course deadlines while also having the time for extracurriculars is fundamental to their feelings of success. Lastly, students shared that **achieving their academic goals** (n=56) is a crucial facet of academic success. These academic goals varied for different students, as responses ranged from **simply passing their courses** (n=40) to **learning something new** (n=19).

Please indicate your agreement with the following statement: "achieving academic success is very important to me"

Figure 1. Responses to the statement "achieving academic success is very important to me"
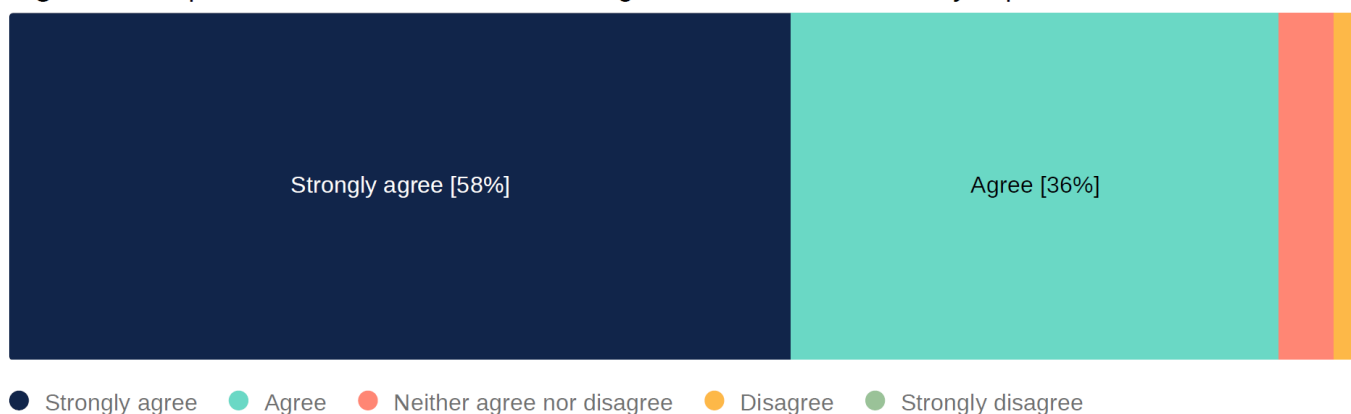
| Strongly agree [58%] | Agree [36%] | |

● Strongly agree   ● Agree   ● Neither agree nor disagree   ● Disagree   ● Strongly disagree

Most students either strongly agreed (58%) or agreed (36%) that achieving academic success was important to them (Figure 1).

When responses were broken down by faculty, students in the Engineering and Math faculties overall agree with this statement as much as students in other faculties, however, they have a larger proportion of agree responses (43% and 47% respectively, compared to 26-32% in other faculties) instead of strongly agree (48% and 45% respectively, compared to 64-72% in other faculties). Although the overall number of students who strongly disagree or disagree is small, most of those responses come from students in the Engineering and Math faculties (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Responses to the statement "academic success is very important to me" by faculty
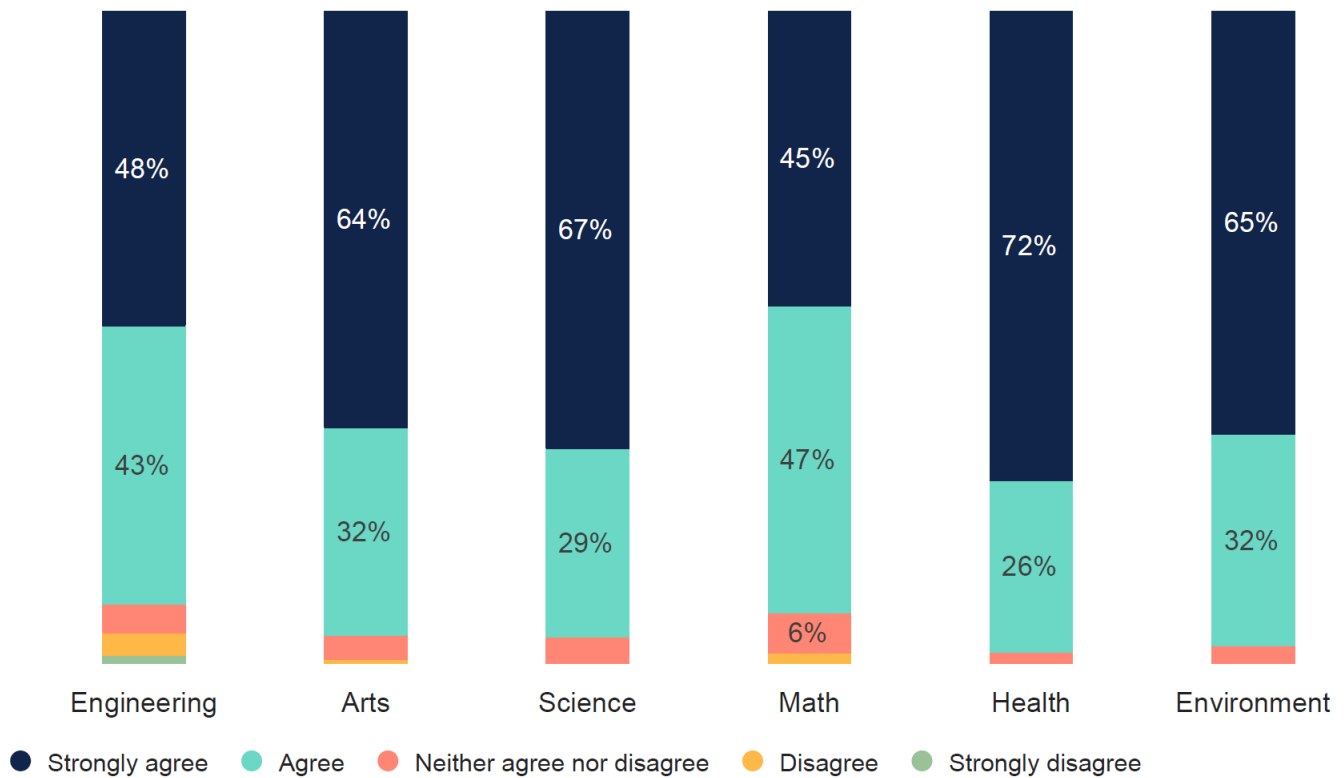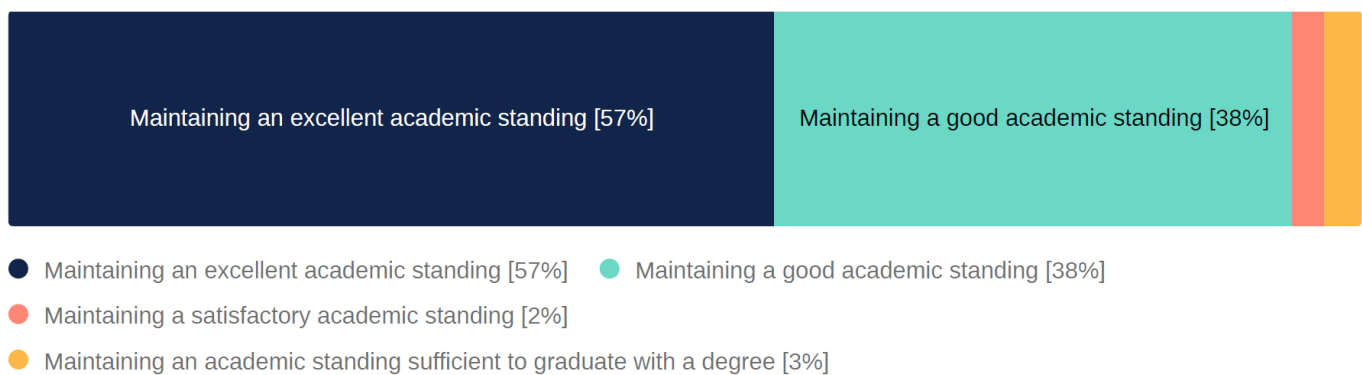

When comparing students registered in co-op programs with those who are not, co-op students overall agree with the statement less than respondents enrolled in regular programs (56% strongly agree and 38% agree compared to 67% strongly agree and 30% agree for non-co-op students, Figure 3). This relatively minor difference in opinion may be due to co-op students having more exposure to the workplace and the realization that employers put less value on academic standing and more value on degree completion and workplace experience.

Figure 3. Responses to the statement "academic success is very important to me" by co-op status
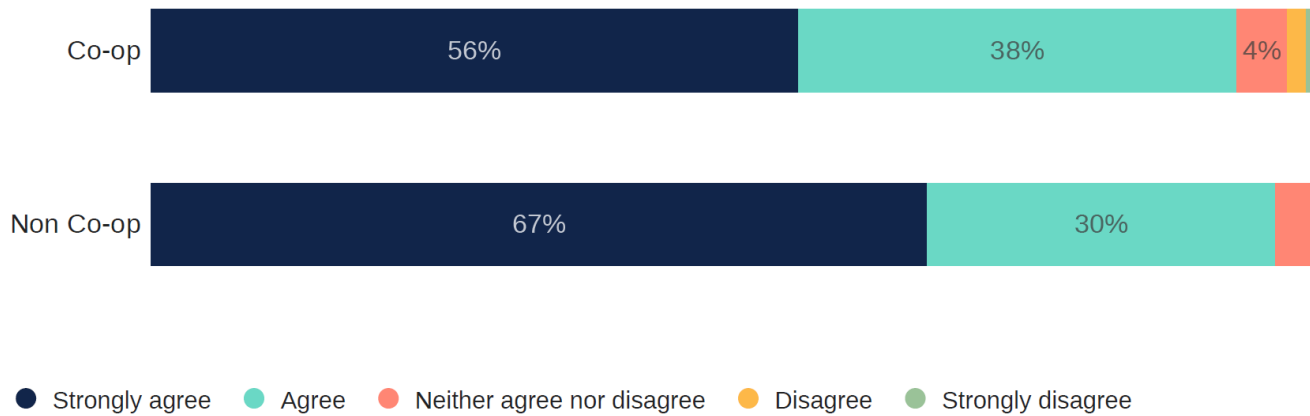
- Strongly agree
- Agree
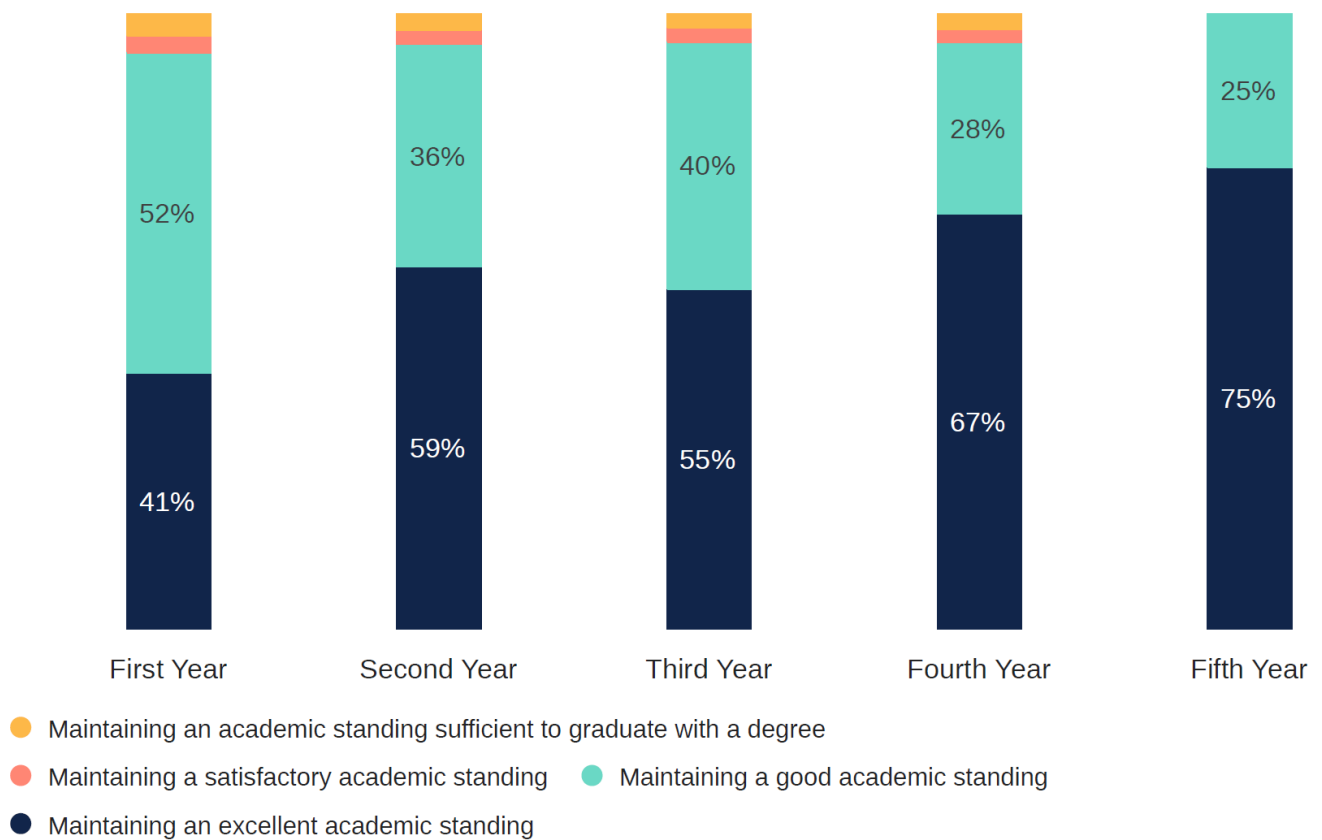- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please indicate your agreement with the following statement: "achieving academic success is very important to me"

When given this prompt, most respondents selected excellent (57%) or good (38%) academic standing (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Respondents indicated which academic status is an indicator of achieving academic success

- Maintaining an excellent academic standing [57%]
- Maintaining a good academic standing [38%]
- Maintaining a satisfactory academic standing [2%]
- Maintaining an academic standing sufficient to graduate with a degree [3%]

When looking at responses based on academic level, first-year students seem to have lower expectations for what academic success looks like than other students for their academic standing (Figure 5), however they still believe success is achieving a good academic standing. The shift from excellent to good academic standing is likely reflective of first-year students being prepared to receive lower grades overall in university than they did in high school.
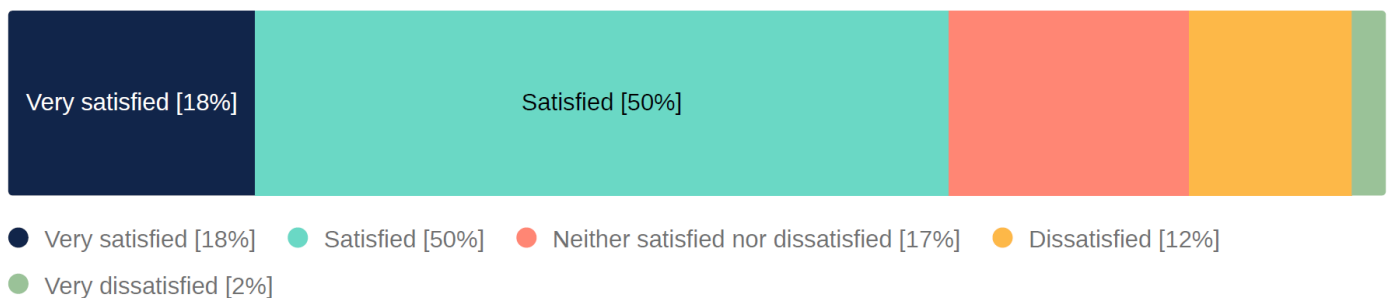
Figure 5. Academic standing that indicates academic success by respondent academic level

Legend:
- Maintaining an academic standing sufficient to graduate with a degree
- Maintaining a satisfactory academic standing
- Maintaining a good academic standing
- Maintaining an excellent academic standing

Reflecting on your experience at UW so far, how satisfied are you with the level of academic success you have achieved?

When asked how satisfied they are with the level of academic success they have achieved at Waterloo, most respondents felt positively (18% very satisfied and 50% satisfied, Figure 6).

Figure 6. Satisfaction with the level of academic success respondents have achieved

Legend:
- Very satisfied [18%]
- Satisfied [50%]
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied [17%]
- Dissatisfied [12%]
- Very dissatisfied [2%]

When looking at how responses differ based on academic level, it appears that overall, first-years are the least satisfied with their academic success and fourth-years are the most satisfied with their academic success (Figure 7). This is an intuitive finding, as it is expected for first-year students to have a difficult transition to the academic expectations in university and students near graduation have been successful enough to continue to the end of their program.

Figure 7. Satisfaction with the level of academic success respondents have achieved separated by respondent academic level
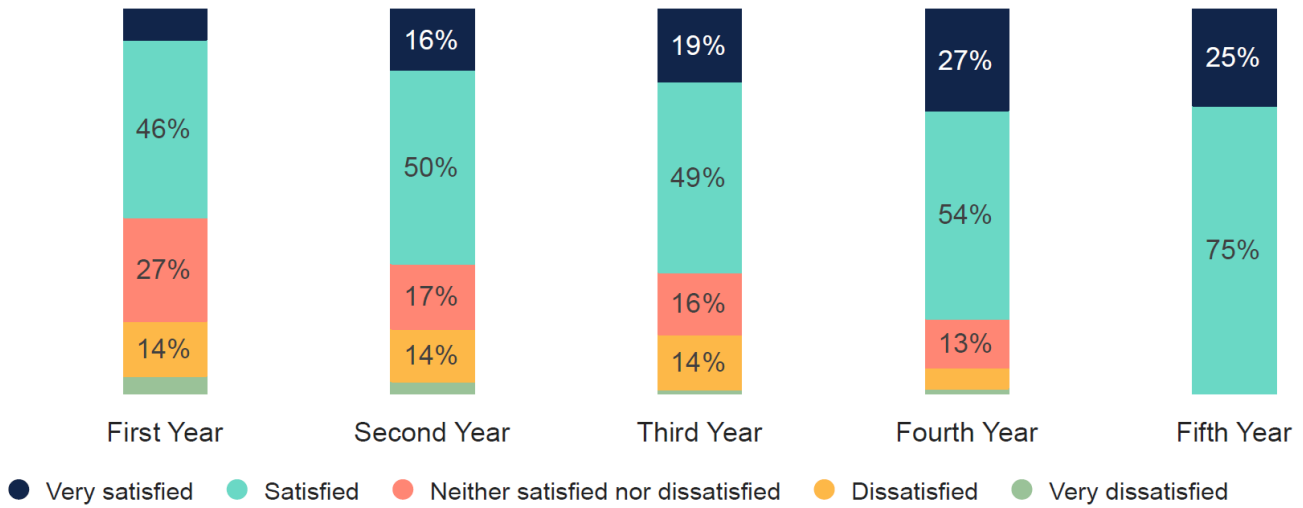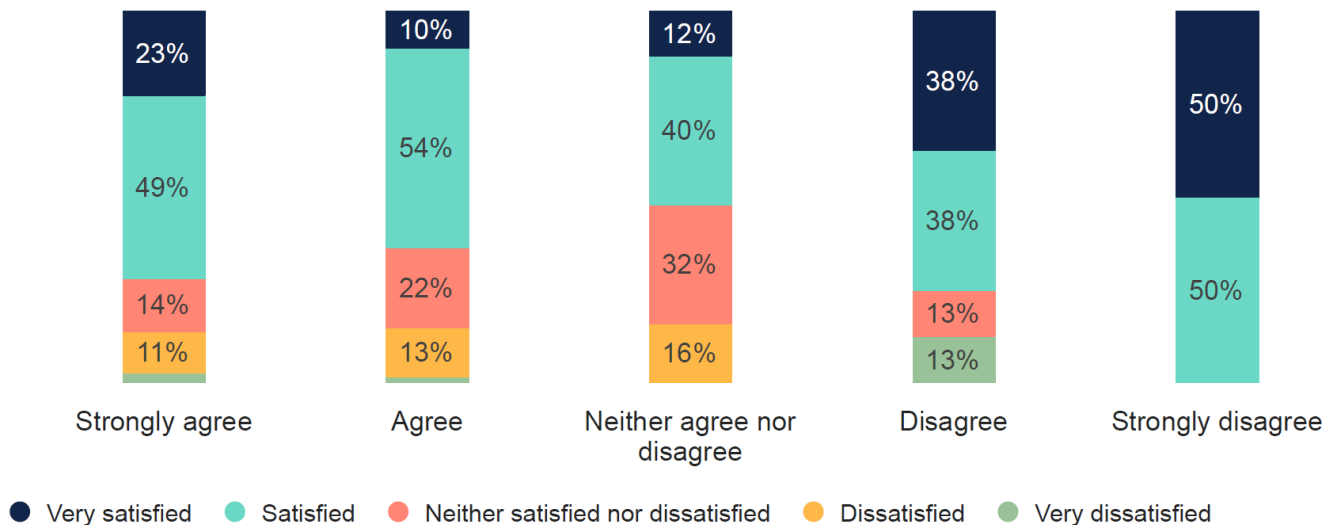

To compare this satisfaction with academic success across faculties, the very satisfied to very dissatisfied scale was re-coded using numerical values (with 1 being very satisfied and 5 being very dissatisfied). The mean for each faculty was analyzed, with a lower mean indicating higher satisfaction (Figure 8). Respondents from the Math faculty are the least satisfied with their success (mean response of 2.53). The Environment faculty respondents are the most satisfied as a group (mean response of 1.89).

Figure 8. Mean satisfaction with academic success respondents have achieved separated by respondent faculty
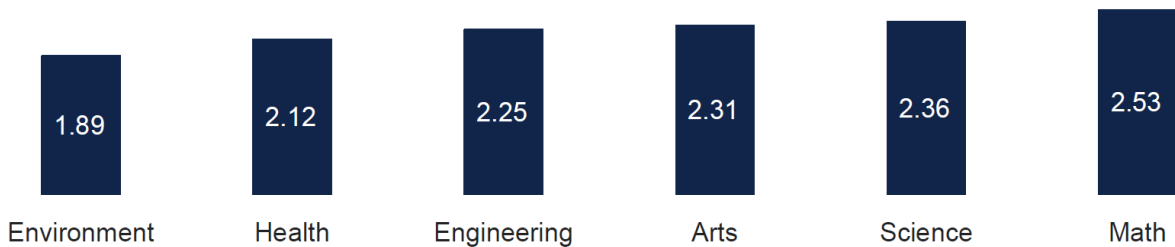
When comparing respondents' satisfaction with their academic success and with how much they agree with the statement "achieving academic success is very important to me", it appears that satisfaction with academic success is inversely correlated with how much a respondent values achieving academic success. Respondents who strongly disagreed and disagreed that achieving academic success was important to them also have the strongest levels of satisfaction with their academic success (Figure 9). It is important to note however that the number of respondents who selected neither agree nor disagree (n=25), disagree (n=8), and strongly disagree (n=2) in Figure 1 is very small which limits the ability to say anything meaningful about this trend.

Figure 9. Satisfaction with the level of academic success respondents have achieved compared to how much they agree with the statement "academic success is very important to me"


Please elaborate why you are not satisfied with the level of academic success you have achieved.

178 respondents who indicated a dissatisfaction with their level of academic success in the previous question were asked to elaborate as to why this was. Most respondents shared that these feelings stemmed from not receiving the grades they hoped for (n=77) which led to **feelings of dissatisfaction** (n=9). Students provided varying answers as to why. Firstly, many shared that they found courses too difficult (n=14) due to assessments and high number of deliverables which impacted their ability to maintain a healthy **work-life balance** (n=9). Additionally, some students shared that their **transition from high school** (n=11) to university did not equip them with the necessary skills to excel in their course work. Lastly, students shared that **professors** (n=6) have great influence on how well they do in the course. Respondents stated that the way professors teach the content and their respective marking schemes affect their overall success in the course. Many respondents shared that they feel they **could have done better** (n=42) in their courses. Students stated that they are having difficulty developing **effective study habits** (n=8) or feel they were not **putting in enough effort** (n=16), such as studying enough, into their course work. Furthermore, students stated that **personal factors** (n=4) such as **mental health concerns** (n=7) and **burnout** (n=4) led them to be dissatisfied with their achieved level of academic success.

Factors Impacting Academic Success

How do you prepare for course selection?

In a select all that apply format, students were asked how they prepare for course selections (Figure 10). Most students chose UW Flow (75%) and the undergraduate studies academic calendar (67%). A large number also utilize Reddit (49%), talking with upper year students in the program (33%), and talking to their academic advisor (25%).

Figure 10. Respondents use of course selection preparation methods
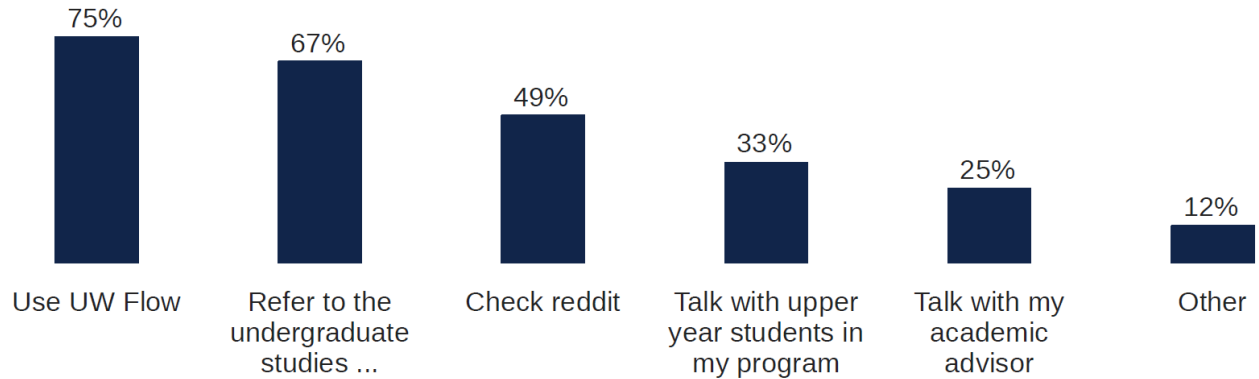
Respondents who selected "other" shared that they do not prepare for course selection at all as they are in programs where they do not choose many or any of their courses. Some students also clarified that they talk to friends in their program (often friends in the same year, not upper years). Some other options mentioned were using Rate My Prof, looking at old course syllabi to get a sense of content and workload, and using their course requirements list from their program as a guide.

Please explain how you utilize UW Flow to prepare for course selection

Respondents were asked to elaborate on how they utilize UW Flow to prepare for course selection. Most students stated that they utilize **comments left by students** (n=215) who have previously taken the course of interest. Students stated that these comments are helpful as many share tips to succeed in the course, overall **opinions about the course** (n=39), and their **enjoyment of the course** (n=14) which influences if they decide to take the course. Students also shared that they value looking at the **professor ratings** (n=189) left by previous students. Responses stated that the ratings allow them to view more information about the course instructors, such as their teaching style and engagement in the course. Furthermore, students stated that they utilize the **course rating** (n=144) feature. Many students shared that the course rating gives them **additional information about the course** (n=22) that is not available on the course index, such as students' rating of its **difficulty** (n=77). Lastly, students shared that they utilize UW Flow to help plan their upcoming **course schedule** (n=101), through viewing **seat availability** (n=11) and viewing when courses are offered (e.g., terms, days of the week).

Please select the top four tools or strategies that you have found most helpful in achieving academic success*

When asked to select which tools or strategies were the most helpful in achieving academic success, the most popular options were attending class regularly (76% of respondents), completing practice question sets (64%), studying alone (64%), and taking notes in class (50%) (Figure 11). Surprisingly, attending seminars/labs weekly was only selected by 22% of respondents. In some courses, attendance at weekly seminars and labs is required and contains graded components. Other tools and strategies that had notably lower selection rates were developing my study skills and strategies (23%), understanding my learning style (21%), attending office hours (14%), attending workshops (0%) and completing weekly readings (11%).

Figure 11. Respondent selection of tools and strategies that they found the most helpful in achieving academic success
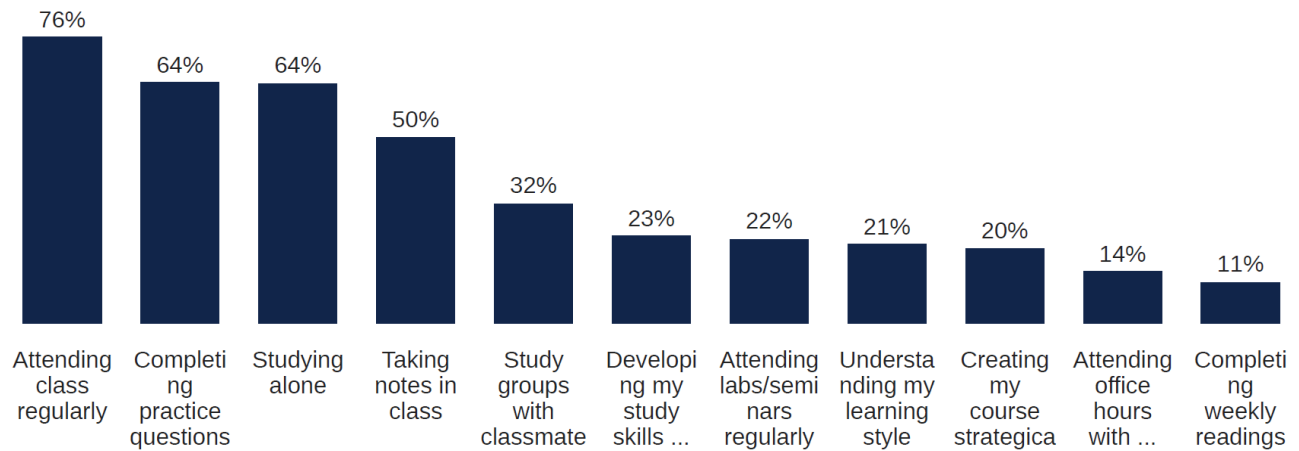
Please indicate your agreement with the following statement: I rely on used and/or reduced cost textbooks to support my academic success

When respondents were asked how much they agree with the following statement "I rely on used and/ or reduced cost textbooks to support my academic success" the response was relatively split (Figure 12). Overall, more respondents agree than disagree but there is a notable number of respondents selecting neither agree nor disagree. Respondents who disagree could be indicating that they are comfortable financially and thus do not depend on used and/or reduced cost textbooks. This could also be because these respondents feel that they do not need to purchase textbooks to succeed academically. However, it is important to continue to ensure access to reduced cost, used, and open educational resources for the 48% of respondents that rely on these resources to succeed academically.

Figure 12. Agreement with the statement "I *rely on used and/or reduced cost textbooks to support my academic success*"
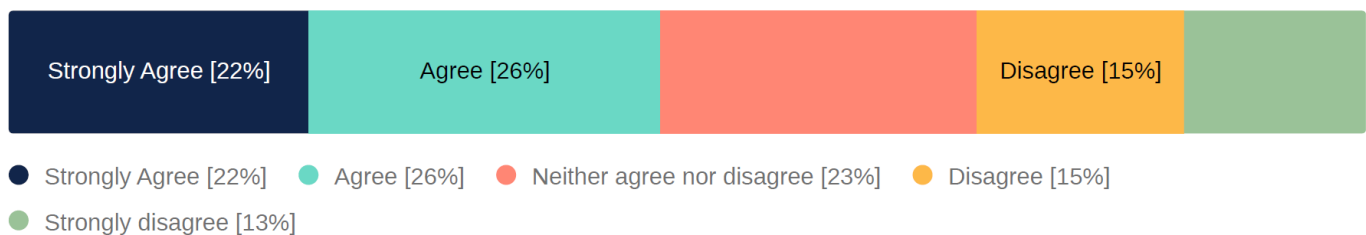
Respondents from the Arts and Environment faculties agree more with this statement overall than respondents from other faculties (Figure 13). Statistically speaking, the responses from students enrolled in Engineering are significantly different from those in the Faculty of Arts ($p<0.05$). This again could be due to an increased need for textbooks to be successful in these programs or indicate a higher level of financial need from students registered in these programs.

Figure 13. Agreement with the statement "*I rely on used and/or reduced cost textbooks to support my academic success*" by respondent faculty
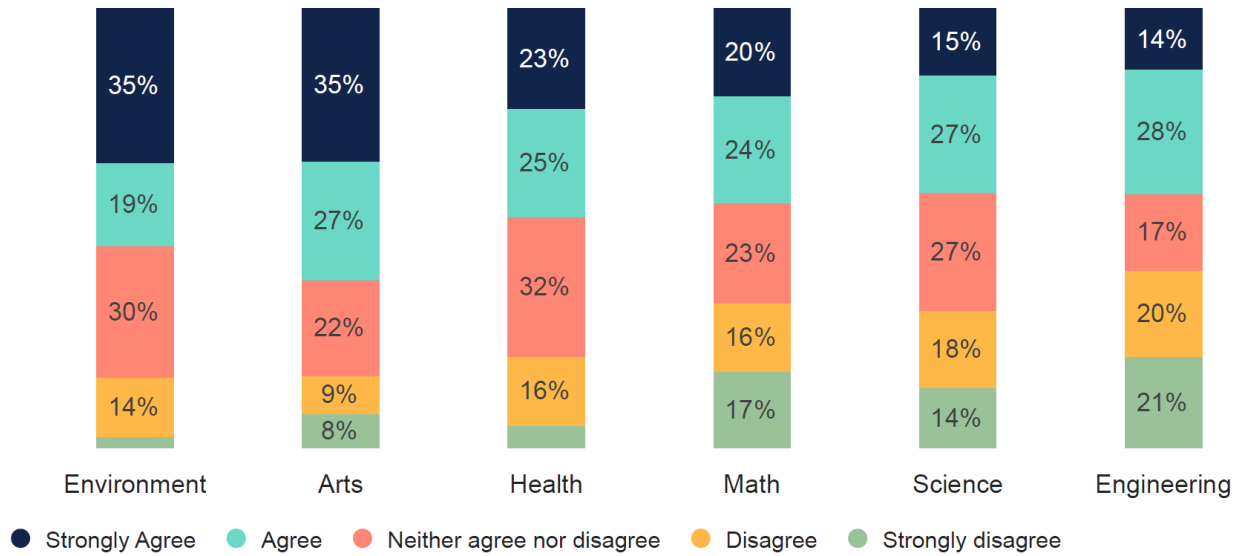
Positive statements about safety at UW

There also is a slight difference between respondents registered in co-op programs compared to those registered in regular programs (Figure 14). Respondents registered in regular programs have stronger levels of agreement with the statement indicating more reliance on reduced cost/used textbooks for their academic success, however this finding was not significant (p > 0.05). This may again indicate a greater amount of financial stress experienced by non-co-op students compared to co-op students.

Figure 14. Agreement with the statement "I *rely on used and/or reduced cost textbooks to support my academic success*" by co-op status
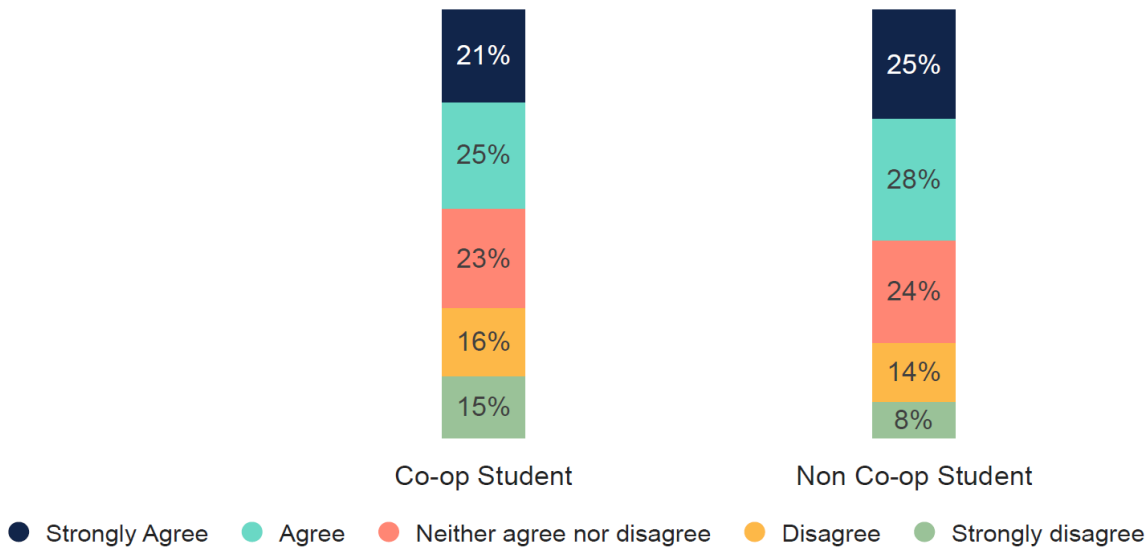
Please select the top four academic factors that make it most difficult for you to succeed in your courses*

When asked to select which academic factors make it most difficult for them to succeed in their courses the most chosen options were teaching style (68%), difficult content (66%), unengaging instructor (60%), and unclear expectations (57%). Some other responses shared were the conflicting schedules of graded content due dates (assignments, midterms, tests) in different courses (and instructors being unwilling to make exceptions for students in these situations) and some courses providing no practice material (Figure 15).

Figure 15. Respondent selection of academic factors that made it difficult to succeed in courses
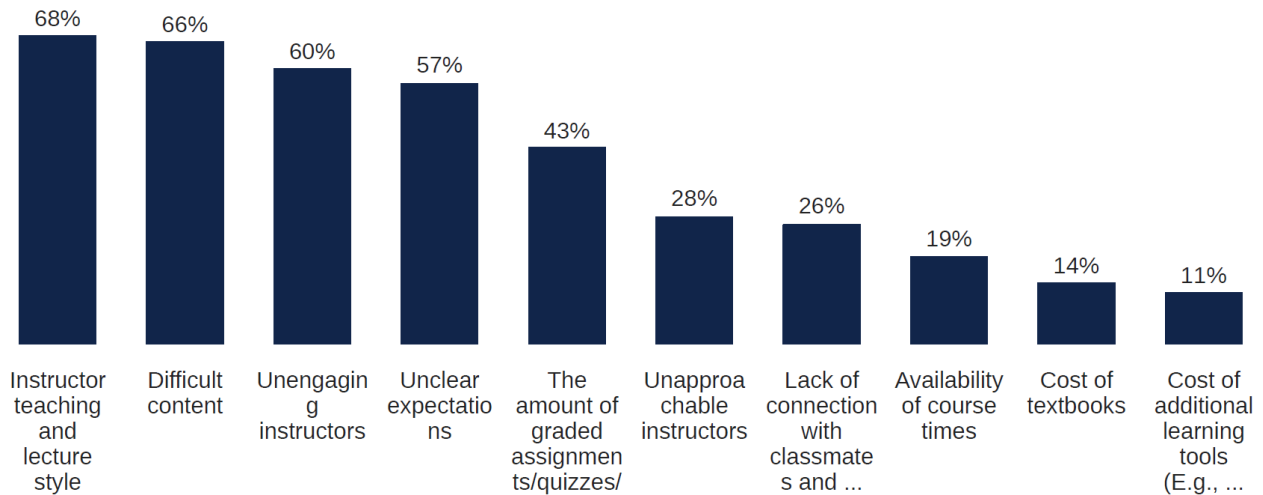
Please select the top four personal factors that make it most difficult for you to succeed in your courses*

In addition to academic factors, respondents were asked to select the top personal factors that make it difficult for them to succeed in their courses. The most common choices were balancing schoolwork and other responsibilities (86%), lack of motivation (78%), time management (73%), and mental health concerns (53%) (Figure 16). Some written responses included that the commute was difficult (both from students attending main and satellite campuses) and difficulties focusing on school during summer terms.

Figure 16. Respondent selection of personal factors that made it difficult to succeed in courses
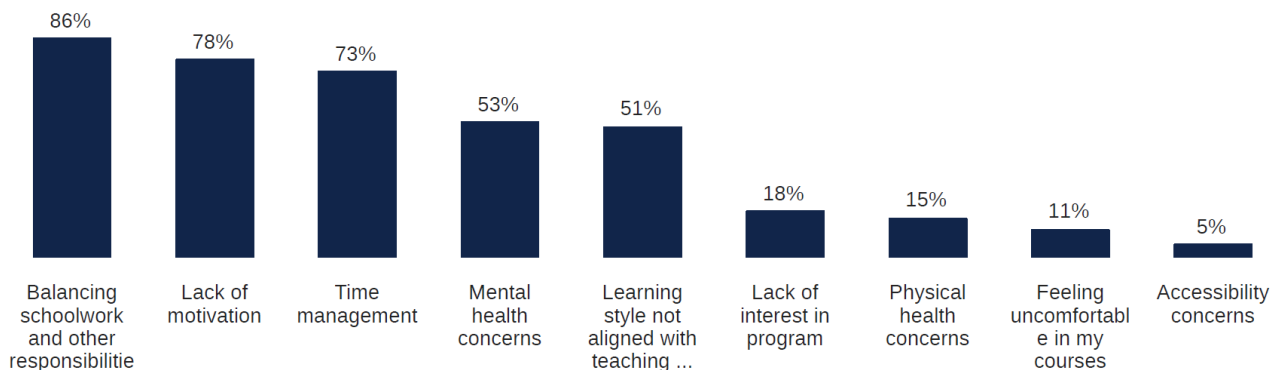
Please select the top four aspects of courses that you struggle with the most*

When asked which aspects of courses respondents struggled with the most, the responses were split among several options. Respondents indicated that keeping up with readings/assignments workload (67%), studying for tests and exams (59%), balancing assignment deadlines (51%), good exam prep strategies (47%), understanding the content (45%), and approaching instructors (43%) were the aspects of courses where they struggled the most (Figure 17). This aligns with responses related to academic factors that make it most difficult for students to succeed in their courses, further highlighting the difficulties students face with managing workload, deadlines, and preparing for exams.

Figure 17. Respondent selection of aspects of courses that they struggled with the most
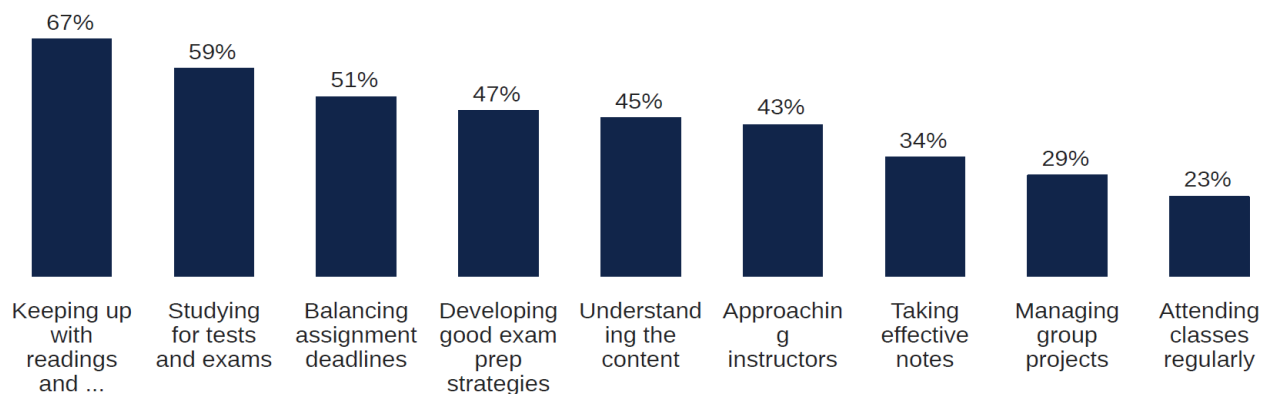
How would you describe the hustle culture at UW? How does it impact your academic success?
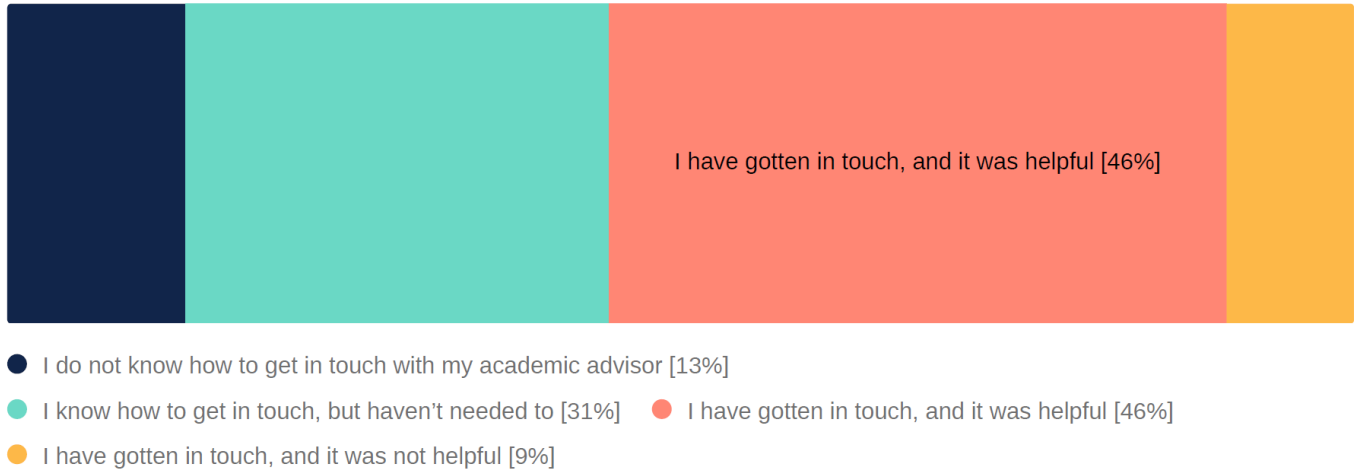
Many respondents shared that they believe the hustle culture at Waterloo is **very prevalent** (n=82) and impacts their academic success. The majority of students shared that hustle culture impacts their **productivity and motivation** (n=138). Some students stated that the culture helped increase their motivation to be productive and work harder. In contrast, many students shared that it creates very **stressful environments** (n=83) and puts lots of **pressure** on students. Additionally, some students stated that their stress stems from trying to reach the **high standards** (n=22) established by the institution. Furthermore, the majority of students shared that they are unable to maintain a healthy **work-life balance** (n=115). Students stated that they participate in unhealthy **study habits** (n=66), such as pulling all-night study sessions, not taking breaks, and not sleeping enough to keep up with their **course load** (n=38). Feelings of **guilt** (n=15) are often associated with taking breaks as students feel they need to be working at every spare moment of the day to be **successful** (n=29) and often feel like they are **falling behind** (n=24). Students stated that this often leads to declines in their **mental wellbeing** (n=76). Furthermore, many students shared that they felt a great sense of **competition and comparison** (n=86) present at Waterloo. Students stated that the pressure to **attain quality co-ops** (n=20) **decreases their confidence** (n=10), **self-esteem** (n=11), and creates a **toxic academic environment** (n=57). Lastly, students shared that participating in hustle culture leads to many **sacrifices** (n=8), such as spending less time **socializing** (n=17) with others, which is both **isolating** (n=14) and impacts their **sense of belonging** (n=4).

Supports for Academic Success

Please select the option that best describes your relationship with your academic advisor

When asked about the relationship with their academic advisor, most respondents were either in touch with their advisor and found it helpful (46%) or knew how to get in touch but didn't need to (31%). 13% of respondents reported not knowing how to contact their advisor and 9% reported being in touch with their advisor and not finding it helpful (Figure 18).

Figure 18. Frequency of contact and usefulness of academic advisors by respondents

I have gotten in touch, and it was helpful [46%]

● I do not know how to get in touch with my academic advisor [13%]

● I know how to get in touch, but haven't needed to [31%]   ● I have gotten in touch, and it was helpful [46%]

● I have gotten in touch, and it was not helpful [9%]

We further analyzed whether the following selections were independent of academic level or faculty:

- Whether respondents had been in contact with their advisor
- For respondents that had not been in contact, whether they knew how to contact their advisor
- Whether respondents who had been in contact with their advisor found it helpful

Contact with academic advisor was found to be dependent on academic level and faculty ($p < 0.005$) with significantly fewer students in first-year and Engineering (separately) being in contact with their advisor (Figure 19 and 20). Knowledge of how to contact their advisor and helpfulness of advisor were independent of academic level and faculty.

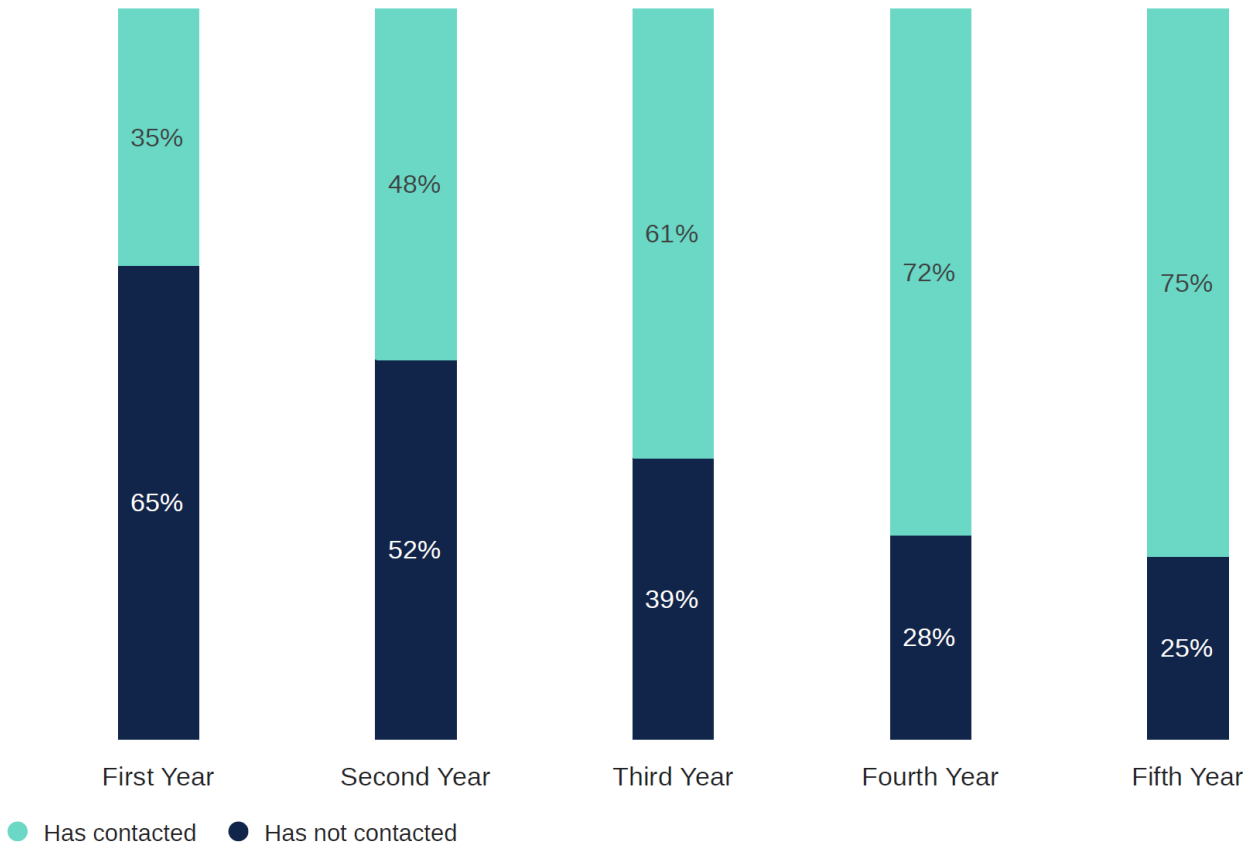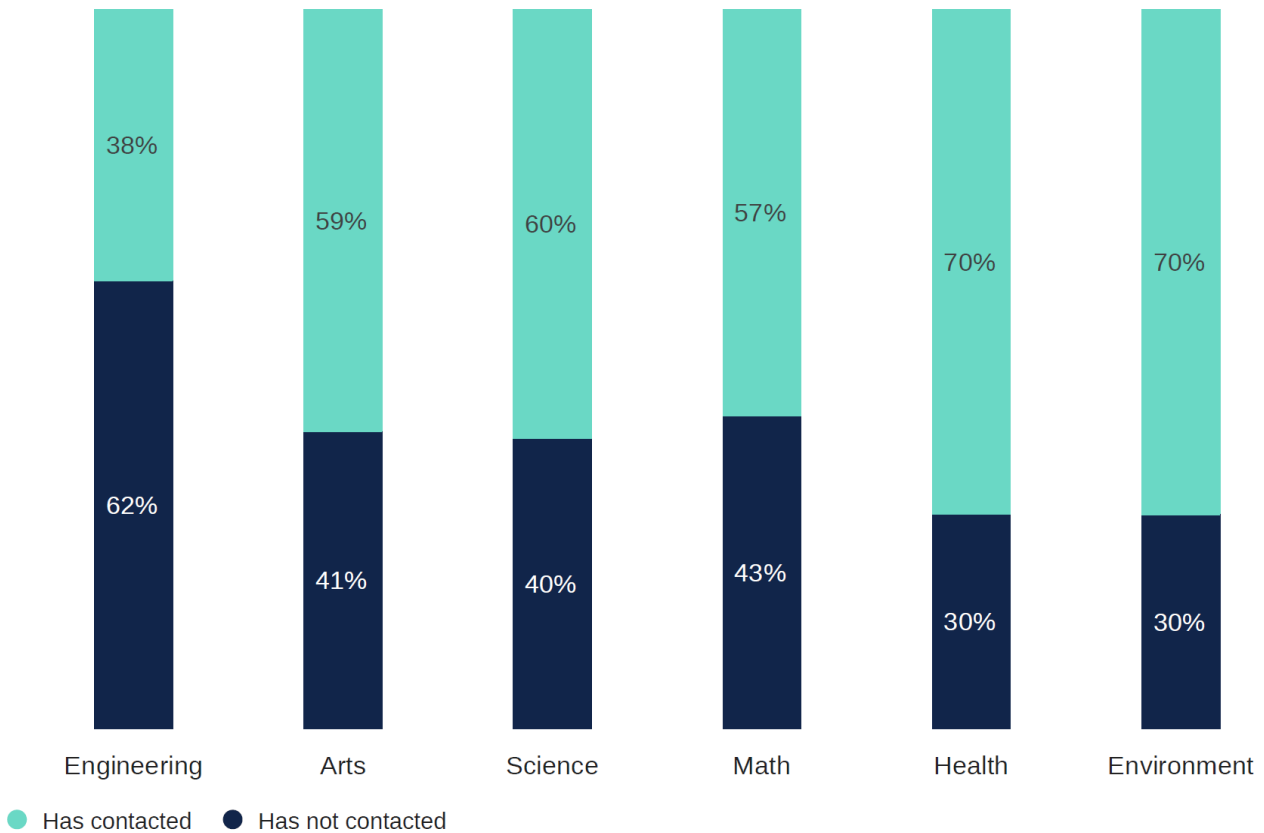**Figure 19.** Contact with academic advisor by academic level

**Figure 20.** Contact with academic advisor broken by faculty

Please describe why getting in touch with your academic advisor was not helpful

55 respondents who indicated that they had gotten in touch with their academic advisor and it was not helpful were asked to describe why this was the case. Most students stated that their advisors were **limited in their knowledge** (n=38) to help support students. Furthermore, many students shared that because of this, their **advisors did not solve the initial problem** the student had (n=12). Respondents also shared that the **advice and information** (n=39) shared by the advisor was unhelpful. Many stated that their advisors were unable to answer their questions or shared their personal opinions rather than taking the student's opinion into account. Furthermore, students stated that their advisors were unempathetic, **unkind** (n=9), and were unwilling to help. Respondents also shared that they had difficulty connecting (n=4) with their advisors. Some examples included, taking a long **time to receive a response** (n=10), lots of back-and-forth **emailing** (n=2), and advisors **not showing up for scheduled meetings** (n=2) without notice.

Please indicate your agreement with the following statement: I feel confident locating academic support resources on campus when needed

Most respondents agree (48%) that they feel confident locating academic support resources on campus when needed. However, a notable portion of respondents chose neither agree nor disagree (28%) or disagree (12%) which leaves room for improving student awareness of on campus academic support resources and how to access them (Figure 21).

Figure 21. Agreement with the statement *"I feel confident locating academic support resources on campus when needed"*

● Strongly agree [8%]   ● Agree [48%]   ● Neither agree nor disagree [28%]   ● Disagree [12%]
● Strongly disagree [4%]
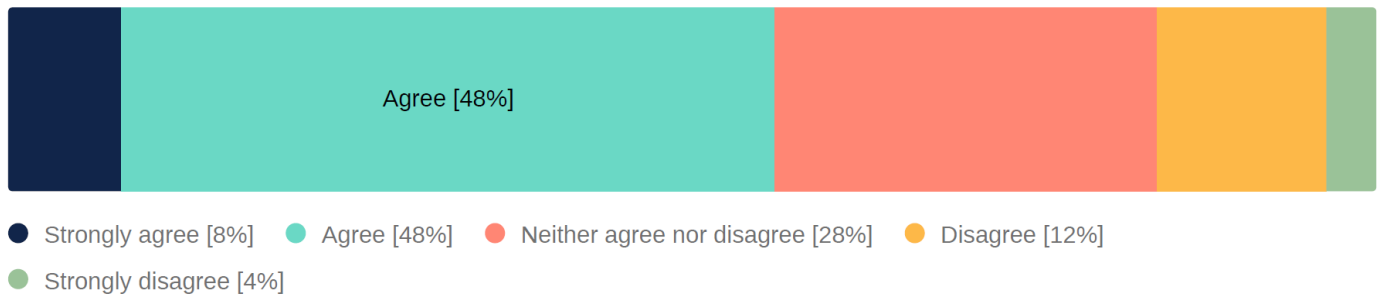
Which of the following on campus academic support resources are you aware of?

When asked about awareness of on campus academic supports, the most popular responses were academic advisors (89%), instructor/TA office hours (89%), AccessAbility Services (56%), the Student Success Office (56%), the Writing and Communications Center (42%), and Library research resources (42%) (Figure 22).

Figure 22. Respondent awareness of academic support resources on campus
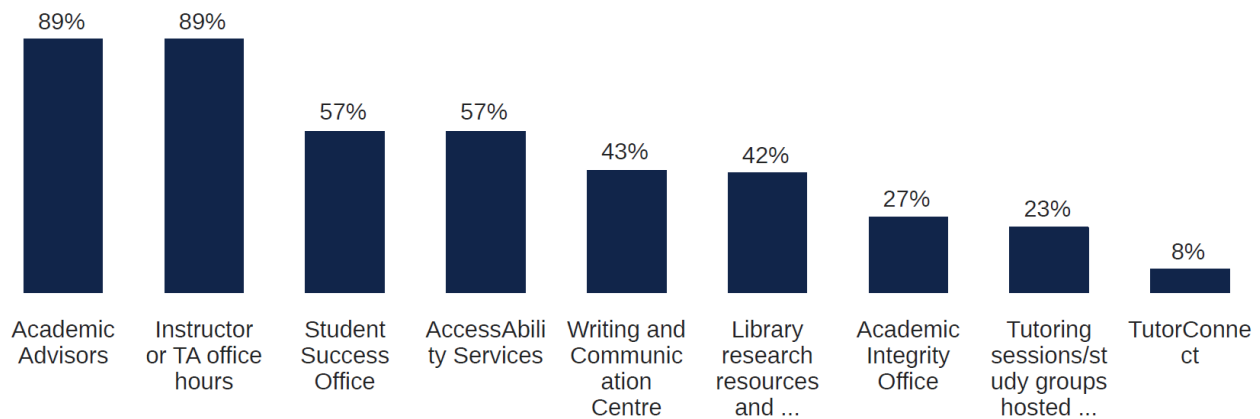
Which of the following academic supports have you accessed?

When asked which of the supports from the previous question respondents had accessed, office hours (72%) and academic advisors (60%) were accessed the most (Figure 23). AccessAbility Services (13%), Library research support (12%), the Writing and Communication Center (10%) and the Student Success Office (8%) were notably accessed much less, especially when compared to the level of awareness these services have (see Figure 22).

Figure 23. Respondent use of academic support resources on campus
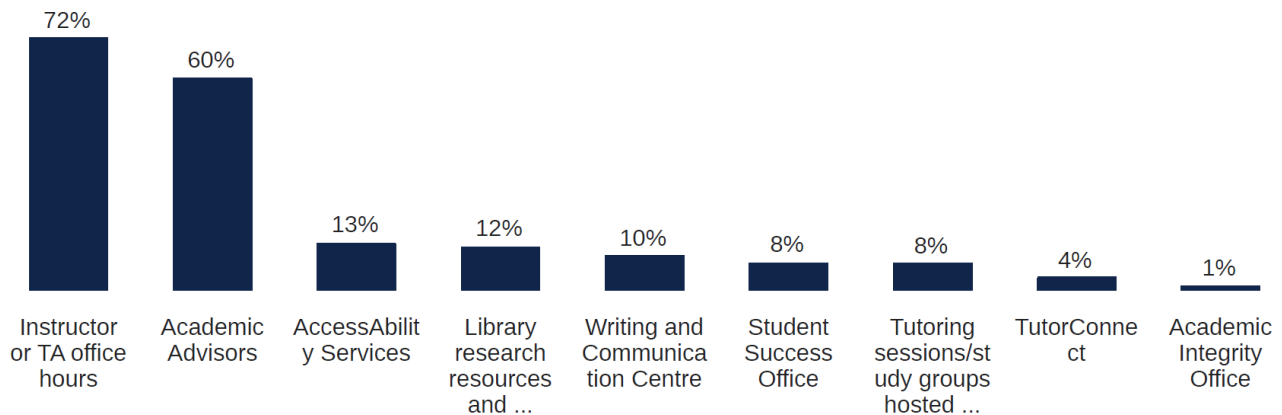
We looked at whether the number of services respondents had accessed differed by academic level or faculty. Respondents from the Engineering and Health faculties use significantly fewer services overall compared to respondents from all other faculties (Figure 24, $p < 0.005$, small effect size). Similarly, students in first- and second-year had accessed significantly fewer services overall than upper-year students (Figure 25, $p < 0.005$, small effect size).

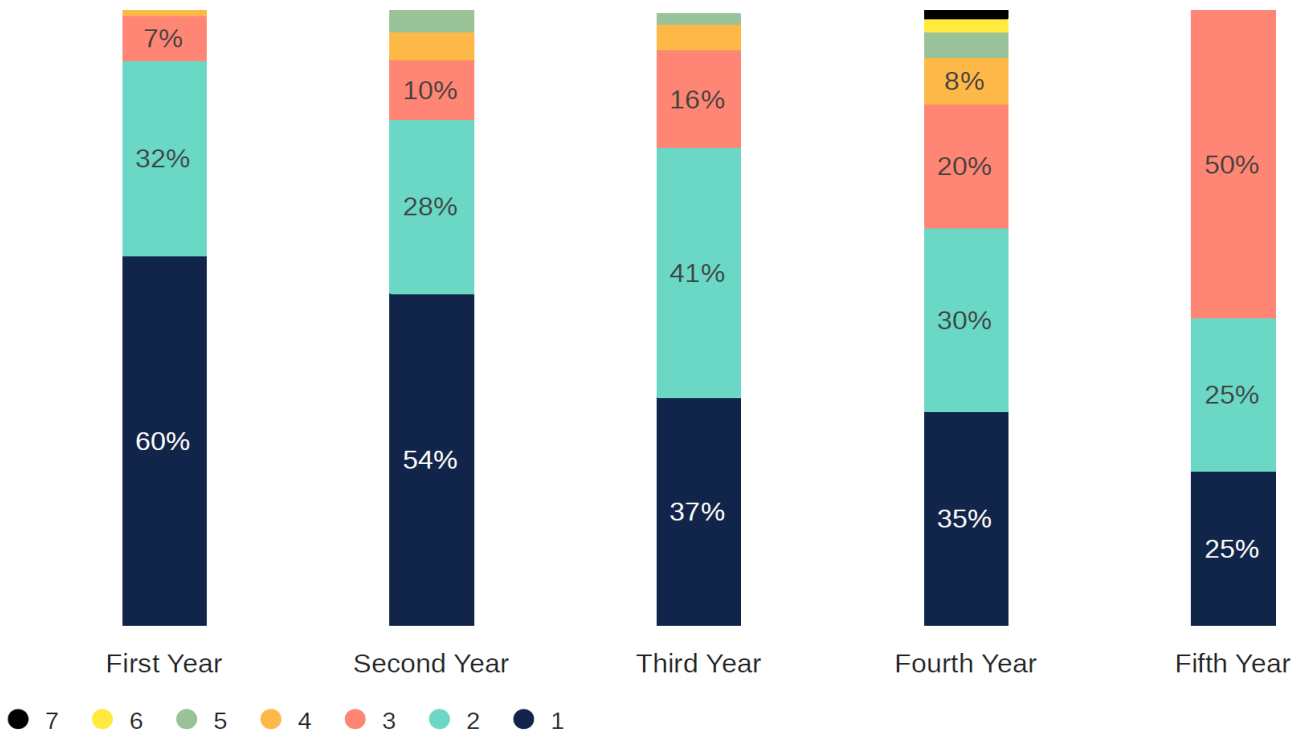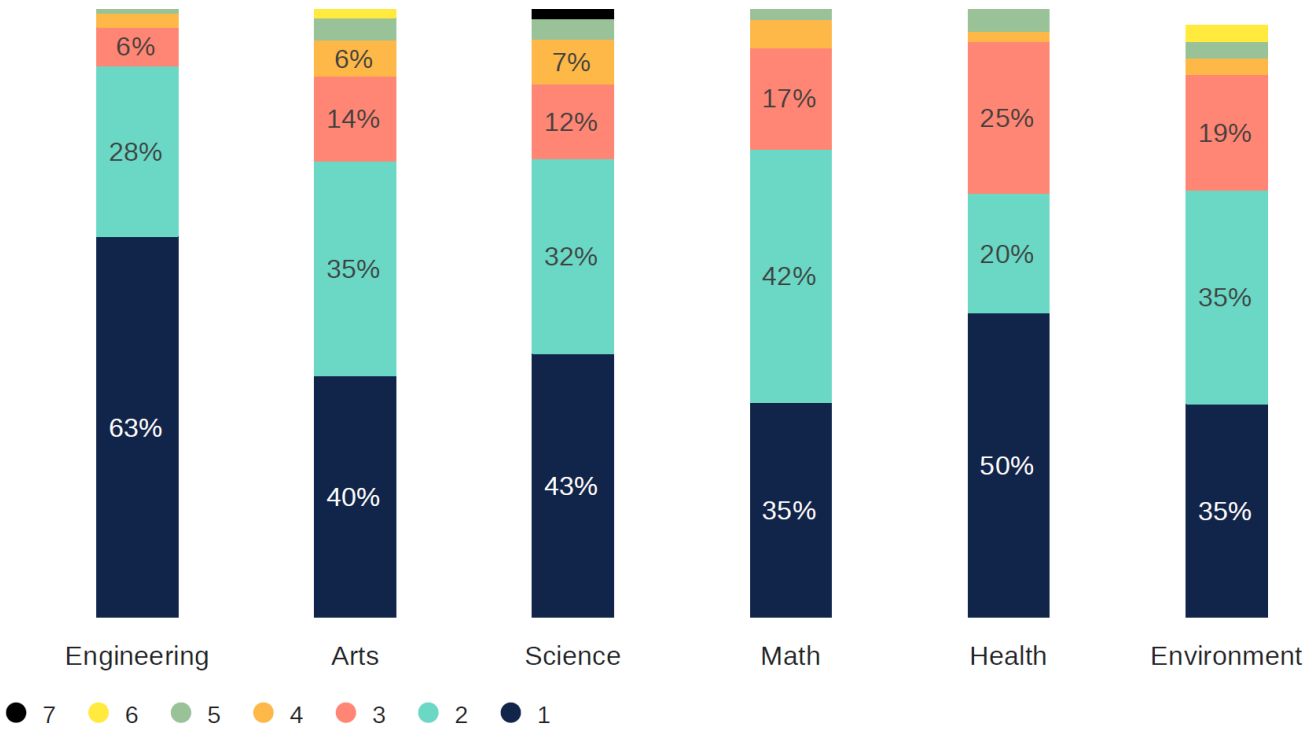**Figure 24.** Number of services used by academic level

**Figure 25.** Number of services used by faculty

We then examined service use to determine if usage differed based on academic level or faculty. Academic advisors are used significantly less by respondents from the Engineering faculty compared to all other faculties (Figure 26, $p < 0.005$). This difference could be explained by Engineering utilizing a block enrollment strategy which results in students not needing to be as involved in the planning of what courses they register for each term. Course registration is one of the primary reasons students engage with their academic advisor.

Figure 26. Use of academic advisors by faculty
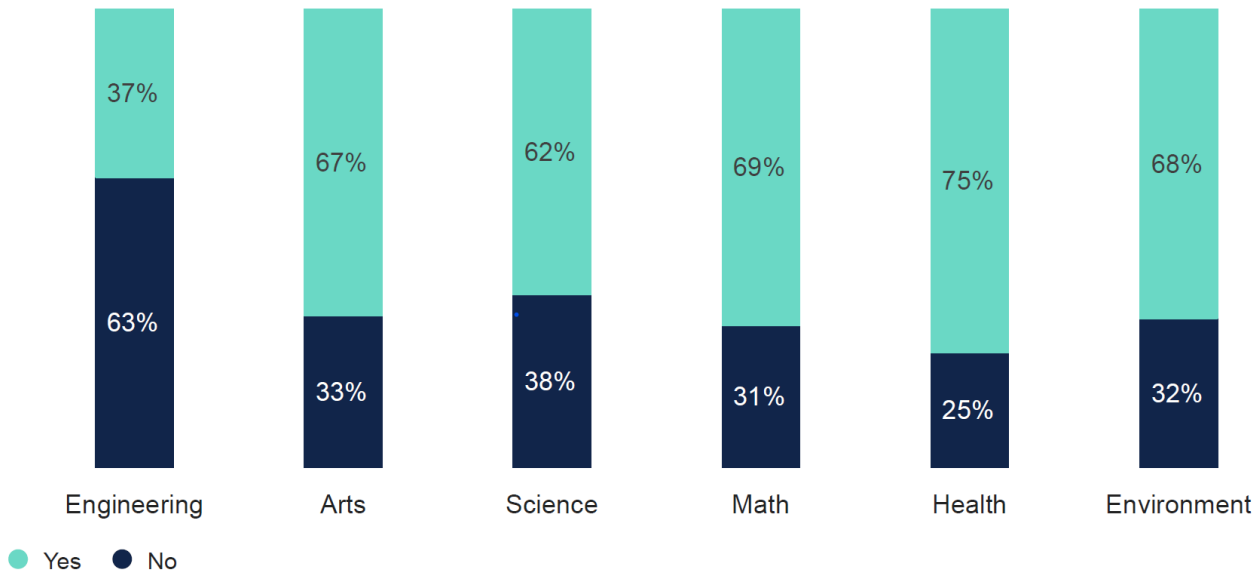
Use of academic advisors also differed significantly based on level, with first- and second-year students utilizing their advisor significantly less than upper year students (Figure 27, $p < 0.005$). Again, this may be related to students being more involved and making more choices in the selection of their upper year courses. The Library Research support service was utilized significantly less by first-year students as well compared to respondents in all other years (Figure 28, $p < 0.05$). This could be due to first-year student assignments being simpler and requiring less independent research to complete compared to the assignments of upper year students.

Figure 27. Use of academic advisors by level
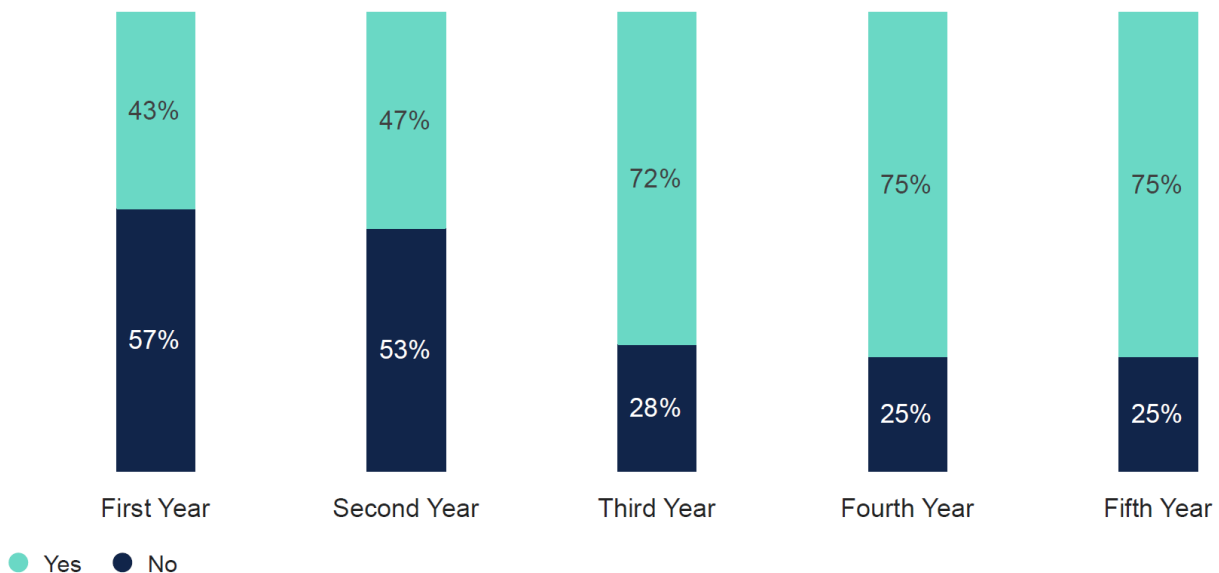
The Writing and Communications Center is utilized significantly less by students in the Engineering Faculty compared to respondents from all other faculties (p < 0.005). This may be due to Engineering courses generally having less focus on written assignments than in other faculties.
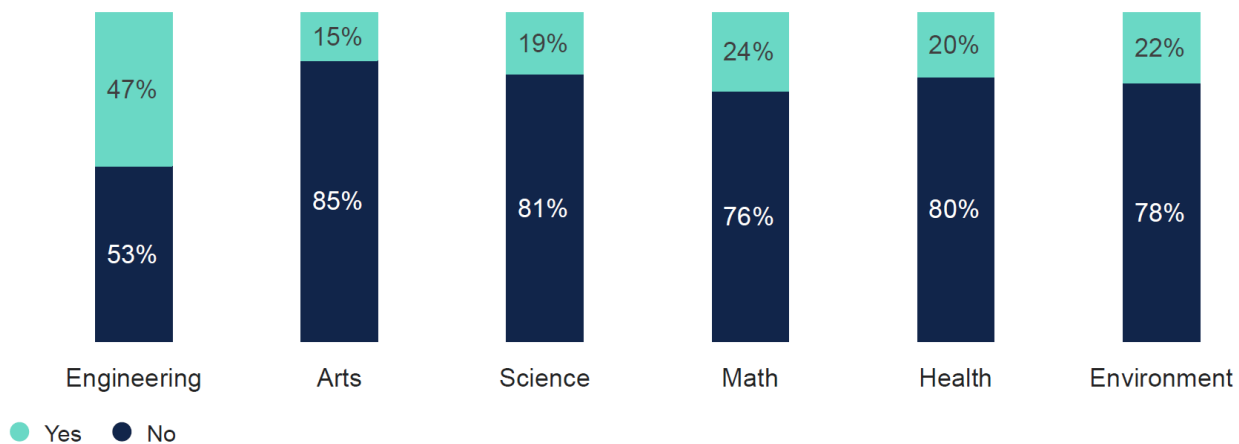
Figure 28. Use of the Writing and Communications Center by faculty

	Engineering	Arts	Science	Math	Health	Environment
No	99%	95%	97%	99%	100%	97%

Yes ● No
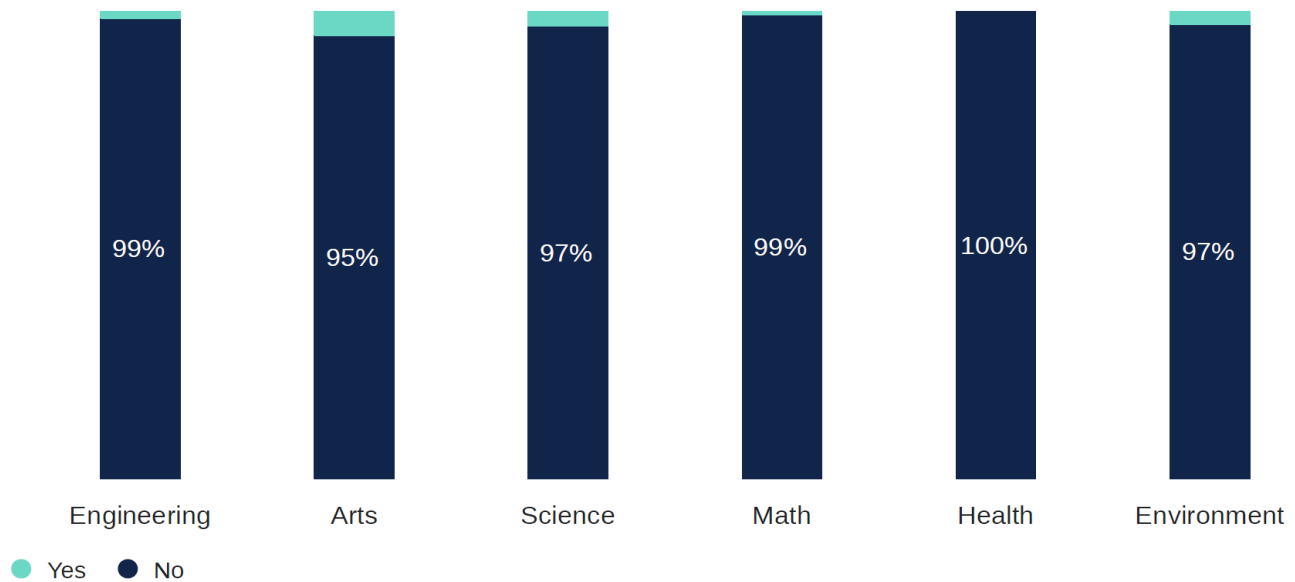
Use of office hours is dependent on respondent faculty (Figure 29, p < 0.005).

Figure 29. Use of office hours by faculty

	Engineering	Arts	Science	Math	Health	Environment
Yes	47%	15%	19%	24%	20%	22%
No	53%	85%	81%	76%	80%	78%

Yes ● No

Use of AccessAbility Services is dependent on academic level of the respondent (Figure 30, p < 0.05). It appears that use of AccessAbility Services decreases as academic level increases which could be because students were able to receive support and accommodations early on in their degree, making their engagement with AccessAbility unnecessary in their upper years.

Figure 30. Use of AccessAbility Services by academic level
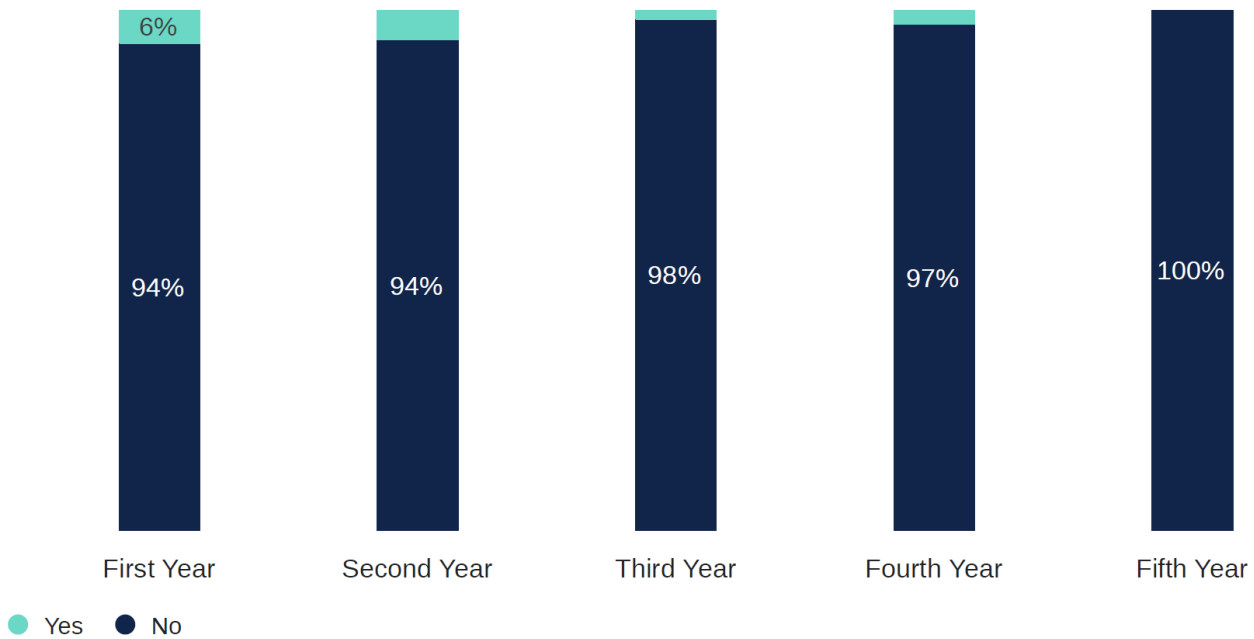
How helpful was accessing these resources to achieving academic success?

When respondents were asked to rate the helpfulness of each service they had accessed, generally most responses were positive for each of the services. Some services had such low reported use that the sample size was too small to warrant analysis.

Most respondents that used their academic advisor felt they were very helpful (29%) and helpful (51%) as a resource (Figure 31).

Figure 31. Helpfulness rating of academic advisors
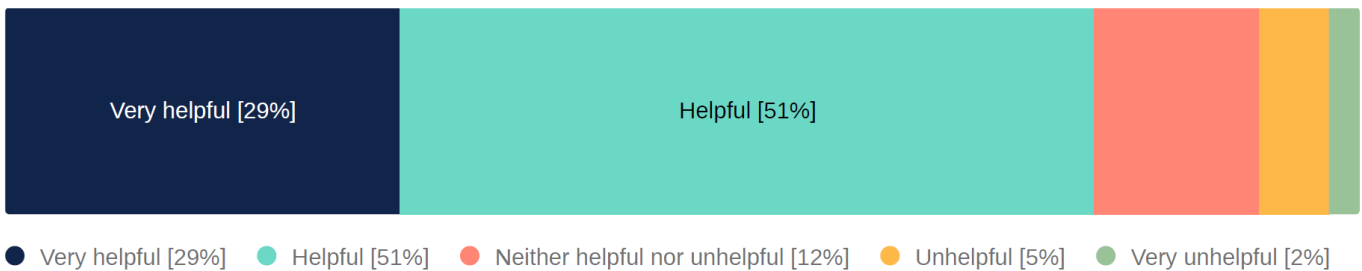
Respondents who attended office hours generally found they were very helpful (33%) and helpful (56%) (Figure 32).

Figure 32. Helpfulness rating of office hours

| Very helpful [33%] | Helpful [56%] | Neither helpful nor unhelpful [9%] | Unhelpful [1%] | Very unhelpful [1%] |

Respondents that used the Library Research support found they were very helpful (26%) and helpful (66%, Figure 33). When looking at how this differs between respondents based on faculty, respondents from the Science faculty were the only ones to report finding it unhelpful (13%, Figure 34).
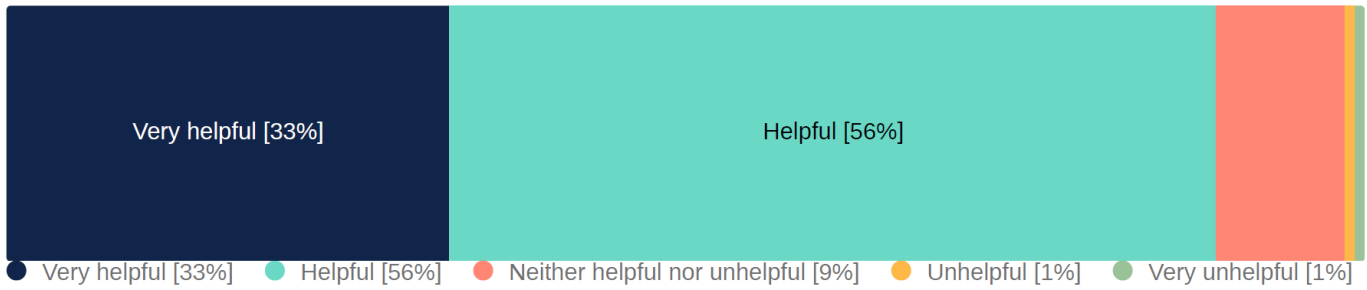
Figure 33. Helpfulness rating of the Library Research Support services

| Very helpful [26%] | Helpful [66%] | Neither helpful nor unhelpful [5%] | Unhelpful [3%] | Very unhelpful [0%] |
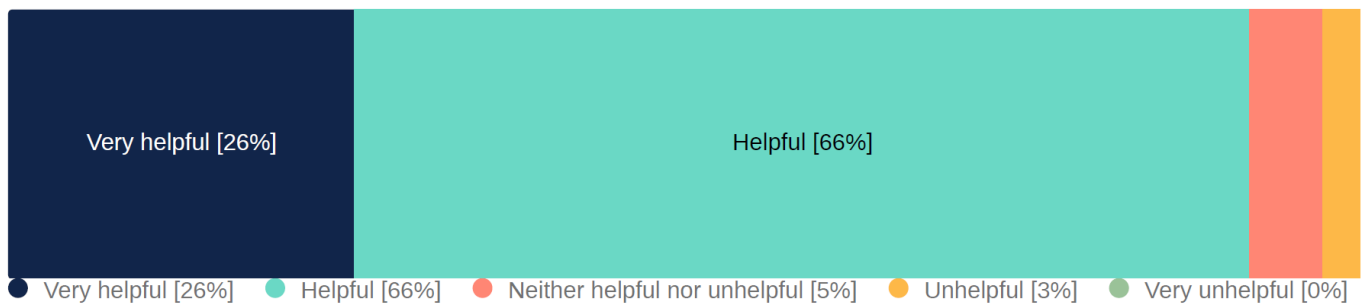
Figure 34. Helpfulness rating of the Library Research Support services by faculty

Very helpful   Helpful   Neither helpful nor unhelpful   Unhelpful   Very unhelpful
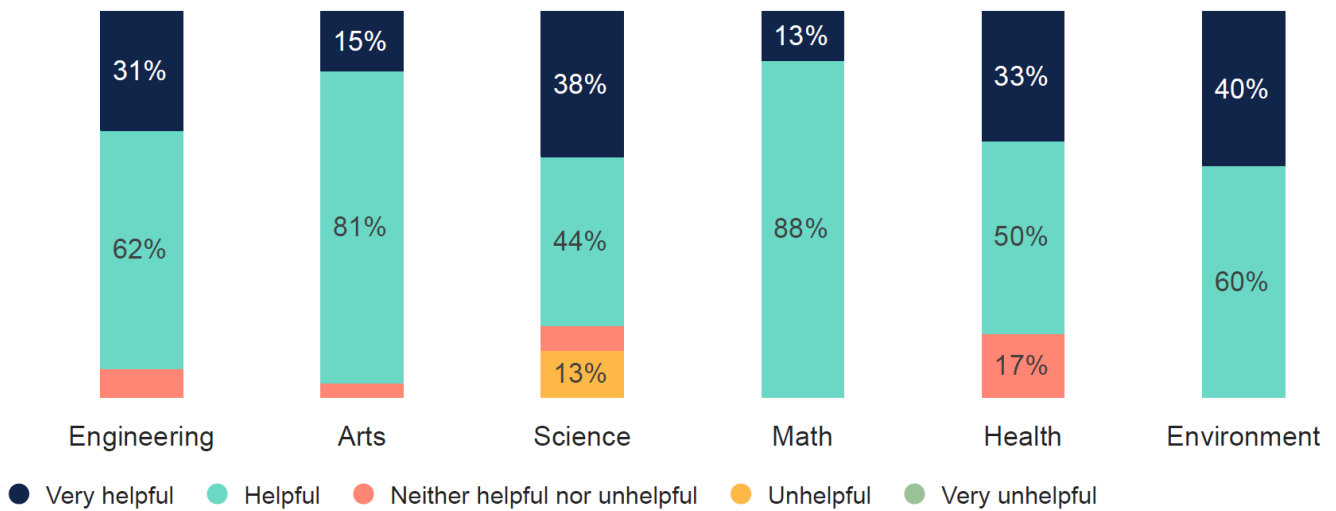
AccessAbility Services had a helpful rating (26% very helpful and 38% helpful), however there was a notable response size for neither helpful nor unhelpful (25%, Figure 35). When looking at how helpfulness ratings were distributed between faculties, respondents from the Engineering faculty proportionally found AccessAbility Services the least helpful (47% neither helpful nor unhelpful, 7% unhelpful, and 7% very unhelpful, Figure 36). This likely speaks to the instructors and academic policies of the Engineering faculty being the least accommodating to students requiring accommodations for disability reasons.

Figure 35. Helpfulness rating of AccessAbility Services

Very helpful [26%]	Helpful [38%]

● Very helpful [26%] ● Helpful [38%] ● Neither helpful nor unhelpful [25%] ● Unhelpful [10%]
● Very unhelpful [1%]

Figure 36. Helpfulness rating of AccessAbility Services by faculty

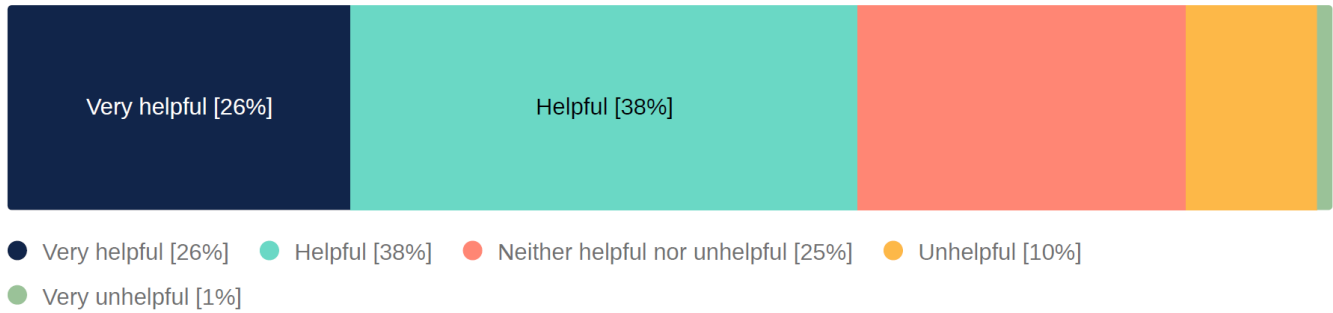| Engineering	Health	Science	Math	Arts	Environment
13%	11%	22%	25%	40%	33%
27%	44%	44%	38%	32%	67%
47%	33%	28%	25%	12%	
	11%		13%	16%	

● Very helpful ● Helpful ● Neither helpful nor unhelpful ● Unhelpful ● Very unhelpful
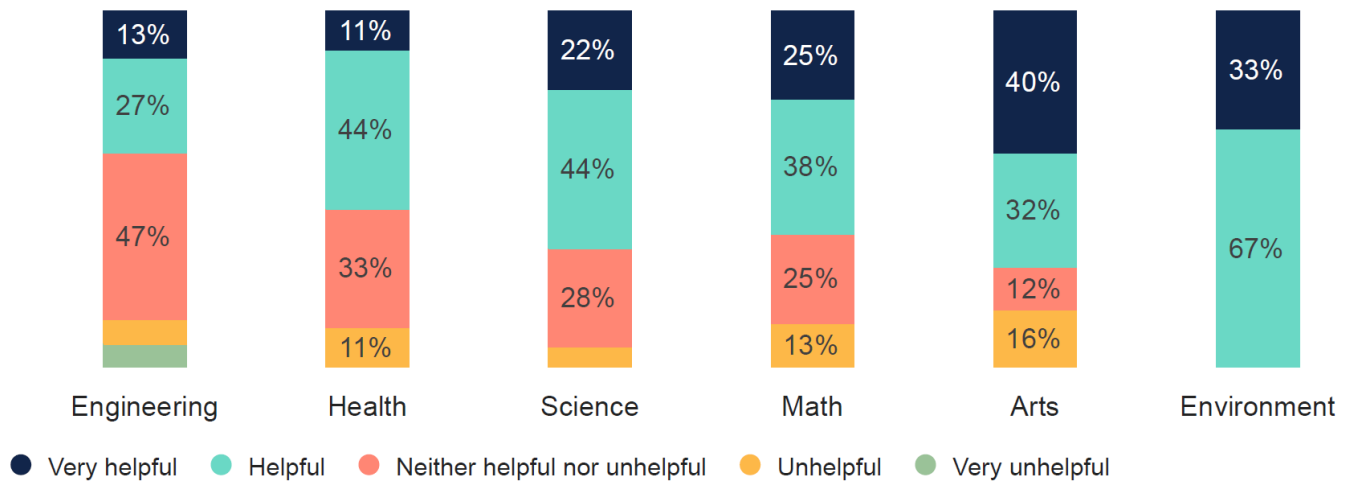
The Writing and Communications Center received a majority of very helpful (17%) and helpful (50%) ratings however there was a notable proportion of neither helpful nor unhelpful responses (25%, Figure 37).

Figure 37. Helpfulness rating of the Writing and Communications Center

Very helpful [17%]	Helpful [50%]

● Very helpful [17%] ● Helpful [50%] ● Neither helpful nor unhelpful [25%] ● Unhelpful [8%] ● Very unhelpful [0%]
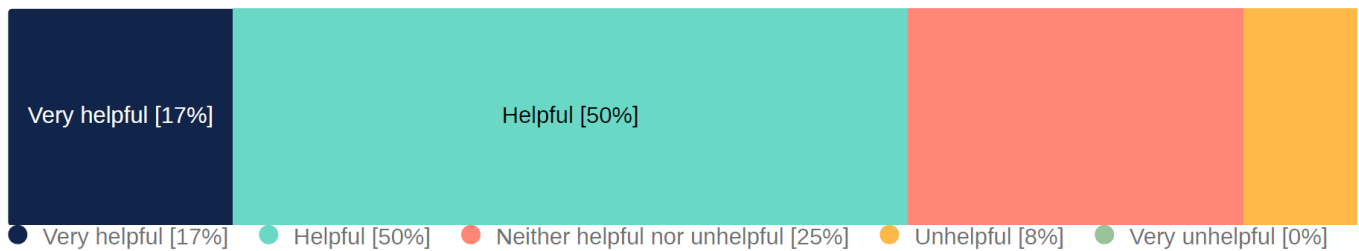
The Student Success Office also generally received a helpful rating (60%), however there was a notable proportion of neither helpful nor unhelpful responses (27%, Figure 38).

Figure 38. Helpfulness rating of the Student Success Office

Helpful [60%]

● Very helpful [10%]   ● Helpful [60%]   ● Neither helpful nor unhelpful [27%]   ● Unhelpful [2%]   ● Very unhelpful [0%]
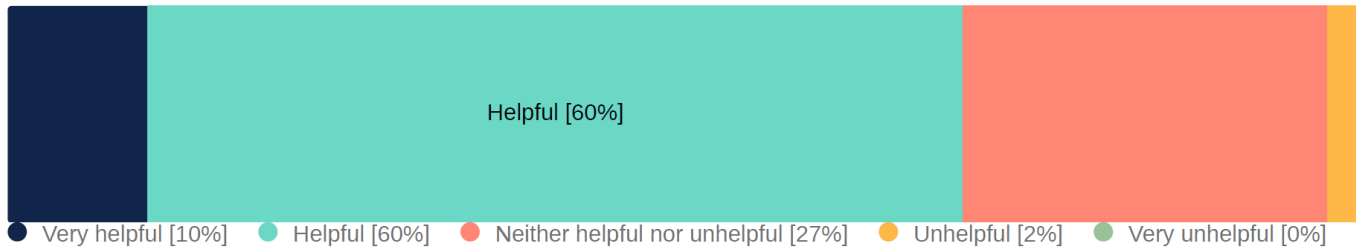
What prevents you from accessing academic support resources?

When respondents were probed to understand what prevents them from accessing academic supports, most respondents reported a lack of time (63%), not thinking they will help (42%), that service hours don't align with availability (37%), or that they do not need support (28%, Figure 39). Notably 16% of respondents selected "I don't know how to access", and "I don't know if they exist" indicating that there is still room for improvement in student awareness of these services. Some respondents wrote in other responses such as supports having long wait times, barriers to access due to attending a satellite campus, or feeling it hard to get over internal emotions around accessing help.

Figure 39. Factors that affect respondents from accessing academic supports
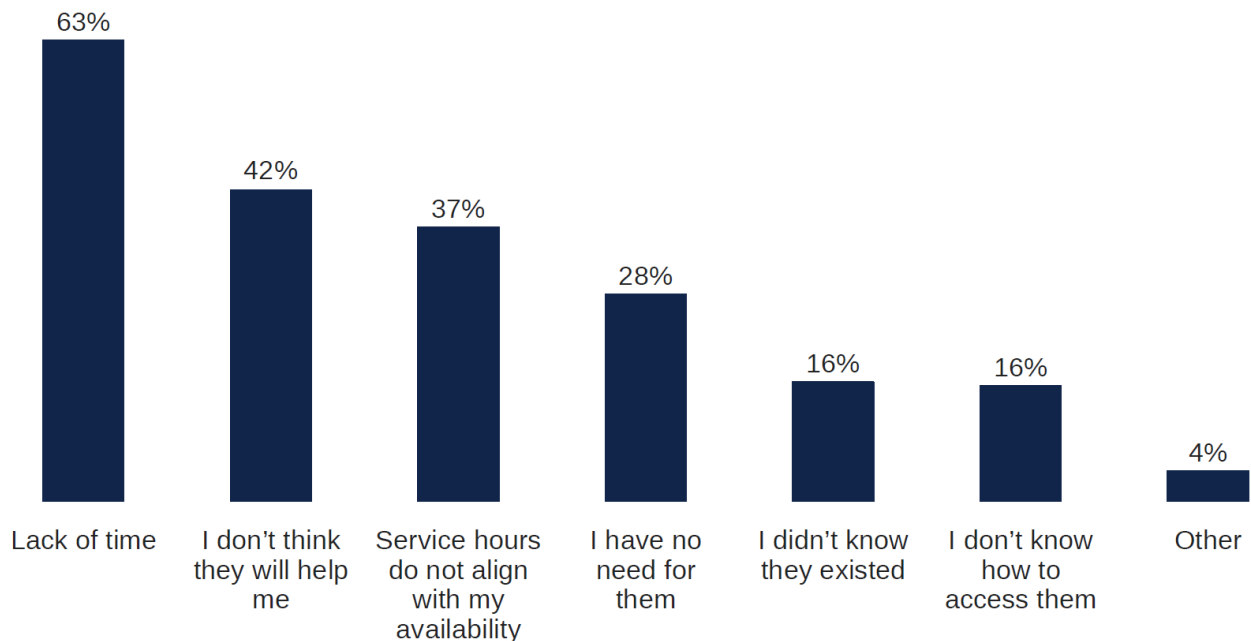
How would you prefer to access academic support resources?

Most respondents would prefer to access academic support resources in a hybrid manner (52%), with a notable number preferring in person (35%) and a small proportion preferring online access (13%, Figure 40). Online and hybrid access would help reduce barriers due to distance (satellite campuses, online only students, and students with a cumbersome commute to campus) and for students with disabilities.

Figure 40. Respondent preferences for mode of access of academic support services
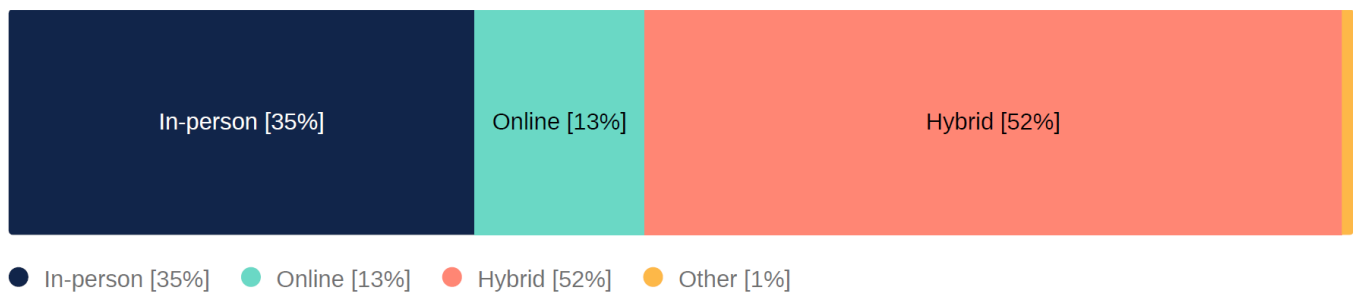
In-person [35%]	Online [13%]	Hybrid [52%]	

● In-person [35%]   ● Online [13%]   ● Hybrid [52%]   ● Other [1%]

Please select the top four academic supports that would most positively impact your academic success*

When asked what academic supports would most positively impact their academic success, respondents selected understanding content (58%), learning better study habits (51%), and learning better time management (47%, Figure 41). This is somewhat interesting as many of these top choices are learning/developing study habits which, in Figure 11, were selected by very few students as a tool or strategy that they found helpful to improve academic success. One notable written response was understanding accessibility support options offered by the instructor.

Figure 41. Respondent selection of academic supports that would most positively impact academic success

Bar chart values:
- Understanding content better: 58%
- Learning better study habits: 50%
- Learning better time management skills: 47%
- Having more confidence reaching out to ...: 41%
- Understanding instructor expectations ...: 41%
- Learning how to prioritize tasks and assignments: 35%
- Learning better test-taking and exam-prep ...: 33%
- Building a stronger connection with classmates/peers: 31%
- Learning better note taking skills: 26%
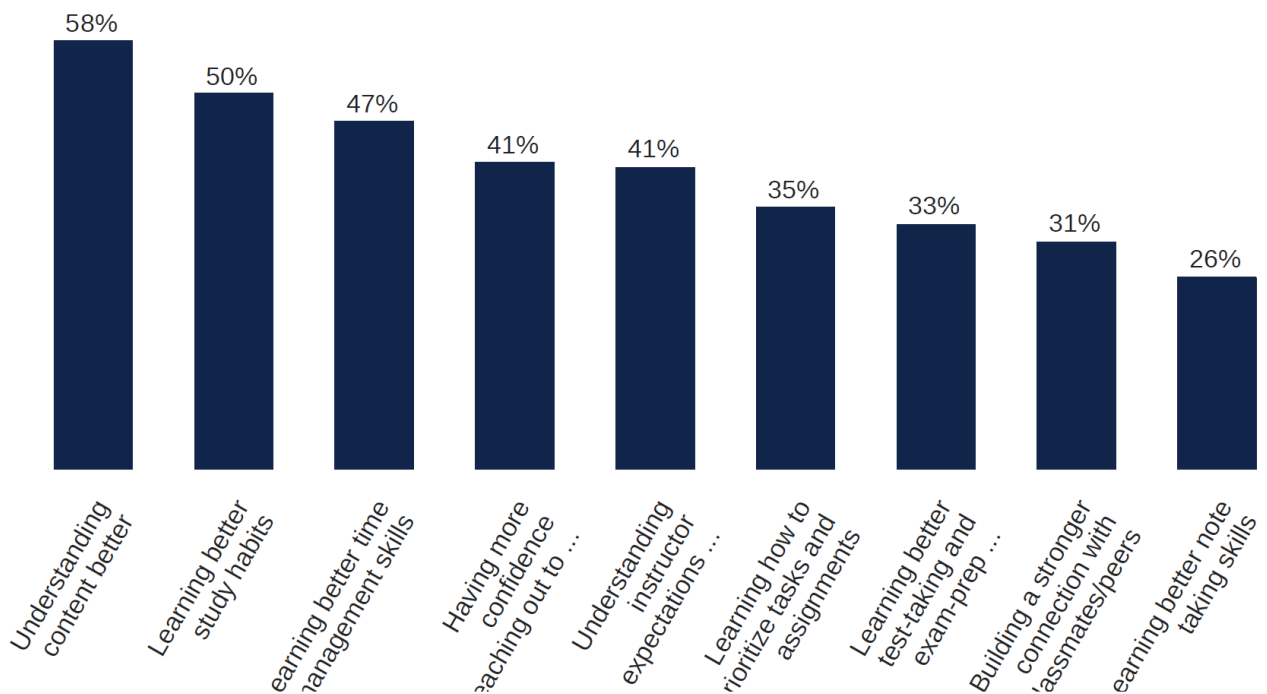
Is there anything else related to academic success that you would like to share?

Respondents were given the opportunity to share any last remarks related to academic success. Due to the broad nature of the question, responses were varied. Some common themes included making support more accessible and easier for students to use (n=13). Students stated that making resources, such as counselling services, more accessible will aid in their ability to achieve academic success. Students shared that they often feel embarrassed asking for help or are unable to receive support due to long wait times. Furthermore, students emphasized the influence professors (n=9) have on their success. Some students stated that when their professors are unengaging or unapproachable, it decreases their confidence in the course. Some other common themes include:

- Learning how to develop effective study habits
- Ability to achieve healthy work-life balance
- Difficulty learning online methods
- Decreasing weekly deliverables in courses to effectively study for larger assessments

Conclusion

This report has explored academic success from the perspective of students and outlined the various challenges they face in their pursuit of this ideal. When asked what academic success means to them, most students associated it with a high GPA or good grades, although many also recognized that this ensures they develop the necessary skills for future endeavours. This is consistent with the fact that most students also viewed maintaining an excellent or good academic standing as an indicator of achieving academic success. Overall, students indicated high levels of satisfaction with the level of academic success they achieved, although this depended on faculty and year of study in some cases. Students who were dissatisfied with their academic success mentioned various reasons why this was, indicating the nuance and complexity of the issue. In terms of the factors impacting their academic success, students emphasized external difficulties related to teaching style, difficult content, and unengaging professors as well as personal difficulties related to balancing schoolwork and other responsibilities, lack of motivation, and time management. Together, these factors encompass the difficulties students face in achieving academic success. In terms of courses themselves, keeping up with workload and studying for tests and exams were identified as major struggles by most students. This aligns with responses related to academic factors that make it most difficult for students to succeed in their courses, further highlighting the difficulties students face with managing workload, deadlines, and preparing for exams. There are various academic support resources already in place across the University to help students with these challenges. Overall, students seem to be aware of these resources that are available to them and those who access them find them to be helpful. However, many students have not accessed these services with the top reasons for this being lack of time and not thinking they will help. When it comes to the difficulties students face and their ability to get help on these matters, time management is a consistent theme. These findings have resulted in the creation of six recommendations, outlined at the beginning of the report. These should serve as suggestions for how WUSA and the University should approach enhancing student academic success.

Demographic Comparison

Demographic information is collected from RSP respondents when they sign up to participate. The following graphs show the demographic breakdown of students who participated in this survey. This participant data is also compared to the actual Waterloo student population data available through IAP Student headcount. This comparison data includes co-op, international students, faculty, and year of study. Currently, there is no UWaterloo data related to gender identity, disability status, and racial identity to compare our participant data to.

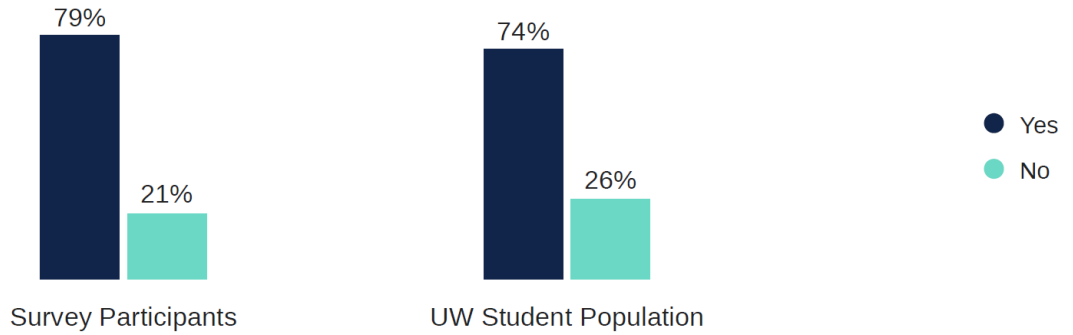**Figure 42: Co-op Students**

Figure 42 demonstrates that we over-selected co-op students in this survey.

Figure 43: Do you identify as disabled?
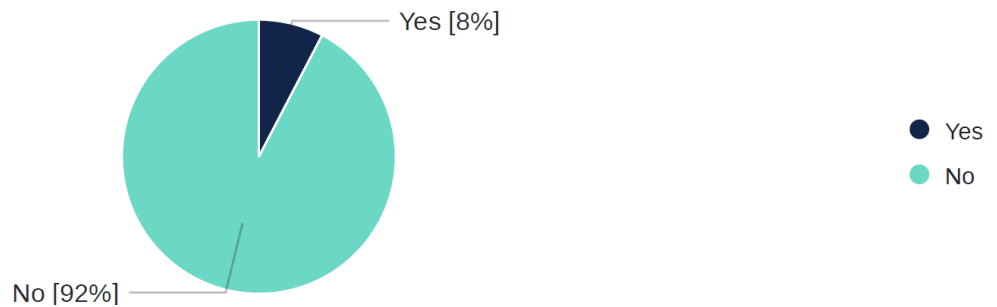
Figure 44: Faculty
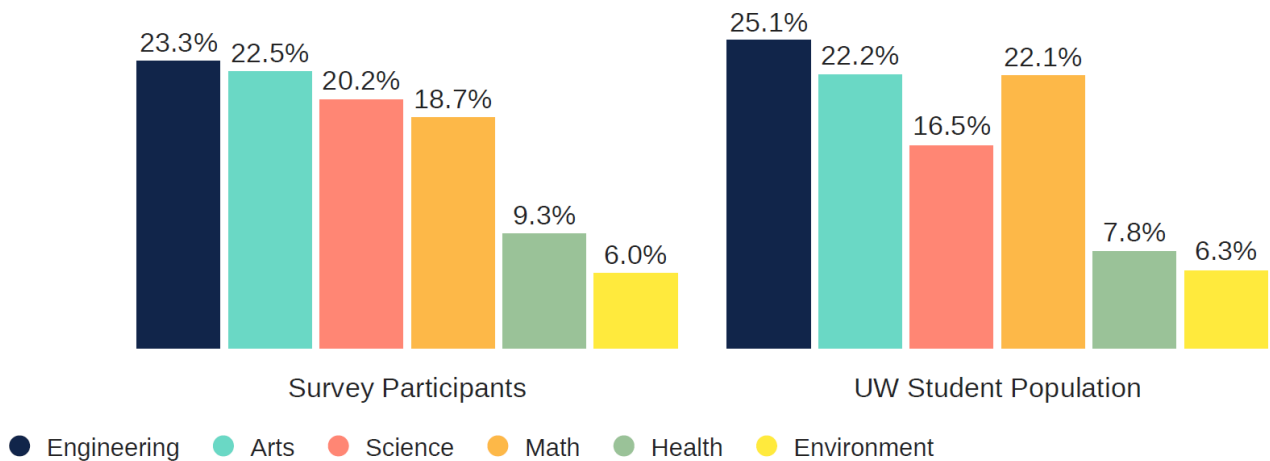
As seen in Figure 44, we slightly under-selected for Engineering, Math, and Environment students and over-selected for Arts, Science, and Health students.

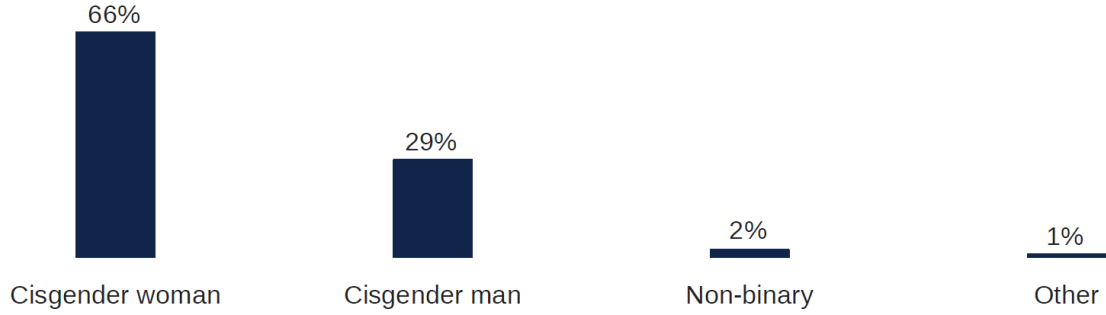**Figure 45: What is your gender identity?**

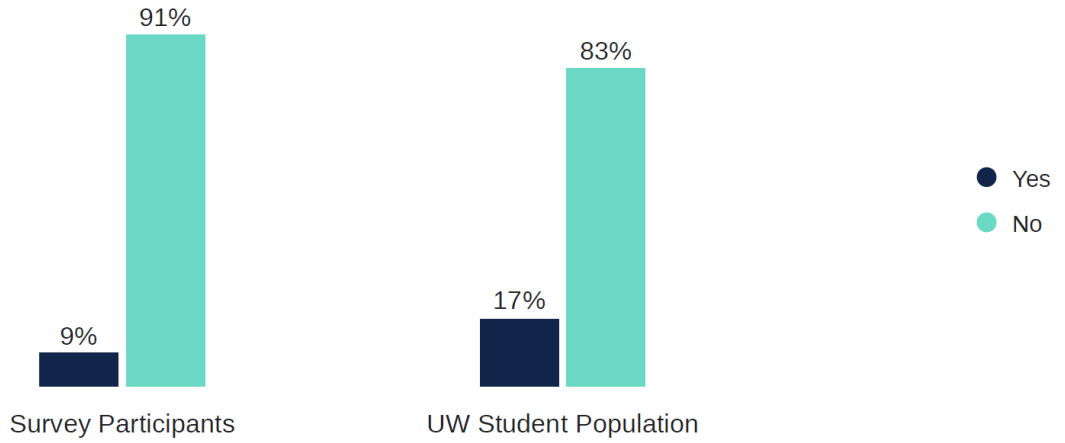

Figure 46: Are you an international student?

Figure 46 demonstrates that we over-selected international students for this survey.

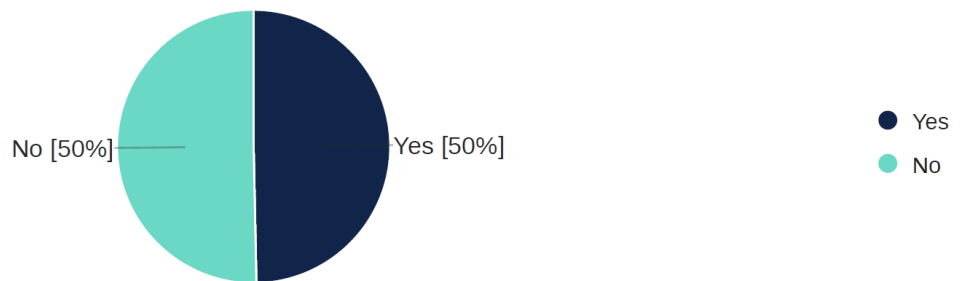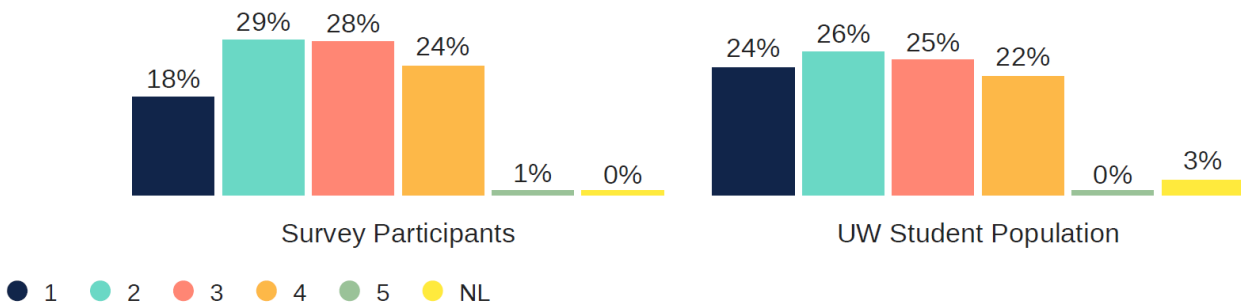**Figure 47: Do you identify as racialized?**

Figure 48: Year of Study

As seen in Figure 48, we under-selected for first-year students and NL students and slightly over-selected for second year, third year, fourth year, and fifth year students.

When looking at responses based on academic level, responses from the following academic levels were excluded from the analysis due to small sample size: 2B, 4B, 1B, 5+, 5A, NL.

Appendix A: Statistical Methods

Statistical Methods

Statistical analyses were conducted on certain questions to explore potential differences in responses based on faculty enrolment or academic level. All statistical testing was done using R.

Question 10[1] utilized a 5-point Likert scale which we converted to numerical data (1-5 based on level of agreement). Since we wanted to compare the responses of multiple groups (faculty or academic level), we utilized the Kruskal Wallis test and followed up with the Dunn's test post-hoc to make pairwise comparisons. To allow us to maintain statistical power, we grouped students in the A and B academic levels within a larger level group (E.g., 1A and 1B grouped in to First Year). For comparing co-op status (co-op vs. regular), the two comparison Wilcoxon Rank Sum test was used.

Question 15 was analyzed differently using the Chi Square and Fisher's Exact tests followed by a post-hoc Bonferroni test (Fisher was used where one cell of the contingency table contained a value less than 5). The question originally asks students to choose one of the following options to describe their experience with their academic advisor:

A.   I do not know how to get in touch with my academic advisor
B.   I know how to get in touch, but haven't needed to
C.   I have gotten in touch, and it was helpful
D.   I have gotten in touch, and it was not helpful

To be more specific in the analysis, we separated responses into the following groups:

Comparison	Response = Yes	Response = No	Response Not Included
Whether a respondent has been in contact with their advisor	C or D	A or B	N/A
Whether a respondent who has not been in contact with their advisor knows how to contact them	B	A	C or D
Whether respondents who have been in contact with their advisor found it helpful	C	D	A or B

Question 19 was analyzed utilizing multiple methodologies. The number of services respondents had selected was analyzed using the Kruskal Wallis test to determine if total usage of services differs by academic level or faculty. The number of respondents that reported using each service was analyzed using the Chi Square test to determine if usage of each service was independent of academic level or faculty.

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[1] A complete list of survey questions can be found in the Appendix B of this report.

Appendix B: Survey Questions

Defining Academic Success

1. What does achieving academic success mean to you?

<div style="border:1px solid #000; height:200px;"></div>

2. Please indicate your agreement with the following statement: achieving academic success is very important to me. [Multiple Choice – Select one]
   ☐ Strongly agree
   ☐ Agree
   ☐ Neither agree or disagree
   ☐ Disagree
   ☐ Strongly disagree

3. Which of the following is an indicator of achieving academic success for you? [Multiple Choice – Select one]
   ☐ Maintaining an excellent academic standing
   ☐ Maintaining a good academic standing
   ☐ Maintaining a satisfactory academic standing
   ☐ Maintaining an academic standing sufficient to graduate with a degree

4. Reflecting on your experience at UW so far, how satisfied are you with the level of academic success you have achieved? [Multiple Choice – Select One]
   ☐ Very satisfied
   ☐ Satisfied
   ☐ Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
   ☐ Dissatisfied
   ☐ Very dissatisfied

5. Please elaborate on why you are not satisfied with the level of academic success you have achieved. [Display only if 4c, d, or e is selected]

<div style="border:1px solid #000; height:200px;"></div>

Factors Impacting Academic Success

6. How do you prepare for course selection? [Multiple Choice – Select all that apply]
   ☐ Use UW Flow
   ☐ Talk with upper year students in my program
   ☐ Talk with my academic advisor
   ☐ Check reddit
   ☐ Refer to the undergraduate studies academic calendar
   ☐ Other
   ☐ _____

7. Please explain how you utilize UW Flow to prepare for course selection. [Display only if 6a is selected]

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8. Please select the top four tools or strategies that you have found most helpful in achieving academic success. [Multiple Choice – Select all that apply – Validation/Answer Range/Min 4 Max 4]
- ☐ Study groups with classmates
- ☐ Studying alone
- ☐ Attending class regularly
- ☐ Attending labs/seminars regularly
- ☐ Completing practice questions/problems
- ☐ Creating my course schedule strategically
- ☐ Developing my study skills and strategies
- ☐ Understanding my learning style
- ☐ Completing weekly readings
- ☐ Taking notes in class
- ☐ Attending workshops
- ☐ Hiring a tutor
- ☐ Attending office hours with my instructor or TA
- ☐ Other

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9. Please indicate your agreement with the following statement: I rely on used and/or reduced cost textbooks to support my academic success. [Multiple Choice – Select one]
- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree or disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

10. Please select the top four academic factors that make it most difficult for you to succeed in your courses. [Multiple Choice – Select all that apply – Validation/Answer Range/Min 4 Max 4]
- ☐ Difficult content
- ☐ Unapproachable instructors
- ☐ Unengaging instructors
- ☐ Instructor teaching and lecture style
- ☐ Unclear expectations
- ☐ The amount of graded assignments/quizzes/tests
- ☐ Lack of connection with classmates and peers
- ☐ Availability of course times
- ☐ Cost of additional learning tools (E.g., calculators, lab coats, access codes)
- ☐ Cost of textbooks
- ☐ Other

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11. Please select the top four personal factors that make it most difficult for you to succeed in your courses. [Multiple Choice – Select all that apply – Validation/Answer Range/Min 4 Max 4]

- ☐ Balancing schoolwork and other responsibilities
- ☐ Mental health concerns
- ☐ Time management
- ☐ Lack of motivation
- ☐ Lack of interest in program
- ☐ Physical health concerns
- ☐ Accessibility concerns
- ☐ Learning style not aligned with teaching methods
- ☐ Feeling uncomfortable in my courses
- ☐ Other
  [   ]

12. Please select the top four aspects of courses that you struggle with the most [Multiple Choice – Select all that apply – Validation/Answer Range/Min 4 Max 4]

- ☐ Understanding the content
- ☐ Taking effective notes
- ☐ Studying for tests and exams
- ☐ Approaching instructors
- ☐ Attending classes regularly
- ☐ Keeping up with readings and assignment work loads
- ☐ Balancing assignment deadlines
- ☐ Developing good exam prep strategies
- ☐ Managing group projects
- ☐ Other
  [   ]

13. How would you describe the hustle culture at UW? How does it impact your academic success? For context, hustle culture promotes the idea that one must work hard, be constantly busy and prioritize productivity above all else to accomplish their goals.

[   ]

Supports for Academic Success

14. Please select the option that best describes your relationship with your academic advisor [Multiple Choice – Select one]

- ☐ I do not know how to get in touch with my academic advisor
- ☐ I know how to get in touch, but haven't needed to
- ☐ I have gotten in touch, and it was helpful
- ☐ I have gotten in touch, and it was not helpful

15. Please describe why getting in touch with your academic advisor was not helpful [Display only if 14d is selected]

[ ]

16. Please indicate your agreement with the following statement: I feel confident locating academic support resources on campus when needed. [Multiple Choice – Select one]
☐ Strongly agree
☐ Agree
☐ Neither agree or disagree
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly disagree

17. Which of the following on campus academic support resources are you aware of? [Multiple Choice – Select all that apply]
☐ Academic Advisors (E.g., through appointments, emails)
☐ Academic Integrity Office
☐ AccessAbility Services (E.g., workshops, appointments)
☐ Student Success Office (E.g., Peer Success Coaching, workshops, microcourses)
☐ Library research resources and services (E.g., AskUs, librarian research consultations, workshops,
☐ online learning modules)
☐ TutorConnect
☐ Writing and Communication Centre (E.g., appointments, workshops, web resources)
☐ Instructor or TA office hours
☐ Tutoring sessions/study groups hosted through UW
☐ None [Skip to Q20]
☐ Other
[ ]

18. Which of the following academic supports have you accessed? [Multiple Choice – Select all that apply]
☐ Selected options carried over from Q17

19. How helpful was accessing these resources to achieving academic success? [Matrix with options for very helpful, helpful, neither helpful nor unhelpful, unhelpful, very unhelpful]
☐ Selected options carrier over from Q18

20. What prevents you from accessing academic support resources? [Multiple Choice – Select all that apply]
☐ Lack of time
☐ Service hours do not align with my availability
☐ I didn't know they existed
☐ I don't think they will help me
☐ I don't know how to access them
☐ I have no need for them
☐ Other
[ ]

21. How would you prefer to access academic supports resources? [Multiple Choice – Select one –DO NOT display for those who select 20f]
- ☐ In-person
- ☐ Online
- ☐ Hybrid
- ☐ Other

[_____]

22. Please select the top four academic supports that would most positively impact your academic success [Multiple Choice – Select all that apply – Validation/Answer Range/Min 4 Max 4]
- ☐ Learning better study habits
- ☐ Learning better note taking skills
- ☐ Having more confidence reaching out to instructors for support
- ☐ Having more knowledge of available resources
- ☐ Understanding content better
- ☐ Learning better time management skills
- ☐ Learning how to prioritize tasks and assignments
- ☐ Building a stronger connection with classmates/peers
- ☐ Having access to all the necessary textbooks and course materials
- ☐ Understanding instructor expectations and teaching styles
- ☐ Learning better test-taking and exam-prep strategies
- ☐ Other

[_____]

General Feedback

23. Is there anything else related to academic success that you would like to share?

[   ]