

2024 WUSA Election Report

May 2024

Ashaya Subhanally, Student Research and Policy Assistant

Jordan Daniels, Research Analyst

Summary of Past Elections

The following table shows the overall turnout for the past few years' elections:

Year	Unique Voters	Eligible Voters	Percentage	Notes
2020	4120	33 764	12.2%	
2021	1738	34 084	5.09%	All Executive positions were acclaimed
2022	1372	29 635	4.63%	New governance structure: election occurred in July this year
2023	1264	35 160	3.59%	First year using the new governance structure during typical timeline
2024	8876	35 325	25.13%	

Voter Demographics

In 2023, there were 1264 total voters in the WUSA General Election, while in this year's election there was an increase in voters, with a total of 8876 voters. The voter turnout for 2024 was 25.13% which is higher than it was for 2023 (3.59%).

Figure 1 depicts the number of voters in each faculty at the University of Waterloo for 2024. In 2024, the faculty of Engineering made up the highest percentage of voters at 23.30%. This was followed closely by Math (23.28%) and then Science (17.83%), Art (17.08%), Health (8.40%), Environment (7.12%). VPA¹ students made up the lowest percentage of voters at 2.99%. This distribution of voters across faculties is very similar to the 2023 data, considering that there was an overall increase in voters across all faculties. However, only looking at the number of voters does not capture the percentage of eligible voters (# of voters/total eligible voters) for each faculty. After calculating the percentage of eligible voters, the faculty of Environment has the highest percentage of eligible voters at 28.56%, meaning that of all the Environment students

¹ "VPA" stands for "Vice Provost Academic" and refers to joint faculty programs such as Software Engineering, Computing and Financial Management and Sustainability and Financial Management.

eligible to vote, 28.56% of them did. This was followed by VPA students (28.46%), Health (27.17%), Science (27.09%), Math (26.64%), Engineering (24.72%) and Arts (20.29%).

Figure 1: 2024 Voter Faculty

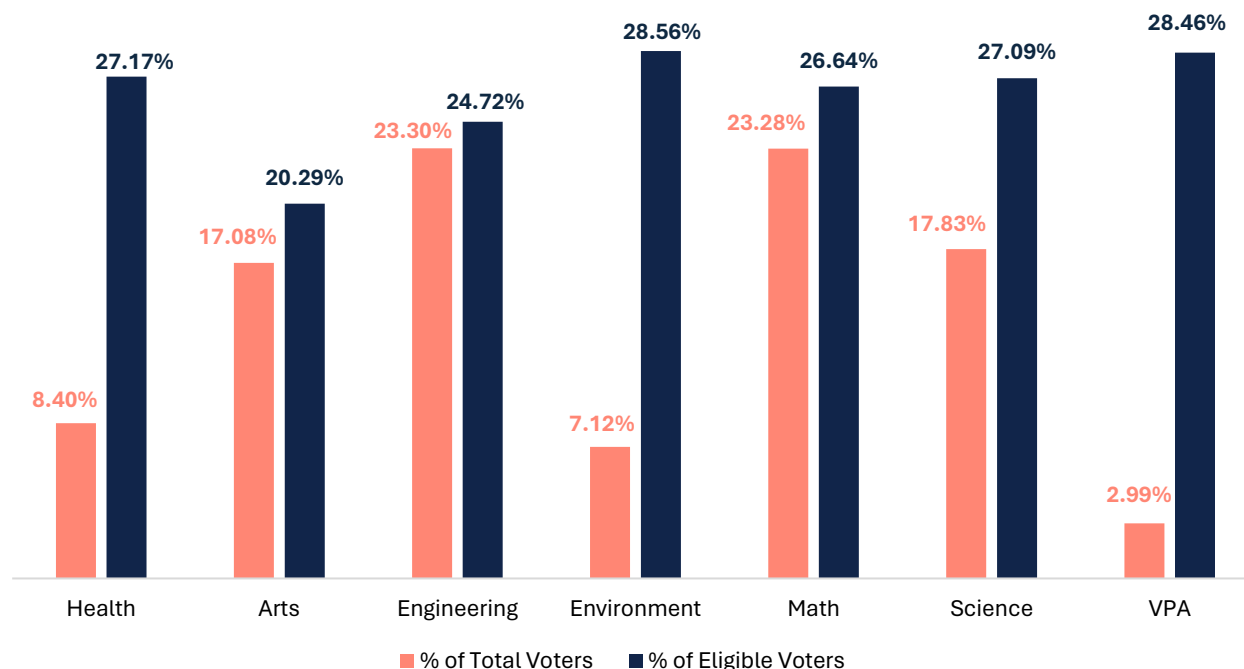
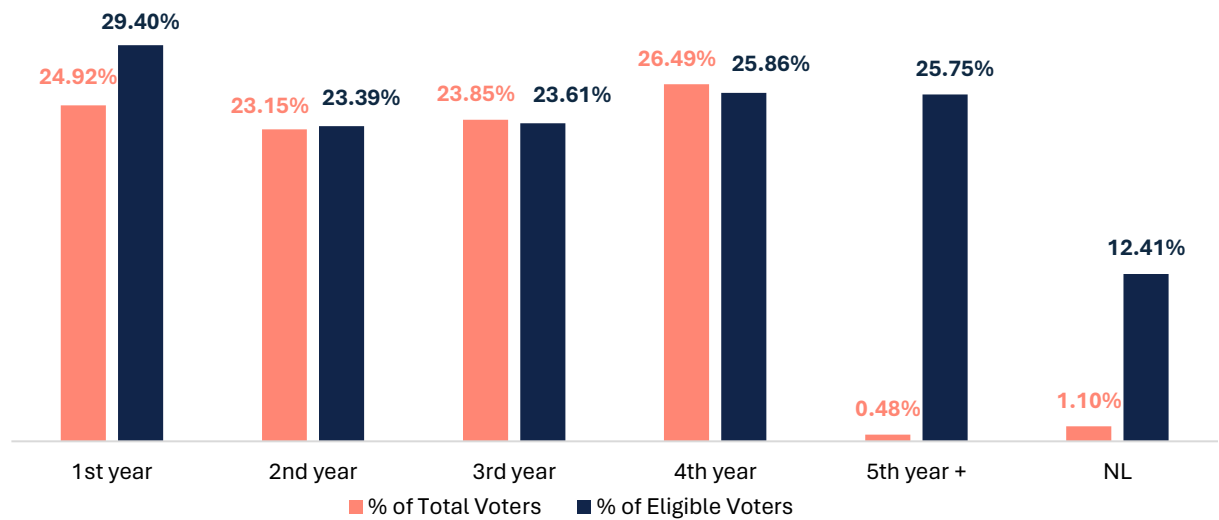


Figure 2 shows the number of voters per year of study at the University of Waterloo for 2024. This year, fourth year students make up the highest percentage of voters at 26.49%, whereas in 2023, fourth-year students held the second smallest share of voters (18.75%). Contrastingly, first-year students made up the highest percentage of voters in 2023 at 29.03%. For 2024, the second highest number of voters comes from first-year students at 24.92%, followed by third-year students at 23.85% and second-year students at 23.15%. Both fifth year and NL² students made up a small percentage of voters (0.48% and 1.10%, respectively).

However, as with faculty, it is important to examine the percentage of eligible voters (# of voters/total eligible voters) for each year of study as well. This calculation concludes that first-year students had the highest percentage of eligible voters at 29.40%, meaning that of all the first-year students eligible to vote, 29.40% of them voted. This was followed by fourth-year students (25.86%), fifth-year students (25.74%), third-year students (23.61%), second-year students (23.39%), and NL students (12.41%).

² "NL" stands for "no level", meaning the student is: (1) a post-degree student (finished degree but interested in more courses); (2) a non-degree student; or (3) studying here on a letter of permission (taking courses at Waterloo but getting a degree at another school)

Figure 2: 2024 Voter Year of Study



Exit Survey

After voting, all students were invited to complete the 2024 WUSA Elections Survey by following a link. The survey received a total of 2850 responses; however, 185 incomplete responses were removed, leaving 2665 for analysis. The number of responses to the survey were significantly higher than last year, where only 284 students completed the survey. Moreover, this year’s exit survey had a 32.1% response rate, compared to 22.47% in 2023.

Survey Demographics

Figure 3 presents the faculties of respondents. The faculty of Engineering made up the highest percentage of respondents (25.46%), followed by Arts (19.69%), Science (18.86%), Math (18.81%), Health (9.39%), and lastly, Environment (7.88%). For the most part, these percentages align with the percentage of voters for each faculty, as outlined in Figure 1. The only notable distinction is that while 23.28% of voters were from the Math faculty, only 18.71% of respondents to the survey were from the Math faculty. Otherwise, the difference between percentage of voters and percentage of survey respondents was less than 3% for each faculty.

Figure 3: Respondent faculties

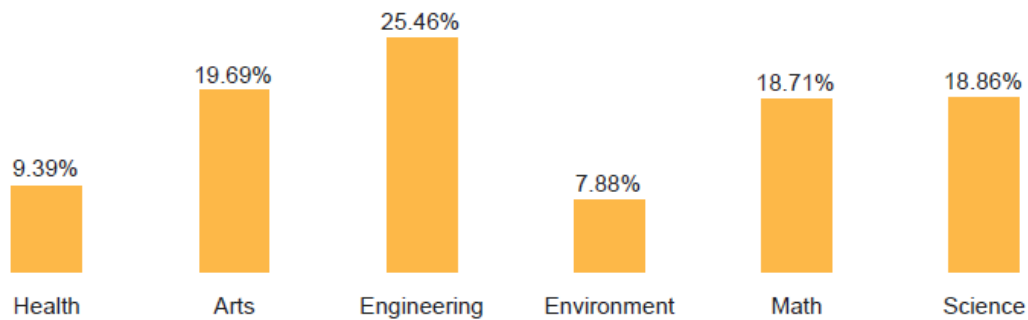
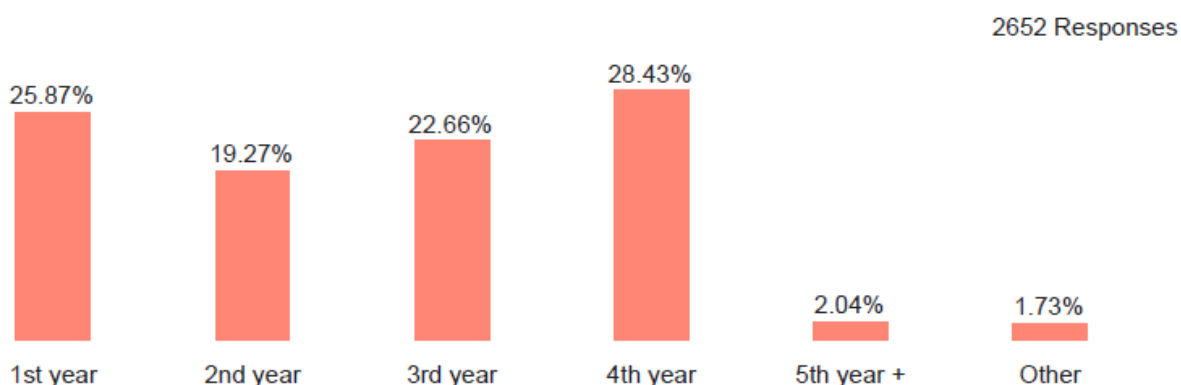


Figure 4 displays respondents' year of study. Students in their fourth year of their studies made up the highest percentage of survey respondents at 28.43%. This was followed by first year (25.87%), third year (22.66%), second year (19.27%), and lastly, fifth year students and above (2.04%). Of the 1.73% of students that selected the "Other" category and chose to share their alternate year of study, co-op was commonly specified as separate from year of study, as well as non-degrees. Notably, voter demographics accounted specifically for NL students, while the survey had an "Other" category accounting for NL students instead. For the most part, these percentages align with the percentage of voters for each year of study, as outlined in Figure 2. The only notable distinction is that while 23.15% of voters were in their second year, only 19.27% of respondents to the survey were in their second year. Otherwise, the difference between percentage of voters and percentage of survey respondents was less than 2% for each year of study.

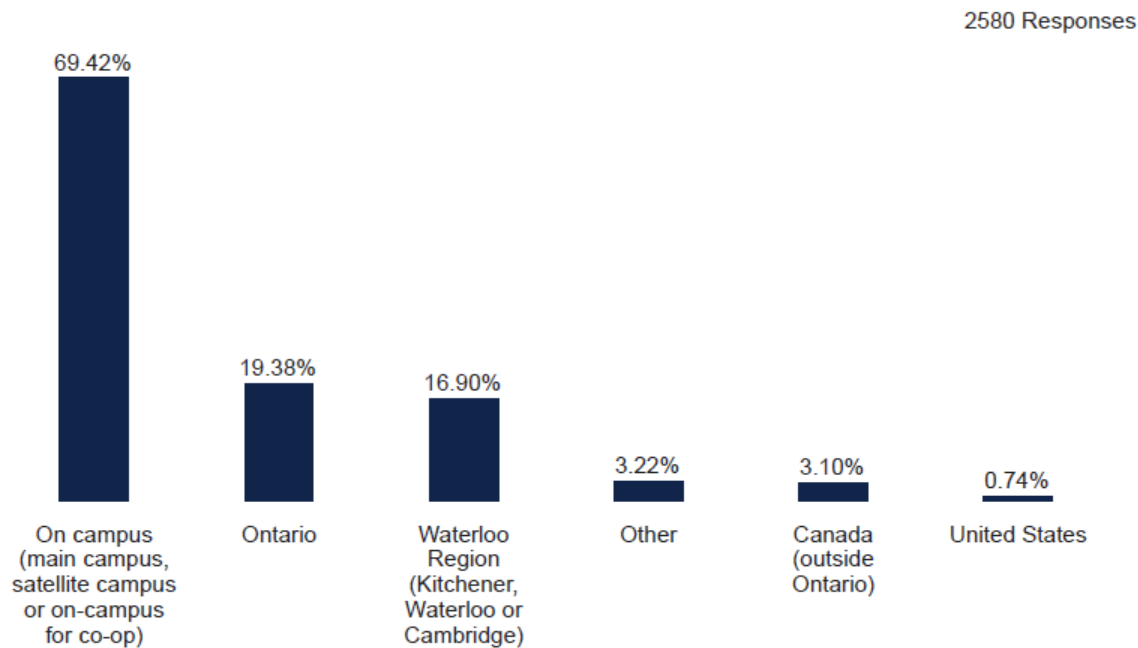
Figure 4: Respondent years of study



Voter Location

In a select all that apply format, survey respondents were asked to specify where they were studying or on their co-op this term. As can be seen in Figure 5, most respondents (69.42%) were studying or on their co-op term on the main Waterloo campus or satellite campus. 19.83% of students selected that they were working in Ontario, followed by specifically Waterloo Region, Kitchener, and Cambridge areas (16.90%), in Canada but outside of Ontario (3.10%), and the United States (0.74%). Of students that selected "Other" (3.22%), studying or working abroad in the United Kingdom, Germany, China, and Tuvalu were mentioned. Notably, a few "Other" respondents misinterpreted the question, stating locations within Ontario, such as Stratford, Hamilton, and Toronto, or mentioning not being on a co-op term. It is important to note that since respondents had the option to select multiple locations, the data shown here represents the percentage of total respondents who selected each response.

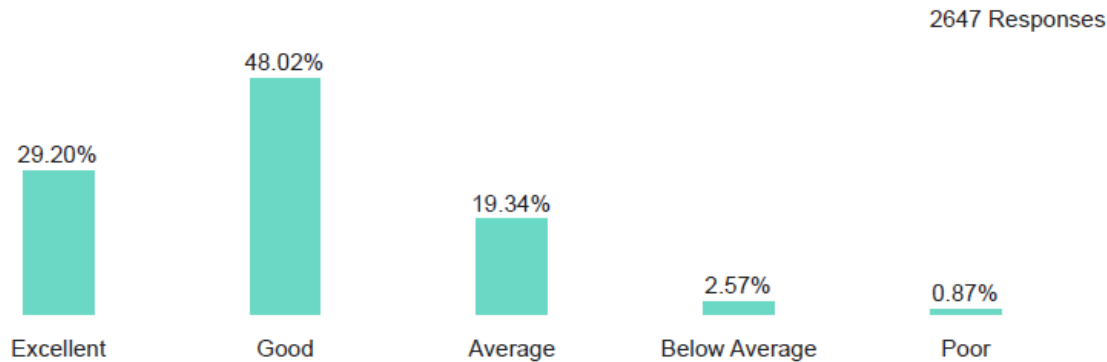
Figure 5: Study/Co-op Location



Satisfaction with vote.wusa.ca

Voters were asked to rate their experience voting through vote.wusa.ca. As can be seen in Figure 6 below, most respondents (48.02%) indicated that their experience was good, followed by excellent (29.20%), average (19.34%), below average (2.57%), and lastly, poor (0.87%). Comparing the 2024 results to 2023, a lower proportion of respondents this year rated their experience as “excellent”, meanwhile a higher proportion of respondents rated their experience as “good” or “average”. In 2023, most respondents (46.48%) indicated that their experience was excellent, followed by good (37.68%), average (11.97%), below average (2.46%), and lastly, poor (1.41%).

Figure 6: Experience voting through vote.wusa.ca ratings



Do you have any feedback about voting through vote.wusa.ca that would be helpful for WUSA?

396 students shared their feedback about voting through vote.wusa.ca. Particularly, student feedback mentioned themes of positive experiences, election protocol, and user experience in their interactions with the website.

Of the 71 students that expressed their **satisfaction with the website** and their voting experience, there was limited elaboration on the elements they enjoyed. Nevertheless, the positive features students were able to identify illustrated the **quick and easy** nature of the voting process. These features included helpful access to candidate profiles and information as well as the website's overall smooth navigational direction that allowed students to vote with ease.

Other students suggested **improvements to the site** related to the operation of the election. Under this broad theme, students discussed issues they experienced on the website that could be improved by reforming election protocol. Most respondents that discussed election protocol brought up the **number of candidates eligible for each position** ($n = 137$). Students pointed out how the position for director had a large quantity of candidates that made the voting process tedious, lengthy, and difficult to make an informed decision. Similarly, students mentioned that other positions had only one candidate running which felt unjust compared to the extensive ballots of other positions. It is important to note, however, that this concern may be due to students' lack of understanding on how the nomination and candidacy process works, since it is reliant on student applications. Nevertheless, to avoid redundant and tedious voting, students propose removing singular candidates from the voting form. In conjunction with candidate representation, students ($n = 32$) expressed their dissatisfaction with the measure used to capture student votes. Considering the issue of having many candidates for certain positions, students expressed the **difficulty of ranking** every candidate for each section. This process was often described as time-consuming and impractical. These students suggested implementing a top choice selection process that allows students to choose their top few candidates in place of ranking every candidate. This recommendation would alleviate the copious amounts of effort that students expressed the current election process demanded of them.

Students provided other suggestions to improve **user experience**, shifting away from the election process to contemplate the website's user interface, organization, and information. Regarding the site's user interface, 83 students outlined **navigational difficulties** related to design choices, mobile navigation, and ranking flexibility. Specifically, these students recommended implementing a drag and drop option for ranking, including submission confirmation buttons, clearly differentiating all button options by color, ensuring the mobile view is accessible, and allowing ranking rearrangements.

Likewise, to continue to provide adequate user experience and complement election protocol, students ($n = 73$) mentioned improving the **organization of the voting platform**. Organization was discussed in the context of comparing **candidate profiles** against the ballots, especially in cases with many candidates. Since candidate profiles and the ballots both respectively randomized the order in which candidates appeared, it was difficult for voters to match candidate profiles with candidates' names in the ballots. To solve this issue, some students

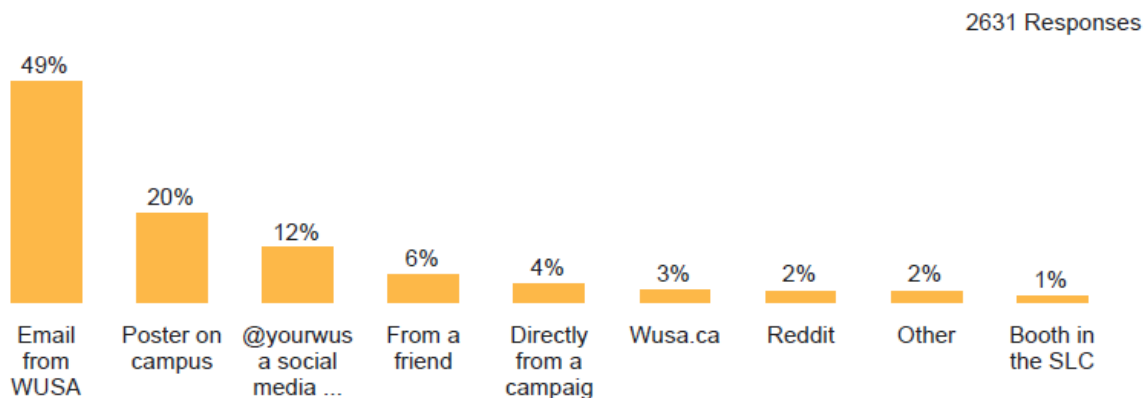
suggested embedding the ranking system within candidate profiles or including candidate profile summaries on the ballot.

A coinciding improvement students ($n = 81$) proposed was towards the **information provided on the site**. Even though students appreciated **candidate profiles**, they often mentioned the length that made learning about each candidate a challenging task. Students recommended mandating candidate profiles while shortening, incorporating candidate profile videos and profile photos, hyperlinking follow-up information, and including position descriptions.

Voting Promotions

Voters were asked to indicate where they *first* learned about this year's WUSA Elections. As depicted in Figure 7, most students (49%) were informed through an email from WUSA, by posters on campus (20%), or through the @yourwusa social media (12%). Of the small percentage (2%) of students that selected the "Other" category and shared how they were informed, hearing from professors in lecture and through Discord, were frequently mentioned.

Figure 7: Method of hearing about the 2024 WUSA Election



What motivated you to vote this year?

1056 students shared what motivated them to vote in the 2024 WUSA Elections. Students' motivations were broadly centered on awareness campaigns, election related factors, and desires for change.

To be expected, just over half of respondents ($n = 594$) noted their motivation for voting as the **MacBook prize incentive**. Of these students, 531 were exclusively motivated by the MacBook incentive, while an additional 63 had various contributing factors, including the incentive, motivating their vote. Other awareness campaigns students recognized were the **marketing initiatives** ($n = 85$) representing the election through social media platforms, posters, emails, events, or booths, professor or friend recommendations ($n = 26$), and students inspired by a particular candidate or campaign, either through relationships with candidates, candidate recruitment or preference for a specific candidate ($n = 106$). Notably, graduating students mentioned their inclination to vote to ensure an improved University experience on behalf of current and future students ($n = 13$).

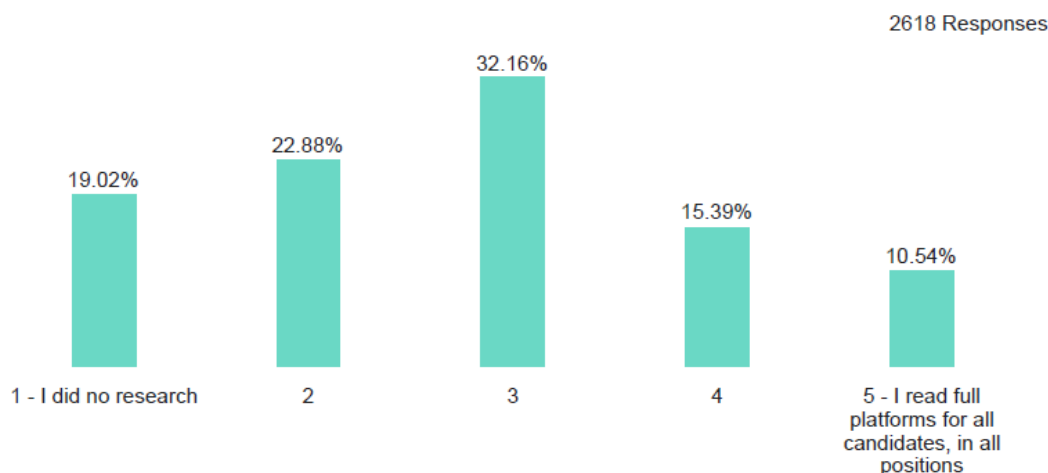
Aside from specific awareness campaigns, **election related motivations** were another top contributor for student votes. Students (n = 217) that had the welfare of the election in mind were inspired to **vote out of civic duty**, selecting suitable campaign representatives, and addressing previous year's low voter turnouts to ensure effective governance representation this year. Not only did students want to vote out of responsibility, however, many students (n = 85) expressed a desire to see improvements regarding the various concerns they brought forward. These students most frequently pointed to the prevalence of internal WUSA adversities leadership challenges. Considering the tragedies resulting from the attack on campus in June 2023 and the former president's unfortunate suicide in September 2023, students urged WUSA to adequately address these incidents and learn from their outcomes to prevent similar misfortunes in the future. Students also felt that WUSA should prioritize the protection of the student body by transparently acting in good faith when conflict arises to maintain the trust of the student population.

Continuing with students' interest in creating effective change, **students demanded that WUSA reform policies** associated with crucial topics of interest such as mental health, co-op, housing, global affairs, and social matters, to name a few. These students articulated their motivation for voting as electing student representatives devoted to taking effective action in implementing change within these divisions.

Candidate Research and Familiarity

Respondents were asked to indicate how much candidate research they did prior to voting in the 2024 WUSA Elections by rating their efforts on a scale from 1 (I did no research) to 5 (I read full platforms for all candidates, in all positions). As seen in Figure 8 most voters (32.16%) rated their efforts a 3, followed by a rating of 2 (22.88%), 1 (19.02%), 4 (15.39%), and lastly, 5 (10.54%). These results are comparable to the 2023 survey results where the majority (29.93%) of voters also rated their efforts a 3, and the minority (13.38%) of voters rated their efforts a 5. However, there was a slight decrease in the number of voters that rated their efforts a 4 from 19.01% in 2023 to 15.39% in 2024 and a slight increase in the number of voters who did no research from 16.20% in 2023 to 19.02% in 2024. Voters that ranked their efforts a 2 merely increased from 21.48% in 2023 to 22.88% in 2024.

Figure 8: Student's levels of candidate research conducted prior to voting in this election



Top Issues for Students

As a Waterloo undergraduate student, what are the top issues you feel WUSA should be addressing?

775 students shared the top issues that they felt WUSA should be addressing. The responses reflected a broad spectrum of issues ranging from **student wellbeing, educational quality and professional development, student experience** and **WUSA related issues**.

In terms of **student wellbeing**, one of the most pressing areas of concern was mental health (n = 166), in which students suggested WUSA improve the resources, services, advisors and quality of mental health aids available. With this topic being a prevalent concern for students, there were multiple mentions of Campus Wellness and Counselling Services on campus being in extremely high demand, where many students experience long wait times and session restraints while attempting to access these services. This becomes problematic as mental health services are a support that students often require within a time sensitive manner, which in its current backlogged state, has negatively impacted students' overall wellbeing and performance.

Affordability emerged as another significant concern related to wellbeing among students (n = 201). Students that discussed affordability highlighted the ongoing financial challenges encountered by the student community, emphasizing the need for WUSA to work towards minimizing student fees, tuition, and other living expenses, where feasible. Given the strain students experienced while coping with the financial demands of university and basic living expenses, housing emerges as another prominent issue. Students not only discussed the high cost of housing but also the challenges related to policies, limited availability, and landlord disputes for which they turn to WUSA for support in navigating.

Students also mentioned **safety** (n = 54), **equity, diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism efforts (EDI-R)** (n = 53), and **accessibility** (n = 52) as crucial issues in relation to student wellbeing. Students hope for a diverse and inclusive environment on campus where they feel represented and safe in expressing their intersectional identities.

In terms of **educational quality and professional development**, students (n = 51) mentioned issues related to their academic experience. These areas of focus include the quality of education, courseloads, professor interactions, advisors, supports and resources. Alongside concerns for academics, issues with the co-operative education program were discussed by many students (n = 189). Students expressed that the current co-op application process and job experiences do not act in the best interest of students, rather work to primarily serve employers. This was highlighted through the programs' outdated interface and policies on the Waterloo Works platform. Moreover, students expressed their negative sentiments regarding the application and ranking process, limited job pool, misleading job postings, employer exploitation and the renege program's punitive restrictions. Students not only demanded improvements in securing a suitable co-op placement, but also recommended restructuring professional development PD courses to better complement their academic and professional development, as well as prompted for helpful guidance by the Centre for Career Development (CECA) advisors to aid the process.

In addition to their academic and professional experience, students highlighted the importance of their **experience on campus**. Students (n = 129) expressed the need for fostering student community through student life in the form of clubs, events, social activities, connectivity services and maintaining campus facilities. One instance of social interaction mentioned by students was clubs (n = 46), specifically, improving funding, support, management, and autonomy in club operations to allow these societies to be a site of positive experience. Students also desired more opportunities for faculties to connect, both through inter-faculty and faculty specific events to ensure that students have the chance to interact with a diverse community but also with students in their program. Students emphasized the significant role of informal social settings within campus facilities for building connections with peers, with a focus on ensuring these spaces are equipped with sufficient resources to encourage student engagement. Likewise, students hope for a revitalized campus through improved infrastructure and the optimization of campus spaces to promote a lively atmosphere (n = 39). Bringing back previously offered services such as the Bombshelter, Feds Hall and the WUSA used Books store, as well as providing new student amenities such as game rooms and food service options were some suggestions.

Lastly, students addressed **WUSA-related issues** regarding WUSA's support and advocacy efforts towards students. Some students (n = 37) made note of their general dissatisfaction with WUSA as an organization regarding its structure, goals, and actions, however, these students did not elaborate further. Of the students that shared specific concerns about the organization, transparency was a common issue (n = 47). Students explained that they would appreciate WUSA being transparent about their purpose and efforts so that students can be aware of the organizations objectives and understand WUSA's advocacy work. As well, students (n = 41) proposed that WUSA disclose how student funding and tuition are allocated so that students can have confidence in WUSA to effectively distribute student contributions in alliance with student expectations. To accomplish these goals, other students (n = 24) concerned for WUSA's visibility among students suggest improving communications and outreach to better reach and connect with their student audience. Moreover, establishing student voices in WUSA's decision making processes surrounding the topics students care about was another important area for improvement that students (n = 39) hoped to continue to see.

Returning Voters

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they had participated in a WUSA Election before. Figure 9 shows that 77.92% of respondents had not voted in a WUSA Election before, while the remaining (22.08%) had. This is similar to 2023, where the majority of voters were also new voters, however last year saw a more even divide between returning voters (48.24%) and new voters (51.76%).

Figure 9: Student’s previous WUSA Election participation

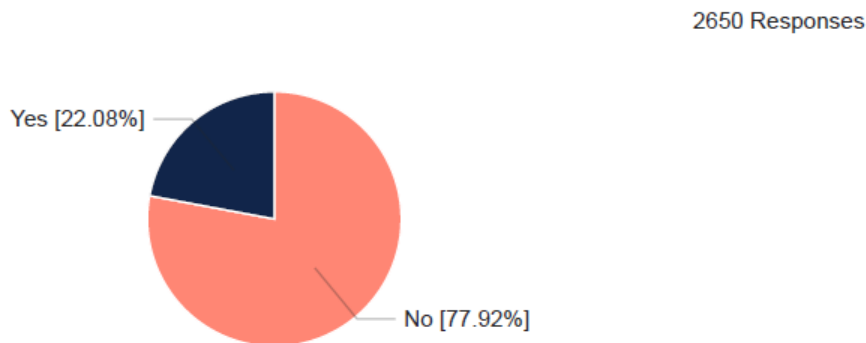
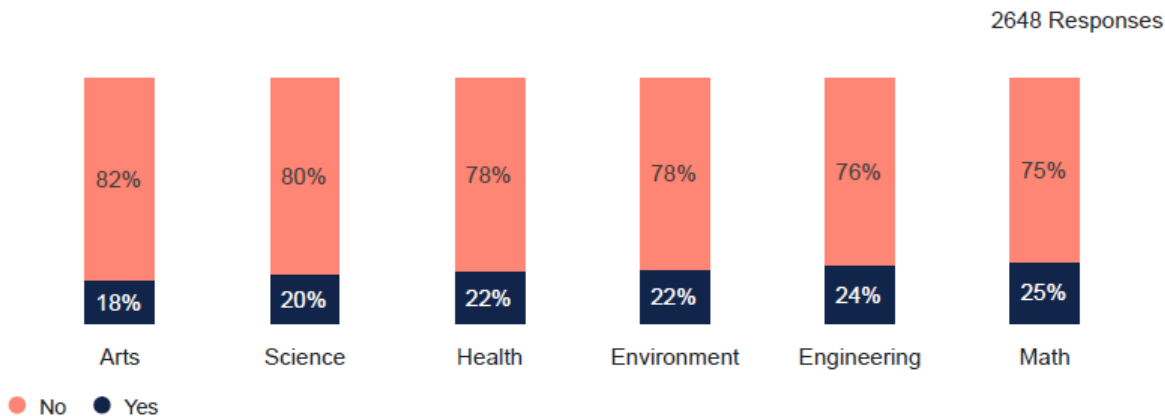


Figure 10 breaks down returning voters by faculty representing the Arts, Science, Health, Environment, Engineering and Math departments. As Figure 10 depicts, returning voters are similarly distributed across all faculties, with only subtle differences ranging from 18% to 25% of returning voters across faculties and 75% to 82% new voters across faculties. The faculty with the highest percentage of new voters and therefore lowest percentage of returning voters was the Arts faculty, with 82% and 18%, respectively. The faculty with the highest percentage of returning voters and therefore lowest percentage of returning voters was the Math faculty with 25% and 75% respectively.

Figure 10: How many students have voted before vs. have not voted before by faculty



Additional Information

Is there any other information you would like to provide?

A limited number of students (n = 54) shared additional information. Some students (n = 16) took the time to **compliment WUSA and their efforts**, by mentioning trust in past and prospective student leaders, admiration of WUSA’s advocacy initiatives and its highly respected integration of student voices. Notably, other students (n =10) reiterated their interest in participating in this survey and the election for the **incentives** in place, such as the Mac Book

prize draw. Most responses, however, captured a small, yet diverse set of areas that require WUSA to address and make improvements accordingly.

These respondents tended to mention improvements WUSA could make to services, programs, and other university matters. 6 students made note of **election related improvements** to ensure elections outreach provides insightful information, the voting process is made easier, and to urge candidates to utilize student concerns as the foundation for their campaign. On the topic of student concerns, 3 students discussed **improving the use of campus spaces** by ensuring useful services and areas are provided for students in vacant spaces around campus, especially to serve as a social backdrop. Further in the social context, students (n = 2) pointed to the **limited funding that clubs are allotted to spend on their resources and events**, suggesting an increase to this limit so that clubs can optimize member experiences. Not only are formally recognized opportunities for social connectivity crucial, however, increasing the student body's engagement with WUSA more generally through fostering a lively student community was noted by 2 students. Another matter students (n = 2) mentioned was the struggle to balance student fees in the already taxing financial demands of university. Reducing student fees through offering more services as optional rather than mandatory fees was a proposed alternative.

Students concerns not only revolved around WUSAs contributions to improving the university experience, but also **WUSA's integrity as an organization**. These concerns included communicating WUSAs purpose with students and addressing specific organizational concerns. A conflict with WUSA for some students (n = 2) was that WUSA's purpose is not clearly translated to students. Through sharing WUSA's goals and efforts, students can feel a sense of understanding, optimism, and trust in WUSA's advocacy efforts. Some students (n = 8) discussed improving WUSAs overall organizational focus to create more tangible change based on students ongoing demand for reform following the same set of prominent concerns discussed in WUSA surveys. Contemplating topics such as mental health, co-op, housing, affordability, accessibility and the use of campus spaces and service offerings, among others, continually prove to be significant concerns for students. This emphasizes the pressing nature of these issues that urges WUSA to not only place importance on implementing viable solutions but also in transparently sharing the process with students. Within this sample of students, there was a dual demand for WUSA to take accountability for their mistakes while also taking ownership of their successes to foster a healthy and communicative relationship with the student population.

2024 Election Survey Draft

1. **What year of study are you in? [MC – Select One]**
 - a. 1A
 - b. 1B
 - c. 2A
 - d. 2B
 - e. 3A
 - f. 3B
 - g. 4A
 - h. 4B
 - i. 5+
 - j. Other [Textbox]
2. **What faculty are you in? [MC – Select One]**
 - a. Engineering
 - b. Environment
 - c. Math
 - d. Science
 - e. Arts
 - f. Health
3. **Have you voted in a WUSA Election before? [MC – Select One]**
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
4. **Please rate your experience voting through vote.wusa.ca? [MC – Select One]**
 - a. Excellent
 - b. Good
 - c. Average
 - d. Below average
 - e. Poor
5. **Do you have any feedback about voting through vote.wusa.ca that would help WUSA? [Text box]**
6. **Where did you first learn about the 2024 WUSA Election? [MC – Select One]**
 - a. @yourwusa social media
 - b. Wusa.ca
 - c. Reddit
 - d. Poster on campus
 - e. From a friend
 - f. Directly from a candidate campaign
 - g. Booth in SLC
 - h. Email from WUSA
 - i. Other [text box]
7. **What motivated you to vote this year? [Text box]**
8. **On a scale of 1-5, how much candidate research did you do prior to voting in the election? [MC – Select One]**
 - a. 1 – I did not research
 - b. 2
 - c. 3

- d. 4
 - e. 5 – I read the full platforms for all candidates, in all positions
- 9. As a Waterloo undergraduate student, what are the top issues you feel WUSA should be addressing? [Text box]**
- 10. Where are you studying or doing a co-op this term? [MC – Select All That Apply]**
- a. On campus (main campus, satellite campus, or on-campus for co-op)
 - b. Waterloo Region (Kitchener, Waterloo, Cambridge)
 - c. Ontario
 - d. Canada (outside Ontario)
 - e. United States
 - f. Other [Textbox]
- 11. Is there any other information you would like to provide? [Textbox]**