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Office of the Vice President Academic and University Affairs

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2023 AMS ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE SURVEY REPORT

Table of Contents

03 Executive Summary

04 General Experience in UBC

Overall Satisfaction

Cost of Education

Class Structure

06 Professional and Academic Development

Degree Planning

Post Graduation

07 Campus Community

Reconciliation & Diverse Education

Discrimination

Belonging

Safety & Wellbeing

09 Health and Wellness

Mental Health

UBC Services

AMS Services

Disabilities

11 Student Affordability

Financial Support

Course Materials

Food Insecurity

13 Housing and Commute

Housing

Commute

Childcare

14 Recommendations

16 Respondent Profiles

Breakdown by Undergraduate and Graduate Studies

Breakdown by Full-Time/Part-Time (Undergraduate & Graduate)

Breakdown by Faculty

Breakdown by Domestic/International (Undergraduate & Graduate)

Executive Summary

Annually, the Academic Experience Survey (AES) is distributed amongst the UBC Vancouver campus in order to collect relevant data on the experiences of the student population. This year's survey received a record 3,413 responses, the most the Alma Mater Society (AMS) has seen in AES history, making not only the results the most accurate, but also the most salient survey the society has ever had. In collaboration with Kai Analytics, the survey data was meticulously analyzed and transformed into a comprehensive report. This report will equip the AMS, as well as students, with an in-depth understanding of the issues and priorities facing those who study, live on, and enrich the campus. Open from March 6th to April 10th 2023, this survey received responses from a range of different full-time and part-time, undergraduate and graduate perspectives. Where possible, questions asked within the survey were analyzed and sorted amongst a variety of demographics (e.g., gender, age group, student status, domestic vs. international, sexual orientation, ethnicity) allowing for an intersectional and nuanced understanding of experiences on campus.

With this report, we seek to create an accessible and comprehensible summary of the results compiled from AES data. Our broad analysis touches on a variety of themes relating to the UBC experience. We explore student experiences in UBC, including major themes of academic and professional plans, reconciliation, discrimination, health, affordability, and housing. Based on the data, we also outline our recommendations on how to improve the student experience at UBCV.

Any questions, comments or concerns regarding this report may be directed to vpacademic@ams.ubc.ca and any data not present in this report can be made readily available upon request to the Vice President Academic and University Affairs.

Best,

Kamil Kanji

Vice President Academic and University Affairs
Alma Mater Society of UBC

General Experience in UBC

This section of the report examines student satisfaction as well as academic experience at UBC. Overall, students seem to have had a positive academic experience on campus and generally feel that they have an adequate understanding of expectations outlined by professors. However, as observed in previous trends, very few students believe that UBC cares about student sentiments towards the cost of tuition and very few believe they are receiving good value for their tuition fees.

Overall Satisfaction

Following the trend of the past few years, 65% of respondents indicate that they are satisfied with their university experience. This number has not increased since its drop from 70% in 2021.

Cost of Education

A staggeringly low 11% of students report that they feel UBC cares about what they think about the cost of education. In past surveys this statistic has fluctuated between 17% to 14% but this year's number is the lowest in AES history. 18% of graduate students agree that UBC cares and in contrast 9% of undergraduate students agree.

Similarly, only 35% of respondents believe that they are receiving good value in proportion to their tuition fees. This number has taken a sharp decline since the reported 50% in the 2020 AES. 33% of undergraduate students agree they are receiving good value whereas nearly half of the graduate respondents (45%) believe they are receiving good value.

Class Structure

Overall, respondents agreed the course expectations at UBC are reasonable, accurate, sufficient and clear. 69% of respondents feel that exam material is reasonable in terms of course content and 83% feel that the syllabi provided at the beginning of their courses are accurate reflections of the content.

With 70% of respondents agreeing that both the feedback received within their courses helps them to improve and they understand why they receive their grades, students seem to be generally satisfied with grading and feedback.

However, more than half of students (51%) indicate that they would prefer if courses provided more flexibility in terms of assessment with weighting of assessments, variety of methods and flexibility of due dates being the most pertinent types. Additionally 56% of respondents believe that they receive grades for their coursework in a timely manner prior to final examinations.

Nearly all of the students (98%) indicated that they feel confident in their understanding of Academic Integrity. Predominantly among respondents, the topics related to Academic Integrity most often spoken about within class were consequences for cheating and plagiarism (74%), what is considered plagiarism (70%) and the importance of academic integrity (69%). Topics that were not as frequently discussed include strategies to avoid cheating and plagiarism (36%) and factors that may drive students to commit academic dishonesty (31%) signaling a gap in what teachers deem to be important during their academic integrity discussions.

Professional and Academic Development

This section of the survey asked respondents about their academic and professional planning. Questions covered course registration, post-graduate plans, UBC's education and career support services.

Less than half (49%) of undergraduate students felt they could achieve academic success at UBC, while 56% of graduate students reported confidence in achieving the academic goals and standards they set for themselves. This number has been steadily decreasing among both groups since 65% of respondents agreed to feeling confident academically in 2018.

Degree Planning

Overall, over half of respondents (52%) felt that they had adequate information when choosing their major/degree. This was more of an issue among undergraduate students (50%) compared to graduate (62%) and post-graduate students (64%) who felt more supported with the information they had.

However, less than half of respondents (46%) felt there is adequate academic planning support available in their faculty. Most respondents (82%) believe that having past syllabi at the time of registration would significantly improve their ability to choose the most appropriate courses for their interest/program.

Post Graduation

Generally, respondents felt that UBC was better at informing them about career choices than equipping them for said career. Undergraduate respondents were more likely to know the career(s) they are interested in after graduation (62%) than to feel prepared to enter the workforce upon graduation (46%). Shockingly, both the level of career knowledge and workplace preparedness has decreased by approximately 10% within the last year. While numbers increased significantly for graduate students, they still felt they knew which careers they were interested in (73%) more than they felt confidence in entering the workplace (63%).

Only 14% of respondents indicated that they have used career support services offered by the Centre for Student Improvement and Careers (CSIC). Just under half of respondents (49%) indicated they have never used nor heard of the CSIC.

Campus Community

This section examines students' engagement with multicultural education in a classroom setting, the danger as well as discrimination that they experience on campus and their sense of belonging brought about on campus. Generally students feel that they have a safe place on campus but many students within racialized minorities are more likely to experience discrimination.

Reconciliation & Diverse Education

Given the indispensable nature of intersectional education, the number of students who reported an ability to engage with multicultural perspectives was underwhelming.

Overall, about half of respondents (50%) felt they had the opportunity to engage with and become aware of Indigenous cultures, histories and perspectives in their degree/program and just under half (47%) indicate that they are able to engage with Indigenous perspectives outside the classroom. Graduate students seem to have more opportunity (54%) to learn about indigenous perspectives in their classes but this number has changed marginally over the last two years.

Just over half of respondents (54%) felt that they had the opportunity to learn with and about cultures different from their own outside the classroom and even less (52%) felt they were able to learn with and about these different cultures within their degree/program.

Discrimination

The highest levels of discrimination reported were based on race or ethnicity (37%) and gender (35%), but other forms of discrimination such as age (23%), religious beliefs (21%) and disability (20%) were also reported to be occurring on campus. Nearly half of LGBTQ+ (48%) respondents indicate that they experience on some level discrimination based on gender. Strikingly 75% of black respondents and 43% of indigenous respondents indicate that they experience racial discrimination on campus. Of those who experience discrimination, respondents are most likely to receive it from other students as well as instructors in the classroom.

Belonging

57% of undergraduate students report feeling a sense of belonging on campus, while 55% of graduate students report feeling like they belong. These are numbers that have stayed relatively consistent since 2022. The groups that report having the lowest sense of belonging is black students (45%) undergraduates-5th and over (48%) and students over 25 (50%).

Students shared that extracurricular activities help them to gain new skills (79%), develop more confidence (75%) and provide opportunities to network with students (77%). Students who participated in extracurricular activities are more likely to have joined a club. Graduate students seem to feel that extracurricular activities help prepare them for graduation (62%) more than undergraduate students (53%).

Safety & Wellbeing

73% of students indicated that they feel safe on campus at night, but there are certain hotspots where students feel unsafe at night. Men tend to feel very safe and secure on campus (84%) whereas both women and Non-Binary students (68%) report feeling slightly less safe.

See below for Heat Map.



Health and Wellness

In this section, the report provides a breakdown and evaluation of the issues negatively influencing mental health for students on campus and the usage of services made available to address persisting mental health crises. The mental health and wellbeing services being used by students varies greatly and there are several degrees of usefulness amongst the different programs.

Mental Health

A large portion of respondents (41%) indicate that they are currently facing mental health difficulties. This number increases greatly in both Non-Binary (77%) and LGBTQ+ respondents (64%) as well as Indigenous respondents (59%). Students who are struggling with mental health share that financial difficulties have been the most significant contributor to their poor mental health.

UBC Services

Broadly, across the many different UBC services made available, there was a diverse range of usage. Of the most widely accessed services, respondents agreed the most helpful were Centre for Accessibility (85%), followed by Health Services (80%), Wellness Centre (70%). The least helpful UBC services have been the Aspiria student program which was only helpful to 63% of those using the service and Counselling Services (67%).

AMS Services

The diverse selection of AMS Services have helped many of those who've accessed them. While AMS Tutoring (78%), Peer Support (69%) and SASC (76%) were all indicated to be very important services to respondents, some of the most helpful services have been Safewalk (82%) and FoodBank (93%). Both the AMS food bank and Safewalk have become an increasingly significant resource since the 21/22 (AES) in which 78% of respondents and 64% stated they were helpful respectively. Another incredibly vital service for students has been the AMS/GSS Health benefit for counseling which was very popular amongst respondents (93%).

Disabilities

Among respondents who have one or more types of disabilities, 29% indicated they are registered with the Centre for Accessibility. This number has remained relatively consistent since 2019. Of those who are not registered with the Centre, around a quarter did not need the service, felt it was too inconvenient to register, did not know how to register, or were unfamiliar with what the Centre offers.

Aside from long term disabilities, 29% of respondents reported they have experienced a temporary health issue in the past 12 months which had some impact on their ability to meet their academic responsibilities. Moreover, over 40% of those who had a temporary health issue felt they did not know where to get support and help. The most common academic consequences include difficulty studying for assessments and struggling to complete assignments.

Overall, 25% of students reported having some type of disability (ie. sight, hearing, mobility) but the most common was mental illness, experienced by 19% of respondents. Particularly, 68% of Non-Binary students reported struggling with mental illness. Women (21%) were also more likely to report having mental illness than men (10%).

Student Affordability

This section discusses the financial situations of UBC students and explores different sources of financial stressors. While many respondents (60%) think they can manage their finances, half of them have experienced financial hardship related to tuition and other expenses (50%). Few respondents agree that the UBC's efforts or initiatives have helped to address financial hardship.

Financial Support

While 56% of respondents who received a scholarship, bursary, or other financial award, received it directly from UBC, 22% of all respondents expressed that they might not be able to return to UBC in the future due to financial reasons. This is the highest percentage since 2015. Moreover, in the case of a financial emergency, only 26% of respondents, continuing a steady increase from 2021, agreed that they would know how to access emergency funding.

When asked about UBC's efforts to address financial hardship, an alarmingly low 9% of students agreed that UBC has taken measures to lower barriers and display compassionate support for students who share experience of financial distress. This number has been steadily declining in past years. Similarly, just 13% of students, a two percent decrease from 2021, expressed that UBC had assisted and helped meet their financial needs required to attend their program has been diminishing. In addition, only 11% of students felt that UBC financial services had been easy to access and transparent about funds available and 14% of students thought that UBC was transparent about how student tuition was being used. Again, this shows a decline from 18% in 2021.

Course Materials

In terms of course materials, 26% of students expressed financial hardship related to the costs of textbooks and course materials. This year, similar to previous years, the cost of textbooks drove students to seek alternatives to buying the materials. 29% of students reported often or frequently going without a textbook due to cost. 41% of students reported they used an out-dated version of a textbook or other course resource to avoid paying for a more recent edition. 39% admitted to accessing a textbook or other course resource illegally from sources other than the UBC Bookstore.

Students showed a preference for open educational resources (OER) and 61% of students expressed frequently or often using OERs in lieu of a textbook.

Food Insecurity

Similar to last year, 38% of students reported having worried, at some point over the last 12 months, about running out of food before they could afford to buy more groceries. About 40% of these students experienced this worry once a month or more. Students reported the main source of this concern comes from high tuition costs and high housing costs. Almost all BIPOC communities, including Black (52%), Indigenous (46%), Latino (45%), West Asian (44%), Southeast Asian (41%), and Arab (40%) students, reported higher numbers of worrying once or more last year.

Housing and Commute

This section explores the lifestyles of students on and off campus. Questions explore different considerations students have to make in order to attend their classes.

Housing

More than half of respondents (57%), a sustained increase from 40% in 2021, have experienced financial hardship related to the cost of housing. Across the board, BIPOC communities expressed significantly higher numbers of this hardship, such as Indigenous (72%), West Asian (70%), Latino (70%), Black (64%), and Southeast Asian (58%) students. Graduate students also face significantly more housing-related financial hardship (73%) compared to undergraduate students (53%).

Living on campus in UBC student residence, living off campus with parents and living off campus with friends or roommates are the most common living situations reported.

Almost 1 out of 10 respondents (8%) have lacked a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and have experienced or are currently experiencing living on the streets, couch surfing, living in a public or private space without consent, or in an emergency shelter. This percentage increases for those who identify as Indigenous (13%) or Black (12%). For students who have experienced a lack of fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, the top reasons are high housing costs, high tuition costs, unexpected expenses and not having enough financial aid.

Commute

For those who do not live on campus, public transit including skytrain and bus is the most common way to get to campus. Other popular ways of commuting include driving, carpooling, walking, and cycling. A third of respondents take more than an hour to commute one way to campus. For those in the first or second year of their undergraduate, this increases even more to 53%.

Childcare

Most respondents (53%) who use care services for others in order to complete their studies reported using daycare services. Of these students, 57% reported being aware of UBC childcare services but chose not to use them. A majority of these students reported struggling with lengthy waitlists, expensive services, and restricted hours of operation for both non-UBC run daycares (60%) and UBC-run daycares (54%).

For students who require either disability or elderly care services for others, most respondents (58%) were not aware of any being offered near UBC Vancouver.

Recommendations

In accordance with AMS Policy CM-3, this section will suggest recommendations based on the outcomes of this survey. The AMS will utilize these recommendations in order to inform its advocacy efforts as to UBC Administration, as well as priorities for the upcoming academic year. It is important to note that this list is non-exhaustive.

Similar to years prior, affordability continues to be a major concern for students. One that students do not feel confident that the University is doing enough to address. Financial hardship related to housing, course materials, tuition, and cost of food create barriers to student success and thus, **UBC must prioritize the implementation of the Student Affordability Taskforce Recommendations and ensure that students are informed of how the University is acting to address the affordability crisis.** Moreover, students should feel confident that their basic needs can be met regardless of financial situation. To meet these needs, we encourage **greater and long-term funding for the AMS Food Bank** in the face of consistent food insecurity on campus. We also urge the university to ensure students have access to safe, affordable housing by developing both long-term and short-term strategies. Another resource that should be at the forefront of the university's affordability undertaking is **new and enhanced access to open educational resources** which the majority of students expressed to be more inexpensive and preferable to traditional course materials like textbooks. Another pivotal way to address this affordability crisis is ensuring that in the interim before the development of a long-term tuition strategy the University is engaging in every possible effort to limit tuition increases.

In terms of learning experience and development, students reported that the classroom was the most common site of discrimination on campus. Thus, **instructors, staff, and professors should undergo mandated racial and unconscious bias training.** UBC should also explicitly commit to **increasing opportunities for Indigenous learning** across faculties and courses so that more students are given the opportunity to enrich their education with diverse cultures, histories and perspectives. In addition, **more financial and operational resources should be provided for the promotion and staff recruitment of the Centre for Student Improvement in Careers** in order to increase student awareness and usage of the service. In regards to course planning, students indicated the extreme value of **having access to syllabi prior to the course selection process** thus it is imperative that this access should be the mandated standard for all courses uploaded to the SSC registration page.

Another theme throughout the survey is inadequate disability support. As mental illness remains the most prevalent disability campus-wide, the university should make financial efforts to **support the psychology coverage in the AMS/GSS Health and Dental Plan** as it is clear that it is the overwhelmingly favored support for students when compared to UBC counseling services. Other mechanisms of disability support are also necessary given the exponential growth in usage for the Centre for Accessibility (CFA) and so we encourage the university to provide **greater resources and funding towards the CFA and its initiatives.** Additionally, physical accessibility to campus is crucial and so we urge the UBC Administration to **continue advocacy towards creating a Skytrain to UBC.** This will also help alleviate the housing crisis for students.

Ultimately, we were incredibly impressed by the engagement with the AES this year which revealed quite alarming patterns of different student concerns. We hope that the AMS and UBC can work collaboratively to address these different challenges and create a strong and affordable campus experience for all students.

Respondent Profiles

The following is a breakdown of our respondent profile comparing the AES 2023 data sample to the Planning and Institutional Research (PAIR) office data on the population of UBC from the academic year 2022 to 2023.

Breakdown by Undergraduate and Graduate Studies

Students	Surveyed (AES) (n=3,413)	Actual (PAIR)
Undergraduate	2,670 (78.23%)	47,612 (80.62%)
Graduate	694 (20.33%)	11,444 (19.38%)
Other	49 (1.44%)	–
Total	3,413 (100%)	59,056 (100%)

Breakdown by Full-Time/Part-Time (Undergraduate & Graduate)

Students	Surveyed (AES) (n=3,413)	Actual (PAIR)
Full-Time Undergraduates	2,586 (75.77%)	42,760 (72.40%)
Part-Time Undergraduates	75 (2.2%)	4,852 (8.22%)
Full-Time Graduates	657 (19.25%)	9,204 (15.59%)
Part-Time Graduates	31 (0.91%)	2,240 (3.79%)
Other	64 (1.88%)	–
Total	3,413 (100%)	59,056 (100%)

Breakdown by Faculty

Students	Surveyed (AES) (n=3,413)	Actual (PAIR)
Arts	940 (27.54%)	13,529 (25.49%)
Science	785 (23.00%)	11,601 (21.86%)
Engineering	316 (9.26%)	5,315 (10.01%)
Commerce	237 (6.94%)	6,393 (12.04%)
Land & Food Systems	149 (4.37%)	2,083 (3.92%)
Kinesiology	92 (2.70%)	1,397 (2.63%)
Forestry	69 (2.02%)	1,605 (3.02%)
Vancouver School of Economics	37 (1.08%)	390 (0.73%)
Pharmaceutical Sciences	17 (0.50%)	1,176 (2.22%)
Architecture and Landscape Arch.	22 (0.64%)	185 (0.35%)
Education	25 (0.73%)	857 (1.61%)
Medicine	11 (0.32%)	4,736 (8.92%)
Music	18 (0.53%)	208 (0.39%)
Social Work	7 (0.21%)	107 (0.20%)
Dentistry	7 (0.21%)	488 (0.92%)
Nursing	15 (0.44%)	275 (0.52%)
Law	2 (0.06%)	695 (1.31%)
Other	664 (19.46%)	–
Non-Degree	–	2,041 (3.85%)
Total	3,413 (100%)	53,081 (100%)

Breakdown by Domestic/International (Undergraduate & Graduate)

Students	Surveyed (AES) (n=3,413)	Actual (PAIR)
Domestic (Lower Mainland)	1,704 (49.93%)	41,815 (70.81%)
Domestic (Outside L. M.)	810 (23.73%)	
International	899 (26.34%)	17,241 (29.19%)
Total	3,413 (100%)	59,056 (100%)