2024 Canadian Student Wellbeing Survey

**Research carried out by YouGov
February 2024**

Studiosity
Study help, anywhere

Contents

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The education sector has the greatest potential to change the world - students become future researchers, teachers, business owners, leaders, caregivers, and more, contributing to the rich societal fabric that the world needs. To protect and grow the education sector, listening and responding to the feedback, concerns, and recommendations of college students is a necessary challenge.

It is evident that students are navigating a changing academic terrain. Personalized support, a heightened sense of belonging, and rapid adaptation to AI supports are paramount .

This survey captures the voices of students to support education leaders in their ongoing efforts to offer students an educational experience that aligns with both their study expectations and aspirations for the future.

Foreword

To all our partners in education and life chances:

It is evident that higher education across the world is undergoing, or being forced to undergo, significant change. This annual Student Wellbeing survey is a pragmatic guide for leaders in higher education to celebrate strengths, address gaps, and ensure our critical societal institutions remain agile and responsive to the evolving needs of the student body and deliver credible and valuable credentials.

In partnership with your institution and others, the Studiosity team continues our core mission of increasing life chances for students. In this spirit we are committed to making this contribution to the sector and putting the spotlight on student wellbeing again this year.

Chris Helsby
Vice President and General Manager, Canada

Foreword

Dear colleagues in education,

It feels as though the world has been turned on its head again, after a year of transformative generative AI launches. It comes on the heels of COVID, now in the not-to-distant past, changing legislation, and changing student demographics. If leaders in the post-secondary sector are looking for a moment to breathe, it isn't coming.

Funding, competition, academic integrity, artificial intelligence, and institutional risk are top of mind for HE leadership the world over. Students can see where institutions have made a commitment – for instance, we can see around two thirds happy with sense of belonging. Let us remember the other third, whether this is the 70 million students the world over, or the additional 6000 undergraduates enrolled just with your institution. Students are telling us where there is room for improvement – accessibility, personalization, and connection.

Whether addressing belonging, establishing more accessible mental health support and peer connection, or accelerating AI for learning - the answer can be summed up as continual investment in quality teaching and learning. This year's report makes necessary actions clear.

Professor Judyth Sachs
Chief Academic Officer, Studiosity

Former Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Provost Macquarie University and
Former Pro Vice-Chancellor Learning and Teaching at Sydney University

Studiosity

Foreword

Unlike so many other studies focused on post-secondary education, this wellbeing study captures the diverse voices of students right where they live. Students aren't asked only to tick boxes but they offer thoughtful, extended reflections on their ongoing experience. It is not surprising, perhaps, to hear they are anxious about the possibility of success, but it is illuminating to hear what the nature and source of their concerns are in 2024.

Many students are concerned that we are not thinking through the benefits of AI for instructional purposes, that universities are not sufficiently attentive to their needs for peer mentors, for personal program and study advice, and for creating an environment that is committed to teaching and learning, not just achieving high rankings in the global marketplace.

Reading this report validates so much of what we already suspect. The integrity of the learning experience is undermined when our universities are too slow or too reluctant to respond to our students' needs for more support in a variety of ways. How quickly and thoughtfully we respond to the recommendations in this study will determine how successful we are in keeping pace with an increasingly diverse student body.

Dr Noreen Golfman
Academic Advisory Board Member, Studiosity

Former Provost and Vice President Academic at Memorial University, St. John's, Newfoundland & Labrador

Studiosity

Introduction

Background

YouGov

YouGov is a global public opinion and data company, international market research and data analytics firm headquartered in the UK with operations in Europe, North America, the Middle East, and Asia-Pacific.

Studiosity

Universities around the world partner with Studiosity to grow student success at scale, via 24/7 formative writing feedback, discussion about core skills, and peer-to-peer connection.

For four years, Studiosity has run an annual Student Wellbeing Survey with Canada's university students. In November 2023, YouGov was commissioned by Studiosity to conduct the fourth wave of this national research.

Objectives

The survey investigates key areas of student wellbeing in 2024. This annual survey seeks to better understand and discuss the motivations, emotions, and demands of university students to provide data and findings to higher education leadership to support initiatives and solutions.

This year, the survey focused on topics such as experiences of artificial intelligence, connection to other students, stress, importance of grades, experiences of cheating, optimism for the future, and institutional belonging.

Methodology

Sample & Target Group:

Studiosity produced the questions for this survey with advice from YouGov to ensure robust data collection. YouGov gathered the responses from students in Canada, United States, United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates via an online survey.

The survey ran from November 23 to December 29, 2023 and gained 10,189 responses, of which 1,035 were in Canada, with 94 Canadian post-secondary institutions represented.

The students (n=1,035) represented a mix of domestic (68%, n = 699) and international (32%, n=336) students. This survey was collected on the YouGov Panels, where each member has accepted to participate in online interviews and has received an email invitation with a link to the survey.
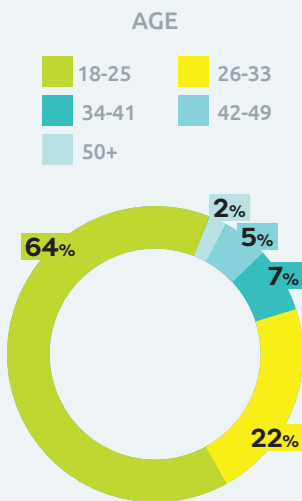
The sample definition is created in order to provide a representative cross-section of the Canada population, based on the target group and the purpose of the survey.

The survey was conducted by the YouGov analysis institute.

November 23-December 29, 2023

Weighting:

The figures have been weighted and are representative of all Canada adults aged 18+. Data was weighted according to the dimensions of gender, level of university studies finished and geography on the basis of an ideal weighting from Statistics Canada, so that the results are representative of the population in relation to the aforementioned target group.

AGE

- 18-25
- 26-33
- 34-41
- 42-49
- 50+

64%
22%
7%
5%
2%

PROVINCE/TERRITORY STUDENTS LIVED FOR MOST OF 2023

Province/Territory	Percentage
Ontario	43%
Québec	20%
British Columbia	14%
Alberta	11%
Manitoba	4%
Nova Scotia	3%
Saskatchewan	2%
Newfoundland & Labrador	1%
New Brunswick	1%
Prince Edward Island	1%
Northwest Territories	
Nunavut	
Yukon	
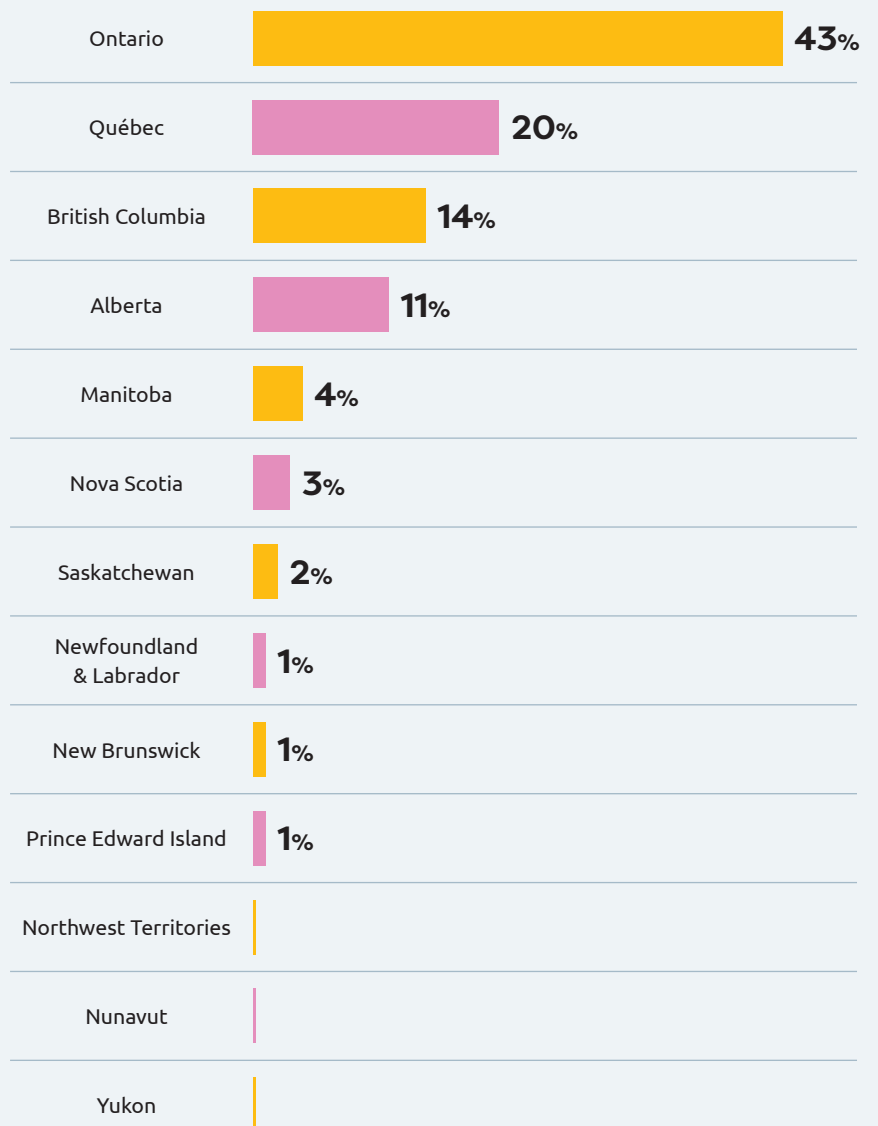
Key findings

Demographics: Diversity and study–life pressures

To accommodate the increasingly diverse experience of students, post-secondary leaders can look to equal-access programming, resources, and support structures to ensure access and wellbeing for all.

As the fourth annual Student Wellbeing Survey in Canada, reported employment trends in post-secondary students can be revealed. More students engaged in some kind of employment in 2023, with a significant jump in part-time work (11% up) but with reported drops in full-time and casual roles. Consistent with this overall trend, students not working at all fell 9%. International and domestic students have similar levels of employment.

Compared to average global responses (78.9%), Canadian students in this survey have higher rates of employment (81.7%) - also higher than UK post-secondary students (70.6%), and the United States (78%).

Of respondents, 54.4% identified as female, 42.1% male, 1.4% non-binary, 0.6% transgender, with smaller numbers of students intersex or preferring to withhold the information. With more female students studying in Canadian post-secondary institutions, the survey is representative in this regard.
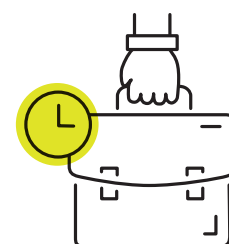
Of respondents, 32.4% were international students. Nursing students were most likely to speak English as a first language (87.4%), compared to the average (67.8%).

Most respondents (42.9%) lived most of 2023 in Ontario, with 20% based in Québec, and 13.8% in British Columbia, making the survey close to a representative population.

1 in 4 (26.1%) students reported being a caregiver in addition to post-secondary study. Students studying Medicine, Languages, and Journalism are more likely to be caregivers.
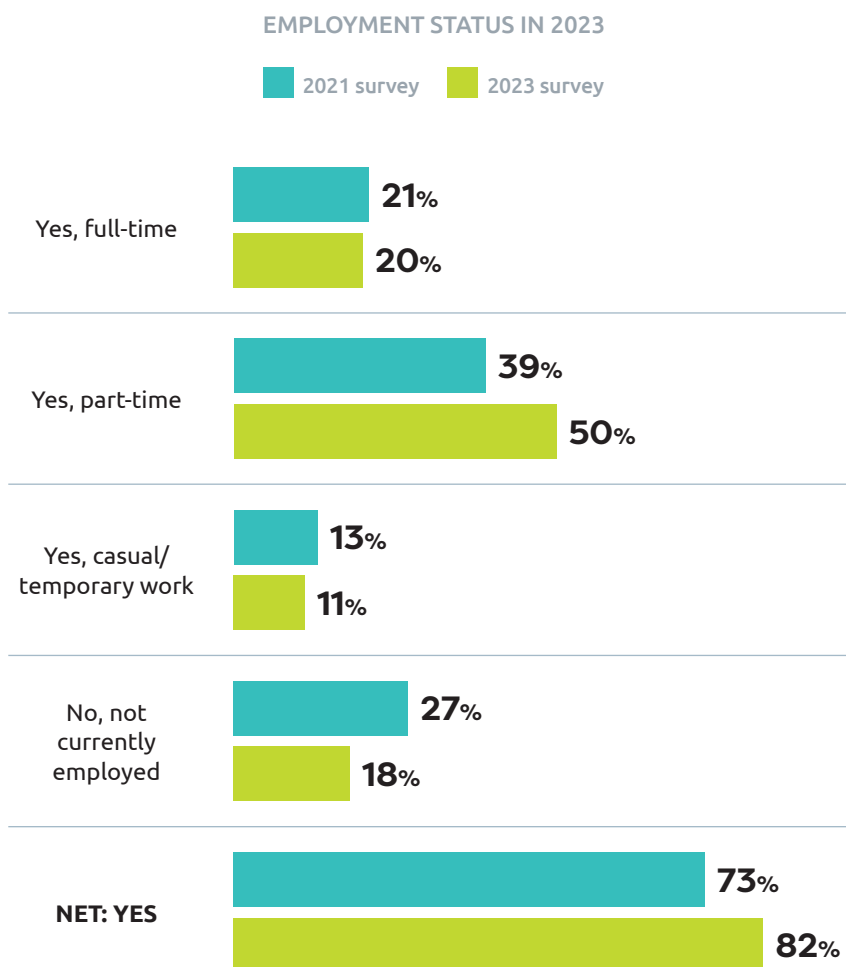
In this survey, 78.9% of the respondents had a full-time study load. Full-time students reported higher grades, compared to 41.7% of all part-time students reporting a Credit, Pass, or Non-Pass. The distribution of reported grades is largely consistent across study areas, with large proportions (9.7% in Law) of pass only, and Psychology, Languages, and STEM reporting non-pass results.

EMPLOYMENT STATUS IN 2023

■ 2021 survey ■ 2023 survey

Yes, full-time	2021	**21**%
	2023	**20**%
Yes, part-time	2021	**39**%
	2023	**50**%
Yes, casual/ temporary work	2021	**13**%
	2023	**11**%
No, not currently employed	2021	**27**%
	2023	**18**%
NET: YES	2021	**73**%
	2023	**82**%

Demographics: Diversity and study-life pressures

AVERAGE GRADE IN 2023

- Non-pass (below 50%)
- Pass (50-64%)
- Credit (65-74%)
- Distinction (75-84%)
- High distinction (85-100%)
- Prefer not to say

Field	Pass (50-64%)	Credit (65-74%)	Distinction (75-84%)	High distinction (85-100%)	Prefer not to say
STEM	5%	23%	32%	37%	3%
Medicine	7%	23%	33%	37%	
Nursing	6%	30%	28%	30%	7%
Psychology		27%	34%	30%	6%
Business	9%	21%	41%	26%	3%
Law	10%	12%	42%	30%	6%
Languages	9%	30%	29%	27%	2%
Humanities / Social Sciences		27%	36%	29%	5%
Journalism / Communications	8%	12%	52%	24%	5%
Creative Arts	7%	23%	30%	38%	3%
Other	4%	19%	46%	29%	2%
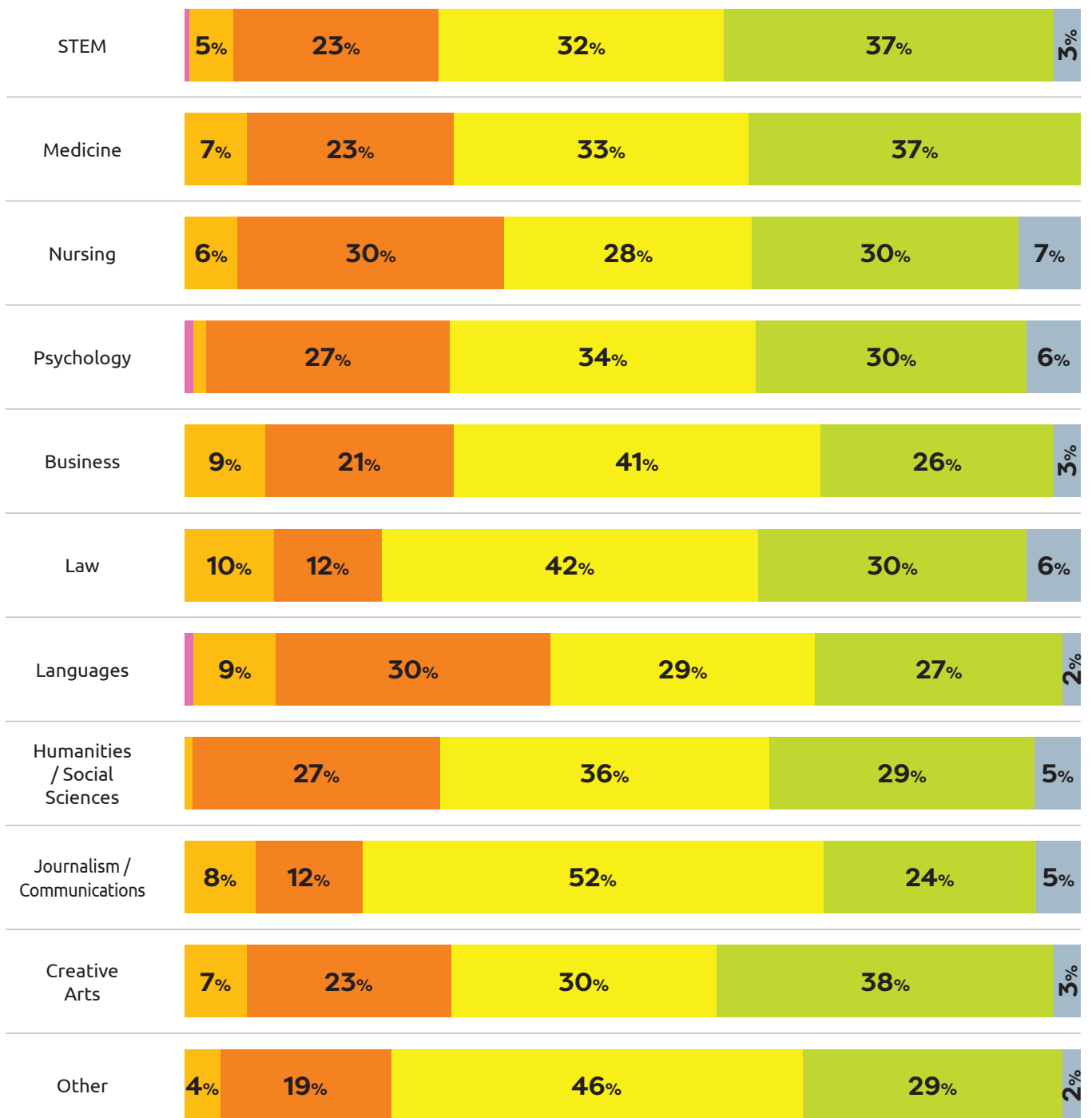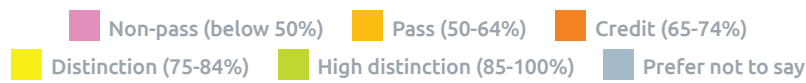
Students expect their post-secondary institutions to adopt AI-based support.

In 2023, Generative AI emerged as a prominent topic and force for change, and now, in 2024, the sector is shifting from planning to implementation.

Universities, being complex institutions, acknowledge their challenge of adapting quickly. This pressure is further compounded by evolving student expectations. Individuals from various demographics are now adept technology consumers, bringing certain assumptions into their academic experiences and more complex demands on their own time and finances. This is seen in the growing number of students balancing employment alongside their studies (73% in 2021, increasing to 82% in 2023).

Q. Do you expect your university to offer AI *(artificial intelligence)* support tools to students? AI or artificial intelligence refers to a trained, digital helper that gives personal feedback and other 24/7 study help.

The majority (54%) of Canadian students expect their university to offer AI support tools.

Notably, students who have been traditionally underrepresented and in some cases undersupported are more likely to expect their university to offer AI support tools. For instance, of students who are also caregivers, 72% expected to be provided with AI support tools. Other groups for whom the majority expect AI support include: part-time students, students in any level of employment, students achieving middle-to-lower range grades (below 83%), students for whom English is an additional language, all age groups (except 42-49) for international students, and male students.

The majority of students in 2nd-, 3rd-year Undergraduate, and Postgraduate studies expected AI support tools, compared to 1 in 2 students in their first year, which still represents a large proportion.

In all provinces and territories, the majority of students expected their university to offer AI support tools - except for more even splits in Newfoundland and Labrador (n=14), Prince Edward Island (n=5), and Northwest Territories (n=1).

Students who responded that they felt regularly stressed in some way during their degree had the strongest expectations for AI support tools from their university. The biggest reasons for stress were 'Not having enough time' and 'Paying for my degree/study,' which may have a correlation with the expectation for more support, and may be an area of further research.

"I feel like the University is more trying to prevent the use of AI for plagiarism rather than use it as a tool for learning."

Q. What is the main reason you would use the university's AI *(artificial intelligence)* support or feedback?

The most common reasons, regardless of gender and study level, for using AI support from the university were: speed (return time of feedback), confidence, and improving grades.
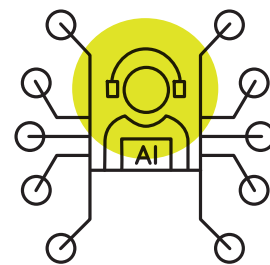
The higher the student's reported grade, the more likely they prioritized 'speed' as a reason for needing AI support over improving grades; then, as a student's reported grade fell, the importance of AI support for 'grades' rose. This trend stops at students achieving a 'Pass' grade, who prioritized speed and 'avoiding embarrassment from a real person' as reasons for using AI support.

There was some variation between demographics: female students and students studying remotely prioritized confidence over grades as a reason for wanting to use AI support. Students studying part-time were significantly more likely to prioritize 'Speed' as a reason for their expectation of support.

MAIN REASON FOR USING UNIVERSITY'S AI SUPPORT OR FEEDBACK

Speed
only waiting minutes, not a day or several days for feedback
21%

Grades
to improve my own work before I submit
17%

Confidence
to check I'm on the right track throughout my assignment
17%

Skills
learn to use AI tools
12%

Do not want to burden others e.g., I will feel bad asking my teachers or friends
10%

Avoid embarrassment from a real person e.g., the AI won't judge my writing
10%

Safety
because I can trust AI resources that my university provides
8%

Other
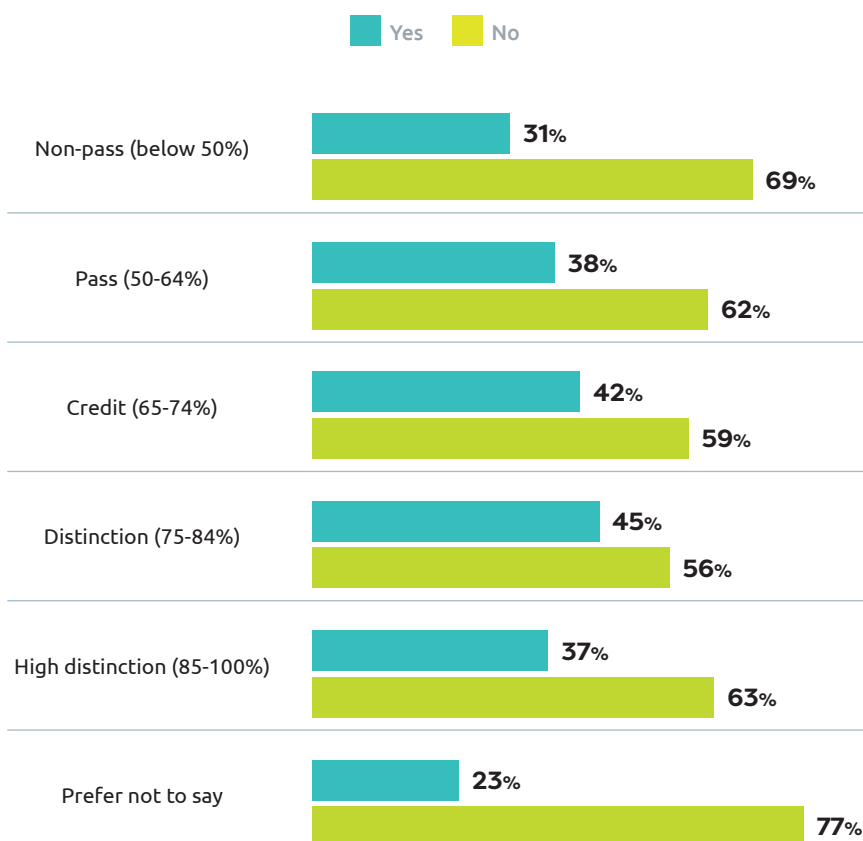**5%**

Chapter 1: Artificial intelligence

Q. Is your university adapting quickly enough to include AI *(artificial intelligence)* support tools to help with your study?

Canadian students of all ages, genders, reported grades, year levels, domestic and international status, said their institution was not adapting fast enough to include AI support tools.

At 60% of Canadian post-secondary institutions, the majority of students believe their institution is not moving fast enough to include AI support tools. Geographically, the majority of students in most provinces and territories responded 'No,' that their institution was not adapting fast enough - with the exception of New Brunswick where the split was reversed (69% Yes, 31% No). Northwest Territories and Nunavut also responded 'Yes', with low respondent numbers.

Selected groups of students believed their institution is in fact innovating fast enough to deliver AI support. Students studying languages (57% 'Yes'), those who are caregivers (54% 'Yes'), and students studying on a casual basis (50% 'Yes').

IS YOUR UNIVERSITY ADAPTING FAST ENOUGH TO INCLUDE AI SUPPORT TOOLS FOR STUDY

■ Yes ■ No

Grade	Yes	No
Non-pass (below 50%)	31%	69%
Pass (50-64%)	38%	62%
Credit (65-74%)	42%	59%
Distinction (75-84%)	45%	56%
High distinction (85-100%)	37%	63%
Prefer not to say	23%	77%

QD4. EXPECT UNIVERSITY TO OFFER AI SUPPORT TOOLS TO STUDENTS

■ Yes ■ No

Yes **54%** / No **46%**
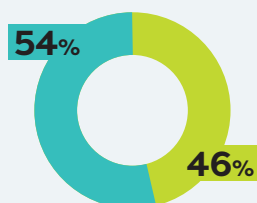
QD3. UNIVERSITY IS ADAPTING FAST ENOUGH TO INCLUDE AI SUPPORT TOOLS FOR STUDY

■ Yes ■ No

Yes **40%** / No **60%**

Students' qualitative comments reflect the diversity of students and student experiences in 2024 across the sector and within institutions.

Some students indicate that their universities are resistant to AI, while others suggest that their institutions are adapting to the technology. Additionally, there are comments highlighting the need for responsible AI usage and ethical considerations. Students expressed their fear that other students might misuse AI and their desire for human support as a result.

Overall, comments seem to reflect the need for balance to underpin the provision of innovative AI technology with trust, ethics, and human connection.

"I feel they are afraid of students misusing it rather than embracing it and finding ways to use it to help them learn."

"They don't have AI support but they are thinking about it."

"The University should come up with an AI Action Plan, which focuses on the tool beyond its use as something that facilitates cheating."

"I can see them being very adaptable to change."

" I don't think they are up to date as far as AI is concerned as a lot [sic] of the professors don't know how to use it themselves."

"My school is still pretty much against AI, specifically ChatGPT, and has advised against using it as it but I think they can do better than that because students, like me, are going to use it anyway. What they can do is improve methods of studying and test-taking that work together with AI tools that will make teaching easier for professors and better improve the quality of studying of the students."

The availability of peer mentoring is mixed in Canadian universities with room to support additional cohorts.

Being able to connect with peers and be part of the academic community is a critical part of college life and a facilitator of student success and wellbeing. Personalized peer mentoring is also correlated with lower reported stress, as seen in the responses. However, scaled peer mentoring is a challenge for university leaders who are also trying to serve diverse cohorts and backgrounds.

In this year's survey, the diversity of student experiences is revealed, with large cross-sections of the cohorts both happy while also needing more support in the form of peer support.

"Please offer support that doesn't take a million clicks on a website, a simple chat room would work."

"Placing more importance in understanding student experiences by asking questions and offering help."

Q. Did you have a student mentor (for example – a student in a senior year who could provide study advice anytime you needed it)?

Q. Would you have liked to have a senior student mentor?

Most students did not have a peer mentor, and across different respondent groups 1 in 2 would have liked one. The survey highlights the varied nature of student experiences at their post-secondary institution, both in terms of mentorship and peer interaction.

The majority (59.4%) of students did not have a student mentor to offer advice, the youngest age group (18-25) were least likely to have a Mentor (61.3%).

Nearly half of respondents (47%) expressed a desire to have a senior student mentor, highlighting a potential unmet need for mentorship in the diverse student population.

STEM (51%), Medicine (59%), Nursing (60%), and Creative Arts (53%) students were the groups most likely to want a peer mentor for study help. Journalism (34%) and Languages (13%) the least likely but representing a substantive cohort.

More than half (54%) of students who were also caregivers at the same time as studying reported that they would have liked a peer mentor. The 42-49 group were outliers, with 1 in 4 students reporting they wanted peer support. Roughly half of all age groups would have liked a senior student mentor.

Q. When you started your degree, how easy was it to ask other students questions, on a scale of 1 to 5 where 5 is very easy and 1 is very hard.

Of all Canadian university students, 17.4% found it hard to ask other students questions (scoring 1 or 2 on the scale), highlighting a significant proportion facing barriers with interacting with peers for study help. This rose to 27% amongst students who also reported feeling constantly stressed.

STEM (56.2%) and Psychology (53.1%) students reported 'neutral' to 'very hard' about the relative ease of asking other students questions.

Students who chose their degree because the institution was 'close to home' were more likely to find it hard to talk to other students.

Perhaps predictably for institutional leaders and teachers, 44.2% of students who responded that they did not feel like they belong at their university, also found it hard to ask other students questions.

Chapter 3: Study stress

Time-related stressors are the biggest concern among the student population. This year's survey shows that time, paying for study, course content, and meeting new friends were key stressors, varying between study modes, study areas, and gender.

Institutions need to ensure support is timely to suit the student's reportedly busy schedules and commitments rather than to suit institutional operations. Scaffolding for the student experience must also be at scale for all, as part of due diligence and risk management, to ensure all students are supported and given the opportunity to use next-tier scaffolding for mental health, financial, and intensive academic help.

"I felt like if I failed I would've wasted admission money and hard work in high school."

"So, what most groups do is they rely only on one person to finish the job and the rest get the marks without contributing to anything. Which is so unfair."

"Worries about submitting proper essays for the graduate level courses I'm completing."

"When teachers/professors are vague about what will be on the exam or test. As well as when practice quizzes do not show what questions you got wrong (e.g., when it only says 7/10 but there is no option or way for the student to verify what questions they answered wrong and possibly why it was wrong)."

Q. On average, how often do you feel stressed by studying?

Overall, nearly all students across all study areas reported stress at least occasionally, with 72% stressed at least weekly, marginally higher than globally (70%). Students studying medicine had the highest rates of constant (more than twice a day), daily, and weekly stress.

Students who reported that their first language is English are significantly more likely to report daily stress (29.1% compared to 18.3% for English as an additional language). Female students are more stressed than male students. Full-time and part-time students had even levels of reported stress.

HOW OFTEN FELT STRESSED BY STUDYING

Constantly (more than twice a day)	19%
Daily	26%
Weekly	27%
Monthly	8%
A few times per term/semester	13%
A few times a year	2%
Less often than a few times a year	3%
Never	2%
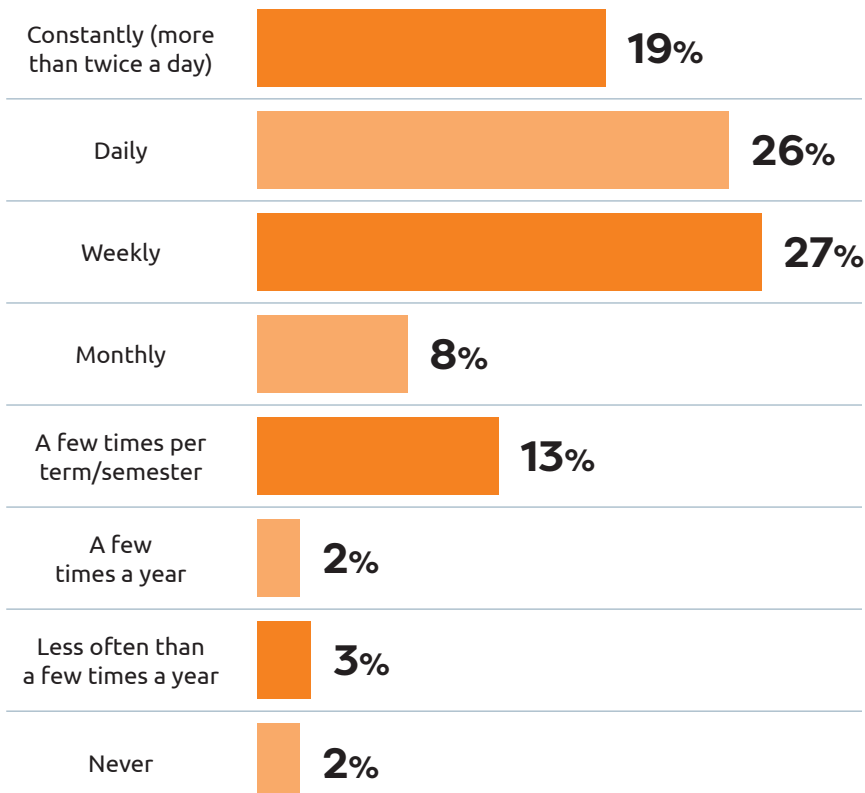
Chapter 3: Study stress

Q. Out of the following options, what makes you feel the most stressed about studying? Please rank in order of importance your top 3.

Time-based reasons - coded separately to both commitments and preparation - were the biggest reasons chosen by Canadian students overall. Financial stress ('paying for my degree') and course content difficulty closely followed.

TOP 3 IMPORTANT REASONS FELT MOST STRESSED ABOUT STUDYING

The ranking in the survey allowed students to record multiple primary stressors.

Reason	Percentage
Not enough time to balance other commitments	56%
Not enough time to prepare for exams & assessments	50%
Paying for degree/study	48%
Difficult course content	47%
Managing more responsibility on my own	37%
Finding study help	22%
Sticking to integrity & plagiarism rules (i.e., referencing & AI use)	20%
Meeting new friends	18%
Other	3%
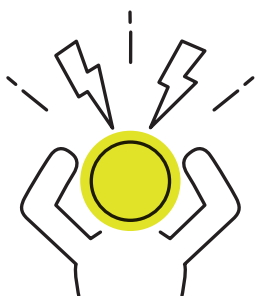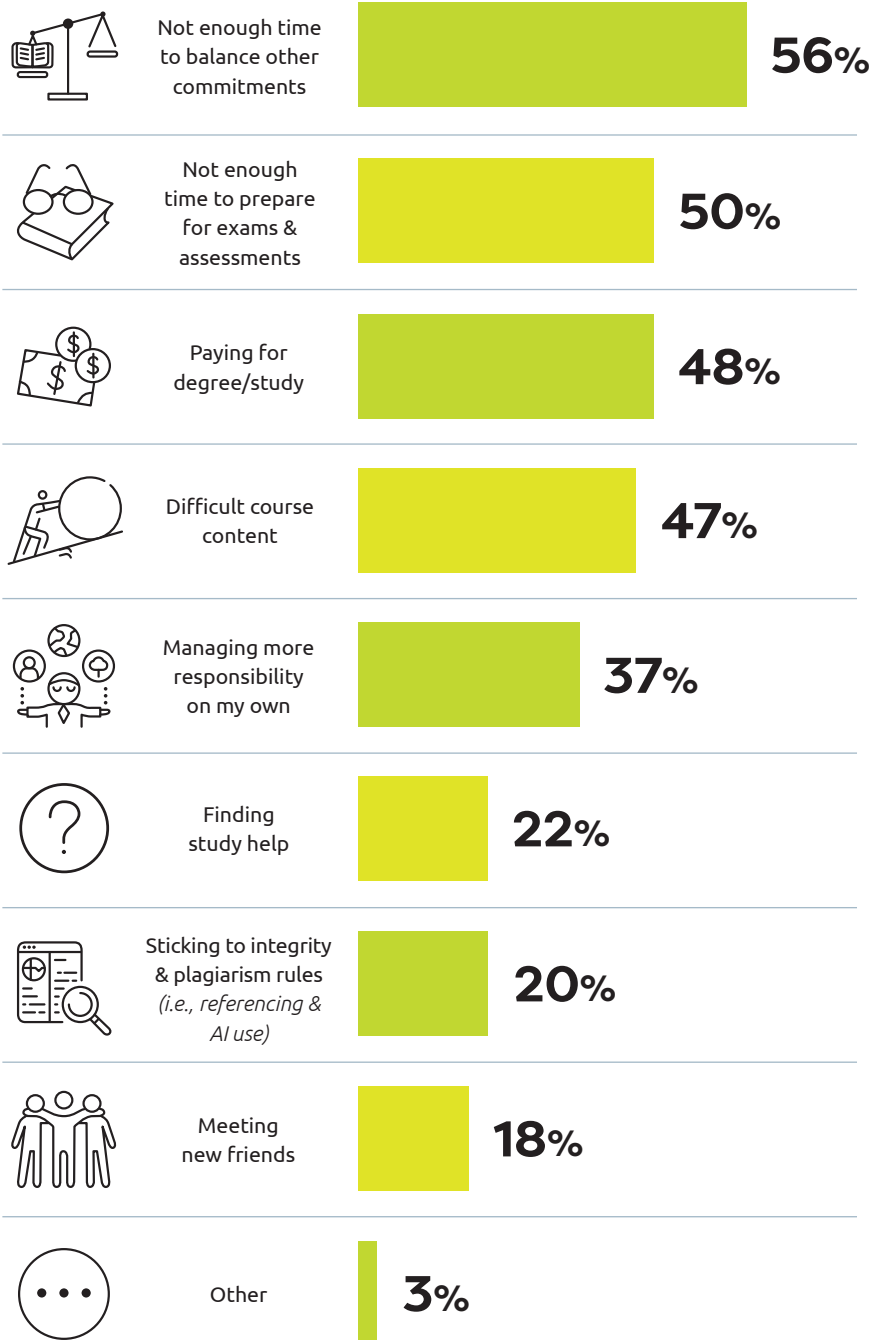
Chapter 3: Study stress

TOP 3 IMPORTANT REASONS FELT MOST STRESSED ABOUT STUDYING – GENDER

Legend:
- Not enough time to prepare for exams & assessments
- Not enough time to balance other commitments
- Finding study help
- Paying for degree/study
- Sticking to integrity & plagiarism rules *(i.e., referencing & AI use)*
- Managing more responsibility on my own
- Meeting new friends
- Difficult course content
- Other

Gender	Not enough time to prepare for exams & assessments	Not enough time to balance other commitments	Finding study help	Paying for degree/study	Sticking to integrity & plagiarism rules	Managing more responsibility on my own	Meeting new friends	Difficult course content	Other
Male	17%	18%	7%	20%	7%	7%	8%	15%	
Female	18%	23%	6%	18%	4%	9%	4%	18%	
Non-binary*	7%	40%	7%	40%			7%		
Transgender*		17%	17%	17%	17%	17%		17%	
Intersex*		100%							
Other*				50%		50%			
Prefer not to say	8%	8%	8%	42%		8%		25%	

Looking at 'first ranked' reasons, males were more concerned by meeting new friends, rules around integrity and plagiarism, and slightly more concerned by financial stressors than female students.

Regionally, student responses were consistent, with one outlier: 41% of students in New Brunswick ranked 'paying for my degree' as their number one study stressor.

Of students studying 'away from campus/ distance only', 1 in 4 were stressed by paying for study, slightly higher than students 'on campus only', and students in a hybrid mode were the least stressed financially.

Students who studied off campus, with occasional visits, were most stressed (32% of these respondents) by finding time for life commitments.

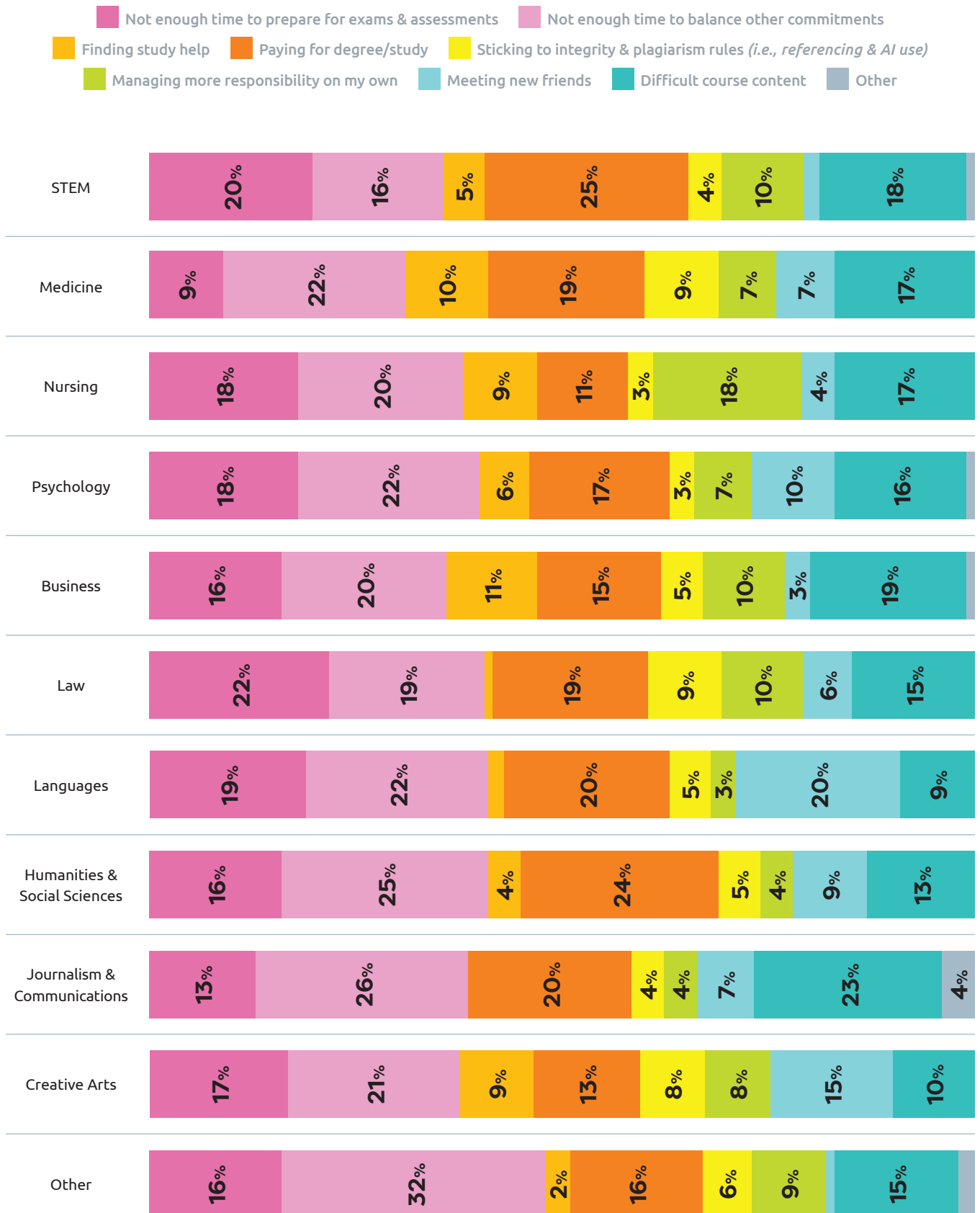By study area, almost 1 in 4 (24.5%) STEM students ranked 'paying for my degree' as the primary stressor, with similar levels for the humanities and social sciences (23.9%). Around 10% of Medicine and Law students ranked higher than other cohorts, with 'following rules of plagiarism and integrity' as a first ranked stressor.

* Note: base sizes for these categories are 15 and below and need to be read with caution.

Chapter 3: Study stress

Legend:
- ■ Not enough time to prepare for exams & assessments
- ■ Not enough time to balance other commitments
- ■ Finding study help
- ■ Paying for degree/study
- ■ Sticking to integrity & plagiarism rules *(i.e., referencing & AI use)*
- ■ Managing more responsibility on my own
- ■ Meeting new friends
- ■ Difficult course content
- ■ Other

Area of study	Not enough time to prepare for exams & assessments	Not enough time to balance other commitments	Finding study help	Paying for degree/study	Sticking to integrity & plagiarism rules	Managing more responsibility on my own	Meeting new friends	Difficult course content	Other
STEM	20%	16%	5%	25%	4%	10%		18%	
Medicine	9%	22%	10%	19%	9%	7%	7%	17%	
Nursing	18%	20%	9%	11%	3%	18%	4%	17%	
Psychology	18%	22%	6%	17%	3%	7%	10%	16%	
Business	16%	20%	11%	15%	5%	10%	3%	19%	
Law	22%	19%		19%	9%	10%	6%	15%	
Languages	19%	22%		20%	5%	3%	20%	9%	
Humanities & Social Sciences	16%	25%	4%	24%	5%	4%	9%	13%	
Journalism & Communications	13%	26%		20%	4%	4%	7%	23%	4%
Creative Arts	17%	21%	9%	13%	8%	8%	15%	10%	
Other	16%	32%	2%	16%	6%	9%		15%	

There is room to improve visibility and awareness of information and support services around academic integrity and how to avoid plagiarism, with around 50% of students aware of academic integrity scaffolding. Further, a proportion of students (10.7%) report that they don't know about the information and services or don't remember hearing about them.

Q. In 2023, did you hear about the following from your university?

The data shows a decline in awareness and recall of academic integrity services with increasing age. There was a drop in awareness and recall in second year, with less than half (46.3%) of all second year students hearing from their university about referencing help. This may point to a frontloading of information at the time of onboarding school-leavers and/or first years; however, with just half (51.6%) of first years reporting recall and awareness, there is room for improvement for all study levels.

> **"I had a lot of workshops on writing and academic integrity, which is helpful but at this stage we are doing our own research so kind of hard to plagiarize anyway."**

WHICH OF THE THE FOLLOWING DID YOU HEAR ABOUT FROM YOUR UNIVERSITY

An explanation of what 'academic integrity' is	**57**%
How to avoid plagiarism	**59**%
Workshops to improve referencing skills	**51**%
Where to get referencing help	**50**%
I don't remember hearing about any of these things	**11**%

Q. When you are unsure about plagiarism or your referencing, how would you prefer to get help?

Students were asked to rank the most useful supports for improving academic integrity skills. Fortunately, most students (71%) included 'ask my teacher' in the Top 3 and more than half (54%) wanted online support. Predictably but also a concern, 26.4% of students chose using a search engine as their first ranked choice.

Using a search engine jumps for Languages students, with 37.9% choosing a search engine first, and 30% among Medicine and Psychology, and 33% for Communications students. International students were more likely to want to use an AI tool (16% compared to 10% of domestic students) which may be for ease of access and formation of their question.

International students were less likely to ask their lecturer, but also less likely to use a search engine than domestic students. Universities and colleges can give students clearer options within institutional ecosystems as a first point of access.

Qualitatively, the majority of students expressed an awareness of academic integrity workshops and other information services. Students also offered their personal experiences and suggestions, with trends toward peer guidance, timely access, and better visibility.

> **"As a part-time student, I don't always watch for workshops or seminars. I only seek out assistance when I require it."**

"It would be nice to be around someone who knows the ropes."

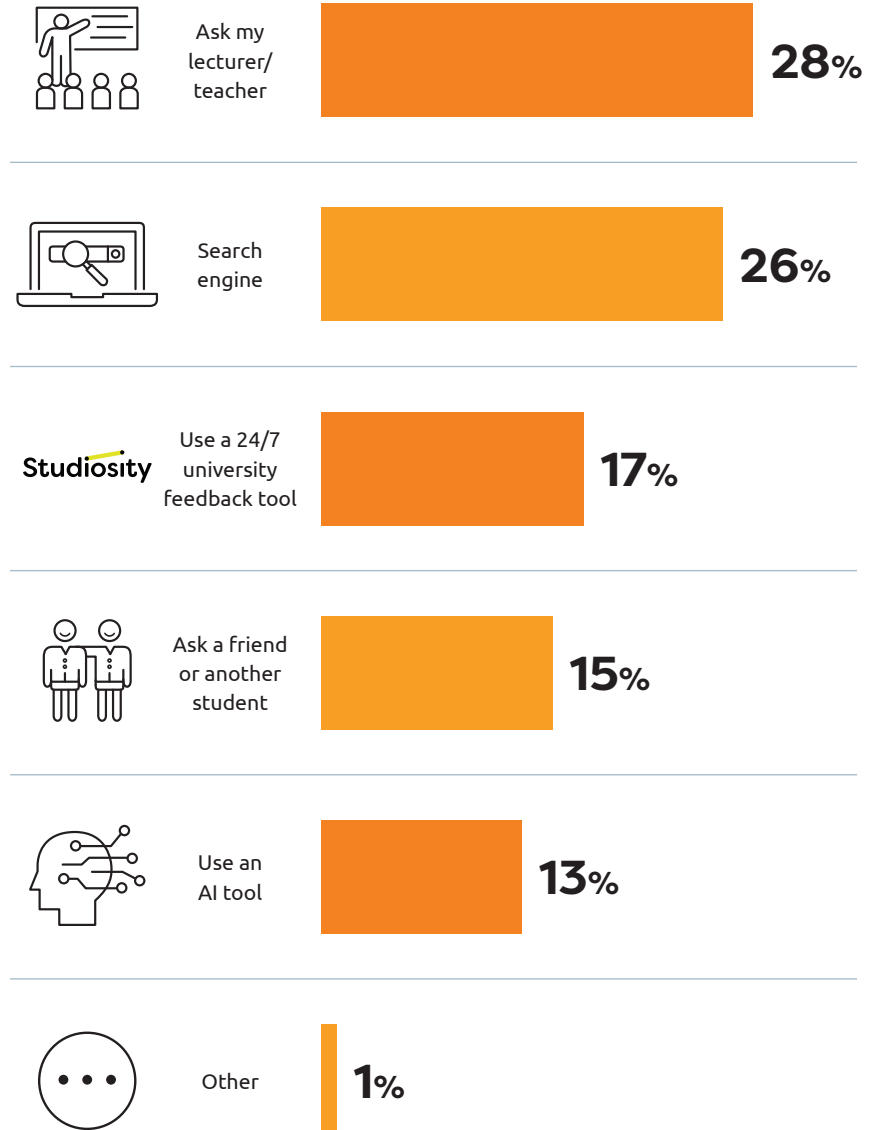"There are many resources that my university offers, however they don't really show you how you can gain access to them"

"There's a lot of things they could be better at promoting often you are left to fend for yourself."

"This is something I would have liked to have."

"Hard to get help from peers and classmates."

"Our university planned lots of workshops addressing many things you might get trouble with as international student."

PREFERENCE FOR HELP WITH PLAGIARISM OR REFERENCING

Ask my lecturer/teacher	**28**%
Search engine	**26**%
Use a 24/7 university feedback tool (Studiosity)	**17**%
Ask a friend or another student	**15**%
Use an AI tool	**13**%
Other	**1**%

Chapter 5: Student experience

In an increasingly globalized higher education landscape, university leaders are committed to learning about what students value and expect from their degree and making competitive and ethical changes. In this study, most Canadian students value the student experience more than university ranking.

Q. Thinking about the factors you considered when selecting your degree/university, please rank the following in order of importance.
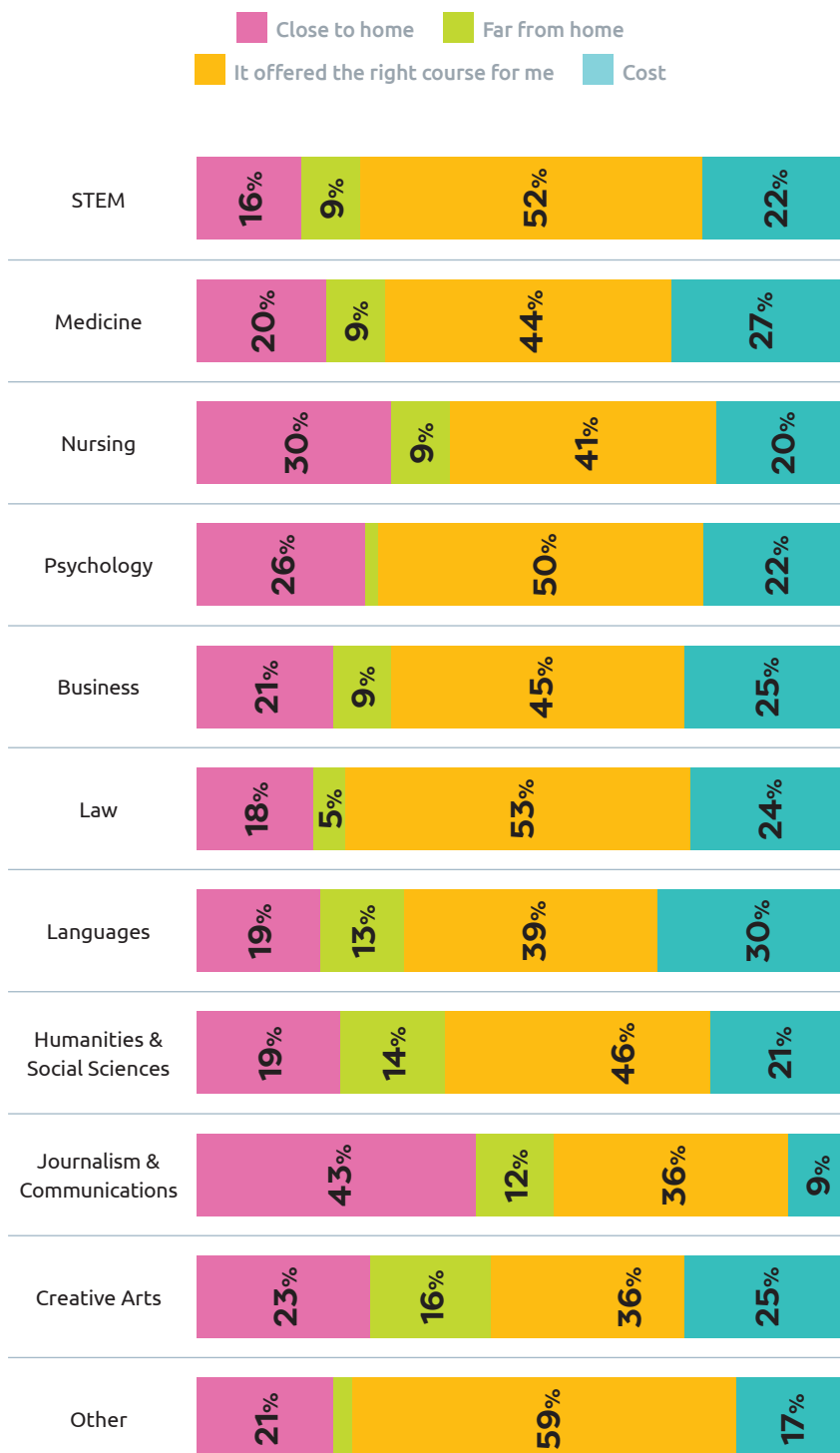
Most students indicated their first reason for enrolment choice was because it offered the right course - as educators might expect from a credentials-based decision. A significant group of students listed 'cost' as first-ranked answer, for example, for 1 in 4 business-based degrees (25.1%).

"Friendly, walkable smaller campus, lots to do."

"Accommodating towards mature students with other life responsibilities."

"Good academics and personable professors."

FACTORS CONSIDERED WHEN SELECTING DEGREE/UNIVERSITY

Legend:
- Close to home
- Far from home
- It offered the right course for me
- Cost

Field	Close to home	Far from home	It offered the right course for me	Cost
STEM	16%	9%	52%	22%
Medicine	20%	9%	44%	27%
Nursing	30%	9%	41%	20%
Psychology	26%		50%	22%
Business	21%	9%	45%	25%
Law	18%	5%	53%	24%
Languages	19%	13%	39%	30%
Humanities & Social Sciences	19%	14%	46%	21%
Journalism & Communications	43%	12%	36%	9%
Creative Arts	23%	16%	36%	25%
Other	21%		59%	17%

Q. Influencers when selecting degree/university. Importance of university global ranking versus activities.

Nursing students are influenced by family members who were past graduates, Law students advertising, and Languages and Psychology reported being more influenced by friends when making a decision, compared to other study areas.

More students (48.7%) reported that a good student experience was more important than the university's ranking (45%). When comparing reputation or student experience, domestic students ranked student experience as most important, international students trended the other way, valuing global ranking slightly more, with a significant proportion (47.6%) selecting student experience as most important.

By grade, students with a 'Non-Pass' grade were significantly more interested in the university's reputation (63%) than other students. Credit and Pass cohorts were most influenced by a university's student experience than reputation, and students with higher grades reported a more equal split between ranking (49.1%) and student experience (43.2%) as motivating their enrolment decision

Qualitatively, many students report that they are satisfied when their university provides support, with a high frequency of these comments. The qualitative responses reflect a wide range of student preferences to navigate study challenges, including official university resources, online tools, and social connections.

The diversity of student experiences and requirements point to the need for universities in 2024 to have a comprehensive and scaled support ecosystem in place.

Students reflected on challenges with their support services as well, specifically access, response times, and possible improvements. Mental health services were a recurring suggestion, with some students asking for these services to be better equipped to serve students' needs.

FACTORS CONSIDERED WHEN SELECTING DEGREE/UNIVERSITY

Legend: University advertising | Family went there | Friends went there

Study area	University advertising	Family went there	Friends went there
STEM	52%	21%	27%
Medicine	60%	19%	21%
Nursing	45%	29%	26%
Psychology	53%	13%	34%
Business	50%	24%	26%
Law	70%	12%	17%
Languages	41%	24%	35%
Humanities & Social Sciences	54%	24%	22%
Journalism & Communications	52%	29%	18%
Creative Arts	48%	24%	28%
Other	63%	19%	18%
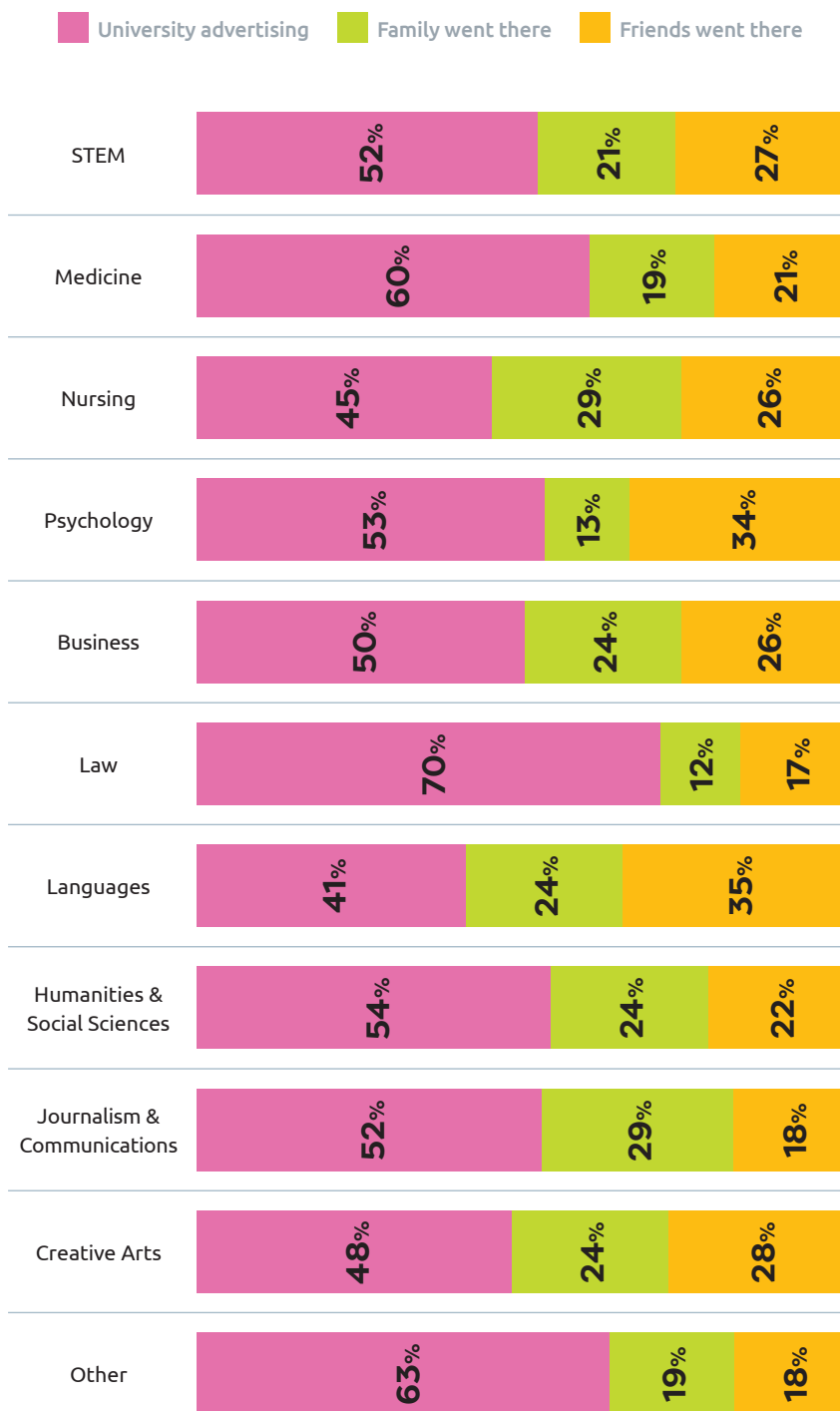
"Always having an option to speak to someone would be nice."

"Seek out activities and groups of people with whom you have common interests, and engage with others."

IMPORTANCE OF UNIVERSITY GLOBAL RANKING VS ACTIVITIES

- Global ranking of the university's reputation
- Lots of activities, ways to make friends and support (a good student experience)
- Other

Non-pass (below 50%)

63%	37%

Pass (50–64%)

42%	53%	5%

Credit (65–74%)

40%	55%	5%

Distinction (75–84%)

45%	49%	6%

High distinction (85–100%)

49%	43%	8%

Prefer not to say

45%	45%	10%

Q. Do you feel like you 'belong' in your university community? *(for example, do you feel supported and included?)*

Leaders can ensure all students feel a stronger sense of belonging with shared initiatives and supports, including 'a way to make friends,' 'engage with others,' and 'support for international students,' that are accessible both on, and beyond, campus.

The majority of students (44.7%) reported that they felt 'somewhat' like they belong in their community, with 23% reporting they felt 'very much' like they belonged. Just under a third of students were 'neutral', or reported 'not much' or 'not at all'.
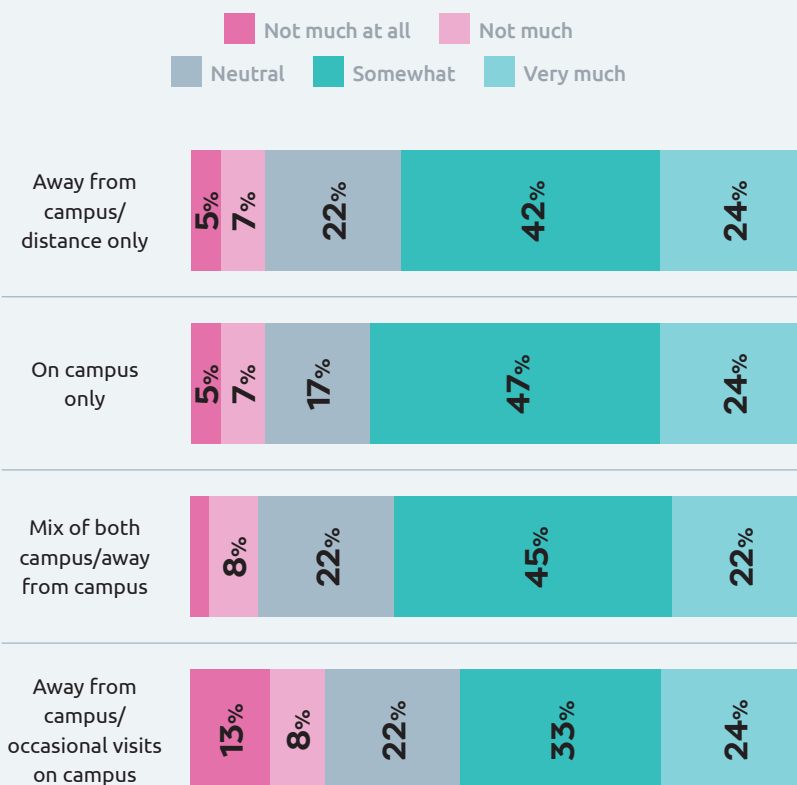
Regardless of study mode (distance, campus, or some level of hybrid) around

1 in 5 students felt 'very much' like they belonged in their learning community. On-campus students were more likely to respond that they 'somewhat' belong, while students who study remotely but visit campus occasionally are the least likely to feel sense of belonging (13%, 'not much at all').

"Sometimes it felt intimidating to seek for help."

"I feel like I belong because I am making friends with people who are studying the same thing as myself."

DO YOU FEEL LIKE YOU 'BELONG' IN YOUR UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY?

- Not much at all
- Not much
- Neutral
- Somewhat
- Very much

	Not much at all	Not much	Neutral	Somewhat	Very much
Away from campus/ distance only	5%	7%	22%	42%	24%
On campus only	5%	7%	17%	47%	24%
Mix of both campus/away from campus	8%		22%	45%	22%
Away from campus/ occasional visits on campus	13%	8%	22%	33%	24%

Q. Which of the following would make you feel like you belong at your university? Please rank your Top 3.

To improve belonging, students were most likely (45.6% of respondents) to recommend online access ('To be able to study online/remotely when I need to') and self-determined support ('To have a flexible schedule that lets me balance work and study') to improve their sense of belonging, with another 20% wishing to be able to confidently reach out to their teachers.

Based on additional qualitative comments, the most frequently occurring themes revolve around this same 'mixed' sense of belonging, with many students wishing for an improved campus environment that values a "friendly" atmosphere over grades. International students highlight challenges related to visas, work, and living support. There is a common call for more inclusivity, diversity, and support for differently-abled individuals. Individual preferences for more on-campus events, better accommodations, and improved mental health support are repeatedly emphasized, reflecting a collective desire for a more welcoming and supportive university community.

"The people are friendly, creating a friendly environment that does not solely focus on grades, but on learning."

"If there were more opportunities to socialize, always having an option to speak to someone would be nice."

"Have friends, seeking out activities and groups of people with whom you have common interests, and engage with others."

"The university is not so welcoming. The people are friendly but not as expected."

"A way to make friends, peer support."

"The university should do something about cliques, and having communities for people from different countries where we can all meet and share our experiences struggles adjusting to the foreign country and offer each other support."

"International students face challenges; the student visa is not sufficient, and there is no support for work and living, or guidance on staying in the country post-graduation."

"The university's improved understanding of the challenges faced by international students. It is precarious being an international student. The student visa is not sufficient to keep you in the country and there is no support concerning work and living, or guidance on how to stay in the country following graduation."

"The environment of the classes seems almost robotic. Nope."

"A stronger sense of community through more active clubs and social events."

"I feel like if universities had more initiatives that would give students the chance to feel welcomed, it would be easier to be more a part of the university community."

Q. Have you ever used one of your university's academic support services?

Q. Which of the following most closely reflects how frequently you use the support services?

Recognizing the diversity of student experiences in 2024, post-secondary institutions could look to serving all students regardless of location or academic literacy, with a focus on scaled, online study supports for the most frequent use, in addition to peer mentoring access, and scaling teacher capacity to respond to student inquiries.

Of respondents, 59.9% had used a support service at their institution, leaving 40.1% who had not engaged. Engagement was lower than this average for: part-time students and students studying in a hybrid or remote study mode, domestic students, and students for whom English is an additional language. Just over half (52.8%) of students had asked their teachers directly, 52.7% had asked a student mentor or joined a peer program.

In terms of frequency, 50.8% of students used 'Online/remote study option' most often and 42.7.% 'asked my teacher directly', at least once a week. Notably, 46.3% students used mental health support once during each teaching period.

Q. Please rate how confident you feel about the following statements on a scale of 1 to 5 where 5 is very confident and 1 is not confident at all.

My degree is developing the skills I need to succeed in my future job:

Most (62.4%) students responded positively, 27.2% neutral, and 10.4% negatively. Students who were working on a casual basis were the most negative (12.1%) and also responded with the most neutral responses (29.8%).

By age groups, 34-41 year olds were the most confident, only 26% of 18-25 year olds were very confident. Nursing students were the most confident (44.6% very confident), but - still in the health sector - 29.3% of Medicine students were very confident. STEM students had the least confidence (16%, very confident).

I will be able to get a job related to my degree, within 6 months of graduation:

Most (50.4%) of students responded positively, with 28.5% neutral, and 21.1% negatively. Postgraduate students were the most confident (57.3% very confident), and 3rd year students the least (45.1% very confident). These responses represent large groups, but also leave large proportions of each cohort that are at best neutral about employment after their degree.

Students who reported feeling least like they belong were least confident about post-graduation employment.

In comments, many students express confidence in securing a job after graduation, while some mention challenges in finding employment, particularly in competitive sectors. A few students mention the need for further education to secure employment, such as pursuing a master's degree. Some students express dissatisfaction with the practicality of their degree programs.
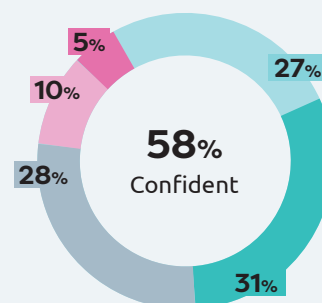
I have strong English writing and communication skills needed to apply for and get a job:

I HAVE STRONG ENGLISH WRITING & COMMUNICATION SKILLS NEEDED TO APPLY FOR AND GET A JOB

Legend: 1. Not confident at all   2.   3.   4.   5. Very confident

English speaking chart: 75% Confident
- 47%
- 29%
- 17%
- 6%
- 2%
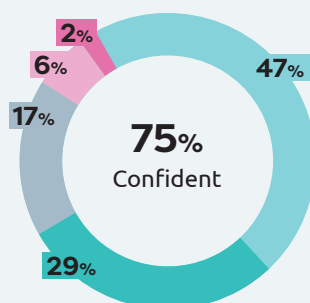
English speaking
(*7*% not confident)

Other languages chart: 58% Confident
- 27%
- 31%
- 28%
- 10%
- 5%

Other languages
(*15*% not confident)

Most (69.7%) students responded positively, 20.6% neutral, and 9.7% negatively. Students who said English was an additional language also had lower levels of confidence with their English writing and communication skills.

International students were less confident than domestic students. Students in their second year and on-campus students were the least confident. Unexpectedly, journalism and communications students and languages students are the least confident, with the highest net-negative results.
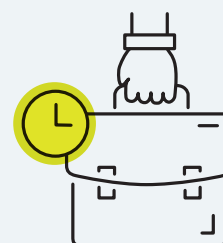
Students' recommendations for education providers:

This year, students were asked to offer their qualitative comment on how to improve student wellbeing, success, overall experience, and could offer an 'other' topic area of interest. Themes are grouped by frequency and a real student comment is included.

Overall, students ask their institutions to provide more one-to-one connection; prioritize mental health supports; improve communication, transparency, and awareness of resources; reduce financial pressure; and offer more feedback mechanisms.

Students' recommendations for: Wellbeing

Offer mental health support:
"More mental health facilities should be provided to students. It should also be among the mandatory courses taught, especially for new students who are struggling to adjust."

Grow a supportive culture:
"They need to connect more personally to new students. One to one."

Enhance communication and transparency:
"Increase communication and transparency: keeping students informed about important updates, policies, and resources can help reduce anxiety and create a more supportive and transparent environment."

Improve access to resources:
"More support and maybe share some resources to get help with the subjects."

Reduce workload and increase flexibility:
"Decrease the fees. Have teachers embed a student's wellbeing into the planning of their courses."

Improve campus environment:
"Adapting the class to a calm atmosphere (light, chair, desk), offering social worker in all times of the day."

Promote work-life balance:
"Easier access to counseling services, mental health days, extensions for certain assignments should not be so hard to get."

Increase community building:
"Offer more social workshops to meet people and reduce stress."
"I had no friends during my whole college study."

Provide financial support:
"Less tuition. It was like days where we can meditate."

Offer more wellbeing workshops:
"More activities and areas that could give more fun for the students to do while they're waiting in between classes."

Students' recommendations for: Success

Provide personalized learning and mentorship:
"Personalized learning plans and mentorship programs would help align education with individual strengths and career aspirations."

Improve academic support:
"More workshops, study groups, and hands-on projects would greatly assist in understanding course material effectively."

Improve student-teacher interactions:
"More interaction with teachers, clearer expectations, and transparent communication would create a positive and supportive learning environment."

Provide career guidance:
"Closer ties with employers, career fairs, and networking opportunities can better prepare students for post-graduation success."

Support wellbeing and mental health
"Increased mental health awareness, reduced stigma, and a supportive environment contribute to overall student wellbeing and success."

Deliver practical skills a part of degree:
"Teaching practical skills relevant to the workforce, with examples and case studies, enhances the application of knowledge in real-world scenarios."

Reduce tuition, improve assistance:
"Reduced tuition fees, scholarships, and financial assistance can alleviate financial burdens and contribute to student success."

Help with post-graduation planning:
"Follow-up after graduation, along with tools and resources for job searching, ensures a smoother transition to post-graduate success."

Improve infrastructure and resources:
"Better infrastructure, more resources, and improved availability of study materials contribute to a conducive learning environment."

Be flexible and adaptable:
"More flexibility in class structures, schedules, and adapting to new learning methods promotes a dynamic and responsive educational experience."

Recommendations for Improvement: Overall Experience

Take pressure off costs:
"Less or free tuition for both international and domestic students. The cost of living is high enough, the state of the economy is bad, and investing in education right now just feels like drowning in debt."

Provide support and feedback:
"Establish a feedback mechanism for students to share their concerns and suggestions. Ensure transparent communication about changes or updates to programs. Invest in modern technology and resources for a more effective learning environment."

Increase awareness of supports:
"Encourage students to use help services."

Offer flexibility:
"Overall, i think a more flexible time schedule offerings would be nice as well so students can find the balance in studying and the other things in their life."

Improve inclusivity and diversity:
"The university needs to take measures to support inclusivity."

Improve technology integration:
"Use different activities in class – videos, discussions, lecture, groups, guest speakers, pair work. Use different assignment methods – written, oral, projects, etc. – so as to engage as many ways of learning as possible."

Improve campus facilities and environment:
"More study areas, better profs, and flexible course times."

Improve communication and feedback:
"Better communication from profs. Feedback."

Offer mental health resources:
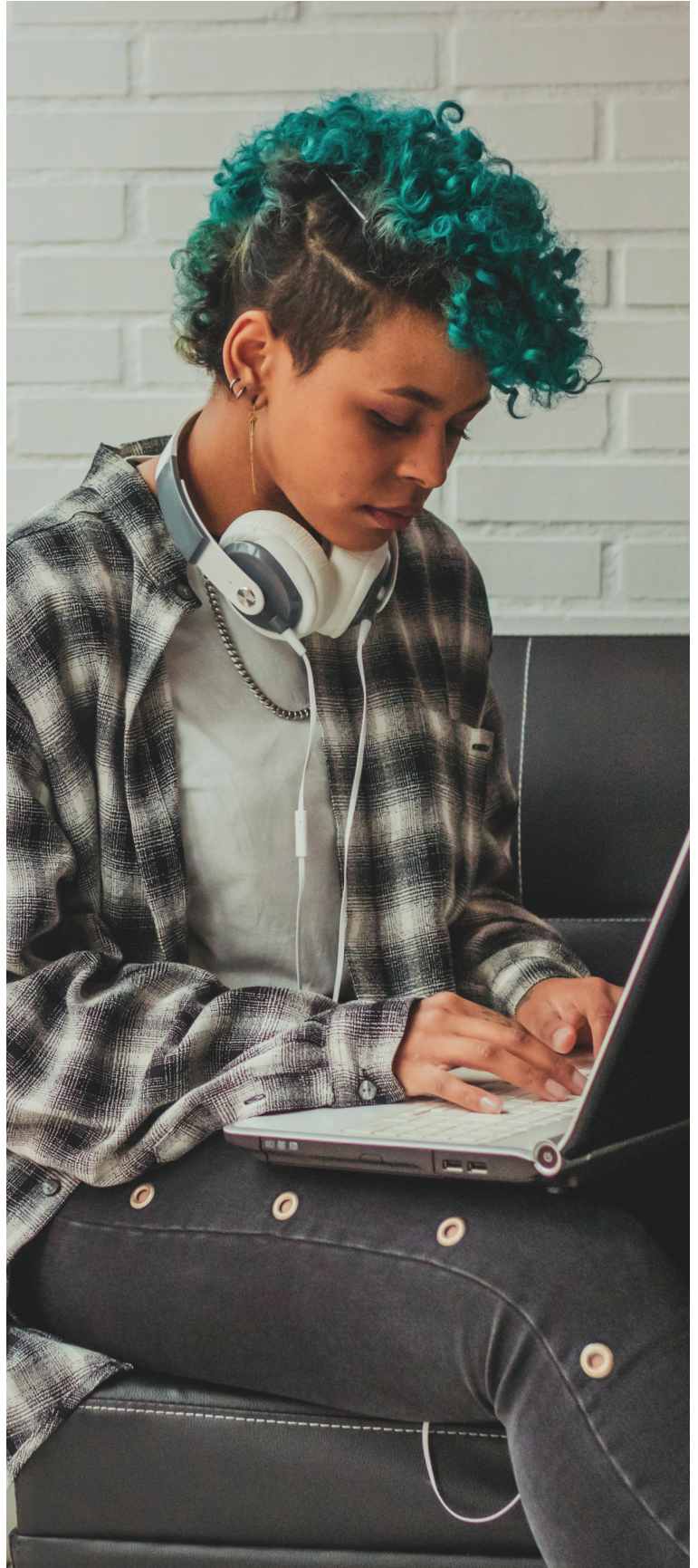"Better mental health support."

Offer career support and opportunities:
"Recommend the students on the company so that they will not find it hard to have a job."

Recommendations for Improvement: Other

Lastly, students were given the opportunity to make suggestions on any other facet of post-secondary life. Students used this opportunity to request increased financial aid and scholarship opportunities, improved mental health support, better communication, and more flexible learning options. Additionally, students asked for enhanced career opportunities and increased transparency in university operations. Some studentsv used this space to emphasize the importance of diverse and inclusive environments.

Despite the diversity of opinions in this last qualitative section of the survey, a recurring theme is the importance of creating a supportive and engaging learning environment for all students.

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