



ACCESSIBILITY

RESULTS FROM THE 2015 ONTARIO POST-SECONDARY
STUDENT SURVEY

OU SA

Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance

ABOUT OUSA

OUSA represents the interests of over 140,000 professional and undergraduate, full-time and part-time university students at eight institutions across Ontario. Our vision is for an accessible, affordable, accountable, and high quality post-secondary education in Ontario. To achieve this vision we've come together to develop solutions to challenges facing higher education, build broad consensus for our policy options, and lobby government to implement them.

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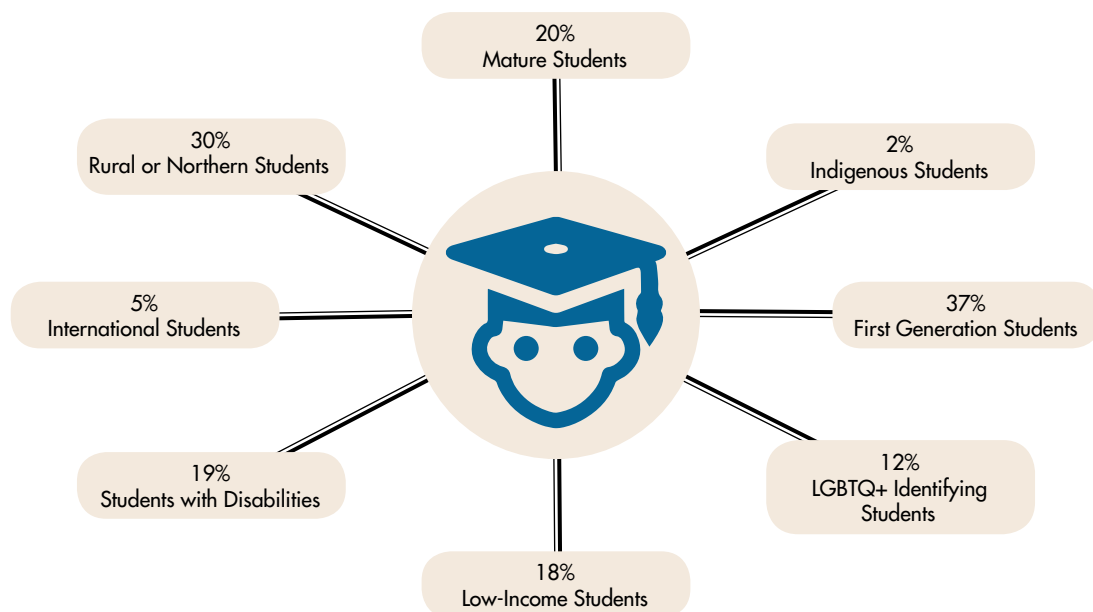
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

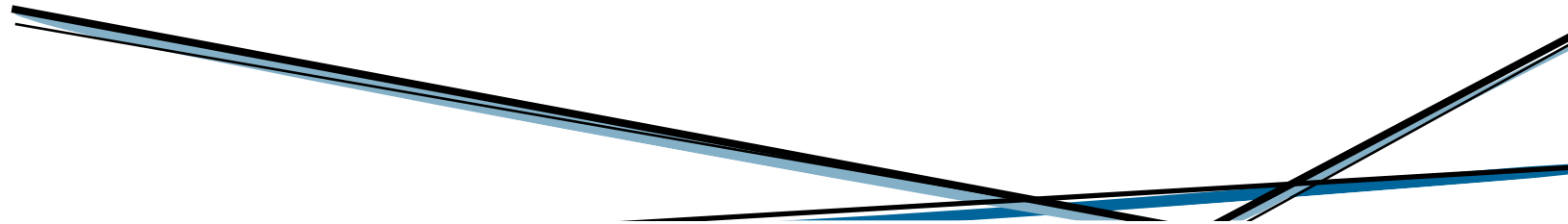
As an advocate for many of Ontario's university students, OUSA prides itself on keeping their voices at the forefront of discussions about systemic change. To this end we survey our membership to ensure that we have the best possible information about their experiences, and can make recommendations for improvements. This report is one in a three part series that presents the results from the 2015 Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey. The discussion herein will assist our organization in determining the underrepresentation of certain groups, the ease of mobility between post-secondary institutions, and the ease of travelling to or living near Ontario's universities.

In November 2015, over 10,000 individuals anonymously participated in the 2015 Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey from six of OUSA's eight member student associations. From these participants we gathered 9,197 complete responses from undergraduate students. Although 55 percent of respondents indicated that they came from middle- to high-income backgrounds, a total of 18 percent of students indicated that they come from low-income families. Almost one in three respondents indicated that their parents' or guardians' highest post-secondary credential was a university Bachelor's degree. Conversely, approximately 37 percent of our respondents are classified as first-generation students to university.

The vast majority of respondents were domestic students: 91 percent identified themselves as Canadian citizens and another three percent identified as permanent residents. Five percent of the sample indicated they were international students in Canada on a visa. A very small minority (2 percent) of respondents identified as Indigenous, which included status or non-status First Nations, Métis, or Inuit identities.

Just one percent of respondents identified their gender as something other than man or woman. Altogether, 12 percent of respondents identified with a sexual orientation other than heterosexual or straight; two percent identified as gay or lesbian, three percent identified as bisexual or pansexual, and seven percent reported sexual identities other than these.





One in five of the respondents are classified as mature students over the age of 21. The findings indicate that these students tended to also be first generation students, be married or in a common-law relationship, have dependents, and report growing up on a First Nations Reserve or some type of disability. Students who grew up in rural or northern communities—30 percent of respondents—also showed an increased likelihood of reporting a disability (when compared to those from urban communities). Among all 19 percent of respondents with disabilities, psychiatric, intellectual or learning, and visual impairments were the most common disability types.

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Just 13 percent of students indicated transferring credits between different institutions during their studies. Most respondents indicated transferring to entirely new institutions (47 percent) or transferring supplementary credits earned at another institution (35 percent). The most common types of transfers were from within the province and between universities. A little over a third of students who had transferred credits reported doing so in order to enter into a specific program that wasn't offered at their previous institution; another 30 percent of students reported that they transferred to upgrade a credential that they currently held. The demographic groups most likely to use credit transfers were: mature students, part-time students, Indigenous students, first generation students, students from the lowest income bracket, students with disabilities, and students with dependants.

With regard to living spaces, 60 percent said they rented an off-campus housing unit. When asked about their perceptions of the housing options available to them, two thirds of these respondents reported feeling very satisfied or satisfied with the quantity of housing units available, but over a third (36 percent) reported feeling dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the quality of the housing units available to them.

The survey also found that 41 percent of students reported taking public transit to commute to campus on a regular basis. Furthermore, the majority (63 percent) of the respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied with the transit service they receive. On the other hand, almost a fifth (18 percent) were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the quality of transit service received. Students with lower commute times reported more positive feelings towards the public transit system, while students with longer commute times reported more negative feelings.

Our evidence suggests a fairly diverse student population, achieved through a mosaic of minority groups. There is a clear need to be mindful of potentially marginalized students when planning and delivering universal supports and services, like first generation student programming, outreach to part-time students, or credit-transfer. Such mindfulness could assist in shifting perspectives and acknowledging the presence of non-traditional student identities on campus while also encouraging their persistence.

Going forward, the government should focus its policy efforts on providing more financial resources to institutions offering support services to first generation students. Next, it is essential for the government to include special purpose grants targeted towards improved access for marginalized and underrepresented students such as: Indigenous students, mature students, LGBTQ+ students, students with disabilities, and part-time students. Finally, the province must invest in better quality off-campus housing options and public transit for students commuting from afar.

INTRODUCTION

All willing and qualified students in Ontario should be able to access and excel within the post-secondary education system. To achieve this, decision makers and influencers need reliable evidence to describe the successes and failures of the system's current arrangement.

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This survey comes out of an initial national collaboration in 2009 when a multi-institutional survey was conducted to engage the entire student body and share their opinions of post-secondary education. The end goal of this previous project was to provide data to national and provincial, student and government leaders to help inform their decisions on improving higher education in Canada.

This current project is unique in its focus on undergraduate students in Ontario and will be used to represent the voices that make up the OUSA membership.

Results from the 2015 Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey (OPSSS) aid us in determining the demographic breakdown of our members, the effectiveness of credit transfer pathways, and the support services available for underrepresented student groups. This is a crucial component for OUSA's policy research in that it provides accurate, up-to-date information on the accessibility of our members' higher education institutions. Results will be used to inform OUSA's advocacy efforts and policy development over the next two years, until the administration of the next survey.

In terms of educational attainment rates, Ontario is a leader among Canadian provinces; 66 percent of those aged 25 to 64 have received some form of trade, college, or university training with 32 percent attending university alone—the highest proportion of university graduates in the country.¹ In spite of the encouraging commitment of successive Ontario governments to improving access to university, there remain significant challenges in addressing the underrepresentation of certain groups. Students with disabilities, Indigenous students, students from low-income backgrounds, mature students, students from rural and northern communities, first-generation students, and students identifying as LGBTQ+ continue to experience barriers to access and persistence.



Indigenous post-secondary students experience strong anxiety related to feeling out of place in university, as well as feeling neglectful of commitments to their families and home communities. Students from rural and northern communities can experience similar familial isolation and feelings of being out of place when attending universities in urban areas. Furthermore, some LGBTQ+ students find the overall campus environment homophobic and feel they are less accepted than their heterosexual peers. These concerns should not dictate where students choose to attend university. All students should be empowered to choose the post-secondary pathway that best suits their competency, skills, and interests.

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Discussions about access to higher education should include more difficult discussions on reforming social and cultural ideologies within our education system. Given the complex sets of financial, informational, attitudinal, and situational barriers that many students from underrepresented groups face, closing participation gaps requires a long-term commitment to pursuing a comprehensive access strategy. Any comprehensive access strategy should aim to efficiently target resources towards those who need them most.

In this report, we approach access from three different perspectives: the underrepresentation of specific groups, the ease of mobility between post-secondary institutions, and the ease of travelling to or living near Ontario's universities. From these perspectives we are able to investigate the characteristics of those who still require substantial support to overcome barriers (and the characteristics of the barriers they experience) as well as the general accessibility of universities to the student body at large. In service of these queries, the report will describe the methodology and limitations of the Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey before presenting the results.



METHODOLOGY

Students belonging to six of OUSA's then-seven member student associations were surveyed in November 2015 (Brock, Laurier, McMaster, Trent Durham, Waterloo, and Queen's). Our application to the Non-medical Research Ethics Board at Western University was not approved due to institutional restrictions regarding the use of student email addresses. Laurentian University's Students' General Association was not a member at the time of administering the survey.

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The survey questionnaire was 118 questions long, although not all respondents were asked every question. The questionnaire was uploaded onto a secure online web platform hosted by CCI Research Inc. Once we received ethics approval, invitations to participate in the survey were sent to students' university emails. Each invitation contained a link to the survey and was mailed from our member student associations. If students decided to take part in the survey, they were directed to a detailed letter of information that explained the risks and benefits of participating as well as the steps taken to keep students' identities and responses private and confidential.

Responses were only recorded after students clicked "submit" at the end of the survey. Respondents could skip any question or invalidate their responses by exiting the browser at any time. All surveys were completed anonymously and participation was entirely voluntary.

To incentivize participation respondents were invited to enter a draw for a chance to win one of two iPad Mini 3 tablets upon completing the survey. Participants were asked to provide their email addresses if they were interested in entering the draw. All voluntarily submitted email addresses were stored separately from survey responses to maintain respondents' anonymity. OUSA never had access to students' email addresses.

Survey participants were recruited using a non-random sampling method. Prior to data analysis, all data were weighted by institutional enrolment to provide a more accurate representation of the OUSA membership at large. In addition to observing differences in descriptive statistics, statistical testing was used to compare means and certain variables' independence from one another. These data analysis techniques helped reveal meaningful patterns in the dataset. Only statistically significant results are reported herein.

LIMITATIONS

As previously stated, the survey was administered to only six of OUSA's then-seven member schools. Unfortunately, the results cannot be generalized to the students attending schools who were unable to participate. Western is the largest OUSA member school so its exclusion from the dataset restricts the sampling frame. This opens results to selection bias. Another limitation, inherent to all survey research, lies in the nature of self-reported data: OUSA must rely on respondents to be honest, truthful, and forthcoming in their responses. Finally, not all students responded to every question, which means less insight is provided in certain areas.



Despite these limitations, the data still hold validity and are useful for providing insight into the student experience. The sample is not made up of a homogenous group of respondents. There are a significant number of students from varying backgrounds and demographics. The survey included several screening and demographic questions to allow for more targeted analyses based on institution, year of study, program of study, identification as having a disability, identification as an Indigenous student, mature student status, full-time status, part-time status, parental education, and parental income. Background information regarding the type of neighbourhood respondents grew up in was also explored to see if differences were found among students who grew up in rural, Northern, or urban communities or on First Nations Reserves. The responses to these questions suggest widespread coverage of the membership. Responses have also been weighted so as to prevent misinterpretations in the data analysis.

RESULTS

SURVEY PARTICIPATION

Over 10,000 students participated in the 2015 Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey. From these participants, we gathered 9,197 complete responses from undergraduate students (surveys were considered complete if the respondent answered at least 30 percent of the questions they were asked). About 225 respondents were disqualified when they indicated they were working towards a Master’s or Doctorate degree.

Results were weighted by institutional enrolment to ensure results would be representative of OUSA’s membership. Weighted participation results are listed in the table below by institution. All further results are weighted.

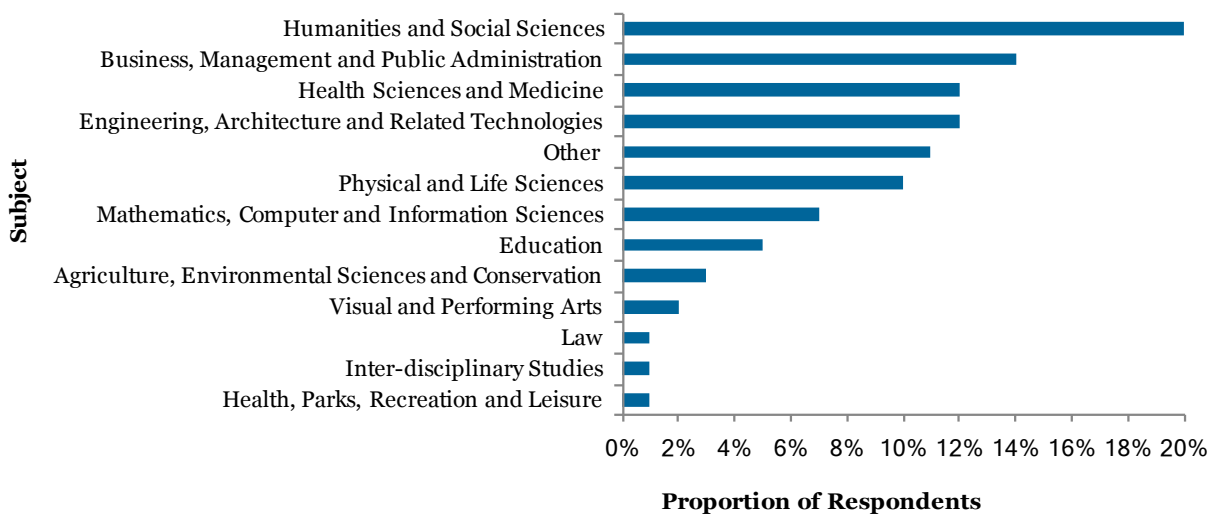
Table 1: Weighted survey participation by institution.

| Institution | Weighted Count | Weighted Proportion |
|----------------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| University of Waterloo | 1778 | 29% |
| McMaster University | 1405 | 23% |
| Queen’s University | 1192 | 19% |
| Brock University | 858 | 14% |
| Wilfrid Laurier University | 851 | 14% |
| Trent University Durham | 51 | 1% |
| Total | 6134 | 100% |

Survey participation was relatively even across academic years of study: 23 percent of respondents were in their first year, 24 percent were in their second year, 25 percent were in their third, and 22 percent were in their fourth year. Very few students (six percent) were in their fifth or higher year of study.

The majority of respondents were studying Humanities or the Social Sciences, however this only represents 20 percent of the sample. The next most common areas of study were Business, Management and Public Administration (14 percent), Health Sciences and Medicine (12 percent) and Engineering, Architecture, and Related Technologies (12 percent). The vast majority of respondents were completing their Bachelor’s degrees (92 percent), but very small minorities were working towards an undergraduate certificate or diploma (three percent) or a professional degree in medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, law, or optometry (one percent). Almost all of the respondents (96 percent) were enrolled full-time; only four percent were enrolled part-time.

Figure 1: Survey participation by field of study, n = 6,132.



We also asked about their immigration status to differentiate between domestic and international students. Among those we consider domestic students, 91 percent reported being Canadian citizens and three percent identified as permanent residents. When asked which province or territory they had graduated from prior to starting their current university program, a vast majority of students (92 percent) identified as graduates from Ontario. The second highest proportion (3 percent) graduated from a high school in British Columbia.

Five percent of respondents identified as international students in Canada on a visa. International students were asked to identify which country they were living in when they applied to university, and while the majority of international applicants that applied to Canadian universities indicated they were from China (47 percent), the next most represented countries included Nigeria (5 percent) and India (3 percent).

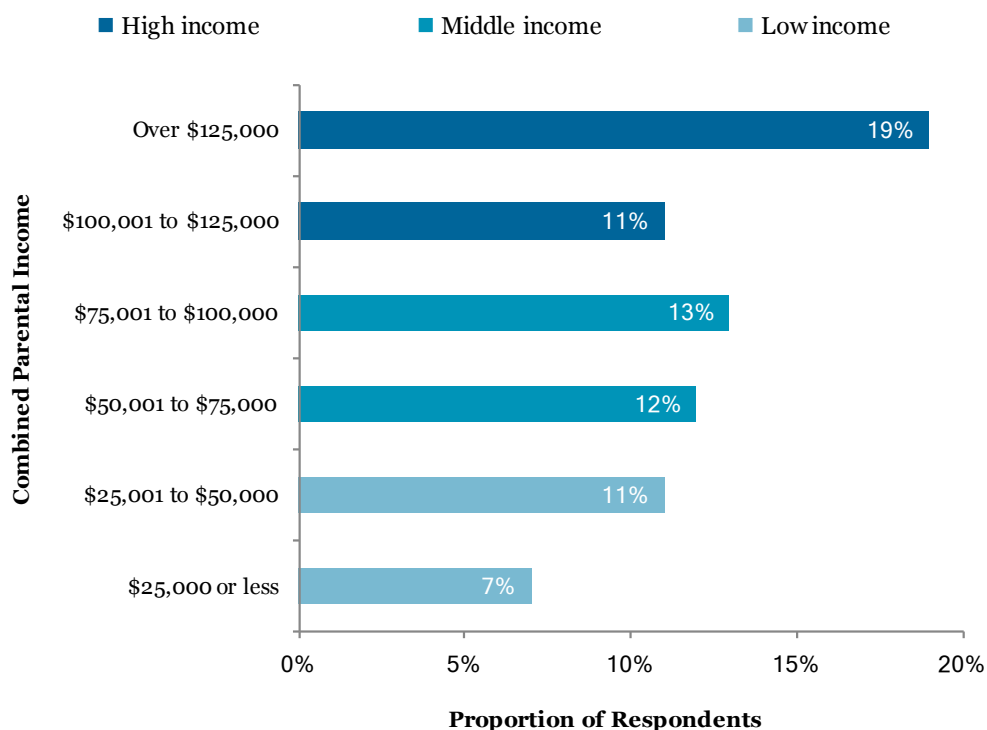
ACCESS GROUPS

Parental Income

As illustrated in figure 2, most of the respondents (55 percent) indicated that they came from middle- to high-income backgrounds. In fact, 19 percent of the respondents reported that their parents' combined income was over \$125,000 per year. A substantial portion of respondents didn't know how much their parents made (14 percent), while another 10 percent preferred not to say. Few students reported their parents made \$25,000 or less per year (7 percent) and even fewer reported their parental income was not applicable (2 percent). A chi-square test for independence found that respondents from low and middle income families (although not the lowest income) tended to study part-time; respondents who reported that their parents' or guardians' income was not applicable were also more likely to report studying part-time, $\chi^2(8) = 42.38, p = < 0.001, \Phi = 0.09$.

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Figure 2: Survey participation by parental income; n = 3,914.

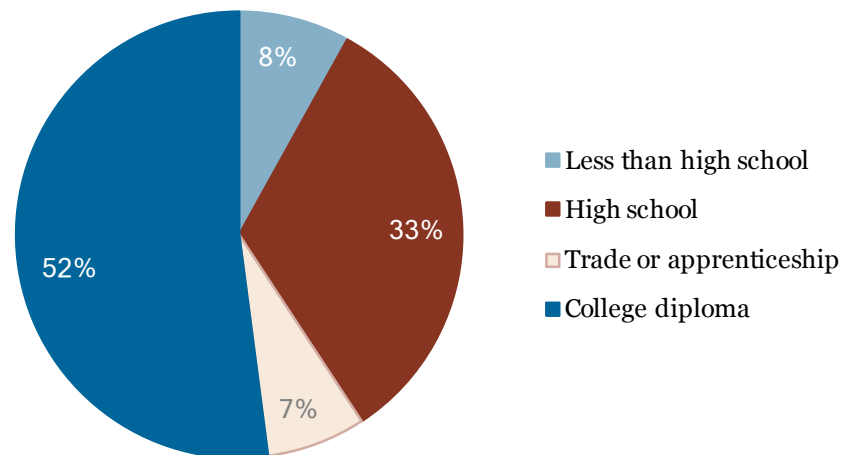


First Generation

Almost one in three respondents indicated that their parents' or guardians' highest post-secondary credential was a university Bachelor's degree. This group is followed by one in five whose parents' held a college diploma as their highest credential and one in six reporting a Master's degree as their parent or guardian's highest credential. A sizable minority of respondents indicated a high school diploma as their parent or guardian's highest credential.

Using this information, we can estimate the proportion of respondents who are the first in their families to attend university (those who are first generation students). Figure 3 separates first generation students according to their parent or guardian's education level; these students represent 37 percent of all respondents.

Figure 3: First generation students by parental education, n = 1,961.



It is also noteworthy that while student support services were deemed a policy priority by 23 percent of all respondents, a third of first generation students (about 22 percent more) felt that it was a policy priority. Similarly, while only 11 percent of the total respondents considered equity and diversity on campus to be a policy priority, 27 percent of first generation students felt that equity and diversity warranted more serious attention.

Indigenous Students

A very small minority (2 percent) of respondents identified as Indigenous or indicated having Indigenous ancestry, which included status or non-status First Nations, Métis, or Inuit (FNMI) identities. Almost none of the sample (just 19 respondents) reported growing up on a First Nations Reserve.

Mature Students

A considerable proportion of respondents in our sample were mature students: 19 percent of respondents were older than 21, which is considered to be above the age of traditional, direct-entry university students. Furthermore, the findings indicate that more than half (56 percent) of mature students were also first generation, about half (49 percent) of them had dependants, two thirds were married or in a common-law relationship, one fifth of our mature student respondents grew up on a First Nations Reserve, and eight percent identified as having some form of disability. Several characteristics associated with mature students were also associated with part-time enrolment status. When compared to full-time students, part-time students were more likely to report having dependents ($\chi^2(2) = 51.74, p = < 0.001, \Phi = 0.10$), being married ($\chi^2(2) = 158.93, p = < 0.001, \Phi = 0.17$), and being older than 21 years ($\chi^2(9) = 421.12, p = .000, \Phi = 0.30$).

LGBTQ+ Identities

Just one percent of respondents identified their gender as something other than man or woman, however, seven percent preferred not to say and not all respondents provided an answer to the question, “what is your gender?” Altogether, 12 percent of respondents identified with a sexual orientation other than heterosexual or straight; two percent identified as gay or lesbian, three percent identified as bisexual or pansexual, and seven percent reported sexual identities other than these. Instead of providing a list of pre-

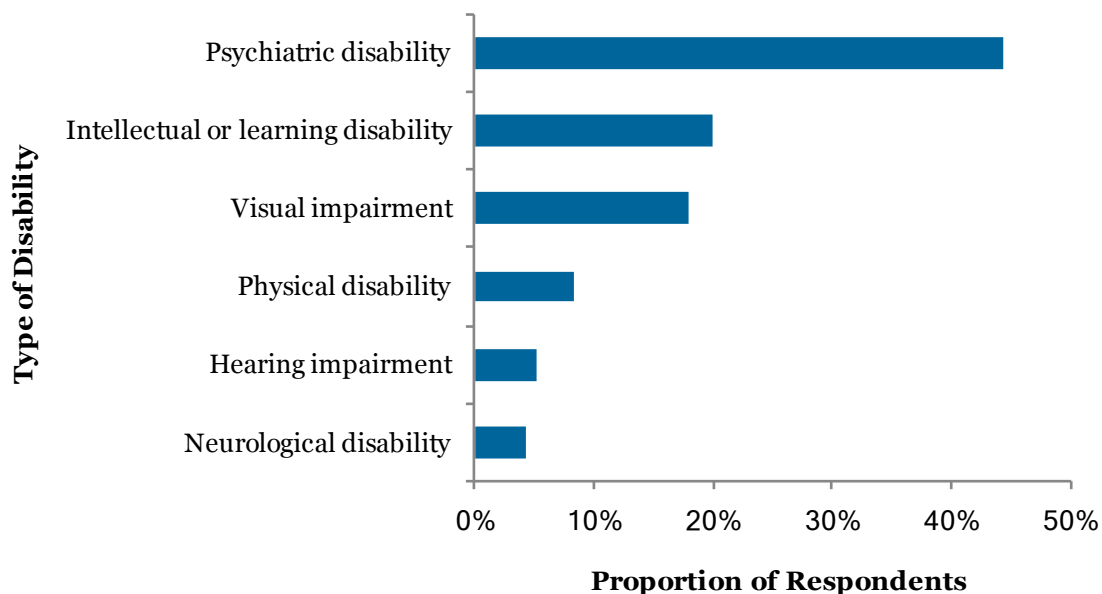
established response categories for genders or sexual orientations, respondents were asked to self-report these identities.

Students with Disabilities

In total, 19 percent of respondents indicated that they would describe themselves as having some type of disability. Among these students, 44 percent identified their disability as psychiatric (disabilities resulting from mental illness); these respondents represent eight percent of the sample. The next most common disability type was intellectual or learning disabilities (affecting individuals' ability to learn tasks or process information) representing 20 percent of those with disabilities and four percent of the sample. Finally, 18 percent of respondents with disabilities described themselves as having a visual impairment; these respondents represent three percent of the entire sample. Respondents were instructed to select all disability types they identified with. The questionnaire relied on the National Educational Association of Disabled Students' definitions of different types of disabilities.

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Figure 4: Survey respondents by disability type, n = 982.²



Community

Two thirds (66 percent) of our respondents reported that they grew up in an urban community, while 27 percent said they grew up in a rural community. Just three percent of respondents described the community they grew up in as northern (located in northern Ontario or another northern part of Canada). Overall, northern and rural students account for almost a third of the respondents in this survey.

We explored whether the community a student was raised in correlated with any demographic characteristics. Those from rural or northern communities had higher proportions of students reporting that they have a disability than those from urban communities. Looking at students who grew up on First Nations Reserves revealed more clear relationships between student characteristics. A larger proportion of students from

First Nations Reserves reported having dependants than students from other communities; around 18 percent of students who grew up on First Nations Reserves reported having dependants versus three to six percent of students from all other community types. A similar pattern can be seen in the proportion of married or common-law students; 11 percent of students from Reserves were married or in a common-law relationship as opposed to the three to six percent from other communities. Given the larger proportion of mature student representation among those who grew up on First Nations Reserves, it is unsurprising that the proportion of students who are married and have dependants is also higher.

CREDIT TRANSFER

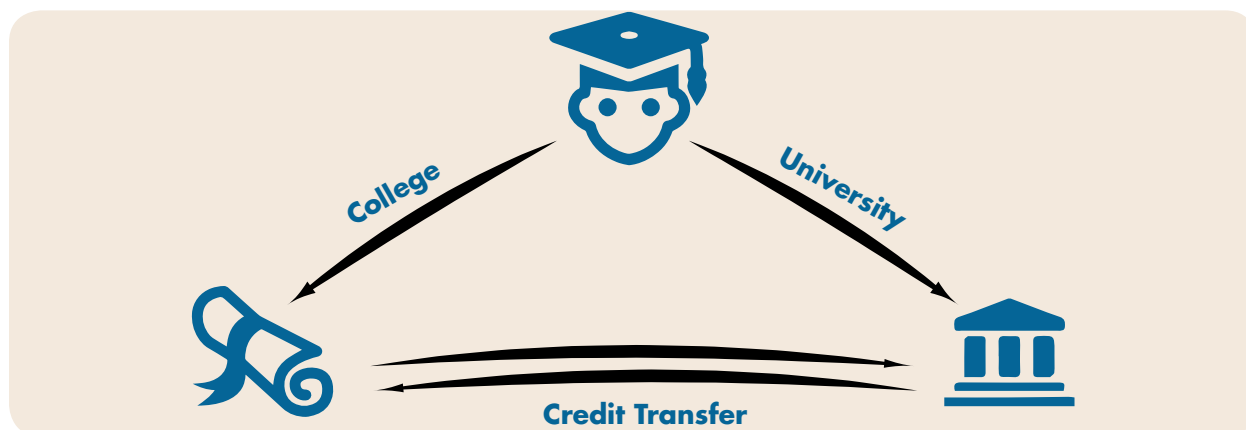
A large portion of the sample—87 percent—indicated never transferring credits between different institutions over the course of their studies. Just 13 percent of respondents had transferred credits. When asked to describe their credit transfer experience, the most students indicated transferring to entirely new institutions (47 percent) or transferring supplementary credits earned at another institution (35 percent). The majority of respondents indicated that these transfers were from within the province—81 percent—while 19 percent originated from out of province. The most common type of transfer was from university to university (used by 71 percent of those who have used credit transfer), followed by 31 percent of students who transferred from college to university.

The results suggest these students are transferring their credits independently; 82 percent said their transfers were not part of a bridging program or pathway and just 18 percent said they were. Only half of those who transferred credits reported that their institution recognized all, or nearly all, of their transferred credits, despite the fact that the majority of these transfers were between universities.

Respondents had diverse motivations for transferring credits between institutions. Over a third (34 percent) of these students reported that one of the reasons they were using credit transfers was to enter into a specific program that wasn't offered at their previous institution. Second, 30 percent of students reported that they transferred to upgrade a credential that they currently held. However, as seen in Table 2 below, many other reasons—some unrelated to academics—shaped our respondents' decisions to transfer institutions.

Table 2: Weighted survey participation by institution.

| Reason for Transfer | Proportion of Students |
|--|------------------------|
| Enter a specific program not offered at previous institution | 34% |
| Upgrade a credential | 30% |
| Be closer to home/family | 22% |
| Be in a specific program that I thought would be better at another institution | 21% |
| Wanted a different campus culture | 20% |
| Other | 18% |
| Live in a different city | 17% |
| Alleviate financial strain | 9% |
| Medical reasons | 3% |
| Pursue particular scholarship | 2% |



We found certain characteristics to be predictive of students' use of credit transfer. Chi-square tests for independence showed weak associations between the use of credit transfer and course load, students' identification with Indigenous heritage, parental education, parental income, disability status, and whether or not the respondent had dependants. The results were such that:

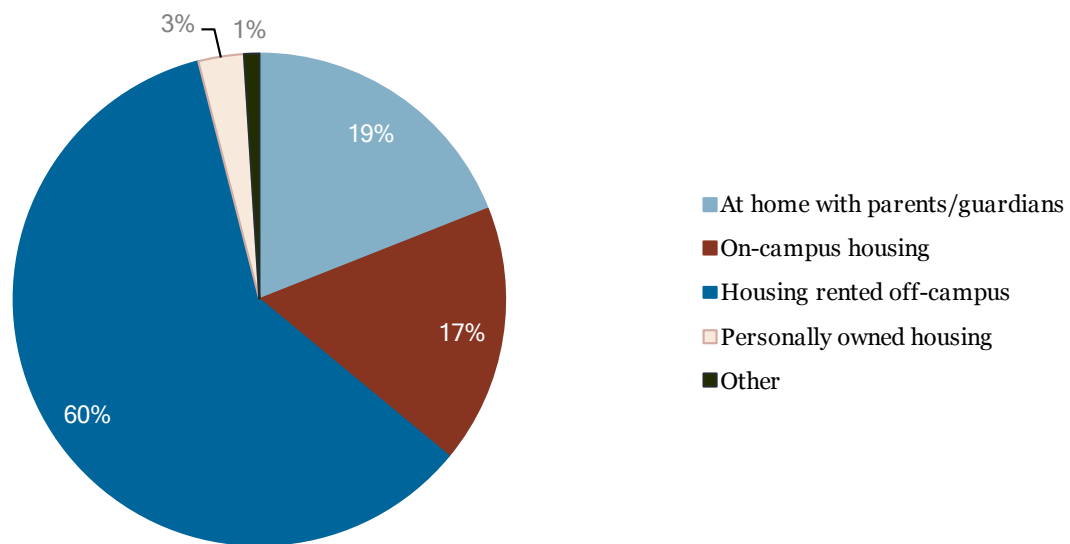
- Full-time students were less likely to say they had transferred credits between two different post-secondary institutions over the course of their studies and more likely to say they had not; part-time students were more likely to say they had transferred credits and less likely to say they had not, $\chi^2(1) = 56.27, p = .000, V = 0.10$;
- Students with First Nations, Metis, or Inuit ancestry were more likely to have transferred credits than students without First Nations, Metis, or Inuit ancestry, $\chi^2(2) = 15.20, p = 0.001, \Phi = 0.05$;
- First generation students were more likely to have transferred credits than students whose parents had attended university, $\chi^2(1) = 14.45, p = < 0.001, V = 0.05$;
- Students from the lowest income background (whose parents made \$25,000 or less) were more likely to have transferred credits than students in any other income group as well, students who indicated their parents' income was not applicable were also more likely to have transferred credits, $\chi^2(8) = 58.07, p = < 0.001, \Phi = 0.11$;
- Students who reported having any disabilities were more likely to have transferred credits than students who did not report having disabilities, $\chi^2(1) = 13.28, p = < 0.001, V = 0.05$; and lastly,
- Students who reported having dependants were more likely to also report transferring credits than students who did not report having dependants, $\chi^2(2) = 112.51, p = < 0.001, \Phi = 0.15$.

Age was the strongest predictor of engagement with credit transfer. A chi-square test for independence showed that mature students (over the age of 21) were more likely to have used credit transfer during their educational career than traditionally aged students (21 and younger) and vice versa, $\chi^2(1) = 380.87, p = < 0.001, V = 0.29$.

STUDENT HOUSING & TRANSPORTATION

We found that 19 percent of the respondents live at home with parents or guardians while they study, 17 percent live in on-campus housing, 60 percent rent an off-campus housing unit, and 3 percent live in a property that they personally own. As such, the overwhelming majority of our respondents (77 percent) report living on or around campus.

Figure 5: Respondents' living spaces during school, n = 5,178.

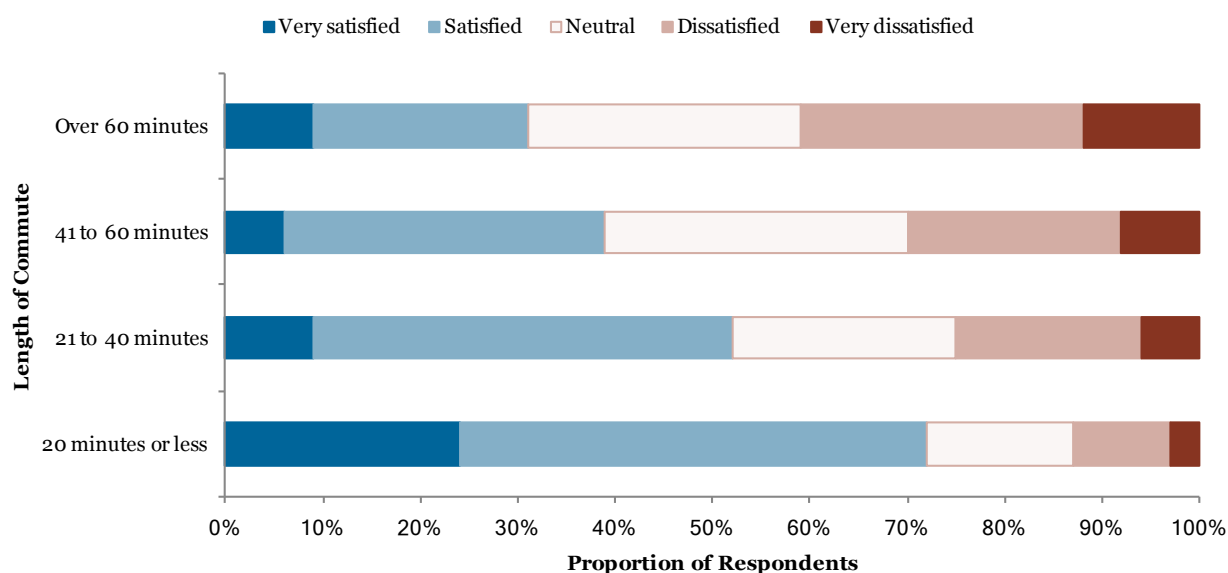


When asked about their perceptions of the housing options available to them, two thirds (66 percent) of the respondents living in off-campus housing reported feeling very satisfied or satisfied with the quantity of housing units available, but over a third (36 percent) reported feeling dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the quality of the housing units available to them.

The survey also found that 41 percent of students reported taking public transit to commute to campus on a regular basis. The majority (69 percent) of these commuters report commute times less than 20 minutes. Furthermore, the majority (63 percent) of the respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied with the transit service they receive. On the other hand, almost a fifth (18 percent) were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the quality of transit service received. There is a correlation in our data between the length of one's commute and their level of satisfaction, which is illustrated in figure 6 below. Essentially, students with lower commute times tend to have more positive feelings towards the public transit system, $\chi^2(12) = 203.49, p < 0.001, \Phi = 0.31$.



Figure 6: Respondents' satisfaction with public transit, by length of commute, n = 2,103.



DISCUSSION

Part of this survey was designed to explore the sector's accessibility for undergraduate students, as well as to gain insight into how to improve it. Results indicate that students consider the accessibility of their institutions to be of moderate significance as a policy priority. When asked to choose the policy initiative in need of the most improvement: 23 percent said student support services, 11 percent said equity and diversity on campus, and 6 percent said credit transfer. The findings demonstrate which demographic groups continue to be underrepresented within the OUSA membership and also illuminate some access issues for the student population more broadly.

The majority of the students surveyed indicated that they came from middle- to high-income backgrounds, with 30 percent of our students in high-income groups (their parents' combined income was \$100,001 per year or more) and 25 percent in middle-income groups (their parents' combined income was between \$50,000 and \$100,000 per year). While the average student in our membership is less likely to face serious financial barriers, low-income students continue to be underrepresented with just 18 percent of students indicating they come from low-income families.

Most of our membership's parents are fairly well educated. A sizeable portion—over a third—can be considered first generation students and a little over half of these first generation students' parents holding college diplomas, suggesting some familiarity with post-secondary education. While our membership's capacity to access higher education is fairly high, a telling finding is seen within this group's priorities for improving their experience. Compared to their peers, more first generation students deemed support services and equity and diversity as in need of more attention.

These findings reaffirm the need for student support services to be targeted to first generation students who, despite high rates of familial experience in the college and training sector, still indicate a need for support at the university level. These students' perceptions of equity and accessibility are more likely to impact their overall success as undergraduates given the other identities that intersect with this characteristic.

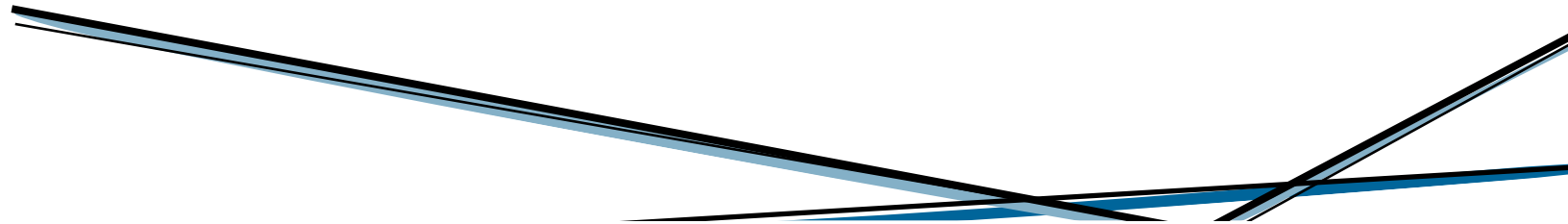
The proportion of first generation students was highest in rural, northern, and First Nations Reserve communities. This implies that provincial efforts to improve outreach to, and resources for, these communities are working, but emphasizes the need to diversify support services to better assist first generation students from potentially marginalized backgrounds.

This survey also revealed a substantial population of students with disabilities among our membership. In total, about one in five respondents indicated having some type of disability, with most saying they live with psychiatric disabilities related to mental illness, learning disabilities, and/or visual impairments. The proportion of students with disabilities was highest among students who grew up in rural and northern communities. It is clear from these findings that psychiatric disabilities are a serious issue for undergraduate students, and a truly accessible university sector has a responsibility to support these students so that they may register, persist, and graduate from their respective programs. There is a clear need for a robust support system in Ontario universities, which prioritizes issues of mental health and wellbeing among our most vulnerable students.

It is noteworthy that 30 percent of all the students in our survey may be coming from remote communities since this is a significant proportion of our membership. These students are often as the first in their family to attend university and managing a disability. More of our students come from rural areas: only 3 percent of respondents described the community they grew up in as a northern community (located in northern Ontario or another northern part of Canada), 27 percent of respondents said they grew up in a rural community.

More broadly, we found part-time students to also have competing priorities and commitments. Those who reported they studied part-time were also more likely to report being mature students, coming from a low-income background, having dependants, and being married or in a common-law relationship.





Our survey suggests a need to be mindful of the potentially marginalized students—Indigenous students, those with disabilities, mature students, students from remote communities—who benefit, and identify with, more universally planned support services for first generation students and/or part-time students. Such mindfulness necessitates the use of an “equity and diversity lens,” at structural and planning levels. Shifting perspectives in this way could go a long way in acknowledging and elevating the presence of non-traditional student identities on campus.

Our respondents had fairly limited experiences with Ontario’s credit transfer pathways. When asked about the use of credit transfers between two different institutions, only 13 percent of students had experience with this while 87 percent of had not. However, most interestingly, respondents who identified with many of our access groups (namely, Indigenous, first generation, low-income, and mature students and students with disabilities, and students with dependants) were the most likely to have transferred credits over the course of their post-secondary studies. For these students, credit transfer can offer an alternative, non-linear pathway through the post-secondary sector. As such, it could be an invaluable option for these students. It is important then that credit transfer pathways within the province are strengthened to remove any potential barriers.

Approximately, 30 percent of those who had transferred credits reported that they did so to upgrade an existing credential. The minimal use of credit transfers may be due to barriers to transferring and the success of transferring. Very few students engaged in some type of facilitated transfer via a bridging program and only half of students reported having all, or nearly, all of their transferred credits recognized by their institutions. This illustrates that continued efforts to enhance credit transfers and student mobility pathways between institutions are essential. The Ontario Council for Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT) will need ongoing support to continue making strides in these areas, and building seamless pathways that bolster accessibility for all students.

More broadly speaking, the overwhelming majority of our respondents (77 percent) reported living on or around campus as tenants. While students do not seem to struggle to find rental units on- or off-campus (as most were satisfied with the quantity of units), there remains a general lack of quality housing units. This could have detrimental impacts on students’ academic success, mental health, or overall wellbeing. We also found 41 percent of students reported taking public transit regularly throughout the school year to commute to campus. Most students commuted less than 20 minutes and were satisfied with the transit service available to them. However, there seemed to be a correlation in our data between the length of one’s commute and their level of satisfaction. Essentially, students with lower commute times on public transit tended to have more positive feelings towards the public transit system. Effective and efficient public transit is important to a vast majority of students not living on campus and the province should incentivize institutions to strike partnerships with their municipalities to ensure that these services remain of high quality. In the long term though universities, municipalities, and the provincial government need to work together in order to find ways to make quality and affordable housing more accessible to students.

CONCLUSION

Accessibility is an important issue for OUSA's student membership. Equity and diversity on campus, as well as requisite support services for marginalized groups, are areas that Ontario's undergraduates value. As such, concerns are apparent for first generation students, Indigenous students, students with disabilities, and mature students, as each of these demographic groups face unique—and yet interconnected—barriers to university education in terms of financial resources, external commitments, and institutional mobility.

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Going forward, the government should focus its policy efforts towards enhancing the overall accessibility of Ontario's universities, which should not only emphasize equitable access, but also equitable persistence. This should be done fiscally via special purpose grants for institutions serving higher proportions of marginalized populations, as well as systemically via broader outreach programs designed to eliminate informational resource barriers to first generation, rural, and northern students across the province. The Ministry must also prioritize accessibility as a key element of the new funding formula, which could take the form of performance-based grants.

This research on access to university education is an important component of OUSA's advocacy process. The OPSSS allows the organization to confirm anecdotal concerns of student members and make evidence-based recommendations to sector partners. It is our hope that our partners will also use this information to inform their advocacy and policy development efforts. Maintaining the accessibility of post-secondary education is a collective responsibility; a goal that can only be achieved by sharing research, data, and maintaining a focus on students.

This report has focused on members' responses that relate to getting through the doors of the province's universities and achieving success. Our biennial student survey was designed, however, to gain insight into a multitude of aspects of the student experience. The OPSSS also provides comprehensive data on students' behaviours and attitudes, concerns and preferences related to student financial assistance, university affordability, teaching and learning, civic engagement, and student life. We invite you to read the other two reports based on this survey, which highlight the themes of affordability and quality in Ontario's universities.

ENDNOTES

1. Statistics Canada, "Table 477-0116 Educational attainment of the population aged 25 to 64, off-reserve Aboriginal, non-Aboriginal, and total population, Canada, provinces and territories, occasional (percent)," CANSIM (database), January 6, 2016.
2. "Making Extra-Curricular Activities Inclusive," NEADS.ca, accessed June 2015, http://www.neads.ca/en/about/projects/inclusion/guide/pwd_01.php.

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