

RSP Advocacy Survey Report

May 2023

Introduction:

In the Winter 2023 term, 508 undergraduate students signed up to participate in the Representative Survey Platform (RSP). In the following survey, 320 students participated, resulting in a response rate of approximately 63%. The goals of this survey were to understand the concerns and struggles students are currently dealing with, learn how students understand and engage with advocacy work and understand what advocacy priorities students want WUSA to focus on for the coming year. The survey was live from March 6 to 17, 2023.

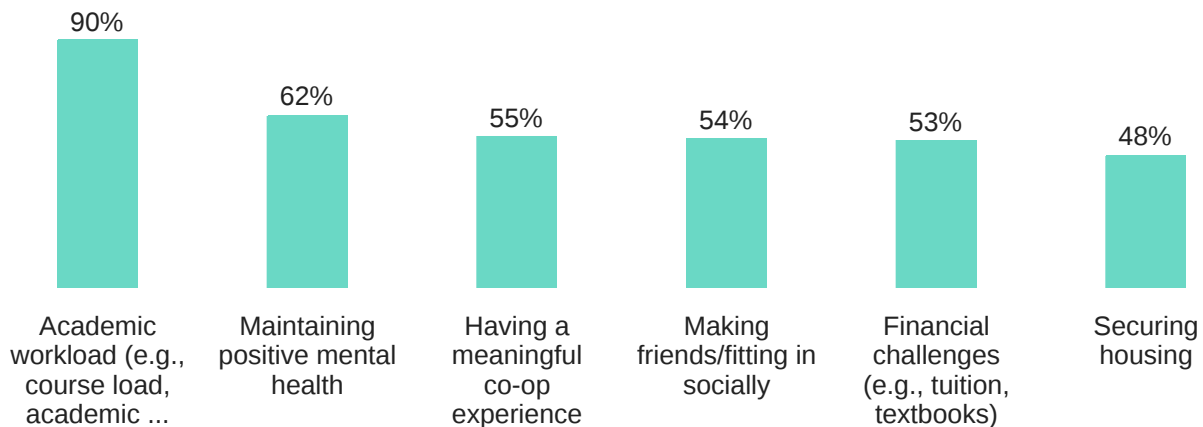
Key Findings:

- 92.6% of students either strongly agree or somewhat agree that WUSA provides important services for students
- 44.3% of students either strongly disagree or somewhat disagree that they know how to get in touch with someone at WUSA if they need to
- 66% of participants are either knowledgeable or somewhat knowledgeable about the advocacy work WUSA does
- Students rated affordability as the most important advocacy issue to them
- 70% of students indicated that they want to see WUSA advocate for student mental health next year
- Most students (39%) want to engage with WUSA advocacy by attending events related to a specific topic
- Most students (27%) want to stay informed about the progress of WUSA advocacy through @yourwusa Instagram

Overall Social and Academic Experience

Participants were first asked to describe their overall social and academic experience at the University of Waterloo in the last six months. The results show that students have mixed feelings about their social and academic experiences. Those who described their overall social experience as positive shared that participating in clubs and other extracurricular activities on campus improved their social engagement. In contrast, those who rated their social experience negatively shared that due to their overwhelming course load, they did not have the time to socialize. Additionally, those who described their overall academic experience as positive explained that it was because they enjoyed the ability to choose courses they found interesting. On the other hand, those who described their overall academic experience negatively shared that their courses are very fast-paced and have increased the number of deliverables required.

Figure 1: Which of the following are stressors for you as a post-secondary student?



Overall, the highest percentage of students indicated that academic workload was a stressor for them, with 90% of students selecting this option. Those students who selected "other" included the following answers:

- Networking
- Being involved in extracurricular activities
- Finding a co-op position
- Supporting family
- Staying healthy (E.g., cooking nutritious meals, exercising)

Figure 2: In which of the following ways have you engaged with WUSA in the past 6 months (i.e., since September 2022)?

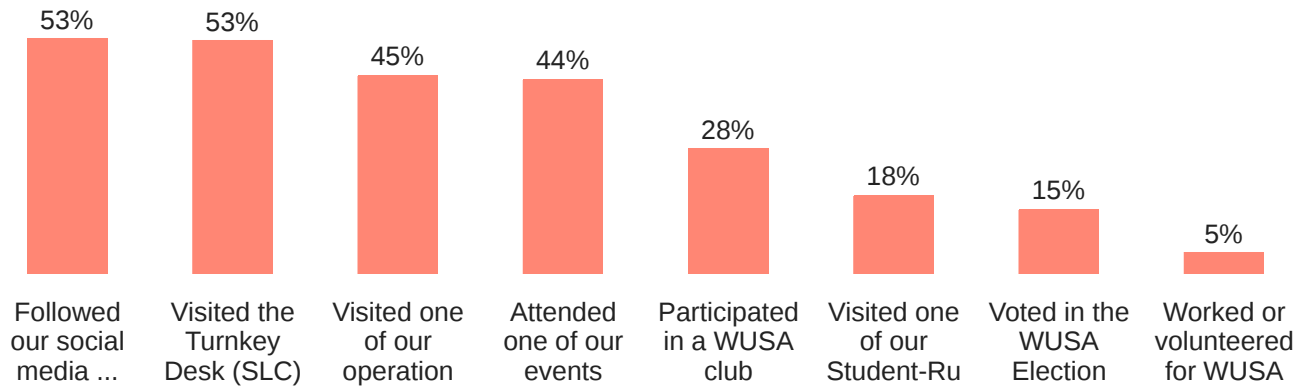
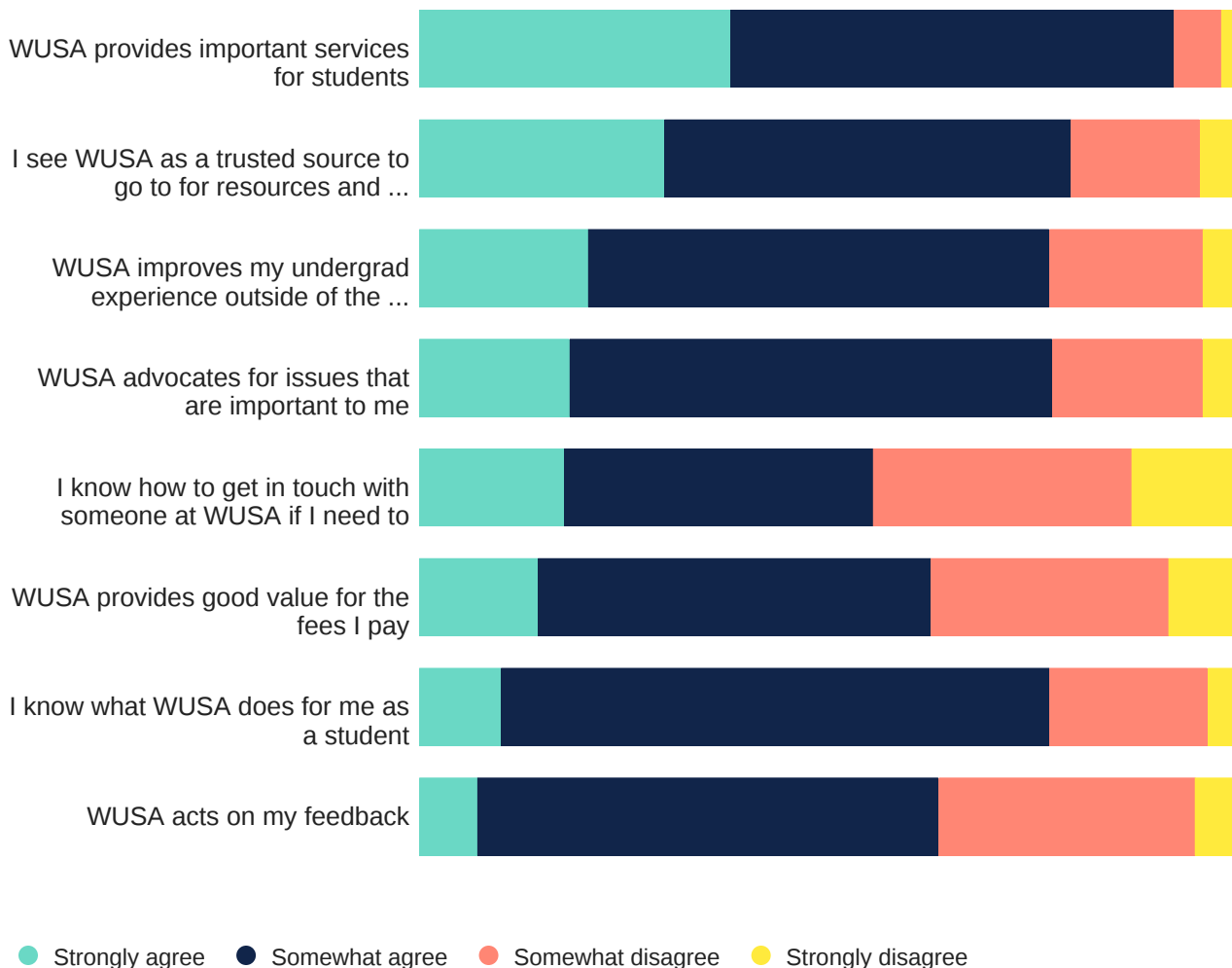


Figure 2 demonstrates that the two most common ways that students have engaged with WUSA in the past 6 months is through social media and visiting the Turnkey Desk.

Figure 3: Student Understanding of WUSA



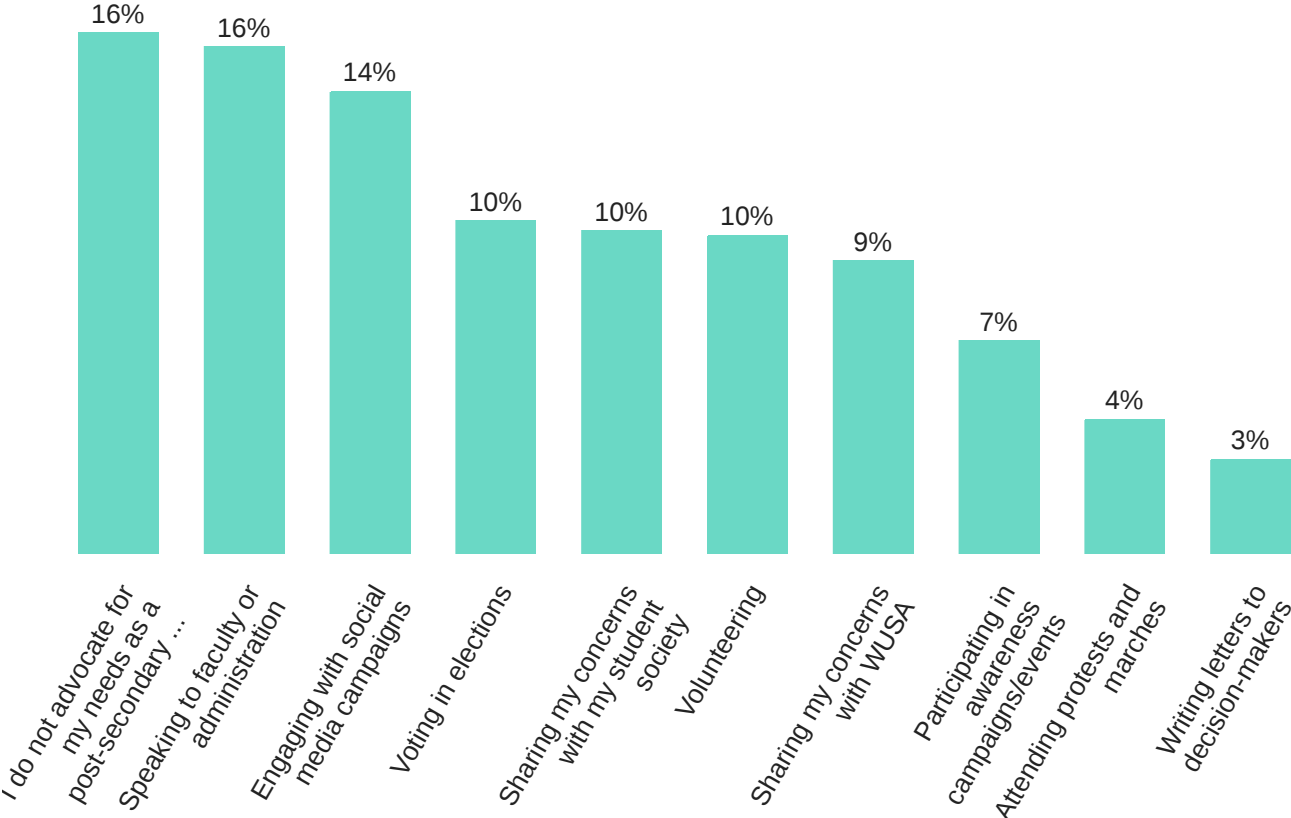
As demonstrated in Figure 3, the statement with the highest percentage of "strongly agree" and "somewhat agree" responses was "WUSA provides important services for students," with 92.6% of students selecting these options. On the other hand, the statement that received the highest percentage of "somewhat disagree" and "strongly disagree" responses was "I know how to get in touch with someone at WUSA if I need to," with 44.3% of students selecting these options.

Defining "Advocacy"

Participants were asked to share what advocacy means to them as post-secondary students. Participants shared the following:

- "Taking the **initiative** to speak and take action on our behalf on issues we collectively experience as students"
- "**Amplifying** someone else"
- "Voicing and **supporting the needs** of the general public or certain groups of people"
- "Taking **action**"
- "Attempting to **make things better** on the whole"
- "Being **outspoken** about things you believe in"
- "Postings on **social media** and **post boards**"
- "Advocacy means taking the time to **hear students' concerns** and looking for solutions"

Figure 4: How do you currently advocate for your needs as a post-secondary student?

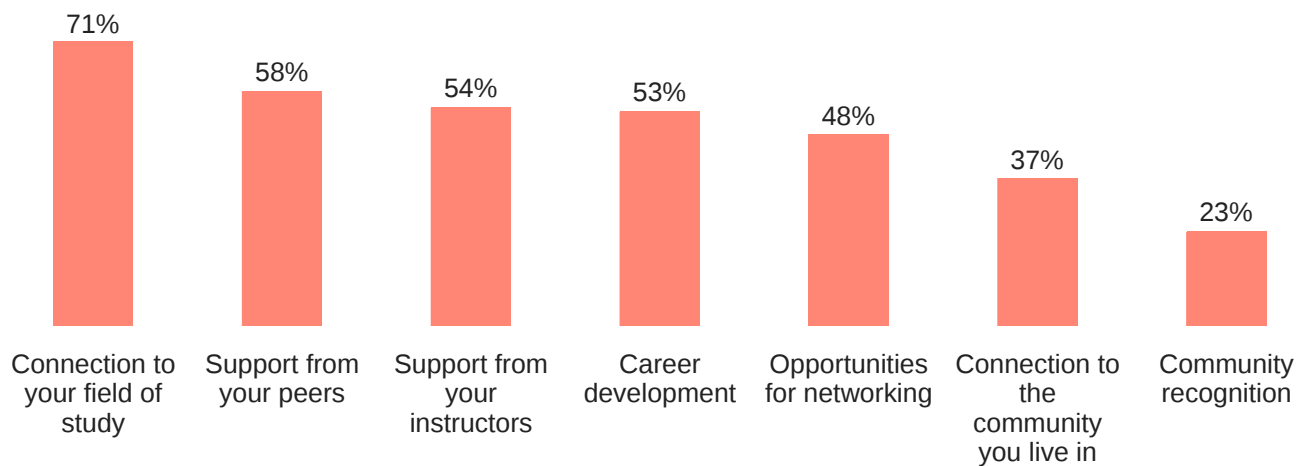


Advocacy Challenges

Participants were asked to name some challenges they face when advocating for their needs as post-secondary students. The challenges include:

- Lack of awareness of who to contact
- Not having the time or support
- Fear of judgement
- Feeling discouraged due to the lack of action taken by higher-ups
- Stigma and discrimination.

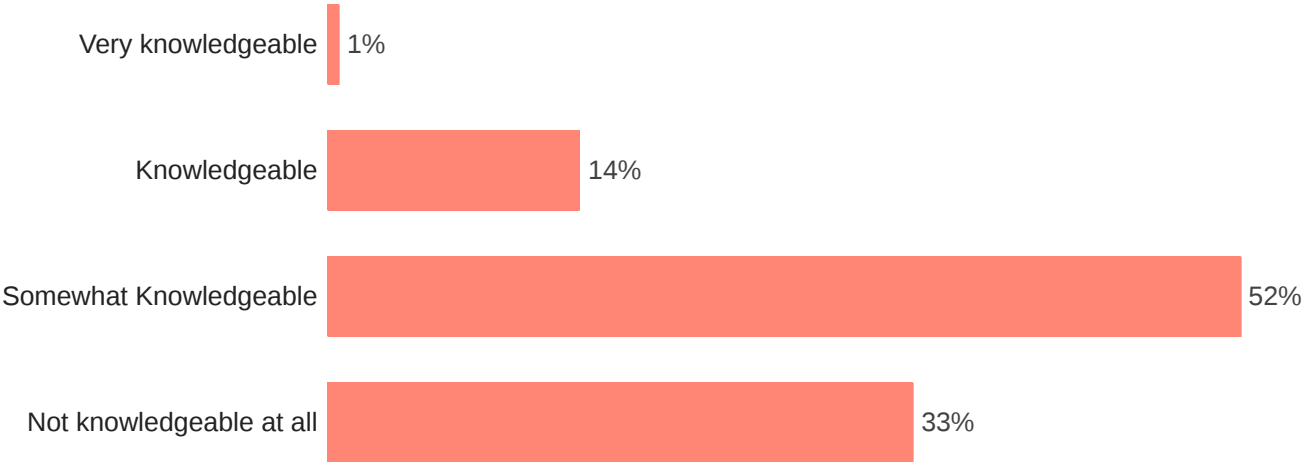
Figure 5: Which of the following would encourage you to participate more in advocacy related activities?



Those students who selected "other" including the following ideas:

- Monetary compensation/incentives
- More time
- "Guarantee of being heard listened to, and getting a response or a solution for problems. Not abandoning initiatives when students graduate but having a good faith transfer of information to the incoming students regarding all initiatives and their statuses"

Figure 6: How knowledgeable are you about the advocacy work WUSA does on behalf of students?



As demonstrated in Figure 6, most students (52%) are somewhat knowledgeable about the advocacy work WUSA does on behalf of students.

Figure 7: Which of the following WUSA advocacy efforts from this past year are you aware of?

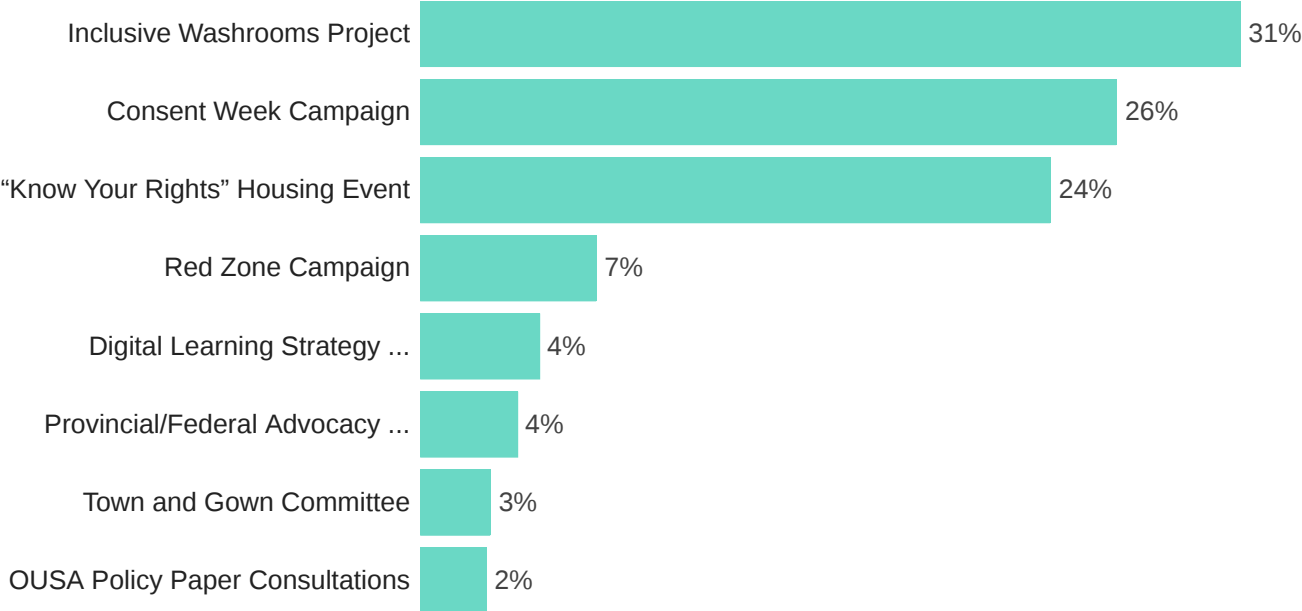


Figure 8: WUSA identified five main advocacy priorities in their 2020-2025 Long Range Plan. Please rank the importance of them to you (1 = most important, 5 = least important)



Figure 8 demonstrates how students ranked the current WUSA advocacy priorities. The priority that was ranked as most important was affordability, with an average rating of 2.14. This was followed by educational quality (2.29), housing (2.86), equity and accessibility of education (3.28) and international students (4.42).

Figure 9: In addition to the five main advocacy priorities, please pick the top two issues that you would most like to see WUSA advocate on next year:

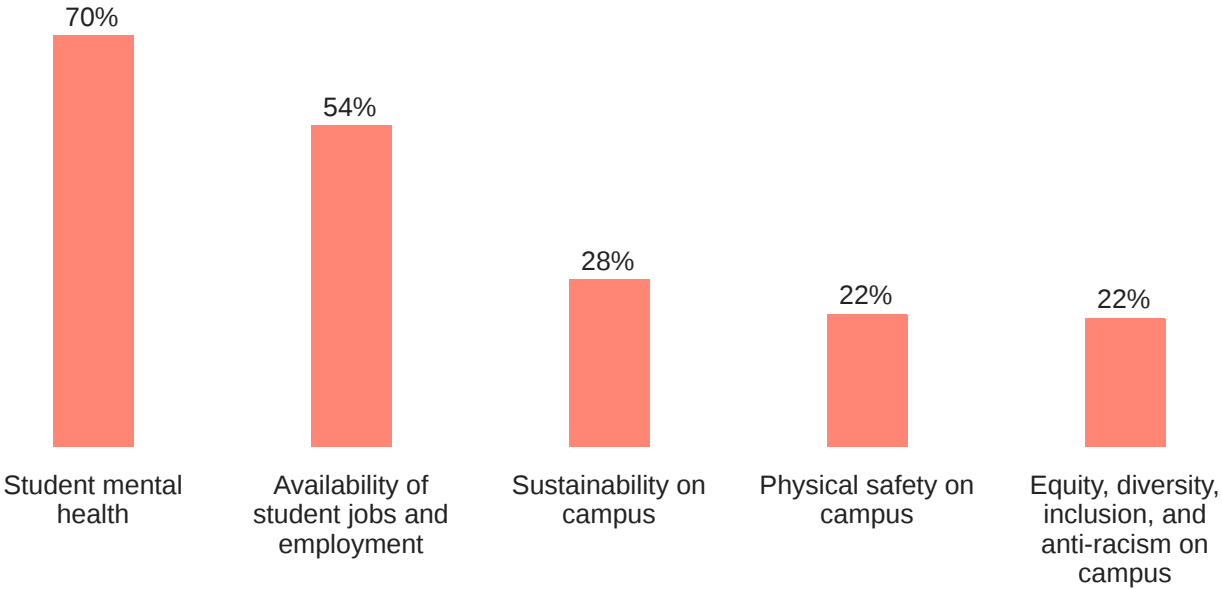


Figure 10: I would like to engage in WUSA Advocacy by...

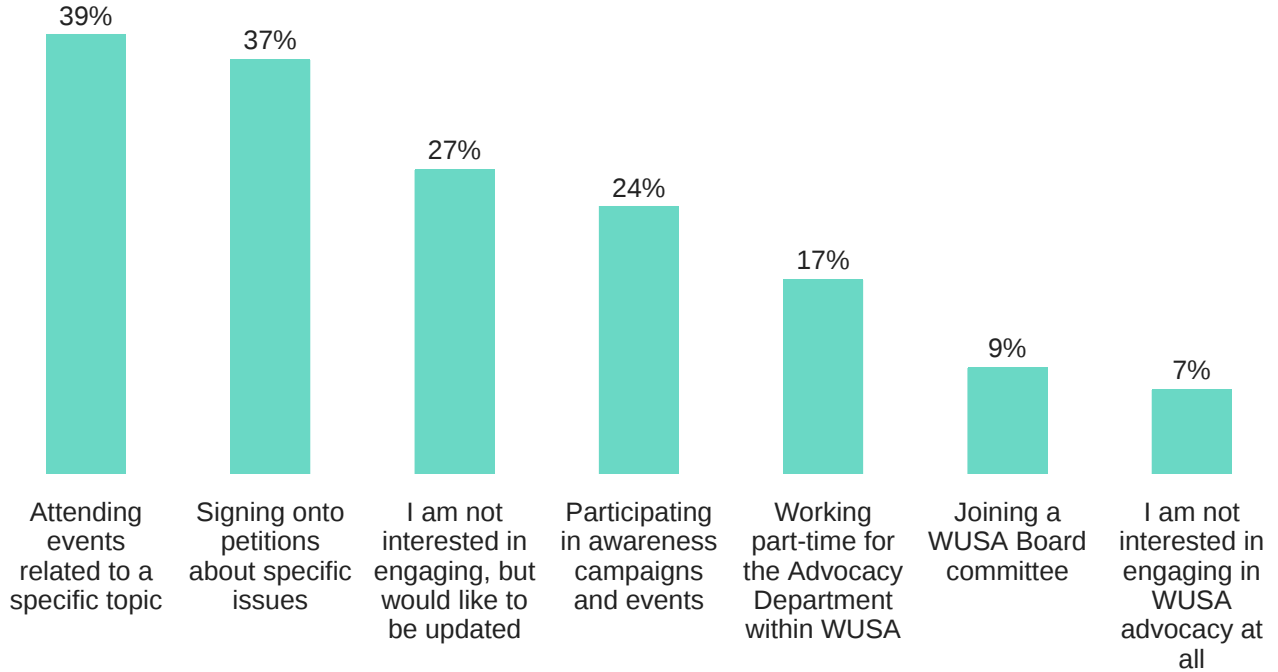
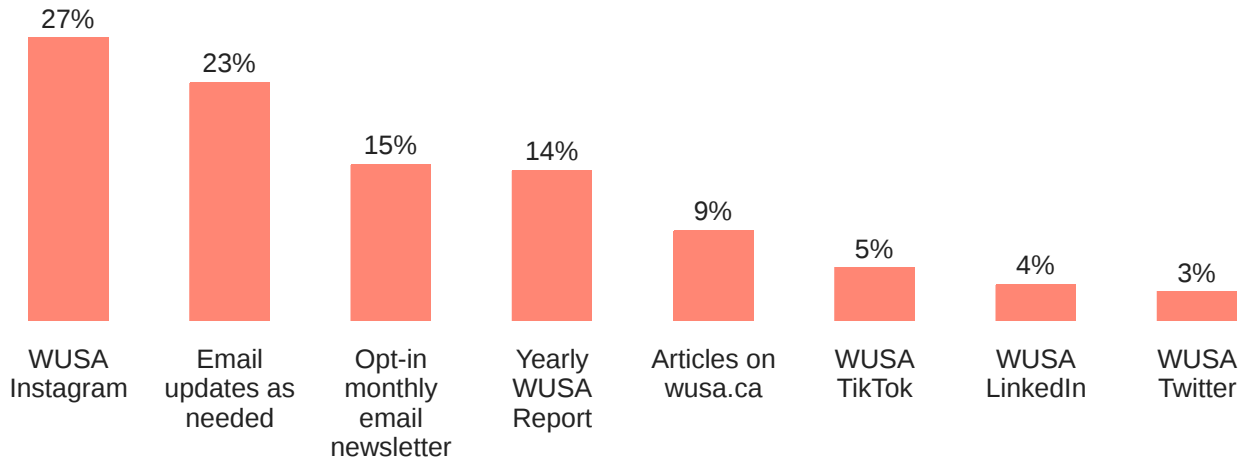


Figure 11: How would you like to stay informed about the progress and outcomes of WUSA advocacy?



Additional feedback on WUSA Advocacy

Participants were asked to share how WUSA can advocate their needs for next year. The suggestions include the following:

- Posting advocacy initiatives on social media pages
- More surveys or direct methods of communication between students and WUSA
- Make information regarding advocacy initiatives more accessible
- Supporting students on issues regarding affordability and housing
- Mental health awareness and support
- Improve campus safety
- Supporting international students with tuition, housing, and better medical care

Recommendations

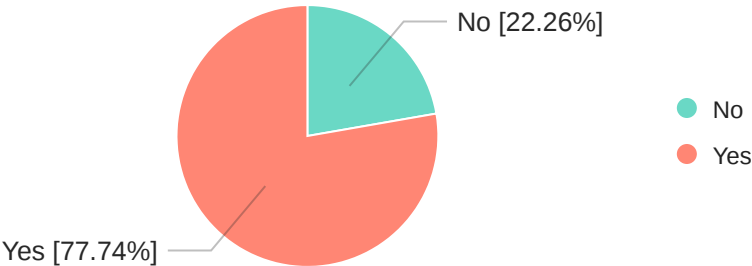
Based on the findings of this survey, it is recommended that WUSA considers the following:

- **Continue to support and advocate for the academic needs of students.** Academic workload was identified as the top stressor for students.
- **Provide students with more free mental health resources and supports.** Most students selected “maintaining positive mental health” as a stressor for them and student mental health was identified by students as the top additional use WUSA should advocate for.
- **Plan events related to various advocacy topics.** Most student wanted to engage with WUSA advocacy in this way.
- **Encourage students to participate in advocacy activities by creating strong connections between advocacy and different fields of study.**
- **Remove challenges such as fear of judgement, stigma and discrimination from advocacy spaces.**
- **Continue to advocate for a more affordable education.** This area was ranked as the most important current WUSA priority.
- **Increase student awareness of how to communicate with WUSA if they need support and our advocacy efforts in general.**
- **Implement a better process for acting on student feedback and sharing the progress and outcomes of our advocacy efforts.** Sharing on @yourwusa Instagram and email updates were the top methods students preferred.

Demographics

Demographic information is collected from RSP participants when they sign up to participate. The demographic breakdown below includes only information from participants who completed this survey. This information can be used to contextualize the survey results.

Figure 12: Are you a co-op student?



As seen in Figure 12, 77.74% of students who responded to the survey identified as being enrolled in the co-op program. [The IAP student headcount data shows that](#) the actual percentage of co-op students for the Winter 2023 term was 75.20%, meaning that we slightly over-selected co-op students in this survey.

Figure 13: Do you identify as disabled?

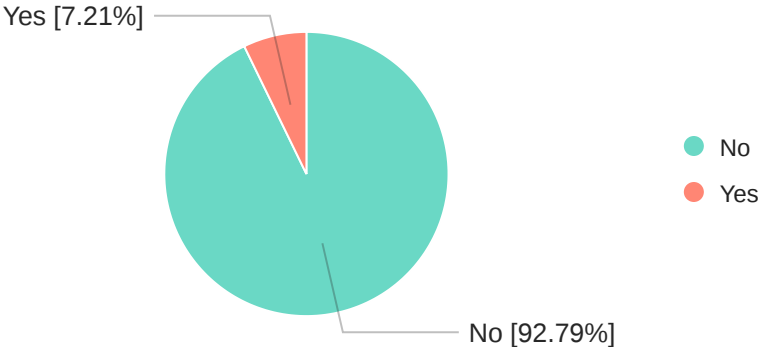


Figure 14: Do you identify as racialized?

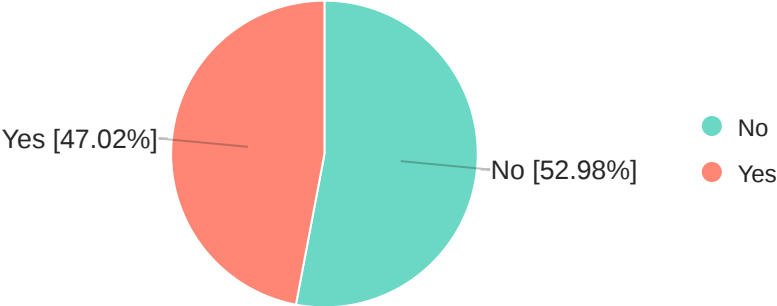


Figure 15: Which faculty are you in?

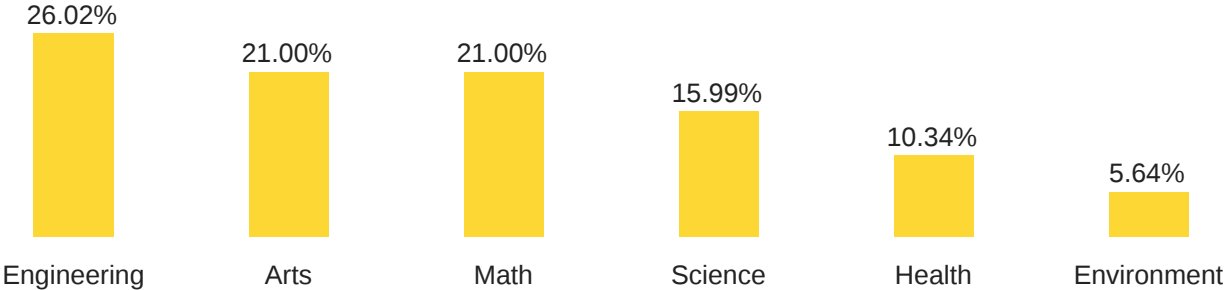


Figure 16: What is your gender identity?

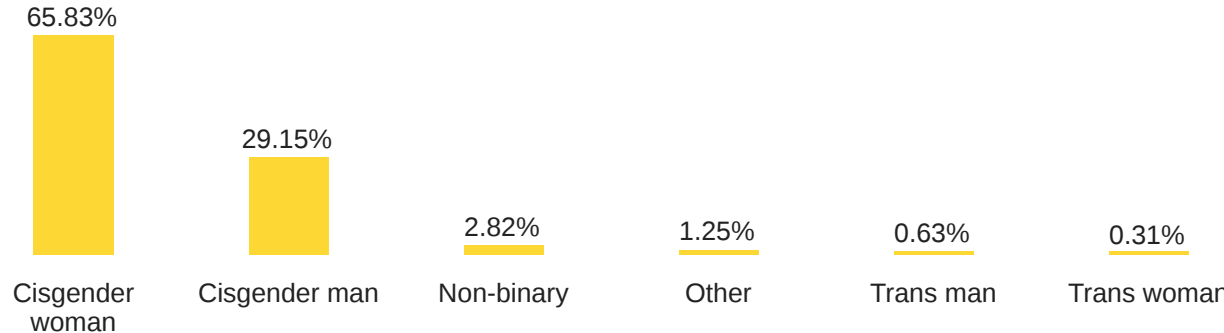
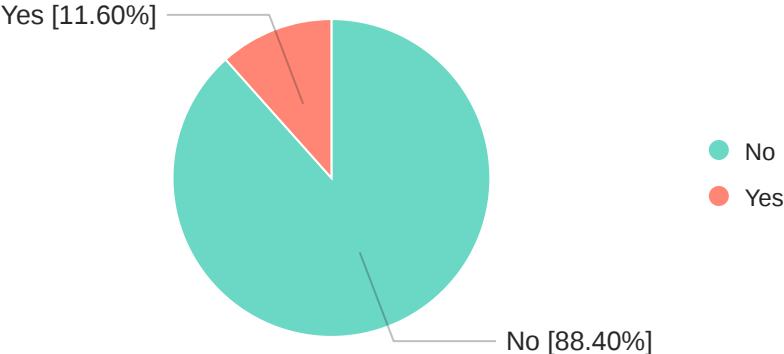


Figure 17: Are you an international student?



As seen in Figure 17, 11.60% of students who responded to the survey identified as international students. [The IAP student headcount data shows that](#) the actual percentage of international students for the Winter 2023 term was 17.85%, meaning that we under selected international students in this survey.

Figure 18: Which year of study are you in?

