

RSP Affordability Survey Report

May 2023

Introduction:

In the Winter 2023 term, 508 undergraduate students signed up to participate in the Representative Survey Platform (RSP). Of those students, 345 participated in the Affordability Survey, resulting in a response rate of 67.9%. The goals of this survey were to understand students' financial situation, what they may be struggling to afford and how aware students are of the cost-saving offerings that WUSA provides. We also wanted to understand, in general, what students think WUSA should do to help make their university experience more affordable. The survey was live from February 6 to 17, 2023.

Key Findings:

- 60.76% of students are responsible for paying for their textbooks on their own
- 29.70% of students indicate that they cannot afford mental health support each term
- 91.9% of students always or usually pay off their credit card bill each month
- 56% of participants were either very concerned or somewhat concerned about having enough money available to complete their education
- Most students (67%) indicated that concerns about affording their education impacts their mental health either always or sometimes
- 53.80% of participants ranked tuition as having the most positive impact on them if its cost were reduced
- 38.01% of participants ranked housing as having the most positive impact on them if its cost were reduced
- 71.93% of participants were not aware of the Food Support Service
- 43.24% of participants ranked advocating for more affordable housing in the Waterloo Region as the most important priority for WUSA to focus on

Figure 1: Which option best describes your current living situation?

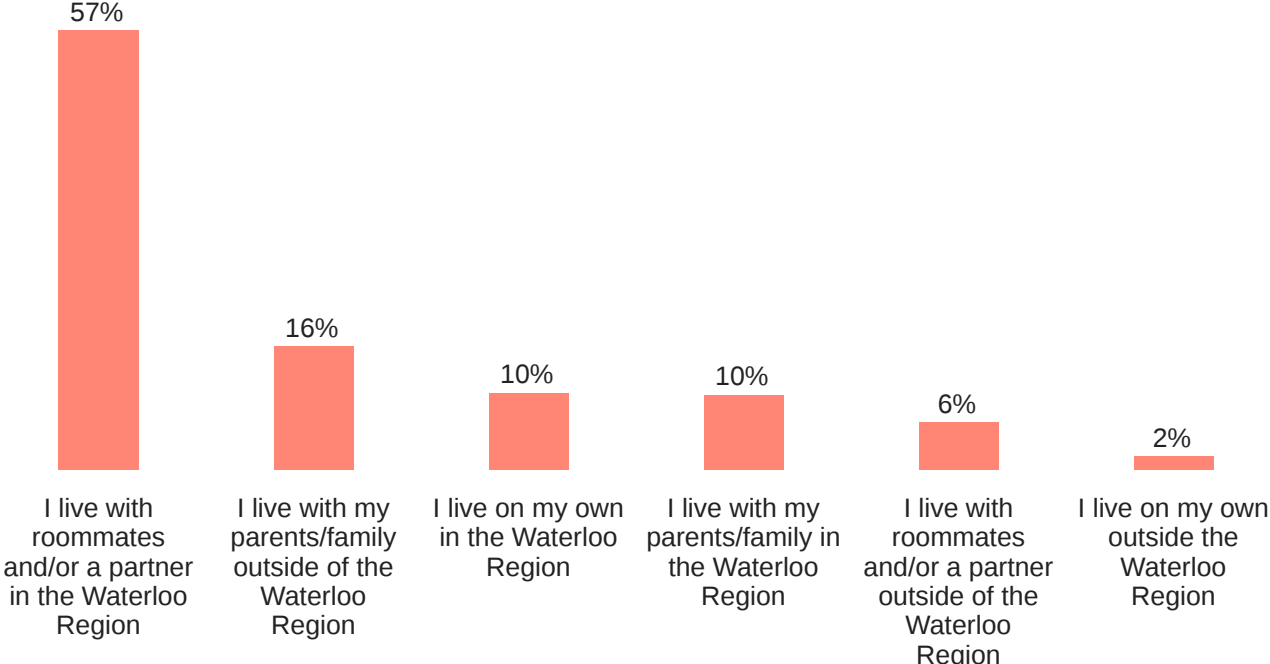


Figure 2: Who is responsible for paying for your education related costs in the following areas?

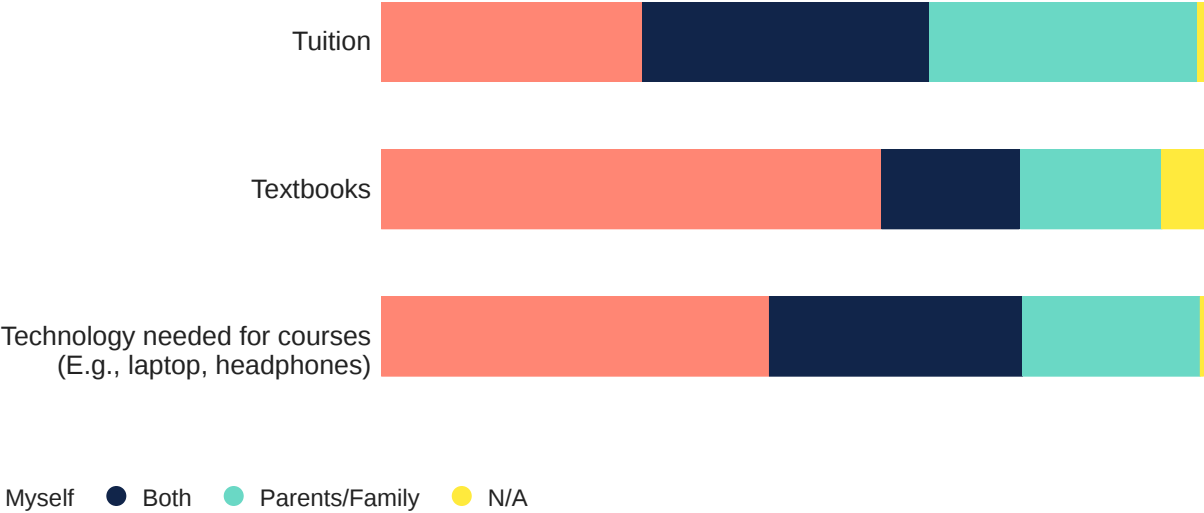


Figure 2 demonstrates that when it comes to education costs, 60.76% of students are responsible for paying for their textbooks, which is higher than both technology (47.06%) and tuition (31.69%). On the other hand, 32.56% of students indicated that their parents/family are responsible for paying for their tuition, which is higher than both technology (21.51%) and textbooks (17.15%).

Figure 3: Who is responsible for paying for your living related costs in the following areas?

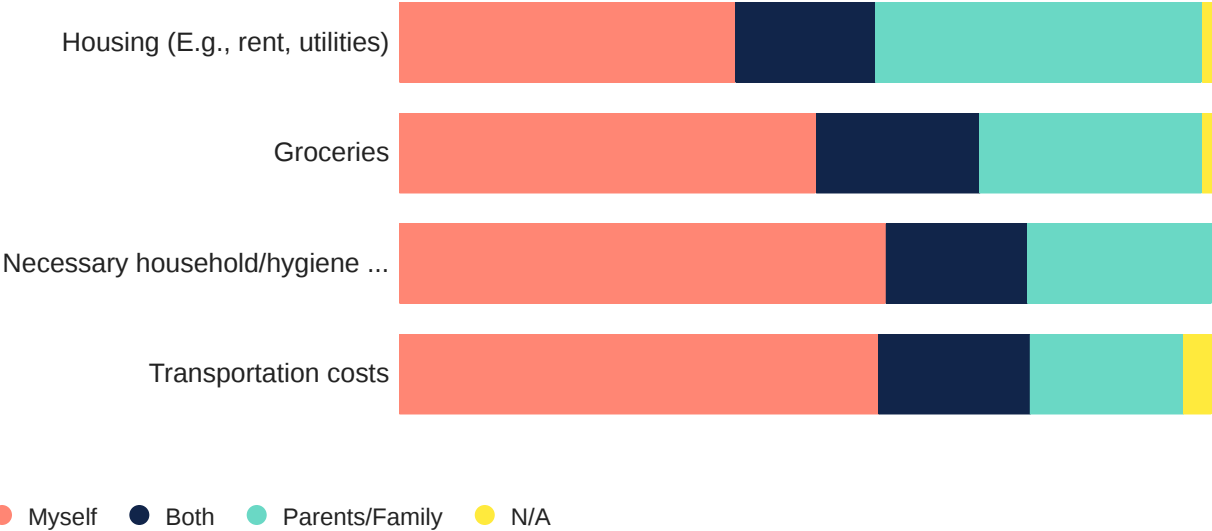


Figure 3 demonstrates that when it comes to living costs, necessary household/hygiene products and transportation costs are the two costs that students are most responsible for, at 59.88% and 59.01%, respectively. This is compared to groceries and housing, which only 51.31% and 41.40% of students are responsible for paying for. On the other hand, 40.23% of students indicated that their parents/family are responsible for paying for their housing costs, which is higher than groceries (27.41%), groceries (22.67%) and transportation costs (18.90%).

Figure 4: For the education and living related costs that YOU are responsible for covering, which sources do you use to pay for those items?

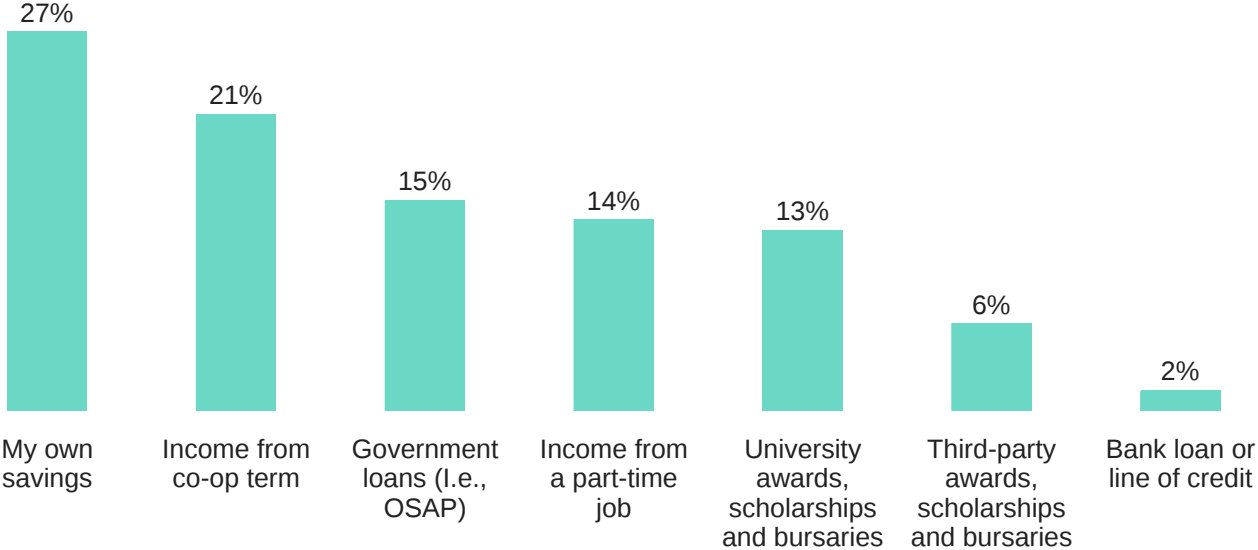
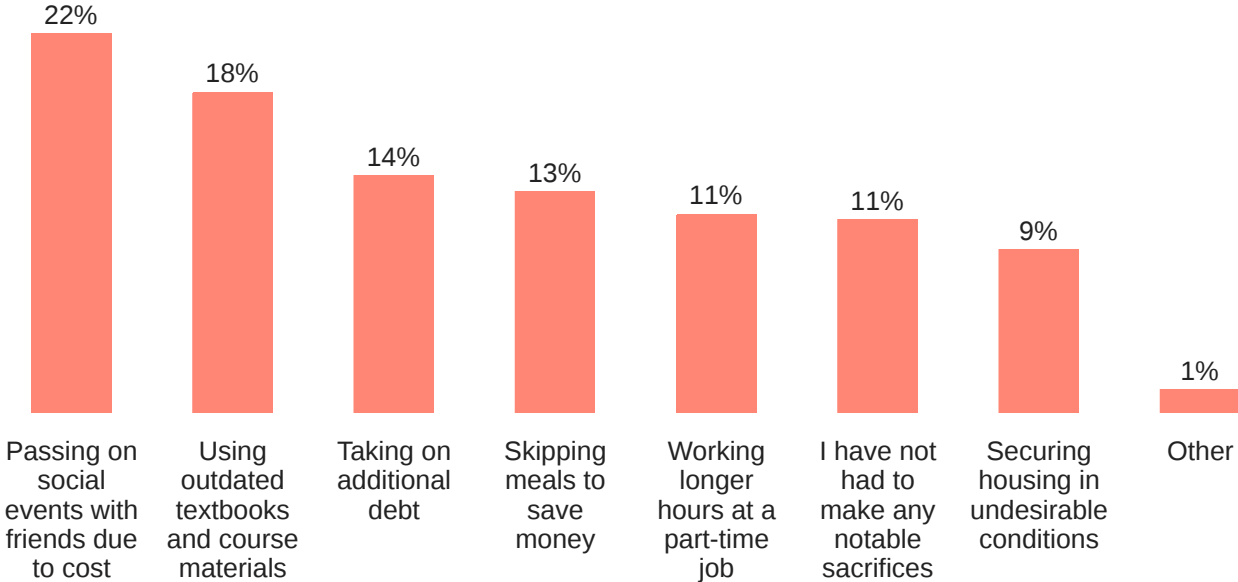


Figure 5: Which of the following sacrifices have you made to afford the cost of your post-secondary education?



For the students who selected "other" some of their answers included:

- Taking on a smaller course load so I can work part-time
- Waiting to buy necessary clothing items (such as underwear)
- Taking a gap year after high school to save money
- Sell old items to make money
- Living at home despite the long commute
- Not visiting home during breaks due to cost of travel

Figure 6: Please indicate your ability to afford the following costs each term

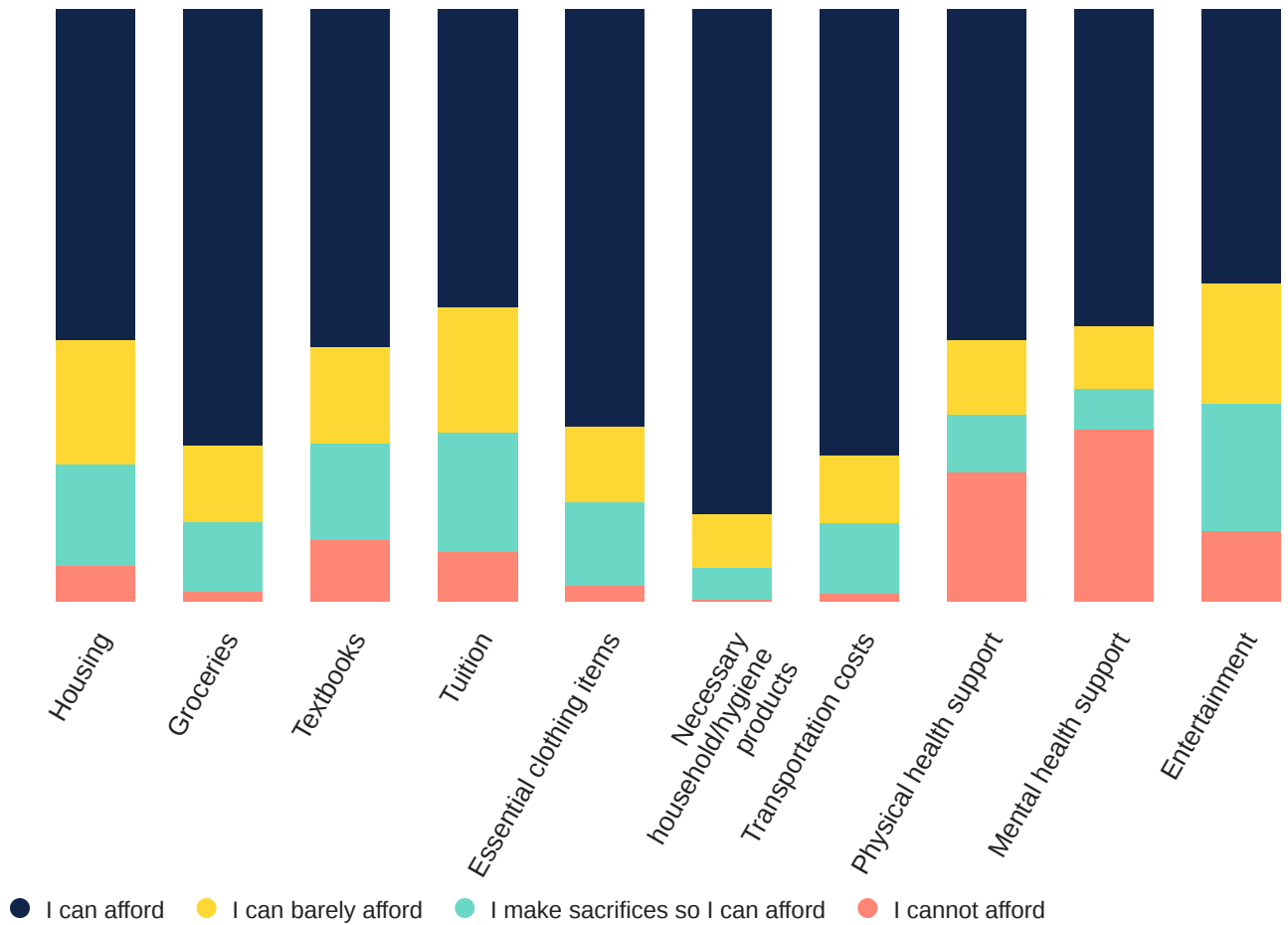


Figure 6 demonstrates that, overall, the majority of students are able to afford these various costs each term except for entertainment, where only 46.22% indicated they can afford this cost. On the other hand, necessary household items/hygiene products had the highest percentage of students (85.71%) indicate that they are able to afford this cost.

Moreover, Figure 6 also demonstrates that mental health support/services (29.70%) and physical health support/services (21.80%) have the highest percentage of students indicate that they cannot afford these costs each term. Entertainment (21.51%), tuition (20.06%), housing (17.15%) and textbooks (16.28%) are the costs where the highest percentage of students indicated that they made sacrifices in order to afford.

Figure 7: How often do you practice the following financial behaviours?

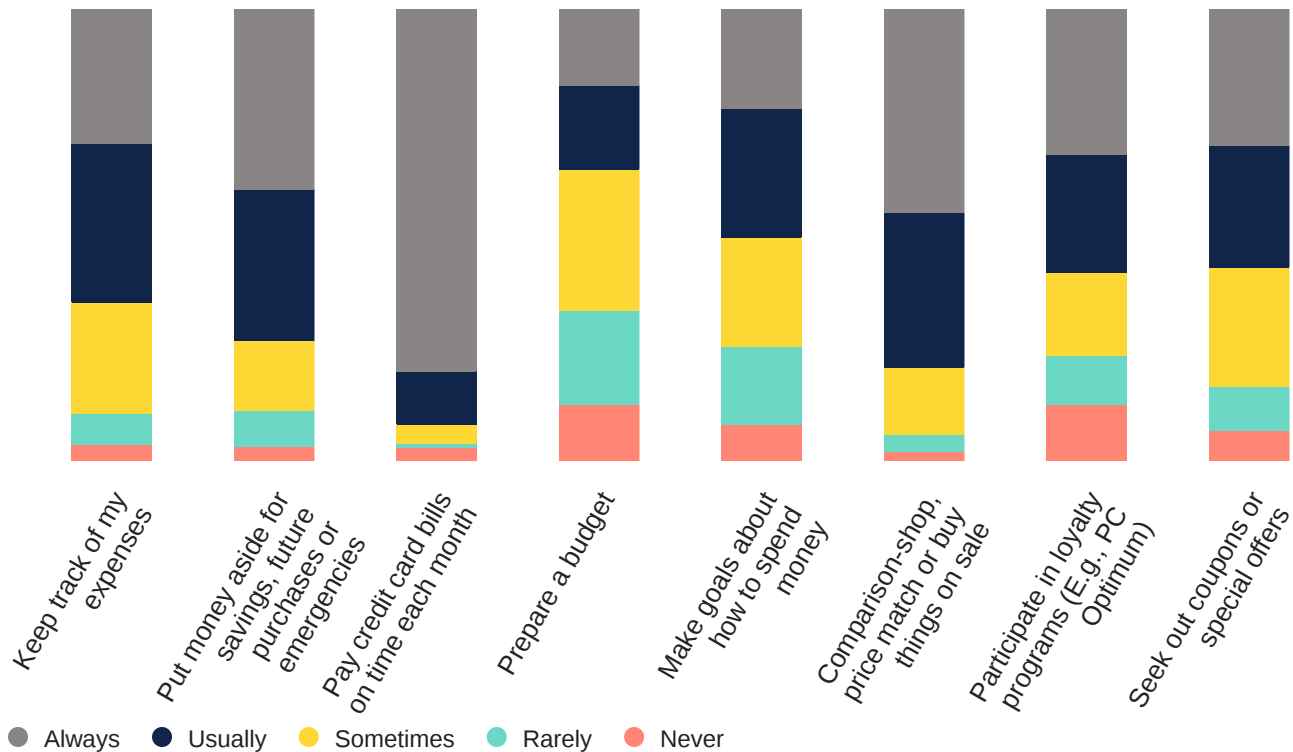
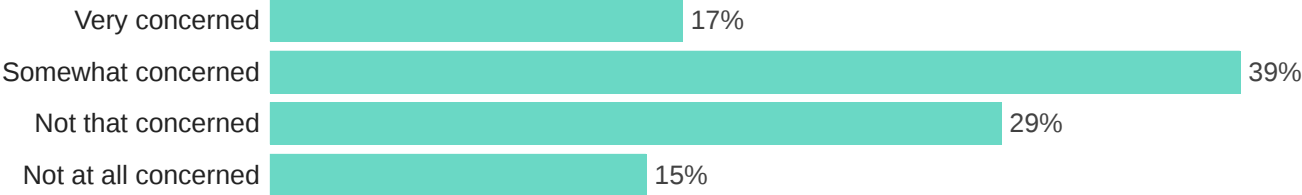


Figure 7 demonstrates that the most common behaviour that students **always or usually practice** is "pay off their credit card each month", with 91.9% of students selecting one of those two options for this behaviour; this was followed by "comparison-shop, price match or buy things on sale" (79.4%) and "put aside money for savings, future purchases or emergencies (73.3%)."

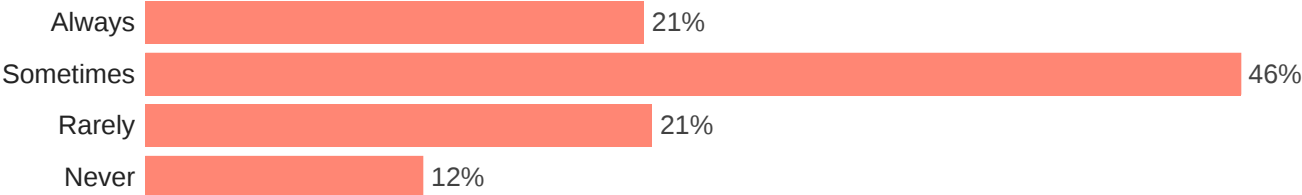
In terms of behaviours that students **never or rarely practice**, the most common is response was "prepare a budget", with 33.1% of students selecting one of those two options for this behaviour; this was followed by make goals about how to spend money (25.3%) and participate in loyalty programs (23.3%). However, when we look at behaviours that students **sometimes practice**, "prepare a budget" was the most common, with 31.4% of students selecting this option for this behaviour; this was followed by "seek out coupons or special offers" (26.2%), "make goals about how to spend money" (24.1%) and participate in loyalty programs (18.3%). This demonstrates that although we do not see high percentages of students "always" practicing these behaviours, they are distributed rather equally throughout the more moderate frequencies and not concentrated in the "never" option.

Figure 8: What is your level of concern about having enough money available to complete your education?



As shown in Figure 8, most students (56%) are either very concerned or somewhat concerned about having enough money available to complete their education, while the remaining 44% are either not that concerned or not at all concerned.

Figure 9: Do your concerns about affording your education impact your mental health?



As shown in Figure 9, most students (67%) indicated that concerns about affording their education impact their mental health either always or sometimes, while the remaining 33% indicated that it impacts their mental health rarely or never.

Figure 10: Please use the drag and drop feature to indicate which of the following would have the most positive impact on your finances if its overall cost was reduced? (1 = high impact, 8 = little impact)

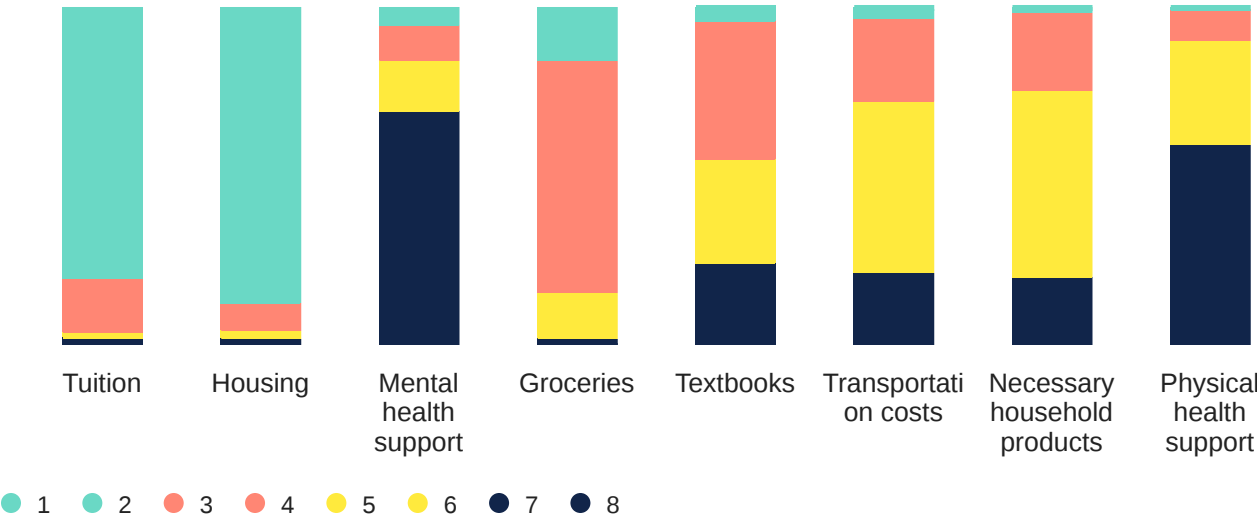


Figure 10 demonstrates that tuition and housing are indicated by students, by far, as having the most positive impact on them if costs were reduced. The average rating for tuition and housing were 1.86 and 1.93, respectively. The ratings for the remaining options, in order of most impact to least impact, are as follows:

- Groceries (3.43)
- Textbooks (5.02)
- Necessary household/hygiene products (5.34)
- Transportation costs (5.40)
- Physical health support (6.39)
- Mental health support (6.64)

It is important to consider that it is likely that students selected tuition and housing as having the most positive impact because they are largest expenses for students compared to the other costs.

Figure 11: Please use the drag and drop feature to indicate your awareness and use of the following WUSA programs

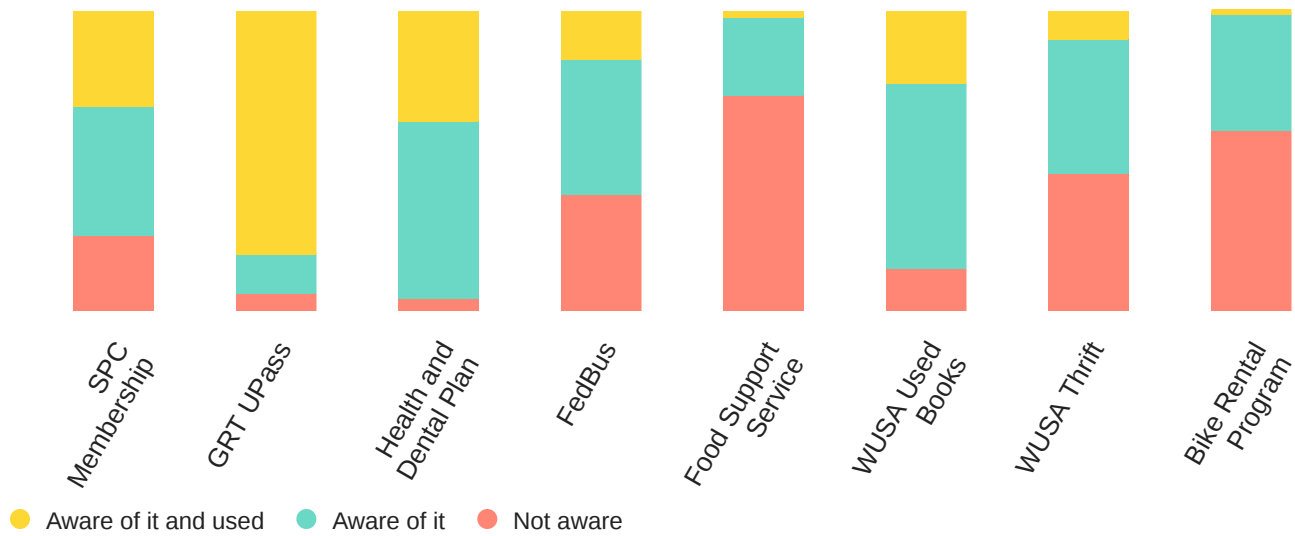


Figure 11 demonstrates that the top three WUSA programs that students are both aware of and have used are GRT UPass (81%), Health and Dental Plan (36.8%) and SPC Membership (31.87%).

On the other hand, the top three WUSA programs that students are not aware of are Food Support (71.9%), Bike Rental Program through the Bike Centre (60.23%) and WUSA Thrift (45.91%).

Figure 12: Please use the drag and drop feature to rank how important the following WUSA programs are to you for saving money

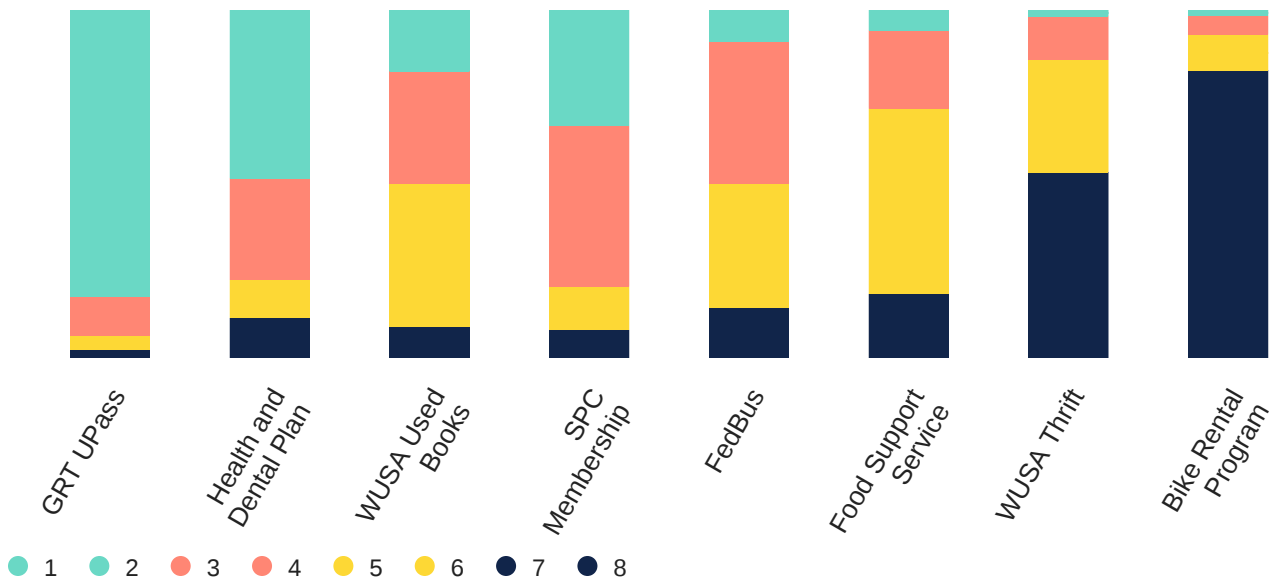


Figure 12 demonstrates that students believe the GRT UPass is the most important WUSA program for saving them money. The average rating GRT UPass was 1.80. The ratings for the remaining options, in order of most important to least important are as follows:

- Health and Dental Plan (3.19)
- SPC Membership (3.46)
- WUSA Used Books (4.38)
- FedBus (4.65)
- Food Support Services (5.14)
- WUSA Thrift (6.12)
- Bike Rental Program through the Bike Centre (7.27)

It is important to consider that it is likely that students selected Food Support Service, WUSA Thrift and the Bike Rental Program as least important because as indicated in Figure 11, many students are not aware of these programs.

Figure 13: When making the decision to purchase food on campus, which of these factors influence your decision the most?

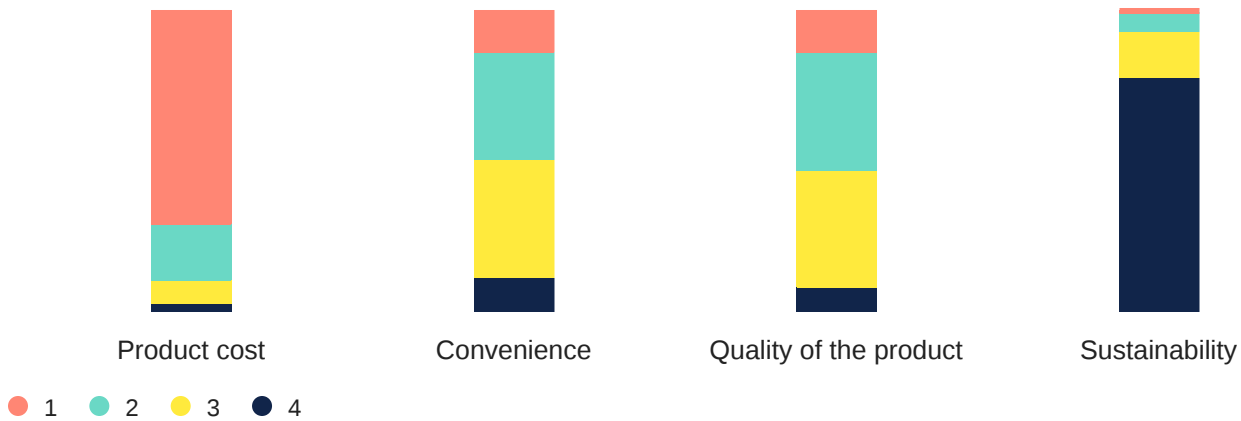


Figure 13 demonstrates that the factor that has the most influence on students' decision to purchase food on campus is product cost (average rating of 1.42); this is followed by quality of the product (2.41), convenience (2.48) and sustainability (3.69).

Figure 14: Please use the drag and drop feature to indicate your awareness and use of the following WUSA peer-support services

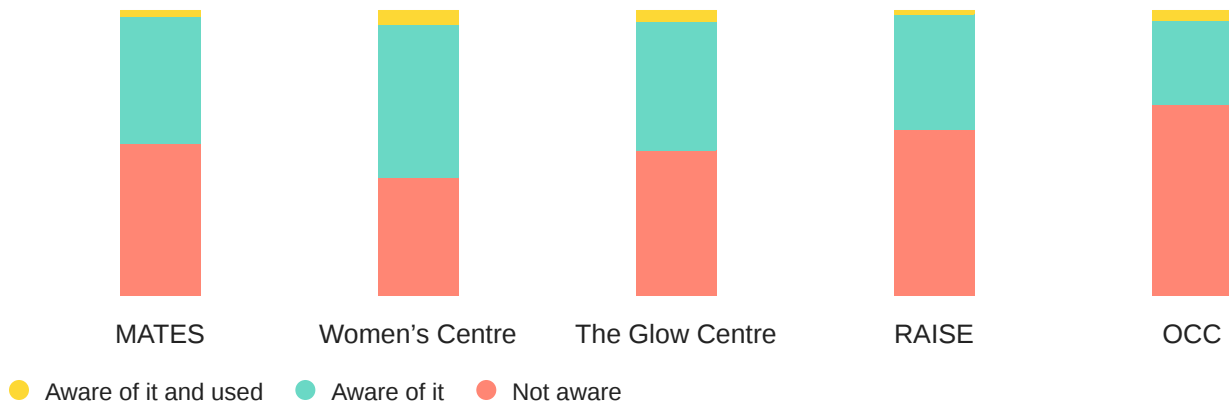


Figure 14 demonstrates that, besides the Women's Centre, the majority of students were not aware of these WUSA peer-support services.

Figure 15: Are you aware that the Health and Dental Plan by Studentcare plan provides the following?

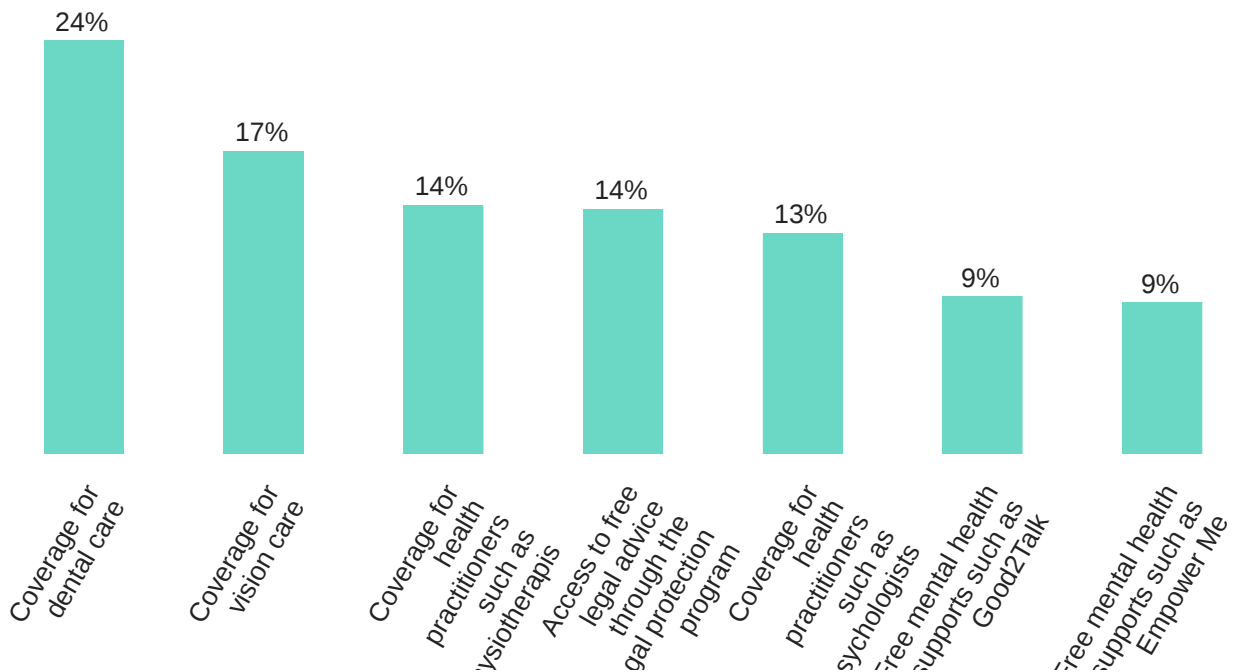


Figure 16: Please rank which additional offerings WUSA could provide that would add the most value to your WUSA membership (1 = most value, 5 = least value)

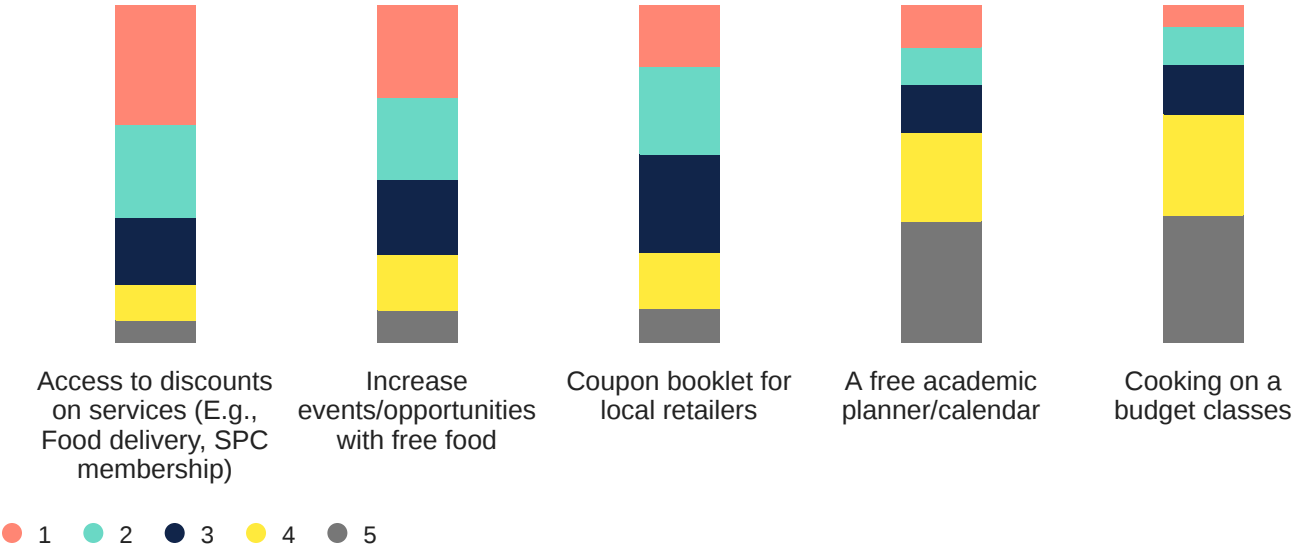


Figure 16 demonstrates that students believe access to discounts on services would add the most value to their WUSA membership, with an average rating of 2.26. This is followed by increase opportunities/events with free food (2.57), coupon booklet for local retailers (3.62) and cooking on a budget classes (3.81).

Figure 17: Please rank which areas you think are most important for WUSA to advocate for as it relates to making your university experience more affordable

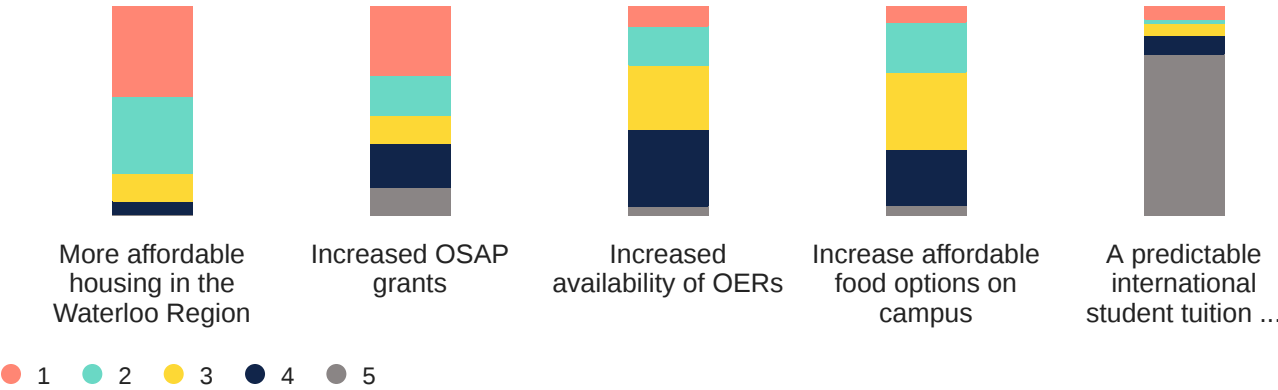


Figure 17 demonstrates that more affordable housing in the Waterloo region was identified by students as the most important area for WUSA to advocate for with an average rating of 1.85.

Affordability Suggestions

Participants were asked to give any suggestions for WUSA to make their university experience more affordable. The suggestions include the following:

- Cheaper food options on campus
- More financial aid for international students
- Advocacy for cheaper off-campus housing
- Increasing Scholarship/Grant options
- Partnerships with local grocery stores for student discounts
- Reducing the cost of required course materials
- Free campus parking for students

Recommendations

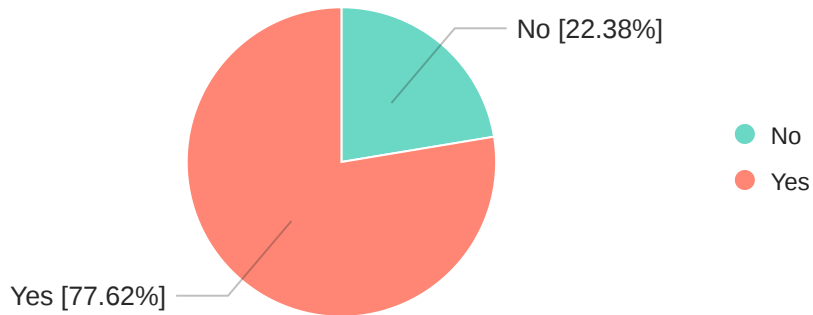
Based on the findings of this survey, it is recommended that WUSA considers the following:

- **Advocate for and support diverse options for affordable textbooks for students.** Textbooks are the education related cost that most students are responsible for paying for on their own. Moreover, using outdated textbooks was also a common sacrifice that students make.
- **Continue to plan free social events for students.** The most common sacrifice that students make was passing on social events due to cost and similarly, entertainment had the lowest percentage of students who said they could afford it.
- **Provide resources for students on how to prepare a budget and make goals about how to spend their money.** Most students rarely or never practice these two financial behaviours.
- **Look into new partnerships for student discounts on groceries in Waterloo.** Groceries were identified by students as having a positive impact on their finances if its cost were reduced. Students also ranked “access to discounts on services” as adding the most value to their WUSA membership.
- **Increase affordable mental health support and services for students, including enhancing awareness of our student-run services that can provide peer support for free.**
- **Continue to provide the GRT UPass for students.** This service was identified as the most important WUSA program for saving students money.
- **Continue to advocate for more affordable housing in Waterloo and increased OSAP grants.**

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 18: Are you a co-op student?



As seen in Figure 18, 77.62% 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 19: Do you identify as disabled?

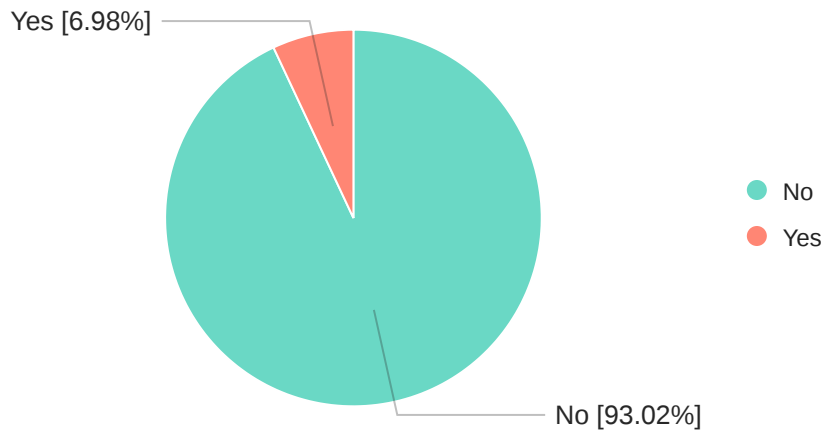


Figure 20: Which faculty are you in?

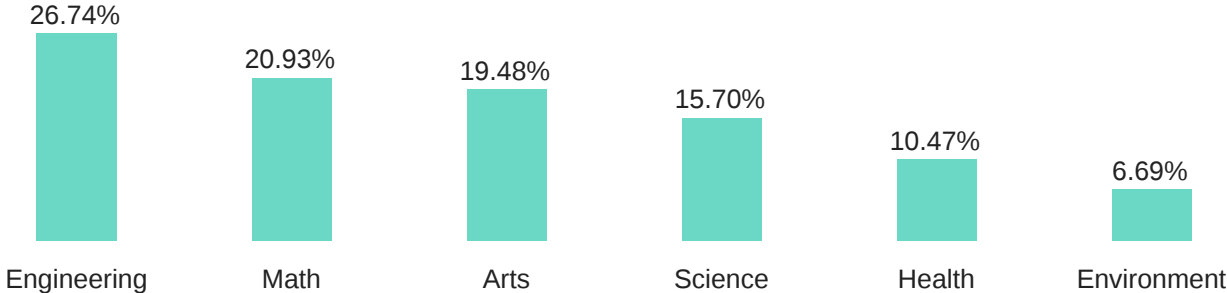


Figure 21: What is your gender identity?

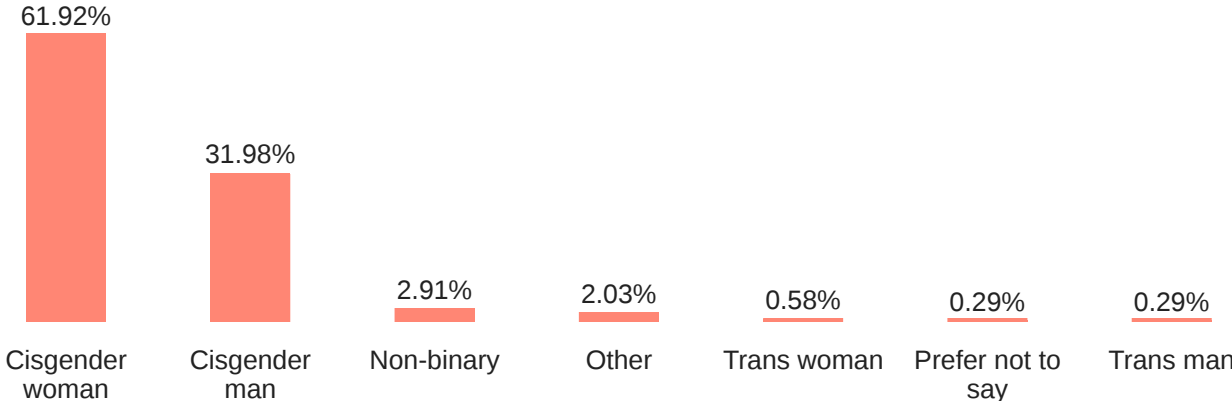


Figure 22: What year of study are you in?

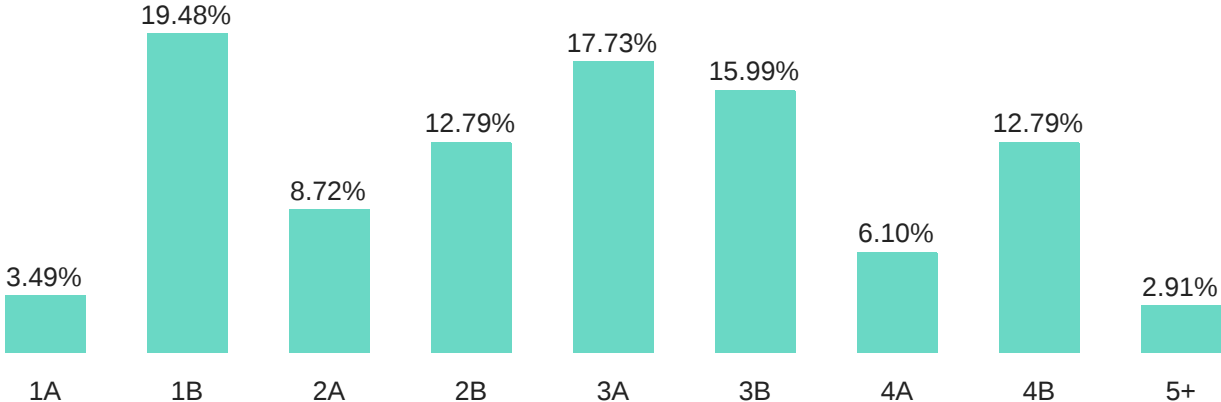
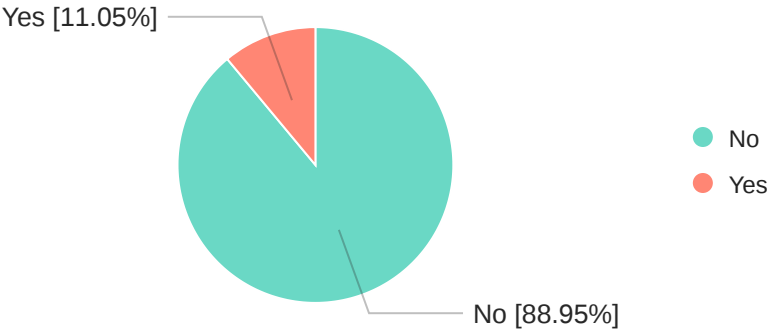


Figure 23: Are you an international student?



As seen in Figure 22, 11.05% 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 24: Do you identify as racialized?

