

Student Safety & Mental Health

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Introduction

In the Fall 2023 term, the Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association (WUSA) sent out a survey on the topic of Student Safety and Mental Health to University of Waterloo Undergraduate students as part of the Representative Survey Platform. The survey was available for students to complete from October 16 to 27, 2023. The goals of this survey were as follows:

- Understand the extent to which students feel safe on campus
- Identify gaps in student safety on campus
- Understand the connection between student safety and mental health
- Explore ways to create a more connected and inclusive UW community

The survey received a total of 651 responses; 45 incomplete responses were removed, leaving 606 responses for analysis. With a total of 931 students signed up for the program in Fall 2023, the survey had a response rate of 65%.

To begin the survey, students were asked to select the University of Waterloo campus they would be referencing while taking the survey. 2.04% of respondents selected the Kitchener campus and 0.51% selected the Stratford campus. The following report only reflects the answers of the 97.45% of students (n=580) who selected the Waterloo campus.

Defining Safety

There are many factors that impact the perception of safety; it is more than just freedom from physical harm and harassment, it also encompasses feelings of acceptance, inclusion and belonging as well. To ensure that students who completed the survey were aware of this holistic understanding of safety the following note on definitions was embedded in the invitation email and within the survey itself:

The term "safety" will be mentioned frequently throughout this survey. We recognize that there are many different components that make up safety. We are choosing to conceptualize safety broadly to include three main aspects. Please keep all three in mind when responding to the survey questions.

- Personal safety: freedom from physical harm and threat of physical harm, and freedom from hostility, aggression, and harassment.
- Emotional safety: the visceral feeling of being accepted and embraced for who you truly are and what you feel and need
- Psychological safety: the belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes.

Overview of Population Size

Throughout the report, the data is broken down by identity demographics that students provided when they signed up for the Representative Survey Platform. A breakdown of these identity demographics and their sample sizes for this survey are provided in **Table 1** below:

Table 1: Summary of Population Size by Identity Demographics

Identity Demographic	# of respondents who selected "Yes"	# of respondents who selected "No"	Total # of respondents
Do you identify as a member of a racialized group?	n = 287 (49%)	n = 293 (51%)	N = 580
Do you consider yourself to be a person with a disability?	n = 43 (7%)	n = 537 (93%)	N = 580
Are you an international student?	n = 48 (8%)	n = 532 (92%)	N = 580

For gender identity, students were asked to indicate how they self-identify their gender¹ and were provided with the options of cisgender woman, cisgender man, trans man, trans woman, nonbinary and other. Most students (95%) selected either cisgender woman or cisgender man. Thus, to increase the sample size of respondents who did not fit into either one of those categories, we grouped anyone who selected nonbinary, trans woman, trans man, other (including gender diverse, gender fluid and gender queer) or any combination of those identities into the broad category of gender non-conforming. The breakdown can be found in **Table 2** below:

Table 2: Summary of Population Size by Gender Identity Demographics

Gender identity	# of respondents
Cisgender woman	n = 381 (66%)
Cisgender man	n = 168 (29%)
Gender non-conforming	n = 31 (5%)
Total number of respondents	N = 580

For a more detailed breakdown of how these demographic groups compare to the actual population of students at the University of Waterloo, please see **page 34** of the report. For an explanation of the statistical analysis used in this report, see Appendix A.

1 It is important to note that students were not asked their sexuality or whether they identified as a member of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. Future surveys on the topic of student safety may consider gathering this identity information as well.

Key Findings

Perceived Personal Safety on Campus

- When asked what it means to feel safe on campus, respondents generally spoke to feelings of comfort, travel methods, connection and belonging, and the ability to express their opinions, beliefs, and identity.
- The hate-motivated attack related to gender expression and gender identity that occurred on campus in June 2023 still weighs heavy on students as it was mentioned throughout the survey in response to a variety of different questions
- Despite this, most students do feel safe on campus, although this depends on the time of day
 - In general, 71% of respondents indicated they feel safe and secure on campus, followed by 17% who said very safe (Figure 4a)
 - During the day, 49% of respondents feel safe, followed by 47% who feel very safe (Figure 5a)
 - At night, 40% of respondents feel safe and only 6% feel very safe (Figure 6a)
 - Moreover, 16% felt unsafe at night compared to only 1% during the day
- However, there are significant differences related to feelings of safety on campus when considering the gender identity of respondents
 - Respondents grouped as gender non-conforming felt significantly less safe on campus compared to cisgendered men (Figure 4c). This was true for both daytime and nighttime specifically as well (Figure 5b and Figure 6b)
 - Cisgender women felt significantly less safe than cisgendered men on campus during the daytime and at night (Figure 5b and Figure 6b).
- Most students feel either very safe or safe accessing various WUSA programming and spaces (Figure 7)
- When presented with positive statements about safety at UW, the level of agreement indicated by students was high for all statements (Figure 8a)
 - The statement with the most agreement was “I feel I am free from physical harm or threat of physical harm while on campus” (15% strongly agree and 52% agree)
 - The statement with the least agreement was “I believe UW has made adequate efforts to educate students about campus safety measures” (24% disagree and 6% strongly disagree)
- Again, agreement with these statements differed when considering the identity of respondents
 - For all statements, racialized students, students with disabilities, cisgender women and students grouped as gender non-conforming shifted away from strongly agree and agree compared to their comparison groups (Figures 8b-f).
 - Notably students who identified as having a disability and students grouped as gender non-conforming seemed to feel less safe on campus and agreed less that UW is providing a safe environment for students

Types and Areas of Safety Concerns

- Theft (52%) and verbal harassment (31%) were the two most common safety concerns that students have on campus (Figure 9).
- Bus stops/parking lots (44%) and walking paths (43%) were areas of most concern for student safety on campus (Figure 10).
- Walking alone at night (66%), being in the presence of strangers at night (63%), lack of awareness about campus safety measures (36%) and evening classes (34%) were the top factors that contributed to students feeling unsafe on campus (Figure 12).
 - Although overall campus culture was not selected by most respondents, those who did select it ranked it highly (Figure 13).

Safety and Mental Health

- Of those who were aware of Counselling Services, 53.68% of students indicated they had accessed it, making it the service with the highest access rate
- Of those who were aware of Mentor Assistance Through Education and Support (MATES), 17.48% indicated they had accessed the service, making it the lowest access rate.
 - However, MATES did have the highest percentage of students indicate they were very satisfied (11.43%, n=4) and satisfied with the service (37.14%, n=13) (Figure 17)
- Most students (81%) said that concerns about safety did not negatively impact their mental health (Figure 18a)
 - Although the negative impact is low for the entire population (19%), it is higher for those with disabilities (42%), those grouped as gender non-conforming (45%), international students (38%), and racialized students (21%) (Figure 18b)

Safety, Identity and Belonging

- Overall, most students agree with positive statements about respect and belonging on campus (Figure 19)
 - Again, agreement with these statements differed when considering the identity of respondents, as students who identify as having a disability and students grouped as gender non-conforming are less likely to agree that their values are respected on campus, that they feel they belong on campus, or that they can be their authentic self on campus
- Many of the above findings related to gender were confirmed when students were explicitly asked if their experience of safety on campus is impacted by aspects of their identity and most responses discussed concerns related to gender based and sexual violence specifically
- When asked what they felt would help create a more connected and inclusive UW community (Figure 21)
 - 71% selected social events to bring students together
 - 59% selected opportunities to build stronger relationships with faculty and instructors
 - 37% selected opportunities to build stronger relationships with support staff

Recommendations

1. WUSA should advocate to the University to implement an additional student safety assessment, aiming for broader participation from students within the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, those with disabilities, racialized students, and international students. This assessment should place a specific focus on gaining insights into the distinctive viewpoints of these groups regarding safety. This will ensure that diverse students are intentionally involved and that their voices are heard in the creation of future campus safety plans.
2. WUSA should work with relevant stakeholders and campus partners to investigate the safety experiences on campus for students with disabilities.
3. WUSA should work with relevant stakeholders to create ongoing initiatives and campaigns to spread awareness of campus safety measures and emergency procedures on campus (especially if changes are made to impact campus-wide processes).
4. The University should further investigate student concerns around theft and verbal harassment on campus and identify improvements to resources and the built environment on campus that could address these concerns.
5. The University should consider how safety around bus stops/parking lots and walking paths can be enhanced for students.
6. WUSA should advocate to the University for the development of campus-wide strategies to address student safety apprehensions related to walking home at night and being in the presence of strangers at night. This should include an assessment of the feasibility of introducing a walk-safe program on campus or something similar.
7. WUSA should work to enhance overall campus culture as it relates to building connection and

- engagement amongst students by creating more opportunities for social events amongst students.
8. WUSA should advocate to the University to enhance opportunities for students to build stronger relationships with faculty, instructors, and support staff on campus.
 9. WUSA should collaborate with the University to enhance resources on campus related to the co-existing experience of safety and mental health, specifically for students with disabilities, international students, racialized students and 2SLGBTQIA+ students.
 10. WUSA should review the EmpowerMe program through StudentCare and explore how awareness and use of MATES amongst students can be enhanced.
 11. WUSA should collaborate with the University to establish and prioritize a continuous feedback loop to ensure ongoing assessment of student responses regarding their sense of safety while accessing and engaging programs on campus.

To ensure that these recommendations are actioned on, we will be sharing this report with the following on campus stakeholders:

- James Rush, Vice-President, Academic and Provost
- Chris Read, Associate Provost, Students
- David DeVidi, Associate Provost, Academics
- Dr. Jennifer Gillies, Associate Provost, Campus Support and Accessibility
- Dr. Paul Fieguth, Associate Vice-President, Academic Operations
- Dr. Christine McWebb, Associate Vice-President, Faculty Planning and Policy
- Campus Wellness
- Safety Office
- Disability Inclusion Team, Human Resources
- Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Office
- Student Success Office
- Sustainable Transportation (formerly UW Parking Services)
- Office of Equity, Diversity Inclusion and Anti-Racism
- AccessAbility Services
- Special Constable Service

Perceived Personal Safety on Campus

What does it mean to you to feel safe on campus?

Respondents were asked to describe what it means to them to feel safe on campus. Generally, respondents spoke mainly to **feelings of comfort, travel methods, connection and belonging**, and the **ability to express their opinions, beliefs**, and identity. Unsurprisingly, **identity** was also mentioned by many students specifically as it related to the hate-motivated attack related to gender expression and gender identity that occurred on campus in June 2023. Students also mentioned the **presence of safety resources and emergency procedures** in this context as well.

Students commonly mentioned that feeling safe on campus meant not feeling uncomfortable, stressed, anxious or worried when attending campus activities and lectures. This feeling of **comfort** was frequently mentioned by students specifically as it related to **methods of travel** on campus. Students stated that feeling safe on campus meant being able to walk on campus worry-free from various threats or danger, even during night hours.

Along with comfort, students explained that **community connection and belonging** also contributed to them feeling safe on campus. Students expressed that feeling safe on campus means being included among their peers without judgement or verbal attacks. Similarly, students also connected feelings of safety with the **ability to express their opinions and beliefs** freely on campus. While students understood

that opinions will differ among their peers, they stated that respect needed to be maintained for them to feel safe. For example, one student explained that safety meant *"feeling that I can share my opinions and thoughts in academic settings without being shot down or targeted because of them. It also means not being discriminated against by fellow classmates for the opinions I have that are different than their own."*

Not only does the ability to express their opinions and beliefs contribute to students' feelings of safety on campus, so too does the ability to **express their identities**. For example, one student stated that safety includes *"walk[ing] around freely without being scared that someone will target me for my ethnicity, gender..."* while another stated that safety for them includes feeling that no *"aspect of [their] identity would cause any conflict."* This theme of identity was commonly brought up by students in connection to the **hate-motivated attack related to gender expression and gender identity** that occurred on campus in June 2023. Students reported that the attack left them feeling fearful of threats, especially in terms of being targeted for specific identities, or beliefs in the classroom. Students stated that this event has impeded their ability to feel safe on campus and expressed an overall distrust in the current **security procedures and emergency responses** available. Students also mentioned that the attack demonstrated an unawareness of safety resources and emergency procedures among students.

Do you live on main campus?

Students were asked to share whether they lived on main campus. As seen in Figure 1, most students (63%) indicated that they do not live on main campus.

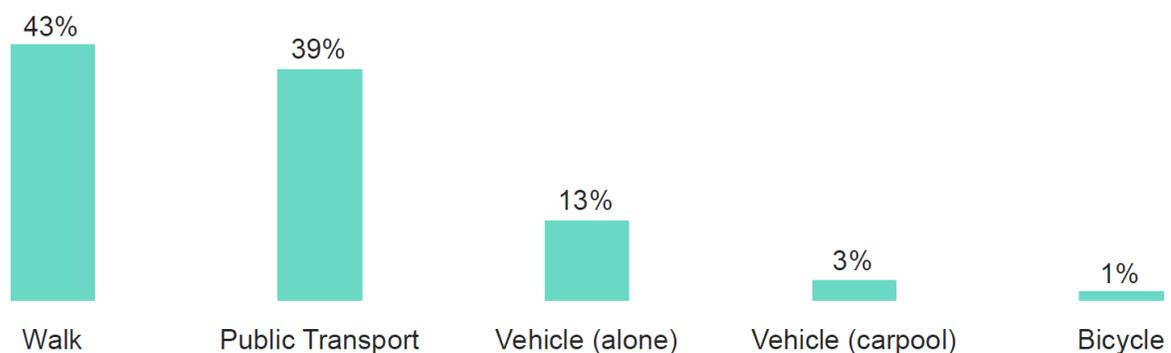
Figure 1: Responses to the question "Do you live on main campus?"



How do you typically commute to campus?

Students who indicated that they do not live on main campus were also asked how they typically commute to campus. As seen in Figure 2, walking (43%) and public transportation (39%) were the most common means of commuting to campus for students.

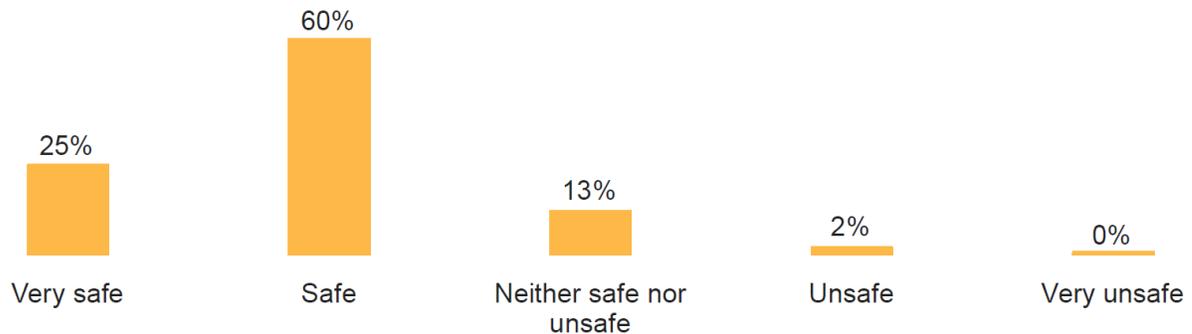
Figure 2: Means of commuting to campus



How safe do you feel travelling to and from campus from where you live?

Students were then asked to indicate how safe they feel travelling to and from campus from where they live. Most students (60%) indicated that they felt safe when travelling to and from campus; this was followed by 25% of students who indicated that they felt very safe when travelling to campus (Figure 3). When compared to Figure 2, travelling by bicycle had the highest proportion of students (20%) indicate they felt unsafe compared to other modes of transportation. It is important to note, however, that only five students indicated they travel by bicycle and thus only one student indicated they felt unsafe.

Figure 3: Safety travelling to and from campus



Overall, how safe and secure do you feel on campus?

When asked how safe and secure they feel on campus, most respondents felt safe (71%) or very safe (17%) with only a small proportion reporting feeling unsafe (2%) and none reporting being very unsafe (Figure 4a).

Figure 4a: How safe and secure respondents feel on campus

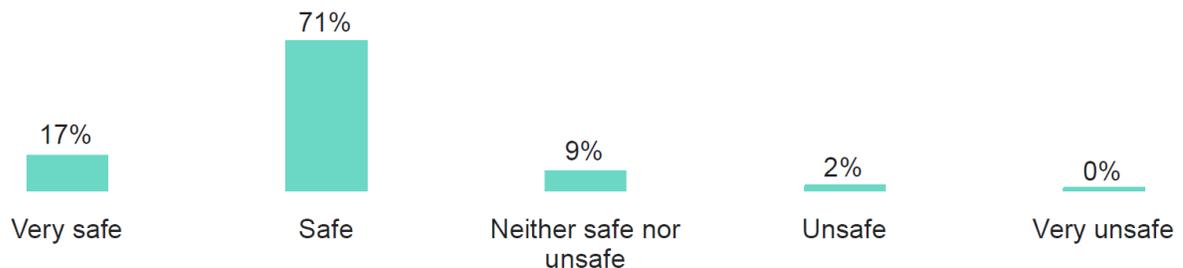
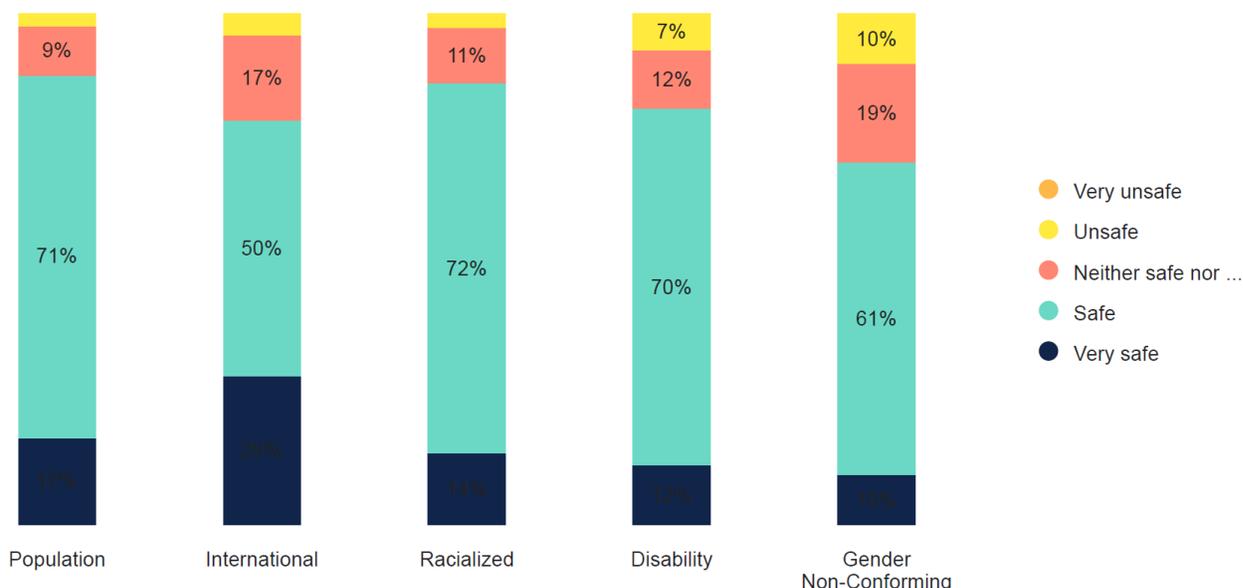


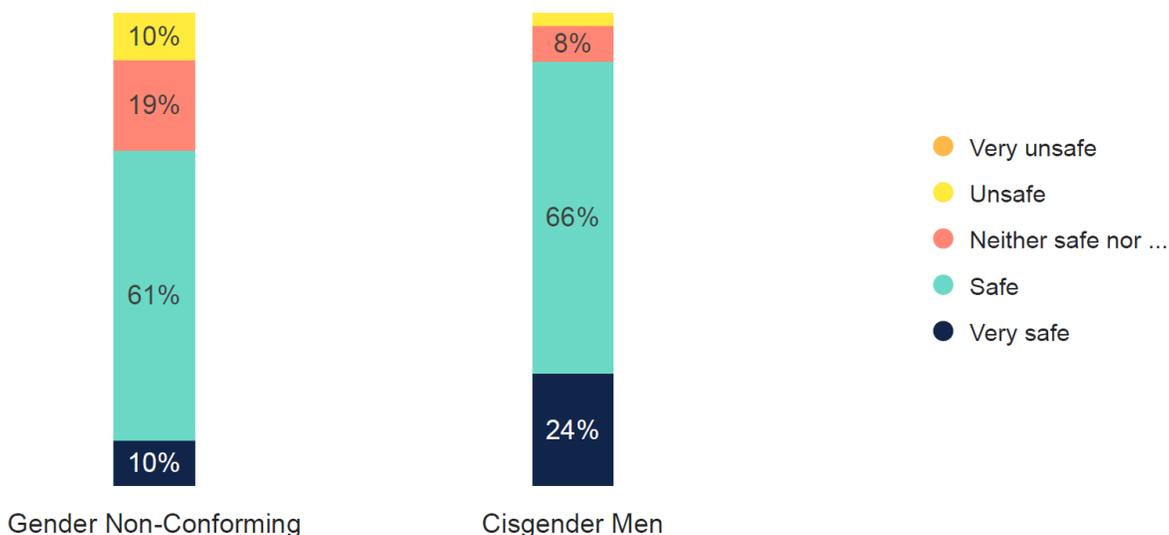
Figure 4b demonstrates the responses to this question when broken down by demographics. Further statistical analysis revealed significant differences in the responses of some demographic groups.

Figure 4b: Demographic breakdown of how safe and secure respondents feel on campus



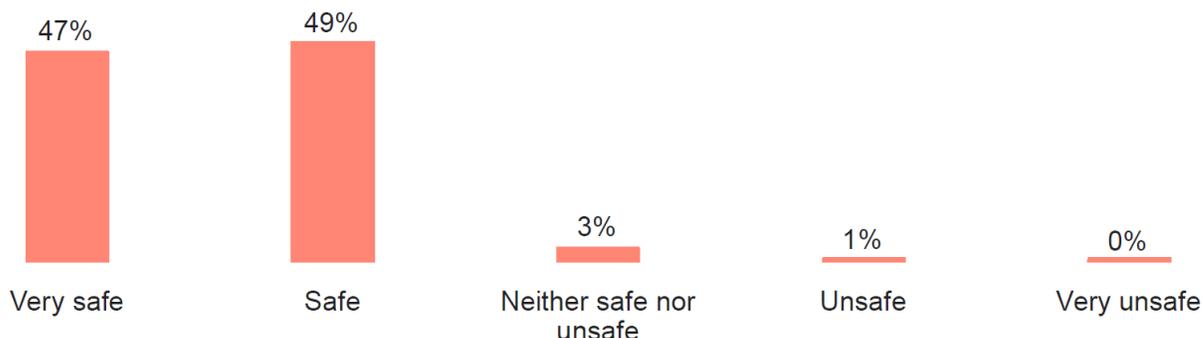
When it comes to gender identity, there was no significant difference between the overall feeling of on campus safety for respondents who identify as cisgendered men compared to cisgendered women. However, students grouped as **gender non-conforming** feel significantly** less safe on campus compared to respondents that identified as cisgender men (Figure 4c), with fewer students grouped as gender non-conforming saying they felt very safe (10%) or safe (61%) on campus and more saying they felt unsafe (10%). As mentioned previously, this survey occurred after the hate-motivated attack related to gender expression and gender identity that occurred on campus in June 2023, which may be partially responsible for this group of students feeling less safe. However, it is important to consider that this feeling may also represent the opinion of this group prior to the incident.

Figure 4c: How safe and secure respondents feel on campus by gender identity



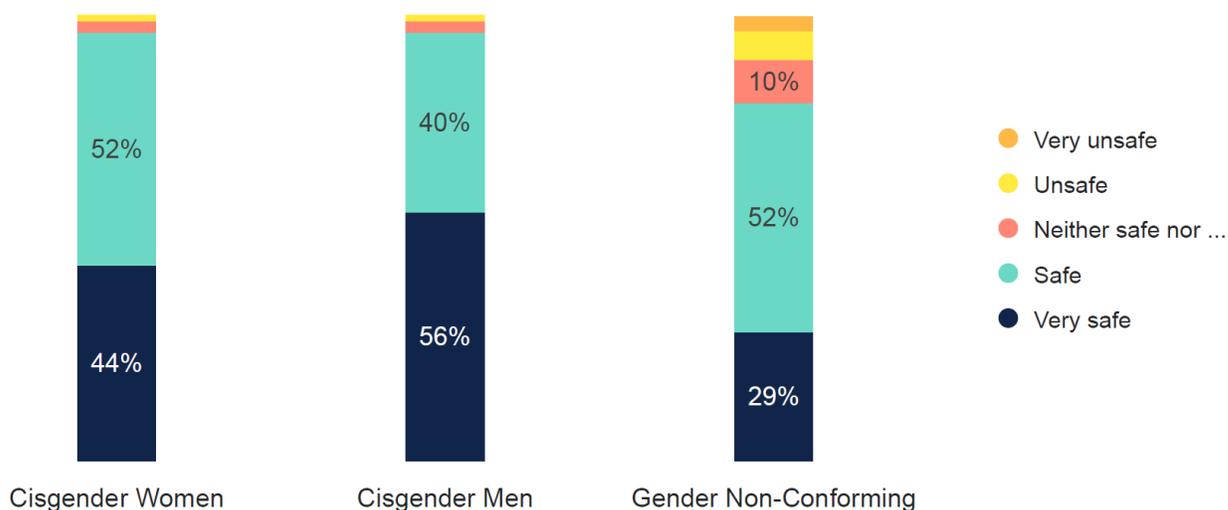
How safe do you feel on campus during the day (E.g., in the daylight)?

Figure 5a: How safe respondents feel on campus during the day



In addition to feelings of safety on campus in general, students were also asked how safe they feel on campus specifically during the day and at night. Figure 5a demonstrates that when it comes to how safe they feel on campus during the day, most students indicated they felt safe (49%); this was followed by 47% that indicated they felt very safe. When looking at how gender impacts respondents' feelings of safety on campus during the day, there were significant differences** between how cisgendered men and students grouped as gender non-conforming responded, with the latter feeling less safe overall during the daytime (Figure 5b).

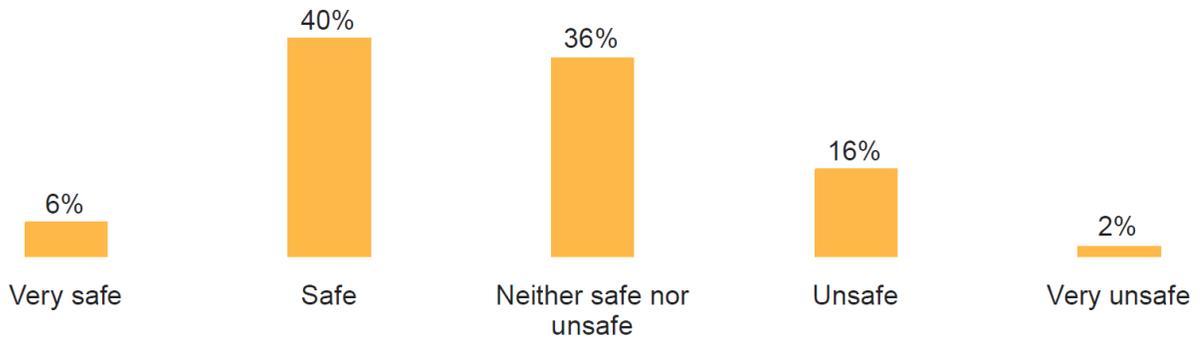
Figure 5b: Demographic breakdown of how safe respondents feel on campus during the day



How safe do you feel on campus at night (E.g., after dark)?

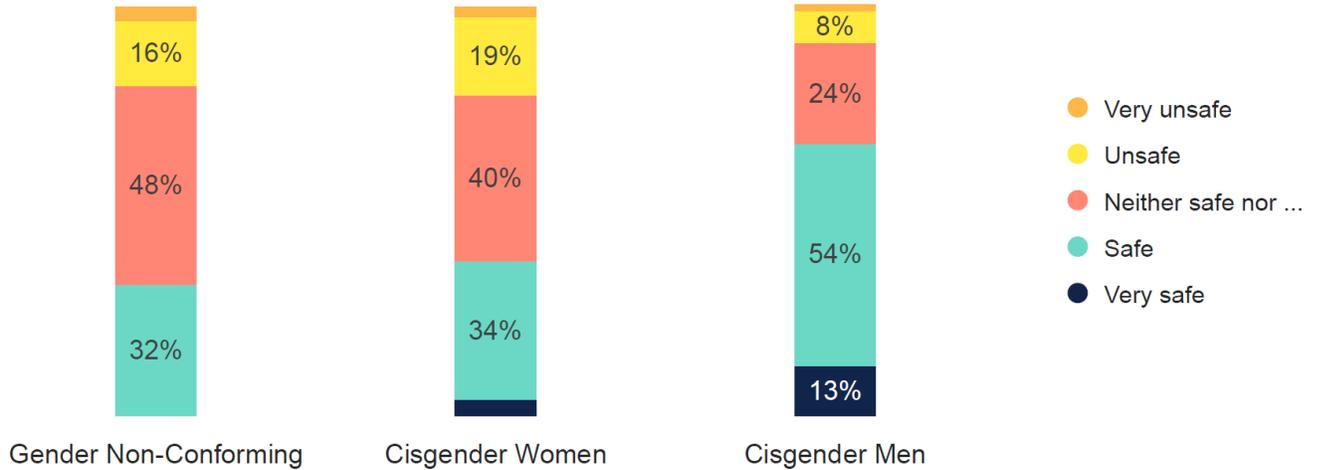
Figure 6a demonstrates that when it comes to how safe respondents feel on campus at night, most students selected they felt safe (40%); this was followed by 36% that indicated they felt neither safe nor unsafe and 16% indicating they felt unsafe. When comparing these results to Figure 5a, there is a clear shift towards feeling less safe at night, compared to daytime with 6% of students indicating they felt very safe on campus at night compared to 47% during the day. Thus, there is a clear impact on feelings of safety depending on the time of day.

Figure 6a: How safe respondents feel on campus at night



Cisgendered men felt significantly safer than cisgendered women** and respondents grouped as gender non-conforming*** at night on campus. This indicates that individuals who identify as marginalized genders feel more vulnerable at night than cisgendered men (Figure 6b).

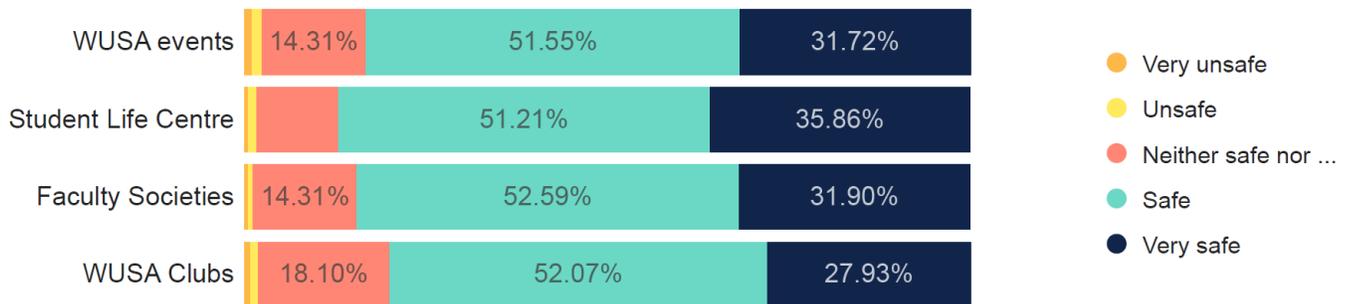
Figure 6b: How safe respondents feel on campus at night by gender identity



How safe do you feel accessing or participating in the following?

Figure 7 demonstrates that only a small number of students indicated feeling unsafe or very unsafe accessing or participating in the various WUSA programming and spaces.

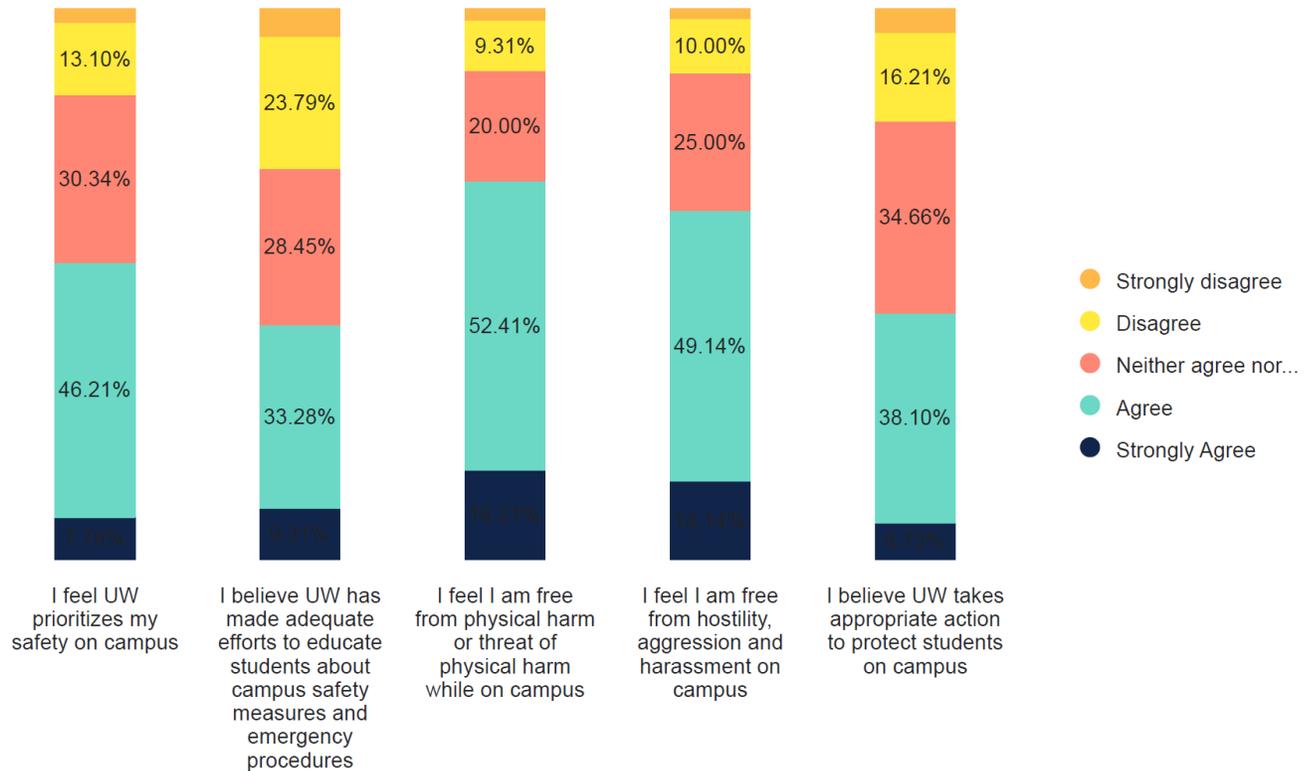
Figure 7: How safe respondents feel accessing WUSA programming and spaces



Positive statements about safety at UW

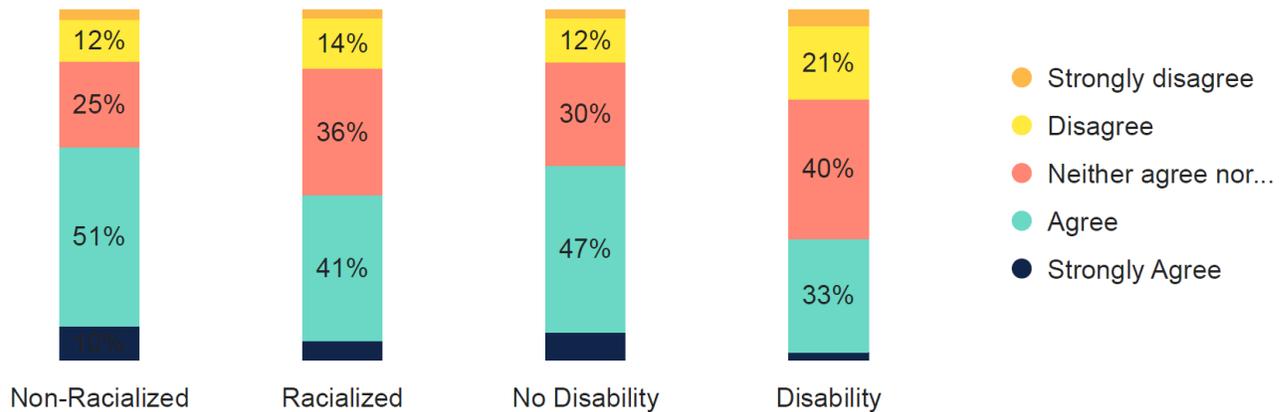
Respondents were asked to share whether they agree with a list of statements about their safety on campus and how the University manages safety on campus (Figure 8a).

Figure 8a: Responses to positive statements about safety at UW



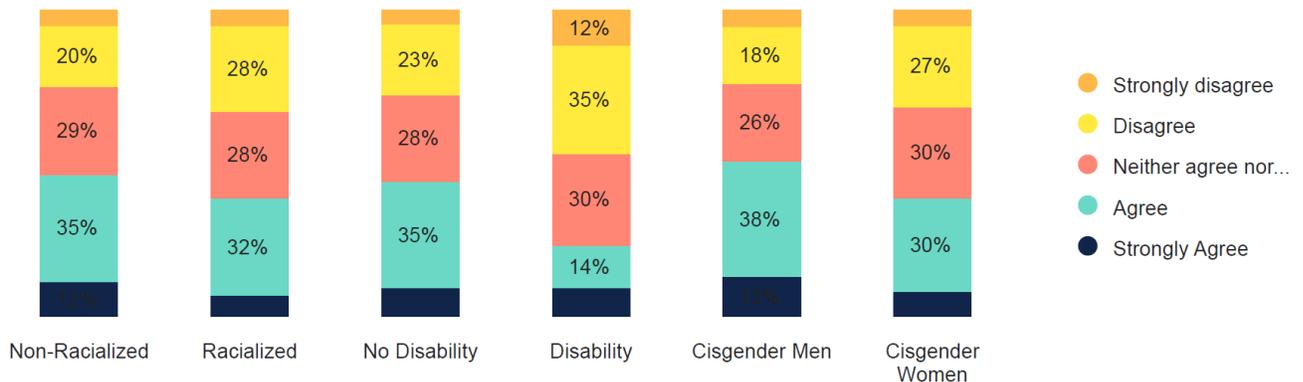
Generally, responses about feelings of safety on campus were mildly to moderately positive, with “I feel I am free from physical harm or threat of physical harm while on campus” having the most agreement (16% strongly agree; 52% agree) and “I feel I am free from hostility, aggression, and harassment on campus” having the second most agreement (14% strongly agree; 49% agree). Responses to statements about the University’s actions were more mixed, with larger proportions of respondents responding disagree or strongly disagree. The statement with the most disagreement was “I believe UW has made adequate efforts to educate students about campus safety measures” (24% disagree; 6% strongly disagree) which, however, is still moderately positive. When breaking out responses by demographic groups, there are some notable differences compared to the overall population.

Figure 8b: Demographic breakdown of responses to the statement "I feel UW prioritizes my safety"



For the statement "I feel UW prioritizes my safety" respondents who identified as **racialized** provided significantly** different answers than those who identified as non-racialized (Figure 8b). Racialized respondents showed a shift toward neither agree nor disagree (from strongly agree and agree in non-racialized responses). Respondents who identify as having a **disability** also showed a significant** difference in their responses when compared to respondents who identify as not having a disability, with a similar shift as was seen in the racialized group, toward neither agree nor disagree and a noticeable increase in disagree. In both cases the effect size was small.

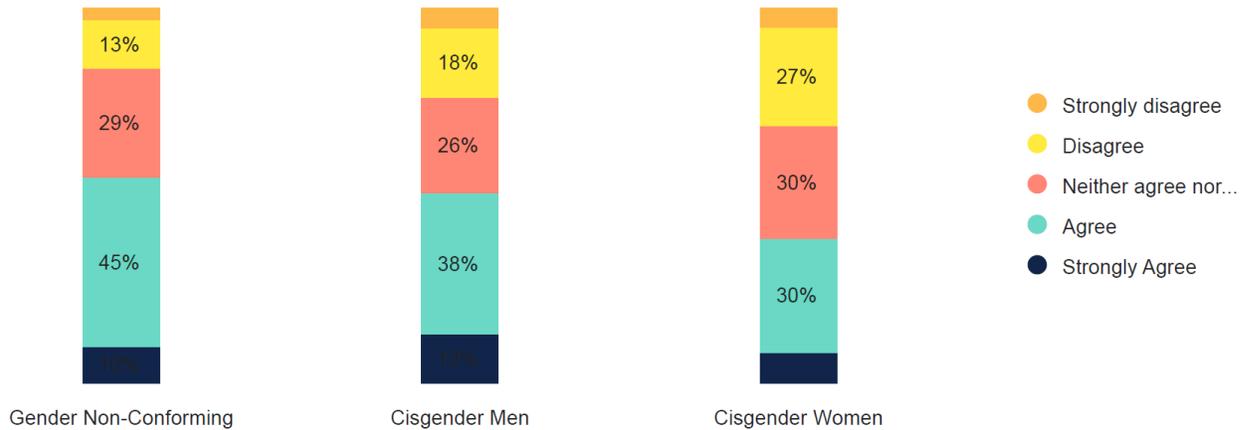
Figure 8c: Demographic breakdown of responses to the statement "I believe UW has made adequate efforts to educate students about campus safety"



For the statement "I believe UW has made adequate efforts to educate students about campus safety measures" the response was quite mixed (Figure 8c). In Figure 11, students were asked to choose which items on a list contributed to feeling unsafe on campus and 36% of respondents selected lack of awareness about campus safety measures. This reinforces the idea that a notable portion of the student population does not feel informed about campus safety measures and that this contributes to feeling unsafe on campus for those students.

Respondents who identified as having a disability**, being racialized*, and as cisgendered women* responded significantly differently than their respective comparison group (no disability, non-racialized, and cisgendered men), with the responses shifted towards neutral and disagree compared to the more positive responses of their comparison groups (Figure 8c). Again, the effect size was small.

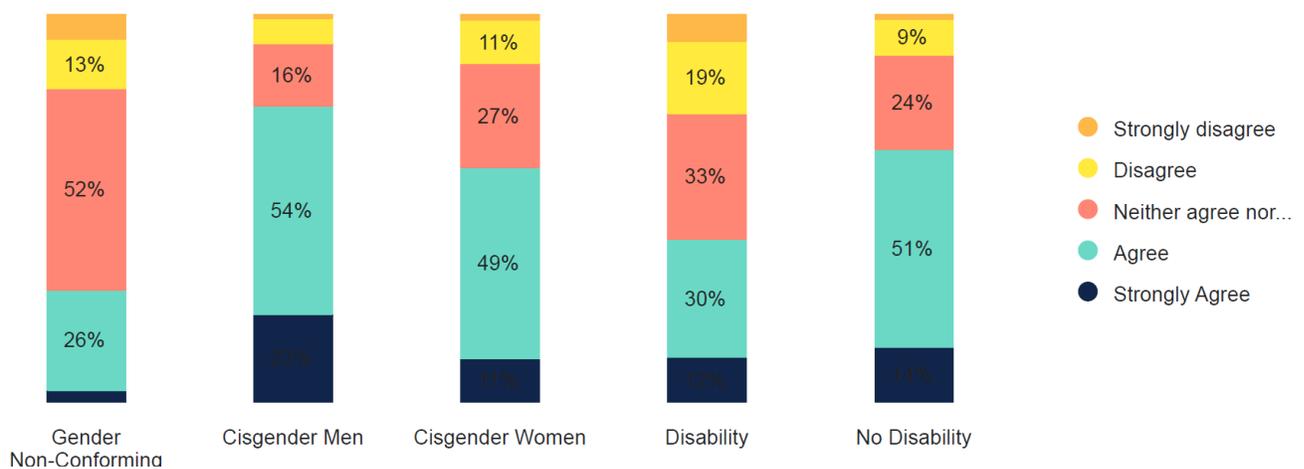
Figure 8d: Demographic breakdown of responses to the statement "I am free from physical harm or threat of harm while on campus"



For the statement "I am free from physical harm or threat of harm while on campus" the responses for the overall population received the highest level of agreement of the five statements, with 16% of respondents selecting strongly agree and 52% agree while 20% neither agree nor disagree. Significant differences when comparing demographic groups include a shift toward disagreement for respondents grouped as gender non-conforming** and cisgender women*** compared to cisgender men. (Figure 8d).

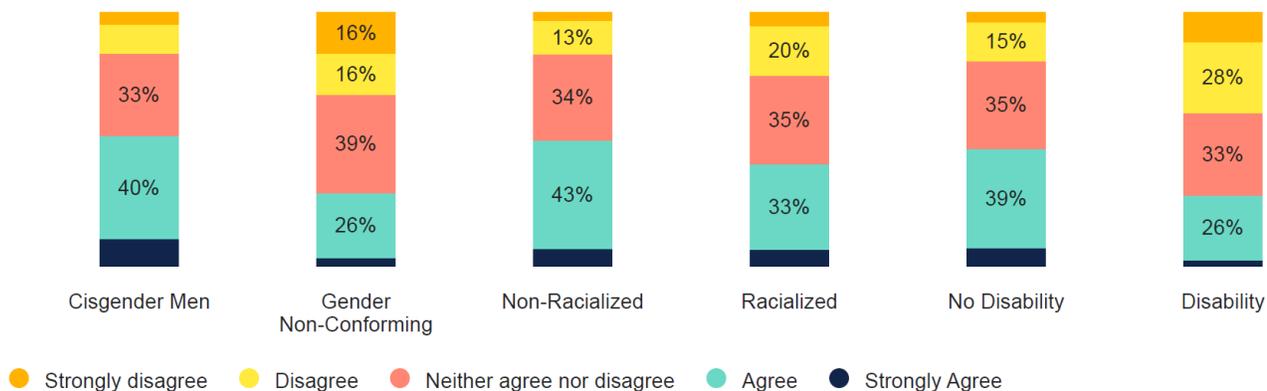
For the statement "I feel I am free from hostility, aggression, and harassment on campus", 49% of respondents agree and 25% of respondents neither agree nor disagree. There are significant differences between demographics and their comparison groups. Respondents who identify as having a disability responded significantly differently*** than those who identify as non-disabled, with a shift away from strongly agree and agree. When looking at gender identity there is a significant difference between cisgender men and cisgender women*** as well as between cisgender men and respondents grouped as gender non-conforming, and between cisgender women and respondents grouped as gender non-conforming** (Figure 8e).

Figure 8e: Demographic breakdown of responses to the statement "I am free from hostility, aggression, and harassment on campus"



For the statement "I believe UW takes appropriate action to protect students on campus" 38% of respondents agree while 35% neither agree nor disagree. Significant differences between comparison groups are observed between cisgender men and respondents grouped as gender non-conforming*, between racialized and non-racialized respondents*, and between respondents who identify as having a disability and those who do not***. In all cases, there is a shift away from agreement for the respondents from equity deserving groups (Figure 8f). However, the effect size was small.

Figure 8f: Demographic breakdown of responses to the statement "I believe UW takes appropriate action to protect students on campus"

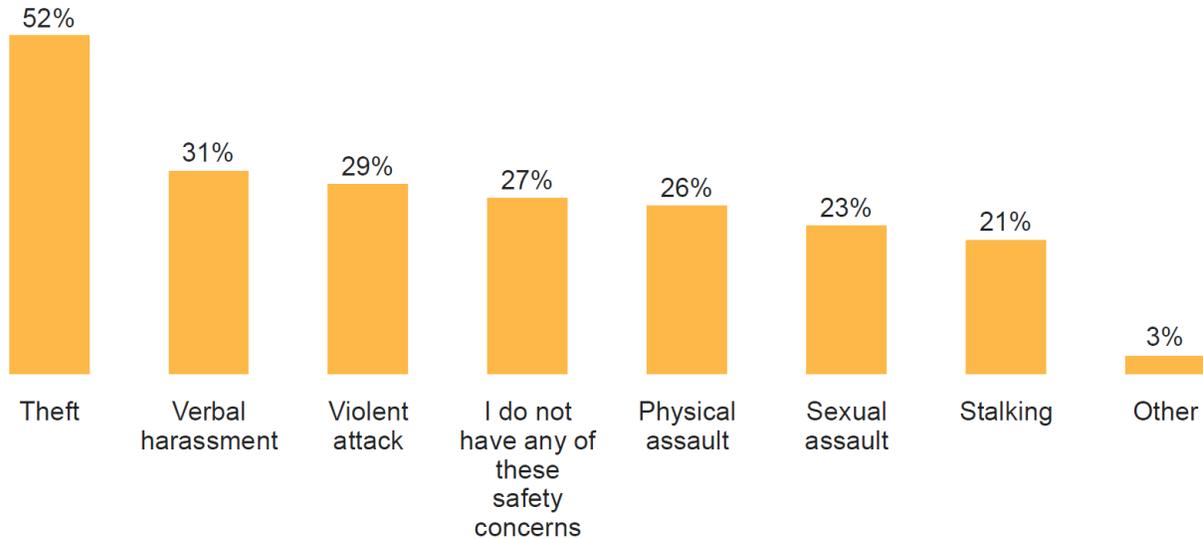


Overall, there is a mildly positive attitude from students towards feeling safe on campus. Notably students who identify as having a disability and students grouped as gender non-conforming seem to feel less safe on campus and agree less that UW is providing a safe environment for students. Considering the attack related to gender expression and identity on campus in June 2023, the negative feelings around safety from students who were grouped as gender non-conforming are valid and understandable. It appears that students are not yet satisfied by the actions of the University to address safety concerns on campus following the attack. The large disagreement from students who identify as having a disability is a strong indicator that this is a group whose feelings of safety on campus has not been addressed by the administration.

Types and Areas of Safety Concern

Do you have any safety concerns about any of the following on campus?

Figure 9: Safety concerns respondents have on campus



Respondents were given a list of options that they may have safety concerns about on campus. Respondents were able to select as many options as they felt applied to them. Of the 580 students who responded, the most common safety concern select was theft with 52% of students selecting this option (Figure 9). This was followed by verbal harassment (31%), and violent attack (29%), I do not have any safety concerns (27%), physical assault (26%), sexual assault (23%), stalking (21%), and other (3%). In terms of students who selected the "other" option, their concerns were around natural disasters, mental health and wellbeing, car accident (as a pedestrian), contagious illness, and bullying.

Are you concerned about any of the following areas related to your safety on campus?

Figure 10: Areas of concern for respondents on campus

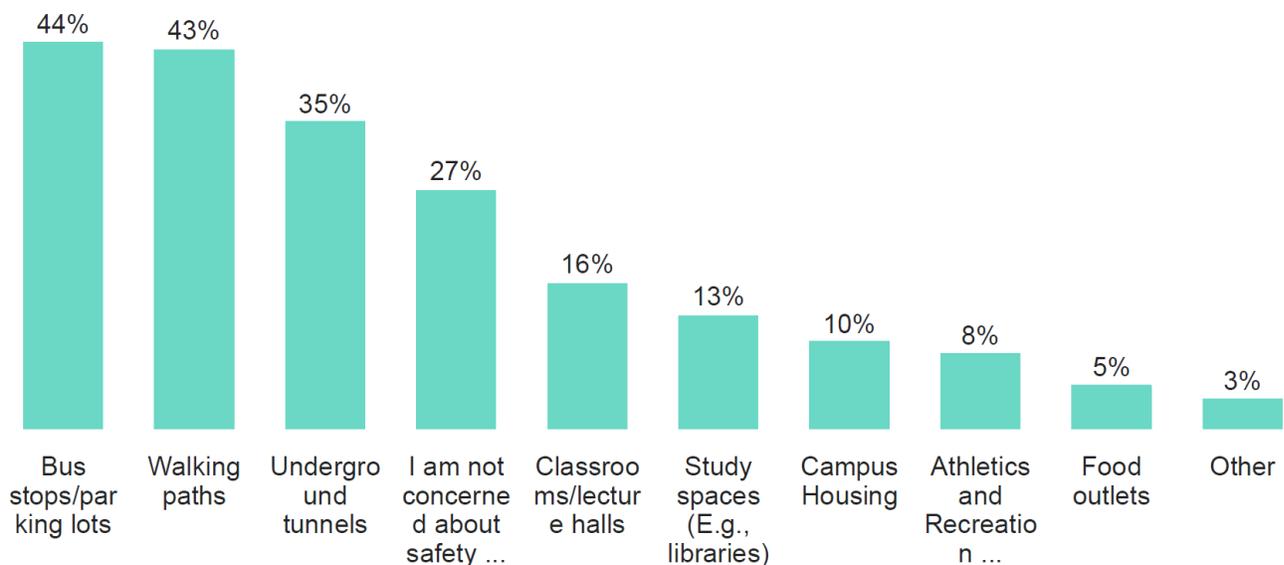


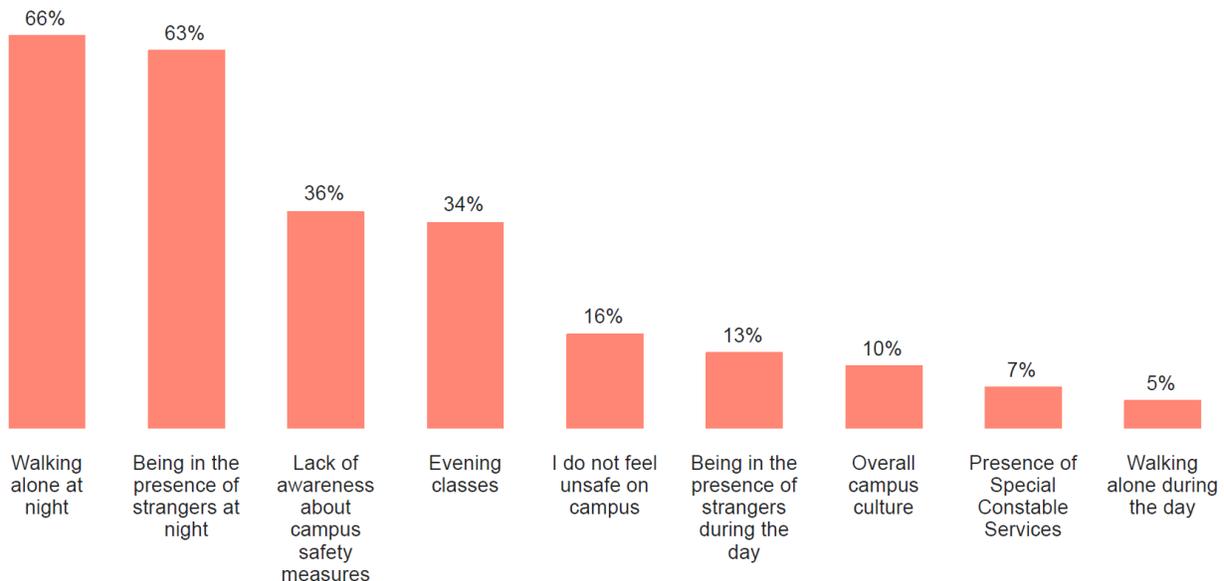
Figure 10 demonstrates that bus stops/parking lots (44%), walking paths (43%), and underground tunnels (35%) were the areas of most concern for students on campus. For the students who selected “other,” some of their answers included:

- Bike racks (theft)
- Public washrooms
- ION railway
- Club rooms
- Homeless shelter near campus

After being asked to select which areas on campus respondents have safety concerns around, they were asked to rank those areas from most to least concern, with 1 being most concern. These rankings aligned with the frequency with which students selected areas of concern in the previous question with bus stops/parking lots (1.74), walking paths (1.74), and underground tunnels (1.99) consistently ranked by students as areas of most concern.

Do any of the following contribute to you feeling unsafe on campus?

Figure 11: What contributes to respondents feeling unsafe on campus



In a select all that apply format, respondents were asked to select what makes them feel unsafe on campus (Figure 11). The most common option selected was walking alone at night (66%), followed by being in the presence of strangers at night (63%), lack of awareness about campus safety measures (36%) and evening classes (34%). Notably only 16% of respondents selected I do not feel unsafe on campus which is not in alignment with earlier responses where most respondents reported feeling safe and very safe on campus. While respondents may generally feel safe on campus, they may express feeling less safe when confronted with specific scenarios.

Students were then asked to rank which options they selected in the previous question make them feel the most unsafe, with 1 indicating the most unsafe. These rankings aligned with the frequency to which students selected areas of concern in the previous question with walking alone at night (1.56) and being in the presence of strangers at night (1.84) consistently ranked by students as what made them feel most unsafe.

It should also be noted that although only 5% of respondents selected “other” in the previous question, those who did select it then ranked it very highly. It makes sense that students who went out of the way

to enter “other” things that contribute to them feeling unsafe on campus would rank that highly. Some of these things were concerns about the homeless shelter near campus, the lack of special constables’ services presence on campus, areas with poor lighting, and the issues of not enough safety poles.

Moreover, although overall campus culture (2.42) and presence of special constable services (2.50) were not selected by most respondents in the previous question, those who selected it ranked it highly. This may suggest that certain groups of students have a different experience around safety related to campus culture and in their interactions with special constable services.

Do you take any of the following actions to increase your sense of safety on campus?

Figure 12: Actions taken by respondents to increase their sense of safety on campus

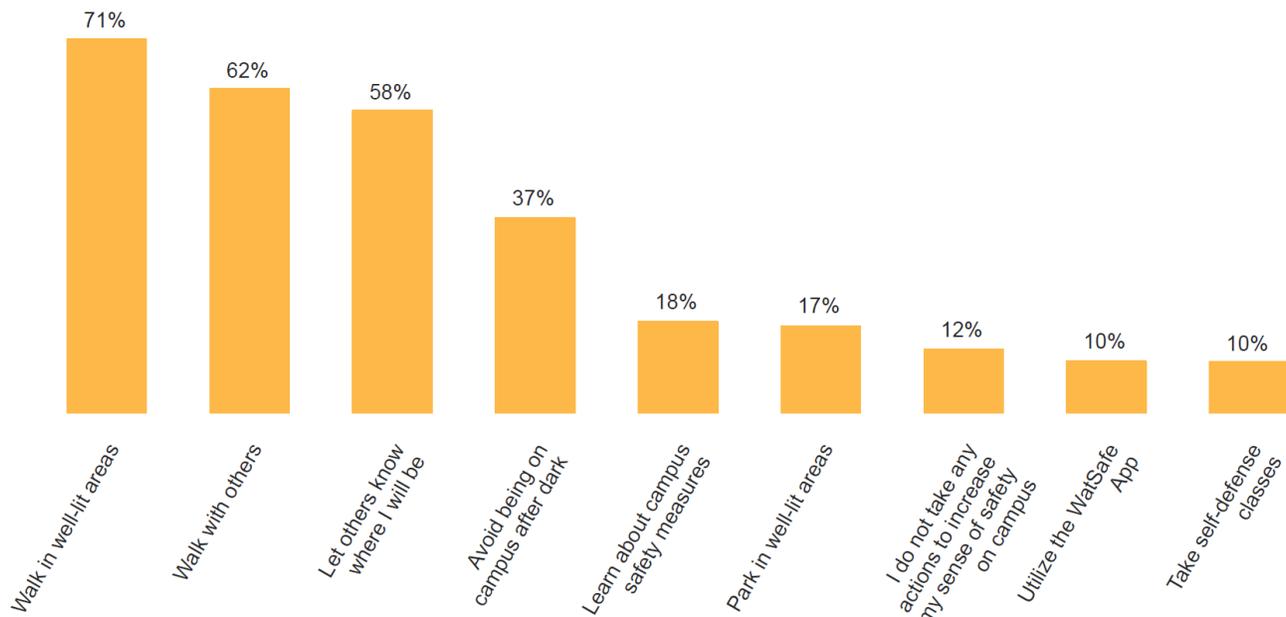


Figure 12 demonstrates that walking in well-lit areas (71%), walking with others (62%), and letting others know where they will be (58%) are the most common actions students take to increase their sense of safety on campus.

What do you think UW could change or provide to help increase the safety of students on campus?

Students were asked to provide their input on ways that UW could change to help increase the safety of students on campus. Some students reported a positive experience in terms of campus safety, stating that current resources are satisfactory and that the University of Waterloo is doing a good job to keep students safe. However, most respondents expressed dissatisfaction with current safety levels on campus and mentioned the following themes when discussing changes needed: **campus infrastructure, emergency procedures, education and awareness, and campus culture.**

The most common theme that students communicated was that changes to the overall **campus infrastructure** are needed to enable better safety. Students expressed improvements related to better lit walkways and pathways, more help buttons, a more visible security presence, as well as speed bumps and stop signs.

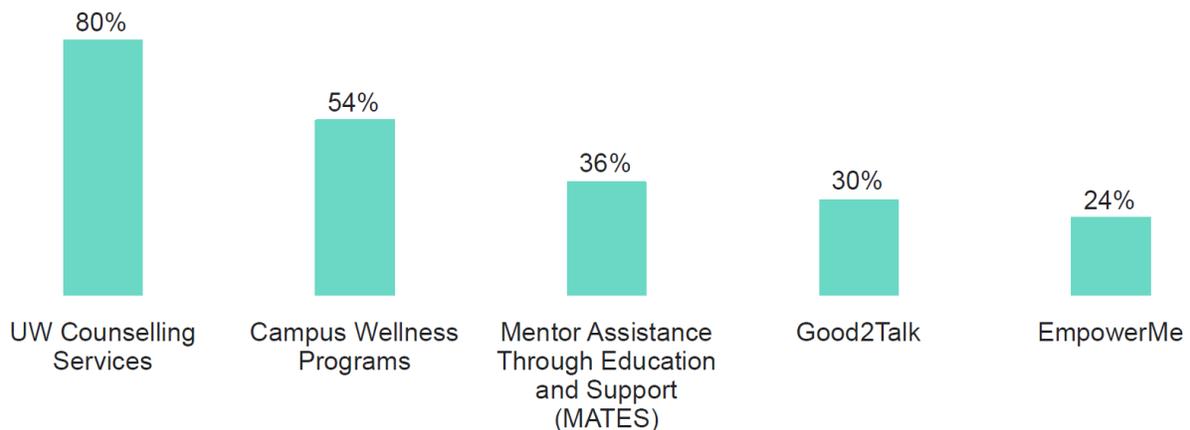
Students also expressed a desire to see improvements to **emergency procedures and services**, specifically in terms of action plans for emergency situations. Students shared that WatSAFE to be mandatory for all students to have. Most importantly, however, students stated that there should also be better promotion of this service and how to use it. Many students emphasized the importance of **education and awareness**, stressing that having safety measures in place is not useful unless there is also effort to inform students about them. For example, one student mentioned having signs around campus with helpful phone numbers to use during various emergency situations, while others mentioned having a course on LEARN or using social media to spread awareness.

Respondents also discussed the need to improve overall **campus culture** to help increase the safety of students on campus. Students mentioned the prevalence of a hateful culture on campus, including cancel culture, xenophobia, homophobia, and transphobia. Two students spoke to personal experiences with transphobia and stated that classrooms are currently unsafe for transgender students. One suggestion that a student provided to combat the toxic environment on campus is through encouraging social connection and fostering a sense of community among students.

Safety and Mental Health

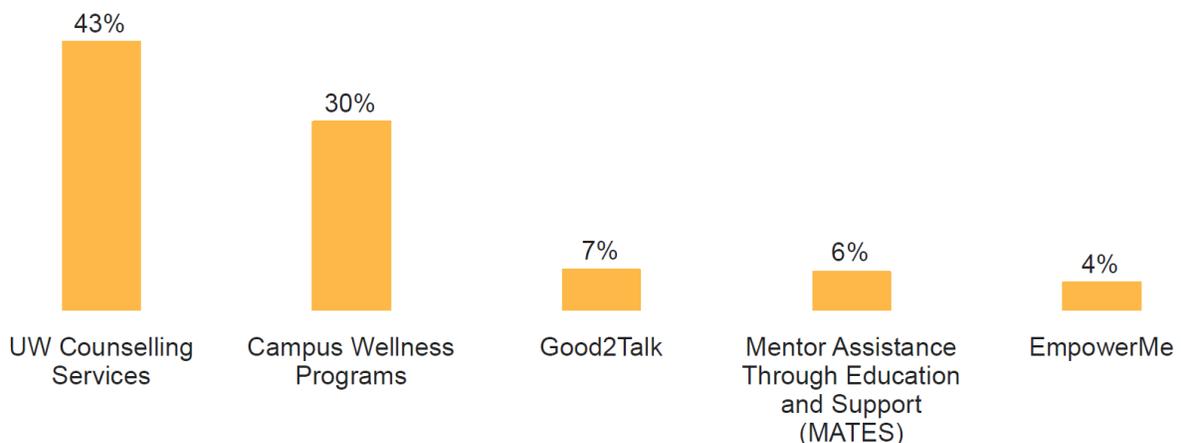
Which of the following campus mental health resources are you aware of?

Figure 13: Campus mental health resources respondents are aware of



Which of the following mental health resources have you accessed?

Figure 14: Campus mental health resources respondents have accessed

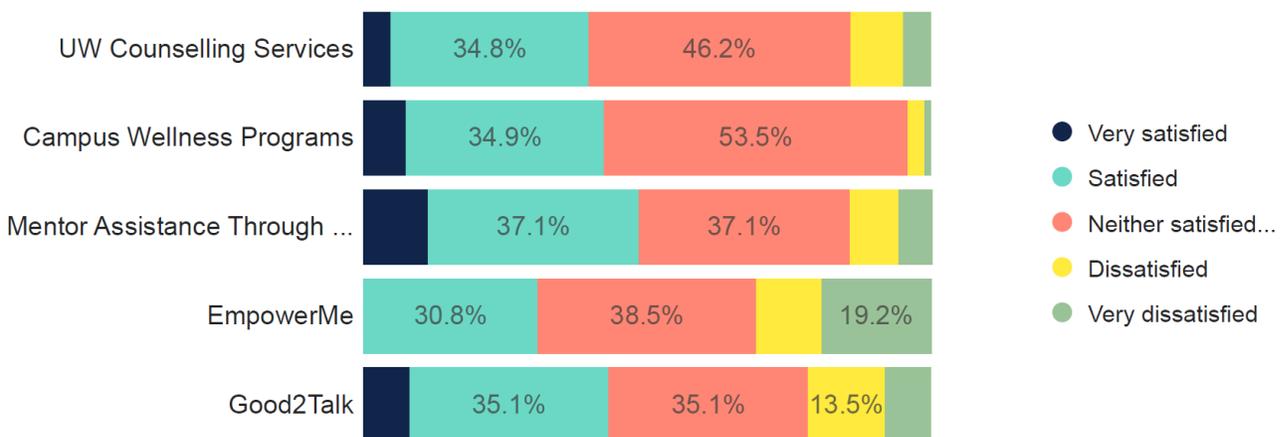


Students who selected campus mental health resources they were aware of (Figure 13) were then asked which ones they had accessed. Figure 14 demonstrates that most students have accessed UW Counselling services (43%) followed by Campus Wellness Programs (30%), which is consistent with student awareness of campus health resources in Figure 13. However, to understand the access rates for each service, it is important to compare the results from Figure 13 and 14. This analysis demonstrated that of the 462 students who indicated they were aware of Counselling Services, 53.68% (n=248) indicated they had accessed the service, making it the highest access rate. On the other hand, of the 206 students who indicated they were aware of Mentor Assistance Through Education and Support (MATES), 17.48% (n=36) indicated they had accessed the service, making it the lowest access rate.

It is also worth noting that there was a design flaw with this question as respondents were not provided with the option to indicate that they had NOT accessed any of the mental health resources they were aware of. Many respondents selected "other" as a replacement and these responses were filtered out of the analysis.

Please rate your satisfaction level accessing the following mental health resources

Figure 15: Satisfaction level accessing campus mental health resources



Finally, students who indicated they had accessed one of the campus mental health resources (Figure 14) were asked to rate their level of satisfaction accessing them. As demonstrated in Figure 15, the mental health resource with the highest percentage of both "very satisfied" and "satisfied" responses was Mentor Assistance Through Education and Support (MATES), with 11.43% (n=4) and 37.14% (n=13) of students selecting these options. On the other hand, the mental health resource with the highest percentage of "very dissatisfied" responses was Empower Me with 19.23% (n=5).

Do concerns about your safety on campus negatively impact your mental health?

Figure 16a: Responses to the question "Do concerns about your safety on campus negatively impact your mental health?"

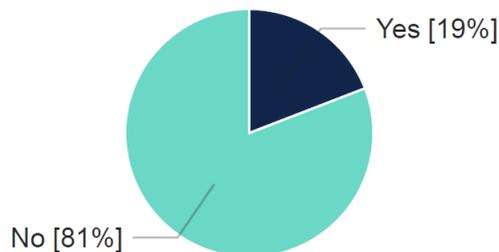
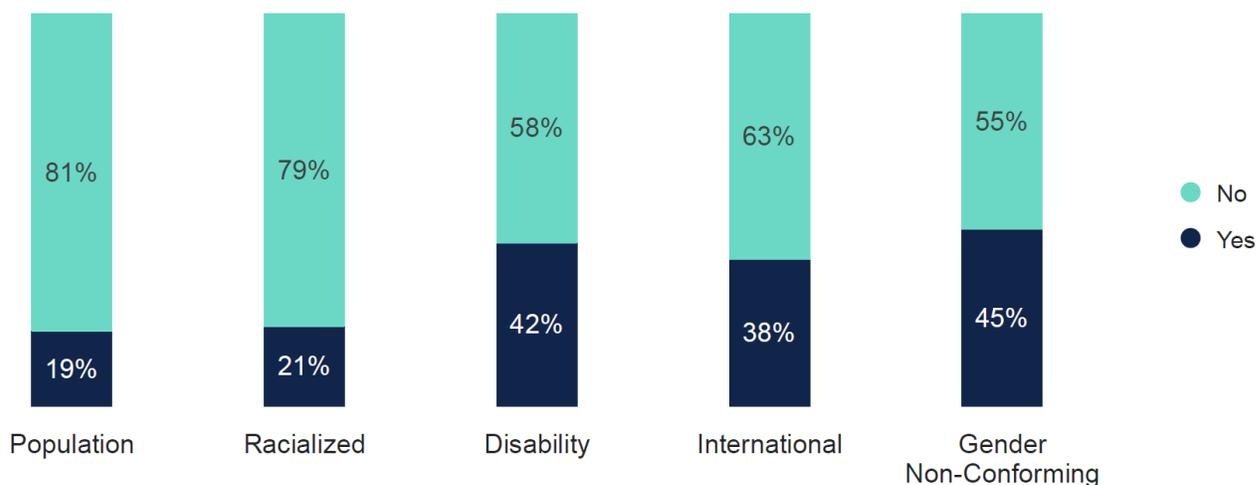


Figure 16a demonstrates that when it comes to whether concerns about safety on campus negatively impact mental health, most students selected that it did not (81%).

Figure 16b: Responses to the question "Do concerns about your safety on campus negatively impact your mental health?" by demographics



Although the negative impact is low for the entire population (19%), it is higher for those with disabilities (42%), respondents grouped as gender non-conforming (45%), international students (38%), and (slightly) for racialized students (21%) (Figure 16b). Statistically, we found that gender identity^{***}, international student status^{**}, and disability status ^{***} were related to whether safety concerns negatively impact mental health.

Please describe how concerns about your safety on campus impact your mental health.

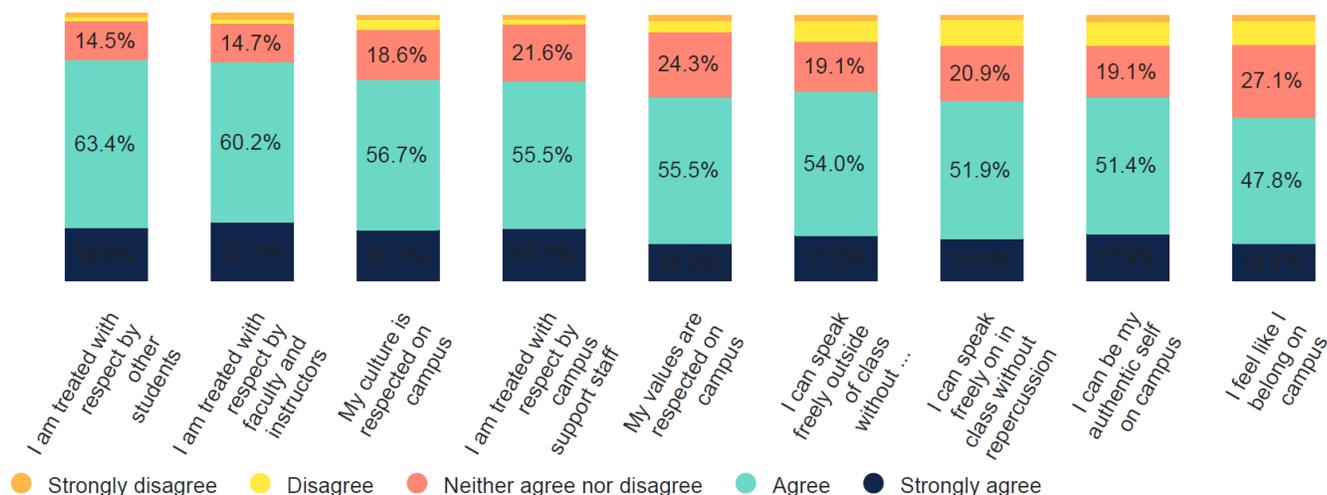
75 respondents described how concerns about safety on campus impacted their mental health. The majority of respondents (n=47) shared that it impacted their mental health by increasing **anxiety and nervousness** when on campus. Many students shared that feeling anxious on campus has led to **changes in routine** (n=11), such as leaving campus earlier than they would prefer or needing to constantly check their surroundings to ensure their safety. One student mentioned having *"Constant anxiety about whether or not I am safe walking in the dark. Anxiety to constantly check my surroundings and analyze the situation*

I am in. Anxiety that I cannot put my headphones in to focus more on my studies because I might not hear something that happens around me." Furthermore, many respondents shared that these feelings stemmed from the attack related to gender identity and expression on campus in June 2023 and the lack of safety measures the University provided. Students also shared that concerns about their safety have become an **additional stressor** (n=14). Their responses stated that being stressed about their safety is an additional burden and has impacted their productivity and academics. One student stated that "On top of all other stressors in student life, fear that somebody could physically endanger us at any time is frightening and an additional stressor." Lastly, respondents shared that fearing for their safety on campus has become an additional factor that has **worsened pre-existing mental health concerns** and overall well-being (n=12).

Safety, Identity and Belonging

Positive statements about campus

Figure 17a: Responses to statements about respect and belonging on campus

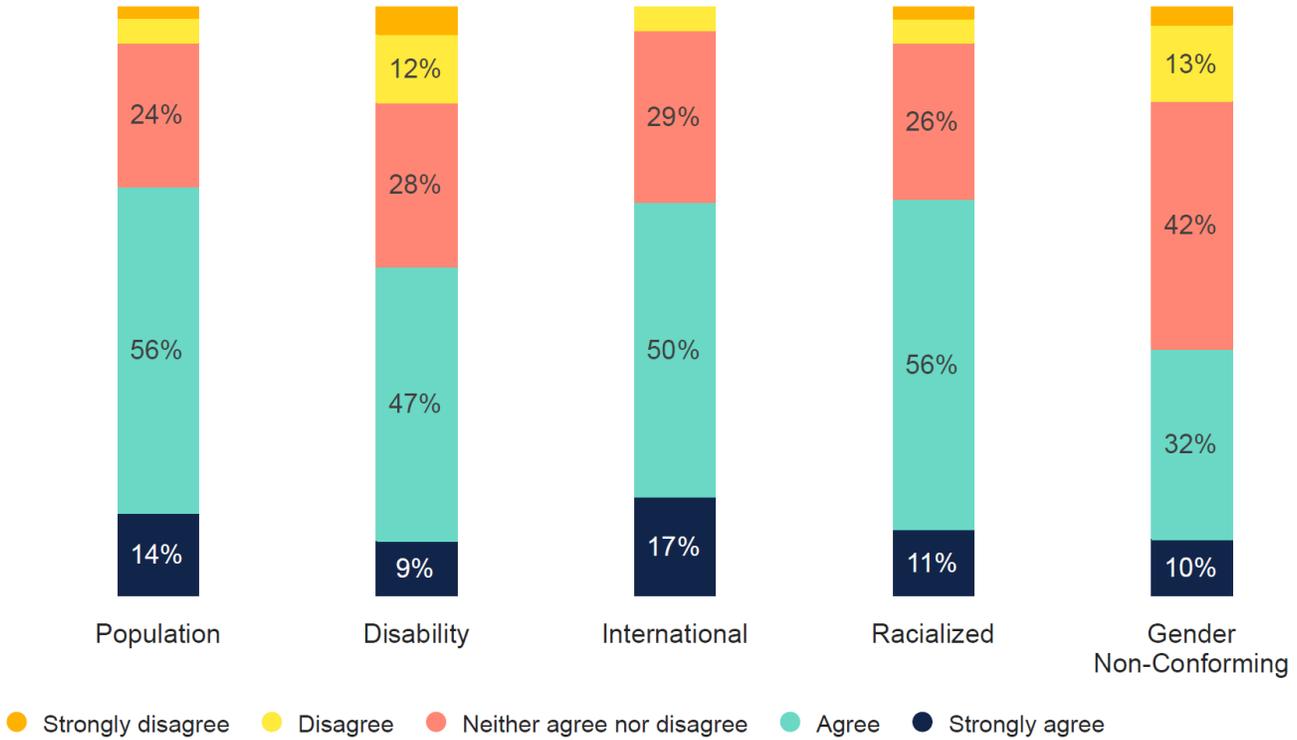


Respondents were presented with several positive statements related to belonging and respect on campus and were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement (Figure 17a). Overwhelmingly the responses were positive, with all statements receiving 60% to 80% either strongly agree or agree responses.

The mean was also calculated for each response, with 1 being strongly agree, 3 being neither agree nor disagree and 5 being strongly disagree. Thus, those with the highest mean indicate the least agreement. The statement "I feel like I belong on campus" had the least agreement, with a mean response of 2.37. The statements "I am treated with respect by other students" and "I am treated with respect by faculty and instructors" received the most agreement with a mean of 1.99 each. It is interesting to note that although many students on campus feel they are treated with respect; they do not necessarily feel a sense of belonging. This could be consistent with the general understanding that UW is an academics-focused institution, rather than a social one.

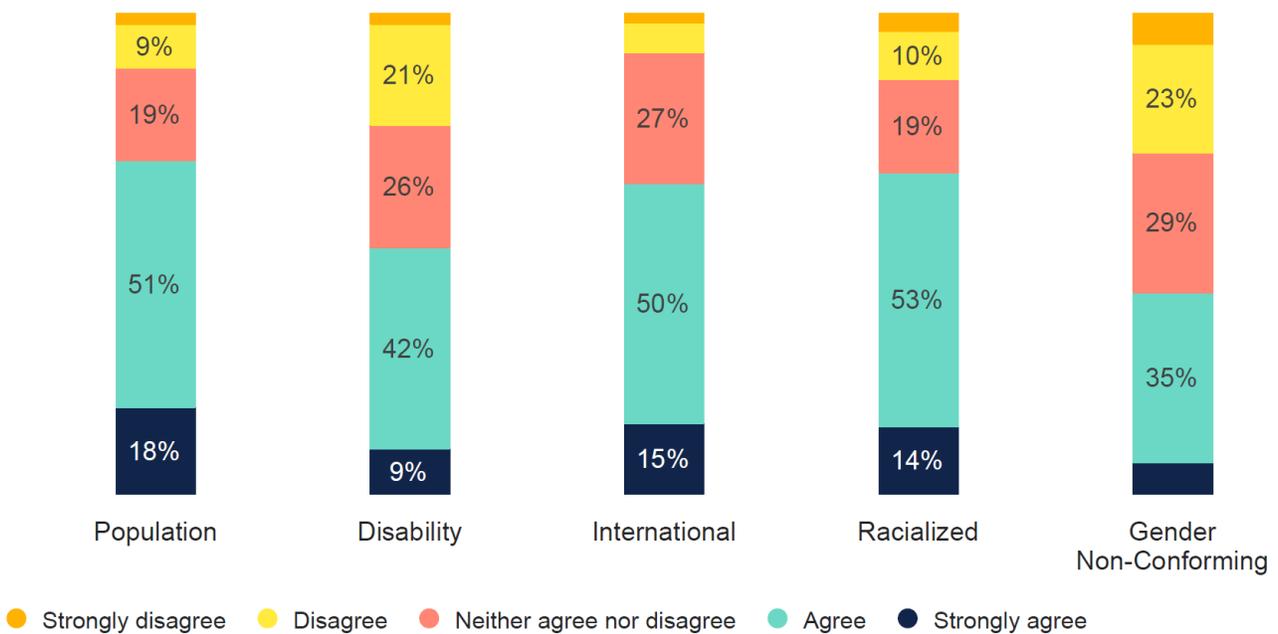
Examining the agreement level for these statements by specific demographic groups revealed that some of these populations have a notable difference in the level of agreement with some of the statements.

Figure 17b: Responses to the statement "My values are respected on campus" by demographics



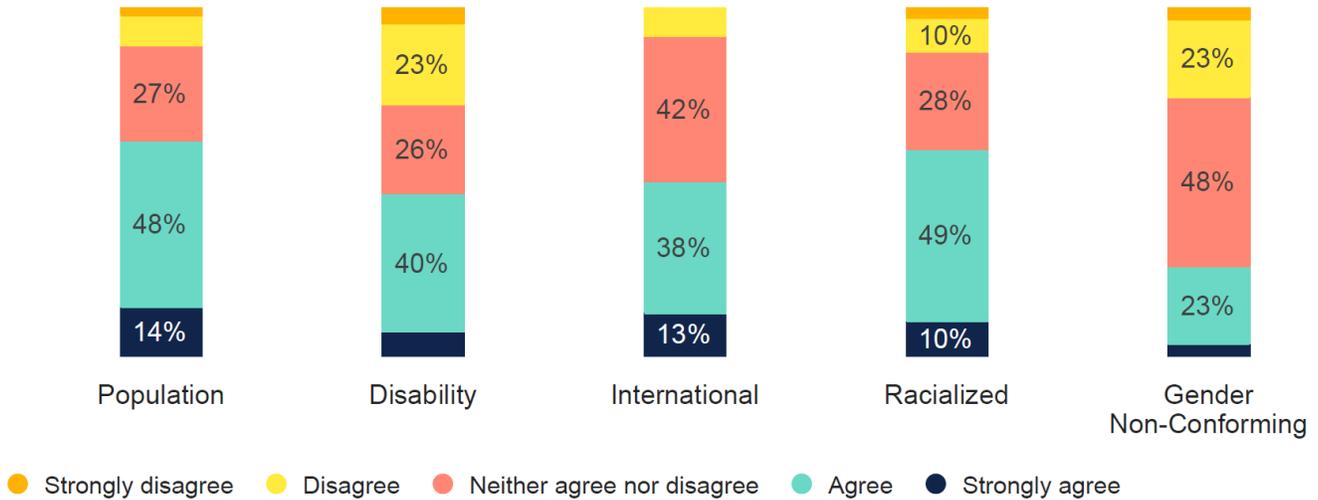
When prompted with the statement "My values are respected on campus," students who identify as having a disability (9% strongly agree and 47% agree) and students grouped as gender non-conforming (10% strongly agree and 32% agree) had notably lower levels of agreement with the statement than the overall population (where 14% strongly agree and 56% agree). This finding is significant* for both groups (Figure 17b).

Figure 17c: Responses to the statement "I can be my authentic self on campus" by demographics



When prompted with the statement “I can be my authentic self on campus,” 18% of respondents strongly agreed and 51% agreed. Respondents who identified as having a disability (9% strongly agree and 42% agree) and who identify as gender non-conforming (6% strongly agree and 35% agree) had notably lower levels of agreement (Figure 17c). This finding is significant for both groups. Specifically for gender identity, it was significant for cisgender men and cisgender women when compared to those grouped as gender non-conforming*.

Figure 17d: Responses to the statement "I feel like I belong on campus" by demographics

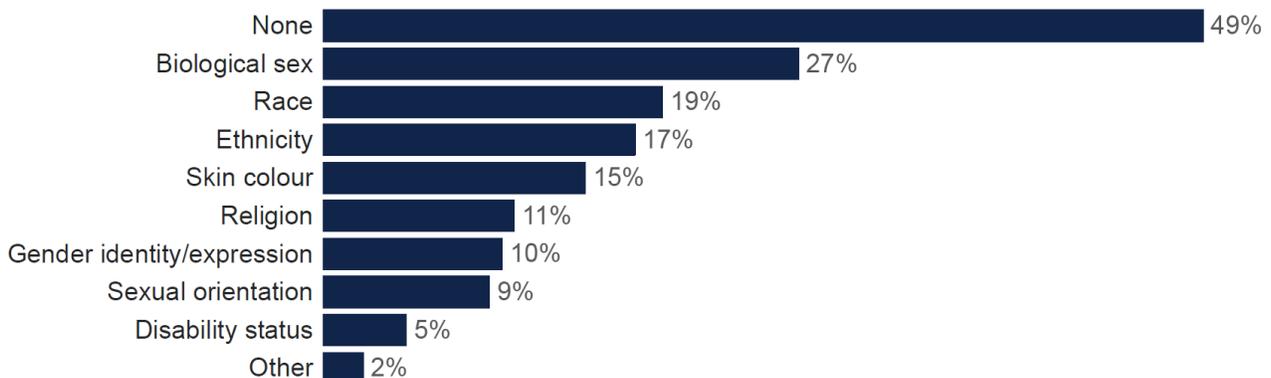


When presented with the statement “I feel like I belong on campus,” students grouped as gender non-conforming showed significantly*** different responses than the general population (Figure 17d), with a high proportion of respondents in that group selecting disagree or neither agree nor disagree. This can also be observed when looking at the responses of students who identified as having a disability*, although to a lesser extent.

Based on the responses to these statements, it appears that students who identify as having a disability and students grouped as gender non-conforming are less likely to agree that their values are respected on campus, they feel they belong on campus, or that they can be their authentic self on campus. This indicates major changes are needed to support the experience of these groups on campus.

Is your experience of safety on campus impacted by any of the following aspects of your identity?

Figure 18: Is your experience of safety on campus impacted by any of the following aspects of your identity?



In addition to those presented to respondents (Figure 18) other aspects of identity shared by respondents included mental health, neurodivergence, and political views.

What specific safety concerns do you have related to aspects of your identity?

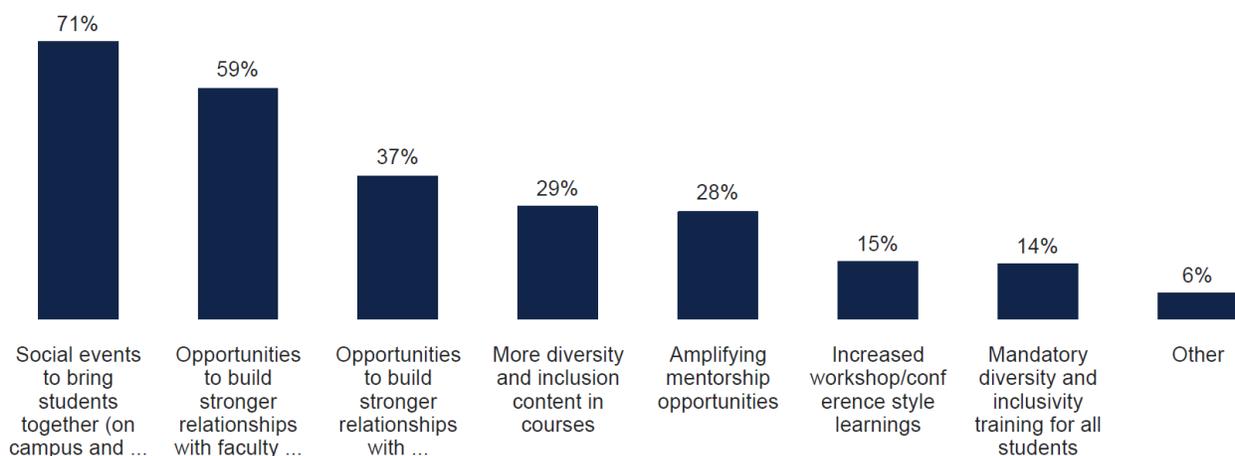
Respondents who selected one of the identity aspects in the previous question were asked to elaborate on what safety concerns they have in relation to their identity. Of the 185 respondents that responded, the main themes mentioned were gender based and sexual violence (100 responses), race (46 responses), religion (23), and respect (10). Within the responses that mentioned concerns around gender based and sexual violence many of the respondents mentioned concerns around feeling vulnerable due to their gender identity, their size, and concerns around walking alone at night. Many of these respondents also mentioned another intersection of their identity (often race) and how that impacts their fear of gender-based violence. Respondents who mentioned race often also mentioned a culture of hate, concerns around discrimination and bias, systems of oppression, and of violence. As one respondent explained:

"As a woman, I am stereotypically targeted as a victim of sexual harassment or abuse, as well as physical harassment and abuse. My physical strength is not enough to keep aggressors away. As a woman of colour, I can be seen as a target since people of colour have often not been believed by authorities. So aggressors can get away with their offence."

The culture around gender in STEM fields was also specifically mentioned, as one student explained that *"I am in Chemical Engineering 1A which is quite a male-dominated program. I have been belittled by men, 'mansplained' by them, treated like a 'stupid person' and so much more. I feel like sometimes, they treat me disrespectfully with my opinions and ideas, and I oftentimes do not feel very heard in group projects with them."*

Do you feel any of the following would help create a more connected and inclusive UW community?

Figure 19: Do you feel any of the following would help create a more connected and inclusive UW community?



Respondents were given a list of options that might contribute to creating a more connected and inclusive on campus community and could select all options that apply (Figure 19). 71% of respondents selected social events to bring students together, 59% selected opportunities to build stronger relationships with faculty and instructors, 37% selected opportunities to build stronger relationships with campus support staff, 29% selected more diversity and inclusion content in courses, and 28% selected amplifying mentorship opportunities.

Some respondents selected other (6%) and their suggestions included:

- Treating complaints from queer students seriously and taking action
- Suggestion to look at the literature at what has been shown to be effective
- Sexual violence prevention training for the men's athletics teams
- Increasing the onus on faculty and instructors to build an inclusive culture
- Individualized accommodation plans based on intersectional identity of students
- Celebration of individual cultural identities
- Repercussion free reporting for incidents of harassment
- Zero-tolerance approach to staff and faculty who commit harassment

What is the most important consideration to include in the development of a campus safety plan?

When asked about the most important considerations that should be included in the development of a safety plan students mentioned **awareness and communication, accessibility, the importance of including students, and inclusivity.**

The most common theme mentioned by students was **awareness and communication.** Many students expressed being unaware of safety procedures and plans at the university, emphasizing the need to increase awareness for effectiveness. Moreover, students suggest that **better communication avenues** are required when developing a safety plan, so that messages involving safety, or threats of danger, can be communicated to students fast and effectively.

Another aspect of this awareness and communication piece is the concept of **accessibility.** Students mentioned that a future safety plan should be clear and easy to understand. However, another way in which students discussed accessibility was related to how accessible different buildings on campus are to people outside of the UW community and how this could be better controlled to ensure safety.

Another common idea presented by students was the importance of **including student feedback** in the development of a safety plan at the University of Waterloo. Students emphasized that the university should actively seek feedback from students with **diverse identities** and incorporate multiple points of views to ensure a safety plan that represents the concerns of all students. In this sense, the idea of **inclusivity** is important to consider in the development of a new safety plan, as students identified the many intersecting identities that exist amongst students on campus. As one student explained, *"it must be inclusive of everyone while focusing on the groups most vulnerable to feeling unsafe on campus."*

What is the most important consideration as we work towards a more connected and inclusive culture on campus?

Students were asked what they think are the most important considerations to include when working towards a more connected and inclusive culture on campus. Generally, respondents spoke to ideas pertaining to **diversity, education, respect, and building community through activities**.

The most common response from students was the idea of developing a positive university culture that supports and celebrates **diversity**, especially as it relates to gender, sexuality, religion, race, and culture. Furthermore, students discussed this idea of diversity both in terms of education and respect.

When it comes to **education**, students suggested that one way to create a more inclusive culture on campus is to provide students with more opportunities to learn about different cultures. Some students even suggested implementing mandatory educational seminars or workshops into programs to enable students to learn more about inclusivity in general. On the other hand, two students expressed concerns in implementing mandatory educational programs, especially since it adds to their heavy workload being students.

Expanding education opportunities can also foster **respect**, another theme highlighted by students. They expressed that increased awareness and education about the diversity of students at the University of Waterloo would contribute to a more respectful environment, allowing students to freely express themselves. It is important to note that many students stressed the complexity of inclusion, particularly when aspects of one's identity, such as religious beliefs, conflict with those of others. It is these situations, students explained, where respect should be maintained.

Finally, many students expressed a desire to see more **activities** to foster a connected and inclusive culture. By providing more activities on campus to connect, this can be an avenue to also educate students on inclusion and diversity in an interactive manner. One student stated their need to see more events celebrating cultures and bringing diverse identities together. While this effort also contributes to community on campus, cultural events can also educate students on diverse identities and concepts of inclusion.

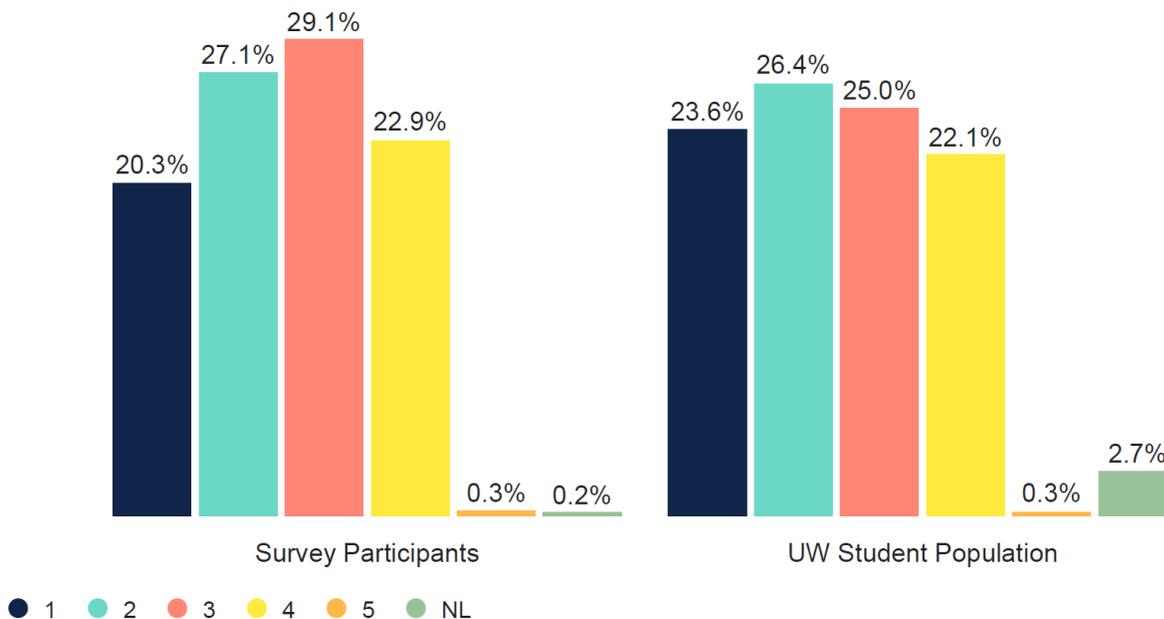
Conclusion

This report has detailed the various ways in which students experience and perceive safety on the University of Waterloo main campus. From feelings of comfort, connection and belonging, expression of beliefs and emergency procedures – there are a myriad of components that make up student safety including both physical and psychological. Although most students do feel safe on campus, this depends on the time of day and differs greatly for students grouped as gender non-conforming and those who identify as having a disability. The types of safety issues students were most concerned about were theft and verbal harassment and the areas of most concern were bus stops/parking lots and walking paths. When it comes to safety and mental health, most students felt their concerns about safety did not negatively impact their mental health, however, this was higher for students with disabilities, those grouped as gender non-conforming and for international students. This connection between safety and identity was a major theme throughout the report, especially as students referenced the hate-motivated attack related to gender expression and gender identity that occurred on campus in June 2023. When explicitly asked how their experience of safety was impacted by aspects of their identity, students discussed gender based and sexual violence most commonly. Clearly, experiences of safety on campus vary among students. Fortunately, this report also shares insights into what students would like to see as we move towards a more safe and inclusive campus. Here, students emphasized awareness and communication, accessibility, involving students, respect, education and building community. Finally, these findings have resulted in the creation of 8 recommendations, outlined at the beginning of the report. These should serve as suggestions for how both WUSA, and the University should move forward with future initiatives related to student safety at UW.

Demographic Comparison

Demographic information is collected from RSP respondents when they sign up to participate. The following graphs show the demographic breakdown of students who participated in this survey. This participant data is also compared to the actual UW student population data available through [IAP Student headcount](#). This comparison data includes co-op, international students, faculty and year of study. Currently, there is no UW data related to gender identity, disability status and racial identity to compare our participant data to.

Figure 20: Year of Study



As seen in Figure 20, we slightly under selected first year students and NL² students and slightly over selected second year, third year and fourth year students.

Figure 21: Co-op Students

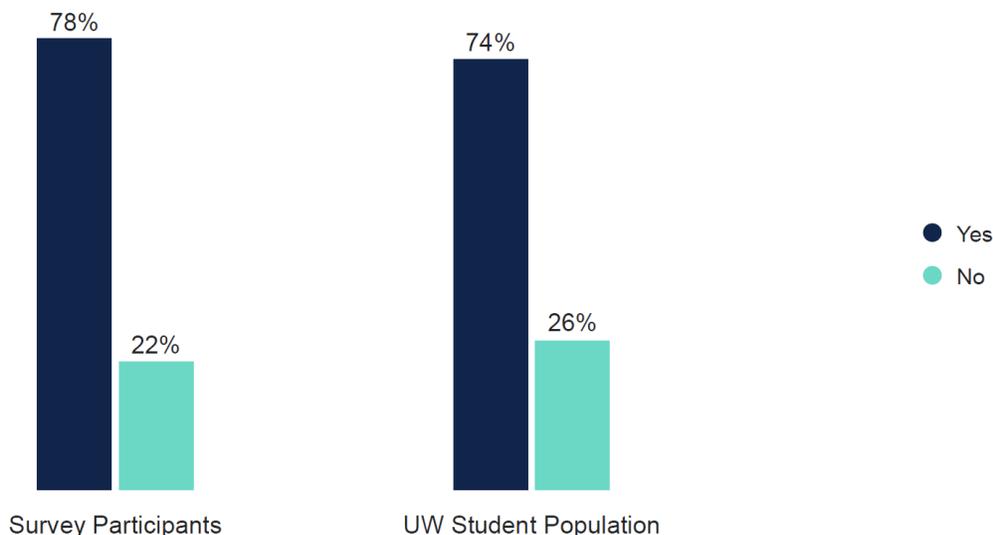


Figure 21 demonstrates that we over selected co-op students in this survey.

² "NL" stands for "no level", meaning the student is: either (1) a post-degree student (finished degree but interested in more courses); (2) a non-degree student; or (3) studying here on a letter of permission (taking courses at Waterloo but getting a degree at another school)

Figure 22: Do you identify as disabled?

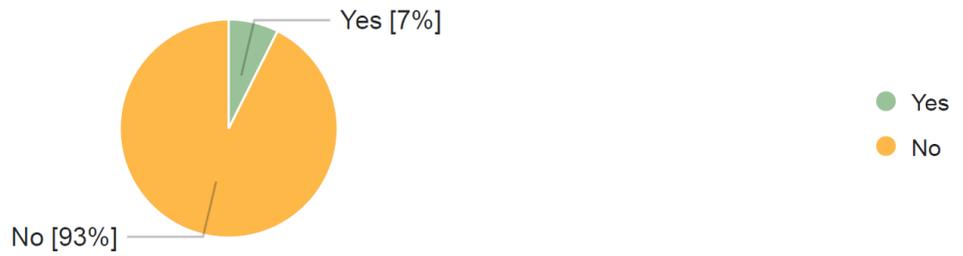
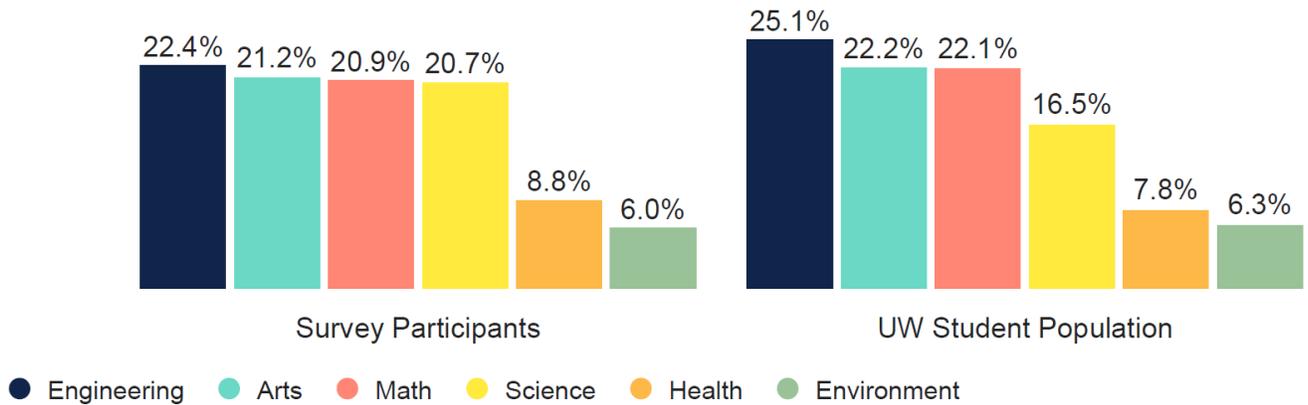


Figure 23: Which faculty are you in?



As seen in Figure 23, we slightly under selected Engineering, Arts and Math students and over selected for Science and Health students.

Figure 24: What is your gender identity?

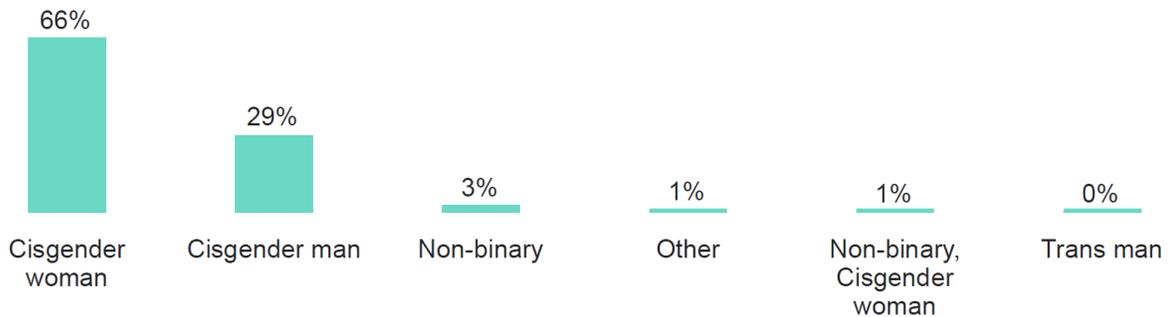


Figure 25: Are you an international student?

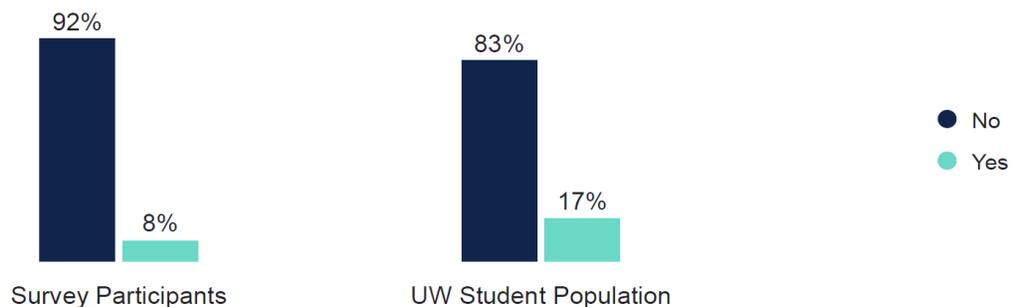


Figure 25 demonstrates that we under selected international students by 9%.

Figure 26: Do you identify as racialized?

Appendix A: Statistical Methods

Statistical testing was performed for some of the survey questions to further investigate how students who identified as international, a person with a disability, a member of a racialized group or those who were grouped as gender non-conforming may have responded significantly differently than the rest of the sample population. All statistical testing was completed using R.

As most of the quantifiable survey questions used a 5-point Likert scale, the data was ordinal and non-normal, so the Wilcoxon Rank Sum testing methodology was used to analyze the responses and determine whether there was a significant difference between the responses based on the demographics we had available to us, as listed in Table 1. This included the following comparisons:

- International students compared to non-international students
- Students who identified as a person with a disability compared to students who did not
- Students who identified as a member of a racialized group compared to students who did not

We also estimated effect size post-hoc using a Wilcoxon effect size calculation; in all cases where there was a significant finding the effect size for all comparisons was small (0.1-0.3).

For investigating whether there was a significant difference between the responses based on gender identity (Table 2), we used the Kruskal Wallis test and followed up with the Dunn's test post-hoc to make pairwise comparisons. As mentioned above, to ensure a large enough sample size, we grouped all respondents who identified as not being cisgender into the group of gender non-conforming and compared their responses to the responses of cisgender men and cisgender women separately.

For Question 21³, which was formatted with only yes and no options, a Chi Square test of independence was performed followed by a post-hoc Bonferroni test.

Throughout the report, any statistically significant findings are denoted with one asterisk (*) for a p-value of 0.05, two asterisks (**) for a p-value of 0.01 and three asterisks (***) for a p value of 0.005.

³ An overview of survey questions can be found in the Appendix B of this report.

Appendix B: Survey Questions

Perceived Personal Safety on Campus

1. What does it mean to you to feel safe on campus?

2. Do you live on main campus? [MC – Select one]

- Yes
 No

3. Please select which University of Waterloo campus you would like to answer the following safety questions about. [MC – Select one]

- Waterloo
 Cambridge
 Kitchener
 Stratford

4. How do you typically commute to campus? [MC – Select one – Display only if 2b is selected]

- Vehicle (alone)
 Vehicle (carpool)
 Walk
 Bicycle
 Public transit
 Other

5. How safe do you feel travelling to and from campus from where you live? [MC – Select one – Display only if 2b is selected]

- Very safe
 Safe
 Neither safe nor unsafe
 Unsafe
 Very unsafe

6. Overall, how safe and secure do you feel on campus? [MC – Select one]

- Very safe
 Safe
 Neither safe nor unsafe
 Unsafe
 Very unsafe

7. How safe do you feel on campus during the day (E.g., in the daylight)? [MC – Select one]

- Very safe
- Safe
- Neither safe nor unsafe
- Unsafe
- Very unsafe

8. How safe do you feel on campus at night (E.g., after dark)? [MC – Select one]

- Very safe
- Safe
- Neither safe nor unsafe
- Unsafe
- Very unsafe

9. How safe do you feel accessing or participating in the following? [Matrix with options for very safe, safe, neither safe nor unsafe, unsafe, very unsafe]

- WUSA Events
- Student Life Centre
- Faculty Societies
- WUSA Clubs

10 Please indicate your agreement with the following statements: [Matrix with options for strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree]

a. I feel UW prioritizes my safety on campus

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

b. I believe UW has made adequate efforts to educate students about campus safety measures and emergency procedures

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

c. I feel I am free from physical harm or threat of physical harm while on campus

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

d. I feel I am free from hostility, aggression and harassment on campus

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

e. I believe UW takes appropriate action to protect students on campus

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

11. Do you have safety concerns about any of the following on campus? [MC – Select all that apply]

- Sexual assault
- Physical assault
- Violent attack
- Verbal harassment
- Stalking
- Theft
- I do not have any of these safety concerns [Make exclusive]
- Other

12. Are you concerned about any of the following areas related to your safety on campus? [MC – Select all that Apply]

- Bus stops/parking lots
- Athletics and Recreation facilities
- Classrooms/lecture halls
- Campus Housing
- Walking paths
- Underground tunnels
- Food outlets
- Study spaces (E.g., libraries)
- I am not concerned about safety anywhere on campus [Make exclusive]
- Other

13. Please use the drag and drop feature to rank which areas you feel the most concerned about related to your safety on campus. [Rank order – 1 = most concerned about]

a. Selected options carried over from Q12

14. Do any of the following contribute to you feeling unsafe on campus? [MC – Select all that apply]

- Presence of Special Constable Services
- Lack of awareness about campus safety measures
- Being in the presence of strangers at night
- Being in the presence of strangers during the day
- Overall campus culture
- Walking alone at night
- Walking alone during the day
- Evening classes
- I do not feel unsafe on campus [Make exclusive]
- Other

15. Please use the drag and drop feature to rank what makes you feel the most unsafe on campus. [Rank order – 1 = most unsafe]

a. Selected options carried over from Q14

16. Do you take any of the following actions to increase your sense of safety on campus? [MC – Select all that apply]

- Walk with others
- Let others know where I will be
- Walk in well-lit areas
- Learn about campus safety measures
- Park in well-lit areas
- Take self-defense classes
- Avoid being on campus after dark
- Utilize the WatSafe App
- I do not take any actions to increase my sense of safety on campus [Make exclusive]
- Other

17. What do you think UW could change or provide to help increase the safety of students on campus?

Safety and Mental Health

18. Which of the following campus mental health resources are you aware of? [Select all that apply]

- UW Counselling Services
- Campus Wellness Programs
- Mentor Assistance Through Education and Support (MATES)
- EmpowerMe
- Good2Talk
- Other

19. Which of the following mental health resources have you accessed? [Select all that apply]

- UW Counselling Services
- Campus Wellness Programs
- Mentor Assistance Through Education and Support (MATES)
- EmpowerMe
- Good2Talk
- Other

20. Please rate your satisfaction level accessing the following mental health resources [Matrix with options for very satisfied, satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, dissatisfied, very dissatisfied]

a. Carry over options selected in Q19

21. Do concerns about your safety on campus negatively impact your mental health? [MC – Select One]

- Yes
- No

22. Please describe how concerns about your safety on campus impact your mental health. [Text box – Display only if 20a is selected]

Perceived Emotional & Psychological Safety on Campus

23. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements [Matrix with options for strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree]

a. I can speak freely on in class without repercussions

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

b. I can speak freely outside of class without repercussions

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

c. My values are respected on campus

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

d. My culture is respected on campus

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

e. I can be my authentic self on campus

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

f. I feel like I belong on campus

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

g. I am treated with respect by other students

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

h. I am treated with respect by faculty and instructors

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

i. I am treated with respect by campus support staff

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

24. Is your experience of safety on campus impacted by any of the following aspects of your identity? [MC – Select all that apply]

- Race
- Ethnicity
- Skin colour
- Sexual orientation
- Gender identity/expression
- Biological sex
- Religion
- Disability status
- None [Make exclusive]
- Other

25. What specific safety concerns do you have related to aspects of your identity? [Textbox – do not display if 23i is selected]

26. Do you feel any of the following would help create a more connected and inclusive UW community? [MC – Select all that apply]

- More diversity and inclusion content in courses
- Mandatory diversity and inclusivity training for all students
- Increased workshop/conference style learnings
- Social events to bring students together (on campus and in the community)
- Opportunities to build stronger relationships with faculty and instructors
- Opportunities to build stronger relationships with campus support staff
- Amplifying mentorship opportunities
- Other

Future Initiatives

27. What is the most important consideration to include in the development of a campus safety plan?

28. What is the most important consideration to include as we work towards a more connected and inclusive culture on campus?