

2023 Tuition Survey for Students – Report on Findings December 2023

Background:

In alignment with the University of Saskatchewan’s goal to engage in robust annual discussions with students about tuition, USask undertook its third Tuition Survey for Students in October/November 2023. The format of this year’s annual survey reflects the progressive development of survey items, with efforts made to ensure that the survey is easy to complete. As a new addition this year, students were asked to provide rankings (1-3) for the areas of investment they consider to be most critical at USask.

The survey invitation also included a reminder that participation is voluntary, and responses are anonymous. The invitation indicated that the goal is to develop key points of action from the student responses that will be shared with university leaders. The survey was open for student responses for three weeks.

Who responded?

Just over 3,000 students responded to an e-mail invitation to provide feedback, which was sent to all undergraduate and graduate students. This represents a response rate of 13%. Complete data were available for **2,528** students (11% of those students invited to participate). Given that a smaller number of students completed the entire survey, proportions for investment items, described below, were compared between the full (but survey incomplete) sample and the reduced (survey completed) sample. No substantive differences were observed in the findings.

The demographics for the responding student group are as follows:

- 78% domestic; 22% international
- 75% undergraduate (including 66% direct-entry and 9% non-direct entry programs)
- 25% graduate (16% master’s degree and 9% doctoral)
- 30% of responding students reported being in their first year of studies, 22% in their second year, and 18% in their third year; the remaining participants (29%) reported pursuing their degree for four or more years
- More than one-third of students responding (38%) were registered in the College of Arts and Science, with four other direct-entry colleges showing similar proportions of representation, including: Education (10%), Edwards School of Business (9%), Engineering (9%), and Agriculture and Bioresources (9%). The proportion of the sample from other colleges and schools can be seen in Appendix A.

Areas of investment that are important to students

Students were asked to consider a range of 26 possible areas where they believe their college or school, and the university as a whole, should consider investing resources to improve education quality, student experience, and/or student supports that are provided. Responses were provided on a scale ranging from 1 (“not at all important”) to 4 (“very important”). Following each cluster of items, students had an opportunity to provide additional ideas about investments.

The table below shows the proportion of students who rated an item as important. The first column reflects those who indicated that an item was “Important” or “Very Important.” The second column indicates those items for which there was at least 10% difference between graduate (G) and undergraduate (UG) students and between international (I) and domestic students (D).

Investment Area	Important + Very Important %	Differences (at least 10%)
<i>Increase open access textbooks and digital online resources</i>	89 (#2)	
<i>Offer more scholarships and bursaries</i>	87 (#1)	I>D
<i>Increase mental health supports</i>	77	
<i>Improve the quality of instruction through expanded training opportunities for instructors</i>	77	
<i>More hands-on experience in courses</i>	76	
<i>Enhance career support to help students transition out of university</i>	76	I>D
<i>Increase opportunities for internships and work-integrated learning</i>	76	I>D
<i>Improve availability of academic advising</i>	73	I>D
<i>Make improvements to student wellness services (in general)</i>	71	I>D
<i>Improve the quality of instruction by providing better learning technology tools (such as Canvas)</i>	71	
<i>Improved parking options</i>	69 (#3)	UG>G D>I
<i>Increase employment opportunities for students on campus</i>	69	I>D
<i>Increase assistance to students in navigating the university processes, such as registering for classes</i>	69	I>D
<i>Provide healthier food options or more choices</i>	67	
<i>Improve safety and security on campus</i>	64	I>D
<i>More comfortable/flexible seating in classrooms</i>	63	UG>G
<i>Improve accessibility, particularly supports provided through Access and Equity Services (AES)</i>	63	G>UG I>D
<i>Maintenance and renovation of buildings</i>	63	
<i>Increase the availability of online classes</i>	60	I>D
<i>Increase the availability of learning resources to support greater understanding and awareness of anti-racism</i>	60	G>UG I>D
<i>Increase the availability of learning resources to support greater understanding of sustainability</i>	60	G>UG I>D
<i>Improvements to lab facilities</i>	58	G>UG I>D
<i>Increase access to tutors</i>	57	I>D
<i>Expand the hours of operation for libraries</i>	56	I>D
<i>Upgrades to classroom technology</i>	52	G>UG I>D
<i>Enhancements to study rooms</i>	51	I>D

Note: The #1, #2, and #3 above represent those items that were ranked as first, second, and third by respondents.

Among the cluster of desired investment areas with the highest proportions of importance ratings (up to 67% or 2/3 of the students who responded), almost half of the items pertain to services and programs where students believe more investment would be important (i.e., online textbooks, financial aid, support for career transition, internship opportunities, and academic advising). Three of the top items are from the student wellness cluster (i.e., mental health supports, wellness in general, healthier food). Some importance was also placed on course delivery and the quality of instruction (i.e., hands-on experience in classes, expanded training for faculty) and facilities and infrastructure (i.e., parking). For those items at the high end of importance, undergraduate and domestic respondents put more emphasis on improved parking. With a different comparative lens, for those 13 items with the highest proportions of importance, a greater number of international students who participated in the survey endorsed these investments as important or very important when compared to the proportion of domestic students.

After providing ratings for each of the 29 items shown on the table, students were asked to identify the three most critically important investments from the full set. The top-ranked item for students was the provision of more scholarships and bursaries. Investments into increasing open-access textbooks and digital online resources was the most common item ranked as #2. Finally, improved parking received the most frequent endorsement as being #3.

In addition to rating the importance of specific investments, responses to open-ended questions included other exemplars of the investment categories. Some of the responses were further elaborations about items that had already been rated, including seeking greater investment into: (1) student financial supports (specific references to international students and graduate students), (2) varied food options (e.g., halal, vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free), (3) less expensive food options, (4) locations of where food is available, (5) less expensive parking and more parking options, (6) more on-line offerings, (7) increased access to mental health services, and (8) renovations and updates to certain buildings (e.g., Engineering, Arts and Science). Other responses reflected additional investments where ratings had not been included. Examples represent investment sub-themes that were raised by multiple students and included: (1) access to more study rooms and spaces for students to congregate, (2) child care, (3) safety and security items (such as lighting), (4) housing, (5) increased supports for students who are parenting, (6) expanded facilities at the PA campus, (7) greater opportunities to work on campus, and (8) training for teaching assistants. Some students commented on their desire to understand how tuition increases are being invested both within their own college/school and across the university.

Where should the university consider disinvestments of resources?

Students were asked to consider a smaller set of seven (7) areas for which the university might consider possible disinvestment. These were areas previously identified by students as places where their college/school and the university should look to disinvest or remove resources. Specifically, students rated their level of agreement on a scale range from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 4 (“strongly agree”) with **investing less in on-campus services and programs**, as follows:

- Food services
- Athletics and Physical Activities Complex (PAC)
- Books or journal articles in the libraries
- Extracurricular and social activities
- Parking Services
- In-person convocation
- Museum and galleries

The table below shows the proportion of students who indicated they strongly agreed and somewhat agreed (second column) and the proportion of students who strongly disagreed and somewhat disagreed (fourth column) that the university should invest less in an array of areas.

Disinvestment Area	Strongly Agree + Somewhat Agree %	Differences (at least 10%)	Strongly Disagree + Somewhat Disagree %	Differences (at least 10%)
<i>Museums and galleries</i>	56		44	
<i>In-person convocation</i>	40	G>UG	60	UG>G
<i>Athletics and the Physical Activities Complex (PAC)</i>	38		62	
<i>Extracurricular and social activities</i>	36		64	
<i>Books or journal articles in the libraries</i>	34	UG>G	66	G>UG
<i>Parking Services</i>	32	G>UG I>D	68	UG>G D>I
<i>Food services</i>	29		71	

Responses to the question about disinvestments provide less clear answers and show discord among the responding student body. Based on the ratings, it seems that students are not interested in the university investing less in food services, books and journal articles in the libraries, or parking services. By contrast, just over half of students responding supported disinvestments in museums and galleries; however, more than 40% disagreed with disinvestments in this area. Undergraduate students, compared to graduate students, more commonly agreed with disinvestments in books or journal articles in the libraries. In contrast, graduate students, compared to undergraduate students, more commonly endorsed agreement about disinvesting in parking services and in-person convocation, with international students, versus domestic, also more frequently seeing a need to disinvest in Parking Services.

Students had the opportunity to provide open-ended responses regarding disinvestments. These responses included a subset of items that are outside the university's purview, including, for example, *The Sheaf*, the transit pass, the University of Saskatchewan Students' Union (USSU) centres, and medical/dental insurance. These activities are under the oversight of the USSU and/or the Graduate Students' Association (GSA) and questions about opting out should be directed to these student governing bodies.

Other open-ended comments showed a pattern of responses that mirrored the ratings described above. Whereas some students elaborated on the need for disinvesting in the PAC, others took the position that access to these facilities is critical for students' well-being. Open-ended comments from those students who participated in the survey reflected a desire for tuition to be lower and that tuition for international students be the same as what is assessed for domestic students. Some students also used the survey to ask for greater transparency about the university's resource allocation and budgeting. For the last several years, the university has been building and updating modules that provide more detailed information for students to improve their knowledge and understanding of these important topics. Specific financial information can be found on the [tuition consultation webpage](#).

Conclusions

The 2023 Tuition Survey for Students resulted in more than 3,000 students providing their input on areas for greater investment at USask, as well as their agreement or disagreement regarding where the university could reduce spending increase investments elsewhere. Not surprisingly, for students, there is much interest in and importance placed on areas where incremental investment is desirable. It is also clear that the university is making investments into many of these areas and it needs to increase its efforts to inform students of these investments. There is less clarity or agreement from the student perspective on how the university might reduce its expenditures.

The largely closed-ended response design of this year's survey appears to assist in increasing the desirability of completing the survey and will be maintained next year. The response rate for the 2023 survey was reasonable but was not as strong as what was observed in 2022. Accordingly, ways to further increase student participation in 2024 will be explored (e.g., opening the survey earlier in October, enhanced advertising). Given that students considered many of the items important, it was helpful to employ a ranking mechanism to gauge the relative importance of investment areas from those who responded.

The findings from this survey provide helpful insights and guidance on where students would like to see incremental investments. The findings will inform ongoing and annual discussions about resource allocation, in general, and tuition discussions, in particular.

Appendix A

Distribution of Student Respondents from each College/School

College or Department	Percentage
Agriculture and Bioresources	9
Arts and Science	38
Dentistry	1
Education	10
Edwards School of Business	9
Engineering	9
Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies	4
Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy	1
Kinesiology	3
Law	1
Medicine	3
Nursing	4
Pharmacy and Nutrition	3
School of Environment and Sustainability	1
School of Public Health	1
School of Rehabilitation Science	0.1
Veterinary Medicine	3

Note: There was only one school with frequencies less than 10 students. The percentages sum to more than 100% due to rounding.