



Tuition Consultation Pilot Survey – Report on Findings December 2021

Background:

In the spring of 2021, a working group on tuition consultation recommended to the Provost that USask pilot a survey of students as part of the annual cycle of information gathering and discussion around setting tuition. Accordingly, students were invited to participate in a survey asking them two key open-ended questions including: (1) Please identify the top two areas or activities where you feel your college, or USask as a whole, should consider **investing resources** to improve education quality, the student experience and/or student supports provided, and (2) Please identify the top two areas or activities where you feel your college, or USask as a whole, should look to **disinvest or remove resources** as these may no longer be providing the intended value to the quality of education, the student experience or are not valuable student supports.

As part of the invitation, students were encouraged to review newly developed materials on tuition, resource allocation, and basic financial facts to gain insights ahead of completing the survey. These new modules can be found [here](#).

Students were informed that the use of this survey is viewed as one element within the tuition consultation process and that there would be other opportunities over the coming year for students to voice opinions about tuition. A reminder was included that participation was voluntary and responses were anonymous. The invitation expressed that the goal was to develop themes and key points of action from responses that would be shared with university leaders.

Who responded?

A total of 813 students responded to the invitation to provide feedback and a subset of 669 students provided completed responses that could be coded for themes and subthemes (e.g., exemplars). The demographics for the group can be described as follows:

- 87% were domestic; 13% international
- 6% indicated they were Indigenous students
- 80% were undergraduate (of which 15% reported being in a professional UG program); 20% graduate (roughly equal split between masters and doctoral)
- 25% reported they began their studies this year (2021); equal proportions of 24% and 24% had been studying for two and three years, respectively; the remaining participants (27%) reported having been pursuing their degree for four or more years.
- Just over a third of students responding (35%) were registered in the College of Arts and Science with four other direct entry colleges showing similar proportions of representation including: Edwards School of Business (10%), Education (10%), Engineering (9%), and Agriculture and Bioresources (8%). The proportion of the sample from other colleges and schools can be seen in Appendix A.

Where does USask need to invest resources?

Almost 1100 responses to the question around investments were coded into themes with subthemes. In all, eight major themes were identified and are described below using subthemes (exemplars). The



number of subthemes varied and only those with at least ten mentions are included here. In all cases (except where noted) the top subtheme was referenced at least 40 times.

- 22% of these responses fell into the category of desired investments into **facilities or infrastructure** with the top subthemes involving:
 - Public and private study rooms
 - Maintenance and renovation of buildings
 - Improvements in lab facilities and the provision of free equipment
 - Better seating in classroom and library settings
 - Renovations to the library
 - Bigger gym or better gym equipment
 - Improved parking options or better bus routes
- 19% of responses were about investments in **services and programs** with the top subthemes including:
 - Student extracurriculars and sports
 - Career supports including internships and academic advising
 - Open access textbooks and digital on-line resources
 - Learning resources (in general)
 - Improvements to orientation and student outreach
 - Employment for students as research assistants
 - Longer library hours
 - Improved Protective Services and security on campus
- 17% of responses involved references to the **quality of instruction and accountability of instructors** with the top subthemes including:
 - Improving the quality of instruction
 - Providing tutors and workshops
 - Increased competency in on-line instruction
- 13% of responses were focused on **student wellness** characterized by the top subthemes of:
 - Providing mental health supports
 - Healthier food options or more choices
- 11% of responses involved seeking investment in **financial supports** including:
 - More bursaries and scholarships
 - Making tuition for remotely delivered courses less expensive
 - Less expensive parking options
- 10% of responses referenced the need to invest in **course delivery** (not related to the instructor):
 - Seeking an increase in on-line classes (mentioned in 27 responses)
 - Wanting more hands-on experience
 - Wanting a greater range of classes to be available
 - Pointing out a specific class that was considered valuable (and was sought after)
 - Seeking an increase in face-to-face classes
- 5% of responses were coded under the theme of investments into **technology**:
 - Seeking upgrades to classroom technology (mentioned in 36 responses)
- 3% of responses included reference to investments in **equity, diversity and inclusion** with the key subtheme being:
 - Improving accessibility, particularly supports through Access and Equity Services (mentioned in 18 responses)



Where should the university consider disinvestments of resources?

Fewer responses were collected on the topic of disinvestment versus investments. A total of 769 responses to the question around disinvestments were coded into themes with subthemes. In all, seven major themes were identified and are described below using subthemes (exemplars). The number of subthemes varied and only those with at least ten mentions are included here. Only the first two themes involved a top subtheme that was reported in more than 40 responses.

- 47% of responses were coded under the theme of **financial** disinvestments. Subthemes include both what students would like to disinvest in themselves (first two subthemes) and what they would like to see the university disinvest in, as follows:
 - Reduce tuition
 - Provide an opt-out for mandatory fees
 - Disinvest (reduce) the salaries of Deans and other administrators
 - Disinvest (reduce) faculty salaries
- 32% of responses highlighted disinvestment from **on-campus services** including:
 - Athletics and the PAC
 - The Sheaf
 - Bus Passes
 - Physical textbooks or journal articles
 - Extracurricular and social groups
 - Students' Union
 - Parking Services
- 7% of responses were associated with desired disinvestment in **university buildings** with the primary subtheme involving:
 - General renovations and maintenance
- 6% of responses pointed to disinvestments in **course delivery** with the driving subtheme involving:
 - Technology
- 3% of responses looked to the university to disinvest in **unsustainable practices** (e.g., printing) with no one subtheme being mentioned more than 10 times.
- 2% of responses pointed to disinvesting in what were considered **extraneous expenses** (e.g., promotional advertising) and a final 2% of responses sought reduced investment in **student wellness** (e.g., poor quality mental health supports).

Conclusions

The move to implement a tuition consultation survey emerged from a Spring 2021 working group on the broad topic of improving tuition consultation. Several activities are being advanced including the use of this survey to strengthen consultation efforts. The findings of the pilot survey summarized herein give helpful guidance on where students would like to see incremental investments as well as where they think the university should reduce the expenditure of resources. Although the participation rate was low, it will be possible going forward to build on the pilot and to increase participation to hear from a greater number of students. Based on feedback received within the survey, this can be done by improving efforts to advertise the survey (with the assistance of student leadership) as well as by reformatting the survey using the current findings to create closed-ended questions (e.g., asking for rankings of areas) that might be viewed by students as easier to complete.



Appendix A
Distribution of Student Respondents from each College/School

College or Department	Frequency	Percentage
Arts and Science	273	34.6%
Edwards School of Business	82	10.4%
Education	77	9.8%
Engineering	69	8.7%
Agriculture and Bioresources	66	8.4%
Law	41	5.0%
Nursing	35	4.4%
Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies	32	4.1%
Pharmacy and Nutrition	30	3.8%
Kinesiology	27	3.4%
Veterinary Medicine	19	2.4%
Medicine	13	1.6%
Johnson-Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy	8	1.0%
School of Public Health	7	0.9%
School of Environment and Sustainability	4	0.5%
School of Rehabilitation Science	3	0.4%
Dentistry	3	0.4%
Not stated	61	-