ACCESSIBILITY
RESULTS FROM THE 2017 ONTARIO POST-SECONDARY STUDENT SURVEY

OUSA
Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance
ABOUT OUSA

OU SA represents the interests of over 150,000 professional and undergraduate, full-time and part-time university students at eight institutions across Ontario. Our vision is for an accessible, affordable, accountable, and high quality post-secondary education in Ontario. To achieve this vision we’ve come together to develop solutions to challenges facing higher education, build broad consensus for our policy options, and lobby government to implement them.
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An essential characteristic of OUSA’s advocacy efforts is ensuring student voices are at the forefront of discussions about systemic change. In order to capture these voices and gather the best possible information about student experiences, OUSA conducts a biennial student survey (the Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey; “OPSSS”) to inform recommendations with an aim to improving post-secondary experiences across the province. This survey is in its fourth year running and has collected responses on the accessibility, quality, and affordability of post-secondary education. As one in a three-part series, this report focuses on post-secondary accessibility, looking specifically at underrepresentation of certain groups, the ease of mobility between post-secondary institutions, and the ease of travelling to or living near Ontario’s universities.

In November 2017, OUSA conducted its fourth iteration of the OPSSS, drawing over 8,000 anonymous participants from among its eight member schools. A total of 8,037 total responses were collected from undergraduate and professional students across academic years, representing a multitude of fields and degrees. Respondents were primarily enrolled in undergraduate degree, certificate, or diploma programs (98 percent), and were predominately studying full-time (97 percent).

There were notable trends amongst respondents that highlighted who was more likely to face barriers to accessing post-secondary institutions. A majority of respondents came from middle- to high-income backgrounds, had parent(s) or guardian(s) with some form of post-secondary education, were domestic students, did not identify as a racialized or Indigenous person, were traditionally-aged, and did not identify as having a disability or as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. This reveals that low-income students, first generation students, racialized students and students of colour, Indigenous students, mature students, students with a disability, and LGBTQ+ students were underrepresented in OUSA’s membership.

Significantly, many of the students from access groups identified in the survey experienced less comfort on campus when compared to their peers. Feeling comfortable on campus is important for students to be able to access and excel within Ontario’s post-secondary education system, and the fact that students from marginalized groups within our membership report feeling less comfortable than their peers requires attention.

Only a small percentage of student respondents reported that they had transferred credits between post-secondary institutions (11 percent). The most common type of transfer was between two universities (73 percent), although students transferring from college to a university accounted for 29 percent of respondents. Fewer than 10 percent of respondents reported using resources provided through the Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer, although of this group almost all respondents provided positive feedback about the resource. Marital status and age were strongly associated with whether or not students transferred, as was having dependents.
Slightly over half (56 percent) of respondents said they lived in housing that was located off-campus. While the majority of these respondents (63 percent) were satisfied with the quantity of housing options available to them, only 40 percent were satisfied with the quality of housing. Respondents who were dissatisfied with the quantity and quality of housing were more likely to report that they did not feel safe in their neighbourhoods. Students with disabilities who reported living off-campus were also less likely to be satisfied with housing quality and to feel safe in their neighbourhoods.

The survey also found that 43 percent of respondents said they regularly commuted to school using public transit, with 71 percent of these students commuting less than 20 minutes. A majority of respondent who commuted (54 percent) said they were satisfied with transit options, and 24 percent reported feeling dissatisfied. Students with longer commute times were also more likely to be dissatisfied with transit options.

Analysis of the results of this survey indicates that students continue to consider accessibility of post-secondary institutions to be of moderate significance as a policy priority. Students highlighted affordability as needing the most improvement at their universities, with tuition and ancillary fees (48 percent) and financial assistance (44 percent) topping the list. Students also highlighted student support services (33 percent), mental health or healthcare resources (19 percent), and equity and diversity on campus (15 percent) as areas needing improvement, followed by accessibility and inclusivity (11 percent), safety and security (8 percent), credit transfer (5 percent), and transportation (2 percent).

In order to ensure that all willing and qualified students in Ontario are able to access and excel within Ontario’s post-secondary institutions, the government should focus its policy efforts on creating a post-secondary system that is accessible both in terms of entrance and persistence. This will require both fiscal and structural commitments that target marginalized groups.
OUSA advocates for all willing and qualified students in Ontario to be able to access and excel within the post-secondary education system. This requires decision-makers and stakeholders to work together using reliable evidence to identify gaps and propose meaningful solutions that address actual concerns faced by students seeking a university education. To this end, OUSA conducts a biennial survey that was first developed in 2011, the Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey (OPSSS), to gather information about the accessibility, affordability, and quality of post-secondary education. This project is unique in its focus on undergraduate students in Ontario and will be used to represent the voices that make up the OUSA membership.

From the OPSSS data collected in 2017, OUSA was able to examine the demographic breakdown of our membership to better understand who is represented, and, importantly, who is underrepresented, in our post-secondary institutions. The results also illustrated what students were saying about the effectiveness of credit transfer pathways as well as municipal issues, such as housing and transit options. This is important for OUSA’s policy research as it provides accurate, up-to-date information on the accessibility of our member’s post-secondary institutions. These results will inform OUSA’s advocacy and policy development until the administration of the next survey.

Ontario is one of the top five provinces and territories in the country in terms of educational attainment, with 67 percent of persons between the ages of 25 and 64 having received some form of trade, college, or university training as of 2017. Ontario also has the highest proportion of university graduates in the country, with 34 percent of 25 to 64-year-olds having received university training. However, while these numbers are encouraging, barriers remain that limit the ability of marginalized groups to access post-secondary education. The result is the underrepresentation of certain groups in universities across the province, specifically students with disabilities, Indigenous students, students from low-income backgrounds, mature students, students from rural and northern communities, first generation students, and students identifying as LGBTQ+.

Improving accessibility of Ontario’s universities was highlighted by respondents as a policy priority. Increasing access and strengthening student support services, specifically mental health supports and enhancing equity and diversity on campus were two commonly cited concerns for students. Given that students from a number of access groups were more likely to experience discomfort on campus, improving access to student support services will require special attention be paid to the unique and interconnected needs of these students.

Increasing access to post-secondary institutions for underrepresented groups requires the government to focus its policy efforts on creating a post-secondary system that is accessible both for all willing and qualified students to enter post-secondary institutions, but also for them to excel as they pursue their education. This will require both fiscal and structural commitments that target marginalized groups. Attention should be paid to outreach initiatives intended to increase representation of marginalized groups, as well as enhancing supports for these students when they are on campus to ensure that they are able to excel without additional barriers.

In this report we approach access from three perspectives: the experiences of underrepresented groups, the ease of mobility between institutions, and the ease of traveling to and living near Ontario’s universities. By exploring accessibility from these perspectives, we are not only able to better understand the general accessibility of universities to the student body at large, but also the specific barriers to accessing post-secondary education and the characteristics of those who are most impacted. The results of this survey are presented below, following a discussion of the methodology and limitations of the survey, in an effort to address these queries.
METHODOLOGY

The Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey was conducted in November 2017, surveying students from OUSA’s eight member schools (Brock University, Laurentian University, McMaster University, Trent University Durham GTA, Queen’s University, the University of Waterloo, Western University, and Wilfrid Laurier University). At Western University and Brock University the survey was run as a quality assurance study.

The survey questionnaire was 120 questions long, although not all respondents were asked every question. The questionnaire was uploaded to a secure online web platform hosted by CCI Research Inc. The survey tool was available in English, with a translated version available for French speaking students at Laurentian University. Following ethics approval, invitations to participate in the survey were sent to students’ university emails. Each invitation was sent from OUSA member student associations and contained a link to the survey. If students decided to take part in the survey, they were directed to a detailed letter of information that explained the risks and benefits of participating, as well as the steps taken to keep students’ identities and responses private and confidential.

Responses were only recorded after students clicked “submit” at the end of the survey. Respondents could skip any question or invalidate their responses by exiting the browser at any time. All surveys were completed anonymously, and participation was entirely voluntary. To incentivize participation, respondents were invited to enter a draw for a chance to win one of two iPad Mini 4 tablets upon completing the survey. Participants were asked to provide their email addresses if they were interested in entering the draw. All voluntarily submitted email addresses were stored separately from survey responses to maintain respondents’ anonymity. OUSA never had access to students’ email addresses.

Survey participants were recruited using a non-random sampling method. Prior to analysis, all data were weighted by institutional enrolment to provide a more accurate representation of the OUSA membership at large. Data was analyzed using SPSS software which helped to organize responses and illustrate trends. In addition to observing differences in descriptive statistics, statistical testing was used to compare means and the independence of selected variables from one another. A chi-square test for independence was used to show the relationship between variables, and \( p \leq 0.05 \) was used as the threshold for determining a statistically significant relationship. These data analysis techniques helped reveal meaningful patterns in the dataset. This report highlights statistically significant results.
LIMITATIONS

One limitation in this study, inherent in all survey research, lies in the nature of self-reported data: OUSA must rely on respondents to be honest, truthful, and forthcoming in their responses. However, while we trust that participants responded honestly, there is necessarily a risk that responses may be impacted by a misinterpretation of questions or measurement of responses, or by a social desirability bias that pushes respondents to skew their answers to match perceived desirability results. Additionally, as students were not required to answer every question, less insight is provided in certain areas where some students elected to provide no response.

Despite these limitations, the data still hold validity and are useful for providing insight into the student experience. The sample is not made up of a homogenous group of respondents. There are a significant number of students from varying backgrounds and demographics. The survey included several screening and demographic questions to allow for more targeted analyses based on institution, year of study, program of study, identification as having a disability, identification as an Indigenous student, mature student status, full-time status, part-time status, parental education, and parental income. Background information regarding the type of neighbourhood respondents grew up in was also explored to see if differences were found among students who grew up in rural, Northern, or urban communities or on First Nations Reserves. The responses to these questions suggest widespread coverage of the membership. Responses have also been weighted so as to prevent misinterpretations in the data analysis.

RESULTS

Survey Participation

Over 8,000 undergraduate students participated in the 2017 Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey. Out of the total number of participants, 8,037 complete responses were gathered (surveys were considered complete if the respondent answered at least 30 percent of the questions asked).

Results were weighted by institutional enrolment to ensure findings would be representative of OUSA's membership. The count and proportion of participants is weighted and listed by institution in the table below. All other results listed in this report are also weighted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Weighted Count</th>
<th>Weighted Proportion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of Waterloo</td>
<td>579</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McMaster University</td>
<td>428</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queen’s University</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brock University</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilfred Laurier University</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trent-Durham University</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laurentian University</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western University</td>
<td>555</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2,635</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants were relatively evenly distributed across academic year: 28 percent of respondents were in their first year, 22 percent of students were in their second year, 22 percent of students were in their third year, 21 percent were in their fourth year, and 6 percent of students were in their fifth year of study or more.

Some of the top fields reported by respondents as their field of study included: physical and life sciences, and technologies (15 percent); health and related fields (15 percent); business, management, and public administration (14 percent); social and behavioural sciences, and law (14 percent); engineering, architecture, and related technologies (11 percent); and humanities (9 percent).
A significant majority (95 percent) of respondents indicated that they were completing their Bachelor’s degree, with professional degrees in medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, law, and optometry making up only 1 percent of the total sample size. Additionally, 3 percent of students surveyed were completing an undergraduate certificate or diploma.

Almost all respondents (97 percent) indicated that they were enrolled in a full-time program and a small group (3 percent) of respondents indicated they were studying part-time.

Survey participants were also able to provide information on their immigration status, which allowed us to analyze both domestic and international student trends. Among those we consider domestic students, the majority indicated that they held Canadian citizenship (92 percent), while 3 percent of students surveyed said they held permanent residence. Of the domestic students surveyed, a high percentage (91 percent) of students indicated that they had graduated from a high school in Ontario. Outside of Ontario, 3 percent of respondents said they graduated from a high school in British Columbia and 2 percent indicated that they had graduated from a high school in Alberta. Additionally, 2 percent of students said they graduated from a high school outside of Canada.

When asked about immigration status, 5 percent of all respondents indicated that they were studying in Canada on a visa. International students also provided information on what country they were living in at the time they applied to a Canadian institution: 36 percent indicated that they were from China, 5 percent from India, and 4 percent from Nigeria.
## Access groups

### Parental Income

A majority of respondents came from middle- to high-income backgrounds, with 32 percent of students reporting the estimated combined income of their parent(s) or guardian(s) as over $100,001, 13 percent reporting a combined income ranging from $75,001 to $100,00, and 12 percent indicating a combined income between $50,001 and $75,000. 16 percent of students said they came from low-income families with a combined income of $50,000 or less and fewer students reported that their combined parental/guardian income was less than $25,000 (6 percent). 9 percent of respondents preferred not to say, and 16 percent of respondents indicated that they did not know what their parent(s)/guardian(s) combined income was.

When compared to students who indicated coming from middle- to high-income backgrounds, a chi-square test for independence revealed that students who came from low-income families were more likely to respond that they felt “not that comfortable” or “not at all comfortable” on campus compared to students from middle- to high-income backgrounds ($\chi^2(6)=15.256$, $p=.018$, $V=.057$).

![Figure 2: Survey participation by parental income, n = 2,335.](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Combined parental income</th>
<th>Low income</th>
<th>Middle income</th>
<th>High income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Over $125,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,001 to $125,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$75,001 to $100,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,001 to $75,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$25,001 to $50,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$25,000 or less</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
First Generation

When asked about their parents’ or guardians’ highest post-secondary credentials, 30 percent of respondents said that their parent(s) or guardian(s) had a university bachelor’s degree, 5 percent of respondents said their parent(s) or guardian(s) completed a professional degree in fields like medicine, dentistry, or law, and 22 percent of students reported that their parents had a master’s or doctorate degree. In addition, 19 percent said their parent(s) or guardian(s) completed a college/undergraduate diploma or certificate and 3 percent said their parent(s) or guardian(s) completed a trade or apprenticeship. 11 percent of respondents indicated that their parent(s) or guardian(s) had no post-secondary credentials and 3 percent indicated that their parents had less than a high school education.

Based on this information, we can estimate that the number of students who are the first in their family to attend university (first generation students) make up a total of 36 percent of respondents. Figure 3 shows the breakdown of this group by parental/guardian education type.

Figure 3: First-generation students by parental income, n = 822.

First generation students were more likely to be employed while studying when compared to students whose parent(s) or guardian(s) had attended university, with a chi-square test for independence revealing a statistically significant correlation between parental education and student employment while studying ($X^2(2)=28.861, p=.000, V=.108$). Notably, of respondents who answered that they were employed while in school, 70 percent were working in jobs unrelated to their academic field of study, and 51 percent felt that their employment “hurt” or “significantly hurt” their academic performance, compared to 10 percent of students who felt that it improved their performance. 39 percent of respondents indicated that working while studying had no effect on their academic performance.
A chi-square test for independence also found that first generation students were also less likely to report feeling “very comfortable” and more likely to report feeling “not that comfortable” or “not at all comfortable” on campus compared to students whose parent(s) or guardian(s) had attended university ($X^2(6)=19.854, p=.003, V=.065$).

Community

When asked to describe the type of community they grew up in, a majority of respondents indicated that they grew up in an urban community and almost a third of students came from a rural community. A small percentage of respondents said they grew up in northern communities or northern parts of Canada. Overall, northern and rural students, which included students who grew up on a First Nations Reserve, accounted for a third of the total sample. Of those students who grew up in northern communities, 10 percent identified as First Nations, Inuit, or Métis, and very few students who participated in the survey said they grew up on a First Nations Reserve (9 students).

When looking for potential demographic correlations, we found that respondents coming from rural and northern communities were also more likely to have dependents ($X^2(4)=51.174, p=.000, V=.105$), to be married or in common-law relationships ($X^2(4)=29.243, p=.000, V=.079$).

We also found that rural and northern students were more likely to be working while studying when compared to urban students. However, the correlation between employment and community was not significant ($p=.053$).

Rural and northern students were also more likely than urban students to report feeling “not that comfortable” or “not at all comfortable” on campus ($X^2(6)=16.657, p=.011, V=.060$).

Mature Students

Our survey results showed that mature students – those students who are older than traditional, direct-entry university students (21 years) – represented 16 percent of respondents. Of these students, almost 70 percent were married and over half (54 percent) said they had dependents. Additionally, almost half (47 percent) said they were the first in their household to attend a university.

Mature students also shared several characteristics with part-time students, including being more likely to have dependents ($X^2(4)=78.426, p=.000, V=.130$), and to be married or in a common-law relationship ($X^2(4)=121.721, p=.000, V=.161$). For example, in addition to part-time students being more likely to be older ($X^2(2)=61.681, p=.000, V=.153$), when compared to full-time students, part-time students were also more likely to have dependents ($X^2(2)=35.490, p=.000, V=.124$) and to be married or in common-law relationships ($X^2(2)=37.949, p=.000, V=.128$).

Additionally, mature students were more likely than their traditionally-aged peers to be working while studying ($X^2(2)=48.642, p=.000, V=.140$).
**Indigenous Students**

A small percentage of respondents self-identified as Indigenous or indicated having Indigenous ancestry (3 percent). This included status or non-status First Nations, Indian, Métis, or Inuit (FNIMI) identities. In addition, a very small number (9 students) indicated that they grew up on a First Nations Reserve. When compared to non-Indigenous students, these respondents were also more likely to have dependents ($X^2(4)=47.861, p=.000, V=.101$), to be married ($X^2(4)=25.553, p=.000, V=.074$) and to come from rural and Northern communities ($X^2(4)=36.054, p=.000, V=.083$).

**Racialized Students**

Student participants were asked if they “identify as a person of colour or racialized person”. A total of 27 percent of respondents identified as such, while a sizeable majority (69 percent) said they did not identify as a racialized person or person of colour. 4 percent of respondents preferred not to say.

Respondents who identified as a racialized person or a person of colour were less likely to be working while studying when compared to students who responded that they did not identify as a racialized person or person of colour ($X^2(2)=19.631, p=.000, V=.092$).

Students who identified as a racialized person or person of colour were also less likely to feel “very comfortable” on campus when compared to non-racialized respondents or students of colour ($X^2(6)=42.165, p=.000, V=.095$).

**LGBTQ+ Students**

Our survey gave students the opportunity to provide information about their gender identity and sexual orientation. Instead of having respondents select from a pre-determined set of responses only, they were also able to answer through open text and list their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Of the total self-reported responses, 12 percent of students identified as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. When asked, “which term best describes your gender identity?” 1 percent of respondents said they identified as non-binary. When asked, “which term best describes your sexual orientation?” 1 percent of student respondents identified as gay, 1 percent identified as lesbian, 1 percent indicated that they were questioning, 1 percent identified as pansexual, 1 percent identified as asexual, and 6 percent identified as bisexual. Not all survey participants self-reported, and a total of 4 percent of students indicated that they preferred not to disclose this information. Few respondents also identified as transgender, Two Spirit, gender fluid, non-binary, gender queer, or gender non-conforming. Of respondents that identified as a sexual orientation other than heterosexual, 18 percent also identified as a person of colour/racialized person and 36 percent described themselves as a student with a disability.
Students With Disabilities

Our questionnaire used the National Educational Association of Disabled Students’ definitions of different types of disabilities and students were able to select more than one disability. In total, 19 percent of student respondents said that they would describe themselves as having a disability and 5 percent preferred not to say. Of the students who disclosed having a disability, the most common disability type was a psychiatric disability (a disability resulting from mental illness), which made up 11 percent of the total sample and represented 47 percent of students with disabilities. Intellectual or learning disabilities (disabilities affecting the ability to learn tasks or process information) were the second most common types of disabilities, making up 22 percent of respondents who indicated having a disability and 6 percent of the total sample. Students who indicated having a visual or hearing impairment made up 5 percent of respondents and 17 percent and 4 percent, respectively, of students who described themselves as having a disability. In addition, a small percentage of students who reported having a disability indicated they had a neurological disability (a disability associated with damage to the nervous system). Figure 4 provides a breakdown of students who described themselves as having a disability by type of disability.

Figure 4: Survey respondents by disability type, n = 567.

Students who indicated that they had a disability were more likely than their peers who did not identify as having a disability to be enrolled part-time ($X^2(2)=12.641$, $p=.002$, $V=.069$).

When asked about how comfortable they feel on their university campuses, the strongest relationship was found with students who identified as having a disability. These students were significantly more likely to feel “not that comfortable” or “not at all comfortable” compared to respondents who indicated that they did not have a disability ($X^2(6)=47.618$, $p=.000$, $V=.101$).
Credit Transfer

Of the total sample, only a small percentage of student respondents reported that they transferred credits between post-secondary institutions (11 percent), with a large majority of these transfers happening within Ontario (87 percent). The most common type of transfer was between two universities (73 percent) followed by transfers from college to a university (29 percent). In addition, 15 percent of all transfer students who said they transferred to another institution entirely indicated that their transfer was part of a bridging program or pathway.

Our respondents were also asked about the supports they utilized in their transfer process, including resources provided through the Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT). Of respondents who transferred credits between two institutions, less than 10 percent said they used ONCAT’s website (ONTransfer.ca). A large percentage of respondents who transferred (79 percent) indicated that they did not use ONTransfer.ca, with 13 percent of respondents saying they were unsure if they had used the resource. A significant portion of respondents who transferred did not utilize ONTransfer.ca, even though respondents who did use ONTransfer.ca had positive feedback about the resource with half (54 percent) saying that the website was somewhat helpful and over a third (34 percent) saying that the website was very helpful. Of the students who had transferred, almost half said that that their transfer involved moving to another institution entirely, while 36 percent indicated that they were supplementing their education by transferring credits from elsewhere, including online courses and summer programs, and about a quarter of students said they had transferred credits that they had earned on exchange.

“I USED ONCAT AND IT WAS VERY HELPFUL”
Just over 50 percent of respondents who said they transferred indicated that all or almost all of their credits were recognized by their new institution. For a quarter of transfer respondents, 20 to 40 percent of their credits were recognized by their new institution and successfully transferred, with slightly less than 10 percent indicating that none or nearly none of their credits transferred.

More than half of respondents who transferred (68 percent) said that they were given no clear rationale for why their credits were non-transferrable. Some, however, indicated that they did receive information about their rejected credits (32 percent). Several of the most cited responses are illustrated in the figure below.

**Table 2: Reasons given for unsuccessful credit transfer n=27**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason given</th>
<th>Weighted Proportion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Different course content or requirements</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not meet grade threshold</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous courses not relevant to new program</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No equivalent course at receiving university</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cap Credits that could be transferred to new program</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous course was less advanced</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credits were too old</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents also had diverse reasons for transferring, including both academic and personal. Students were given the opportunity to select more than one reason for transferring. Table 3 highlights several responses.

The responses also revealed several characteristics that were predictive of students’ use of credit transfer. Chi-square tests for independence found significant relationships between credit transfer and certain demographic information, including marital status and age. Weak levels of association were found when looking at relationships between course load and transfer and disability and transfer.
Table 3: Reason for transferring n=117

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for transfer</th>
<th>Weighted Proportion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upgrade my credentials</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific program wasn’t offered at previous institution</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different campus culture</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closer to home/family</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific program I thought would be better</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alleviate financial strain</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical reasons</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A particular scholarship</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Predictive Characteristics of Student Transfers

- Respondents who were married or common-law were more likely to have transferred than those who said they were not married or common-law ($X^2(2)=56.109$, $p=0.000$, $V=0.160$).
- Mature students were more likely to have transferred credits than traditionally-aged students ($X^2(2)=144.937$, $p=0.000$, $V=0.254$).
- Respondents who said they had dependents were more likely than those who said they did not have dependents to indicate that they had transferred ($X^2(2)=35.057$, $p=0.000$, $V=0.127$).
- Students who identified as having a disability were more likely to have transferred than not ($X^2(2)=9.245$, $p=0.010$, $V=0.064$)
- Part-time students were more likely to report transferring than full-time students ($X^2(1)=5.017$, $p=0.025$, $V=0.047$).
- First generation students were more likely to report transferring when compared to students whose parent(s) or guardian(s) had attended university ($X^2(2)=9.387$, $p=0.009$, $V=0.065$).
- Students from low-income families were also more likely to report transferring credits than students who came from middle- to high-income families ($X^2(2)=6.924$, $p=0.031$, $V=0.056$).
According to these findings, the strongest predictor of transfer was age, which was also supported by the additional qualitative data gathered from respondents who said they had transferred. When asked to describe their motivations for transferring, many respondents said they transferred because they wanted to update credentials and a significant portion said they transferred from college to university, having already completed a college program. Additionally, some respondents also shared that they transferred institutions because of their own career or job change or that of their spouse. These factors support our inference that age is a strong predictor of transfer.

**Student Housing & Transportation**

Slightly over half of our respondents said they lived in housing that was located off-campus (56 percent), with almost a quarter of respondents living on-campus (24 percent), and 18 percent living at home with their parent(s) or guardian(s) during the school year. A very small percentage of respondents reported living in a property they personally owned (2 percent). The majority of our respondents, therefore, reported living in student housing or residences on or around their campus.

![Figure 5: Respondent living spaces, n = 2,378.](image)
Of respondents who said they lived in off-campus housing, most said that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the *quantity* of housing available to them (63 percent) and 13 percent of these respondents reported being dissatisfied. However, only 40 percent indicated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the *quality* of housing and a close percentage of respondents (36 percent) indicated that they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the quality of housing. A chi-square test for independence revealed a significant relationship between disability and feelings of satisfaction with housing quality. Students who reported having a disability were more likely than students who did not report having a disability to report feeling “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied”, and less likely to report feeling “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with housing quality ($X^2(8)=16.498$, $p=.036$, $V=.079$).

We also found that while a high percentage of respondents who lived off-campus said they felt safe in their neighbourhood at all hours of the day and night (70 percent), 30 percent indicated that they did not feel safe in their neighbourhoods. There was also a strong correlation between housing satisfaction and safety, as respondents who were dissatisfied with the quality of housing were more likely to report that they did not feel safe in their neighbourhoods ($X^2(4)=108.290$, $p<.001$, $V=.287$).

When asked about their commute, 43 percent of respondents said that they regularly commuted to school using public transit, while 57 percent said that they did not commute. Of respondents who commuted, a significant portion of respondents said that their commute was less than 20 minutes (71 percent) and 5 percent of students had a commute time longer than 60 minutes. A majority of the respondents who commuted (54 percent) said they were satisfied or very satisfied with their options and a little under a quarter (24 percent) reported feeling dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their transit options. A chi-square test for independence revealed a correlation between commute time and satisfaction with transit options, where longer commute times were associated with greater dissatisfaction ($X^2(12)=55.516$, $p<0.001$, $V=.134$).

Students were also asked if they planned to work in the city where they attended university for at least one year following graduation. A large majority (71 percent) reported that they did not have such plans, while the remainder (29 percent) did. A chi-square test for independence revealed a correlation between the community where a student grew up and their intentions to remain in their university municipality following graduation, with rural and northern students being more likely to indicate that they would stay in the city where they attended university following graduation ($X^2(2)=9.968$, $p=.007$, $V=.065$).
DISCUSSION

The aim of OUSA’s biennial survey is to gather data about our student membership and gain insights about student experiences. This survey was designed, in part, to explore the accessibility of post-secondary education. Accessibility of post-secondary education includes several different aspects, from physical accessibility and financial accessibility, to feeling safe and included on campus. In this report we focused on three dimensions of accessibility: the experiences of underrepresented groups, the ease of mobility between institutions, and the ease of traveling to and living near Ontario’s universities.

Analysis of the results of this survey indicates that students continue to consider accessibility of post-secondary institutions to be of moderate significance as a policy priority. Because accessibility encompasses many aspects, we looked at a range of initiatives to determine how students felt about the accessibility of their campuses. Areas related to accessibility that students highlighted as needing the most improvement at their university included student support services (33 percent), mental health or healthcare resources (19 percent), and equity and diversity on campus (15 percent), all of which contribute to students’ feelings of comfort on campus. Respondents also highlighted the need to improve accessibility and inclusivity (11 percent) and safety and security (8 percent). Additionally, some students highlighted credit transfer (5 percent) and transportation (2 percent), as important areas for improvement.

In addition to pre-listed choices, a qualitative analysis of comments offered by respondents supported the finding that students want to see improvements to accessibility services and to mental health counselling. Respondents also highlighted the need to improve services provided specifically for students with disabilities. Safety and equity were also discussed in the comments as respondents said they wanted to see improved supports for survivors of sexual assault and more efforts to target homophobia, racism, and transphobia on campuses.
When it came to issues such as credit transfer, transportation, and housing, students said they wanted to see easier and more fluid credit transfer between universities, better commuting options, and more affordable and comfortable living spaces.

When compared to results from the 2015 OPSSS, there has been an increase in the proportion of students who consider student support services and equity and diversity on campus as important policy priorities. There was also greater attention to the need to improve mental health and healthcare resources in student responses compared to the results of the previous study. This makes it clear that there not only continues to be a need for improved student support services and greater equity and diversity on campus, but also that mental health and healthcare resources are being vocalized as a greater concern for students. These services and initiatives are particularly important for vulnerable and underrepresented students and therefore ensuring that they are improved to meet student need is essential to increasing access to post-secondary institutions across the province.

**Access Groups**

In addition to shedding light on access issues, the survey results also demonstrate which demographic groups continue to be underrepresented within our membership. Respondents were mostly students coming from middle-to high-income backgrounds, with over 30 percent coming from high-income households, 25 percent coming from middle-income homes, and less than a quarter of respondents (16 percent) coming from low-income households. While a significant portion of student respondents came from relatively high-income homes and are therefore less likely to face serious financial barriers, we see that low-income students continue to be underrepresented and major gaps remain to ensuring students from all income backgrounds have equitable access to post-secondary education. Additionally, while a majority of our respondents indicated that their parents held post-secondary credentials, a sizeable portion (36 percent) of respondents were the first in their families to attend university.
Another underrepresented group in our membership is mature students, with only 16 percent of respondents indicating that they were older than traditional, direct-entry university students (21 years). This group was more likely to be married or in a common-law relationship, to have dependents, and to be the first in their household to attend university. Part-time students were more likely to be older, sharing characteristics with mature students such as being more likely to be married or in a common-law relationship and to have dependents. These findings suggest a need to be mindful of the ways in which mature students can benefit from universally planned support services for first generation students and/or part-time students.

Indigenous students also continue to be underrepresented in our membership, which is illustrated by the fact that fewer than 5 percent of respondents (70 students) self-identified or indicated having ancestry as status or non-status First Nations, Indian, Métis, or Inuit. These students were more likely than non-Indigenous respondents to have dependents, be married, and to come from rural or northern communities. Of this group, only nine students (12 percent) indicated that they had grown up on a First Nations Reserve. According to Statistics Canada, 44.2 percent of First Nations people with registered or treaty Indian status live on a First Nations Reserve. While a direct comparison cannot be made between these statistics, it does suggest that post-secondary education may be less accessible to those students who come from First Nations Reserves. These numbers are concerningly low, particularly given the country’s commitment to reconciliation following the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s Final Report. Ensuring that those who identify as First Nations, Indian, Métis, or Inuit are encouraged and enabled to equitably access, engage, and succeed throughout their postsecondary careers and beyond is essential to reconciliation in Ontario’s university sector. However, the underrepresentation of Indigenous students amongst our respondents indicates that there continue to be ongoing barriers to access for these students.

Students who identify as a racialized person or person of colour are also underrepresented in our membership, indicated by the fact that only 27 percent of respondents identified as such. According to the African Canadian Legal Centre, as cited by Chief Commissioner Renu Mandhane of the Ontario Human Rights Commission, structural and systemic inequities persist throughout secondary schools in the province that “limit racialized students from meeting their full potential and, ultimately, from enrolling in post-secondary education.” These results support the need to continue to address barriers such as this one that limit access to post-secondary education for racialized students.

Our survey also found that LGBTQ+ students are underrepresented in our membership. While not all students responded when asked what terms best described their gender and sexual orientation, only 12 percent of those who did choose to respond identified as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. A small number of respondents (1 percent) identified as non-binary, and 11 percent of respondents identified as a sexual orientation other than heterosexual. Of these respondents, close to one-fifth also identified as a racialized person or person of colour, while over one-third described themselves as having a disability. Notably, the proportions of racialized students and students with disabilities who also identified as a member of the LGBTQ+ community were higher than that of the total sample population, highlighting the need to take an intersectional lens to ensuring students have access to support services. Doing so necessitates adopting an equity and diversity lens at the structural level when planning support service systems. Shifting perspectives in this way could go a long way in acknowledging and elevating the presence of non-traditional student identities on campus.

Students also highlighted accessibility for students with disabilities as an important concern. For example, one student shared: “Supports for disabled students is a big area for improvement. Many campuses are still inaccessible or lacking the support and accommodation practices students with disabilities need.” Importantly, a significant number of respondents (19 percent) identified as having a disability based on the definitions of different types of disabilities from the National Educational Association of Disabled Students, indicating that close to one in five students from our membership have some type of disability. Notably, the most commonly identified type of disability amongst respondents was a psychiatric disability, followed by intellectual or learning disabilities. Compared to the results of OUSA’s 2015 OPSSS, the proportion of students who indicated that they had a psychiatric disability has risen, as has students’ identification of mental health resources as an important area for improvement. This tells us that not only are psychiatric disabilities an issue for undergraduate students, but that there continues to be a need for Ontario to provide a robust support system for students that prioritizes mental health and well-being among our most vulnerable students. This was captured by another student who shared: “We need better access to mental health resources as it remains a huge challenge. I have friends who have left school in order to go home and access resources because of the long wait times they were faced with on campus.”

The results of our survey highlight some shared priorities and commitments across access groups. For example, students coming from rural or northern communities, mature students, and Indigenous students shared characteristics, including being more likely than other students in the sample to be married or in a common-law relationship and to have dependents.
Another priority that was shared by multiple access groups was employment while studying. First generation students were more likely to be employed while studying when compared to students whose parent(s) or guardian(s) had attended university, as were rural and northern students, and mature students. This is significant, as the majority of students who were employed while in school both had jobs that were unrelated to their academic field and felt that their employment negatively affected their academic performance. While our survey did not ask students to reveal their motivations for working while in school, these trends suggest that students whose parent(s) or guardian(s) did not attend university may be hindered academically should they choose to work, regardless of whether it be for financial purposes, a lack of understanding of the challenges of working while in school, or any other reason. However, racialized students were less likely to be working while studying when compared to students who did not identify as a racialized person or person of colour.

Significantly, many of the students from access groups identified in our survey experienced less comfort on campus when compared to their peers. Students from low-income families, rural and northern students, and students with disabilities were more likely to respond negatively when asked about their comfort-level on campus, and first generation and racialized students were less likely to report feeling very comfortable on campus when compared to other students. The strongest correlation was found between students who identified as having a disability and feeling not that comfortable or not at all comfortable on campus. Feeling comfortable on campus is important for students to be able to access and excel within Ontario’s post-secondary education system, and the fact that students from marginalized groups within our membership report feeling less comfortable than their peers requires attention.

**Credit Transfer**

There continues to be limited experience with Ontario’s credit transfer pathways, as only 11 percent of respondents indicated that they had transferred credits between post-secondary institutions. Of these students, the majority had experience transferring credits within Ontario, with the primary transfer type being from one university to another at 73 percent, followed by 29 percent of students who had transferred from a college to a university. Respondents who identified with many of our access groups were the most likely to have transferred credits over the course of their post-secondary studies. While age continues to be the strongest predictor of credit transfer, students with disabilities, first generation students, and students from low-income families were also all more likely to transfer credits across post-secondary institutions. Additionally, marital status, having dependents, and being enrolled in part-time studies were also predictors of transfer.
The reasons that students provided for why they transferred credits included both academic and personal motivations. The two most commonly reported reasons were to upgrade existing credentials and to access a specific program not offered at the previous institution. The most common personal reasons students provided were to access a different campus culture, be closer to their home or family, or to live in a different community.

While a significant majority (88 percent) of those students who indicated they had used resources provided through the Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT) found the website (ONTransfer.ca) to be helpful, fewer than 10 percent of students who had transferred reported that they had used the website, and 13 percent were unsure if they had used the resource. This highlights a significant gap in either the accessibility of ONTransfer.ca or knowledge of this resource.

Ensuring that credit transfer pathways with the province are strengthened and potential barriers are removed is important. This is particularly true for the students from access groups that are more likely to pursue credit transfer as it can offer an alternative, nonlinear pathway through the post-secondary sector. Credit transfer is an invaluable resource that helps to increase the accessibility of post-secondary education and requires greater attention to ensure that it is available and accessible to all students.

**Housing & Transit**

Another important aspect of accessible post-secondary education is access to safe, good, and affordable housing and transportation options. Housing and transportation play important roles in daily life and can have an impact on students’ academic success, mental health, and overall wellbeing. To this end, the survey therefore asked students about their feelings of safety and satisfaction with housing and transit services in their municipalities.

In terms of housing, the results were consistent with findings from the 2015 OPSSS, with the majority of respondents indicating that they lived in off-campus housing. However, while respondents who lived off-campus felt that perhaps there were enough housing options available, there was a significant portion that felt unhappy with the quality of housing. When compared to the previous OPSSS results, it is clear that there continues to be enough housing available for students to be able to live off-campus, although there are limited quality housing units available for students. A correlation between housing satisfaction and safety was also found, highlighting the importance of providing quality housing to students in order to improve feelings of safety in their neighbourhoods. Students with disabilities who reported living off-campus were also less likely to be satisfied with housing quality and to feel safe in their neighbourhoods, which suggests that particular attention should be paid to providing quality accessible housing units for students.
Improving transit options for students was one area that respondents highlighted as a priority in their communities. With close to half of all respondents indicating that they regularly commuted to school using public transit, this is an issue that affects a significant proportion of our membership. Almost one quarter of students who commuted reported feeling dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their transit options. While the majority of students lived either on-campus or off-campus with a short commute time, students who had longer commutes where more likely to be dissatisfied with transit options. One student explained: “My commute is timely and exhausting. It takes me three buses to get to my campus.” It is therefore important that transit options for students be improved so that all students are able to access high-quality, effective, and efficient public transit.

Notably, students who reported coming from rural or northern communities were more likely than those who came from urban communities to report that they planned to work in the city where their university is located following graduation. While the reasons for this were not explored in our survey, it is important to acknowledge this trend considering rural and northern students make up a significant portion of our membership. The effects of student retention in university communities can also have implications for the rural and northern communities where these students come from, specifically in the form of loss of talent and skilled workers.
CONCLUSION

The results of the 2017 OPSSS highlight accessibility as an important concern for OUSA’s student membership. There has been an increase specifically in the proportion of students who consider student support services and equity and diversity on campus to be important policy priorities, and many marginalized students continue to be underrepresented across Ontario universities. The concerns raised by low-income students, students from rural and northern communities, mature students, Indigenous students, racialized students, LGBTQ+ students, and students with disabilities speak to the unique, yet interconnected barriers these students face when accessing university education.

In order to ensure that all willing and qualified students in Ontario are able to access and excel within Ontario’s post-secondary institutions, the government should focus its policy efforts on creating a post-secondary system that is accessible both in terms of entrance and persistence. This will require both fiscal and structural commitments that target marginalized groups. For example, the Government of Ontario should invest in the creation of grant funding specific to outreach programming, encompassing underrepresented groups, prioritizing the inclusion of strategies targeted to marginalized and low-income communities. Further, the government should provide dedicated funding for community-based mental health providers to supply culturally relevant and diverse counselling on campus, and all health care practitioners that engage with post-secondary students should be trained in gender and cultural competency, and any other provisions needed to service the diverse student population.

Conducting research on the accessibility of university education in Ontario is an important aspect of OUSA’s advocacy process. As such, this survey plays a crucial role to confirm anecdotal concerns expressed by member students in order to draw conclusions and make evidence-based recommendations to the Province. To this end, we have produced this report as part of our commitment to sharing research, data, and maintaining a focus on students. It is our hope that our partners will draw on this research to inform their advocacy and policy development efforts as we work collectively towards a more accessible post-secondary education system.

This report has highlighted the concerns expressed by OUSA’s student membership regarding post-secondary accessibility, specifically in terms of both entering and achieving success in universities across the province. However, the aim of this biennial student survey extends beyond investigating student responses to post-secondary accessibility to gaining insight into a multitude of student experiences. This survey also provides comprehensive data on students’ behaviours and attitudes, concerns and preferences related to student financial assistance, university affordability, teaching and learning, civic engagement, and student life. We invite you to explore our companion reports, one on affordability and one on quality, which, together with this report, illustrate a more complete picture of student experiences across the province.