

*Does “it” get any easier?*

A Comparative Study of International and Domestic Students' Second Year Experiences at Four Canadian Universities.

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## **Introduction**

Although the literature on the first year experience is expansive (e.g., Brown & Vasquez, 1982; Bunz, 1997; Burnaby, 1996; Burr, 1992), little has been written on the second year experience. The significance of the current research is that it extends our understandings of how international and domestic students navigate university beyond the first year experience by answering the following questions: How is second year different from first year? What lessons did the students learn from first year that helped in their second and, more importantly, how can universities facilitate improving the student experience beyond first year?

The first year experience literature tells us that the challenges students face are both academic and social. Students have to adjust to the expectations and work load of a university program and also must create/establish new social networks. These experiences are particularly relevant to international students or domestic students who choose to study outside their own province. Residence is seen as a key facilitator of the social component of the first year experience through organized events, peer-support networks and social activities on-campus. Orientation, particularly residence orientation, also facilitates transition to university. Anxiety, stress, and relief are all emotions experienced during the first year (Pidgeon & Andres, 2005).

So does “it” – the university experience – change for students as they transition into and through their second year studies? Does making friends, going to classes, dealing with writing papers, residence life, being independent, interacting with professors, managing finances and career goals change from first year to second year? How are the experiences of first year and second year students similar or different for international and domestic students? This report will attempt to address these issues. We build on the first year report entitled *The First Year Experiences of International and Domestic Students at Canadian Universities* (Pidgeon & Andres, 2005) by reporting the findings of a follow-up study of the experiences of second year international and domestic students at four Canadian universities.

## **Purpose**

This report will focus on the experiences of second year students gathered through focus group sessions at each institution. This report is part of a larger research project that began in September, 2003 when researchers at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, British Columbia; York University in Toronto, Ontario; McGill University in Montreal, Québec; and Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia (see Appendix I) engaged in a three year cross-national study to investigate the experiences of international and domestic students. This research is shaped by the question “what are the experiences and outcomes of international students in Canadian universities?” The first wave of surveys and focus groups of first year international and domestic students were conducted at each participating institution during the fall and winter term of 2003-04. The overarching purpose of this study is to track international and domestic students as they journey through their first, second and third years of undergraduate studies.

## Research Design

### *Sampling*

In the autumn of 2004, participants for the second year focus groups were recruited using a variety of methods. Those students who participated during their first year were invited back (via e-mail and phone) to participate as second year students. Some institutions were able to rely on international student services. List-servs and recruitment posters displayed through campus (e.g., student buildings, residences) were also used to recruit participants.

### *Focus Group Research*

For the second year experience phase of this project, one focus group for international students and another for domestic students were held during the winter term of 2004-05 at each institution. This resulted in two focus groups per institution. All focus groups used the same protocol so that comparisons could be made between groups and across institutions. Each focus group lasted from between 1.5 to 2 hours. Participants were paid for their time and some were provided with dinner (e.g., pizza and non-alcoholic beverages).

### **Participants**

There were a total of eight focus groups conducted during the second term of the 2004-2005 academic year. Each site (UBC, Dal, York, and McGill) held separate focus groups for international students and domestic students. Table 1 outlines how many female and male students were involved in each focus group from each site.

**Table 1**  
**Participants in the Second-Year Focus Groups**

	International		Domestic		Total
	F*	M	F	M	
University of British Columbia	5	3	5	3	16
York University	1	3	3	1	8
McGill University <sup>1</sup>	2	3	2	1	8
Dalhousie University	1	1	4	2	8

\* F=female; M=male

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<sup>1</sup> McGill held four separate sessions, each with small group (i.e., 2-3 students) or one-on-one interviews, while the other institutions met with each group in one session.

In total, 40 second year students participated in the second year focus groups. Of these, 19 were international and 21 were domestic students. At UBC more females than males and had the strongest turn out overall. The gender distribution varied in the York focus groups with more international male and more domestic females. McGill's focus groups had a more even distribution by gender. There were more females in Dalhousie's domestic focus group. At UBC, 67% of the international participants and 40% of the domestic students had participated in the original first year focus group sessions in 2003-05. Comparable figures from the three other institutions are not available.

## **Results**

The following sections of the report address the results of the focus groups. These results highlight the ways in which the second year experiences of international and domestic students differed from their first year experiences. Also, relevant institutionally specific differences are reported.

### **Second Year Compared to First Year**

Overall, when compared to their first year, second year was better for many students. Both groups of students at all four universities indicated they were more familiar with their institutions and what was expected of them academically in their coursework.

Many domestic students commented that they felt more settled and happier in second year. They knew "what was going on" and were more focused on their studies. They acknowledged that they had to work harder in second year were enjoying their courses more. Students from Dalhousie, UBC and York explained:

*I think it's more focused on working than like socializing and partying and stuff. - Dal domestic*

*I definitely work harder to get the same marks I got last year. Last year, I didn't have to do as much and this year I have to do more to get the same marks. - Dal domestic*

*I like 2<sup>nd</sup> year way more than first year. Personally because my classes are a lot more difficult 'cause last year I found it kind of trying 'cause the classes were just so I did grade 13 in Ontario as well so it kind of felt like a step back a lot of the times. I was taking a lot of classes that I really wasn't interested in so this year I'm taking a lot of third year classes so that makes me a lot happier. - UBC domestic*

*Last year as I said it was hard because it was my first time in university. The workload is heavier. Last year I worked but I could still manage it.*

*This year is just harder and time consuming . . . this year I worked that is how come I am getting good outcomes. - York domestic*

*In second year the courses are harder. In first year I had a hard time. I was not getting good grades nor was I interested in anything. I did not know what to do. In my second year, it is harder but it is more interesting. It is much easier for me. - York domestic*

When comparing first year and second year, balance and organization was a prevalent theme. Many students remarked they had more balance between their social and academic lives, as this McGill student reports:

*A major difference is this year is a lot more calm. Last year was just basically 90% social and 10% academic. And now it's probably, I would say 30 social, and 30 academic and the rest, I don't know. I don't know where the time goes . . . but it's not spent very efficiently. So it's just, I don't know, the days seem to go by a lot quicker. And less eventful, I guess, but not in a bad way. Just like I definitely needed it, because it sort of was almost like a recovery period from last year. So it has its positives as well, I should say. - McGill domestic*

Being more familiar with the campus helped some students in their second year because they had already adapted to their institutions.

*Well, in general, I know more what's going on. I'm not confused when I'm walking around the campus. It's just more of a comfort level 'cause I know where everything is. - Dal domestic*

*Well, I think I've already adapted, I kind of adapted last year. This year I am still learning things how to, just making my way through the system I guess. I think all the adapting was done last year. - McGill domestic*

Also changing residences where there was a more conducive study environment helped some of the domestic students.

*I found that living in a house where people are really focused on their work makes it a lot easier than living in res or something because there everyone's ready to party anytime whereas at home, I know everyone thinks, "no, we cannot go out tonight because we have our essay due on Monday." So like, it's a lot easier atmosphere. - Dal domestic*

This UBC domestic student, who was now in a smaller faculty compared to first year in general courses, had several positive experiences in second year. Being more familiar with classmates and being in a smaller community were things she preferred over first year.

*In my particular case I'm in a faculty that has only 35 students in it in second year compared to 600 in first year and I'm really enjoying the fact that I know like half the peoples' names in all the entire program and I know everyone's name in my year so it is a lot more interesting. You make a lot closer friends you spend a lot of time in classes with the same people and I'm really enjoying the fact that I am part of a smaller community now.*  
- UBC domestic

Similarly, a student from York also claimed that being more familiar with professors and having more confidence to approach his professor to talk about marks or ask questions helped improve his second year experience.

*In second year I am getting to know my professors better. In first year I would get my test and if I had a bad mark, I would go home and try to figure out why. This year, for example, . . . I asked and found out that I made a mistake, and I understood. I should have done that last year. So, because I made one mistake but everything else is right, but normally you don't see what you did. I've lost lots of marks because of this. I figure I should have done that last year.* - York domestic

International students also felt more balanced in second year. Many talked about having better time management and being more responsible (e.g., financially). One international student from Dalhousie shared that in first year he had spent a lot of his money because of the shopping and franchises that were available in Halifax were not in his home country. In second year, he explained that

*it's been good for me. I just need learn to manage my money. So, yeah, like, learning to manage money and then my time management with classes and everything and incorporating my work and my play and, you know, type of thing, during the day, makes it go pretty fast.*

An international student from York also felt that he was more balanced between his social and academic activities because of an established social network and feeling more independence.

*Well, everything in second year is very is different from first year, because you go to less social events, and I guess the reason why you don't go to as many social events is because you've already have your group of friends, and you've established . . . I've established you know a whole group of friends where . . . I can just pick up a phone and call them as opposed to being worried all the time whether I will meet new people and . . . I have to go to all these things because I need to meet new people . . . not feel lonely or something. I think second year is, like what he said, I think it's a lot of choice, it's a lot of independence.* - McGill international



Similar to their domestic peers, international students also felt they were more comfortable with their institutional surroundings and they were also more aware of campus resources. These three international students from UBC and York exemplify the comfort students felt in second year, particularly in their classes and general campus environment.

*Yeah, I agree, I think I'm pretty relaxed, this year is much more settled so far. You know where things are and you don't have to search anymore. I think that the challenge would be now is to get to know more people 'cause now you know where your basic necessities are. - UBC international*

*Last year was very difficult. This year is more easy to get used to the environment. It is easier because I've been through last year. It is more wider. I feel more relaxed. I know more what I am going to do. I have more safety. It is more easier. It is good. It is more enjoyable and I am more involved with York. - York international*

*Yeah, the classes that you get to pick are more geared towards the major that you want and things are interesting, rather than just being general sciences or really broad. - UBC international*

Many felt more confident in their ability to speak English but also acknowledged that formal English is very different from conversational slang spoken by their domestic peers.

*I feel more confident and before I think I probably have much difficulty in speaking English. Like when I am doing a project I am a leader. I try to organize things so that I don't have to do presentations. I get the work done for the meeting, I book the meetings, I push everyone around. - York international*

Some international students also said their residence or roommate experiences were improved in second year simply because they had a choice of who they lived with. Students often choose to live with friends or people with the same study ethic which resulted in more positive experiences. This McGill international student spoke of the community that she and other friends have established by living together. She had a sense of community that was different from the residence experience because of her ability to choose her roommates.

*We are five, six, including myself. And we try to organize things together; we try to at least have dinner together once a week, so all of us are there. That's usually on Sunday. And that kind of community aspect when you are in school, it's something that you don't get in residence. If you do it's not the same because you don't choose who you live with in residence or who your neighbours are, or who is in your close proximity. It's kind of just by chance. It sometimes works out and sometimes doesn't. But what was nice*

*is that you have more of a choice in second year, in terms of everything, in terms of who are your roommates, in terms of where you live, and in terms of how you live your life. It's not saying that you didn't have choices in first year, but you have even more choices in second year. - McGill international*

## **Academic Experiences**

Academically, most international and domestic students were more settled in second year than they were in first year. Students used words like “not confused”, “more grounded” and “more focused” to talk about their second year.

*Well, in general, I know more what's going on. I'm not confused when I'm walking around the campus. It's just more of a comfort level 'cause I know where everything is. - Dal Domestic*

As this one domestic student from UBC indicated, her first year was a negative experience, involving feelings of inadequacy around her academics.

*In terms of last year, I found it less enjoyable because I found a struggle with everything. I felt I had not clue how to do anything. I remember writing my first mid term and getting the mark back and wondering just like “wow what did I do wrong?” like why are my classmates getting like a 120 percent and I'm getting 2%? Like what is wrong with me. I don't know, I felt bad emotionally, and I felt inadequate and even though it's part true. - UBC Domestic*

Several students spoke of being more grounded academically and more aware of expectations of their professors.

*I learned it in second year when once I got my test I was very upset and I went to [my professor] and asked about my mark. I thought I should do this in all my classes now. It helps to clarify what was said in my paper. I realize that I did understand but I may not have said that in my paper. I get better marks. - York Domestic*

Second year seemed to be more focused for students. As one Dalhousie domestic student commented, “I have to get a job when I finish university,” so she felt she needed to be concentrated on her studies. There was also a general feeling that the workload in second year was much heavier than first year. A York domestic student explained his courses were harder in second year but he was more interested and therefore doing better academically. While some students felt this was a negative aspect of second year, particularly when it impacted their social lives (to be discussed in a later section), other students felt that although the courses were harder, they were also more specific and more interesting.

*In second year the courses are harder. In first year I had a hard time. I was not getting good grades nor was I interested in anything. I did not know what to do. In my second year, it is harder but it is more interesting. It is much easier for me. - York Domestic*

When asked whether they would do things differently or the same in second year, most domestic and international students felt they would do the same.

*I would probably keep every thing pretty much the same - I would study more, a little bit more. - UBC domestic*

However, some did feel there would be a few things they would change. For example, many domestic and international students said they would work harder.

*I would work harder in one of my courses, I'm doing so badly, it's just painful. I'm like in the middle of it and I don't want to study any more because no matter how much I study I knew I wouldn't do to well in it. - UBC domestic*

Some UBC domestic students and Dalhousie international students felt they would get more involved in extra-curricular activities.

*I may have decided that I really didn't care about money, about the [scholarships] and just had a lot of fun this year, 'cause after our program I haven't done a single extracurricular activity. I wanted to play ultimate and go on field trips with the outdoor club and I wanted to do some of the racket sports, like volleyball.- UBC domestic*

One Dalhousie international student remarked that he would have chosen another institution that meet his recreational needs.

*I'd be in a school that had what I needed it to have. Like this doesn't have everything I want. I wanted, like. . . I was a huge lacrosse player, so. . . I thought that it was gonna have this, you know, 'cause the woman said it had a lacrosse club. And I found out that it wasn't even a club, you know, it just was there. So me and a buddy and one of his buddies tried to develop like, a team.- Dal international*

Another domestic student from Dalhousie felt he would change his studying habits, while a domestic student from York shared he would study differently. A McGill student claimed he would not procrastinate as much.

*I still don't know how to study, I would try to study differently. I don't know what works. I don't know yet of a proper way to study. I don't know what I am doing wrong. Some professors say different stuff. I like studying in my bed under my blanket. But I know that it is not good. It is not good because*

*sometimes I am not that focused. I think I am pretty good at studying if I sit there at the table. Here I always go to the second level. - York domestic*

*Well, I can always say that I am not going to procrastinate, and it always works for the first two weeks of classes, but then after that it just . . . You know, I mean no matter how much times I would start over again, my second year, it's always going to end up the same way. But I find that it is better than last year. I am procrastinating less, and get things done earlier, more evenly, but there is still procrastination. I think there always will be. - McGill domestic*

### ***Academic Experiences & Performance***

Most of the international and domestic students in these focus groups reported that they were doing either the same academically or a little better than their first year.

*Ok, this year my academic performance is definitely better than last year, I would say it's now above average, while last year for me it was way below average but on the whole, it was probably average. And is it harder or easier? I don't know. I guess I find it easier because of my experience. Last year just learning about how exams are in university and learning how to study. But I don't really think that I am studying more or studying harder, so I think it's just the fact that I am studying better. And I am enjoying what I study more, that is contributed to my improvement. - McGill domestic*

As suggested before, domestic students spoke of the increase workload in second year. Those from York and McGill discussed how this increase has changed how they studied, and required them to be more efficient and put more effort into their work.

*I think the courses are harder, that way we have to work harder and put in more effort. At the same time, with the increase in work, you get good outcomes. I think I am doing better than last year with the courses I am taking. They expect so much. It is worth the extra effort that I am putting in. - York domestic*

*Someone said that second year was easier than first year. When I started first semester this year, I thought that that's impossible. I found the courses are just harder, but I end up doing better because I don't know somehow I guess just not being in res, and just concentrating more, I did better in the classes even if they are harder. And I think that's true this semester too. It's just getting used to like, when you actually do work, doing work more efficiently, and knowing which work, like how much effort to put into something rather than going a hundred percent on everything, deciding what's more important, and when you just need to relax and when you actually really need to give it. - McGill domestic*

Dalhousie domestic students also indicated that they had to work harder to get their course work done. As one student explained,

*I'm doing better. I didn't work as much at all last year. . . I would work maybe two days before the test would come up and cram everything in there, but I'm doing a lot more spaced out work. Like I'm keeping up with my readings every week as opposed to doing them all the night before. . . and it really shows. I found I'm doing a lot . . . a lot better. - Dal domestic*

Some Dalhousie students also spoke specifically of having better time management skills in second year. UBC domestic students reported that while there was more work in second year, the courses were easier because they were no longer general. One domestic UBC student said that he wanted more hands-on experiences in his program, because

*I found the hands on materials to be far more educational. When you are just reading from the text book about these forces and trying to calculate them, there is such a sense of detachment from what you are doing. - UBC domestic*

A McGill domestic student stated that he did not like all the group projects but everything else was going well for him.

*I've had a lot more this year or actually this semester, probably because I am taking more management classes. But I don't really like the group projects. But other than that everything is going really well. - McGill domestic*

The UBC group raised an issue that students from the other institutions did not comment on. According to UBC students, students were “weeded out” in their first year. This was particularly relevant for the engineering and chemistry students. Most students felt that they had “made it” to second year and that was one reason why things were easier for them. The pressure to academically do well so they would not get dropped from the program was not present in second year, although they still felt the need to do well.

*I'm in civil engineering and I found second year easier than first year. Like I have had no problem keeping up in all my courses and they are actually keeping the class averages ridiculously higher like 10% higher than it was in first year. It seems like they are trying . . . I know. . . they weed you out in first year but I don't know it seems like they are trying to keep everyone in there. - UBC domestic*

*I have friends who are in second year as well but they are like bio or something so they have to take organic chemistry and right at exams you hear people talking about crying or like. Just even sometimes it's a lot of stress on student and sometimes I think they didn't need to make it so hard but I think that they do it on purpose and that makes sucking up very not*

*enjoyable. [Organic chemistry] is one of my least favourite classes. - UBC domestic*

Similar to the McGill student who found that living off-campus helped her studying, some of the Dalhousie students, who lived in residence last year and had moved off campus in their second year, also felt that their study habits improved over first year. Students noted that residence was not that conducive to studying since first year residence life atmosphere was more about socializing than academics.

Domestic students from UBC, York, and McGill also discussed how their performance varied depending on their interest in the course. Some students, like the UBC student quoted below, found they did worse in courses they really liked but better in courses they were not that interested in.

*Ffor some reason I'm better at stuff that doesn't interest me. It's weird I'm really good at calculus and like I get As and stuff but I don't like it and I really enjoy biology. It's my favourite course I've taken here and the first half of the year I was doing terrible. It's strange. - UBC domestic*

Another student from McGill decided to work harder in her courses when she realized with some assistance from her parents that her marks counted if she was to pursue an honours program. She explained:

*It seems that the harder the class gets the better I do, which I mean comparatively, like I would say last year and this first semester I was still doing pretty terribly in school. I was not going to class, and I just, I don't know, didn't even attempt to do well in the classes. And then this semester I am really trying, not only because my parents are sort of threatening me too . . . but I just realized it could matter to the future if I want it to, like I am trying to get into honours psych and all that stuff, and I am starting to realize that this stuff counts. - McGill domestic*

An increase in workload was also a common point of discussion for many of the international students across the country. Some felt that their second year courses had more work in terms of assignments and papers. Others also talked about having other activities which also made their second year busier than their first.

*Actually, my second year is much harder than my first year because in my first year I only take 30 credits and this year I take 33-34 because in my first year I take a lot of math courses which I didn't need to study for that because it wasn't difficult. I could skip classes and I could still do well in the final. But this year, no such courses exist so those courses are usually commerce courses this year so and those courses require you to either write homework or write case analysis or prepare for presentations and that stuff. So the course load is much heavier than last year and like, I also*

*got other stuff besides my study to do, so the overall the load is much heavier than my first year, much heavier. - UBC international*

*Things are harder, but because they're harder, I work harder. Do you know what I mean? When things are easy I kind of just like, "Ah, whatever. . . I can. . . that can be done in an hour. I can write a five page paper in an hour." You know what I mean? When I can't. And it's way harder this year so it's just like, "Okay. Get down to work. Do it." And I do. I just focus. Do you know what I mean?- Dal international*

*I have more assignments than last year. This year the level is higher. It is more academic English. I have to put out more, more have to read more academic journals to read. There are more assignments than last year. - York international*

Many international students felt they were doing the same or better than last year. Several students commented that they were doing better because they were "settled" in as second year students. As one international student from UBC said, "no, I think things are easier, you just know how to deal with things better." Others felt that they had a better understanding of their professors' expectations. As this international student from McGill explained,

*so I think I've developed a better sense of what university professors are asking, or what the course is looking for and what they are requiring. And that makes it easier to study, and I've become more organized, which also makes it easier to handle, and it was good. So in terms of academically, I am doing, I am doing a B plus average. And honestly that's not enough for me, I think. I can always do more, I can always, have the expectations that I can do more, but the truth is that I am doing better than last year, because I have a better sense of what I need to do in order to pass the course as opposed to you know just improving.- McGill international*

A few international students did admit that they were doing worse than in their first year. When asked to elaborate, some revealed they were not working as hard or were not that interested in the courses they were taking, so they were not trying hard to get good marks.

*I don't know, I guess I don't study as much, well, maybe because I'm taking less courses, 'cause I'm only doing three right now where I took five last year, and I found that too much. . . and I don't really like the courses I'm taking, they are required courses. Like I'm taking this psych course that is so boring. When you really don't like the courses you really don't want to study them kind of. - UBC international*

*Like, I, for some reason, cannot do that well on easy assignments. Like, I just can't. No matter how hard I try to do the assignment, like I always seem to miss something on the easier assignments. But on the large ones,*

*you know, like . . . it's just, I get so many better grades, you know, on the harder assignments.- Dal international*

Similar to the domestic students, a couple of Dalhousie and McGill international students felt that their hard work often did not translate into good grades, which was a source of stress for some.

*I think it is, 'cause like, I was just taking a . . . a really easy computer course, you know. . . and, it was supposed to be really easy, you know. And I didn't come out with a grade that would reflect how really easy it would be. I technically should have had an A+ you know, in the class, you know, but I didn't come out with an A+, so like . . . But in a course that, everyone's like, "Oh, you know, that's really hard," you know, I come out with like an A or something, you know. . . So to me that's hard because like, my work habit is pretty much the same from paper to paper you know. I just don't understand why I can't do the same on like. . . it's probably psychological. - Dal international*

A McGill international student talked about how the increase in work load required more skill in terms of balancing his courses. He also discussed how the grading system does not always reflect the amount of work he may have put into his course.

*For me, I have done pretty good so far in academics, like way above average. But I don't really think that it's. . . I think the grading system does not really reflect how a student is interested or is, how much work one has put into his work. I mean the grading system is quite unbalanced. And I think the workload is quite a bit, and I was trying to, because a lot of the stuff that was covered in lectures I didn't understand the first time. I mean in lecture, so I really have to take initiative to read books as a help in order to understand the stuff. But I think the work load is a bit too much that I have trouble trying to balance both, my self-initiative study or I mean both the assignments and the time that I put into it. – McGill international*

Some international students from McGill and York University felt that their marks had decreased because of “class participation” grades. This 5-10% often makes the difference between an A and B.

*The problem is that there are 5 marks allocated to participation. Some people cannot even open their mouths in class. It is partly that [English is a second language] but the other thing is that we don't come from the same environment. We don't get used to arguing. It is cultural. - York international*

*And for me in terms of academe, I was not very satisfied with me for the second year's marks as compared to the first year because for me the class is getting harder and the teacher kind of marks very hard. And my total*



*GPA is decreasing and also my mark is decreasing. And GPA goes down, and I don't know why, just getting harder and harder and harder and you know sometimes it's the teacher marks students ridiculously and I can't believe how she marked it and all that participation . . . It's hard, yeah. - McGill international*

*The problem is that there are 5 marks allocated to participation. Some people cannot even open their mouths in class. It is partly [due to English] but the other thing is that we don't come from the same environment. We don't get used to arguing. It is culture. For Japanese for sure. - York international*

These students explained that while some of the difficulty in participating in class is an issue of self-confidence in speaking in English, most felt that there were larger cultural barriers, particularly if they came from cultures where asking direct questions or challenging the authority of the professor or the texts were not acceptable forms of classroom behaviour.

### ***Classroom Experiences***

Comparing the differences between large and small classes in second and first year was the focus of international and domestic students' comments on classroom experiences. Class size affected student learning experiences and class participation. It also influenced more positive interactions with faculty and classmates. Small classes were viewed as better environments for learning and interacting with professors and peers. Comments by domestic and international students are portrayed in the next two sections.

Small classes were more common in second year than first year. Domestic students from UBC, Dalhousie, York, and McGill all mentioned that smaller classes were generally more enjoyable. The instruction was better and there was more interaction, all of which improved their learning and classroom experiences overall. York, Dal and UBC domestic students also indicated that the nature of the course content was more specific in second year, especially if they were taking third-level courses.

*My classes have gotten a lot smaller especially since I belong to such a small program. And I found that the level of teaching has actually improved beyond the level of just like being frustrated. Like, some of the teachers last year either had no practical experience. Like one guy was teaching us physics that he was a theoretical physicist and teaching us objects And when he is looking at the formulas, he is just like "You know what? I didn't know these until last night and I have never use this formula" . . . and he just studies straight theory and that is so just so far removed from anything that we are being taught. That's just one example of a very bad teacher I had. This year, there are at least like four decent subjects. - UBC domestic*

*They're more specialized and you get more out of them. History class, it's not just general history. - Dal domestic*

*All my courses are third year. But I guess the courses are more about critical analysis. Not everything you read you have to know, you have to critically analyze. It is totally different from last year. - York domestic*

*I find that the teaching is a lot different. A lot more like classroom participation because the classrooms are just so small whereas in like my international development classes, it's all like the Leacock 132 or other auditoriums. It's a pretty big class, so that's the biggest difference. – McGill domestic*

Classroom experiences of international and domestic students were also influenced by professors. This aspect of the classroom experience will be discussed further in the next section.

Some domestic students felt that their interaction within the classroom and engagement with the course material was influenced by the fact that professors knew students' names. Domestic students from Dalhousie and UBC commented that small classes meant that the professor not only knew your name but also knew when you did not go to class.

*Well, the teacher knows your name which is cool. In that sense I like that. I think he is the second prof that has ever learned my name so . . . that is good. - UBC domestic*

*It makes you go to the classes. . . 'cause when there's such a huge class and there's no attendance and it's. . . faceless. . . then you don't have . . . to go to that class. But this year I have a lot of smaller classes, which means that the professor knows you and when you're not there, they know that you're not there. It just makes you go to class. - Dal domestic*

Familiarity with professors also helped facilitate classroom participation and interaction with professors inside and outside the classroom for domestic Dalhousie, York and McGill students. Some domestic students from McGill also felt that their own self-confidence in the classroom had improved in second year.

*I find that I get a lot more out of a class if I participate. I am more confident in my own abilities too in a small class. In a big class I still never talk. - Dal domestic*

*I do find this year that I'm more confident in . . . if I am going to say something in class like that I think is relevant, I will. And if I do feel that I need to talk to the professor about a mark or just ask him a question about an assignment, I would go to office hours, whereas in last year, I wouldn't*

*put in that effort. Not really because I was not confident enough, just because I didn't think it would pay off like going to ask the professor about an assignment. I didn't think you could really get any output there. That's the difference.- McGill domestic*

Some domestic students from UBC and some international students from York valued large class sizes because larger classrooms required students to develop their independent learning skills. Independently studying a text book was seen by one UBC domestic student as a skill that university was supposed to teach them.

*We can argue about tuition costs . . . . but I think that at the same time, the larger the class size the more learning you have to do on your own and it's important to know the skills, to be able to teach your self something and not have to rely on one-on-one tutoring to learn whatever it is you are learning. Because I think in the future you have to be able to be self-sufficient somewhat. - UBC domestic*

However, York domestic students remarked that participating in large classrooms was difficult because of the large numbers. As one student stated, participating was difficult “when there are so many students.” Another student indicated that “if I don't step in, I have to deal with the consequence,” referring to the academic penalty for not participating in class. There was also discussion of the “unfriendliness” of large classrooms and the difficulty in following the professor's instruction.

*In my business class you have to open your mouth. Sometimes I don't think that we really have to go to class. In one of my classes I'm looking in the book and I was writing down the numbers but I did not have a clue where the professors got this information. I asked another student who blasted me for not following. Sometimes the professors move so fast that you can't follow. At the end, students line up to ask questions. - York domestic*

During first year, a domestic student from McGill reflected she also valued large classrooms as she did not see the value of a personal relationship with her professor. However, during her second year she had more experiences with smaller classes and saw how having a “contact” with professors influenced how well she did in a class.

*For me, I am still pretty much in Leacock 132 [large lecture hall], like the entire day. But I think it's just because the psych program, like the classes are just so huge. It actually didn't really bother me much last year because I didn't really see why people felt it was a problem that they couldn't, like have a personal relationship with their teachers. I thought If you get the work done, you get the work done. But now I am starting to see that really does affect how well you do in a class. And for my small classes, I do do better. So you know, I started to see, and that will affect my course selection for next year for sure. - McGill domestic*

Another McGill domestic student reiterated how large classes did not help facilitate his learning.

*The class sizes I think are still a big issue, because all my classes are still humongous, and it's something that I don't really enjoy too much. I think my learning experience would be, not just mine, but my learning experience would be really enhanced by the same materials just coming to me in a smaller class size, being able to discuss more and so the class sizes are still very large. - McGill domestic*

For some international students from York University, attendance at lectures varied. Some preferred to study from the textbook than go to a large lecture hall. An international student from McGill who was used to large classes in his high school felt there were advantages to large classrooms, although he preferred smaller classes.

*I don't go to lectures but I study in my own way. I have to read the textbook. - York international*

*I was never intimidated by the large classroom size although I was used to more smaller settings before coming to McGill, and in high school, and I think that's normal. So I, I do prefer a smaller classroom, but there are advantages to having a large classroom. I mean, there is more likelihood that you will be in a class with someone that you know and or someone that you can meet with and study well with, you know, and if you are in a*

*smaller classroom, you know, people that may not be, you may not know them because they are in a different year than you. And I found a lot that, I am a second year student but I am in a three year program so a lot of my classes are with students who are a year ahead of me, and I wasn't in the same instructional level classes with them.- McGill international*

Some international students from York felt that their classroom experiences were not about size, but about the professor. As one student explained “*It depends on the professor your experience is different. The experience is different; it is not the number of years, but the professor.*” International students from UBC, Dalhousie, and McGill found their professors to be more engaging in second than first year. For example, several UBC international students felt most of their professors were providing more concrete examples and they valued the humour used in class. This issue will be discussed a later section in this report.

*Like in Commerce 290, I have XXXXX and he is just amazing, he can give concrete examples from life, from every aspect of their lives, and bring that to class and teach you. You can remember those examples very easily; it just makes the text book thinner and includes all the examples. I hope that I can meet more professors like that. - UBC international*

International students also experienced smaller class sizes in many of their second year courses. Similar to their domestic peers, international students from UBC, Dalhousie, and McGill all felt that their courses were more interesting in terms of content.

*This year I'm doing really interesting stuff and I'm really impressed with all the other people in the class and learning really interested in what is going on, like, in the actual field I want to work in but I don't know I just think that it's, the classes are so much better this year. - UBC international*

*I think in your second year, your classroom size is definitely smaller without a doubt, probably because I was taking you know very broad classes like first year basic level classes that everybody has to take . . . And that might, the classroom size is definitely related to how much you can participate, because the smaller your classroom size, the more chances you have in participating simply because there are not many people that challenge you, that not many people that compete with you for discussion chances. I would say that my learning experience is definitely been improved because, also because I have been taking classes that are more specific. - McGill international*

Not all students thought second year classes were enjoyable. One international student studying at Dalhousie, who was American, said that he was not enjoying his second year classes because of anti-US discourse and that he often left such classrooms angry.

*And the main reason is that I find that like, so many people talk about the United States, whether it's a prof or a Canadian, like, blatantly, you know. . . . I got so fed up with the fact that . . . the United States was talked about so bad, you know. And whether it was about war or economics and things like that, you know. I mean, being American like I'm a patriot. You know, like, I love America. - Dal international*

The variation in workload was also an issue for many international and domestic students. One international student from UBC felt that group work was both a “good and bad” thing. Another international student in the same focus group felt that the variation in workload was unfair in terms of cost-per-credit.

*I really like the content more, a little bit better I realized that when I was studying for my mid-term, I actually liked the stuff I was studying which is kind of new for me. But I also had a lot of group work this year, where last year I was general sciences, I was just thrown in, you are 1 in 250, but this year I find I have a lot more group work which has been both good and bad. Sometimes it is was really frustrating but sometimes it actually helps, I get more out of smaller group interactions, we actually talk in class and get to learn the material more. So that's pretty nice. - UBC international*

*Again, I don't think that there is any uniformity to what the classes are doing. Like in the summer three hours of reading from the text book, I don't think that is worth 550 dollars for the credit. - UBC international*

Some Dalhousie international students felt that their smaller classes allowed for more interaction and discussion with their professors and peers. For example, one international student from Dalhousie felt that smaller classes helped her “to make a relationship with the prof.” McGill international students also felt small classes helped create an atmosphere where they felt more comfortable to approach their professors.

*Smaller classes- there's more discussion, I can ask more questions. It's not just like a, like Psych 2000, like 500 people sitting there and it's a lecture and it's like, (groans), writing down notes, you know what I mean? It's. . . you can get more, you can understand more from asking questions. . . . So maybe that. Maybe smaller classes. . . more helpful. . . definitely. You feel more comfortable asking questions, you know what I mean? - Dal international*

*So I know it's, it's, I do feel the classroom size is a problem, but it's a problem that is out there and being addressed, and I think this is maybe a difference between first year and second year, I feel more comfortable now, maybe because I have already gone through the experience approaching my TA, and approaching my professors, and asking them a question and emailing them, especially emailing them for me that was a kind of bridge for communicating. Before I couldn't go up and talk to them. Now I start*

*with email, and then I start corresponding with email. And then I can eventually go up and talk to them. And so I think it's just a matter of confidence building that you get after your first year. McGill international*

### **Contact with Faculty**

From their comments about classroom experiences, it is evident that for the most part both international and domestic students believed they had better interactions with faculty in their second year. In fact, most participants highly ranked their comfort level in approaching their professors on a scale from 1 (least comfortable) to 10 (most comfortable) on a range of 6-10; this comfort level dramatically increased to a 10 if contact was via e-mail. One McGill domestic student ranked his interaction with his professors as a 10 because

*I think I had more contact with professors this year, as opposed to last year. Yeah, I feel more comfortable approaching them. And I find out like if I get to know them a little bit more, like I play basketball with my sociology professor. I want to have that kind of, you know that they are just normal people. It's easier to understand like they have to wake up for an 8:30 class too. And they have to go, so, I don't know. I just find like by having more personal relationships with professors, it's more enjoyable to like listen to them, and, it has increased a lot from last year. So I will give everything 10. - McGill domestic*

Domestic students from UBC, McGill and Dalhousie had mostly positive comments about their interactions with their professors in second year. Most felt they were using the office hours more than they had in first year. Some students felt that office hours were a good way for getting their professor to know them by name. Others stated they were just more confident in second year to approach professors.

*Our classes have slightly more, the course work is slightly more difficult, so I end up actually follow the office hours and speak to profs an awful lot to clarify things because I do have a lot of trouble with data assignments and I need a lot of help sometimes. I think that more than half the profs I have this year know me by name and have much more contact compared to last year there was only two or three of my what 15 professors that knew me. - UBC domestic*

*Also I feel more comfortable now because I know, like in first year I was a little confused, I can go up to them [now] and say "I didn't really understand this. Can you help me a little bit with this?" - Dal domestic*

*But I do find this year that I'm more confident in . . . if I am going to say something in class like that I think is relevant, I will. And if I do feel that I need to talk to the professor about a mark or just ask him a question about an assignment, I would go to office hours, whereas in last year, I wouldn't put in that effort. Not really because I was not confident enough, just because I didn't think it would pay off like going to ask the professor about an assignment. I didn't think you could really get any output there. That's the difference.- McGill domestic*

The use of office hours varied among students. Some domestic students from Dalhousie and McGill either spoke to professors after class or went to office hours. Some professors at Dalhousie and McGill were using online technology, such as WebCT, to hold office hours.

*It depends . . . sometimes I just go after class. A lot of them seem to have office hours right after my classes specifically for that reason . . . or right before. - Dal domestic*

*We had ah . . . virtual office hours last semester r . . . on like the WebCT? And it was pretty good so you didn't have to go see him you just, like he'd be on-line and you just write. - Dal domestic*

*I feel comfortable going to their office hours but I just don't use them. But I find that's more, the professors are having less office hours and being active on the WebCT more. So, I like that too because personally I feel very comfortable doing everything on the internet anyway. So, I check the boards often and you are likely to find in each thread that the professor would respond to the questions students have pretty frequently, which I think is really convenient because you can post a question and then there will be an answer from a student and the professor like a few days later. So, that really helps out. And I think that's a change from last year for sure. - McGill domestic*

*Office hours, not too many of my professors, I am trying to think . . . I don't think any of them actually this year have specifically said they have office hours. So if we have questions we just ask after class or before class or email is a big way of communication. - McGill domestic*

A UBC domestic student indicated that office hours held during the day were not helpful since his course schedule went from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., conflicting with any office hours scheduled during that time.



*You know it's funny, we have courses from 8 to 4 pm everyday except on Fridays in which case we end at 6 pm . . . so we have . . . about 5 profs who have office hours and a couple of other TAs who are just around and they are having great difficulty trying to schedule people to come in because first of all because of the fact that we have solid school the whole week they have to stay way later than they are obligated to. The other problem is the kids don't go in because it really impedes on their ability to go home and spend how many number of hours doing the actual work. - UBC domestic*

In identifying traits of a good professor, students valued professors who were gave examples and were flexible with assignment deadlines.

*I think that the thing for me that distinguishes a good professor from a bad one is the bad one don't give examples in class or don't give things that are practical and I'm in engineering because I'm practical person I like to see problems that aren't just quite completely theoretical so it really helps me apply the formulas that they are teaching in class. See what they look like in the real world kind of thing. - UBC domestic*

*If I talked to my professors like, they usually like. . . say if you had two essays due in a day, they'd let you hand it in later or something.- Dal domestic*

Some domestic students from UBC felt that the quality of teaching also improved in second year in that professors shared studying strategies with students.

*This year, I would say that the quality of teaching I see it improved by quite a bit where I actually found where they are trying to give hints on how to memorize things or how to understand things. - UBC domestic*

York domestic students also claimed that there was a difference in professors from first and second year. The expectation of second year professors was higher because of the higher level of coursework. Similar to the York international students, domestic students spoke of how differently professors interacted with students in terms of availability and support.

*First year the professors are really nice. In second year, they are different and they expect a lot from you. It is just different. They expect a lot of you. One professor gave us his phone number at home, another one is a harder marker . . . . Some are more available and helpful than others. - York domestic*

*I had one professor who was really good, he was the best and he helped you study. I have a professor that I hated, no one could stand him. The whole class failed. This year is better. York domestic*

Another York domestic student expressed how much students have come to rely on their professors for learning and as a result, having a “good” professor was very important. He explained “*I never understood how important it was to have a good professor. I really rely on my professors. I hardly rely on my textbooks.*”

In all focus groups, there was much discussion about the reasons the nature of interactions with faculty and even in the quality of teaching changed between first and second year. As discussed in the previous section, smaller classes simply changed the nature of the classroom and the type of teaching. Both UBC and Dalhousie domestic students felt that professors were more engaged in second year. UBC, McGill, and Dalhousie students felt that small class sizes facilitated more interaction with their professors. Another Dalhousie student also pointed out that smaller classrooms also meant that students got to know their peers better.

*They're smaller, for the most part. . . I've found. . . which makes it a lot better. You can actually talk to the professor a lot easier. I have a couple of professors who actually lead tutorials so you can get to talk to them on a one-on-one basis.- Dal domestic*

*I think you also get to know the people in your program. Everybody's been together . . . you're in a lot of the same classes together.- Dal domestic*

One domestic student from McGill suspected that professors had changed from second year from first year, not because they were more engaged with the content, but because professors were attempting to be “cool” to get better rankings from students on an online website where students could give feedback on professors. This website “rate-my-professors.com.” was seen as a motivator for the improved teaching in second year.

*I have noticed a weird thing - that teachers are trying to be really cool now. It's a phenomenon that has a lot to do with “rate-my-professors.com,” because teachers have mentioned in class it really upsets them when they go, and when they see nasty comments about themselves like personal attacks. And so they are trying to make the lectures like, even with the exam questions, they will put really weird references to like music they think we were listening to, and like the movies we've seen. It's so bizarre. And I guess it's to make it more interesting but I think it's, I don't know, it's kind of sad. It helps because there is more time spent on that than actual lecture materials. Yeah, that's what I noticed as a difference.- McGill domestic*

For some domestic UBC and Dalhousie students, TAs were seen as more engaging and understanding, in that the TAs took the time to answer questions and held flexible office hours. Professors were valued for their expertise in content knowledge.

*[My TA] was doing his masters in science and he was teaching a second year math differential equation and I found him to be the most willing to help outside of class I would go to his office hours all the time. Like I noticed if someone didn't understand something in class he would invite them back to his office at some point and he would just always do everything that he could. And even while he was teaching the class he was trying to write a masters report and he finished it at the end of class like he was incredibly busy but he was always still finding time for students. . . I found that was . . . that he really cared. - UBC domestic*

*I found that TAs may not have the same knowledge base but they are usually very enthusiastic about what they are doing but then again it's nice to have an experienced prof you can go and they know their subject matter. - UBC domestic*

A UBC domestic student pointed out that some TAs, whose first-language was not English, were unable to communicate their point effectively in English.

*Most of them want to help you. They are willing to give you the time of day but a lot of my TAs can't speak English . . . I find it really really hard. I know when I ask them something they want to help me they try to help me but it's really hard when they can't speak the language and I remember sometimes when I ask them something all they can say is "ya, ya" and I would be like "ya" and that wasn't really the answer to the question but it's so hard. Like you know that they are so nice and they are so willing to help but I think that is one of the major barriers I found between going to a professor and going to a TA. - UBC domestic*

Although these TAs were seen as earnest, students were frustrated by this communication barrier.

International students from UBC and Dalhousie reiterated that office hours are not always held at convenient times for students.

*I think that the problem is, well, it's my problem for this one, but most office hours that they have I actually have class so I can't actually go them. The office hours are to their convenience as apposed to ours, which is kind of pitiful. - UBC international*

*Never used [office hours]. 'Cause like, it's the timing. I've never had an office hour where I didn't have a class and if it was an hour I didn't have class, I didn't ever have a question. Do you know what I mean? - Dal international*

Similar to their domestic peers, international students from UBC, McGill and Dalhousie felt that their contact with professors had increased. In fact, some Dalhousie and McGill

international students also felt they were more confident in approaching a professor for help in second year than in first year.

*I think that this year I have more contact with my advisor, more than last year, I even become friends with some of my faculty members and we, I think, I just sometimes come to the office, sometimes writing, sometimes in person, I just find that they are very friendly to us. - UBC international*

*I've got . . . I think over the year more confidence to approach faculty members and ask them. I don't know. . . even if it's through e-mail contact first and then going up to them in the classroom and asking, going after class and asking the prof, "Oh, I have a question" or "I have a problem with this. How do you do it?" So it's . . . yeah definitely talking more with them. - Dal international*

*I definitely feel more comfortable. I think in my first year, I felt that I didn't have anything worth saying or I didn't have anything worth their time, if you think of them as such you know important . . . you will feel intimidated, like am I wasting their time. And I think you kind of lose that, or I did. I lost that, that feeling. And I felt like I have a legitimate question, or I have an interesting point of interest. And most have been very well accepted. I've gone up to some, a professor, after class, and I was like something you brought up was very interesting, I am actually thinking for another class, so not for his class, of writing a paper about it; could you help me with some work to look for some information. And he said sure, email me and with your questions, and I will give you some resources on it. I did that on that night, and the next day he had half a page of resources, you know just starting off for me. I am sure that I can approach him later on with it. - McGill international*

Another UBC international student found her contact with faculty was very positive and supportive, particularly around academic advising.

*I know I get a lot more contact with my profs, like one of my profs is one of the advisors too so they are really open and just like "come by anytime" blah, so it's such a small thing. We have classes with them once every two weeks to like the whole program has class together which is good. - UBC international*

There was mixed use of office hours by York and Dalhousie international students. Although similar to their domestic peers some preferred the face-to-face interaction with professors, others felt just as comfortable using online technologies. An international student from Dalhousie made the point that although some international students might be fearful of confrontation or asking their professors questions, they were paying tuition fees and deserve to have their questions answered.

*I prefer going and seeing them in person. I use WebCT though a lot, 'cause you can get internal, you know, e-mail. - Dal international*

*I tend to use the discussion board and ask the other people and if they can't, if they have some whack answers, then yeah, I'll definitely have to e-mail the prof or, after class, go and speak to him and ask in person. Communication face-to-face is way better than e-mail. - Dal international*

*I mean there are people like, that have issues 'cause they're afraid of confrontation, but I figure, you're paying four thousand dollars plus, you know what I mean, for a half a year. . . you deserve to have your questions answered. -Dal international*

Students in both the international and domestic student focus groups were able to distinguish several traits that differentiated “good versus bad” professors. These traits included attending office hours, giving practical examples in class, and having flexibility in deadlines.

International students from UBC, McGill, and Dalhousie also felt that their interactions had improved in second year, but also felt there were “good” and “bad” professors. One student specified that a “bad” professor for him was a professor who never showed up to office hours and never made time after class to talk to students.

*I would say that my learning experience is definitely been improved because, also because I have been taking classes that are more specific. And I feel like we are covering, I am able to cover more material, and the professors are genuinely interested in their studies. These are professors that are teaching their areas of interest so they've gone through decades of experiences, and they are definitely qualified, not that first year professors are unqualified, but I feel that second year class professors teach classes that are more prominent to their areas of interests, and therefore know more about it.- McGill international*

*But I do have some bad memories because there are some professors like who never show up and they don't have office hours and they are late for class and always end class early so that after class it's almost certain that they are busy. There are some good professors and some not very good. - UBC international*

International students from UBC also felt that another quality of a good professor (and a good classroom) was the use of humour.

*Yes, also it's a great sense of humour, makes classroom atmosphere very good and makes the class participate. - UBC international*

International students from York and Dalhousie also reported that they had a better understanding of professors in their second year. One international student from York explained that he learned that not all professors are the same, which influenced the nature of his classroom experiences and learning. As he explained, he found that just a lecture-format while taking notes was difficult for him to follow the lecture.

*I am learning that not all professors are the same. That some are easier than others. They are all good professors but it is not my way. He is really old and can barely walk because he is too old. This professor just stands in front of the class and talks and talks and talks. He said that we need to write everything that is coming out of my mouth. All my notes are taken while he is talking. It is so hard for me because sometimes I cannot follow, I cannot write. - York international*

Another reason discussed was that faculty were more engaged with the material since compared to the generic first year courses the courses were more specific.

*I think the context [matters]. I think that I don't know if I was a professor and that intensely educated in a field I wouldn't want to be teaching first year courses either but I think that is the kind of vibe you get from a lot of first year courses so they have to do this. They just get up there and deliver overheads and go on with it, but this year it seems like a lot of the Profs are interested in what they are teaching and have the desire to convey the knowledge but it makes sense. - UBC international*

Similar to some of their domestic peers negative experiences with professors or TAs whose first language was not English, some of the international students from McGill noticed that students complained about faculty whose first-language was not English.

*The Chinese teachers, the Indian teachers, I am OK with them because they have the knowledge there and their teaching methods are ok. They know their materials. But some of the students, they complain, this professors because of language that they don't pronounce good, and then they are, they just simply don't like the professors. - McGill international*

*I have also experienced problems with professors that don't really speak, I mean not native English speakers. I love their teaching styles and all that, but I really have trouble following the classes. - McGill international*

Some international students from UBC and Dalhousie also felt that TAs were a little more flexible than professors in terms of office hours and therefore more approachable. One international student from Dalhousie spoke about the tutorial sessions that were run by TAs as a good way to get questions answered.

*Sometimes I find that TAs are more flexible, like they are more available for their office hours. If I say I can't make it then they will rearrange something to meet me. - UBC international*

*I have a good communication with my profs. I think more or less I have a better communication with my TAs because of the whole tutorial thing. Like I hate tutorials but like, in general, they do work, you know. Like it does give you the chance to take down a bigger group and talk about an issue where you can have feedback and not have to raise your hand for like an hour. - Dal international*

Some McGill international students felt more comfortable with face-to-face interaction with their TAs rather than their professors.

*I think, in terms of talking face-to-face, this year I spend more time talking with the TAs whereas last year, I made an effort to go to professors' office hours, which I found to be not always as helpful as you might think. And so, that I think was a big change this year. But this year, I mean everything has been very handy and very convenient. I mean, I had good experiences for the experiences that I've had. - McGill international*

*And in terms of being welcome, in terms that, you know, they always, the professors will always say that they are approachable, but then you send them an email, you are trying to contact them, and you know they have their own schedules and their own thing. And it's often very difficult to coordinate that, and you know because they are the professors and they are in a position of power, you feel that they have the priority, and then if you are trying to fit into their schedules, you are inconveniencing them. - McGill international*

Most international students felt very positive about their experiences with faculty overall. However, one McGill student was cognizant that the student-professor relationship was one of power and that interactions with professors were always related to the professors own personal schedule.

### ***Contact with Staff and Support Services***

When they described their contact with other staff and support services, the majority of international and domestic students tended to focus on their involvement or interactions with academic advisors. For the most part, domestic students commented that their academic advisors were helpful, but there were some concerns over scheduling appointments. As one York student explained,

*for me, the advisor was saying that I had to take certain courses. I told her that I did not want those courses but she said that I had to do them. She said that based on my average I was not allowed to take more than 18 courses. I told her that she did not know what I am capable of doing. My marks were lower than what I was supposed to have for one course and I could not get in touch with my professor. Once I had my mark switched, I went back to her but she did not help me. I had to wait for so long to see her. - York domestic*

Some UBC domestic students spoke of the difficulty in scheduling appointments (e.g., lab instructors). One UBC domestic student said that when she began in first year, she found people at the university indifferent in trying to help her bridge her support services from high school to university. She told the story of some staff saying,

*“it’s not really our problem if you are not going to be able to make to university ‘cause of your problem well, go to another university we don’t really care.” That’s how I felt and that’s one experience that really turned me off and there is no human aspect at all. - UBC domestic*

Many of the Dalhousie domestic students mentioned that they had not used the services very often. One domestic student from Dalhousie acknowledged that she was acquainted with the security guards. York domestic and international students found the librarians helpful. Like Dalhousie students, McGill domestic students commented their academic advisors were helpful and indicated that they were using services more this year than last year. Students spoke of going to their advisors for course information, planning, and even with questions about graduate school.

*I went to an academic advisor. It was really helpful. They’re really good too. Like they want you to ask questions . . . they know what they’re talking about . . . so that was helpful. - Dal domestic*

*So this year, it’s more about going to my advisor, and asking them . . . I want to get into grad school, and I am kind of interested in this area, and I am not so sure if I am interested in that area. So the advisors are pretty much qualified to talk to us and tell us what classes to take and what classes to consider. They are actually really great, because, you just go there and talk to them, and actually they are quite qualified, and I was quite surprised. McGill domestic*

Similar to their domestic peers, many international students concluded that their academic advisors were helpful. However, there was mixed usage of these types of services. Although some students never sought academic advice, others frequently did. There was also variation in opinion about the helpfulness of advisors. Some students found them to be very helpful and knowing a lot about things outside of advising that were relevant to the students (e.g., UBC international students); others students found their advisors as not helpful because students were told “*go figure it out yourself.*”



*They would know about things like scholarships, they would know about things like exchange which is not part of the program, they know about things like what happens after you graduate because in most commerce degrees you need to get other qualifications and recognitions before you actually practice. So they know all that. - UBC international*

*I went [to my program advisor] because I had questions about my program, and what she would suggest for classes, I brought a list of classes that I was interested in, asking her advice on which and when I should take. And she said "oh you have to figure that out yourself." And then I waited, I waited for like 20 minutes to go see her. It was the worst experience that I have ever had. - McGill international*

*Ok, last year I didn't have any contact with advisors, I don't think. I don't really remember. But this year I have seen an advisor a couple of times. I have – I don't know. I don't think I have talked to a course secretary. - York international*

*I go see the advisors I think probably once or every two weeks just to see if I'm on track with courses just to see, like I'm going on exchange this summer, just to see that everything is all set. They seem to know a lot about the program and a lot of things that are not related to the program but are what commerce students would need to know. - UBC international*

*Well I've used [NAME] and she's been helpful. Only because the last time they didn't count like any of my credits all five, last time and I was freakin' out! And she was saying, "no, you need this much credits," and I was like, "No I don't." Anyway, so she helped and they got it all sorted out. So she's been helpful to me. I've used a lot more services this year than last year. I'm paying for it. Why not? - Dal international*

Another issue for international students that was similar to some domestic student issues was the difficulty in making appointments or getting to see their academic advisors.

*Academic advisors. The office opens at 10:00am. The first five people can walk in but the sixth person is not allowed. Then the person needs to make an appointment but you cannot get an appointment for two weeks. - York international*

International students from UBC and McGill differentiated between general academic advisors versus program/department advisors. Both groups of students spoke of the high quality of academic advisors. One particular student from UBC described how she had negative experiences with general advisors but had positive experiences with advisors from her department.

*I've had some really bad experiences with advisors, like it's really rude too, like the general academic advising is just so big, like it is a small faculty and there is only one main first year advisor so like, it's a really tough job. But I really had a rough experience. Like over the summer I try to do some courses, and she was like "I'm sorry but if you don't take these classes you may want to think about leaving for a year and coming back" and I was like "excuse me, but I really want to be in school so" so I had to go through totally craziness for that and that was really frustrating. But then like in this other program it is so much smaller and a lot more personal attention. I know I get a lot more contact with my profs, like one of my profs is one of the advisors too so they are really open and just like "come by anytime" blah, so it's such a small thing. We have classes with them once every two weeks to like the whole program has class together which is good. - UBC international*

*I made an appointment with the general advisor, not just to drop in. And I met with her, and she looked at the classes that I had taken, my marks, and classes that I had taken in the second semester that were still going on, and she was very positive, she was very supportive, in terms of the marks that I had received already, and in terms of what my goals were and what I wanted to achieve, and what classes to take in the future. I mean, she was much more helpful, and that was much more satisfying after having experienced the other one, which I was supervised because you know, program advisor versus general advisor. - McGill international*

Some international students felt that support services, like career services, were not that helpful to them particularly if the student was going back to their country of origin for work. As this international student from Dalhousie explains:

*I've used services like career services, and . . . way more to help me get on track and figure out what I want to do and basically it's just, "What jobs can I get?" and it's been, but it's kind of odd, 'cause they can't really help me with what kind of jobs I can get 'cause it's in Bermuda. I'll be going back there right. - Dal international*

In summary, overall students found support services and staff to be useful and knowledgeable. However, as their comments indicate, there is considerable room for improvement.

## **Social Experiences**

There were a variety of social experiences shared by both international and domestic students. Similar to the first year experience, residence still plays an important role in social activities of second year students. However, many international and domestic students revealed that second year was more about balancing social lives with their

academic responsibilities. Many students said they choose to decrease or minimize their social activities because they wanted to concentrate on their studies.

### ***Social Lives***

Domestic students from UBC, Dalhousie, York and McGill had mixed reactions to their social lives in second year when they compared them to first year. Some students reported an increase in social activity, in that they were more involved in clubs, societies, and sports or had taken on leadership positions within their student groups. Others had decreased their involvement because they were concentrating on getting good grades (e.g., for scholarships or graduate school). Some students reduced the amount of socializing they did with friends (e.g., partying, movies) because they were working part-time; however, this will be discussed in the next section.

Domestic students from UBC were satisfied with the quality and quantity of activities on-campus (e.g., sports, clubs/societies, and athletics). Their one concern was the limited “free” hours to the weight room and pool. While this was not a big concern, it did impact how frequently students could gain access to these services. Also, there was some discussion around how exactly recreation fees were used by the AMS (student union at UBC) and UBC.

Some domestic students claimed that their social lives were curtailed by choice because they were trying to concentrate on their studies. They saw second year as a time to find a better balance between work, school and social activities. Others felt second year was about concentrating increasingly on academic study. This differed from first year when they focused on the socializing with friends. Domestic students also talked about having established groups of friends in second year which was different than trying to meet new people in first year.

*Well, like I said before, first semester was a lot harder for me 'cause I was getting used to the job and everything and it was interfering a lot 'cause I was trying to get. . . to do everything at once and it just wasn't working out. But this semester I've gotten used to it and I've been able to. . . get everything working and I've restrained a bit . . . Like if I have a test or something I'll just call in and like, I can't, because it's not like a few dollars or my marks. Like I know that school's more important. So just trying to get everything more balanced it's definitely hard but you have to do it. - Dal domestic*

*I am doing better than last year. I did not like school, but now I have formed my group of friends. - York domestic*

UBC and York domestic students discussed concentrating on their grades for scholarships or admittance into another program.

*Well, I haven't been involved since November, because I just don't have any time. I slipped into the study mode because I'm trying to get the scholarship thing again . . . if you get an A in your top 27 credits they give you \$2500. They don't offer it to first year students. But if last year you were first year or above you are still eligible until you graduate. - UBC domestic*

*I do not have a social life. My goal is to get a degree and then leave. I want to go to an American school. To go to American school is not easy. I spend all my time trying to get a good mark. After, I can do what I want and have a social life. I don't think that you can be too old to have a social life. - York domestic*

*I find I've become a lot less social, like I'll have my friends over just to hang out but we're not doing anything crazy, we're not going out more. . . reading a lot. . . yeah. - Dal domestic*

For some McGill students, social life was dependent on where they lived. There was a discussion of the “ghetto” as the place to be; however, one student felt that living away from that scene, where everyone knows everyone, was a better arrangement.

*People always say like if you want to have a nice social life, with a lot of like partying stuff, you should live in the ghetto because everyone is close together, but not from my experience. McGill domestic*

*Yeah, I am really glad that I don't live in the ghetto. I think I was just being too. . . like people compared to high school like you can't walk out of your apartment without seeing somebody you know, and that's is just irritating. McGill domestic*

Another McGill domestic student said that her social life was limited because even in second year she was having problems meeting new friends. She explained:

*Ok, I am not the most social person, but I have quite a few friends but they are not friends that I see very much outside of class. And it was the same way last year. And I guess it's improved a little bit, but not that much. Yeah, that is something that I still don't really understand because in high school, I had pretty good friends. But when I came here, I just couldn't make any good friends, and still haven't. - McGill domestic*

Those domestic students who met the legal drinking age requirements reported an increase in their activities in second year because they were able to go to more venues. As one Dalhousie domestic student said, “more bars, yeah ‘because we moved from 18 to 19.”

Others, like one student from UBC, had become presidents of their academic or social clubs. Another McGill domestic student joined a lot of groups, but because of time he did not participate in all these group events.

*I have already said before like how my percentage for academic and social changed but I am slightly more involved in the extracurricular. I am on more mailing lists but I don't necessarily participate. But that's obviously a fault of my own but I am more involved in like maybe two or three clubs. I don't know, and I am trying to do catch up stuff. I will see if that works out.  
- McGill domestic*

International students also had mixed responses about the quality or level of their social activity in second year. Generally, international students talked more about concentrating more on their studies. However, some had increased their activities because they were either more involved in their department/faculty or took on leadership roles within their student organizations.

*I was more involved this year; I was the president, in fact. Because I felt that I wanted to give back, you know I wanted to do something for everybody who was like me, who was yearning for the small group of Singaporeans that we have here, which numbers 20, or something like that. So next year I definitely want to join in more activities, because it's my last year and I am in a three-year program. - McGill international*

One UBC international student increased his social activities (e.g., going to social events, talking with professors, working part-time) and was surprised that his grades were still good.

*I try to spend a lot of time this year compared to this last year on the social events, especially those events organized by the commerce club, because I went there, and I almost I went to every event, and I spent a lot of my time part-time working and I spend a lot of time networking with a lot of professionals in those career areas and actually I spend less time on my study and I don't know why because I get better marks first term. - UBC international*

However, some international UBC students who commuted to campus found the travel time limited their ability meet with people in Vancouver. As this student explained, socializing on-campus was limited because of the bus but she did not mind the commuting time.

*Well, for social life I guess it difficult for me to meet up with people in Vancouver because it takes me so long to get back but I don't think that it is that much harder. Like people think that people think that that an hour and a half commute is like 3 hours is a waste of time, but honestly like in those hours I can rest or chat with friends. I don't really think that it is that bad. Like I take the 97 sky train and the 99 so that it is not that hard. And they come like every ten minutes. UBC domestic*

Some international students from Dalhousie and McGill felt that first year was the time to socialize because there were more organized first year events where participation was expected; in second year, students tended to have established social networks and more personal choice on social activities because of the lack of organized second year activities. Basically students had gotten first year out of their systems and were ready to concentrate in second year.

*I think this year I cut down the socialization a bit more, because I've already had my group of friends there, and it's not like I don't go out with them. And there is no desperate need to meet new people constantly as much as last year. . . Last year I was involved with just a bunch of random clubs. I joined kick boxing because I thought that was a very fashionable thing to do. I joined modeling because it was fashionable, and this year I was more involved with my cultural group, the Malaysian and Singapore Students Association, because I think it established a kind of awareness of being away from home. - McGill international*

*I'm here to learn. I'm here to get my money's worth, or my mother's money's worth and then go home and make money so I can pay my mom back and all that stuff right? So, my social life, has calmed the partying but more in. . . like. . . I still do a lot of stuff with my friends but, like we all go to the library, do stuff. . . It sounds kind of like nerdy like when I just said that but it's just because we're more focused and like we have to be more focused. I just don't wanna like be a mediocre, like just passing. It's not good enough anymore, like, just passing. You know what I mean? So, yeah, definitely, I've changed it up from partying to academic type thing. . . It's still fun. I mean, I do have my times when I party but it's way less than first year. - Dal international*

*First year was a time to go out and explore Montreal, and do a lot of the touristy things because you know you are living here, but you still have not done them so. You go out to the Biodome and to the theatre, so you go and you go do the tourist excursions. And you also go to the clubs, and the bars, and the restaurants that you know that are doing. So you kind of get that out of the way. So the second year I didn't feel such an urge to go. I had a desire to concentrate on study and less a desire to go socializing. I feel more secure by my friends as well I don't feel that I need to go out and meet new people although I do stay involved in certain thing to go, simply*

*to meet new people and to interact with new people but that's the case. I get involved, I think, get involved less with clubs this year. - McGill international*

Clearly, for both international and domestic students, academic study had begun to displace socializing as a central feature in their lives.

### ***On- and Off-campus Activities***

The range of on- and off-campus activities of international and domestic students did not vary much from first year. Both groups of students still predominately participated in residence-organized events, clubs, and societies on-campus. This was also true for York students who did not live on-campus. Many domestic and international students were also working part-time either on- or off-campus. On-campus work was seen as a flexible option for many students, in that on-campus employers understood student schedules, particularly around exam time.

McGill domestic students were actively involved in sports and exercise on-campus. However, as one student's experiences highlight, lack of familiarity with processes and procedures can hinder participation.

*I am not really involved in anything out of school. But I wanted to do the peer-advising thing. Except that I got the email and it was like you have to drop off like this thing, and it's like four days from that. And I don't even know where I have to drop it off. It was some building that probably is Dawson Hall. Probably I should know where that is, but I don't. So then I figured if I didn't even know where that is, I probably shouldn't be advising people.- McGill domestic*

Some of the domestic students from Dalhousie reported that attempting to organize intramural sports posed challenges.

*I was interested in like trying to do intramural sports at the gym? I like wanted to play some sports but you have to whole group to sign up like that. I don't know, there wasn't a lot of like information on if you don't have a whole team how you sign up. I don't know. . . and we went with like 10 people or so, to play intramural soccer and they were like, "You don't have a team so you can't play." - Dal domestic*

Participation in off-campus activities were variable. Many of the UBC and McGill domestic students lived on-campus and therefore kept their social activities mostly on-campus. One UBC domestic student said, "*I never go off campus - just to get groceries.*" Dalhousie domestic students claimed that their course loads impeded how many off-campus activities they could get involved in. They were more concerned in second year with concentrating on their academic work (e.g., getting good grades, studying) than

partying like they did in first year. One York domestic student shared that off-campus activities were difficult due to family responsibilities.

*It was difficult because my mom is a single parent and I'm the older brother, I have a younger sister and brother. But this year is good because we all help. York domestic*

In terms of part-time work, many domestic students worked part-time during their semester. Some students like the flexibility of the schedule of working on-campus, as the following Dalhousie student explained:

*I have a part-time job but it's through Dal. . . so I find that a lot, like every evening . . . like they want us there but if you have a test or whatever it's cool. - Dal domestic*

Some Dalhousie domestic students cut back or simply did not work part-time in order to focus on their studies. One student said she worked off-campus as a way of getting her out of the house and doing something.

*It's unfortunate that I've been working so much and not doing so well in school because I'm trying to do so much. This semester I try to not, I'd take shifts that were shorter and everything so I could concentrate more on school rather than on work. - Dal domestic*

*I work in the summer for university and I work now just to have spending money and to do something. 'Cause last year I found myself just doing nothing all the time. And the amount of spare time that I had last year, even with all the work, I still was doing nothing. So this just makes me get out of the house and do something else. - Dal domestic*

An on-campus activity that both international and domestic students enjoyed was working out in the gym. Many students saw physical activity (e.g., sports, working out) as a way to relieve stress. As one Dalhousie international student said,

*It's a relaxation thing to me . . . and I make sure I relax, like, I try to feel good and stuff like that . . . just to bring it down, you know what I mean? Like, I work all day and I try to stay in that mode all day so that at night time I can just chill out. - Dal international*

Off-campus activities for international students were mostly related to social outings, like window shopping, going to movies or attending church. Another way international students de-stressed was hanging out with friends or their significant others. One male international student from McGill said his off-campus activity of spending time with his girlfriend was time-consuming, but in a good way, in that spending time together helped them de-stress from school.



*[I do] other things like going for walks with my girlfriends, going to movies, chilling out, going to get coffee, talking, people watching. . . Even if I sit in Tim Horton's, like with my girls, and just watch people. - Dal international*

*With the exception of extracurricular clubs that I really sort of become more involved in this year was a friend of mine and I, we go on a regular basis to a church on Sunday. So that sort of takes up a good portion of Sunday, requires more commitment to get up early, and to drag myself out. And on the whole, it's actually a good thing, because you know just the little changes, when I come home by the time that I, and it sort of promotes my efficiency for the rest of the day. - McGill international*

Unlike their domestic peers, international students from UBC and York were limited to working only on-campus. One York international student discussed the challenges of getting a part-time job on-campus despite doing all the “right” things like volunteering at the library where she wanted to work and getting reference letters:

*Recruiting system in the library is not fair. If you know someone and there is work available, and if they know someone, they approach their friends. The student might be in their home country, and they find a friend to cover their work while they are away. York has an English language library, I volunteer for that. I received a letter of recommendations from my supervisor. I don't have a chance though. - York international*

Both groups of students saw the value of part-time work as a way of gaining experience in their academic fields. Although many international students were not working, there was interest expressed by some students in working part-time in their third year.

*I actually work two jobs. I work for my own faculty. I do technician work there and I work for my professor doing a research assistant. - UBC international*

*In second year I am working part-time, I get the work study; I go into the work study program. Because for international students, if you are in first year, you cannot go into the work study program, you cannot work outside of campus, you cannot, like you cannot do anything. But when you go into the second year, you go into the work study program, you get a permit, so you can find a job everywhere in the campus. I got a job in the accounting department. It's a really good job and it's 10 dollars an hour, it's good pay, and flexible hours. Every time I have an exam, and I don't want to work, they say “ok, you just feel free to go.” So I think it's really good because in that department I work, and because it's related to my field of study, accounting, so I get the experience and I make money, so it's really fun. - McGill international*

Some of McGill international student participants either cut back on part-time work or were hesitant to work part-time because they didn't want it to interfere with their studies.

*I don't think I have many off campus commitments apart from, you know being involved in the club that I am in. So, I probably, it's probably because I consciously didn't want them to affect my studies because knowing me, I was afraid that I wouldn't be able to take the stress. I have friends who work off campus. And. . . I have a friend who is working 28 hours a week for some reason off campus. I don't know. I didn't think I wanted to get into that at the end of my first year because I was quite petrified in the kind of even working, because I didn't think I would be able to do it. - McGill international*

Another McGill international student found that her part-time work actually helped her organizational skills.

*I think it is affecting my studies positively. I think that as much as students say how busy they are, I think they really, or I really can say I have quite a bit of free time. Sure, it can be easily filled with computers and TV and stuff and, so anyway, working has been a positive influence on my grades. It forces me to plan more, in terms of studying, which has benefited my studies. McGill domestic*

Some other international students felt that they did not want to deal with the stress of finding work off-campus, particularly in areas like Montreal, where one needed to know French.

*I thought about frequently the possibility of getting a job, because it will be very handy to have some extra resources at my disposal. But I am very intimidated by the prospect of, because I am not a Canadian, trying to get a job here. It just feels sort of intimidating, like I have a feeling that there will be a lot of red tape involved, in terms of first finding a place that is willing to hire you especially when it's not on campus. Finding a place, and being able to speak French here, and then if it's on campus, you know you have to fight for a position with people who really deserve it, you know, like in terms of work study, people who need the money to help pay for university as opposed to just. - McGill international*

As students reported, the demands of second year study placed resulted in considerably less time for other activities. Part-time work on campus gave students the opportunity to earn money in a flexible, understanding environment.

## ***Parental Influence***

Students were asked how their relationships with their family changed since first year. Many students, both international and domestic, felt that they had less frequent contact with their parents. For some this was by choice because they were not “overly” close to their parents; for others, it was because their parents were more used to and comfortable with their children living away from home.

Domestic students from UBC, McGill, and Dalhousie varied in the amount of contact they had with their parents. One student had “cut off” his mother because she asked too many questions while another student was frequently in contact (especially through e-mail) with his mother and step-mother. Dalhousie domestic students felt they were less lonely in second year and did not need to speak to their family as often. Two female students from Dalhousie mentioned that during first year they did not contact family much because of all the activity within residence; however, now living in a house with roommates they found they had more time to call and talk to their parents.

*Like in res last year, there was always people around like always. . . and so like I didn't feel alone as much. Like and this year I'm more. . . like there's just the people in my house. It's not that I get lonely but if no one's at home, I think, "Okay, maybe I'll call my parents up." - Dal domestic*

*But it's not homesickness or anything like that. . . like I didn't have that last year either. . . . I talk to them maybe once a week or so. . . which is probably a bit more than I did last year. - Dal domestic*

McGill, UBC, and Dalhousie domestic students had less contact with their parents than when in first year, but felt their parents were supportive, especially financially.

*My mom has supported me- all my life. - UBC domestic*

*I only call her when I need rent money or to tell her if I am coming home or not. And she calls me when she. . . I don't know why she. . . sometimes she. . . It's. . . I don't know, sometimes she just like calls and I will be like did you get the bank deposit interest in your bank account? And I will be like, ah. . . no. So she is like ok, I need to call them because they didn't do it for me either. And then that's it. I am like, ok, whatever. Yeah so I am like. . . it is usually like financial issues. - McGill domestic*

*OK, well, my family is pretty much my mom and I, so we are very close. So last year it was very difficult for us, both of us, being apart. So, we do keep in touch. We talk everyday, and that hasn't changed. Financially I don't especially rely on my mom. I work, and I receive loans, and bursaries so . . . but I mean I rely on her because I guess we are more of sort of friends, and also you know - mother daughter. McGill domestic*

Domestic students from York predominately lived at home which was another way parents supported their university-aged children. Some students felt their parents were very supportive. These students still contributed to the house (e.g., doing laundry) but the focus was on their studies. One student mentioned that while his family was supportive it was difficult to find a place to study at home. Another student felt that his father did not understand him and he felt pressure to be like his dad.

*Now they are more understanding because last year I was not working, I was not studying as much. School is taking so much from me . . . , I hate to bug my parents, so I try to do everything on my own.- York domestic*

*My parents, I don't think they really understand. The first year I got a 92 on a test. I was so happy. I told my dad and he said "so." "That is just one test, tell me you got a 92 on all tests." If I get a bad mark my dad says that I am just lazy and that I am not studying hard enough. He tells me "when I was going to school I worked." He wants us to do like him. - York domestic*

Family, for many international students, was an important form of support - emotionally, mentally, and financially. One international student from Dalhousie spoke of not only getting an education for himself but also for his family so he could take care of his parents later in life.

*Financially - definitely. Emotionally, 'cause when I'm like, when I think I can't do anything, I call my Mom or I call my boyfriend, or I call my Dad. I'm like, "Dad, tell me I can do this right." I mean I'll like chat with my boyfriend, like, "Tell me, motivate me to go to class. I don't feel like going to class." I mean, he's doing work, whatever, okay, I'll go to class. It motivates me. My Mom is like, "Mom, I don't think I'm doing this. I don't know what to do." She tells me, "Go speak to somebody and then call me later." So yeah, they help me with a lot of things. . . which I need 'cause it's like my backbone, you know what I mean? I'm not only working for my degree and my money. I'm working to take care of Mom and Dad at the end as well. - Dal international*

*It's financially. The most of it is financially because we are international students and we pay a lot of like tuition fees. So the majority of money is coming from parents. Because although I work part-time, those money will only cover like some food or something. It's not cover the majority of the expense. - McGill international*

Some international students stated that they had less contact with their family than in first year simply because their parents were more accustomed to them being away and hence were more secure. Others said they were independent from their family and did not need to talk to them as often.

*They call me a lot less, I don't talk to them half as much as I did last year. Yeah, when I talk to them it's a lot less of, "oh my god are you still alive," and now it's just checking in to see how it is going. - UBC international*

*I've been kind of independent since I was very young so my parents don't care too much, they just call once a week and our topics are usually focusing on my academic standing. - UBC international*

*I think my parents were more worried first year. They would call me and ask me how I am adjusting. And they were seeing, you know they didn't I believe I think they had believed that I could do it with you know adjusting to university and without too much troubles, but they were more worried. They weren't sure if I would had a hard time of making friends or I used to have too hard a time with adjusting academically. So this year I think they are more relaxed, and they feel that, they feel that I feel, that I know what I am doing more. So I think they are more at ease, and so we can kind of get beyond my life here and are you ok type of questions, and move to how are things going and you know what's interesting, what's new, what are you learning about, you know, that kind of conversations. - McGill international*

One international student from McGill found that he had come to appreciate his family dynamics more as a result of being apart from them for so long. Another international student from McGill, who felt a lot of guilt about moving away from her family in first year, said she got used to being away. Although this student talked less frequently to her family, it did not change how much she cared for them.

*And [guilt of moving overseas] was horrible. I think being away you just get used to it. Because you know, what can you do about it? I chose to come here, I chose to you know go overseas, and that was the decision that I made. And being in second year, I was more used to that idea. My mom calls, she calls less often now. She doesn't call sometimes because she forgets to call me. So I think that is a good thing because you know she is not like "oh are you ok"? And rather I think she is asking herself "Is she ok"? So my family is definitely getting more used to me being away. You know they are not as anxious. They didn't wonder when you are coming home. You know, in fact I have to tell them that here I am coming home you know this month. And then my mom is like ok, so she is not anxious any more. So I think being in my second year, although I can say that I am more independent from my family, of my family rather, I still care about them. I don't think that has changed at all. McGill international*

Other international students believed that they had more contact with their family in an attempt to remain close to their parents. Some students also felt contact was important to remind their parents that they were still alive and safe in another country, as this international student from UBC said:

*Not almost everyday, say like almost every other day, and it's usually not a long conversation just to show that I still exist here and that kind of stuff and usually we will talk a bit longer 1-2 hours like once a week or once a month or whatever. Yeah, I just want to because I think this is only for my family way, cause they still want to know I'm still here and still alive here. I call them just to show them I still exist here .- UBC international*

The international student from McGill, who earlier had spoken about spending time with his girlfriend as a way to de-stress from school, also discussed the important role his family played in helping him through school.

*It's being close to my family if not physically but you know, and communication is very important to me, and to them. So just that, just you know the hours you spend on the phone, or talking, or talking through the instant messenger, or sending each other email and information back and forth. It's time consuming but it's a time consumption that is important. That commitment is important because it's making sure that you don't feel . . . that you always feel that you are a part of that family. - McGill international*

An international student from Dalhousie indicated that family was an important support for her but also wanted her parents to be more encouraging for her to do better academically.

*The only thing I wish that my Mom and my Dad would have pushed me more in first year and more through my whole degree is like saying, not that it's not good enough, 'cause my mother would say, "Oh how did you do in your exam?" And I'd say, "Oh, I just passed." "Oh at least you passed. That's okay." And that's why in first year I was like, okay, pass is cool. But now it's like. . . it's more for me, who have said, "Well, I just can't pass. I'm going to do this!" So I wish my Mom would have pushed me more but, you know what? She's been there from the start, you know what I mean. I just think she doesn't want to put all the pressure on. But I wish she would have pushed me a little bit more. - Dal international*

Despite reporting varying degrees of closeness with family members, focus group participants indicated overall that family was important in many different ways.

### ***Friendships***

Generally, there was much more discussion among the international than domestic students regarding their friendships. There were many similarities, though, in the themes arising from the domestic and international discussions. Focus group participants differentiated between close friends and acquaintances. Friendships that were developed during the first year were maintained if students remained in close proximity to each

other (e.g., same residence, program, classes). One of the challenges of second year for both domestic and international students was maintaining friendships with friends who moved off-campus or changed programs. Residence still played an important part in developing and maintaining friendships in second year.

For domestic students, friends tended to remain the same in first and second year. However, Dalhousie and McGill domestic students also acknowledged that maintaining friendships, especially if they were not living in the same residence, was difficult and required more effort.

*My friends have stayed the same from first year, and actually, I'm like making new friends who are in my specific major or in the same classes as me. - UBC domestic*

*Like in res you run into people and you'd be like . . . it's a lot harder to make plans, to call people and give out numbers. . . figure out where houses are. . . and so it takes a lot more work. - Dal domestic*

*I've started to hang out more with people from last year, but only like three people from my floor last year, and I've definitely run into people, and they've wanted to hang out, and I have been like yeah, "that sounds good". But at the same time, I don't know . . . I just found that they weren't really people that I really wanted to be really good friend with, so . . . it's not really worth it. And friends off campus, I don't really have any friends off campus. - McGill domestic*

*OK, my friends are still the same friends I had last year. Because luckily we all were in the same area, and I think that's a big thing if you don't have classes with people, you are unlikely to stay friends with them. It's just too difficult, different schedules, different programs. It's just, if you don't see them a few times a week in class it's really hard I think. And I can say that because one of my better friends that I had last year and sort of first semester went off on another program and I saw her once this semester, but it's tough because just have different schedules and you know. - McGill domestic*

UBC, Dalhousie and McGill domestic students talked about staying connected with their friends through residence. This UBC domestic student talked about his residence friendships as follows:

*I remain really good friends with a few people from the floor last year and my sister floor. Basically, I have a lot of acquaintances from classes and from outdoor club and I just have a small, small number of close friends that I do spend a lot of time with. - UBC domestic*

Like the UBC group, Dalhousie students kept residence friends, but also expanded their social network depending on their club, work, or other activities. One domestic student from Dalhousie described how her friendships changed from last year:

*I'm [close] with the friends that I made first year and then. . . I've also met a lot of people in my program . . . but I've become friends with [people I meet] through work so I've met a lot of new people this year that I didn't [know] last year. - Dal domestic*

Although one McGill student did not maintain close friendships with the same circle of friends from first year, her friendships were still formed by those they meet in residence.

*I am not really good friends with actually people from last year. I sort of took on my roommates' social circle as well, which is from another residence from last year. But now, it's . . . I am starting to hang out with them more so it's nice because I have the two different groups that I can sort of hang out with. - McGill domestic*

York domestic students did not discuss their friendships in detail. Most indicated that their friendships had stayed the same as first year. One student commented that his good friends were of the same background as him and shared similar interests.

*My good friends are people who come from my background. I find it very natural. We have more in common. I had a girlfriend who was Mexican and I found it very confusing. My good friends are people who are more like me. - York domestic*

Academic programs, especially those that had structured class offerings, also helped create friendships that eventually developed into support groups for many domestic students from UBC, Dalhousie, and McGill.

*I think you also get to know the people in your program and you're not like . . . everybody's been together, like . . . I don't know, you're in a lot of the same classes together. - Dal domestic*

Domestic students were also asked who their friends were, in particular if they had international friends. Most felt they knew international students and spoke of these friendships in terms of residence roommates or classmates. For example, some Dalhousie domestic students met international students through a volunteer language program. A student from McGill spoke of knowing a few people from another country, but did not see American students as “international” students.



*Last year in residence too, I mean, here's such a huge group of people, you get to meet lots of new people and international students. . . everyone just lived together so. . . like everyone was just friends and you get to meet 'em. If you didn't live in residence I guess it would be more difficult, but because everyone lived together last year, we just stayed friends. - Dal domestic*

*I have an exchange. . . language exchange partner. I want to learn Chinese so I met this guy from China and I help him with his English. - Dal domestic*

*I guess like we have a lot of Americans. But I don't really consider them as international. We may have in a group of friends like one or two from different countries, but not that many, actually. A lot of kids from either from the States or Toronto. - McGill domestic*

International students seemed to have a more mixed reaction to the question, "Who are your friends?" Those international students from UBC and McGill claimed they knew more people in second year than they did in first year. Residence and academic classrooms still played an important role in facilitating meeting people, either as friends or acquaintances for international students. As this McGill student explained,

*most of my friends are either from the same class same lectures or from student clubs that I am involved in. I have quite some friends from last year, in where I mean we were living in res, and we were still keeping in contact. And actually most of them are in science too, and that's probably something that keeps us related, and I think in terms of friendship I would say that I enjoy more about meeting people this year because last year I was experiencing a lot of trouble with language and all that so I wasn't really outgoing and meeting a lot of people. - McGill international*

Similar to their domestic peers, most international students spoke of the challenges of maintaining friendships and the differences between close friends and acquaintances. Dalhousie and McGill international students spoke of having different friends for different needs.

*I can say that I have like a couple of good friends but the rest are acquaintances. And acquaintances are fine with me. 'Cause anywhere you go, you can still go out with an acquaintance but it's not like . . . you're not obligated, you know? - Dal international*

*Over here is a little different because it's harder to make friends and it's harder to keep friends because everybody is so diverse in their interests. They take different classes from you, and you know the huge amount of work piling up. And every time you call your friends, "I am busy", and you get that reply. Or "I've already have something on." But I think that you*

*know friendship patterns here are more informal, and that you don't have to keep your friendships on the go, because people understand that you are busy. I like that kind of thing because you know I don't have to explain to my friends all the time that, "oh I am really busy, and I am really sorry," because they understand straight away. - McGill international*

*I think it's a nice thing about university. Everyone is kind of centralized in this one little area of town and you are bound to meet up with them, and talk to them. And you know you might meet them in a class once, and you had, you start a good conversation with them, and we will remember you and you can continue doing that. So that constant feeling that you know someone and you are not alone, and it's not like walking around, with no one knows you. That's kind of nice and that is something that I appreciate. Ah, I have class-made friends that I don't call. I don't really talk to you unless I need you know help on something with the class. But I don't think that, I don't think that means that we are not friends. I think that you know they have their established friends, and what they like to do, and that I have mine. You know we will go out if the occasion calls. But there are classroom types of friends, where you are more school buddies than anything else. And I think that for me, it is not a problem. It's like that. It's just a way of not committing yourself too much. - McGill international*

Dalhousie and UBC international students spoke about the proximity issue and the challenges of maintaining friendships with students they had met in first year but now live off-campus.

*It's really hard to keep up with people that live off campus this year which a lot of my friends from last year do this year, just because you don't see them every day. It's amazing how much you can lose contact just because of that even if you are still friends with them kind of still. - UBC international*

*I'd say like, my friends, like, I think they turned, like now that I'm away from residence, they turned more into acquaintances. 'Cause when you're in residence, you're right there with them, you know? - Dal international*

One McGill international student also spoke of a similar issue. She spent a lot of time during her first year making sure she met a lot of diverse people; however, she found it challenging to maintain close connections with all the people she met. As a result, in second year, found she wanted to maintain a closer network of friends.

*So my first year, it was a lot of like going out and meeting different people, and I kind of would meet people and lose contacts with them. And I see that in second year a lot. I looked back on my friendships of first year, and I've lost contact with a lot of them. And it's mainly because of the quantity of them. It's hard to maintain such good relationships with so many people, and your school commitments. So I felt a, I felt that second year has produced a lot more, a lot more off campus friends. I have a lot more friends from different universities or who are not involved in university at all but just living in Montreal. And I've also found, I've found friends through friends, right? So I started to diversify my friends, but this year I have decided to stick to more closer network, and not try to branch out as much. And the result was that I lost, I've lost a lot of friendships the first year. - McGill international*

Students' academic programs, in the form of study groups, sometimes cemented friendships for international students.

*Especially, people who are, have, we, like stayed in the psych program together and we like, help each other out like, go to the same classes. We make sure, not make sure, but try to sign up for the same classes we, like, help each other with that, motivate each other. So we've got a strong bond. - Dal international*

However, these in class friendships may or may not transcend into socializing with their domestic classmates outside of class (i.e., not working on school projects). Similarly, some international students from Dalhousie, because they had switched programs, felt they were close to their first year friends and had made little connection to their classmates. As one student explained,

*I can't say that I've made a huge bond with the people in my classes. I have a lot of friends, but a lot of them are in different programs, so. . . the majority of my friends are in . . . probably like the Arts program. 'Cause I met them first and. . . a few switched over to management, but for the most part, and a lot of them are in kines[iology], too. - Dal international*

For one international student from McGill, it was also important to acknowledge that in second year friendships change because you become more aware of with whom you want to be friends (e.g., people with similar tastes or personalities).

*I think I met most of my friends in residence. I am still keeping in contact with some of them. I think, you know, as you go from first year to second year, you just lose some of your friendships, because you, I think I subconsciously didn't want to keep some of them because they weren't very compatible in a sense, because I am kind of like a nerd, you know. I like to stay in, and be with my computer, playing my computer games, and sometimes I am a little crazy and I want to go out and have fun. And I need*

*to be with people who are kind of like me, and who understand that sometimes I am really quiet and sometimes I am really loud. And I think first year you meet a lot of people who are really loud, and then you realize that they can't be quiet at all. So that's quite problematic. - McGill international*

Most international students indicated that “friendships” with domestic students were based on class assignments or living arrangements. With the exception of one international student from Dalhousie who said “*Yeah I definitely have Canadian friends . . . my best friend's Canadian,*” very few international students spoke of having close domestic friends. Many acknowledged that their close friends were from the same cultural background so there was a shared language and a cultural connection. Students from UBC and York explained:

*I feel that my close friends are mostly from the same culture. It's easier to communicate. When it comes to local people, there are still some cultural differences and they are more open and they want to and also their topics are not always our favourite so we can not make conversation. Sometimes, we talk about homework and assignments and stuff. - UBC international*

*The Canadian people I know are not actually friends. They are on the same team. We have meetings but it is all about our project. We don't do anything like go to bars and things like that. For me I think that probably after this term they are gone. This term I got more Canadians but like I said they are not actually my friends. I am not talking personal things with them. - York international*

One international student from UBC believed that making domestic friends was getting easier as became more accustomed to “Canada.” Also, he commented that having domestic friends was important in terms of making connections and “networking” that would be beneficial later in life.

*It's easier as time goes by. Personally, I was asking too much of myself when I was here and I had really high hopes when you enter the environment and you look at the high. As time goes by you slowly conquer each obstacle and I'm meeting more people from different walks of life. Another thing that is an advantage is that people who study in UBC end up working in different parts of the world so you actually seed your connections with lots of people who end up in different parts of the world. - UBC international*

However, a fellow international student claimed the opposite; according to him, meeting students who were not from the same cultural background was a challenge because they did not share the same interests.

*It's kind like politics and local events something like that. We don't care that much about local events so much, you only care about your own country's events. You know maybe you were in China 18 years. It's hard to even though your physical body is here, still your spirit is in China, keep in contact with family. It's hard to relate and get involved in this culture. - UBC international*

In summary, friendship patterns that were established in first year were maintained in second year. International students continued to form friendships within their own cultural groups. Although both international and domestic students had placed greater emphasis on their studies in second year, making and maintaining friendships was still important.

## **Culture Experiences**

### ***Diversity***

International and domestic students reported a range of experiences related to diversity. Residence was still an important facilitator for fostering diversity in second year. Views about diversity on campus was exemplified in this conversation among York students. One York domestic student remarked that “[diversity] is a positive thing because it gives us a multicultural feeling. I find that all different cultures hang around each other,” her peer countered that “most people tend to hang out with their own.” Domestic students from UBC and Dalhousie commented that residences facilitated meeting people from different cultures and countries.

*I have a girl from Germany living with me this year . . . so yes [I am socializing with international students]. - Dal domestic*

*Last year in residence too, I mean, here's such a huge group of people, you get to meet lots of new people and international students. . . everyone just lived together so . . . like everyone was just friends and you get to meet 'em. If you didn't live in residence I guess it would be more difficult, but because everyone lived together last year, we just stayed friends. Dal domestic*

UBC domestic students commented that international events were either not well publicized or that they did not go to such activities. Rather, residence was key for them meeting others.

*I went to a few international events in my first year, but yeah, living in residence is one of the best things to do cause second year, because my floor this year has probably about 10-15 international students from all over the world. A couple from India, actually 6 from Australia, yeah - it's*

*crazy this term, so it's really cool to get to know people from all over the world . . . Not even internationally, even Canada wide - we are meeting people from all over the world. - UBC domestic*

*I live with a couple of people that are from like Korea, Australia and Belgium, and there are definitely international students in my class but that's it. I know that there are cultural events going on campus but I've never really gone to any. - UBC domestic*

Although some domestic students from UBC remarked that their classrooms did not facilitate diversity, their international peers from UBC, York, and McGill all commented that the classroom was another venue at university where they experienced diversity. Domestic students from McGill felt that diversity on campus was fostered through exposure to professors from different countries. As one student said,

*the professors are definitely diverse; classmates are also diverse. I don't think it is something that as students we really think about or like we don't really look around and you know pick people out from the crowd that are look different or whatever. So it's hard to think of it. - McGill domestic*

Experiences reported above were similar to those of some international students from UBC. Some UBC international students indicated they were meeting many different people; however, one student claimed that his program was dominated by one cultural group.

*I'm in a program that has a lot of people that want to do an exchange and there are a lot of people like exchanging through the program. And I live in an exchange house too which is sweet, so I have a lot of friends, which is actually different from last year. Like last year I lived in the same house but I am better friends with the exchange students than most people. So I have some really good friends from Spain, France and Mexico and Australia. - UBC international*

*I just find the second year course are full of Chinese people. I see the yellow face every day and like, 80% of my class they are either from China or have Chinese background or even if they are Canadian, they Chinese. - UBC international*

McGill international students also had mixed views on diversity in terms of the disconnect between institutional support and the mission of diversity (to be discussed at the end of this section). Most commented that their positive experiences at McGill were facilitated by the people they were meeting and not the curriculum or student services.

*There is such a mix at McGill so you know in terms of people I meet, I meet a whole bunch of people from all around the world. - McGill international*

*But what I learned most was of course from the people that I've met since I have been here. They are really from all over the place around the world, so it really broadened my view. So I appreciate what I've learned from people more than actually what I've learned from classes. - McGill international*

Like their domestic peers, York international students agreed that living in residence facilitated friendships with domestic students.

*My friends are multicultural people. Naturally I will hang out with people from school but my friends are more cultural friends. I live in residence. - York international*

*This term I got more Canadians but like I said they are not actually my friends. I am not talking personal things with them. - York international*

Some York international students indicated that although they had more Canadian friends in second year, they were still close friends with people from their same cultural group. As this one student explained, he had more friends who were diverse:

*I seem to have more friends. I have coffee with my friends. In my mind they are my friends. Culture is different. I tried to get involved with multicultural backgrounds. - York international*

An international student from Dalhousie who was American also talked about the cultural differences between Canadians and Americans. An example of cultural difference was explained by this student as

*it must be something cultural. But like, where I'm from you make eye contact with people . . . And it's like I can see someone here in Canada, all the way down across the street and have no problem being like, "Hey," you know. But like there you don't. - Dal international*

Professors were also seen as part of the student's diversity experiences by international students from UBC. A couple of international students stated that very few of their professors were from Canada. Another Dalhousie international student claimed that Dalhousie misrepresented how diverse the campus was and that he was having a difficult time on campus as a Black man.

*'Cause that's what happened, like, when I was being recruited, like, I asked them about diversity. That was my main question 'cause like, I didn't want, I wanted to be completely diverse, you know? And they kind of lied to me a bit. And they were like, "Oh, we have such a diverse culture!" You know? Which is true, but the diverse culture that they have is very cliquy and like, just 'cause I'm black, I'm not African black, you know? And there's a complete difference between that . . . like "Black Like Me". . . The Arab*

*culture is huge and the Chinese culture, or Asian culture, is quite large. The African. . . they have the, on the fourth floor, BSAC [Black Students Advisory Council] . . . so they have their own black student union thing. But I just don't find that I . . . I just don't click with any of them. I click better with white Bermudian guys than I do with like black African guys . . . 'Cause like, from Bermuda, they kind of see the same thing. Like you don't stare at someone – you mind your own business. - Dal international*

A couple international students from McGill also discussed how they felt that McGill misrepresented culturally diversity. These particular students indicated that the lack of student support and activities did not promote the diversity in which McGill took pride.

*I still feel that McGill doesn't, as much as it promotes itself as culturally diverse, it's not really doing much for the students. There is no support for activities I feel. I've organized many activities for my club, and I don't feel that we are getting the support that we need to, well we don't get any funding from them at all. - McGill international*

*I feel the McGill bureaucracy is very self-serving. I don't see enough . . . I don't see McGill administration or the . . . McGill power, power to be McGill powers working in the students' interests. I see them working in things that benefit students but will also promote the school's image or benefit them. I don't see them as really orienting themselves, or I don't have the image of them orienting themselves to help students. - McGill international*

For the most part, students welcomed diversity on campus.

### ***Internationalization and Globalization<sup>2</sup>***

When students were asked about their experiences with internationalization and globalization, most domestic and international students felt that they were getting these experiences either informally through the people with whom they lived in residence, their classmates, their academic program, and their professors.

Domestic students acknowledged that exposure to international and global issues during their academic experiences were dependent on their programs. For example, a chemistry student from UBC indicated that unless international issues were related to the lab, they were not discussed or applied to her learning.

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<sup>2</sup> This particular theme was discussed at greater depth for the UBC domestic and international students; hence the more frequent use of their quotes.



*Our mentality it doesn't even leave the lab like in organic for example, it's all about making something and you know the one thing that they try to connect to is the real world they would say "oh . . . but in the lab we would really do this" . . . But that is it . . . like it's just the lab is the whole world of chemistry . . . once you step outside of it . . . there is nothing there for you. - UBC domestic*

Another domestic student from York said that internationalization was not addressed in her courses while her peer said learning about other cultures was rather general.

*We are learning about cultures in other countries but it is very broad. We have compared other cultures compared to Canada. In our sociology it was called women and migration. - York domestic*

For the most part, domestic students maintained that internationalization/globalization topics were not part of their formal lectures, with the exception of those courses specifically related to these issues. One student from UBC described it as an "*anecdotal type of thing.*" Another expressed that "*I guess it depends on the program, I guess it's not there, and they don't have to talk about anything of the international nature I mean if you really want to know you go and read a newspaper.*"

*Maybe in my class, a little bit in microbiology we are learning about living systems all over the world . . . I guess AIDS and stuff but that's really thing that I've encountered in terms of internationalization. - UBC domestic*

*Probably a little bit more than everyone considering that it's political science . . . and I think it really should have a lot to do with that but even so I take more classes on theory and it's mostly western theory it seems. - UBC domestic*

*Basically I think all my classes because I am in international development. All my classes have to do with globalization but they are all from different perspectives. My economics classes are more of a right wing kind of ideal of what should happen as globalization progresses whereas my sociology classes and geography classes are more of what happens in the downside of globalization. - McGill domestic*

Professors played an important role in bringing international issues into the classroom through their research, work experiences, or their own backgrounds (e.g., coming from a country outside of Canada).

*I find that this year that some of our professors just in some of their spare time or just in any little between lectures [address globalization]. It is not necessarily formally taught but I do learn a lot about world issues and particularly because there are presentations by students who worked abroad. There are students who have worked all over the world I have talked to. Some of our professors come from South America or Australia or wherever . . . or they visit or been other places and they tell us stories and we learn that there is a global business and a global economy to consider. So we learn about how the mining industry in Canada is especially picking up because of demands in particularly China and that why there are such great opportunities now. - UBC domestic*

*I think my teachers are making me more aware that it's going on, globalization . . . . It has come up a lot just recently in my personality class about what sort of influence we have in the education material we are learning, and realizing more and more that what we are learning is very biased to the western culture. Like for example, the recent random statistic. I think like practically 99 percent of social psych comes from western culture. And we keep, and least I do, like I keep forgetting we are learning all these all these materials and it's been processed by me as fact when I have to realize that there is such strong bias. Like what we are learning is really like centered about where we live and is only applicable here. And that doesn't really help me, because I want to go abroad and study there and also work there, in which case this education is really not preparing me for it. So, it was sort of unfortunate in that sense and like I wish I was more like sort of global, inclusive education than just specific western culture. - McGill domestic*

*Well, my field of study, physiology doesn't really have to do with that too much. So the only thing I can think of is I don't even know if this counts, but my professors, that a lot of them are from other countries. - McGill domestic*

Domestic students also saw their interactions with their international classmates or residence mates as another form of international experience. Most domestic students indicated that learning international or global issues was an important to them.

*It really helps I think. You need a world perspective on anything you do especially this day and age cause everything has global ramifications . . . . XXXX just reminded me that actually I forgot entirely. . . we are taking a distance ed course online called Engineering & Sustainable Development . . . and a lot of that stuff is related to like developing nations versus developed nations. Just a lot of it it's, like, it's a completely global course. - UBC domestic*

However, one student remarked that such issues were not important for they did not relate to the type of work she wanted to do.

*To me it's not really important I don't think that it has a lot of bearing on the work that I want to do- that is lab work, which is what I want to do. I don't think it really matters to me. - UBC domestic*

Most international students also agreed that exposure to international/global issues was very dependent upon their programs and the types of courses they took. One international student from UBC indicated that she chose UBC as her institution because of the international opportunities (e.g., programs and organizations) available.

*It's all we talk about in my courses, my program is international relations.  
- UBC international*

*Yeah, that's one of the reasons I came to Vancouver to study 'cause it seems like it was an international place and the clubs available, like there is one club that is very globally oriented in terms of helping and doing exactly the kind of international work that I want to do. - UBC international*

*For me, the accounting course the conversation varies from paper's topics so it depends on what he focuses on all Canadian and that drafts of paper, so in commerce maybe it's not that international. - UBC international*

An international student from York reported that only one out of the five courses he had taken had an international focus. Others acknowledged the importance of such a focus.

*I am pretty sure that internationalization has a big impact on the classes that we are taking at McGill. For example, last semester, I took a course on the Arabic area conflict, and then this semester I am doing foreign policies in Asia. So you can see that it's definitely become a move toward trying to creating classes that are region specific. A lot of the classes have different case studies of different parts of the world, not just cases in North America. - McGill international*

Another international student from Dalhousie commented that his courses were talking about global environmental issues. He remarked that globalization issues were really dependent on a nation's access to information and technology, which he saw predominately in developed nations. This left other nations at a disadvantage.

According to many international students, professors also played an important role in bringing internationalism into the classroom. Some international students said that they came to study in Canada to gain a Canadian perspective which for them was more international.

*One thing I can say about internationalization is that I like the way some professors incorporate their own experiences in their class. For example, I have one professor now who is from Japan and he is teaching me economics, and apparently he likes talking about comparing his experiences in Japan to his experiences in Canada which I find really useful. For example, he compares the banking system and the way credit cards work and small menial mundane things that you probably wouldn't get to know unless you were living in Japan for 5-10 years. I think that is very important and that might constitute as globalization is the fact that international professors and they experiences over. - UBC domestic*

*I find that actually my political science classes that are about internationalization, they are international development, I think that it all comes from the Canadian lens, just because in terms of thinking about what I am learning here in comparison to what I would be learning in the US but here is much different so I see it as it coming from a Canadian lens. But I see the Canadian lens as a much more world view. Canadians I find pay more attention to the international than a North American point-of-view. Just the Canadian perspective is more international. - UBC domestic*

*This is something that I find McGill professors are very qualified to do, that they really try to really show you the different, the same thing, but in different areas of the world, and see how you relate to them. And I think because of this, McGill students, and even more general Canadians, I find that I felt too, have a much more knowledgeable, they know how is the rest of the world and are more involved with the issues, and are more, and are interacting with the ideas of internationalization and globalization. And so I think that is something that the university does put forth and the students do internationally and globally. - McGill international*

Some international students who had classmates who were from all over the world found that their global experiences and understandings had been broadened. One McGill international student claimed that “*I really enjoy this kind of multicultural environment.*”

### ***Institutional Culture***

Most international and domestic students believed that their respective institutions had an open culture. Institutional culture for many students was about the people on campus.

UBC domestic students described their institutions culture as open and it was just a matter of “finding where you fit in.” McGill domestic students also believed their culture was open but “up to you to find it.”

*There is a card from an international student who was just here last term. He left a card, it had a saying on it, “no matter where you are it's your*

*friends that make the experience.” And then he had it signed and how much he liked us and liked our floor. I think that it’s really, really touching. . . Yeah that’s it, there is so many different types of people here, there’s any type of person goes here to UBC. It’s just a matter of finding where you fit in. - UBC domestic*

*I don’t know. It’s. . . there is really so much that I would not be able to pinpoint it. But I think it gives you a lot of opportunities for you to experience pretty much anything you want. So, whatever you are into, you can find people going into that. And it’s sort of, it works for you, and doesn’t necessarily have a distinctive culture. But it has everything that you want it to have.- McGill domestic*

People on campus were responsible for giving the institution its culture. For example, UBC domestic students claimed the people make the culture, while Dalhousie domestic felt people were more apathetic. As one Dal domestic student said of his campus culture as “*is calmer and more comfortable, I still see people all the time that I don’t recognize.*” A UBC student stated the following:

*The people make it good. . . the people I met here are really good. I enjoy being friends with them and stuff. But if they took the people away there is nothing for me here. I don’t feel intimately connected, I don’t feel like “oh, UBC is my school.” I’m still proud to go to UBC and stuff like that, but it’s still people. -UBC domestic*

Another factor that influenced campus culture for one McGill domestic student was the large number of commuter students participating in their program.

*I found that the culture changed quite a bit this year, because of like CEGEP people coming in whereas last year I noticed. . . there [we]re a lot more in the management faculty, I think like this year, usually like half the class are from CEGEP. And I found it is a lot different from what I experienced last year, and also what I have experienced from the other classes. . . . So I find it’s more like commuter school in the management faculty, a commuter school mixed with out of province people. Kind of like U of T is largely a commuter school. So that was very strange to me last semester because in first year, there are no CEGEP people really. And I find it hard to like kind of socialize with people like that, because they are in such a different situation, and they live so far away. - McGill domestic*

Some McGill international students talked about types of people based on the extent to which they studied or focused on their social lives. Other international students from McGill also commented that McGill had a culture of studying and focusing on academics which they found a little intimidating.

*There is pretty much two groups of people, there is like the partying people and there is the not partying people. So I guess that's a culture, I don't know, and that's how I can describe it anyway. - McGill international*

*I was very idealistic during my first year. I felt that I could be in a university where they promote intellectual discourse among these different people from everywhere. And that was what I felt when I was in first year. What was the culture at McGill, you know, to be yourself, be different from everybody, you know, hang out together, and just be a group. In my second year, let's say that people here study way too often. The culture of McGill is to study really hard. That's why we have 24 hours library services, and we have, I don't know, we have WebCT for discussion, so you will know everything and you will do well in your classes. I think everybody here is very academically oriented. I mean everywhere, I see people are asking about grades, people are taking about grades. It's pretty scary. - McGill international*

*I think my perspective of McGill in first year as comparing was what I saw it as a big party school, which completely changed in my second year. I mean in your first year, you are exposed to frosh, as, you know, a first year student, you are exposed to all the different activities that are organized, you know for floors. And you are going into the residence, and residence is all about partying, I mean at least new res was. And so I think that changed dramatically in my second year where I feel that people are more involved with issues and more involved politically and again I agree with you more involved in studying. I think there is a large tendency of studying at McGill. And to study, but I do hand it to most of McGill students that they are not solely, as least some of them that I see, are not solely based on academic studying. They are diversified, you know, they are, they may be on the rugby team, but you know they are still trying to get into the law school. So I mean it's, you don't have the stereotypes of, you know, that you see in the movies. - McGill international*

Although some UBC international students felt the campus was open, diverse, and it had a community feel to the campus, other students did not appreciate the commercialization of the UBC campus.

*It's good. Things feel pretty open and not even in the drinking sense but in the fact that like the whole city is open to you when you are 19. It's so much nicer than the US. Like you can go to actual music which is fantastic. That's the greatest thing that no concerts are closed to me anymore. And as far as a cultural thing, being in the city, I mean that Vancouver is way bigger more diverse than Portland, that's pretty cool. - UBC international*

*Although, I really like the bubble feel of UBC, like its own community kind of outside of Vancouver. I was a little worried that Vancouver would be so big that you could just get overwhelmed. I really like the community feel that UBC has. But I'm not looking forward to University town. - UBC international*

*Although I study commerce I don't, you know, want UBC to become such a place. I want UBC to become a pure research and academic research oriented, not to be a market place. - UBC international*

## **Physical Surroundings**

Students during their second year generally seemed to have a better understanding of their physical surroundings. They were also more adjusted to the food and their health generally improved from their first year. Some students had changed their living arrangements from on-campus to off-campus.

Domestic students who commuted found the privacy of a home environment or staying close to family and friends as one of the attractions of living off-campus.

*I actually enjoy living at home a lot. I actually could come to campus but I prefer living at home. Like I don't know - I am pretty close to my family, it's actually what keeps me sane like, I don't know if I'm not close like to people who are like supporting me, no matter what, if I do well, I feel like I'm going to go insane so that's actually one of the main reasons I choose to not live on campus. - UBC domestic*

Some students, like those from Dalhousie or McGill, technically lived off-campus but they were within walking distance to campus and therefore had easier access to campus compared to UBC domestic students who lived an hour commute from campus. Both McGill and Dalhousie students spoke of enjoying the walk to campus and enjoying the area they lived in.

*I, well I don't usually like, go to school and then go home and then go back to school again . . . unless I have a really big break. So I usually kind of hang out at the library instead. I don't go out anywhere. . . I would if I lived closer I guess but. . . I like the walk 'cause it's just so nice to be out in the fresh air. - Dal domestic*

*And I usually end up walking at least 2 hours everyday because I come home and go back. But I love the area. Like I live right by Mont-Royal and like I love Saint-Denis and that whole area because before we just stuck around basically like Prince Arthur and Saint-Laurent. And there is so much to do, like we really fully take advantage of it, so I am really proud of living there. - McGill domestic*

Another McGill student spoke of wanting to live in the real world, outside of the bubble of campus.

*OK, I wanted to live off campus because I am here everyday. I see people of my age all the time, everyday. I don't know. I just need to live out in the real world, you know outside of the bubble I guess you can say. Sometimes, it does seem really appealing to live so close, not having to take the bus for 20 minutes, and just being able to I guess just roll out of bed and go to class. But, 20 minutes by bus is not going to kill me. - McGill domestic*

International students from UBC, McGill and Dalhousie who commuted to school felt that living off-campus impeded their social lives and sometimes their academic work.

*Well, for social life I guess it is difficult for me to meet up with people in Vancouver because it takes me so long to get back but I don't think that it is that much harder. Like people think that people think that that an hour and a half commute is like 3 hrs is a waste of time, but honestly like in those hours I can rest or chat with friends. I don't really think that it is that bad, like I take the 97 sky train and the 99 so that it is not that hard. And they come like every ten minutes. - UBC international*

*See, when I go home it's distractions. You know? It's my T.V., it's my phone, it's my . . . people in my building. It's like, "I don't feel like doing work. What am I gonna do?" Pick the phone up, call. Turn the T.V. on, watch nothing . . . you know what I mean? So I have to come to the library. - Dal international*

*It steps up my academic life and steps down my social life. I focus more on studies than socializing and because you have that sort of geographical distance between you and your friends it's often times, it's a lot easier to pass up activities in favour of academics, because you know "oh I want to go out," because I have to get onto the metro to go somewhere or I have to walk over there. And because then you have to realize how much time it takes and like the time to do something or have someone come over. It takes all that much more time from school work. - McGill international*

*I think living off campus is kind of like lose some opportunities to make new friends, because I have friends who live in the residence, and they said they made a lot of friends in the residence because the whole floor they know everybody and everyday they are having party, everyday. Yeah, so I kind of like just lose some opportunities there. - McGill international*

According to these students, living off-campus had its advantages and disadvantages.



### *On or Off-campus Experiences*

Domestic students' off-campus activities across the four institutions were very similar. They included part-time work (both on and off campus), volunteering, going to the gym, movies, and many of the other activities that international students also enjoyed. Some domestic students who lived on-campus said that they rarely left campus. As one UBC domestic student stated "I don't go off campus except to get groceries."

One domestic student from Dal indicated she volunteered to get out of the house. Others volunteered as a way of stress relief.

*It's like, well, I work in the summer for university and I work now just to have spending money and to do something. 'Cause last year I found myself just doing nothing all the time. And the amount of spare time that I had last year, even with all the work, I still was doing nothing. So this just makes me get out of the house and do something else. Dal domestic*

*I am part[time at] the sexual assault center, the phone line and stuff like that. Other than that, nothing really. McGill domestic*

Working part-time was a topic discussed by both international and domestic students. Although some saw working as a great way to earn extra money to pay for school or just to have as extra spending, others felt that working part-time hindered their academic progress. Some students were also too busy in second year to work part-time or had to reduce the number of hours they worked each week because of their course load.

*It's unfortunate that I've been working so much and not doing so well in school because I'm trying to do so much. This semester I try to not, I'd take shifts that were shorter and everything so I could concentrate more on school rather than on work. - Dal domestic*

*I think it is affecting my studies positively. I think that as much as students say how busy they are, I think they really, or I really can say I have quite a bit of free time. Sure, it can be easily filled with computers and TV and stuff and, so anyway, working has been a positive influence on my grades. It forces me to plan more, in terms of studying, which has benefited my studies. - McGill domestic*

Similar to the first year experience, most international students kept their activities to on-campus, particularly since they were not allowed to work off-campus. For some, getting work on campus was also difficult. One international student from York explained that by knowing someone who was already working on-campus often helped to get work.

*Recruiting system in the library is not fair. If you know someone and there is work available, and if they know someone, they approach their friends. The student might be in their home country, and they find a friend to cover their work while they are away. York has an English language library, I volunteer for that. I received a letter of recommendations from my supervisor. I don't have a chance though. - York international*

Another McGill international student felt intimidated about looking for work because he was not Canadian and did not think he would get hired. He said,

*I thought about frequently the possibility of getting a job, because it will be very handy to have some extra resources at my disposal. But I am very intimidated by the prospect of, because I am not a Canadian, trying to get a job here. It just feels sort of intimidating. Like I have a feeling that there will be a lot of red tape involved, in terms of first finding a place that is willing to hire you especially when it's not on campus. Finding a place, and being able to speak French here, and then if it's on campus, you know you have to fight for a position with people who really deserve it, you know like in terms of work study, people who need the money to help pay for university. - McGill international*

For those international students from UBC, York, Dal and McGill who did go off-campus, their activities were related to going to church, going shopping or other social things (e.g., movies, clubs). Other activities included going to the gym, hanging out with friends, going for coffee, watching TV and attending clubs/societies.

*Other things like going for walks with my girlfriends, going to movies, chilling out, going to get coffee, talking, people watching. . . Even if I sit in Tim Horton's, like with my girls, and just watch people, like. . . not like staring at people, but, just to watch them. - Dal international*

*I go to church. - UBC international*

*[The gym] is a relaxation thing to me. And I make sure I relax, like, I try to feel good and stuff like that. . . just to bring it down, you know what I mean? Like, I work all day and I try to stay in that mode all day so that at night time I can just chill out. - Dal international*

*I don't think I have many off campus commitments apart from, you know being involved in the club that I am in. So, I probably, it's probably because I consciously didn't want them to affect my studies because knowing me, I was afraid that I wouldn't be able to take the stress. I have friends who work off campus. And. . . I have a friend who is working 28 hours a week for some reason off campus. I don't know. I didn't think I wanted to get into that at the end of my first year because I was quite*

*petrified in the kind of even working, because I didn't think I would be able to do it. - McGill international*

*Well for me, the second year I am working part-time, I get the work study; I go into the work study program. Because for international students, if you are in first year, you cannot go into the work study program, you cannot work outside of campus, you cannot, like you cannot do anything. But when you go into the second year, you go into the work study program, you get a permit, so you can find a job everywhere in the campus. I got a job in the accounting department. It's a really good job and it's 10 dollars an hour. It's good pay, and flexible hours. Every time I have an exam, and I don't want to work, they say "ok, you just feel free to go." So I think it's really good because in that department I work, and because it's related to my field of study, accounting, so I get the experience and I make money, so it's really fun. - McGill international*

### **Health Issues**

There is a strong link among international and domestic students' overall health, their living arrangements, and their eating habits. For example, most students from both groups across the country felt either the same or better than last year. Part of this was explained as cooking for oneself, although some students were choosing less healthy options to save money which had an impact on their health.

Some students had learned to be better cooks, while others were limited in their menu choices. Both UBC domestic and Dalhousie domestic students commented that their residence food had improved, or at least they were making healthier choices.

*I'd say better just because the food has gotten better. Dal domestic*

*I love residence food. . . It is what you make it out to be, you can eat crap or you can actually think about it and make what you like and then look at other people and when they are finished you can eat theirs as well. UBC domestic*

*It's been good. It is nice to make your own food, to make exactly what you want to taste the way you want. After a while you get so lazy and there are dishes. We have been eating so much less meat, we are too lazy to go buy vegetables so there is a lot more crap in there. . . UBC domestic*

One domestic student from UBC pointed out doing well physically doesn't translate into good mental health.

*Basically, I'm doing okay, I actually try to exercise more now, even if with a more hectic schedule I try to do my physical health exercise. Mental health wise I don't know. I really don't. Still okay, sometimes I don't feel okay. - UBC domestic*

This domestic student from UBC felt that his insurance plan also helped his health and was good value. He said,

*I also like the health plan that we are on, because the student health network, whatever it is, I haven't really used it until I got some shots I went to Guatemala. So I got two shots which they covered the cost of - like they were 105 dollars which was pretty sweet. You get \$150 worth of shots every year so just go and get as many shots as you can. - UBC domestic*

One international student from UBC claimed that she was generally healthier at home because of her food choices; however, another UBC focus group participant remarked that he was healthier because he was cooking for himself. A McGill international student asserted that he was healthier than last year because he was being more proactive about taking vitamins and eating better.

*I think that I'm really healthier at home than I am here, mostly because the food. But I mean it's okay. - UBC international*

Other students made similar comments:

*My health has improved everything, because I cook for myself. I think that I can improve my health by varying less course load and stuff, but since I don't really don't have time to go to the gym, plus a heavy course load makes me tense every time, I really don't have time to go there. - UBC international*

*I think my health has generally been good because I am afraid of being sick so I stuff myself with juice and fruits. If I feel like a flu coming on, take a lot of Vitamin C, that sort of thing. - McGill international*

Some students felt they were healthier because they were exercising more regularly. As one international student said “I'm good, yeah, I always participate in games.” International students, like their domestic peers, were also happier with their dietary habits in second year. Some students were cooking for themselves as a result of residence change.

*I cook all the time by myself, because when I was in China I always cooked something so now that I'm here it's a habit, it's hard for me not too. I like to only eat my own food. - UBC international*

*I am eating better. I tend to cook for myself but I have to. It is healthier than buying food. - Dal international*

However, some international students indicated that they needed to think about adding variety in their diets. For example, one student said “*I cook one dish for about a week and ½ and it lasts, and then I get sick of it and like right now it’s kind of like a really bad vegetarian chili.*”

Others who lived in residence or shared accommodation also reported more flu or colds because of the rapid spread of viruses in close quarters.

*And you’re not around as many people all the time. There’s constantly, when you’re in residence, someone’s always sick. So you’re not around that. - Dal domestic*

*In general I think my, my health has been fine, normal, except for that I get colds really easily. And I think that’s maybe because I am living with other 5 people, very tight quarters, so that’s probably it. - McGill international*

McGill international students, like their UBC domestic counterparts, commented on their health care insurance. One McGill student felt if he never used the service, paying for insurance was a waste of money. Also, waiting times at the clinic could be improved. However, the cost was perceived to be reasonable:

*But more importantly, I just recently got the flu, and so I had to wait two hours in the drop in to see a nurse. . . Yeah, who told me that I should just take Advil, which at time was very reassuring because I felt really crappy. And I did get out of some assignments that were stressing me out, and weren’t helping me to get better. But also as opposed to being in the United States, being here having health insurance for just five hundred for a year and knowing that you know things like going to the doctor if I had the flu or if I had something else, it’s going be covered, it’s a heck of a lot cheaper than if I had to pay for in the United States, so that’s just great. And you know paying for the dental stuff and getting free cleanings; I love it. - McGill international*

### ***Quality of Life***

Both domestic and international students from around the country ranked their quality of life as high. When asked to rank their quality of life (1= poor to 10=excellent). Most students felt their quality of life in second year was between 7 and 9.

The weather, nice people, reputation of the school, and day-to-day experiences were some reasons why students ranked their quality of life as high. Students in all focus groups talked about balance in their second year compared to their first year. Admittedly,

things were getting more stressful because of course demands, but in second year students generally felt they were more well adjusted and had better balance between academics and social lives; this resulted in an overall better quality of life.

For domestic students, quality of life was also related to their interactions with other people on campus. As this Dal domestic student said,

*everyone's a lot more friendly here because it's smaller, well it's quite a bit smaller than Toronto. . . Toronto's a pretty cold city. - Dal domestic*

This McGill student felt that his quality of life was about balance:

*I do feel like you have to walk a really fine line between concentrating too much on school and the concentrating too much on friends because as soon as you start concentrating too much on friends I find that school starts slipping. And the first semester was definitely lopsided, and I feel like this semester it's a lot more balanced, but it definitely has to be balanced. It's not always easy, so life creates stress; you have to make sure that everything is in check. - McGill domestic*

In terms of ranking quality of life, one international student from Dal said "I'd say eight or nine. I'm happy here." Another UBC international student said his quality of life was

*a pretty high quality, when I look at the weather, I mean one of the reasons why I chose to be at UBC is because I knew I would be getting a higher quality of life. - UBC international*

Although most students said their quality of life was good, one international student from McGill ranked her quality of life as a 5. She explains by saying

*I would say 5, because I am, we are students. We work hard and, I know I work hard because I am really slow. Five because you know I study so much that I hardly really get enough time for sleep at all. And I will only sleep during the summer. And you know, yeah so 5. - McGill international*

Another international student felt his life was a 10, recognizing that there were stressors and issues but still felt his quality of life was high. He explained:

*I am a very lucky person and I want to say I am very thankful for the fact I go to a world renowned university that people recognize when I say it almost everywhere I go. I am living in a very comfortable apartment on my own. I don't pay a lot to go to university as opposed to had I gone to school in the United States. I have a lot of good friends that I can share a lot of things with, and I am very grateful for that. I mean, yeah, I had stress and yeah I have a whole lot of issues. - McGill international*

## Future Aspirations

### *Educational Objectives*

When domestic students were asked about their expectations from their university education and what their educational objectives, most students talked about finding a job that would be related to their education, a career path. Others simply discussed their objectives within the next few years (e.g., switch programs, finish degree).

*I would hope that at the end, by the end of my degree I would like to know what to do, and then most likely go back and get more schooling and by the end of that I will have figured out what I want to do. . . and then do something else. . . So basically, I just want to figure out what I actually want to do the rest of my life.*

*- UBC domestic*

*I have the fortune of thinking about things too much. I tortured myself in high school about what I wanted to do and that's engineering and that's what I'm doing. Along the line I may change careers but for now. . . and I'm going hope, I'm sure that the reason I'm here is because I want a career that will provide travel, opportunity and I'm sure I will get that. - UBC domestic*

Like their domestic peers, international students were focused on their career aspirations; however, many international students also discussed academic preparation as part of their educational objectives. As this Dalhousie student stated,

*That's why I'm here. I'm here to learn. I'm here to get my money's worth, or my mother's money's worth and then go home and make money so I can pay my Mom back and all that stuff, right? So, my social life, has calmed the partying but more in. . . like. . . I still do a lot of stuff with my friends. Like we all go to the library, do stuff. . . It sounds kind of like nerdy like when I just said that but it's just because we're more focused and like we have to be more focused. I just don't wanna like be a mediocre, like just passing. It's not good enough anymore, like, just passing. - Dal international*

*Just the degree. . . and also like to apply the knowledge, to practice, because it's the school when you learn something, you always want to try it and see is it really working. . . just to try to apply it. McGill international*

One Dalhousie international student learned that passing was not good enough for a career. In terms of thinking of a career, another Dalhousie student was concerned that his Canadian education may not be recognized in the US job market.

*So I'm kind of scared going back to the United States and like, how are you getting into the jobs that I want to do, like, having a Canadian oriented degree, like versus the United States. 'Cause like, people don't know but it's completely different. - Dal international*

A question put forward by this York international student was an option for co-op placement to enhance his chance for employment. He asked, "I am wondering why we don't have internships in our programs."

### ***Commitment to the Institution***

Most students, both international and domestic, were proud to be attending their respective institutions. Both groups seemed to have slightly more interest in owning their university-logo merchandise, but similar to first year, many students felt such items were over priced.

Many domestic students were quite proud to be attending their respective institutions. These McGill students explained:

*I am definitely proud to say I go to McGill, and definitely don't hide it. I flash my McGill ID around everywhere I go, but I am definitely proud to be here and happy to be here. - McGill domestic*

*I mean that really made me appreciate like even if I do complain that nothing exciting happens, it's pretty exciting compared to some of my friends and I feel proud to say that I go to McGill, and I like what that means. I like that. It's not just the school, but it's also the city, which I think is really separated from the school. You know a lot of places don't have that so I am really glad to be here. - McGill domestic*

One UBC domestic student who was from outside BC was proud to talk about his friends who were jealous that he was attending UBC:

*I am proud to go to UBC - to make a long story short a lot of our friends in Ontario are jealous what we do on a regular basis. We both like photography and go on trips, a lot of people we know wish they came here and we do wish they came here too. I'm proud to live in Vancouver but UBC is pretty good. - UBC domestic*

Domestic students from York, McGill, and Dalhousie believed they were more invested in their institution in second year. A Dal student talked about owning more school



clothing but also being “more invested in the school itself.” One York student talked about his investment in terms of loyalty because he was having a good time and doing well academically:

*My loyalty has become more because I am doing well and I'm having a good time. I am happier. My loyalty has not changed. When I graduate I am going to go home and work in my field. - York domestic*

A McGill domestic student felt that while he had some criticisms of McGill he felt committed because he had been there for a while now. He explained:

*As much as I didn't have a good time last year, I still thought that McGill was a really good school. And I still think so. This is despite what I mentioned about huge class sizes, and all that stuff. But I don't know that McGill within itself could really do much about that. It has to do with the money, which they are not getting because of lots of reasons but I think McGill as a whole is a very good school. Most of the professors are not out to get us students, you know, they are there to help us, and help us learn. So I think I am more committed to McGill just because I've now been here longer. - McGill domestic*

As a UBC domestic student pointed out that it is the people who make the institution good.

*The people I met here are really good, I enjoy being friends with them and stuff. But if they took the people away there is nothing for me here. I don't feel intimately connected. I don't feel like “oh, UBC is my school.” I'm still proud to go to UBC and stuff like that but it's still people. - UBC domestic*

International students expressed very similar sentiments about their institutions.

*In terms of the institution and commerce people, the people are friendly, profs are nice and overall its high quality. - UBC international*

*I would say that I am a part of McGill in a sense of identify with McGill. I've had a lot of pleasant experiences here, and I have made a lot of friends. You know I feel like I am growing academically in all sorts of ways. I am being more independent. So I will say, yeah, I definitely identify with McGill. - McGill international*

*Being in second year, I feel that I am more connected simply because I have friends here, I am in really great classes that I am interested in, and I kind of have that connection with professors already. I am in a club which makes that connection even more obvious. So I am more connected to McGill in a sense that, I like what I am doing in McGill; I don't know if*

*there is a McGill spirit going on. I know that I like what I am doing; I really like what I am getting out of McGill academically; I like hanging out with my friends. And I think I will always view McGill as very pleasant experience because here I got the opportunities to go to all these funny funky classes, and be with all these funny people. - McGill international*

Although domestic students talked about owning more university paraphernalia (e.g., logo merchandise), most students felt that such merchandise was overpriced. For example, one McGill student said that he wore other institutions' sweatshirts, because McGill's merchandise was too expensive. He said,

*I wear a lot of the other universities, like I don't have the McGill, but I have a University of Calgary because my friend gave it to me. I have a lot of American university T-shirts and stuff. Because when I went to Detroit, they were like I think seven dollars for a long sleeved T-shirt, whereas if you go to the McGill Bookstore, everything is very expensive. So they can make it cheaper, yeah. - McGill domestic*

One UBC domestic student said she would not buy t-shirts from her department because they were badly designed. She explained:

*[Discipline] sells shirts and stuff like that, but they are so ugly, I'm embarrassed from wearing them . . . . If they looked better, I would actually, I was going to get one, but when I saw it during science week I was just like I don't want to buy that . . . you know. - UBC domestic*

Some domestic students did own items like t-shirts or clip boards, especially if they received it as a gift or on sale.

*I buy their binders. They are expensive but I buy them when they are 50% off. I buy their purses. Shoppers Drug Mart – they are expensive, so I go to York because it is cheaper. - York domestic*

*I just have an agenda, that's pretty much the only thing I have that says McGill. - McGill domestic*

One UBC domestic student learned that he got free UBC t-shirts by signing up for credit cards:

*No matter how many times you sign up for a credit card you get a white UBC t-shirt - that has UBC on it and if you randomly pull out garbage bins, there is a UBC binder there, so you can find UBC stuff in all different places you don't always have to pay for it. - UBC domestic*

Like their domestic peers, international students also felt that university-logo merchandise was overpriced. A few had received items as gifts from family or as free items.

*Well, my first year, I had to use my DalCard up so yeah, why not buy a few things but besides that no. Dal international*

*I haven't bought a Dalhousie item. It's all either been bought for me or I found it. Dal international*

*I have a York t-shirt and a York bag but the bag was free. York international*

Other international students felt they did not need to be part of the advertising of their university. This one McGill international student said, “*I find it kind of tacky for myself to wear, to kind of advertise McGill. Now the difference is when someone asks me about what school I go to, I will say very, I say how proud I am to go to McGill. And so it's more of just a matter of how you represent it. I think I do an injustice by wearing the corporate logo of McGill.*”

For some international students, the issue of institutional commitment was also related to the increasing costs of tuition. Some international students from UBC, for example, indicated that they would have gone to other schools, particularly those with more scholarships and lower tuition. One male student remarked,

*yeah, had I known earlier, for me, if I stayed in the States, I would of gone somewhere probably where I could have gotten a scholarship because they don't have many academic scholarships here and so I'm missing out by not doing this in the States. But I know that I've probably could have gone to school for a lot less. - UBC international*

Another international student indicated that she wanted to go to another institution that offered a more liberal arts education:

*I have been thinking about transferring actually all last semester, because I don't think that the quality of education is what it could be. I mean it is what I'm putting into it. But I guess I would be rather having more of a liberal arts education, at a small education with more discussion, less theory and more discussion. - UBC international*

One international student from Dalhousie wished that his institution had more school spirit in terms of athletics, but he admitted that he was too busy with his school work to worry too much about it. He explained:

*When Dalhousie is closed for a day of school, Dalplex is not, you know what I mean? Like, it's still open. So that's why there's no unity. Whether people see it or not, there's no unity between school and the sports place because you won't see very many people at the basketball games because they don't even know there's a game going on. You know, like it's . . . people don't know. People don't care. Like I personally don't care anymore, because I have too much school, but if you're at SMU and you're in all the football players' classes and you're like . . . Exactly. You go out to the game. And I think it's a big problem 'cause I wanted to go to a university that [had more school spirit]. - Dal international*

Another international Dal student claimed that while he was proud to go to Dalhousie, it was not the main way he would describe himself. He said,

*My initial reaction would be I go to Dalhousie University. Like, yada, yada, yada, not because I'm patriotic to Dal . . . I'd describe myself as a student but I don't think that mentally I think it's my main way of describing myself. It's just something, part of my life you know, like a job, "I work at McDonald's." - Dal international*

Although one York international student was proud and loyal to York, he did not feel that loyalty was exclusively to York. For example, if he had gone to the University of Toronto he would be just as proud and loyal. He explained:

*Going to York is not really my part. I don't see the difference between U of T or York. It is my parents who want me to go to York. I really don't care. I am pretty happy with York University and I have a sense of belonging. If I go to U of T, I am happy too. - York international*

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

### *Academic Adjustment*

Many domestic and international students spoke of being more academically adjusted in their second year compared to first year. For example, many students had improved their grades since first year. Also, students reported that they were more well adjusted in second year because they were more cognizant of the expectations and workload of university. Several students spoke of the importance of rapport with their professors. Several international and domestic students expressed that smaller class sizes in second year also helped their academic performance. Faculty had more of a presence in many students' lives in second year compared to first year. The fact that faculty knew students' names or faculty were more engaged in the classroom resulted in positive classroom

experiences for many students. Several students commented that the workload in second year was heavier than first year, but they were also more prepared and felt positive about their classroom experiences. There was some discussion among a few participants that faculty or TAs for whom English was not their first language sometimes impeded their ability to understand lessons.

### ***Social Adjustment***

First year for many international and domestic students was a period of major social adjustment. Second year did not seem to produce the same anxiety as first year. Many students commented that they had established social networks. In addition, residence played an important role in this process. However, socialization between international and domestic students was still predominately at the “acquaintance” level. Differences in perceptions about social experiences between international and domestic students remained. Many domestic students claimed that their classrooms and residence helped facilitate meeting international students and many felt they were friends with international students. However, many international students maintained their interactions with domestic students in the classrooms were a result of group work and never evolved beyond “acquaintances.” Many international students felt that their lack of cultural knowledge about Canada, especially in terms of youth lingo and interests, hindered their ability to form more meaningful friendships. Other international students felt more comfortable being close friends with those from the same cultural group because of shared understanding within the culture.

Also, students reported more balance between academics and social experiences in second year than in first year. Many domestic and international students saw second year as a time to concentrate more on their studies and found a way to negotiate academic demands and the need to socialize. Some students dealt with this by moving out of residence. Although these students enjoyed the social nature of residence in first year, as second year students residence was seen as too social and not conducive for studying. Other students became more independent and just made specific choices about when and what events they would participate in.

### ***Physical Adjustment***

Second year was a better year health-wise than first year for many students. Both international and domestic students claimed they were healthier in second year because they were either cooking for themselves or making healthier choices with the residence/campus food menu. Some students remarked that they could be healthier but their busy academic schedule did not allow them to take advantage of such facilities as the gym or swimming pool. Most students indicated they participated in some form of physical activity. Some regarded their exercise regime, whether walking to school working out at the gym, as a good way for them to deal with stress.

Also, students reported a sense of feeling more settled within the campus. They relied less on student services designed to help with their adjustment to the university. Logically, students were also more familiar with their physical surroundings.

### ***Cultural Adjustment***

Many domestic and international students identified “internationalization and globalization” experiences as part of their day-to-day interactions on campus (e.g., with faculty from different countries or with international students). However, unless students were enrolled in programs that were specifically related to internationalism or taking a course on the topic, their curriculum did not expose them to international or global issues.

Cultural adjustment to Canadian institutions by international students’ improved since first year. Many international students discussed how they were better adjusted to the Canadian climate and food.

Feeling part of the university was an interesting discussion amongst the students. Many domestic students were proud of attending their respective institutions; however, some indicated that they would have felt “proud to be” a student at any other university as well. Many students, both international and domestic, stressed that university-logo merchandise was too expensive and was not a large part of their university identity.

### **Recommendations**

That many international students still predominately socialized with members of their own cultural group indicates that more work needs to be done to help bridge cultural barriers between domestic and international students. This bridging has to occur from both sides. For example, international students require more informal education about Canadian culture while domestic students need to be educated on how to be inclusive and respectful of their international peers. The fact students were experiencing racism on-campus speaks to the need for more culturally diversity education within universities.

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## **Appendix I**

### ***Site Descriptions***

#### *University of British Columbia*

In the academic year, 2003-2004 UBC was home to 40,945 students. The undergraduate student population was 33,566. The total international student population (including graduate and undergraduate) was 4,054, of which 720 were in their first year of undergraduate studies.

The first year international student population was comprised of 403 females and 317 males. These students originated from fifty-eight different countries. Undergraduate international fees at the University of British Columbia in 2003-04 were as follows: 15unit/30 credit program= \$15,870 and for 18unit/36 credit program = \$19,044.

#### *York University*

York University, Canada's third largest university is located on the north-most fringe of Toronto and enrolls approximately 40,000 students at all levels of study. Of this number, approximately 6% are international students. A survey conducted in 2004 indicated that approximately 38% of entering first year students are not born in Canada and the same percentage spoke a language other than English while growing up. The vast majority of students commute to their classes.

#### *McGill University*

McGill University was chartered in 1821 and began classes in 1843. It is located on the slope of Mount Royal in Montréal Québec, and also has a campus, Macdonald College, which houses the Faculty of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, on the West Island. Students live in residences next to the campuses, in apartment blocks owned by the university, or in the city of Montréal. In the fall of 2003, 23,206 students were enrolled in degree programs, 17,903 at the undergraduate level and 5,303 at the graduate level (Planning Office, McGill University). Of this number, approximately 18% were international students. A survey conducted by the university in 2004 indicated that approximately 18% of entering first year students was not born in Canada and the same percentage spoke a language other than English while growing up.



## *Dalhousie University*

The largest university in the Maritimes, Dalhousie University is situated in the primarily residential south end of Halifax, Nova Scotia. It offers more than 125 different programs<sup>1</sup> and provides high quality post-secondary education to more than 15,000 students<sup>1</sup>. Dalhousie's international reputation combined with active recruiting strategies employed by university administration has seen the Dalhousie student population grow substantially over the past four years. This growth is reflected not only in domestic enrolment figures but also in international numbers.

The international student population is distributed throughout all faculties and undergraduate and graduate programs, “with 56% at the undergraduate level and 44% at the graduate level” and as representing over 120 countries – China, the United States, India, Bermuda, and Saudi Arabia being the countries most highly represented.

### ***Limitations of the Study***

Conducting focus groups at a longitudinal level presents challenges to this project. Many of the e-mail addresses of the first year student participants were no longer valid. As a result, unless alternative ways of contacting students were available, contacting those who participated in the first year focus groups return for second year was difficult. Although there are many list-servs and “modes” of contacting first year students (e.g., first year only residences; first year only events and courses), contacting second year students provided more of a challenge since many second year students live in a variety of residences and take courses that are not solely “second year.” The low participation in some focus groups is indicative challenges associated with having students beyond first year participate in research.

Some of the challenges that arose during the first year focus group were also present in the second year groups. One focus group had an international students participate during the domestic student focus group. In the first instance, the student's comments were noted and were excluded if not related to the project. In the latter case, this particular student's comments were included in the international student transcripts.

An issue that was present during the first year focus groups was the variance of experience among the moderators in conducting a focus group. This did not seem to be evident in the second year focus groups. Moderators (some of whom were involved during the first year focus group) were more experienced in focus group research. However, ways of negotiating group dynamics and probing students' responses for more explanation were not consistent across all the groups.

For this second year experience report, the analysis (i.e., coding) was conducted by the same researcher and then a draft of the analysis was sent to the research team for verification and clarification.

It also has to be recognized that a challenge in longitudinal research is having the same people participate in each year of the project. While at some institutions had a fairly positive turn out for their focus groups from the previous years' participants, other institutions either had no repeat participants or very few participants.

