

“Experienced and some-what wiser.”
The experiences of international and domestic students as second year
students at the University of British Columbia.

Michelle Pidgeon

Lesley Andres

Department of Educational Studies
University of British Columbia

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Table of Contents

Background	1
Themes	1
Non-enjoyable experiences as second year students	3
Academic challenges in second-year	3
Non-academic challenges in second-year	5
Lessons learned from first year that helped in second year	5
Typical days as second year students	7
Academic integration	9
Academic performance	9
Experiences of ESL students	10
Classroom experiences	11
Internationalization & Globalization	12
Professors	15
Other staff	19
Support services	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Online resources	21
Social Integration	23
Social life	23
On-campus activities	23
External commitments (off-campus; activities outside of academics)	24
Residence/Commuting	24
Peer group interactions	26
Family Relationships	28
Diversity on Campus	29
Financial experiences	30
Intentions for next year (plans for next year; career goals)	31
Institutional commitments	33
Culture of university	34
Identification with university	36
Discussion and Conclusion	37

Background

This research report is part of a longitudinal national study of international and domestic student experiences over the first three years of university. This national project includes four universities, Dalhousie University, McGill University, University of British Columbia and York University. This particular report documents the findings of focus groups held with 2nd year international and domestic students at the University of British Columbia.

In January and February of 2004, participants from the first-year focus groups were re-invited by e-mail to participate in the second-year focus group. In addition to previous participants, a general recruitment drive was carried out through displaying posters in residences, student union building, bus loop and a variety of academic buildings. A separate focus group was held for second year international students and domestic students.

The international focus group was held on February 24, 2005 and had nine participants in total. Six of the nine participants had been part of the first-year focus groups held in 2004. The domestic focus group was held on February 28, 2005. There were eight participants of whom 3 had been participants in the first-year focus groups.

The focus groups were held on-campus and lasted 2 to 2.5 hours. Participants were provided a pizza lunch and beverages during the focus groups and each participant also was given 15 dollars for their time. Students were given the money prior to the focus group starting, recognizing that students may not be able to stay (or not wish to stay) for the entire focus group.

The focus group protocol was comprised of open-ended questions that were similar to the first-year focus group questions. Generally, the protocol was designed to encourage students to reflect upon their experiences as second year students in comparison to those of their first-year. The goal of this focus group was to compare second year experiences to those of first year experiences of international and domestic students.

Themes

Enjoyable experiences as second year students

Overall, both domestic and international students expressed that they found their second year to be more enjoyable than their first year. International students' positive experiences can be summarized as having fuller classroom experiences. These experiences were facilitated by smaller class sizes, perceived relevant course content, and more meaningful interaction with professors. Domestic students felt their most enjoyable experiences included having a social network of friends and an awareness of their surroundings (academically, physically). Similar to international students, domestic students also discussed more meaningful classroom experiences facilitated by more interaction with professors and relevant content which led to a more enjoyable experience in second year.

It's great, there is way more to do this year than last year, and yeah, I'm involved outside academics more than I was last year that adds time. I'm taking four more classes than I did last year so it's like the number of courses has changed. Also I feel like no matter what year you are in, you always feel like you are doing more work than you have ever done before so I don't know if I will next year be not feeling that, but right now it seems like a lot. International student

I think that it is more enjoyable just because. . . I knew a whole bunch of people when I first came in, last year I came here. . . I knew one person coming in so I had no friends. So that first couple weeks of school are a lot easier to adjust just cause you are already adjusted. Work wise it's been about the same. Domestic student

Good aspects of second year, we are branching off, at least in our case, first year was just the whole class in large lecture halls but now we are branching off and as a result we are getting a lot more attention from our profs and a fuller classroom experience which can be really helpful and intimate with who ever you are having it with. Domestic student

Domestic and international students indicate that most things were easier in second year because they were more familiar with the university, what was expected of them academically and socially. Although some international students did feel things were still a little difficult socially, others expressed they had more friendships established in their second year compared to their first year. Some domestic students also stated that they had more social networks established in second year which made adjusting much easier. Some domestic students also had changed residences from last year which they found more appealing and suitable to their social life and maturity level. (The social aspects of second-year life and residence will be discussed in a later section.)

No, I think things are easier, you just know how to deal with things better. International student

I found first year really frustrating because being in first year science I just found that everything was really general and glossed over and they didn't give any sort of detail about how anything really works so it was really easy things, a lot of it I knew from high school. This year I'm finding that there is a lot more detail and a lot more of my curiosity is satisfied. I do enjoy that. Domestic student

Academically, both international and domestic students generally seemed more satisfied with the content of their courses. Where some indicated that their first year courses were too general, repetitive from high school or relied too much on memorization, second year content proved to be more focused, more challenging and better learning experience overall.

Non-enjoyable experiences as second year students

Some domestic and international students pointed out that their second year was proving to be more difficult as result of heavier work loads and increased difficulty of courses.

I think that second year has been a lot more difficult for more; the level of my classes has jumped, like skyrocketed. International student

The negatives are it is probably isolated to my program because it is all experimental there is a lot of organization issues and over estimating workload and time schedules and the courses are just horrendously hard in 2nd year compared to 1st year. It's not even a slow increment it's a huge thing compared to other people. . . I am noticing that I am having no free time at all. Domestic student

However, while most agreed that the work load was heavier and more difficult, some international students felt that there was not necessarily more work than first year. Rather, the content itself required more concentration and focus. Both international and domestic students generally valued this aspect of their course work in second year. On one hand, as indicated in the previous section, increased difficulty was welcomed. On the other hand, second year was more challenging. This is discussed further in the next section Academic challenges.

Many international and domestic students reported that their course work had become more difficult compared to their first-year courses. Some international and domestic students felt this was due to the courses being higher level and therefore more specific content.

The course load is much heavier than last year and like, I also got other stuff besides my study to do so the overall load is much heavier than my first year, much heavier. International student

The course load in year two is different in the way that it seems that the courses are more difficult yet less work but it's of more difficulty so it equals the same to a little bit more time spent every week doing work that translates to as less time to socialize. Domestic student

Academic challenges in second-year

Much of the issues around course work were about time management skills. Several domestic students actually spoke in length about how many essays and lab reports they now had to write as compared to first year. However, this was dependent on the program. For example, one arts student wrote one essay per course, while others in a professional program wrote several essays for each of their classes. An international student felt that the challenges for her were lack of familiarity with her faculty and anxiety over report writing.

I have one essay per class per term maybe a midterm, but not this term and then a final exam. Domestic student

A 20 page lab report for one lab times four, that's eighty pages of writing a week, I mean that's not all writing- there are graphs too. Domestic student

I realized that last semester that I . . . didn't know how to do a research paper in a way that I knew would be expected and that was really really hard and frustrating. International student

Biggest academic challenge is keeping up with everything, just making my self do the work when I don't have assignments all the time. Making sure I keep up with my readings. Domestic student

As a result of the more difficult content, some domestic and international students felt they had less time to socialize. One international student indicated that his social life was curtailed because he was taking more courses than he did in first year. Some domestic students also talked about the impact of a heavier course load on their social life. Earlier, one domestic student talked about how the workload having increased drastically; however, he still maintained his "free time." For example, during the weekends he would keep his Friday and Saturday free by working later on Sunday nights.

I'm still maintaining the same level of academic activity so the weekends are mine and nothing is going to take that away. On weekdays and after weekends I have to get back [to work]. I stay up way too late on Sundays . . . just doing the work where compared to last year I found it to be a quite a well balanced act. Domestic student

Another domestic student spoke of the challenges of doing more lab work in second year, which gave her limited free time and few choices of electives. However, she also saw being part of a smaller program with structured classes as a way of staying in touch with her friends in the program.

The thing that I don't really like and that I didn't expect was the fact that we have a lot of labs, we have a lab for every single course I'm taking and as a result I go to school from 8 to 5 every day each week it happens every week, and I have so much lab reports to write which really are not worth much but they are worth something if you don't pass them in. Plus like chemistry in second year it's a lot more specified so it became a lot harder for me and also competing with people who a lot of people who I feel are smarter than me so that was not very enjoyable but I think the one thing that does makes second year very enjoyable is the fact that you like have friends from first year you have an established circle so you have friends to share your common interests with it kind of makes it okay not that bad. Domestic student

Another challenge mentioned by domestic students was failing or the fear of failing. One international student said that getting behind in work was more stressful in second year.

Non-academic challenges in second-year

International students felt that class size and changing courses made it difficult for some of them to maintain friendships they had established during first year. Also, for some domestic students and international students moving to a different residence, club activities (e.g., outdoors club), living off campus or having friends living off-campus were other factors that influenced their social lives.

Domestic students reported still feeling the impact of not living with their family and leaving childhood friends behind. Some domestic students also spoke about regretting not keeping in touch with friends from high school and first-year.

My biggest non-academic challenge living, not living with my family, having my own habits and taking care of myself without my mom there all the time. That's pathetic soundings but it's definitely a challenging part. Domestic student

I went to school in Ontario with the same people from grade 4 until grade 13 cause I was in a special program there and I made some really close friends that I haven't been able to make that many really close friends here. I do miss the fact that they are so far away. I don't get to talk to them a lot, well, I talk to them online. So I guess the challenge is just getting close friends at UBC. I'd say being able to experience some of the things that the outdoor club, rock climbing, I've always enjoyed physical activity. Domestic student

Lessons learned from first year that helped in second year

When asked what lessons they had learned from first year that had helped them in second year, most international and domestic students answered “study skills.” Several international students discussed the fact that they now had better study strategies. For example, both international and domestic students explained they studied less than in first year because they were more aware of expectations. A few of the domestic students said they had learned not to procrastinate. Another domestic student said he had learned not to copy other people's work, in that he was now more independent in doing his own work and as a result was learning more.

Well, you kinda know what you have done to get a mark you want, to get it done. To get what you want out of it, so I think that is the kinda effort you start to put in. International student

Don't procrastinate. Domestic student

Don't copy other people's work. . . [laughter]. Well, not necessarily copy but I found that this year I'm doing my assignments all on my own as compared to last year so basically I think that is the reason I'm being much more successful this year is because I'm doing the work myself. Domestic student

Other international students spoke of knowing what courses to take for grades and knowledge of the system (e.g., negotiating course choice) as lessons they had learned from first year.

Knowing how to take tests and notes, generally, how to take courses to boost your GPA. And social aspects, like knowing how to just get involved. International student

According to one international student, being more settled as a second year student now gave him more time to focus on getting to know more people.

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 the challenge would be now to get to know more people because you know where your basic necessities are. International student

Some also felt they had better time management skills. However, a few international students spoke of being more “lazy” about their academic work and their day-to-day activities. One student acknowledged that she was lazy in that she had trouble with waking up in time for classes.

I used to be one of those that studied 5 hrs a day, well which I did, I used to be very disciplined and now I'm still very disciplined. Don't get that wrong. It's just that there are times when I am lazier right now because you get more comfortable with the environment you are in, you are more settled. International student

I agree about being more lazy, cause I used to wake up in time for 9 class but now I can't even make it in time for a 9:30 class I'm always late. International student

A few of the domestic students also felt that their interest in the content of second year courses helped motivate their studying and improved their academic performance.

I don't know if I have learned much more since last year. I'm more interested in my classes, that's the reason I'm doing better in my classes. Like I did nothing last year and I'm doing something this year but it's because I'm more interested. Domestic student

It's not like every five minutes my study skills kick in . . . pure interest motivates me. Domestic student

I found that I do better in the courses that interest me less. I don't study them more but for 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 favorite course I've taken here and the first half of the year I was doing terrible. It's strange. Domestic student

Another domestic student said he felt opposite, that is, he studied less and performed better in classes that did not interest him. Another domestic found that “*the hands on materials to be far more educational. When you are just reading from a text book about these forces and trying to calculate them. . . there is such a sense of detachment from what you are doing.*”

Another “lesson” one domestic student shared was facing the reality of being a “number.” She shared that she came to UBC because it was a good school, with a strong research and teaching reputation. Unfortunately, when she came to UBC, despite its reputation, she felt she was just a number.

I thought wow you know I really want to go to this school it's great that I live so close location to school. But when I got here I was just a number, I was no different that anyone else if I had problems that was my problem not their problem they didn't want to deal with it, . . . “get-over” it kind of thing move on you are a number accept it.
Domestic student

This particular student went on to say that she felt students were responsible for their own lives and did not need the university to “take care of her.” However, she did expect the university to be more supportive and understanding when she came to them for help with a personal-academic issue.

Typical days as second year students

The typical day of second year students were dependent on whether they were in science, arts or co-op programs. Typical days varied depending on schedule in classes all day. Some students started at noon while others were in classes all day from 9 a.m. to 5pm. Some students also work part-time so their day was a mix of classes and working.

My typical day means waking up at 7:30 for an 8:30 class every day, it's horrid. It will go all the way until 6pm at night and that's the same thing from Monday to Friday. Well, it started being really bad but then after you get into the habit of it then it is actually pretty fine. International student

I have a job at 7 a.m., so every morning I work from 7 to 9, then I usually have 2-3 hrs break, then I need to go to my afternoon schedule. My afternoon schedule is all classes, which will end usually 4:30-5:30 depending on the day. After I finish my class I cook my supper and after I eat I do my assignments or homework or sometimes study. Then the most important thing I need to sleep at least before 11pm. International student

Some international and domestic students who were in arts programs had classes only in the afternoons so they did a lot of studying in their off hours.

I usually don't have class until at least 11 or 12, so I have class all afternoons. But I'm doing two classes online too, so I do a lot of work at home, because I couldn't get courses in other classes, but I get up at 8 every day, and I do stuff around or I usually do a literature review. International student

*My first class is at noon on Mon, Wed, Fri and I'm done at one on those days, I'm sometimes free on tues and thurs, I have class from 9:30 to 12:30, I'm only taking 4 courses. I come home I don't do any work, the night before an essay I write one and I survive.
Domestic student*

Health

In terms of health, students reported they were doing better in second year than they were in first-year. Most of the international students believed they had adjusted to Canadian food and culture. One student felt he had adjusted to the Canadian culture, food and better health habits compared to first year. Other international students also indicated they were healthier than in their first year. One international student felt that she was healthier at home just because of the food she was eating. The following comments were typical:

I've moved out [of residence] now so an advantage is that I'm actually able to cook my own food now, and manage my own habits better than last year. International student

I think that I'm really healthier at home than I am here, mostly because of the food but I mean it's okay. International student

Domestic students also felt healthier than their first year. They maintained that health was about balance. While some students found staying healthy a challenge because of their heavy course load which impeded their participation in some activities, most domestic students were involved in various clubs and activities (e.g., outdoor club).

As far as health goes, I really like the quality of the food. I'm not a picky eater, I just like to be able to eat whatever I feel like at that exact moment cause usually by the time I cook something up I usually don't feel like it anymore. So it's good to see, I really enjoy my salads and stuff. . . ah. . . they sell salad that day. 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 off-like they were 105 dollars which was pretty sweet. Domestic student

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. Domestic student

For those domestic and international students who were cooking for themselves, some claimed they were good cooks and others were working on their culinary skills.

*My health as improved everything, because I cook for myself.
International student*

I cook one dish for about a week and ½ and it lasts, and then I get sick of it and like now it's kind of like a really bad vegetarian chili.
International student

Cooking healthy or a variety of food was not dependent only upon their skills but on finances and time. Both hindered the quality and frequency of meals.

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. International student

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's 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. Domestic student

Those international students living in residence complained that the residence food was still of bad quality. As one female international student stated “*the cafeteria has terrible food.*” Another person said that even though she still lived in residence, she was making more healthy choices.

I think that it takes a little time to realize that you can't eat like that, like last year I lived in residence and this year and the cafeteria will give you all the horrible food that you want but you realize that you can't eat that all the time. International student

I was going to say that 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. Domestic student

Contrary to the international students' opinions about residence food, some domestic students “*loved residence food.*” They also clarified that residence food was about choice, and it was important to make healthy choices.

Academic integration

Academic performance

Most of the international students reported that their achievement levels were the same or better than they were in first year. One student indicated that her grades had declined. When asked she explained that she was doing fewer courses and not really enjoying the courses she was taking now:

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.
International student

There was a mixed reaction among domestic students in terms of their academic performance in second year. A few students asserted they were doing better than first year while others said they were doing the same and another group remarked they were doing worse.

I'm doing better in most of my courses because it's all chem this year, whereas last year there was stuff I wasn't good at, but then organic chem brought it down so it's remained the same. Domestic student

I did really well [last year] 'cause most of the courses were math, physics and things that are very objective and I tend to do quite well in math where there is actually a right and a wrong answer and I know what it is and I make sure that I put it down on a test. But this year, it is still math and physics but a lot of my classes are slightly more subjective so my marks have dropped in points. Domestic student

Domestic students spoke about academic “weeding out”. They claimed this happened more within the sciences (e.g., organic chemistry) but all students tended to agree that first year was designed to eliminate students from certain programs. Students talked about being in classes of 200 in first year to class sizes less than half of that in second year.

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 . . . I think that they do it on purpose and that makes sucking up very not enjoyable. It's one of my least favorite classes. Domestic student

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. Domestic student

Experiences of ESL students

Last year, the LPI was a major point of contention for international students. Although the international students present at the focus group had passed the LPI, many were dissatisfied with the effectiveness and purpose of the LPI. That students did not know what questions they answered incorrectly and the cost of retaking the test or getting the answers checked were still important issues for many. This topic elicited a level of anger not provoked by any other topic.

I think it doesn't matter how many times you take it. I think the thing that aggravated people was that no matter how many times you took it you didn't know what you did wrong, it was a matter of

chance or luck. There were courses that you could take but then again there weren't any guarantees that those courses would help. And some people say that they don't even help at all, like they failed regardless of taking the course. So I guess if they had a procedure where they could teach you English after failing, then they wouldn't be a problem. But the fact that you have to do it again without knowing what you did wrong is a problem. International student

I think one important thing for the LPI is it really isn't your ability that determines whether you pass or not. It has no reason why people would force students to take test, why they force students to take the test and the chances of passing the test is not dependent on your ability. It depends on luck, like you go to a lottery. International student.

Unanimously, all of the international students felt that the LPI had not benefited their lives academically or measured their ability to speak English. As one student stated “*I think that it tests everything but English.*”

Classroom experiences

The general consensus amongst UBC domestic and international students was that their classroom experiences had improved in second year. They felt their classes were much more interesting in terms of the delivery of the content and the content itself. The quality of interaction with fellow classmates and professors was also valued when compared to their experiences as first year students.

This year I'm doing really interesting stuff and I'm really impressed with all the other people in the class and learning really interesting 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. International student

As discussed previously in the section on academic challenges and successes, international and domestic students also discussed the nature of course work. There were more assignments and higher expectations for the work they were doing. Students liked the focussed content, reinforcing the findings from last year's focus groups that the first year content was too general.

I realized that when I was studying for my mid-term, I actually liked the stuff I was studying which is kinda new for me. But I also have a lot of group work this year, where last year I was in 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 really frustrating but sometimes it actually helps. I get more out of smaller group interaction; we actually talk in class and get to learn material. So that's pretty nice. International student

Some of the domestic students indicated that some but not all their classes had become slightly smaller. Smaller class size was seen as a more enjoyable and interactive environment for many domestic students.

I found in general that all the classes are roughly the same size so that there is still the same environment this year there's now about 120-130 students instead of 200 so it's roughly the same environment. There are one or two classes, I have one class right now that is small about 20-25 kids...but. . . in that kind of environment I think I enjoy more I don't know. . . you kind of have to pay more attention in that environment I found. Domestic student

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. Domestic student

According to some domestic and international students, the quality of teaching had also improved. Another important aspect of an enjoyable classroom experience for one domestic student, which was also evident in some of the international students' comments, was having more meaningful interactions with their professors (i.e., professors knowing their names).

Actually the teacher knows your name which is cool. Like I think he is the second prof that has ever learned my name. . . that is good. But I figure that in later years I will have smaller classes that will be better. Domestic student

Internationalization & Globalization

Students' experiences with internationalization or globalization were again dependent on their program of study and living accommodation. For example, an international student explained that her entire program was about internationalization as she was studying international relations.

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. International student

A domestic student studying political science also believed her program encompassed a lot of global issues – but from a western perspective.

[I've experienced globalization] 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 like. Domestic student

One domestic student studying engineering claimed that globalization did not emerge as part of his program until his field placement.

That's the problem . . . we don't we don't learn about these things unless we are actually out in the field. Domestic student

Another domestic student studying chemistry indicated that her program was all about the lab and was not practically related to global issues.

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" Domestic student

Others reported that the internationalization or globalization content in their courses was not always applicable, especially when the course were intended to address Canadian specific content or issues. Some international students acknowledged they were gaining a Canadian perspective in all their courses due to the fact that they were studying at a Canadian university. But, as this student explained, "Canadian content" had an international dimension:

I think that it all comes from a 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. International student

Another international student related her nutrition course was about the Canadian nutrition system and not about systems of other countries.

They talk a lot about the regulations of the food system and what not, so they do some comparisons to the US but like I think the purpose of the course is to be from a Canadian perspective because you are learning about the Canadian food systems so although they might say like in the US it is like this as an aside, the main focus is from the Canadian point-of-view. International student

Other domestic and international students indicated that due to the nature of their content, some courses, like biology or psychology, were international because they were learning about different animals or theories from all over the world.

I would say that all that all my classes have had aspects of internationalism but in an awareness or knowledge I don't know if it's just the classes I'm taking or but even in just first-year biology course we talk about ecology and all those things. In my pathology class we talk about diseases around the world and we talk a little bit about culture in some cases and resources and then I'm taking a nutrition class that incorporates that stuff into that I'm taking an international health course that obviously has. . . so for me I found

that all of my courses. In terms of my chemistry class I think that it largely has to do with my professor how he likes to incorporate internationalism into his work, whereas other professors are different . . . yeah but almost all my courses were professors made a conscious effort to include international issues. Domestic student

However, for a program like finance, where financial systems were pretty uniform globally, international comparisons were minimal and specific to the topic of discussion.

If you are learning the capital markets of Canada then it only makes sense to talk about Canada itself, there might be comparison and there are comparisons with other parts of the world because it's financial markets 'cause they are pretty much the same all over the world. The main aim is to learn about the Canadian capital market because they are expecting you to work in Canadian society afterwards. International student

According to students, the extent to which course work was international or global-focused, was course and program related. Math and sciences courses were not so international-specific while most of the arts courses did have some aspect of their content focused on international or global issues. Some students even questioned the necessity of such a focus.

I guess it depends on the program, I guess it's not there, 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. Domestic student

Having professors from different countries with varied experiences also added an international perspective to courses. A few domestic students felt that exposure to students from other countries and having professors from other places or who had traveled were informal ways to learn about globalization.

I have a course which the professors are from the States but has been in Canada for many years, and he also has work for many years in the US and he gives us a lot of examples in the US. But other courses that are almost focused on the Canadian practice especially in finance. International student

I find that this year that some of our professors just in some of their spare time or just in any little between lectures, 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 have 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 is such great opportunities now. Domestic student

The majority of domestic students supported the idea that internationalization should be an important part of their education.

It really helps I think, you need a world perspective on anything you do especially this day and age because everything has global ramifications. Domestic student

However, one student, who planned to do lab research, indicated that globalization had little relevance to her work.

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. Domestic student

Professors

Generally, international and domestic students had high praise for their second year professors. Professors who were engaging and who actively used examples and a variety of teaching methods were valued by domestic and international students.

I had a very good experience this year. Actually in my last term and this term I have had some very good professors and they are some of them are very basic lectures, others are research chairs, they are very bright and give us very good examples. International student

Some of the teachers last year either had no practical experience . . . like one guy was teaching us physics. . . . 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. Domestic student

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. International student

A few students also felt that a sense of humor was also an important part of their interaction with professors. Last year, students felt their professors were boring. When asked if they felt why their professors were not boring this year, the general consensus was it was that the content was more interesting. Students saw their professors more engaged in and excited about the higher level content covered in second and third level courses. As these students explain, they saw engagement by professors in the content and teaching as a result of their professional interest and training.

I don't know. If I was the professor and that intensely educated in a field, I wouldn't want to be teaching first year courses either. But I think that it is the kind of vibe you get from a lot of first year courses – that 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. International student

I found that most of my first-year profs weren't that great like I thought . . . probably 'cause of large class and they were teaching more than one section and each section was large. I remember trying to go to office hours and I remember just standing there . . . like there would be 20 kids lined up outside and by the time you got there, their office hours were over and you wasted an hour standing in line and you are like "what math did I learn?" kind of thing. But 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. Although I did have one professor who wasn't that great – he talked for half the course during the semester and basically he just talked a lot about theory and he spent like $\frac{3}{4}$ hour on one equation. Domestic student

It may also be that as second year students, these focus group participants were also more actively engaged in their learning which, in turn, encouraged professors to be more engaging teachers. Small classroom size also helped create a more engaging classroom environment for professors and students. However, a few domestic students indicated that they would not want to compromise good teaching over small class size, especially in first-year.

I think in first year it's impossible and I would rather have large class sizes with very good professors than small classes with poor teachers. With me you get the same education out of it. Domestic student

In terms of contact with their professors, some international and domestic students felt that they had more contact this year while a few felt that contacting professors was difficult because they did not have time to meet during scheduled office hours.

For me . . . 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. . . so 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. Domestic student

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. . . . I just come to the office, sometimes writing, sometimes in person. I just find that they are very friendly to us. But I do have 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. There are some good professors and some not very good. International student

Some domestic students also asserted that it was important for their professors to know them by name, rather than being just a number in class. Also, some international students believed that in second year, they were getting to know their professors better. Although the following international student felt more comfortable this year, he still had concerns about some professors who did not accommodate the needs of 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 to them. The office hours are to their convenience as oppose to ours, which is kinda pitiful. International student

However, most international students ranked their comfort level with contacting their professor seven out of ten. The rating was slightly higher when international students wished to contact their professor via e-mail. One student commented that she did not really have much contact with her professors because she really did not need much assistance or direction.

Probably a 7 maybe, in e-mail may be an 8 or 9. I wouldn't go to them in person unless I had something to talk about, I mean I wouldn't go see them if I had personal problems, I would only go to them if I wanted to talk about my paper or something. But if I really have to then I can, if not, then I really wouldn't contact them. International student

Teaching assistants (TAs) also received favourable reviews by domestic and international students. In fact, a couple of students reported that TAs were more flexible and approachable than their professors. They saw TAs as being more energetic and enthusiastic about their work since they were just beginning their careers compared to professors who were tired and close to retirement. However, one domestic student indicated that for higher level courses, TAs were not experienced enough to bring practical examples to the classroom.

I have an English TA and they don't have any classes this term so he can meet me whatever time so he asks to just give him an e-mail and we can set up a time to meet. International student

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. Domestic student

Actually I would just like to say that last term I had [a TA] . . . he 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. Domestic student

A few domestic students had trouble with TAs who were not proficient in English. They knew the TAs were trying to help but didn't have enough command of English to communicate well:

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. Domestic student

During the domestic focus group, students were discussing the issue of quality teaching. In differentiating a good professor from a bad professor, one domestic student stated,

I think that the thing for me that distinguishes a good professor from a bad one is the bad ones don't give examples in class or don't give things that are practical. 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. Domestic student

Others felt that it was also important for students to be able to "teach themselves." Self-directed learning was important for some students even if they were paying for the course (e.g., without assistance from the professor), especially in the case of large classes where one-on-one help would not be that accessible.

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. . . 'cause I think in the future you have to be able to be self-sufficient somewhat. Domestic students

When asked if they would like to attend a university that had no professors, a few students felt they would like this idea, while others preferred to have professors, since they go to their professors for help.

I actually would do that, if there is a study going on I think that I would do that.. It would be really interesting to see how they do compared to students that were taught in classes of 30, I don't think that they would do as well, but perhaps in the long run they would do better, it would be very very interesting to see how they do it.
Domestic students

I go to my professors for help and talk to them, if I need to help, I do visit all my professors' office hours this semester. Domestic student

Other staff

In terms of interacting with other staff at the university, international students had positive comments about the advisors and administrators with whom they had interacted. International students remarked that their advisors were knowledgeable about their programs and other services that students needed to know about outside of the department.

The advisors in XXXX are very nice. They give you a lot of assistance. And they give you a hand with computers. International student

Another student was impressed with the assistance she received when inquiring about switching academic programs.

I contacted the people off the website who were in charge of the programs and that was actually really helpful, they responded really quickly and I even got a lot of questions answered and they responded by e-mail. International student

In the domestic focus group, very few of the students had any comment about interactions with other staff. In fact, one student indicated she only had contact with her professors or TAs. She told the group that her interaction with lab directors had not been positive and she did not find them to be supportive or helpful.

I don't know about any other staff member in my faculty other than my TAs and professors. TAs I usually ask them a lot of questions sometimes I e-mail them. I guess lab directors would be the other faculty members and with them I actually talk to them more than my professors mostly it's the lab work . . . it's due constantly so you constantly have writing difficulties with it but other than that if you don't go during the scheduled hours and then you try to go another time, even if they are there they don't really want to help you out.
Domestic student

However, as the next section reveals, domestic students had used various support services around campus and gave them favourable reviews.

Domestic students gave support services around campus a positive review. There were mixed comments from international students about support services and the general usage of these services. One international student didn't know where the Writing Centre was, while another student had used the Centre as a first year student and now in second year.

I think that they are great, they are always almost available. I mean it's not a service that I use but I know people that do and they are always around. Yeah, I think that student services here are pretty good. Domestic student

In terms of other services, such as the pool, some of the international students who were from the US unfavourably rated UBC services compared to state schools.

We have one in residence that is really little, which is one thing I'm frustrated about here at UBC. At a lot of state schools we get access to the gym whenever you want like it's just part of, and it's state of the art, and you are paying all of this money and you get access to the gym. Whereas here, they make you pay more to go on certain days or hours, I think it's a little bit weird actually.
International student

A few of the international students had used career services to find work on campus. A few of the international and domestic students felt that tutoring services that were available to them as first year students were now lacking or difficult to access in second year. When international students were asked if they felt these services were important to second year students, one student responded,

I think it would be helpful in a couple of courses, I mean it's one of those things where I feel like even if there would be drop in hours for people to get help, they have kinda declined. International student

However, one domestic student felt that this type of service would not be a good use of AMS resources:

No, I wouldn't need it this year. . . but I used it once or twice last year and I thought it was really good and it would be impossible too for second years just because by second year things are so much more branched off. . . they had it for Math 101 whatever which a lot of kids take that class so you can't do that for a course that has 35 kids in it. . . you can't have an AMS tutor for that.
Domestic student

Generally, usage of services such as the writing centre and pool was dependent on students' own schedules. In times when the students' timetables permitted, they used the free swim times or went for assistance at the Writing Centre.

I think that one problem with the pool does not accommodate my schedule . . . and all the free times doesn't fit my schedule, that's the main reason I could never go there in my second term. I went to the pool in my first term because it fit my schedule but this second year it doesn't fit at all. International student

International student used International House for services in relation to their needs. For example, one student indicated he had gone to International house when he lost his passport.

I lost my passport last year and went there several times, they were quite helpful, they knew all the procedures I had to follow . . . So they were nice. International student

This year, students were more involved as volunteers rather than “novices” searching for assistance. A few of the international students were involved in volunteering in the Peer support program or in cultural events held at the House. One student summarized his role with IHouse as evolving since first year.

I think from my own personal experience . . . last year was more like participating in different events, where as this year, is more like helping out and helping plan events. So my role has changed significantly and I think that IHouse is a good place for people to volunteer. International student

A few of the domestic students suggested sustainable services for students (e.g., student gardens or use of UBC farms) as a service they would like to see available to students.

Online resources

Online services, such as the student service centre and the library, were rated highly amongst international students. One international student indicated he was using the online job bank more this year since he is looking for a co-op placement.

I use the library a lot, especially for research papers. I use the online journals, they are really good. International student

I'm really satisfied with the student service centre website because I get so much information on there. I can look at the courses, I can see my financial account, my tax form I downloaded that today, and I don't ever have to go, I've only been to Brock Hall like three times because I only need to go there to pick up cheques for scholarships or completely other occasional things that I need to do. So I feel that is an awesome help. Domestic student

Domestic students also were frequent users of the online library services. While one student indicated that the system was slow, most others indicated they had no problems with the system and found it easy to navigate. Most felt it was a good service using it frequently in their course work.

The online resources at the library are very helpful and very accessible as well. Domestic student

However, WebCT as an online resource received mixed reviews by domestic and international students. Technically both groups felt the system was slow, especially during peak usage hours. Some students really valued the convenience of online course support, especially having their lecture notes available to print-off prior to their classes.

I think that it's kinda cool, we have it for some of our classes and we only meet every two weeks for one class, but we are required to participate in a discussion thing based on what we have already talked about in class and it's pretty cool actually. All the people are pretty cool and really into the stuff so online discussions are very interesting. International student

They are kind of relying really heavy on it, I'm finding which I think is too heavy at times. To ask for every single course spending, adding another component to every course and they kinda say that everyone else is doing it. It makes it a lot more work and harder to figure out what you need out of a course. International student

However, others felt that professors were relying on the technology too much, and that at times, the system was cumbersome.

As far as WebCT, the only problem I have is when you download files, there is usually just given that long string of numbers as the file name and that's really frustrating cause if you keep all the files in your computer to look at offline then you just have random gibberish of numbers of PDF files which is really stupid but I really like the idea of WebCT to have your courses and stuffs accessible . . . it's a really good idea. Domestic student

The use of WebCT as an extra resource translated into increased study time and additional financial burden for some students. The use of online discussion forums was also mixed. While some felt that online discussions aided their learning, others felt that the online discussions were “artificial” compared to face-to-face class discussions and were an additional burden on time.

I think[the online discussion] defeats the purpose of discussion because it's like this it should be ongoing free flow feedback but then on the computer, you have to think okay, this is how you write and then no one is necessarily on the other side replying to what you are saying, so it's a bit slower I find. International student

One international student who did not like the online discussions did like the online tutoring component of one of her courses. She described this aspect as “peer-mentoring,” because other students responded to their classmates’ questions. Like many domestic students, one international student felt “the purpose of the system was good, but the technology needs improvement.”

Social Integration

Social life

International students had mixed comments about aspects of their social lives as second year students. One student remarked that his social life was “kaput.” However, others indicated that they were meeting more people and were more involved in on-campus activities, in roles such as orientation leaders and peer support leaders.

I try to spend a lot more time this year compared to last year on social events, especially those events organized by the XXXX club, because I went there, and I almost 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. International student

I know twice as many people. I went to residence both years, and . . . the people I met first year and then you meet a whole bunch of new people, it's kinda like a lot more going on. International student

Domestic students were also varied in their social lives.

On-campus activities

On-campus activities for domestic and international students ranged from part-time work to volunteering with a variety of clubs and on-campus events. The involvement of on-campus activities seemed to be facilitated by the type of residence. Students who lived on-campus seemed to be more actively engaged on-campus, particularly events organized through residence. Some domestic students indicated they were more involved in various on-campus clubs and sports this year.

I'm a residence activity coordinator. I did Imagine last term, and I'm going to do it again this year. [Also,] there is ultimate Frisbee and volleyball. International student

I actually work two jobs, I work for my own faculty, I do technician work there and I work for my professor as a research assistant. International student

I'm doing a lot more because I'm in Improve and I do that 3-4 nights a week. . . I played a one of intramural sports last year. Domestic student

While domestic students also discussed using the pool and gym facilities, either in their residence or at the pool, some students were wondering why they were paying approximately \$200 a term for limited access to these services.

Yeah, they are limited. I actually tried to use the facility, I tried last year and I tried again this year and last year, my schedule this year it's just impossible, but even last year like I found it kind of hard 'cause you don't have your own locker kind of thing and you have to lug all these things around and. . . access to the gym is quite awkward too. You actually have to go through the changing room and walk through the shower area by the pool, yeah. . . just walking by I get sweaty. Screw the gym. Domestic student

Similarly, some international and domestic students claimed that the limited hours were not conducive to their academic schedules and therefore could not use the free services. If they were to use the pool or gym outside these times they would have to pay and they did not see this as a fair option.

External commitments (off-campus; activities outside of academics)

Off-campus commitments for international and domestic students were very limited. At the time of this focus group, international students were still limited to working on campus. Some international students did indicate they went to church off-campus. In fact, one domestic student stated the only time he went off-campus was to get groceries.

I don't go off campus except to go get groceries. Domestic student

Domestic students also had limited external commitments; most seemed to center their social activities on-campus.

Residence/Commuting

An important aspect of residence life for domestic and international students was the social aspects of residence. Some domestic students had remained in on-campus housing but had changed the type of residence as they recognize that they needed to be with people the same maturity level.

I really like the social aspects of residence so I stayed there another year. International student

Maybe because I had an extra year of high school in Ontario and I'm a year older than a lot of people that were in first year residence with me last year I felt there was a maturity gap that existed in those residence and a lot of people had just escaped their parents and they were going through the phase where they just wanted to drink and party and do nothing and I had already gone through that stage so for me I found that in Gage it is easier to meet people that you can get along with maturity wise. Domestic student

Also important to some international and domestic students was the ability to cook for themselves. The quality of residence food was an issue for several students who were relying on the meal plans for their meals.

The Totem cafeteria food is really really bad and there was nothing that you could escape from it. I mean it's not like you can forfeit the money and cook for yourself because there wasn't even a kitchen.
International student

I enjoy cooking although I'm not that great at it but the idea is I try and I like living with roommates and just feeling a part of the whole independence. Domestic student

I just need a kitchen, I just need some vegetables that aren't oily and some real meat. International student

Negotiating roommate issues was an issue for some of the international students. One student who could not receive phone calls after 10 p.m. or shower beyond a certain hour felt that the poor quality of insulation between dorm rooms was the reason why he was struggling with a roommate who was a light sleeper.

No sound barrier at all. So I understand my roommate, and I think that his problem is probably legitimate and I think that my requirement to take showers is also true. So there are quality errors, and that quality are not our fault, it's the fault of UBC.
International student

Although some international students remained on-campus, they also changed their residences. Others who lived on-campus during her first year were now living off campus with roommates.

I live in a house with nine people, now, we are having a really good time, and we get along really well. Cooking for myself has been an interesting experience because I'm able to buy exactly the kind of food I want to eat. International student

I live in residence, but I've changed residence though. There is more social life because so many more people live in Gage. I live with people I know because I actually planned my roommates who have the same living style and basically sleeping patterns, which is way better than last year, which we had different complex.
International student

Two of the nine international students lived off-campus. One student lived about a ninety minutes to get to campus, another lived approximately 20 minutes from campus. Socializing with on-campus friends was an issue for one international student who lived off-campus; however, another off-campus student was having fun socializing with her roommates.

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 an hour and a half commutes like 3hrs waste of time, but honestly, in those hours I can rest and 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 is it is not that hard.
International student

Most of the domestic students lived on campus during their first-year and remained in residence during their second year. Some had moved to the more mature residence (e.g., Gage).

Living in Gage is hugely different, because in that we are cooking for ourselves and it's much different atmosphere, much nicer.
Domestic student

However, one domestic student remained in the same residence.

I'm still in the same residence as last year and I found that this year is better . . . I'm a little older this year. I feel that I should have gone to one of these more independent buildings for a little bit more, I don't do the first year stuff anymore. Domestic student

Those domestic students who did commute back and forth lived with their parents. Commuting on the bus system was seen as a convenient way for transportation. Another student felt that living at home with her parents provided her support and privacy she didn't think she would get living on campus.

I bus to get home and that usually takes a while so but the 99 and all the buses that leave campus to other places, that's pretty good, comes pretty consistently. Sometimes the bus drivers are grumpy, I mean road rage grumpy,. . . then you have the ones who tell jokes at each stop . . . it's pretty decent. I like the U-pass I think that it's really really good. Domestic student

I actually enjoy living at home a lot. I actually could come to campus but I prefer living at home. . . I am pretty close to my family. It's actually what keeps me sane, I don't know if I'm not close to people who are 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. Domestic student

Peer group interactions

Some international students commented that their friendships, like the year previous, were determined by their living arrangements. Most international students said they had both domestic and international friends. Some of the students commented that although their friends were both domestic and international, these friends were of the same racial background.

Most of my friends they are Chinese people, whether they are immigrant or like Canadian. I think only one of my friends is Korean, and he returned to Korea for the army and he is no longer here. International student

Some international students reported that it was now easier to meet domestic students. However, keeping friends from the same culture was important for them as well, especially in terms of similar understandings of culture, humour, and experiences.

It's easier as time goes by [to meet domestic students]. 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. International student

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 favourites so we can not make conversation. Sometimes, we talk about homework and assignments and stuff. International student

One international student commented that even though he lived on-campus in first year and second year, the friendships he has made were quite different. In fact, several students commented on their changing friendships. It was not that they wanted to change friends, but it was difficult to maintain long lasting, deep connections with so many people that they had meet during first year through residence, in classes, or other campus activities. Once students changed the situation in which they met (e.g., classes or residences), it was harder to maintain those friendships.

When you live with people around you, you are usually friends with them because you spent lots of time with them. It's a little regret that I have, in that I'm not staying in contact with the ones from last year as much as I would like to. Some of them were exchange students so it's even harder to do keep in touch with them. International student

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

Domestic students, especially those who lived in residence, indicated they had maintained friendships from their first year and created new friendships. From their discussion, it was evident there were various types of friendships. Acquaintances were met in classes, other campus socialization, or from residence. Close friendships were those in whom domestic students invested time and make the effort to “stay connected with.”

I'm with the girls that were my friends from last year, they are some of my closest friends. Domestic student

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. Domestic student

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.
Domestic student

There was little discussion from the domestic students about who their friends were. However, when discussing diversity of campus, several domestic students shared they were roommates or acquaintances with international students.

Family Relationships

In terms of family relationships, most international and domestic students felt they had a more relaxed relationship with their parents compared to their first year. For example, their parents were calling less often and more comfortable with their son or daughter living away from home.

They call me a lot less. I don't talk to them half as much as I did last year. 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.
International student

One international student had been living independently prior to coming to UBC and felt there had been no change in his relationship with his parents.

I've been kinda 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 academics. International student

Another student talked to his mother frequently citing his culture's view of parents as the reason.

Say like almost every other day, and it's usually not a long conversation just to show that I still exist here and that kinda of stuff and usually we will talk a bit longer 1-2 hours like once a week or once a month. I just want to because I think this is only for my family way, 'cause they still want to know I'm here and still alive here. International student

Domestic students also varied in their frequency of talking to parents. One student who seemed independent of his parents spoke to them infrequently, while another student indicated that he contacted his parents on a regular (but also infrequent) basis.

Well, because they are far east - I'm here in the west - communicating is difficult. Domestic student

Compared to my family, I e-mail my mother a few times a week, my step mom and I are also close I talk to her too . . . I phone home like once a month just because I'm done all my homework it is actually too late to call back to Toronto to call everyone. Domestic student

Some international and domestic students (especially those not from Vancouver) were using MSN, e-mail or Skype, both online communication tools, to speak to their parents. An international student e-mailed her parents and called her parents since that was the way her mother preferred to communicate.

Diversity on Campus

Diversity was seen as something dependent again on interactions. One student claimed that students in his program were mostly Chinese; therefore, he socialized with them.

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

Another remarked that by living in residence she and others were experiencing diversity.

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, Mexico and Australia. International student

Some students indicated that there was a lot of diversity in their professors. Most students acknowledged that many of their professors were not Canadian.

Domestic students' interactions with international students on a meaningful level seemed to occur within the residences and was positively viewed by most in the focus group. Although one had met international friends in their classes, it was localized and context specific to the course. Some students did speak of the international student events; a few domestic students mentioned attending these events but generally felt the events were not well advertised.

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. Domestic student

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. Domestic student

My roommates are from Hong Kong, Denmark, china, Halifax, Philadelphia and I'm from Toronto - my roommates are fantastic. I have the best roommates I mean I'm kept up nights debating different political or social issues and it's super interesting and as well they are not too messy so I really enjoy it. Domestic student

Financial experiences

Most international and domestic students maintained that their tuition was extremely high, although they acknowledged that it was less expensive than other countries. Housing and parking fees were also an issue for some international students.

It's extremely high. I think it still tends to rise, the increase in tuition fees every year. Worse they increase the housing fee every year by like 2.25% or something so we are actually getting an increased fee and we are required to take more credits this year than last year so one credit is \$500 so it is more money. International student

I think that it's terrible, I think that it comes with the territory of getting a degree in higher education. It's not a good thing but it's . . . I guess I kind of look at the States and then I look at Canada and I think it's not so bad. Domestic student

One international student stated that although the university was consulting with students about the tuition increases, she did not feel that the university was listening to her. Other international students agreed with her comments. Similar concerns were also raised by domestic students during their focus group.

It's kind of funny, I always get by e-mail these tuition surveys online and they never take into account international students. Like I always fill them out and I fill in at the end where there is comments and they ask you questions where you kinda answer what you pay and stuff but they never really talk about paying tuition as an international student. International student

It's one of these things . . . there's nothing you can do because the student's don't really have much of a voice I don't think. You just got to live with it. Domestic student

Another international student claimed that if international students were aware of the increasing tuition they would have chosen another institution. However, the US and UK were seen as less safe destinations. He commented that many international students were returning to their home countries because of the cost of an international education and the quality of the degree being seen similar.

I know lots of friends including myself, if they study back in their home country, for example, Korea or Japan, it's actually going to be cheaper next year or the year afterwards so people are going to make different choices if the tuition is going to keep increasing. 'Cause I don't see any difference in the degree, it's just that the tuition itself is increasing and we are paying more for the same thing. International student

Most indicated that if they had known about increasing costs prior to starting at UBC, they would have changed their minds about coming to Canada. However, these same students felt that their investment in time and tuition already at UBC, along with considering the cost of relocating and making new friends, was not worth changing institutions at this time. International students commented that they would like to see added value for the fees that they were paying, particularly in terms of services.

Domestic students also discussed how they were financing their education. While some believed that they were better at managing their money, others claimed that having enough money for school was a challenge. Some students indicated that while they had some parental support, they were paying for their own education through scholarships, bank loans, part-time work, and/or summer jobs. The challenge of going to school and worrying about finances seemed to vary depending on the resourcefulness of the student in searching for funding (e.g., part-time work, scholarships, and savings).

My parents only pay for my meal plan and I pay for everything else . . . and it's manageable as long as you work continuously through the summer. I worked four jobs last summer. . . and it also helps that I got scholarships the first year. Domestic student

I borrow, scholarships, using savings and money my parents give me . . . I probably pay half and my mom pays half but she considers the scholarship . . . my half. Domestic student

A few domestic students were also taking on student loans, although they maintained that student loans were not enough to cover their living expenses.

Well, they give you an estimate, but the estimate is never as good as it says, I enjoy the way that they do it. I don't actually think that there is a deadline – I haven't actually had to fall back on what I get thanks to working really hard this summer. But last year I know I did and it really didn't pay enough. Domestic student

Intentions for next year (plans for next year; career goals)

International and domestic students had a variety of plans for their third year of university. Most of the international students intended to stay on at UBC and continue in their respective programs. One international student indicated she might “*might leave for a year to take a break to do go a volunteer project somewhere*” but did not have any concrete plans. Some international and domestic students were making plans to apply for co-op job placements and start a work placement in third year.

Apply for co-op program, so perhaps this time next year I will probably start to work full time and at the end of August return to my studies. But this is all based on whether or not I can get a co-op job. International student

Approximately half of the domestic students were thinking of switching to other programs within UBC. The remaining students seemed to be happy with their current programs and were continuing on with their plans.

If I pass, then I will stay. . . but you have to pass everything to go ahead. Domestic student

I'm definitely going to stay where I am I'm really excited about my co-op this summer and the job opportunities and travel opportunities that I have, the monetary income that I could potentially get. There is a lot of freedom. Domestic student

I'm thinking of switching to film studies I don't think that it actually matters 'cause I could say arts or archeology or whatever, I just want some, I guess I have a more better idea of what I actually want to do rather than what I'm good at. Domestic student

I'm going to say biology, I've been thinking about switching to arts but I'm too scared to do it so I've decided biology. Domestic student

Despite possible academic program changes, many of the domestic students rated the quality of their second year as 8-9 out of 10. A few said their second year had improved slightly from first year or had not changed and gave the ranking of 6-7 out of 10.

In terms of their career plans, some international students acknowledged that as first year students, they had not been sure of their goals. However, now as second year students they were more certain of their plans and had taken action to make these career or program goals possible (e.g., changing programs).

My goals always changed during my years out here, but now I think, at least for now I'm pretty sure about what I am doing because my professor is really amazing and I just find my interests, so I've made my mind up. So yeah, it has changed from the first year but I don't think it will change a lot over the next year or so. International student

I've changed programs and stuff, so I'm happy now. International student

Other international students indicated their goals had not changed since first year, it was just a matter of preserving to attain them.

I think for myself, my goals are the same, it's just a matter of trying to obtain them which is pretty hard. International student

It's usually, what you estimate and what the actual situation is usually different and in my circumstances I think my goals are, I estimated myself to be of higher ability than I am right now so I have to work hard. International student

A few students within the domestic student focus group had a vision of their future plans. One student planned to go on to graduate school and do research. Others wished to graduate and get a job in the program or field they were studying. For example, one student knew from high school he wanted to be an engineer and as a second year student was continuing on with that plan.

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. Domestic student

Some did not have any plans, they were going to finish their degrees and see if enjoyable pathways opened to them. This indecision or lack of commitment was a contrast to the international students.

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. Domestic student

Institutional commitments

When asked how they felt about UBC, many international students felt satisfied with their experiences as a second year student.

I'm happy here, I'm fairly happy with the school, and I'm very happy where I am. International student

However, one international student was thinking about transferring because she was not satisfied with the quality of education she was received at UBC. She was thinking of going to a small institution that had a more liberal arts focus, more discussions and less theory.

I've been thinking about transferring actually all last semester, because I don't think that the quality of education is what it could be. International student

In discussing UBC's academic reputation, some students felt that UBC was not what they expected. Some others saw UBC as a good institution compared to others based on the grades their friends were getting.

Most people from Hong Kong think that the education system here is easier than it is back in Hong Kong, and I was kind of stunned when I came here to learn that it is actually kind of hard.

International student

I have friends who are studying in the US as well. I don't know if it's much different, but they told me that they are studying really hard as well, and they are in fourth year and they are only getting the same grades that most people like myself are getting.

International student

Culture of university

International and domestic students generally liked the culture of the university, particularly the community culture of the campus. One international student remarked that the ability to take part in local events, particularly music concerts was also a great aspect of UBC.

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. As far as a cultural thing, being in the city, I mean that Vancouver is way bigger and more diverse than my home town, that's pretty cool.

International student

Generally, domestic students indicated that UBC was student focused. Most domestic students claimed that their fellow students made their experiences enjoyable and created the culture of UBC. However, as the student below explains, she did not feel overly connected to UBC, but people were making her experience positive.

The people make it good . . . the people I met here are really good, I enjoy being friends with them, 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.

Domestic student

Many international and domestic students expressed concern over the development of University Town and other parts of the campus. Some international students believed that the development will change the community environment of UBC. A few of the domestic students saw the lack of consultation on the development of the campus as disrespectful to students and as a contradiction to the development of student leadership and voice.

I really like the bubble feel of UBC like it is it's 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.

International student

In terms of University Town, the AMS is pretty much frustrated with it but they are not even considering that fourth option of nothing happening. There is definitely a sense of just hitting your head against the ceiling or something like if you want to have a voice. I think that a lot of people, like you said, a lot of people are not in favour of it. It's kind of frustrating because UBC talks about making this your community and democracy and it's just kind of like this disconnect. Especially at UBC a university that prides itself on creating future leaders, however perhaps it is kind of squashing their political voice. Domestic student

The general conclusion could be made that most international and domestic students were not pleased with the concept of University Town. Some international students worried that the development was trying to bring the city into campus, especially in terms of housing developments. Others saw this development as a way of taking affordable on-campus housing away from students. Several domestic and international students argued that no rationale had been made for the development. Others indicated it was a way for the university to make money and saw the development not being a benefit to students.

I think that it's just ridiculous and I don't understand the purpose of it, other than the economic benefits to the school, because honestly, I haven't heard any good justification for it. International student

They are trying to bring the urban part of the city onto campus, like through housing. International student

The Safeway nearest campus already charges a lot more than the Safeway at McDonald because they know they are going to reap the profits from the students. That shopping mall probably isn't going to be for groceries it's going to be for expensive clothing and things, that we university kids actually don't need that stuff on campus. Domestic student

I don't like that UBC has become a commercial place. I want UBC to become a pure research and academic research oriented, not to be a market place. International student

I expect the development but the point they are developing it for is not students at all, it's all these private contractors and stuff. Domestic student

One international student went so far to say that “*UBC is kind of losing its reputation by bringing a shopping mall here, because if I wanted to be in a shopping mall I probably would have gone to the University of Toronto.*” He continued by saying that he thought the community and atmosphere that attracted many of the students to UBC (e.g., location, beauty) would be destroyed by such development. Some domestic students also felt the same way about the development of campus and its negative impact on its reputation.

I'm quite convinced that UBC will lose the reputation that it had that got me and [my friend] to come here from Toronto to come out to Vancouver, never having been to this city. It's the most beautiful campus in Canada, that it is really laid back and it's a very relaxed place to come and do your education. We came because it was inexpensive and it's because it's Vancouver and this campus like you said is pretty. Domestic student

UBC is just here and we made that choice to come out here and they had their choice to come here. . . I can't give it credit - it's just a nice location and it was built up to this point, but in terms of where it is going, I'm not too happy about the [development]. Domestic student

Identification with university

Most of the international students felt they were committed to the institution, even the student who had indicated earlier in the focus group she wants to take a year off.

Yeah, I take pride in UBC but I don't feel stuck here, I want to take a year off to travel. International student

Although domestic students were not planning to leave UBC, which could be interpreted as a sign of commitment to their education, students had varied reactions in terms of being a “proud” UBC student. Some students did not think that wearing costly UBC paraphernalia as a sign of their identification. The students in Engineering, a field with a tradition and reputation of letter jackets, had mixed opinions on the value of the jacket. While some agreed with the tradition and pride of being an engineer in wearing the jacket, another student felt the jacket (along with other university labelled items) as a waste of money and outdated tradition.

They are trying to change the stereotype! Because there are a lot of people like us - they are subsidizing the jackets, like every jacket they sell, they are trying to get rid of the stigma. . . like of the 600 first years, like 150 of them have the red jackets, which is ridiculous since last year they sold 30. Domestic student

Domestic students in other departments felt that some of their t-shirts and items were expensive and also “ugly.”

In terms of UBC paraphernalia - I wouldn't wear UBC not necessarily cause of the university, but because it is really expensive. Domestic student

Yeah, chemistry sells shirts and stuff like that, but they are so ugly, I'm embarrassed to wear them. Domestic student

The UBC motto is *Tu'um Est*. This motto has two interpretations “it is up to you” or “it is yours.” Students were asked what this meant to them in second year. The international student

discussion focused on the interpretations of these phrases. One student felt that they were one in the same.

I don't see the difference between "it's yours" and "up to you" because say if there is an opportunity there, and that is yours but it's up to you whether you actively seek that opportunity. And I think that opportunity are just there, they are yours, but it is really up to you to get it or not. International student

Approximately half of the domestic students felt that the motto meant "it's up to you." As one student stated "*I would say that it's up to you, I don't really see what is mine here.*" Others agreed with the international students who believed it meant both. The opportunities were already in place and it's up to you to take it and make something of it.

I would say that it's anything that you want but it's just up to you as to what you want that to be, it's still there it yours, but it's up to you. Domestic student

I think it's yours more like you have some sort of decision on what goes on around here, and we don't really, it feels really good to tell someone about this - perhaps you can do something about it.
Domestic student

Discussion and Conclusion

When asked what UBC could be doing to satisfy their personal and academic life, the international students had several recommendations particularly in the area of improving on-campus housing. In particular, many felt that UBC should get rid of the housing lottery. As this report suggested, this lottery was unfair to international students who come to Vancouver to study at UBC. International students felt they should have priority over domestic students for on-campus housing because domestic students often have family support and knowledge of the off-campus housing options. Many international students in on-campus housing return home for the summer break, yet have to pay full rent to maintain their space in housing over the summer. Therefore, international students suggested that the university with storage space (or lower rent, permit sublets) so during the summer when they return home they do not have to pay full rent on an empty apartment. Related to housing, students also felt that UBC had a monopoly on on-campus housing so it should use its power wisely when developing programs and policies that meet international student housing needs. Another recommendation from the international students was improving the exam schedule so that they could have their exams closer together so they could go home sooner.

Domestic students felt that UBC needs to listen to student voice. Another student suggested that UBC use the money it was getting from development to improve the quality of teaching or decrease the cost of education. Others wanted an increase the amount of activities available to second year students.

Increase the extracurricular activities and decrease the super developments that don't actually benefit students at all. Actually use the money students are paying to increase the quality of teaching or use the money they are making from all these developments to decrease the cost of education, or something like that it seems like we are being hammered on every side. Domestic student

Domestic and international students felt that academic programs should do more to overcome the reputation they have for weeding out students. The competitive nature of some programs harmed student moral. In relation to their academic programs, second year students also wanted to have more courses offered, particularly core courses required for their programs. This recommendation also relates to number of seats in programs and was viewed by students as a way of weeding out students or limiting access to the program. Both student groups valued the U-Pass for its convenience and cost savings to students.