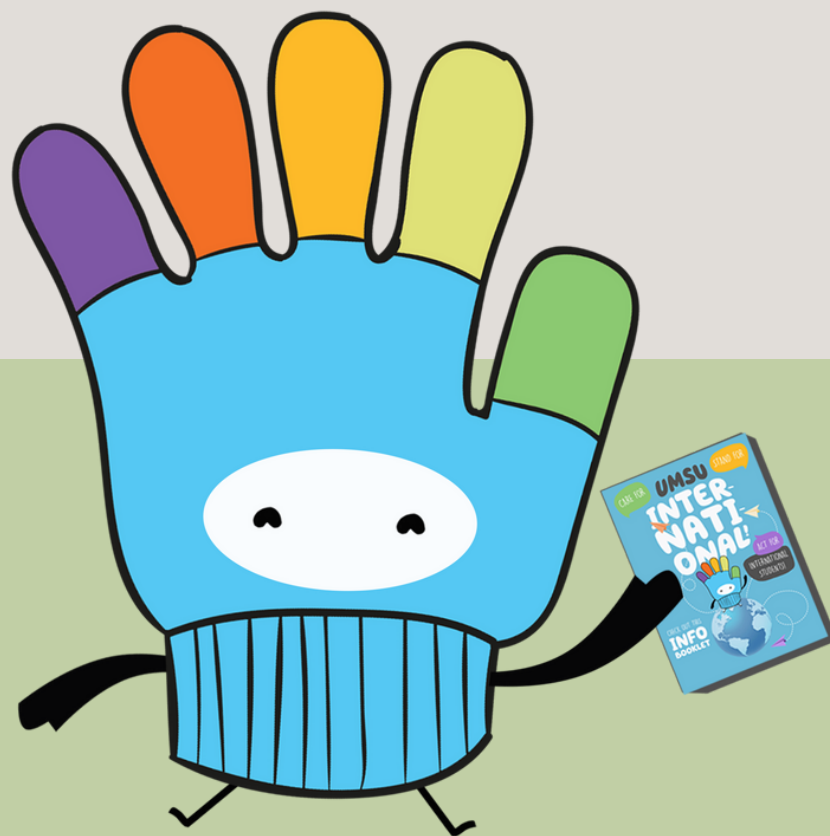


INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY REPORT 2023



UMSU INTERNATIONAL

Care for, stand for, act for international students

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BACKGROUND

UMSU International (referred to in this document as "we", "us", or "our") is the official representative body for all international students at the University of Melbourne (referred to in this document as "the University"), regardless of whether they are an undergraduate, graduate, study-abroad, or exchange student.

As one of the largest international student organisations in Australia, we are responsible for holding various events, publishing surveys, providing outreach and resources, performing giveaways, and attending regular meetings with the University to constantly improve the experience of international students at the University of Melbourne.

As a part of our mission to advocate for international students, we organised the International Student Survey (ISS). This survey aims to enhance our understanding of currently enrolled international students and their experiences at the University. In 2023, the ISS was conducted from the 27th of March to the 30th of April and focused on nine different sections: UMSU International Awareness and Perception, Accommodation, University Experience, Academic Experience, Graduate Experience, Health, Safety and Inclusivity, Work and Employment, and Financial Situation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE UNIVERSITY AND STUDENTS

UMSU International expresses heartfelt gratitude to everyone who has contributed to the publishing of this report, and we extend our thanks to all the participants who made this report possible. We believe that this comprehensive report will provide crucial insights to the University and its stakeholders, enabling them to make necessary decisions to enhance the experience of international students at the University of Melbourne.

Furthermore, we would like to acknowledge and thank certain staff at the University who played pivotal roles in preparing and delivering ISS 2023. Nicole Carrie, Project Officer, Chancellery (Academic), has dedicated countless hours collating feedback and preparing questions from diverse stakeholders within the University, greatly enhancing the relevance and effectiveness of our survey.

A special thanks goes to Tim Brabazon, Director, Student Success, whose invaluable suggestions and support with survey promotions significantly increased our reach within the international student community at the University of Melbourne.

Lastly, immense appreciation to the entire UMSU International 2022/2023 Committee. Your remarkable dedication and willingness to prioritise the ISS, even amidst other planned programming, were truly remarkable. Your passionate campaigning, promotions, and unwavering support exemplify the spirit of a united and enthusiastic group. We are grateful for your outstanding efforts and teamwork.



SANSKAR AGARWAL
PRESIDENT
UMSU INTERNATIONAL



SHEA LAW
VICE-PRESIDENT (E&W)
UMSU INTERNATIONAL

METHODOLOGY

The International Student Survey was conducted using Typeform and was embedded on UMSU International's website. The ISS could also be accessed directly through the survey's link or our social media.

The ISS is designed to be anonymous, however students were required to provide their University of Melbourne student email and student ID for validity verification and as a form of contact for lucky draw prize collection. All personal information is managed under the Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic) and the Health Records Act 2001 (Vic).

The survey questions consisted of: (1) multiple-choice questions, where participants could choose one or multiple listed answers to the questions or fill in their answers in the "other" option, and (2) ranking questions. The ranking questions were used to indicate satisfaction or level of agreement with different statements, with 0 indicating completely dissatisfied and 5 for very satisfied. The scale 3, 4, and 5 indicates the different degrees of satisfaction, with 3 indicating somewhat satisfied.

The survey also allowed participants to provide us with extra comments and/or suggestions in each session that the survey might not have covered or required strong justification.

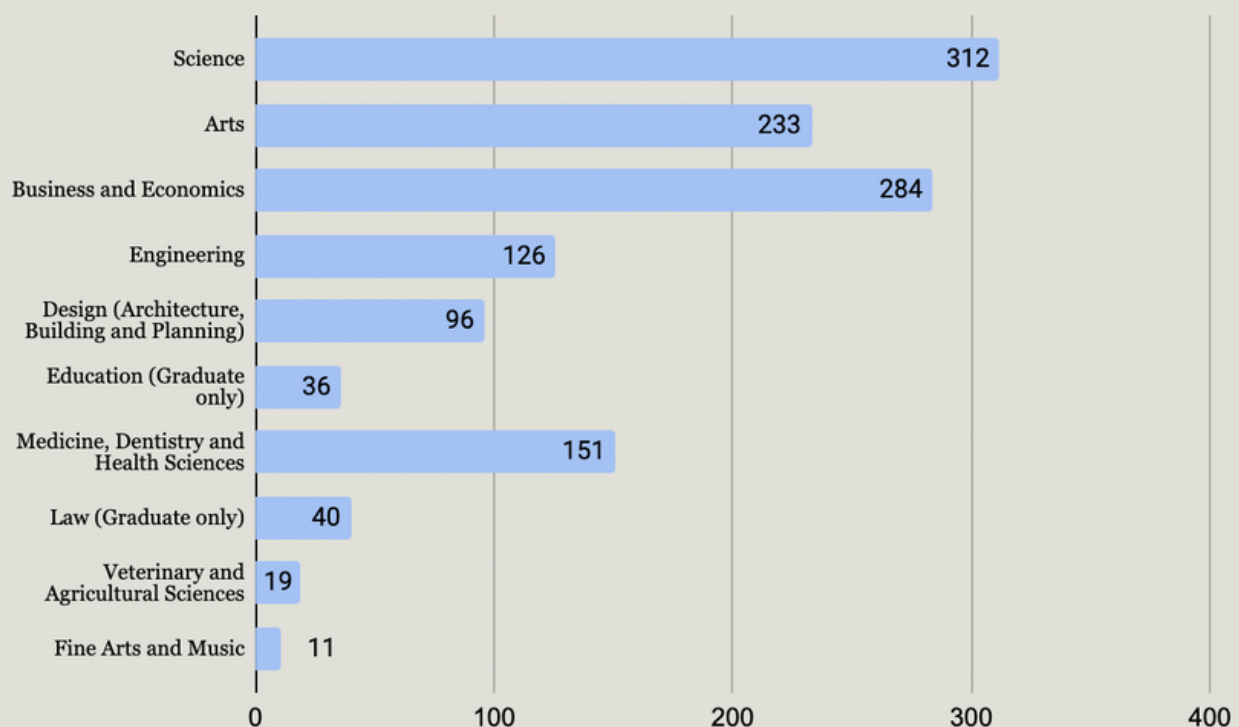
A total of 1666 responses were collected, and 1569 of them were identified as valid responses. As this report focused on international students' responses, 1317 international students who provided a valid response will be referred to in this document as "students", "they", "them" or "their".

DEMOGRAPHICS

The international students who conducted this survey comprised of 1239 full-time students and 78 students who were on exchange. In terms of academic levels, most of the students were pursuing their Bachelor's or Master's degree, with 742 and 506 students respectively. 58 students were studying for a PhD degree, and 6 for Honours.

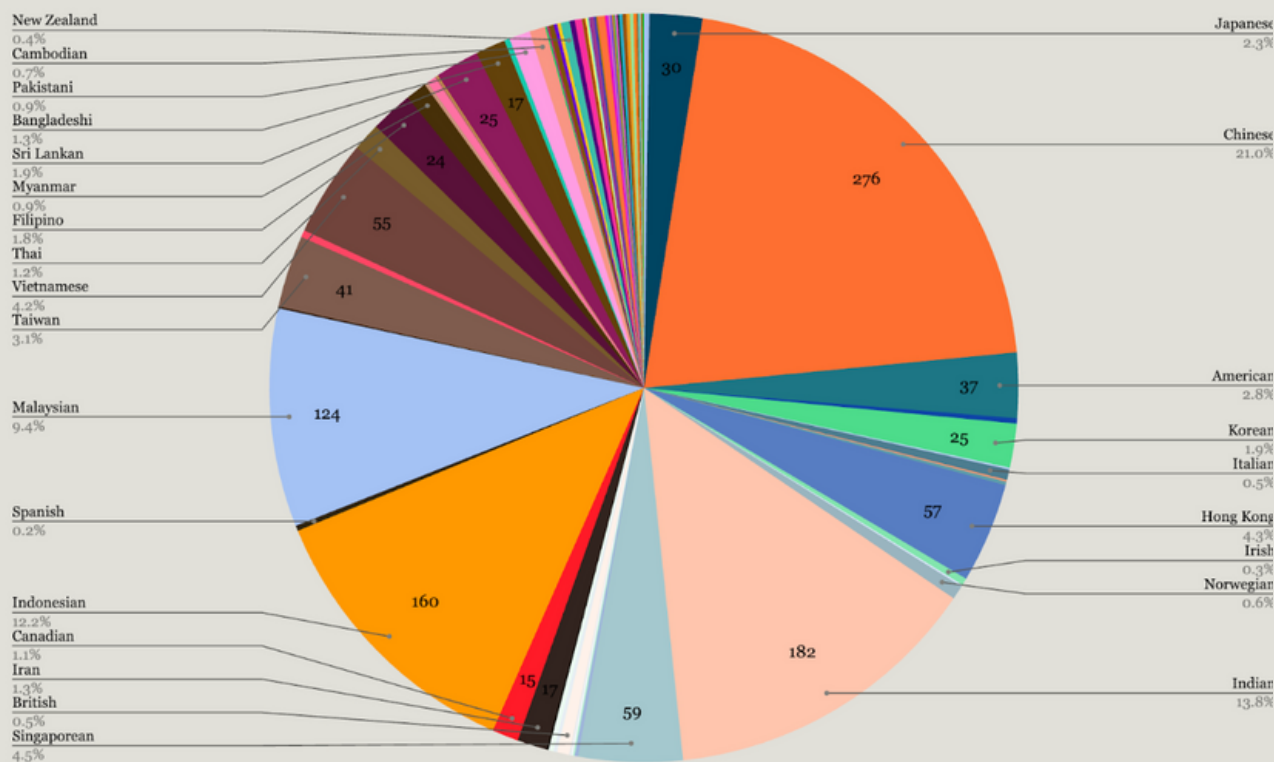
Students contributed to a richly diverse academic landscape across various faculties. Predominantly, the Faculties of Science and Business and Economics accommodated the largest contingents, 312 and 284 students respectively, followed by the Faculty of Arts with 233 students. Other faculties, while hosting smaller proportions, contribute to the comprehensive dispersion of students.

Figure 1. Faculty Distribution of International Students Who Surveyed in ISS 2023.



Regarding the nationality of students, the largest cohort hailed from China (n=276), followed by India (n=182) and Indonesia (n=160). Other notable populations are from Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Japan.

Figure 2. Distribution of Students' Nationality in Percentage.



ACCOMMODATION

Housing plays a pivotal role in the student experience, influencing not only academic performance but also overall well-being and satisfaction. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the variety of housing options chosen by international students and the extent of their awareness and engagement with the University's accommodation services.

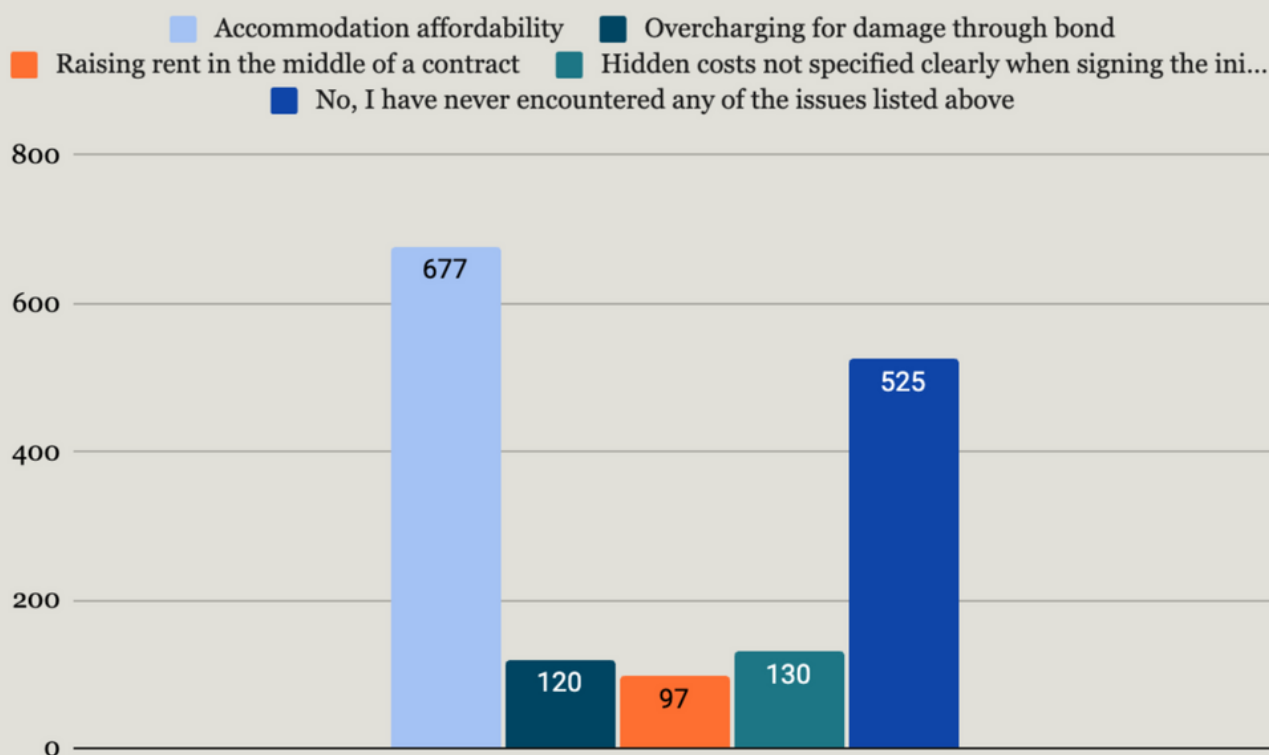
Key Findings

Regarding accommodation types, the majority of international students lived in Apartments/Share Houses with other people (n=511) or in Student Apartments (n=485). A smaller portion lived alone in Apartments/Share houses (n=161), stayed with family (n=83), in Residential Colleges (n=49), or opted for homestay accommodation (n=15).

Students have encountered various issues in securing accommodation, with a significant number facing challenges related to inflexible contract dates (n=355) and a lack of accommodation supply (n=328).

Financial concerns also loom large, with 677 students facing issues of accommodation affordability, followed by hidden costs (n=130). 525 students have never encountered any financial difficulties in this regard (see Figure 3 for more information).

Figure 3. Financial Issues that Students Have Encountered.



Housekeeping issues mainly pertain to slow response times for fixing issues (n=379) and dirty communal spaces (n=236). Safety aspects also raised concerns, with 265 students reporting issues related to the lack of security and/or overnight staff, followed by a lack of transportation or insufficient street lighting at night (n=144).

Despite these accommodation challenges, awareness of available services remains limited, with only 361 students being aware of UMSU Legal Service, 286 students knowing about the University Emergency Accommodation Services, and a significant 703 students unaware of any listed services.

Financial issues were found to be the most impactful aspect when considering and dealing with accommodation (n=296), followed by being able to secure an accommodation (n=233), while safety issues ranked as the least impactful aspect (n=383).

Notable Comments:

In addition to the challenges identified, students have also reported experiencing noise problems and encountering old and dirty facilities in their accommodations. Noise disturbances have significantly affected a number of students, impacting their study, sleep, and overall well-being.

Recommendations:

To address these issues, the University should intensify its efforts to raise awareness about the available accommodation services through dedicated orientation sessions or comprehensive online resources. Furthermore, advocating for more flexible housing contract dates and collaborating with housing providers to alleviate concerns would be beneficial for international students.

For the significant financial issues reported, the university should strongly consider providing subsidised accommodation or financial aid for international students. These measures will go a long way in improving the overall housing experience and well-being of students.

UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE

The university experience encompasses various aspects of university life including studies, food, events, facilities, and more. This section aims to investigate the satisfaction of students with the University's services and facilities.

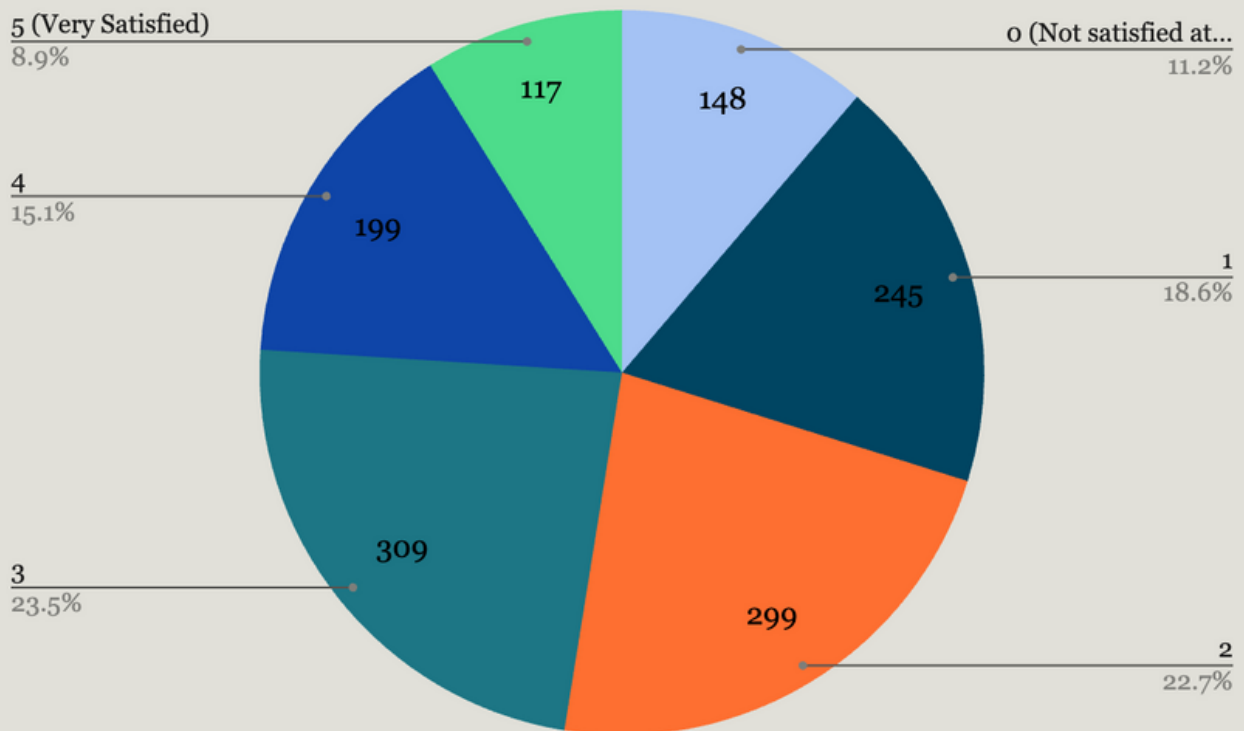
From our findings, students are satisfied with the quality of the facilities and the learning system. However, they strongly requested affordable food and beverage options on campus.

Key Findings

Generally, students expressed contentment with the academic staff (n=1087), the Learning Management System (LMS) (n=1133), along with university facilities (n=1156).

However, there were prominent concerns raised by students, including the lack of affordable food and beverage options on campus and the qualities of the University's health, mental health, and career services. A significant majority (n=692) indicated varying degrees of dissatisfaction, with 148 students stating they were completely unsatisfied (see Figure 4). This alarming number stands out in comparison to other statistics.

Figure 4. Student Satisfaction with Affordable Food Options on Campus



Regarding the University's health services, 378 students responded that they were at least somewhat unsatisfied, with 55 indicating they were completely unsatisfied.

As for the University's mental health services, 350 students expressed dissatisfaction to different degrees, while 372 students indicated they were at least somewhat unsatisfied with the university's career services.

Notable Comments

Students have raised several concerns about their university experience, including the lack of period products on campus, the absence of affordable food options, and limited social events. Moreover, students expressed a desire for more opportunities and support for all types of students, such as subject-specific tutoring and fostering a culture of information sharing.

Additionally, students at other campuses, like Southbank and Werribee, feel neglected in terms of social events and welfare support. These collective issues significantly impact the overall student experience, warranting attention from the University.

Recommendations

To address the lack of affordable food options, the University should provide a wider variety of affordable food and beverage choices on campus, considering food discounts and subsidised meals at planned University cafeterias. The University's Food Security plan should incorporate Halal, vegan, vegetarian, and diabetes-friendly food options.

Creating more safe spaces for specific purposes is essential for students in need, such as dedicated prayer rooms, disability rooms, and women's rooms. Providing these safe spaces will contribute to a more inclusive and supportive environment for all students.

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

Students' academic experience at the University is of utmost importance, as their studies are the focal point of going to university in the first place. Therefore, it is crucial for their course content and teaching quality to be at the highest standard. This section analyses the overall satisfaction of students towards their course and University academic services as well as the academic difficulties that they face.

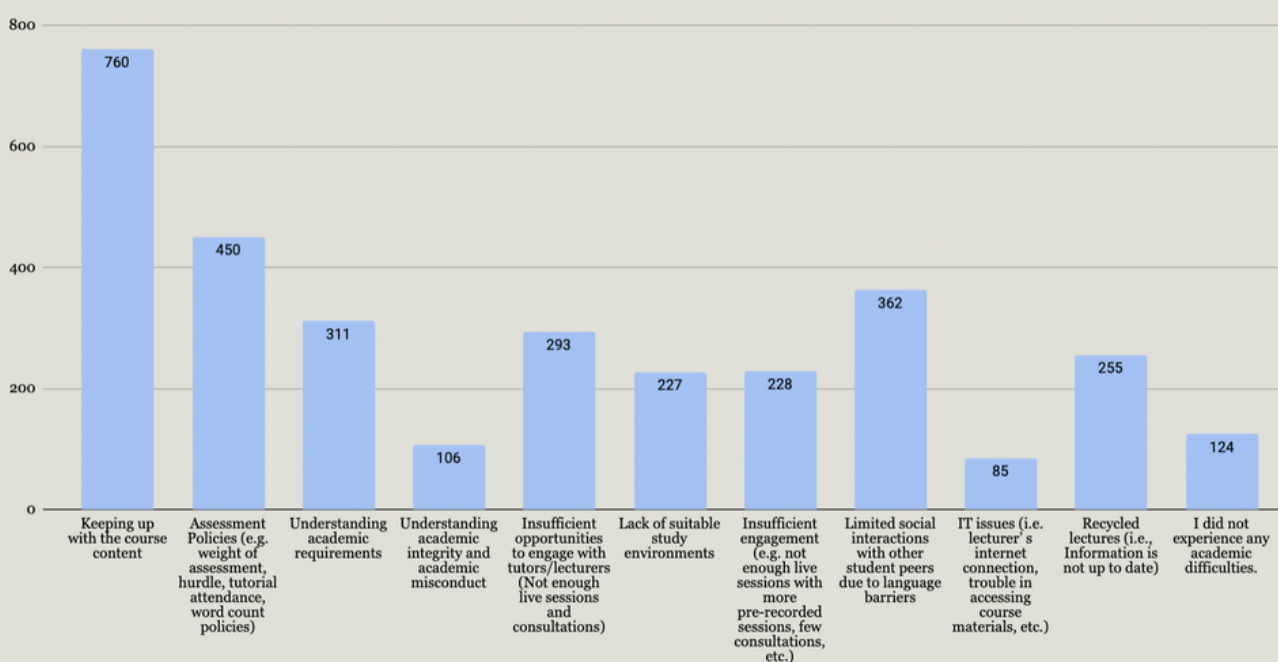
Students are satisfied with most of the aspects of their academic experience. However, many students face numerous challenges with their studies, including keeping up with course content and the difficulty of their assessment policies.

Key Findings

Students were generally satisfied with their academic experience across multiple aspects, as well as the academic services that the University provides. Regarding the quality of the courses, 1115 students have shown different levels of satisfaction, with the majority scoring a 4 (n = 483). Students also agreed that the University has provided enough materials and sessions to understand the course thoroughly (n = 1075), and that their academic experience has helped them feel more prepared for life after graduation (n = 1120).

With regards to academic difficulties, most of the students encountered some form of academic difficulties. The main difficulties were keeping up with course content (n = 760), assessment policies (n = 450), limited social interactions with peers due to language barriers (n = 362), and understanding academic requirements (n = 311).

Figure 5. Academic Difficulties Students Have Encountered



In regards to the University's academic services, students found tutor and lecturer consultations are the most useful (n = 951), followed by Stop 1 (n = 901). While students generally found the Peer Mentoring Program useful to different degrees (n = 598), a considerable number found them not very useful (n = 423), and some (n=98) found them completely useless.

Notable Comments

Some notable comments include students finding the study load of 4 subjects per semester to be too intensive, with too many pre-class readings and assignments causing stress. Students also expressed concerns that some lecturers' and lecture qualities were unacceptable. For instance, lack of engagement, live sessions that were being replaced with pre-recorded videos, and lack of good teaching skills or conciseness in presenting information and materials.

Students are demanding more practical elements in their courses to better prepare them for future employment, as well as access to previous exam papers, and more opportunities to interact with their peers.

Recommendations

It is strongly recommended to reduce the number of pre-recorded lectures, and increase interaction between students and staff. In addition, course content and resources should be re-evaluated more often to ensure that the quality improves year-to-year instead of being reused constantly. The focus should also be on improving academic support services and the teaching quality of staff.

Lastly, there is a strong demand to review and amend the high-stakes exam and its policies, as it is unfair to review students' study progress solely on a 2-3 hour exam, disregarding their hard work throughout the semester.

GRADUATE EXPERIENCE

This section analyses the experience of graduate students at the University and the issues that they currently face. According to The University of Melbourne (2023), 49% of students are graduates while of the ISS respondents, 42.5% are either Masters or PhD students and a total of 569 students participated in this section¹.

As such, graduate students make up a significant portion of the University but numerous graduate students have expressed their dissatisfaction with being underrepresented, and they have a lower level of satisfaction towards their overall university experience according to the ISS.

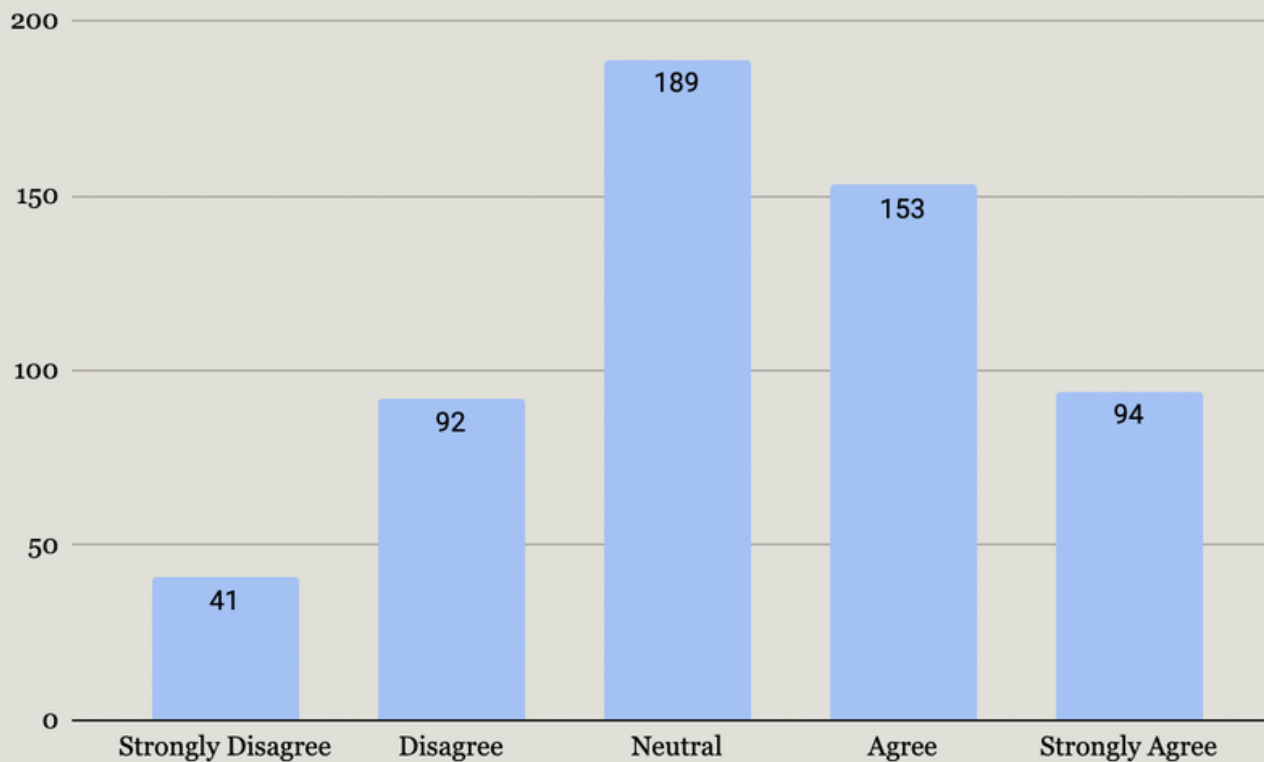
Key Findings

Many students agree that the University has provided good teaching materials for research purposes, with 259 students agreeing and 148 students strongly agreeing. The core subjects have provided essential knowledge and skills for their future career paths, with 235 students agreeing and 129 students strongly agreeing.

Nevertheless, students were not as favourable towards the other statements. With regard to the University providing opportunities for international graduate students to work on career-related projects, only 247 students agreed on different magnitudes, while around 23% of the students (n=133) disagreed with the statement (see Figure 6). Moreover, more than 101 students failed to agree that University seminars provided useful information regarding the role of academia in the Australian industry.

¹ The University of Melbourne. (2023). University of Melbourne: Australia's #1 university. Facts and Figures. <https://about.unimelb.edu.au/facts-and-figures>

Figure 6. Graduate Students' Satisfaction Towards the Opportunities Provided by the University to Work on Career-related Projects.



Notable Comments

Many students seek more networking and professional development-related opportunities, such as project-based learning and social events with industry experts, academic professionals and fellow peers in related careers.

Some students expressed the issues they had with limited career support and opportunities provided by the University, and had difficulty finding the peer mentoring program as graduate students. Therefore, they ask for additional support to be provided by the University for international students to obtain full working rights after graduation.



Recommendations

The University should increase the resources and opportunities catered towards international graduate students in terms of career-specific information and career-related projects, such as project-based learning.

Provide and/or integrate graduate programs and subjects with industrial practices and perspectives. These could provide a beneficial platform for graduate students to further engage and allow them to gain relevant skills and insights towards their career aspirations.

HEALTH, SAFETY, AND INCLUSIVITY

As students often encounter challenging situations, encompassing various issues from mental health concerns to instances of discrimination, ensuring their well-being and safety should be a top priority.

While some students are familiar with the available support services, many others remain unaware or face obstacles that hinder their access to getting help.

The survey results reveals concerning statistics regarding the prevalence of discrimination among students. Particularly troubling is the racism experienced by international students, highlighting a significant issue. It is worth noting that the issue of discrimination, especially racism, has also been reported in the ISS 2022 as a concerning issue. This underscores the persistent nature of the problem and emphasises the need for sustained efforts to address it.

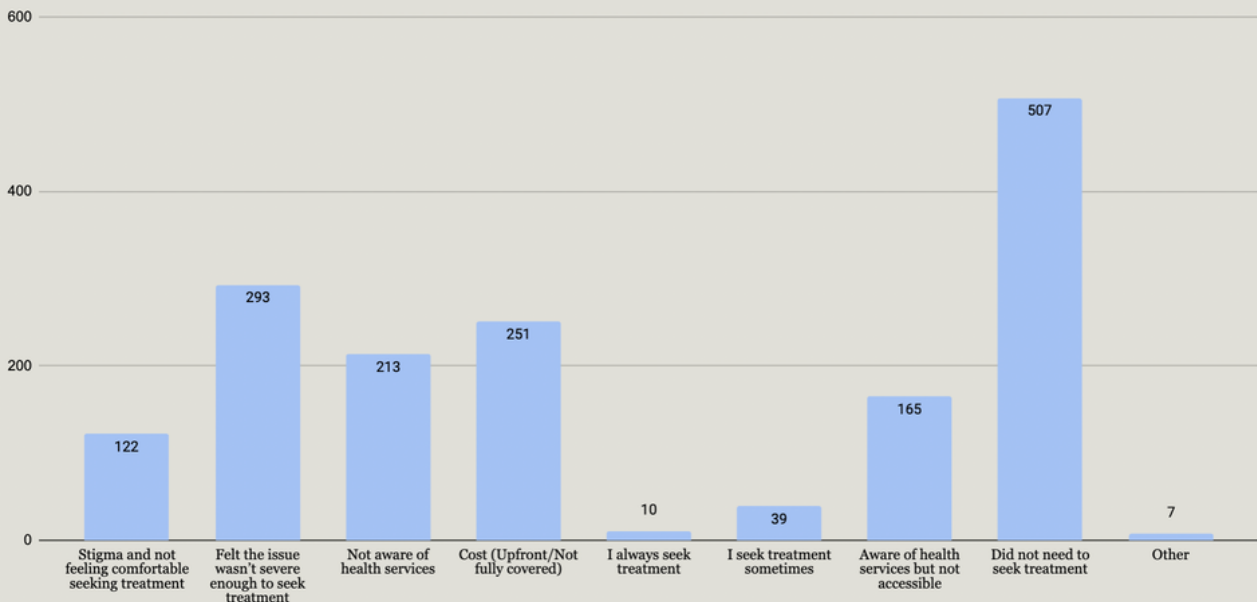
Health

Key Findings

Out of the students surveyed, 72.4% (n=953) reported that they have never sought any professional treatment. Regarding reasons for not seeking treatment, the majority of students (n=507) stated that they did not need to seek treatment, while 293 students felt their illness was not severe enough. Additionally, 251 students cited the cost of treatment as an obstacle, and 165 students reported facing accessibility issues when seeking these services.

Notably, there was a considerable increase in the number of students who were not aware of the available services (n=213) compared to the previous year's ISS report, where only 103 students reported being unaware. While this increase can be attributed to the rise in the total number of responses, it still indicates that a substantial proportion of students remain unaware of the health services offered.

Figure 7. Reasons Students Have Sought or Have Not Sought Treatment



Only 183 students stated that the University of Melbourne Health Services have been beneficial. Furthermore, a large amount of students are not aware of the services (n = 795), while 191 students reported dissatisfaction. 176 students found CAPS to be beneficial, however almost double the amount of students (n=346) had either never accessed CAPS, or reported that it was not beneficial.

Many students reported the lack of accessibility and availability for CAPS, highlighting a recurring comment. Similarly, whilst 144 students reported that the Sexual Health Products have been beneficial, 242 students have yet to access it. Many commented that there was insufficient advertisement, resulting in the lack of knowledge about these services.

Notable Comments

A large majority of students noted that they were not aware of the health services available, while those that were aware reported extensive wait time, lack of guidance, and availability in accessing these services.

Recommendations

The University should strive to expand their advertising efforts surrounding the health services and free women hygiene products in order to promote awareness of these services. Greater efforts should be put into creating a clearer guideline on how to access these services, such as guidance on the appointment process.

The University should increase resources to support students' physical and mental health, promote well-being, and provide platforms to develop positive social habits, thereby minimising the number of students utilising the health services. The University would then have a better capacity to prioritise students in need and reduce the waiting times for these students.

The University should look into potentially providing more opportunities for students to socialise with their peers, which can lead to improved mental health as fewer students will feel lonely or without emotional support.

Safety and Inclusivity

Key Findings

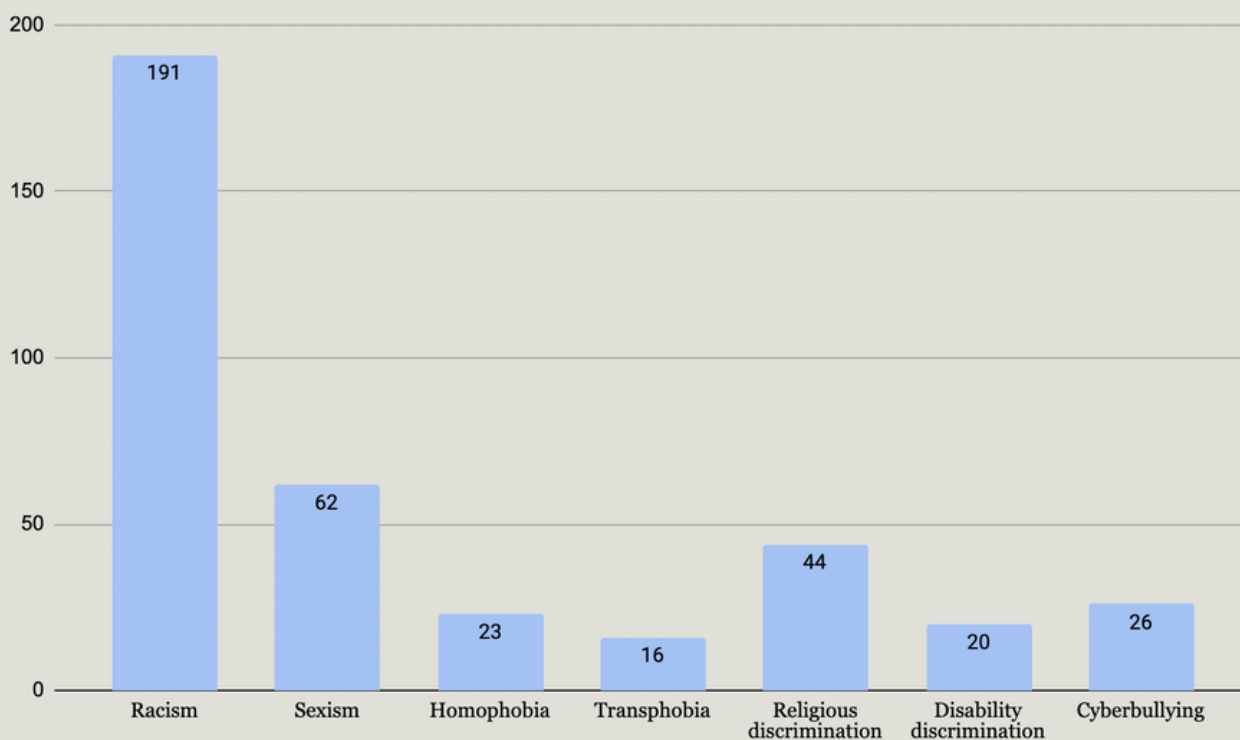
The majority of students expressed the desire for more safe spaces, including those for women (n=809), people of colour (n=543), people with disabilities (n=345), the LGBTQIA+ community (n=317), and prayer rooms for different religious groups.

On the other hand, 504 students reported being unaware of the available security services on campus. Given this, the University should prioritise increasing students' awareness of these services and ensuring easy access to them.

Discrimination remains a significant and pressing issue, affecting a concerning number of students (see Figure 8). Out of the surveyed participants, a total of 238 students reported witnessing or personally experiencing various forms of discrimination. The most prevalent form of discrimination reported by international students is racism, with 191 instances reported.

In addition, sexism was reported by 62 students, and religious discrimination by 44 students. These figures highlight the need for targeted efforts to address these pervasive issues.

Figure 8. Types of Discrimination Experienced by Students

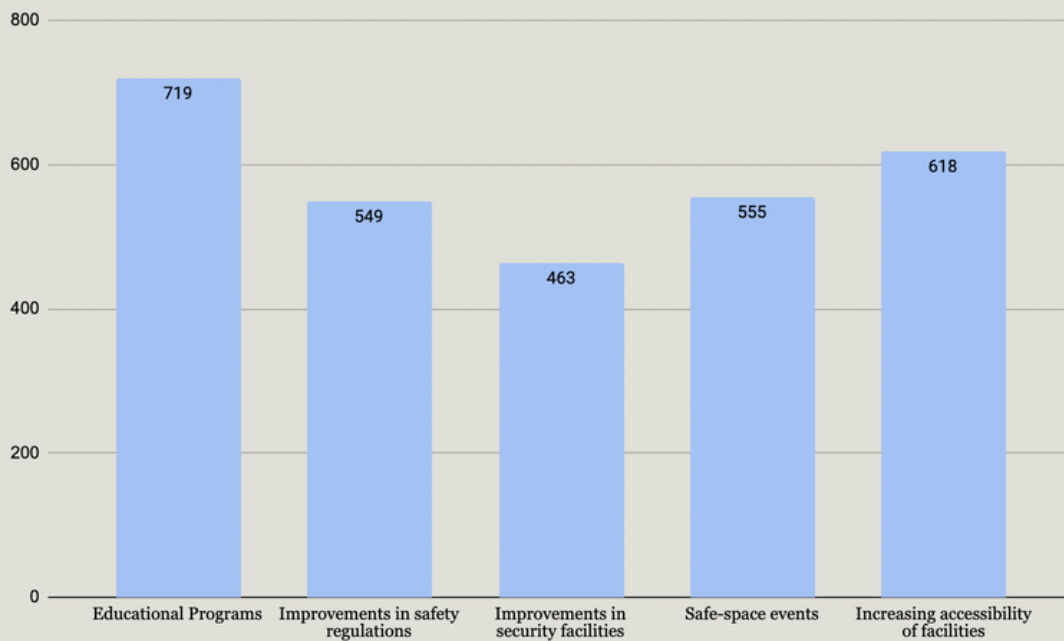


Notable Comment

Many students have reported that the main source of discrimination on campus comes from the teaching staff or other University personnel. In particular, a student reported that a University staff had outrightly questioned whether the student has autism. Some other notable feedback include teaching staff deliberately ignoring students, or clearly showing favouritism towards domestic students.

Considering the issues reported in this survey, students have recommended that the University put more effort into educational programs (n=719), improving safety regulations (n=549), improving security facilities (n=463), safe-space events (n=555), and increasing accessibility of facilities (n=618).

Figure 9. Recommendations to Reduce Discrimination Issues on Campus



Recommendations

Implementing clear guidelines for reporting incidents of discrimination, along with providing students with accessible information on who to contact, will help ensure they receive the necessary assistance promptly.

The University should also establish a comprehensive and transparent reporting framework for incidents of discrimination. This includes clearly outlining the steps involved in reporting, ensuring confidentiality, and swiftly addressing reported cases. Taking immediate and appropriate action against instances of discrimination will demonstrate the University's commitment to fostering a safe and inclusive environment.

Recognizing that staff members can sometimes inadvertently perpetuate discrimination, implementing mandatory training programs is suggested to raise awareness and educate them on issues related to racism and discrimination. By equipping staff members with the necessary knowledge and tools, an environment where diversity and inclusivity are actively created and promoted, and discriminatory behaviours are effectively addressed.

WORK AND EMPLOYMENT

With its commitment to providing a global educational experience, the University should place great emphasis on supporting its international student community. One crucial aspect of this support is ensuring that international students have access to meaningful work and employment opportunities during their time at the University. This section aims to examine the current landscape of work and employment for international students at the University of Melbourne, identify challenges they may face, and propose strategies to enhance and optimise their work experiences.

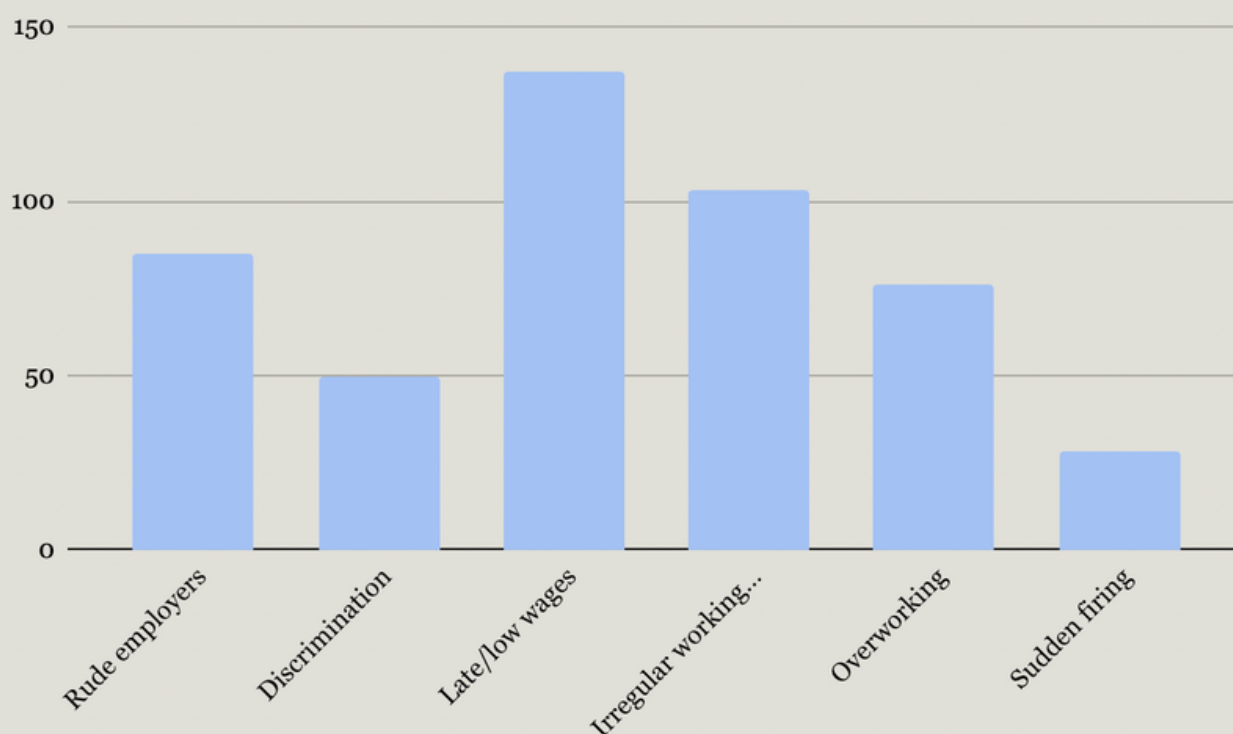
Students have found a lack of opportunities and resources for international students and have difficulty in seeking employment in Australia, therefore more work is required by the University.

Key Findings

The majority of students were working while studying (n=386). In fact, 300 students were looking for employment at the time and had not worked before. Moreover, 903 students have stated that they have had a hard time looking for employment, which raises concerns regarding the accessibility of employment opportunities for international students provided by the University.

Among the students who have previously worked before, there were 231 students who have faced one or more issues with their employer to some degree, which mainly related to Late and/or low wages (n=137), followed by Irregular and/or lessened working hours (n=103).

Figure 10. Issues Students Have Faced with Current/Previous Employers.



Many students found that the Student@Work program (n=320) and the jobs posted on careers online (n=313) have been the most beneficial platform and programs. They were interested and looking forward to more diverse careers and employability programs that could be provided by the University, with Career fairs (n=923) and mentoring and placement programs (n=814) being the most popular.

Recommendations

The University should provide workshops and resources to support students when they are seeking employment and also educate them in dealing with conflict with employers, thus increasing students' confidence while exploring jobs and working in the field.

The University should also increase the number of internship fairs, workshops, employment and placement/shadowing opportunities, as well as resources for international students in order to boost their employment rate in Australia

FINANCIAL SITUATION

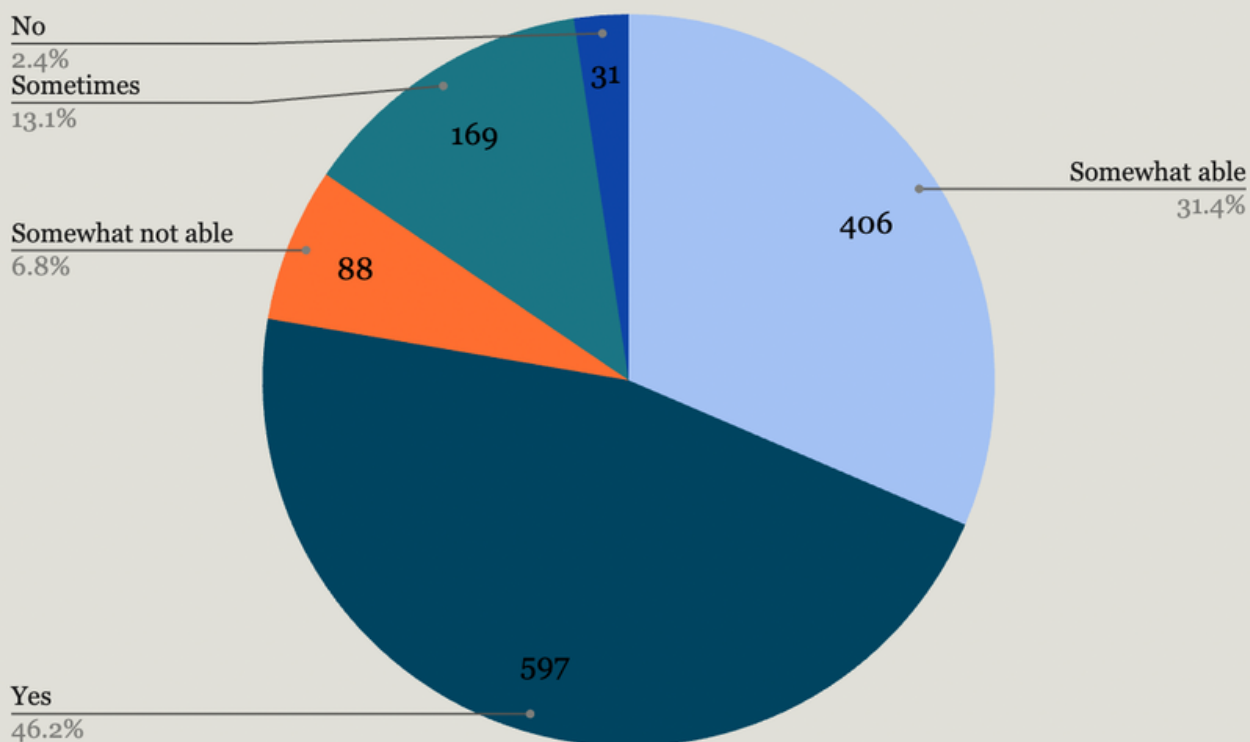
Money and finances are always an important consideration that students have to focus on, as it often affects their academics, social life, physical health and wellbeing. The financial circumstances and challenges that students face are examined in this section, reviewing the impacts of financial difficulties towards their living quality and overall health and wellbeing.

Many students were not able to fulfil their necessities fully, and sought for more support from the University, especially more affordable food and beverage options on campus.

Key Findings

With regards to financial situation, 813 students said that their situation remained unchanged or has improved in different degrees. Meanwhile, 296 and 99 of the students found their situation to be somewhat and much worse, respectively. Moreover, no more than 597 students indicated that they were fully able to fulfil their necessities, for example rent, food and daily supplies, while the rest (n=694) stated they were not able to fully fulfil their necessities to varying degrees. 406 were somewhat able, 88 were somewhat not able, and 169 students were only able to fulfil their necessities at times. 31 students weren't able to fulfil their necessities.

Figure 11. Distribution of Students' Ability to Fulfil Their Necessities

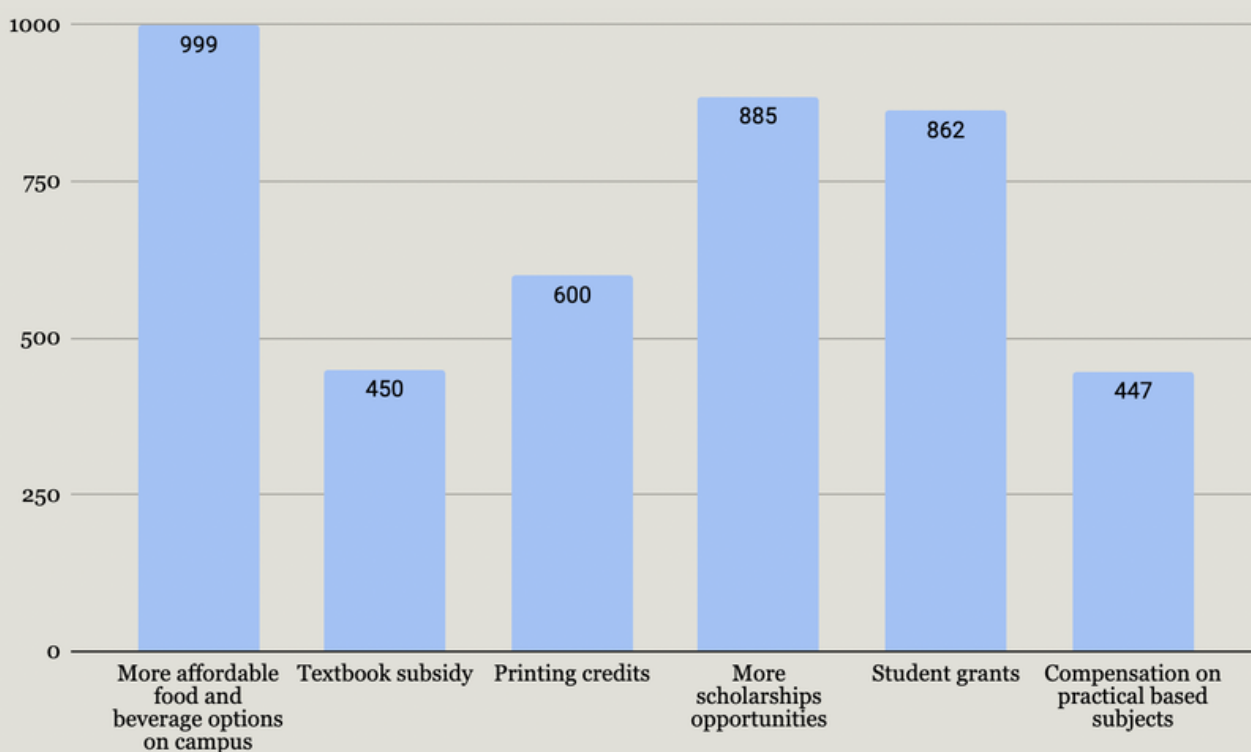


Students were generally aware of the University's financial support services, with 517 students saying that they know of them but have not utilised them.

313 students did not know about these services. On the other hand, 398 students indicated that they have made use of scholarships. Students still seek for more financial support from the University.

Around 1000 students (n=999) agree that the University should better support them by providing more affordable food and beverage options on campus, as well as more scholarships (n=885), and more grants (n=862). Students were also looking for printing credits (n=600), textbook subsidies (n=450), and compensation on practical subjects (n=447).

Figure 12. The Financial Support that Students were Seeking From the University




Notable Comments

Several key suggestions were highlighted by the students. Many expressed the need for more scholarships to alleviate financial burdens. Additionally, there were calls for reduced tuition fees for international students and subsidies for groceries, along with a desire for more welfare events. Affordable housing emerged as another critical concern, with students seeking better access to housing options that align with their budget constraints.

Recommendations

The University should focus on providing more scholarships opportunities and grants to assist students in their financial needs.



Increasing the number of affordable food vendors on campus and conducting a review of the price of food provided by current vendors would help alleviate the cost of living for students.

Offering transportation and food subsidies to further support students, particularly those facing financial challenges, can better ensure their access to essential resources while pursuing their academic goals.


SUMMARY

In conclusion, the report sheds light on the various aspects of the university experience for international students at the University of Melbourne. It highlights crucial areas that require attention and improvement to enhance the overall well-being and satisfaction of international students.

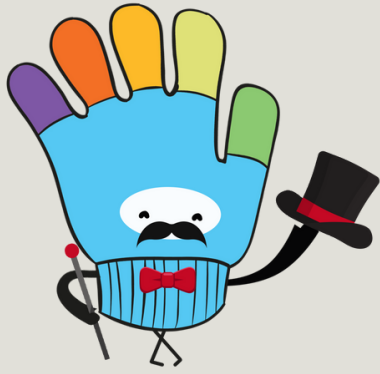
The issue of food security on campus remains significant and critical, with 692 students not being satisfied with the current affordable food options on campus to different degrees, and 999 students demanding more affordable food choices. To address this, the University should increase its support to students by providing food subsidies and bringing more affordable food vendors onto campus to reduce the financial burden on students. Additionally, expediting the construction process of the cafeteria on campus would offer more healthy and affordable food options.

Discrimination continues to be a pressing issue within the University, with over 230 (n=238) students reporting witnessing or personally experiencing various forms of discrimination. While the University is currently working on the Anti-Racism Action Plan, it should also focus on addressing other forms of discrimination and implement effective reporting mechanisms for incidents.

Due to the return of all international students to Melbourne, the current accommodation supply is insufficient to meet demand, as reported by 328 students. Many accommodation providers have taken advantage of the situation by increasing rent prices and imposing inflexible contract dates to maximise profits. Consequently, a large number of students find the accommodation unaffordable (n=677) and face difficulties with fixed contract dates (n=355). To tackle this issue, the University should establish more partnerships with student accommodation and housing providers, offering University of Melbourne students exclusive discounts to ensure access to affordable accommodation.



In addressing these issues, the University of Melbourne can significantly improve the university experience for its international students. Such improvements will not only contribute to better academic performance but also positively impact the overall well-being and satisfaction of international students during their time at the University of Melbourne.



THANK YOU!

