



STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION  
OF MACEWAN UNIVERSITY

# 2026 Spring Survey Report

**SAMU Data Research Findings Report**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	Executive Summary
2	Introduction & Methodology
3	Respondent Demographics
4	Key Findings
5	Discussion
6	Conclusion

# 1. Executive Summary

This report outlines the findings from the **2026 SAMU Spring Survey**, which was conducted to help keep SAMU's programs, services, and advocacy relevant and impactful. The survey received a total of **1,084 responses** from MacEwan University students. The survey was administered from **03/16/2026** to **04/06/2026** and received a total of **1084** responses.

## Key findings from this research indicate that:

- **Key Finding 1: Students highly value SAMU and feel supported:** An overwhelming majority of students agree that SAMU adds to their student experience, provides value for their fees, makes them feel safe and welcome, and effectively advocates for their interests. Notably, 864 students indicated they would miss SAMU if it no longer existed.
- **Key Finding 2: Financial and mental health barriers remain paramount:** Educational costs (63.6%), mental health (49.7%), and living costs (46.6%) are consistently the top three barriers to student success. While financial barriers have slightly decreased from their 2024 peak, they remain a significant burden, particularly for students entering their fourth year.
- **Key Finding 3: The SAMU building is a central hub for student life:** The building sees high foot traffic, primarily driven by students visiting food vendors, looking for flexible study spaces, and socializing.
- **Key Finding 4: Orientation events are the primary driver of SAMU awareness:** "New Student Orientation or Meet SAMU Week" is by far the most successful avenue for introducing students to SAMU, greatly outperforming other discovery methods like social media or word of mouth.

**This report provides a detailed analysis of the survey data, broken down into demographics, key thematic findings, and a broader discussion on what these metrics mean for the student experience.**

## 2. Introduction & Methodology

### 2.1. Research Objectives

The primary objectives of this survey were to gather accurate, up-to-date information on the overall student satisfaction with MacEwan University and SAMU-specific services, programs, and advocacy. It also identifies key challenges and barriers students are currently facing in their academic and personal lives. As well as feedback on communication preferences, building utilization, and future intent to use services to ensure offerings remain impactful and relevant

### 2.2. Methodology

- **Target Population:** The survey targeted all students at MacEwan University. With some focus on students living in residence.
- **Survey Period:** The survey was open from 03/16/2026 to 04/06/2026.
- **Distribution Method:** The survey was promoted via email, promo squad distributing QR codes, SAMU website, tabletop stickers, tent cards in Building 6, and large banners.
- **Response Rate:** A total of 1084 students responded to the survey, resulting in a response rate of 6.27% (Based on 17,327 Student Population\*)
- **Margin of Error:** With a Student Population of 17,327, this sample size of 1084 yields a margin of error of ( $\pm 2.88\%$ ) providing a medium-high degree of statistical confidence in our findings

### 2.3. Limitations & Response Rate

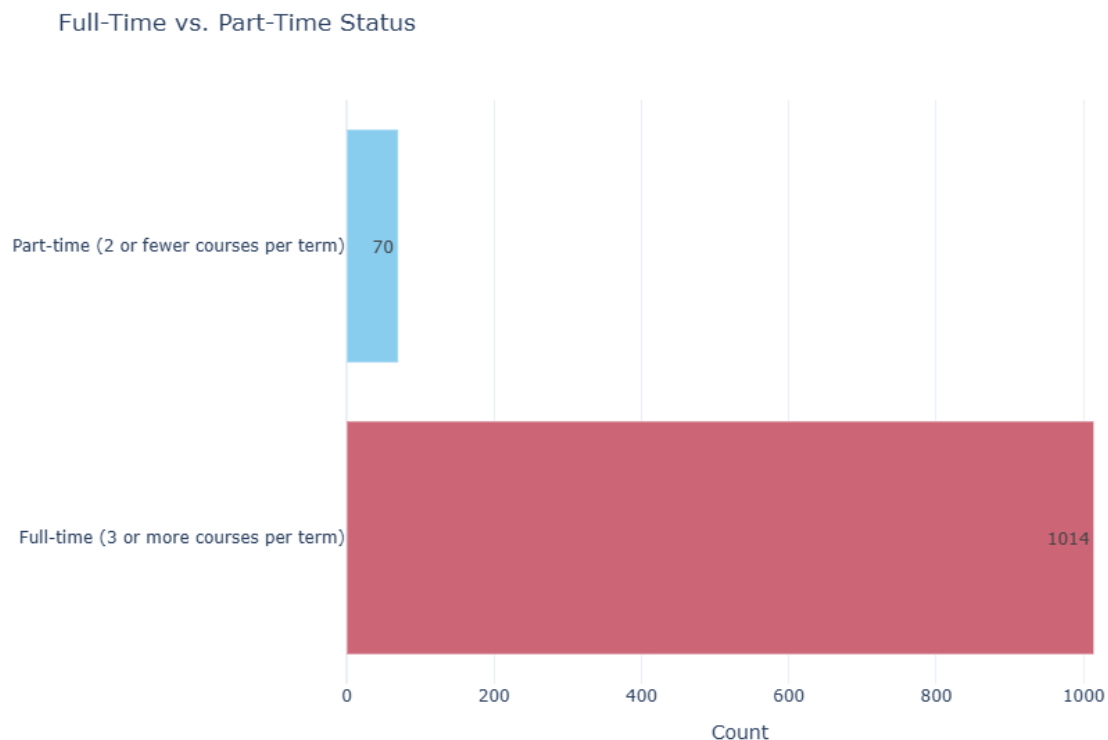
**Response Rate Context:** The survey received 1,084 responses, which represents approximately a 6.27% response rate based on MacEwan University's general student population. It is important to note that this is a decrease from the 2025 Spring Survey (which saw 1,984 respondents).

**Underrepresented Demographics:** While the sample size of 1,084 provides a statistically significant confidence level, certain demographics are underrepresented. Part-time students made up only 6.5% (70 respondents) of the survey, which is lower than the actual university composition. Additionally, international students and those in the School of Continuing Education (39 respondents) yielded lower engagement, meaning the data leans heavily toward the domestic, full-time undergraduate experience.

### 3. Respondent Demographics

The following section provides a demographic overview of the 1,084 survey respondents. The sample strongly represents full-time students, primarily clustering around those beginning their second year, with a heavy representation from the Faculty of Arts & Science.

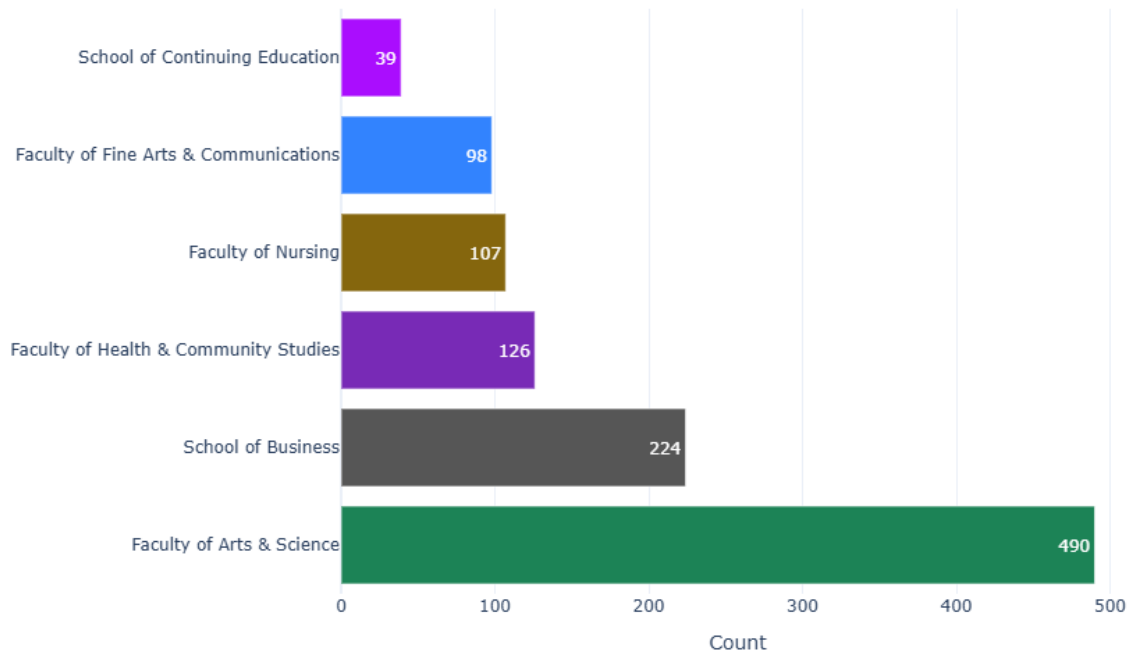
**Enrollment Status:** 93.5% (1,014) of respondents are Full-time students taking 3 or more courses per term, while 6.5% (70) are Part-time.



#### Distribution by Faculty:

- Faculty of Arts & Science: 490 respondents (45.2%)
- School of Business: 224 respondents (20.8%)
- Faculty of Health & Community Studies: 126 respondents (11.6%)
- Faculty of Nursing: 107 respondents (9.9%)
- Faculty of Fine Arts & Communications: 98 respondents (9.0%)
- School of Continuing Education: 39 respondents (3.6%)

### Respondents by Faculty



### Year of Study:

Starting my 1st year: 73 (6.7%)

Starting 2nd year: 362 (33.4%)

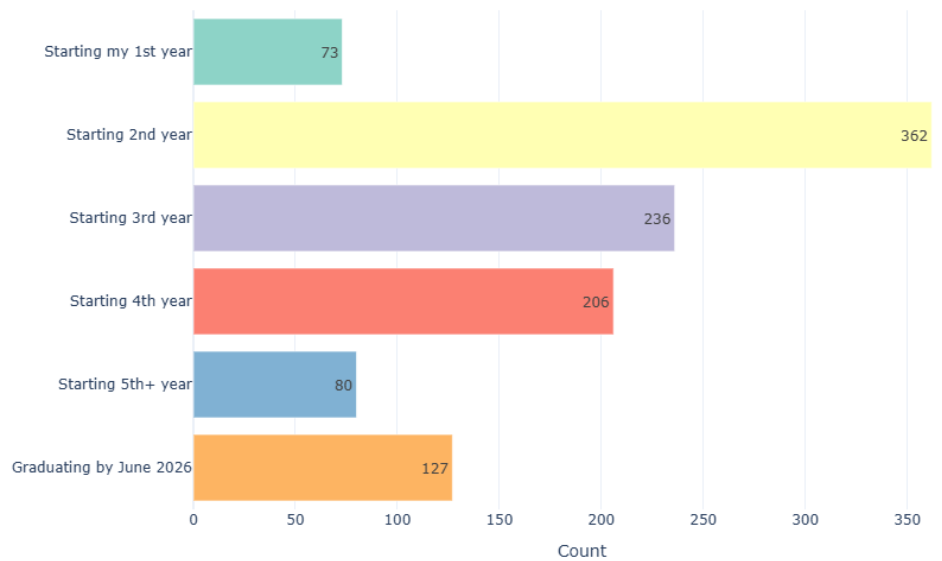
Starting 3rd year: 236 (21.8%)

Starting 4th year: 206 (19.0%)

Starting 5th+ year: 80 (7.4%)

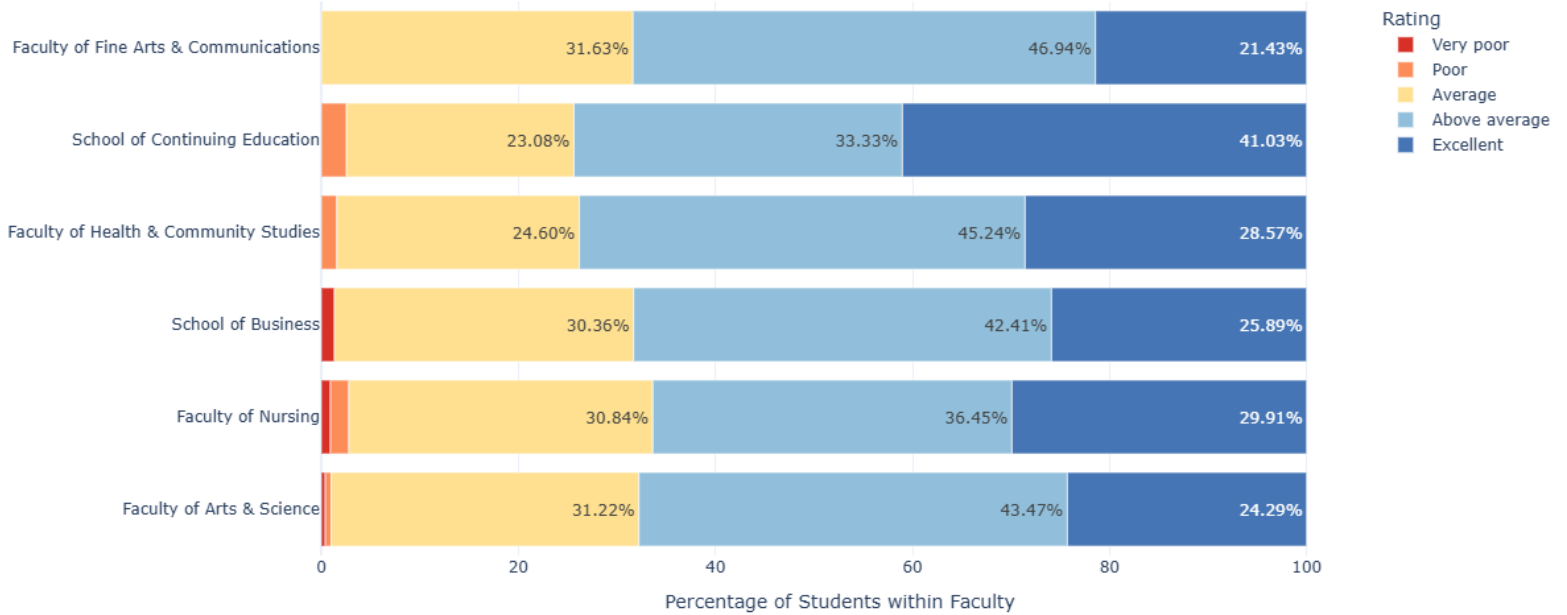
Graduating by June 2026: 127 (11.7%)

### Respondents by Year of Study



**Overall Student Experience by Faculty:** When asked to rate their overall student experience at MacEwan University, the Faculty of Fine Arts & Communications reported the highest proportion of "Above Average" and "Excellent" experiences. Conversely, the School of Business and Faculty of Nursing displayed slightly larger proportions of "Average" experiences.

Overall Student Experience by Faculty (100% Normalized)



## 4. Key Findings

This section details the main findings from the survey, organized by key themes or research questions.

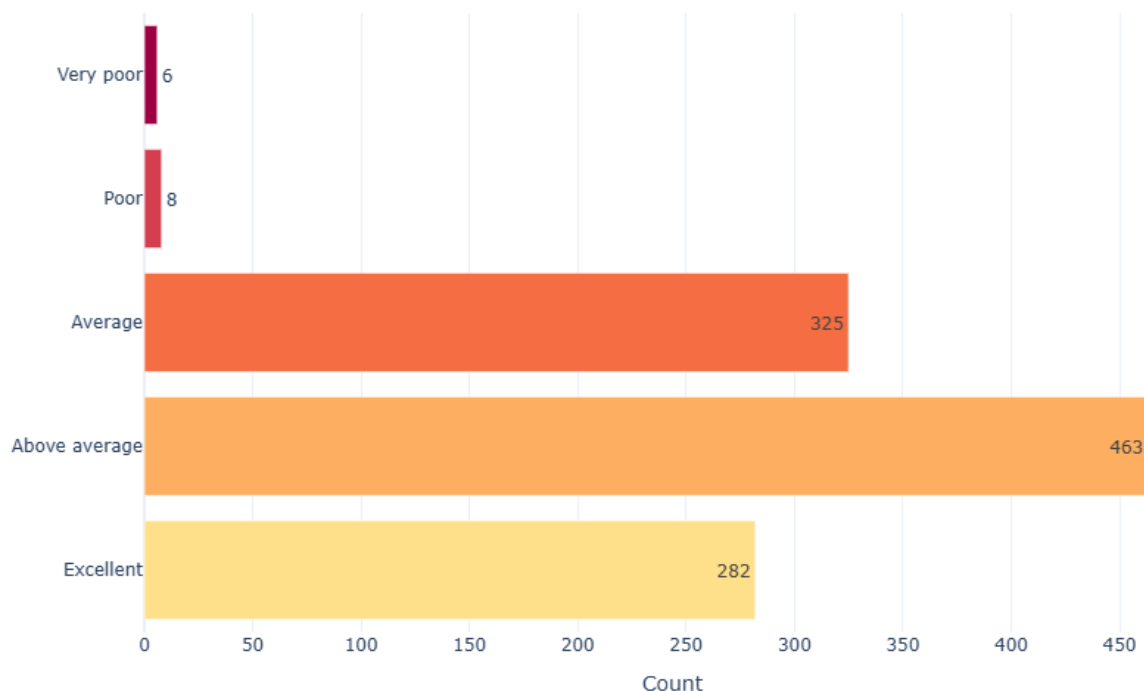
### Theme 1: Overall Perception, Value, and Advocacy

*Students demonstrate strong loyalty and high satisfaction regarding their interactions with SAMU.*

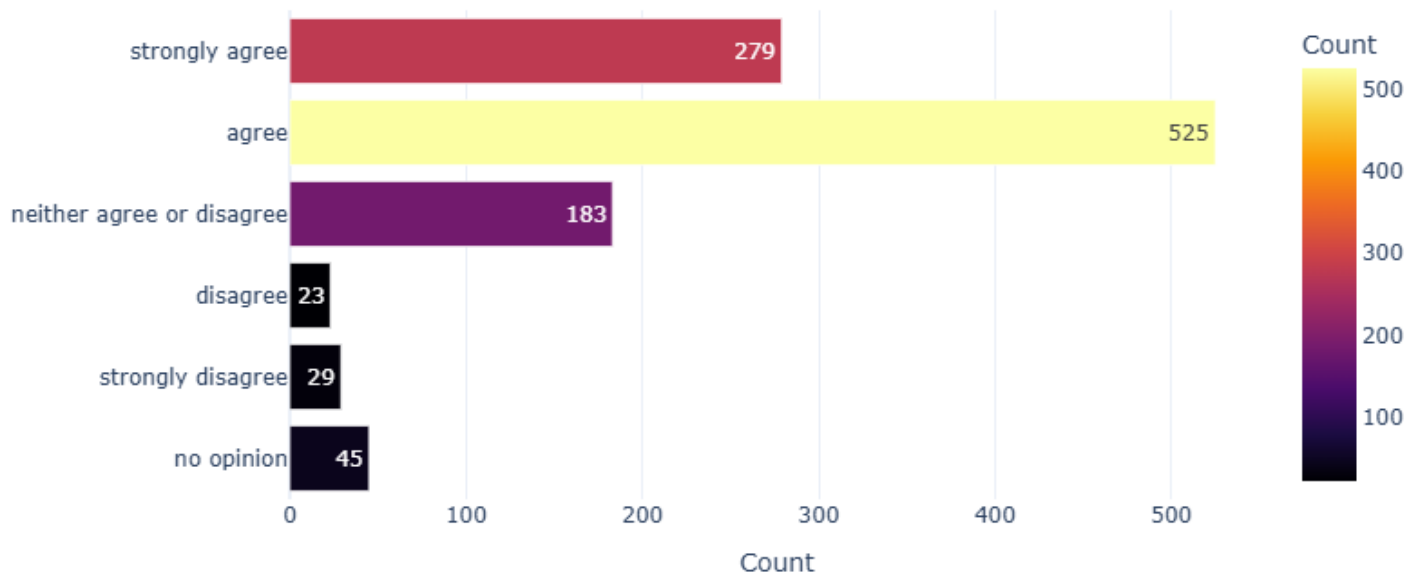
**Finding 1.1:** Overall experience at MacEwan is largely positive. 745 students rated their experience as "Above Average" (463 (32.7%)) or "Excellent" (282 (26.0%)), with less than 1.5% reporting a "Poor" or "Very poor" experience.

- **Finding 1.2:** SAMU is seen as a highly valuable and welcoming presence. **841 students** agree or strongly agree that SAMU makes them feel welcome and safe.
- **804 students** agree or strongly agree that SAMU effectively advocates for their interests.
- **864 students** agree or strongly agree that they "would miss SAMU if it no longer existed" (with 492 of those strongly agreeing).
- When rating the likelihood to recommend getting involved with SAMU on a scale of 1-10, the largest single group chose a perfect 10 (247 students), followed by scores of 7 and 8, indicating strong net-positive advocacy.

Overall Student Experience at MacEwan University

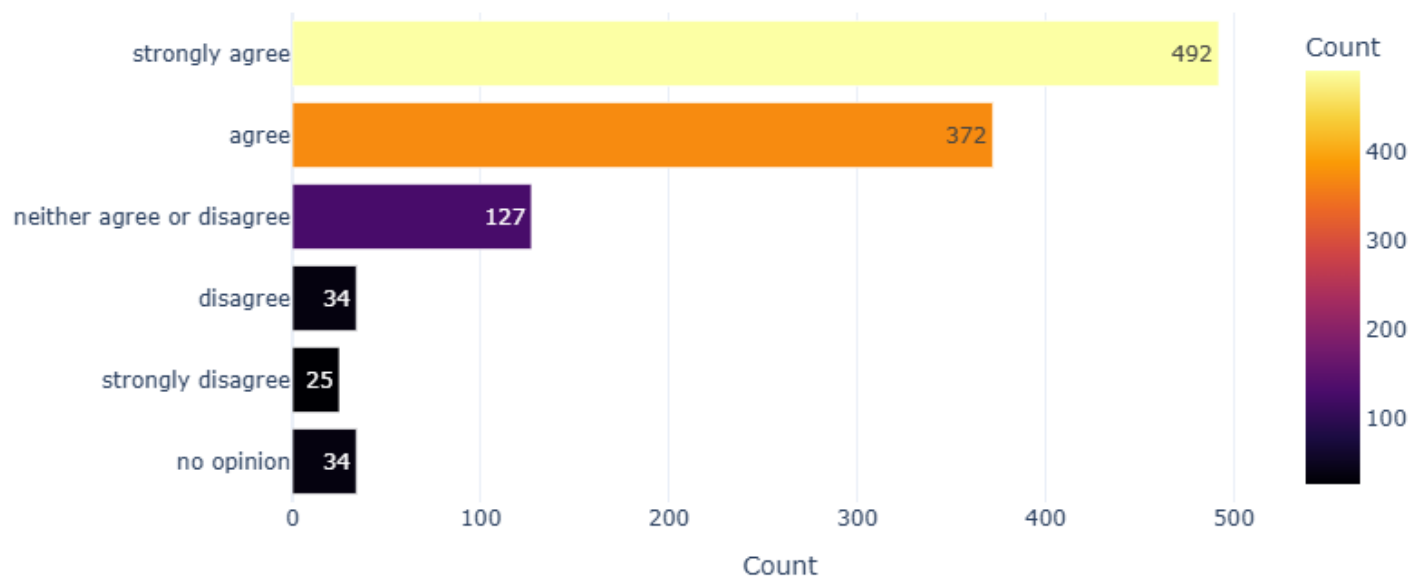


SAMU effectively advocates for my interest as a student.



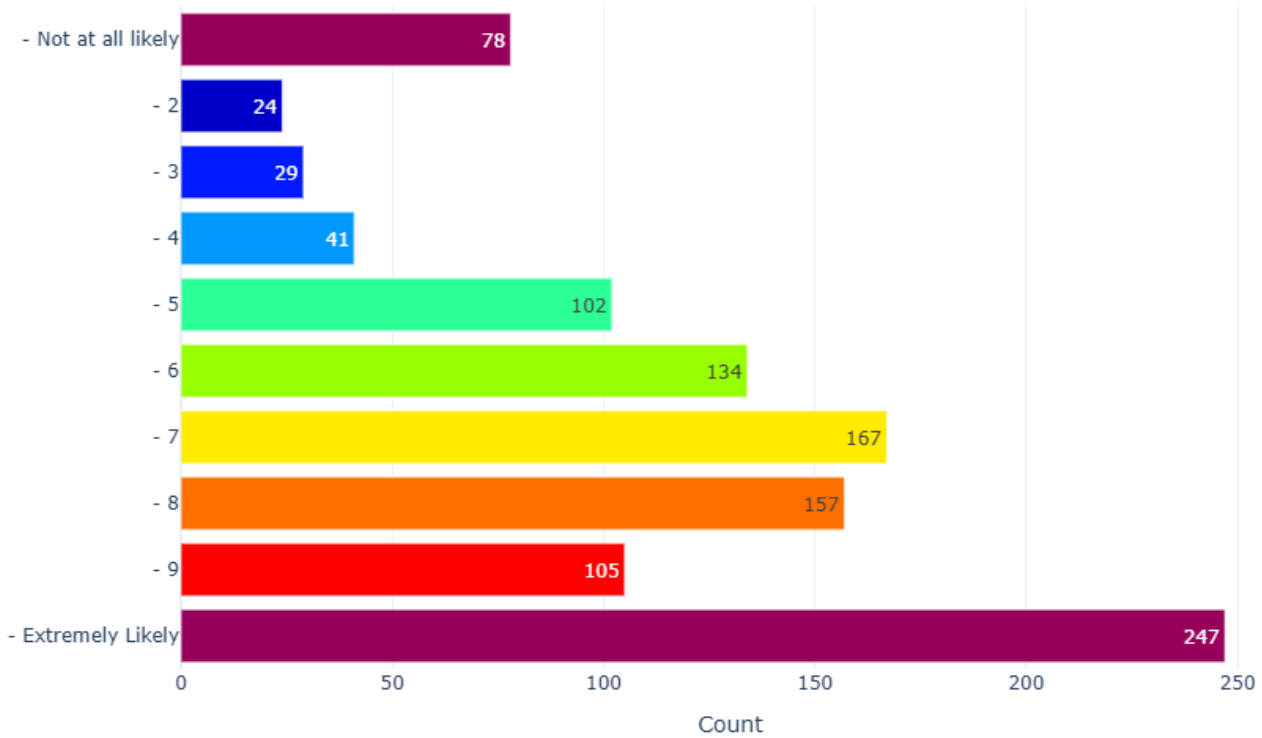
Strongly agree: 279 (25.7%), Agree: 525 (48.4%), Neither agree or disagree: 183 (16.9%), Disagree: 23 (2.1%), Strongly disagree: 29 (2.7%), No opinion: 45 (4.2%)

I would miss SAMU if it no longer existed.

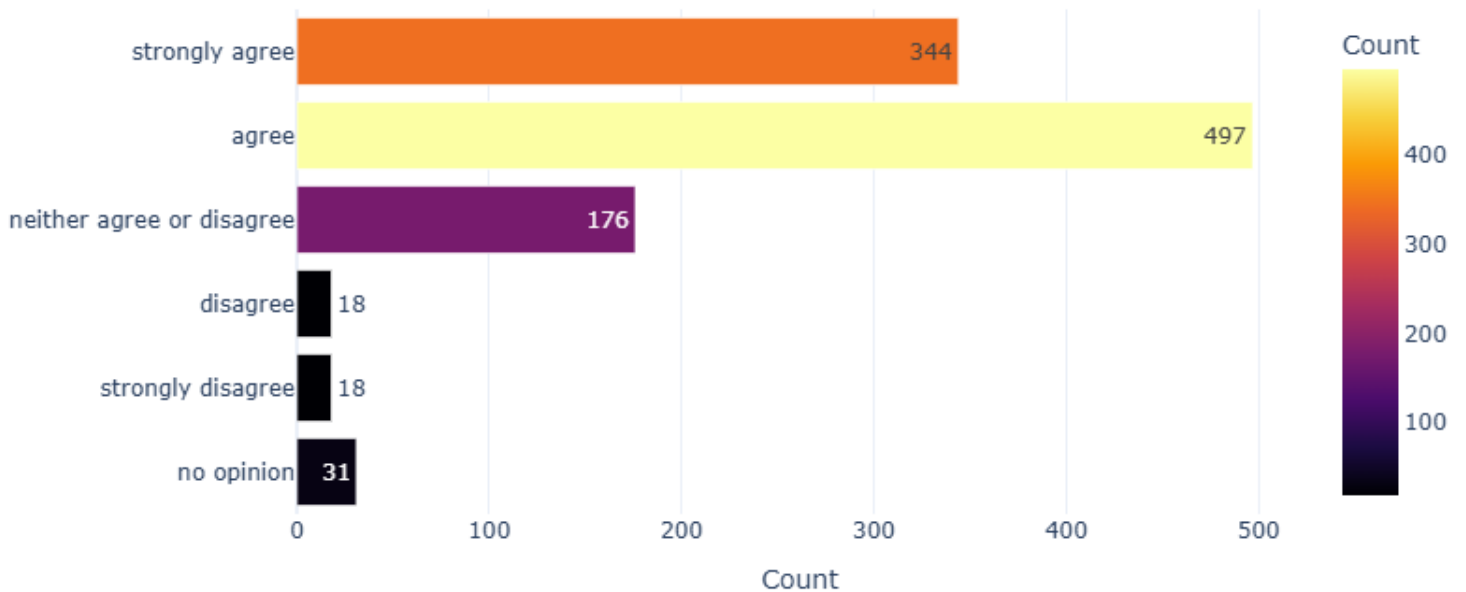


Strongly agree: 492 (45.4%), Agree: 372 (34.3%), Neither agree or disagree: 127 (11.7%), Disagree: 34 (3.1%), Strongly disagree: 25 (2.3%), No opinion: 34 (3.1%)

### Likelihood to Recommend Getting Involved with SAMU (1 to 10)



### SAMU makes me feel welcome and safe.



Strongly agree: 344 (31.7%), Agree: 497 (34.3%), Neither agree or disagree: 176 (16.2%), Disagree: 18 (1.6%), Strongly disagree: 18 (1.6%), No opinion: 31 (2.6%)

## Theme 2: Barriers to Student Success

**Financial pressures and mental health continue to be the dominant challenges facing the student body.**

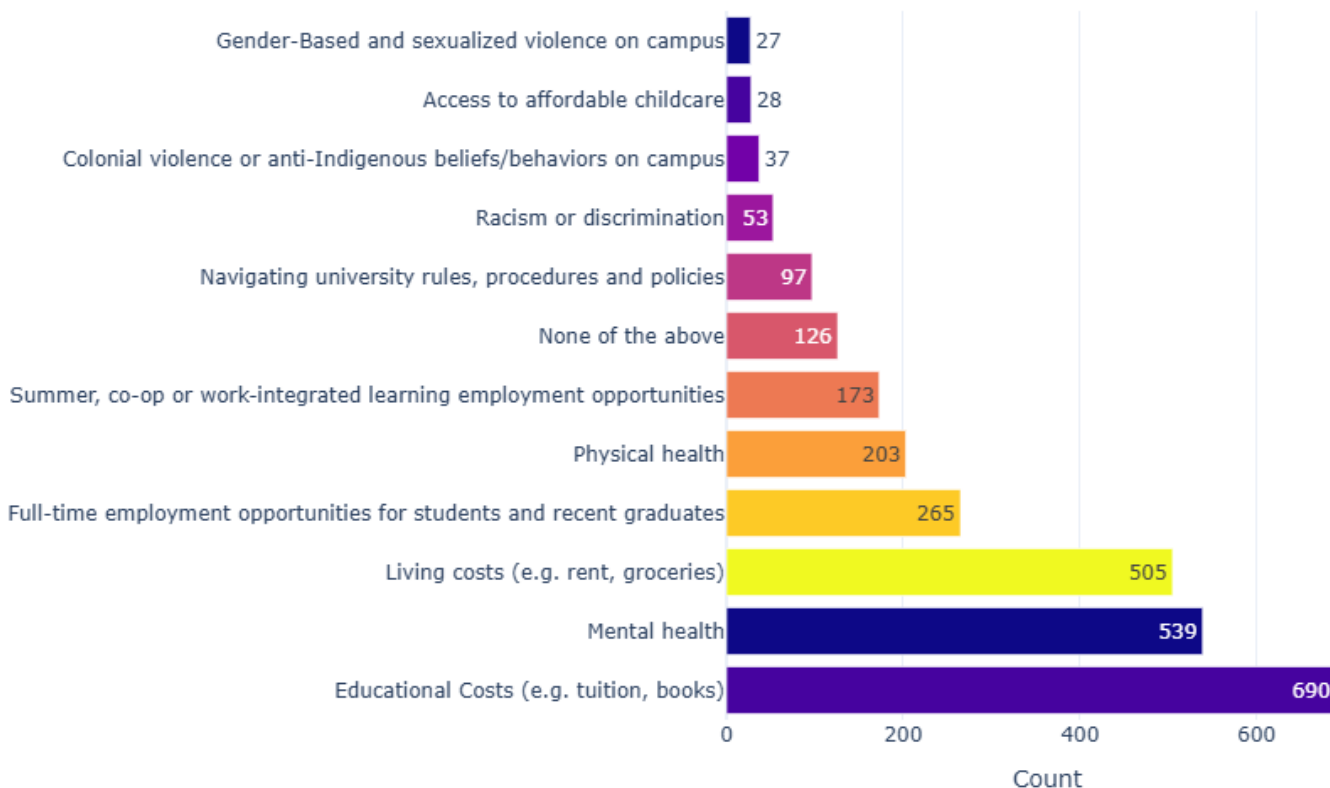
**Finding 2.1:** Educational and living costs are the most prominent barriers, though they have eased slightly since 2024.

- **Educational Costs (e.g., tuition, books)** is still the #1 barrier, affecting 690 students (63.7%). Looking at year-over-year trends, this peaked at over 80% of students in 2024 but dropped closer to 64% in 2026.
- **Living costs (e.g., rent, groceries)** affect 505 students (46.6%).

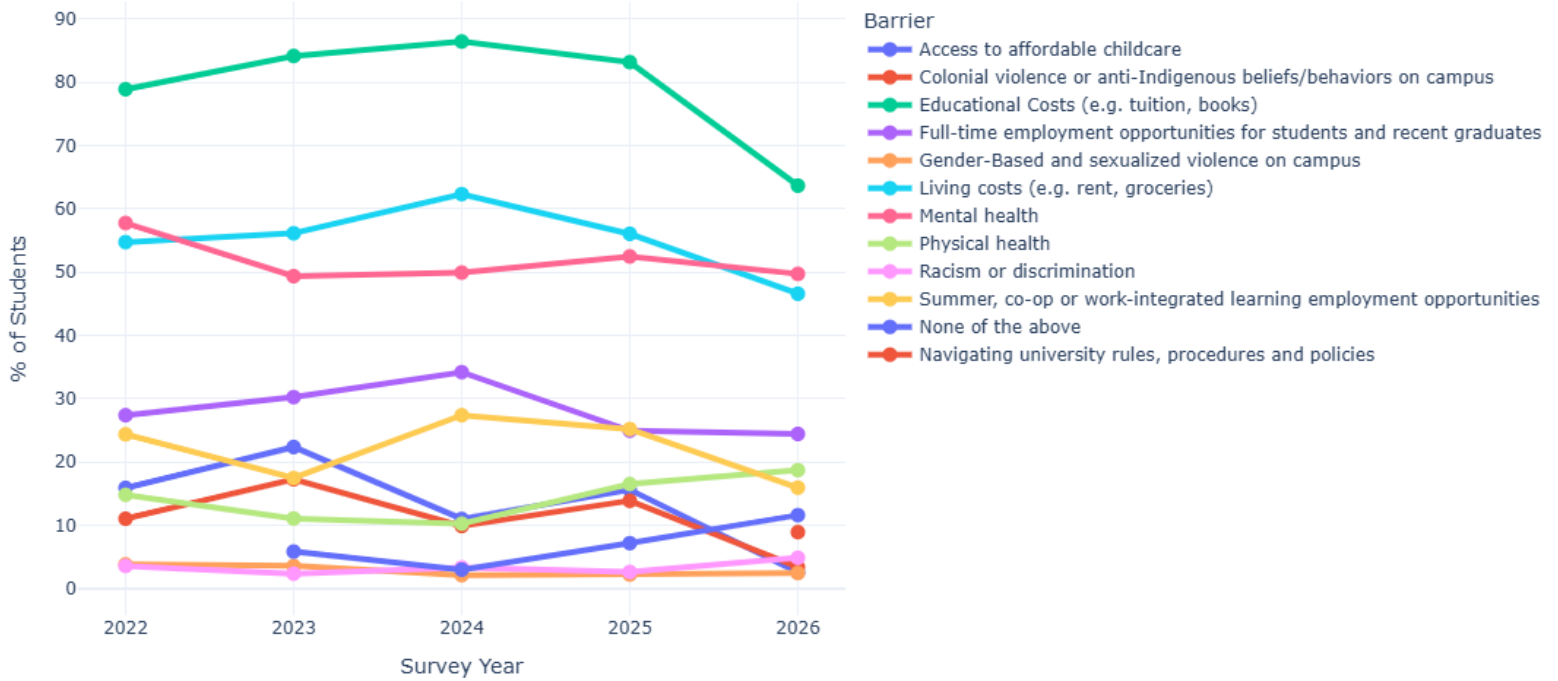
**Finding 2.2:** Mental health remains a persistent struggle. 539 students (49.7%) cited Mental Health as a barrier. The YOY trend shows this metric has remained largely stagnant around the 50% mark for the last five years.

**Finding 2.3:** Barriers compound significantly as students reach their upper years. A demographic heatmap reveals that "Educational Costs," "Mental Health," and "Living Costs" peak sharply for students who are *Starting their 4th year* (67.5%, 57.5%, and 55.0% respectively).

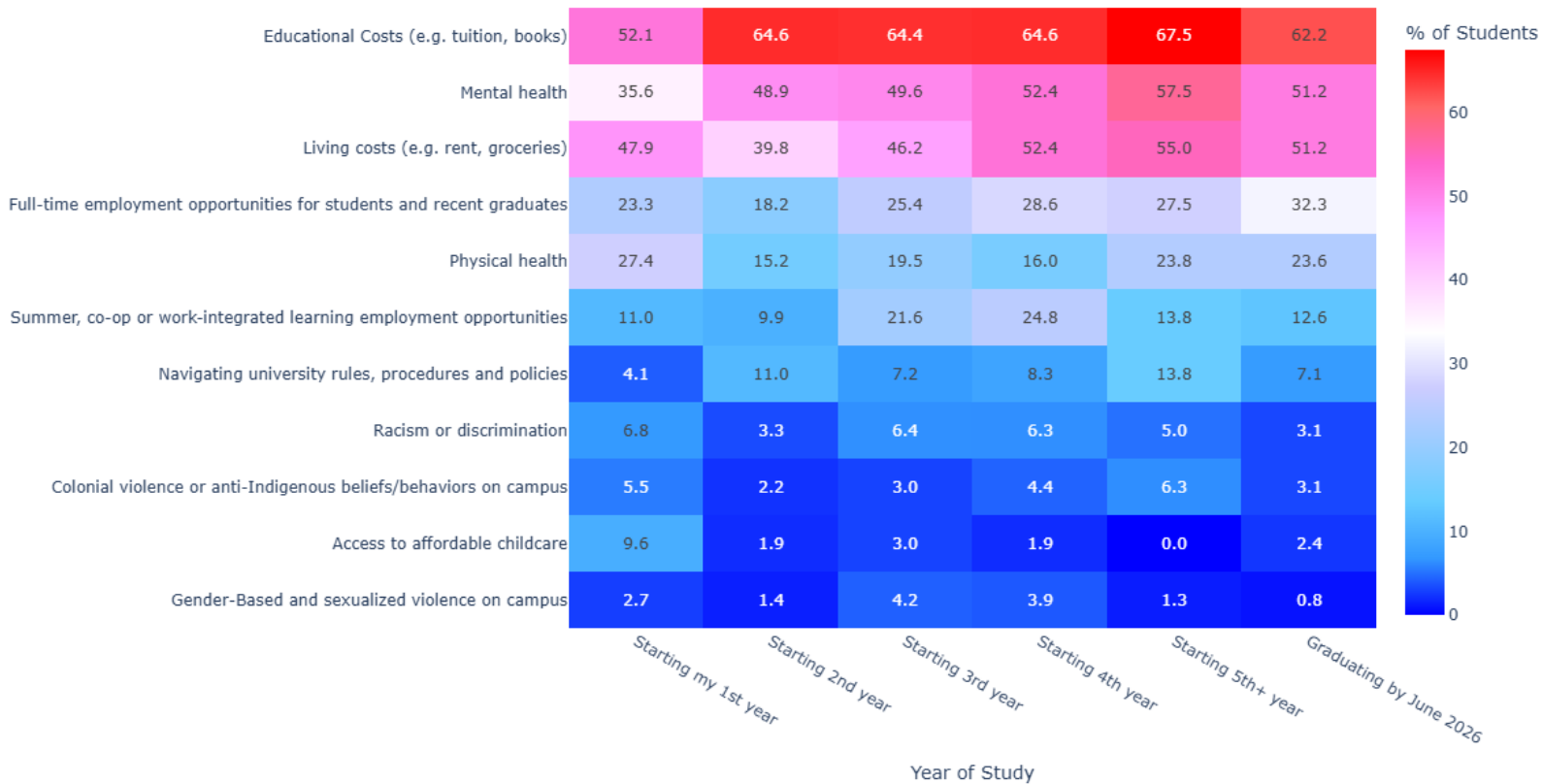
### Barriers to Student Success (2025-2026)



### Year-over-Year Trend of Student Barriers (2022-2026)



### Heatmap: % of Students Facing Barriers by Year of Study



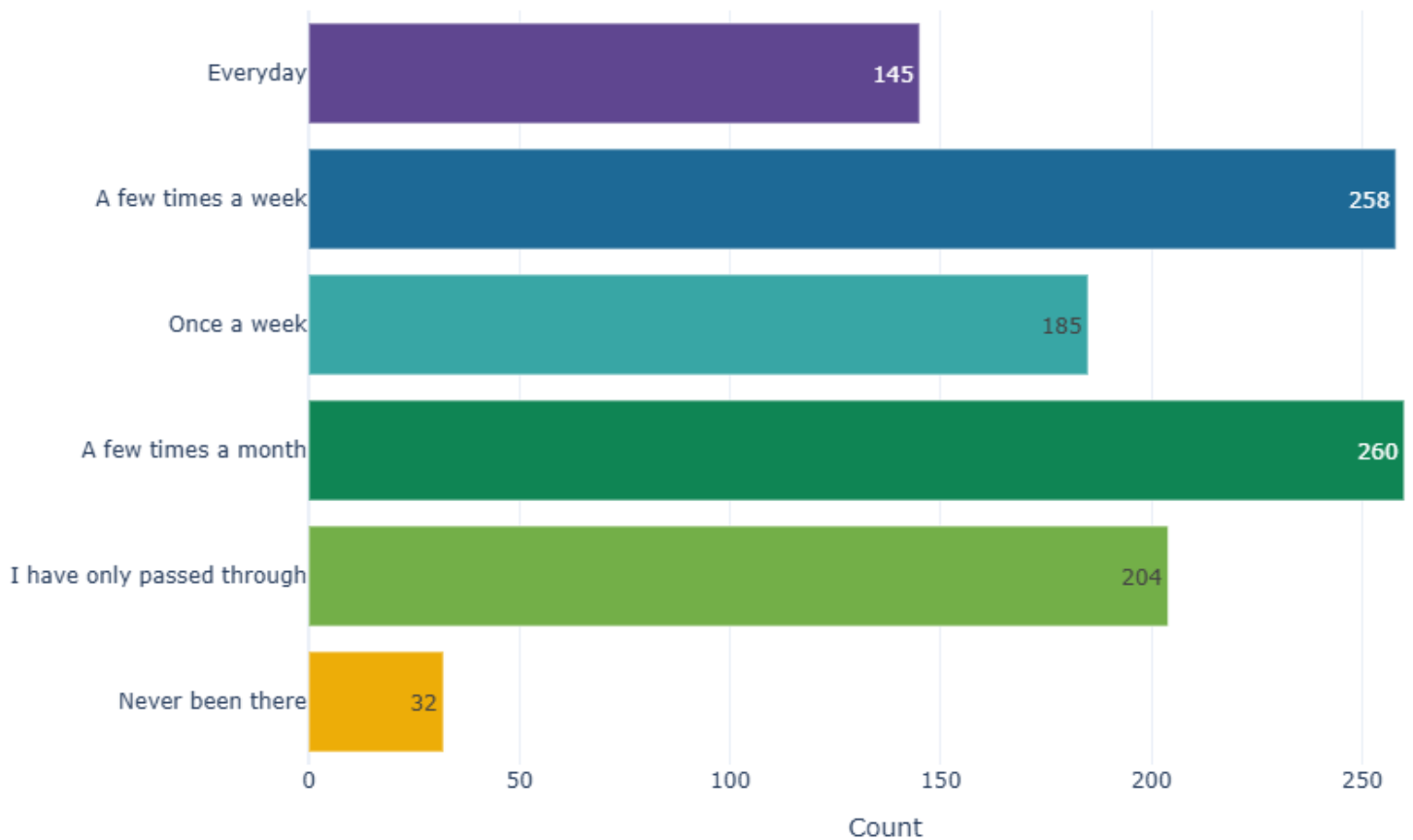
### Theme 3: Building Usage & Engagement

*The SAMU building serves as a crucial hub for basic needs and flexible gathering.*

**Finding 3.1:** The building has consistent foot traffic. Over 500 respondents visit the building frequently (145 every day (13.4%); 258 a few times a week (23.8%)). Only 32 respondents (3.0%) had "never been there."

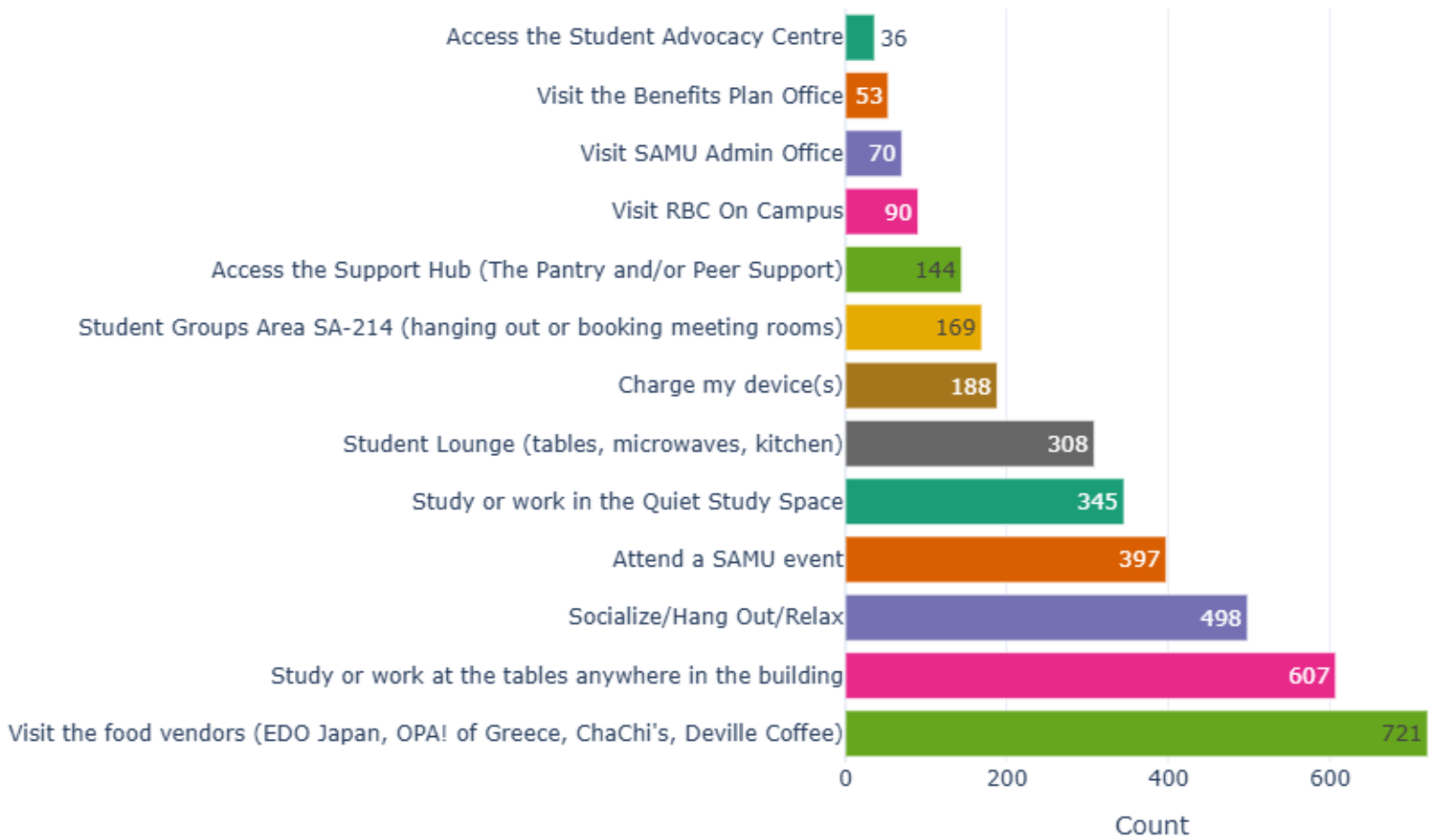
**Finding 3.2:** Food and informal spaces drive building utilization. The most popular activities are visiting food vendors (721 (66.5%)), studying/working at tables anywhere in the building (607 (56.0%)), and socializing/hanging out (498 (45.9%)).

#### Frequency of SAMU Building Visits



Everyday: 145 (13.4%), A few times a week: 258 (23.8%), Once a week: 185 (17.1%), A few times a month: 260 (24.0%), I have only passed through: 204 (18.8%), Never been there: 32 (3.0%)

## Popular Activities in the SAMU Building



## Theme 4: Programs, Services & Events

**Financial support and health wellness are prioritized above social programming.**

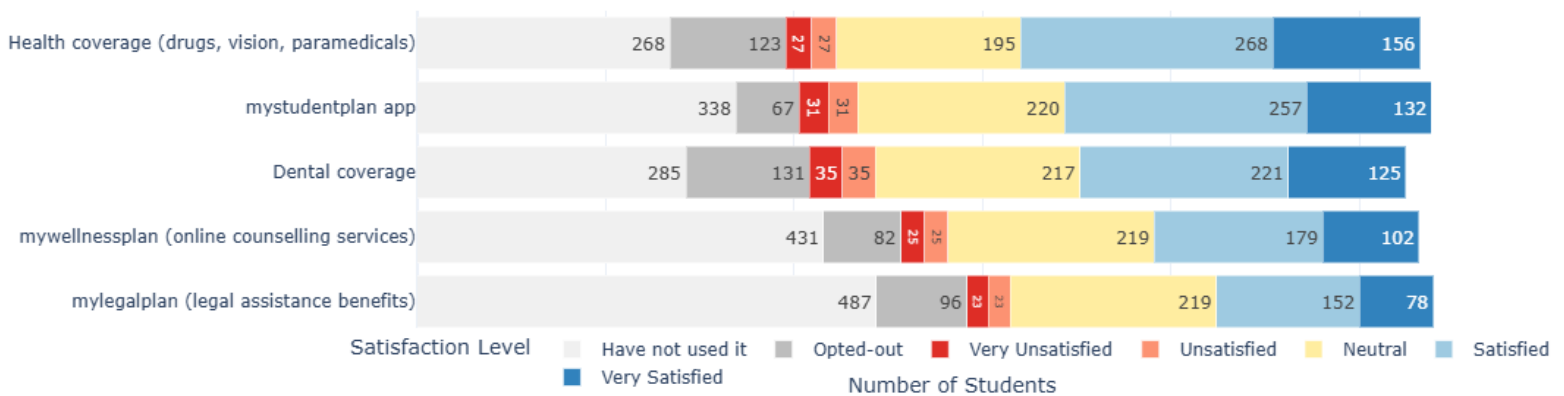
**Finding 4.1:** Basic needs dictate service importance. When asked to rank the most important SAMU offerings, "Financial Supports" (Average Rank 2.51) and "Health & Wellness" (Average Rank 2.54) took the top spots, outranking Student Resources, Student Life, and Student Leadership.

Most Important SAMU Offerings (Average Rank)



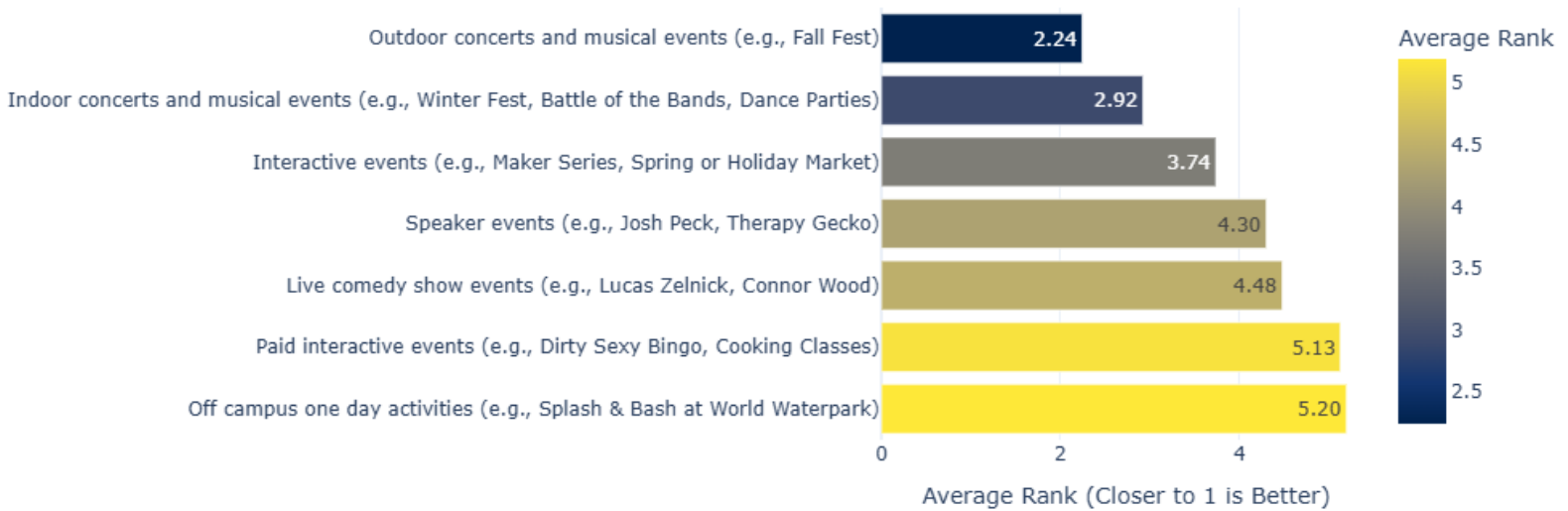
**Finding 4.2:** Core benefits are highly utilized and satisfactory. Health coverage, dental coverage, and the mystudentplan app show decently high satisfaction ratios from those who use them.

Holistic View: Satisfaction with Benefits (Sorted by Satisfaction)



**Finding 4.3:** Event preferences lean heavily toward concerts. "Outdoor concerts and musical events" (like Fall Fest) are the top preferred event types (Avg Rank 2.24), followed closely by indoor concerts. Off-campus day activities rank lowest.

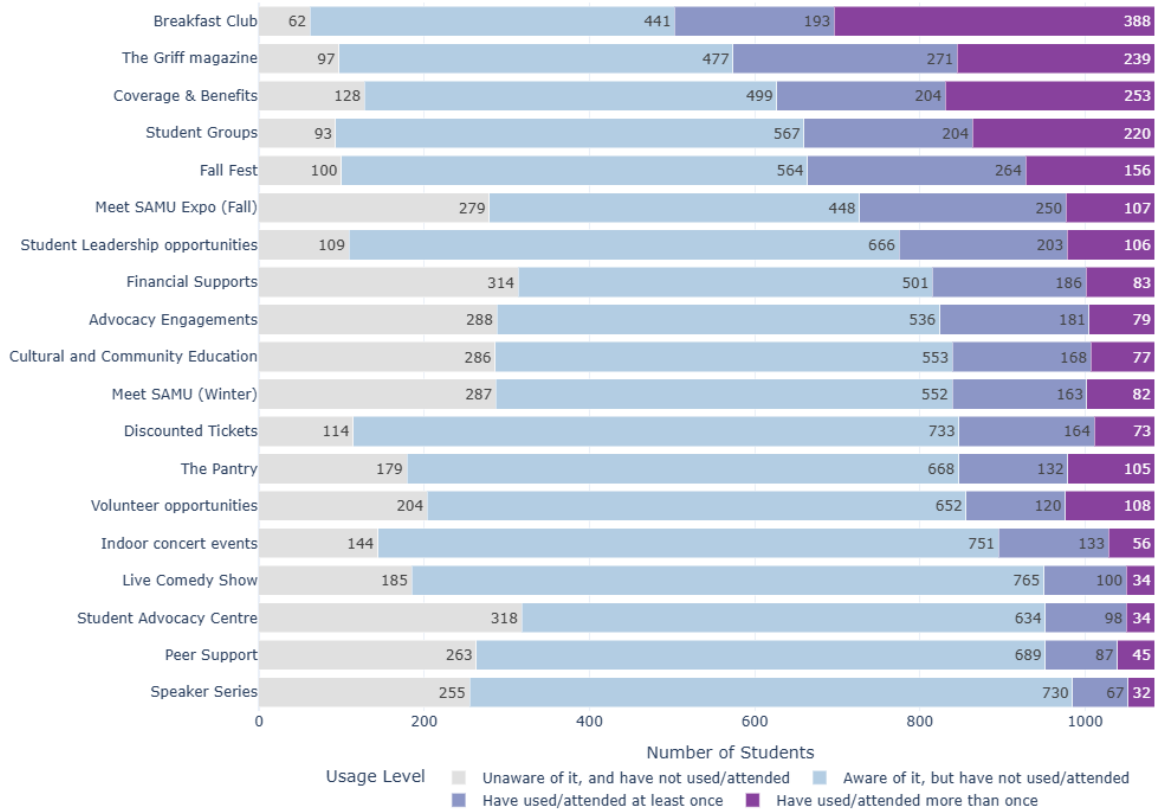
### Preferred Event Types (Average Rank)



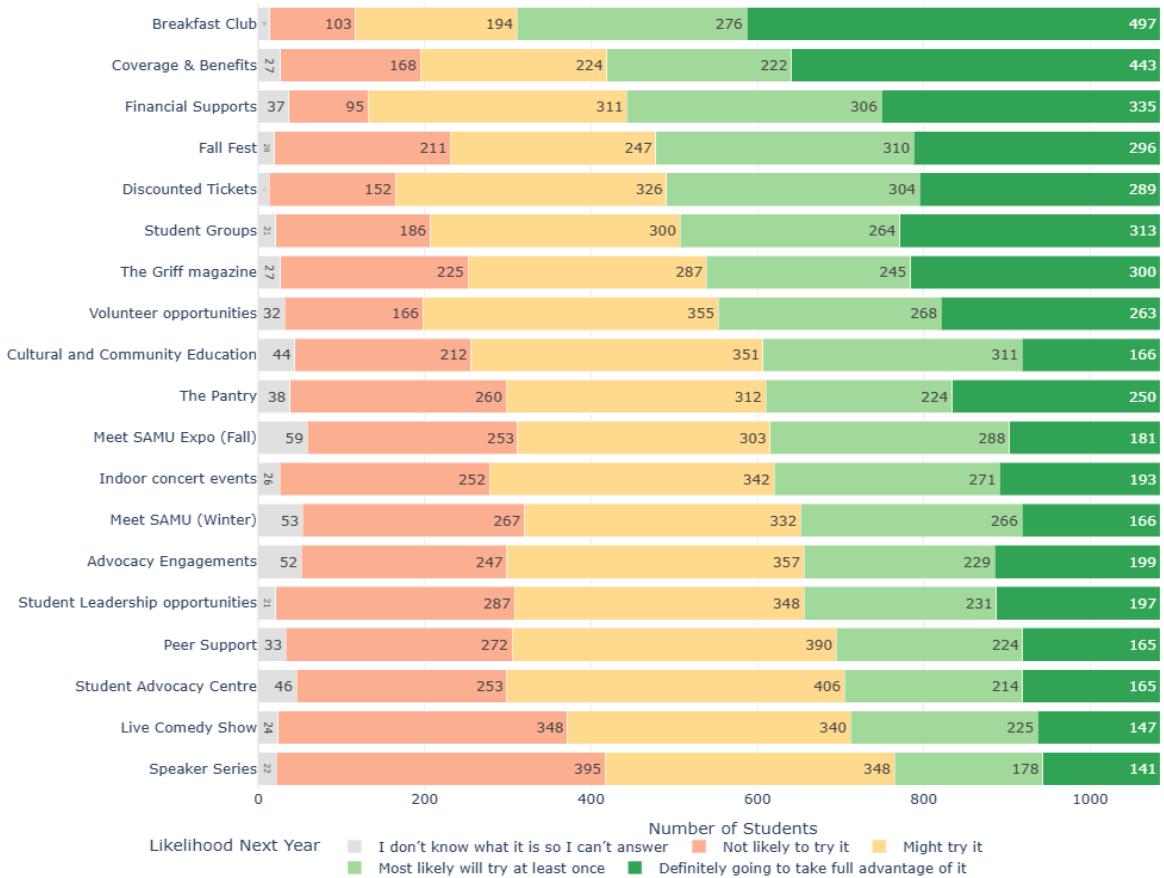
**Finding 4.4: There is a significant spike in future demand for Financial Supports.**

- While current building and service utilization is dominated by the Breakfast Club, *The Griff* magazine, and Coverage & Benefits, future intent tells a different story.
- When students projected their likelihood to use services next year, "Financial Supports" emerged as a top three priority, highlighting a growing reliance on SAMU's financial aid offerings.

### Holistic View: Current Service Usage (Sorted by Total Usage)



### Holistic View: Future Likelihood to Use Services (Sorted by Intent)

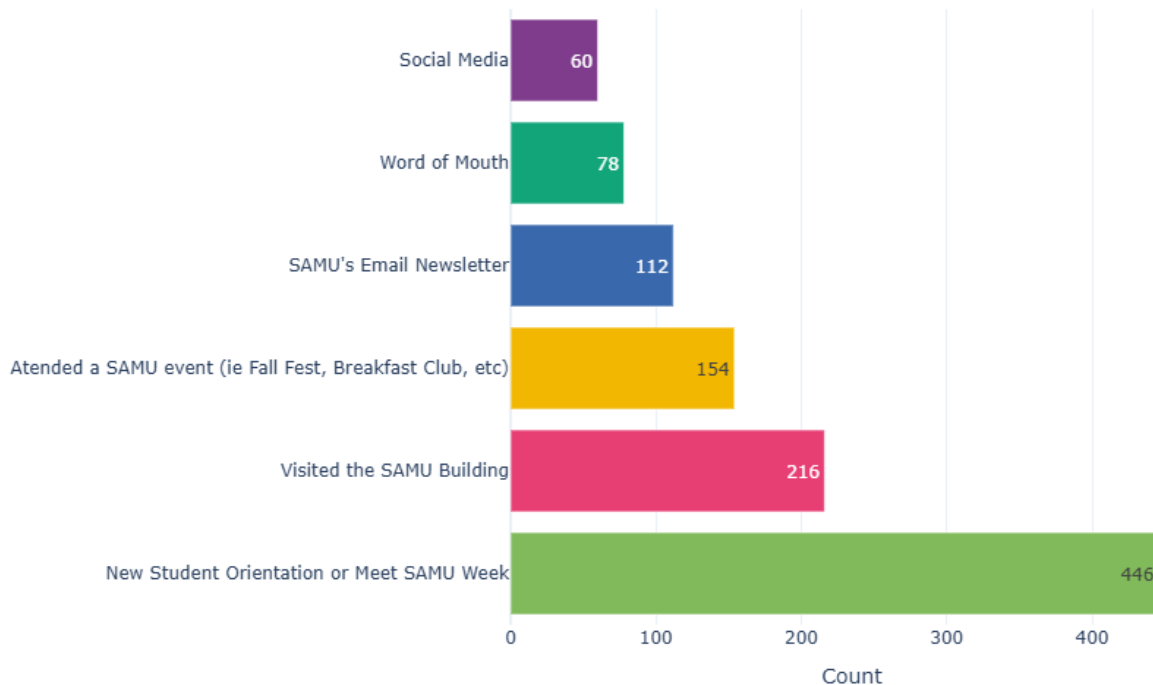


## Theme 5: Communication & Awareness

**Direct, early-intervention touchpoints are the most effective way to reach students.**

**Finding 5.1:** Orientation is important for discovery. 446 students first learned about SAMU through "New Student Orientation or Meet SAMU Week"—more than double the next highest method (Visiting the building - 216).

How Students First Learned About SAMU



**Finding 5.2:** Students prefer direct, written communication. Email/Email Newsletter is the #1 preferred communication method (Avg Rank 3.41), followed by Instagram (4.13). Facebook and LinkedIn ranked lowest.

Preferred Communication Methods (Average Rank)



## Theme 6: Student Voice (Qualitative Insights)

To humanize the statistical data and better understand the emotional drivers behind the ratings, students were given the opportunity to elaborate on their experiences in open-ended text boxes. The following quotes were selected as they accurately summarize the most common recurring themes in the 2026 responses:

- **On Financial & Basic Needs:**

*"As a student paying for my own tuition and rent, the Breakfast Club and The Pantry have been absolute lifesavers this year. Groceries are just too high right now, and knowing SAMU has our back takes a lot of stress off."*

- **On the SAMU Building:**

*"I love having the SAMU building to go to between classes. It's the only place on campus where I can actually find a microwave, grab coffee, and have a decent place to just exist and sit with my friends without feeling like I have to be completely silent."*

- **On First-Year Discovery:**

*"Meet SAMU week was incredible. I didn't know anyone when I moved here, but the events made me feel like I actually belonged on campus. It was the first time I realized how much the student association actually does."*

- **On Mental Health & Bureaucracy:**

*"I appreciate the health and dental plan, but the mental health coverage doesn't always go far enough for regular therapy. Also, while I know SAMU advocates for us, it sometimes feels like there is a lot of red tape and confusing forms when trying to organize events for our student groups."*

- **On Overall Value:**

*"Even though I don't go to every single event, just knowing the advocacy centre, the peer support, and the study spaces are there if I need them makes the fees worth it. It makes MacEwan feel like a community instead of just a place I commute to for lectures."*

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Interpretation of 2026 Key Findings

The results from the 2026 Spring Survey paint a picture of an organization that is highly successful in its core mission but operating within an environment where students are heavily burdened by outside stressors.

**Interpretation of Key Findings:** The high volume of students reporting that they feel safe, welcomed, and advocated for by SAMU proves that the organization's foundational mandate is being met. However, the data also shows that students view SAMU primarily as a support mechanism for their basic needs rather than just a social outlet. The ranking of Financial Supports and Health & Wellness as the most important offerings correlates directly with the top student barriers (Education Costs, Mental Health, Living Costs). The SAMU building acts as a vital "third place" for students, functioning heavily as a cafeteria and flexible study zone.

**Surprising or Unexpected Results:** While social media is often prioritized in modern marketing, "Social Media" (60) was actually the lowest performing channel for how students first discovered SAMU. The immense success of "New Student Orientation/Meet SAMU Week" highlights that making a physical, high-energy first impression during a student's first few weeks is significantly more effective than ongoing digital discovery.

**Vulnerable Cohorts:** It is notable that students entering their 4th year report the highest rates of financial and mental health barriers across the board. This suggests "burnout" or cumulative financial strain peaking just before graduation.

### 5.2. Year-Over-Year Analysis: Following Up on 2025 Brandish Insights

Last year, the 2025 SAMU Spring Student Experience Survey conducted by Brandish laid out several strategic recommendations. Comparing the 2026 data against the 2025 report reveals strong continuity in student needs and validates several of the strategic shifts proposed last year.

**Validating the Communications Pivot:** In 2025, Brandish recommended modernizing the communication strategy by pivoting away from low-yield platforms like LinkedIn and Twitter/X in favor of Email, Instagram, and TikTok. The 2026 data validate this recommendation. Email newsletters (3.41 Avg Rank) and Instagram (4.13) firmly held their spots as the most preferred communication methods, while LinkedIn (7.31) and Facebook (6.87) ranked last. Continuing to aggressively prioritize email and Instagram over other channels is heavily supported by the current data.

**The Power of First-Year Onboarding:** Brandish identified a critical gap in first-year awareness and recommended strengthening early onboarding (e.g., embedding SAMU in Orientation and launching a "What is SAMU?" campaign). In 2026, "New Student Orientation or Meet SAMU Week" absolutely dominated as the way students first learned about SAMU (446 responses), outpacing the physical building (216) by more than double. This proves that

Brandish's hypothesis was correct: concentrated, high-visibility efforts during the first few weeks of the fall term yield the highest return on investment for brand awareness.

**Persistent Barriers Validate Core Service Needs:** In 2025, Brandish highlighted that Educational Costs, Living Costs, and Mental Health were the top barriers to student success and recommended enhancing financial and wellness supports. Unfortunately, the 2026 data show no change in this hierarchy, these three remain the undisputed top barriers. However, because these challenges persist, the 2026 respondents explicitly ranked "Financial Supports" and "Health & Wellness" as the most important SAMU offerings. This indicates that SAMU's ongoing investments in the Breakfast Club, The Pantry, peer support, and health/dental coverage are correctly aligned with the most acute student pain points.

**Sustained Brand Equity:** Brandish noted in 2025 that 97% of aware students rated their experience as "Average" or better. The 2026 data shows SAMU has successfully maintained this high brand equity. Despite a slightly smaller survey sample this year (1,084 vs 1,984), the distribution remains overwhelmingly positive, with less than 1.5% of respondents rating their overall MacEwan experience as "Poor" or "Very Poor," and massive majorities agreeing that SAMU effectively advocates for them and provides value for their fees.

## 6. Conclusion

This research has provided valuable insights into the current state of the MacEwan student experience and their relationship with SAMU. The key takeaways indicate that SAMU is highly appreciated and heavily used, successfully operating as a safe welcoming, and value-additive organization. However, the data also reinforces that students are grappling heavily with financial constraints and mental health challenges. By continuing to align its services, building up utilization, and advocacy efforts to directly address these core barriers, SAMU can ensure its offerings remain highly relevant and impactful for the student body in the years to come.