



STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION
OF MACEWAN UNIVERSITY

Academic Survey Report

SAMU Data Research Findings Report

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1. Executive Summary

This report outlines the findings from the SAMU Academic Survey, which was conducted to gather accurate, up-to-date information on MacEwan student perspectives regarding the academic calendar, course scheduling, classroom spaces, and learning materials. The survey was administered from February 2nd to February 28th, 2026, and received a total of 498 responses.

Key findings from this research indicate that:

- **Key Finding 1:** An affordability crisis regarding learning materials is severely altering student behavior. An overwhelming 69.3% of students skip purchasing required textbooks due to high costs, and 54.9% encounter unexpected "hidden" course costs (such as software codes and mandatory kits) after paying tuition.
- **Key Finding 2:** Institutional bottlenecks and scheduling constraints are major stressors. 42.4% of students frequently have trouble enrolling in necessary courses due to capacity limits, and 69.5% of students were subjected to severe exam "bunching" (writing two or more final exams within 24 hours) in the last academic year.
- **Key Finding 3:** Students face severe "time poverty" but still highly prefer traditional academic models. Despite having a median of only 18 hours per week available to study outside of class, students overwhelmingly prefer In-Person learning and traditional In-Person (Closed Book) assessments over flexible, asynchronous, or Hyflex models.

This report will provide a detailed analysis of the survey data for the SAMU Executive Committee

2. Introduction & Methodology

2.1. Research Objectives

The primary objectives of this survey were to:

- Assess student satisfaction with the current academic calendar (start/end dates and reading breaks).
- Identify scheduling bottlenecks, capacity issues, and preferred times for class delivery.
- Evaluate student preferences regarding course delivery methods and assessment formats.
- Quantify the financial burden of learning materials (textbooks and hidden costs) and how it affects student behavior.

2.2. Methodology

- **Target Population:** Current MacEwan University students across all faculties and years of study.
- **Survey Period:** The survey was open from February 2nd to February 28th, 2026.
- **Distribution Method:** The survey was distributed via email list, physical media (Posters, TVs, etc.), and social media channels
- **Response Rate:** A total of **498** students responded to the survey, resulting in a response rate of 2.87% (Based on 17,327 Student Population*)
- **Margin of Error:** With a Student Population of 17,327, this sample size of 498 yields a margin of error of ($\pm 4.33\%$) at a 95% confidence interval providing a medium-high degree of statistical confidence in our findings.

2.3 Technical Methodology & Tech Stack

To ensure the integrity, reproducibility, and depth of this analysis, raw survey data was processed using a custom programmatic pipeline built in **Python 3.13**. Unlike standard spreadsheet analysis, this approach allowed advanced statistical correlation, interactive visualization, and Natural Language Processing (NLP) of open-ended responses.

1. Data Processing & Statistical Analysis (pandas, numpy)

- **Data Cleaning:** Raw SurveyMonkey exports were ingested and sanitized to remove incomplete entries and format metadata.
- **Transformation:** Categorical responses were programmatically grouped to allow direct statistical comparison.
- **Statistical Logic:** Commute times and housing costs were analyzed using comparative aggregation (Mean/Median) and correlation matrices to identify the relationship between housing costs and financial stress levels.

2. Advanced Visualization (plotly, matplotlib)

- Data was visualized using **Plotly and Matplotlib**, allowing for the creation of multi-dimensional charts.
- Plotly was also chosen for the interactivity it provides if this report is posted to a live web-application and matplotlib for rapid development time.

3. Qualitative Analysis (nlTK)

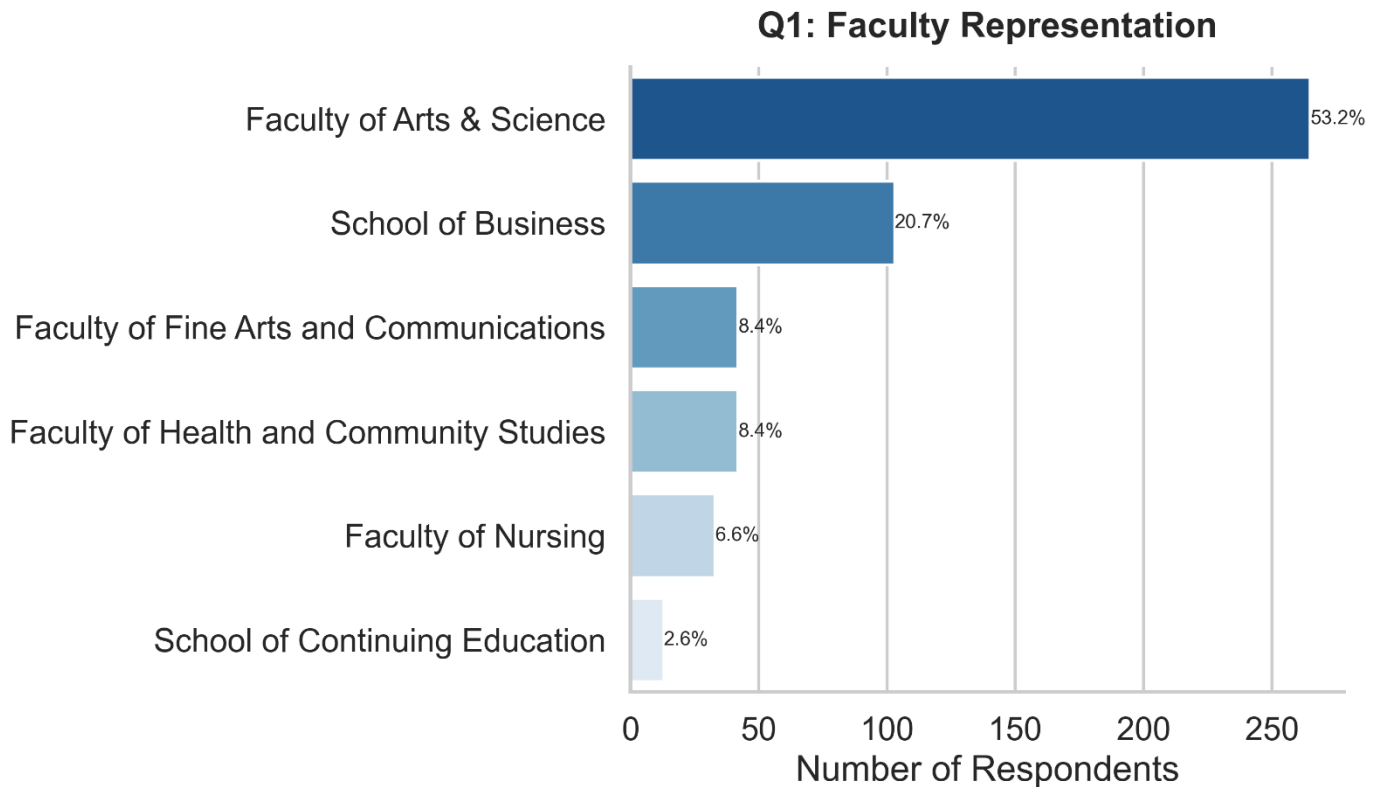
- **Natural Language Processing (NLP):** The NLTK (Natural Language Toolkit) library was used to tokenize text and identify high-frequency keywords in open-ended responses. This also allowed for:
 - Automated sentiment analysis of student complaints
 - Thematic categorization of hundreds of open-ended responses into actionable buckets
 - Cleaning of Major/Program of Study responses

* Population is based on the 2025-2026 Election Eligible Voters count (Oct 17, 2025)
<https://samu.ca/election/samuelection/>

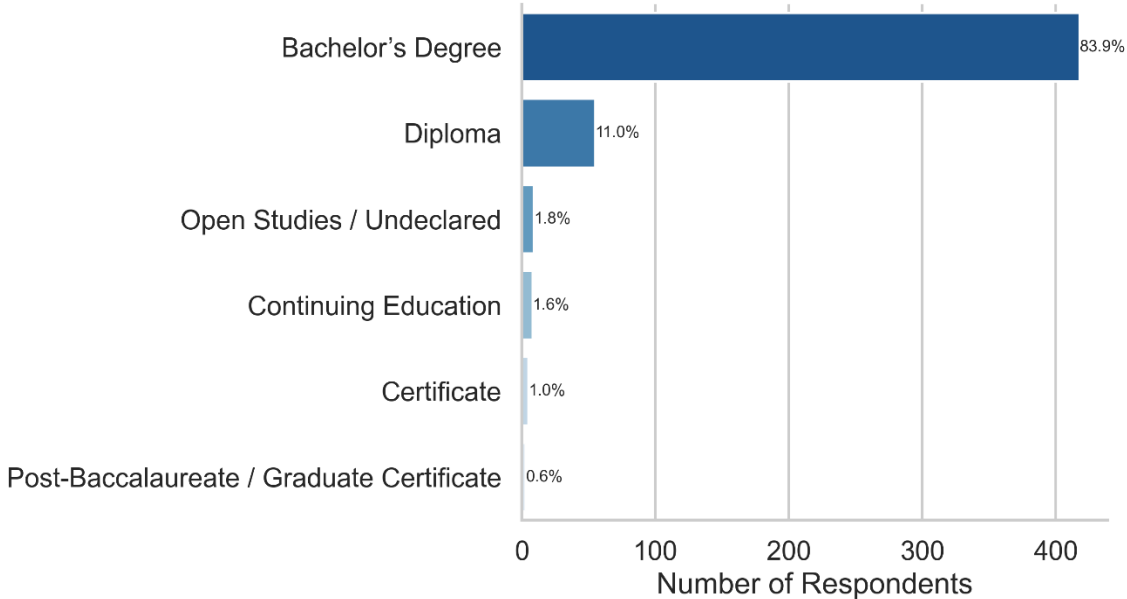
3. Respondent Demographics

The following section provides a demographic overview of the survey respondents. The data indicates a young, predominantly full-time, domestic student sample, heavily weighted toward the Faculty of Arts & Science and School of Business.

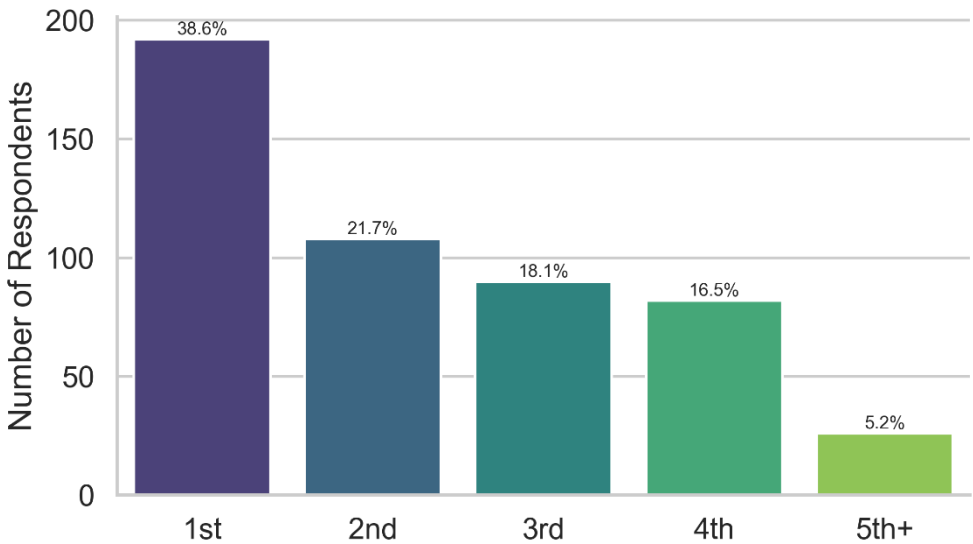
- **Faculty & Majors:** Most respondents belong to the Faculty of Arts & Science (53.2%), followed by the School of Business (20.7%). The top majors/programs of study represented are Psychology (54 students), Undeclared (51), and Biology (47).
- **Credential & Year of Study:** 83.9% are pursuing a bachelor’s degree. The sample skews toward earlier years of study, with 38.6% in their 1st year and 21.7% in their 2nd year.
- **Course Load:** The sample consists largely of full-time students. 72.4% of respondents were enrolled in 4.0 or 5.0 courses during the Winter term.
- **International Status:** 92.2% of respondents are domestic students, while 7.8% are international students.



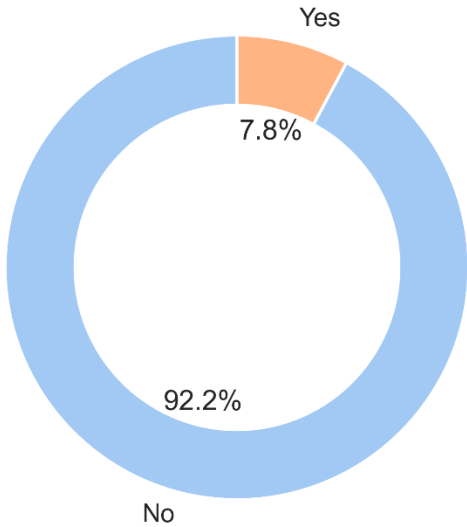
Q2: Credential Pursued



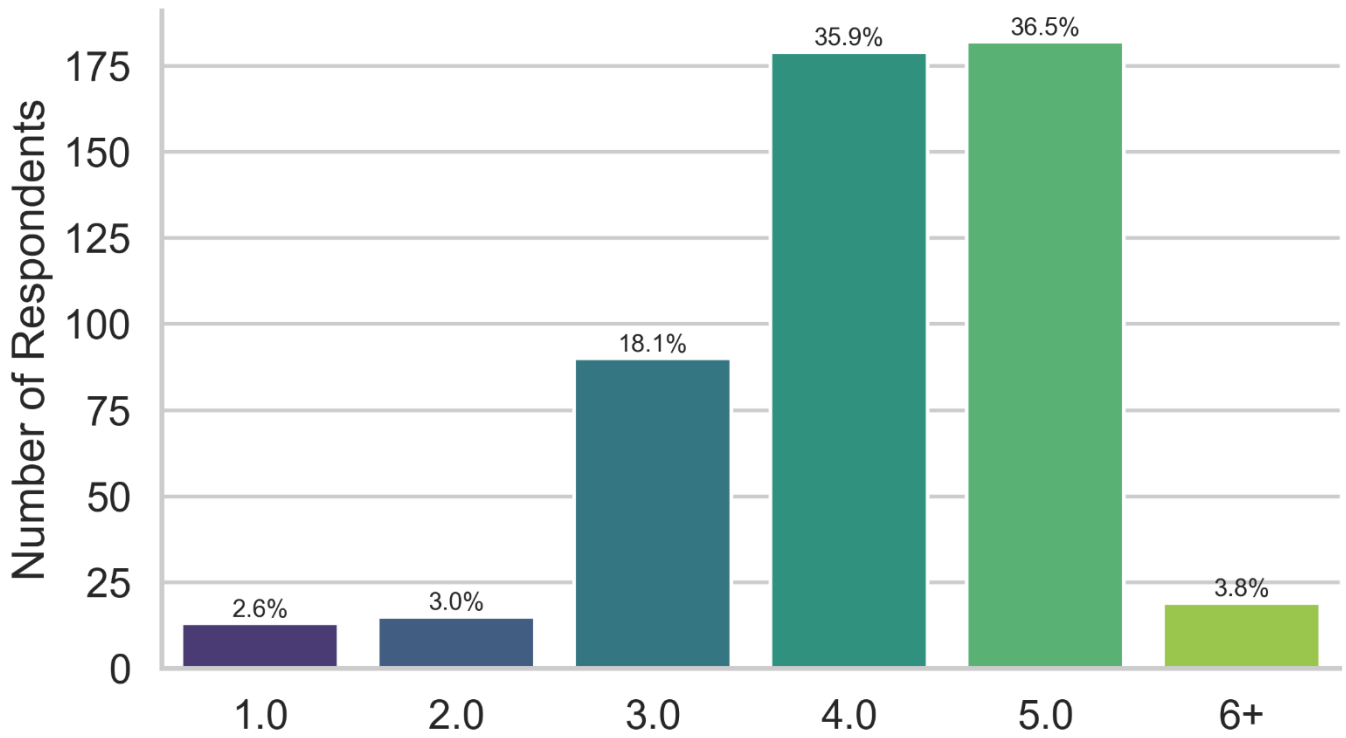
Q4: Year of Study



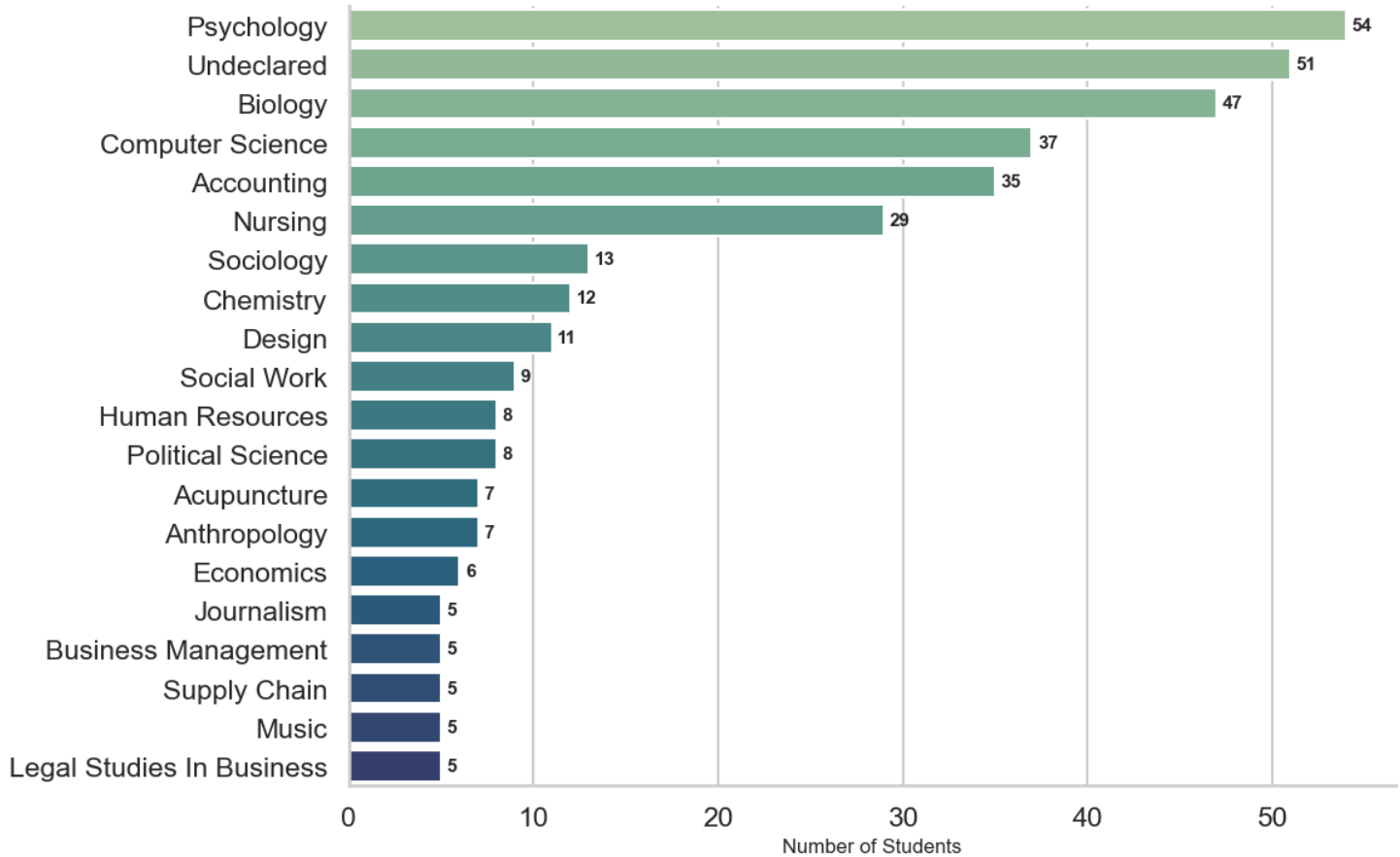
Q6: Are you an international student?



Q5: Courses Enrolled (Winter Term)



Top 20 Majors/Programs of Study



4. Key Findings

This section details the main findings from the survey, organized by key themes regarding student academic experiences, financial burdens, and scheduling capacity.

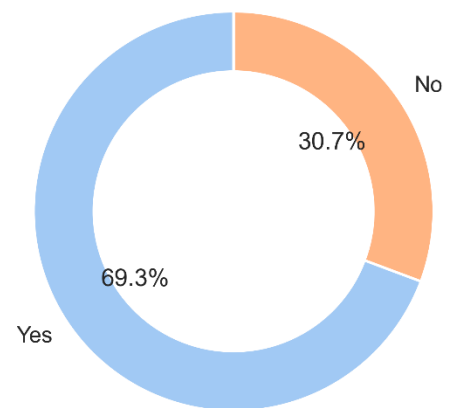
Theme 1: The Affordability Crisis & "Hidden" Course Costs

The data reveals a disconnect between assigned course materials and student purchasing behavior, heavily driven by financial constraints.

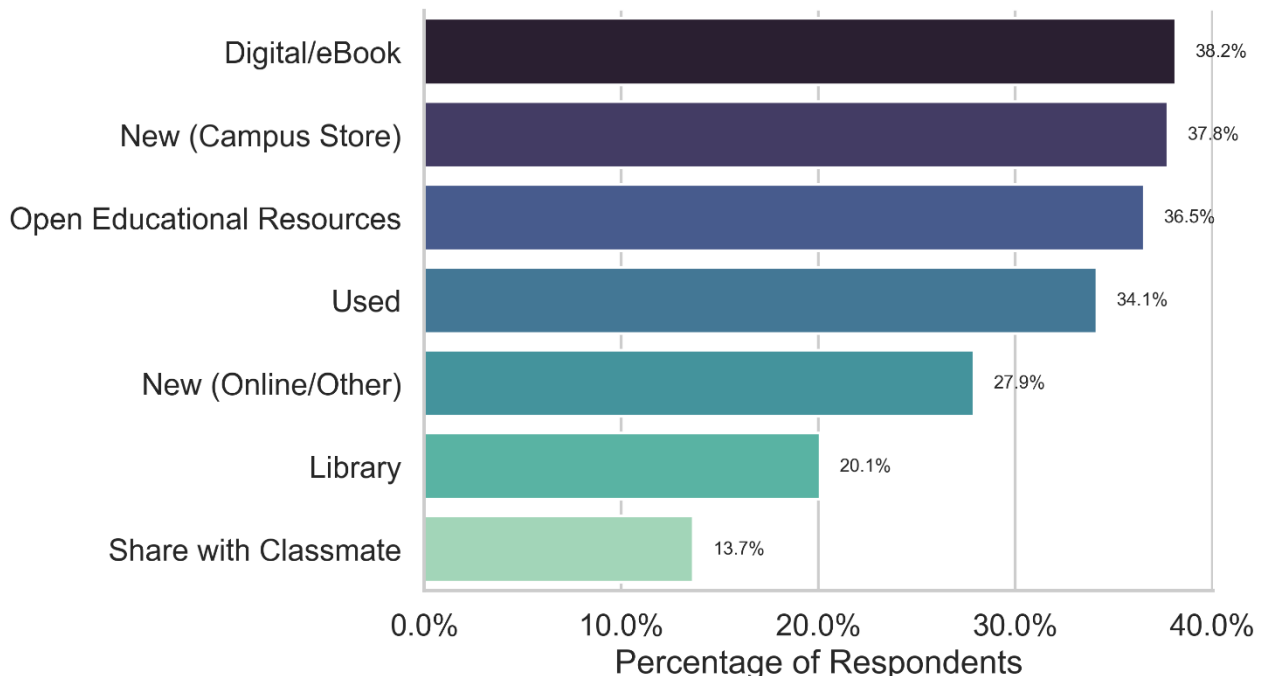
Finding 1.1: Cost is the primary deterrent to acquiring required course materials, heavily altering student behavior.

- An overwhelming 69.3% of respondents report skipping the purchase of a required textbook due to cost.
- Despite these avoidance strategies, 70.3% of students are still spending over \$100 per semester on textbooks, with the largest bracket (42.6%) spending between \$101 and \$250.
- Students utilize a highly fragmented approach to source affordable materials: Digital/eBook (38.2%), New from the Campus Store (37.8%), Open Educational Resources (36.5%), and Used (34.1%).

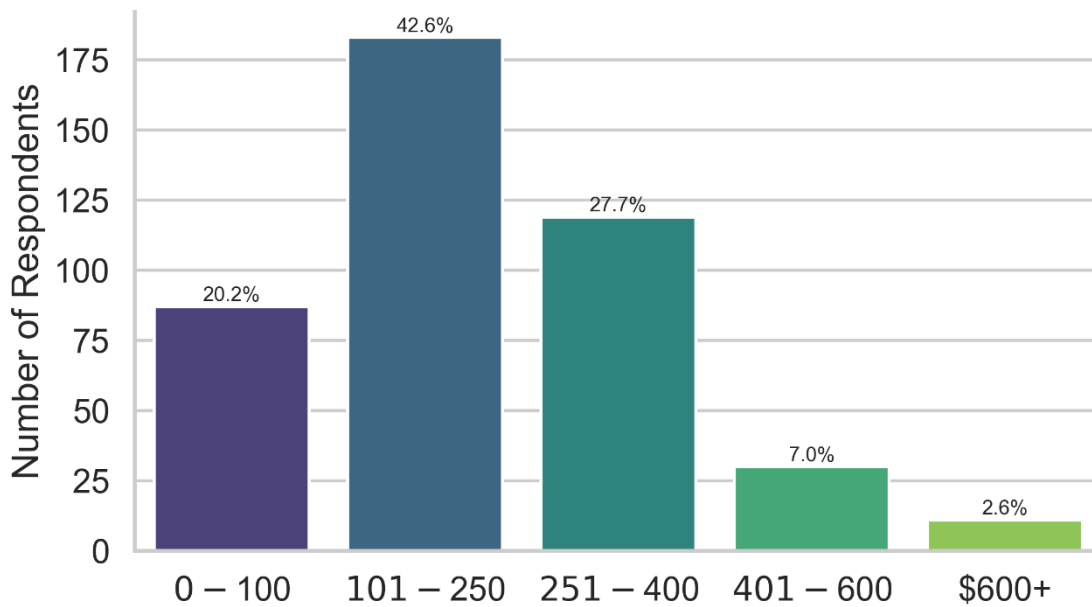
Q27: Skipped Buying Textbook Due to Cost?



Q26: Primary Methods for Obtaining Materials



Q25: Textbook Spend per Semester



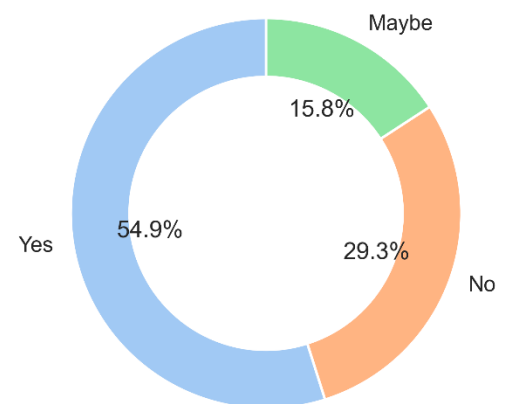
Qualitative Insights:

When asked in an open-ended question why they skipped buying a textbook, 69 students explicitly wrote "Too Expensive," while others noted they "Found it free online" (10) or realized "Professors rarely use it" (5). Conversely, among the minority of students who did buy the textbook, the leading write-in reason was "Fear of Failing," indicating purchases are driven by anxiety rather than perceived course utility.

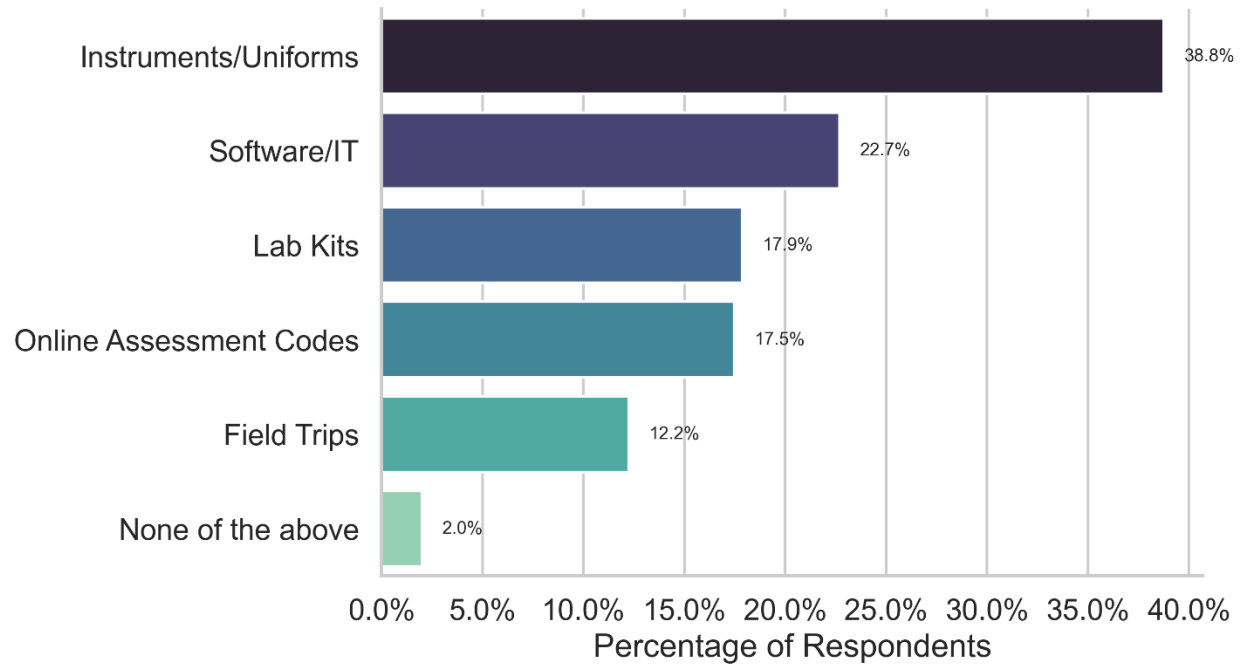
Finding 1.2: Over half of the student body encounters "hidden" course costs after paying tuition.

- 54.9% of students report encountering hidden costs at MacEwan, with another 15.8% stating "Maybe."
- The most prevalent unexpected expenses are physical requirements like Instruments/Uniforms (38.8%) and Lab Kits (17.9%).
- Digital hidden costs are also prominent, with 22.7% of students forced to pay for Software/IT, and 17.5% paying for Online Assessment Codes.

Q29: Encountered Hidden Costs at MacEwan?



Q30: Types of Hidden Costs Encountered



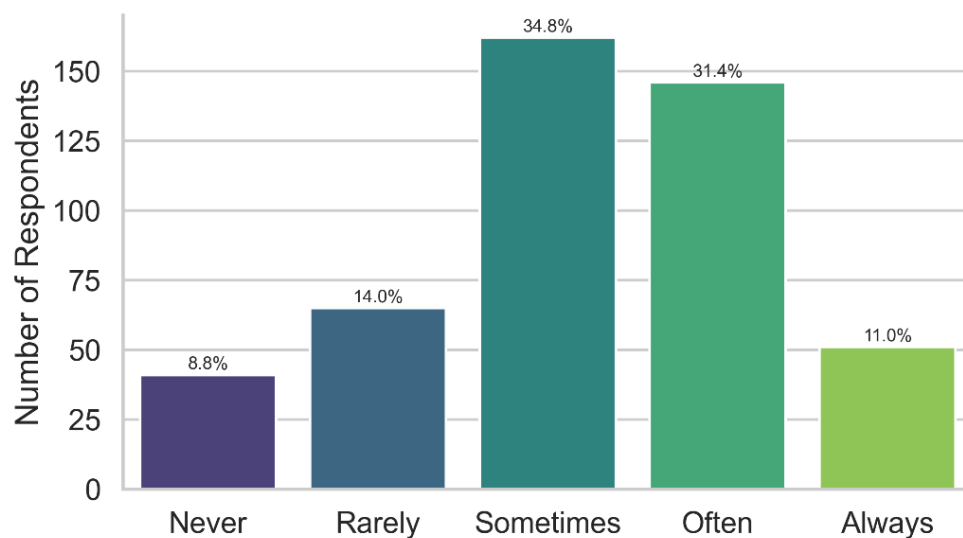
Theme 2: Systemic Bottlenecks & Course Capacity

A significant portion of the student body is experiencing institutional friction when attempting to build their schedules and access necessary courses.

Finding 2.1: Enrolling in required courses is a persistent, widespread challenge.

- The respondent pool is heavily composed of full-time students, with 72.4% taking 4.0 or 5.0 courses in the Winter Term.
- However, 42.4% of students report they "Often" (31.4%) or "Always" (11.0%) have trouble enrolling in courses due to capacity limits. Only 8.8% report "Never" facing capacity issues.

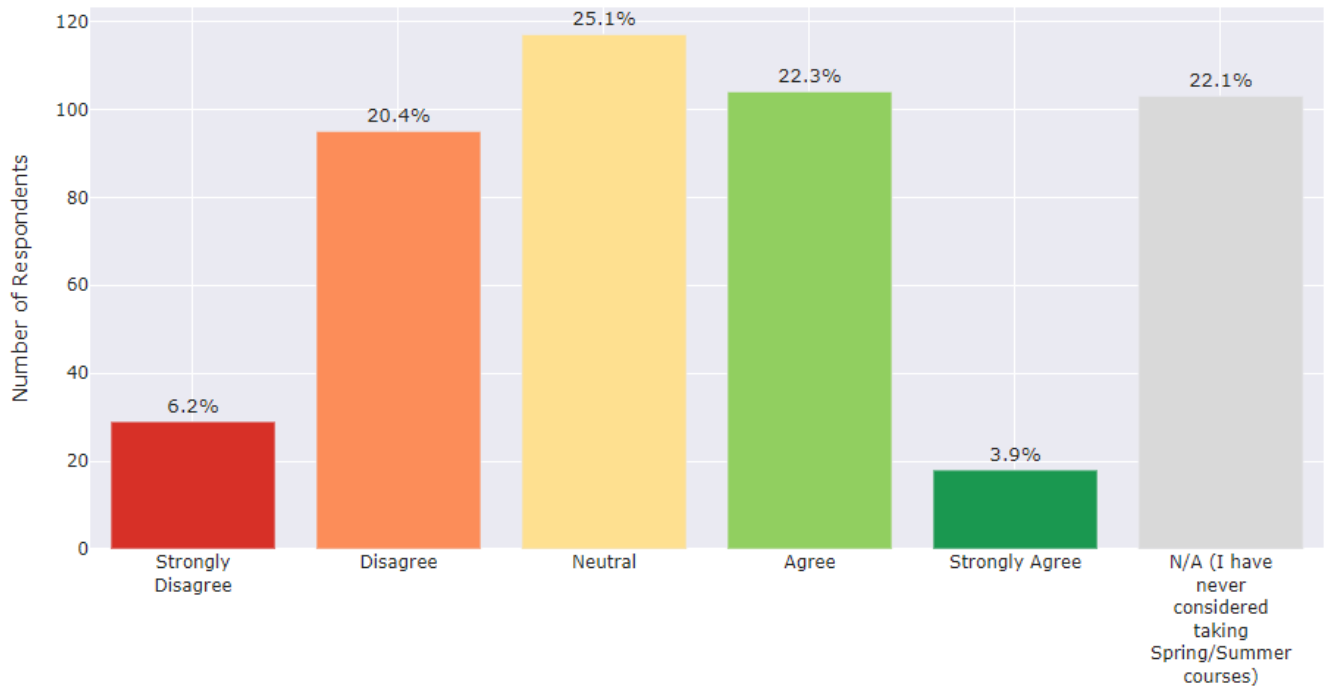
Q13: Difficulty Enrolling Due to Capacity



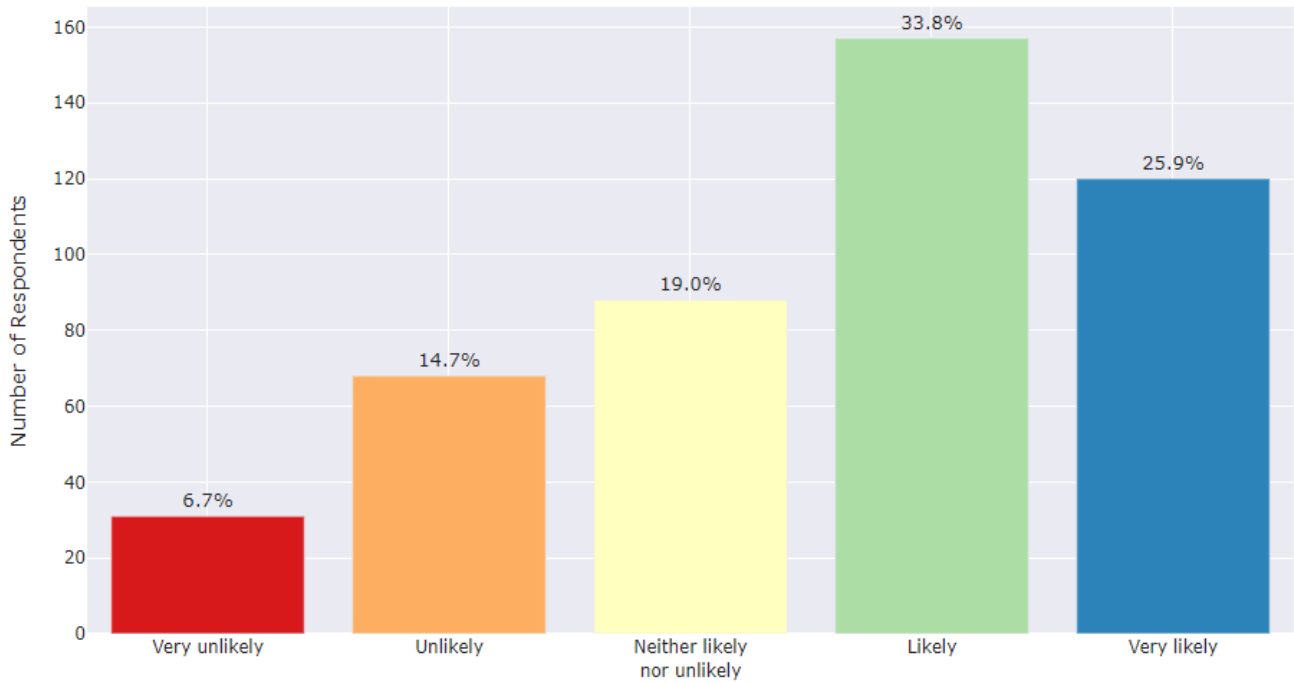
Finding 2.2: High demand for Spring/Summer terms is met with supply friction.

- Nearly 60% of students indicated they are "Likely" (33.8%) or "Very Likely" (25.9%) to take Spring/Summer courses.
- When asked if current Spring/Summer offerings are sufficient, responses were fractured: while 44.4% agreed they are sufficient, 26.6% disagreed or strongly disagreed, indicating a sizable gap between student demand and course availability.

Q15: Spring/Summer Offerings are Sufficient



Q16: Likelihood of Taking Spring/Summer Courses

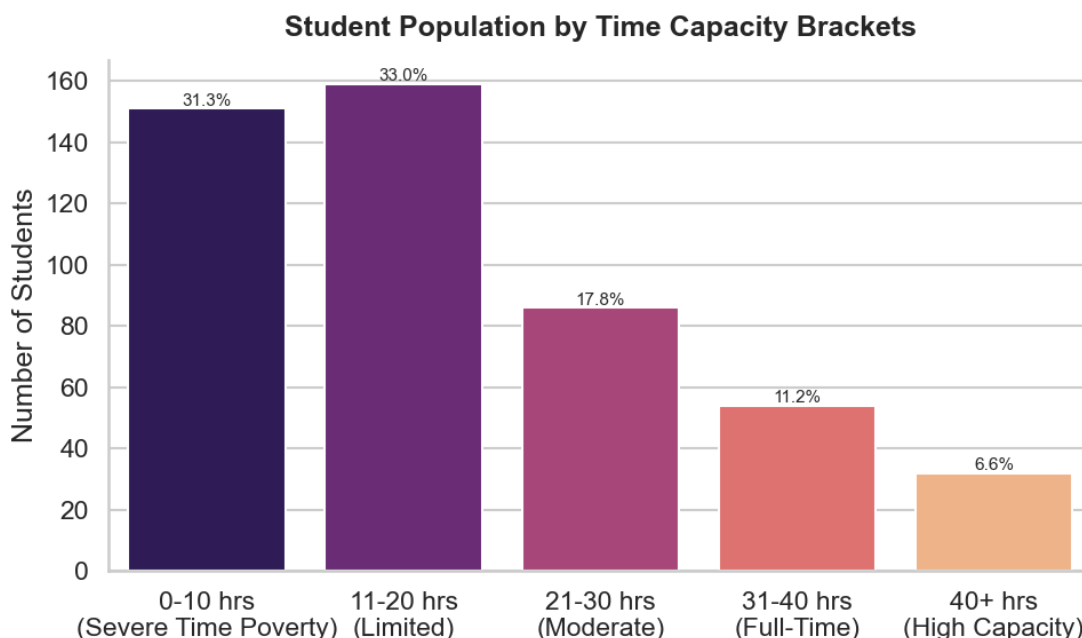
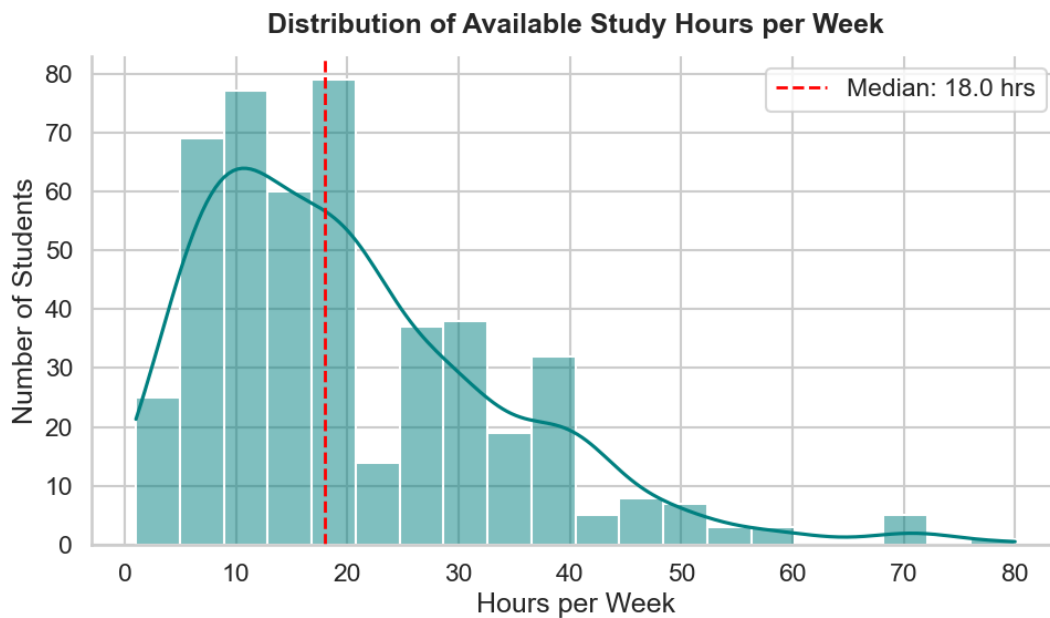


Theme 3: Time Poverty & Scheduling Stressors

The data highlights a student population operating with strictly limited time, navigating heavily condensed assessment periods and restricting their campus hours.

Finding 3.1: Most students operate with severe "Time Poverty."

- The median available study time outside of class is just 18.0 hours per week.
- When grouped by capacity, 64.3% of the student body falls to the lowest brackets: 31.3% have 0-10 hours available ("Severe Time Poverty") and 33.0% have 11-20 hours available ("Limited"). Only 6.6% of students have 40+ hours available to study.

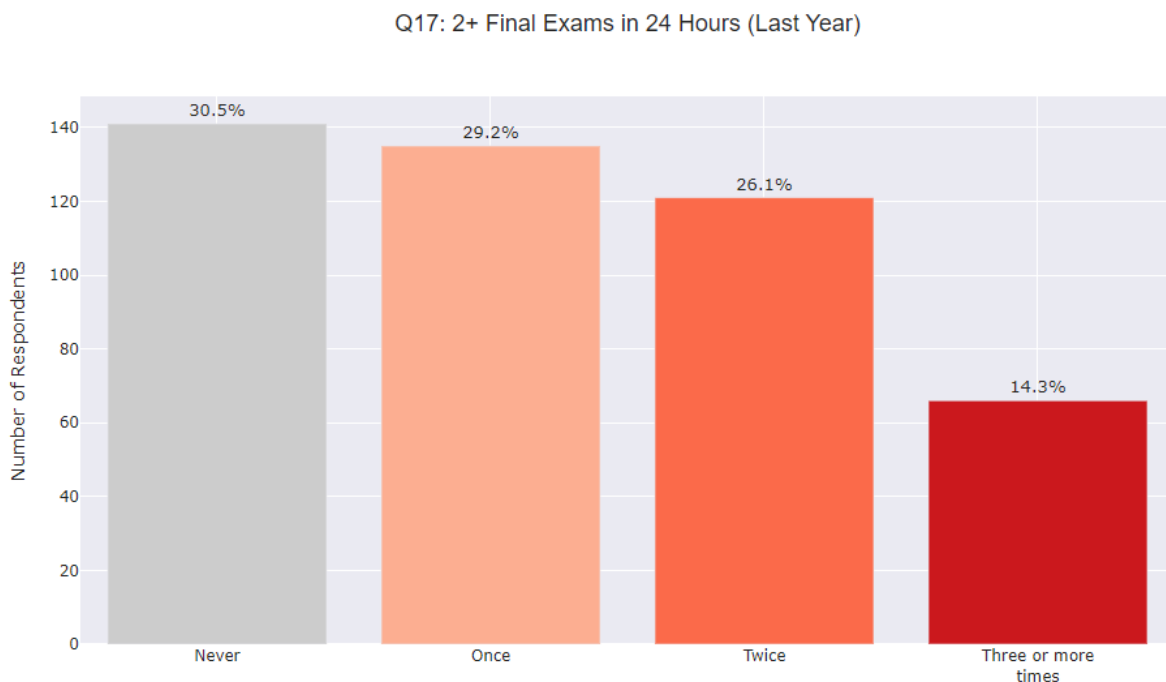
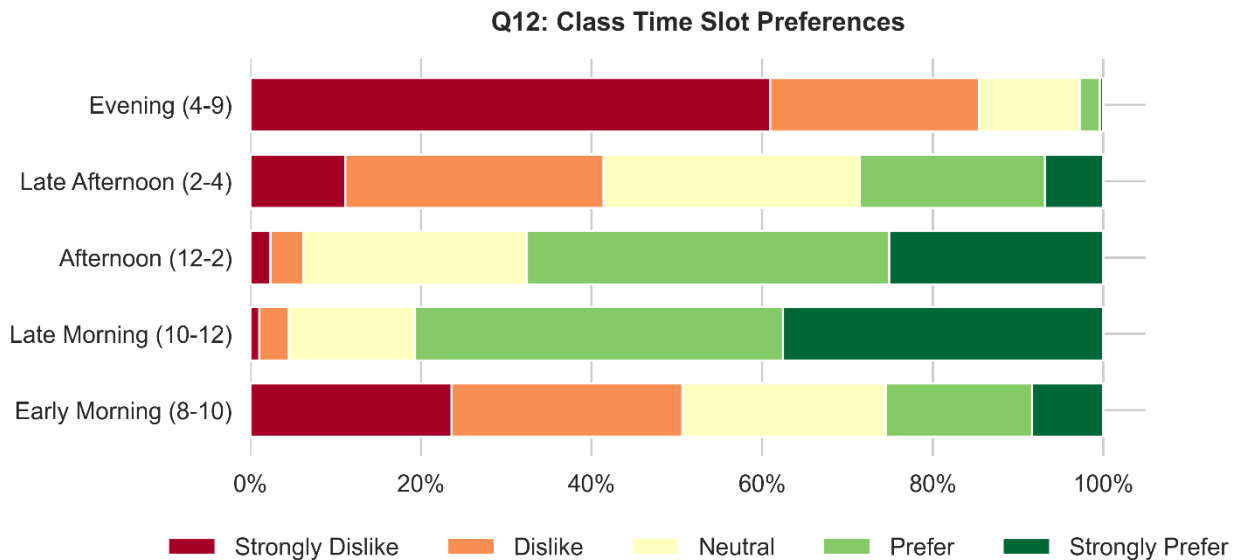


Finding 3.2: Class time preferences are highly restricted to midday blocks.

- There is a clear preference for midday learning. Students prefer the "Late Morning (10-12)" and "Afternoon (12-2)" time slots.
- Students strongly reject the outer edges of the day: "Evening (4-9)" received the highest "Strongly Dislike" rating, closely followed by "Early Morning (8-10)."

Qualitative Insights:

"Please have more class options at various times. There are a few classes where there is only 1 option available, or there are multiple options, but all are around the same time."



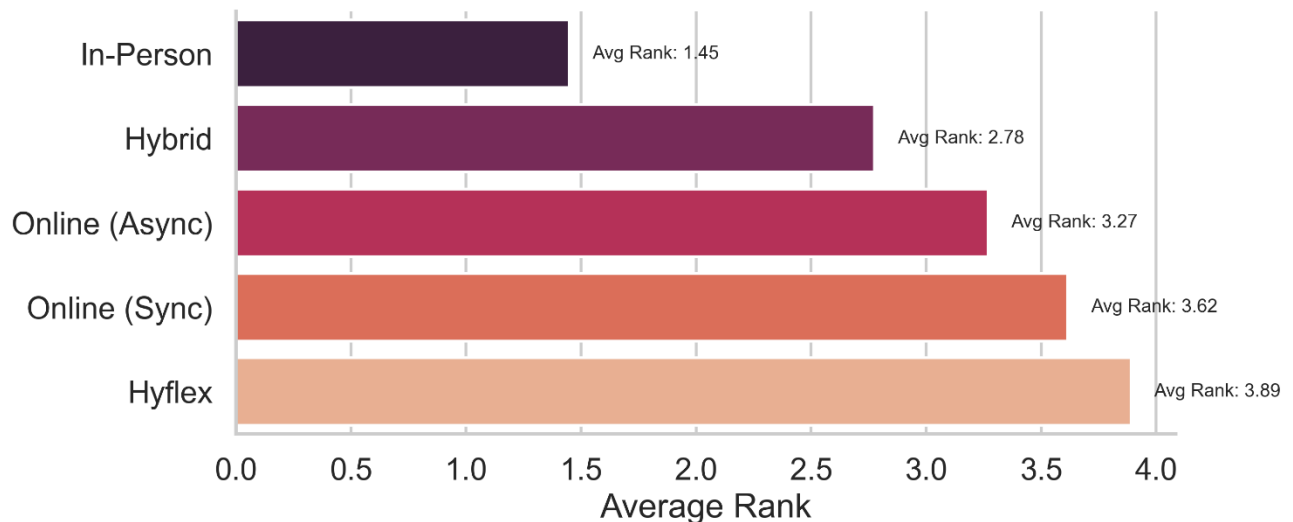
Theme 4: Academic Delivery, Assessments, & Calendar

Despite technological integrations post-pandemic, student preferences lean toward traditional academic models.

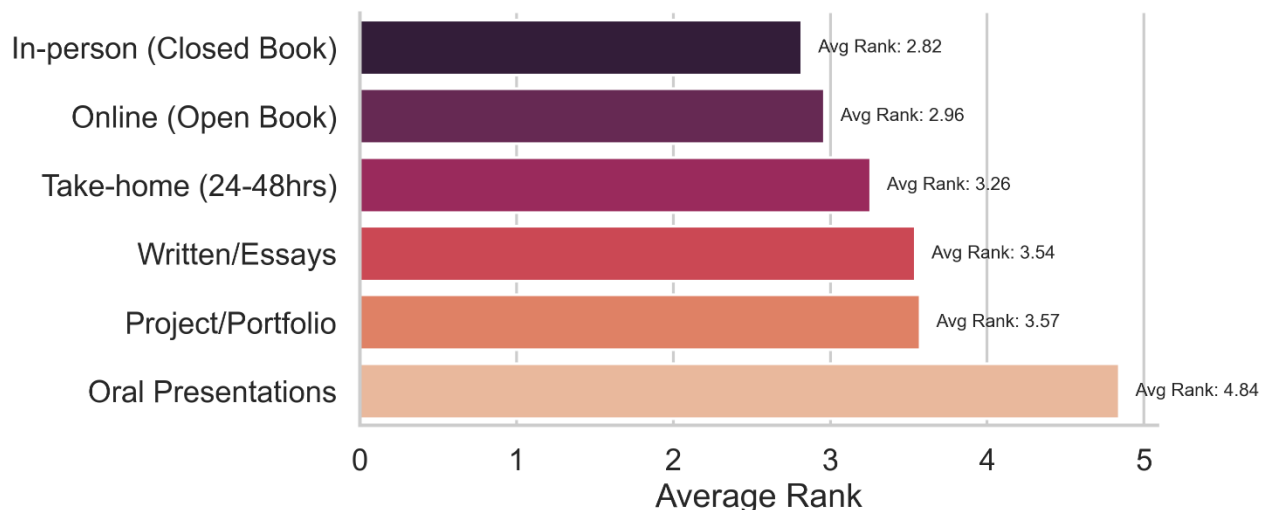
Finding 4.1: "In-Person" learning remains the dominant and preferred modality.

- 84.7% of students report that their current majority delivery method is entirely In-Person.
- When asked to rank their preferred delivery format, "In-Person" ranked as the clear favorite (Avg Rank: 1.45). Highly flexible digital formats like "Online (Asynchronous)" and "Hyflex" ranked lowest.
- Similarly, students ranked "In-Person (Closed Book)" as their most preferred assessment format (Avg Rank: 2.82).

**Q22: Preferred Course Delivery Format
(Lower score = Higher Preference)**



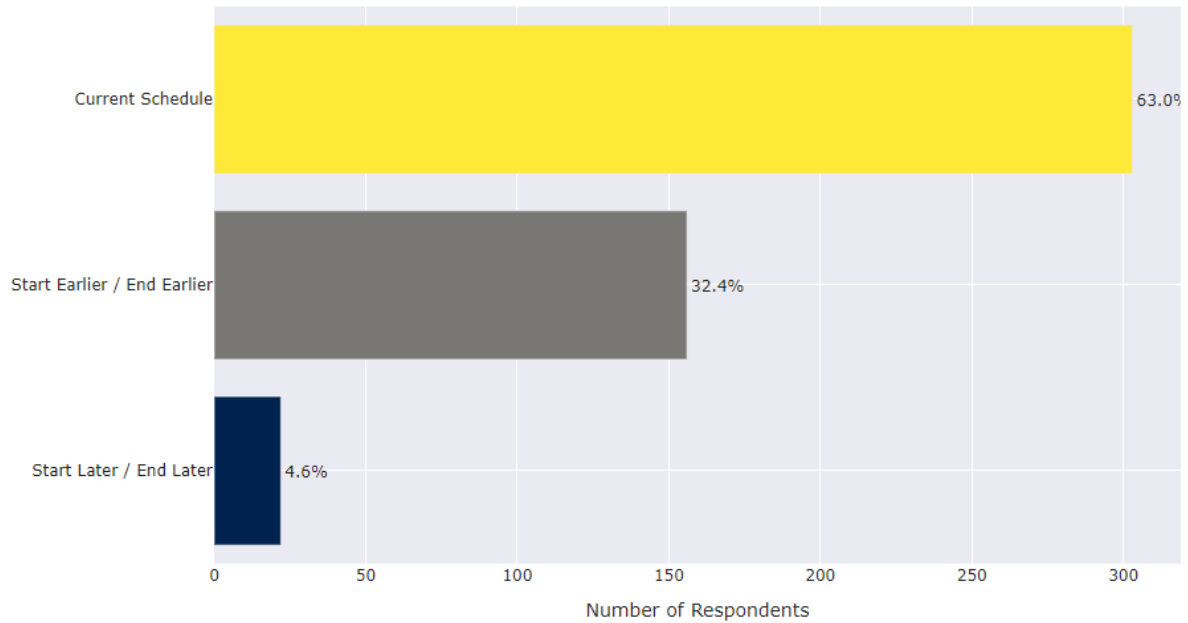
**Q19: Preferred Assessment Format
(Lower score = Higher Preference)**



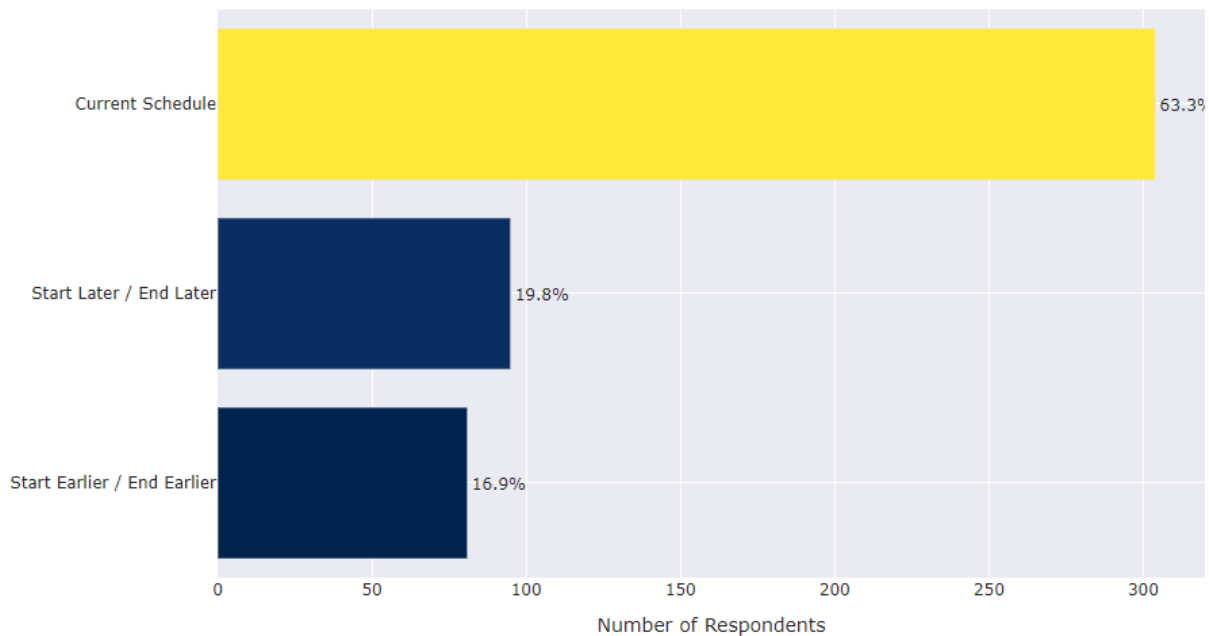
Finding 4.2: Students are highly satisfied with the current academic calendar and digital policies.

- 63.0% of respondents are satisfied with the current Fall Term schedule, and 63.3% are satisfied with the Winter Term schedule.
- A plurality of students (44.6%) prefers the Fall Reading break to align with Remembrance Day in mid-November.

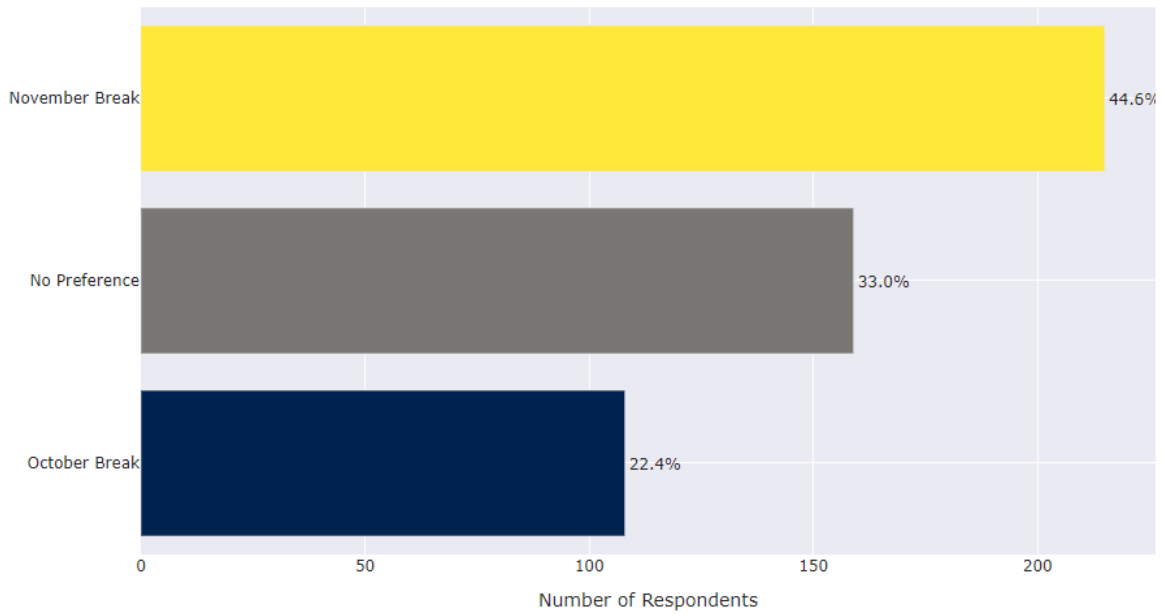
Q9: Fall Term Schedule Preference



Q10: Winter Term Schedule Preference



Q11: Fall Reading Break Preference



5. Discussion

The findings of this survey paint a clear picture: today's MacEwan students still deeply value a traditional, in-person university experience. However, their ability to enjoy and succeed in it is being restricted by rising costs, rigid scheduling, and severe lack of time.

Interpretation of Key Findings:

The "Pay-to-Submit": While the data shows 54.9% of students face hidden costs, the types of costs are highly concerning. Specifically, 17.5% of students forced to pay for "Online Assessment Codes" highlights a systemic inequity. Students are paying thousands in tuition, only to hit a third-party paywall simply to submit their mandatory homework. This functions as a double tax on education.

Ghost Textbooks and the "Fear Tax": A staggering 70% of students skip buying textbooks due to high costs. But the reasons behind their choices are even more telling. Students who buy the books often do so out of a "fear of failing," while those who skip them quickly realize the professor rarely uses them. The result? Students are paying a massive "fear tax" for ghost materials that don't improve their learning.

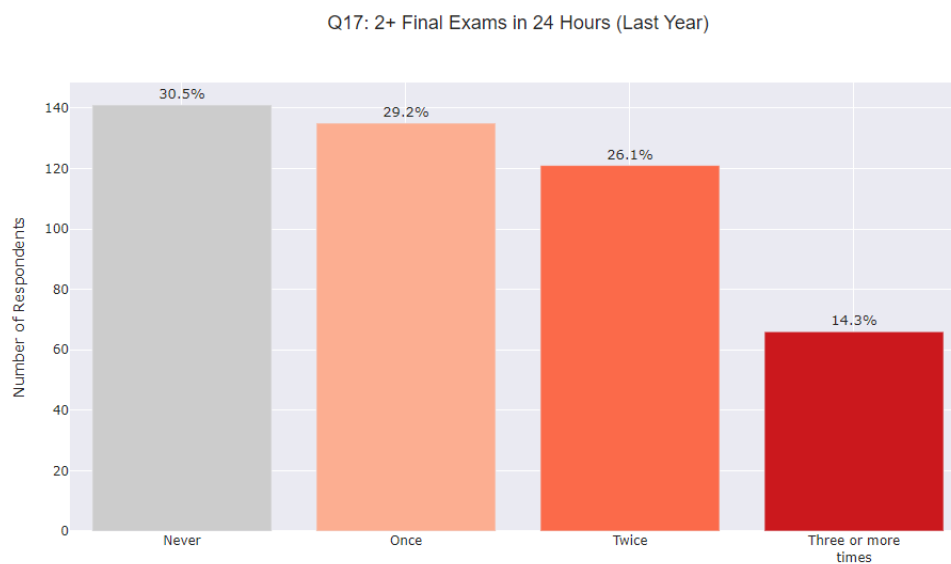
The Class Registration Bottleneck: Students are trying to take full course loads to graduate on time, but the seats simply aren't there. With 42.4% of students frequently locked out of required classes—combined with a lack of Spring/Summer options—many are seeing their graduation delayed through no fault of their own.

The "Business-Hour" Squeeze: The idea of the flexible, on-campus-all-day student is a thing of the past. With a median of only 18 hours a week available to study, students are fiercely avoiding 8:00 AM and evening classes, trying instead to cram their education into a strict 10:00 AM – 2:00 PM window. Why? The affordability crisis means they are likely working off-campus jobs early in the mornings and late into the evenings just to survive.

Surprising or Unexpected Results:

Rejection of Hyflex and Asynchronous Models: In-Person Learning is Still King: In a post-pandemic world, we often assume extreme flexibility is what students want most. Surprisingly, fully online and "Hyflex" courses were ranked as the *least* preferred formats. Even traditional, in-person exams beat out take-home essays. MacEwan students clearly crave structure, face-to-face interaction, and clear boundaries between school and home.

The Normalization of Exam Bunching: It is shocking that 69.5% of students have faced two or more final exams within 24 hours in a single year. This indicates that extreme exam clustering is not an anomaly or a rare scheduling glitch, but rather a normalized, systemic feature of the current academic calendar, directly exacerbating the stress of a highly time-poor student body.



Limitations:

Because our survey leans heavily toward first- and second-year students (60.3%) in Arts & Science and Business, the unique struggles of upper-year students in specialized programs (expensive studio fees in Fine Arts or demanding clinical hours in Nursing) might be underrepresented here. Future surveys should dive deeper into the specific hurdles of individual faculties.

6. Conclusion

This research has provided valuable, objective insights into the current academic realities, scheduling constraints, and financial pressures facing MacEwan University students. The key takeaways are that while students highly value and prefer traditional, in-person academic experiences, their ability to engage with these formats is heavily constrained by an affordability crisis (particularly regarding textbook and hidden course costs), severe institutional bottlenecks in course capacity, and systemic time poverty exacerbated by condensed exam scheduling.

By utilizing the objective data outlined in this report, the SAMU Executive Committee can better advocate for targeted, evidence-based policy changes that alleviate financial burdens, improve course accessibility, and meaningfully support the student experience.