



STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION
OF MACEWAN UNIVERSITY

The Evolving MacEwan Student: 5-Year Longitudinal Analysis of the SAMU Spring Survey

SAMU Data Research Findings Report
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1. Executive Summary

This report outlines the findings from SAMU Spring Survey's from 2022–2026, which was conducted to evaluate the five-year trajectory of the MacEwan University student experience, track the shifting barriers to student success, and measure the organizational impact of the Students' Association of MacEwan University. The combined surveys were administered annually during the Spring terms from 2022 to 2026 and received a total of 8,074 responses over the five-year period.

Key findings from this research indicate that:

- **Key Finding 1: Students highly value SAMU and feel supported.** Positive overall student satisfaction with the university experience rebounded from a post-pandemic low of 54.5% in 2022 to a stable ~69% in 2026. Concurrently, SAMU's perceived organizational value has surged; the percentage of students who "would miss SAMU if it no longer existed" jumped from 63.7% in 2024 to 79.7% in 2026.
- **Key Finding 2: Financial and mental health barriers are compounding into systemic "Time Poverty."** Student struggles have fundamentally shifted. While mental health recovery dominated in 2022, a financial crisis has taken over. By 2026, the dominant barriers are Educational Costs (63.6%) and Living Costs (46.6%). As corroborated by our Housing and Academic surveys, students are facing severe "Time Poverty" sacrificing study hours for long commutes to save on rent and skipping required learning materials due to hidden tuition costs.
- **Key Finding 3: The SAMU building acts as a vital "Safe Harbor" and central hub.** In stark contrast to safety concerns reported in the off-campus housing market, 77.6% of students report feeling safe and welcome in the SAMU building. The building sees high, consistent foot traffic primarily driven by students visiting food vendors (66.5%) and utilizing flexible study spaces (56.0%) between their condensed class schedules.
- **Key Finding 4: Orientation events and Omni-Channel communication drive SAMU awareness.** "New Student Orientation or Meet SAMU Week" is by far the most successful avenue for introducing students to SAMU. To maintain engagement, a pivot toward an omni-channel approach (combining Email newsletters with Instagram and physical digital screens) is proving highly effective.

Note to the Reader: *This document serves as a high-level longitudinal analysis focused on 5-year macro-trends (2022–2026). For the most granular, up-to-date cross-tabulations of the current student body, stakeholders are encouraged to review the companion [2026 SAMU Spring Survey Report](#).*

2. Introduction & Methodology

2.1. Research Objectives

The primary objectives of this survey were to:

- Measure long-term student satisfaction with the overall MacEwan University experience and SAMU-specific services.
- Identify and track the key challenges and barriers students face over a multi-year timeline (2022–2026), contextualized by current housing and academic environments.
- Evaluate SAMU's organizational effectiveness, brand awareness, and alignment with the 2021–2026 Strategic Plan.

2.2. Methodology

- **Target Population:** All enrolled MacEwan University students across the five-year period.
- **Survey Period:** Data encompasses five distinct cross-sectional surveys conducted during the Spring academic terms of 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025, and 2026.
- **Response Rate:** A total of 8,074 students responded across the five iterations: 1,241 (2022); 1,591 (2023); 2,174 (2024); 1,984 (2025); and 1,084 (2026).
- **Technical Methodology:** To ensure integrity across a five-year dataset, raw survey exports were ingested using a custom programmatic pipeline built in Python 3.13. This allowed for categorical normalization (standardizing shifting question scales) and Natural Language Processing (NLTK) to perform automated sentiment analysis on thousands of open-ended qualitative responses.

2.3. Limitations

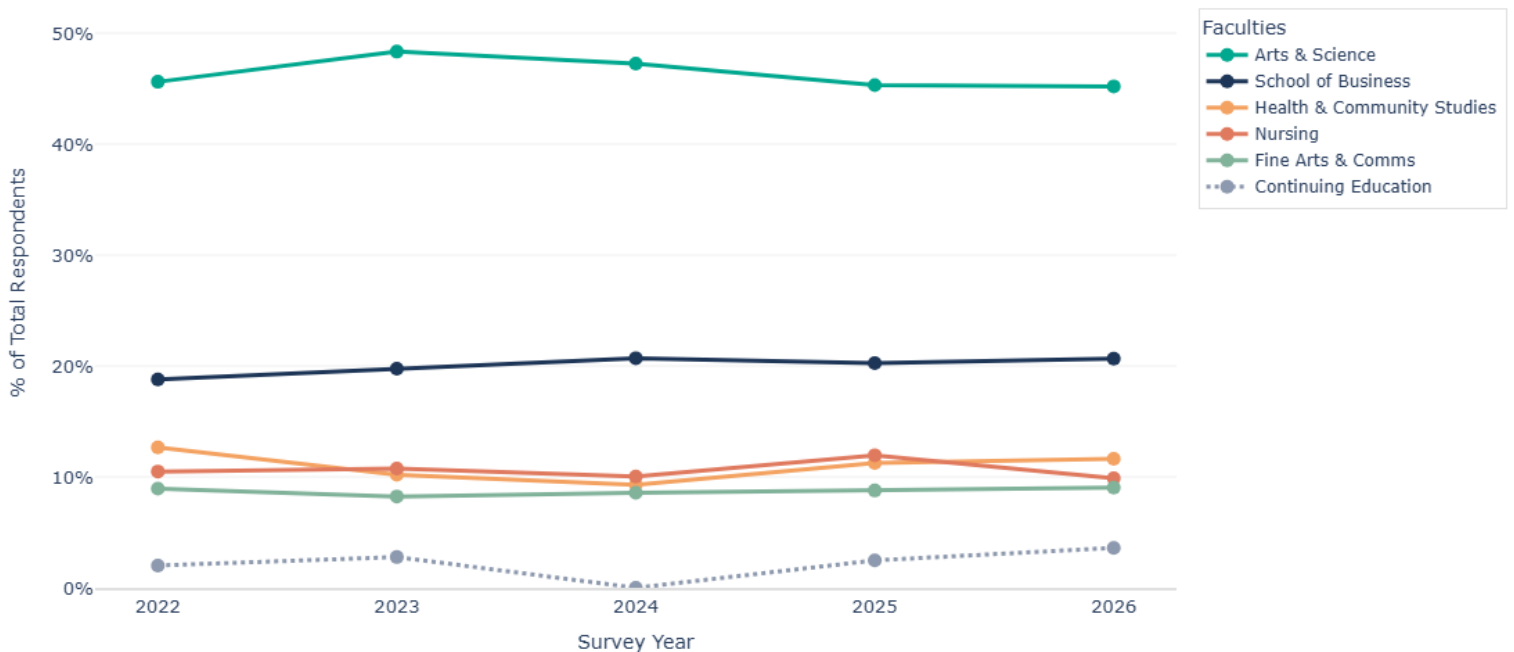
- **Scale Adjustments:** Where question scales changed between years (e.g., the Awareness scale shifting from 5-point to 4-point in 2024, causing an artificial statistical dip, and "Barriers to Success" moving to a "check-all-that-apply" format in 2026), data has been mathematically contextualized to reflect accurate macro-trends.

3. Respondent Demographics

The following section provides a demographic overview of the survey respondents across the five-year tracking period. The demographic makeup has remained remarkably consistent from 2022 to 2026, indicating a highly stable and reliable longitudinal sample.

- **Enrollment Status:** The majority of respondents are Full-Time students, fluctuating only slightly between 90.6% and 93.5% across all five years.
- **Faculty Representation:** The Faculty of Arts & Science consistently represented the largest cohort (holding steady between 45% and 48%). The School of Business followed, representing roughly 18% to 20%.

Stability in Respondent Demographics (2022–2026)
Percentage of total respondents by Faculty/School



- **Vulnerable Cohorts:** While smaller in response size, insights from our specialized surveys indicate that students in the Faculty of Nursing and School of Continuing Education consistently report the highest levels of financial and housing-related stress due to program demands (e.g., unpaid practicums) and mature student demographics.

4. Key Findings

This section details the main findings from the 5-year data, organized by key themes and supported by supplementary data from the 2025 Housing and 2026 Academic surveys.

Theme 1: Overall Perception, Value, and Advocacy

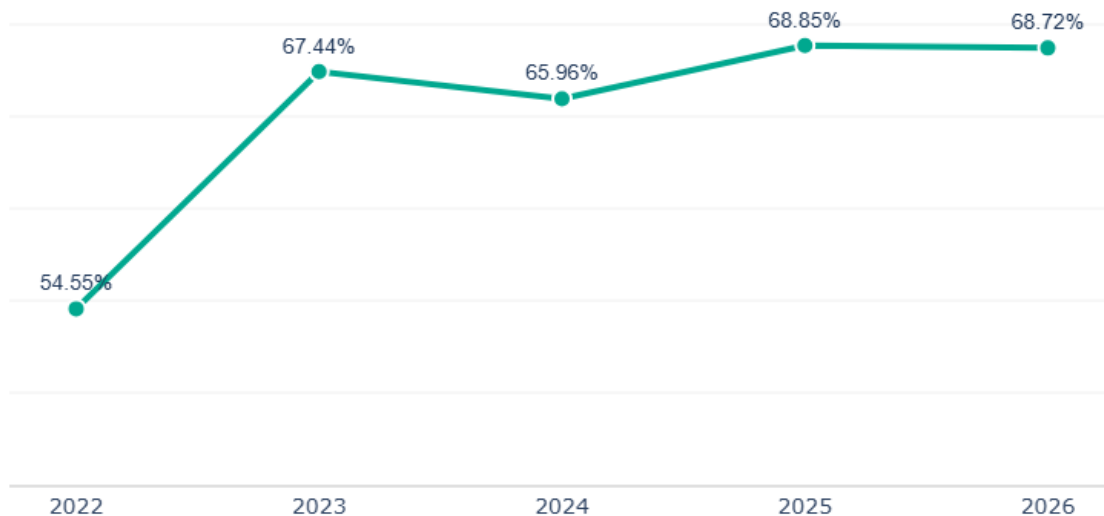
Students demonstrate strong, growing loyalty and high satisfaction regarding their interactions with SAMU post-pandemic.

Finding 1.1: Overall experience at MacEwan has rebounded and stabilized.

- In 2022, only 54.55% of students rated their experience as "Above Average" or "Excellent."

Overall Positive Student Experience (2022–2026)

% of students rating their experience as 'Above Average' or 'Excellent'



- By 2026, this combined positive metric had grown by over 14 points, stabilizing at 68.72%.

Finding 1.2: SAMU is increasingly seen as an indispensable, highly valuable presence.

- When asked if they "would miss SAMU if it no longer existed," agreement surged aggressively from **63.7% in 2024**, to **71.2% in 2025**, reaching a peak of **79.7% in 2026**.
- Belief that "SAMU effectively advocates for my interests" also grew consistently, from **63.6% (2024)** to **74.1% (2026)**.

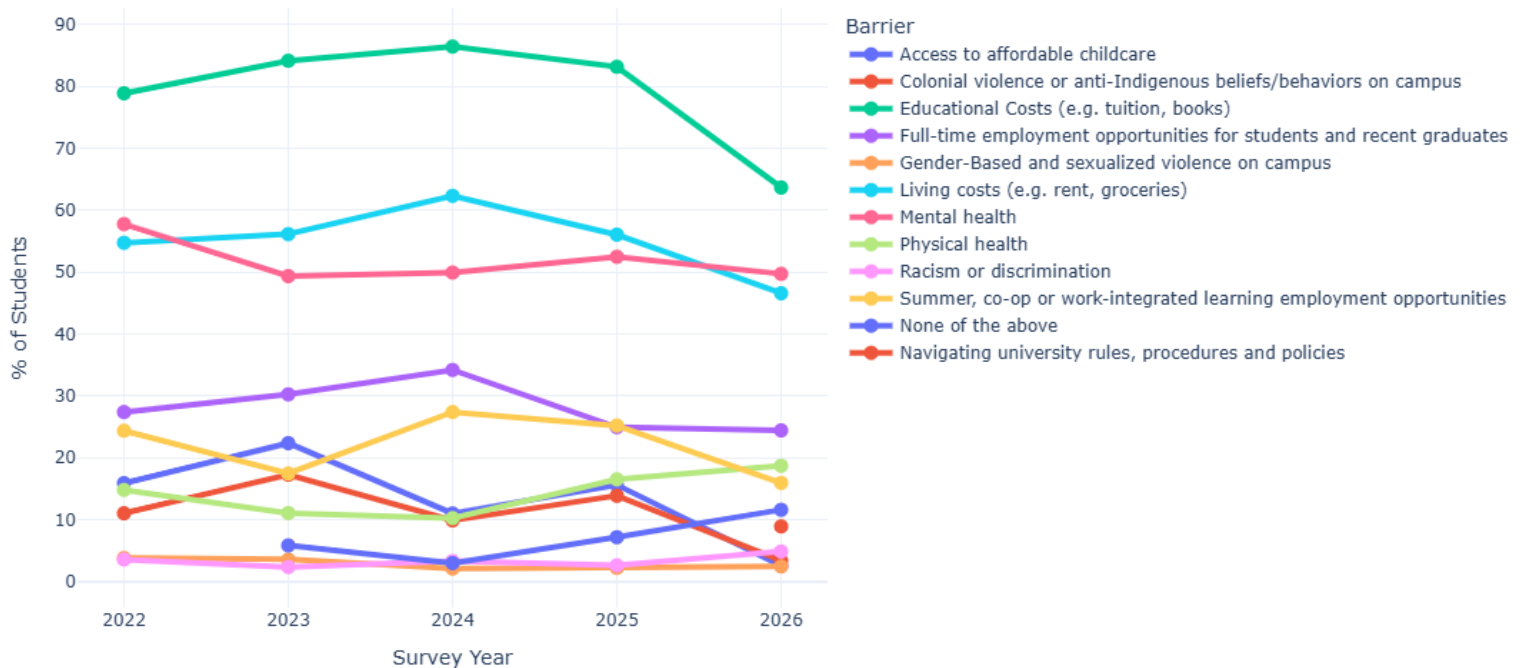
Theme 2: Barriers to Student Success (The Cost-of-Living Crisis)

The existential threats facing MacEwan students have fundamentally shifted from pandemic-era mental health struggles to a severe, compounding affordability crisis.

Finding 2.1: Financial survival has overtaken mental health as the primary barrier.

- In 2022, Mental Health was ranked as a heavier burden than Living Costs. However, as inflation spiked through 2023–2025, "Living Costs (rent, groceries)" consistently overtook Mental Health in severity.
- In 2026, the compounding reality is stark: 63.6% of students are hindered by Educational Costs, 49.7% by Mental Health, and 46.6% by Living Costs.

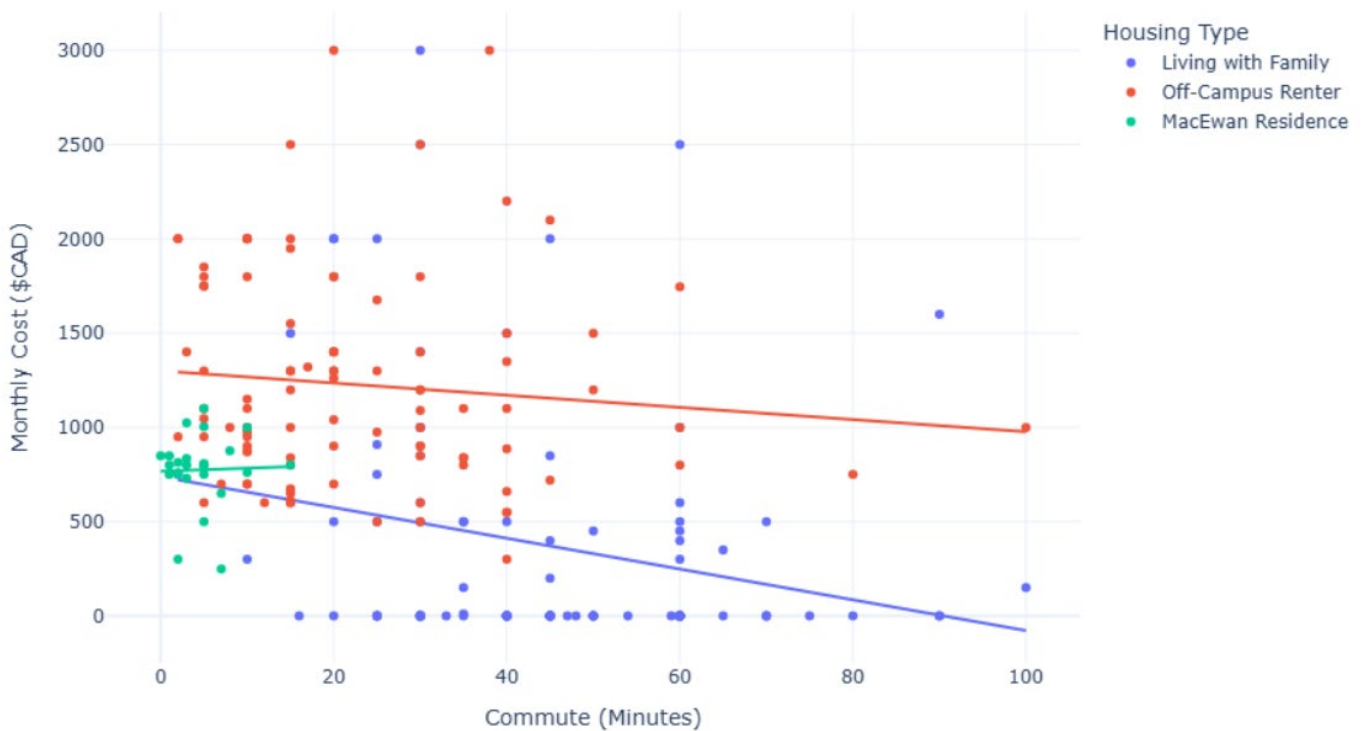
Year-over-Year Trend of Student Barriers (2022-2026)



Finding 2.2: The "Double Tax" and "Time Poverty" exacerbate these barriers.

- **Qualitative & Supplementary Insights:** The Spring Survey barriers are deeply explained by our recent Academic and Housing reports. Students are facing a "Time Poverty" crisis—enduring 60 to 100-minute commutes to live with family to avoid predatory off-campus rent. Furthermore, they are hit with a "double tax" in the classroom; 54.9% of students report hidden course costs (like mandatory online assessment codes), leading 69.3% to simply skip buying textbooks out of financial self-preservation.

The Trade-Off: Commute Time vs. Monthly Housing Costs



Theme 3: Building Usage & Engagement (The Safe Harbor)

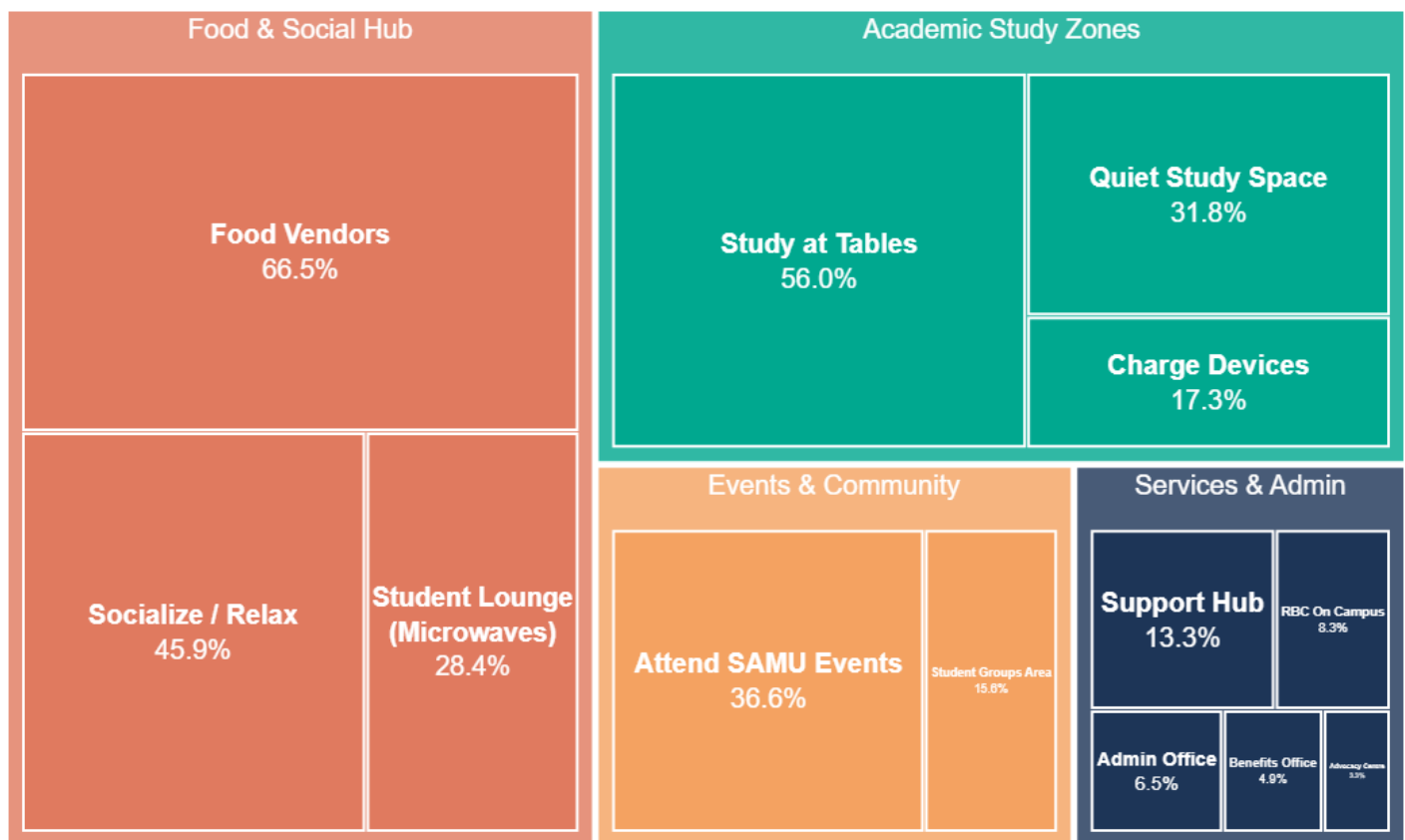
In a broader Edmonton environment that students find increasingly precarious, the SAMU building serves as a crucial hub for basic needs, safety, and flexible gathering.

Finding 3.1: The SAMU Building is a primary refuge for food and academic persistence.

- Consistently across all surveys, eating at food vendors is the #1 activity in the building (66.5% in 2026).
- Studying at tables is the #2 activity (56.0% in 2026). Because students are time-poor and face severe scheduling bottlenecks (avoiding 8:00 AM and Evening classes due to transit/work), the building acts as a vital holding ground during the midday rush.

The 'Third Place' Breakdown: SAMU Building Usage (2026)

Relative footprint of student activities (% of students who utilize the space)



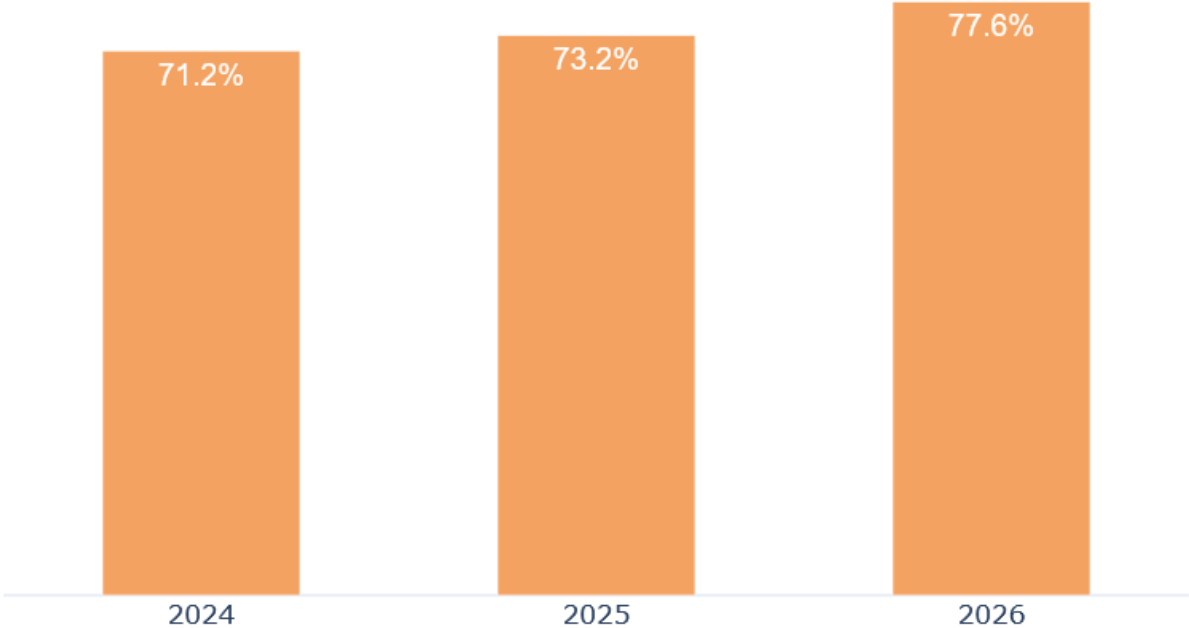
Finding 3.2: The "Safety Gap" positions SAMU as a vital protector.

Agreement that "SAMU makes me feel welcome and safe" grew from 71.2% in 2024 to 77.6% in 2026.

- **Qualitative Insights:** Contrast this with our Housing Survey, where 42.6% of off-campus renters report neighborhood safety concerns. The SAMU building is highly valued precisely because it represents an accessible, climate-controlled, and secure "third place" for vulnerable students.

The SAMU Building as a Safe Harbor (2024–2026)

% of students agreeing: 'SAMU makes me feel welcome and safe'



Theme 4: Communication & Awareness

Direct, early-intervention touchpoints and diverse digital media are the most effective ways to reach today's students.

Finding 4.1: First-year onboarding is the ultimate brand driver.

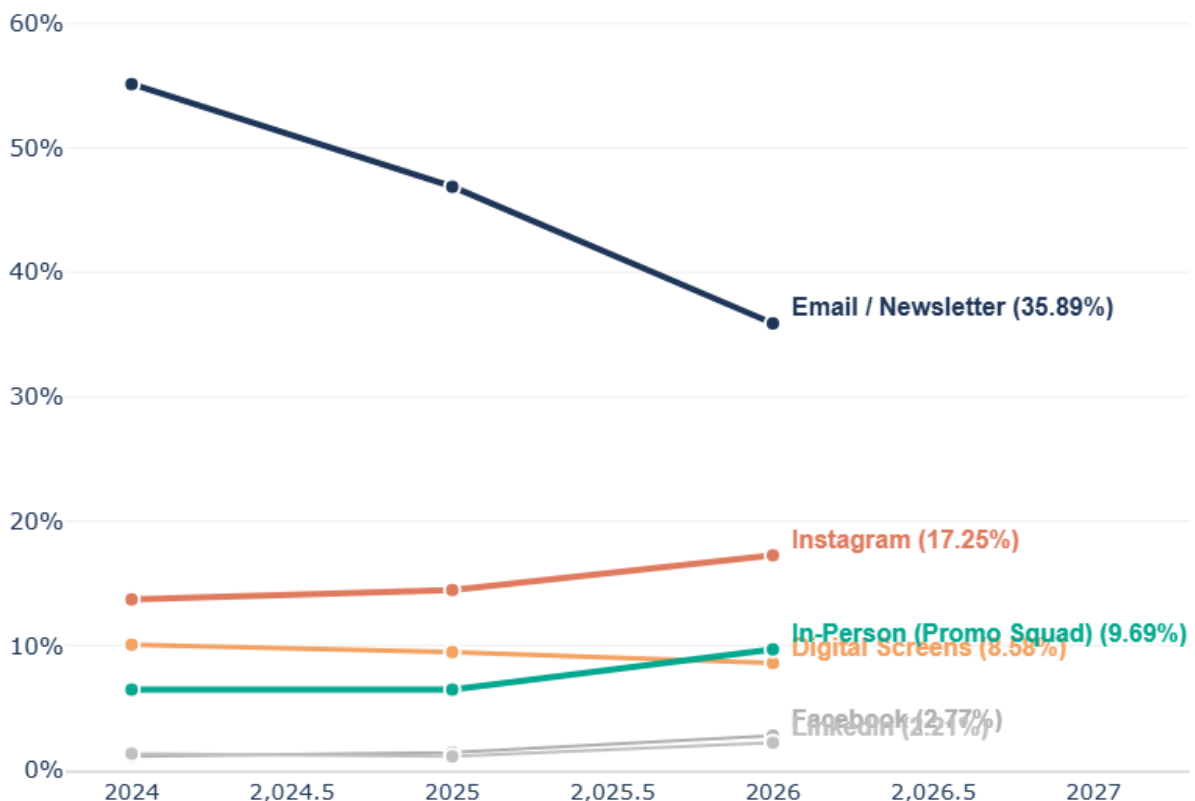
- Brand awareness suffered an artificial dip in 2024 due to a survey scale change but has organically recovered to 61.3% in 2026.
- The primary driver of this recovery is Orientation. "New Student Orientation or Meet SAMU Week" absolutely dominates as the way students **first learn** about SAMU, outpacing physical building discovery by more than double.

Finding 4.2: Students prefer a mix of direct, written, and visual communication.

- Email/Email Newsletter remains the #1 preferred method (35.8% ranked it 1st in 2026), but its dominance is shrinking. Instagram (17.2%), Digital Screens (10.0%), and In-Person Promo Squads (9.6%) are rapidly capturing student attention, while platforms like LinkedIn and Facebook have flatlined.

The Shift in Student Communication Preferences (2024–2026)

% of students ranking the channel as their #1 preference



5. Discussion

5.1 Interpretation of Key Findings:

The 5-year longitudinal data paint a picture of a student body navigating an environment characterized by **forced compromise**. Students are trading time for money (long commutes), safety for affordability (substandard off-campus housing), and academic resources for financial survival (skipping textbooks).

Within this high-stress environment, SAMU has successfully positioned itself as a critical lifeline. The massive 16-point jump in students claiming they "would miss SAMU if it no longer existed" between 2024 and 2026 is an exceptionally high rate of positive brand growth for a higher education association. It proves that SAMU's foundational mandate is being met; **students feel safe, welcomed, and advocated for.**

5.2 Alignment to Strategic Plan (2021-2026 Goals)

1. Student Experience & Engagement

- **Progress: Exceptional.** "SAMU makes me feel welcome and safe" grew from 71.2% agreement in 2024 to 77.5% in 2026. The SAMU building has become a vital hub, with students using it primarily for food vendors (66.5% in 2026) and studying (56%).
- **Sentiment:** Highly positive. Students increasingly view SAMU not just as a student government, but as a crucial community space.

2. Student Voice (Advocacy)

- **Progress: Strong alignment.** SAMU's advocacy priorities accurately mirror student pain points. In 2026, 71.5% of students want SAMU to advocate against Educational Costs, and 59.5% want advocacy regarding Living Costs. The fact that 74.1% of students now agree SAMU effectively advocates for them (up from 63.6% in 2024) proves the messaging is landing.

3. Student Supports

- **Progress: Growing reliance on essential services.** Awareness of *The Pantry* (food support) has reached peak levels. In 2026, roughly 22% of students have utilized The Pantry at least once this year. Similarly, satisfaction with the Health & Dental plan remains a net positive, with roughly 41% actively satisfied compared to only ~7% actively unsatisfied in 2026.

4. Strengthening SAMU Operations

- **Progress: Steady optimization.** SAMU has refined how it reaches students. In 2024, 46.8% of students preferred email newsletter; by 2026, this stabilized at 35.8%, with a notable uptick in preference for physical engagement (Digital screens and In-person Promo Squads). This omni-channel operational shift is directly responsible for the YoY recovery in SAMU Awareness since 2024.

5.3 Surprising or Unexpected Results:

The most surprising result is the sheer scale at which financial and mental health barriers are compounding in the 2026 data. Rather than identifying a single primary barrier, nearly half the student body is simultaneously battling high tuition, expensive rent/groceries, and the resulting mental health strain. Furthermore, the rapid 16-point jump in perceived indispensability ("would miss SAMU") over a short three-year window (2024-2026) is an exceptionally high rate of positive brand growth for a higher education student association.

5.4 Validating the Communications Pivot:

In 2025, third-party recommendations suggested modernizing the communication strategy by pivoting away from low-yield platforms (X/Twitter, LinkedIn) toward Email, Instagram, and physical in-building engagement. The 2026 data completely validate this pivot. Continuing to aggressively prioritize high-energy, in-person touchpoints during the first weeks of the semester yields the highest return on investment for long-term brand equity.

5.5 Limitations:

As with all voluntary surveys, there is a potential for self-selection bias; students currently experiencing distress may be more motivated to complete the survey. Additionally, because the respondent pool heavily leans toward first- and second-year students in Arts & Science and Business, the unique struggles of upper-year students in specialized programs (who, as noted in the Housing survey, often face peak burnout and financial strain right before graduation) may be slightly underrepresented in the macro-data.

It is important to note that changes in survey methodology slightly limit direct 1:1 numerical comparison for certain metrics. For example, the awareness scale changed from a 5-point scale to a 4-point scale in 2024, causing an artificial statistical dip that year. Similarly, the "Barriers to Success" question changed from a ranking system (2022-2025) to a "check-all-that-apply" format in 2026. However, because the sample sizes are highly robust ($n > 1,000$ annually), the macro-level themes and proportional trends remain statistically reliable.

6. Conclusion

This 5-year longitudinal research provides objective, undeniable insights into the current state of the MacEwan student experience. The overarching narrative is one of remarkable organizational success operating within a constrained student reality.

SAMU is highly appreciated, heavily utilized, and successfully functioning as a safe, value-additive organization. However, the data reinforces that students are grappling heavily with systemic financial constraints, time poverty, and mental health challenges. By utilizing this objective data to align its internal services (food security, safe study spaces) and its external advocacy efforts (fighting hidden academic costs and housing inequity), the SAMU Executive Committee can ensure its offerings remain profoundly impactful for the student body in the years to come.

