

International Student Survey (ISS) Report

2022

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D I S C O V E R Y B A C K

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 undergraduate, graduate, study-abroad, or exchange students. As one of the largest international student organizations in Australia and a branch of the University of Melbourne Student Union (UMSU), we are responsible for holding various events, publishing surveys, performing giveaways, advocating for students and attending meetings with the University regularly to improve the University experience of International students at the University of Melbourne.

As a part of our mission to advocate for international students, we organized the International Student Survey (ISS), which aims to enhance our understanding of the experiences of current international students enrolled at the University of Melbourne. In 2022, the ISS was conducted from 31 August until 2 October 2022 and focused on nine different sections: UMSU International Awareness and Perception, Accommodation, University Experience, Academic Experience, Graduate Experience, Health and Safety, Work and Employment, Financial Situation, and COVID-19 and Post-COVID-19 Impact.

We thank everyone who has contributed to the publishing of this report and we thank all the participants who have made this report possible. We hope that this report will give crucial insights for the University and its stakeholders to make the necessary decisions to enhance the experience of international students at the University of Melbourne.

UMSU International Family

Y G O L D O R H I T H E M

The International Student Survey was conducted using Typeform and was embedded on our UMSU International's website which 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 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).

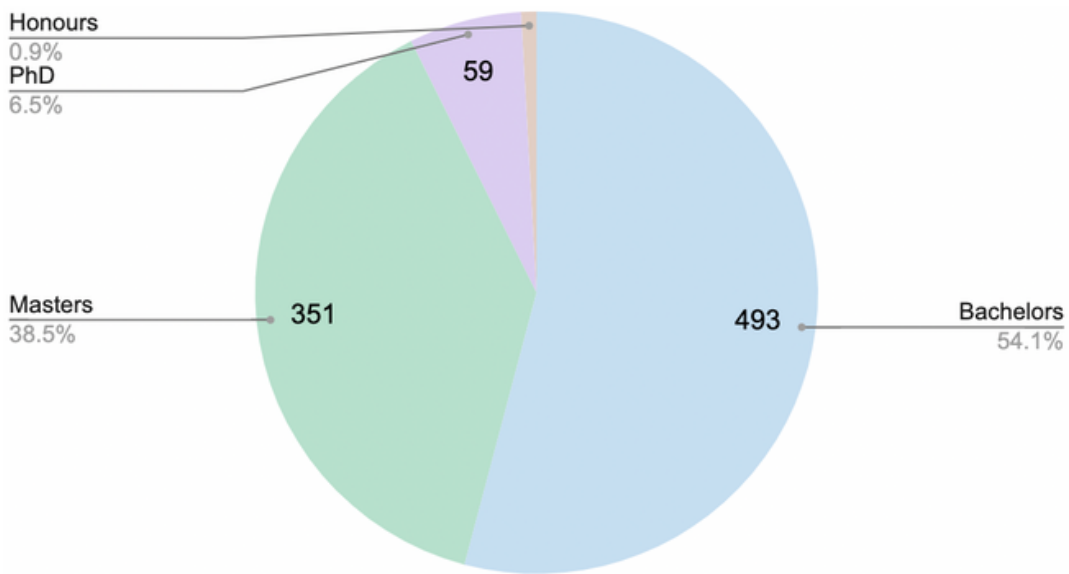
The survey questions consisted of multiple-choice questions, where participants could choose one or multiple listed answers to the questions or fill in their answers at the "other" option. The survey also allows participants to fill in any additional comments in each session, to provide us with extra comments and/or suggestions that the survey did not cover or required strong justification.

A total of 1026 responses were collected, and 947 of them were valid responses, international students who provided a valid response will be referred to in this document as "students", "they", "them" or "their".

DEMOGRAPHICS

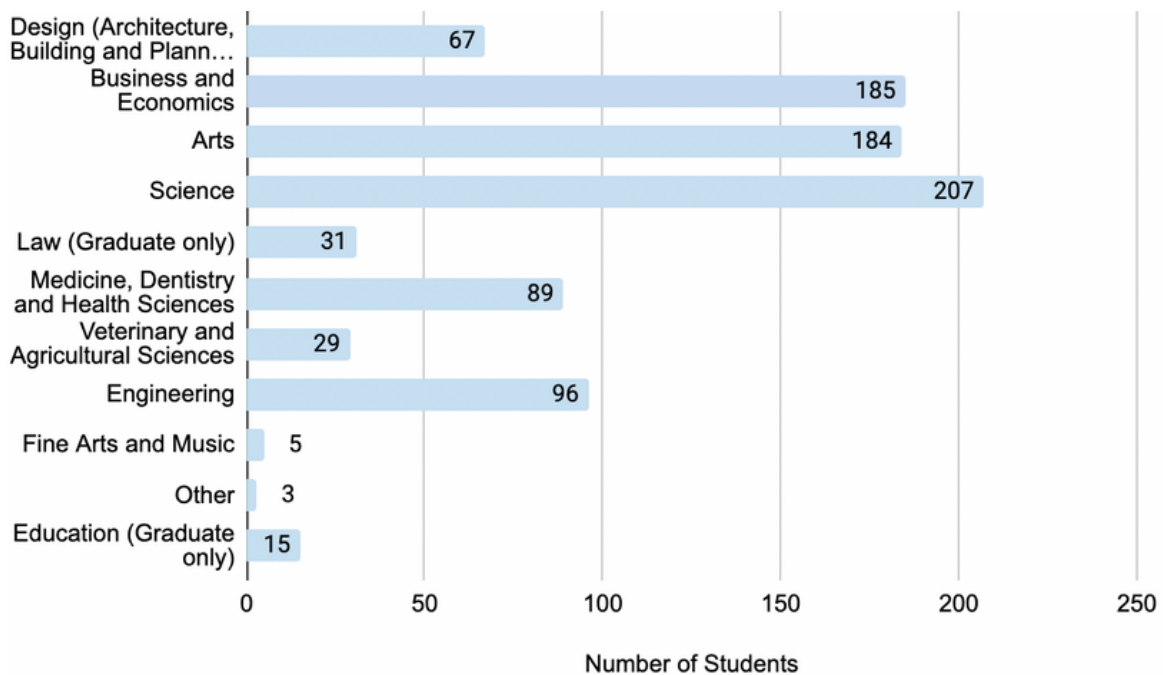
Out of 1052 responses 947 were deemed valid responses, 911 of them were international students at the university, 865 were full-time students and 46 were on exchange. 493 students were studying for a bachelor's degree, 351 were studying for a Master's degree, 59 were studying for a PhD, and 8 were studying for an Honours.

Figure 1. Degrees that participants were studying.



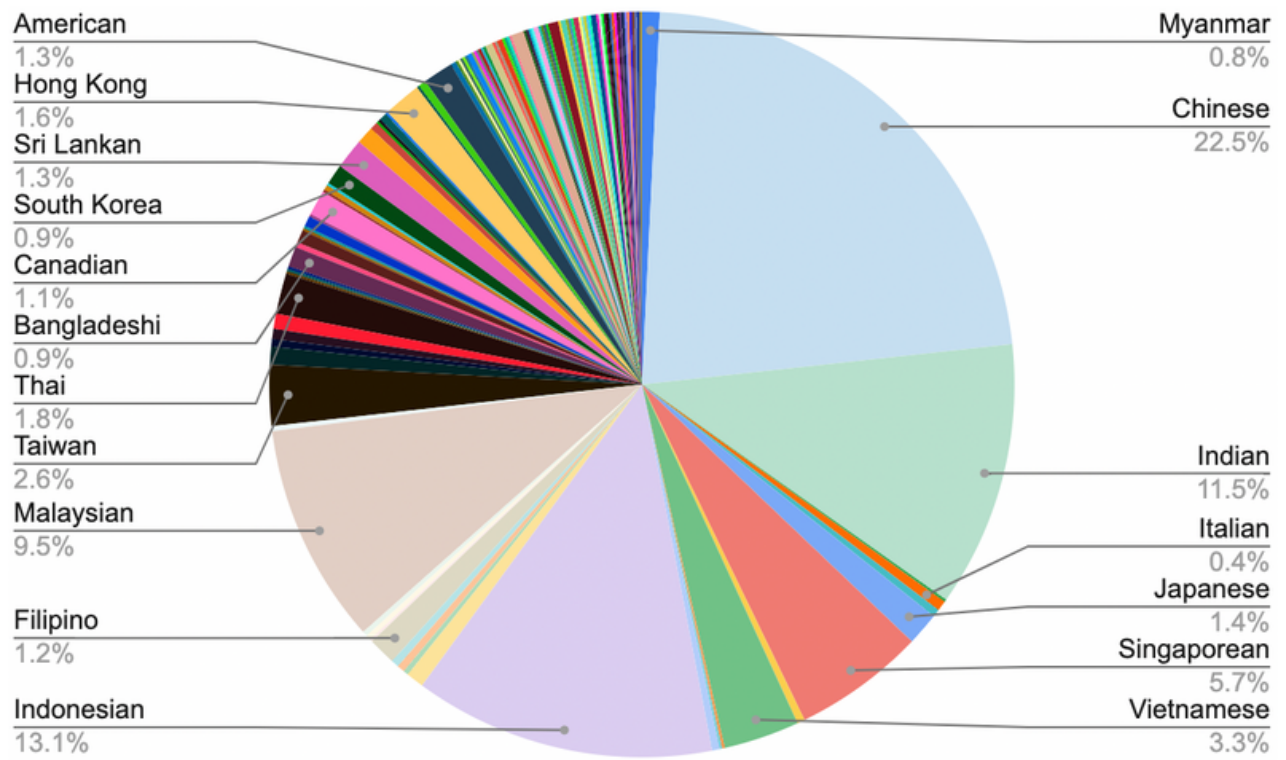
The most popular faculties amongst international students are Science (n=207), Business and Economics (n=185), and Arts (n=184) respectively.

Figure 2. Faculty distribution of ISS participants.



The most common nationalities of participants were Chinese (n=205), Indonesian (n=119), and Indian (n=105).

Figure 3. Nationality distribution of ISS participants in percentage.



ACCOMMODATION

Finding and securing affordable accommodation is one of the most critical issues for international students. It was tough, it remains tough and it will be tougher for students due to the influx of students at the start of 2022, returning to Australia after the pandemic. This section focuses on understanding the types of issues and concerns that students have been facing with their previous and/or current accommodations.

Most students did not encounter any major issues, but accommodation affordability, and finding and securing suitable places were the most pressing issues, as there was limited support and available housing near the university.

Key Findings

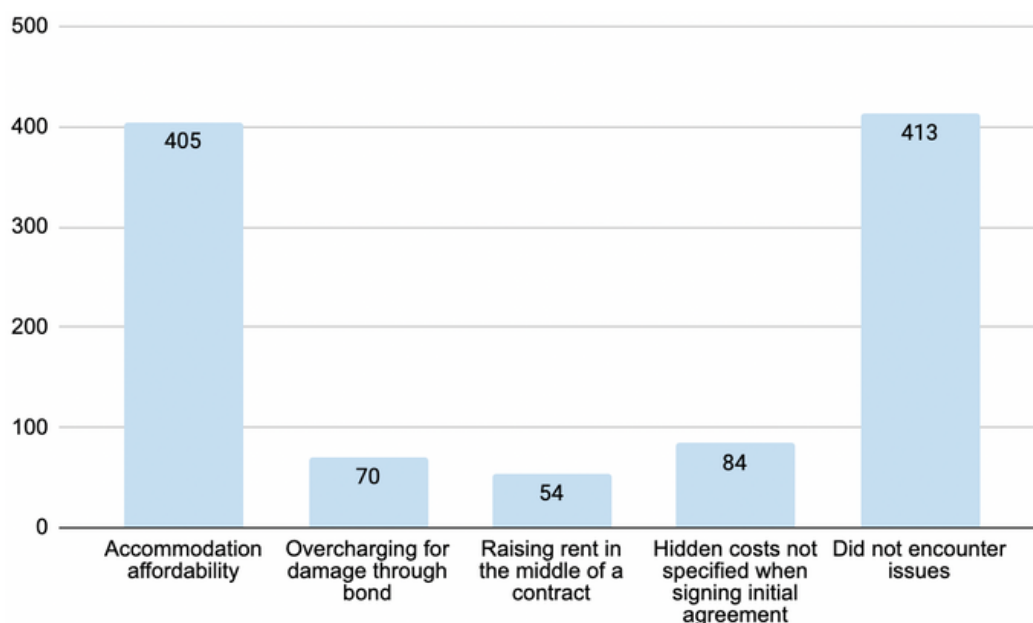
At the time, 896 students were living in the Melbourne Metropolitan region or Regional Victoria, 14 were still overseas, and 1 student was in another state in Australia.

The majority of students stayed at student apartments (n=398), share-houses or apartments (n=393), and only certain students stayed at residential colleges, their own place, or home-stays.

Many students (n=552) stated they did not encounter any problems with securing accommodation, while the primary problem for students in this aspect was inflexible contract dates (n=237) followed by unreliable websites and agencies (n=83).

Despite, a large number of students (n=413) have stated they did not encounter any financial issues with accommodation, still a large portion stated issues including accommodation affordability (n=405), hidden costs (n=84), overcharging for damages (n=70), and rent being raised in the middle of the lease (n=54) were critical.

Figure 4. The number of students who faced Financial issues with the accommodation.

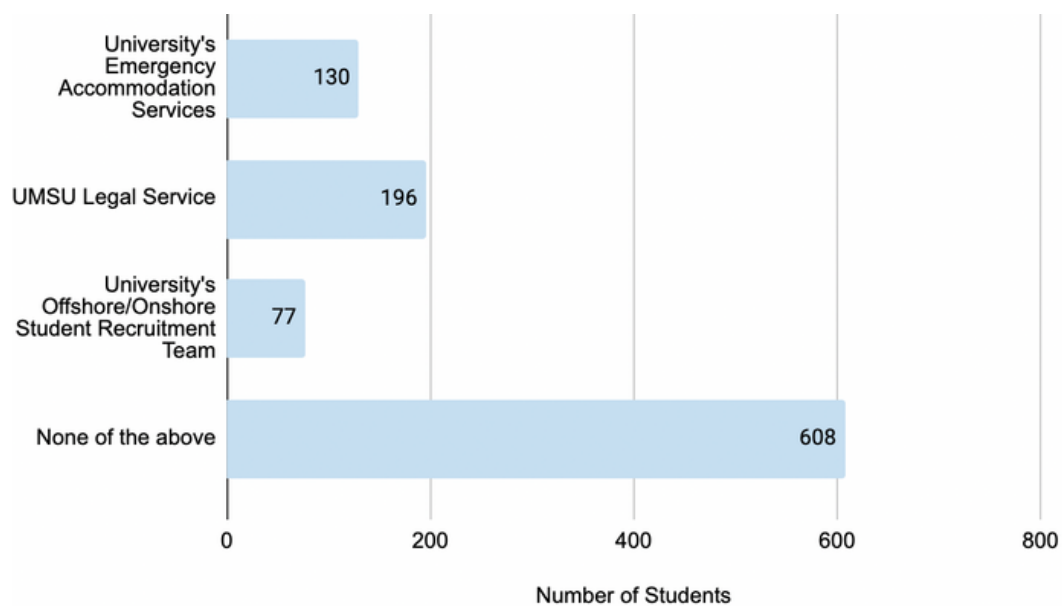


The majority of students did not encounter safety issues with their accommodation (n=628 and the most common issues were no overnight staff (n=183) and inappropriate behaviour from staff and/or other residents (n=96).

With housekeeping, the main concerns from students were slow response times for fixing issues (n=279), limited utilities (n=162), and dirty communal spaces (n=160).

Most students were not aware of the services provided by University and UMSU that assist with accommodation issues (n=608), some students were aware of UMSU's Legal Service (n=196), Emergency Accommodation Services (n=139), and Offshore/Onshore Student Recruitment Team (n=77).

Figure 5. Students' awareness of accommodation services.



Notable Comments

According to the majority of students, financial issues were the largest issue (n=478), followed by securing accommodation (n=169) and safety (n=74) in the aspect of accommodation.

Recommendations

The University should review and increase the support provided to students with university-affiliated and non-university-affiliated student accommodations. By reducing the rent across the university-affiliated accommodations and making commercial relationships with external student accommodation providers, providing accommodation at a more affordable price.

To tackle issues with accommodation, increase the number of staff for accommodation support, and more information and resources provided are required to aid in securing housing not under or affiliated with the university through the housing advice and support page.

The temporary accommodation and the offshore student recruitment team are also required to provide more detailed information and specify what help they provide on their web pages.

UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE

University life contributes a big part to international students' living experience in Melbourne, it is important to listen to their feedback regarding the services, facilities and experience in the University. This section seeks to investigate the satisfaction of students with the University's services and facilities.

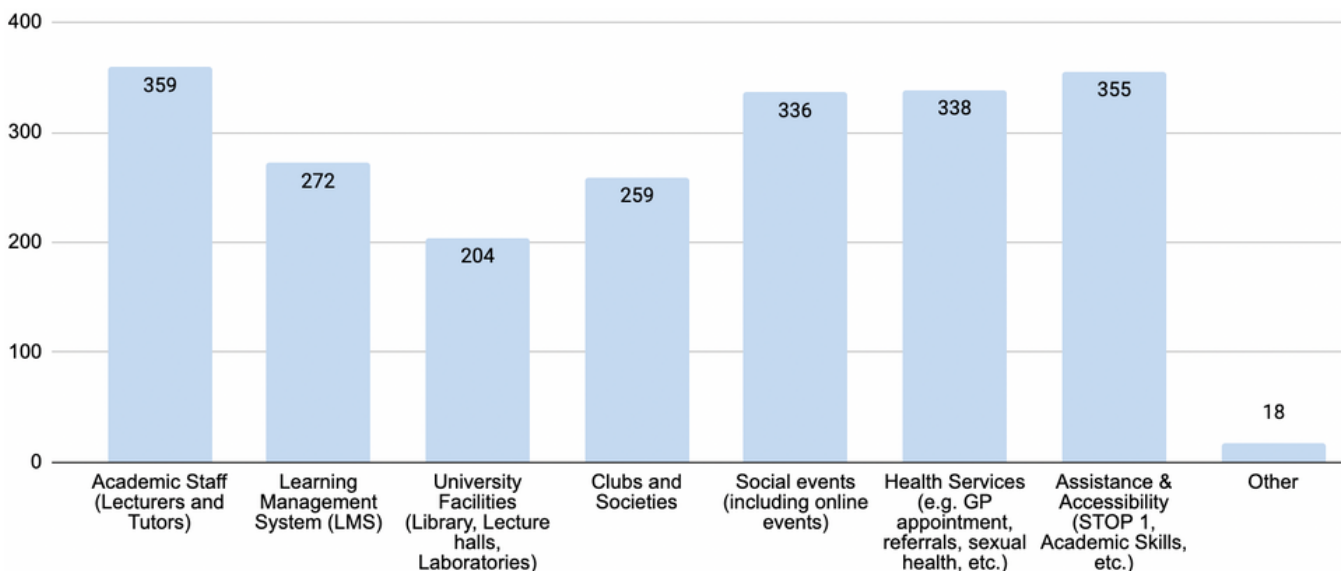
Students are satisfied with the quality of the facilities and the learning system, however, they strongly requested affordable food and beverage options on campus.

Key Findings

The quality of the facilities provided by the University exceeded a large number of students' expectations (n=456), followed by the Learning Management System (LMS) (n=305).

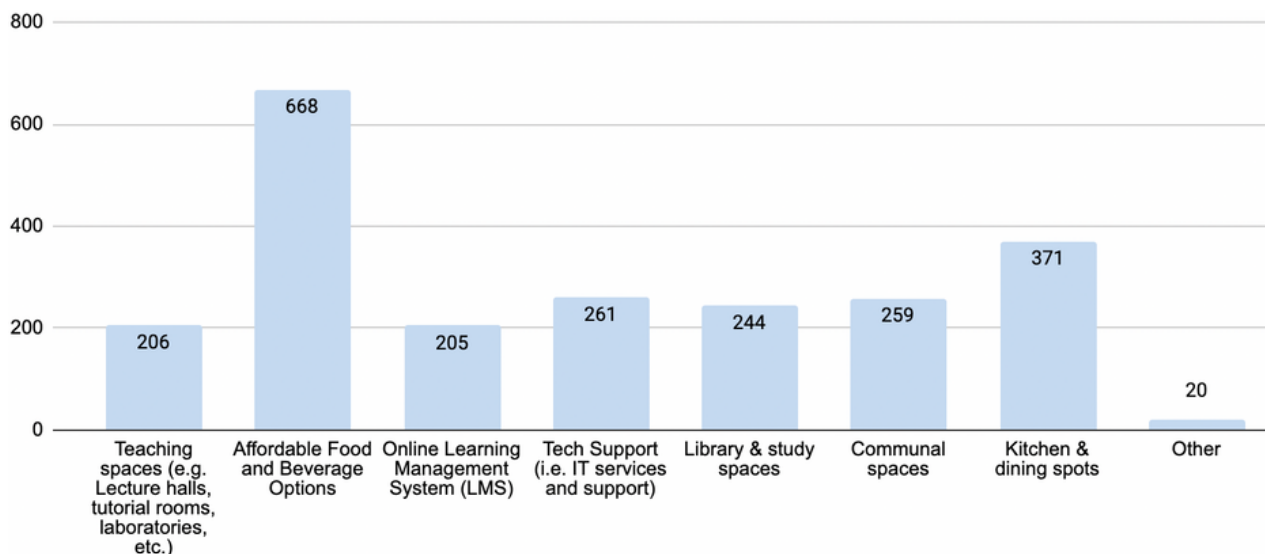
Students believe many aspects of the University have room for improvement. The quality of the academic staff (n=359) and the assistance and accessibility of the University Student services such as STOP 1, Academic Skills, etc. (n=355) have the highest amount of votes from the students. Followed by Health Services (n=338), Social events (n=336), LMS (n=272), Clubs and Societies (n=259) and University Facilities (n=204).

Figure 6. Aspects of University that students believed have room for improvement.



The majority of students (n=668) demanded and strongly believe in the provision of affordable food and beverage options on campus requires a crucial improvement.

Figure 7. University facilities which require improvements.



Notable Comments

A number of students demanded access to various buildings and facilities, for instance, sports facilities, studio spaces, and kitchen areas. More accessible and accommodating food options are also requested, such as Halal, gluten-free, vegetarian and vegan food.

Recommendations

The University should also try to regulate the food option provision for all on-campus vendors while also providing more affordable and wide-ranging food options for students, such as it is essential to provide vegan, vegetarian, gluten-free, Halal and diabetic diets.

To improve the quality of staff, providing different types of training for academic staff to remove barriers between students and staff such as communication training, conflict-solving and cultural lessons and also updating students with the report categories and application procedures of Student Feedback, Complaints and Grievances, which can increase the quality of the university's services.

The University should attempt to increase the accessibility of health, assistance and accessibility student services by simplifying the process and providing more support staff, which lowers the waiting time and minimises the chance of issues being escalated due to inconvenient of services.

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

Most of the time, students' academic results are used to evaluate the course content and the teaching quality of the academic staff. As students' academic experience is a crucial factor that contributed to their academic results, it is important to investigate their academic experience in order to improve the course and the teaching content in a valid and efficient way.

The majority of students had a great academic experience, despite most of them were not able to maintain pace with the course content.

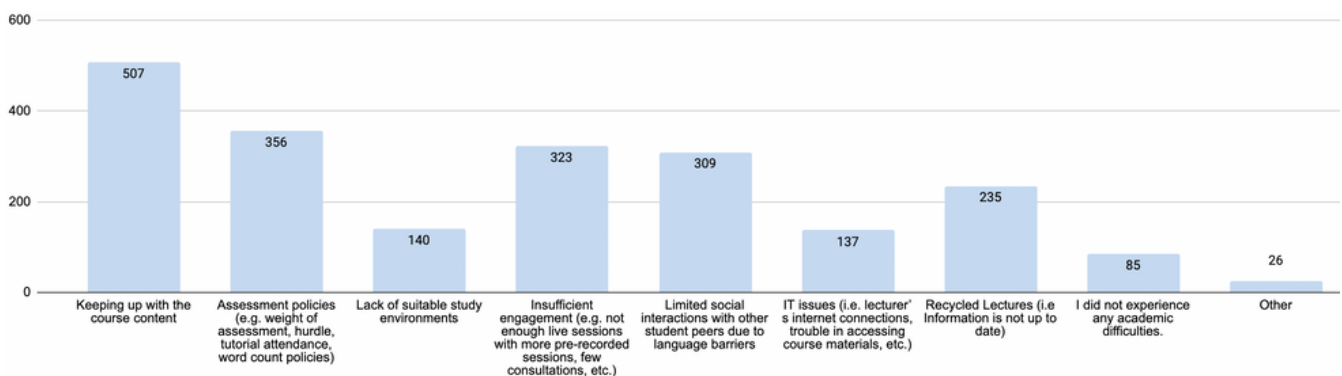
Key Findings

The majority of students expressed satisfaction with the quality of course content (n = 346), provision of learning materials and sessions for thorough understanding (n = 274), facilities for staff and student engagement (n = 268), accessibility to university facilities was also positively commented on by students (n = 317). Meanwhile, students found Stop 1 helpful for academic services (443).

A significant number of students held a neutral opinion (n = 234) or were somewhat satisfied (n = 232) with the online class experience. However, students were satisfied with the in-person class experience (n = 272).

Most students faced different kinds of academic difficulties throughout their studies. Maintaining pace with course content (n = 507) was the most common challenge that students faced, followed up by the assessment policies (n=356), insufficient engagement (n=323), limited social interaction with other student peers due to language barrier (n=309), Recycled lectures (n=235), lack of suitable studying environments (n=140), IT issues (n=137) and others (n=26), and only small-scale students did not encounter any academic difficulties (n=85).

Figure 8. The academic difficulties that students encountered throughout their study.



Notable Comments

Some students found out the academic skill page was not accessible and demanded an increase in the provision of past papers and mock papers for study and exam preparation purposes.

Recommendations

In order to reduce the number of students that unable to maintain pace with the course content. Course content, resources, delivery approach and facilities provided to students are all required to be re-evaluated more often over time, keeping in consideration of the course quality and suitability of amounts of classes and assessments to improve the satisfaction of a student's academic experience in university and their mental health.

Increasing the visibility and accessibility of the [Academic service page](#) and providing facilities access to students helps in improving students' academic experiences and their study quality.

GRADUATE EXPERIENCE

Graduate students make up a large portion of the University student body. Despite this, graduate students are sometimes overlooked in terms of student experiences. It is crucial that we cater towards and maintain a level of engagement with graduate students as they often become the next generation of innovators and professionals. This section analyses the academic experience of graduate students.

Graduate students have expressed a neutral-low satisfaction towards their overall experience and support provided by the University. In the future, the University should endeavour to put more effort in providing research, internship, and job opportunities.

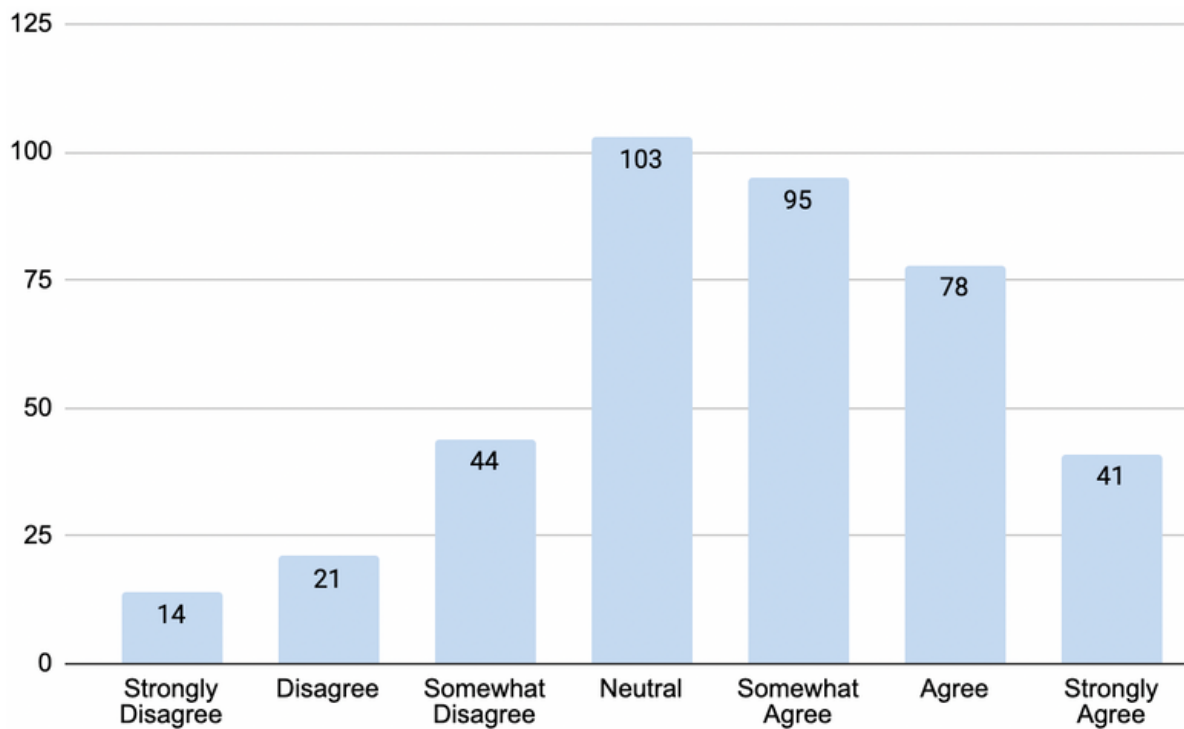
Key Findings

Many students had different degrees of satisfaction towards: the quality of teaching material provided by the University for professional and academic research (n=304), and the provision of core subject learning materials applicable to their corresponding career (n=278).

However, many students expressed a neutral (n=92) or low satisfaction (n=93) towards the number of opportunities provided by the University to work on career-related projects.

26.0% of the graduate students (n=103) were neutral towards the information provided by the University in relation to the role of academia in the Australian work industry. Graduate students also (n=115) showed low satisfaction towards the provision of core subject learning materials applicable to their corresponding career paths. Only 39 graduates strongly agreed that university-organised networking events are useful. Many students also reported disagreement towards the value of knowledge obtained from core subjects in relation to their career aspirations. This suggested that they were discontent with the relevancy of these core subjects, viewed them as non-essential, and did not contribute to their career pathways.

Figure 9. Graduate students' satisfaction towards information provided by the University in relation to the role of Academia in the Australian job industry.



Notable Comments

Graduates reported dissatisfaction with the unavailability of jobs and/or internship opportunities designed for international students. There were also comments on the inflexibility of their course plan, and the unavailability of career-specific information and resources designed for international students by the university.

Recommendations

The University should increase access and resources catered towards international students in terms of career-specific information. Many currently available resources are targeted towards domestic students, thus, it would be beneficial to further engage with international students in graduate programs. Including holding career workshops for international students exclusively, or offering advisory on work placement in Australia/overseas depending on student visa requirements.

Provide or integrate more career-related projects in graduate programs and subjects. This will better allow students to gain relevant skills and insights towards their career aspirations.

Increasing the flexibility in graduate course planning helps improve the overall graduate student experience.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

The health and safety of our students are of utmost importance. However, under many occasions, students find themselves experiencing difficult situations ranging from mental health to facing discrimination. Whilst many students are aware of services and help they can seek, many others are still unaware or have obstacles preventing them from seeking help.

From this survey, the statistics showing the amount of students that have experienced discrimination is alarming. One of the major problems is racism experienced as an international student. Whilst the University is constantly working towards equality and promoting diversity, it is suggested that some aspects can be further improved through education and regulations.

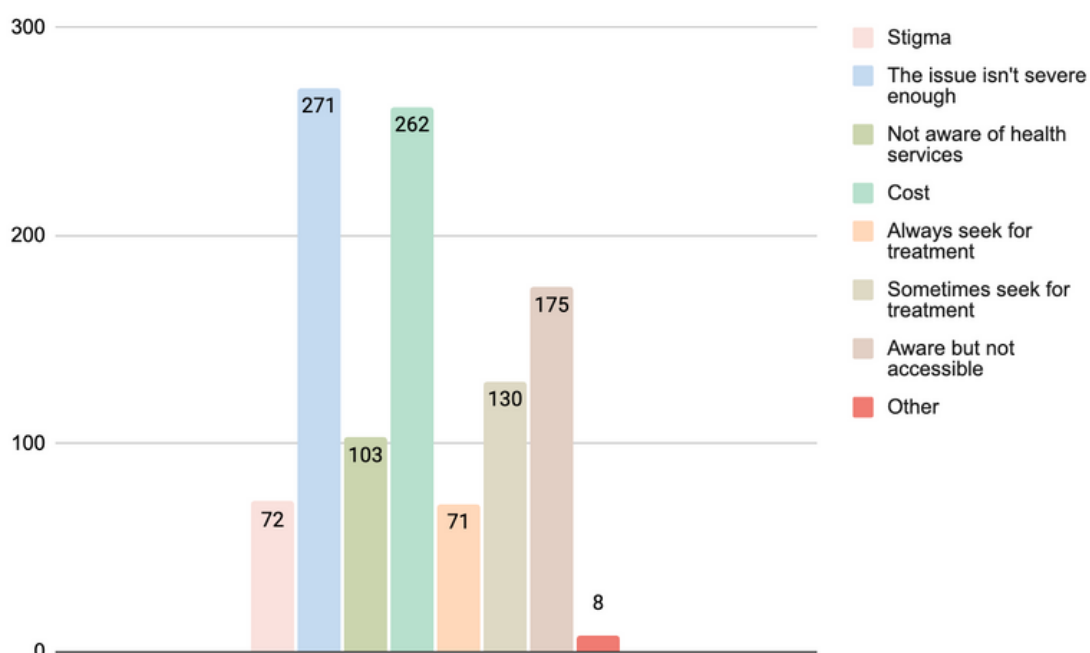
Health

Key Findings

Most students reported familiarity as neutral (n=276) or familiar (n=308) with the services, amenities, and terms of their current OSHC insurance. Only 201 students would always or sometimes seek professional treatment.

The largest obstacle preventing students from seeking professional treatment was that they felt their illness wasn't severe enough (n=271), and 262 students stated that it was due to the cost of the treatment. Some students were aware of health services but felt that they were not accessible (n=175) whilst 103 students were simply not aware of health services.

Figure 10. Obstacles that prevented students from seeking professional medical treatment.



Despite many students stating that the University of Melbourne Health Services have been beneficial (n=356), many other students were either not aware (n=246) or expressed dissatisfaction (n=199). Whilst 212 students reported that CAPS has been beneficial, many students also expressed concern over the lack of availability and never being able to make an appointment. Other concerns included improper treatment of students, health services do not cater towards international students, and the health services do not take students' illnesses seriously.

Notable Comments

Many students have expressed issues of inaccessibility due to extensive wait times and the lack of guidance and concerns of improper treatment of students, health services do not cater towards international students, and the health services do not take students' illnesses seriously.

Recommendations

The health service website's international student page and the appointment system should provide more information and guidance on appointment fees and insurance coverage.

To lower the appointment waiting time, the University is required to provide more staff and health professionals.

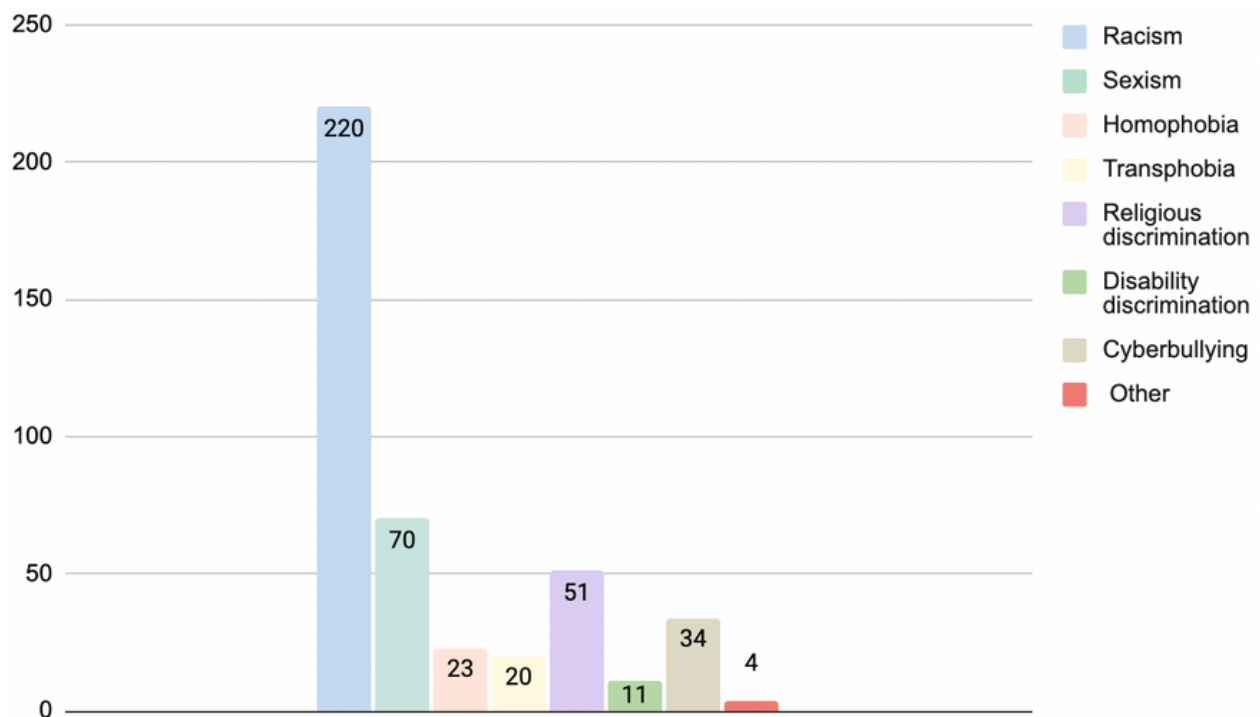
The university should promote its health services to raise awareness and increase the transparency of health issues to de-stigmatize seeking professional help, ensuring that students understand that any problem is valid.

Safety

Key Findings

It was evident that the majority of students would like more safe spaces for women (n=532), people of colour (POC) (n=359), the LGBTQIA+ community (n=251), people with disabilities, and prayer rooms for Muslim students. Discrimination at the university remains a pressing issue with almost a quarter (n=211) of students having witnessed or experienced some form of discrimination. The most common form of discrimination experienced by international students was racism (n=220), followed by sexism (n=70) and religious discrimination (n=51).

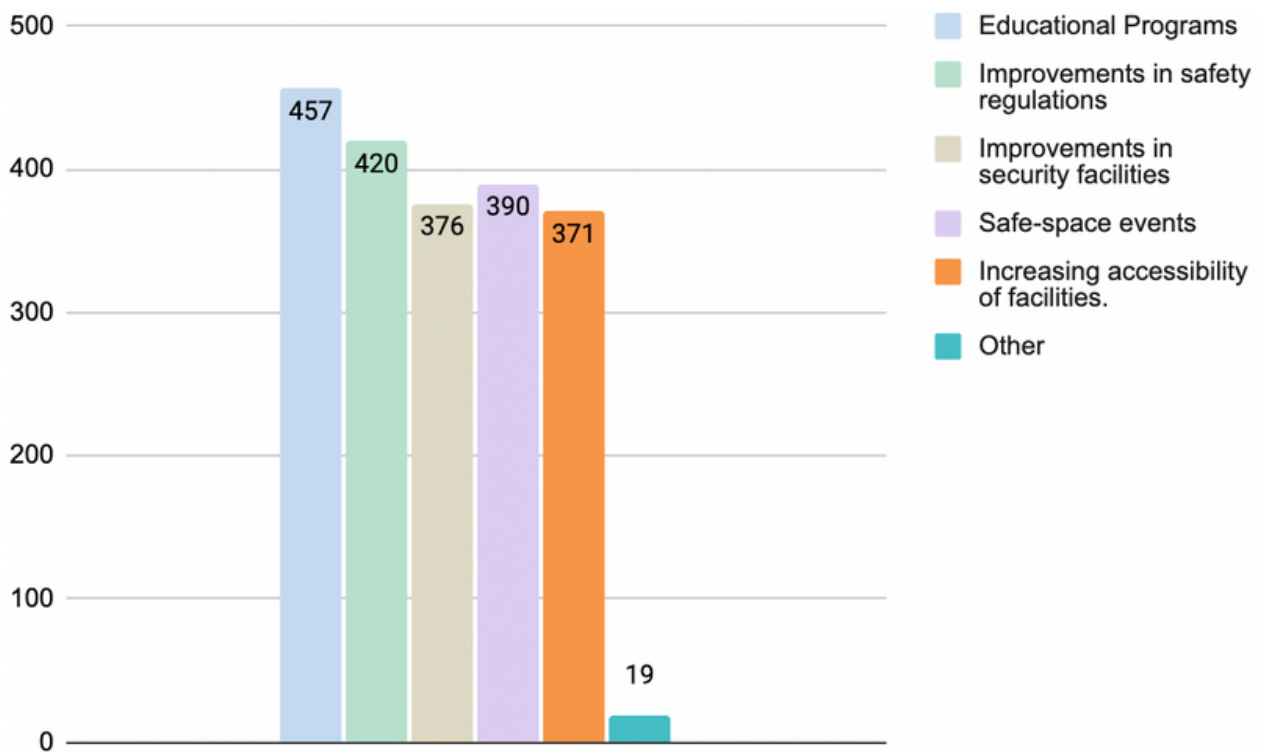
Figure 11. Acts of discrimination that students had experienced and/or witnessed at the University.



Notable Comment

To reduce these issues raised in this survey, educational programs (n=457), Improvements in safety regulations (n=420) and security facilities (n=376), safety-space events (n=390) and increase accessibility of facilities (n=371) were all largely recommended by students. Many students had also expressed concerns over experiencing racism from tutors and lecturers.

Figure 12. Events that students suggested the University to execute to reduce Safety issues.



Recommendations

The University should provide more safe spaces on campus for students to enhance their sense of safety and security as well as improve education for students via modules on equality, equity, and removing stereotypes.

To set up discrimination-reporting mechanisms and support for students who face discrimination. Strong disciplinary action for students/staff alike who partake in discriminatory behaviour should be considered and complaints must be taken more seriously.

Students hope for safe spaces to be quiet places and also somewhere they can voice their opinions freely. These spaces could also engage in small-scale activities.

WORK AND EMPLOYMENT

This section focuses on understanding students' current employment status, issues faced in the aspect of employment, understanding of Australia's working rights and the frequency of utilising support provided by the University.

Most students did not work whilst studying and reported having experienced different levels of difficulties while looking for employment. Some students have also noted that they have found University Career and Employability programs/platforms useful but the majority are not aware of these resources or are aware but have not utilized them.

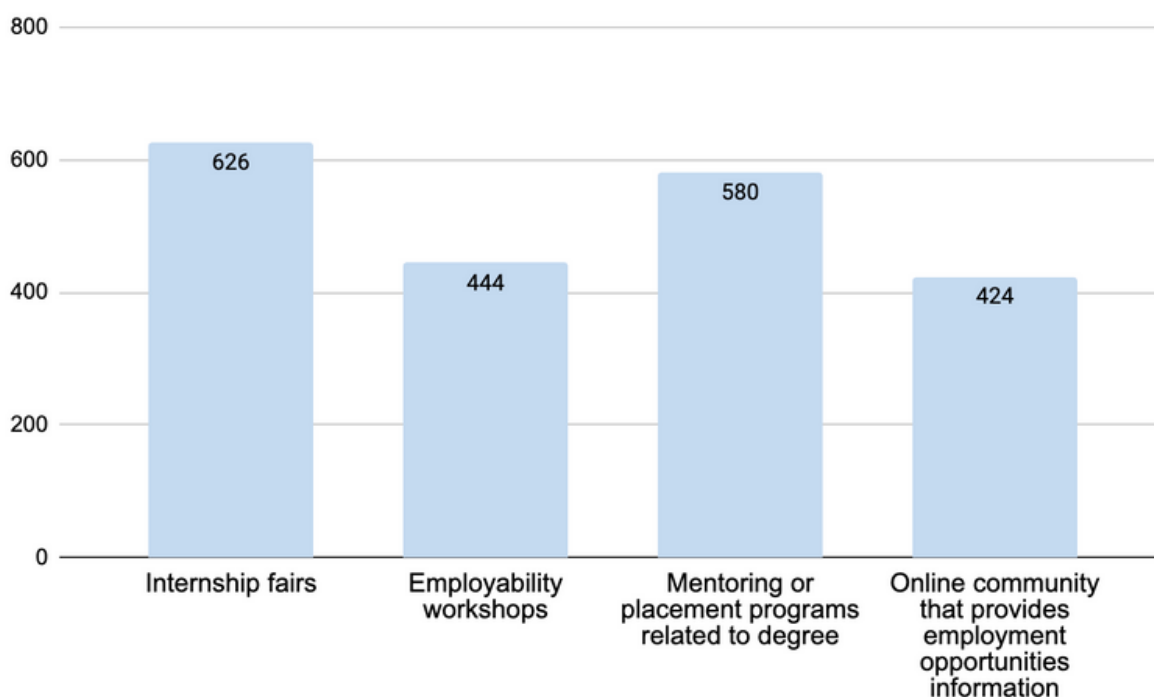
Key Findings

82.7% (n=520) of the students had moderate to high awareness of international students working rights in Australia but only 36.4% (n=333) of students are currently working while studying.

More than half of the students (n=542) reported having experienced hard times and or degrees of difficulty while looking for employment.

Many students were aware of the Career & Employability team (n=460) and Stop 1 (n=357) as work-related University agencies. Students reported being highly interested in career and employability programs from the University, such as Internship fairs (n=626), mentoring or placement programs related to their degree (n=580), Employability workshops (n=444) and online community which provide employment opportunities (n=424).

Figure 13. Career and Employability Programs that students were interested in.



Recommendations

The university should continue and increase the provision of internship fairs and workshops for international students run by the Career and employment team as they are popular and beneficial for students.

Providing more educational workshops that provide information on work rights, visa restrictions and employment pathways in Australia specific to international students would increase the employment rate of international students.

The University should offer and provide help with placement/shadowing opportunities that are financially viable for international students.

FINANCIAL SITUATION

During and after the COVID-19 pandemic, many students have been under a personal financial crisis, where every penny matters. In this section, questions are focused in relation to the students' financial situations, and how it affected their living quality.

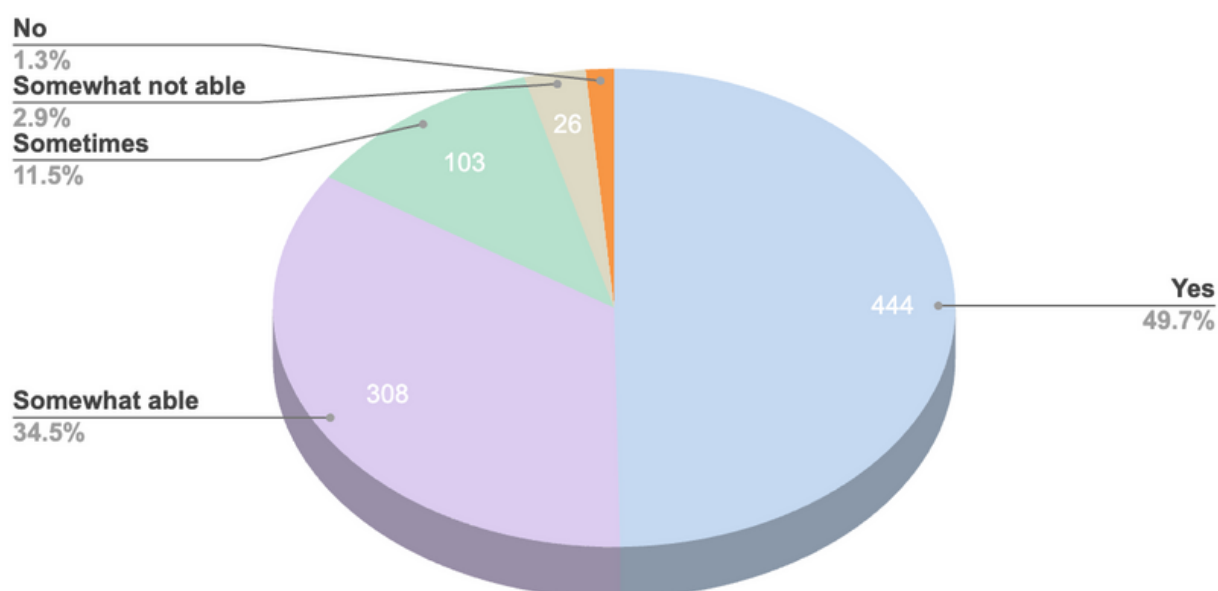
A quarter of students had reported that their financial situation had worsened compared to the previous year and only half of the students reported utilising different financial services provided by the University. Whilst, just under half of the students reported that they were either unaware or aware but did not utilize any of the services.

Key Findings

Almost half of the students (n=364) reported that their financial situation was unchanged compared to last year and 220 students reported that their financial situation had somewhat worsened compared to last year. Only 176 students reported their financial situation to be better/somewhat better compared to last year.

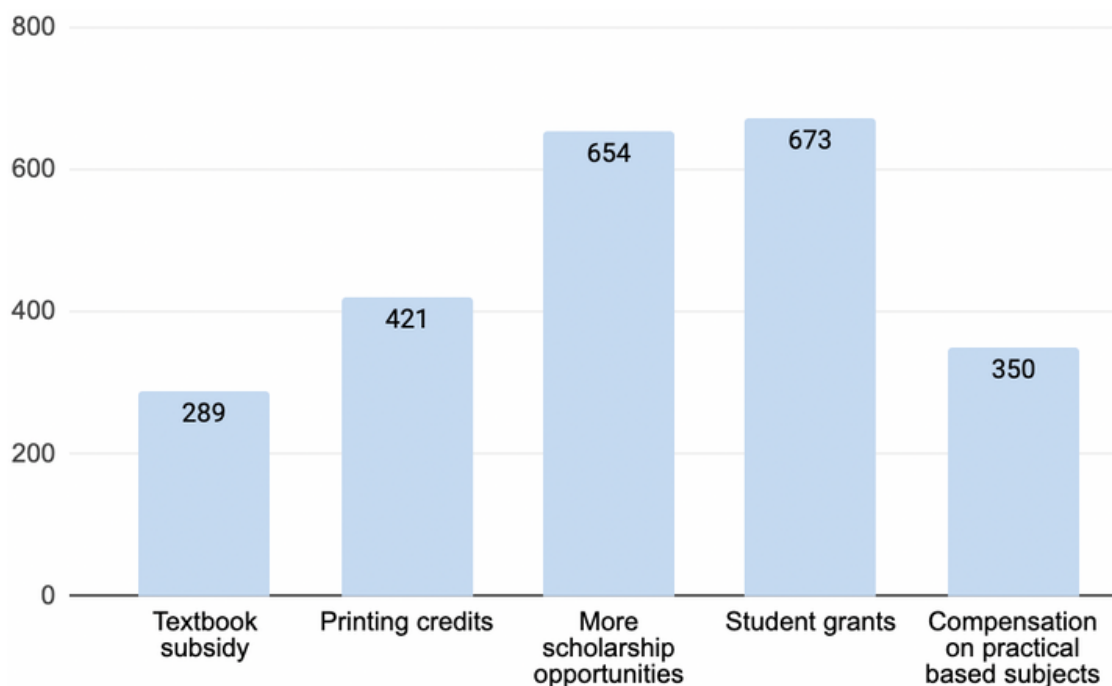
Meanwhile, only close to half of the students (n=444) were able to fulfil their necessities such as rent, food, and daily living expenses, 308 students were somewhat able to fulfil, 103 students were sometimes able to, 2.6% (n=26) were somewhat not able to and 1.3% (n=12) were not able to fulfil their necessities, despite most students having utilized financial support services provided by the University.

Figure 14. Distribution of students' abilities to fulfil their necessities.



In terms of financial support services, some students (n=196) reported that they were unaware of any financial support services that Unimelb provides whilst 28.3% (n= 285) were aware but had not utilized these services. Of the financial services utilized, the most common support was through scholarships (n=317).

Figure 15. Further financial support that students were looking for.



Recommendations

The university should attempt to provide different types of subsidies, such as increasing the amount of money put into the food relief programs, reducing university-affiliated accommodation and providing transportation subsidies to International students. At the same time, provide more opportunities and increase the value of international students grants and scholarships for both undergraduates and postgraduates reflecting the inflation in living costs post covid-19.

COVID-19 AND POST COVID-19 IMPACT

COVID-19 has undoubtedly affected students globally over recent years. Impacts range vastly from financial to mental health and wellbeing. This section analyzes how COVID-19 has specifically affected international students in different ways.

The statistics showed many students were not impacted by COVID-19 by the time of the survey however there were still a few who felt post-COVID-19 impacts.

Key Findings

517 students reported that COVID-19 has impacted their overall situation, with 40% (n=237) of students reporting that COVID-19 is still impacting them currently. COVID-19 had evidently impacted the majority of students in many ways including their health and wellbeing, and education.

Figure 16. Impacts of COVID-19 towards students' education.

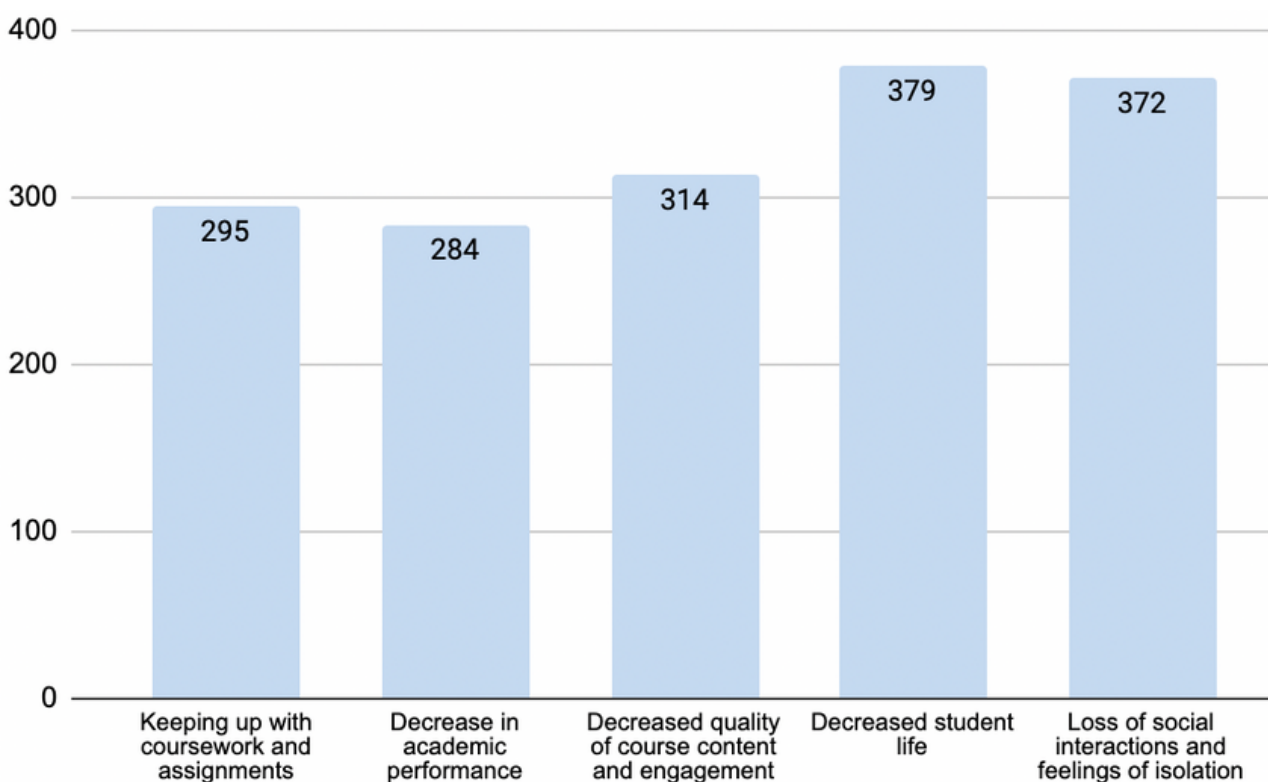
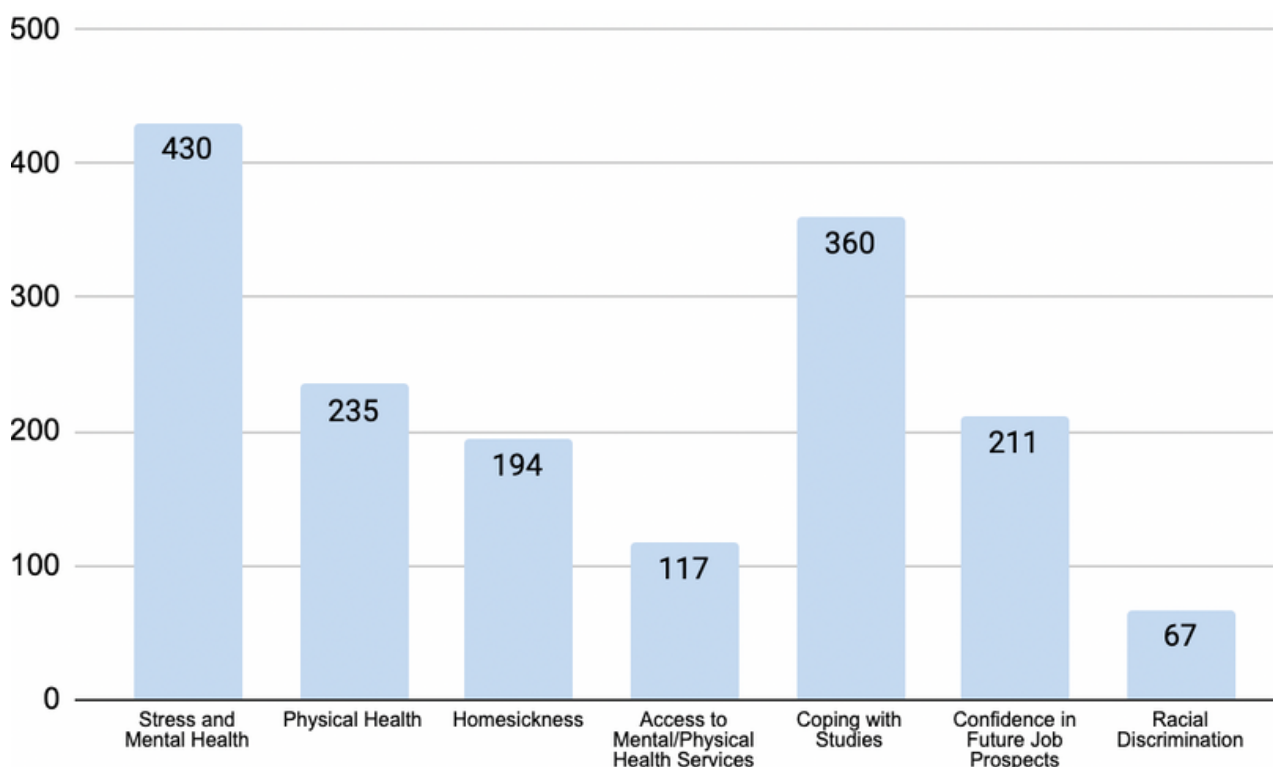


Figure 17. Impacts of COVID-19 towards students' health and wellbeing.



Students explained COVID-19 had decreased their student life and social interactions; in turn causing feelings of isolation. Many reported COVID-19 had caused stress and affected their mental health, causing them unable to cope with their studies.

Many students demanded improvements in flexible class hours (n=464), and more education and technical support (n=339) in on-campus and dual-delivery environments.

Recommendations

Coursework content intensity and mode of delivery should be reviewed more frequently to match the learning pace of students after the pandemic.

The university could consider holding a social mixer for each subject to bond students and staff together and to increase a sense of community and belonging. Courses and classes should be more catering towards different timezones for offshore students and better assistance for students who had to defer due to situations related to COVID-19 should be provided.