

## Summary Report of Campus Consultations: Student Experience

### Introduction

The University of Windsor launched the Aspire online survey between February and March 2022 as the first step in the strategic planning process. The survey was accessed by more than 2,000 respondents, with 1,534 usable responses. The Aspire Café Conversations were the second step in the consultation process. These sessions provided students, staff, and faculty with the opportunity to provide their input through in-person, discussion-based, consultation sessions targeted at key topics identified through the Aspire survey. A total of 665 students and nearly 200 staff and faculty participated in these events. The Aspire online survey and Café Conversations aimed to gather respondents' perceptions of where the University of Windsor should be and how the University can best get there. As part of the Aspire Café conversations, attendees were asked to respond to questions centered around the student experience at the University of Windsor. This summary report will discuss responses to these questions.

It is important to note that these consultations were intended for broad, community-based input. The University also implemented separate consultations with approaches that are appropriate for specific communities whose voices must be heard. For example, while questions about Indigenization and Decolonization and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) were included in consultation questions, dedicated consultations with community members using informed and appropriate methods were also needed to ensure that this priority was supported by rich and informed processes.

### Key Aspects of the Student Experience at UWindsor

Faculty and staff were asked the following question at the Aspire Café consultation events: **What are the key characteristics of excellence in the student experience?** This question received 218 total responses, with 120 responses (55.0%) from staff and 98 responses (45.0%) from faculty. The five most common themes that emerged from faculty and staff responses are shown in Table 1.

Interestingly, staff and faculty shared similar responses to this question. For both respondent groups, the most common theme was faculty-student connection, suggesting that positive interaction between students and faculty is the primary feature of an excellent student experience. The fourth- and fifth-most common themes were also the same for both groups of respondents, as it was suggested that a vibrant campus life and opportunities for experiential learning were important components of an excellent student experience. For the second- and third-most common themes, staff focused on aspects of student experience that

occur outside the classroom with non-academic student support and post grad opportunities. Faculty, on the other hand, emphasized the importance of research opportunities and experiencing a sense of belonging. It is important to note that a single phrase was consistently mentioned in the theme of belonging: community.

Table 1. Five most frequent themes regarding excellence in the student experience.

Role	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5
Staff	Faculty-Student Connection (19)	Post-Grad Skills/Training and Opportunities (17)	Non-Academic Student support (16)	Campus Life (11)	Experiential Learning (6)
Faculty	Faculty-Student Connection (18)	Research (11)	Belonging (10)	Campus Life (10)	Experiential Learning (8)

Note. Numbers in parentheses represent the frequency of the theme.

Regarding the key aspects of their experience, students were asked, **What are the most important aspects of the University experience?** This question provided approximately 20 options for students to select, and respondents were able to choose multiple options in their answer. There was a total of 1,235 responses to the question. The five most popular categories as well as the larger themes that could include multiple categories are outlined below in Table 2.

Table 2. Five most frequent themes regarding the most important aspects of the University experience.

Type	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5
Categories	Co-op/ Internships/ Experiential Learning opportunities (97)	Friends made at University or attending the University with me (90)	Financial Aid/Scholarships/ Bursaries (86)	Activities and Programs that Support Career Development (85)	Career Development (81)
Larger Themes	Campus Life (187)	Post-Grad Skills/Training and Opportunities (167)	Experiential Learning (105)	Infrastructure (93)	Scholarships and Awards (86)

Note. Numbers in parentheses represent the frequency of the theme.

From the categories, three general themes can be seen in the data. First, there is strong support from student respondents for activities related to careers and employment, as three of the top five categories are related to this theme. Second, student social life is an important concern for students, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Third, students are looking for an affordable student experience and appreciate any measures that support this. These

themes can also be seen more generally within the larger themes, with Campus Life, Post Grad and Scholarships and Awards indicated as three of the top five most common themes. A significant portion of the experiential learning support is made up of the co-op and internships category, as it is the most popular individual category for respondents. An interesting inclusion based on the themes is infrastructure, as support for the categories of Study Spaces and Campus Facilities place it as the fourth most popular general theme.

### **Improving the Student Experience at UWindsor**

Questions at the Aspire Café Conversations also focused on what could be improved regarding the student experience at UWindsor. Faculty and staff were asked: **What needs to change about the student experience at UWindsor?** This question received 297 total responses, with 125 responses (42.1%) from staff and 172 responses (57.9%) from faculty. The five most common themes from the faculty and staff responses are outlined in Table 3.

*Table 3. Five most frequent themes regarding changes needed in the student experience.*

Role	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5
Staff	Student Centred/ Experience (19)	Campus Services (12)	Culture and Atmosphere of University (8)	Post-Grad Skills/Training and Opportunities (8)	Course and Program Options (7)
Faculty	Non-Academic Student Support (23)	Flexible Learning Modalities (15)	Research (12)	Campus Life (11)	Workload (11)

*Note.* Numbers in parentheses represent the frequency of the theme.

The most common themes in the responses for this question were spread across several topics that are not mentioned in the table above. Along with course and program options, there were three additional themes with a strength of seven for the staff responses: non-academic student support, staffing, and international students.

For staff, the three most frequent themes emphasized the importance of listening to students and responding effectively to their needs. The most common response within the discussion regarding student-centred experience was to listen to students and act on student feedback. The same trend can be seen in the other two most frequent themes, with responses related to the services theme emphasizing the importance of having services that meet the needs of students and responses related to the culture and atmosphere of the University generally indicating the need for a more supportive culture for students. Other responses from staff focused on providing course and program options that more effectively meet the needs of students during and after their degree as well as providing more support to the staff so that they can provide more responsive service to students.

Faculty respondents suggested a variety of potential changes from more support for students inside and outside the classroom, to more research opportunities and in-person experiences

on campus. Responses under the most frequent theme, non-academic student support, suggested that students needed more support and guidance from the University when completing their degree. Faculty also emphasized the importance of providing students with options that included more course options, research experiences, and in-person engagement inside and outside the classroom. Some faculty respondents also suggested that overworked faculty teaching large classes were a detriment on general student experience, especially in the early years of their degree.

Comparably, students were asked: **What is one thing the University can improve to make the student experience better?** This question received 714 responses. The five most common themes from the student responses are outlined below in Table 4.

*Table 4. Five most frequent themes regarding improvement in student experiences.*

Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5
Campus Life (146)	Parking (65)	Campus Services (63)	Tuition and Affordability (38)	Curriculum (36)

*Note.* Numbers in parentheses represent the frequency of the theme.

Students most frequently brought up issues related to campus life. The discussion regarding this topic included suggestions for more events on campus and more peer-to-peer interaction. The most supported suggestion under this theme was for exam survival kits that included food and other items. Responses related to parking all emphasized the need for cheaper parking on campus. Similarly, responses that centred around tuition and affordability called for more financial support for students, as well as lessening the gap between tuition for international and domestic students. Responses under the campus services theme generally called for more flexibility and responsiveness from services at the University, but particularly emphasized the need for better and a greater variety of food options on campus that met dietary restrictions. Under the curriculum theme, students supported a variety of changes within the classroom, including more engagement with students and course content in mandatory courses that is relevant to the program.

In addition, students were asked: **What do you see as the single biggest barrier to UWindsor students completing their degrees?** This question received 674 responses. The five most common themes are outlined below in Table 5.

*Table 5. Five most frequent themes for barriers to completing degrees at UWindsor.*

Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5
Tuition and Affordability (145)	Workload (136)	Course and Program Options (73)	Non-Academic Student Support (45)	Academic Standards and Integrity (35)

*Note.* Numbers in parentheses represent the frequency of the theme.

Students most frequently mentioned tuition and affordability in response to this question. Their comments reflected concerns about the cost of their University experience and the lack of financial support to complete that experience. Students also expressed concerns regarding their workload. This discussion revealed student difficulties in managing their time and the pressures placed upon them by significant course load requirements. This concern was also reflected in discussions regarding student support, where students suggest that there is a lack of support for students suffering from burnout. Students also indicated difficulties navigating the requirements of their degree and lament the lack of flexibility in course options in certain degree paths in responses related to the course and program options theme. There are several themes with the same approximate frequency as the fifth most popular theme, including health and wellness, student success and support academic, and faculty-student connection. Some of the common constraints from these responses include a lack of clarity with regards to degree requirements, student difficulties with stress management, a lack of academic support inside and outside the classroom, and a lack of interaction and sufficient explanation of concepts by instructors.

The question, **Can you give an example of a change that the University should make to improve the student experience at UWindsor?** was also posed to students during Aspire Café Conversations. This question received 958 responses. The five most common themes from the student responses are outlined below in Table 6.

*Table 6.* Five most frequent themes in the examples of a change the University should make to improve student experience.

Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5
Campus Life (179)	Campus Services (162)	Equity, Diversity, Inclusion (59)	International Students (58)	Infrastructure (52)

*Note.* Numbers in parentheses represent the frequency of the theme.

In response to this question, students most frequently discussed aspects related to campus life. Many responses called for more clubs or the introduction of a specific type of club. Other responses focused on the need for more events on campus and the celebration of international events and holidays. The comments regarding services at the University were almost entirely focused on increased variety for food and drink options on campus as well as increased hours of operation for food services. Some responses also requested more flexibility in library hours.

A significant portion of the responses related to EDI asked for more cultural events and for the celebration of cultural holidays. Discussion surrounding international students focused primarily on making tuition more affordable for international students. Statements regarding the University’s infrastructure emphasized a desire for more places for students to hang out on campus including spaces for music as well as more study spaces.

## **Next Steps**

Ensuring a high-quality student experience is a key function of the University, and these insights were incorporated into discussions of teaching and learning as well as research and creative activities. Ongoing engagement around how to improve student experience will need to be a part of this strategic plan and the comments and feedback here will help shape specific activities and future planning.