Graduate Students' Association
University of Alberta

Under Pressure: Mental Health Realities for Graduate Students at U of A

On behalf of the Graduate Students' Association (GSA), we would like to express our sincere gratitude to everyone who contributed to the successful completion of our recent survey project.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to the previous 2023-2024 GSA Board for their foundational work that set the stage for this initiative. Your dedication and foresight were crucial in paving the way for this project. Special recognition goes to Haseeb Arshad, who served as the previous VP Student Services and is now our current GSA President. The President's analysis brought deeper insights to the findings, ensuring that the report reflects the most pressing concerns of our graduate student community.

We would like to specifically acknowledge Brandon Ellamil, our Strategic Operations Coordinator, and Lewie Moodley, GSA Executive Director for their significant contributions in crafting the survey, analyzing the survey data, overseeing its distribution, and compiling this detailed report. Brandon's meticulous attention to detail and dedication were key to the project's success.

The collaborative efforts of the GSA Board, Staff, and all contributors highlight the strength and commitment within our association. This project is a testament to what we can achieve when we work together with a shared vision.

Thank you all for your invaluable contributions and for playing a crucial role in the success of this important endeavor.

Graduate Students' Association
University of Alberta

Executive Summary

This report aims to evaluate the mental health status of graduate students at the University of Alberta, assess the effectiveness of current services, and identify areas for improvement.

Current Mental Health Status
Graduate students face significant mental health challenges due to academic pressure, financial stress, and transitioning to the workforce. A substantial portion of students have received formal mental health diagnoses, and many rely on medication for management.

Status of Services
The awareness and utilization of mental health services are moderate, with significant barriers to access identified, including lack of information and limited operating hours. The effectiveness of current initiatives is perceived as moderate, and there is a strong demand for additional resources and better communication.

Main Asks of the GSA
1. Increased Funding for Mental Health Resources
2. Enhanced Communication and Awareness Campaigns
3. University support for the implementation of the GSA Peer Support Programs
4. Flexible and Inclusive Services
5. Regular Feedback and Continuous Improvement

By addressing these key areas, the University of Alberta and the GSA can better support the mental health and well-being of graduate students, ultimately contributing to their academic success and overall quality of life.

Graduate Students' Association
University of Alberta

Introduction

Graduate students from the University of Alberta face unique challenges that can significantly impact their mental health, including academic pressure, financial stress, and the transition to the workforce. Understanding these challenges is crucial for developing effective support services. This survey was conducted to gather data on these issues and identify areas for improvement.

Methodology

The GSA's "Under Pressure: Mental Health Realities for Graduate Students at U of A" survey was open to responses from February 5 to February 22, 2024. To ensure maximum participation, the online survey link was primarily distributed through our weekly GSA newsletters and further amplified its reach with a special bulletin on Feb 5, Feb 12, and Feb 21. Asides from that, social media was also used to share the survey link.

We were pleased to **receive 824 responses**, offering a comprehensive and diverse representation of graduate students at the University of Alberta. This encompassed a wide range of demographics, reflecting various age ranges, residence statuses, gender identity, and more.

Additionally, we conducted a Natural Language Processing (NLP) analysis on the open-ended survey responses to gain deeper insights into students' perceptions and experiences. The text data was preprocessed to remove noise and irrelevant information. We then performed topic modeling using the Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) model to identify prevalent themes. Additionally, we conducted aspect-based sentiment analysis and Empath-based emotional analysis to understand the sentiment and emotional tone of the responses.

To encourage participation, respondents were offered the opportunity to enter a raffle with the chance to win one of four different prizes: Oilers game tickets, cinema vouchers, park passes, and gift cards. Additionally, the survey ensured complete anonymity.
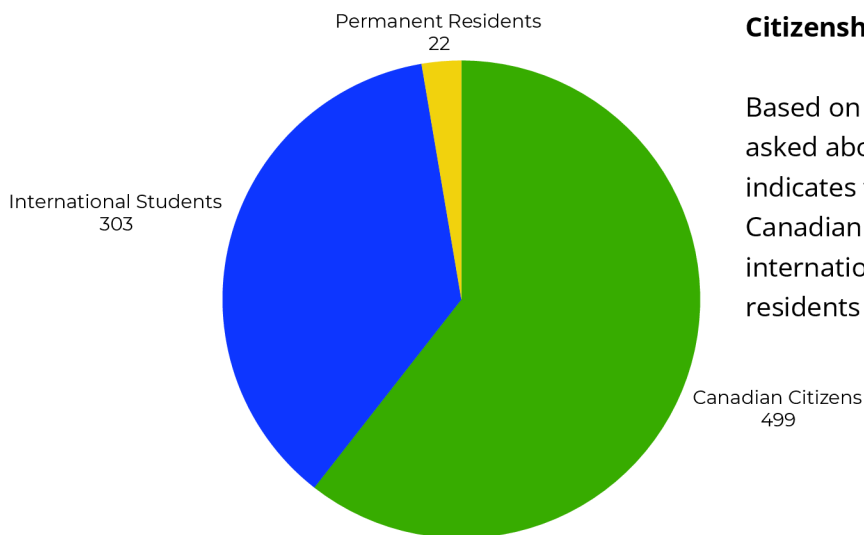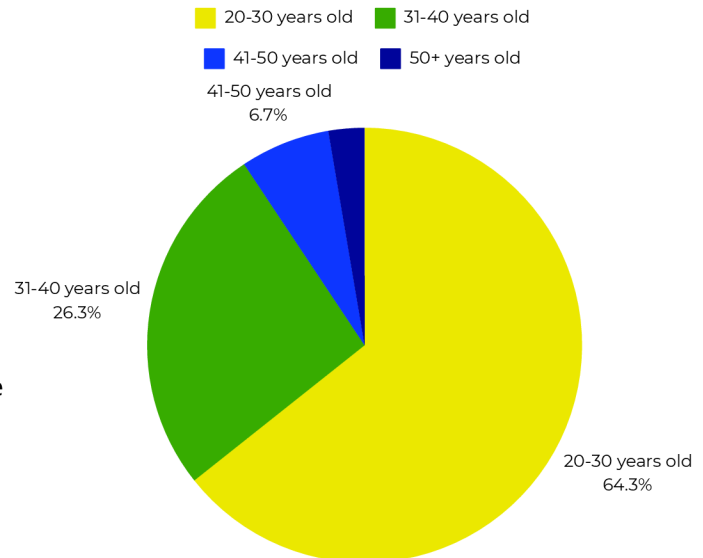
Graduate Students' Association
University of Alberta

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Age Group Distribution

Based on the ages provided, the data indicates that the majority belong within the 20 to 30 years old age group.

A report from the **National Institute of Mental Health** shows that young adults, belonging in the 18-29 age distribution are often at higher risk for mental health issues due to various factors. Some of these maybe due to academic pressures, financial stress, and difficulty of becoming an adult.

Legend:
- 20-30 years old
- 31-40 years old
- 41-50 years old
- 50+ years old

41-50 years old
6.7%

31-40 years old
26.3%

20-30 years old
64.3%

Permanent Residents
22

International Students
303

Canadian Citizens
499

Citizenship Status Distribution

Based on the respondents' answers when asked about their citizenship status, the data indicates that the majority of them are Canadian citizens (60%), followed by international students (37%), and permanent residents (3%).

Graduate Students' Association
University of Alberta

Gender Distribution

Among the survey respondents, 60% identified as females, 36% as males, 2.6% as non-binary, 0.2% as unsure/questioning, and 1.2% preferred not to disclose their gender.

In an academic setting, all students experience stress regardless of gender. However, a study by **Alzaidi, L.A (2024)** from Western University reveals that female post-secondary students exhibit a greater awareness of mental health concerns. They are more adept at identifying symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress.

Legend:
- Female
- Male
- Non-Binary
- Unsure/Questioning
- Prefer not to say
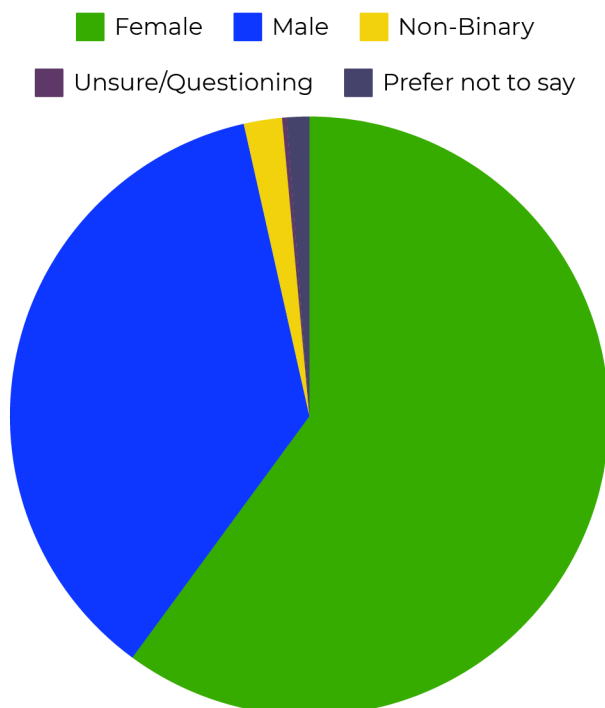
Identification with Specific Groups

When asked if the respondents have other identifiers, 418 provided more identifiers they identify with. The top four most common identifiers they've mentioned were:

2SLGBTQ+
22%

PERSON OF COLOR
51%

FIRST NATIONS, INUIT, METIS
8%

PERSON WITH A DISABILITY
19%

Other responses include various racial, cultural, and neurodiverse identities, highlighting the diversity within the GSA community.

Graduate Students' Association
University of Alberta

MENTAL HEALTH DIAGNOSIS

Mental health is a critical aspect of student well-being, particularly among graduate and doctoral students who often face intense academic pressures. This report summarizes the findings from a survey conducted among GSA members, focusing on mental health diagnoses, the timing of these diagnoses, and current medication use.

Formal Mental Health Diagnosis

The survey results indicate that a significant portion of the respondents have received a formal mental health diagnosis. Specifically, 26.5% reported having received a formal mental health diagnosis, while 73.5% did not. This finding highlights that mental health issues are a prevalent concern among graduate students. The high prevalence of mental health diagnoses can be attributed to the unique stressors of graduate studies, such as academic pressure, financial stress, and the transition to a more independent and demanding academic environment. Furthermore, the fact that 73.5% of respondents have not received a formal diagnosis does not necessarily mean they are free of mental health issues. Some students may avoid seeking a diagnosis due to fear of stigma, concerns about the impact on their academic or professional future, or a lack of awareness about mental health resources.

This is supported by an article entitled *An Empirical Investigation of Mental Illness, Impostor Syndrome, and Social Support in Management Doctoral Programs*, which have found that **rates of mental illness among graduate students exceed reported averages but remain underdiagnosed and untreated due to various factors including stigma and lack of awareness**.

3 out of 10 people are clinically diagnosed with mental health disorder

Impact of Graduate Studies on Mental Health

Out of the 218, majority of them said that they have received diagnosis after starting graduate studies. The fact that **66% of diagnosed respondents received diagnosis after starting graduate school suggests a significant link between the academic environment and mental health**. Graduate programs often involve rigorous coursework, research responsibilities, and sometimes teaching duties, which can exacerbate or reveal underlying mental health issues.

Current Medication Use

For those who have received a formal diagnosis, only 59% respondents are currently taking medication while 41% respondent do not take any medication. The **high rate of medication use among diagnosed students** indicates that medication is a primary strategy for managing mental health conditions. This reliance on medication highlights the **necessity for comprehensive mental health services that include not only pharmaceutical support but also counseling, peer support groups, and stress management programs**.

Graduate Students' Association
University of Alberta

MENTAL HEALTH STATUS AND INFLUENCES

This section provides a comprehensive analysis of the mental health status and influences among GSA members, based on survey responses. The analysis focuses on several key factors including academic pressure, financial stress, social support, research/work environment, physical health, and anxieties related to academic and career transitions.

Specific to this section, we will be looking at mean, standard deviation, and correlation between key factors.

Question	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpreation
Overall Mental Health	3.4	1.1	Most respondents rates their overall mental health as moderate to good, with some variability
Academic Pressure	4.0	0.9	Academic pressure has a significant impact on mental health, with most respondents rating it as high.
Financial Stress	3.8	1.0	Financial stress is a critical factor affecting mental health, with a high impact on many respondents.
Social Suport	3.2	1.2	The level of social support varies, with some respondents having strong support networks while others feel isolated.
Impact of Research/ Work Environment	3.7	1.2	The research/work environment significantly impacts mental health, with ratings ranging from low to high.
Physical Health and Wellness	3.4	1.2	Physical health and wellness ratings are moderate, reflecting the interconnectedness of physical and mental health.
Cultural and Institutional Inclusivity	3.2	1.1	Perceived inclusivity varies, affecting respondents' sense of belonging and mental well-being.
Anxiety About Transitioning from Graduate School to Workforce	4.2	0.9	Many respondents feel anxious about transitioning from graduate school to the workforce, reflecting uncertainties and pressures.

Question	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpreation
Anxiety About Decision to Remain at School	3.6	1.2	Respondents feel anxious about their decision to remain in school, balancing education benefits against potential career delays.
Anxiety about Entering Workforce	4.1	1.0	Entering the workforce is a source of anxiety for many respondents, influenced by job market uncertainties.
Pursuing Graduate Degree to Avoid Employment • Yes: 215 • No: 609	A significant number of respondents pursued a graduate degree to avoid immediate employment, indicating that some students may use further education as a strategy to delay entering the workforce.		

Summary of Findings

The survey results reveal diverse experiences and perceptions of mental health among GSA members. The mean rating for overall mental health was 3.4 out of 5, with a standard deviation of 1.1, indicating moderate mental health with some variability among respondents.

Academic pressure emerged as a significant stressor. A high rating highlights the substantial effect of academic demands on students' mental health. Similarly, **financial stress was rated with a high impact as well**, underscoring the critical role that financial concerns play in exacerbating mental health issues.

In contrast, the level of **social support received varied widely among respondents**. The data suggests that while some students benefit from strong support networks, others may feel isolated, lacking the necessary support to buffer against stress.

The **research/work environment also has a high significant influence on the respondents' mental health**. This finding indicates that a supportive work environment is crucial for maintaining good mental health, while a toxic environment can have detrimental effects.

Physical health and wellness and **cultural and institutional inclusivity are found as moderate factors that impact the mental health** of the respondents, reflecting the interconnectedness of physical and mental health and suggesting that inclusivity issues might affect students' sense of belonging and mental well-being.

Graduate Students' Association
University of Alberta

Anxiety levels related to various academic and career transitions were notably high. Respondents reported **significant anxiety about transitioning from graduate school to the workforce**. This high level of anxiety reflects uncertainties and pressures associated with entering the job market. Similarly, **anxiety about entering the workforce was high**.

Interestingly, a small number of respondents pursued a graduate degree to avoid immediate employment. This suggests that a portion of students may use further education as a strategy to delay entering the workforce.

STUDENT SERVICES ON CAMPUS

Understanding the awareness and utilization of student services on campus is essential for evaluating the effectiveness of support systems available to students. This report analyzes the awareness and usage of mental health and other support services at the University of Alberta among GSA members.

Awareness of Services

When asked to rate their awareness about the different services offered by the university, respondents' say that that there is a **moderate level (mean = 3.1) of awareness of the different services**. The data suggests that students generally have a moderate level of awareness about the various support services offered by the University of Alberta. The standard deviation indicates that while many students are well-informed, there are some who may not be fully aware of these services.

Access to Mental Health

28.8% of respondents have accessed mental health services, indicating utilization of available resources, while 71.2% have not. This utilization reflects the accessibility and perceived importance of mental health support among students. However, the fact that 71.2% of students have not accessed these services **suggests potential barriers to utilization, such as lack of awareness, stigma, or accessibility issues**.

Access to Other Support Services

About 47.6% have accessed other support services like recreation, finance, and academic support, reflecting varying degrees of engagement with campus resources. The fact that **52.4% of respondents have not accessed these services highlights the need for increased outreach and awareness to ensure all students can benefit from the available support**.

ON-CAMPUS WAYS TO HANDLE STRESS AND SUPPORT SYSTEM

Understanding the awareness and preferences for support services on campus is essential for optimizing the well-being of students. This report analyzes the awareness of various support services at the University of Alberta among GSA members and their preferences for accessing physical and recreational services.

Services	Mean	Standard Deviation
Physical Activities Services (e.g., gym, summer sports, martial arts, yoga, climbing programs, fitness classes):	3.4	1.2
Recreational Services (e.g., dance, crafts, hip hop, jazz, spike ball):	3.1	1.3
Academic Success Center Services (e.g., workshops [writing services and learning strategies]):	3.2	1.2
Social Workers (wellness supports):	2.9	1.2
Accommodations & Accessibility Services (Academic Success Centre) and Modifications on Protected Grounds (disability, medical, religious)	3.0	1.3
Mental Health Support (Counselling & Clinical Services, Wellness Supports, Sexual Assault Centre, University Health Centre, Interfaith Chaplains Association)	3.5	1.2
Mental Health Support through UHC Physicians.	3.1	1.2
Student-led Mental Health Support (e.g., Graduate Student Assistance Program, Chaplains Association, Active Minds, Interdisciplinary Womens' Health Association, CMHA Student Group):	3.0	1.3
Financial Assistance Services (e.g., UAI emergency loan, University's Emergency Bursary):	3.1	1.3
GSA's Emergency Bursary	3.2	1.3

Key Findings

1. **Awareness of Support Services**: Overall, awareness of various support services ranges from moderate to high among respondents, indicating that most students are at least somewhat aware of the services available to them.
2. **Preference for Access**: 54.2% of respondents prefer in-person access to physical and recreational services, which highlights the importance of maintaining and promoting these in-person activities.
3. **Variability in Awareness**: The standard deviations suggest variability in awareness levels, indicating that while some students are well-informed, others may not be fully aware of all available services.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following actions are recommended:

- **Enhanced Communication and Outreach**: Improve communication strategies to increase awareness of all support services. This could include targeted information campaigns, workshops, and seminars.
- **Promotion of In-person Activities**: Given the preference for in-person access, ensure that physical and recreational services are readily available and well-promoted.
- **Regular Assessments**: Conduct regular surveys to gauge awareness and utilization of support services, allowing for continuous improvement and adaptation to student needs.

EXTERNAL SUPPORT SYSTEM

Understanding the utilization and satisfaction with external mental health services, as well as the reasons for accessing these services, provides comprehensive insight into the mental health support network available to students. This section analyzes the use of external mental health services among GSA members, including frequency of access, effectiveness, satisfaction, and the reasons for seeking external support.
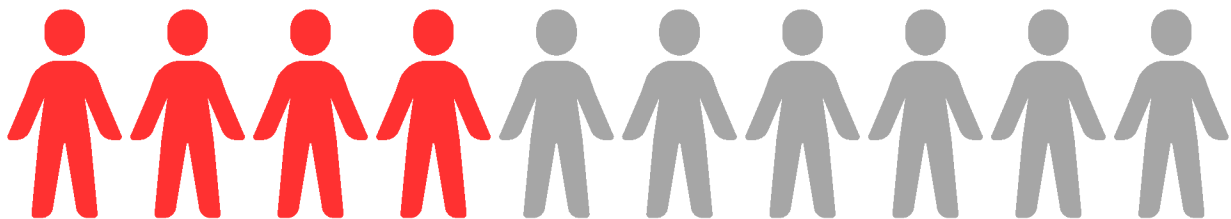
Use of External Mental Health Services: Base on the responses, a significant portion of students relies on external mental health services. **4 out of 10 students rely on external mental health services.**

Frequency and Effectiveness: Students access these services moderately often and generally find them effective. Their overall satisfaction is positive, indicating a beneficial impact to them (x̄ = 3.5).

Reasons for Accessing External Mental Health Services

To further understand the reasons behind seeking external mental health services, students were asked to provide their main reasons for accessing services outside of the University of Alberta. Below are some key comments that capture the diversity of reasons:

1. **Long Wait Times**: "The University of Alberta's services were completely unhelpful. I was reaching a point of crisis and when I attempted to access counselling they told me that there were no appointments available. When I tried going to the wellness center, they advised me to seek out Homewood health on my own. Both of these were a waste of time, and external help was faster and much more compassionate in dealing with my situation."
2. **Specialized Services**: "I get mental health treatment for combat related PTSD from the Veterans Administration back in the States... I don't want to build a new therapeutic relationship with a civilian practitioner because my issues will likely frighten some student therapist/psychologist used to treating school anxiety and other minor issues. "
3. **Privacy Concerns**: "Confidentiality as I don't risk bumping into someone I know."
4. **Quality of Care**: "I don't have a great deal of faith in the university to support mental health"
5. **Availability:** "External services had more availability and flexibility with appointments." "It's what was most quickly available to me."
6. **Negative Experience**: "Depression, horrible services of Homewood." "Homewood is the worst mental health service I have ever used. I did not feel listened to and us given generic, useless advice. Searching for services elsewhere led to a much higher quality of support." "Homewood Health is absolutely awful! I do not know why UofA supports it. The therapists are absolute scum. I can(m)e out of a session with more trauma than I had before coming. At one point, the Homewood therapist said I had Stolckhome syndrome because I did not want to confront my sexually abusive mother for what she had done to me as a child "
7. **Comprehensive Support**: "External services offered more comprehensive support tailored to my needs."
8. **Continuity of Care**: "I started seeing this therapist a long time ago and have a good relationship with them." "Quicker waitlists and longer timelines of service"
9. **Accessibility**: "I don't know if the university provides these services, and the amount of different services UofA provides is quite overwhelming -- it's hard for me to figure out where to start to find out whether there is something I might want to access"

ACCESS BARRIERS

Understanding the barriers that students face in accessing various services on campus, as well as their perceptions of promotional coverage, is crucial for improving these services. This section analyzes the access barriers identified by GSA members for different services and evaluates the promotional coverage of these services.

Physical Activities Services (e.g., gym, summer sports, martial arts, yoga, climbing programs, fitness classes)
- The primary barriers identified were **limited operating hours** and **lack of information**.
- 34% of respondents have not accessed these services, indicating a potential gap in awareness or relevance.
- Other notable barriers include **financial constraints** and **overcrowded facilities**.

Recreational Services (e.g., dance, crafts, hip hop, jazz, spike ball)
- The most significant barrier was **lack of information**, followed by **limited operating hours**.
- 61% have not accessed these services, highlighting potential issues with promotion and relevance.
- Additional barriers include **expense concerns** and **logistical issues** such as *distance* and *parking fees*.

"The classes may not be expensive compared to an outside gym, but I can't justify the expense. I also worry about being the oldest person in the room, which happened when I tried yoga on campus."

"Too distant from home and requires parking fees"

Academic Success Center Services (e.g., workshops)
- **Lack of information** and **limited operating hours** were the main barriers.
- 57% of respondents have not accessed these services, indicating potential issues with promotion or scheduling conflicts.
- Other barriers include being overwhelmed with coursework and schedule conflicts with work or classes.

"I work off and on campus, and while I would love to attend the workshops, they are usually either during one of my classes or while I am at work."

"Too overwhelmed with coursework to take time out for this kind of help"

Graduate Students' Association
University of Alberta

Mental Health Support (e.g., grad podcast, social worker support, sexual assault center, counselling and clinical services)

- **Lack of information** and **long waiting times** were significant barriers.
- 56% of respondents have not accessed these services, indicating potential issues with availability and awareness.
- Additional concerns include the **need for consistent therapy** and **negative perceptions or experiences with specific services**.

"Every time I look it says not accepting people. I need to build a relationship with a therapist, not have never ending drop-in first time sessions where I repeat my story again and again"

"I'm hesitant to access the Sexual Assault Centre after recent actions by the University against members of that centre."

Financial Assistance Services (e.g., UAI emergency loan, University's Emergency Bursary)

- **Lack of information** was the primary barrier.
- 67% of respondents have not accessed these services, indicating significant issues with promotion or perceived accessibility.
- Additional barriers include perceived **lack of staff care**, **eligibility issues**, and **long processing times**.

"Lack of scholarship and bursary options for part-time graduate students (those of us who are working full-time and studying part-time or who are taking a course-based rather than a research focused master's program have few to now options when it comes to scholarship applications)."

"Felt a barrier with the amount of info required for an emergency bursary."

GSA Emergency Bursary

- **Lack of information** was the most significant barrier.
- 72% of respondents have not accessed these services, indicating significant issues with awareness or perceived accessibility.
- Additional barriers include the **complicated and invasive application process** and **limited eligibility criteria**.

"Complicated application process very invasive."
"I found the emergency bursary process extremely invasive and embarrassing."
"Limited eligibility criteria, other accessibility barriers (e.g. needing multiple months of bank statements)"

Graduate Students' Association
University of Alberta

Promotional Coverage of Services
There is significant variability in responses, suggesting differing perceptions of the effectiveness of promotional efforts for the different services available on-campus but the average rating is below average ($\bar{x}$ = 2.8), indicating room for improvement.

Key Findings
1. **Need for Improved Information Dissemination**: A significant barrier across all services is the lack of information, highlighting the need for better communication and promotional efforts.
2. **Addressing Accessibility Issues**: Many services face accessibility barriers, such as limited operating hours and physical accessibility issues, which need to be addressed to ensure all students can benefit from them.
3. **Enhancing Service Availability**: Ensuring that services are available when students need them is crucial, as long waiting times and limited hours were common barriers.
4. **Reducing Administrative Barriers**: Simplifying application processes and ensuring eligibility criteria are clear and fair can help improve access to financial assistance services.

NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS

Understanding the needs and expectations of students regarding mental health support is vital for enhancing the services offered by the University of Alberta and the Graduate Students' Association (GSA). This section examines the identified gaps in current mental health support, the call for additional resources, the evaluation of current initiatives, and the university's anticipated standards.

- **Identified Support Gaps**: Students believe that existing services meet their mental health needs to a *moderate extent*, with *varying responses indicating different levels of satisfaction*, thus indicating a need for service delivery enhancements.
- **Strong Demand for More Resources**: There is a *significant need for additional mental health resources*, underscoring the importance of increased investment in mental health support.
- **Importance of Awareness and Communication**: It is crucial to effectively promote available mental health services, as students consider this aspect *highly significant*.
- **Moderate Effectiveness of Current Programs**: The university's ongoing mental health initiatives are viewed as *moderately effective*, suggesting potential for improvement.
- **High Student Expectations**: *Students have high expectations for the effectiveness of mental health support offered by the university*, highlighting the necessity of meeting these expectations.

GRADUATE SUPPORT PROGRAM

The Graduate Support Program section of the survey focuses on evaluating the potential impact of a Graduate Peer Support Program, gathering creative input for improving accessibility of campus services, and identifying steps that the Graduate Students' Association (GSA) can take to enhance mental health services.

When asked about a possibility of having a graduate peer support program, a significant majority of respondents (58%) believe that a Graduate Peer Support Program can significantly alleviate many challenges faced by graduate students. The remaining respondents are divided between uncertainty (30%) and disbelief (12%).

Insights from survey participants primarily highlighted the importance of enhancing online and flexible service offerings, providing multilingual support to serve diverse student communities, creating centralized information platforms for convenient access, extending service hours to accommodate different schedules, and implementing transportation solutions to enhance campus accessibility within the support program.

When asked about what specific steps the GSA should take to help enhance the mental health services for the members, the most common suggestions were:

- Securing additional funding to expand resources and reduce wait times.
- Organizing awareness events and workshops.
- Establishing peer support groups.
- Ensuring inclusivity and accessibility for all students.
- Offering confidential support options.

Talking about the current services that the university offers, common demands from students are:
- Increasing the availability of counselors and reducing wait times.
- Offering culturally sensitive and diverse services.
- Enhancing promotion and awareness of available services.
- Providing flexible appointment options.
- Implementing a feedback system for continuous improvement.

The analysis of the Graduate Support Program section highlights several key areas for improvement in mental health support and accessibility of campus services. The potential implementation of a Graduate Peer Support Program is widely supported, and various creative and practical suggestions have been provided to enhance the accessibility and effectiveness of services. By addressing these suggestions and implementing the recommended steps, the University of Alberta and the GSA can better support the mental health and well-being of graduate students.
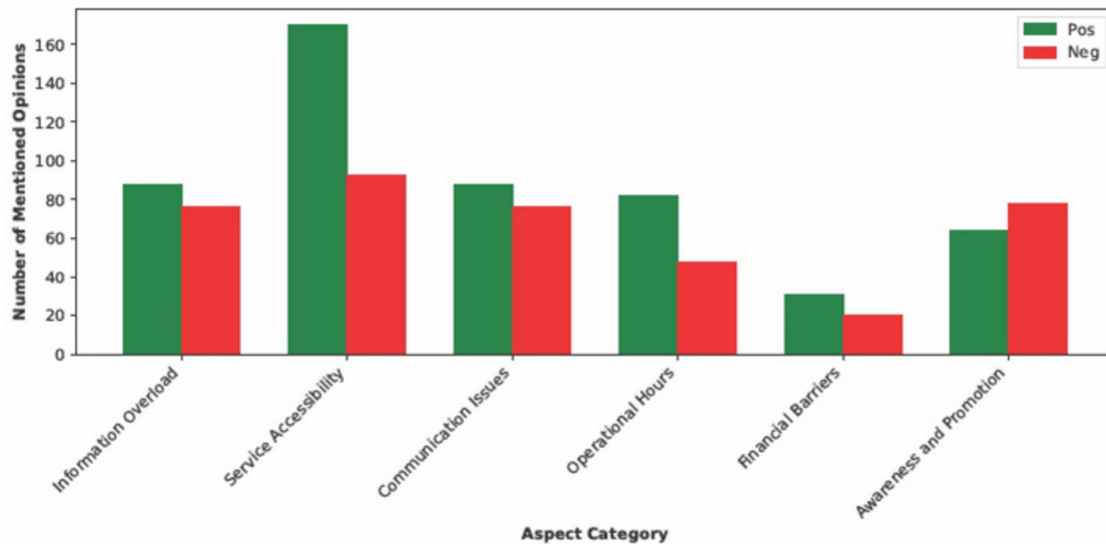
NATURAL LANGUAGE PROCESSING

In this section, we provide a closer look at the open-ended questions from the survey using the natural language processing (NLP). Main goal is to better understand what students really think and feel about the mental health support they get. These open-ended answers are important because they show things that might not come up in regular survey questions, like personal opinions and emotions. This helps us see where things could be better and understand what students are really going through.

We used a method called topic modeling to find common themes in what students said. We also created word clouds for each theme—these are visual tools that show the most important ideas in each topic, making them easier to understand. The themes we identified include Service Accessibility, Communication Issues, and Financial Barriers. The following figure shows the word cloud for each theme along with its name.

Following the topic modeling, we conducted an aspect-based sentiment analysis to determine the sentiment (positive or negative) associated with each aspect. Additionally, we employed Empath-based emotional analysis to gauge the emotional tone of the responses, categorizing them into various emotional states such as help, health, communication, work, trust, and technology.

The aspect-based sentiment analysis results are depicted in the following histogram.

The analysis above shows what students think about the services and support they receive. We looked at the feedback and grouped it into key topics using a technique called natural language processing.

Service Accessibility
- Mixed opinions: Some students find services easy to access, but many struggle with barriers.
- What this means: UofA needs to make services easier to access by simplifying processes or better distributing resources.

Communication Issues
- Mixed feedback: Some students are satisfied with how information is shared, while others are not.
- What this means: UofA should improve communication strategies to ensure all students know about the services available to them.

Information Overload
- Balanced views: Some students feel overwhelmed by the amount of information they receive.
- What this means: UofA should streamline how they deliver information to reduce overload while still providing essential details.

Operational Hours
- Mixed reactions: Some students are happy with current hours, but others find them inconvenient.
- What needs to be done: UofA might need to adjust service hours to better fit students' schedules.

Financial Barriers
- Critical concern: Financial issues, though mentioned less frequently, have a major impact on students' access to resources.
- What needs to be done: UofA should enhance financial support mechanisms to help students overcome these barriers.

Awareness and Promotion
- Slight negativity: While some students know about the services available, many do not.
- What needs to be done: UofA should focus on targeted promotional efforts to raise awareness.

This histogram shows the average scores across several emotional categories related to students' experiences, including health, help, communication, work, trust, and technology.
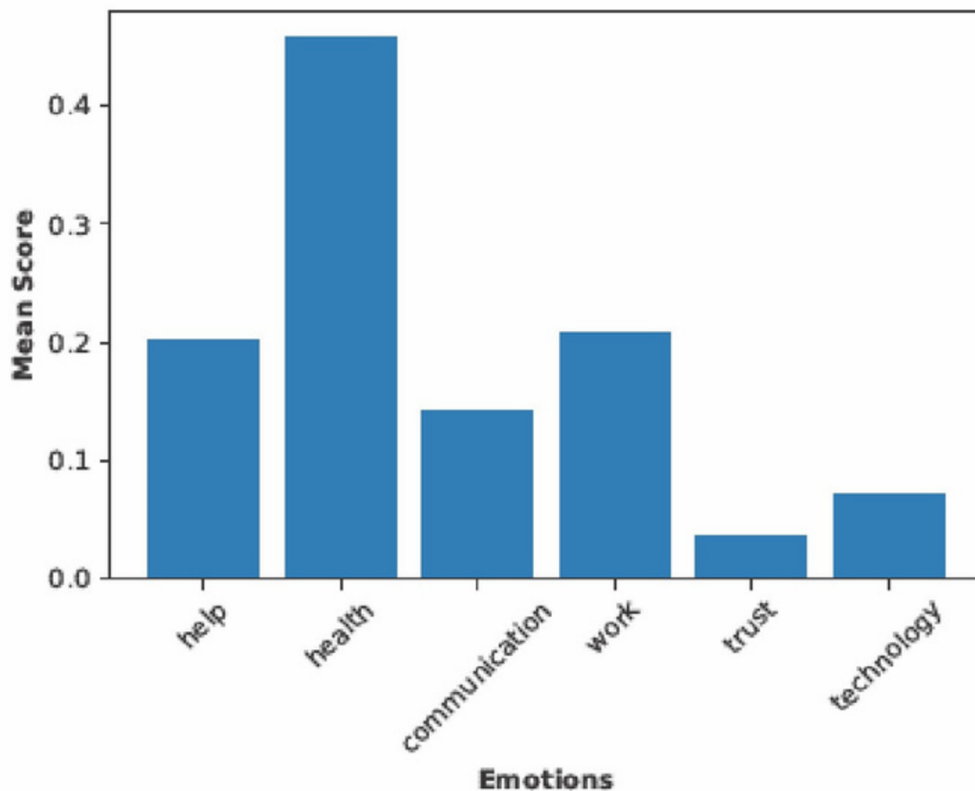
Help. The high score in this category reflects students' strong desire for assistance. This emphasizes the role in improving the awareness and accessibility of support systems to make sure students know where to get help.

Health. The highest score in this category shows that students are very concerned about their well-being which means there's a need for better communication about health resources. Institutions should focus on sharing health information more effectively to meet students' needs.

Communication. Results show that there is a huge gap in the current methods, suggesting that they aren't fully effective in connecting students with the resources they need. Better communication strategies are crucial to ensure students are informed about the support available to them.

Work. The *work* score indicates that academic pressures are adding to students' stress and health concerns. The UofA should look at workload management and provide support to help students balance their academic responsibilities with their well-being.

Trust. Low *trust* score shows that students may have skepticism towards institutional systemsBuilding trust through clear, consistent, and empathetic communication is essential to encourage students to engage with available resources and support systems.

Technology
The *technology* score suggests that current tools may not be meeting students' communication needs effectively. Investing in better technology can improve communication and ensure that students receive timely and relevant information.
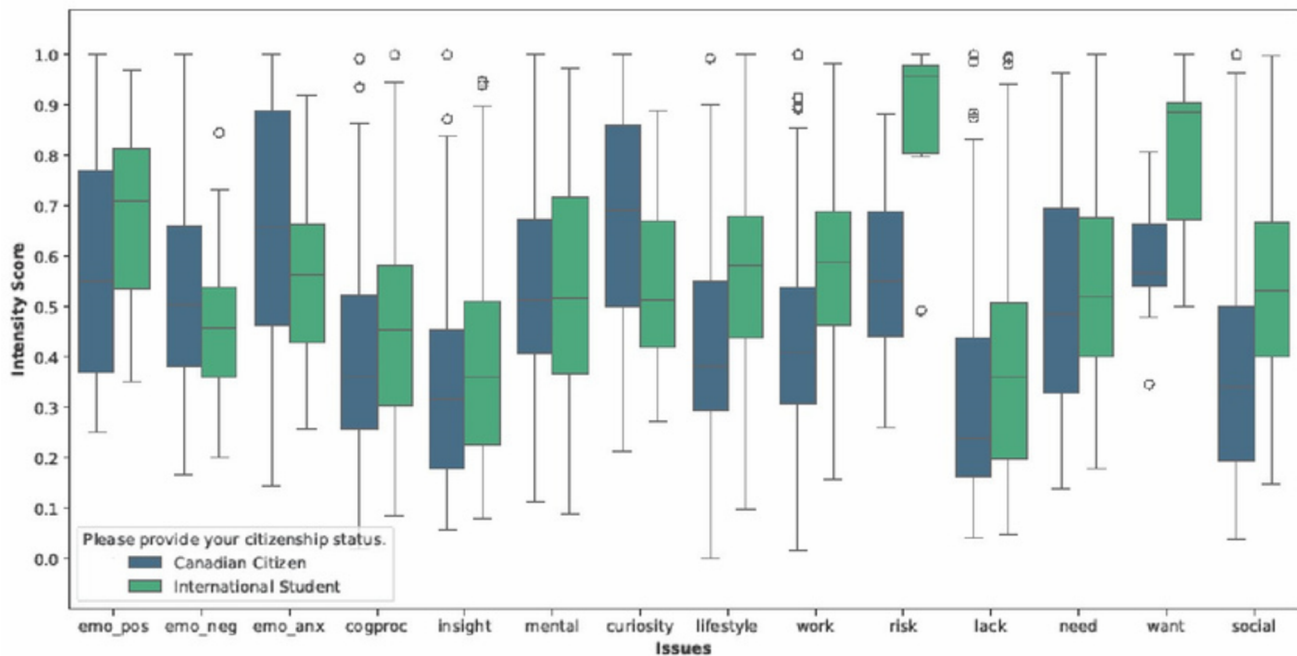
To gain further detailed understanding of the psychological aspects of the responses, we performed a Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) analysis. This analysis provides insights into the psychological states, cognitive processes, and social dynamics reflected in the text. The LIWC analysis revealed patterns in language use that correlate with various psychological dimensions, such as emotional tone, cognitive complexity, and social orientation. These insights help in understanding the deeper psychological factors influencing students' feedback and can guide the development of targeted interventions to address their concerns.

The figure above shows how LIWC category scores differ between domestic and international students, giving us important insights into their mental health, wellness perceptions, awareness of services, and social interactions.

Negative Emotions and Anxiety (Domestic Students)
- Domestic students have higher levels of negative emotions and anxiety.
- Smaller social networks: This may be linked to smaller social circles, which can negatively impact their mental health.

Positive Emotions (International Students)
- International students show more positive emotional expressions, suggesting a more balanced emotional state.
- These larger networks seem to help with their emotional well-being, but they might also lead to stress from trying to fit in.

Wellness Perceptions (International Students)

- International students feel confident in their health but might be taking more risks, as shown by higher scores in the risk category.
- This confidence could mean they underestimate their health risks, highlighting the need for tailored support and interventions.

Awareness and Cognitive Abilities

- International students: They score higher in categories like insight and cognitive processing, indicating better awareness but also a greater need for resources.
- There's a clear need for targeted outreach to make sure international students can access the services they need.

Social Interactions

- *Larger circles, but more pressure*: Even with larger social networks, international students might not have better mental health outcomes. The pressure to fit in and manage stress might make their social support less effective.

In conclusion:

- **Greater Risk for International Students**: Despite some advantages like larger social circles and positive emotions, international students may still be at greater risk for mental health issues and might not be fully aware of the support available to them.

- **Need for Targeted Support**: UofA should focus on providing targeted support and awareness programs for international students to help them better manage their mental health and wellness.

- **Comprehensive Understanding**: The combination of different analyses provides a complete picture of the issues students face. Addressing these issues in service accessibility, communication, and other areas will help institutions better meet students' needs and improve their overall experience.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

High prevalence of mental health issues
26.5% diagnosed, 59% using medication

Significant **academic pressure** and **financial stress.**

High demand for **additional resources and awareness.**

Moderate effectiveness of current initiatives

High expectations from the university

Evident support for the Peer Support Program.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Increased Funding: Advocate for increased funding for mental health resources to expand services and reduce wait times.

Enhanced Communication: Develop targeted communication strategies to raise awareness of available services.

GSA Peer Support Programs: Implement and promote peer support programs to provide additional support and reduce stigma.

Flexible Services: Offer flexible appointment options and extended hours to accommodate diverse schedules.

Inclusive and Culturally Sensitive Services: Ensure services are inclusive and culturally sensitive to meet the needs of a diverse student population.