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MEMORANDUM

ATTENTION	Senate	**DATE**	May 26, 2011
FROM	Jon Driver, Vice-President, Academic and Provost	**PAGES**	1/4
RE:	Response to Senator Black's Question		

I am responding to a question asked by Senator Sam Black in April. As his question is important, detailed and complex, I will first reproduce the question and then provide some responses.

Senator Black's question

Background:

The March 6th "Student Issue" of Maclean's magazine published data regarding responses to student satisfaction questions collected by the NSSE (National Survey of Student Engagement) and CUSC (Canadian University Survey Consortium). The latter survey polled 1,000 first year SFU students and had a 70% return rate. That was significantly higher than the national average among the other 38 institutions polled. The Administration is commended for electing to participate in these national surveys.

Our relative rank among Canadian institutions seems consistently very low for all four questions relating to student satisfaction. The comparison class includes many smaller schools. But in the CUSC survey, our students also grade us significantly worse than do students from larger institutions such as McGill, Dalhousie, and Montreal. We also score lower than cross-Province rival Victoria.

I have not been able to obtain access to the CUSC data using the internet, however, Maclean's describes the first year student responses to two questions as follows:

1) "Generally, I am satisfied with the quality of teaching I have received."
   Among 39 schools SFU scores LAST nationally for students who "strongly agree" with that statement. (Calgary declined to release their information.)

2) "I am satisfied with my decision to attend this university."
   Among 39 schools SFU scores SECOND TO LAST nationally for students who "strongly agree" with that statement. (Calgary declined to release their information.)

The relative rankings for the small schools collected in the NSSE survey follow a similar pattern for their student satisfaction questions. SFU is below average and below all of its local competitors (except Capilano). Here again, I've not been able to obtain direct access to the data.

Questions:

1) Does the Administration believe these results present cause for concern? What is their cause? Is the Administration alarmed by the lack of enthusiasm for the quality of teaching at SFU, as expressed by first year students, relative to our competitors?
2) What concrete steps are being taken to address the apparent causes of student discontent?
3) Several years ago the non-completion rate at SFU stood at 40%. What is the current non-graduation rate?

VPA Response

We need to be careful about how we use the results of survey questions that ask for student opinions of their experiences, as opposed to questions that track student experiences and outcomes on a more empirical basis. To illustrate my point, I have attached a document (compiled by Institutional Research and Planning) that provides some examples of survey results that are more positive than those cited by Senator Black. I do not want to suggest that we don't have any problems, but I do want to point out that our students report satisfaction and positive outcomes on a range of other survey instruments. I also note that the Maclean's report is based on a subset of survey questions that do not reflect the full range of student responses.

I should also point out that the CUSC survey asks whether students "strongly agree" and "agree" with certain statements, and whether they are "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with their experience. Senator Black reports SFU's ranking on the basis of the percentage of students who "strongly agree" that they are satisfied with the quality of teaching; however, if we add the responses of students who "agree", SFU's percentage rises to 93, ranking us tied for 9th place, behind smaller undergraduate-focused universities, and ahead of other large universities such as Ottawa, Calgary, UBC, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Alberta, Victoria, Carleton, McGill and Montreal. Similarly, if we combine students who are "very satisfied" and "satisfied" with their decision to attend SFU, the percentage rises to 91, again ranking us tied 9th behind smaller undergraduate-focused universities (with the exception of Victoria who are just ahead of us), and ahead of Calgary, Ottawa, Saskatchewan, Alberta, Montreal, and UBC.

However, I also want to recommend that we do not engage too seriously in the widespread practice of ranking institutions based on survey results. One of the most respected student survey organizations (NSSE) specifically cautions against this practice, and advises institutions that their survey data can be used most effectively by measuring trends through time at a single institution.

It is important that we examine negative survey results carefully, but we must also try to understand the context of the results, and ensure that as we respond we are not simply trying to get good survey scores but are also meeting our own goals of providing a high quality education.

One of the reasons that we decided to participate in NSSE is that it asks questions about student experiences that are generally thought to be positively correlated with a high quality post-secondary education (so called "high impact" practices), rather than solely asking about student opinion of their experiences. For example, instead of simply asking "are you satisfied with the quality of instruction" the NSSE survey also asks about the instructional activities in which a student has participated (e.g. writing papers, analyzing data, making presentations etc.), thus providing a better empirical basis for assessing whether the institution provides a good quality education. NSSE is also a useful survey because it combines student responses into a series of "benchmarks" (e.g. "level of academic challenge" or "student-faculty interaction") that provide a summary of how well an institution serves its students.

Question One

I agree with Senator Black that the survey results he reports, and others, should cause us concern, even if, as argued above, our ranking is perhaps not as poor as he suggests. However, it is very difficult to respond to the second part of his question and assess the cause of dissatisfaction reported by first year students. Although quality of teaching could be a contributing factor to student dissatisfaction, some other factors that relate to student dissatisfaction during first year might include:

- SFU has a high proportion of EAL students who may find university level work and university teaching styles especially challenging, particularly in their first year;
- General dissatisfaction with the commuter campus environment;
- High degree of flexibility in curriculum at SFU may result in a less clear academic structure; trimester system means a less structured school year;
- W and Q courses may be seen as more difficult;
- Difficulty in transition from high school to first year in combination with high grading standards;
- Large first year class size relative to colleges or as compared to the high school environment;
- Less sense of connection to one Faculty or departmental "home" when first admitted to the university;
- The significant proportion of students who hold part-time jobs and consequently have difficulties managing their schedules in an environment where course availability is an issue.

I am more concerned by NSSE data, which mainly report student experiences. Our recent NSSE results show that we do not excel in any of the five benchmark areas, and we do slightly worse in some areas than comparator institutions in BC or in the entire NSSE population. For example, first year students at SFU reported lower rates of feedback from faculty members and less writing activity than at other universities in the BC comparison group. As noted above, NSSE would urge us to be cautious in interpreting these results. For example, in the NSSE survey students are asked how many papers they wrote during the year, but SFU students typically take lower course loads (approximately 10 credits per semester) than at other universities; thus, the number of papers written at SFU may be lower even if the percentage of courses requiring a paper is consistent across institutions. In spite of these cautions, I do think we need to pay more attention to the first year experiences of our students, especially as the overall level of satisfaction expressed by SFU students after graduation is high, and seems consistent with results from other BC universities (see attachment 1).

Question Two

If some students express dissatisfaction with first year courses, and if the NSSE data tend to support this opinion through a more empirical analysis, then we should be looking at a number of options, including better support for instructors, better support for students, and some changes to curriculum.

With regard to instruction, we have taken the following steps:

1. Restructuring and repurposing of the Teaching and Learning Centre, following recommendations from the Task Force on Teaching and Learning. The TLC produces regular bulletins for instructors, and is currently hiring staff to provide closer coordination between the needs of individual Faculties and the services offered by the TLC. The TLC continues to provide numerous workshops on many aspects of teaching and learning.
2. Increased funding for the International TA program.
3. Re-thinking instructor and course evaluations. As approved by Senate in May 2011, SCUTL will lead a project to develop more effective evaluations of courses and instructors. This should result in better understanding of what teaching methods are most effective.
4. Developed a fund to support investigation by faculty members of innovative teaching and learning practices, in order to diversify teaching methods at SFU.

We have already upgraded support for students significantly through a number of initiatives in recent years, including:

1. Development of Student Central and Arts Central
2. Implementation of the Student Success program
3. Development of Student Learning Commons
4. Development of Degree Progress Report
5. Implementation of FAL and FAN courses
6. Increased retention programming for international and aboriginal students
7. Increases to student services generally through use of over-enrollment tuition

With regard to curriculum:

1. Some first year cohort programs already exist, and others are being developed.
2. New curriculum management software will allow information on learning outcomes to be incorporated in information for students, thus clarifying purpose of course and program.
3. Beginning in fall 2011, we will work on clearer definitions of learning outcomes for all programs and courses, and processes that better support evaluation for improvement of programs and curricula. Some academic units (e.g. Beedie School of Business and School of Engineering Science) are already developing more formal learning outcome measures because of discipline accreditation requirements.

Question three

In British Columbia, the graduation rate for a particular institution is complicated by the fact that BC has a highly integrated post-secondary system that allows easy transfer between institutions. We therefore should ask what proportion of students admitted to SFU complete an SFU degree, what proportion complete a degree or other credential elsewhere, and what proportion never complete. Comparative data are provided in the second attachment to this document. Just over 70% of high school students entering SFU complete their degrees at SFU, a rate that is lower than UBC and comparable with UVic. Some students who start at SFU leave and complete a credential elsewhere, but there are still more than 20% who start at SFU and do not complete a credential within 7 years.

Again, looking at entering high school students (attachment 3), we see this pattern persisting over a number of years, with UBC graduating a slightly higher percentage than SFU, and UVic slightly lower than SFU. This attachment also provides some data on first to second year retention rates, and shows that SFU and UBC have similar patterns.

In recent years, BCCAT and the Ministry of Advanced Education, through the Student Transitions Project, have been collecting data about how students move between institutions. The preliminary results of this research are showing that students are now "swirling" between institutions to a much greater extent than was previously understood or expected. This puts the concept of credential completion in a somewhat different light, and as the STP research continues it will be useful for all post-secondary institutions in better understanding the choices students are making about their education.

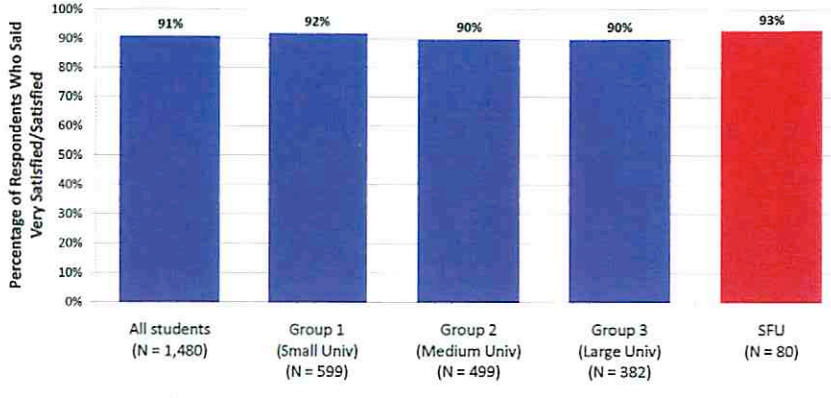
Attachment 1: "Other survey data"
Attachment 2: "Mobility data"
Attachment 3: "High school retention"

Question 1: In Which Areas Does SFU Do Well In?

A. Canadian University Survey Consortium (CUSC) *

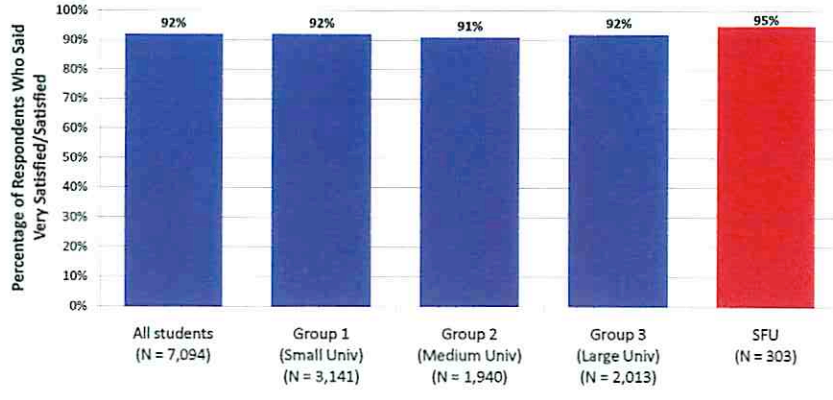
A1. 2010 Survey of First Year Students

Figure 1a: Please rate your level of satisfaction with: Services for co-op program, internship, and other practical experiences related to your program



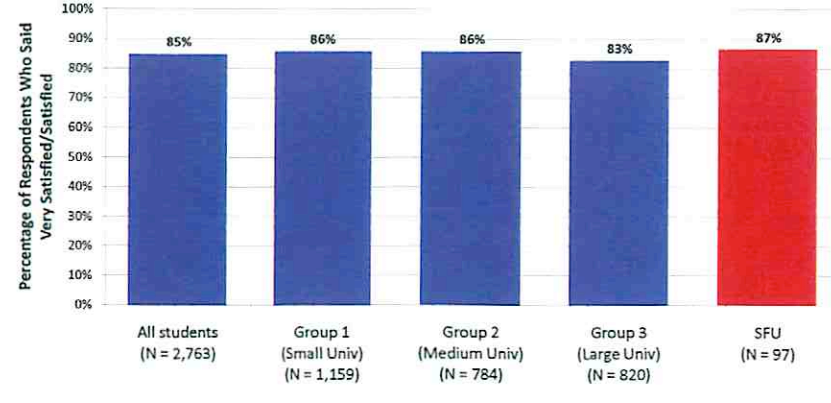
Source: CUSC 2010 - First Year Students

Figure 1b: Please rate your level of satisfaction with: Athletic facilities



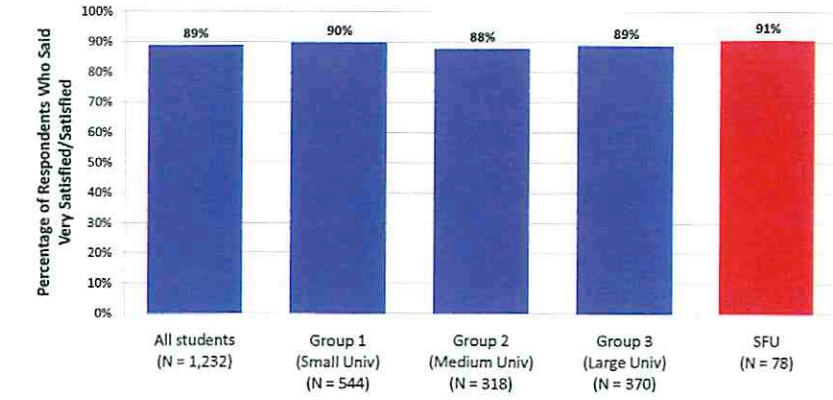
Source: CUSC 2010 - First Year Students

Figure 1c: Please rate your level of satisfaction with: Campus medical services



Source: CUSC 2010 - First Year Students

Figure 1d: Please rate your level of satisfaction with: Career counselling services



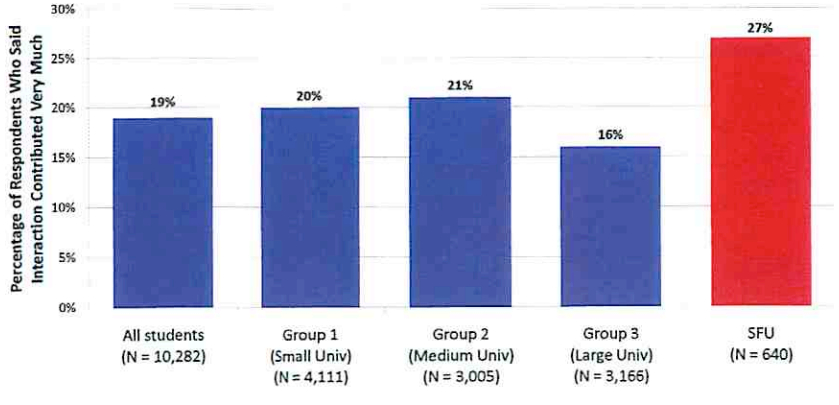
Source: CUSC 2010 - First Year Students

* In 2010, 705 out of 1,000 students responded to the survey for SFU. Percentages for Figures 1a, 1b, 1c, and 1d are based on those respondents that offered a rating.

A. Canadian University Survey Consortium (CUSC) *

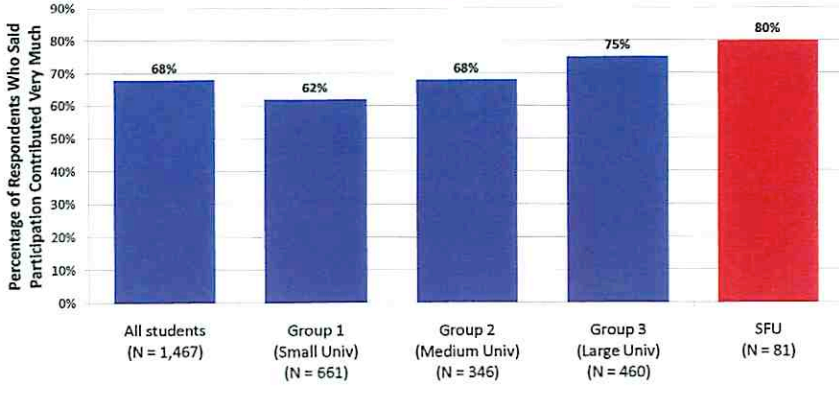
A2. 2009 Survey of Graduating Students

Figure 2a: How did the following contribute to your personal growth and development: Interaction with teaching assistants



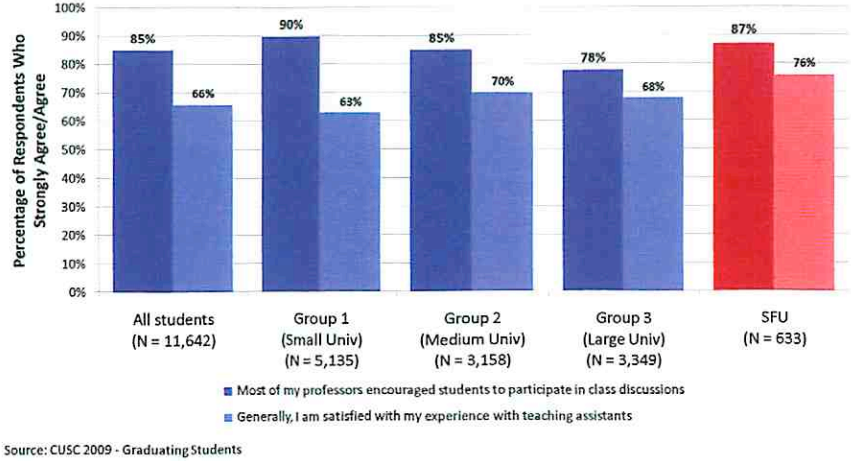
Source: CUSC 2009 - Graduating Students

Figure 2b: How did the following contribute to your personal growth and development: Participation in international study or exchanges



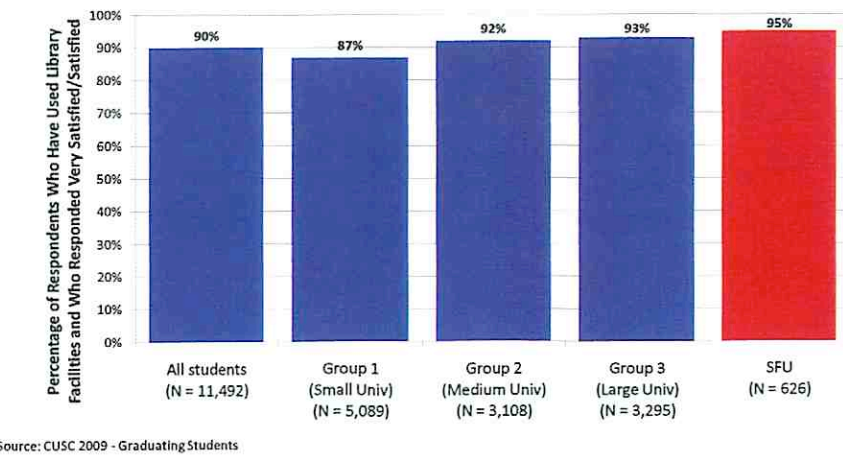
Source: CUSC 2009 - Graduating Students

Figure 2c: Please indicate your level of agreement with the following assessments of faculty



Source: CUSC 2009 - Graduating Students

Figure 2d: Please rate your level of satisfaction with: Library Facilities

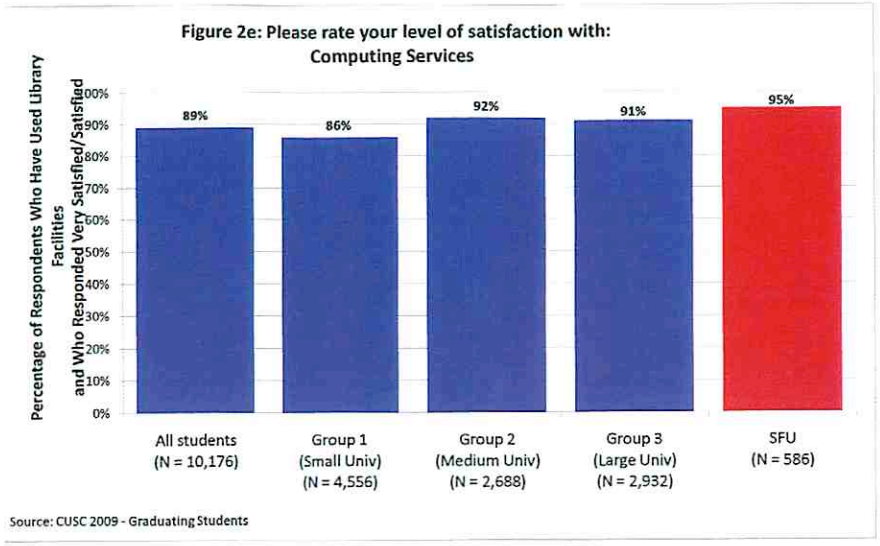


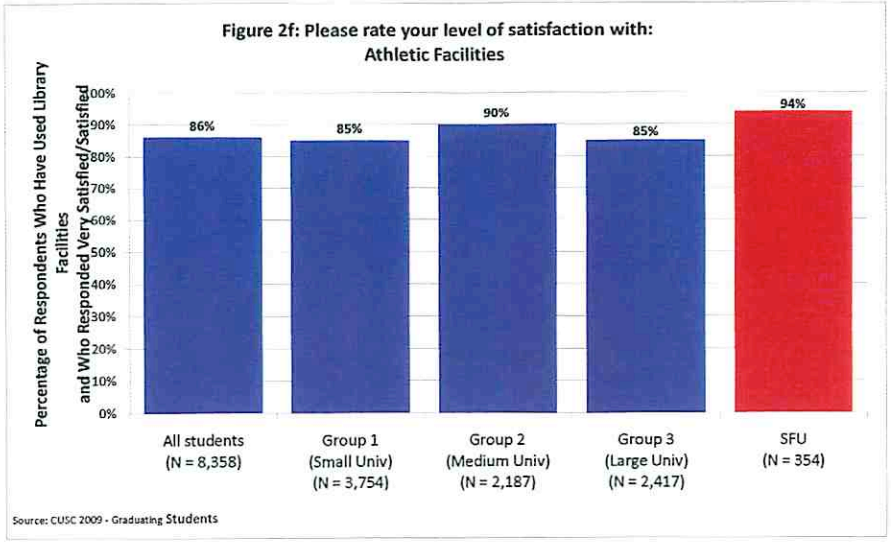
Source: CUSC 2009 - Graduating Students

* In 2009, 647 out of 1,000 students responded to the survey for SFU. Percentages for Figures 1a, 1b, and 1d are based on those respondents that used or had experience with those facilities/services

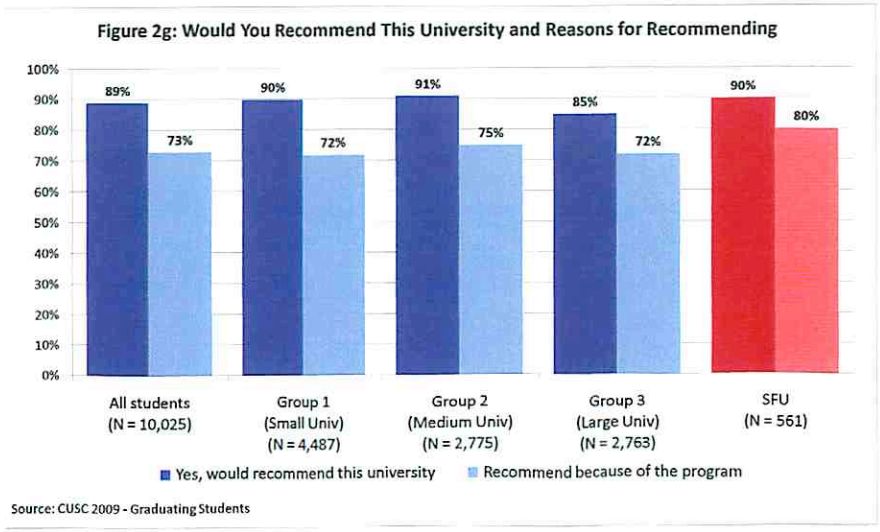
A. Canadian University Survey Consortium (CUSC) *

A2. 2009 Survey of Graduating Students





Please also see Figure 1b

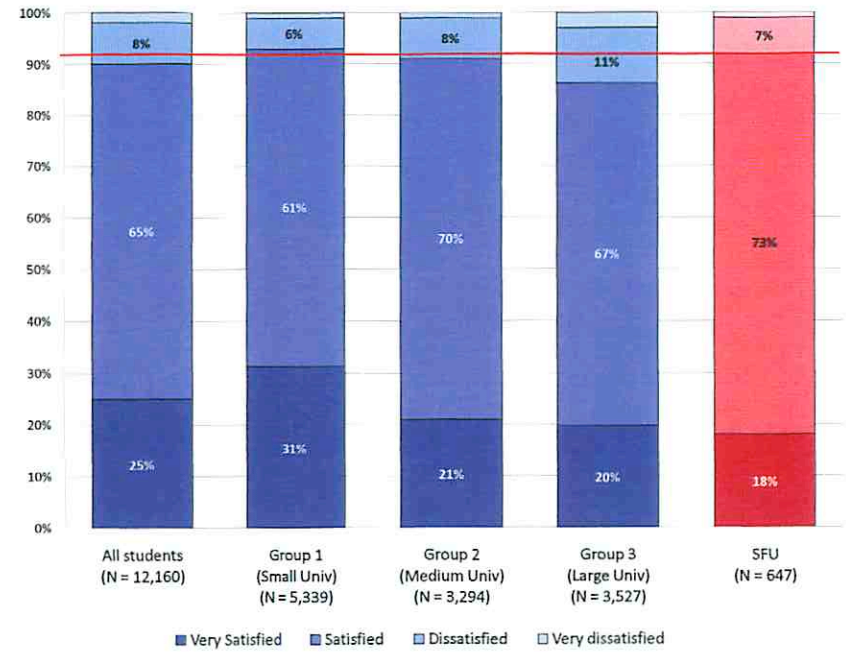


* In 2009, 647 out of 1,000 students responded to the survey for SFU. Percentages for Figures 2e and 2f are based on those respondents that used those services
Percentages in Figure 2g - "Recommend because of the program" are based on those respondents that said "Yes, they would recommend this university"

A. Canadian University Survey Consortium (CUSC) *

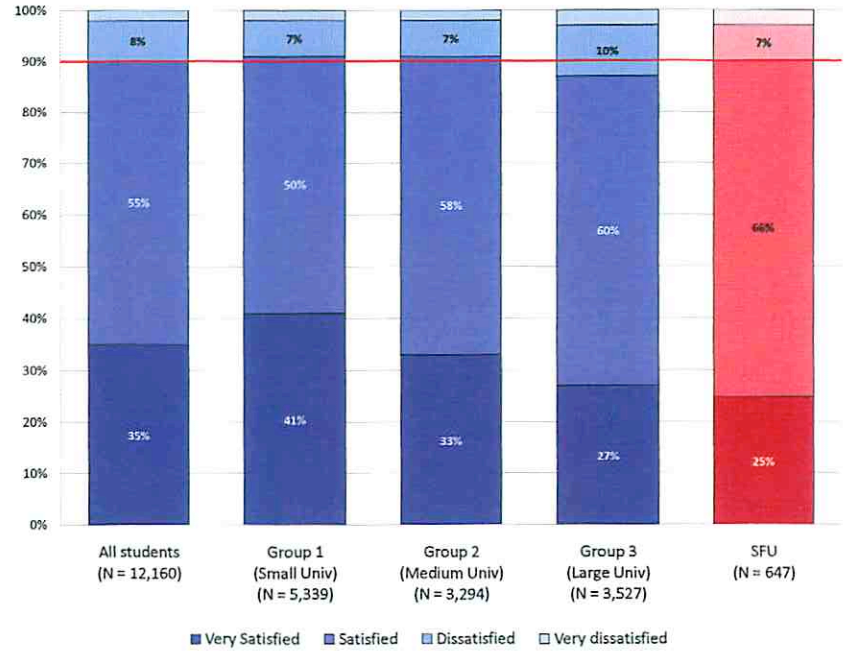
A2. 2009 Survey of Graduating Students

Figure 2h: Satisfaction With Overall Quality of Education



Source: CUSC 2009 - Graduating Students

Figure 2i: Satisfaction With Decision to Attend This University



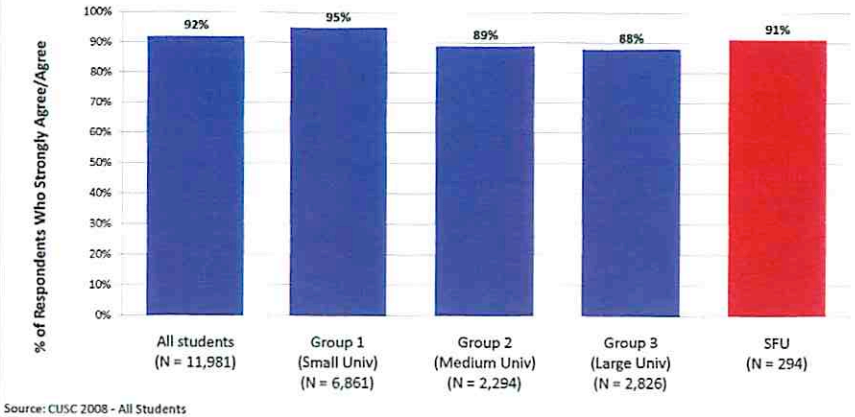
Source: CUSC 2009 - Graduating Students

* In 2009, 647 out of 1,000 students responded to the survey for SFU. Please note that columns may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

A. Canadian University Survey Consortium (CUSC) *

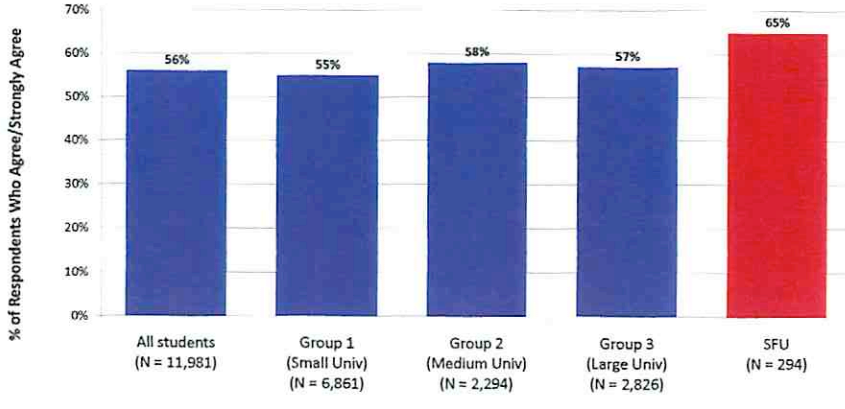
A3. 2008 Survey of All Students

Figure 3a: Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: Most of my professors encourage students to participate in class discussions



Source: CUSC 2008 - All Students

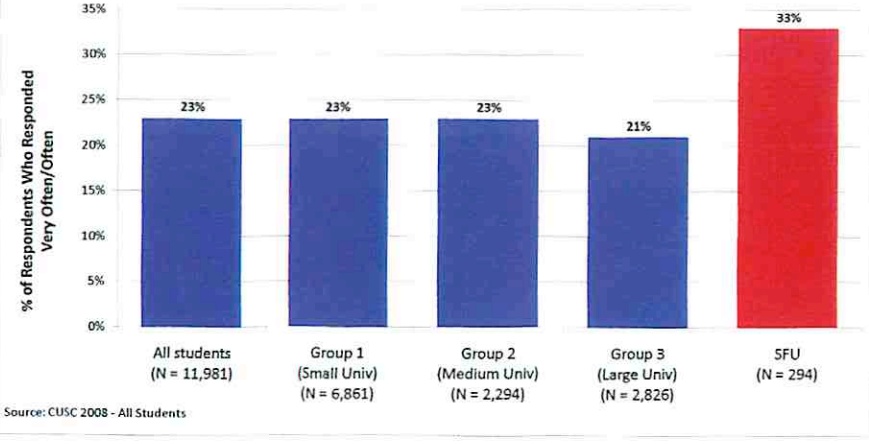
Figure 3b: Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: Teaching assistants have been helpful in my academic program



Source: CUSC 2008 - All Students

Please also see Figure 2a

Figure 3c: During the current academic year, about how often have you: Attended campus lectures (in addition to regular classes)



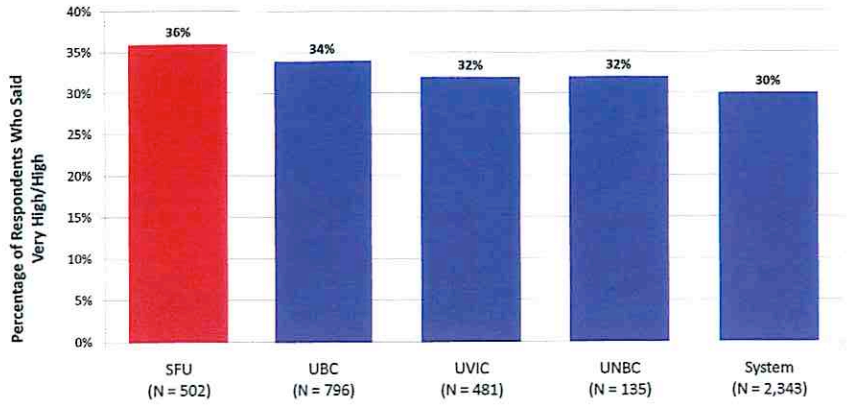
Source: CUSC 2008 - All Students

* In 2008, 294 students responded to the survey for SFU.

B. BC Baccalaureate Graduate Outcomes Survey (BGS)

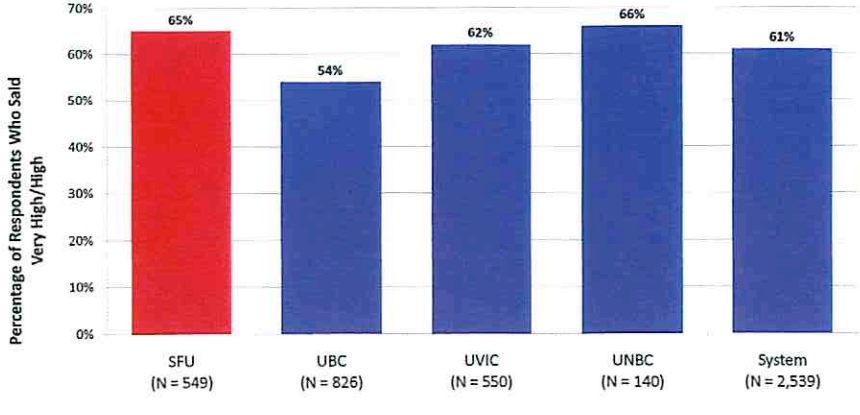
B1. 2009 Survey of Students Who Graduated in 2004

Figure 4a: To what degree did your program help you develop the following skill: Use of Mathematics Appropriate to Field



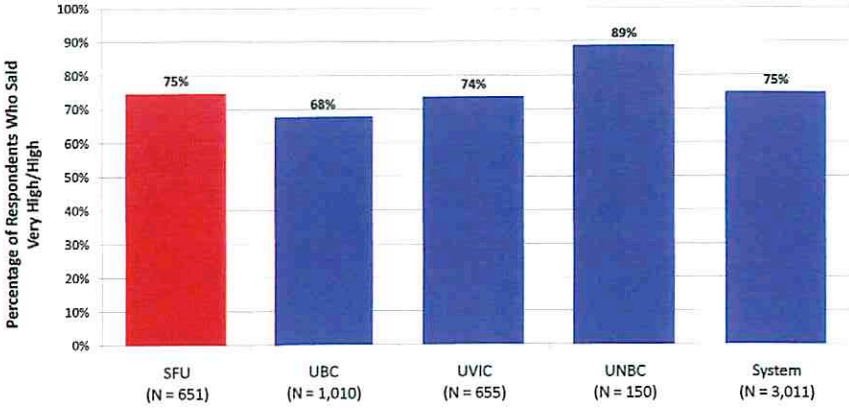
Source: BGS 2009 - 5 year out

Figure 4b: To what degree did your program help you develop the following skill: Use of Computers Appropriate to Field



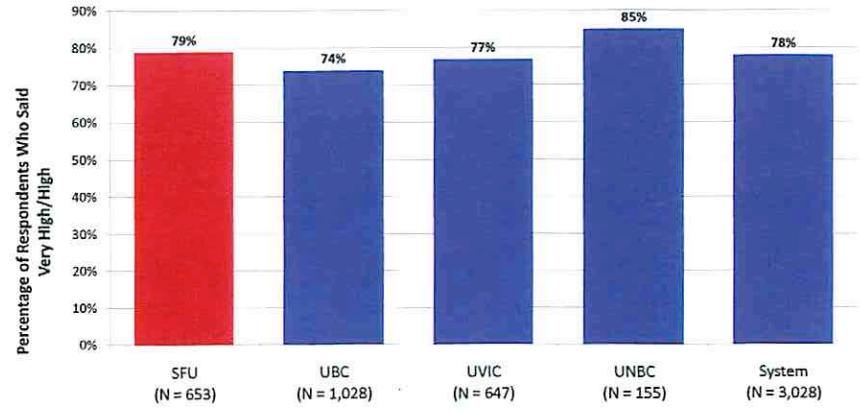
Source: BGS 2009 - 5 year out

Figure 4c: To what degree did your program help you develop the following skill: Oral Communication



Source: BGS 2009 - 5 year out

Figure 4d: To what degree did your program help you develop the following skill: Problem Resolution

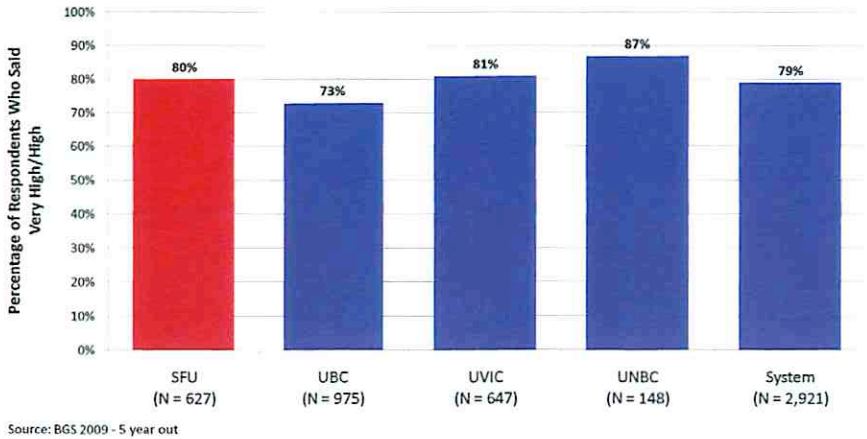


Source: BGS 2009 - 5 year out

B. BC Baccalaureate Graduate Outcomes Survey (BGS)

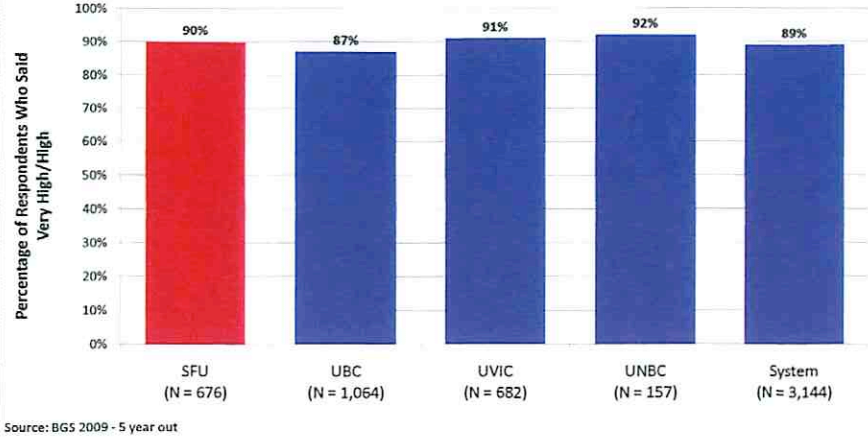
B1. 2009 Survey of Students Who Graduated in 2004

Figure 4e: To what degree did your program help you develop the following skill: Written Communication



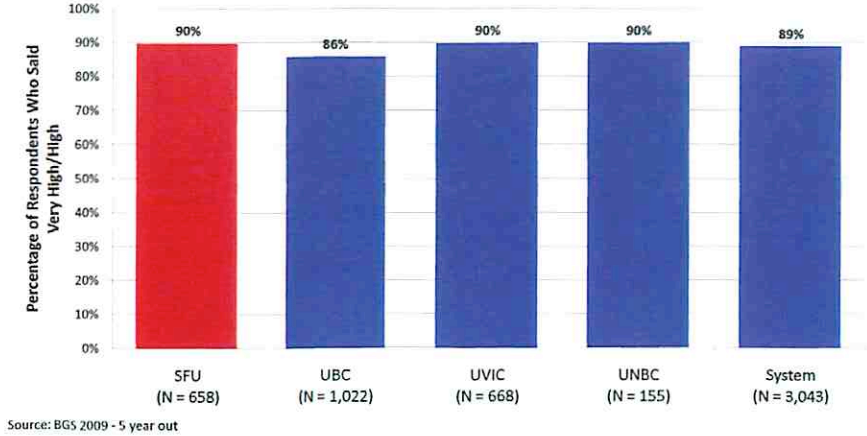
Source: BGS 2009 - 5 year out

Figure 4f: To what degree did your program help you develop the following skill: Critical Analysis



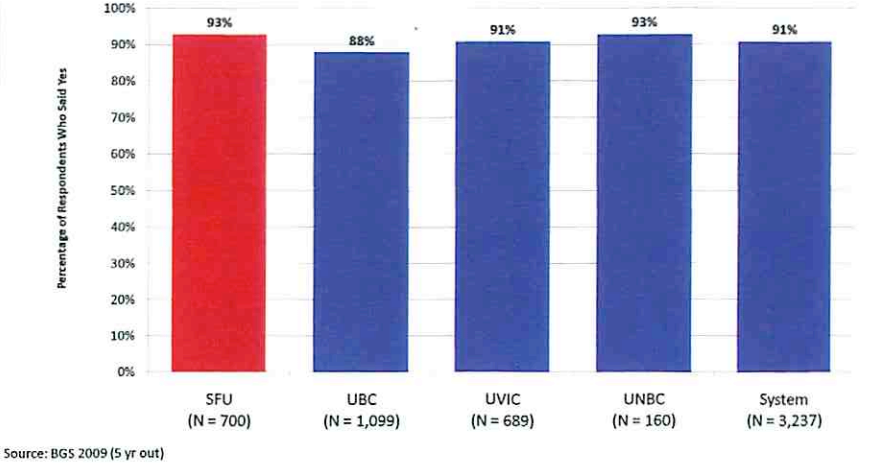
Source: BGS 2009 - 5 year out

Figure 4g: To what degree did your program help you develop the following skill: Learning On Your Own



Source: BGS 2009 - 5 year out

Figure 4h: Are you currently working or seeking work at a paid job or a business?

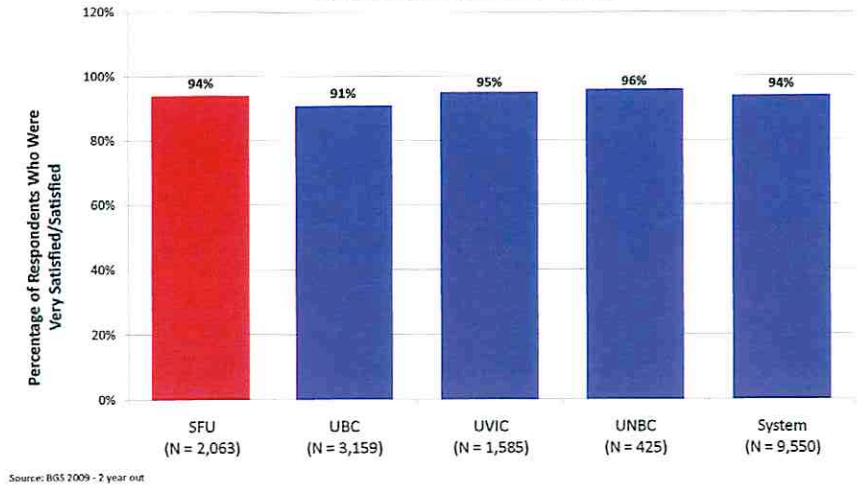


Source: BGS 2009 (5 yr out)

B. BC Baccalaureate Graduate Outcomes Survey (BGS)

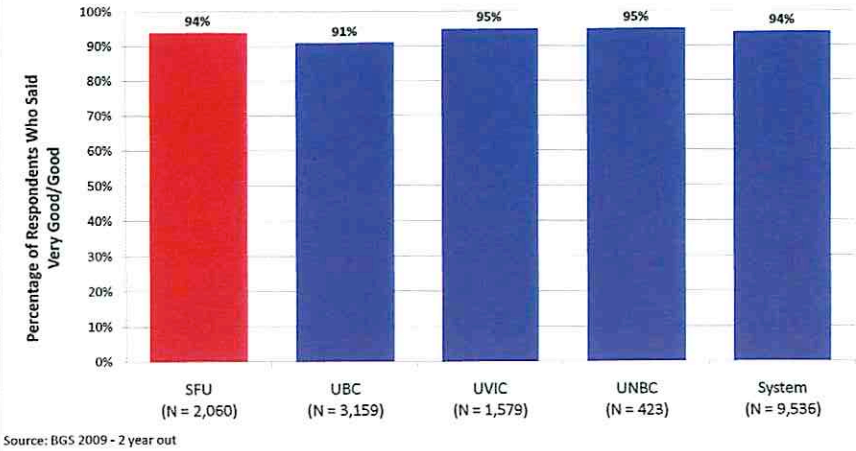
B2. 2009 Survey of Students Who Graduated in 2007

Figure 5a: Satisfaction with Program



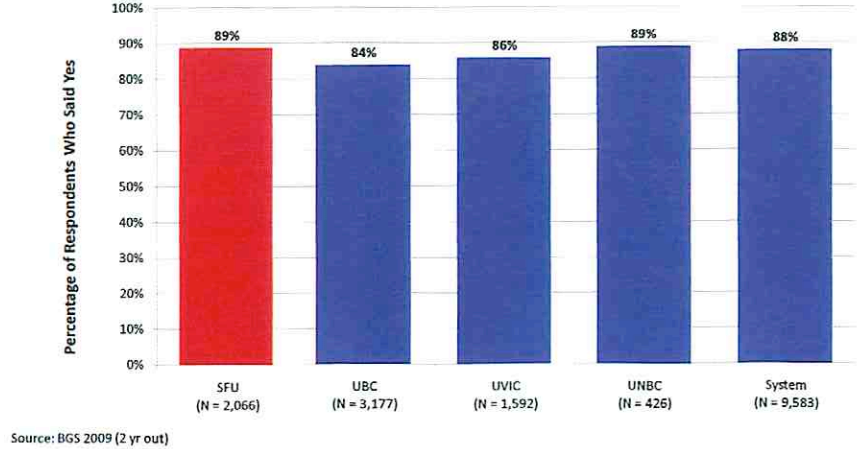
Source: BGS 2009 - 2 year out

Figure 5b: Please rate the quality of instruction at your institution



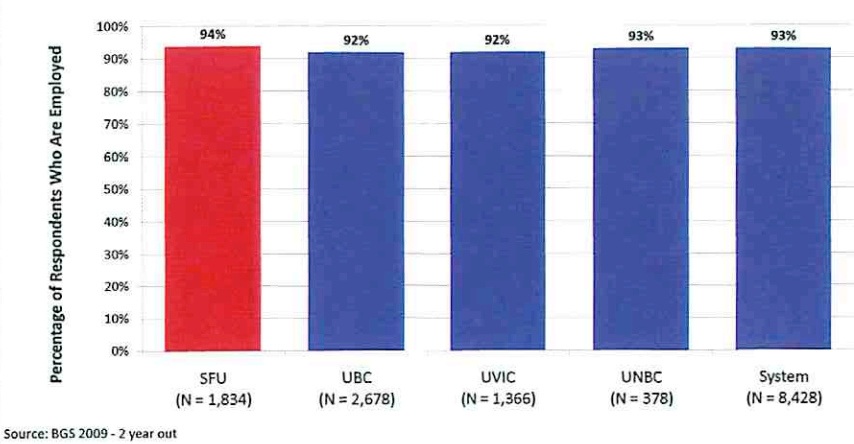
Source: BGS 2009 - 2 year out

Figure 5c: Are you currently working or seeking work at a paid job or business?



Source: BGS 2009 (2 yr out)

Figure 5d: Employment Status

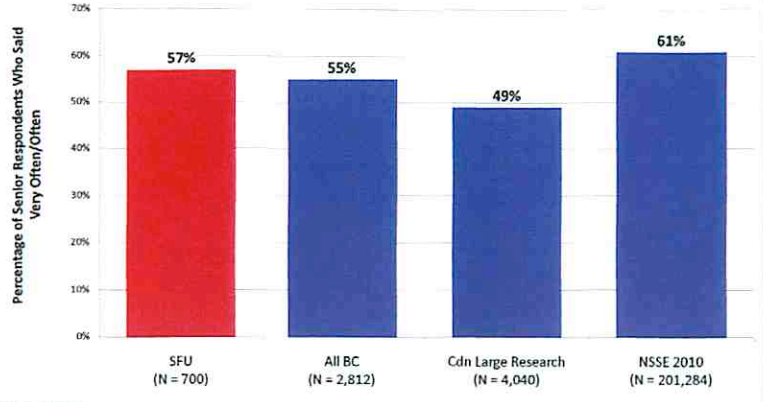


Source: BGS 2009 - 2 year out

C. National Survey of Student Engagement

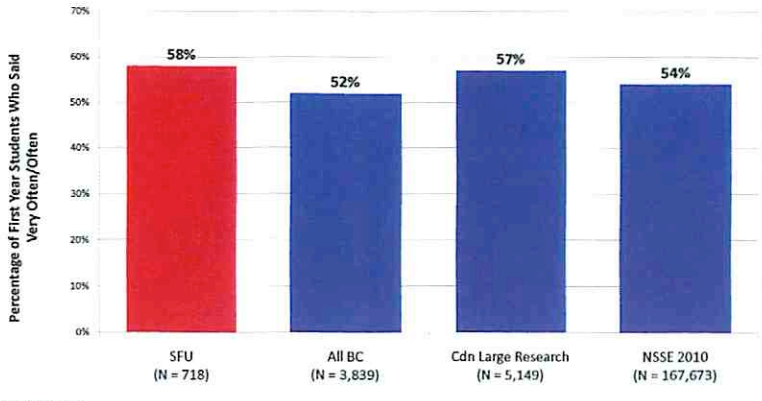
C1. 2010 Survey

Figure 6a: In your experience at your institution during the current school year, about how often have you done each of the following: Made a Class Presentation



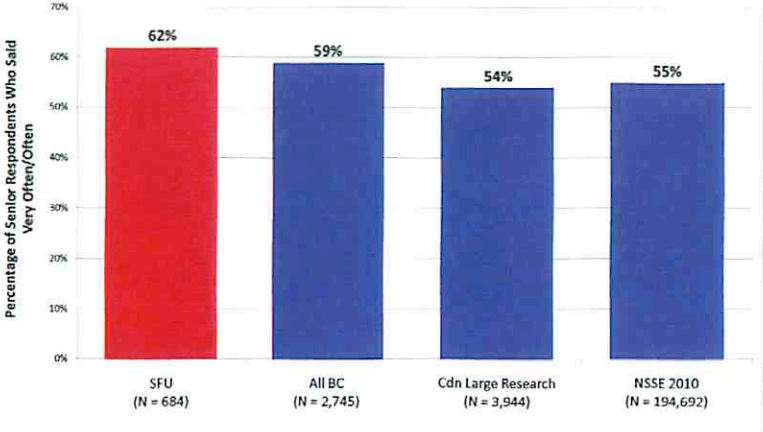
Source: NSSE 2010

Figure 6b: In your experience at your institution during the current school year, about how often have you done each of the following: Used an Electronic Medium to Discuss or Complete an Assignment



Source: NSSE 2010

Figure 6c: In your experience at your institution during the current school year, about how often have you done each of the following: Had Serious Conversations with Students of a Different Race or Ethnicity



Source: NSSE 2010

For 2010:

All BC category includes the following institutions:

Capilano University
Kwantlen Polytechnic University
Thompson Rivers University
University of the Fraser Valley
University of Victoria
Vancouver Island University

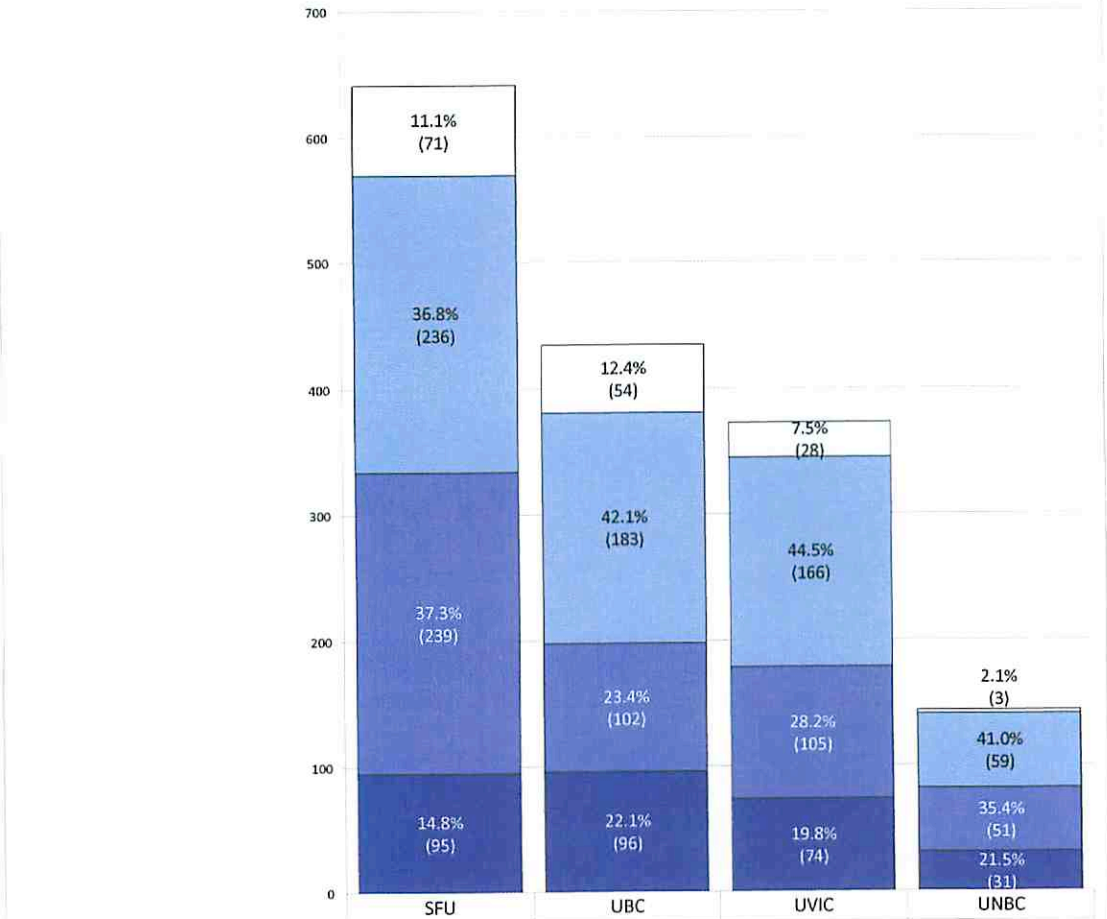
Cdn Large Research category includes the following institutions:

Grant MacEwan University
Humber College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning
Mount Royal University
Universite d'Ottawa/University of Ottawa
Universite de Sherbrooke
University of New Brunswick - Fredricton
University of Victoria

List of institutions in the All NSSE 2010 category can be viewed at nsse.iub.edu/pdf/2010_comparison_group3.pdf

Post-Secondary Mobility

Question 2b: Of Those That Moved to Another BC Institution, Where Did They Go?



EXPLANATION/ INTERPRETATION:

Data displays PSE sector of:

1) Undergraduates entrants in academic year 2007/08
2) From the four BC research universities
3) One year after enrollment

Among those that moved to another BC institution from SFU, the majority went to either a teaching intensive university or community college.

For UBC, UVIC and UNBC, over 40% went to a community college.

The percentage that went to an institute from SFU and UBC was in the range of 11% - 12%

Data for SFU is summarized below:

Of the 641 students that moved to another BC institution:

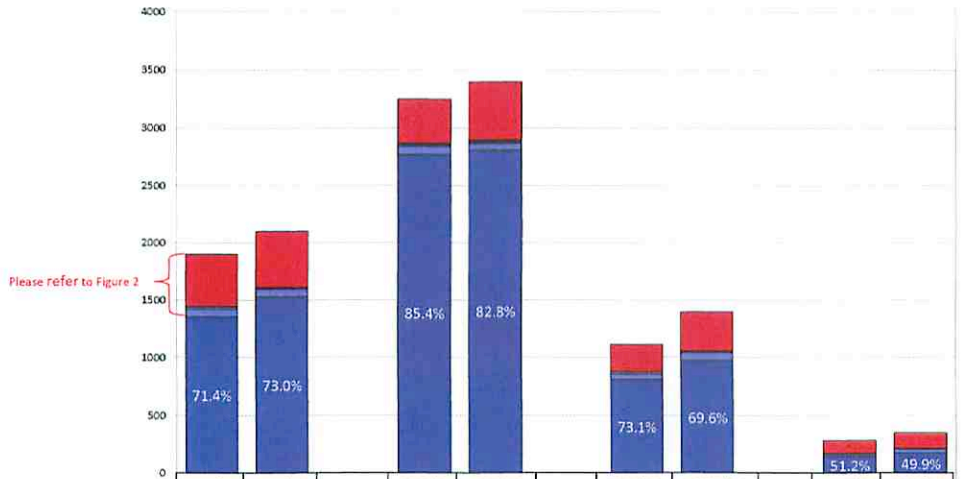
- 71 (11.1%) went to an institute
- 236 (36.8%) went to a community college
- 239 (37.3%) went to a teaching intensive university
- 95 (14.8%) went to another research intensive university

Source: Post-Secondary Student Mobility (PSM): 2007/08 to 2008/09

Student Transition Project

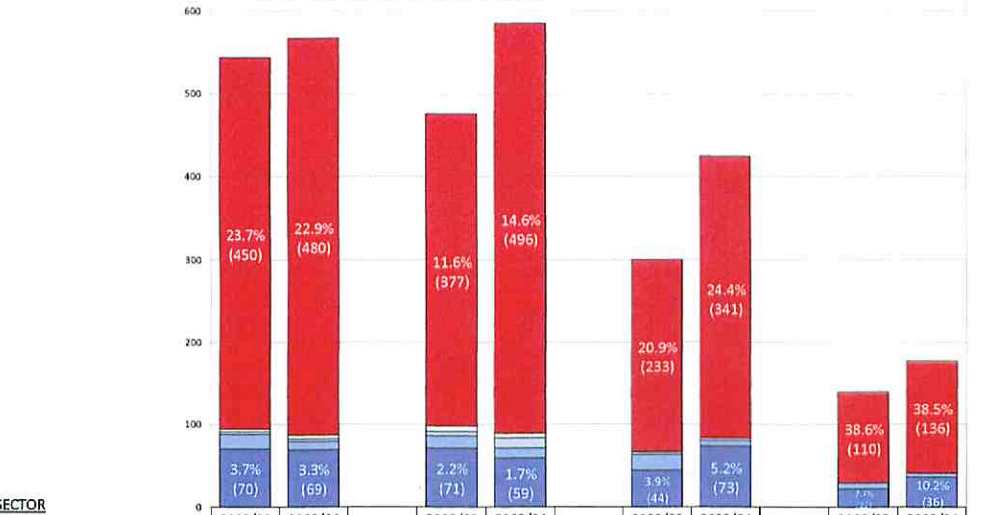
Question 3a: Are BC 12 Graduates Admitted to a Research University Completing Their Bachelor's Degree at the university (within 7 years of enrollment)?

Figure 1: Bachelor's Degree Awarded by PSE Sector (including university first enrolled at)



BACHELOR'S DEGREE AWARDED BY:	2002/03 SFU	2003/04 SFU		2002/03 UBC	2003/04 UBC		2002/03 UVIC	2003/04 UVIC		2002/03 UNBC	2003/04 UNBC
UNIVERSITY FIRST ENROLLED AT	1355	1532		2777	2814		814	973		146	176
OTHER PSE SECTOR	544	567		475	585		300	424		139	177
TOTAL	1899	2099		3252	3399		1114	1397		285	353

Figure 2: Bachelor's Degrees Awarded by PSE Sector (excluding university first enrolled at)



OTHER PSE SECTOR BACHELOR'S DEGREE AWARDED FROM:	2002/03 SFU	2003/04 SFU		2002/03 UBC	2003/04 UBC		2002/03 UVIC	2003/04 UVIC		2002/03 UNBC	2003/04 UNBC
NO CREDENTIAL YET	450	480		377	496		233	341		110	136
INSTITUTE	3	5		7	6		1	3			
COMMUNITY COLLEGE	3	3		5	12		3				
TEACHING-INTENSIVE UNIVERSITY	18	10		15	12		19	7		7	5
OTHER RESEARCH-INTENSIVE UNIVERSITY	70	69		71	59		44	73		22	36
TOTAL	544	567		475	585		300	424		139	177

EXPLANATION/INTERPRETATION:

Data shows:

1) BC 12 graduates admitted to the four BC research universities
2) Two cohorts admitted in academic year 2002/03 and 2003/04 per university
3) PSE sector where bachelor's degree was awarded

Students who first enrolled at a research intensive university may subsequently receive their first Bachelor's degree from the institution they first enrolled at OR another BC post-secondary institution.

At SFU 71.4% and 73.0% of the BC12 entrants in 2002/03 and 2003/04 respectively received their bachelor's degree from SFU within 7 years.

EXAMPLE:

Figures 1 and 2 displays the data as follows:
After 7 years in the post-secondary education system, for the SFU 2002/03 cohort:

Figure 1:
- 1,355 (71.4%) students were awarded their first bachelor's degree from SFU

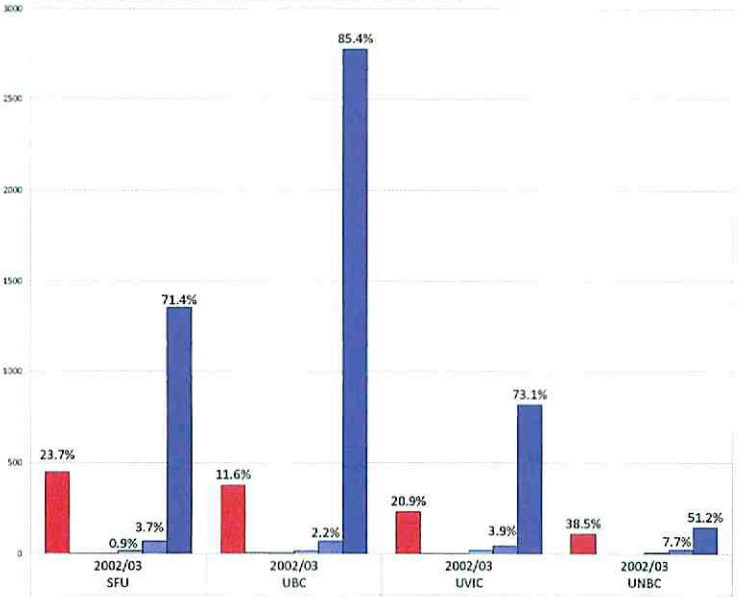
Figure 2:
- 70 (3.7%) students were awarded their first bachelor's degree from another BC research intensive university
- 18 (0.9%) students were awarded their first bachelor's degree from a BC teaching intensive university
- 3 (0.2%) students were awarded their first bachelor's degree from a BC community college
- 3 (0.2%) students were awarded their first bachelor's degree from a BC institute
- 450 (23.7%) students have yet to be awarded their first credential

Source: STP First Annual Transitions of Eligble Graduates to Post Secondary (2002-03 to 2009-10)

Student Transition Project

Question 3a: Are BC 12 Graduates Admitted to a Research University Completing Their Bachelor's Degree within 7 Years of Enrollment?

Figure 1: Bachelor's Degree Awarded Within 7 Years of Enrollment by PSE Sector for BC12 Graduates Admitted in Academic Year 2002/03



	2002/03 SFU	2002/03 UBC	2002/03 UVIC	2002/03 UNBC
NO CREDENTIAL YET	450	377	233	110
INSTITUTE	3	7	1	0
COMMUNITY COLLEGE	3	5	3	0
TEACHING-INTENSIVE UNIVERSITY	18	15	19	7
OTHER RESEARCH-INTENSIVE UNIVERSITY	70	71	44	22
UNIVERSITY ENROLLED AT	1355	2777	814	146
TOTAL	1899	3252	1114	285

EXPLANATION/INTERPRETATION:

Data shows:

1) BC 12 graduates admitted to the four BC research universities
2) Two cohorts admitted in academic year 2002/03 and 2003/04 per university
3) PSE sector where bachelor's degree was awarded

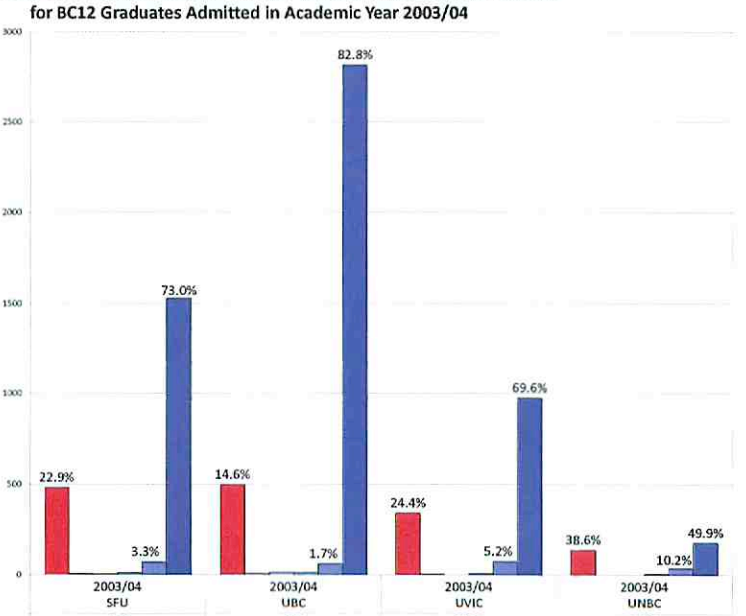
Figures 1 displays data for students admitted in academic year 2002/03.

Figures 2 displays data for students admitted in academic year 2003/04.

Students who first enrolled at a research intensive university may subsequently receive their first Bachelor's degree from the institution they first enrolled at OR another BC post-secondary institution.

At SFU 71.4% and 73.0% of the BC12 entrants in 2002/03 and 2003/04 respectively received their bachelor's degree from SFU within 7 years.

Figure 2: Bachelor's Degree Awarded Within 7 Years of Enrollment by PSE Sector for BC12 Graduates Admitted in Academic Year 2003/04



	2003/04 SFU	2003/04 UBC	2003/04 UVIC	2003/04 UNBC
NO CREDENTIAL YET	480	496	341	136
INSTITUTE	5	6	3	
COMMUNITY COLLEGE	3	12		
TEACHING-INTENSIVE UNIVERSITY	10	12	7	5
OTHER RESEARCH-INTENSIVE UNIVERSITY	69	59	73	36
UNIVERSITY ENROLLED AT	1532	2814	973	176
TOTAL	2099	3399	1397	353

The following summary is based on Figure 1 for those students that first enrolled at SFU:

After 7 years in the post-secondary education system:

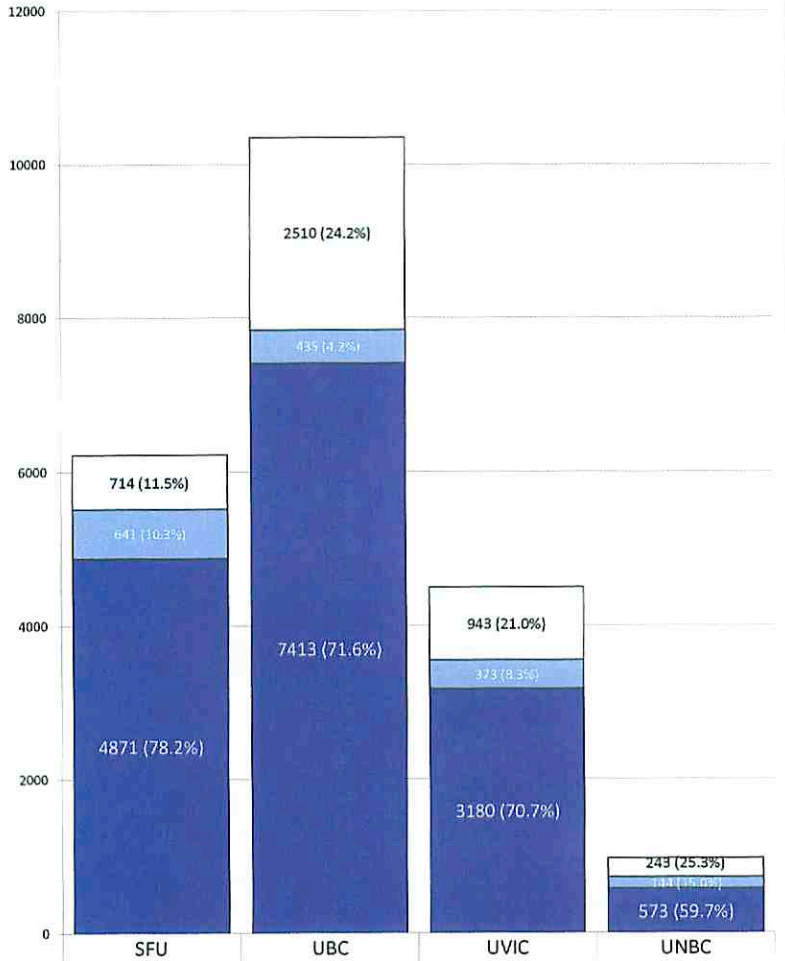
- 1,355 (71.4%) students were awarded their first bachelor's degree from SFU
- 70 (3.7%) students were awarded their first bachelor's degree from another BC research intensive university
- 18 (0.9%) students were awarded their first bachelor's degree from a BC teaching intensive university
- 3 (0.2%) students were awarded their first bachelor's degree from a BC community college
- 3 (0.2%) students were awarded their first bachelor's degree from a BC institute
- 450 (23.7%) students have yet to be awarded their first credential

Source: STP First Annual Transitions of Eligble Graduates to Post Secondary (2002-03 to 2009-10)

Post-Secondary Mobility

Question 3b: Undergraduate Research University Students Admitted in Academic Year 2007/08, Where are They One Year After Admission?

Movement of Academic Year 2007/08 Research University Entrants One Year After Admission



	SFU	UBC	UVIC	UNBC
☐ Left BC PSE System	714	2510	943	243
▫ Moved to Another BC Institution	641	435	373	144
■ Stayed at Institution	4871	7413	3180	573
TOTAL	6226	10358	4496	960

EXPLANATION/ INTERPRETATION:

Data displays mobility of:
1) Undergraduates entrants in academic year 2007/08
2) From the four BC research universities
3) One year after enrollment

The categories of mobility include:
a) Stayed at the same institution
b) Moved to another BC post-secondary institution
c) Left the BC PSE system

Among the research universities:
1) UNBC and UBC had the largest proportion of 2007/08 entrants that left the PSE system after one year
2) SFU had the highest percentage that stayed
3) UNBC and SFU had the largest and second largest percentage of entrants move to another BC institution, respectively.

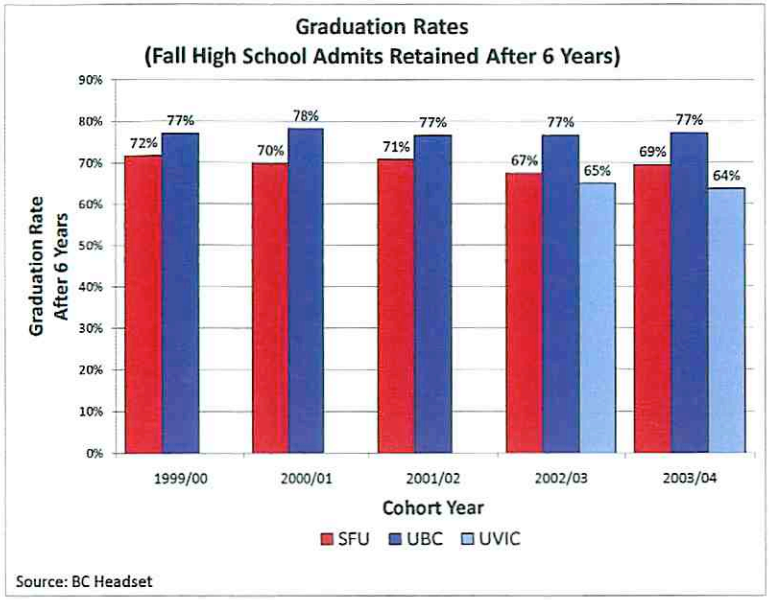
Data for SFU is summarized below:

SFU had 6,226 new undergraduate students enroll in academic year 2007/08.

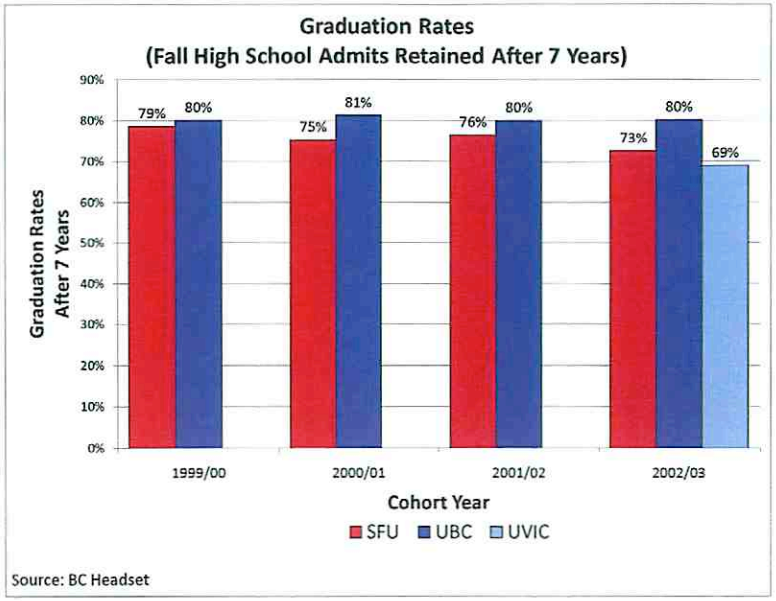
At the end of academic year 2008/09:
- 4,871 (78.2%) stayed at SFU
- 641 (10.3%) moved to another BC post-secondary institution
- 714 (11.5%) discontinued their post-secondary education

Source: Post-Secondary Student Mobility (PSM): 2007/08 to 2008/09

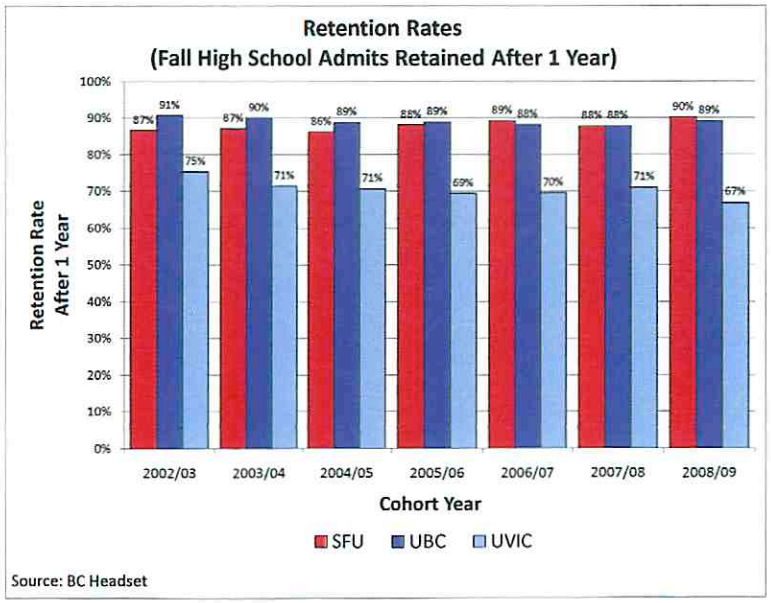
Graduation and Retention Rates



Source: BC Headset



Source: BC Headset



Source: BC Headset