



UNIVERSITY OF
CALGARY

October 9, 2024

Student Experience Think Tank

What We Heard Report



STUDENT EXPERIENCE AND SUPPORT

What we heard

Housing

What's working well

- On-campus housing options; including emergency, family and group housing
- Emergency housing supports for students

Ideas for improvement

- Increase residence capacity
- Improve maintenance and cleanliness of residence buildings
- Provide more detailed housing information for international students
- Simplify processes for securing accommodations
- Reduce housing costs and address delays in housing offers (challenging for late program acceptances)
- Build more residence units and create subsidized housing options for families
- Community efforts and lobbying to address high housing costs; fight for caps to rental increases to ensure affordability
- Establish partnerships with rental companies and governments for affordable off-campus housing
- Develop more housing options closer to transit and food access points

Provide more housing opportunities
↳ highlight student voices in need

Help
- stop annexing Neighbouring lots
for Commercial/Private residential zoning

petition Calgary City Council
to create affordable
housing

pls build more rooms,

↳ Make the rooms bigger

↳ Better heating

↳ safety → improve campus security

Direct feedback from students

Collected during pop-up engagements
and during the Think Tank on Oct. 9

What we heard

Food security

What's working well

- Affordable Food Market, Ladle UP! and other programs at the Campus Food Hub
- SU's Campus Food Bank
- \$3 meal initiative at The Den

Ideas for improvement

- Better promotion and awareness of existing food security resources to increase utilization
- Host food-focused events (e.g., cooking or nutrition classes) to raise awareness and destigmatize food security
- Reduce food waste across campus
- Offer more dietary options and discounts for students
- Establish subsidized meal options at the Dining Centre

Promote the
agricultural industry

Raise funds for the
student food hub

Increase food drive initiatives

Donate to the
SU Foodbank

promote the food initiatives
at the FSC more

Limit Food Waste

Direct feedback from students

Collected during pop-up engagements
and during the Think Tank on Oct. 9

What we heard

International student support

What's working well

- International Student Services (ISS)
- Mentorship programs across campus
- Immigration support services

Ideas for improvement

- Advocate for simplified work permit and visa extension process
- Improve access to information about available resources
- Provide financial education tailored to international students (e.g., fraud awareness, Canadian banking systems)
- Minimize redirection between offices when seeking support
- Expand immigration and pre-arrival supports for incoming students
- Encourage greater participation in social clubs and community events
- Enhanced integration opportunities into Canadian and campus life (e.g., a buddy system to support international students upon arrival, culture and community-based programming, expanded mentorship opportunities prior to arrival)

Provide more academic support

Establishing more student Associations for shared heritage/nationality → I agree
↳ provide more socializing activities

Foster family support
these newcomers

awareness about programs
happening mostly social media

Provide more on-campus jobs,
the market outside is crazy 😞

Decrease tuition fees :)
↑
for sure!

Direct feedback from students

Collected during pop-up engagements and during the Think Tank on Oct. 9

Activities during the Student Experience Think Tank, Oct. 9



Feedback themes

These suggestions underscore the importance of creating a supportive, informed and inclusive campus environment.

Collaboration

Participants highlighted the potential for innovative partnerships within and outside UCalgary to address these challenges, but especially in areas like food security, housing and general affordability. For example, collaborating with private sectors could enhance food security efforts, while partnerships with transit authorities could improve access for commuters. These approaches were viewed as effective ways to address resource limitations while delivering holistic support.

Improved communication

A lack of awareness about available resources emerged as a recurring theme. Many students were unaware of the breadth of services until they were in urgent need. A recommended approach was to establish proactive and comprehensive communications to increase visibility and raise the base level of awareness among the campus community. Clearer communication regarding eligibility criteria and limits was also emphasized, as some felt confused or misdirected when navigating support processes.

Students familiar with resources often described the process of accessing support as overly complex. They noted the need for streamlined pathways and fewer instances of being “bounced around” between offices.

Invest to expand existing supports

Students expressed appreciation for existing campus resources, such as wellness services and emergency financial aid, but frequently encountered challenges with limited availability and capacity.

Staff shortages, appointment availability, or long wait times for support sometimes exacerbated their situations, leading to feelings of frustration and discouragement. Expanding the availability of key resources and improving their accessibility was a common request.

Continued engagement and transparency

In both the pop-up engagements and during the Think Tank, students were enthusiastic about having a platform to share their thoughts and feedback. Many noted that such events reassured them that the university was genuinely invested in their input. To build on this trust, participants requested regular feedback loops to show how their contributions shape decisions. Engagement activities like these had the additional benefit of creating awareness of the ways Student Experience and Support, the SU and GSA were working collaboratively to support students.

During the Think Tank, participants were interested in seeing how their feedback would be used after collection. Some students suggested increasing the frequency of events like this so that students can provide input on topics beyond the main issues of the Oct. 9 Think Tank. The engagement activities and event format proved promising for future consultation, even for single topics or issues.



| Appendices

Appendix A | Transcribed facilitator notes

The following facilitator notes, and the anonymous Slido results, were assessed to develop the “What we heard” section as well as determine overall feedback themes for the report. The notes are transcribed as written by facilitators.

Appendix B | Slido poll results

Due to the size of the poll results, Appendix B is a separate document.

Discussion 1

Affordability

Question 1

What currently exists on campus related to affordability that should we continue to support or enhance?

- Food Bank is limited, have more options
- Affordable market, more items, milk packets were expiring very soon
- Graduate funding (TA Funding)
- Emergency grants
- Affordability bursary, very competitive and hard to get. Student mentioned they knew someone who took months to get this bursary and had to reach the chancellor to get approved.
- On campus housing is too expensive
- SAS resources
- More advising/acknowledgement of funding
- Better communication, some students on campus are not aware

Question 2

What can we reduce or eliminate to better focus on the most impactful areas of affordability?

- More clear communication about what funding is available for international students
- More career fairs, student did not get much help from career services
- Discrimination between the domestic and international students
- International student fees are way more than being a domestic
- Mac Hall is pricey
- Study spaces
- More bursaries for international graduate students
- Tuition fees and rent, average student spends less than \$250 a month
- The gates of TDFL are too much, don't see the need of it
- Tuition fees, 6% increase for international students, no increase in thesis. Fees for gym etc. Students say where is the return
- Parking, lack of awareness
- Wasting money on festival
- Academic support—failing
- Extra academic support
- Support for international students. Have different types of advisors like for bursaries or emergencies etc.

Question 3

What are the things we have not thought of that we need to do to be an innovator and leader in this space affordability?

- Provide more coop opportunities, better relationships with industry, makes finding jobs after graduation easier
- Transparency fees, where is everything
- Higher density housing, maybe 5 people rooms
- More awareness, students do not know what is happening at UCalgary
- Instructors could help facilitate
- Optional fees for transit, sports, gyms
- Encourage people to work on projects about affordability, research students
- Affordable family housing
- Complete funding that can be utilized towards living expenses not tuition
- Parking pass, UPass should include parking
- Find inspiration from the UofT foodbank model
- Grad students job opportunities, more information
- Partners with industry
- Clarification on renewability of scholarships and awards

Question 4

If we could take only one action to address affordability, what should it be?

- Lower tuition
- No tuition fees for funded grad students
- Better health care packages (dental + eye)
- Transit fees opt out
- Stop tuition increases
- More transparency on tuition increases
- Non domestic students may be excluded from a number of scholarships

Discussion 2

Wellness and well-being

Question 1

What currently exists on campus related to wellness and wellbeing that should we continue to support or enhance?

- Ability to set up accounts for international students so they can see what services exist before they arrive
- Flexible deadlines
- Having a policy on flexible deadlines, more student support
- Wellness Centre
- UCRC
- Have wellness services on the syllabus
- Gates at TDFL
- Coffee chats
- GSA – board game nights
- Appt time is too far away
- Neurodivergent study spaces can be loud
- We should continue to support the women’s resource center and faith and spirituality center
- Peer support = feel heard

Question 2

What can we reduce or eliminate to better focus on the most impactful areas of wellness and wellbeing?

- Booking wellness appointments, it is too busy and too hard to get an appointment
- Clinic is not physically accessible
- Improve wait times
- Improve advising (only 3 advisors in ISS)
- Increase number of counsellors at SWS, be able to connect to affordable off campus food banks, housing, etc.
- ISS, enlarge it to accommodate more people, size of office is not enough
- Fitness on the weekends
- There are limits to the dental and health care plan
- For haskayne, it is difficult to find information on website. Eg. Wellness services, housing, etc.
- Lack of awareness. It can be done by someone coming down during the classes and telling the students about the free resources available on campus
- Surveys are not a good idea in their opinion
- It is difficult to find information students are looking for. Too much info and too many pages to look from.

Question 3

What are the things we have not thought of that we need to do to be an innovator and leader in this space wellness and wellbeing?

- Better onboarding for new students
- Awareness = barriers
- Help students with the vocabulary to advocate for their needs
- Add additional support during peak periods
- Free access to scientific writing software
- Sleep pads, massage chairs
- Free adobe full access
- Subsidized events, footballs games or concerts
- Diversity of counsellors
- Gap of available resources and students knowing what is available
- No time to network as students
- Being authentic about how stressors impact students
- Responsibility on instructors to let them know

Question 4

If we could take only one action to address wellness and wellbeing, what should it be?

- “ThursDen” bring it BACK. Good prices on foods and drinks
- Wanting an environment to socialize. Now everyone goes off campus
- More counsellors + potentially group sessions
- Better communication regarding wellness supports
- Free training for someone at the gym or other physical activities
- Make one mandatory activity for mental health like gym credit but being mindful of course load
- Having fitness coaches
- Encourage the industry to understand about accommodation
- Better promotion of programs + services
- Promote activities where it makes most sense

Other comments on wellness and well-being

- Reduce disparity between faculties
- More study spaces
- More gender specific gyms and housing
- It is difficult to get student accommodations, it is a long process
- Be more strategic about where programs are
- Post along walkways from train station

Discussion 3

Housing

Question 1

What currently exists on campus related to housing that should we continue to support or enhance?

- Residence is good enough
- Start of semester was great but then that died off
- More ways to subsidize more housing
- More resources, community ambassadors
- Substance free housing
- Varsity estates, family housing
- Group housing
- Quota system in housing, depending on enrolment
- On campus housing gets filled quickly
- Family hosts students to help around house/children
- Grad family housing. Increase availability to reduce wait times
- Emergency housing support
- Affordable temp stays on campus
- Building more residence
- More spaces, especially family housing
- There was no waiting list 2 years ago

Question 2

What can we reduce or eliminate to better focus on the most impactful areas of housing?

- Enhance the repairs on campus
- Places on putting a request, make this better
- Informing the international students about housing
- Did not know residence existed—thought people lived off campus (international student)
- Better information about where to live once admissions was accepted
- International student did not know he needed a meal plan when living in residence so that impacted how much money he needed to move from his country
- Paying for services that do not relieve stress
- Government side to look at landlords that commercialized their homes around campus, putting the price very high
- Give more chances to get a place on campus
- Reduce cost
- Stove top instead of microwave in the units
- Student has positive experience living in the residence. For international students it's a great way to connect with other internal students

Question 3

What are the things we have not thought of that we need to do to be an innovator and leader in this space housing?

- Building more housing units
- Cleanliness of residence buildings
- More housing for upper year students
- Move partnerships with rental companies to attest housing, work with government
- Rental increases from year to year should be capped
- Late offers to programs don't allow students to apply late for residence
- Working more directly with the city
- Having resources closer to transit, more access to food and campus
- Make residence more affordable to live in
- Living in a shared accommodations off campus will be cheaper
- Maintenance in residence is not good enough
- Inform international students ahead of time

Question 4

If we could take only one action to address housing, what should it be?

- Incentivize private housing to offer below market rate to students
- Get sponsors
- Subsidized housing
- Renewable benefits
- Have off campus partnerships with the university
- Dialogue with the city, help reasoning

Other comments on housing

- Government subsidies make more accessible
- University approved subsidized listed housing to avoid scams
- Safety on campus, inappropriate timeline for redress for lack of safety on campus
- LGBTQ+ community not feeling safe
- Is there a way/process that is followed when putting people/roommates together
- University district is not prioritized

Discussion 4

Food security

Question 1

What currently exists on campus related to food security that should we continue to support or enhance?

- Affordable market, meet diverse dietary needs
- Halal food is available in the NE
- Good meal program—Den UCalgary \$3 meal
- Campus Food Bank, get the word out more
- SU emergency food carts
- Having to pay tips, feels embarrassed to not tip

Question 2

What can we reduce or eliminate to better focus on the most impactful areas of food security?

- Not much promotion, many students do not know
- Encourage more events
- Providing more dietary restrictions
- Donation - more healthy options
- Should be better + more discounts to students
- Make cheaper options for food
- It will increase the goodwill @ the university to promote discounts
- Pay for use for some services to allow for better budgeting
- More awareness of campus food bank
- Unaware of FSC food options
- Eliminate high prices at mac hall
- Student has never been to the campus food hub, location is too hard to find, mac hall is more central
- Hard to transit from grocery stores to home
- More diverse food options at the food court
- “Reduce the stigma” we are all hungry
- Power pack, students need to go to volunteer services
- Few events on campus to socialize
- We need more healthy food at MacHall and have it be available later in the night

Question 3

What are the things we have not thought of that we need to do to be an innovator and leader in this space food security?

- Get food from local grocery stores and then offer to students
- Carry out food from dining centre
- Grocery store on campus, affordable for students
- Cooking classes!
- Reduce waste
- Meal plans for non-residence students
- Reduced price meal passes
- Subsidized meals and reduced prices at Dining Centre
- Have free offerings at the food hub
- Better information on the SU food bank
- Community kitchen and food pantry

Question 4

If we could take only one action to address food security, what should it be?

- 24 hour healthy food access
- Campus food hub model, UCalgary should change their strategy
- Offer free cooking classes for the students
- Cookbook for students
- Free coffee stations across campus and snack bar
- No tips with vendors on campus
- Increase awareness and partnerships
- Allergies and other dietary restrictions

Other comments on food security

- Remove the tip option from all the mac hall restaurants
- We need healthy options on campus

Discussion 5

International student support

Question 1

What currently exists on campus related to international student support that should we continue to support or enhance?

- Staff at ISS are not accessible/friendly, need better support due to immigration delays
- There needs to be more staff
- Would be good for internal/external food vendors to provide jobs to international students
- “Commuter school vibe”
- Socializing outside of school
- Access to ISS throughout the whole year
- Some don’t check their emails or newsletters
- USpeak, mentorship, but students do not check their emails
- IRCC immigration expert support
- Info session before moving to Canada
- Student mentioned we only have ISS

Question 2

What can we reduce or eliminate to better focus on the most impactful areas of international student support ?

- Worried about work permits and extensions of VISAs
- Focus more on immigration issues
- Have ethnically/nationality specific issues for information
- Reduce redirection of students’ b/w offices
- Encourage students to be a part of social clubs or events

Question 3

What are the things we have not thought of that we need to do to be an innovator and leader in this space international student support ?

- More jobs on campus for international students
- Help students access practicums
- Better time offerings for workshops, maybe online videos
- IRCC is very slow
- Culture + community-based programming
- Move space availability for student clubs
- Wellness center support, specifically for newcomers
- Increase awareness of mentorship programs prior to students arriving to Canada

Question 4

If we could take only one action to address international student support, what should it be?

- Buddy systems—helping students and giving support from step 1
- Provide courses specifically for international students
- More immigration support, more information on work permits
- Driving classes to support/subsidizing for getting a license in Canada

Other comments on international student support

- Generally support is well
- Student loves the activities, has made global friendships
- Students feel that there is a lack of awareness and do not find it easy to access information
- Have Community/Peer navigators for students to feel welcomed and navigate campus resources and services
- Implement cultural immersion programs for new students to learn about first nations and Canadian culture

Additional discussion — Other topics

- How will this info be compiled and shared with students and participants
- Where can participants follow up with regarding today’s events
- There are too many emails, students are not opening UThisWeek
- Access to feminine products and more availability on campus
- Physical fitness lessons should be more accessible
- There should be more think tanks
- Opening bank accounts here, system of Canadian banks, recognizing what are scams and frauds
- Student believes there should be more events like this often
- Food collaboration with private sectors with food security
- Facilities for transit users, shelters and more access