

UBC Vancouver Student Listening Sessions Report

November 2023

2023/24 Winter Term 1

Prepared by the VP, Students Office



This report is a summary of two in-person Listening Sessions at the Vancouver campus in November, 2023.

A message to students

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to each student who participated in the November 2023 Listening Sessions. Your dedication, engagement, and diverse perspectives showed, yet again, the exceptional nature of the student community at UBC. I greatly appreciate your willingness to show up, share your experiences, and tackle complex and challenging topics.

The insights and feedback from these sessions is invaluable, and continues to shape the evolution of the Student Strategic Plan and guide initiatives across the VPS Portfolio. My team and I are deeply committed to continue to foster an environment where all students feel heard, supported, and empowered to pursue their personal and academic goals.

Your voices are a guiding force in our ongoing efforts to build an exceptional and inclusive experience for all students at UBC. It is a real privilege to connect with students to hear your ideas, perspectives, and experiences.

I welcome your comments, ideas, and feedback on this report. I look forward to hearing more at upcoming Listening Sessions, student events, and informal conversations. Talking to students is one of the best parts of my job - please [connect with me anytime](#).

With respect and appreciation,

Ainsley Carry, Ed.D., M.A., MBA

Participants

Over 800 students participated in the UBC Vancouver Student Listening Sessions held at the UBC Nest Atrium on November 6th and 16th, 2023. The participants represented a diverse mix of undergraduate, graduate, international, domestic, and non-degree, students. Lunch was provided to all participants, with consideration for dietary restrictions.

Students shared their perspectives on the five guiding questions:

1. What is working well?
2. What is not working well?
3. What should we keep doing?
4. What should we stop doing?
5. What questions are we not asking?

Planning and Institutional Research (PAIR) analysts attended every session, took notes, and analyzed the data from the sessions. This report provides a summary of the aggregate data from the Listening Sessions.

Results

A summary of the key themes and our plans to address these issues are provided below. These challenges are complex, and solutions will require broad consultation. The intent here is to share the broad themes, so we can work together on more detailed solutions.

Key themes

Academic Experiences

Students expressed dissatisfaction with lack of information about the exam schedule at the time of registration, instructors' inconsistent application of the [academic concession policy](#), course delivery modes, and inadequate opportunities for applied and community-based learning experiences.

Students also advocated for revisions and enhancements to UBC policies and procedures to better reflect the currently available hybrid opportunities.

We are continuing to work with our campus partners and across the VPS portfolio to improve students' ability to navigate the UBC system and make informed choices about their UBC experience.

Student Health and Wellbeing

Students informed us that information about health and dental coverage is not clear and that they lack understanding of what the AMS/GSS Health and Dental Plan will cover. Students also expressed concerns regarding the comprehensiveness of their health and dental coverage and felt that it may not be adequate enough to meet their needs.

All students at UBC Vancouver are automatically covered by the AMS/GSS Health & Dental Plan administered by the UBC Alma Mater Society.

Moving forward we will continue to partner with the AMS and GSS to provide consistent, effective communication of all of the supports available to students through UBC's Student Health and Wellbeing services, programs and resources, as well as through the AMS/GSS Health and Dental Plan.

Student Affordability

Students expressed concerns about the cost of living, tuition, and on- and off-campus housing.

Recognizing the impact of the increased cost of living on students, UBC convened a Student Affordability Task Force in March 2021. Members included student leaders, faculty, and staff from across both campuses. The group examined systemic issues and financial pressures that students and their families face.

In March of this year, the task force released a report outlining 10 recommendations as well as key actions already underway. This includes an historic \$100 million fundraising initiative for needs-based student aid.

To ensure the recommendations are implemented, we have initiated a Student Affordability Task Force Implementation Committee. We have also assembled a separate task force to focus on affordability issues more specific to graduate students and their needs. Moving forward, this will continue to be a priority focus area.

We recognize that the cost of housing in metro Vancouver is a challenge for some students. UBC is the largest provider of student housing in Canada, and we have invested significantly in response to growing student demand and for the residence life experience provided.

Between 2010-2022 UBC invested more than \$670 million to add 5,500 new student housing beds across our two campuses. This fall we opened 318 new beds to UBCV students. Campus Vision 2050 will result in a long-term plan for the campus that supports the needs of the university and community.

A [comprehensive guide to off-campus housing](#) is available to help students start their search armed with the knowledge they need to find a place to live. This was not initially communicated to students and we will be implementing communications to share more broadly with students.

Navigating the UBC System

Students called for increased, proactive, and clear and transparent communication that support and enhance students' ability to navigate programs, services, funding, and supports available to access, understand policies and procedures at UBC.

A core focus within the VPS Portfolio is to continually refine and deepen our understanding of the UBC student journey to make it easier for all students to navigate the UBC system and make informed choices about their experiences. To this end, we have embarked on in-depth audience research and analysis, adopting a student-centred lens to better understand how students navigate our ecosystem and areas of improvement and optimization across student touchpoints. This initiative is crucial in developing an approach that puts students at the centre of our communications ecosystem.

This work will also inform an updated Student Communications Strategy. This strategy is being designed to deliver vibrant, consistent, and inclusive communications through a scalable and student-centred digital ecosystem. This will deliver improvements on student websites and other channels, streamlining and optimizing communications touchpoints across the VPS portfolio.

As we proceed with this work, we will continue to collaborate with our campus partners to share our learnings and strategy, providing leadership and best practices in student-centred communications. We will be engaging with students on an ongoing basis to inform and improve our communications to make sure that students can find the information they need to progress in their studies, and discover ideas and opportunities that allow them to make the most of their time at UBC.

University Policies and Approaches

Students asked for a continued review of UBC policies and procedures and better pathways for students trying to navigate them. Students also wanted to see the university provide clear communication and transparency on financial investments and its approach to geo-political issues.

Moving forward we will continue to engage with our campus partners to create clarity and transparency around these items as well as support effective communication in supporting enhanced student navigation through UBC's systems and services.

Student Experience, Supports and Services

Students shared their thoughts and experiences with a number of student-facing services including: UBC Counselling Services, Student Health Services, Centre for Accessibility. The most common concerns were around inaccessibility due to lengthy wait times, lack of capacity, and limited information on how to access resources. Graduate student also expressed an inconsistent and limited approach to the graduate student experience.

Moving forward, we are continuing to focus on a student-centred approach to improve students' ability to navigate the UBC system and make informed choices about their UBC experience. We are continuing to focus on our systems and processes to make accessing and using these services more user friendly.

We anticipate that the updated Student Communications Strategy, mentioned above, will help students understand their options around when, how, and where to access services. In addition, in partnership with Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies we will be examining the graduate student experience to identify opportunities for improvement and enhancement in creating a graduate student experience accessible for all.

Moving Forward

Multiple initiatives are either in development or already being executed to address some of the concerns raised by students.

These initiatives come from the implementation of existing institutional plans and actions such as:

- [Student Affordability Task Force](#)
- [Student Strategic Plan](#)
- [Anti-Racism and Inclusive Excellence Task Force Recommendations](#)
- [Inclusion Action Plan](#)
- [Indigenous Strategic Plan](#)

As we move forward in the weeks and months ahead, our commitment is to continuously work with students and the respective units to address the issues and concerns raised.

We look forward to engaging with you in the 2023-2024 Winter Term 2 Student Listening Sessions, where we will share how we are continuing to address concerns raised and to hear from you on how we can continue to work together to create an accessible student experience for all.

As we proceed, we look forward to your ongoing involvement as we work together to define the issues and create effective solutions.