

# DEVELOPING A SHARED UNDERSTANDING TO ENRICH THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EXPERIENCE

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# Acknowledgement Of Traditional Lands

I would like to acknowledge with respect that I live and work on the traditional territory of the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ peoples on whose traditional territory the University of Victoria stands and whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

As a visitor to this Territory, I would like to acknowledge and respect the **Bitterroot Salish** peoples on whose traditional territories we are meeting today.



# Session Outline

- Introduction to UVic & Context for Collaboration
- Academic Advising's Role
- Preliminary findings
- Influence of the research on practice
- Lessons Learned & Next Steps
- Questions & Discussion



# University of Victoria

## **Student enrolment (2016-2017)**

- 21,696 students (18,389 undergraduate, 3,307 graduate)
- 3,775 international students from 118 countries
- Over 300 exchange opportunities and partner agreements with organizations in over 60 countries

## **Faculty and Staff**

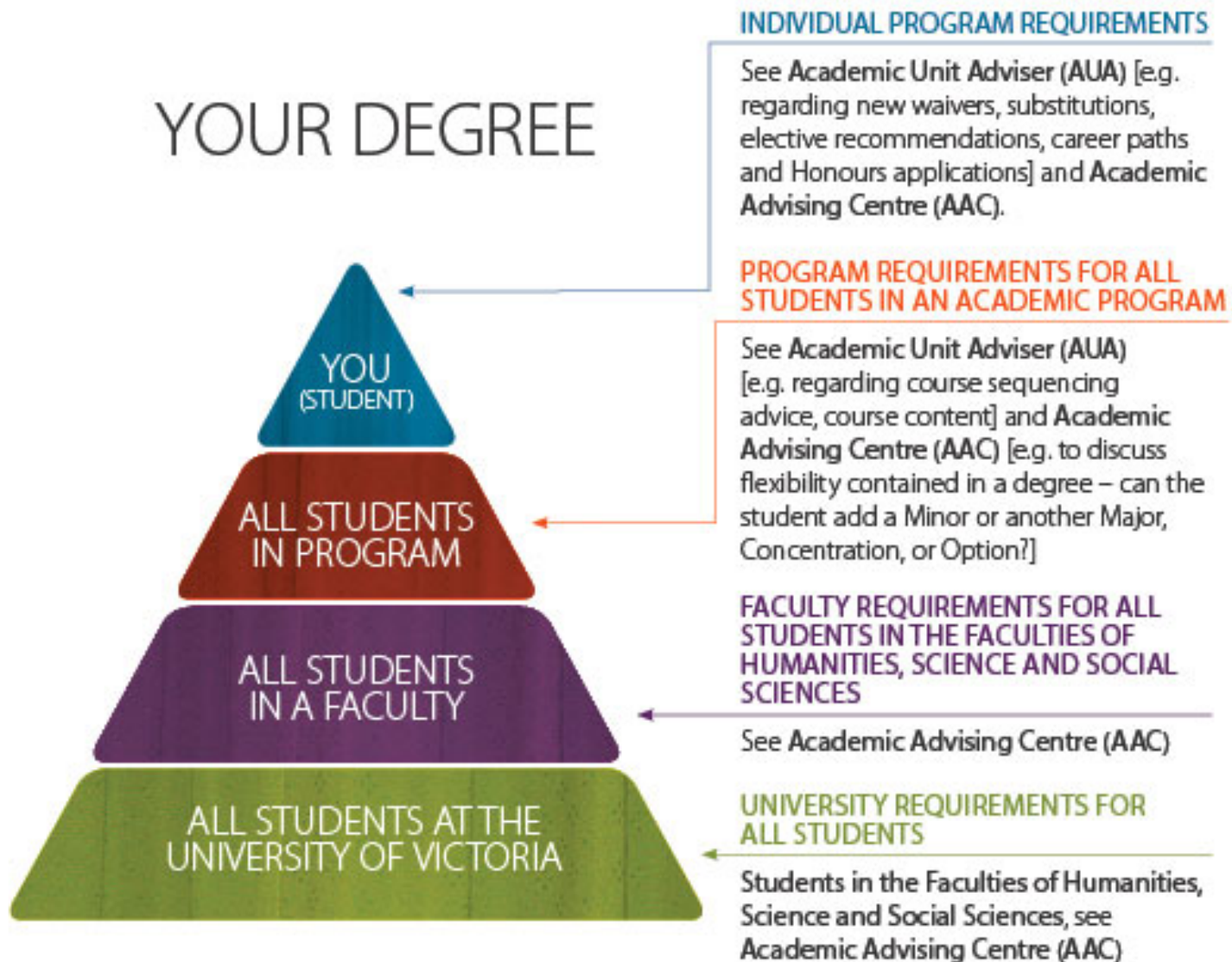
5,156 employees, including:

- 874 faculty (44% female, 56% male)
- 651 sessional instructors
- 1,156 specialist/instructional staff
- 2,475 administrative, professional and support staff



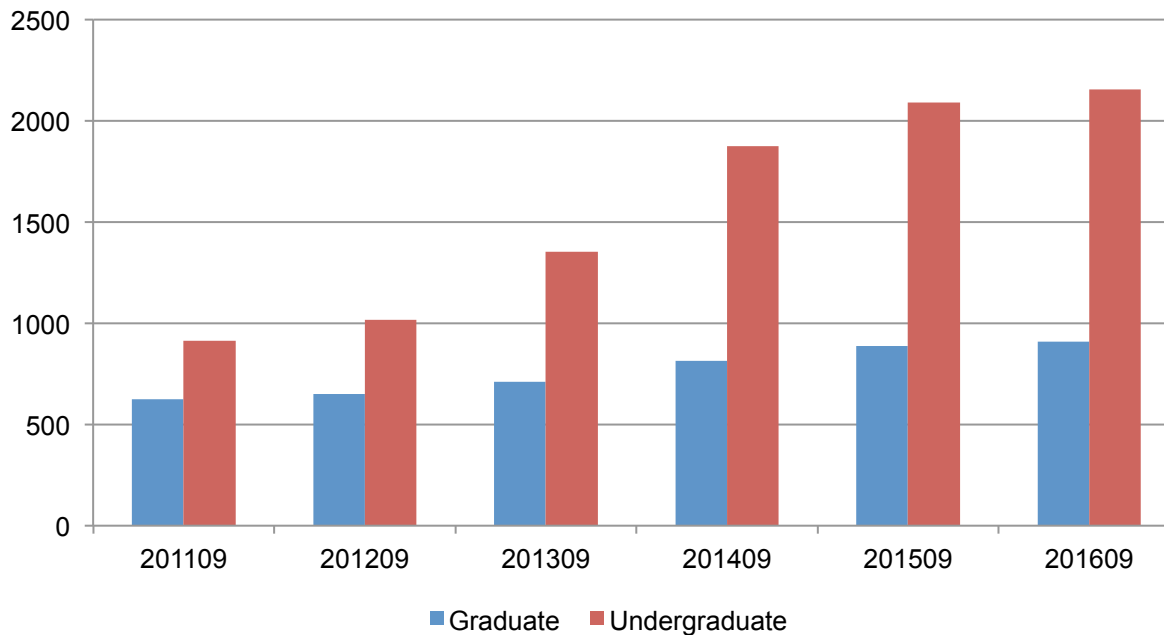
# Academic Advising Centre – Hybrid Model

## Faculties of Humanities, Science and Social Sciences



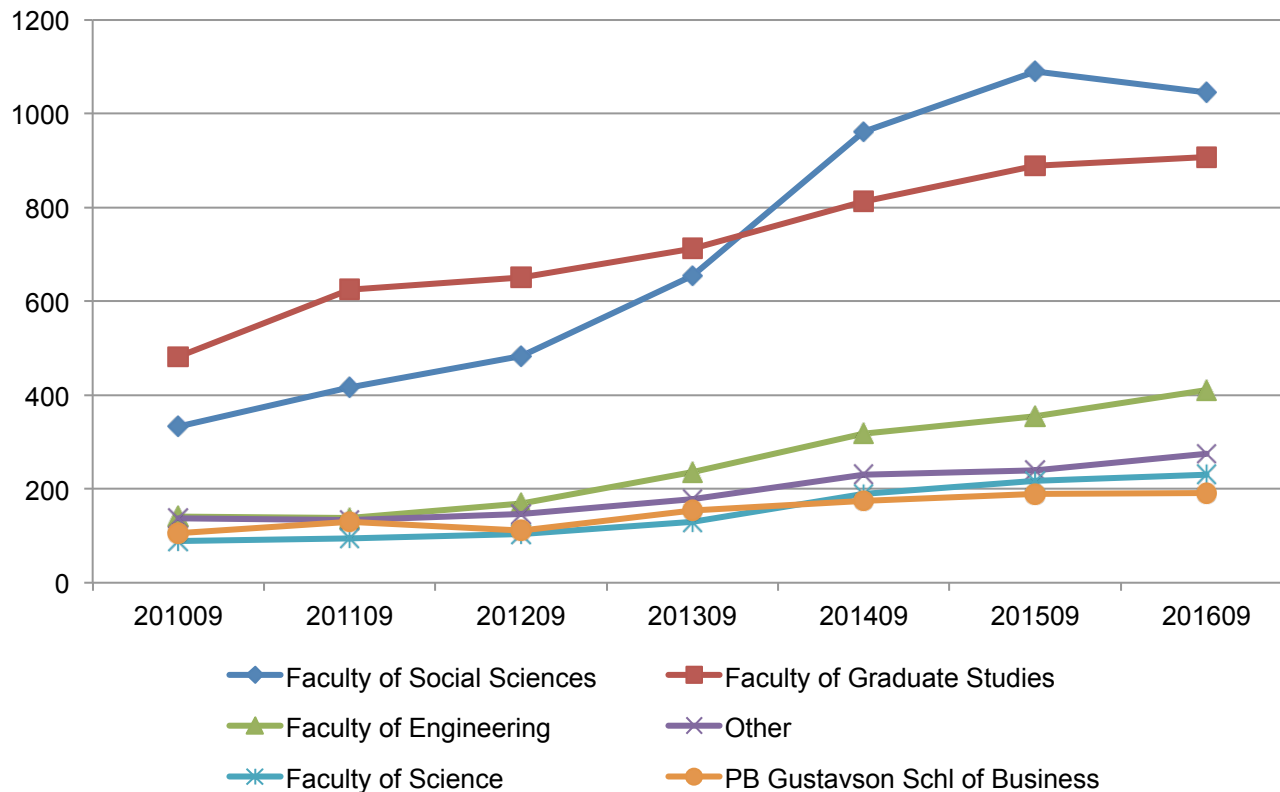
# Context – The Enrolment Picture

Headcount of degree-seeking international students, Fall 2011-2016



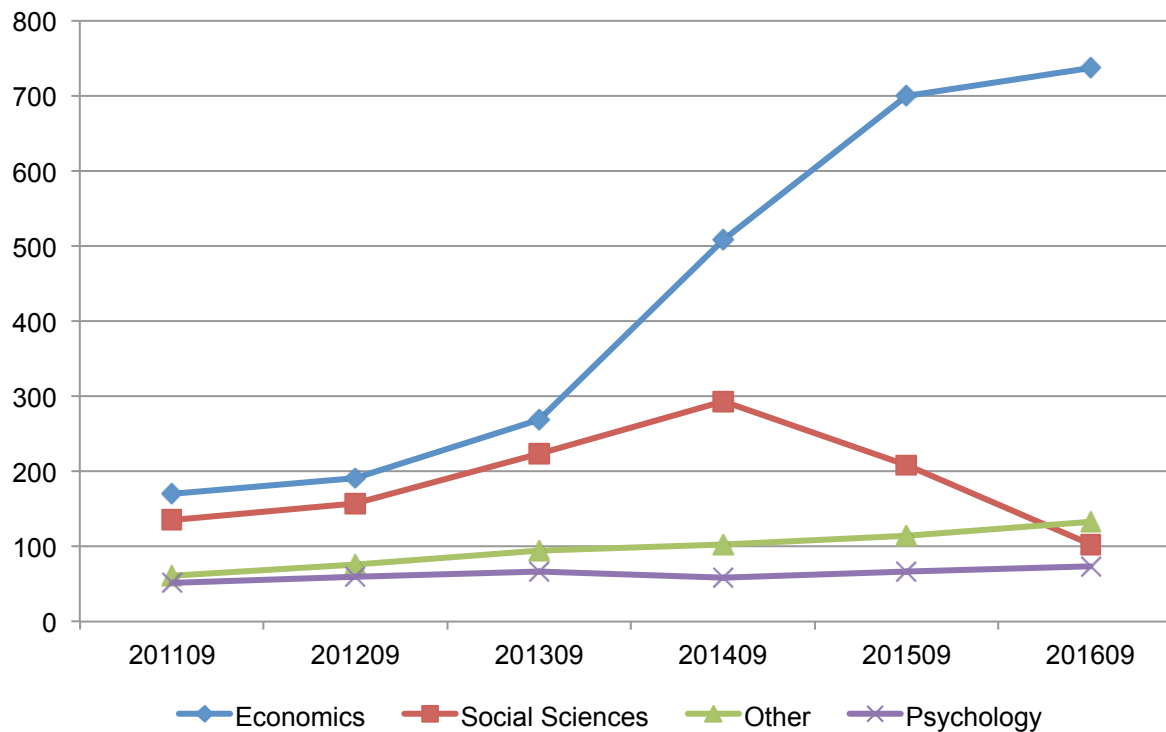
# Context – The Enrolment Picture

Headcount of degree-seeking international students by faculty, Fall 2011-2016



# Context – The Enrolment Picture

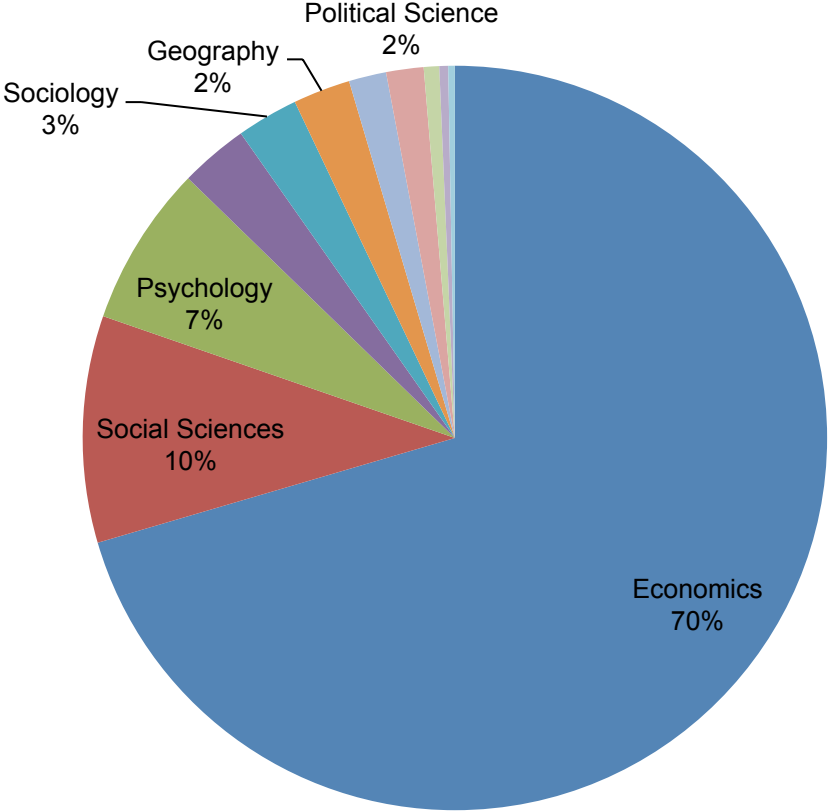
Headcount of degree-seeking international students in the Faculty of Social Sciences by department, Fall 2011-2016





# Context – The Enrolment Picture

Proportion of international degree-seeking students per Social Sciences department, Fall 2016



# Review of Timeline to Launch Research Project

## 2014

April ISS joins AAC in Student Services Department

Summer Academic Advising and Student Recruitment offered first webinar for Mandarin-speaking students from 2+2 partner institution

Pilot explored to support international students' academic success

Economics often students' second choice after Bachelor of Commerce (limited entry)

September First Associate Director, ISS hired and takes lead as research project coordinator



# Review of Timeline to Launch Research Project

## 2015

- Winter Research team conducted website review, literature review, and draft ethics application and student survey
- Spring Survey conducted through Campus Labs
- Summer/Fall Initial data analysis and preparation for focus groups/interviews

## 2016

- Spring Interviews conducted and initial data analysis

## 2017

- Spring Completing interview analysis



# Collaboration – Key Observations

- Completing the ethics application and literature review were key components of this project as it built a shared foundation for the research team (in place of research proposal)
- New synergy as relationships have developed between Student Affairs and academic units
- Engaging students with resources remains a challenge



# Research Questions

1. What are the challenges (e.g. academic, social, cultural, personal, etc.) that undergraduate international students in the Department of Economics at the University of Victoria face and what strategies do the students employ to address these challenges?
2. How do international students intersect with student affairs, academic units and other students to support their academic experiences?
3. What are the objectives, motivations and expectations that contribute to International Students decision to take a course(s) in the Department of Economics at the University of Victoria?



# The Collaborative Research Project

Four phases of the project:

1. Website audit
2. Literature review
3. Survey
4. Interviews



## Why is this research important?

“Internationalization is changing the world of higher education, and globalization is changing the world of internationalization” (Knight, 2004).

### **Literature Review Team**

Even when international students adjust to their new environment, their academic achievement still depends on how well they are integrated into the new culture and whether they have developed a sense of coherence.



## Why is this research important?

Grayson (2008) finds that a sense of coherence has both direct and indirect effects on a student's grade point average (GPA).

Building intercultural competencies has positive implications for the development of academic skills (McLean & Ransom, 2005).

Burdett and Crossman (2012) highlight that the social and academic engagement of international students are interconnected and must be approached from a holistic perspective.

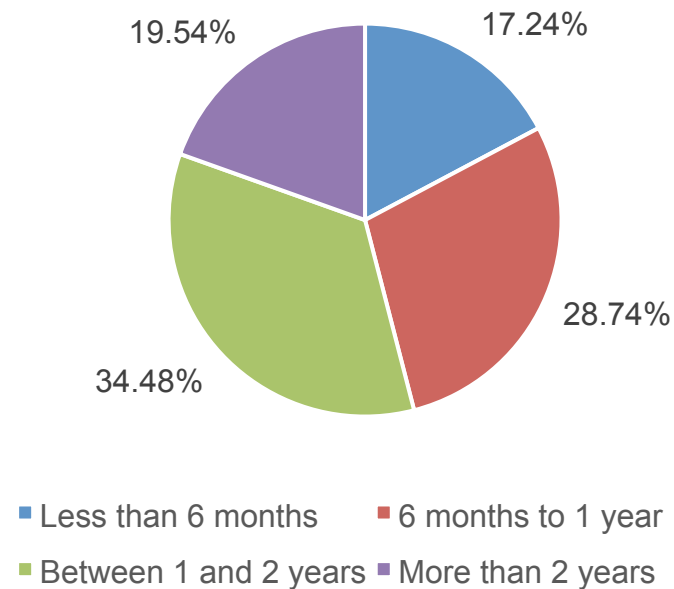




## Phase 1: Survey

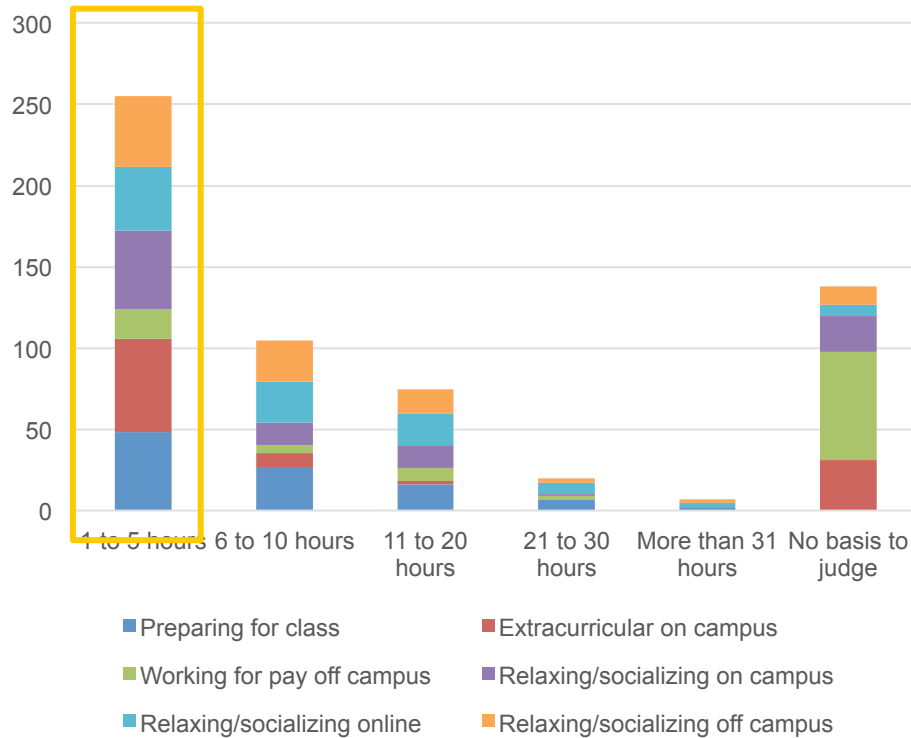
- 656 email invitations sent to international students taking at least one Economics course in Spring Term 2015
- 121 respondents (18.45%)
  - 87 completed surveys (13.62%)

Length of time studying at UVic

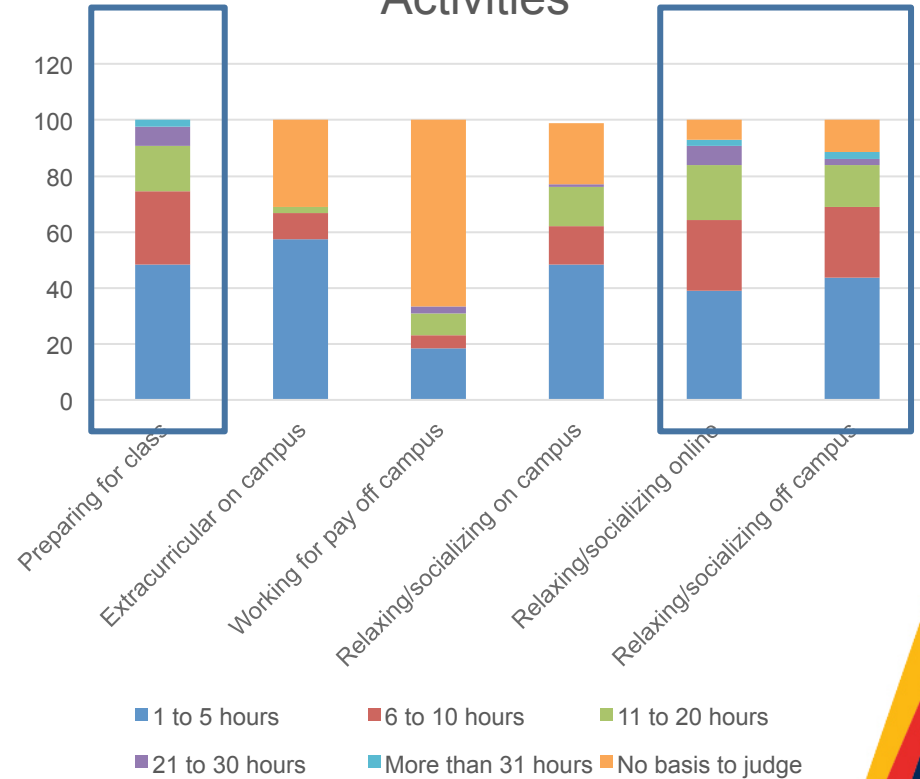


# What students are doing in a Typical 7-day Week

## Chart 1: Typical 7 Day Week Time Allocated to Activities

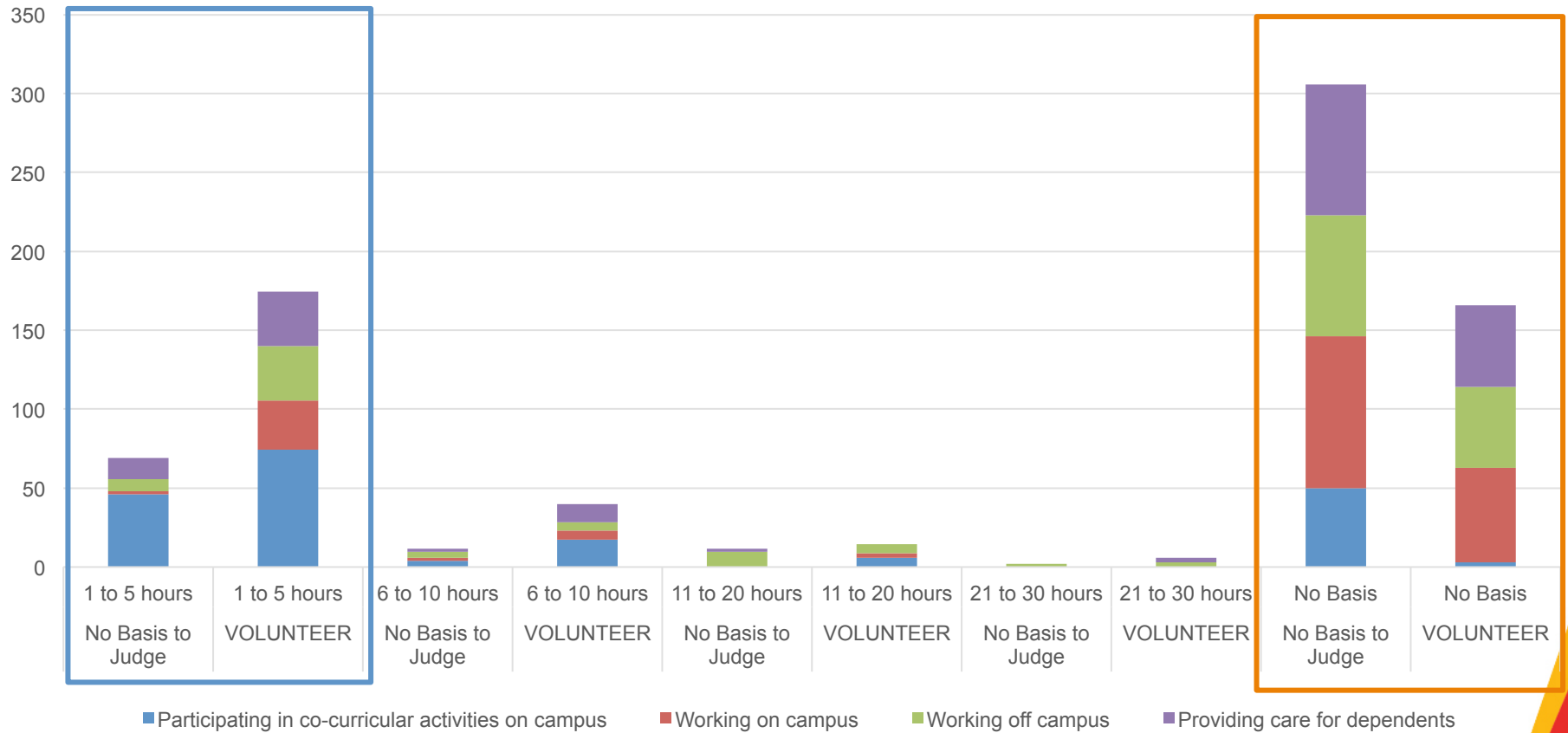


## Chart 2: Typical 7 Day Week Activities

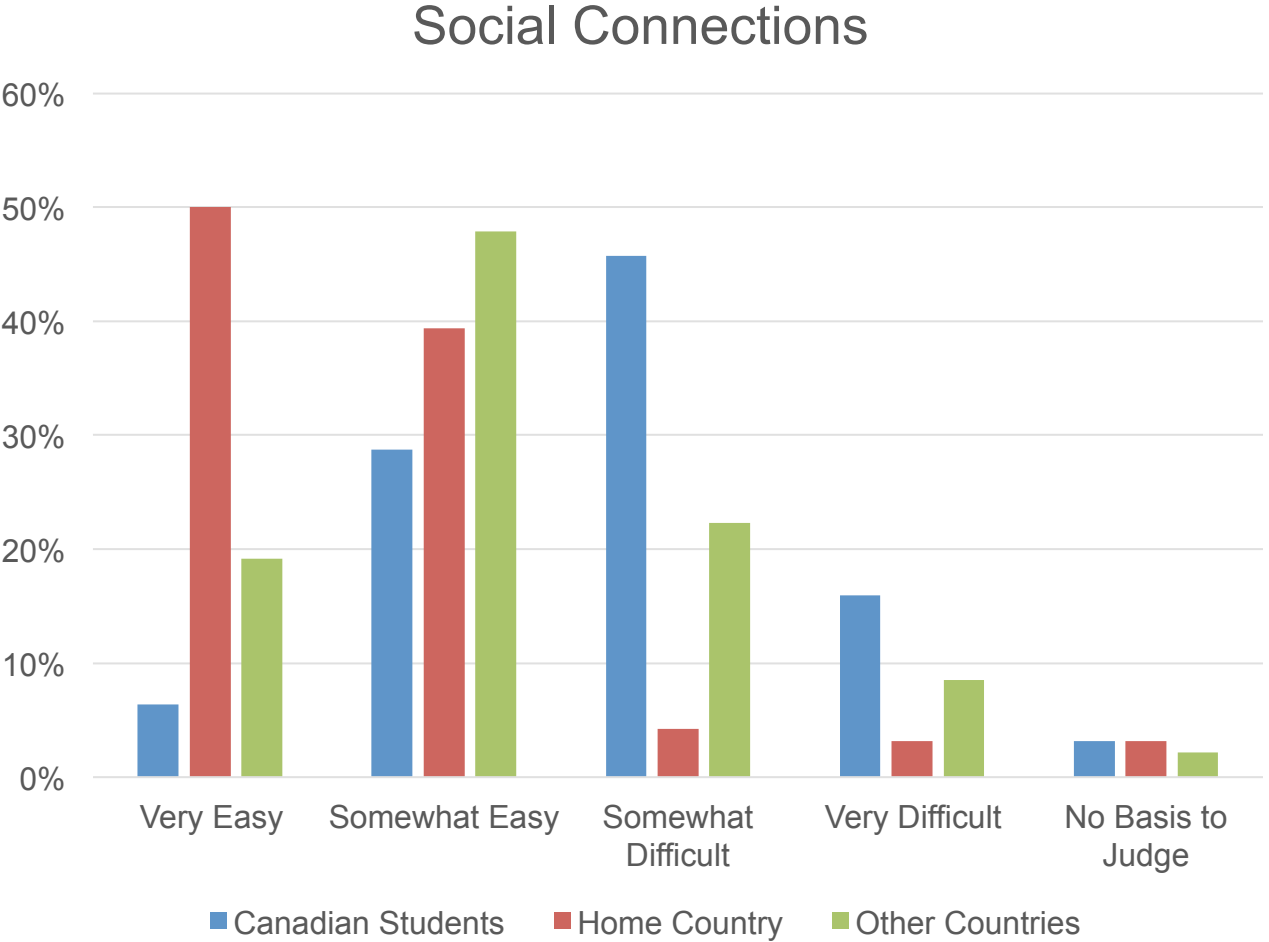


# Typical 7-Day Week – Time Allocated to Activities

Students who volunteer/do community service compared to No basis to judge - Activities



# How easy to make friends with Canadians, students from home country, students from another country?



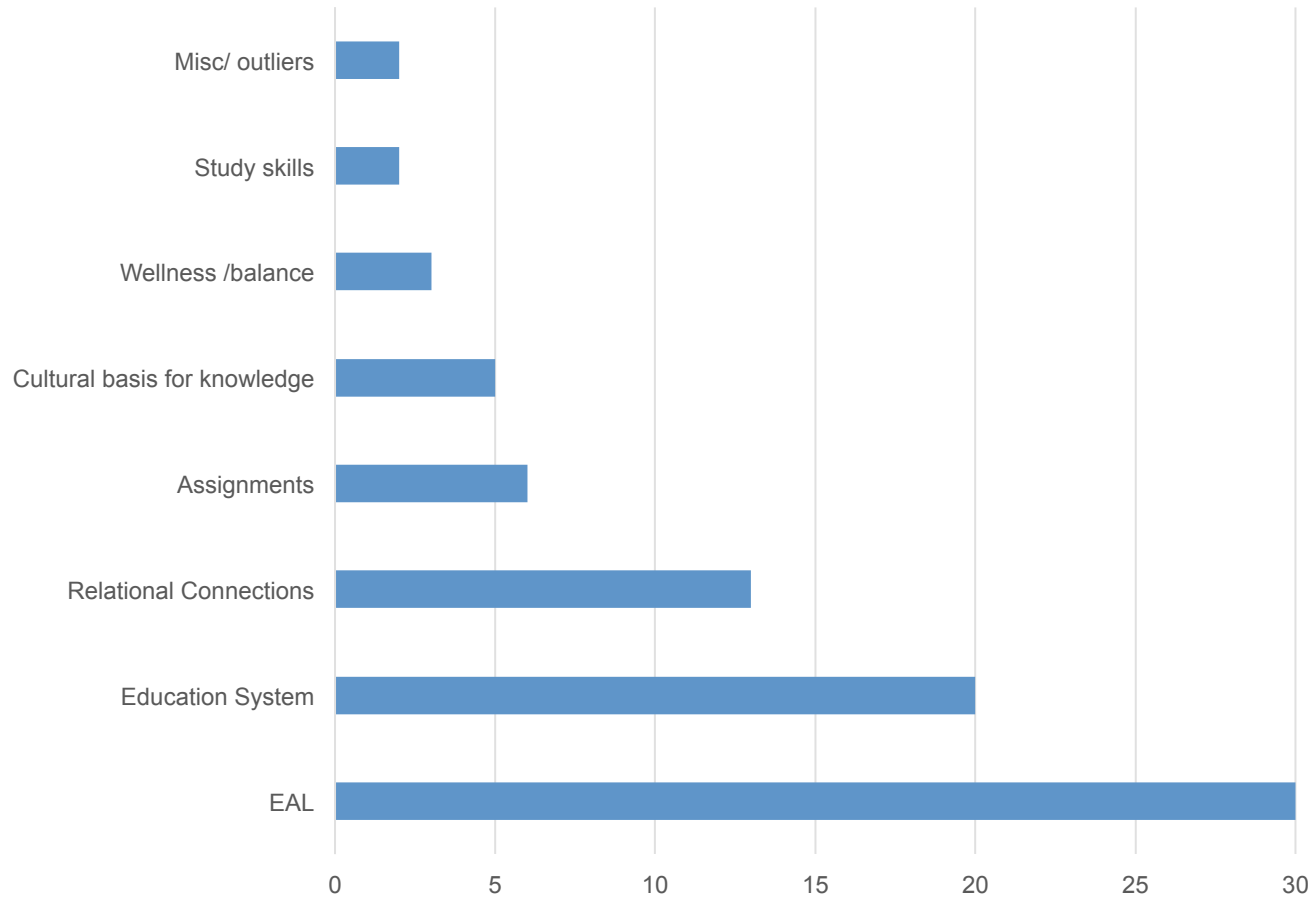
# Using Open-ended questions and coding to better understand the student experience

1. Cultural basis for knowledge
2. Relational connections (relationship to self, other and environment)
3. Wellness/balance
4. Study skills
5. Assignments
6. English as an Additional Language
7. Education System
8. Miscellaneous/Outliers



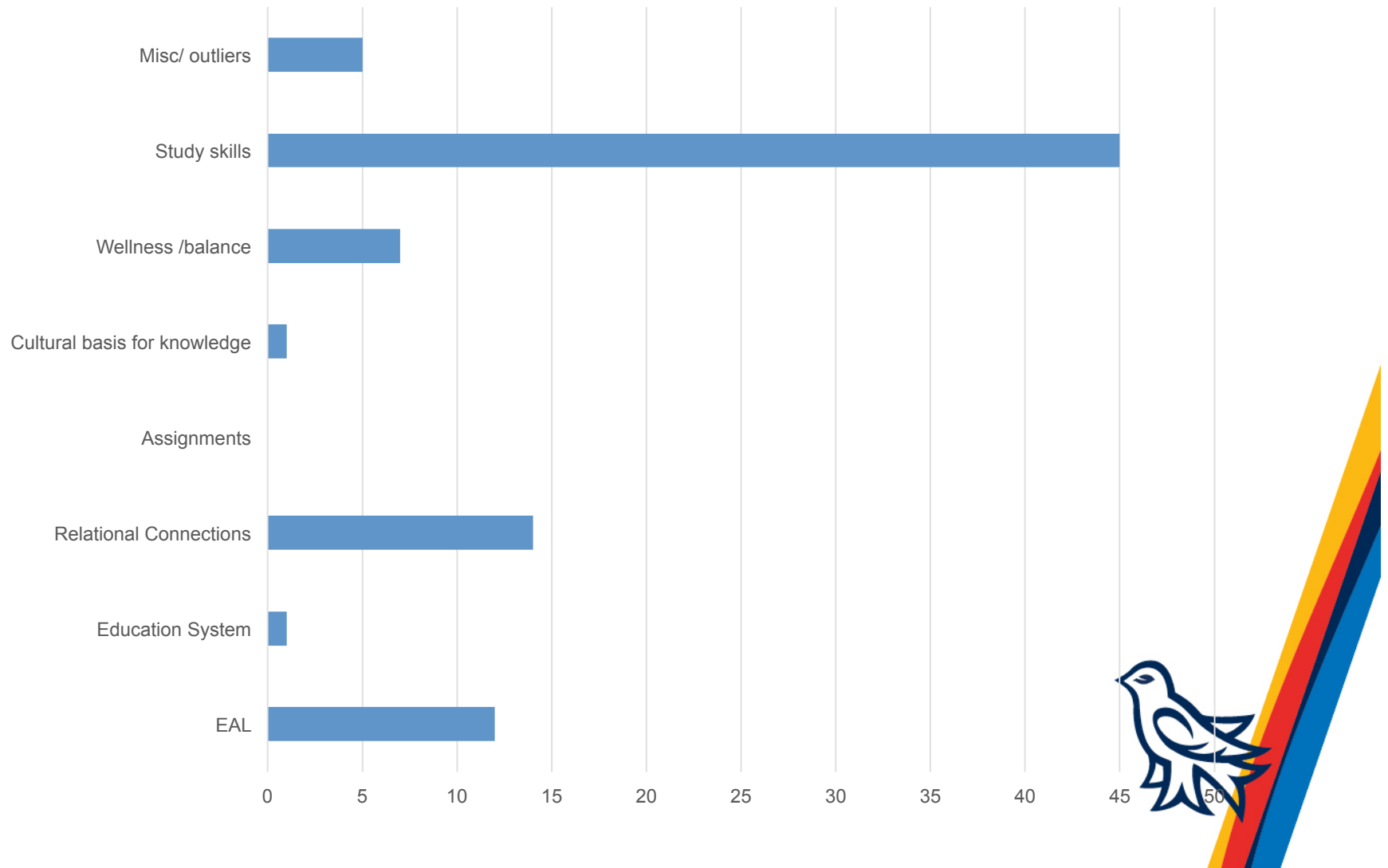
# Challenges and Academic Study

Challenging Situations Related to Academic Study



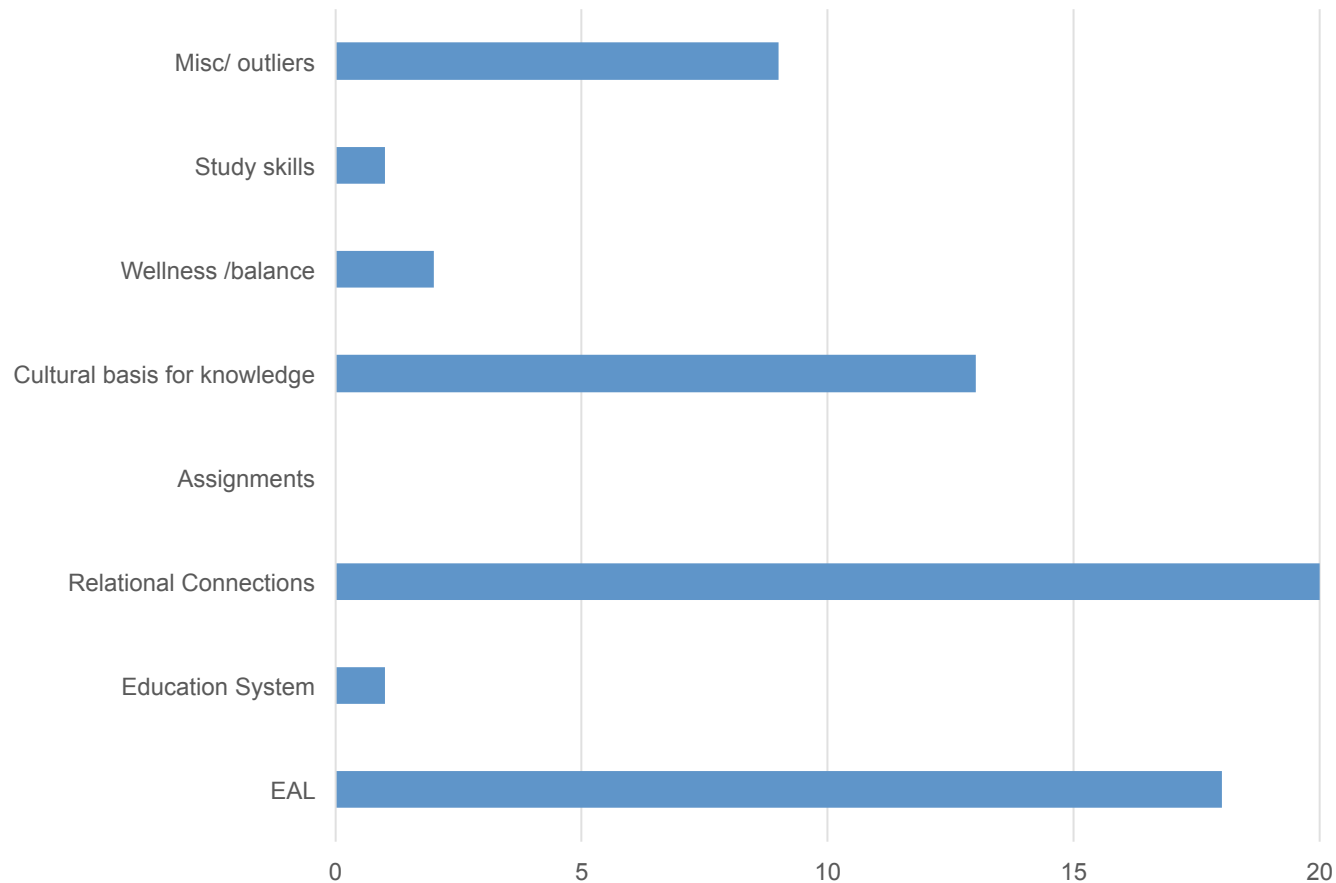
# Strategies and Academic Study

What strategies have you used to address academic challenges?



# Challenges and Social Connections

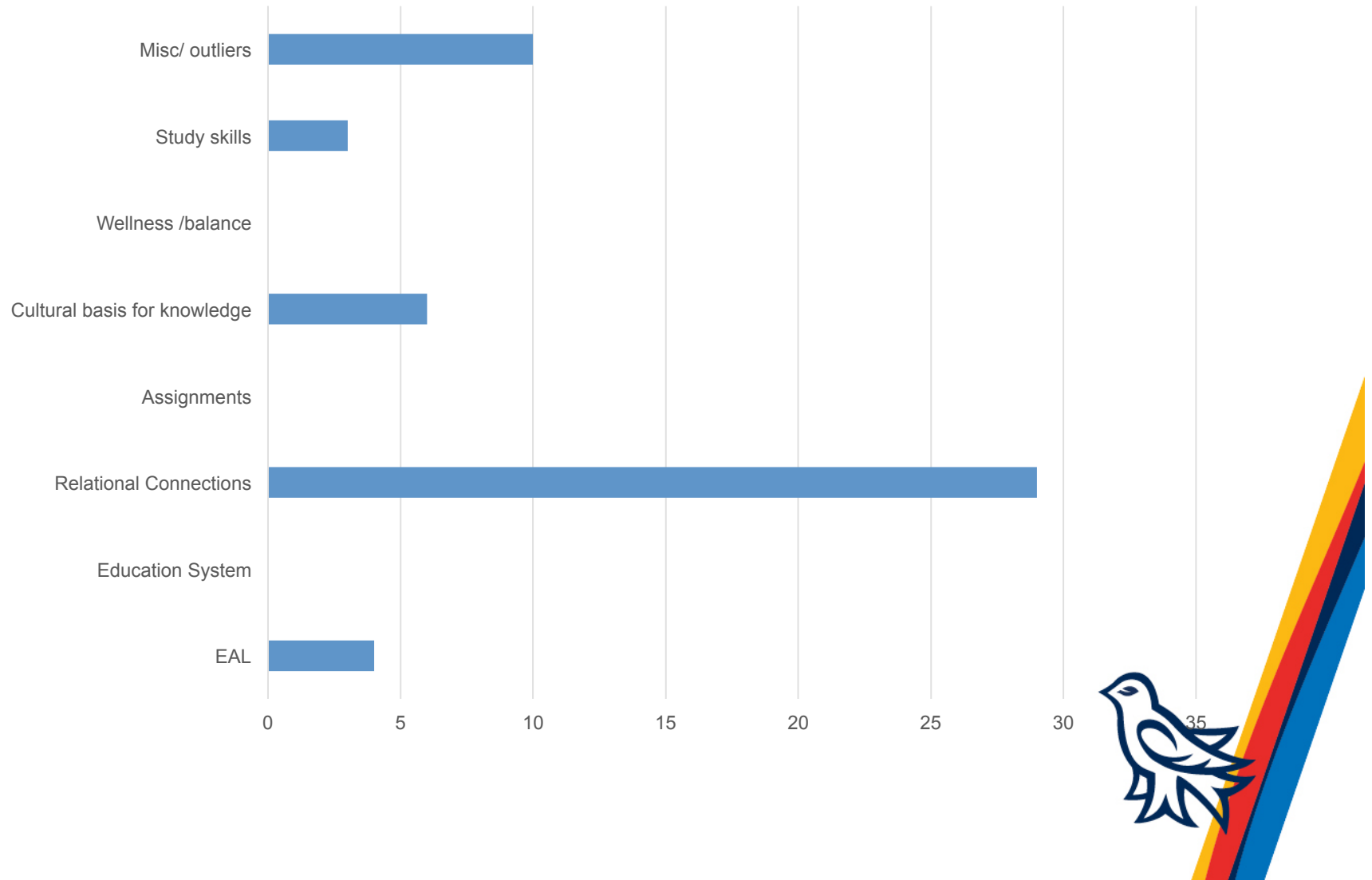
What situations have you found challenging related to making social connections?





# Strategies and Social Connections

What strategies have you used to address social connection challenges?



# Economics and Survey Data



## Discover your edge in economics

Economics at UVic offers a range of options that let you study what you're most passionate about.



# Survey Results

## Motivations to choose **Economics** at UVic

How important were the following factors when choosing to study Economics at UVic? (% important)

Factor	Overall (n=81)	Female (n=57)	Male (n=21)
Family/friends already living/studying in Canada	53%	53%	52%
Entry/admission requirements of the program	67%	75%	43%
Reputation of UVic	77%	86%	52%
Reputation of the Department of Economics at UVic	65%	72%	48%
Personal safety and security in the area	78%	84%	62%
Weather/location of Victoria	85%	88%	76%
Cost of education (tuition fees)	74%	81%	57%
Opportunity for increased career options	79%	86%	62%
Opportunity for permanent residence in Canada	62%	61%	62%

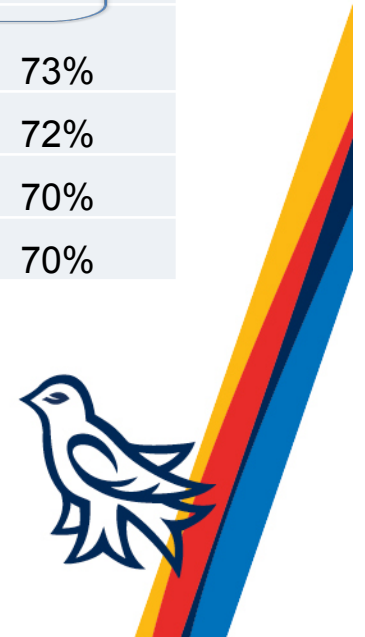


# Survey Results

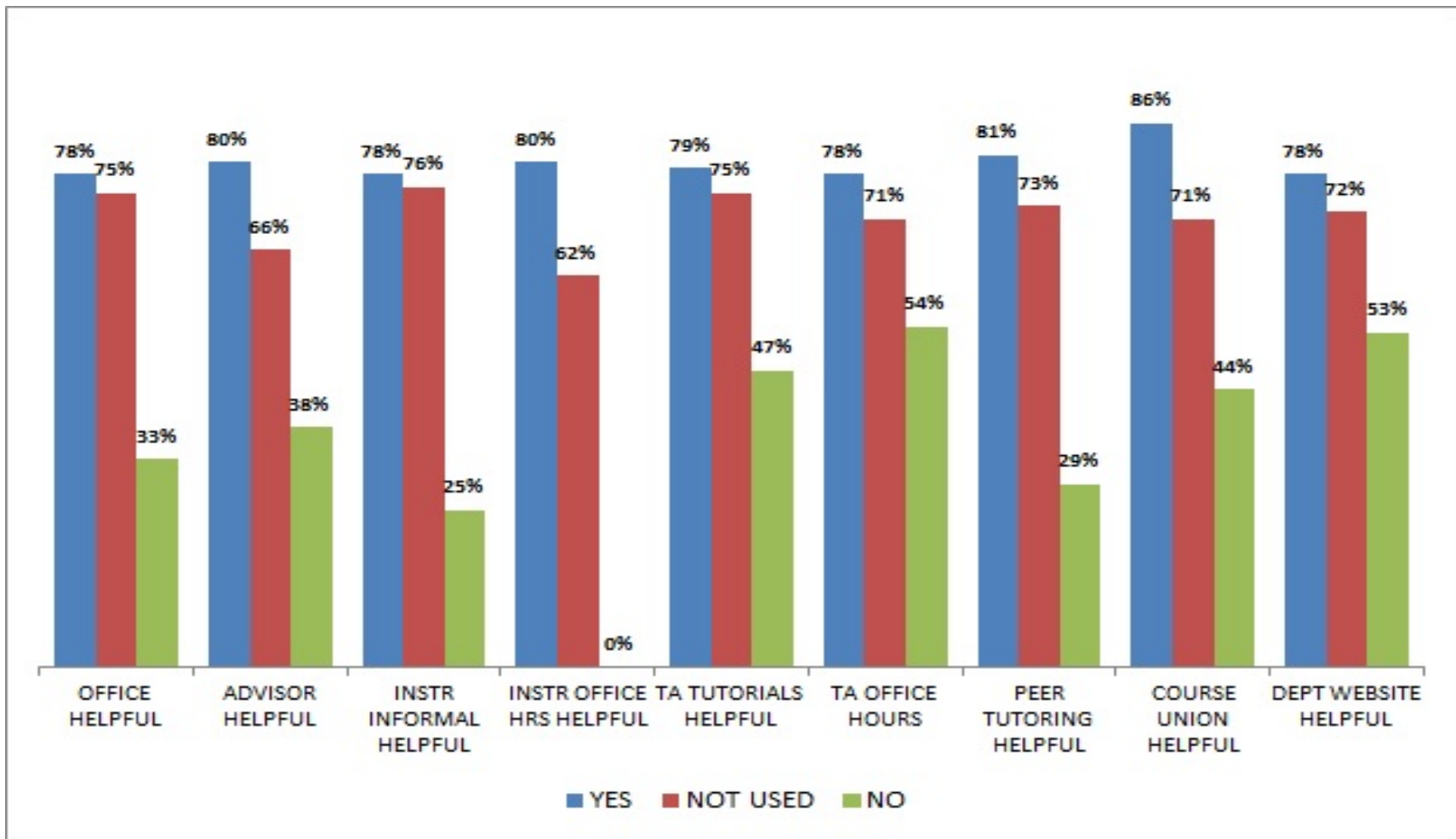
## Services/Support by Economics

How helpful are the following resources provided by the Economics faculty, staff and students? (n=78)

Factor	Uptake (%)	All resp. (% Helpful)	Female resp. (% Helpful)	Male resp. (% Helpful)
Front Office Advising	69%	83%	82%	87%
Economics Undergraduate Adviser	69%	85%	87%	81%
Meeting Instructor Outside Office Hours	68%	85%	92%	67%
Meeting Instructor During Office Hours	83%	92%	96%	84%
Economics Teaching Assistants - Tutorials	74%	74%	74%	73%
Economics Teaching Assistants - Office Hours	69%	76%	78%	72%
Economics Course Union - Peer Tutoring	42%	79%	83%	70%
Economics Course Union - Other Activities	38%	70%	70%	70%



Percentage of students whose overall program expectations were met by students who found that service helpful (blue), didn't use (red), or found not helpful (green).



## Phase 2: Interviews

### Recruitment

- Follow-up survey question in Phase One
- Recruitment posters on UVic bulletin boards
- Electronic recruitment poster through Economics
- Classroom recruitment presentations
- Snowball sampling

### Method

- Semi-structured interviews
- Thematic data analysis

### Interview Participants

- 23 participants
- 19 female; 4 male
- 14 participants from China
- 19 – 27 years old
- 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> year undergrad



# Two Themes

THEME 1: Motivations/Reasons to Study in Economics

THEME 2: Academic Experiences in Economics



## THEME 1: Motivations/Reasons to Study Economics

- |   |       |
|---|-------|
| 1. (Economics) “It was my second choice”    | (77%) |
| 2. “To Get a Job”: Career/Job Opportunities | (46%) |
| 3. Personal Interest/Skills                 | (46%) |
| 4. Influence of Family/Friends              | (23%) |





## THEME 2: Academic Experiences in Economics

### 1. Course Selection/Registration

- 1. *Unhelpful Experiences* (54%)
- 2. *Helpful Experiences* (31%)

### 2. The International Student (IS) Classroom Experience

- 1. *Too Big? The Econ Class Size* (77%)
- 2. *The “Wished For” Classroom* (62%)
- 3. *Class Structure* (54%)
- 4. *Specific Econ Courses* (23%)

### 3. Economics Program Suggestions: An IS Perspective

- 1. *Program Communication with IS*
  - *Email* (46%)
  - *In-Person* (31%)
- 2. *More Co-op Opportunities* (31%)
- 3. *Program Design (Required vs. Elective Courses)* (15%)
- 4. *Misunderstandings: The Pathways Program* (15%)
- 5. *IS Program Support: An IS Econ Program Advisor?* (8%)

## Specific Economics Advisor

“**Advisor would be good**...like [an] advisor that you can just reach out to. With professors, it is kind of hard to like do something like this because professors specialize in different fields, it is hard to answer questions like the grade structure.”

“Yeah, so like idea like just services to international students if they have any problem with Econ studying—with courses or just like general questions....**a service just for international students in Econ.**”

“We can have **an advisor physically there so we can go and ask questions.** Also, International Student Services only provide general advice. But with Econ faculty it can be—like, for example, the session like I just said about to prepare for interviews—that can be only for Econ field.”



## Discussion from Interviews

- Economics is a “Safe” Degree
- Program Planning and Advising
- Classroom Needs
- Co-op Opportunities
- Program Communication
- Identified Supports
- Support Gaps



## Conclusion

- Data confirmed some of the research team's observations – international students experience challenges with social connections and academic challenges
- Benefits for academic affairs and student affairs of working on research project across divisions
- Importance of data collection to confirm experience and make informed decisions



## Considerations for Academic Advising

- Value of collaboration and being part of the discussion – across the institution
- Importance of enhanced working relationships between faculty members and Student Affairs practitioners, including academic advisers
- Creation of International Officer position in Social Sciences supported partnership with Student Affairs and is supporting development of new programs for international students



## Considerations for Academic Advising

- Better understanding of Economics' interests and perspective (e.g. hidden academic probation)
- Importance of intrusive advising and developing relationships with students
- Identify best ways to engage students to support their full participation in advising services and events – at both academic department and Faculty levels



## Next Steps

- International Student Working group formed to continue discussion
- More analysis student experience within Economics
- Collaborative strategies for connecting students with resources



## Next Steps

- Academic Advising Consultant, International to support AAC and ISS collaboration and program development
- Funding request to support continuing International Academic Success Program and increasing socio-cultural programming
- Ongoing discussions with Associate Deans of Humanities, Science and Social Sciences and Academic Advising





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## Questions

- How are you engaging international students on your campus?
- How are you collaborating/relationship building with Student Affairs and Academic Affairs?

