

## Overview

This survey ran on the UASU Perks platform from October 24 to November 2, reaching 1099 respondents. Joining the results to another anonymous survey allowed us to cross-tabulate by gender and international-versus-domestic status for the majority of our respondents. Key findings ranged from encouraging to distressing.

- 24.7% disclosed that, in the past few weeks, they had wished they were dead, a common question in broader surveys designed to pick up on suicidal ideation.
  - This result is up from 17.6% in April 2022, in a similarly-sized survey.
  - 'Yes' responses were very common among first- and second-year students, a pattern that did not appear in the April 2022 data.
  - Faculties of concern: Education, Law, Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, and Business.
  - Results were very highly gendered. Women and gender minorities were far more likely than cisgender men to say 'yes.'
  - International students gave almost identical responses to domestic students, *except* when focusing on first- and second-year students. Over one third of international students in their first two years had wished they were dead in the past few weeks.
- 28% had accessed the University's Mental Health Supports for Students web page. Resulting concerns centered on gender and some of the same faculties. (Business students, for example, were very unlikely to view the web page, as were Augustana students. Note that Augustana students have often requested more mental health support resources, especially in-person resources.)
- Almost half of students who reach out for a first mental health appointment get it in three weeks or longer, or never get it at all. Follow-up appointments face similar or greater delays.
- The number of students participating in binge drinking has fallen by 50% since the 2019 NCHA. Binge drinking was highly gendered, stable by year of study, and strongly associated with Science and professional faculties.
- 3.1% tested positive for COVID-19 in the previous two weeks, consistent with late September and the inter-spike period during Winter 2022. First-year and domestic students may be less likely to take tests when sick.

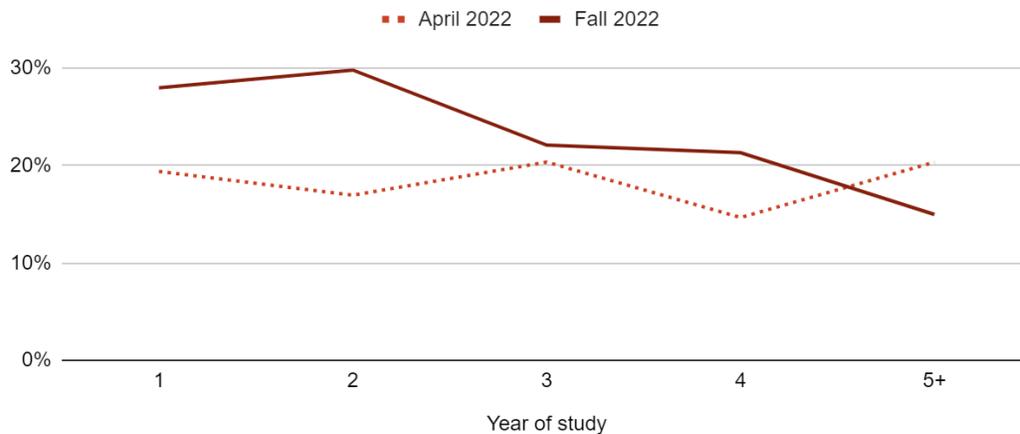
## Suicidal Ideation

"We're seeing some concerning data about students' mental health needs. It would really help to know how many students are facing a risk of suicide. While we're not going to go through a full risk-assessment questionnaire, we do want to ask one of the standard introductory questions for surveys like that. You can absolutely choose not to answer. QUESTION: 'In the past few weeks, have you wished you were dead?'"

	Yes	No	Prefer not to say
Fall 2022	24.7%	60.5%	14.8%
April 2022 (n=927)	17.6%	64.9%	17.5%

'Yes' responses were strongly clustered in first- and second-year students, and tapered off in later years. This concerning pattern did not appear in the April 2022 survey.

### Respondents who had wished they were dead in past few weeks



Variation by faculty was also significant.

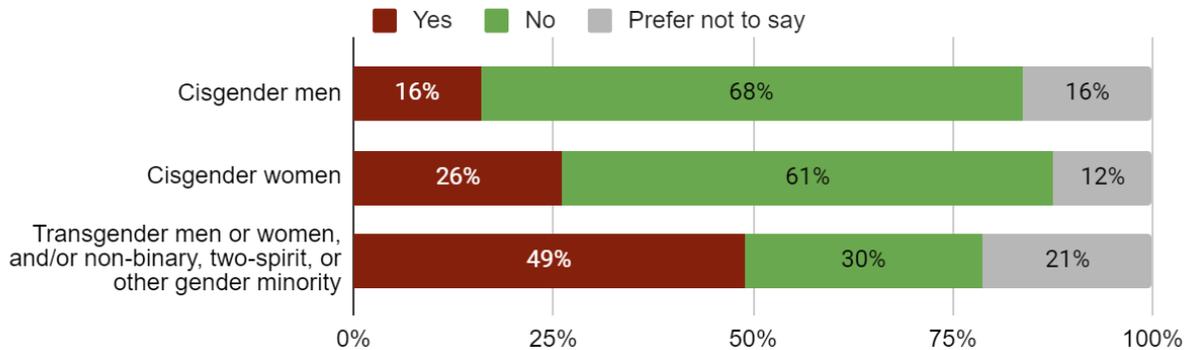
- 'Yes' responses were unusually common among Education students (32%), Law students (38%), and Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences students (42%), though each of the latter two faculties only had around 10 respondents. The April 2022 survey likewise flagged Education and Law as problems, while Pharmacy reported very low 'yes' rates and very high 'prefer not to say' rates at the time.
- Business students were just as likely as other faculties to say 'no,' much less likely to say 'yes,' and much more likely to pick 'prefer not to say.' This suggests that Business students may struggle to engage with mental health issues, which previous surveys have also suggested.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The April 2022 survey showed the same pattern. In a survey [earlier this semester](#), Business students reported very low rates of attempting to access mental health services.

Results were also highly gendered. Our survey collected gender identity with a combination of two overlapping questions: the first asked for gender (Man/Woman/Non-binary, two-spirit, agender, or other gender identity/Prefer not to say) and the second asked whether respondents were transgender (Yes/No/Prefer not to say). Out of 883 respondents who answered these questions, 47 (5.3%) were transgender and/or a gender minority.

Fully half of this combined group answered 'yes.' Cisgender women were also far more likely than cisgender men to have this experience.

### Respondents who had wished they were dead in past few weeks



This survey had a relatively strong international student turnout (8.7%) but, in the context that 15% of UAlberta undergraduates are international students, this data may not reflect all international students. The most isolated and vulnerable to suicidal ideation may be less likely to participate in surveys, for example.

With that caveat, international and domestic respondents looked almost identical in our data when viewed as a whole; the problem is pervasive across both groups. International students were perhaps slightly more likely to say 'yes' and slightly less likely to pick 'prefer not to say.'

However, the first- and second-year problem noted above was especially bad among international students: fully one-third of first- and second-year international students picked 'yes.'

## Usage of Mental Health Supports Web Page

*"Thanks for answering that; the rest of the questions aren't as sensitive. The University keeps a long list of resources on their Mental Health Supports for Students web page. We encourage you to use any and all of these resources. Have you ever been to this web page?"*

	Yes	No	Prefer not to say
Fall 2022	27.8%	66.4%	5.8%

'Yes' responses rose to 39.9% for students who had wished they were dead. Visiting the web page was also extremely gendered (19% of cisgender men, 32% of cisgender women, and 49% of the combined-gender-minorities category).

'Yes' responses increased smoothly by year of study, starting with 20% of first-year students (as one would expect from a 'have you ever...' question), stable across international/domestic.

Faculties of concern emerged: Business and Augustana students were very unlikely to have visited the website (the latter likely for the same reasons that have prompted Augustana students to ask for more mental health resources, especially in-person resources, for years).

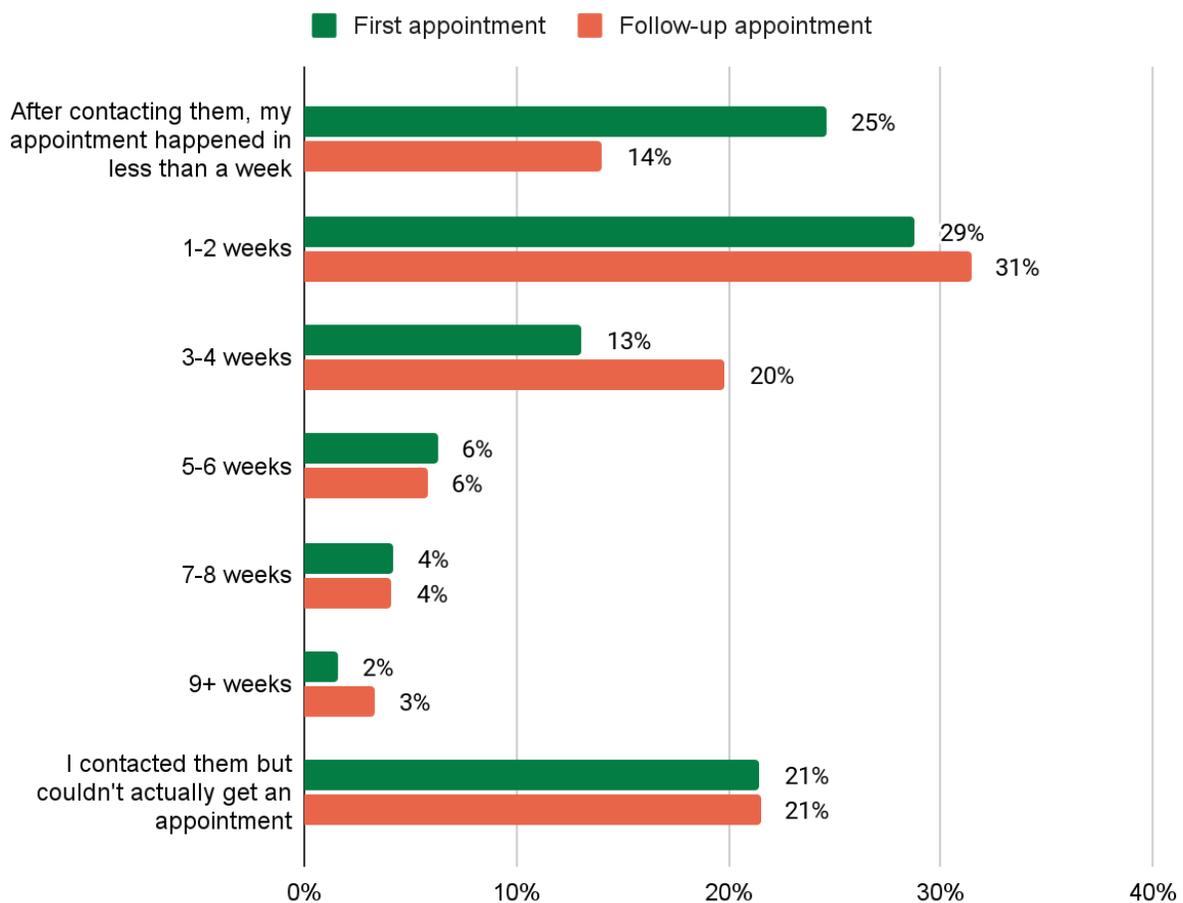
Meanwhile, Medicine and Dentistry, Law, Nursing, and Arts students were especially likely to have accessed the website.

## Mental Health Wait Times

*"The last time you tried to get a [FOLLOW-UP APPOINTMENT/FIRST APPOINTMENT] with University mental health services, what did the wait times look like?"*

In a [September 2022 survey](#), the UASU showed that wait times for University mental health services appointments (in students' last attempt to seek an appointment) were often radically unacceptable. When this data was shared with University leadership, one common response was to ask whether there were distortions based on bundling first appointments with follow-ups.

The October/November survey re-asked the question, separating first appointments and follow-ups. The resulting picture is comparable to the September 2022 data, with the caveat that first appointments can happen somewhat sooner than follow-ups; however, almost half of students who reach out for a first appointment get it in three weeks or longer, or never get it at all.



## Drinking Alcohol

*"Have you consumed five or more drinks in a single sitting in the past 14 days? This question echoes the 2019 National College Health Assessment survey - we need more up-to-date information. Stay safe out there!"*

Five or more drinks in a single sitting is often defined as 'binge drinking,' including by Alberta Health Services, but this phrasing is not used in our survey or the NCHA, for obvious reasons.

After filtering out a small cohort of 'prefer not to say' respondents, this question echoes but does not exactly reflect the NCHA question. Focusing on behaviour in the past two weeks, our survey does not distinguish between students who self-identify as not drinking and students who simply haven't had a drink in that time period. It does, however, distinguish between those who haven't had a drink in that time period and those who have, both of which could easily fall under the NCHA's 'none' option. The difference does not impact the three binge drinking options or the rate of binge drinking.

	Null option		Drink, no binge	1-2 binge	3-5 binge	6+ binge
Fall 2022	Haven't drank alcohol at all in the past 14 days		No, I've had drinks in that time frame but not five or more in a single sitting	Yes, I've had 5+ drinks in a single sitting once or twice in the past 14 days	Yes, I've had 5+ drinks in a single sitting three to five times in the past 14 days	Yes, I've had 5+ drinks in a single sitting six or more times in the past 14 days
	58.7%	29.0%		9.7%	1.6%	1.1%
NCHA 2019	<i>N/A, don't drink</i>		<i>None [i.e. no sessions with 5+ drinks]</i>	<i>1-2 times</i>	<i>3-5 times</i>	<i>6 or more times</i>
	23.0%	50.3%		22.4%	3.6%	0.6%

Overall, the number of students participating in binge drinking has halved; however, there has been a significant increase in the small number of students binge drinking six or more times in a two-week period. Binge drinking was stable across year of study and domestic/international categories.

Binge drinking was very highly gendered: cisgender men and all gender minorities were significantly more likely to binge drink than cisgender women. Binge drinking was especially common in Science and professional faculties.

## COVID-19 Testing

Respondents took the survey between October 24 and November 2; in the previous two weeks, 3.1% (around 1 in 30 students) had tested positive for COVID-19.

This number is consistent with [mid-to-late February and early March](#) (3.2-3.3%) and [late September](#) (3.4%). We infer that, as of late October, COVID-19 levels were consistent with the start of the Fall 2022 semester and with the period between the two major spikes that impacted the Winter 2022 semester.

Two points of concern emerged:

- Rates rose very sharply by year of study, suggesting that first-year students may not be taking tests as regularly as later-year students when they get sick.
- International students were four times more likely than domestic students to test positive during this period. Although the small number of international students involved may play a role, this may also suggest that international students are more likely to take tests when sick.