

Perceived Career Value of a UAlberta Education

August 12, 2019



Overview

The 2018 UASU annual survey reached over 5,000 points of contact among the UAlberta undergraduate student body. This report explores student responses to an agree/disagree question on a 0-100 slider scale: "I feel like my experience at U of A is preparing me to find a good job."

The average rating on that scale was 58.5, reflecting a slightly optimistic attitude toward the value of their UAlberta education with reference to future employment. However, several groups of students responded with more pessimism or optimism.

Several groups of students are especially likely to feel that their experience at UAlberta is preparing them to find a good job:

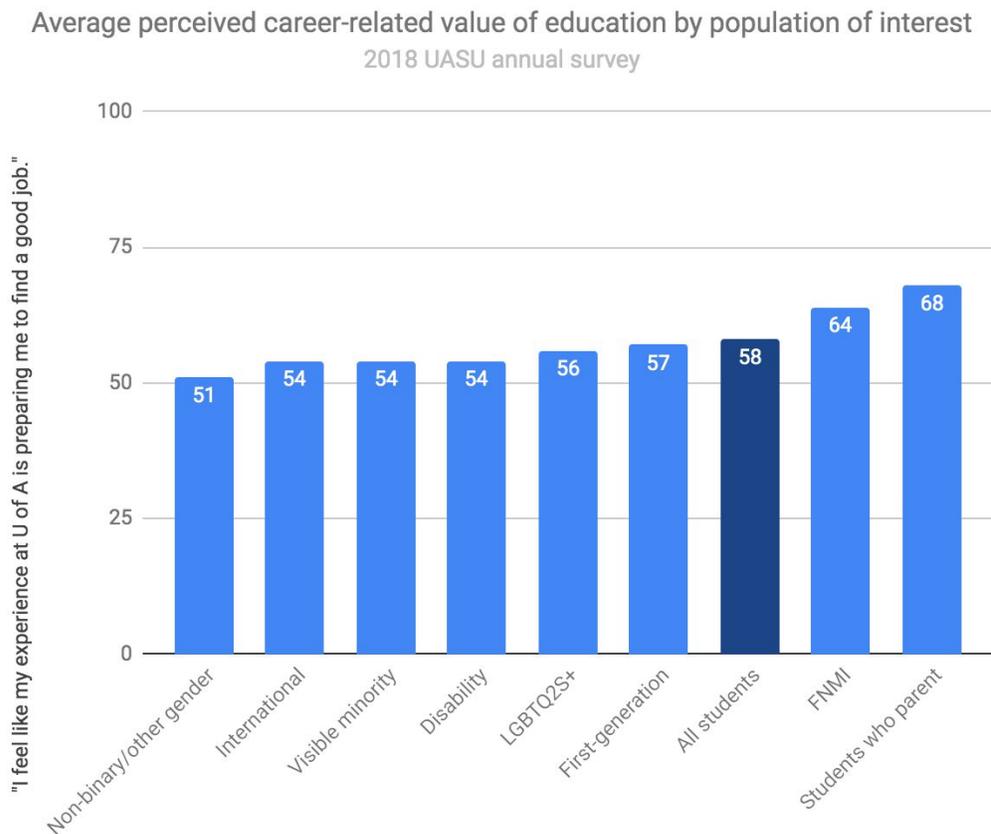
- Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry (average rating 79)
- Faculty of Nursing (71)
- Faculty of Law (69)
- Students who parent (68)
- Students who were participating in work-integrated learning at the time of the survey (68)
- Faculty of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences (66)
- Students who had already participated in work-integrated learning (65)
- Students who felt confidence in their financial stability, i.e. 75+ out of 100 (65)
- First Nations, Metis, and Inuit students (64)
- Faculty of Education (64)
- Students who planned to participate in work-integrated learning (61)

Several groups of students are especially unlikely to feel that their experience at UAlberta is preparing them to find a good job:

- Students who skip meals more than twice a week due to the cost of food (average rating 48)
- Faculty of Science (49)
- Non-binary/other gender (51)
- Students who have at least one type of homelessness-related experience (52 and lower, explored below)
- Students who work 20 or more hours per week during the school year (53)
- Students who do not plan to participate in work-integrated learning (53)
- Students who skip meals once or twice a week due to the cost of food (54)
- Students who have not decided whether to participate in work-integrated learning (54)

By Populations of Interest

The survey used a battery of demographic questions to isolate the needs of specific groups of students. Populations of interest included: International students; students who identified as members of a visible minority; students who identified as disabled or as persons with a disability; students who identified as LGBTQ2S+; students who parent dependent children; First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students; first-generation students; and students who selected 'non-binary or other' when asked about their gender.

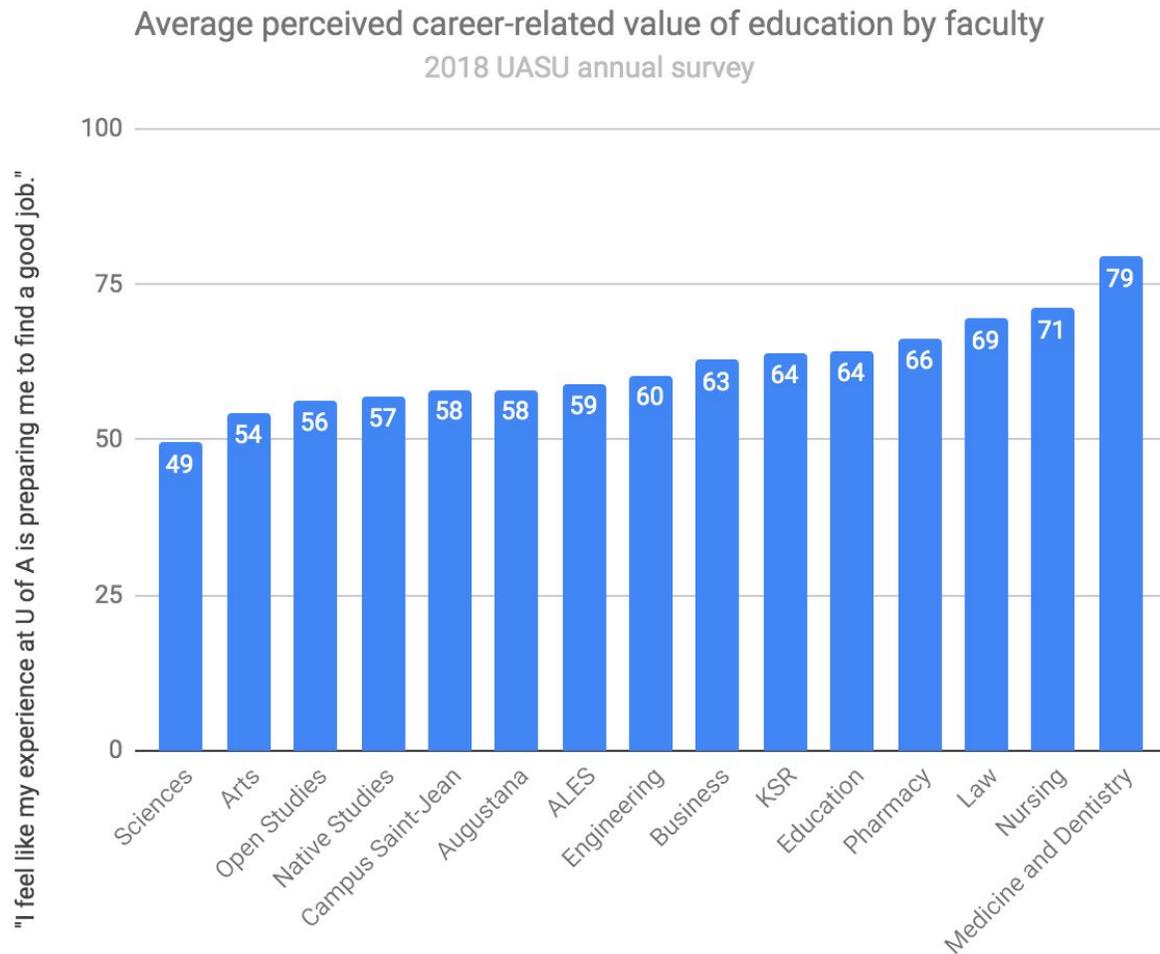


Most populations of interest had roughly the same opinion of how well their university experience prepared them to find a good job, with some exceptions.

- The 41 non-binary respondents skewed pessimistic. The numbers involved were too small for the difference to be statistically significant. However, the experiences and attitudes of dozens of non-binary students should not be discounted.
- The 159 respondents who parent skewed significantly optimistic.
- The 232 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit respondents skewed significantly optimistic.

By Faculty

Faculty, or field of study in the aggregate, influenced responses to this question far more powerfully than demographics.



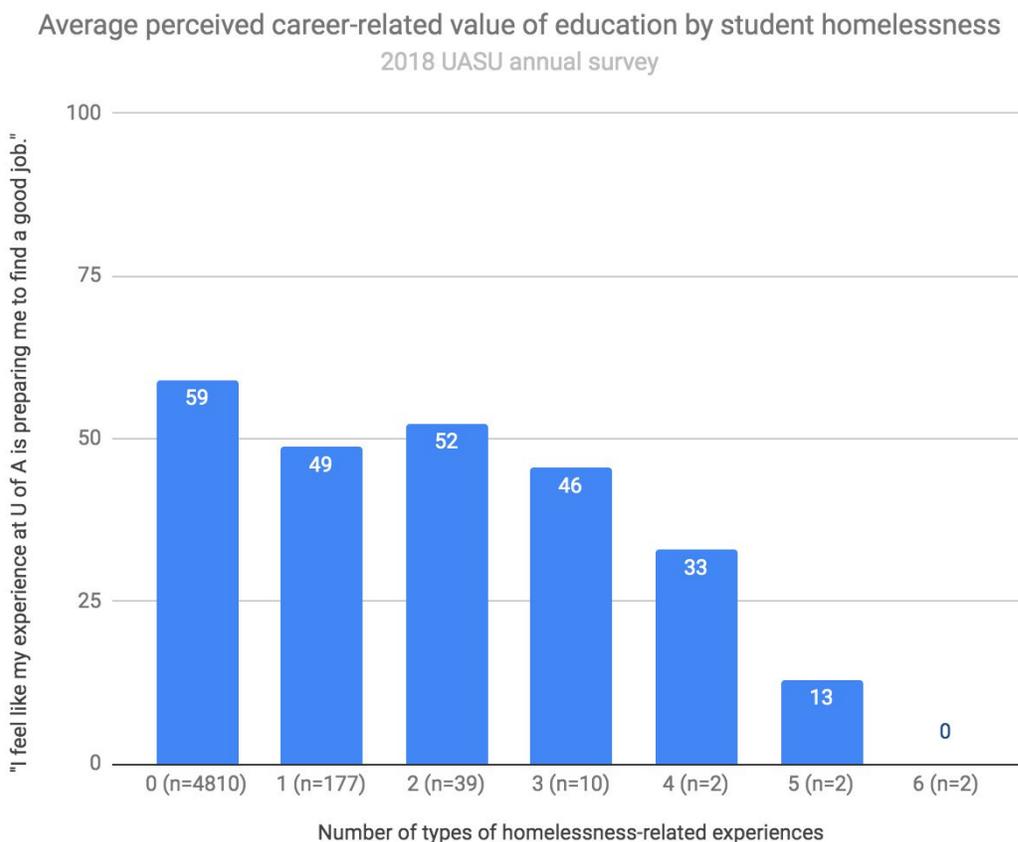
Professional faculties with defined career path options, unsurprisingly, demonstrated high optimism. In descending order, the top five faculties were Medicine and Dentistry; Nursing; Law; Pharmacy; and Education.

The Faculty of Arts, which includes a broad variety of disciplines, averaged toward pessimism. By far the most pessimistic group, however, was the Faculty of Sciences. By a small margin, the average Science student *disagrees* that their UAlberta education is preparing them to find a good job.

Student Homelessness and Food Insecurity

The survey connected with hundreds of students who face homelessness and food insecurity. Unsurprisingly, students who have these experiences feel deeply pessimistic about the value of their UAlberta experience for their future job prospects.

The survey asked whether students had faced six types of homelessness-related experiences since enrolling at UAlberta: Being evicted or forced to leave their residence; sleeping at the Commuter Study Hostel because they had nowhere else to go; sleeping on campus, other than at the CSH, because they had nowhere else to go; staying in a car, abandoned building, or other place not meant for housing; 'couch-surfing' or staying with friends without paying formal rent; and identifying as homeless. The more types of hidden or overt homelessness factors that students face, the lower their opinion of the value of their UAlberta experience with reference to finding a good job.

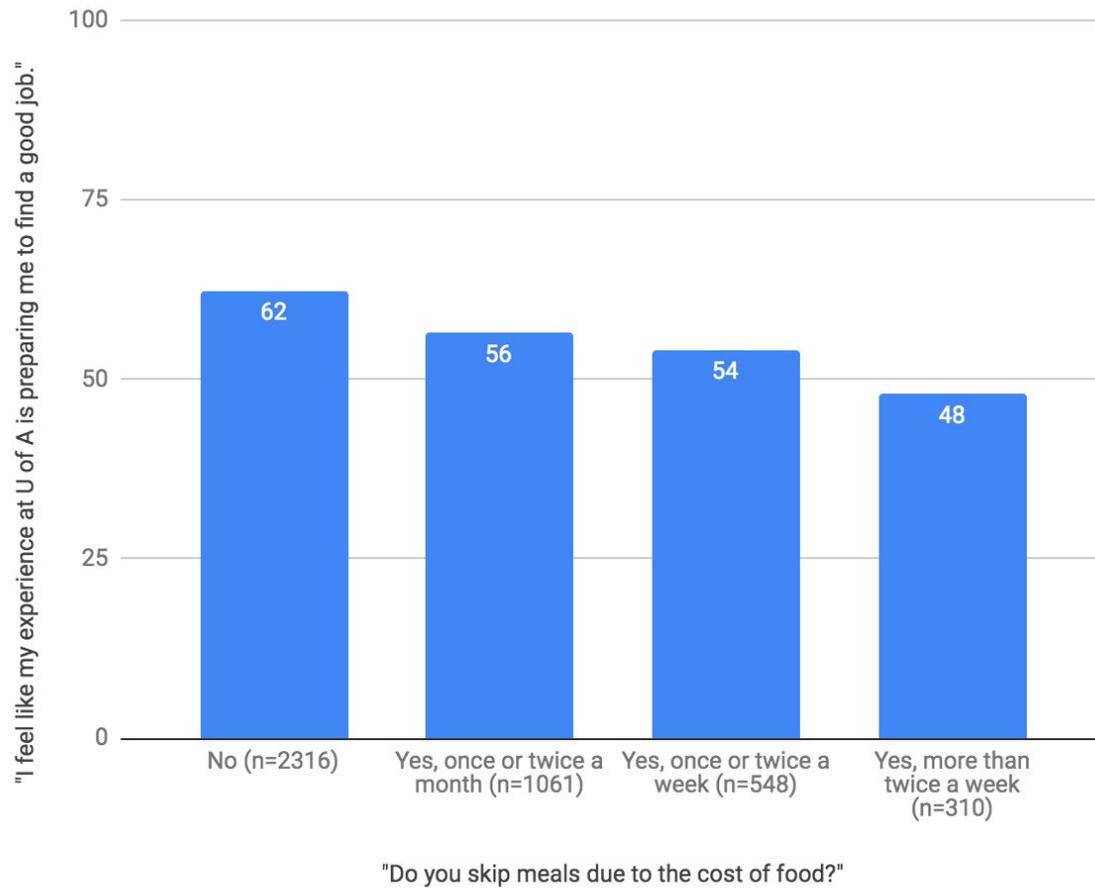


The related issue of food insecurity creates similar pessimism. Over 300 survey respondents, likely representing roughly 2000 undergraduates, skip meals three or more times a week due to the cost of food. The average student in this situation is, by

a small margin, likely to disagree that their UAlberta experience is preparing them to find a good job.

Average perceived career-related value of education by food insecurity status

2018 UASU annual survey

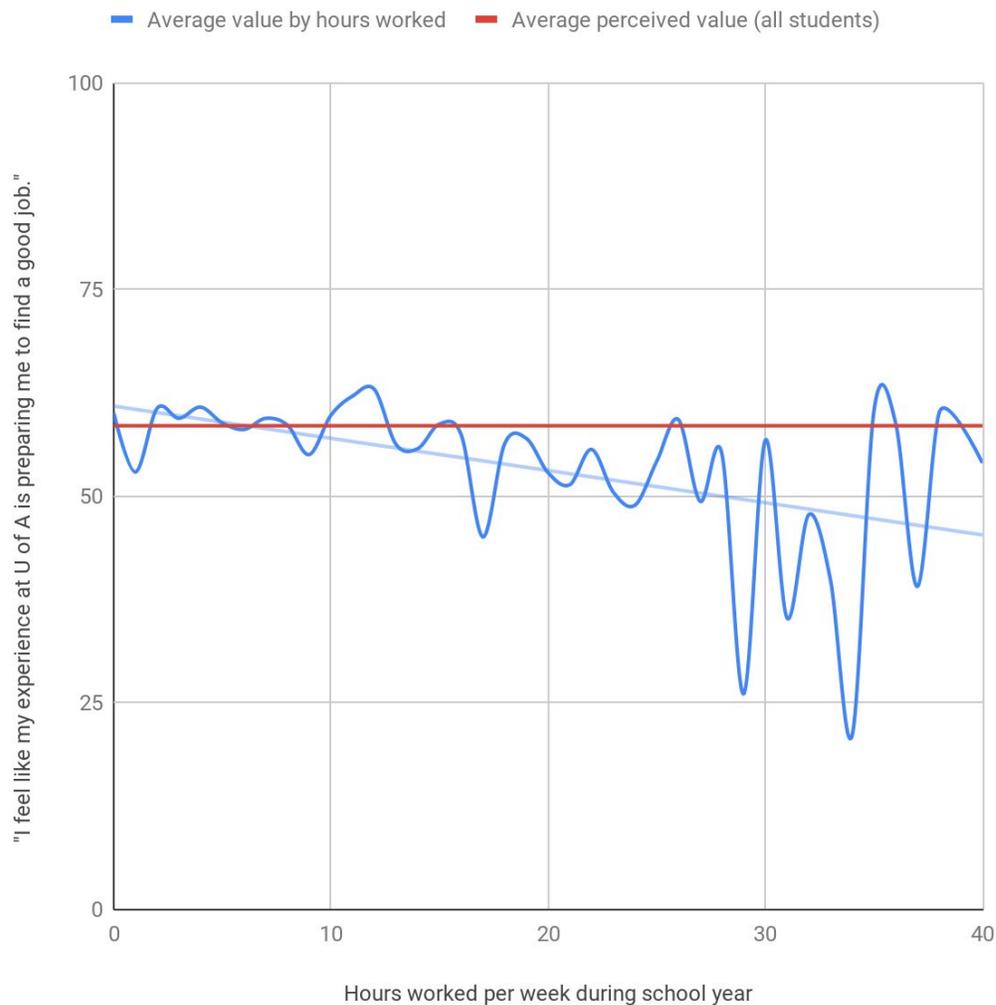


By Hours Worked Per Week

Most students work at least some hours for pay during the school year. A student's ongoing work experience has a strong impact on their attitude about the value of their UAlberta experience with reference to finding a good job.

Average perceived career-related value of education by hours worked during school year

2018 UASU annual survey



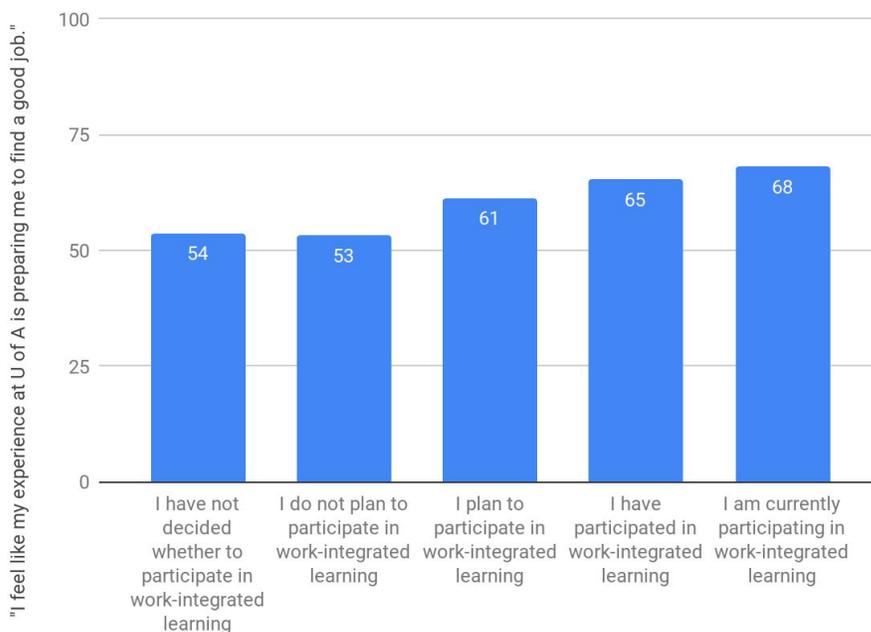
These variables have a Pearson product-moment coefficient correlation (CORREL function) of -0.49, a negative and modestly strong relationship. As a general rule, the more hours a student works, the more pessimistic they feel about the value of their UAlberta experience in helping them find a good job. The average rating for a student who works 20+ hours a week during the school year is 53 out of 100.

By Work-Integrated Learning Experiences

'Work-integrated learning' refers to opportunities like internships, co-ops, field experience, student teaching, or clinical placements. These experiences add value to many students' course of study. They also correlate very strongly with a student's attitude about the value of their UAlberta experience with regard to finding a good job.

Average perceived career-related value of education by work-integrated learning experience

2018 UASU annual survey



Deciding not to participate in work-integrated learning, or simply being undecided about it, weighed students' attitudes just as heavily as severe food insecurity, having one type of homelessness-related experience, or working 20+ hours during the school year.

Meanwhile, students who participate in work-integrated learning see just as much job-related value in their UAlberta experience as students from high-performing professional faculties. This differential is nearly strong enough to cancel out the pessimism found in some other faculties. For example, an average Arts student gives a rating of 54, but an Arts student participating in work-integrated learning gives a rating of 64, comparable to a student in KSR or Education. Science sees a similar increase (from 49 to 55, comparable to an average Arts student). All else being equal, work-integrated learning participation may be enough to shift a given student's

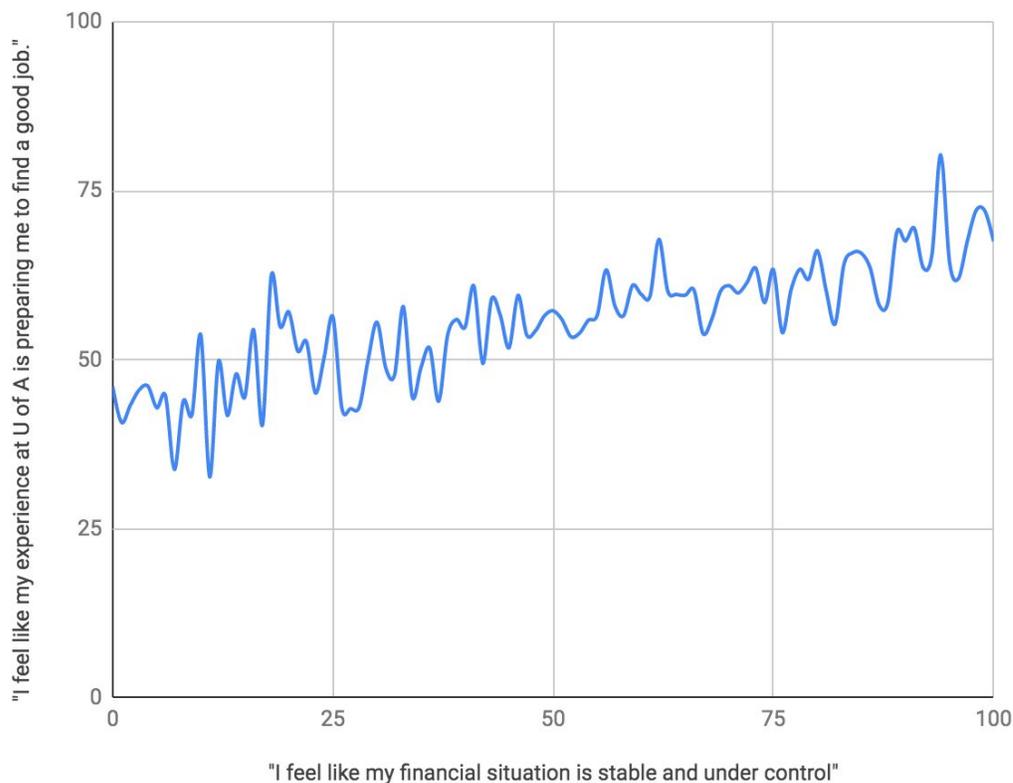
perception of their entire academic experience from slightly negative to slightly positive.

By Sense of Financial Stability

On a 0-100 slider scale, the survey asked the extent to which students felt like their financial situation was stable and under control. While causality is ambiguous, this variable has a very strong (CORREL=0.84) positive relationship with a student's attitude toward the value of their UAlberta education with reference to future employment. Given the negative relationship between hours worked and value attitude, however, it seems reasonable that sense of financial stability is not tied to working during the school year, and likely has more to do with preexisting (e.g. familial) means.

Average perceived career-related value of education by sense of financial stability

2018 UASU annual survey



In that case, the strong relationship between financial stability and a sense of being well-prepared for a good job suggests that career preparation, in all its forms, is especially important for students from less-advantaged backgrounds. It is vital that students from all backgrounds receive an educational experience that prepares them to find good jobs.