



Listen, understand, act

2018-2019 Report

Submitted to David Graham, Provost and Vice-President, Academic Affairs, April 29, 2019

uO SATISFACTION



I think it's really cool that you post the number of comments received, issues solved, when it was last updated, and monthly 'Top 5'. This shows that the feedback actually goes somewhere! And the Top 5 includes a range of problems that students might consider too small for the University to fix, but this proves us wrong! Keep going!

– A grateful student

Student Satisfaction Action Group

<https://www.uottawa.ca/vice-president-academic/satisfaction>



uOttawa



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Action Group on Student Satisfaction

Mandate

In recent national surveys¹, the University of Ottawa has been trailing behind other institutions in terms of student satisfaction. In order to address this, the Provost and Vice-President, Academic Affairs mandated a working group to identify the sources of this dissatisfaction and to offer possible solutions.

Context and Overview

Students attach a great deal of importance to the relationship of trust they have with their university². In return, the institution must demonstrate that it cares about students' interests and well-being throughout their academic experience, whether in the classroom or through its other services.

In its Destination 2020 strategic plan, the University of Ottawa expressed its commitment to place the student community at the heart of its educational mission and to offer students a rich and inspiring experience. Nevertheless, despite efforts, student dissatisfaction persists. There is a clear disconnect between the University's willingness to act, and the reality of the student experience.

Therefore, the Student Satisfaction Task Force (the "Action Group") aims to identify the irritants that adversely affect the university experience and, as a result, the relationship of trust between students and the institution.

In its first year, the Action Group broke new ground by soliciting comments directly from students about their university experience, a first in the academic world³. Hundreds of students answered the call (from September 2018 to March 2019). All those who signed their comments received a personalized response and, in specific cases, individual follow-ups were made to the faculties and departments involved.

This report provides an overview of more than 1,700 comments received and proposes specific, short-term improvements while highlighting systemic issues. It also proposes a permanent structure for listening to the student community with the aim of keeping this important channel of communication active, thus helping to preserve a relationship of trust with the institution.

¹ EOPS, NSSE, CUSC, Macleans

² Universities UK (2017). *Education, consumer rights and maintaining trust: what students want from their university*. <<https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/what-students-want-from-their-university.aspx>>

³ No similar projects in other universities were found during a brief search



Structure

The Student Satisfaction Action Group (the "Action Group") is made up of eight students, three support staff members and three professors. It met five times (April, September and November 2018, January and April 2019) to discuss various internal operational problems and the actions needed to be taken to address some of the systemic issues.

An operational team comprising of six members managed the communication strategy with the university community and was responsible for receiving and following up on individual comments.

Advisory Committee Members

Professors	Students	Staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • François Chapleau (Faculty of Science) <i>President</i> • Jenepher Lennox-Terrion (Faculty of Arts) • Eileen O'Connor (Faculty of Health Sciences) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paige Booth (Faculty of Social sciences) • Rachel Carmichael Campbell (Faculty of social Sciences) • Mathieu Chapdelaine (Faculty of Law, Civil Law Section) • Zaynab Fellahi (Faculty of Social Sciences) • Mark Ingham (Faculty of Education) • Brittany Love (Faculty of Science) • Peter Soroye (Faculty of Science) • John Ward (Faculty of Education) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Louise Labelle (Faculty of Science) • Isabelle Mayrand (Enrolment Management) • Caroline Renaud (Office of the Vice-President External Relations) <i>Replaced by Michel Lapointe (IT) in December 2018</i>

Operational Team Members

- Dani Ablack (Office of the Provost and Vice-President, Academic Affairs) - Coop Student
- Laurine Adovohekpe (Office of the Provost and Vice-President, Academic Affairs) - Coop Student
- François Chapleau (Faculty of Science)
- Julie Gareau (Office of the Provost and Vice-President, Academic Affairs)
- Rachel Ouellette (Office of the Provost and Vice-President, Academic Affairs)
- Véronic Tardif (Office of the Provost and Vice-President, Academic Affairs)



Action

After consultations held in the spring of 2018 with both faculties (meetings with deans) and services (meetings with management) aimed at defining the objective of the Action Group, it was decided that actively listening to the university community's concerns would be the best way to detect the elements contributing to student dissatisfaction.

[A uOSatisfACTION Web page](#) was launched in September 2018, inviting students and community members to share their academic experience. Statistics on the number of comments received, examples of comments, and flash polls on popular issues were added to the page.

A communication strategy using the term **uOSatisfACTION** was implemented to promote the Web page and the purpose of the project:

- Visuals and posters with a call to action were posted across campus (example below) and sent to the student community using multiple media platforms;





- Short presentations were made in large classrooms;
- E-mails asking students to write about their student experience were sent in October and January to the entire student population (over 43,000 students).

All comments received were forwarded to the relevant faculties and services. Personalized acknowledgments were sent to students who signed their comments. When immediate action was needed, follow-up with the faculties and services was undertaken promptly. The name of the student was communicated to the faculty or department as needed, only after obtaining the student's written authorization. Many issues were resolved on an ad hoc basis. The collaboration of most faculties and departments has been exemplary.

In fact, several solutions to issues raised by students were provided by faculties and services. To communicate some of them to the university community, a monthly "Top 5" solution has been added to our Web page. Here are some examples: direct deposit for grants, repair of microwaves, wifi improvement, printer repairs, addition of silent study spaces during exams, repairs to residences, solutions to scheduling problems, etc.



General Data

- Nearly 4,600 people visited the [uOSatisfACTION Web page](#) in English (for a total of 5,351 visits) while 1,568 people visited it in French (for a total of 1,877 visits). The Web page was therefore consulted by more than 6,000 people and received more than 7,000 visits.
- As of March 30, 2019, uOSatisfACTION had received 1,498 messages from its Web page and 1,786 comments, as messages could contain comments on several topics.
- More messages were submitted in English (approximately 57%, 1,011 comments) than in French (approximately 43%, 775 comments).
- Signed messages received a personalized acknowledgment and response. All messages received were sent to faculties, departments or the University's central administration.
- All personal problems (academic or otherwise) were promptly and directly forwarded to the faculties and services concerned and are now considered addressed or resolved.
- Nearly half of the messages received were signed (49%) and most came from the student community (96%). The majority of the messages were sent by women (Figure1).

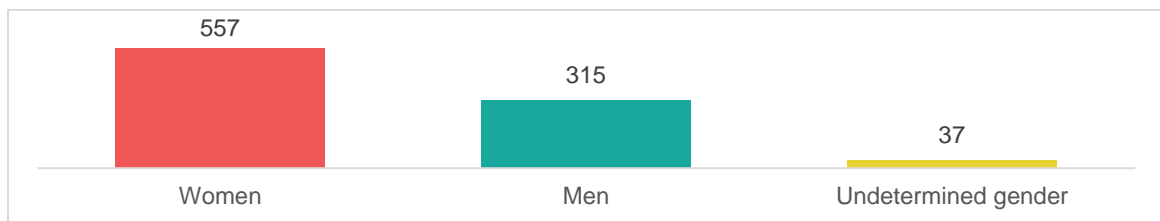


Figure 1 Gender of people who submitted a comment *

* Please note that some students chose not to indicate their gender. These statistics do not include anonymous comments.

- A relatively equal proportion of students from all years of undergraduate and graduate studies (Figure 2) sent messages, mostly complaints or suggestions (Figure 3). Finally, the majority of complaints came from Canadian students (Figure 4).

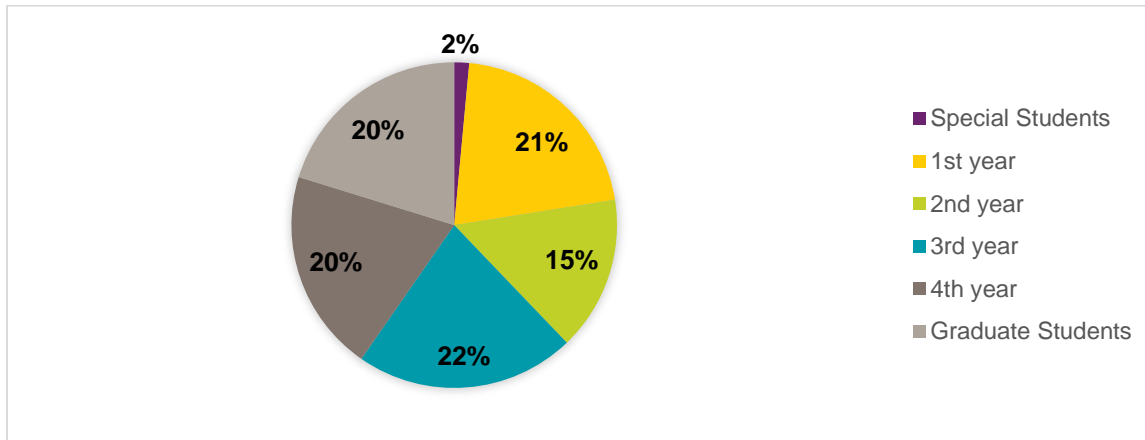


Figure 2 Level of study of students who submitted a comment *

* Please note that this does not include anonymous comments.

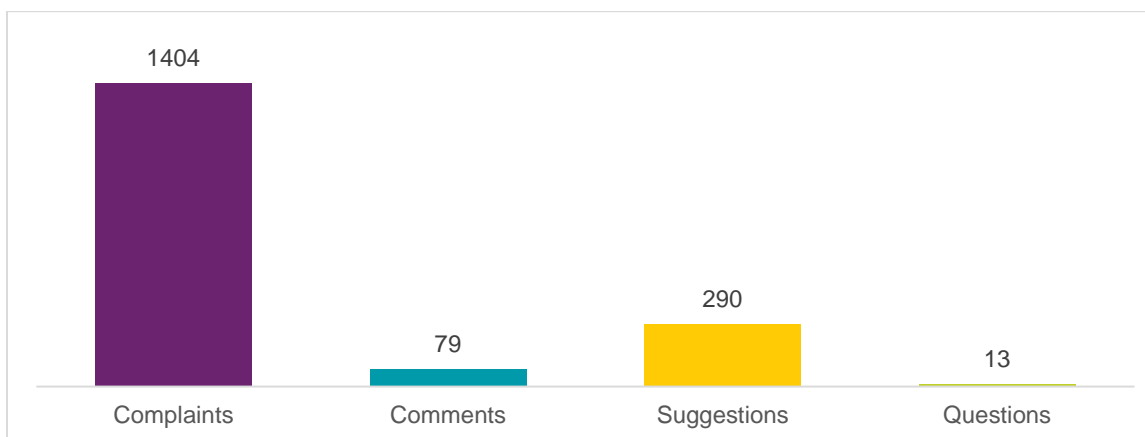


Figure 3 Type of messages

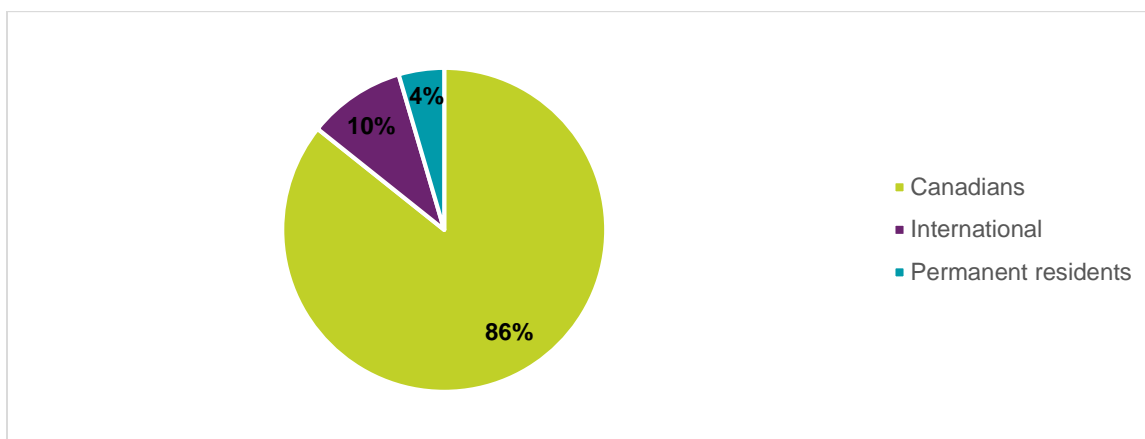


Figure 4 Status of students who submitted a comment *

* Please note that this does not include anonymous comments.



- In this report, the comments received will be discussed under three main topics (Figure 5):

ACADEMICS

Comments mainly related to professors, academic support, exams and course offerings.

SERVICES

Comments regarding the offer and quality of complementary services (mainly food services, sports, health services and transportation).

INFRASTRUCTURE

Comments on buildings, construction, repairs, etc.

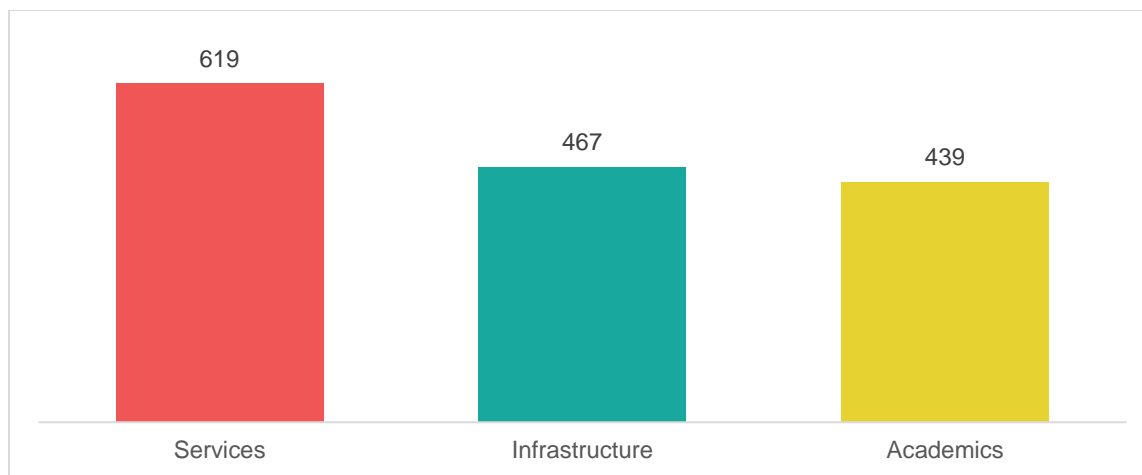


Figure 5 Number of comments received by topic *

* Please note that 248 comments concerned the University's central administration and are not compiled in this chart as they were often very general in nature.



Academics

This section includes all comments regarding the academic aspect of the student experience, including comments on professors, courses, programs and all academic support.

Professors

- All comments related to professors and their teaching (196) were sent directly to the vice-deans (academic) of each faculty (Figure 6).

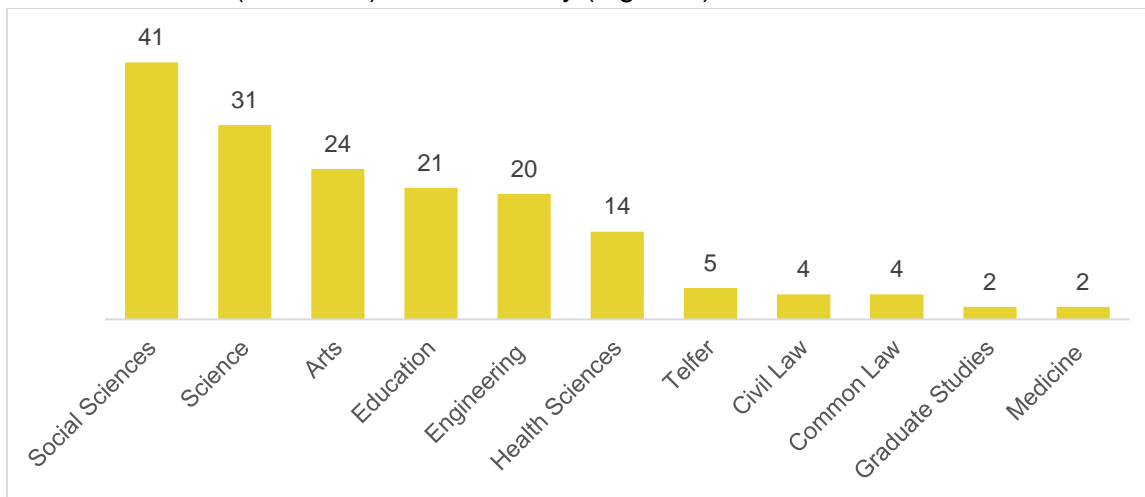


Figure 6 Number of comments about professors by faculty

- General comments on faculty (29) were sent to the Office of the Provost and Vice-President, Academic Affairs.
- Some comments were positive (see the example on the title page).
- Some professors were mentioned in more than one comment.
- The detailed comments received often varied in nature and only applied to few professors: poor teaching skills, shortcomings in the supervision of graduate students, poor communication skills in the language of instruction, confrontational relationship with students in the class, lack of respect, limited knowledge of the course material, failure to respect the course syllabus, delays in the marking of assignments, poor or lack of use of BrightSpace and poor management of student accommodations.



Example of comments n° 1

Il va contre le contrat qu'on a avec l'Université pour lequel on paie beaucoup d'argent afin d'avoir une qualité d'éducation. J'ai eu des professeurs qui plagiaient le contenu de leurs cours, des professeurs qui lisaient leurs présentations en classe sans même faire face aux étudiants, des professeurs qui oubliaient qu'ils avaient un cours et beaucoup qui arrivaient en retard. Cela est inacceptable et ça ne me donne pas envie de faire une maîtrise ici.

- General comments received regarding faculty also varied in nature: quality of faculty, demand for more professors focused on teaching rather than research, improved working conditions for part-time faculty, better faculty pedagogical training, improved knowledge of university regulations, better knowledge of their language of instruction.
- **Example of comments n° 2**

Constantly mentioning the shortcomings of students out loud and emphasizing that he does not care if you fail his class is not the proper way to address the students that are trying hard to succeed in his complex course.

Academic Support

The most frequent comments focused on the following topics:

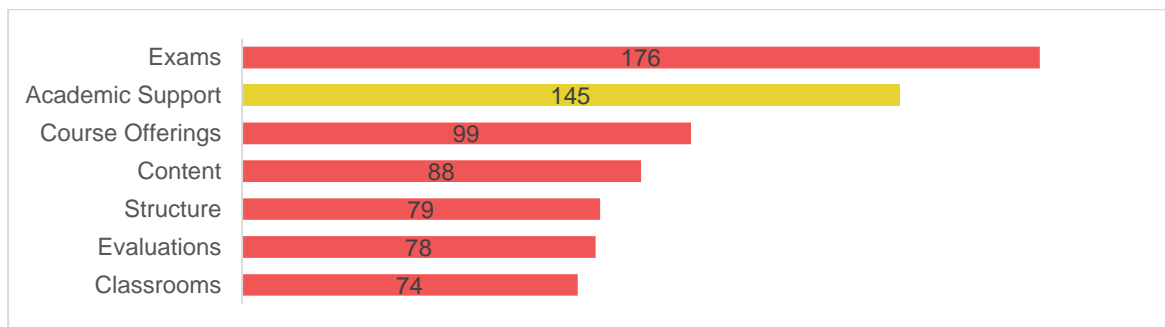


Figure 7 Number of comments by topic under the Academic Support heading.

- **EXAMS**

The late publication of the final exam schedule was the source of most comments (Figure 7).



▪ **ACADEMIC SUPPORT**

The poor quality of academic support (Figure 8), especially in the office of undergraduate studies (OUS) of some faculties, was mentioned 119 times. Comments included difficulty accessing a counsellor, extensive waiting times, difficulty in getting quick answers by email or telephone (especially at the beginning of the term), the speed at which academic problems were solved and the quality of solutions ultimately implemented, the management of waiting lists for courses and late course registrations.

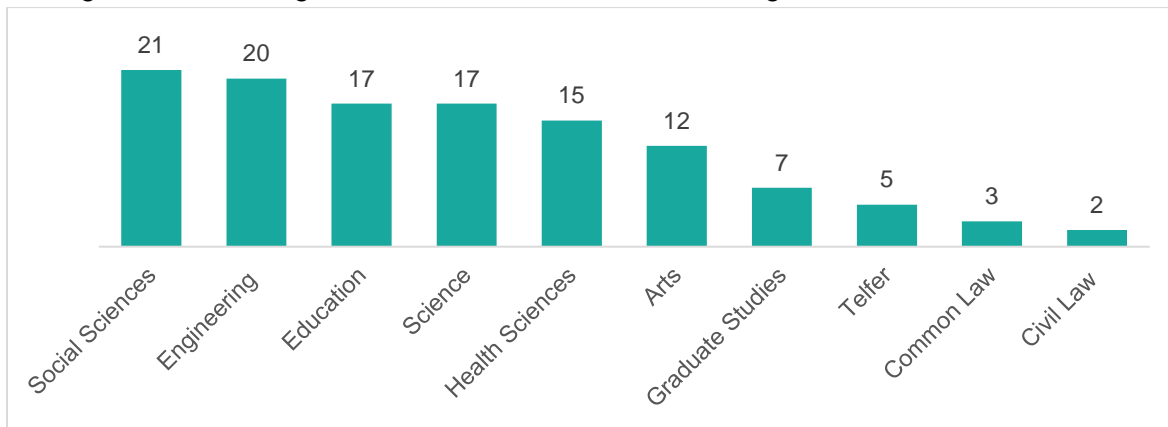


Figure 8 Number of comments on academic support by faculty*

* Please note that 19 comments related to academic support were addressed more generally to the University's central administration and therefore do not appear in the figure above.

▪ **COURSE OFFERING**

Comments received in this section (Figure 7) were related to course offerings and the late publication of the summer term course schedule, as well as the low number of online courses available in several faculties.

▪ **CONTENT AND STRUCTURE OF COURSES AND PROGRAMS**

The relevance of some courses, the overlap of course content, the content of programs and the quality of laboratory equipment were mentioned in the comments received in this category (Figure 7).

COURSE EVALUATIONS

In this section, students expressed their lack of trust in the teaching and course evaluation process. They criticized the lack of a formal evaluation of courses, laboratory courses and of laboratory components and mentioned the evaluations' inability to improve the course quality in real time (Figure 7). Some comments indicated that, despite negative evaluations, professors did not change their teaching methods.



- **CLASSROOMS**

Comments received in this category (Figure 7) indicated that the setup and cleanliness of some classrooms fell short of expectations, and that students occasionally outnumbered the seating available in the room.

Example of comments

Je crois finalement que le processus d'évaluation des cours est déficient. Je sais que le processus est important du côté administratif et permet aux facultés d'évaluer leur personnel enseignant, mais ces évaluations arrivent beaucoup trop tard dans le trimestre. Si nous avons un problème avec l'un de nos professeurs ou que nous sommes en désaccord avec une façon de faire, comment pouvons-nous voir une amélioration ou un changement significatif à la suite de nos commentaires ? Les professeurs nous mentionnent qu'ils prennent connaissance de nos évaluations uniquement le trimestre suivant et, de ce fait, ils ne peuvent même pas régler la situation défailante ou encore y apporter les correctifs nécessaires pour faciliter l'enseignement en classe. Il serait pertinent que ces évaluations se fassent dès les examens de mi-trimestre et que les professeurs aient accès plus rapidement aux commentaires des étudiants.



Services

A wide variety of services received comments (Figure 9).

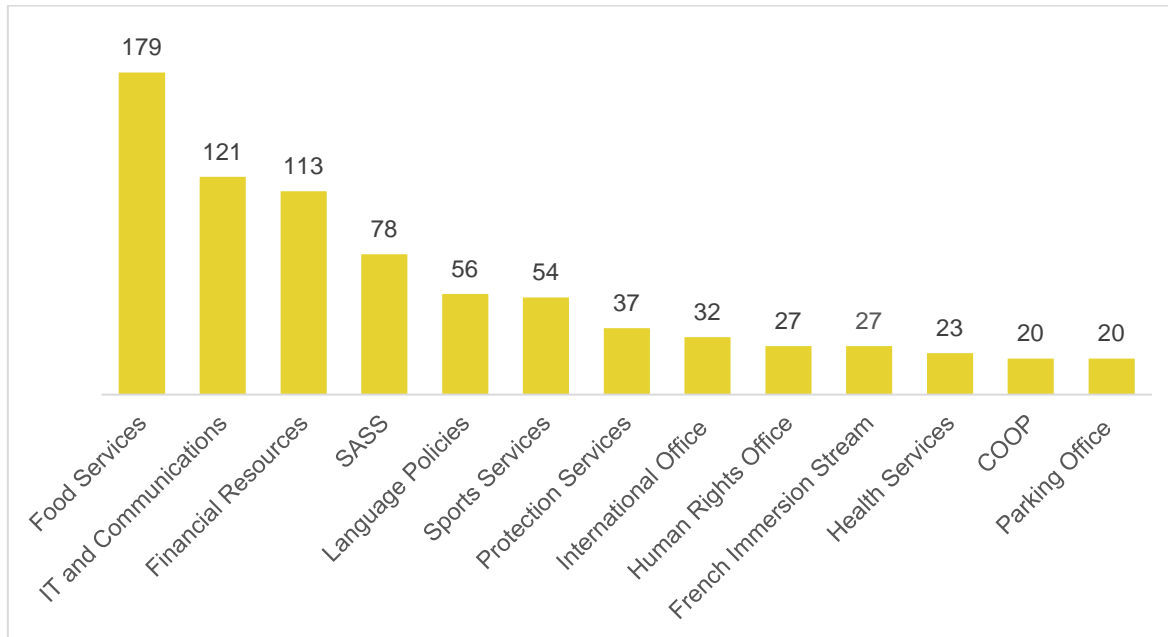


Figure 9 Number of comments received by service

The most frequent comments concerned

- **QUALITY OF FOOD AND SERVICE**

The variety and quality of the food served on campus (52) and poor service at the CRX cafeteria (20) were the most frequent comments regarding the University's Food Services.

- **MENTAL HEALTH**

The majority of comments received (67 out of 78) for the Student Academic Success Service (SASS) dealt with mental health services, specifically difficult access to care and lack of awareness surrounding mental health issues. In addition, several comments concerned the University of Ottawa's Health Services (14) and were related to the difficulty of accessing physicians, particularly for mental health services.



Example of comments

L'accès au service de soin mental est très complexe et décourageant (malgré les changements) dû au manque de places et des longues files d'attente avant de recevoir un service.

- **SPORTS FACILITIES**

Access to sports facilities (12) and the need for larger and better maintained gymnasias were topics mentioned in a number of comments (22).

- **FINANCES**

Several comments mentioned tuition fees (20) or scholarships (16). Students indicated that tuition fees, particularly international tuition fees were too high, that scholarships were difficult to access and delays for obtaining some scholarships or reimbursements were very long.

Mandatory fees for several services were criticized (Figure 8), namely for the SFUO, the universal pass (U-Pass) and Sports Services.

- **CULTURAL LIFE**

Students (22) mentioned the lack of social activities on campus designed to increase the sense of belonging to the University.

- **FRANCOPHONIE AND BILINGUALISM**

Some comments mentioned the quality of the language of service and the lack of employment opportunities for unilingual students on campus.

- **WEB**

Forty comments dealt with the University website. The website is perceived as not user-friendly and difficult to navigate when searching for services or specific information.

Some comments were related to issues regarding course registration and the use of specific uoCampus functions.



Infrastructure

The uOSatisfACTION team received approximately 800 comments regarding infrastructure (Figure 10).

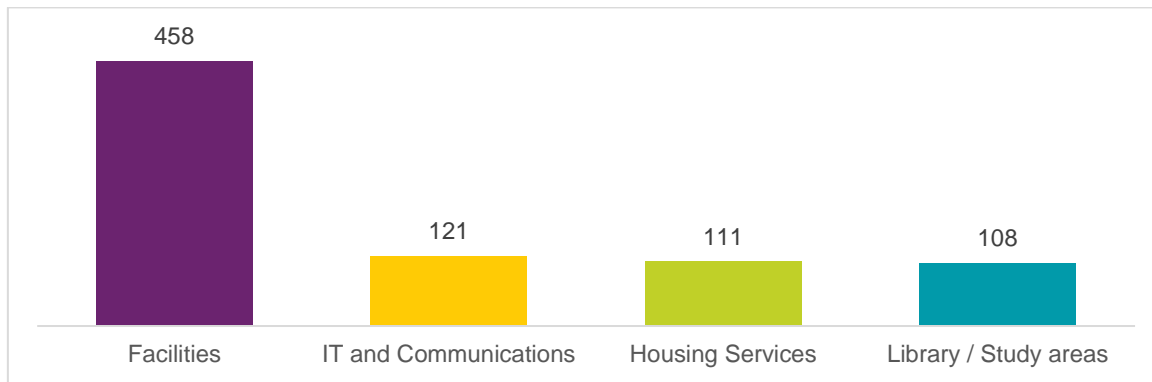


Figure 10 Number of comments received per service for infrastructure-related issues

The most frequent comments focused on the following topics (Figure 11):

- Maintenance and repairs to buildings and classrooms, and snow removal were some of the most common comments about facilities (258).
- Finding quiet study areas on campus and in our libraries has proven to be difficult and problematic. For example, law students have complained about the lack of space at the Brian Dickson Library.

Example

Have more security or a better system to ensure the Library stays silent, removing students that are being loud. Ban students from entering the Library after enough legitimate noise complaints have been issued.

This should be applied to all silent study areas.

- A recurring comment related to both buildings and study areas / libraries is the lack of power outlets to charge electronic devices (computers, phones, etc.).
- Several comments mentioned that furniture (chairs, tables, etc.) is inadequate or not readily available in sufficient numbers.
- uOSatisfACTION received 22 comments about the insufficient number of functional microwaves (many out of service) on campus.



- The absence of gender-neutral washrooms (universal washrooms) on campus was reported a few times.
- The number of broken printers was the most common IT topic (18 comments).
- Thirty three comments were received with regards to the non-smoking areas near building entrances and the disposal of cigarette butts on the ground near ashtrays.

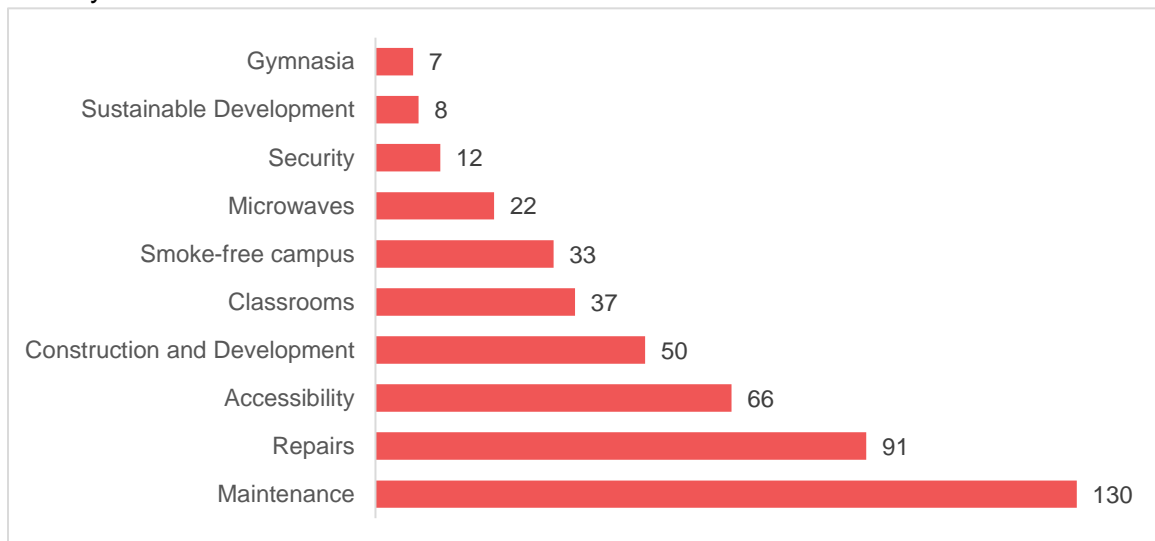


Figure 11 Number of comments received by topic for infrastructure *

* Accessibility includes comments on campus access for persons with disabilities, hours of operation, orientation and access to buildings (snow removal, damaged sidewalks, non-gendered washrooms, etc.).



Recommendations

In this section, we focus on issues that were raised frequently in the comments or that we consider essential to the quality of the academic experience. The recommendations are based on suggestions from student comments or ideas advanced by members of the Action Group. The uOSatisfACTION team has already discussed a number of these issues, as well as several others mentioned in the previous pages, with the management teams of services or faculties in order to find solutions. Some of these recommendations are already in place.

1. Feedback from Professors

In light of the comments received about professors' teaching, it became clear to us that, in many cases, the problem stems from a communication breakdown between the professor and students. Students often avoid discussing their concerns openly with the professor for fear of an impact on their final grade. In fact, students who wrote to uOSatisfACTION on this subject asked to remain anonymous in the follow-ups.

Recommendation 1

- Give access to an application that would allow students to provide feedback anonymously and in real time about their professor's teaching and the course flow (compliance with the syllabus, punctuality, professor's availability outside of class, etc.). At uOSatisfACTION's suggestion, the Teaching and Learning Support Service is currently reviewing the implementation of such a tool in BrightSpace.
- **Suggestions :** Encourage BrightSpace training for all professors; make it a contractual obligation for new professors and add compulsory basic pedagogical training.

2. Undergraduate Studies Offices

The quality of the services offered by some Undergraduate Studies Offices (USO) is poor, particularly at the beginning of a term. An academic committee on the operation of the USO is currently examining these issues.



Recommendation 2

- Ensure that each USO has developed quality-of-service standards (average response time to e-mails or phone calls, waiting lines, etc.) to better manage student expectations. Moreover, it is important that these standards be communicated to students.
- **Suggestion** : USOs could ask student associations or 4th year students for help to manage the demand at the beginning of the term.

3. Final Exam Schedule

Students have difficulty scheduling their end-of-term trips because the exam schedule is published late. This topic has already been discussed with Enrolment Management.

Recommendation 3

- Publish the final exam schedule earlier and post it on the University's [Important academic dates and deadlines](#) web page to allow students to better plan their trips.
- **Suggestion** : The schedule should be published the day before Thanksgiving in the Fall term and at the beginning of Reading Week in February.

4. Summer Courses

Courses offered during the summer are limited and the schedule is often known only in the beginning of April, which causes problems for students hoping to combine work and university courses during the summer or looking to complete their diplomas.

Recommendation 4

- Offer more summer courses in both languages and announce them earlier in the winter term, even if scheduling is not completed.
- **Suggestion** : The publication date of the course offering and of the summer course schedule should be added on the University's [Important academic dates and deadlines](#) web page to help students plan their summer term.



5. Study Spaces

Students want more study areas to prepare for mid-term and final exams as well as better compliance with the rules of existing quiet areas.

Recommendation 5

- Add study spaces and ensure that quiet study areas are respected, particularly in libraries. Increase the number of classrooms designated as additional study areas at the end of the term and promote the use of these spaces. To this end, Enrolment Management, at uoSatisfACTION's suggestion, has already identified some of these new rooms using posters ([Appendix A](#)) and added all the small rooms on the 3rd floor of the Learning Crossroads building to the list. Students should respect but also enforce silence in the study halls.

6. Mental Health Services

Students complain about the limited access to mental health services and do not seem to know where to go for help.

Recommendation 6

- Increase awareness of the new Stepped Care model implemented by the Counseling and Coaching Service at the Student Academic Success Service (SASS) to better support our students, and develop a communication strategy to explain the different services provided by the University of Ottawa Health Services (UOHS), SASS and within the community.

7. Smoke-Free Campus

More than thirty students expressed their disappointment that the University is not a smoke-free campus or that smoke-free areas are not respected. Students are also waiting for the university to release the results of the consultation on this subject held in the fall.



Recommendation 7

- Develop a smoke-free policy as recommended in the Canadian Cancer Society's report on 100% smoke-free campuses in Canada⁴. The number of campuses with such a policy has grown exponentially since 2012. In 2018, 65 Canadian universities and colleges were smoke-free. Among Ontario campuses, Western and McMaster Universities are "smoke free".
- **Suggestion** : If the university does not become a smoke-free campus, it must adopt stricter and firmer measures to ensure that smokers respect areas where smoking is prohibited (near doors, for example).

8. Charging Sites for Electronic Devices

There is a shortage of functional charging sites for electronic devices in classrooms and in study and rest areas. Students also commented on the limited number of power outlets in libraries.

Recommendation 8

- Install more charging stations for electronic devices throughout the campus and regularly check that existing outlets are functional, particularly in the Learning Crossroads building.

9. Food Court in the Learning Crossroads Building

The quality and speed of service as well as the quality of the food served at the Learning Crossroads food court were widely criticized.

Recommendation 9

- Review the services provided and develop a strategy to ensure quality control of food and service.
- **Suggestion** : Develop a communication strategy to inform the university community of any improvements made. (Note: improvements have been implemented in the winter term.)

⁴ <http://www.cancer.ca/~media/cancer.ca/CW/for%20media/Media%20releases/2018/Universits-et-collges--campus-100-p.c.-sans-fume--rapport-SCC--2018-09-14.pdf?la=fr-CA>



10. Help Lines

Several of the comments received by uOSatisfACTION reveal that students do not seem to know who to call to report a technical problem, an emergency, or to ask for help, etc. even if several help lines do exist on campus.

Recommendation 10

- Conduct a study of the different help lines on campus and determine if they should be combined to simplify the process.
- In the meantime, develop and implement a communication strategy to raise awareness of help lines 6555 (Information Technologies), 2222 (Facilities), 5222 (Human Rights Office) and 5411 (Protection Services) as well as the [Emergency](#) button on the the University's home page.
- **Suggestion :** Post the various emergency numbers (including 911) with a short description in all washrooms on campus.



Proposal for a Permanent Structure

uOSatisfACTION must remain a neutral, effective and relevant tool to guide services and faculties regarding student expectations. We therefore recommend that it becomes a permanent structure, reporting directly to the Office of the Provost and Vice-President, Academic Affairs.

We also recommend that the Task Team on Student Satisfaction (page 2) be enhanced and that the Advisory Committee be abolished.

The new operational team could be composed of:

- Two co-chairs: a professor (course release of three units per term) for the management of academic issues and the Manager, University Experience for issues related to services and infrastructure;
 - According to the nature of the issues raised, one of the co-chairs would be invited to meetings with the Office of the Provost and Vice-President, Academic Affairs and other university committees that examine the student experience.
- Two co-op students per term (only one presently) to help manage comments received by uOSatisfACTION, identify problems, but also look for solutions.
- A communication officer (partial workload) for the development and implementation of the communication plan.
- Small ad hoc action groups assigned and managed by one of the co-chairs and made up of students who have submitted to uOSatisfACTION well-articulated comments on specific issues and managers or staff involved in possible solutions.

We recommend the abolition of the advisory committee. This committee was supposed to help identify and resolve the irritants of the student experience. It did not really work because:

- The uOSatisfACTION Web page was more efficient at identifying and quantifying the extent of the irritants of the student experience;
- Solutions to problems raised were often outside the field of expertise of group members; and
- As the operational team aims for immediate action, the advisory committee, with its two meetings per term, was too static to be effective.



We believe that the proposal of creating small ad hoc groups by the operational team will allow students to participate more effectively in improving the student experience at the university.



Conclusion

Impact

By allowing students to express themselves freely and by responding promptly to their comments, uOSatifACTION has fostered a relationship of trust between students and the institution, a concrete demonstration that the University cares about the well-being and the university experience of each student.

In addition, this approach helped identify more systemic issues related to the university experience. Services and faculties, now equipped with a better understanding of the reality of the student experience, are able to prioritize their decision making accordingly. Their active participation in the initiative helped establish a relationship of trust and respect with students, which positively contributes to student satisfaction (see the total number of comments by subject in [Appendix B](#) and the total number comments by faculty and service in [Appendix C](#))

At the pedagogical level, uOSatifACTION offers students the opportunity to express themselves anonymously on issues happening in the classroom when a communication breakdown occurs with the professor. Students feel heard, which decreases their frustration and this allows faculties to assess corrective measures. This respectful approach enhances the academic experience.

In conclusion, we believe that uOSatifACTION should be an essential component of the strategic plan for improving the academic experience.



Appendix A

AIRE D'ÉTUDE SILENCIEUSE

Ouverte de 6 h à 22 h durant la période d'examens

Soyez respectueux envers les autres étudiants et étudiantes

Bonne étude!

QUIET STUDY AREA

Open from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. during exam period

Please be considerate of other students.

Good luck studying!





Appendix B

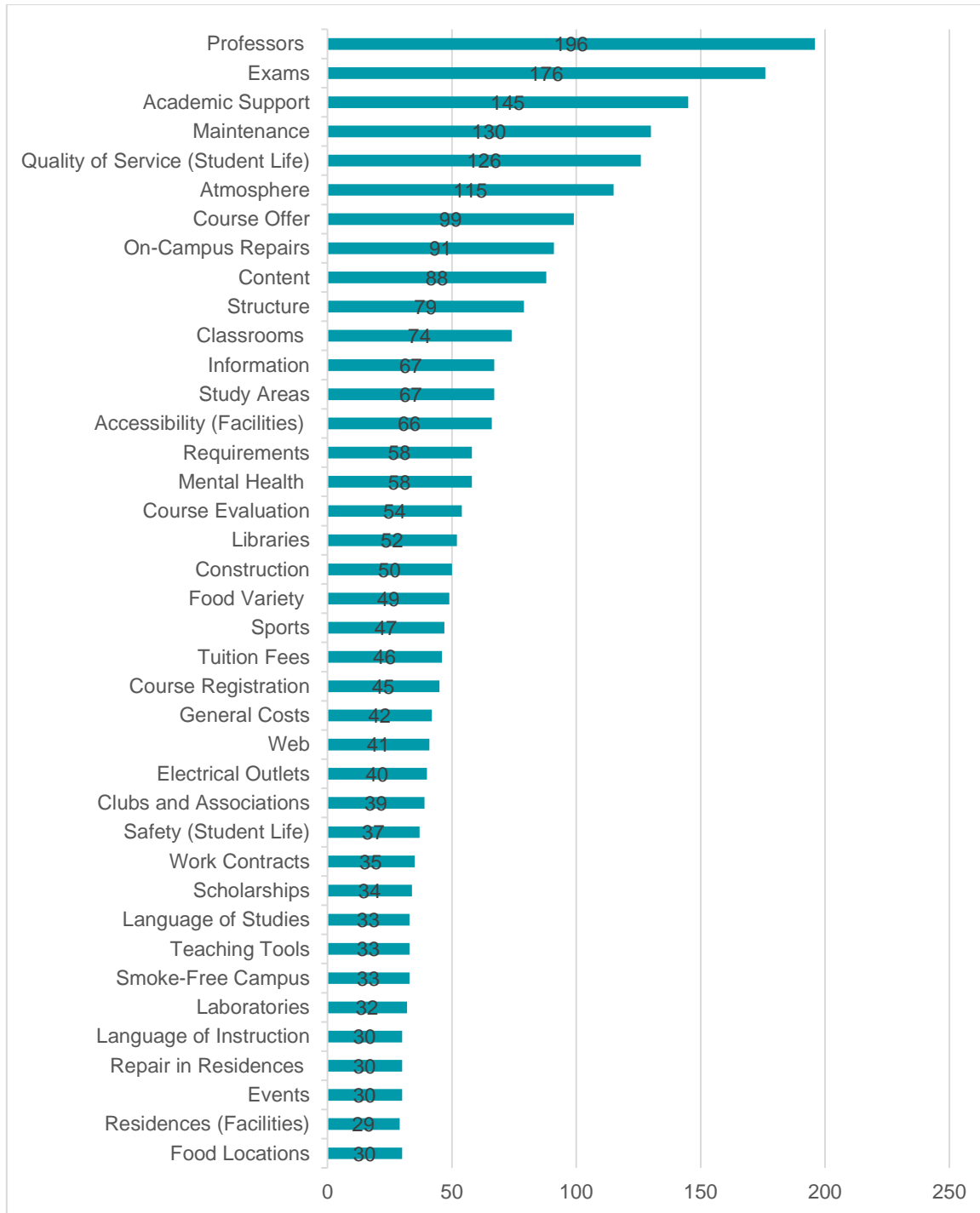


Figure 12 Total number of comments received by topic



Appendix C

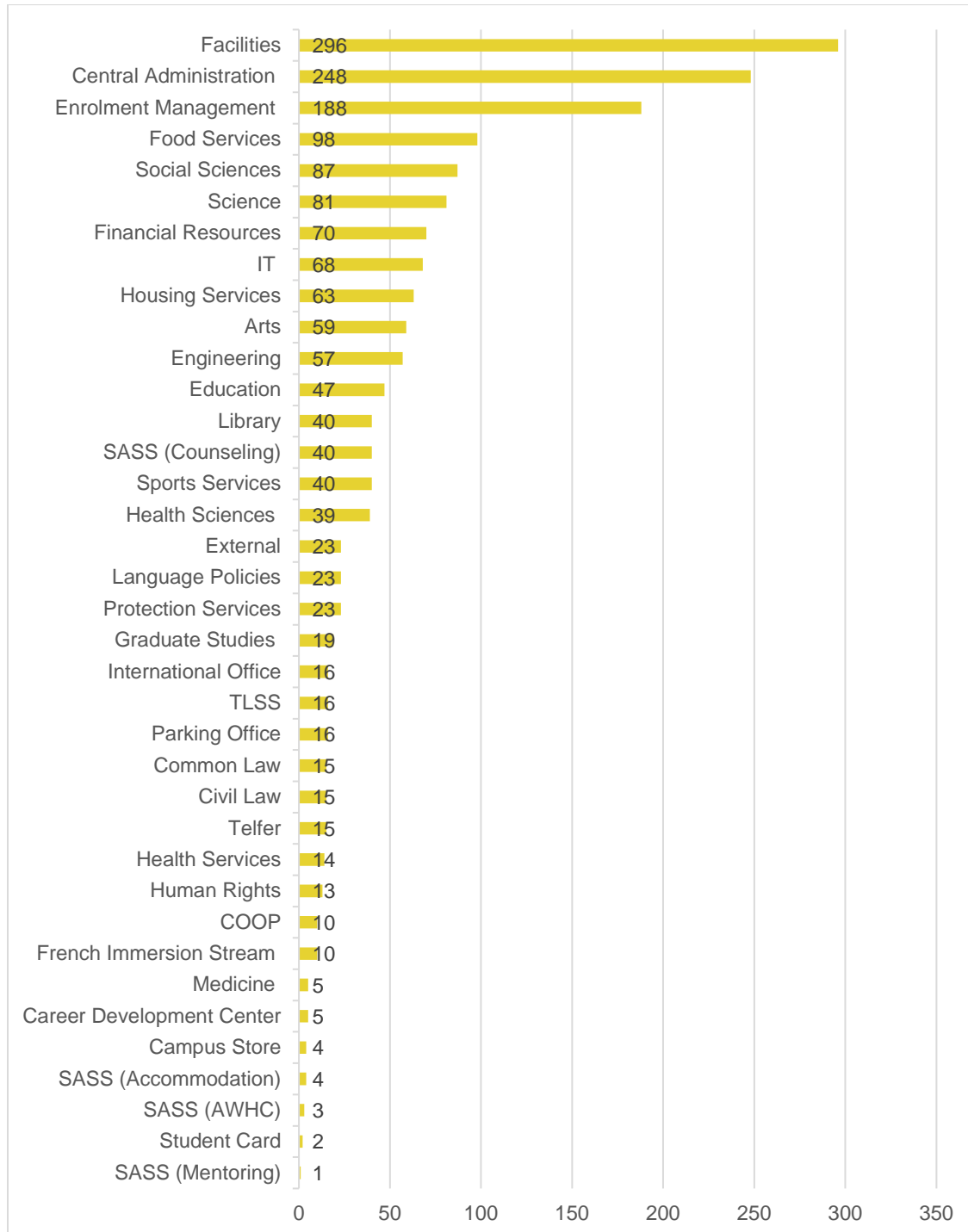


Figure 13 Total number of comments by faculty and service