

A photograph of the University of Manitoba's main building, a large red-brick structure with a central clock tower and classical columns. The building is surrounded by green trees and a paved plaza. The sky is blue with some clouds.

Grades, Goals, & Growth: The Experiences of First- Year Undergraduate Students

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Traditional Territories Acknowledgement

The University of Manitoba campuses are located on original lands of Anishinaabeg, Ininewuk, Anisninewuk, Dakota Oyate and Denesuline, and on the National Homeland of the Red River Métis.

We respect the Treaties that were made on these territories, we acknowledge the harms and mistakes of the past, and we dedicate ourselves to move forward in partnership with Indigenous communities in a spirit of Reconciliation and collaboration.

First-Year Students' Goals

The underlying assumptions of our study:

1. Transitioning to postsecondary study is difficult for many students. As such, it is important that programs are designed and implemented that effectively support students particularly in their first year of studies.
2. Students have various goals when they begin their postsecondary educations.
3. Students' goals can and do change over time.
4. Understanding how these goals change can be important for service providers
 - Designing of supports
 - Timing of supports

This research was conducted in partnership with Student Affairs at the University of Manitoba

Purpose of The Study:

To examine the goals of first-year postsecondary students, and how they change from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.





Methods – Part 1

142 students completed both versions of the survey (Fall/Spring)

Participants were asked the following question:

- What are your goals for your post-secondary studies this year?

We then inductively coded their responses.

Theme #1

Academic Success

- Grades:** Many students identified academic success in terms of grades or GPAs.
 - “achiev[ing] all A's in my classes.”
 - “maintaining a 3.8 or higher.”
- Do Well:** Some students were more general in how they defined academic success.
 - “do well in all my classes”
 - “being successful in my studies,”
- Pass:** For some students, academic success meant passing their courses.
 - “I just want to pass all my classes this semester”

Theme #2

Navigating Campus Life

- a. **Navigate Campus:** Figure out their new postsecondary environment.
 - “to get used to the workload of uni[versity], and learn my way around the campus”
 - “allow myself time to adjust to campus life”
 - “figure out how to navigate university”
- b. **Skill Development:** Learning the necessary skills or knowledge to be successful in their programs of study.
 - “achieve an effective study schedule”
 - “advance my skills [and] knowledge”
 - “understand material taught in my classes”

Theme #3

Social Connection

- a. **Social Connection:** Social connection more broadly, such as feeling like a part of the campus community.
 - “get involved in clubs, groups, and sign up for events”
 - “become an active member of the university community”
 - “I want to get involved in student life”
- b. **Making Friends:** The specific goal of making new friends.
 - “make new friends”
 - “make more friends”
 - “making friends, instead of acquaintances, which would last only a term”

Theme #4

Personal Development

- a. **Self-Improvement:** Growing as a person and figuring out their plans for the future.
 - “find something I’m passionate about”
 - “grow as a person”
 - “getting to know more about my interests and what I am good at”
- b. **Career Preparation:** The desire to prepare for their future careers.
 - “to finish nursing in the next 3-4 years,”
 - “to get into the faculty of architecture,”
 - “to further explore what my options are regarding possible career directions”

Methods – Part 2

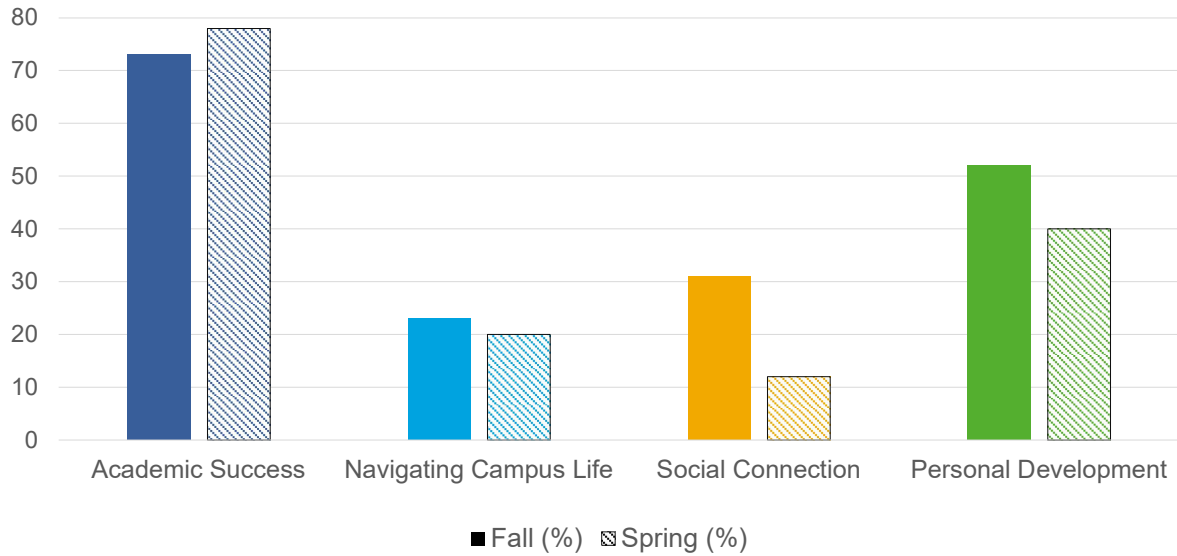
Created sums for each of the themes and sub-themes separately for the Fall and Spring responses and converted into percentages.

Graph the percentages and examine the differences across time.

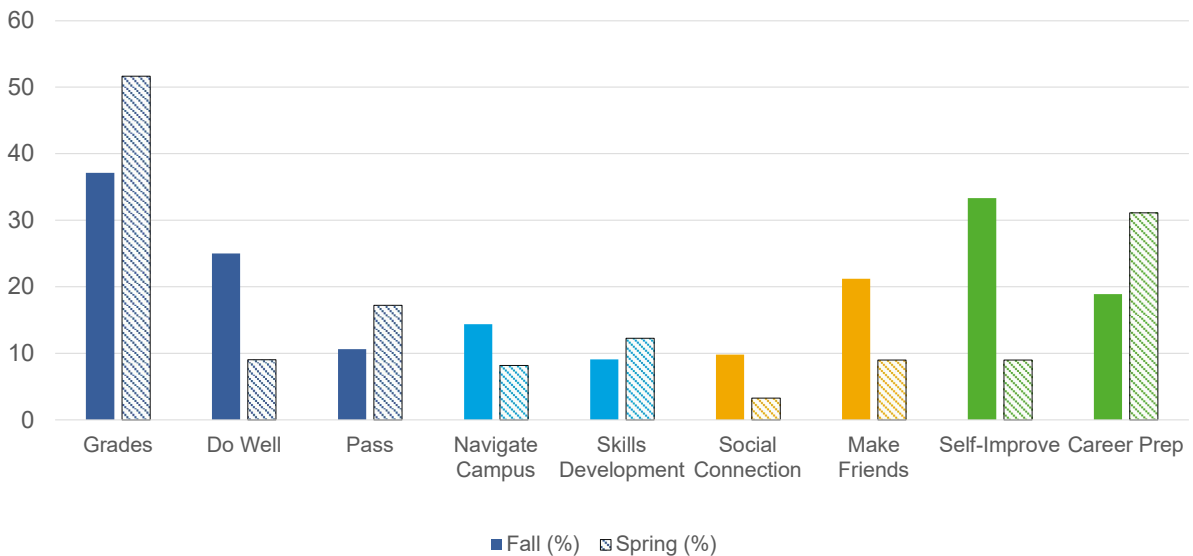
Compare themes from Fall and Spring to observe change over time.



Themes Over Time



Sub-Themes Over Time





In Summary

1. **Grades** are and remain a strong goal for students at postsecondary.
2. Students' goals for **social connection** drop significantly... why?
 - Made connections?
 - Goals focused to other areas?
3. The rising importance of **career preparation**.
 - The need to consider the timing of services?

Next Steps: Connecting goals to supports offered by the University.

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Thank you!