

Better Data – Annual Report (2023-2024)

Context

The Better Data Project was developed to facilitate campus-wide demographic data collection, management and analysis, while centring a community-driven, transparent and accountable approach. The project has prioritized the highest standards of data privacy and security and continues to engage key campus partners in how demographic data should be used to inform inclusive action across campus. The annual report that follows offers insight into progress so far, and highlights areas of on-going development over the course of the next year.

The Better Data Questionnaire itself, which provides an opportunity for UVic community members to self-identify across six identity categories [Gender identity; Sexual orientation; Indigenous identity; Disability identity; Racial and/or ethnocultural identity; and Religious and/or spiritual identity], has been available to all members of the University of Victoria community for a year. With over 10,000 students and 5,000 employees having completed their questionnaires to date, we now have a better understanding of the demographic make up of our community than ever before. As the project team moves into the next phase of work, the data will begin to be shared and used in several important ways.

This report is divided into two parts:

1. An examination of the current response rates for both populations, including exploring relative response rates for specific faculties and/or employment groups across campus;
2. A discussion of the work that lies ahead in beginning to report on, share, and use the insights gained from the questionnaire data to date.

Note that data insights are not shared in the report though there is work underway in developing an interactive and live/up-to-date data sharing platform (see Part 2: Informing inclusive action, data sharing for more details).

Part 1: Understanding response rates

Because of realities related to student and employee turnover, responses to the questionnaire must be understood in both a historical context and an active context. This reality needs to be captured on an on-going, constantly up-to-date basis. As such, the questionnaire and all associated reporting tools reflect the following:

- **The historical context** demonstrates how many individuals have completed the questionnaire since its launch, regardless of whether those individuals are still connected to UVic;
- **The active context** demonstrates how many individuals who maintain an active relationship with UVic either as a student or an employee have responded to the questionnaire.

Student responses to date

As of November 1st, 2024, the Better Data Questionnaire has been completed by 10,150 students, including over 9,200 active students or 40% of those currently enrolled. Importantly, in the context of demographic collection tools across Canadian post-secondary environments, this number represents a major success in terms of project communication and engagement. Comparative projects at other institutions have received between 10 and 25% response rates in their first year or during their first

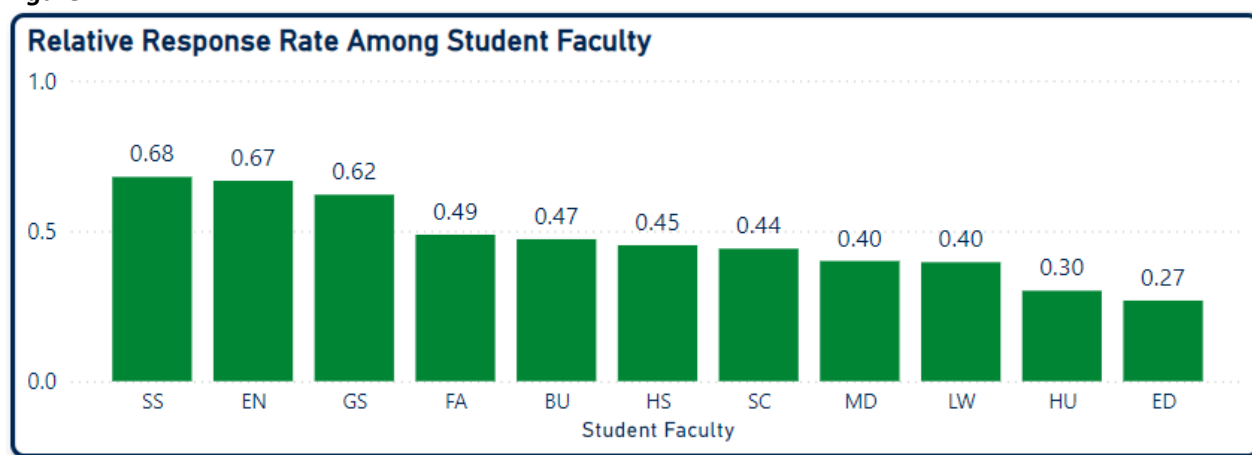
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round of data collection. We are also continuing to average over 1,000 new student responses every month, meaning the Better Data Project is well-positioned to move into its next phase.

As of September 2024, the data from the questionnaire has been accessible via a Power BI reporting space, which allows the project team to contextualize the institutional student response rate across different faculties, among other filters.

Figure 1 displays the current relative response rate of each faculty using the number of active questionnaire responses among students and annualized enrolment totals. Notably, response rates range across faculties from 27% in Education to 68% and 67% in Social Sciences and in Engineering and Computer Science respectively. This information will help to guide future communication and engagement efforts and, in its interactive form in Power BI, will serve as an important method of evaluation for ongoing communication.

Figure 1



Note: In the above visualization, graduate students are represented in the Faculty of Graduate Studies and not their specific graduate unit.

Employee responses to date

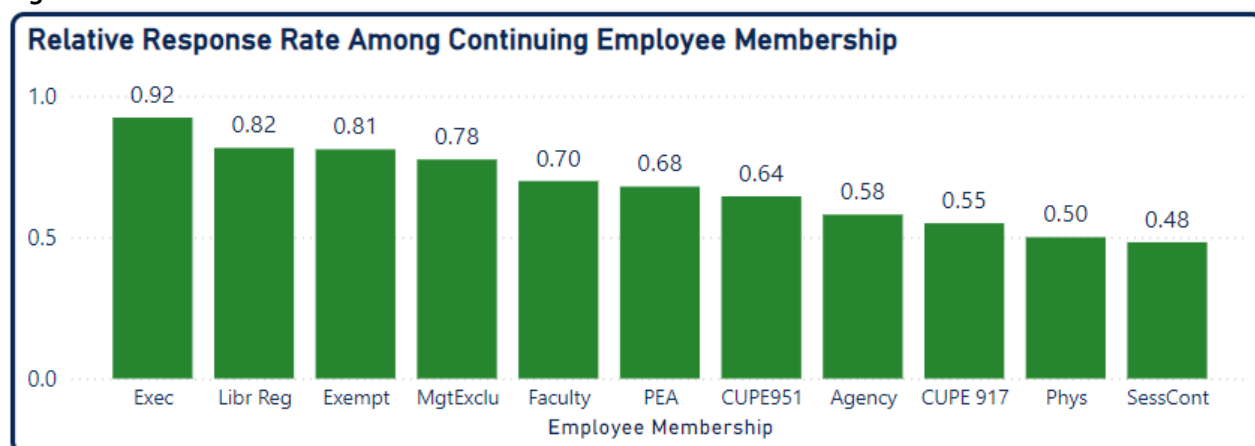
As of November 1st, 2024, the Better Data Questionnaire has been completed by 5,700 employees, including over 4,500 active employees or 50% of those currently categorized as an active employee (~9,000). Notably, of these active responses, approximately 2,250 are continuing employees resulting in a 70% response rate among the most consistent subset of the employment population (~3200 employees at the institution are continuing).

At the outset of the project, the Better Data Questionnaire was designed as a replacement demographic data collection tool for the Employment Equity Survey (EES). Throughout its use, the EES averaged an 85% among continuing employees. As such, the project team set an initial like-for-like goal of an 85% response rate among continuing employees for the Better Data Questionnaire. While we have not yet surpassed this benchmark, the overall employee response rate continues to climb consistently averaging 350 new responses a month; as such, we predict we will meet this initial goal by late spring 2025.

Figure 2 displays the relative response rate across each continuing employment membership group, further demonstrating the reach of the questionnaire to date. The two largest continuing employee groups – Faculty and PEA – have 70% and 68% response rates, respectively.

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Figure 2



The visualization also highlights a known gap in our current communication efforts, where those employees who do not work on their computers throughout the day (e.g., some members of CUPE 951, CUPE 917, etc.) have been more difficult to reach. This insight has allowed us to work directly with leaders within specific portfolios to discuss ways to better engage employees in this context. Notably, an in-person, tailored approach has proven to be most effective to date.

Questionnaire feedback

Given that over 15,000 community members have now completed the questionnaire, the feedback received to date is overwhelmingly positive. Our anonymous feedback form is continuously available via the project's landing page where we also invite feedback via email or any other preferred method (e.g., meeting with a member of the project team). Each disaggregated question also includes a written in option [noted as "An identity not listed (please specify)"] where community members can manually input whatever information they choose. These selections are used as a form of quality assessment to ensure the questionnaire is as inclusive as possible for each community member. Moving forward, feedback will continue to be collated and reviewed by the Better Data Steering Committee any changes to the questionnaire will be noted in future annual reports.

Part 2: Informing inclusive action

While the current success in response rates across both populations reflects the thoughtful, community-centred approach taken throughout project planning, efforts to put the data to use while addressing the shortcomings of previous collection tools will ensure the long-term success of the project. To lead this work, the Better Data Steering Committee, whose mandate is to provide guidance, oversight, and decision-making support for data governance strategies related to the Better Data Project, has been established. The committee's composition includes leadership from across campus, including experts in data privacy and security, student experience and the employee lifecycle. The committee, which is chaired by Cassbreea Dewis, Executive Director, Equity and Human Rights, will meet on a quarterly basis to:

- Share updates related to project progress, challenges, and achievements within respective areas.

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- Provide relevant area-specific expertise to assist in reporting and data use decision-making processes.
- Advocate for the project and its importance at both executive and functional, portfolio-specific levels.
- Monitor the long-term success of the project against the stated project objective and associated project outcomes.
- Provide area-specific guidance and support to the project facilitators as needed.

Data sharing

In seeking to address issues of data access and a lack of transparency surrounding institutional data collection, data collected through the questionnaire will be shared publicly in aggregate form through interactive data dashboards for both employees and students. These dashboards, which are built in Power BI, will allow for easy access and use of the data which will limit the need for other sources of UVic demographic data collection, ensuring consistency across the university. Importantly, public data sharing via dashboards has been previously approved in the project's Privacy Impact Assessment.

Given the public nature of these dashboards, the Steering Committee's current priorities revolve around determining which filters will be made available for community use, as well as important considerations surrounding accessibility, privacy and security. While the dashboards are not available as of yet, we are sharing regular updates to questionnaire response rates and initial data insights on [our landing page](#).

For an example of what the Better Data Project is working towards, please see the University of Toronto's [public dashboard](#) that presents data stemming from their Student Equity Census project.

Tracking progress across campus

The information collected through the questionnaire is also already being used in several important evaluation and reporting processes. For instance, UVic's first annual Pay Transparency Report was created in part using the Better Data gender identity category. This integration means that the report was produced using the most up-to-date, inclusive dataset available at the time, reflecting the true diversity across campus.

Our ability to understand the demographic make up of the UVic community (including identifying under-represented groups) is also a key evaluation tool for recruitment and retention related initiatives. Our approved special program which governs UVic's right to conduct limited and preferential hires is already greatly benefitting from an improved understanding of the demographic composition of the employment population. This new insight will allow us to seek additional approvals to conduct limited or preferential hires for under-represented groups that are not currently included in our approved program (e.g., approvals among the 2SLGBTQIA+ community).

The data will also be integral to the work of the Employment Equity Steering Committee which is currently working to develop and implement a new goal setting process for enhancing the diversity of UVic's employment population across our campus.

Progress related to the above initiatives is currently being shared on our [new reporting page](#) which will continue to be updated as related reports are developed.

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Conclusions and next steps

Having been a year since its launch, the Better Data Questionnaire is well-positioned to make a meaningful and sustainable contribution to advancing equity across UVic's campus in both short and long-term outlooks. Response rates to the questionnaire for both employees and students are, in most cases, better than comparable projects at other institutions across Canada. Those that have achieved higher response rates (i.e., Toronto Metropolitan University and the University of Toronto) have moved to making their data collection tool a requirement for all members to complete rather than something that is optional. As work continues around improving UVic response rates, the project team will explore the benefits and challenges of eventually making the questionnaire 'required', while maintaining the flexibility for community members to not provide any data within the questionnaire itself via 'prefer not answer' options.

The formation of the Better Data Steering Committee will help to advance work from a data use and implementation perspective. Public data dashboards are currently in development and will be shared with executive for approval once completed.