

2019 REPORT

STUDENT COMMUNICATIONS SURVEY



UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The University of Waterloo's Student Success Office (SSO) conducted a Student Communications Survey in Winter 2019. Our goal was to understand the communications preferences of University of Waterloo students in order to provide the information they need through the channels they prefer. This is a follow-up from a similar survey conducted in 2015 and compares some of the results to find out what has changed.

The online survey was customized for graduate and undergraduate students and sent via email to a random sample of international and domestic students from all six faculties.

The survey objectives were to find out from Waterloo students:

1. **Where** they want to receive information from the University
2. **What kind of information** they want to receive in each channel
3. **Who** they consider to be an important source of information



Key takeaways:
Important findings throughout the report.



Tips: Ideas about how to apply key findings to student communications.



KEY FINDINGS

WHERE

STUDENTS PREFER EMAIL AND SOCIAL MEDIA FOR INFORMATION FROM THE UNIVERSITY

Much like 2015 survey results, students rated email as their top preferred method for communications from the University. Students also want to receive information from the University through social media, and specifically Facebook.

WHAT

STUDENTS PREFER TO RECEIVE OFFICIAL INFORMATION THROUGH EMAIL. STUDENTS RATED SOCIAL MEDIA HIGH FOR RECEIVING INFORMATION ABOUT STUDENT LIFE AND SERVICES.

Email is the preferred channel for all types of information from the University, but rated especially high for official communications like tuition and fees, academic information, and awards. Social media was popular with students for information like campus events, faculty/program events, and urgent campus updates. Students would also like to receive information on LEARN.

WHO

STUDENTS MOST OFTEN CONSIDERED PROFESSORS AS AN IMPORTANT SOURCE OF INFORMATION

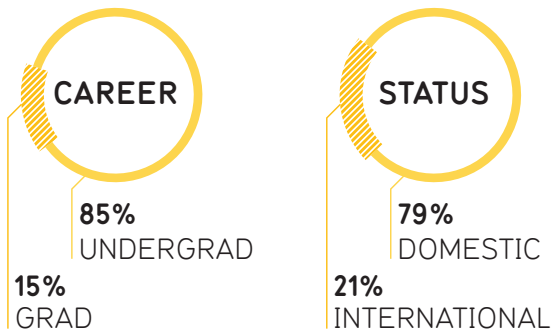
An important source of information means that students trust and believe the source is reliable. Students most often rated professors as an important source of information, which is consistent with 2015 results. Academic advisors, for undergraduate students, and program co-ordinators, for graduate students, are also considered important sources of information.

METHODOLOGY

FIGURE 1

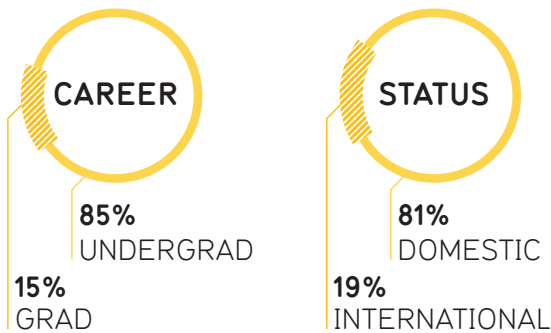
UWATERLOO POPULATION

WINTER 2019
N = 36,757



SURVEY SAMPLE

n = 556




The Student Communications Survey, conducted in 2019, included key questions from the 2015 survey to track the evolution of student communications preferences over time. Specifically, questions around important sources of information and preferred methods of communication were repeated. Based on changes in communications best practices and social media trends, new questions and options were added to the survey including new categories of information and university-associated social media accounts. The survey questions were customized slightly for graduate versus undergraduate students (such as program co-ordinator versus academic advisor). Each student who completed the survey was awarded a \$5 credit on their WatCard balance.

The survey was administered to a stratified random sample of the student population at Waterloo including graduate and undergraduate students, international and domestic students, and each of the six faculties. Just over 2,500 students were invited to participate in the online survey using a personalized link sent via email invitation and reminder emails. The final survey sample includes 556 respondents, or a 20 per cent response rate, which is a representative sample of the student population.

Figure 1 displays the breakdown of the Waterloo population on the top, and the survey sample below, by career (undergraduate and graduate), by status (domestic and international) and by faculty.

FINDINGS

GENERAL COMMUNICATIONS PREFERENCES


 **Key takeaway:** Students want to receive information about urgent campus updates through multiple channels.


Email and social media remain the preferred student communication method overall for most categories of information from the University (see figure 2). Graduate students are more likely to choose websites, after email, than undergraduate students. Overall, these preferences align with the existing methods that the University of Waterloo uses for communicating with students.

LEARN, Waterloo's web-based learning management system, was also popular with students for specific categories of information including: academic information, Registrar information, and urgent campus updates (see figure 2). Students reported wanting to see information on UWaterloo Portal including: urgent campus updates, tuition and fees, and academic information. Students also preferred to see some information on websites including student service information and urgent campus updates.

Urgent campus updates was a category of information that came up often in the survey data and in the open-ended responses. Students would like to see urgent campus updates communicated in multiple formats including email, text/SMS, social media, websites, LEARN, and UWaterloo Portal.

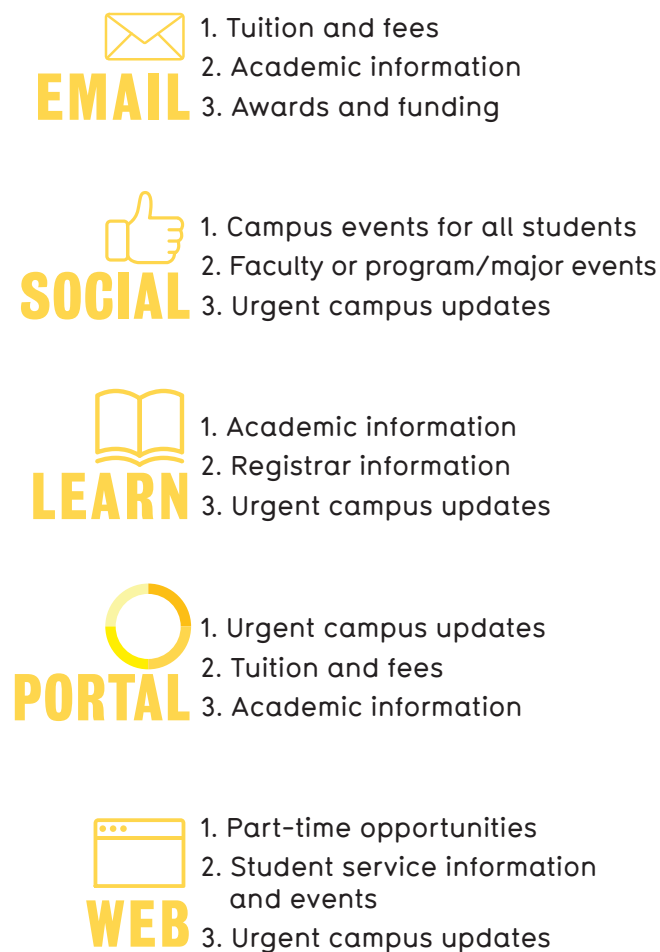
For each category of information we asked students to choose their preferred channel. Figure 3 lists the top three preferred channels for each category, and the categories are in order of those students want to see on the most channels listed first.

 Based on the type of information you want to share, consider which channels students prefer.

 **Key takeaway:** Students identified email as their preferred channel for receiving all types of information from the University.

WHAT ARE THE TOP CATEGORIES OF INFORMATION THAT STUDENTS WANT TO RECEIVE THROUGH EACH CHANNEL?

FIGURE 2

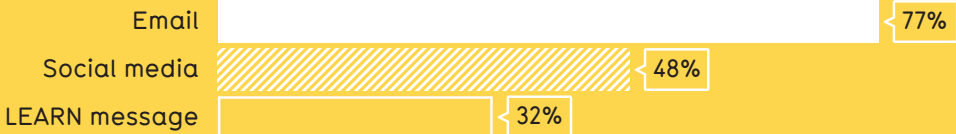


WHAT CHANNELS DO STUDENTS PREFER FOR EACH CATEGORY OF INFORMATION?

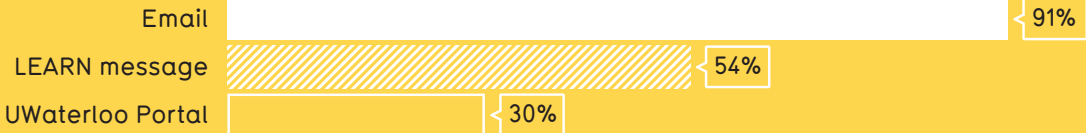
URGENT CAMPUS UPDATES



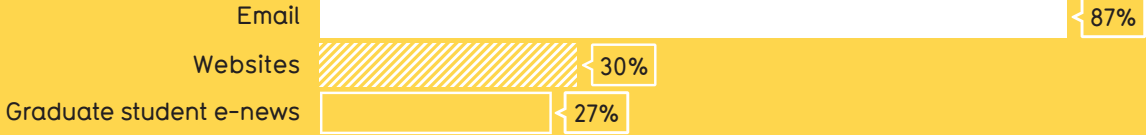
FACULTY OR PROGRAM/MAJOR EVENTS



REGISTRAR INFORMATION (UG)



GRADUATE STUDIES AND POSTDOCTORAL AFFAIRS (GSPA) INFORMATION (G)



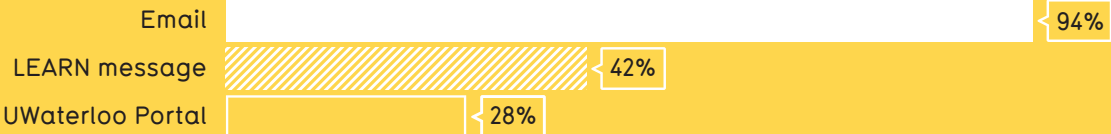
PART-TIME OPPORTUNITIES ON CAMPUS



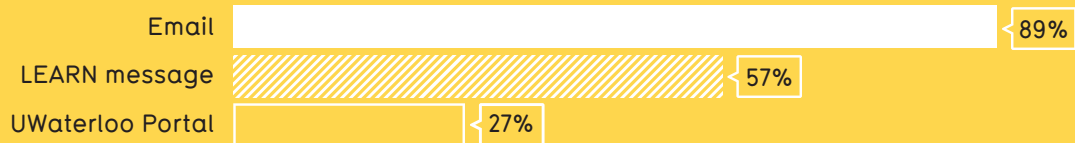
CAMPUS EVENTS FOR ALL STUDENTS



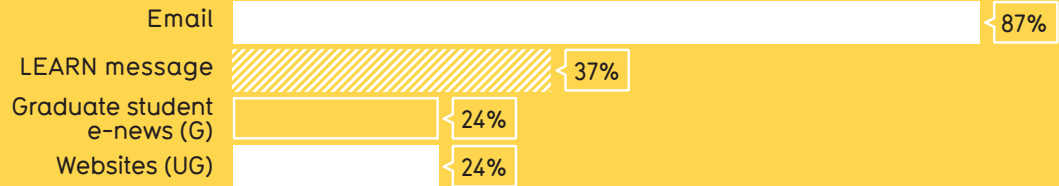
TUITION AND FEES



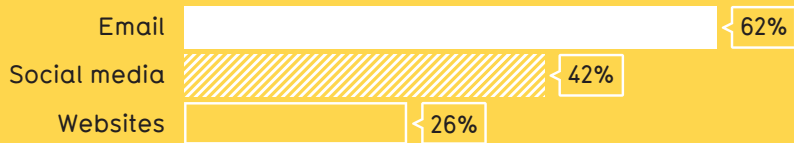
ACADEMIC INFORMATION



AWARDS AND FUNDING



STUDENT SERVICE INFORMATION AND EVENTS



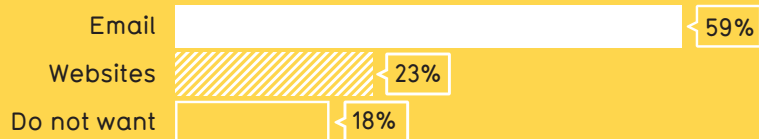
STUDENT UNION INFORMATION AND EVENTS (UG)



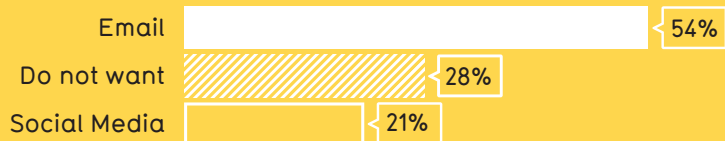
STUDENT ASSOCIATION INFORMATION AND EVENTS (G)



UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION



RESIDENCE INFORMATION AND EVENTS (UG)



RESIDENCE INFORMATION AND EVENTS (G)

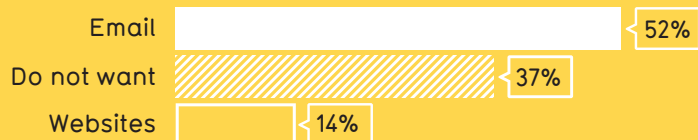


FIGURE 4

WHO DO STUDENTS CONSIDER TO BE AN IMPORTANT SOURCE OF INFORMATION ON CAMPUS?

ALL STUDENTS

PROFESSOR



UNDERGRADUATE

ACADEMIC ADVISOR



REGISTRAR'S OFFICE



GRADUATE

PROGRAM CO-ORDINATOR



GSPA



An important source of information is an individual or group that students trust and believe the information they provide to be reliable. Students continue to report professors and academic advisors (undergraduate) or program co-ordinators (graduate) as the most important sources of information on campus (see figure 4). However, ratings for both are down slightly from 2015. For undergraduate students, the Registrar's Office was more frequently rated as an important source in 2019 (79 per cent) than it was in 2015 (75 per cent). Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs (GSPA) is also an important source of information for graduate students with 71 per cent rating GSPA as an important source of information.

Students also reported professors and academic advisors/program co-ordinators as the senders that motivate them the most to read an email.

When we drilled down to ask about student services, students were most likely to list Health Services and the Library as important sources of information. Graduate students are more likely to select the Writing and Communications Centre as an important source of information. International students are more likely to select the Student Success Office (SSO) and The Centre as important sources of information.

Key Takeaway: Professors and academic advisors/program co-ordinators are important sources of information.

EMAIL



Key Takeaway: Most students use the @uwaterloo.ca email interface to check their email.

Since email is the most preferred channel for all types of information, we wanted to learn more about student preferences in relation to email. We asked students about checking and receiving emails as well as about their preferences for email formats.

When it comes to checking emails, we wanted to understand which interface students use to access their email. This information can help to inform how emails are sent, received and designed. The majority, more than three quarters of respondents, log in to the University's email interface for their @uwaterloo.ca email, versus about 10 per cent that have it forwarded to another email (e.g. Gmail). Graduate students are more likely to forward their emails to another email interface than undergraduate students (see figure 5).

Fifty-six per cent of respondents primarily use a mobile phone to check their email, and international students are 14 per cent more likely than domestic students to use a mobile device to read their email (see figure 6).



Key Takeaway: Most students use a mobile device as the primary way to read their email.



When sending emails to students, make sure the email is optimized for mobile and the content is clear and concise.

FIGURE 5

HOW DO STUDENTS CHECK THEIR UWATERLOO EMAIL?

Graduate vs. Undergraduate

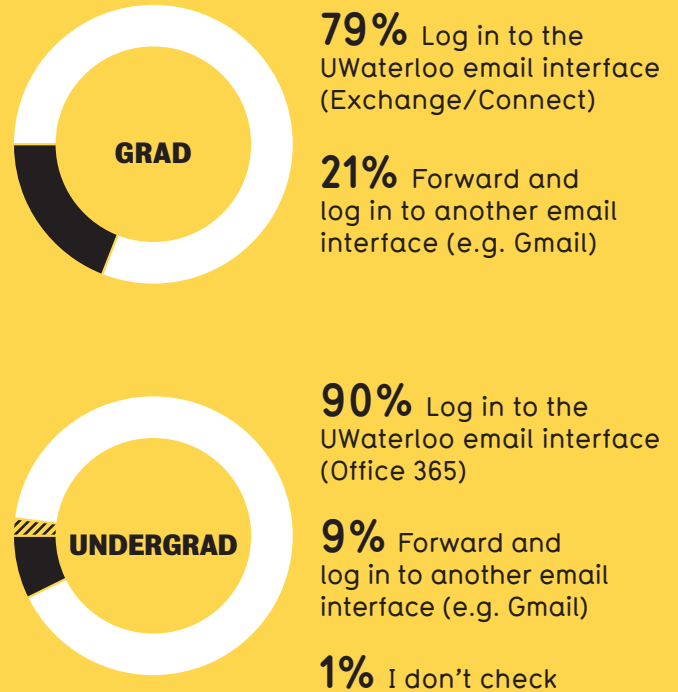


FIGURE 6

WHAT DEVICE DO STUDENTS USE MOST TO READ THEIR EMAIL?

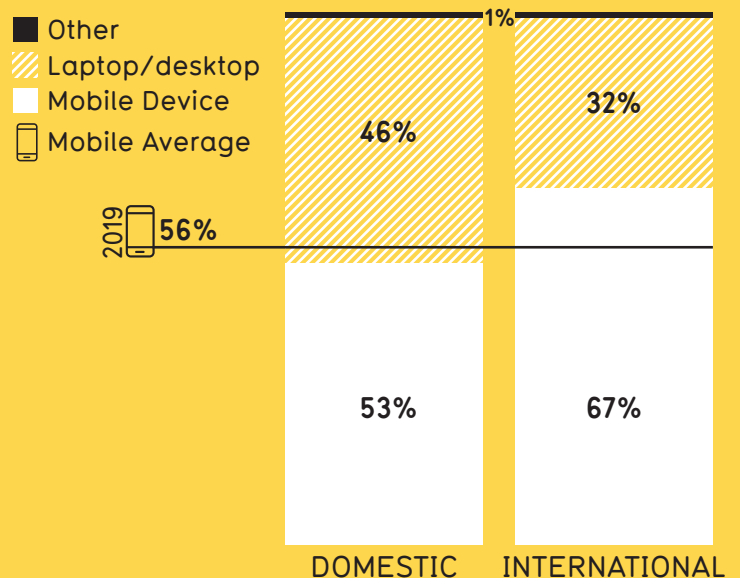
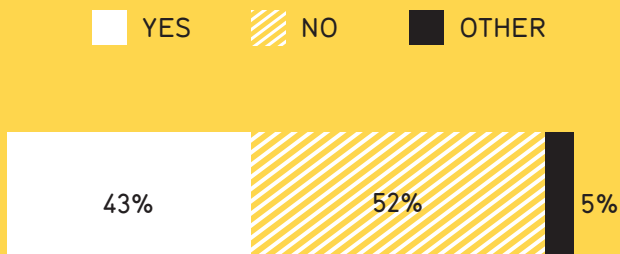


FIGURE 7

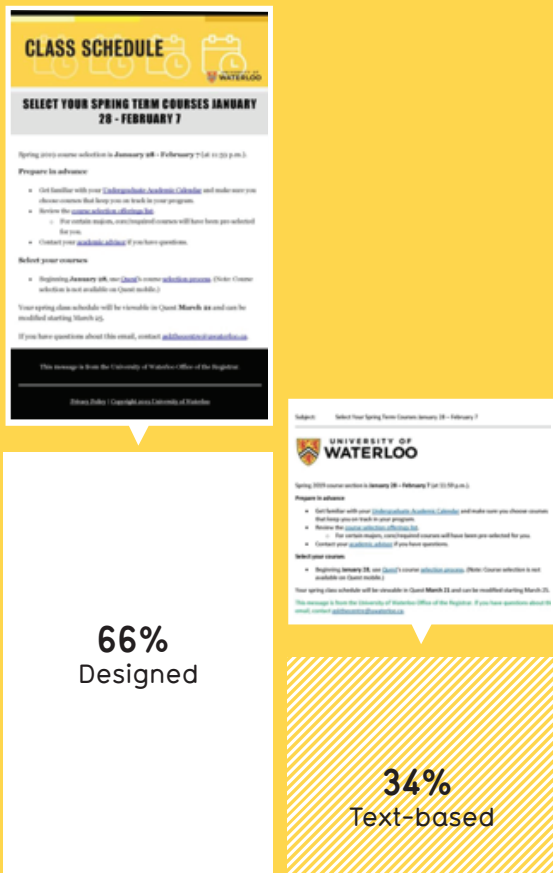
DO STUDENTS READ EVERY EMAIL FROM THE UNIVERSITY?



Less than half read every email – down 6% from 2015

FIGURE 8

WHICH STYLE OF EMAIL DO STUDENTS PREFER?



Only send students information that they want to receive or that they would consider relevant.

We often hear anecdotally from students that they get too many emails from the University. So, we asked! Just over half of the respondents reported receiving emails from the University daily or more often (52 per cent). The majority of students would like to receive emails less often. Graduate students were more likely to say that they receive emails daily or more often and that they prefer to receive emails daily. Only 43 per cent of students read every email from the University, fewer than in 2015 (see figure 7).



Key takeaway: Students reported they would prefer to receive emails from the University less often than they are currently.



Make sure email subject lines are relevant to the student and send the email from an individual versus a generic account.

When it comes to the format of an email, students prefer emails that have an attractive, stylized template with a header and footer (see figure 8). The relevancy of the subject line is most likely to influence whether or not they will read an email. The from line in an email is not as influential, but students are more motivated to read an email if it is from their professor or advisor/program co-ordinator. Overall, students prefer to receive an email from a person rather than a generic account.



When sending emails to students use a well-designed, branded email template.

SOCIAL MEDIA

We wanted to understand more about how students use social media platforms and which social media accounts associated with the University they look to for certain types of information.



Key takeaway: Facebook and Instagram are top social media platforms where students want to see information from the University.

Of those respondents who answered this question, most would like to see the University using the most popular social media platforms. Facebook and Instagram were the most popular overall. Graduate students were more likely to want to see the University using Twitter. International students were more likely to want to see the University using WeChat (see figure 9).

To understand how students use different social media platforms, we asked about two categories of use:

1. Entertainment and information (e.g. watching videos, finding out about events)
2. Connecting with others (e.g. messaging, posting, sharing)

For entertainment and information, students ranked YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook as used most often. When it came to connecting with others, Facebook was on top, followed by Instagram and Snapchat.

FIGURE 9

WHAT SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS WOULD STUDENTS LIKE TO SEE THE UNIVERSITY USING?

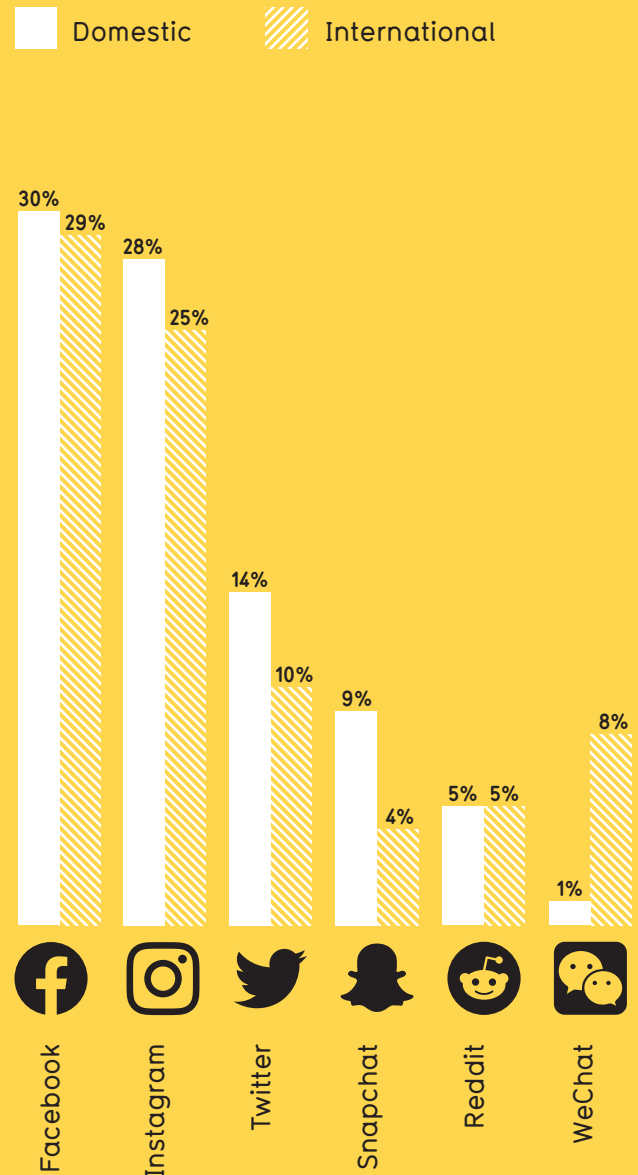


FIGURE 10

WHAT TYPES OF INFORMATION WOULD STUDENTS LIKE TO SEE ON EACH UWATERLOO SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNT?

- 1 @UofWaterloo – The University**
- Urgent campus updates
 - Tuition and fees
 - Campus events and Academic information (tied)

- 2 Faculty Social Media**
- Faculty or program/major events
 - Urgent campus updates
 - Student service information and events

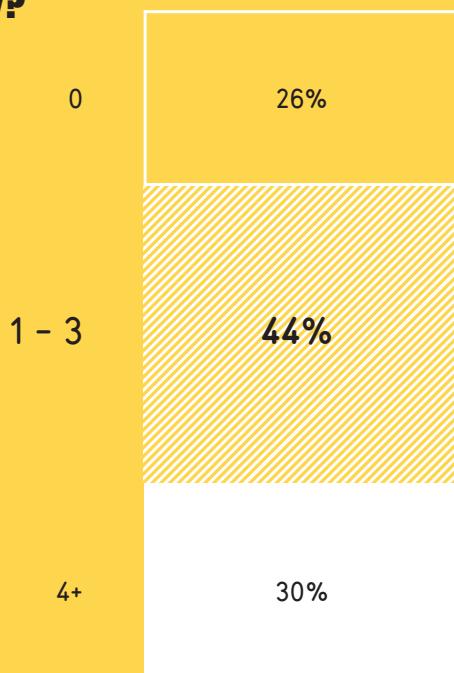
- 3 @UWaterlooLife – The SSO**
- Campus events
 - Urgent campus updates
 - Student service information and events

Most respondents follow the central University of Waterloo accounts (@UofWaterloo, @UWaterloo), their faculty, and the Student Success Office (@UWaterlooLife). Graduate students are more likely to follow their program on social media. Students want to see similar types of information, like urgent campus updates and events on each of the accounts (see figure 10). However, respondents look to their faculty accounts for faculty or program/major events. Students want to see information about tuition and fees on the University's central accounts.


When it comes to the number of social media accounts associated with the University that students follow, about a quarter of respondents (26 per cent) do not follow any of the accounts listed. Of those that do follow social media accounts associated with the University, most will follow one to three accounts, but many will not follow more than three accounts (see figure 11).

FIGURE 11

HOW MANY UWATERLOO ACCOUNTS DO STUDENTS FOLLOW?



Key Takeaway: Students are unlikely to follow more than three social media accounts associated with the University.

 If you are sharing information that is relevant to all students, utilize central social media accounts when possible.

CONCLUSIONS

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Students consistently identify email as their preferred communication channel for all types of information.
- Students would prefer to receive fewer emails from the University and less than half read every email.
- Students want to receive official information from the University via email. They are likely to choose social media for information about student life and services.
- Most students use the official uwaterloo.ca email interface versus forwarding to another email platform.
- Most students use a mobile device as the primary way to read their email.
- Professors and academic advisors/program co-ordinators are most often considered an important source of information on campus.
- Students want alerts for urgent campus updates in multiple formats including email, text/SMS, social media, websites, LEARN, and UWaterloo Portal.
- Facebook and Instagram are the top social channels that students want to see the University using.
- Students are unlikely to follow more than three social media accounts associated with the University and many don't follow any.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Consider the preferences of the student audience and the type of information when choosing how to communicate with students.
- Keep content short and simple and optimize emails for mobile when sending to students.
- Only send students information that they want to receive or that they would consider relevant.
- Make sure email subject lines are relevant to the student and send the email from an individual versus a generic account.
- Use a well-designed, branded template when sending emails to students.
- Coordinate the delivery of urgent campus updates to students through multiple channels.
- Consider utilizing central accounts for content that is applicable to all students.

UNIVERSITY OF
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