

UCGSA Brief on Free Speech

August 27th, 2026

Background:

The Graduate Students' Association of the University of Calgary conducts an annual survey of its membership. Last year, we also released our *Comprehensive Advocacy Survey*, a 114-question document on institutional, municipal, provincial, and federal advocacy priorities. Both surveys asked questions about free speech on campus and asked students to list their primary advocacy priorities.

Our annual survey has 785 respondents while our *Comprehensive Advocacy Survey* had 469, with a margin of error of +/- 4% 19 times out of 20. Both samples were random.

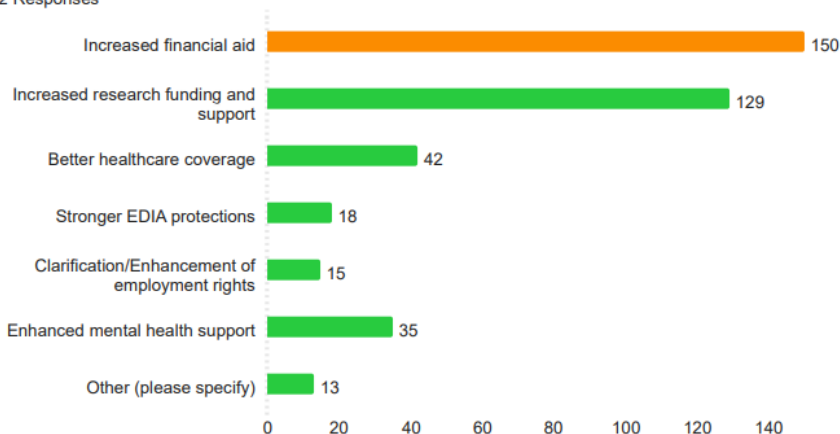
Data:

According to our *Comprehensive Advocacy Survey*, the graduate students do not perceive a free-speech crisis on campus. On the contrary, graduate students are concerned about the rollback of EDIA policies, with **45% of students saying that this is a severe or major problem**. When asked to name a provincial policy change that would have the largest positive impact of their studies, stronger EDIA protects had the **fifth most selections**, not including students who included some form of EDIA protections in "other," while **no respondents included free speech in the open response portion of the survey**.

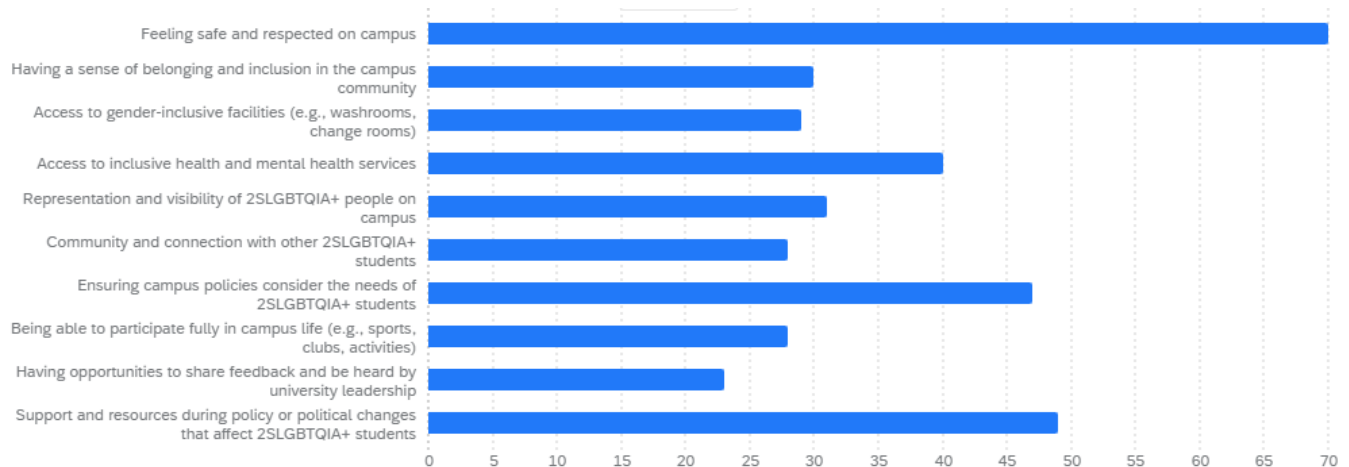
Overwhelmingly, students are concerned about financial aid, research funding, and mental health support, and see space for the university to be *more* aggressive in promoting equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility.

Q73 - Which provincial policy change would have the greatest positive impact on your graduate studies? - Selected Choice

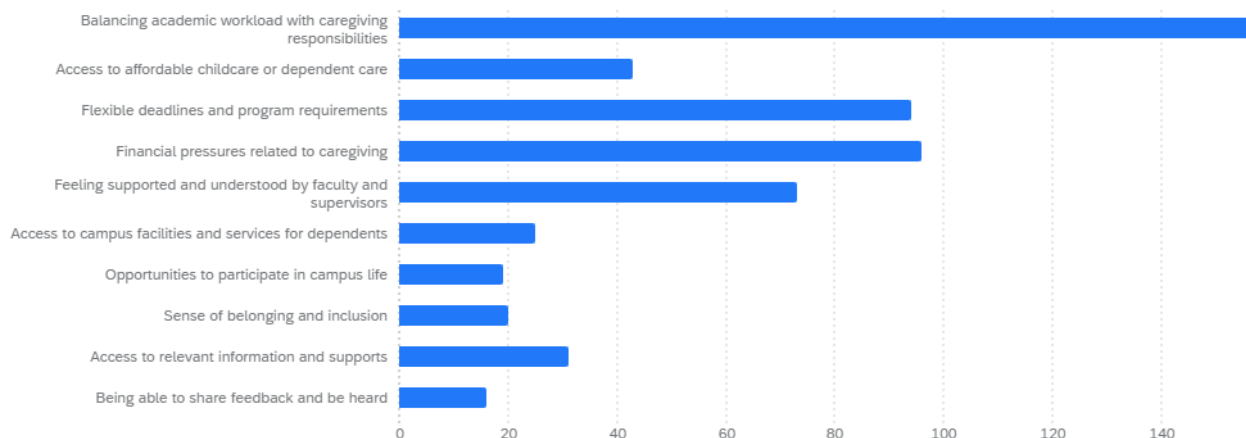
402 Responses



Similarly, while a majority of queer graduate student respondents to our annual survey believe that the university adequately listens to the concerns of 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, a sizeable portion (**30%**) believe that the university could do more to hear their voices. Additionally, when asked about their priorities on campus as queer students, **a near supermajority of respondents (62%) answered with “Feeling safe and respected on campus.”** 27% selected “Having a sense of belonging and inclusion in the campus community” and also “Representation and visibility of 2SLGBTQIA+ people on campus,” 25% selected “Being able to participate fully in campus life,” and **43% wanted supports and resources for queer students during policy or political changes that impact their lived experiences.**



One group of graduate students that *do* feel marginalized and isolated from campus life are **students with caregiving responsibilities**. Over a quarter of respondents to our annual survey (26%) have some form of caregiving responsibilities, and nearly **30% feel they are not included in campus and academic life**. When asked for their priorities, an **overwhelming majority of them (87%) chose balancing their academic and care-giving responsibilities**.



The marginalization faced by graduate students with caregiving responsibilities are cultural, but they do not involve issues of free speech. Instead, there are insufficient regulations to protect graduate students who have to make career sacrifices to start raising a family. This is compounded by general affordability and student debt concerns that can place an extreme financial burden on new families.

Given this data, we believe the following inferences can be drawn:

1. Graduate students at the University of Calgary believe existing free-speech policies are sufficient;
2. They believe government priorities should address funding, research, and mental health, rather than policing discourse on campus;
3. If the government *is* going to involve itself in speech issues on campus, graduate students lean in the direction of *enhancing* EDIA initiatives, rather than restricting them;
4. Vulnerable students, such as 2SLGBTQIA+ students, want safety and support on campus in order to successfully complete their degrees; and
5. A marginalized and isolated group that the government *could* help support are students with caregiving responsibilities, but this involves material support and protections for students beginning to raise a family, rather than the enforcement of speech codes.