

**UNDERGRADUATE**  
**ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE SURVEY**  
**2016-17**



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REPORT ON RESEARCH FINDINGS  
UNDERGRADUATE ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE SURVEY 2016-17

June 2017

Published by

Center for Enterprise and Society, University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh

House 56, Road 4/A, Dhanmondi, Dhaka 1212, Bangladesh, [www.ulab.edu.bd](http://www.ulab.edu.bd)

## Table of Contents

1. Background .....	3
2. Objective .....	4
3. Methodology .....	4
4. Research Findings .....	5
5. Conclusion .....	18

## List of Figures

Fig 1: Satisfaction with Overall University Experience .....	5
Fig 2: Satisfaction Levels across Majors .....	6
Fig 3: Satisfaction across Years of Enrolment .....	6
Fig 4: Perception of “Very Good Value-for-Money” across Income Groups (Income in BDT/Month) ....	7
Fig 5: Perception of “Very Good Value-for-Money” across Majors .....	8
Fig 6: Levels of Stress (All Students) .....	8
Fig 7: Level of Stress across Year of Enrolment .....	9
Fig 8: Level of Stress across Majors .....	9
Fig 9: Average Student to Faculty Ratio (Highest Response Rates) .....	10
Fig 10: Satisfaction with Faculty Members .....	10
Fig 11: Satisfaction with Faculty Members across Income Groups (Income in BDT/Month) .....	11
Fig 12: Availability of Faculty Members across Majors .....	11
Fig 13: Availability of Faculty Members across Years of Enrolment .....	12
Fig 14: Relevance/Practicality of Curriculum .....	13
Fig 15: Level of Satisfaction with Career Services .....	13
Fig 16: Self-perception of Mental/Emotional Wellbeing .....	14
Fig 17: Mental/Emotional Wellbeing across Years of Enrolment .....	14
Fig 18: Level of Satisfaction with Extracurricular Activities .....	15
Fig 19: Trends in Satisfaction with Extracurricular Activities over 4 years .....	15
Fig 20: Satisfaction with University Facilities and Resources .....	16
Fig 21: Level of Satisfaction with Health/Hygiene Standards .....	16
Fig 22: Satisfaction with Health/Hygiene Standards across Years of Enrolment .....	17
Fig 23: Level of Satisfaction with Safety/Security Arrangements.....	17

## 1. BACKGROUND

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) defines demographic dividend as the economic growth potential that can result from shifts in a population's age structure, mainly when the share of the working-age population (15 to 64) is larger than the non-working-age share of the population (14 and younger, and 65 and older). As a country enters a stage of demographic dividend, with appropriate policy interventions, there can be a significant boost in economic productivity as growing numbers of people join the work force relative to the number of dependents.

According to the World Bank, 66% of Bangladesh's population lies in the 15-64 years age group. This translates to approximately 106 million working-age people, which constitutes a significant boon for and a challenge to Bangladesh's growth aspirations. Moreover, a third of the population is aged 15 or younger. This is a sizable population subset and constitutes the potential size of the tertiary sector in Bangladesh. Moreover, with large increases in the number of private universities catering to the demographic dividend, and increasing number of graduates produced by the public and private university system, it has become imperative to assess the quality of the university system in Bangladesh from the perspective of the beneficiaries themselves, i.e., the students.

To repeat an oft-cited truism, the youth and perhaps the university-going youth in particular, represent the country's future. The hope for the youth is that they will, in addition to holding respectable positions of employment or entrepreneurship, uphold civic values and responsibilities that complement our development as a nation. Therefore, it is important to assess their feedback regarding their overall undergraduate experience, which is a crucial period for mental, emotional and intellectual development, in addition to skill development.

With that in mind, the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB) has conducted a student satisfaction survey to assess students' perceptions. Data on how students perceive their academic experience at public and private universities can generate awareness among universities, private sector stakeholders, civil society members, and the University Grants Commission (UGC), on areas that require attention and intervention, and thus contribute to the development of the tertiary education sector.

## 2. OBJECTIVE

The objective of the Undergraduate Academic Experience Survey 2016-17 has been to assess student satisfaction regarding their undergraduate academic experience. In addition to overall satisfaction level, the survey has sought to understand students' perception of whether their educational experience was "value-for-money", their average academic work load, desired characteristics in faculty members, satisfaction with faculty members, student-faculty ratio, class size, satisfaction with of extra-curricular activities, university facilities, as well as their outlook on their careers.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

The research consisted of a quantitative and qualitative survey of students in private and public universities in Dhaka, the largest urban center of Bangladesh. Moreover, more than 50% of all universities in Bangladesh are situated in Dhaka (and most of the leading public and private institutions).

Details regarding sampling breakdown:

- A total of 460 respondents constituted the survey sample
- Of this sample, 290 respondents were drawn from private universities and 170 from public universities. The private to public university ratio of 59:41 is consistent with student population estimates in UGC Annual Report 2011
- A total of 230 male respondents and 230 female respondents were surveyed. The male to female student ratio varies from university to university and therefore, the nationally representative ratio has been used (approximately 50:50)
- Other demographic categories covered include:
  - Student year of enrolment (1<sup>st</sup> Year/2<sup>nd</sup> Year/3<sup>rd</sup> Year/4<sup>th</sup> Year/Others)
  - Student's choice of major
  - Students' family income

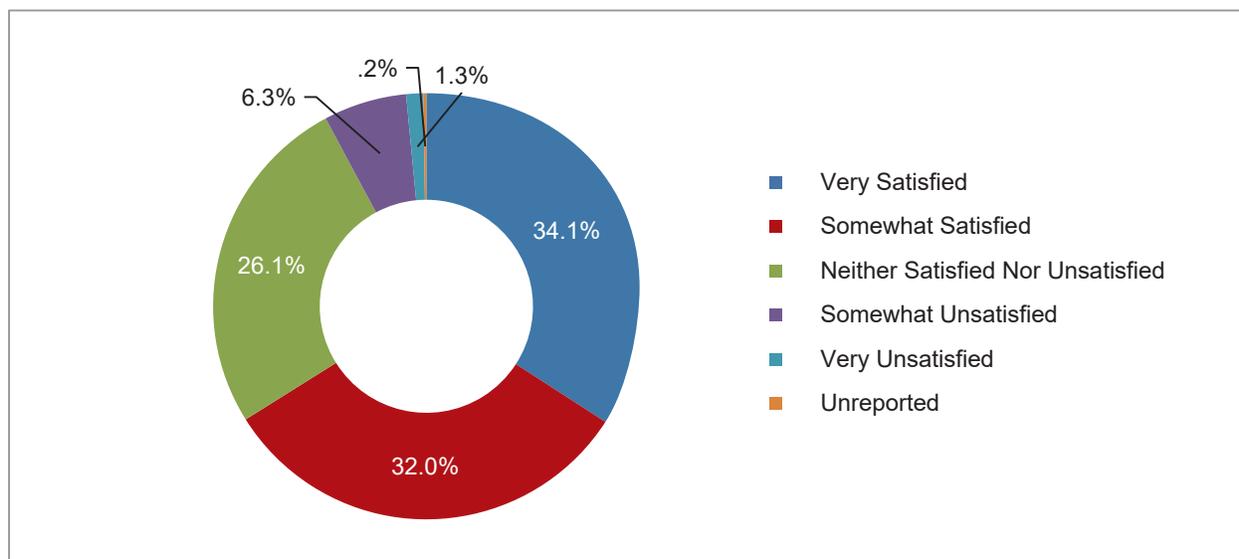
For the quantitative survey, data collection was conducted using structured questionnaires and pen-and-paper interviewing technique (PAPI). The questionnaires were drafted, field-tested and finalized incorporating feedback from the field test. All field staff, enumerators and field supervisors were centrally trained with regard to the nature and scope of the study, information coverage of the questionnaires, interviewing etiquette, and quality control measures.

## 4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

### Overall Satisfaction

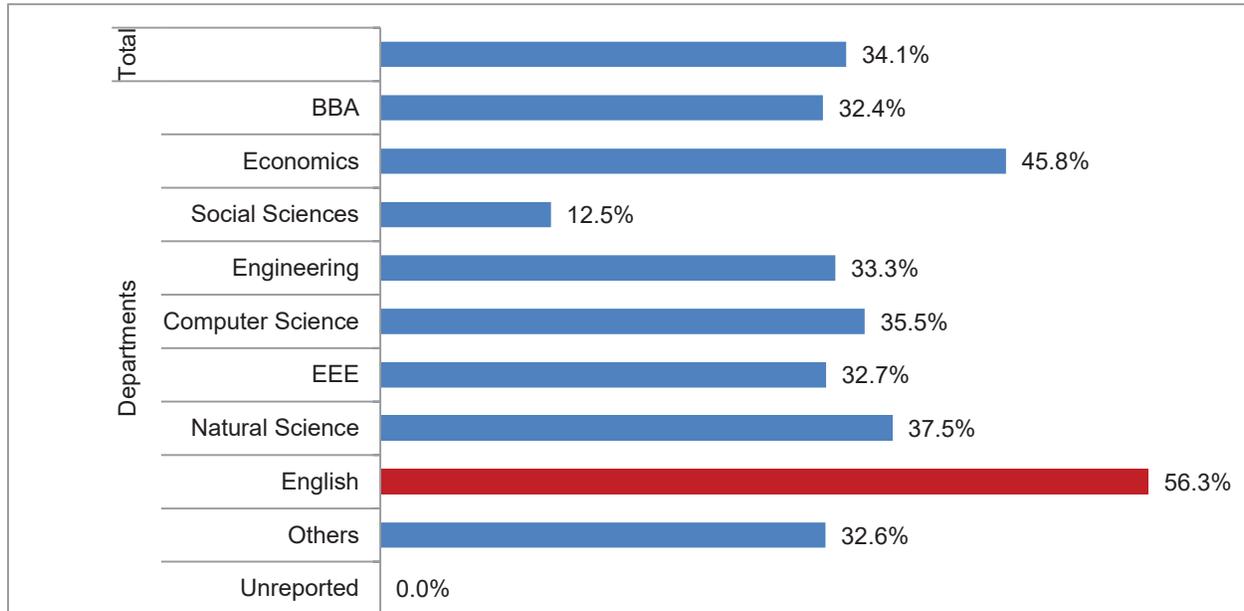
The good news is that undergraduate students, in terms of cumulative satisfaction with the quality of their undergraduate experience, appear to be quite satisfied. For instance, less than 10 percent of student respondents said they were “Very Unsatisfied” or “Somewhat Unsatisfied” with the quality of their university experience. Meanwhile, more than two-thirds reported to being “Very Satisfied” or “Somewhat Satisfied” (Fig 1).

**Fig 1: Satisfaction with Overall University Experience**

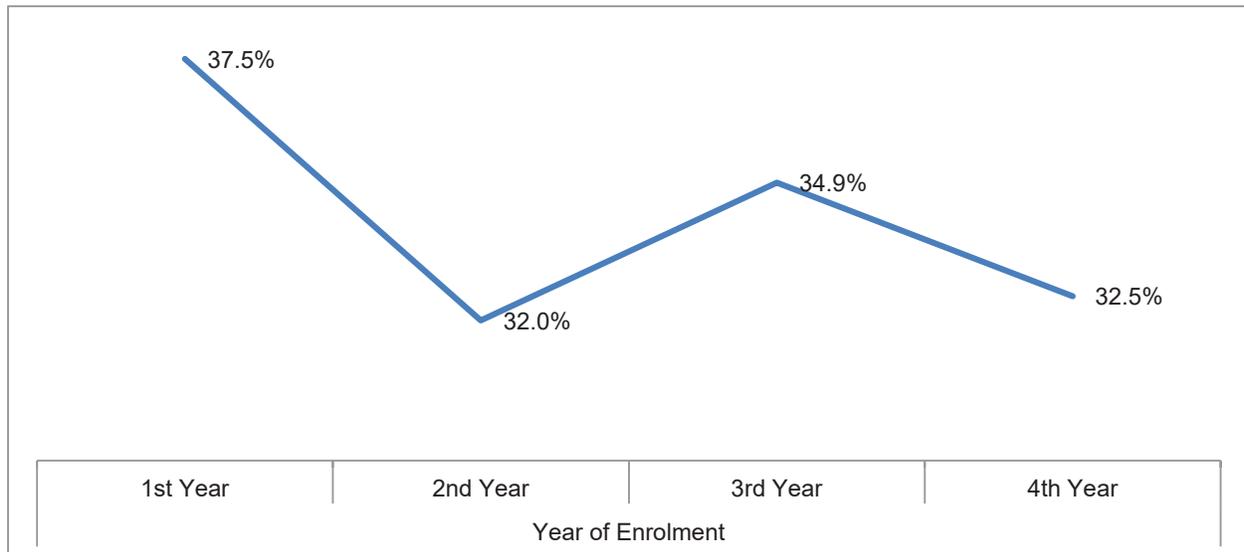


Satisfaction levels are comparable across male and female respondents. The highest-income groups are more likely to report being “Very Satisfied” than the lower income groups. But it is plausible that their level of satisfaction may correlate with other factors external to their university experience, such as not having to worry about tuition fees. Across majors, English major respondents are most likely to be “Very Satisfied” (Fig 2). Moreover, satisfaction levels also appear to decline somewhat in the course of a student’s enrollment at a university (Fig 3).

**Fig 2: Satisfaction Levels across Majors**



**Fig 3: Satisfaction across Years of Enrolment**

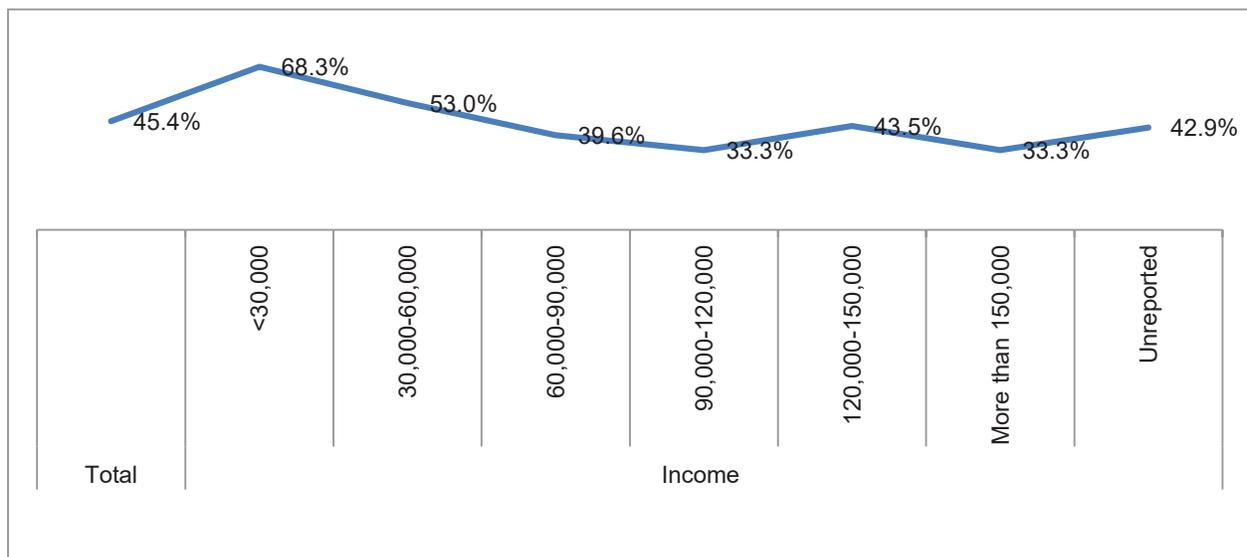


In terms of reasons cited by students for their satisfaction, the overwhelming reasons appear to be teaching skills and methods and also “good attitude towards students by faculty.” Therefore, it appears that faculty members play a crucial role in students’ level of satisfaction. Among reasons cited for dissatisfaction, the highest response rate is for the criterion “Mental/Emotional Wellbeing.”

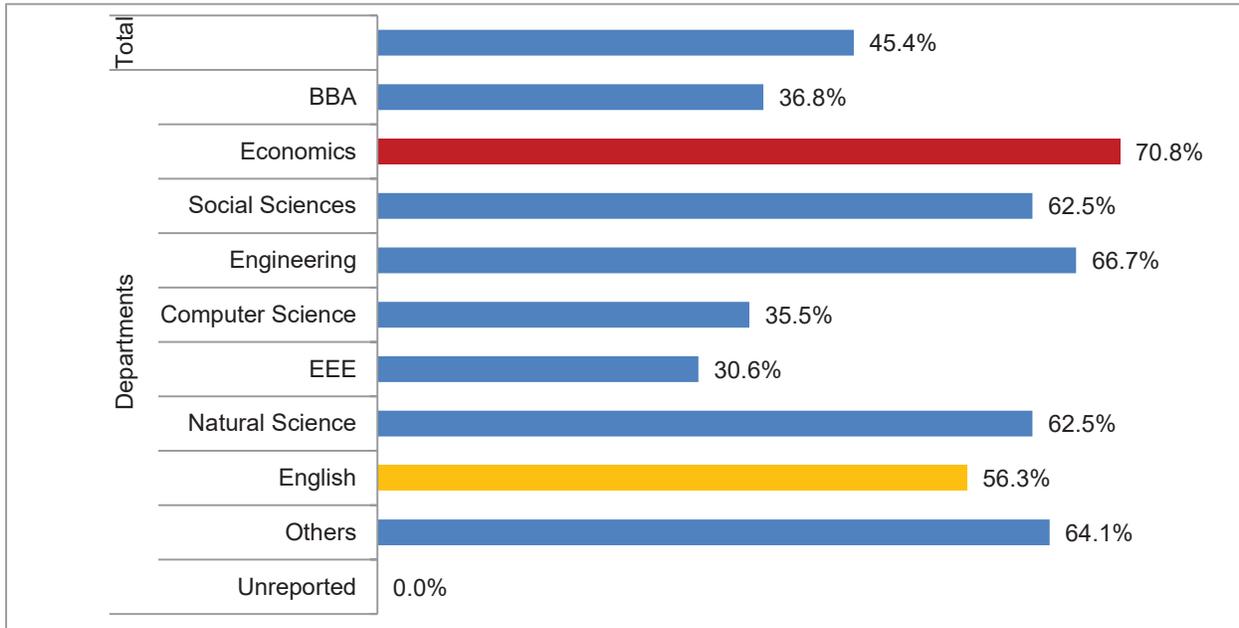
## Perception of Value-for-Money

Less than half the students surveyed reported that they think that the education they receive is “Very Good Value -for-Money”. However, less than 6% said it was “Poor Value -for-Money” or “Very Poor Value -for-Money”. Perception of value for money is comparable across male and female respondents. Interestingly, the lowest income-groups are more likely to regard their education “Very Good Value-for-Money” than then higher income groups (Fig 4). There appears to be no trends or no noticeable change in perception for “Value-for-Money” across year of enrolment. However, comparing across majors, curiously, Economics majors and Media Studies/Journalism majors are most likely to perceive their education as “Very Good Value-for-Money”, at 70.8% and 66.7% response rates, respectively (Fig 5).

**Fig 4: Perception of “Very Good Value-for-Money” across Income Groups (Income in BDT/Month)**



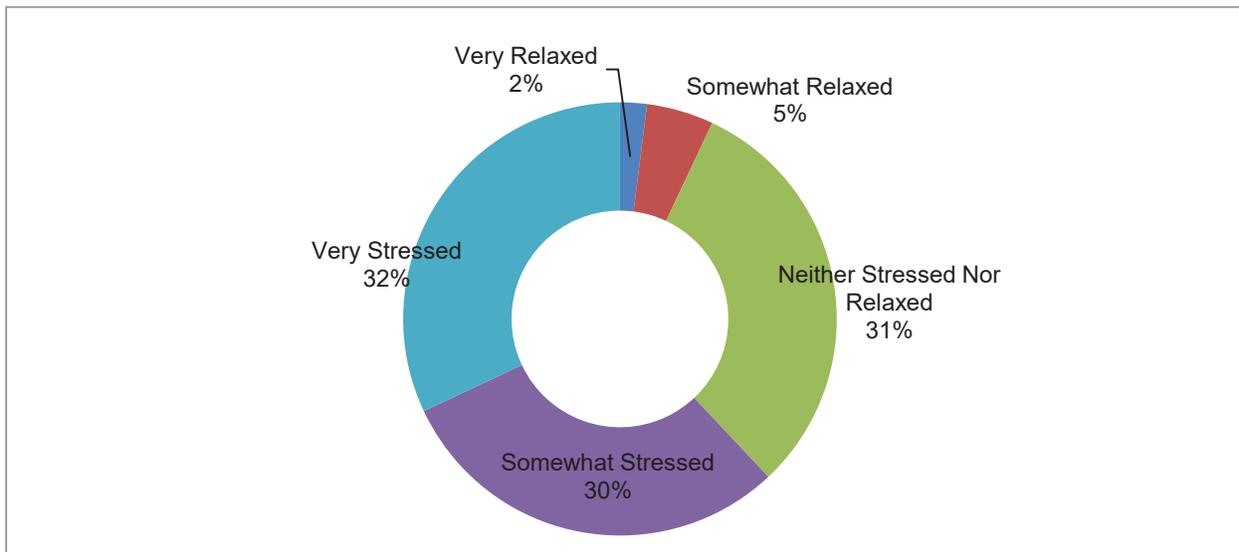
**Fig 5: Perception of “Very Good Value-for-Money” across Majors**



### Students’ Experience of Academic Stress

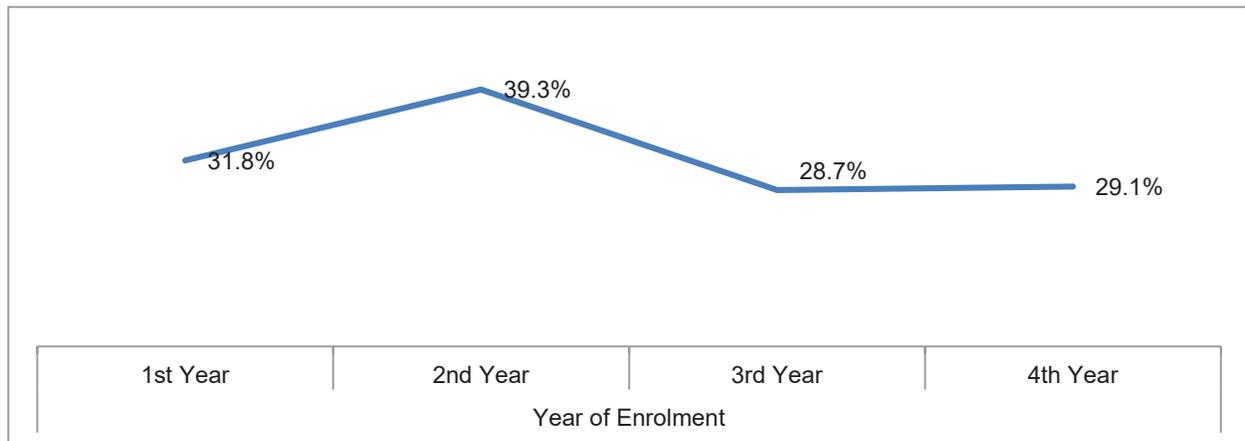
Levels of reported stress due to workload such as course work, assignments, exam preparation and office hours with faculty, appear to be high. About 62.2% of all students surveyed reported to being either “Very Stressed” or “Somewhat Stressed” (Fig 6). Whether this speaks more about the stress at our universities or the pre-university preparation of students to handle an undergraduate academic workload is debatable. Stress levels are also comparable across male and female respondents.

**Fig 6: Levels of Stress (All Students)**

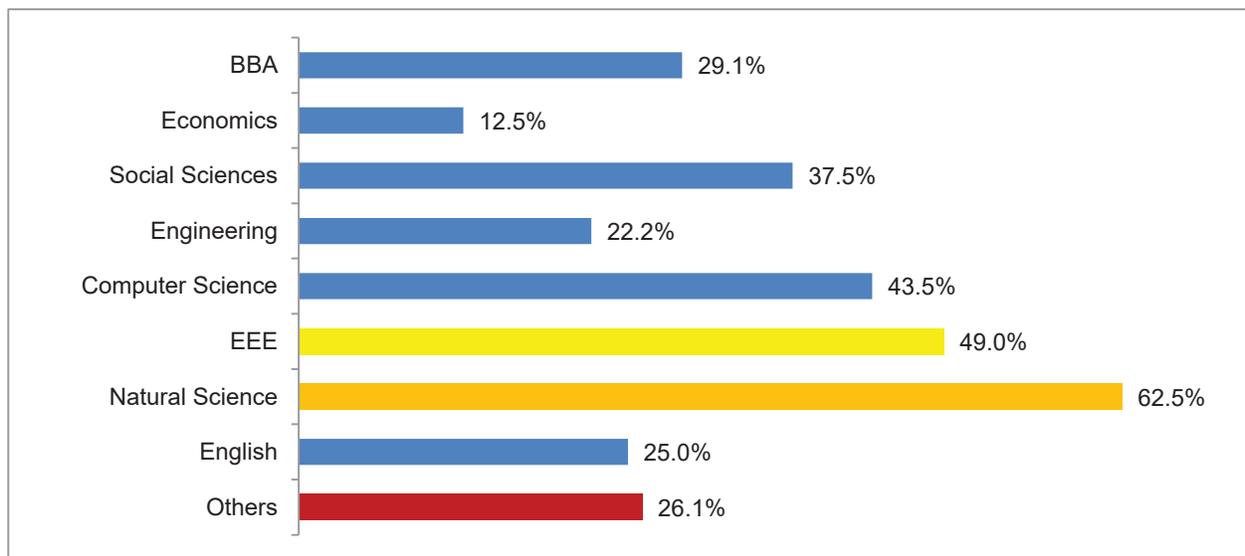


The level of stress appears to go down in the course of a student’s enrolment, with second year students being most likely to report to being “Very Stressed” (Fig 7). Moreover, Natural Sciences majors (e.g., Biology, Physics, Chemistry, etc.) and Engineering majors are most likely to be very stressed (Fig 8).

**Fig 7: Level of Stress across Year of Enrolment**



**Fig 8: Level of Stress across Majors**

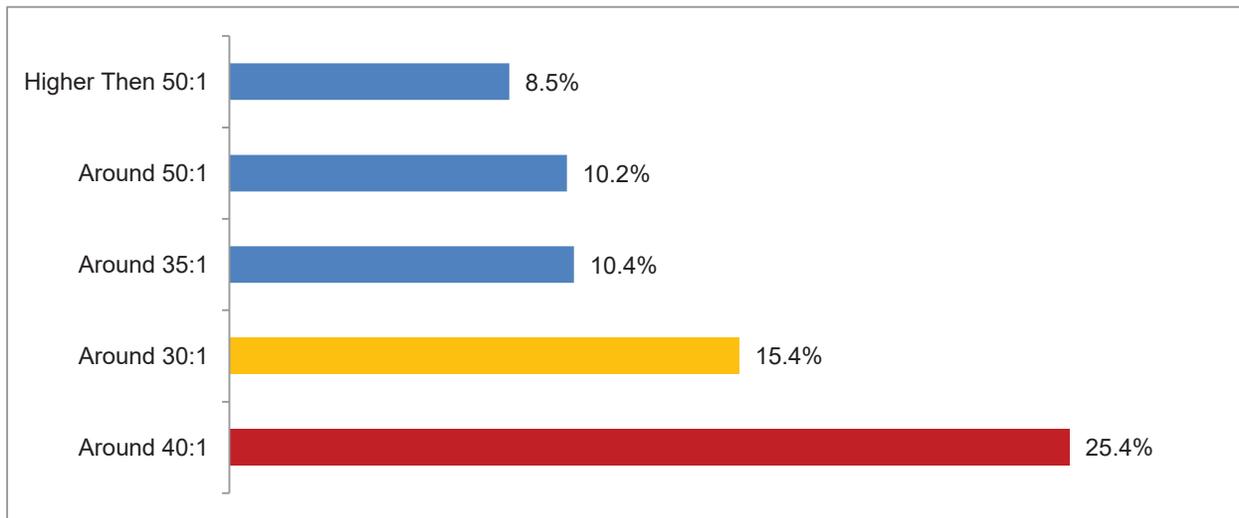


### Student-Faculty Ratio

According to our survey, the average size of the university classroom in Bangladesh appears to be 30-40 students per class. This is on the higher side, but partially explainable by the demographic dividend in Bangladesh, i.e., the sheer number of university students in the country (and also the fact that the survey was not conducted in the smaller private universities). Private

university classroom size is smaller than public university counterparts, which is to be expected. With regard to student-faculty ratio, the highest response rate from private university students fall within 30:1 to 40:1 (Fig 9). For public university, the highest response rate falls within 50:1 and higher. Meanwhile, engineering students also appear to enjoy the smallest classrooms.

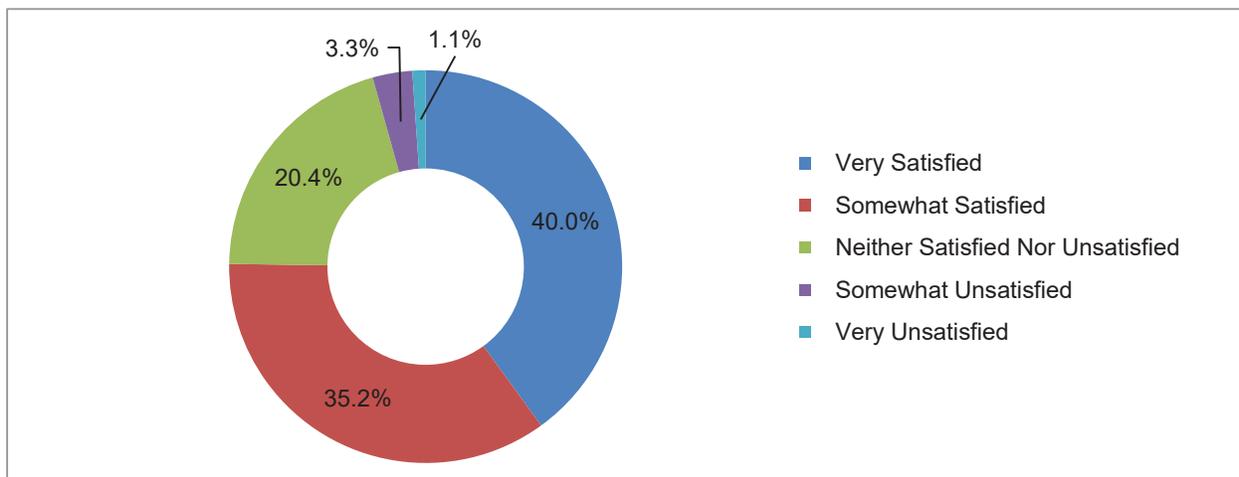
**Fig 9: Average Student to Faculty Ratio (Highest Response Rates)**



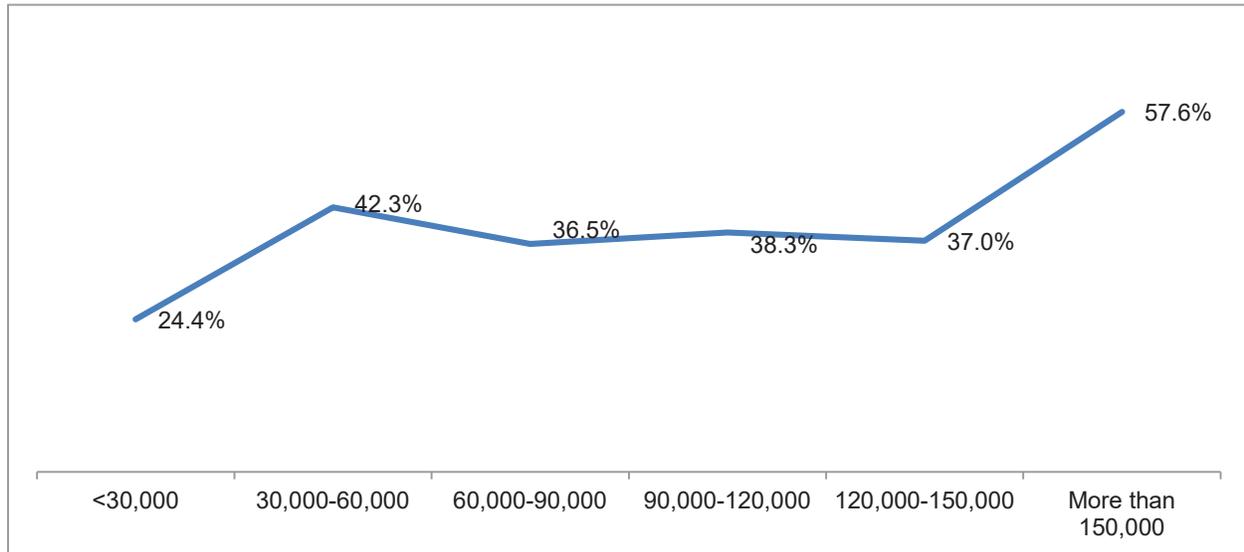
### Satisfaction with Quality and Availability of Faculty Members

One of the most promising results of this survey is the overall high level of satisfaction with faculty members at our leading universities. Over 75% of all students are either “Very Satisfied” or “Somewhat Satisfied” with the quality of faculty members at their universities (Fig 10). The highest income group (BDT 150,000+ per month) is the most likely to being satisfied with the quality of faculty members (Fig 11). Whether students from higher socio-economic groups receive preferential treatment merits closer attention.

**Fig 10: Satisfaction with Faculty Members**

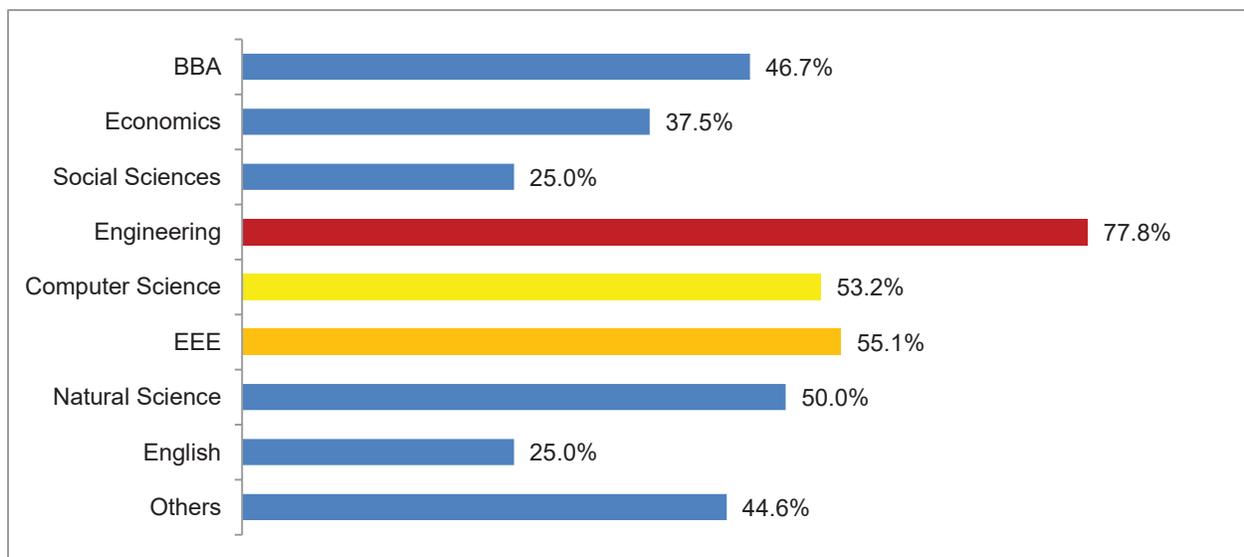


**Fig 11: Satisfaction with Faculty Members across Income Groups (Income in BDT/Month)**

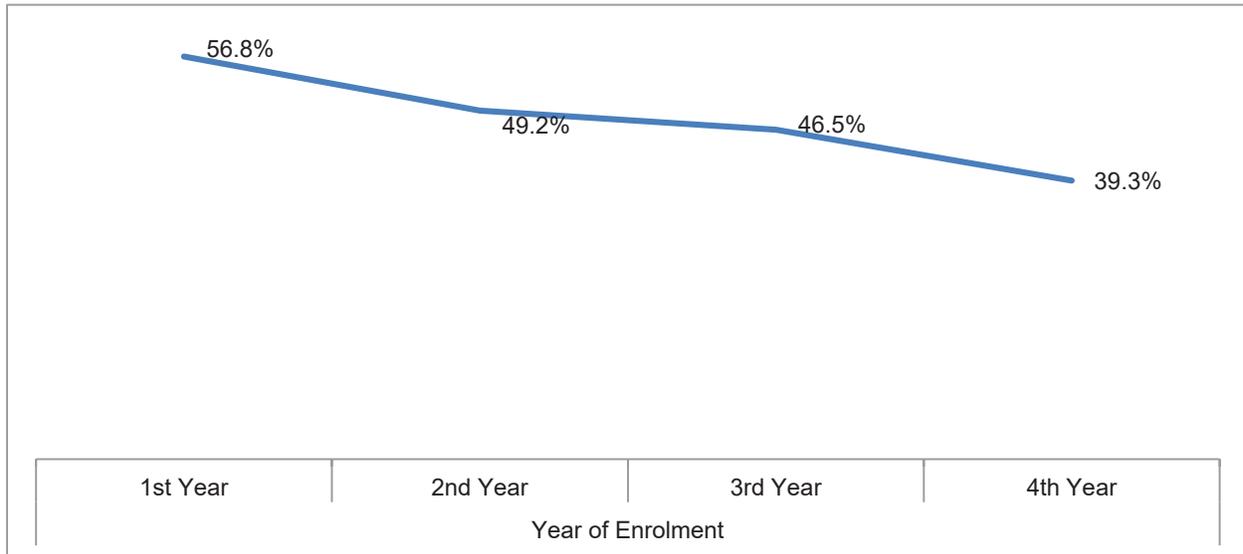


Regarding availability of faculty members, 77.8% of students reported their faculty members are either “Always Available” (47.4%) or “Somewhat Available” (30.4%). Private university respondents are more likely to report that their faculty members are available. Engineering and computer science students are most likely to report that their faculty members are “Always Available” (Fig 12). Availability of faculty also appears to go down in the course of a student’s undergraduate life (Fig 13).

**Fig 12: Availability of Faculty Members across Majors**



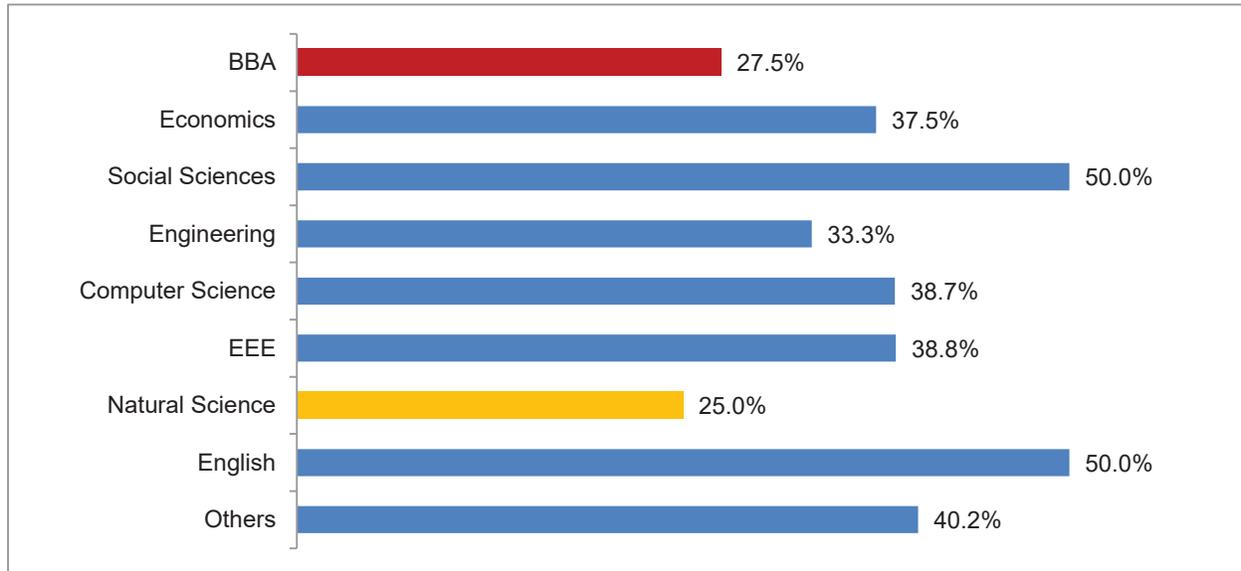
**Fig 13: Availability of Faculty Members across Years of Enrolment**



### **Practicality and Relevance of Course Curriculum**

A salient issue oft-discussed among academics and administrators is the relevance of course curriculum to real-world job skills. The results of the survey yield interesting results. Only around a third of respondents (34.6%) consider the curriculum to be “Very Relevant/Practical” and 33.5% regard it as “Somewhat Relevant/Practical”. The curriculum, being a foundational element to any level of education, in particular tertiary education, ought to have received higher response rates for relevance/practicality. Comparing across departments, only 27.5% of BBA students consider their curriculum to be relevant, which is not a promising statistic, given the inherently practical objectives of a BBA education (Fig 14). There are suggestions that this low response rate is partially due to the fact that textbooks have a foreign orientation in their content and also because students find faculty members to be less industry-oriented than desired. Students majoring in natural sciences also reported a low perception of practicality of curriculum (25.0%).

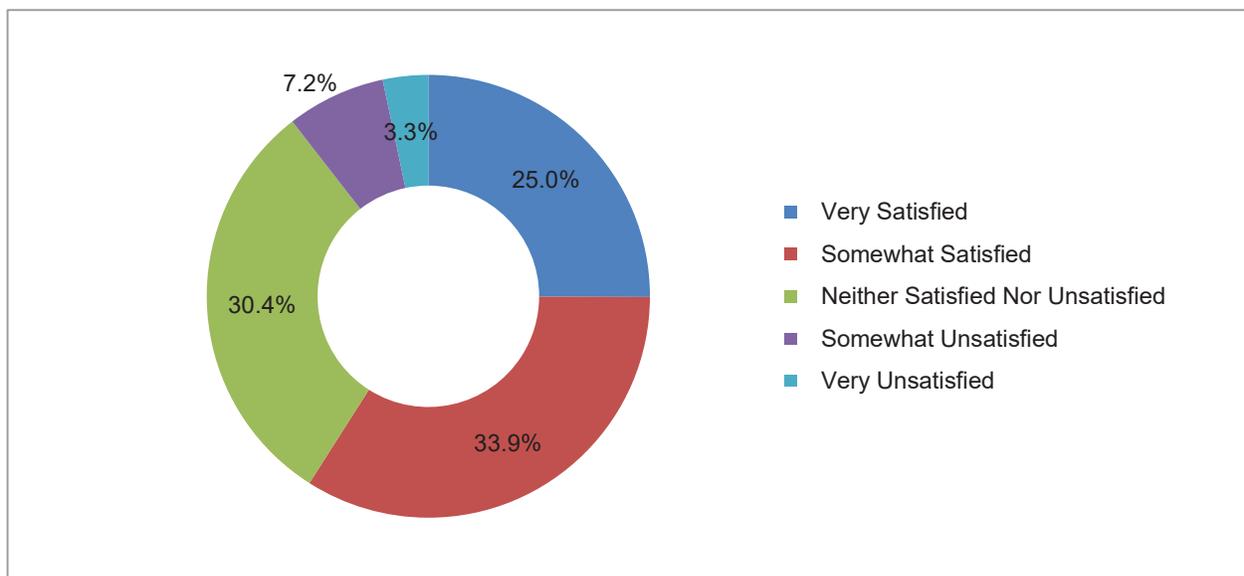
**Fig 14: Relevance/Practicality of Curriculum**



### Career Vision and Career Preparedness

Although 75.4% of students think that their university education has helped them develop a vision for their career, only 25.0% are “Very Satisfied” with the career services at their university and 33.9% are “Somewhat Satisfied” (Fig 15). Also interesting to note is that out of 182 BBA students (the largest major group represented in the sample), only 26.4% are “Very Satisfied” with their career services office.

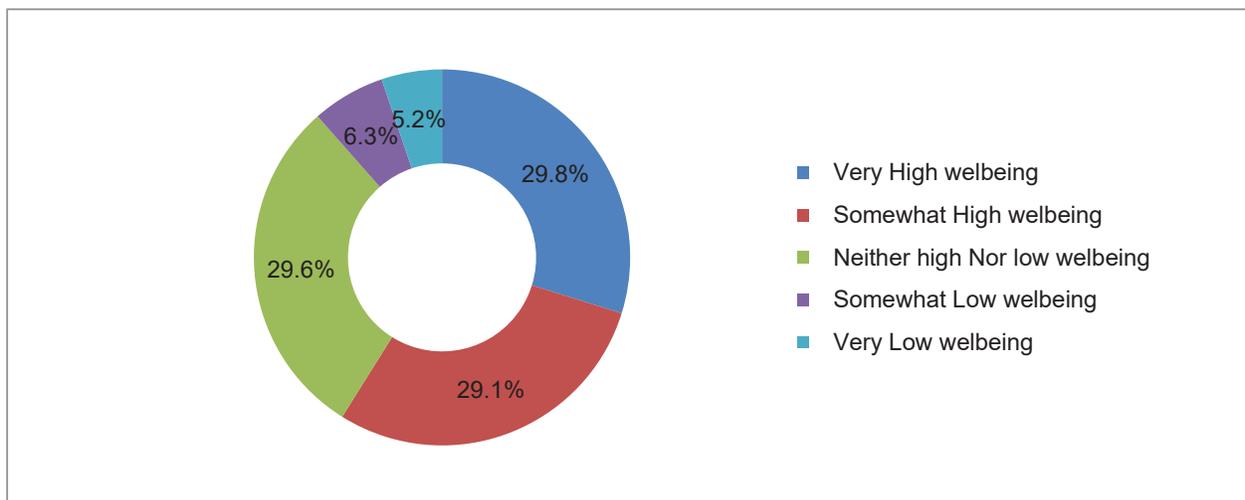
**Fig 15: Level of Satisfaction with Career Services**



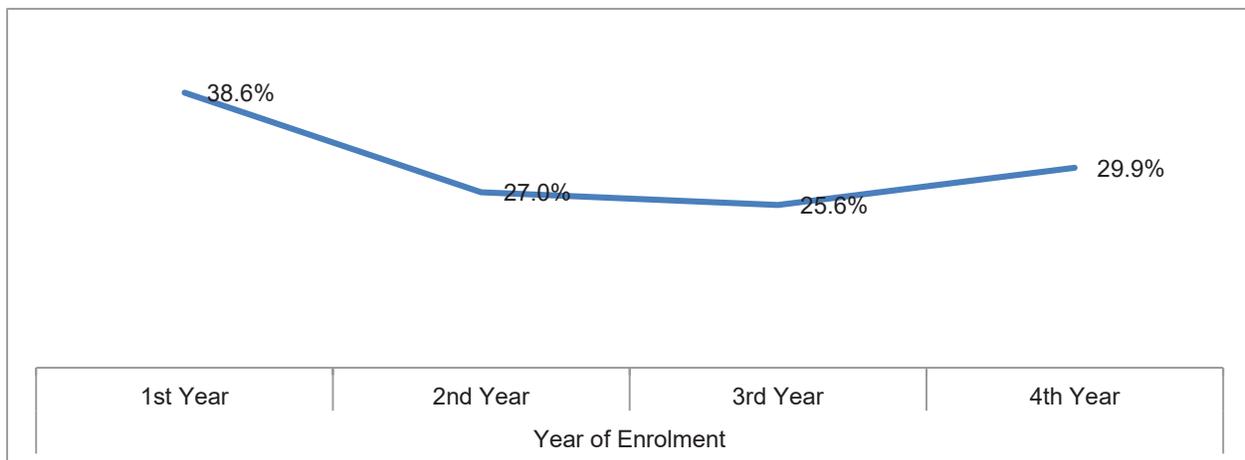
## Mental / Emotional Health

Mental and emotional health is an increasingly important criterion to an undergraduate life that some universities have taken note of. Certain universities have dedicated student affairs offices and counseling centers and resources to help students navigate the emotional and mental complexities of university life. Troubles at home or in social and romantic lives of students can take heavy toll on their mental and emotional health, thereby affecting their ability to perform in their courses, and even, in some cases, complete their studies. Our survey finds that students’ self-reported statistics reveal that there is scope for much to be done in this space, since 29.8% of students report to having “Very High Mental/Emotional Wellbeing” and 29.1% report to having “Somewhat High Mental/Emotional Wellbeing” (Fig 16). Female students report slightly higher levels of wellbeing than male students. Level of wellbeing also appears to go down after the first year of enrolment (Fig 17), reaching their lowest levels in year 2 and year 3 of enrolment.

**Fig 16: Self-perception of Mental/Emotional Wellbeing**



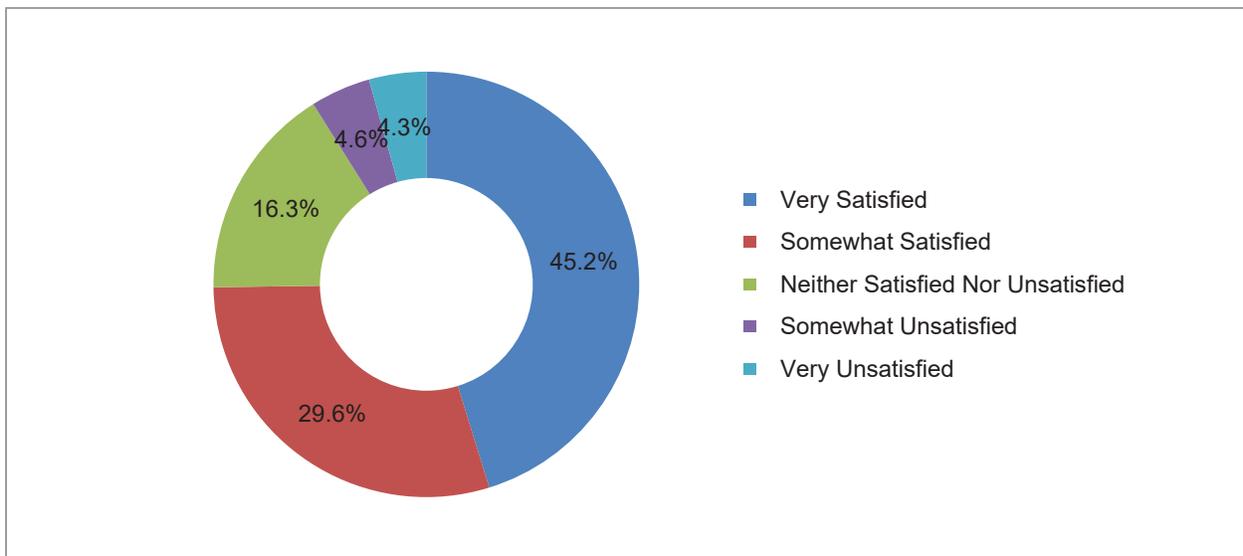
**Fig 17: Mental/Emotional Wellbeing across Years of Enrolment**



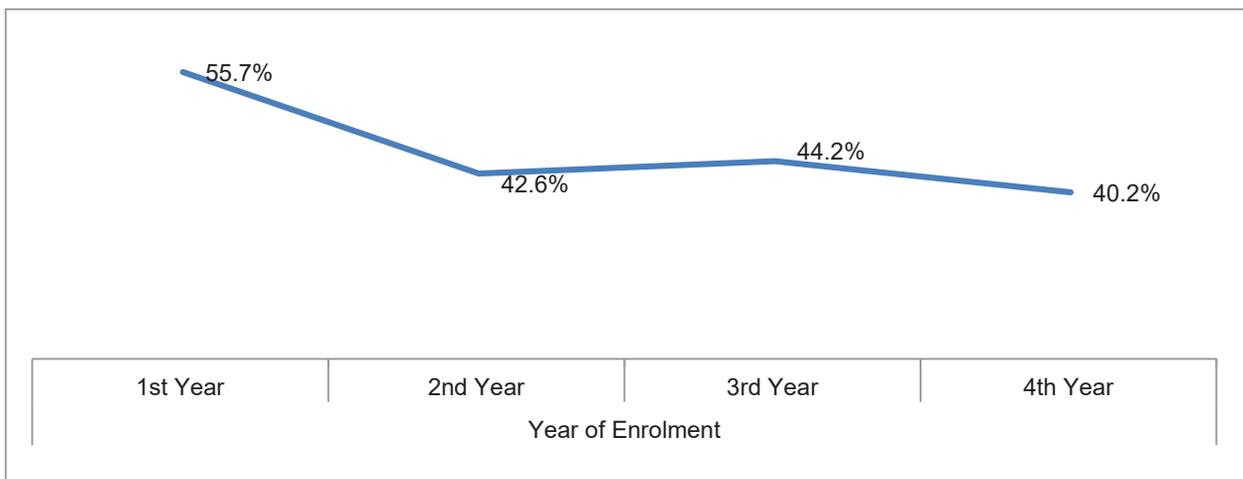
### Extracurricular Activities: Perception of Importance and Level of Satisfaction

Only 59.6% of all students perceive extracurricular activities to be “Very Important” and 22.6% perceive it to be “Somewhat Important”. There is clearly scope for awareness generation so students begin to regard extracurricular activities as more important to their lives and education. With regard to satisfaction levels, less than 50% of students are “Very Satisfied” with the extracurricular activities at their university and 29.6% are “Somewhat Satisfied” (Fig 18). Satisfaction with extracurricular activities appears to be highest in the first year of enrolment and lowest in the fourth year (Fig 19).

**Fig 18: Level of Satisfaction with Extracurricular Activities**



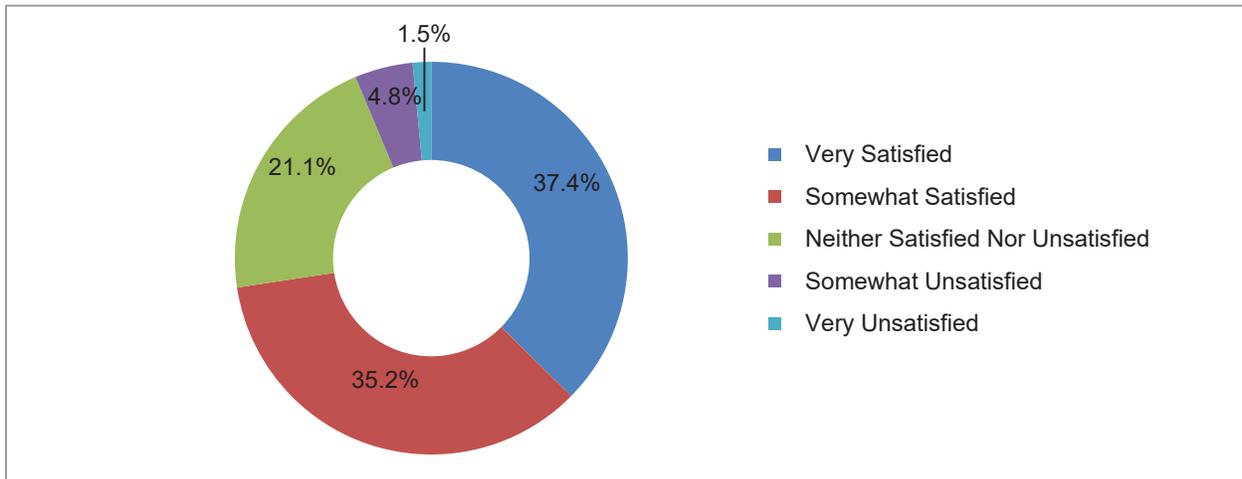
**Fig 19: Trends in Satisfaction with Extracurricular Activities over 4 years**



## Satisfaction across Other Parameters

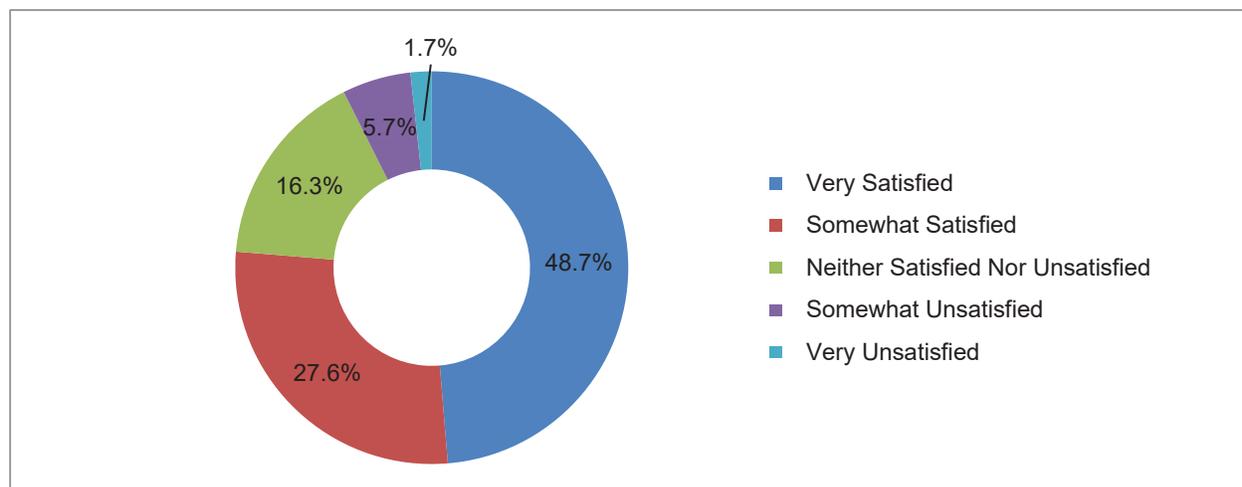
**University Facilities:** Across the entire set of student respondents, 72.6% report to being “Very Satisfied” or “Somewhat Satisfied” with university facilities such as computer lab, library, and cafeteria (Fig 20).

**Fig 20: Satisfaction with University Facilities and Resources**

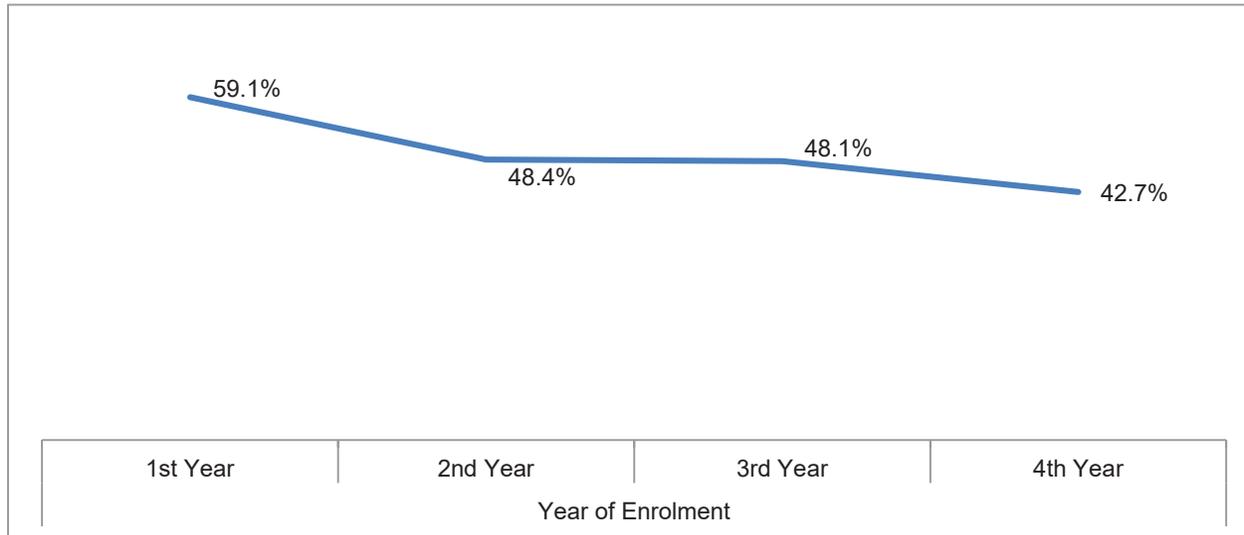


**Health and Hygiene:** With regard to health and hygiene standards, less than half report to being “Very Satisfied” and 27.6% “Somewhat Satisfied” (Fig 21). Given the context of a developing country, and the significant logistical resources required for health and hygiene standards in organizations of the scale that most leading universities tend to have, these statistics are not surprising. However, this is an area that requires to be addressed. Satisfaction levels with health and hygiene standards also decline over the four years of enrolment in an undergraduate program (Fig 22).

**Fig 21: Level of Satisfaction with Health/Hygiene Standards**

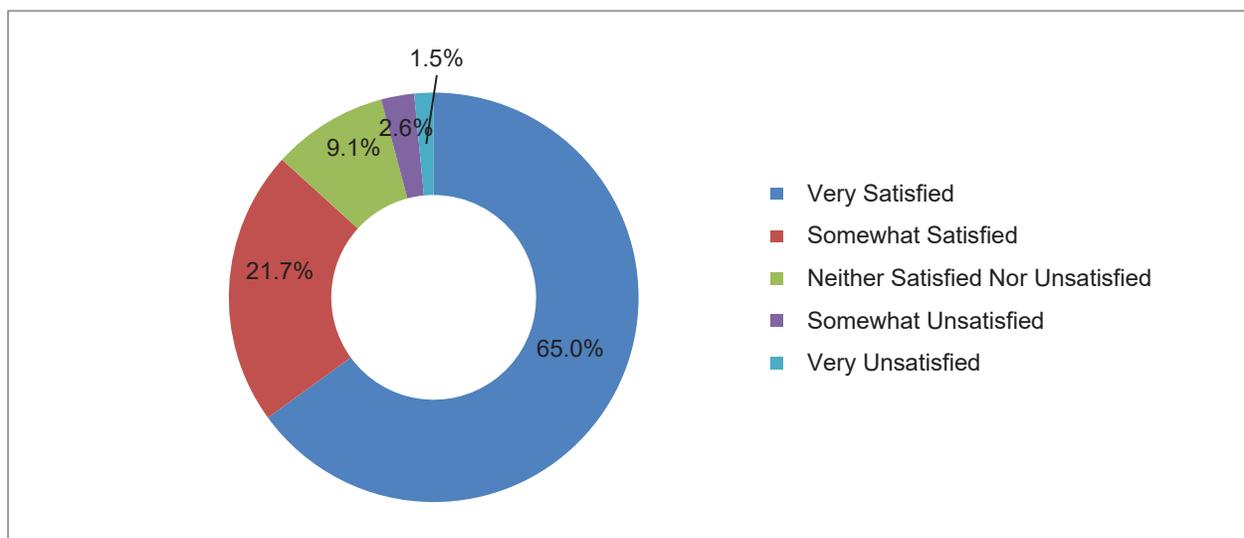


**Fig 22: Satisfaction with Health/Hygiene Standards across Years of Enrolment**



**Safety and Security:** Safety and security arrangements at universities constitute a criterion of utmost concern to families, administrators and of course, the students themselves. This is an issue that has come to the fore in the wake of Holey Artisan Bakery attacks in July 2016. Response rates to satisfaction levels regarding safety and security standards are not worrisome, as per the results of this survey, but they can be improved. Of all students, 65.0% report to being “Very Satisfied” with the safety and security arrangements at their universities, while 21.7% report to be being “Somewhat Satisfied” (Fig 23) . Satisfaction levels are similar for male and female students.

**Fig 23: Level of Satisfaction with Safety/Security Arrangements**



## 5. CONCLUSION

With the large increases in the number of private universities catering to the unique demographic dividend, it has become imperative to assess the quality of the university system in Bangladesh and hear from the beneficiaries themselves, i.e., the students, regarding their overall academic experience. In light of this need, the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB) has conducted a student satisfaction survey encompassing various parameters regarding teaching quality, facilities, value for money, and employment prospects.

First and foremost, regarding overall satisfaction, although more than two-thirds of student respondents reported to being very or somewhat satisfied with their university experience, this is a metric for which universities ought to continue to strive for improvement. Also, according to the survey, the primary reason for satisfaction is the quality of teaching by faculty members and behavior of faculty members. Therefore, the current practices of recruiting high-quality faculty at the leading universities ought to continue, and up-and-coming universities ought to focus on this metric of student satisfaction.

It is a welcome sign that majors in Humanities subjects like English report high satisfaction. In the longer run, it is important to generate interest among students for such subjects, and not only BBA programs. This is not because the latter is not important or useful, but as a nation, we ought to maintain a balance of graduates across disciplines in arts, humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and business. Moreover, in an increasingly globalizing and digitally interconnected world, skills in English will eventually translate to better, diverse, and higher-income jobs, as has already happened in neighboring countries.

With regard to student dissatisfaction, since mental and emotional health appears to be an important cause, it is essential that universities across the board implement high-functioning students' support offices that offer counseling services so students have a "safe space" within which to avail guidance and support regarding emotional and stress management. Regarding experience of stress, 62.2% of all students surveyed reported feeling very or somewhat stressed. Meanwhile, only 29.8% of students report to having "Very High Mental/Emotional Wellbeing" and 29.1% report to having "Somewhat High Mental/Emotional Wellbeing." Mental/emotional health has, for long, been insufficiently discussed or addressed in families and civil society, let alone academic, administrative or policy circles. However, there has been a greater uptick in people's awareness of such issues. Given that there is awareness on such issues, it is now high time to develop interventions that facilitate mental/emotional health among university students.

There is also scope for greater transparency in terms of making students aware of how their tuition fees are spent. This is connected to students' perception of whether they think their education is "Value-for-Money." Less than half the students surveyed consider their education to be "Very Good Value-for-Money."

The issue of rendering course contents more relevant and practical to real world skills and employability also appears to be a concern. Only about a third of students find their course content to be relevant and practical in light of real-world job skills. Our leading universities still have a disproportionate reliance on textbooks of North American origin. This is understandable given the paucity of textbooks carrying local content. However, administrators may consider the inclusion of a greater number of Bangladesh-specific case studies and/or a more practical orientation to the curriculum and pedagogy. It is also important that faculty members have an industry orientation relevant to the courses they teach. On a related note, it appears that career services functions require upgrading so as to maintain greater coherence and contiguity with, and access to the industry, jobs, and internships. Students ought to feel more confident of the capacity of their career services functions.

As discussed in the previous section, a salient finding from this survey is the high level of satisfaction with faculty members at our leading universities. Over 75% of students are either very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the quality of faculty members at their universities. This is clearly an area of strength of the leading universities in that they are able to attract bright candidates as faculty members. Such recruitment practices ought to be encouraged so that this becomes a norm across the tertiary sector in Bangladesh since faculty-student interaction appears to be an important driver for student satisfaction. Moreover, faculty members ought to be encouraged to interact more widely and deeply with the industry in which they specialize.

Overall, despite criticisms and of course, areas that require improvement, our tertiary sector has considerable promise. The data generated from this survey is intended to be a small step in the direction of understanding the concerns of students, areas that require administrative and policy attention, and also reflect on achievements of the tertiary sector. Further studies are required that address universities outside Dhaka, and also those that focus on one of the many issues that this particular survey has covered, e.g., focused studies on emotional/mental health of students; relevance/practicality of curriculum; and so forth. It is the hope of the research team at the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB) to perpetuate such studies in its own institutional capacity and also encourage others that stakeholders may wish to undertake.







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