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Safe and Inclusive Spaces for All - Student Equity Survey Report

2023



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Preface

Purpose and intentions of the equity survey

EDPP Vision

The Equity, Diversity and Public Policy Initiative (EDPP) is committed to fostering an environment at the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy where students can actively engage in intersectional policy analysis. In light of the prevalent issues surrounding identity-based inequalities and the observed challenges in discussing personal positionalities on campus, particularly amidst rising tensions, EDPP recognizes the imperative of creating a safe and inclusive space.

The purpose of conducting an equity student survey aligns with EDPP's dedication to addressing the growing polarization and feelings of insecurity among peers. The survey aims to capture the diverse perspectives and experiences of students at the Munk School, especially in the context of the current global crisis in Palestine and Israel.

EDPP condemns injustices in the region and, as a student-led initiative, prioritizes supporting the well-being of students on campus. The survey is a proactive step towards understanding and responding to the varied impacts of recent events, ensuring that all students, regardless of their visible or invisible diversity, feel heard, supported, and included in discussions surrounding global affairs and public policy.

Putting this Survey and its Findings into Context

The survey was conducted at the end of November 2023 and consisted of over 50 results from across programs and cohorts. As we interpret these results (December 14th-18th), over two months since this humanitarian crisis started, more than 19,076 Palestinians and about 1,200 people in Israel have been killed. These staggering figures do not account for the violence, harm, and loss experienced by individuals in this region and their families around the world. It doesn't show that nearly half of the Palestinian casualties are children and that more than three-quarters of the population of the Gaza Strip has been displaced. It doesn't show that here, in Toronto, 40% of the hate crimes reported this year are anti-Semitic.

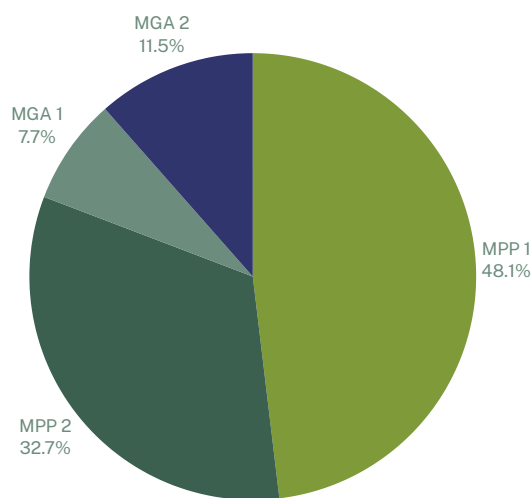
It is also important to note that the testimonies and numbers included in this report occurred before the US vetoed a motion to urge the immediate ceasefire after weeks of war and Canada joined the call for a ceasefire (December 12th 2023). To echo Agnes Callamard, [Amnesty's](#) secretary general, the lack of international action "displays a callous disregard for civilian suffering in the face of a staggering death toll". This is an evolving situation which EDPP pledges to follow closely. In the meantime, this survey helps students, faculty and administration create a safer and more inclusive space to support its students in the Winter semester both in the response to this humanitarian crisis and in the highest inequalities and inclusivity issues surrounding it.

Demographic information

EDPP employed various outreach strategies to maximize participation in the survey, aiming to ensure a representative sample of the Munk population and opinions. The subsequent information provides details on respondent demographics. We acknowledge that since this survey data was collected, several situations have evolved in the context of the crisis which have not been captured by these results.



56 overall survey responses



In analyzing the data, it is important to keep in mind that the data was collected from an intersectional lens and comes from deeply personal experience. The following facts may be relevant to the results:

- Most of the respondents identify as women (over 60%)
- Respondents identified with a variety of faiths (including Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Sikhism) or presented themselves as Atheist or Agnostic
- Most respondents identified as belonging to a federally designated equity group
- A majority noted that they were not personally affected by violence occurring in another region (69.4%), however 18.4% did answer yes
- A majority noted that they were not personally affected by the ongoing violence in Palestine and Israel (63.5%), however, 17.3% did answer yes and another 3.8% indicated that they were impacted in an “other” way.

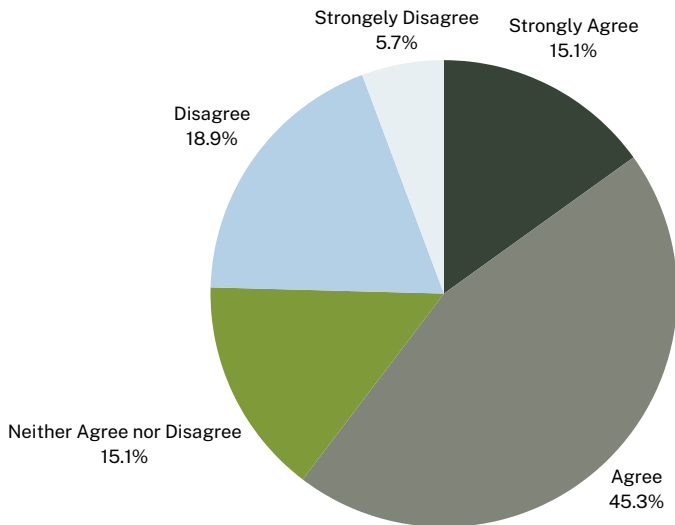
Results from General Inquiry

How does inclusivity, accessibility and diversity manifest itself on campus

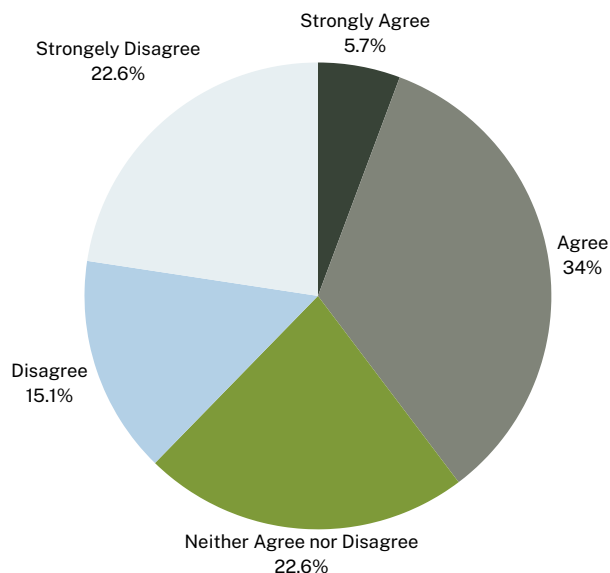
Comfort

Symptom of a safe and inclusive environment

a) I feel comfortable talking about my social and cultural background in class.



b) I feel comfortable sharing my opinions with peers and faculty when my perspectives differ from others.



The data provided indicates that the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy creates an environment where divergence of opinions are somewhat fostered. The majority expressed a positive or neutral stance on the two questions. Yet, it remains that a significant portion (close to a fourth in question a. and over a third in question b.) expressed discomfort in sharing their perspectives.

Answers in later questions suggest that one reason may be the situation in which the question is posed. In the past two years, our cohorts - and the world - have been confronted with contentious issues and a rise in inter-state violence.

Another reason that came forth was the lack of representation in Munk School's staff which can in turn limit the scope of discussion and/or the comfort/willingness to engage when perspectives differ from others.

These indications must be further validated, yet they are a good starting point for us as students to reflect on what we seek to learn in our classrooms and how to create safer and more inclusive spaces for others to enter the discussion.

Diversity at and in Munk

Statement: Diverse perspectives are encouraged by the administration and faculty

There is a disaggregate of experiences when it comes to the perception of diversity in our classrooms. Almost 30% of respondents remained neutral on the question and both strong views (strongly agree and strongly disagree) as well as medial views (agree and disagree) remained close in comparison - less than a 2% difference in the first and just over 7% in the second.

The data is inconclusive and suggests a highly personal lens in this sector of the student experience. We posit that this is due to the diverging positionalities and backgrounds in our cohorts. Yet, delving deeper into the subject, an interesting trend emerged:

Diversity in Munk's curriculum and classroom discussions

In spite of the initial equity proposal, a significant proportion of students still express concerns about the lack of diversity in both our curriculum and classroom discussions. Out of the survey participants, 17% strongly disagreed with the assertion that diverse perspectives are adequately represented in Munk's curriculum and classroom discussions, and an additional 28.3% simply disagreed. Conversely, only 7.5% agreed with the statement, while approximately 28% of respondents maintained a neutral stance. This suggests that a considerable number of students perceive a deficiency in the incorporation of diverse perspectives within the academic content and discussions at Munk.



Values

Statement: Are your personal values matched by the decisions and policies at the Munk School? (in reference to Munk’s communications to students and administration on global issues)

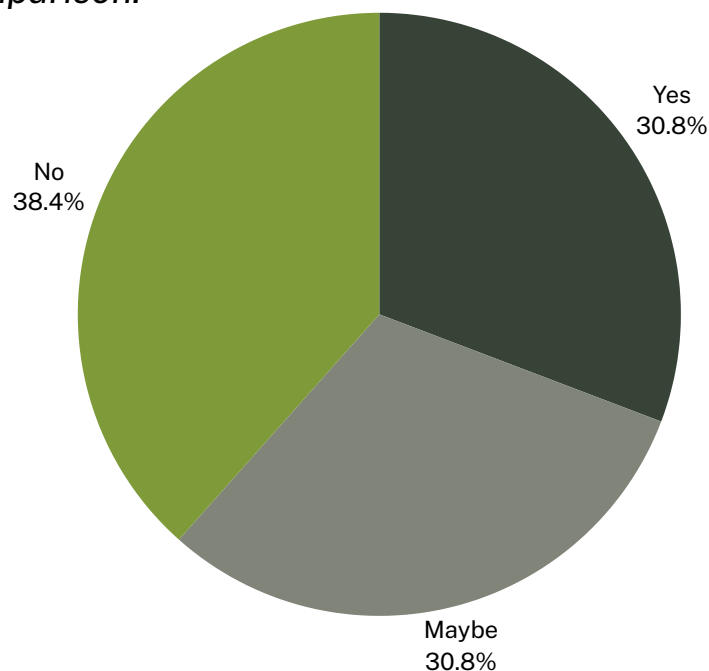
“I feel the school is doing the best it can given the circumstances and trying to juggle diverse opinions in order to validate students’ feelings.”

“I feel like Munk School sometimes chooses the "safe" way [in their actions]”

“I believe Munk aims to take a neutral stance on certain issues to avoid further polarization”.

“...[faculty does not discuss the issue which is wrong”

“ The kind of academic machinery devoted to the war on Ukraine and Ukrainians by the Munk School is commendable however, the response to the humanitarian crisis happening in Gaza right now seems to go almost unnoticed [in comparison.]”

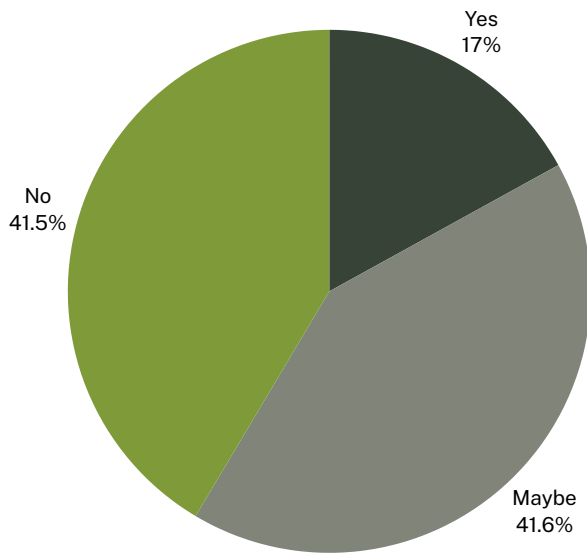




Expressing Yourself

Do you feel like you can express your opinions without :

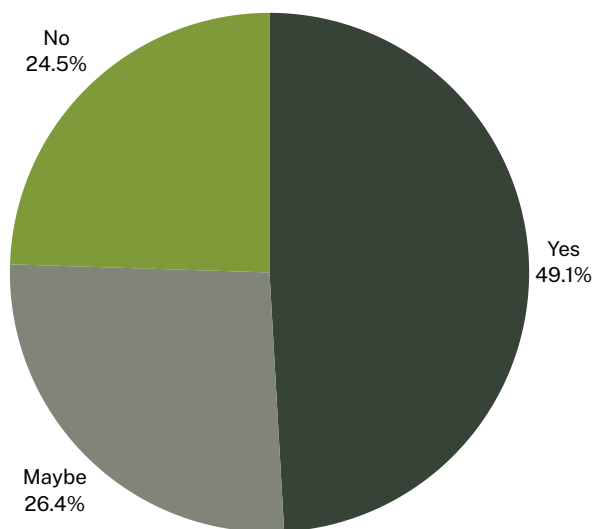
Social Repercussions



Responses to this question were quite situational. Hear from your peers below:

“As a second-year, I don't feel as much pressure from faculty because there aren't any conscious or unconscious financial repercussions that could arise due to scholarships and I have built a rapport with the administration. However, I do feel like sharing my opinion or not using the right words on certain issues could affect how my peers view me.”

Academic Repercussions

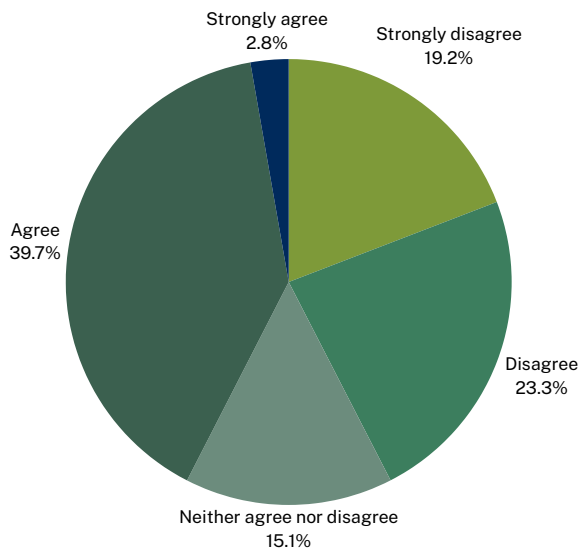


“Only with my very close friends in the program”

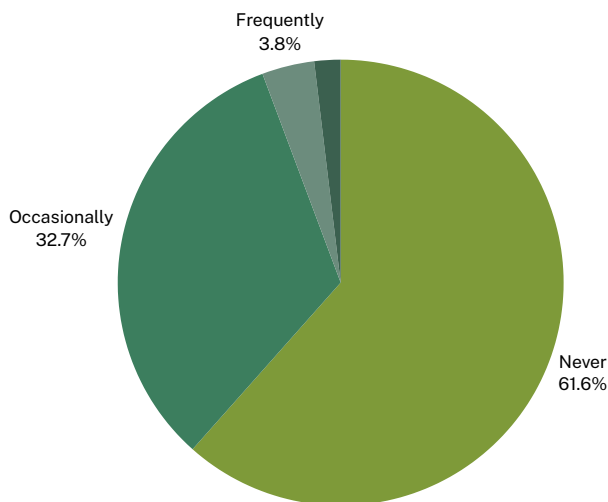
“[...] due to the lack of diversity of perspectives in the readings and professors, I fear that my point of view won't be fully understood.”

Diversity & Discrimination

Have you experienced any forms of discrimination due to your positionality(ies) in the Munk environment?



Have you experienced any forms of discrimination due to your positionality(ies) that intersect with your on and off campus life?



Case examples

“Generally microaggressions, such as classmates scurrying past me, almost as if they are fearful of me.”

“Invisible disability- profs needs to make more of an effort to ensure that information is accessible on quercus, to avoid penalizing students who cannot attend class due to disability reasons [...]”

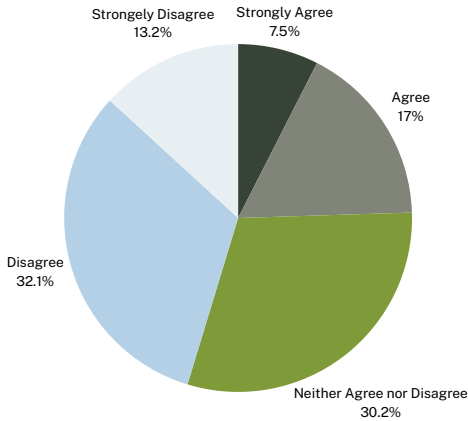
“Fellow classmates discriminate against national origin, political beliefs, and assume that an individual’s opinion represents their culture.”

“People often asking me for thoughts on the Israel-Hamas war, demanding to know my stance as though I am somehow responsible for Netanyahu's politics, someone shouted "is-not-real" in my face multiple times at a party”

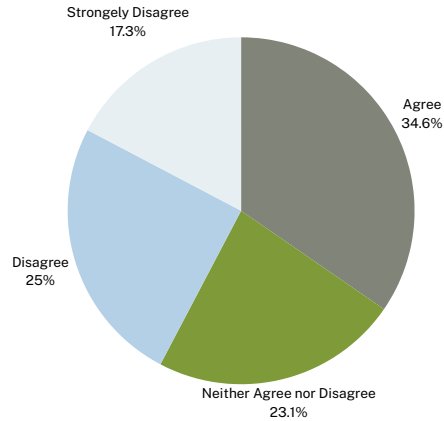
Accessibility, Inclusivity and Equity

The Munk School provides enough resources on:

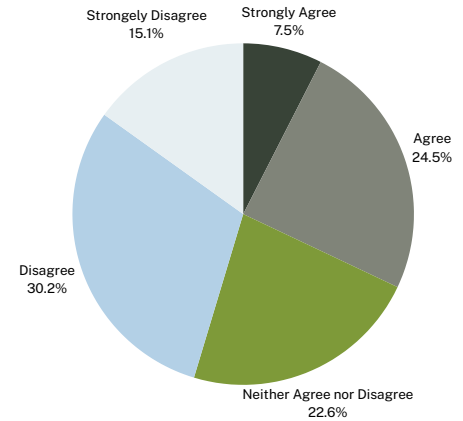
Equity



Inclusion



Accessibility



If you or someone you know has experienced harassment or discrimination based on race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship and/or creed at U of T, report the incident to the **Anti-Racism and Cultural Diversity office**: <https://antiracism.utoronto.ca/help/>.

You can also reach out to either the **MPP or MGA Equity representative** for support within our community.

For the MPPSA equity advisor: <https://www.munkmpps.com/equity-advisor>

For the MGSA equity advisors: equityadvisor.mgasa@gmail.com

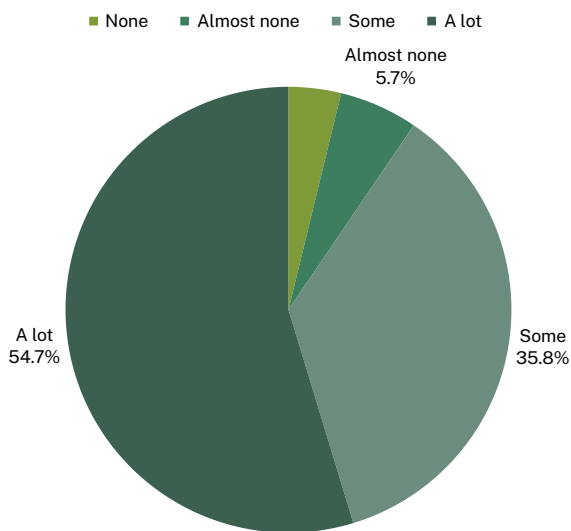
Context Specific Results

How do inclusivity, accessibility and diversity manifest themselves on campus given the current humanitarian crisis in Palestine-Israel?

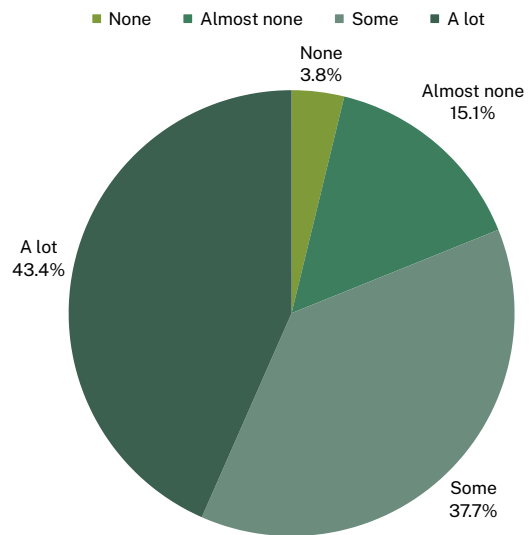
Context specific results

We acknowledge that some of these results may not be representative of current ongoing affairs as the situation is volatile and unstable. Nevertheless, they are valuable in understanding Munk students' perspectives and emotions at the time of the survey

Time spent learning about the humanitarian crisis in Palestine and Israel



Self-identified mental health being negatively affected by the crisis



Context specific results

Overall comments and specific quotes

The survey reflects a range of intense emotions and perspectives among Munk students regarding the ongoing crisis. The survey reveals a complex and emotionally charged atmosphere at Munk, where students grapple with their personal convictions, academic responsibilities, and the global impact of the ongoing crisis.

Key themes include:

Emotional Impact: Many respondents express deep distress, sadness, anger, and frustration due to the graphic images and news coverage of the conflict. The impact on mental health is evident, with concerns about the well-being of those directly affected.

Social Pressures: Students feel pressured to take sides in social settings, leading to tension on campus. There's a sense of difficulty in navigating the situation and engaging in discussions, with instances of bias perceived in faculty members.

Academic Environment: Some respondents criticize the Munk school's perceived silence on the conflict, linking it to complicity in the face of ongoing events. Others express frustration with the lack of safe spaces for dialogue and a perceived toxic environment created by pro-Palestinian messaging.

Global Awareness: There is a shared difficulty in balancing academic responsibilities with the overwhelming nature of the crisis. The feeling of helplessness and the struggle to make a meaningful impact on the situation are recurrent themes.

Personal Connections: Students with family or friends directly impacted by the crisis express heightened distress and a lack of support from the institution. On the other hand, those without personal connections still feel affected by the graphic content and negative news.

Political and Ethical Perspectives: Diverse political and ethical stances are evident, with some advocating for Palestinian liberation, while others express concerns about antisemitism and intimidation against Jewish students. The survey highlights a polarized environment on campus.

Institutional Dynamics: Criticism is directed at the Munk school for perceived censorship in discussions and a lack of inclusivity, with concerns raised about the impact on People of Color (POC) students and the reinforcement of a white majority in academic spaces.

Fear and Anxiety: Some respondents, particularly hijab-wearing Muslim women or Jewish-identifying individuals, express fear due to the rise of Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, linking it to the current geopolitical situation.

Context specific results

Overall comments and specific quotes

"I feel pressured to "choose a side" especially when in social settings. I have felt tension on school campus and often am not sure how to navigate the situation."

"Not having a safe space to learn and engage (outside of a close few friends) means that I am isolated in the process of advocating and digesting all this information. I am also deeply affected by the tensions I feel in class and the unspoken actions of not talking about it when everyone knows we are thinking about the situation during a class discussion. I also fear and feel for my friends and peers who are deeply affected either personally or in their actions to try and create a safe space to hold a dialogue in - there is something to be said about a bunch of 20 years olds having to organized because the academic and administrative "adults" and authorities are unable to do so"

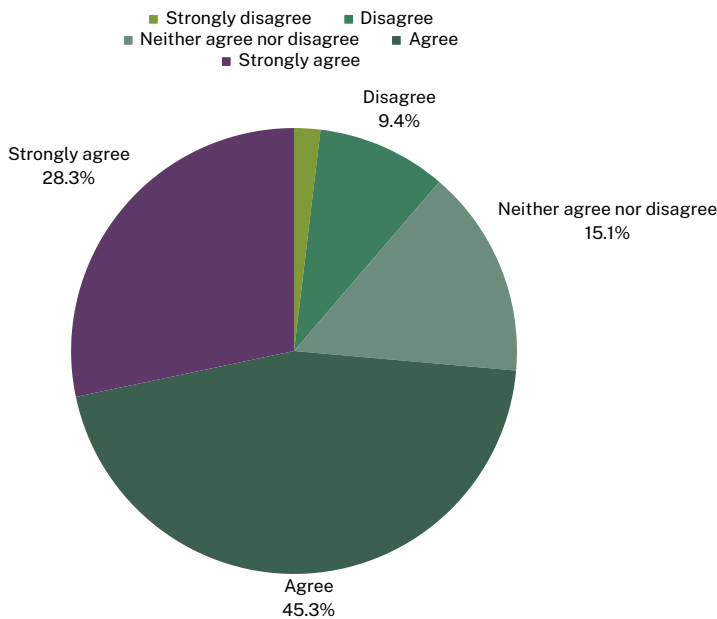
"[...] I struggled with wanting to speak up, but hearing that some students had lost jobs by posting or liking the wrong post. This was very upsetting to me and made me question whether this is the right career path for me."

"I've seen increasing intolerance of racial, cultural and ethical differences, based on opinions expressed in groups and beyond the classroom. Some disagreements are guided toward the persons and beliefs; national background is often the basis of judgment and prejudice, without valuing diverse opinions."

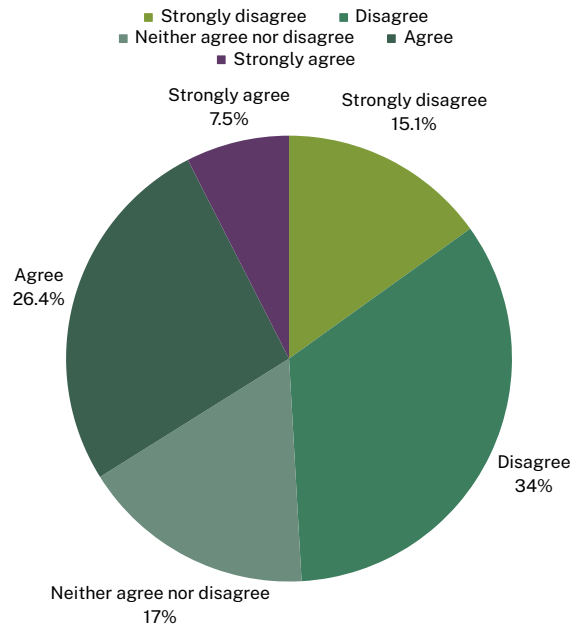
Safety and well-being

The following multiple choice questions were answered based on how much students agreed with the following prompts:

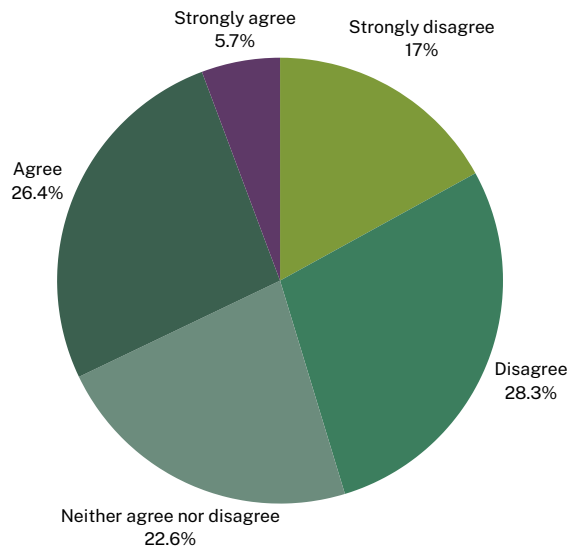
I feel physically safe in Munk classes and buildings.



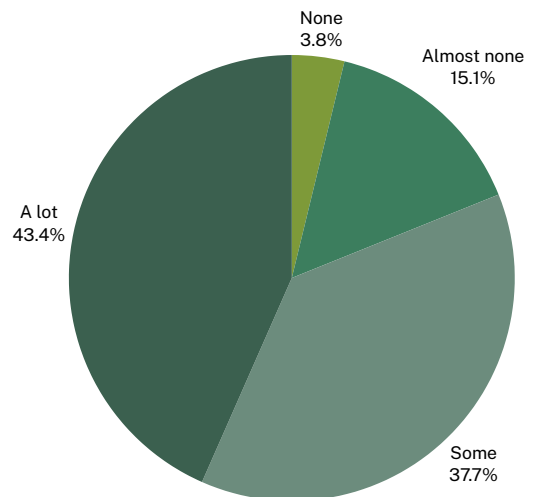
Instructors and Munk classes provide an environment in which my mental health is not compromised.



I feel safe engaging in conversations related to the crisis with my Munk peers.



Self-identified mental health being negatively affected by the crisis

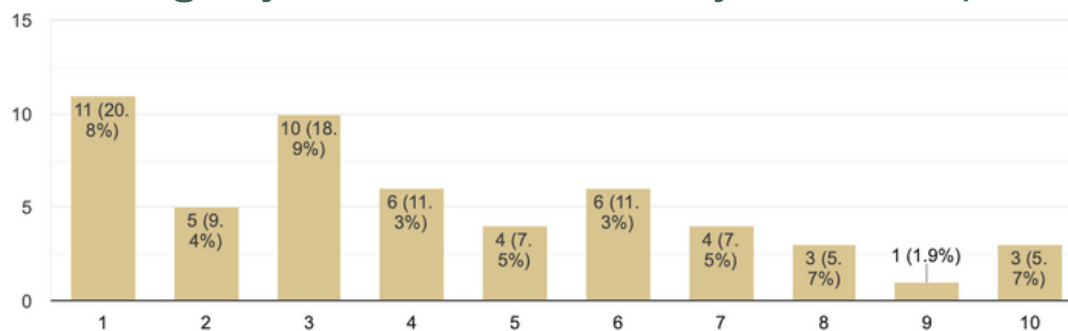


“People have to be careful in our advocacy and ensure that they are not inciting hate. I have seen posts from peers who I know are hurting and upset about the genocide occurring but I sometimes feel that their anger is misdirected and it starts to turn into a discussion of who is a better advocate from the lens of posting every thing they find online rather than who is engaging in productive conversations, sharing helpful resources or information, etc.”

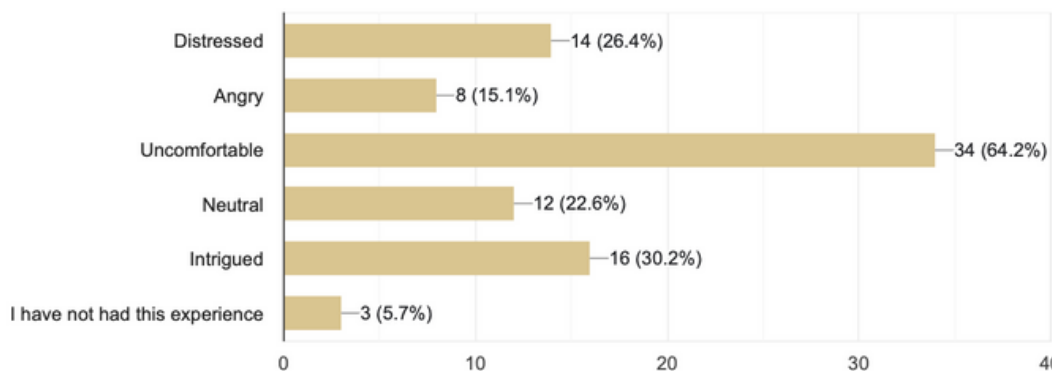
“It is upsetting that we are in a program where frank, sincere, conscientious, informed, tactful, and mature conversations about issues should be happening, but they can't. “

“I think it's really frustrating that people like to conflate Zionism and Judaism, I find it really disrespectful to Judaism and not all Jewish people agree with Zionism so it's weird that people assume that they are one and the same. It's unfair to accuse those who are pro-Palestine or anti-Zionism of being anti-semitic. That is the only fear that I have when expressing my views.”

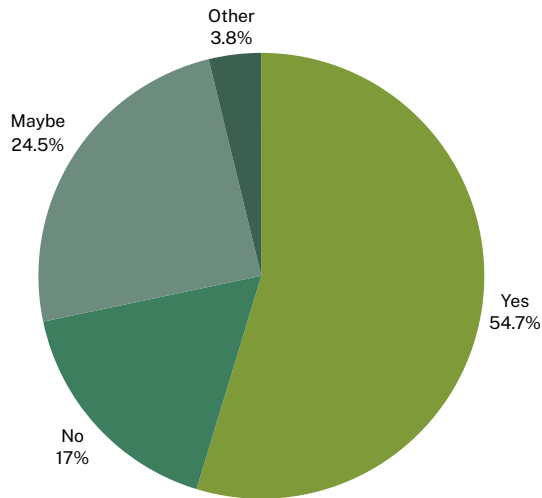
How comfortable are you sharing your opinion on the current crisis with peers and faculty when their perspectives differ from yours (on a scale of being very uncomfortable to 10 very comfortable)?



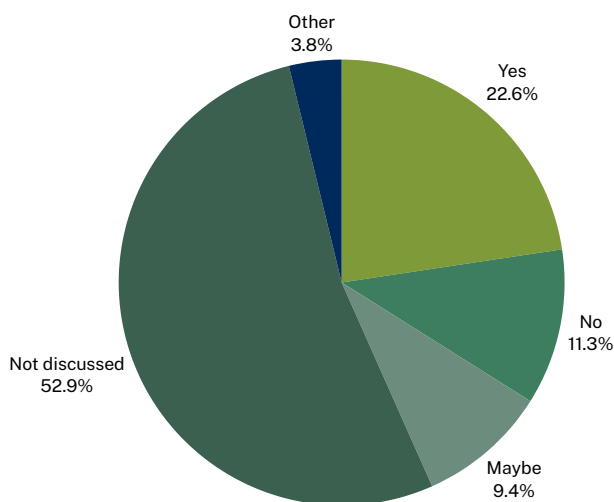
How do you feel about peers who hold a differing stance from you on the current crisis? Please select one or more of the following.



Do you feel like there has been increased polarization in Munk’s classrooms?



If your professors have talked about the crisis in classroom settings, do you believe they have done so equitably?



Case examples

“Students are discriminated against personal origin, language and cultural barriers. Some domestic students demonstrate superiority against other students, intellectually or culturally in various settings. Team works are monopolized by a few students who coerce others into certain beliefs.”

“The professors seem to be parroting a lot of what most western leaders are saying. The leaders however, have their political motivation behind it. However, professors who we see as academic personalities then not engaging with it critically or from an intersectional lens is rather disappointing.”

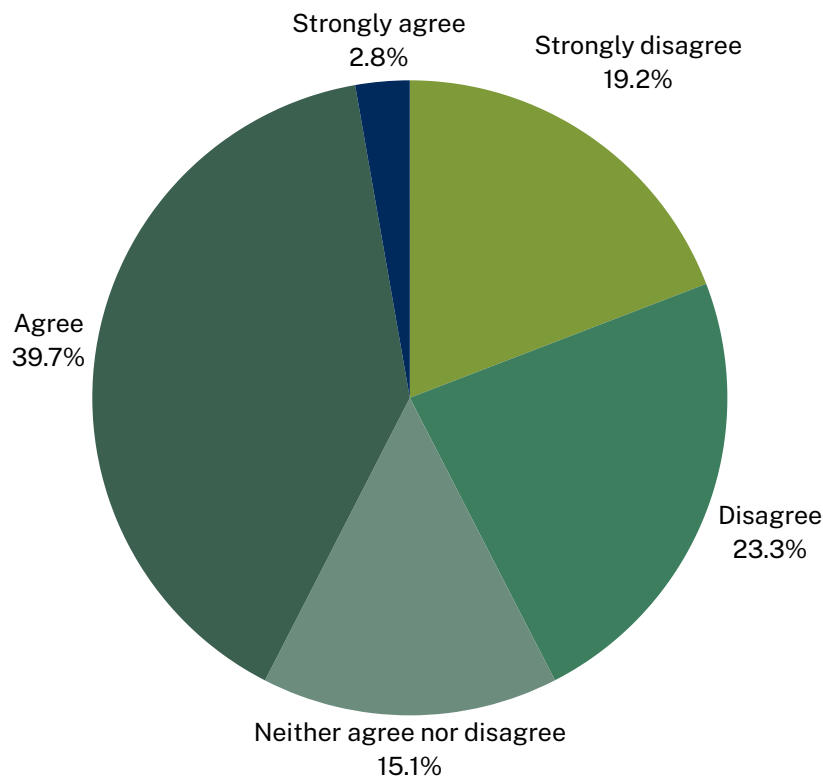
“I believe there should be a greater attempt to critically examine the case of Palestine/Israel, in order to intelligently tackle the facts, as well as rampant misconceptions and/ or competing narratives.”

“Not a single one of my professors has even brought it up. Which is infuriating considering I am literally taking an ethics course where it seems like wigs and breast reconstruction are more ethically challenging topics than a genocide.”




Resources

I feel like the resources made available at the Munk School about this crisis are sufficient.



What we heard - Future demands

There has been a significant surge in the demand for enhanced education and robust discussions both within classrooms and during Munk events. As a school dedicated to Public Policy and Global Affairs, we cannot afford to be complacent in the face of misinformation, propaganda, or uninformed biases. It is imperative that we actively address and rectify these issues as part of our commitment to fostering a well-informed and unbiased academic environment. Given the situation, we suggest the following steps to administration and faculty:



Roundtables	Education	Admin statement	Transparency
Discussions with leaders, historians and other academics well versed with the region and history of relationships.	Promotion of class debates and discussions facilitated by professors. Invite more guest speakers.	Highlight the tragic loss of life and steps taken to support notions of peace and liberation in the region.	Greater access to all resources available to students, provision of learning spaces, and transparency with what proactive steps Munk is taking.
Engagement in more nuanced discussions and further dialogue.		Condemn any forms of discrimination including Antisemitism and Islamophobia, and conflation of Palestinian liberation/Anti-Zionism with Antisemitism.	

What we heard - Future demands (continuation)

As an EDI-based SLI, EDPP intends to continue its work on bridging gaps in inclusivity, diversity and accessibility on campus. This includes standing up for students and key public policy or global issues. Given the reach, impact and crisis level of the Palestine-Israel case, we are committed to adapting our initiative to reflect this ever-evolving situation.

The present survey is our first step. We will in 2024 strive to:



EDPP remains here to help students navigate this crisis and other EDI-related issues. Please feel free to reach out

[www.https://www.edppinitiative.ca/](https://www.edppinitiative.ca/)
edppinitiative@gmail.com

2023



Thank you to all those who participated in the survey as well as students and faculty who aided in its creation. For those who still wish to express their experience or position, please contact us.