



# **Education** Committee

## Shopping Week Survey Findings *Fall 2018*

## Shopping Week Survey Report 2018

### The Undergraduate Council Education Committee

#### Introduction

Each semester, students are encouraged to “shop” courses during the first week of the term before they submit their course enrollment choices. In light of the recent student, faculty, and administrator discussions regarding potential alternatives to shopping week, the UC Education Committee administered a survey to undergraduate student population to gather an objective and accurate measure of current opinions regarding shopping week. As students are the largest stakeholders in these discussions, and efforts to collect and assess data on student opinion were previously scarce, the UC designed a survey to collect extensive information which could provide the Harvard community with a more comprehensive reflection of student sentiment concerning shopping week. The survey was circulated to the student body and collected the responses of 1,883 students.

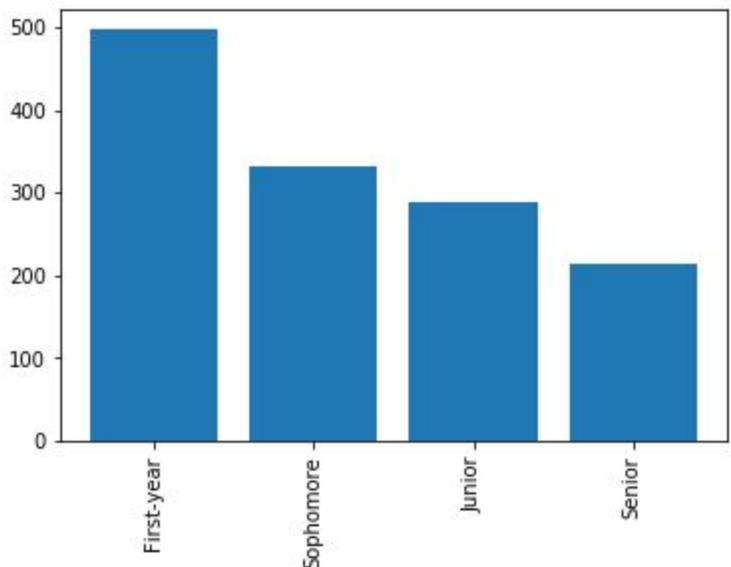
The survey’s goals were to 1) examine students’ current attitudes regarding shopping week, 2) gauge how aspects of shopping week affect students in terms of stress, educational exploration, and learning experiences more broadly, and 3) hear from students in an inclusive manner on the concerns brought forth in the discussions so far (including class lotteries, preparation of teaching fellows and faculty, and normalized low expectations for work and reading completion during shopping week).

We hope that the methods and findings presented below will help support a more thorough consideration and process of revision for shopping week in the coming semesters.

**Key Findings**

Predominantly, the results showed a unified support for shopping week and a positive review of its effects. A few noteworthy findings are highlighted below.

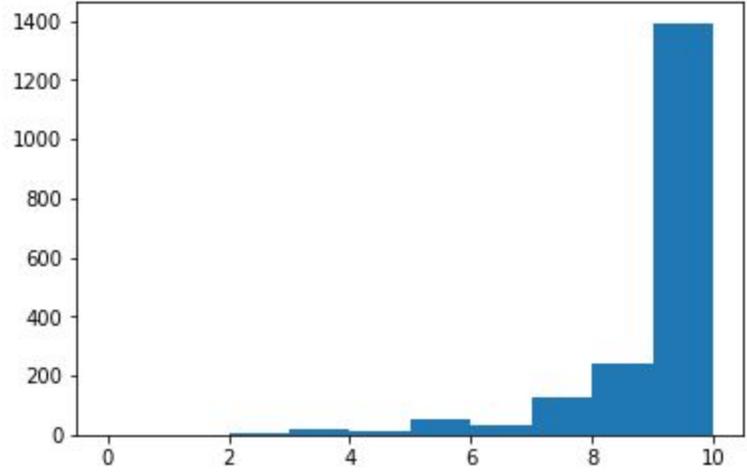
**Q1: What is your class year?**



This question served to provide context regarding who was responding to the survey as class year can potentially impact one’s experience with and attitudes towards shopping week. First-year students comprised the largest number of responses, 498. Sophomores provided 332 responses while junior and senior response rates were 289 and 213, respectively.

**Q2: How has shopping week affected you? (10 positive, 0 negative)**

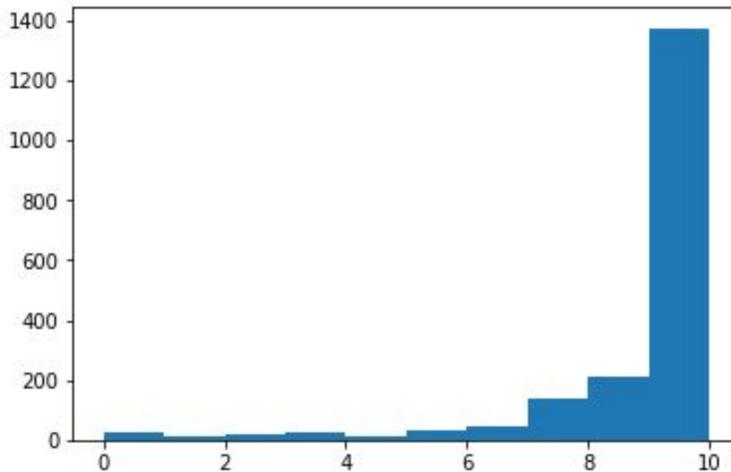
- Mean: 9.1
- Median: 10.0



This question sought to assess holistic student opinions regarding shopping week. Students were given the option to rank their experiences from 0 (extremely negative) to 10 (extremely positive). As shown in the figure above, students largely tended to have been positively affected by shopping week. In addition, only 33 out of 1,883 students who responded to the survey selected a value less than 5 (indicating a negative effect).

**Q3: How upset would you be if shopping week no longer existed?** (10 upset, 0 not upset at all)

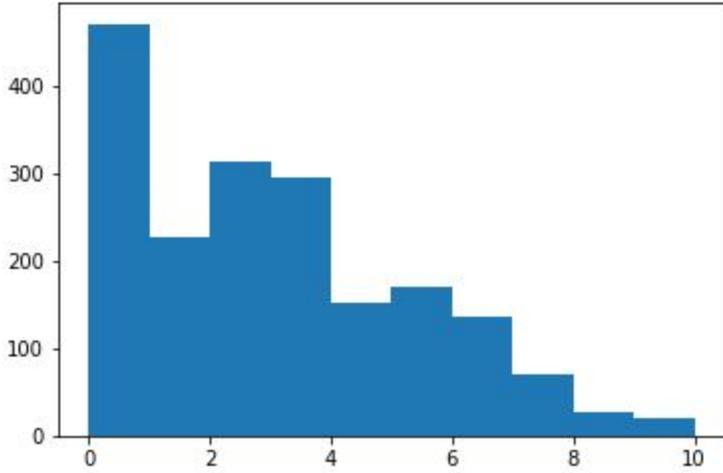
- Mean: 8.9
- Median: 10.0



This question gauged potential student reactions to a complete removal of shopping week. Similar in format to the previous question, students were given the chance to rank their opinion. As displayed in the figure above, student opinions trended toward the “upset” end of the scale.

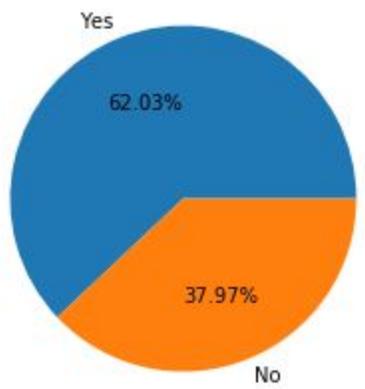
**Q4: Has shopping week caused you stress or anxiety?** (10 a lot of stress, 0 none at all)

- Mean: 2.6
- Median: 2.0



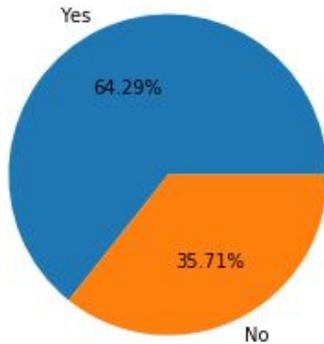
An important consideration in shopping week discussions was the impact of shopping week on student stress levels. This question asked students to rate the extent to which shopping week has induced stress upon themselves. Given an average of 2.6 (on a scale of 0 to 10), students tended toward the lower end of the scale indicating low induced stress with respect to shopping week.

**Q5: Did the existence of shopping week affect your decision to attend Harvard?**

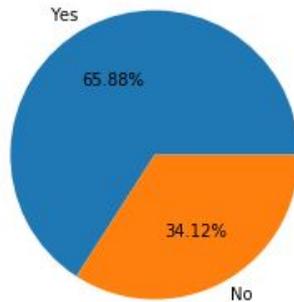


Many students shared anecdotal references citing shopping week as a central motive in their selection of Harvard for their undergraduate studies. In turn, this question served to quantify the extent to which shopping week had an effect on college-selection choices. Though the question did not qualify whether shopping week was a *crucial* aspect of a student's decision to attend Harvard, the results show that shopping week influenced the majority of student survey respondents' college-selection.

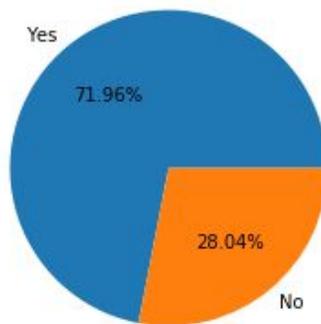
**Q6: Did your shopping week experiences affect your declared, or potentially declared, concentration?**



**Q7: Did your shopping week experiences affect your declared, or potentially declared, secondary?**



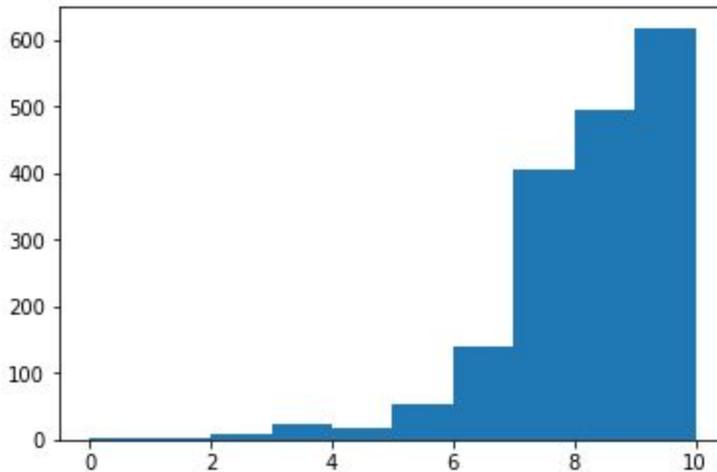
**Q8: Did your shopping week experiences affect your choice of language courses/language citation (if any)?**



Questions 6 - 8 sought to assess whether shopping week significantly affected students' academic paths, including their declared or potential concentration, secondary concentration, and language courses or citation. In each case, over 60% of the surveyed students responded that shopping week *did* affect their decisions regarding significant academic pathway choices.

**Q9: Does shopping a class give you an accurate sense of what a course will be like? (10 accurate, 0 not at all)**

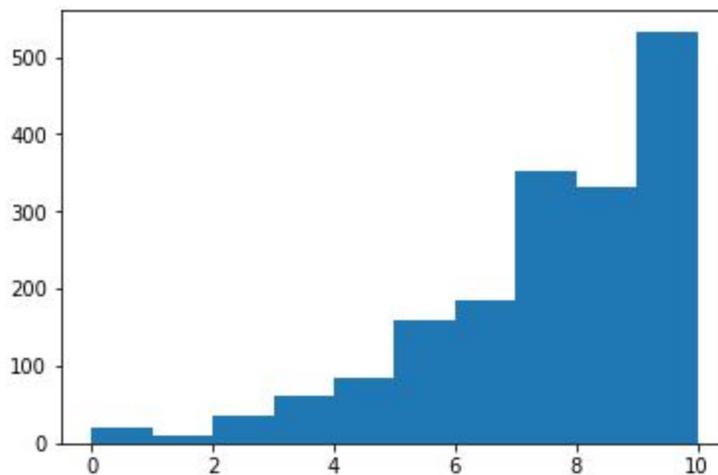
- Mean: 7.9
- Median: 8.0



This question served to determine whether shopping week provides an accurate indication of course content and style, as this is likely one of shopping week’s chief purposes. Students, once more, tended toward the upper end of the scale, demonstrating that shopping week provides an accurate representation of offered courses.

**Q10: Do you feel that professors can teach effectively during the first week of class? (10 extremely, 0 not at all)**

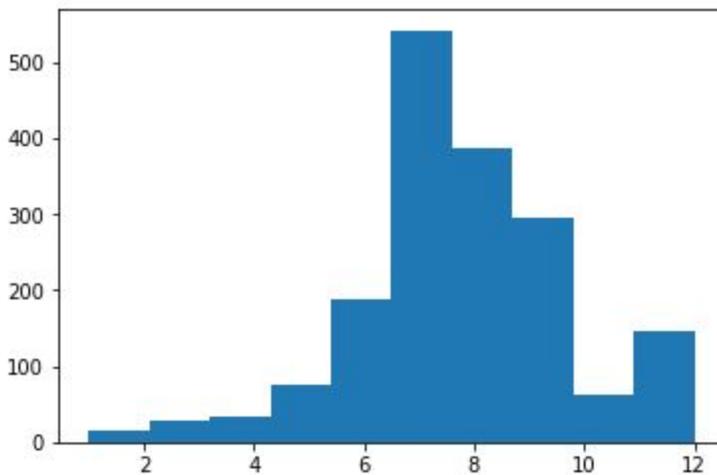
- Mean: 7.2
- Median: 7.0



Given faculty concerns regarding effectiveness of teaching during shopping week, this question asked students to rate the extent to which, from their perspective, professors could carry out class effectively (as this, in relation to question 9, could indicate whether shopping week truly provides an accurate sense of available courses). Given a mean of 7, more than half of students believed that their professors could still teach effectively during shopping period.

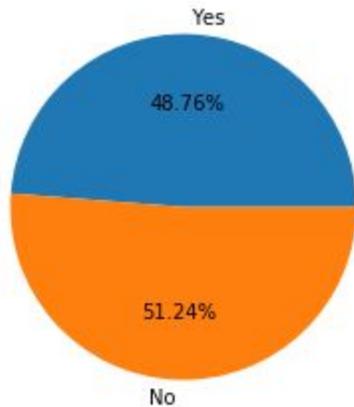
**Q11: How many classes do you typically shop a semester?**

- Mean: 7.7
- Median: 8.0



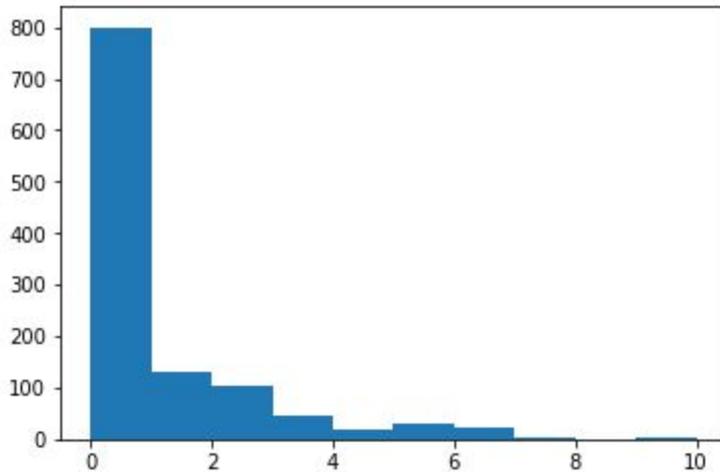
On average, students shop between 7 and 8 courses each semester. Given that most students enroll in only 4 courses, these result demonstrate the great extent to which and the eagerness with which students use shopping week period to test a wide variety (or at the least a large number of courses) such that they can plan their semesters for future course offerings or merely explore diverse fields of study.

**Q12: After shopping week, did any of your courses move from one classroom to another?**



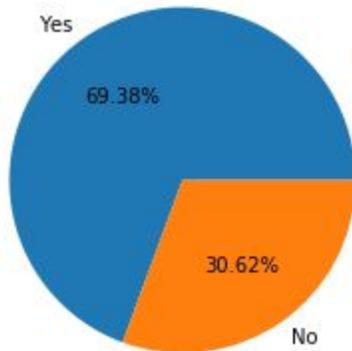
**Q13: If yes to the above question, did that cause you stress? (10 extremely stressful, 0 not at all)**

- Mean: 0.77
- Median: 0.0



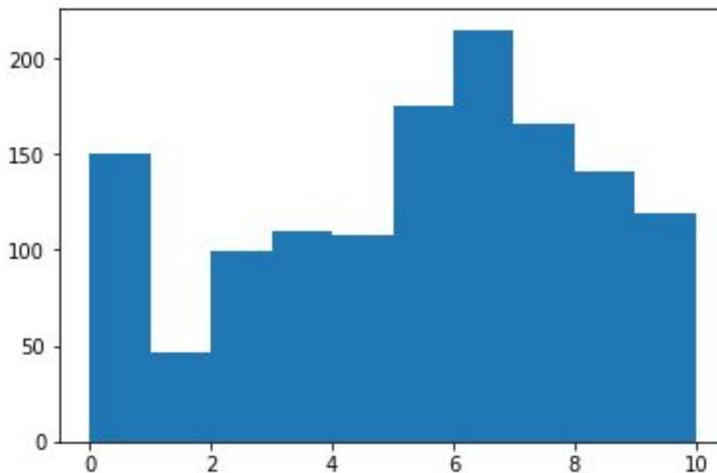
Questions 12 and 13 were posed to measure both the reality of faculty concerns regarding class location changes and the extent to which these changes affected students. The results in Question 12 show that class location changes are often occurring (nearly 50% of students responded saying that their classes had moved); however, responses to Question 13 show that this has little to no effect on students in terms of stress.

**Q14: Have you ever had to wait for the results of a lottery before registering for classes?**



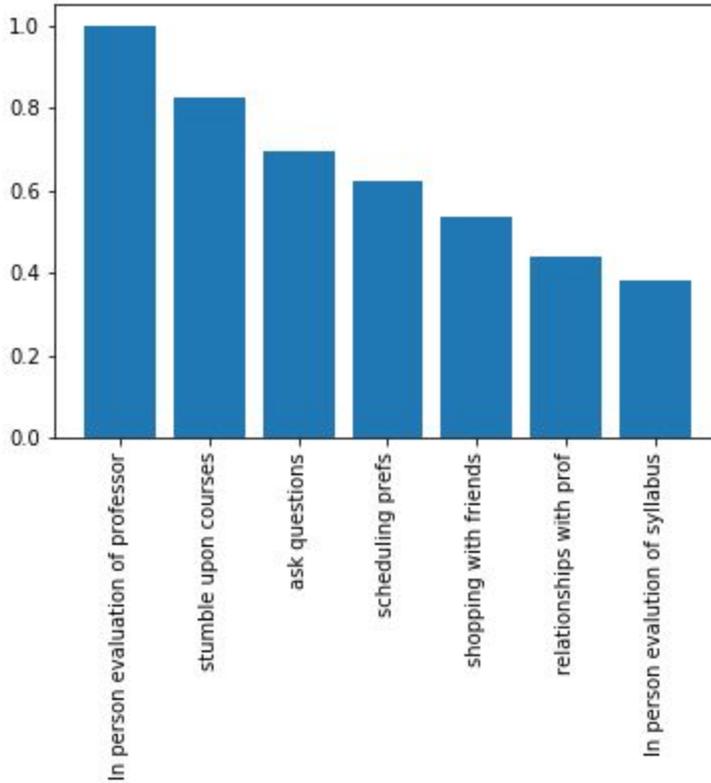
**Q15: If yes to the above question, did that cause you stress? (10 extremely stressful, 0 not at all)**

- Mean: 4.97
- Median: 5.0



Class lotteries, since not standardized or not always occurring in a timely fashion, are an important consideration in shopping week discussions. In their responses to Question 14, students showed that the wait for lottery results often delayed their registration for classes. Additionally, in Question 15, students expressed that this delay did cause stress—though the data showed an average below 5, this would still indicate an ample amount of stress.

**Q16: Please rank how important the below aspects of shopping week are to you:**



This question was designed to understand which aspects of shopping week students value most. Students ranked aspects of shopping week in the following order 1) In person evaluation of a professor, 2) Ability to stumble upon courses, 3) Ability to ask questions to the professor, 4) Deciding on classes based on scheduling preferences, 5) Shopping classes with friends, 6) Fostering relationships with the professor, and 7) In person evaluation of the syllabus. The rankings show that students most value the opportunities shopping week affords to have face-to-face interactions with professors and serendipitously discover classes which they may not have planned to enroll in prior to shopping week.

## **Conclusions**

Given the large scope and high participation rate of our survey, many insights can be drawn regarding the importance of shopping week and its effects on students. First—regarding the demographics of the survey population—of the four classes surveyed, the first-year class had the highest volume of responses, with each following class cohort demonstrating fewer responses than the last; however, upperclassmen in total demonstrated a sizeable response volume when compared to the first-year class. Despite receiving the largest number of responses from first-year students, we find that the repeated polarization of responses to extremities of the scales shows that student opinion, across all class years, is quite similar. Additionally, survey responses from first-year students should be valued highly, as these students will experience the longest duration of any effects generated by changes to shopping week.

It is important to recognize that while graduate student payment for teacher assistantship is related to course enrollment, the existence of shopping period and student concerns for the institution are still divorceable from income security of graduate students. The payment schedule and logistics of income for graduate students should therefore be treated as a separate issue from that of shopping period, and support of shopping period does not in any way correlate with a disdain or disappreciation of graduate income security, and should not be misconstrued as such. Therefore, our survey did not ask students to respond to concerns on graduate student payment -- the purpose of the survey was to gauge student opinion on and experience of shopping period as it currently stands, and the issues that exist specifically with shopping period itself.

It is also important to acknowledge certain limitations of shopping period as highlighted by the survey results. In response to a question regarding the extent of stress students faced during shopping period, while students generally faced little to no stress (the median score on a scale from 0 to 10 was 2.0), there were certainly a small group of students that experienced a significant amount of stress, and this should not, in any way, be disregarded. Moreover, while lotteries are not exclusive to shopping period, responses to the amount of stress caused by lotteries during shopping period showed the wide-ranging nature anxiety and strain induced by the combination of the two—shopping week and lotteries. Students responded in significant numbers on both extremities of the 10-point scale, but most importantly, the average did convey a concerning degree of stress rooted in the simultaneous occurrence of the two.

In the interest of creating an impartial survey to gather data representative of all sides of the issues at hand, questions were also asked investigating potential problems or inconveniences that shopping week has caused students. In particular, the survey included questions on preparation of teaching staff during

shopping week and the effect on student stress of moved class locations during or after shopping week. Responses showed that students thought professors were, indeed, sufficiently prepared (with a median score of 7.0 and an upper 75% quartile of responses being full rankings of 10), and students agreed that class location changes were not at all a cause for stress (with a median score of 0.0).

Above all else, **the findings as a whole make clear that students are overwhelmingly in support of shopping week.** In response to questions that asked students to indicate their support for shopping week, or to assess whether shopping week increased or decreased problems in student life, students consistently showed uniform support for the institution and claimed that the process itself caused little to no stress. Further, the results collected prove that shopping week is conducive to encouraging students' academic curiosity and enthusiasm. Shopping week was identified as a key factor in deciding at least two-thirds of respondents' concentrations, secondary fields, and language citations, and for most, shopping week even played a large role in their selection of Harvard for their undergraduate studies.

Though confounding factors, such as the co-occurrence of lotteries and their accompanying delays to registration, cause issues with shopping week experiences, on the whole, students greatly appreciate shopping week for the opportunity it provides to perform in-person evaluation of professors and to discover, by chance, courses which they may not have found if strictly following prescribed plans of study or guidance provided by advisors or peers. In adherence to the College's mission to provide a transformative liberal arts educational experience which encourages academic exploration and intellectual curiosity, this aforementioned ability to unexpectedly encounter new courses is all too important. And the uncharted effect such exploration has on concentration declaration—though quantified to the extent that two-thirds of students demonstrated that shopping week did affect their concentration selection—should be examined further if not strongly promoted. These are among the most difficult factors to replicate (in an equitable fashion for all students) through an alternative system for class previews and selection, and so, all-in-all, what is evident from these findings is that students find shopping period to be an quintessential, invaluable, and irreplaceable piece of Harvard's undergraduate educational experience.