

The Spirit of SUNY Potsdam

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to capture the spirit that people feel when they arrive and have stayed in the SUNY Potsdam college community. In collaboration with Public Affairs in the SUNY Potsdam Marketing Department, we asked Faculty, Staff, Students and Alumni to help us extract positive and negative attributes of the community that could both be marketed to future students and employees as well as restored to elevate the campus.

By way of a 14 question survey sent out via email, the social media platform Facebook and the SUNY Potsdam Alumni newsletter, we received feedback from 458 participants who had some type of relation, past or present, to SUNY Potsdam. We asked six closed ended questions, for example, would they recommend the college to others. We also asked eight open ended questions such as ‘If SUNY Potsdam was a computer brand, would it be a MAC or a PC?’, and we gave them the option to explain their answer. These questions were asked in order to derive adjectives that would help us understand the participants’ true feelings about the college community.

Findings indicated that alumni were more satisfied with their social, academic, and overall experience at SUNY Potsdam than current students, faculty and staff. The data showed that participants are satisfied with their academic, social and overall experiences and feel a sense of family in the community. The majority of participants would recommend the college to someone else. However, there are issues and concerns addressed by respondents. There was a disconnect with answers between closed ended questions, which were generally positive, and open ended questions, in which respondents both expressed affinity for as well as negative feelings for SUNY Potsdam.

Key Words: Spirit, SUNY, Potsdam, University, Promise, Essence, Open, Safe, Diverse, Education, College, Student, Staff, Alumni, Small

Introduction

Most campus communities have spirit expressed within the arts, academic, or even within athletics. When students get involved and support each other it allows students to develop a sense of community within their college setting. In the study by Wilcox et.al “data support[ed] the claim that making compatible friends is essential to retention, and that students’ living arrangements are central to this process. Such friends provide direct emotional support, equivalent to family relationships, as well as buffering support in stressful situations” (p.707). In this study interviews with 34 first-year students were held, investigating how social relations affected their decision to stay or leave the school. Studies such as this one prove how important a sense of community is to student success. Aside from the friendships formed, students also feel a sense of community when they are able to relate to the staff and professors. According to Hixenbaugh (2012) “Higher award marks were related to measures of commitment to the institution and positive student evaluations about staff concern for students.” When people feel connected it helps them feel part of that community, it can be assumed the same for college students. A sense of community can influence a higher sense of commitment from the members of that community.

To illustrate how a sense of community can illicit commitment, we look to the many stories of cults and followers that commit or participate in extreme acts of loyalty to their cult pack. The commitment of cult members provides an interesting base in which we can ask what makes them so steadfast and what creates their spirit.

How the members of the campus community describe the campus will reveal how these individuals feel about their overall campus experience. Knowing how people feel about the campus will assist in communicating what areas the campus excels in, as well as communicate

areas where they could improve. This feedback will also assist in defining the overall spirit within a community, which could help to attract prospective students because they will be able to see if the institution is right for them.

There is a strong sense of community within the SUNY Potsdam environment. The purpose of this research is to explore and define it. This will be done by obtaining feedback from the individuals that make up the campus community which are: students, faculty members, staff members, and alumni. Spirit can be better understood through these individuals' academic and social experiences while within our campus community.

Literature Review

Along with belonging to a community, a sense of spirit portrays a strong core that lays base to the foundation of an institution's student body. School spirit is often associated with cheering at sports games, or representing the college by wearing school gear with a logo or the school colors. School spirit can be derived from how the students feel about their current institution. According to the Merriam-Webster English dictionary 'spirit' is defined as, "Those qualities regarded as forming the definitive or typical elements in the character of a person, nation, or group or in the thought and attitudes of a particular period." Those qualities are the characteristics of what makes up an entity.

Think about the last time someone opened the door for you and how nice that little act of hospitality felt. Dean Yin and Simon A. Lei (2002) explore the impact of hospitality in their article. They argue that, "With an appropriate involvement level of selected campus activities, students may benefit in terms of promoting academic achievement, as well as personal, career, and leadership development" (p. 282). This is the type of behavior that is often exhibited in a small college setting. This is because there are so many different activities, sporting events, and musical performances that occur in such a concentrated space. Overall this can promote a sense of spirit within the campus community. Because small colleges are so intimate, they are known for a tight-knit small town feel, which contributes to their allure. This paper has defined that allure as it's 'spirit.'

Students that are involved on a college campus feel as if they are making a difference. They also feel as if they have ties and/or a sense of responsibility to the community (Astin, 1999). This notion connects to what Maslow developed about the basic human need of being part of a community for security and how one can achieve it, by getting involved. This sense of

security is developed further in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. First a human being seeks to find biological needs, those of food and water. Secondly, humans seek to fulfill safety needs of shelter and security. We see third world cultures striving to actualize the first and second levels of Maslow's hierarchy in their lives, due to lack of resources. The third level he presented was the desire to belong (Longe, 2006). This, laid out, is the desire to be part of a group, have loving relationships and be accepted. Maslow's hierarchy infers what a cult offers to its members in order to win them over.

Many believe that the allure in joining a cult stems from overall societal disarray where members feel a sense of order and security. Strickland, in her essay on cults, explains that many organizations act similarly to the way cults do. According to Strickland (2001), "Many social organizations other than...cults require strict adherence to a set of beliefs and, in turn, provide a sense of meaning and purpose to their followers" (p. 163). An example of this can be a Greek organization, a religion, or (more closely related to the topic) a university setting, such as a Christian college where students may have to adhere to rules pertaining to the opposite sex. These social organizations require a member to adhere to certain doctrines while the organization delivers a community to be part of. For our purposes, we will focus on why they join, that sense of unity, meaning and security.

Institutional Branding and Choice

Students choose to attend different colleges and universities for a myriad of reasons. Factors include well-known sports teams, the academic opportunities, opportunities to get involved and get good jobs after school and the in-state versus out-of-state tuition cost. Another main factor, is developing and maintaining a strong brand. The way the school brands itself has an impact on how students feel about their campus and the pride they take in it. This is because

the students represent the school but also, and more importantly to prospective and current students, the school represents them.

One might think of larger institutions like Harvard, Duke, North Carolina, Oregon, and University of Southern California (better known as USC) and how strong their brand is. People who do not even attend these universities choose to watch their sporting events. These same people are familiar with the institution's mascot, colors, and even wear their jerseys. Roger Dooley might contend those places would fit into his category of "national brand schools." According to Dooley (2013) national brand schools are always filling up due in part to their well-known reputation for admitting candidates who show the potential for academic excellence. That is part of those schools' brand, which is that academically excellent students go there. Those schools are large compared to SUNY Potsdam; nevertheless, it is possible Potsdam could learn from the factors that people like about those brands and the consistency with which those schools maintain their brand. These similar practices could better define SUNY Potsdam's brand.

One of the brand qualities for SUNY Potsdam is its small community. The students are not just a number when attending school here; they also become a member of the Potsdam Community. Could this be a key portion of that which Potsdam can market as part of their brand? Dooley writes in his essay on "College Branding" that schools need to start "branding the in-person experience and differentiating it from competing institutions" (Dooley, 2013, para. 22). In another article that serves to empower the quality of being a smaller college, the author George Seidel (1968) says that small colleges are important because they provide a "unique learning environment" and also because they cater to "a particular type of student...who can easily become lost in the crush of a large university" (p. 339).

In order for SUNY Potsdam to build up their brand, first they must understand it. They must know how students, faculty, and alumni would assess it in their own words. Then a comparison could be made between the actual and the perceived, and needs could be assessed. When SUNY Potsdam looks into the level of spirit students and faculty have at this school, they will have to think of the factors that go into this spirit, like getting involved, and ask themselves if they are delivering on their promise to provide such things.

In working to obtain and retain students, should SUNY Potsdam better disseminate the essence of their campus as a community where students will be part of a family, a group? While current students may feel the essences, it may be beneficial to portray this feeling to prospective students. This may influence the potential students to attend SUNY Potsdam. In order for SUNY Potsdam to do this, they will first need to explore the essence that their college community emulates.

Purpose and Research Questions

With a long term goal of attracting, obtaining and retaining students at SUNY Potsdam, further investigation will be to uncover answers to research questions in order to see where students, faculty and alumni feel SUNY Potsdam falls in relation to those topics. Our Research Questions are:

- 1) Can the essence of SUNY Potsdam be captured in words?
 - a) What are some descriptive characterizations that might help describe SUNY Potsdam?
 - b) What adjectives do students, faculty, staff, and alumni associate with SUNY Potsdam?
- 2) Is SUNY Potsdam delivering on their promise to students?
 - a) Is the academic experience that students receive consistent with their expectations?
 - b) Is the social experience that students receive consistent with their expectations?

Methodology

While conducting this project to reveal the spirit of SUNY Potsdam, we set up a meeting within the Public Affairs Department with Deborah Dudley, the director of marketing at SUNY Potsdam. When we met with her on September 25th, 2014 we stated our proposal and interview questions (see Appendix A). From this meeting our team received a better idea and direction to move forward with this project, and she agreed to be our client while we work to uncover the spirit of SUNY Potsdam. After this initial meeting, we emailed our client to keep her up-to-date with the progress of this project, and to get her approval of different components of the project along the way.

Based on our research questions, we created a survey to be distributed to all students, faculty, staff members, and alumni. The survey questions are generated within QuestionPro. QuestionPro is an easy to use professional survey software. A link is generated after the survey is completed and ready to be viewed. When the participants click on the link they are brought to the landing page (see Appendix B), which discusses the survey, and general background information that the participants should know before choosing whether or not to partake in the survey. Our survey (see Appendix B) consists of 6 close-ended questions and 8 open-ended questions. This mixture of questions was helpful in receiving the respondents' overall perspective on their thoughts of SUNY Potsdam. There are 458 participants who have responded to the survey out of our sample size of about 9,500 community members. Our sample size is broken up into about 4,260 students, 892 faculty/staff members, and 4,500 alumni.

In order to generate the types of questions within our survey, it took a lot of thought of how to ask the questions in just the right manner in order to get honest information that our group and our client were looking for. We first asked demographic questions regarding what our

respondents' backgrounds were and what their role is within our community. This was done by asking what their affiliation to the campus is and what gender they identify themselves as. This way our group was able to get a better idea of the respondents' role within the Potsdam campus community. This will allow us to determine if there is a significant difference in the answers of current students to alumni. It is these different trends that our research group is looking for to have an accurate determination about what the spirit is within our campus community.

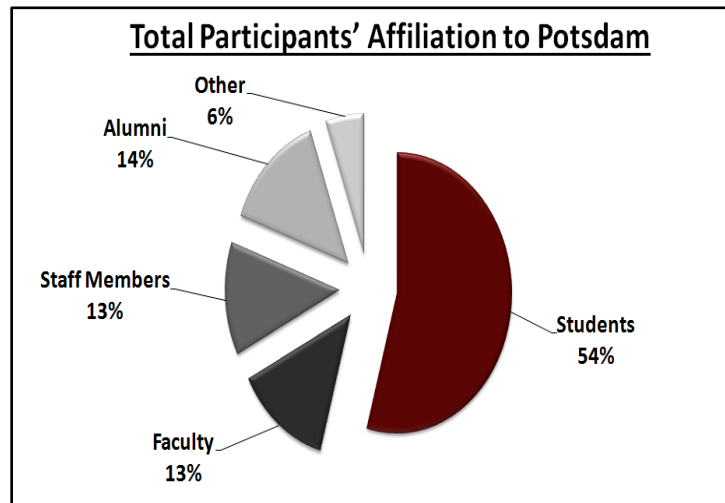
We also feel that it is important to ask about the respondents' academic, social, and overall experience while being a part of the campus. This displayed the respondents feelings of what they expected from the college to what they received when attending, showing whether the respondents received what they expected, or did they expect more than what actually occurred. How the respondents feel about the campus will ultimately display what they feel the spirit within the campus is. Respondents then shared whether or not they would recommend SUNY Potsdam to someone else. After the respondent stated yes/no, we asked if they would explain their answer as to why or why not they would recommend SUNY Potsdam to someone else. This is a question where the respondents show what they think of the institution. If people had a good experience they may recommend it to others, but if they had a disappointing experience, they may not recommend the school. These opinions will then generate the respondents' feelings as to what the overall spirit is within SUNY Potsdam.

Within our next section of the survey, we titled this the "Creative Thinking Section" to get our respondents into a creative mind set asking them questions about what they think SUNY Potsdam would relate to and why. Questions were asked on whether they feel SUNY Potsdam would be a Mac or PC, the gender SUNY Potsdam would be, the type of food it would be, etc. Within asking these questions as a group our main focus was not whether the participants said

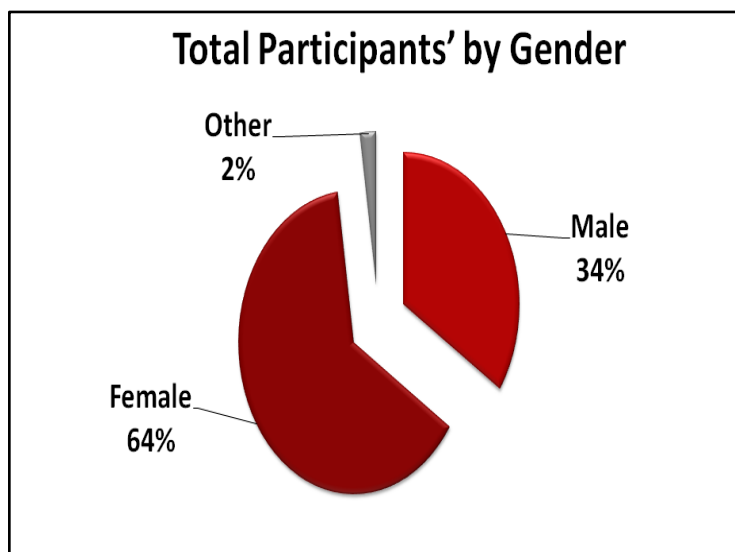
SUNY Potsdam would be a Mac, or if they said SUNY Potsdam would be pizza. We were looking for the descriptive words that they used to defend their answer as to why they believe their answer is indicative of the spirit of SUNY Potsdam. It is with these descriptive words that the respondents used that defined what the spirit of SUNY Potsdam is.

It was also important within the survey to give the respondents the opportunity that if they could create their own slogan for the school, what would he/she make it. This demonstrates how the participants would choose to advertise the school, and the words that the respondents chose reflect the feelings that the respondents have towards SUNY Potsdam. The survey concluded with giving the respondents the opportunity to leave any further comments that they wished to make about either SUNY Potsdam or about our survey in general.

Our audience for this survey was students, faculty members, staff members, alumni, and other participants who may be familiar with the campus, but they may not identify primarily as being one of these selected groups. With looking at the demographics of the participants who took part in this survey: 242 respondents were students, 58 faculty members, 58 staff members, 64 alumni, and 24 other participants who did not identify themselves as associating with one of these particular groups within the campus community. This does not display whether there are participants who identify themselves as possibly being a part of two of these categories. Overall mostly student feedback was received from the survey, but the perspectives of faculty, staff members, alumni, and participants familiar with the campus community contribute to the underlying spirit of SUNY Potsdam.



As part of the survey the demographics also included asking the participants what gender they identified themselves as either female, male, or non-specified (other). From looking at the results of the participants who took the survey 64% are female, 34% are male, and 2% of our population is non-specified (other). Overall, this figure is accurate because the ratio of women to men on campus is 58 to 42. This is fairly close to what we received from the respondents. Since a majority of our campus is female, it is still important to consider that their perspectives may be different on what the spirit is compared to males or individuals who do not identify themselves as either one of these genders.

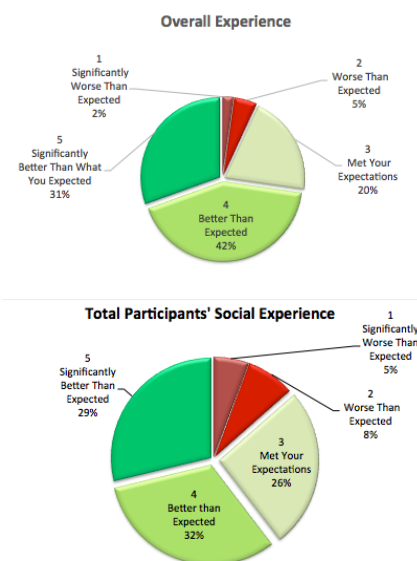


Overall, the respondents who took the survey identified through their use of descriptive words what they felt best described SUNY Potsdam. It is how the respondent described the institution that displays what he/she feels is the true spirit within the campus community. The further analysis of the responses will shed additional light on this subject matter.

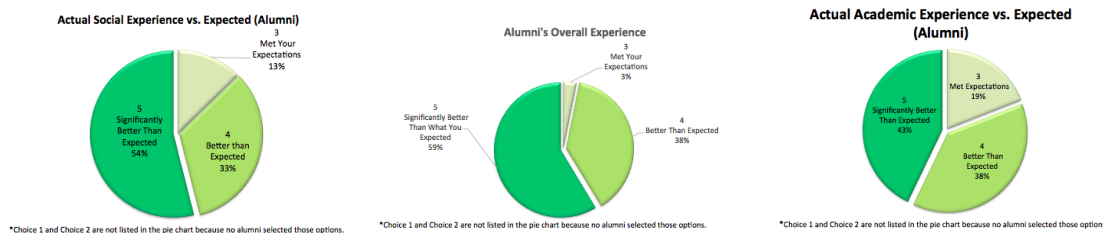
Data Analysis

Approximately 50% of the people who started the survey completed it. There were 458 surveys completed. We can see that of those responding, 88.4% of participants would recommend SUNY Potsdam to someone else (Question #6). When asked to describe why they would or would not, respondents used words such as ‘welcoming’ and ‘diverse’ to explain why. Many respondents also indicated the “beautiful campus” as a reason to attend and recommend SUNY Potsdam. As one of the respondents put it “Potsdam is a great place to find out who you are and what you are made of. You are a person, not a number here.”

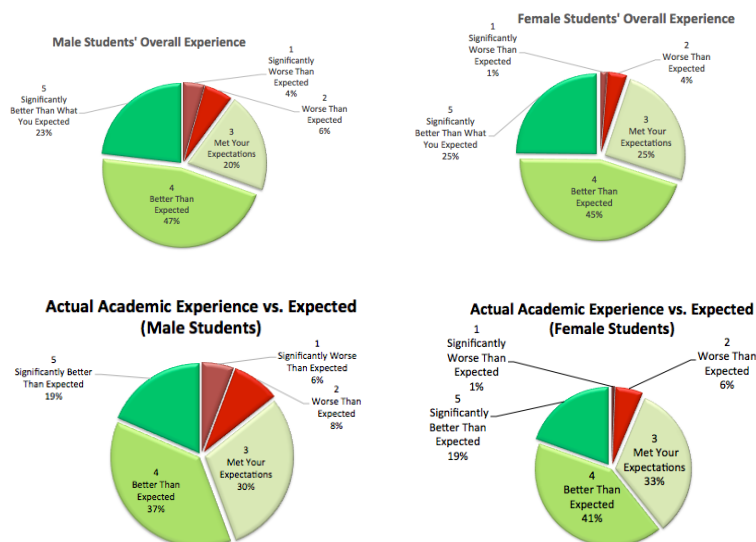
The majority of participants, males and females in every demographic, rated their *overall experience* ‘better than expected’. Female students and alumni carried that category making the average ‘better than expected’. 93% of total participants said that their *overall experience* here ‘met’, was ‘better than’ or was ‘significantly better’ than they expected. 87% of total participants felt their *social experience* ‘met’, was ‘better than’ or ‘significantly better’ than they had expected.



Alumni rated their *overall*, *social* and *academic experiences* the highest of students, faculty, staff, and alumni. 59% of alumni said their *overall experience* was ‘significantly better’ than they expected, 54% of them said their *social experience* was ‘significantly better’ than they expected and 43% said their *academic experience* was ‘significantly better’ than expected. Not one alumnus that participated said that their *overall*, *social* or *academic experience* was worse or significantly worse than they expected.

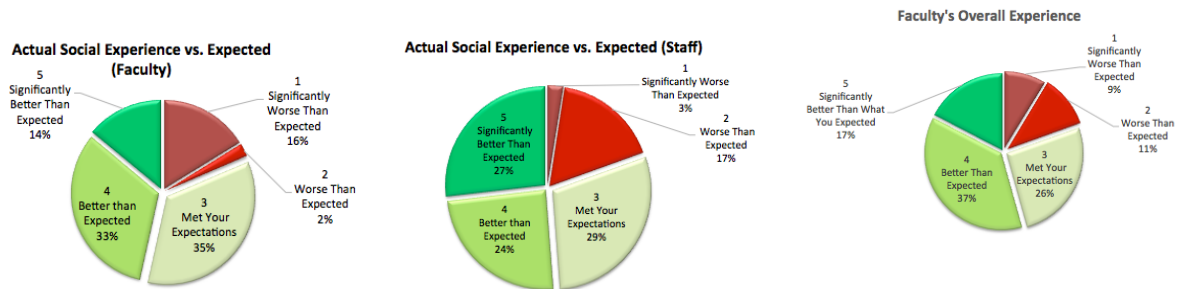


The majority of current student responses, 47% of males and 45% of females, showed that their *overall experience* at SUNY Potsdam was ‘better than’ they expected while 10% of males and 5% of females said their *overall experience* was ‘worse’ or ‘significantly worse’ than they expected. 92% of current students said their actual *academic experience* ‘met’, was ‘better than’ or ‘significantly better’ than they expected. Worth noting was that males doubled women in their rating of their academic experience (7% vs. 14%) as ‘significantly worse’ or ‘worse than expected’.



Standing out were survey responses from faculty/staff. This group had the highest percentage of people, 18% for faculty and 20% for staff, who said their *social experience* was ‘worse’ or ‘significantly worse’ than they expected. Faculty also had 20% of participants say their *overall experience* was ‘worse’ or ‘significantly worse’ than expected, the highest of

any of the groups surveyed in the overall category (see Appendix C).



Question #13 in the survey asked if SUNY Potsdam was Safe, Diverse, Open or Other. The question asked participants to check all that apply. Those adjectives are the three main promises in the Potsdam Pledge offered by the college to current and future students and staff. Of the 458 students, faculty, staff, alumni and combination of those four categories that took this survey, 329 of them said SUNY Potsdam was safe. Safety held the highest response rate of the three adjectives. 307 participants of 458 said the college was diverse and 294 said the college was open. Those answers indicate that 129 participants did not vote that SUNY Potsdam was safe, 151 did not vote that the campus was diverse and 164 did not vote that the campus was open. There is a possibility that some participants did not realize they could check more than one word though it was noted in the question. 58 participants offered other adjectives describing the campus. Some that came up were: friendly, nurturing, closed, dysfunctional, welcoming, caring, outdated, isolated and supportive (See Appendix D).

In Question #9, we asked if SUNY Potsdam were a gender what gender would it be. 173 participants described the school as female, 65 described it as male, and 49 respondents described it as a transgender or androgynous. Some participants did not respond to this question. Words such as 'nurturing', 'compassionate' and 'caring' were used to describe the gender (see Appendix D). As one respondent said, "SUNY Potsdam would be a female

because of the caring and compassionate environment that is created here.” Some answers were based on the physical environment “Female because of its caring, compassionate and nurturing atmosphere” also “She, based on the idea of Minerva and Julia Crane.” While other answers were based on the people, such as staff, like we see in this example, “SUNY Potsdam would be a female. The attention to detail and compassion [of] the staff and faculty.” A different response was, “Male because we have Maxcy bear (he is portrayed as male),” this response based on the college mascot.

When asked if SUNY Potsdam would be a Mac or a PC more respondents chose to say it is a Mac. 255 participants said Mac whereas 162 said it was a PC. Aside from choosing which computer brand it would be, the top adjective to come up in responses was ‘old’. ‘User-Friendly’, ‘Innovative’, ‘Problematic’ and ‘Reliable’ were also common keywords especially when the participants compared SUNY Potsdam to a computer brand (see Appendix D). One respondent stated, “A Mac. The Spirit of Potsdam is forward thinking, diversity, and innovative.” Another answer identified SUNY Potsdam as a PC stating “PC, because it is easier to navigate and use. It is more user-friendly.” A response that culminated both brands read, “Bits of each/ Crane is def Mac, as are art, theatre, creative writing & dance. The natural and social sciences are more PC.”

We asked another open-ended question inviting participants to tell us what type of Family SUNY Potsdam would be (Question #11). The most frequently used words were ‘Dysfunctional’, ‘Extended’, ‘Blended’ and ‘Close’ (see Appendix D). Many participants used the term ‘tight knit’ in their answers. Many also used the terms ‘diverse’, ‘welcoming’ and ‘mixed’. One answer from a male sophomore student communicated what many others said in not so different ways, “It would be a large extended family because we are one

community here”. On the other end of the spectrum, many contributors chose to write about SUNY Potsdam as being ‘dysfunctional’. An example here from a female staff member, “Dysfunctional. Big lack of communication all over.” Reference the Word Pictures below to visualize answers to this question. The program used, Wordle, picks up the most common words and puts them together into one image. The most common words are the largest.

Faculty/Staff responses are the first image and Student responses are the second image.



The top response coming from Questions #12 asking what type of food SUNY Potsdam would be was pizza. Participants used the food to say many different things about the school. Here is a response from a female, sophomore student at SUNY Potsdam, “If SUNY Potsdam was a food it would be pizza, because all the people here represent a different topping.” Another participant of the same academic standing, a female sophomore student attending Potsdam, answered pizza but in a different way. She said, “It would be a pizza. Average, everywhere and always good just nothing really different like Thai.” Another from a male staff member answered, “Pizza - lots of variety in terms of offerings and even at its worst, it's still not all that bad.” Other common foods listed were ‘Salad’ and ‘Italian’ (see Appendix D). Many, instead of specifying a food, wrote adjectives that would describe the food. For example, the most commonly used adjectives were ‘Different’, ‘Healthy’ and ‘Variety’. Reference the Word Pictures below to visualize answers to this question. The program used,

Wordle, picks up the most common words and puts them together into one image. The most common words are the largest. *Faculty/Staff responses are the second image and Student responses are the first image.* Faculty/Staff responses were similar to Student responses.



Conclusion

Many conclusions can be taken away from the Spirit of Potsdam survey. The participants including Faculty, Staff, Alumni and Students, had a positive experience at Potsdam. There is a great love for this school and pride in being here. So many respondents felt the ‘Spirit of SUNY Potsdam’ was its family feel; the diverse population and the close-knit relationships developed here. Answers similar to this one came up over and over again, “SUNY Potsdam, a place where you will feel like a family.” However, that being said, there are conclusions that can be drawn that Potsdam is also a broken entity that needs some help to be fixed.

Though there is a strong love for the SUNY Potsdam community, based upon the data, there are some secondary conclusions that can be drawn. Encouraging academic development could have a positive influence for current and future enrollment of students. With the competition for students to attend colleges and universities so high, SUNY Potsdam should work to strengthen their academic standing to attract new students through word of mouth from current and past ones. It does not look good to have students posing potential slogans like, "If you slacked off in high school we'll accept you anyway!" When talking about current students, however, it is important to point out that staff, faculty, and students said their overall experience was good according to data we have acquired. The overall experience, which combined academic and social factors, resulted in some positive numbers. Data collected from staff and faculty showed that 36% thought their experience was better than what they expected, and that 26% felt that it was actually significantly better than what they expected. Following a similar trend, 46% of students thought it was better than expected, and 24% thought it was significantly better. The data leaves open the question, where is there a

problem with students returning, if a significant number of them say that Potsdam is meeting their expectations or exceeding them.

Another conclusion taken from survey responses is that we could work to achieve some differentiation on campus. One student writes, “If you want to go to school and just get it over with, come here because we don't have anything cool on campus.” We are the oldest SUNY school and a beautiful one at that, with a campus and history similar to landmark institutions like Amherst and Colgate, we know we have a lot to offer but some changes must be made according to survey responses, many being financial ones. “I have a great love for this school but many things need to be fixed. Infrastructure wise and the SGA organization and how money is spent.” This bit of information is a huge disconnect at our school. Potsdam is concerned about retention rate. When searching through the data one can realize this fact. The students don't make a mention of shortcomings in the budget, but do complain about dysfunctional attributes the school utilizes. One student inserted this as their selected slogan for the school, “We'll charge you ridiculously for a parking pass and roadrunner Wi-Fi that doesn't work!” These aspects are potential reasons for a low retention rate. You find unhappy students, who have simple-everyday utilities that either do not work or the students feel that they are overcharged for having them. These are some of the problems that one may find in our data collected.

Many comments from the faculty/staff participants touched on the aspect of finances here at SUNY Potsdam. The word dysfunctional topped the adjective list when participants were asked what type of family SUNY Potsdam is. One male faculty member chooses to write SUNY Potsdam was “Dysfunctional - because of the poor management of administration.” Clearly it is a problem when the personnel in a higher education setting are

not on the same page. It may have a trickle down effect that may or may not be affecting retention rate. Based on the open ended questions, disgruntled staff and faculty may be limiting their potential due to them feeling stressed by budget cuts and factors dealing with finances. To summarize the feelings of this population from the data the quote, “not growing, but not closed down,” seems to hit the nail on the head.

Many other comments spoke to that feeling of dysfunction, and it came up in other questions in the survey. For example, these comments from a faculty member when asked to write a slogan for SUNY Potsdam, “It is particularly difficult to 'be creative' and celebratory in the midst of the seemingly never-ending and increasingly bleak financial crisis we are mired in. While I am deeply committed to Potsdam and its role in providing access to education, it is impossible for me to come up with any upbeat slogan about it this morning.” Another male faculty member, responding to the same slogan question writes, “We take advantage of our faculty” as his answer. Those were not the only answers pertaining to dissatisfaction among employees, and it is something that we concluded was a major feeling pushing again a positive ‘Spirit of Potsdam’ feeling.

Some other major conclusions we can draw from this survey is that in answering the close ended questions, respondents gave the college positive marks, and many times when they had to chance to dig deeper in their response, there was more to their opinions than first assumed. There was a discrepancy between answers from faculty and staff as compared to those from students. Data concludes that Potsdam needs to give the students things to do, allow them to embrace Potsdam, and they may be more likely to stay. If that was the case, retention rates may rise, giving staff the finances to do the things they want in the classroom. The data shows Potsdam has participants who want to do more, but they need some help.

There is a great sense of pride in Potsdam. This quote taken from a faculty member demonstrates this: “I realize my remarks seem contradictory at times. I really feel strongly that our community is simultaneously progressive... As a student here, the world was my oyster and opportunities were ripe for the taking. As an employee, I sometimes am saddened to see the dark underbelly of the place that shaped me so greatly as a younger person. That doesn't change my love for the Potsdam experience I had as an undergraduate. I do wish faculty could see the good that staff does behind the scenes in support of a quality student experience... My pride as an alumna is overwhelming.”

Though there was negativity expressed in many open-ended questions, participants overwhelmingly felt this college was a family. From our survey results, and the adjectives that came up the most, we have identified that the ‘Spirit of Potsdam’ can be captured in these few slogans that participants wrote concerning the college community. Some of these include, “SUNY Potsdam, where great minds come to grow”; “SUNY Potsdam, Where Everyone is Family”; “SUNY Potsdam, Explore Yourself”, “Big enough to give you choices, small enough to make you feel a part of a family”; “Start out as a student, leave as a member of our family.” One quote that gives Potsdam hope, however, would be “Potsdam: We never stop trying.”

Limitations

If this survey were to be repeated, it would be necessary to dig a little deeper with the questions to get a better idea of why people wrote negatively in their answers. The college cannot improve if they simply know some are dissatisfied but cannot pinpoint where that dissatisfaction stems from. Data indicates mostly positive findings for closed ended questions but responses for open-ended questions included more negative feedback. It is possible that the questions asked in the survey did not address the real concerns of the SUNY Potsdam population; different questions might prompt respondents to clearly express positive and negative attitudes consistently. Other factors also played a role in affecting the study and resulted in contributing to the content of the results collected with the survey models in place. The first limitation was simply time. The time for the research group to find a client and compose good research questions with a competent survey device limited the potential to dig deeper into what the group specifically wanted to know. Combined with the strict time limits of meeting with the client the group's surveys were distributed with limited amount of time to turn back and run the analytics on the results. With more time available, the group might have gotten back more useful results to diversify the findings.

The second limitation we had was running our survey during a period where SUNY Potsdam was also distributing a lengthy survey for their purposes. This set the group up with the challenge to distribute our survey to a group already exposed to a longer one leaving them less likely to finish our instrument from simply being burned out. The group targeted staff and alumni with more force on social media and through email links in hopes of getting more useful results back in the data collection phase as a result. If again, the group had more time and unexposed participants, the results may have contained more context to what we wanted to find.

A limitation for our group was a technique we used in our survey instrument. In order to trigger key adjectives out of participants the group formed a “creative question” section that some users liked and others did not. This section may have resulted in a drop of participation from the population as half of those who started the survey did not finish it. Some users even said in their additional comments that their brain “isn’t capable to think in these terms,” resulting in them not answering those key questions. If the group asked those questions in a different format the result may have been more participants finishing the survey, but the group wouldn’t have the results that were needed to answer the research primary questions.

A question that was probably not clear for participants was Question #13 where we asked if SUNY Potsdam was Safe, Diverse, Open or Other. The question asked participants to check all that apply. There is a possibility that the results are skewed because respondents might not have had the clear understanding of checking more than one option. It is possible participants did not read the instructions and assumed only one box should be checked.

Future Research

Further research can generate more in depth data by adding research methods such as focus groups and participant observation. Such methods can help the researcher(s) capture qualities that define the spirit of the SUNY Potsdam community. The face-to-face meetings with real people, portraying real emotions in their answers, would increase the context and understanding of said spirit in the community. The researchers would better understand the results through the increased connection to the participants who are expressing their feelings. If future researchers were to dive deeper into the questions our group is trying to answer they would also explore asking more alumni to participate, going back to as far as possible to compare and bring back SUNY Potsdam traditions and expressions lost in time.

If the school wants to change the culture to one that contains more unity and school spirit they may first start with our research to use our results to define our community to future potential students. This would help increase enrollment, which would help the budget problem that many participants feel strongly affects our SUNY Potsdam's ability to educate. Future students may also benefit from our research if the school used our results to "brand" SUNY Potsdam. With the increased pride the student population would also form a unity more close-knit than what studies already portray. This unity and bond amongst students will help increase retention and satisfaction rates may increase.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Questions

We went into the interview with 5 main questions for Deb Dudley. The questions were:

1. What do you feel is the spirit of Potsdam?
2. Can you tell us about efforts have you made to capture and communicate this spirit?
3. How do you feel Potsdam could do a better job of capturing and communicating this spirit?
4. What are the methods SUNY Potsdam currently used to convey messages and market information?
5. Which method is the most effective?

Appendix B: Landing Page/Survey

Purpose: HELP! We are asking for your feedback to aide our ongoing research to find The Spirit of Potsdam.

In your own words please help us find what defines the essence of SUNY Potsdam.

Directions: Please answer the questions as accurately as you can based on your personal feelings.

There are multiple choice and open ended questions present on this survey that will be anonymous.

Dear Member of the Potsdam Community,

You are invited to participate in our Spirit of Potsdam Survey. We want your opinion on what makes the Potsdam campus community what it is and why. The average time needed to complete this survey was about five minutes. Your answers are anonymous, and this report will be used for class and internal use only and will not be published.

Tell us what you think. Thank you.

You are invited to be in a research study on your experience at SUNY Potsdam. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a current student, faculty, or alumni of SUNY Potsdam. This study is being conducted by Anthony Betrus, Samantha DiPietro, Bethany Geating, Nicholas Peryea and Franchell Polanco in the Business Administration Department of SUNY Potsdam. The purpose of this study is to capture The Spirit of SUNY Potsdam. We want

to know what makes it a community for students, faculty, and staff. The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records. Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with SUNY Potsdam.

If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact them at Anthony Betrus at Dunn Hall 393, (315) 267-2987, or betrusak@potsdam.edu. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you are encouraged to contact Johanne Sullivan, Chair of the SUNY Potsdam Institutional Review Board by mail (204 Raymond Hall, 44 Pierrepont Avenue, Potsdam, NY, 13668), telephone (315-267-2688) or email (SUNYPotsdamIRB@potsdam.edu). Approval by the Institutional Review Board of SUNY Potsdam and the Institutional Review Board attests only that appropriate safeguards have been included in the research design to protect human participants. This approval does not imply that the College endorses the content of the research or the conclusions drawn from the results of the research.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. By clicking on the link at the top of this page it indicates your consent to participate in this study. The average time to complete this survey is about 5 minutes. The survey website being used for this study has safeguards to keep your responses confidential. You are encouraged to review the specific precautions taken by the website by reviewing the privacy policy or statement posted on the site. Please keep in mind, though; that it is not possible to provide a 100% guarantee that information traveling over the Internet is safe. In addition, when information is collected online, there is a risk of that information leaving the direct control of the researcher and being accessed by others. When sending private information over the Internet, you should take precautions to make sure the information you provide online cannot be viewed by others. First, if you complete the survey at work, please be aware that some employers use tracking software to monitor and record keystrokes, mouse clicks, and web sites visited. This could impact the confidentiality of your responses.

Therefore, you are advised to complete the survey on your home computer or a public computer to better protect your privacy. Further, please remember to clear your browser's cache and page history after you submit the survey in order to better protect your privacy. If you do not know how to do this, you can go to the following websites for help:

<https://www.google.com/adsense/support/bin/answer....> and

<http://www.computerhope.com/issues/ch000510.htm>

What is your affiliation with SUNY Potsdam?
Are you a Student/Faculty/Staff Member/Alumni?

- ☐ Student
☐ Faculty
☐ Staff Member
☐ Alumni
☐ Other
-

Gender?
Male/Female/Other

- ☐ Male
☐ Female
☐ Other
-

Undergraduate Studies: Expected year of graduation or year graduated from SUNY Potsdam. *Please disregard this question if not applicable.

Graduate Studies: Expected year of graduation or year graduated from SUNY Potsdam. *Please disregard this question if not applicable.

Please rate your experience:

Was the quality of your ACADEMIC, SOCIAL and OVERALL experiences at SUNY Potsdam consistent with what you expected they would be?

- *1 star to designate it was significantly worse than what you expected.**
***2 stars to designate it was worse than expected.**
***3 stars to designate it met your expectations.**
***4 stars to designate it was better than expected.**
***5 stars to designate it was significantly better than what you expected.**

Academic Experience	☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆
Social Experience	☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆
Overall Experience	☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Would you recommend SUNY Potsdam to someone else?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

Would you care to express why or why not to the previous question?

CREATIVE THINKING SECTION

Directions: Lets get creative! In the following section please use adjectives to describe your answer. We strongly encourage you to fill in the 'why', but ultimately the 'why' is optional.

EXAMPLE:

QUESTION: If SUNY Potsdam was a major, what would it be? Please tell us why.

ANSWER: SUNY Potsdam would be an art major because the campus is beautiful, the people are creative and each person takes something unique away from being on the campus.

If SUNY Potsdam was a gender, what gender would it be? Please tell us why.

If SUNY Potsdam was a computer brand, would it be a Mac or a PC? Please tell us why.

If SUNY Potsdam was a family, what type of family would it be? Please tell us why.

If SUNY Potsdam was a type of food, what would it be? Please tell us why.

Do you feel the SUNY Potsdam campus community is:

****Please check all that apply.***

- ☐ Safe
- ☐ Diverse
- ☐ Open
- ☐ Other

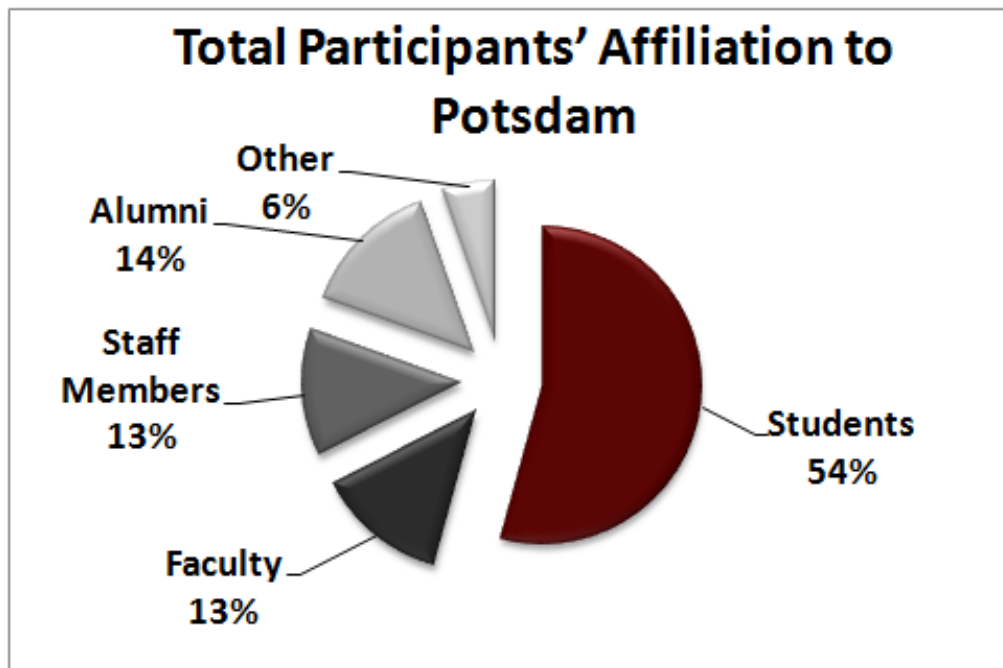
We would love for you to share any additional adjectives (descriptive words) that you feel represent, to you, the Spirit of the SUNY Potsdam community. **Up to ten*

If SUNY Potsdam had a slogan, what would it be?

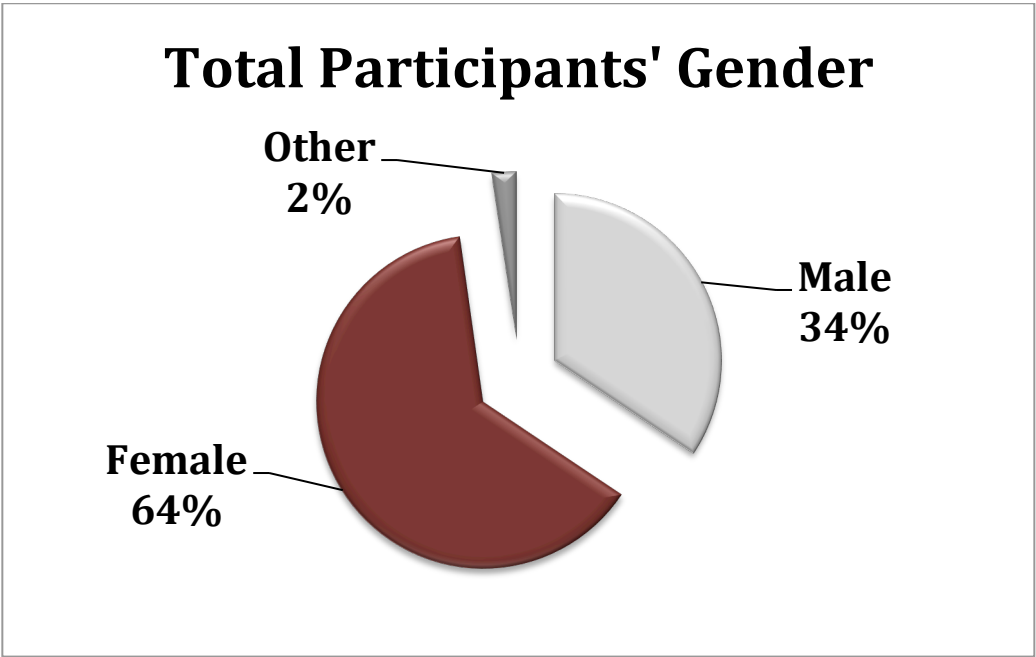
Please feel free to leave any further comments below.

Appendix C: Data Tables, Charts, and Wordles

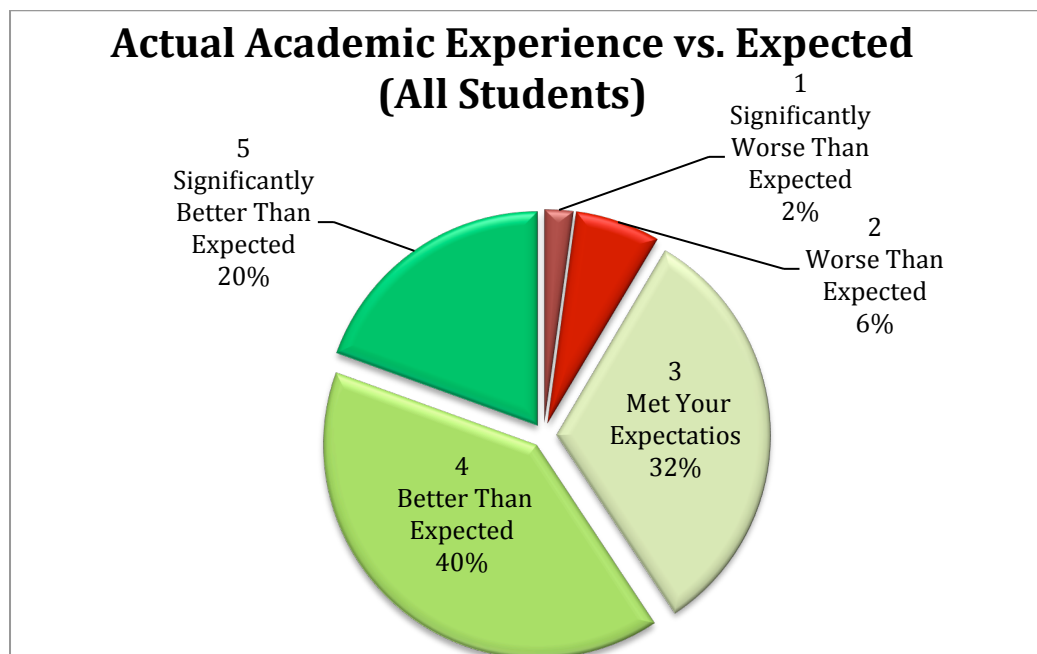
What is your affiliation with SUNY Potsdam?	Total Participants by Demographic	Percentage
Students	242	54.26%
Faculty	59	13.23%
Staff Members	58	13.00%
Alumni	63	14.13%
Other	24	5.38%
Total	446	100.00%



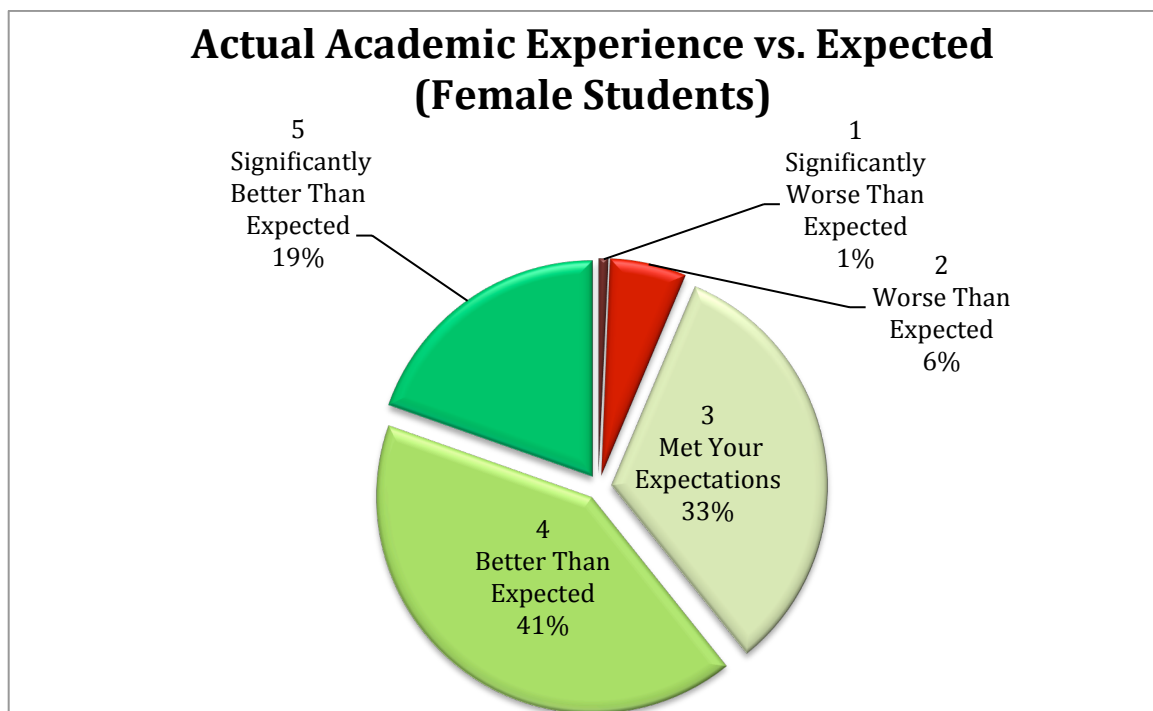
Gender?	Total Participants by Demographic	Percentage
Male	154	34.38%
Female	284	63.39%
Other	10	2.23%
Total	307	100.00%



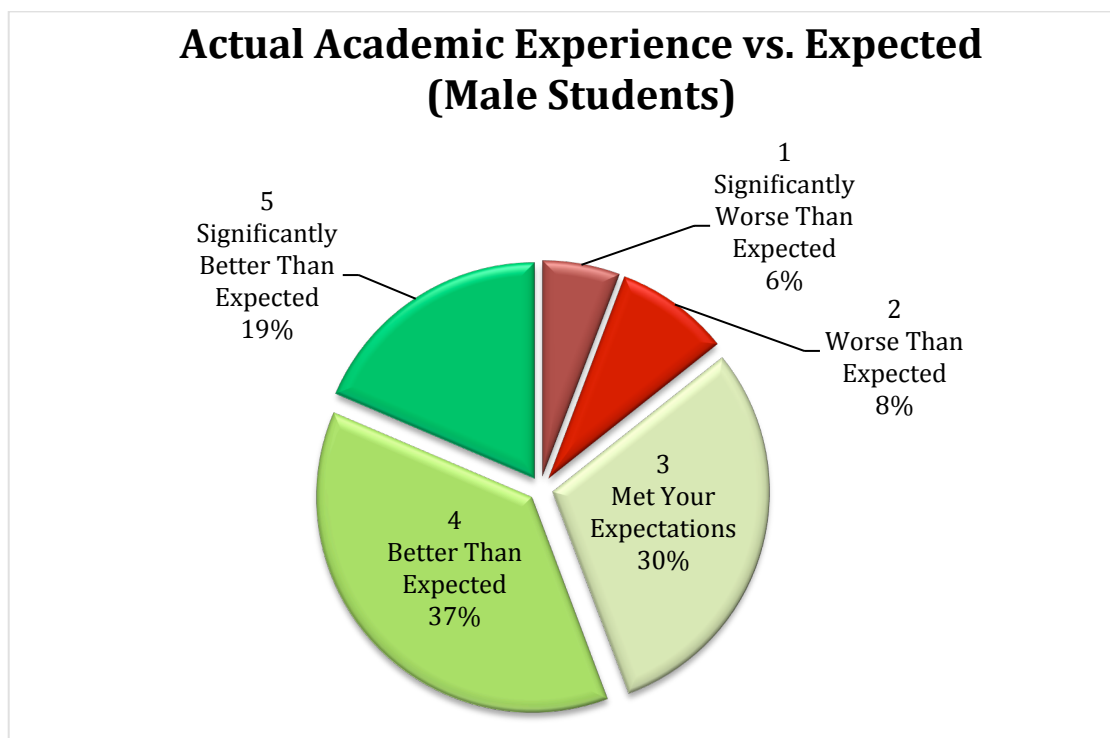
Actual Academic Experience vs. Expected (All Students)	Total Responses
1 Significantly Worse Than Expected	5
2 Worse Than Expected	15
3 Met Your Expectations	76
4 Better Than Expected	94
5 Significantly Better Than Expected	46
Total	236



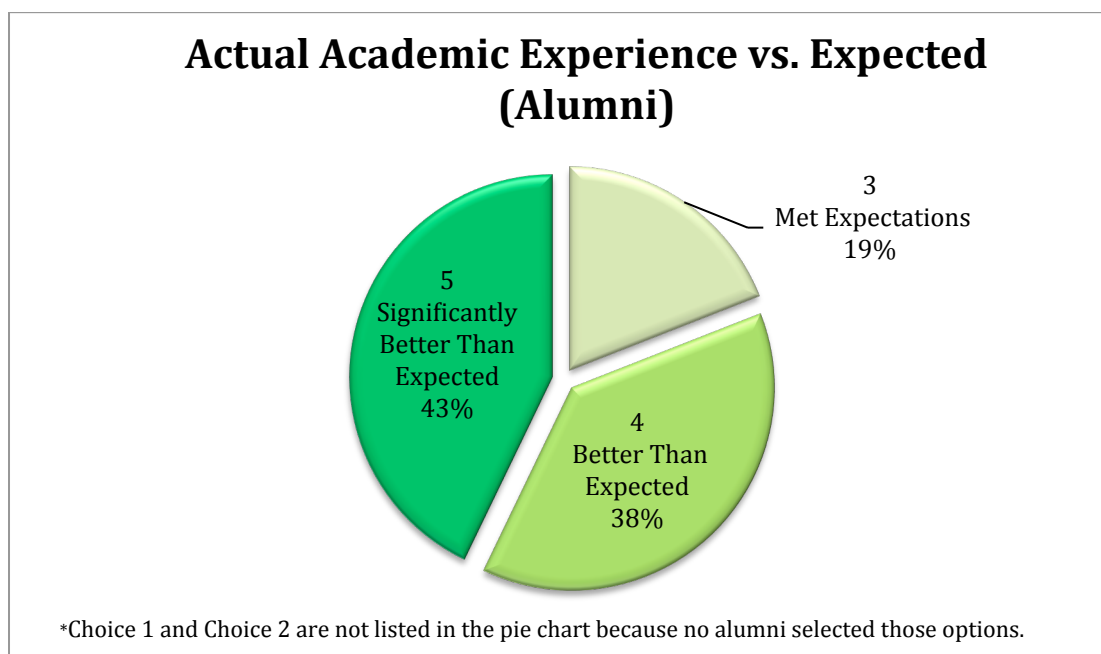
Actual Academic Experience vs. Expected (Female Students)	Total Responses
1 Significantly Worse Than Expected	1
2 Worse Than Expected	9
3 Met Your Expectations	52
4 Better Than Expected	65
5 Significantly Better Than Expected	31
Total	158



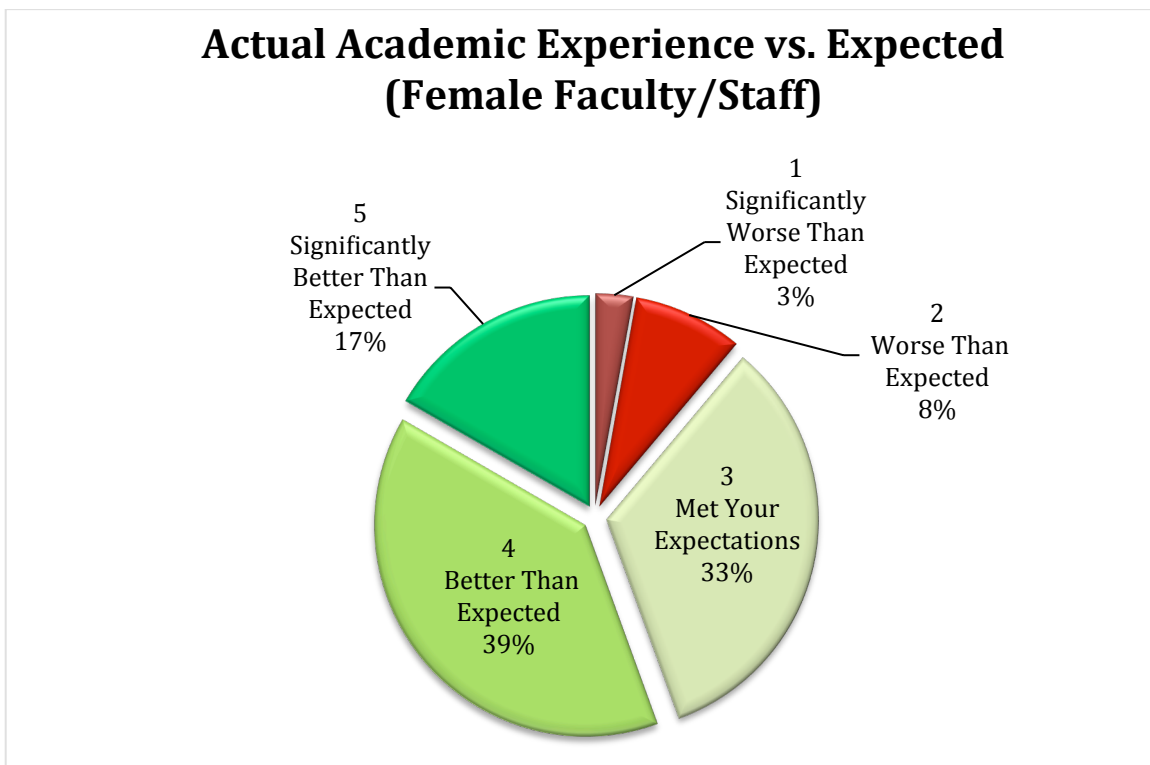
Actual Academic Experience vs. Expected (Male Students)	Total Responses
1 Significantly Worse Than Expected	4
2 Worse Than Expected	6
3 Met Your Expectations	21
4 Better Than Expected	26
5 Significantly Better Than Expected	13
Total	70



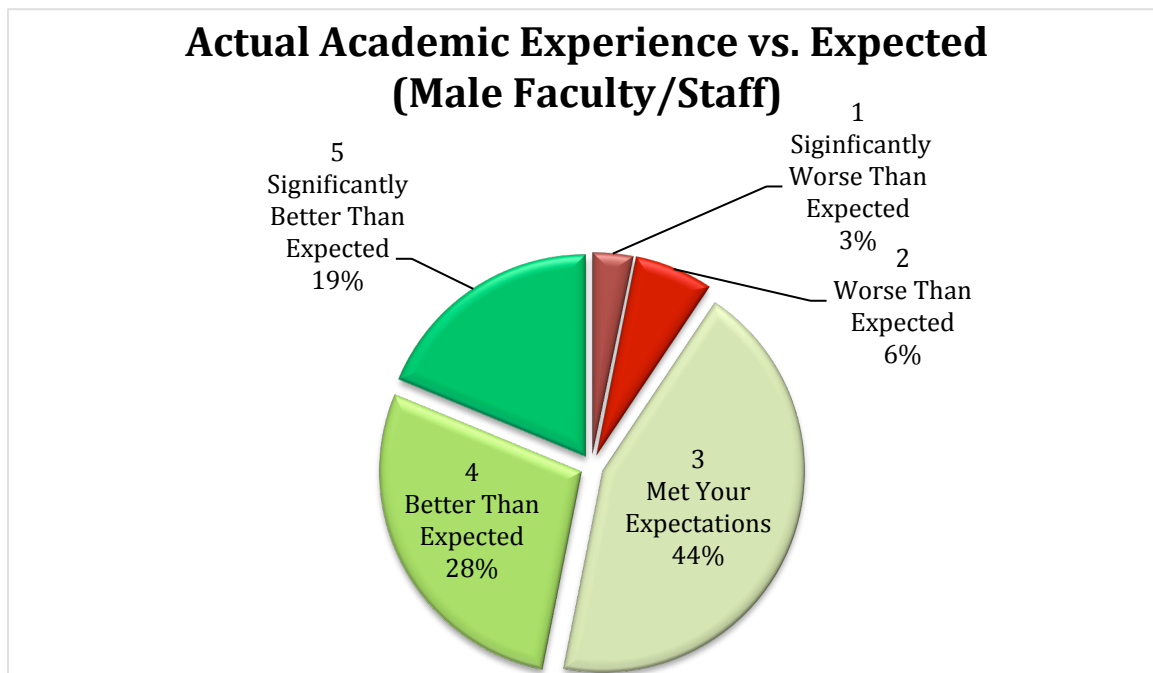
Actual Academic Experience vs. Expected Alumni	Total Responses	Percentage
1 Significantly Worse Than Expected	0	0.0%
2 Worse Than Expected	0	0.0%
3 Met Expectations	12	19.0%
4 Better Than Expected	24	38.1%
5 Significantly Better Than Expected	27	42.9%
Total	63	100.00%



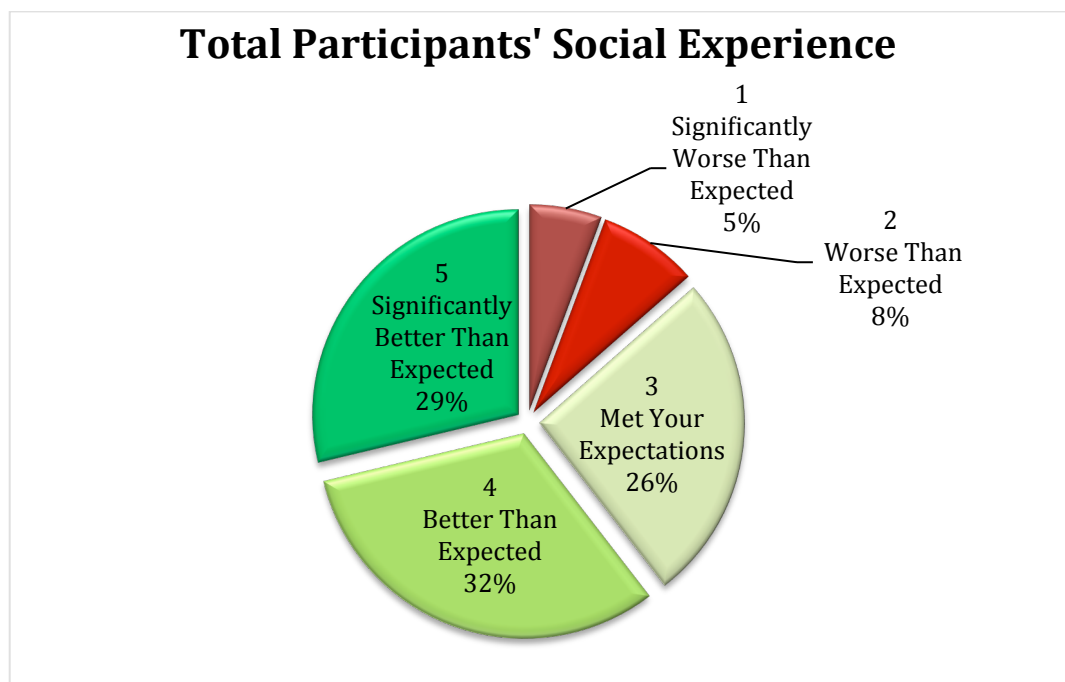
Actual Academic Experience vs. Expected (Female Faculty/Staff)	Total Responses
1 Significantly Worse Than Expected	1
2 Worse Than Expected	3
3 Met Your Expectations	12
4 Better Than Expected	14
5 Significantly Better Than Expected	6
Total	36



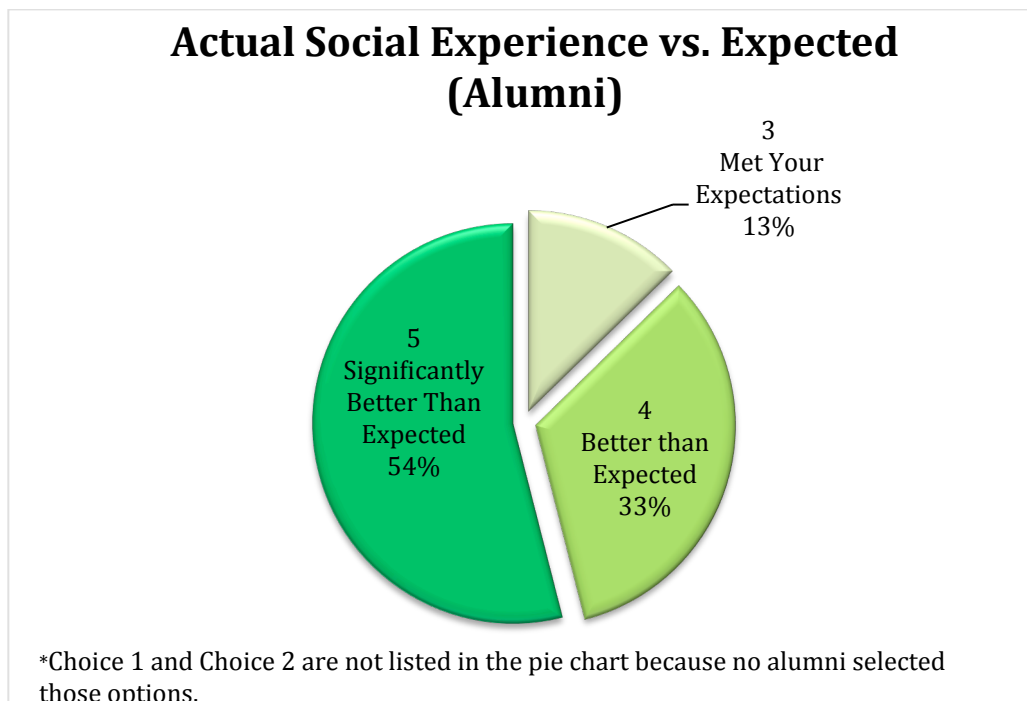
Actual Academic Experience vs. Expected (Male Faculty/Staff)	Total Responses
1 Significantly Worse Than Expected	1
2 Worse Than Expected	2
3 Met Your Expectations	14
4 Better Than Expected	9
5 Significantly Better Than Expected	6
Total	32



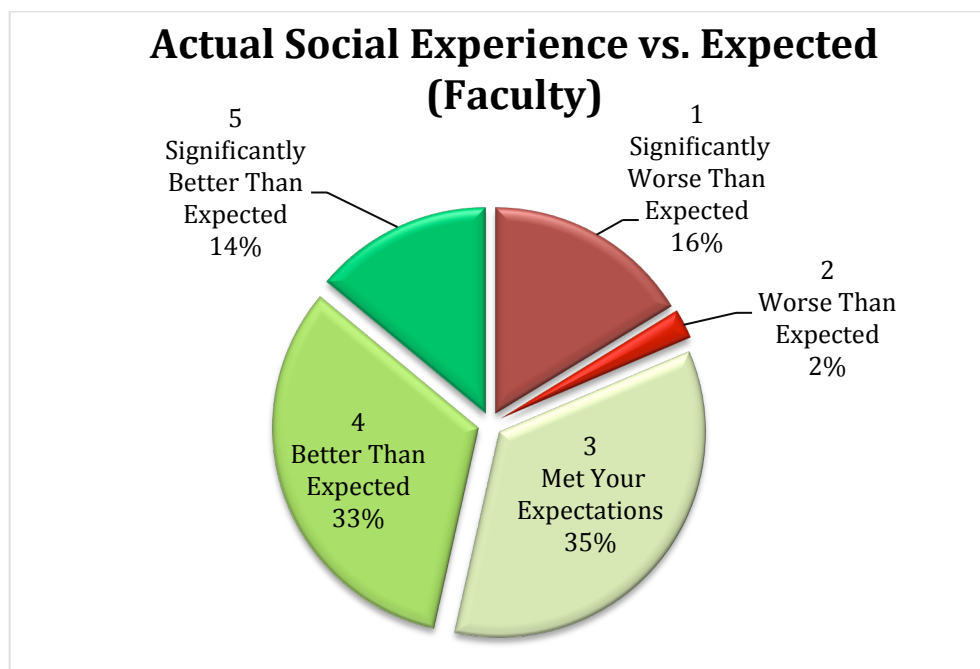
Total Participants' Social Experience by Number	Total Responses
1 Significantly Worse Than Expected	23
2 Worse Than Expected	32
3 Met Your Expectations	106
4 Better than Expected	129
5 Significantly Better Than Expected	117
Total	407



Actual Social Experience vs. Expected (Alumni)	Total Responses
1 Significantly Worse Than Expected	0
2 Worse Than Expected	0
3 Met Your Expectations	8
4 Better than Expected	21
5 Significantly Better Than Expected	34
Total	63



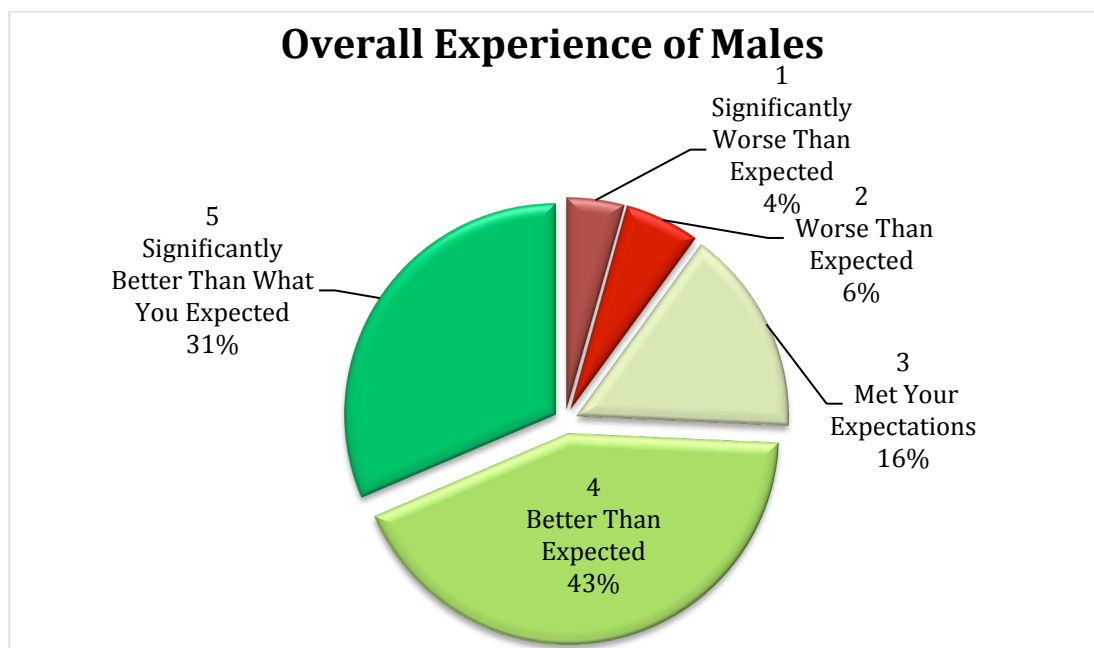
Actual Social Experience vs. Expected (Faculty)	Total Responses
1 Significantly Worse Than Expected	7
2 Worse Than Expected	1
3 Met Your Expectations	15
4 Better than Expected	14
5 Significantly Better Than Expected	6
Total	43



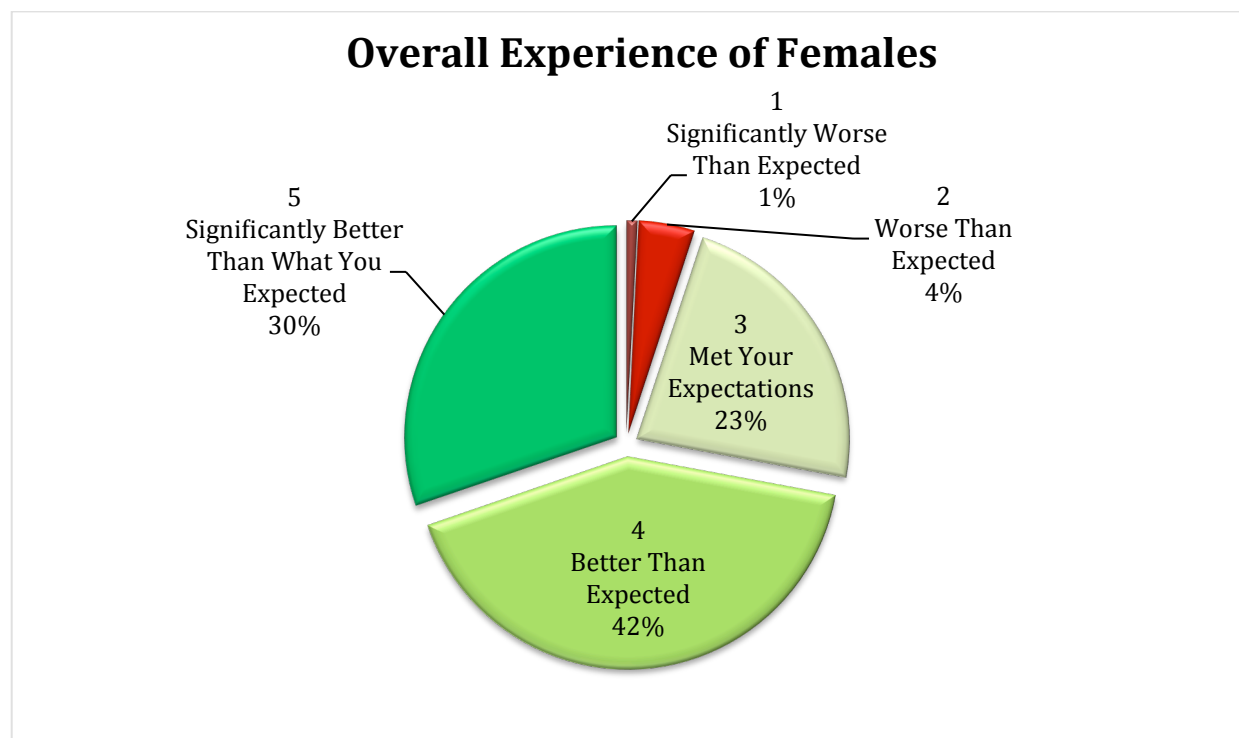
Actual Social Experience vs. Expected (Staff)	Total Responses
Significantly Worse Than Expected	1
Worse Than Expected	7
Met Your Expectations	12
Better than Expected	10
Significantly Better Than Expected	11
Total	41



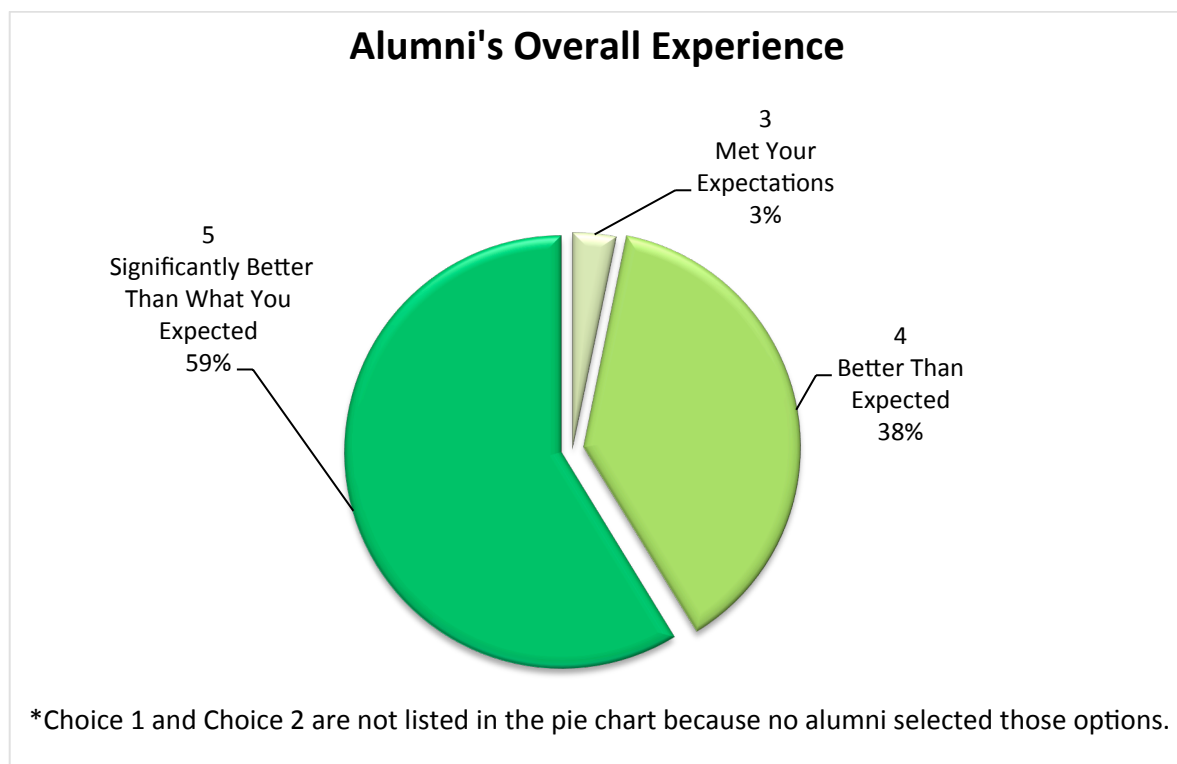
Male Students' Overall Experience	Total Responses	Percentage
1 Significantly Worse Than Expected	3	4.35%
2 Worse Than Expected	4	5.80%
3 Met Your Expectations	14	20.29%
4 Better Than Expected	32	46.38%
5 Significantly Better Than What You Expected	16	23.19%
Total	69	100.00%



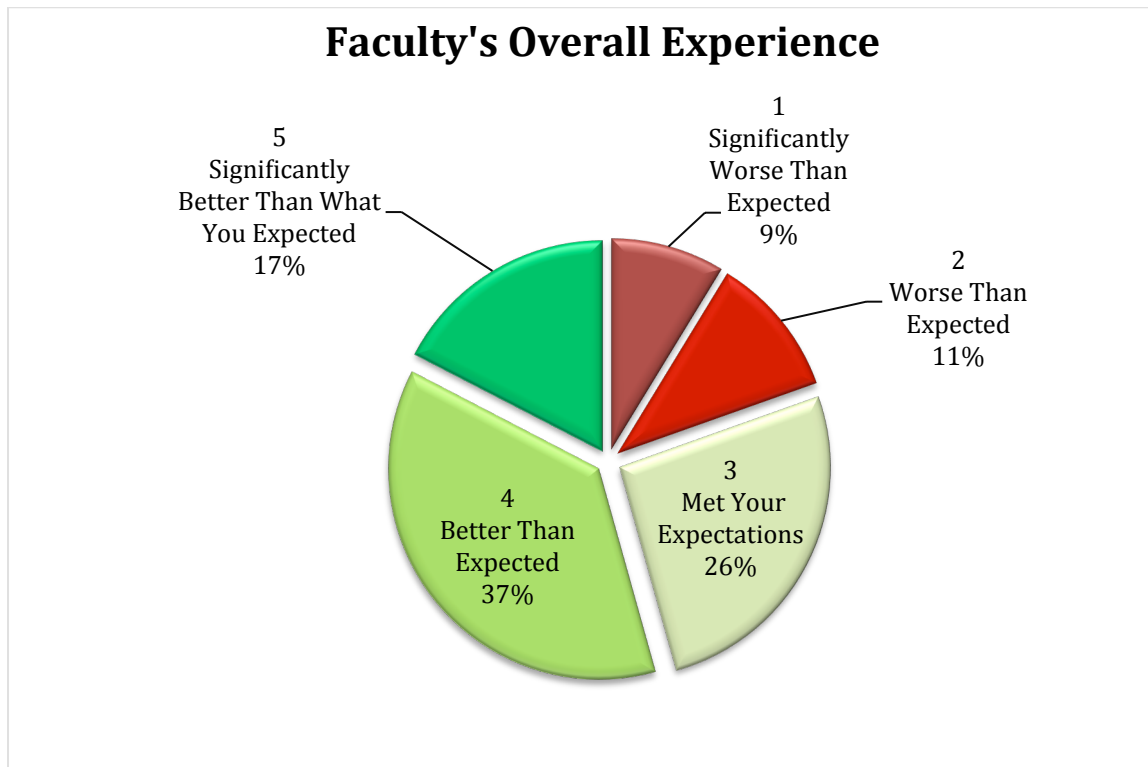
Female Students' Overall Experience	Total Responses	Percentage
1 Significantly Worse Than Expected	2	1.27%
2 Worse Than Expected	6	3.82%
3 Met Your Expectations	39	24.84%
4 Better Than Expected	71	45.22%
5 Significantly Better Than What You Expected	39	24.84%
Total	157	100.00%



Alumni's Overall Experience	Total Responses	Percentage
1 Significantly Worse Than Expected	0	0.00%
2 Worse Than Expected	0	0.00%
3 Met Your Expectations	2	3.17%
4 Better Than Expected	24	38.10%
5 Significantly Better Than What You Expected	37	58.73%
Total	63	100.00%



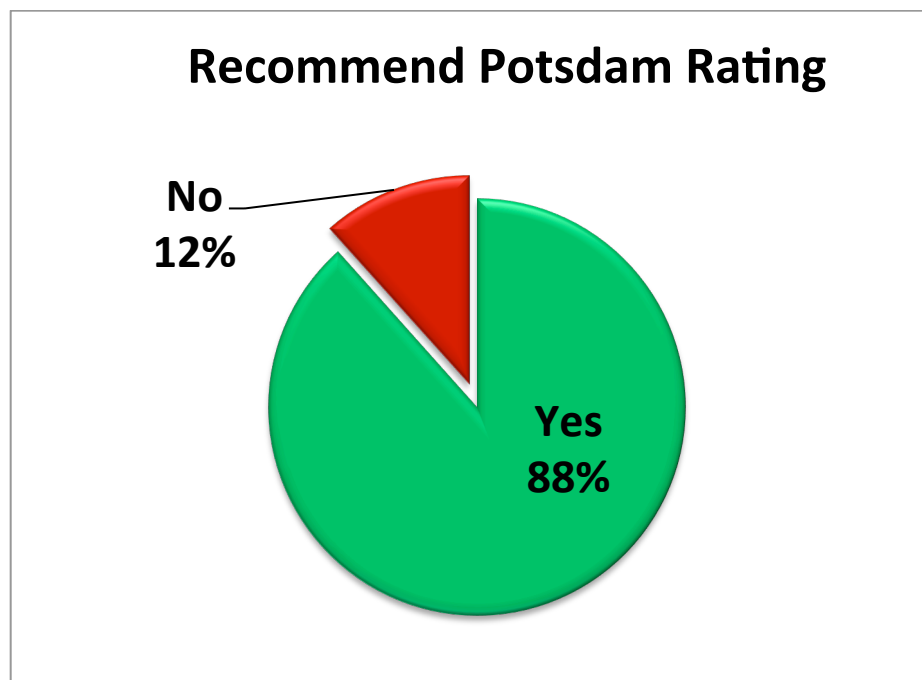
Faculty's Overall Experience	Total Responses	Percentage
1 Significantly Worse Than Expected	4	8.70%
2 Worse Than Expected	5	10.87%
3 Met Your Expectations	12	26.09%
4 Better Than Expected	17	36.96%
5 Significantly Better Than What You Expected	8	17.39%
Total	46	100.00%



Staff's Overall Experience	Total Responses	Percentage
1 Significantly Worse Than Expected	0	0.00%
2 Worse Than Expected	4	9.52%
3 Met Your Expectations	8	19.05%
4 Better Than Expected	15	35.71%
5 Significantly Better Than What You Expected	15	35.71%
Total	42	100.00%



Would you recommend SUNY Potsdam to someone else?	Total Participants	Percentage
Yes	381	88.40%
No	50	11.60%
Total	431	100.00%



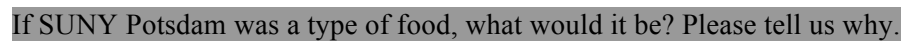
Students' Key Words

[illegible]

Students' Key Words



Faculty/ Staff's Key Words

[illegible][illegible]

Students' Key Words

[illegible]

**Please check all that apply.*

Answer	Count
1. Safe	<u>329</u>
2. Diverse	<u>307</u>
3. Open	<u>294</u>
4. Other	<u>58</u>
Total	988

Appendix D: Descriptive Words Tables

Q 9	
Man	32
Woman	100
Open	10
Historic	5
Caring	15
Compassionate	9
Beautiful	15
Accepting	17
Wise	2
Transgender	61
Bland	1
Nurturing	16
Laid Back	3
Unicorn	2

Q 10	
Mac	114
PC	88
Old	32
User-Friendly	24
Reliable	20
Innovative	18
Problematic	15
Creative	13
Adaptable	10
Infected w/ virus	9
Beautiful	5
Low resources	4
Cheap	2
Unique	2
Overrated	2

Q 11	
dysfunctional	20
extended	20
blended	9
close	8
diverse/ty	7
close knit	6
nuclear	5
community	4
tight knit	4
small	4
loving	4
traditional	4
traditional	4
adoptive	3
nurturing	1

Q 12	
pizza	18
salad	13
italian	11
diverse	8
variety	7
comfort food	7
mac and cheese	5
burger	4
buffet	4
taco	3
fruit	3
grilled cheese	2
chile	2
stew	2
bagelry	2