

Student Identity and the First-Year Learning Community



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on The First-Year Experience
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Presenters

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Outline

- I. Introduction, history, & initial questions
- II. Definition & approach to identity
- III. Fall 2012 CAT Community study
- IV. Implications, conclusions, & future questions



Part I

K-STATE FIRST AND THE CAT COMMUNITIES

History of K-State First

The logo for K-State First, featuring the text "K-STATE" and "FIRST" in white on a purple background, with a stylized white arrow pointing upwards between the two words.

K-STATE FIRST

- 2005-07 Two Task Forces
- 2008-09 Initial Pilot Study of FYS Program
- 2009 Creation of GPS, Visit to U. of Oregon
- 2010 Launch of K-State First, Creation of KSBN and CAT Communities
- 2011-13 Development, Changes, Success, and Growth

Our Four Programs

K-STATE FIRST



CAT Communities



- CAT = Connecting Across Topics
- Interdisciplinary, FIG model
- Lead instructor, supporting instructor, and Learning Assistant (undergraduate peer mentor for class)
- Growth in number of communities (c. 20 students each)
 - 2010 = 6 2012 = 14
 - 2011 = 11 2013 = 17
- Solid gains in retention and student satisfaction, following an inconclusive first year

Some Early Lessons Learned



- Not all pairings worked well
- Importance of professional development
- Need for enthusiastic faculty and supportive units
- Students won't sign up if they're unsure what it is
- Our “pre-professional” communities attracted a lot of interest, and they had real success in terms of retention and student academic performance

Emergence of Different Kinds of CAT Communities


- Liberal Arts
 - general education, interest driven
- Pre-Professional
 - architecture, agriculture, engineering, hospitality, pre-physical therapy, pre-law, education
- Residential
- Study Abroad





Some Questions Raised

- Were some of these communities more successful than others? If so, why?
- Why was there such interest in the pre-professional CAT communities?
- To what extent did a student's sense of identity impact his or her desire to participate?



Identity and Learning Communities: An Initial Case Study

- Our observations and questions
- Literature on social learning and identity
- Development of a study that uses some empirical data to help us answer those questions
- Lessons learned: local and transferable



Part II

IDENTITY



Why explore questions related to identity?

- Identity has held a prominent place in student development literature
 - Psychosocial (i.e., Erikson, Marcia, Josselson)
 - Chickering's Seven Vectors
 - Baxter Magolda's Self-Authorship/Learning Partnerships Model
- Identity development has been understood as one's evolving beliefs about self in relation to social groups
(Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009)

Exploring Social Learning

- Knowledge is co-constructed through social participation; context and environment play an important role.
- Learning communities are designed to provide social interactions and environments/contexts for learning.
- Yet, there is still much yet to learn about how environment and context influence identity development (Torres et al., 2009)
 - HOW do students' beliefs about self develop as a result of membership and participation in various communities?

Framework: Situated Learning

- **Communities of Practice**
 - Represent the place of knowledge, *the social world* in which the person engages in learning.
 - *A set of relations* among persons, activity, and the world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice. (Lave & Wenger, 1991)
- **“Legitimate Peripheral Participation”**
 - The process by which newcomers become active participants of a community. (Lave & Wenger, 1991)
 - Learning is a process of developing knowledgeably skilled identities within a community of practice .




Learning in Community

- Observation
- Access
- Participation

- Belonging
- Motivation
- Identity





Our study explored these facets of identity development through social practice:

- **Access:** How and why do students enter into our communities?
- **Meaning of Participation:** What are their experiences of membership (memorable and meaningful experiences)?
- **Learning Trajectory:** How does participation in a community influence their “what’s next” as a learner in general, as a college student, and as a future “professional.”



Part III

FALL 2012 CAT COMMUNITY STUDY

Participants

- 226 students enrolled in CAT Communities in Fall 2012
- 103 of them (46%) voluntarily completed an online survey to assess:
 - Access
 - How they found out about the courses
 - Their motivations for enrolling
 - The Meaning of Participation
 - The connections they developed to others in the courses
 - Their experiences within the course
 - The Learning Trajectory
 - The future and further impacts of the course



Breakdown of the 103 Participants

- Residential
 - 2 courses, 20 participants
- Pre-Professional
 - 5 courses, 43 participants
- Liberal Arts
 - 6 courses, 32 participants
- Study Abroad/Service Learning
 - 1 course, 8 participants
 - Did not yet embark on their Community experience



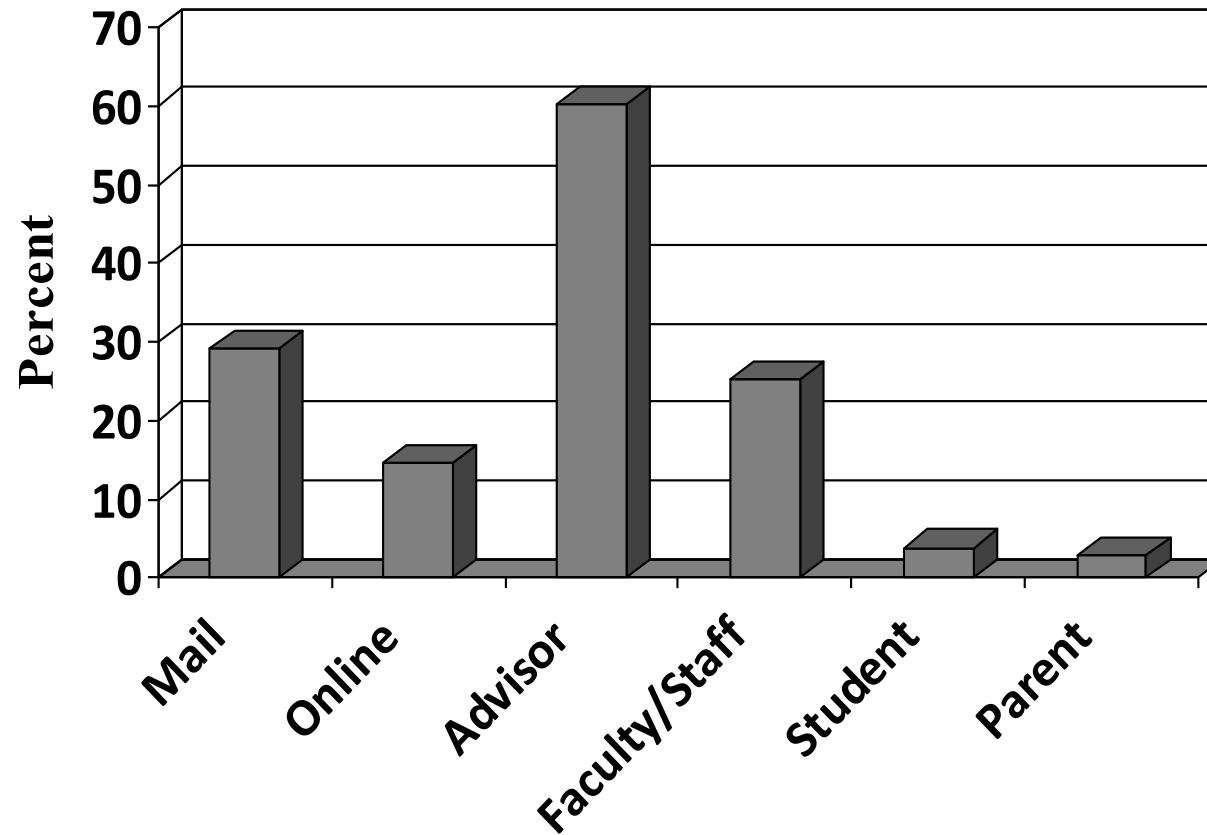
Data Collection

- We used quantitative and free response items
- Themes in free response items were identified and then coded by two independent coders
- Reliable levels of coding were established
 - Phi product moment correlations $\geq .70$
- Discrepancies were resolved by discussion

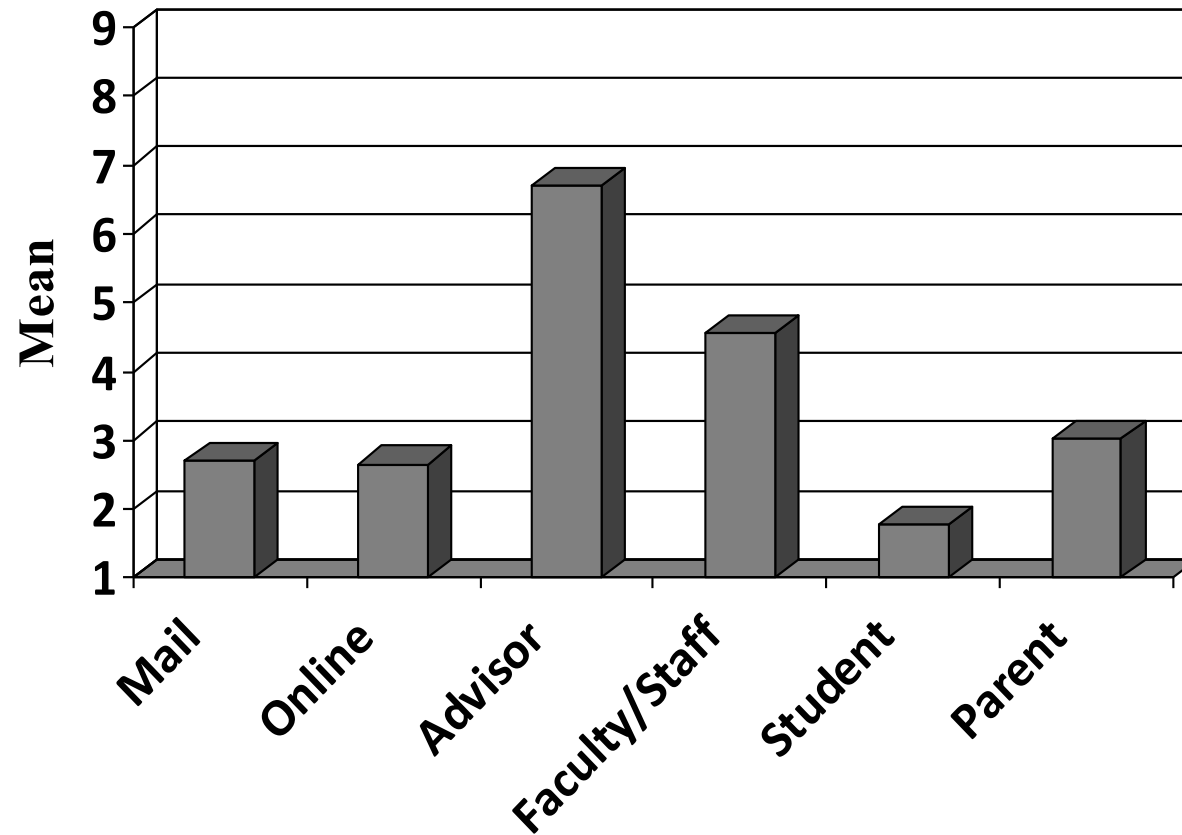


Access Results

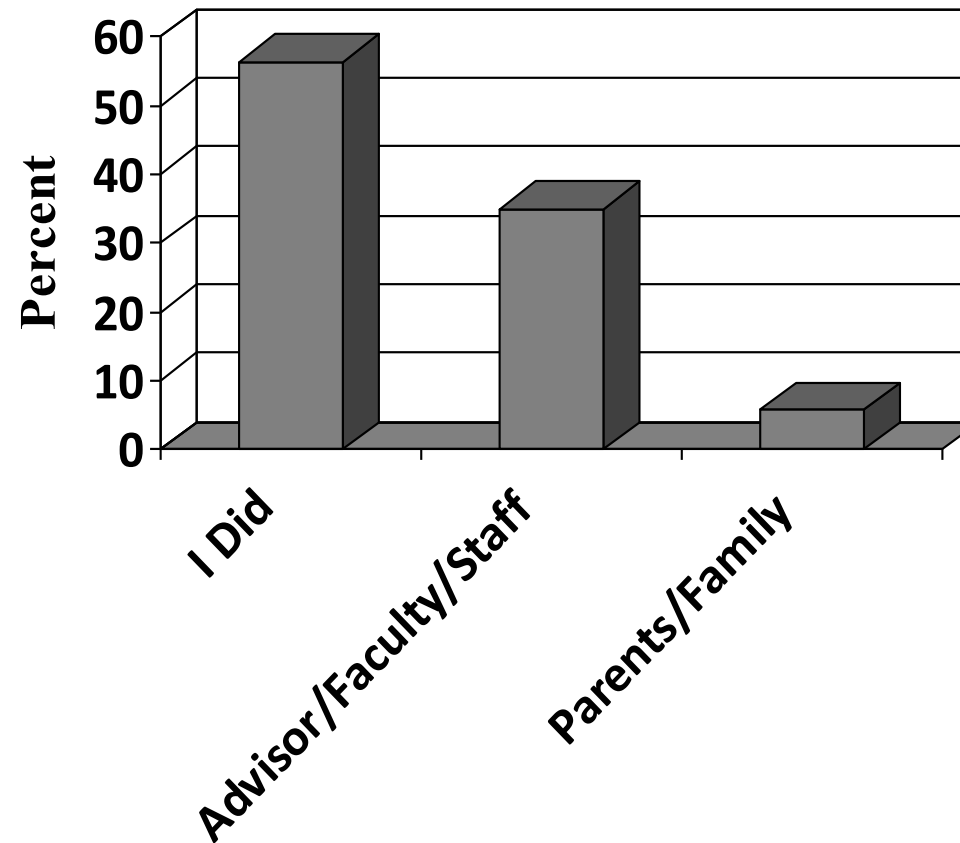
How they found out about courses



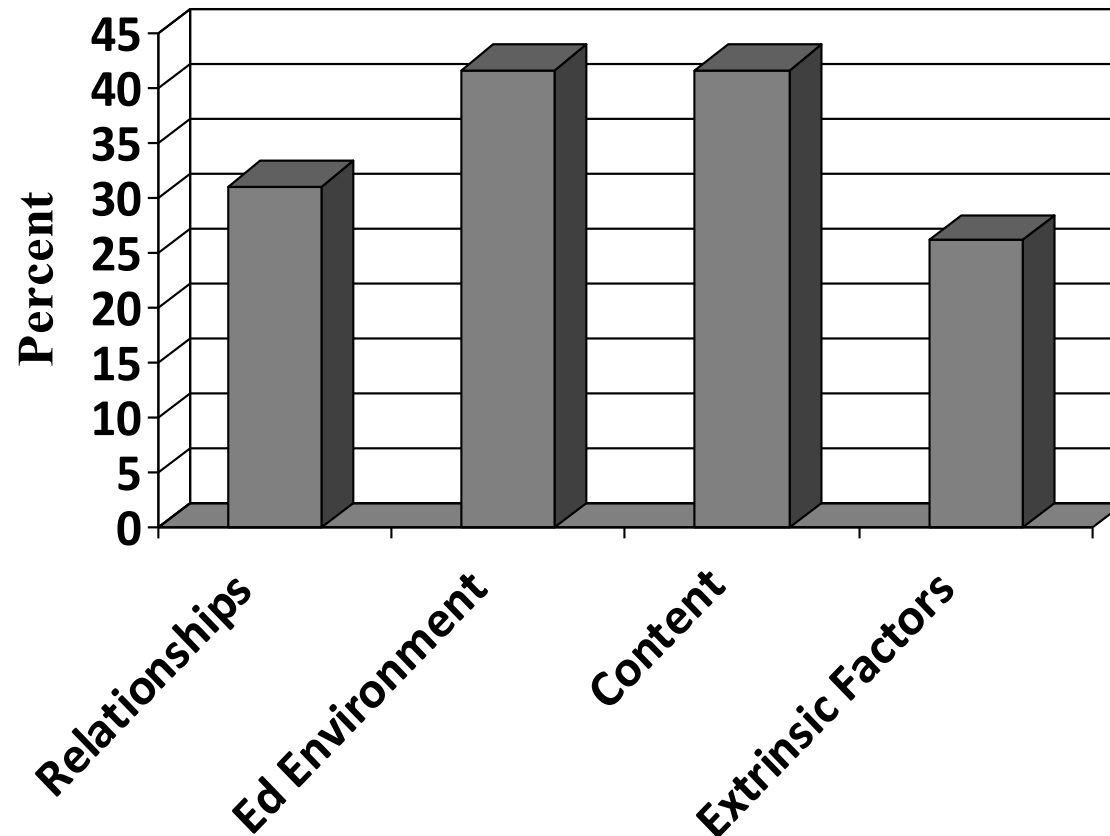
How much decision was influenced by:



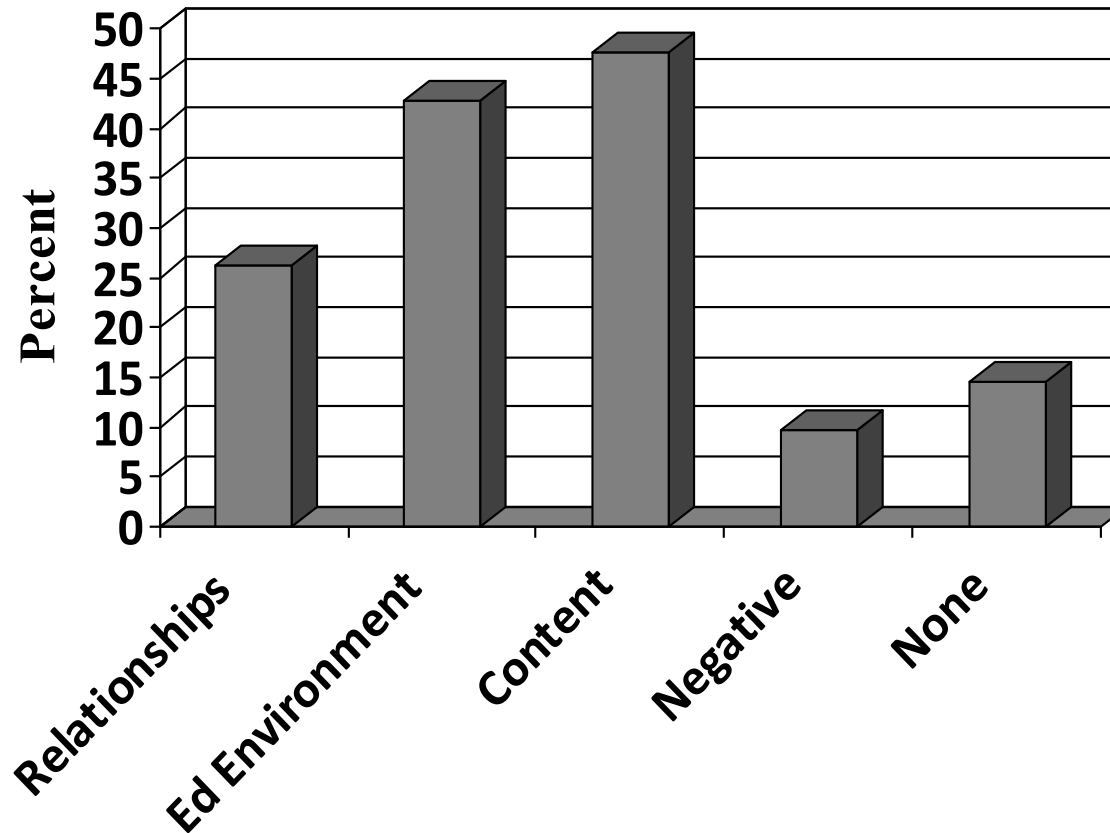
Who had the largest role in decision



Motivation for Enrolling



Expectations for CAT Community





Expectations for CAT Community

- Content Expectations:

“I expected to **learn a lot about physical therapy** and what I have to do as a student to apply for physical therapy school.”

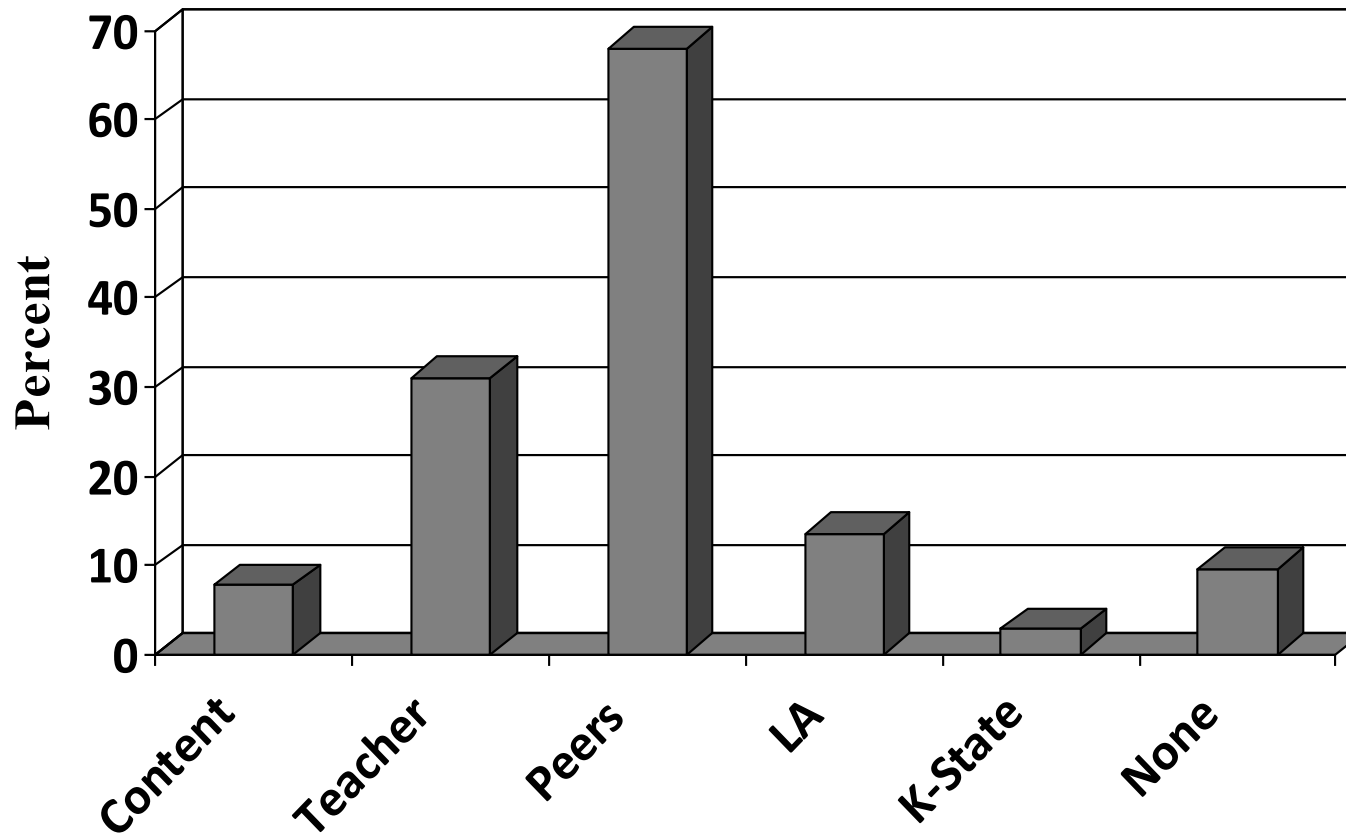
- Educational Environment Expectations:

“I was expecting a **small course** with students who are experiencing their first year of college just like me.”

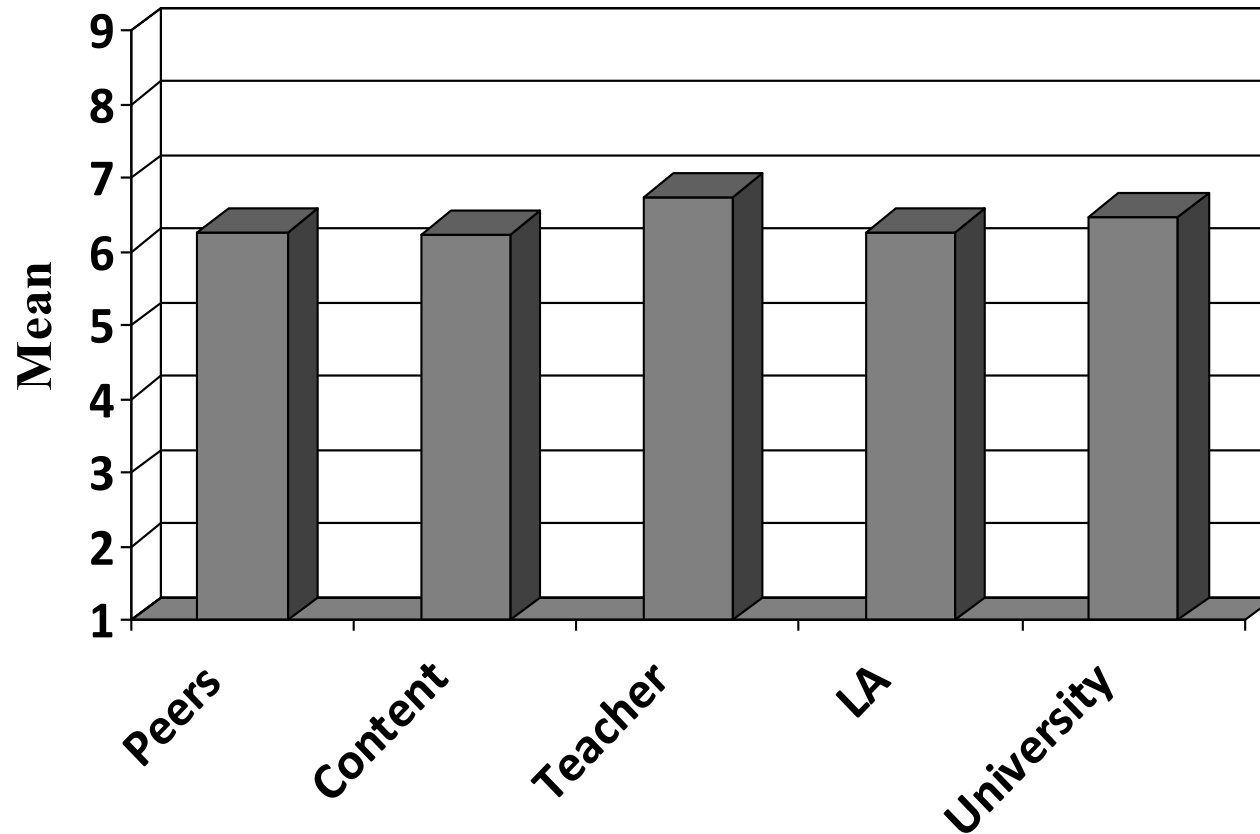


Meaning of Participation Results

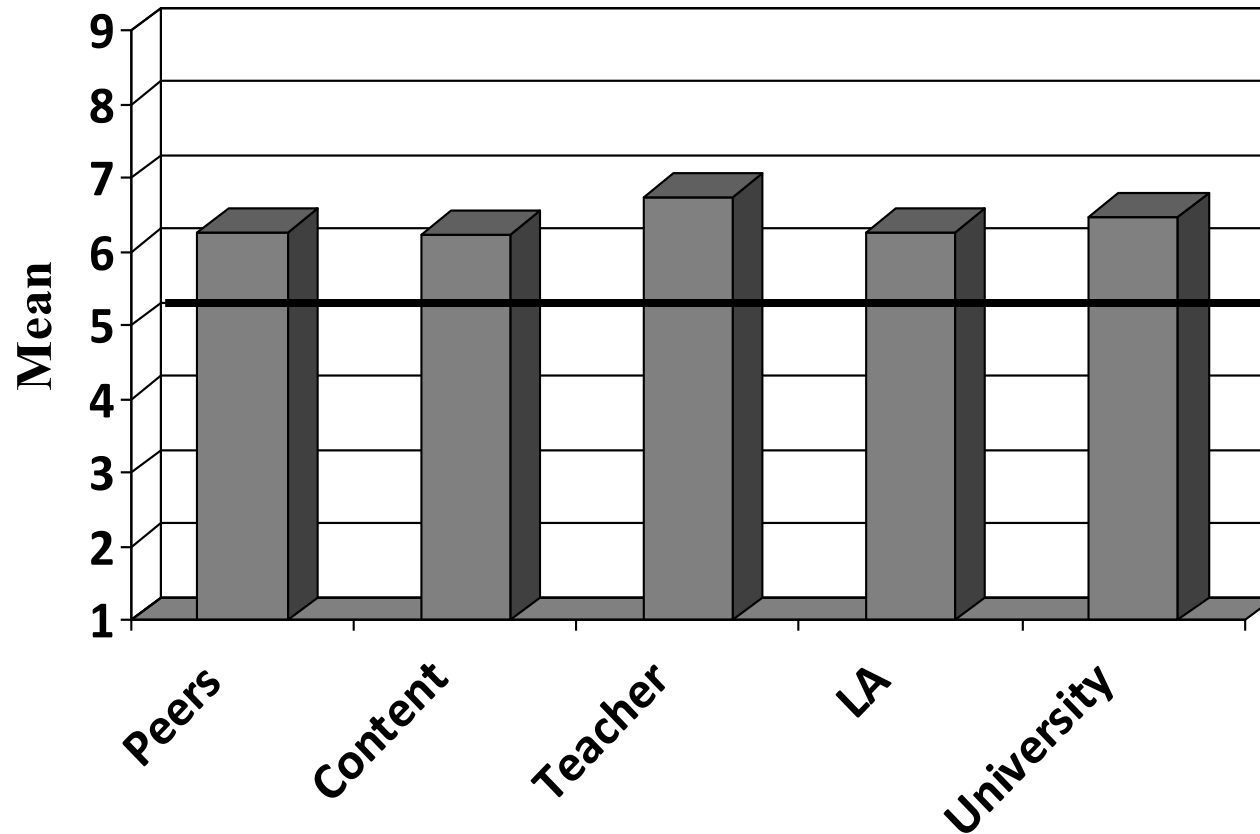
Strongest Connections Formed



How connected students felt to:



How connected students felt to:

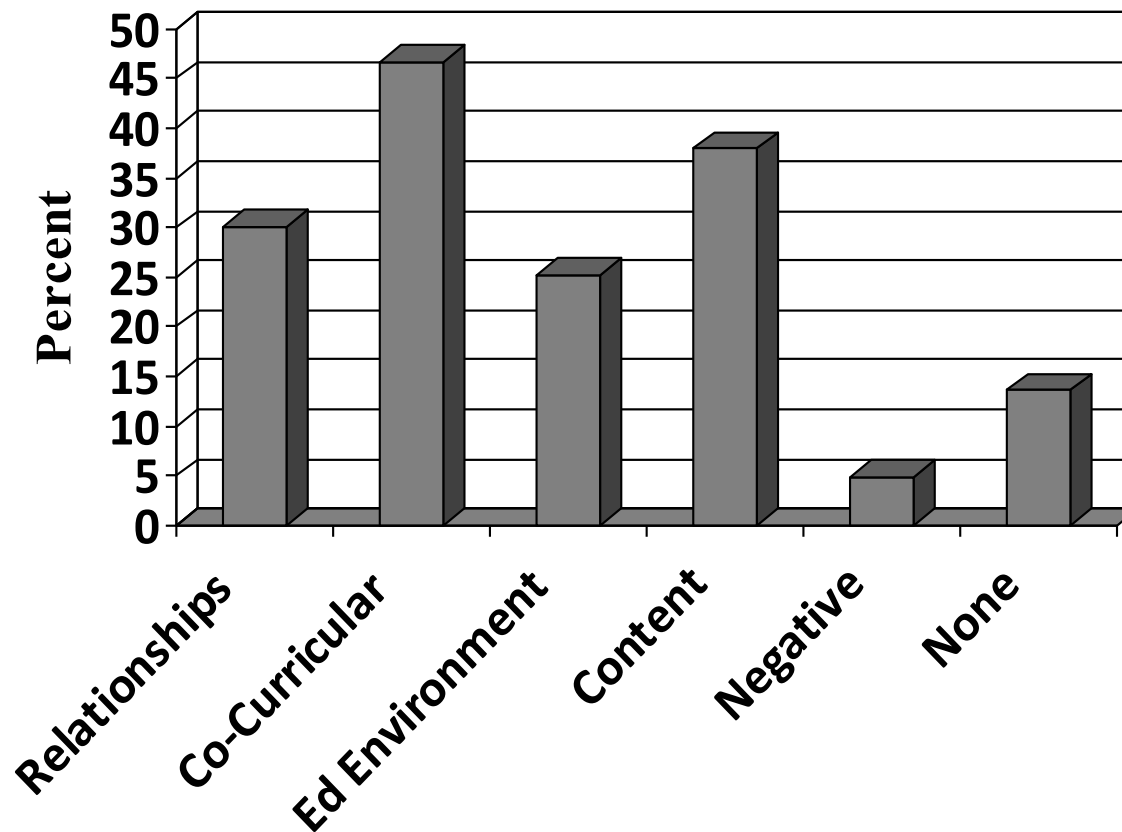


How connected students felt to:

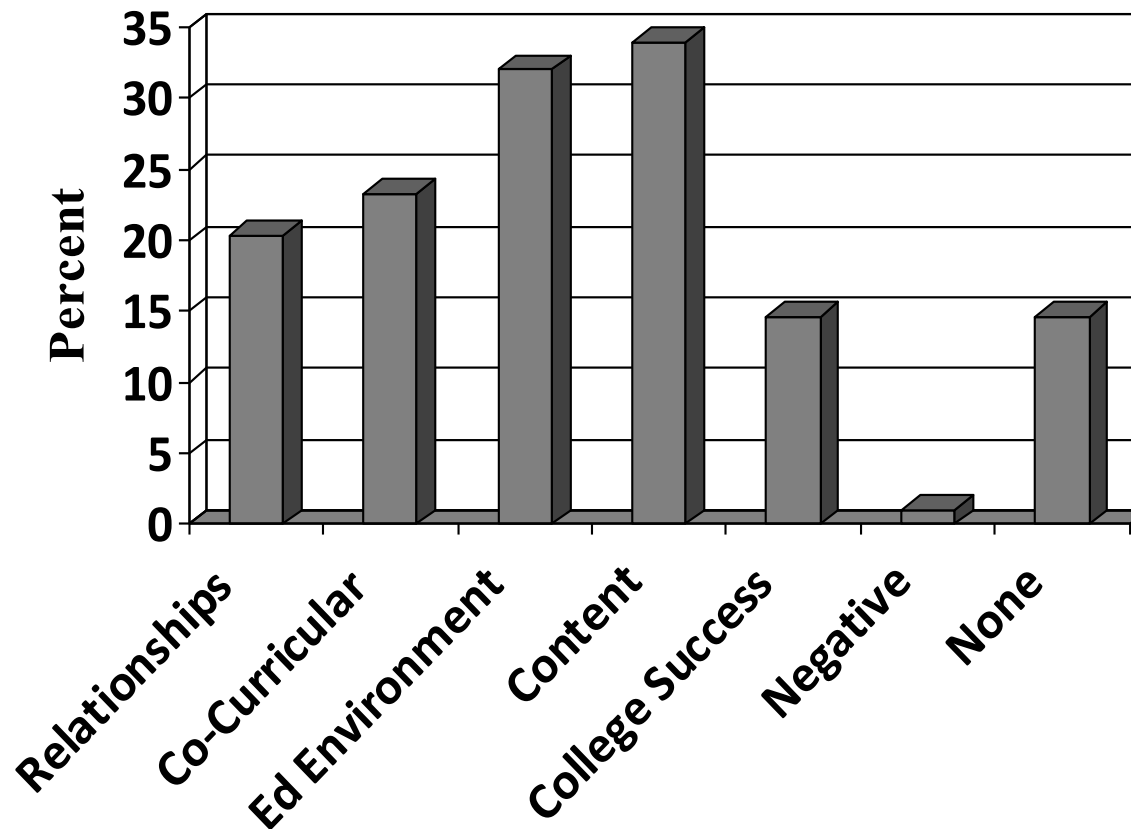
- Connection to Teacher

“I have created quite a **strong bond** with my CAT Community instructor. I have very much enjoyed his causal teaching style and complete dedication to his students in this small course. **He has inspired me** to think about things in many different ways.”

Most Memorable Experiences



Most Meaningful Experiences



Most Meaningful Experiences

- Content Experiences:

“The most meaningful event that we have done is when we **speak in class on prejudice** ... This is most meaningful to me simply because it gives a big insight on society today and the ways in which people still decide to partake in prejudice events and shows that there are ways in which they can be stopped.”

Most Meaningful Experiences

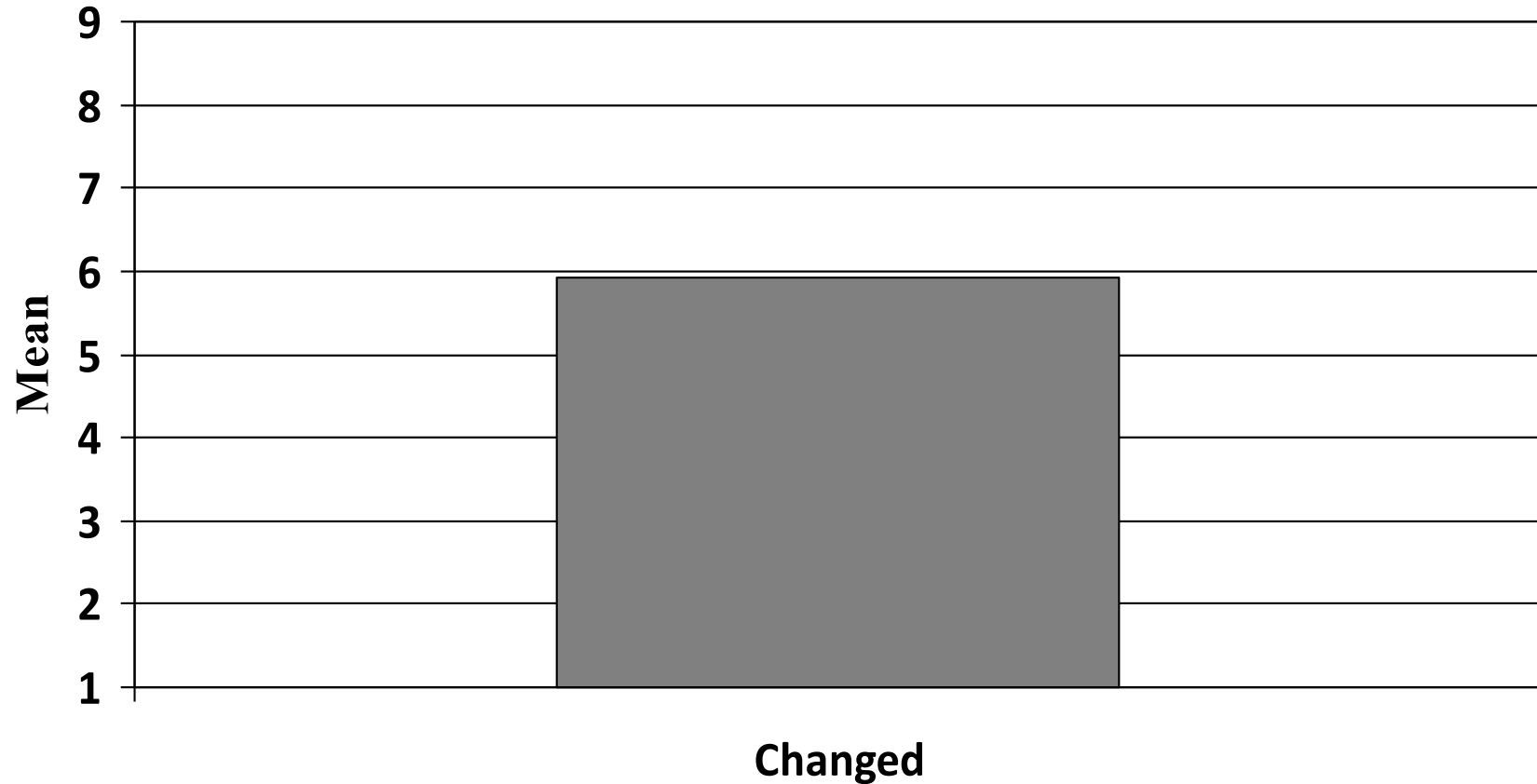
- Educational Environment Experiences:

“We have had some **great conversations** within the CAT discussion hour. I value the opinions and thoughts of my peers and one of the discussions was about Henrietta Lacks and the ethics behind compensation for tissues.”

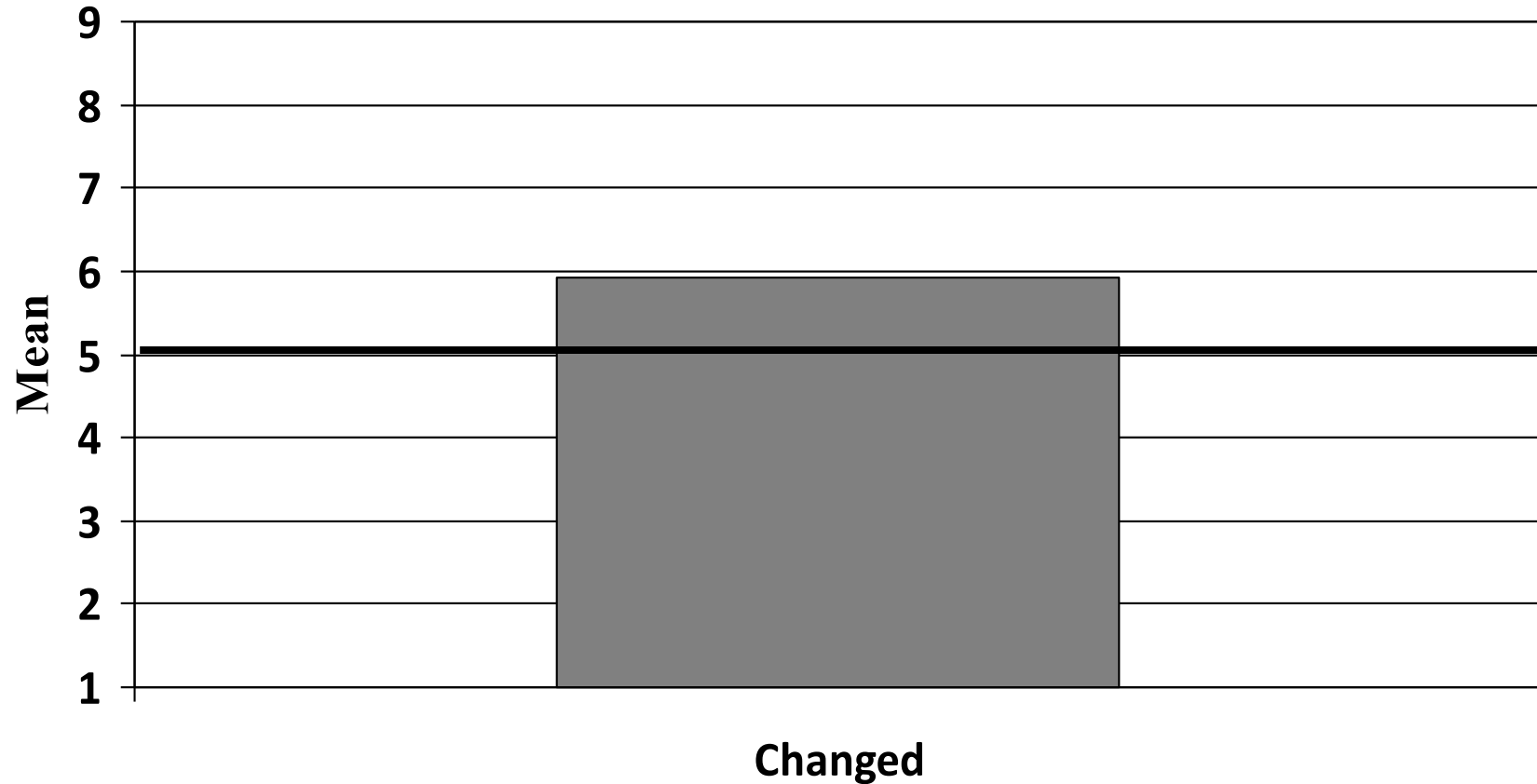


Learning Trajectory Results

Changed Outlook or Plans for the Future

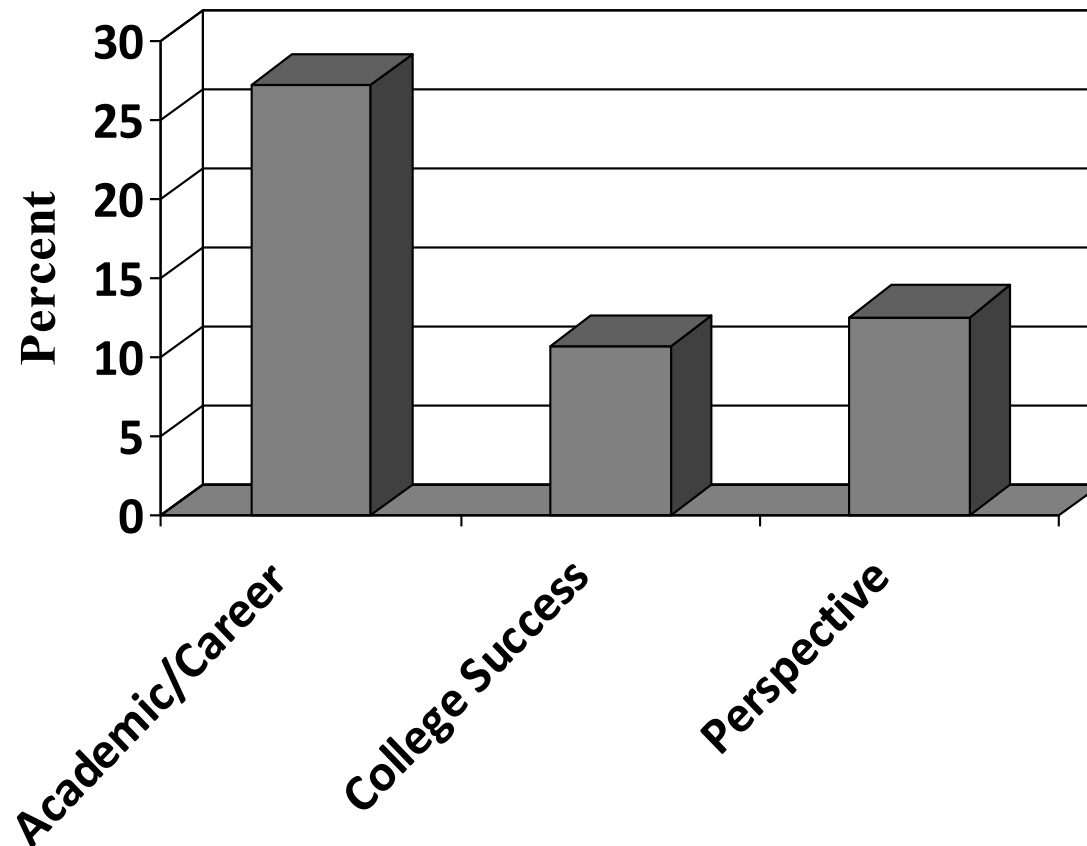


Changed Outlook or Plans for the Future



*49% of students indicated the CAT Community changed their outlook or plans for the future

How CAT Community Impacted Future



How CAT Community Impacted Future

“I have begun to **think about law** or being a family lawyer, which I had never considered before this class.”

“It has made me more **aware of people’s feelings.**”

“I came to college scared of almost everything that had to do with academics, people, and life here. I was scared that I didn't know anyone and I'd never get friends. I was scared that the classes would be too hard and I would fail. I was even scared that I wouldn't be able to live away from my parents. This class has made me feel **ready and prepared** to take on my next three and a half years of college.”

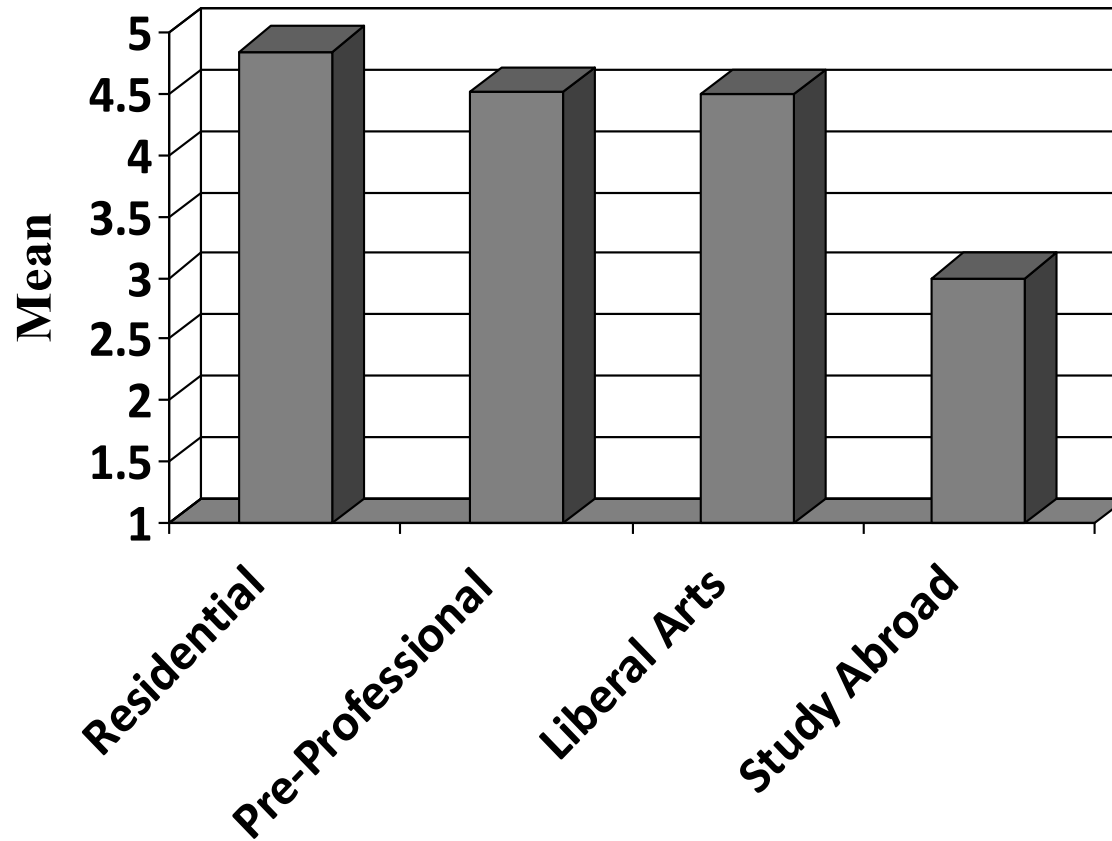


Community and Teacher Results

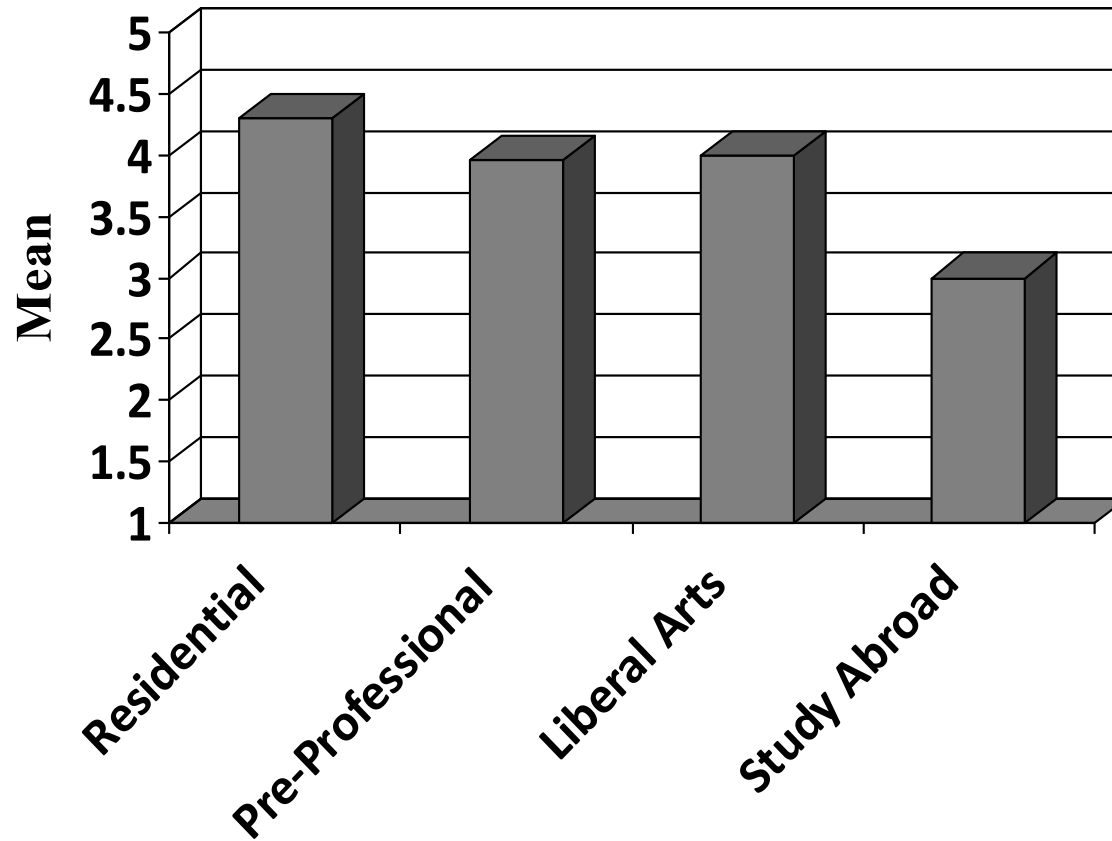
Student Evaluations

- Assessed student evaluations via IDEA forms
 - E.g., ratings of “Excellent Teacher” and “Excellent Course”
- Also assessed specific objectives
 - E.g., helped transition to college life
- Calculated a “CAT composite success rating”
 - Averaged across 10 ratings from IDEA and objectives
 - *Alpha* = .941

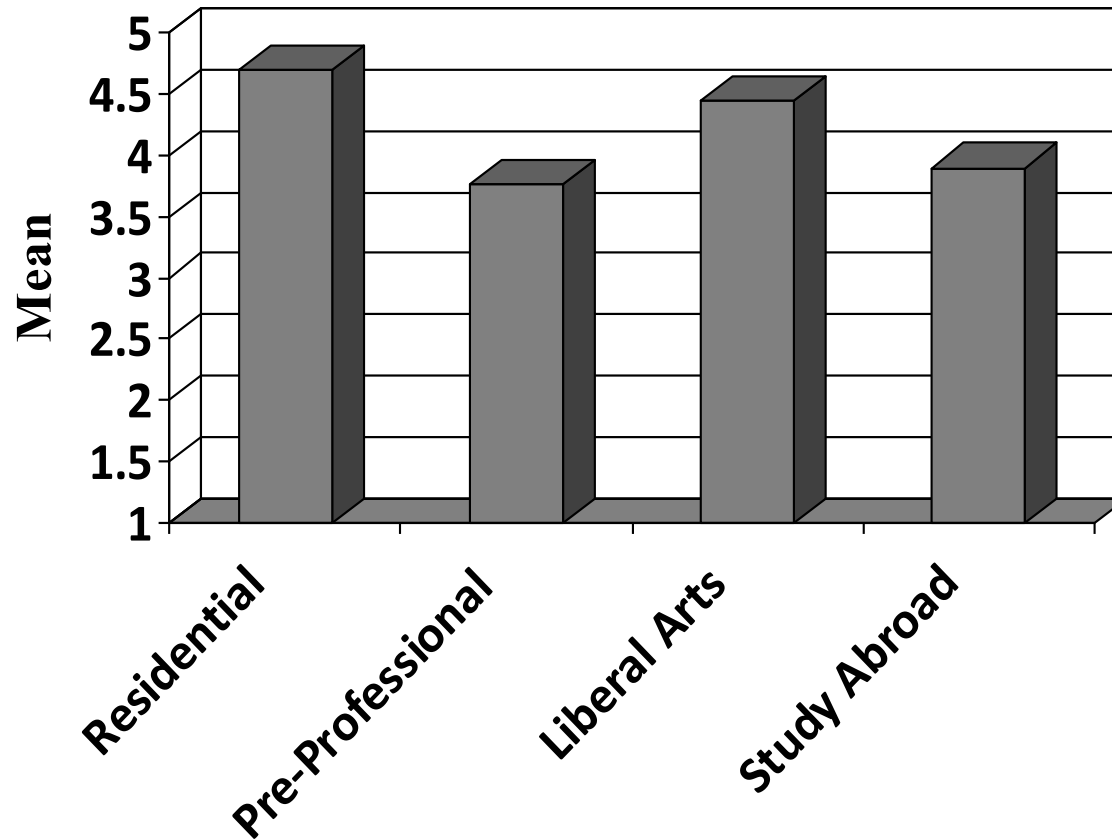
Excellent Teacher (1 to 5)



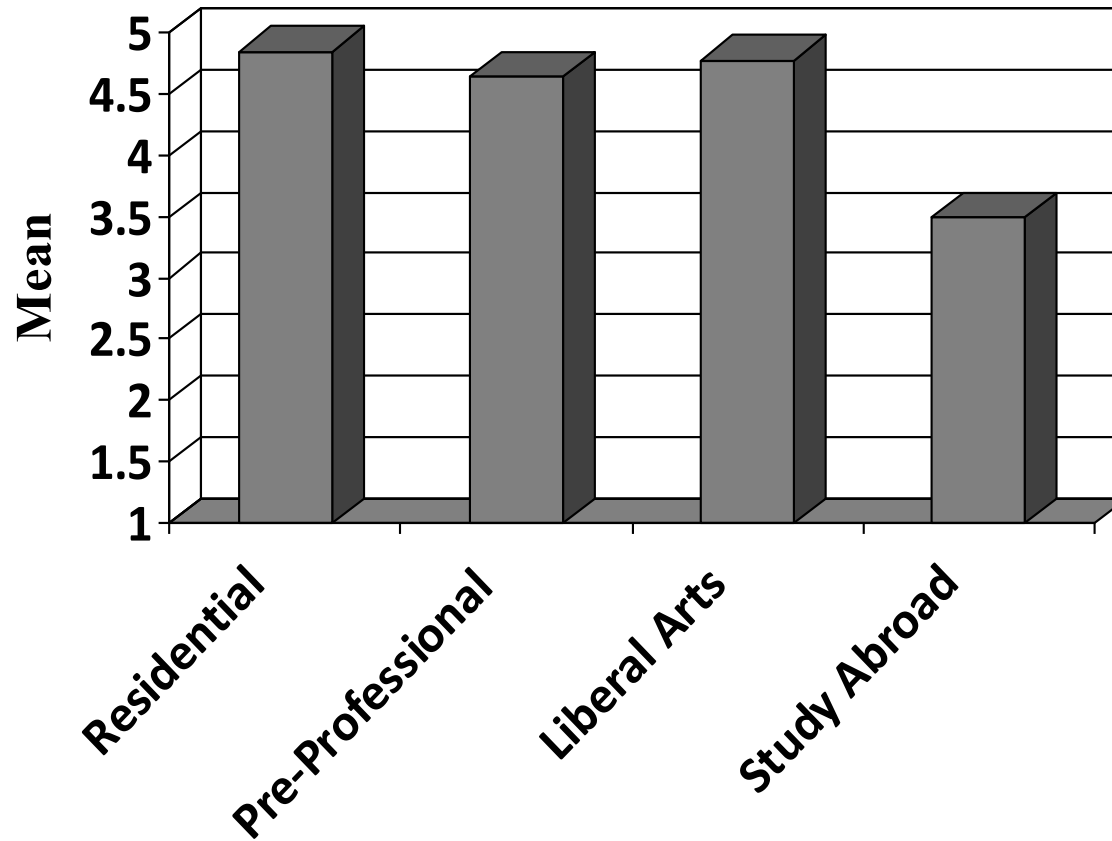
Excellent Course (1 to 5)



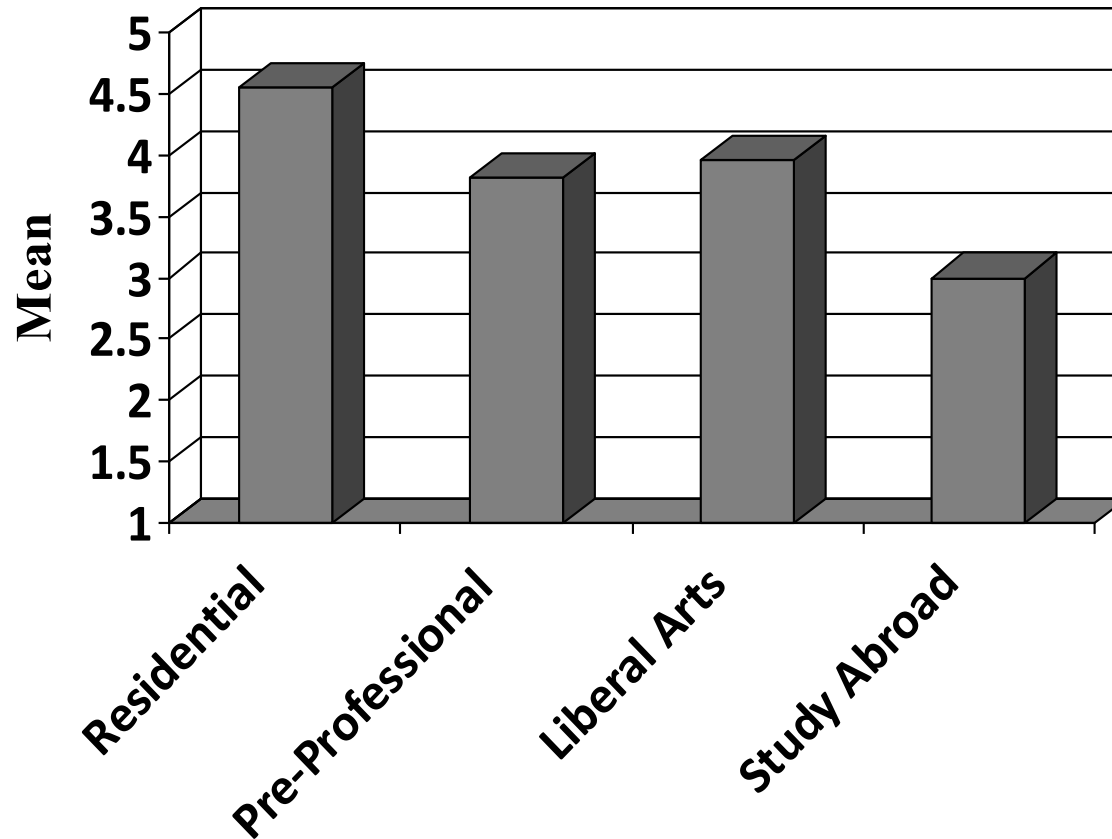
Hands On Content (1 to 5)



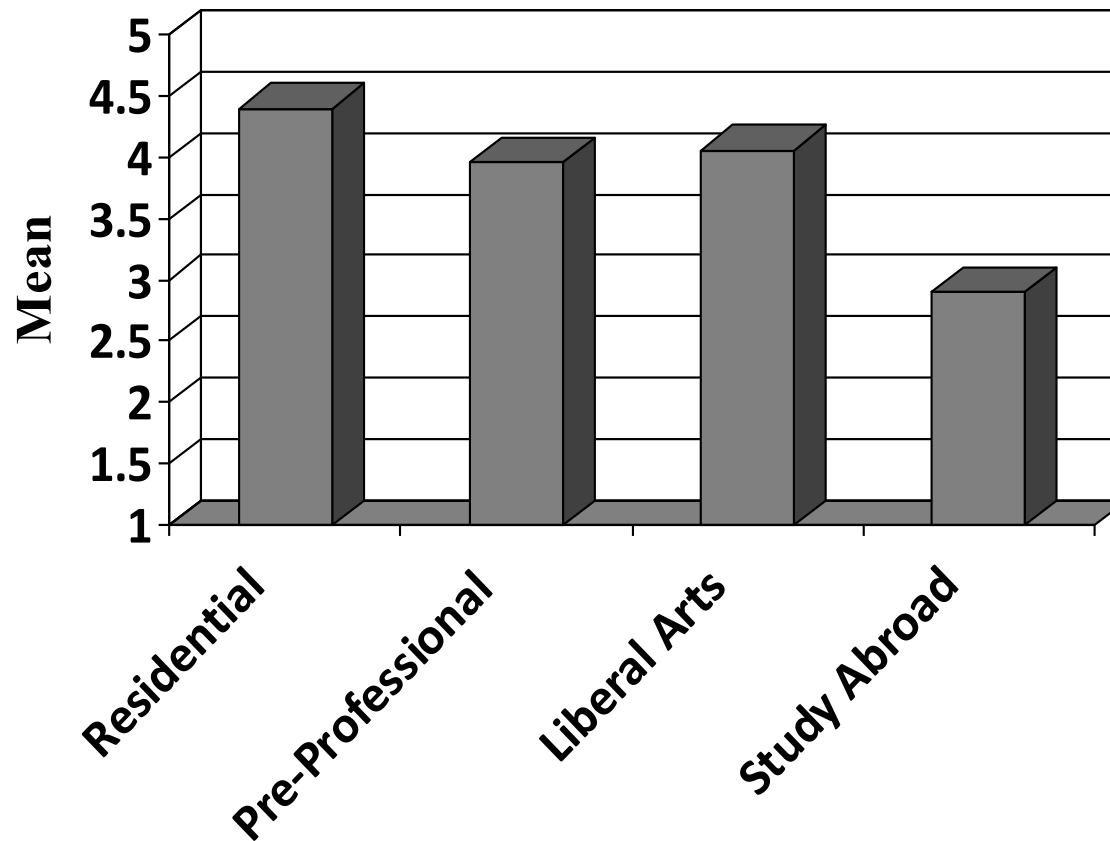
Related to Real Life (1 to 5)



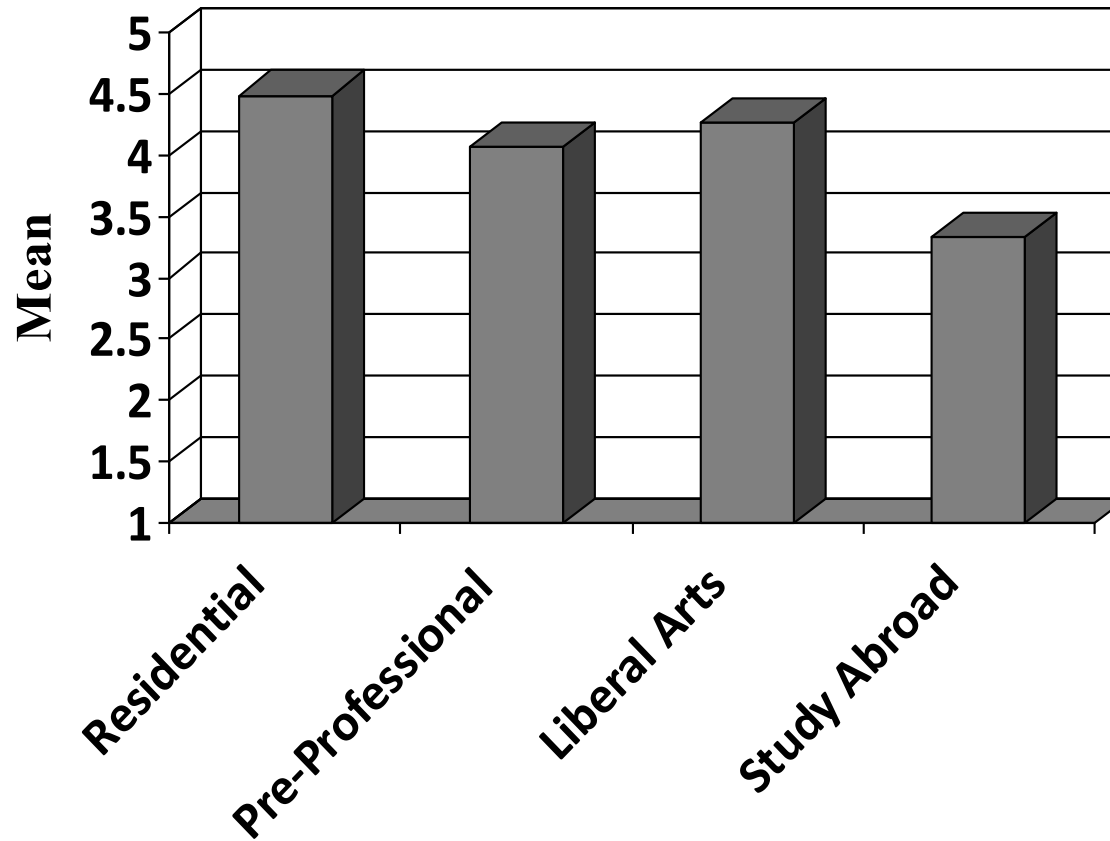
Helped Transition to College (1 to 5)



Introduced New Ways of Thinking (1 to 5)



CAT Composite Success Rating (1 to 5)

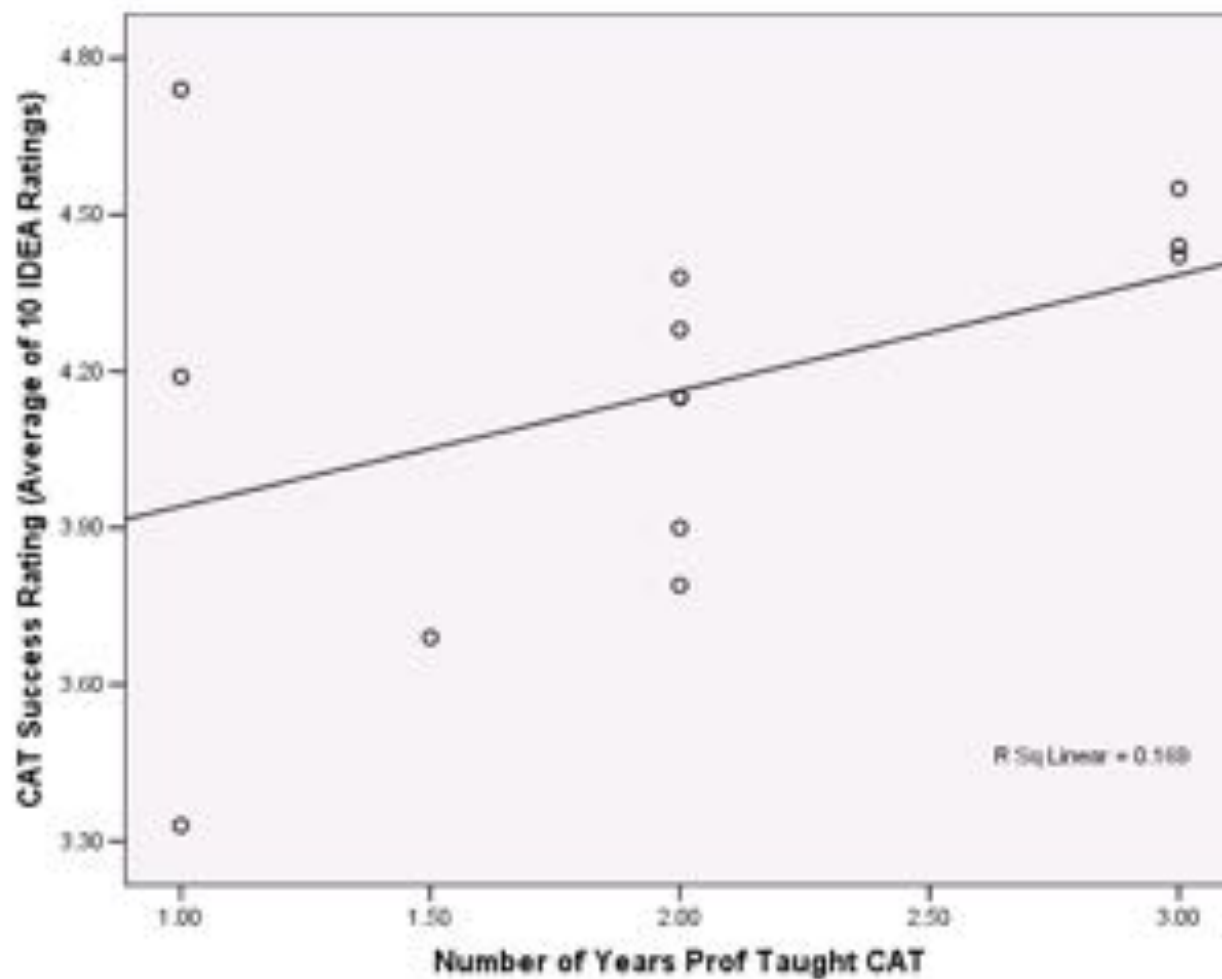


Impact of Teacher Experience

- Calculated relationships between the number of years the teacher has taught the CAT Community course with:

<u>Rating</u>	<u>Correlation</u>
• Excellent Teacher	+ .46
• Excellent Course	+ .22
• Related to Real Life	+ .33
• Helped Transition to College	+ .46
• Introduced to New Ways of Thinking	+ .43
• Co-Curricular Activities Were Relevant	+ .30
• CAT Composite Success Rating	+ .41

Impact of Teacher Experience





Overview of Results

Key Findings

- Access
 - Advisors were instrumental
 - Content and educational environment were among the most powerful motivators

Key Findings

- Meaning of Participation
 - Strong community connections were formed, especially with peers
 - Course content and out-of-class activities were especially memorable
 - Course content and the educational environment were especially meaningful



Key Findings

- Learning Trajectory
 - Students frequently reported that CAT Community experiences did impact their future outlooks and plans
 - These impacts were especially likely in their future academic and career planning



Key Findings

- Community Effects
 - CAT Communities were generally successful
 - Residential CAT Communities were especially successful



Key Findings

- Teacher Effects
 - The teachers' experience was associated with CAT Community success
 - This suggests the identity of the teachers as part of the CAT Communities may:
 - Develop over time
 - Drive the success of the program



Part IV

LESSONS LEARNED: LOCAL AND TRANSFERABLE



Lessons Learned

- Designing Learning Communities
- Advising and Marketing
- Faculty Development
- Instructional Design

Designing Learning Communities



Consider the culture and values of the larger campus community.

- LCs are situated within a larger campus community
- Consider campus traditions, regional culture, student backgrounds, demographics, programs of study, etc.

Designing Learning Communities



Experiment to find the model that best suits your university.

- Learn from colleagues
- Conduct pilot studies
- Listen to students
- Partner with other campus initiatives

Spanish in Action CAT Community | January 2013



Advising and Marketing



Advisors are key!

- The advisor-student relationship is critical
- Advisors encourage students to enroll and help them find the community that is the best fit
- Continue to invest time in communicating with and training advisors

Advising and Marketing



Design marketing materials that represent factors that shape students' identities:

- Content (What will we study?)
 - Overall LC content
 - Courses involved
 - Title and description of the LC
- Classroom Environment (What will we do?)
- Relationships & connections (Who am I doing this with?)

Social Media & Print Publications

..... K-State First

Residential CAT Communities



GCAT COMMUNITIES

A great college experience starts with a great first year.

..... K-STATE.EDU/FIRST



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K-State First is the University's first-year experience program, our way of helping students establish a great foundation for the rest of their college career.

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383 TWEETS 71 FOLLOWING 166 FOLLOWERS

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A great college experience starts with a GREAT first year.

K-STATE FIRST

166 likes · 3 talking about this · 3 were here

Education
K-State First is the University's first-year experience program, our way of helping students establish a great foundation for the rest of their college career.

About Photos Map Twitter Top Fans

Faculty Development



Help prepare faculty by emphasizing that LC teaching may be different from other teaching experiences.

- Even experienced faculty may need time to adjust



Faculty Development

Use data about LC teaching to help faculty members persist & thrive.

- Include in faculty development and peer mentoring programs

Teacher identity is also shaped by the LC.

- Teachers not only shape the identity of the community, but their own identity as a teacher changes and grows
- Teachers are becoming a part of a new professional community through this experience.
- This is an area for further investigation

Instructional Design



Create engaging co-curricular experiences for students.

- Co-curricular experiences are prime meaning-making opportunities for students
- They facilitate a sense of belonging and also help students create connections with the course content

“We took a **field trip** to Topeka! I was so excited, I didn’t think we would get field trips any more being in college. It was so much fun **getting to go with some of my best friends on campus**, and I was able to learn a lot.”




“The different times we went to the library and Boys and Girls Club to read to the children in Spanish was very memorable. I love children, and to be able to **apply what I have learned** in the language was very exciting.”

Instructional Design



Create active learning experiences for students.

- These promote engagement in the classroom
- Students are invited to be co-constructors of their learning through active participation
- This shapes their identity as learners



“My most memorable experience in the CAT Community has been just the different **‘hands-on’ experiences** I have had. In a regular classroom, the ‘hands-on’ stuff is harder to come across, however in the CAT Community it seems like we do quite a lot of hands on activities that really help me understand what they’re trying to teach me.”

“... the things we are learning will help us **go home and make improvements** in our farm operations. We are gaining life skills that we can apply in our own operations.”

THANK YOU!





Questions?

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