



Master of Information Student Council

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MISC Annual Survey Report 2014-15

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Analysis and report prepared by Diana Kulpa

Introduction

Part of the Master of Information Student Council (MISC)'s mission is to "represent and advocate for Master of Information students within the iSchool" and "improve the quality of the information community at the Faculty of Information for MI students, the university, and the broader information community."¹ One way to identify the issues that MISC should be advocating for is by conducting student surveys. Therefore, the *MISC Annual Survey 2014-15* was emailed (late-March 2015) to all Master of Information (MI) students that were enrolled in the program as of fall 2014. 115 current students completed the survey (a response rate of 27.5 per cent).²

The report outlines the methodology used and then presents the findings under six subject matter sections: background information, money and work, iSchool experience, iSchool services and support, after iSchool, and MISC and final thoughts. An appendix outlines some of the limitations of the survey. In order to improve readability of the report, the responses to each question were visualized and only elaborated on when further context was required, there was a notable finding, or the results related to other survey findings.

Methodology

MISC used the online application Google Survey to create and administer the 2014-15 survey. The survey included 31 semi-structured questions using Likert Scales, multiple choice, and open-ended questions. The variety in questions reflected the need to collect predefined variables (i.e., a student's status in the program) as well as unknown variables (i.e., a recommended course). Survey answers were reviewed, with open ended questions being analyzed for broad themes and then coded. Coding for the 2014-15 survey was not evaluated for reliability; however, MISC retains a record of the raw data, analysis and coding used to generate this report and upon request may be available for further review.

¹ MISC Mission Statement retrieved from <http://misc.ischool.utoronto.ca/sites/misc/files/documents/misc-mission-statement.pdf>

² 418 students were enrolled in the MI program in fall 2014. Two 2015 incoming students had completed the survey but their answers were not included as they were not current students of the program.

Section 1: Background Information

Background information covers various demographic information including: student status, year in program, primary and secondary concentration, and previous education.

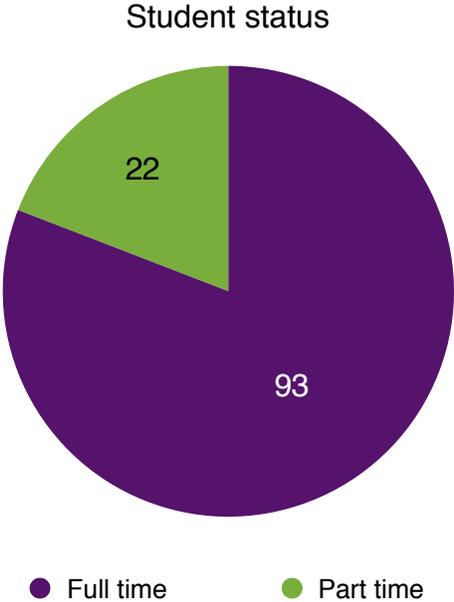


Figure 1: Responses to question "What is your student status?"

With 315 students registered as full time and 103 registered as part time, the response rates for each group of students were 29.5 per cent and 21.4 per cent respectively.

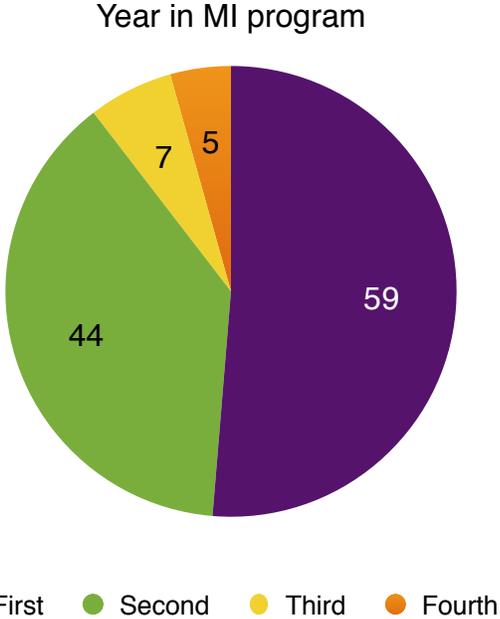


Figure 2: Responses to question "What year of the MI program are you in?"

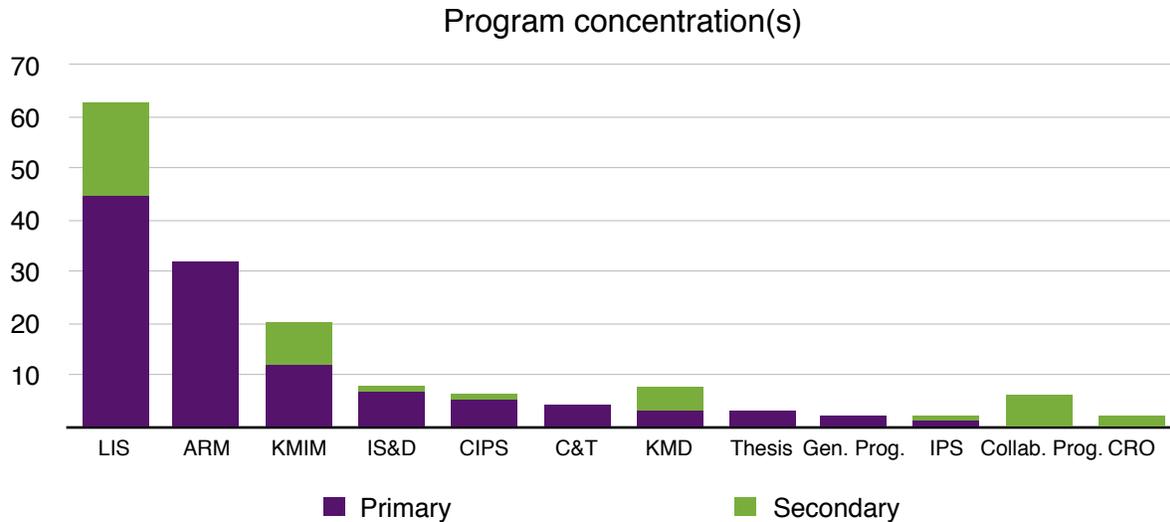


Figure 3: Responses to question “What is your primary and secondary concentration?”

Ideally response rates for students enrolled in each of the concentrations would have been included; however, current data on confirmed concentrations was not available at the time the report was drafted.

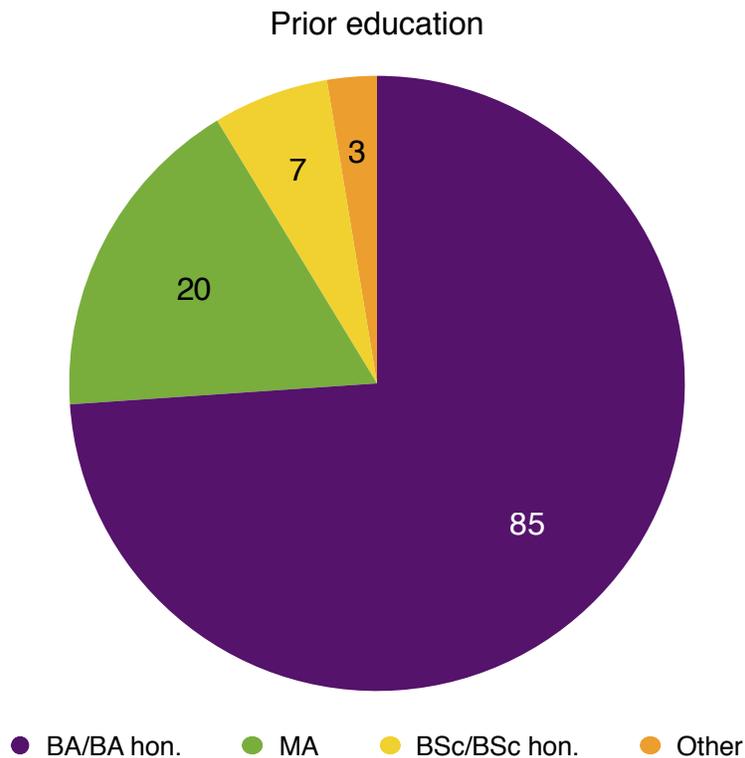


Figure 4: Responses to question “What was your education prior to the iSchool?”

Other includes: BBA (1 response), BCom (1 response), and BFA (1 response). Two students also came to the iSchool with a Library Technician Diploma.

Section 2: Money and Work

Money and work inquires into hours spent in paid and unpaid work, scholarship funding, and expected debt upon graduation.

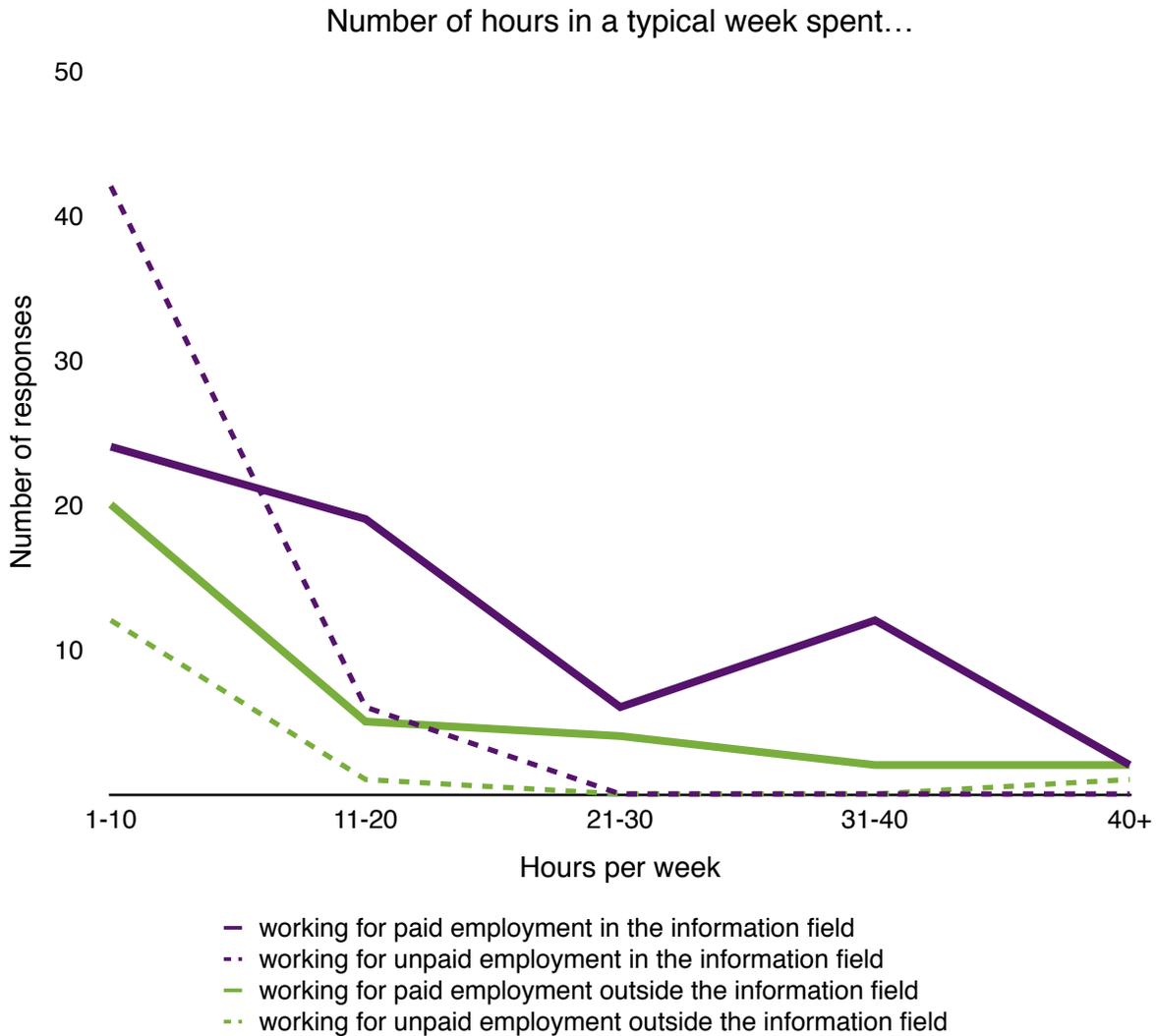


Figure 5: Responses to questions “How many hours in a typical week do you spend working for paid and unpaid employment inside and outside the information field?”

It is reassuring to know that students that work while in the MI program spend more hours in paid work in the information field rather than outside the information field. This indicates that students are taking advantage of paid opportunities in the field when possible and that there are opportunities available. However, student satisfaction with their work and their rate of pay were not included so limited conclusions can be drawn from these results.

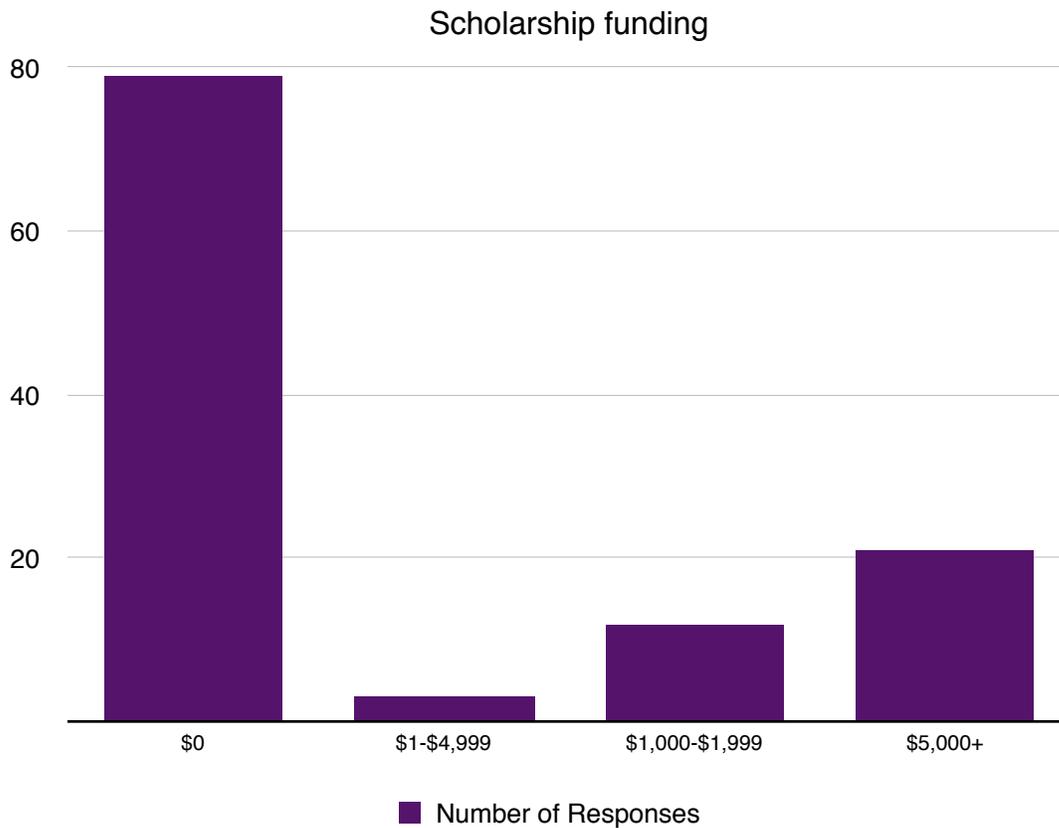


Figure 6: Responses to question “How much scholarship funding have you received throughout your MI education?”

Three students preferred to not answer this question.

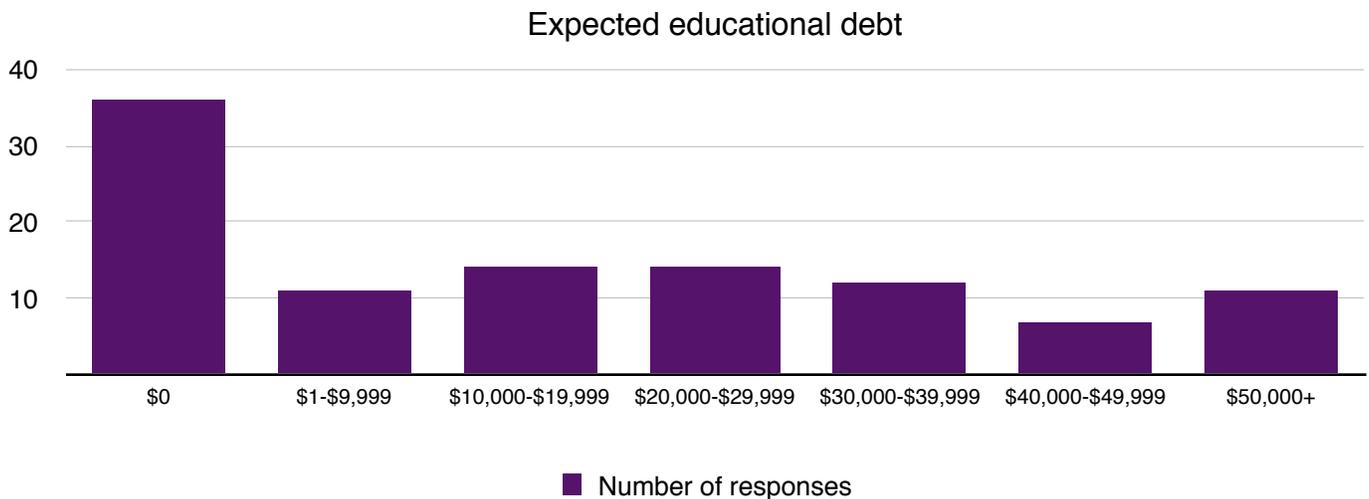


Figure 7: Responses to question “What is your expected educational debt upon graduation?”

Nine students preferred to not answer this question.

Section 3: iSchool Experience

iSchool experience covers various topics including: recommended and not recommended courses, characteristics of favourite classes, influential professors and instructors, student groups and activities, and expectations of first year versus second year students.

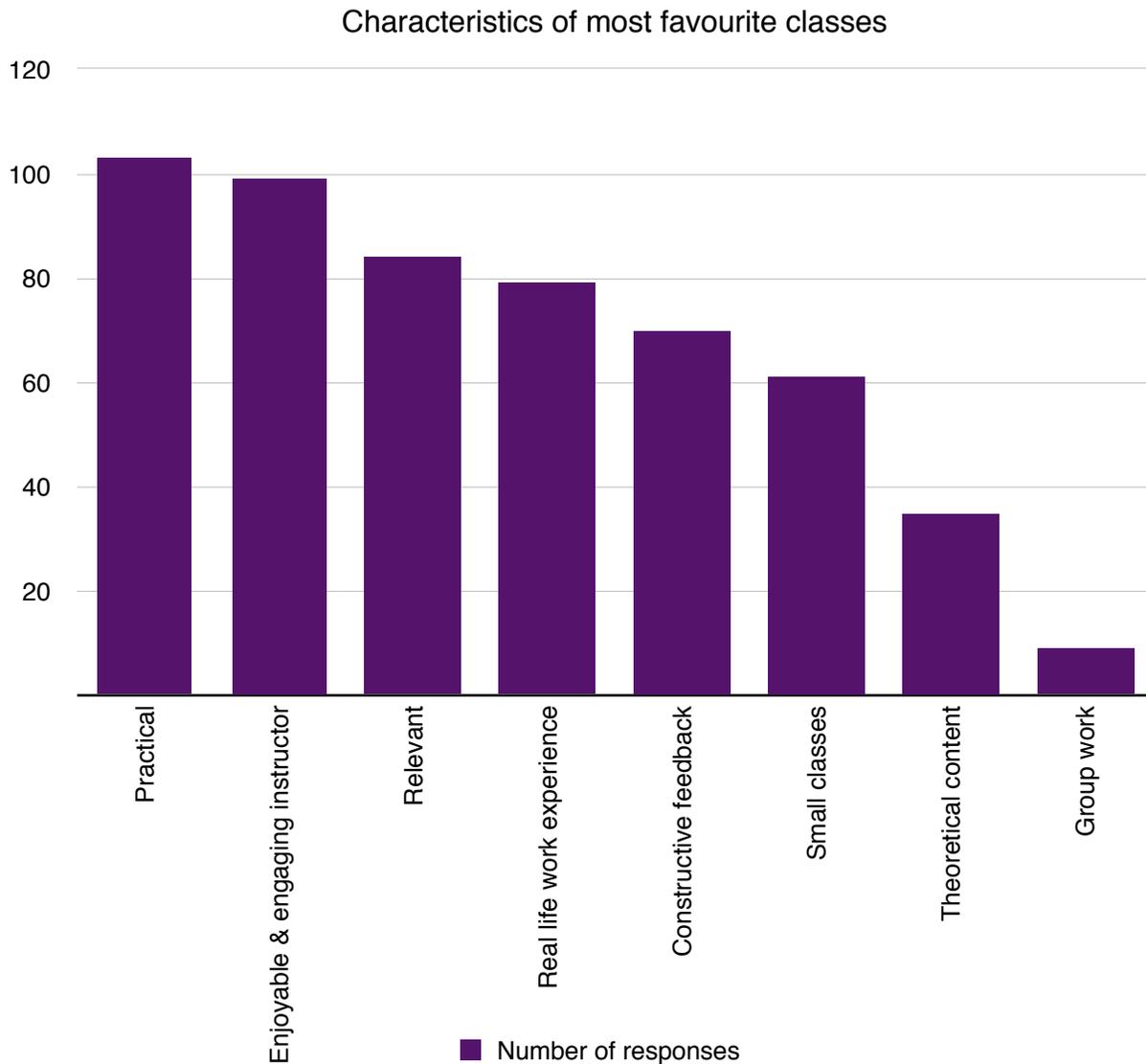


Figure 8: Responses to question “What are the characteristics of your most favourite classes?”

It is important to note that nearly all students indicated that classes that were practical and which were taught by an engaging instructor were the most favourable classes to take, regardless of concentration, year in program, or student status.

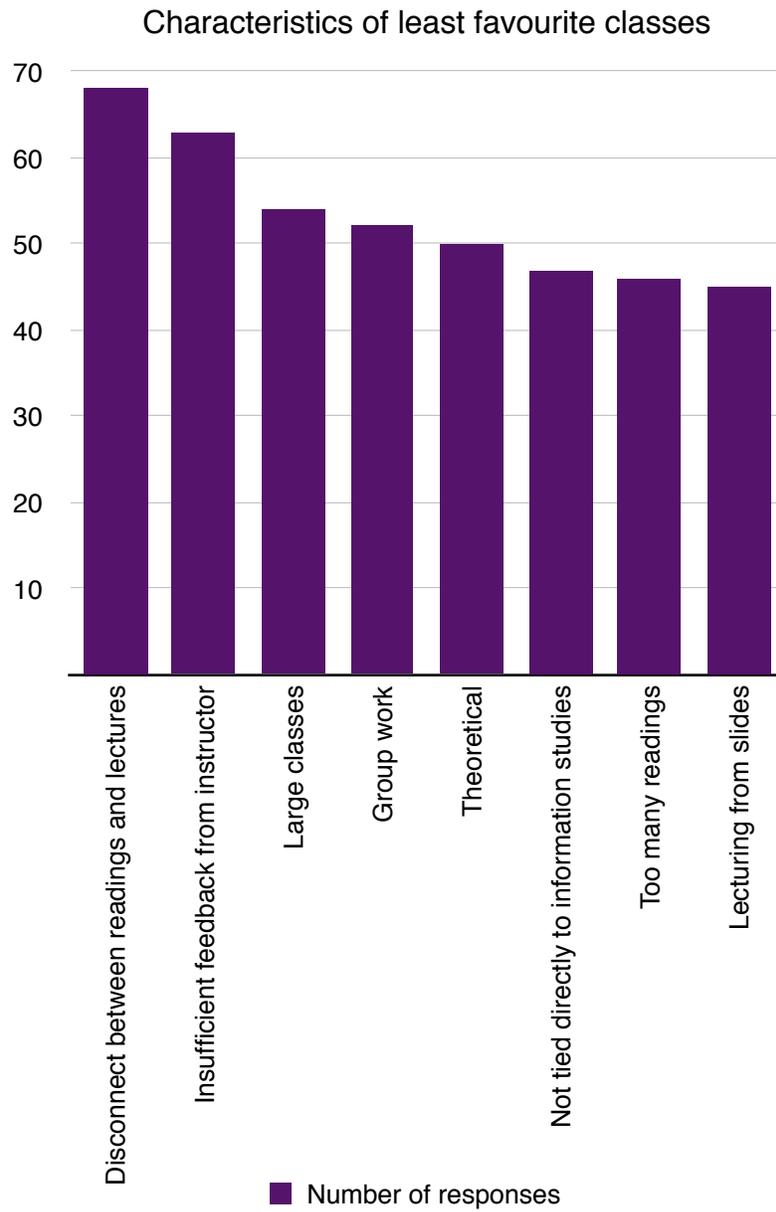


Figure 9: Responses to question “What are the characteristics of your least favourite classes?”

Recommended and not recommended courses

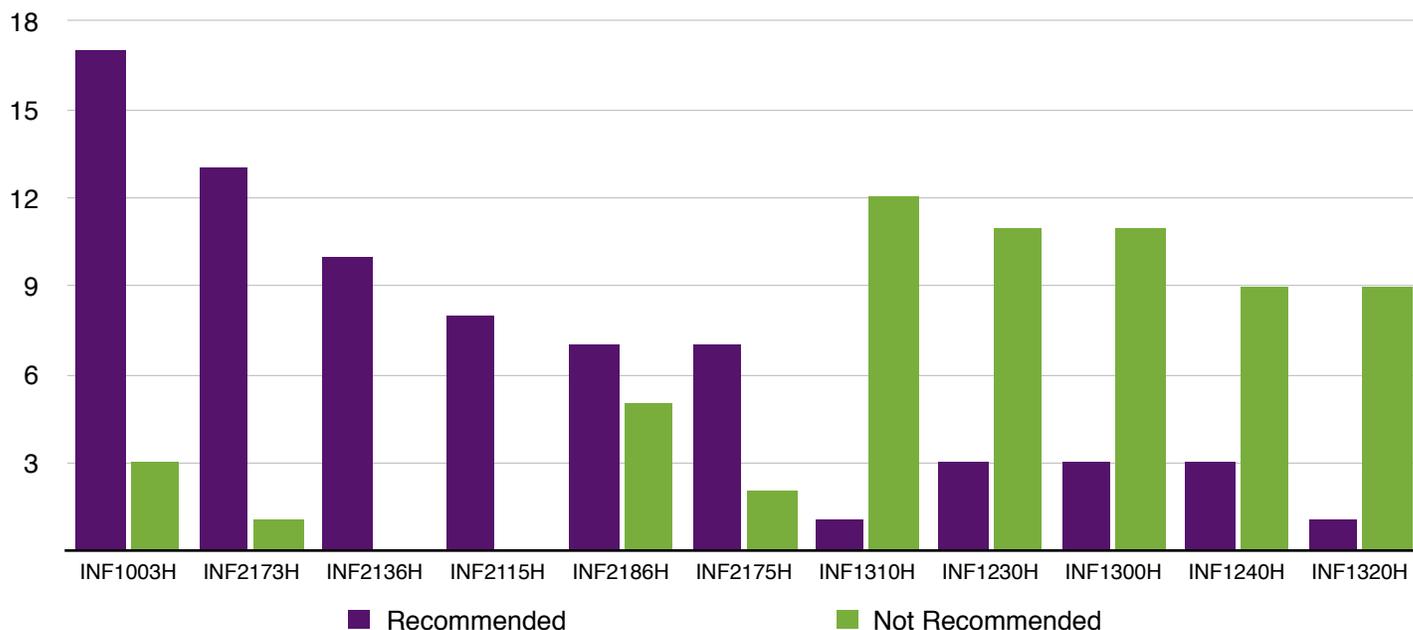


Figure 10: Responses to question “Which courses would you recommend and not recommend to other students?”

Interestingly, some courses were both recommended and not recommended equally amongst students. As well, with the exception of INF1003H there was an array of courses that students would recommend, which is likely a result of the divergent focuses within the program and individual preferences. It is important to note, that although the course was the focus of the question, a number of respondents specified that the professor or instructor was the key factor in either recommending or not recommending the course. Therefore, students are advised to inquire into why students recommend one course over another to determine if those factors have remained the same over time.

In five instances, the professor or instructor was named as recommended and not the specific course(s) that she or he taught. Therefore, these comments could not be included in the final analysis because the individual taught more than one course and so it was unclear which courses were being recommended. In three instances, students indicated that *some* of the core library courses were not recommended. But again, because the specific courses were not named it was unclear which courses the students were referring to and so these courses were not included in the analysis. Interestingly, the core library courses were not recommended by first and second or later year students equally, and no student in any of the other concentrations specified that they would not recommend all or the majority of their core courses.

Professor or instructor that has made the greatest positive impact

Professor or instructor	Number of responses
Colin Furness	13
Mike McCaffrey	12
Greta Golick	7

Table 1: Responses to the question “Which professor or instructor has had the greatest impact on you?”

Only the top three professors and instructors were listed in this report. In total, 37 professors or instructors were identified, perhaps reflecting the diverse and unique needs and goals of each student as well as the interaction between individual personalities.

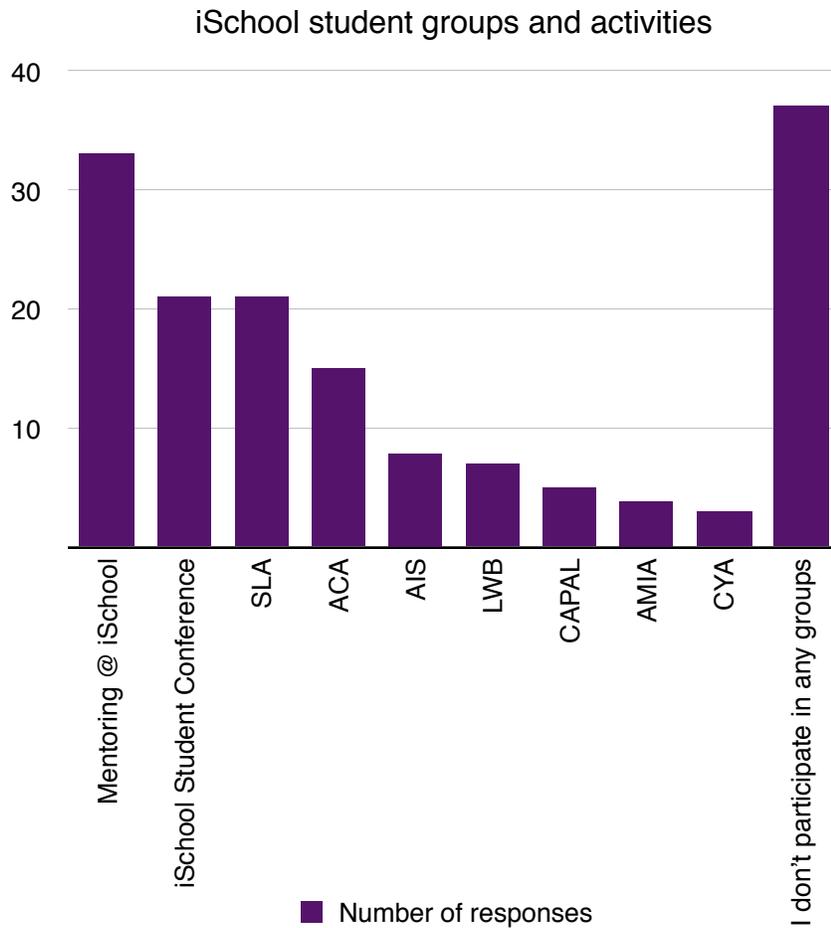


Figure 11: Responses to question “Which iSchool student groups or activities do you participate in?”

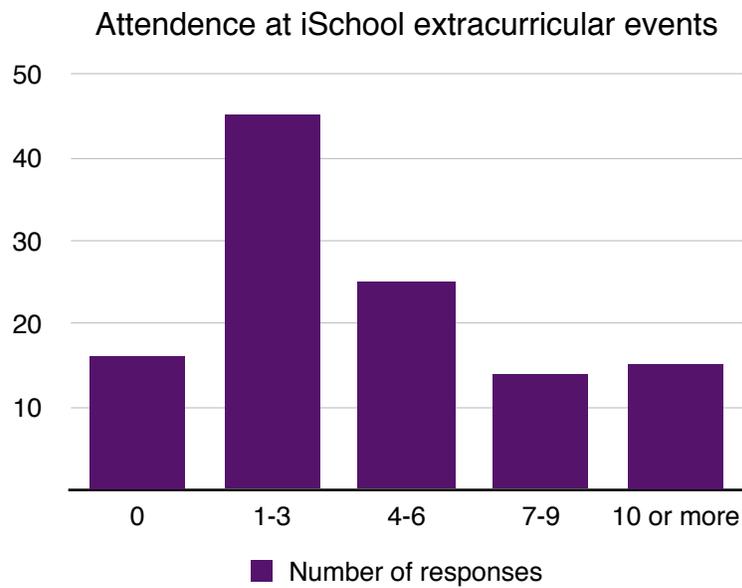
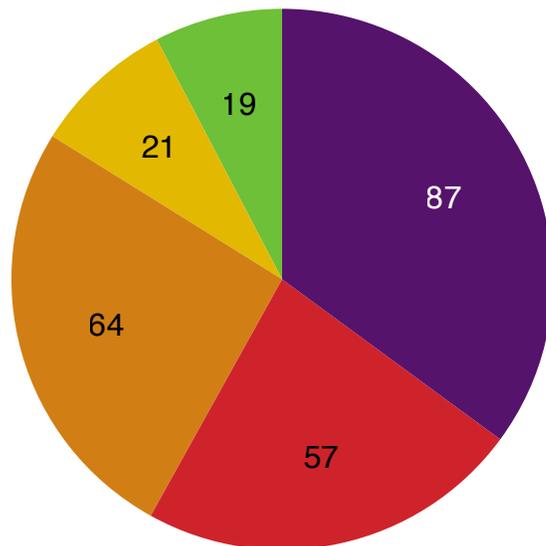


Figure 12: Responses to question “How many iSchool extracurricular events have you attended in the 2014-15 academic year?”

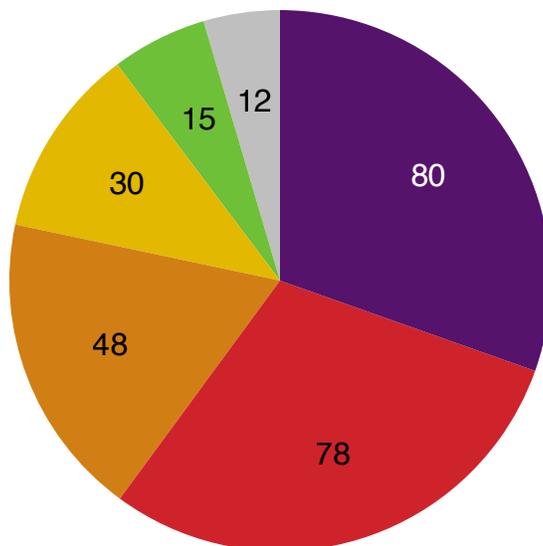
Reasons for attending events



- they are relevant to my educational or career interests or needs
- they enhance my practical skill set
- I enjoy socializing with my classmates
- the activity has an LIS focus
- the activity does not have an LIS focus

Figure 13: Responses to question “When you did attend events what is or are the reasons why you did?”

Reasons for not attending events



- they conflict with school schedule
- they conflict with work schedule
- they are not relevant to my educational or career interests or needs
- they are not useful for me
- they are LIS-focused
- I did not know about extracurricular events

Figure 14: Responses to question “When you did not attend events what is or are the reasons why you did not?”

FIRST vs. SECOND YEAR (AND BEYOND) STUDENTS: what were you looking forward to the most in fall 2014?

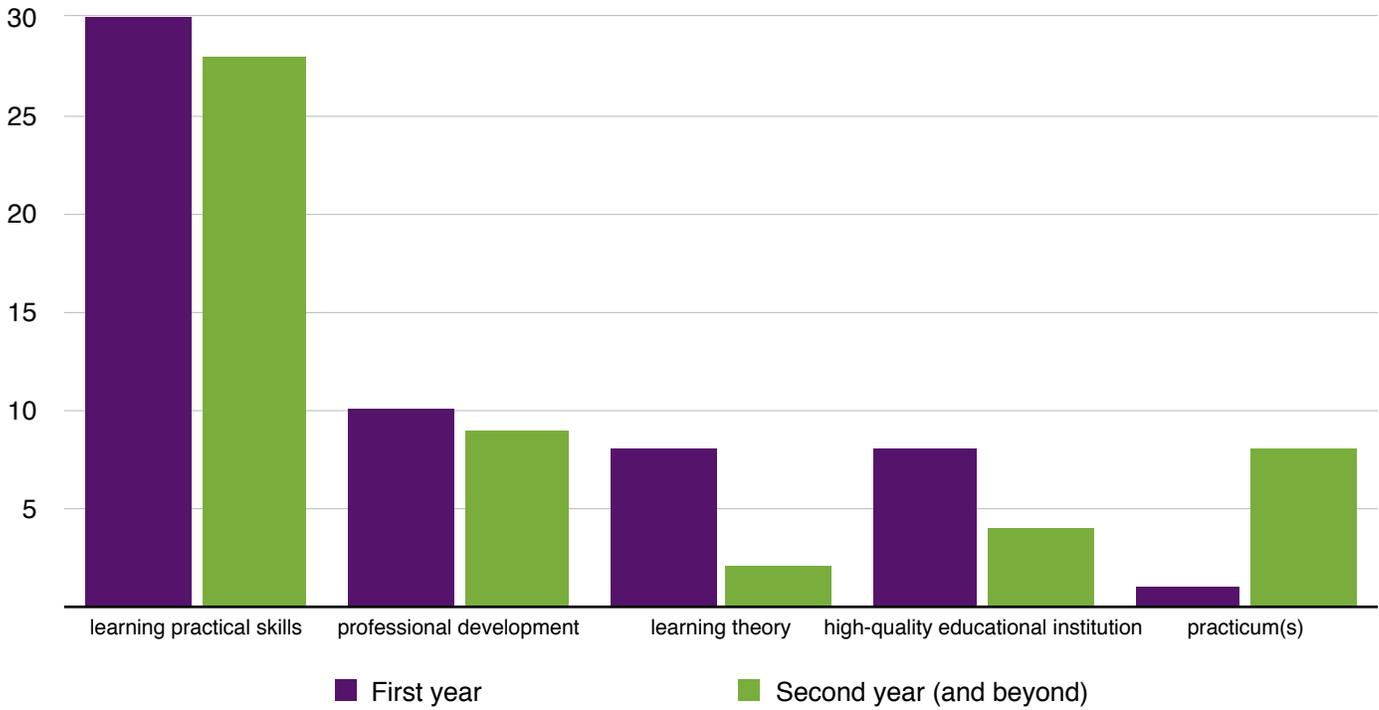


Figure 15: Responses to question FIRST vs. SECOND YEAR (AND BEYOND) STUDENTS: ‘What were you most looking forward to when you returned to the program in September 2014?’

FIRST YEAR STUDENTS ONLY: Were these expectations met?

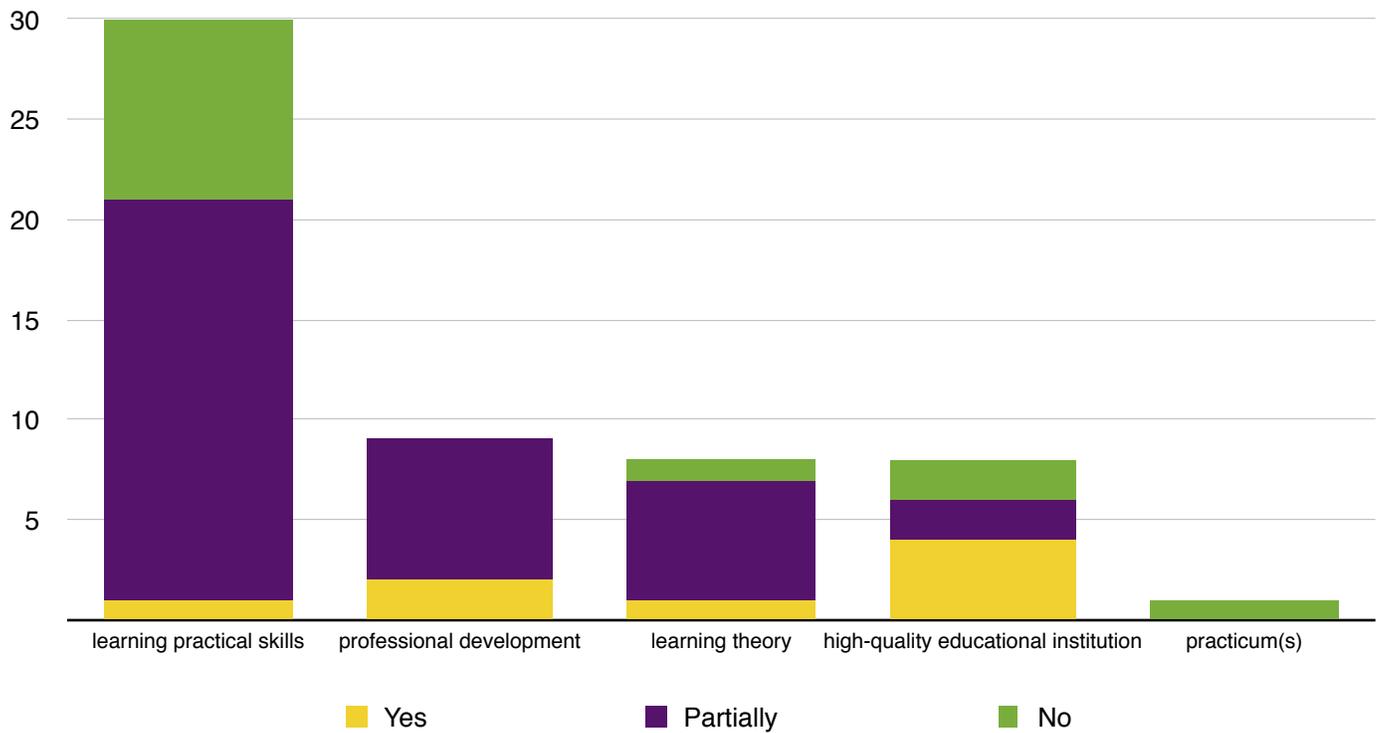


Figure 16: Responses to question FIRST YEAR STUDENTS: ‘Were these expectations met?’

SECOND YEAR (AND BEYOND) STUDENTS ONLY: Were these expectations met?

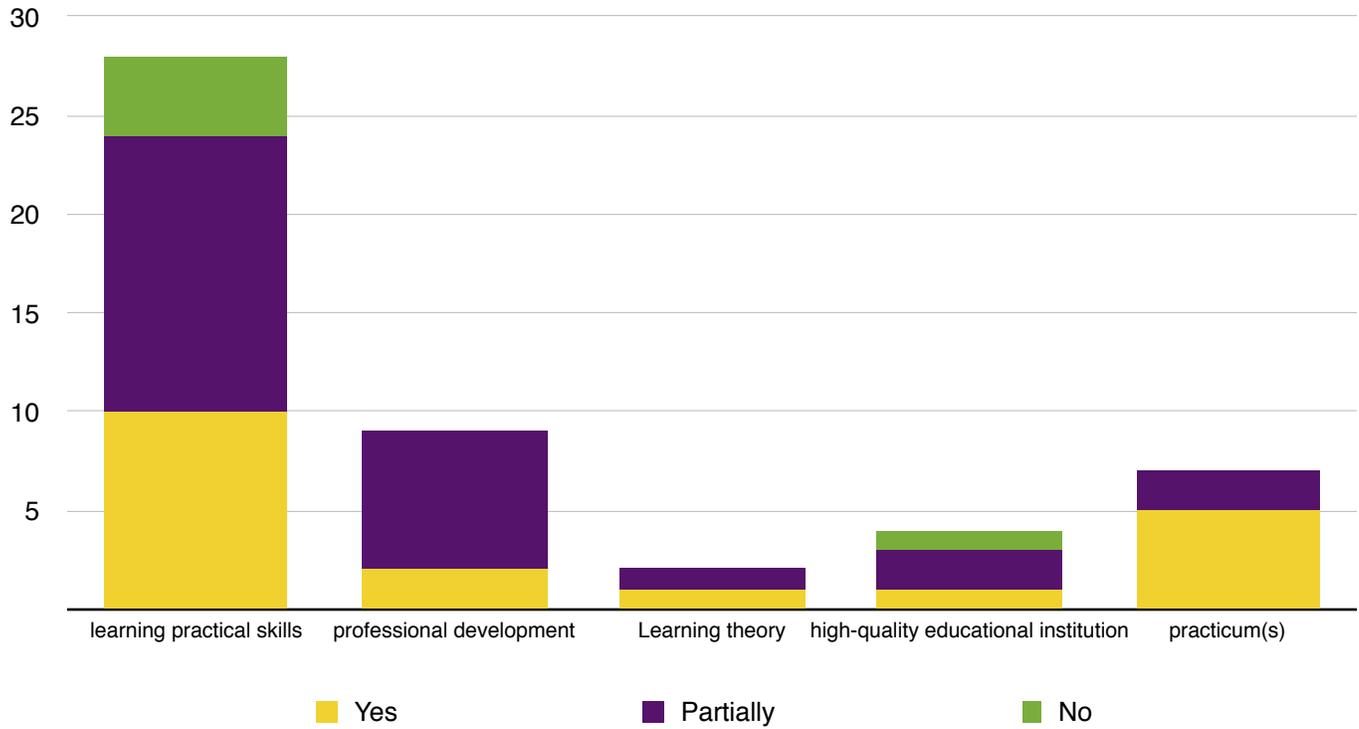


Figure 17: Responses to question SECOND YEAR (AND BEYOND) STUDENTS: ‘Were these expectations met?’

Section 4: iSchool services and support

iSchool services and MISC inquires into student perceptions of Student Services and Information Services, whom in the iSchool students would approach with personal problems, and the Tech Fund.

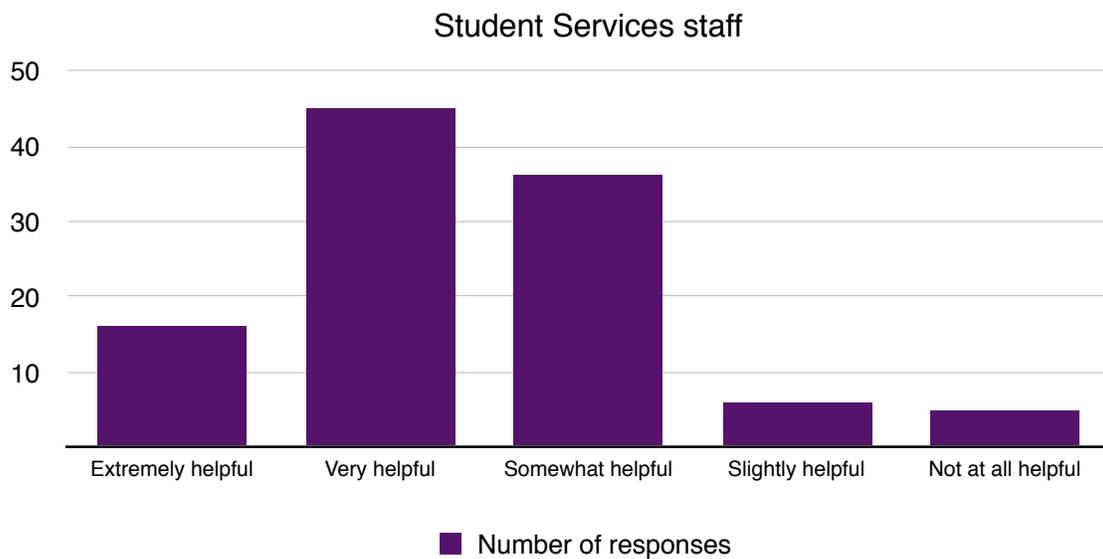


Figure 18: Responses to question “How helpful is the staff in Student Services?”

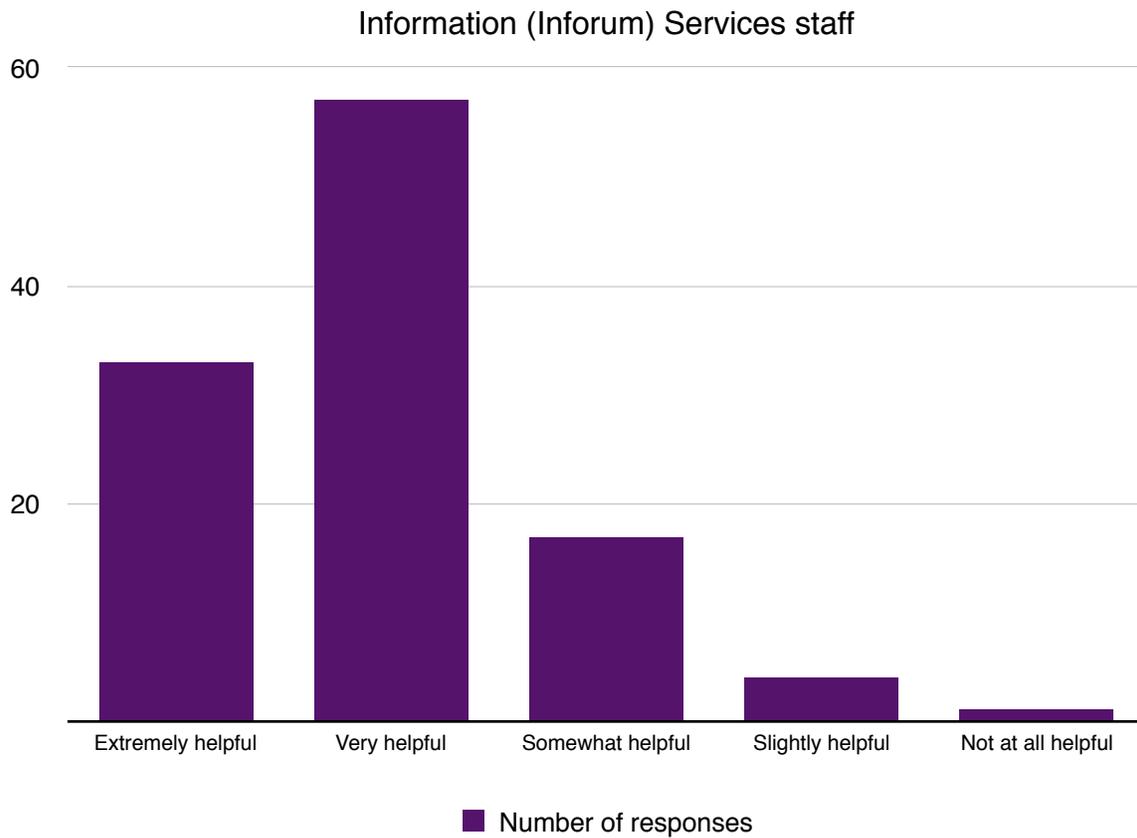


Figure 19: Responses to question “How helpful is the Information (Inforum) Services staff?”

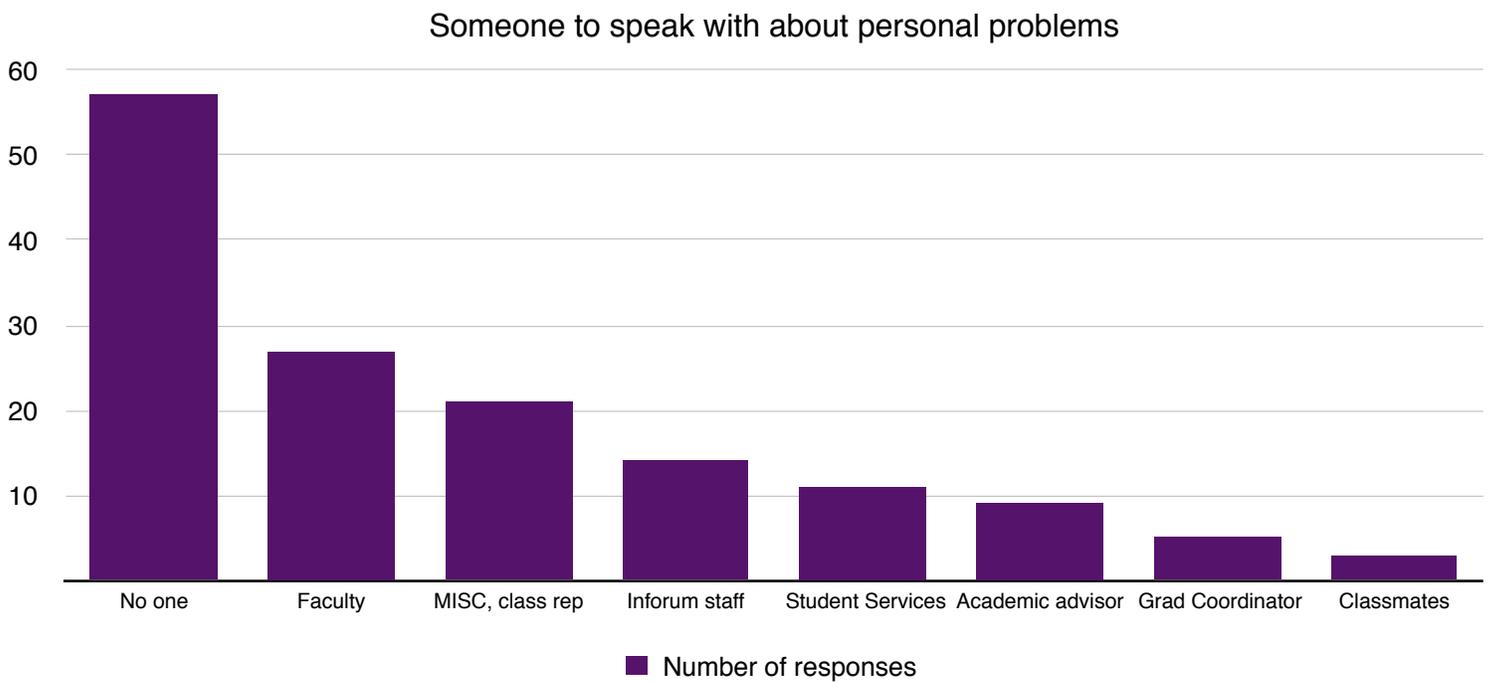


Figure 20: Responses to question “Is there someone at the iSchool you would feel comfortable approaching with personal problems? If so, whom?”

Satisfaction with the Tech Fund?

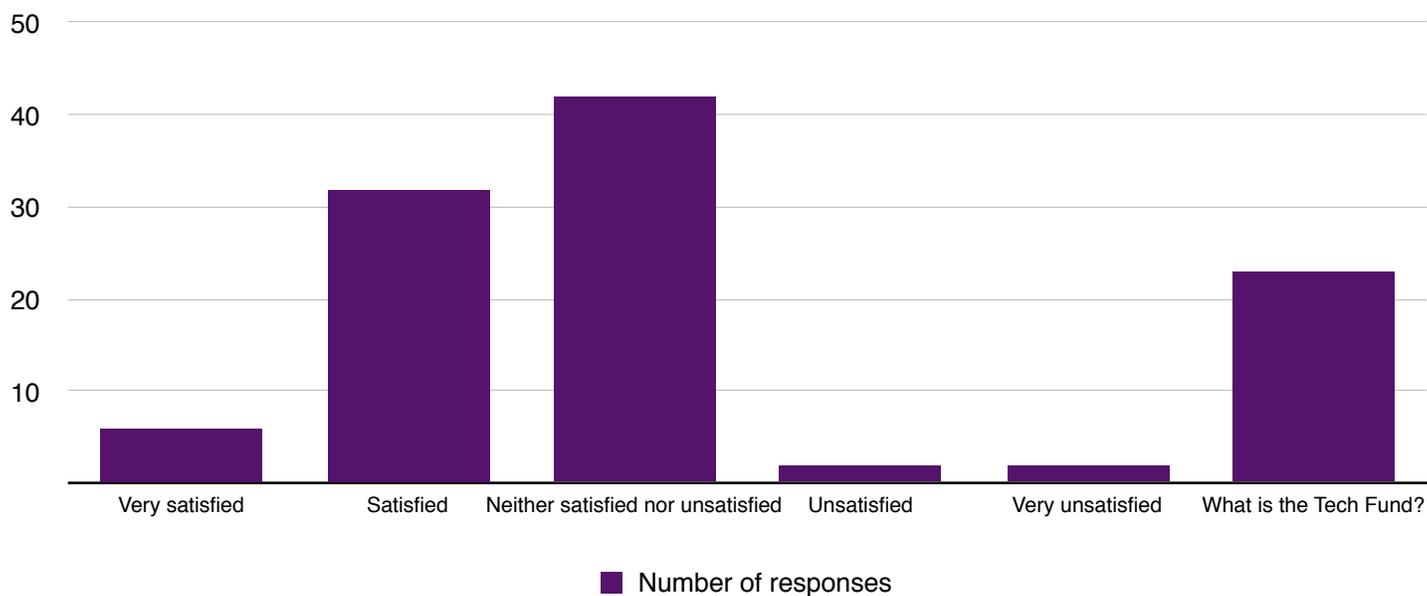


Figure 21: Responses to question “How satisfied are you with the Tech Fund?”

Tech Fund Suggestions

Suggestions	Number of responses
Support equipment (e.g. chargers, cords)	5
Other supporting technology (e.g. projectors, video cameras, arduinos)	5
Technical workshops (e.g. IS&D, technology/system related)	4
Laptops and computers	3
Software (e.g. SPSS, specialized databases)	3
Easier access to equipment	2s

Table 2: Responses to question “How satisfied are you with the Tech Fund?”

Section 5: After iSchool

After iSchool inquires about student perceptions of their education and readiness for employment after graduation.

Readiness for employment

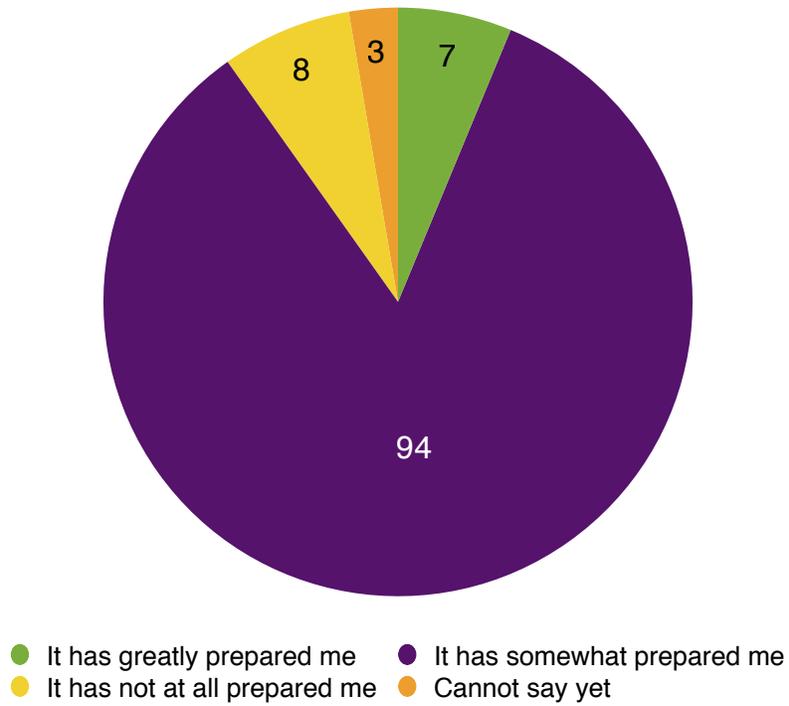


Figure 22: Responses to question "To what extent do you feel the iSchool has prepared you for employment after graduation?"

Satisfaction with iSchool practical skills

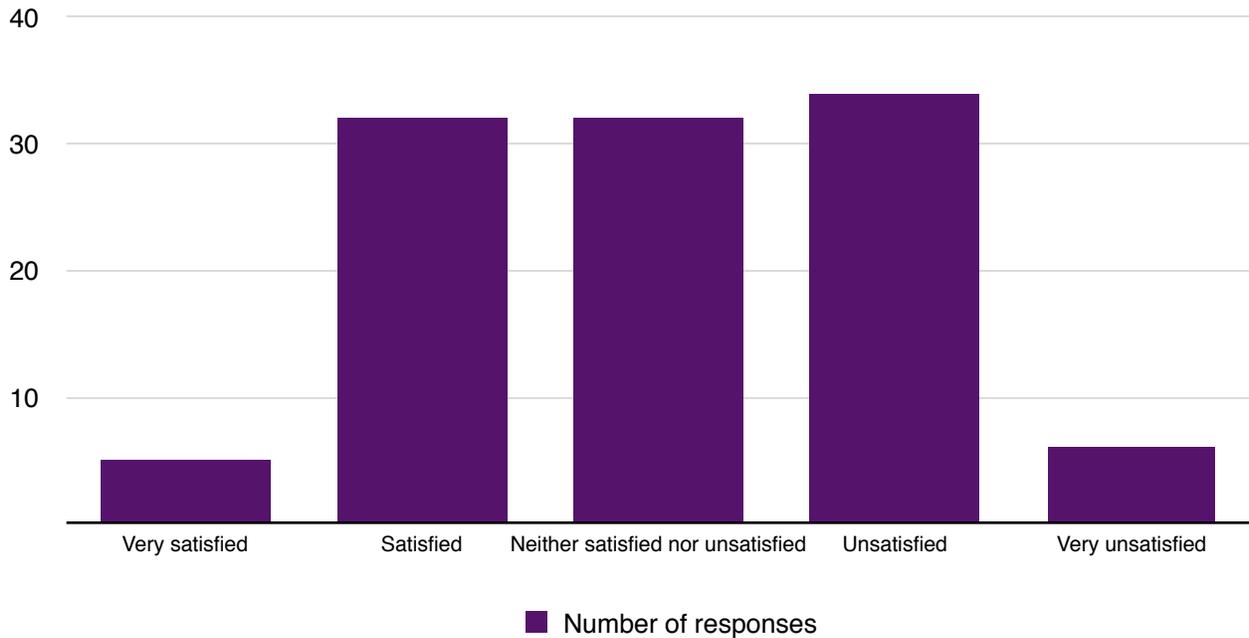


Figure 23: Responses to question "Overall, how satisfied are you with the practical skills taught in the iSchool?"

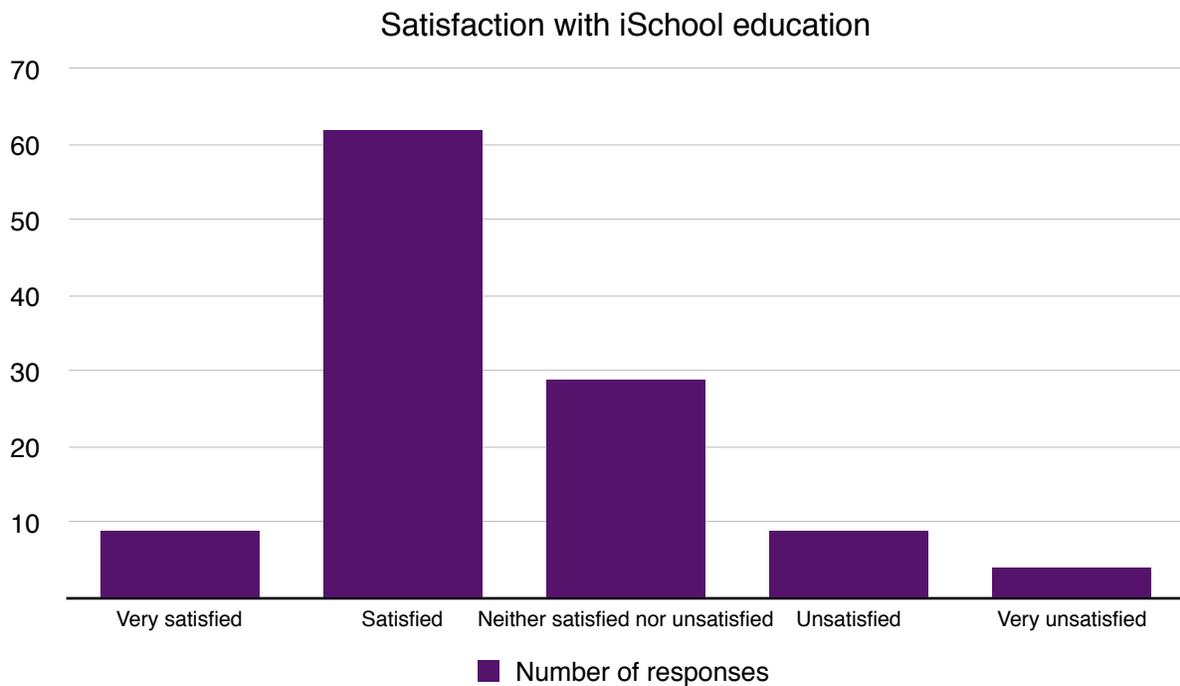


Figure 24: Responses to question “Overall, how satisfied are you with your iSchool education?”

Section 6: MISC and Final Thoughts

MISC and final thoughts provides insight into what students expect of MISC as well as their comments and suggestions for the iSchool as it educates the next generation of information professionals.

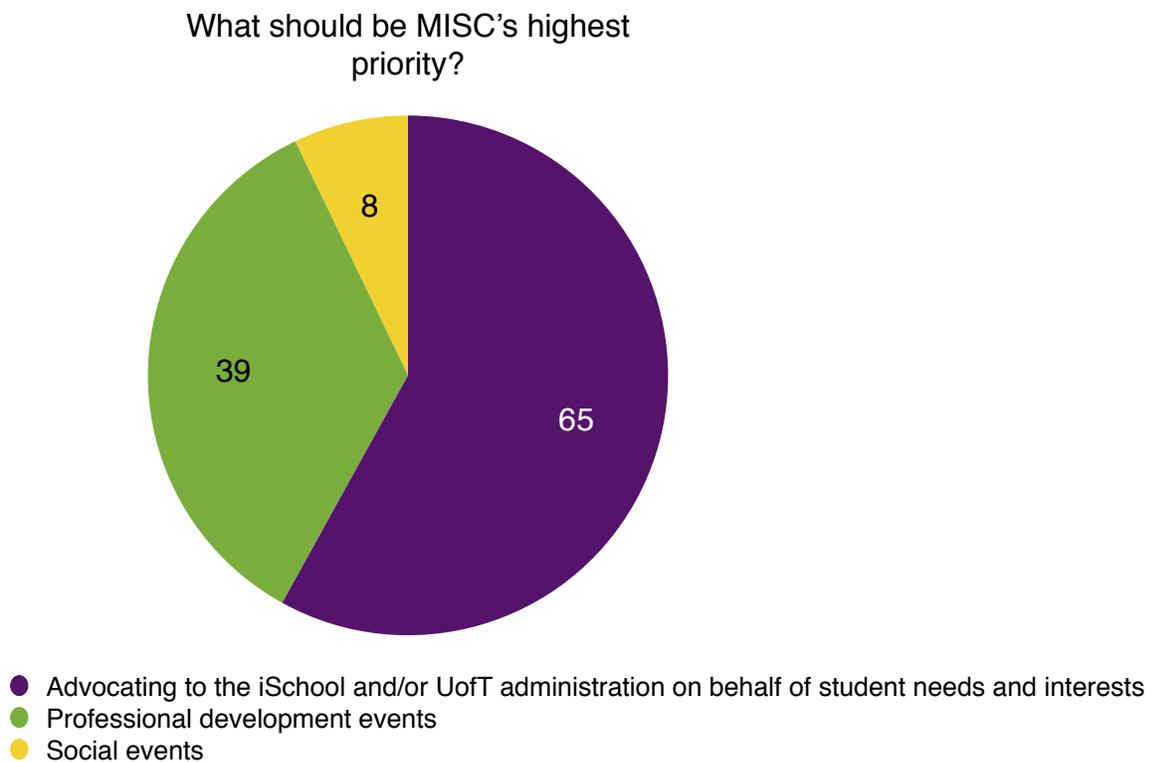


Figure 25: Responses to question “What should be MISC’s highest priority?”

Final comments for MISC and iSchool administrators

Comment	Number of respondents
Need and interest in more practical courses	13
Issues with course selection	13
Concerns about the MI concentrations	8
Concerns about the direction of the iSchool	7
Improving student, faculty, and administration relations	6
Meeting diverse student needs	6
Improving faculty and advisor mentoring of students	4
Concerns over the proposed Inforum changes	3

Table 3: Responses to question “Is there anything else you would like to share with MISC or iSchool administrators?”

The final question was analyzed and coded into high-level themes. The analysis did not include comments or feedback on issues that were specifically raised in earlier questions in the survey. The hope was that the final question would present an opportunity to raise new issues or articulate broader concerns or issues that perhaps underlie findings in previous questions. For example, there is a consistent interest from and need for students to take courses that teach practical skills rather than those that are more theoretical and appropriate for academia. Given that the iSchool promotes itself as a professional program and that very few students enrol in the thesis stream (three respondents) it is reasonable to expect the MI program to include a meaningful and reliable supply of courses that teach practical skills that are in demand throughout the information profession.

Each year the survey reflects the issues that have been raised by students throughout the year and which may be unique for that year. The 2014-15 was no different as students reiterated their concerns about the proposed Inforum changes and their general concerns about the leadership and current direction of the iSchool. These are issues that MISC has continued to push forward on throughout the 2014-15 academic year and likely into the 2015-16 year as well.

The survey also reveals that some concerns continue as cohorts come and go through the iSchool. This is reflected in student concerns over the content, direction, and progression of learning through a student’s journey in any one of the MI concentrations. These concerns were exasperated in the 2014-15 academic year given that an above average number of faculty were on sabbatical or had left the iSchool but were not replaced, resulting in students perceiving if not experiencing fewer course offerings.

Last, students communicated a general need to build better relationships between students, faculty, and administration and to find common ground on which to address our diverse needs and interests. More specifically, some students are looking for greater mentoring from the faculty and their advisors while others advocate for improving awareness and support for students with diverse needs including, but not limited to: part time, mature, minority, and LBGT students as well as those with disabilities and mental health needs.

Nevertheless, 71 of the 115 students that responded to the survey (62%) are satisfied or very satisfied with their iSchool education overall. Perhaps the results of this survey provide suggestions on what MISC, faculty, and the administration could — together — work on to bring these numbers up.

Thank you to everyone who completed the survey and provided feedback.

Appendix: Limitations and Suggestions

There are limitations to the MISC Annual Survey 2014-15, which should be noted. They are not discussed in great detail but hopefully can be used as guidelines for improving upon the survey, when possible, when drafting, disseminating, analyzing, and reporting on future surveys.

- The response rate of 27.5 per cent is relatively low, which reduces the overall validity of the findings. (A survey response rate of 50% would be a great response rate.) Given that LIS students outnumber all other concentrations a higher response rate would improve the validity of any findings that relate to non-LIS students. Therefore, it may be worth exploring if response rates improve (or worsen) by administering the survey at different times of the year. It is suggested that the survey be administered the week prior to the winter reading week with frequent (twice a week reminders) for the duration that the survey is open. In mid-late February, first year students will have completed a full semester of the program and one workshop, while all students are *usually* less busy than they would be at the end of the semester. Late March is a busy time of year for all students but especially graduating students. Similarly, late November may be undesirable because students have exams and September through October is likely too early for first year students to really comment on their iSchool experience.
- The coding was not validated by another student. It is important to validate coding and all findings of the survey. It is suggested that the survey committee be formalized in the fall and be composed of three people, one of whom takes the lead on the project. It would also be ideal for the survey to be composed of both first and second year students. Second year students can provide better insight into the student experience while first year students will be more likely to commit to the completion of the report as they will be returning to the program the following year.
- Correlations and statistical significance were not used. Given the low response rate for this iteration of the survey, it is less meaningful to test for statistical significance. However, should the response rate be higher in future years it would be useful to do basic correlations and test for statistical significance. This is not unreasonable to do using certain variables such as LIS students, first year vs. second (and later) year(s), satisfaction with courses, and other variables with fewer categories of responses. These calculations need not be complex and would be an excellent way to build on skills learned in some of the iSchool courses (i.e., KMD2002H and INF2115H), which then could be added to a student's portfolio of work.