Peer-to-Peer Student Outreach in Linguistic Studies
MA Curriculum Assessment and Development
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Background

- Curriculum revisions are typically faculty-driven.
- This study used peer-to-peer research to assess students' perceptions of program learning outcomes & opinions on proposed innovations.
- Through an independent study and internship model, three graduate students in the program under study conducted this research.

Literature Review

- Innovative questioning by students can lead to commercially viable ideas, transforming education and preserving certain professions. (Ncube, 2020)
- Educators can create more effective and meaningful curricula by considering their students' diverse viewpoints, experiences, and needs. (Dlamini, 2023)
- The mixed-method approach is valuable for studying intricate social phenomena and allows for the collection and integration of diverse data types. (Wray & Bloomer, 2012)

Research Questions

1. Do students know about current program outcomes?
   - How have the program courses helped students meet the core program outcomes?
2. How do students feel about the MA focus areas on offer?
   - What changes/improvements would students like to see in the program?
3. Should a psycholinguistics focus area be added?
   - What factors would influence your decision to enroll in this area?

Methodology

Procedure: a mixed-methods approach
- Surveys (for past and current students)
- Individual interviews or focus groups (for current students)

Participants: 20 student survey responses; academic/demographic summary:

Year of program	
1st year	5
2nd year	9
Alumni	6

| Student status	
Domestic	11
International	9

Completion status	
Thesis option	6
Non thesis	14

Survey Questions

- What year are you in the program? *first year/second year/completed*
- What is your MA focus area?
- What is your student status? *international/domestic*
- Are you completing/completed with a thesis? *yes/no*
- Do you know the program outcomes for the Linguistic Studies MA? *yes/no/maybe*
- Do you know where to find the program outcomes? *yes/no/maybe*
- Do you think your courses have helped you answer the program outcome questions? *(strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree)*
- How much did you rely on the program's website and its representation of the program when deciding to apply? *(not at all, slightly, somewhat, mostly, completely)*
- To what extent does your experience in the program reflect how it was presented before you applied? *(not at all, slightly, somewhat, mostly, completely)*
- Please rate your level of agreement with the statements below *(strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree)*
   - I am satisfied with the core courses required for the MA
   - I am satisfied with the courses required for my focus area
   - I am satisfied with the variety of courses offered in my focus area
   - I am satisfied with the availability of inter/cross-disciplinary courses
   - I am satisfied with the quality of interactions I had with faculty members in the program
- Do you think a psycholinguistics focus area would be a good addition to the program? *(yes/no)*
- What factors would influence your decision to enroll in a psycholinguistics focus area? *(research interest, career goals, other)*
- What changes/improvements would students like to see in the program?
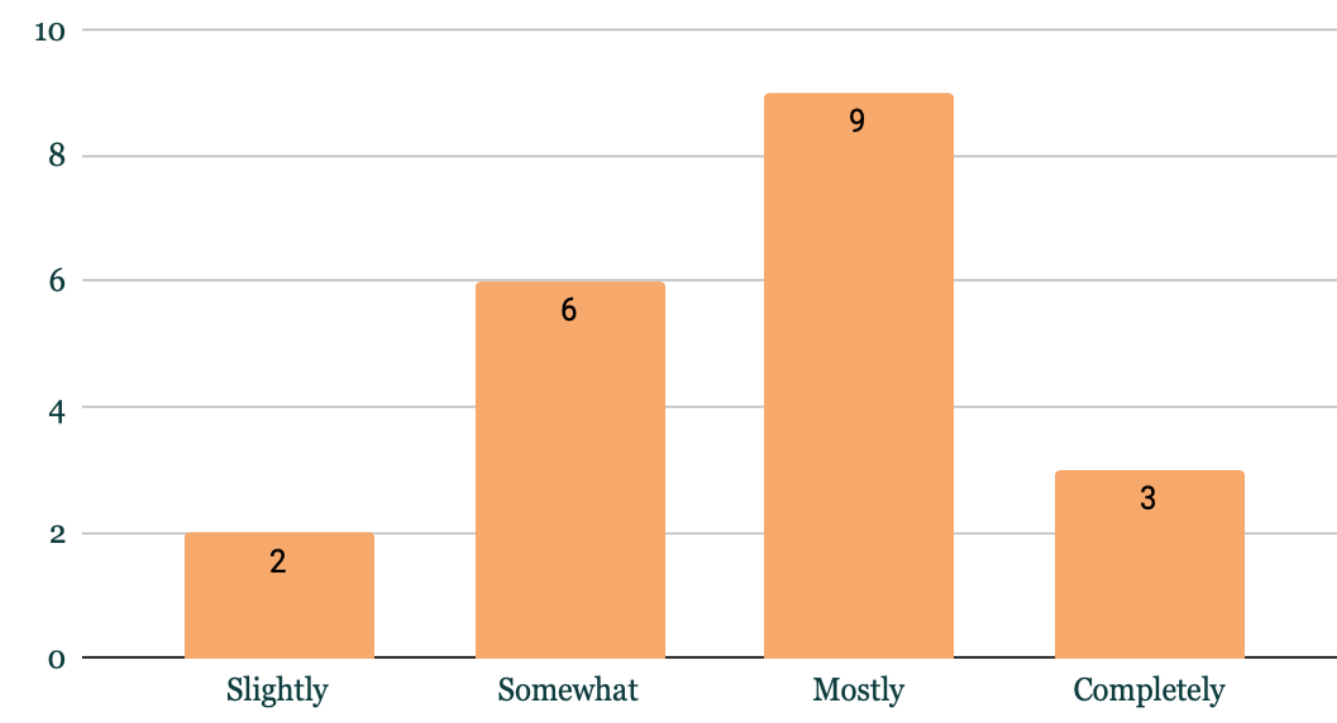
Results: Program Outcomes

Do you know the program outcomes are for the MA Linguistic Studies?

Do you know where to find the program outcomes?
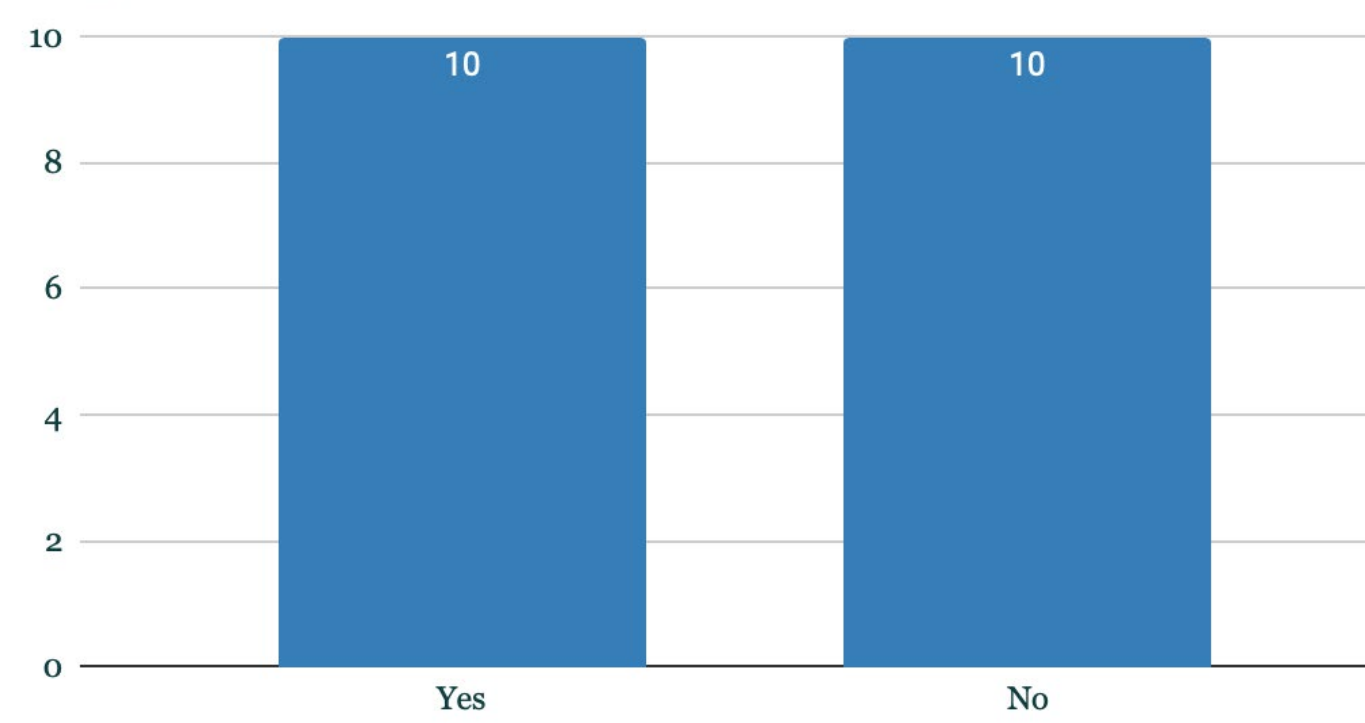
MA Linguistic Studies Core Program Outcomes:
- Evaluate claims about human communication and about the innate language competence in humans.
- Evaluate claims about the history and structure of specific languages and the universal principles that underlie the knowledge of all languages.
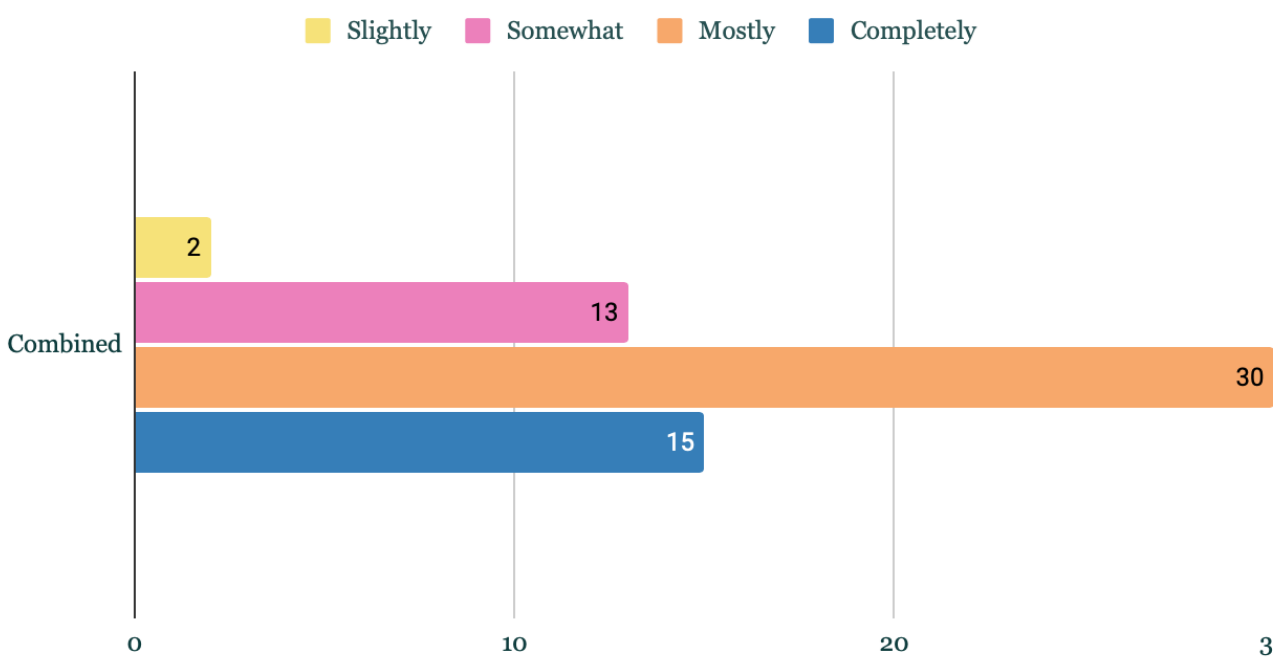- Evaluate claims about the role of language in culture and society.
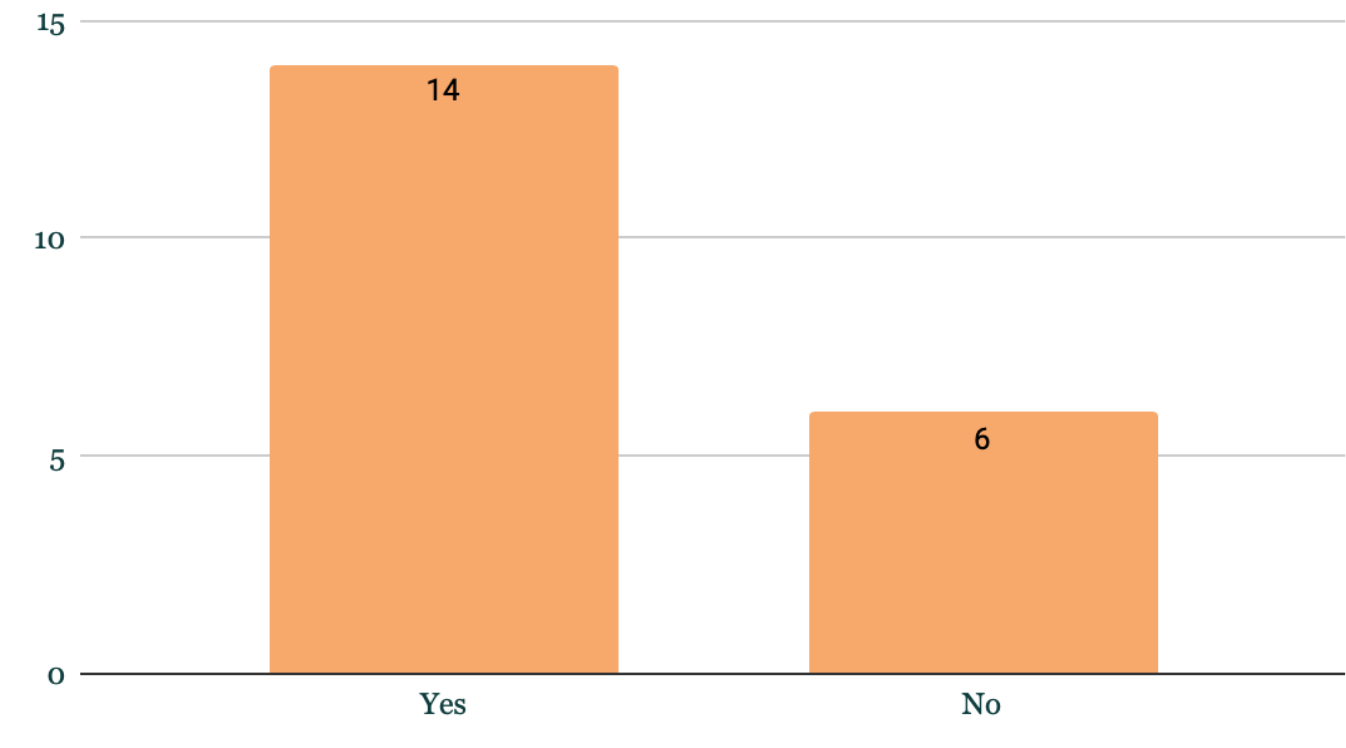
Do you think your courses have helped you meet the core program outcomes? (All 3 outcomes combined)

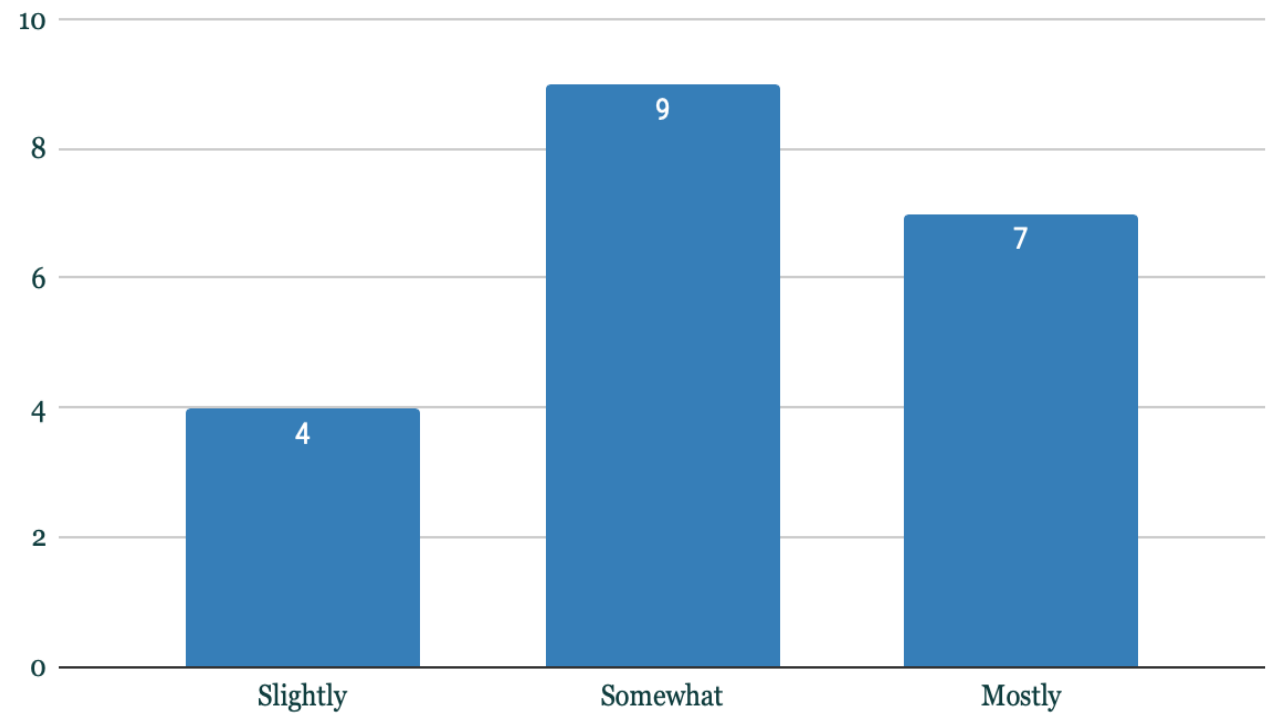How much did you rely on the program's website and its representation of the program when deciding to apply?
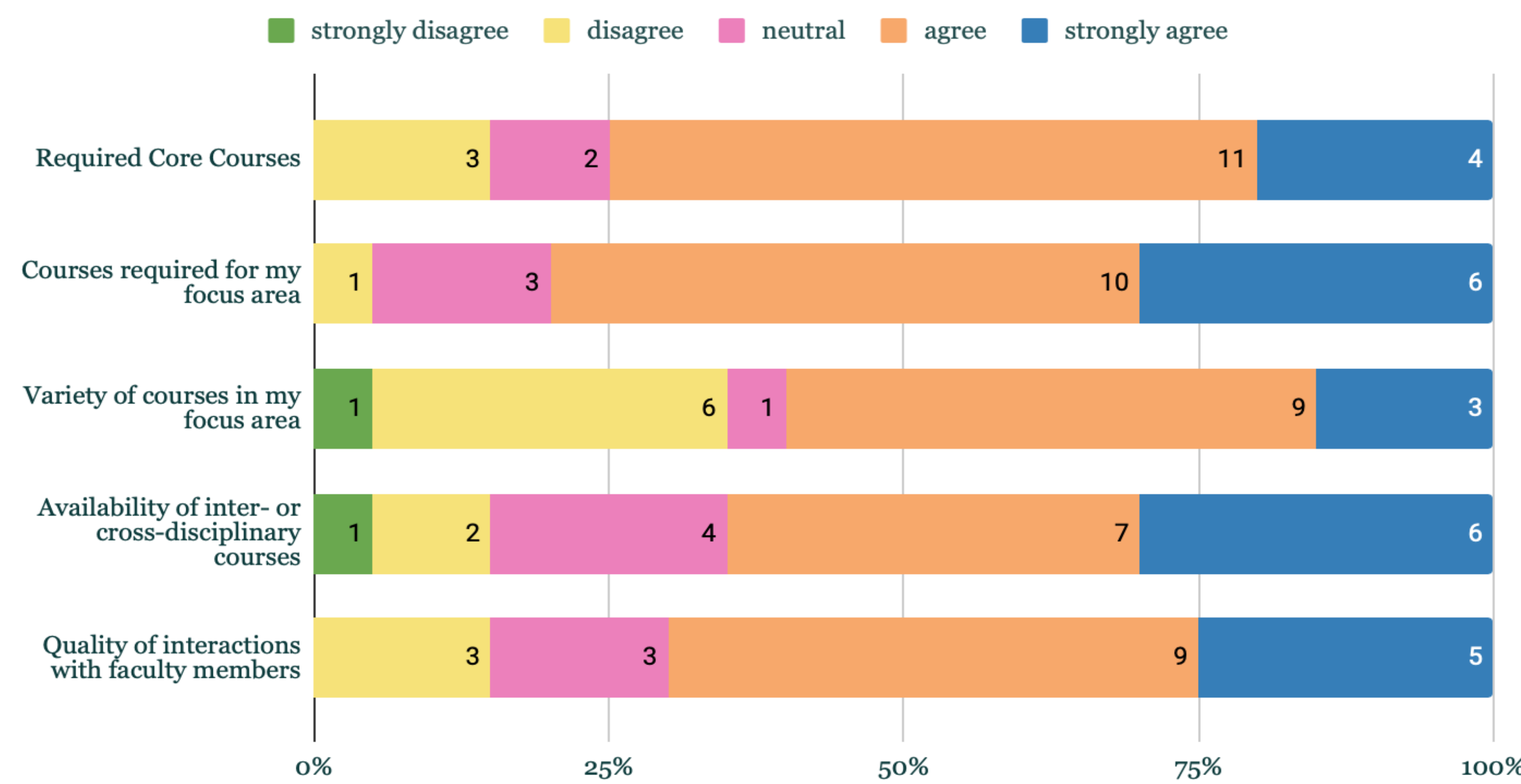
To what extent does your experience in the program reflect how it was presented, e.g. online, before you applied?

## Results: Courses & MA Focus Areas

I am satisfied with the …

### What changes/improvements would students like to see in the program?

Comments	#
"Allow for a 5-year accelerated combined BA/MA program for well-performing students."	1
"I feel that I would've benefited from some kind of placement tests, especially since I had an undergraduate degree in linguistics."	1
"I think students will benefit from 1 or 2 statistics courses for quantitative research."	1
"More advanced courses available for each semester and less theory or the required core."	1
"I would like to see more flexibility in how you complete your degree."	1
"Better/more consistent advising."	1
"I wish the various concentrations had corresponding professors in the department and not outside the department to give more support to students."	1
"My main feedback is faculty-grad student interaction where they share their interests and help grad students to understand how and why things are done a certain way in the field."	1
"You might want to consider splitting combined undergrad and grad classes because it can be quite unbalanced and/or "intimidating.""	1

Results: Psycholinguistics Focus Area

Do you think psycholinguistics focus area would be a good addition to the program?
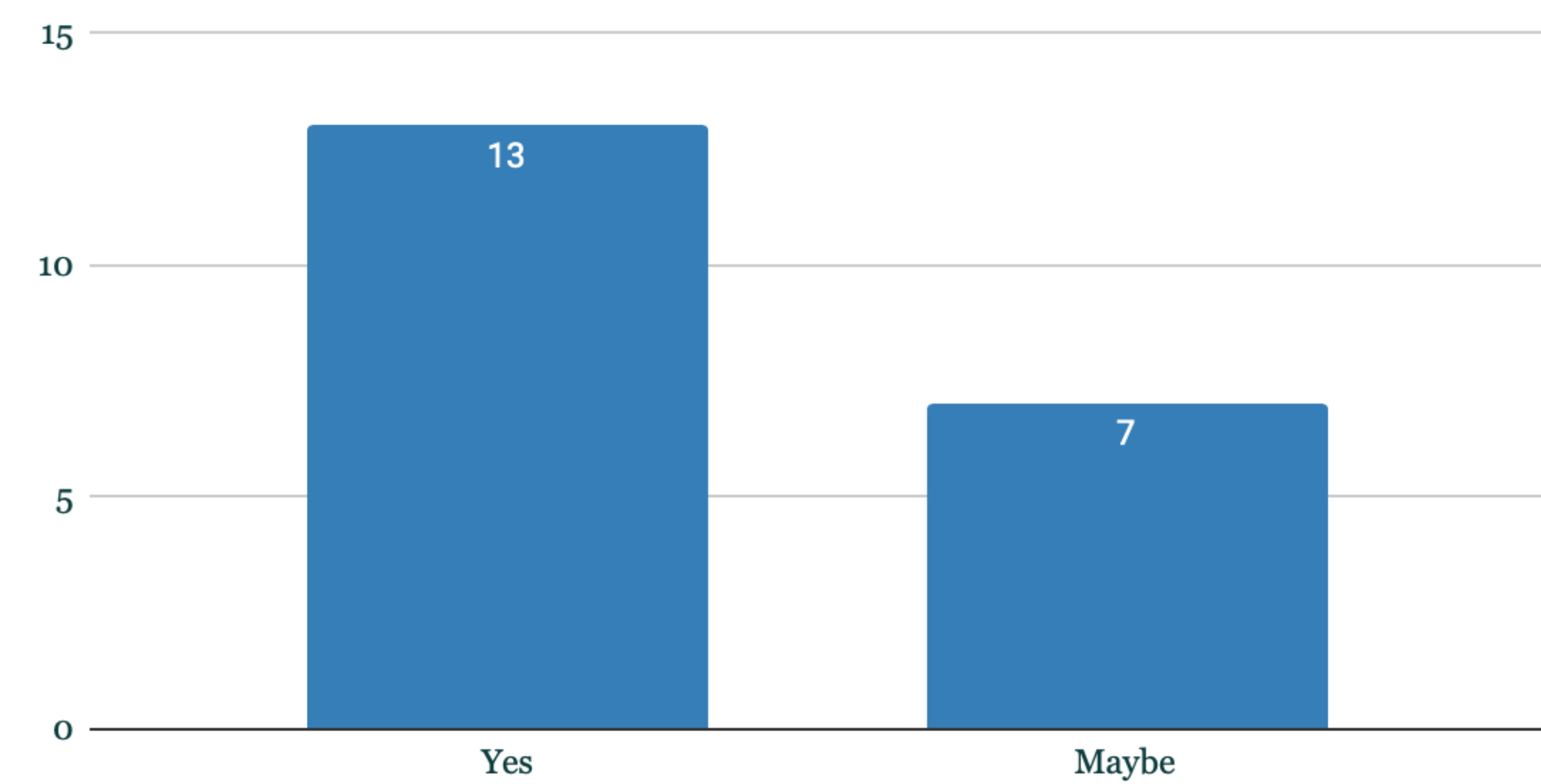
What factors would influence your decision to enroll in psycholinguistics concentration?
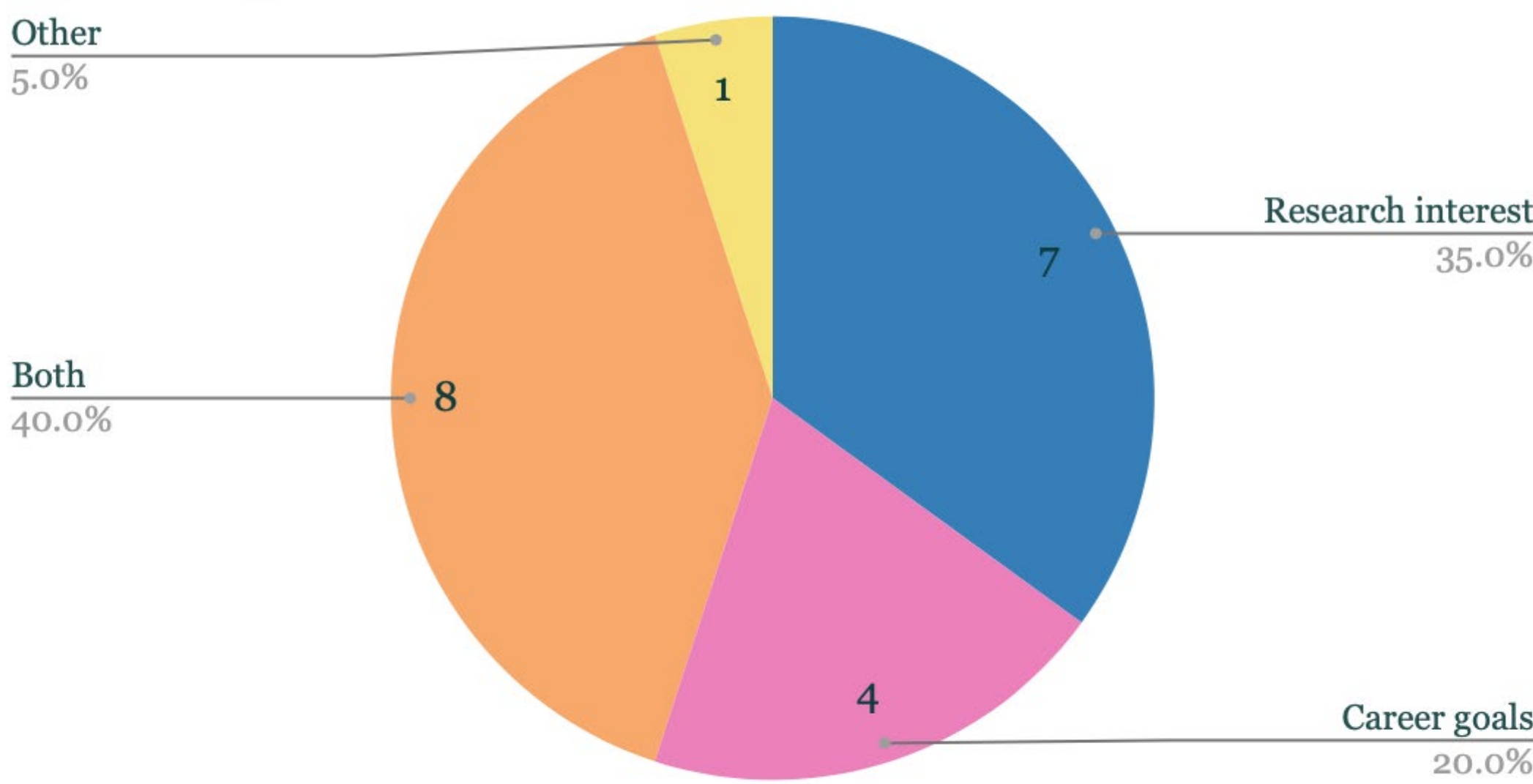
Conclusions

- While individual courses are routinely assessed and a program exit survey is available, this project has provided in-depth <u>program-level</u> information from student perspectives to help guide assessment/curriculum development.
- Interviews/focus groups > elaborated responses, triangulated data
- Program work is needed to communicate and locate program outcomes, establish placement testing, explore 4+1 option, review advising.
- Six diverse MA focus areas have 40% common + 60% focus-specific curricula. More analysis is needed to correlate results with focus areas, e.g. dept. external advising, focus area courses.

Limitations
- Despite peer-to-peer research, 20% of respondents expressed concern about faculty access to responses > may have limited participation.
- Likert scale items may have introduced bias through one-sided wording.
- Some suggestions may not be feasible/may have unintended consequences:
- Splitting grad/undergrad classes > generally fewer classes (likely not more advanced classes; some splits are already implemented for fall)
- LLL-only advisors > fewer focus areas / (interdisciplinary) courses

Implications

- Independent study + intern model was effective for this project.
- Student researchers practiced real-world uses of applied linguistics.
- Findings will inform faculty in curriculum assessment & development.
- The current project model is applicable beyond Linguistic Studies.

References

- ChatGPT (2025) was used to help the organization of the some of the aspects of the outline of this project. The results were thoroughly reviewed and verified for accuracy.
- Dlamini, P. S. (2023). Student voice: Does it matter in curriculum development in higher education? *UNESWA Journal of Education (UJOE)*.
- Ncube, M. (2020). Quality Assurance-Student Involvement Confluence: Exploring gaps and implications for higher education institutions in Zimbabwe. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 35(4). https://doi.org/10.20853/34-5-4256
- Wray, A., & Bloomer, A. (2012). Questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups. In *Projects in linguistics and language studies: A practical guide to researching language* (3rd ed., pp. 164-178). Routledge.