

Introduction

Each month, the Wake Forest University Women's Center hosts Dinner & Dialogue, a space where undergraduate women can gather to build community and reflect on their experiences at Wake Forest University as women. This peer-facilitated conversation began during the 2014-2015 academic year, and has a different theme each month for the students to reflect on and discuss in small groups. During the 2015-2016 academic year, Dinner & Dialogue featured the following themes: *Welcome to Wake* (September), *Friendship* (October), *Resilience* (November), *Belonging* (January), and *Vulnerability* (February).

Methods

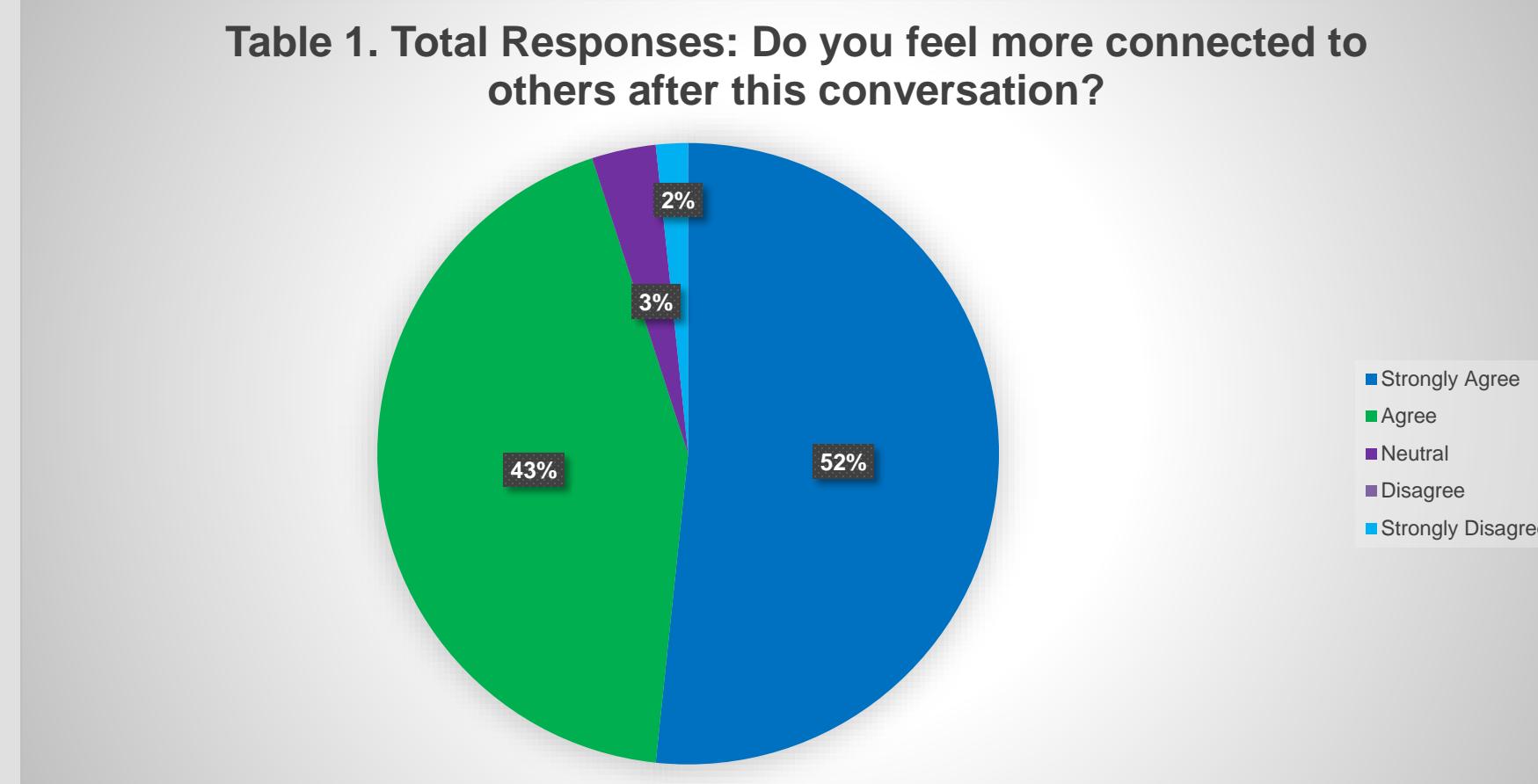
Prior to the 2015-2016 academic year, Dinner & Dialogue was not assessed. Starting with Dinner & Dialogue in September 2015, students were asked at the end of each dinner to share their thoughts on the event. Prior to September's Dinner & Dialogue, Dr. Paige Meltzer, Director of the Women's Center, and I created a list of questions to assess the students' experiences at the monthly event. Students completed assessments through paper and pen, during the last few minutes of each event. Students were asked to respond to the following questions:

1. **Do you feel more connected to others after this conversation?** Please circle one: Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree
2. **What points of commonality did you find with others at your table about their transitions to Wake? What points of difference?**
3. **Did this conversation change how you've thought about your experiences at Wake?**
4. **How did you learn about Dinner & Dialogue?** Please circle all that apply:
Facebook Instagram Twitter Flier Listserv Word of Mouth Other
5. **We welcome other comments about this event:**

Although the original four questions (numbers one, two, three, and five) were asked on the assessment each month, the second question was reworded each month to reflect the month's theme. For example, during the month of February when the theme was *Vulnerability*, the question became: *What points of commonality did you find with others at your table about their experience being vulnerable? What points of difference?* In addition, question four was not asked during the Fall 2016 semester, rather, it became part of the assessment in January 2016 and only yielded two months worth of data.

Results

Of the 69 students who participated in Dinner & Dialogue throughout the 2015-2016 academic year, 60 assessments were completed. Students were asked to rate their feeling of connectedness to others on a scale of strongly disagree to strongly agree. Based on the total number of responses to the question, *do you feel more connected to others after this conversation*, fifty-two percent strongly agreed and forty-three percent agreed, as shown in Table 1. Only three percent of students responded they were neutral to the question, and two percent strongly disagreed.



Then, students were asked about points of commonality and differences they had with others through their conversation. The students' responses were coded to see what intercultural communication skills¹ appeared in the Dinner & Dialogue conversations. The skills were coded for: 1) awareness of our cultural context, 2) awareness of others' cultural context, 3) ability to manage feelings around differences, 4) ability to bridge difference between self and others.¹ The responses suggest students used these skills during the Dinner & Dialogue.

Almost half of the student responses seemed to indicate awareness of others' cultural context¹. For example, one student wrote, "Shared values, shared interest. Different ways of experiencing and expressing love and value for friends," and another student wrote, "Pressure from peers and parents in common. Different types of cultural pressures." The data also suggests students showed awareness of themselves,¹ for example, one student wrote, "I heard a lot of advice that I try to follow, but I'm not quite there yet." The data suggests some students managed feelings around difference¹ when they stated the points of commonality and difference they found in their discussion. Finally, some student responses indicated the ability to bridge differences.¹ These are two examples: "Stress surrounding academics and social stress. Different experiences, but seeing the unification of our experiences realizing you aren't alone," and another student wrote, "Even though most of the other students were older, we talked a lot about freshman friendships, and my 'panel of senior moms' gave me some really good advice." Overall, the intercultural communication skills¹ appear in Dinner & Dialogue, although the student responses indicates some appear more often than others.

Next, students were asked whether the conversation at Dinner & Dialogue changed how they thought about their experiences at Wake Forest University. Of the 60 responses, forty-six percent said the conversation did change how they thought about their experiences at Wake Forest University, and twenty-two percent said the conversation did not. One student responded, "Yes! I've always thought my experience at Wake was like nobody else but this event has shown me that I'm not alone," and another student wrote, "Yes! I learned that there are a lot of different aspects that make our experiences unique." At the same time, many students simply wrote, "yes." If the student did not explain, then I do not fully know what the student meant. In addition, some students indicated no change in thought about their experience, however suggested the conversation was still valuable. For example, one response said, "Not really, just nice to talk about it!" and another student said, "No but I was able to reflect on how I choose my friends and what things that I'm not willing to compromise for other people." Overall, the date suggests students valued the conversations at Dinner & Dialogue and

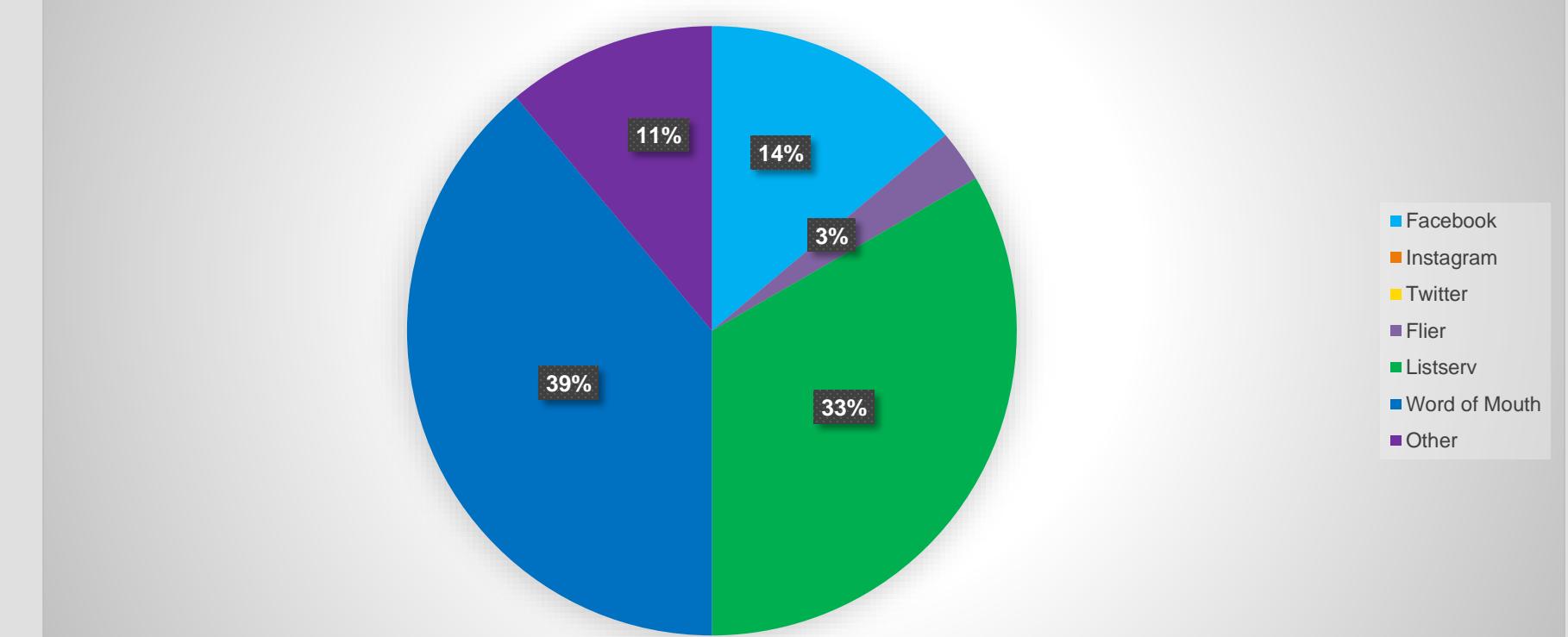
allowed them to reflect on their experiences at Wake Forest University.

Conclusions

Attendance for Dinner & Dialogue was not the most consistent. The data reflects higher attendance at the beginning of the fall and spring semesters. In addition to considering attendance, one should also consider how many students returned to Dinner & Dialogue: nineteen percent of students. The student responses suggest they enjoyed their experience, yet there is a surprisingly low return rate. As a result, next year I can look to create more targeted outreach to students, in an effort to increase the return rate.

In addition, I wanted to see how students learned about the event. Beginning in January 2016, students were asked to share how they learned about Dinner & Dialogue. Table 2 shows the responses. One should particularly take note that thirty-nine percent of students responded they heard about the event through word of mouth, meanwhile, only three percent said they learned about the event through a (paper) flier. As the Women's Center considers the best way to advertise to students and encourage students to return to Dinner & Dialogue, this question will continue to be important to ask and review student responses.

Table 2. Total Responses: How did you learn about Dinner & Dialogue?



Finally, future assessment of Dinner & Dialogue could include questions about the peer-facilitators. Peer engagement is a major component of this event, yet there is no question to specifically assess the peer-facilitators. At the same time, I noticed students commenting on enjoying their facilitators: "We love (facilitator's name) (with a heart drawn)" and "I love (facilitator's name) (with a heart drawn)." Although these comments suggest the facilitators did well, the responses do not indicate what they did particularly well or if there are areas of growth for the peer-facilitators. In addition, some students commented on their overall satisfaction with the event, which due to the nature of the event, may suggest their peer-facilitator did well. Some examples of student responses that indicated great satisfaction from the event include: "(drew a heart) you all @ the Women's Center," "Love the Women's Center," "Keep It Up!" and "Yay Dinner & Dialogues!" Overall, the Dinner & Dialogue assessment during the 2015-2016 academic year provided great insight into what students gained from attending the event, and allows for further assessment of the student experience at Dinner & Dialogue.

References

1. Drawn from Von Berg, Mick. "4 Skills for Effective and Meaningful Intercultural Communication." Winter Institute for Intercultural Communication. Winston-Salem, NC. March 2015. Conference Presentation.