

The Effectiveness of Communication: A Study of the Level of Awareness Concerning
Campus Carry at Texas State University

Hannah Bennett

Meagan Kerr

Christina Leicht

Aissa Martinez

Chance Mena

Texas State University

Abstract

This paper explores the effectiveness of the methods of communication Texas State University (Texas State) chose to employ in order to disseminate information regarding Texas Senate Bill 11, otherwise known as Campus Carry. The researchers conducted a survey to collect data from the campus community in order to assess the level of awareness possessed pertaining to the upcoming changes in Texas State policy due to Campus Carry.

Keywords: Campus Carry, gun control, Texas State University, Texas Legislation

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Introduction

Texas State University is a growing campus of nearly 40,000 students and over 2,000 full-time faculty and staff (“Facts and Data”, 2016). Having such a large campus creates the need for dynamic campaigns that not only reach this mass audience, but also generates the necessary responses needed to develop and create new campus policy.

Recently, the Texas Legislature passed Senate Bill 11 into a law that will allow licensed-to-carry (LTC) gun holders the right to carry concealed handguns within campus buildings (S. 11, Sec. 411.2031(b), 2015). The passing of this bill has led Texas State administrators to create policies and regulations in accordance with this bill, creating the need for an efficient campaign that informs students, faculty and staff on imminent changes to campus policy.

Before the passing of LTC, formerly known as concealed handgun license, holders were restricted from carrying concealed firearms within campus buildings. They were, however, allowed to carry on campus property (S. 1907, Sec. 411.2032, 2013). Campus Carry allows private institutions to continue the ban of concealed firearms on campuses. However, publicly funded universities, such as Texas State, cannot outright ban concealed firearms (S. 11, Sec. 411.2031(c), 2015).

The purpose of this study is to answer the following question: is Texas State University launching and maintaining an efficient campaign that properly informs the target audience in regards to campus policy changes; gauges awareness of Campus Carry information resources; and effectively identifies major views within the target audience? The research group poses two additional questions which will be answered by the end of the study.

- RQ1: What platforms are being utilized to communicate with the target audience (students, faculty, staff, prospective students and parents of prospective and current students)?
- RQ2: How aware are students of future policy changes?

Literature Review

Though studies have yet to be conducted in regards to campaigns concerning Campus Carry, there have been several campaign studies from researchers that examined other universities' campus campaigns that were a response to legislative action. There have been several more studies that look into the effectiveness of utilizing social media and Web 2.0 (Stoner, 2013) as platforms to reach target audiences. A particularly useful review (Miller, 2013) conducted a large study that looked at social media as a tool and explored how to use it in accordance with the political behaviors of millennials. Jacek (2014) examined other studies and how simple tasks implemented in campaigns increased the chance of a responsive audience. None of these studies have yet to clearly define what makes a campaign successful.

Dupain and Lombardi (2014) conducted a study to assess the effectiveness of their university's implementation of a campaign that addressed sexual assault violence prevention and awareness. The researchers sought to assess the university's implementation of the Sexual Assault Violence Prevention and Awareness Campaign and whether it achieved the seven objectives laid out by Healthy Campus 2020. The data provided in the survey was presented to university administrators and used to implement future policy and highlighted the need for further student awareness of sexual assault violence and prevention. Dupain and Lombardi conducted a similar study (2015) that

assessed the effectiveness of their university's implementation of a campaign that addressed substance abuse prevention and awareness.

D'Alessandro, Peltier, and Dahl (2012) conducted a two-year study to create a model of how college students can be used as social media catalysts for viral marketing to increase awareness of the importance of organ donations and to help increase organ donor participation. The study concluded that college students understood the need for organ donation and had a desire to participate. It also identified four barriers that prevent potential donors: (1) lack of personal connection; (2) lack of knowledge on potential donors' behalf; (3) common myths dissuading potential donors; (4) students' short term perspective on life (D'Alessandro et al., 2012, p. 189).

Method

Participants

Participants included 81 members of the students, faculty and staff of Texas State who volunteered to complete the questionnaire. All but one of the 81 respondents identified themselves as students. The majority of our participants, approximately 67%, were between the ages of 18 and 21, while the remaining 33% consisted of individuals who were between the ages of 22 and 29. Overall, 65.4% were female, 33.3% were male and 1.2% preferred not to say.

Materials

To collect the data, the researchers used Google Forms to create a custom questionnaire which included six multiple-choice questions, one Likert scale and five demographic questions.

Design and Procedure

For convenience, the researchers posted the survey link to their personal social media accounts and sent mass emails to their classmates, creating a nonrandom sample consisting mostly of students from the School of Journalism and Mass Communication (SJMC). To submit their responses, participants followed the link, answered a series of twelve questions and hit submit.

Results

The questionnaire received 81 responses in total. The following results were retrieved through Google Forms, which automatically aggregated the data into graphical displays of the responses. It should be noted that certain questions were to be skipped by the respondents depending on their individual answers to specific questions. Such conditions will be further explained below.

As shown in Figure 1 (refer to appendix), approximately 88% of the respondents had knowledge of Campus Carry while 12% did not. In Figure 2, the 73 respondents who answered “yes” to the previous question were asked when they believed Campus Carry would take effect. This was the only question asked that had a correct answer, which was chosen by 62% of respondents. Approximately 1% chose the only incorrect and fabricated answer; 21% believed the law was already in effect; 16% reported no knowledge of the start date.

Figure 3 demonstrates that 49% of the respondents had no knowledge of what would be changing at Texas State once Campus Carry takes effect. The 51%, about 41 respondents, who had knowledge of the changes in policy went on to answer the next question, while those who did not skipped ahead to answer the question that followed.

Out of the previously mentioned 41 respondents, over half said they learned of the changes in policy via emails sent by Texas State; 19% chose social media platforms as their answer; 24% listed “other” platforms, which included word of mouth, Campus Carry forums and the Texas State website.

Respondents were also asked about their knowledge of Campus Carry forums held in San Marcos. As shown in Figure 5, just over half--51%--of all 81 respondents were not aware of the forums. The 49% who knew of the forums--40 respondents--reported where they learned of them. About 70% listed email as the primary source of information; 20% said social media platforms; 10% listed “other” platforms, including word of mouth.

The final question required respondents to rate their level of agreement with a particular statement on a Likert scale. In response to the statement, “I support Campus Carry on our campus,” 32 respondents strongly disagreed; 14 disagreed; 15 remained neutral; 13 agreed; and seven strongly agreed.

Discussion

In our first research question, we inquired about the kind of platforms that were being utilized to communicate to the university’s target audience. From the results, we found that the majority of the respondents are aware of Campus Carry, and gained their knowledge through email, social media, and “other” platforms. Most respondents who chose “other” were made aware of Campus Carry through classes they are enrolled in.

Our second research question asked how aware students were of future policy changes. By a margin of about one respondent, over half displayed knowledge of the

impending changes in university policy. The sample may not have been large enough to conclude that the majority of students, faculty and staff are aware of policy changes.

Although there are no existing studies that have conducted research on the efficiency of universities' communication about Campus Carry to students, our results can be compared to Dupain and Lombardi's study (2014) on developing and implementing sexual assault violence prevention. The research conducted through our Campus Carry survey also deals with new legislation and the importance of communicating effectively to those who are affected by it. The research conducted in both surveys measures awareness of students and focuses on what changes can be implemented to increase awareness.

The results illustrated that most students received their knowledge of Campus Carry through email. This is most likely due to the fact that every student attending the university must be assigned a student email address. It is one of the easiest ways for Texas State to communicate important information to its students, faculty and staff. Most students are more likely to check their email due to easy access and therefore are made aware of most happenings on campus through this particular platform. It can be speculated that those who lacked knowledge of policy changes are skipping over or automatically deleting emails they may deem unimportant due to the high velocity of emails sent out from the university or professors.

Limitations

The discrepancies that occurred may have resulted from limitations due to technology, in the design of the questionnaire and in the demographics of the sample. The details of the limitations are discussed below.

Technological limitations. Since the survey was hosted online, only those who had access to internet as well as a computer or other device capable of internet-browsing, such as a smartphone, tablet or other mobile device, were able to complete the questionnaire.

Design limitations. A small discrepancy emerged in the form of responses to the questions intended for faculty and staff only. Although only one respondent identified themselves as a staff member, there were 12 responses to the questions regarding occupational title and number of years employed by the school. The instructions on the page clearly stated that respondents who identified themselves as students should skip the questions on that page and continue on to submit their answers. This flaw can mostly be attributed to design error since there was no way to make sure that respondents who answered, “student” could not submit answers on the page intended for faculty and staff.

Demographic limitations. A major problem encountered was with the sample itself. Since the survey link was shared by each of the researchers to classmates, only one respondent out of 81 identified themselves as a staff member of Texas State. More answers from faculty and staff would have added variety to the results. Additionally, it was speculated that most student responses would be from those enrolled in SJMC, yet only 41% of the respondents who disclosed their majors were SJMC students.

Conclusions

The analysis of the results and the fact that our sample was relatively small and lacked diversity, as far as inclusion of faculty and staff, leads us to believe that the data collected may not be a reflection of total awareness of Campus Carry. It may be of use to future studies involving Campus Carry to conduct studies that will include a wide variety of roles in the campus community, as well as the largest sample possible. If the level of awareness of Campus Carry at Texas State is high enough, it may then be possible to correlate amount of knowledge with level of agreement with Campus Carry.

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Appendices

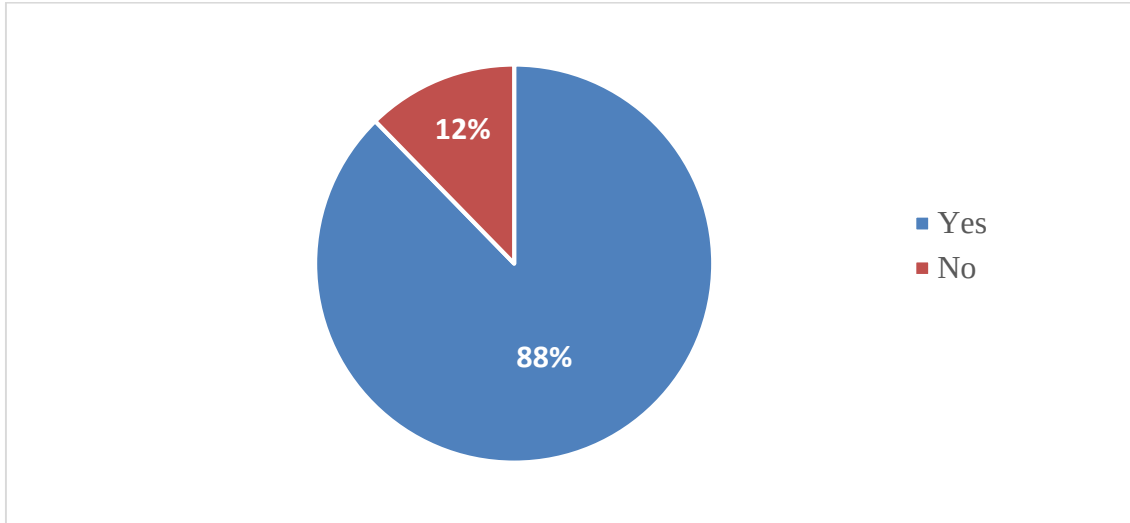


Figure 1. “Are you aware of the Campus Carry law?” This figure illustrates the percentage of respondents with knowledge of the Campus Carry law versus those without.

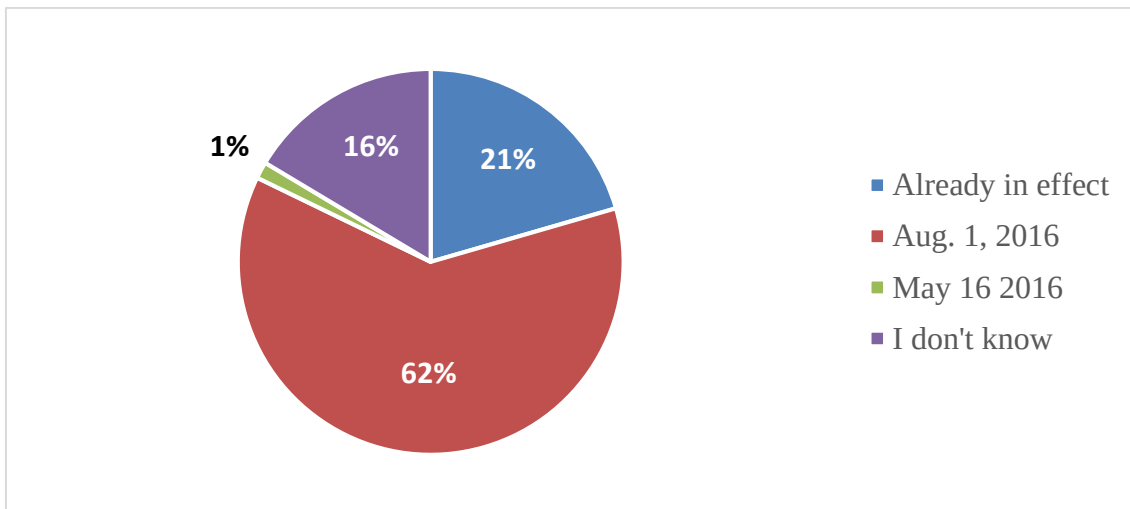


Figure 2. “If yes, when do you believe the law will be in effect?” This figure illustrates respondents’ knowledge of when Campus Carry will be effective.

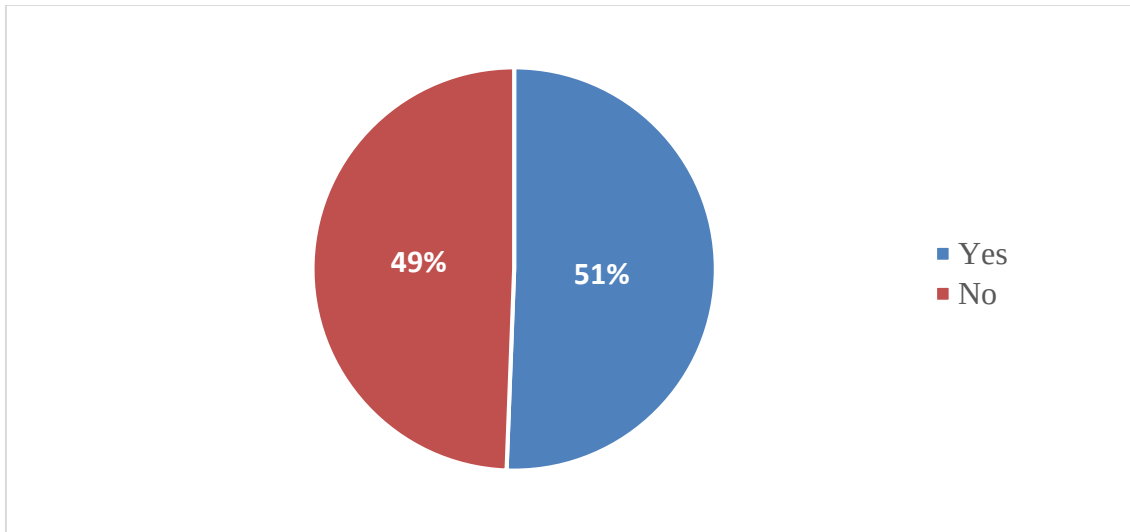


Figure 3. “Are you aware of the changes Texas State will be making when the law is in effect?” This figure illustrates respondents’ knowledge of the changes in Texas State policy once Campus Carry is in effect.

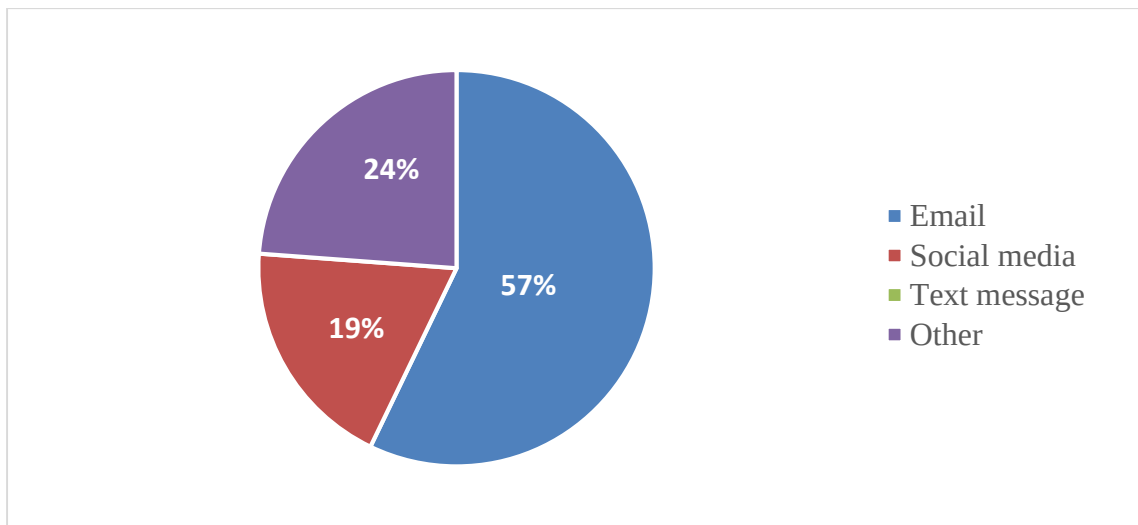


Figure 4. “How were you made aware of these changes?” This figure illustrates the method of communication respondents gathered information from about changes in Texas State policy.

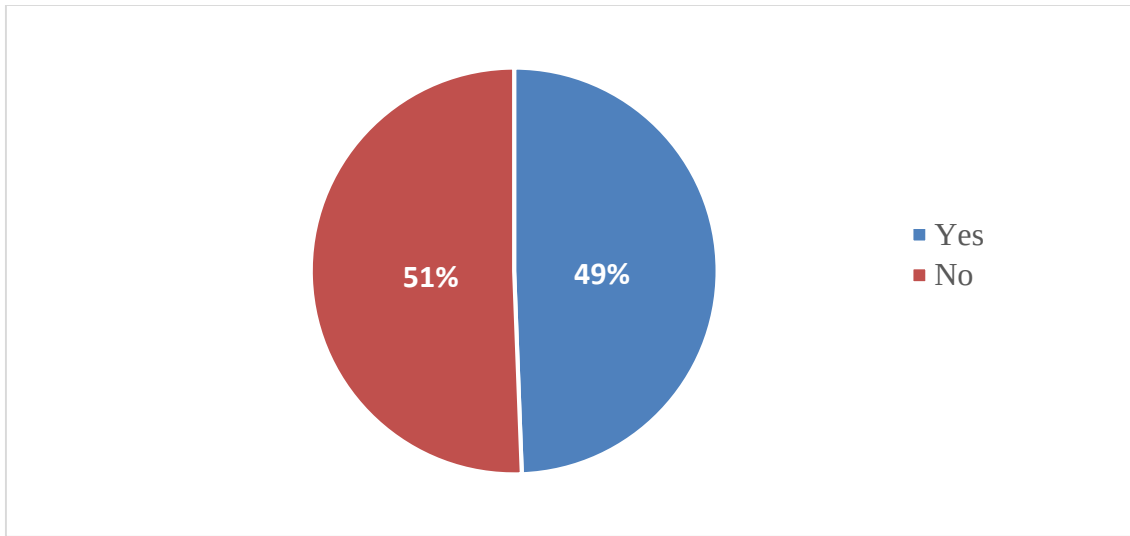


Figure 5. “Are you aware of the Campus Carry forums held in San Marcos?” This figure illustrates respondents’ knowledge of Campus Carry forums held in the city of San Marcos.

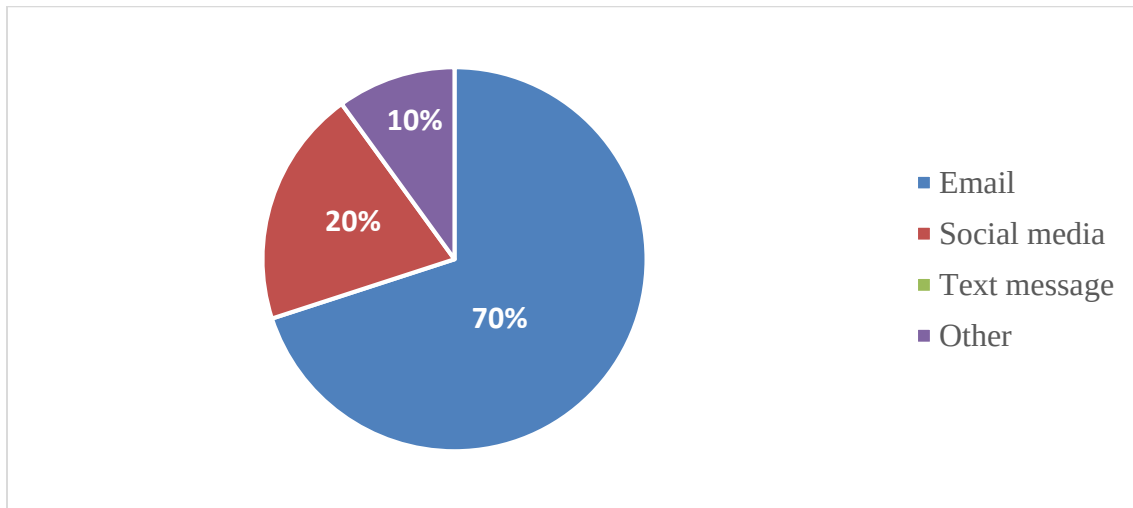


Figure 6. “If yes, how were you made aware of them?” This figure illustrates the method of communication respondents gathered information from about the Campus Carry forums.

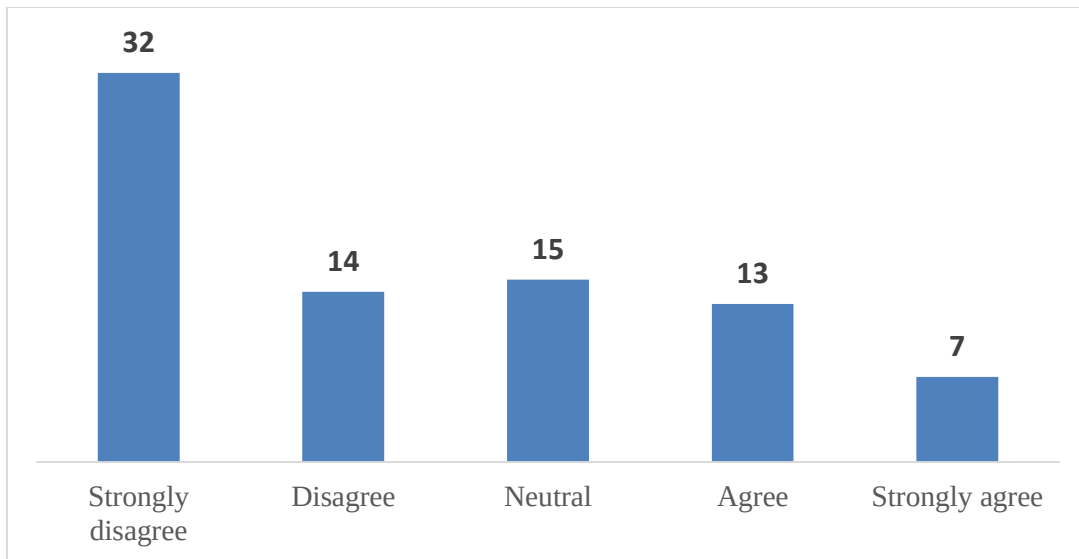


Figure 7. “I support Campus Carry on our campus.” This figure illustrates respondents’ feelings towards Campus Carry at Texas State.

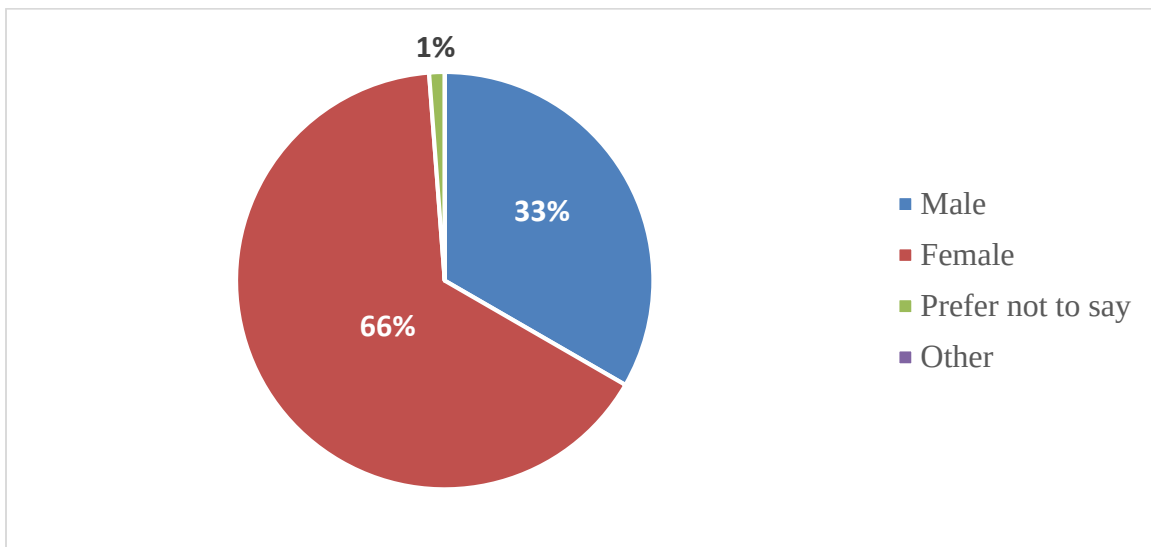


Figure 8. “Gender of participants.” This figure illustrates the gender demographic of the participants.

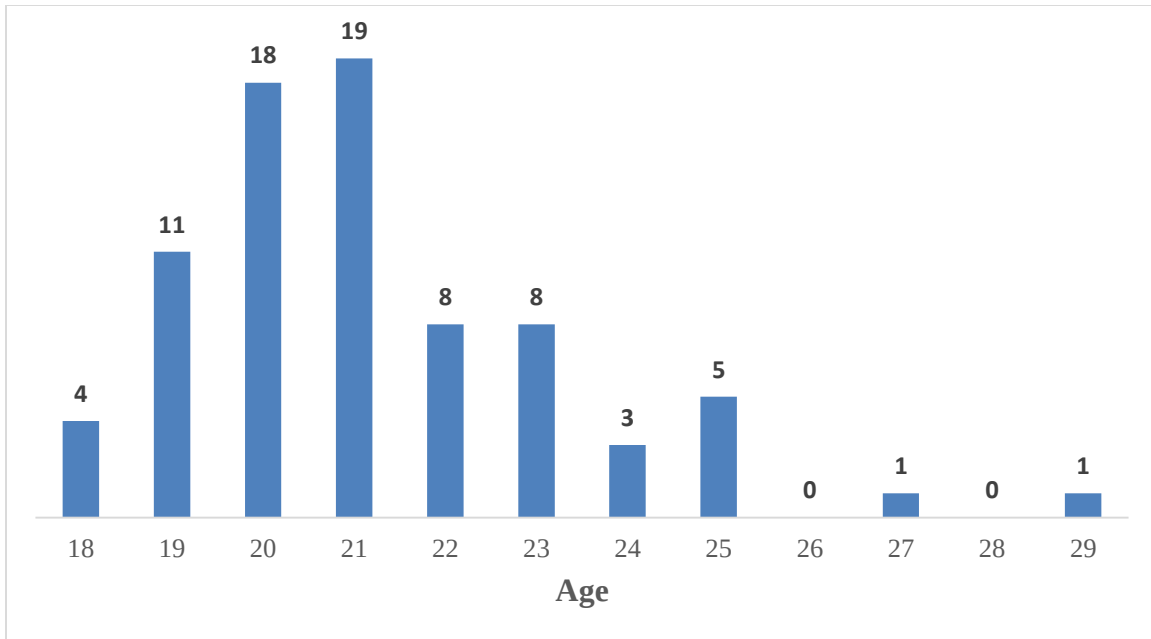


Figure 9. “Age of participants.” This figure illustrates an age range of 18-29 and the amount of respondents that are each age.

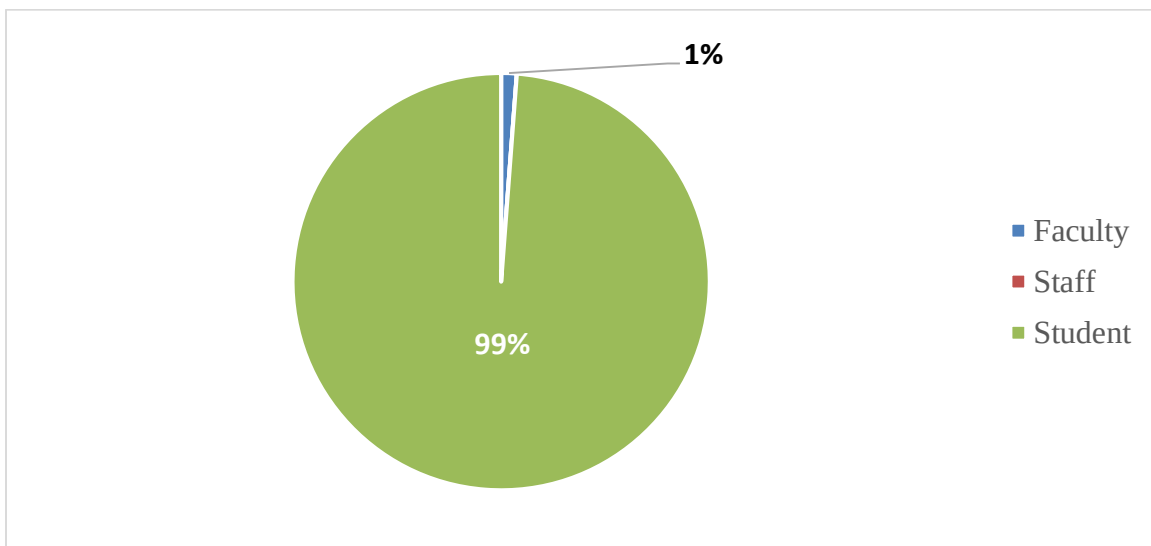


Figure 10. “What is your affiliation with Texas State?” This figure illustrates the percentages of students versus faculty versus staff.

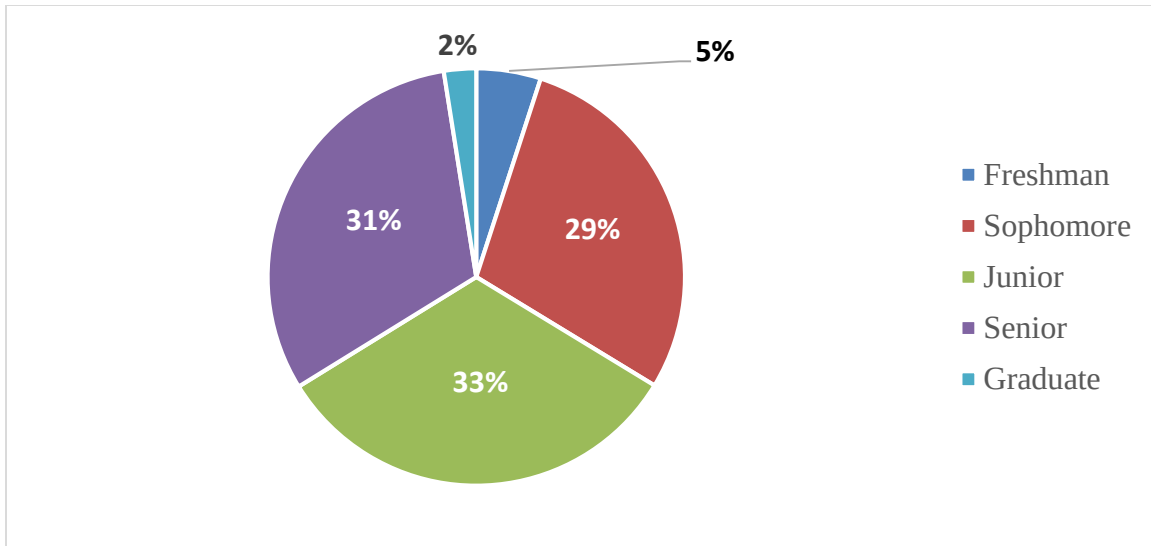


Figure 11. “Students – What is your classification?” This figure illustrates the classification of those who identified themselves as students.

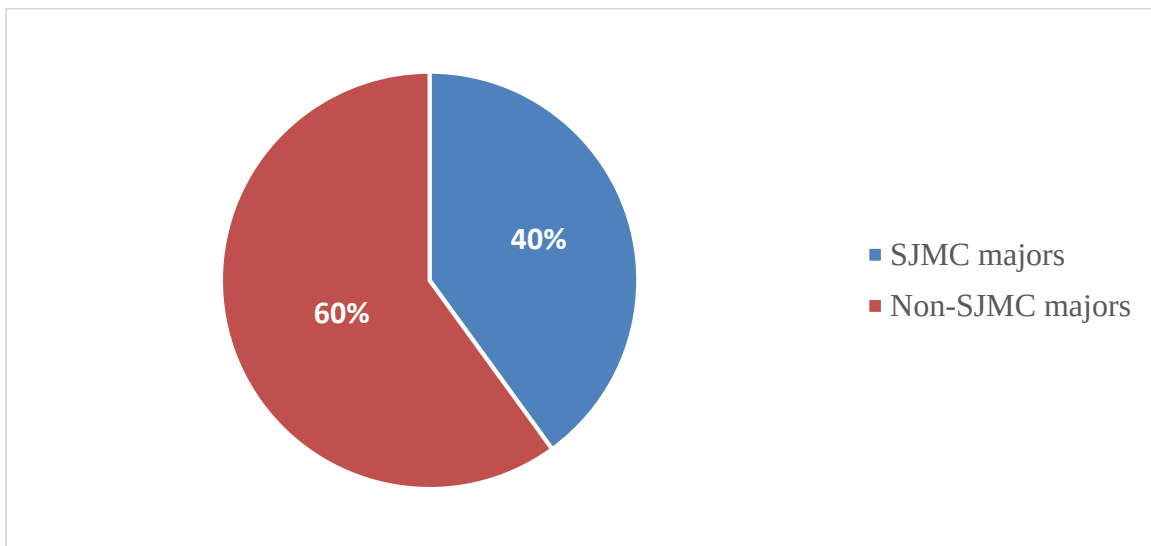


Figure 12. “Students – Please list your major.” This figure illustrates the amount of respondents who are students enrolled in SJMC versus non-SJMC students.