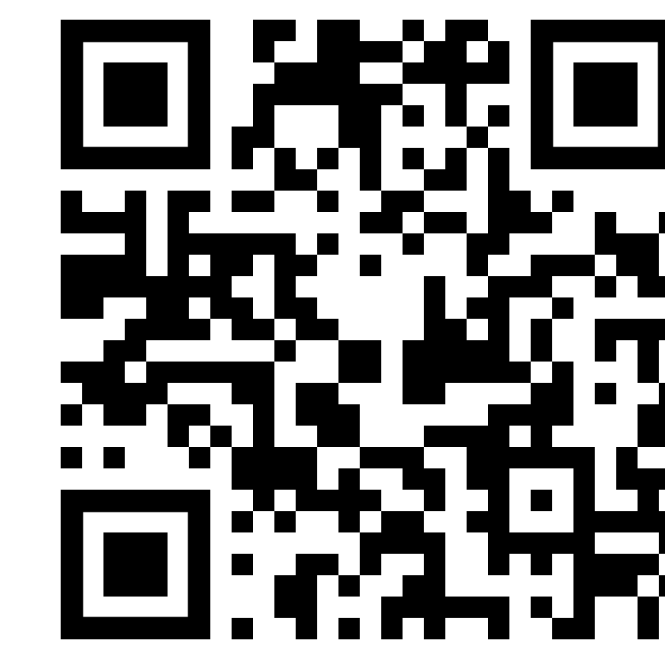


Variations and Barriers in Academic Support Usage

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Scan the QR code on your mobile device to access more information on the Data Fellow's program.

1. Open your camera app on your mobile device.
2. Hold your device over the QR code so that it is clearly visible.
3. Open the website when it pops up on your screen.

Research Questions

Our study focused on student use of non-advising academic support (tutoring, academic coaching, supplemental instruction). A large proportion of entering students anticipate using academic support. For example, in the 2018 CIRP survey of incoming CSULB freshmen, 83% of respondents indicated that there was at least some chance they would use tutoring – and 35% indicated that there was a very good chance. Yet, in Fall 2018, only 6.5% of students actually used tutoring. In our initial look at TLC usage data from Fall 2017-Fall 2019, we found that some demographic groups, such as 1st Gen, used academic support at a lower rate than their percentage in the overall University student population. Thus, our original research questions were:

- Does use vary as a function of student demographics (or other characteristics)?
- If so, what barriers potentially account for these variations in usage?

Introduction

Academic help-seeking (AHS) behavior – seeking sources of support to help achieve good results in an academic context is not well-understood. A recent meta-analysis found little consensus on the structure of AHS as a construct, as well as little clarity on demographic and other variables that may affect it (Martin-Arbós, et al., 2021). Various studies have found gender, ethnicity, and age are variables that may influence AHS. Other studies have found a sense of belonging may influence help-seeking (Won, et al., 2021). Some studies have also looked at barriers to help-seeking (Stebleton & Soria, 2011).

Our project is an initial exploration of AHS in the CSULB context investigates several of the variables and potential barriers noted in the literature that may affect academic help-seeking in our students. The project aligns with at least two main Beach 2030 priorities: “Remove Barriers to Success for All Students” and “Be a Student-Ready University.” Understanding and addressing barriers to students’ usage, particularly opportunity gap students, will help us remove barriers to access and close gaps in retention and graduation, as well as create a more focused, efficient, and personalized support system for students.

Methods

Research Methods

- We used a mixed methods research strategy
- Descriptive statistics of student demographics/characteristics and academic support usage of student who used academic support, as well as some comparisons to the university population as a whole.
- Interviews of student who have used and not used academic support and survey targeting first-gen students, in general.

Data Overview

Student-level SSD 2.0 data merged with student-level data from EAB Navigate (Beach Connect).

Variables in the data sets: Academic support usage, by service (including number of visits), URM, 1st Gen, Pell, Gender, CSULB GPA (Cum/Term), Major, Enrolled Department, Classification, Student Type, LBCC, LBUSD, DSS (BMAC), EOP, MSI, UH.

Limitations

Different aspects of the study used somewhat different student populations and data sets. For the quantitative data, this is largely due to inconsistencies and limits on the University’s collection of academic support usage data. For example, some forms of academic support were not tracked in Beach Connect until Fall 2019. And not all academic support centers use Beach Connect. Quantitative data after Fall 2019 was not used due to anomalies likely created by the pandemic. Survey data were collected in Spring 2023.

Results

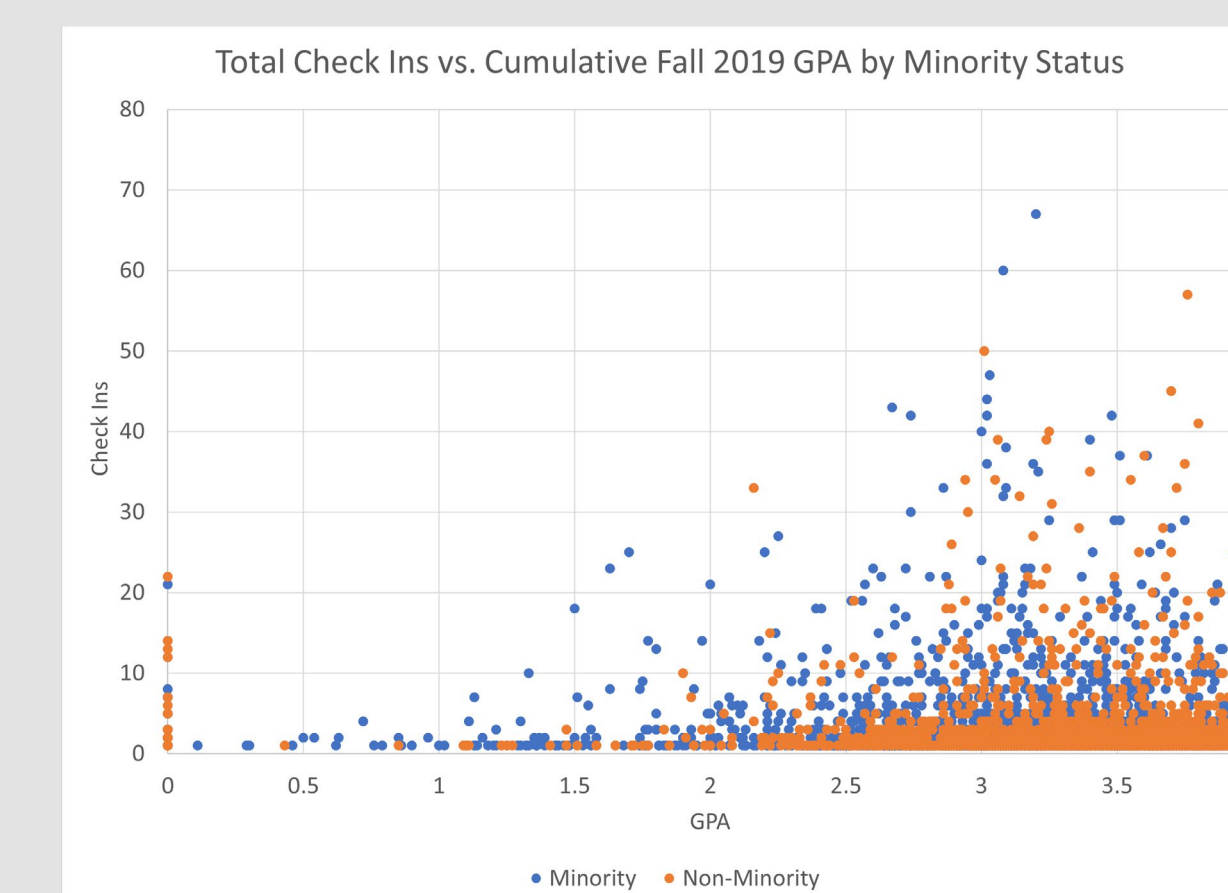
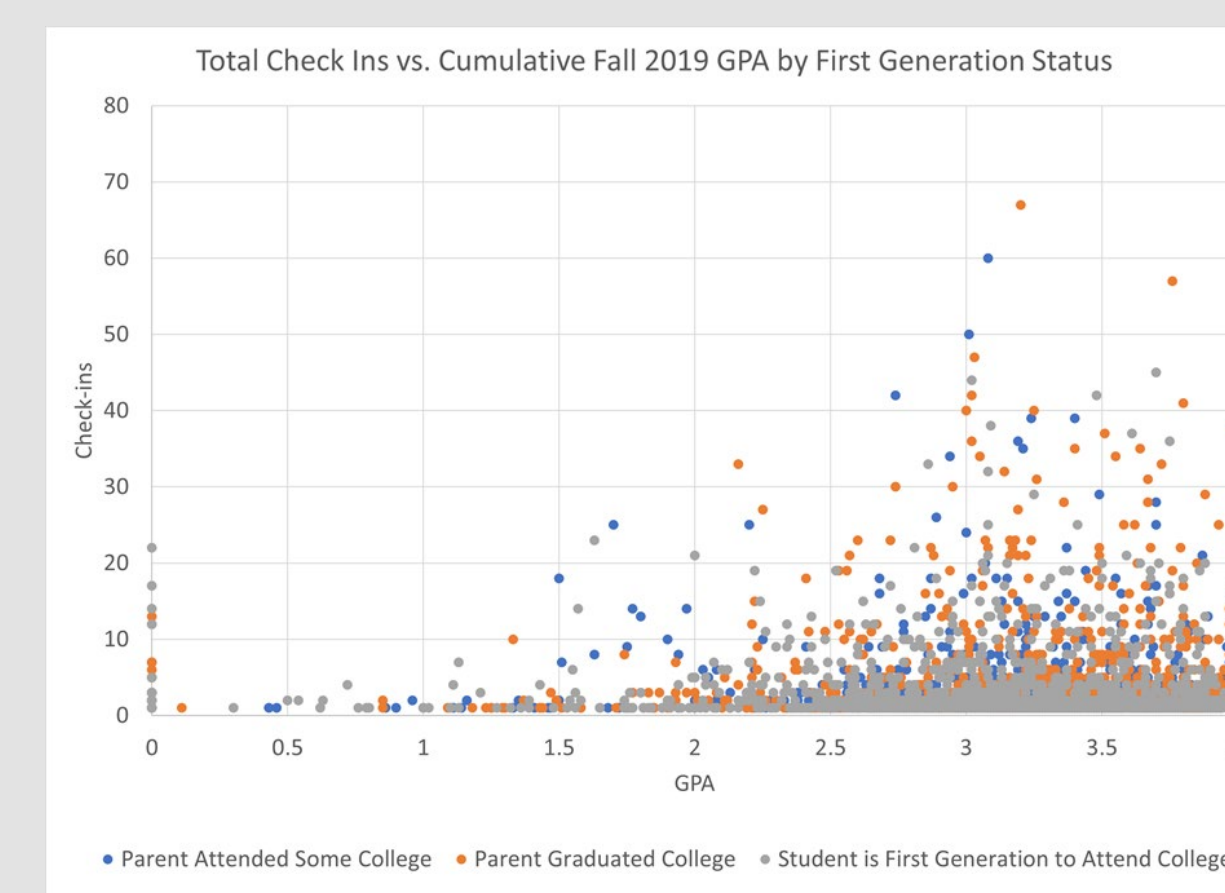
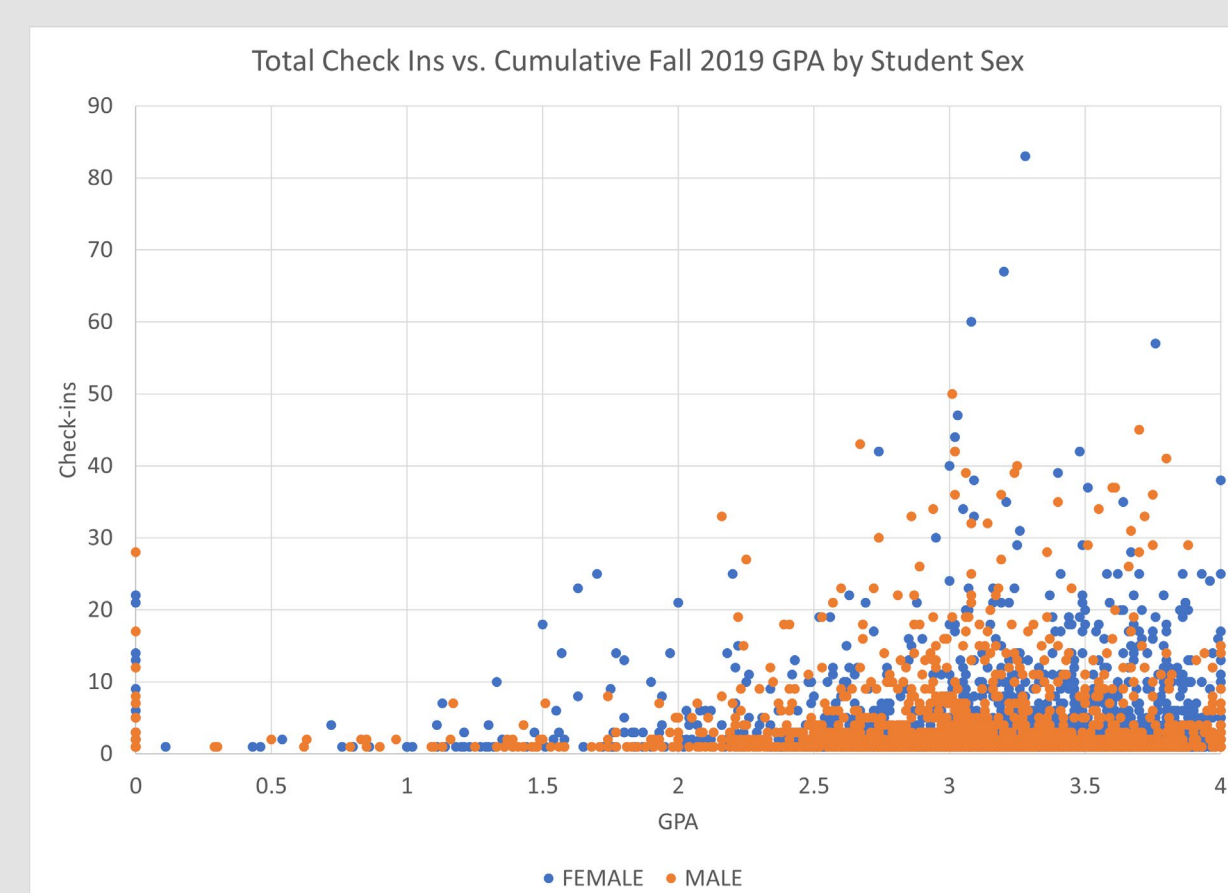
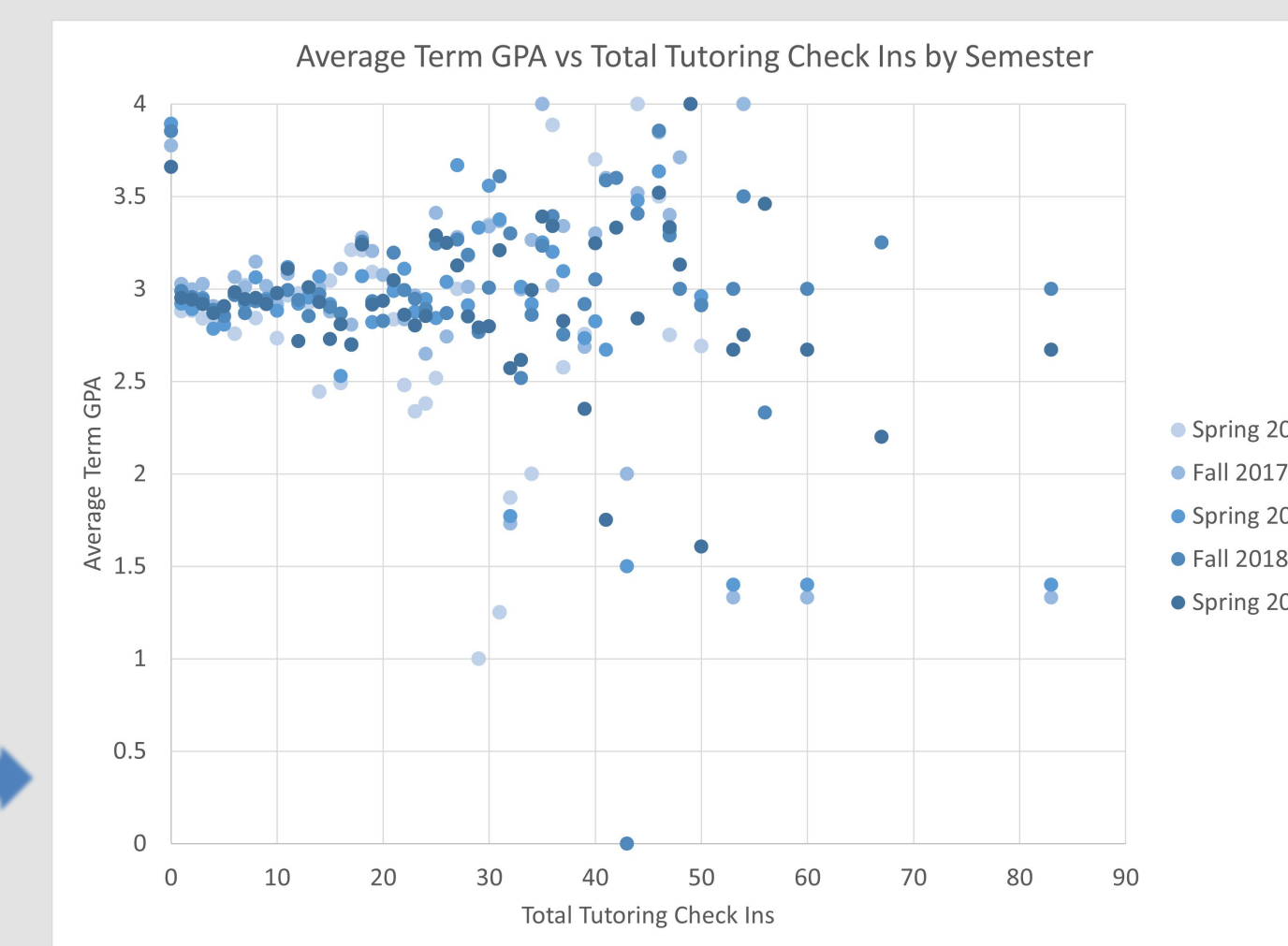
Academic Support Usage Varies by Demographic

In Fall 2019, academic support use by equity gap populations was, across the board, somewhat lower than their percentages in the overall University population. The percentage of academic support users who were 1st Gen was 52% compared to 56% of the University population being 1st Gen, a difference of -4.3%. The difference was -4.4% for Pell students and -2.1% for URM. The biggest differential was with gender, with males having a -5.9% difference. LBCC transfers also used services less than their percentage in the population, 2.94% versus 5.5% of the population.

Academic Support Use Varies by GPA

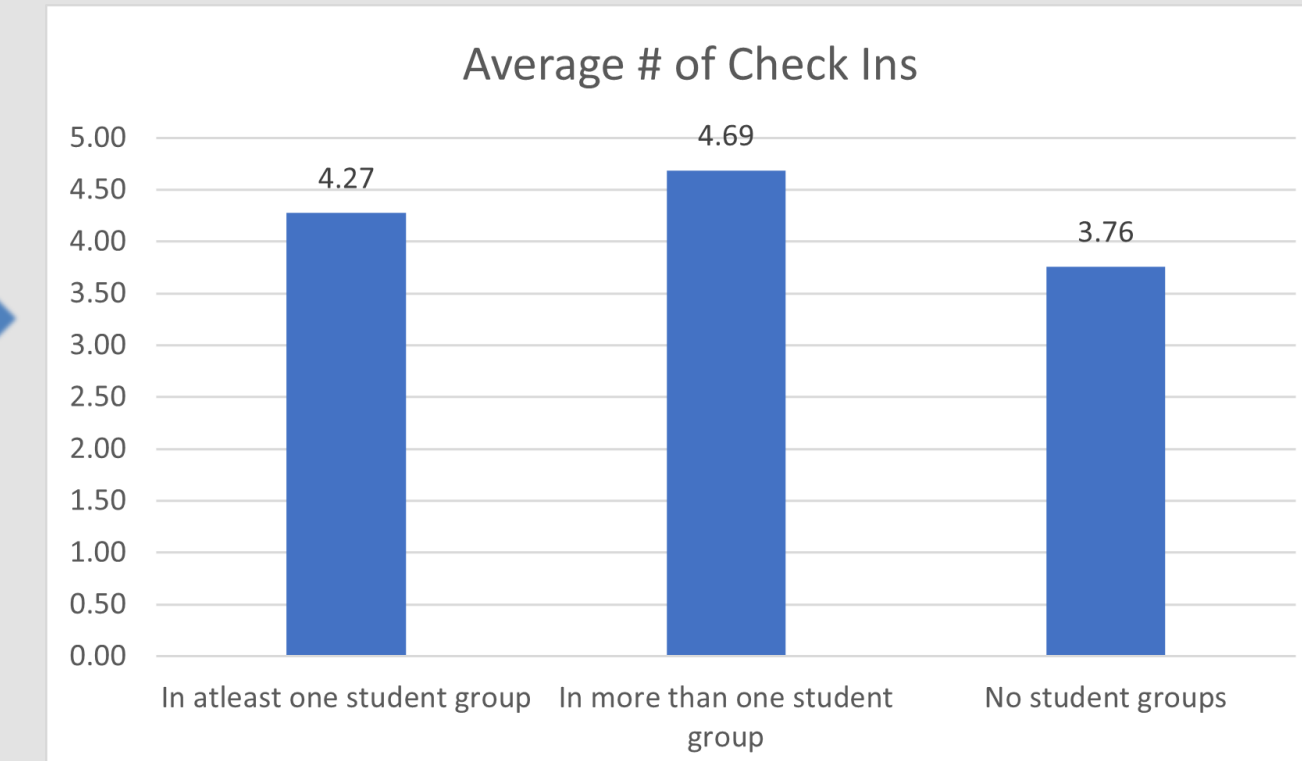
Students with lower GPAs are far less likely to use academic support.

- From Fall 2017 to Fall 2019, few students with Term GPAs (as measured at the start of the term) below 2.5 used tutoring.
- In Fall 2019, students with lower GPAs were far less likely to use academic support and, when they did, used it less. Only 418 students with a CUM GPA of 2.5 or lower used support (only 206 < 2.0 GPA) and 2,903 with GPA over 2.5 used support (2,184 > 3.0). This trend holds true for gender and equity gap groups.



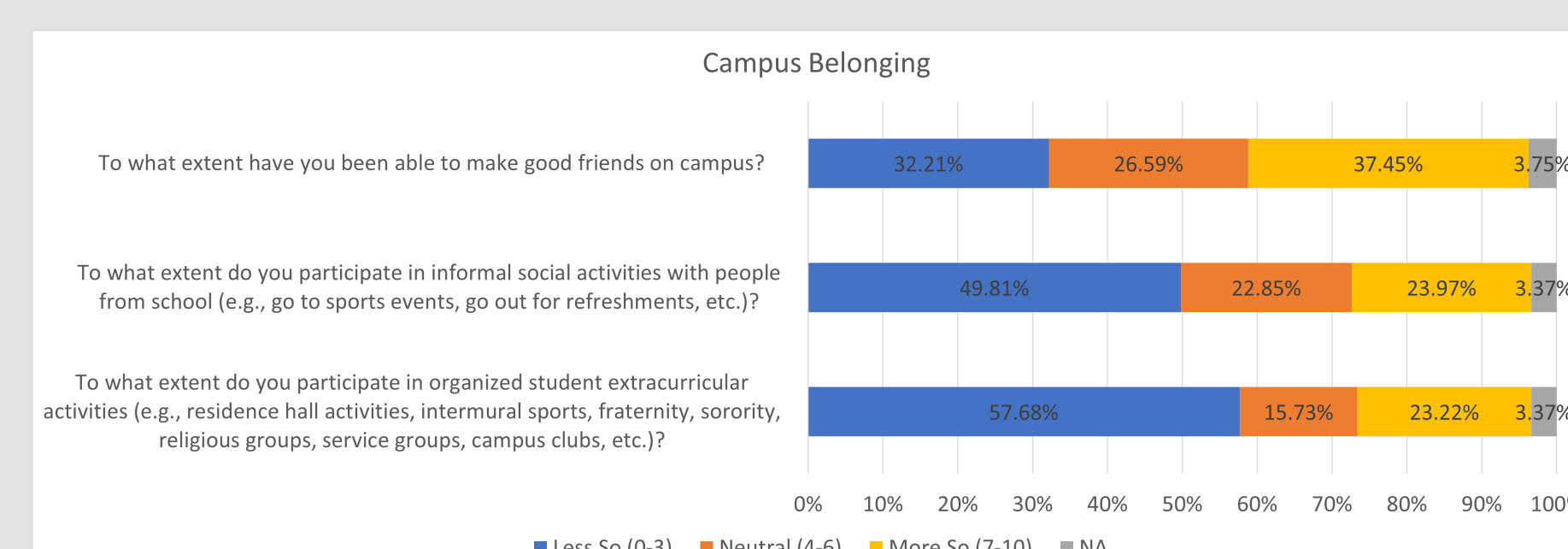
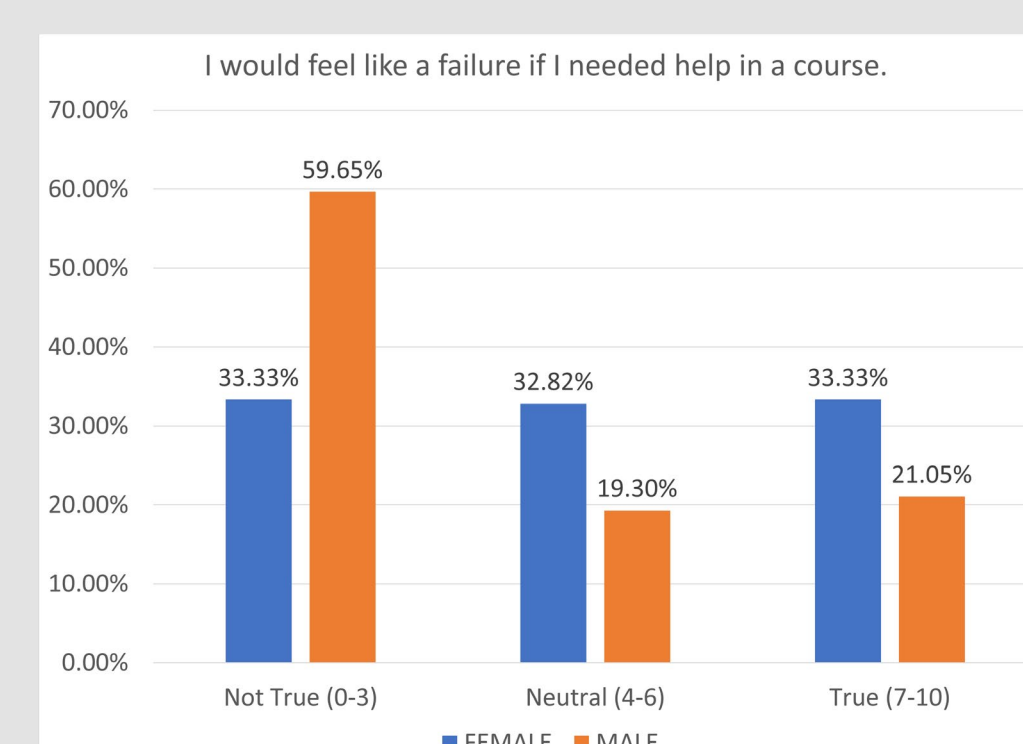
Group Membership Makes a Difference

- From Fall 2017 to Fall 2019, students in student groups generally used academic support more often when they did use it.
- Student groups such as EOP, MSI, and the Beach Learning Community increased use of support.
- Students in some groups, such as Honors, used support less.



The Survey Result Raise Questions

- The survey results (n=267) are from 1st Gen students (Spring 2023). The survey sought to measure: Help-seeking avoidance/threat, help-seeking norms, perceptions of campus academic support, and campus belonging. Many items are from surveys in the literature (Fittler, 2016, and Hoffman, 2002).
- Perceptions of campus support were strongly positive (though only 89 of 267 respondents are recorded as using academic support in the previous 4 years).
 - Perceptions of help-seeking norms, such as “seeking help is a regular part of the learning process” were strongly positive.
 - Help avoidance/threat was somewhat evenly distributed overall, skewing towards “not true,” but males felt less avoidance/threat.
 - Mental health affected students’ use of academic support.
 - Students generally did not feel a strong sense of campus belonging.



Interviews Offer Insights

Interviewees: Ten total in Fall 2020 and Spring 2023. Nine in at least one equity gap group. They included FTE, transfers and graduate students. Main themes:

- **Not belonging.** Students did not feel a sense of belonging at the University. This was tied to feelings of intimidation regarding seeking academic help and lack of feeling welcome at support centers.
- **Not available.** Lack of availability of services included: support not offered for a course, not being aware of the support service, not available due to high demand, and not available due to conflict with students’ schedule demands. Students followed social media - mostly DAS – to be aware of campus events, but little/no academic support info/events.
- **Not alone.** Students who had eventually used academic support reported developing personal connections on campus – with peers, faculty, or staff. Students used Discord to form community support groups around classes.

Student Voices:

“And I was kind of like upset I really kind of bugged me because, uh, well I felt lost. And I had to take the initiative to go find resources and go find these people and go find, you know, set up relationships, set up contacts.”

“And that my first thought of figuring out why I wanted to take an SI class.... You know, it was by word of mouth.”

“But putting on social media, I think social media is like a big thing to target people. Because if I don't listen to my email, I'll probably listen to something that's on social media a lot more.”

Conclusion / Discussion

Use of Academic support varies with regard to different student groups

- Numerous variables are correlated with lower use of academic support. These include all equity gap groups, males, and LBCC transfers.
- The students who presumably most need academic support – those with low GPAs – have very low usage of academic support.
- The University already has some programs that are effective in increasing student usage of academic support, including support by equity gap students. These include EOP, MSI, BMAC, and, previously, BLC.

Barriers to the Use of Academic Support Exist

- Students find resources limited. They are interested in academic support beyond low-level, high DFW courses. They are also interested in more availability (time and space-wise) of current supports offered. Practically speaking, broader and more specialized support would be difficult to achieve with current, or even increased resources.
- Students often lack awareness of available resources and/or feel they are “on their own” in tracking them down on our large and decentralized campus.

A Sense of Belonging is Key

Both survey and interview data indicate, in their own ways, that a sense of belonging is an important factor in students using academic support and overcoming the real and perceived barriers to using it. Survey results show that indicators of campus connection and belonging are generally not strong among 1st Gen students. Part of this belonging can happen in online spaces, such as course-centered Discord groups.

Implications for Action

Develop a campus-wide plan to collecting and assessing academic support usage data. Currently, any campus-wide data collection rest on voluntary use of Beach Connect.

Continue to address engagement issues with equity gap groups, males, and students with low GPAs. Some existing campus programs are already increasing student academic support usage, but many students fall outside these programs. Part of this is reconsidering outreach methods. Collaborating with DSA and their social media presence among students may be one avenue. Creating engaging events around academic support may fit within the DSA “model” and help engage students. Also, consider working more with campus student organizations. Also, consider expanded use of embedded support – both in courses and in other student spaces.

Develop a campus plan for academic support. This could include standardized training or peer educators to provide a standard of service. Also, perhaps an academic support council to continually evaluate and address academic support needs with a campus-wide view.

Next Steps / Future Directions

- Conduct statistical analysis (regression models) on a data set comprised of the entire enrolled University population with respect to academic support usage – **in progress**.
- Revise survey and broaden the population surveyed.
- Conduct additional qualitative research to expand and deepen the narrative regarding academic support usage.
- Investigate Post-COVID use of academic support use on campus, including online modalities of support.
- Develop pilots for programs and outreach efforts to remove barriers to and increase student usage of academic support.