



It Takes a Village:

A Community of Equity Champion Instructors Improving Student Academic Outcomes

Susanne Nonekowski, Julie Murphy, Michelle Seegert, Ana Maria Oyarce, College of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, Heather Robbins, College of Health and Human Services, Melissa Oddo, Office of the Provost, The University of Toledo, Toledo, OH; Denise Bartell, Office of the Provost, Kent State University, Kent, OH



Background

Educational equity gaps in students' experiences and academic outcomes exist, particularly in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) college courses. Research shows that the classroom is a key intervention point where instructors and peers have a profound impact on students' psychological experiences, performance, and persistence.¹ The Project for Education Research That Scales (PERTS) helps educators apply evidence-based strategies in order to advance educational excellence and equity on a large scale.

Objective

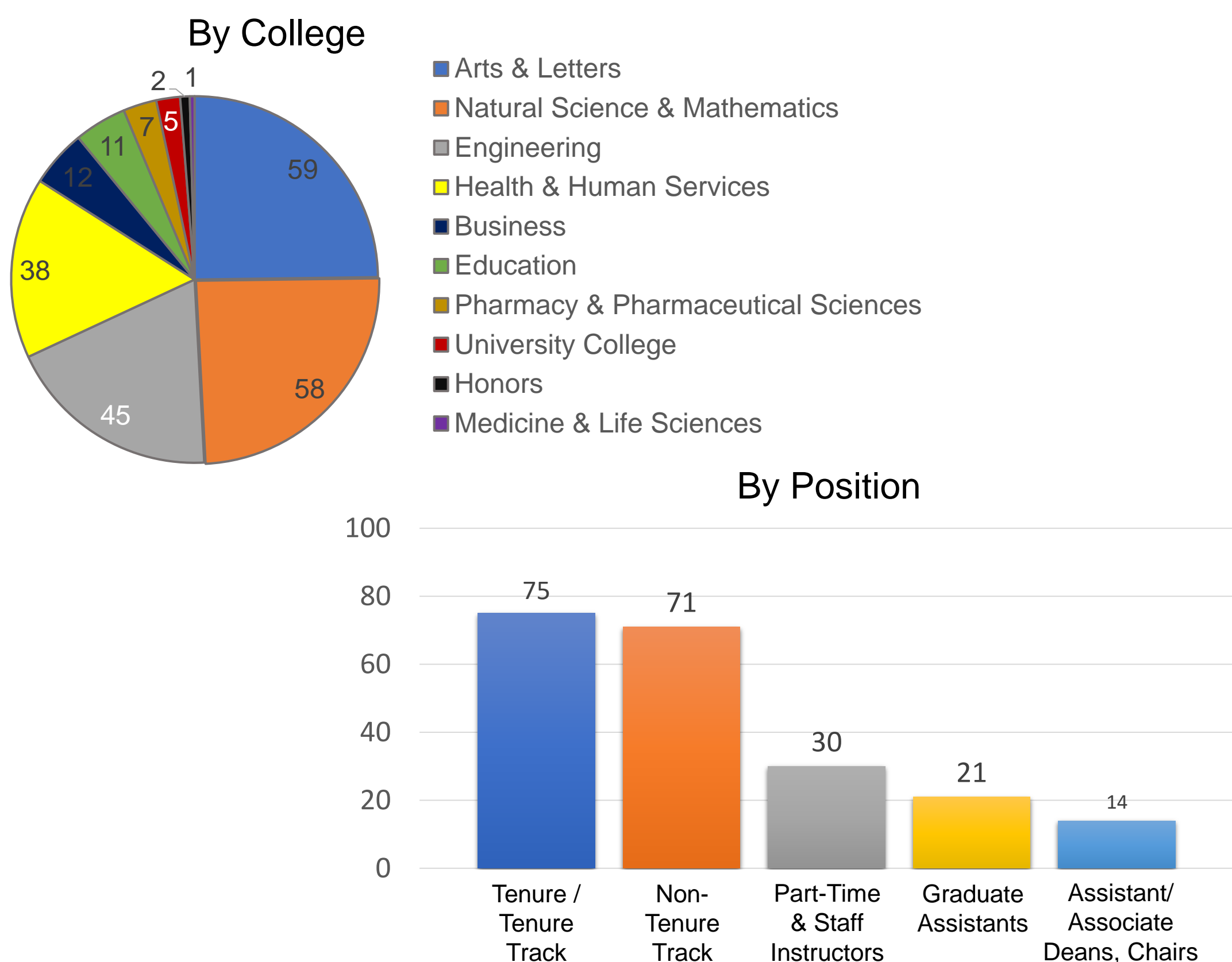
The Association of Public & Land-Grant Universities' Student Experience Project (SEP) was a national collaboration between university leaders, faculty, researchers, and educational organizations aimed at transforming higher education by creating equitable learning environments using innovative evidence-based practices to improve student academic outcomes and increase degree attainment.



Methods

As one of the six universities participating in the SEP, the University of Toledo (UToledo) created a community of Equity Champions. SEP initially focused on STEM but was quickly opened to all majors.

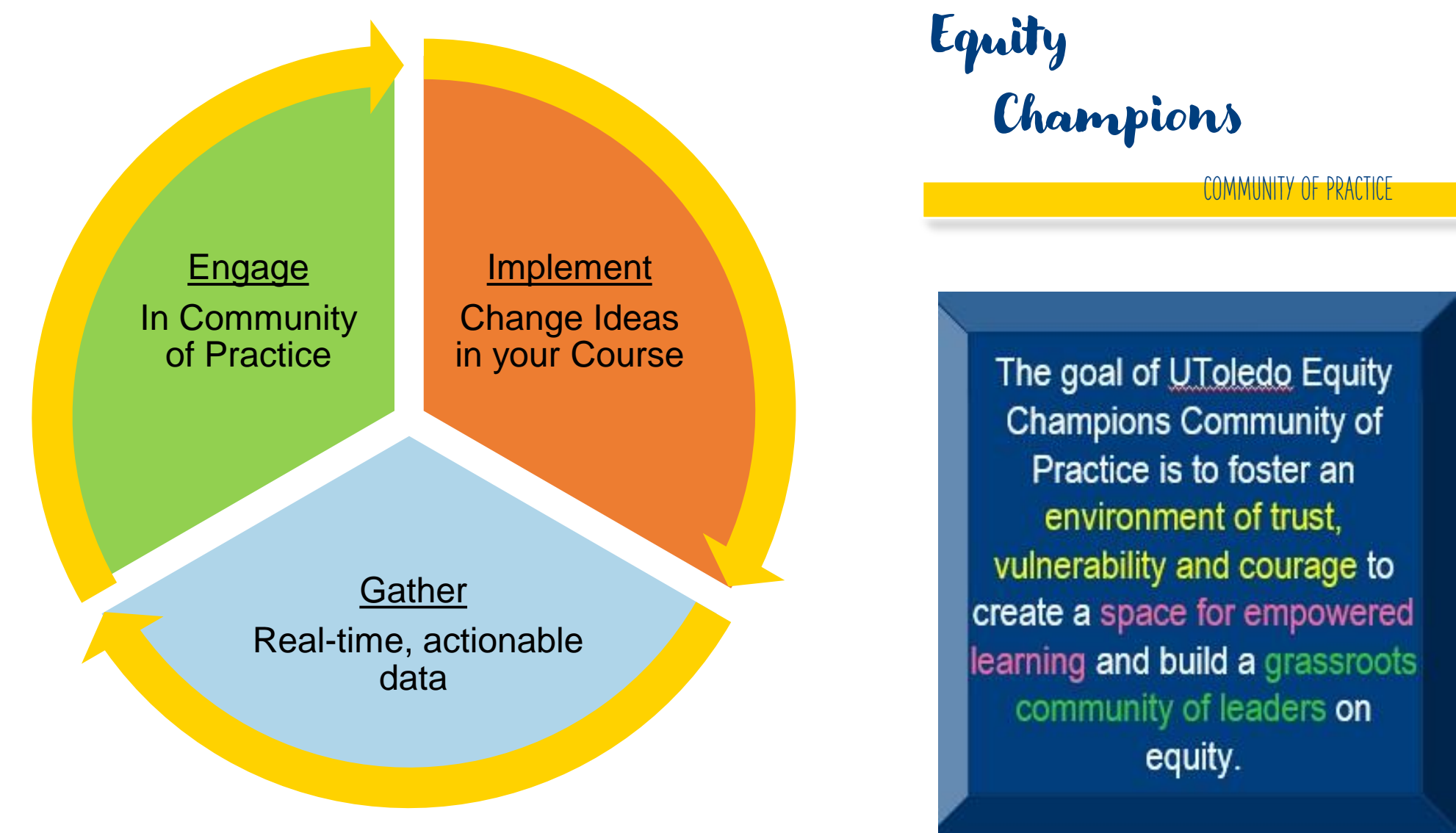
THE UTOLEDO EQUITY CHAMPIONS



Methods

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE (CoP) MODEL²⁻³

- Attend virtual orientation workshops and complete modules prior to start of semester
- Engage in the Equity Champions CoP through:
 - Weekly Small Group Meetings led by an Equity Champion Faculty Leader
 - Monthly Large Group meetings led by the Equity Champion Leadership Team
- Implement classroom practices during the semester
- Complete three cycles of PERTS surveys in classes



THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

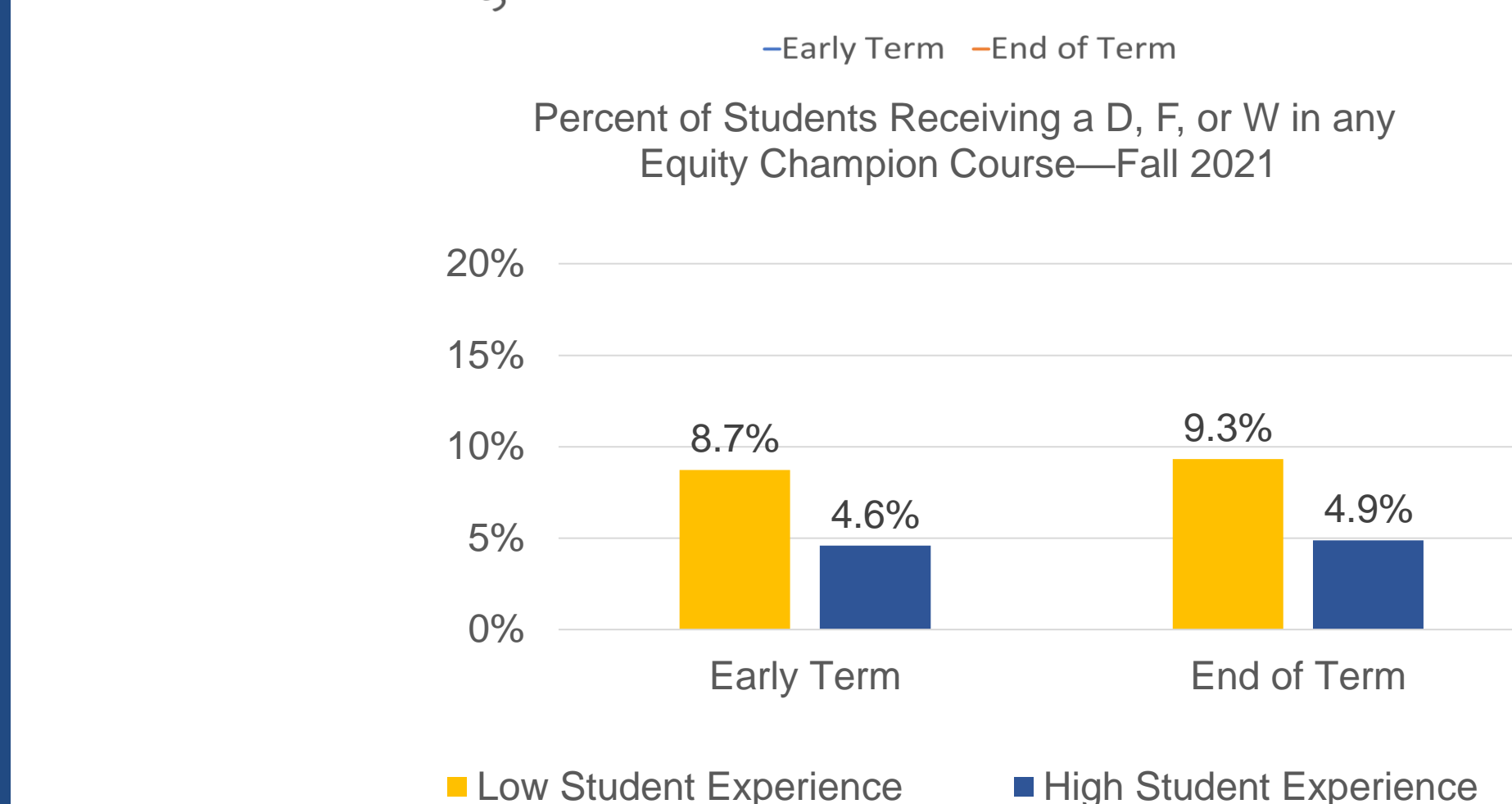
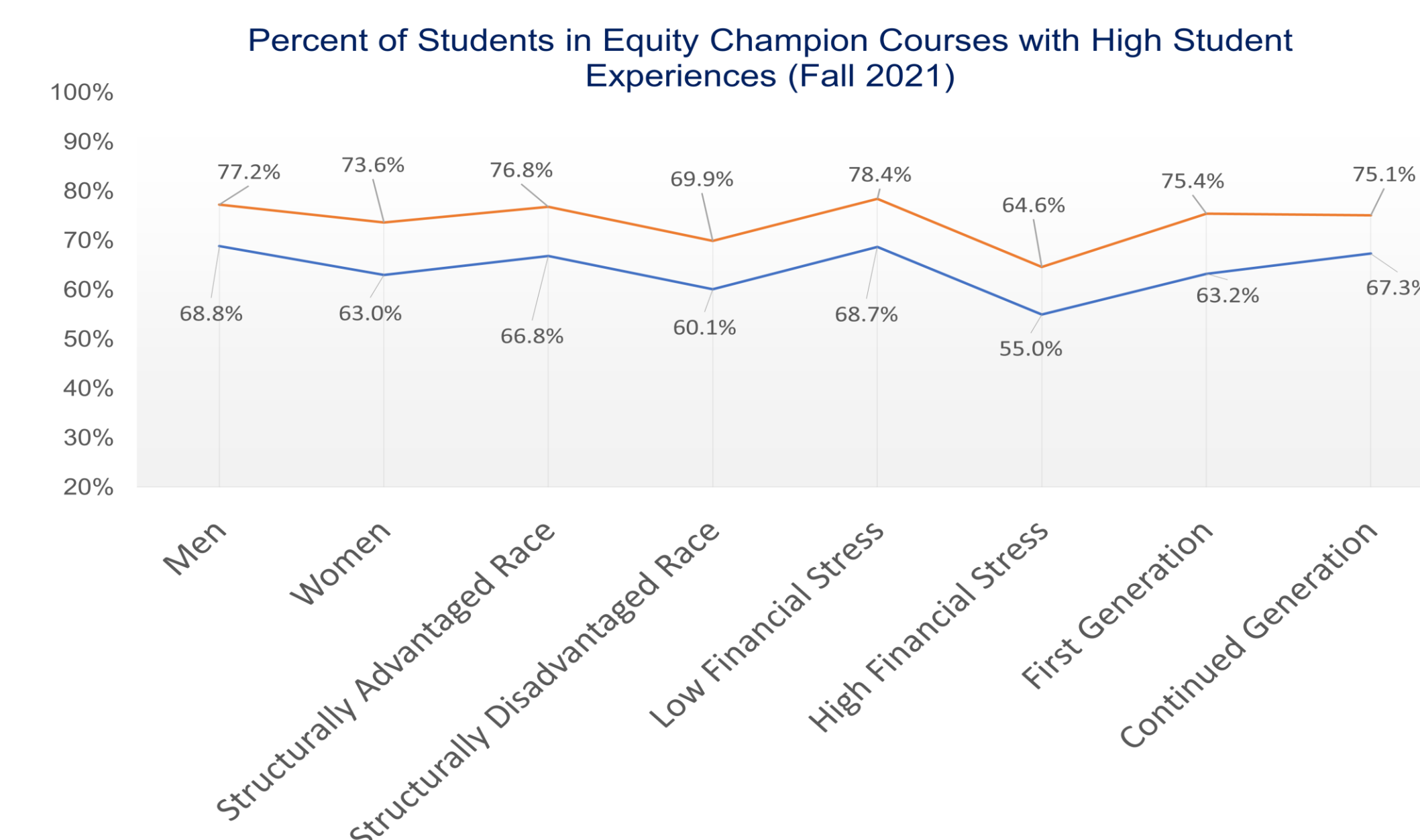
Their work focused on improving learning conditions across five social-psychological constructs⁴:

- Social Belonging**
 - Feelings that one belongs in the learning environment
- Institutional Growth Mindset**
 - Perceptions that instructor & institution believe students' abilities are malleable and can be improved with effort, feedback, and using effective strategies for learning
- Trust & Fairness**
 - Concerns about being treated fairly in interactions, grading, and evaluation
- Identity Safety**
 - Cues that can signal a social identity one holds is either valued or devalued in a particular context
- Self-Efficacy**
 - Confidence in one's abilities to do well in the domains required by the learning environment

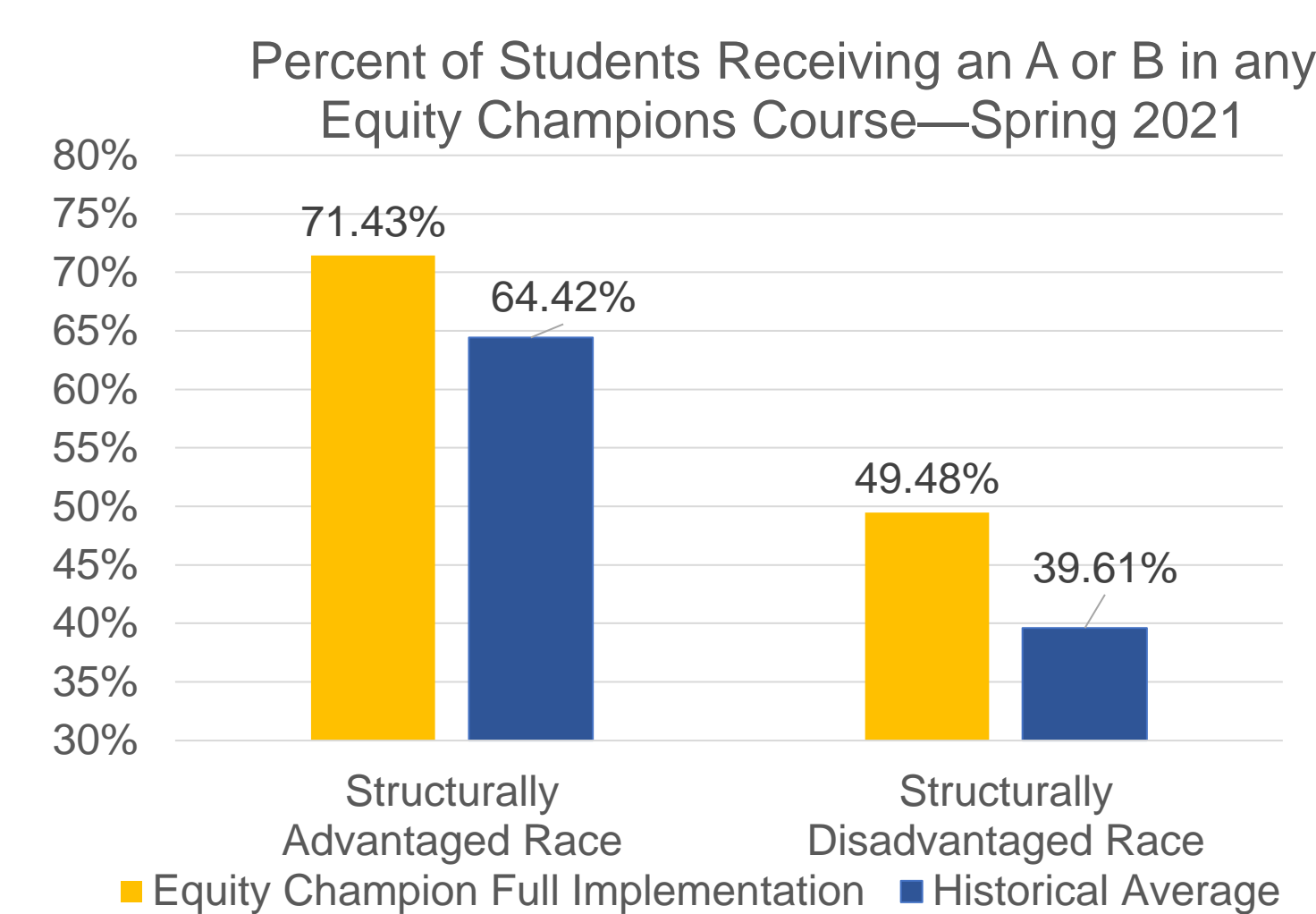
Results

SAMPLE OF CLASSROOM PRACTICES

Before Class Begins	First Days and Weeks of Class	First Performance Opportunity	Midterm Grade Reports	Last Weeks of Class
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review Course Policies to promote student-centeredness Craft a Welcome Message 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Craft and Share a Belonging Story Encourage Social Connection in the Classroom Offer Life Token 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessment Wrappers Wise Feedback Framing Statements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reinforce Self-Efficacy Use Growth Mindset Messaging Be aware of Imposter Syndrome 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use a Growth Mindset & Belonging Booster



The Student Experience Index is measured by a composite score of five constructs. To be considered as having a High Student Experience, the student must report a positive experience (score of 5 or higher on a 6-point scale) for at least four of the five constructs.



Comments from Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences Students:

"I was at the edge of leaving pharmacy school from the mental breakdown with last semester, so I told myself I will give it once more chance for spring 2022. I am very grateful I did that, because I got to meet you and work with you. You always keep motivating us."

"You were a great support throughout the semester, and I am very grateful for that. I became the Lead Pharmacy Technician in October. Taking your course helped me become more confident in myself to take on such a position, and I can't wait to see what is next for me."

"My group members are very supportive; we rely on each other a lot."

Discussion

- Overall, College students in courses coordinated by faculty participating in Equity Champions demonstrated better outcomes compared to the same course in the previous academic year.
- College outcomes followed the same trends as those observed at the University level.
- Student comments demonstrated that when faculty create equitable learning environments where students experience a sense of belonging, it may enhance retention.

Strengths

- A variety of faculty appointments and departments within the College participated in the program.
- Equity Champion courses included pre-professional and 1st and 2nd year professional division students, targeting students at various points in the curriculum.

Limitations

- College specific outcomes for underrepresented minorities and financially disadvantaged students is unavailable.
- The potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on outcomes is unknown.
- During this time, the College's remediation efforts expanded which could also enhance retention.

Conclusions

Semester long CoPs provide instructors with the support and tools needed to promote equitable learning environments. This directly impacts student retention and degree completion. Participants in the CoP benefited from the deeper connections to their students and peers. Many of the changes implemented by instructors did not require extensive time or resources to implement, which allows for the opportunity to apply these principles more widely across college courses.

References

- Boucher K, Murphy M, Bartell D, Smail J, Logel C, Danek J. Centering the student experience: what faculty and institutions can do to advance equity. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning* 2021;53(6):42-50. doi: 10.1080/00091383.2021.1987804.
- Office of the Provost, University of Toledo. <https://www.utoledo.edu/offices/provost/successandretention/equity-champions/> Published 2023. Accessed June 27, 2023.
- Bartell D, Boswell C. "Promoting Equity by Design." In: *Delivering on the Promise of High-Impact Practices: Research and Model for Achieving Equity, Fidelity, Impact, and Scale*, edited by Zilvinskis J, Kinzie J, Daday J, O'Donnel K, Vande Zande C, Stylus, 2022, 50-8. College Transition Collaborative. Classroom Practices Library: Organized By Social-Psychological Construct. <https://collegetransitioncollaborative.org/sep-practices-library-by-construct/> Published 2022. Accessed June 27, 2023.

Disclosure: Authors have no financial or personal relationships with commercial entities that may have a direct or indirect interest in the subject matter of this presentation.