Climate Survey for PhD Program in Mechanical Engineering

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March 16, 2018

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Ph.D. Climate Survey

- Creation
  - Draft was created by drawing from existing surveys at other institutions and from the Provost's exit survey
  - Revisions by an external consultant (JaggerMoon Consulting)
  - Revisions by the department's Ph.D. Program Committee
- Format: 2 separate surveys in SurveyMonkey
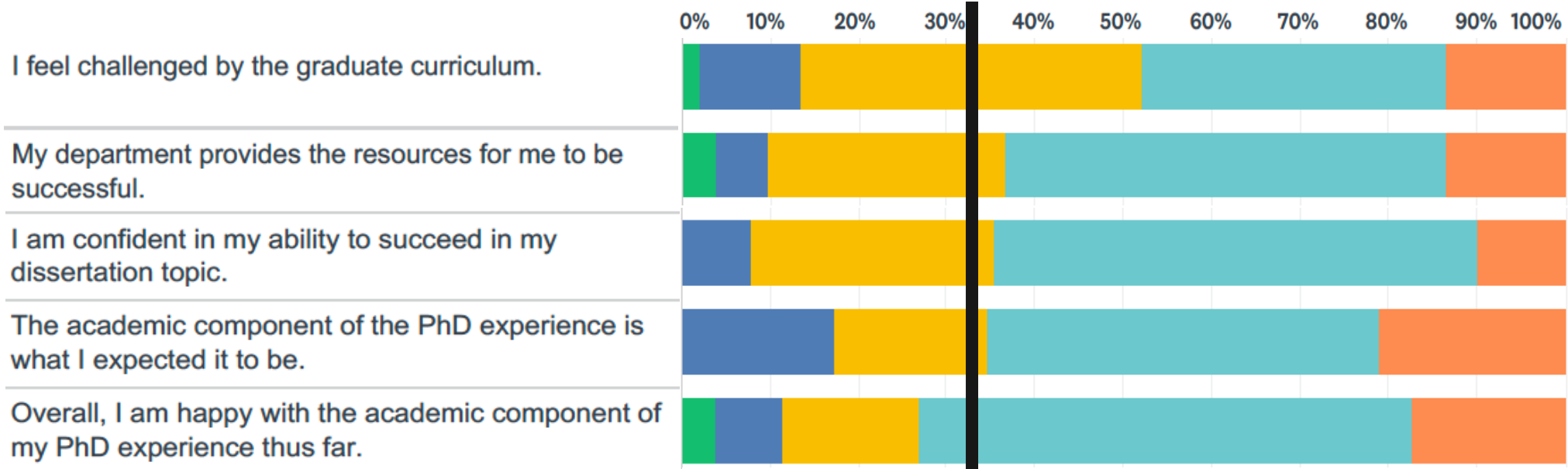 - I. Ph.D. program
  - II. Advisor-advisee relationship
- Administration
  - Late October 2017
  - Invitations—and several reminders—sent to all 76 Ph.D. students in ME
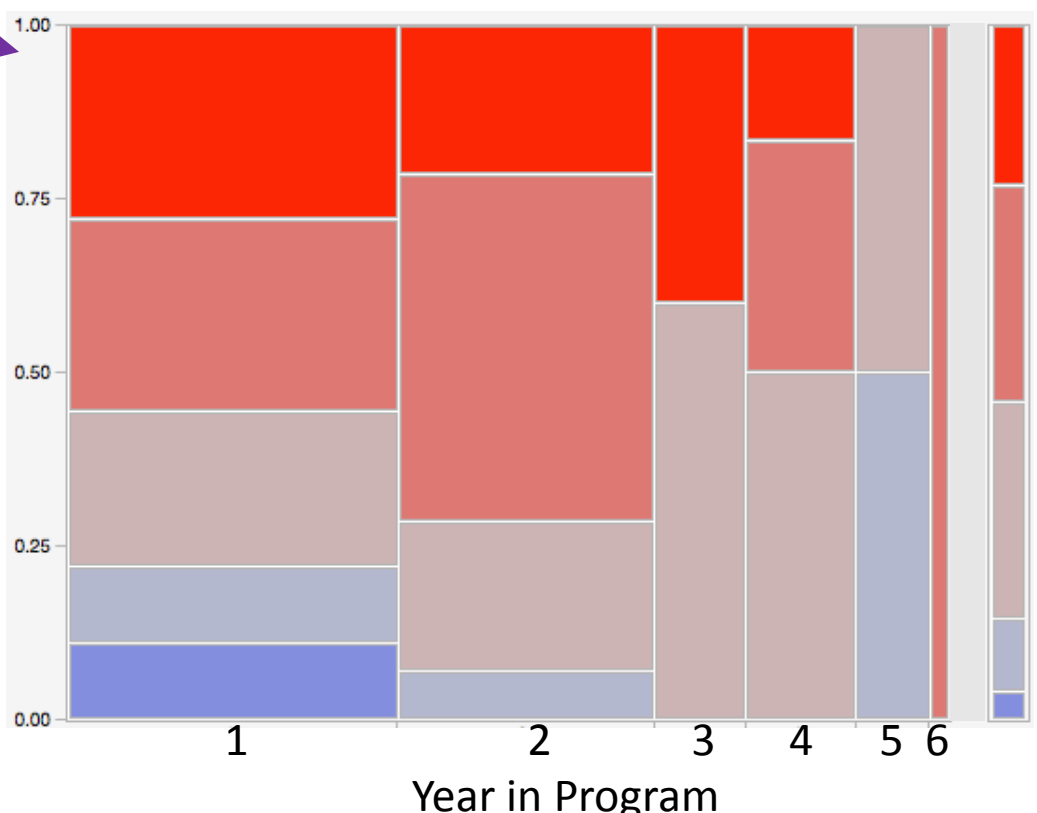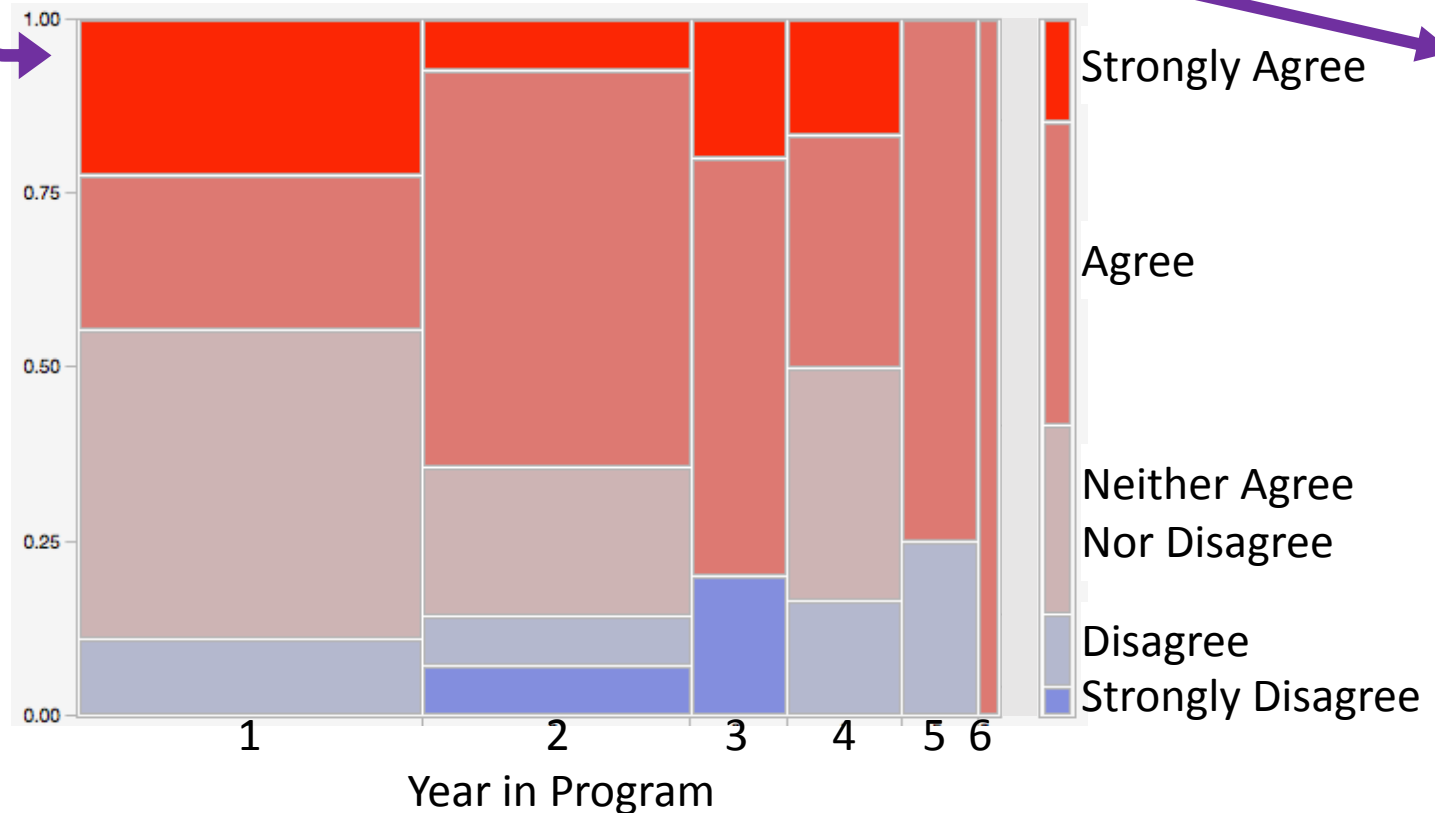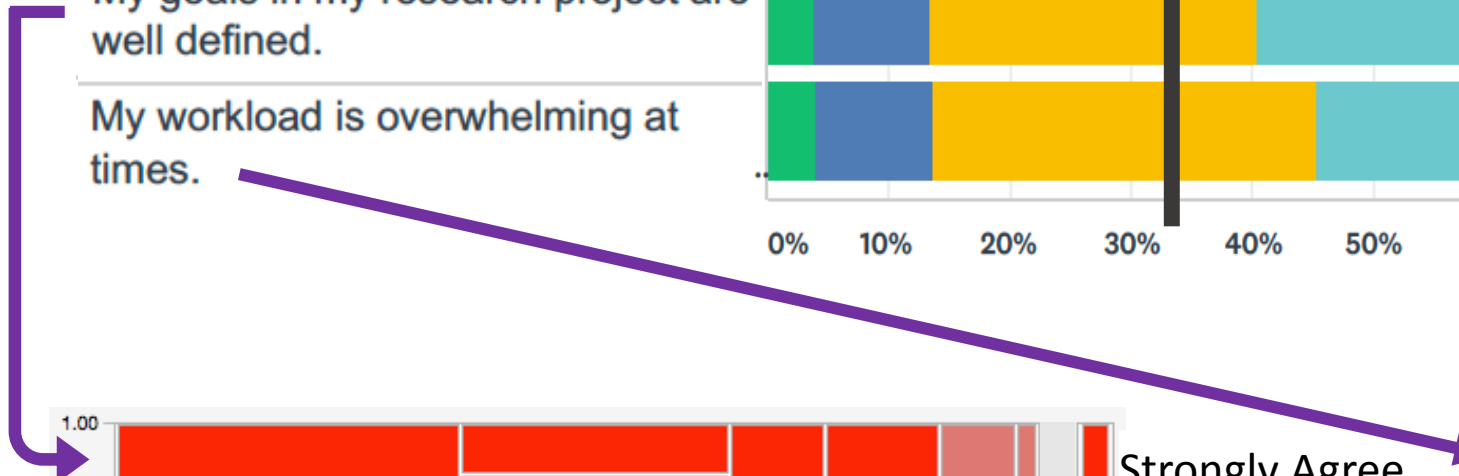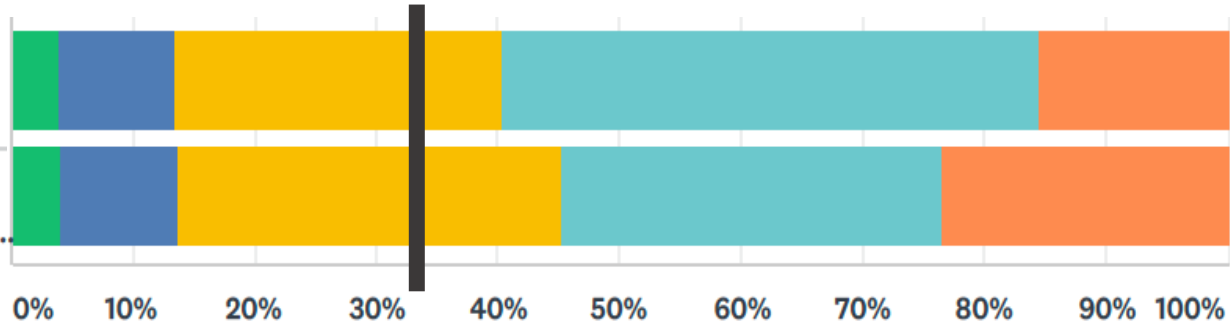- Response rate: 52 (68%) to Survey I; 43 (57%) to Survey II

Survey I: Program

Questions on Academics and Research

Questions on Academics and Research

I feel like I'm making good progress on my research.
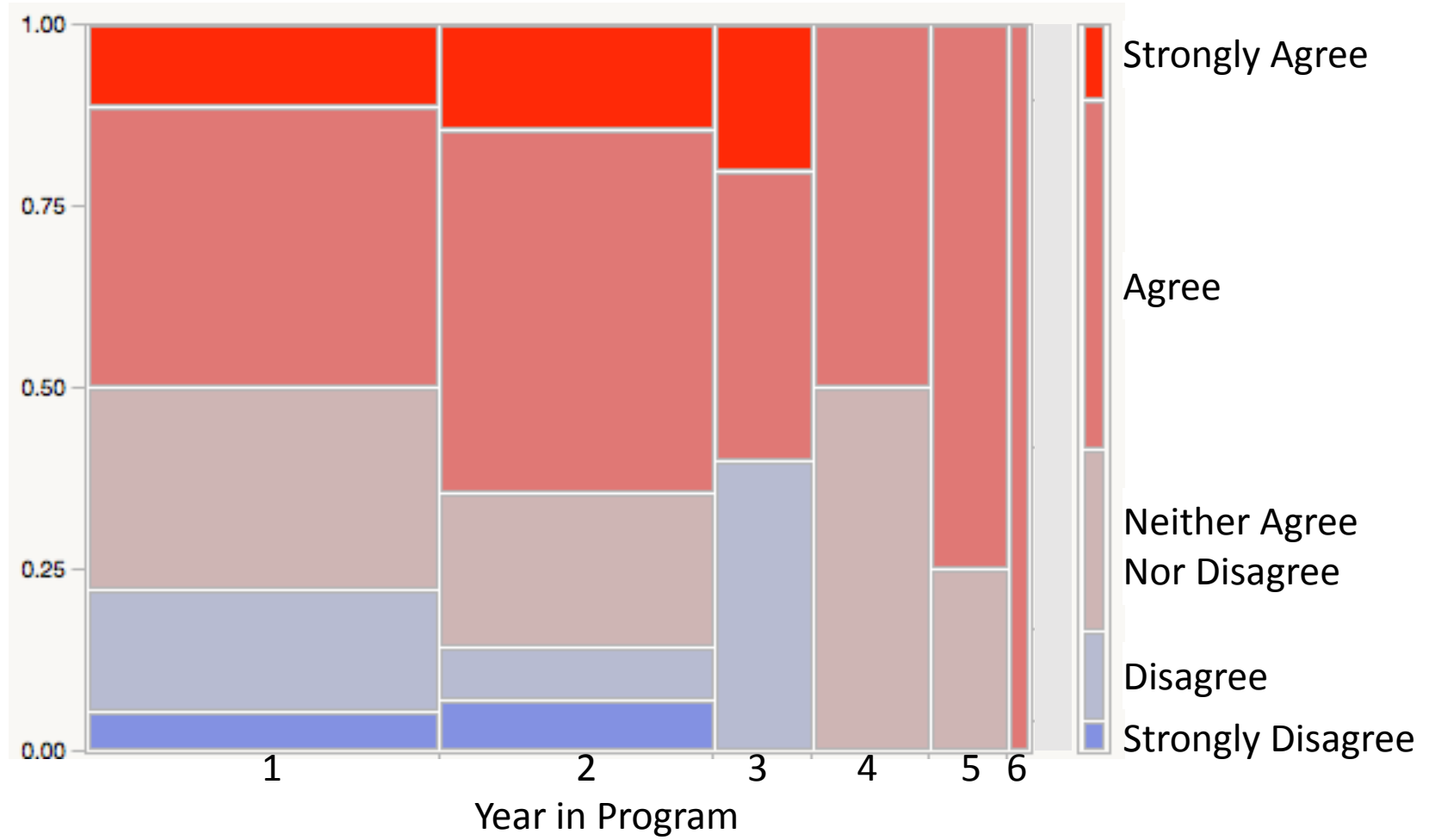
Questions on Career Preparation
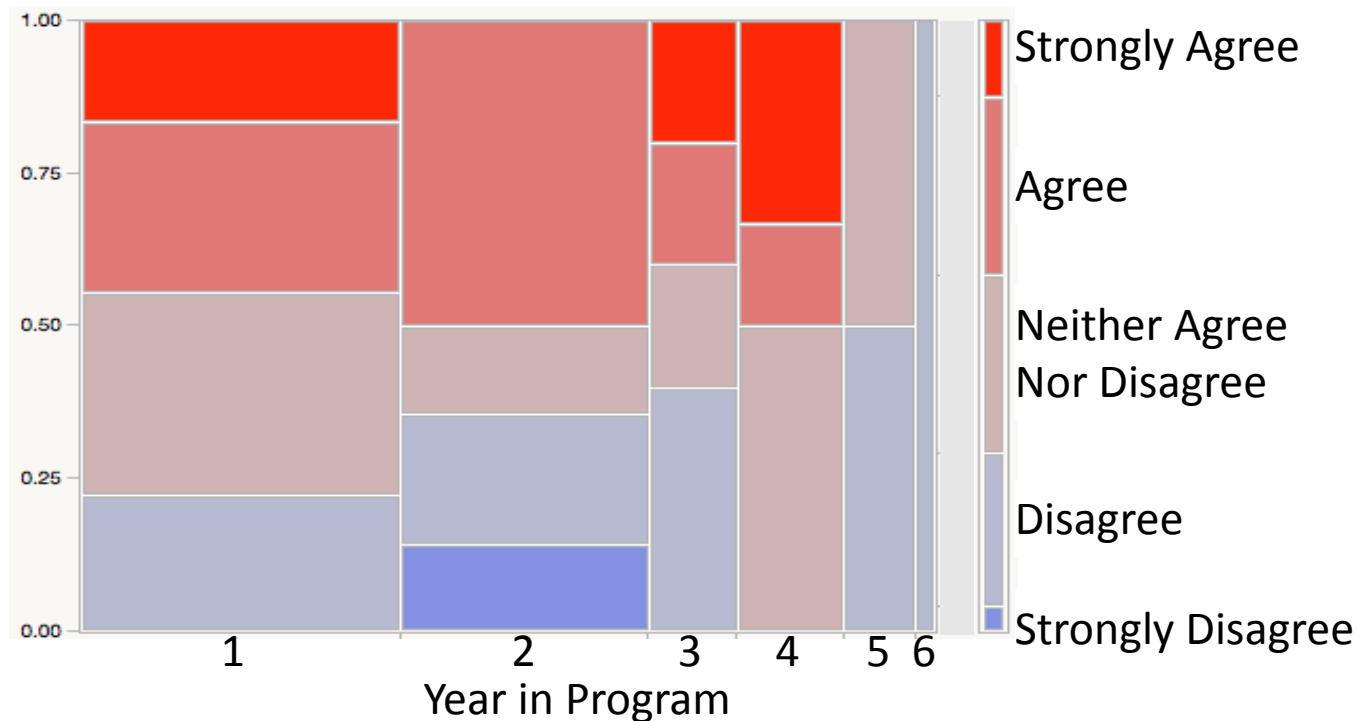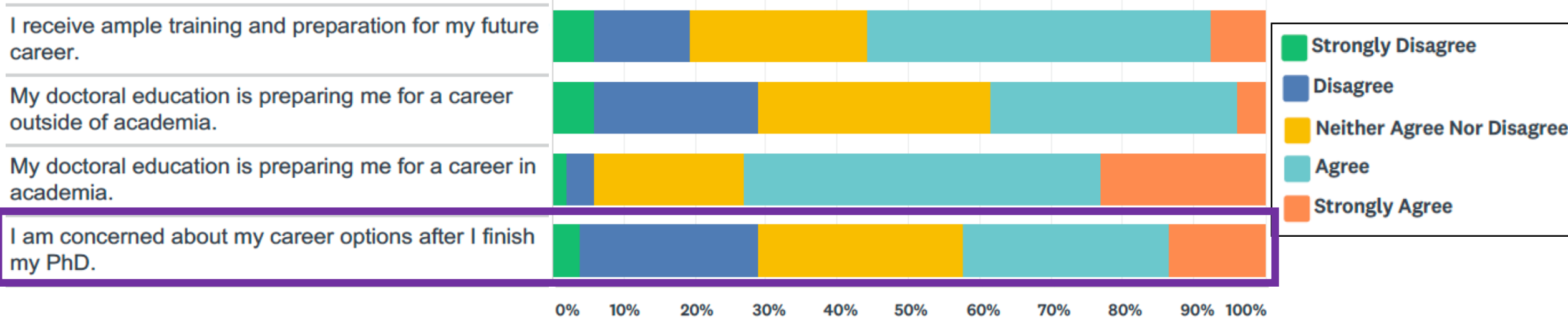
I have sufficient opportunities to receive constructive feedback on my research…

…from students in my dept.

…from faculty (not including my advisor) in my dept.

…from researchers outside of my university.

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

Legend:
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree Nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Agree

Neither Agree Nor Disagree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

1   2   3   4   5 6

Year In Program
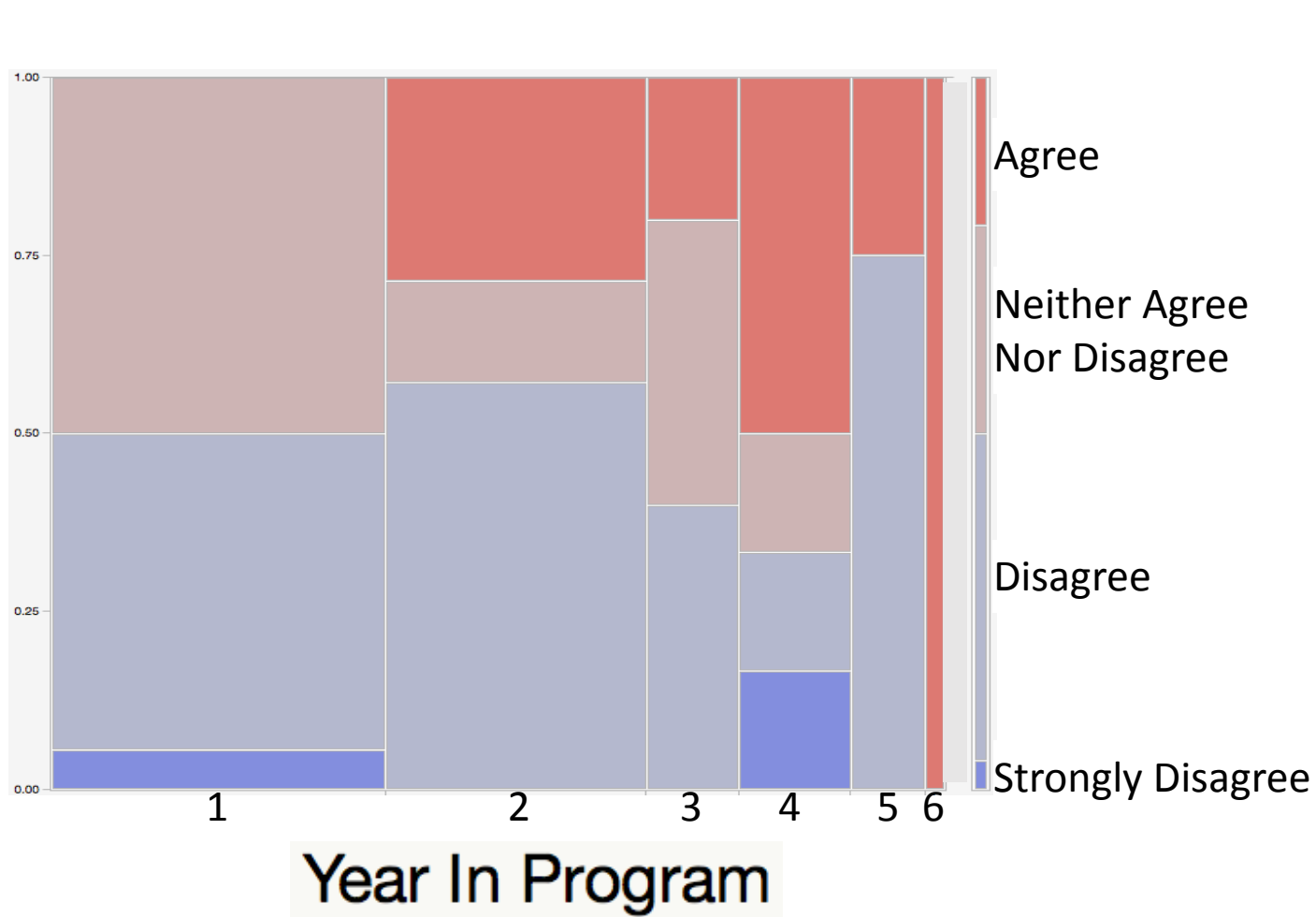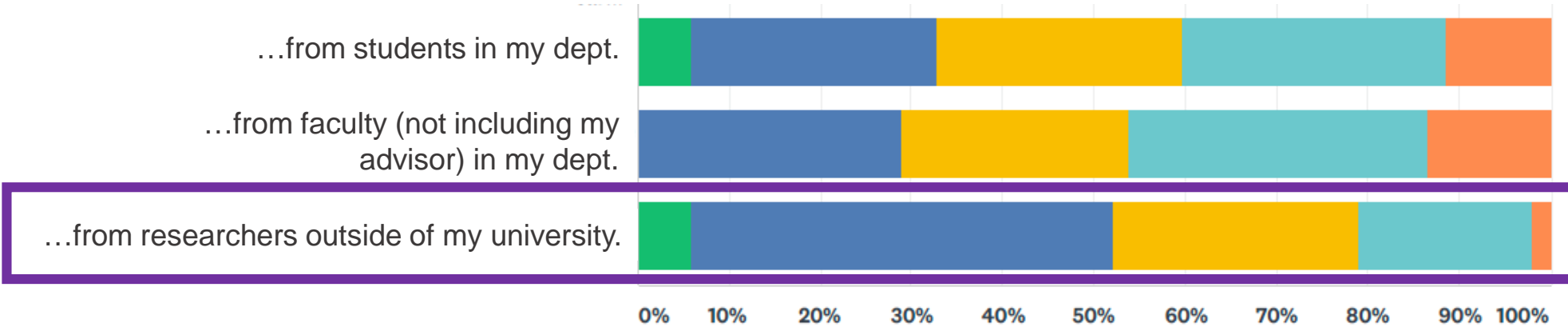
Questions on Community (10 questions total)

I worry about...

Legend:
- **Finding funding for research** (green)
- **Writing my dissertation** (blue)
- **Future employment prospects** (yellow)
- **My research topic** (teal)
- **Other** (orange)

X-axis: 0, 20, 40, 60, 80, 100, 120

"Other" responses:
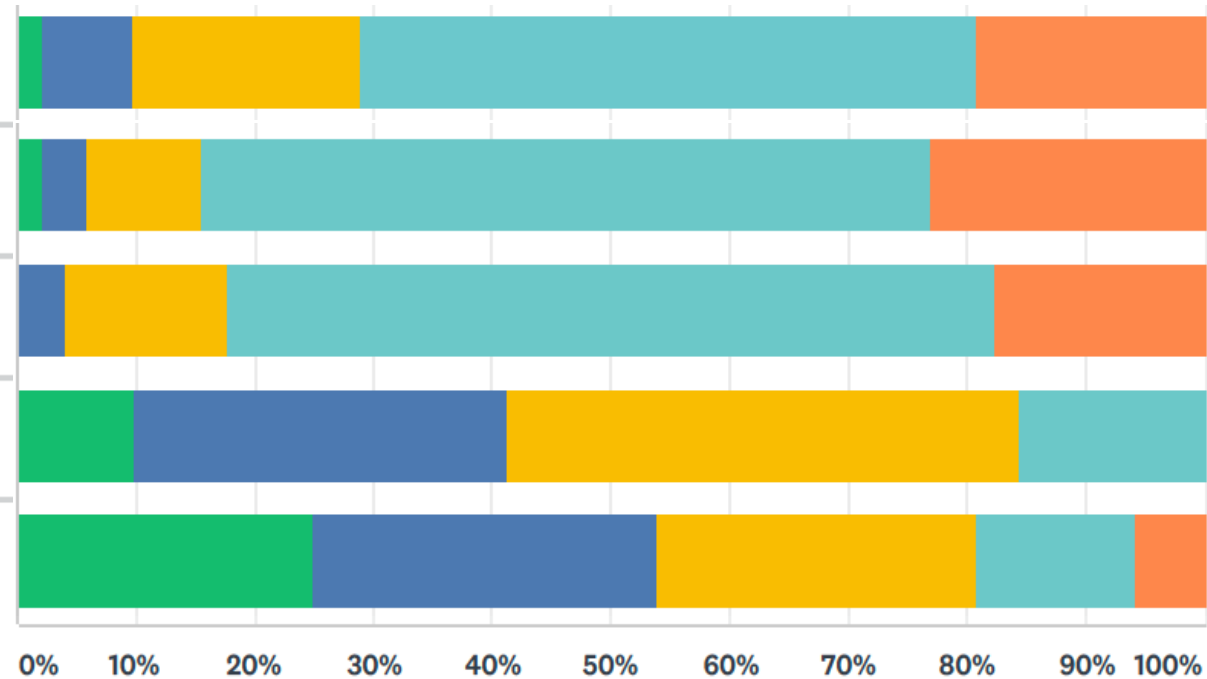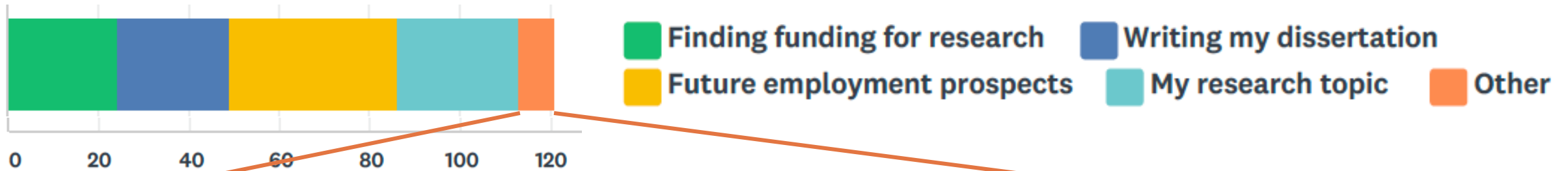
Having the foundation in course work to explore research questions.

My research gets enough visibility

Saving money towards my future, time and money for proper nutrition, getting to see daylight at some point during my day.

Can't emphasize on "future employment prospects" less

Publishing and Conferences, Qualifying Exam

Grades. Some courses are more focused on the grade than on learning. I am taking courses to better understand my field or something related to it.

Whether my committee would eventually agree with the direction of my research. No common threads seem to emerge within any one of them. Almost makes me feel like I am just working on completely useless things.

Survey II: Advisor-Advisee Relationship

Survey responses (horizontal stacked bar chart) with statements:

- I receive valuable feedback from my research advisor.
- It is easy to reach my research advisor when I need him/her.
- I feel comfortable confiding in my research advisor if I feel stressed or anxious about my research/thesis.
- I find it easy to discuss my research with my research advisor.
- I receive valuable career guidance from my research advisor.
- I am treated respectfully by my research advisor.
- I have a good working relationship with my research advisor.
- I feel like I have the right amount of input on shaping my dissertation topic.
- I feel like I have a balanced workload.
- My research advisor and I have clear expectations of one another.
- My research advisor is good about keeping meetings with me.
- My research advisor takes a personal interest in me.
- My research advisor helps me set realistic goals for my work.
- My research advisor is receptive to my suggestions and ideas.

Legend:
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree Nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Axis: 0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

Action Items

- Compare to benchmark data?

- Analyze potential correlations among responses to questions
  - e.g. happiness in program vs. making good progress

- Better messaging to incoming students about program's nuts and bots, and expectations

- Department travel grants for PhD students

- Hold more industry "meet and greet" events for PhD and MS students

- Next year, include question about post-graduation plans: academia, industry, unsure

Misc. Comments

- There are several courses which are listed but have not been offered in many years. Often these are higher level courses which have more specific topics.

- I do not think anyone should TA in their first semester unless they request to

- I would have liked to know more information about the logistics of the program WAY sooner (perhaps at least a month in advance) AND on an individual basis (i.e. stipend payout and timelines, less vagueness about rotations, health insurance...

- There's not as much support at BU for incoming students as my friends who started programs at other schools.

- The department could provide more easily accessible resources and documentation for graduate students.

- The format of the qualification exam is strange

- Thank you for your consideration. Have a good day.

What kinds of PhD social events would you like to see?