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Transforming the Civic Engagement Leader Program to Create Sustainable Leadership

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Transforming the Civic Engagement Leader program to create sustainable leadership

Lanh Dang

Background



Created by Alan Shawn Feinstein in 1995, the Feinstein Enriching America Program (FEAP) is the civic engagement component of URI 101, a 1-credit seminar for URI freshmen. The goal of FEAP is to engage URI first-year students in a meaningful service experience that connects them to the community. The **Feinstein Experience**, launched in fall 2012, primarily serves URI 101 students through FEAP, but any URI student can participate in any number of projects that match their service interests.¹

Civic Engagement Leaders are upperclassmen that lead over 75 community service experiences through the Feinstein Experience each fall semester. CELs are energetic and enthusiastic students interested in inspiring their peers to get engaged in the community while enhancing their own leadership skills. CELs are grouped into teams focusing on different service areas such as business, education, environment, health, or human services.¹

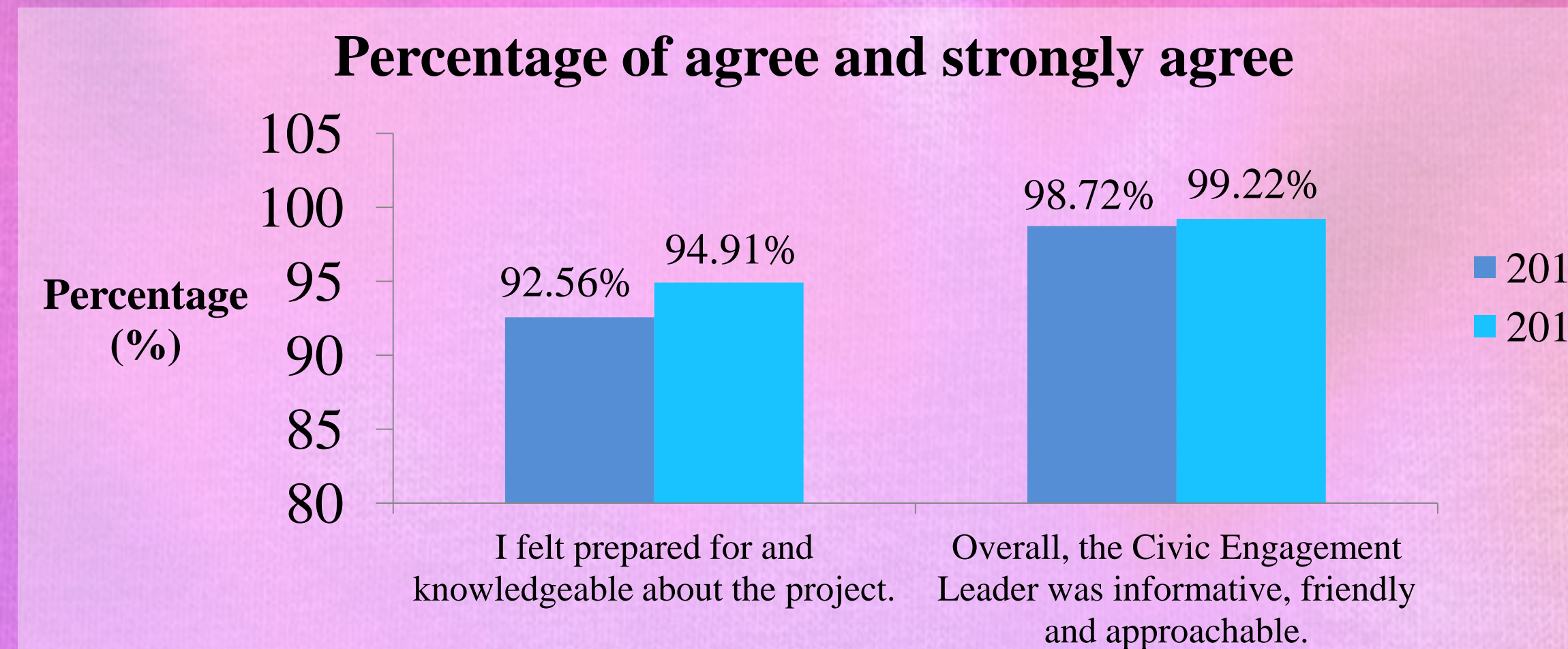
Introduction

In fall 2012, the newly launched Feinstein Experience, previously targeting only URI 101 students, changed to include any student who wanted to participate in volunteer opportunities. The Civic Engagement Leader (CEL) program needed to be reformatted to fit the new Feinstein Experience. This included creating more sustainable leadership in the Clearinghouse for Volunteers office and building more successful servant leaders for the community. Trainings and class lesson plans were changed to focus on four areas: knowledge, skills, values, and motivations. By the end of the project, leaders walked away with greater knowledge about the program and social issues, additional skills such as problem solving and communication, values and commitment to a greater good, and motivations to continue serving and leading after the program ended.

Results

At the end of every service project, participants are asked to fill out an evaluation about the service experience and the CELs.

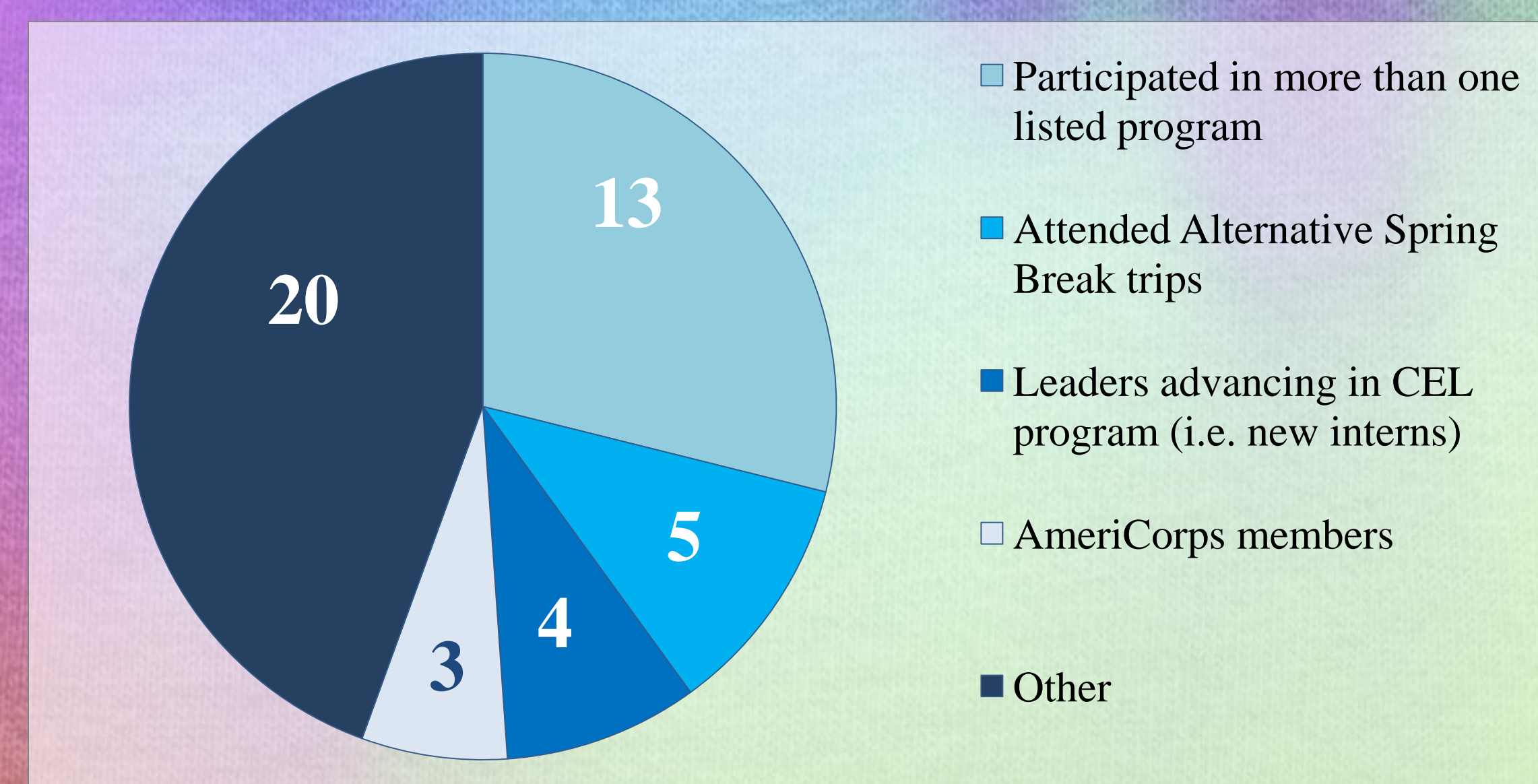
Two questions and responses were analyzed from fall 2012 and 2013 evaluations. The data indicate that the leaders from fall 2013 prepared the participants more for the project and had better satisfaction rates from their participants.



The fall 2013 CELs and intern team inspired a greater number of students to become involved with CELs and the Feinstein Experience. Compared to fall 2013, the fall 2014 team will be larger and include more CELs and interns.

	Fall 2013	Fall 2014	Percent increase (%)
Number of CEL applications	62	109	78.5%
Number of CELs	37	46	24.3%
Number of service and office interns	8	13	62.5%

Of the 45 leaders in the fall 2013 CEL team, over half have continued to be civically engaged and are still actively involved both in the Clearinghouse for Volunteers and the university.



Discussion

“What? So what? Now what?”

Every year, the Civic Engagement Leader program transforms to better suit the URI 101 community service requirement and develops more skilled and successful leaders. This project improved the CEL program to fit the new Feinstein Experience and created more sustainable leadership within the Clearinghouse for Volunteers. Changes made within the CEL program included:

- A two-day fall training compared to a one-day training. The training focused on providing ample information over a longer period of time to ensure preparedness to lead service projects without anxiety.
- A quiz factored into the class grade to test basic knowledge about the program and fellow leaders.
- An enhancement to homework assignments promoting reading before class for more in depth classroom discussions.
- More skills training such as safety and first aid, QPR training for suicide prevention and SafeZone training to become an ally to the LGBTQ community.
- Reflection activities on Sakai providing greater feedback about the service projects to the coordinator, intern team, and fellow leaders.
- More structured service intern meetings focused on accomplishing more significant and sustainable goals.
- Encouraging inter-team communication and collaboration to create lasting friendships and change in the community.

These changes set the foundation for a more successful Clearinghouse for Volunteers office. The Feinstein Experience for fall 2014 will have an enhanced and more cohesive leadership team that will lead more student volunteers in a greater number of community service projects.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Sarah Miller for allowing me to complete this project providing guidance, motivation, and friendship all along the way. Also, thank you to all the servant leaders I've had the pleasure of working with during this project and beyond through the Clearinghouse for Volunteers, the Feinstein Enriching America Program, and the Rhode Island Alternative Spring Break trips.

Resources

1. Center for Career and Experiential Education. Service and Volunteering, Feinstein Civic Engagement Program. URL: www.uri.edu/volunteer

Poster supplement:

The Civic Engagement Leader (CEL) program develops leadership skills in upperclassmen while serving the University of Rhode Island and greater Rhode Island communities. In fall 2013, the CEL program transformed to create more sustainable leadership. In this project, the definition of sustainable leadership was multifaceted to include individual leadership development and office sustainability. Individually, CELs improved their personal leadership skills and qualities to sustain their active involvement on campus with over half of the fall 2013 CELs still involved in the Clearinghouse for Volunteers and the university. As for office sustainability, the Clearinghouse for Volunteers office now has a new cohort of 46 CELs and 13 interns for the fall 2014 Feinstein Experience, a substantial increase from fall 2013. This project, with its many changes both in and outside of the classroom, set the foundation for more civic engagement, leadership development, and sustainable leadership within the Clearinghouse for Volunteers and the Civic Engagement Leader program.