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### Abstract:

Mental health in college students has been a continuous issue with many students suffering from anxiety and depression. Many students are particularly vulnerable to stress, which is correlated to academic underperformance, failure to fulfill academic obligations, and problematic health behaviors, such as substance abuse. A higher perceived stress level in university students can cause a poorer quality of life, well-being, and sleep quality. It is important to recognize coping strategies to relieve these mental health stressors. There are many resources available on campus to help students in regards to mental health, but the newly developed sensory room located in Monroe Hall gives students access to mental health resources without relying on staff members. Students who are uncomfortable reaching out for help can utilize these tools on their own time. We evaluated the current effectiveness of the sensory room through surveying students who use the room. From the survey results, we have identified ways to improve the mental health benefits of the Monroe sensory room by adding things like play-doh, another bean bag chair, and stickers. We also recommend expanding the pilot, implementing it in other residence halls. We have found that the sensory room is a beneficial and resourceful way to combat mental health struggles and relieve stress in college without significant financial commitment from the college.

### Introduction:

Anxiety in general is directed toward the unknown, and for first year college students, some anxieties include separation anxiety, test anxiety, and social anxiety. Mental health issues often rise among college students due to first experiences of freedom, relationships, stress and responsibility, and environmental factors like temptations of drugs and alcohol. Peer pressure can result in an added anxiety, and because drugs, alcohol, and sexual contact are things that are seen as a normal part of college, students may feel pressured to do these things even though they feel uncomfortable. The economic aftermath of COVID-19 also leaves college students with a sense of fear in terms of paying for their tuition. Sleep hygiene, nutrition, and practicing daily affirmations are some ways to combat negativity in mental health. The sensory room was added to Monroe Hall as an independent mental health resource.

### Methods:

For data collection, we created an anonymous survey. The survey included questions about how often students used the room and what they used it for, as well as questions about their mental wellbeing.



### Results:

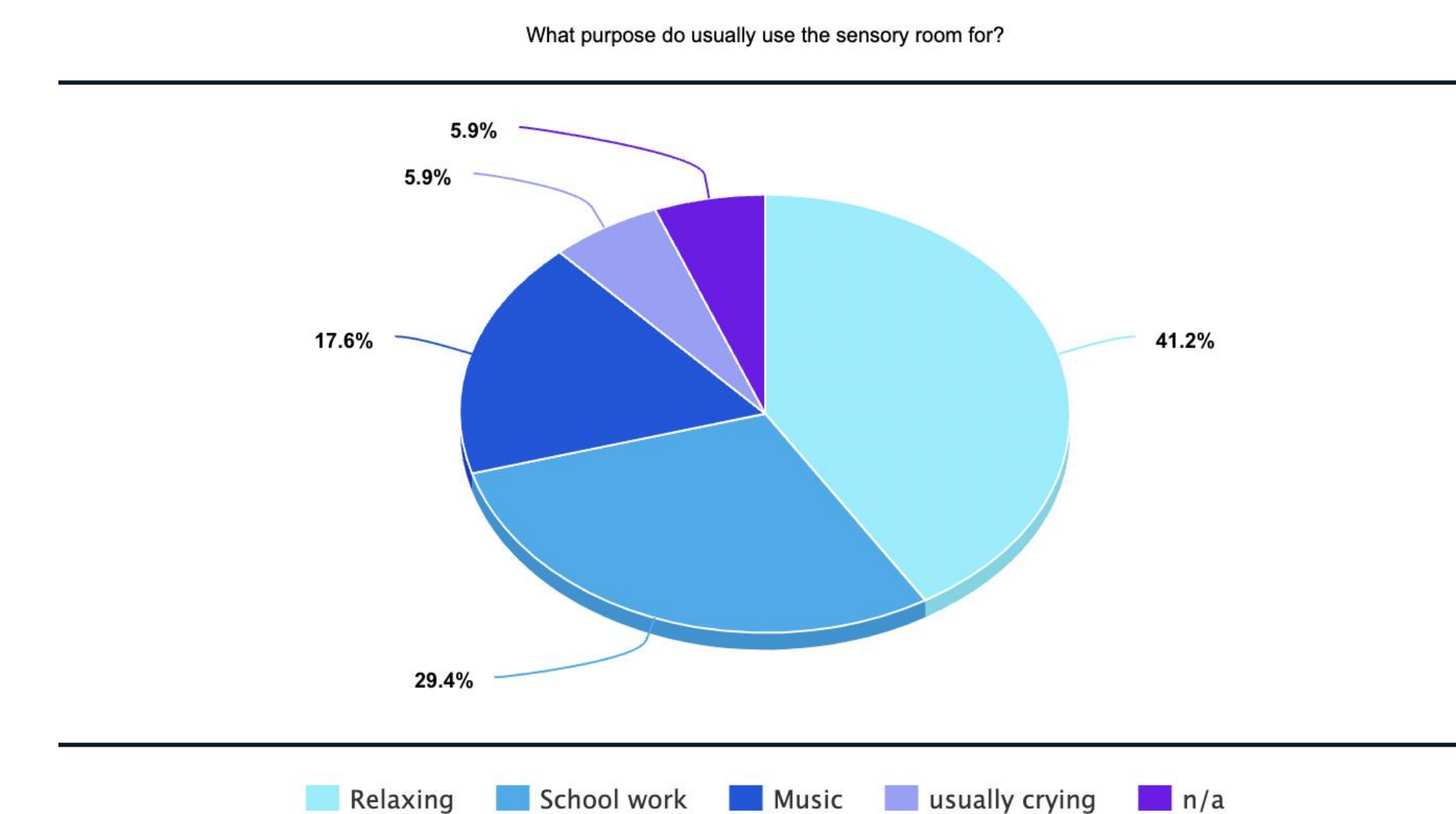
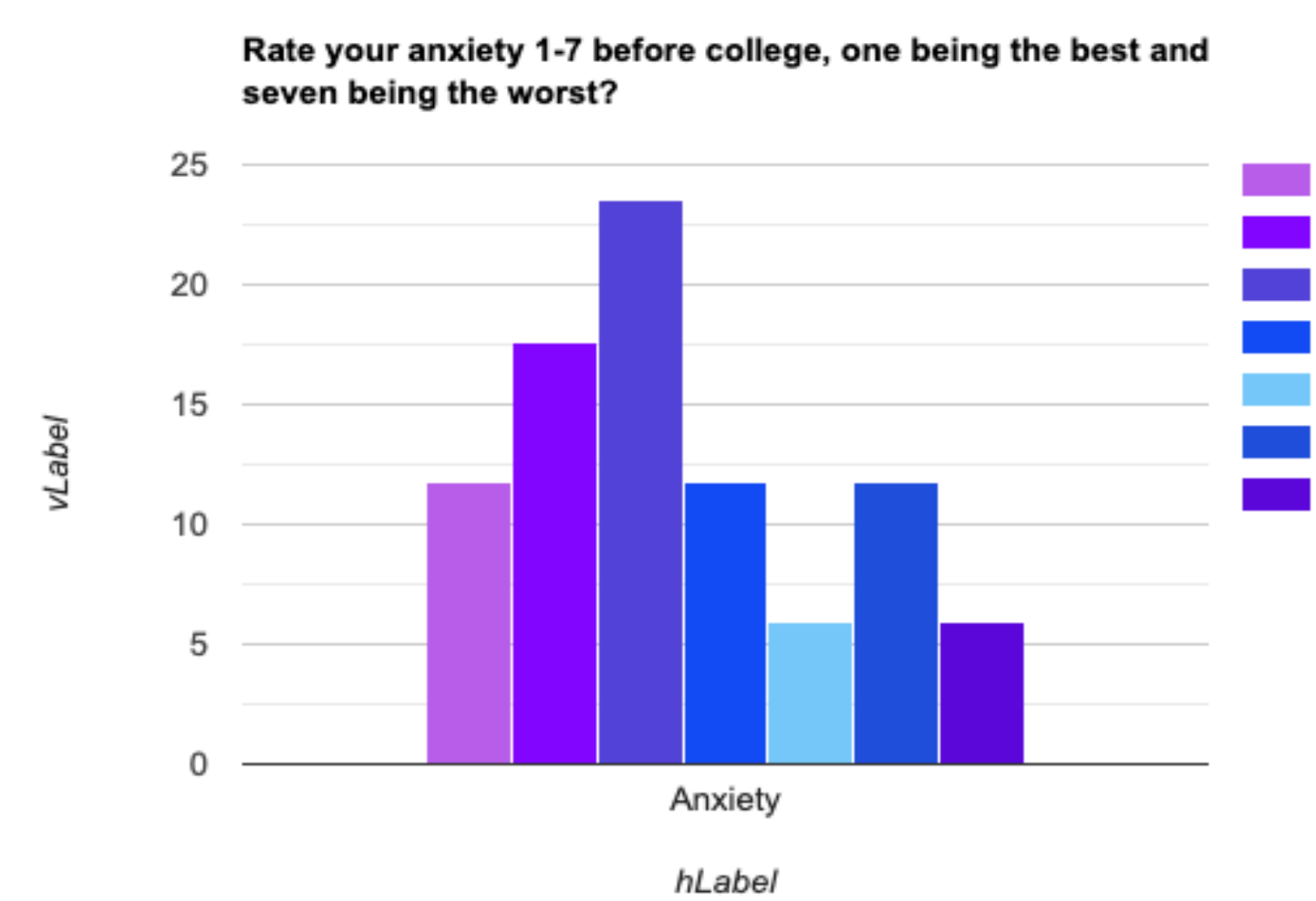
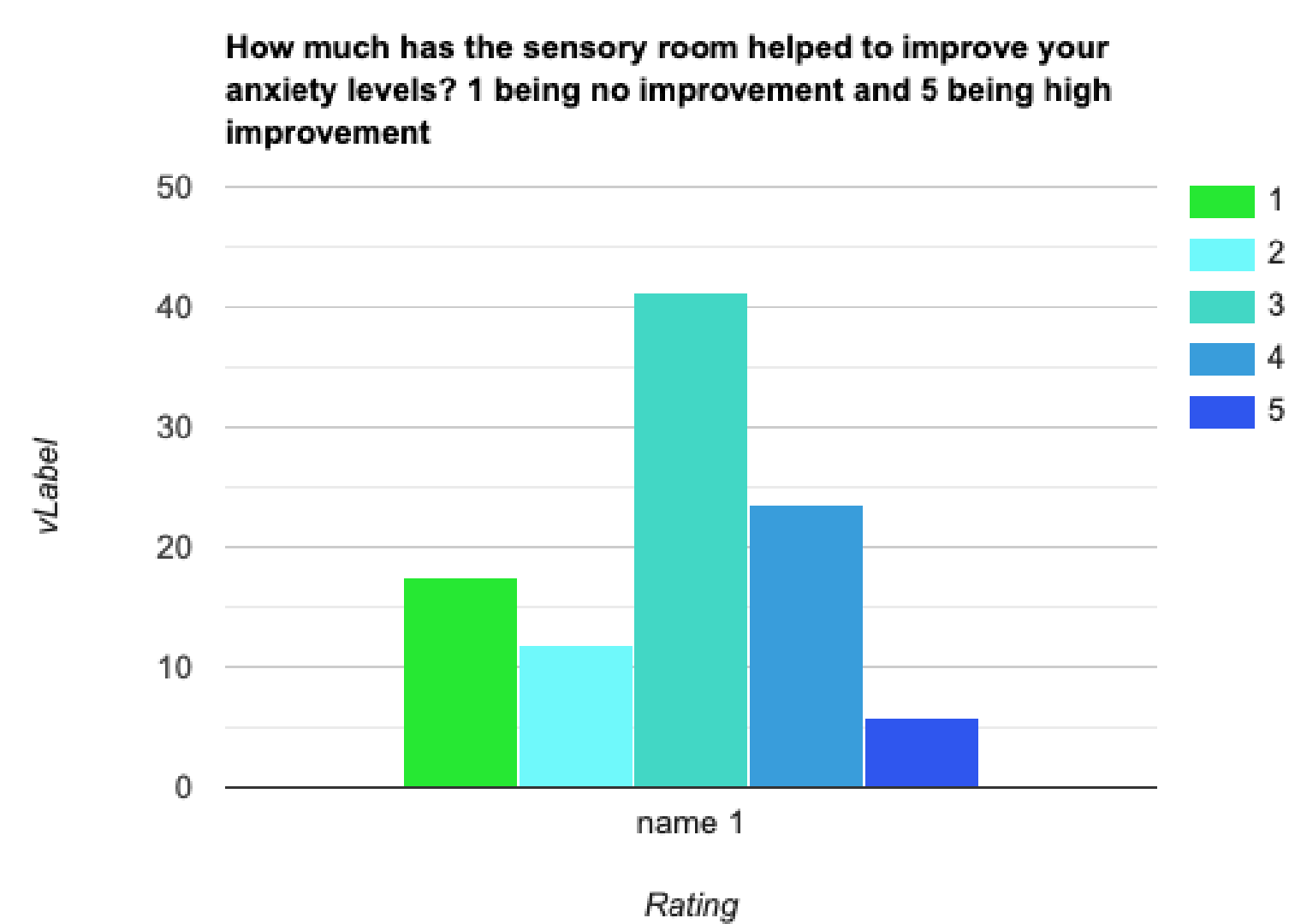
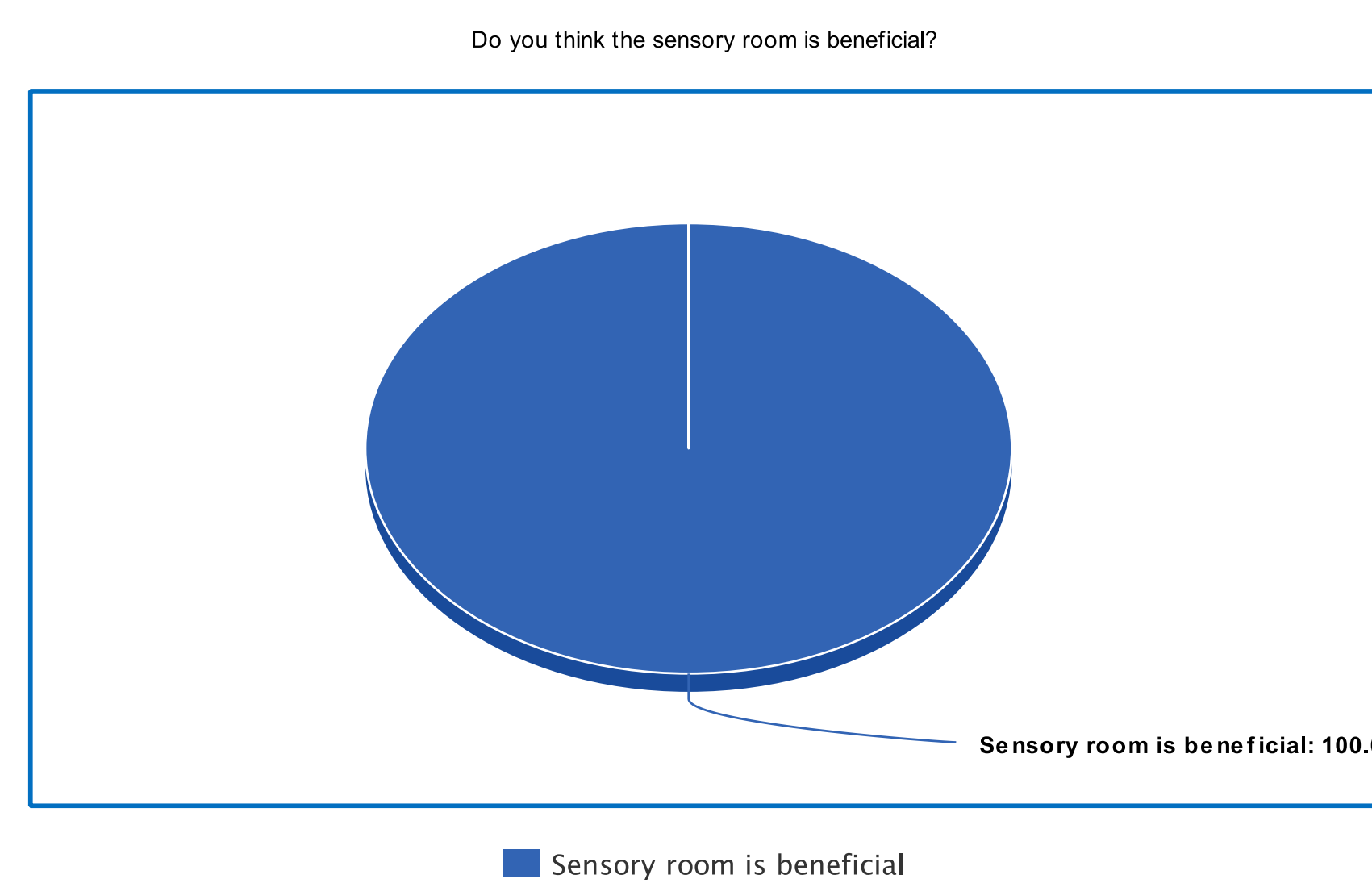
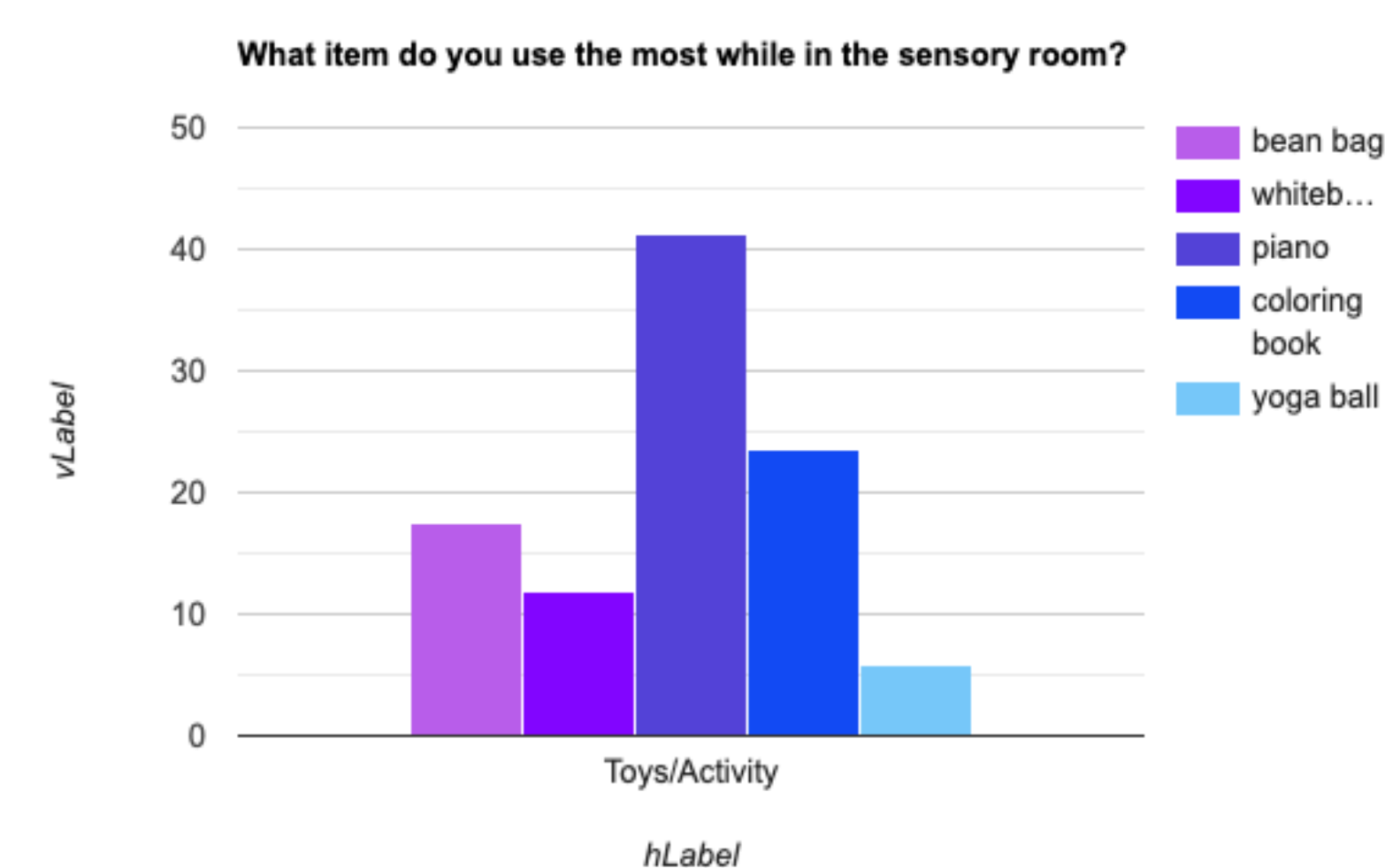
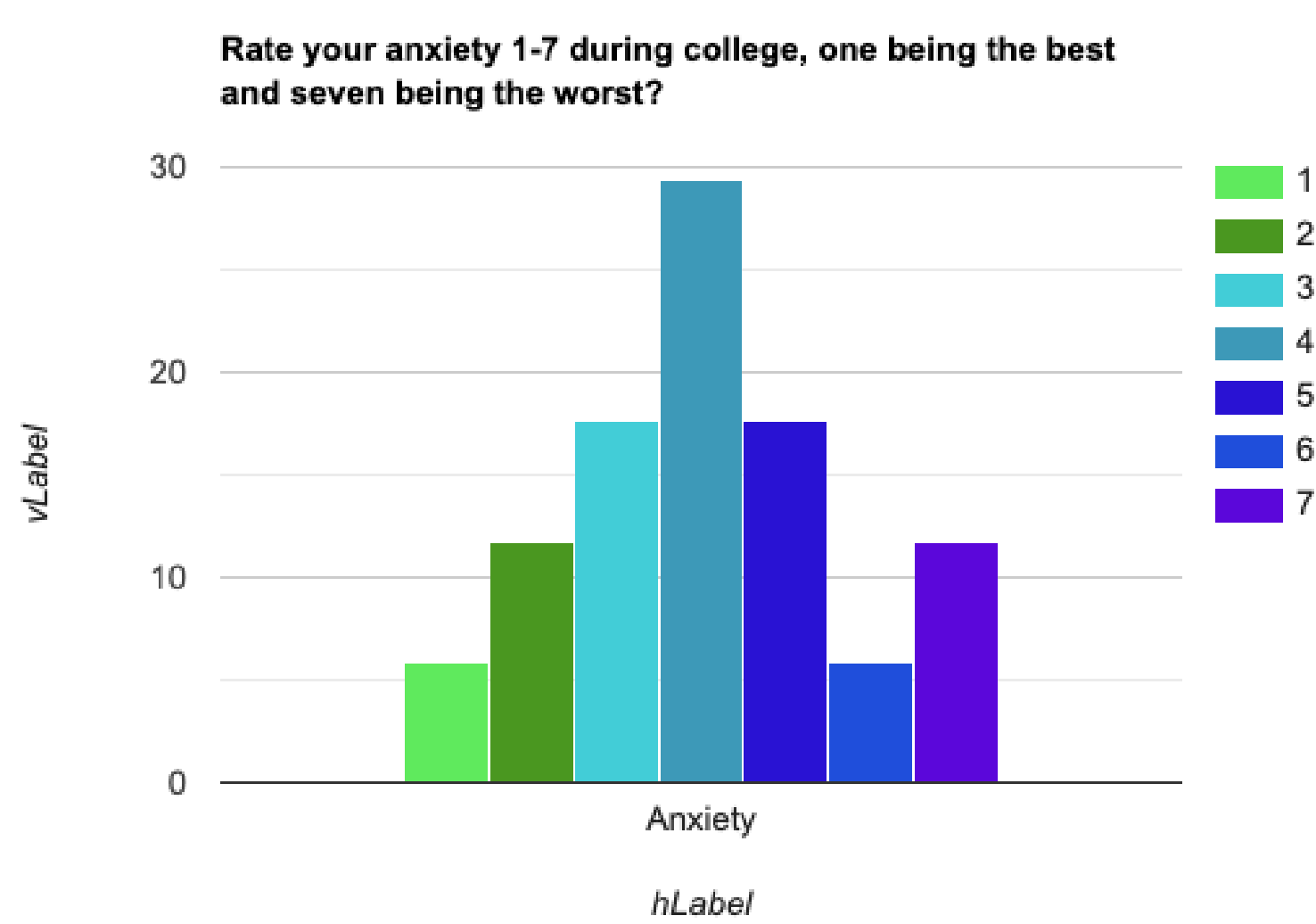
- In order from highest percentage down, almost 50% of the participants say they rarely use the sensory room and almost 30% say that they use it a few times a month.
- All participants unanimously agree that the sensory room is beneficial whether they reported using the room or not.
- Most participants say that the items they use the most are the piano and the beanbag.
- According to the survey the sensory room is most often used for relaxing, and then schoolwork, and then music.
- Most of the students reported having worse anxiety after entering college, and the majority of them reported a mild improvement after using the sensory room.
- The majority of students said that they felt the room didn't need anything added to it.
- Almost all students were already aware of Lauderdale and counseling as resources but that was it.

### Discussion:

- When asked how much the sensory room helped to improve their anxiety levels, over 2 thirds of the participants answered 3 or above on a 5 point scale.
  - Which means they believed that their anxiety was better or at least more manageable after using the sensory room.
  - The data however, is most likely skewed to the low end because the participants that never used the sensory room did not have an option to opt out of that question, so we would assume that those students would answer 1 or no improvement.
  - This doesn't mean that this is the most effective or best resource for mental health
  - It does however, mean that it successfully lowers stress and anxiety for most students that use the room, at least temporarily.
  - Even though a large majority of students reported rarely using the room, when asked if it was beneficial to have, the unanimous decision was yes.
  - However this could mean beneficial in different ways, because we were not specific with the wording of this question.
  - Therefore, this does not equate to everyone believing that the sensory room is beneficial to mental health
- According to the survey, the sensory room is most often used for relaxing, and then school work, and then music.
- These activities can all be interpreted as helpful for the mental health of college students.
  - Having a calming, relaxing place to rest during a stressful college life can definitely be beneficial
  - At the same time, using the calm environment to get work done can be relieving of stress as well
  - And of course music has been proven to help with stress and anxiety as well as many other mental health problems

### Conclusions:

Our results mean that the sensory room has been a useful tool for many students as a space to relax. However nearly half of the participants rarely use this resource. This range of room usage means that there are many different ways for students to cope with stress and while the sensory room is a beneficial source for many students other students might find other ways to manage their stress that best works for them. All participants agreed that the sensory room is a beneficial resource regardless of how often they use it which proved that while it might not be a go to resource for some students it is a beneficial resource to have around for the best interest of the majority.



### Acknowledgement:

We want to thank our professor Meg Reitz and our area coordinator, Frank Parsons, for sending out our survey.