

College Misconceptions

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Introduction

Researching a topic can never take the place of actually experiencing something, but you can find out a lot about a topic by looking at information online.

You can't research *every* aspect of college to be completely prepared, but you could still learn a lot so why isn't the difficulty of adjusting to college a thing of the past? Our group chose to focus on college misconceptions because with so much information readily available online, we want to know what areas students still end up struggling with. We wanted to gain insights on how college students' expectations of college compared to the reality and where these expectations are coming from.

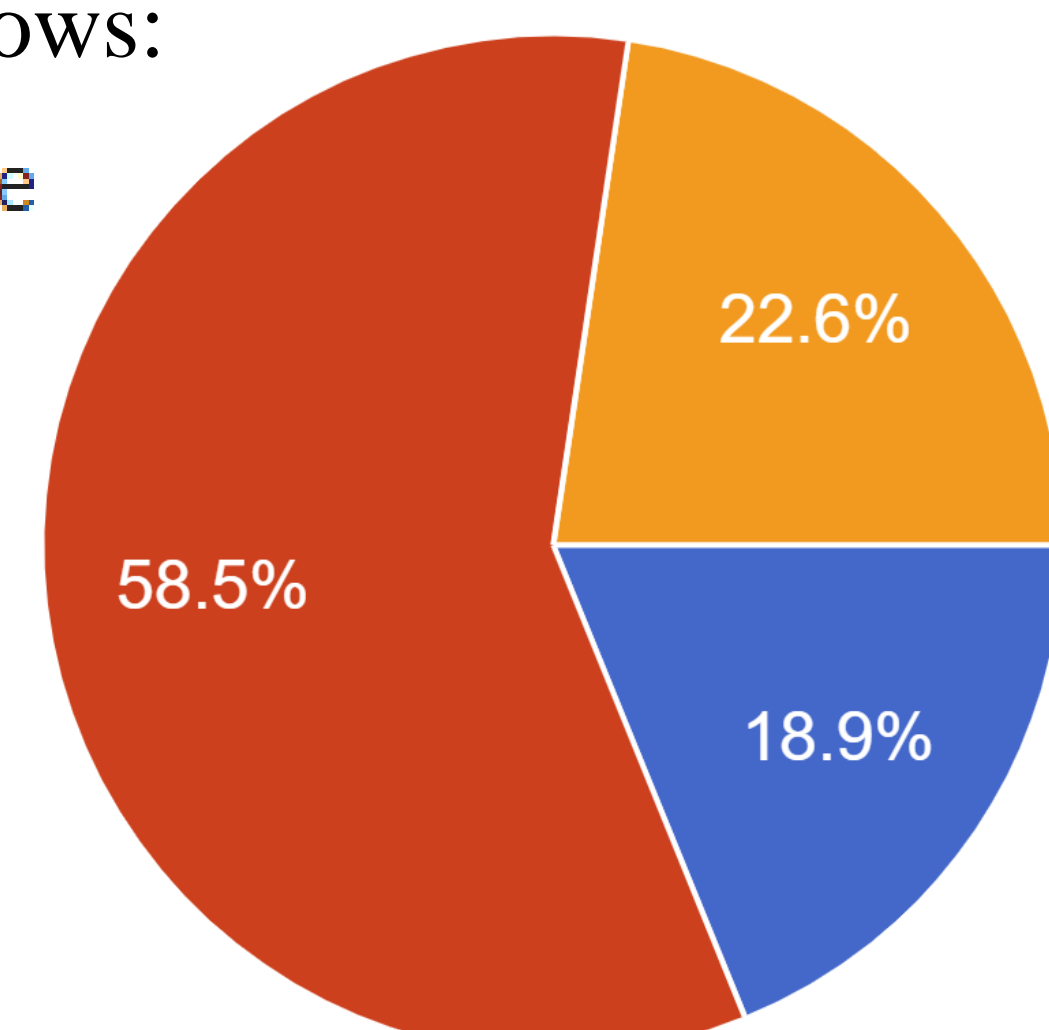


Objectives

- Compare students' expectations of college to the reality of various aspects of college life, including expectations on the demands of their course load.
- Examine any differences in college experience or expectations between community colleges and universities.
- Determine if there is any pattern to students' misconceptions based on their background such as their field of study or type of institution

The institutions our survey participants have attended are as follows:

- Only Community College
- Only University
- Both



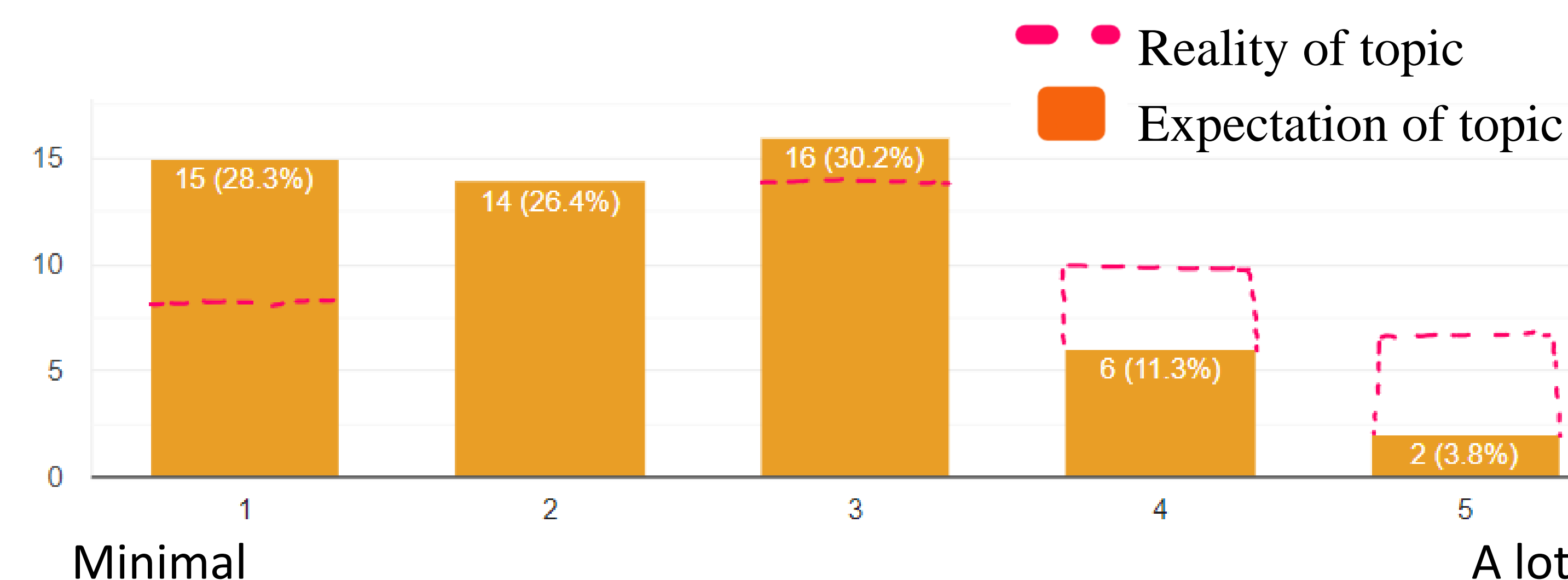
Materials and Methods

To collect data about people's college experience and how their expectations of it have changed, we created an online survey and conducted interviews asking open-ended questions in-person or through Zoom. We collected 53 survey responses and had 15 student interviewees and 5 faculty interviewees. Participants consisted of past and current students of Parkland College and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign as well as some faculty at Parkland College.

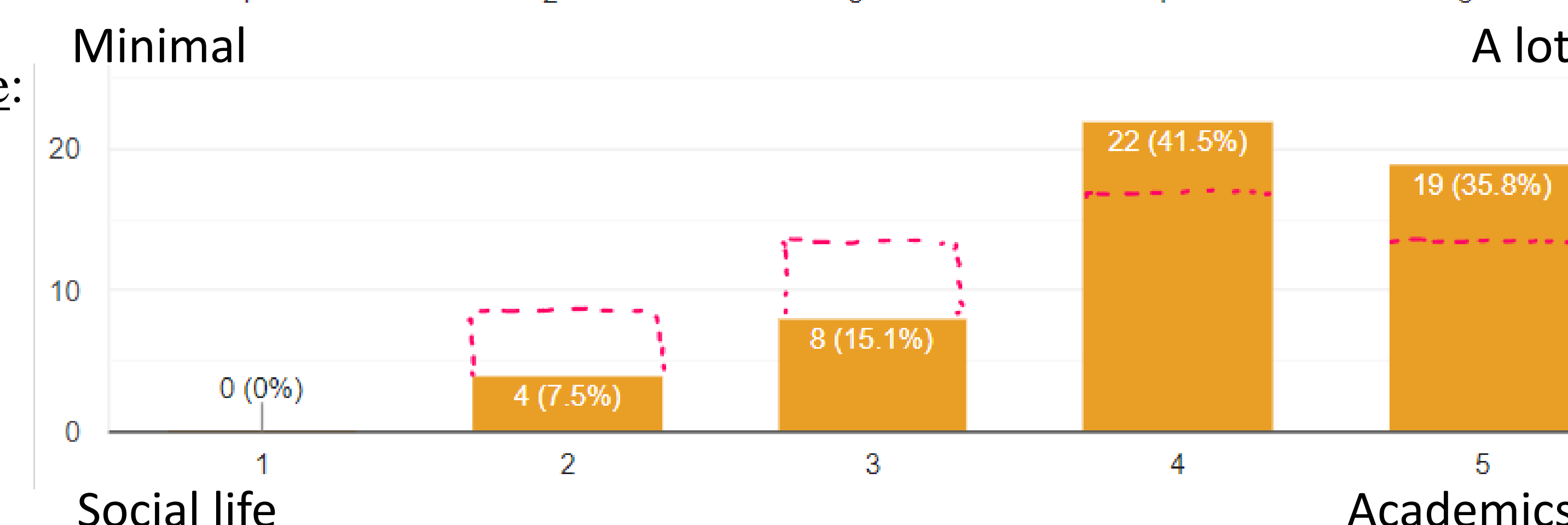
Results

- Student interviews:
 - Some community college students were surprised at how the social/ club opportunities were lacking compared to some 4-year institutions
 - The smaller community can have its advantages and can more easily offer help than bigger colleges
 - Many students shared that communicating with Professors could be difficult
 - A part of adjusting to college can be culture shock
 - Study groups are useful but can be hard to put together.
- Faculty interviews:
 - Varying adjustments have needed to be made to incoming students since the pandemic
 - A structured way to help students develop better study habits would be useful
 - Success doesn't look one way.
- Survey Data:
 - Most students had a different amount of workload than expected, but it varied between more or less than expected.
 - Socializing can be more difficult than expected despite having in-person classes due to differences in background
 - Many student's college expectations came from friends or family and/ or social media more than their own research
- Graphs on the topics of:

Amount of free-time students would have:



Prioritizing academics and social life:



Conclusion

Overall, the survey and interviews we collected were very informative. We expected a fair amount of disparities between expectations and reality in the survey and this was reflected in our data. People were less social than they had imagined themselves and students generally found their peers to be more approachable than they had expected. The expectations on how social a campus would be varied significantly compared to the expectation of how much academic support would be offered, which varied little. We had no obvious inverse correlation in expectations versus reality in any of our questions. For further research on this topic, we suggest it would be good to examine if there's any trends in these topics depending on students' field of study, which would be possible with a larger sample size.

Something notable from our interviews is that for some students, the difficulties in socializing came more from differences in cross cultural communication than from how lively a campus was.

These differences could lie in body language, paralinguistics, or even in the dialect used by that community. Cultural anthropologist Linda Light notes that enculturation in a community takes place through these types of non-verbal communications (Light 2020). From both interviews and surveys, students shared media was something that influenced their expectations of college. Another venue to further look into the topic of college expectations could be the impact of social media on students' general expectations of college and/ or themselves.

References

Perspectives: An Open Invitation to Cultural Anthropology, 2nd edition. Nina Brown, Thomas McIlwraith, and Laura Tubelle de González (editors). Arlington, Virginia: American Anthropological Association, 2020.

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<https://library.parkland.edu/>
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