



EDUCATION JUSTICE PROJECT
an initiative of the University of Illinois

DEI Committee Survey 2024

Results summary by
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on behalf of EJP's DEI Team

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Introduction

EJP's Mission Statement

The mission of the Education Justice Project is to build a model college in prison program that demonstrates the positive effects of higher education on incarcerated students, their families, the communities to which they return, the host institution, and society as a whole.

Our vision is a more humane and just society, sustained through education and critical awareness. Learn more about the Education Justice Project at educationjustice.net.

DEI's Mission Statement

We recognize that in order to build a model college-in-prison program we must honor the value and dignity of all EJP members.

We commit to individual and organizational action to build respect, dignity, fairness, caring, equity, and self-esteem in our communities.

Survey Goals

We aim to conduct this survey biannually to answer key DEI questions.

We are interested in examining:

1. **The demographic profile of EJP**
2. **Whether EJP spaces are inclusive, equitable, and safe, and**
3. **What EJP can do to improve the inclusivity, equity, and safety in its spaces.**

We plan to conduct this survey every 2 years, and our next survey will be released in Spring 2026.

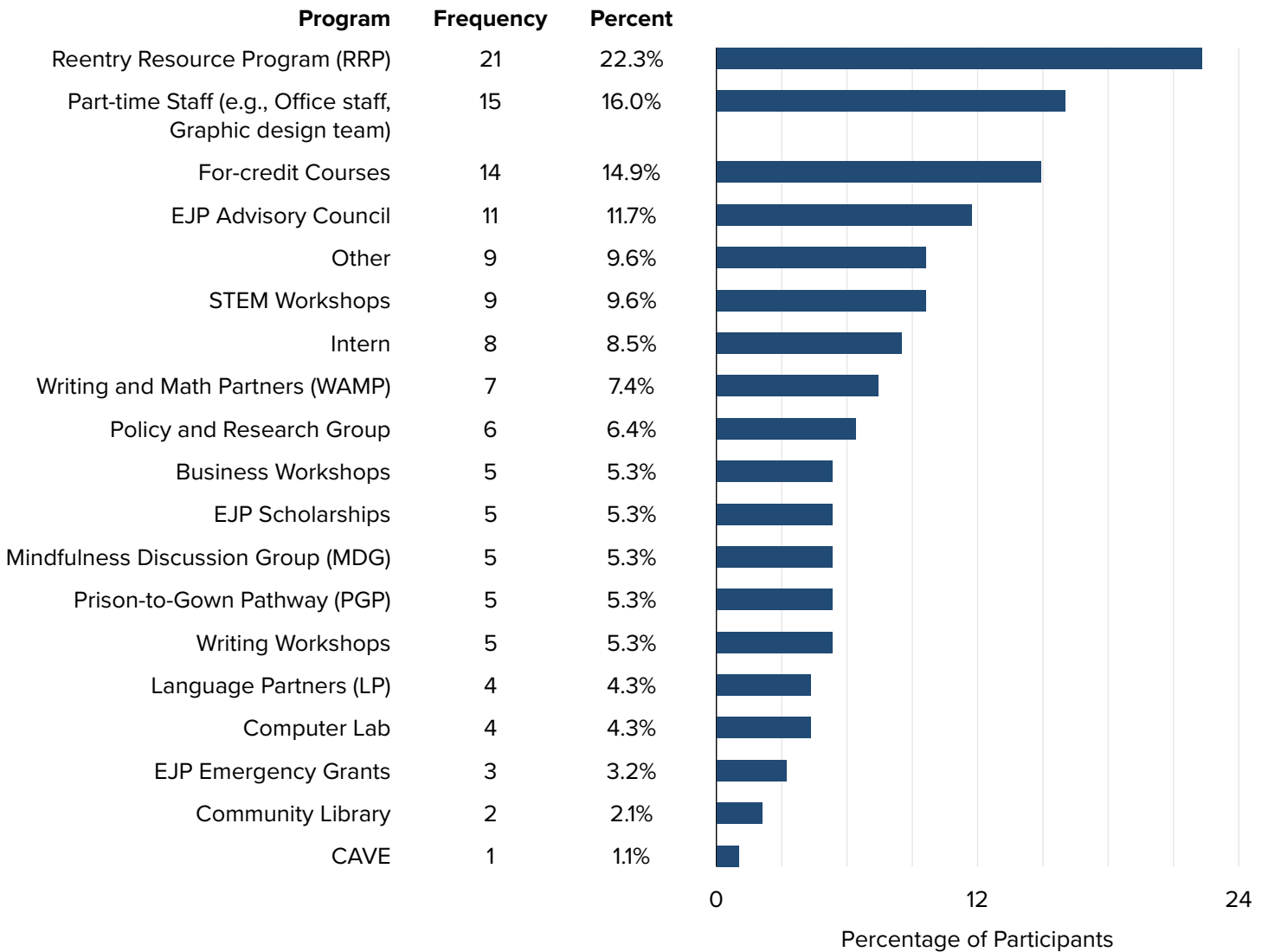
Sample Characteristics

94 respondents (outside members) completed the 2024 survey between April 20 – May 20, 2024.

Roles in EJP

EJP Programs

Participants represented the following EJP programs (note that percentages do not add up to 100, because participants can be involved in multiple programs):

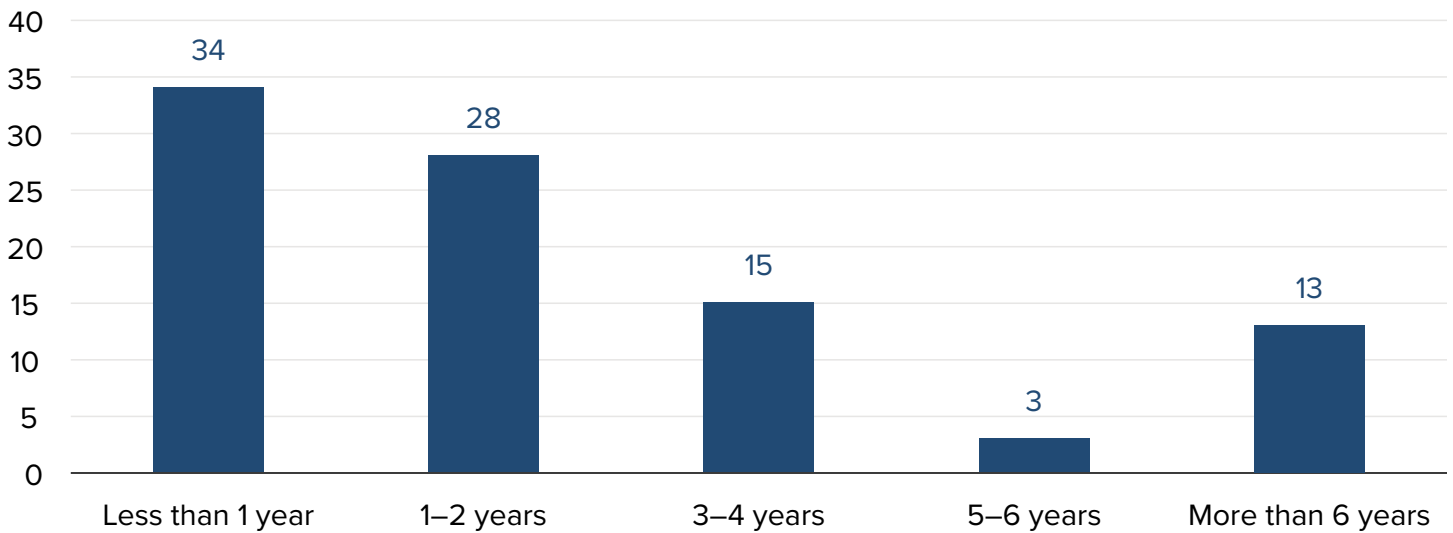


Leadership Roles

21 participants (22.3% of the sample) held a leadership position in EJP at the time of the survey (e.g., Coordinator, Director).

Length of Membership

Participants ranged from 1 year or less to More than 6 years of involvement in EJP. The following table shows the distribution of the length of involvement:



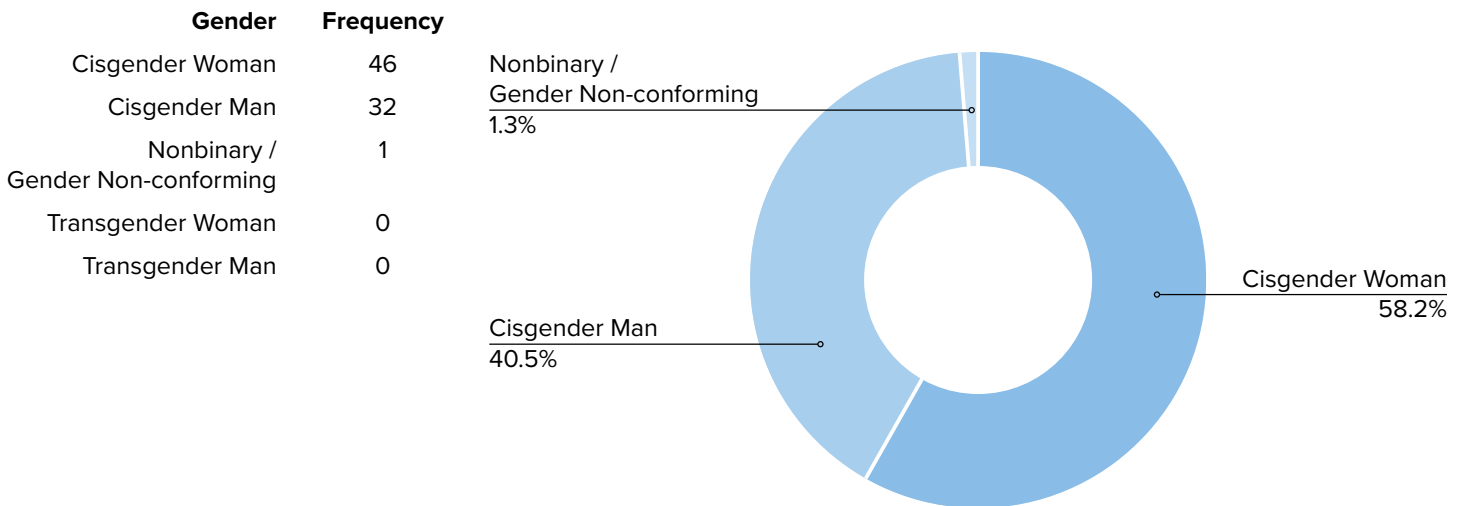
Demographics

Age

Participants ranged in age from 18 to 86 years. The average age in the sample was 38.5 years.

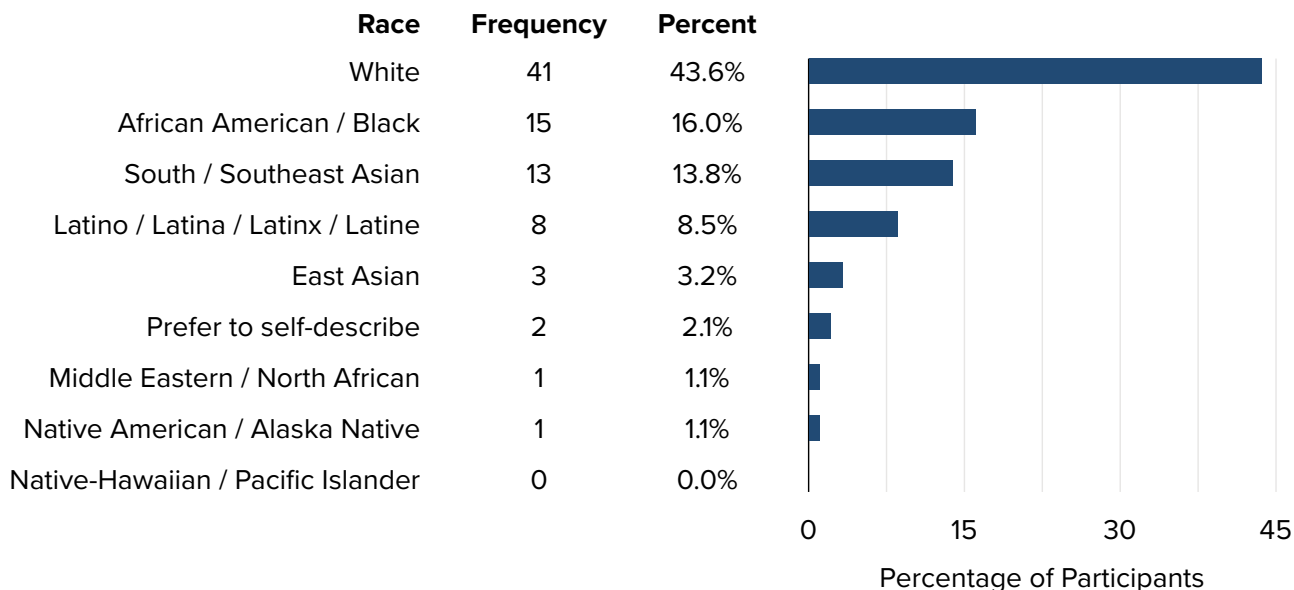
Gender

The following chart shows the distribution of gender in the sample.



Race and Ethnicity

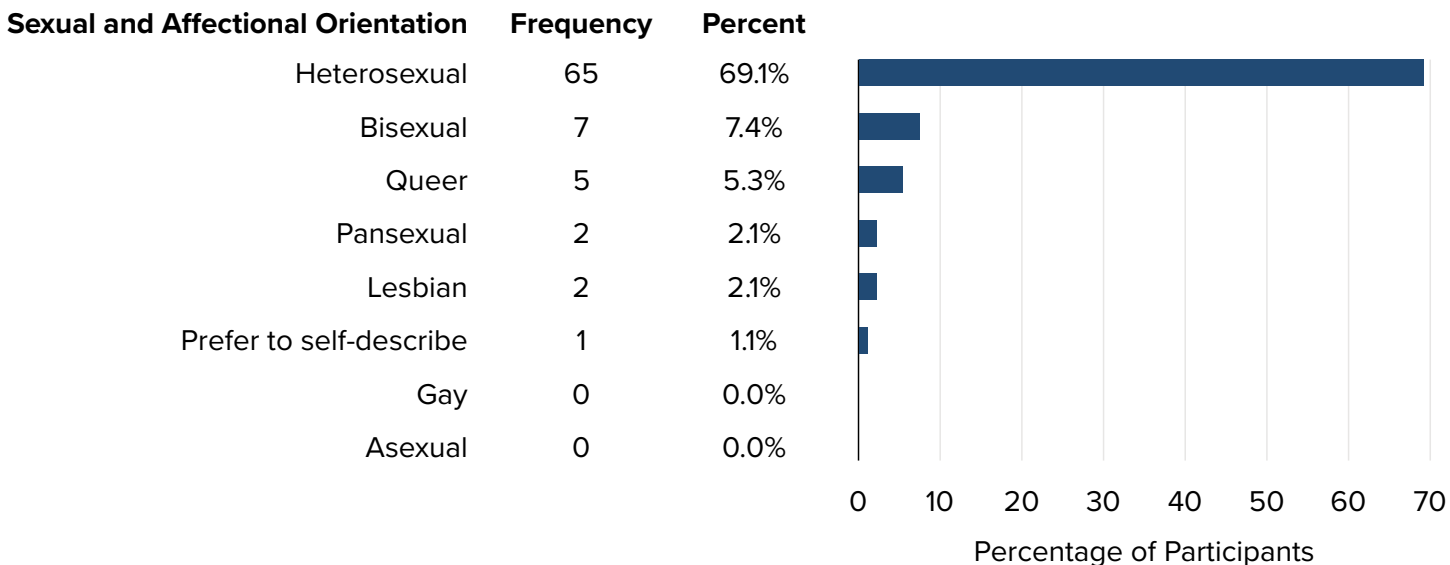
The following table shows the distribution of racial and ethnic identities in the sample. Percentages do not add up to 100, because participants were able to select more than one option. The 2 participants who chose to self-describe identified as Asian American and Hispanic (Spain):



In total, 3 participants (3.8% of those who responded to this question) identified with more than one race or ethnicity.

Sexual Orientation

The following table shows the distribution of sexual orientation in the sample. Percentages do not add up to 100, because participants were able to select more than one option:

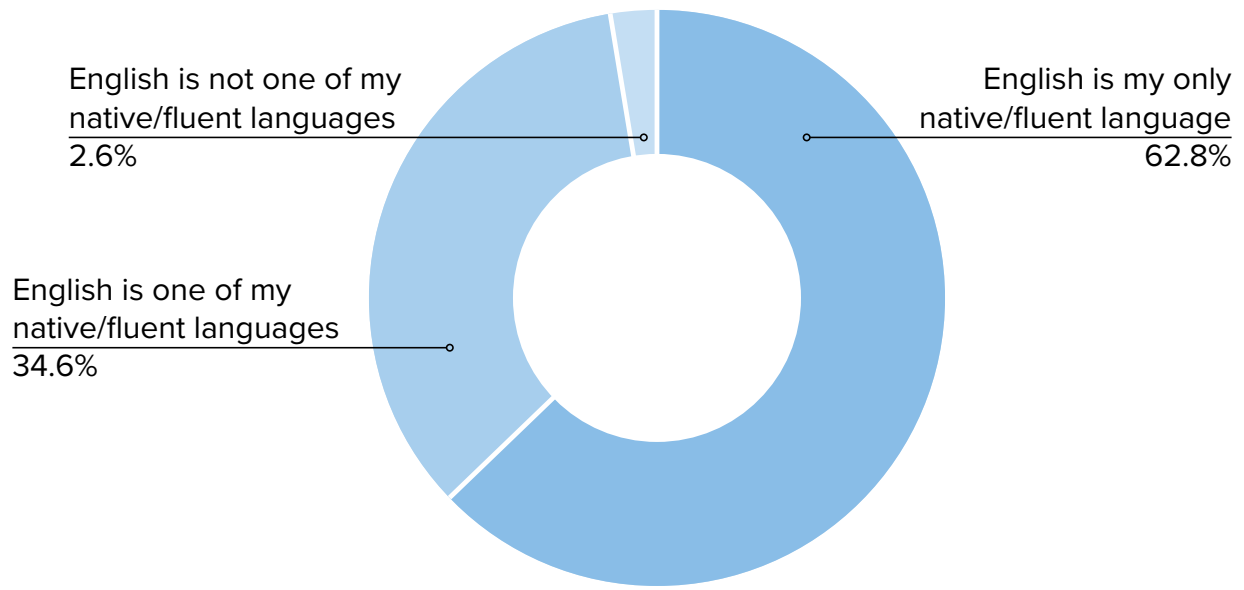


First Generation College Students

17 participants (21.5% of those who responded to this question) are first-generation college students.

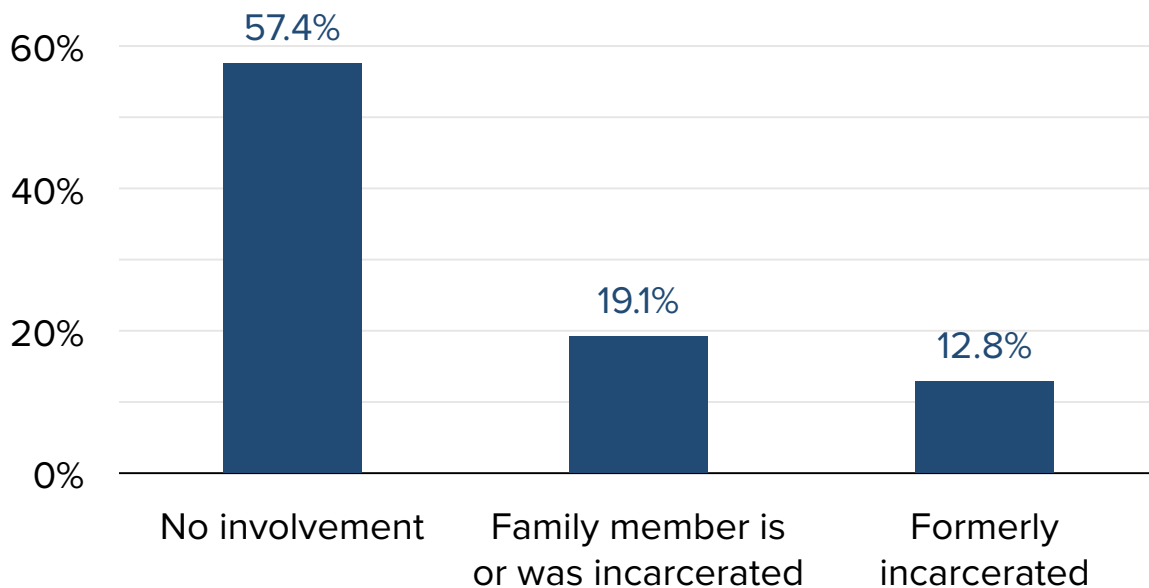
English Proficiency

The following table shows the distribution of English proficiency in the sample:



Criminal Justice System Experience

The following table shows members' extent of experience with the criminal justice system. Percentages do not add up to 100, because participants were able to select more than one option:



Disability

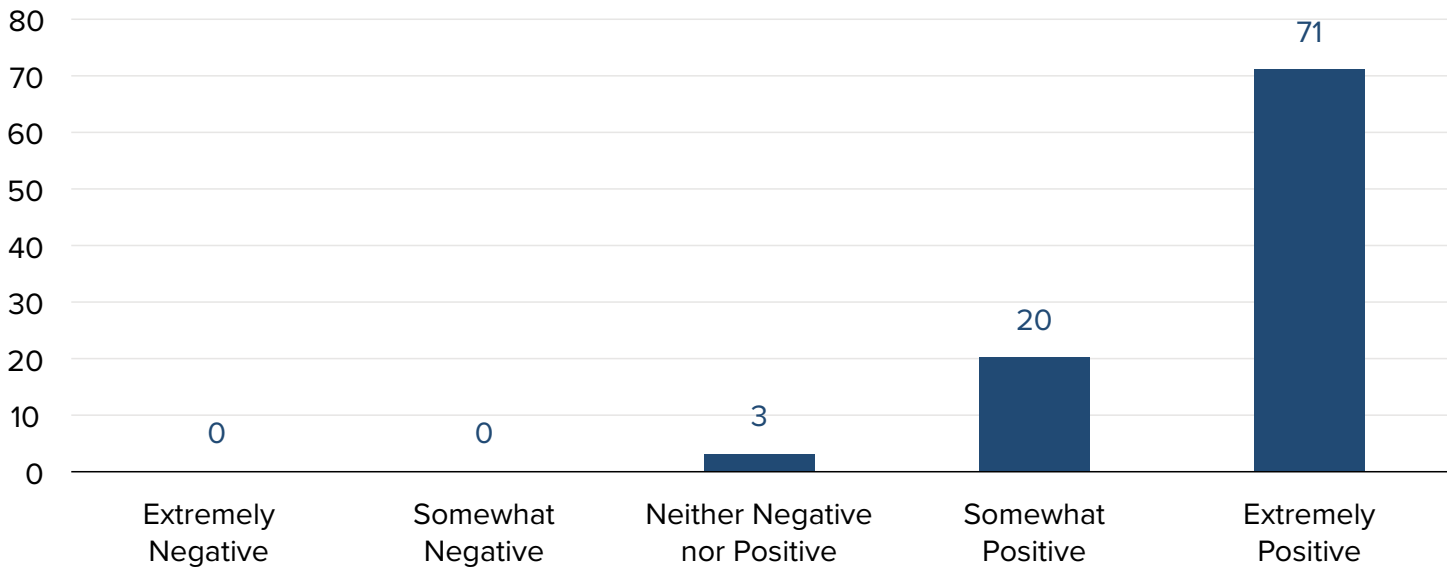
17 (21.0%) participants identified as having a disability and 4 (4.9%) participants preferred to self-describe.

Overall Satisfaction with EJP

Satisfaction

Overall Satisfaction Ratings

Participants responded to the question, “Overall, how positive/negative has your experience been in EJP?” on a scale from 1 to 5. The average rating was 4.72.



Demographic Differences in Satisfaction Ratings

We examined differences in overall satisfaction ratings by:

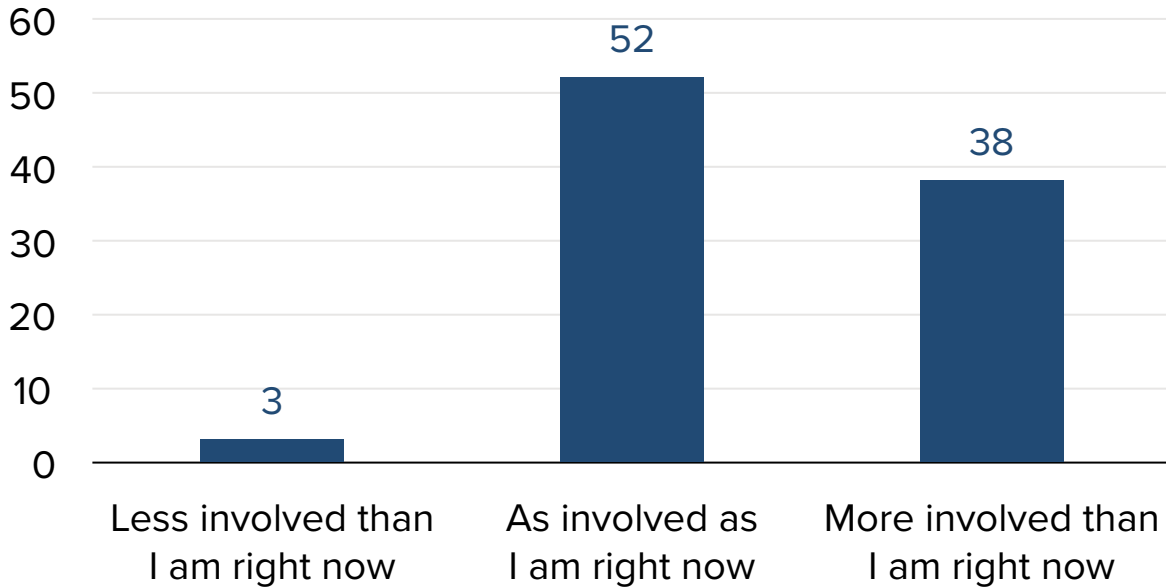
- gender (comparing experiences of cisgender men, cisgender women, and genderqueer or non-conforming participants)
- race (comparing the experiences of White participants to those of participants of color)
- sexual and affectional orientation (comparing the experiences of heterosexual participants to those of participants with another identity)
- first-generation status (comparing the experiences of first-generation college students to those of non-first-generation students)
- criminal justice system involvement (comparing the experiences of those who have been incarcerated or whose family members have been incarcerated to the experiences of those who do not have an incarceration history)
- disability status (comparing the experiences of participants with a disability to those of participants without a disability)

There were no statistically significant differences in ratings of overall satisfaction by gender, race, sexual orientation, first-generation status, criminal justice system involvement, or disability status.

Desired Level of EJP Involvement

Overall Involvement Ratings

Participants responded to the question, “How much would you like to be involved with EJP?”

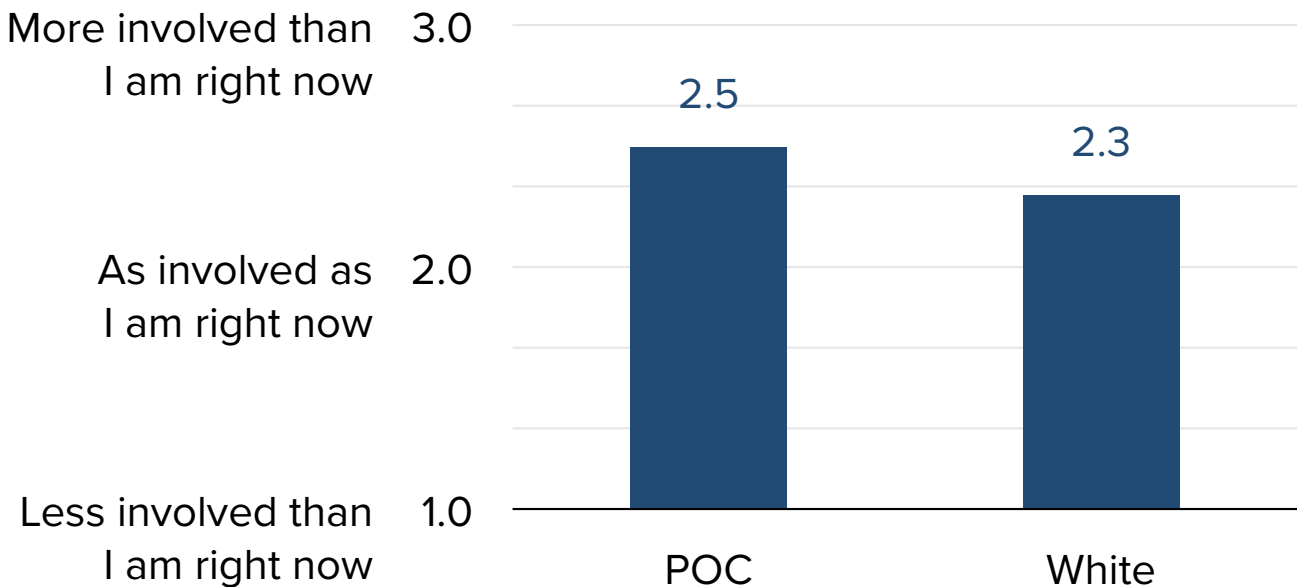


Demographic Differences in EJP Involvement

We examined differences in EJP involvement by gender, race, sexual orientation, first-generation status, criminal justice system involvement, and disability status.

There were no statistically significant differences in the desired level of EJP involvement by criminal justice experience, gender, sexual orientation, first-generation status, or disability status.

There was a significant difference in desired EJP involvement by race. Participants of color wanted to be significantly more involved in EJP activities than White participants ($p = .026$).

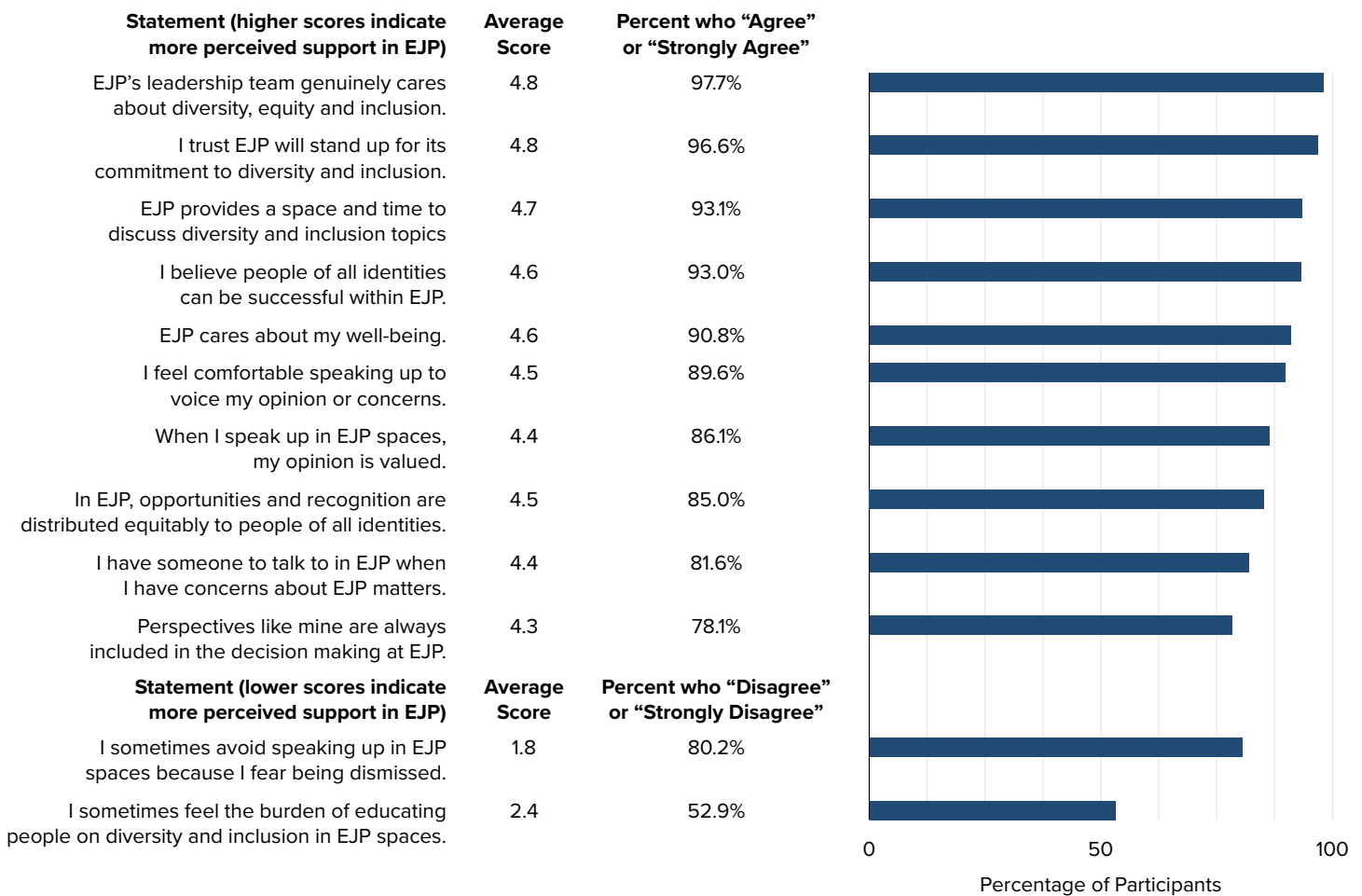


Support and Safety in EJP

Support

Overall Support Ratings

Participants rated their level of agreement with a series of statements indicating how supported they feel as members of EJP. Each item was rated on a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The following table shows the distribution of responses:



The 12 support items listed above had high reliability when combined into a scale ($\alpha = 0.8$), so we calculated the average score across all items. On a scale from 1 to 5, in which higher scores indicate participants feeling more supported, the average score was 4.5.

Demographic Differences in Support Ratings

We examined differences in average support ratings by gender, race, first-generation status, criminal justice system experience, and disability status.

There was a significant difference in support by sexual orientation. Sexual minority participants reported higher sense of support ($M = 4.7$) than straight participants ($M = 4.4, p = .03$).

Welcoming Environments for Different Identities

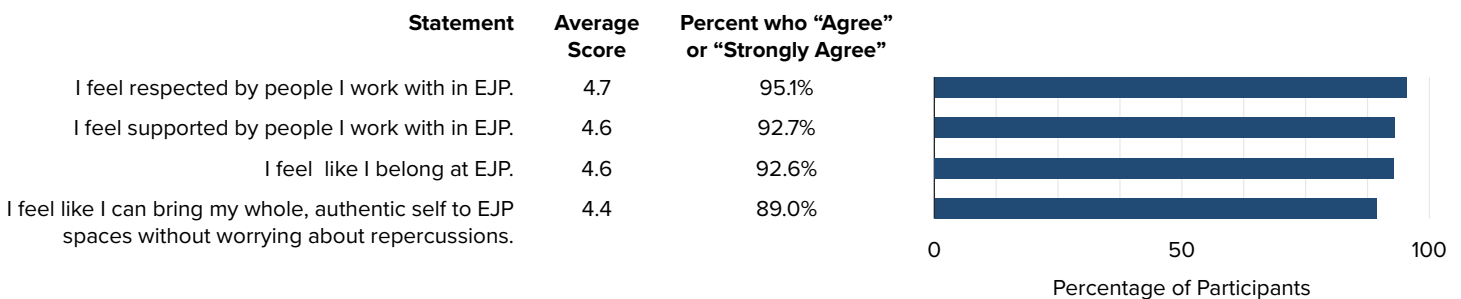
We asked participants, “Are there any identity groups that you think would not feel welcome in EJP spaces?” The following is a list of verbatim responses from participants who identified an identity:

- Non-English speaking members may have some difficulties initially but I believe it is only because we have not had many primarily non-English as a first language students. To my knowledge, there is not a professional translator. However, I firmly believe if this becomes a challenge that the EJP curriculum and team would be more than welcoming to reach that person so they can experience the space to its fullest.
- Possibly politically conservative group members
- This is just on the horizon, but having been involved in a few conversations about Palestine with RGI membership, I worry that Jews (I am Jewish) may end up feeling uncomfortable or even unwelcomed in certain contexts. This may be inevitable, given the unique challenge of understanding Israel as both a Jewish nation and not representative of individual Jews. But I’d be remiss if I didn’t mention it.
- Unsure, in general people who do not believe in our mission

Safety

Psychological Safety Reports

Participants rated their level of agreement with a series of statements indicating how psychologically safe they feel in EJP spaces. Each item was rated on a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The following table shows the distribution of responses:



The 4 psychological safety items listed above had high reliability when combined into a scale ($\alpha = .89$), so we calculated the average score across all items. On a scale from 1 to 5, in which higher scores indicate participants feeling more psychologically safe, the average score was 4.57.

Demographic Differences in Psychological Safety

We examined differences in average psychological safety ratings by gender, race, sexual orientation, first-generation status, criminal justice system involvement, and disability status.

There were no statistically significant differences in average ratings of psychological safety across any of these demographics.

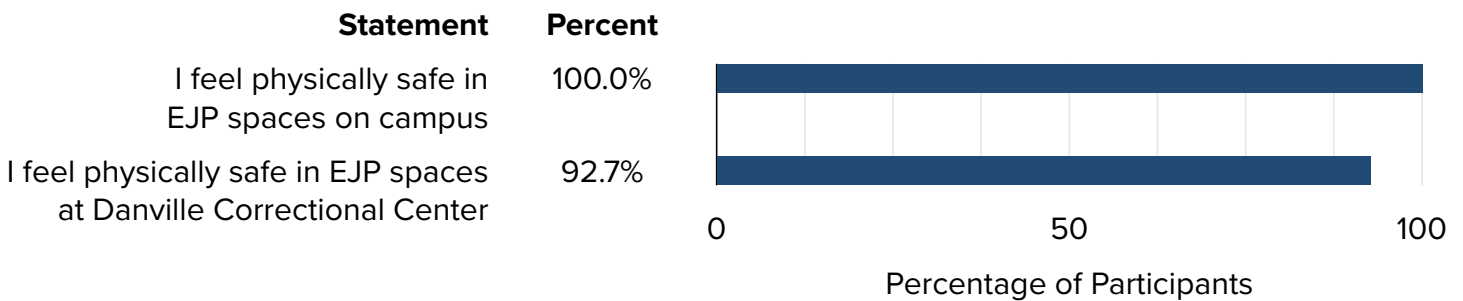
Physical Safety Ratings

82 participants (100% of those who responded to the question) agree with the statement, “I feel physically safe in EJP spaces on campus.”

38 participants (92.7% of those who responded to the question) agree with the statement, “I feel physically safe in EJP spaces at Danville Correctional Center.” (**Note:** Participants who do not enter DCC did not answer this question.)

The remaining 3 participants (7.3%) disagreed with this statement, providing the following explanations:

- There is a physical unease by being a women in the space. Only in the sense that I feel overly scrutinized and supervised by correctional officers.
- I am still not comfortable going out to Danville by myself. I think the EJP space within the classroom building is fantastic, and I feel respected and SAFE in those spaces. But crossing the yard to go into the education building—I still feel insecure as a femme- presenting woman (being looked at up and down, or feeling vulnerable without a more experienced EJP member)
- DCC staff hostility



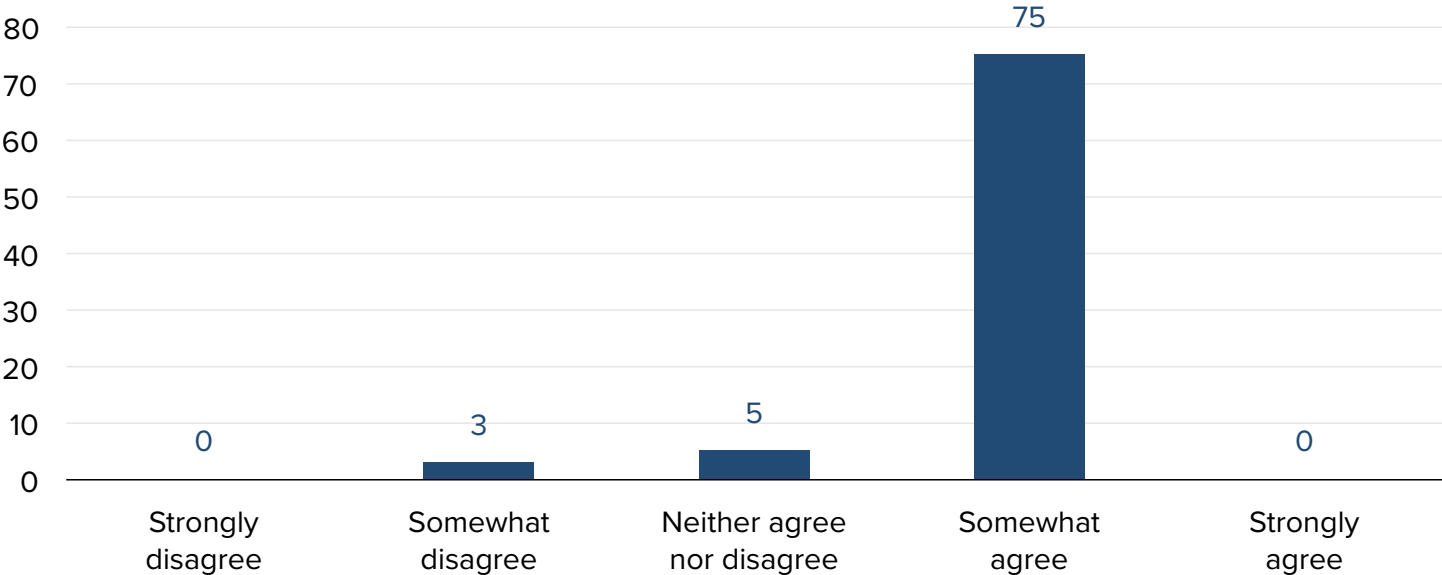
Specific Incidents of Harassment, Microaggressions, or Bullying

Comfort Reporting an Incident

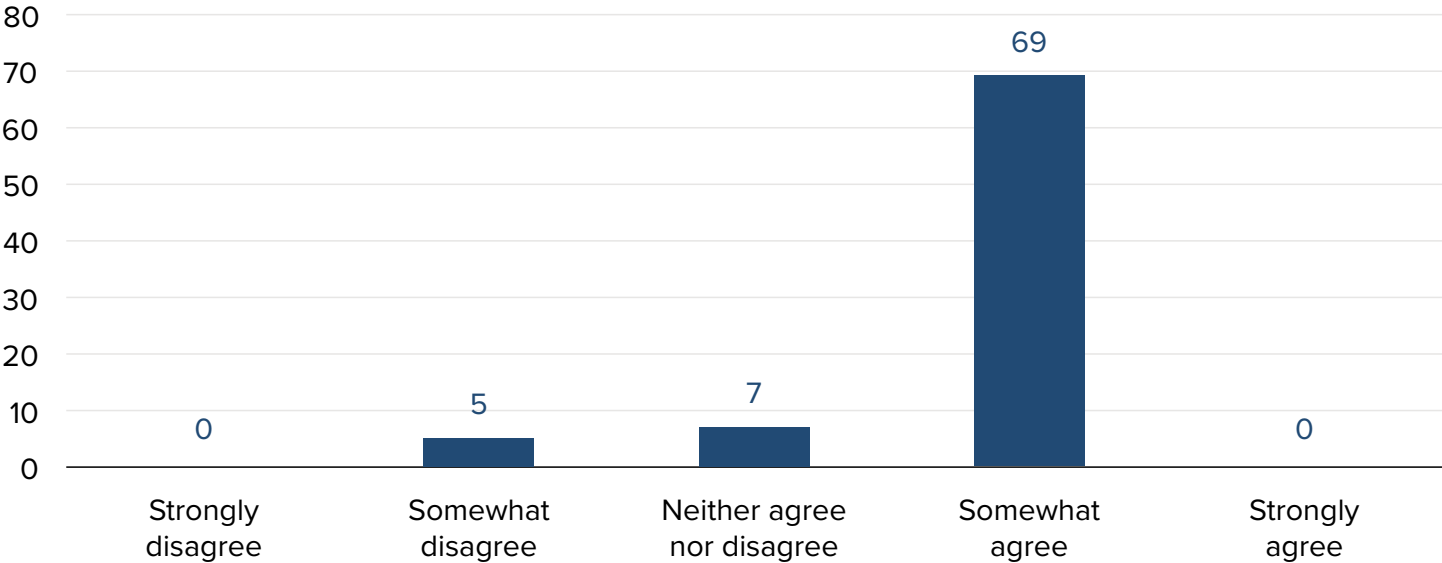
Overall Comfort Ratings

Participants rated their level of agreement with the following statements:

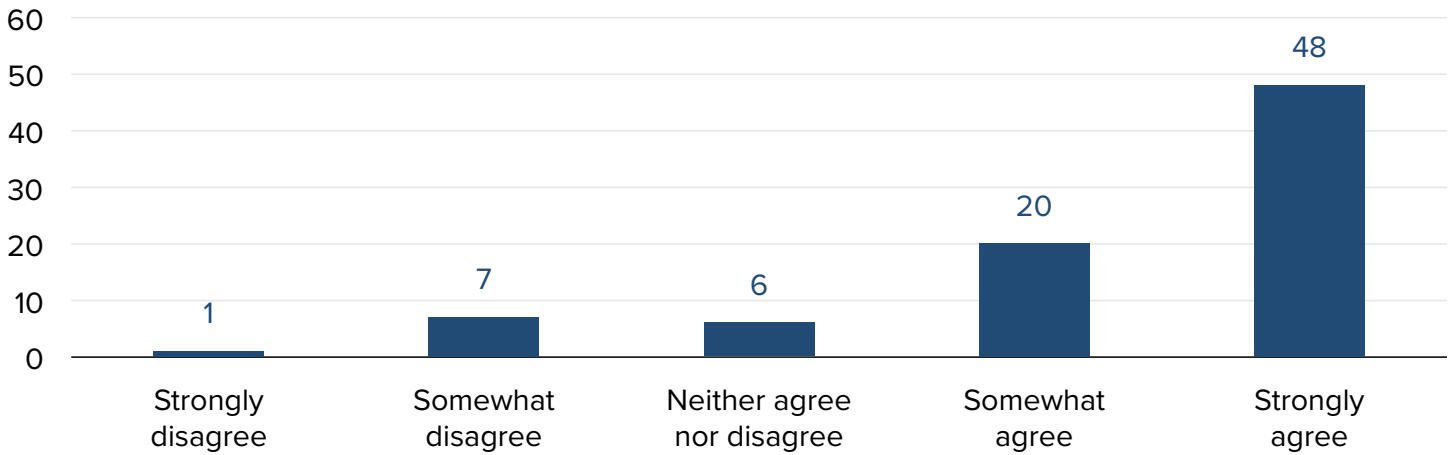
“I would feel comfortable reporting an incident of harassment, microaggressions, or bullying to my supervisor.” The following chart shows the distribution of responses.



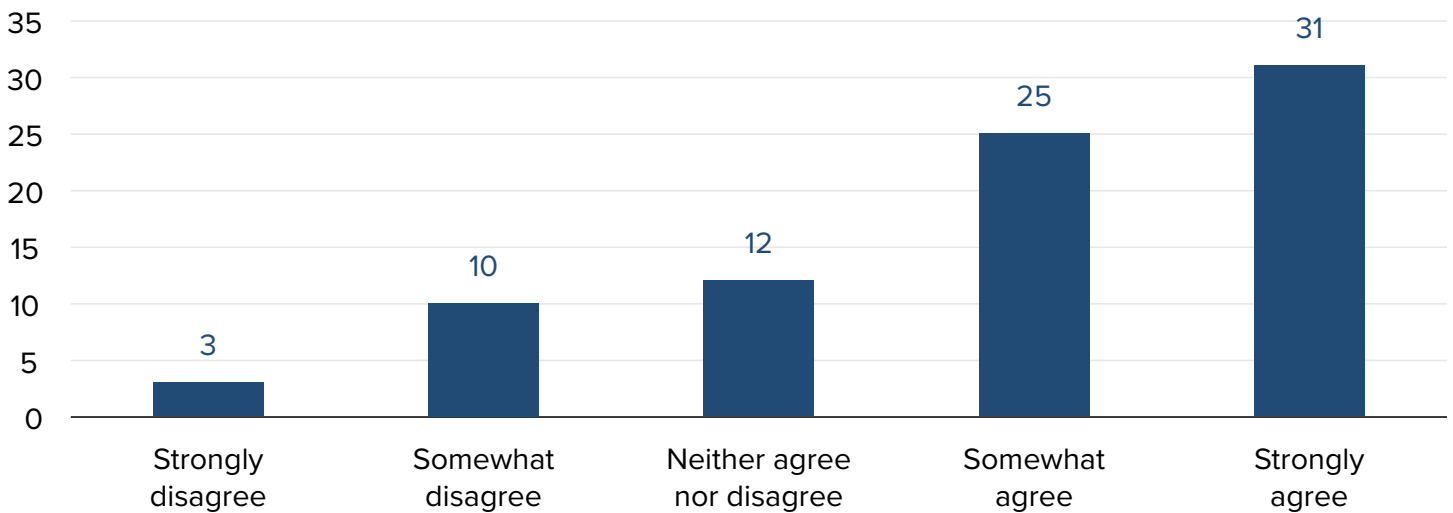
“I would feel comfortable reporting an incident of harassment, microaggressions, or bullying using the EJP Grievance Process.” The following chart shows the distribution of responses.



“I would know how to report an incident of harassment, microaggressions, or bullying to my supervisor.” The following chart shows the distribution of responses.



“I would know how to report an incident of harassment, microaggressions, or bullying using the EJP Grievance Process.” The following chart shows the distribution of responses.



Demographic Differences in Comfort Ratings

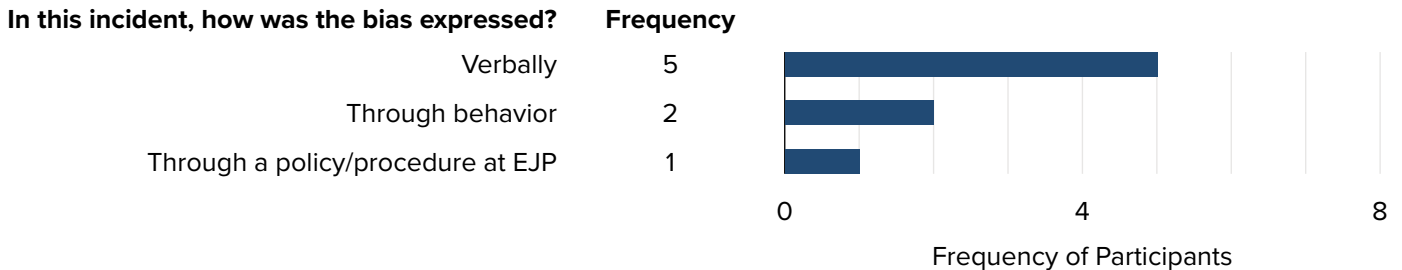
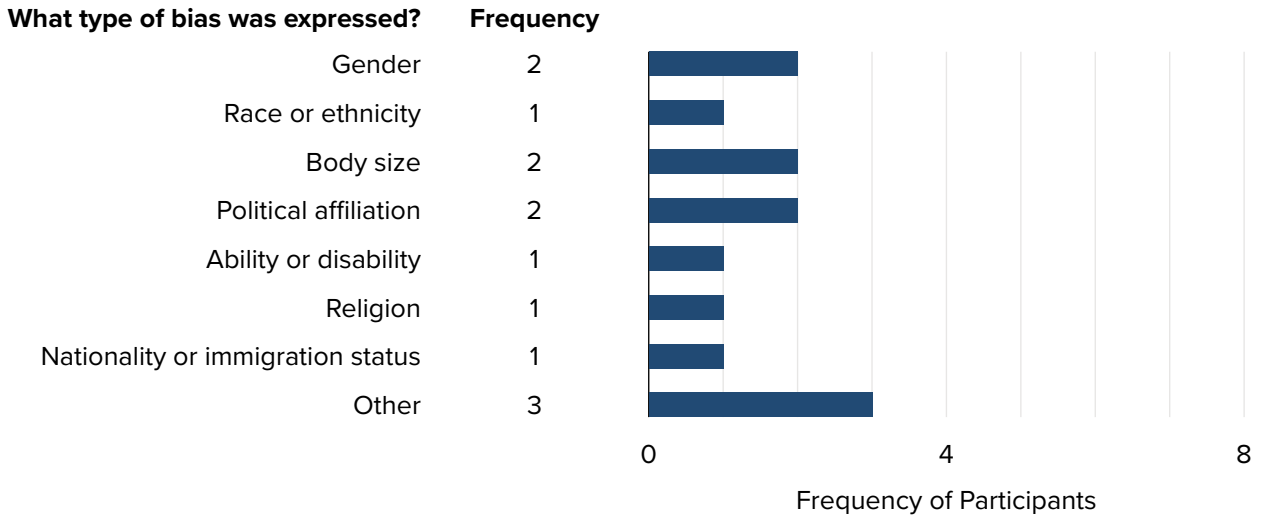
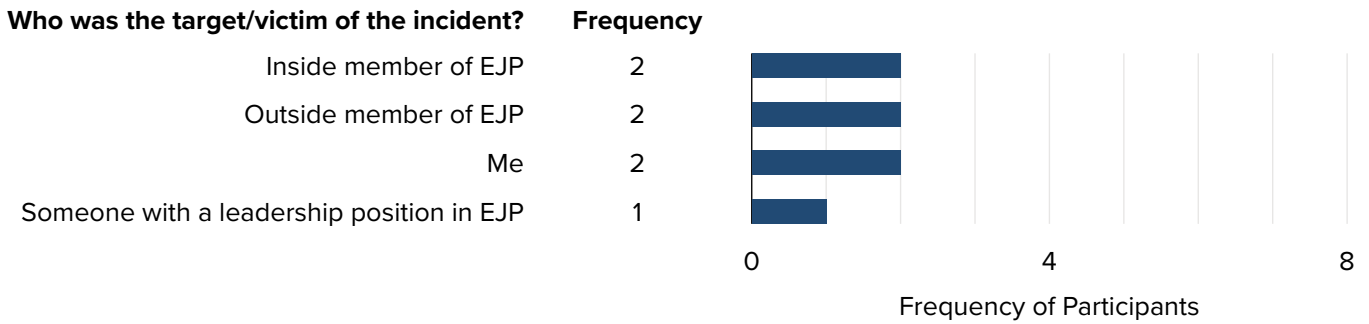
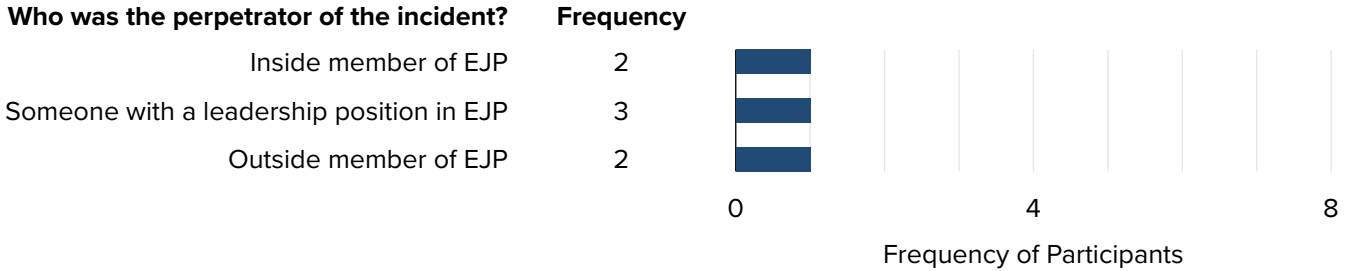
We examined differences in participants’ level of comfort reporting an incident by gender, race, sexual orientation, first-generation status, criminal justice system involvement, and disability status.

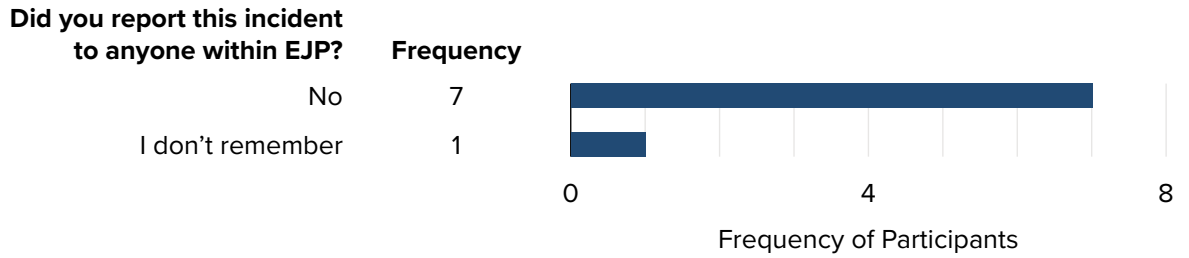
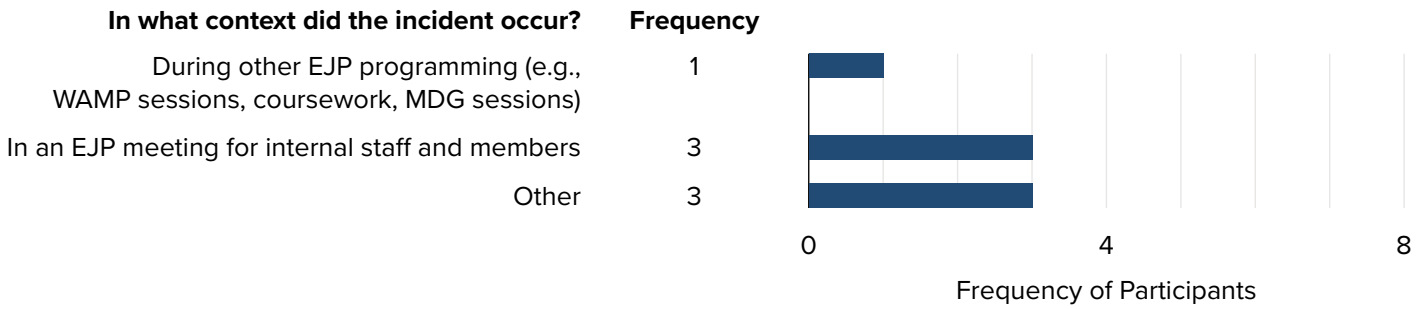
There were no statistically significant differences in ratings of comfort across any of these demographics.

Reports of Specific Incidents

Participants were asked, “Have you ever experienced, witnessed, or heard about an incident of harassment, microaggressions, or bullying in EJP spaces in the past year?” Of 83 participants who responded to the question, 8 (9.6%) answered “Yes.”

In a series of follow-up questions, these 8 participants reported the following characteristics of 7 incidents:





Three participants provided the following comment in an open-ended response:

- There was an incident where a past member of the office staff team was talking about an office assistant behind their back. I am not sure what specifically was said, but the situation was resolved and that person no longer works here. I was not aware of what had occurred until the person who was doing the harm had been asked to leave her position.
- Give and take in discussion, “kidding”
- DCC, correctional officer targeting women EJP volunteers about their clothing and denying the EJP member entry for the day.

Additional Thoughts

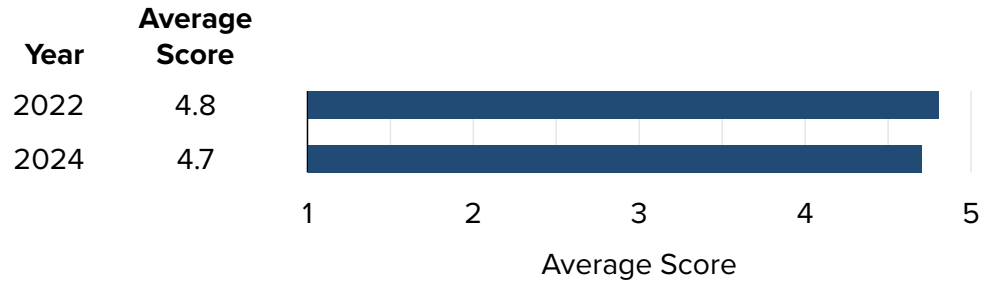
Finally, participants had the opportunity to provide any final thoughts in an open-ended text box. The following is a list of the verbatim responses:

- This is one of the most inclusive environments I have been
- The incident involved being ignored and not responded to by a coordinator. It felt more difficult to report given that no particular action occurred.
- Thank you for doing this. Self-examination can only strengthen EJP.
- Some of my “somewhat agree” responses come from a combination of being new at EJP and being a white, cis-gendered male who is not system-impacted. And I think this is fine. It will take me some time to recognize how to balance listening with speaking in a way that honors everyone’s experience. Also, a quick note on my answer two pages forward about my involvement with the criminal justice system. I spent a few days, twice, in jail. I do not consider myself “formerly incarcerated” but it’s also not true to say I have “no involvement” with the criminal justice system.
- Keep doing the good in this world EJP
- I think EJP has a powerful platform and network, that could be used to spread more social activism beyond the specific program to address what is occurring in the world right now.
- I really appreciate the time the community takes to listen and educate
- I appreciate the dedication and effort EJP places in their programs and teachings to consider the importance and implement actions consistent with DEI initiatives.
- I appreciate our group’s emphasis on mutual respect in our meetings
- For the questions on which I replied, “Somewhat Agree,” I have never had an identity-based issue with EJP per se, but I do feel that, as a grad student, my values are not necessarily heard when they conflict with other personal values. Namely, as a student, I need experience to prepare for jobs and life. Also, because I am a student, it can be difficult to get paid in ways that do not conflict with my appointment. As such, I would like EJP to be able to hear when someone asks to volunteer for a position. I respect EJP’s desire to make sure everyone is valued and well compensated; for me, experience can be a kind of compensation, as can the value of the work we do at DCC.
- EJP has been swift in addressing any inkling of problems within the organization. It makes me feel heard and safe.
- Any negative experiences I’ve had have been with the guards at Danville, which seems to be consistent with others’ experiences

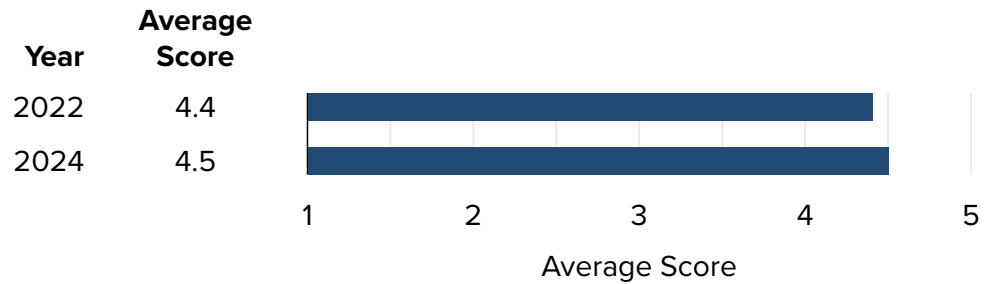
Comparison Across Years (2022 vs. 2024)

As of May 2022 – 236; as of May 2024 – 228

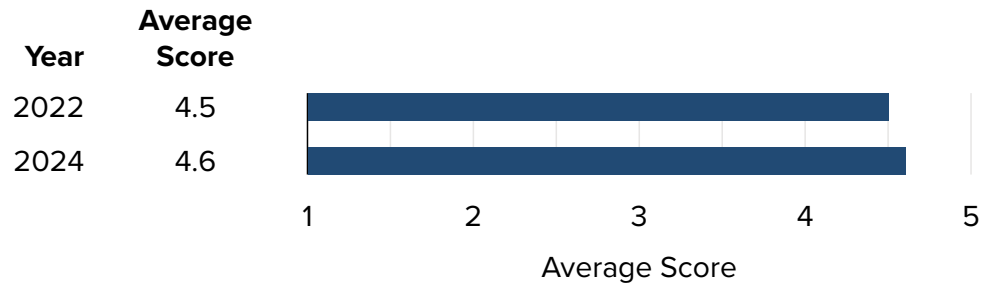
Satisfaction



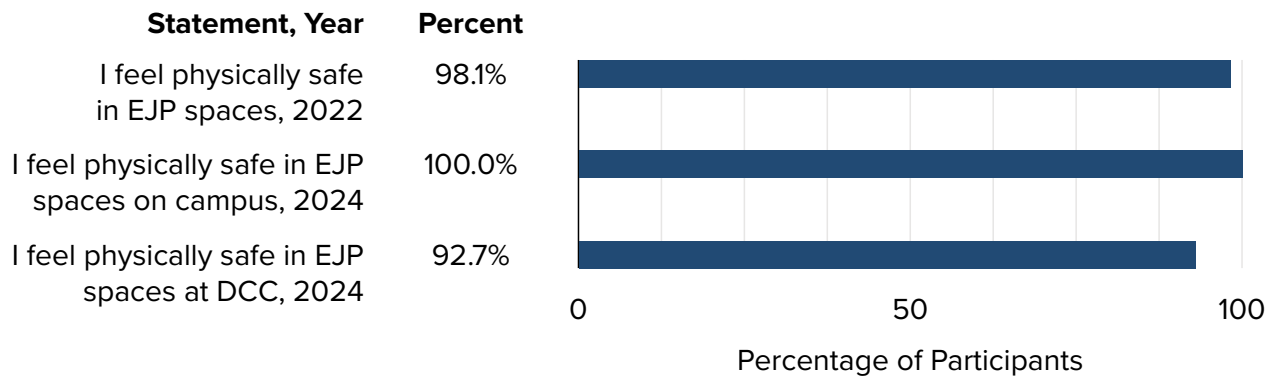
Support



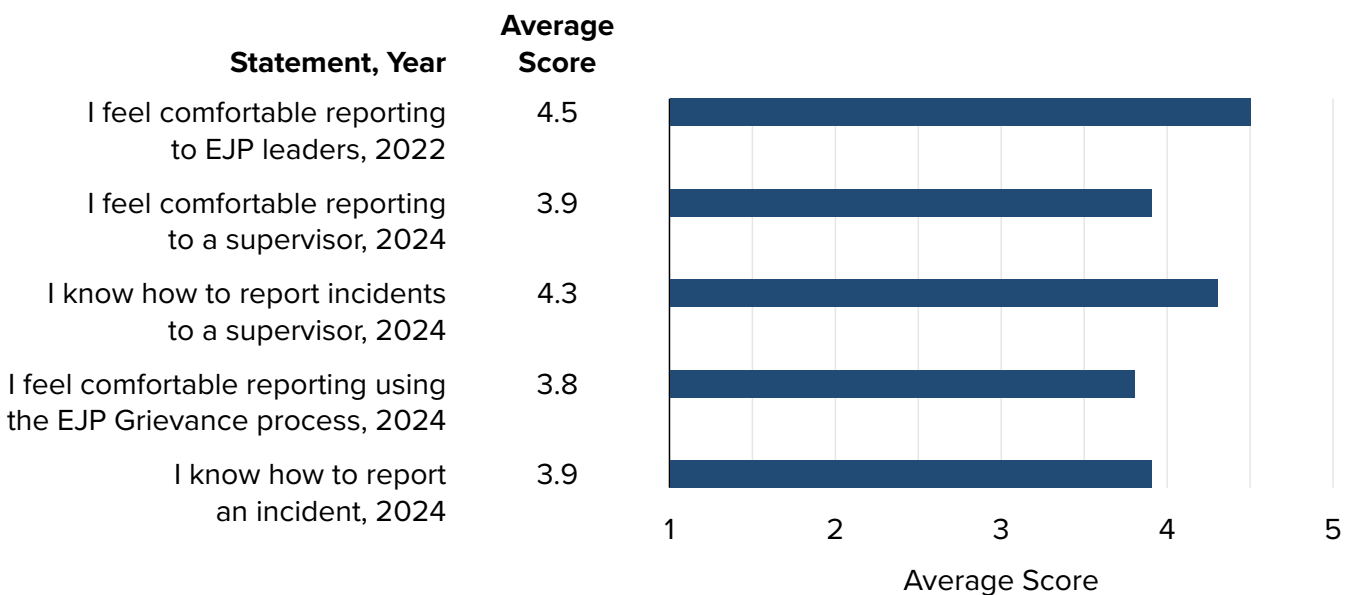
Psychological Safety



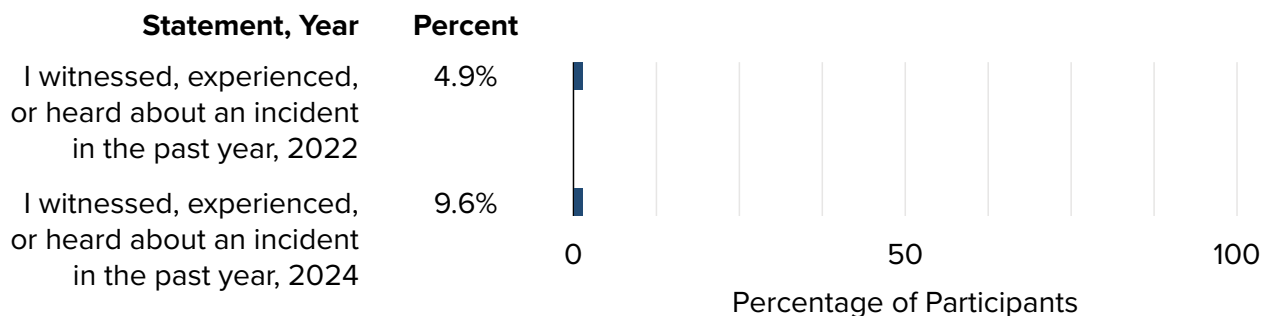
Physical Safety



Comfort Reporting Incidents



Specific Incidents




Concluding Remarks

We want to thank everyone who took the time to provide information about their experiences within EJP. We plan to conduct the next survey in Spring 2026. In the meantime, we plan to distribute a version of this survey among inside EJP members. To this aim, we have met with EJP students to discuss their interests in assessing the climate within EJP, what they feel are important issues to cover, and what they'd like to highlight in a survey. We are working to put together this survey for inside members by the end of this year.

We continue to critically examine and discuss survey results with EJP members at large. The goal is to create a transparent evaluation process. To this end, we have provided a comparison across the first survey (2022) and the most recent survey (2024). As can be seen in the section above, many of the key variables assessed in the survey remained stable over time or increased slightly. We did see that more people reported having witnessed, experienced, or heard about an incident in 2024 compared to 2022 (9.6% vs 4.9%). EJP feels strongly about creating a safe environment for everyone and will evaluate ways to foster more inclusive classrooms and spaces at DCC and on campus.

The DEI team is always looking for more support and new members. If you are interested, please reach out via dei@educationjustice.net.



To learn more about the Education Justice Project or the
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Initiative, contact us at
dei@educationjustice.net



EDUCATION JUSTICE PROJECT
an initiative of the University of Illinois