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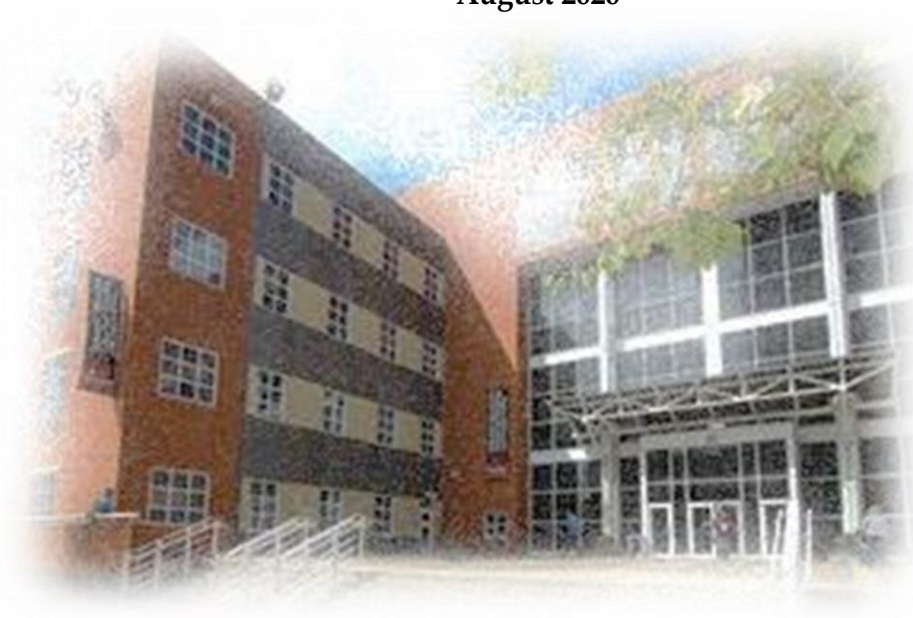
Perception and Reputation Research Final Reports of Findings

Prepared for:

RUTGERS

Edward J. Bloustein School
of Planning and Public Policy

August 2020



1528 Walnut Street, Suite 1001 / Philadelphia, PA 19102 / 215-545-0054 / www.meliorgroup.com



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Report of Key Findings and Conclusions Market and Audience Research

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INTRODUCTION

In its RFP for Market and Audience Research, the Bloustein School presented a set of aspirational goals, among them being:

- Attracting and retaining leading thinkers, faculty, and researchers
- Encouraging innovative, exciting, “press-worthy” faculty and student work
- Being a first choice for both undergraduate and graduate student prospects who represent and value the highest caliber of education and experience
- Assuring that graduates of the School are sought out by employers for their education and experience
- Enhancing the visibility, identity and reputation of the School, such that it is a primary resource for the media, highly ranked for its programs, well-funded, engaging of alumni

The research undertaken by The Melior Group in support of strategic planning to attain these goals, provided the necessary market-based knowledge to...

- Understand the landscape in which the School operates
- Determine the perceptions of Bloustein by its stakeholders
- Learn the reputation of the School
- Assess how the School might position itself to take advantage of the opportunities that lie ahead

After a discovery session and interviews with Bloustein School leaders, the research plan included implementation of research with the following audiences:

- Focus groups with faculty (qualitative)
- In-depth interviews (qualitative) with internal stakeholders: key alumni, faculty, staff
- In-depth interviews (qualitative) with external influencers and key opinion leaders: donors, legislators, government officials, employers

(both public and private sector), association executives

- Quantitative surveys of current Bloustein students, faculty and staff, and alumni
- Quantitative survey prospective (national and international) students (those interested in pursuing an undergraduate or graduate degree in fields related to the programs available at the School)

Note that reports of results of each of these are included at the end of this document.

What follows are key learnings from the research, followed by conclusions and recommendations for strategic action.

KEY LEARNINGS

What Is Today's Landscape for Bloustein?

Who could have imagined, on August 19, 2019 – the day Bloustein accepted proposals for Market and Audience Research – what our world would look like exactly one year later? We are in the middle of the COVID-19 Pandemic, and its seismic impacts have exposed the fault lines in our communities, our country, and the world.

While we know the light at the end of the tunnel is still far away, it is there... and **Bloustein is standing at the nexus of opportunity**. It will celebrate its 30th anniversary in a world that needs its students and faculty to **re-imagine and rebuild the future**. Bloustein is **unique among its peers given its inclusion of public policy, planning AND health**. Its programs, and graduates, are known for their emphasis on applied, versus theoretical, knowledge.

The 30th anniversary, and the re-emergence of “normal,” provide the opportunity for Bloustein to build its reputation in ways that matter to prospective students, faculty and staff, funders, employers of its graduates, and the people and entities who rely on its expertise. The people who are affiliated with Bloustein are “do-gooders;” they want to – and have the tools to – improve lives and communities. They want to feel proud of their School, and to see it **commit – in an even stronger, more intentional way – to diversity, equity and inclusion within the School itself, and in its educational mission to change the world**.

What Are Perceptions of Bloustein School?

Bloustein provides the educational curriculum and programs that today's students will need to contribute to the society of tomorrow – the short-term solutions, leading to longer-term supportive strategies.

- Bloustein “*provides the bridge between health and community, employment, transportation and the environment.*” Bloustein’s emphasis on multi-disciplinary opportunities is a strength that promotes its role in the solving of today’s and tomorrow’s community problems.
- Yet, there remain concerns about assuring that the health administration/ public health focus of Bloustein is sufficiently integrated into the full work it delivers.

Bloustein’s faculty and its research centers contribute to driving its reputation. Bloustein is known for its applied, not theoretical, programs, which adds to its distinctive reputation as providing resources for problem solving. There is recognition of strong research faculty that can bring a national perspective to the work that Bloustein is doing.

- One strength of the School is that of being responsive and flexible – having the ability to quickly develop programs that meet current needs; one demonstration is the online MPI degree, moving from initiation in under two years.
- There is also recognition by some internal stakeholders of the need for more diverse faculty, especially faculty with national reputations, now that there are senior faculty retirements.

Bloustein’s conceptual mission/vision (*to create inclusive, just, and sustainable local, national, and international communities*) resonates well both internally and externally. It captures what the School is now, the goals of students, faculty, and staff, and what could be, given today’s realities, and is sufficiently aspirational to bring constituencies together.

- The statement resonates “very well” with about half of each of the internal audiences, including alumni, where 54% agree it suits the School “very well” and almost all (98%) say “well.”
- Among prospective students already “very familiar” with Bloustein, 77% say the mission resonates “very well.” Almost all (94%) find the vision **distinctive** among other schools and programs.

There is much consistency in descriptions of Bloustein across all constituencies. The audiences interviewed “get” what Bloustein does and offers. To them, the School...

- Offers education that is more applied, vs. theoretical – “*a get things done kind of place*”
- Is opportunistic and responsive, offering timely programs, programming, and current events

- Can quickly develop programs that can set it apart (e.g. MPI)
- Prepares graduates to tackle today's issues
- Is uniquely positioned ... the program areas of planning, public policy, and health allow it to provide guidance to solve issues that impact NJ, the region, the nation, the world
- Produces research that is seen as engaging and applicable
- Is home to leading faculty, who have real world experience

What is the Reputation of Bloustein School?

Considerations of a “good” reputation for a college/university are driven, in large part, by how well it performs on the attributes that are important in decision-making for enrolling in that university. That the degree attained enables one to achieve career goals, along with value for the cost of attending that university, are (for the most part), the most important considerations for where to pursue an education (rated by over 8 in 10 prospective student respondents).

- According to internal audiences, a “good” reputation is driven by: (1) a general feeling of pride in the institution with which they are affiliated; for Bloustein, whose students may be considered “do gooders,” pride is a result of institutional values, ability to effect change in the world, policies, etc.; and (2) value of the degree aimed at achieving this goal, which includes job and internship placement (and much less “admissions selectivity” – the least important factor in the development of a reputation).
- For alumni, reputation is built on those aspects of Bloustein that make them proud to say they attended the School... and the elements that served them well since graduating. These include the influence Rutgers has within the state, the jobs and positions they hold, their ability to secure a desired job, and seeing and hearing about the work the School has accomplished.

The individual programs within Bloustein are known, but the overall focus, mission and vision of the School are not. Even individual leaders in the University are not knowing of all that's available, how the pieces fit

together, what's being done at the School that stands out and should/could be showcased.

There are no direct competitors, then, to Bloustein. There are universities with individual programs that compete, but no regional university that addresses all of what Bloustein does.

There is the potential to leverage Bloustein's position within Rutgers University in building its reputation.

- Rutgers is well-known nationally (only 6% of prospective students “don't know” enough about it to rate it), even across geographies.
- Rutgers' reputation is largely positive: two-thirds (65%) of prospective student respondents describe its reputation as “excellent” or “good.” And, these ratings are even higher in Rutgers' closer-in markets (i.e., NJ, NY and Philadelphia).

How to Consider Positioning of the School?

There is a “push and pull” between the strength of Bloustein's reputation within New Jersey and the opportunities available to leverage this reputation into one that is more nationally (and maybe internationally) focused. The question becomes one of focusing resources on its home state versus building a (perhaps, costly) reputation on the national and international stage, which will take time, marketing efforts and financial support.

The challenge most often raised is that of trying to fit together all the “buckets” that comprise the Bloustein School – assuring that the “new” health administration program is aligned with public policy and planning, and communicating how they all work together within the framework of building for a healthy, just and sustainable society. Overall, there is interest in better demonstrating the connection between health administration and the other parts of the School. As noted in the section about today's landscape, there are opportunities to and interest in “bundling” the School's programs to focus them on what is of consequence to today's society, overall.

There is significant support for building a strong, intentional, and outward-facing marketing effort for Bloustein. Faculty, staff and other internal stakeholders believe that Bloustein is an “undiscovered gem” within Rutgers, ready to be pushed forward with assets such as: research faculty;

new Dean; stories of impacts on society; “triangulation” of public policy, health, and planning; research centers; graduates that are “*making decisions that shape our world*”; etc.

The name “Bloustein” has Rutgers-only internal recognition. Outside of the School and even among Alumni, the presumption is that it is named for someone who was “*probably some rich alumnus*” (but not who the person is and why the school was named for him). Given this, positioning the School to be focused on its mission may provide the traction it needs in the market, suggesting it is less about its name and more about what it does and what it can contribute to society.

- The question is how important is the Bloustein name in talking about the School? And, the sub-brand name (School of Planning and Public Policy) leaves out the growing and relevant Health component.

What Are the Important Metrics to Considering and Evaluating the Success of the School?

In addition to the, perhaps, obvious ones of media hits, earned media, fund-raising, applications from top- notch students and faculty, and general awareness of the School, the goal for Bloustein is to be seen as a school whose efforts, programming and research “change the world.” Yes, these represent top-tier goals... but there is sufficient pride in the School and recognition that there are opportunities ahead. Other metrics to be considered include:

- Research grants and desired level of financial support
- Ranking in the top 5 for each program
- Web hits
- Student job placement, success stories
- Top faculty with national and international reputations
- Publications in top journals
- Being a resource for media interviews (faculty engagement - called upon, writing of op eds)
- National media coverage
- Demonstrable collaboration among faculty within the School and throughout the University
- Symposia, other forums convened at the School
- Internships and job placements in all the key fields within the School
- Benchmarks against other Big 10 schools
- State and federal agency funding

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- With the new Dean, the Bloustein School can move away from “institutional memory” (i.e., anecdotes about the former dean’s performance and approach) and toward what is now special about Bloustein, what it can offer regionally, nationally, and internationally. There is interest in learning about her vision, meeting her, and having her be the voice for the School.
- Bloustein is now in a position to shine. Its emphasis on “the public” – policy, planning, community, health, etc. – puts it in a distinctive position to attract students who want to change the world, contribute significantly to a new reality. And, the School, as part of Rutgers, provides great value for the cost, critical to attracting today’s students. As noted earlier, positioning the School to be focused on its mission may provide the traction it needs in the market, suggesting it is less about its name and more about what it does and what it can contribute to society.
 - The most appealing messages to prospective students focus on two themes: 1) the value of the degree (in terms of cost and return on investment relative to getting a job after the degree) and 2) the School aligns with the values of those students who are interested in making the world a better place... taking pride in the affiliation with the School.
- There is significant support for a strong, intentional marketing effort for the School, focusing both inwardly (to inform all stakeholders within the School) and outwardly (with those who do and could benefit from all the School is doing. This should be a priority. Faculty research and its implications, student success stories, the impact the School is making on the State and elsewhere are critical contributors to enhancing reputation, as is assuring that all audiences (internal and external) know about this.
 - What Bloustein alumni are doing and how they are shaping today’s and tomorrow’s world is important to communicate. These are certainly current and prospective donors, but they are also the ones who have the potential to grow with the School.
 - The School’s 30th Anniversary is an especially important time to reinforce the School’s mission and refresh all communications. Suggested is the creation of a curated repository for what’s going on at Bloustein, to be used by media, alumni, and others. There certainly

is a legacy during those times that can be fodder for wonderful stories of the School's input into change.

- People inside Bloustein (i.e., faculty and staff) are eager to know each other, the work they each doing, how they can contribute to the Dean's vision for the School, collaborative opportunities, and to contribute to "breaking down of silos." Internal newsletters and other opportunities to connect and share are vital to building a common sense of mission.
- In terms of faculty and staff (and certainly students), the School should reflect its outward mission of inclusivity and diversity. There is support of encouraging the level of diversity that "looks like New Jersey," reflecting all that comprises it. Constituencies are encouraging of diversity to leverage the School to the national stage.
- Focusing on the Bloustein name is not critical in branding the School. Given today's new realities, perhaps the Bloustein School could be presented as the School of Public Policy, Planning and Health at Rutgers.
- In conclusion, let's look at Bloustein as **The School of Now...** a contemporary, thoughtful School with lasting impact, providing urgency in tackling today's challenges and issues.

Its strengths and brand positions incorporate:

- Contributes to solving issues that impact society
 - Produces graduates prepared to tackle today's issues
 - Studies topics and creation of programs that are contemporary
 - Has leading faculty in their respective fields, with real world experience
 - Produces research that is not just of interest (externally) but is engaging and applicable – it's not research for the sake of research
 - Expertise (faculty, students, alumni) who are/should be the go-to resource on New Jersey, regional, national, and global issues
- Now, more than ever, society is looking for expertise to guide them through the impact that this pandemic has had – and will continue to have – on our communities: workforce changes, urban living, health management and equity, public health mandates etc. These are all within the

wheelhouse of the School's academic/theoretical and practical/real-world based programs.



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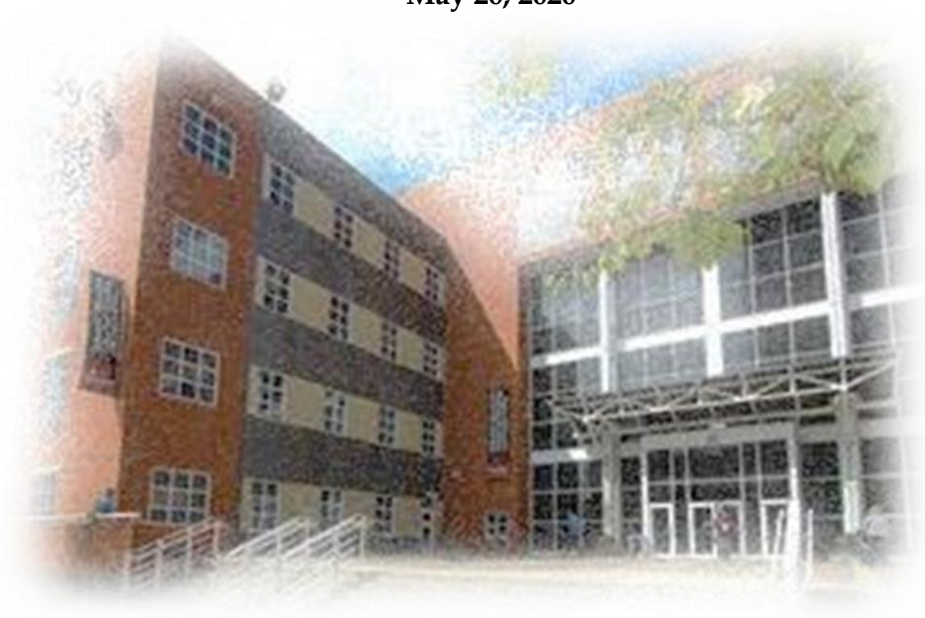
Report of Findings from External Stakeholder Interviews: Perception and Reputation Research

Prepared for:

RUTGERS

Edward J. Bloustein School
of Planning and Public Policy

May 26, 2020



BACKGROUND

Along with the results of qualitative research with Internal Stakeholders (reported separately), the goal of these interviews with External Stakeholders is to learn as much as possible about the current identity, reputation and perception of Bloustein School and its programs, as well as to identify the future direction these stakeholders and key opinion leaders feel the School should/could accomplish.

A total of 24 interviews were completed with individuals representing the following areas: health administration, public health, public policy, associations, planning, and media – individuals whose insight into the role and importance of Bloustein can guide future planning. [A list of the organizations represented follows this report.]

This report provides key themes and representative commentary from these External Stakeholders. Note that these interviews were conducted during the “stay at home” responses to the COVID-19 crisis (March-May 2020), which may have impacted the responses to strategically-directed questions asked.

KEY FINDINGS

Overall, Bloustein’s reputation is one of a trusted, excellent, and respected School. However, much of this reputation is an historical one, with not much known about what the School is and does today. Rutgers and Bloustein are strongly associated with New Jersey. External stakeholders are comfortable with this, especially given their own focus on the State, and do believe that one of Rutgers University’s roles is to assure that New Jersey remains true to itself. They are reluctant to encourage striving for a national (and international) reputation for Rutgers and Bloustein if it means it will mean giving up (or loosening) its roots in any way.

“It’s part of THE ‘State University of New Jersey’ – it’s obvious that it should focus on New Jersey issues.”

“Bloustein has an excellent reputation in the NJ business community; it is well known, well regarded and considered a respected source for research and data and being a part of Rutgers – the New Jersey State University - they have resources.”

“Bloustein has the prestige of being the public policy school of the state university – the other schools in NJ do not have that prestige.”

Connection with The Bloustein School by these stakeholders is with and through the Dean and her office; and to many, there was historic connection with Dean Hughes, not yet established with the “new Dean.” As a result, little is known by these stakeholders of the vision for Bloustein and what its future direction might be... and there is an interest in hearing more. There is a significant opportunity to communicate the story of Bloustein and its future to those who could promote, shape, and influence Dean Thakuriah’s vision. The story of change should now be written, to include issues around caring for the well-being of the community in its myriad forms.

“To a large extent, a lot of credit for Bloustein’s positive reputation goes to Dean Hughes – his reputation and his prominence.”

“I am a lobbyist now and I don’t see anything from the new dean quoted, but the old dean was quoted a lot.”

“It feels like I have not been seeing them as much out there in the news and I don’t think that’s positive for the reputation of the school. Maybe it is because of the transition from him to her. Dean Hughes was, and still is, active on the speaking circuit and he waves the Bloustein flag when he is out there speaking.”

These stakeholders are eager to meet Dean Thakuriah and speak to her directly. There is an interest in making this personal connection. Dean Hughes was known for being media-savvy, dynamic, and a personality who promoted the School; while there is recognition that Dean Thakuriah is not Dean Hughes, there is interest in having her be a spokesperson and advocate for the issues the School addresses, something that these stakeholders want to see happen.

“The new dean has the opportunity to take Bloustein to the next level. It has a long history of quality research, faculty, and top caliber graduates. She’s got to continue that while still pursuing more for the School.”

“The new dean needs to step up her presence – planners struggle to get respect in this state. Bloustein is well respected and advises people – planners aren’t deciders, is it a strategic move that the new dean has not stepped up yet? Is it the mother ship (Rutgers University) making the call?”

“I would want to know what her vision is for the school, what the plan is to ground the work they do in the broader community, what type of public policy work they will do for problems in the community, what her priorities are, what will the push be – the sequence of priorities and achievement.”

There is a lack of clarity between Bloustein’s public health degree and the Rutgers School of Public Health that seems to bother those stakeholders in the healthcare and health-related sector. These people want to better understand the points of differentiation between the two degree programs and, by implication, which is driving which directions. Several of these stakeholders take Bloustein undergraduate interns yet refer to these students as part of the School of Public Health (rather than Bloustein). While it is not an important issue to them and they are pleased with the interns, it indicates that these stakeholders are not up-to-date on all that Bloustein is and does and, as a result, don’t give it the credit it may deserve for these top-tier interns and the Bloustein programs they represent.

“As part of a health system in NJ –when I think of public health –I think of Rutgers School of Public Health, not Bloustein. I think of the Bloustein School more for Planning and Public Policy – not as much for the public health aspect.”

Bloustein produces high quality graduates in the planning and public policy areas. These graduates are said to be practical, not theoretical, “in the now,” and understanding of real-life practice. Especially at the graduate level, students who do internships and/or get hired are “ready to go,” and not naïve. There is also positive recognition of the newer faculty in these fields.

Several stakeholders involved in public policy and planning roles comment about “lots of faculty are retiring and the new faculty coming in will be/are forward thinking in understanding what is important in New Jersey, looking at New Jersey’s issues differently than in the past.” Positive impact is already being felt in the areas of paratransit and healthcare inequity in the state.

“We have hired interns from Bloustein – they are good. They have public policy experience; they are well trained in a combination of politics and business in NJ. They have an incredibly unique perspective based on their curriculum that fits nicely into our mission.”

“There is a thoroughness in their way of educating researchers and public planners, they are taught about quality of the research – students ask the right questions and look at the right measures.”

“There is an emphasis on project management and presentation – the faculty at Bloustein use that approach to prepare graduates for the real world.”

“Graduates come out of Bloustein equipped to handle themselves in the real world – the world doesn’t operate like a textbook – they know how to apply philosophies in the field. When I hire, the course-load isn’t the most important to me, graduate work,

internships, applied work, studios – more practical experience, as opposed to conceptual.”

“I judge based on the skills I learned when I was in grad school in NY. Bloustein graduates are getting those skills – GIS, statistical packages, technology is up to date – writing skills, ability to communicate them – writing, communications are crucial.”

“Students coming from Bloustein School have more work experience, more knowledge than those from other schools. The Bloustein students have a good depth of clinical work, policy, informatics/analysis, they are better prepared than students from other schools.”

Not surprising, there is less known about the health administration program than about the other programs (e.g., planning, public policy). One administrator interviewed indicated, however, that the number of hours given for internships from Bloustein is significantly less than for William Paterson University, so the Bloustein interns’ projects are not as robust. On the positive side, those who do know the students and graduates from health administration admire their communications skills and knowledge base.

Perhaps it’s the newness of the health administration program, but those in the field are eager to learn more about what is happening with this program and how competitive it is with other New Jersey university programs in public health (e.g., Rowan and William Paterson).

“I am on the MHA Advisory Board at Seton Hall. The ease of navigating the system, of applying, or onboarding, etc. is easier at Seton Hall than at Bloustein.”

“The Rutgers School of Public Health does a great job of sharing their contributions with stakeholders. But Bloustein does not do it as well – I am not getting the same level of information from Bloustein that I get from school of Public Health.”

“William Paterson is the only other school that we have had interns from– their Public Health education program is very intense; they are able to start and finish core projects because of the number of hours they have to work on. Bloustein intern hours are a lot less – so they are not as able to complete projects at the same level.”

The metrics these stakeholders use to judge a school like Bloustein focus on the tangible and the intangible. Among the words and phrases used to describe Bloustein are: integrity, teaching, quality product (i.e., students, graduates, research) and the results of research. For example, the data that comes from the School is of high quality and objective – that is, without bias, without a political slant, not skewed toward a particular outcome, impartial reporting.

“There is a lot of really serious research and writing going on there – conducted by some really smart people – in a big building fortified by brick and mortar.”

“What I want to know is: Do they do cutting-edge research, timely reporting on the research and how it affects our field? Do they cultivate smart students that are ready for whatever is going to hit them when they graduate? Are they well versed in policy development and implementation?”

“Bloustein is one of the few colleges that I work with for student placement –because of the quality of students, the depth and reach and the quality of faculty. It is a great arrangement —I trust the students, I know the caliber of the students we are getting, we take both graduate and undergraduate students.”

[Note: Stakeholders were read this vision statement and asked for comment: *The vision of the Bloustein School is to create inclusive, just and sustainable local, national and international communities*] **The vision statement is seen as bold, broad and urging, although with some need for specificity.** According to the stakeholders, there are two overarching comments: 1) it does not seem distinctive today, perhaps needing to focus more on “public” and “health-related” needs; and 2) there is no mention of New Jersey, which, to many of these stakeholders, is as important – if not more so – than national and international actions.

“Bloustein would stand out if they were in Nebraska, in the middle of the country. There is too much competition in the area where they are now; it is hard to make a name for itself or distinguish itself with Princeton, NYU and Columbia in the neighborhood.”

“Rutgers is more regional. Rutgers has an International presence, but its national presence is not as strong.”

“The vision sounds wishy washy. I am not sure how a planner from Bloustein can create an international community – it sounds like a utopian, think tank vision and is not practical. It’s not distinctive – very typical for academic planners.”

Many of the stakeholders suggest that it is important to “pay attention to your own backyard,” and focus on the state of New Jersey before moving further into national and international prominence. While this may appear to be a parochial attitude, it is also reflective of the work these stakeholders are doing and the pride they feel in both their work and that of Rutgers. These stakeholders feel that Bloustein’s leadership position in New Jersey can be a leverage point for more national visibility: “It may be time to be bolder, to have a national and international focus... but don’t lose the New Jersey quality.”

“One of the challenges of NJ policy making is being stuck between NY and Philadelphia – dealing with the issues that trickle from those two metro areas. They (Rutgers/Bloustein) are able to carve out and be NJ centered.”

“It is a noble goal – it takes a lot to bring those things to fruition, partnerships with local and county officials and organizations are key to helping bring that about.”

“The vision is realistic – but the immediate impact is on the surrounding community and the state. I don’t know what the national or international impact is – need to hear more about it. I think its distinctive – doable, but a lot of room for growth – as far as I know, the focus is more local – needs to be phased in appropriately.”

Bloustein has the opportunity to be more well-known to the media covering New Jersey (and New York). While some in the press know of – and rely on – the communications person at Bloustein, others are unaware of all the School is doing. It would be helpful to have ongoing and regular media briefings.

“I need to have someone there always accessible because of deadlines. I used to know who to go to, but I’m not sure anymore.”

External stakeholders will welcome more communication from Bloustein, especially its research and information that is deemed media-worthy. They would like to see email communication, short and quick, headlines, and a link to more information. They also indicate they will attend educational symposia and conferences to learn more about the new vision for the School. Information has to be practical and relevant for themselves and their audiences. They enjoy reports from Bloustein because they are not too academic and engage business leaders; Bloustein understands its audiences.

“I want to see the latest research they’re doing.”

“I would like to have a cup of coffee with someone in a leadership – as personal as possible to start – that’s what I am used to with Dean Hughes; I used him as resource to bounce ideas in the past – and he used me.”

“I would like to know what the latest research is. Now I hear it through the grapevine, and I would like to know more on a timelier basis. I would like to get the facts early; if I want a deeper dive, I can get it.”

“I am big on collaboration, so knowing what other organizations similar to ours are working on [with Bloustein] is beneficial. Our organization is primarily involved in healthy activities for Somerset county; since New Brunswick is in Middlesex county I wonder if we miss out?”

Appendix

External Interviews - Participating Organizations

Anti-Poverty Network of New Jersey
Association of Public Policy Analysis and Management
Atlantic Health System
Children’s Specialized Hospital
Community Investment Strategies
Gannett News (Asbury Park Press)
Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey
Mathematica Policy Research
Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration
New Jersey Bankers Association
New Jersey Business and Industry Association
New Jersey Hospital Association
New Jersey Policy Perspective
New Jersey State Chamber of Commerce
NJ Institute for Social Justice
NJ.com
Office of Legislative Services, New Jersey State Government
Robert Wood Johnson Barnabas Health
Robert Wood Johnson Center Advancing Research and Evaluation
Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital (2)
St Peter’s University Hospital
Utility Transportation Contractors Association
Wellspring Center for Prevention



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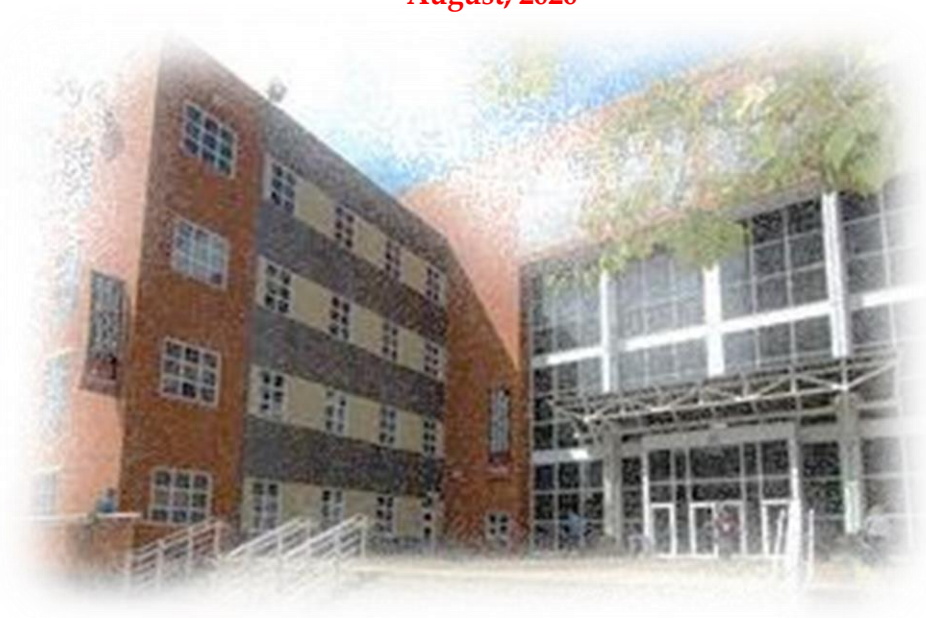
Report of Findings from Internal Stakeholder Interviews: Perception and Reputation Research

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August, 2020



BACKGROUND

Along with the results of qualitative research with External Stakeholders (reported separately), the goal of these interviews with Internal Stakeholders is to learn as much as possible about the current identity, reputation and perception of Bloustein School and its programs, as well as to identify the future direction these stakeholders and key opinion leaders feel the School should/could accomplish.

A total of 38 people were interviewed one-on-one or in small groups. These included School faculty and senior staff, University leadership, members of the Dean's Advisory Board, and selected alumni.

This report provides key themes and representative commentary from these Internal Stakeholders. Note that many of these interviews were conducted prior to the "stay at home" responses to the COVID-19 crisis (March-May 2020), which may have impacted the responses to strategically directed questions asked.

That being said, one overarching theme that has emerged in considering the positioning of Bloustein School in these times of pandemic, is that

Bloustein's role in preparing students for and providing responses to the crisis is never more important.

In fact, this points out Bloustein's position within the appropriate "teeing-up" of relevant, timely, critical education and information leading to a new way of looking at and planning for our society in the "new normal" to come.

BLOUSTEIN SCHOOL REPUTATION

At this time (spring/summer 2020), Bloustein provides the educational curriculum and programs that today's students will need to contribute to the society of tomorrow – the short-term solutions, leading to longer-term supportive strategies. As one stakeholder commented, Bloustein *"provides the bridge between health and community, employment, transportation and the environment."* Bloustein's emphasis on multi-disciplinary opportunities is a strength that promotes its role in the solving of today's and tomorrow's community problems.

"Bloustein is the school that can address public health in a broad way, understanding and working through how society deals with these types of disruptions: how to use space safely, how to maintain public transportation and provide it safely."

“What we have is what young people want... how they can contribute to society.”

But there remain concerns by these stakeholders about assuring that the health administration/public health focus of Bloustein is sufficiently integrated into the full work it delivers. Not everyone yet understands where health administration fits in, although there is recognition that the health focus does substantially add to the complex nature of the programs under the Bloustein umbrella, without necessarily defining it: *“The pieces do fit together (environment, workforce, state government, economy, public health) when you think about them; Rutgers University doesn’t always need to be too focused.”*

Bloustein is well-known among the leadership of New Jersey state government – and while it is known, there should be more opportunities to leverage the reputation within New Jersey into one that is more nationally (and maybe internationally) focused. Not surprising, Bloustein’s reputation is formed through its work at the state level, with few internal stakeholders aware of what has been – or could be – done nationally. There are many stakeholders who want to see Bloustein become more than a “state” school – but there are also some who are comfortable with its current role and strength.

“We’ve never tried to be a national brand – and we don’t necessarily need to be one – you need a lot of money to be competitive with such schools as Kennedy and Wilson.”

“We are really more than they (Wilson and other NJ colleges) are, because of the programs and research we offer.”

Of those who recognize that there are elements of Bloustein that can be leveraged to a national reputation, they also understand that this will take time, marketing efforts, and financial support. There is a real interest in effectively bundling Bloustein’s programs to focus them on what is of consequence to today’s society.

“There is the triangulation of urban planning, public policy and public health – this is unique, with synergy that has national implications.”

“There is a strong community element to Bloustein. The community angle is one to stress – we work toward healthy, just and sustainable communities in a multidisciplinary way. And this is translatable from New Jersey only to a national and even international platform.”

“We are a multidisciplinary resource that can solve community problems.”

Bloustein’s faculty and its research centers contribute to driving its reputation. Bloustein is known for its applied, not theoretical, programs which adds to its reputation as providing resources for problem solving. There is recognition of strong research faculty that can bring a national perspective to the work that Bloustein is doing but is not yet doing so. Bloustein is seen *“not as in ivory tower school, but one that gets things done, that studies the issues*

important in New Jersey and combines a well-rounded curriculum, practical applications and the best of planning and public policy.”

That being said, there is also recognition by some internal stakeholders of the need for more diverse faculty, especially faculty with national reputations now that there are senior faculty retirements. A few stakeholders comment about the importance of assuring that faculty “looks like” the population of New Jersey in all its cultural and racial/ethnic diversity.

There is significant support for building a strong, intentional and outward-facing marketing effort for Bloustein. Faculty, staff and other internal stakeholders believe that Bloustein is an “*undiscovered gem*” within Rutgers, ready to be pushed forward with assets such as: research faculty; new Dean; stories of impacts on society; “triangulation” of public policy, health, and planning; research centers; graduates that are “*making decisions that shape our world*”; etc.

BLOUSTEIN SCHOOL STRENGTHS

Where Bloustein excels is in having programs that incorporate all of today’s societal issues under one roof.

In addition, internal stakeholders feel the School’s strengths are:

- New Dean with vision and “*great energy to shape the School*”
- School runs efficiently and influences public policy
- Research centers
- Applied (vs. theoretical) focus
- Solving real-world problems
- Influence on New Jersey, ability to keep both political parties on board
- Intimate, nurturing environment for students
- Best educational value for the money
- Opportunity to increase visibility of the School
- Leading faculty
- Works well with other schools at Rutgers
- Strong reputation among peer schools in planning and public policy

BLOUSTEIN SCHOOL CHALLENGES

The challenge most often raised is that of trying to fit together all the “buckets” that comprise the Bloustein School – assuring that the “new” health administration program is aligned with public policy and planning, and communicating how they all work together within the framework of building for a healthy, just and sustainable society. The relatively

new health administration program is not well-known among those within the University, as well as outside the School. And, within the School, there is an interest – even a willingness – to *“blow up the siloes and work toward building up collaboration among faculty, such that the School ultimately wins.”* Overall, there is interest in better demonstrating the connection between health administration and the other parts of the School.

“The faculty needs to think collectively and collaboratively.”

“We need to explain why we are bringing these disciplines together (in one school).”

“We share a vision of health, and a just sustainable community – it’s why we have all these programs at Bloustein. So we can solve these problems.”

“There is health in all policies.”

Other challenges for the Bloustein School include:

- Low awareness of the School, both outside the University and within it
- Need for a description of *“how to talk about the School and how it is positioned”* [the 30-second elevator pitch]
- Need for more faculty engagement, especially within the School and with each other
- Need to increase faculty diversity
- Provide more online degree programs (*“we are way behind”*)
- Assure that the Dean is on the national stage: *“Vonu is a rock star and needs to be promoted; this is her school and she can play big in it”*
- How to effectively integrate the Research Centers with other parts of the School – the Research Centers have their own messaging
- Work to leverage New Jersey work on a national platform
- Alumni from the 1970s and 1980s need to know more about Bloustein and what it’s doing
- Faculty need to be told that *“legislative and media relationships are expected of them”*
- Build the marketing focus – it needs to have the resources for PR, development, and especially social media; it *“needs to help the Dean be the chief cheerleader, getting in front of important stakeholders who can bring research grants, funds, active projects, etc.”*; it *“must be thorough, social-media focused, driven, and robust.”*

METRICS TO CONSIDER GOING FORWARD

In addition to the, perhaps, obvious ones of media hits, earned media, fund-raising, applications from top- notch students and faculty, and general awareness of the School, internal stakeholders want Bloustein to be seen as a school whose efforts, programming and work “change the world.” Yes, these represent top-tier goals... but internal stakeholders feel a pride in the School and recognize that there are opportunities ahead.

The metrics to be considered include:

- Research grants and desired level of financial support
- Stories in the media about the work Bloustein does
- Ranking in the top 5 for each program
- Web hits
- Student job placement, success stories
- Top faculty with national and international reputations
- Publications in top journals
- Being a resource for media interviews (faculty engagement - called upon, writing of op eds)
- National media coverage
- Demonstrable collaboration among faculty within the School and throughout the University
- Symposia, other forums
- Leveraging of community work, such that students have internships and jobs in all the key fields within the School
- Benchmarks against other Big 10 schools
- NIH funding



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Information. Intelligence. Insights.

Building Bloustein's Reputation: Results of Market Research with Bloustein Faculty

Prepared for:

RUTGERS

Edward J. Bloustein School
of Planning and Public Policy

August 2020

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Background

The Bloustein School is in the process of preparing a Strategic Communications Plan to guide its path to achieving a top national and international reputation... to be a school of choice, one that is highly regarded, favorably known, and recognized for its ability to attract top tier students, faculty and funding for research and other purposes.

The Melior Group designed market and audience research to inform the Strategic Communications Plan. Research results include...

- a set of baseline metrics to understand perceptions of the School by its stakeholders
- an assessment of how Bloustein can position itself to take advantage of the opportunities that lie ahead
- an understanding of the competitive landscape on which to shape its future.

To elicit sufficient market-based data to inform the Communications Plan, Melior's research approach included:

- In-depth individual and group interviews with internal stakeholders (administrators and faculty)
- In-depth interviews with external influencers and key opinion leaders
- Internal surveys of Bloustein alumni, faculty, staff and current students
- Survey of prospective students

This report provides the results of an internal survey of Bloustein faculty. Results of the other research tasks and surveys are provided under separate cover.



Methodology

This report presents the results of an online survey with Bloustein faculty. The Melior Group developed a survey instrument with input and approval from the Bloustein project management team, and then developed a survey link which Bloustein embedded in an email invitation to all faculty, including those who are Tenure Track, Non -Tenure Track, and Part-time Lecturers. Returns went straight to The Melior Group.

A total of 170 email invitations were sent out on June 17, 2020, and several reminders were also sent. The survey remained open until July 20, 2020. A total of 67 faculty members completed the survey, yielding a response rate of 39.4%. Average length of time to complete the survey was 6 minutes.

What follows are detailed survey results. The sample size does not allow for segmentation of results, however, differences between segments that are directionally significant are noted in the analysis.

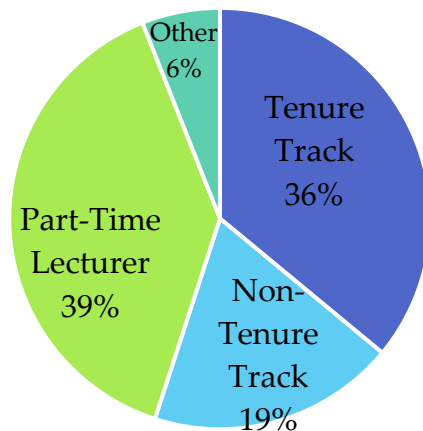


Characteristics of the Sample

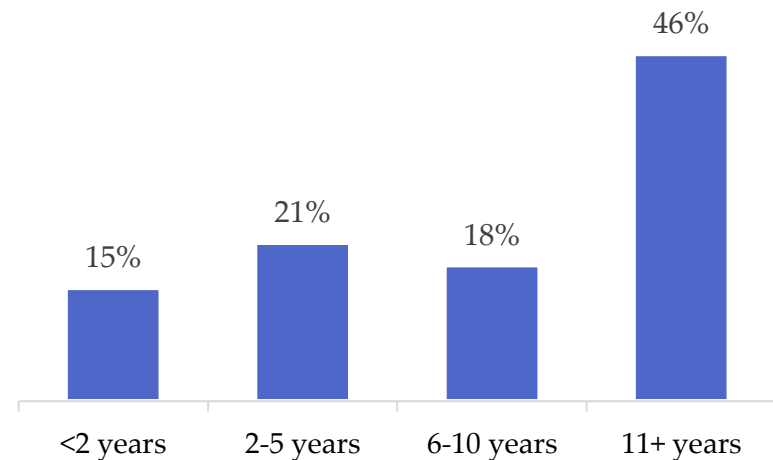
A third (36%) of the survey respondents are Tenure Track faculty; another 39% are Part-time Lecturers. Two in ten (19%) are Non-Tenure Track.

Just 15% of respondents were hired since Dean Thakuria took over leadership of Bloustein. Almost half (46%) are long-time faculty, having been at Bloustein for more than ten years.

Role at Bloustein (%)



Length of Time as Faculty at Bloustein (%)



Defining Reputation

This section is devoted to understanding what factors Bloustein faculty believe contribute to a college or university's reputation, and to answering the question, *"what are the measures upon which a reputation is built?"*

Defining Reputation

- It's clear that a “good reputation” is important for colleges and universities to attract quality students and faculty, as well as research and other support, but what does reputation really mean? What are the factors that lead faculty to associate a college or university with a “good reputation”?

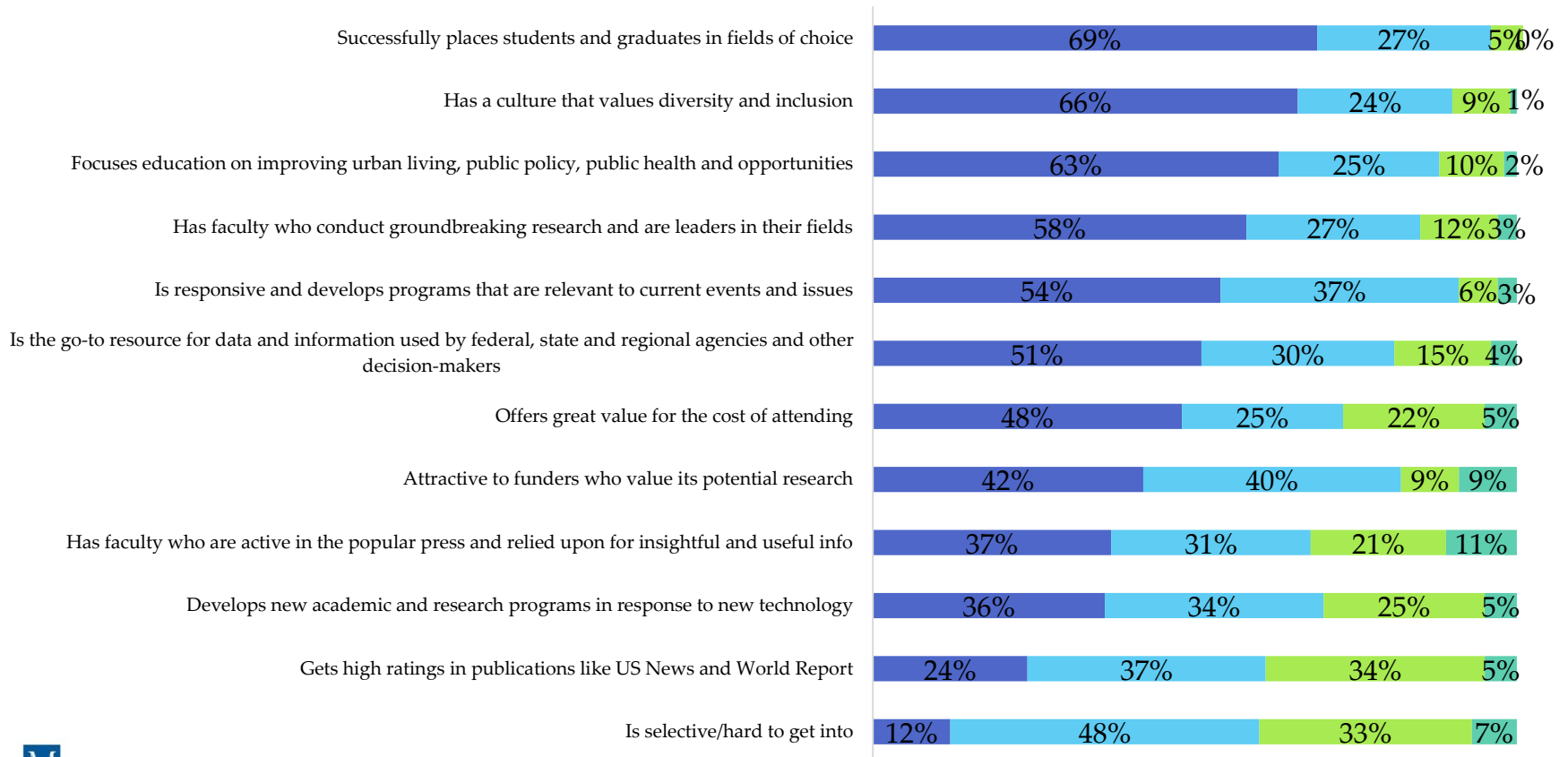
To Bloustein faculty, reputation is perceived to be driven by many factors. Of top importance is successful placement of graduates in their fields of choice. A culture that values inclusivity and diversity is also critical; this research was conducted during the height of the Black Lives Matter protests, bringing diversity and inclusion front and center generally, and perhaps even more so for Bloustein faculty, who are in their fields because they want to play a role in improving civic life.

It is interesting to note that admissions selectivity is the least important factor in the development of “reputation”.



Defining Reputation

Importance of Factors in Describing a School's "Reputation" (%)



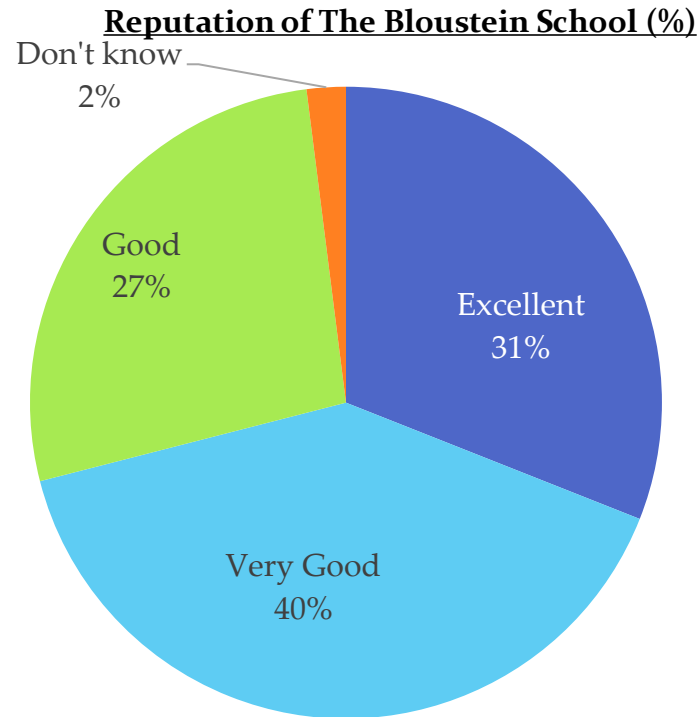
■ 5 = Very Important ■ 4 ■ 3 ■ 2 and 1 = Not Important

Perceptions of Bloustein

This section presents data about the current state of Bloustein's reputation among faculty and impressions of strengths and challenges.

Perceptions of Bloustein -- Overall

- Faculty were asked to assess the overall reputation of Bloustein. As shown, its reputation is largely positive, with seven in ten respondents (71%) rating it as “excellent” or “very good”. No respondents say that its reputation is less than “good”. That said, the findings also demonstrate that there is room for reputational growth.
 - It is important to note that part-time faculty are more likely to rate its reputation as “excellent” than are full-time faculty (50% vs. 13%)



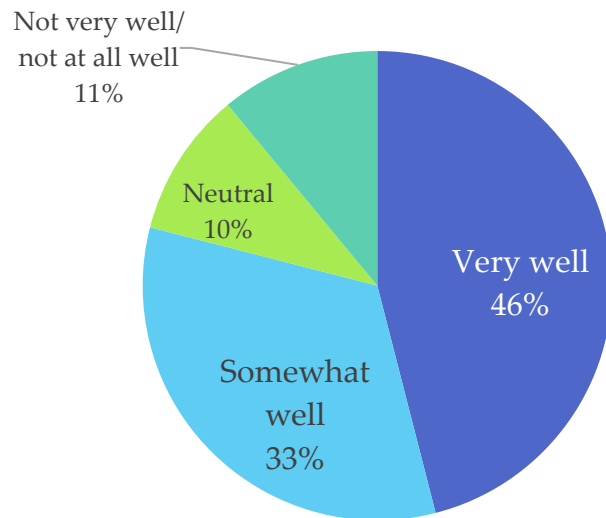
Perceptions of Bloustein -- Mission

- Respondents were reminded that the mission of The Bloustein School is ***to create just, socially inclusive, environmentally and healthy sustainable local, national and international communities***, and asked to rate how well this vision personally resonates for a school of planning, public health, health administration and public policy.

The vision resonates very well with almost half of the respondents (46%), and somewhat well with an additional 33%. This suggests that the statement really captures for faculty what Bloustein is all about.

- Here, too, part time staff are more enthusiastic than full time; 61% of part-time staff say the mission resonates “very well,” versus 31% of full-time staff.

Personal Resonance of Bloustein’s Vision (%)



Perceptions of Bloustein -- Performance

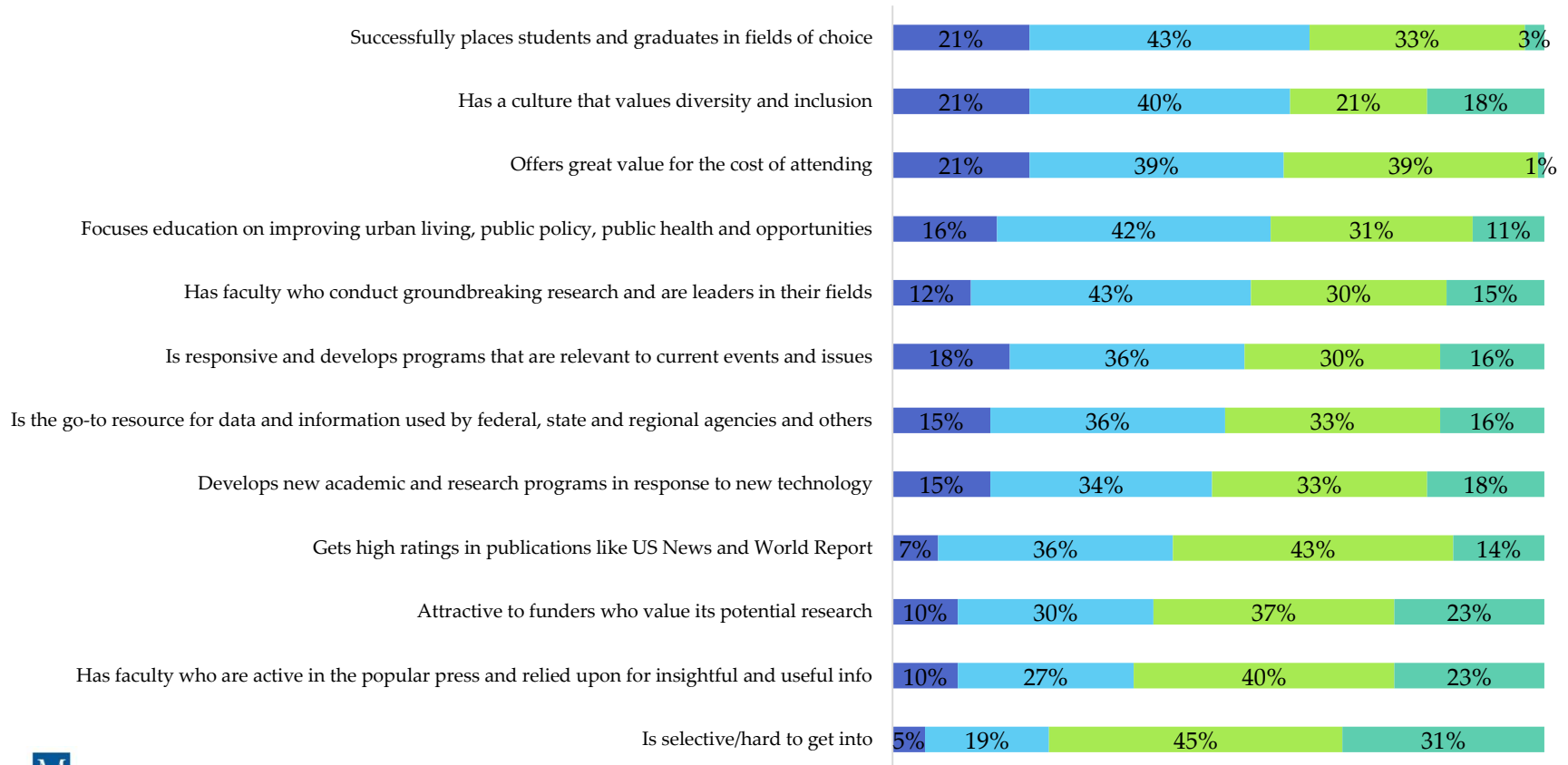
- To better understand where faculty believe Bloustein excels, and where it could do better, respondents were asked to rate Bloustein on the same measures used to define Bloustein's reputation. As shown, faculty are positive about Bloustein on nearly every measure (except for selectivity and faculty in the press).

Bloustein is most highly rated for its student placement, its culture of diversity and inclusion, and value for cost (on each, over 6 in 10 respondents rate Bloustein as "excellent" or "very good").



Perceptions of Bloustein -- Performance

Impressions of Bloustein School's Performance (%)



■ Excellent ■ Very Good ■ Good ■ Fair/Poor

Perceptions of Bloustein -- Performance

- There is room for Bloustein to improve its performance. Comparing “excellent/very good” impressions of Bloustein, to what respondents believe is very important for a good reputation (ratings of 5 and 4 on a scale where 5 = “very important,” and 1 = “not at all important”) shows deficits/gaps. In trying to build its reputation, Bloustein could target the most important contributors to reputation.
- Right now, importance far exceeds impressions of Bloustein’s performance on these measures:
 - Attractiveness to funders (-42 gap)
 - Programs responsive to current events and issues (-37 gap)
 - Is selective/hard to get into (-36 gap)



Perceptions of Bloustein -- Performance

Gap Between Ratings for Bloustein, and Importance of Factors in Describing a School's "Reputation" (%) Total Respondents

	Importance*	Performance**	Gap
Successfully places students and graduates in fields of choice	96	64	-32
Is responsive and develops programs that are relevant to current events and issues	91	54	-37
Has a culture that values diversity and inclusion	90	61	-29
Focuses education on improving urban living, public health and opportunities	88	58	-30
Has faculty who conduct groundbreaking research and are recognized as leaders in their fields	85	55	-30
Attractiveness to funders who value its potential research	82	40	-42
Is the go-to resource for data and info used by government agencies and others	81	51	-30
Offers great value for the cost of attending	73	60	-13
Develops new academic and research programs in response to new technologies	70	49	-21
Has faculty who are active in the popular press, relied upon by media for insightful and useful information	68	37	-31
Gets high ratings in publications like US News and World Report	61	43	-18
Is selective/hard to get into	60	24	-36

*5 and 4 ratings on a scale where 5 = "very important" and 1 = "not important"

**"Excellent" and "very good" ratings on a scale which also includes "good," "fair," and "poor"

Bloustein Communications

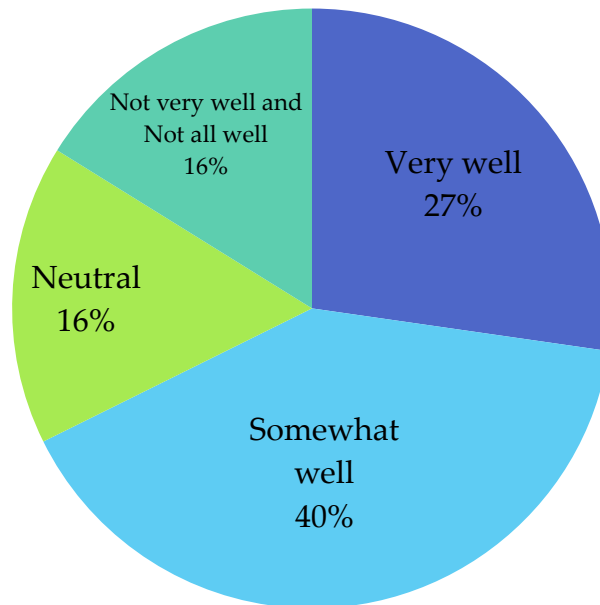
As Bloustein develops a strategy for building and shaping its reputation, it will need an accompanying plan for informing the people and constituencies who can help spread the word about all that Bloustein offers to its students and to the world. The analysis in this section can inform its communications strategy and can serve as a baseline to track the success of ongoing efforts.

Bloustein Communications

- Overall, two-thirds (67%) of Bloustein faculty feel well informed (somewhat well and very well) about all that's going on at Bloustein.

As noted throughout this research project, advocacy, support and positive word-of-mouth from internal constituencies is critical for building reputation. There is room for Bloustein to grow and expand its efforts to keep faculty “in the loop” about Bloustein’s accomplishments, press appearances, new initiatives, research findings, etc., so that they can be effective ambassadors for the School.

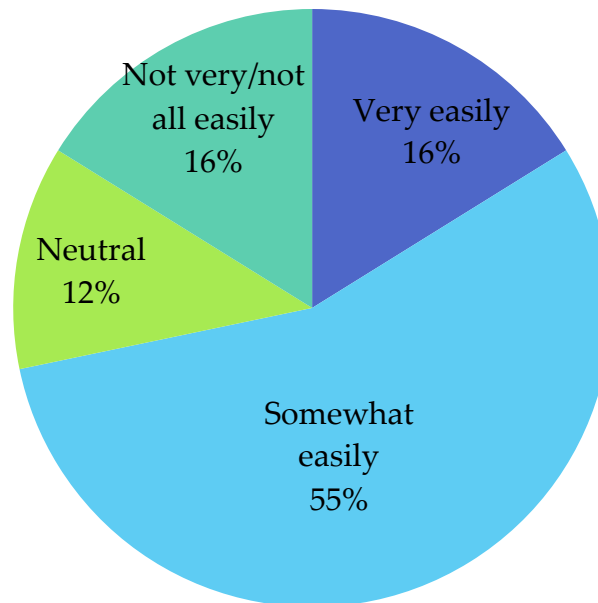
Personal Resonance of Bloustein’s Vision (%)



Bloustein Communications

- Seven in ten (71%) Bloustein faculty feel that it is at least somewhat easy to find the information about Bloustein that they might need. That barely two in ten (16%) respondents say it's "very easy" suggests consideration of a continually updated, central repository of information, e.g., "things to be proud of at Bloustein."
 - Part-time faculty are significantly more likely to say it's "very easy" to find the information they seek, than are full time faculty.

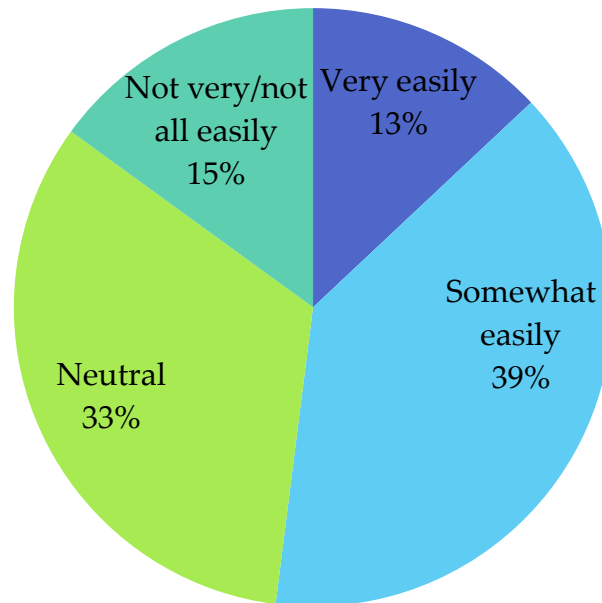
Ease of Finding Information about Bloustein
(on website, events-related media, social media, emails, etc.) (%)



Bloustein Communications

- That only one in ten (13%) Bloustein faculty feel it is “very easy” to connect its mission and goals to communications suggests the need to develop a stronger identity with consistent visuals, tone, and messages.

Ease of Connecting Bloustein’s Mission, Goals and Objectives from its Communications (%)



Bloustein Communications – Social Media

- Understanding faculty social media habits can inform Bloustein’s social media strategy, both internally and externally. LinkedIn is clearly the leader, with 73% of staff using it, followed distantly by Facebook.

Top 3 Social Media Platforms Used Most Often (%)

	Total
LinkedIn	73
Facebook	49
Twitter	35
YouTube	33
Instagram	27
Snapchat	--

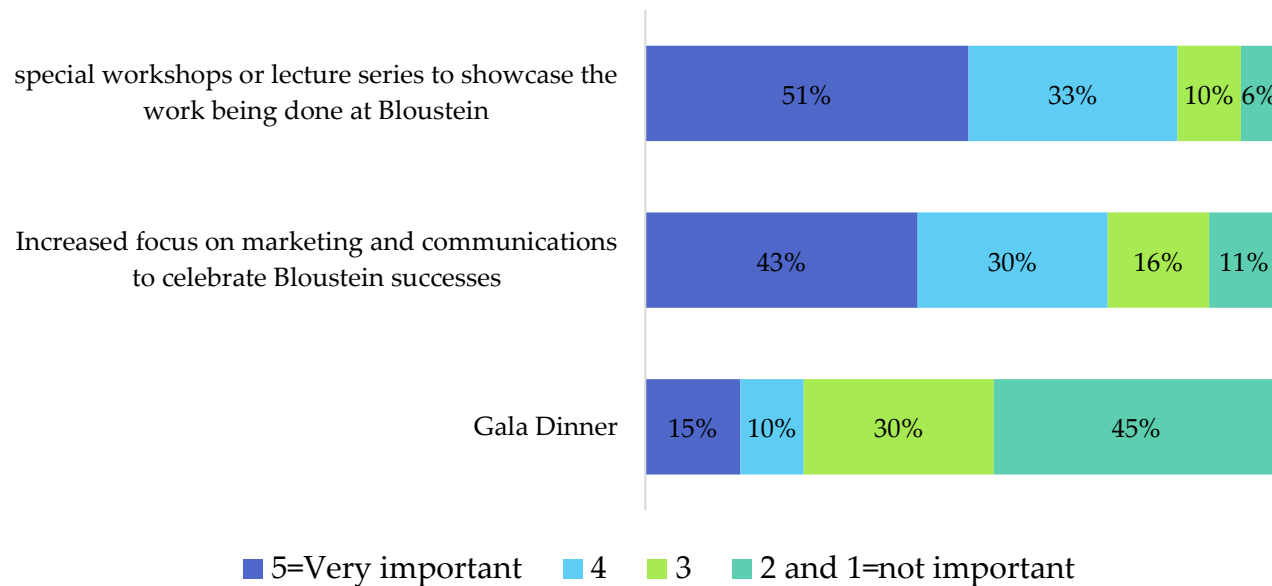


Bloustein Communications – Commemorating 30 Years

- The Bloustein School is fast approaching its 30th anniversary, which presents an excellent opportunity to celebrate the past and to pursue new directions for the future. As such, faculty were asked to assess the importance of different events/activities to mark this milestone.

Both increased marketing to celebrate accomplishments and workshops and lectures are most desired by faculty. A gala is significantly less so.

Importance of 30th Anniversary Events (%)
5 and 4 Ratings on a scale where 5 = “very important” and 1 = “not at all important”



Bloustein Communications – Commemorating 30 Years

- Specific suggestions for how to mark this milestone include...
 - Spotlight the work conducted by Bloustein students, alumni and faculty and the impact of that work in the community
 - “Highlight success stories of our alumni who make a difference and reflect the values of our school.”*
 - “Feature random alumni (not just leaders) on social media ... as part of a build up for the official 30-year recognition of the school. Just quick little blurbs to connect past to present (and future).”*
 - “Honor professors from various categories!”*
 - Develop speaking events/lecture series that involve Bloustein alumni, current and retired faculty, addressing relevant issues
 - “A series of lectures dedicated to all areas of planning. It would be good to bring back retired faculty to forums where they can have a conversation with new faculty and students.”*
 - “Discussions about #BlackLivesMatter and the coronavirus reshaping urbanism and equity considerations in American cities with alums and current faculty/students.”*
 - “Conferences and seminars with noted state speakers to bring attention to the fantastic offerings in the Bloustein program, and to illuminate for the public the value that planning delivers in creating a more sustainable, resilient, and equitable society.”*
 - Enhance Bloustein communications including social media, podcasts, advertising
 - “Involving students in social media campaigns, celebrating the diversity of faculty and students, connecting research of the faculty to current events in recent years or in the history of the school.”*
 - “Take out a cable TV add highlighting the school’s contributions to society.”*
 - “We can (and should) do a much better job promoting our work/the work of our students. Take a page out of USC’s book. They are a hype machine.”*
 - “Weigh the efficacy of podcasts, regular participation on New Jersey and broadcast media.”*



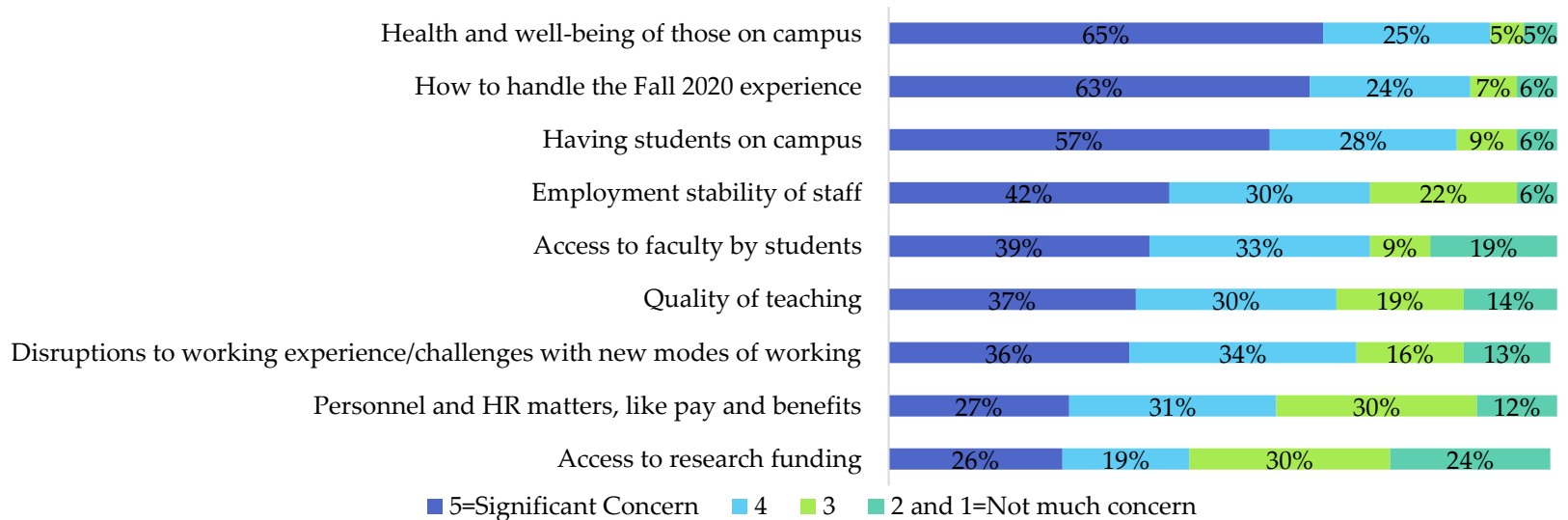
Impact of COVID-19 on Bloustein Faculty

In this time unlike any other, it is important to understand faculty concerns, as well as their reactions to possible strategies the school may take.

Impact of COVID-19– Consideration of Future Directions

- The health and well-being of those on the campus is, by far, the most concerning to faculty, with two-thirds (65%) saying they are significantly concerned about this issue. They are also concerned about how to handle the Fall 2020 semester and having students on campus. (Since the survey was fielded, Rutgers has announced its plans for the fall.)
- It is important to note that 73% of part time faculty are “significantly concerned” about employability (versus 21% of tenured or tenure track faculty who feel the same way).

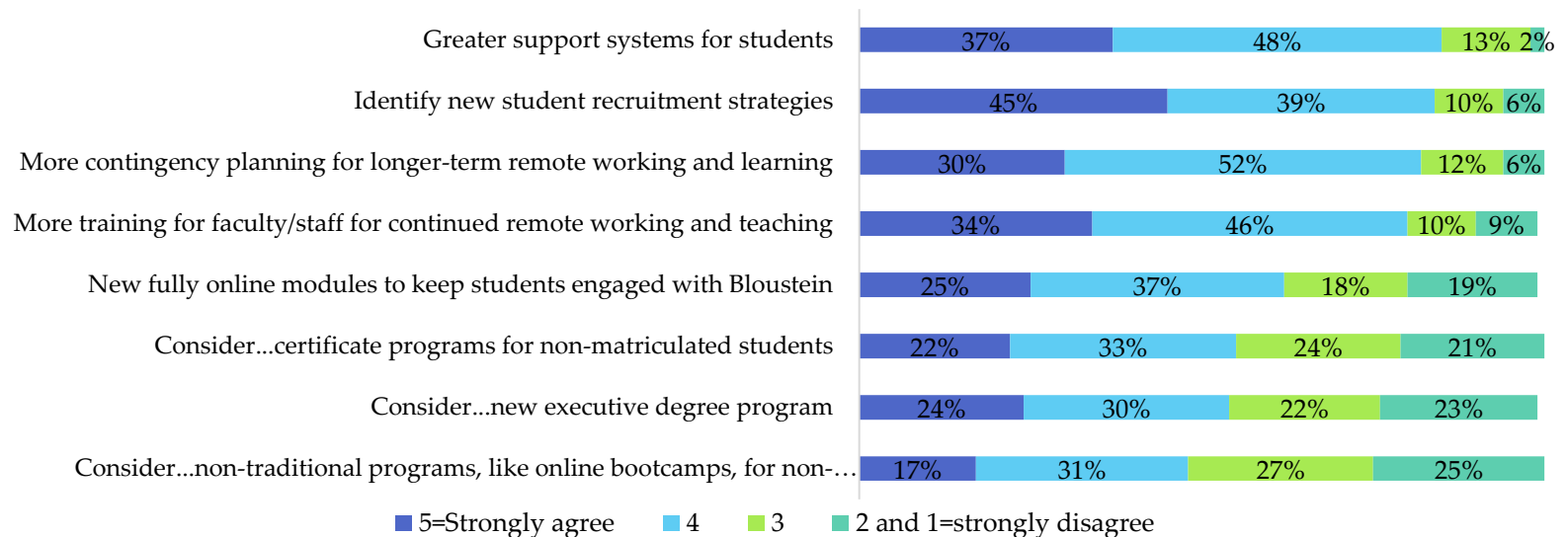
COVID-19’s Impact on Faculty (%)



Impact of COVID-19 – Consideration of Future Directions

- Given all of the uncertainties around Rutgers' financials and campus reopening, faculty were asked to rate the appeal of some new ideas and strategic directions. As shown, they are most supportive of strategies that address the immediate situation, e.g., support systems for students, student recruitment, contingency planning for remote working and learning, and training for faculty around remote teaching. Development of new programs for non-matriculated students and executives are clearly not the priority right now.

Consideration of Future Directions(%)



Impact of COVID-19 – Consideration of Future Directions

- Many faculty members shared their thoughts about strategies that Bloustein could consider.
 - Maintain the quality of instruction, programs despite budget restrictions: *“Let academic quality establish budget priorities rather than letting the budget determine academic priorities.”*
 - Provide more support relative to online teaching and programming, including...
 - Guidance around hybrid learning models
 - More training for faculty regarding online instruction, student engagement
 - Support for implementation of non-academic programs and activities to keep students engaged while virtual (community service/programs, lectures, internships, etc.)
 - Increased tech and tech support to facilitate working from home
 - Demonstrate thought leadership relative to current issues, especially regarding public health and social justice
“Share how we contribute to the COVID crisis. We seem to have almost no footprint in this space and yet we should be a huge player given our focus on justice, social determinants of health....our presence is tiny compared to many of the other schools and programs.”
 - Improve/enhance communications about budget, plans for upcoming semesters, programming, marketing, faculty accomplishments
 - Involve alumni in program creation, idea generation, internship opportunities for students
 - Improve internship experience for students; create a better network for internships
 - Provide more support for research, grant-writing, research fund-raising



Impact of COVID-19 – Suggestions for Bloustein

- Additional ideas include:
 - Workshops/presentations on faculty research to engage/inform students
 - Non-degree programs, e.g., prep program for Health Officer Licensing and Exam
 - Improvements to specific majors, e.g.. Public health, hospital administration, Urban Planning
 - More support for the work of the Centers, Center staff and service to the state
 - More involvement with real world community problems, including in-field work experience
 - Physical plant improvements, including development of a fabrication lab and improved classroom space and technology
 - Investment in new programs, including...advocacy training program with a year-long cohort model; Greater emphasis on environmental and planning law
 - Mental Health check ins for students, staff and faculty
 - Development of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion programs and training





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A total of 114 email invitations were sent out on June 17, 2020, and several reminders were also sent. The survey remained open until July 20, 2020. A total of 59 staff members completed the survey, yielding a response rate of 51.8%. Average length of time to complete the survey was 6 minutes.

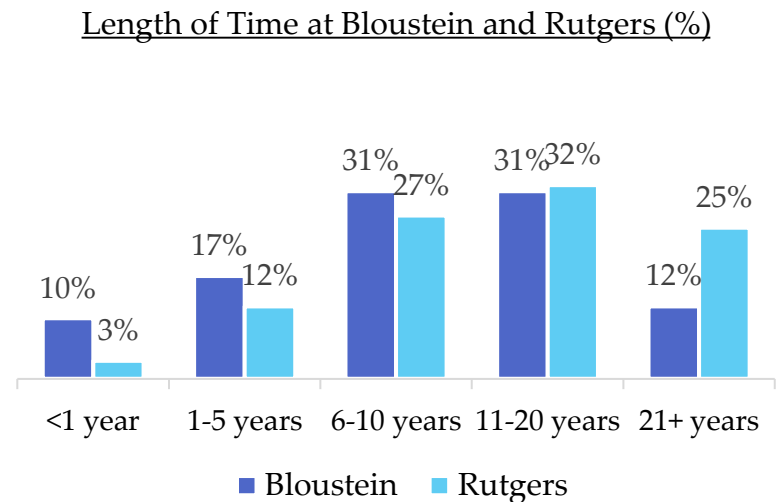
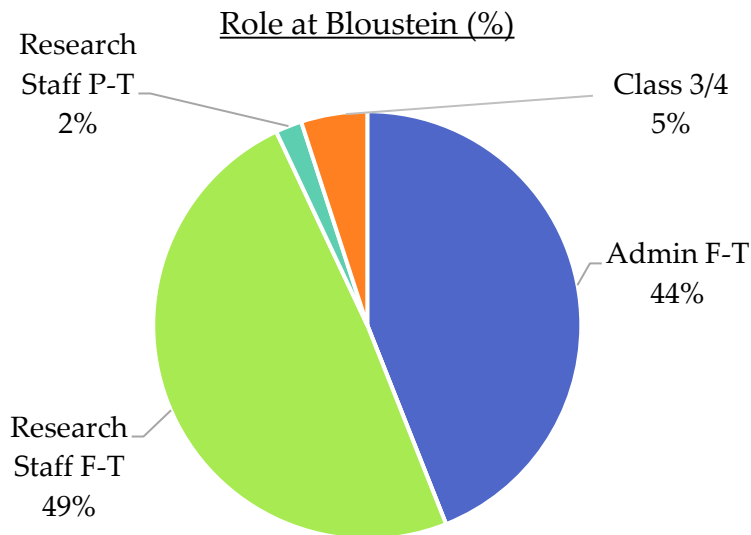
What follows are detailed survey results. The sample size does not allow for segmentation of results, however, differences between segments that are directionally significant are noted in the analysis.



Characteristics of the Sample

Half (49%) of the survey respondents are full-time research staff. Another 44% are full-time administrative staff. Very few part-time research staff (and no part-time administrative staff) participated in the survey.

Just 27% of staff respondents have been associated with Bloustein for five years or less, compared to 15% who have been at Rutgers for the same period.



Defining Reputation

This section is devoted to understanding what factors Bloustein administrative and research staff believe contribute to a college or university's reputation, and to answering the question, *"what are the measures upon which a reputation is built?"*

Defining Reputation

- It's clear that a “good reputation” is important for colleges and universities to attract quality students and faculty, as well as research and other support, but what does reputation really mean? What are the factors that lead people to associate a college or university with a “good reputation”?

A culture that values inclusivity and diversity is very important to eight in ten staff in defining a school's reputation. Note that this research was conducted during the height of the Black Lives Matter protests, bringing diversity and inclusion front and center generally, and perhaps even more so for Bloustein staff, who work there because they believe in its mission to play a role in improving civic life.

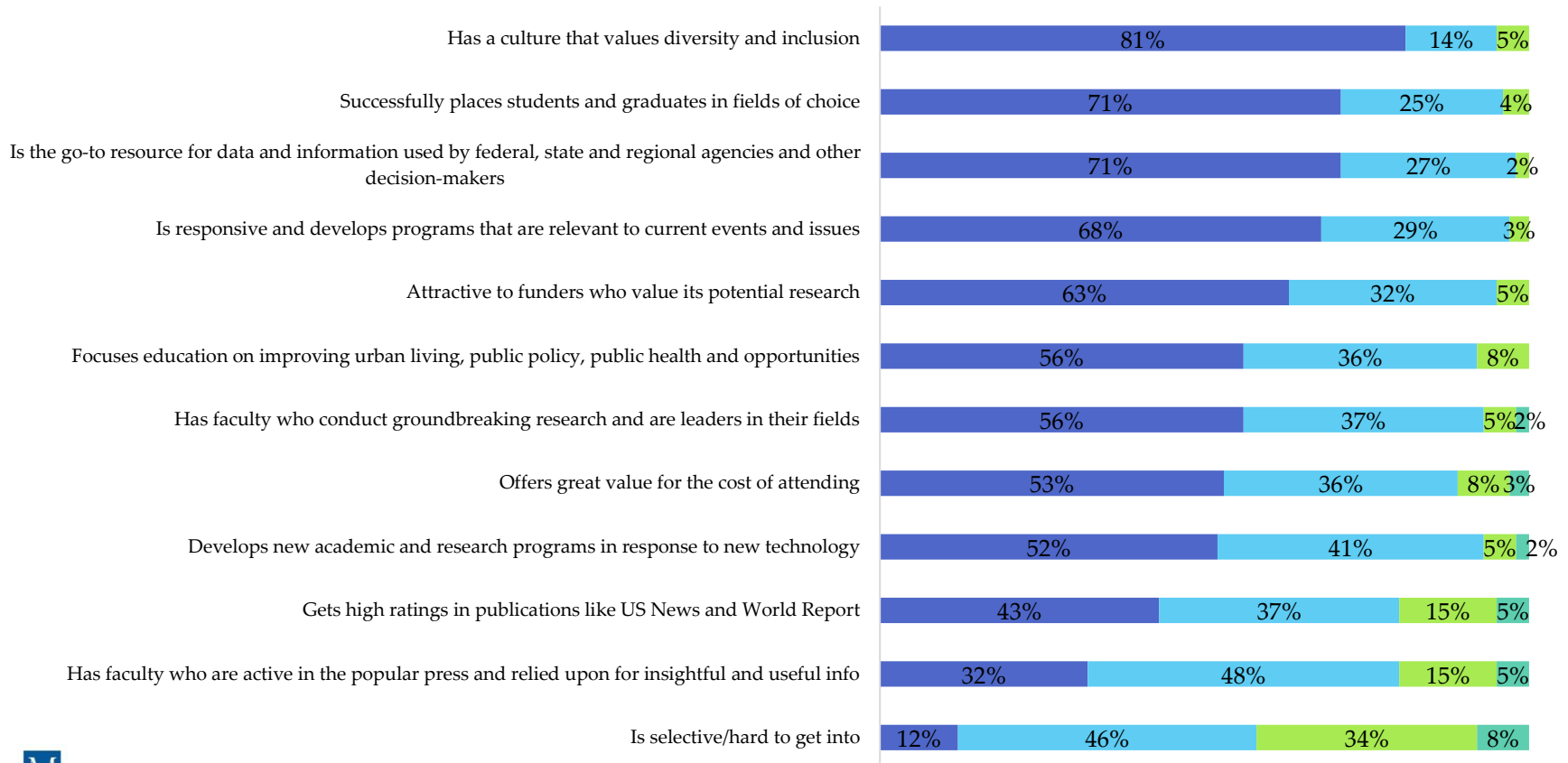
Reputation is also perceived to be driven by successfully placing graduates in their fields of choice, being a resource for government agencies and key decisionmakers; and responsive curriculum.

It is interesting to note that admissions selectivity is the least important factor in the development of “reputation”.



Defining Reputation

Importance of Factors in Describing a School's "Reputation" (%)



■ 5 = Very Important ■ 4 ■ 3 ■ 2 and 1 = Not Important



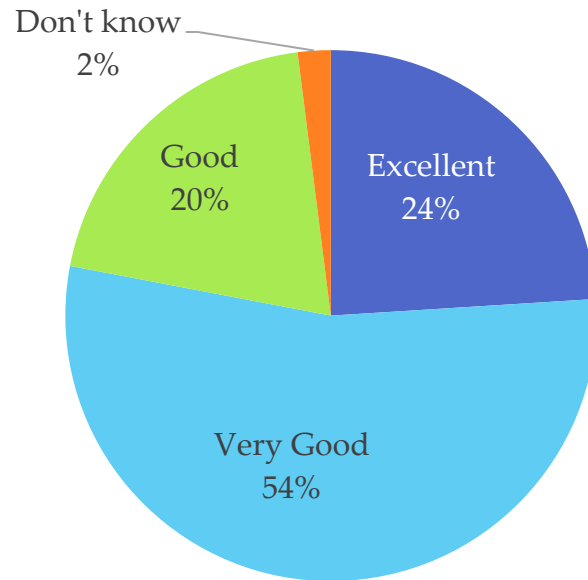
Perceptions of Bloustein

This section presents data about the current state of Bloustein's reputation among administrative and research staff, and impressions of strengths and challenges.

Perceptions of Bloustein -- Overall

- Administrative and research staff were asked to assess the overall reputation of Bloustein. As shown, its reputation is largely positive, with three-quarters of respondents (77%) rating it as “excellent” or “very good”. No respondents say that its reputation is less than “good”. That said, the findings also demonstrate that there is room for reputational growth.
 - It is important to note that administrative staff are more likely to rate its reputation as “excellent” than are research staff (35% vs. 17%)

Reputation of The Bloustein School (%)

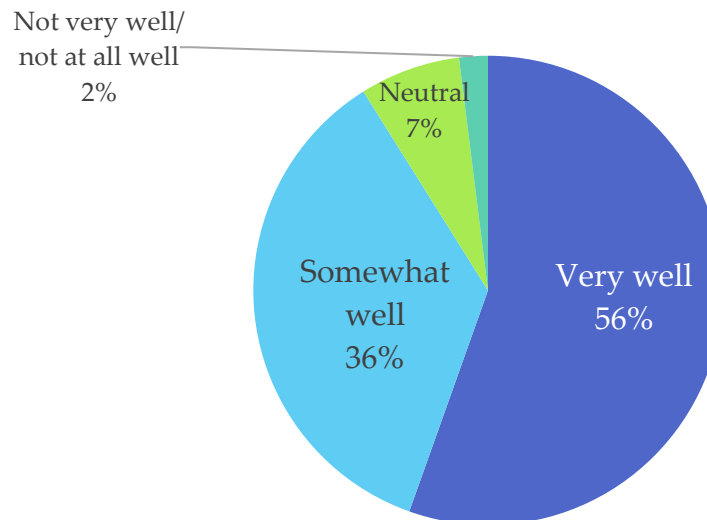


Perceptions of Bloustein -- Mission

- Respondents were reminded that the mission of The Bloustein School is ***to create just, socially inclusive, environmentally and healthy sustainable local, national and international communities***, and asked to rate how well this vision personally resonates for a school of planning, public health, health administration and public policy.

The vision resonates very well with over half of the respondents (56%), and somewhat well with an additional 36%. This resonance is equally high across all segments, suggestion that the statement really captures what Bloustein is all about.

Personal Resonance of Bloustein's Vision (%)



Perceptions of Bloustein -- Performance

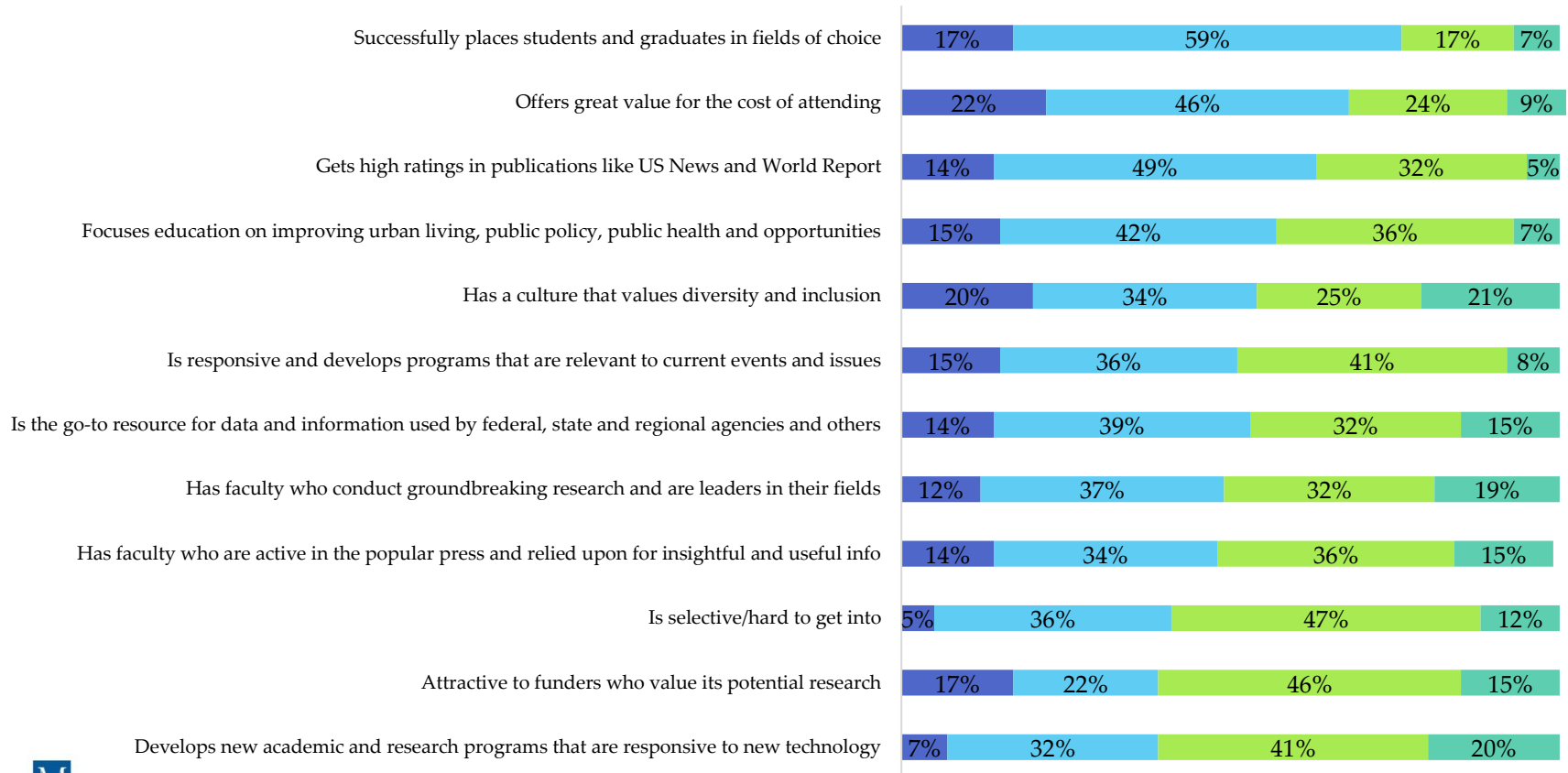
- To better understand where administrative and research staff believe Bloustein excels, and where it could do better, respondents were asked to rate Bloustein on the same measures used to define Bloustein's reputation. As shown, staff are positive about Bloustein; on nearly every measure (except for program development and diversity/inclusion).

Bloustein is most highly rated (over 6 in 10 respondents rating it as excellent and very good) for its placement track record, cost of attending, and high ratings in publications.



Perceptions of Bloustein -- Performance

Impressions of Bloustein School's Performance (%)



■ Excellent ■ Very Good ■ Good ■ Fair/Poor



Perceptions of Bloustein -- Performance

- There is room for Bloustein to improve its performance. Comparing “excellent/very good” impressions of Bloustein, to what respondents believe is very important for a good reputation (ratings of 5 and 4 on a scale where 5 = “very important,” and 1 = “not at all important”) shows deficits/gaps. In trying to build its reputation, Bloustein could target the most important contributors to reputation. Right now, importance far exceeds impressions of Bloustein’s performance on these measures:
 - Is attractive to funders (-56 gap)
 - Develops new programs in response to new technologies (-54 gap)
 - Is responsive to current events and issues (-46 gap)
 - Is the Go-to data/info resource for government agencies and others (-45 gap)

Perceptions of Bloustein -- Performance

Gap Between Ratings for Bloustein, and Importance of Factors in Describing a School's "Reputation" (%) Total Respondents

	Importance*	Performance**	Gap
Attractive to funders who value its potential research	95	39	-56
Develops new academic and research programs in response to new technologies	93	39	-54
Is responsive and develops programs that are relevant to current events and issues	97	51	-46
Is the go-to resource for data and info used by government agencies and others	98	53	-45
Has faculty who conduct groundbreaking research and are recognized as leaders in their fields	93	49	-44
Has a culture that values diversity and inclusion	95	54	-41
Focuses education on improving urban living, public health and opportunities	92	57	-35
Has faculty who are active in the popular press, relied upon by media for insightful and useful information	80	48	-32
Offers great value for the cost of attending	89	68	-21
Successfully places students and graduates in fields of choice	96	76	-20
Gets high ratings in publications like US News and World Report	80	63	-17
Is selective/hard to get into	58	41	-17



Bloustein Communications

As Bloustein develops a strategy for building and shaping its reputation, it will need an accompanying plan for informing the people and constituencies who can help spread the word about all that Bloustein offers to its students and to the world. The analysis in this section can inform its communications strategy, and the data can serve as a baseline to track the success of ongoing efforts.

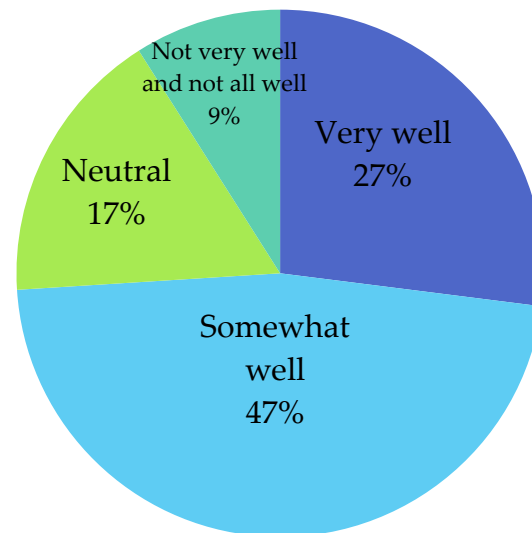
Bloustein Communications

- Overall, three-quarters (74%) of Bloustein staff feel well informed (somewhat well and very well) about all that's going on at Bloustein.

As noted throughout this research project, advocacy, support and positive word-of-mouth from internal constituencies are critical for building reputation. There is room for Bloustein to grow and expand its efforts to keep staff “in the loop” about Bloustein’s accomplishments, press appearances, new initiatives, research findings, etc.

- Administrative staff are significantly more likely to feel “very well informed” about the goings on at Bloustein than are research staff (54% vs. 7%, respectively).

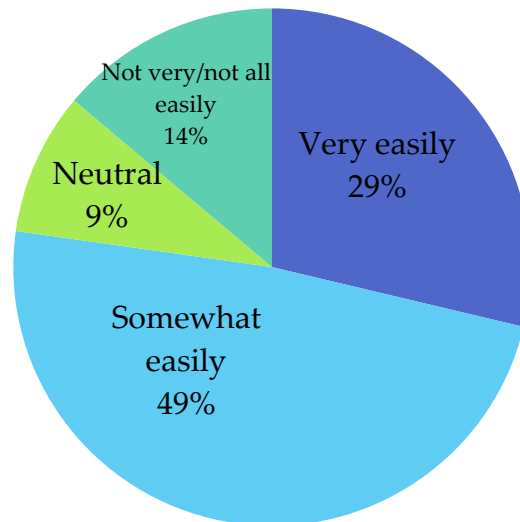
How Well Informed Do You Feel about Developments, Events and Other Activities at Bloustein? (%)



Bloustein Communications

- More than three-quarters (78%) of Bloustein staff feel that it is at least somewhat easy to find the information about Bloustein that they might need. That only three in ten (29%) respondents say it's "very easy" suggests consideration of a continually updated, central repository of information, e.g., "things to be proud of at Bloustein."
- Administrative staff are significantly more likely to feel it is "very easy" to find information about Bloustein than are research staff (46% vs. 17%, respectively).

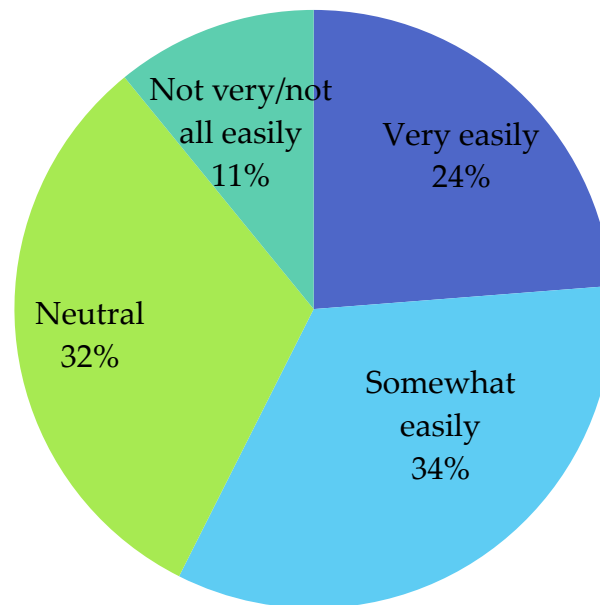
Ease of Finding Information about Bloustein
(on website, events-related media, social media, emails, etc.) (%)



Bloustein Communications

- That fewer than 1 in 4 Bloustein staff feel it is “very easy” easy to connect its mission and goals to communications suggests the need to develop a stronger identity with consistent visuals, tone, and messages.
- Here, too, administrative staff are more positive than research staff; 39% say it is “very easy” to connect Bloustein’s communications to its mission and goals, versus 14% of research staff who feel that way.

Ease of Connecting Bloustein’s Mission, Goals and Objectives from its Communications (%)



Bloustein Communications – Social Media

- Understanding staff social media habits can inform Bloustein’s social media strategy, both internally and externally. Facebook is clearly the leader, with 73% of staff using it. This is followed distantly by LinkedIn and Instagram.

Top 3 Social Media Platforms Used Most Often (%)

	Total
Facebook	73
LinkedIn	57
Instagram	36
YouTube	30
Twitter	21
Snapchat	4

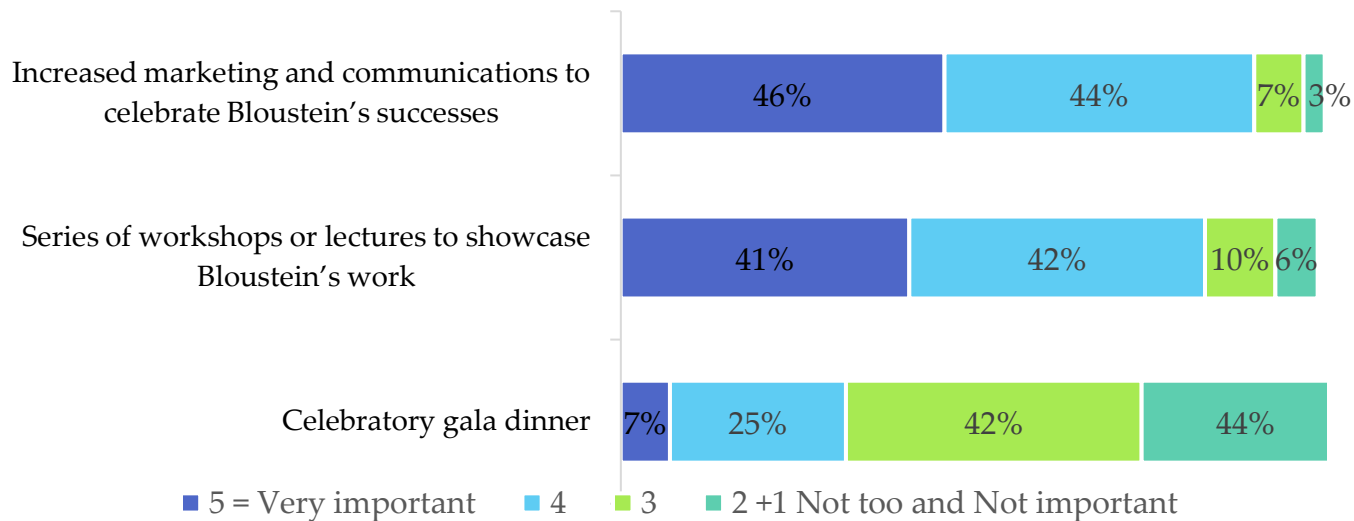


Bloustein Communications – Commemorating 30 Years

- The Bloustein School is fast approaching its 30th anniversary, which presents an excellent opportunity to celebrate the past and to pursue new directions for the future. As such, staff were asked to assess the importance of different events/activities to mark this milestone.

Increased marketing to celebrate accomplishments and workshops and lectures are most desired by staff. A gala is significantly less so as it “seems like a waste of time and effort especially at this time (of COVID)” and “most schools don’t celebrate (with a gala) until milestone dates... even a 50th as a school isn’t that significant.”

Importance of 30th Anniversary Events (%)
On a scale where 5 = “very important” and 1 = “not at all important”



Bloustein Communications – Commemorating 30 Years

- Specific suggestions for how to mark this milestone include...
 - Honor distinguished alumni, professors and students (through publications, awards, lectures, etc.)

“Inclusion of testimony from former students, praising the School and its impact on their careers as well as the perceived prestige of the School outside of the University.”
 - Spotlight the work conducted by Bloustein and the impact of that work in the community

“Having an area located in the school that showcases the school, students and research centers achievements and recent research findings. A place to go other than your desk or email for short snip-its or visuals of the awesome work we do all year long.”

“30-year lookback at the contributions of EJB to NJ - through projects, research, service, students, and scholars”

“A strong effort to develop communicative videos and electronic medium of QUALITY showcasing academic programs for recruitment purposes and to enhance peer to peer standing.”
 - A retrospective that includes history of the school, Edward J. Bloustein and some of the early faculty
 - Announcement of short- and long-range goals/vision for the next 30 years

“Partnering with NJ professional organizations like APA and NJACCHO, especially the Rutgers Student chapters, to highlight where they see the link between public health, planning and policy are going in the next 30 years.”
 - A day-time event at the school celebrating the anniversary
 - Hosting an alumni homecoming event

“Maybe like an informal BBQ meet and greet between alums and current students and faculty? Strong faculty attendance at this event will be important as it will be a great way to get more alums to come out.”
 - Event with local community in and around New Brunswick
 - News coverage



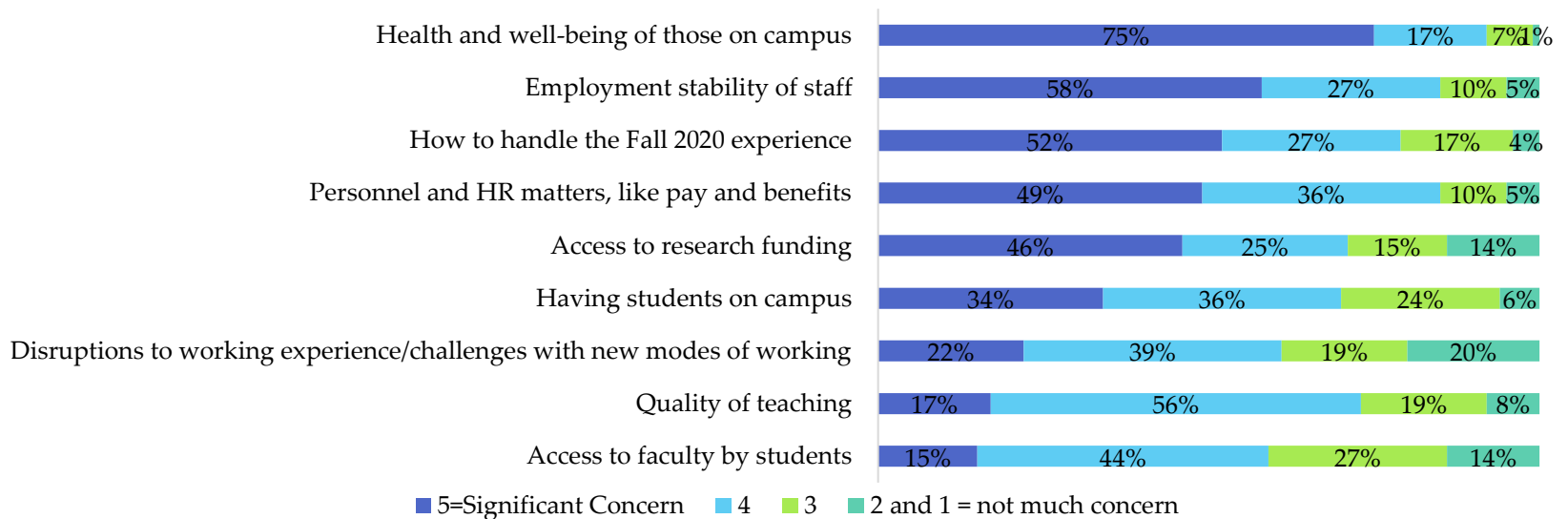
Impact of COVID-19 on Bloustein Staff

In this time unlike any other, it is important to understand staff concerns, as well as their perceptions of possible strategies the school may take.

Impact of COVID-19

- The health and well-being of those on the campus is, by far, the most concerning to staff, with three-quarters (75%) saying they are significantly concerned about their colleagues and students. They are also concerned about their professional futures and, given the uncertainty surrounding Rutgers' Fall 2020 reopening plans at the time this survey was conducted, how to handle the Fall semester. (Rutgers has since announced its plans for the fall.)
- Encouragingly, many fewer are concerned about quality of teaching or students' access to faculty, suggesting that these issues have been handled well so far.

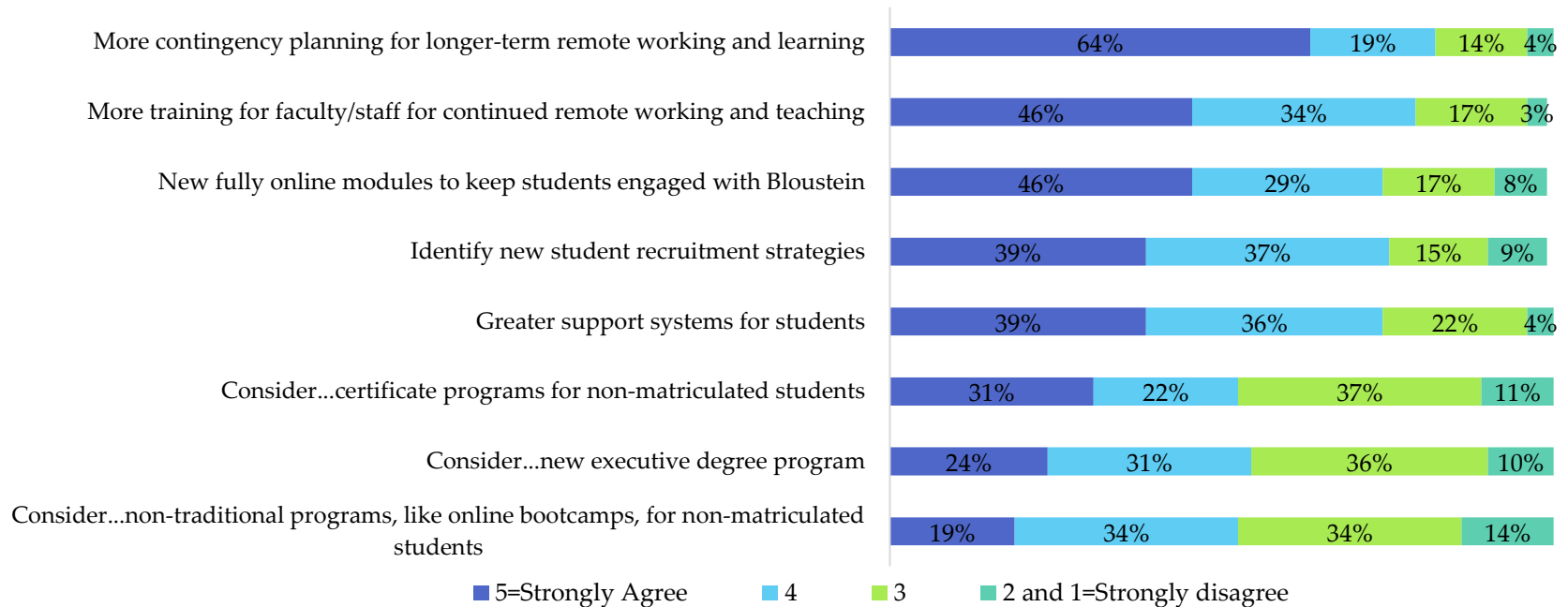
COVID-19's Impact on Staff (%)



Impact of COVID-19 – Consideration of Future Directions

- Given all of the uncertainties around Rutgers’ financials and campus reopening, respondents were asked to rate the appeal of some new ideas and strategic directions. As shown, they are most supportive of strategies that address the immediate situation, e.g., contingency planning for remote working and learning, and training for faculty around remote teaching. Development of new programs for non-matriculated students and executives are clearly not the priority right now.

Consideration of Future Directions (%)



Impact of COVID-19 – Suggestions for Bloustein

- Many staff members shared their thoughts about strategies that Bloustein could consider.
 - Greater support for faculty and staff working remotely: *“Better tech supplies for fac and staff working from home!”* and *“Access to specialty software normally available in the labs.”*
 - Improved communication about Bloustein’s COVID response
 - “Timing -- consider compressed learning until winter/late fall when pandemic is likely to increase in transmissions -- students leaving for Thanksgiving should not come back to campus.”*
 - “More communication on the state of the fall semester to students!”*
 - “Are our jobs secure? We need to hear about that.”*
 - Better training for online/remote teaching
 - “Training and development for faculty and PTLs to teach remotely so experience is still high quality and customized for each student.”*
 - More virtual/online non-academic programming
 - “Online networking events, could be by topic.”*
 - “Meet the faculty/staff online events.”*
 - Greater focus on revenue generation/cost savings measures
 - “Get rid of smaller centers that cannot bring in enough money.”*
 - “Put out a call to all employees to solicit ideas for revenue generation and cost-savings.”*
 - “Show appreciation to staff who bring in research money and support students.”*
 - “Expand base of funders.”*
 - Increased attention to internship experiences for students; create a better network for internships



Impact of COVID-19 – Suggestions for Bloustein

- Specific programming ideas include...
 - More collaboration with other Schools within Rutgers: *“Joint funding strategies with other schools and programs (e.g., engineering, SEBS); Joint programs and class offerings with other schools (e.g., engineering, SEBS).”*
 - Accelerated degree programs:
 - “We need to develop ONLINE one-year, 30 credit programs in our core subject areas, not executive but core subject areas like GIS/Graphics, Design, Informatics, Public Management, Global Health.”*
 - “Consider offering more online degree grad degree program options with less credits required for nontraditional students who are mid-career or making career changes and advertise to this group.”*
 - Non-degree programs:
 - “I think the bootcamp idea is a very good one, especially with regards to data analytics, big data, data science, GIS. Maybe collaborate with other schools at Rutgers to do joint Bootcamp programs (e.g. Data Science in Business School or Computer science dept combined with public informatics.”*
 - “Collaborate with large employer partners (state, fed, local gov't/private companies) whereby they could provide a continuous cohort of employees who go through our certification programs/bootcamps/executive programs/training programs/masters programs virtually or onsite (at their location). Offer a lot of classes that count towards the PP certification; one final thought: Could there be a 'mini-MCRP' for those who work in the planning field who don't have master's degree's but who are in higher level positions? (not sure this exists, but a thought).”*
 - “In service training programs for professional in our fields.”*
 - COVID specific content: *“Implement strategies for community development in the COVID context.”*





THE
MELIOR
GROUP

Information. Intelligence. Insights.

Building Bloustein's Reputation: Results of Market Research with Alumni

Prepared for:

RUTGERS

Edward J. Bloustein School
of Planning and Public Policy

August 2020

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Background

The Bloustein School is in the process of preparing a Strategic Communications Plan to guide its path to achieving a top national and international reputation... to be a school of choice, one that is highly regarded, favorably known, and recognized for its ability to attract top tier students, faculty and funding for research and other purposes.

The Melior Group designed market and audience research to inform the Strategic Communications Plan. Research results include...

- a set of baseline metrics to understand perceptions of the School by its stakeholders
- an assessment of how Bloustein can position itself to take advantage of the opportunities that lie ahead
- an understanding of the competitive landscape on which to shape its future.

To elicit sufficient market-based data to inform the Communications Plan, Melior's research approach included:

- In-depth individual and group interviews with internal stakeholders (administrators and faculty)
- In-depth interviews with external influencers and key opinion leaders
- Internal surveys of Bloustein alumni, faculty, staff and current students
- Survey of prospective students

This report provides the results of an internal survey of Bloustein administrative and research staff. Results of the other research tasks and surveys are provided under separate cover.



Methodology

This report presents the results of an online survey with alumni. The Melior Group developed a survey instrument with input and approval from the Bloustein project management team, and then developed a survey link which Bloustein embedded in an email invitation to its alumni with valid email addresses. Returns went straight to The Melior Group.

A total of 6,053 email invitations were sent out on June 16, 2020 and several reminders were also sent. This group also includes 653 recent (2020) graduates.

Average length of time to complete the survey was 6 minutes. The survey remained open until July 20, 2020. A total of 423 completed surveys were received, for a response rate of 6.9%.

What follows are detailed survey results. Where helpful for decision-making, responses are analyzed by key segments, defined as follows:

- Last attended Bloustein. Respondents were asked how long it had been since they last attended Bloustein. Note that the category “ ≤ 2 years” includes alumni who are currently attending Bloustein (for perhaps an additional degree, to take classes, etc.)
- Degree(s) earned at Bloustein. Many of the respondents have obtained more than one degree from Bloustein, so a respondent could fall into more than one category here. These groupings may miss people who earned a Masters that did not include an MCRP.

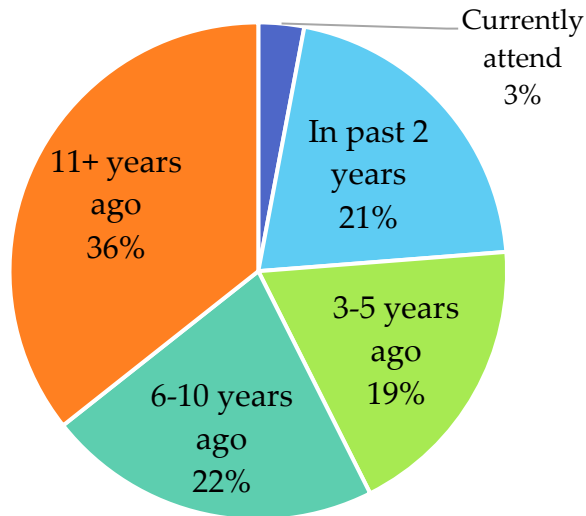


Characteristics of the Sample

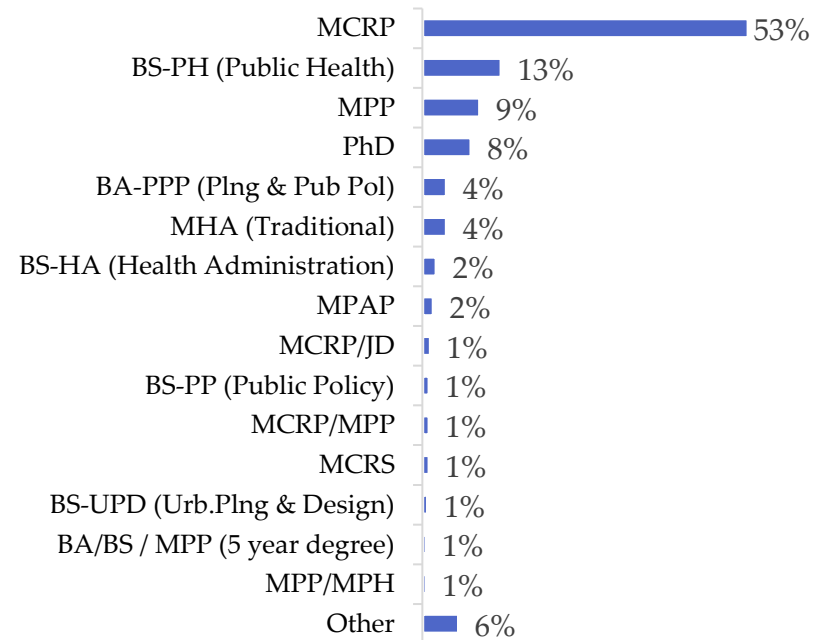
One quarter (24%) of the survey respondents attend now or have done so in the past 2 years. Another 41% last attended between 3 and 10 years ago. More than a third (36%) graduated more than 10 years ago.

Over half (53%) of respondents earned the MCRP. One in ten (each) have earned BS-PH, MPP and PhD.

Last Attended Bloustein (%)



Degrees Earned at Bloustein (%)



Defining Reputation

Alumni can be critically important for building Bloustein's reputation. Because alumni have experienced it firsthand, prospective students, employers and others may rely upon Bloustein alums to learn whether they should enroll, and/or hire graduates of the program, and/or call a certain professor for advice on a problem, etc.

This section is devoted to understanding what are the factors that Bloustein alumni believe contribute to a college or university's reputation, and to answering the question, *"what are the measures upon which a reputation is built?"*



Defining Reputation

- It's clear that a “good reputation” is important for colleges and universities to attract quality students and faculty, research dollars, and the interest of employers in hiring graduates. But what does reputation really mean? What are the factors that lead people to associate a college or university with a “good reputation”?

It appears that alumni associate a “good reputation” with the aspects of a school that would make them proud to have attended, and which have served them well since graduating. As shown, alumni are most likely to associate a good reputation with graduates' employment in fields of choice; a culture that values diversity and inclusion; the School's focus on improving civic life; the ability of the School to adapt its curriculum; and value/cost.

It is interesting to note that admissions selectivity is the least important factor in the development of “reputation”.

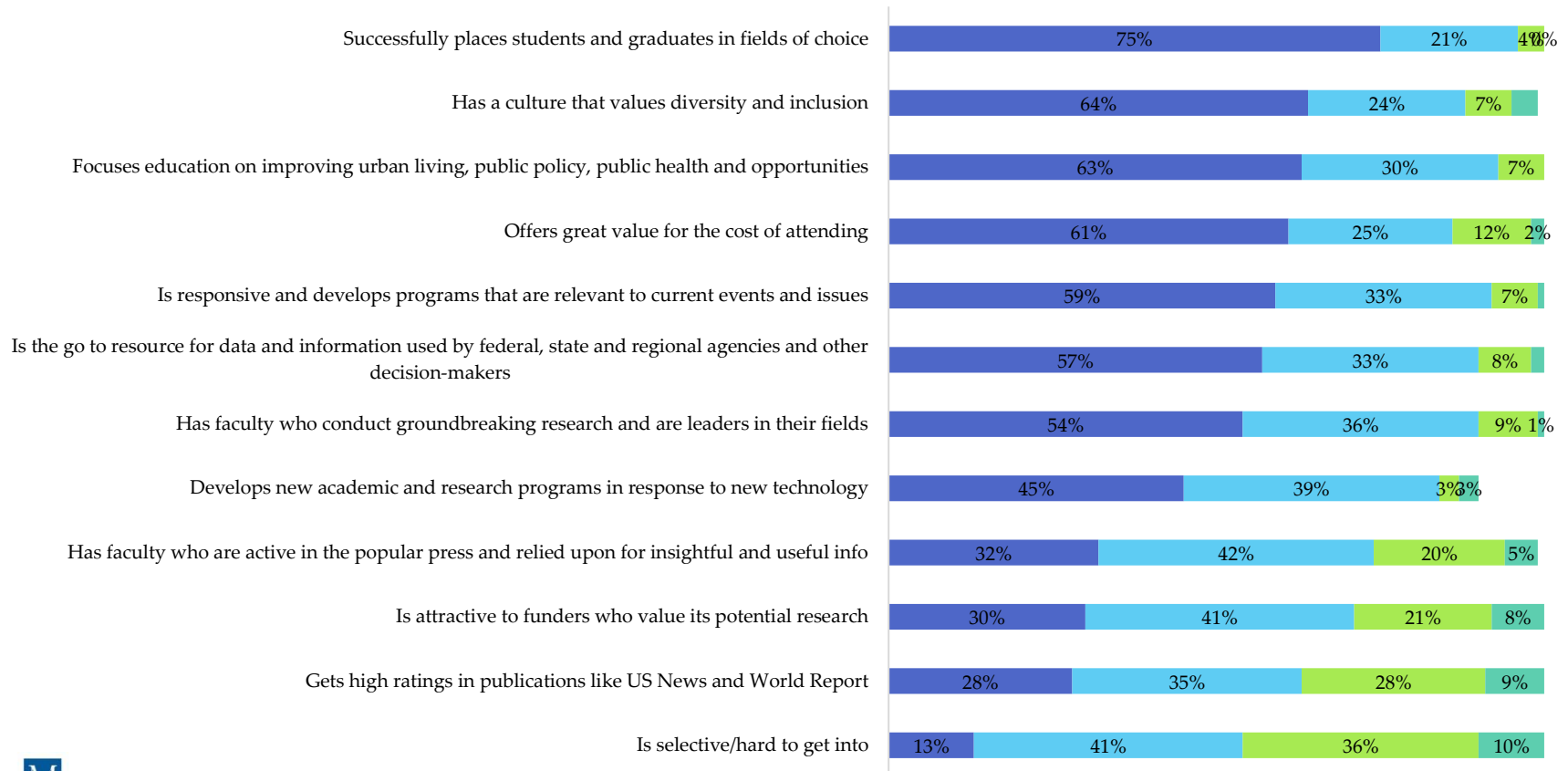
There are not many differences in how different segments rate the importance of these characteristics in overall reputation, but there are a few:

- Most recent graduates and current students are more likely to rate culture that values diversity and inclusion as highly important (97% rate this 5 or 4, versus 89% of other respondents who give that rating).
- Only 50% of PhD recipients say that high ratings in publications like US News and World Report are important (5 or 4 ratings) versus 64% of overall respondents.



Defining Reputation

Importance of Factors in Describing a School's "Reputation" (%)



■ 5 = Very Important ■ 4 ■ 3 ■ 2 and 1 = Not Important

Perceptions of Bloustein

This section presents data about the current state of Bloustein's reputation among alumni, and impressions of strengths and challenges.

Perceptions of Bloustein -- Overall

- Alumni were asked to assess the overall reputation of Bloustein. As shown, its reputation is largely positive, with over 8 in 10 respondents (82%) rating it as “excellent” and “very good”. Only a very few respondents say that its reputation is less than “good”. That said, the findings also demonstrate that there is room for reputational growth.
 - Bloustein’s reputation is higher among people who attended graduate programs at Bloustein than those who attended undergraduate programs. Six in 10 PhD attendees rate Bloustein as “excellent” versus four in ten BA/BS or MCRP degree holders. Nine in 10 MCRP attendees rate Bloustein as “excellent or very good,” versus 79% of undergrads.

Reputation of The Bloustein School (%)

	Total	Last Attended Bloustein				Degree(s) Earned at Bloustein		
		≤2 Yrs	3-5 Yrs	6-10 Yrs	10+ Yrs	MCRP	BA/BS	PhD
n=	(423)	(99)	(79)	(94)	(151)	(238)	(95)	(34)
Excellent	39	34	32	44	44	43	41	59
Very Good	43	49	44	47	37	47	38	21
Good	14	14	20	9	15	7	20	12
Fair and Poor	1	1	3	--	1	1	1	--
Don't Know	2	2	1	1	3	2	--	9



Perceptions of Bloustein -- Mission

- Respondents were reminded that the mission of The Bloustein School is ***to create just, socially inclusive, environmentally and healthy sustainable local, national and international communities***, and asked to rate how well this vision personally resonates for a school of planning, public health, health administration and public policy.

The vision resonates very well with alumni across the board; nearly 9 in 10 say it resonates well (very or somewhat). The PhD alums are most likely to say it resonates “very well” (71%).

Personal Resonance of Bloustein’s Vision (%)

	Total	Last Attended Bloustein				Degree(s) Earned at Bloustein		
		≤2 Yrs	3-5 Yrs	6-10 Yrs	10+ Yrs	MCRP	BA/BS	PhD
n=	(423)	(99)	(79)	(94)	(151)	(238)	(95)	(34)
Very well	54	57	46	60	54	54	54	71
Somewhat well	34	36	38	30	33	33	37	23
Neutral	8	5	13	9	8	9	7	3
Not very well/not at all well	3	2	4	2	5	4	2	3



Perceptions of Bloustein -- Performance

- To better understand where alumni believe Bloustein excels, where it could do better, and what they simply don't know about the School, respondents were asked to rate Bloustein on the same measures that are important in the development of a School's reputation. As shown, alumni are mixed on how they perceive Bloustein, and what they know about it.

Bloustein is most highly rated (50% or more rate it as "excellent or good") for cost/value, emphasis on education to improve civic life, its culture of diversity and inclusion, successful placement of students, and strengths of the faculty. That said, even on some of those measures significant portions of respondents rate Bloustein as fair or poor; 19% rate it as "fair or poor" on successful placement of students, and 16% rate "fair or poor" on having a culture that values diversity and inclusion.

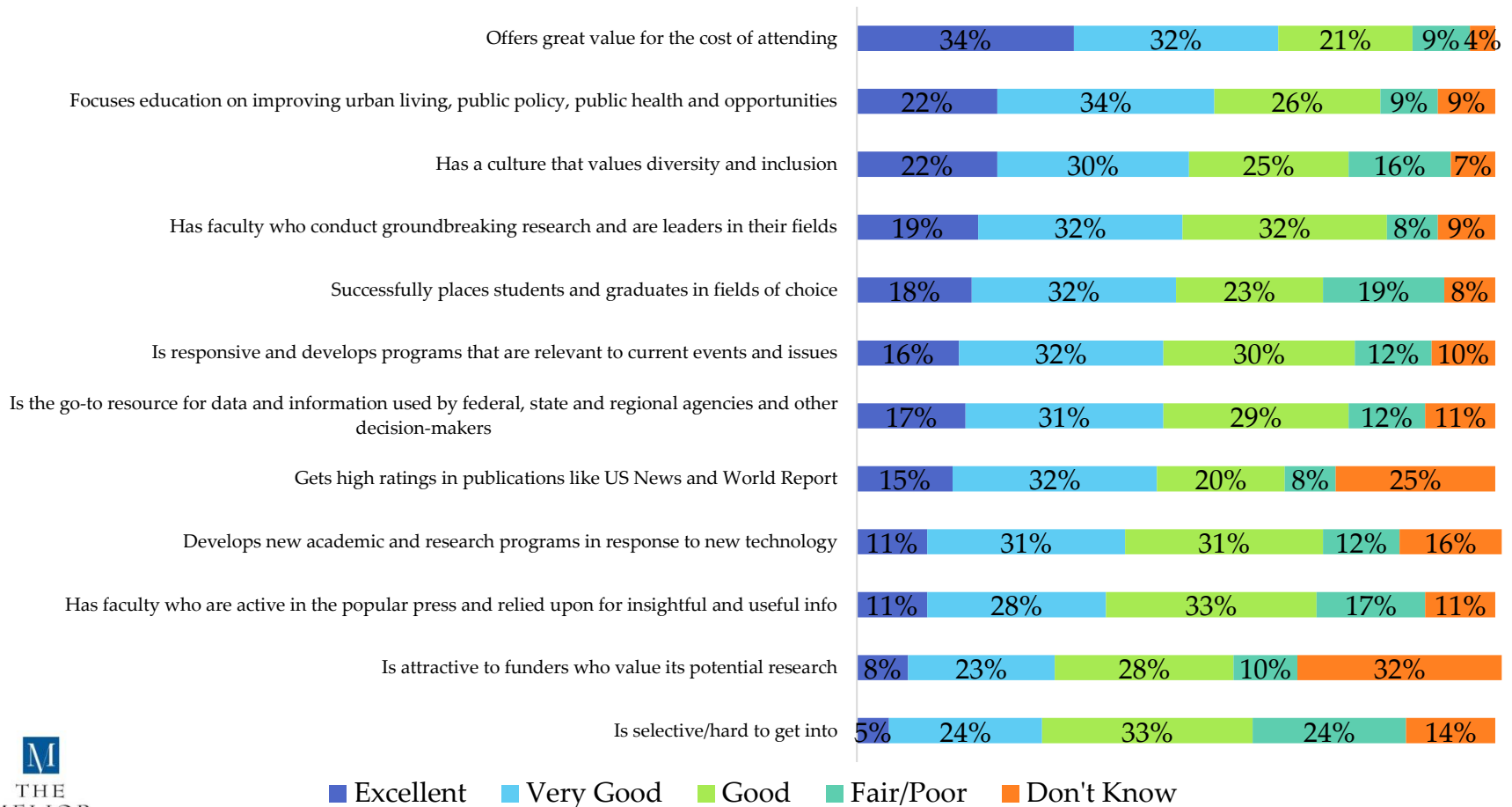
- It is also important to note that there are things alumni don't know about Bloustein, e.g., attractiveness to funders (32% don't know) and whether it gets high ratings in publications like US News and World Report (25% don't know). And 16% don't know about its responsiveness and development of new programs.

This data suggests that prioritizing communication with alumni – who have the potential to hire graduates, contribute money to the school, consult with professors, etc. – will be important going forward.



Defining Reputation

Impressions of Bloustein's Performance (%)



Perceptions of Bloustein -- Performance

- There are some differences in how Bloustein is perceived across the different segments. With only a few exceptions, the most recent attendees are more positive about Bloustein. As one example, 60% rate Bloustein's development of new programs that are relevant to current events and issues as “excellent or good,” versus 37% of people who graduated 10+ years ago (21% in this latter category “don’t know” what Bloustein has done here).
- People who attended Bloustein graduate programs are generally more positive about Bloustein as well.



Perceptions of Bloustein -- Performance

Impressions of Bloustein's Performance (%) Excellent and Very Good Ratings

	Total	Last Attended Bloustein				Earned at Bloustein		
		≤2 Yrs	3-5 Yrs	6-10 Yrs	10+ Yrs	MCRP	BA/BS	PhD
n=	(423)	(99)	(79)	(94)	(151)	(238)	(95)	(34)
Offers great value for the cost of attending	66	67	64	70	64	73	53	62
Focuses education on improving urban living, public health and opportunities	56	60	44	64	56	57	48	65
Has a culture that values diversity and inclusion	52	64	44	50	50	48	60	53
Has faculty who conduct groundbreaking research and are recognized as leaders in their fields	51	55	47	53	49	54	52	65
Places students and graduates in fields of choice	50	53	48	55	46	56	37	59
Is responsive and develops programs that are relevant to current events and issues	48	59	43	45	46	44	55	62
Is the go-to resource for data and info used by government agencies and others	48	49	44	45	51	51	42	62
Gets high ratings in pubs like US News and World Report	47	47	48	52	44	58	33	50
Develops new academic and research programs in response to new technologies	42	60	32	39	37	40	46	53
Has faculty who are active in the popular press, relied upon by media for insightful and useful information	39	45	33	43	36	41	38	53
Is attractive to funders who value its potential research	31	34	30	24	33	31	34	47
Is selective/hard to get into	29	26	25	25	37	34	20	47

Perceptions of Bloustein -- Performance

- There is room for Bloustein to improve its performance. Comparing “excellent/very good” impressions of Bloustein, to what respondents believe is very important for a good reputation (ratings of 5 and 4 on a scale where 5 = “very important,” and 1 = “not at all important”) shows deficits/gaps. In trying to build its reputation, Bloustein could target the most important contributors to reputation, i.e., successful placement of graduates, a focus on education to improve urban living, public health and opportunities, responsive programming, and a culture that values diversity and inclusion.



Perceptions of Bloustein -- Performance

Gap Between Ratings for Bloustein, and Importance of Factors in Describing a School's "Reputation" (%) Total Respondents

	Importance	Performance	Gap
Has a culture that values diversity and inclusion	88	52	-36
Successfully places students and graduates in fields of choice	96	50	-46
Focuses education on improving urban living, public health and opportunities	93	56	-37
Is responsive and develops programs that are relevant to current events and issues	92	48	-44
Develops new academic and research programs in response to new technologies	84	42	-42
Has faculty who conduct groundbreaking research and are recognized as leaders in their fields	90	51	-39
Is the go-to resource for data and info used by government agencies and others	90	48	-42
Offers great value for the cost of attending	86	66	-20
Has faculty who are active in the popular press, relied upon by media for insightful and useful information	74	39	-35
Is attractive to funders who value its potential research	71	31	-41
Gets high ratings in pubs like US News and World Report	63	47	-16
Is selective/hard to get into	54	29	-25

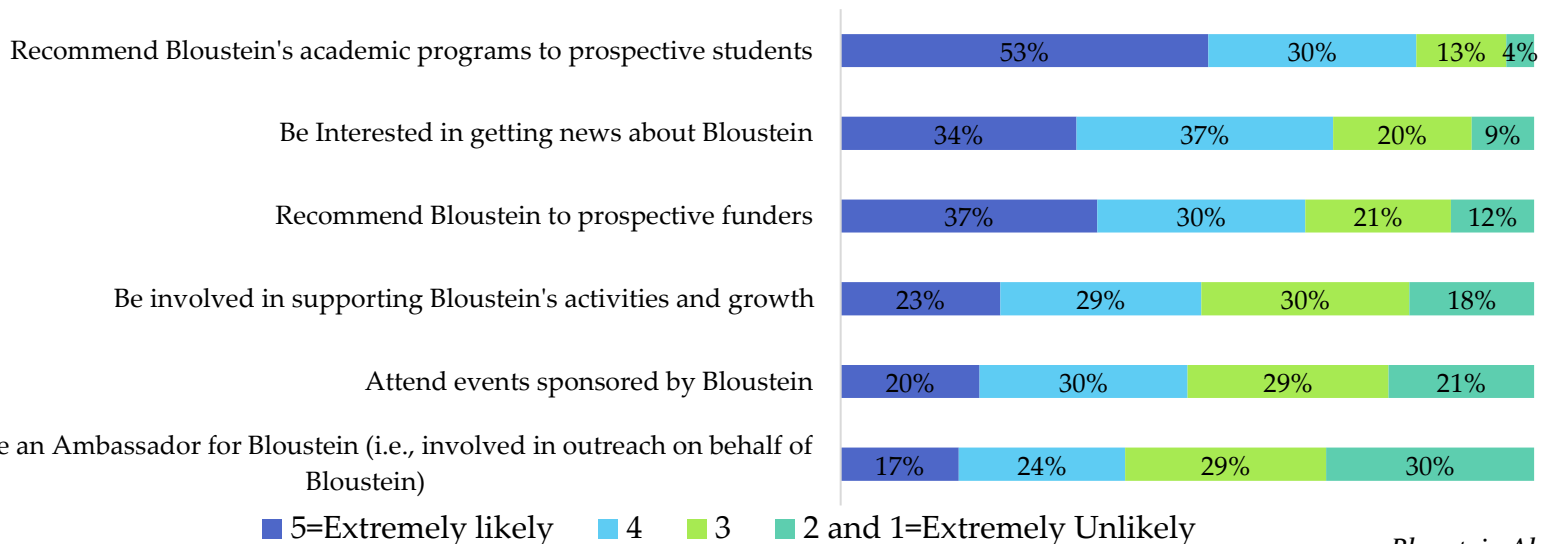


Perceptions of Bloustein – Willingness to Endorse and Support the School

- Alumni were also asked about their willingness to advocate for Bloustein. As shown, they are highly likely to talk positively about Bloustein (e.g., over 8 in 10 respondents are likely to recommend the academic program). This is excellent, because positive word-of-mouth from people who have experienced Bloustein is critical for encouraging new students to consider it, and for building Bloustein’s reputation in employment sectors where there is potential to hire Bloustein graduates.

That said, despite the willingness to recommend Bloustein to prospective students, and to a lesser extent, funders, fewer than half of the respondents are willing to take on a “formal” role as an Ambassador. But that’s ok for the moment; it’s the unscripted comments, heartfelt recommendations and support for Bloustein’s activities that are most important to building authentic buzz about it in workplaces and other settings that count most.

Considering Your Experience as a Student, How Likely Are You to... (%)



Perceptions of Bloustein – Willingness to Endorse and Support the School

- Interestingly, graduates from 3 – 5 years ago seem less interested in supporting Bloustein overall. This prompts consideration of whether this was a time of upheaval at the School, and, if so, development of strategies to forge stronger relationships with these alums should be considered.
- Though Bloustein graduate students are significantly more likely to be enthusiastic about supporting and endorsing Bloustein, and receiving news about it, they are significantly less likely to become Ambassadors for Bloustein.

Considering your Experiences as a Student, How Likely Are You to...(%)
5 Ratings on a scale where 5 = “very likely” and 1 = “not at all likely”*

	Total	Last Attended Bloustein				Earned at Bloustein		
		≤2 Yrs	3-5 Yrs	6-10 Yrs	10+ Yrs	MCRP	BA/BS	PhD
N=	(423)	(99)	(79)	(94)	(151)	(238)	(95)	(34)
Recommend Bloustein’s academic programs to prospective students	53	55	49	55	52	56	47	53
Recommend Bloustein to prospective funders	37	42	29	36	38	38	37	35
Be interested in getting news about the Bloustein	34	36	23	33	39	37	26	38
Be involved in supporting Bloustein’s activities and growth	23	31	18	20	21	22	25	12
Attend events sponsored by Bloustein	20	29	17	22	15	21	25	9
Becoming an Ambassador for Bloustein (i.e. getting involved in outreach)	17	29	17	15	11	14	26	9

* Only “very likely” ratings are shown because these statements involve actions, and typically only people who are “very likely” to do something will actually do it.

Bloustein Communications

As Bloustein develops a strategy for building and shaping its reputation, it will need an accompanying plan for informing the people and constituencies who can help spread the word about all that Bloustein offers to its students and to the world. The analysis in this section can inform its communications strategy and can serve as a baseline to track ongoing efforts.

Bloustein Communications

- Overall, slightly more than half of Bloustein alums feel well informed (somewhat and very well) about all that's going on at Bloustein. MCRP and PhD alumni are slightly more likely to feel informed than are undergrad alums.

As noted throughout this research project, advocacy, support and positive word-of-mouth from alumni are critical for building reputation. There is room for Bloustein to grow and expand its efforts to keep alumni “in the loop” about Bloustein’s accomplishments, press appearances, new initiatives, research findings, etc.

How Well Informed Do You Feel about Developments, Events and Other Activities at Bloustein? (%)

	Total	43 Last Attended Bloustein				Earned at Bloustein		
		≤2 Yrs	3-5 Yrs	6-10 Yrs	10+ Yrs	MCRP	BA/BS	PhD
N=	(423)	(99)	(79)	(94)	(151)	(238)	(95)	(34)
Very well	11	21	6	11	8	8	14	23
Somewhat well	43	47	42	44	40	49	35	35
Neutral	25	15	29	23	31	26	20	18
Not very/not at all well	21	16	23	22	21	18	32	24



Bloustein Communications

- Approximately two-thirds of Bloustein alums feel that it is at least somewhat easy to find the information about Bloustein that they might need. That only 1 in 5 respondents say it's "very easy" suggests consideration of a continually updated, central repository of information, e.g., "things to be proud of at Bloustein."

From the School's Various Ways of Communicating (i.e., website, events-related media, social media, emails or other methods), How Easily Can You Find the Information You're Seeking? (%)

	Total	43 Last Attended Bloustein				Earned at Bloustein		
		≤2 Yrs	3-5 Yrs	6-10 Yrs	10+ Yrs	MCRP	BA/BS	PhD
N=	(423)	(99)	(79)	(94)	(151)	(238)	(95)	(34)
Very easily	20	30	15	19	17	16	20	32
Somewhat easily	48	44	51	46	51	53	41	35
Neutral	28	21	28	33	29	28	31	32
Not very/not at all easily	3	4	6	2	3	3	9	--



Bloustein Communications

- Half of the alumni believe it is at least somewhat easy to connect Bloustein’s mission, goals and objectives, from its current communications. Bloustein’s upcoming 30th anniversary presents an exciting opportunity to reinforce the mission through a refresh of the website and other communications.

How Easily Are You Able to Connect Bloustein’s mission and its goals and objectives from the current communications?

	Total	Last Attended Bloustein				Earned at Bloustein		
		≤2 Yrs	3-5 Yrs	6-10 Yrs	10+ Yrs	MCRP	BA/BS	PhD
n=	(423)	(99)	(79)	(94)	(151)	(238)	(95)	(34)
Very easily	15	26	6	17	12	10	16	18
Somewhat easily	35	45	25	37	33	35	39	38
Neutral	38	23	49	33	44	41	32	38
Not very/not at all easily	12	5	19	13	11	14	14	6



Bloustein Communications – Social Media

- Understanding alumni's social media habits can inform Bloustein's social media strategy. As shown, more recent alumni (within 10 years – more likely younger) are more likely to rely on LinkedIn and Instagram, while less recent alums – who are likely older – are more likely to use Facebook.

Social Media Platforms Used Most Often (%)

	Total	Last Attended Bloustein			
		≤2 Yrs	3-5 Yrs	6-10 Yrs	10+ Yrs
n=	(423)	(99)	(79)	(94)	(151)
LinkedIn	64	72	65	71	52
Instagram	52	65	69	54	31
Facebook	52	49	45	48	60
Twitter	34	30	40	37	31
YouTube	24	22	20	25	28
Snapchat	4	9	7	--	--



Bloustein Communications – Commemorating 30 Years

- The Bloustein School is fast approaching its 30th anniversary, which presents an excellent opportunity to celebrate the past and to pursue new directions for the future. As such, alumni were asked to assess the importance of different events/activities to mark this milestone.

Both workshops and lectures and increased marketing to celebrate accomplishments are perceived as good ideas. A gala is not viewed by many as an important way to celebrate.

- It is important to note that alumni who graduated before the School became Bloustein don't want to feel left out of this celebration:

“I would hope that any celebration of the School would pay tribute to the entire 50+ year history of the School's City and Regional Planning program.”

Importance of 30th Anniversary Events (%) 5 and 4 Ratings on a scale where 5 = “very important” and 1 = “not at all important”

	Total	Last Attended Bloustein				Earned at Bloustein		
		≤2 Yrs	3-5 Yrs	6-10 Yrs	10+ Yrs	MCRP	BA/BS	PhD
n=	(423)	(99)	(79)	(94)	(151)	(238)	(95)	(34)
Series of workshops or lectures to showcase Bloustein's work	84	92	81	84	79	84	86	77
Increased marketing and communications to celebrate Bloustein's successes	66	69	59	62	70	62	66	59
Celebratory gala dinner	34	49	35	24	28	27	53	21



Bloustein Communications – Commemorating 30 Years

- Specific suggestions for how to mark this milestone include...
 - Honor distinguished alumni, professors and students (through publications, awards, social media, etc.)
“Create a temporary Bloustein School “Hero’s Page” on the main website which showcases a few distinguished professors from the past 30 years and their accomplishments.”
 - Develop special communications (e.g., 30th anniversary film, social media campaign, print anthology of contributions to real world problems, podcasts, etc.) to focus on Bloustein contributions and successes
“Showcase the diverse career paths that alumni have chosen.”
“Anniversary events should focus on the school’s legacy--how its ideas have manifested throughout the planning and public policy realms and shaped the fields.”
“Demonstrate how the mission and goals of the school have been met by presenting the changes and updates that the school has made over the years.”
“Illustrate the incredibly wide array of research and teaching by connecting that work to real world issues, of which there are MANY recently. Highlight how Bloustein is making planning relevant, useful, and important.”
 - Develop a new vision for the future (changes to culture and mission, specifically incorporating greater focus on issues that affect disadvantaged populations; expanded recruitment of minority students and professors; and other initiatives.)
“Foster a more just, inclusive environment that is more representative of the country.”



Bloustein Communications – Commemorating 30 Years (cont'd)

- Fundraise for scholarships, endowed professorships, etc.
- Hold events that are consistent with the school's mission, e.g., city walking/transit tours, community service projects
- Deepen connections between alumni through regional events (not just in NJ/NY) – *“Hold networking events around the US to connect Bloustein alumni and help us feel proud.”*
- Deepen connections between students and alumni
 - *“Bring alumni back to serve as mentors to current students for the semester. Have a series of leadership talks live streamed on Facebook, Youtube, and LinkedIn with professionals in public health and policy.”*
- Distribute commemorative swag (t-shirts, other giveaways)
- Conduct educational symposia/professional development for planning and policy entities, both public and private
- Deepen connections/open up Bloustein to the local community and all of Rutgers



Navigating COVID-19

In this time unlike any other, it is important to understand alumni expectations for how Bloustein should respond, and their own willingness to play a role in helping the School and its students.

Navigating COVID-19

- Alumni believe that given its educational mission, Bloustein is obligated to adjust course and incorporate – in real time – the COVID-19 crisis into its curriculum. Nine in 10 respondents agree that Bloustein should educate future students in decision-making under crisis conditions and help improve public welfare as it relates to COVID-19 and its aftereffects through service and research. Support for these initiatives is high across the board.

That said, there is less willingness to become personally involved in helping current Bloustein students. Two-thirds of respondents agree that they would be willing to offer mentorship, advice and other forms of support to current students who are having difficulties completing their education or finding jobs and internships. Interest in supporting Bloustein students is highest among most recent alumni.



Navigating COVID-19

Navigating COVID-19 (%)
5 and 4 Ratings on a scale where 5 = “agree strongly” and 1 = “disagree strongly”

	Total	Last Attended Bloustein				Earned at Bloustein		
		≤2 Yrs	3-5 Yrs	6-10 Yrs	10+ Yrs	MCRP	BA/BS	PhD
n=	(423)	(99)	(79)	(94)	(151)	(238)	(95)	(34)
Bloustein should educate future students in decision-making under crisis conditions	90	92	85	94	89	87	95	91
Bloustein should help improve public welfare as it relates to COVID-19 and its aftereffects through service and research	89	94	90	91	83	86	92	94
I am willing to offer mentorship, advice and other forms of support to current students who are having difficulties completing their education or finding jobs and internships	65	84	59	73	50	62	76	44





THE
MELIOR
GROUP

Information. Intelligence. Insights.

Building Bloustein's Reputation: Results of Market Research with Current Students

Prepared for:

RUTGERS

Edward J. Bloustein School
of Planning and Public Policy

August 2020

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Background

The Bloustein School is in the process of preparing a strategic communications planning document to guide its path to achieving a top national and international reputation... to be a school of choice, one that is highly regarded, favorably known, and recognized for its ability to attract top tier students, faculty and funding for research and other purposes.

The Melior Group designed market and audience research to provide the data to inform the strategic directions for the plan to provide:

- a set of baseline metrics to understand perceptions of the School by its stakeholders
- an assessment of how the School might position itself to take advantage of the opportunities that lie ahead
- an understanding of the competitive landscape on which to shape its future.

To that end, Melior conducted qualitative and quantitative research to provide sufficient market-based information to inform the strategic plan:

- In-depth interviews with internal stakeholders
- In-depth interviews with external influencers and key opinion leaders
- Internal surveys of Bloustein alumni, faculty, staff and current students
- Survey of Prospective Students.

This report provides the results of an internal survey of **current students attending Bloustein**. Results of the other studies (referenced above) are provided separately.



Methodology

This report presents the results of an online survey with current students, both undergraduate and graduate. The Melior Group developed a survey instrument with input and approval from the Bloustein project management team, and then developed a survey link which Bloustein embedded in an email invitation to all its currently enrolled students. Returns went straight to The Melior Group.

A total of 1,761 email invitations were sent out on June 17, 2020, and several reminders were also sent. The survey remained open until July 20, 2020. A total of 203 students completed the survey yielding a response rate of 11.5%. Average length of time to complete the survey was 6 minutes.

Note that the sample pool excludes 2020 graduates of Bloustein. These individuals received invitations to participate in the Alumni survey (results presented under separate cover).

What follows are detailed survey results. Where helpful for decision-making, responses are analyzed by key segments.



Defining Reputation

Findings from previous higher education studies reveal that “reputation” is a significant driver of educational decision-making. People who are investing in education make clear that they want to earn their degrees from colleges and universities, and/or specific programs within those institutions, that have “good reputations” in the fields they want to pursue; they believe that this will translate into lifelong professional benefits.

This section is devoted to understanding what are the factors current Bloustein students believe contribute to a college or university’s reputation, and to answering the question, *“what are the measures upon which a reputation is built?”*



Defining Reputation

- It's clear that a “good reputation” is important for colleges and universities to attract quality students and faculty, as well as research and other support, but what does reputation really mean? What are the factors that lead people to associate a college or university with a “good reputation”? As shown, it seems that a “good reputation” is driven by how well the college/university performs on the attributes that are important to students in the selection of a college/university.

As learned in previous research, that a degree enables one to achieve career goals and value for the cost of attending a college or university are for most people the most important considerations for where to pursue one's education. It is not surprising, then, that – as shown on the chart on the next page – these two are seen as very important contributors to “reputation”.

Note also the importance of inclusivity and diversity in defining reputation. This research was conducted during the height of the Black Lives Matter protests, bringing diversity and inclusion front and center generally, and perhaps even more so for Bloustein students, who attend because they want to play a role in improving civic life.

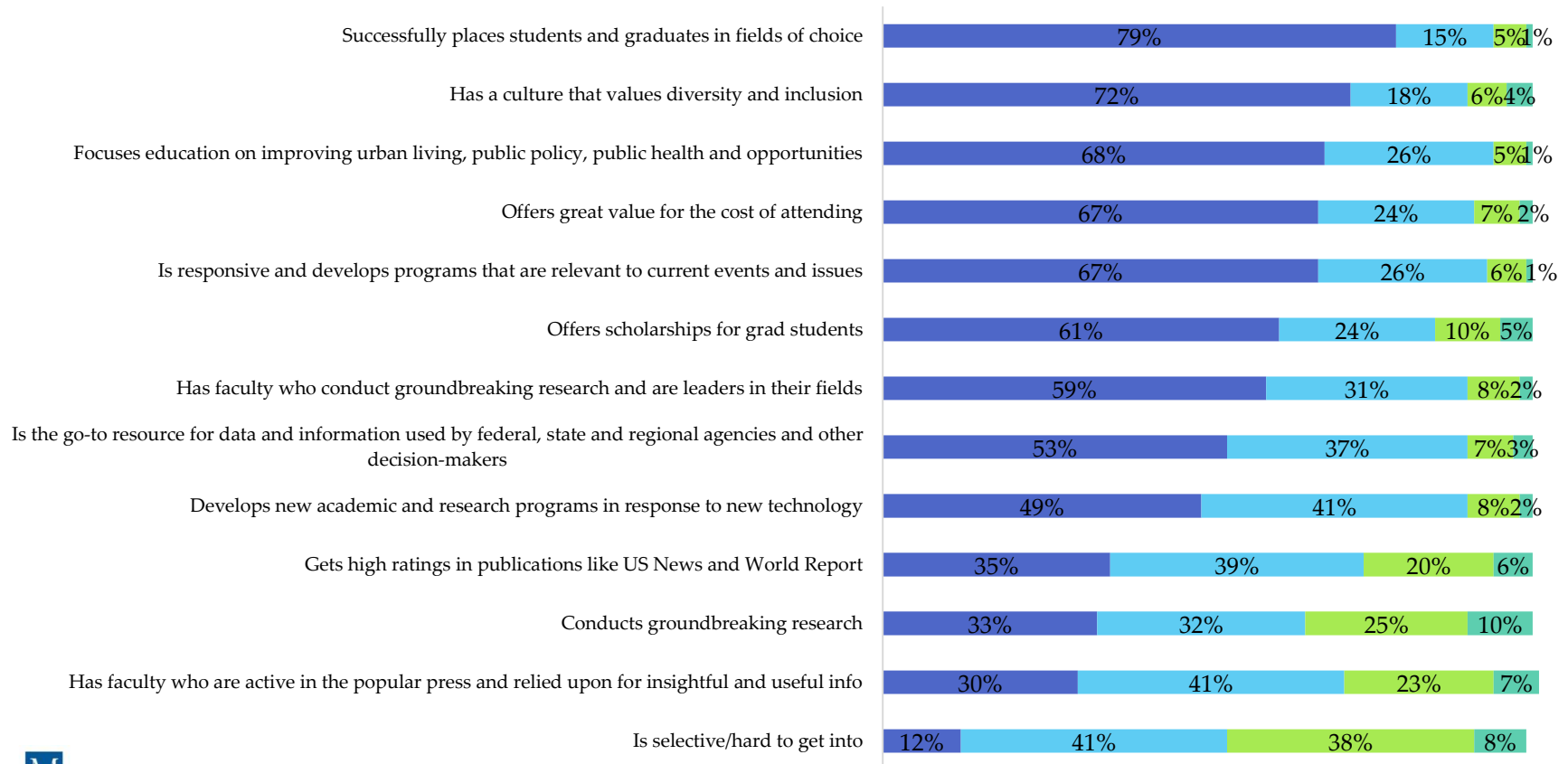
Reputation is also perceived to be driven by innovative, responsive curriculum; groundbreaking research; and faculty who are leaders in their fields (but not necessarily in the population press).

It is interesting to note that admissions selectivity is the least important factor in the development of “reputation”.



Defining Reputation

Importance of Factors in Describing a School's "Reputation" (%)



■ 5 = Very Important ■ 4 ■ 3 ■ 2 and 1 = Not Important



Defining Reputation

- There are a few differences between undergrads and grad students. The former are more impressed by high rankings in mainstream media outlets, professors appearing the popular press, and great value for the cost of attending the college/university. Graduate students – who may have worked in related fields prior to coming to Bloustein, and/or who may be more solidly committed to careers in public policy/planning – are more likely to associate admissions selectivity as a mark of a good reputation.

Defining Reputation

Importance of Factors in Describing a School's "Reputation" – 5 and 4 Ratings* (%) Total Respondents

	Total	Undergrads	Graduate Students
Successfully places students and graduates in fields of choice	94	92	94
Focuses education on improving urban living, public health and opportunities	94	95	93
Is responsive and develops programs that are relevant to current events and issues	93	95	91
Offers great value for the cost of attending	91	95	87
Has faculty who conduct groundbreaking research and are recognized leaders in their fields	91	90	92
Has a culture that values diversity and inclusion	90	90	89
Develops new academic and research programs in response to new technologies	90	90	89
Is the go-to resource for data and info used by federal, state and regional agencies and others	90	91	89
Offers scholarships for grad students	85	84	85
Gets high ratings in publications like US News and World Report	74	76	71
Has faculty who are active in the popular press, relied upon by media for insightful and useful information	71	77	65
Is selective/hard to get into	53	49	57

*5 and 4 ratings on a scale where 5 = "very important" and 1 = "not important"

Perceptions of Bloustein

This section presents data about the current state of Bloustein's reputation among students, and impressions of strengths and challenges

Perceptions of Bloustein -- Overall

- Students were asked to assess the overall reputation of Bloustein. As shown, its reputation is largely positive, with over 7 in 10 respondents (71%) rating it as “excellent” or “very good”. Only a few respondents say that its reputation is less than “good”. That said, the findings also demonstrate that there is room for reputational growth.
 - Bloustein’s reputation is higher among grad students than among undergrads. There are many possible reasons for this, perhaps including a perception that Bloustein’s graduate programs are better than its undergrad programs.

It is also interesting to note that more undergrads “don’t know” about Bloustein’s reputation (8% vs 4% of graduate students). This is consistent with previous research conducted by Melior, wherein findings confirm that graduate students are much more likely to have done the homework to assess the reputation of their degree program in academic/professional circles, given that a major driver to earn a grad degree is to find a job in their field of choice.

Reputation of The Bloustein School (%)

	Total	STUDENT STATUS	
		Undergrads	Grad Students
n=	203	92	105
Excellent	25	19	29
Very Good	46	46	48
Good	21	25	19
Fair and Poor	3	3	1
Don’t Know	5	8	4

Perceptions of Bloustein -- Mission

- Respondents were reminded that the mission of The Bloustein School is ***to create just, socially inclusive, environmentally and healthy sustainable local, national and international communities***, and asked to rate how well this vision personally resonates for a school of planning, public health, health administration and public policy.

The vision resonates very well with over half of the respondents (55%), and somewhat well with an additional 31%. This suggests that the statement really captures – for both undergrads and graduate students – what Bloustein is all about.

Personal Resonance of Bloustein’s Vision (%)

	Total	Undergrads	Grad Students
Very well	55	51	57
Somewhat well	31	34	29
Neutral	10	14	6
Not very well/not at all well	4	1	8



Perceptions of Bloustein -- Performance

- To better understand where current students believe Bloustein excels, and where it could do better, respondents were asked to rate Bloustein on the same measures used to define Bloustein's reputation. As shown, current students are positive about Bloustein; on nearly every measure (with the exception of scholarships for grad students, and admissions selectivity) fewer than 1 in 10 respondents rate it as "fair or poor."

Bloustein is most highly rated for its leading faculty, responsive curriculum, its culture of diversity and inclusion, groundbreaking research, and focus on improving urban living (on each, over 6 in 10 respondents rate Bloustein as "excellent" or "very good.")

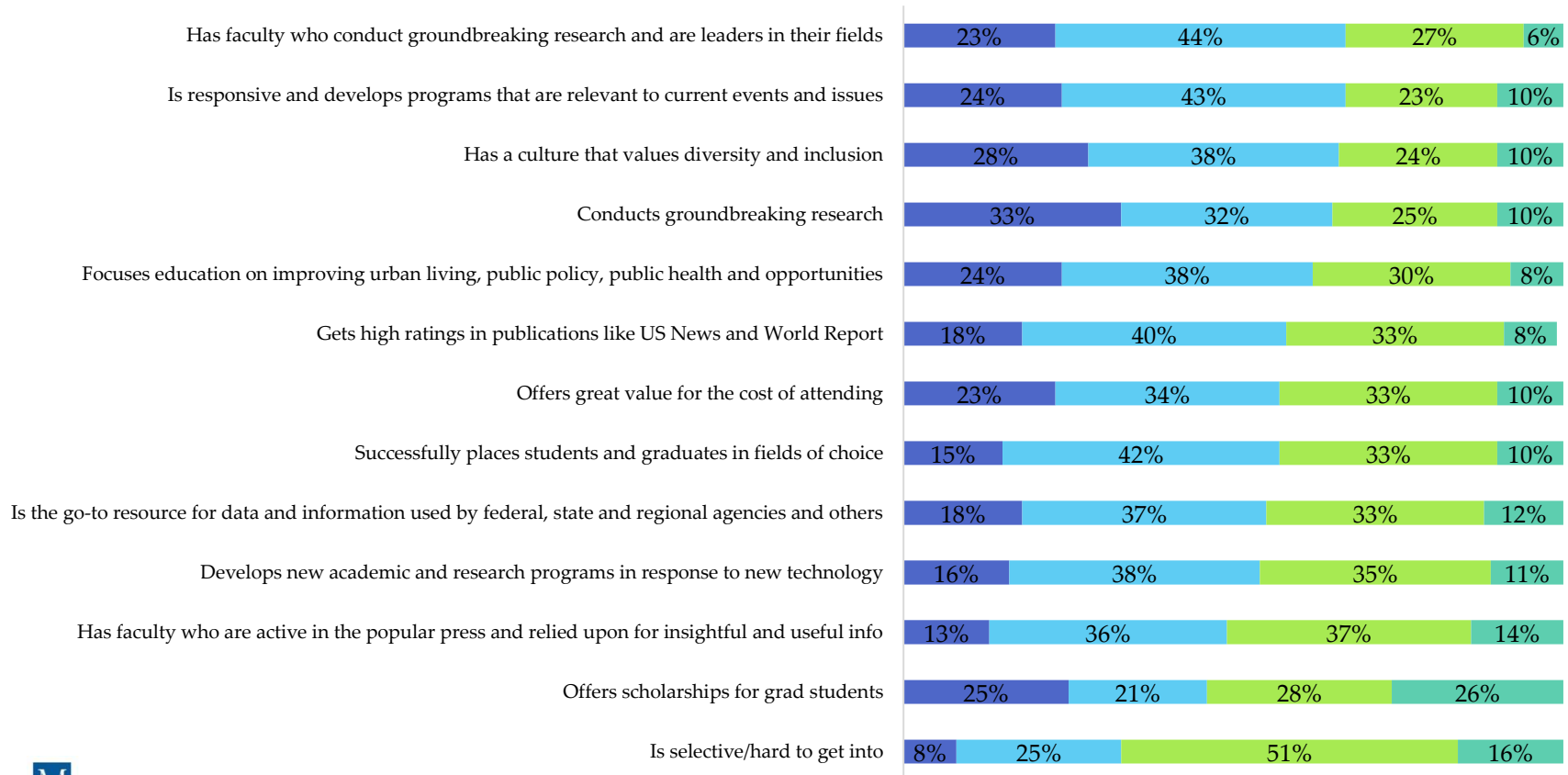
- There are significant differences in how Bloustein is perceived by undergrads and graduate students. The latter are generally more positive about the School, particularly around cost/value, and offering scholarships to grad students (this latter difference is not surprising, but perhaps points to the need to communicate about graduate scholarships to undergrads who are desirable candidates for Bloustein's advanced degree programs).

Additionally, grad students are more likely to know that Bloustein is a go-to resource for data and information, and to appreciate some of the strengths of a Bloustein education (faculty are leaders in their fields, and the curriculum is relevant and appropriate to current events and issues).



Perceptions of Bloustein -- Performance

Impressions of Bloustein School's Performance (%)



■ Excellent ■ Very Good ■ Good ■ Fair/Poor

Perceptions of Bloustein -- Performance

Impressions of Bloustein's Performance (%)
5 and 4 ratings on a scale where 5 = "excellent," and 1 = "poor"

	Total	Undergrads	Grad students
Is responsive and develops programs that are relevant to current events and issues	67	62	71
Has faculty who conduct groundbreaking research and are recognized as leaders in their fields	67	63	71
Has a culture that values diversity and inclusion	66	66	65
Focuses education on improving urban living, public health and opportunities	62	58	65
Gets high ratings in publications like US News and World Report	58	54	63
Successfully places students and graduates in fields of choice	57	54	59
Offers great value for the cost of attending	57	47	65
Is the go-to resource for data and info used by government agencies and others	55	46	62
Develops new academic and research programs in response to new technologies	54	47	59
Has faculty who are active in the popular press, relied upon by media for insightful and useful information	49	49	49
Offers scholarships for grad students	46	31	57
Is selective/hard to get into	33	26	37



Perceptions of Bloustein -- Performance

- There is room for Bloustein to improve its performance. Comparing “excellent/very good” impressions of Bloustein, to what respondents believe is very important for a good reputation (ratings of 5 and 4 on a scale where 5 = “very important,” and 1 = “not at all important”) shows deficits/gaps. In trying to build its reputation, Bloustein could target the most important contributors to reputation, e.g., successful placement of graduates. Right now, its importance far exceeds impressions of Bloustein’s performance on this measure (though keep in mind that this research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, when graduates may not have had as much success finding jobs as they might have previously).



Perceptions of Bloustein -- Performance

Gap Between Ratings for Bloustein and Importance of Factors in Describing a School's "Reputation" (%)
Total Respondents

	Importance*	Performance**	Gap
Successfully places students and graduates in fields of choice	94	57	-37
Offers great value for the cost of attending	91	57	-34
Focuses education on improving urban living, public health and opportunities	94	62	-32
Is responsive and develops programs that are relevant to current events and issues	93	67	-26
Has a culture that values diversity and inclusion	90	66	-24
Develops new academic and research programs in response to new technologies	90	54	-36
Has faculty who conduct groundbreaking research and are recognized as leaders in their fields	91	67	-24
Is the go-to resource for data and info used by government agencies and others	90	55	-35
Offers scholarships for grad students	85	46	-39
Gets high ratings in publications like US News and World Report	74	58	-16
Has faculty who are active in the popular press, relied upon by media for insightful and useful information	71	49	-22
Is selective/hard to get into	53	33	-20

*5 and 4 ratings on a scale where 5 = "very important" and 1 = "not important"

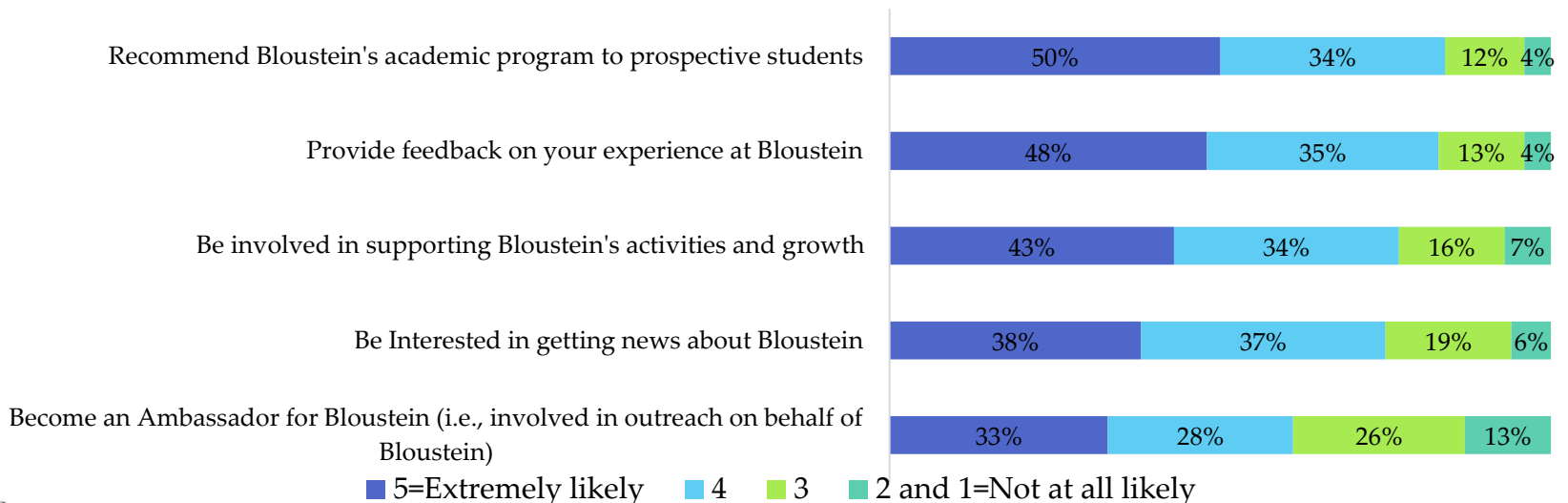
**"Excellent" and "very good" ratings on a scale which also includes "good," "Fair," and "poor"

Perceptions of Bloustein – Willingness to Endorse and Support the School

- Respondents were also asked about their willingness to advocate for Bloustein. As shown, students are highly likely to talk positively about Bloustein (e.g., over 8 in 10 respondents are likely to recommend the academic program and provide feedback about their experiences). This is excellent, because positive word-of-mouth from people who have experienced Bloustein is critical for encouraging new students to consider it, and also for building Bloustein’s reputation in employment sectors where there is potential to hire Bloustein graduates.

That said, despite the willingness to recommend Bloustein, and to support its activities and growth in a general sense, fewer of the respondents (61%) are willing to take on a “formal” role as an Ambassador. But that’s ok for the moment; it’s the unscripted comments, heartfelt recommendations and support for Bloustein’s activities that are most important to building authentic buzz about it in workplaces and other settings that count most.

Considering Your Experience as a Student, How Likely Are You to... (%)



Perceptions of Bloustein – Willingness to Endorse and Support the School

- Bloustein graduate students are significantly more likely to be enthusiastic about supporting and endorsing Bloustein. They are more likely to recommend it, provide feedback, want to receive news, and be involved in supporting Bloustein’s activities and growth.

That said, grad students are no more likely than undergrads to be “extremely likely” to become an Ambassador for Bloustein.

Considering Your Experiences as a Student, How Likely Aare You to...(%)
5 Ratings on a scale where 5 = “very likely” and 1 = “not at all likely”

	Total	Undergrads	Grad students
Recommend Bloustein’s academic programs to prospective students	50	40	56
Provide feedback on your experience at Bloustein	48	40	55
Be interested in getting news about the Bloustein	38	33	43
Be involved in supporting Bloustein’s activities and growth	43	39	47
Becoming an Ambassador for Bloustein (i.e. getting involved in outreach)	33	30	33



Bloustein Communications

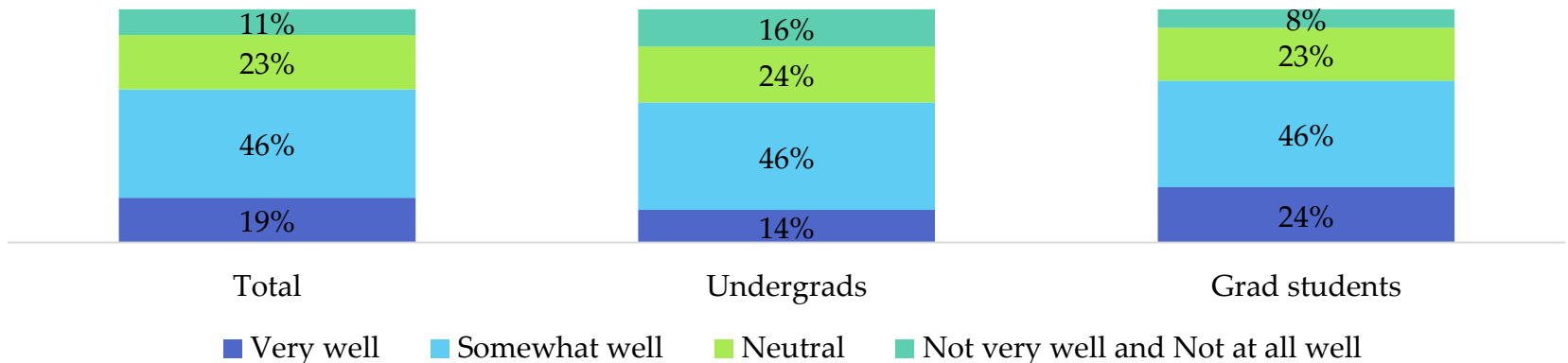
As Bloustein develops a strategy for building and shaping its reputation, it will need an accompanying plan for informing the people and constituencies who can help spread the word about all that Bloustein offers to its students and to the world. The analysis in this section can inform its communications strategy, and can serve as a baseline to track ongoing efforts.

Bloustein Communications

- Overall, two-thirds of Bloustein students feel well informed (somewhat and very well) about all that's going on at Bloustein. Significantly more grad students (24%) than undergrads (14%) feel very well informed.

As noted throughout this research project, advocacy, support and positive word-of-mouth from internal constituencies is critical for building reputation. There is room for Bloustein to grow and expand its efforts to keep students “in the loop” about Bloustein’s accomplishments, press appearances, new initiatives, research findings, etc.

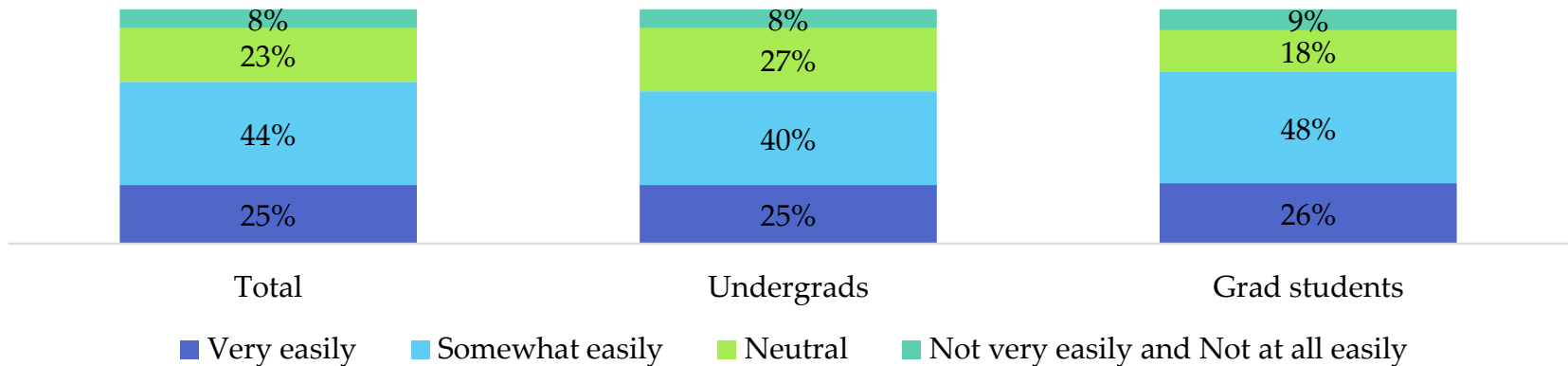
How Well Informed Do You Feel about Developments, Events and Activities at Bloustein? (%)



Bloustein Communications

- Here, too, two-thirds of Bloustein students feel that it is at least somewhat easy to find the information about Bloustein that they might need. That only one-quarter of respondents say it's "very easy" suggests consideration of a continually updated, central repository of information, e.g., "things to be proud of at Bloustein."

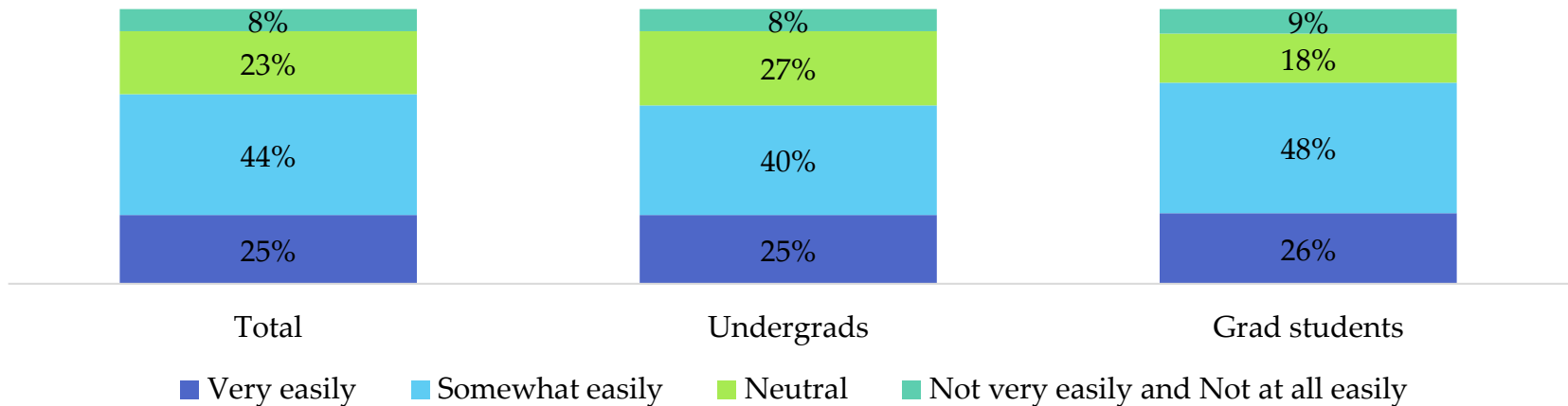
Ease of Finding Information about Bloustein
(on website, events-related media, social media, emails, etc.) (%)



Bloustein Communications

- That fewer than 1 in 3 Bloustein students feel it is “very easy” easy to connect its mission and goals to communications suggests the need to develop a stronger identity with consistent visuals, tones, and messages.

Ease of Connecting Bloustein’s Mission, Goals and Objectives from its Communications (%)



Bloustein Communications – Social Media

- Understanding students' social media habits can inform Bloustein's social media strategy, both internally and externally. Though there are significant differences between undergrads and graduate students' social media usage, Instagram is the leader among both segments, followed by Facebook. Though LinkedIn is much more popular among grad students, one-third of undergrads (32%) say it is one of their top three social media platforms.

Snapchat has a strong following among undergrads, and very little interest among grad students.

Top 3 Social Media Platforms Used Most Often (%)

	Total	Undergrads	Grad Students
Instagram	73	83	66
Facebook	51	45	56
LinkedIn	45	32	54
Twitter	30	35	25
YouTube	24	22	26
Snapchat	18	31	5



Bloustein Communications – Commemorating 30 Years

- The Bloustein School is fast approaching its 30th anniversary, which presents an excellent opportunity to celebrate the past and to pursue new directions for the future. As such, students were asked to assess the importance of different events/activities to mark this milestone.

Both workshops and lectures, and increased marketing to celebrate accomplishments, are popular with students. A gala is less so; it seems “*exclusive*” and “*not in keeping with the times*”.

Importance of 30th Anniversary Events (%)
5 and 4 Ratings on a scale where 5 = “very important” and 1 = “not at all important”

	Total	Undergrads	Grad Students
Series of workshops or lectures to showcase Bloustein’s work	81	79	82
Increased marketing and communications to celebrate Bloustein’s successes	68	70	66
Celebratory gala dinner	52	52	51



Bloustein Communications – Commemorating 30 Years

- Specific suggestions for how to mark this milestone include...
 - Honor distinguished alumni, professors and students (through publications, awards, etc.)
 - “Honor professors whose work impacted/contributed to innovations/policies in the public health field, public policy.”*
 - “Highlight PhD students' work. They are a big investment for Bloustein, so showcase what they have accomplished.”*
 - Develop special communications (e.g., 30th anniversary film, print anthology of contributions to real world problems, etc.)
 - “Develop a print/web summary of EJB accomplishments over the years & strategically share that broadly with potential employers, as well as with alumni & other parts of the university.”*
 - “Get alumni and current students to reflect on how their time at Bloustein translates to their experiences beyond the school.”*
 - Create and award student scholarships/focus on development/fundraising
 - Deepen connections between current students and alumni through symposia, internships, etc.
 - Develop a new vision for the future (changes to culture and mission, specifically incorporating greater focus on issues that affect disadvantaged populations; expanded recruitment of minority students and professors; and other initiatives.)
 - Distribute commemorative swag (t-shirts, other giveaways)
 - Involve the community around Bloustein – *“we should have a block party on Livingston Avenue”*
 - Host an Open House for all of Rutgers to showcase Bloustein
 - Tack real world problems (in a symposium, throughout the year, in collaboration with other universities' students/graduates); embark on volunteer projects



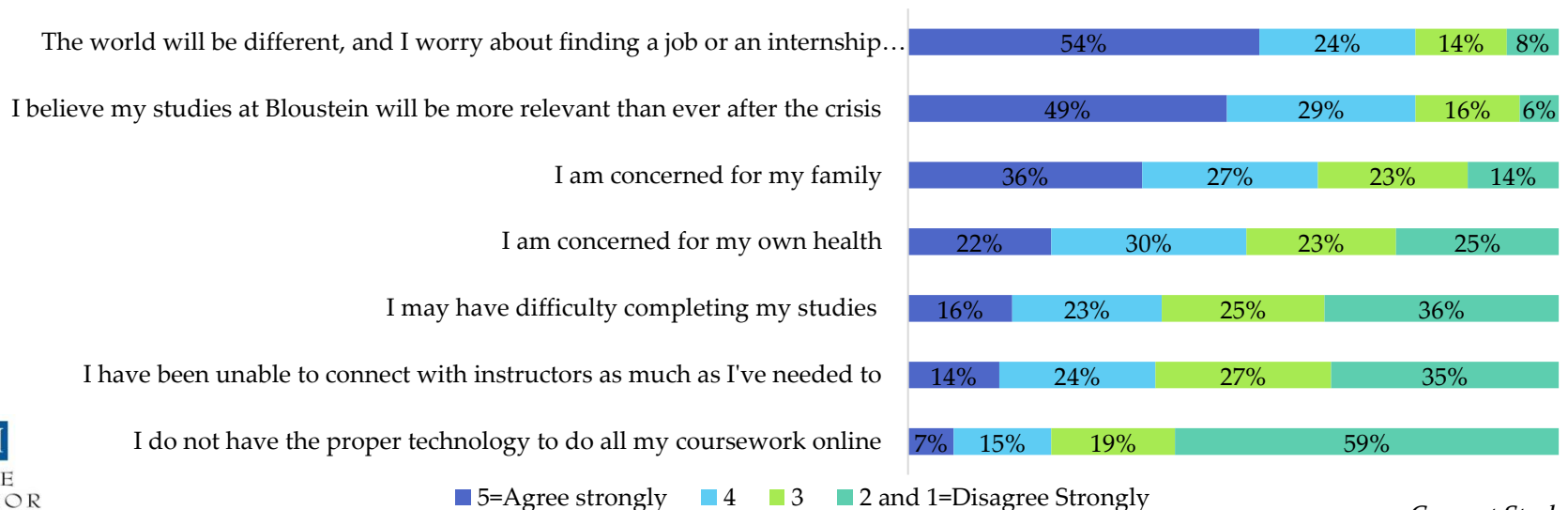
Impact of COVID-19 on Bloustein Students

In this time unlike any other, it is important to understand students' personal worries and concerns, as well as the extent to which they feel able to complete their studies.

Impact of COVID-19 on Bloustein Students

- COVID-19 appears to be taking its toll on students' worries and anxieties. The majority are concerned about their professional futures and their families, and some believe they might have difficulty completing their studies. There is less concern for personal health (52% rate 5 or 4).
- Encouragingly, nearly 4 in 5 (78%) agree (rate 5 or 4) that their studies will be more relevant than ever after the current crisis...which for many likely affirms their decision to enroll in Bloustein.
- Most participants believe they have had the resources needed to do their studies online, including technology and support from instructors.

COVID-19's Impact on Students (%)



Impact of COVID-19 on Bloustein Students

- Some interesting findings emerge when the results are segmented by undergrad/grad student. The latter are more concerned about their families. Yet undergrads are significantly more likely to have concerns about their ability to finish their education, and they also are much less positive about the amount of support they received from Bloustein instructors (48% agree they have been unable to connect with instructors as much as needed, versus 31% of grad students). This will be something for Bloustein to pay attention to going forward, as it is not surprising that undergrads may need more/different supports than older, more mature students.

COVID-19's Impact on Students (%)

	Total	Undergrads	Grad students
I believe my studies at Bloustein will be more relevant than ever after the crisis	78	78	77
The world will be different, and I worry about finding a job or an internship after completion	77	79	79
I am concerned for my family	63	59	67
I am concerned for my own health	51	52	52
I may have difficulty completing my studies	39	46	34
I have been unable to connect with instructors as much as I have needed to	37	48	31
I do not have the proper technology to do all of my coursework online	22	19	24

Impact of COVID-19 on Bloustein Students

- Many students shared their worries in the comments section of the survey; clearly, there is a great deal of unease about the short and longer-term future.

“First it was pandemic, then it was civil unrest. Can't wait for hurricane season! In all seriousness, there are a lot of issues to deal with.”

“I am not sure I can feel safe enough in a classroom to finish my degree. Even with masks and social distancing, I do not feel comfortable coming back to in-person classes.”

“In light of the given events it will be extremely difficult for international students to come back on campus. Please consider offering a hybrid or an online semester. Deferring for a semester is not a feasible option for many given those who are in their last semester.”

“I and many of my classmates are very concerned about our studies and job outlook during and after COVID-19 pandemic; especially with talk of a recession around the corner. Many of us appreciate Bloustein's efforts against the spread of COVID-19 as well as being a school who is proactive around social and environmental justice. But I would like to suggest more resources during these transitional times such as access to remote certification courses, that would allow us to further build our resumes for entering the workforce.”





THE
MELIOR
GROUP

Information. Intelligence. Insights.

Building Bloustein's Reputation: Results of Market Research with Prospective Students

Prepared for:

RUTGERS

Edward J. Bloustein School
of Planning and Public Policy

July 2020

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Background

The Bloustein School is in the process of preparing a Strategic Communications Plan to guide its path to achieving a top national and international reputation... to be a school of choice, one that is highly regarded, favorably known, and recognized for its ability to attract top tier students, faculty and funding for research and other purposes.

The Melior Group designed market and audience research to inform the Strategic Communications Plan. Research results include...

- a set of baseline metrics to understand perceptions of the School by its stakeholders
- an assessment of how Bloustein can position itself to take advantage of the opportunities that lie ahead
- an understanding of the competitive landscape on which to shape its future.

To elicit sufficient market-based data to inform the Communications Plan, Melior's research approach included:

- In-depth individual and group interviews with internal stakeholders (administrators and faculty)
- In-depth interviews with external influencers and key opinion leaders
- Internal surveys of Bloustein alumni, faculty, staff and current students
- Survey of prospective students

This report provides the results of an external survey of prospective students. Results of the other research tasks and surveys are provided under separate cover.



Methodology

This report presents the results of an online survey with prospective students. The Melior Group developed a survey instrument with input and approval from the Bloustein project management team. Melior collaborated with its partner, an international research panel organization, to recruit participants and host the survey. A total of 430 surveys were completed with respondents screened to assure they met key target market criteria on the following characteristics:

Education:

- Rising high school senior who wants to attend a 4-year college
- Already have or are working toward completing a Bachelor's or a Masters degree
- At least "somewhat interested" in earning a Bachelors or Masters degree to eventually find a job as...data analyst, government/public policy professional, urban/regional planner, urban designer, community or economic development professional, sustainability professional, public health professional, resilience planner, hospital or nursing home administrator, transportation planner, environmental planner, housing planner, public official, policy/government analyst, political strategist, or town administrator.

Geography:

- NJ resident (n=150)
- NYC and Philadelphia DMA resident (n=106)
- DE/VA/Baltimore, and Washington DC DMA resident (n=103)
- International students from India and China who are interested in attending school in the US (n=71)



Methodology

The survey was in the field between the dates of 5/29/2020-6/4/2020. Average length of time to complete the survey was 6 minutes. What follows are detailed survey results. Where helpful for decision-making, responses are analyzed by key segments, some of which require explanation:

- Adult learners are defined as people who are currently in the process of earning a Bachelors degree, and those who already have one
- Non-white respondents do not include international respondents



Defining Reputation

Findings from previous higher education studies reveal that “reputation” is a significant driver of educational decision-making. Prospective students make clear that they want to earn their degrees from colleges and universities, and/or specific programs within those institutions, that have “good reputations” in the fields they want to pursue; they believe that this will translate into lifelong professional benefits.

This section is devoted to understanding more about how prospective students assess reputation, that is, what are the factors that contribute to their overall reputational impressions.

Defining Reputation

- It's clear that a “good reputation” is important for colleges and universities to attract quality students and faculty, as well as research and other support, but what does reputation really mean? What are the factors that lead people to associate a college or university with a “good reputation”? As shown, it seems that a “good reputation” is driven by how well the college/university performs on the attributes that are important in decision-making for a college or university.

As learned in previous research, that a degree enables one to achieve career goals and value for the cost of attending a college or university are for most people the most important considerations for where to pursue one's education. It is not surprising, then, that – as shown on the chart on the next page – these two are the most important factors in defining “reputation”.

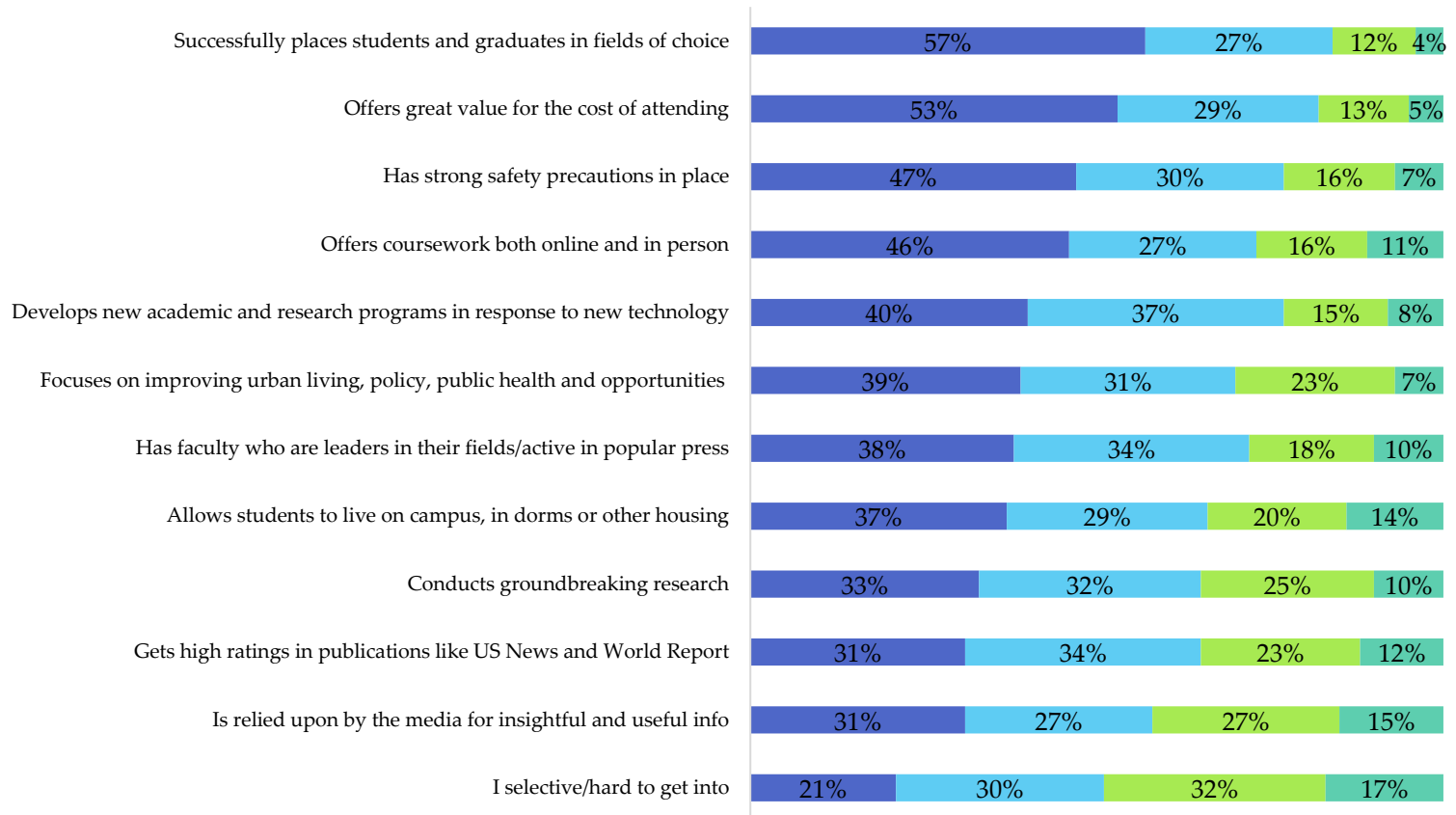
Another key learning from this data is that because people have different priorities and as such, may define “reputation” differently, a number of additional factors can emerge as important contributors to an institution's reputation. For instance, a college might develop separate reputations for...the quality of education (based on innovation, faculty leadership, groundbreaking research); how well it treats its students (by offering housing, keeping the campus safe – of particular importance today, etc.); and its ability to deliver online education to people who want to attend but can't do so in person.

- It is interesting to note that admissions selectivity is the least important factor in the development of “reputation”.



Defining Reputation

Importance of Factors in Describing a School's "Reputation" (%)



■ 5 = Very Important ■ 4 ■ 3 ■ 2 and 1 = Not Important



Shaping Bloustein's Reputation

This section presents data about the current state of Bloustein's reputation and assesses reactions to messages designed to enhance it going forward.

Shaping Bloustein's Reputation

- Because Bloustein is part of Rutgers, it is important to begin this analysis with an understanding of Rutgers' reputation...as this can provide direction for how to position Bloustein in relation to Rutgers.

As shown, Rutgers is well known (only 6% of respondents “don’t know” enough about it to rate it), even across the different geographies included in the sample. And its reputation is largely positive; two-thirds of respondents overall (65%) describe its reputation as “excellent or good”, and these positive ratings are even higher in its closer in markets (NJ, and NY/Philadelphia).

Interestingly, Rutgers' reputation is higher among high school seniors than among adult learners (74% vs. 63% rate it “excellent/good”, respectively).

- Among respondents with family members who attended Rutgers, 86% rate its reputation as “excellent/good”.

Rutgers University's Reputation (%)

	Total	GEOGRAPHY					EDUCATIONAL STATUS	
		US-Based				Int'l	High School Seniors	Adult Learner
		Total	NJ	NY/Phl	DC/DE MD/VA			
Excellent	25	24	26	31	15	30	38	23
Very Good	40	41	48	41	32	32	36	40
Good	23	23	19	17	33	27	12	25
Fair and Poor	6	6	5	5	10	4	7	6
Don't Know	6	6	2	7	11	7	7	5

Prospective Students 10



Shaping Bloustein's Reputation

- Given previous survey results suggesting that Bloustein is not familiar to most people, respondents read the following description before answering any questions about it:

The Edward J Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy of Rutgers University is located on the Rutgers flagship New Brunswick NJ campus. It has 1100 full time students, and offers undergraduate and graduate degrees in disciplines including, and related to, public policy, urban planning, public informatics, public health, and health administration. Its programs are highly ranked among peer institutions and from leading ranking publications, such as US News and World Report. The Bloustein School is focused on preparing students for rewarding professional careers in public service, and in solving public problems.

- Even with the description, 4 in 10 respondents (42%) say they are not familiar (somewhat or not at all familiar) with Bloustein. This is even higher in the Baltimore/DC area.
- Interestingly, the high school students in this sample are significantly more familiar with Bloustein than are the adult learners.



Shaping Bloustein's Reputation

Familiarity with The Bloustein School (%)

	Total	GEOGRAPHY					EDUCATIONAL STATUS	
		US-Based				Int'l	High School Seniors	Adult Learner
		Total	NJ	NY/Phl	DC/DE MD/VA			
Very familiar	22	20	23	26	13	31	41	19
Somewhat familiar	36	33	33	35	30	52	41	35
Somewhat unfamiliar	18	20	23	15	21	4	5	20
Not at all familiar	24	27	21	26	36	13	12	26



Shaping Bloustein's Reputation

- Based on their previous knowledge and what they'd just read about it, respondents were asked to assess the reputation of Bloustein. As shown, its reputation is largely positive, with over 6 in 10 respondents (63%) rating it as “excellent” and “very good”. It is interesting to note that geography really has little to do with perceptions of its reputation, once those who are “not at all familiar” with it are excluded from the question.
 - Consistent with results throughout this report, Bloustein's reputation is higher among high school seniors than among adult learners.
 - (NOT SHOWN) Bloustein's reputation is significantly better among people who have family who attended Bloustein (98% rate its reputation is “excellent” or “very good”) or Rutgers (80% rate Bloustein's reputation as “excellent” or “very good”).

Reputation of The Bloustein School (of Rutgers University) (%)
Excluding Respondents who are “Not at all Familiar” with Bloustein

	Total	GEOGRAPHY					EDUCATIONAL STATUS	
		US-Based				Int'l	High School Seniors	Adult Learner
		Total	NJ	NY/Phl	DC/DEM D/VA			
Excellent	27	24	19	35	23	40	35	26
Very Good	36	35	40	35	24	40	47	34
Good	26	28	27	21	38	18	14	28
Fair and Poor	8	10	10	6	14	2	4	9
Don't Know	3	3	4	4	1	--	--	3



Shaping Bloustein's Reputation

- Respondents were told that *The vision of The Bloustein School is to create inclusive, just and sustainable local, national and international communities*, and asked to rate how well this vision personally resonates for a school of planning, public health, health administration and public policy.

As shown on the next page, the vision resonates well with over three-quarters of respondents (76%). Encouragingly, it resonates extremely well with “closer in” stakeholders, e.g., those who are very familiar with Bloustein already, and those who have family who attended Bloustein. This suggests that the statement really captures what Bloustein is all about.

- Though it is unclear why, the vision resonates a little bit less well with non-white respondents. If this is an audience that Bloustein is especially interested in attracting, it could be important to explore this a bit further.
- In addition to resonating well, most respondents believe that the vision does set the Bloustein School apart from other Schools; only 6% of respondents believe it is not at all distinctive.

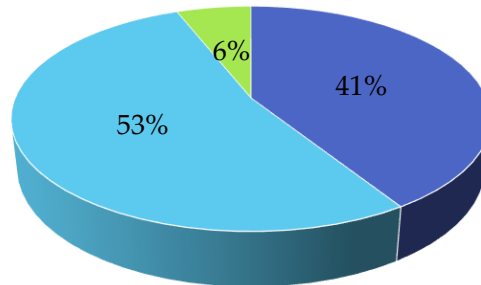


Shaping Bloustein's Reputation

Personal Resonance of Bloustein's Vision (%)

	Total	Respondents "very familiar" with Bloustein	Respondents with family who attended Bloustein	RACE/ETHNICITY	
				White	Non-white
Very well	38	77	75	40	30
Somewhat well	38	17	22	38	39
Neutral	19	5	1	18	22
Not very well/not at all well	5	1	2	4	9

Distinctiveness of Bloustein's Vision Statement (%)



■ Very Distinctive
 ■ Somewhat Distinctive
 ■ Not at all Distinctive

Shaping Bloustein's Reputation

- To understand how Bloustein should be communicating about itself, and to help determine what it wants to develop a reputation for, respondents were asked to select the top 5 statements that would encourage students to consider The Bloustein School. As shown on the next page, the most appealing messages are those that focus on two themes: value of the degree (in terms of cost, and return on investment in terms of getting a job after), and social justice/commitment to making the world a better place (focuses its educational resources on improving the health and sustainability of communities around the world, the vision of the School is to create inclusive, just and sustainable local, national and international communities).

When asked to select the most appealing message, however, success in its placement and employment of students and graduates in fields of choice is the leader by a significant margin. This is consistent across most segments and suggests that Bloustein would be well served to focus on building its reputation as a School that develops graduates who are able to find employment in their fields of choice.

The implication of this for Bloustein is that the other reputational elements – e.g., success in research, leading faculty, mission-focused education, high rankings, etc. – should all be viewed as means to an end, which is a valuable degree. These reputational elements, in and of themselves, are just not as important to prospective students.

- There are a few interesting differences by segment:
 - High school seniors seem more idealistic and are significantly more likely to select The vision of the School is to create inclusive, just and sustainable local, national and international communities as the most appealing message (17% selected it, versus 11% of adult learners). As well, high school students are more interested in expertise in using technology to solve public problems (15% chose it as the most appealing message, versus 7% of adult learners).
 - Those who have family who attended Bloustein are also more attracted to the mission-related messages over the degree/career value messages. Only 7% of people with a Bloustein family connection selected success in its placement and employment of students and graduates in fields of their choice as the most appealing message, and 22% selected The vision of the School is to create inclusive, just and sustainable local, national and international communities.



Shaping Bloustein's Reputation

Response to Messages to Consider The Bloustein School (%)

	Selected as a Top 5 Appealing Message	Single Most Appealing Statement (totals to 100%)
Is successful in its placement and employment of students and graduates in fields of choice	57	23
Focuses its educational resources on improving the health and sustainability of communities around the world	49	9
The vision of the School is to create inclusive, just and sustainable local, national and international communities	48	12
Offers great value for the cost of attending	47	12
Develops programs that are relevant to current events and issues	46	10
Faculty are leaders in urban planning, public policy and health administration	41	9
Expertise in using technology to solve public problems	36	9
Gets high ratings in publications like US News and World Report	31	8
Research Focused	25	5
Is attractive to funders who value its potential research	23	3
Is relied upon by the media for insightful and useful information	19	1



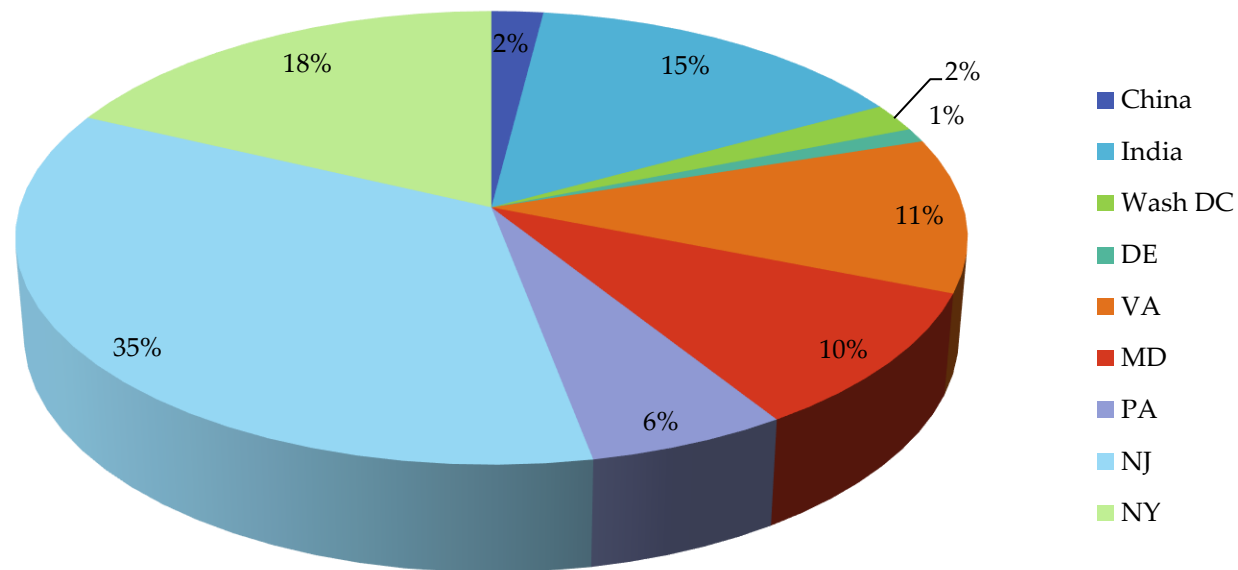
Sample Characteristics

Keeping in mind that the intent of the screening process was to include respondents that would reflect the probable target market for Bloustein (based on geography, education level, interest in specific fields which for which Bloustein prepares students), what follows are key characteristics of the survey respondents.

Sample Characteristics -- Geography

- By design, the survey sample is targeted to the areas, both domestic and international, from which Bloustein recruits most of its students.

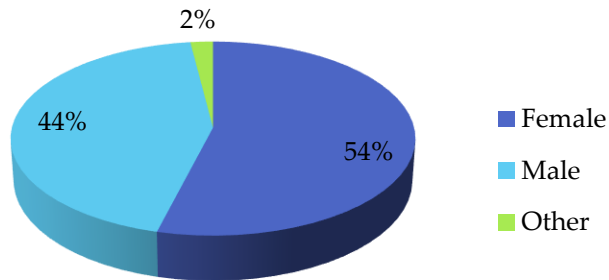
Geography (%)



Sample Characteristics -- Demos

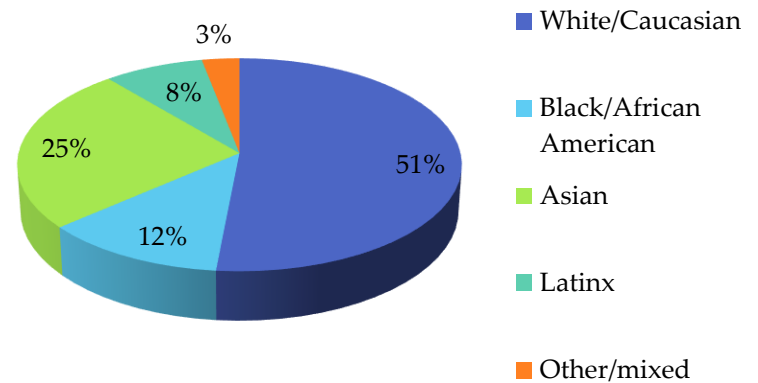
- In keeping with online survey research trends, and with educational trends, the respondents skew female (54%).

Gender (%)



- In keeping with the inclusion of international respondents in the sample, 25% of respondents identify as Asian.

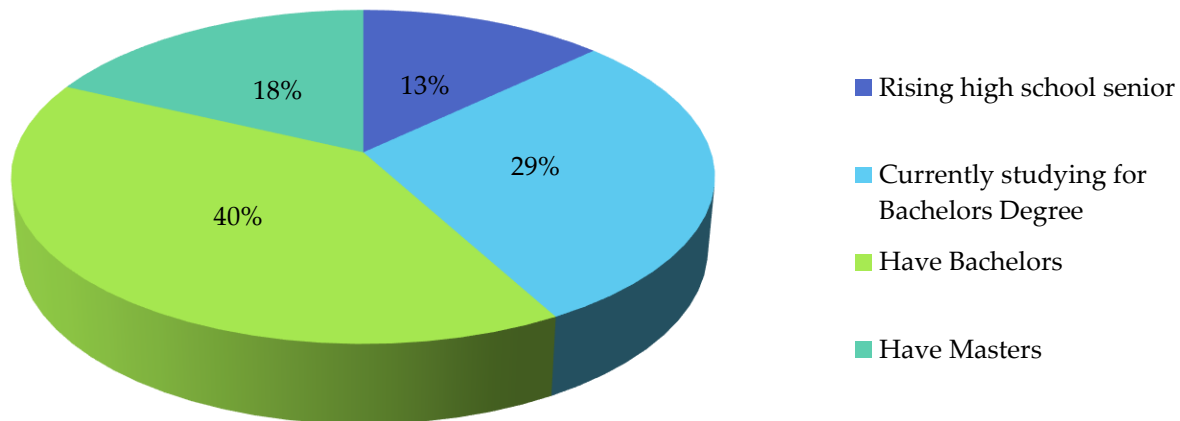
Race/Ethnicity(%)



Sample Characteristics -- Education

- All respondents were required to have, or be working on completing, a Bachelors degree. Respondents with anything higher than a Masters were screened out of the sample.

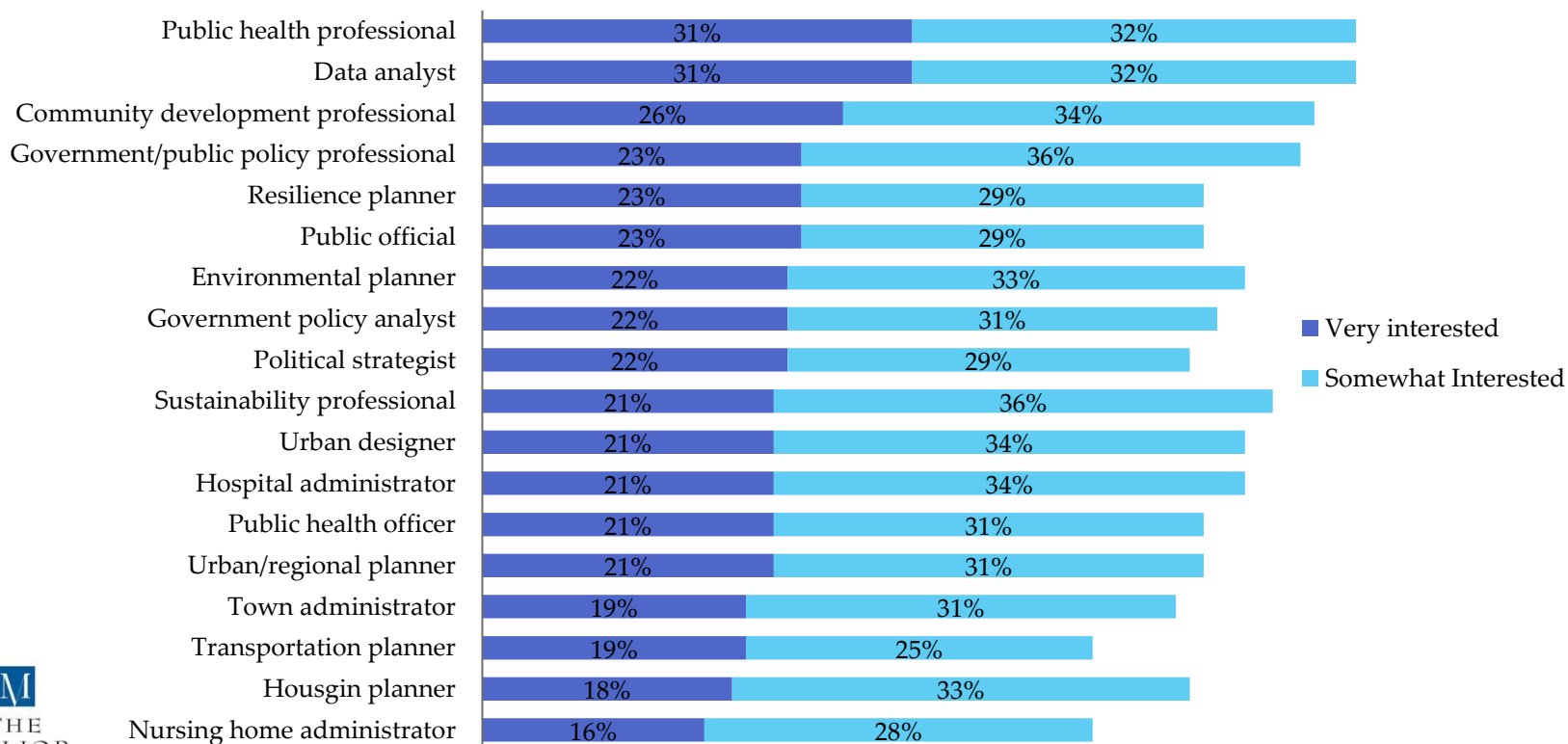
Highest Level of Education Attained (%)



Sample Characteristics – Career Considerations

- To qualify for the survey, respondents were required to be at least “somewhat interested” in careers related to public policy, urban/regional planning, public health and health administration. These are the people who Bloustein needs to attract to its programs.

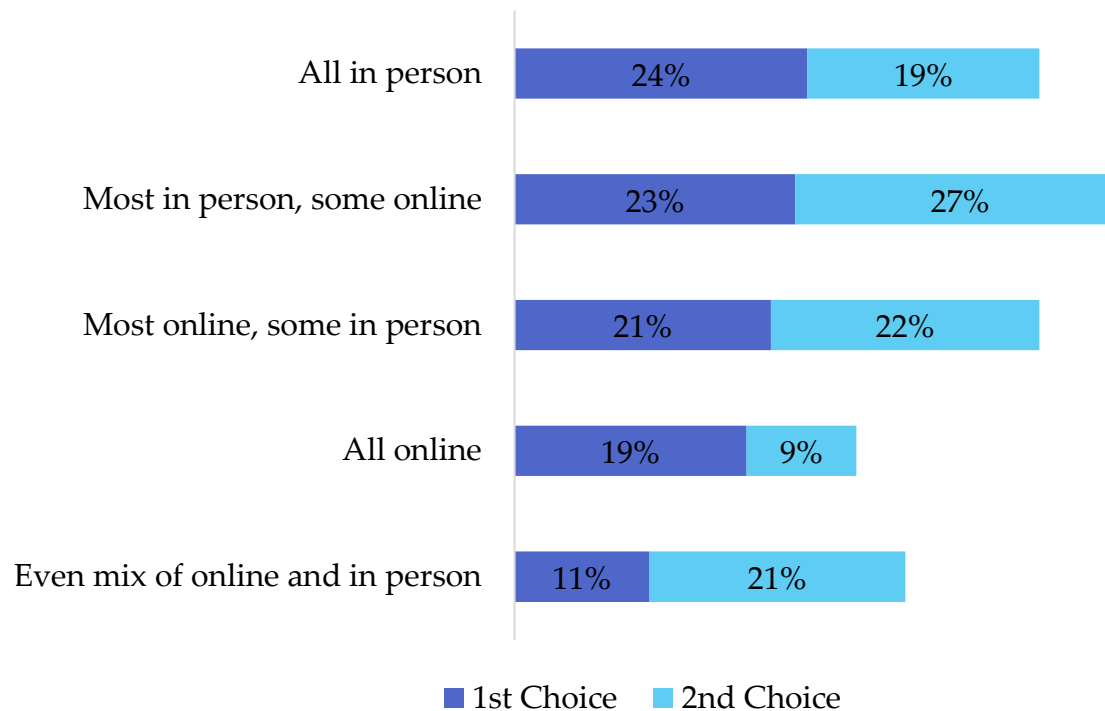
Interest in Career Fields (%)



Sample Characteristics – Preference for Online Versus Face to Face College Courses

- Given COVID-19, the question of how prospective students would prefer to learn has never been more important nor timely. As shown, the majority of respondents would like some kind of hybrid delivery...with online and face-to-face classes. Clearly, online education is here to stay.
 - International students are slightly more likely than those from the US to choose all online courses (28% vs 18%, respectively).

College Course Delivery Preferences (%)



Sample Characteristics – Social Media Usage

- Effective social media strategy can play a role in enhancing Bloustein’s reputation among the constituencies it hopes to attract. As such, these target market respondents were asked to identify the three social media channels that they use most often. As shown, prospective international students look quite different than US-based respondents; international students are significantly more likely to use Facebook and YouTube, and significantly less likely to use Snapchat and Instagram.

Top 3 Social Media Channels Used (%)

	Total	US-Based	International
Instagram	64	66	52
Facebook	60	56	80
YouTube	52	48	75
Snapchat	33	37	17
Twitter	32	31	35
LinkedIn	17	16	24
Don’t use social media	2	2	1



Sample Characteristics – Relationship to Bloustein

- Not surprisingly, NJ respondents are most likely to say that they have a family member who attended Bloustein.

Family Members' Experience with Rutgers University and The Bloustein School (%)

	Total	US-Based			
		Total	NJ	NY/PhI	DC/DE/ MD/VA
Family member attended Rutgers	28	27	39	22	15
Family member attended Bloustein	13	11	11	17	5

