

# DISCOVERING THE JUNCTION: PROFESSOR EXPECTATIONS AND STUDENT INTERPRETATIONS OF ACADEMIC SKILLS

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# INTRODUCTION



**Learning & Curriculum Support Team @ the University of Guelph Library**

- Front-line support to students
- Learning, Research and Writing

**Witnessing challenges in student skill development**

- Across disciplines

**Collaborative, cross-unit research project**

- Funded by the University of Guelph's Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Grant



## **Series of disconnects**

- **Between the learning, writing and information literacy skills professors expect students to possess and the skills students think they possess when they enter the course.**
- **Between professor expectations of student skill requirements and student interpretation of skill requirements from the course outline.**
- **Between professor and student understandings of where students should develop these skills (i.e. in class or outside of class).**

# OBJECTIVES

**To identify the gap between the learning, writing and information literacy skills professors expect students to possess before a course and which of these skills students think that they have when they enter the course**

**To identify which skills professors explicitly articulate to their students and indicate they expect in their courses, and which skills professors expect students to develop outside of the course**

**To identify which skills students seek to develop based on their interpretations of professor expectations**

**To evaluate, across multiple disciplines, students' ability to articulate and identify the skills necessary for particular third-year courses before and after taking these courses**

**To recommend curriculum support and academic service delivery based on these findings.**

**To inform the content strategy of the Virtual Learning Commons @ the University of Guelph Library**

# LITERATURE REVIEW

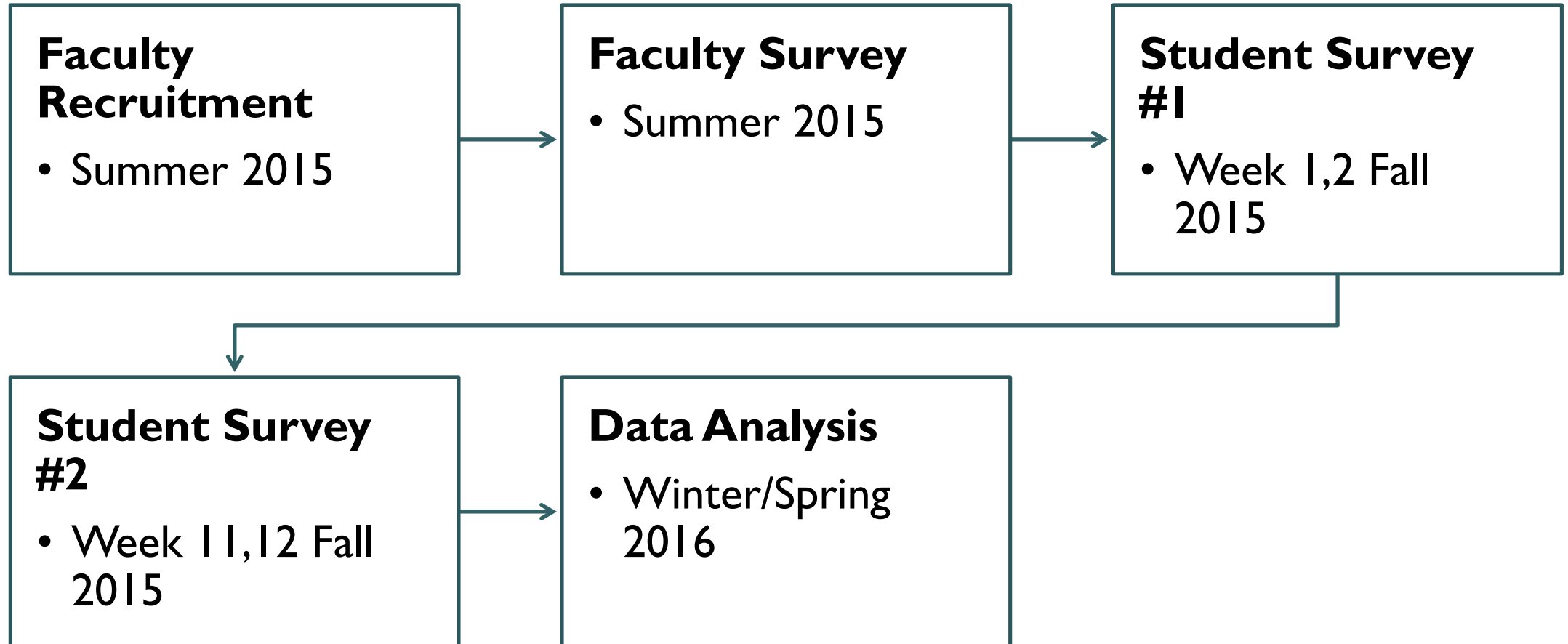
Lack of literature on the extent to which professors communicate to students the skills they expect them to develop.

Some assumption that students possess academic skill sets when they enter courses or that students will develop these skill sets independently (Mager and Spoken-Smith, 2014).

No consistent approach to the development of necessary skills within courses, programs, disciplines, or across disciplines.

Professor communication of skill expectations is often limited and “fails to provide sufficiently clear guidelines for the students, in terms of the level of mastery they are expected to reach” (McGuinness, 2006).

# DATA COLLECTION



# DATA OVERVIEW

## Number of Student Participants

1904 Total Students

Survey 1: 900 (47%)

Survey 2: 566 (30%)

## Number of Classes / Faculty

Number of 3rd Year Classes Invited: 281

Total Participating Classes: 24 (8.5 %)

## Number of Skills Rated

Total: 33

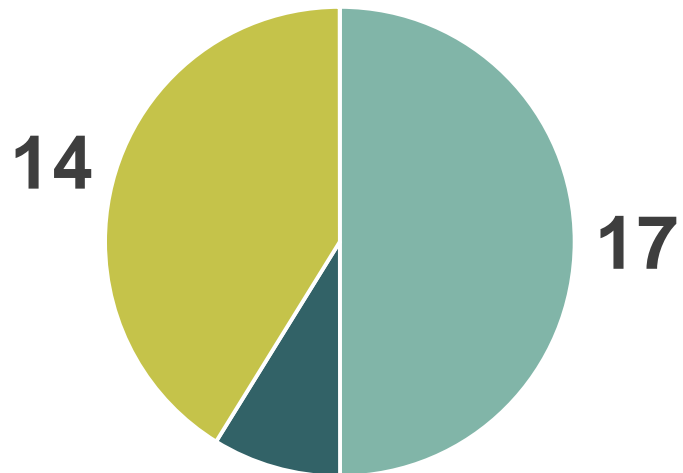
Information Literacy: 11

Learning: 11

Writing: 11

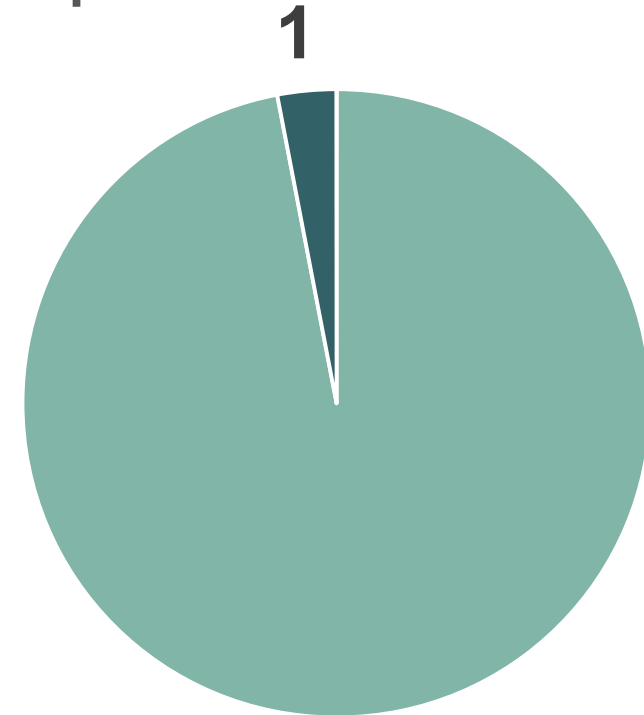
# DATA OVERVIEW

**Top Faculty Responses**  
(33 potential academic skills)



- Students are Expected to Already Have This Skill
- Students do Not Require this Skill
- I will Teach this Skill

**Top Student Responses**  
(33 potential academic skills)



- I Already Have This Skill
- I Do Not Need This Skill

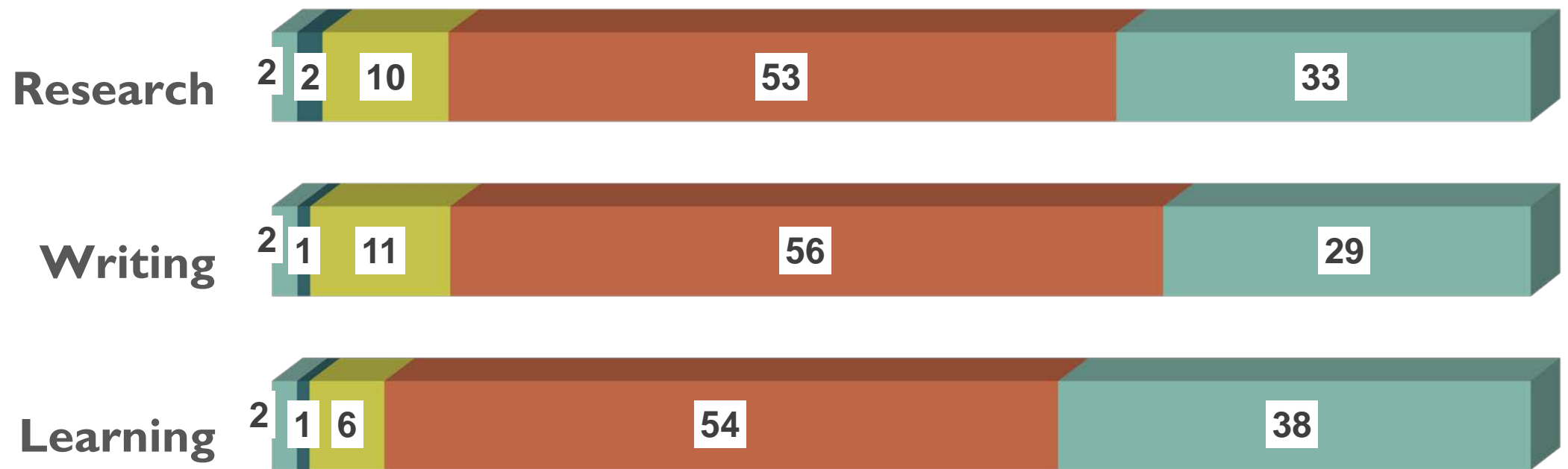


# DATA OVERVIEW

We asked students to respond to the statement:

I feel confident in applying my learning, writing and research skills to future courses.

■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neither Agree nor Disagree ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree



Percentage of Student Responses

# DISCOVERING THE DISCREPANCIES

- **The students' options were coded as:**
  - 1= I already have this skill
  - 2= I expect to be taught this skill during course time (instructor or other)
  - 3= I expect to develop this skill outside of course time
  - 4= I do not need this skill for this course
- **Faculty options were coded as:**
  - 1= Students are expected to come into the course with this skill
  - 2= The skill will be taught during course time (instructor or other)
  - 3= This skill must be developed by the student outside of class time
  - 4= Students do not need this skill for my course.

# SAMPLE STUDENT SURVEY QUESTION

I already have  
this skill

I expect to be  
taught this skill  
during course  
time (instructor  
or other)

I expect to  
develop this  
skill outside of  
course time

I do not need  
this skill for this  
course

Present a clear and  
consistent message,  
using appropriate  
language for audience  
needs in oral  
presentations and  
class discussions



# SAMPLE FACULTY SURVEY QUESTION

Students are expected to come into the course with this skill

The skill will be taught during course time (instructor or other)

This skill must be developed by the student outside of class time

Students do not need this skill for my course

Present a clear message, using appropriate language in oral presentations and class discussions



# IS THERE A DISCREPANCY?

## Question 1:

### Student Response:

- I already have this skill
- I expect to be taught this skill during course time (instructor or other)
- I expect to develop this skill outside of course time
- I do not need this skill for this course

Present a clear and consistent message, using appropriate language for audience needs in oral presentations and class discussions



### Faculty Response:

- Students are expected to come into the course with this skill
- The skill will be taught during course time (instructor or other)
- This skill must be developed by the student outside of class time
- Students do not need this skill for my course

Present a clear message, using appropriate language in oral presentations and class discussions



**No!**

## Question 2:

### Student Response:

- I already have this skill
- I expect to be taught this skill during course time (instructor or other)
- I expect to develop this skill outside of course time
- I do not need this skill for this course

Present a clear and consistent message, using appropriate language for audience needs in oral presentations and class discussions



### Faculty Response:

- Students are expected to come into the course with this skill
- The skill will be taught during course time (instructor or other)
- This skill must be developed by the student outside of class time
- Students do not need this skill for my course

Present a clear message, using appropriate language in oral presentations and class discussions



**Yes!**

# DISCOVERING THE DISCREPANCIES

- Assumption: any option (out of four options) which received more than 50% of respondents from the student survey can represent the general opinion of the student sample in a particular class.
- This study, therefore, compared the students' option (which received more than a 50% response rate) and the faculty option for each measurement item for each class.

# DISCREPANCY DATA: BY SKILL AREA

- Overall discrepancy rate is 63%

Information Literacy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 58% (Y)</li><li>• 43% (N)</li></ul>

Learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 69% (Y)</li><li>• 31% (N)</li></ul>

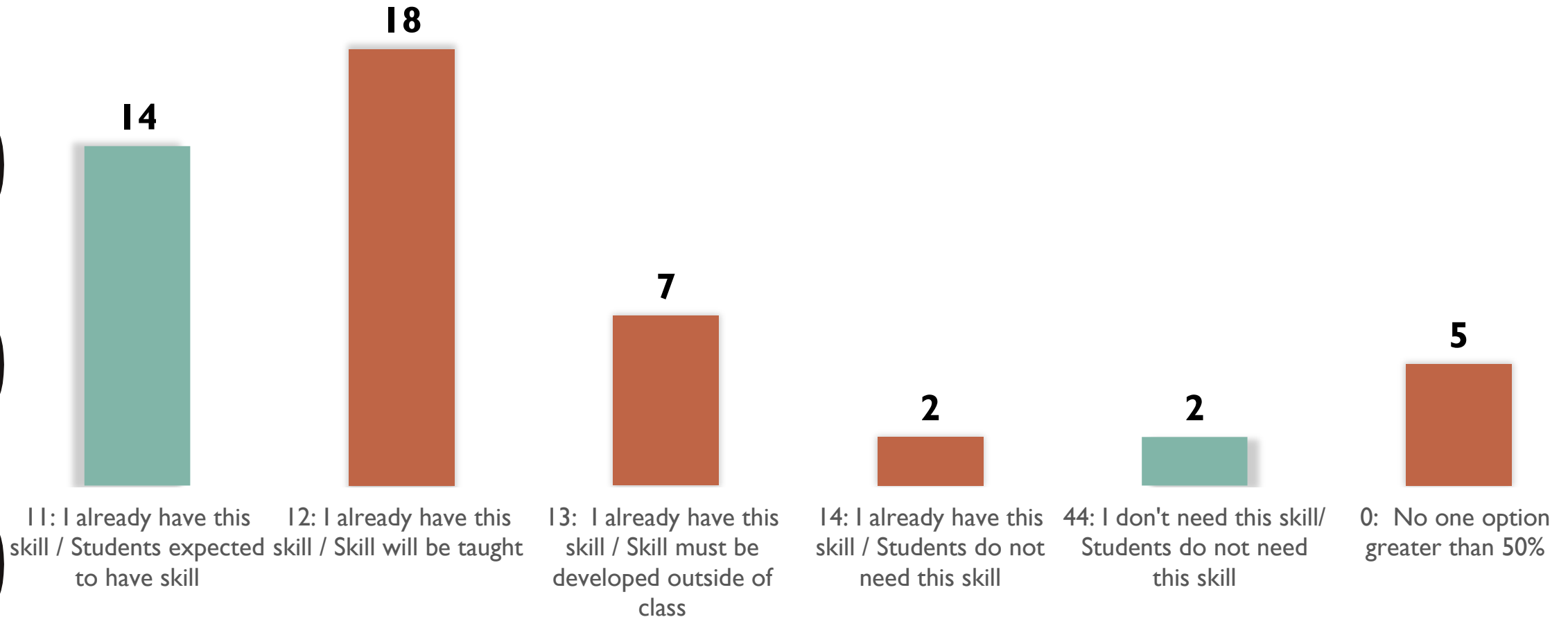
Writing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 63% (Y)</li><li>• 37% (N)</li></ul>

# SAMPLE FINDINGS:

Select relevant, current, academic and non-biased sources for use in my assignment(s)

71%  
Discrepancy

## DISTRIBUTION OF DISCREPANCY SCENARIOS



Skill: I2 Note: \*All other discrepancy combinations did not occur

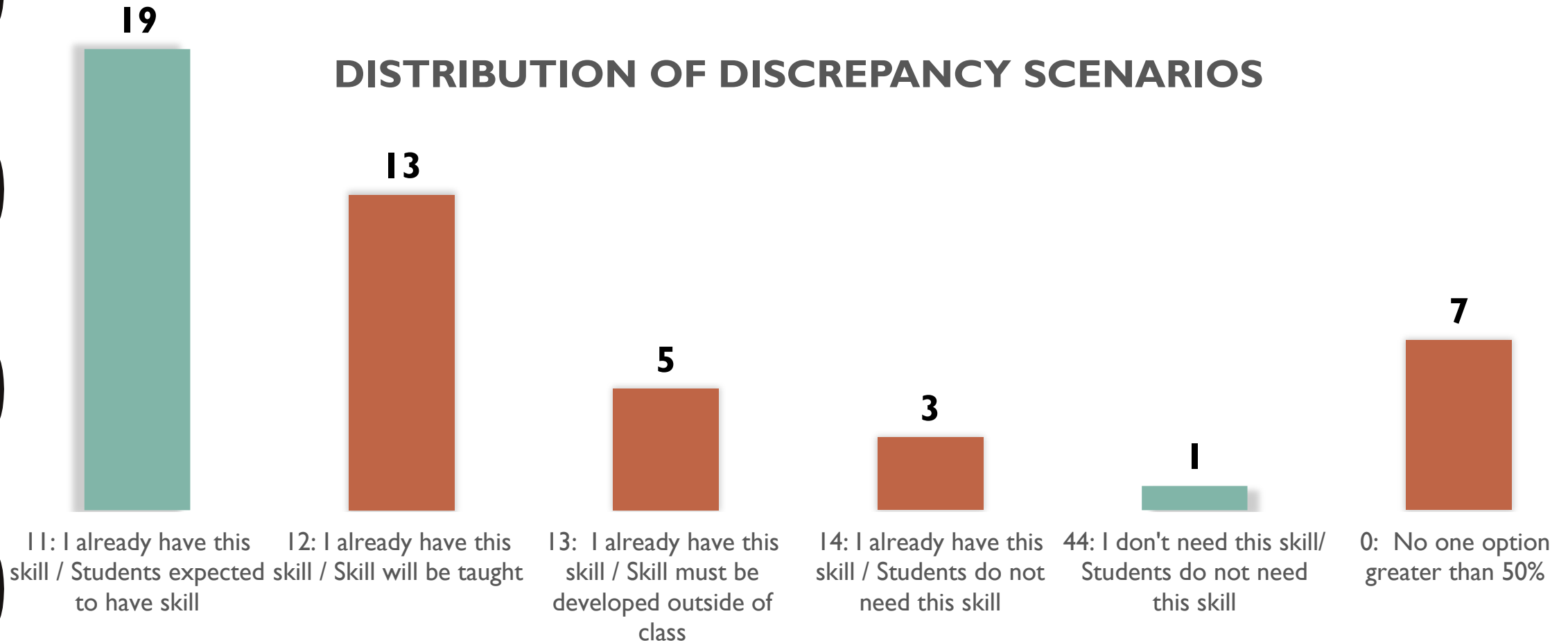


# SAMPLE FINDINGS:

Search a variety of resources (library databases) and source types to find information

58%  
Discrepancy

## DISTRIBUTION OF DISCREPANCY SCENARIOS



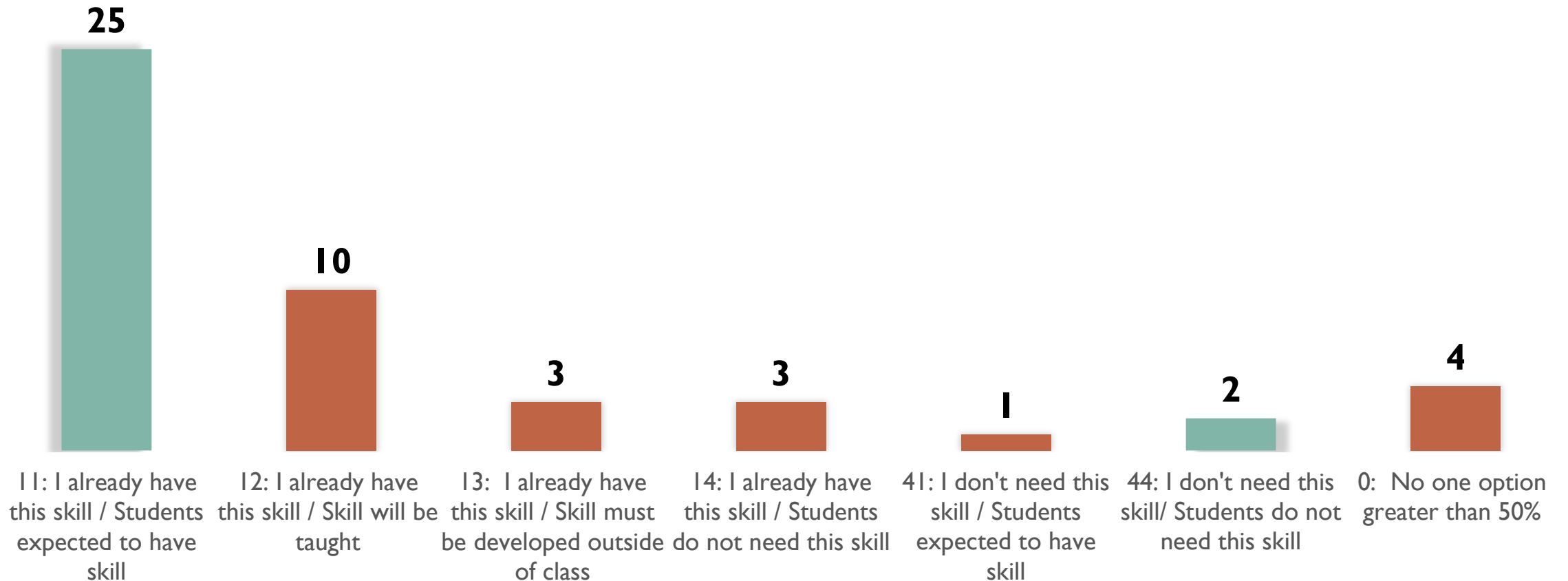
Skill: 11 Note: \*All other discrepancy combinations did not occur

# SAMPLE FINDINGS:

Create appropriately formatted bibliographies / works cited

44%  
Discrepancy

## DISTRIBUTION OF DISCREPANCY SCENARIOS



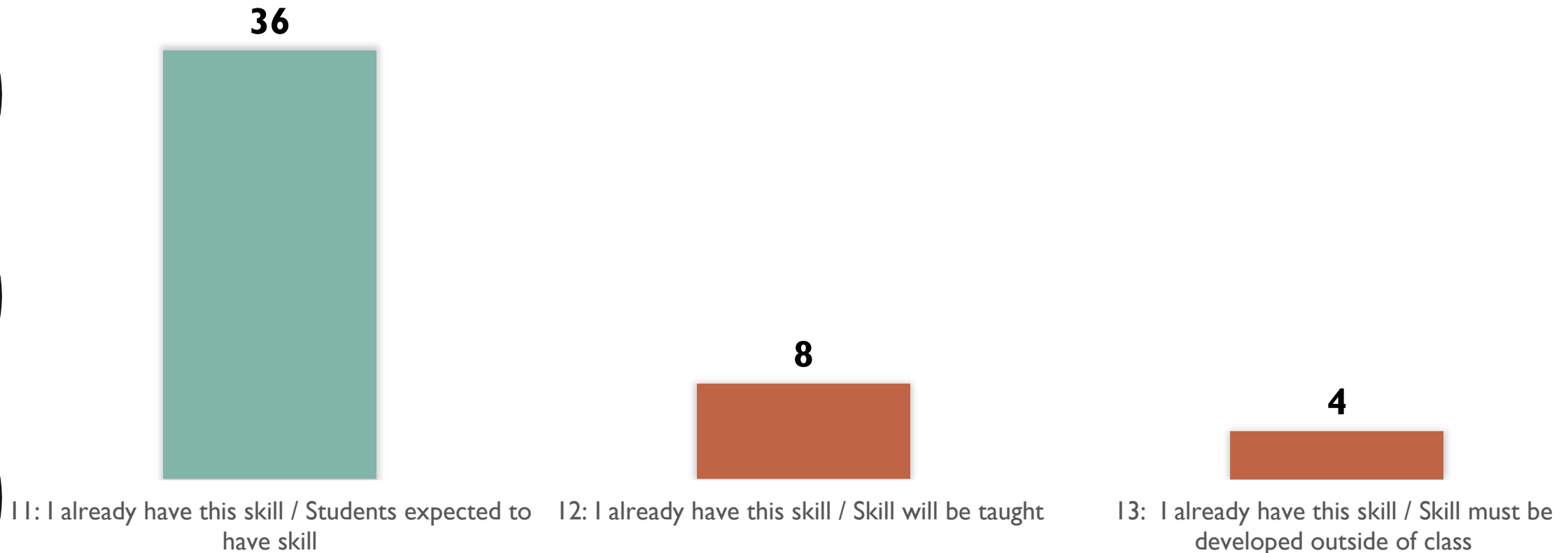
Skill: 16 Note: \*All other discrepancy combinations did not occur

# SAMPLE FINDINGS:

Meet standards of conduct for academic integrity (i.e. avoiding plagiarism)

25%  
Discrepancy

## DISTRIBUTION OF DISCREPANCY SCENARIOS



Skill: I7 Note: \*All other discrepancy combinations did not occur



# WHICH SKILLS DO STUDENTS WANT HELP WITH? INFORMATION LITERACY SKILLS

## Examples:

- **“Researching appropriate background articles for final project”**
- **“Researching and applying appropriate information”**
- **“Coming to conclusions when looking at controversial research”**
- **“Connecting creative ideas with scientific data to support them”**
- **“Critically analyzing readings and reports”**

# WHICH SKILLS DO STUDENTS WANT HELP WITH? WRITING & LEARNING SKILLS

## Examples:

- **“Structuring my thoughts coherently in writing”**
- **“Time management on the big projects and not feeling overwhelmed and getting stuck”**
- **“How to write the required assignments to meet and exceed expected level”**
- **“Grammar. Don’t know how to use commas.”**

# WHICH SKILLS DO STUDENTS WANT HELP WITH?

## AFFECTIVE SKILLS

### Examples:

- **“Studying motivation”**
- **“Being more inquisitive and being more confident in asking questions in class”**
- **“Paying more attention during the 8:30 class”**
- **“Making friends”**
- **“Listening in class during boring lectures”**

# FURTHER FINDINGS: DISCREPANCY TRENDS

<b>Discipline</b>	<b>Survey 1</b>	<b>Survey 2</b>
Social Sciences + Humanities	61%	58%
Sciences	68%	65%



# FURTHER FINDINGS: DISCREPANCY TRENDS

Survey 1	Survey 2	All Surveys
65%	62%	63%

# FINDINGS: COURSE OUTLINE ANALYSIS

- Which skills do professors articulate they will teach in their course and which skills they expect students to develop outside of class time?
- Currently conducting NVIVO analysis
  - content analysis of course outlines to determine how course skills are articulated and the frequency
  - coding and analyzing for these



# ACTIVITY

LOOKING AT COURSE OUTLINES

- **What challenges might students encounter when interpreting a syllabus?**
- **What opportunities do you have in your practice to decrease the disconnect between student interpretation and faculty expectations of academic skills?**

# IMPLICATIONS

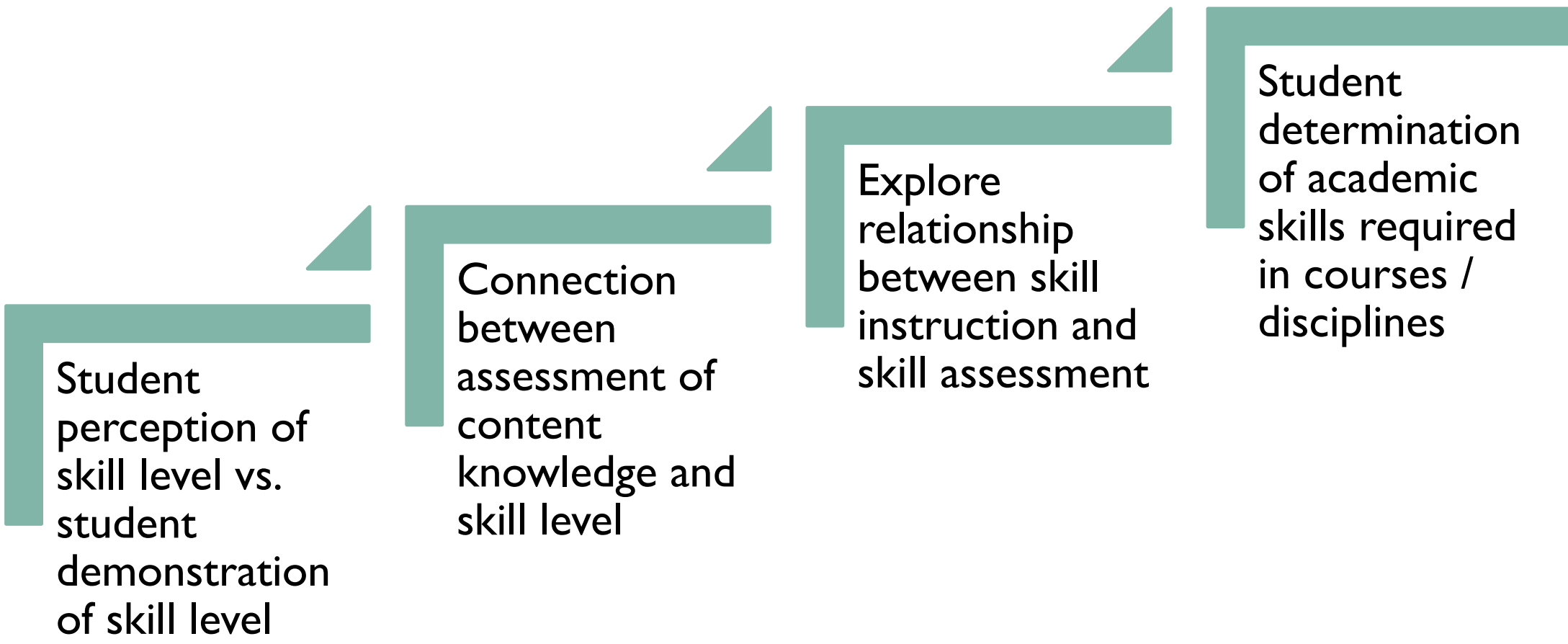
## For Practice

- Make skills explicit in Course Outlines, Provide resources for students to develop skills
- Map and scaffold skills to curriculum
- Develop collaborative partnerships to support student skill development on program or curriculum committees
- Support faculty in skill instruction
- Advocate for student skill development

## For Research

- Academic Support Staff can provide additional perspectives and be partners in SoTL research
- A multidisciplinary approach to skill development research builds awareness of disciplinary assumptions and generalizations
- Skill development research benefits from a holistic understanding of student learning (learning, writing and research).

# FUTURE RESEARCH



Student perception of skill level vs. student demonstration of skill level

Connection between assessment of content knowledge and skill level

Explore relationship between skill instruction and skill assessment

Student determination of academic skills required in courses / disciplines



**Questions?**

# CONTACT

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# SKILLS: INFORMATION LITERACY

Skill ID	Statement
I1	Search a variety of resources (library databases) and source types ( to find information)
I2	Select relevant, current, academic and non-biased sources for use in my assignment(s)
I3	Use effective search strategies, keywords and criteria to find appropriate information sources
I4	Access full text information, both print and digital, and download online material and data
I5	Cite printed and electronic sources using suitable and appropriate reference styles
I6	Create appropriately formatted bibliographies / works cited
I7	Meet standards of conduct for academic integrity (i.e. avoiding plagiarism)
I8	Use appropriate data management software and techniques to manage data
I9	Analyse and present data without misrepresentation
I10	Use appropriate software (i.e. spreadsheet, technical, etc.)
I11	Develop a personal profile in the community using appropriate personal networks and digital technologies (i.e. discussion lists, social networking sites, blogs, etc.)

# SKILLS: LEARNING

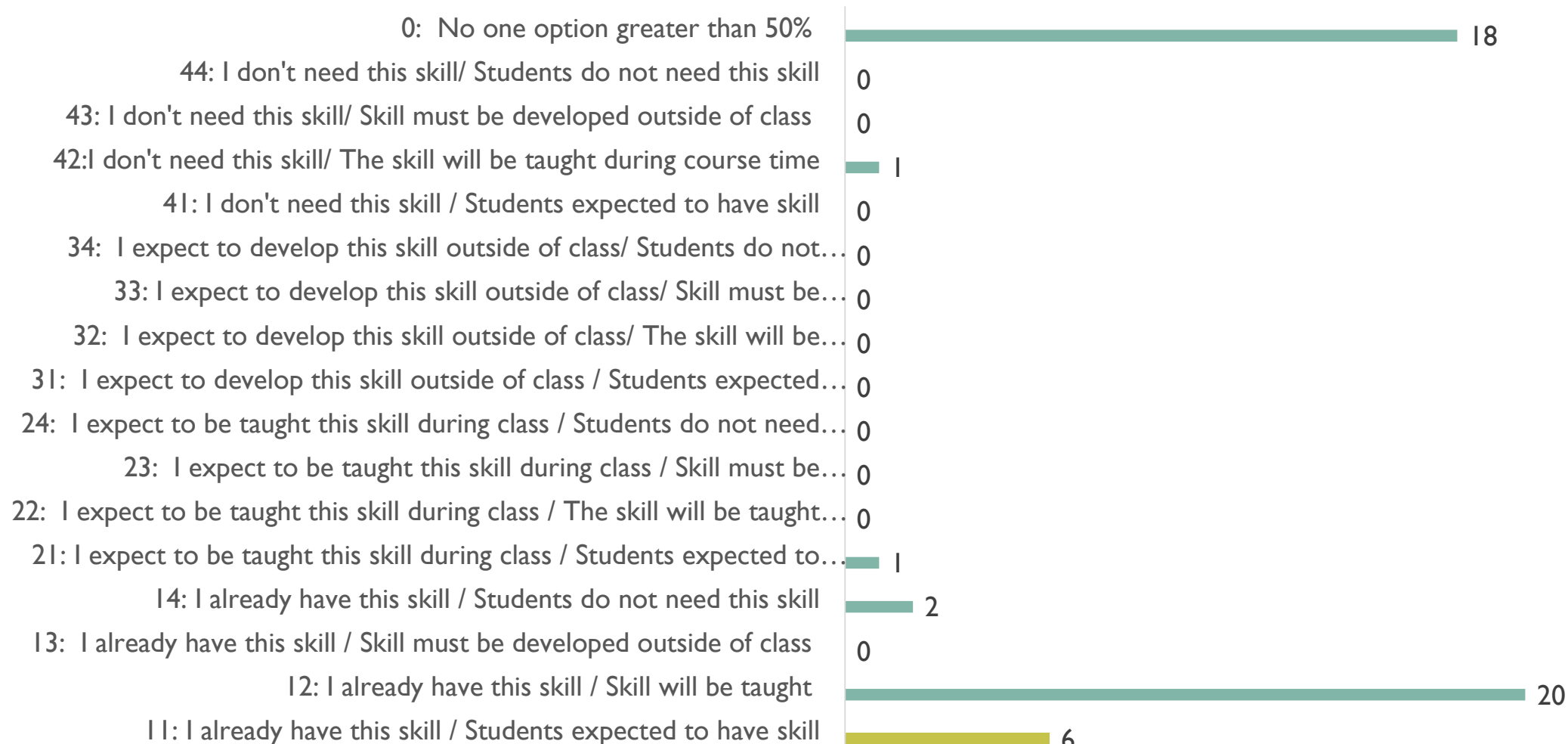
Skill ID	Statement
L1	Interpret sources and develop an opinion when presenting an argument
L2	Present a clear and consistent message, using appropriate language for audience needs in oral presentations and class discussions
L3	Work with group members to achieve group goals and complete a group/team project
L4	In group or team projects, offer alternative solutions that build on the ideas of others
L5	Identify multiple approaches for solving problems and implement or recommend solutions in course work or assignments
L6	Self-check understanding of course content by reviewing and monitoring learning
L7	Independently connect examples, facts or theories from more than one field of study or perspective
L8	Adapt studying and exam preparation techniques based on the type of assessment (i.e. multiple choice vs. essay answer)
L9	Apply time management skills and strategies (i.e. to-do lists and calendars) to manage multiple deadlines
L10	Use texts and lecture content to deepen understanding of course material and complete course assignments
L11	Use presentation techniques (i.e. good posture, eye contact, vocal expressiveness, and audience engagement) during oral presentations

# SKILLS: WRITING

<b>W1</b>	<b>Develop a thesis or main argument in written tasks</b>
W2	Use academic evidence to support your thesis or main argument in written tasks
W3	Paraphrase, quote and summarize academic sources in written tasks
W4	Develop introductions, body paragraphs and conclusions in written tasks
W5	Plan, manage, and divide writing process
W6	Use correct grammatical forms, sentence construction and punctuation in written tasks
W7	Use transitions to establish flow between ideas in written tasks
W8	Use appropriate language and tone based on assignment expectations (i.e. audience and purpose) in written tasks
W9	Select a writing structure and format based on the type of assignment (i.e. literature review, lab reports, critical review, research essay)
W10	Sequence ideas in logical order using paragraphs in written tasks
W11	Select and use academic or disciplinary vocabulary in written tasks
W1	Develop a thesis or main argument in written tasks

# SAMPLE DISCREPANCY FINDINGS: WRITING

- Meet standards of conduct for academic integrity (i.e. avoiding plagiarism)



# SAMPLE DISCREPANCY FINDINGS: LEARNING

- Select relevant, current, academic and non-biased sources for use in my assignment(s)

