

Evaluation of the Participatory Governance System Academic Year 2014–2015

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Executive Summary

For Deciders

- Input from councils was useful to College leadership, but varied in utility according to council and issue.
- Main benefits of governance were open communication channels, clearer and more equitable process for identifying people to serve on various committees or workgroups.
- The number of councils made working with governance complicated at times.

For Council Members

- Majority of respondents indicated yes each time when asked if they had enough information to contribute as they desired, if governance processes were sufficient to address issues, if they were clear about which issues were informational and which needed input, and if they believed decisions makers valued their input.
- The average council member indicated satisfaction with personal contributions and council contributions. Both types of contributions were significantly related ($r = 0.659$)
- The most significant factor affecting satisfaction and most suggested improvement was ensuring that decision-makers provide timely feedback about how input was used and that it was valuable.

For College Community

- Engagement with governance was higher in 2015 than in 2014 or 2013 for administrators, faculty, staff and students.
- The distribution of level of engagement or involvement was asymmetrically U shaped. More people indicated very high or low involvement rather than medium or high involvement. More respondents indicated low involvement than any other level.
- When asked the *impact that governance had on decision-making, the most frequent response was unsure of impact, followed by significant impact, some impact, and little to no impact respect respectfully.*

Key Area of Strength

- Realized opportunities for open communication among constituents, representatives and College leadership.

Key Areas of Growth

- *Raising College community awareness that governance inputs are considered beneficial by decision-makers.*
- *Streamlining pathways and processes to enable governance to be utilized more effectively by constituents and leaders.*

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Evaluation of the Participatory Governance System Academic Year 2014–2015

To evaluate the third year of the participatory governance system, Montgomery College piloted a more robust assessment process that included interviews as well as surveys: (1) interviews of a sample of senior leaders serving as leader liaisons, (2) survey of exiting council members, and (3) a College community survey of governance. The assessment process was developed by a committee led by the governance coordinator with special help from the College Council, Employee Services Council, and Student Council. The assessment is qualitative and quantitative, modeled after assessments utilized to evaluate the effectiveness of public participation according to the International Association of Public Participation. The purposes of the evaluation are to support the ongoing improvement of governance and to assess the performance of the system based on its objectives. This evaluation includes the following sections:

- What was evaluated
- Description and results summary of interviews with senior leaders, survey of exiting council members, and survey of the College community
- Discussion of results, recommendations, and planning for the coming year

What Was Evaluated?

1. The process, structure, and tools used to implement governance
2. The outcomes of governance

Interviews with Leader Liaisons

Interview Description

Four senior leaders were interviewed to assess their views of governance and its role in bolstering decision-making processes. These leaders were asked five questions with regard to the councils they liaised with and the governance system as a whole:

1. What were the top three topics or issues you asked the council/s to consider this year?
2. Was input from the council/s useful on these issues or other issues brought to your attention through governance?
3. How did the input contribute to better overall decisions or to better decision-making processes?
4. What was the biggest frustration in working with governance this year?
5. What worked well about governance this year?

Interview Response Summary

Responses were compiled by question and summarized (see Table 1).

Table 1. Leadership Interview Responses

Question	Response Summary
1. What were the top three issues?	<i>Issues varied</i> and included general education redesign, employee engagement, student campaign, and feedback on policies and procedures.
2. Was input useful?	<i>Yes and</i> the degree of usefulness varied according to the issue and council.
3. How did decision or process benefit?	<i>Consensus</i> that having open communication channels led to better sharing of information.
4. What was biggest frustration?	<i>Consensus</i> that the number of councils made it difficult to ensure maximum participation and contributed to confusion about what issues needed to go where. The number of councils also made getting feedback take longer than desired due to scheduling complexities. Another challenge was helping councils understand the scope of the councils' work and how this was distinct from the scope of management. <i>Responses varied</i> with regard to utility of functional councils compared to constituent and campus councils.
5. What worked well?	<i>Consensus</i> that open communication channels, a more equitable and clear process for identifying people to serve on some task forces and committees, and ability to obtain representative feedback worked well.

Survey of Exiting Council Members

Survey Description

Council members whose term of service ended this year were invited to respond to an online survey about their perspective on governance. Items 1, 9, and 10 were open-ended questions designed to identify areas for growth. Items 2, 3, 7, and 8 were yes or no questions designed to address whether expectations about processes and outcomes were met. Items 4 and 5 used a Likert scale (e.g., very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied) to assess satisfaction with individual contribution and council contribution respectively. Item 6 was designed to help identify factors that tied to satisfaction with participation.

Survey Results

Of the 49 council members invited, 12 completed the survey. Responses to the open-ended questions, items 1, 9, and 10, were categorized and then analyzed based on frequency of response for each item (see Table 2).

Table 2. Exit Survey Open-Ended Responses

Question	Category/Frequency
What do you wish you had known when you started your term as a council member?	Role and scope of governance/3 Processes for moving issues through system/2 Processes for conducting business/2 Role of officers/2 Goals for College and campuses/1 Time commitment/1 Familiarity with other members/1
If you could make one change to governance next year to improve it, what would that change be?	Ensure councils know how leaders utilized their input/4 Clarify process and ensure timely responses/4 More input, less updating/2 Clarify councils' scope of responsibility/2
What other feedback or suggestions would you like to share about governance?	Enriching experience/4 Need to focus on input over updates/3 Less overlap of councils/2 Need opportunities to practice/2

Items 2, 3, 7, and 8 were individually analyzed by frequency of yes or no response (see Figure 1). Participants were also able to select an “other” option and provide a comment. The majority of other responses repeated themes expressed in the previous table, such as need for feedback about how input informs decisions or need for clarity about how to move issues through governance.

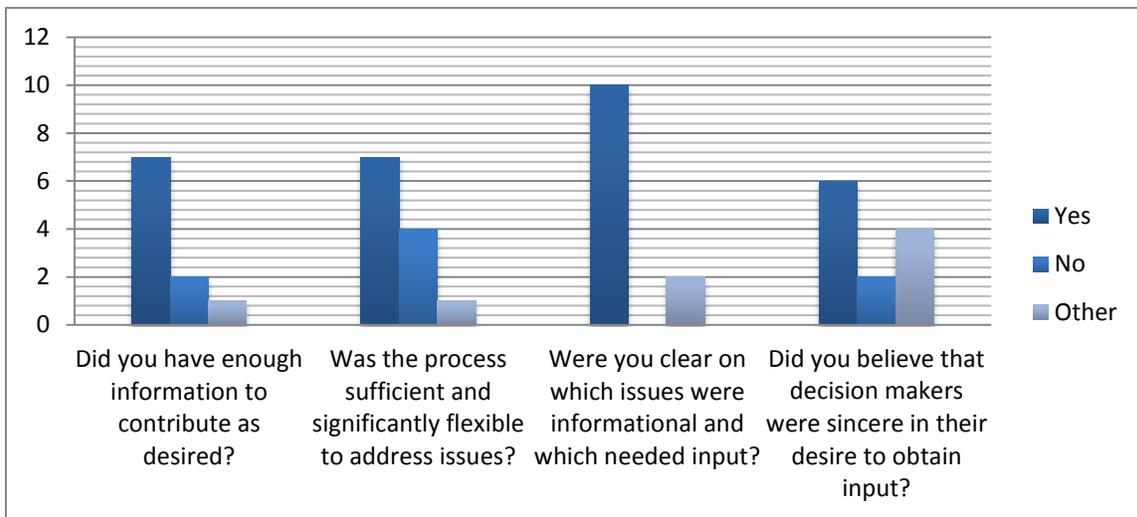


Figure 1. Yes/No frequencies by item

Items 4 and 5 were scored according to the following point system: very satisfied was 2 points,

satisfied was 1 point, and dissatisfied was 1 point. An average satisfaction score was then calculated for individual contribution and council contribution (see Table 3). Additionally, a correlation coefficient was calculated to determine a relationship between satisfaction with personal contribution and council contribution. The result indicated a strong relationship between the variables ($r = 0.659$).

Table 3. Individual and Council Contribution Satisfaction

Type of Contribution	Average Satisfaction Score
Individual	1.25 = Satisfied
Council	1.09 = Satisfied

Responses to item 6 were categorized and analyzed according to frequency (see Table 4).

Table 4. Significant Satisfaction Factors

Factor	Frequency
Validation/feedback that input was meaningful to decision makers	4
Dedication of fellow council members	4
Open communication/friendly environment	3
Timeliness of response	2

Survey of the College Community

Survey Description

Members of the College community completed a 15-item survey to assess the governance system. Items 1-7 and 13 were the same as in previous years. The other items were changed slightly to better align with assessing the purposes of governance. Items 1 and 2 asked participants to identify as student, staff, faculty, or administrator and to indicate whether they had full-time or part-time status. Items 3-7 measured community engagement with the governance system by asking participants to indicate whether they took certain actions to get information or advocate. Item 8 asked participants to rate their level of involvement. Items 9 and 10 asked participants to share their perspectives about the outcomes of governance on decision-making. Items 11 and 12 focused on access and participation in governance. Item 13 allowed for open-ended comments and suggestions about governance. Items 14 and 15 asked if the objectives and processes were understood and valued respectively.

Survey Results

A total of 109 members of the College community participated in the survey, with 84 answering all items. Compared to last year, fewer individuals took the survey but more completed the survey. Participants included eight students (7.3%), 49 staff (45%), 20 faculty (18.3%), and seven

administrators (6.4%). The remaining respondents did not select a category (23.9%). Half of the students, three staff, and five faculty indicated they had part-time status (10.1%).

Table 5 shows the responses for Items 3-7 for 2014 so they can be compared with the responses for this year in Table 6. Subtotals by constituency as well as employment status are provided. Numbers in bold indicate whether yes or no was a more frequent response within each constituency category and employment status category. The percentages indicate how much each category contributed to the total yes or no responses. Note that percentages were calculated using ($N=84$) the number of participants who completed the full survey. Due to rounding, the sums of percentages may be slightly less than 100.

Table 5. Items 3-7: 2014 College Community Engagement (% of Yes/No)

Item	Response	Total	Administrator	Faculty	Staff
3. Did you attend council meetings?	Yes	41	6 (15%)	22 (54%)	16 (39%)
	No	31	2 (6%)	10 (32 %)	16 (39%)
4. Did you email council representatives or chairs?	Yes	45	8 (18 %)	17 (38%)	20 (44%)
	No	27	0 (0%)	15(19%)	11 (41%)
5. Did you read council agendas, minutes, and/or ancillary materials?	Yes	69	8 (12%)	29 (42%)	32 (46%)
	No	3	0 (0%)	3(100%)	0 (0%)
6. Did you visit the governance website?	Yes	57	8 (14%)	26 (46%)	24 (42%)
	No	15	0 (0%)	6 (40%)	8 (53%)
7. Did you discuss governance issues with colleagues?	Yes	61	8 (13%)	32 (52%)	21 (34%)
	No	11	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	11 (100%)

Table 6. Items 3-7: 2015 College Community Engagement (% of Yes/No)

Item	Response	Total	Administrator	Faculty	Student	Staff	Full-Time	Part-Time
3. Did you attend council meetings?	Yes	45	6 (7%)	9 (11%)	2(2%)	29 (35%)	41 (49%)	4(5%)
	No	39	1 (1%)	11 (13%)	6 (7%)	21(25%)	35(42%)	4 (5%)
4. Did you email council representatives or chairs?	Yes	51	6 (7%)	11 (13%)	1(1%)	33(39%)	46 (54%)	5(6%)
	No	33	1 (1%)	9(11%)	7(8%)	16 (19%)	30 (36%)	3(4%)
5. Did you read council agendas, minutes, and/or ancillary materials?	Yes	65	3 (3%)	19 (23%)	4 (4%)	41 (46%)	62(73%)	5 (6%)
	No	19	4 (4%)	1(1%)	4(4%)	8 (9%)	14 (17%)	3(4%)
6. Did you visit the governance website?	Yes	50	5 (6%)	12 (14%)	2(2%)	32 (39%)	49 (59%)	2 (2%)
	No	34	2 (2%)	8 (9%)	6 (7%)	17 (53%)	27 (32%)	6 (7%)
7. Did you discuss governance issues with colleagues?	Yes	54	5 (6%)	18 (21%)	1(1%)	41 (49%)	50(60%)	5(6%)
	No	28	2 (2%)	2 (2%)	7(8%)	8 (9%)	16(19%)	3(4%)

A limitation of this portion of the survey is that it does not allow us to determine the number of times a person engaged in these behaviors. For example, a faculty member who attended multiple council meetings is reflected in the data identically to someone who attended one meeting. It is likely that someone who was interested enough to attend multiple meetings would also discuss governance with colleagues or engage in other behaviors. Therefore, the data allow us to roughly estimate the level of engagement for each constituency. An additional limitation is the small sample size.

One of the ways that community engagement can be considered is by assigning point values to the different behaviors based on the amount of engagement. Basic behaviors to stay informed would be counted as one point. Intermediate engagement, such as attending a council meeting, could be counted as two points. Advanced behaviors focusing on advocacy and sharing information, such as e-mailing a council representative or discussing governance issues with colleagues, and could be counted as three points (see Table 7).

Table 7. Behaviors by Level of Engagement

Basic (1 point)
Did you read council agendas, minutes, and/or ancillary materials?
Did you visit the governance website?
Intermediate (2 points)
Did you attend council meetings?
Advanced (3 points)
Did you discuss governance issues with colleagues?
Did you email council representatives or chairs?

Based on this metric, Figure 2 shows the levels of involvement by constituency. Thus, administrators and staff displayed more advanced engagement with governance than faculty or students. Additionally, the data indicated that employees tended to either be involved at an advanced level or a basic level, with intermediate involvement least likely. Student engagement was more evenly distributed.

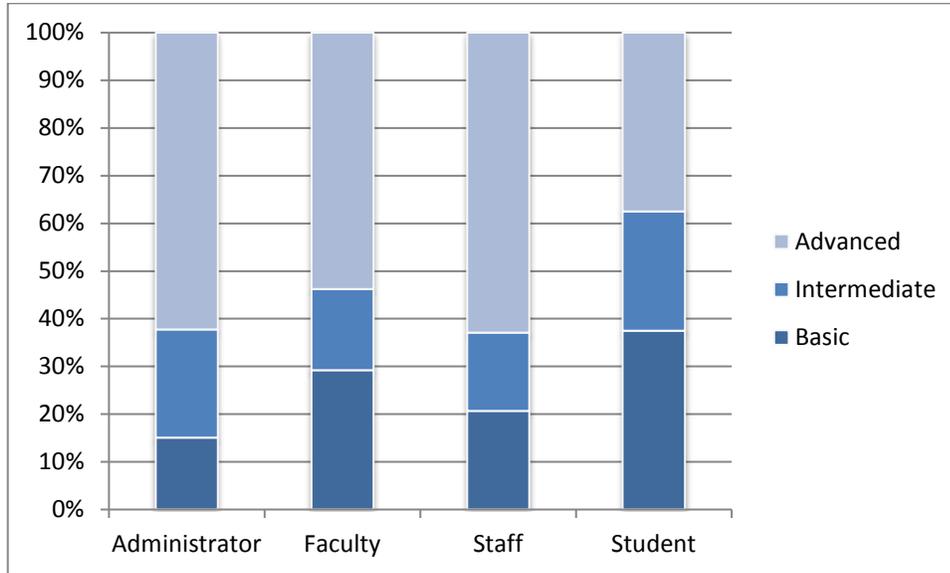


Figure 2. Weighted distribution of engagement by constituency

The data were compressed to calculate a weighted average level of engagement for comparison among groups. Figure 3 shows a comparison of 2013, 2014, and 2015 data.

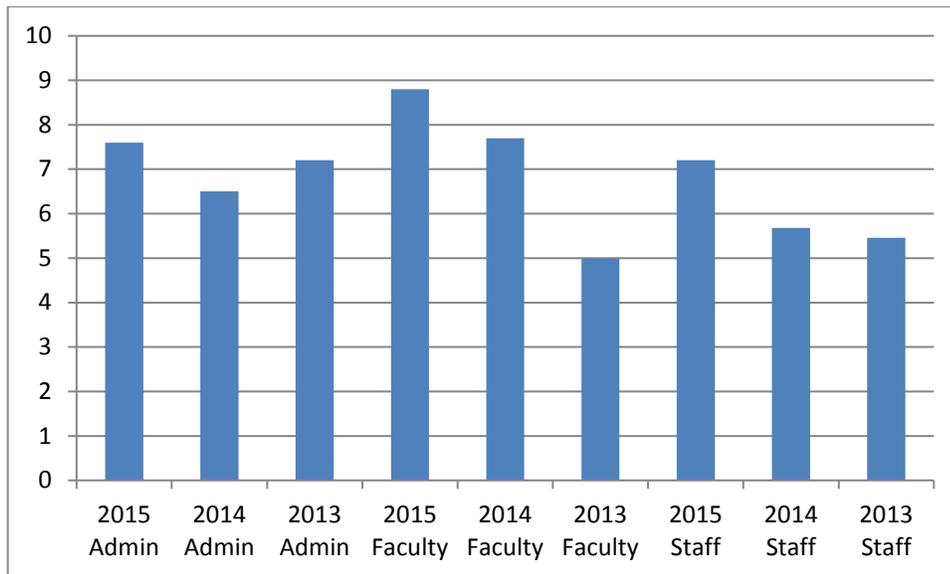


Figure 3. Comparison of 2013, 2014, 2015 weighted distribution of relative engagement by constituency

Item 8 provided validation for the aforementioned behaviors as constituting engagement. All participants who rated themselves as having high or very high involvement indicated yes for at least three out of five on items 3-7. Those perceiving themselves to have medium involvement responded yes on one or two of the items, whereas the majority of those having low involvement had one or fewer yes responses. See Table 8 for percentage of self-reported involvement in governance.

Table 8. Perception of Involvement

Level of Involvement	Percentage
Very high	21%
High	7%
Medium	30%
Low	35%

Item 9 asked participants what their perspectives were regarding the impact of governance on decision-making. Responses were coded as significant impact, some impact, little to no impact, or unsure of impact. A frequency distribution of this data can be found in Figure 4.

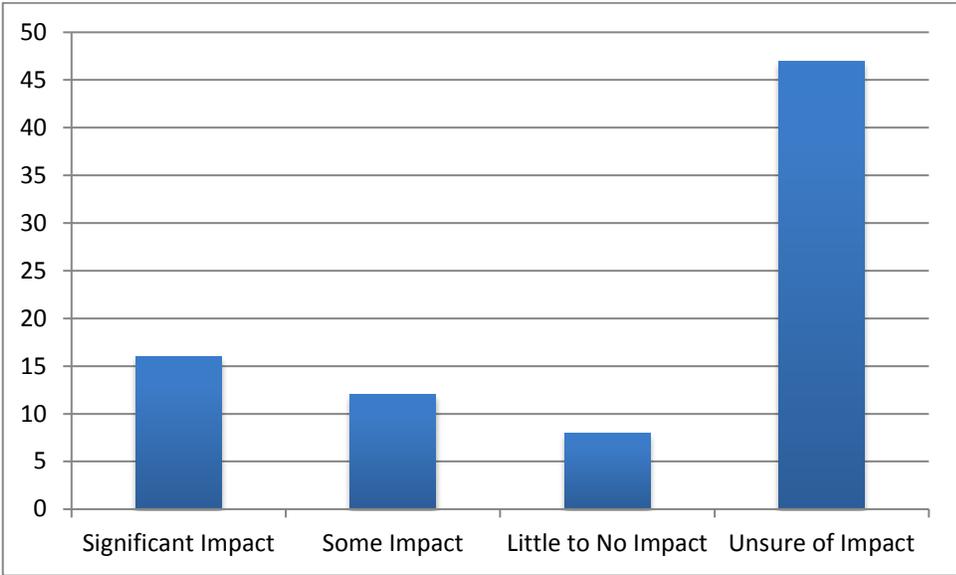


Figure 4. Distribution of perceived impact of governance on decision-making

It should be noted that there was a significant difference ($p < .01$) between groups classified by level of involvement and perceived impact of governance on decision-making based on an analysis of variance. Those with high level of involvement had the most favorable perception of governance making an impact on decision-making. Those with medium level of involvement had the least favorable perception of governance making an impact on decision-making, while those with low level of involvement were almost exclusively unsure or unaware of whether governance had made an impact (See Figure 5).

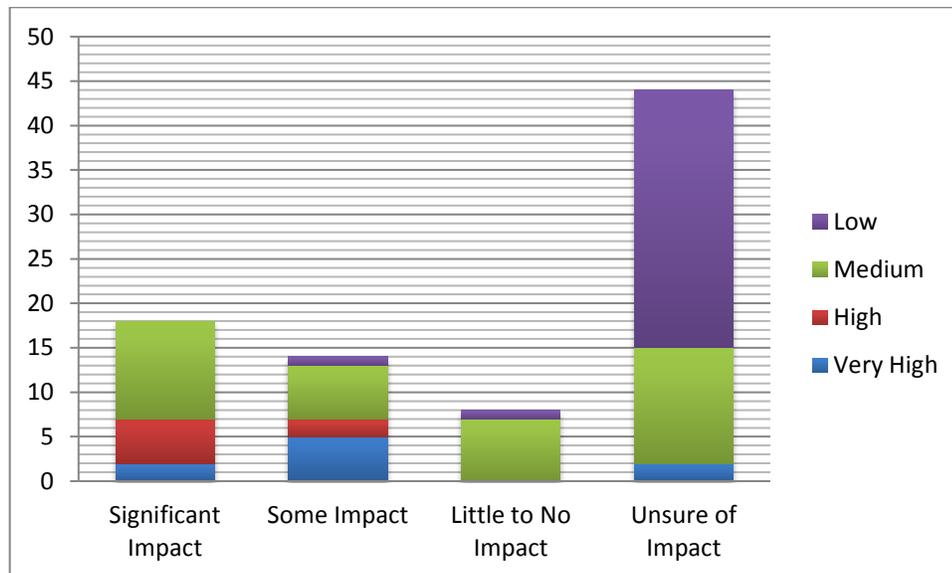


Figure 5. Distribution of perceived impact of governance on decision-making by respondent level of involvement

Item 10 asked respondents to specify decisions they believed were improved through governance. Issues identified included campus shuttle, College budget, campus safety, College procedures, academic calendar, MyMC redesign, and academic restructuring. The majority of respondents (90.5%) did not identify a specific decision that was improved by governance.

Item 11 asked respondents from their perspective if all the individuals and groups with a stake in governance had been included or had the opportunity to be included. Possible responses were yes, not sure, and no. If no, then the respondent was asked which groups were not included. The majority of responses were yes or not sure. However, there were three groups identified as not equitably included. This included staff whose jobs were not conducive to attending council meetings (e.g., night security officers), part-time students, and WD&CE students whose courses did not fit a semester sequence, thereby increasing the likelihood that they would not be eligible for elections when the ballots were set.

Item 12 requested open-ended feedback about ways to improve participation and engagement. More than a quarter of responses were of the type that participation would improve when direct results could be shown. Sample responses included:

- If positive outcomes were more frequent, better advertised, and didn't take so much time to get something accomplished, people would be more interested in participating.
- Need guidelines for a situation when a supervisor of the person who is the chair is on a council.
- Simply the governance structure.
- Provide executive summary sheets about key issues rather than having people dig through minutes.
- People need to be self-motivated to participate rather than being cajoled. We are professionals.

Item 13 requested open-ended suggestions for improving governance. The most frequent responses were of this type:

- Decision-makers should indicate how governance helped them. They may communicate this to the councils, but the rest of the College does not know.
- Clarify roles of council members and officers.
- Simplify and streamline the process.

Items 14 and 15 addressed whether the processes and outcomes were understood and valued. Responses were categorized as yes, somewhat, no, and other. Figure 6 shows the response frequencies for yes, somewhat, and no.

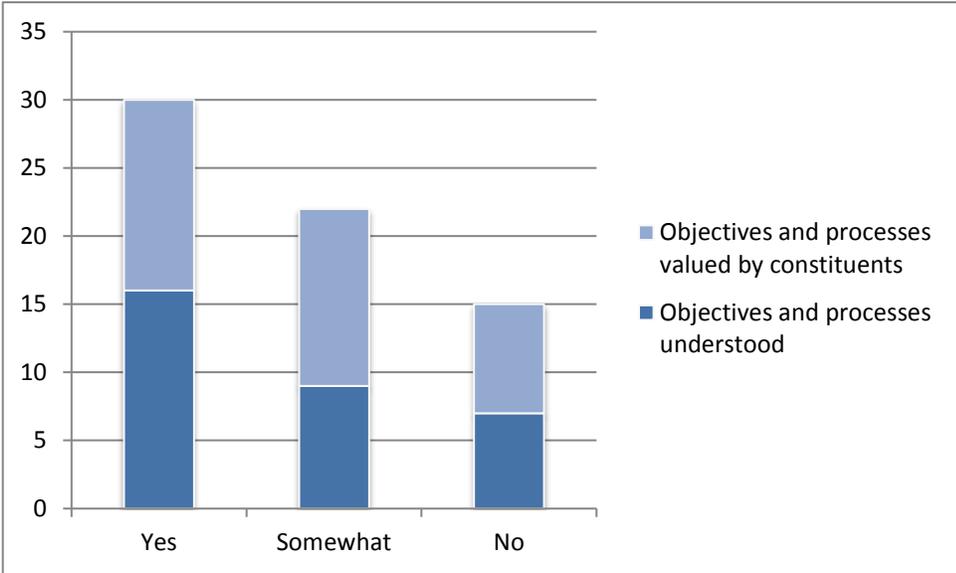


Figure 6. Frequencies of responses indicating understanding and value of objectives and processes

Discussion of Overall Results

Limitations to the evaluation include the number of responses. More responses would allow for more robust analysis of data. However, the responses reveal some significant focal points.

The responses indicate that the strength of governance is improved communication channels among constituents, councils and leaders. A significant area for future growth is the need to understand the value and impact of the work being done through governance. Whereas in 2013 and 2014 the assessment results indicated the need for councils to have more time to deliberate and share meaningful feedback with senior leaders, the results this year indicate the desire to know the value of governance to College leadership by having tangible council outcomes and receiving feedback from College leadership as to how the input was used in decision-making, not only to the councils but to the rest of the College community.

Possible ways to address this would be for leader liaisons to identify, at the beginning of the governance term, two to three items where they would value a recommendation or specific input from the particular council, along with a timeframe. Then leaders could communicate to the College community how governance meaningfully contributed to decision-making on those issues.

Additionally, senior leaders can provide guidance as to the type of feedback preferred (e.g., specific recommendation, range of perspectives, constituency needs and interests). In a number of cases, feedback may not be desired, or it may be welcome but not needed. In such cases, the intent is to provide informational updates to the council.

Clarification is important, not to limit the council's feedback, but to empower it to decide how best to use its resources. Moving from a cafeteria-style approach to governance to more defined pathways for how issues move through governance may be of help. Additionally, as the leadership and organizational structure of the College evolves, there is a need to continue to provide clarity about roles and connections with governance. Focused training on council member and officer responsibilities is needed and plans are underway to address this.

Other results of note are that students participated in this survey for the first time and the level of engagement for administrators, faculty, and staff is trending upward compared to 2013 and 2014.