

Originally developed four decades ago as “a procedure for student evaluation and feedback on faculty instruction” at the University of Washington, Small Group Instructional Diagnoses (SGIDs) have long been a staple of faculty development. SGIDs were developed as an alternative to conventional Student Evaluations of Teaching (SETs) and “designed for instructional improvement rather than administrative evaluation” (Clark and Redmond).

Illinois State University’s Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology (CTLT) has been providing SGIDs to faculty who request them since 2007 in the guise of “Midterm Chats” (MCs). In our initial conversations with faculty, we provide a bibliography of research regarding SGIDs, which identifies them as having the potential to improve student motivation (Redmond), increase rapport and interaction between students and faculty (Clark), allow instructors to adjust their teaching in a timely fashion (Redmond), improve end-of-semester SETs (Redmond), and serve as a valuable professional resource (Russell).

We have also been able to note that SGIDs have been identified as “a better means of obtaining feedback than other evaluation methods” (Clark) and that, among instructors who have used SGIDs, they often become “the preferred method” for obtaining feedback (Clark). We can further report that “the literature has been overwhelmingly positive about the benefits of midterm student feedback” (Harris and Stevens).

Until now, however, we have not been able to assure faculty that MCs (SGIDs) have the potential to actually improve instructional practice. This is because, although an early external evaluation of the SGID process “suggested that the technique [had potential as] a major mode of facilitating instructional improvement” (Clark and Redmond), there have been no studies that looked specifically at the impact of SGIDs on either instructional practice or student learning. Thus, in the spring of 2018, we began a study designed to answer the following question:

Do MCs (SGIDs) affect the instructional practices of individual instructors at Illinois State University in lasting and positive ways?

Resources Cited Above

Clark, D., and Redmond, M. (1982b). Small group instructional diagnosis: Final report. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED217954.pdf>.

Harris, G. L. A.. "The Value of Midterm Student Feedback in Cross-Disciplinary Graduate Programs." *Journal of Public Affairs Education* 19.3 (2013):537-558. Web.

Redmond, M.V. (1982). A process of midterm evaluation incorporating small group discussion and its effect on student motivation. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED217953.pdf>

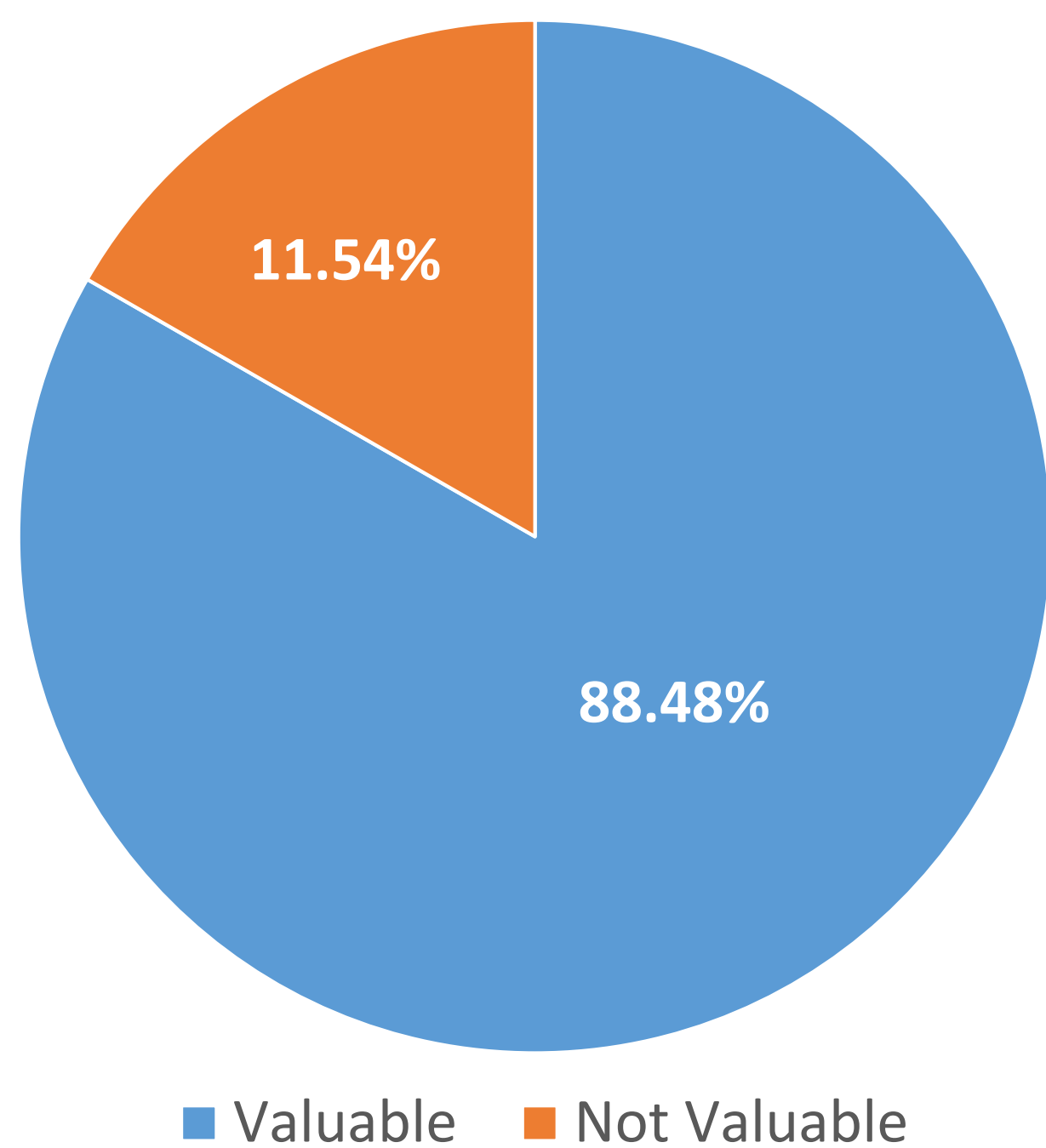


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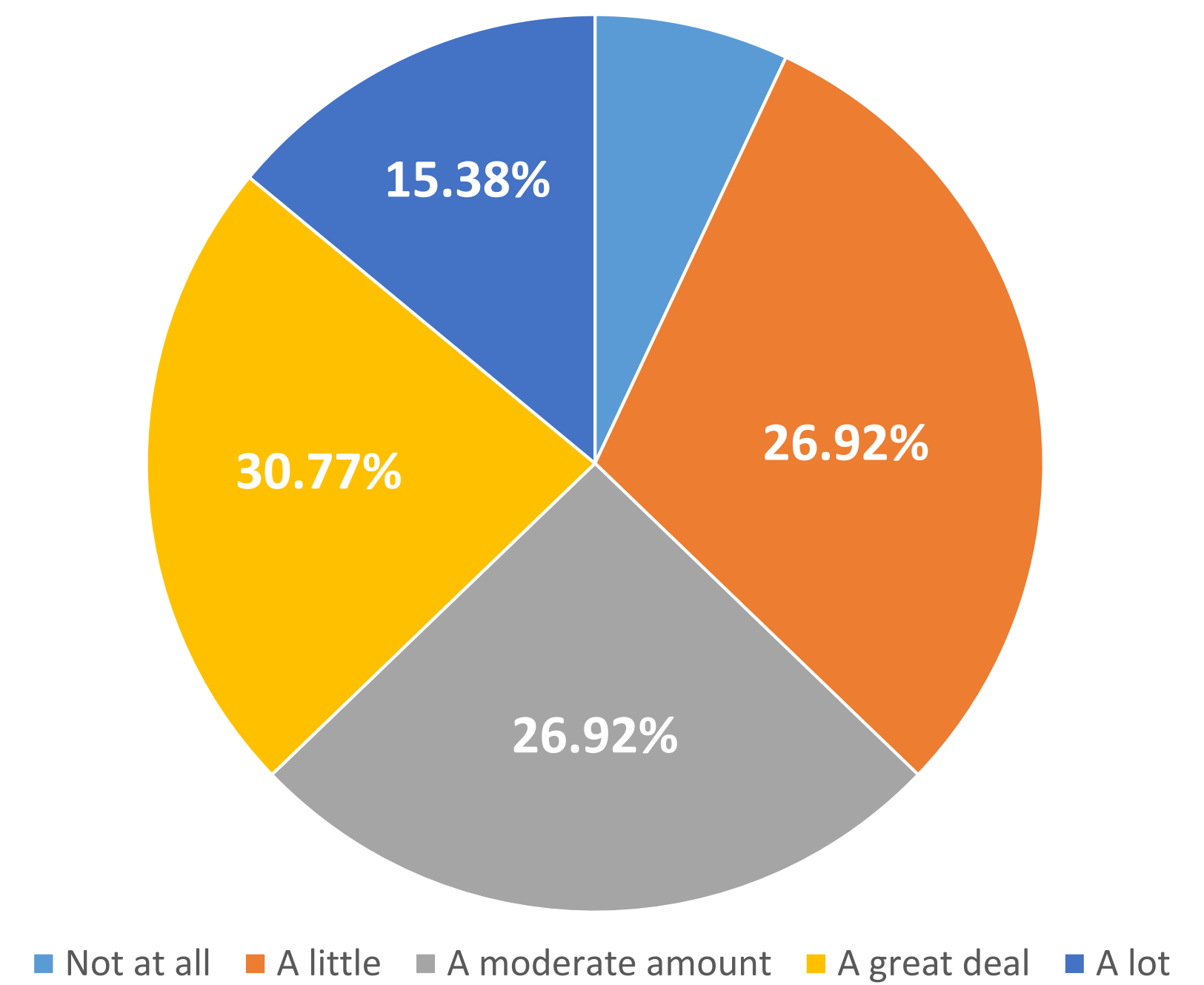


Investigating the Impact of Midterm Chats (Small Group Instructional Diagnoses) on Instructional Practice PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Was the Midterm Chat process valuable to your teaching?



Overall, to what extent would you say your participation in Midterm Chats has affected your instructional practice?



"... the results from the two midterm chats have provided ... focused information that I can really use to revise my teaching. The [end-of-semester] course/instructor evaluation items do not quite address or provide the information that I believe to be most helpful for my teaching development."

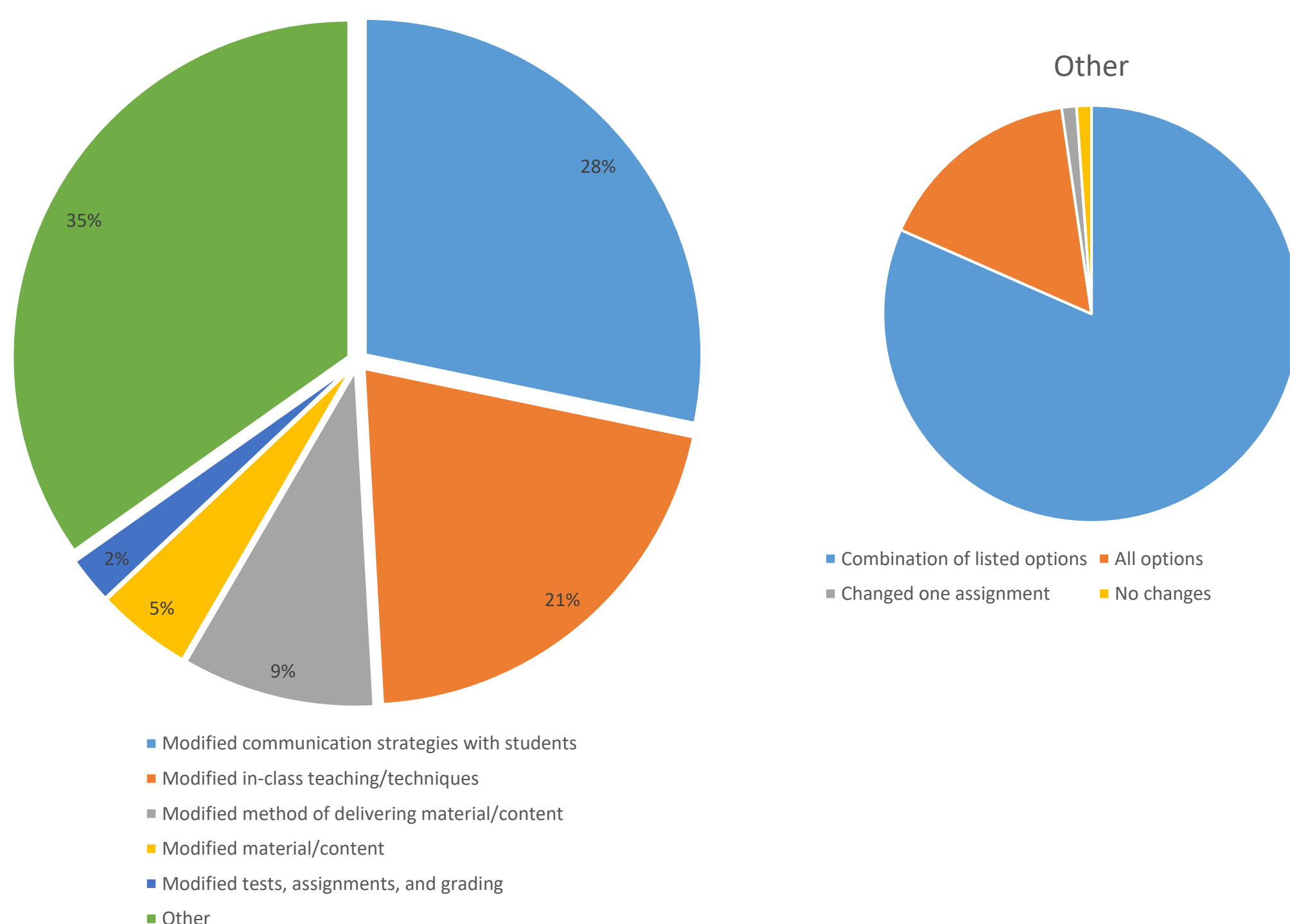
"It was valuable in that it let me know what I do well and what other things students might like to see in the courses. Importantly, it gave me an objective, outside, professional evaluation to have alongside of the ... narratives that I receive from the ... department through the performance appraisal system."

"[I] think it changes us in a way we couldn't do ourselves."

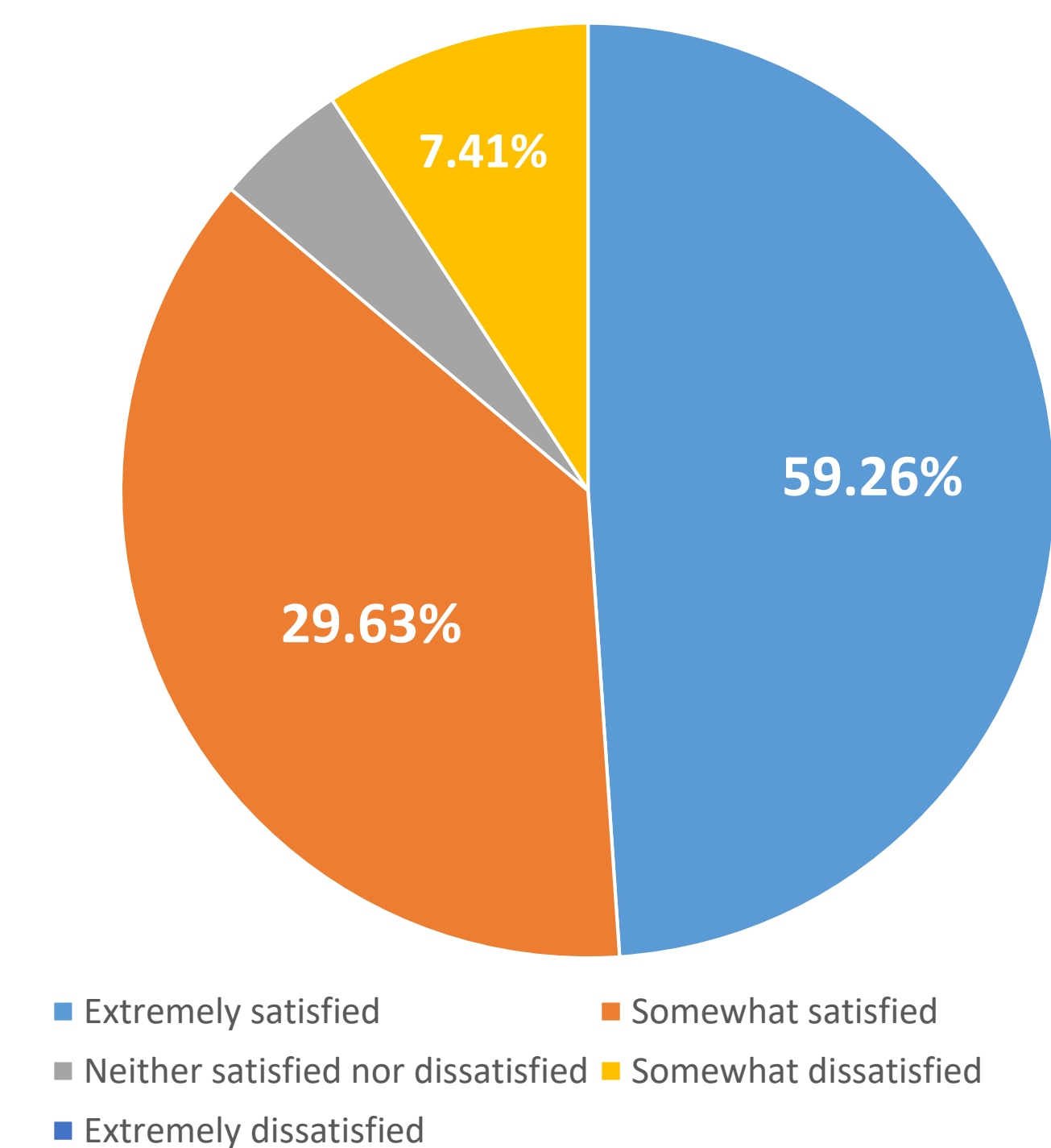
"The things that [students] were responding to, are things that I've continued to think about as I've come forward."

"I took all of that feedback...I really changed my behavior in class...I concentrated on incorporating just about as much as I could."

Overall, how would you say that your instructional practices have changed as a result of your participation in Midterm Chat?



Generally speaking, how satisfied have you been with your Midterm Chat experience(s)?



"I feel like my teaching is getting better...having that experience was a useful part that has probably factored in to the way that my teaching has been evolving."

"[Because] I could see it working in the Midterm Chat class...it extended to a curriculum that we use department wide ... it is [now] being used by anybody that teaches that course."

This was "valuable information, obtained and received in a non-threatening way."

"To know that this service is available for us to use is great, it's comforting...to have someone that you can just speak authentically [to] about what your experiences are, what your trepidations are, your fears, your worries, what your expectations, hopes, goals, dreams are for the course."

METHODOLOGY In the spring of 2018, we sent an online **survey** to 270 faculty who (1) had participated in our MC process between 2007 and 2017 and (2) were still teaching at the university. Forty-seven (17%) responded, with 25 agreeing to participate in a follow-up **interview**.

Findings

Preliminary findings from the study indicate that faculty who engage in CTLT's Midterm Chat service find it valuable to their teaching and are overwhelmingly satisfied with their experiences. Most importantly, however, **93% of these faculty agree that MCs have influenced instructional practice** to some extent.

In follow-up interviews, faculty indicated that these changes to instruction were lasting and were not limited only to the courses in which the MCs were conducted.

While we still have much to learn from the data, it is evident that the answer to our research question is **"yes."**

Discussion

The ability to demonstrate an impact on teaching practice is invaluable to teaching centers. While we at Illinois State continue to enjoy the full confidence and support of our upper administration, we know we shouldn't take that for granted. This makes the current research valuable to us, but we feel it's valuable to the profession of faculty development as well.

Caveat

The size of our sample is relatively small and limited to a single institution.

Future Research

As we move ahead with our use and investigation of MCs, we will likely want to consider additional questions such as:

- Are MCs more or most helpful for certain populations of instructors?
- How can MCs support the review, revision, and certification of university programs?

What else would YOU like to know? (Tell us!)

