Centre for Teaching and Learning

UBC Okanagan Teaching Assistant Training Program

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Background

The Teaching Assistant Foundational Training Program is a paid, campus-wide, 10-hour micro-credential program for all new-to-UBC undergraduate and graduate TAs.

280 Teaching Assistants participated in the W2023 Foundational Training Program.

Program Format

To earn the micro-credential and receive full compensation, TAs must complete the six core modules (M1 – M6), and two electives of their choosing (M7 – M12).

| M1 | Identifying Leaners | M7 | Online Facilitation |
M2	Ethics & Professionalism	M8	Teaching Basics
M3	Equity, Diversity, Inclusion	M9	Student Engagement
M4	Mental Health	M10	Lesson Planning
M5	Marking & Assessment	M11	Canvas Basics
M6	Academic Integrity	M12	UBCO's Host Nation

Program Outcomes & Evaluation

Program Outcomes: **a)** Understand and identify UBC policies, services, and systems, **b)** understand UBC's expectations of teaching assistants, **c)** recognize and navigate factors that contribute to classroom climate and student engagement with learning, **d)** and develop learner-centered facilitation strategies.
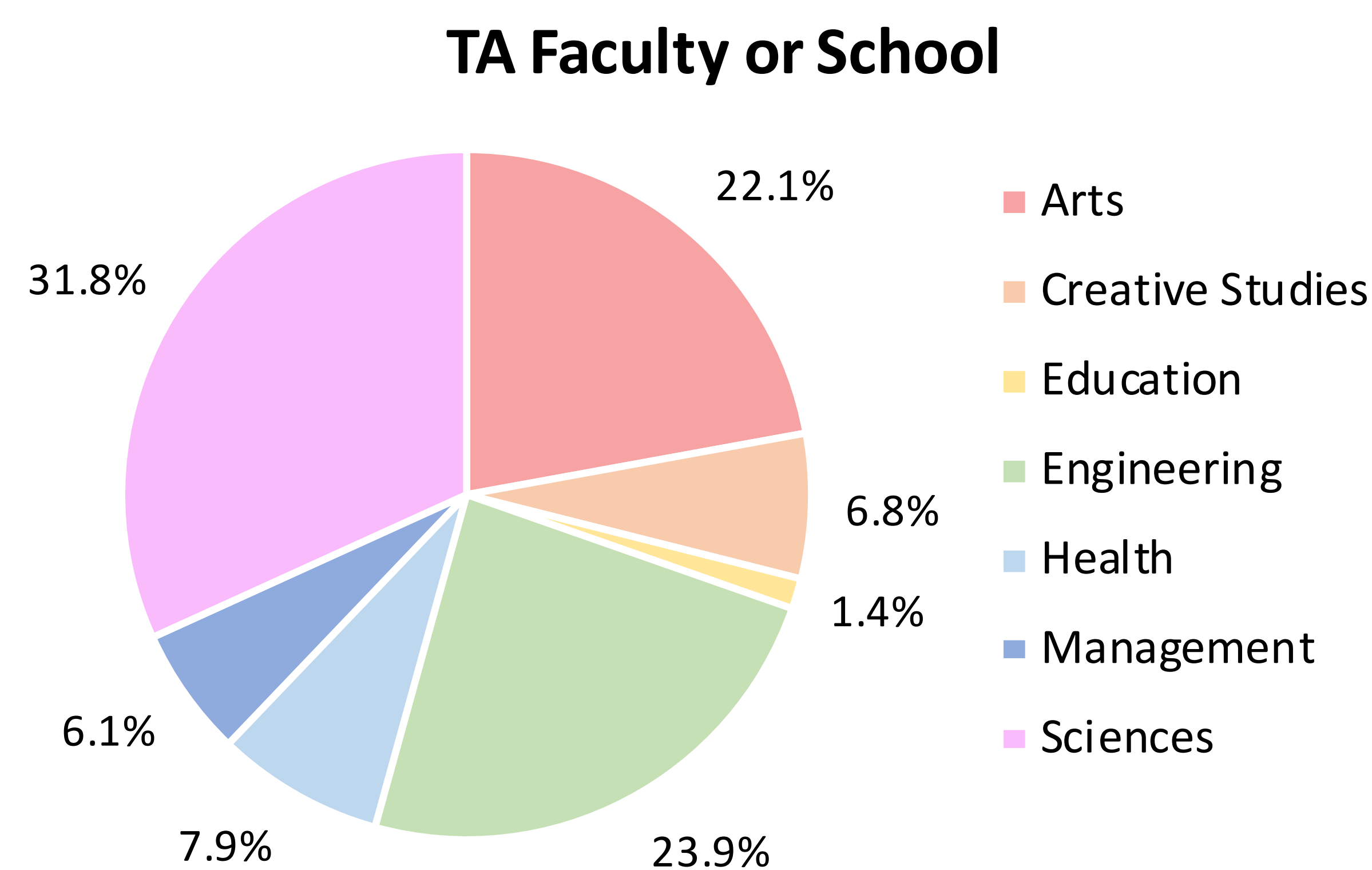
Using **Interviews** and **Surveys**, we assessed:
1) Are Program Outcomes being achieved?
2) Which modules are most useful for new TAs?
3) What are some common challenges for new TAs?
4) How can the program better prepare TAs?

Participant Distribution

TA Degree Type

| 18.2% | 40.4% | 41.4% |

0   20   40   60   80   100

■ Ph.D. ■ Master's ■ Undergraduate
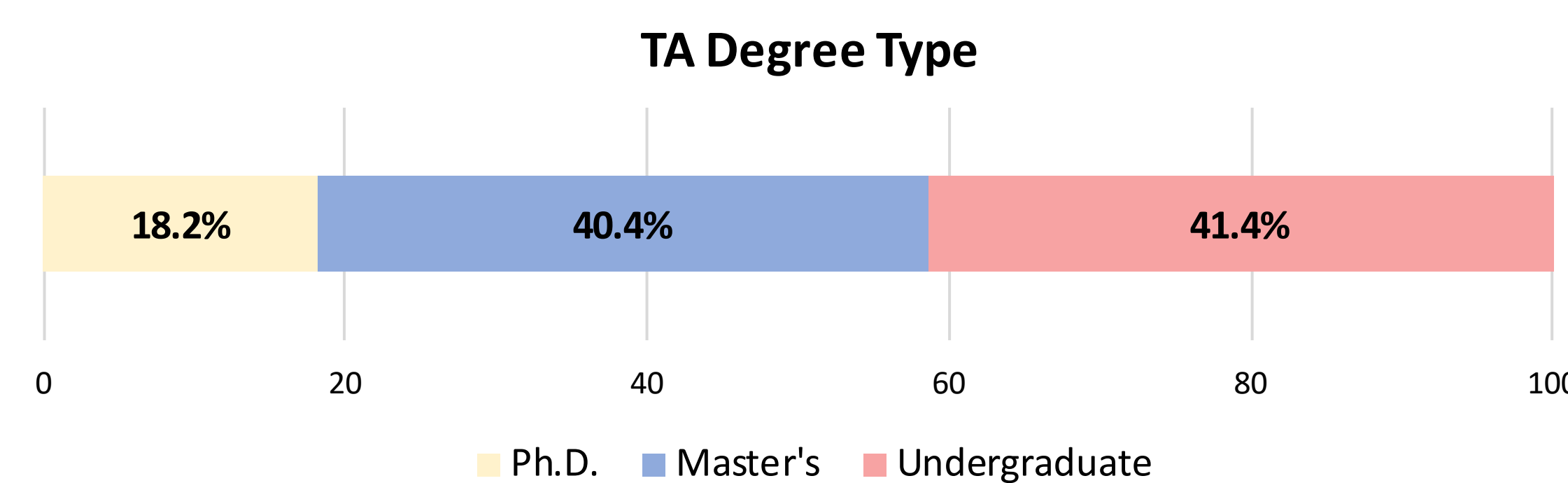
Degree types and Faculty or School being supported by new-to-UBC TAs engaged in the W2023 training.

TA Faculty or School

- 22.1% ■ Arts
- 6.8% ■ Creative Studies
- 1.4% ■ Education
- ■ Engineering
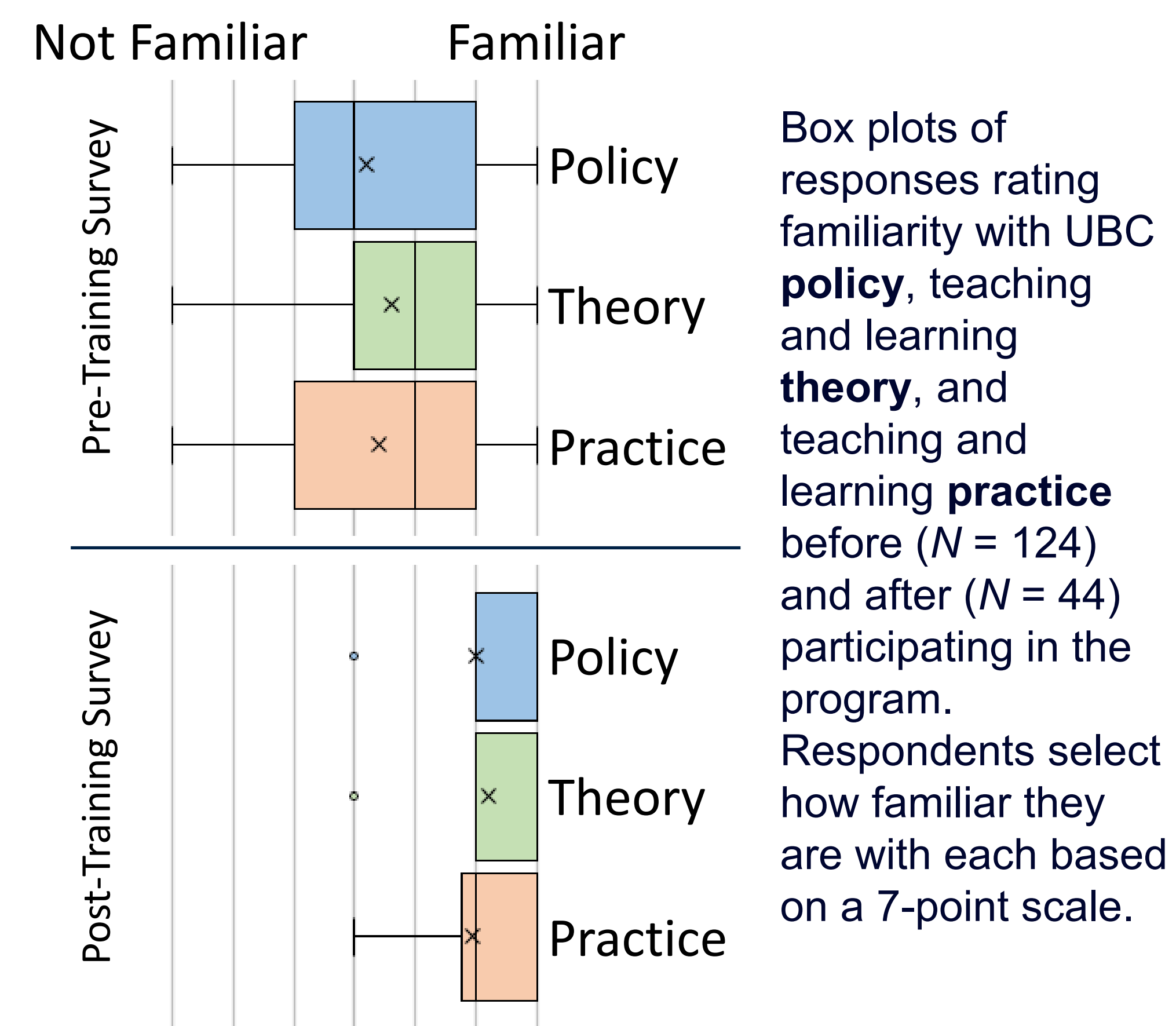- ■ Health
- ■ Management
- ■ Sciences

31.8%
23.9%
7.9%
6.1%

Interview Response Themes

A small collection of TAs that had just finished their first semester (N = 5) and experienced TAs (N = 5) that had earned institutional awards were interviewed about their experiences and challenges.
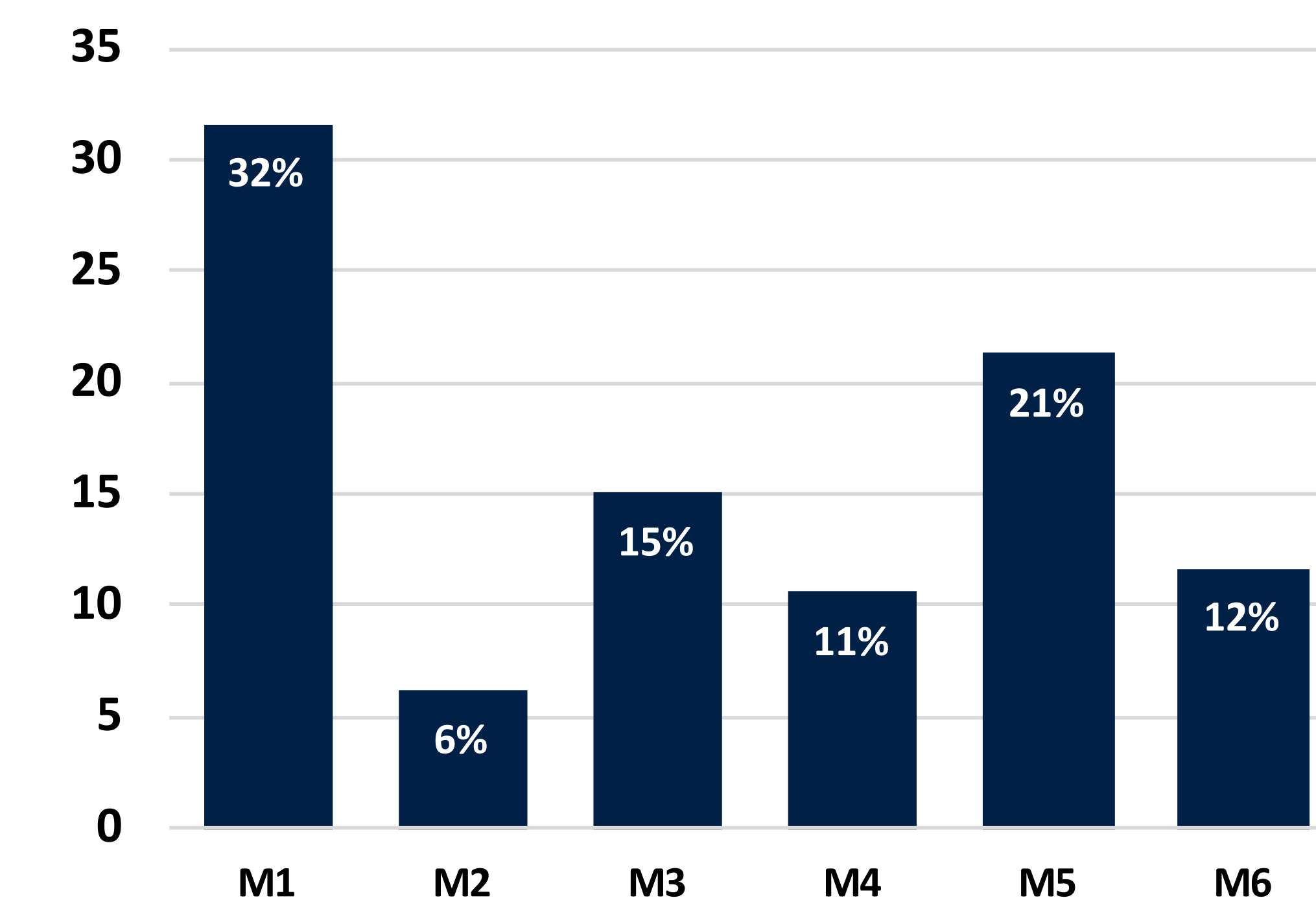
Overall, new TAs were focused on communication, and were often concerned with the way they presented themselves:

- "I wanted to make myself **approachable** if they had questions but also still maintain the authoritative figure in the room."

and experienced TAs had a high degree of autonomy, and were more concerned with how they personally can improve the learning experience:

- "If you want to teach something, then you put the effort to **create** things that are **effective resources** for students."

Survey Data: Training Impacts

Not Familiar   Familiar

Pre-Training Survey: Policy, Theory, Practice
Post-Training Survey: Policy, Theory, Practice

Box plots of responses rating familiarity with UBC **policy**, teaching and learning **theory**, and teaching and learning **practice** before (N = 124) and after (N = 44) participating in the program. Respondents select how familiar they are with each based on a 7-point scale.

% change in comfort with each required Module

Module	Change
M1	32%
M2	6%
M3	15%
M4	11%
M5	21%
M6	12%

Change in favourable responses to the Likert prompt "*I am comfortable with the following module topic*" before and after the training program.

Most **popular elective**: **Teaching Basics**

Most **useful** module: **Marking & Assessment Strategies**

Most **requested** module: **Communication with Instructor**

Survey Data: Recommendations

At the end of their first semester, TAs were given an opportunity to offer constructive feedback:

- "It would be nice if the increasing student engagement module went into more detail about strategies you can use in class. I think a lot of the things from the module **sound great in theory**, but it is **still hard to engage students**."
- "I found many **issues with communication** between **myself**, the TA **coordinator** and **professors**… Instructions were always quite ambiguous and when I reached out for clarification I was met with little or no responses."
- "… support with **dealing with difficult situations**, for example, how to deal with students that continuously fight for grades."

Discussion & Future Directions

There is an opportunity for creating more touchpoints and learning experiences for TAs throughout the academic year outside of the training program. Experiences should be developed for experiential learning, communication skills, and difficult conversations. Topics for optional and continued learning experiences for future TAs will include:

- Facilitating a laboratory, tutorial, or office hours;
- TA and Instructor relationships (offered for both parties, separately);
- Managing difficult conversations;
- And a community of practice to help build self-concept as a teaching assistant.

Acknowledgements

We respectfully acknowledge the Syilx Okanagan Nation and their peoples, in whose traditional, ancestral, unceded territory UBC Okanagan is situated.