

UVM EXTENSION AND VERMONT FAMILY COURT
COPING WITH SEPARATION AND DIVORCE: A PARENTING SEMINAR
EVALUATION –FEBRUARY 2007

Reporting on the year October 1, 2005-September 30, 2006

Coping with Separation and Divorce: A Parenting Seminar [COPE] is a four hour parent education program mandated by judicial discretion in the Vermont Family Courts for parents (of minors) filing for divorce, separation, change in parental rights and responsibilities, and determination of parentage and child support. In 1992 the program was piloted in one county and by the end of 1993 nine County Courts sponsored the program. Since 2001 all 14 Family Courts send participants to seminars held in 12 County Courthouses. Instructors trained by UVM Extension present the seminars monthly or bi-monthly to groups ranging in size from 10-25 to accommodate the approximately 175 parents registering statewide each month.

The COPE program continues to be well received by both the parents attending and the court staff facilitating the program's implementation. Recently, a Court Manager commented that she knows within minutes in a Case Manager's meeting whether the parents have attended the COPE class. This observation points to achievement of one of the program's goals: to lessen the burden on the Courts as parents work to restructure their lives. The other main goal is to mitigate the negative effects for the children by providing insight to parents about the process of family restructuring and by teaching skills that are essential for parents especially during stress laden times. The exit surveys completed by parents after the seminar show that COPE is successful in this area. Participants are asked to respond to a series of questions by checking "strongly agree," "agree", "neutral", "disagree, and "strongly disagree". The following data summarize the responses to the exit surveys of 1947 participants in all classes offered October 1, 2005 through September 30, 2006. Combining the strongly agree and agree categories 80% of parents agree the seminar is helpful with 85% commenting that they will use something they learned to **help them do a better job parenting**. 78% find the information helpful in understanding what their children are experiencing and 74% contend that their behavior will be influenced by what they have learned. Only 49% of parents feel that the information presented helps them to understand the child's other parent. This is historically the program's lowest ranked educational category. The program emphasizes the child's experience and parenting skills. A question about improving communication skills for shared parenting might yield more agreement than asking people if they "understand" the other parent.

Questions about the mechanics of the program provide information about COPE's strengths and weaknesses. The program's strength is in its Instructors many of whom have been with the program from its inception in 1992. At least 80% of participants concur that the Instructors are presenting information in a likable manner. Unfortunately we are constrained by the Courthouse setting and only 59% feel that the room is arranged to support their learning. Interestingly, 69% agree that it is a good idea to mandate the seminar and only 35% would attend without the Court's mandate. One might conclude

that parents feel the seminar is useful and appreciate the mandate because it gets their child's other parent to attend and thus be influenced by the same information.

In addition to the questions requiring a rating participants are asked to put into writing the most helpful thing that they learned. These are typical responses:

"The most important thing I learned was not to vent to your child and to validate their feelings, letting them know that you understand and sympathize with them, also to take time to step back and think before you say something that is not helpful"

"To not draw the kids into parental conflicts. I already know that, but sometimes it helps to hear it over and over again."

"Self-control, hearing from an outside party how my children are affected makes a big difference."

"I thought I was doing everything I could to help my kids, with this class I found several other tools"

"The value of communicating with your children's other parent over takes any bad feelings you may be experiencing about that person."

"Talking to my kids and asking questions. Not bashing dad in front of them."

"I don't feel so alone and confused. That there are tools to help me respond to my child."

"I need to be with my girl more and stop arguing with my ex. How my anger towards the other parent affects how I act toward my children. I will be sure to try to separate my emotions when directed to my children"

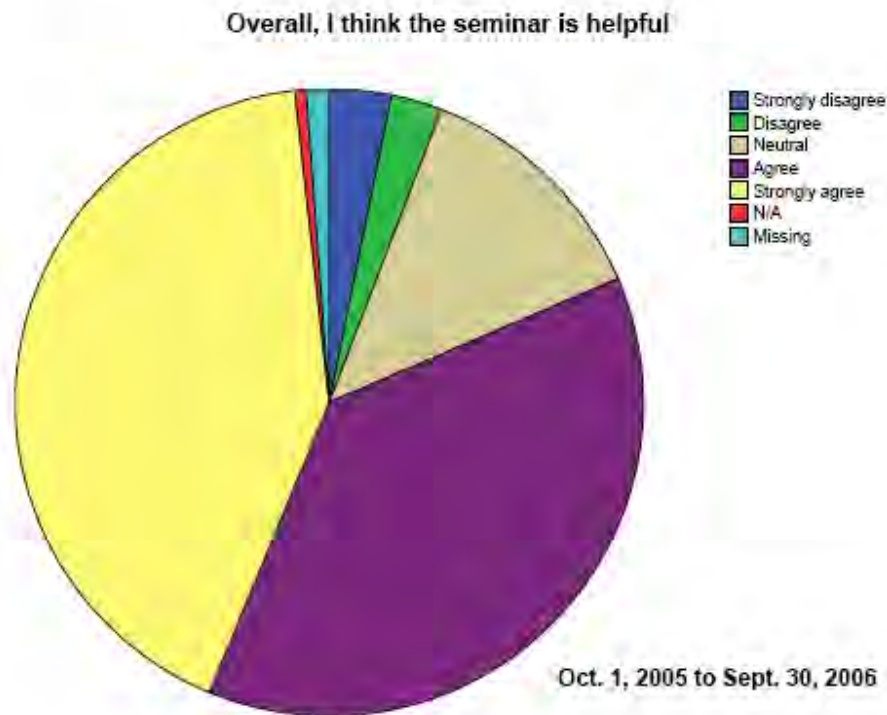
Finally the comment that summarizes the main message of the COPE program:

“All decisions must be made in the child’s best interest”

The graphs below give a more detailed picture of participant responses to the COPE program:

Overall, I think the seminar is helpful

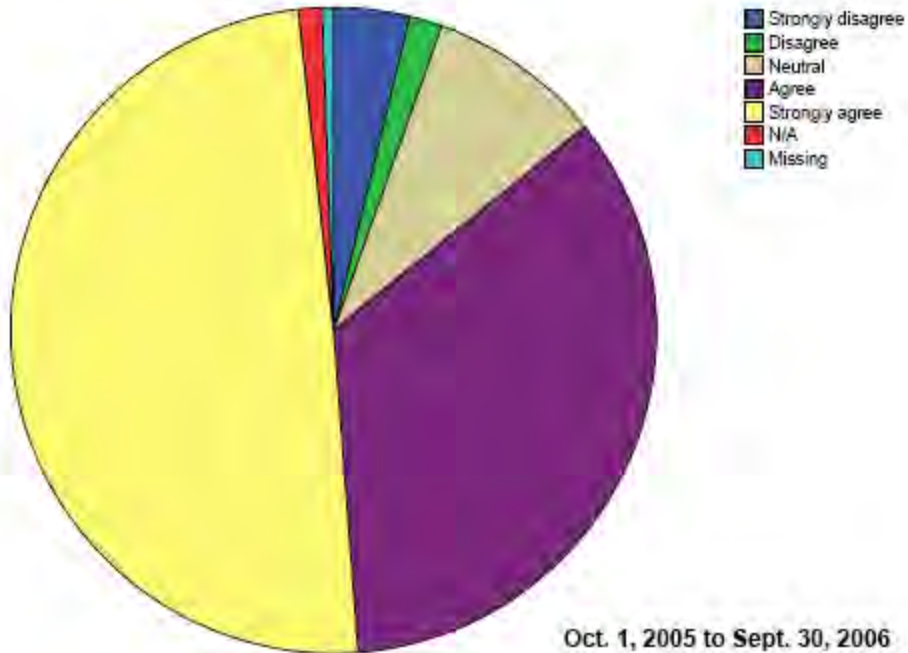
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly disagree	62	3.2	3.2	3.2
Disagree	51	2.6	2.7	5.9
Neutral	248	12.7	12.9	18.6
Agree	734	37.7	38.1	56.9
Strongly agree	818	42.0	42.5	99.4
N/A	11	.6	.8	100.0
Total	1924	98.8	100.0	
Missing System	23	1.2		
Total	1947	100.0		



I will use something I learned here to help me do a better job parenting

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	74	3.8	3.8	3.8
	Disagree	32	1.6	1.7	5.5
	Neutral	170	8.7	8.8	14.3
	Agree	674	34.6	34.8	49.1
	Strongly agree	963	49.5	49.7	98.8
	N/A	23	1.2	1.2	100.0
	Total	1936	99.4	100.0	
Missing	System	11	.6		
Total		1947	100.0		

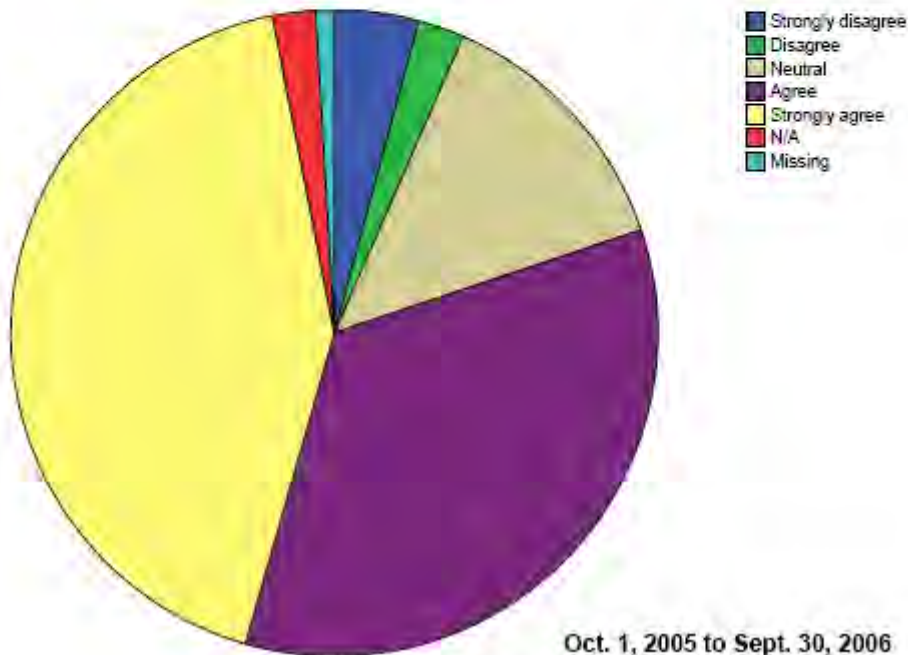
I will use something I learned here to help me do a better job parenting



This information helps me understand what my children are experiencing

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid				
Strongly disagree	82	4.2	4.3	4.3
Disagree	46	2.3	2.3	6.6
Neutral	259	13.3	13.4	20.0
Agree	874	34.6	34.9	55.0
Strongly agree	827	42.5	42.9	97.8
N/A	42	2.2	2.2	100.0
Total	1929	99.1	100.0	
Missing				
System	18	.9		
Total	1947	100.0		

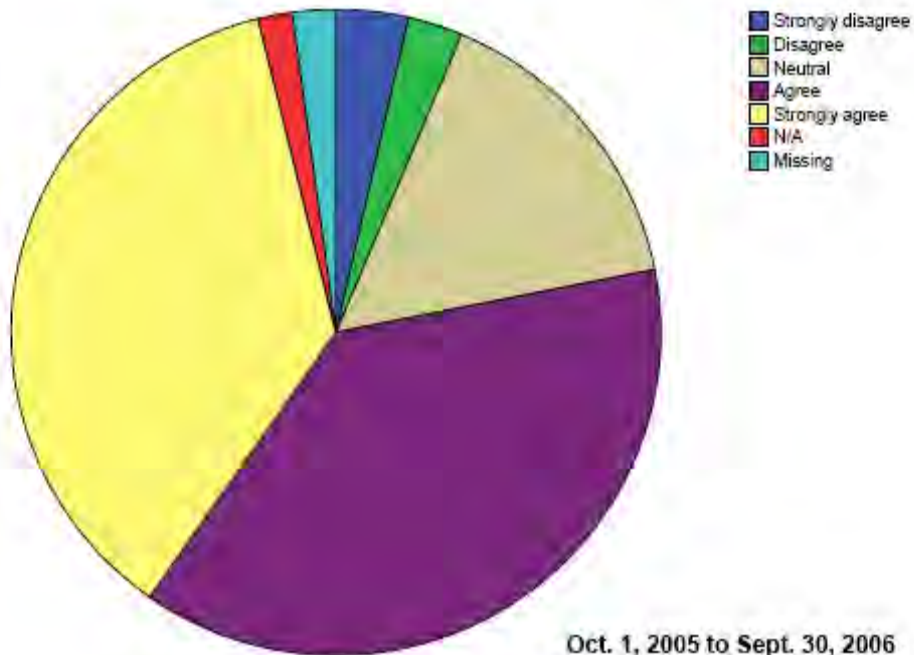
This information helps me understand what my children are experiencing



What I learned here will influence my behavior

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	70	3.6	3.7	3.7
	Disagree	53	2.7	2.8	6.5
	Neutral	303	15.6	15.9	22.4
	Agree	737	37.9	38.7	61.0
	Strongly agree	709	36.4	37.2	98.3
	N/A	33	1.7	1.7	100.0
	Total	1906	97.8	100.0	
Missing	System	42	2.2		
Total		1947	100.0		

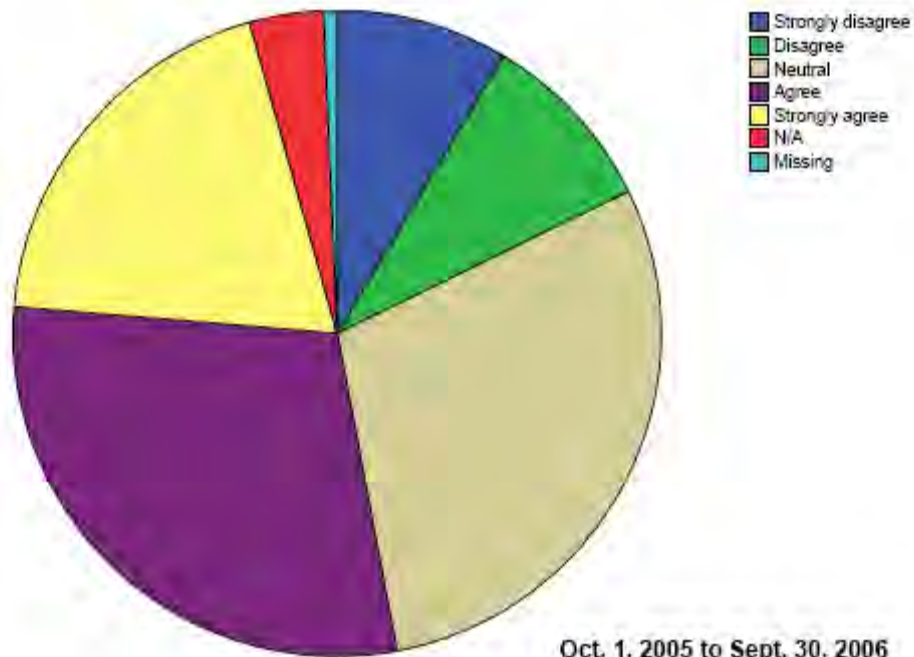
What I learned here will influence my behavior



The information helps me understand my child's other parent

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	167	8.8	8.8	8.8
	Disagree	178	9.2	9.3	17.9
	Neutral	570	29.3	29.5	47.4
	Agree	570	29.3	29.5	76.8
	Strongly agree	378	19.3	19.4	96.3
	N/A	72	3.7	3.7	100.0
Total		1934	99.3	100.0	
Missing	System	13	.7		
Total		1947	100.0		

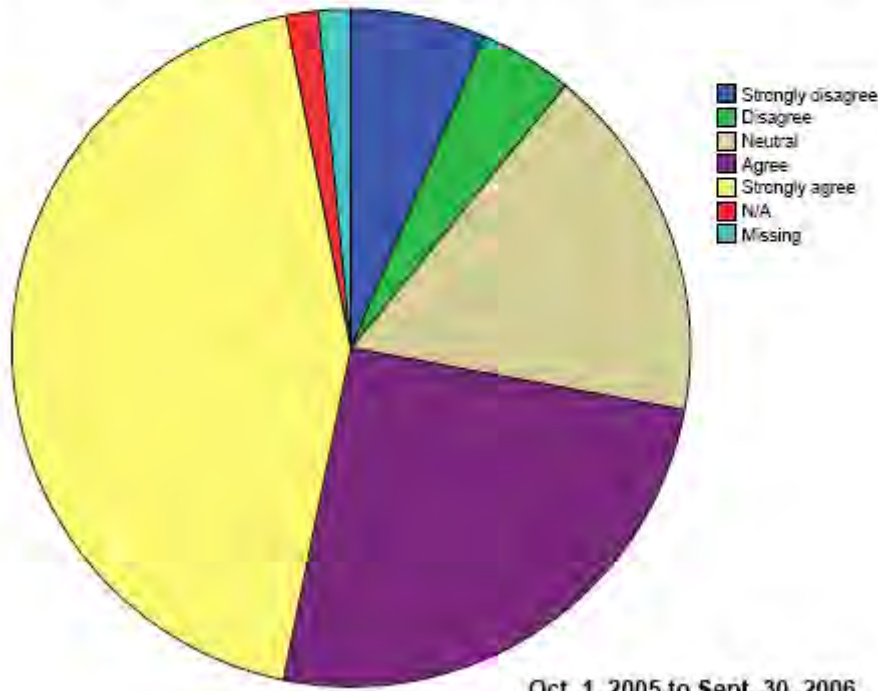
The information helps me understand my child's other parent



It is a good idea to mandate a parenting class for separating parents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	126	6.4	8.5	6.5
	Disagree	87	4.5	4.5	11.1
	Neutral	332	17.1	17.3	28.4
	Agree	492	25.3	26.7	54.0
	Strongly agree	851	43.7	44.4	98.4
	N/A	30	1.5	1.6	100.0
	Total	1917	98.5	100.0	
Missing	System	30	1.5		
	Total	1947	100.0		

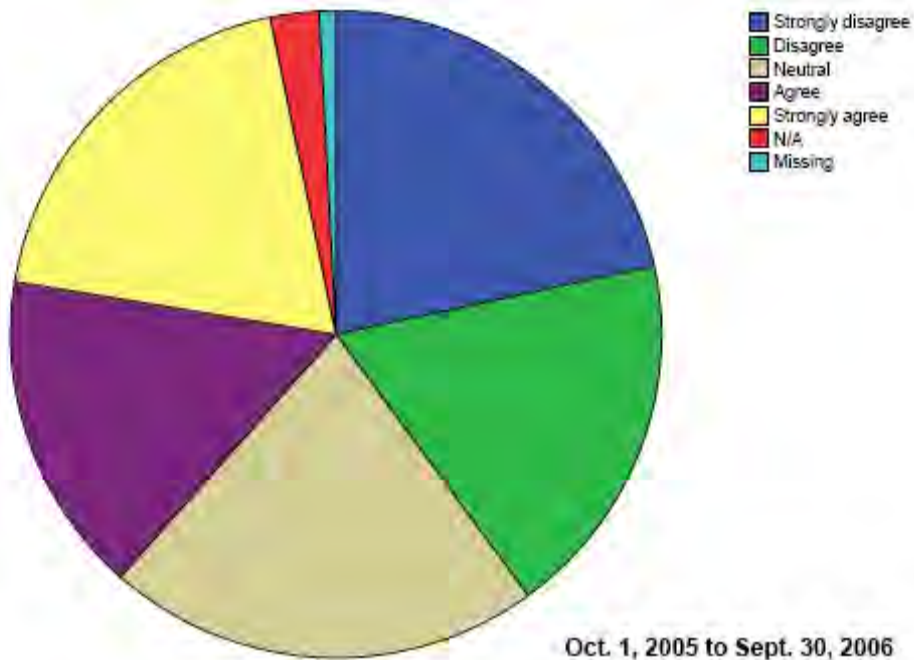
It is a good idea to mandate a parenting class for separating parents



I would have attended a parenting class without the Court mandate

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	421	21.8	21.8	21.8
	Disagree	357	18.3	18.5	40.3
	Neutral	420	21.8	21.8	62.0
	Agree	313	16.1	16.2	78.2
	Strongly agree	373	19.2	19.3	97.6
	N/A	47	2.4	2.4	100.0
	Total	1931	99.2	100.0	
Missing	System	16	.8		
	Total	1947	100.0		

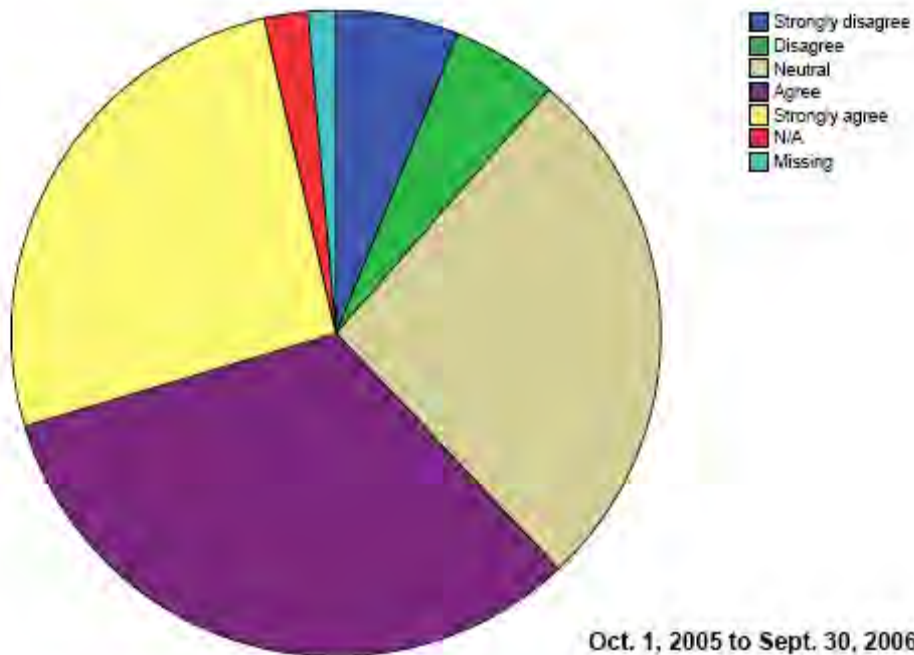
I would have attended a parenting class without the Court mandate



The room for the class was arranged to support my learning

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly disagree	119	6.1	6.2	6.2
Disagree	103	5.3	5.4	11.6
Neutral	518	26.6	27.0	38.5
Agree	830	32.4	32.8	71.4
Strongly agree	508	26.1	26.5	97.8
N/A	42	2.2	2.2	100.0
Total	1920	98.8	100.0	
Missing System	27	1.4		
Total	1947	100.0		

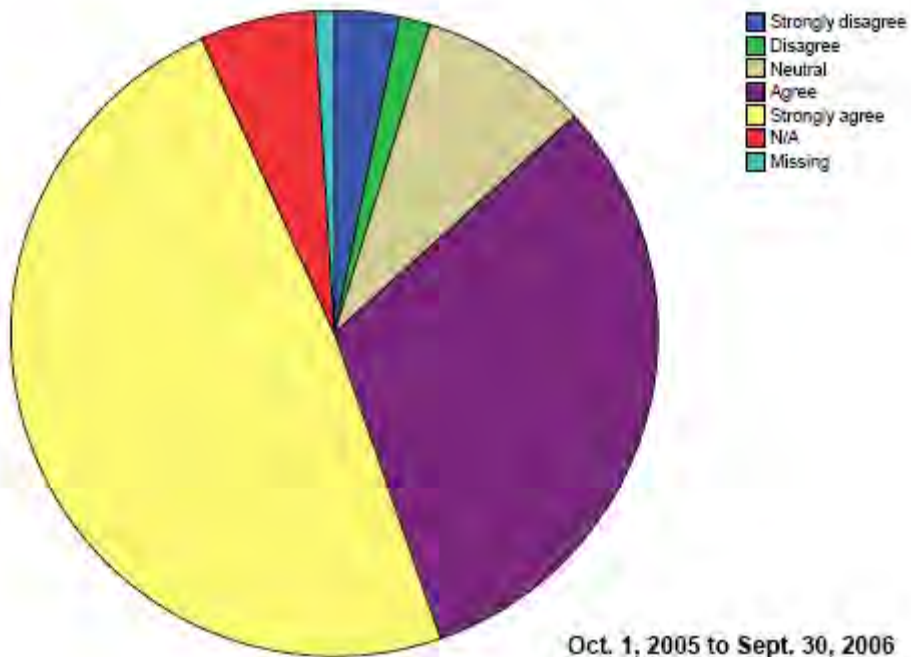
The room for the class was arranged to support my learning



I liked the way the female instructor presented information

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly disagree	63	3.2	3.3	3.3
Disagree	30	1.5	1.6	4.8
Neutral	186	8.5	8.8	13.4
Agree	811	31.4	31.7	45.1
Strongly agree	946	45.6	49.1	94.2
N/A	112	5.8	5.8	100.0
Total	1928	99.0	100.0	
Missing System	19	1.0		
Total	1947	100.0		

I liked the way the female instructor presented information



I liked the way the male instructor presented information

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	60	3.1	3.1	3.1
	Disagree	25	1.3	1.3	4.4
	Neutral	172	8.8	8.9	13.3
	Agree	664	34.1	34.4	47.7
	Strongly agree	963	49.5	49.9	97.6
	N/A	46	2.4	2.4	100.0
	Total	1930	99.1	100.0	
Missing	System	17	.9		
	Total	1947	100.0		

I liked the way the male instructor presented information

