

## JSEM Faculty Survey – Fall 2018

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The Core Learning Committee (CLC) conducted a survey in Fall 2018, with the purpose of improving the understanding of the Junior Seminar (JSEM) as a nearly ten-year-old community of practice and, from there, to identify points of incoherence, to create spaces where concepts of pedagogy can be more clearly distinguished, and to establish an informal core of consistency around recommended common assignments, approaches, and outcomes. This inquiry is part of the larger Core Academic Experience initiative to stabilize and integrate the core learning sequence to ensure that students, faculty, and staff see a clear and connected pathway through General Education from the first to final year. Fifty-nine (59) active faculty having taught JSEM between Fall 2013 and Fall 2018 were invited via email by Dr. Megan O'Neill, Director of the Core Academic Experience, to complete the online survey. With 38 responses, the survey received a 64% response rate.

### Survey Background

In contrast to the First-Year Seminar (FSEM), the importance of JSEM in the Gen Ed curriculum has been rendered unclear; certainly its importance is not as well articulated or understood as that of FSEM, and potential conceptual or instructional relationships between these two vital seminars have never really been considered. During a listening tour that began in November and continued through the spring semester, the CLC learned quite a lot about faculty opinions, frustrations, and joys around teaching the Junior Seminar. These informal interviews with JSEM faculty helped develop the survey questions in an effort to gather a sense of actual faculty classroom practice, beliefs, and approaches to JSEM, with the end goals of rendering more consistency in practices and narratives and of identifying clear cut learning connections that start in FSEM.

Additionally, the CLC inquired about faculty preparation for teaching this significant course, and—hoping to disentangle two concepts that have too often been elided—for operating definitions of *interdisciplinary* and *integrative*. Inquiries extended into why respondents taught a JSEM, hoping for illumination of faculty workload issues that may have lain hidden.

### Respondent Demographics

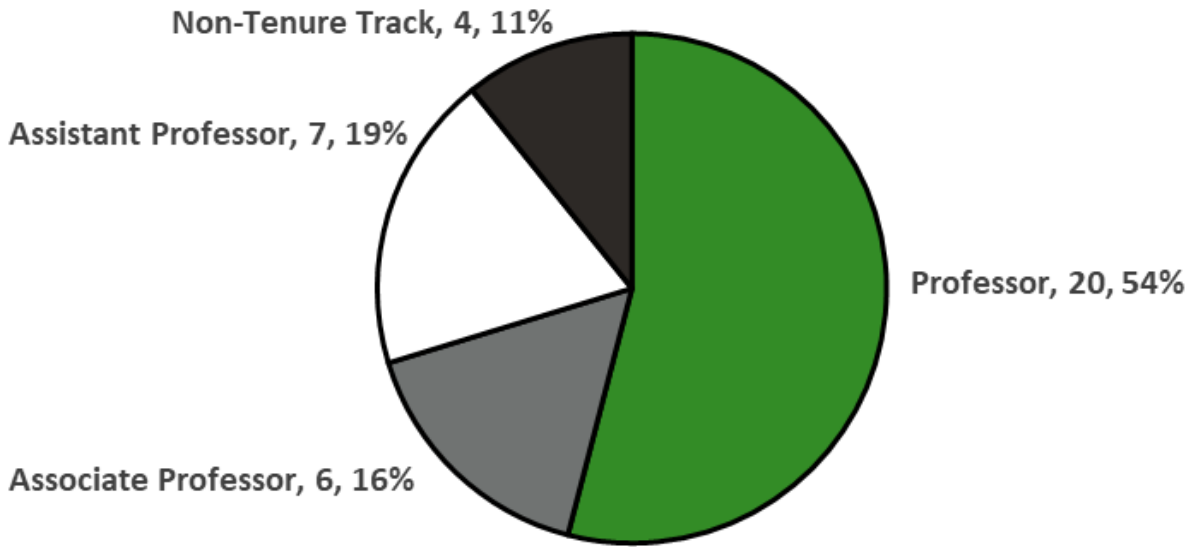
#### **Unit Affiliation**

The survey was primarily completed by member of the College of Arts and Sciences (36 of 38 responses), although that is partially to be expected given that 85% of the active JSEM instructors since Fall 2013 can be found within the College. Two of the nine faculty from the School of Business Administration responded to the survey, and no active faculty from the School of Music have taught JSEM since Fall 2013.

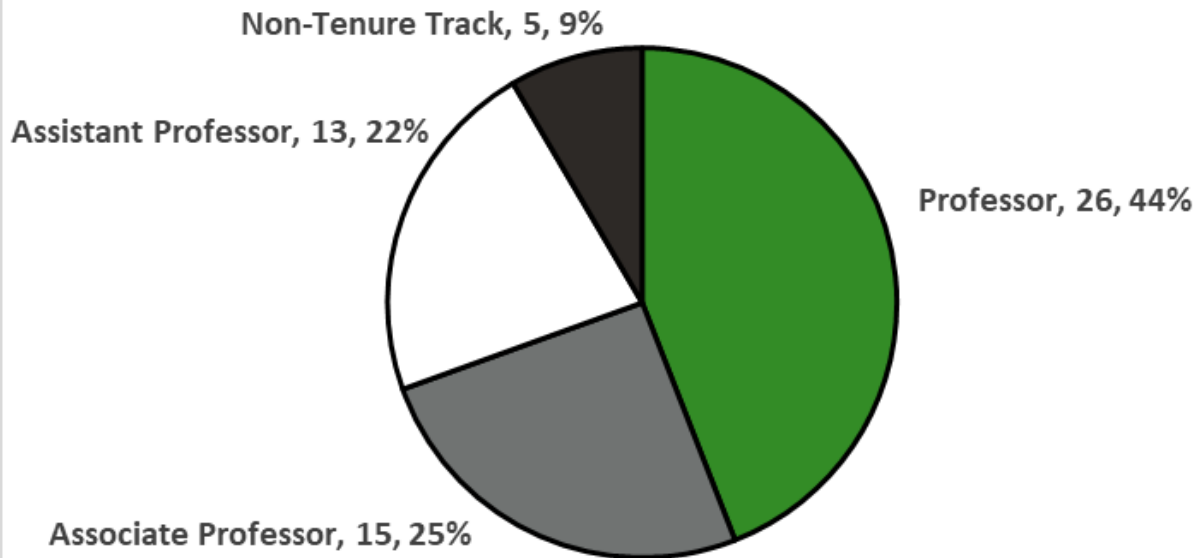
#### **Faculty Rank**

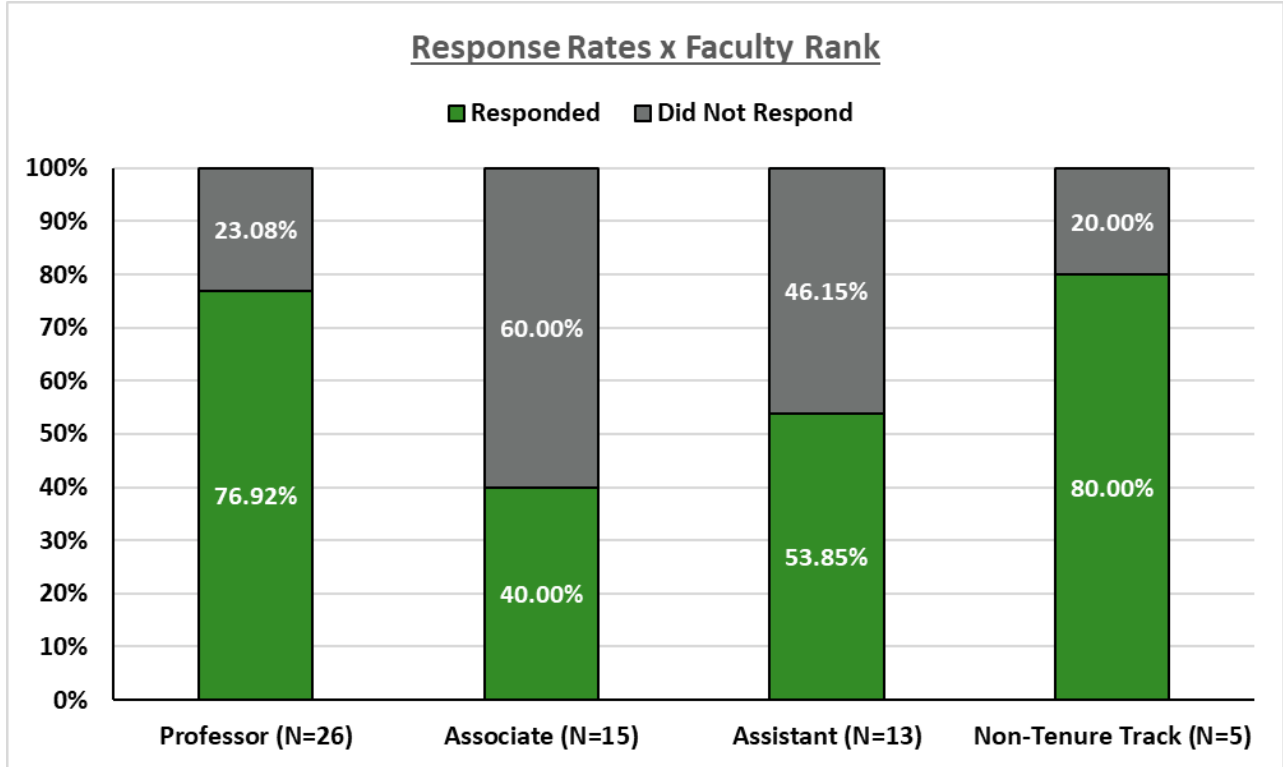
Over half of the respondents (54%) were full professors, yet again this is not necessarily unexpected given 44% of the active JSEM faculty are full professors. The survey may be offering slightly more weight to these higher ranking faculty given associate professors and assistant professors represent just under half (46%) of the active JSEM faculty but only constituted 35% of the responses.

**Survey Respondents x Faculty Rank**



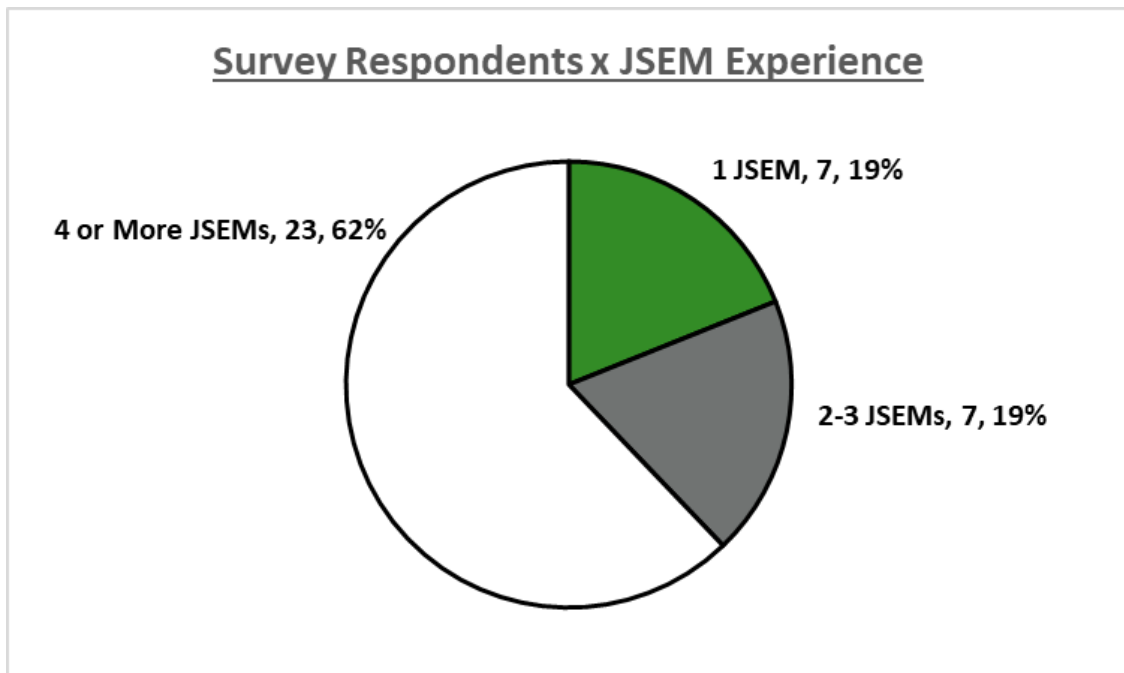
**Active JSEM Faculty x Faculty Rank**

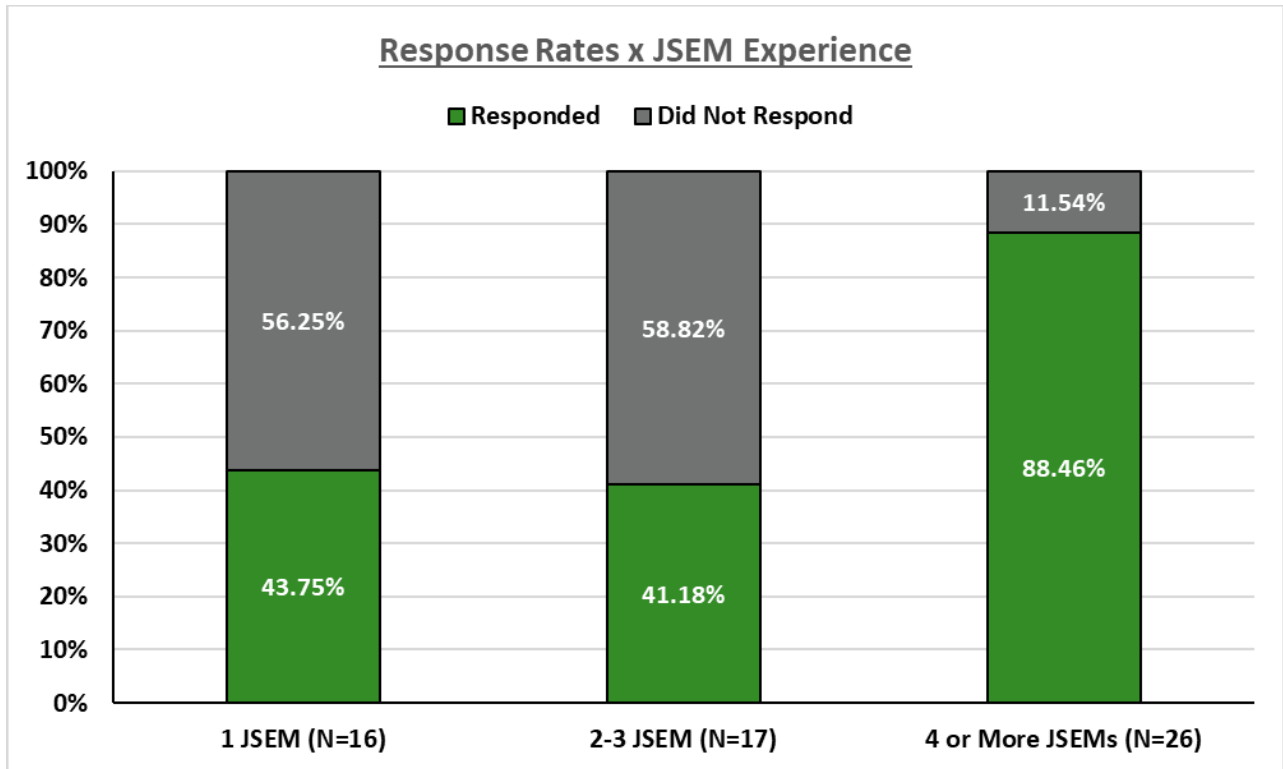
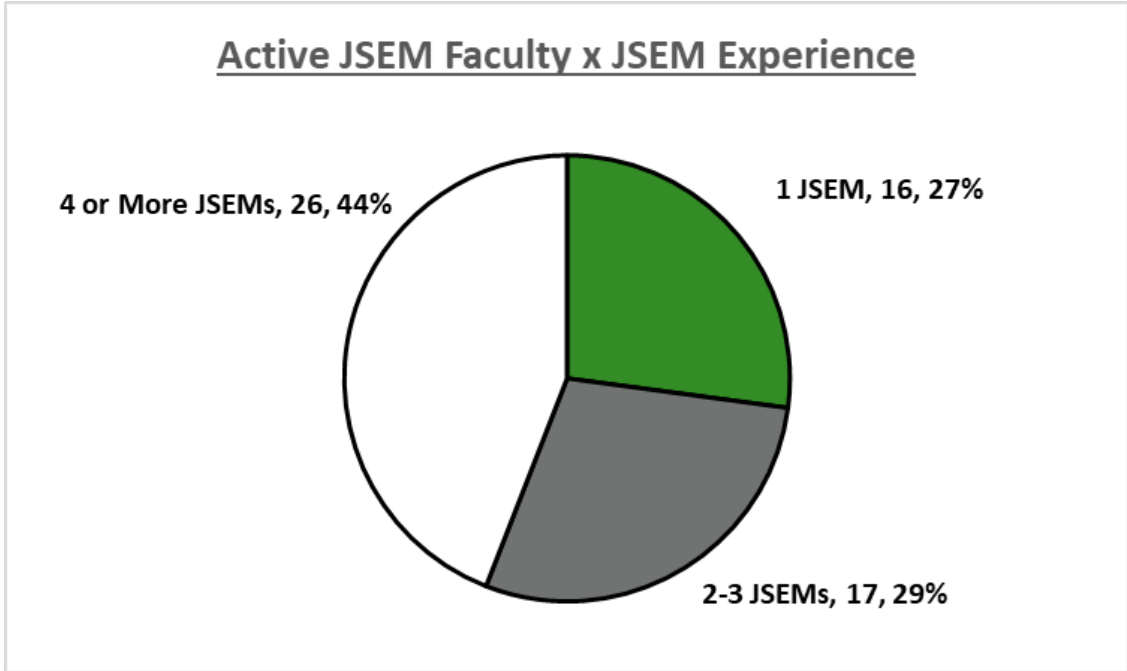




### JSEM Experience

Regarding experience teaching JSEM at Stetson, the distribution also suggests a skew towards the more experienced faculty voice. Although only 44% of the active JSEM faculty, those having taught four or more JSEMs accounted for almost two-thirds of the responses.





Function of JSEM

Respondents clearly indicated consensus on a number of issues, including the function of JSEM in the Gen Ed curriculum. In this way, JSEM is true to its initial spirit, born in the 2007 proposal to adopt a course unit curriculum: a junior level seminar “employing an *integrative* [emphasis added] learning pedagogy” was seen as an opportunity for students to partake in liberal education extending

beyond the first two years of a bachelor's degree and an opportunity to integrate their learning of both general education and disciplinary concepts. The opportunity to integrate is highlighted because for a variety of reasons, this focus has been blurred and diffused over time.

The below responses regarding the question about the function of JSEM serve as representative examples and may be able to spur movement to a shared definition and narrative around JSEMs:

Common experience with an interdisciplinary course that brings together students of diverse backgrounds. In the course there is an opportunity to develop intensively writing and oral skills, to examine a values component of the university, and to use a subject in a professor's area of expertise to make connections across intellectual borders. Also opportunity to create a sense of an intellectual community, given the small size.

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Bringing students back together after some time apart working in their major; an upper-level interdisciplinary class that speaks to values and makes students step back and engage in larger questions; working on core outcomes like writing and speaking and critical thinking, again not in the context of a major, but in the context of Big Questions.

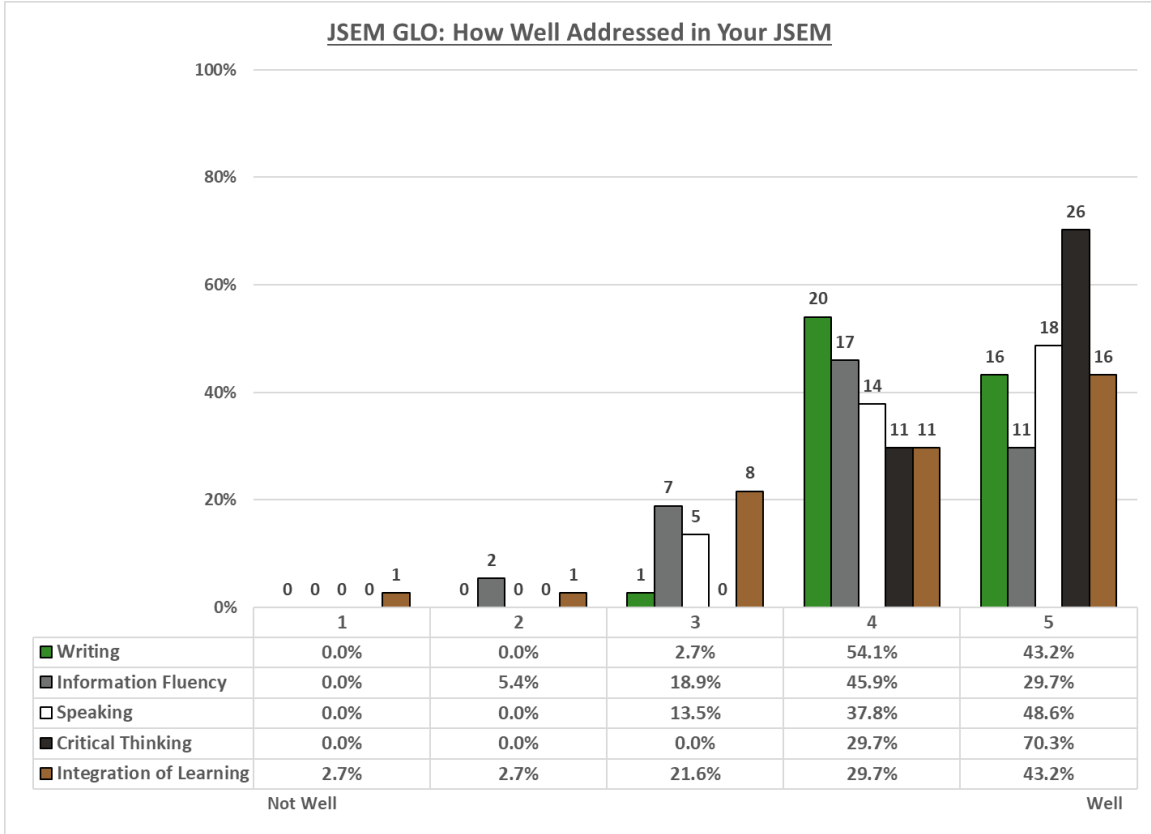
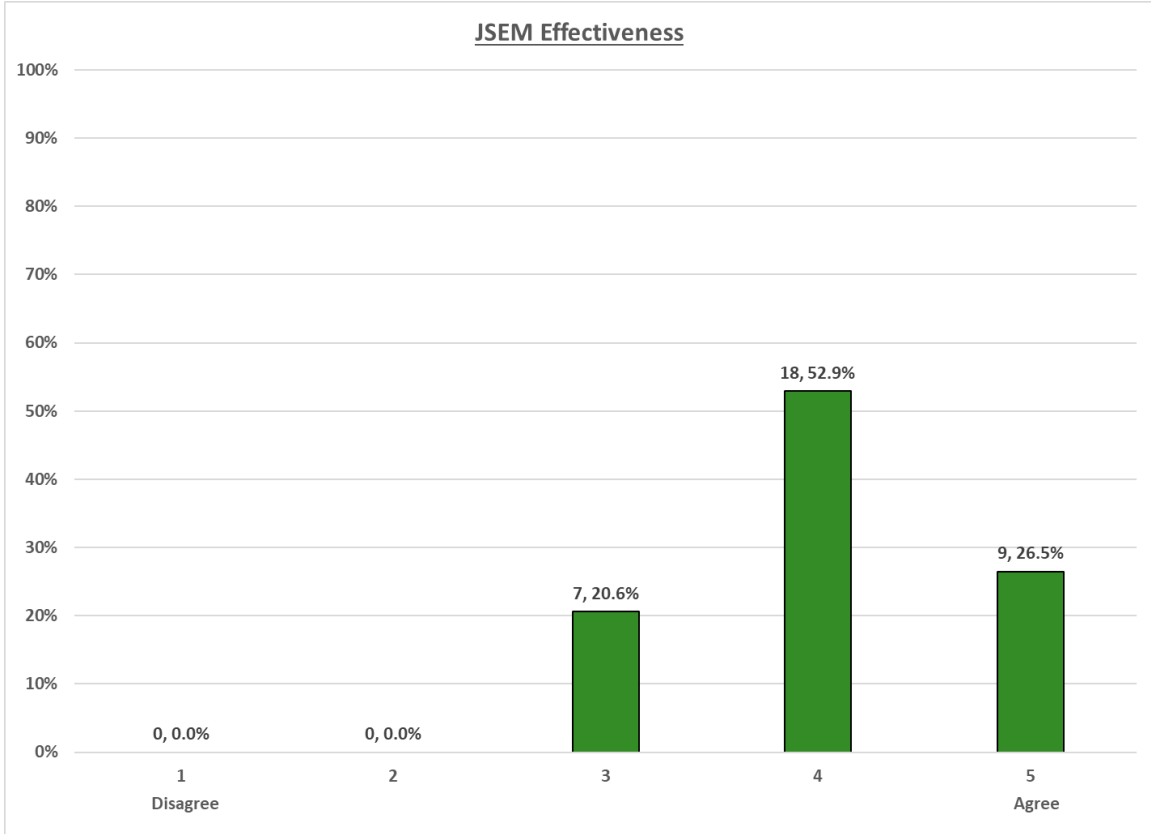
## Effectiveness of JSEM

### Overall Effectiveness

Respondents were asked, based on the purpose they had just described, how effective they perceived the JSEM. No active faculty disagreed that the JSEM was effective, although only one quarter were willing to full endorse their agreement. Overall, approximately 80% of active JSEM faculty agreed that JSEM was effective.

### General Learning Outcomes

A more targeted exploration of JSEM effectiveness was conducted by asking respondents how well they perceived their JSEM to be at addressing the five General Learning Outcomes (GLOs) of the program. Treatment of Critical Thinking and Writing rose to the top with 100% and 97%, respectively, of respondents citing their JSEMs addressed those GLOs well. Speaking was also perceived to be generally addressed well, with no response of not well and only five responses (14%) taking a neutral stance. Respondents entered into the not well side of the response spectrum when evaluating their JSEMs treatment of Information Fluency and Integration of Learning, as for both GLOs only approximately 75% rated their JSEM as addressing the GLO well.



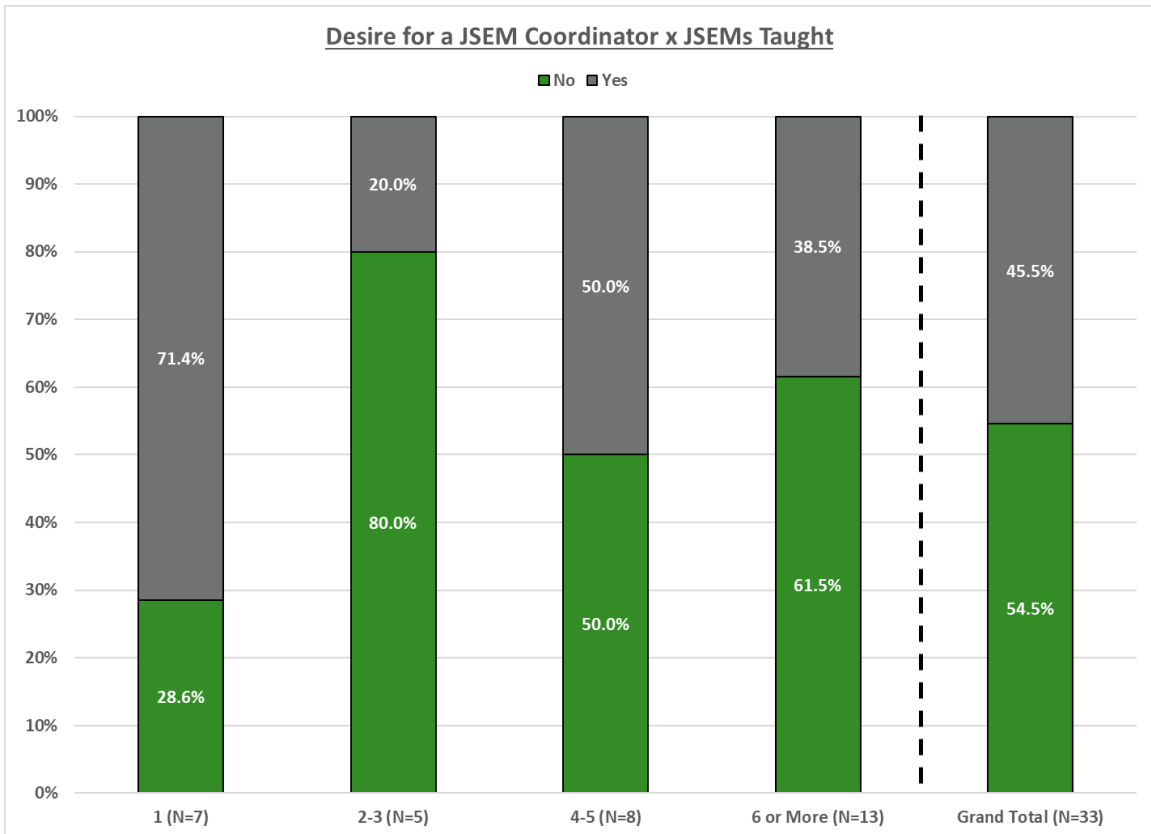
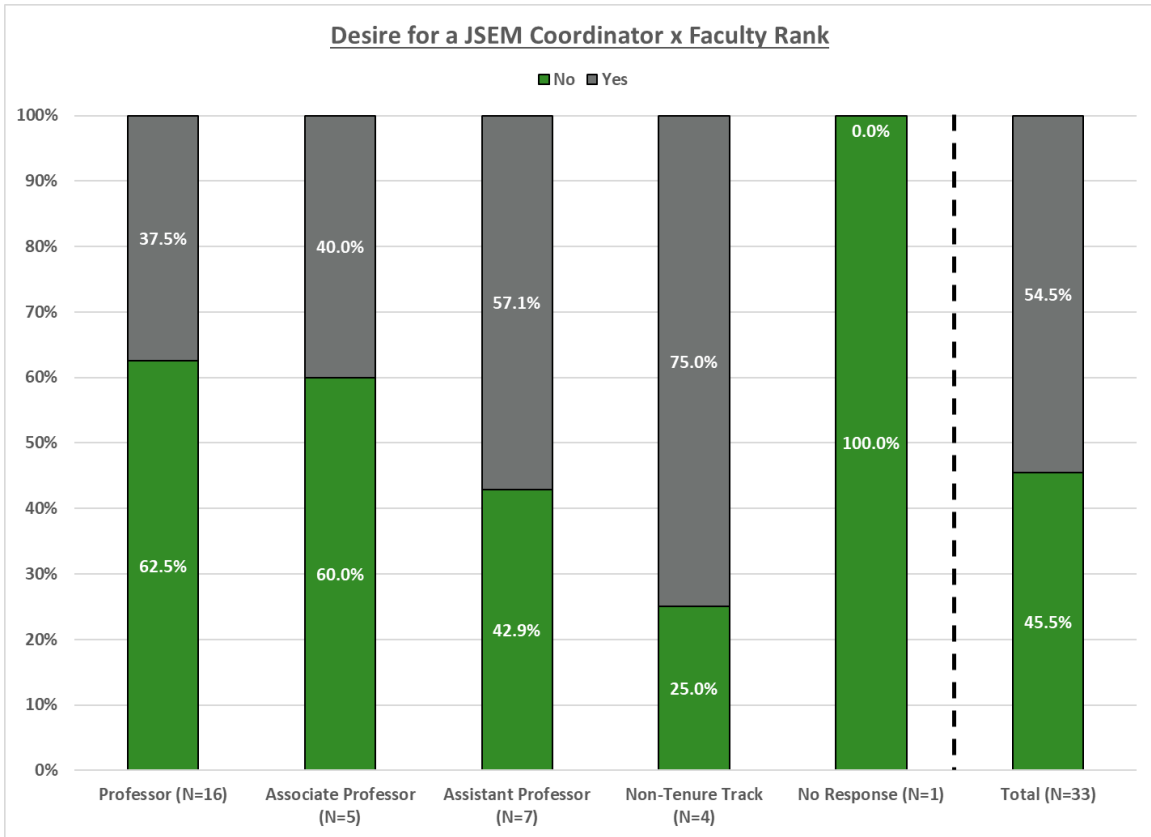
## Integrative or Interdisciplinary

The survey results also indicate that, with certain semantic differences, JSEM faculty generally have a shared definition of both terms, interdisciplinary and integrative. JSEM is currently the only Gen Ed course formally tagged with explicit learning outcomes about interdisciplinary thinking/integrative learning; however, not a lot of time has been spent discussing how these outcomes might be approached in a Gen Ed course taught from a department, nor has there been widely shared recognition that interdisciplinary and integrative are different concepts. The CLC survey and the listening tour data suggest the interdisciplinary element of the course is accomplished in one of two ways: in the first method, the instructor creates that component by assignment, resource, or lecture design, while in the second, the students themselves—often taking their JSEM outside their home department—constitute interdisciplinarity. If one thinks of the course as inherently lending itself to interdisciplinary study, sometimes simply because students enroll from different majors, one can then identify integrative learning as our ultimate goal, as indeed it was in the initial proposal document compiled in 2007. Such a narrative move allows fresh thinking about how integrative learning can be accomplished.

The disentangling of these concepts would be very useful. First, such articulation is helpful to faculty who have taught at Stetson for five or fewer years; in contrast, faculty with substantial experience teaching JSEM tended to have received very good mentoring or were in the initial faculty guidance groups that formed around the inception of JSEM. Colleagues who have joined the JSEM ranks within the last five years have more or less inherited a set of concepts and expectations without the requisite effective support structure or indeed any sustained discussion of what the course does or should do.

## JSEM Coordinator

Although it's clear that the JSEM faculty worry about being burdened by administrative/coordinator/director expectations and consequent potential overreach—this is obvious in the number of negative responses to a potential JSEM coordinator—it is also clear that respondents who felt such a position would be helpful represented the ranks of those who have come recently to Stetson or to JSEM. A JSEM coordinator would be a point person for resources, example syllabi and other teaching resources, mentorship needs for new faculty, and organization of development opportunities (workshops, lunches, speakers, outings, etc). In fact, Stetson's original JSEM coordinators—Karen Kaivola and Becky Watts—did precisely these tasks before the position was eliminated. While concerns of administrative overreach are present, so too is a desire for a JSEM community of sorts, which is something that is currently absent.





## Discussion

While the JSEM program appears to be operating well overall, preventative maintenance in the present can stave off the need for major repairs in the future. With the FSEM program approaching a revitalization, it is important the JSEM not get lost again, but rather receive the attention necessary to blossom beyond its current successes. An opportunity is present to fine tune the program and ensure the entire Stetson community understands the purpose of this pivotal course. Many students do not understand how the JSEM fits into their overall education and why it is required, creating a void to be filled by a resonant narrative such as the one offered below:

Stetson offers students a 3-year General Education curriculum, each of the core elements (FSEM and JSEM) being a significant learning experience in a student's development of essential skills (writing, speaking, reading, critical thinking, and information literacy) and the JSEM itself being the place where, given an interdisciplinary opportunity, students are challenged to formally integrate their learning.

Although the survey and listening tour have offered valuable insights to complement the origin documents of the program, two structural issues remain somewhat overlooked.

- Students from the School of music do not take a JSEM.
  - They are required to take a Values (V) course, of which many offerings are also JSEMs, but they are not required to complete a JSEM to graduate.
- Over one quarter (28%) of students from the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Business between Fall 2010 and Spring 2018 have taken a JSEM within their major.

Thus, Stetson General Education has a disconnect on two levels: the desire for an inclusive/common experience for all students, and the structural/curricular expectations that students take this experience outside their home department or program. Students from a number of majors (51% of the non-music majors offered at Stetson) are allowed to take a JSEM in their home department to satisfy a requirement in their major, often an elective within the major. This may not be a problem, if we formally adopt a narrative of integration rather than interdisciplinarity.

The question of a common experience for all students, however, speaks to the University's inclusivity mission, and that cannot be ignored. The curricular demands on the School of Music present a unique challenge for Stetson General Education—not a new challenge for Music, but one that has typically expected the School of Music to make difficult accommodations. It's useful, then, to offer innovation instead: given the suggested re-emphasis on integration of learning, is a JSEM the best choice for every student? What course or co-curricular experience might allow all students access to an integrative learning experience? For many students, it might be the JSEM. For others, there exists the rare opportunity to be truly innovative.

## Appendix A –Open Response Summaries

In your opinion, what function, if any, does JSEM serve in the General Education curriculum?

Respondents Presented with Question	37
Individual Responses	37
Total Distinct Comments	73

	Comments	% of Total
Essential Skill Development	22	30.1%
Synthesis of Multiple Perspectives	18	24.7%
Deep Engagement with Complex Topics	13	17.8%
Personal and Social Responsibility Value	8	11.0%
Liberal Arts/Seminar Experience	8	11.0%
Other	4	5.5%

The skill development was further broken down to describe which particular skills the JSEM developed.

Individual Responses	22
Total Distinct Comments	43

	Comments	% of Total
Writing	19	44.2%
Speaking	11	25.6%
Critical Thinking	7	16.3%
Research and Analysis	3	7.0%
Critical Reading	2	4.7%
Information Literacy	1	2.3%

If we were to say FSEM, JSEM, and Senior Research/Capstone are on a continuous learning trajectory, what relationship, if any, do you see between JSEM and Senior Research/Capstone?

Respondents Presented with Question	37
Individual Responses	33
Total Distinct Comments	39

	Comments	% of Total
Essential Skill Development	16	41.0%
None	14	35.9%
Other	9	23.1%

The skill development was further broken down to describe which particular skills the JSEM developed.

Individual Responses	16
Total Distinct Comments	29

	Comments	% of Total
Writing	10	34.5%
Research	6	20.7%
Speaking	5	17.2%
Critical Thinking	4	13.8%
Information Fluency	3	10.3%
Interdisciplinary Learning	1	3.4%

What kind(s) of preparation/training did you receive?

*Only asked of faculty who reported they had received training.*

Respondents Presented with Question	15
Individual Responses	15
Total Distinct Comments	15

	Comments	% of Total
Meetings and Workshops	8	53.3%
Unofficial Mentoring	7	46.7%

What kind(s) of preparation/training for JSEM would be most valuable to you?

*Only asked of faculty who reported not having received training and wishing they had received training.*

Respondents Presented with Question	13
Individual Responses	11
Total Distinct Comments	11

	Comments	% of Total
Sharing of Course Tools, Pedagogy, etc.	5	45.5%
Workshops or Monthly Meetings	4	36.4%
Assignment Development Support	2	18.2%

What resources, mentoring or other support could the University provide to make your teaching of JSEM more rewarding and impactful?

Respondents Presented with Question	37
Individual Responses	28
Total Distinct Comments	28

	Comments	% of Total
Funding for Course Experiences	7	25.0%
Nothing (No Meetings, Director, etc.)	6	21.4%
Funding for Informal Faculty Gathering	3	10.7%
Informal Teaching Observations	3	10.7%
Junior Faculty Mentoring	2	7.1%
Workshops	2	7.1%
Other	5	17.9%

What would be the role or duties of the JSEM coordinator?

*Only asked of faculty who reported wanting a JSEM coordinator.*

Respondents Presented with Question	15
Individual Responses	14
Total Distinct Comments	26

	Comments	% of Total
Administrative Logistics	10	38.5%
Resource Collection and Dissemination	9	34.6%
Securing and Overseeing a JSEM Budget	4	15.4%
Providing a Face and Voice for JSEM	3	11.5%

What does Integrative Learning mean to you?

Respondents Presented with Question	37
Individual Responses	35
Total Distinct Comments	53

	Comments	% of Total
Bringing Together Concepts	26	49.1%
Bringing Together Skills	9	17.0%
Unsure	5	9.4%
Making Connections to Apply to New Situations	5	9.4%
Other	8	15.1%

What does “interdisciplinary” mean to you?

Respondents Presented with Question	37
Individual Responses	35
Total Distinct Comments	36

	Comments	% of Total
General Learning from Multiple Disciplines	21	58.3%
Use of Methodology from Multiple Disciplines	7	19.4%
Other	8	22.2%

Why teach a JSEM?

Respondents Presented with Question	37
Individual Responses	32
Total Distinct Comments	54

	Comments	% of Total
Unique Course Topic	20	37.0%
Engagement with Students Beyond Major	16	29.6%
Facilitating Student Skill Development	5	9.3%
Connection to Own Research Agenda	4	7.4%
Small Seminar Course	3	5.6%
Different Experience Each Semester	3	5.6%
Other	3	5.6%

If you could change anything about JSEM, what would you change and why?

Respondents Presented with Question	37
Individual Responses	30
Total Distinct Comments	52

	Comments	% of Total
Unify Expectations and Purpose	11	21.2%
Adjust Learning Outcomes	8	15.4%
Facilitate Interdisciplinary Learning	6	11.5%
Improve Registration Process	5	9.6%
Maintain Rigor Through Any Changes	4	7.7%
Nurture a JSEM Faculty Community	3	5.8%
Other Singular Ideas	15	28.8%

Do you have any other feedback?

Respondents Presented with Question	37
Individual Responses	11
Total Distinct Comments	17

	Comments	% of Total
Avoid Overadministration	4	23.5%
Appreciation of JSEM Inquiry	3	17.6%
Unify Expectations and Purpose	2	11.8%
Facilitate Interdisciplinary Learning	2	11.8%
Other	6	35.3%