

Holy Cross

Sexual Misconduct, Harassment, and Discrimination Student Survey: Executive Summary of Results

Background

Our recent Sexual Misconduct, Harassment, and Discrimination Student Survey fulfills the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' statutory requirement under Section 168D, which mandates that all higher education institutions conduct comprehensive sexual misconduct climate surveys. This legislation requires institutions to gather data on critical areas including reported and unreported incidents, student awareness of policies and procedures, resource utilization, and perceptions of campus safety. The state required survey employs model questions developed by a state task force composed of education officials, advocates, researchers, and student representatives to ensure consistent, trauma-informed data collection across all institutions.

The College developed survey questions reflective of the state law's requirements that also align with the College's policy language and prevention education efforts, while also allowing a broad range of student experiences to be represented. In utilizing the term experience rather than victimization or incident, we aimed to reduce the risk that survey respondents might confuse the survey with a reporting mechanism or feel limited to describing only formally reported cases. Our customized questions helped to capture more detailed information about sexual violence, dating violence, stalking, and harassment in ways that reflect how these topics are discussed in campus based trainings and materials. This approach also allowed us to better measure students' knowledge, confidence, and engagement with Title IX processes and resources in ways that reflect our campus culture and ongoing improvement efforts.

Previously conducted every four years, our survey cycle has been updated to occur every two years to provide more timely insights into campus climate.

Survey Administration

The survey was offered to all students actively enrolled in the Spring 2025 semester, totaling 3,270 students. It was initially open from March 9 through March 28, with an initial response rate of 8.23%. To increase participation, the survey was reopened from April 7 through May 2. It was distributed via Qualtrics using individualized links to ensure that only Holy Cross students could access the survey and that each student could respond only once. This distribution method allowed us to connect responses to existing demographic data while preserving survey respondent anonymity.

To encourage participation, we established a priority completion date and offered two chances to win one of eight prizes. When the survey reopened, additional prizes were added. Student employees also tabled in various locations across campus to promote the survey and answer questions. Finally, an on-campus event was held to encourage students to complete the survey.

Participation Rate

Although 689 students interacted with the survey, 470 responses contained a sufficient number of answers to the core elements of the survey to be considered “high quality.” This results in an effective participation rate of 14.4% (470 of 3,270 total students).

Which groups of students are under- or over-represented in the responses?

Chi-square tests were used to measure disproportionality and determine which groups of students are over- or under-represented in the survey responses. No significant differences were found in regards to race/ethnicity, but in all other cases, some groups of students were found to be under- or over-represented. Table 1 summarizes both the basic demographics of the student-body surveyed and whether there is disproportionality in their responses.

Table 1. Demographics and disproportionality.

Category	Group	% of Population	% of Responses	Representation in survey
Academic Level*	First-Year	25.61	28.72	Adequate
	Sophomore	24.90	30.21	Over-represented
	Junior	25.83	19.57	Under-represented
	Senior	23.66	21.49	Adequate
Gender*¹	Female	54.70	71.70	Over-represented
	Male	45.27	28.30	Under-represented

Note: Categories with statistically significant disproportionality are marked with an asterisk.

¹ Male and Female are the only two gender categories used in this analysis. To ensure accurate demographic data while maintaining anonymity, we used the Embedded Data feature in Qualtrics. Limited data prevented us from including separate statistics for students who identify as transgender, nonbinary, or another gender identity. For this reason, results are reported using only Male and Female categories.

Analysis of Likert Scale Items

Throughout the survey, students were asked to express their agreement or disagreement with XX statements on a four point likert scale. To analyze results, the possible responses were converted to numerical values centered around 0. With this conversion, average item scores of less than 0 indicate disagreement with a statement, while positive scores indicate more agreement with a statement. **Table 2** shows the relationship between likert responses and numeric values, and positive/negative descriptors used throughout this report. In some cases, item values are reversed depending on whether agreeing or disagreeing with the statement is the preferred response within a category of items. These items are labelled as reverse coded in the graphs in the subsequent sections.

Table 2. Numeric conversion of Agree/Disagree likert scale

Response	Numeric value
Strongly agree	1
Somewhat agree	0.5
Somewhat disagree	-0.5
Strongly disagree	-1

For each of the six item categories, non-parametric statistical tests were conducted to determine if there were group differences. For comparisons with two groups, the Mann-Whitney U test was used; Kruskal-Wallis tests were used when there were three or more groups. In many of the item categories, there were no significant differences between groups. Notably, there were no significant differences related to race and ethnicity. However, there were differences related to

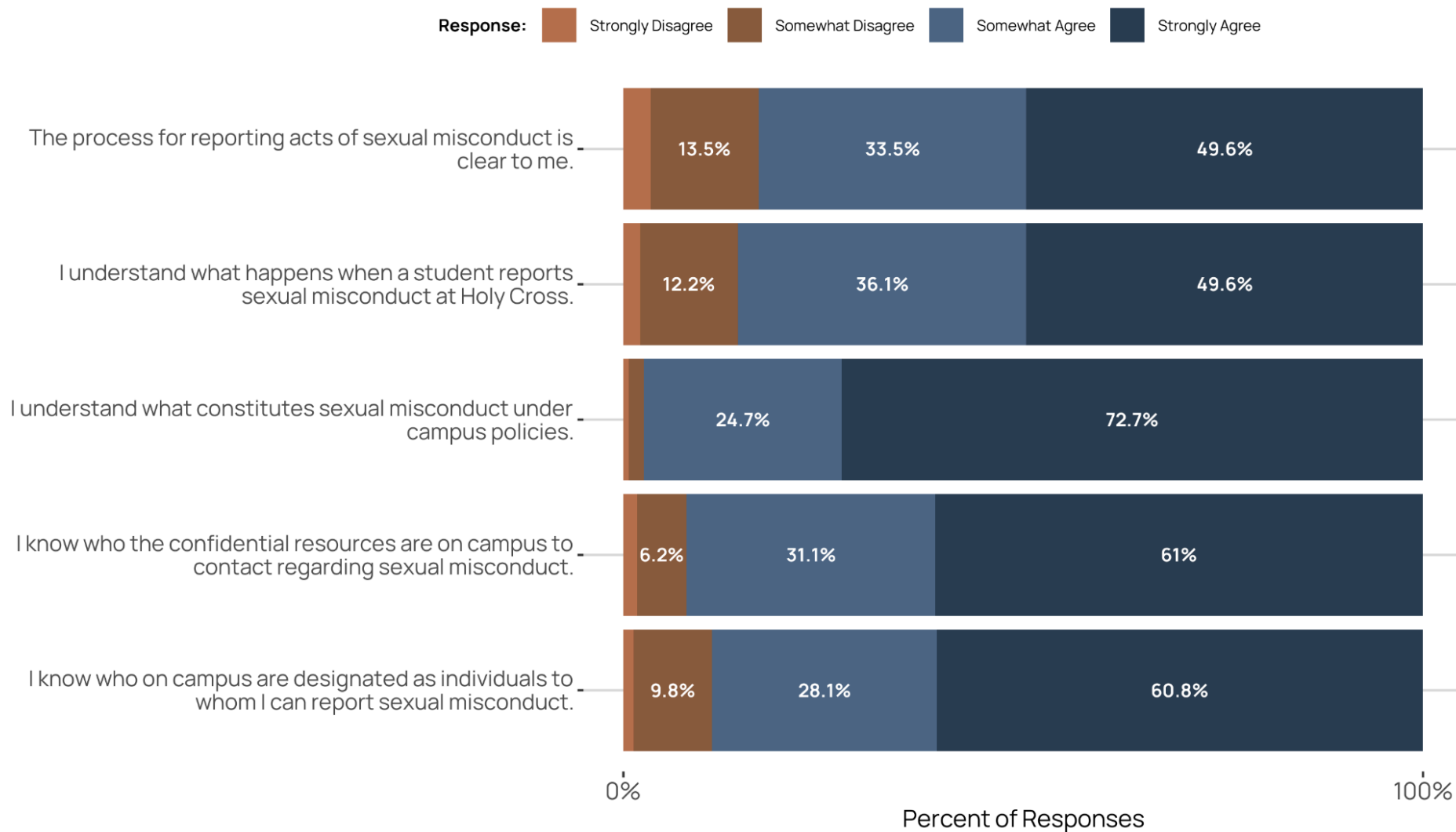
gender, class level (First Year, Sophomore, etc.) and the interaction between gender and class level. In the sections below, these differences are discussed alongside the more general pattern in responses.

Knowledge of Policies and Procedures

Students responded to five items related to their knowledge of sexual misconduct policies and procedures at Holy Cross. Responses to these items are overwhelmingly positive: looking across all five items, nearly 90% of respondents somewhat or strongly agree with the statements. No significant differences related to gender or class level were found.

This strong level of awareness likely reflects the College's sustained prevention and education efforts, including required online training, in-person sessions, and continued integration of Title IX information into orientation, annual signature programming, and supplemental programming. The consistent messaging used in these initiatives reinforces student familiarity with reporting processes, available resources, and campus expectations around sexual misconduct. The lack of variation across demographic groups suggests that these efforts are reaching students broadly and equitably, rather than being limited to specific subgroups.

Figure 1. Responses to items related to campus policies and procedures.

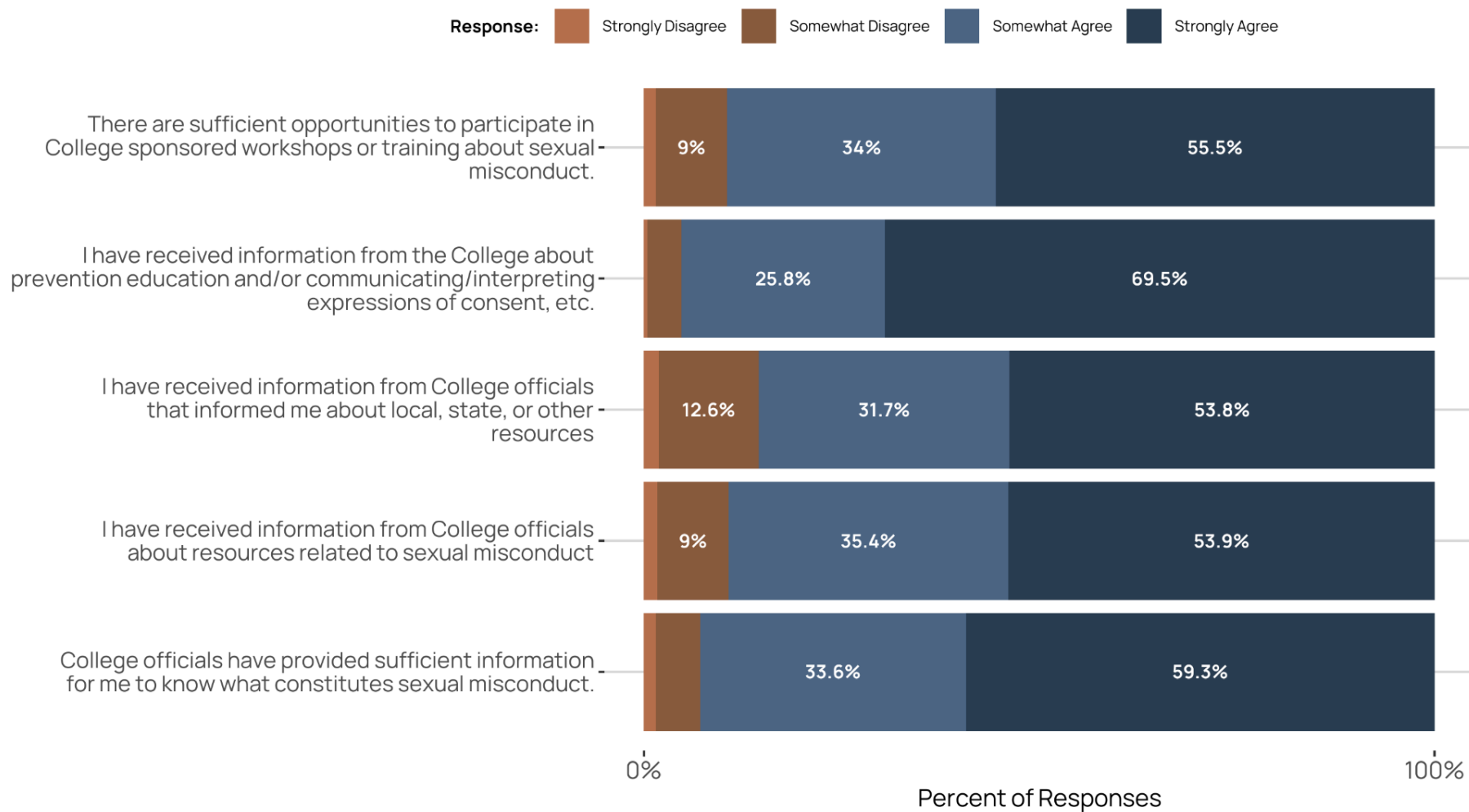


Information and Training Provided to Students

Similar to the items related to knowledge of campus policies, responses to the five items related to information and training are overwhelmingly positive. However, significant differences in responses exist between academic levels, with responses becoming slightly less positive as class year increases. For example, Male First Year student's responses to these items are 100% positive but 82% of Male Senior's responses are positive.

This small but meaningful decline likely reflects the current structure of required prevention education, which is concentrated in the first year and not systematically reinforced in later years. As students progress through college, they may have fewer structured opportunities to revisit or deepen their understanding of sexual misconduct prevention, reporting options, and bystander intervention. These findings highlight an opportunity to expand ongoing education and engagement for upper-class students, ensuring that awareness and confidence remain strong throughout all four years at Holy Cross. Another possible basis for the decline is that the prevention education function within the Office of Title IX and Equal Opportunity was created 4 years ago and has consistently grown over time. This means that students in the upper academic classes received different and less robust education as compared to the current first year students.

Figure 2. Responses to items related to information and training about sexual misconduct



Confidence in how Holy Cross handles reports of Sexual Misconduct

While the mean scores for both Male and Female students are positive (indicating overall agreement across all six items), the mean difference between Male (0.548) and Female (0.728) students has a Cohen's effect size of 0.327, indicating a small but significant effect of gender across these items. Responses from Female students indicate that they have less confidence in how sexual misconduct is handled by the College as compared to Male students. This pattern holds across all six items with Cohen's D and rank biserial effect sizes indicating a small but significant effect.

Similarly, confidence also differs across class level and the interaction between class level and gender; Kruskal-Wallis tests show a small but significant effect in both cases. These results indicate that students' confidence declines as their time on campus increases. Figure 4 shows that while this pattern is true in both Male and Female students, the mean scores for Female survey respondents across class years show a steeper and more significant decline. Although mean scores remain positive for all groups, 92.2% of responses for Female First Year students are positive but only 74.6% responses of Female Seniors are positive.

This pattern may reflect changing perceptions as students spend more time on campus, become more familiar with college processes, and hear about the experiences of their peers. While the Office of Title IX & Equal Opportunity must maintain confidentiality and cannot share details about specific cases, these findings suggest the need for continued education and engagement to strengthen student trust in the College's response process. Providing general information about how reports are addressed, what supportive measures are available, and what students can expect when seeking help can build greater understanding. Offering these opportunities beyond the first year, through collaboration with student leaders, faculty, and staff, may help maintain student confidence and reinforce a shared commitment to safety and accountability. These results also speak to a need for enhanced support systems. This may look like further coordination between departments that offer support resources such as Counseling and Psychological Services, Health Services, Office of the College Chaplains, Class Deans, as well as local community based resources. Further, expansion of alternative resolution

options may provide additional support and avenues of redress for students who feel that a formal adjudication process may not best address their needs.

Figure 3. Responses to items related to confidence in Holy Cross community to respond to sexual misconduct

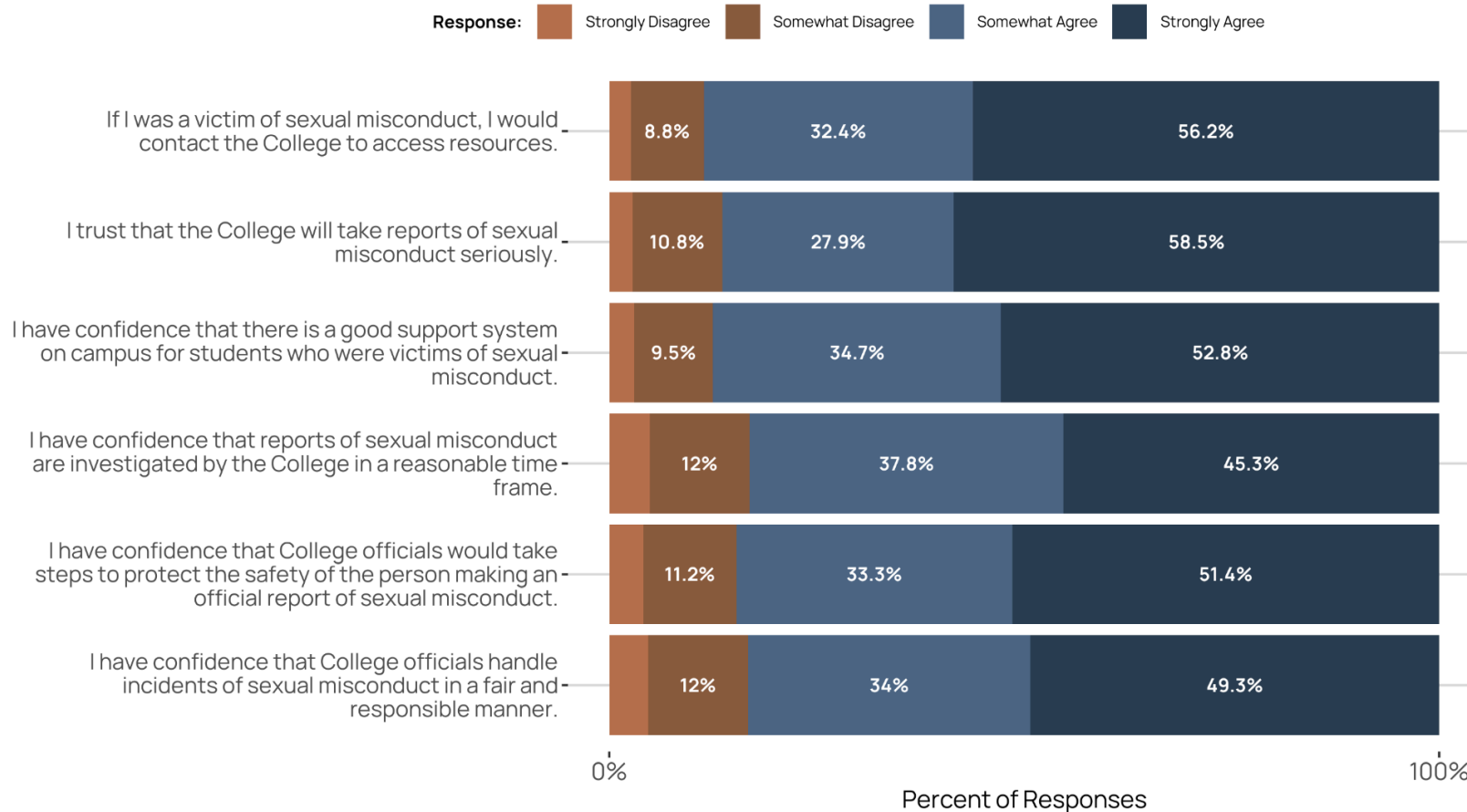
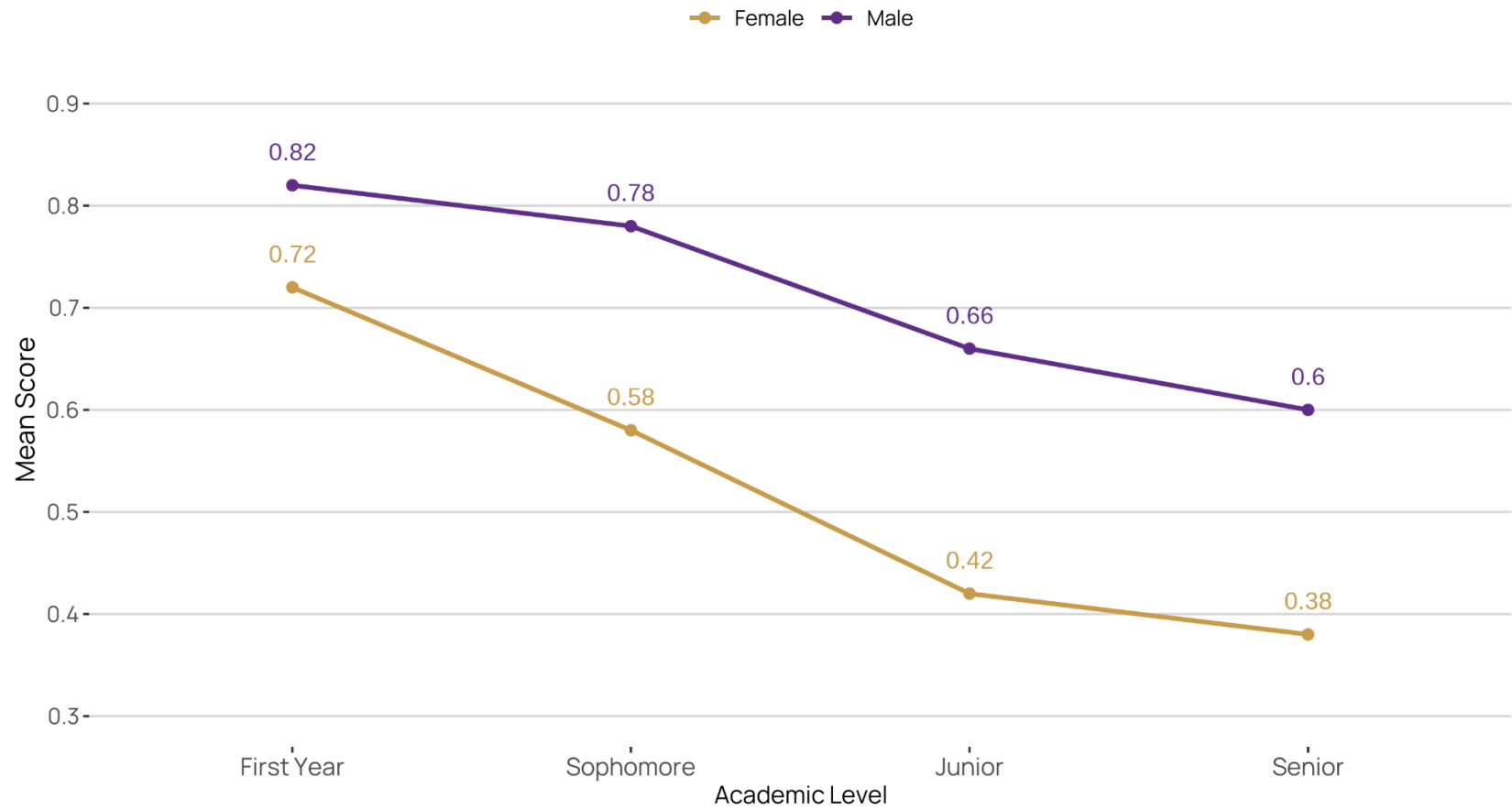


Figure 4. Mean score on items related to confidence in Holy Cross community to respond to sexual misconduct.



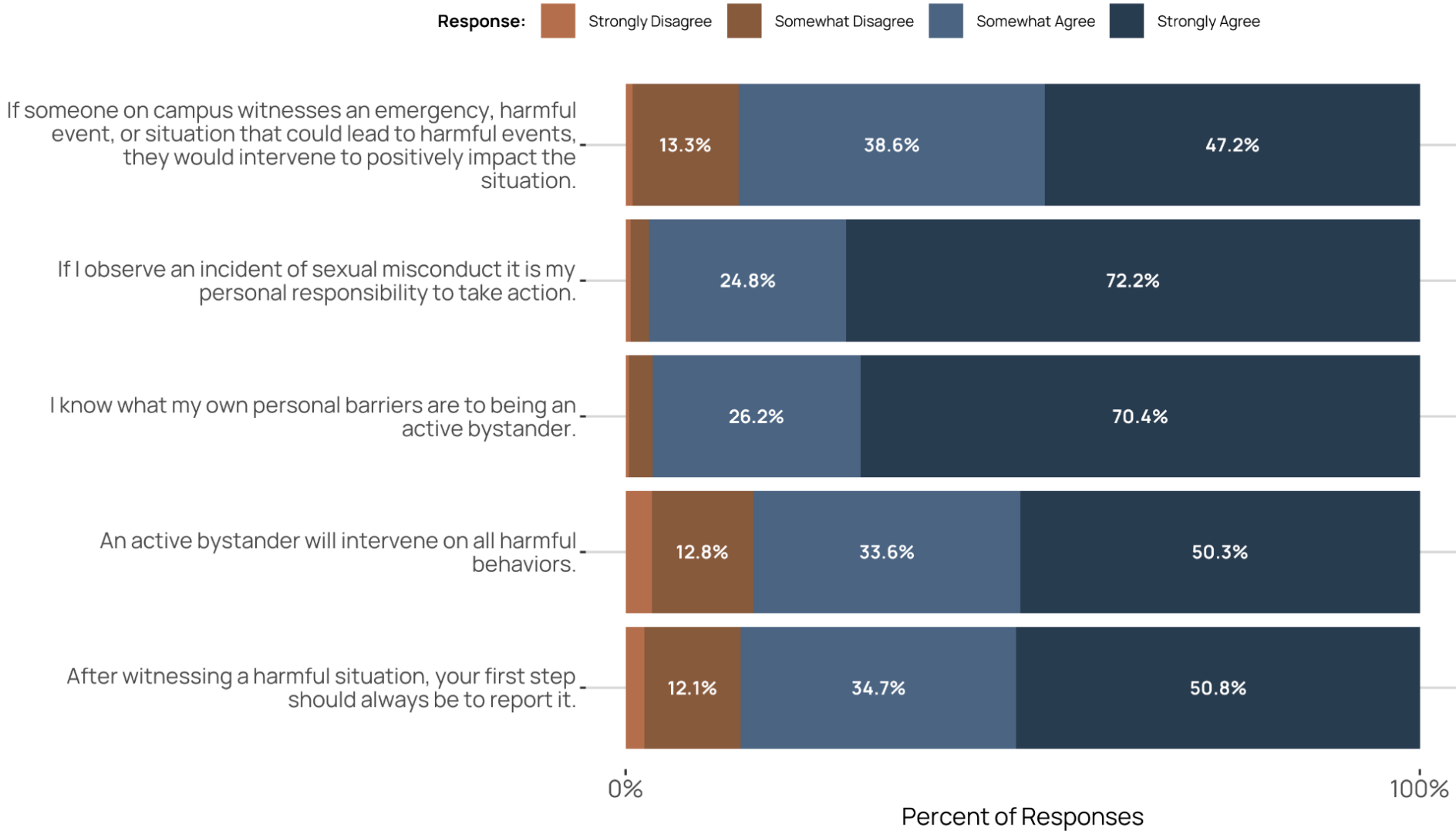
Knowledge & confidence in acting as an Active Bystander

Overall, responses indicate that students hold positive attitudes toward bystander intervention and feel a sense of responsibility to act when witnessing harmful or potentially harmful situations. More than 85% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that if they observed an incident of sexual misconduct, it would be their personal responsibility to take action (72.2% strongly agree). Similarly, 70.4% of students strongly agreed that they understand their own personal barriers to intervening, suggesting a high level of self-awareness around bystander behavior.

About half of survey respondents (50–51%) strongly agreed that an active bystander would intervene in all harmful situations and that reporting should be the first step after witnessing harm, while roughly one-third somewhat agreed. These responses show strong endorsement of intervention and reporting behaviors but suggest that some students may still hesitate or feel uncertain about when or how to intervene.

Taken together, these results reflect a strong campus culture of shared responsibility for preventing harm, with opportunities to further strengthen student confidence in responding across a wider range of situations.

Figure 5. Responses to items related to bystander intervention.



Occurrences of Sexual Misconduct

In the survey, students were asked to indicate whether they experienced any of 26 listed acts of sexual misconduct during their time at Holy Cross. To ease in interpreting and reporting results, each of the 26 occurrences were grouped into one of five categories based on policy definitions of sexual misconduct. Table 3 shows the number of unique students that reported at least 1 incident in each of the five categories: Sexual Harassment, Sexual Violence, Sexual Exploitation, Stalking or Relationship Violence.

Of the 470 respondents to the survey, 179 (38.1%) reported an occurrence of at least one incident of sexual misconduct during their time at Holy Cross. One third (33.4%) of students that responded to the survey reported at least one incident of sexual harassment making this the most frequently reported category; sexual violence was the second most frequently reported category with 70 students (14.9%) reporting at least one occurrence.

Table 3. Number of incidents reported by category

Category	Students reporting at least 1 incident	Percent of all students responding
Sexual Harassment	157	33.4%
Sexual Violence	70	14.9%
Sexual Exploitation	41	8.72%
Stalking	30	6.38%
Relationship Violence	17	3.62%

Table 4 shows the number of students reporting incidents by gender. Over 43% (146) of Female students reported at least 1 incident of sexual misconduct compared to 24.1% (32) of Male students. Nearly, 40% of Female students reported an

incident of sexual harassment compared to 24% of Male students. Nearly 20% of Female students reported an incident of sexual violence compared to 6% of Male students.

Table 4. Counts and percentage of unique students reporting at least one incident by category and gender.

Category	Female (n)	Female (%)	Male (n)	Male (%)	Total (n)	Total (%)
Sexual Harassment	130	38.6	27	24.1	157	33.4
Sexual Violence	63	18.6	7	6.3	70	14.9
Sexual Exploitation	34	10.0	7	6.3	41	8.72
Stalking	27	8.1	3	2.7	30	6.38
Relationship Violence	14	4.1	3	2.7	17	3.62
Report in Any Category	146	43.3	32	24.1	179	38.1