

Bay Area, Play Area: SCU Students' Perceptions and Usage of Public Transportation

Purpose

The goal of our project was to understand SCU students' behaviors and perceptions of public transportation in order to improve students' usage of these systems and decrease environmental impact when traveling off-campus. Our project began by studying past research about types of transportation programs such as bike sharing, car pooling, and university transit passes that other universities offered their students. We learned about the programs' implementation on various university campuses and the feedback they received from their students. With this in mind, we aimed to discover the potential barriers to SCU students' usage of public transportation in order to promote sustainable student travel in and around the Bay Area.

Methods

We researched SCU students' perceptions and behaviors regarding public transportation. We investigated their traveling habits by holding focus group sessions to gauge their use of and opinions of public transportation. Following these sessions, we surveyed 100 students in Benson, half being female, half being male, and a majority being freshmen. We were inquiring on each student's gender, class standing, and main purposes for transportation. In addition, we asked about their accessibility to cars, use of transportation, as well as their overall experience and perception about public transportation in the Bay Area.

Findings

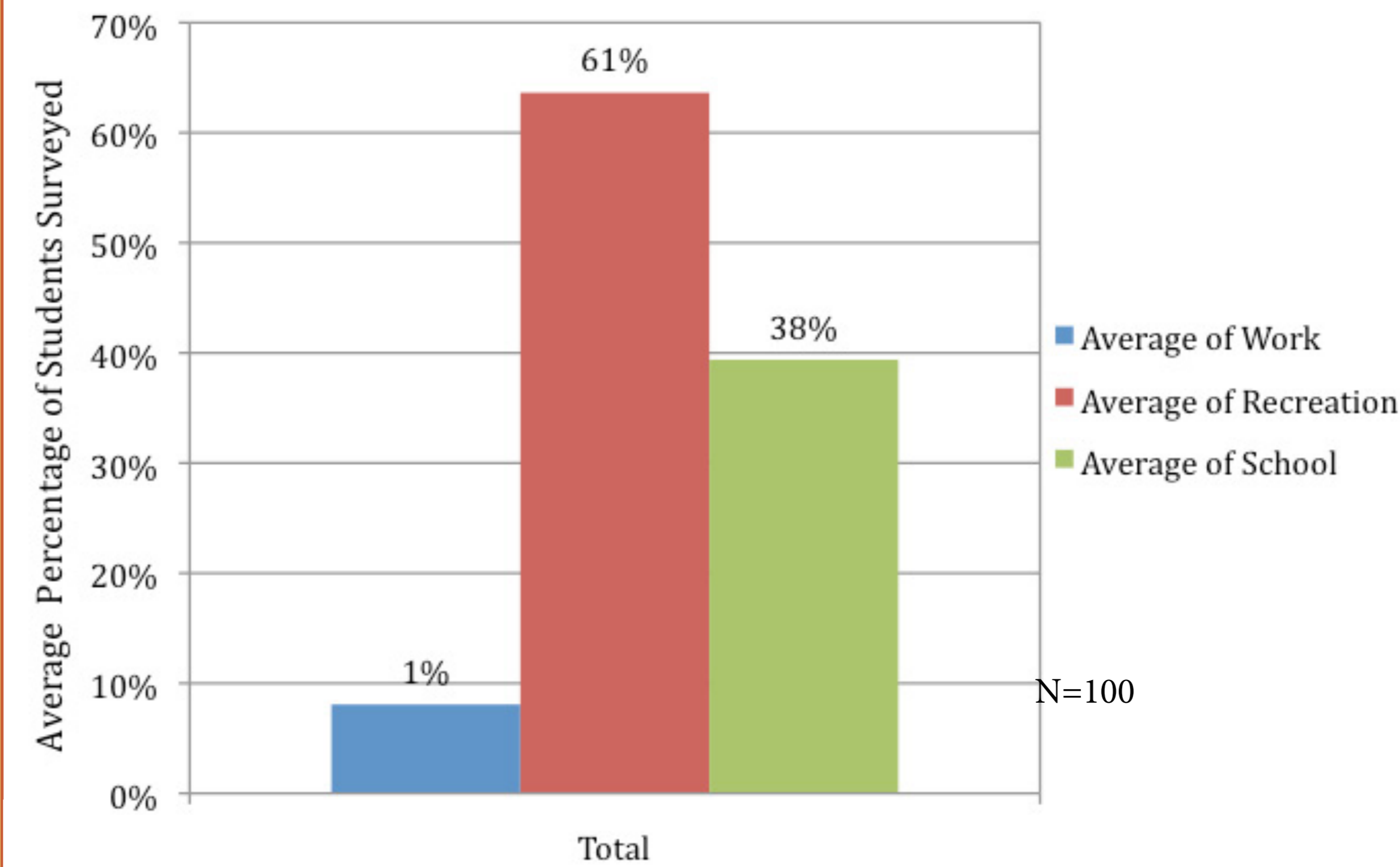
These are our main findings:

- 96% of the students surveyed have had experience with public transportation in the Bay Area
- 61% majority of the students use transportation for recreation, more than for work or school purposes
- Saving time and convenience were the most important determining factors that students considered when traveling
- Students were most critical of the cleanliness of public transportation
- The majority of students travel in groups rather than individually when taking public transportation

Average ranking of six factors students considered when taking public transportation in order of highest to least importance:

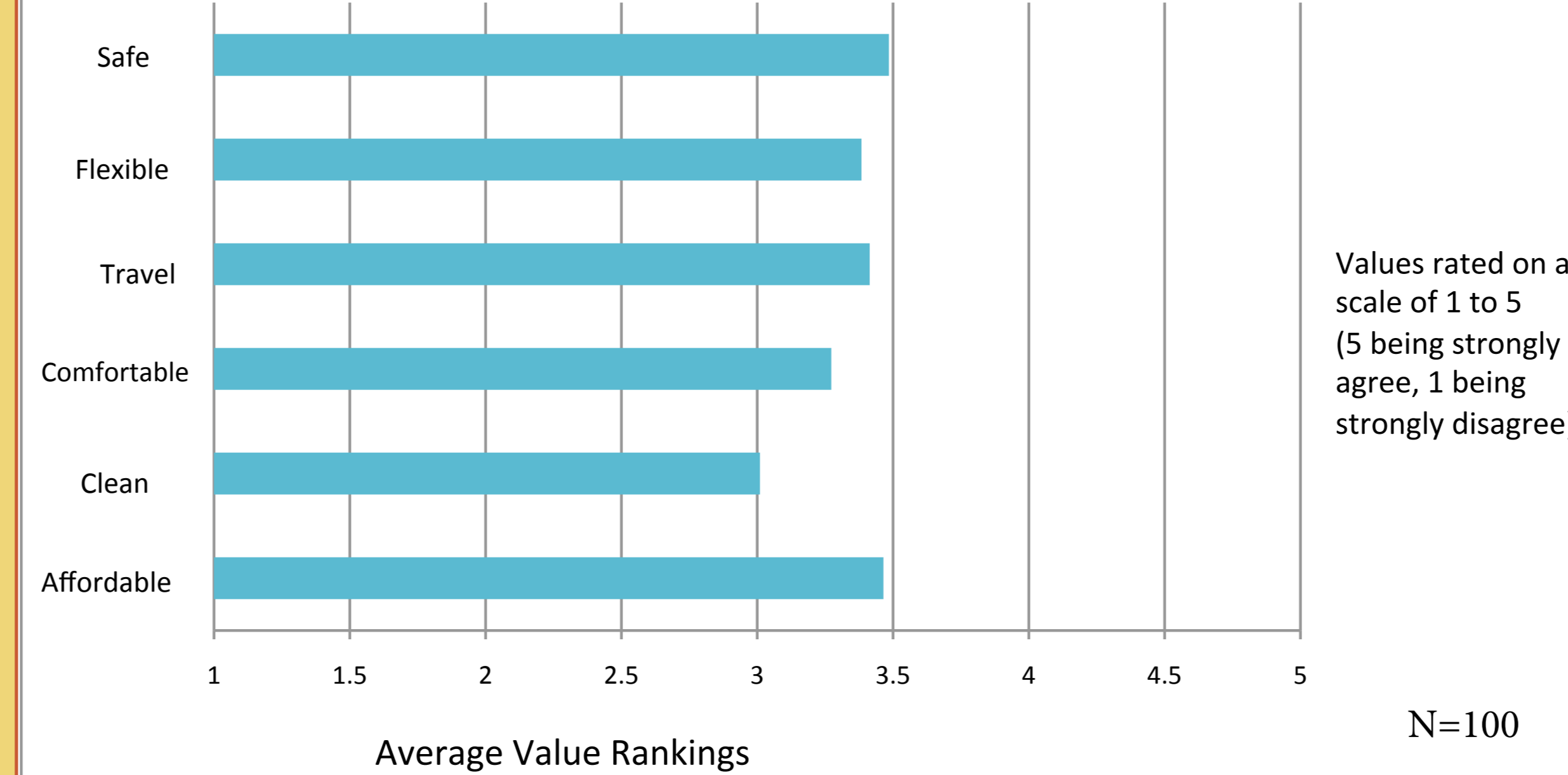
1. Time
2. Convenience
3. Cost
4. Safety
5. Distance
6. Environmental Impact

Reasons for Transportation Needs



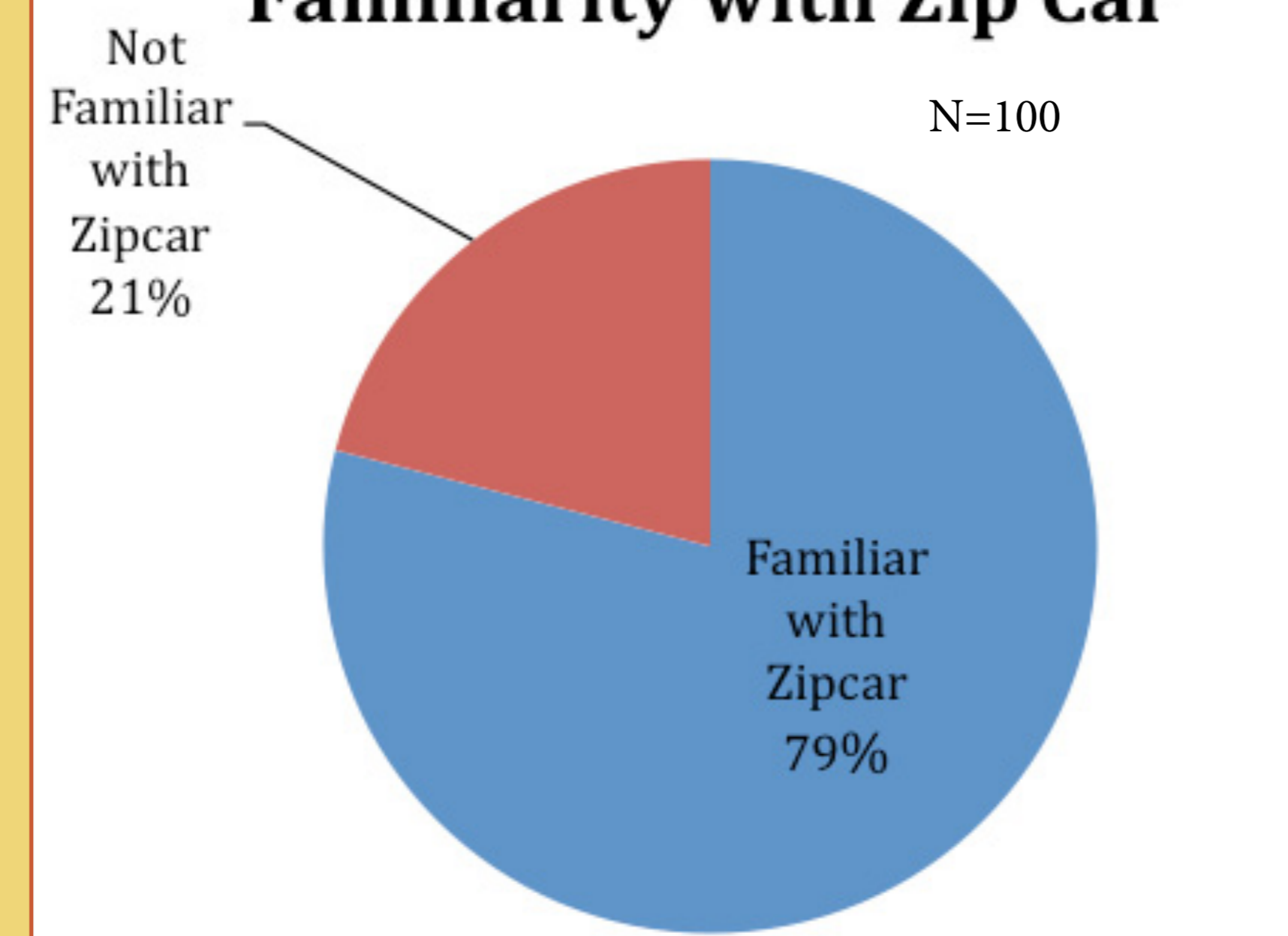
Students used public transportation for recreation most often, but also occasionally used it for school and work related purposes.

SCU Students' Perceptions of Public Transportation



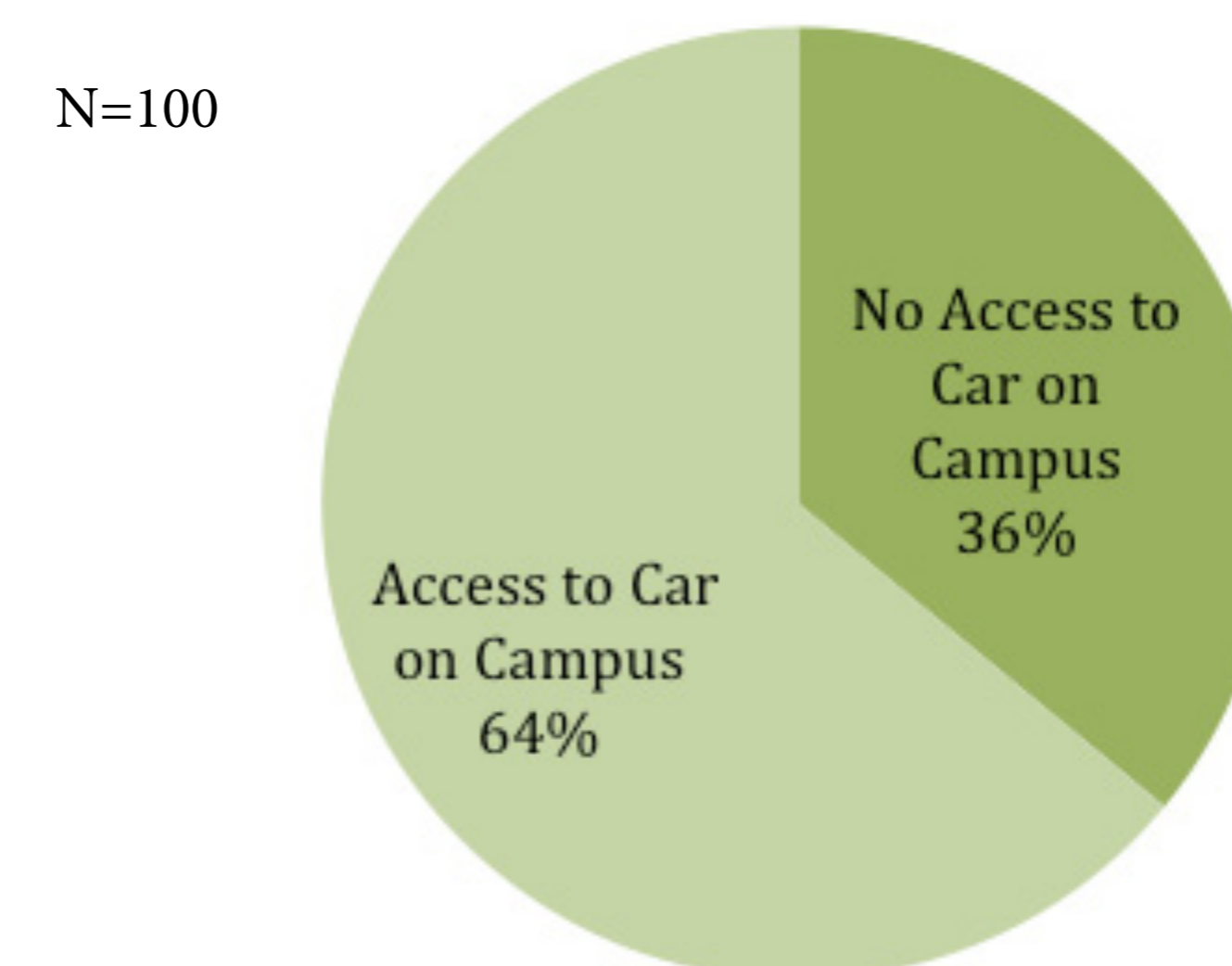
Students felt that public transportation was moderately safe, flexible, comfortable, clean, affordable, and good for travel.

Familiarity with Zip Car



79% of SCU Students were familiar with the Zipcar car sharing service on campus.

SCU Students Car Accessibility



64% of SCU Students have access to a car while they are on campus.

Discussion

On average, the students we surveyed had good experiences with public transportation, but were most critical of its' cleanliness. This leads us to believe cleanliness could be a potential barrier for students. Moreover, we found that the 100 students surveyed had used public transportation 170 times in the past month, and 35 times in the past week. These are not staggering numbers but they are a good insight into the frequency that public transportation is used by students. In addition, we learned from the focus groups that a university transit pass would encourage increased public transportation use.

Students were asked to rank six factors, such as time, convenience, cost, safety, distance, and environmental impact in order from 1 to 6, 1 being most important to them, and 6 being least important to them when taking public transportation.

When the responses from students were averaged, saving time (ranked most important) and convenience were highly ranked. Cost, safety, and distance followed, being additional factors that students considered when taking public transportation. Decreasing environmental impact was ranked last by students, showing that this factor was of least importance to students when traveling.

Recommendations

As a result of our findings, we would recommend:

- An option for students to have transportation day swipes on their access card to better facilitate and encourage public transportation usage
- Future educational campaigns for public transportation usage emphasize saving time and convenience, rather than focusing on decreasing environmental impact, better addressing students' motivations
- The creation of a promotional campaign for students that would continue to promote public transportation for recreational purposes with groups of friends
- More research should be done regarding students' actual usage of the Zipcar program seeing that 79% of students say they are familiar with the program