

OPTOMETRY STUDENT PERCEPTION OF INDUSTRY SUPPORT

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Introduction

With the implementation of the Sunshine Act, doctors of optometry are required to report monetary gifts from industry. However, optometry students do not have these same requirements, and ophthalmic industry representatives invest a great deal of time and money directly marketing to students. Often optometry students are unaware of the possible conflict of interest with receiving gifts, and how those gifts could influence the doctor-patient relationship. Our goal was to be able to gain a better understanding of the types and number of gifts given to students, including meals, equipment, products, or other items of value, as well as the perception optometry students have on these gifts.

FIGURE 1: RESPONSE BY COLLEGE OF OPTOMETRY

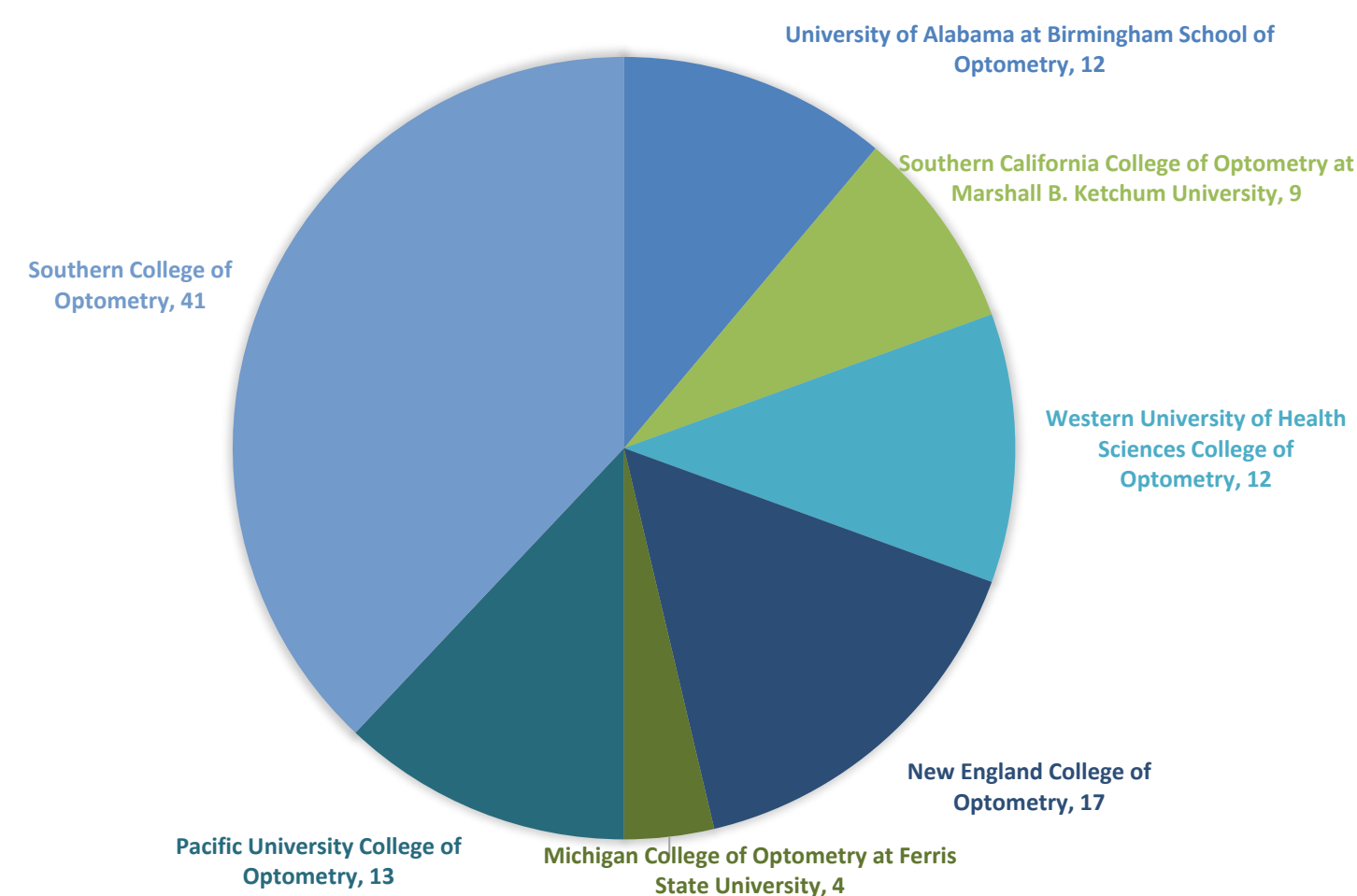


FIGURE 2: SUBJECT RESPONSE BY GENDER

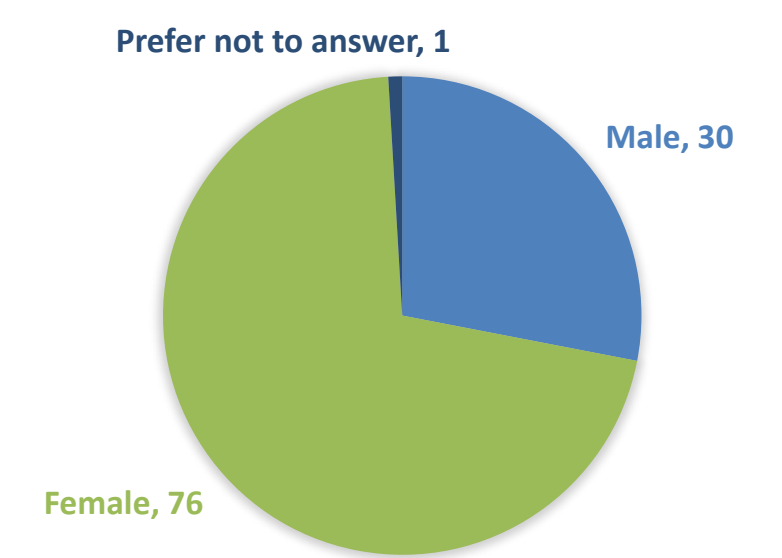
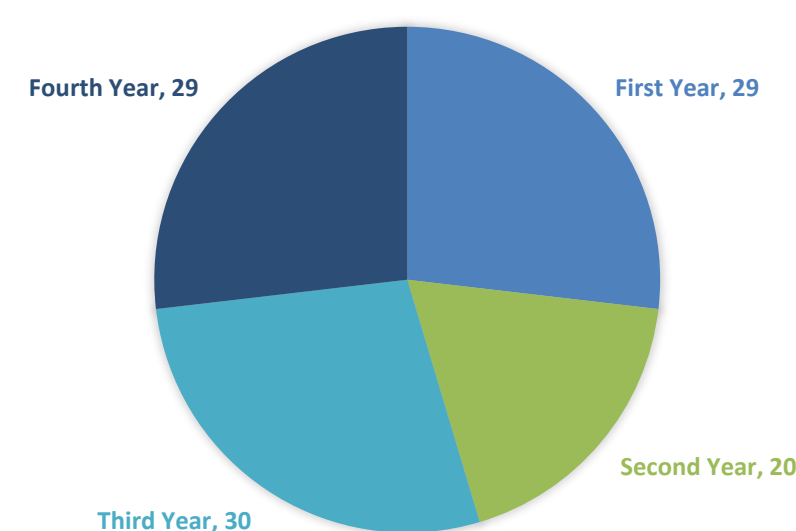


FIGURE 3: SUBJECT RESPONSE BY YEAR



Conclusions

In conclusion, the majority of subjects perceive industry involvement in optometry schools as beneficial, especially to stay up to date on current technology and network within the profession. The study also revealed that not all schools view industry involvement equally, as 3.7% of participants in the survey indicated their school did not allow industry sponsored events. A larger study is warranted to further investigate actual monetary values being spent on students. Further study is also needed to explore changes in physician prescribing habits following graduation based on exposure to certain products throughout their education.

Methods

A QuestionPro survey was created and distributed via email to the deans of all of the programs associated with the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (ASCO) to be distributed to the entire student body. Students were surveyed on the type and number of events they attended over the past 3 months. Student motives behind attending industry events were then evaluated with a likert scale response-style question. They ranked the reason for attending from 1 to 5, with a fill-in-the-blank option for "other." Questions regarding the type of food provided at events as well as how many events offered alcohol were included in the survey. Lastly, participants in the survey were asked what they perceived to be the biggest benefit from attending these industry events in their school. Their responses were gathered in an open-ended format.

Figure 4: Number of Events Attended by Type of Event

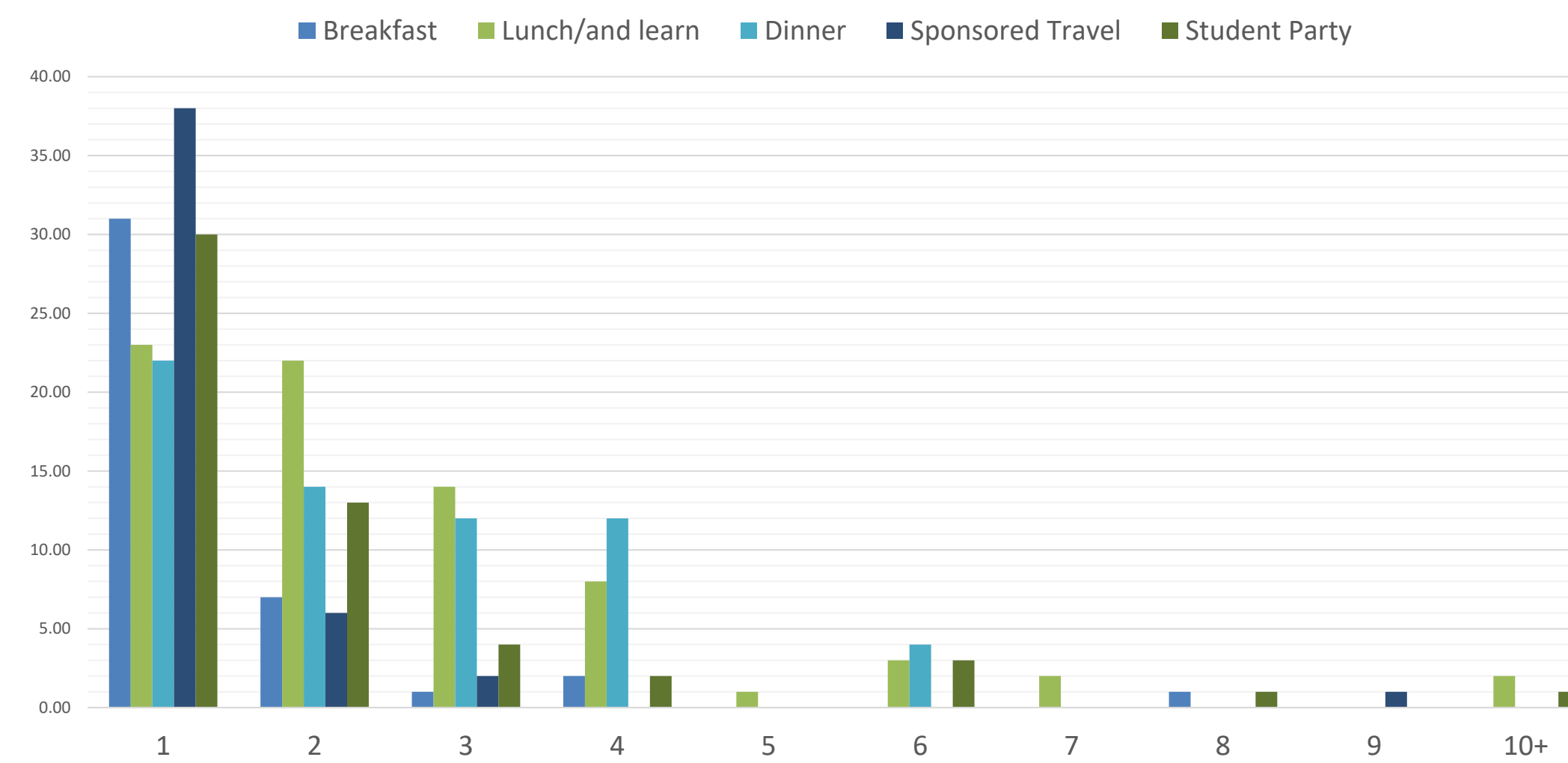
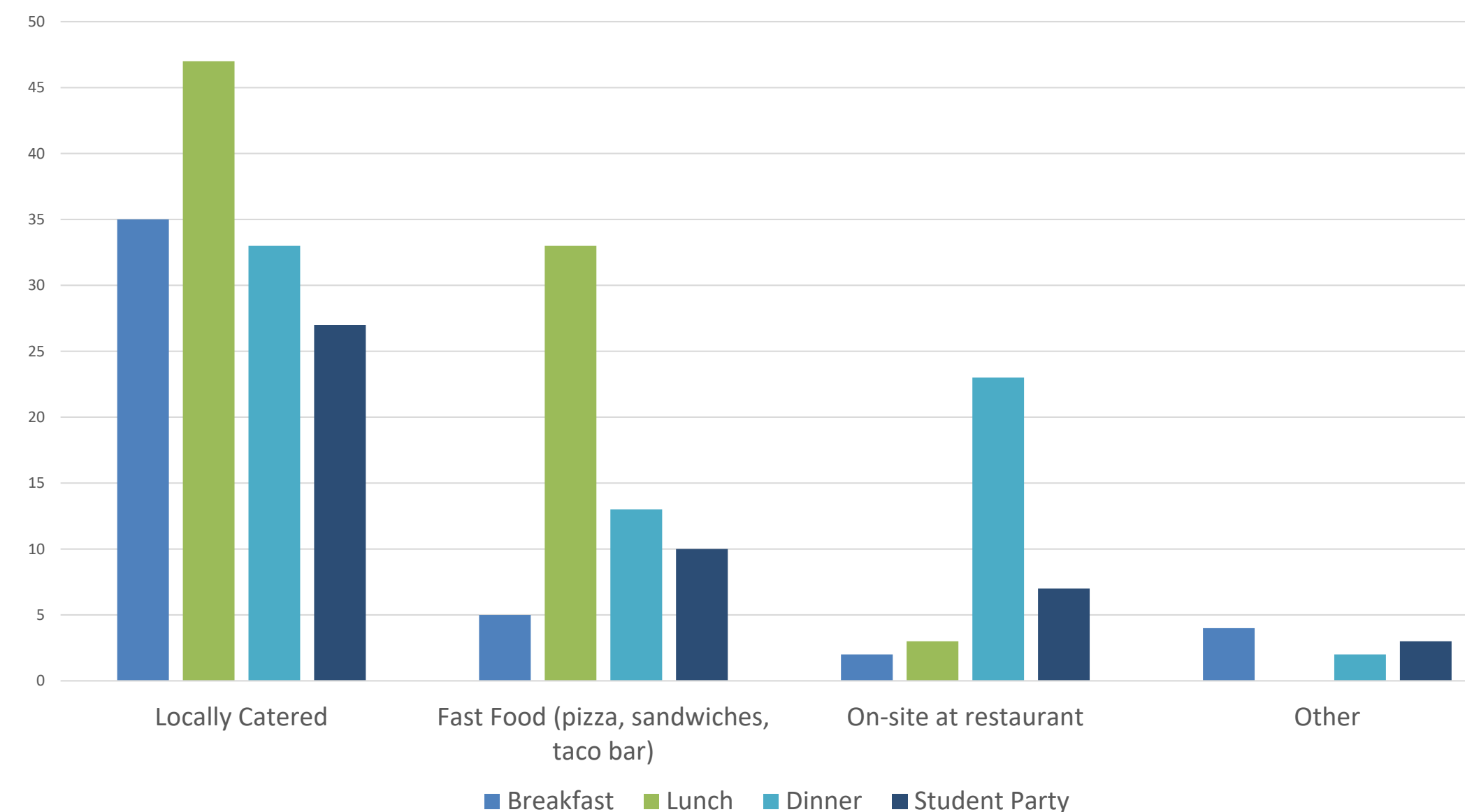


Figure 5: Types of Catering by Type of Event



Results

Seven of the schools and colleges of optometry were represented (see Figure 1). The majority of respondents were female (see Figure 2) and there was relative equal participation between all academic years (see Figure 3). The majority (96.3%) of participants reported that their program allows industry sponsored events with 93.27% attending the events. The majority (72.09%) of participants have been to at least one event in the past three months (see Figure 4). Nearly half of students reported that they have participated in at least one industry sponsored travel event in the last three months. Most events were locally catered or provided fast food (see Figure 5). Most students (81.15%) state that they will continue to attend industry sponsored events in the future. Students main reasons for attendance included product education, free meals, and networking (see Figure 6). Additional comments were also received (see Figure 7).

Figure 6: Ranked Reasons for Attendance

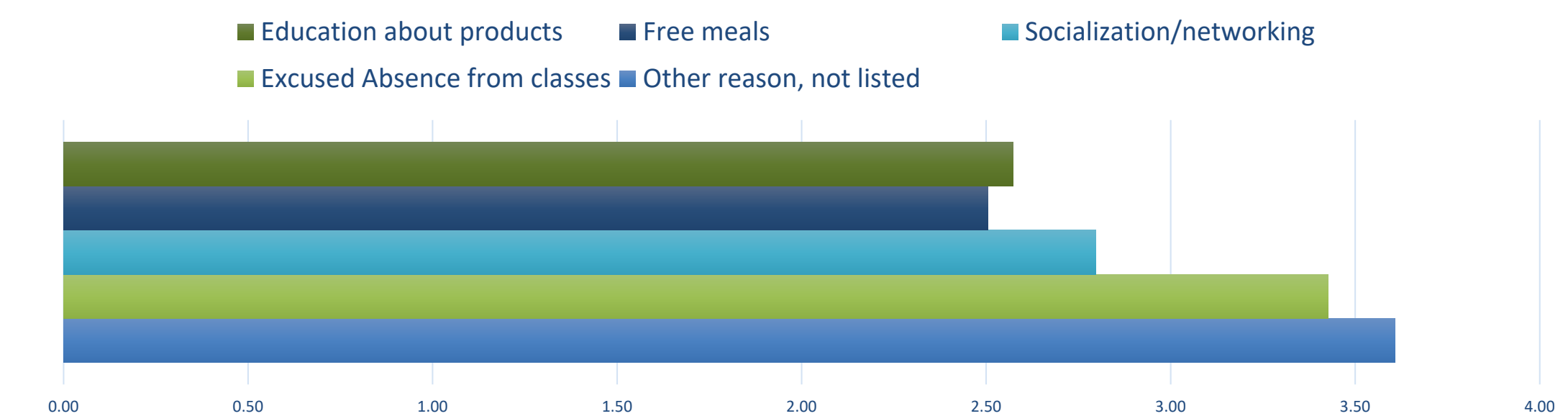


Figure 7: Additional Comments

"Students and doctors should be aware of where information is coming from and take appropriate action to verify its truth. Information coming from industry sponsors is almost certainly going to come with bias. It would be unwise otherwise."

"I support it and think that the students that are not exposed to it are being denied great opportunities."

"Students' time/attention should not be sold to corporations in exchange for an institution's financial stability. It is incredibly unsettling and frankly disgusting that so many schools are willing to invite corporate speakers into what is supposed to be a neutral educational environment just to keep donations flowing. Every time you use "lunch & learns" to bend a student's bias toward using a certain product over others, you disrupt our ability to provide equitable care to people who are trusting us to do so."

"If a company is willing to invest in me, I will be willing to use their products in practice. It seems like a mutually beneficial relationship."

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