

# Memo

To: Ashesi Community

Re: Reflections on the semester ending May 2017

Date: 5<sup>th</sup> September 2017

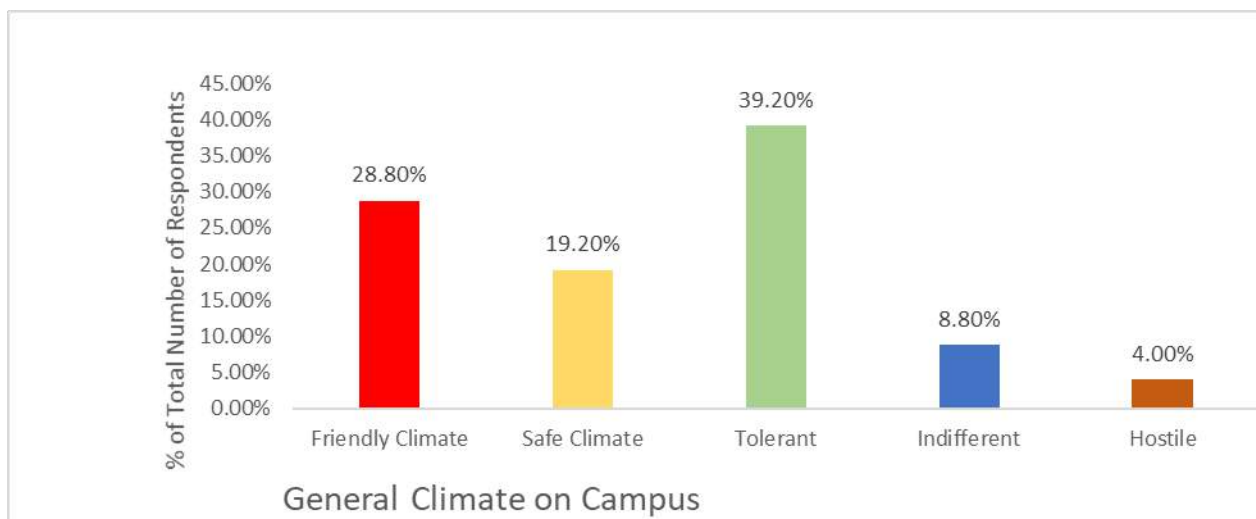
Welcome back to campus. I hope we are all returning to campus well rested and ready to tackle this semester with renewed energy and purpose. Following up from various conversations last semester, I would like to share a few thoughts on how we intend to move forward with the following issues: diversity and inclusion; sexual misconduct; and the academic work load. We discussed many issues last semester, but these three strike me as the highest priority items to focus our attention.

As I have previously mentioned, it is very important to base our decisions and actions on evidence and the truth. As such, we have endeavored to gather and analyze data that illuminates the issues before us so that we can proceed more effectively.

I have also included in Appendix B of this memo, summary results of our campus-wide departmental reviews by students. Although I will not be addressing that survey in this memo, I want you to know that the university's administrative departments will be addressing and implementing some of your feedback over the next twelve months.

## Diversity and inclusion

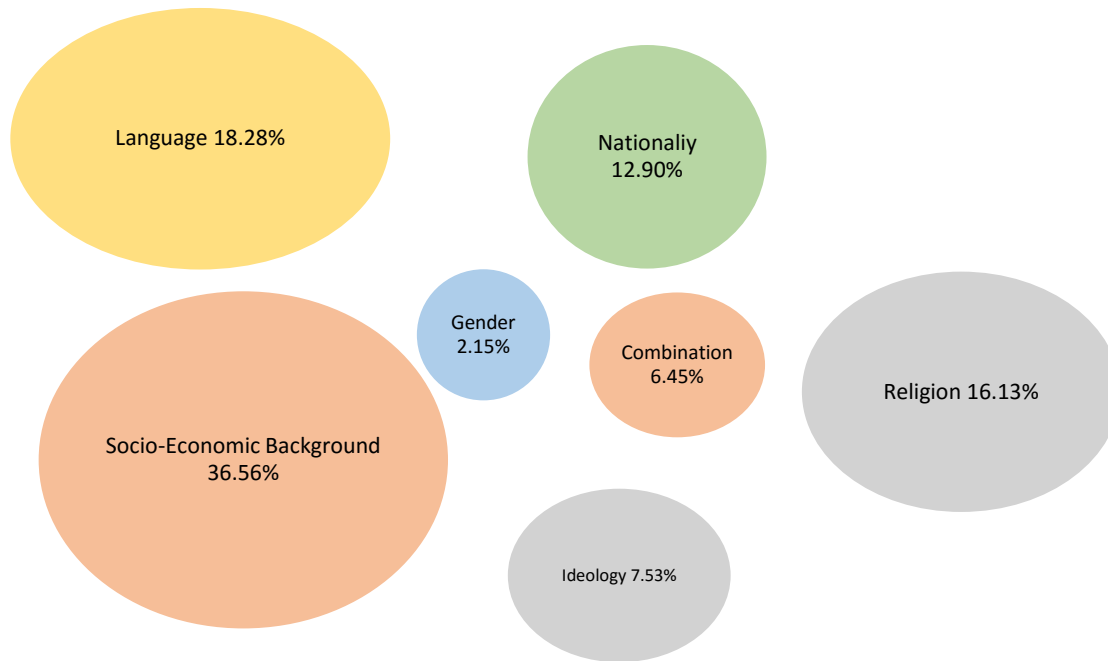
On the matter of diversity, I would like to refer to data from a 2015 survey conducted by the Office of Diversity and International Programs (ODIP). 20% of the student body responded to this survey. 87.2% of respondents believed that the general climate around diversity on campus was tolerant, friendly or safe. The data also indicated that 12.8% felt the campus was indifferent or hostile towards diversity.



The overall picture from this survey is encouraging. However, the data also shows that we can do better. We can achieve a more excellent community, not only through constructive dialogue (which we must do), but with specific actions and behaviors from each of us.

The results of the survey also point the way forward. One question in the survey attempted to compel each respondent to identify an area that we should all pay attention to.

*Q: Consider the following areas of diversity at Ashesi: beliefs, ideologies, gender, religion, nationality, socio-economic background, any form of disability and language, and tell us which area you struggle with the most and why.*



The responses to this question were informative. 30% of respondents did not find any of the listed areas of diversity especially challenging.

Of the 70% who indicated an area that they found challenging, 83.87% reported that they struggled most with navigating differences around Socio-economic Diversity, Language, Religion, and/or Nationality. 2.15% indicated that they had gender related challenges. The data presents a clear set of areas for us to address in order to increase a sense of belonging for everyone here.

I see the conversations around diversity and inclusion as a sign of progress at Ashesi. It signals that we are succeeding in increasing diversity on campus, otherwise these conversations would not be happening. We must be proud of this, and proceed with a sense that by working together, we can create a phenomenal community.

## Sexual misconduct

On the matter of sexual misconduct, as defined in Appendix A of this memo, I refer to data from a survey conducted last semester by the Office of Student and Community Affairs and analyzed by the Office of the Provost. 80% of students responded to this survey, and I am happy that you all assigned importance to it. The data in the survey paints an unacceptable picture.

**One respondent indicated having been raped by another Ashesi student. This is one person too many.**

**10.1% of respondents indicated that they had experienced sexual harassment or assault. This is 10.1% too many.**

Of those who experienced sexual assault or harassment, 68% did not report to anyone. Of those who reported incidents, 19% (4 people) reported to Ashesi staff, while 81% (17 people) reported the incident to a friend or other individual.

Ashesi students, graduates, faculty and staff, must be among those who defend everyone's right to live and work in a society free of sexual harassment, assault, or rape. No member of this community should think that they can engage in, or allow this behavior.

Last semester, for the first time in our history, the Ashesi Judicial Council (AJC) received reports of sexual misconduct. One victim insisted that the case be resolved outside the AJC process. The remaining three cases were adjudicated by the AJC, resulting in three findings of guilt and sanctions applied accordingly (two expulsions and one suspension). A few people on campus expressed unease at the level of sanctions last semester, calling the judgments unduly harsh. Others felt that the sanctions applied were appropriate. I agree with the latter group, and here's why.

Ashesi is home to many of us, for a significant period in our lives. We will continue working to provide a conducive environment for everyone to learn from mistakes, engage in meaningful work, and build strong relationships with each other. However, people whose actions make others feel unsafe, and disenfranchise others, should not have a place here. Every member of the Ashesi community, has a right to feel safe and respected, and we will be unyielding in insisting on this. When these rights are breached, our response should not, and will not, be wishy-washy. Our responses to such behavior must always be consistent with the values we espouse.

For those who are uneasy about punishing, or afraid of reporting sexual misconduct, we will continue to work on making it easier for you to do so.

## Navigating the intensity of Ashesi's academic program

Ashesi students and graduates are generally respected across the world as exceptional at the work they do; and more and more people are expressing interest in engaging with you because of this. Our academic program has played a key role in preparing our graduates to excel, as it should. However, at our last town hall meeting last semester, one message that came through very clearly from students who spoke up, was a feeling that Ashesi's academic work load is too demanding and stressful.

We are taking two approaches to helping address this. First, faculty have begun work to evaluate the volume of academic work we assign. Second, student support services are putting in place measures to better enable students to succeed in and out of the classroom. These processes have started, but their results will not be felt overnight. We will continue to engage with students to identify progress made.

In the meantime, as I tend to do, I would suggest that it is worth looking at some data regarding academic performance at Ashesi. To assess this issue objectively, we should consider three indicators of academic achievement: graduation rates; the percentage of student whose grades earn them a place on the Dean's List; and career placement and alumni feedback. The data at Ashesi looks strong for all three factors.

### Average graduation rates

Average graduation rates	4-year	6-year
Ashesi University College (Source: Ashesi)	70%	80%
US 4-year public (Source: IES-NCES 2016*)	34.8%	55.3%
US 4-year private nonprofit (Source: IES-NCES 2016*)	53.0%	62.6%
US 4-year private for-profit (Source: IES-NCES 2016*)	13.9%	23.9%

\*[https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16\\_326.10.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16_326.10.asp)

Ashesi's completion rates are significantly higher than the average in the United States. However, we are not satisfied with this result. Over the past two years, the university has been working quietly to try to boost completion rates to 90% or more.

### Student Academic Achievement

Over the past four years, we have seen a steady rise in student academic achievement as measured by the percentage of students who earn a place on the Dean's list every semester. A recent trend seems to be that 20% of the freshman class earn a place on the Dean's list, and that this ratio increases to 30% in subsequent years on campus. A significant number of Ashesi students are excelling at the highest levels, even with the intensity of academic work here.

We see a similar result for students graduating with academic honors. For example, 34% of the Class of 2017 graduated Cum Laude, Magna Cum Laude, or Summa Cum Laude. For the Class of 2016, it was 31%. This is a significant shift from the Class of 2015, which had 16% graduating with honors, and the Class of 2014, which had 10% graduating with honors. The data shows that student academic performance is increasing, not declining. It is important to mention here that some students see this as a reflection of students spending more time with their academic work, at the expense of other extracurricular activity.

### Career Placement & Alumni Feedback

Ashesi's success in placing graduates in jobs, postgraduate institutions, or entrepreneurial pursuits, is also a strong indicator of the appropriateness of the education offered here. Ashesi has an excellent record, with 90-100% being consistently placed within six months after national service. In addition, alumni consistently report back that Ashesi's curriculum, in retrospect, generally gives them a leg up in the world of work. Areas of improvement alumni ask us to focus on, are mostly around better preparing students for the unspoken rules of work, and relationship building outside of school. In response to this feedback, Ashesi's Learning Goals now include a new goal on "Professionalism".

Ashesi is a different place, where, to succeed, one must work harder and often differently (our learning philosophies are often different from what students come in with). No doubt, the educational experience here is a rigorous one. But rigor causes us to exert ourselves in a way that prepares us for the demands of life. It helps us to learn to balance competing priorities; helps us to develop grit; and challenges us to grow.

## Next Steps

I would now like to summarize a set of actions that we believe will help address the issues described in this memo. These are just a starting set of ideas from university administrators, and they will evolve over time.

	Interventions	Target issue(s)
1.	<p>Our first and most important suggestion is to <b>invite students to actively engage in formulating and suggesting solutions to the three issues discussed in this memo.</b></p> <p>We look forward to engaging with all of you and with student government (executive, parliament and judicial) in making Ashesi what you want it to be. We encourage the current discussions about expanding the honor code, to include discussions about creating a safe, tolerant and respectful environment for everyone.</p> <p>Ashesi has been, and will continue to be, what students make it.</p>	All
2.	<p><b>The Office of Diversity and International Programs (ODIP) has been merged with the Office of Student and Community Affairs (OSCA) in order to focus ODIP priorities on student life.</b> In so doing, we hope to strengthen a campus ethos that promotes awareness of, respect for, and an attitude of celebrating the diversity of the Ashesi Community.</p>	Strengthening campus climate on diversity and inclusion
3.	<p>The Office of Student and Community Affairs <b>will implement a campus-wide mentoring program called <i>Community Care</i>, involving student peer-mentors, faculty, and staff.</b> <i>Community Care</i> will enable us to maintain a high level of interaction and mutual support, even as our institution grows.</p>	All
4.	<p>The Human Resources department will <b>organize professional training programs on diversity and inclusion for all faculty and staff.</b></p>	Strengthening campus climate on diversity and inclusion
5.	<p>The Office of Student and Community Affairs will <b>facilitate reporting and adjudication of sexual misconduct on campus.</b> I urge each of us to participate in this effort, as a matter of being responsible to self and to our neighbors.</p>	Eliminating sexual misconduct
6.	<p><b>Regular evaluation of academic workload and student performance.</b> In the immediate short term, this review will focus on making the tempo of academic work less frenetic, while maintaining the academic rigor that is the hallmark of the Ashesi education.</p>	Helping students cope with academic work load

	<b>Interventions</b>	<b>Target issue(s)</b>
7.	<b>Implement a new twelve-week first year course, <i>Ashesi Success</i></b> , designed to help freshmen gain effective skills for studying, building mental muscle, and managing their time to cope with the academic workload at Ashesi.	Helping students cope with academic work load
8.	<b>Conduct annual surveys and focus groups to track our progress and enable continuous improvement.</b> As always, Town Hall meetings will also continue to be an important venue for us to discuss openly, ways that we can build a more excellent institution.	All
9.	I intend to <b>make it easier for students to interact more frequently with me by scheduling regular open hours on my calendar.</b> Open hours will be communicated with students at the start of every semester.	All

As I mentioned at our Town Hall meeting, there is no doubt that we are confronting some important challenges; but those who have been at Ashesi longer, know that this is not our first difficult test, and it won't be the last. We will welcome assistance and advice from anyone interested in helping us address these challenges.

If our history is anything to go by, we can emerge from this stronger than we were before. It will require concerted action; a commitment to proceeding on the basis of facts and understanding; and a determination to not only identify problems, but to help solve them.

Patrick G. Awuah, Jr., Founder and President  
Ashesi University College

## APPENDIX A: DEFINITIONS OF SEXUAL MISCONDUCT USED IN CAMPUS SURVEY

**Sexual harassment** is of two basic types: (a) any action, verbal expression, usually repeated or persistent, or series of actions or expressions that have either the intent, or are reasonably perceived as having the effect, of creating an intimidating, hostile, or demeaning educational, employment, or living environment for a student or University employee, by focusing on that person's gender. A hostile environment is defined as one that interferes with the ability to learn, work (if employed by the University), or have access and opportunity to participate in all and any aspect of campus life (harassment creating a hostile environment); (b) any action in which submission to conduct of a sexual nature is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's education or employment, or submission to or rejection of such conduct is used as the basis for academic or employment decisions affecting that individual (quid pro quo harassment). (Ashesi Student Handbook)

*Sexually harassing behaviors* differ in type and severity and can range from subtle verbal harassment to unwelcome physical contact. Sexual harassment includes but is not limited to (a) unwelcome verbal or physical advances, persistent leers, lewd comments; (b) the persistent use of irrelevant references that insult or degrade a person's gender, or the use of sex stereotypes to insult or degrade; (c) the use by a person in authority of his or her position to coerce another person to do something of a sexual nature that she or he would not otherwise do. Coercion need not involve physical force. (Ashesi Student Handbook)

**Sexual assault** is defined as any sexual contact that occurs without the consent of the other person. Specifically, it is intentional physical contact with an intimate part of the body or with clothes covering intimate body parts without the consent of the person touched. (Ashesi Student Handbook)

**Rape** is defined as unlawful sexual intercourse or any other sexual penetration of the vagina, anus, or mouth of another person, with or without force, by a sex organ, other body part, or foreign object, without the consent of the victim. ([www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com))

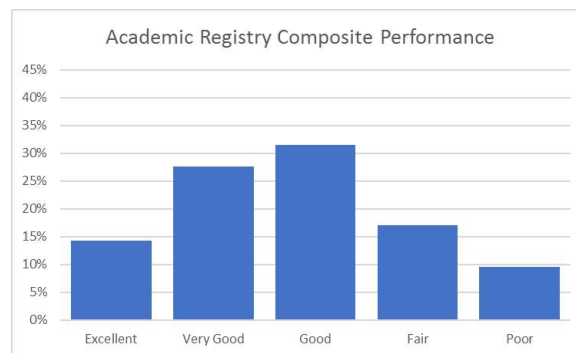
## APPENDIX B: RESULTS OF DEPARTMENTAL REVIEWS BY STUDENTS

Out of 796 students, a total of 180 students, or 23%, completed at least a portion of the survey. All non-academic departments were evaluated, with the exception of the Human Resource department. All comments that students submitted went to the relevant departments and the Executive Committee. The HR team is meeting with each department to review comments, prioritize issues raised, and put in place implementation plans for any improvements warranted based on ratings and comments.

Below is a summary of the comments and evaluations for each non-academic department. Only comments on the same issue that were made by two or more students are included below. Note that this is simply a summary of what students reported. Departments will respond after a full review of the comments, priorities, and implementation of feasible solutions have been agreed by administrative staff.

### Academic Registry

Respondents: 179; Students Rating Good or Better: 73%

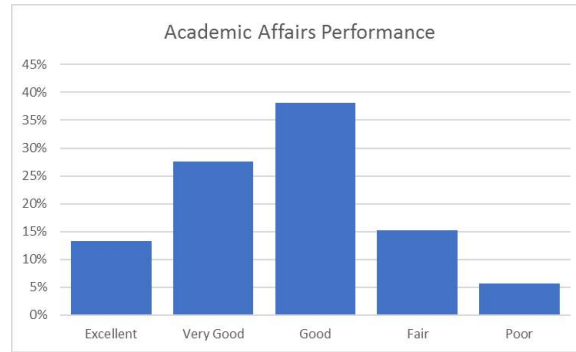


Many good comments were made on the diligent work and efforts of the department and its efficiency although there were some reservations regarding the department's interpersonal communications. Many students expressed frustration with the registration process: that information about courses and the time table was sent to students less than a day before registration commenced which doesn't give students enough time to consider what they want to take. A few students reported that the schedule was inflexible and they could not sign up for the courses or lecturers they wanted, and others that the times for some classes would shift after the semester commenced.

### Academic Affairs

Respondent: 105; Students Rating Good or Better: 79%

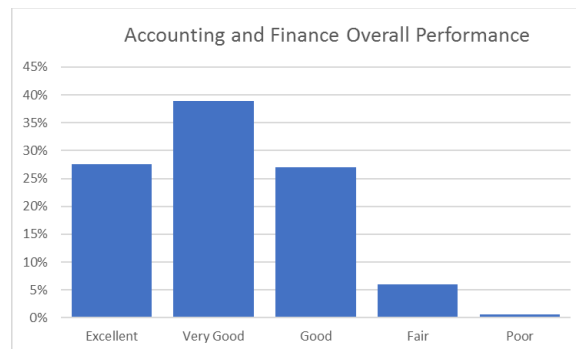




Many students commented that they were satisfied with their interactions with the Provost, although there were a few dissenting voices as well. Some students commented that they did not feel that course evaluations were used, since some lecturers who have been rated poorly on evaluations are still behaving the same way. Some students commented that the faculty and faculty interns were very good, although others commented that the hiring process should be more rigorous and that some lecturers were not the best. Some comments focused on the difficulty of classes and the workload. There were also some comments about the need for more clarity on plagiarism and informal resolution processes and punishments.

#### **Accounting and Finance Department**

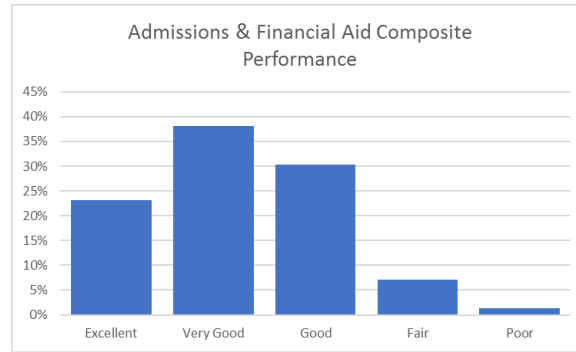
Respondents: 167; Students Rating Good or Better: 93%



There were many good comments about the friendliness and responsiveness of members of the department, although there were a few dissenting comments as well. Some students commented they had to make multiple visits to the office to obtain a receipt due to difficulty printing. Some students commented on delays in receiving bills, others commented on delays in getting work study or reimbursement checks. Some students commented on departmental processes, such as the lack of a portal for students to check their payment balances and due dates, bills being sent during break instead of the end of the previous semester, lack of clarity of summer school costs, needing to scan and send bank payment receipts as proof of payment, not including meal card expenses in bills, and not being able to make payments on campus.

#### **Admissions and Financial Aid**

Respondents: 171; Students Rating Good or Better: 92%



There were a wide range of comments: some praising how they were treated as applicants and the overall admissions processes, some saying they were spoken to harshly and that there were parts of the admission process that were last minute and a hustle; some saying their admission offer was timely, some saying they did not hear about their admission until quite late; some saying communication during the admissions process was good, some saying it was poor. Some commented that they didn't think the awards of scholarships was fair or handled properly, and some thought that merit scholarships should be available. A few students commented that the application process was long and cumbersome, and a few commented that they thought they would have on-campus housing once admitted.

### **Development and External Relations**

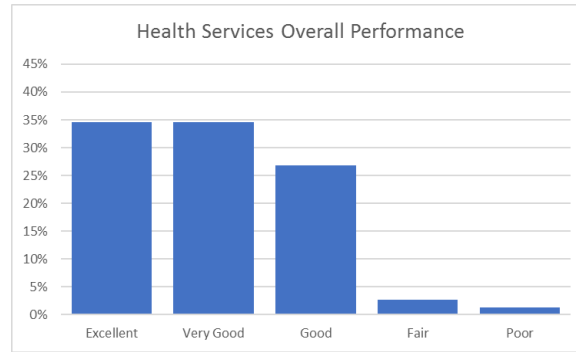
Respondents: 169; Students Rating Good or Better: 93%



There were many comments commending the department for its effective promotion of the Ashesi brand; for the excellent coverage of the university and events; for fundraising. There were a few comments stating that the website is focused more on external relations and donors and therefore paints an incomplete picture of Ashesi or doesn't contain updated information that students need. Some students thought the brand and marketing was too US and Ghana focused and suggested more advertising and other outreach to other African countries. Some students requested more non-academic and recreational facilities (and the fundraising required to implement them).

### **Health Services**

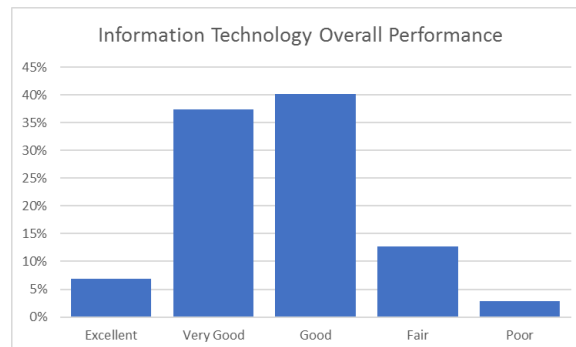
Respondents: 156; Students Rating Good or Better: 96%



Many students lauded the nurses' professional and courteous attitude. Many students commented that the new health center was too far from campus and in a true emergency or severe illness, students cannot get there; many students who made this comment also suggested a golf cart-like vehicle to transport very sick students to and from the health center. Many students also commented that referrals were too frequent and wished that more could be done on campus instead of having to go off campus to a hospital. There were a few negative comments about the MedX health plan; that sometimes drugs were given that masked symptoms or that didn't solve the problem; that there was a need for more sex education and sexual wellness services.

### Information Technology

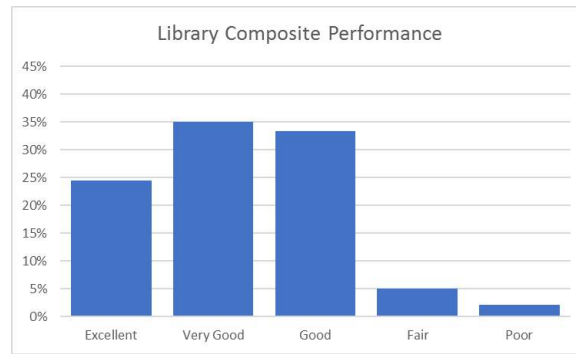
Respondents: 175; Students Rating Good or Better: 84%



There were a lot of comments about internet connectivity and frequent interrupts, and WIFI coverage and outages, especially in the hostels. Some students praised the department and team for how they were treated and how their issues are resolved, while some thought they were not treated well or that issues were not resolved or resolved slowly. Some noted that the department and the services that it provides has been improving. Some students commented on projectors and printers being not always operational.

### Library

Respondents: 175; Students Rating Good or Better: 93%



Some students praised the helpfulness of the library staff, while others commented that they were treated harshly. There were some comments about the inefficiency in distributing textbooks each semester. There were some comments about the good supply of books and other resources for students, and there were some comments about the high noise levels in the library as well as insufficient printers and printer outages. Some students commented on the bad smell in the library washrooms.

### **Logistics and Facilities**

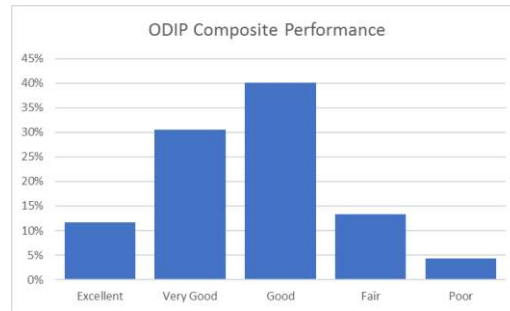
Respondents: 173; Students Rating Good or Better: 91%



There were a wide range of comments regarding the some of the services and responsiveness of the Logistics and Facilities team. Students praised how quickly problems were fixed, while others criticized the department for long delays in resolving issues. Many students reported dissatisfaction with security guards sleeping at night, and some students reported dissatisfaction with security overall, although a few students stated that some of the guards are very good. Many students reported dissatisfaction with the attitude of particular cleaning staff, and some students commented on the poor performance of the cleaning staff overall, although a few students stated that some of the cleaning staff were good. Many students commented on the poor state of washrooms, especially on weekends. Some students reported that water sometimes didn't flow during peak times in the mornings, and there was poor ventilation and bad smells in washrooms. A few students suggested alternative water for toilets during water outages. A few students requested that the buses be available to student groups or for academic purposes at a reasonable cost.

### **Office of Diversity and International Programs**

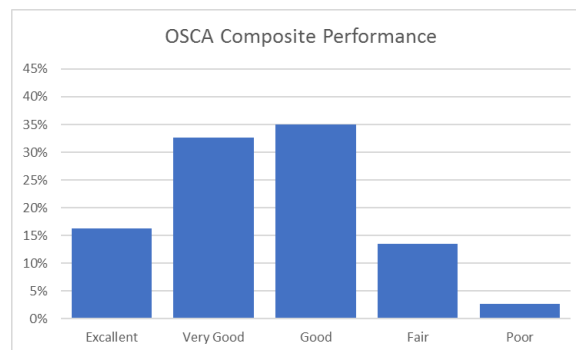
Respondents: 148; Students Rating Good or Better: 82%



Many good comments were made regarding the warm and caring attitude of the staff, although there were a few dissenting voices as well. Some students thought that ODIP should be more involved with the International Students Association, and expand orientation and involvement with international students. Many students commented on diversity issues on campus, and while HardTalk was praised, students commented that more needed to be done with diversity issues on campus, especially with Ghanaian and international students.

#### **Office of Student and Community Affairs**

Respondents: 152; Students Rating Good or Better: 84%



Overall comments for the staff in the department were good; despite the vacancies in the department, most students felt their needs were being met. Regarding Career Services specifically, many students did not feel that Career Services staff were friendly and helpful; some did not like the policy of having to attend three Career Services events to get a letter of introduction and a few thought that they were marked absent at events they attended; a few thought that favoritism was being practiced in the department. Some students thought that orientation was too short and not effective. A few students thought that the student handbook needed to be reviewed regularly.

Lastly, a few students commented on the mechanics of the survey – that it was too long, that it shouldn't be done at the same time as the course evaluations, and that there should be ways to save for each section so that it didn't need to be completed in one sitting.