

Student Attitudes Regarding the Impact of the Murder of Mathew Shepard

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Senior Honors Project

Political Science and Gender & Women's Studies

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Personal Experience

- Loveland, CO
- Out-of-State Perspective
- Activism and the University of Wyoming
- Coursework and personal development



Matthew Shepard's Death as a Historical Moment

- The murder that shook the nation
- Media attention and hate in Wyoming
- The trial and “Gay Panic” defense
- Aftermath and changing opinions



Research Question

- Is Matthew Shepard's death a salient issue on the UW campus for students? If so, what discourse surrounds this issue?



Predictions



- Matthew Shepard significance greater with Out-of-State students
- Contemporary figures more salient
- In-State students starting to lose identification with Shepard

Methodology



- 2 Step Data Collection
 - Goal: 250 quick surveys
 - Goal: 10 qualitative interviews

Methodology- Surveys

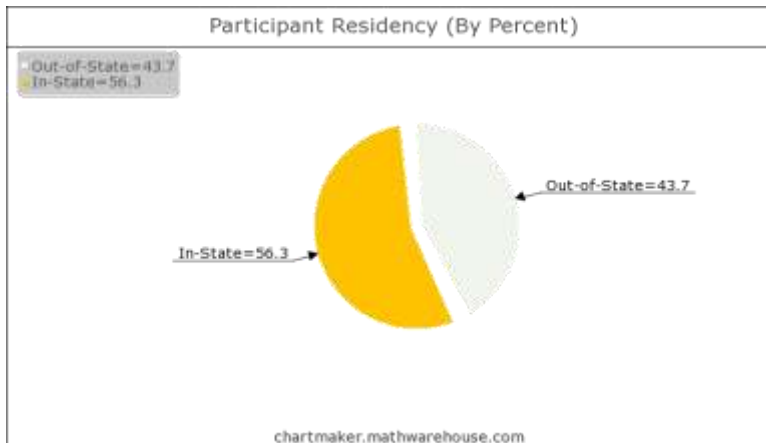
- Union and Classroom Building
- Consent for Research
 - IRB guidelines for risk and confidentiality
- Demographics
 - Residency
 - College representation
- 2 Identification Questions
 - Matthew Shepard
 - Dave Christensen
- Voluntary Interview Section

Interviews

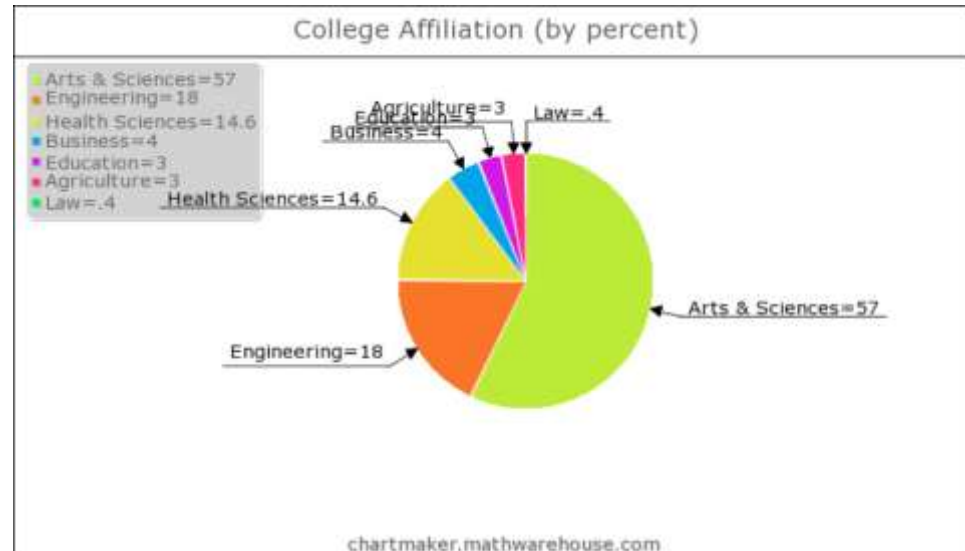
- Confidentiality Statement w/ Explanation
- Basic Structure
 - Tape recorder
 - Some structured questions
 - Follow up questions
- Introductory Questions
 - “Why did you volunteer for this interview?”
 - “Do you know who _____ is?”

Data Results- Survey Demographics

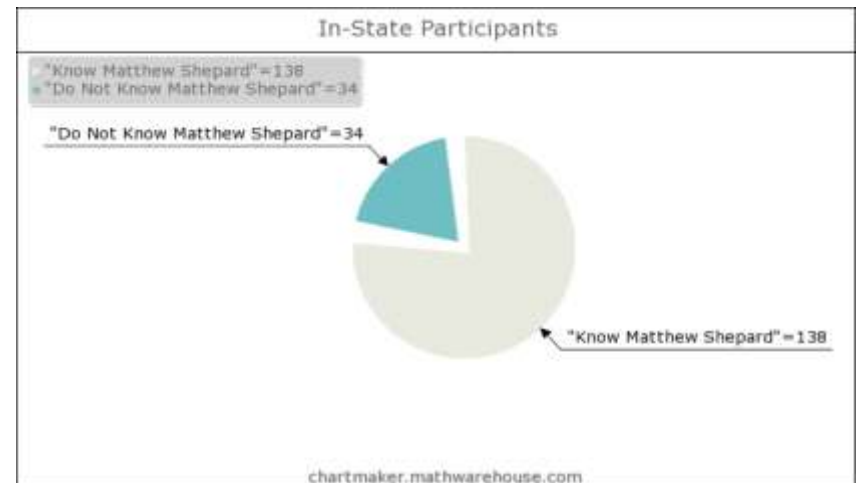
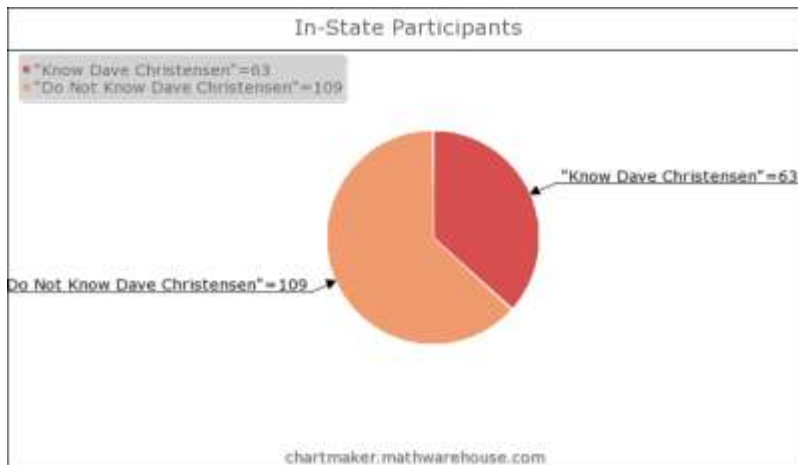
In-State versus Out-of-State



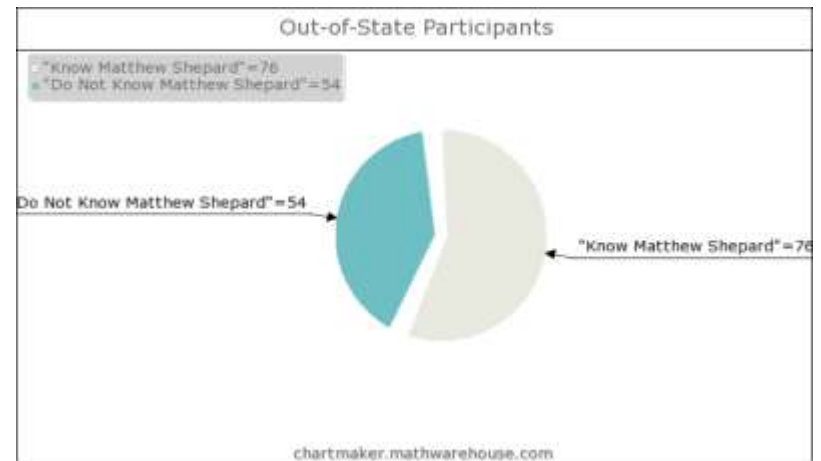
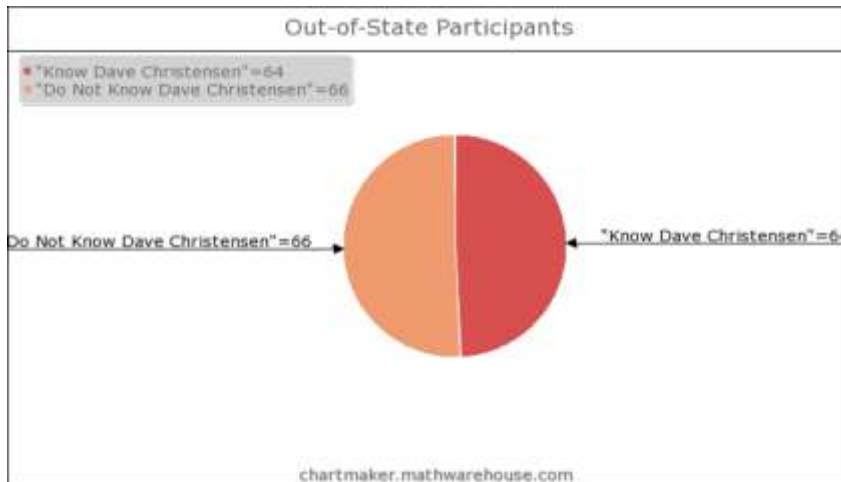
Campus Representation



Data Results- Survey of In-State



Data Results-Survey of Out-of-State



Data Results- Interviews

- 4 UW students
 - 2 In-State
 - 2 Out-of-State
- Continued confidentiality
- Varied results to initial inquiries
 - All knew Matthew Shepard
 - 2 knew Dave Christensen



Interview Themes

- Variance in sources of information
- Out-of-State familiar with Christensen
- Importance of Shepard's death to current students
- Language formation
 - Sympathy
 - "Homosexual"
 - Detailed accounts of Christensen and Shepard events



Initial Critiques

- Positive survey outcomes
 - 302 respondents
- Good sample?
 - 2 locations
 - Same classes?
 - Student discussion created in preparation
- Poor qualitative pool
 - All aware of Shepard
 - Fell short of goal
 - Bias of thinking well of participants?



Conclusions



- Out-of-State students more aware of Christensen
- Shepard awareness
- Historical memory for In-State and Out-of-State students
- Differing explanations of Shepard's death
- Further research
 - Interviews
 - Disciplining discourse and its origins

Questions and Inquiry



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