



Assessing Use of Community-Engaged Research by UC Merced Faculty

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Background

The definition of Community-Engaged Research (CEnR) can sometimes mislead people to assume that only social sciences and applied researchers “engaged community” in research. This misunderstanding may keep some researchers from doing CEnR and may misclassify some researchers who do CEnR but may define it differently.

- UC Merced Resource Center for Community Engaged Scholarship (ReCCES) supports CEnR across disciplines as an approach to improve the rigor, reach, and relevance of all research.
- A survey of UC Merced faculty was conducted to understand and support their use of CEnR. To avoid missing faculty because of differences in CEnR definitions, the survey assessed faculty CEnR in two ways:

1. A standard definition of CEnR used by ReCCES. This definition may be interpreted more traditionally and may be more likely to be misunderstood.
 2. CEnR defined as community engagement across standard stages of research. This definition is broader and allows faculty to define their use of CEnR based on their own interpretation of community engagement in each stage of research.
- This study aimed to understand:
 1. How do faculty report doing CEnR across two different definitions of CEnR?
 2. How can lessons about how faculty define their use of CEnR help ReCCES to support CEnR across all faculty at UC Merced?

What is Community-Engaged Research (CEnR)?

Community-Engaged research constitutes research that:

- Attends to the needs and interest of the community/ies affected by the research
- Mutual benefits community and academic interests
- Engages community throughout the research process
- Values both community and academic wisdom in decisions



*“Community-engaged research is incredibly important and should be supported by the University at all levels.”
- UC Merced Faculty Participated in the 2022 Survey*

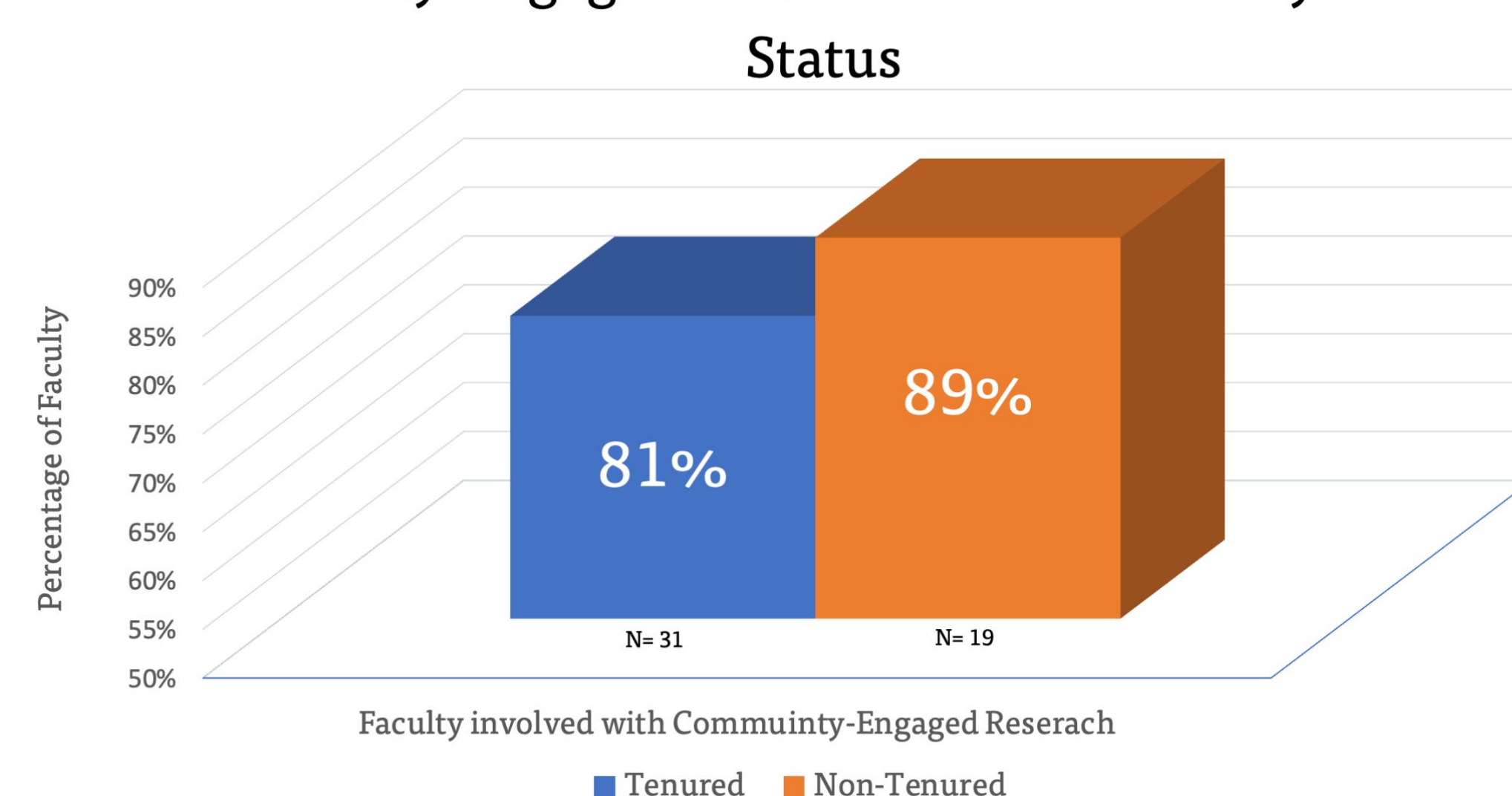
Methods

- Cross-sectional survey was conducted with UC Merced tenure-track faculty in Spring 2022.
- Tenure-track faculty were identified and reached through the three Schools: School of Engineering, School of Natural Sciences, and School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts
- 10-item web survey had two aims:
 1. Identify faculty who use CEnR (using two different approaches to defining CEnR)
 2. Identify ways to best support faculty use of CEnR
- Quantitative and qualitative analyses examined CEnR across Schools and tenure status

RESULTS: Faculty Doing CEnR as Defined by Standard ReCCES Definition

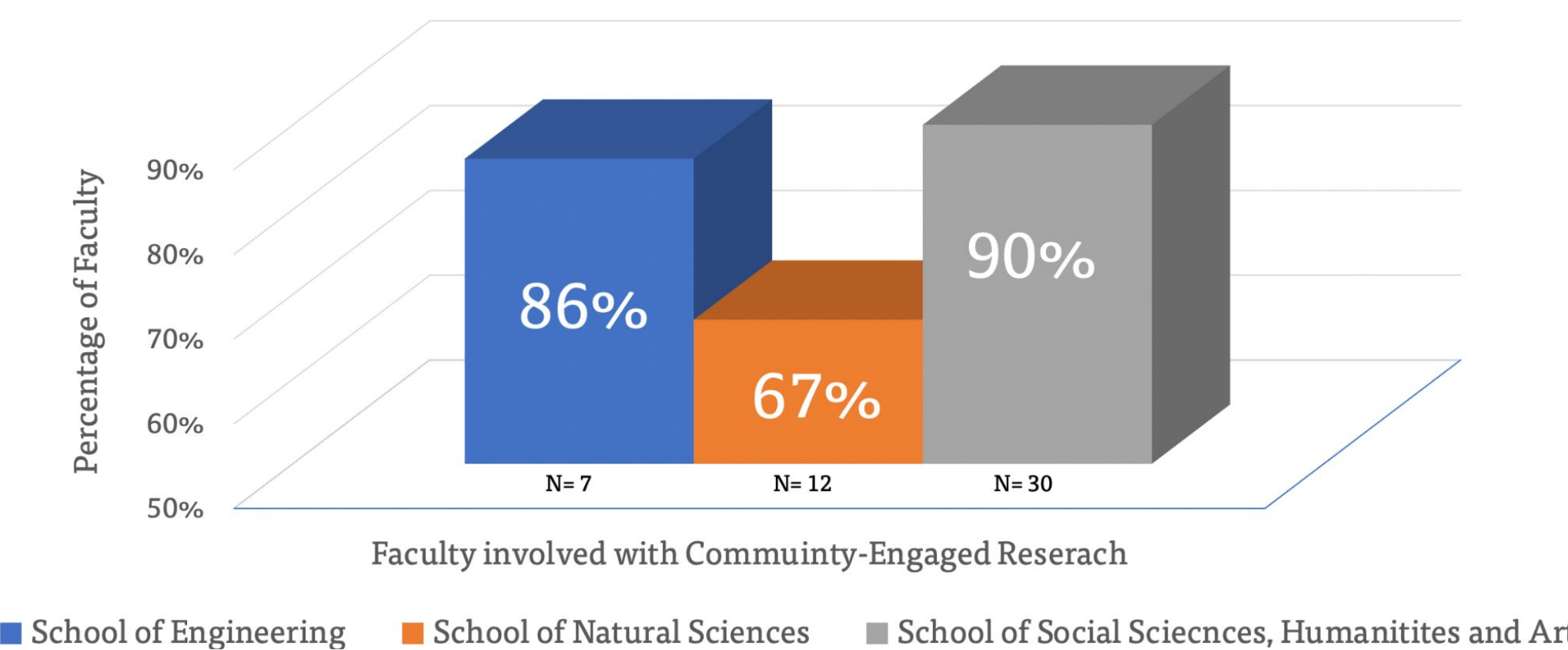
ReCCES Definition of CEnR: an approach to research that brings campus and community partners together to address shared concerns in ways that benefit both academia and the broader society.

Community-Engaged Research Involvement by Tenure Status



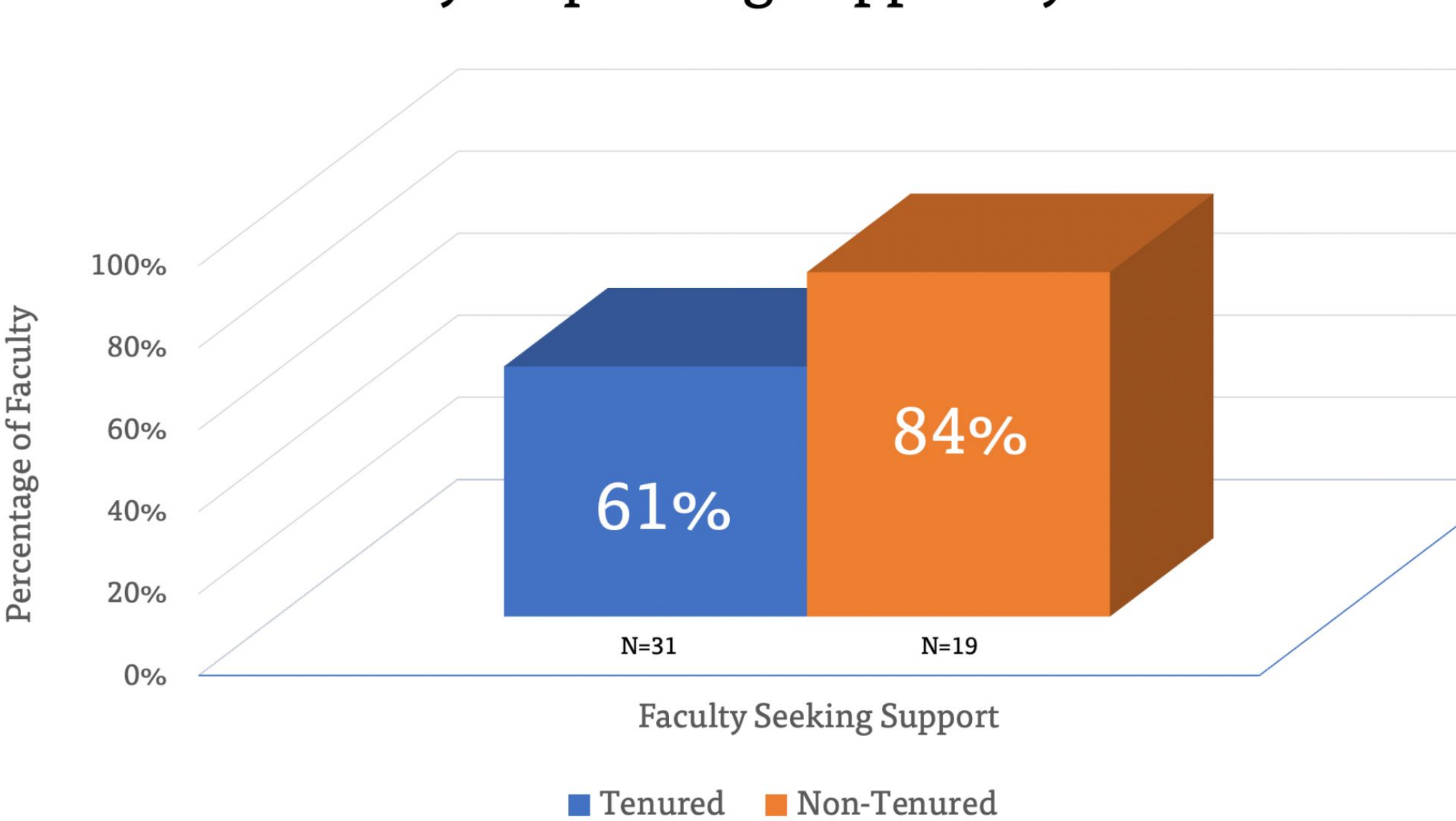
- Though tenure is sometimes assumed to give faculty greater academic stability to do CEnR, non-tenured faculty reported greater use of CEnR.

Community-Engaged Research Involvement by School



- Based on the ReCCES definition of CEnR, a greater percent of SSHA faculty, followed closely by the SOE, do CEnR than SNS (natural sciences). This result may reflect the more applied nature of social sciences (SSHA) and engineering (SOE) research.

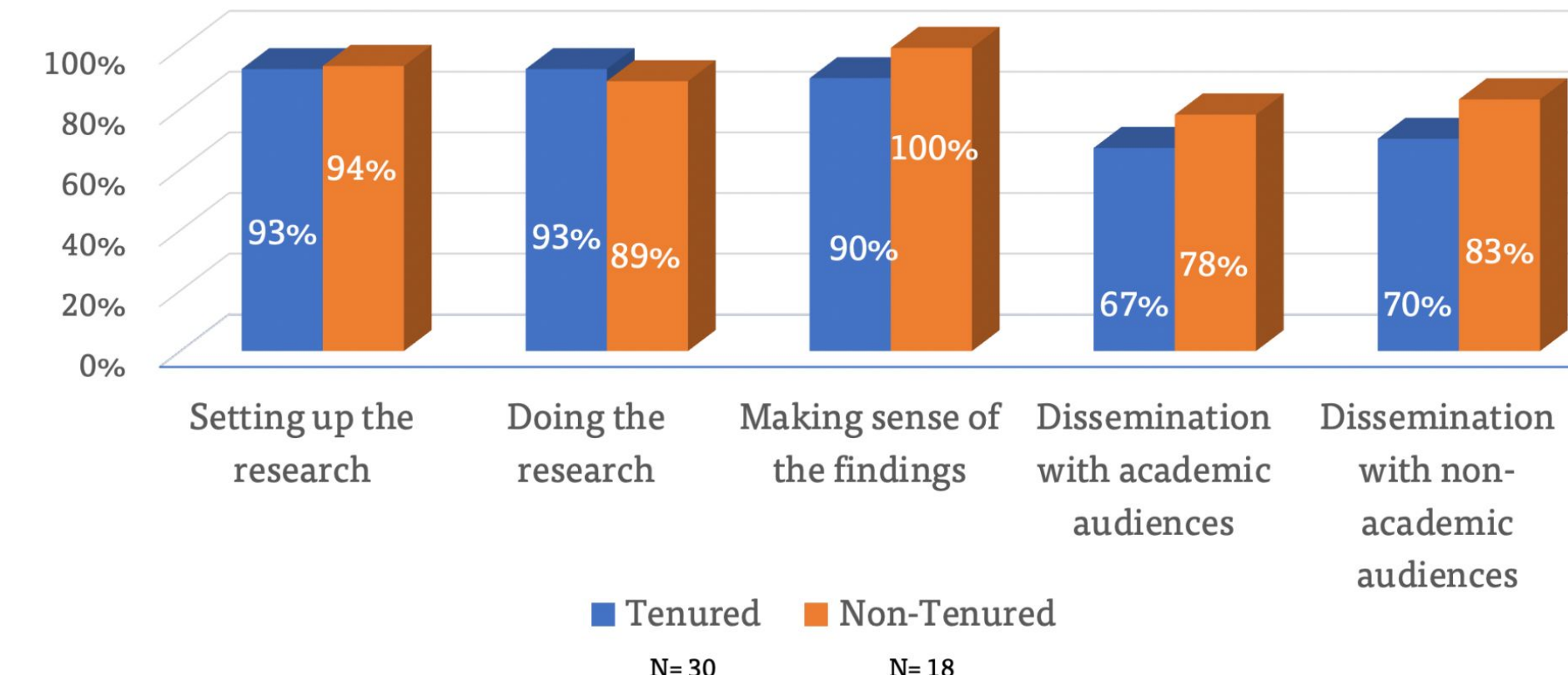
Faculty Requesting Support by Tenure Status



- The majority of tenured and non-tenured faculty requested support for doing CEnR.

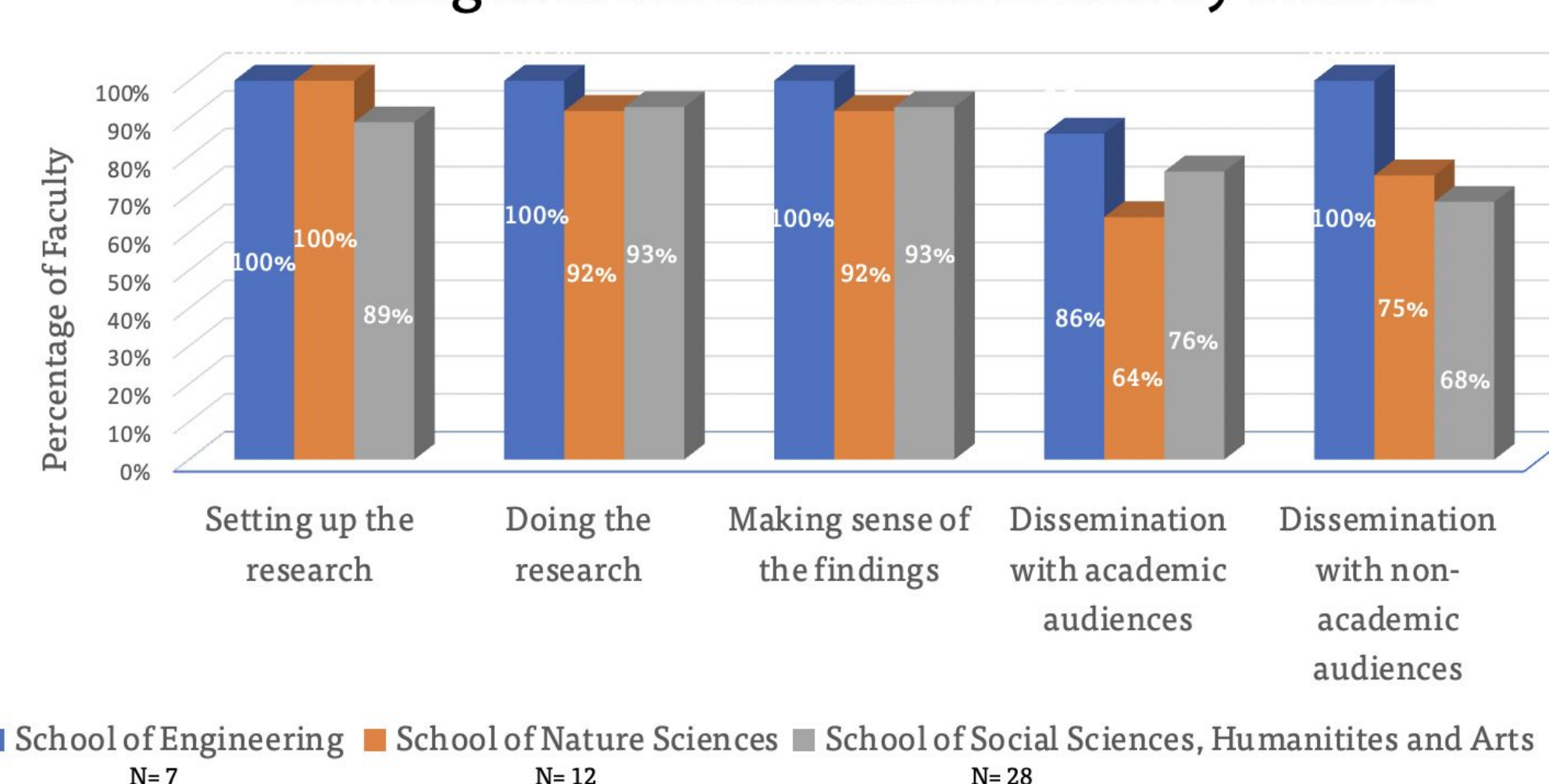
RESULTS: CEnR as defined by community engagement across stages of research.

Faculty Engagement With the Community Throughout the Research Process by Tenure Status



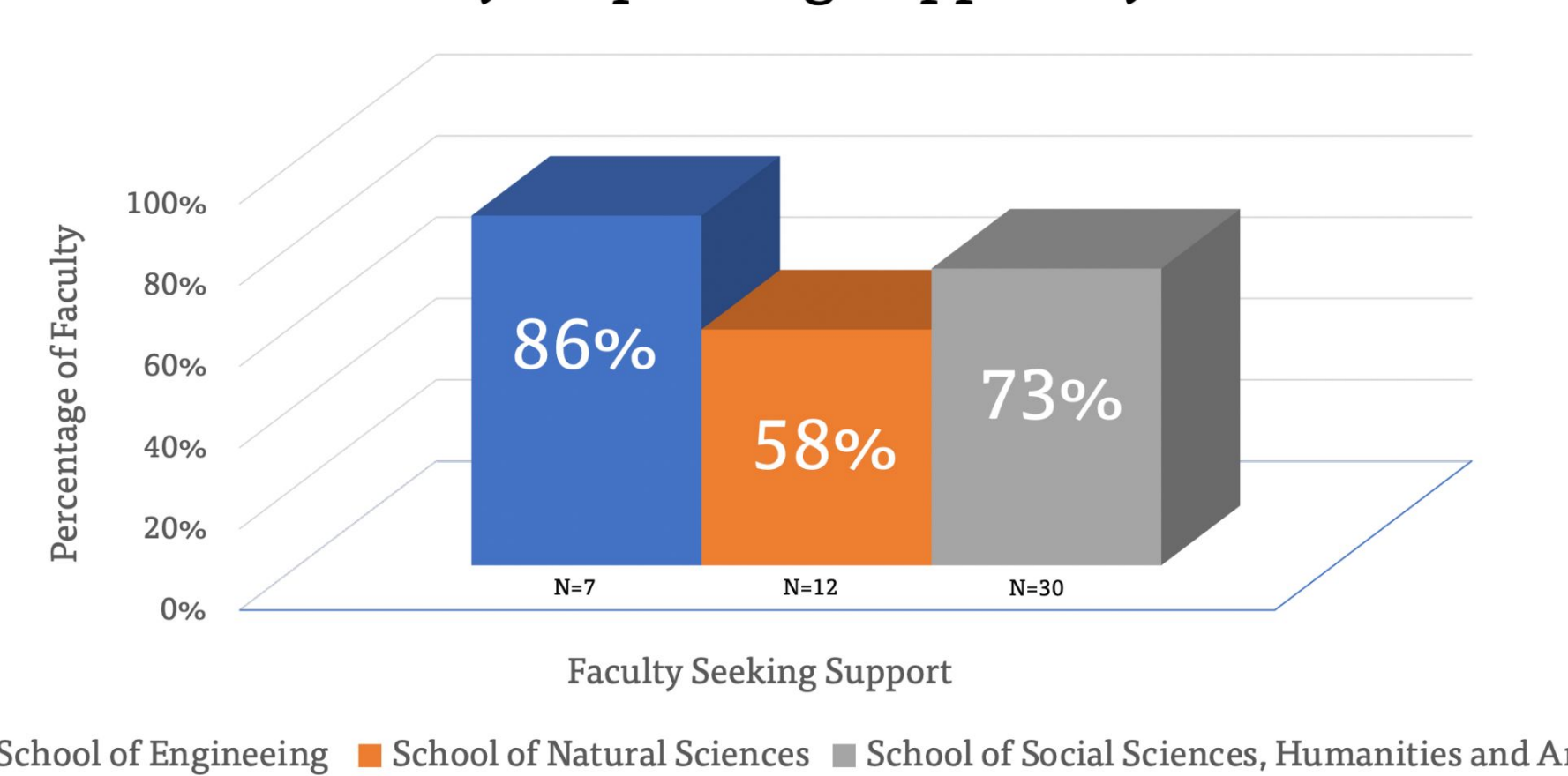
- Tenure status does not seem to substantially affect the degree of community engagement across the stages of research.
- Community engagement may be reflecting how much faculty believe community could be engaged at each stage. For example, the earlier stages of research prove to be the best stage for researchers to engage community members. While dissemination may be the most expected stage for optimal community engagement, the results prove that it actually may be more difficult to engage the community in the final steps.

Faculty Engagement With the Community Throughout the Research Process by School



- Community engagement is similar across the Schools, except for dissemination of findings.
- SSHA (social sciences) faculty report a greater need of support for community engagement in research dissemination, especially with academic audiences.

Faculty Requesting Support By School



- The majority of faculty participating in the survey from each school requested support for CEnR.
- A greater percent of SOE (engineering) faculty indicated a request for CEnR support. This may reflect the smaller sample of faculty in the survey.

Conclusion

- Measuring CEnR by “stages of research” (rather than a broad standard definition of CEnR) may be able to identify more faculty that do CEnR.
 - Other than dissemination of research findings, slightly higher percentages of faculty reported doing CEnR across research stages than when reporting CEnR using the ReCCES definition. This suggests that faculty may believe they are doing CEnR in some stages of research more than others, with dissemination of research findings being the stage of the research process where faculty need the most support and guidance.
- Support for faculty to do CEnR is important across definitions of CEnR.
 - Across tenure status and School, the majority of faculty are requesting support to do CEnR. Although many see their work, or certain areas of their work, to be community engaged, the survey respondents still seek for support and guidance to involve community and academic partners throughout the entire research process while providing mutual benefits to both sides involved.

Recommendations for Research

- More research is needed to understand how faculty define their use of and implementation of CEnR. Stereotypical definitions of CEnR may miss some faculty who may be doing CEnR but explain their engagement of community in different ways relevant to their field of study.
- Future research on the types and methods of support for CEnR may help UC Merced faculty in ways that matter most to them, for their School, discipline, tenure status, and other key faculty characteristics.
 - Each School, discipline, and tenure status is going to need a different form of support to help them gain a better understanding of how to implement CEnR.
 - Our support cannot be generic, but rather, it has to be fit to benefit and meet the needs of faculty member.



*“Want it to be meaningful to those communities”
- UC Merced Faculty Participated in the 2022 Survey*

Recommendations for Practice

- UC Merced as a campus and each School may benefit from better understanding how their faculty do CEnR and engage the community in their research.
- Support for CEnR was consistently requested by faculty. Faculty should be included to define the method and content of this support.
 - Faculty at UC Merced need to be our focus for our expanding definition for CEnR.
 - We must be careful to not suggest that we know what faculty assume or believe about community engagement before supporting them.

CONTACTS & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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