

Program Evaluation
Ninth Summer Program in Punjab Studies
July 3-August 13, 05

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Introduction

The Ninth Summer Program in Punjab Studies involved intensive study of Punjabi language and culture, Indian and regional history, and comparative religion (especially Sikhism). The program was based in Chandigarh, a Union Territory as well as joint capital of the states of Punjab and Haryana. The program involved extensive travel in the region, including day trips to Kasouli (in Himachal Pradesh), Patiala, Ropar, Naina Devi and Anandapur Sahib, and Ludhiana, and a weeklong trip to Amritsar, Batala, Dharamsala, McLeod Ganj, and the Kangra Valley. The program involved 21 people—three faculty and 18 participants (including the evaluator). The faculty was the director, Dr. Gurinder Singh Mann, Religious Studies, UCSB, Dr. Shinder Thandi, Economics, Coventry University, and Prof. Sadhu Binning, Punjabi Studies, University of British Columbia. Among the participants were graduate students from the United States (including a recent PhD and several doctoral students from UCSB, and doctoral students from UCLA and Claremont Colleges, among others) and other countries (including a doctoral student from Oxford University and a master's student from Lund University, Sweden), and undergraduate students from UCSB, Principia College, University of Texas, and other schools. The standard day started with 2 hours of elementary Punjabi language training and two hours of formal academic lecture by an invited expert. The expert frequent joined the group for informal discussion at lunch. After an afternoon break, there was advanced Punjabi training and a two-hour program (varied among lecture, discussion, and demonstration) on an aspect of Punjabi culture.

This evaluation is based on surveys—both quantitative and qualitative—from 19 of the participants and extensive interviews by the evaluator with nine of the student members—including graduate students and undergraduates, men and women, Americans and non-Americans. Almost all of the interviews were conducted prior to completion of the evaluation forms. As a result, the participants also wrote many of the comments. A couple of the participants, in lieu of an interview, wrote short essays or extensive notes.

Strengths

It is evident that the program has many strengths. The most recurring strength, noted universally and without prompting, is the director—Dr. Gurinder Singh Mann. One graduate student summed it up: “The best thing about the program is Prof. Mann.” The participants remarked about his insightful critiques and alternative points of view, as well as his humanity and love for both the program and the students. One participant

stated, “Gurinder tried very hard to accommodate our needs. He went out of his way.” Another participant spoke of “Prof. Mann’s personal touch.”

Several participants remarked that Prof. Mann “does everything.” One student stated, “He needs assistance,” while another student was more direct, “Prof. Mann needs a sidekick.” At least two of the graduate students volunteered for the position.

This paragraph captures many of the comments complimenting Dr. Mann:

“Professor Man was wonderful. He has amazing connections here. He did an excellent job of communicating the living spirit of Punjabi culture. I deeply appreciate how he worked so hard to make the program an enriching and pleasant experience. He always was very caring and made sure everyone was healthy and happy and doing well. I am so glad I did this program with him.”

Participants noted a range of other strengths. The program provides access to experts and specialists, as well as the major universities in the Punjab (Punjabi University, Punjab Agricultural University, Khalsa College of Guru Nanak Dev University, Baring Christian College). The faculty (especially Prof. Mann) suggested research topics (good for master theses and doctoral dissertations) and introduce students to original source materials. The students were complimentary of the lectures (as a whole). “I’ve learned so much, and made a greater connection with the Punjab (even for a Punjabi),” said one graduate student. Another graduate student, in rapid succession, said that the program “is comprehensive, covers a whole number of areas, the lectures are strong, and the subjects covered are strong.”

One participant made the point that the program was enriched by the presence of Indians (not just NRIs or PIOs). She suggested that the program advertise in India. A number of the participants commented on the benefits of informal contact with other students. Several of the undergraduate students specifically mentioned the benefits they received from associating with graduate students.

Some of the best-remembered activities were the spontaneous activities. Several of the undergraduates and graduates students remembered the additional hours at Khalsa College, when the new dean arranged classroom and departmental visits and lectures. College visits allowed students to speak with Indian students and for faculty to make contacts with peers. A number of the participants urged more time for these visits and the development of professional relationships. Indian colleagues, especially at Khalsa College and Baring Christian College, were eager to build professional relationships.

There appeared to be a natural and expected pattern that graduate students appreciated the academic lectures and the undergraduate’s spoke of the afternoon cultural activities. The afternoon sessions were “good,” with variety and diversity. The undergraduates appreciated the informality of the cultural sessions.

In summation, one doctoral student enthusiastic reported, “I’ve gotten energized [to pursue her doctorate]!” Here are quotes and comments from other participants:

- “I would definitely recommend this program” (graduate student)
- “I think [the program] is brilliant” (graduate student)
- “I’m going [home] with much more than I came for” (graduate student)
- “Quite a learning experience for me” (graduate student)
- “I feel more mature about my studies” (undergraduate student)
- “The program was live changing” (graduate student)

- “[The program] was absolutely full of ideas and excitement” (graduate student)
- “[The program] is quite remarkable in that it combines lectures and fun and travel and language” (graduate student)
- “The program gives an excellent overview of the Punjab” (graduate student)
- “We had interaction with amazing people” (graduate student)
- “I wish there were programs like this for every part of India” (faculty participant)
- “I got a really good sense of geography and its relationship to history” (undergraduate student)
- “I couldn’t have done this by myself” (graduate student)
- “We had lots of very well informed speakers” (graduate student)
- “[The program] was very organized and much more in-depth than I had expected” (graduate student)
- “I liked the regional focus” (shared by a number of the participants)
- “We addressed historical and contemporary issues” (graduate student)
- “I thought the culture part was fun and useful” (undergraduate student)
- “Punjabi was really useful; I did learn a lot of Punjabi” (undergraduate student)

What follows are some of the statements written by participants. Because the evaluation forms were anonymous, it was not possible or appropriate to determine the identity or nature of the respondent.

“This is a unique program, enabling access to some of the best experts in the field of Punjab Studies. There is no other program in Indian or abroad which is able to offer both depth and breadth in coverage of topic areas. The programme also provides an excellent balance between academic study, exposure to varied Punjabi traditions and customs and travel to both religious and historical sites. I would regard this programme as a must for any young scholars thinking of embarking on any academic study in Sikh and Punjabi studies.”

“Overall, the program is a wonderful opportunity to learn from eminent scholars and put that knowledge into practice by traveling to and visiting the places we learn about.”

“As an undergraduate student I was so grateful for the opportunity to be a part of this program. Since this was my first time to India, I don’t think I could have imagined a more experienced or scholarly individual to initiate me into the various aspects of the country. The caliber of the people, places and lesson we were exposed to was on a level all its own.... I had an amazing time learning, traveling and meeting people. I don’t think that it has sunk in yet that I’ve done some of the things that I’ve done these past six weeks. Thank you, Prof. Mann, for developing such a unique program that manages to be packed with so much history and intellect yet so fun!”

“Program organization and execution was outstanding. It was an excellent introduction to the various aspects of Punjabi culture.... Overall, an excellent program.”

“Travel destinations were exclusive [unique opportunities], inspiring and relevant to the material at hand; lectures were intensive, informative and covered a wide range of issues and span of time.”

“This was an excellent chance to get an overview of the Punjab region. We covered a huge range of topics in a short time which made me more aware of the many research possibilities.... [T]he Summer Program was very well organized and well thought out! I was impressed by the level of the presenters—very knowledgeable. Gurinder Singh Mann is amazing: full of energy and enthusiasm. We were all looked after exceptionally well.”

“I will whole-heartedly recommend this program to graduates considering research in the Punjab.”

Areas for development or improvement

The participants offered a number of suggestions for improvements. Almost all of the comments related to the academic and programmatic elements of the program. There were very few, if any, comments on personal arrangements, such as lodging, food, or transportation. Some participants did comments on the strenuous nature of the program, such as the intensive heat and somewhat rugged travel requirements.

There needs to be more background on travel, prior to travel. Several of the participants, both graduate and undergraduate students spoke of the need for more extensive briefings prior to travel. As one participant stated, “We need to know what to observe.” As one undergraduate (with training in Asian studies) stated, “There was an assumption that we knew much more than we did.”

A number of the participants spoke highly of the post-visit and post-talk debriefing sessions. The summaries (by Prof Mann) after talks and visits were good, but too brief, said one graduate student. This was reinforced in the words of one participant, “One general suggestion would be for Professor Mann to play an increased role in our instruction.” Another graduate student urged more review sessions. For her, there was no regular method for “processing” of what they were learning. She urged more discussions and review.

A few of the participants made a very strong argument for “an overhaul of the website.” One person was concerned that references to the “discover your roots” theme made it more difficult to convince the person’s university to provide financial support.

Several participants commented on the problem of traveling in a conveyance of four-wheel drive vehicles. Those in Prof. Mann’s vehicle got the benefit of his observations, insights, and discussion. One participant offered a potential solution, “Walky-talkys (sic) between cars so any conversation regarding important observations can be shared immediately. This should not be hard or expensive.”

Here is a list of topics that participants suggested for inclusion or expansion:

- visit the Jain temple in Sector 28 and observe a Jain service;

- lecture on the Partition (several people mentioned this), perhaps with eyewitnesses or survivors;
- add a modern film (as a cultural activity), followed by a critique or discussion;
- more information on modern religious movements (e.g., Radha Soamis, Adi Darmis)
- add cooking class;
- add home stays (suggestion made by two of the undergraduates);
- “more attention should be paid to economic, labor, and other social issues, including politics”;
- add Punjabi sports;
- Prof. Mann presenting a lecture on the status of Punjab studies;

There were a number of suggestions regarding rearranging the scheduling of activities, including:

- include cross-border travel to Lahore, Pakistan, to see Pakistani Punjab;
- move dancing to the end (reduce by one day)

There were several suggestions of what to reduce or revise:

- the lecture on villages in the Punjab was highly theoretical and would have benefited by a follow-up visit to a proto-typical village to see the theory in practice; another person suggested, “a field-trip to a village and lecture there”;
- the literature lecture needed to be more current and relevant to the interests of the participants;
- library tours (undergraduate)

One of the students (an undergraduate with limited introduction to the language) in the basic Punjabi course gave a lot of thought to the program suggested homework assignments as well as quizzes on “key vocabulary.” “A dictionary of all vocab words throughout the 9 exercises would also have been extremely helpful.”

Several of the advanced language students commented on their desire for more advanced Punjabi language lessons. “I thought there would be more language, especially for advanced students,” said one graduate student.

A number of the participants commented on the varying levels of interest and engagement by the participants. Because the evaluator was the sponsor of three undergraduate students, the participants were asked directly if the presence of undergraduates detracted or hampered from the program. Every person responded that the issue of involvement and engagement was not based on a pattern of graduate versus undergraduate. In fact, the three undergraduate students from Principia College (none of whom were Indian, Punjabi, or Sikh studies majors) were considered among the most engaged and involved. Thus, engagement/non-engagement was not based on graduate level. It appeared, instead, to be based on area of interest—graduate students (for example) were not often engaged in subject matter outside their field of study. This raises the issue of how the director filters applicants for engagement (rather than area of study or education level). With regard to the different levels of student preparation and maturity (rather than commitment or engagement), one of the mature graduate students liked the diversity of the participants, especially the different levels of experience and variety of interests and training.

The varying levels of engagement were highlighted with the lecture on the environment. The lecture, using power point presentation, was packed with information. Some of the participants were drawn into the topic and were deeply engaged (including follow up conversations with the guest lecturer) while others seemed to tune out.

Evaluation Form

Each participant was asked to complete a short rating form with six items: elementary Punjabi language (PunjabiE), advanced Punjabi language (PunjabiA), history and geography (HistGeo), Culture, Travel, and General Organization (GenOrg). Each item could be rated on a four-point scale of average, good, excellent, or outstanding. The following chart provides a statistical summary of the results. Since almost all participants attended the elementary Punjabi language course, there were 18 responses. A smaller group of seven students provided information on the advanced Punjabi course. All responding participants provided ratings on the other four items.

As a quick glance at the chart indicates, the participants solidly and universally gave excellent ratings to general organization, travel, culture, and history & geography. The advanced Punjabi ratings were a little more spread, though the group generally rated the training as excellent. The participants rated the elementary Punjabi training as good.

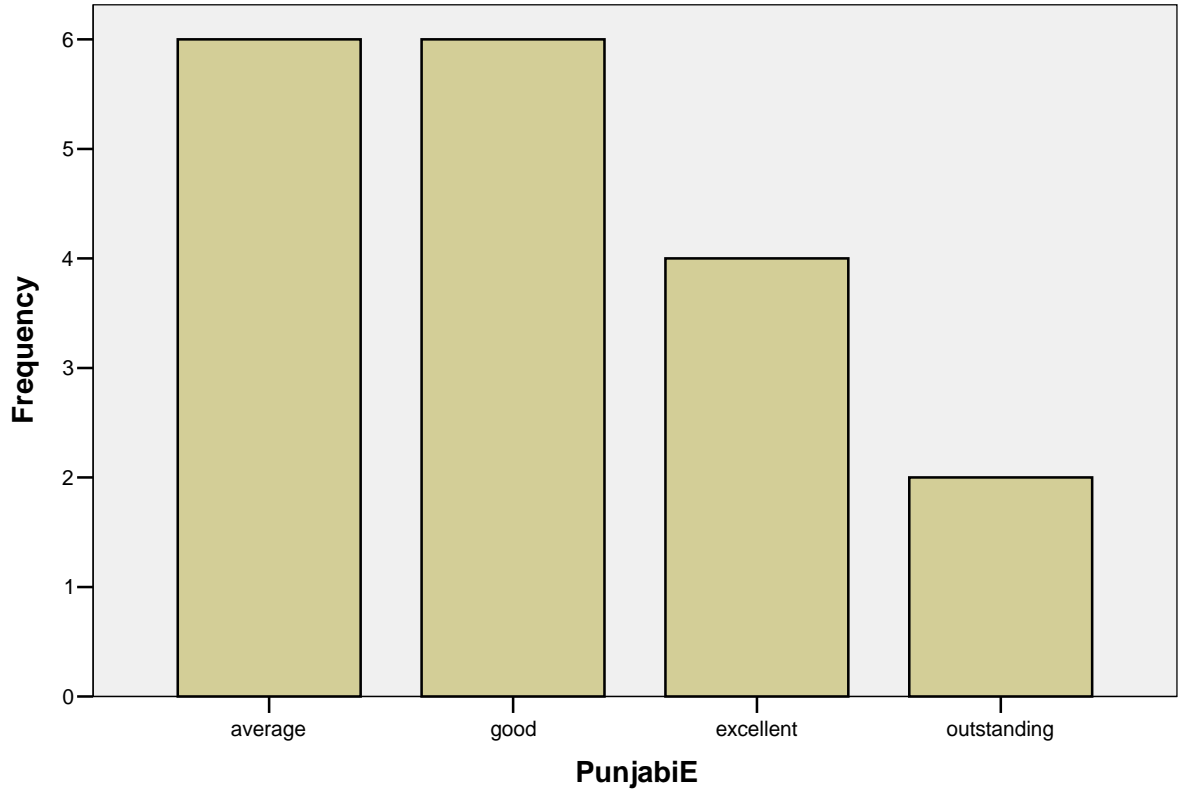
Statistics

		PunjabiE	PunjabiA	HistGeo	Culture	Travel	GenOrg
N	Valid	18	7	19	19	19	19
	Missing	1	12	0	0	0	0
Mean		2.1111	2.4286	3.1579	3.1053	3.1579	3.1053
Median		2.0000	3.0000	3.0000	3.0000	3.0000	3.0000
Mode		1.00 ^a	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
Std. Deviation		1.02262	1.13389	.76472	.93659	.60214	.87526

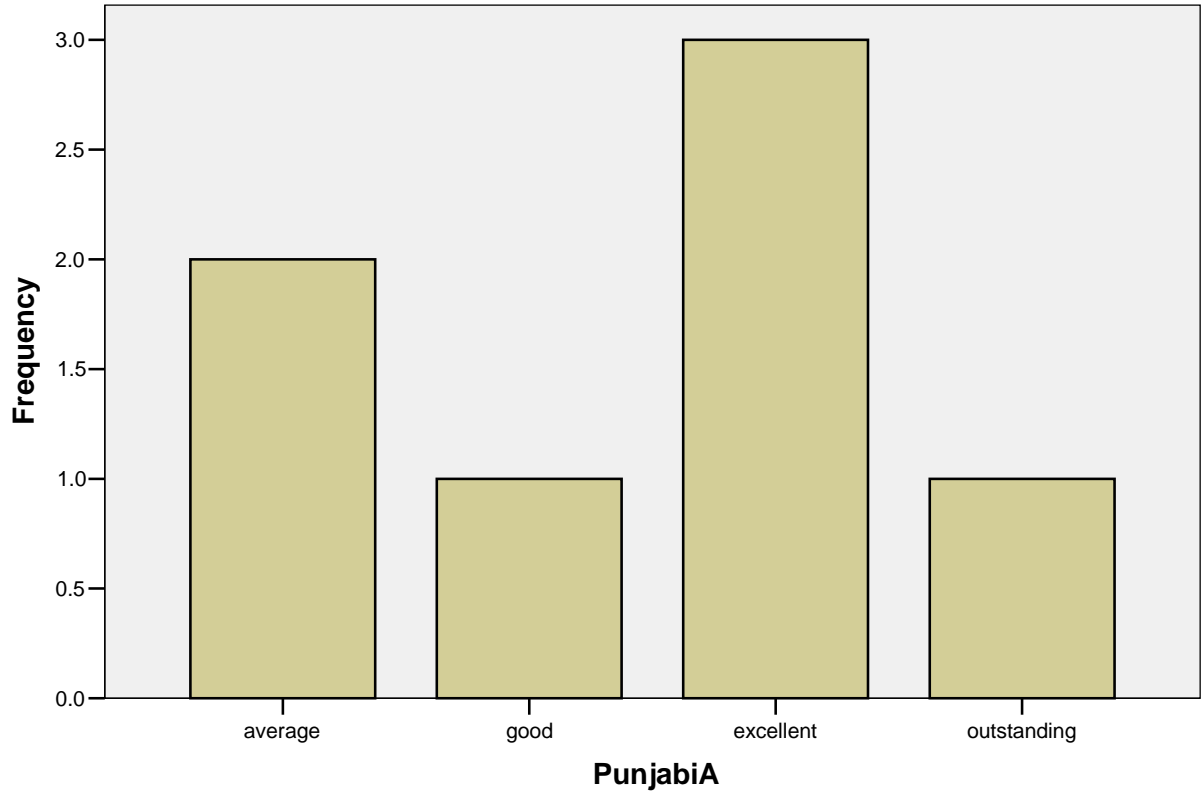
a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

The following graphs indicated the spread of actual ratings by item.

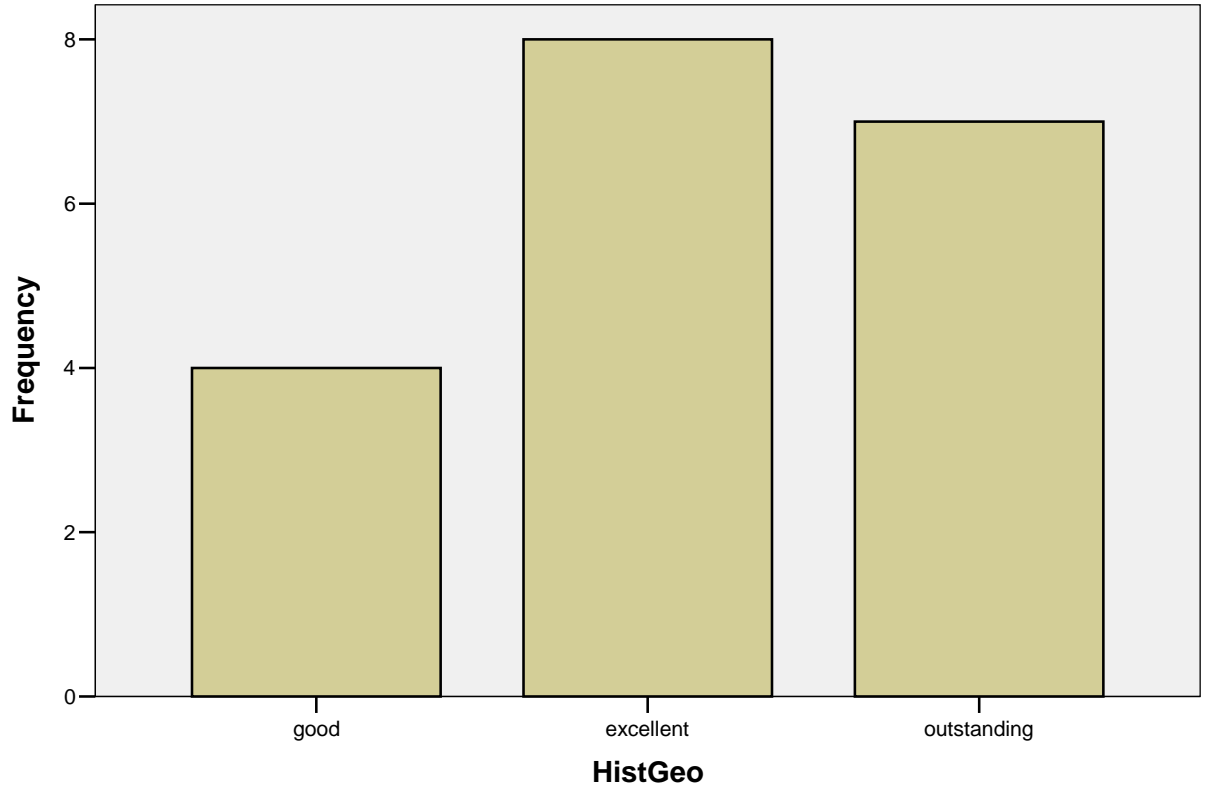
PunjabiE



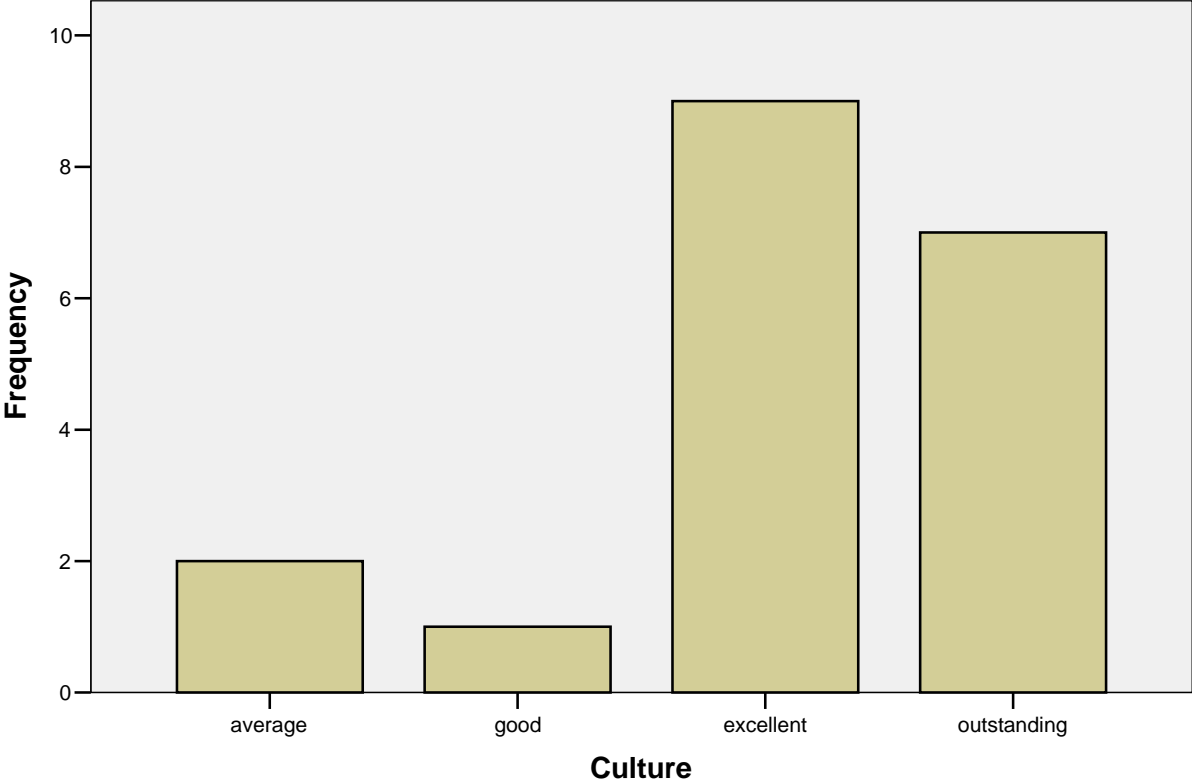
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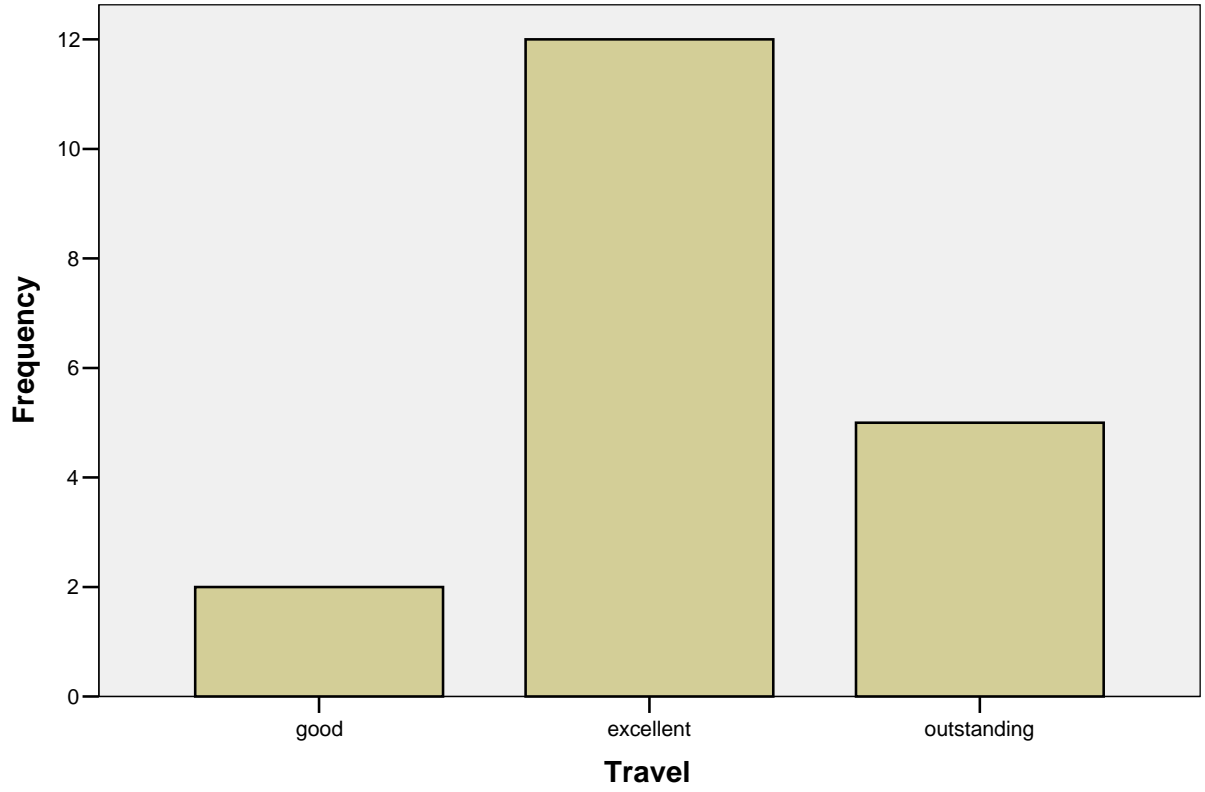
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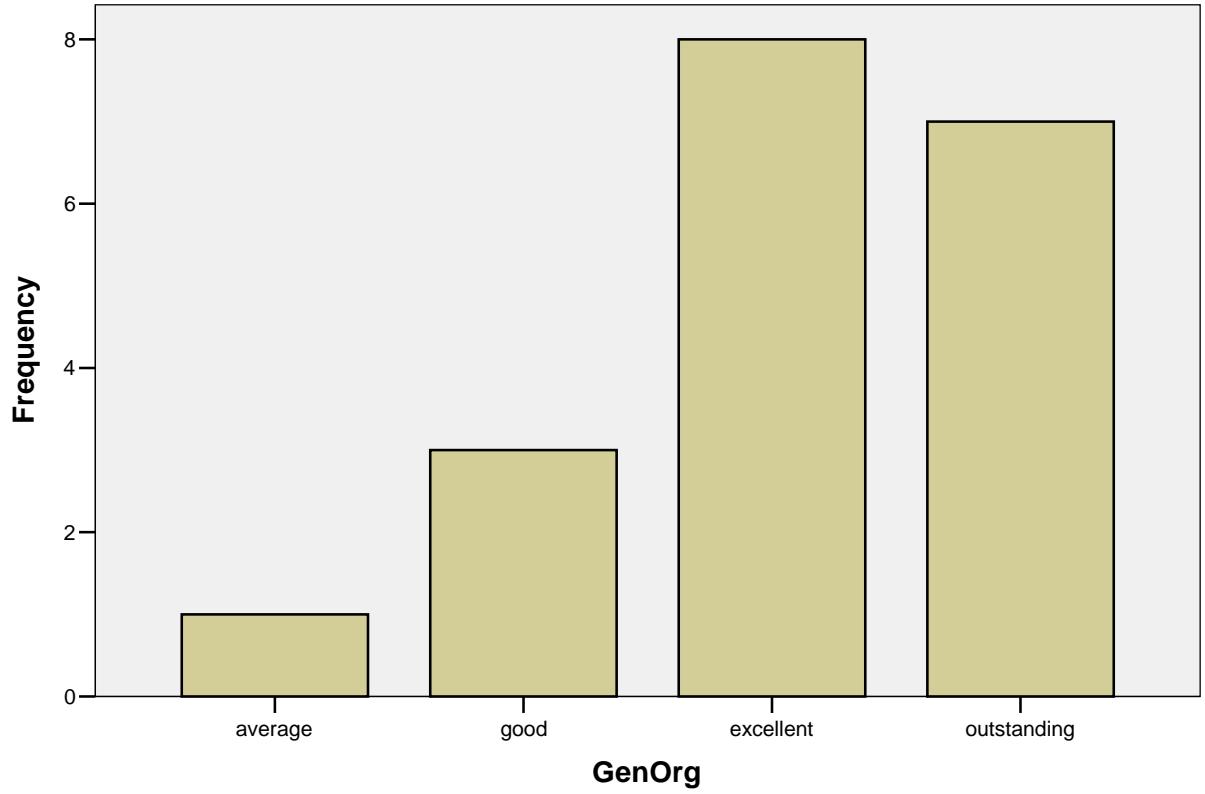
Culture



Travel



GenOrg



Conclusion

As comments, both written and through interviews indicate, the Ninth Summer Program in Punjab Studies was highly successful and very appreciated by the participants. Everyone noted that the most important element of the program was the character of its director, Dr. Gurinder Singh Mann. As the comments reveal, the participants were highly enthusiastic about Prof. Mann and the program.

Participants offered lots of suggestions for improvements. The suggestions fall into two general categories: individual activities to add or modify (the evaluator is aware from his discussions with the director that there is a longer list of “things to do differently”), and changes to be made in the elementary Punjabi course. What did not appear in the formal interviews or written comments as a solution, which several of the participants offered informally.

A number of the participants spoke to a concern that Prof. Mann and the other faculty were aware of—the inconsistent level of engagement and professional behavior of some of the participants. Based on observation and investigation, it appears that level of education (graduate versus undergraduate), experience with India, age, etc., were not the determining factors. Some of the least experienced and youngest participants were among the most engaged, whereas several of doctoral students (in this field) were not. Their lack of attachment was noted and commented on privately by other participants. This situation, which contributed to some interpersonal tensions and frustrations among those responsible for the program, may be unique to this year’s mix of participants. The evaluator, who administers undergraduate travel-study programs, acknowledges that personality situations arise on most programs. The demanding nature of programs can aggravate personal issues, too. As the participants noted, the unique mentoring and parenting skills of Prof. Mann helped gently confront these matters and guarantee the success of the program.

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