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## An evaluation to determine if there is a communication gap between campus auxiliary services and their student customers

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**AN EVALUATION TO DETERMINE IF  
THERE IS A COMMUNICATION GAP BETWEEN  
CAMPUS AUXILIARY SERVICES  
AND  
THEIR STUDENT CUSTOMERS**

**BY**

**Marylynne Crocker**

**A project submitted to the  
Faculty of the School of Food, Hotel and Travel Management  
at  
Rochester Institute of Technology  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree  
of Master of Science**

**August 1993**

**ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY**  
**School of Food, Hotel and Travel Management**  
**Department of Graduate Studies**

**M.S. Hospitality-Tourism Management**  
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Presentation of Thesis/Project Findings

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to find out what the student customers of Campus Auxiliary Services have as their perceptions of the services provided by the corporation, and also if there is a communication gap between the corporation and their student customers. The question of whether there is a gap between what the customers expect and what they receive was also studied. The population studied consisted of student customers, Resident Advisors, and the Salaried CAS/Dining Service employees.

A ten item perception questionnaire was given to CAS/Dining Service employees and also to the SUNY Geneseo Resident Advisors. A twenty two item perception questionnaire was distributed to eight hundred student customers of CAS, through the dining units at specified meal periods. The responses from the three groups surveyed were informative and covered a wide range of opinions. A SPSS, statistical package for the social sciences, was used for the analysis of the data provided by the student customers.

It became apparent from the written questionnaire responses and from the student surveys that the student customers of CAS/Dining Services have a negative perception of the corporation which is caused by a communication gap. The services provided by the corporation, and the purpose of the corporation are very unclear to the customers. The Resident Advisors, who are supported by CAS, and who function as a communication avenue between CAS and the student customers, are a key group of individuals who do not understand the corporation. Increasing communication between CAS and the Resident Advisors should become an immediate goal for CAS.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

How would you like to work for a corporation that provided many services to customers, that you thought were of high quality, but that the customer had negative feelings towards? Would you like to constantly be on the defensive and have to defend and explain what you do? Would you like to be criticized by potential customers who have never experienced your services? Would you like to be known as a "Rip Off Corporation"? Would you like to be the most popular topic for the campus marketing class and for the campus newspaper? Would you like to be criticized and misunderstood by your own employees? Would you like to be downgraded when compared to your competition, when in actuality your products and services are superior in quality? Of course your answers to these questions would be no.

Campus Auxiliary Services, a not-for-profit service corporation, at SUNY Geneseo, experiences these negative attitudes and perceptions frequently. The main function of the corporation is to provide quality services to student customers, through the Dining Services division. The corporation provides numerous and varied services for the students which include: contract feeding, catering, cable T.V., vending, bookstore, conferences, computer sales, a campus I.D. card system, support for Resident Advisors and other campus organizations, special funding, and accounting for Student Association and other on campus groups.

Current literature is plentiful on the topic of customer service, service excellence, empowering employees, total quality management, and on customer expectations. It all seems so easy when you read a book. Putting the literature suggestions into use and implementing change in an organization is a difficult task. The changes have to begin at the top of the organization. The customer must really become the most important person. If you are not serving the customer then you had better be serving someone who is, must be truly believed and practiced. Smile training alone isn't the answer.

What can we do? How can we do it? First we can go out and ask our customers what they want. We can find out what their expectations are. We can obtain their feedback. We can close the communication gap that leads to negative perceptions.

The problem of a negative image and a negative perception of services is extremely important to any business. A negative perception is easily communicated and passed on to new customers, adding to a vicious cycle. A customer's perception of service can be influenced either positively or negatively by peer comments and other environmental influences. A customer who has been told that service is good will not generally comment on a random incident when service isn't good. If a customer has been told that service is poor, they will view an incident of poor service as the general case. Student customers of CAS are frequently influenced by comments made by older students and written materials that are plentiful at SUNY Geneseo.

A review of the student newspapers at SUNY Geneseo over the past ten years indicate that the same comments, complaints, and student perceptions of the services provided by CAS exist today that existed in the past. At each Summer orientation session, when new Freshman and their parents come to campus, and during the Fall training sessions, for campus groups, the same misinformation and questions arise concerning CAS. When group question and answer sessions are held with CAS members and the student population, what usually starts out as a hostile and negative situation soon turns into an informative communication session as information is shared. An example of this situation occurred when CAS management members met with a group of students who were very concerned with vegetarian and low fat meal options. The group assumed that CAS would be uncooperative and difficult to communicate with which was not the case at all. An open forum was held between interested students and CAS. At the conclusion of the meeting a mutual respect and a good working relationship were established between the student customers and the CAS staff.

As the literature indicates, in order to have credibility with your customers, you have to know what their expectations are and you must meet them. Find out

what your customers want. It does not matter who is right or wrong in an exchange with a customer you must correct the negative perceptions that your customer has. A company has to think like a customer and must understand their customers.

The student customers at CAS are present for an average of four years. They are forced to buy a meal plan if they live on campus and therefore they must use the services of CAS. This fact in itself can lead to a negative perception of the corporation if the students don't understand why they must have a meal plan. CAS is a separate corporation from the rest of the campus, which is all State employees. Because of this we are considered to be outsiders. At this point CAS has not taken an active approach to marketing their services which may have contributed to a lack of communication and a negative perception of the company. CAS has not promoted the positive things that they do for the students and the campus, such as providing financial support for many programs and providing various services.

## **History**

CAS has been serving the Geneseo campus for 41 years. First organized under College President Herbert G. Espy and four other members of the campus community, the purpose of the Corporation was to "promote and cultivate educational and social relations among the students and faculty of the State University Teachers College, and to aid the students and faculty of the College in every way possible in their study, work, living and extracurricular activities." Over the past 41 years the purpose of the Corporation has remained unchanged, yet in order to keep pace with changing technology and customer needs, the style and type of services offered to the College community have changed dramatically. Total annual corporate revenue has changed from a few thousand dollars in 1951/52 to over seven million dollars at the end of the 1991-92 fiscal year.

The Corporation's ability to change and adapt to the College community's various needs has enhanced our success over the past 41 years. The management of the corporation and the Board of Directors work in harmony to identify these needs and subsequent solutions. Now that we are in our fifth decade, the support of the Corporation to the mission of the College is more important than ever. The



continued erosion of funding by the State of New York forces the College to seek other resources to fill the void. CAS is uniquely situated to assist the College during this challenging time in the fulfillment of its educational mission.

As a result of our successful long range plan and sincere dedication by all CAS employees, the Corporation is financially secure. CAS has the ability and creativity to undertake and fund new projects. An example of this was the ability to bring cable television to campus. More than 20 channels became available allowing the campus to post messages, see a daily listing of campus events, transmit educational programs to resident student rooms and view a variety of entertainment and news programs.

The opportunities and changes facing the Corporation over the next several years will be unique and challenging. The management of the Corporation understands our purpose and mission to the State University of New York at Geneseo. Through this spirit of understanding and commitment, the Corporation will expand as necessary to meet the needs of our customers and the campus and also live within the tenets of our original charter.

### **Mission**

The mission of Campus Auxiliary Services, Inc. at the State University of New York at Geneseo is to provide self supporting, responsive, diversified, creative and high quality services which complement the programs of the State University of New York at Geneseo and assist the Institution in achieving its mission.

### **Services**

Campus Auxiliary Services (CAS) is a not-for-profit corporation which has operated at the State University College at Geneseo since 1952. CAS is governed by a Board of Directors consisting of students, faculty and administrators. The Board determines budget and policies of the Corporation within the guidelines established by SUNY Central Administration. Dining Services is the largest division of CAS at Geneseo serving the diverse dietary needs of the campus community. CAS also

provides many other vital campus functions such as: catering, vending conference operations, campus bookstore and accounting services for the Student Association and other on-campus groups, in addition, CAS provides the only official campus I. D. card.

The Dining Service operations include Red Jacket Dining Hall, Letchworth Dining Hall, The MacVittie Union Station and the Hub Snack Bar. All facilities are fully staffed and equipped to provide the College community with dining services to meet a variety of dietary needs. Current nutritional needs issues are discussed in monthly information sheets and in the CAS Messenger, which are available in the dining units and in CAS offices.

It is a policy of the State University at Geneseo to require all campus residents to purchase one of four on-campus meal plans offered by CAS each semester. For the 1992-1993 academic year more than 3000 board contract customers are being served each semester. Additionally, more than 1500 students elect to purchase one of two meal programs geared to the off-campus students. It has always been an important objective of the Board of Directors and management to keep the cost of the minimum resident meal program as low as possible. In 1992-93 this cost was \$595.00 per semester. This is more than \$100 per semester lower than the cost of the average SUNY board contract.

Each student receives a campus identification card which is magnetically encoded with the Meal Plan of his or her choice. Meal Plans are based on a debit card system which allows students to eat at any dining facility during posted hours of operation.

Each dining hall offers different menus and monotony breakers designed to provide a variety of meal choices for students. Dining Services puts forth a collective effort with the planning, preparing and serving of thousands of meals daily for students, faculty and staff. In addition to the daily management of food services, the dining units also feature a variety of specialty entrees and innovative methods of meal presentation. For example, serving lines often feature a variety of ethnic entrees. Other dining specialties include a Waffle Bar, Make-Your-Own Sundae,

Pasta Night and many other programs that transform dining from a boring routine to an interesting and satisfying event. These activities will continue in the future and will constantly be improved upon to meet the changing dining needs of the campus community.

The Conference Office assists members of the College community and outside organizations in all phases of conference planning. One of the purposes of the conference program is to generate revenue for the Corporation and the College through the utilization of campus facilities during periods when these facilities are otherwise not used. The means of accomplishing this purpose include assisting faculty and staff in the development of programs, seminars, symposia and conferences. In addition, the Conference Office offers high quality services and facilities to outside organizations for fees designed to cover all direct and indirect costs. College facilities are made available for programs which are consistent with the educational purpose of the College.

Catering for college-related events is a service coordinated by the Dining Services Office. Catering services are provided for numerous cultural programs, receptions, faculty and staff events, and student activities at Geneseo. Some of the catered events that are held each year include; the Madrigal Dinner, Parent's Weekend, Alumni Weekend, and the Wadsworth Lecture Series. Student groups, such as fraternities, sororities, and departmental organizations are also provided with catered services.

One of the most prestigious events that CAS is proud to cater is the Geneseo foundation's Annual President's Recognition Dinner held in April. This special ceremony recognizes academic excellence, artistic talent and other student achievements with the presentation of scholarships and awards.

The Administrative Services division is responsible for providing the campus I.D. card for all faculty, staff, and students. In addition, Administrative Services monitors and services all campus meal plans, provides accounting services for a number of campus organizations, and coordinates all public relations between the Corporation and the College community. Internally, this division is responsible for

controlling the Corporation's financial activities.

The College Bookstore is operated by the Follett corporation, as a service to students, faculty, and staff, its policies are under the control and direction of Campus Auxiliary Services. The convenient location of this facility on the first level of the MacVittie College Union Building makes it a recognized source for textbooks, art and office supplies, trade books and college clothing and memorabilia. The Bookstore is also the source for commencement attire and class rings. Textbooks for courses at Geneseo (new and used) are sold at very competitive prices and bought back year round.

CAS provides a wide variety of vending services on campus. Vending machines are located in all campus buildings. Numerous items are sold in the vending machines, which include; candy, snacks, coffee, milk, soda, juices, sandwiches, and other popular items.

CAS is the largest employer of students on campus. Students may apply in any unit where they choose to work, work up to an average of twenty hours per week, or as little as four hours per week. Shifts are scheduled around the student's classes. No experience is required, training on each particular job is provided. By working for CAS a student gains; job experience, job skills, earn money, meet friends, have a say in the company, and learn management skills.

### Communication

Communication has always been an important goal of Campus Auxiliary Services and the Dining Service division of CAS. Numerous methods are currently being used to communicate with the student population at SUNY Geneseo. A detailed list of communication methods is included in Appendix V. These methods consist of: training sessions with R.A.'s, question and answer sessions with student groups, picnics, monthly meetings in each dormitory quad between dorm representatives and members of the CAS management team, and monthly student supervisor meetings. Written communications is provided through brochures, a CAS question and answer placemat, The Messenger, which is a company newspaper, an

employee newsletter, memos, signs, table tents, nutrition information sheets, suggestion boxes and written responses to the suggestions, and information tables, which are set out at Orientation and during registration. Students can also call the Dining Services office for information, make an appointment to talk to the Director of Dining Services or with a Dining Hall Manager, or meet with the Meal Modification Committee to discuss special dietary needs. CAS has also produced a videotape which outlines the services that the company provides and how they operate. This tape is used in training sessions and during the Summer Orientation program. The most vital communication method that CAS has is the Dining Service employees who work in the service areas and interact with the customers.

Although the current communication methods used by Dining Services are extensive they may not be what is needed to reach our student customers. It is important to find the most effective communication methods to use or there will be a service gap between what is expected and what is delivered and negative perceptions could be formed.

The corporation faces the difficult task of answering many questions surrounding negative customer perceptions of their services. The questions will be answered by this research project. The questions are: Where did our student customers obtain their negative perceptions? What are the expectations of our student customers? How did they obtain such expectations? Where does CAS need to begin in order to change the student customer's perceptions and to fill their expectations? How realistic are their expectations? How big is the gap between the expectations of the student customers and the actual performance that they receive.

## **Problem Statement**

The Food Service industry specifically and the Service industry in general are experiencing numerous and severe problems. For example there is a lack of motivated and skilled labor to produce essential services that customer's demand. The numerous problems can lead to service gaps, image problems, poor service, and perception problems. Dining Services at SUNY Geneseo experiences many of the

problems that are inherent to the Food Service Industry. They are able to compensate for some of their problems by cross training employees and by adjusting their systems as customer demands change. The problem that Dining Services faces, that this study attempted to solve, is that the student customers have a negative perception of the corporation and of the service that they provide. These perceptions are believed to be caused by a communication gap.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to find out what the student customers of CAS have as their current perceptions of Dining Services and what they expect CAS to be. Is there a gap between what customers expect and what they receive? Is CAS fulfilling their customer's expectations? Are they communicating effectively with their student customers?

## **Significance**

As the business becomes more focused on customer service and putting both the internal and external customers first this study becomes increasingly important. A very real problem does exist on the SUNY Geneseo campus. CAS spends a lot of man hours and dollars providing services that are perceived in a negative way. A change is needed. This study will designate the changes that can and need to be made in order to change the perceptions of the customers. Any negative comments about a part of the college affect the entire college, therefore the study has significance for the entire campus.

The study will highlight the importance of the customer and quality service to the customer. It will also touch on the importance of service recovery and customer perceptions. How do the champions provide service? How can we do it right the first time? How do we give the value that the customer expects for their money? What are the customer's true needs? The above are very significant questions that must be answered by CAS. If and when CAS answers the questions and implements the changes then the entire campus will benefit. Perhaps other

campus departments will follow the example set by CAS and increase customer service in all divisions. The study may also provide other service corporations with insight as to how they can also change their customer's perceptions and increase their communication.

## **Hypothesis**

This study will show that the student customers of Campus Auxiliary Services at SUNY Geneseo have a negative perception of the corporation which is caused by a communication gap. When the secondary research is completed and the primary data has been collected and analyzed, the results will indicate that the problem that CAS has is caused by a lack of communication.

## **Scope and Limitations**

This study was limited to student customers at SUNY Geneseo. It did not take into account the perceptions and expectations of the faculty, staff and external catering customers who verbally and by attitude may influence the thoughts of the students.

Customer's as well as employees have preconceived notions about how something should be, even before they experience it. Some of these thoughts that could have influenced the data collected were: people deserve value for their money, image and what peers value is important, the customer is always right, quality is a given, a service should be free.

The study was affected by the participants who were selected. Just the fact that they were asked to participate may have caused them to answer the questions in a positive manner or they may have used it as an avenue to voice all of their personal frustrations. The study focussed attention on the customer immediately and that usually makes the customer feel important. The goal of the study was to find out what the student customer's current perceptions of Dining Services are and what they expect CAS to be. While conducting the research, more information about

what the customer wants out of Dining Services was discovered then can be implemented and changed at one time. In the analysis of the data, it will be determined if a communication gap exists and if CAS is fulfilling the expectations of their student customers.

## **Definition of Terms**

Several of the terms that are used in customer service research need to be defined for this research paper to be easily understood. They are:

1. Cycle of service -

A cycle of service is a complete sequence of events that the customer experiences in getting his or her needs met. It starts with the first moment of truth and continues through a series of related moments of truth until the customer is satisfied with the result and is willing to come back and try the service again, (Albrecht, 1992).

2. Customer report card -

A customer report card is a structured presentation of the criteria for service excellence, it interrelates three kinds of information: the key quality attributes, the relative desirability of each attribute, and the company's score on the attributes, (Albrecht, 1988).

3. A research model -

A research model is a list of key topics you want to inquire about. The key topics include opinions or preferences about the key attributes of the service you are selling, and includes demographic information on the customer, (Albrecht, 1988).

4. Benchmarking -

A continuous, systematic, process for evaluation of the products, services, and work processes, of organizations that are recognized as representing best practices, for the purpose of organizational improvement, (Camp, 1989).



5. Serv-qual -

Serv-qual is a concise multiple item scale with good reliability and validity that companies can use to better understand the service expectations and perceptions of their customers, (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry, 1990).

6. Breakthrough service -

Breakthrough service makes complex services seem simpler, helps build customer self-confidence, and in the process achieve a level of reliability that helps insure that expectations, regarding both service quality and cost are met.

7. Service recovery -

Service recovery is responding to a mistake in service. To elicit a response from a dissatisfied customer.

8. Moment of truth -

Any episode in which the customer comes into contact with any aspect of the organization and gets an impression of the quality of its service, (Albrecht, 1988).

9. Delivery system -

The service delivery system is conceived as an opportunity to enhance and control the quality of results achieved for customers, (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry, 1990).

10. Guarantees -

A guarantee offers customers important assurances about risks generally associated with a product or service. It includes a clear objective standard.

11. Positioning -

All of a firms' resources are devoted to and designed around the competitive position that the firm seeks in a customers' mind. To establish a place in and a share of a customer's mind.

12. Service culture -

Service culture is one that influences people to behave and relate in service

oriented ways, or in customer first ways, (Albrecht, 1988).

13. Paradigm -

A paradigm is the way in which we view the world. A mental frame of reference that dominates the way people think and act, (Albrecht, 1992).

14. Empower -

To push decision making power down other lowest levels of the company. Granting contact personnel the authority to make important decisions about serving customers, (Block, 1987).

15. Service leadership -

Service leadership is service to the customers, service to the employees, service to the organization.

16. Total quality service -

Total quality service is a state of affairs in which an organization delivers superior value to its' stakeholders , its' customers, its' owners, and its' employees, (Albrecht, 1992).

17. Continuous improvement -

Continuous improvement is a journey that never ends, it involves a fundamental shift of mind, involves a team effort, requires a commitment to continuous learning, and requires system thinking.

18. The quality axiom -

The quality axiom states that doing things well usually costs less than doing them poorly, (Albrecht, 1992).

19. Focus Group-

A focus group consists of a discussion about a topic of particular interest to a client organization among eight to ten people led by a trained moderator, (Greenbaum, 1988).

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Topics that were reviewed included: customer service, service expectations, communication gaps, problem solving, delivering quality service, service management, listening to customers, customer feedback, customer attitudes and surveys, total quality management, focus groups, bench marking and empowering employees. The topics were chosen because they relate directly to the situation and problems that are occurring within the Dining Service division of Campus Auxiliary Services, (CAS). The information contained in the resources assisted in understanding and interpreting the problems that are occurring in the Dining Services division of Campus Auxiliary Services.

#### Student Newspapers

A review of the student newspaper "The Lamron", for the past several years indicates that CAS/Dining Services has always occupied a controversial position in the eyes of the student customers. In April of 1990 CAS was accused of being religiously biased because they did not provide enough choices during The Celebration Of Passover. The following year, 1990-1991, studies were conducted by several separate student groups in an attempt to prove that CAS was "ripping off the students". The conclusion of one of the studies was printed in the student newspaper in April of 1991. The study was conducted by the president of the SUNY Geneseo Student Association. The conclusion was that CAS is not ripping off the students. In May of 1992 an article was written about the role that CAS should play on campus. Many students felt that CAS was gaining too much control of services on campus. The question was, should a private corporation have the power to control so many positions and therefore, decisions on the campus of a public university?

CAS was commended in April of 1992 for their cooperation and the support given to the World Hunger Task Force efforts that student groups were involved in. In September of 1992 a concerned student spoke about the problem of theft in the dining units which leads to inconvenience and increased costs for CAS and in turn for student customers. CAS is frequently the subject of the roving reporter and

cartoonists in the school paper. In October of 1992, CAS was featured in a Lampoon article on the top ten things overheard in CAS kitchens.

In November of 1992 CAS participated in an open forum with the members of the CARE group and other students who were interested in having food questions answered by the Dining Services management team. Articles were published in the newspaper in November and December, thanking CAS for their efforts and for the changes that were made. The forum initiated many positive changes for students interested in vegetarianism and low-fat, healthy eating.

Every year when the CAS budget is prepared for the following year, proposed changes in CAS operations are shared with the student customers. The proposed changes for the Fall of 1993 were mentioned in an article written in February of 1993. The article became controversial as information was incorrectly stated. An editorial was featured in the paper in February of 1993 titled "CAS screws the students, again". This article was prompted by misinformation printed in the previous article. The campus underground paper, THE GENESEO REVIEW, also featured a lengthy article in March of 1993, which was very negative towards CAS and based on total misinformation .

The student newspaper continues to exemplify the problem of a lack of communication and of factual information about the corporation and Dining Services being known by student customers. The final article to be included in this paper, was written in March of 1993, by a student member of the CAS Board Of Directors, who is also a member of the SUNY Geneseo Student Association. The article gave facts and attempted to point out the positive aspects of CAS.

Other SUNY food service departments have been experiencing the same negative perceptions that CAS/Dining Services has. The General Managers of the Auxiliary corporations within the SUNY system developed a survey that can be administered to student customers which will fairly evaluate the food service departments and give an accurate comparison between campus'. SUNY Albany experienced criticism in late August of 1992 in a national newspaper because of a biased survey that was done comparing food service departments on different

campuses. The article appeared in USA today and was titled "Dorm food, flunking the taste test".

### Training Materials

Employee training materials produced by the Marriott corporation, the Myers Rue Training and consulting firm and the Disney Corporation were studied and used. The materials stressed the importance of the six step problem solving method and the TQM improvement process used by Marriott. Other important points made in the Marriott information were; the customer is the reason for our existence, quality is meeting or exceeding your customer's expectations and requirements. Doing your best is not good enough. You have to know what to do, then do your best. Continuous improvement is a journey that never ends, it involves a fundamental shift of mind, it involves learning, and it requires system thinking. Obstacles to creativity are; criticism, lack of goals, meaningless work, people or processes that are too comfortable, and survival goals. Marriott also stresses that to make changes you need a breakthrough in attitude. You must challenge the historical standard, have a breakthrough in knowledge. Reach new levels of knowledge, have a breakthrough in cultural patterns, deal with resistance to change, and have a breakthrough in results. Implement new methods and verify the results.

The materials produced by the Myers Rue Corporation emphasized the customer focused organization and the service triangle. Interpersonal skills and leadership were discussed as well as having vision, and the importance of active listening. Creative problem solving, gaining a commitment to excellence, teams, and guidelines for effectiveness were also reviewed. Measuring performance and customer perceptions were discussed in detail. Measurements of reliability, assurance, empathy, responsiveness and tangibles were outlined. Communicating results to individuals was highly stressed. Questions such as what systems block service were asked.

The Disney Corporation emphasizes the importance of the internal as well as the external customer. They see the importance of every moment of truth for their customers. Atmosphere and cleanliness are stressed. The Disney culture is present

everywhere, it affects and is affected by every thing that occurs in the organization. The Disney Corporation has a mission, they know who their customers are, what their customer's expectations are and they know what business they are in.

### **Journal Articles**

Numerous journal articles and publications were reviewed. The publications discussed topics such as; the fifteen keys of customer satisfaction, customer satisfaction surveys, listening skills and the importance of listening to customers and employees, giving power and decision making ability to employees, doing whatever is necessary to take care of the customer, the importance of training, and opening channels of communication with employees, enhanced service and the fact that it does not have to cost more, the importance of service recovery, and how to implement a service recovery program in your operation. They also talked about total quality management, how it is being used in different organizations, and that it is about constantly improving and innovating. Points that were consistently repeated in the sources were; treat the customer as you would like to be treated, learn from other industries, ask the customer what they want, meet your customer's expectations, people purchase goods and services for two reasons, one to solve problems and the other to feel good. Performance follows expectations. If you expect little of your employees in the way of service, that is what you will get. People who believe they can and should deliver "excellent" service will deliver excellent service. Several articles touched on this important aspect of customer service; successful companies know that customers form an impression of them on the basis of each encounter with their employees. These companies treat every customer contact as a moment of truth, a time when a careless word or a bad attitude can ruin a relationship with a customer forever.

### **Book Review**

In the books reviewed the authors discussed many diverse customer service topics such as; focus groups, benchmarking, surveys, interviewing, serv-qual, customer report cards, continuous improvement, moments of truth, the importance of employees, paradigms, service recovery, and how to treat customers and employ-

ees. In the focus group resources, it was stated that the basic philosophy behind focus groups and their methods is that the dynamics of the group process will lead to the generation of many diverse and useable ideas. In the bench marking process competitive intelligence is gathered and used. It was pointed out that bench marking involves thinking out of the box. This process identifies the best practices available, that can be used by an organization.

The resources by Willingham (1992), Schonberger (1990), Rosenblath (1992), Sewell (1990), and Brown (1990), emphasized the treatment of the customer. They mentioned the following important points; quality is what attracts, delights, and holds customer loyalty. The time of service is important, it is important to recognize that other people's perceptions will differ from our own, service is an attitude, a skill, and a process. To provide service you must have happiness in the work place. Service guarantees force companies and their customers to look closely at their accuracy rates. Mistakes can promote learning and change if we use them as steps to improvement. People should not have to settle for less than outstanding service. Leaders must practice what they preach. Each and every encounter between a customer and a client holds the ability to enhance or diminish the company's standing. Follow the ideas that you believe in no matter how absurd they might seem to the outside world. Before you can provide better customer service you must determine how good you want to be. Ask your customers what they want and then find the right systems to provide the service. Your customers will tell you how to provide good service. It is best to under promise and to over deliver. If a customer asks for something say yes, and then find a way to do what they want. Doing a good job consists of doing the job right the first time, and having a plan in place to deal with things when they go wrong. Effective service recovery is important. Customers want organizations to look good, to be responsive, to be reassuring, to be empathetic, and most importantly to be reliable. They want you to do what you say you are going to do. If something goes wrong apologize and fix the problem.

Some important questions to ask yourself when providing the right service are: do you know what the benefit to your customer will be? Will your customer understand the benefit? How will this service affect your employees? How will it affect your existing systems? Is anyone else providing the same service success-

fully? What can you learn from their experience? What could go wrong? Will the service give you an advantage over your competitors? How much will it cost? Can you evaluate what you will be doing? Make sure that you have the best people working for you and never stop raising your performance standards.

Important considerations mentioned by the authors Willingham (1992), Covey (1998), and Peters (1988), were; if you want your customers to be treated right you have to treat your employees right, remember if you are not serving the customer, then you had better be serving someone who is. A customer is the most important person, whether in person or on the phone, they are the reason for our work. Follow the customer satisfaction system. Greet customers, value customers, ask how to help them, listen to them, help them, and then invite them back. And avoid the seven sins of customer service which are: apathy, brushing off people, coldness, condescension, robotism, the rule book, and the runaround.

According to Willingham (1992), when solving problems, first understand the problem, then identify the causes of the problem, discuss the possible solutions, suggest options, ask for ideas, agree on the best course of action, then solve the problem. Remember that a problem is the difference between what we want to happen and what actually happens. Try to understand problems from the other person's view point.

The resources on TQM stated that it is a business philosophy that uses tools to guarantee customer satisfaction. Some of the tools consist of doing things right the first time, involving employees in decision making and in making improvements. TQM involves the people who will be using the system in the beginning of the project when designing or making changes. It means continuously improving products and services., and using good leadership techniques.

The authors Albrecht (1985), Zemke (1989), and Schaaf (1989), Bowen, Chase, and Brown (1990), discussed service in general. They stressed the following points; ask yourself how can we improve what we already do, there is no point in doing something if it is not what the customer wants, and the measure of quality equals actual service minus expected service.



No matter who is right or wrong you have to correct the perception.

Drucker (1992), Carlzon (1987), and Peters (1988), stressed leadership. They stated that you must trust the people who you work with. Establishing service standards starts with good leadership. A top leader must communicate with employees, impart the company vision and listen to the needs of the employees. There is often a gap between what an organization believes about how it is treating its customers, and what the customers believe. Every dissatisfied customer will complain to at least ten other people. When discussing moments of truth it is important to know that a moment of truth occurs whenever a customer comes into contact with any aspect of your company. The moment of truth forms the customer's opinion of the entire company. You can control these moments of truth that the customer has. Good service will enhance not hinder your bottom line. Good service brings repeat customers. Service quality is when your customers perception of your service exceed their expectations. Good service is much more than a smile and a handshake.

Your people who deliver service must be competent, responsive, well trained, and courteous. A company must provide its employees with the training, tools and equipment, and the supervision that would result in the production of credible and reliable service. Disgruntled employees can hurt your organization. In order to be thought of as an excellent service organization by customers, the company must treat its employees the way it wants its customers to be treated. When employees view an organization favorably customers do also. Service is total dedication to anticipating and meeting client needs. All parts of the organization need to function and interact. Personalized customer service should include, identifying true customer needs, satisfying the customers basic needs, and satisfying them at the customer's convenience. The customers perceptions of service quality result from a comparison of customer expectations with actual service performance. A customer's expectations can be established by advertising, previous personal experience, conversations with other users of the service, their culture, and other areas that they have been exposed to. When a companies image improves their performance tends to improve. When you criticize, criticize the performance not the performer. A sincere compliment is one of the most effective teaching and

motivational methods in existence. Success occurs when opportunity meets preparation. If you want to be successful as a company you must work towards your objectives everyday. If you can not deliver quality do not advertise quality. Your front line employees are the ones who can make or break the customer's perception of quality and their moments of truth. Companies who put the customer as a priority think about customers and evaluate their perceptions.

The information on customer perception research provided by Albrecht (1985), Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry (1990), made many important points. The customer's entire experience determines his or her perception of quality. That perception is affected by the organization's product, processes, and practices as they compare to what the customer expects. Quality is the measure of the customer's satisfaction with the entire experience. Customer perception research is conducted to identify the characteristics of the service product that are most critical to its acceptance by customers and to separate traits that can form the basis for successful differentiation of your service products from others in the market. Customer perception research attempts to understand the expectations, thoughts, and feelings of the individual customer toward the service product and service providers. It helps to point out the more critical factors in the perception of the total experience. The resources talked about the five possible service gaps that can occur. The gaps are: gap (1) customer expectations are different from the managers perceptions of the customer's expectations, gap (2) the management's perceptions of what the customer expects and the service quality specifications are different, gap (3) the service quality specifications are different from the service delivery, gap (4) the service delivery is different from the external communications to the customer, gap (5) the external communications to the customer is different from the service quality, the expected service and the perceived service.

All of the secondary resources studied provided valuable material that increased the level of understanding of customer service and what changes need to be made in Dining Services and their treatment of customers.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Student Customer Sample**

The population for the research were students attending SUNY Geneseo during the Spring 1993 academic year, who had a meal plan or who paid cash in CAS dining units. The students lived both on and off campus. They had been meal plan holders for at least one term. The sample consisted of one hundred ninety three students who were randomly chosen.

#### **Student Customer Measurement Instrument**

A questionnaire consisting of twenty two perception questions was distributed by CAS food service managers on two consecutive days in four dining units. A total of eight hundred questionnaires, two hundred per unit were given out. The forms were given to every tenth customer during each meal period. The Union Station Snack Bar was surveyed on Monday March 8, 1993 at breakfast and lunch. The Hub Snack Bar on Monday March 8, 1993 during lunch and dinner. Letchworth dining hall on Monday March 8, 1993 at late night snacks and on Tuesday March 9, 1993 at the food court. Red Jacket was surveyed on Tuesday March 9, 1993 at lunch and dinner. When a completed questionnaire was returned the customer was given a coupon for a free small soda. The questionnaires were collected through Friday March 12, 1993. Current student customer perceptions of Dining Services and their expectations were measured. The questionnaire consisted of twenty two statements, which were rated on a scale of 1 strongly disagree to 7 strongly agree. The questionnaire is included in Appendix A.

#### **Resident Advisor and Employee Samples**

Customer perceptions and expectations were also measured by using two different customer groups. The first group consisted of salaried management people from CAS/Dining Services. The second group consisted of Resident Advisors who had been students at SUNY Geneseo for at least one year. Both groups

answered written questions concerning customer expectations and perceptions of Dining Services. The questionnaires concentrated on measuring the following areas of service: 1. reliability, the ability to provide what was promised, dependably and accurately. 2. Assurance, the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey thrust and confidence. 3. Empathy, the degree of caring and individual attention provided to customers. 4. Responsiveness, the willingness to help customers and to provide prompt service, and 5. Tangibles, the physical facilities and equipment and the appearance of the personnel. The questionnaires are included in Appendix B and C.

## **Data Collection**

The Resident Advisor questionnaires were distributed , during the week of February 22, 1993, by the Resident Director of each dorm during a mandatory weekly meeting that was held with the Resident Advisors. The Assistant Director of Residence Life made sure that the questionnaires were distributed to the Resident Advisors. One hundred and twenty five forms were distributed and 107 were returned.

The questionnaires were given to the Dining Services salaried employees at the weekly staff meeting on Tuesday February 16, 1993. Eighteen questionnaires were given and thirteen were returned. The salaried employees consisted of eleven managers and two office workers. The salaried employees filled out the forms during the week that they were distributed and returned them to me personally on or before Tuesday February 23, 1993.

The questions were asked to find out, what the student customers of CAS/ Dining Services have as their current perceptions, and what they expect CAS/ Dining Services to be. Is there a gap between what customers expect from CAS/ Dining Services and what they receive? Is CAS/Dining Services fulfilling their customer's expectations: Is CAS/Dining Services communicating effectively with their student customers? What does CAS/Dining Services need to change and where do they need to make improvements? What can be done to change the perceptions that the student customers have of CAS/Dining Services?

## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The answers that were given by the salaried Dining Services employees were very interesting and helpful. To the question do you feel that student customers of Dining Services have a negative or a positive perception of Dining Services some answered positively and some negatively. They felt that the image was more positive when managers were present on the serving lines and communicating with the customers. They also stated that negative comments about food service are the “in” thing to do. Other comments that were made included; customers have a positive perception of individuals in Dining Services but a negative perception of the company as a whole, there are some pockets of dissatisfaction, personal contact leads to a positive perception by students, some feel we can’t do anything right, we are easy targets for criticism, and they felt that one meal that is not up to expectations can ruin the image of the company.

The question of where do our student customers get their perceptions of Dining Services was answered with the following thoughts; from talking to a dissatisfied customer, from a poor attitude, from first hand experience and from contact with employees, from what they see and hear when in a dining unit, from other students, newspaper articles, food quality, food presentation, from the atmosphere of the building, from horror stories that have been passed on, and from their own experiences.

#### **Salaried Employees**

The perceptions that the students have of Dining Services according to the salaried employees are; that the prices are too high and that they don’t get value for their money, that CAS is not consistent in pricing and quality, that the food is greasy, that CAS is responsible for everything on campus and that CAS overcharges because of their monopoly. They also think that CAS has a captive audience, that Dining Services is ripping them off, that CAS is inflexible, that the food is not like at home, CAS doesn’t care, and they feel they should get larger portions, more for their money

and that CAS should be more accommodating to them.

The question of where does Dining Services need to begin in order to change the student customers' perceptions was answered in the following manner; students need to work for us to understand us, more advertisement about what we do and why, be consistent in price and quality, educate all employees in customer service, managers need to interact with the customers more frequently, keep the mystery out of what we do, let the customers know about the company, and provide quality at a fair price. Other ideas were to; compare our prices and services to other schools for the customers, put hourly employees on the serving lines, provide more customer oriented service and advertising, and begin with friendly, courteous service, and consistency in our food quality.

The expectations that the employees think that the student customers have of Dining Services are; that we are here to serve them, they expect good service, quality food, that special requests can be fulfilled, cleanliness, good presentation, healthy food, reasonable prices, that we will change with the times, pleasant efficient service, continuous choice, food that is at the proper temperature, to be treated as individuals, fast service, they want everything, that we won't make any mistakes and that if we do we will fix the problem. They also want, to be treated with care, to have a menu with a wide variety of products, lower cost food, and that we will always have what we say we will have.

The salaried employees thought that the expectations were basically very realistic. They also made the following comments; we would not be here without the customers, we are here to serve them, we should meet their expectations, their pricing expectations are unrealistic, their expectations are the minimum levels of service that we should provide, and why should we bother if we can't do it right and do it to the satisfaction of our customers.

The answers to the question is there a gap between what customers expect and what they receive were mixed, some thought there is a gap and some don't think there is a gap. The answers given were; sometimes when we slide we ruin our reputation, pricing, variety, and consistency are problems, if there is a gap it is

corrected immediately, there is not a gap when everyone works to their capacity, it is getting better but student expectations are also increasing, and there will always be some students who are dissatisfied, but overall Dining Services meets their needs.

Are the communication methods used by CAS for student customers adequate was answered in a variety of ways although most said the methods are adequate. The thoughts stated were; no matter what we do some people will be aware but the majority will not be, we need more daily interactions between managers and customers, dorm presentations are useful, more verbal communication is needed, meetings with groups would help to eliminate the communication gap, we need to be visible, we need to advertise more, and all departments need to treat students as people.

The suggestions for how can the communication methods can be improved were; give the customers an opportunity to talk to the employees, have employees on the serving lines, keep using written materials, have more meetings with student groups, use cable T.V. for communication. Ask customers specific questions, show more flexibility when dealing with students, listen to students instead of stating policy, and educate our student workers so that they can answer questions about the food.

The services that students want that Dining Services is not yet providing for the customers are; longer serving hours, more self serve items, more window type service, a convenience store, late night hours on weekends, more nutrition information, bulk food, better service, lower prices, more vegetarian foods, more gourmet foods, more options to spend their meal plan dollars on, a change machine, a larger gathering room, and all you can eat dining. One employee made the significant statement that maybe the question isn't what new services do they want. Maybe we should ask what do we have to do to perfect and enhance the services that we currently have.

## **Resident Advisors**

The results of the questionnaires given to the Resident Advisors were varied and informative. Many of the questionnaires were incomplete or the answers given did not pertain to the question. The percentages used in interpreting the data are based on the number of participants that gave the same response out of 107 participants. Many participants gave more than one answer, and many did not answer all the questions. The questions and responses are indicated in the tables that follow.

The Resident Advisors felt that students generally have a negative perception of Dining Services. They indicated that students form their perceptions of Dining Services for many different reasons. A high percentage of customers form their perceptions from their own experiences with the services provided. The top three negative perception that the students have of Dining Services are that prices are too high, that the food quality is poor and that the food is greasy.

In order to change the student customer's perceptions, Dining Services must concentrate their time and effort on improving the quality of the food served. Add more variety to the menus, and lower the prices that are charged.

Other comments made were that the food is not real, it is not like my mom's and the lines are too long.



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TABLE 1.

Do You Feel that Student Customers of Dining Services Have a Negative  
or a Positive Perception of Dining Services?

Negative response	70%
Undecided	20%
Positive response	10%

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TABLE 2.

**Where Do Our Student Customers Get Their Perceptions  
of Dining Services?**

First hand experience	75%
Peers	15%
High prices formed perceptions	14%
Upper classmen	7%
Comparing service to other schools	4%
Lack of selection	4%
Jokes	2%
CAS employees	2%
Rumors	2%
Presentation	2%
Negative talk	2%
Perception from high school	1%
Comparison to restaurants	1%

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TABLE 3.

What Are the Perceptions That Students Have of Dining Services?

Prices are to high	40%
Food is of poor quality	27%
Food is greasy	20%
Lack of variety	18%
To much fried food	14%
Food is to fattening	6%
Food is cold	4%
Food not cooked properly	3%
Company is out to get money	2%
Lines are slow	2%
Not what the individual wants	2%

Other comments made were that the food is not real, it is not like my mom's and the lines are to long.

---

TABLE 4.

Where Does Dining Services Need to Begin in Order to Change the  
Student Customers' Perceptions?

Quality of food must improve	18%
Add variety	18%
Lower prices	15%
Healthier food choices	13%
Ask customers what they want	3%
Explain pricing	3%

Other suggestions that were made were; cook real food, have better presentation, communicate better, start by fixing things at the top, have more student and RA input, and serve more normal food.

The Resident Advisors felt that students expect Dining Services to charge reasonable prices for a fair portion. They expect consistently good high quality meals. They also want healthy and vegetarian food alternatives available. Service must be quick, friendly, and efficient.

Sixty two percent of the respondents felt that the students expectations were realistic. The Resident Advisors agree that there is a gap between what student customers expect and what they receive. Sixty six percent felt that the communication methods used by CAS for student customers are not adequate.

The communication methods used by Dining Services can be improved in many ways and especially by communicating menu information more adequately. Interacting with customers and asking them what they want was frequently mentioned by the Resident Advisors.

Dining Services can provide more services to student customers in many areas, although the Resident Advisors did not have many clear suggestions as to what is needed. They did state that more menu communication and lower prices are important.

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TABLE 5.

What Expectations do Student Customers Have of Dining Services?

Reasonable prices	23%
Consistently good meals	15%
Quality meals	12%
Healthy food	10%
Food that is like home	7%
Hot, flavorful, affordable meals	5%
Quick service	3%

Other expectations that were mentioned included; that we serve what we advertise, that we give the same treatment that a restaurant does, that we meet all individual needs, serve good salads, and that we serve food like Cornell does.

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**TABLE 6.**

**How Realistic are Their Expectations?**

Realistic	62%
Unrealistic	25%
Undecided	12%

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**TABLE 7.**

**Is There a Gap Between What Customers Expect and What They Receive?**

Yes there is a gap	84%
No there isn't a gap	2%
Undecided	14%



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TABLE 8.

Are the Communication Methods Used by CAS for Student Customers

Adequate?

No it is not adequate	66%
Yes it is adequate	22%
Undecided	10%

The participants answered this question with the following comments; communication isn't the problem, get rid of the Messenger, there is not enough student interaction, need more than suggestion boxes for communication, most students do not take advantage of communication methods, and communication can be improved.

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**TABLE 9.**

**How Can the Communication Methods be Improved?**

More frequent menus and more copies	35%
Ask customers what they want	10%
Put up more information signs	2%
Listen to suggestions	2%
Educate RA's	2%
Survey RA's and Freshmen	2%
Have forums and panel discussions	2%
Use table tents	2%
Managers should be more visible	2%
Answer questions on time	2%

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TABLE 10.

What Services do Student Customers Want that Dining Services is not Providing at this Time?

Monthly menus for everyone	35%
Lower prices	22%
More money for food and less for overhead	4%
Want basics	3%
Franchise food operation	3%
Extra service lines and faster service	2%
Alcohol	2%
24 hour service	2%
More operating hours	2%

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**TABLE 11.**

**Student Questionnaire Comments:**

We don't understand why the prices are so high	16.5%
Mentioned personal preferences	14%
CAS employees are very nice and pleasant	10%
Open at earlier hours especially at the Hub	8.5%
More vegetarian food	8%
More healthy food	6.5%
Bring back the old menus	6%
Why can't we roll over money to the Fall term	3%
Food is bad	2.5%
Don't want a mandatory optional spending account	2%

The student customers also wrote additional comments on the comment section of the questionnaire, they were; late night is great, thanks for making changes, there are not enough low fat choices available, the salad bar is not good, we like the food court at Letchworth, the Hub is great, the vegetables are not cooked enough, why is the food different in different units, we like the College Union, we like Red Jacket, we don't want managers in the dining room staring at us, better quality produce please, and we want a better selection.

### **Student Customers**

The results of the questionnaires given to the student customers of CAS/ Dining Services at SUNY Geneseo were informative. The responses to most of the questions followed a standard bell curve format. The results indicate that there is a communication gap between Dining Services and their student customers. The students have some negative and some positive perceptions of Dining Services and the services that they provide.

The answers to the following questions did follow an average pattern. Customers of CAS understand how CAS operates, CAS gives you individual attention, employees of CAS understand your specific needs, CAS's physical facilities are visually appealing, CAS shows interest in solving your problems, CAS performs the service right the first time, employees in CAS tell you when the service will be performed, CAS has operating hours convenient to customers, employees in CAS have the knowledge to answer your questions, and the behavior of employees in CAS instill confidence in you.

The responses to the questions of, CAS understands the customer's needs, CAS serves quality food, CAS communicates information about the Corporation and the services they provide, and CAS has your best interest at heart, are skewed toward a negative opinion.

The responses to the following questions were skewed towards the positive side of the curve. CAS's employees are neat appearing, materials associated with the services provided by CAS are easy to understand, CAS gives you prompt service at the time it is expected, CAS employees are willing to help you, employees in CAS

respond to your requests, you understand your transactions with CAS, and employees in CAS are consistently courteous with you.

The responses given by the one hundred and ninety three students who participated in the survey are shown in the following tables.

TABLE 12

Customers of CAS Understand How CAS Operates

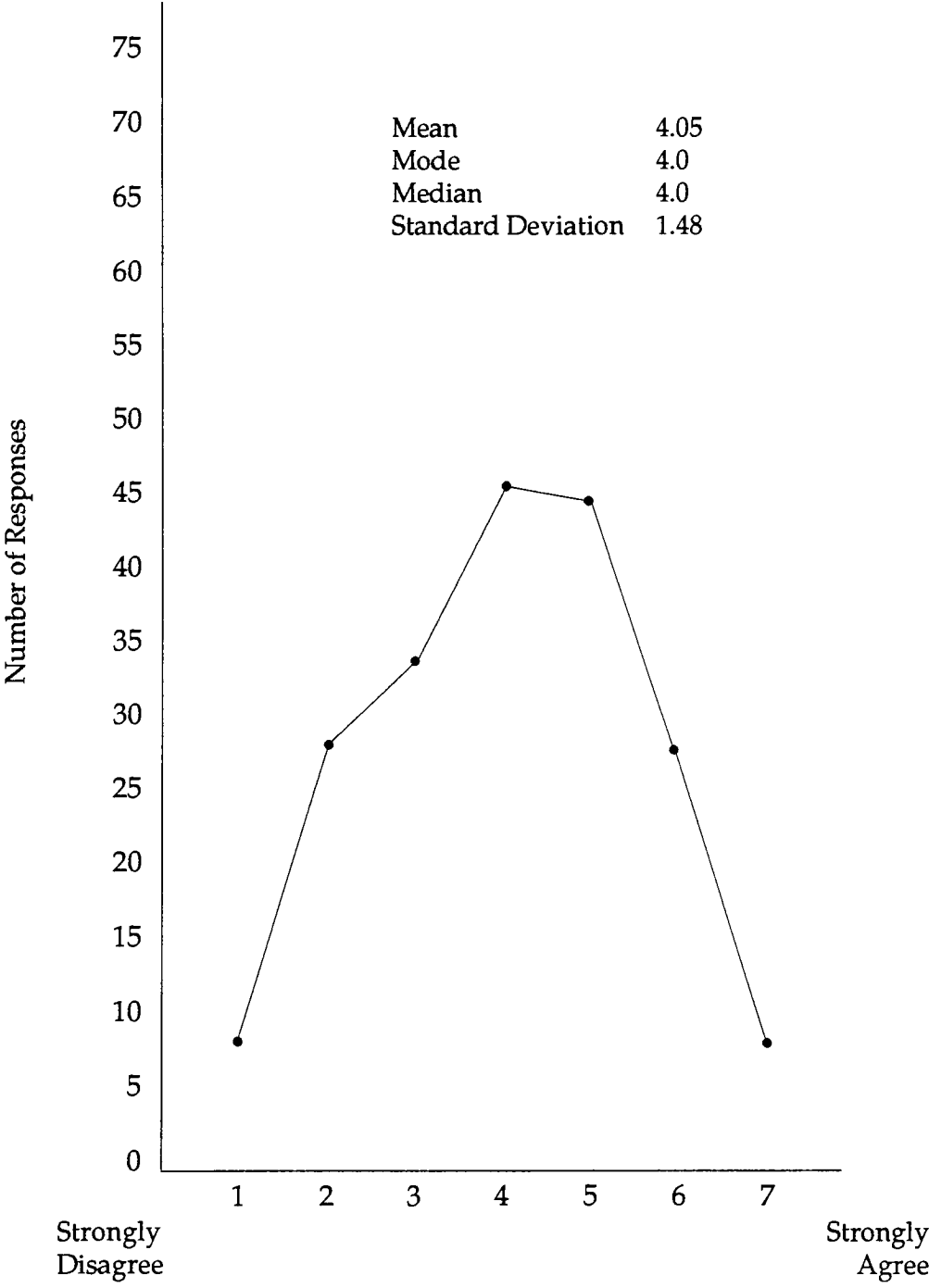


TABLE 13

Materials Associated with the Services Provided by CAS are Easy to Understand

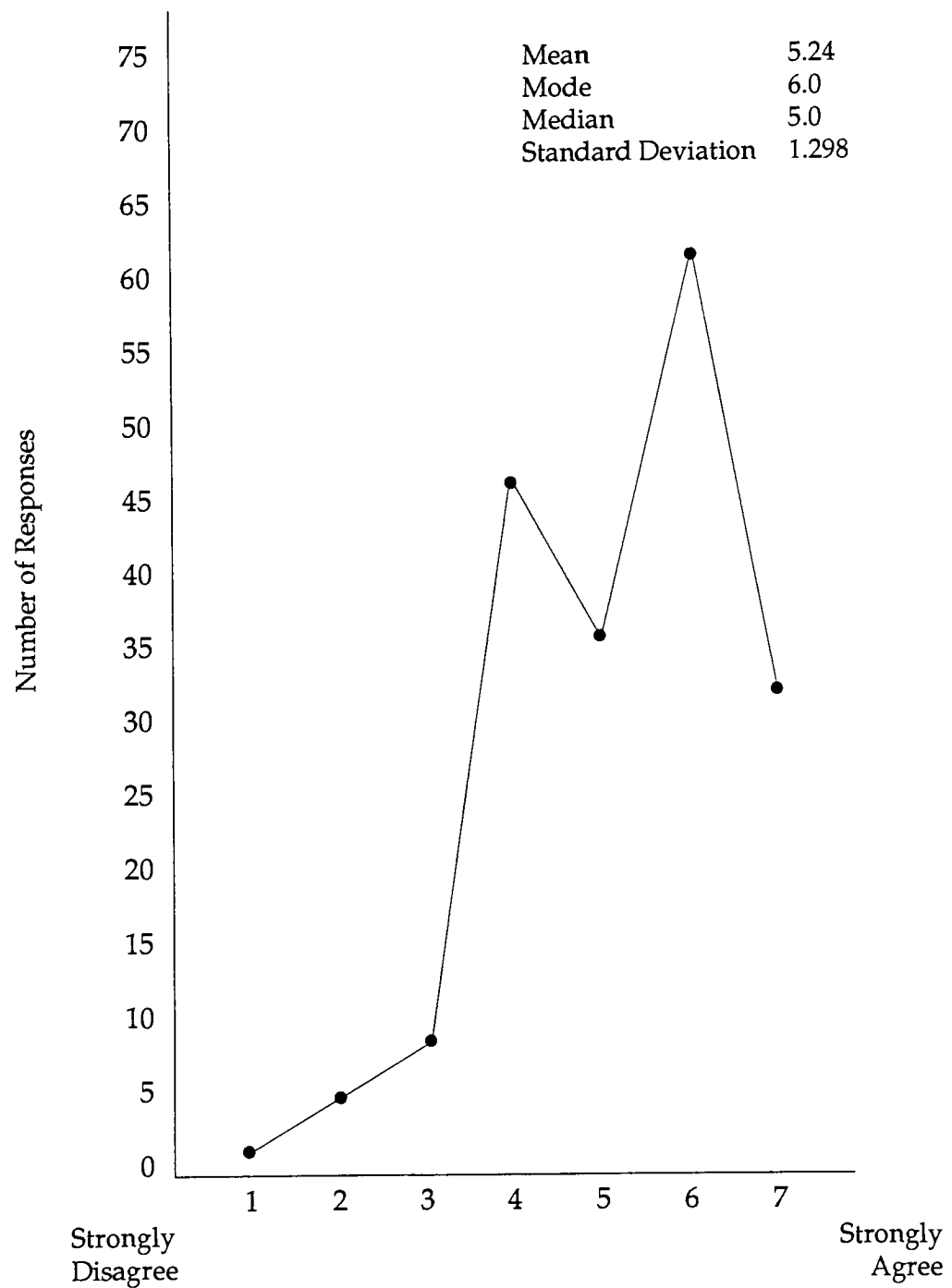




TABLE 14

CAS's Physical Facilities are Visually Appealing

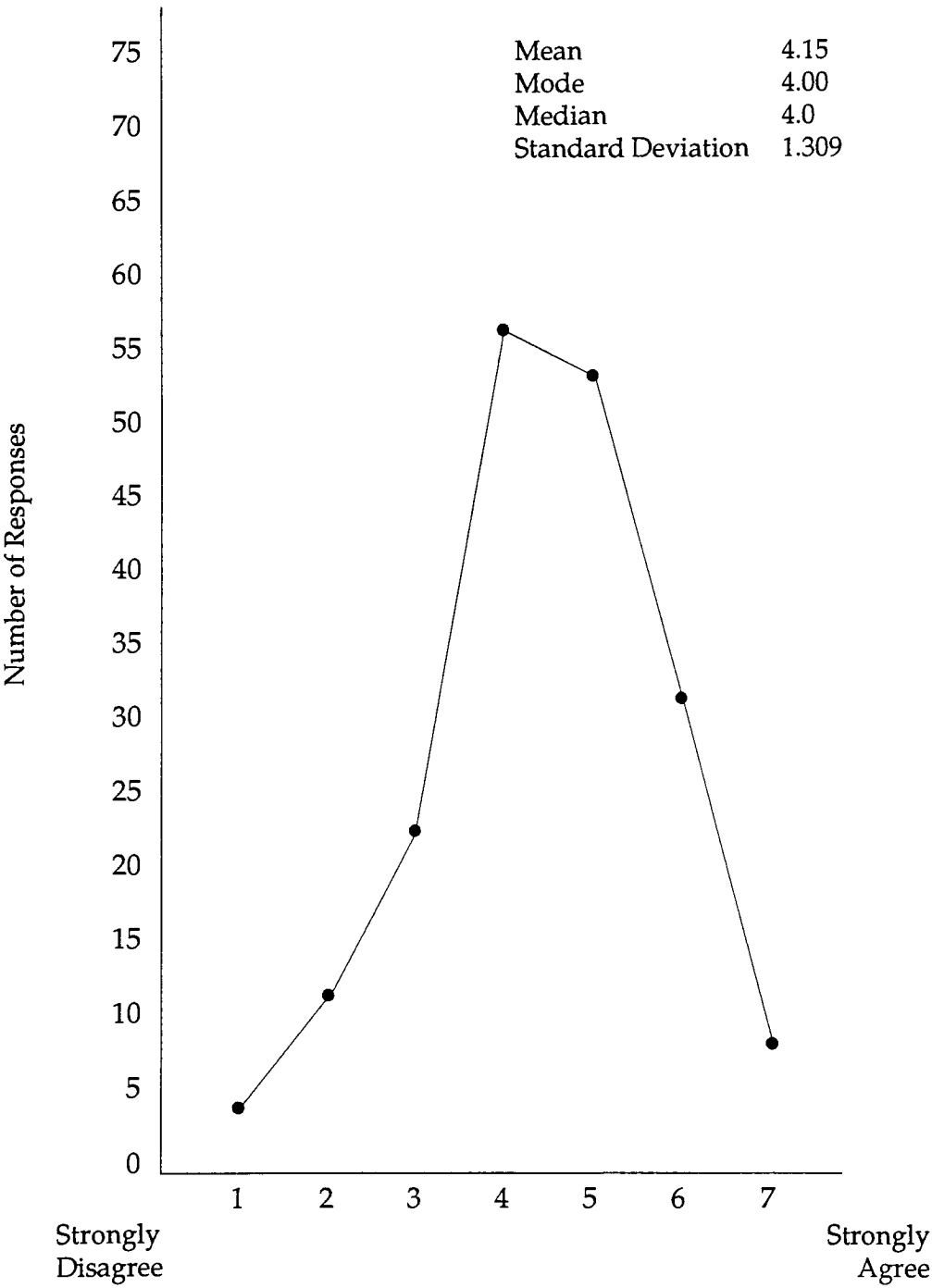


TABLE 15

CAS's Employees are Neat Appearing

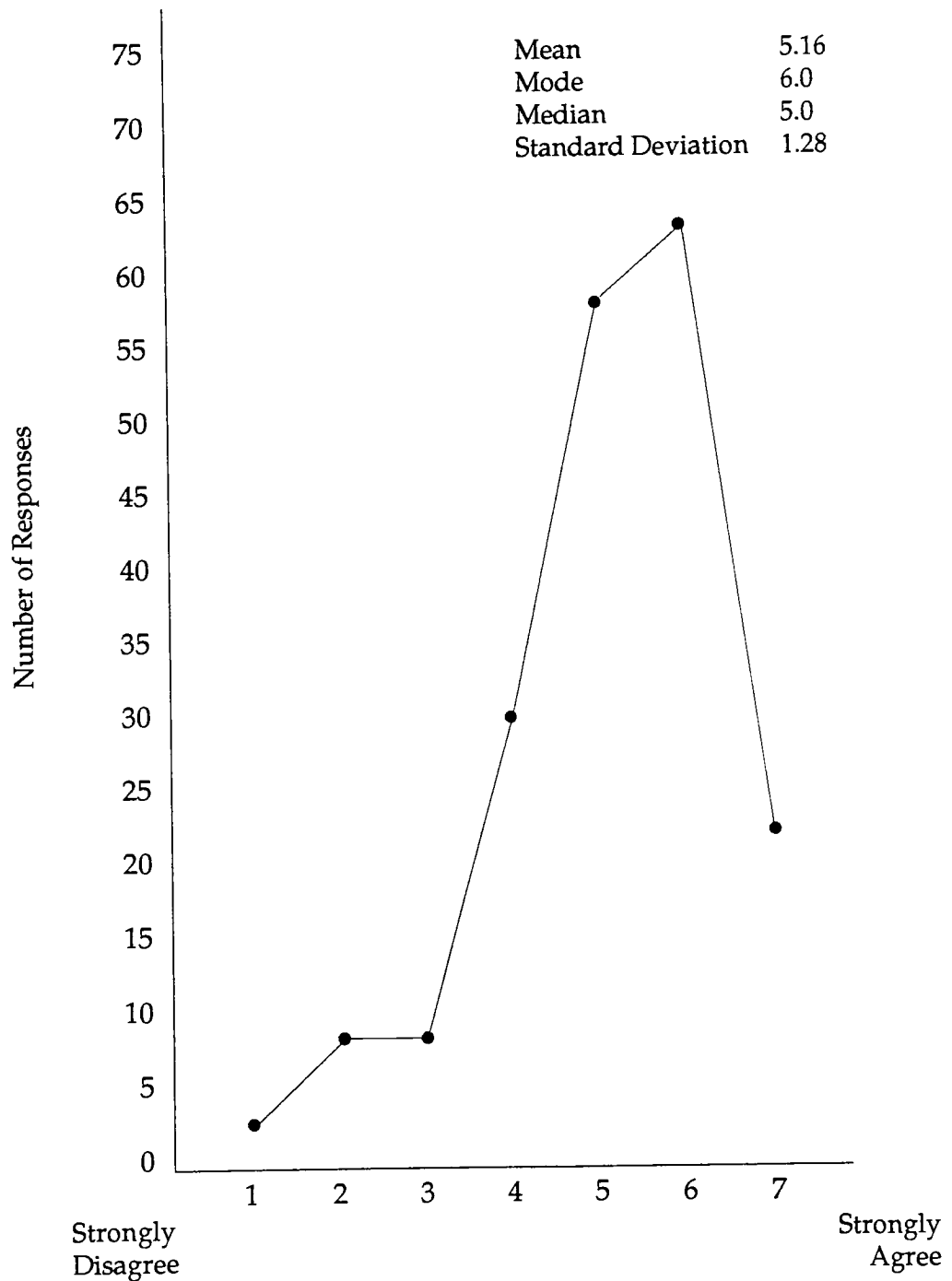


TABLE 16

CAS Understands the Customers Needs

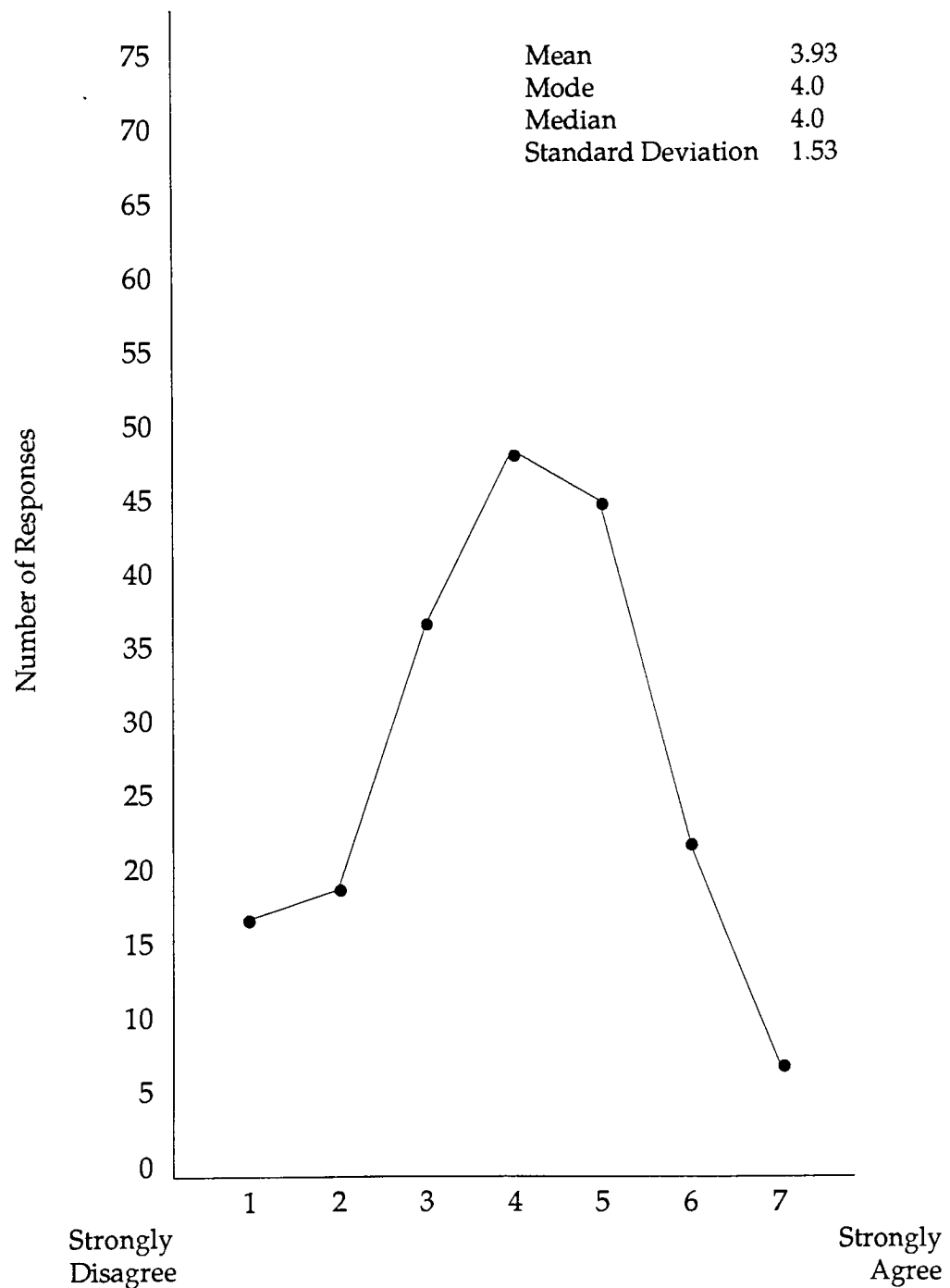


TABLE 17

CAS Shows Interest in Solving Problems

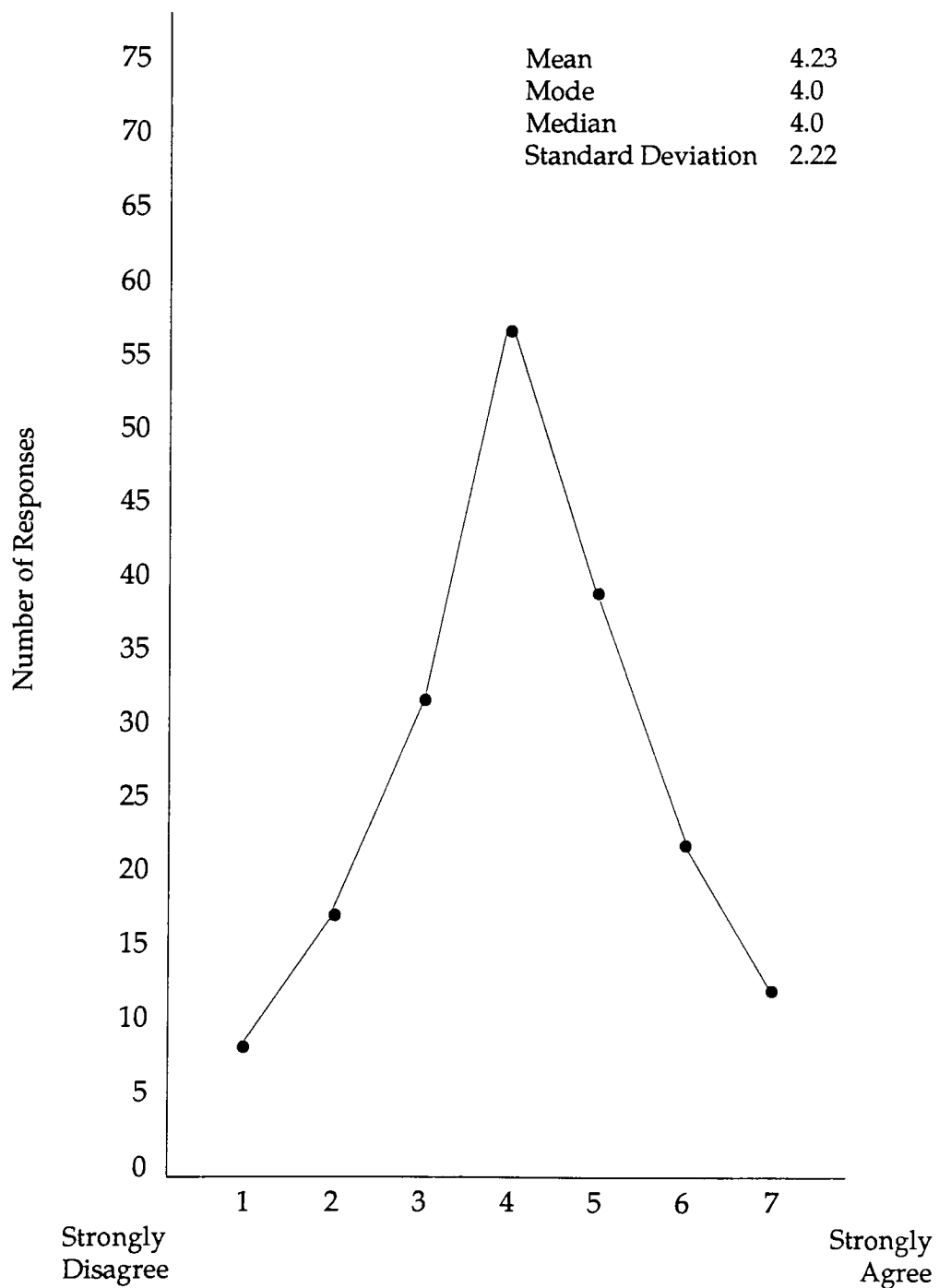


TABLE 18

CAS Performs the Service Right the First Time

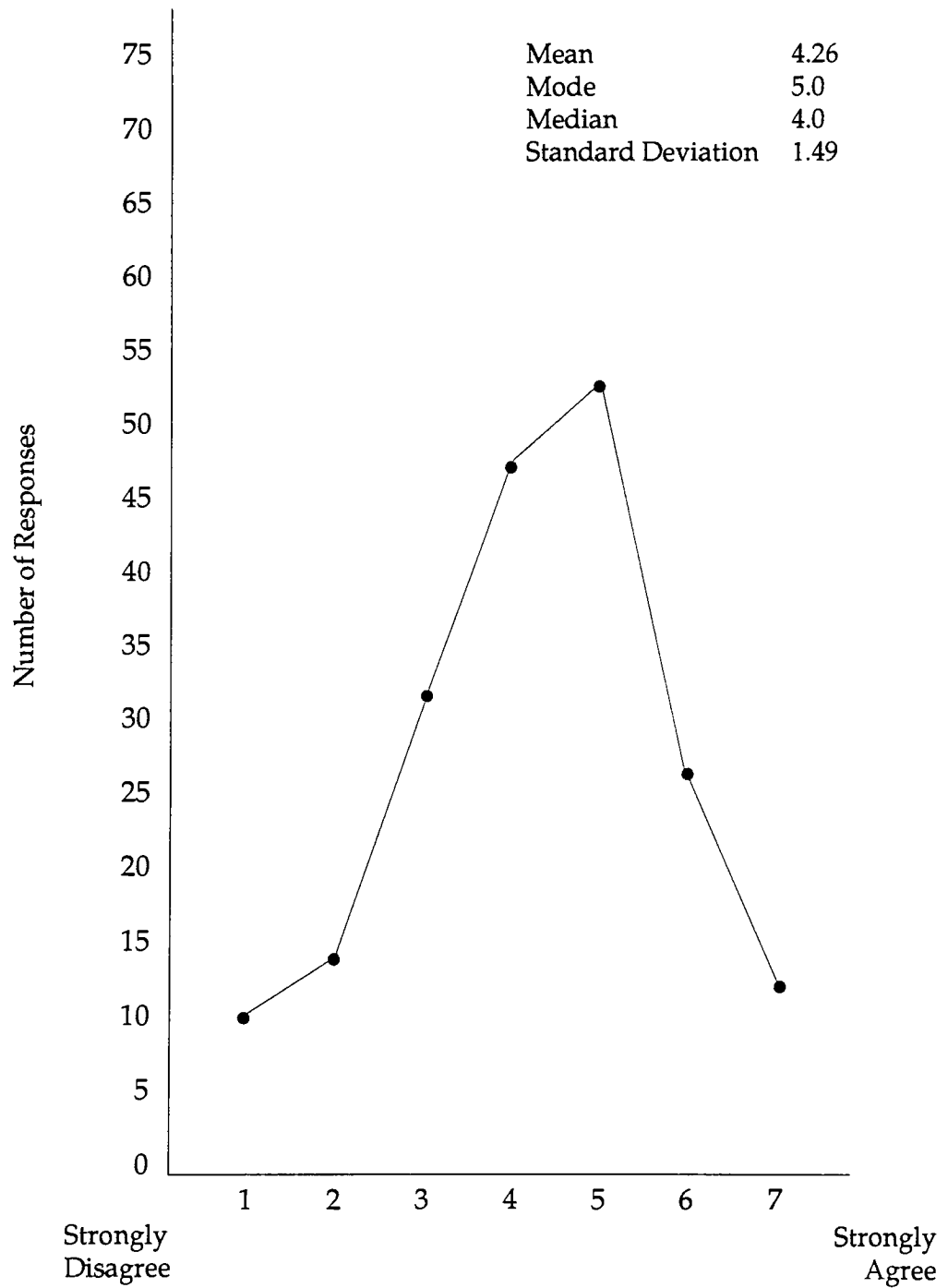


TABLE 19

CAS Performs the Service at the Time it Promises To Do So

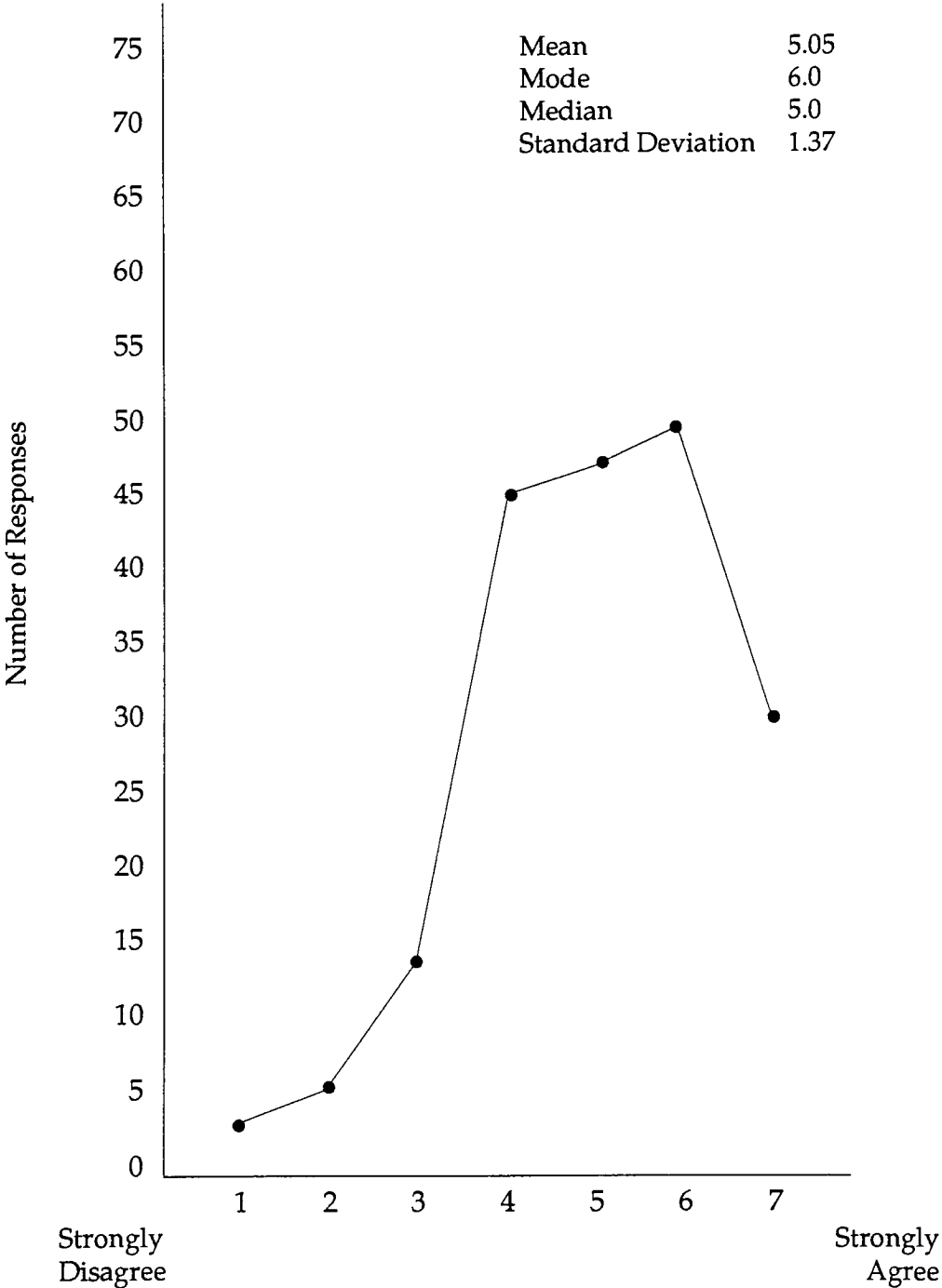


TABLE 20

CAS Serves Quality Food

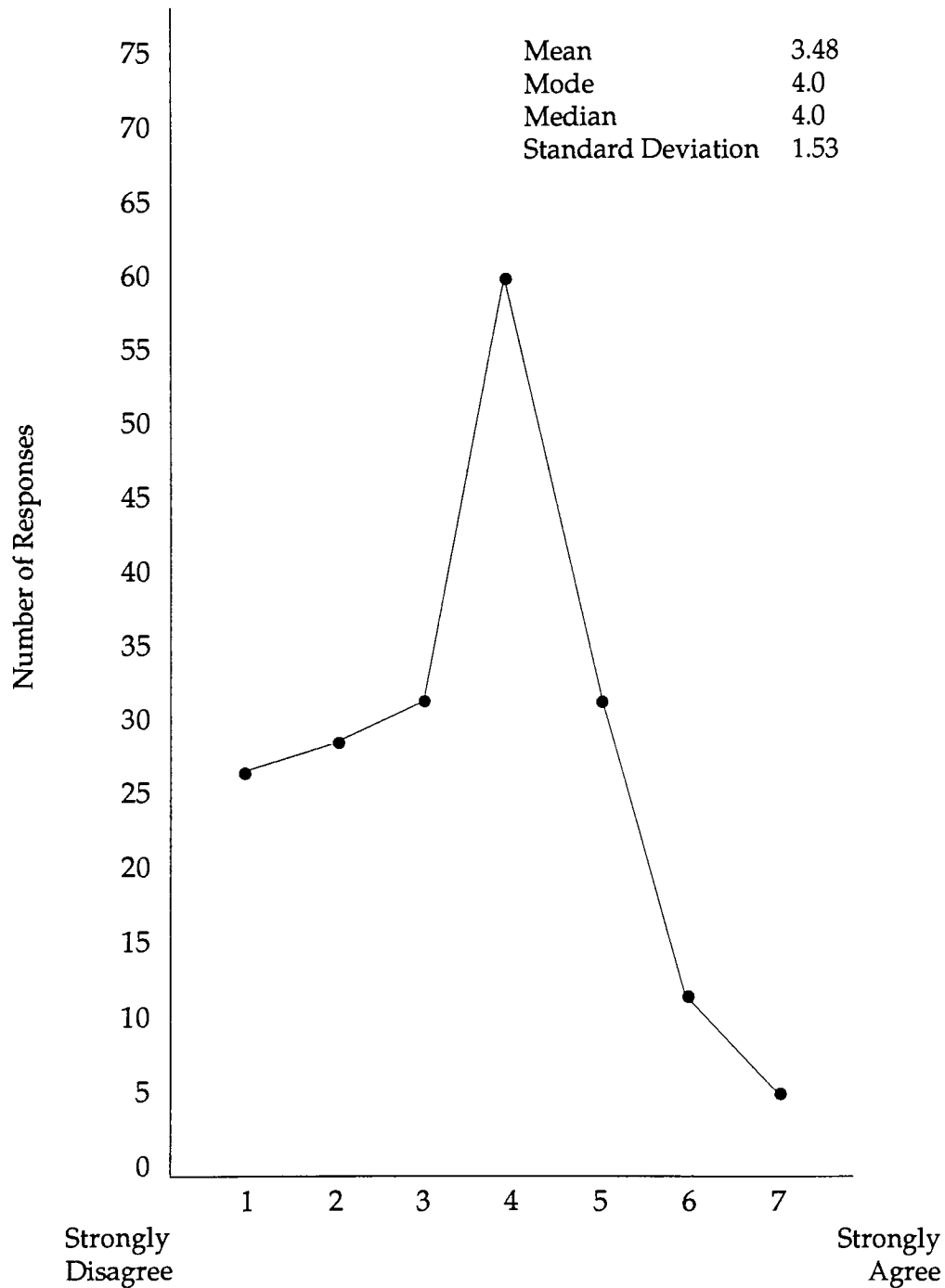


TABLE 21

CAS Employees Tell You When Services Will Be Performed

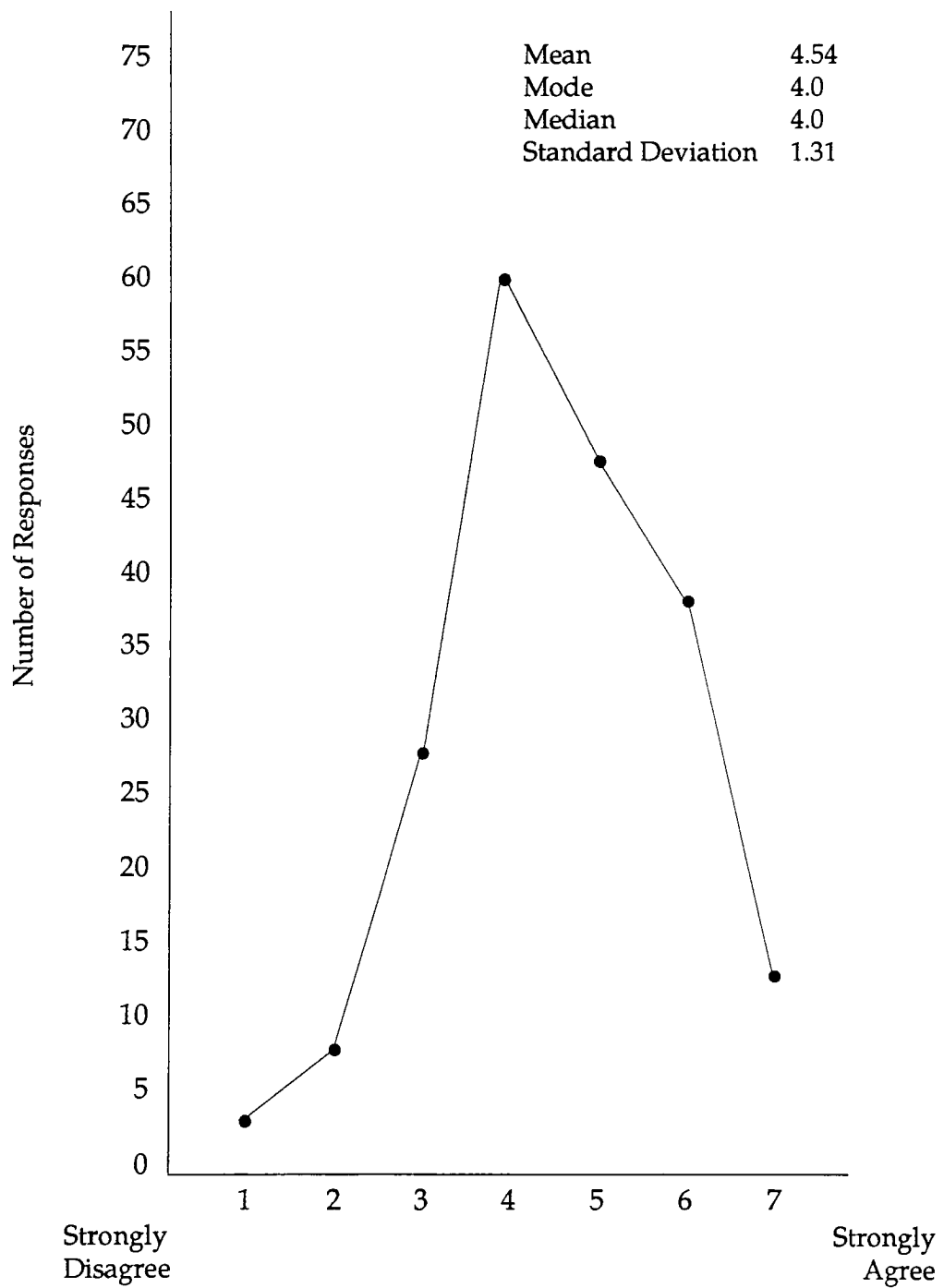




TABLE 22

CAS Employees Give Prompt Service at the Time You Expect the Service

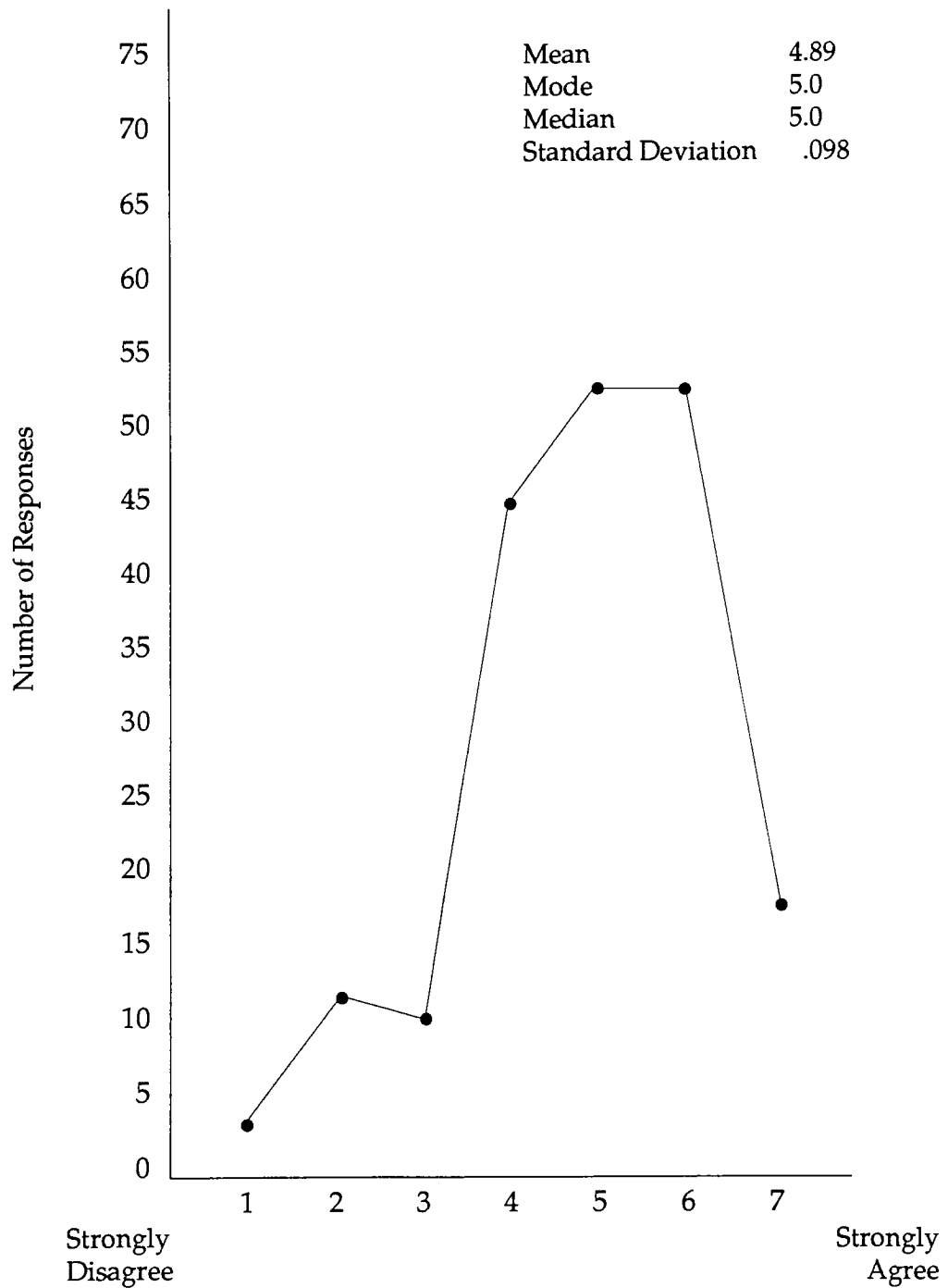


TABLE 23

CAS Employees are Willing to Help You

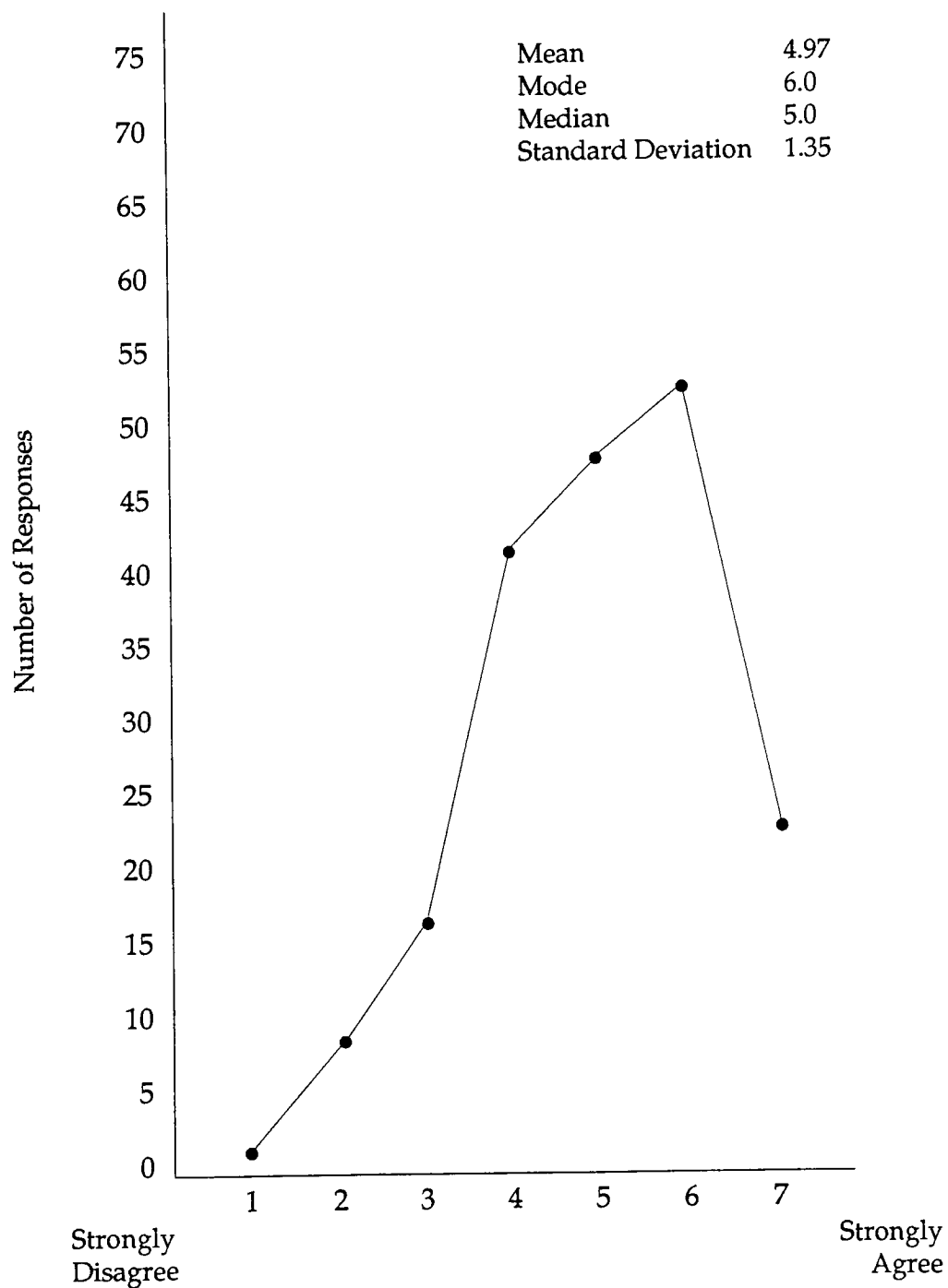


TABLE 24

CAS Employees are Never Too Busy to Respond to Your Requests

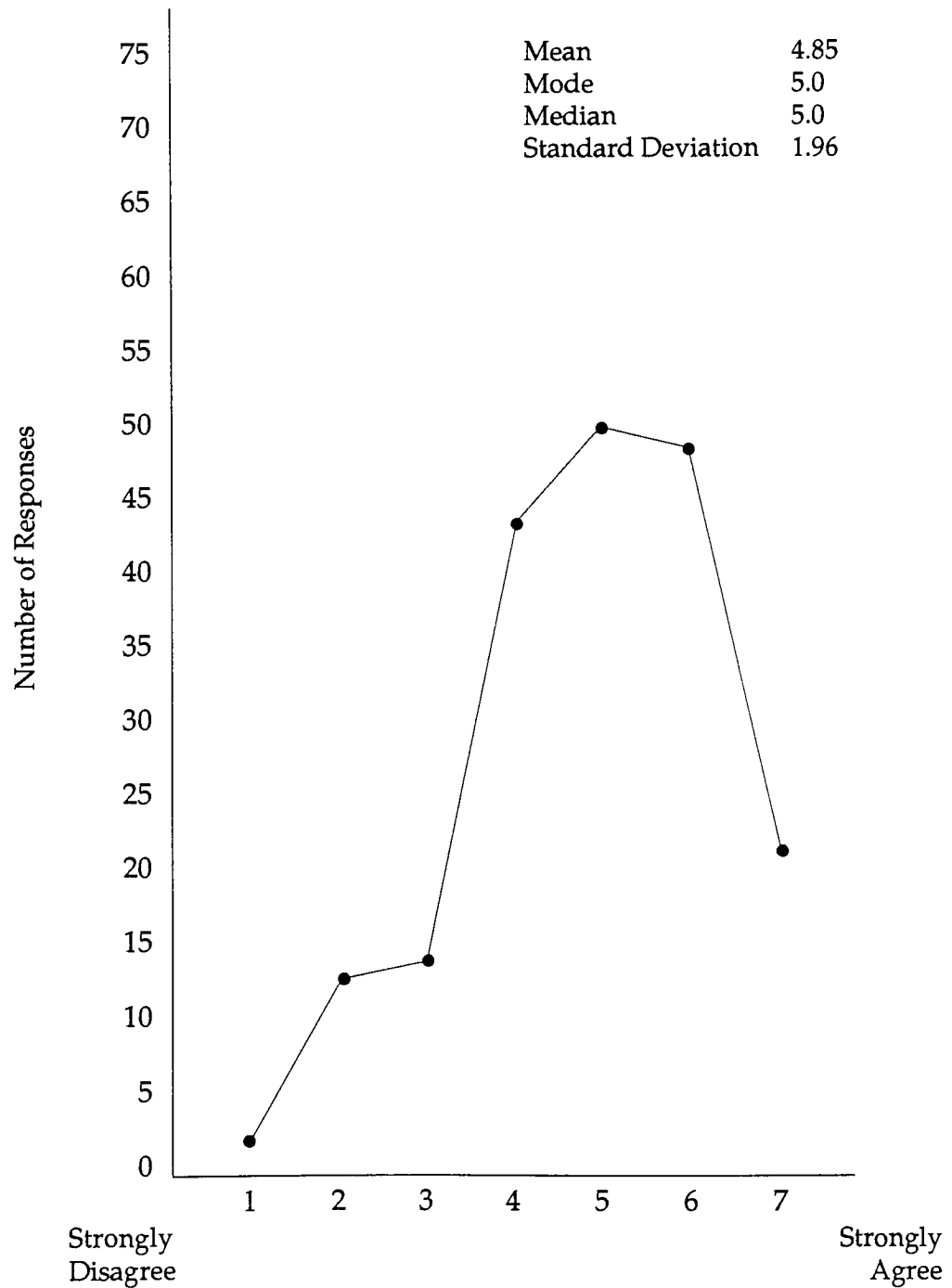


TABLE 25

The Behavior of CAS Employees Instills Confidence in You

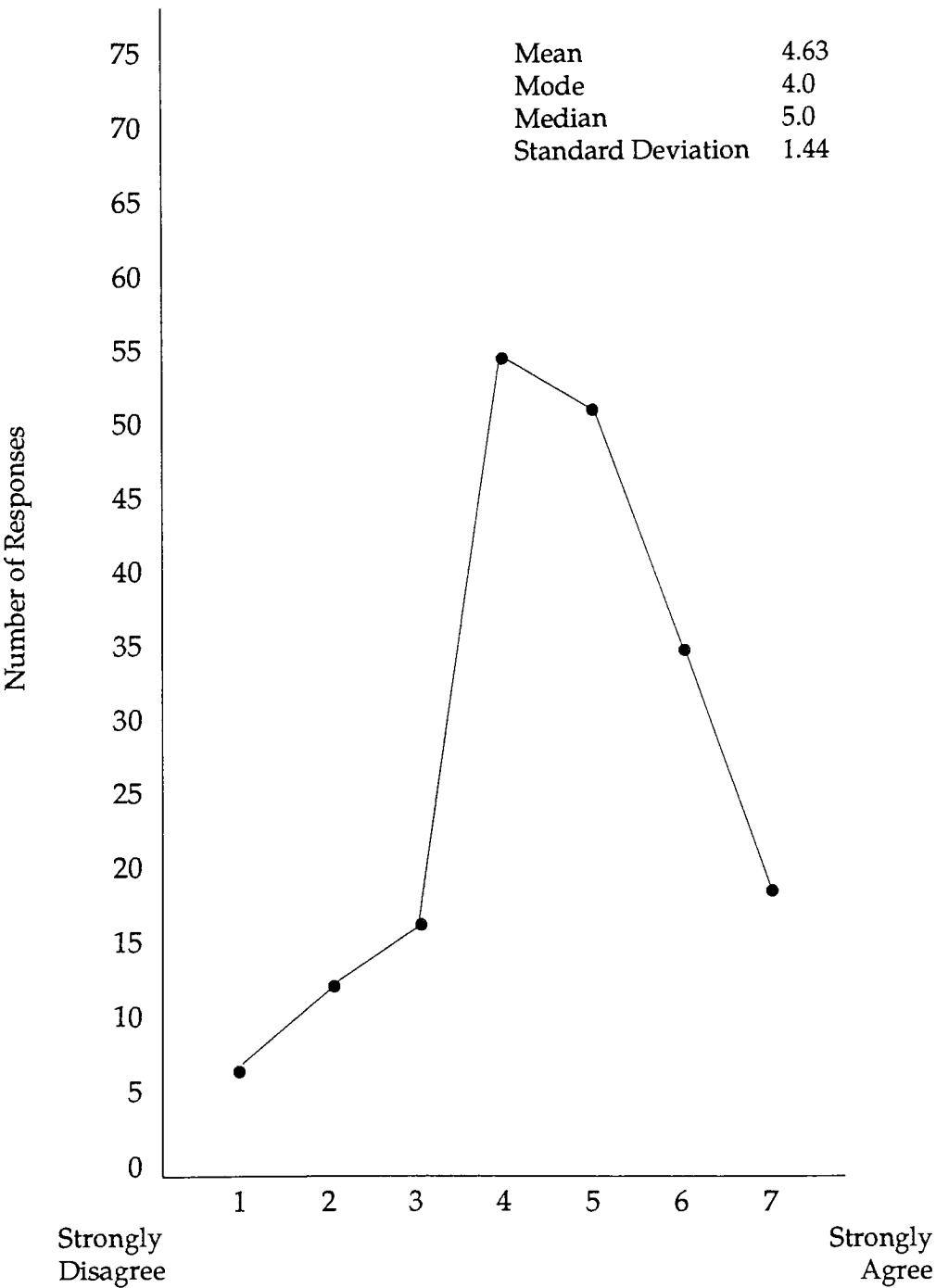


TABLE 26

You Understand Your Transactions with CAS

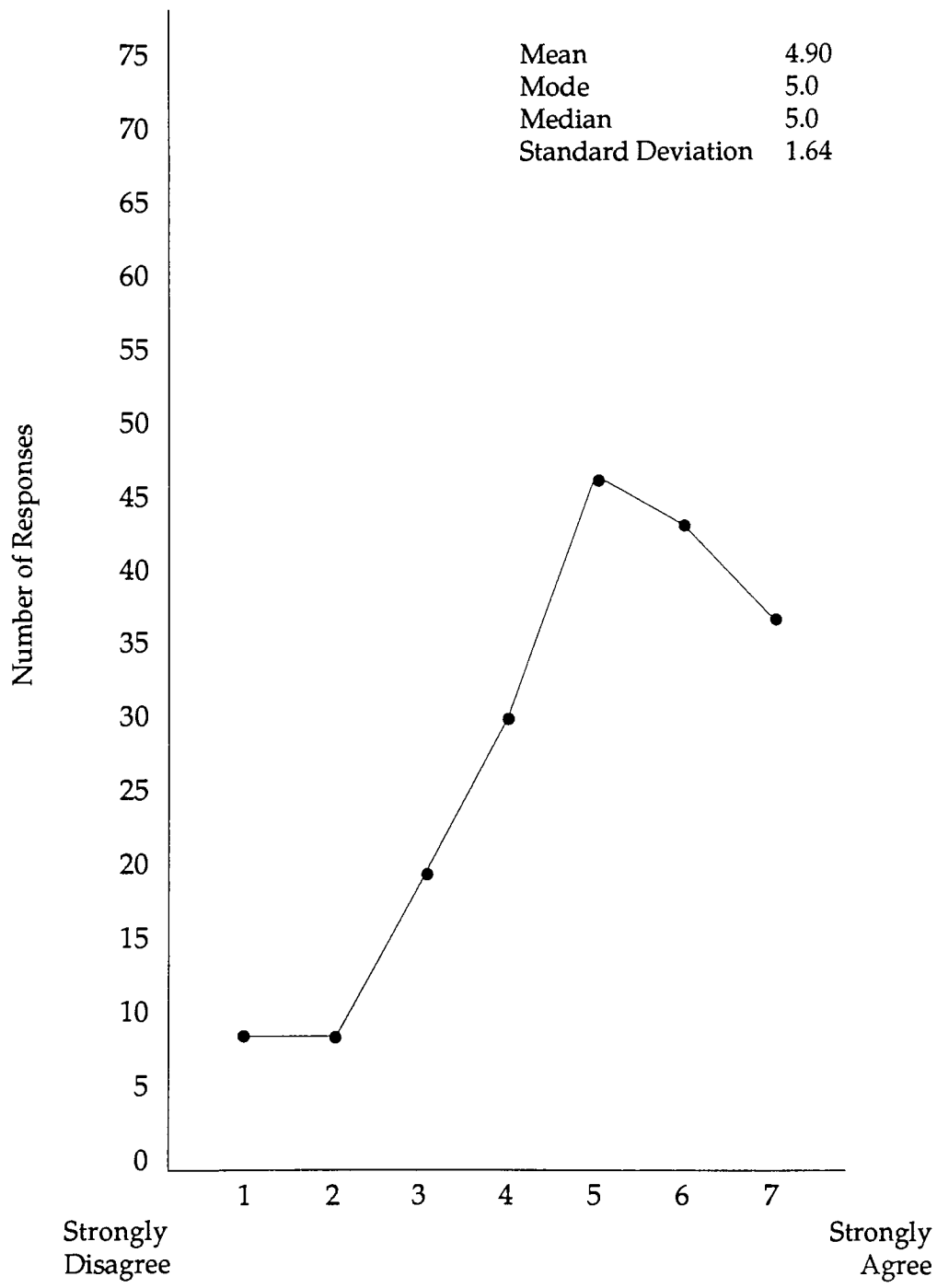


TABLE 27

Employees in CAS are Consistently Courteous

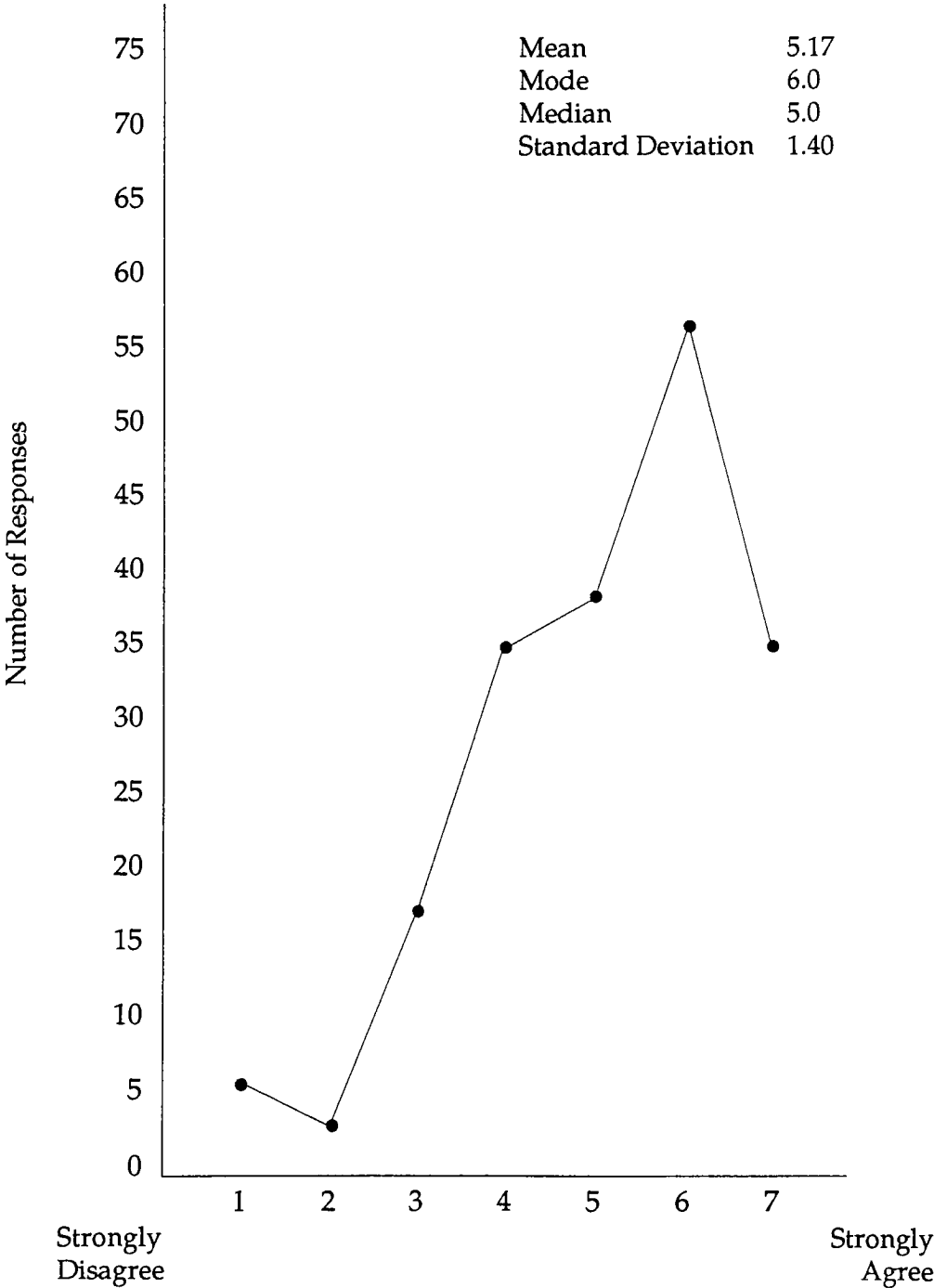


TABLE 28

Employees in CAS have the Knowledge to Answer Your Questions

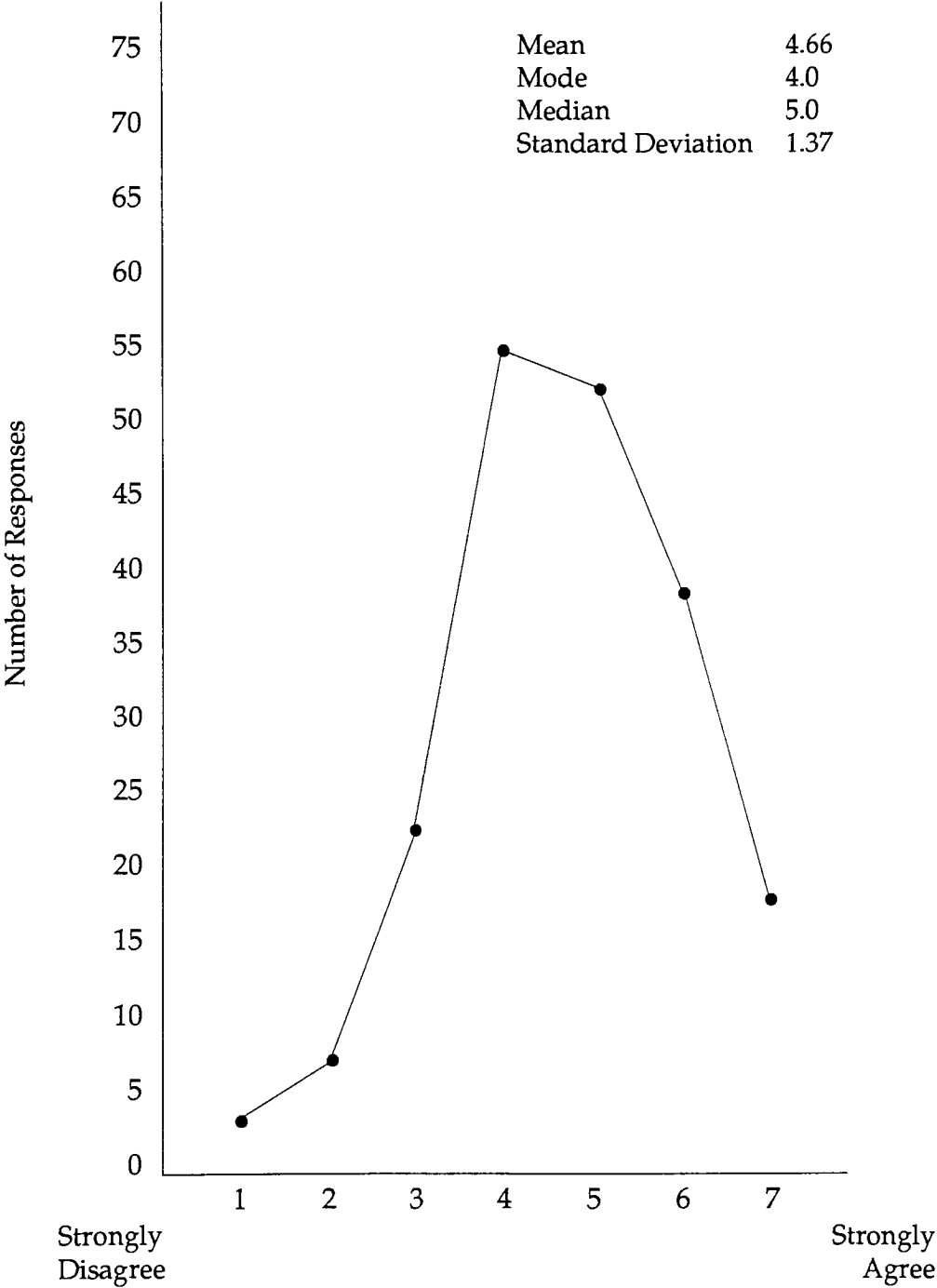


TABLE 29

CAS Gives You Individual Attention

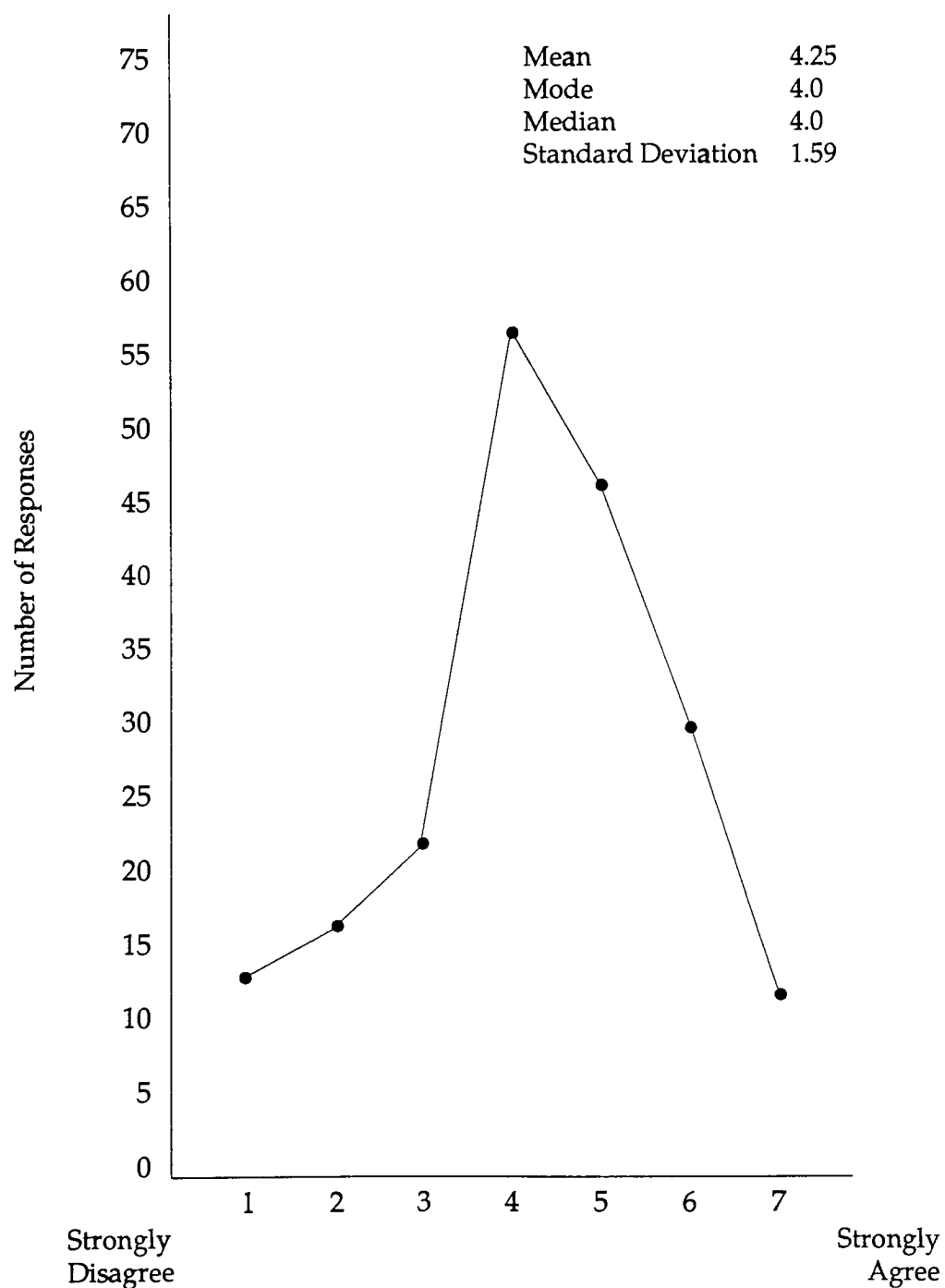




TABLE 30

CAS Has Operating Hours Convenient to all Customers

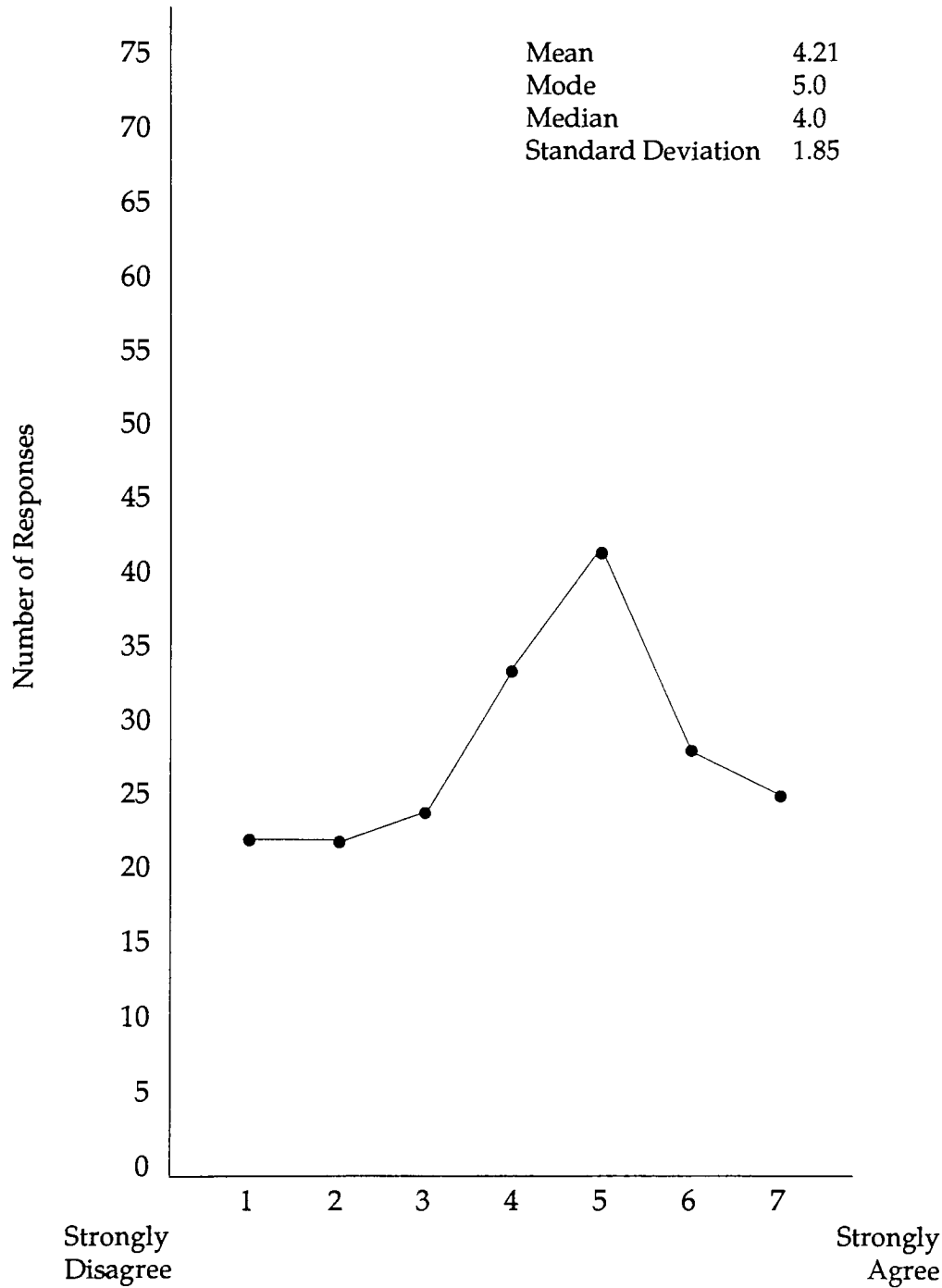


TABLE 31

CAS Communicates Information About Services

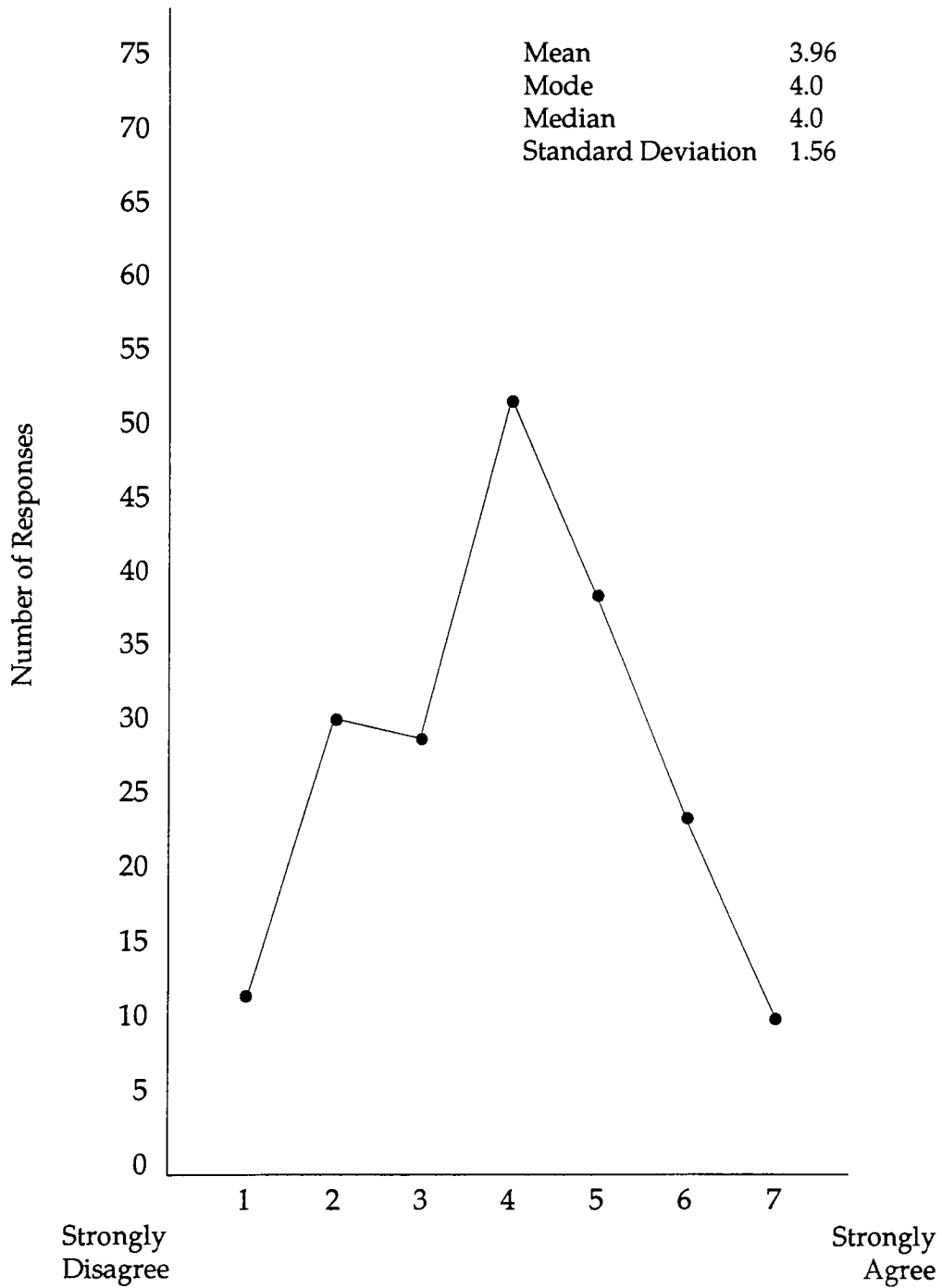


TABLE 32

CAS Has Your Best Interest at Heart

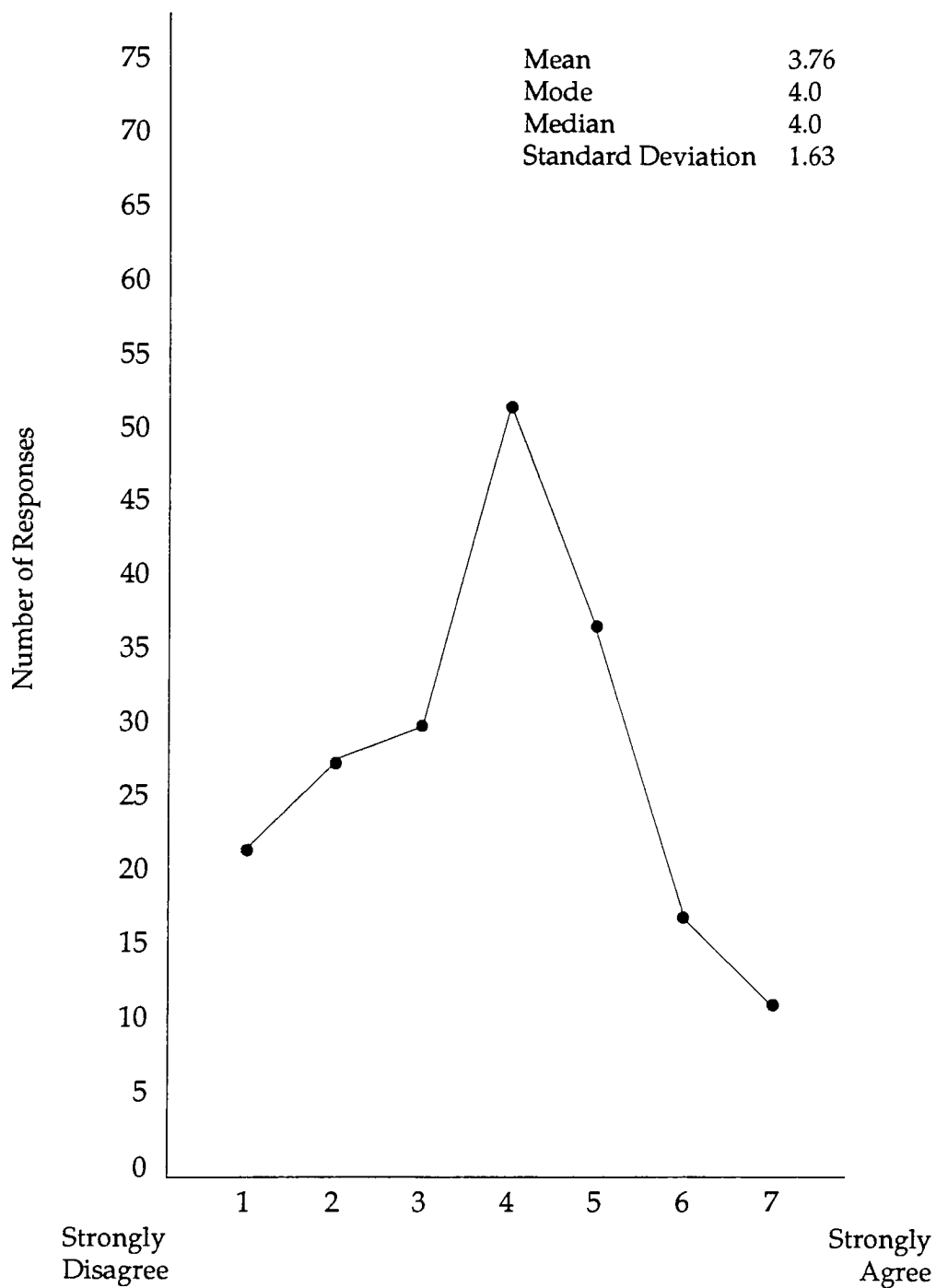
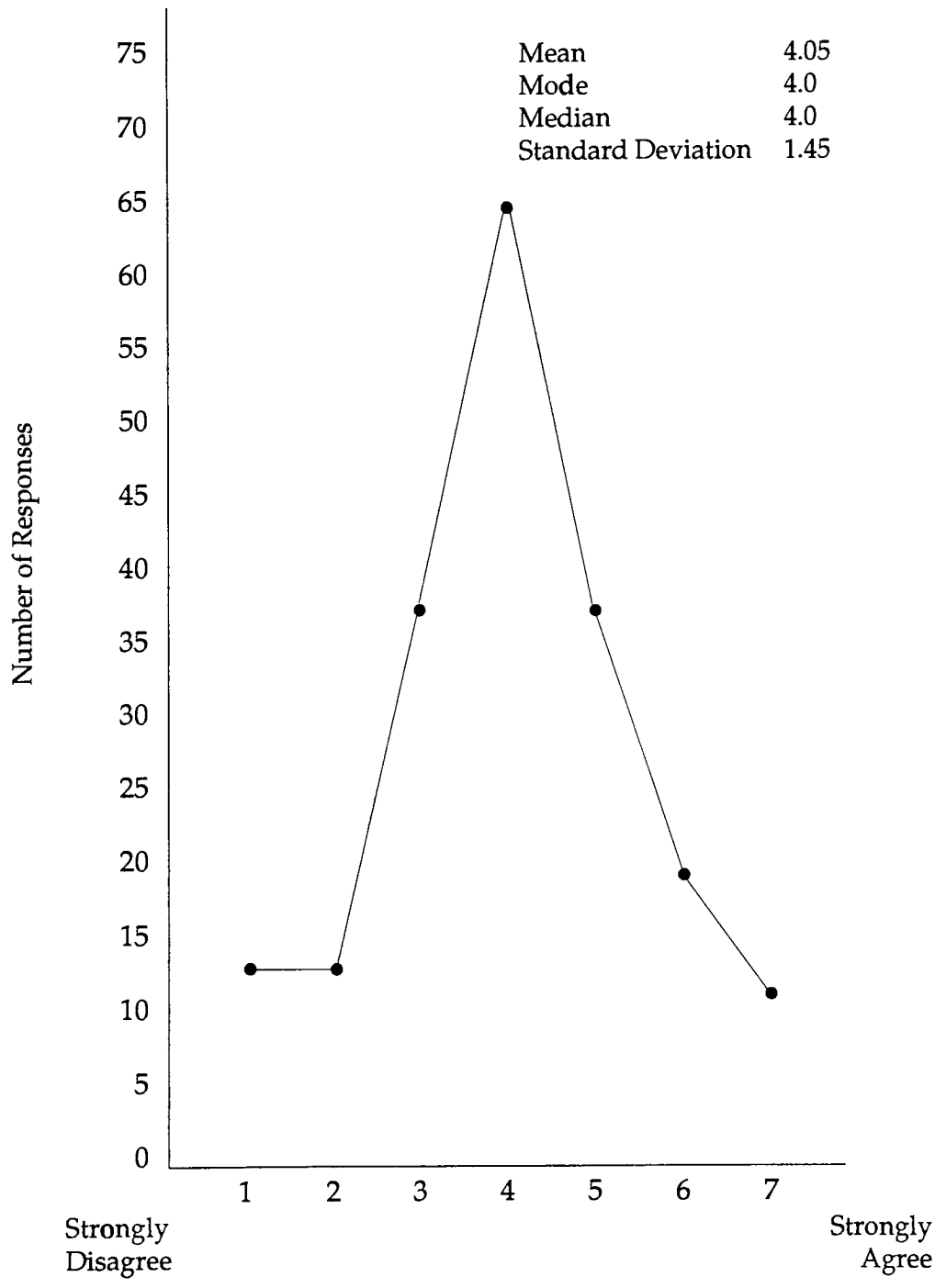


TABLE 33

Employees of CAS Understand Your Needs



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Resident Advisors**

The comments from the Resident Advisor questionnaires have led to the following conclusions. The Resident Advisors do not understand the corporation CAS. They are confused by pricing policies and by how their meal plan dollars are spent. They were upset by the change that were made in the method of presenting and distributing the CAS menus this term. The Resident Advisors are unaware of suggestion boxes, and other communication methods that are used by CAS. They used the perception questionnaires as a method for venting their personal feelings and frustrations rather than answering the questions from an overall customer standpoint.

All students who live on campus must buy a meal plan. They do not understand the reason for this policy and they do not like it. The Resident Advisors also do not understand what CAS does with their money at the end of the year. They want an explanation as to why CAS does what it does.

There is a large gap in communication between CAS and the Resident Advisors. They are supported by CAS and they are a liason between CAS and the general student customer population. The Resident Advisor's negative perceptions of CAS will be passed on to future customers if a change is not made in the communications methods and understanding that exists between CAS and the Resident Advisors.

#### **Salaried Employees**

The salaried employees gave a good, and realistic view of what occurs at CAS/ Dining Services that forms the perceptions of student customers. The employees feel that there is a gap between what the student customers expect and what they receive. The expectations are sometimes realistic and at times they are above and beyond what a college food service is able to provide within the parameters that they

are given. The customers deserve and have a right to expect, high quality food, served at the proper temperature, in a clean and safe environment, by a pleasant and efficient staff, within a reasonable time period, at a fair price. Sometimes these basic expectations have not been met which lead to negative perceptions and service gaps.

A problem exists because the student customers do not understand CAS. They expect the corporation to be different than it is. They sometimes equate the word service with the word free. They expect the food to be priced cheaply, but also to be of high quality, with a large variety, served at any hour of the day. They need to be educated concerning CAS and what the corporation does for the campus. They also need to be told how their meal plan dollars are spent.

The services provided by CAS are unknown and misunderstood. Students do not understand what their food dollars are used for. Communication between CAS and student customers must be improved at all levels and in all areas before customers will understand the corporation and before the corporation will understand the needs of the customer. Change must begin at the top. When the communication occurs the gaps can be closed.

### **Student Customers**

There is a communication gap between CAS/Dining Services and the student customers at SUNY Geneseo, which has led to negative perceptions of the corporation. Customers do not understand the varied and extensive services provided by CAS. The costs of providing these services is totally foreign to the customers. They expect CAS to provide high quality services at cheap prices. The students feel that they are being "ripped off". They feel that they are not receiving the volume of service that they expect for the money that they are spending. They do not understand what their dollars are used for.

The student customers want a wide variety of products, prepared in a way that is familiar and acceptable to each individual, offered at low price, at any time of the day or night, served in an efficient manner by friendly people, in a pleasant environment. They also want to be listened to and reacted to immediately if they

have a question or a concern.

The expectations of the student customers can be met and the communication gap can be closed, which has led to the negative perceptions that the student customers have towards the corporation. This can be accomplished by effort successfully directed towards educating and communicating with customers.

### **Variables**

The answers given by the RA's were influenced by many variables which included: the time of the year, the mood of the particular participant, the last dining unit experience that they had, and the fact that they were made to fill out the survey by a Resident Director. Detailed explanations of the questionnaires were not given, and many questions were not understood. CAS had made a recent change in the menu format and distribution which led to dissatisfaction with CAS by the RA's. According to the Director of Residence Life the RA's felt that they were being singled out and forced to complete the survey. The RA's seemed to be interested in getting their own personal needs listened to through the surveys. They did not seem to be thinking about the answers to the questions through the majority of the students' opinions.

The salaried employees were free to be very honest and open with their questionnaire responses. They will be directly affected by the results of the study. If they can assist in finding answers to the negative perception problem then their jobs will become more rewarding. They were influenced by the comments that they had heard on the serving lines and in meetings with the Resident Advisors.

The responses given by the student customers may have been influenced by variables such as: the time of the year, boredom with the same atmosphere of the dining halls, individual stress levels, the amount of money remaining on their meal plans, the last experience that they had in a dining unit, the service that they just received, their personal mood, or their last encounter with an employee. Other important variables affecting the survey responses were the age of the student, the class standing of the student, the size of their meal plan, whether or not they lived

on campus, are they an employee of CAS, do they read CAS printed materials, and have they had personal attention from a CAS Manager or employee.



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TABLE 34

Student Customer Sample Size

Female	61.1%
Male	38.8%

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**TABLE 35**

**Age Of Student Participants**

18	18.7%
19	19.2%
20	35.8%
21	15.5%
22	5.2%
Other	5.6%

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TABLE 36

Class Standing Of Student Participants

Freshmen	33.2%
Sophomore	24.4%
Junior	28.5%
Senior	14.0%

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**TABLE 37**

**Does the Student Live On or Off Campus**

On Campus	82.4%
Off Campus	17.6%

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TABLE 38

Transfer or Non-Transfer Student

Non-Transfer	91.7%
Transfer	7.3%

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TABLE 39

Dining Unit Visited Most Frequently

Letchworth	35.2%
Red Jacket	26.4%
College Union	22.3%
Hub Snack Bar	16.1%

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TABLE 40

Meal Plan Level

Standard \$595	24.4%
Silver \$710	55.4%
Gold \$900	7.8%
Off Campus \$175	3.6%
Super Off Campus \$290	6.7%

## LONG RANGE CONSEQUENCES

After completing the study the necessary data and proof are available in CAS to request that resources be appropriated for extensive customer service training. The study also indicates that funds are needed for the marketing and advertising of the services provided by CAS. The CAS Board of Directors will see that customer service, communication, and meeting the needs and expectations of our customers must be our top priority. Another goal that the study assisted with pointed out the need for a change in some to the systems that are currently in place that make it extremely difficult to serve the customer. The systems are causing negative experiences at many moment of truth points. The CAS facilities need to be modernized to meet the expectations of our customers. The analysis of the survey responses indicate areas where more research is needed such as: what are the best methods to use for communicating information to student customers? What additional services should CAS be considering for customers in the future. What type of training is most needed for the internal customers of the company? There may also be many other potential areas for study. The results of this study will put an end to the continual question of WHAT IS THE PROBLEM WITH CAS?



## Appendix A

### Student Customer Questionnaire



#### To Our Student Customer:

- Please help Campus Auxiliary Services provide better service for you by completing this questionnaire.
- The following set of statements relate to your feelings about the Dining Services division of CAS.
- Circling a "1" means that you strongly disagree that CAS has that feature. Circling a "7" means that you strongly agree.
- There are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in your perceptions about CAS/Dining Services.

	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree			
1. Customers of CAS understand how CAS operates.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
2. Materials associated with the services provided by CAS (such as brochures/pamphlets or statements) are easy to understand.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
3. CAS's physical facilities are visually appealing.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
4. CAS's employees are neat appearing.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
5. CAS understands the customers needs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
6. When you have a problem, CAS shows a sincere interest in solving it.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
7. CAS performs the service right the first time.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
8. CAS provides its services at the time it promises to do so.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
9. CAS serves quality food.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
10. Employees in CAS tell you exactly when services will be performed.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
11. Employees in CAS give you prompt service at the time you expect the service.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
12. Employees in CAS are always willing to help you.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
13. Employees in CAS are never too busy to respond to your requests.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
14. The behavior of employees in CAS instills confidence in you.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
15. You understand your transactions with CAS.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

	Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree	
16. Employees in CAS are consistently courteous with you.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. Employees in CAS have the knowledge to answer your questions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. CAS gives you individual attention.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. CAS has operating hours convenient to all its customers.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. CAS communicates information about the Corporation and the services they provide.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. CAS has your best interests at heart.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. Employees of CAS understand your specific needs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Male _____	Class Standing:	Freshman _____
Female _____		Sophomore _____
Age _____		Junior _____
		Senior _____
On-Campus Student _____		
Off-Campus Student _____		
Transfer Student _____		
Which dining facility do you regularly eat in?	CU Snack Bar _____	
	Letchworth _____	
	The Hub _____	
	Red Jacket _____	
Do you have a meal plan? _____	If yes, what size? _____	
Comments: _____		
_____		
_____		
_____		
_____		

**Appendix B**  
**Resident Advisor Questionnaire**

The perception questions that were given to the Resident Advisors were:

1. Do you feel that student customers of Dining Services have a negative or a positive perception of Dining Services?
2. Where do our student customers get their perceptions of Dining Services?
3. What are the perceptions that students have of Dining Services?
4. Where does Dining Services need to begin in order to change the student customers' perceptions?
5. What expectations do student customers have of Dining Services?
6. How realistic are their expectations?
7. Is there a gap between what customers expect and what they receive?
8. Are the communication methods used by CAS for student customers adequate?
9. How can the communication methods be improved?
10. What services do student customers want that Dining Services is not providing at this time?

## **Appendix C**

### **Salaried Management Questionnaire**

The perception questions that were given to the Dining Service Management employees were:

1. Do you feel that student customers of Dining Services have a negative or a positive perception of Dining Services?
2. Where do our student customers get their perceptions of Dining Services?
3. What are the perceptions that students have of Dining Services?
4. Where does Dining Services need to begin in order to change the student customers' perceptions?
5. What expectations do student customers have of Dining Services?
6. How realistic are their expectations?
7. Is there a gap between what customers expect and what they receive?
8. Are the communication methods used by CAS for student customers adequate?
9. How can the communication methods be improved?
10. What services do student customers want that Dining Services is not providing at this time?

**Appendix D**  
**Individual Responses By Salaried Management Employees**  
**To Perception Questions**

**1. Do you feel that student customers of Dining Services have a negative or a positive perception of Dining Services?**

1. The majority of our customers have a negative opinion.
2. Positive, positive to middle of the road, positive, positive in the Hub, positive perception is about 75%, positive, positive perception,
3. Most customers have a positive perception especially when managers are on the serving line talking to customers and treating them as individuals.
4. Most students have a positive perception. I also believe that negative commenting is the hip thing to do and not the reality.
5. Customers have a positive perception of individuals in Dining Services, but a negative perception of Dining Services as a whole.
6. There are some pockets of dissatisfaction. Overall Dining Services is viewed positively. Things I hear in other CAS areas (Bookstore, Accounting ) are not positive.
7. The majority of students have a positive perception because of personal contact with them. However there is a minority of students who feel we can not do anything right.
8. Generally students have a positive view. We are an easy target for criticism. One meal that is not up to their expectations ruins our image in their eyes.

**2. Where do our student customers get their perceptions of Dining Services.**

1. From communication with an unsatisfied customer, and from being raised with a poor attitude.
2. From eating in the dining hall and from the employees.
3. From what they see and hear when going through the line. If you speak to them and look at them and let them know that they are important it helps their attitude the next day.
4. From other students, newspaper articles, food quality, presentation of food, and from managers.
5. From what they eat and other students.

6. From first hand interaction with CAS full time and student employees. Their eyes are fixed on presentation of the products and product appeal. Seeing is believing which leads to trust.
7. From other students.
8. Other students, condition of the building, and from employees.
9. From other students. This begins during Orientation. They have a negative perception of institutional food service before they arrive. There are horror stories that are passed from student to student. It is cool to complain. Any mistake made is magnified.
10. From eating in the dining units.
11. From the services and food products we offer. Our employees often help are image. When students see full time employees on the serving line it builds their confidence and trust. They also feel that if a cook attaches their name to a product that it must be good.
12. Through personal experiences in the units and also by word of mouth. Interaction with Dining Service's employees.
13. From our workers on the line and from how the food is presented.
14. From the quality and appearance of our food and our attitudes during the meal. From our student and hourly employees.

### **3. What are the perceptions that students have of Dining Services.**

1. Students feel that prices are to high and that we are out to get their money.
2. Students feel that the prices are to high.
3. One bad experience will do more harm than a months worth of good food. We have to form their perceptions.
4. Over charging, greasy food, CAS has to much control, managers are helpful, we aren't afraid to change things, not consistent in prices and quality.
5. That we are responsible for everything on campus and that we overcharge because of our monopoly.
6. That we overcharge and serve greasy food. They have a positive opinion of homemade and specialty items.
7. That it is quantity cooking but still should taste good. Prices.
8. That CAS has a monopoly and a captive customer base.
9. Dining Services is ripping them off. The food is greasy. We don't care about

- their needs. Anyone could do a better job "my mom's food is much better"
10. Want a quality product at a fair price. Serving lines need updating. Portions need to be increased. We try to meet their needs.
  11. It varies, some find us accommodating, others think we are inflexible. Some think our prices are fair, others feel we are ripping them off. Some find us to be bureaucratic and uncaring.
  12. Food needs to be consistent. They want more for their money, larger portions, and more hours of operation.
  13. Students see us as a monopoly. Our prices are too high and we rip them off.

**4. Where does Dining Services need to begin in order to change the student customers' perceptions?**

1. Students need to work and serve the customers to understand us.
2. Advertise more, to make students aware that if they are not satisfied they should let us know.
3. I think that what we are doing is the best that we've done in twenty years. We are on the line constantly, we smile, we speak, say hello, and listen.
4. Consistency in price and quality. Start with employees and management.
5. Provide quality at a fair price.
6. Education through interaction which includes face to face customer service. Educating all employees in customer service. Need to advertise what we do and why. We should keep the mystery "why" out and instill oh, that makes sense".
7. They want to eat at the Hub and they can't understand why they can't.
8. Managers should go beyond the comfort of the line and wander into the dining room.
9. Publicize our services, especially and changes made because of student demand. We have a very reasonable meal plan cost compared to other colleges. I feel if they understood more about CAS they would become allies.
10. Keep up quality work standards.
11. Offer tours of our facilities. Put hourly employees on the line. Let students know what we are planning for the future. Put out information on pricing.
12. Customer oriented service and advertising. We need to continue to emphasize to our staff the importance of customer service and follow through to the students with this. We also need to advertise the positive things that we do.

13. Need to follow recipes and put out quality products. Need to inform students of what we do. Be on the serving line. Answer their concerns.
14. Begin with friendly, courteous service, and consistency in our food quality.

**5. What expectations do student customers have of Dining Services?**

1. They feel that we are here to serve them and obligated to them at all times.
2. They expect good service, quality food, and that things that they want be available on request.
3. They expect cleanliness, good presentation and quality. They are educated about what is good for them and they expect it.
4. Quality food and service at a reasonable price. To keep students informed of services and nutrition. To change with the times. To give more to students without taking from them.
5. Want quality at a fair price.
6. They expect quality food, pleasant efficient service, at a good price. They expect continuous choice and want anything that is trendy and tasty.
7. To serve hot food hot. To be responsive to concerns and to have variety.
8. Food should be inexpensive and high quality. They are paying for service and they should get some. To be treated as individuals and listened to instead of ignored, avoided, and treated as an inconvenience.
9. Cleanliness, quality, and fast service.
10. They want everything. They don't want us to make any mistakes with our food quality. When we do have a problem they want us on the lines listening to their complaints. Want bigger portions. They expect to be treated with care.
11. They want quality products and service, presented in an efficient and pleasant manner. They want a wide variety of menu selections, at a variety of later hours at a lower price.
12. They want a lot of food at a lower cost. Bigger portions or lower prices.
13. To provide them with what is advertised on the menu at the correct temperature. A variety of choices.

**6. How realistic are their expectations?**

1. They are realistic. We would not be here without them and we are here to serve them.



2. Many times they expect the same service as at a restaurant.
3. They are aware that we do have to follow rules and regulations. If we treat them nicely they tolerate us.
4. Most are valid expectations.
5. It's what we should do.
6. They can and should expect all of these things. Why would we bother if we couldn't do it right and do it to the satisfaction of our customers which are 3000 students.
7. I think that they are valid.
8. I think their service expectations are valid. Their pricing expectations are very unrealistic.
9. Realistic.
10. Realistic. We have to make sure that we are serving things in a manner that leads to a better perception of portion size.
11. Some are realistic. I don't think that they fully comprehend the reality of life. I don't think they understand the complexity of running some of these units.
12. They are basically realistic but they are out of line on their pricing expectations.
13. This is the minimum that we should provide. The students are our business.

**7. Is there a gap between what customers expect and what they receive?**

1. I don't think so, I feel that we do a good job.
2. No, if they read the menu although they may have to wait in line.
3. Sometimes when we slip and slide through a meal it ruins our reputation. Some of our older employees need to be taught how to cook for the younger generation.
4. In most situation no, however, pricing, variety, consistency is a problem.
5. Sometimes.
6. If there is a gap it is corrected immediately. Constant interaction is the key and astute listening skills need to be used even when they only want to make a comment.
7. We try not to have them in this unit.
8. Yes, access to manager and the temperature of food.
9. Yes, it's getting better, but students expectations are also higher than in the past.
10. There isn't a gap when everyone is working up to their capacity.
11. Overall No. There will always be some students that are dissatisfied but overall

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Dining Services meets their needs.

12. For the most part the portions are fair on the more expensive items they expect more for their money.
13. Yes, we don't always provide consistency. Each cook in each building makes products differently. Service isn't as polite as it should be.

**8. Are the communication methods used by CAS for student customers adequate?**

1. Our communication lines are adequate. I feel that we really couldn't do much more than we do now.
2. Yes, I think CAS has come a long way.
3. Fair.
4. Yes, no matter what we do some people will be aware, but the majority will not.
5. We could always improve on communication between CAS and the students. I feel that managers doing dorm presentations has been one of the better avenues of a new understanding in a casual setting.
6. I try to communicate with posters, and on a one on one basis.
7. We need more daily interaction. Formal style such as quad meetings are O.K.
8. Most students are bombarded by signs more verbal communication is needed.
9. More meetings with managers are needed.
10. Meetings with groups could help to eliminate the communication gap.
11. We need to be more visible in the front of the house, so that students feel comfortable talking to us. Other CAS departments need to treat the students as people not children.
12. Yes, communication methods are good.
13. No, we need to advertise our products and the ingredients that they contain.

**9. How can the communication methods be improved?**

1. Give students the opportunity to talk to the production people.
2. Keep the printed materials coming. Have employees out on the serving lines.
3. More meetings with students, open sessions, more media coverage.
4. Use the cable T.V.
5. A positive attitude is one of the keys to being in tune to the needs of the students. We should interact more freely and look for ways to make that communication

more accessible.

6. Management needs to ask students specific questions.
7. Educate student and hourly employees to answer questions. Labels and nutritional information on menus. Have managers on the lines to answer questions.
8. More frequent meetings with managers.
9. Show more flexibility when dealing with the students and listen to them instead of just stating policy.
10. We need to accurately post the products and ingredients that we use. We have made great strides in educating student servers.

**10. What services do students want that Dining Services is not providing at this time?**

1. Longer salad bar hours.
2. More self serve items, more window type service. Convenience store.
3. Late night operation on weekends. Franchise operation.
4. Late night on Sundays.
5. Late night on weekends. More gourmet type desserts and specialty items. Convenience store. More nutrition information. Exercise classes.
6. To be able to buy food in bulk.
7. I don't think the question is what new service but to enhance the service we currently provide.
8. Better service while going through the line. More and improved ethnic and vegetarian foods. There is a need for a larger gathering place for students where they don't have to fight for space.
9. More options to spend their meal plan money on. Ex. a store that offers products at a competitive price with the uptown establishments. Change machine in the Union.
10. A customer oriented bookstore. Longer hours. Have late night on weekends. Convenience store. All you can eat dining. Full service commercial style bakery.
11. Later times for brunch on weekends.

## **Appendix E**

### **Student Communication Methods**

1. In May the Resident Advisors are given a training packet containing information on CAS and Dining Services. This information is to be used for new R.A. training. This information is reviewed with the RA's during a training session during opening week in September.
2. In June a Picnic is held in Letchworth park to acquaint the Orientation advisors with the CAS staff. Questions concerning CAS are addressed by the Director of Dining Services.
3. A CAS question and answer session is held in June with the Director of Dining and the Orientation advisors.
4. During Orientation a CAS video tape, that explains the corporation and the services that are provided is shown. There is a question and answer period following the video tape .
5. An information table is set up outside of the dining room during the lunch period on the second day of Orientation. The students and parents are informed of this service during the Orientation presentation. This is used quite frequently by the parents who have individual questions.
6. All incoming Freshman and transfer students are sent a CAS brochure during the month of May.
7. A brochure is sent to all off campus students in May explaining CAS and the off campus meal plan.
8. During the last week of August a training meeting is held with the R.A. staff and a folder of information is given to all RA's.
9. A follow up dinner or snack service is held during the last week in September with the R.A. staff so that questions can be answered and information on CAS can be clarified or re-explained.
10. The Dining Service staff meets with the College Union student managers at the end of August to explain Dining Services and the Corporation.
11. The Director of Dining Services and the managers meet with student groups such as the Activities students, BSU, BACUS, Hub Club, and IRC students to plan events and to answer questions.
12. Every two weeks a student supervisor meeting is held in the Dining units to

answer questions that the supers may have and to clarify job duties and policies. Student questions and concerns are addressed at these meetings.

13. Quad meetings are held in both the Letchworth and the Red Jacket quad every other week. The meetings are attended by a R.A. or R.D. from each dorm and by a Manager from each dining unit and also by the Director of Dining Services. Questions, suggestions, complaints, policies etc. are discussed.
14. Each unit has a suggestion box. The Managers are responsible for reading and answering all questions either on the suggestion board, in person or by phone. The suggestions are listened to and implemented when possible.
15. Students can make an individual appointment at any time to discuss questions, suggestions or problems with either the Executive Director, the Director of Dining Services or with a Manager. Many students use this avenue of communication.
16. A meal modification committee is available for students who have special dietary concerns or problems using the meal plan. Meetings are frequently held with students who have too much money on their plan or not enough money on their plan.
17. Phone calls are handled on a daily basis from parents with meal plan questions.
18. Signs and table tents are used in the dining units to promote specials.
19. The CAS Messenger is printed monthly giving information on the corporation and Dining Services.
20. Nutrition information is printed in the Messenger and also on information sheets that are distributed in the dining units.
21. Managers and employees running the cash registers seem to be our best avenue of communication as students feel free to voice their opinions and questions there. If a question can not be handled by the Manager the student is directed to the correct person.
22. Surveys have been handed out at the end of each term for menu input and menu suggestions. We have received very little response to them. This term we are using small single question sheets to receive input. Questionnaires have been used during quad meetings to prompt communication.
23. Students who have used the Corporation or an aspect of it for their class projects have been very helpful in spreading correct information and in giving input.

24. Student interest groups such as the Vegetarians, Environmental groups, CARE, and others meet with the Director of Dining to express their wishes and concerns.
25. Letchworth and Red Jacket serve floor dinners to groups requesting them. These dinners are small and promote positive communication.
26. When new or different items are offered on the menu students are given taste samples. When this is done comments and suggestions are freely given.
27. Managers are required to be in the service areas during lunch and dinner hours. Most students are open and freely make comments to them.
28. Nutrition information sheets concerning current issues are placed in dining units for students to read.
29. The Director of Dining Services and or the Executive Director of CAS have frequently done dorm presentations for students when issues or concerns have come up. These meetings are planned and advertised. Managers have also done these presentations.
30. When ever student requests, complaints, or meetings occur, the topics are discussed at the Dining Service weekly staff meeting.

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