



# Student concerns and constraints: on the need for inclusive fieldwork

Bouke van Gorp (UU), Veronique Schutjens (UU) & Wim Bosschaart (WUR)

[b.vangorp@uu.nl](mailto:b.vangorp@uu.nl); [v.a.j.m.schutjens@uu.nl](mailto:v.a.j.m.schutjens@uu.nl); [wim.bosschaart@wur.nl](mailto:wim.bosschaart@wur.nl)



## Introduction

Fieldwork is a core pedagogy in GEES and often a mandatory part of their curriculum. There are calls to action to make fieldwork more accessible and inclusive (Laurence & Dowey 2022, Woodley et al. 2024). Previous research on inclusive fieldwork has focused on lessons learned from small scale experiments or on general suggestions to improve inclusion.

Meanwhile insights from experiences from large numbers of students in field courses are lacking, as are insights from Dutch Higher Education. Quantitative studies can help to make evidence-based changes to the design of field courses (Chasen et al. 2025).

## Pre & Post fieldwork survey

In/exclusion in fieldwork is a **multifaceted** issue which relates to its taken-for-granted position, being in the field with a group, field locations, traveling, being away from home and the practicalities of daily life in the field (Van Gorp et al. 2026). These different dimensions were included in the survey together with:

### Pre fieldwork:

- Familiarity & perceptions of destination;
- Fieldwork perceptions;
- Fieldwork preparation;
- Concerns regarding fieldwork;
- Disclosure of concerns;
- Personal characteristics.

### Post fieldwork:

- Fieldwork perceptions;
- Fieldwork preparation & information;
- Experiences in the field & inclusion;
- Disclosure of concerns in hindsight;
- Personal characteristics.

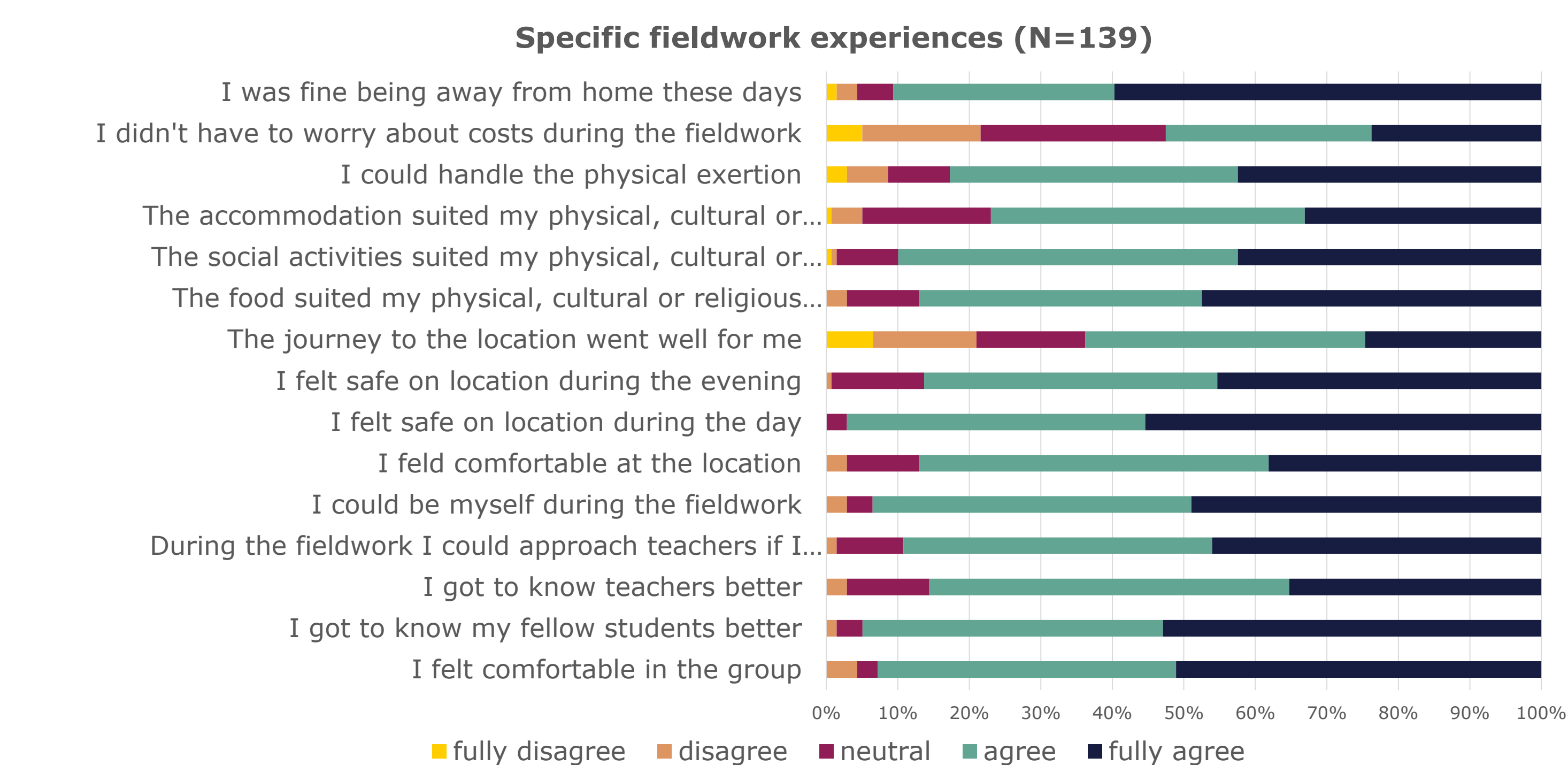
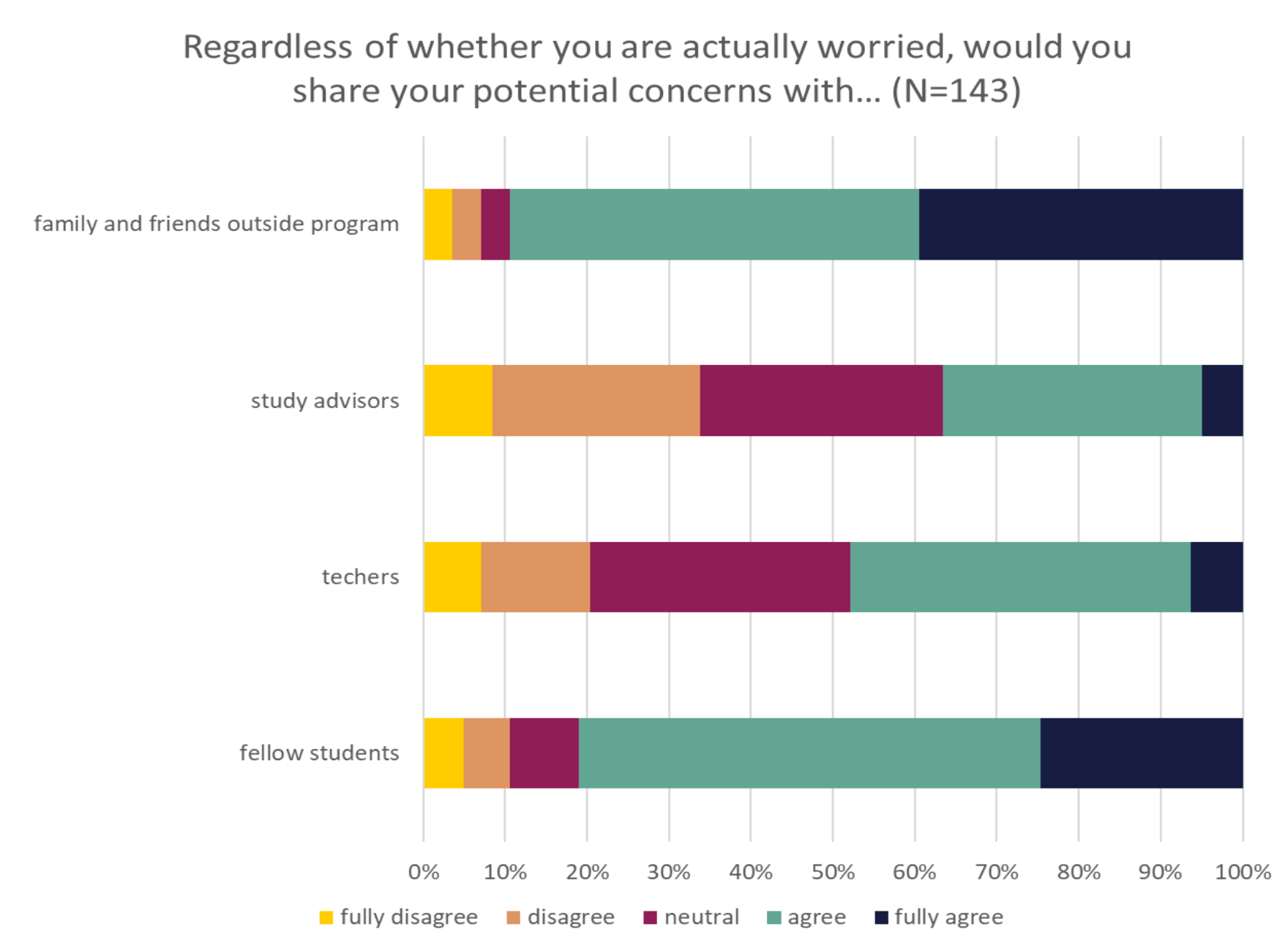
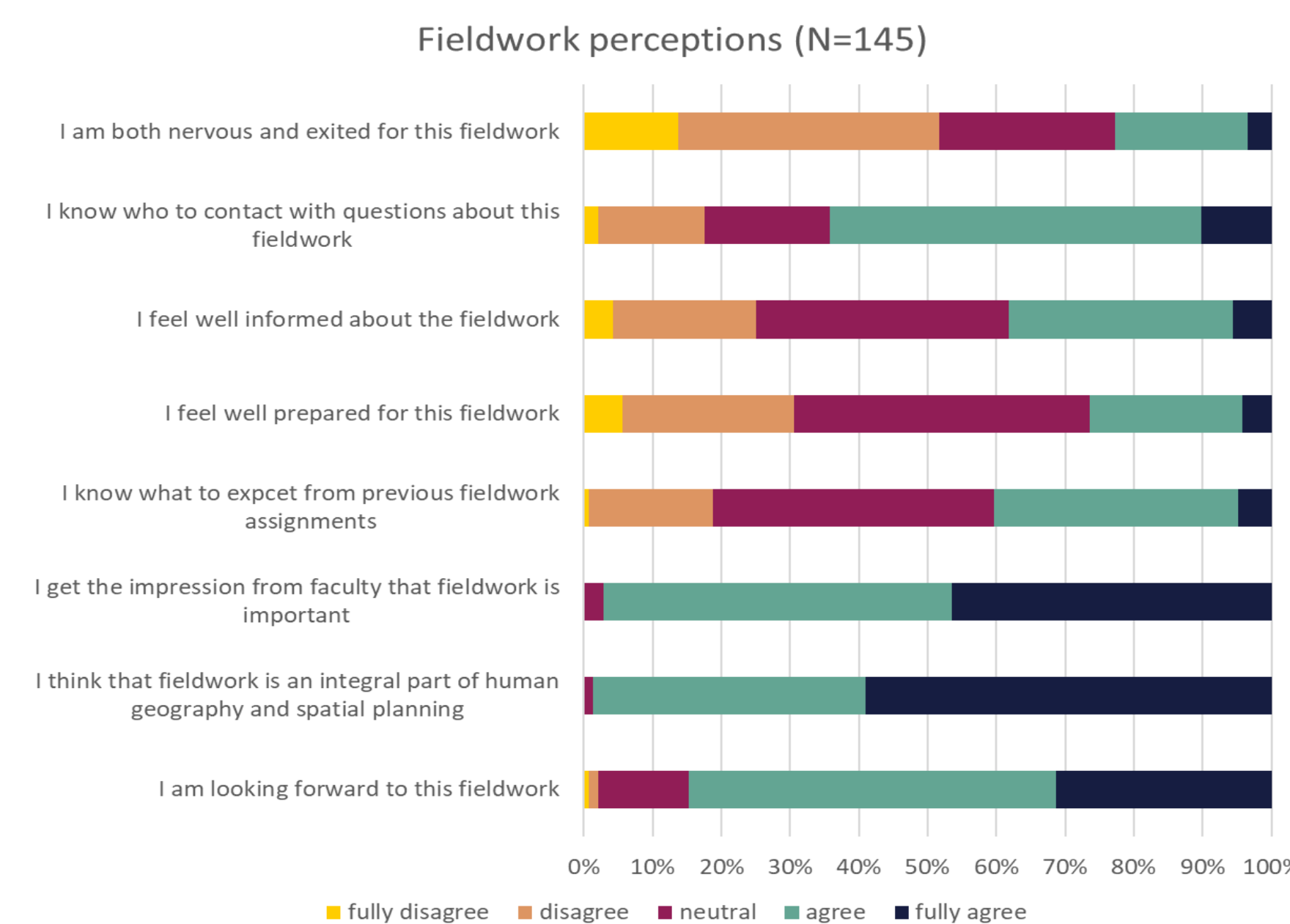
The Pre fieldwork and Post fieldwork surveys have been conducted in two mandatory BA courses with residential fieldwork, resulting in N=145 (pre) and N=155 (post).

## Results – Pre fieldwork

Most students look forward to fieldwork, but not all of them. The taken-for-granted nature of fieldwork in geography and planning education is reflected in the respondents answers. 12 students out of 145 report to have (several) concerns. Respondents are more inclined to share concerns with fellow students and family or friends than with representatives of the program – suggesting that there might be non-disclosure.

## What is fieldwork?

Fieldwork is defined here as *'any component of the curriculum that involves leaving the classroom and learning through first-hand experience'* (Boyle et al. 2007, 300). This can range from guided city walks to multiple day excursions with overnight stays. During fieldwork students typically work in small groups to experience places and phenomena in real life, connect practice to theory, or collect data (observations, survey, street interviews).



## Results - Post fieldwork

The vast majority of students enjoyed the experience (90%) and said they learned a lot (87%), however 4 respondents would have rather not gone on the trip if they had been given the choice. 29 respondents (21%) reported to have experienced some barriers that mostly relate to physical exertion of fieldwork, health, illness, fatigue, and costs.

## Why is it important that all students are aboard? Statistical analysis

Having concerns (Pre fieldwork) and having experienced barriers (Post fieldwork) negatively relates to the overall fieldwork perceptions and fieldwork experiences.

This is significant for the relation between concerns and looking forward, being nervous and excited, but also for finding the destination interesting and offering a lot to experience.

And likewise for experienced barriers and enjoyed fieldwork, learned a lot, look forward to next fieldwork and confirmed my choice of study, got to know the teachers better, be myself during fieldwork, felt comfortable at the fieldwork location, journey went well, social activities suited my needs, could handle the physical exertion.

## Conclusion

The outcomes confirm the need for designing more inclusive fieldwork. They also confirm the occurrence of non-disclosure, demonstrating that it is not enough as teachers to rely on a reactive strategy – making accommodations to the fieldwork when a students explicitly asks for it. A more pro-active approach is needed. Moreover, the descriptive statistics also offer insights in areas where easy fixes can make a difference such as in preparation of students.

### Acknowledgments:

We want to thank Karin van Look & Miriam de Boer for their support in designing the survey. We are obliged to all the students of *Grenzen in Perspectief* and *Studio Planning Basics Parkstad* for completing the survey.

## References

Boyle, A, Maguire, S, Martin, A, Milsom, C, Nash, R., Rawlinson, S., Turner, S., Wurthmann, S. & Conchie, S. (2007) Fieldwork is good: the student perception and the affective domain, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 31(2), p. 299-317

Chasen, A., Chapman Tripp, H., & Borrego, M. (2025). Disability and postsecondary fieldwork experiences in the natural sciences: a systematic review. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching* 62, 1006-1039

Lawrence, A. & Dowey, N. (2022). Six simple steps towards making GEES fieldwork more accessible and inclusive. *Area* 54, 52-59

Van Gorp, B., Bouwer, S., Miller, C. & Schutjens, V. (2026). From simple steps to deep roots: on the road to inclusive fieldwork in the Netherlands, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03098265.2026.2628326>

Woodley, E., Barr, S., Batty, L., Bickerstaff, K., Darvill, C., Ferdous, R., Holmes, N., Jon, I., Lynch, K., Martin, J., Marvell, A., McDougall, D., Pitt, H., Singleton, A., Souch, C., Yorke, L. (2024). The future of geography field course pedagogy in UK higher education. *Geo: Geography and Environment* 11, e00158