

SUUSI 2024: Shine On

Evaluation Survey Report

JP Vidas

The mission of SUUSI is to provide a one week experience evoking the best within us, in concert with Unitarian Universalist principles. SUUSI offers the opportunity to share an intergenerational environment of love, personal freedom, ethics, and joy in an intentional, nonjudgmental community.

Executive Summary and Strategic Programming Responses

The Executive Summary was written by JP Vidas, SUUSI 2024 Survey Staff, and the Strategic Responses to the primary themes of the summary were written by Chris Breivogel, SUUSI 2025 Director, based on the dynamic work of the SUUSI Core Staff and Board over the past year. The Strategic Responses are in *green italics* to delineate them. If you have any questions, please reach out to Chris at director@suusi.org.

SUUSI 2024 was the third year back in person since 2019, and our first year back at Radford University since 2014. A mid-year change in direction by Western Carolina University required a change in venue; happily our relationship work with Radford and our internal covenant work, combined with our smaller footprint and a change in week, allowed Radford to partner with us this year. As we have found, there is no “normal year” in recent times.

SUUSI continues to seek a new equilibrium between our expansive program of years past, which were supported by an attendee pool of around 1100, and the realities of a SUUSI with attendance just over half that. Adjusting to a different week meant some long-time participants could not join us. As with 2023, fewer participants meant a consolidated housing experience, with more “togetherness” as a result. Any change brings challenges, and this year was no exception, with a Nature program that scrambled to check out and update trip offerings, to Logistics staff needing to close out storage spaces in Cullowhee and bring needed equipment and supplies to Radford.

From beds to new registration forms and check-in space, from new worship and concert space to “UnBBQUUSI”, SUUSI continues to adapt to new bumps in the road, albeit with various levels of success and grace.

Some high points:

- Our attendees remain aware of – and appreciative of – the incredible amount of work, improvisation, and sheer determination that it took to pull SUUSI off this year. Again and again they commented about their deep gratitude for the Core Staff and Board and the work that we do. Complaints were tempered by appreciation of the effort and resources dedicated to a (mostly) smoothly running experience.
- SUUSI is deeply loved, especially by repeat attendees. SUUSI holds a central place in people’s hearts. People are eager to do what they can to help SUUSI, and have a hard time imagining their lives without it.
- Survey respondents mostly feel welcomed, loved, and accepted at SUUSI. Deep friendships form at SUUSI, even when contact outside SUUSI week is rare. Many of us feel that we are free to express our truest selves at SUUSI in a way that can be difficult in other settings of our lives.
- People feel challenged to be their best selves at SUUSI. Many attendees welcome SUUSI as a time for personal growth and inspiration for the rest of the year, not just fun.
- SUUSI offers a program rich in both depth and breadth (albeit a slimmer menu than in years past). People are sometimes overwhelmed by the opportunities. SUUSI creates joyful and satisfying ways to fill our time, along with hard choices.
- Our LGB participants and their children report experiencing SUUSI as an extremely welcoming place. Many of them report strong feelings of gratitude for the acceptance and inclusion they experience at SUUSI.

- The Radford campus is a familiar home for veteran SUUSI-goers, and has been updated (no non-A/C dorms among other enhancements). The efforts of Radford to welcome us with our demanding set of requirements were commented on by many participants.
- Separate teen housing was regarded as a win both for the teen program and for other residents.

Of course, we still have work to do.

- Newcomers to SUUSI continue to be overwhelmed by the experience. Not everyone takes advantage of the outreach beforehand and then some are unnecessarily surprised.
- Newcomers also report an experience of being superficially welcomed but not fully invited in.

Strategic Responses:

New for SUUSI 2025:

- *“Sundae Social” on Sunday evening, our first night at SUUSI.*
 - *Open to all ages.*
 - *Includes get-to-know-you activities.*
 - *Aims to help newcomers feel welcome from the start.*
- *DEIA staff sponsored meet-ups during the week*

Coming in SUUSI 2026

- *Optional open housing groups.*
 - *Participants can sign up to be housed near others with shared interests and/or identities.*
 - *Designed to foster community and connection.*
- Communication at SUUSI continues to be refined. The impossible goal of reaching everyone with exactly the right information in the right channel at the right time remains an aspiration.

Strategic Responses:

- *Digital-first approach: Most SUUSI information is now online to reduce paper use and leverage widespread cell phone usage.*
- *Access via SOLIS: Key details are available through the SUUSI website and participants’ SOLIS accounts.*
- *Daily emails: Participants receive nightly emails with their next-day schedule and open events of interest.*
- *SUUSI Helpline: Available nearly all day for info, support, and problem-solving.*
- *In-person support: SUUSI Office is open Monday–Friday, 8:30 am–2 pm for help with registration, workshops, and more.*
- *Paper schedules will be available upon request at the SUUSI Office.*
- Accommodating mobility and accessibility special needs remains an area of growth. Star Car program was well regarded this year.

Strategic Responses:

- *Improved accessibility for SUUSI 2025:*
 - *Additional dorm available with better access for mobility scooters and wheelchairs.*
 - *Registrants needing mobility accommodations will be housed in the most accessible dorms available.*
- *Dedicated accessibility staff:*
 - *Focused on addressing physical and neurological accessibility needs.*
 - *Contact via access@suusi.org (before or during SUUSI) or the SUUSI Helpline (during SUUSI).*
 - *Staff support is limited, but all reasonable efforts will be made to assist.*
- Covid protocols remain an area of tension.
- Room and board, while adequate for many, remain the least satisfying areas for many more. Dorm beds always pose challenges - this year it was adjusting bed height. Dorm room climate control also provided

finicky. Expectations for food have been managed to some extent, but we still need to explore creative ways to help people meet nutritional needs and to rehabilitate the social dimensions of meals. For meals Radford was a “sideways” move from WCU, with some experiences better and others worse.

Strategic Responses:

- *Dorm room updates:*
 - *Conference Services will lower all dorm beds before check-in.*
 - *Suggestions to be included in the suggested packing list: consider bringing a foam mattress topper and an oscillating fan—it may help keep the A/C running by simulating motion in the room.*
- *Dining accommodations:*
 - *SUUSI now has a staff dining liaison who is a licensed nutritionist.*
 - *Liaison works with Radford Dining to ensure ingredient transparency and meet dietary needs.*
 - *Suggestions to be included in the NUUS: note any food sensitivities or dietary restrictions during registration and register by early June to allow time for accommodations to be arranged.*
- Late night noise from unBBQUUSI (and post-unBBQUUSI conversations) engender conflict on noise levels and appropriate quiet hours.

Strategic Responses:

- *New housing approach:*
 - *Efforts will be made to avoid placing guests near large lounges with late-night activities.*
 - *Those rooms may be reserved for people running the activities (who will be up late anyway).*
 - *While ideal spacing isn’t always possible, housing staff will do their best within constraints.*
- Keeping up with information now presupposes access to email and texting while at SUUSI. While this is true for most participants, a sizable group have difficulty accessing electronic communication, and don’t know the alternatives available.

Strategic Responses:

- *In-person support available for SUUSI 2025 at SUUSI Office:*
 - *SUUSI Office open Monday–Friday, 8:30 am–2 pm.*
 - *Help available for registration, workshops, and more.*
 - *Paper copies of schedules can be requested.*
- Crafting “the perfect SUUSI” experience remains an art and not a science. With very diverse expectations and goals, no one template provides the best way to SUUSI. Helping participants choose their own adventure will increase participants’ satisfaction and the vitality of the SUUSI community.

Strategic Responses:

- *There continues to be lots of information available for participants on the SUUSI website.*
- *Support for newcomers:*
 - *The Newcomer Coordinator will reach out to newcomers after registration has been open for a bit.*
 - *Anyone—new or returning, registered or not—can email newcomers@suusi.org for tips.*
- SUUSI continues to wrestle with issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. These concerns are more front-and-center, but the work remains challenging and needs broad-based buy-in and participation.

Strategic Responses:

- *SUUSI leadership has expanded staff dedicated to diversity, equity, and inclusion.*
- *Feedback is encouraged: Suggestions can be sent to deia@suusi.org.*
- Differing perspectives on issues such as the balance between teen independence and appropriate supervision, transparency in SUUSI decision-making and communication, and whether SUUSI is a fun

camp or an intentional spiritual community (or both, and in what proportions) need to find healthy and robust resolutions that are at least understood if not subscribed to by all.

- Afternoon timing of Community Time (4-6 pm) conflicting/overlapping with dinner times being 4:30-6:30 pm and dinner times changing part way through the week.

Strategic Responses:

- *Schedule adjustments for SUUSI 2025:*
 - *Afternoon programming (youth, middlers, workshops) shifted to 1:30–3:30 pm.*
 - *Community Time moved earlier to 3:30–5:30 pm.*
 - *Dinner time pushed later to 5:00–7:00 pm, with Radford's agreement.*
 - *The time adjustments aim to reduce overlap between Community Time and dinner.*

What's new

Most of these bullet points above were carried forward from the prior year's report with only slight adjustments – returning SUUSI participants' experiences are fairly stable. Notable “new” notes voiced include:

- Reactions to differences between WCU and Radford
- Concerns about future viability of SUUSI (finances, participant cost, critical mass/size, precariousness of relationship with our hosts, concerns about attendee pipeline particularly for families).

Strategic Responses:

- *Financial landscape:*
 - *SUUSI lost money from 2020–2023 due to free/underpriced virtual events in 2020 and 2021 and low in-person attendance combined with registration fees that did not cover expenses in 2022 and 2023.*
 - *Attendance has dropped post-COVID from 1,000–1,200 to about 550.*
 - *SUUSI borrowed ~\$80,000 from the SUUSI Foundation during this time to keep SUUSI going.*
- *2024 financial turnaround:*
 - *To ensure that SUUSI 2024 did not result in a 5th year budget deficit, the registration fee increased from \$550 to \$975 and costs were minimized by operating with fewer staff and reduced spending.*
 - *Due to registration cost calibration and budget reductions, SUUSI 2024 resulted in a modest budget surplus, a strong step toward financial sustainability.*
 - *This modest surplus has been transferred to the SUUSI Foundation to begin to replenish the reserves that were spent keeping SUUSI going over the course of 2020-2023.*
- *2025 pricing:*
 - *Registration fee remains the same as 2024.*
 - *There is a new \$75 single-occupancy surcharge to cover Radford's housing costs.*
- *Optimism for 2025 and beyond:*
 - *Same location and dates as 2024*
 - *No change in the dates mid-year (SUUSI had to find a new host between Dec 2023 and Feb 2024).*
 - *Increased marketing and outreach efforts are underway.*
 - *SUUSI has, and continues to cultivate, a strong relationship with Radford.*
- *Future pricing outlook:*
 - *The goal is to keep registration costs stable in coming years.*
 - *This goal is more achievable if registration numbers continue to grow.*
- *Ongoing participant expectations to continue strong relationship with Radford:*
 - *Use SUUSI Helpline or staff for any needs or complaints—not Radford staff.*
 - *Continued kindness and courtesy toward Radford staff is essential.*

About the survey and survey report

Purpose of the survey and survey report

The survey provides a structured way of capturing attendee's experiences, and allowing them to raise issues with and provide constructive feedback to the Board and Core Staff to improve future SUUSIs. The survey also helps attendees process their SUUSI experience and identify ways they can improve the experience on their own.

In past years, the survey has also deliberately attempted to frame aspects of the experience, so attendees can manage their expectations appropriately and not treat the survey like a Yelp review or another opportunity to simply vent. To streamline the survey, we removed some of the steering questions last year.

The survey report highlights themes and trends, provides context for individual observations, and filters the approximately 4000 open-ended responses into a manageable summary. While not faithfully reproducing every wart and blemish (or rainbow and unicorn) of the survey responses, it tries to provide a high-level view while reporting sufficient detail to be useful input to the SUUSI Board's and Core Staff's decisions.

As we did last year, we managed to deliver an announcement with links in the departure NUUS, and printed posters with QR codes to get to Teen and YA/Median housing (historically under-represented in survey responses) and on announcement boards. This year, our response rate was close to 50%.

Helping the rest to process their SUUSI – and finding out how their SUUSI went and how to improve future SUUSIs - will require additional tools and possibly efforts prior to SUUSI 2025.

Adjustments to this year's survey and survey report

1. Section asking about the Teen program was extended to also cover the YA program.
2. By request, questions were added about key areas of SUUSI experience and about ideas to cut costs. An additional question was added to capture specific feedback to be shared with Radford.
3. As with last year, we expedited reporting out survey responses that indicated they desired a contact from SUUSI leadership.

Demographics: Who We Are

575 people registered to attend SUUSI 2024, about level with the past two years (596, 607) and approximately half of the pre-pandemic attendance, which had been relatively steady the prior 10 years. 228 adults or teens filled out the survey, and 12 youth or middlers filled out the youth survey, for a combined participation rate of 41.4%, compared to last year's 51.4%. It is possible we need to do more post-SUUSI survey reminders to boost participation rates, or alternately expand the response window.

SOLIS reports racial breakdown as 8% BIPOC (27 multiracial, 11 Hispanic/Latinx, 4 Black, 3 Asian/Pacific islander, 1 native American). I have not been able to find the report that gave me numbers for White or Decline to Answer from SOLIS. Survey respondents were overwhelmingly white, not of Hispanic/Latinx origin (78%). More survey respondents identify as Asian or Pacific Islander (4) or Hispanic/Latinx (29) than do as Black or African American (2). 5 respondents indicated Other (participants can indicate more than one category).

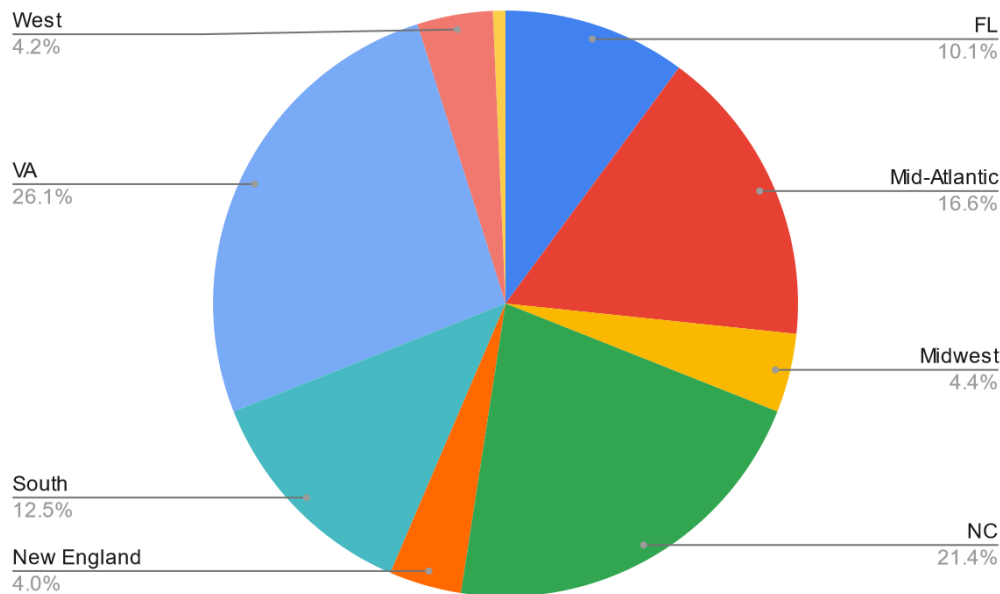
Survey respondents overwhelmingly identify as Unitarian-Universalists (88%), and the majority in all age groups are affiliated with a church (74%).

SOLIS reports the gender breakdown as 59% female, 39% male, 1% transgender. Survey respondents report their gender as 63% cisgender female, 28% cisgender male, with the remainder split between transgender, non-binary, and other or preferring to self-define. 31% of respondents identify as LGBTQIA+.

Where Do We Come From? What Are We?

Per SOLIS, SUUSI 2023 attendees came from 32 states, the District of Columbia, and Canada and the UK.

57.5% of the total attendees came from just three states: Virginia, North Carolina, and Florida. This year, the percentage of participants coming from Florida and the South dropped.



Ages of 2024 SUUSI attendees ranged from under 1 to 87. 18.2% of our 2024 attendees were legal minors, compared to 17.6% in 2023 and 23.5% in 2019.

If each age (0-87) had the same number of participants, we would have more participants aged 0-10, 14-17, and 26-50, and fewer aged 14-17 and 51-65. Other groups are in line with equal distribution by age.

Participants 26-50 disproportionately do not fill out the survey.

Compared to other years, age distribution is rather similar, although youth attendance is down and teens are as usual over-represented. Continued attention to factors reducing attendance for young adults (26-35) may be desired if continuous attendance and lifelong participation in SUUSI is a goal. To truly know why people stop attending SUUSI, we may need to reach out to non-attendees (who have attended in the past) rather than surveying attendees. A non-attendee survey has been designed and can be distributed to prior attendees after review of distribution list to weed out addresses for the deceased..

How many SUUSIs have you attended, including this one?

In the past, SUUSI-goers who fill out surveys are about evenly split between “lifers” (6+ SUUSIs) and “relative newcomers” (1-5 SUUSIs). This year, 41% of attendees and 50% of survey responses come from those attending 10 or more SUUSIs, with groups of newer SUUSI-goers modestly under-responding. Some report it taking 3, 4, even 7 years to no longer feel like a newcomer, while others integrate more quickly. Newcomers provided 12.4% of survey responses and made up 15.1% of attendees.

Note that our retention rate of first-time attendees (as measured by percentage of respondents staying a second year) is in the 40-50% range. This may be acceptable and reflects the reality that the SUUSI experience is not the ideal vacation or camp for some, or that family circumstances or conflicting plans may not allow for returning to SUUSI each year. This number may not reflect the overall retention rate, given bias that may be present in those choosing to fill out the survey.

We may want to extend newcomer activity invitations to those coming their second year also. Many respondents report it taking several years to “get their feet” under them.

Newcomers Survey (28 total responses)

Most newcomer responses were positive. Newcomers did find registration and the first day in particular to be overwhelming, and noted inside jargon that they felt they were expected to know.

We still have difficulty helping newer SUUSIgoers find their place and their SUUSI “way”. Established groups being sensitive to newcomers and offering opportunities to invite them in is an area for continued growth. However, in general, newcomers appreciated the ways of designating newcomers on name tags, and felt that other participants were at least superficially welcoming and inclusive.

How welcome and comfortable did you feel at SUUSI?

Most participants reported feeling welcome at SUUSI. Multiple respondents noted that it felt they were witnessing a reunion from the outside.

What particular features of SUUSI (for example, programs, activities, events, or people) helped you feel connected or helped you become part of the community? Do you have any ideas about what else might help newcomers get connected?

Most responses to this question indicated that **smaller contexts** (connection circles, Common Grounds, Pair-a-Dice, nature trips, other small group workshops) made good opportunities to connect and integrate. When they felt comfortable asking to join a table at meals, newcomers found that worked well.

A few noted it was **difficult to build connection**, either because social circles were already firmly in place and did not make efforts to include newcomers, or that they had not met more of the newcomer cohort until late in the week. Those that found other newcomers noted the mutual support was helpful, while others had a previous connection with a veteran SUUSI-goer, and found that helped.

The **newcomers check-in process** has helped several people integrate better in the past; this year the check-in process faced unique challenges.

Suggestions include extending the newcomer name tag, designating tables at mealtime for “meet someone new”, and more activities in OASUUS and/or having an equivalent designated drop-in space for all newcomers.

Other comments or impressions about being a newcomer at SUUSI:

Most respondents to this question reported very positive experiences, feeling warmly received and making connections. The first day can be overwhelming, and again, the experience of cliques/already formed social groups can be daunting especially for newcomers.

Some adjustments (either signing up for more or dropping some events) proved necessary for some participants. The sleep experience was suboptimal for some respondents.

The packing list was appreciated, although some realized after the fact that it would have been helpful to have more of the suggested items from the packing list.

This comment sums up a common feeling: “... the fact that so many people knew each other and had strong connections already really made it hard to connect.” We don't want to weaken the connections, but need to welcome newcomers in, and that has been challenging for a long time.

Overall SUUSI experience

Most respondents reported having a good SUUSI experience. Areas that were lower than we would hope:

Basic needs (food, sleep)

Continued work on the food experience and on dorm experiences would be beneficial. In particular:

Food

- Vegetarian options, especially for protein
- Longer hours especially for dinner (conflicts with community time, other programs, no grab-and-go options)
- More options and variety on vegetables
- Some additional variety especially for breakfast would be appreciated
- Condiment options to add more customized flavor would also be welcome
- Information on and possibly the option of high chairs in the dining hall

Some people really liked the food, but noted that desserts went to the swift. Several respondents wished the hours had been more expansive or settled earlier in the week, rather than changing and increasingly restricted throughout the week. Again, our communication channels explaining the reasons behind changes are not reaching everyone.

Dorms

Two comments predominated here - bed height and climate control. The mattress situation was significantly improved from WCU; but having most bed frames at a high level and needing to call Radford staff (who were helpful) to adjust bed height was inconvenient, especially for an aging SUUSI population. Climate control required something moving (like a fan) to continuously trigger the A/C.

Other comments noted the unusual profile of power outlets in Moffett, requiring a slim power cord to connect. Many phone charger adapters and power cords could not be plugged into the outlets in that dorm.

A relative scarcity of common rooms and available refrigerators led to some consternation, especially for people who have medications requiring refrigeration. See comments re: OASUUS location. First floor of Moffett also had a lack of refrigerator capacity with the needs of Common Grounds taking most available fridge space.

Finally, SUUSI-goers with mobility issues would appreciate accessible dorm rooms with universal design features like grab bars in bathrooms.

Spiritual needs (worship, etc.)

While many liked the services this year, a sizable minority were looking for more variety in presenter and feeling more like a “theme talk” of old. The bridging ceremony received mixed reviews, with some loving it and others wishing that the glitter blessing did not feel rushed. Most seem to have made their peace with the separation of celebrating the lives of those who have died from the other life transitions.

The virtual option for services in particular had been popular in years past and was missed this year.

One respondent voiced concerns about cultural appropriation in the Nature worship/pagan service Friday morning.

Most services had moderate attendance.

Ingathering organization was not universally celebrated, with some feeling lectured and longing for it to feel more like a pep rally - while others felt it was too much like a pep rally. Celebrating how many years people have come to SUUSI remains divisive, especially between newcomers and SUUSI veterans. Some wondered whether an accessible option can be found for opening circle similar to the solution found for closing circle. Educating participants on the reasons underlying the “lecture” part of Ingathering continues to be challenging, and new approaches may be needed.

Pastoral care - in general, people appreciated the option being available, whether it was working with HEART or with ministers one on one. Interactions were characterized as positive and productive.

Dedicated spaces (Meditation, OASUUS)

10 responses indicated use of a dedicated space. Most respondents knew about the spaces.

A few comments noted the meditation space should have been larger or that it wasn't clear where it was.

Reactions to OASUUS note that more clarity on the purpose of this space would be helpful, and more “thought and energy” should go into it. Some who used it found it very helpful, others thought more scheduled events would be helpful, while some (including some participants who identify as BIPOC) question the need for the segregated space. Explicitly calling out the overwhelmingly white context of SUUSI and explaining the value of a space where constant vigilance is not needed could be helpful. SUUSI participants living on this floor noted the space was rarely in use and that no convenient refrigerator was available.

Community and other SUUSI experiences

SUUSI survey respondents liked community time in general. Although the tail end conflicted with the restricted dinner hours, community time was well attended across the generations. Participants liked the variety of activities including crafts and decorations, card games, spelling bee, and the concerts by SUUSIBoyz and the Big Sing.

Participants naturally found community in many other ways, spanning the gamut of programming, from late night song circle to Pair-a-Dice to Cabaret to workshops to conversations over jigsaw puzzles and/or coffee in Common Grounds.

Workshop selection was noted as thin compared to prior years; additional transparency on how workshops “work” for the larger SUUSI population could be helpful. SOLIS issues with allowing on-campus signups for cancelled workshops led to some unnecessary disappointment which can probably be avoided with a technical fix.

Coming back

About 6.7% (12) said they were not coming back, or would come back only if changes are made. Responses of those not leaning towards returning include:

- Issues with rooms (internet, air conditioning, accessibility issues)
- Fewer workshops offered than in the past
- Critical mass with age groups (need to build back up)
- Distance, travel becoming more difficult
- Dietary issues with dining hall that can't be mitigated
- Covid policies (too lax)
- Cost

A few comments noted they came in order to enable their childrens' SUUSI experience by necessity, and as their children aged up into the YA bracket, the children may continue coming but the parent may opt out.

Most comments were very positive, highlighting the community, the activities, the friendships, and the sense of belonging most participants eventually find.

Staff (51 responses)

51 of those completing the survey indicated they received some staff credit. Almost half indicated credit in excess of 75%.

One in eight respondents (12%) felt they did not successfully balance work and non-work parts of their SUUSI.

75% plan on being on staff next year. Slightly more plan on decreasing time commitment than increasing, with the majority keeping it the same.

Some found they did not hear anything from their team until they were at SUUSI. Other responses noted the need for formalizing institutional knowledge and knowledge transfer, and conducting more pre-SUUSI work to enable success. Some staff members expressed interpersonal and communication challenges with core staff members (vague about precisely who).

One workshop leader reported having trouble finding out how to submit workshop expenses for reimbursement. Several workshop leaders reported inappropriate room assignments for their workshop (not appropriate physical space, or no working internet in the room).

By and large, staff felt appreciated, but this was not universal. It's helpful when non-staff participants directly thank staff; this is not always possible for behind-the-scenes roles, but we can continue to work on expressing gratitude.

Most staff enjoyed the shared work and took pride in what they were able to accomplish. Strong teams and successful workshops were cited, as were groups that had strong communication before and going into SUUSI, enabling them to hit the ground running.

Suggestions for improving the staff experience include a more substantive June/July schedule, more and better communication, increased access in SOLIS, scaling back staff commitment, knowing schedule prior to SUUSI (so staff can sign up for workshops), and more staff available for some functions.

One staff member reported (in vague terms) serious conflict with other staff rising to the level of hostility.

Covid

Respondents largely felt the right balance was being struck this year. Some were glad about the relative lack of restrictions; other noted the pre-SUUSI Covid test should have been monitored to some extent to avoid a super-spreader event. Participants did report contracting Covid or other respiratory illnesses while at SUUSI. a segment of respondents felt masking should have been better supported, for instance bringing back a "Mask Required" area in worship services. Some immune compromised attendees felt constantly at risk.

Note: we did not hear from people who chose not to attend because of Covid restrictions (in both directions). Anecdotally, some people stayed home because of the vaccination requirement, and fewer elderly participants are attending than in the past.

Virtual SUUSI

Some interest remains in having Virtual SUUSI options, not necessarily "live". In particular, some survey respondents indicated the ability to watch a service or concert hour at a time of one's choosing helps when one's staff schedule is incompatible with attending one or the other. By and large, participants do not need or expect a streaming or delayed virtual option with high production values, with some saying a cell phone camera would be sufficient if audio can come from the PA system. The ability to review a recording was regarded as more essential than a livestream.

Program spotlights

Teens

11 teens responded to the survey. They (mostly) loved CACHE, although some noted it was way too loud. Community, staff, and activities were all highlighted as positives. Negatives included CACHE/late night volume levels and hygiene of some participants (need to shower more often).

One response indicated touch groups could have had more structure; another noted tubing trip was a bit too long (but better than last year). They said to keep/not change CACHE, new curfew time, and the all nighter. One response wanted the all-nighter moved to the last night. Lots of suggestions for workshops were provided, and the genderfluid theme for CACHE was particularly popular.

Nature

Most participants love nature trips - when they can participate. Respondents frequently cite the variety of trips (including one with short drives) and the chance to connect with other participants on a longer adventure.

Physical limitations, weather cancellations, and schedule challenges all work against those happy aspects of the nature program. Cost is also a deterrent to increased participation, as are physical limitations.

Suggestions for next year include developing more close-to-campus trips which might help keep cost down due to reduced van use, and keeping enough gentle trips available for those with physical limitations.

Transportation generally worked fine this year. One participant appreciated the option of driving since they are a “poor passenger.” A few responses noted a trip where a driver was hurrying back, and reported this being singularly unpleasant in the back row on rough roads.

Issues were reported with the Dismal Falls teen trip return taking a longer way back than necessary; possible solutions including having printed directions for van drivers.

Participants on an adult tubing trip noted a call to the outfitter prior to leaving campus would have avoided a drive there and back (cancelled due to swift currents) and allowed participants to switch into another activity.

Several responses did not like the lack of masking while in vans. Last year, a similar response in the other direction occurred (not liking masking in vans).

Help line

The Help Line seems to be working for the most part as a single point of contact for miscellaneous requests.

Some calls were promised an action (signage around Common Grounds/unBBQUUSI space to remind participants to be considerate near the dorm rooms) but this did not occur. A better tracking system for help line items might ensure better follow-through.

One respondent expressed concern for those answering the line, hoping they get sufficient breaks. Another noted not just anyone can effectively staff the help line. This function may need additional staffing so the registration staff (which also cover the help line) are not over-worked.

Night Life

Serendipity remains a central part of the experience for some participants, and reaction to the themes and decorations was very positive. The music seemed less divisive than usual this year, although suggestions and preferences were offered (asking for mutually contradictory things). Some concerns were voiced about the cost of having 4 bartenders each night to serve alcohol. Volume levels were considered too high (ear damaging levels) by several participants, and use of a dB monitoring app was recommended in a few responses. Police presence had mixed reviews - some loved how participatory they became, while others really didn't like their presence as a matter of principle. Education on the necessity of campus police presence for Serendipity to serve alcohol (or whatever other considerations required it) may help. Participants really appreciated the food at Serendipity.

UnBBQUUSI was appreciated this year, but people understandably miss the vibe of the outdoor BBQUUSI of years past, and its proximity to dorm rooms where other participants sleep requires additional care and consideration that was not always exercised. The earlier start is appreciated.

Concert Hour and Cabaret

Most respondents enjoyed concert hour when they could attend. One concert-goer noted they would prefer more diversity in music type (versus 100% folk). As usual, some people like some performers, others like different performers. SUUSI-goers missed the opportunity to catch up on performances via recording when they could not attend due to scheduling conflicts. The lack of back stage room in this venue made queuing up tricky for Jamboree especially and other nights also. Making sure newer/younger performers know to be there enough ahead of scheduled times for Cabaret acts will help better integrate them. School of Rock went better this year.

Age-specific programming

Participants liked these when they plugged in. Some older adults missed information on the connection circles that were done in past SUUSIs. Restrictions on music selections at CACHE were not well received, resulting in less attendance by YAs. YAs did like the one YA-only night for CACHE. Some YA newcomers found it difficult to integrate with the age group specific programming, but connected with peers at other activities like Pair-a-Dice..

Middler programming got mixed reviews for non-13s programming, although messing with boats was highly regarded. Communication was missed about the closing circle for middleers and probably needs to be more explicit (with parents and middleers both) so newcomers understand what the closing circle is.

Parents of teens shared opinions about the difficulty of getting to mailboxes and visiting in the dorm due to the (appropriate but draconian) key card restrictions for the teen dorm. Some teens are looking for more structured activities than they found this year. Others noted that having a buffer between TWOB commitments and mandatory teen activities would be helpful.

YAs noted low attendance of certain activities (touch groups, lip sync battle e.g.) made them less compelling. Others reported repeated mix-ups excluding them from activities such as Assassin led to them feeling left out.

One response voiced concerns about how the nursery was run.

In a nutshell

What was your favorite part of SUUSI this year?

Participants called out:

- Community time
- Concert Hour/Cabaret
- Meeting new people
- Connecting with friends, new and old
- Late night Song Circle
- Nature trips (Tubing, foraging, hikes)
- Pair-a-Dice
- Hugs and seeing friends
- Serendipity
- TWOB

What one area needed the most improvement, and how should it be improved?

Top issues:

- Light and A/C management, bed heights in dorm rooms
- Food and Dining (hours, expectations, options)
- Accessibility issues
- Higher attendance/rebuilding community
- Communication (prefer over- rather than under- communicating especially at the beginning of the week)
- Building access (repeated issues with cards)
- Mug Book instructions for reviewing information, indicating what numbers will be listed
- Areas outside of dining hall or education/communication on spaces available for unstructured gathering
- Morning worship
- Ingathering (too much like a pep rally, not enough like a pep rally, "feeling scolded")
- Communication with nursery staff
- Inter-staff communication (YA group and Nurture for chaplain availability e.g.)
- Registration chaos

- Workshop cost

What do you wish you had known?

- How to design a SUUSI experience (late night vs. morning, workshops vs. volunteer/staff)
- How much work full time staff is
- New dorm layout, lighting, other particulars on rooms
- How intense the week can be
- How helpful move-in staff would be
- Late Night Song Circle (knowing about it earlier in week)
- Locations for room assignment (ahead of time would be nice) and workshops
- Accessibility situation with dorm rooms
- Various packing items
- To ask for a room far from Common Grounds/unBBQUUSI

What do you plan doing differently at future SUUSIs?

- Bringing more items (various types)
- Sign up for more (or less)
- Moving to medians from YA
- Connect more with unfamiliar people

What programming area(s) of SUUSI are most essential for you?

- Pair-a-Dice
- unBBQUUSI
- Artisan's Bazaar
- Community Time
- Concert Hour
- Dancing
- Nature trips
- Workshops (various types called out)
- Music
- Worship
- Late Night Song Circle
- Volunteering
- Star Car/Accessibility support
- Youth/Teen/YA programming

Communication

SUUSI staff has many communication channels available to it, split between physical (poster/sign/flyer, printed NUUS, printed catalog, registration packet), ephemeral (verbal announcements), and electronic (website, SOLIS, text, online NUUS, Facebook). Most survey respondents indicating using many of these methods.

Communication was appreciated and effective overall. Some felt it was great, others felt it was poor. More printed information and signage would be helpful.

Overall, most people appreciated the fluid circumstances of this SUUSI and understood there was a lot going on, but missed information led to some frustration.

Some ran into glitches, not hearing about cancelled workshops. SUUSI jargon can still be an issue.

Signup information for the Remind text service could be shared more times and explained better for first-time attendees. Text numbers on file are sometimes stale (participants should review on registration). Some people reported having their text number on file but not being signed up for the SUUSI texts. Others noted that for them, uninstalling the app and just getting texts was superior to the app experience.

Suggestions on additional platforms include Youtube. Discord was divisive, with some saying it would be a great idea and others explicitly saying “please don’t do it”, while other responses indicate “we have enough (or too many) places to check already”. Having the same information published in multiple places may increase uptake.

Youth programming

Most comments were quite positive; a few noted that communication (pre-SUUSI and during SUUSI) could have been better. Comments about nursery and middler issues have been covered above.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

Sense of Belonging

A few participants noted difficulty feeling a sense of belonging in the larger SUUSI context, but found belonging and connection in sub-groups within SUUSI. Others say that, while they have fun at SUUSI year after year, they have never felt like they belonged. Awareness of class and race differences affects participants coming from a different background, with one person of color noting “Sometimes I feel my belonging is conditional or it’s tokenized”.

Many newcomers (including those here more than one year) report feeling disconnected. One quote: “It is difficult to integrate into the strong connections people have.”

Being mindful of others’ potential lack of connection, and inviting them in, remains a potential area of focus.

Most participants reported having a feeling of belonging. Some noted the smaller size of this SUUSI made it easier, and worried about the “feel” of a larger SUUSI.

Furthering the Goal of welcoming and including all participants

No consensus was present here. Some people see no problem, others see large issues. Whether it’s a mobility/accessibility axis, or a culture/race axis, opinions and perspectives differ. It is clear the majority cis/White/heteronormative culture is vulnerable to blind spots, but have a growing awareness of these blind spots and would like help working on better welcoming and including all participants while not coming off as insincere or patronizing. OASUUS remains a divisive topic even for people who identify as BIPOC; is having this space patronizing and part of a segregationist mindset, or is it indeed helpful or even essential for some?

Working towards building the Beloved Community

The survey had very few BIPOC, non-binary or trans respondents. Opinions on the completeness and validity of the information gathered through the survey should take that implicit bias into account.

The cost increase this year also made it difficult for some to attend without working or receiving a SUUSIship. The path from SUUSIship to regular staff could be streamlined also to address those who max out the 3 years of SUUSIships. Multiple participants report cost being a factor influencing their decision to attend next year.

How did SUUSI's efforts to support your needs work for you? What suggestions do you have to further improve your SUUSI experience?

Star Cars were very appreciated. Multiple participants noted this part of the campus where adults were housed is not very accessibility friendly. Issues arose regarding access to refrigerators for medications in Moffett, where mobility issues raise significant barriers to going to another floor's refrigerator. Someone also mentioned having size inclusive chairs in various settings (both large and sturdy, rated for higher weights) would help inclusivity efforts.

Parting thoughts (these are all direct quotes from the parting thoughts on the survey)

Great work everyone!

Huge thanks to all the staff for making this year a great SUUSI despite the logistical challenges

I am in awe of the generosity of those leading various areas. Their spirit of giving and fostering community is overtly evident. The generosity and compassion expressed by the musicians: Pat, Greg, drum daddy, Eric, etc. Not only do they share and teach but all of the schlepping they did. I'm thankful to all.

I appreciate all the hard work the board and committees put in to make SUUSI happen -it is a huge undertaking and not without glitches. They are all to be commended.

Great job by all the volunteers that work so hard putting this together - Thank you!

Great time. Exhausting as always but in a good way! I hope we can re-invite more people back and get to a slightly larger, sustainable place.

Enjoyed the experience, keep it at Radford and do whatever you can to engage the community, students and university in our programs so we can stay at Radford long-term

I love SUUSI--thank you for all you do!

I loved having SUUSI at Radford and hope it returns to Radford next year.

I'm deeply grateful to have SUUSI in my life

I'm just happy to come here

Thank you for all your hard work! It was a wonderful experience.

Thank you so much for making SUUSI so great in such a challenging year!