

California State University, Stanislaus
Graduating Senior Survey
Class of 2006-2007

General Education Information excerpted from the Executive Summary

Survey Purpose

The Office of Institutional Research has been administering the Graduating Senior Survey since 2002-2003. The survey contains 31 questions and 142 items covering a broad range of seniors' educational experiences and satisfaction with their program of learning at CSU Stanislaus. The results provide an important source of information for institutional evaluation and planning.

The Graduating Senior Survey measures baccalaureate students' perception of different aspects of their overall general education at CSU Stanislaus. The survey is organized into nine sections, including sections about their general education experiences, experiences with their major department, personal development, classroom and social climate, library services, student support services, additional plans for further study, a section about employment, and several open-ended questions about seniors' overall evaluation of CSU Stanislaus.

Survey Methods

The survey is administered each academic year (summer, fall, winter, spring) to all seniors that have met their graduation requirements. The population is therefore all students classified as seniors who are graduating (have completed their program of study) during the academic year. The survey is administered during the summer following commencement. Graduating seniors are contacted via a mailed letter inviting them to participate in the survey. A second and third follow up letter is mailed as necessary reminders to participate.

The primary means of survey delivery for the class of 2006-2007 was through an online, web-based system. A small number of seniors, however, chose to complete the survey in hardcopy format (N=17). These are aggregated with the online web version.

During the 2006-2007 academic year, the total number of graduating seniors was 1,459. Seniors completing the survey numbered 226, for a response rate of 15 percent.

Summary of Results

Part A. General Education Experiences

A majority of seniors rated their general education experience favorably. Utilizing a 5-point scale of strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and, strongly agree, 83 percent of seniors either agreed or strongly agreed their general education at CSU Stanislaus enhanced their ability to look at issues from multiple perspectives.

Seventy-nine percent felt General Education enhanced their understanding of the disciplines' basic principles, methodologies, and perspectives, that it contributed to their critical thinking skills and lifelong learning (76%), and including a contribution to their ability to find, understand, examine critically, and use information from various sources (73%).

The majority of seniors believe they have a better understanding of the interrelationships between disciplines (71%). They feel they command better ability to communicate (69%).

Still a majority, but not as highly rated was on whether or not they agree they were properly advised as to what courses to take to fulfill the general education requirements. This was rated as “agree” or “strongly agree” by 52 percent of graduating seniors.

An open-ended question asked seniors to briefly describe their understanding of the purpose of a general education. The responses clustered around a dozen or more themes. A combination of the responses seem to underlie sentiments or viewpoints that a general education in effect intends to, “broaden or extend or expand one’s knowledge and perspective” (16%), that it provides for a “well-rounded education/person” (14%), that a general education “prepares for outside of college, i.e., life, career, future” (11%), that it provides for a “general/basic understanding/knowledge of various subjects” (11%), that general education supports the attainment of “various skills, viewpoints and/or knowledge” (5%), and that it is “foundational/introductory/general education” (6%). Together these clusters of responses (that in many respects are overlapping and similar) account for 63 percent of the viewpoints about what is a general education.

Part C. Personal Development

A battery of 17 items is used to assess seniors’ perceptions of their educational gains and personal development. Seniors responded to the 5-point scale: a loss, no gain, slight gain, moderate gain, and high gain. A positive result combines moderate gain and high gain and is summarized in the following.

All but two items were above 50 percent. The highest ratings of educational gains and personal development were writing effectively (90%), conducting research (83%), creating original ideas and products (82%), “learning on my own” (82%), and speaking effectively (81%).

The lowest ratings were for, communicating in a language other than English (14%), and understanding mathematical reasoning (42%).

Also important in their described gains and personal development are, getting along with people of diverse attitudes and opinions (76%), working cooperatively with groups (74%), and cooperating with diverse populations (71%).

Moreover, 60 percent or more of seniors indicated important gains in using technology effectively (68%), preparing for graduate or professional school (67%), preparing for employment (65%), and in understanding American and World social and political systems (63%).

Part F. Student Support Services

Service Learning. As for whether or not students are satisfied with service learning activities, such as the availability of volunteer and service opportunities in their major, 52 percent of seniors indicate they did not use or participate, however, 38 percent of seniors indicated satisfaction. With regard to the availability of volunteer and service opportunities in general education courses, 69 percent said they did not use or participate in these, although 26 percent indicated satisfaction.

Global Affairs. Here very few seniors have participated in Global Affairs student support activities: 94 percent did not study abroad, 82 percent did not have a local cross-cultural experience, and 84 percent did not have any foreign language instruction. Activities showing more participation were in course work: 52 percent were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with global issues in general education courses, and 45 percent were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with global issues in their major.

Part I. Overall Evaluation of CSU Stanislaus

Lastly, the survey queried graduating seniors with several open-ended questions about CSU Stanislaus’ attraction to prospective students, about aspects of the university that were of most help to seniors, and about any improvement CSU Stanislaus could make.

In many instances seniors provided multiple responses. The responses cluster around the perceptions and opinions that CSU Stanislaus would be attractive to prospective students because of the campus atmosphere/aesthetics (19%), availability of classes/small class sizes/variety of classes (15%), professors and faculty/diversity, friendly, available for students (14%); and small town atmosphere/small university (10%). Together these accounted for 58 percent of the responses.

According to seniors, most helpful to them in achieving their education at CSU Stanislaus was the faculty and teaching (31%). But also helpful was class availability, campus location and accessibility, and small class size/small campus. Together these accounted for 23 percent of responses.

Graduating seniors were asked that if they could make one improvement to CSU Stanislaus, what would it be? The top reasons include: increase the availability of classes (20%), improve the quality of instruction (16%), improve parking and transportation (11%), improve the quality of advising/orientation (8%), improve social activities (6%), and improve classroom facilities/technology (5%).