

California State University, Stanislaus
Graduating Senior Survey
Class of 2006-2007
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 B. Major Department

Graduating seniors were asked to respond to a battery of 14 items about their courses and experiences in their major department. Again a 5-point scale is used from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

The overwhelming majority of seniors, 92 percent, agreed or strongly agreed the class sizes for upper division courses were acceptable. Seniors felt they were prepared for upper division coursework in their major (89%), that their major courses were appropriate (87%), that their major courses were intellectually challenging (87%), and that the teaching by faculty was effective (85%). In addition, 80 percent agreed or strongly agreed the grading practices and other academic policies were administered fairly, and that faculty members were accessible during office hours (80%).

The lowest rating by seniors was on whether or not they were able to get the courses they needed that fit their schedule. Here, less than half (47%) agreed or strongly agreed.

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 D. Classroom and Social Climate

This section reports on whether or not seniors, by gender, by race/ethnic group, for international, disabled, and gay/lesbian group, believe the classroom and campus social climate of the university is supportive of all student groups.

There appears to be high agreement that the classroom social climate is supportive and not discriminatory to students overall. Seventy-two percent of females indicate the classroom is supportive and 79 percent indicate the campus social climate is also supportive to females.

Males also agree: 68 percent indicate the classroom climate is supportive to males as is 68 percent who say the campus social climate is also supportive.

By race and ethnicity the rates vary from a high of 66 percent of Hispanics that say the classroom is supportive and 70 that say the campus is also supportive. White non-Hispanic (Caucasian) seniors also report 65 percent who say the classroom is supportive as well as 63 percent who say the campus social climate is supportive.

Although a majority, the lowest rating is by Native American seniors at 57 percent that indicate the classroom is supportive, as well as 57 percent again saying the campus is supportive of Native American students.

International students, disabled students, and gay/lesbian students correspond with the majority ratings by other groups; however, with respect to gay/lesbian seniors, the ratings are lowest of all groups: 53 percent of gay/lesbian seniors report the classroom climate is supportive, but less than half (48%) indicate the campus social climate is supportive.

Part E. Library Services

The graduating seniors were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with the services provided by the university library and also indicate the extent of their knowledge and use of the various library collections and services.

On a 4-point scale of very satisfied to very dissatisfied, the overwhelming majority of seniors indicate (90%) they are satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of services overall. In fact, each of the following indicators received more than 80 percent “satisfied” or “very satisfied”: the courtesy of library staff (94%), the physical environment (91%), the circulation service desk (89%), the knowledge of library staff (89%), the hours of services (88%), and the “books and journals in my major” (82%).

It was found that only 3 percent did not use the library’s services at all during the last 12 months. However, 29 percent used the services 1-5 times; 24 percent used the services 6-10 times; 15 percent used it from 11-20 times, and 30 percent used the services more than 20 times during the last 12 months.

Specifically, databases or other electronic sources were most in demand at 96 percent utilization, followed by books or journals at 91 percent usage. Also in high demand was use of the study areas (75%) and reference librarians (58%). Course reserves revealed the lowest usage during the last 12 months at 49 percent.

Seniors were also asked to indicate their preference of a particular type of library instruction: 77 percent indicated a preference for written guides or handouts, 66 percent indicated a preference for web-based tutorials, and 61 percent preferred workshops, orientations, or tours. Less than half of seniors (44%) preferred credit classes.

Part F. Student Support Services

Student support services is assessed by a complex battery of 44 items covering topics such as, enrollment services, career services, counseling, academic and student support, student activities, service learning, and global affairs. The following summarizes the most salient features.

Enrollment Services. Overall, graduating seniors rate very highly their satisfaction with enrollment services. A substantial majority of seniors, 91 percent, say they are “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the admissions processing services in enrollment services.

Career Services. Most seniors report they did not use career services: 77 percent said they did not use career placement services; 76 percent said they did not use campus employment services while a student; 71 percent did not use internships/co-op while a student; and 62 percent did not use career planning and guidance services.

Counseling. An overwhelming majority of seniors did not use any counseling services. Ninety-two percent did not use couple counseling services (of course most students are not married); 92 percent did not use wellness/personal development workshops; and 80 percent did not use personal counseling services.

Academic and Student Support. Some services are used sparingly. Seventy-five percent do not use the tutoring center; 86 percent do not use the writing center; and 87 percent do not use the residence halls. However, 87 percent are “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with computer laboratories; 79 percent are satisfied or very satisfied with the computer center hours; 80 percent are satisfied or very satisfied with the bookstore facilities, and 79 percent are satisfied with the health center.

Student Activities. A majority of seniors did not involve themselves with programs, events, or campus organizations. Ninety percent did not participate in a fraternity or sorority, and 86 percent did not participate in campus intramural sports. Eighty percent did not participate in cultural programs, and 76 percent did not participate in athletic events. Just more than half of seniors indicate they did not use or participate in music productions (57%), drama productions (58%), or art/gallery exhibitions (57%), yet there was 42 percent who did use or participate in music productions and were “satisfied” or “very satisfied.” Also, 41 percent were satisfied or very satisfied with drama productions, as were 41 percent who felt the same about art/gallery exhibitions.

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 G. Additional Education Plans

Ninety percent of graduating seniors say they plan to or have continued their education (10% say, “No”). Those responding “yes” also indicate some of the most important reasons for continuing their education are to earn a graduate or professional degree (72%); to meet certification or continuing education requirements (31%), and to improve skills related to “my current job”(20%).

The reason of least importance to seniors for continuing their education—by 41 percent—was in order “to prepare for a career change.”

Of graduating seniors that intend to further their education, 37 percent intend to pursue the field of education or teaching, followed next by 15 percent that intend to follow a business path. Seniors also acknowledge social sciences and social work at 8 percent each.

The top three post-graduate degree goals are Master’s degree (47%), teaching credential (17%), and a master’s in education degree. Only 9 percent indicated a Ph.D. as their goal.

Forty-nine percent plan on graduate school at CSU Stanislaus, while 8 percent plan on attending graduate school at some other CSU campus, and 4 percent plan on attending the University of California. More than a quarter of seniors, however, are undecided (28%).

More than half (54%) plan to complete a graduate degree by the year 2009; another 32 percent plan to finish by 2010. And the highest degree they wish to obtain is the master’s (58%). More than a quarter of seniors (28%) see a Ph.D. as the highest degree goal for them.

Seniors were asked about financing their higher education pursuits. Seniors indicated a range of financial support options. These included personal earnings or savings (67%), loans (57%) or grants (53%), and scholarships/fellowships (48%).

Part H. Employment

Most seniors are working students. Only 16 percent did not work. However, 21 percent worked 35-40 hours per week while enrolled in classes; 15 percent worked 20-24 hours per week; and 11 percent worked 25-29 hours per week.

More than a third (36%) of seniors will work at their current job (job they had before graduation or newly obtained job), and more than a third (36%) will seek employment after graduation. Twenty percent will attend graduate or professional school immediately after graduation.

About a third (34%) received a promotion due to obtaining the bachelor’s degree, and most anticipated a salary increase as well (56%).

Seniors are evenly split as to the type of employer upon graduation: 43 percent indicate a public sector organization such as a government agency or school, college, or university; 43 percent indicate a private business sector employer such as a local/regional business or a national/multi-national corporation.

Seniors indicate by 29 percent that their job is related specifically or highly to their bachelor’s degree. Another 32 percent indicated it is “fairly related.” And 24 percent said it is “not at all related” to their bachelor’s degree.

Two main reasons are given by seniors who are not employed in a field related to their bachelor's degree: one is that they are working in another field while they are looking for employment in a related field (38%); another reason is they have not seriously sought employment related to their major (31%).

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%).