

California State University, Stanislaus

Graduating Senior Survey

Class of 2005-2006

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 2005-2006 survey contains 30 questions and 138 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 education at CSU Stanislaus. The survey is organized into nine sections, including sections about general education experiences, experiences with the major department, library services, student support services, classroom and social climate, personal development, employment, additional plans for further study, 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 who 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 follow up letter is mailed as a necessary reminder to participate.

The total number of graduating seniors for 2005-2006 was 1,504. The entire class was mailed a letter of invitation to participate, which included a printed survey and the option to complete the survey online. Non-respondents were mailed one follow up postcard reminder. Most graduating seniors chose to respond via the printed survey. Using this format, 125 seniors responded. A smaller number of seniors chose to complete the survey via the online web format (n=47). Thus, the total number of seniors completing the survey was 172, for a response rate of 11 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 find, understand, examine critically, and use information from various sources."

Eighty-two percent felt General Education contributed to their critical thinking skills and lifelong learning; 78 percent indicated General Education enhanced their understanding of the disciplines basic principles, methodologies and perspectives; and 76 percent indicated General Education

enhanced their ability to communicate. In addition, 76 percent said they were able to enroll in the courses they needed to fulfill their GE requirements.

The majority of seniors believe General Education enhanced their ability to look at issues from multiple perspectives (75%). They also feel they have a better “understanding of social responsibility, ethical behavior, and the disciplines’ connection to social issues” (69%).

A majority of seniors agreed or strongly agreed that General Education enhanced their understanding of the interrelationship between disciplines (67%); that it enhanced their ability to see a discipline’s connection to global issues (63%); 60 percent also felt they were properly advised as to what courses they needed to fulfill their GE requirements.

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 will in effect, “broaden or extend or expand one’s knowledge and perspective” (15%), that it provides for a “well-rounded education/person” (14%), that a general education is “preparation for after college/life, career” (15%), that it provides for a “exposure to and understanding of various disciplines” (14%), and that it is “foundational, introductory, education” (9%). Together these clusters of responses (that in many respects are overlapping and similar) account for 67 percent of the viewpoints about what is a general education.

Part D. 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, 54 percent of seniors indicated they did not use or participate here; however, 37 percent of seniors did and indicated satisfaction. With regard to the availability of volunteer and service opportunities in general education courses, 61 percent said they did not use or participate in these, although 27 percent indicated satisfaction.

Global Affairs. Very few seniors participated in Global Affairs student support activities: 81percent did not study abroad, 68 percent did not have a local cross-cultural experience, and 79 percent did not have any foreign language instruction. Activities showing more participation were in course work: 33 percent were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with global issues in general education courses, and 50 percent were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with global issues in their major.

Part F. 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 (83%), conducting research (85%), “learning on my own”

(84%), “getting along with people whose attitudes and opinions differ from my own” (80%), speaking effectively (82%), and creating original ideas and products (79%).

The lowest ratings were for, communicating in a language other than English (17%), and understanding mathematical reasoning (47%).

Also important in their described gains and personal development are, “organizing my time effectively” (74%), working cooperatively with groups (77%), and cooperating with diverse populations (72%).

Moreover, 60 percent or more of seniors indicated important gains in using technology effectively (66%), preparing for graduate or professional school (69%), preparing for employment (67%), and in understanding American and World social and political systems (65%).

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.

Seniors were asked, “What aspects of CSU Stanislaus do you feel would be most attractive to prospective students?” The responses include 27 percent saying it is the campus size and appearance; 12 percent indicated the “faculty: diverse, friendly, knowledgeable, available to students”; 11 percent said the “campus atmosphere, climate and life”; 10 percent indicated the availability of classes, class size, and access to courses; 7 percent said campus location and accessibility; and 7 percent indicated the department and program effectiveness as the primary reasons. Together these reasons account for 74 percent of all responses.

According to seniors, most helpful to them in achieving their education at CSU Stanislaus was the faculty who are perceived as supportive, knowledgeable, and available (33%). But also helpful was the availability of classes, class size, and access to courses (11%); academic support services, advising, tutoring, counseling, and mentoring received acknowledgment by 9 percent of seniors; friendly, helpful, and knowledgeable staff and administration was a primary aspect according to 8 percent of seniors; 7 percent acknowledged the campus location and accessibility; and 7 percent indicated the department program and course effectiveness as an important aspect.

Finally, graduating seniors were asked if they could make one improvement to CSU Stanislaus, what would it be? The top reasons include: improve parking and transportation (15%); increase the availability of classes (13%); improve the quality of advising and orientation (10%); improve administrative services (8%); improve the quality of instruction (8%); keep fees, costs down, and other financial issues (7%); and improve classroom facilities and technology (6%).