

1995 GRADUATION SURVEY RESULTS

Executive Summary

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As part of an ongoing effort to make improvements to undergraduate education at the University of Oregon, the Office of the Registrar contracted with the Oregon Survey Research Laboratory (OSRL) to conduct a mail-out/mail-back survey of all students who received their bachelor's degrees in June 1995. This report summarizes the methodology and findings of the 1995 Graduation Survey.

Survey Methodology

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument was developed and pretested by OSRL, in consultation with Herb Chereck, the U of O Registrar. Original questions were developed and pretested from discussion about the University's information needs. Other questions were drawn from similar survey instruments developed previously by OSRL and the University of Iowa. The instrument underwent OSRL's standard three-pronged pretest procedure and was revised until it met the needs of the review and showed no bias.

The survey was sent out as a part of a package which included the bachelor's degree diploma, a diploma receipt verification form, and a postage paid return envelope. Graduates were instructed to acknowledge receipt of their diploma by filling out the verification slip, noting any errors on the diploma, and returning it to the U of O. Attached to the verification form was the mail-out/mail-back Graduation Survey. A copy of the degree receipt verification slip and the survey instrument is presented in Section 2 of this documentation.

The survey instrument comprised questions on the following subject areas:

- ◆ **Overall satisfaction**, including satisfaction with education received, undergraduate teaching, faculty research in the classroom, and major source of students' learning;
- ◆ **Self-assessed improvement in skills and learning**, including writing, speaking, leadership, critical thinking, appreciation of creative endeavors, and others;
- ◆ **Coursework**, such as attending summer sessions, tutoring, academic difficulty, DUCKCALL, and the value of required general education courses in seven subject areas;
- ◆ **Activities on campus**, such as internships and speaking with faculty members;
- ◆ **Employment and graduate education**, such as working for pay while attending school, methods of finding employment, career preparation experiences, how

graduates may have been influenced by jobs or internships, and if they will be seeking a post-baccalaureate education in the next three years;

- ◆ **Faculty advising**, including how a faculty advisor was selected, how helpful faculty were in providing advice and information, personal experiences with faculty advisors, and suggestions for improving departmental advising;
- ◆ **Peer advising**, including when peer advisors were first contacted, which department(s) they were contacted in, how helpful they were, personal experiences with peer advisors, and how frequently other sources of advising were used;
- ◆ **Choice of major**, such as students' knowledge of what area of study to pursue in college at enrollment, what year a major was declared, formal and informal changes of majors, and reasons for selecting a major;
- ◆ **Strengths, weaknesses**, and other open-ended comments that graduates wished to make about U of O.

Sample and Data Collection

In August 1995, staff at the University of Oregon Office of the Registrar mailed diplomas, diploma receipt verification forms, graduation surveys, and business-reply envelopes (addressed to OSRL) to all 1,527 students who graduated with a bachelor's degree in June 1995.

Completed surveys were received at OSRL from August 28 - November 30, 1995. Surveys received after November 30, 1995 will be forwarded to the Office of the Registrar, where they may be added to the data file.

Altogether, 472 return envelopes were received. Of those, 24 were diploma receipt verification slips without surveys. Thus, the final sample of completed questionnaires was 448. The overall survey response rate was 29.3% (see Section 3 of this documentation).

The survey instrument was programmed into OSRL's computer-aided telephone interviewing (CATI) system and further pretested. CATI was then used for the data-entry process.

Survey Results

This presentation of survey results is organized around respondents' overall feelings toward the U of O, skills and learning, coursework, activities on campus, employment and graduate education, faculty and peer advising, choice of major, and respondents' perceptions of the U of O's strengths and weaknesses. Complete results are presented in the "banner" data in Section 4 of this documentation, and in the enclosed Excel files on disk. (Data are also available in SPSS for Windows, if needed.)

Overall Feelings toward U of O

Overall, 53% of graduates surveyed were very satisfied with their U of O education, 44% were somewhat satisfied, while only 2.5% reported being not very satisfied. No graduates reported being not at all satisfied with their U of O education.

Thirty-two percent of graduates felt faculty does a very good job teaching undergraduate students. Sixty-three percent felt that the faculty does a somewhat good job teaching undergraduates, while only 4% reported somewhat bad job. No one reported that the faculty does a very bad job teaching undergraduate students.

Twenty-nine percent of graduates felt that the faculty does a very good job bringing their research into the classroom. Fifty-seven percent responded somewhat good job, 12% somewhat bad job, and less than 1% responded that the faculty does a very bad job bringing their research into the classroom.

Thirty percent of graduates felt that most of their learning came from inside classrooms and 18% felt most of their learning came from out of class experiences. A majority felt that most of their learning came both from in-class and out-of-class experiences (55%).

Skills and Learning

Respondents rated how much their U of O education helped them to develop certain skills and abilities (see Table 1). Graduates felt that the U of O has most helped them learn to gather information and data and analyze it, with over three-fifths saying that their U of O education improved those abilities “a lot.” In addition, over half of the graduates reported their critical thinking ability, their knowledge of facts, terms and basic subject matter, their ability to communicate in writing and work independently, and their knowledge of major theories also improved “a lot”.

Table 1: How much did your U of O experience improve your (ability to)..?

	A Lot	Some	Not At All
Gather information & data	65.4%	30.1%	2.9%
Analyze information & data	61.6%	34.6%	2.5%
Knowledge of basic subject matter	57.6%	38.8%	2.2%
Critical thinking ability	57.4%	37.7%	3.6%
Major theories & their development	53.6%	42.2%	2.9%
Communicate in writing	50.7%	44.6%	3.6%
Work independently	50.4%	38.4%	9.6%
Understand cultural differences	49.3%	38.4%	10.7%
Tolerate differing views	48.7%	40.0%	9.6%
Understand individual differences & similarities	48.2%	41.1%	8.7%
Manage your time	40.8%	44.4%	13.6%
Recognize & appreciate art	38.6%	48.0%	11.8%
Exercise leadership	30.8%	50.9%	16.5%
Speak before an audience	27.0%	51.3%	20.1%
Manage your finances	20.8%	42.4%	35.3%

Rated lowest was learning to managing finances and speaking before an audience, with 35% and 20%, respectively, saying their U of O experience did not improve those abilities at all.

Coursework

Almost half of the newly graduated respondents had attended a University of Oregon summer session (47%). Sixty-six percent reported that they never felt they needed special tutoring.

Only 5% of graduates reported that the U of O is very difficult academically, 68% somewhat difficult, 24% somewhat easy, and 2% very easy.

Graduates were overwhelmingly positive about DUCKCALL, with 69% reporting that the U of O does a very good job managing registration and 25% reporting somewhat good.

When asked to rate the value of required general education courses, respondents placed the highest value on social science classes (40% very valuable), followed by arts and letters (36%) and the multicultural requirement (36%) (see Table 2).

Table 2: Value of required general education courses?

	Very Valuable	Somewhat Valuable	Not at all Valuable	Not Applicable
Social sciences	40.2%	45.1%	4.5%	2.2%
Arts and letters	35.9%	46.4%	5.8%	2.2%
Multicultural/race & gender	35.7%	31.9%	17.0%	2.2%
Foreign language	31.9%	25.0%	6.3%	1.6%
Written English	31.5%	38.4%	12.1%	1.8%
Natural sciences	28.8%	44.0%	10.0%	2.5%
Mathematics	21.4%	39.3%	10.7%	2.5%

Activities on Campus

Thirty-eight percent of respondents reported volunteer or internship activities on the U of O campus, and almost 55% reported volunteering or interning off campus in the community. Ninety-five percent reported speaking with faculty members outside of class.

Employment & Graduate Education

Seventy-one percent of graduates reported working for pay while attending the U of O. Employed students averaged about 22 hours of paid work per week.

How do U of O graduates go about obtaining permanent employment? Each method listed was a separate yes/no question; therefore, multiple mentions were counted and the percentages do not add 100%. The methods most used to obtain permanent employment were: direct contact with employer (80%), application to employer (74%), and personal contact with individuals in the

students’ area of interest (74%). The least used methods were: the University placement office (41%), and students, faculty and staff (42% each).

The most used career preparation experience for graduates was “job related coursework in field of major” (62%). The least used was “additional basic skill courses” (35%).

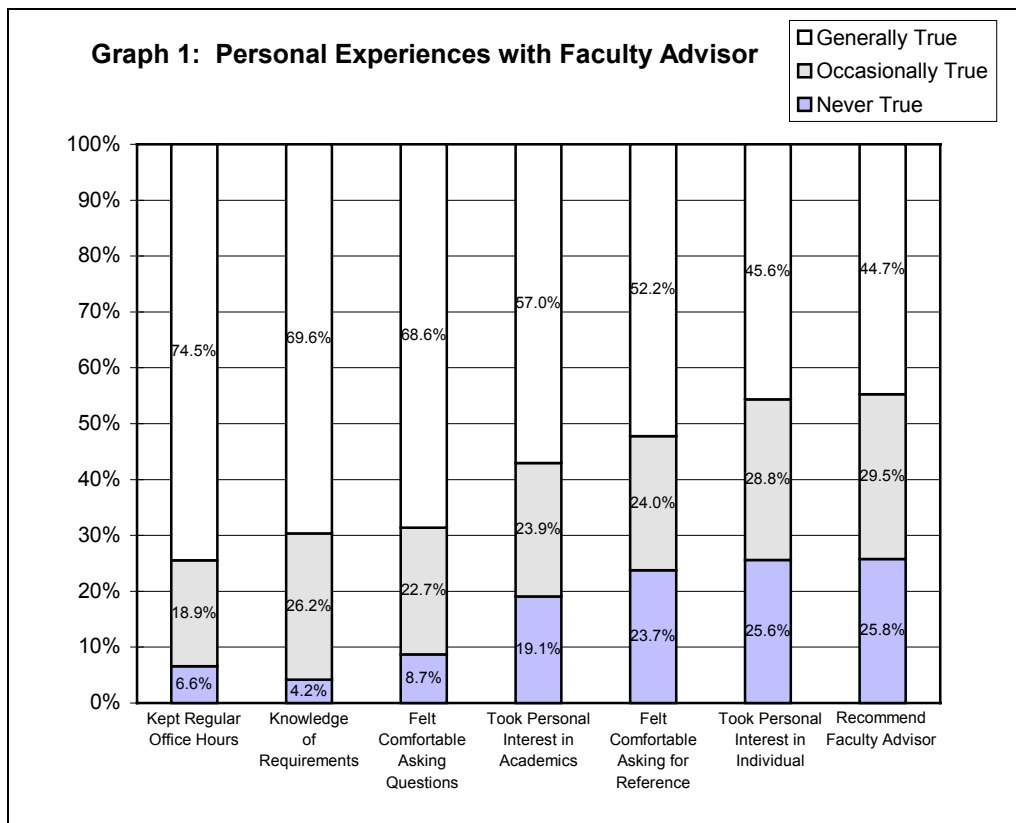
Of those graduates who participated in an educational work assignment or internship, 13% were offered jobs.

Almost 60% of graduates reported that they would be seeking a post-baccalaureate education. Forty-four percent of those graduates said that they would be seeking or receiving financial aid.

Faculty and Peer Advising

Eighty-six percent of graduates felt that there was a faculty member on campus who cares about them. Almost nine-tenths of graduates used faculty advising (89%).

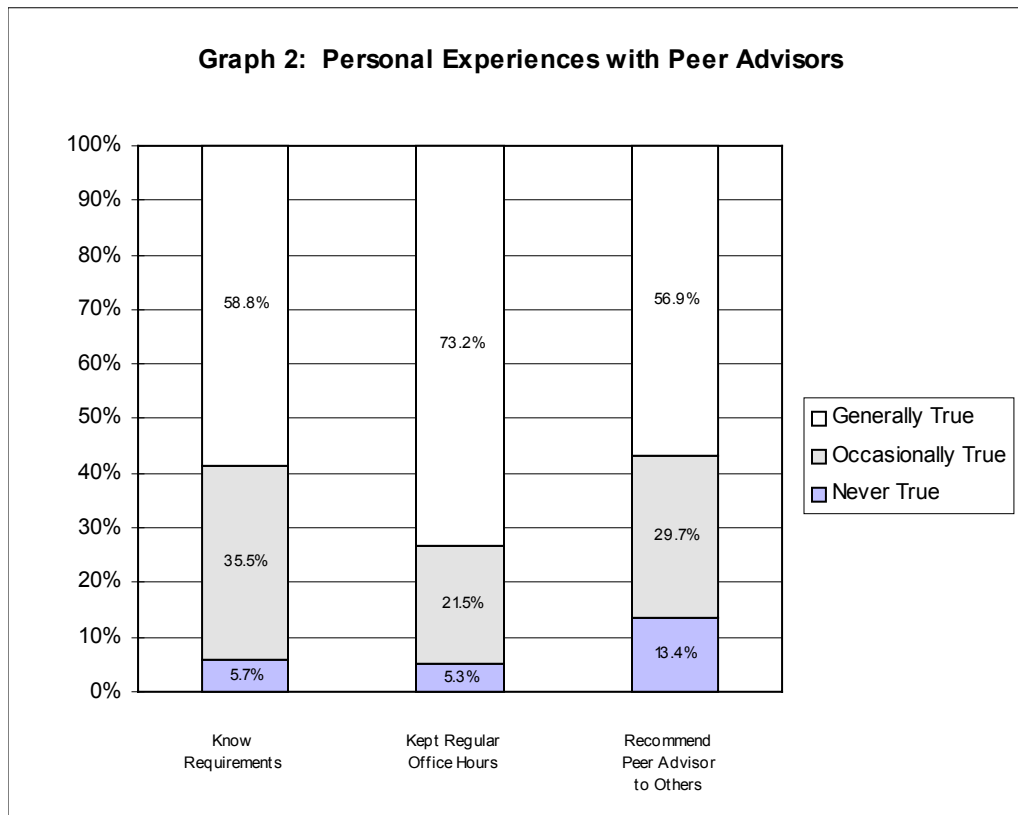
Graduates said their faculty advisors kept regular office hours (75% “generally true”) and were knowledgeable about requirements (70%) (see Graph 1). Sixty-nine percent agreed that it was “generally true” that they felt comfortable asking their faculty advisor questions.



Graduates considered several aspects of faculty advising to be “very helpful,” including: help with departmental requirements (39%), university requirements (27%), and advice on career possibilities (20%). However, about 9% of respondents considered other aspects “not at all helpful,” including helping to feel more comfortable with faculty, and providing information on career possibilities, graduate schools, internships and practica.

Fewer than half of the graduates reported using peer advising (48%). Students with peer advisors tended to have initial contact their junior year (18%) followed by sophomores (12%). The highest percentage of peer advisor use among departments was psychology (14%), business administration (12%), and biology and sociology (8% each).

Graduates’ personal experiences with peer advisors was positive (see Graph 2). Seventy-three percent said it was “generally true” that peer advisors kept regular office hours, and 59% said it was “generally true” that peer advisors know university and departmental requirements. Over half would recommend their peer advisor to other students.



Graduates reported that peer advisors were “very helpful” in scheduling classes (14%), departmental requirements (20%), university requirements (15%), particular classes (13%), and particular professors (11%). Two areas in which peer advisors were “not at all helpful” were information on career possibilities and information on graduate schools.

Other sources of advising graduates used “often” and “always” were themselves (76%), friends (48%), another faculty member (29%), and departmental secretaries (20%).

Choice of Major

Sixty-three percent of graduates reported that they knew what major they wanted to pursue when they first enrolled at U of O. Thirty-seven percent declared their major in their freshman year, 30% their sophomore year, 24% junior year, 3% senior year, and 8% other (i.e. transfer students).

Forty-eight percent reported having changed their major formally or informally at some point in their undergraduate career.

The biggest factors influencing choice of a major were interest in that major (95%), job opportunities (52%), and course offerings (52%).

Strengths & Weaknesses

The final questions in the survey were general and open-ended, asking graduates’ perceptions of the U of O’s greatest strengths and weaknesses. Respondents’ actual narrative answers to these questions are presented in Section 6 of this report. The codes which were developed to group responses into categories are provided in Section 5.

The two U of O strengths most often mentioned were diversity (such as diversity of faculty, students, and curriculum) and educational quality (such as the quality of professors, teaching, programs, classes, research, library, and education in general). Approximately one quarter of students mentioned diversity and a little over one third mentioned education in their responses. Other strengths included extra-curricular activities, the environment, and economic issues.

Interestingly, sometimes what some graduates viewed as strengths, others saw as weaknesses. The most frequent weaknesses mentioned included: academic issues, teaching, and U of O financial issues, which each accounted for 12-15% of responses. Other weaknesses mentioned concerned advising, administrative issues, research resources, student financial issues, and extra-curricular activities.

Suggestions for Replicating This Survey

From the beginning, this survey was regarded as an experiment, to see how the U of O’s graduates’ experiences compared both to findings at other institutions and to the U of O student satisfaction surveys conducted in Fall 1994 and Fall 1995. Those comparisons await further analysis.

In considering replicating this survey in future years, OSRL has a number of suggestions. First, the response rate must be improved. A 29.3% response rate is fairly low for a survey of this type, and can result in unknown biases (e.g., what if all non-respondents were extremely satisfied, so satisfied that they did not think it necessary to respond?). The most effective method of improving the response rate would be multiple mailings. Two to four weeks after the initial diploma and survey mail-out, another letter could be sent, reminding the respondent to return their diploma verification. If it still hasn't been received 2 - 4 weeks after that, then the diploma receipt verification, complete with the survey, could be re-sent with more strongly worded reminder letter. Thus, there would be three mailings in all: the initial mailing to all graduates; a second reminder letter to non-respondents; and a third, to re-send the verification survey with a letter. Multiple mailings show that the U of O is serious in assessing graduates' opinions and experiences, but it can be expensive.

Other suggestions for future replications of this survey (which also may improve the response rate) include: enclosing a cover letter signed by the U of O president, shortening its length, having a U of O stamp or seal on the front in color, and using a nicer, heavier paper.

OSRL recommends that this survey be replicated, at least periodically. The only way to find out how to improve "customer service" is to ask the customers, in this case U of O's students. Moreover, this year's findings may be colored by this particular cohort of undergraduates' experiences -- in particular, they went through the budget cuts resulting from Ballot Measure 5 in 1991 and the subsequent increases in tuition and fees. These few years have been exceptionally emotional and difficult, and may result in graduates' opinions and experiences which also will be found to be exceptional five years hence.