

USU GRADUATING STUDENT SURVEY - 1997

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University Assessment

GRADUATING STUDENT SURVEY - 1997

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1296 graduating students of Utah State University (USU) completed this survey which was administered between July 1997 and June 1998. The sample constituted approximately 53 percent of the (baccalaureate) graduating class of 1996-97 (N= 2442). Students voluntarily participated in this survey. There were no formal contingencies that mandated participation. The survey was distributed with the materials given to students to prepare for graduation. Conservatively, the proportion of the class that participated suggests that inferences drawn from this data set must be specific to the set itself, since the sample may not be representative of the population from which it voluntarily arose. However, there are reasons to believe that the sample is broadly representative of USU'S graduating students. First, the demographics of the sample closely match those of the university in general. Second, the data from this year are very similar to those from prior years. (The latter attests more to reliability than validity.)

The survey, a copy of which is enclosed as an appendix, asked for demographic information, graduating student goals and their progress toward them, academic preparation in a variety of skill areas, satisfaction with various aspects of student experience at USU, use of university services, and opinions thereof.

The data set for this survey now extends from 1993 to the present, that is, for five years. *For the most part the data are highly consistent from year to year.* Therefore, data from other years are discussed for the most part only if they identify a potential trend or an exception. All data are presented in percentage format. Percent totals throughout need not add to 100 because nonresponders have been excluded.

DEMOGRAPHICS

College. Students from all the colleges were represented in the survey. The proportions of survey respondents from the various colleges were similar to the relative proportions of the colleges with respect to 1996-97 graduation rates.

Table 1. Percent respondents by college for survey and by degrees conferred.

	Agriculture	Business	Education	Engineering	Family Life	HASS	Natural Resources	Science
Survey %	5.8	17.1	23.4	11.5	9.0	23.4	4.6	8.3
Degrees %*	5.3	20.9	24.3	9.4	7.1	19.9	3.9	8.5

*Utah State University Fact Book 1996-97

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Sex. More females than males participated. This has been true for most of the years of this survey and proportions of each gender are similar each year. These proportions reflect the distribution of this variable in the population of students at USU.

Table 2. Percent survey respondents and enrollment by gender at USU.

	Male	Female
Survey	45.5	53.9
Enrolled*	47	53

**Utah State University Fact Book 1996-97*

Geographic Origin. 93.4% of respondents were US citizens while 5.9% reported they were not. These proportions were similar to this variable in the entire student body.

Table 3. Percent survey respondents who are US citizens.

	US Citizen	Not US Citizen
Survey	93.4	5.9
Enrolled*	95.7	4.3

**Utah State University Fact Book 1996-97*

Ethnic Background. The ethnic background of survey respondents was primarily Caucasian. The ethnic mix of respondents was similar to that of the entire student body.

Table 4. Percent survey respondents by race/ethnic status.

	Caucasian	Asian	Hispanic	Native American/ Pacific Islander	African American
Survey	88.3	2.9	2.1	0.8	0.6
Enrolled*	89.8	1.0	1.8	1.0	0.5

**Utah State University Fact Book 1996-97*

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Length of Attendance at USU. The modal attendance of survey respondents was 4 years. Smaller and similar proportions attended 5 and 3 years.

Table 5. Percent survey respondents by years of attendance at USU.

Years	<1	1	2	3	4	5	6	>6
Percent	0.3	1.8	17.2	19.9	27.2	21.4	5.9	5.0

Age. Modal age for survey respondents was 23-25. Ages 18-30 describe about 89 percent of survey respondents. The university population from age 18-29 describes about 74 percent of the population while the modal age of students in the entire student body is 18-22. Thus, the larger numbers of older students in the survey sample appropriately characterizes the nature of the survey sample, i.e., graduating students—those who have been here awhile, and who, therefore, have aged somewhat.

Table 6. Percent of survey respondents in various age categories.

Age Category (yrs)	18-22	23-25	26-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	>60
Survey	29.3	39.3	20.3	6.6	3.1	0.6	0.0
Enrolled*	45.2	18.6	9.8**	9.9**	7.2**	2.7**	

*Utah State University Fact Book 1996-97

**Category extends through 29; others are 30-39, 40-49, and 50+ so are not strictly comparable.

Marital Status. Over half the survey respondents report being married. This figure is constant across the past 5 years.

Table 7. Percent of survey respondents marital status.

Married	Yes	No
	52.1	47.1

Employment. 68% of survey respondents report being employed either part or full time. This figure is constant for the past 5 years.

Table 8. Employment status of survey respondents.

Employment	Full Time	Part Time	Unemployed
	17.8	50.2	30.6

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Career-related Experience. A plurality of students experienced practica and internships as a function of their college experience while a majority experienced the aforementioned along with part time work in their career field.

Table 9. Percent of respondents indicating types of career related experiences.

Experience	Practicum/ Internship	Part time in field	College Work Study	Volunteer Experiences	Extracurricular College Activities
	31.0	27.3	7.9	12.6	15.0

Conclusions on Demographic Information

The sample for these data was, in part, self-selected. That is, while graduating students were asked to complete the survey as a function of the completion of their information packets during the graduation process, there were no formal contingencies to ensure that they did. Notwithstanding that difficulty, the sample's size constituted over half of the baccalaureate degrees conferred in 1996-97 (*USU Fact Book 1996-97*). Thus, the size of the sample alone suggests its potential representativeness. Two other facts also argue in favor of its status as representative of the graduating student body. First, in virtually every case where a comparison was possible with population data on the student body gathered elsewhere in the university (i.e., Office of Planning and Analysis), the composition of the survey sample was highly similar to the composition of the entire student body. And, in the several instances where the survey sample differed (e.g., age), it did so in an appropriately logical manner. Therefore, the sample is considered to be a valid representation of the graduating student population at USU for 1996-97.

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THE GOALS OF USU STUDENTS: THEIR IMPORTANCE AND PROGRESS

Table 10. Extent of progress toward and the importance of goals of graduating students at USU.

Goal	Important (Very & Moderately)	Progress (Very Good & Good)
Obtain skills necessary to work in the profession of your choice.	89.8	84.3
Develop and expand general knowledge.	88.5	85.7
Develop appreciation of culture and fine arts.	71.0	69.3
Acquire skills for self-directed learning.	86.2	80.7
Develop social skills or interpersonal relations.	81.8	78.9
Find a compatible spouse	39.6	43.8
Prepare for a meaningful family life.	67.5	65.6
Develop independence and self-confidence.	84.7	81.3
Develop leadership ability.	82.8	76.5
Develop sensitivity and tolerance to different philosophies, views, cultures, and ways of life.	80.1	76.8

Students consider some of these goals more important than others. For the most part if the goal is clearly an academic (that is, scholarly) one, large proportions of students consider the goal very and/or moderately important to their education. Although still a clear majority, a smaller proportion of students claim importance for the appreciation of culture and fine arts. Substantial majorities of respondents claim very good or good progress toward these academic goals by the time of graduation. Again fewer claim progress toward the goals that are not academic. Notably, the proportion of respondents claiming good and/very good progress toward an appreciation of culture and fine arts represents a 10 percent increase over last year's survey—and is the largest increase observed in any variable in this survey.

INTERRUPTIONS IN EDUCATION

About half the students report an interruption in their educations.

Table 11. Percent respondents reporting interruption in their education.

Interruption	Yes	No
	47.8	48.0

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Length of Interruption. A majority of USU graduating students who report an interruption in their educations report an interruption of 2 years while almost 8 in 10 stop out either one or two years. The sample also contains about 1 in 10 re-entry students (defined as being out 5 or more years).

Table 12. Percent of students reporting various lengths of interruptions of their educations.

Length (yrs)	1	2	3	4	>= 5
	23.2	52.9	7.7	2.2	10.3

Reasons for Interruption. Students could indicate more than one of these items. The major reason among all of these reasons for interruption was for church mission/service. Financial difficulties also commanded considerable response. The church mission reason for stopping out fits well with the predominant stop out time of 2 years.

Table 13. Percent respondents indicating the following were a major and/or minor reason for an interruption in their educations.

Reason	Major and/or Minor Reason
Financial difficulties	35.8
To assume homemaking responsibilities	14.2
Too much stress	13.9
Low academic standing	6.2
Church mission/service	55.5
Good job opportunity	18.9
Illness	8.6
Lack of Interest	9.9
Other	0.5

FINANCIAL AID

Students could mark more than one of these items. The majority of USU graduating students finance their educations at least partly through their own employment. In fact nearly all of these categories account for some considerable support with the exceptions being other relatives, and graduate assistantships. (The latter is understandable since very few graduate students completed this survey.)

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Table 14. Sources of financial aid and their importance. In this table the figures indicate those respondents who claimed the item was a major and/or a minor source of financial aid.

Source	Major and/or Minor Source
Parents	60.2
Spouse	34.1
Other relative	9.6
Savings	53.8
Employment (not work study)	77.2
Work study	13.0
Graduate assistantship	0.9
Scholarship	43.1
Loans	48.4
Grants	55.3
Veterans Benefits	2.8
Other	0.1

ACADEMIC PREPARATION

Students were asked how well they felt they were prepared in the following areas.

Table 15. Student perception of academic preparation in a variety of areas.

Area/Preparation	Very Well	Well	Poorly	Very Poorly
Writing concise, expressive compositions	34.2	53.4	6.5	0.5
Statistics and research methods	13.7	56.6	20.9	3.3
Speaking clearly and effectively	40.5	48.0	5.4	0.5
Reading/writing a foreign language	16.9	16.2	23.4	36.5

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General algebraic computations	36.6	36.6	14.6	6.2
Calculating advanced math problems	20.1	29.2	30.5	14.0
Applying knowledge to a new situation	53.9	38.2	2.0	0.2
Understanding and use of computers	37.3	48.6	7.2	1.4

These questions appear to discriminate among respondents given the variations in responses. The results are highly similar to last year's. The least satisfaction is with preparation in foreign languages, but this outcome is difficult to interpret as these items were forced choice, and many students don't take a foreign language for their baccalaureate degree. The proportions therein might only reflect the institution's land grant status with its focus on agriculture, natural resources, science, and engineering. It will be interesting to watch for changes in the statistics and research methods item in which a small proportion of respondents reported feeling very well prepared given the emphasis in the new University Studies program on numeracy.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

Students were asked how satisfied they were with the quality of their educational experience at USU in a number of areas.

Table 16. Level of satisfaction with educational quality.

Item/Satisfaction	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
Overall quality of education	35.5	54.7	2.9	0.6
Variety of courses toward general education requirements	24.1	56.8	8.3	2.0
Quality of the program in your major	50.2	35.9	6.0	1.3
Variety of courses in your major	42.4	40.9	8.5	1.5
Challenge of courses in your major	51.5	38.3	3.2	0.5
Accessibility of instructors in your major	46.6	37.5	7.2	1.9
Helpfulness of faculty in your major	49.3	35.0	6.9	2.0
Professional/vocational advising in your major	32.4	37.1	16.0	6.9

These outcomes are very similar to the prior year. Once again, relatively fewer students report satisfaction with advising, although it should be emphasized that, absolutely, a substantial majority of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with that process.

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It is perhaps noteworthy to examine the disparities in the items responded to as very satisfied. General education is the lowest here. Interpretation is difficult since so many students transfer to USU and may have completed their general education elsewhere. Nevertheless, the question is raised as to what it might take to increase the proportion of students responding very satisfied in this domain. The new University Studies program may have some effect.

USE AND OPINION OF CAMPUS SERVICES

Table 17. Use and rating of campus services.

Service	Use (%Yes)	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	No Response
Merrill Library	85.4	25.5	52.3	7.6	2.3	12.3
Computer Services	82.3	35.4	43.9	4.6	0.9	15.2
Student Health Center	53.2	26.9	26.1	4.9	1.4	40.7
Counseling Center	17.6	9.5	15.2	2.5	0.8	72.0
Financial Aid Center	68.4	16.8	37.4	12.8	5.2	27.7
Taggart Student Center	81.6	33.6	46.1	2.4	0.7	17.2
Career Development	28.3	8.6	22.6	4.0	1.2	63.5
Placement Center	18.6	6.0	17.7	3.8	1.3	71.1
Tutoring Services	16.6	5.9	16.0	3.3	1.9	72.9
Academic Advising	56.3	23.4	28.0	7.1	2.7	38.8
Recreation Center	58.5	27.9	31.6	2.6	0.7	37.2
Residence Halls	26.1	7.4	18.8	6.7	2.3	64.7
Parking	71.5	4.2	20.5	27.3	22.7	25.2
Registration & Records	86.0	23.7	51.2	8.5	3.6	13.0
Food Services	66.1	18.1	41.0	7.4	3.1	30.4
Bookstore	87.8	15.8	40.7	21.1	11.0	11.3
Children's House	3.5	3.9	7.7	2.2	0.8	85.3
Student Employment	30.6	11.0	21.6	4.2	1.3	62.0
Fee & Tuition Payment Service	77.2	21.4	46.3	7.9	3.7	20.8
Shuttle Bus	61.3	32.1	30.1	2.9	1.3	33.6

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These results are highly similar to last year's. Changes in items were fractional. This is a difficult section to interpret because of the (low) numbers of students using some services and the corresponding (higher) numbers of non responders. Where there was use by 50 percent of the respondents of a particular service, there was also a majority who reported they were satisfied or very satisfied with that service. The only exception was parking, which is probably doomed to be rated much lower, always.

WHAT WOULD YOU TELL YOUR FRIENDS ABOUT USU?

Table 18. What respondents would tell their friends about USU.

Response	It's great	Mostly positive things	Nothing much positive or negative	Mostly negative things	Almost all negative	Other
	40.4	41.4	6.6	1.3	0.2	2.9

These responses are very similar to last year's. A substantial majority would tell their friends it's great here or mostly positive things about their USU experiences.

CONCLUSIONS

The sample in this data set appears to be representative of the graduating student of 1996-97. Students' opinions about their progress toward personal goals, their satisfaction with the quality of their educations in general and with their majors specifically, and with most campus services are highly positive. As such, the data are similar to past years of this survey. The only change large enough to be considered exceptional (i.e., $\geq 10\%$) was the rating of progress toward the development of appreciation of culture and fine arts. Last year 59.1 percent noted that they had made good or very good progress toward this goal, while 70.7 percent thought it a very or moderately important goal. This year about the same proportion considered it a very or moderately important goal (71.0 %); however, 69.3 percent this year rated progress toward this goal as good or very good. This change (+10.2%) is by far the largest in the survey and was the only one of this magnitude. Virtually all other items changed fractionally, that is, by less than a full percentage point, perhaps a reflection in many cases of ceiling effects. Reasons for the change in culture and fine arts appreciation are not known.