

December 5, 2007

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 2007 GRADUATE ALUMNI SURVEY CLASSES OF 2000, 2001, 2002 and 2003

The content of the Graduate Alumni Survey reflects elements of the Vision, Values and Directions for the UI, including the goals of developing innovative and distinctive curricula, engaging and expanding student minds, and providing integrated experiences in teaching, research, creative activity and outreach. The survey includes questions about major curriculum, quality of research experiences, the relationship of the graduate program to subsequent success in employment or further advanced study, and satisfaction with program quality and services.

In 2007 the survey was mailed to a random sample of 642 names on an official list of graduate degrees awarded for August, December, and May graduates in 2000, 2001, 2002 and 2003. Of the 618 deliverable surveys, 312 completed surveys were returned in time for the analysis (51%). This is the second-highest response rate for this survey to date, seven percent (7%) below the previous response rate (2003, the highest ever).

Different from previous surveys, the proportion of females among respondents rose to fifty percent (50%) from forty-three percent (43%). Consistent with previous years, ninety-one percent (91%) of respondents were Caucasian American, and three percent (3%) were international students.

From a list of elements often required in graduate studies, respondents were asked to identify all that applied to their program. Only forty-six percent (46%) of the total number of respondents completed theses or dissertations during their course of study; this is up five percent (5%) from the previous cycle, but still considerably reduced from sixty-five percent (65%) in 1995.

The number of respondents who “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with the statement “I would advise a friend with similar interests to study in this department” remained at eighty-six percent (86%), and their ratings of the “overall quality of instruction in UI courses” increased three percent (3%) to ninety-two percent (92%).

University of Idaho
GRADUATE ALUMNI SURVEY
Classes of 2000, 2001, 2002 and 2003

INTRODUCTION

The content of the Graduate Alumni Survey reflects elements of the Vision, Values and Directions for the UI, including the goals of developing innovative and distinctive curricula, engaging and expanding student minds, and providing integrated experiences in teaching, research, creative activity and outreach. In addition, the survey was designed in response to the policy of the state Board of Regents mandating assessment of student learning outcomes, as well as the assessment policy of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, the UI's regional accrediting agency. The survey includes questions about major curriculum, quality of research experiences, the relationship of the graduate program to subsequent success in employment or further advanced study, and satisfaction with program quality and services.

A random sample of students was chosen from the graduating classes of 2000, 2001, 2002 and 2003, mailed a pre-letter, the survey instrument, a follow-up postcard, a second mailing of the survey instrument itself, and a second follow-up postcard. (In the interests of time and cost, surveys were not sent to alumni with foreign addresses.) The instrument was identical for all classes and the data were summarized and analyzed together. Of the 618 deliverable surveys, 312 completed surveys were returned in time for the analysis (51%). This is the second-highest response rate for this survey to date, seven percent (7%) below the previous response rate (2003, the highest ever). The random sample contained a minimum of 20 graduates from each college.

DESCRIPTIVE/DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

The primary purpose reported for seeking an advanced degree was to "obtain a professional license or certification" (22%, down 5% from the 2003 survey). This was followed closely by "qualify for higher pay or job advancement" (20%, down 1%), "extend my expertise in general" (13%, down 4%) and "personal enrichment, interest in subject/field" (13%, up 6%).

Seventy-seven percent (77%) of respondents reported that they are currently "employed full-time," a six percent (6%) decrease from the previous survey administration in 2003. Seven percent (7%, down 1%) reported they are "self-employed", and four percent (4%, up 1%) are "employed part-time (less than 35 hrs/wk)". Three percent (3%) more respondents reported this year that they are "primarily studying in an advanced degree program" (4%). One percent (1%) of respondents reported that their current occupation is "military service" (unchanged from the previous survey) and two percent (2%, up 1%) are "caring for home/family/dependents". Sixty-three percent (63%, down 3%) of employees reported that "the knowledge and skills developed at UI" are "highly related" to their employment, while thirty percent (30%, up 2%) report that they were "moderately" or "slightly related."

Two job related questions were included this year for the first time. When asked how long it took to find employment upon graduation, sixty-three percent (63%) responded they “had a job offer at time of graduation”, with twenty-four percent (24%) reporting “0-6 months” and the remaining thirteen percent (13%) reporting from seven months to more than one year. For the first time alumni were also asked how many jobs they had since graduation, with seventy-eight percent (78%) reporting “1-2”, nineteen percent (19%) reporting “3-4”, and three percent (3%) reporting “5 or more.”

Unlike previous surveys, the proportion of females among respondents increased seven percent (7%) to fully half of respondents (50%). Ninety-one percent (91%, up 3%) of respondents were Caucasian American, and three percent (3%, down 1%) were international students. For this cycle, specialist and masters degrees were combined, for a total of seventy-four percent (74%), up one percent (1%) from the combined total in 2003. Three percent (3%, up 1%) completed MFA programs, eleven percent (11%, down 1%) JD programs, and twelve percent (12%, down 2%) doctoral programs. When asked where they took most of the courses that were applied to the degree program, sixty-eight percent (68%, down 3%) of respondents reported the Moscow campus, ten percent (10%, down 4%) the Boise campus, six percent (6%, up 1%) the Coeur d’Alene campus, eight percent (8%, up 3%) the Idaho Falls campus, and four percent (4%) each by video outreach (up 1%), and other UI locations (up 2%). (*Q-2, 3, 4, 13, 14, 15, 16*)

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Graduate studies were supported financially in a variety of ways, but primarily through the use of student loans. Thirty-one percent (31%, down 10% from 2003) used student loans as their “primary” source of financial support, and twelve percent (12%, down 2%) reported using them as a “lesser” source. Personal savings were reported by twenty-five percent (25%, down 6%) as a “primary” source and by thirty-three percent (33%, down 13%) as a “lesser” source. An item, new last year, asked about financial support from “employer,” with thirteen percent (13%, down 3%) reporting their graduate study was primarily supported by their employer and five percent (5%, down 6%) reporting lesser support from their employer. (See table below.)

Sixteen percent (16%, down 9%) used an “academic year job” as “primary” or “lesser” support, twenty-four percent (24%, down 7%) used “research assistantships” and twenty-four percent (26% down 6%) used “teaching assistantships.” Fifty-three percent (53%, up 1%) of respondents reported that the “debt was worth the education received”, with an additional thirty-nine percent (39%, up 1%) reporting “the value of the education exceeded the cost.”

It appears the increase in student fees since the 2003 administration of the survey was reflected in one of the items; when asked “how the cost of your UI graduate education compared to costs at other universities with programs in your field,” responses were:

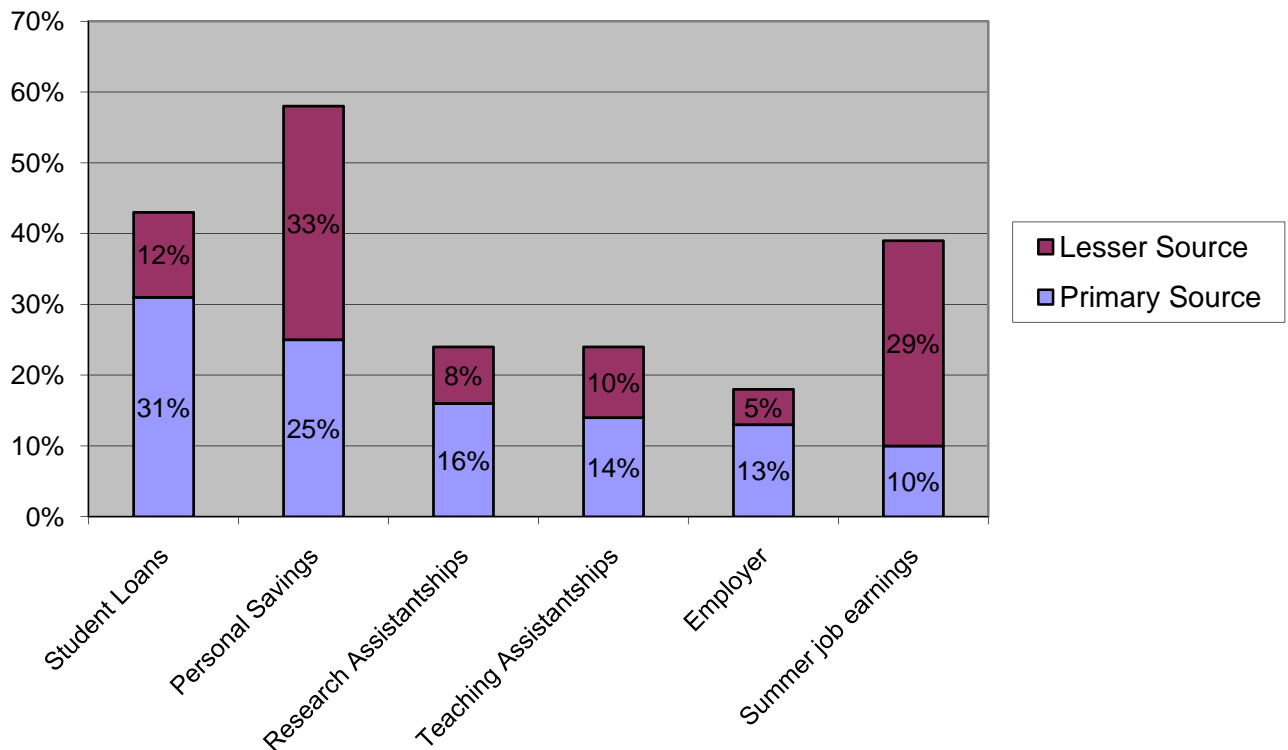
- Greater cost (4%, up 1%)

- About the same cost (15%, down 12%)
- Lower cost (41%, down 3%)

Those who reported they “don’t know/didn’t inquire” how the cost of their UI graduate education compares with costs at other universities rose sharply to forty percent (40%, up 15%).

Despite the increase in educational costs, ninety-two percent (92%, down 2%) reported that they were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the “cost of UI.”

Primary Financial Sources Used by Over 10% of Respondents



Other elements used to financially support graduate study to a lesser extent included spouse, off-campus employment while at UI, scholarships, on-campus employment while at UI, parents/guardians, veteran’s benefits, and other. (Q-5, 6, 7)

PART I. GENERAL UNIVERSITY

General Satisfaction Of Alumni

Ninety-six percent (96%) of respondents reported they were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their “graduate education overall”, unchanged from 2003. Nearly all responding graduate alumni were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their graduate education in their major field (93%, down 1% from last year). Additional elements in which eight of ten respondents reported being “satisfied” or “very satisfied” were “cost of

UI” (92%, down 2%); “graduate admissions process” (94%, up 4%); “convenience of university location I attended” (90%, unchanged); and, “academic reputation of the UI” (87%, up 1%). A new item this year asked alumni how satisfied they were with the quality of “career development opportunities”; sixty-six percent (66%) reported being “satisfied” or “very satisfied.” (Q-1)

General Services and Programs

Students were asked to indicate the quality of several UI general services and programs. When adjusted for the number of students reporting that they did not use them, seven out of ten rated the following services as “excellent” or “good”: “main UI library services” (86%); “main UI library holdings (books, periodicals, etc.)” (89%); and, “College of Graduate Studies Information (print, web)” (70%).

After adjustment for reported non-use, the top five programs with “excellent” or “good” ratings were “programs for international students” (90%); “major department office”, “Cooperative Extension” and, “recreational resources” (all 82%); and, “programs for minority students” (79%). Those with the lowest adjusted ratings were “UI Bookstore prices” (38%). New items on the survey this year were services provided by Career & Professional Planning: “career development events & presentations” (36%), “career advising” (38%), “career fairs” (44%), and “internships & job postings” (46%). These percentages appear to indicate a lack of knowledge about or use of the services rather than dissatisfaction with the programs. (Q-8 and 9)

PART II. DEPARTMENTAL/ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES

Program Requirements

From a list of elements often required in graduate studies, respondents were asked to identify all that applied to their program. The items most frequently reported as being required in graduate degree programs were “comprehensive written exam” (47%, down 8%), “thesis or dissertation” (46%, up 5%), “in-depth literature search(es)” (41%, up 15%), and “research methods course(s)” (40%, up 1%).

Forty-six percent (46%) of the total number of respondents completed theses or dissertations during their course of study, up five percent (5%) from last year, but significantly lower than sixty-five percent (65%) in 1995. The 2003 survey results showed, for all these elements, a decline in the percentage of programs that required them. The current results show an increase in nearly half of the elements being required. (Q-12)

Satisfaction With Graduate Program Experiences

Nineteen aspects of graduates’ study experiences were the focus of one item. Ninety-two percent (92%) of respondents “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they “experienced a good academic environment for graduate study at the UI,” up four percent (4%) from the

previous survey. Ninety-two percent (92%) “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that the “overall quality of instruction in UI courses was good” (up 3% from the last cycle).

Among those aspects most frequently “agreed” or “strongly agreed” upon were: “I view earning my graduate degree at UI as a significant accomplishment” (95%, no change) and “I received the theoretical background I needed through courses taken” (91%, up 1%).

Response rates for those who “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with the elements provided in the item increased in most areas, but the number of respondents reporting they would “advise a friend with similar interests to study in this department” remained at eighty-six percent (86%). Other areas in which over three-quarters of respondents reported they “agreed” or “strongly agreed” were:

- “Most UI faculty supported my progress as a graduate student.” (93%, up 5%);
- “Degree requirements corresponded well with the stated objectives of the program.” (91%, up 3%);
- “Professors in my department expect high quality graduate work.” (89%, up 2%);
- “Goals and objectives of my program and its courses were made clear.” (89%, up 2%);
- “I developed a close personal relationship with at least one faculty member.” (85%, up 3%);
- “My ability to collaborate with others was enhanced through my program.” (81%, up 3%);
- “My program of study prepared me well for employment.” (81%, up 5%);
- “My program’s objectives were clearly stated.” (88%, new this year).

After adjusting percentages by eliminating the responses of “didn’t know”, several additional areas yielded agreement ratings from eight out of ten respondents: “technical and computer assistance needed was available at UI” (82%, down 7%) and “critiques on thesis/dissertation and major projects were pertinent and constructive” (92%, up 3%), “critiques on thesis/dissertation and major projects were timely enough to be useful” (91%), “my program of study prepared me well for further advanced study” and “the department attracts and admits high quality graduate students” (both 86%).

An item which showed a significant increase this year was “my UI experience increased my awareness of cultural diversity”, up five percent (5%) for those reporting they “agreed” or “strongly agreed”. When adjusted for respondents who reported they “didn’t know”, sixty-four percent (64%, up 7%) of respondents “agreed” or “strongly agreed.”

A new item was included this year as well, “my program’s objectives were clearly stated,” with eighty-eight percent (88%) reporting they “agree” or “strongly agree”. (Q-10)

Quality Of Department's Environment, Resources, Teaching, And Preparation

Quality ratings (excellent, good, fair, poor) of the department's environment and resources were sought in this item. The elements related to teaching and advising received the highest ratings. When adjustment is made for the proportion that responded "don't know" or "not applicable", items that received ratings of "excellent" or "good" most frequently were: "academic qualifications of department faculty" (92%, up 2%), "willingness of my advisor/major professor to help" (87%, down 2%), "availability of my advisor/major professor" (84%, down 5%), "overall quality of my graduate education" (89%, up 4%), and "quality of teaching in my major field courses" (87%, up 4%).

Additional items in which three-quarters of respondents reported ratings of "excellent" or "good" included "standards of quality for student performance" (84%, up 3%), "intellectual climate of the department" (83%, up 2%), "depth of content in graduate courses" (82%, up 3%), and "timely access to courses I needed for my program" (82%, up 6%). After adjustment, the items drawing the largest proportion of "fair" or "poor" ratings were "specialized facilities such as laboratories, studios, and equipment needed for research/creative activity in my major field" and "opportunity for practica, internships" (both 40%), and, "TA office/consulting area (for student assistance)" and "laboratory/work space and equipment for research assistants" (both 38%). (*Q-11*)

OPEN-ENDED COMMENTS

The remainder of the survey consisted of broad, open-ended questions regarding the greatest strengths and weaknesses of the respondents' graduate programs, and any recommendations respondents might have to improve the programs or services offered. The original page of the survey instrument containing the responses to the open-ended comments will be forwarded to the college from which the respondent graduated.

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