

**OFFICE OF ANALYSIS, ASSESSMENT, AND ACCREDITATION**

**COMPARISON OF RESPONSES:**

**FRESHMAN/SOPHOMORE VERSUS GRADUATING STUDENTS 2005 - 2011**

**FEBRUARY 2012**



## **DESCRIPTION OF SURVEYS**

Each year, the Office of Analysis, Assessment, and Accreditation conducts two general surveys of students to determine attitudes and perceptions of their experiences at Utah State University: a survey of freshmen and sophomore students, and a survey of graduating baccalaureate students. In addition to some general demographic questions, both the Freshman/Sophomore Student Survey and the Graduating Student Survey include topics on: Financial Aid, Advising, Faculty/Department Experiences, General Education, Libraries/Technology, Campus Climate, and overall USU Experiences.

In 2009 the Graduating Student Survey added a section of Future Plans which is not a part of the Freshman/Sophomore Student Survey. This section is not included in this analysis. With this exception, the majority of the survey questions are similar between the two survey instruments, which allows for a comparison of how students attitudes and perceptions may have changed over time.

## **SAMPLE SELECTION AND SURVEY ADMINISTRATION**

The Freshman/Sophomore Student Survey is administered during class time in classes with high proportions of freshmen and sophomore students. All of the students in each class fill out the survey. The surveys are sorted to include only freshmen and sophomores. Sorting is done using a survey question that asks students to report the total number of credit hours they have completed. Over 1,000 surveys are completed by freshman/sophomore students each year. These are the basis of the results.

The Graduating Student Survey attempts to survey all of the undergraduate candidates for graduation. Surveys are distributed as part of the graduation application packet. Students are instructed to fill out the survey and return it with their graduation application materials to the Registrar's Office. Over 1,500 usable surveys are completed each year and these are the basis of the graduating student results.

## **DATA PRESENTATION**

This summary focuses on a subset of matching items from the two surveys. It includes data collected over a seven year period. The tables compare results of the Freshman/Sophomore Student Survey from 2005 through 2011 with those of the Graduating Student Survey for the same seven year period. The narrative presentation focuses on "strongly agree" and "agree" student responses to survey questions. In the tables, where cells are blank, no data was available for those years. In the tables, the numbers printed in red are subtotals for "agree" plus "strongly agree" responses, or subtotals for "disagree" plus "strongly disagree" responses. Some question wording has been modified in the seven year period and this is noted by text and numbers printed in blue. The tables referenced in each section can be found in the appendix at the end of this report.

## **YEAR-TO-YEAR VARIATIONS**

An interesting and important finding that resulted from evaluating the data over a seven year period was that there tends to be little variation of ratings over time. That is, for most of the survey questions, the results from the Freshman/Sophomore Student Survey and also from the Graduating Student Survey did not change very much from year-to-year. Consequently, the focus of this report will be on comparisons between the responses given by students in their freshman/sophomore year to those given at graduation.

## **RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS (See Table 1)**

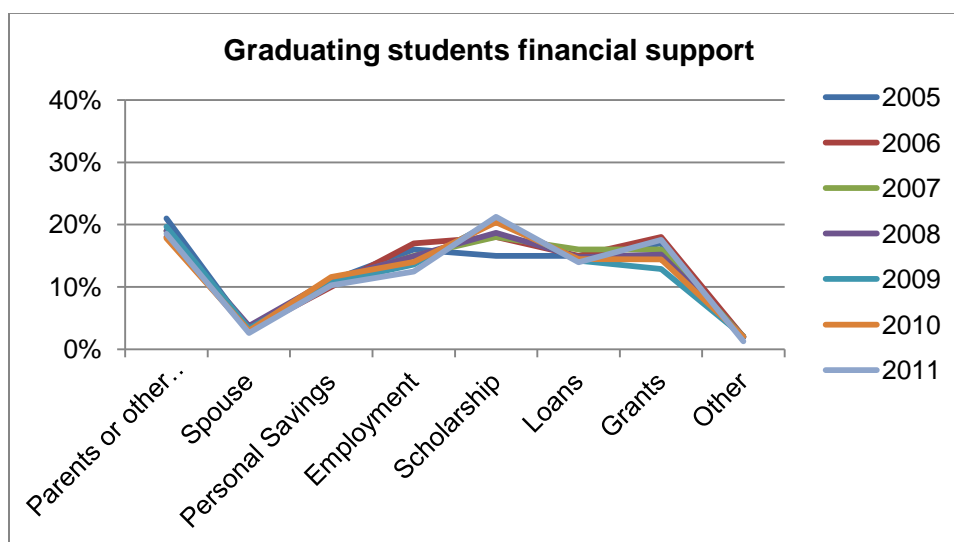
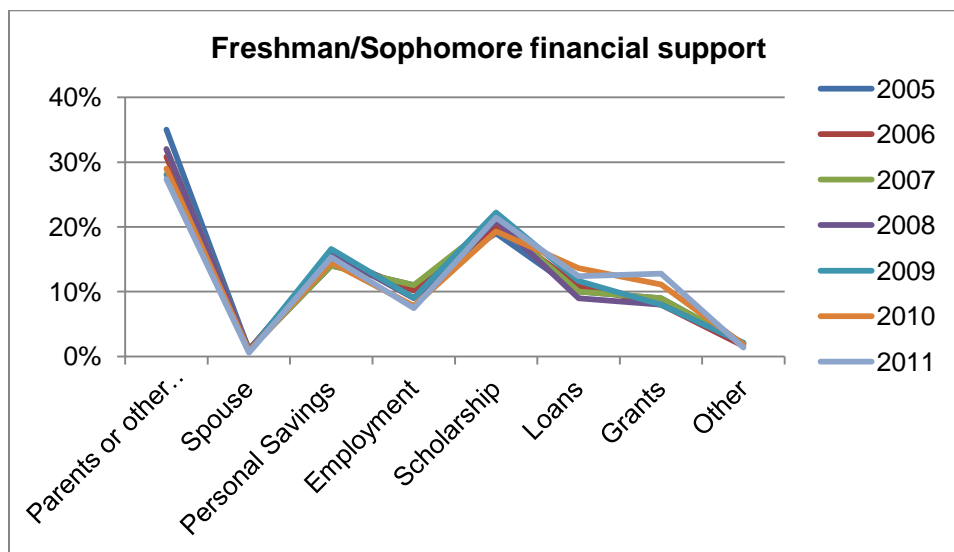
In 2005 there were more female respondents in both groups. From 2006 through 2011 there were more male freshmen/sophomore respondents and more female graduating respondents. In all years, the percentage of male and female respondents was within  $\pm 5\%$  of the median (50%). Across the seven year period, graduating respondents were about five times more likely to be married than freshman/sophomore respondents. In all seven years there were 2% to 3% more freshman/sophomore minority respondents than graduating minority respondents.

## FINDINGS: SOURCES OF FINANCIAL AID (See Table 2)

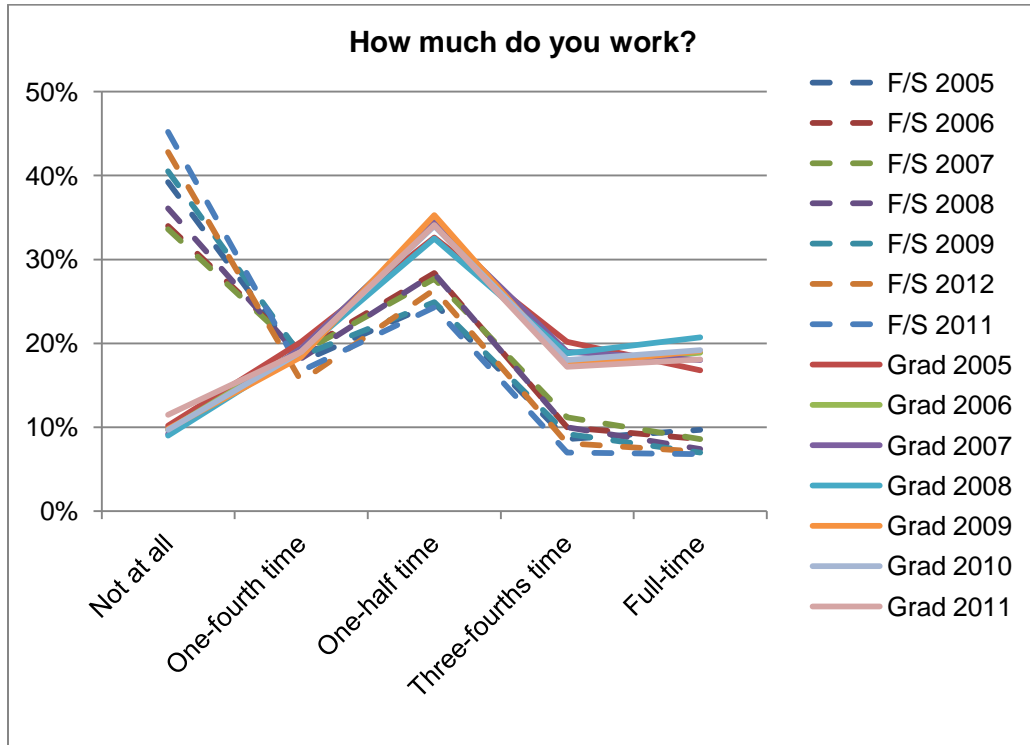
Questions are asked to determine how students supported themselves through college. Students are asked to indicate the percent of their financial support for school (tuition, books, housing, food, etc.) that came from each of the sources mentioned. The percentages in the table are the means for each source.

For freshman/sophomore respondents, from 2005 through 2011, parents or other relatives were the most common source of financial support, providing about 31% of support for an average student across those years. The next largest sources of support for freshman/sophomore respondents were scholarships (21% on average), personal savings (15% on average), and loans (11% on average).

For graduating respondents, support from parents or other relatives declined to an average of about 19%. By the time of graduation, these respondents reported a mix of financial sources that included scholarships (19% on average), grants (16% on average), and loans and employment (15% on average for each) as the largest sources of support. From 2005 through 2009, 1% to 4% more freshman/sophomore respondents received scholarships than graduating respondents. Across all years 3% to 10% more graduating respondents received grants and 1% to 6% more graduating respondents used loans, except in 2010 when the use of loans was the same. Over the seven year period, 2% to 6% more graduating respondents relied on employment than freshman/sophomore respondents.



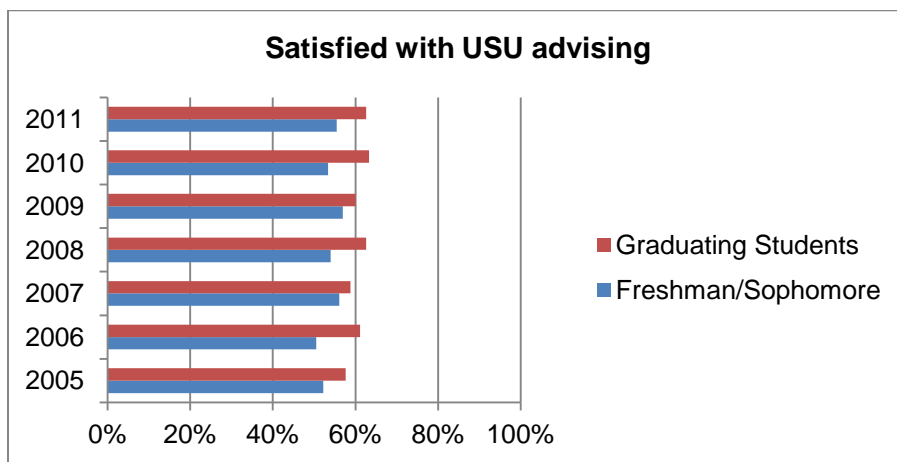
On average, across the seven years, more than four times – nearly 40% – as many freshman/sophomore respondents reported doing no [paid] work, when compared to graduating student respondents. Most graduating respondents reported working. Less than 10%, on average, did not work at all. More than 37% of graduating respondents reported working three-quarters, or full-time. As might be expected, over the seven year period, a greater percentage of graduating respondents worked more hours than freshman and sophomore respondents.



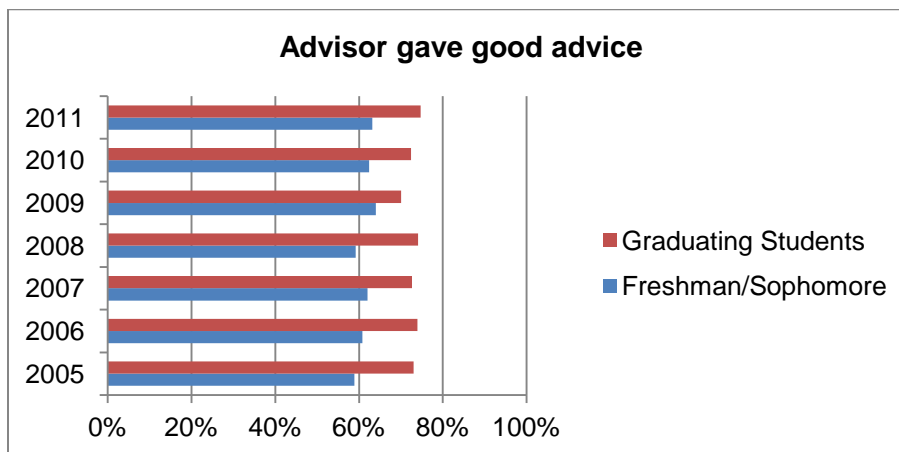
### FINDINGS: ADVISING (See Table 3)

The surveys include several questions about USU's academic advising program. When asked about the most important source of information used for academic planning, the first choice of the freshman/sophomore respondents was their academic advisor. From 2005 and 2006, Graduating respondent's most important source of information came from the Major Requirement Sheets but their advisor was their top choice from 2007 through 2011. The most common number of advisor visits for both groups was once a semester. While 20% to 24% of freshman/sophomore respondents had not met with their advisor during the school year, only 5% to 9% of graduating respondents reported the same. The most notable reasons that freshman/sophomore respondents gave for not meeting with their advisor were: 1) they did not know who their advisor was, and 2) they got their information from other sources. For graduating respondents the most frequently mentioned reasons for not meeting with their advisor were: 1) they got the information from other sources, and 2) they communicated with their advisor by email or telephone.

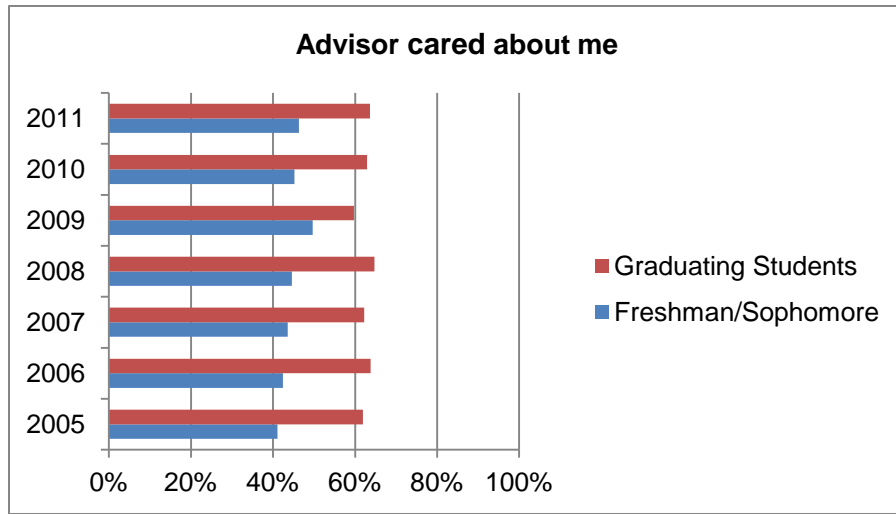
Students' opinions of USU advising start out generally positive, and improves over the course of students academic careers. A majority (more than 50%) of freshman/sophomores are satisfied with USU advising, Three percent to 10% more graduating respondents than freshman/sophomore respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the advising system at USU.



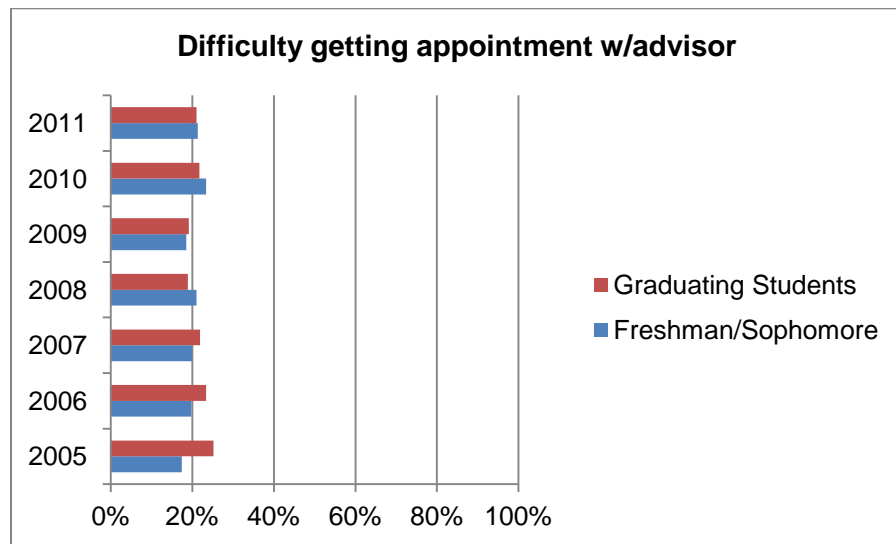
When asked if their advisor gave them good advice, on average, more than 60% of freshman/sophomores agreed or strongly agreed. By graduation, these percentages had increased, with 6% to 15% more graduating respondents than freshman/sophomore respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that their advisor gave them good advice.



Affirmative responses to the question: "My advisor cared about me as an individual" increased by 10% to 21% between freshman/sophomore respondents and graduating respondents.

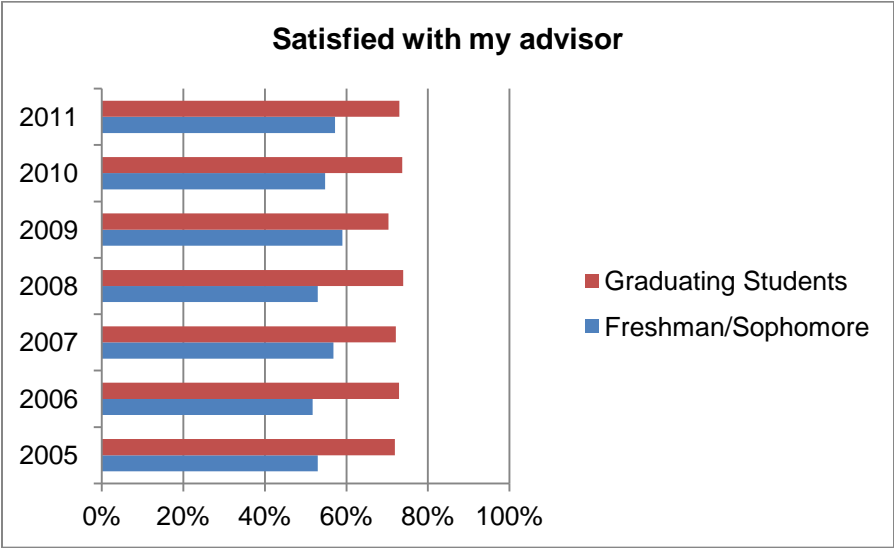


When responding to the question, "I often have difficulty getting an appointment with an advisor," 40% or more of the freshman/sophomore respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. Fifty-four percent to 64% of graduating respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.



A new question was asked in 2011, "my advisor is an effective mentor who provides useful and supportive guidance. Fifty-three percent of the freshman/sophomore respondents compared to 62.5% of the graduating respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their advisor was an effective mentor.

When asked if they were satisfied with their advisor, over 50% of the freshman/sophomore respondents agreed or strongly agreed. A higher percentage (11% to 21% more) of graduating respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with their advisor.

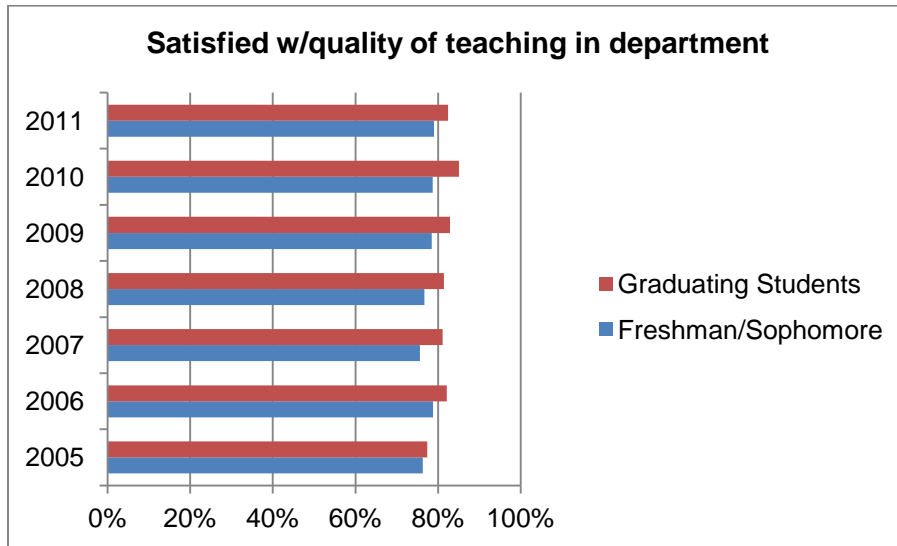




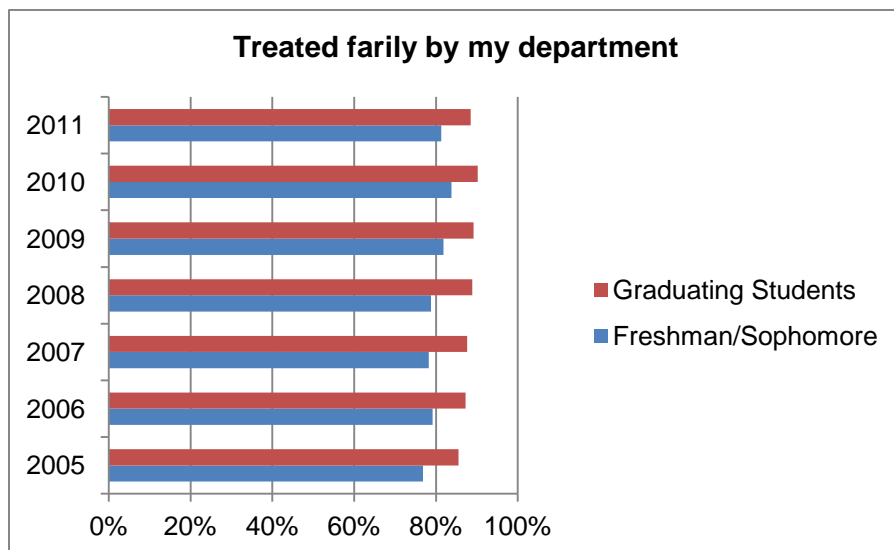
## FINDINGS: FACULTY/DEPARTMENT EXPERIENCES (See Table 4)

Students' opinions about their departments are very positive, and show a steady trend of improvement among both freshman/sophomores and graduating respondents over the last seven years. Several questions about faculty and department interactions are included in the surveys.

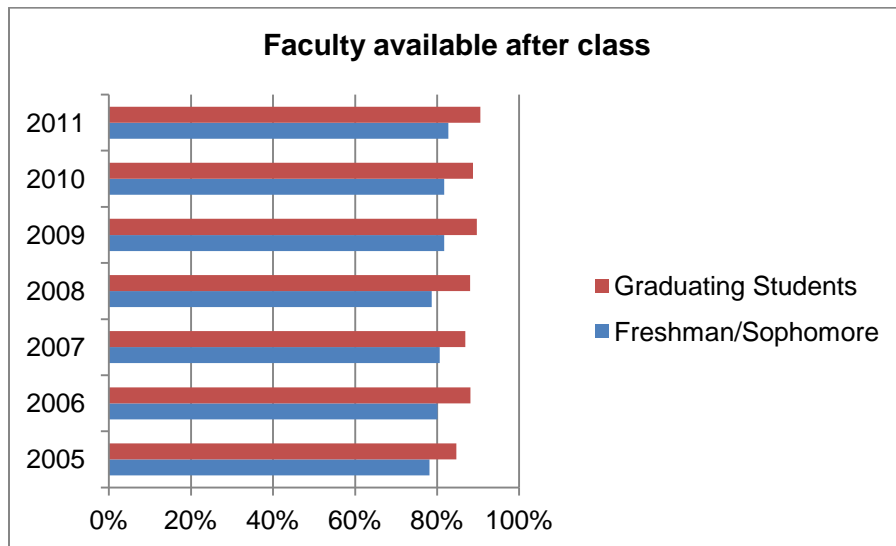
When responding to the statement, "I am satisfied with the quality of teaching in my department", 76% to 79% of freshman/ sophomores agree or strongly agree. Graduating respondents' ratings ranged from 77% to 85%.



Six percent to 10% more graduating respondents than freshman/sophomore respondents said they were treated fairly by their departments. In 2010, a little more than 90% of the graduating respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

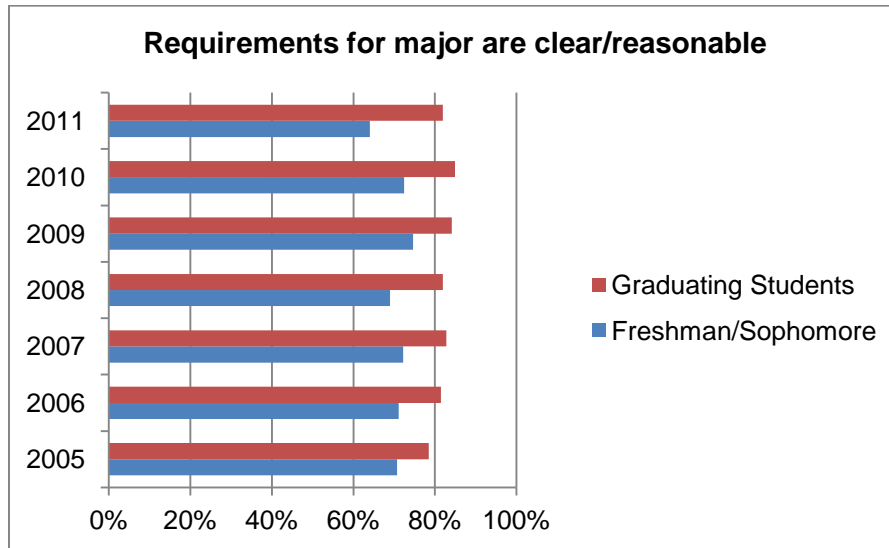


When rating the availability of faculty after classes and during office hours, more than 78% in both groups agreed or strongly agreed that faculty were available, but 6% to 9% more graduating respondents rated this item higher than freshman/sophomore respondents.

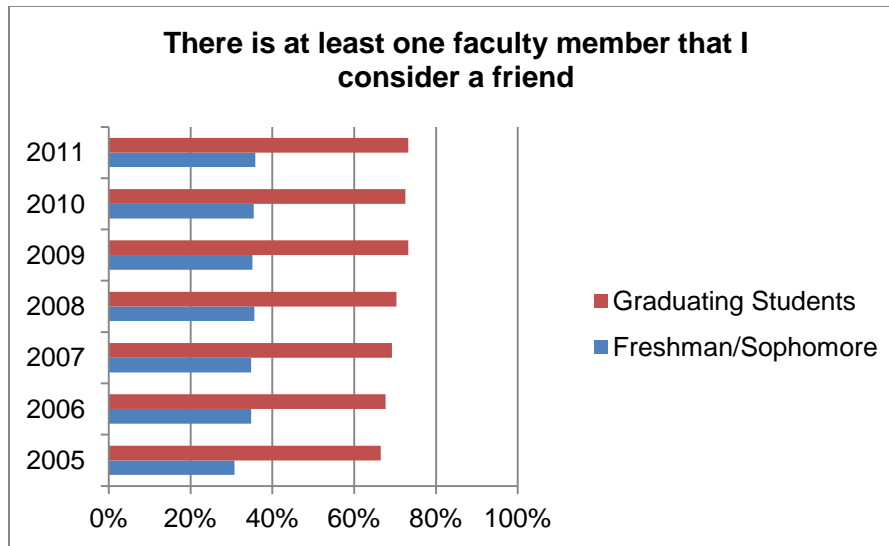


There were five new questions added in 2011. When students were asked if they received timely feedback on their coursework, 66.4% of the freshman/sophomore respondents compared to 79.8% of the graduating respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they received timely feedback. When asked if they were satisfied with the amount of interaction they had with faculty, 64.1% of the freshman/sophomore respondents and 79% of the graduating respondents said they were satisfied. In responding to the question, "I am satisfied with the quality of feedback that faculty give me on my work", 60.3% of the freshman/sophomore respondents and 76.4% of the graduating respondents said they were satisfied with the quality of the feedback received. When asked, "I would like to receive better feedback on my academic progress", 52.2% of the freshman/sophomore respondents said they would but only 37.4% of the graduating respondents said they wanted better feedback. Students were then asked if faculty created an atmosphere of helpfulness. Seventy-two percent of the freshman/sophomore respondents and 81.9% of the graduating respondents said faculty did create an atmosphere of helpfulness.

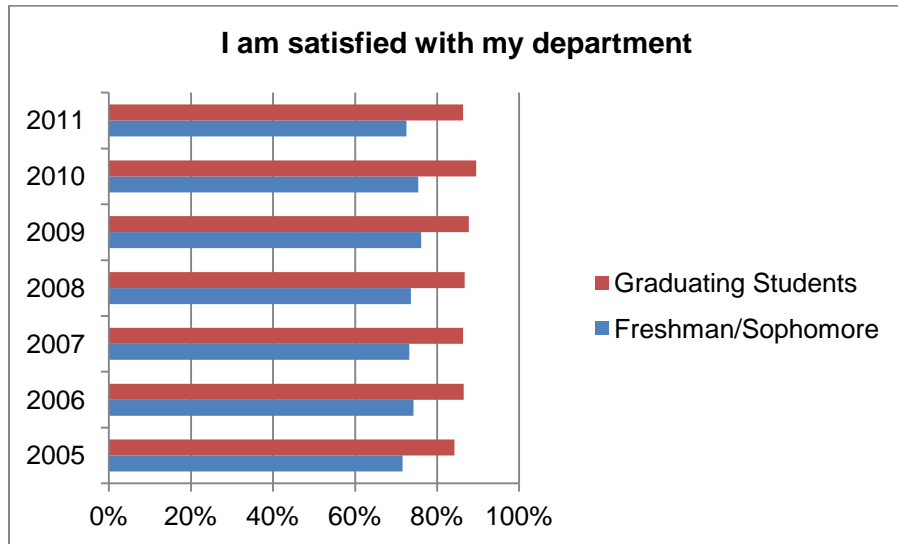
When asked if requirements for their majors were clear and reasonable, on average, more than 70% of freshman/sophomores agreed, and 8% to 18% more graduating respondents agreed or strongly agreed than freshman/sophomore respondents.



When asked if there was at least one faculty member students considered a friend, double the number of graduating respondents agreed or strongly agreed (67% to 73%), suggesting there are good opportunities to develop friendships with faculty members over the course of students academic careers at USU.



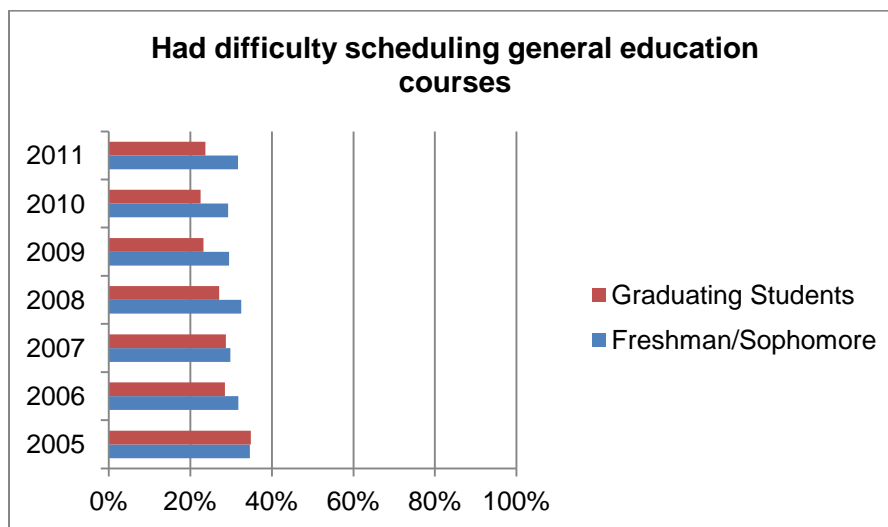
Seventy-two percent to 76% of freshman/sophomores agreed or strongly agreed that overall, they were satisfied with their department. Again, even more graduating respondents (12% to 14% more) agreed or strongly agreed that, overall, they were satisfied.



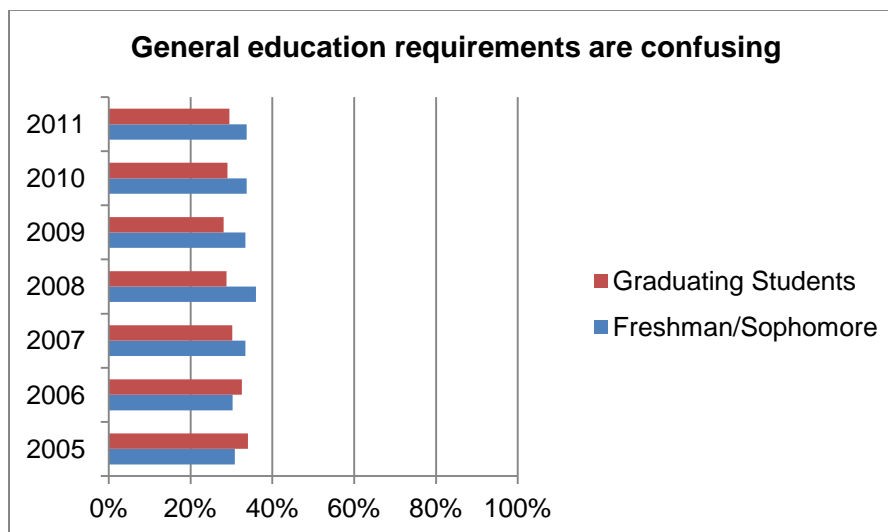
## FINDINGS: GENERAL EDUCATION/UNIVERSITY STUDIES (See Table 5)

Most freshman/sophomore students spend much of their time in general education courses, while graduating students are often trying to finish the general education courses they had not completed earlier. General education courses are designed to enhance students' communication, quantitative, and computer literacy skills and give needed background in humanities and in the social, life, and physical sciences.

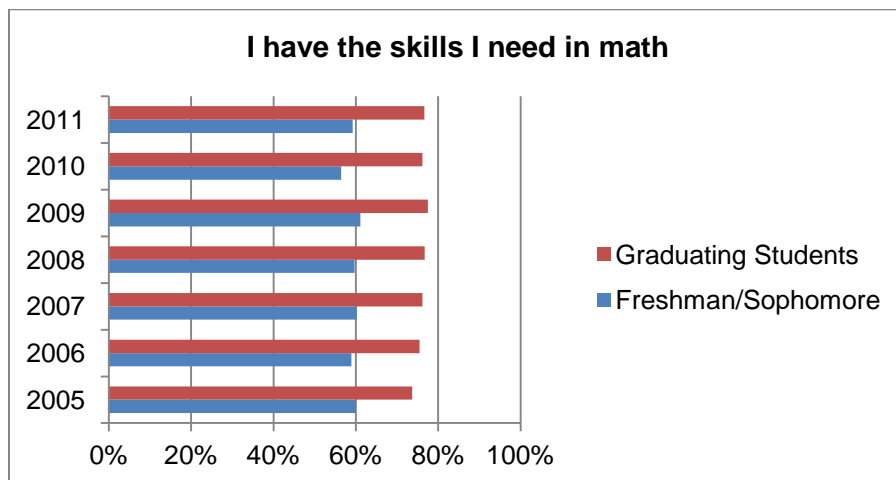
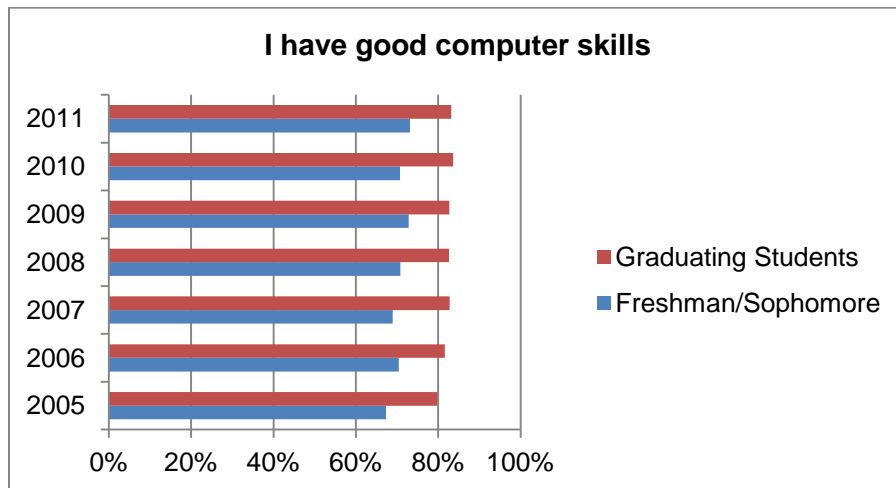
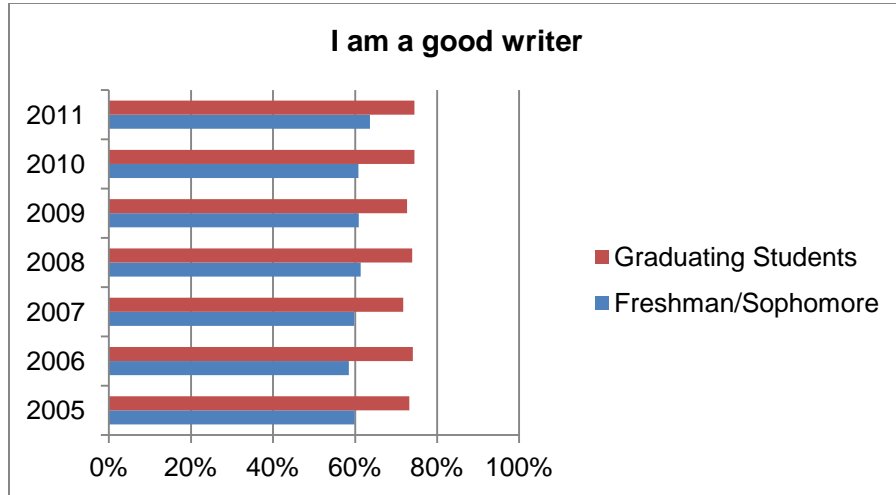
When answering the question "I have difficulty scheduling general education courses", a slightly higher percentage of freshman/sophomore respondents (0.2% to 8%) than graduating respondents indicated that they had difficulty scheduling general education courses. The number of students reporting difficulty shows a slight decline for freshman/sophomores between 2005 and 2010, and a more pronounced decline for graduating respondents. By 2010, less than 30% of freshman/sophomores and graduating students reported difficulty in scheduling general education courses. In 2011 there was a slight increase in scheduling difficulties from both groups.



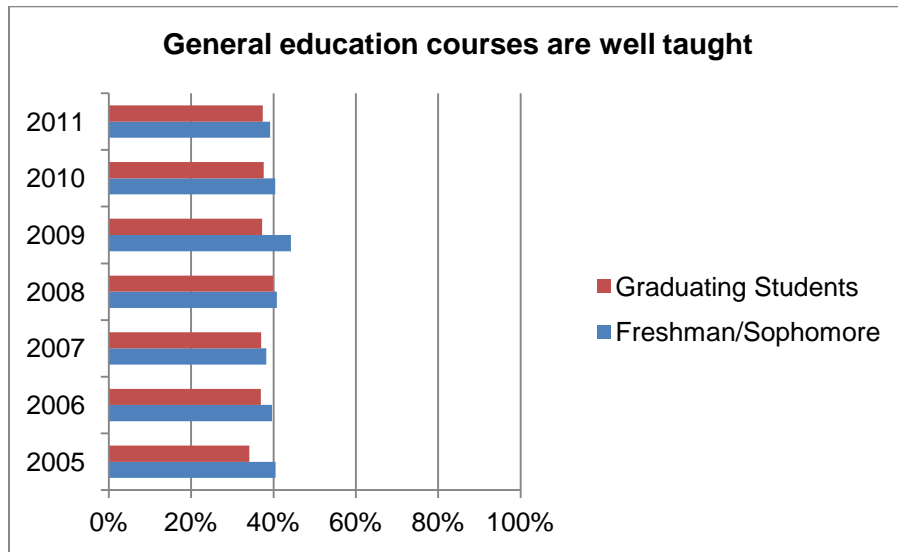
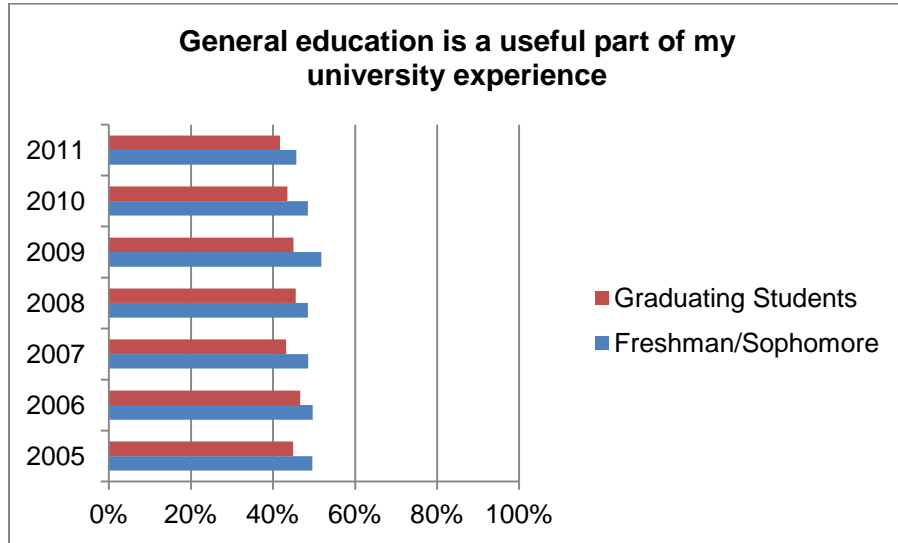
When asked if general education requirements are confusing, freshman/sophomore respondent and graduating respondent agreement ratings were within 2% to 7% of each other, with graduating respondent's agreement ratings declining a little each year until 2010.



Freshman/sophomore respondent's start with a fairly high opinion of their initial skills and capacity, with nearly 60% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statements: "I have the skills I need in mathematics," and "I am a good writer." They felt even stronger about their computer skills; nearly 70% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I have good computer skills." By the time of graduation students' self assessment of these skills had increased by 10% to 20%.



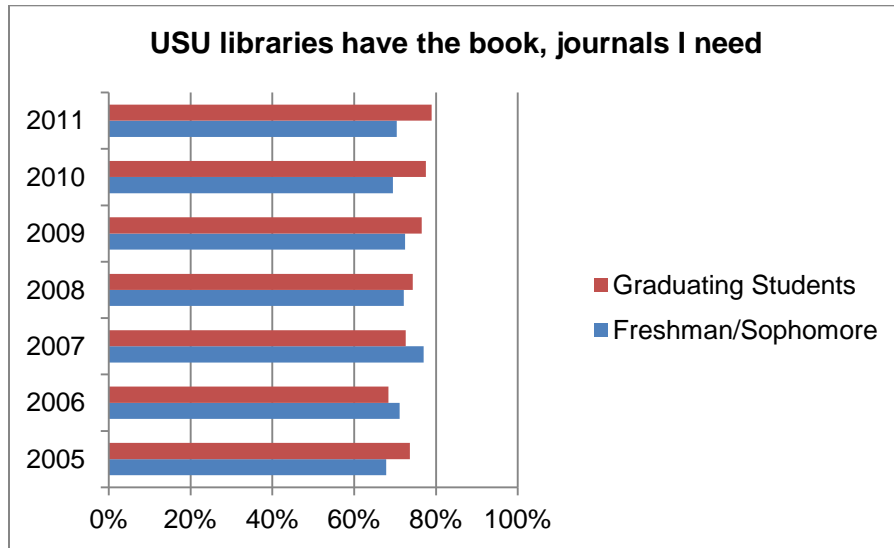
Respondent's opinion of their skills may in turn, influence their overall opinion of general education courses. Slightly less than 50% of freshman/sophomores agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "General Education is a useful part of my university experience." Positive responses to this question by graduating students were 3% to 7% lower. When asked if general education courses were well taught, 38% to 44% of freshman/sophomore respondents agreed or strongly agreed. Graduating student responses to this question were 1% to 7% lower.



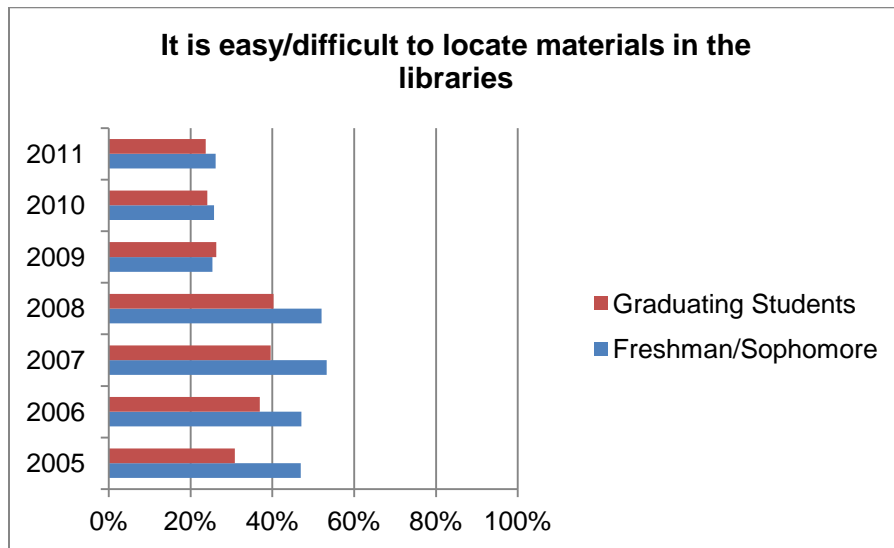
## FINDINGS: LIBRARIES/TECHNOLOGY (See Table 6)

These items deal with experiences involving library materials and staff, online courses, and classroom technology.

When asked if “USU libraries have the books, journals, materials I need”, both freshman/sophomore respondents and graduating respondents rated this item between 68% and 79% agreement.

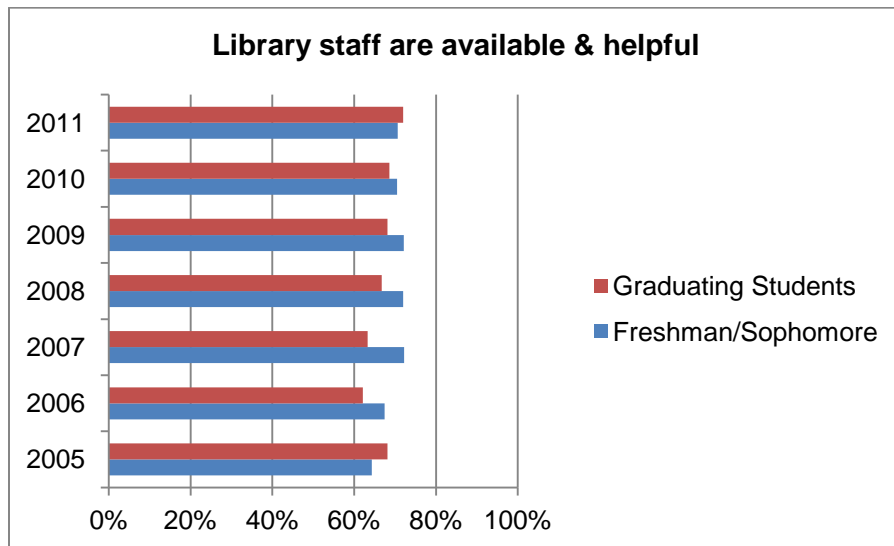


Students were surveyed on the ease and difficulty of locating materials in the USU libraries. Overall, more freshman/sophomore respondents (10% to 16%) than graduating respondents thought it was easy to locate materials in USU's libraries. In 2009, the wording of this question was changed to ask students if it was difficult to locate materials in the library. With this new wording, 26% or fewer students felt that it was difficult to locate materials. Freshmen/sophomore respondents and graduating respondents had roughly the same difficulty.

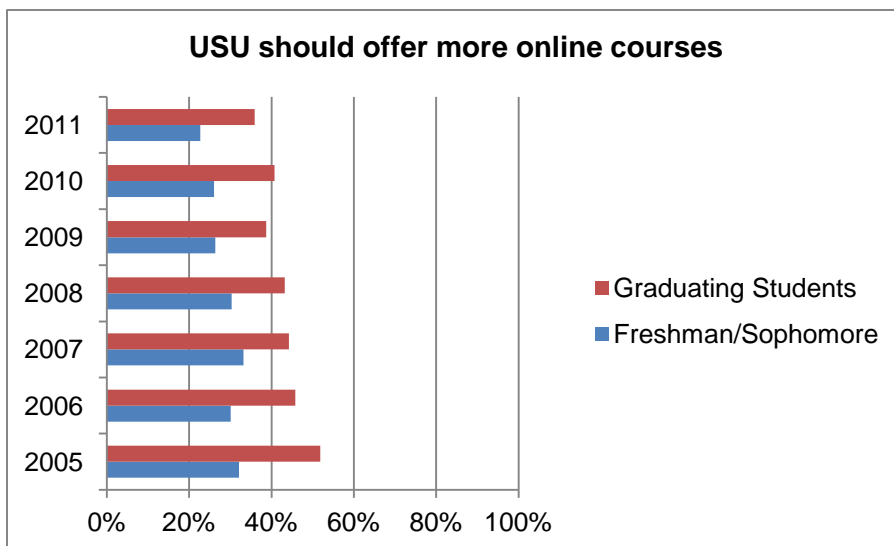




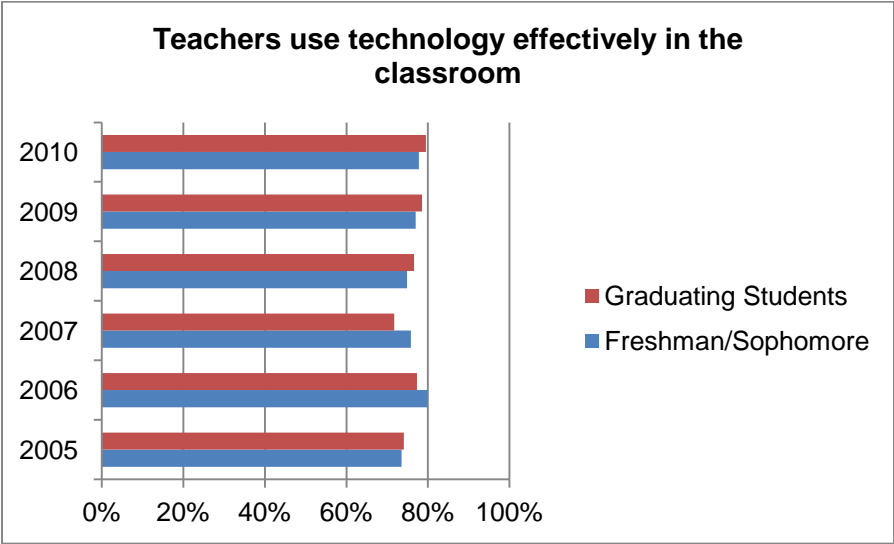
Overall, a slightly higher percentage of freshman/sophomore respondents (2% to 9%) than graduating respondents thought library staff was available and helpful, except in 2005 and 2011 when a few more graduating respondents (2% to 4%) agreed or strongly agreed that staff was available and helpful.



When given the statement, "USU should offer more online courses", 11% to 20% more graduating respondents than freshman/sophomore respondents agreed or strongly agreed. It's notable that the percentage of graduating students agreeing or strongly agreeing that USU should offer more online courses has been in significant decline since 2005, from 52% in 2005 to 36% in 2011. In 2011 a separate Regional Campus and Distance Education (RCDE) Graduating Student Survey was created and those results are not included in this analysis; this could account for the additional decline in desire for online courses in 2011. Typically RCDE students often want more online courses. However, the decline in agreement with the question is also seen in the Freshman/Sophomore numbers. This suggests a trend where USU is better meeting the need/demand for these classes over time.



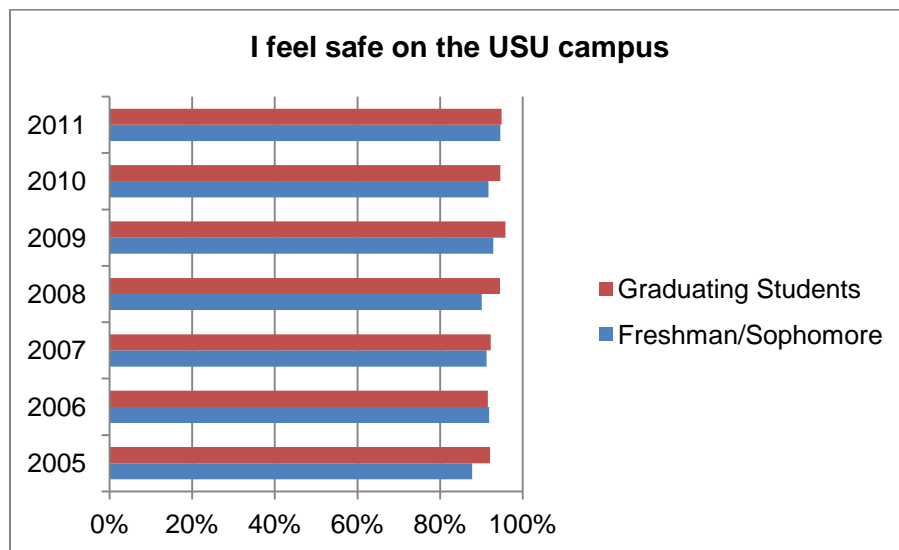
When asked if teachers used technology effectively in the classroom, evaluations between the two groups were quite similar, over 71% for both groups agreed or strongly agreed.



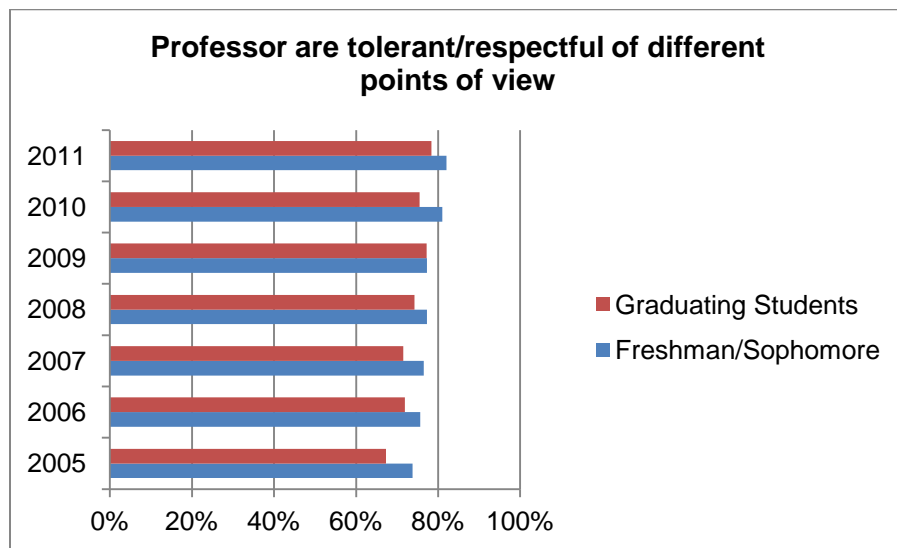
## FINDINGS: CAMPUS CLIMATE (See Table 7)

This group of questions addresses student opinion regarding safety, tolerance of different points of view, diversity, and a sense of being cared about at Utah State University.

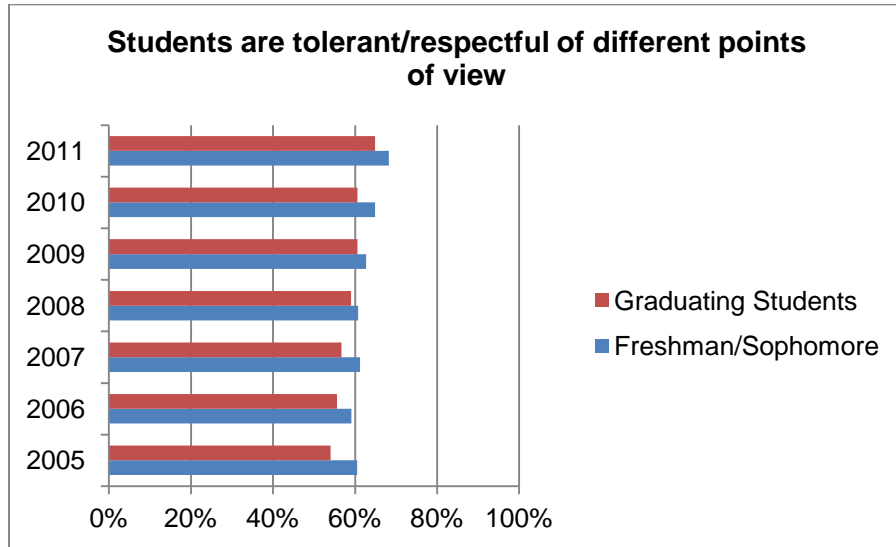
Utah State is considered a very safe campus. Over 90% of both freshman/sophomores and graduating respondents reported that they felt safe on the USU campus. The sense of safety seems to grow slightly over time, with 0.3% to 4% more graduating respondents than freshman/sophomore respondents agreeing that they felt safe on the campus.



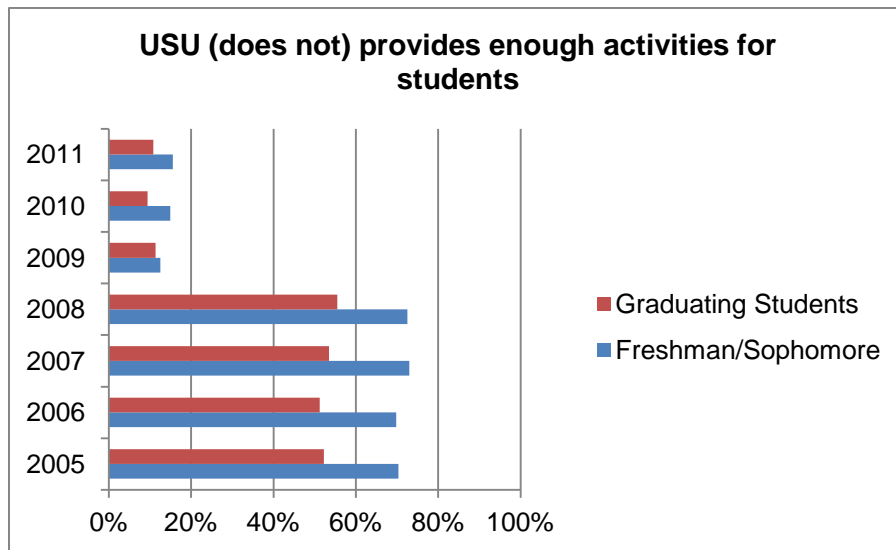
The percentage of students agreeing that professors are tolerant or respectful of different points of view has been increasing slightly, with 78% of graduating respondents and 82% of freshman/sophomore respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing to this statement in 2011. In 2005, these numbers were 67% and 74% respectively. In 2011 the wording in the question was changed and the word "tolerant" was replaced with the word "respectful".



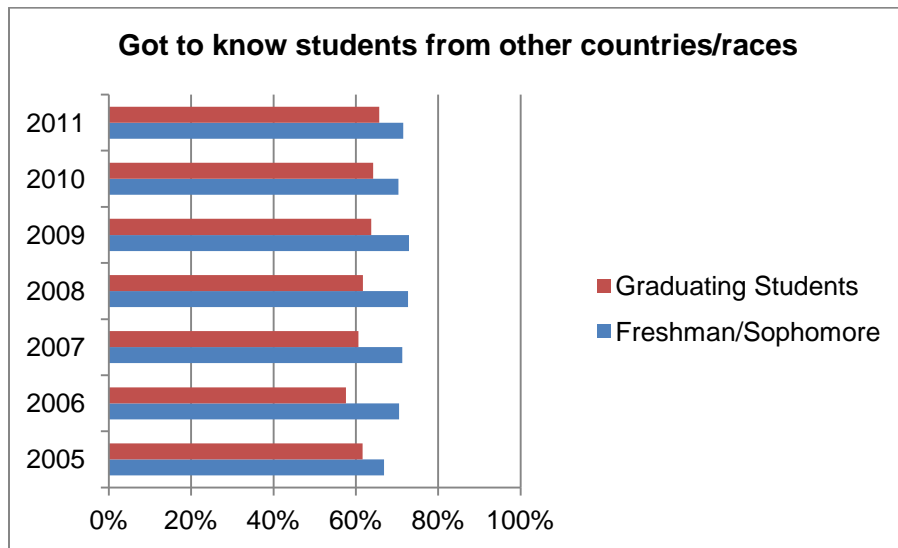
Respondents in both groups felt students were less tolerant of different points of views than professors, but this number has also been improving over time, with 65% of graduating respondents and 68% of freshman/sophomore respondents agreeing in 2011 (compared to 54% and 61% in 2005). In 2011 the wording in the question was changed and the word "tolerant" was replaced with the word "respectful".



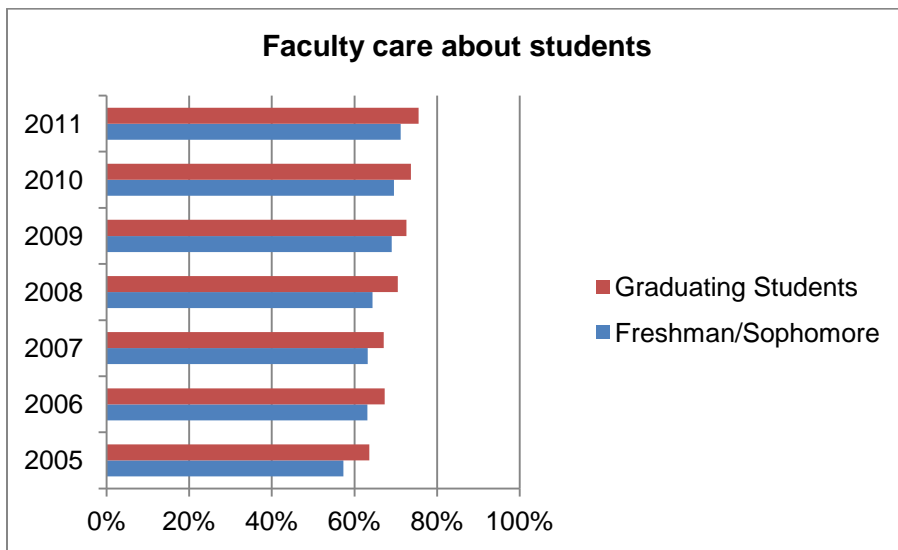
In 2005 through 2008, 17% to 20% more freshman/sophomore respondents than graduating respondents thought that USU provided enough activities for its students. In 2009 this question was changed to focus specifically on whether or not USU did not provide enough activities for students. Thirteen percent to 16% of freshman/sophomore respondents agreed or strongly agreed that USU “does not provide enough activities for its students,” while 9% to 11% of graduating respondents felt the same way.



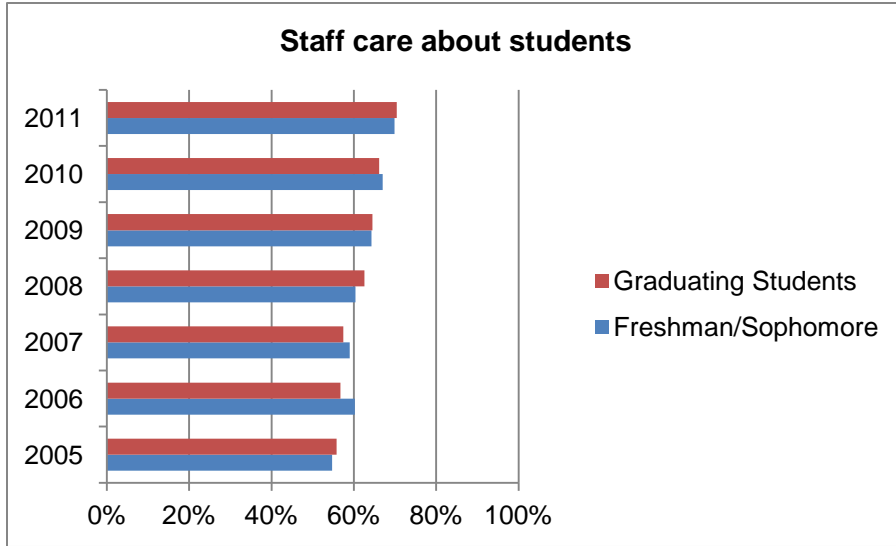
Since 2005, 67% to 73% of freshman/sophomore respondents have agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: "I got to know students from other countries and of other races." Interestingly enough, these numbers are 5% to 13% higher than the survey results from graduating respondents.



The percentage of students saying that "faculty care about students" has been increasing for freshman/sophomore respondents and graduating respondents over all seven years. Four percent to 6% more graduating respondents than freshman/sophomore respondents agreed or strongly agreed that faculty at USU care about students.



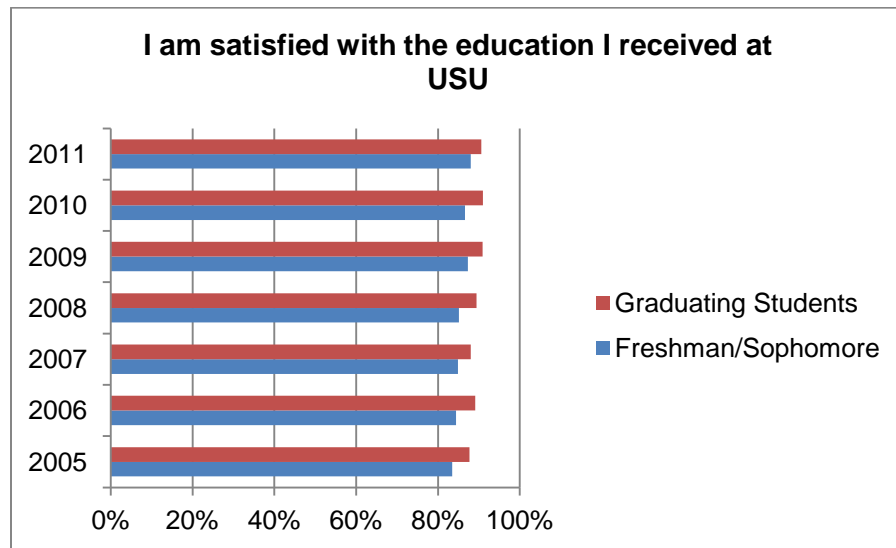
The percentage of students saying that “staff care about students” has also increased over that same period. In 2006, 2007, and 2010 more freshman/sophomore respondents (0.9% to 4%) than graduating respondents said staff at USU cared about students. But, in 2005, 2008, 2009 and 2011 more graduating respondents (0.2% to 2%) said staff care about students. Overall, a clear majority of respondents from both groups saw USU as a safe, tolerant, and caring place to be.



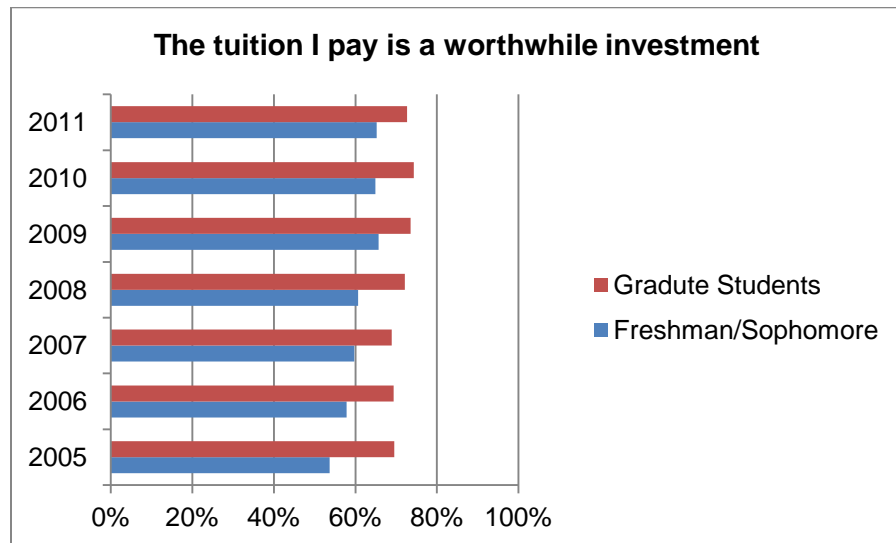
## FINDINGS: OVERALL USU EXPERIENCES (See Table 8)

Several questions are included in the survey to determine students' general perceptions of USU. Students' overall satisfaction with their experience at USU appears to increase over time.

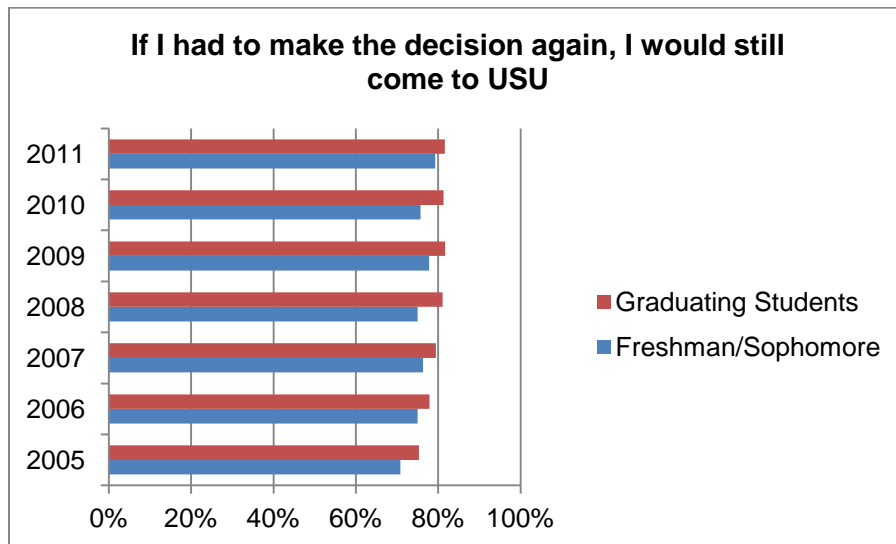
When students were asked if they were satisfied with the education they were receiving at USU, 84% to 88% of the freshman/sophomore respondents were satisfied. Three percent to 5% more graduating respondents than freshman/sophomore respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the education they received at USU.



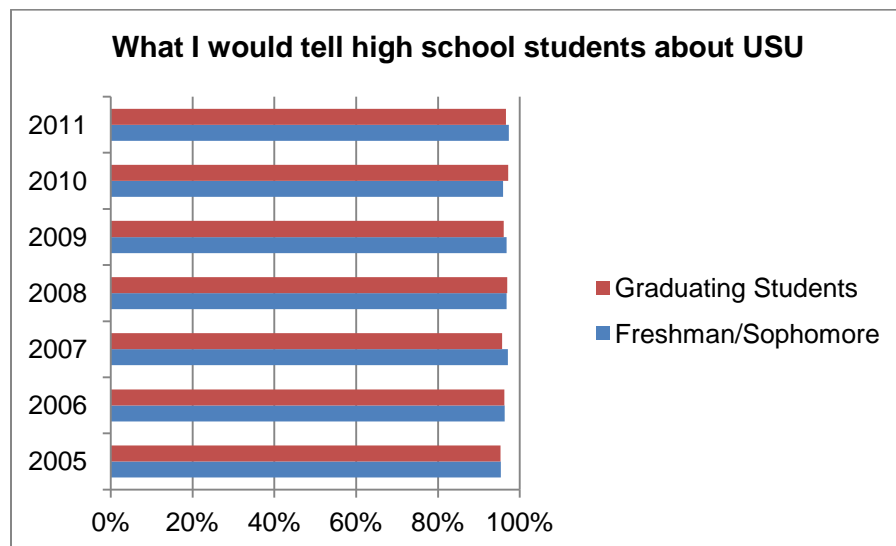
Students' satisfaction with their financial investment at USU also improves over time. In evaluating whether tuition was a worthwhile investment for USU students, 54% to 66% of the freshman/sophomore respondents agreed or strongly agreed. More graduating respondents (8% to 16%) than freshman/sophomore respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the tuition they paid was a worthwhile investment.



When students were asked, "If I had to make the decision again, I would still come to USU", 71% or more of the respondents in both groups agreed or strongly agreed, and that number was consistently 2% to 6% higher for graduating respondents when compared to freshman/sophomores.



Students were asked what they would tell a graduating high school student about Utah State University. The four choices were: (1) It's great, come here, (2) Mostly positive things, (3) Mostly negative things, (4) It's not great, don't come here to school. Over 95% of both groups said USU was great or at least mostly positive things about the university, while only 3% and 5% of both groups selected (3) and (4).



**LOCATION OF FULL REPORTS**

The reports and additional data for each of these studies can be found on the Analysis, Assessment, and Accreditation Web Site ([http://www.usu.edu/aaa/survey\\_results.cfm](http://www.usu.edu/aaa/survey_results.cfm)).



**APPENDIX**

**Raw Data Tables 2005 - 2011**

