

September 24, 2010

Re: Survey Report – Comparison of Freshman/Sophomore vs. Graduating Students (2005-2010)

Dear Colleagues;

I'm pleased to provide a summary report comparing six years of surveys from freshmen/sophomores (2005-2010) with six years of results from graduating students. Each year the Office of Analysis, Assessment & Accreditation conducts two general surveys to determine attitudes and perceptions of undergraduate student experiences at Utah State University. These surveys ask the same questions at the beginning, and at the end, of students' experiences. They provide a way to compare the evolution of those experiences for undergraduates over time. The survey questions cover financial aid, advising, faculty and departments, general education, libraries/technology and overall campus climate. These are large surveys, with more than 1,000 freshmen/sophomores and more than 2,000 graduating students responding each year. These samples are broadly representative of the student population at USU. For details of sample sizes and student characteristics, please see our survey reports, at: usu.edu/aaa/assessment/surveys.cfm

Below, I've highlighted three positive stories and two areas for additional inquiry/work, in the hope that this might entice you to open the report and take a look at the charts and text in your specific area(s) of work or service. Please feel free to contact me with questions or areas for additional inquiry.

Three positive stories about students' undergraduate experiences:

- Students at USU feel very positive about their experiences overall, and those feelings have been improving over time. More than 90% of graduating students were "*satisfied or very satisfied with their USU education.*" More than 80% agreed they would "*make the decision to come to USU again*" [if they had to do it all over again], and more than 96% of respondents would inform graduating high school seniors "*it's great, come to USU,*" or say "*mostly positive things.*"
- Experiences with USU faculty and departments have been improving over the past six years. Over 85% of graduating students in 2005 agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "*I am treated fairly by my department.*" By 2010, this had increased to more than 90% of respondents. Graduating respondents' satisfaction with the teaching in their department increased from 77% in 2005 to 85% in 2010, and faculty showed improved availability after class during that period.
- Students feel very safe on the USU campus. On average, over the last six years of surveys, more than 91% of students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "*I feel safe on the USU campus.*" For graduating respondents, this reached an all time high of 95.8% in 2009.

Two areas for additional work/inquiry:

- General Education is an area for additional inquiry/work. Less than half of undergraduates agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “*General Education is a useful part of my university experience.*” (Many students, ~30% over the six years, were neutral on this question). Students’ self-evaluation of their skills and competencies may be contributing to their relative indifference to the value of General Education. Over the six years of surveys, about 60% of freshmen and sophomores agreed or strongly agreed with the statements: “*I have the skills that I need in mathematics,*” and “*I am a good writer.*” This is a potentially useful area for additional work, to better understand and align student self-perceptions with measured results and competencies. On the positive side of General Education, there has been a decline in the percentage of graduating students who express difficulty in scheduling General Education courses. The data is clear that student experiences have been improving in this specific area over time.
- On-line courses: The percentage of students agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement, “*USU should offer more online courses,*” has been declining over the last six years. This trend is most evident for graduating students. In 2005, 52% of graduating respondents said that USU should have more online offerings. That number had declined to 41% in 2010. These results suggest that overall students are happier with the volume of online offerings now, but they may obscure differences in individual colleges and departments, and the question is not specific enough to address the need for additional on-line offerings. Additional questions/survey work/focus groups might help to better differentiate important details of student experiences with regard to online courses. Each individual year’s survey results provide a slightly more detailed picture of students’ perceptions. For example, the 2010 Graduating Student Survey shows considerable variability across colleges on this question, with 21.9% of Jon H. Huntsman School of Business undergraduates strongly agreeing that “*USU should offer more online courses,*” but only 6.3% of College of Natural Resources respondents concurring strongly. Without additional work, it’s hard to say if these responses are more supply or more demand driven.

Thank you for your attention to this report. I look forward to working with you in the months ahead to better understand and improve our work with the students at Utah State University.

Warm regards,

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