

## **School of Social Sciences Graduates' Experiences and Opinions Five Years After Graduation<sup>1</sup>**

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In Spring 2006, 156 respondents who graduated from School of Social Science undergraduate programs Fall2000/Spring 2001 (overall response rate was 42%, see Table 1). Although 42% is a respectable response rate for a mail survey (Dilman, 2000) and comparable to other alumni surveys, it is important to remember that these data do not represent the entire population of graduates. It is also important to remember that 1) psychology department graduates represent the largest subsample (35.3%), 2) different sample sizes and response rates mean that comparisons between departments can be misleading and 3) any differences among respondents could reflect different university experiences or initial differences among students who chose different social science majors.

In this summary, we describe respondents' ratings of their SSU experiences, their current employment and any graduate training, their current levels of civic engagement and their personal satisfaction and values. Respondents rate their SSU experiences positively and they report high levels of voting and community service (higher in comparison to other national survey data). However, they consistently report concerns about career and job prospects – especially given the local cost of living. They rate advising for graduate study and providing job skills as among the least effective aspects of their education and they suggest a variety of ways in which this area could be improved.

### **Sample demographics**

Of those who listed their ethnicity, 81.8% listed white or European-American, 2.1% listed African American, 2.8% listed Asian American and 11.2% listed Latino or Hispanic American. 79.9% were women and 20.1% were men. Respondents' ages at time of graduation ranged from 20 to 63, (mean age at graduate was 27.8, median age was 23). 42.9% of these respondents indicated that neither of their parents completed a college degree.

### **SSU experiences**

Most respondents viewed their major as good to excellent ( $M=3.36$ , see Table 1).<sup>2</sup> 59.7% reported that they would complete the major again and 87.6% reported that they had recommended SSU to someone since graduation. Approximately 45% of respondents rated their GE classes within and outside of

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<sup>1</sup> This project is a collaborative research project involving Timothy Abraham, Brooke Bauer, Kaitlyn Baumgartner, Betzy Chavez, Lisa Dobias, Ryan Halley, Kate Lachowsky, Anne-Marie Miklos, Stephanie Moore, Ray Parr, Matthew Schmitz, Nichole Thompson, Raven Woods, Alexandria Ysmael and Heather Smith. For further information, please contact Heather Smith ([smithh@sonoma.edu](mailto:smithh@sonoma.edu)). We would like to thank our faculty colleagues who helped us make this a much better project. The original questionnaire is posted at <http://www.sonoma.edu/users/s/smithh/2006alumsurvey/survey.html>.

<sup>2</sup> All ratings range from 1 to 5 unless otherwise noted.

the School of Social Sciences as good (there were no clear differences in the two ratings). When asked to rate the best method for assessing the undergraduate major, respondents rated a portfolio of written work (M=3.89), independent research project (M=3.83) and a community service project (M=3.34) as most appropriate and a standardized exit exam as least appropriate (M=2.24). Respondents did not agree that there was “nothing that would capture” their experience (M=1.84).

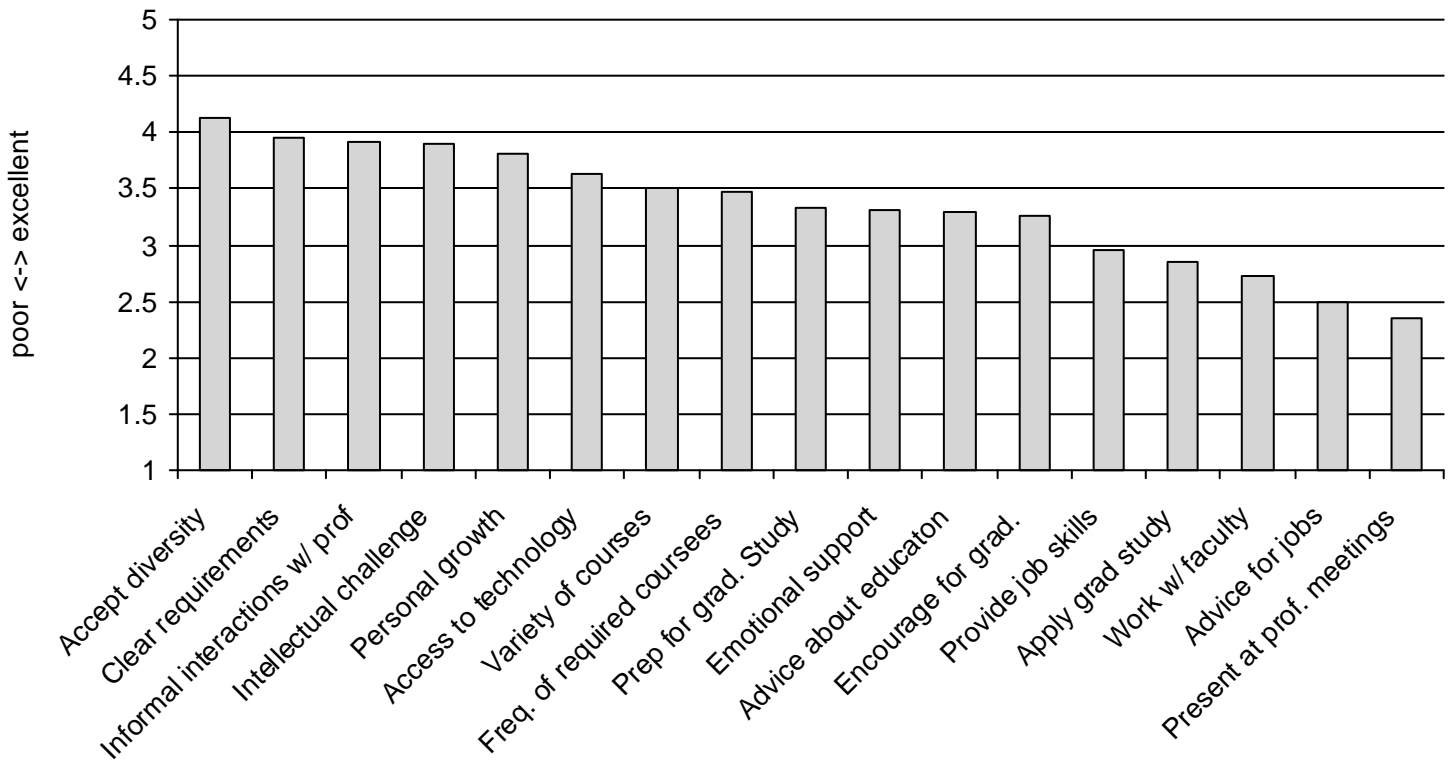
**Table 1. Overall ratings of major department.**

Major	N	Response Rate	% poor	% average	% good	% excellent	% outstanding
Anthropology	7	29.2%	0	14.3	28.6	42.9	14.3
CJ & C	4	18.2%	25	50	0	0	25
ENSP	19	37.3%	0	5.3	36.8	42.1	15.8
Geography	7	87.5%	0	28.6	28.6	42.9	0
HD	6	54.5%	16.7	0	66.7	16.7	0
History	16	41.0%	0	18.8	50	31.2	0
Liberal studies, Ukiah	8	38.1%	0	50	25	25	0
Political Science	4	26.7%	25	0	25	25	25
Psychology	55	42.3%	0	18.5	31.5	42.6	6.4
Sociology	26	40.6%	3.8	3.8	34.6	42.3	11.5
WGS	3	75%	0	0	33.3	33.3	33.3
Overall	156	41%	1.9	15.5	34.2	38.1	9.0

*Note.* Ratings could range from poor (1) to 5 (excellent). For small samples, one respondent can represent a large percentage. There were 14 double majors (the second major in 7 cases were other School of Social Science departments) and 20 minors (the minor in 12 cases were other School of Social Sciences departments).

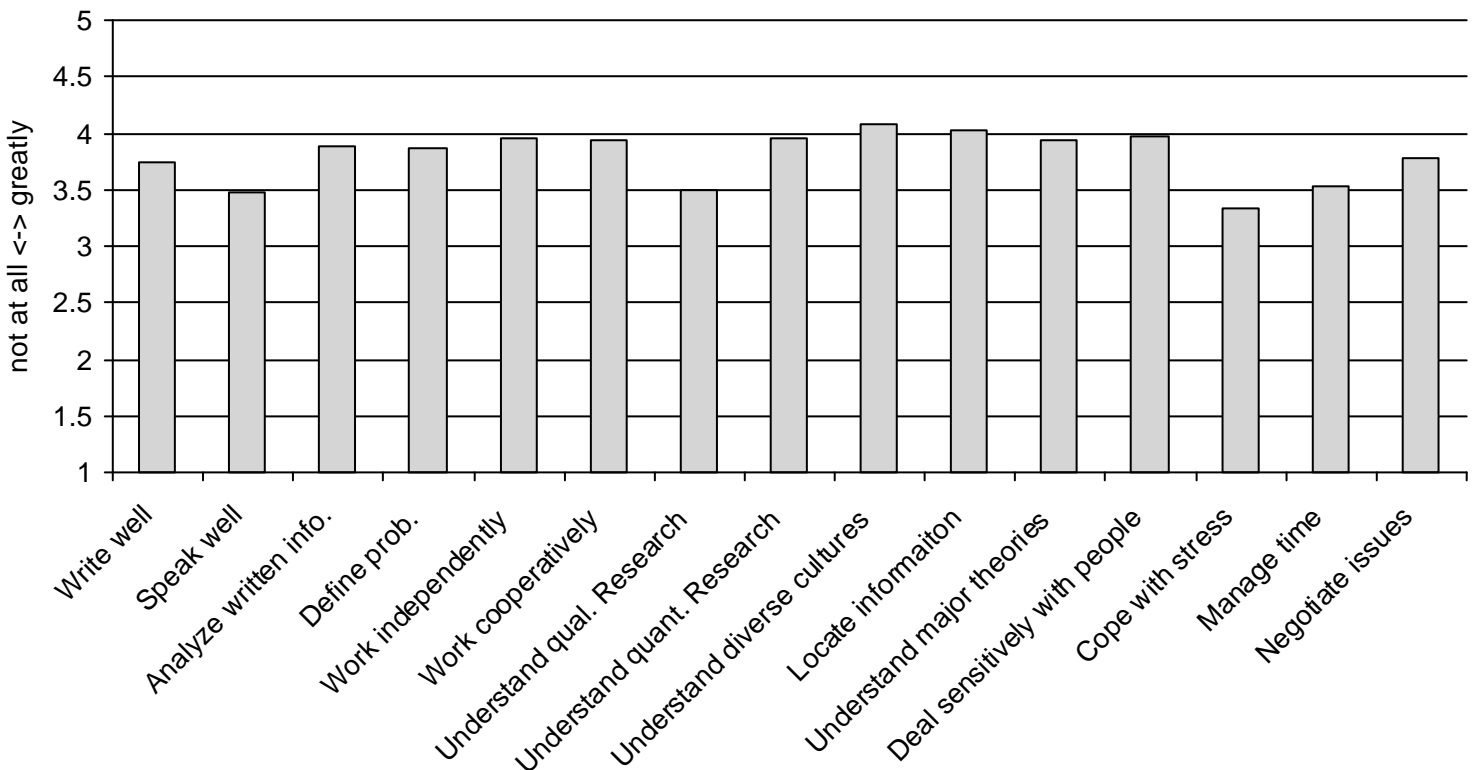
As shown in Graph 1, respondents rated acceptance of diversity, clear degree requirements, informal interactions with professors and intellectual challenge as the best aspects of their departments. They rated opportunities to work with faculty, ad vice for employment and opportunities to present or publish at professional meetings as the poorest aspects of their department.

**Graph 1. Major department ratings.**



As shown in Graph 2, respondents reported that understanding theories, working independently and seeing the world through other people’s perspectives was the most developed by their major education. Respondents reported that speaking well, understanding qualitative research and coping with stress were the least well developed skills.

**Graph 2. Ratings of Skill Development By Major Department**



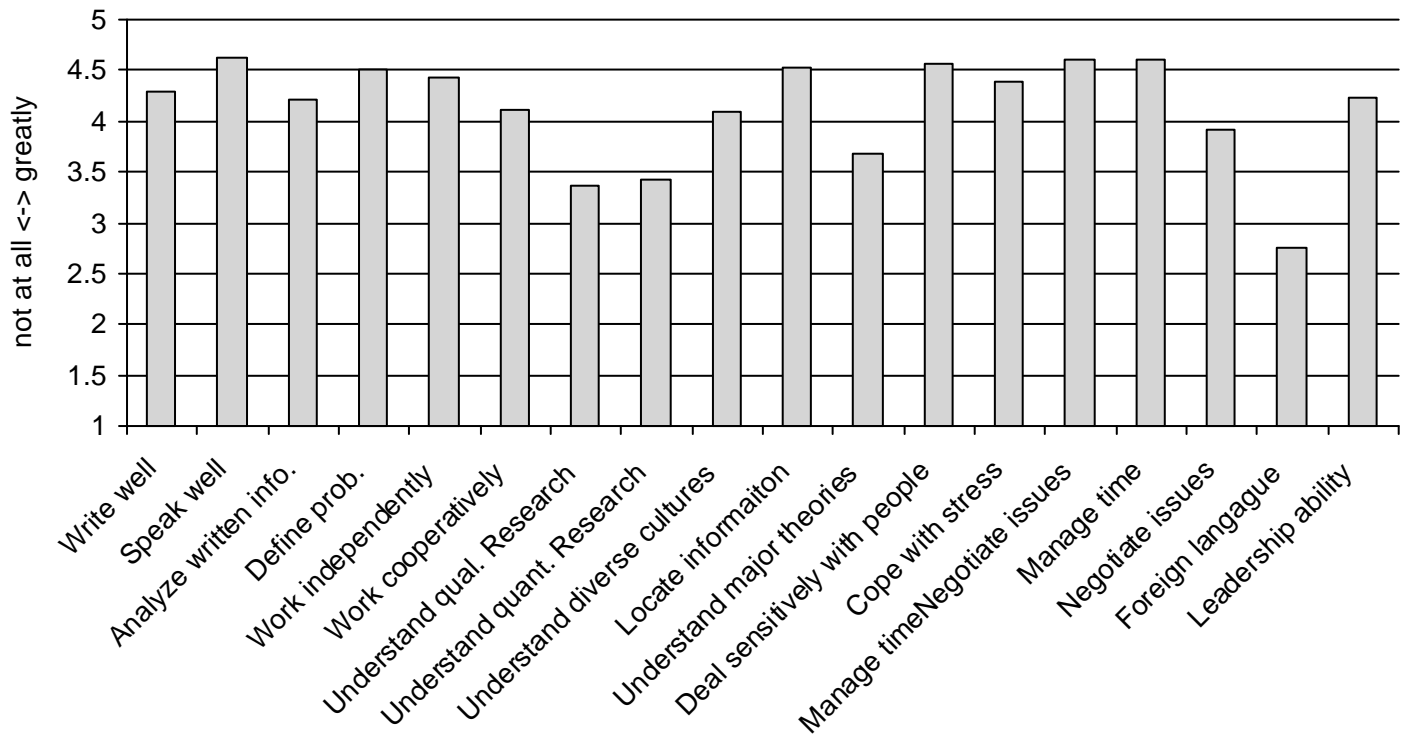
57.1% (89) respondents reported participating in a public service internship, 48.5% (76) volunteered in the community outside of class, 39.1% (61) volunteered in the community as part of class, 20.8% (48) took a freshman seminar class, 16.7% (26) served as faculty research assistants and 7.1% (11) studied abroad. Respondents reported that their participation in public service internships had the most impact on their postgraduate life ( $M=4.03$ ) followed by participation in community service ( $M=3.72$ ). Respondents rated participation in a freshman seminar course ( $M=2.26$ ), faculty research ( $M=2.80$ ) and studying abroad ( $M=2.42$ ) as less important (but there were large standard deviations in participants' ratings). When asked for any suggestions for their major department, 91 respondents wrote comments. 68 comments (69% of the written comments) mentioned issues related to jobs and careers (other categories of qualitative comments are included in the Appendix). Individual respondents also suggested giving advice about how to interview, write resumes, sell social science skills, invite alumni back to campus and create mentoring program for new graduates. Ten respondents recommended that internships be required for their major.

### **Current Employment**

86 respondents (66.7%) reported that they were employed full time in an area related to their career, 23 (18.1%) reported that they were employed full time but in an area not related to their career plans and 18 respondents (14.2%) reported that they were employed part time. On average, respondents worked between 30 and 39 hours a week (median was 40 to 49 hours). Respondents reported earning monthly incomes that ranged from less than \$500.00 to more than \$6000.00, but on average, respondents reported earning between \$2500.00 and \$2999.00 (median income is the same). 21 respondents reported not being a student or employee. When asked on the first page of the survey to list two or three issues faced by recent college graduates, 40% of respondents' comments mentioned the difficulty in finding a job that pays well enough to cover local housing and living costs. 10.5% of respondents' comments referred to the difficulty in paying off student loans. 20% of the respondents' comments mentioned a lack of experience or specific knowledge for work. Finally, 24% of respondents comments referred to questions about graduate school (e.g., whether to attend, how to get into a graduate program).

As shown in the Appendix, respondents reported a range of occupations including a 911 dispatcher, construction supervisor, registered dental assistant, realtor and waitress. However, most respondents reported being teachers ( $N=24$ , 22% of those who listed job titles), clinical social workers, therapists and school counselors ( $N=17$ , 15.6% of those who listed job titles) and project managers, administrators or office managers ( $N=14$ , 13.8% of those who listed job titles). 15.5% of respondents reported that their current employment was definitely beneath their level of training and degree, 24.4% reported that it was somewhat beneath their level, 57.7% reported that it was appropriate for their level and 2.4% reported that it was above their level.

Graph 3. Ratings of Skill importance to their current work



As shown in Graph 3, respondents rated speaking effectively, dealing sensitively with a wide variety of people and coping with stress as the most important skills. Further, the average ratings for most skills were above 4.0 on a 5 point scale (excluding understanding research, major theories, negotiating controversial issues and using a foreign language) Respondents rated the following skills as reliably more important to their work in comparison to how well they were developed in the major: writing effectively, speaking effectively, critically analyzing written information, define and solving problems working and learning independently, dealing sensitively with a wide variety of people, seeing the world from another person’s perspective, coping with stress and managing time effectively.

**Graduate School**

94 respondents reported attending graduate programs; 66 indicated that they had completed their programs and 23 reported that they were still in school. As shown in the Appendix, 26 (27.4% of those who attended graduate school) completed teaching credentials, 18 (28.9% of those who attended graduate school) completed masters degrees in counseling, 7 (7.4% of those who

attended graduated school) completed law school, 6 (6.3% of those who attended graduate school) enrolled in PsyD programs and 5 (5.3) enrolled in social work graduate programs. Three respondents reported completing degrees in history, Masters of Public Administration and Masters of Business Administration. As shown in the Appendix, 21 respondents (28.8 of those who attended graduate school) attended SSU, another 14 (19.2% of those who attended graduate school) attended other CSUs, 8 (11.0%) attended private universities, 7 attended independent graduates schools (9.6%) and 6 (8.5%) attended University of California schools. In comparison to data from a national survey of 8,474 college graduates six years after graduating (Vogelgesang & Astin, 2005), more SSU respondents reported graduate training. In the national survey study, 24.8% of their respondents completed Masters programs, 1.4% completed PhD programs, 3.0% completed J.D. programs and 2.8% completed M.D. programs.

### **Civic engagement**

73.1% reported voting in the 2005 State election, 91% reported voting in the 2004 presidential election and 77.6% voted in the 2003 State election. Since leaving SSU, 74.4% of the respondents reported using the internet to raise political awareness among friends and family, 2.7% reported participating in protest demonstrations, 4.5% reported working for a local, state or national political campaign and 39.1% reported donating money to a political candidate or cause. These figures can be compared to the data from a national survey in which 57.7% of college graduates voted in a national election and 50.1% of college graduates voted in a state election (Vogelgesang & Astin, 2005).

61.5% of the respondents reported doing some sort of community service over the past two weeks. Respondents listed tutoring or teaching most frequently (20.5%) followed by political activities (15.4%), community clean-up (14.1%), child care (14.1%) and counseling or mentoring (14.1%). Since leaving SSU, 77.6% of the respondents reported participation in a community project, donating their services or working with a community or government non-profit organization, 96.8% of the respondents reported donating blood, clothes or goods, and 70% reported donating money to non-profit organizations. These figures can be compared to 68.1% reported by all college graduates (and 63.3% of public university graduates who reported community service in a national survey (Vogelgesang & Astin, 2005).<sup>3</sup>

### **Personal Life**

Respondents reported being very satisfied with their life (M=4.07) - they rated their family life (M=4.20) as most satisfying and their income (M=3.05) as least satisfying. They rated influencing social values (M=4.56), becoming an authority in their professional field (M=4.14) and raising a family (M=4.13) as most important to them. They rated becoming a community leader (M=2.51), helping others who are in difficulty (M=2.76) and cleaning up the environment (M=2.96) as least important. If we compare our data with the data analyzed by

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<sup>3</sup> 16.7% of the respondents reported donating money to SSU.

Vogelgesang & Astin (2005), more SSU respondents strongly agreed that they want to become a community leader (17.7% vs. 15%), influence social values (54% vs. 37.8%), help others in difficulty (69.8% vs. 57%) and develop a meaningful philosophy of life (73.9% vs. 63.3%).

### **References**

- Dillman, D. A. (2000). *Mail and Internet Surveys: 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. Hoboken, New Jersey.
- Vogelgesang, L.J. & Astin, A.W. (2005). *Post-College Civic Engagement Among Graduates*. Higher Education Research Institute.