

Surveying Graduating Seniors and Former Graduates: Satisfaction is only the beginning

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Introduction

Overview

According to by Lana Low¹, Vice President of Noel-Levitz, “Successful institutions share three basic attributes: they focus on the needs of their students; they continually improve the quality of the educational experience, and they use student satisfaction data to shape their future directions. Student satisfaction studies measure how effectively campuses deliver what students expect, need, and want.” Meeting the needs of students and improving the quality of their education are priority directives at the University of North Florida. They are included in its overall strategic plan and are consistent with its mission, goals, and objectives. In an effort to measure its effectiveness in achieving these directives, the University requested the Office of Instructional Research (OIR) to gather input from its students.

In response to the University’s request, the Office of Instructional Research (OIR) annually conducts an online survey of its graduating seniors prior to the completion of their Spring term. Known as the Graduating Seniors Survey (GSS), the purposes of this instrument are to measure student behavior and opinion concerning the programs and services offered at UNF, to identify programs and services that need to be improved, and to learn more about the personal experiences of students during their enrollment.

Additionally, every two years, the OIR conducts a follow-up survey of UNF students who graduate with baccalaureate degrees one year and five years prior to the date of the survey. Called the Former Graduates Survey (FGS), the purposes of this survey are to learn about their experiences with the programs and services offered at UNF, and to assess the overall relevance and impact of these programs and services on their current occupational and/or educational pursuits.

¹ Low, Lana. “Are college students satisfied? A national analysis of changing expectations.” USA Group Foundation, New Agenda Series, February 2000.

Since the beginning of Fall 1999, the OIR has completed two rounds of the FGS (surveying the graduating classes of 1992/1993, 1994/1995, 1997/1998, and 1999/2000) and three rounds of the GSS (surveying the graduating classes of 2001/2002 through 2003/2004). The original administration of the FGS marked the first time that graduates of the University of North Florida were surveyed in a comprehensive and systematic way.

All institutions ask themselves, "Where are we now and where do we want to be? The use of appropriate student surveys and the application of that data to program planning and evaluation are critical to answering these questions. The following sections describe our efforts to develop graduate surveys from which data could be used for planning and evaluation purposes.

Survey Development

The problem with "Student satisfaction"

One of the initial design decisions that had to be made was whether to go with a commercially available survey or to design one of our own. We decided to develop our own for two primary reasons: (1) the commercially available surveys were not specifically related to our university's goals and objectives, and (2) we had a lot of in-house surveys upon which to base our own. At our institution, college seniors are no strangers to surveys. Many of our offices and service components like Alumni Services, Institutional Advancement, the Library and the Health Center were routinely surveying seniors. Additionally, some of the individual colleges and departments were also surveying them. Besides being more relevant to our goals and objectives, the decision to create our own survey served another purpose: by incorporating and consolidating into our survey many of the items from other UNF surveys, the number of different surveys that a student had to answer was dramatically reduced.

In designing our survey, we reviewed as many survey items as we could from other institutions and commercially available surveys as well as from other UNF sources. We also studied the research literature on student satisfaction surveys as well. We wanted to find items that did the best job of identifying why students go to college, what they hope to achieve while in college, and what factors determine their choice of a specific college.

Most of the surveys we reviewed were of a Likert variety, such as those requiring respondents to indicate their level of agreement with qualitative statements. We decided to not use these typical "Agree/Disagree" scales on our surveys because of their inherent weaknesses (to be discussed below). Instead, we chose to use scales that measured levels of quality and levels of magnitude or frequency.

Another consideration we had in developing our survey was not to "reinvent the wheel." Since we already had a great deal of information gathered from other sources pertaining to specific issues such as parking or the quality of instruction, we did not need to explore these issues to any great extent. For example, after the completion of every term, all instructors (with some exceptions) are evaluated by their students using the Instructional Satisfaction Questionnaire (ISQ). The ISQs provide a lot of data on the perceived quality of instruction, and consequently, we have only a few questions on our graduate surveys about instructor quality.

From the outset, we wanted to design a survey that could provide data on how well the university was achieving its mission, goals, and objectives as stated in their strategic plan. Another objective was to have that survey data evaluated and translated into an action plan.

A third objective was to design a survey comprehensive enough to cover all of the important outcomes of the student's college experience while keeping it to a manageable length. As we learned from our initial former graduates survey, shorter is better.

The more we studied how other student satisfaction surveys were being constructed and used around the country, the less we found them to be relevance to our needs and research objectives. Consequently, we decided not to model our survey after any of the student satisfaction surveys currently in vogue. To put it another way, we were not at all satisfied with the concept of student satisfaction.

According to Levitz², the more an institution provides situations which closely correspond to the student's expectations, the greater the level of student satisfaction. Additionally, the more fully an institution meets the needs of the students, the greater will be the level of student satisfaction. However, in reviewing the various student satisfaction surveys in use, we found it difficult to identify the specific student expectations and needs that these surveys were measuring. In some instances, the concept of student satisfaction was being treated as a concrete entity rather than as a proxy measure for describing how effectively needs, wants, and expectations were being met.

For example, some institutions compare their student satisfaction averages to other institutions, both individually and collectively, much in the same way that they would compare ACT or SAT scores. Despite a number of commonalities among them, student needs, wants, and expectations tend to differ even among institutions having similar traits. Because indices of student satisfaction are relevant only to the institution that produced them, establishing norms like ACT or SAT scores tend to obscure their intended usage.

² *Ibid*

The problem with scales of agreement and satisfaction

In addition to how the concept of student satisfaction was used (or abused), we found a number of other problems in the surveys we reviewed. In particular, most of the problems centered on the use of “Agree/Disagree” and “Satisfied/Dissatisfied” scales of measurement:

1. In order to fit these formats, artificial position statements are often created. For example, one of the items we found on a survey using an Agree/Disagree scale was, "Faculty are serious about treating male and female students equally." A more natural statement a student might say is "Faculty give preferential treatment to students on the basis of gender."
2. “Agree/Disagree” statements force respondents to take a position “For” or “Against” an issue which, if not relevant to them, can result in a large number of “No opinion” or “Neutral” responses. For example, if a small proportion of students participate in distance learning courses, and all students are asked if they desire more distance learning courses, the vast majority of responses will fall in the "No response" or "No opinion" block.
3. “Agreement-disagreement” is not a semantic differential. For example, the following two questions are grammatically opposite but not semantically opposite: “There should not be designated parking areas for students,” and “There should be designated parking areas for students.” Students may interpret the first statement to mean that they should be allowed to park anywhere they want, and interpret the second one to mean that they should have their own parking areas as do faculty and staff.
4. There is no clear-cut way to interpret one’s agreement or disagreement with a statement when the proper response choices are unrelated to agreement. For example, if a student agrees with the statement, "A variety of intramural activities are offered," what does it mean? Does it mean that the student is “satisfied” with the variety of activities offered, or is the student merely verifying a statement of fact?
5. Too many items using agreement scales are built upon “face validity” alone. The underlying assumption in surveys of this type is that agreeing with an item indicates a person has a specific opinion about that item. However, the wording of a statement can restrict the range of responses such that agreeing (or disagreeing) with it is the only logical choice.
6. In order to classify data as "satisfaction information," many survey items are essentially “shoehorned” into a Satisfaction-Dissatisfaction format. This is especially true for statements using the adjectives, “adequate,” and “reasonable” such as "There is an adequate selection of food available in the cafeteria." Little thought is given to making the questions more relevant to the intended outcomes.

7. As an additional criticism, satisfaction surveys contain many statements that use the same scale format for expediency sake only, and not because the scale fits the statement. In many instances, the scales and statements are mismatched leading to ambiguous or even nonsensical results. For example, using the item from #4 above: "A variety of intramural activities are offered." This is a statement of fact that basically can be answered with a "Yes" or "No" response even if that "variety" is only three in number and includes activities that are of no interest to the student. Answering with a Satisfaction Scale does not make sense.
8. Satisfaction surveys are good at identifying general problem areas, but do not lend themselves to specific solutions, especially when most of the items use the qualifiers, "Adequate" and "Reasonable."
9. All of the statements are typically couched in positive terms thus increasing the likelihood of a positive response bias. Not surprisingly, the distribution of responses to satisfaction surveys is heavily skewed towards the positive side; e.g., means averaging around five for a seven-point scale. In a vague attempt to not be overly positive, some items include words like "Adequate" and "Reasonable;" yet, respondents will still interpret them as positive items. Meanwhile, other items may be off to one side of the scale entirely, such as "The instruction in my major field is excellent." There should be a mix of positive and negative items to ensure content validity and internal consistency.
10. "Importance" and "satisfaction" are not comparable metrics. Importance measures are comparative in nature while satisfaction measures are not. Rating importance is implicitly comparative; i.e., a student might think, "Parking and having a safe campus are both important to me but parking is not as important as having a safe campus." Conversely, being satisfied with one has little to do with being dissatisfied with the other.
11. Because they focus so heavily on "student satisfaction," many surveys do not include quantitative data such as measures of student behavior.
12. Finally, in an effort to make all items multiple-choice and easy to analyze, free responses are too often overlooked on surveys of student satisfaction.

Satisfaction is not an outcome in and of itself, but is the consequence of an outcome. Since satisfaction occurs as a consequence of meeting student needs, wants, and expectations, and therefore, surveys should focus on specific outcomes rather than on its concomitant effects. In relation to needs, satisfaction may be a misnomer since the proper term for fully meeting a need is "satiating," not "satisfaction." In reality, meeting needs is an "all-or-nothing" process; i.e., needs are either met or not met. We tend to view the process of meeting needs as both quantitative and qualitative, when in fact, the process is only quantitative. What may be either qualitative or quantitative is the type of need met.

The confusion occurs when we lump needs together or fail to account for all the needs involved. For example, a steak or a hamburger can be made from the same cut of meat. The meat in both forms can fulfill one's need for food, but there may be additional needs for which the steak fulfills but not the hamburger. Thus, satisfaction may have more to do with the number of needs that are met than with the degree to which any one particular need is met.

Building a better scale of measurement

Our institution has established goals and objectives for meeting the needs and expectations of its students, but has not established any goals or objectives for increasing "student satisfaction." The word "satisfaction" does not appear anywhere in the university's strategic plan. If the university does not consider student satisfaction to be an outcome, then perhaps its institutional researchers should not either.

We approached our task of developing surveys in a way that is analogous to needs assessment and program evaluation. We designed our survey to identify the critical needs and expectations of students as they themselves identified them. We also wanted to know if students have realistic expectations and needs, and whether the university has realistic goals and objectives towards meeting them. Finally, we designed our survey to determine how well the university is achieving its goals and objectives, and to identify the short-term and long-term impacts that the university has on its students.

In the end, our solution to the problem of defining student satisfaction as a specific, identifiable construct was to avoid using it altogether. Instead, we chose to use scales and response choices that were more, direct measures of student opinion and behavior.

When constructing survey items, the best place to start is usually to include the most basic of questions, such as those concerning age, gender, and other demographic information. Beyond descriptive data, one of the first questions we ask our graduates is why they went to college and why they choose our institution. There are many different reasons why students go to college and some may have nothing to do with getting a degree or a quality education. Institutional researchers may think they know what students want out of their college experience, but unless they ask them point-blank, they can never know for sure.

Personally, we felt that too much survey time was being devoted to measuring the affective domain of student opinions and attitudes, and too little time on measuring student behavior. Thus, we chose to develop our sets of questions with particular attention to why students come to UNF, what they hope to accomplish, what they actually do during the time they are here, and in what ways have they grown.

When we were deciding on the type of scales to use for our surveys, we raised the following question, “With what type of qualitative scale are students most familiar?” The answer was not immediately obvious, but it should have been: students are most familiar with scales known as “letter grades.” Therefore, for some of our survey items, we chose to use scales that were comparable to letter grades in interpretation; i.e., scales that ranged from “Poor” or “Very Poor” to “Very Good.”

For some of our other qualitative items, we chose scales that more closely matched the actual quality or quantity being measured. For example, on a series of questions dealing with sources of academic advising, we asked students to rate how helpful were each of the sources, using a scale ranging from “Very Helpful” to “Not Helpful” (a response choice of “Did not use” was also available). For a series of questions asking students to rate the degree of influence that their education had on different skill levels, we used a scale that ranged from “Very High” to “None.” As a final example, we asked students to use a scale ranging from “Frequently” to “Never” to indicate how frequently they used each of the services available at UNF.

The evaluative scales that we chose to use in our survey are both qualitative and quantitative, and more directly relate to the underlying student needs, expectations, and behaviors that we wished to measure. Although we constructed four and five-point scales for our surveys as most others have done, they are neither of the “Agree/Disagree” variety, nor do they represent an underlying “Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction” continuum. As it turned out, the only reference to “satisfaction” in our surveys appears on the very last line of our forms: it is a sentence that says, “Press the SUBMIT button if you are satisfied with your responses.”

Matching survey items to goals and objectives

In developing our survey, we tried to create questions that related back to the goals and objectives of the university. The following is an example of how we achieved that matching. Listed below are one of the main goals and its supporting objectives found in the university's strategic plan:

Goal: The University of North Florida will provide a campus climate that supports student learning and student life, and one that enables faculty and staff to fulfill their respective roles and engage in professional growth and development

Under this goal are four objectives:

1. The University of North Florida will support student learning by maintaining small class sizes and a high proportion of fulltime faculty teaching courses at the undergraduate level, providing direct and personal contact between student and faculty.

2. The University of North Florida will demonstrate its success at improving student learning by its increasing graduation rates, while taking into account the urban nature of the institution and the proportion of students that work significant numbers of hours at the same time that they attend school.
3. The University of North Florida will improve the quality of on-campus student life by improving support services such as orientation, retention services, advising, career planning, and placement; and by providing a vital and rich intellectual life on campus through lectures, concerts, academic clubs, intramural sports, and an active intercollegiate athletic program.
4. The University of North Florida will foster an atmosphere of civility and respect, with faculty and staff setting the example for students by behaving in a civil, caring, and respectful manner to one another and to students.

In the first objective, there are three main focal points: reducing class size, increasing the number of full-time faculty teaching undergraduate courses, and promoting the quality of the student-teacher interaction. We included in our survey several items that related to the first and third points (the proportion of full-time faculty was measured directly using the instructor activity file). We had two items pertaining to class size, in addition to free response items, and two items pertaining to the student teacher interaction.

Regarding the second objective, measuring increasing graduation rates was done directly through our student data course files and not through the survey. To determine how many students work in addition to going to school at how much they work, we included two questions our survey.

We included a series of questions regarding the services that the University provides to students. In that section of the survey, students indicated how frequently they made use of those services, and rated the quality of the services. We also included questions that ask them about their participation in extracurricular activities.

To provide data on the fourth objective, we asked students to comment on the student teacher relationship as well as to indicate which courses and instructors they found to be most memorable.

We know from experience and from research that there are many characteristics of the instructor, the materials, the mode of instruction used, and the learning environment that go into an overall rating of quality. We had to decide at what level of detail we needed the information to be and weigh that against how long it took the average person to complete the survey. We decided to keep the length of the survey such that the average student could complete the survey in ten minutes or less.

Before making our survey available to students, we ran a quality and validity check by sending copies of the survey to key individuals in our University community as well as having groups of students pilot test of the instrument.

Survey methods

Former Graduate Survey (FGS)

Structure of the FGS. Developed in Fall 1999, the original FGS (known then as the Prior Graduate Survey) was divided into two sections: the first section asked graduates to describe the nature of their current occupation and to relate their experiences at UNF to their current occupation. We were particularly interested in learning how closely their current occupation was related to their degree major and how well UNF prepared them for their work. The second section asked graduates to describe their experiences at UNF, with a special emphasis towards their experiences with courses and instructors.

The original FGS (Appendix A) was a mail out survey consisting of a two-page, two-sided form printed on 8.5 x 14" paper. The use of legal size paper and two-sided printing was necessary given the total number of items: there were 30 numbered question statements containing a total of 137 answerable items. Of the 137 items, 118 required closed-end responses while 19 required free-responses. The survey grouped these items into seven sections: (1) Demographics; (2) History at UNF; (3) Contributions to Personal Growth; (4) Evaluation of Courses Taken; (5) Academic Advising; (6) Quality and Frequency of Services Used; and (7) Additional Questions.

The original FGS was mailed out to UNF students who had graduated with baccalaureate degrees during the academic years of 1992-93 and 1997-98. The OIR obtained mailing labels from the Office of Alumni Services containing the names and addresses of all students who graduated with baccalaureate degrees during those academic years.

Included with the survey was a cover letter with a detachable response card containing our return address and a randomly generated ID code, and a postage-paid, return envelope into which respondents were to insert their survey forms and the detachable response card. The response card was used to keep track of who had responded from our list of graduates. The FGS was sent to 2,436 graduates in a single mail out, and of that number, the OIR received back 349 completed surveys for a response rate of 14.3 percent.

Data collection and analyses. Data was extracted from the mail out surveys by scanning the forms using an optical character recognition program called Remark. This program converts scanned data into standard SPSS data files. Because the program did not have the capability to automatically transcribe handwritten responses from different sources, the free response items had to be coded as graphic fields and manually transcribed.

After transcribing the free response items into a text document, they were categorized using a content analysis program called Text Analyst and the resultant categories were then coded as numerical items in the SPSS data file created by Remark. SPSS/PC was then used to create means and frequency distributions of all the items which were then exported to Microsoft Excel for the creation of graphs.

A number of things became readily apparent from analyzing the original FGS. First of all, many respondents commented that the FGS was too long and took too much time to complete. The length and complexity of the survey was probably the primary reason for the low number of completed surveys we received. Secondly, besides the overall length of the survey, respondents noted that the second part of the survey was problematic for them to complete because of the length of time they had been out of college. This was especially true for the graduates who had been out for five years.

From that point onward, we decided to split the survey into its two different sections: the first section would continue to be a follow-up survey given to former graduates who had been out of college for one year and five years, and the second section would be given to students before they graduate. Thus, the original first section would continue to be the Former Graduate Survey, and the second section would become the current Graduating Seniors Survey.

The second version of the FGS survey instrument (Appendix B) now consists of single response and multiple response questions, with 27 numbered question statements containing a total of 42 answerable items. Of the 42 items, 22 require multiple-choice responses and 22 require free-responses. The items on this survey are grouped into three sections: (1) Demographics; (2) History at UNF; and (3) Additional Questions. The size of the survey was also reduced to a one-page, double-sided, 8.5 x 14" sheet of paper.

The data collection and extraction procedures for the second version were identical to the first. For future administrations of the FGS, the OIR will use a web-based survey instead of a mail out form.

Current Graduate Survey (CGS)

Structure of the CGS. Although the current CGS was an outgrowth of the original FGS, it was intended to be a web-based survey from the start. The main reasons for doing so were issues of cost and ease of data analyses. Like its original form, the CGS instrument (Appendix C) consists of single response and multiple response questions, of which 28 are numbered question statements containing a total of 137 answerable items. Of the 137 items, 118 require closed-end responses while 16 require free-responses. The survey grouped these items into seven sections: (1) Demographics; (2) Contributions to Personal Growth; (3) Academic Advising; (4) Evaluation of Courses Taken; (5) Quality and Frequency of Services Used; and (6) Final Comments and Suggestions.

The actual survey form was created using a companion program to Remark OCR, called Remark Web survey. This program was selected because it converted the paper and pencil templates that we used on our prior surveys into a web-based one. The program also provides a management function and data analysis capabilities as well. The data collected by the Web-based survey was saved as an Excel file and imported into SPSS for further analyses.

Survey distribution. The names and e-mail addresses of all students graduating in Spring were obtained from our student data course files. A bulk mailing program called Group Mail was used to distribute the cover letter and link to the survey. We generated random ID codes to be included in the cover letters. The purpose of the codes was limit access to the survey, and also to provide a way of tracking who responded to the survey. We sent a total of three follow-up announcements.

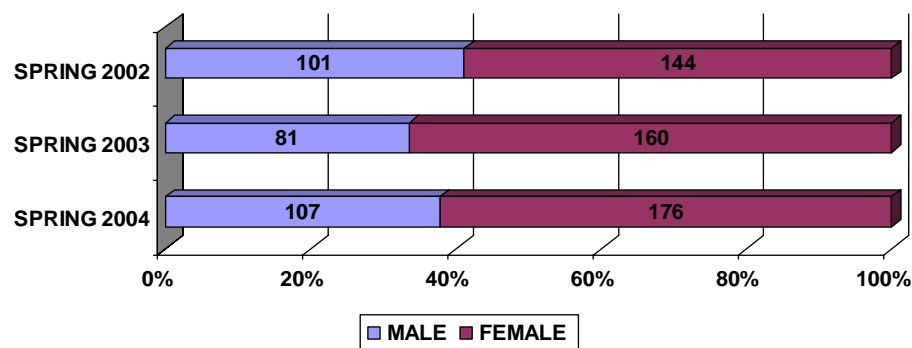
Data collection and analyses. As mentioned above, the data was collected in a tab-delimited text file and imported into Excel and SPSS. The analyses of the data, the production of charts and tables, and content analyses were handled in the same way as were the previous, mail out surveys.

Survey results

The complete results of the Fall 2002 FGS and Spring 2003 CGS appear in Appendix D. Although the complete results for Spring 2004 are not yet available, here are some of the highlights of all three previous CGS surveys.

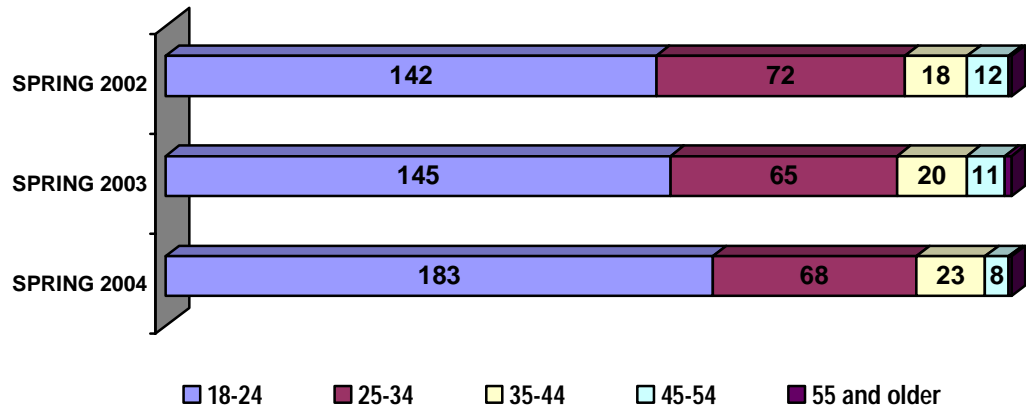
More females than males enroll and graduate at UNF each year, and, according to the last three CGS, the percentages has been increasing.

Figure 1: Distribution of Gender by Survey



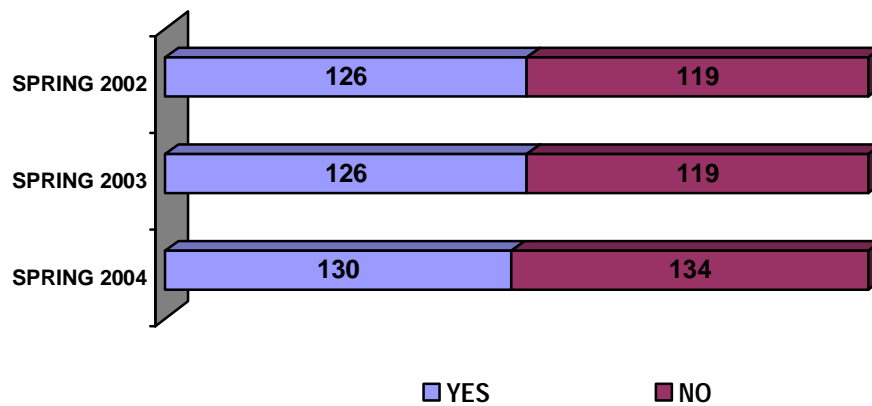
Our student population is growing younger as well. From last year to this year, there has been a major increase in the percentage of 18 to 24 year olds at UNF.

Figure 2: Distribution of Age by Survey



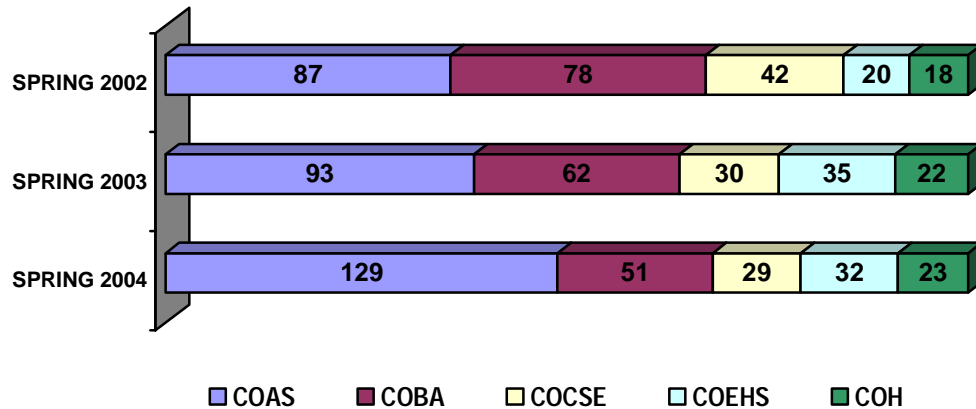
About 50 percent of the respondents plan on attending graduate school within the next year.

Figure 3: Distribution of Graduates Attending Graduate School by Survey



More than two-thirds of all graduates receive their degrees from the College of Arts & Sciences (36%) and the College of Business (32%). However, there has been a dramatic reversal in the numbers of graduates from these colleges in the past year. In Spring 2003, 38 percent of respondents were graduates of the College of Business while 26 percent were graduates of the College of Arts & Sciences. In Spring 2004, 49 percent of respondents were graduates of the College of Business while 19 percent were graduates of the College of Arts & Sciences.

Figure 4: Distribution of Graduate's Major College by Survey



Respondents were asked to indicate what type of Bachelor's Degree they were to receive. More than two-thirds (68%) indicated the Bachelor of Arts was their first degree. About 72% also indicated the BA as their second degree choice.

The most frequent choices of a first major were Computer and Information Sciences and Business Management.

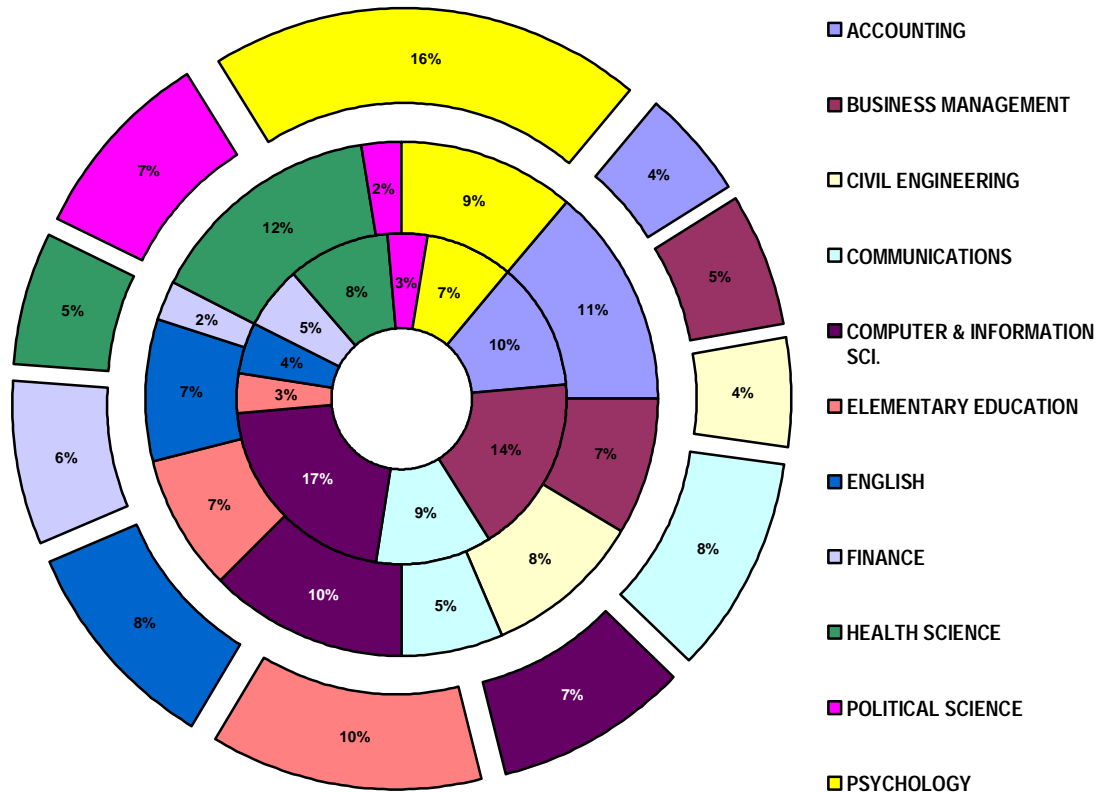
The most frequent choice of a second major was marketing. Surprisingly, there was a shift in one's choice of major but the shift did not follow the shift in College of graduation.

Most graduates (86%) never changed their major during their Junior or Senior year. For the 14 percent who did change majors, all of them changed in their senior year, and Accounting was one of their top three most frequent choices of a prior major.

Table 1: Distribution of Changed Majors by Survey

<u>RANK</u>	<u>SPRING 2004</u>	<u>SPRING 2003</u>	<u>SPRING 2002</u>
1	BUSINESS MANAGEMENT	ACCOUNTING	ACCOUNTING
2	NURSING	CIVIL ENGINEERING	BIOLOGY
3	ACCOUNTING	ELEMENTARY EDUCATION	ART

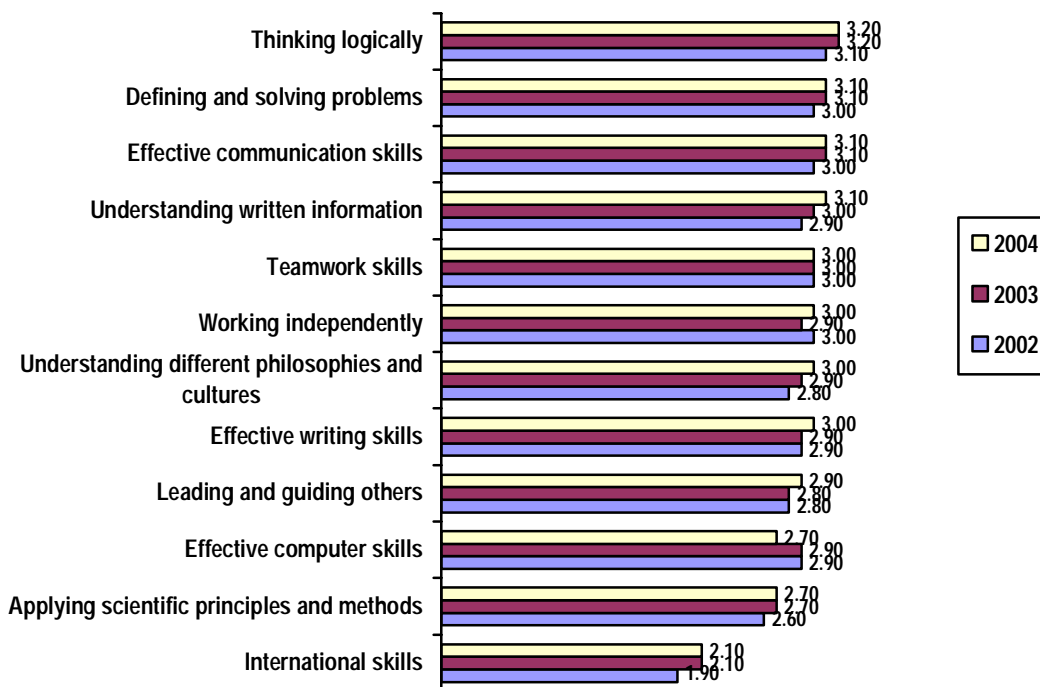
Figure 5: Distribution of Majors by Survey



Big winners for 2004 were majors in Psychology, Elementary Education, and Political Science. There were fewer majors in Computer Science, Accounting, and Business Management.

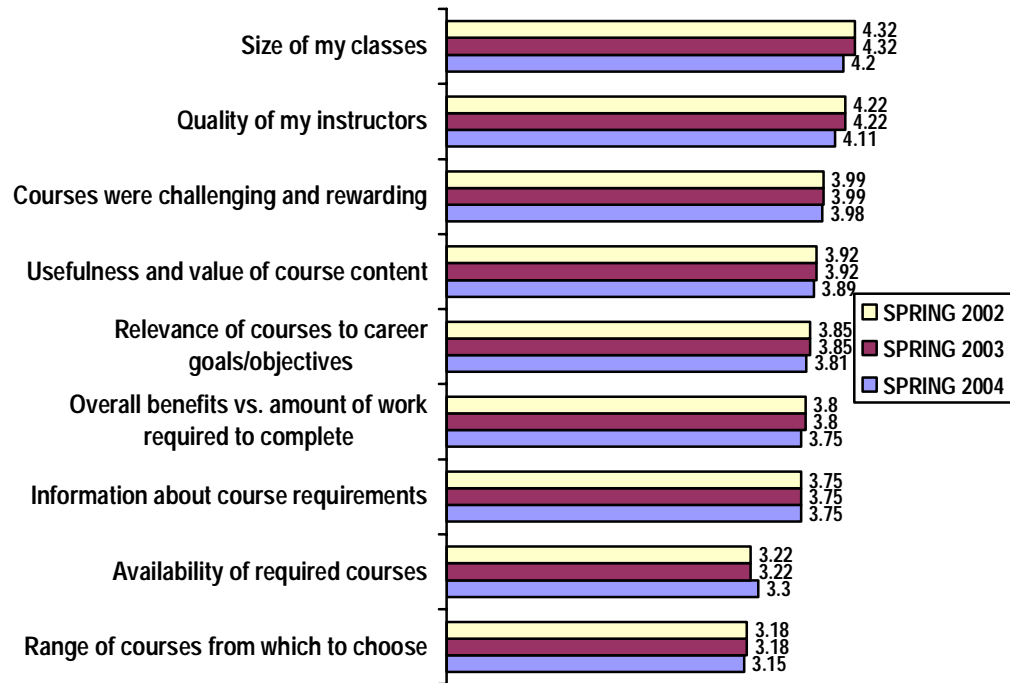
Graduates were asked to rate the influence that UNF had on their skill development in twelve areas. "Thinking logically" continues to be rated the highest and "International skills" the lowest. There have been gradual increases in the rating of "Understanding different philosophies and cultures," and "Understanding written information." There was a significant decrease in the rating for "Effective computer skills."

Figure 6: Average Ratings for Degree of Influence by Source and Survey



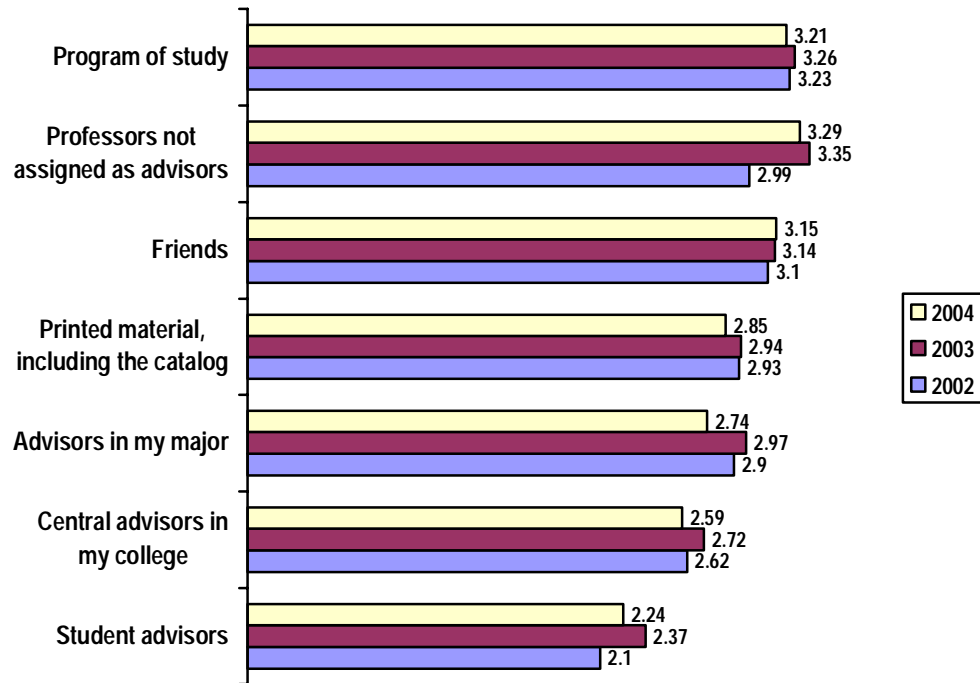
Graduates were asked to rate courses on the basis of six characteristics: (1) quality of their instructors, (2) size of their classes, (3) availability of required courses, (4) range of courses from which to choose, (5) information about course requirements, and (6) relevance of classes to career goals and objectives. “Size of my classes” and “Quality of my instructors” were rated highest across the past three years while “Range of courses from which to choose” and “Availability of required courses” were consistently rated lowest (although any rating of 3 or more indicates “Good”). The ratings were consistent across all categories.

Figure 7: Average Ratings of Course Characteristics by Survey



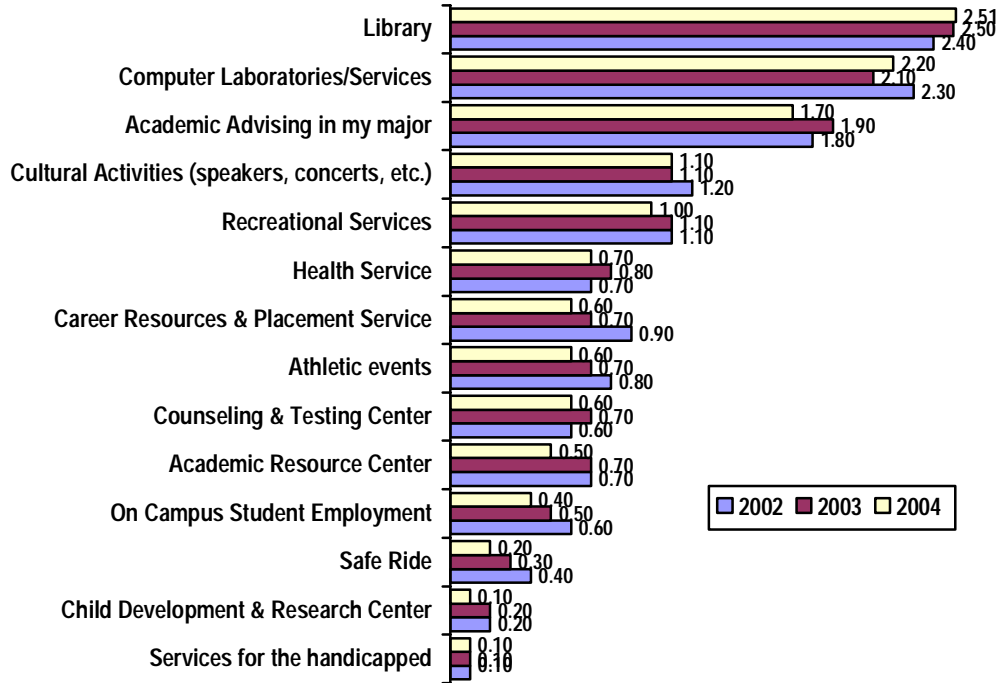
Graduates were asked to rate the utility of seven sources of advising. Overall, they rated "Program of study" to be the most helpful while "Central advisors in my college" were rated least helpful. About 10 percent and eight percent rated "Advisers in their major" and "Central advisors in their college" as being "Not helpful at all." Respondents indicated that student advisers were the least used resource.

Figure 8: Average Utility Ratings for Sources of Advising by Survey



Respondents were asked to indicate how often they used certain types of services at UNF as well as to rate the quality of these services. Of the services listed, respondents rated the library as the most frequently used service while services for the handicapped was rated the least frequently used.

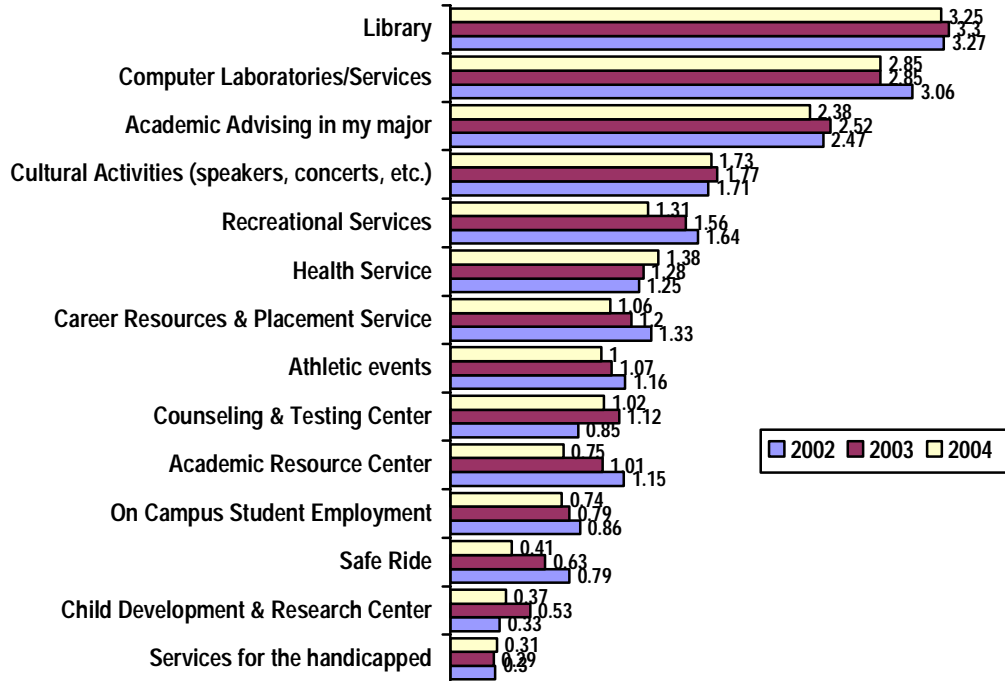
Figure 9: Average Usage Ratings for Service Components by Survey



There has been a steady increase in the use of the library and a steady decrease in the use of most of the other services.

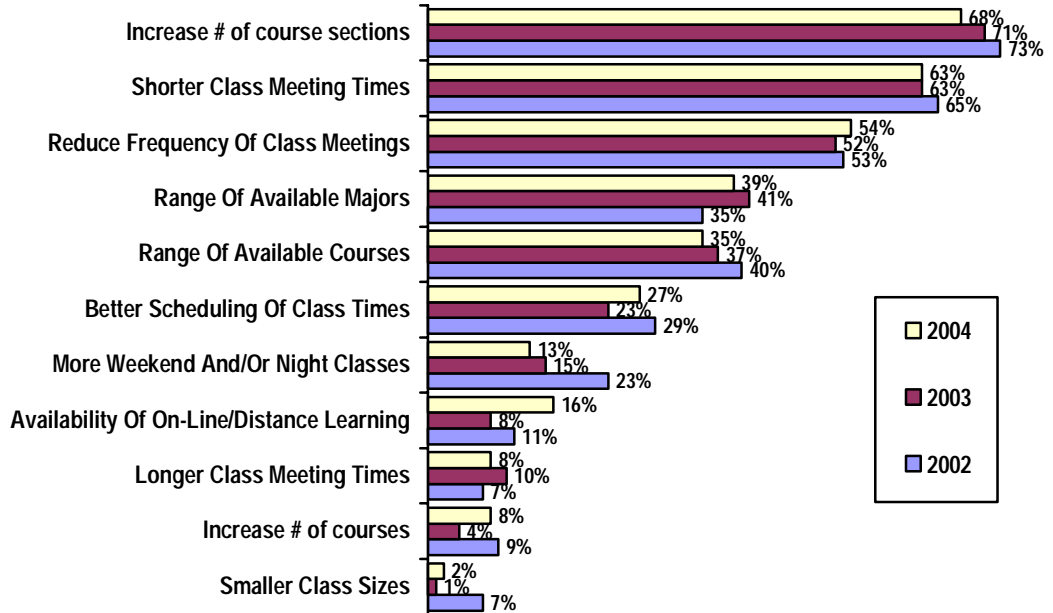
The library and recreational services were rated the most effective or received the highest quality rating while career resources & placement services received the lowest rating. Of all the services, only the Health Service increased its ratings over the past three years.

Figure 10: Average Quality Ratings for Service Components by Survey



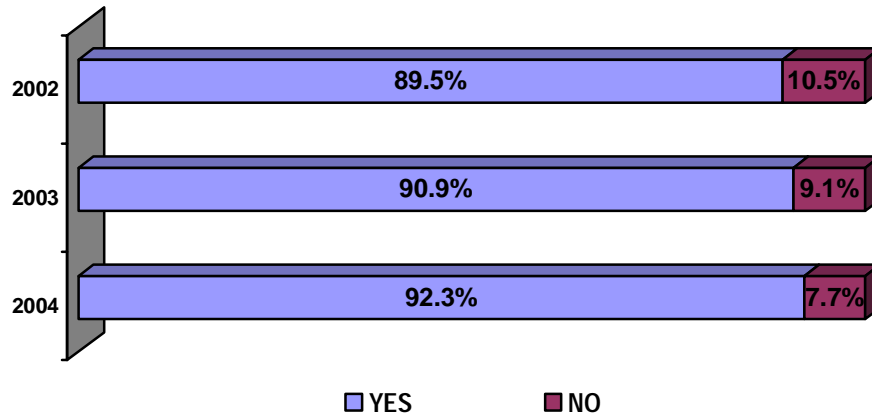
Graduates were asked to indicate what changes they would recommend to improve the quality of educational services. Most would increase the number of courses sections available, but not the number of actual courses offered. About two-thirds want shorter class meeting times. The most dramatic changes from Spring 2002 to Spring 2004 are in those graduates wanting online or distance learning classes and night or weekend classes. In Spring 2002, 23 percent wanted night or weekend classes. That number dropped to 13 percent in Spring 2004. Conversely, the demand for online or distance learning classes increased from about 8 percent in Spring 2003 to 16 percent in Spring 2004.

Figure 11: Frequency Distribution of Suggested Improvements by Survey



Asked if they could redo their college education at UNF, more than 90 percent indicated that they would choose to go to UNF again while less than 10 percent indicated that they would choose another university or college.

Figure 12: Percentage Choosing to Attend UNF Again by Survey



Additional Analyses

There were a wide range of responses to the four, open-ended questions at the end of the survey. While there were as many responses as respondents to Question #24, “Which two courses were the most valuable to you,” there were some commonalities among the other two. In response to Question #24, “What educational experiences did you find most valuable?” graduates consistently indicated that their interaction with professors and teachers was the most rewarding. In response to Question #25 “What could be improved at UNF?” most graduates indicated “professors, adjuncts, and teachers” as areas of concern. Most of these graduates wanted better and more consistent quality among instructors, better communication between themselves, their students and their departments, and more involvement with students.

A number of graduates said that “advisors and advising” could be improved. They suggested that UNF needs more qualified advisors citing lack of knowledge, communication skills, and motivation to work with students as deficits. Graduates also commented on the number and availability of classes. They wanted more hands-on, real-world learning experiences and more distance learning and online courses. These free-responses are consistent with the multiple choice items on the survey covering the same topics.

Class availability was the main issue cited in the Additional Comments section (Question #27), followed closely by better parking. The remainder of the comments was ones of praise for the university and its professors.

Discussion and Recommendations

This is the third time that the online version of the survey has been conducted. The prior response rates for the first two surveys (Spring 2002 and Spring 2003) were 26 and 27.4 percent respectively. The response rate for this survey was 30.3 percent. Although the response rate was again lower than desired, the sample was still representative of the population. Without some kind of incentive to offer graduates for completing the survey, however, this response rate is not expected to improve very much in succeeding terms.

Overall, the results are similar across years with some notable exceptions. There has been a shift or redistribution of degrees awarded among the five colleges: COBA (32% to 26%, a 6% decrease) and COCSE (17% to 12%, a 5% decrease) to COEHS (8% to 14%, a 6% increase), COAS (36% to 39%, a 3% increase), and COH (7% to 9%, a 2% increase).

In Spring 2002, about 70% of respondents indicated that they would choose the same major as they had done if they could do their program of studies over again. In Spring 2003, more than 80% of respondents said that they would choose the same major again. For the 27% in Spring 2002 who would change majors, Accounting was their #1 choice. For Spring 2003, Accounting was not mentioned as one of the choices.

In Spring 2002, most students went to college to “get a better job” with “furthering education” ranked second. In Spring 2003, “furthering education” ranked as the clear #1 choice in comparison to “getting a better job,” (37% versus 26%).

The number of students working and the number of work hours increased from 2002 to 2003. In Spring 2002, 17 percent said that they were unemployed and 50 percent worked 21 or more hours. In Spring 2003, 11 percent said that they were unemployed and 59 percent worked 21 or more hours.

In Spring 2002, students recommended increasing the number of course sections and increasing availability of online courses and weekend classes as the main ways of improving educational services. In Spring 2003, students also recommended increasing the number of course sections and increasing the availability of off-campus sites for instruction. However, they also wanted shorter meeting times and reducing the number of class meetings – two recommendations that were hardly mentioned at all in Spring 2002.

The decline in quality ratings is somewhat perplexing. It is not clear whether this is due to a shift in the population characteristics or represents a real perceived decline. Also difficult to explain are the increases in those choosing not to suggest improvements which, in turn, led to the declining percentages of each recommendation.

Although individual program areas are using the data from these surveys for program planning and improvement purposes, there is currently no system in place to do this at a university level. However, that deficit will change this Summer as the heads of the various University sectors will meet to discuss how to utilize the data. It is hoped that a new process will be put in place to refine not only the ways that data is collected and distributed, but how it can be used to shape policy and program development.