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Western Washington University Alumni Attitudes and Perceptions of Their Undergraduate Experiences--1987 and 1989

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Western Washington University Alumni
Attitudes and Perceptions of Their
Undergraduate Experiences--1987 and 1989

Report 1992-04

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June, 1992

Executive Summary

This report was designed to provide information that may help colleges and departments with internal planning and periodic reviews. Where possible, data was combined from two sources: a survey of the class of 1989, and a survey of 1987 seniors, nearly all of whom graduated in 1987 and 1988. By combining the two sets, the resulting sample was large enough to provide meaningful feedback to all but the smallest departments.

The findings attached as part of this report have not been analyzed or interpreted. Tables and graphs displaying the appropriate data were generated, but no analysis was done nor conclusions drawn. Although the hope was to provide useful information, the findings were *not* meant to be used for either inter-college or inter-department comparisons. Such comparisons were never intended for these surveys and would be illegitimate short of a full analysis taking into account a wide range of student characteristics, demographics, and other such concerns. The intent was to offer each college and its departments a series of descriptive reports, loosely contextualized via descriptions of larger units.

Distribution of the data in this report was threefold: 1) a summary and complete listing of the entire set of data was provided to the president and provost; 2) a summary and complete listing of all departmental data within each college was provided to each college dean; 3) a complete set of departmental data was provided to each departmental chair. Data on individual departments was distributed vertically only: each department sees their own data, but not the data on other departments. Each dean received data for his or her college and for each department within it, but not for other colleges. The Provost received data displayed for the entire university and each college, and can access both college-level and departmental-level data. Policy regarding the lateral exchange of data has been left to department chairs and college deans to decide on.

In addition to the requisite information reporting students' satisfaction with various aspects of their majors, occupational and related information, departments were presented three verbatim reports: 1) a job titles and employers list of each member of one sample, the class of 1989; 2) summary descriptive statistics on the backgrounds and attitudes of graduates; and 3) duplicated copies of graduates' responses to open-ended questions that were found at the end of each survey.

Finally, this report marks the first attempt of the Office of Institutional Assessment and Testing to make survey information available tailored to each department and college at WWU.

Introduction

This report has been designed to provide information that may help colleges and departments with internal planning and periodic reviews. Raw data generated by recent surveys of alumni, and categorized on the university, college, and department level, are presented. Although findings on only a few concerns can be offered, and although caution must be exercised when interpreting perceptual data, we hope this information proves useful.

The findings attached as part of this report have not been analyzed or interpreted. Tables and graphs displaying the appropriate data were generated and printed for each department, but no analysis was done nor conclusions drawn. It is especially important to note that these findings are *not* meant to be used for either inter-college or inter-department comparisons. Such comparisons were never intended for these surveys and would be illegitimate short of a full analysis taking into account a wide range of student characteristics, demographics, and other such concerns. The intent is to offer each college and its departments a series of descriptive reports, loosely contextualized via descriptions of larger units.¹

Distribution of the data in this report was threefold: 1) a summary and complete listing of the entire set of data has been provided to the president and provost; 2) a summary and complete listing of all departmental data within each college has been provided to each college dean; 3) a complete set of departmental data has been provided to each departmental chair. Data on individual departments have been distributed vertically only: each department sees their own data, but not the data on other departments. Each dean receives data for his or her college and for each department within it, but not for other colleges. The Provost receives data displayed for the entire university and each college, and can access departmental-level data. Departments should not, however, assume that the Provost will be familiar with department-level findings; the sheer bulk of these unanalyzed tables prevents that. Policy regarding the lateral exchange of data has been left to department chairs and college deans to decide on.

Moreover, while reports to the President, Provost, and Deans contain selected listings of data, department level reports contain nearly all the data generated. In addition to the tables reporting students' satisfaction with various aspects of their majors, and graphs reporting occupational and related information, departments are presented two verbatim reports: 1) a job titles and employers list of each member of one sample, the class of 1989; and 2) summary descriptive statistics on the backgrounds and attitudes of graduates. The

¹ To facilitate this endeavor, the College of Arts & Sciences has been broken down into four discipline areas: Humanities, Social Sciences, Math and Natural Sciences, and Applied Majors. Also, the FMDS major in the College of Business & Economics is large enough to allow additional breakdowns into its three specialties. Where colleges contain no departments, that variable is, of course, omitted.

latter section contains tables that may serve as background information for those who wish to dig deeper into the data. Twelve questions selected from the surveys are presented. Resources did not allow transcription of these data into the more readable form used for other tables in this report; even so, the tables were included in department-level reports in hopes that this set of measures could add a small amount of systematic data to departments' much more detailed knowledge of their students.

Department-level reports also include duplicated copies of graduates' responses to open-ended questions that were found at the end of each survey.² While these data are less comparable than others, they offer rich detail lost in quantitative measures.

Regarding the actual findings, it is important to remember that the numbers do not stand by themselves. Critical interpretation must be applied. The data raise questions and may offer possible answers, but only in conjunction with knowledge each unit has concerning its goals, personnel, and offerings. For example, if a department's students, like many, would like internships, but that department has decided that education in its field is not well served by offering internships, then low student satisfaction with "the availability of internships" may represent a disagreement of perception but not a problem to be solved. Even with questions such as satisfaction with the quality of instruction in the major, the satisfaction ratings of alumni result from the interplay of their expectations and the instruction they received. Low expectations, as well as quality offerings, may raise satisfaction. For example, students may be dissatisfied because challenges are greater than they want, or they may have other reasons to be dissatisfied, about which a department might be more concerned. This is not to say that the report's data should be completely discounted, only that it is important to reflect on what the data may indicate in each context.

As well, it should be noted that small variations in findings can easily occur by chance, especially in the case of department-level data, where sample sizes are typically very small. In addition, there may be chance fluctuation in the particular alumni who graduated from each department in the years in question.

Finally, this report marks the first attempt of the Office of Institutional Assessment and Testing to make survey information available tailored to each department and college at Western. Comments regarding the usefulness of the information included in this report (or lack thereof), requests for additional or other information, recommendations regarding the presentation of results, or other comments would be appreciated. In addition, any college or department can arrange computer access to the original data sets and/or arrange to discuss the interpretation of these findings. Please address your comments or requests to Joe

²For most departments, about one-third of the total sample responded to these open-ended questions. Almost one-third were not asked these questions because their surveys were conducted over the telephone rather than through the mail. The other third or so simply chose not to add any comments.

Trimble, at the Office of Institutional Assessment and Testing, WWU, for routing to the appropriate individual.

The Source of the Findings

Where possible, this report combines data from two sources: a survey of the class of 1989, and a survey of 1987 seniors, nearly all of whom graduated in 1987 and 1988. Where the same questions were asked, the two data sets were combined to make the resulting sample large enough to provide meaningful feedback to all but the smallest departments. This new capacity brings the assessment effort closer to its ideal role: to provide information to particular units to interpret and use as they wish, as part of their own assessment efforts. Either survey alone contained too few cases to report to any but the largest units.

The downside associated with combining the two surveys is that one sample graduated from Western long enough ago that many departments and units will have changed considerably during the interim. Moreover, while the alumni survey of the class of 1989 is quite straightforward--all data were gathered in the spring of 1990, six to eighteen months after respondents' graduation--the information from 1987 seniors is slightly less straightforward. These students were interviewed twice, in 1987 and again in 1991, and the timing of data received from them depends on the issue being asked about. For instance, information concerning perceptions of Western and their major fields was gathered during their senior years in 1987, when the experiences were fresh; whereas the students were asked about their jobs in 1991, three to four years beyond graduation.

The most important distinction is that about half of the data summarized in this report concern the graduating class of 1989, with nearly all the other half split evenly between the classes of 1987 and 1988. In cases where departments have changed markedly since Spring, 1987, the findings may be partially or entirely non-applicable to the present.

For some questions, data are available from only one survey. For example, job satisfaction data come from only the class of 1989. For these tables, sample sizes are smaller and there were too few respondents to provide data for some departments. For more information on the surveys, see our full reports on each, published and distributed to all departments. (A report of the 1987 survey was published in 1988. Reports of the 1990 and 1991 surveys will be published in 1992.)

TABLE 1: How satisfied are you with each of the following aspects of your job? (in percentages)

	All Western				Woodring				Elementary Certification				Secondary Certification				Special Ed			
	Very	Mostly	Some-what	Not	Very	Mostly	Some-what	Not	Very	Mostly	Some-what	Not	Very	Mostly	Some-what	Not	Very	Mostly	Some-what	Not
The amount you earn	10.4	31.3	36.2	22.1	6.4	23.4	39.4	30.9	3.8	20.8	37.7	37.7	4.3	27.7	27.7	40.4				
Job Security	38.9	32.0	19.9	9.3	34.2	31.0	18.7	16.0	35.3	29.4	15.7	19.6	25.0	27.1	22.9	25.0				
Opportunity for advancement	27.5	26.0	26.1	20.4	17.4	32.0	29.7	20.9	15.2	32.8	32.6	17.4	15.9	22.7	34.1	27.3				
Kinds of daily work you do	24.5	44.1	24.4	7.1	40.1	38.5	16.6	4.8	52.8	34.0	11.3	1.9	19.1	48.9	25.5	6.4				
Importance and worth of work	39.3	32.7	21.5	6.5	68.3	17.5	11.1	3.2	83.0	9.4	7.5	0.0	45.8	29.2	18.8	6.3				
Self-fulfillment received	34.4	34.4	25.9	9.4	59.6	22.3	12.8	5.3	73.1	21.2	3.8	1.9	41.7	22.9	27.1	8.3				
The entire job, overall	24.4	44.7	26.4	4.5	33.0	45.7	17.0	4.3	40.4	51.9	7.7	0.0	25.0	37.5	27.1	10.4				
	All Western				Woodring				General Science				Human Services				Social Studies			
	Very	Mostly	Some-what	Not	Very	Mostly	Some-what	Not	Very	Mostly	Some-what	Not	Very	Mostly	Some-what	Not	Very	Mostly	Some-what	Not
The amount you earn	10.4	31.3	36.2	22.1	6.4	23.4	39.4	30.9					14.3	21.4	45.2	19.0	0.0	11.8	64.7	23.5
Job Security	38.9	32.0	19.9	9.3	34.2	31.0	18.7	16.0					33.3	35.7	21.4	9.5	35.3	52.9	11.8	0.0
Opportunity for advancement	27.5	26.0	26.1	20.4	17.4	32.0	29.7	20.9					24.4	36.6	19.5	19.5				
Kinds of daily work you do	24.5	44.1	24.4	7.1	40.1	38.5	16.6	4.8					36.6	36.6	24.4	2.4	47.1	47.1	5.9	0.0
Importance and worth of work	39.3	32.7	21.5	6.5	68.3	17.5	11.1	3.2					61.9	23.8	11.9	2.4	88.2	11.8	0.0	0.0
Self-fulfillment received	34.4	34.4	25.9	9.4	59.6	22.3	12.8	5.3					57.1	21.4	19.0	2.4	82.4	17.6	0.0	0.0
The entire job, overall	24.4	44.7	26.4	4.5	33.0	45.7	17.0	4.3					28.6	45.2	23.8	2.4	29.4	64.7	5.9	0.0

N too small for percentages to be meaningful

TABLE 2-A: How satisfied are you with the following aspects of your primary major at Western? (In percentages)

	All Western				Woodring				General Science				Human Services				Social Studies			
	Very	Mostly	Some-what	Not	Very	Mostly	Some-what	Not	Very	Mostly	Some-what	Not	Very	Mostly	Some-what	Not	Very	Mostly	Some-what	Not
Availability of courses	18.7	45.5	25.3	10.5	13.5	50.0	28.2	8.3					37.1	43.5	17.7	1.6	10.0	65.0	2.0	5.0
Quality of instruction	26.6	53.0	17.9	2.5	22.4	51.3	23.1	3.2	N too small				33.9	35.5	25.8	4.8	15.0	45.0	40.0	0.0
How well challenged	24.5	46.8	25.7	3.1	16.0	56.0	22.0	6.0	for percentages to be meaningful				41.9	25.6	23.3	9.3	N too small			
Dept/faculty advising: courses	23.7	32.6	30.5	13.2	20.0	30.0	28.0	22.0					39.5	32.6	18.6	9.3				
Dept/faculty advising: career	11.7	24.5	37.6	26.2	9.1	36.4	40.9	13.6					22.0	39.0	31.7	7.3				

TABLE 2-B: How satisfied are you with the following aspects of your teacher education courses at Western? (In percentages)

	All Western				Woodring				Elementary Certification				Secondary Certification				Special Ed							
	Very	Mostly	Some-what	Not	Very	Mostly	Some-what	Not	Very	Mostly	Some-what	Not	Very	Mostly	Some-what	Not	Very	Mostly	Some-what	Not				
Availability of courses	18.7	45.5	25.3	10.5	11.1	52.8	25.0	11.1	13.0	53.6	23.2	10.1	5.9	47.1	35.3	11.8	2.9	58.0	31.9	7.2	3.9	47.1	35.3	13.7
Quality of instruction	26.6	53.0	17.9	2.5	4.9	50.7	33.3	11.1	5.8	55.1	33.3	5.8	4.0	30.0	50.0	16.0	53.6	24.6	15.9	5.8	52.9	25.5	15.7	5.9
How well challenged	24.5	46.8	25.7	3.1	6.3	41.3	41.3	11.1	10.3	50.0	30.9	8.8	18.4	32.7	34.7	14.3	not applicable				N too small for percentages to be meaningful			
Practice teaching					52.8	27.1	14.6	5.6																
Informal relations w/profs	29.0	32.1	30.2	8.7	14.4	39.6	31.7	14.4	18.4	32.7	34.7	14.3												

TABLE 3: How satisfied are you with the opportunities provided by your primary major at Western for each of the following? (In percentages)

	All Western				Woodring				General Science				Human Services				Social Studies											
	Very	Mostly	Some-what	Not	Very	Mostly	Some-what	Not	Very	Mostly	Some-what	Not	Very	Mostly	Some-what	Not	Very	Mostly	Some-what	Not								
Involved in faculty projects	9.1	19.3	33.0	38.6	4.2	14.3	24.4	57.1	N too small for percentages to be meaningful												10.2	26.5	32.7	30.6	10.0	25.0	60.0	5.0
Internship/experiential courses	24.2	28.3	28.5	19.1	29.6	43.0	19.7	7.7	N too small for percentages to be meaningful												54.1	27.9	14.8	3.3	21.2	63.2	10.5	5.3
Informal relationship w/profs	29.0	23.1	30.2	8.7	13.6	32.0	38.8	15.6	N too small for percentages to be meaningful												58.1	24.2	17.7	0.0	10.0	25.0	60.0	5.0
Challenging individual project	24.0	33.1	31.5	11.3	16.3	34.9	32.6	16.3	N too small for percentages to be meaningful												48.8	23.3	25.6	2.3	N too small			

TABLE 4: Was each of the following a major reason, minor reason, or not a reason why you chose the major you graduated with? (In percentages)

	All Western			Woodring			Elementary Certification			Secondary Certification			Special Ed		
	Major	Minor	Not	Major	Minor	Not	Major	Minor	Not	Major	Minor	Not	Major	Minor	Not
Job opportunities in field	31.5	35.2	33.3	17.0	46.5	36.5	17.9	58.9	23.2	5.7	45.3	49.1			
Enjoying nature of work	88.5	9.3	2.2	94.7	3.9	1.5	96.4	0.0	3.6	92.5	5.7	1.9			
Grades received in field	26.0	43.3	30.7	17.7	40.2	42.0	12.5	53.6	33.9	28.3	45.3	26.4			
Improving self as person	49.4	32.2	18.4	56.6	29.2	14.2	54.5	27.3	18.2	61.5	25.0	13.5			
Income levels in field	17.8	33.9	48.3	0.9	24.1	75.0	0.0	39.3	60.7	0.0	20.8	79.2			
Liking profs or intro courses	27.3	34.7	38.0	18.3	27.6	54.2	16.4	32.7	50.9	24.0	40.0	36.0			
Contribute to society in field	60.1	26.6	13.3	91.0	7.5	1.5	94.5	1.8	3.6	88.7	11.3	0.0			
	All Western			Woodring			General Science			Human Services			Social Studies		
	Major	Minor	Not	Major	Minor	Not	Major	Minor	Not	Major	Minor	Not	Major	Minor	Not
Job opportunities in field	31.5	35.2	33.3	17.0	46.5	36.5				15.5	50.0	34.5	16.7	41.7	41.7
Enjoying nature of work	88.5	9.3	2.2	94.7	3.9	1.5				93.5	4.8	1.6	92.3	3.8	3.8
Grades received in field	26.0	43.3	30.7	17.7	40.2	42.0				21.3	29.5	49.2	16.7	66.7	16.7
Improving self as person	49.4	32.2	18.4	56.6	29.2	14.2				76.2	20.6	3.2	54.2	37.5	8.3
Income levels in field	17.8	33.9	48.3	0.9	24.1	75.0				1.7	16.7	81.7	0.0	32.0	68.0
Liking profs or intro courses	27.3	34.7	38.0	18.3	27.6	54.2				36.2	27.6	36.2	16.0	32.0	52.0
Contribute to society in field	60.1	26.6	13.3	91.0	7.5	1.5				93.5	6.5	0.0	87.5	8.3	4.2

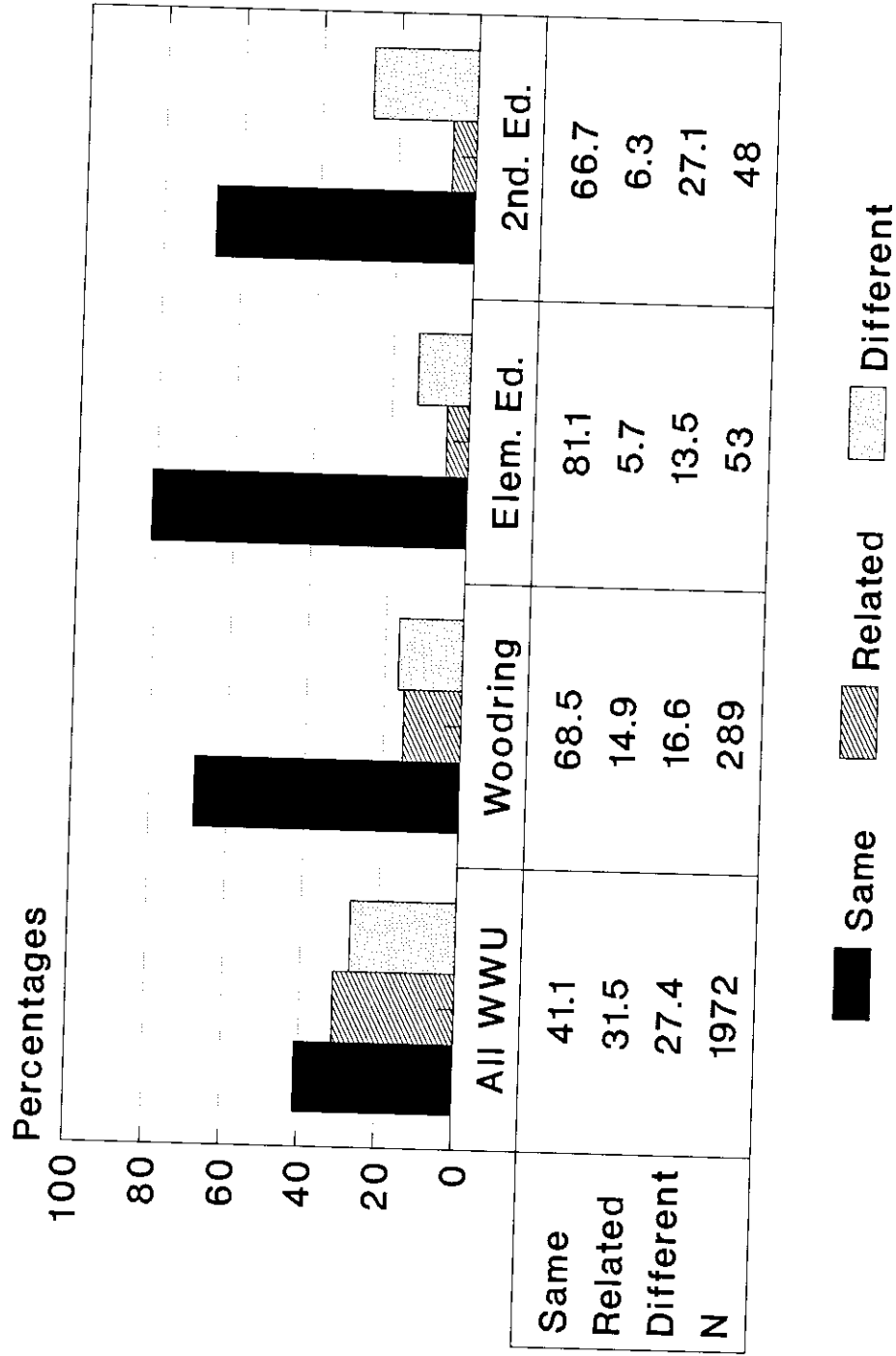
N too small for percentages to be meaningful

N too small for percentages to be meaningful

Table 5: Academic major as undergrad
for Woodring College of Education
graduates

MAJOR	FREQUENCY	MAJOR	FREQUENCY
English	23	Anthropology	less than 3
History	17	Chemistry/Biochemistry	"
Social Studies	14	Communications	"
Psychology	10	Economics	"
Physical Education	9	Foreign Language/Literature	"
Mathematics	8	Geography/Regional Planning	"
Sociology	5	Geology	"
Biology	4	Journalism	"
General Studies	4	Philosophy	"
Music	4	Fairhaven	"
Technology	4	Student-Faculty Designed Major	"
Art	3	Social Work/Human Services	"

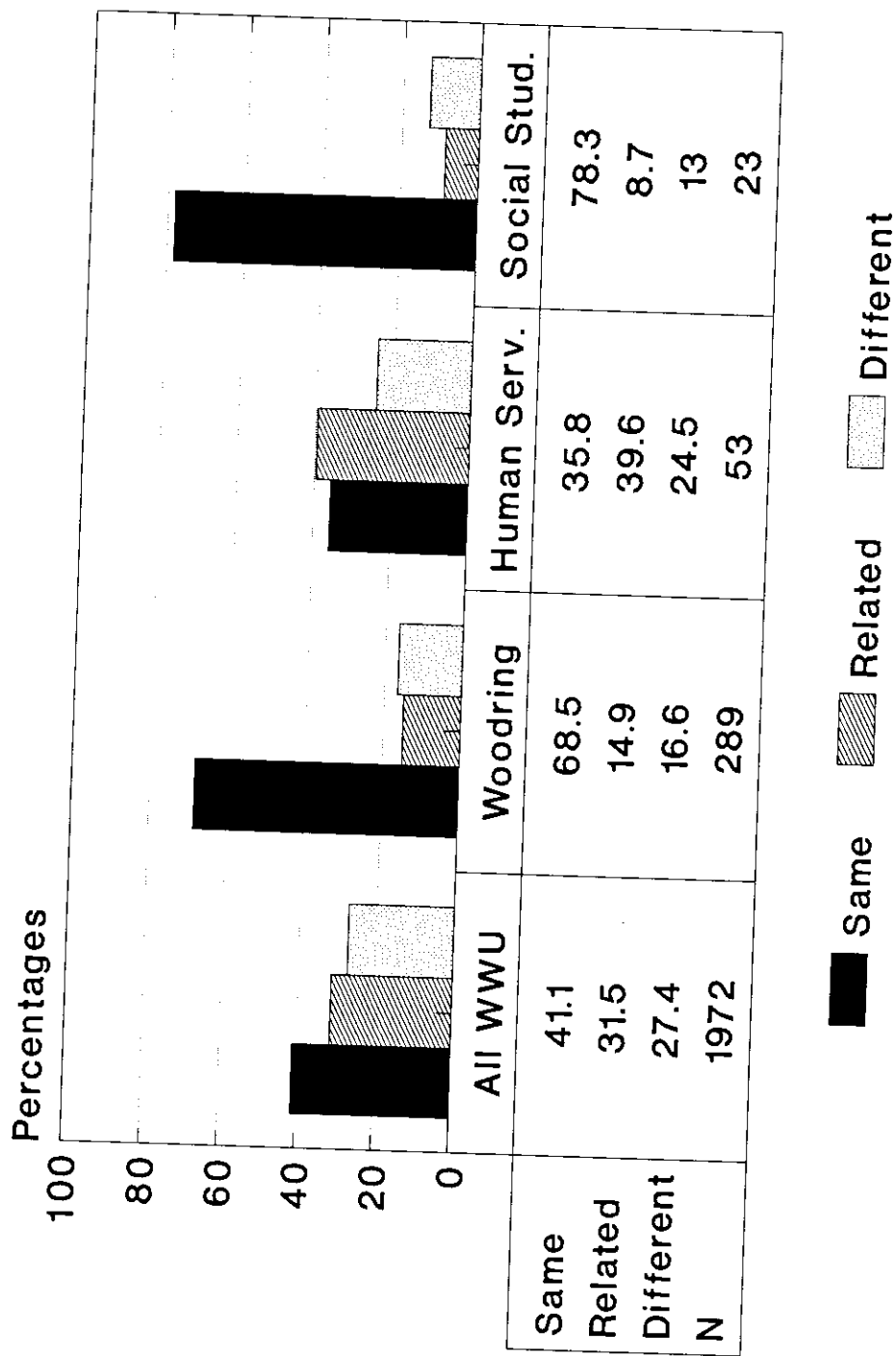
FIGURE 1a - GRADUATE SURVEY
Job in the Same Field as Major



N for Special Education Major < 15

FIGURE 1b - GRADUATE SURVEY

Job in the Same Field as Major



N for General Science Major < 15

FIGURE 2a - GRADUATE SURVEY

Value of Courses in Major for Job

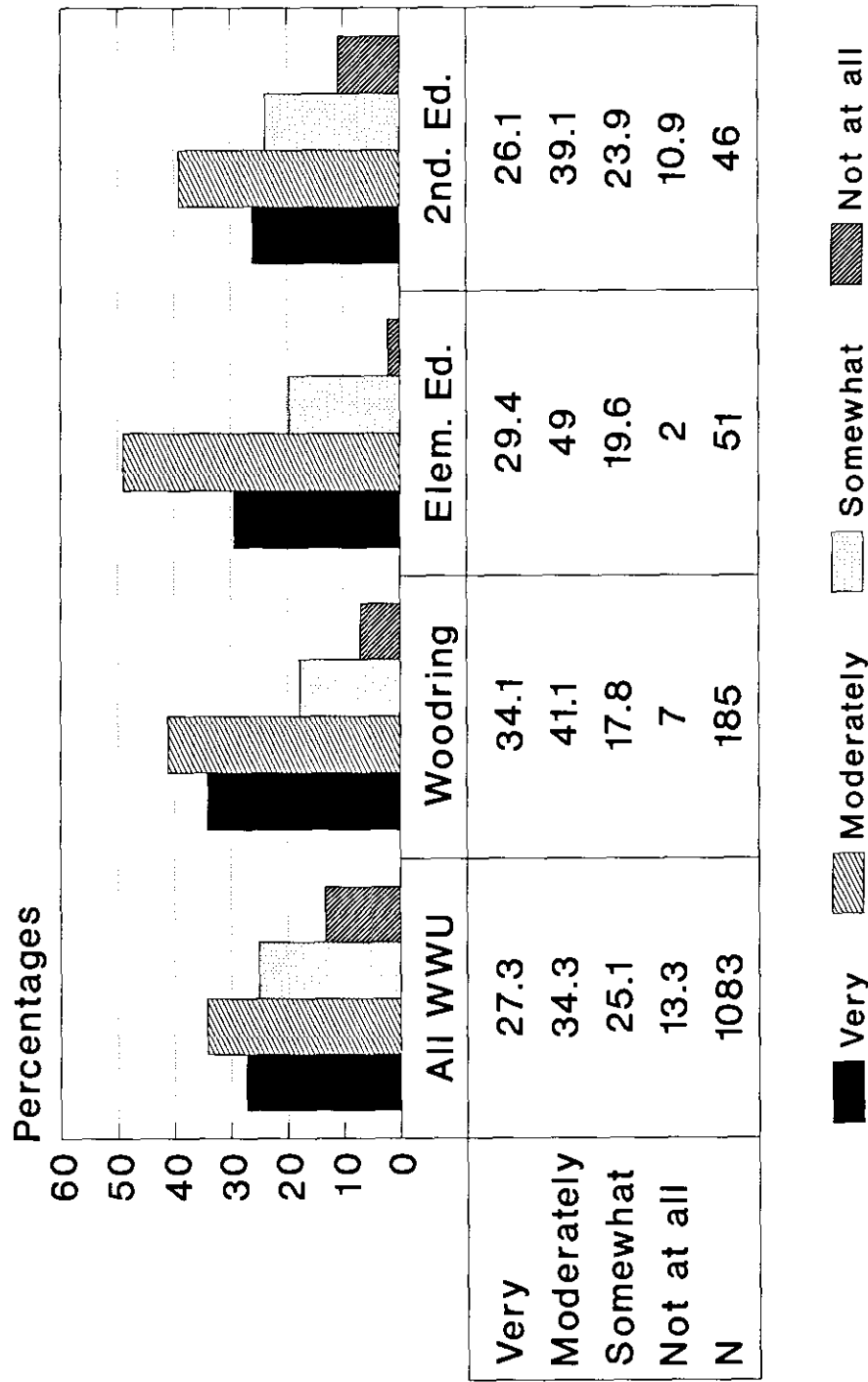


FIGURE 2b - GRADUATE SURVEY
Value of Courses in Major for Job

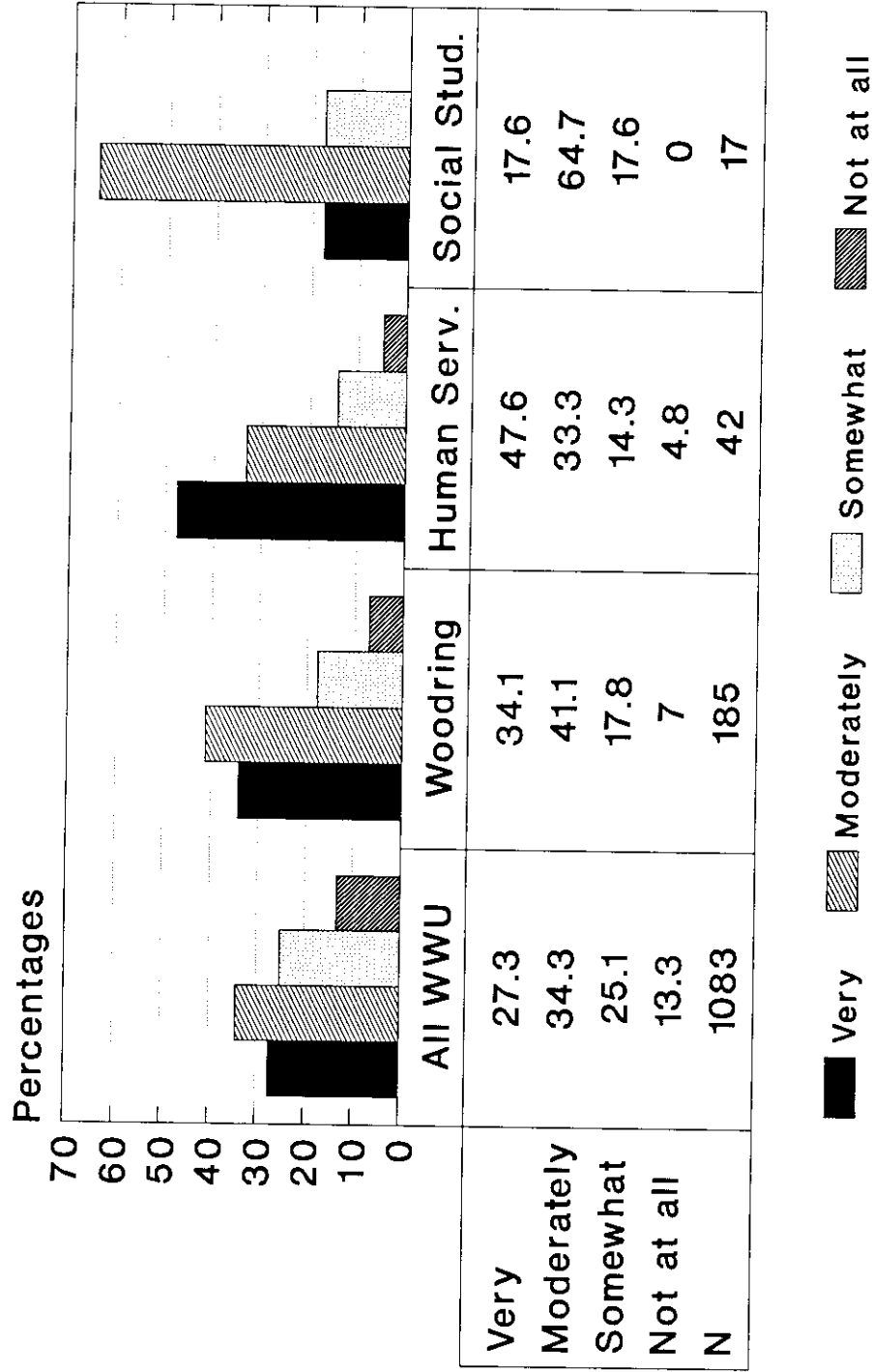
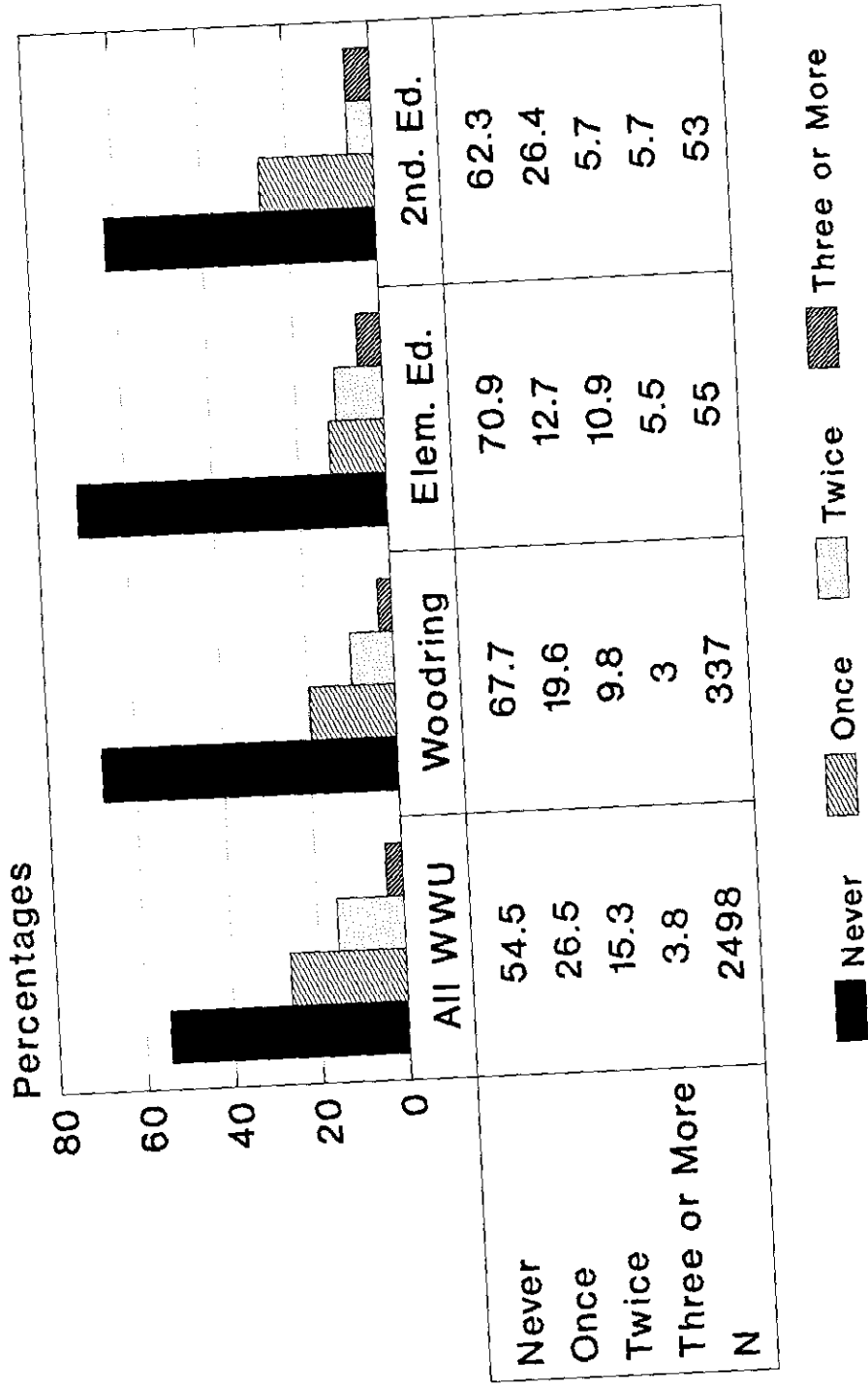


FIGURE 3a - GRADUATE SURVEY
Number of Times Changed Major at WWU



N for Special Education Major < 15

FIGURE 3b - GRADUATE SURVEY

Number of Times Changed Major at WWU

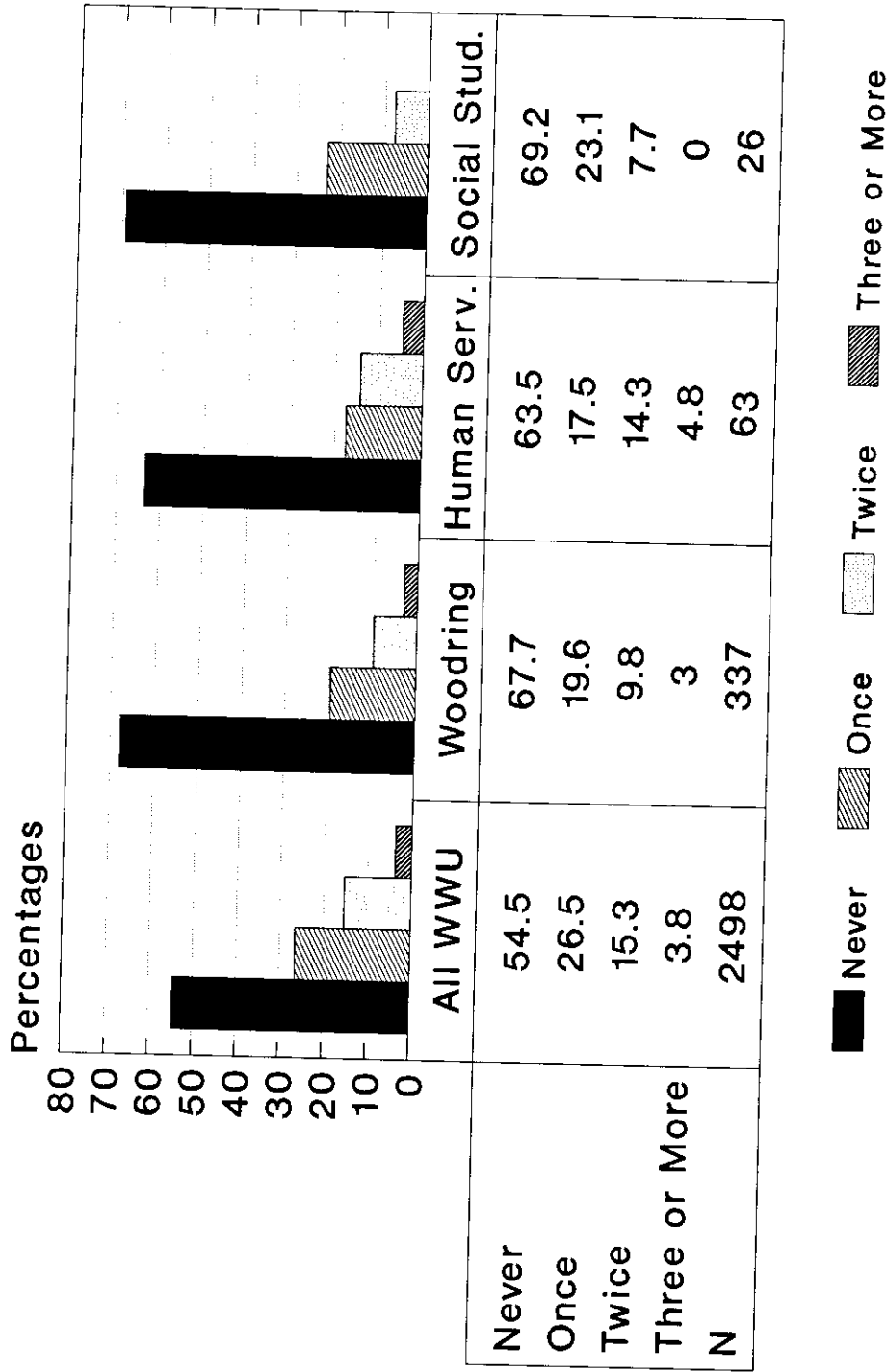
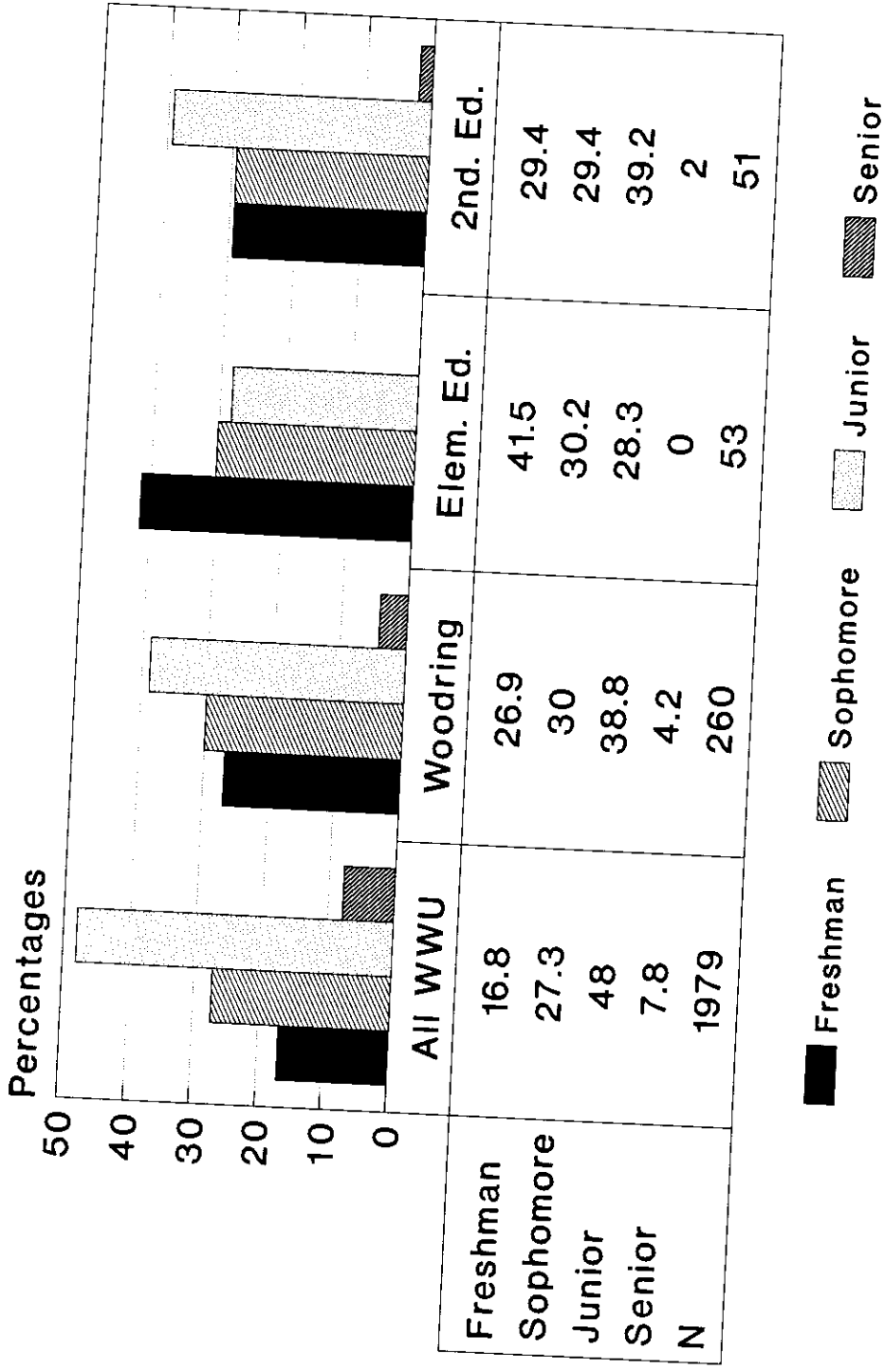


FIGURE 4a - GRADUATE SURVEY

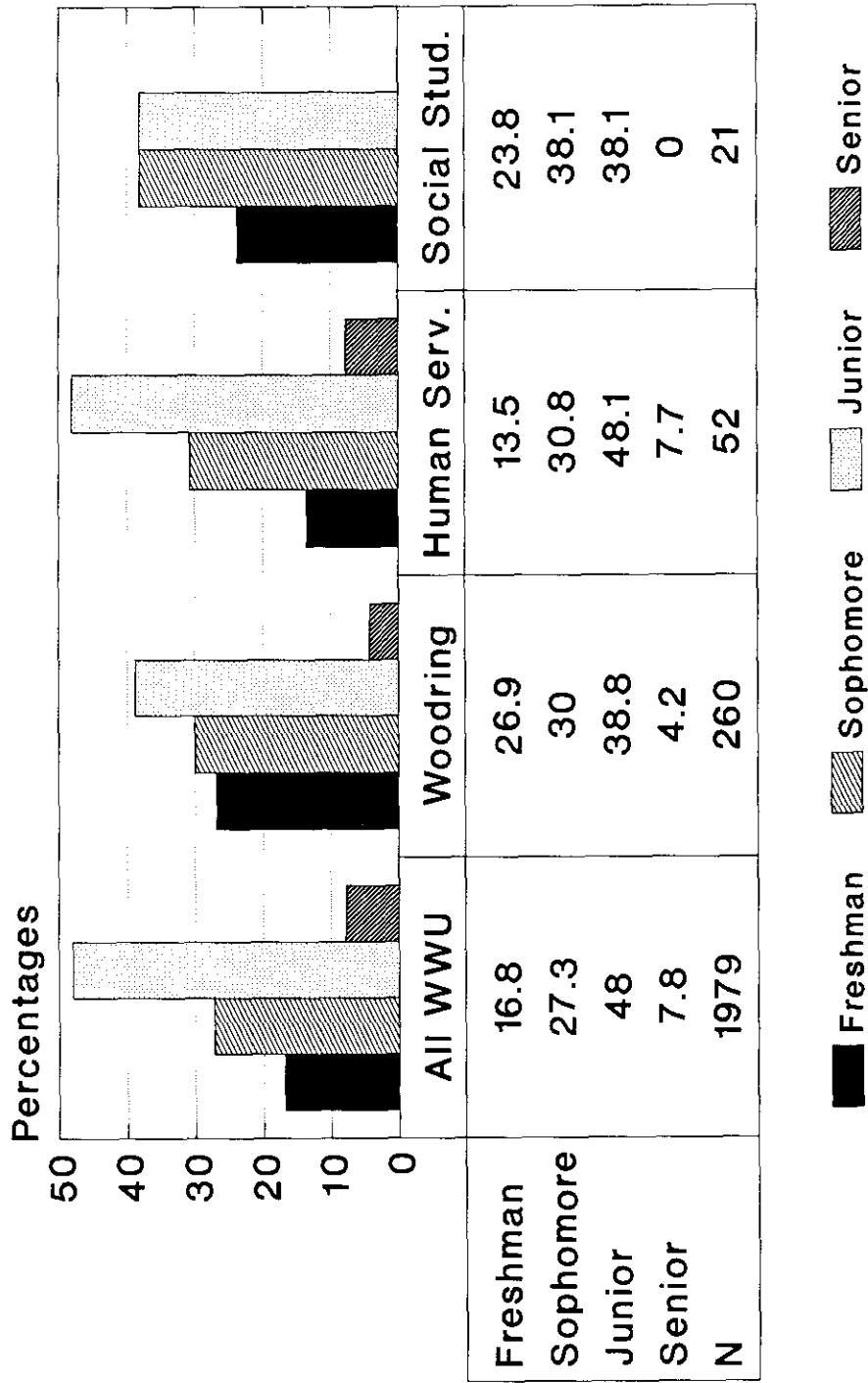
Year Decided on Major



N for Special Education Major < 15

FIGURE 4b - GRADUATE SURVEY

Year Decided on Major



N for General Science Major < 15