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The Office of Institutional Assessment and Testing • Western Washington University

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Profile of Alumni from the Class of 1992

Part Two: Reflections on the Western Experience

Prepared by George Cvetkovich, Gary R. McKinney,
Joseph E. Trimble, and Richard Frye

INTRODUCTION

A survey of Western Washington University alumni from the class of 1992 (fall quarter, 1991, through summer quarter, 1992) was conducted over the course of two quarters, winter through spring, 1996. The amount of time between an alumni's graduation and participation in the survey was a minimum of three years and two quarters and a maximum of four years and two quarters. Previous alumni surveys done at Western followed the Higher Education Coordinating Board's standard of one year to eighteen months from graduation. (Results from these surveys—four have been completed to date—are available through the Office of Survey Research.)

Assessment researchers at Western were familiar enough with alumni survey literature to believe that a more com-

plete analysis of alumni satisfaction should also include findings from alumni further from graduation than a year to eighteen months. This survey of alumni three to four years from graduation was conducted to complement and enrich Western's alumni survey research series.

The survey was conducted through the mail and administered by the Office of Survey Research. The first mailing on January 12, 1996, was to the entire 1992 graduating class of 1,917 students. The first reminder was mailed February 8; the second reminder (including a new survey form) was mailed April 19; and the last reminder was mailed May 10. Ulti-

mately, 843 alumni from the class of 1992 responded to the survey. The 44.0% participation rate, though respectable, was not as strong as in other alumni survey administrations. The probable causes for this include the longer period since graduation, and a slightly more lengthy survey form. Overall, however, the total number of returned questionnaires was satisfactory.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|
| SATISFACTION WITH OVERALL | PAGE 2 |
| SATISFACTION WITH MAJOR | PAGE 3 |
| OPPORTUNITIES/ADVICE IN MAJOR | PAGE 4 |
| ACADEMIC ADVISING | PAGE 5 |
| CAREER SERVICES | PAGE 6 |
| HEALTH/COUNSELING | PAGE 7 |
| RESIDENCE HALLS | PAGE 8 |
| CONTINUING EDUCATION | PAGE 9 |
| ADMIT STATUS DIFFERENCES | PAGE 10 |
| SUMMARY | PAGE 11 |



WESTERN
WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

FINDINGS

OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH WESTERN RAN HIGH, WITH 84.7% OF RESPONDENTS REPORTING THEY WERE VERY OR MOSTLY SATISFIED WITH THE EDUCATION THEY RECEIVED.

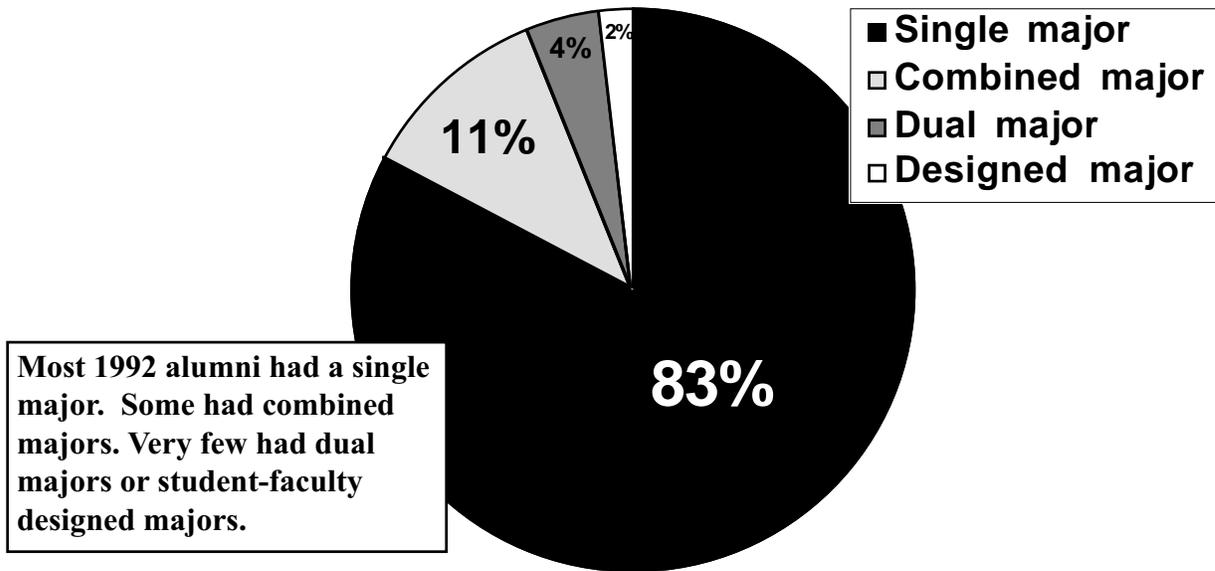
A majority of the 1992 alumni survey respondents had entered Western as freshmen (54.5%). About a third had entered as transfers with Associate of Arts degrees (33.2%), while the remaining respondents had transferred without an AA degree (12.4%).

Besides *overall* satisfaction, sixteen other areas of satisfaction were polled. In all but three areas, a majority of respondents were satisfied with Western's contribution to their growth. Some areas (learning independently, 83.5%; working cooperatively in a group, 81.8%; and defining and solving problems, 77.3%) received high percentages. One response in particular—being ready for a career—received a rather low percentage (47.8%). This finding would appear critical, and may suggest some further investigation. Also, an analysis of satisfaction with being ready for graduate school appears on page nine of this report.

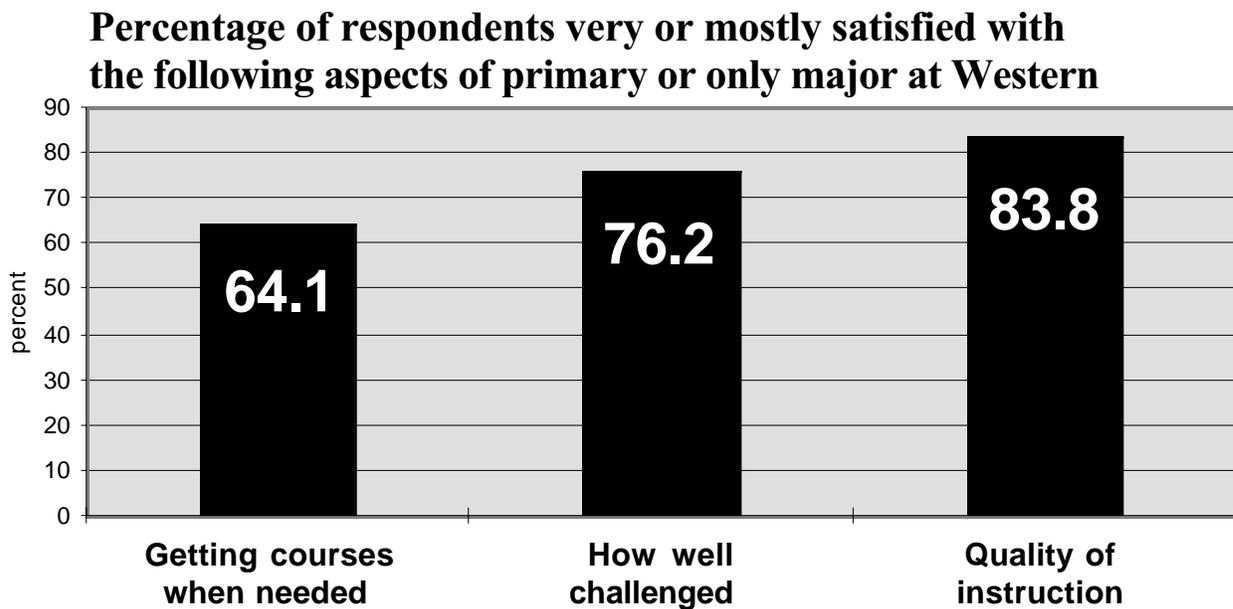
“Please indicate how satisfied you are with Western’s contribution to your growth in each of the following areas:”

Very/Mostly Satisfied

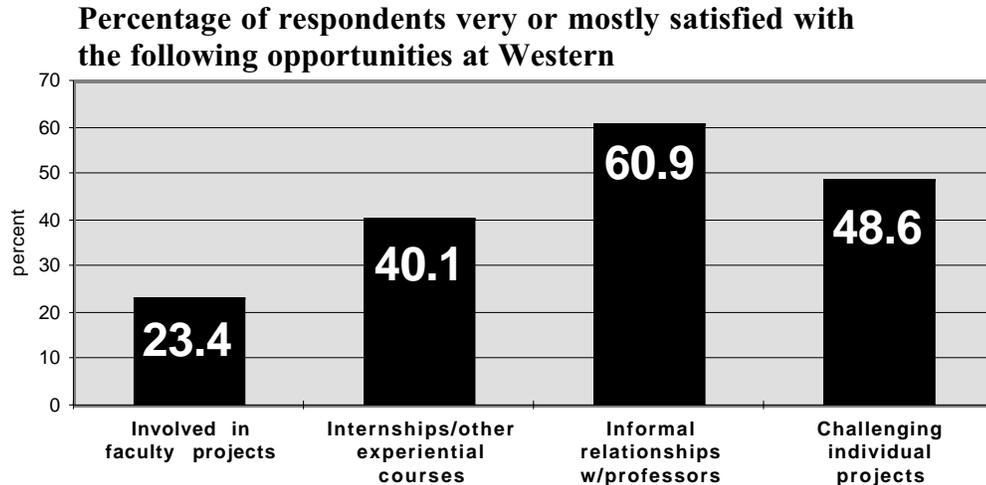
| | |
|------|--|
| 83.5 | Learning independently |
| 81.8 | Working cooperatively in a group |
| 77.3 | Defining and solving problems |
| 68.9 | Understanding differing philosophies and cultures |
| 67.7 | Critically analyzing written information |
| 66.2 | Understanding the interaction of society and the environment |
| 64.4 | Writing effectively |
| 63.0 | Understanding and applying quantitative principles and methods |
| 55.4 | Speaking effectively |
| 53.9 | Understanding and appreciating the arts |
| 52.9 | Understanding and applying scientific principles and methods |
| 51.7 | Being able to develop a satisfying meaning for life |
| 50.8 | Being able to cope with life changes and stress |
| 49.0 | Recognizing your rights, responsibilities, and privileges as a citizen |
| 47.8 | Being ready for a career |



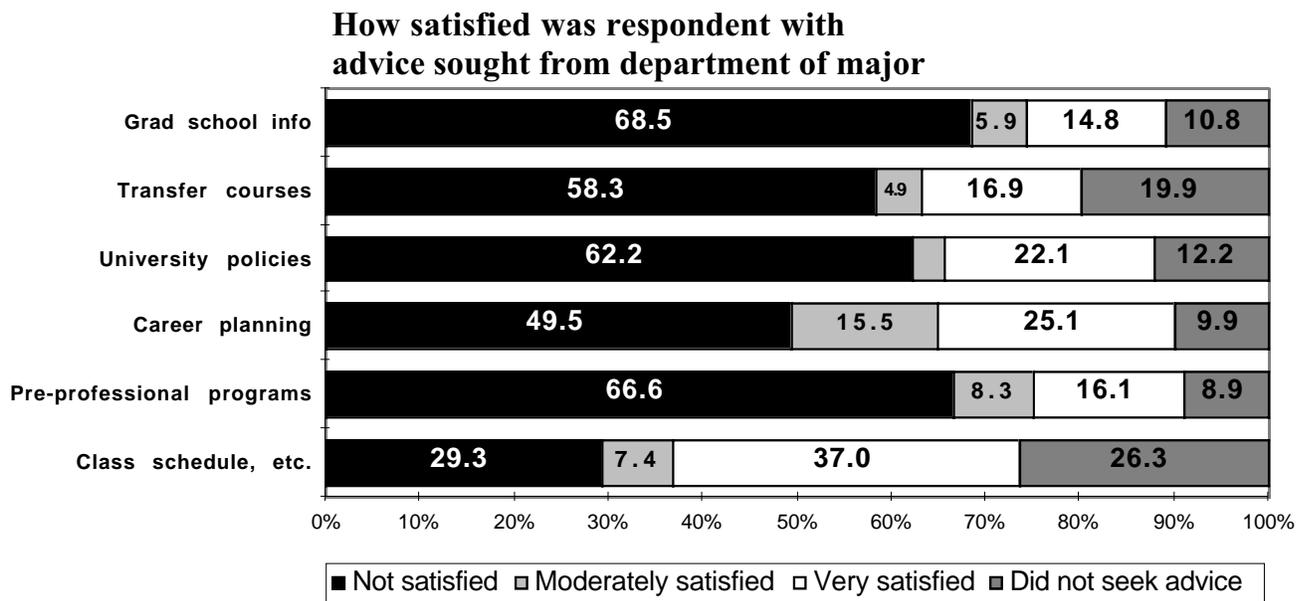
Survey respondents appeared quite satisfied with the quality of instruction they received within their major, with 83.8% indicating they were very or mostly satisfied. Most 1992 alumni also were very or mostly satisfied with how well they were challenged to do their best, and with getting courses in their major when they needed them.



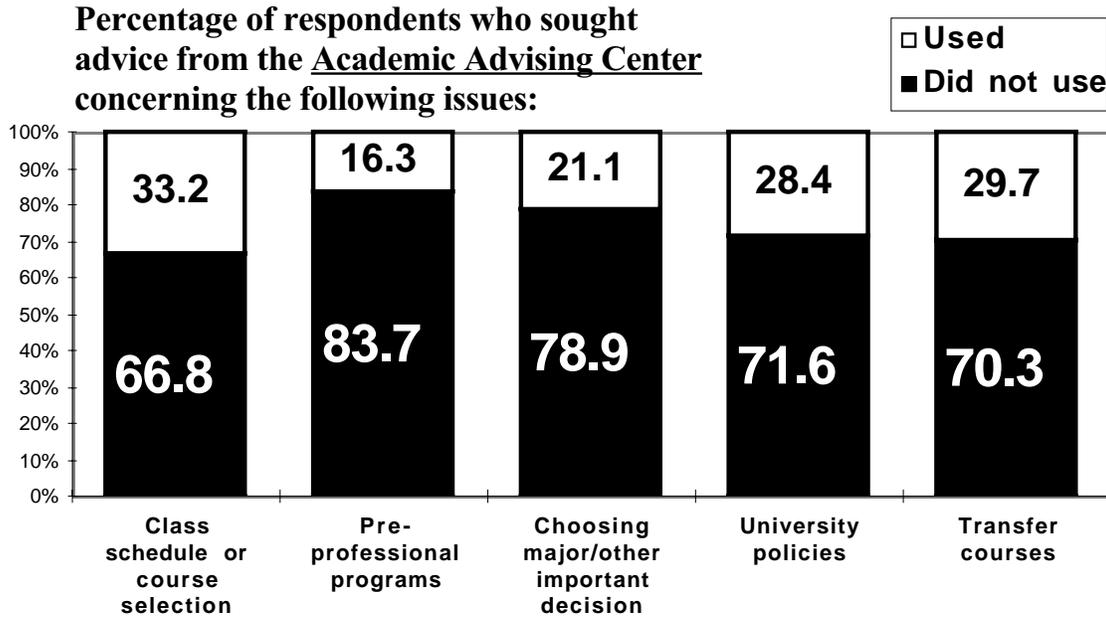
When asked how satisfied they were with a list of opportunities they may have had within their major, most alumni indicated they were very or mostly satisfied with the opportunity to develop an informal relationship with professors. Smaller percentages of alumni were satisfied with their opportunity to pursue challenging individual projects, or to pursue internships or other experiential courses. Less than a quarter of alumni were satisfied with their opportunities to get involved in faculty projects.



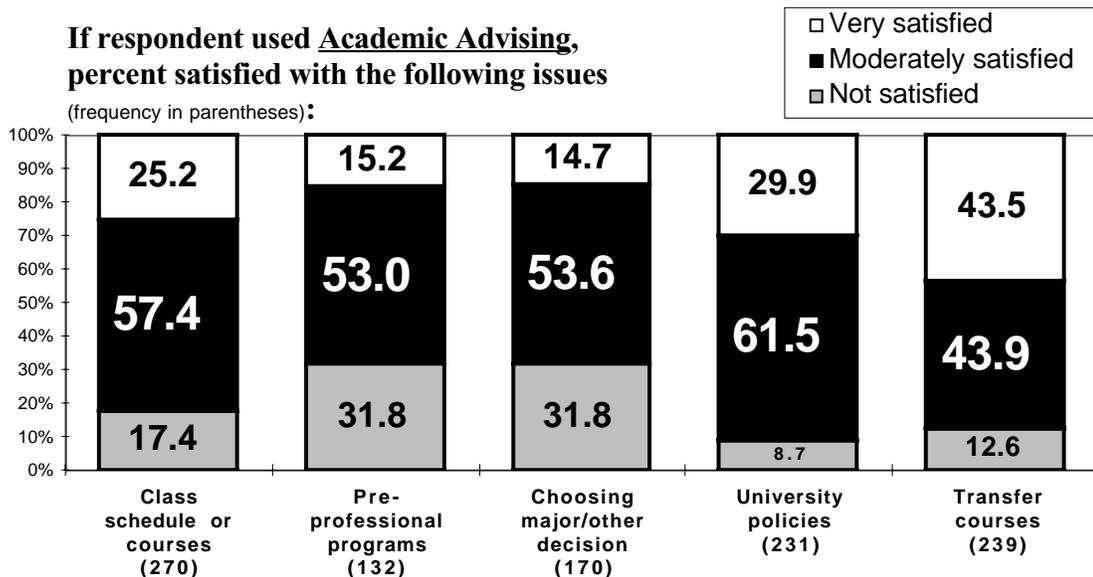
Alumni were not shy in approaching the departments of their majors for advice. Anywhere from **73% to 88% of survey respondents sought advice within their majors.** Unfortunately—with the exception of class scheduling advice, with which alumni were fairly satisfied—satisfaction levels were not high. Alumni were least satisfied with the advice they received regarding graduate schools, pre-professional programs, and University policies, such as late course withdrawal.



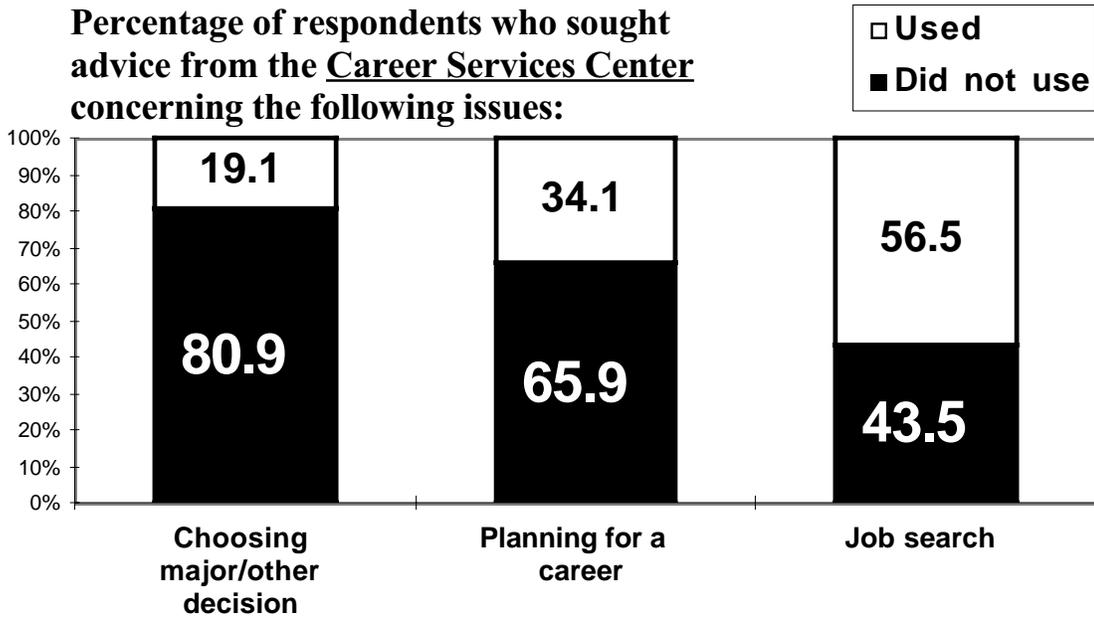
Though alumni did not appear reluctant to approach the departments of their major for advice, most were, for whatever reasons, unlikely to have approached the Academic Advising Center. Except for the issue of class scheduling, on average only about a quarter of alumni had used the Academic Advising Center services.



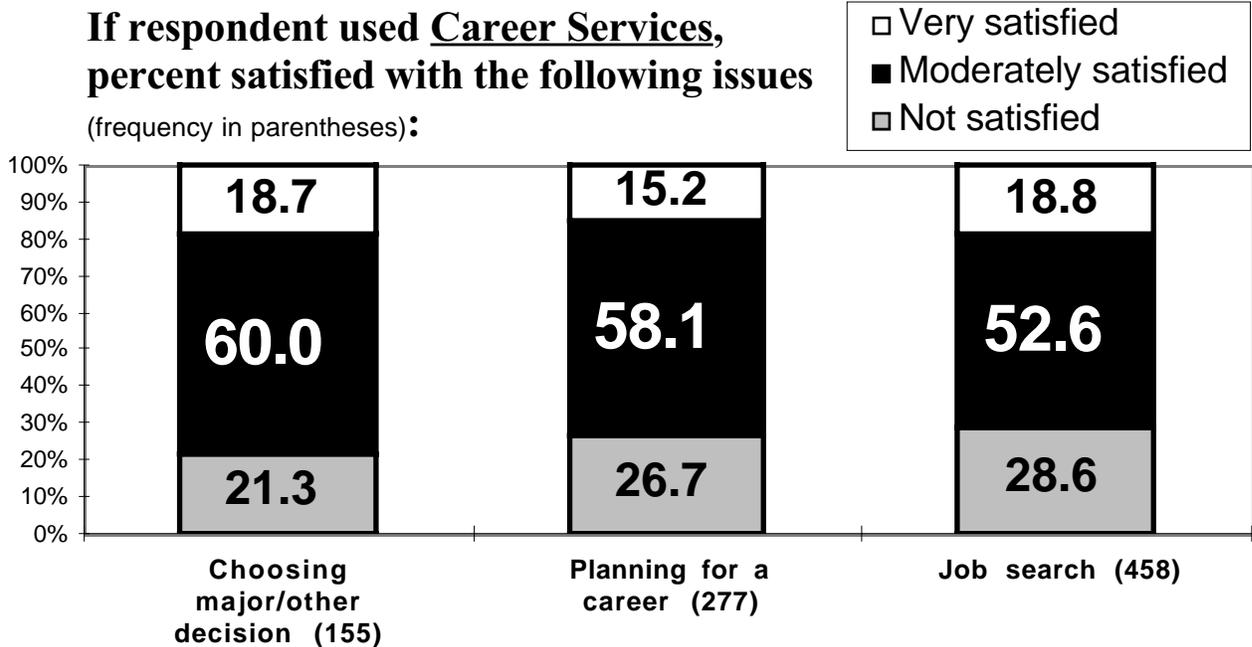
When alumni did use Academic Advising Center services, satisfaction levels were high, especially when it came to University policies, issues related to transfer courses or GUR requirements, and class scheduling or selection. Even the difficult advising issue of choosing a major or making other important life decisions received favorable responses.



Alumni from the class of 1992 were asked if they had ever sought help from the Career Services Center. Most had used the Career Services Center for a job search, but few had used it for planning a career, or for choosing a major or other important life decision.

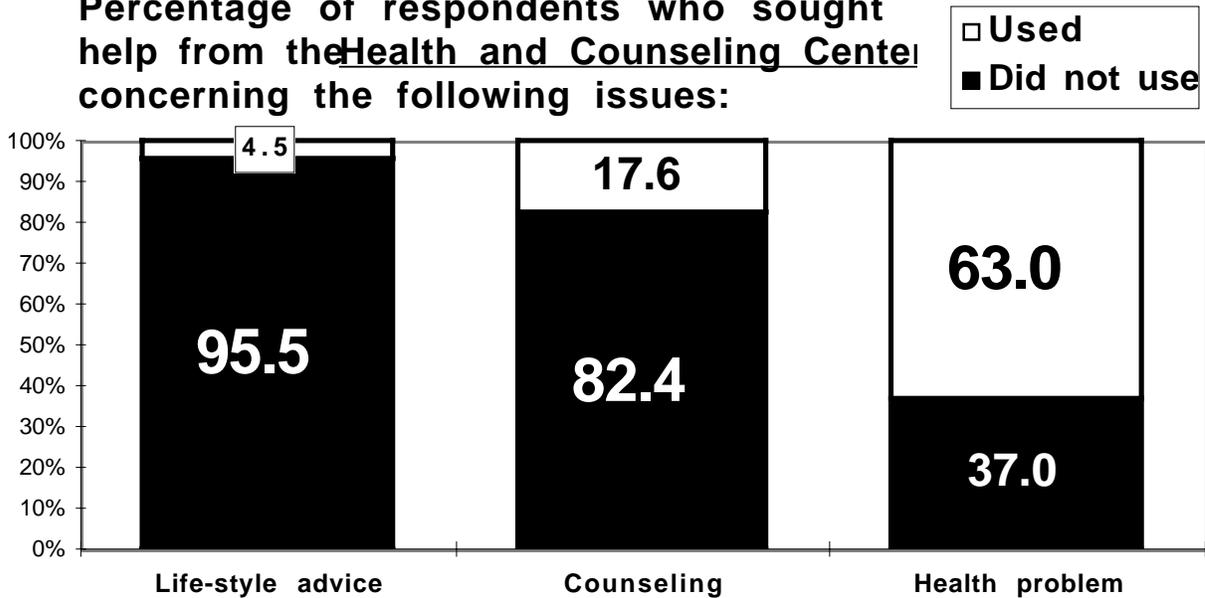


For those alumni who did approach the Career Services Center, satisfaction with the help they received was positive, regardless of the issue, whether it was choosing a major or making other important life decision, planning for a career, or a job search.



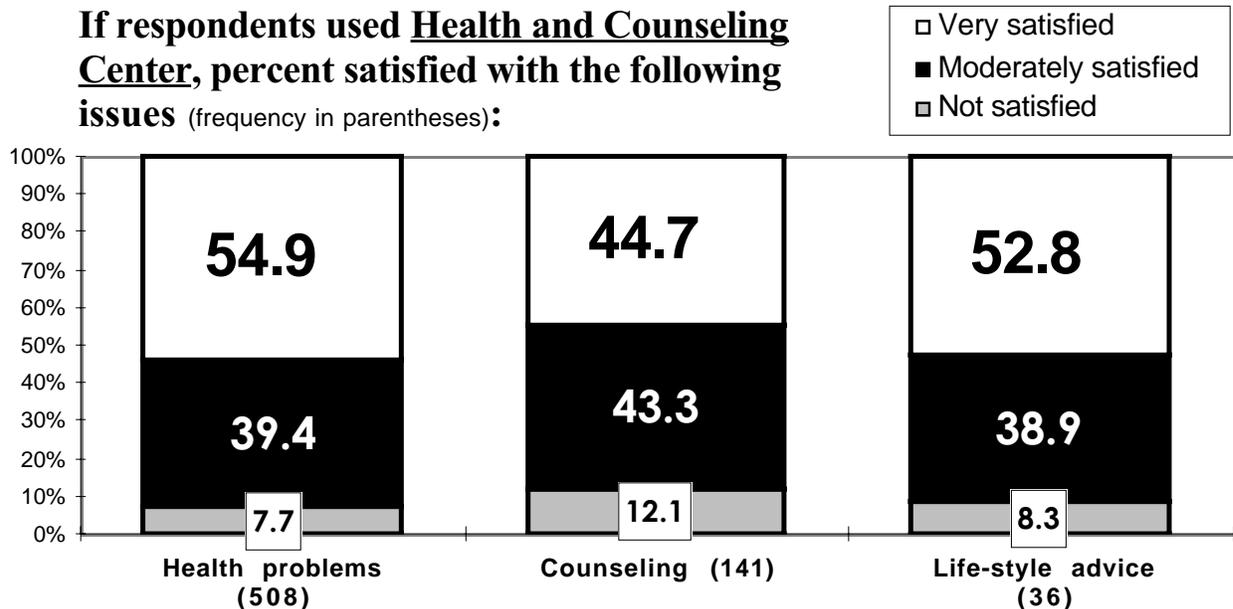
Alumni were asked if they had ever sought help from the Health and Counseling Center. Though many did seek help for health problems, very few had sought counseling, and hardly any had sought life-style advice.

Percentage of respondents who sought help from the Health and Counseling Center concerning the following issues:

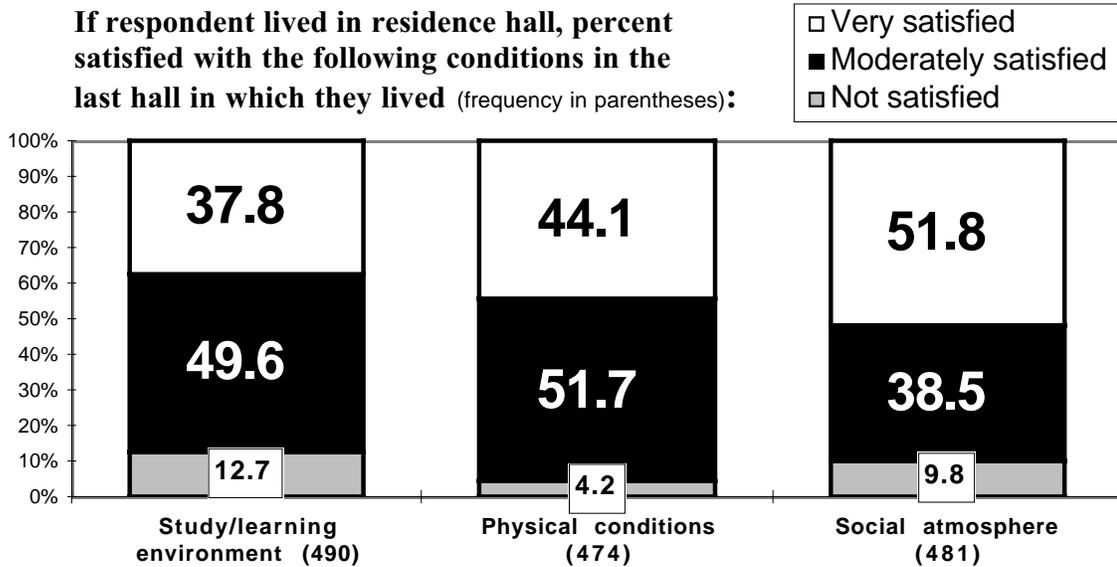


Again, as with the Academic Advising Center, and the Career Services Center, though use was relatively light, satisfaction with the services offered by the Health and Counseling Center was high, in all three areas: health problems, counseling, and life-style advice.

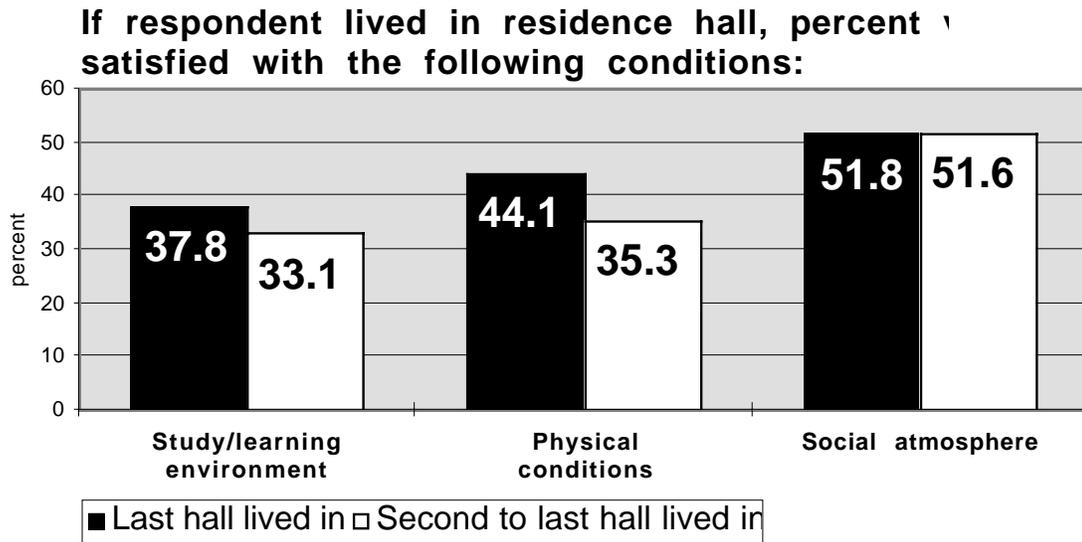
If respondents used Health and Counseling Center, percent satisfied with the following issues (frequency in parentheses):



Approximately 58% of survey respondents indicated they had lived in a Western residence hall. Natives were more likely to have lived in residence halls than transfers (71.2% natives vs. 34.5% transfers). Most of those who had lived in a residence hall indicated a positive response to three important living conditions: the studying and learning environment, the physical conditions, and the social atmosphere. There was no statistical difference in satisfaction levels by admit status.

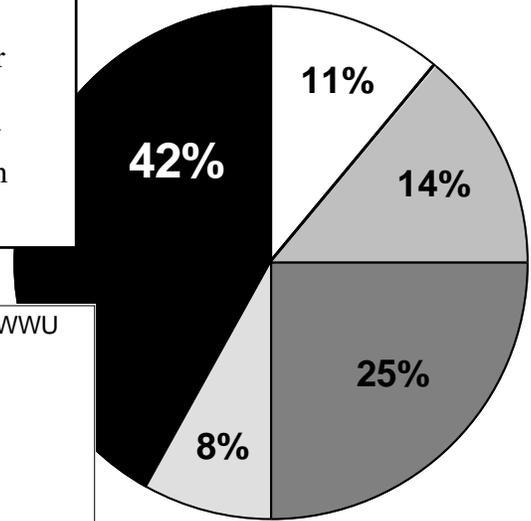


Those alumni who had lived in more than one residence hall responded to the same sets of questions for each hall they had lived in. Comparisons of responses indicated that while satisfaction with the social atmosphere changed little, alumni were slightly more satisfied with the studying and learning environment and the physical conditions of the last residence hall they had lived in compared to the second to last hall.



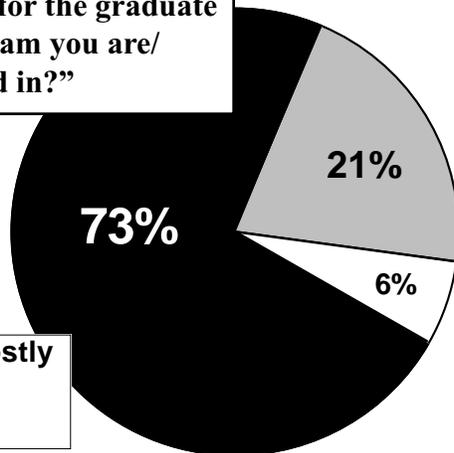
Alumni were asked which situation best described any further educational accomplishments and/or educational plans for the foreseeable future. Some had already completed a college or university program since leaving Western, while some were currently enrolled in such a program. About a quarter had plans to enter a college or university program within five years. Most respondents, however, had no plans to enroll in a college or university program, or were uncertain whether they would enroll in such programs.

- Finished college program since leaving WWU
- Currently enrolled in college program
- Plan to enter college within 5 years
- Plan to enter college after 5 years
- Do not plan to enroll in college program



“How well did your WWU undergraduate education prepare you for the graduate degree program you are/were enrolled in?”

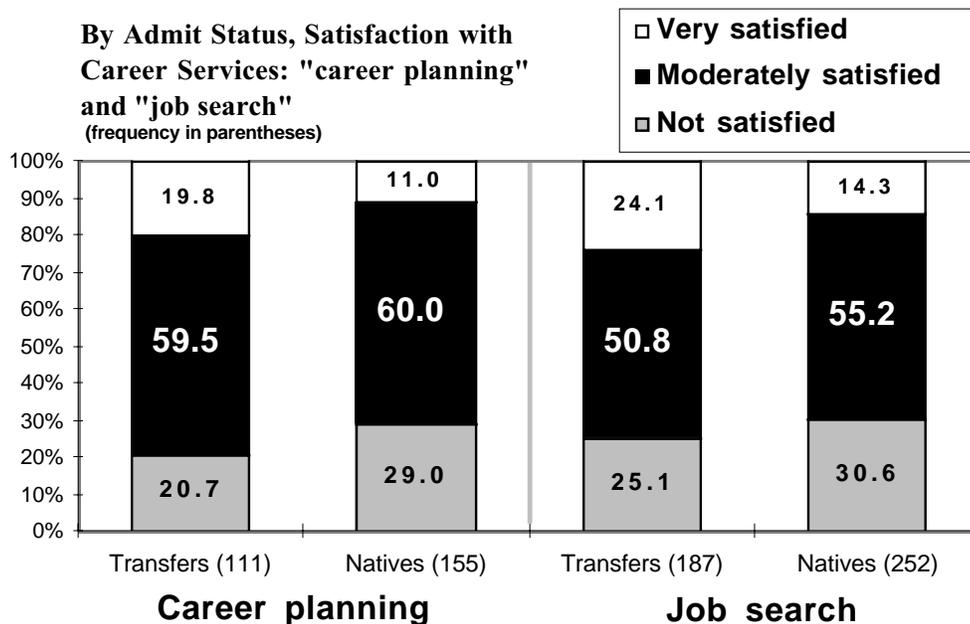
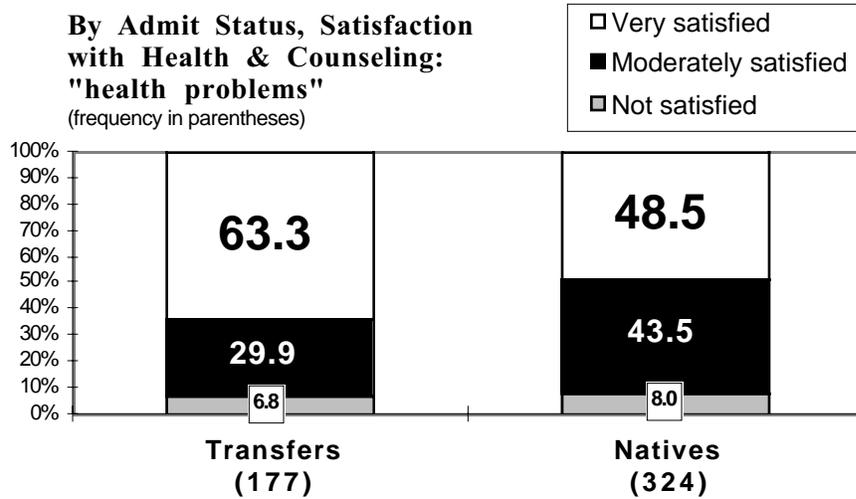
- Very or mostly
- Somewhat
- Not at all



When asked to indicate how satisfied they were with Western’s contribution to their growth in each of a number of areas, satisfaction with “being ready for graduate study” received the lowest percentage of very/mostly satisfied responses (38.6%). Yet a very different response was noted later in the survey when nearly three-quarters (72.5%) of those respondents who had completed or were currently enrolled in a college or university program indicated that Western had prepared them well for that program. A scant number felt not at all prepared (6.5%). This finding helps to explain the low percentage of students indicating satisfaction with how Western had prepared them for graduate school. That finding was for *all* survey participants, as opposed to *only those who had actually attended or were attending a college program since leaving Western*.

Analyses were conducted to discern differences in student satisfaction levels by gender or admit status. No differences were detected by gender. Males and females were equally satisfied with services offered by Academic Advising, Career Services Center, Health and Counseling Center, and academic departments.

Three items indicated a difference by admit status. Transfers tended to be more satisfied than natives with the Career Services Center when it came to “planning for a career” and “job search.” Transfers also tended to be more satisfied with the Health and Counseling Center when it came to “health problems.” These items tested for statistical significance, though the variation in each accounted for by admit status was in each case less than 2%.



SUMMARY

Overall, Alumni from the class of 1992 appear satisfied with their Western experience, with 85% indicating satisfaction with the education they received, and 84% indicating satisfaction with the quality of instruction they received. They felt particularly satisfied with Western's contribution to their growth in learning independently and working cooperatively in a group.

Yet despite their satisfaction with skills thought of as vital to the job market, 1992 alumni reported relatively low satisfaction with Western's contribution to their "being ready for a career." Unlike the low satisfaction reported "being ready for graduate school," which had some degree of explanation (see page 9), there is no easy answer as to why 1992 alumni felt this way. The issue was not related to income. There was no statistical difference between the opinions of lower earners and higher earners. Neither was the issue related to major. There was no statistical difference between the opinions of alumni across nine areas of study (business, arts, Fairhaven, environmental studies, education, social science, humanities/languages, and math/science/technology). Nearly all alumni were employed (see **Focus vol2/issue5**), and had been since graduating, so were not unfamiliar with the job market or the workplace, but rather seemed to be expressing an opinion that had sufficient time to mature.

The other noteworthy trend was in advising. For whatever reason, alumni were far more likely to approach their major department for advice rather than any of the service offices dedicated to specific advising areas. The limited number of alumni who used service offices were fairly well pleased with the advice they received. But many simply didn't use those offices very often. When instead they approached department personnel seemingly untrained to advise specific areas—career planning, for instance—alumni were inevitably dissatisfied. The positive levels of satisfaction with advising obtained through service offices seems to indicate that the problem is not the lack of contributive advising available at Western, but that alumni were not directing their questions to those trained personnel. (OIAAT)

Alumni

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