EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

This report presents the results of the most recent of three surveys in the Graduating Student Opinion Survey (GSOS) series spanning the decade from 1992 to 2001. Current survey results are based on data collected from students receiving baccalaureate degrees in Spring 2001 from Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. This study, conducted by the Office of Institutional Research and Academic Planning, provides information used to assess the success of Rutgers as an institution in delivering a quality education to its undergraduates. The current survey was designed to elicit information and student opinion on the various departments, operations, and services at the university; and graduating students’ evaluation of their academic and nonacademic experiences at Rutgers, including their frequency and patterns of interaction with faculty and how they spend their time. The survey also sought to determine students’ short- and long-range academic and career goals, and the extent to which Rutgers contributed to their attainment of such goals. There is considerable overlap with each of the three surveys, allowing for trend analysis. The results of the survey provide valuable information to faculty and administrators in maintaining and enhancing the quality of undergraduate education at Rutgers.

Survey Description and Methodology

In April 2001, the GSOS was sent to all students who had accumulated sufficient credits to graduate in May inviting them to go online to complete the Graduating Student Opinion Survey. Three follow-up mailings and email reminders were sent over the following two months. The option of completing the survey online was also offered. After graduation, we confirmed eligibility for the population (May 2001 graduates) and restricted usable returns to those eligible. 1,886 of those eligible among graduating students we had attempted to contact (n=4,622) returned useable surveys for an overall response rate of forty-one percent. See Chapter Two: Survey Methodology and Student Profiles for a detailed description of the respondent and target population characteristics.

Student Goals and Their Achievement

Student goals and the role Rutgers plays in achieving these goals is an important topic in the assessment of undergraduate education. Overall, the goals most frequently cited as those being most important to current graduates include: knowledge in an academic field, improved critical thinking, improved chances for getting a good job, meeting people and making friends, and enhanced communication skills. More than forty percent of graduating students credit Rutgers as being “Very Helpful” in attaining a wide range of academic goals, including those listed by students as most important: general education and appreciation of ideas, increasing knowledge in an academic field, improved ability for critical thinking, and increased communication.
Students give similar levels of credit to Rutgers in helping them to learn more about personal interests, how to pursue these interests or develop a particular talent, and in their becoming a more cultured person. Graduating students also report that Rutgers is particularly helpful in achieving important career related goals such as: discovering their career interests, improving their chances for getting a good job, and formulating long term career goals. The importance of social and cultural participation has become more important to students over the last fifteen years. Most graduating seniors report that Rutgers aided in their efforts to meet people and make friends and acknowledge their participation in many of the varied opportunities for social and cultural activities offered by Rutgers. Rutgers is also credited by current graduates as being helpful in improving their self-confidence, ability to get along with others, and improving their leadership skills.

According to respondents, Rutgers could strengthen students' academic exposure to both Western and non-Western cultures and institutions and be more helpful in their goal of gaining a better appreciation of literature and the arts. When it comes to career goals, graduating seniors would like Rutgers to be more helpful in training students for a specific career and in giving them guidance on how to improve their chances for a raise or promotion. Finally, less than half of the respondents credit Rutgers as being helpful in their becoming active in student life or in campus activities while they were at Rutgers.

**The Rutgers Experience**

The 2001 Rutgers graduates are, in general, pleased with their overall academic experience at the university and are somewhat more likely to rate their experience as “Excellent” compared to those graduating in 1997 or 1992. This was especially true among those who are not New Jersey residents where one-third rate their undergraduate experience as excellent. Even greater positive evaluations come from students who are studying here on temporary visas where forty-three percent rate their experience this highly. Ratings of “excellent” for their overall academic experience have improved over the decade among African Americans and Latinos, although not achieving the level indicated by their white contemporaries. Asians, on the other hand, continue to offer slightly less positive ratings than other racial/ethnic groups. University College students on all three campuses are most likely to rate their experience as excellent. Nursing students the least likely.

Additional measures on the 2001 GSOS captured the overall perceptions of graduating students about the university and their departments. Eighty-three percent agree that they would choose Rutgers again if they were starting college over and eighty-seven percent would recommend Rutgers to siblings or friends as a good place to go to college. More than eight-in-ten (83%) give a positive rating to their program with more than one-third (37%) rating their academic experience within their major as “Excellent,” and four-in-ten strongly agree they would choose the same major area of study at Rutgers if starting over. Latinos are the most positive and Asians the least positive when it comes to evaluations of their departments.
In 2001, as in 1997, interaction with faculty tends to be higher in areas directly related to class work (e.g., talking with a faculty member at the end of class or outside of class, and talking about class-related issues) than in less formal intellectual exchange such as discussions about a faculty member’s research. Most graduating seniors also report having discussed their future education or career plans with faculty members.

Only one-fourth (26%) report they received “some” or “a great deal” of guidance from faculty or staff in deciding their major. Academic advising in the student’s major area was a new topic on the 2001 GSOS. This is an area where improvement is needed. While two-thirds (63%) were satisfied with the academic advising they received from their major area advisor, thirty-eight percent indicated that their academic advisor was “not at all helpful” once they had chosen their major. Responses to the GSOS also indicate that scheduling of classes is another academic service area that could be improved. One-in-five report that courses for their degree were not available when they were needed.

Students agree overwhelmingly that “The cost of attending Rutgers was reasonable” (92%) and that “Rutgers has high quality academic programs” (91%). The percent who “Agree Strongly” that the cost is reasonable has expanded from twenty-one percent in 1992, to 30% in 1997, and has grown still further to forty-seven percent by the 2001 survey. Respondents universally agree that promotion of a multicultural environment is important (91%) and that Rutgers promotes respect for diversity (91%). Furthermore, graduating students agree that minority students are afforded the same treatment as other students in the classroom (90%); Rutgers provides an open expression of ideas, opinions, and beliefs (91%); men and women are afforded the same treatment in the classroom and generally respect one another (95%).

Although not a primary reason for attending Rutgers, diversity is one of the reasons considered by more than half of Asian and Black students. Almost half of Latinos and one-third of white students cite diversity as a consideration in their decision to attend Rutgers.

Rutgers Services – Utilization and Satisfaction

Academic support services, on-campus resources, and administrative computing services are widely used by graduating seniors. In particular, the proportion of students who participate in skills improvement (reading, writing, math, and study skills) has increased steadily over the past ten years. Students remain satisfied with the services they used while at Rutgers. Many on-campus resources have maintained a high level of satisfaction as well. Three areas of on-campus services have experienced a decline in student satisfaction over the decade covered by the three studies: Rutgers bookstores, housing, and dining services. Transportation and parking remain services with which students express the greatest dissatisfaction. Administrative and computing services receive high satisfaction scores in general. Eight-in-ten respondents felt there has been an improvement in Rutgers computing facilities.
over the years they were enrolled at Rutgers, with one-third indicating that the facilities have “improved a lot.” This result is undoubtedly due to the investment of the university in information technology infrastructure over the last five years through projects such as RUNeT 2000. Also, on-line communication is quite popular with students. They frequently use this service to contact other students (here and at other colleges), family, and friends. Most also report using the internet several times a week for research or homework. All but two percent use the internet for nonacademic reasons.

Future Plans

More than three-quarters of graduates in each of the study years indicate that they plan to continue their education, and many of these students were admitted to programs in graduate and professionals schools by the time they graduated. One-third of women and one-fourth of the men who expect to continue their education, intend to do so within the next academic year. The proportion of women has remained the same over the decade bracketed by the surveys. However, the proportion of men continuing their education into the next year has dropped from thirty-seven percent in 1992 to twenty-nine percent in 1997 and stands at twenty-four percent in 2001. As in previous years, many expect to achieve a Master’s degree. By 2001, half or more indicate this intention – an increase of at least ten percent over the previous decade. According to responses to the 2001 GSOS, one-fourth of the graduates from each of the campuses intend to pursue a doctorate.

Approximately eighty percent of the current graduates indicate that Rutgers has prepared them for the job market. More than half of these graduates will continue or start a job after graduation (45% full-time and 10% part-time). A similar proportion (58%) gave a job location for their current or expected employers. In 1997, more than two-thirds of these jobs were located in New Jersey; only fifty-seven percent reported New Jersey locations for their employers in 2001.

Conclusions

The results from the 2001 Graduating Student Opinion Survey lead us to the conclusion that Rutgers had made considerable progress over the last decade. Students strongly believe that the cost of attending Rutgers for their undergraduate education has been reasonable and that Rutgers, in general, and their departments, in particular, offer a high quality academic experience. They would come to Rutgers if starting over and would recommend the university to their family and friends as a good place to go for their undergraduate education.

Students indicate strong support for diversity and recognize Rutgers’ part in promoting diversity and equitable treatment among men, women, and minority students. More recent graduates have emphasized seeking improvement in the skills they leave the university with (reading, writing, math, study skills) as well as skills that will help them in their future careers or as they continue with post graduate
education: a general education and appreciation of ideas, critical thinking, communication and teamwork skills.

Recent graduates are more career-minded and credit Rutgers for preparing them for the job market and helping them choose their career path. Although undergraduates have frequent interactions with faculty outside the classroom, they indicate that academic advising is one area were improvements could be made. Furthermore, students report they still are not receiving the individual attention from faculty and staff at the level they desire.

Many services receive high satisfaction marks from students, especially in many of the administrative and computing services areas. Most students are computer literate and appreciate the new online services offered by the university. Areas that continue to need attention, according to respondents, are the bookstores, housing, dining services, and parking.