

**Results of the 2002 Alumni Survey  
Classes of 1992 and 1997**

**compiled by  
Michael S. Johnson, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs**



**Spring Hill College  
Office of Academic Affairs**

**November 2002**

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Each year since 1999, the Office of Academic Affairs at Spring Hill College has conducted a survey of alumni from 5- and 10-year-out classes. The survey for 2002 covered the classes of 1992 and 1997. An initial mailing was done in March 2002. A follow-up mailing was sent to non-respondents after about two weeks. For the first time, we also contacted alumni using email addresses from the Development Office. This latter effort brought in several responses, and will be utilized as the first option in future surveys in order to reduce mailing costs.

Response rates continued a trend of lower participation levels than in earlier surveys. Based on graduate totals from the Registrar's Office, response rates were 23% for the class of 1992 (45 of 197) and 16% for the class of 1997 (35 of 214). Response rates based on the number of surveys mailed were 26% for the class of 1992 (45 of 174) and 21% for the class of 1997 (35 of 169). Of the 80 surveys returned, 30 (37.5%) responded via web, and another 6 (7.5%) faxed in their responses. One reason for the lower response rate was a printing error in several of the survey forms in the first mailing, where the main "bubble" response page was illegible. Efforts to correct this error were only partially successful. Appendix A gives details on response rates. Because of the low response rates, future surveys will be done biannually instead of annually, and will be mailed to 4-, 5-, 9-, and 10-year-out classes. This will allow more efficiency in compiling the results.

In an effort to make the survey shorter, and to create a form that might be able to be optically scanned, several questions were dropped from the prior survey. On the other hand, three new questions were added to elicit information about student life aspects of the alumni's college experience. The actual survey instrument can be found in Appendix B. The text of this report gives responses to scaled questions and summaries from the comment items. Appendices give all responses to all items, with one editorial change: comments have been edited where specific instructors are mentioned by name in extremely negative light. Other appendices show information about graduate school and employment of the respondents.

Respondents using the paper survey were asked to circle numbers for each question corresponding to a standard 5-point scale, as follows:

- 1 strongly agree
- 2 agree somewhat
- 3 neutral
- 4 disagree somewhat
- 5 strongly disagree.

Web respondents faced the same choices, but had no numbers – just a radio box to check next to the preferred verbal response. The results were then translated into the 5-point scale given above. Since all

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\* Joan Siegwald and Mindy Hovell developed the mailing list data for the survey. Cheryl Kirkland and Kathy Broxterman oversaw the mailing and collection of surveys. A special thank you is due Mary Burke Schlichting, who did the majority of the data entry.

questions are in the affirmative, the lower the mean response, the more favorable the finding. The survey contained the following statements:

**The core curriculum in my baccalaureate education helped me acquire the knowledge and ability to:**

think critically.  
 write effectively.  
 speak articulately.  
 analyze, synthesize, and make informed judgments.  
 understand and appreciate how mathematics is used in everyday life.  
 develop a sense of responsibility and respect for the needs and rights of others.  
 reflect on my value system and personally integrate values.  
 develop a mature sense of faith.  
 personally integrate reason, faith, and justice.  
 critique my personal beliefs, prejudices, and presuppositions.  
 explore artistic approaches to reality.  
 become a creative and imaginative being.  
 explore and understand scientific ideas.  
 analyze problems systematically.  
 explore historical approaches to reality.  
 grow in social awareness and responsibility.  
 appreciate and understand other cultures.  
 analyze relevant social issues.  
 provide leadership and service in the community.

These statements were followed by an opportunity to give comments on the core curriculum. The survey continued with additional questions, that included a “not applicable” option:

**Questions and Comments on your Academic Preparation or Overall Experience at Spring Hill:**

I am satisfied with my Spring Hill College core experience.  
 My education at Spring Hill prepared me well for my studies in graduate/professional school.  
 My degree from Spring Hill prepared me to be competitive in my job performance.  
 My Spring Hill internship/practicum was beneficial to my career goals.  
 I feel confident in using a computer because of skills I learned at Spring Hill.  
 The Career Services Office at Spring Hill was helpful to me in my search for employment or graduate/professional study.  
 The faculty in my major were helpful to me in my search for employment or graduate/professional study.  
 I was satisfied with student housing while at Spring Hill.  
 I was satisfied with recreation/athletic programs while at Spring Hill.  
 I was satisfied with the leadership opportunities I had while at Spring Hill.

### **Findings from the Current Survey**

The mean answer for all items in the survey was 1.94 including the three new questions relating to student life, and 1.89 without those questions. This is consistent with past surveys. Responses were significantly better than the overall mean for the following items [item mean significantly lower than 1.94 at the 0.01 or 0.05 level]. In effect, we can give ourselves a grade of “A” to “A-“ on these items.

<b>Items with significantly better scores than the mean of 1.94 (0.01 level)</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Think critically.	1.40
Write effectively.	1.49
Analyze, synthesize, and make informed judgments.	1.44
Develop a sense of responsibility and respect for the needs and rights of others.	1.51
Reflect on my value system and personally integrate values.	1.46
Critique my personal beliefs, prejudices, and presuppositions.	1.55
Analyze problems systematically.	1.61
Grow in social awareness and responsibility.	1.64
Analyze relevant social issues.	1.70
<b>I am satisfied with my Spring Hill College core experience.</b>	<b>1.49</b>
<b>Items with significantly better scores than the mean of 1.94 (0.05 level)</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Speak articulately.	1.72
Personally integrate reason, faith, and justice.	1.68
Provide leadership and service in the community.	1.74
My degree from Spring Hill prepared me to be competitive in my job performance.	1.68

This list is almost identical to the areas where the College received favorable responses in past alumni surveys. “Social awareness and responsibility” and “social issues” did slightly better in this survey than in the prior year, while “preparation for graduate/professional studies” dropped from the list. However, this latter question still earned a mean score better than responses in general.

There were other items on which we scored significantly below the mean [item means significantly higher than 1.95 at an 0.01 or 0.05 level of significance].

<b>Items with significantly worse scores than the mean of 1.94 (0.01 level)</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Understand and appreciate how mathematics is used in everyday life.	2.47
I feel confident in using a computer because of skills I learned at SHC.	2.87
The Career Services Office at Spring Hill was helpful to me in my search for employment or graduate/ professional study.	3.71
The faculty in my major were helpful to me in my search for employment or graduate/ professional study.	2.69
I was satisfied with student housing while at SHC.	2.50
I was satisfied with recreation/athletic programs while at SHC.	2.93
<b>Items with significantly worse scores than the mean of 1.94 (0.05 level)</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Explore artistic approaches to reality.	2.16
Explore and understand scientific ideas.	2.14
Explore historical approaches to reality.	2.14

It must be remembered that the questions are based on a five-point scale, where a mean of 3 is at the midpoint – a neutral response. In only one instance was the mean score above that central point. Over 70% of responding alumni strongly or somewhat agreed with the statement that the core curriculum helped the student in the area of exploring “historical approaches to reality.” Only 13% of respondents somewhat disagreed or strongly disagreed about the mathematics question. Clearly the reason these results stand out is not that they are so weak, but that the overall alumni responses are so overwhelmingly positive. This list is consistent with prior years, again showing areas where many students express relative dissatisfaction. However, The written responses confirm that many students paid little attention to career services while in college – in hindsight, they wish more career information had been force-fed them while at Spring Hill.

The student life questions were new to the survey this year, so there is no baseline with which to compare the housing and recreation/athletic programs responses. We will monitor this question in future years. Fairway Apartments opened in 1996, so over half of these respondents did not have these newer facilities while at Spring Hill. It should be pointed out that the new question about satisfaction with leadership opportunities had a very respectable mean score of 2.08. Full results for all scaled questions on the survey appear in Appendix C.

Alumni may have different attitudes towards their education as time passes. The life experiences of students (both before, during, and after college) differ depending on when they attended college. Also, the College itself has changed over time. For example, the emphasis on service learning has heightened in recent years, new residence halls have been built and old ones renovated, and curricula have been changed (e.g., in computer instruction). For these reasons, it is worth exploring if alumni responses differ by the graduating class of the respondents. There were significantly different mean responses between the 1992 graduates and the 1997 graduates on the following items:

Item	1992 mean	1997 mean	Difference significant at
Think critically.	1.55	1.21	0.01
Write effectively.	1.70	1.24	0.01
Provide leadership and service in the community.	1.91	1.53	0.05
My Spring Hill internship/practicum was beneficial in my career goals.	2.37	1.52	0.01
I feel confident in using a computer because of the computer skills I learned at Spring Hill.	3.23	2.38	0.01

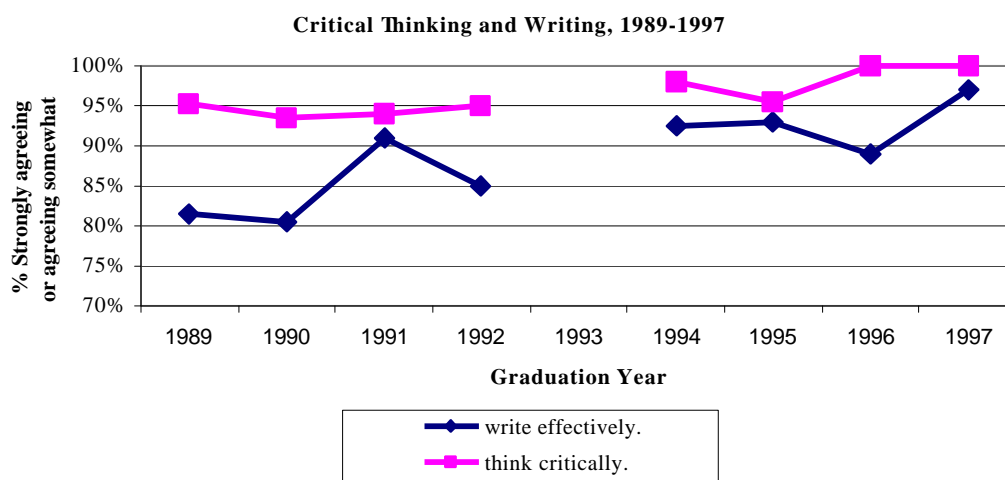
Considering the small sample sizes, these are a large number of items to show such differences. In every case, satisfaction is higher in the class of 1997 than in the class of 1992. The difference in the internship/practicum results is especially large. – a finding that mirrors last year’s results. There have been clear improvements in recent years in satisfaction with internship/practicum opportunities. Similarly, since 1992, both the general expectation of computer usage and the content of basic computer classes have changed drastically. The differences in writing and in leadership and service in the community support explicit efforts on the part of Spring Hill to strengthen these areas of the undergraduate experience. These results are gratifying validation of our efforts. Full results comparing the responses of the 1992 and the 1997 classes can be found in Appendix D.

### Comparisons with Earlier Surveys

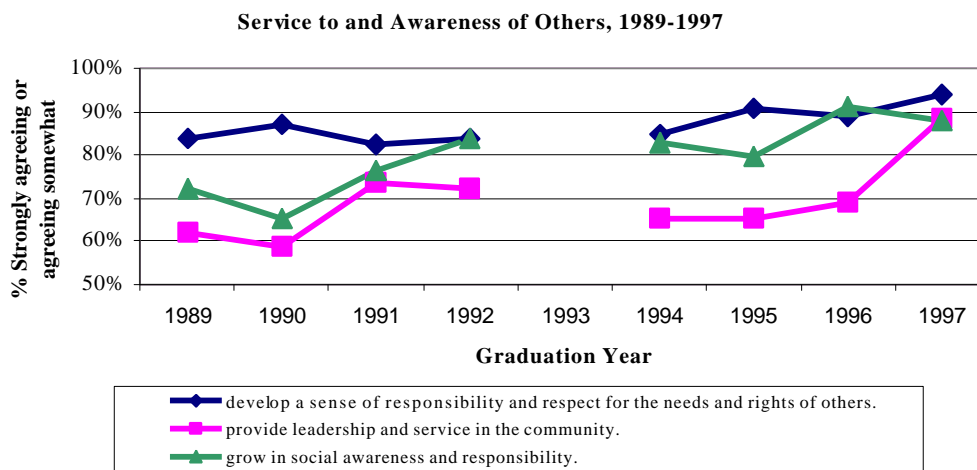
Pair-wise comparison of consecutive alumni classes from last year’s survey to this year’s survey showed no significant differences in responses between the consecutive classes of 1991 and 1992. However, there were three survey items with significantly different means between the classes of 1991 and 1992. Once again, we see the pattern of higher satisfaction in the more recent class:

Item	Class year	Mean response	Difference significant at
Write effectively.	1996	1.64	0.01
	1997	1.23	
Understand and appreciate how mathematics is used in everyday life.	1996	2.82	0.03
	1997	2.27	
Provide leadership and service in the community.	1996	2.00	0.01
	1997	1.47	

Some longer-term trends also appear in the data. For example, there appears to be a slight improvement over time in student perceptions of the core's ability to help them with critical thinking and effective writing. This effect is independent of the recent core revisions, which should show strengthened writing effectiveness results beginning with graduates in 2007.

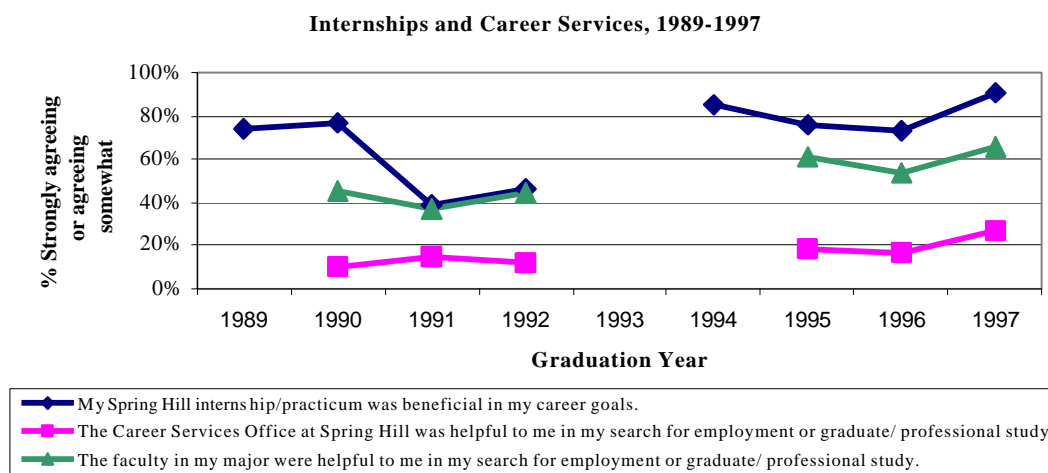


A slightly stronger trend appears in those questions relating to service to and awareness of others. In all of the cases outlined below, the more recent years show more agreement that the college core curriculum helped students in these areas. Foley Center programs began in earnest around 1992, with a broadened financial aid program that involved service learning requirements. Graduates exposed to these service learning opportunities would begin appearing in our alumni results with the classes of 1996 and



1997. These results suggest that the College's new focus on service learning may well be having discernable results. It should also be noted, however, that high schools, especially Jesuit high schools, also began additional emphasis on service learning about this time; it would be difficult to separate their influence from that of the College.

Finally, there have been very clear trends in career development and internship effectiveness. Both internship experiences and career support receive higher evaluations from more recent classes. The internship trends are especially clear.



There is one important caveat in interpreting the data over time: These results combine responses from both 10-year-out and 5-year-out alumni. It is possible that the more recent graduates have more favorable responses that will fade with time. Until we start having overlapping results (i.e., the same class at the 5-year and the 10-year mark), we will not know if this is the case. See Appendix E for additional comparisons from graduating classes ranging from 1989 through 1997.

## Results from the Open-Ended Questions

The survey included space for comments on the “core curriculum” and on “preparation/overall experience.” Other questions seeking open-ended comments include:

Which core curriculum courses have been most helpful to your personal development or your participation in life?  
 Which core curriculum courses have been least helpful to your personal development or your participation in life?  
 Which professors and/or staff members at SHC had the greatest positive impact on your life?  
 In what ways have you been involved in community service or in church ministries in the last few years?  
 Within your major, which courses or areas of study at Spring Hill were the most helpful for preparing you for your current employment or course of graduate studies? [If a double major, please answer for each major]  
 Within your major, which courses or areas of study were least helpful?  
 Within your major, what do you regard to have been the strongest aspects of the program?  
 Within your major, what would you regard to have been the weakest aspects of the program? How could they be improved?  
 The College is always interested in your input for recruiting new students. If you would like, please use the space provided below for a quote that we will be able to use in publications designed to recruit students to our school.

Appendix F contains all of the comments received, with the respondent identified only by year of graduation and his or her majors and minors. As in prior years, the comments are overwhelmingly positive. However, a handful of negative comments have been edited out to protect the identity of specific faculty members.

Some open-ended responses can be codified to help us identify trends. For example, alumni were asked, “Which core curriculum courses have been most helpful to your personal development or your participation in life?” The three areas of the core with the largest semester hour loads – Philosophy, Theology, and English – led the responses.

#### Class of 1992: Most helpful core courses

Area	Number of respondents mentioning	Percentage of total mentions
Philosophy	19	29%
Theology	16	24%
English	10	15%
Social Science [includes economics]	6	9%
Business [includes computer courses]	5	8%
Fine Arts	3	5%
History	2	3%
Science	2	3%
Communication	1	2%
Mathematics	1	2%
Venice program	1	2%

#### Class of 1997: Most helpful core courses

Area	Number of respondents mentioning	Percentage of total mentions
Theology	17	33%
Philosophy	15	29%
English	8	15%
Social Science	5	10%
Communication	3	6%
Fine Arts	3	6%
Business	1	2%

Specific courses or disciplines mentioned at least twice	Number of respondents mentioning
Basic Moral Values/Ethics	7
Logic	4
Computer courses	3
World Religions	3
Human Sexuality and Marriage	2
Political Science	2
Sociology	2

Specific Courses or disciplines mentioned at least twice	Number of respondents mentioning
Ethics	7
Logic	4
Catholicism	3
Art History	2
Composition & Literature I & II	2
Public Speaking	2
Sociology	2
World Religions	2
Psychology	2

Note: If more than one course in an area was mentioned by the same respondent, it was counted only once in the "area" summary, but each mention appears in the "specific courses" listing

As has been true in prior surveys, some alumni included in their responses courses from within their majors, not courses that were part of the “core” curriculum. However, this trend appears less pronounced than in previous years.

We also asked respondents which courses in the core they found least helpful. There were many fewer responses to this question. In many cases, the same areas reported as “most helpful” also appeared as “least helpful,” confirming the adage that you cannot please all the people all the time. Respondents from both years mentioned mathematics courses, often citing the basic mathematics course for non-majors. That course has undergone significant revision over recent years. Similarly, students mentioning science as

“least helpful” often specify the course for non-majors. How to successfully provide for basic mathematics and science instruction for non-majors is a continuing problem for almost all colleges and universities.

#### Class of 1992: Least helpful core courses

Area	Number of respondents mentioning	Percentage of total mentions
Mathematics	5	21%
Theology	5	21%
English	3	13%
History	3	13%
Philosophy	3	13%
Business	2	8%
Fine Art	1	4%
Foreign Language	1	4%
Social Science	1	4%

Specific courses or disciplines mentioned at least twice	Number of respondents mentioning
Finite Math	2

#### Class of 1997: Least helpful core courses

Area	Number of respondents mentioning	Percentage of total mentions
Science	5	21%
Mathematics	4	17%
Philosophy	4	17%
Business	3	13%
History	2	8%
Social Science	2	8%
English	1	4%
Fine Art	1	4%
Foreign Language	1	4%
Theology	1	4%

Specific Courses or disciplines mentioned at least twice	Number of respondents mentioning
Computer	3
Logic	3
Biology	2

Note: If more than one course in an area was mentioned by the same respondent, it was counted only once in the "area" summary, but each mention appears in the "specific courses" listing

We asked “Which professors and/or staff members at SHC had the greatest positive impact on your life?” The class of 1992 mentioned by name 43 different people, as did the class of 1997. The following tables list only faculty who were mentioned multiple times by that year’s responding alumni. In addition to other faculty members, a few staff members received single mentions. If a survey included multiple names, each mention was counted.

#### Professors or Staff Members Having a Positive Impact: Class of 1992

First name	Last name	number of mentions
Diane	Thompson	5
Mel	Brandon	4
Neil	Hamilton	4
Bob	Macaleese	4
Pat	Macnamara	4
John	Hafner	3
William	Harmless, S.J.	3
Michael	Johnson	3
Barbara	Nolan	3
Andy	Sharp	3
Charles	Boyle	2
Tim	Carmody	2
	Education profs	2
Nader	Entessar	2
George	Gilmore	2
Pat	Harrison	2
Bob	Heiner	2

First name	Last name	number of mentions
Bettie	Hudgens	2
Kathleen	Orange	2
Ralph	Sandler	2
Chris	Viscardi, S.J.	2
John	Welch	2

**Professors or Staff Members Having a Positive Impact: Class of 1997**

First name	Last name	number of mentions
William	Harmless, S.J.	8
Margaret	Davis	5
Michael	Kaffer	5
Pat	Macnamara	5
David	Dean	4
Mel	Brandon	3
John	Hafner	3
Stu	Langdon	3
Robert	Rimes, S.J.	3
Andy	Sharp	3
Charles	Boyle	2
Nader	Entessar	2
George	Gilmore	2
Bob	Macaleese	2
Ralph	Sandler	2
David	Sauer	2
Lois	Silvernail	2
Diane	Thompson	2

Survey participants were asked, “How many cultural events did you attend last year [e.g., go to an art gallery, a play, a concert]?” The median response was “3 or 4” events for each class, but the most common response was “5 or more” in each group. There was no significant difference in responses between the two class years.

**Number of Cultural Events Attended Last Year**

Response	Frequency	Percentage of total Responses
none	7	8.8%
1 or 2	14	17.5%
3 or 4	27	33.8%
5 or more	32	40.0%
Total	80	100.0%

Alumni were asked for information about their employment and also about their post-graduation educational activities. Over 60% of respondents reported their first permanent job after graduation as being in their field of study, and over 70% reported their current job as “in the field of study.” Appendix G gives details of “first job” after graduation, while Appendix H contains current employment data.

Overall, 56% of the respondents have continued their formal education after leaving Spring Hill (45 of 80). This percentage is up slightly from the prior alumni survey. Respondents received JD degrees from Notre Dame, Tulane, Alabama, Georgia, and Washington & Lee. One law school graduate also earned an LLM from New York University. Graduates earned medical, dental, or veterinary degrees from

UAB, Mercer, Oklahoma State, South Alabama, and Auburn. Students earned business degrees from Spring Hill College, Ohio State, Tennessee, and Louisville. Additionally, several students earned degrees in education (from several different undergraduate majors). Several alumni have either earned or are in the process of earning doctoral-level degrees in counseling, psychology, biochemistry & molecular biology, and economics. Appendix I contains details of graduate school attendance, and professional certifications attained.

## **Conclusion**

This alumni survey reveals generally high levels of satisfaction with the undergraduate experience, especially with the lasting benefits of the core curriculum. Graduates hold very favorable impressions of the educational programs of the College in terms of imparting critical thinking and writing skills, and in imparting skills for sound decision-making. Alumni also agree that their education helped them become more sensitive to issues of justice, social awareness, and respect for others. The written comments that follow reinforce these findings.

There are areas of concern raised by the survey, but even in these areas, more recent graduates are less negatively inclined than earlier graduates. The mathematics, science, and computer courses for nonmajors receive some negative reviews. However, the majority of responding alumni agreed that their studies in these areas added to their knowledge and abilities. As with prior surveys, the area of career services receives the strongest negative comments. Since the time these respondents attended Spring Hill, we have resumed on-campus employer recruiting, begun offering mock testing for the main examinations used in graduate admissions, greatly expanded internship opportunities, and begun a program of extensive emails to students about career services on campus. It will be interesting to see if these efforts change the negative perceptions past students held about career services.

Our alumni have found and kept good jobs, and have had clear success in pursuing graduate studies. Perhaps more important, these former students have taken leadership roles in their communities. This is a record of success in which the College can take great pride.