

**Results of the 2003 Alumni Survey
Classes of 1993, 1994, 1998, and 1999**

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



**Spring Hill College
Office of Academic Affairs**

March 2004

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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. This year, we have moved to a biannual format, collecting data from students who graduated four, five, nine, and ten years ago. This survey marks completion of a cycle, allowing us to have a complete picture of alumni attitudes for every class since 1989. There are few surprises in the results, with the pattern of a high level of student satisfaction evident in the survey comments.

For the first time, we utilized email addresses as the primary means of contacting alumni, and did a follow-up postal mailing to those who did not respond or for whom the Development Office did not have a valid email address. The email and the postal mailing both encouraged alumni to complete the survey via the Internet. This approach proved very successful. Of the 150 responses received, 71% came via the Internet, with 27% returned by mail and 2% via fax.

Unfortunately, a recent trend of lower response rates continues with these results. Response rates based on actual graduates by class for the four classes in the current survey range from a low of 15% for the class of 1993 (27 of 185) to a high of 20% for the class of 1998 (41 of 201). The number of alumni for whom the College has addresses is lower than the actual number of graduates. Based on those alumni we attempted to contact, response rates ranged from 16% to 24%. Because the results and comments presented in this report represent less than one fourth of the students graduating during the survey years, care must be taken in interpreting the results. On the other hand, the similarity of responses to those from previous alumni surveys lends more credibility to the findings. Appendix A provides details on response rates by student major area of study.

The survey form was virtually unchanged from last year's survey. One item was added – a question that asked alumni, "What are the first adjectives that come to mind now when you think of Spring Hill?" The complete survey instrument is in Appendix B. Other appendices contain all responses to all items, with one editorial change: comments have been edited where specific instructors are mentioned by name in extremely negative light. The final 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.

* 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 Burk Schlichting, who did the majority of the data entry.

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 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, including 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

Overall results from this survey were more favorable (higher levels of satisfaction) than in the last survey. The mean response for all items was 1.85 [1 = “strongly agree” to the item; 2 = “agree somewhat” to the item]. As with past surveys, many questions elicited significantly strong favorable and negative responses when compared to the grand mean. Responses showed significantly greater satisfaction than the

overall mean for the following items [item mean significantly lower than 1.85 at the 0.01 or 0.05 level]. In effect, we can give ourselves a grade of “A” to “A-“ on these items. The items are ranked from the most favorable mean downward.

Items with significantly better scores than the mean of 1.85 (0.01 level)	Mean
I am satisfied with my Spring Hill College core experience.	1.30
My education at Spring Hill prepared me well for my studies in graduate/professional school.	1.39
Reflect on my value system and personally integrate values.	1.47
Think critically.	1.47
Write effectively.	1.49
Analyze, synthesize, and make informed judgments.	1.52
Develop a sense of responsibility and respect for the needs and rights of others.	1.53
Critique my personal beliefs, prejudices, and presuppositions.	1.54
Grow in social awareness and responsibility.	1.58
My degree from Spring Hill prepared me to be competitive in my job performance.	1.65
My Spring Hill internship/practicum was beneficial to my career goals.	1.65
Items with significantly better scores than the mean of 1.85 (0.05 level)	Mean
Personally integrate reason, faith, and justice.	1.67
Analyze problems systematically.	1.71
Speak articulately.	1.71

This list has shown remarkable stability from survey to survey. “Provide leadership and service in the community” and “analyze relevant social issues” are the only items that were significantly different from the grand mean last year that are not in the above list; however, in keeping with the overall better results this year, the mean responses on these items have not changed significantly. Student satisfaction with preparation for graduate education shows a significant jump since the last survey.

There were other items on which we scored significantly below the mean [item means significantly higher than 1.85 at the 0.01 or 0.05 level of significance]. The least favorable items are listed first in the table.

Items with significantly worse scores than the mean of 1.85 (0.01 level)	Mean
The Career Services Office at Spring Hill was helpful to me in my search for employment or graduate/professional study.	3.58
Understand and appreciate how mathematics is used in everyday life.	2.43
I feel confident in using a computer because of skills I learned at SHC.	2.37
The faculty in my major were helpful to me in my search for employment or graduate/professional study.	2.32
I was satisfied with recreation/athletic programs while at SHC.	2.19
Explore artistic approaches to reality.	2.12
Explore and understand scientific ideas.	2.09
Explore historical approaches to reality.	2.08

While these items show less satisfaction than other items in the survey, it must be remembered that the questions are based on a five-point scale where the number 3 is at the midpoint – a neutral response. In only one instance was the mean score above that central point. Even more significant, every single item in this list shows improved satisfaction over the prior year’s results. In a couple of cases, the changes were extraordinary – the mean for “satisfaction with recreation/athletic programs” fell from 2.93 to 2.19 between these two surveys. Similarly, “satisfaction with housing” fell from the list of items significantly worse than the mean [dropping from a mean of 2.50 to 1.98].

To put these apparent “negative” findings in perspective, note from Appendix C (containing the combined results for all graduating classes in the survey) that 61% of respondents either agreed strongly or agreed somewhat that they were confident using a computer as a result of skills learned at Spring Hill, and 69% agreed the core curriculum helped them “explore artistic approaches to reality.” The reason these results stand out is not that they are so weak, but that the overall alumni responses are so overwhelmingly positive. Unfortunately, the career services area continues to be the one item that shows overall dissatisfaction.

Results between consecutive years sampled in the survey show remarkable similarity, while the 1993-94 alumni give many significantly different responses from the 1998-99 alumni. The only item showing statistically significant differences between the class of 1993 and the class of 1994 was satisfaction with recreation/athletic programs. The mean for 1993 on this item was 3.00, and for 1994 the mean was 2.30 [significant difference at 0.05 level]; neither of these are particularly favorable outcomes. Between the classes of 1998 and 1999, there were two items with significant differences: the item pertaining to the core curriculum helping the student to “critique...beliefs, prejudices, and presuppositions”; and the item pertaining to overall satisfaction with the core. In every case, however, the responses to these items were highly favorable.

When the results of the classes of 1993 and 1994 are combined and compared to the combined findings from the classes of 1998 and 1999, many significant differences are uncovered. In every case of significantly different responses, the findings were more favorable among the more recent graduates. There were significantly different mean responses between the 1993/94 graduates and the 1998/99 graduates on the following items:

Item	1993/94 mean	1998/99 mean	Significance Level
Think critically.	1.59	1.37	*
Speak articulately	1.91	1.53	**
Analyze, synthesize, and make informed judgments.	1.67	1.40	**
Reflect on my value system and personally integrate values.	1.67	1.30	**
Critique my personal beliefs, prejudices, and presuppositions.	1.67	1.43	*
Analyze problems systematically.	1.90	1.54	**
Analyze relevant social issues.	1.88	1.62	*
Provide leadership and service in the community.	2.03	1.48	**
I feel confident in using a computer because of the computer skills I learned at Spring Hill.	2.73	2.06	**
I was satisfied with recreation/athletic programs while at SHC.	2.59	1.85	**

** Difference statistically significant at 0.01

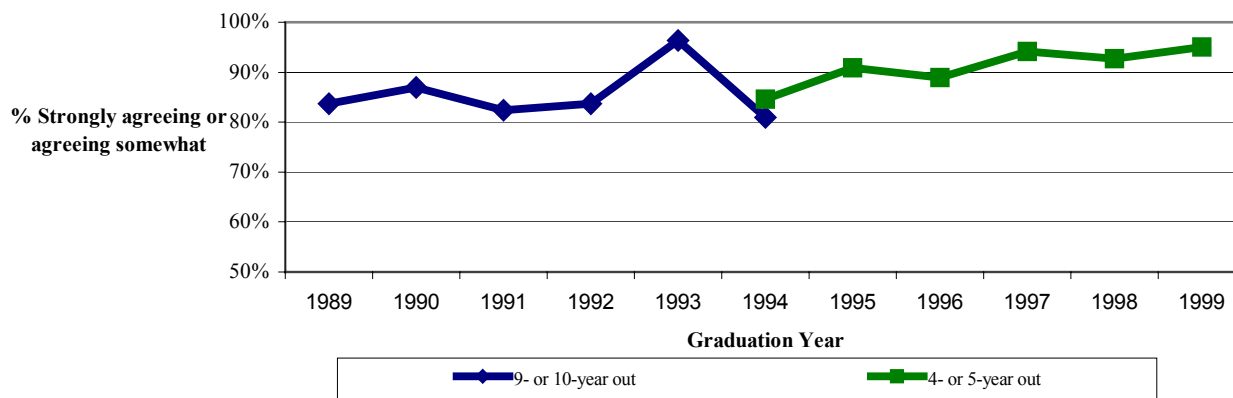
* Difference statistically significant at 0.05

In last year’s survey, we also found significantly higher satisfaction among the more recent graduates. Among the most striking findings in the above table are the last three items. Clearly our renewed focus on mission and identity and the significant expansion of service learning opportunities through the Foley Center have had a desirable effect. The growing ubiquity of computer usage on campus, a broadening of the curriculum in basic computer courses, and the advent of more formalized instruction in bibliographic searches appear to be making a difference as well. Finally, there is no mistaking the importance of the Arthur Outlaw Recreation Center in changing student satisfaction with recreation/athletic opportunities. Full results by class can be found in Appendix D.

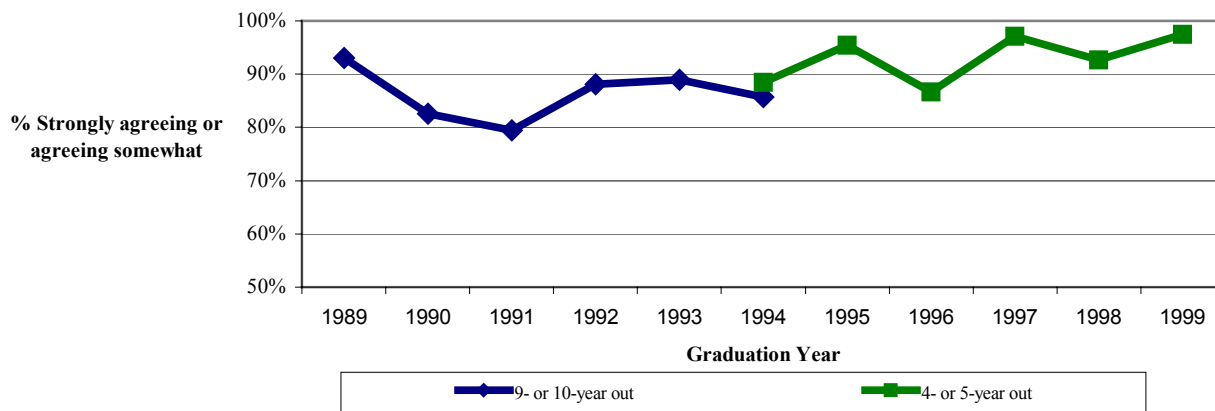
Appendix E contains data that covers eleven years of classes that have been asked about the core curriculum and satisfaction with their educational experience at Spring Hill College. The data show consistently high levels of satisfaction across a broad spectrum of student experiences. But there are discernible trends.

One area showing a pattern of improved outcomes includes those questions pertaining to recognition of and leadership in addressing the needs of others. Consider the following three graphs of results:

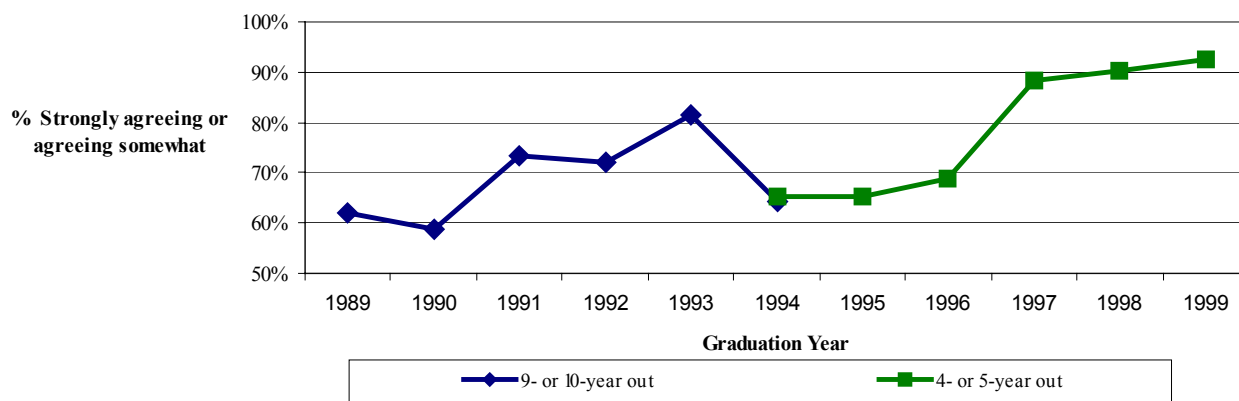
**The core curriculum helped me to:
Develop a sense of responsibility and respect for the needs and rights of others.**



**The core curriculum helped me to:
Reflect on my value system and personally integrate values.**

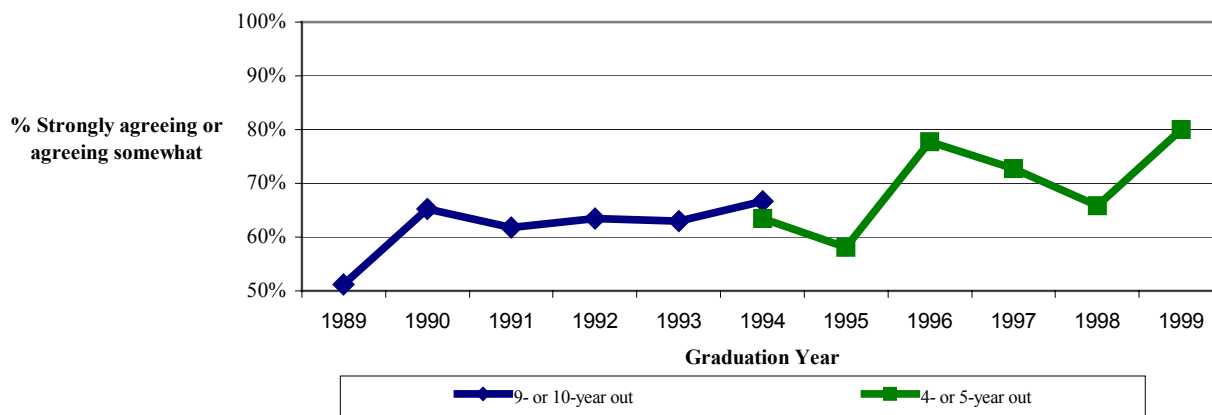


**The core curriculum helped me to:
Provide leadership and service in the community.**

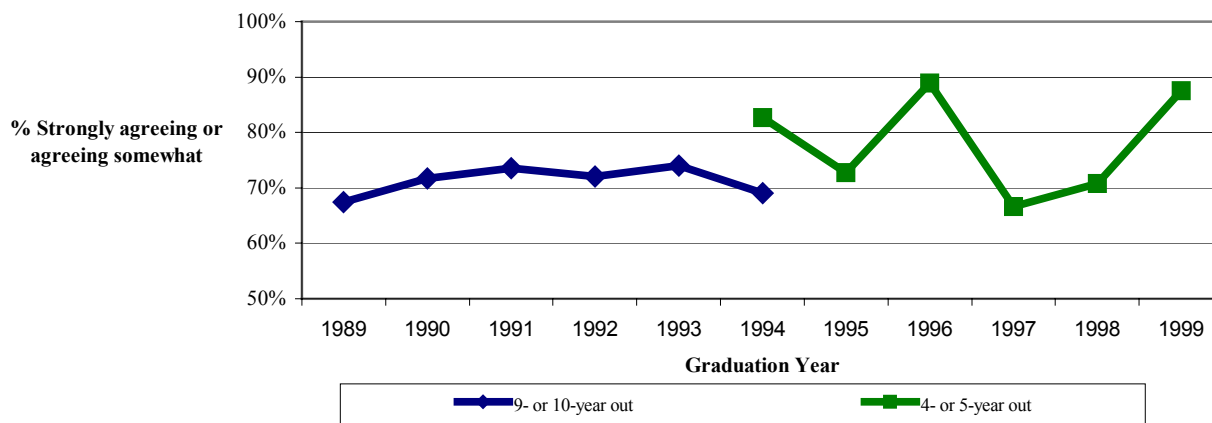


Another area exhibiting a favorable trend is in student appreciation for the arts and for individual creativity. There are two questions that relate to this trend:

**The core curriculum helped me to:
Explore artistic approaches to reality.**

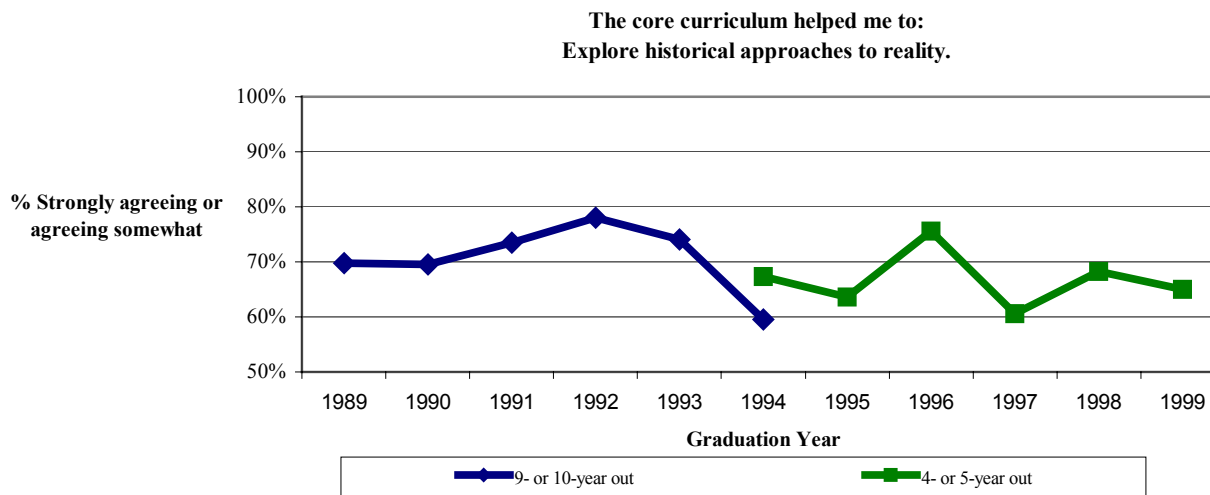


**The core curriculum helped me to:
Become a creative and imaginative being.**



One reason for these favorable trends might be the broadening of fine arts courses to include more music and dance offerings. Enrollments have also shown favorable trends in more traditional fine arts courses.

On the other hand, student attitudes towards history knowledge from the core curriculum have not shown this favorable trend:



It may be a legitimate question to ask what the wording of this question really means to a former student.

Results from the Open-Ended Questions

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

Curriculum and Life

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?

Major and Concentration at Spring Hill

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?

Other

What are the first adjectives that come to mind now when you think of Spring Hill?

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 by year of graduation and his or her major(s) and minor(s). 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. In general, respondents to this year’s survey appear to be more vocal at offering suggestions for improvement than in prior years.

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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.

Most Helpful Core Courses: Classes of 1993, 1994, 1998, and 1999 combined

Area	Number of respondents mentioning	Percentage of total mentions	Specific Courses or disciplines mentioned at least twice in one graduating class	Number of respondents mentioning
Philosophy	61	28.8%	Logic	21
Theology	55	25.9%	Basic Moral Values/Ethics	8
English	36	17.0%	Computer	4
Social Science	12	5.7%	Sociology	4
Business [includes economics, computers]	10	4.7%	World Religions	4
Art	8	3.8%	Writing	4
Communication	8	3.8%	Catholicism	3
History	8	3.8%	Literature	3
Mathematics	5	2.4%	Public Speaking	3
Foreign Language	3	1.4%	Art History	2
Science	3	1.4%	Medical Ethics	2
Education	1	0.5%	Philosophy of Human Nature	2
Nursing	1	0.5%	Political Science	2
SDS	1	0.5%	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

This ordering of "most helpful" courses is the same as found in previous surveys, and the percentage of respondents mentioning these subjects has been very consistent over the years. However, these results include (by far) the highest number of alumni specifically mentioning "Logic" as a course of importance. Prior surveys were generally led by Ethics/Basic Moral Values as the course mentioned most often. Appendix G shows results broken down by year of graduation of the alumni.

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. In fact, just as Logic was the course most often cited as "most helpful," it achieves the same distinction among courses cited as "least helpful!" Appendix H gives results by graduation year.

Least Helpful Core Courses: Classes of 1993, 1994, 1998, and 1999 combined

Area	Number of respondents mentioning	Percentage of total mentions	Specific Courses or disciplines mentioned at least twice in one graduating class	Number of respondents mentioning
Mathematics	24	23.1%	Logic	11
Philosophy	20	19.2%	Calculus/Business Calculus	4
History	12	11.5%	Algebra	2
Science	12	11.5%	Computer	2
Business [includes economics, computers]	8	7.7%	Economics	2
Theology	8	7.7%	Finite Math	2
Art	5	4.8%	French	2
English	5	4.8%	Political Science	2
Foreign Language	5	4.8%	Western Civilization	2
Social Science	4	3.8%		
Communication	1	1.0%		

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

By “netting out” negative mentions from positive mentions, we can perhaps derive a better picture of alumni perceptions of the core curriculum. This exercise shows the same three areas at the top of the list, but Theology passes Philosophy into the “number one” spot, due largely to the love-hate attitudes toward Logic.

Net Positive Mentions, Core Courses: Classes of 1993, 1994, 1998, and 1999 combined

Area	Number of positive mentions	Number of negative mentions	Net positive mentions	% positive mentions by area
Theology	55	8	47	87.3%
Philosophy	61	20	41	75.3%
English	36	5	31	87.8%
Social Science	12	4	8	75.0%
Communication	8	1	7	88.9%
Art	8	5	3	61.5%
Business [includes economics, computers]	10	8	2	55.6%
Education	1	0	1	100.0%
Nursing	1	0	1	100.0%
SDS	1	0	1	100.0%
Foreign Language	3	5	-2	37.5%
History	8	12	-4	40.0%
Science	3	12	-9	20.0%
Mathematics	5	24	-19	17.2%
Totals	212	104	108	

We asked “Which professors and/or staff members at SHC had the greatest positive impact on your life?” This question always elicits many responses, and this survey is no exception. There were at least 39 different names mentioned for each graduation year, and the class of 1994 mentioned 57 separate names or groups (e.g., “business professors” or “the Lifelong Learning staff”). Because the faculty and staff change from year-to-year, it is not instructive to combine results across years. The following tables list those persons who received at least four mentions by alumni from a particular class year. If a survey included multiple names, each mention was counted. Results are ranked starting with the most mentions, and alphabetically in cases of the same number of mentions. Appendix I gives more extended results from

this question. Examination of the Appendix will show that several staff employees from across the College received mention, as did a few adjunct instructors. It is also clear from the lists that the Jesuit community continues to play an extraordinarily important role in the lives of students.

Professors or Staff Members Having a Positive Impact: Class of 1993

First name	Last name	Number of Mentions
Kathleen	Orange	5
Robert	Rimes, S.J.	5
Nader	Entessar	4
Tricia	Sharp	4

Professors or Staff Members Having a Positive Impact: Class of 1994

First name	Last name	Number of Mentions
William	Harmless, S.J.	10
David	Sauer	6
Cort	Schlichting	6
Sheri	Katz	5
Pat	Macnamara	5
Stephen	Campbell, S.J.	4
Michael	Johnson	4
Michael	Kaffer	4
Robert	Rimes, S.J.	4
Tricia	Sharp	4
Lois	Silvernail	4

Professors or Staff Members Having a Positive Impact: Class of 1998

First name	Last name	Number of Mentions
Pat	Macnamara	9
Lois	Silvernail	7
David	Dean	6
Michael	Kaffer	6
John	Hafner	5
Michael	Johnson	5
Stu	Langdon	5
Varnell	Lee	5
William	Harmless, S.J.	4
Bob	MacAleese	4
David	Sauer	4
Mark	Starr	4

Professors or Staff Members Having a Positive Impact: Class of 1999

First name	Last name	Number of Mentions
Stu	Langdon	6
Pat	Harrison	5
Lois	Silvernail	5
William	Harmless, S.J.	4
Varnell	Lee	4
Pat	McGraw	4
Diane	Thompson	4

Survey participants were asked, “How many cultural events did you attend last year [e.g., go to an art gallery, a play, a concert]?” Within both the classes of 1994 and 1998, over half the alumni reported

the top category of “5 or more” events [57.1% and 53.7% for the classes of 1994 and 1998, respectively]. Over 49% of the class of 1999 gave this top response. These responses show more arts/cultural participation than found in earlier surveys.

Number of Cultural Events Attended Last Year [classes of 1993, 1994, 1998, and 1999 combined]

Response	Frequency	Percentage of Total Responses
none	4	2.7%
1 or 2	27	18.0%
3 or 4	48	32.0%
5 or more	71	47.3%
Total	150	100.0%

Alumni were asked for information about their employment and also about their post-graduation educational activities. Seventy-five percent of respondents reported their first permanent job after graduation as being in their field of study, and 78% reported their current job as “in the field of study.” These rates are higher than in prior surveys. The range of employment activities is very wide, ranging from accountants to zoo marketing directors. Appendix J gives details of “first job” after graduation, while Appendix K contains current employment data.

Overall, 55% of the respondents have continued their formal education after leaving Spring Hill (82 of 150). This percentage is virtually unchanged from the last alumni survey. Respondents received JD degrees from Tulane, Vanderbilt, St. Thomas, Cumberland (Samford), Alabama, LSU, Jones, Mississippi, Loyola-New Orleans, and Hamline; one law school graduate also is working on an LL.M. from Florida. Law school graduates had Spring Hill undergraduate degrees in a broad range of subjects: Business, English, Philosophy, History, International Studies, Political Science, and Psychology.

Alumni earned medical degrees (MD and DVM) from Texas, Mayo Medical, Tennessee, South Alabama, and LSU-Shreveport. Others earned or are working on graduate business/accounting degrees from Memphis, Mississippi State, Alabama State, South Alabama, Minnesota, Southern Mississippi, LSU, Tulane, Spring Hill College, UNO, and Phoenix. Advanced degrees in Education have been earned from Spring Hill College, Memphis, South Alabama, Samford, Florida Gulf Coast U, Rivier College, Maryland, and Vanderbilt. Several alumni have completed or are in the process of completing Ph.D. degrees in Cell Biology (UAB), Chemistry (Emory), Mathematics/Statistics (Alabama), and History of Technology (Auburn). Alumni have degrees in Physical Therapy, Social Work, Art Direction, Health Administration, Nursing, and Nonprofit Management. The full, impressive list can be found in Appendix L.

Conclusion

This alumni survey completes a full cycle of results from eleven different graduating classes. Alumni consistently report high levels of satisfaction with their undergraduate experiences, both within their majors and with the core curriculum. There are very favorable trends apparent in the data in terms of education for creativity and the arts, as well as for computer competency.

The written comments offer departments some food for thought about ways to strengthen academic programs. As with prior surveys, the area of career services receives the strongest negative comments. However, the most recent results in this area come from the class of 1999, and there have been many initiatives to improve the career services function on campus since then. It should be noted that our Senior

Survey results consistently show that Spring Hill students express less concern and activity about post-graduation job search than students at peer institutions; clearly this is not a sound strategy, and we need to find ways to reverse this lack of concern.

Our alumni have found and kept good jobs, and have had clear success in pursuing graduate studies. The College's emphasis on its mission of creating graduates in service of others is most apparent, both in the alumni responses to questions pertaining to issues of justice, social awareness, and leadership/service to the community, and also in their written comments. Apparently we have served most of our students well, and they in turn have given us ample reason to celebrate their successes.