

A Brief Summary of Results of the Alumni Survey, Classes of 1990 and 1995

compiled by
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In the spring and summer of 2000, the Office of Academic Affairs has conducted a survey of alumni from 5- and 10-year-old classes. The survey this year covered the classes of 1990 and 1995. Surveys were mailed to close to 400 alumni in March 2000, with a second mailing done in July 2000 to enhance response rates. Response rates were 24.1% for the class of 1990 (46 of 191) and 22.7% for the class of 1995 (44 of 194). Three changes will be made this year to try to enhance these response rates. First, letters with the survey will be mailed over the signature of the Department/Division chair, not that of the Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs. Second, a post-card follow-up will be mailed to non-respondents approximately one week after the requested return date (as opposed to a second mailing). Finally, we will make available a method to respond via the Internet.

Results from the Scaled Questions

Respondents utilized a standard 5-choice scale:

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

This scale was applied to questions pertaining to the core curriculum. The mean answer for all items in the survey was 2.01. This is almost identical to last year's results, even with the addition of a few more questions where students viewed us rather poorly. Responses were significantly better than the overall mean for the following items [item mean significantly lower than 2.01 at the 0.01 level]. In effect, we can give ourselves a grade of "A" on these items.

Items deserving an "A" grade	Mean
think critically.	1.44
write effectively.	1.58
analyze, synthesize, and make informed judgments.	1.47
develop a sense of responsibility and respect for the needs and rights of others.	1.56
reflect on my value system and personally integrate values.	1.49
critique my personal beliefs, prejudices, and presuppositions.	1.63
I am satisfied with my Spring Hill College core experience.	1.44
My education at Spring Hill prepared me well for my studies in graduate/professional school.	1.61
In comparison to other employees with similar educational backgrounds, my degree from Spring Hill prepared me to be competitive in my job performance.	1.64

* Joan Siegwald did much work on the early stages of this survey, and coordinated the effort to obtain and clean the mailing list. Cheryl Kirkland and Kathy Broxterman oversaw the mailing and collection of surveys. A special thank you is due Niasha Stoutamire, who did the majority of the data entry.

With one exception, this list is identical to that from last year's survey of the classes of '89 and '94. Last year, the item "personally integrate reason, faith and justice" made this list of areas where we earned an "A" grade. This year, the item just barely missed the list, with a mean of 1.78 (significantly different from 2.01 at the 0.03 level). Another item that just missed the list is "speak articulately," with a mean of 1.78, significant at the 0.02 level. These results reflect a strong core educational experience, one that holds its value to students over time.

There were other items on which we scored significantly below the mean [item means significantly higher than 2.01 at an 0.01 level of significance].

Items deserving a "C" grade	Mean
use mathematics effectively.	2.50
provide leadership and service in the religious life of the community.	2.42
explore and understand scientific ideas.	2.33
use computers effectively.	2.47
I feel confident in using a computer because of the computer skills I learned at SHC.	2.73
The Career Services Office at Spring Hill was helpful to me in my search for employment or graduate/ professional study.	3.79
The faculty in my major were helpful to me in my search for employment or graduate/ professional study.	2.78

Some of these negative results can be explained through poor question design. In other cases, there have been noteworthy changes at the College since the time the surveyed students were in residence. It has been pointed out that the question "use mathematics effectively" might not be appropriate, as the function of the core curriculum is as much to instill an appreciation of the importance of mathematics as it is to provide mathematical tools. The 2001 survey will be reworded to better capture the spirit of the core mathematics requirement. Also, there was no computer component in the core curriculum for year 1990 graduates, and computer courses were one of several other options facing 1995 graduates. Further, the computer curriculum in the entry-level courses has changed from an emphasis on DOS to the Windows environment, allowing students to gain more experience with widely-used software programs. Core level science offerings for non-science majors have been broadened and altered in the last several years. The Career Services office has instituted mass e-mails to all juniors and seniors of office activities, and on-campus interviews have been reinstated.

With slight alterations, the current core curriculum went into effect with the 1989-90 *Bulletin of Information*. While it is possible one or two 1990 graduates petitioned to graduate under that catalog, it is safe to presume that the meaning of the Spring Hill "core curriculum" differs between the 1990 and the 1995 graduating classes. Both classes were required to take 12 hours of English and 6 hours of history. However, the 1990 class faced 12-hour requirements in Philosophy and in Theology, while the 1995 class had 9-hour requirements in each. The later class also had universal social science, foreign language, mathematics, and science requirements not necessarily found among 1990 graduates. Given the different requirements, it is worth exploring if satisfaction with the core differs by the graduating class of the respondents. There were significantly different mean responses between the 1990 graduates and the 1995 graduates on the following items:

Item	1990 mean	1995 mean	Difference significant at
Write effectively.	1.74	1.42	.05
Reflect on my value system and personally integrate values.	1.70	1.27	.01
Critique my personal beliefs, prejudices, and suppositions.	1.80	1.45	.05
The faculty in my major were helpful to me in my search for employment or graduate/ professional study.	3.10	2.46	.06

It is notable that in all of these cases, the 1995 class held more positive views than did the 1990 class. However, this list is significantly smaller than the number of items that differed between the 1989 and the 1994 classes found in last year's survey. The following table is taken from that report:

Item	1989 mean	1994 mean	Difference significant at
Use mathematics effectively.	2.60	2.26	.10
explore artistic approaches to reality.	2.51	2.17	.10
become a creative and imaginative being.	2.30	1.87	.05
analyze problems systematically.	2.17	1.81	.05
increase powers of observation.	2.35	1.92	.05
appreciate and understand other cultures.	2.09	1.77	.10
I am satisfied with my Spring Hill College core experience.	1.60	1.32	.05
I feel confident in using a computer because of the computer skills I learned at SHC.	3.57	2.96	.05
Members of the Spring Hill College community were helpful to me in my search for employment or graduate/ professional study.	2.97	2.48	.10

Pair-wise comparison of the 1989 and 1990 classes revealed significant differences in the two computer questions, with 1990 reporting more positive experiences than 1989. There were no significant differences between the responses of the 1994 and the 1995 classes.

Results from the Open-Ended Questions

Alumni were asked, "Within the core courses, which 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, with from 33% to 15% of total mentions. The Social Sciences (including Economics) also received frequent mention, tying for third place with English in the class of 1995 results.

We also asked, "Within the core courses, which courses have been least helpful to your personal development or your participation in life?" Many fewer students responded to this question than to the prior one – a good sign in and of itself. No clear pattern is discernable in these responses. The same areas of the core some students viewed as "most helpful" others viewed as "least helpful". Comments suggest that many responses reflect courses students did not see as relevant to their majors, or where they had personality conflicts with specific instructors.

Alumni were asked for information about their employment and also about their educational attainments after leaving Spring Hill. Details of "first job" after graduation, current employment, and graduate school attendance will be furnished on request. Overall, 59% of the respondents have continued their formal education after leaving Spring Hill (53 of 90).