

## **Results of the Alumni Survey, Classes of 1991 and 1996**

**compiled by  
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For the third consecutive year, the Office of Academic Affairs at Spring Hill College conducted a survey of alumni from 5- and 10-year-out classes. The survey this year covered the classes of 1991 and 1996. An initial mailing was done in April 2001. A follow-up postcard was sent to non-respondents after about three weeks. For the first time, respondents were given an option to respond via a web-based survey instrument as well as by mailing back the paper copy of the survey in a postage-paid envelope. Of the 80 surveys returned, 31 (38.8%) responded via web. There was no difference in type of response between 1991 and 1996 graduates. Response rates were 18.8% for the class of 1991 (35 of 186) and 20.7% for the class of 1996 (45 of 217). Response rates by major can be found in Appendix A. These response rates are based on degrees conferred, not actual students attending the college. These were very low response rates, the lowest since we began these surveys. The low response rate is especially disappointing, since we undertook several initiatives to improve responses, including: creating the web option; using follow-up postcards; and sending separate cover letters by Division based on the students' majors. For the coming year, we are hoping to substantially shorten the survey itself to encourage responses.

The survey instrument was little changed from prior years to allow comparisons. A few items were dropped, and the opportunities to give comments were concentrated a bit from prior years. 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. Another appendix shows information about graduate school and about current employment of the respondents.

Prior surveys divided questions about the core curriculum into groups of similar content, and gave suggested disciplines to fit that area. This year, we combined all the core questions into one longer list. Both prior years' respondents and campus faculty members had commented that the core could not be easily defined along disciplinary lines. For example, science and social science courses may teach critical thinking and effective writing in addition to the areas of "logic, mathematics, and English" that were suggested as topic areas in the prior surveys. This change appears to not have had a significant impact on the findings, but it did reduce the negative comments about the grouping of the questions.

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.

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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. Theresa McGonagle Crider and Pat Quinn, S.J., provided technical support and expertise in developing the web-based survey instrument. A special thank you is due Mary Burke Schlichting, who did the majority of the data entry in addition to helping with follow-up mailings.

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.  
 provide leadership and service in the religious life of the community.  
 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.  
 I am satisfied with my Spring Hill College core experience.

These statements were followed by an opportunity to give comments on the core curriculum. The survey continued:

Looking at your overall college experience, please answer the following questions, using the same scale as for the previous questions. If the question does not apply, either leave blank, or write N/A beside the question.

My education at Spring Hill prepared me well for my studies in graduate/professional school.

In comparison to other employees with similar educational backgrounds, 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.

## Findings

The mean answer for all items in the survey was 1.95. This is slightly better but very close to prior results. Responses were significantly better than the overall mean for the following items [item mean significantly lower than 1.95 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 deserving an "A" grade</b> (significantly below 1.95 at 0.01 level)	<b>Mean</b>
Think critically.	1.43
Write effectively.	1.59
Speak articulately.	1.73
Analyze, synthesize, and make informed judgments.	1.50
Develop a sense of responsibility and respect for the needs and rights of others.	1.63
Reflect on my value system and personally integrate values.	1.56
Analyze problems systematically.	1.65
<b>I am satisfied with my Spring Hill College core experience.</b>	<b>1.35</b>
In comparison to other employees with similar educational backgrounds, my degree from Spring Hill prepared me to be competitive in my job performance.	1.51
<b>Items deserving an "A-" grade</b> (significantly below 1.95 at 0.05 level)	<b>Mean</b>
Personally integrate reason, faith, and justice.	1.76
Critique my personal beliefs, prejudices, and presuppositions.	1.76
My education at Spring Hill prepared me well for my studies in graduate/professional school.	1.61

These results are very robust; they are very consistent with findings from the last two surveys. There were other items on which we scored significantly below the mean [item means significantly higher than 1.95 at an 0.01 level of significance].

<b>Items with significantly worse scores than the mean of 1.95</b> (0.01 level)	<b>Mean</b>
Understand and appreciate how mathematics is used in everyday life.	2.67
Provide leadership and service in the religious life of the community.	2.59
Explore and understand scientific ideas.	2.24
I feel confident in using a computer because of the computer skills I learned at SHC.	2.69
The Career Services Office at Spring Hill was helpful to me in my search for employment or graduate/professional study.	3.60
The faculty in my major were helpful to me in my search for employment or graduate/professional study.	2.70

This list is again almost identical to the findings last year. The question pertaining to mathematics was reworded this year – the prior statement was “use mathematics effectively”; the change made no discernable difference in responses. The “mathematics” and “religious leadership/service” questions score lower because of a very high number of neutral responses. However, only 18% of respondents disagreed somewhat or strongly with the mathematics question, and only 15% disagreed somewhat or strongly to the religious leadership/service question. On the other hand, 31% or more of respondents disagreed somewhat or disagreed strongly with the remaining three questions.

Except for a few changes in history and foreign language, the current core curriculum went into effect with the 1989-90 *Bulletin of Information*. Thus, most 1991 graduates faced the “old” core while 1996 graduates faced the “new” core. 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. 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 1991 graduates and the 1996 graduates on the following items:

<b>Item</b>	<b>1991 mean</b>	<b>1996 mean</b>	<b>Difference significant at</b>
Think critically.	1.59	1.31	0.05
My Spring Hill internship/practicum was beneficial to my career goals.	2.61	1.71	0.01

This is a very short list of differences. Both items show higher levels of satisfaction in the more recent class. The difference in the internship/practicum results is especially large.

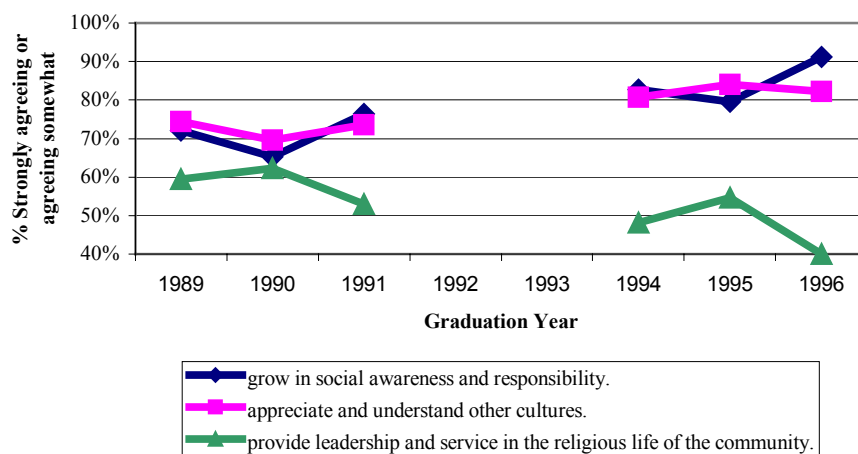
Pair-wise comparison of consecutive alumni classes from last year's survey to this year's survey showed significant differences in very few items.

Item	Class year	Mean response	Difference significant at
Analyze problems systematically.	1990 1991	1.93 1.62	0.06
My Spring Hill internship/practicum was beneficial to my career goals.	1990 1991	1.85 2.61	0.03
Critique my personal beliefs, prejudices, and presuppositions.	1995 1996	1.45 1.82	0.03

When coupled with results presented above, this suggests that the 1991 responses pertaining to internships/practicums is an aberration. This may have been a year of transition in the career services office on campus.

While most survey questions show consistency year-to-year, there do appear to be some trends in the data. For example, consider the responses to the three statements given in the following table. These findings suggest that the "new" core curriculum has done a better job of exposing students to social and international issues, but that students find the curriculum less oriented toward religious leadership and service.

Trends in Results, 1989-1996



Detailed information on the open-ended questions from the 2001 survey of the classes of 1991 and 1996 can be found in Appendices B and C of this report. See Appendix D for additional comparisons from graduating classes ranging from 1989 to 1996.

## Results from the Open-Ended Questions

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

Within the core courses, which courses have been most helpful to your personal development or your participation in life?

Within the core courses, which courses have been least helpful to your personal development or your participation in life?

Which professors at the college had the greatest positive impact on your life [regardless of whether the professors taught core, elective, or major-area classes].

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? Which courses should have been beneficial but were not? How could they be improved?

In your opinion, what changes should be implemented in the major program you studied at 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.

Do you have any other comments or suggestions for us?

Appendix E 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, “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. Complete responses can be seen in the following tables:

**Class of 1991: Most helpful core courses**

Area	Number of respondents mentioning	Percentage of total mentions
Philosophy	18	35%
English	10	20%
Theology	9	18%
Business	4	8%
Art	3	6%
History	2	4%
Social Sciences	2	4%
Science	2	4%
Communication	1	2%

Specific Courses mentioned at least twice	Number of respondents mentioning
Logic	4
Ethics/Business Ethics/Basic Moral Values	3
Writing classes	3
Accounting	2
Art History	2
Biology	2
Management	2
Psychology	2

**Class of 1996: Most helpful core courses**

Area	Number of respondents mentioning	Percentage of total mentions
Philosophy	19	23%
English	15	18%
Theology	14	17%
Social Science (includes Economics)	11	13%
Art (includes Photography)	6	7%
Communication (excludes Photography)	4	5%
History	4	5%
Business (includes Computers)	3	4%
Science	3	4%
Internship	1	1%
Leadership	1	1%
Mathematics	1	1%

Specific Courses mentioned at least twice	Number of respondents mentioning
Ethics/Medical Ethics/Basic Moral Values	7
Logic	6
Sociology	5
World Religions	5
Psychology	4
Photography	3
Catholicism	2
Media Writing	2
Philosophy of Religion	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

In many cases, students listed courses in their majors, not courses from the core curriculum. Perhaps the meaning of the "core curriculum" is not as clear to our alumni as it is to the campus community.

We also asked respondents which courses in the core they found least helpful. There were many fewer responses to this question. No clear pattern emerged. Specific results are available from the author on request.

We asked "Which professors at the college had the greatest positive impact on your life [regardless of whether the professors taught core, elective, or major-area classes]." the classes of 1991 and 1996 responded with a total of 59 and 52 different names, respectively. The following tables list only those faculty who were mentioned multiple times. Responses were fairly evenly split between professors within the major and those teaching core classes. For this reason, there is a tendency for professors with active core involvement or those from areas with high survey response rates to appear most often. If a survey included multiple names, each mention was counted.

**Professors Having a Positive Impact: Class of 1991**

<b>First name</b>	<b>Last name</b>	<b>number of mentions</b>
Jim	Lambert	6
David	Sauer	6
Mel	Brandon	4
John	Hafner	4
Ruth	Belasco	3
Pat	Harrison	3
Sheri	Katz	3
Robert	Rimes	3
Tom	Wood	3
Barry	Corona	2
Fred	Hemphill	2
Michelle	Hilmes	2
Bettie	Hudgens	2
Michael	Johnson	2
Tom	Loehr	2
Gerald	Regan	2
Lois	Silvermail	2
Don	Wilson	2

**Professors Having a Positive Impact: Class of 1996**

<b>First name</b>	<b>Last name</b>	<b>number of mentions</b>
Bill	Harmless	9
John	Hafner	8
Varnell	Lee	6
Pat	Macnamara	6
Betty	Hudgens	5
Tom	Loehr	5
Lois	Silvermail	5
George	Gilmore	4
Stu	Langdon	4
Charles	Boyle	3
Margaret	Davis	3
David	Dean	3
Michael	Kaffer	3
Jim	Lambert	3
Pat	McGraw	3
Cort	Schlichting	3
Celestine	Algero	2
Mel	Brandon	2
Larry	Hall	2
Neil	Hamilton	2
Pat	Harrison	2
Bob	Heiner	2
Patsy	Neal	2
Kathleen	Orange	2
Robert	Rimes	2
Ralph	Sandler	2
David	Sauer	2
Barbara	Starr	2
Mark	Starr	2
Mike	Williams	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. There was no significant

difference in responses between the two class years. These responses are substantially different from last year's survey, in which 74.5% of respondents answered "5 or more times." There is no clear explanation, except the mix of majors differed in the two survey years.

**number of cultural events attended last year**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage of total Responses</b>
none	1	1.3
1 or 2	17	22.1
3 or 4	22	28.6
5 or more	37	48.1
Total	77	100.0

Alumni were asked for information about their employment and also about their post-graduation educational activities. Over 70% of respondents reported their first "real" job after graduation as being in their field of study. Appendix F gives details of "first job" after graduation, while Appendix G contains current employment data.

Overall, 49% of the respondents have continued their formal education after leaving Spring Hill (39 of 80). Respondents received J.D. degrees from Alabama, Mississippi, Loyola-New Orleans, Uleat-Panama, and Missouri. Others earned M.D. degrees from Georgetown and LSU. Respondents earned business degrees from Georgetown, Spring Hill, Loyola-Baltimore, Thunderbird (The American Graduate School of International Management), St. Louis University, and Miami. In education, students earned advanced degrees from Alabama, Marymount, South Alabama, Northeastern, SUNY-Albany, and Missouri-St. Louis. One graduate holds a perfusion certificate from Johns Hopkins, while another earned a Ph.D. in Chemistry from Florida State. Appendix H contains details of graduate school attendance, and professional certifications attained.