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University of Nebraska at Omaha Alumni Survey: Part I: Academic Programs

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University of Nebraska at Omaha

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UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA
ALUMNI SURVEY

Part I: Academic Programs



Center for Applied Urban Research

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA
ALUMNI SURVEY

PART I
ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

Center for Applied Urban Research
University of Nebraska at Omaha
September, 1979

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Any value judgments made or implied in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The University of Nebraska at Omaha--History and Mission

The University of Omaha was established in 1908 as a co-educational nonsectarian college. In 1931, the University became the Municipal University of Omaha through a popular vote by citizens of Omaha. The University merged with the University of Nebraska system on July 1, 1968.

After becoming one of the three major campuses of the University of Nebraska system, the University of Nebraska at Omaha experienced dramatic growth. In the last ten years, the student body increased from the equivalent of 7,122 full-time students in 1967 to 11,148 in 1978, representing a 57% increase over an 11-year period. Major capital improvements costing more than 27 million dollars have been made. These include three classroom-office buildings, the new University Library, the Performing Arts Center, and the Health, Physical Education, and Recreation Building, due for completion in December, 1979. A 14-million-dollar Downtown Education Center/State Office Building is currently under construction.

The purpose of the University of Nebraska at Omaha is to provide teaching, research, and services for the state of Nebraska with an emphasis on the urban areas of the state. In order to carry out this charge, UNO must provide a faculty with the academic preparation and ability to assist students in developing their maximum potential.

Keenly aware of ever-changing societal needs and the impact of these changes on individuals, the University seeks to give its students a broad liberal education plus competence in at least one of over 60 academic programs and areas of concentration. Apart from classroom and laboratory teaching, the University engages in research to add to the general store of knowledge and to serve human needs. As an urban-related institution within a populous metropolitan area, the University is challenged to provide a sense of direction and leadership through various community outreach and service programs such as short courses, conferences, workshops, and seminars for the very young, senior citizens, and business professionals.

New Era of Excellence

Dr. Ronald Roskens became Chancellor of University of Nebraska at Omaha in 1972, and charged the University to begin a new era of excellence. For the past eight years, the University has grown in stature as well as in size. For example, more than 75% of the current faculty members possess a terminal degree. In order to meet the changing needs of its student body, the University has developed several new academic programs such as Applied Mathematics, Black Studies, Computer Science, Public Administration, Urban Studies, and Gerontology.

Excellence in teaching has a high priority at UNO. This is evident in the creation of the Office of Improvement of Instruction as well as an increased use of modern instructional materials such as computers, video tapes, slides, audio cassettes, and programmed texts. The new University Library is evidence of this continuing commitment to excellence as well as a great asset to both students and faculty of UNO and to the Omaha community.

Purpose of Study

The University of Nebraska is continually striving to improve educational programs and services offered to current and future Nebraska residents as well as those from other states and countries. At the beginning of this year, both President Roskens and Chancellor Weber expressed their interest in and support for seeking innovative ways to improve the quality of education at UNO. Among those who are most knowledgeable about the quality of education at UNO are its 40,000 alumni. Therefore, this group was selected to evaluate past programs and to provide ideas for change at the University.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

The Population

Data gathered for use in this study were obtained from a sample of UNO graduates. Since significant changes in curricula, program design, and University services have been made since 1972, the year President Roskens' administration as UNO's Chancellor began, the decision was made that the survey population should consist of all graduates recorded in UNO's alumni file from 1973 through summer, 1979, except those who received honorary degrees. The UNO Alumni Office's records indicated that 12,016 students graduated from UNO from 1973 to summer, 1979. This record served as the sampling frame.

Sample Size

The sample consisted of 1,200 randomly selected graduates. Such a sample size would have a maximum of a 2.82% sampling error at a 95% confidence level. The exact magnitudes of sampling error vary with the number of completed questionnaires and between various categories examined in the questionnaire.

Sampling Technique

The sampling technique used in the study was simple random sampling. When administered correctly, this technique generates the best representative sample possible. It also allows researchers to estimate correctly the magnitudes of sampling errors. In practice, each graduate was assigned a five-digit number; a computer program was then written to generate 3,900 random five-digit numbers. Those graduates whose names were associated with these random numbers were then drawn into the sample. A 30% rate of return has been estimated as necessary to yield the desired size of sample.

Questionnaire Design and Method of Interview

The questionnaire is a crucial survey instrument for obtaining needed information. The design of the questionnaire and the formulation of questions were completed in accordance with the study purposes and were finalized by consulting with personnel from the various areas involved.

After the questionnaires were designed and the sample was drawn, questionnaires were mailed to those graduates who were selected by the random sampling procedure described above.

Computation of Sampling Error

As indicated in previous sections, the magnitude of sampling error depends upon the size of the sample, the level of confidence, and the reported proportions. It can be calculated by using the following formula:¹

$$S.E. = t \sqrt{\frac{P \times Q}{n}}$$

where t is the student's t-value associated with each level of confidence, P is the reported percentages of responses by each question, Q is the opposite of P (Q=1-P), and n the actual sample size. Since 937 completed questionnaires were returned by August 3, 1979, a month after the questionnaires were mailed, the estimated sampling errors by each confidence level and reported percentages are listed in Table 1.

TABLE 1
ESTIMATED SAMPLING ERROR

Reported Percentages	Confidence Level (%)		
	99	95	90
	(percent)		
90 or 10	2.5	1.9	1.6
80 or 20	3.3	2.5	2.1
70 or 30	3.8	2.9	2.4
60 or 40	4.0	3.1	2.6
50	4.1	3.2	2.7

Comparison Between Sample Statistics and Population Parameter

Aside from measuring the magnitude of sampling errors, the quality of a sample can also be measured by comparing the sample statistics and the population parameter, if the latter is readily available. A search of the UNO alumni files showed that the male and female ratios in the population were 64.4% and 35.6% respectively. When these ratios are compared with those obtained from the sample (59.4% of males, 40.6% of females) as shown in Table 2, the difference between these two ratios is found to be surprisingly small. Furthermore, the difference of sex ratios between sample and population might be attributed to the fact that more female graduates are working in the educational field and, hence, had time to complete the questionnaires during the summer vacation when the survey was conducted.

TABLE 2

A COMPARISON OF SEX RATIOS BETWEEN SAMPLE AND POPULATION

Sex	Sample		Population	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Male	555	59.4	7,738	64.4
Female	<u>380</u>	<u>40.6</u>	<u>4,278</u>	<u>35.6</u>
Total	935	100.0	12,016	100.0

CHAPTER 3

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

Quality of Instruction

A primary measure of the success of a university is the quality of its instruction. Alumni were asked to rate the quality of the instruction they received at UNO in their major fields and university-wide.

The ratings of both were overwhelmingly favorable, although alumni were more enthusiastic about the teaching in their major fields. Almost nine out of ten (85.9%) alumni considered the quality of instruction in their majors as either very good or good; almost half (46.9%) rated it as very good. Only 2.5% considered the quality as poor or very poor.

University-wide quality of instruction was rated somewhat lower, although only 2.3% considered it poor or very poor. Almost three out of four (74%) rated it as very good or good, but only one out of six (18.7%) gave it the highest rating of very good. This difference in the rating of instruction in the majors compared to university-wide instruction was statistically significant. See Table 3.

Perceptions of the quality of instruction varied with the sex and age of the respondents. Women were less enthusiastic about the instruction in their majors with only 81.5% considering it very good or good compared to 89.2% of the men; no difference occurred in the way the two groups rated university-wide instruction (approximately 74% of each group rated it very good or good). See Table 4.

Older alumni had more favorable judgments on the quality of teaching. For instance, none of the alumni over 50 considered the teaching at UNO as poor. The differences among the age groups on the evaluation of university-wide teaching were statistically significant, but the differences on instruction in the majors were not. See Table 5.

Alumni who received their undergraduate degrees at UNO were as likely to view the quality of teaching in their major fields favorably as were those who earned their graduate degrees at UNO. Almost half of each

TABLE 3

RATINGS ON QUALITY OF INSTRUCTION AT UNO

Rating	Please rate the quality of instruction you received at UNO.			
	In Major Field		University-wide	
	N	%	N	%
Very good	439	46.9	169	18.7
Good	365	39.0	500	55.3
Average	109	11.7	214	23.7
Poor	18	1.9	19	2.1
Very poor	<u>5</u>	<u>0.5</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>0.2</u>
Total	936	100.0	904	100.0

$\chi^2 = 175.913^*$ with 4 degrees of freedom

$\chi^2_{.05} = 9.490$

*Significant difference at 5% level.

TABLE 4

RATING ON QUALITY OF INSTRUCTION BY
MALE AND FEMALE GRADUATES

Rating	In Major Field				University Wide			
	Male		Female		Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Very good or good	495	89.2	309	81.5	402	74.3	267	73.8
Average	51	9.2	56	14.8	129	23.8	84	23.2
Poor or very poor	<u>9</u>	<u>1.6</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>3.7</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>1.9</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>3.0</u>
Total	555	100.0	379	100.0	541	100.0	362	100.0
	$\chi^2 = 11.597^*$ with 2 degrees of freedom				$\chi^2 = 1.368$ with 2 degrees of freedom			

$$\chi^2_{.05} = 5.991$$

*Significant at 5% level.

TABLE 5

RATING ON QUALITY OF INSTRUCTION BY AGE OF GRADUATES

Rating	In Major Field										University Wide									
	Ages																			
	22-29		30-39		40-49		50-59		60+		22-29		30-39		40-49		50-59		60+	
No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Very good or good	343	84.7	301	85.0	128	92.8	25	83.3	5	100.0	271	68.1	249	74.5	119	86.2	23	88.5	5	100.0
Average	49	12.1	45	12.7	8	5.8	5	16.7	0	0.0	115	28.9	80	24.0	15	10.9	3	11.5	0	0.0
Poor or very poor	13	3.2	8	2.3	2	1.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	12	3.0	5	1.5	4	2.9	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	405	100.0	354	100.0	138	100.0	30	100.0	5	100.0	398	100.0	334	100.0	138	100.0	26	100.0	5	100.0

 $\chi^2 = 9.161$ with 8 degrees of freedom

 $\chi^2 = 25.555^*$ with 8 degrees of freedom

 $\chi^2_{.05} = 15.507$

*Significant at 5% level.

group rated the quality of instruction in the highest category, and less than 3% of each group considered it below average. See Table 6.

Some variation in the assessment of teaching quality in the major fields was found for colleges within UNO. Alumni of the College of Business Administration and the College of Continuing Studies rated teaching in their major fields higher than did other students; 95% of their ratings were in the two highest categories. It should be noted that CCS does not have its own faculty. The College of Home Economics received the least favorable ratings, but it still had almost two-thirds (64%) of its alumni rating it very good or good. See Table 7.

No significant differences in assessment of teaching were found based on the year of graduation, nor were differences found based on current income.

Academic Program

The mission statement of the University of Nebraska at Omaha is concerned not only with career preparation but also with preparation for life skills--i.e., the University recognizes the value of a broad educational experience. Another way of measuring the quality of education at UNO, therefore, is to measure the alumni's degree of satisfaction with their academic programs as they relate to the diverse objectives of career preparation and preparation for life skills. This was done by asking them to rate their academic programs for these aspects on a scale ranging from very satisfactory to very unsatisfactory.

A clear majority evaluated their academic programs positively, with very satisfactory or satisfactory ratings given to preparation for a career by 81% of the respondents and to preparation for life skills by 71% of the respondents. Approximately 13% rated their academic programs as unsatisfactory on these bases. See Table 8.

These perceptions were related to the ages of the respondents with older alumni viewing their academic programs more favorably. For example, although 76% of alumni in their 20's rated their academic programs' career preparation as satisfactory, this proportion rose to 93% of those 50 or over. Similarly, satisfaction with their academic programs' preparation for life skills increased from 64% of those under 30 to 92% of those 50 or over. See Table 9.

TABLE 6

RATINGS ON QUALITY OF INSTRUCTION IN MAJOR FIELDS
BETWEEN GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AT UNO

Rating	Graduates Who Received			
	Undergraduate Degrees		Advanced Degrees	
	N	%	N	%
Very good	353	49.0	142	46.4
Good	275	38.2	117	38.2
Average	77	10.7	38	12.4
Poor	10	1.4	9	2.9
Very Poor	5	0.7	0	0.0
Total	720	100.0	306	100.0

$\chi^2=5.795^*$ with 4 degrees of freedom

$\chi^2_{.05}=9.490$

*Not significant at 5% level.

TABLE 7

RATINGS ON QUALITY OF INSTRUCTION IN MAJOR FIELDS AMONG COLLEGES
BY GRADUATES WHO RECEIVED UNDERGRADUATE DEGREES

Ratings	Majors															
	Arts and Sciences		Business Administration		Education		Engineering Technology		Fine Arts		Home Economics		Public Affairs and Community Service		Continuing Studies	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Very good	93	47.9	98	56.3	78	45.9	16	37.2	6	40.0	9	40.9	38	46.4	15	75.0
Good	76	39.2	67	38.5	66	38.8	19	44.2	5	33.3	5	22.7	33	40.2	4	20.0
Average	25	12.9	7	4.0	21	12.3	8	18.6	3	20.0	6	27.4	6	7.3	1	5.0
Poor	0	0.0	1	0.6	3	1.8	0	0.0	1	6.7	1	4.5	4	4.9	0	0.0
Very poor	0	0.0	1	0.6	2	1.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	4.5	1	1.2	0	0.0
Total	194	100.0	174	100.0	170	100.0	43	100.0	15	100.0	22	100.0	82	100.0	20	100.0

$\chi^2=53.971^*$ with 28 degrees of freedom

$\chi^2_{.05}=41.330$

*Significant difference at 5% level.

TABLE 8

EXTENT OF SATISFACTION WITH ACADEMIC PROGRAM

Extent of Satisfaction	Please rate your satisfaction with the <u>academic program</u> at UNO.					
	Preparation for Career		Preparation for Life Skills		Value of General Requirements	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very satisfactory	320	36.9	201	24.2	196	22.7
Somewhat satisfactory	382	44.0	390	46.9	487	56.4
Undecided	57	6.6	135	16.3	77	8.9
Somewhat unsatisfactory	74	8.5	81	9.7	79	9.1
Very unsatisfactory	35	4.0	24	2.9	25	2.9
Total	868	100.0	831	100.0	864	100.0

$\chi^2=96.075$ with 8 degrees of freedom

$\chi^2_{.05}=15.500$

TABLE 9

RATING ON SATISFACTION OF ACADEMIC PROGRAMS
BY GRADUATES OF DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS

	Ages									
	22-29		30-39		40-49		50-59		60+	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
For Preparation for Career										
Very or somewhat satisfactory	298	76.2	266	81.8	111	91.7	23	92.0	3	100.0
Undecided	27	6.9	24	7.4	6	5.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Somewhat or very unsatisfactory	<u>66</u>	<u>16.9</u>	<u>35</u>	<u>10.8</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3.3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>8.0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0.0</u>
	391	100.0	325	100.0	121	100.0	25	100.0	3	100.0
$\chi^2 = 21.961^*$ with 8 degrees of freedom										
For Preparation for Life Skills										
Very or somewhat satisfactory	239	63.6	229	74.6	100	83.4	20	91.0	3	100.0
Undecided	71	18.9	46	15.0	16	13.3	1	4.5	0	0.0
Somewhat or very unsatisfactory	<u>66</u>	<u>17.5</u>	<u>32</u>	<u>10.4</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3.3</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>4.5</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0.0</u>
	376	100.0	307	100.0	120	100.0	22	100.0	3	100.0
$\chi^2 = 30.861^*$ with 8 degrees of freedom										
For Value of General Requirements										
Very or somewhat satisfactory	294	77.0	253	79.6	110	84.0	21	80.8	4	100.0
Undecided	37	9.7	27	8.5	10	7.6	2	7.7	0	0.0
Somewhat or very unsatisfactory	<u>51</u>	<u>13.3</u>	<u>38</u>	<u>11.9</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>8.4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>11.5</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0.0</u>
	382	100.0	318	100.0	131	100.0	26	100.0	4	100.0
$\chi^2 = 4.302$ with 8 degrees of freedom										

$$\chi^2_{.05} = 15.507$$

*Significant at 5% level.

Personal Interaction

Education is not limited to the classroom. Much of it stems from personal interaction with faculty, especially one's major professor, and from interaction with fellow students. Examining alumni satisfaction with their personal interactions involving segments of the University community also sheds some light on the quality of education at UNO.

Half of the respondents gave the highest rating of very satisfactory to their interactions with their major professors and with their fellow students. More than eight of ten alumni viewed their interactions with faculty and students as satisfactory (the proportion ranged from 84% to 88%). Those viewing their interactions as unsatisfactory ranged from 7% to 11%. See Table 10.

Women were more likely than men to report satisfaction with their interactions, although only the pattern for interactions with fellow students was statistically significant. Similarly, older alumni were more likely to view their interactions at UNO favorably (with the pattern for interactions with other students being statistically significant). See Table 11.

Academic Advising

Faculty responsibilities are not limited to teaching and research but also include academic advising. The quality of the educational process at UNO, therefore, can be gauged partially by measuring alumni perceptions of the effectiveness of their academic advising. Among the aspects of academic advising examined were choosing a career field, selecting a major or program, and completing course scheduling.

The effectiveness of academic advising for completing course scheduling was perceived to be greater than effectiveness for selecting a major or a career. Approximately 44% viewed their advising as very effective in completing their course scheduling, and another 38% viewed it as somewhat effective; only 18.7% said it was not effective. Larger proportions viewed their academic advising as ineffective for selecting a major or choosing a career field. The survey did not probe into the factors which led students to select a major or a career, but many students may make their program and career field decisions independently of their academic advisors, perhaps even before an advisor is selected. See Table 12.

TABLE 10

EXTENT OF SATISFACTION WITH PERSONAL INTERACTION

Extent of Satisfaction	Please rate your satisfaction with <u>personal interaction at UNO.</u>					
	With Major Professor		With Faculty and Staff		With Fellow Students	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very satisfactory	458	50.3	375	40.4	463	50.0
Somewhat satisfactory	305	33.5	419	45.2	348	37.6
Undecided	45	4.9	53	5.7	52	5.6
Somewhat unsatisfactory	80	8.8	67	7.2	53	5.7
Very unsatisfactory	23	2.5	14	1.5	10	1.1
Total	911	100.0	928	100.0	926	100.0

$\chi^2=41.586^*$ with 8 degrees of freedom

$\chi^2_{.05}=15.500$

* Significant difference at 5% level.

TABLE 11

RATING ON PERSONAL INTERACTIONS WITH FELLOW STUDENTS BY GRADUATES' SEX AND AGE

Rating	Sex				Age									
	Male		Female		22-29		30-39		40-49		50-59		60+	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very or Somewhat Satisfactory	468	85.5	342	90.7	331	82.3	312	89.4	131	96.3	29	96.7	5	100.0
Undecided	32	5.9	20	5.3	27	6.7	21	6.0	3	2.2	1	3.3	0	0.0
Somewhat or Very Unsatisfactory	<u>47</u>	<u>8.6</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>4.0</u>	<u>44</u>	<u>11.0</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>4.6</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1.5</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0.0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0.0</u>
Total	547	100.0	377	100.0	402	100.0	349	100.0	136	100.0	30	100.0	5	100.0

$$X^2 = 7.875^* \text{ with 2 degrees of freedom}$$

$$X^2_{.05} = 5.991$$

$$X^2 = 28.234^* \text{ with 8 degrees of freedom}$$

$$X^2_{.05} = 15.507$$

*Significance at 5% level.

TABLE 12

EFFECTIVENESS OF ACADEMIC ADVISING

How effective was your academic advising at UNO?	Degree of Effectiveness					
	Very Effective		Somewhat Effective		Not Effective	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. For selecting a major or program	252	28.8	300	34.2	324	37.0
2. For choosing a career field	178	20.6	289	33.5	396	45.9
3. For completing course scheduling	399	43.7	344	37.6	171	18.7

$\chi^2=189.255^*$ with 6 degrees of freedom

$\chi^2_{.05} = 12.600$

*Significant difference at 5% level.