

## College Experiences and Alumni Satisfaction at Whitman College

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The HEDS Alumni Survey was administered members of the graduating classes of 1985, 1995 and 2000. Two hundred forty-six responses were received, resulting in a response rate of 38%. The survey asked alumni to evaluate their undergraduate experiences, as well as questions regarding their activities after graduation.

### *College Experiences*

Alumni were asked how certain aspects of their academic experiences, campus services and facilities, and the campus climate contributed to their college experience. For example, one item asked how satisfied students were with the residential life on campus. Another set of questions asked alumni to what extent their particular undergraduate education fulfilled their expectations about areas commonly associated with a college experience. For example, one item asked alumni whether the expectations they held about developing competency in career relevant skills during their undergraduate education were fulfilled.

Alumni indicated many areas that contributed positively to their college experience. These include fulfilling expectations like “enhancing intellectual growth”, which, on a 4-point scale (4=expectations greatly fulfilled) received a mean rating of 3.82. Alumni also expressed satisfaction regarding academic experiences, as the “quality of teaching” received a mean rating of 3.79, and “contact with faculty” a mean rating of 3.72. Despite the high mean scores in these areas, however, there were other aspects of Whitman where alumni reported less satisfaction. For example, both career services (2.81) and ethnic/racial diversity (2.58) received low mean ratings in terms of how well they contributed to college experiences. **Table 1** (below) shows Whitman’s mean score for both the highest and lowest areas that contributed to the college experience.

**Table 1: Areas Contributing To College Experience**

<b>Top 5 Areas Contributing To College Experience:</b>	<b>Mean Score</b>
Enhance intellectual growth	3.82
Quality of teaching	3.79
Sense of belonging	3.74
Contact with faculty	3.72
Foster personal growth	3.71
<b>Bottom 5 Areas Contributing To College Experience:</b>	
Academic advising	3.24
Financial services	3.24
Develop competency in career relevant skills	3.09
Career services	2.81
Ethnic/racial diversity	2.58

To evaluate whether these low mean ratings also indicate areas where Whitman needs to improve, the relationship between these areas and student satisfaction must also be investigated.

### *Relationship to Satisfaction*

Two questions on the survey were related to overall satisfaction: 1) “Overall, how satisfied have you been with your undergraduate education,” measured on a scale of 1 = Very Dissatisfied to 4 = Very Satisfied; and 2) “Would you encourage a high school senior who is like you were as a high school senior (similar background, interests, and temperament) to attend your undergraduate institution,” measured on a scale of 1 = Definitely Not to 5 = Definitely Would. Overall, alumni reported nearly universal satisfaction: 81% said they were “very satisfied” with their Whitman education, with an additional 18% saying they were “generally satisfied.” In addition, 85% “definitely” would encourage a high school senior to attend Whitman, and an additional 10% “probably” would do so.

These two questions were standardized and combined into one overall satisfaction measure, then correlated with services and aspects of the college to determine how each area might affect overall satisfaction. **Table 2** (below) shows Whitman’s mean score for each service or aspect, as well as the correlation to overall satisfaction.

**Table 2: Mean Score and Correlation with Satisfaction**

<b>More Important for Student Satisfaction and Whitman Does Well:</b>	<b>Correlation with Satisfaction</b>	<b>Mean Score</b>
Sense of Belonging	0.622	3.74
Foster Personal Growth	0.524	3.71
Promote Ability to Form Relationships	0.489	3.52
Social Life on Campus	0.487	3.60
Enhance Intellectual Growth	0.466	3.82
Campus Safety	0.442	3.62
Residential Life	0.402	3.66
Contact with Faculty	0.399	3.72
Financial Services	0.382	3.24
Acquire In-Depth Knowledge in a Particular Field	0.330	3.45
Student Voice in Policies	0.310	3.30
<b>Less Important for Student Satisfaction and Whitman Does Well:</b>		
Independent Study/Research	0.286	3.45
Quality of Teaching	0.285	3.79
Library Resources	0.284	3.47
Academic Advising	0.274	3.24
Courses Outside Major Field	0.261	3.53
Courses In Major Field	0.191	3.64
Recreation/Athletics	0.106	3.46
<b>More Important for Student Satisfaction and Whitman Does Not Do Well:</b>		
Develop Competency in Career Relevant Skills	0.303	3.09
Career Services	0.318	2.81
<b>Less Important for Student Satisfaction and Whitman Does Not Do Well:</b>		
Ethnic/Racial Diversity	0.151	2.58

Creating a “sense of belonging” and “fostering personal growth” were both highly correlated with student satisfaction. In addition, social aspects of the college also appear to be important for student satisfaction, as “promoting the ability to form relationships” and the “social life on campus” were highly correlated with satisfaction as well. In general, alumni indicated that these important areas successfully contributed to their college experience.

However, there are other areas Whitman could improve upon that would increase student satisfaction. For example, career services and developing career-relevant skills are both correlated with satisfaction, yet alumni gave Whitman’s performance a relatively low mean rating of 2.81. Interestingly, alumni also indicated that the ethnic/racial diversity present at Whitman did not contribute positively to their college experience, nor was it important for their satisfaction. Whitman should strive to improve in areas that are both highly correlated with student satisfaction and that alumni indicated as making a low contribution to their college experience.