

RESULTS OF UWO JOURNALISM ALUMNI SURVEY

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Introduction

The 2003 alumni survey was conducted to meet the following objectives.

- To study the attitudes of UW-Oshkosh journalism alumni toward the program's quality
- To investigate the connections journalism alumni make between the development of their career and the education they received in the program
- To determine possible avenues that might encourage and enable alumni to contribute their experiences to current students in the program
- To gather information on how best to approach fund raising
- To enhance the existing database of alumni

Methodology

Questionnaire:

The 2003 questionnaire was a revision of the alumni survey conducted in 1997. The current version included 39 questions. The department's Alumni Committee drafted the questionnaire, which was subsequently reviewed by the entire faculty.

The questionnaire was administered in two formats, a mail and an online version. Both versions were available to alumni in the first week of February 2003. The mail version included a four-page questionnaire, a postage-paid return envelope, and an alumni newsletter. The online version was posted on the journalism website and instructions provided specific instructions to assist subjects in filling out the survey. Several pre-tests were administered to assure the consistency of formats, questions and to assess ease of data processing.

Sample size:

The survey was sent to all of the more than 1,600 alumni whose demographic information is stored either in the department's database or in the UW Oshkosh Foundation office database. Gross returns of the questionnaire (both forms) numbered 286, which is an 18 percent return rate. Six respondents were dropped from the final analysis because their questionnaires were duplicates, incomplete or arrived after the analysis had started. Sixty-six percent of the alumni returned the questionnaires by regular mail, while 34 percent sent back the online version.

Data gathering:

Alumni were contacted by e-mail several weeks before survey questionnaires were sent out. The e-mail explained the purpose of the survey and assured the confidentiality of respondents. Two e-mails were sent, subsequent to the survey distribution, as reminders to alumni of the importance of the survey and to ask that completed surveys be returned as soon as possible.

The online version of the survey was constructed so that responses did not require a separate coding process prior to analysis, but could be subjected to analysis without further effort by the department.

Two departmental student assistants were trained to enter responses received by mail in hard copy form into the online version of survey questionnaire. This approach reduced the chance of errors usually found in the traditional method of data entry.

Hard copies of returned survey questionnaires were secured in the chairman's office. Online survey data (including the hard copy responses that were coded) was stored in a university file on the computer server administered by the division of Academic Computing. Only the chairperson of department had access to this file.

When all responses were in the university file, they were downloaded to an Excel spreadsheet before being converted to an SPSS data file for analyses.

Data analysis began a little more than three months after data-gathering had begun.

Descriptive Analysis

Demographic information

- Sixty percent of respondents are female and forty percent male. More than 99 percent of respondents are white. Sixty percent are married. About 26 percent are single, while the rest say they are divorced, living with a friend, or single living with children.

- The average age of respondents is 36 years old. Nearly 26 percent of the respondents are 23-29; 40 percent 30-39; 21 percent 40-49; 11 percent 50-59; and only two respondents are older than 60 years old.
- More than 50 percent report annual incomes between \$25,000 and \$50,000. One of five earned \$50,000 and \$75,000. Sixteen percent more than \$75,000, while 13 percent earned less than \$25,000.
- More than 55 percent of reported their department emphasis was advertising/public relations, while 35 percent said news/editorial. Ten percent were enrolled in the program before 1974, when two current emphases were established.
- More than 71 percent said their overall GPA was 3.0 or higher and 28 percent reported between 2.50 and 2.99. Only one respondent listed a GPA below 2.50.
- The years of graduation were collapsed into five time periods corresponding to meaningful differences in department concerns and emphases (see history of the program in the section on mission and scope). More than 22 percent of the respondents were enrolled in the program between 1998 and 2002. About 23 percent were in the program between 1992 and 1997, while about 28 percent studied journalism between 1986 and 1991. Fourteen percent were enrolled between 1979 and 1985, and 13 percent were in the program prior to 1979.
- Nearly 15 percent of the respondents were graduated from the program in 2000-2002. More than 41 percent were graduated in 1990-1999. About 29 percent were graduated between 1980 and 1989. Fifteen percent completed their degree in 1970-1979, while only one respondent reported being graduated before 1969.
- More than 30 percent of alumni work in communities with populations of more than 500,000. Nearly 20 percent work where the population is between 100,001 and 500,000. Another 19 percent are in areas having 50,001-100,000 people and 31 percent in places with fewer than 50,000 people.

Satisfaction with the quality of the program

Alumni were asked to what extent they were satisfied with their experiences in the program. Responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree, through disagree, neutral, agree to strongly agree. If a respondent did not select a point on the scale he or she was excluded from the analysis of this question.

The question focus was on alumni satisfaction with the following subjects.

- overall quality of the journalism program
- quality of instruction
- interaction with department faculty
- competence of department faculty
- quality of course offerings
- equipment available
- interaction with professionals, student organizations, and competitions

The last area of concern was phrased as a hypothetical, “All things considered, if I had to do it again, I would choose to enroll in journalism at UW-Oshkosh.”

Alumni responses to all of nine subjects are summarized below.

- Overall quality of the journalism program

More than 93 percent of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed they were satisfied with the overall quality of the journalism program. Only two percent disagreed or strongly disagreed, while five percent of respondents expressed a neutral position.

- Quality of instruction

Alumni satisfaction with quality of instruction was almost identical to their responses to the overall quality of the program.

- Interaction with department faculty

More than 86 percent of respondents strongly agreed or agreed they were satisfied with their interactions with department faculty. Less than 6 percent were dissatisfied with the interaction with faculty. Eight percent of the respondents expressed neutrality.

- Competence of department faculty

More than 89 percent said they thought the faculty were competent. Only 1 percent disagreed, while 9 percent were neutral.

- Quality of course offerings

More than 76 percent of the respondents were satisfied with the quality of course offerings in the journalism program. Only 4 percent disagreed. Nineteen percent maintained a neutral position.

- Equipment available

More than 43 percent of respondents were satisfied with department equipment, while 18 percent were unsatisfied. Most alumni who expressed dissatisfaction had been graduated before journalism computer laboratories were installed, updated or renovated.

- Interaction with professionals, student organizations, and competitions

Nearly 53 percent of the respondents were satisfied with this interaction, while 19 percent were dissatisfied. Twenty-eight percent remained neutral.

- All things considered...

If they had to do it again, nearly 77 percent of the graduates said they would choose to enroll in journalism at UW-Oshkosh. Nearly 12 percent would not choose the program again, while 12 percent expressed neutrality.

Perceptions of the journalism program

Two open-ended questions were included to elicit perceptions of alumni about strengths and weaknesses of the program. Answers to the questions were collapsed into only a few categories for convenience of analysis.

- Perceived strengths of the program when you were in school

The breakdown of the perceived strengths includes faculty (39 percent of 283 respondents), curriculum (27 percent), real-world atmosphere (12 percent), campus newspaper/other student organizations (7 percent), combinations of faculty and technology (3 percent), and students in the major (1 percent), and technology (1 percent). Eight percent of the respondents did not provide any answers.

- Perceived weaknesses of the program when you were in school

The breakdown of the perceived weaknesses includes curriculum (26 percent of 282 respondents), technology/equipment/classes (20 percent), faculty (10 percent), lack of real-world atmosphere (8 percent), lack of help in job search (7 percent), lack of contact with outside professionals (2 percent), and campus newspaper/other student organizations (2 percent).

Importance of internship/practicum classes in finding a job

Nearly 55 percent of 283 respondents said they had an internship while 11 percent reported taking the public relations practicum class. About one-third of the graduates did not have an internship or practicum while at UW-Oshkosh. More than 75 percent of those graduates who had an internship/practicum said they believed the experience was somewhat or very important to them in finding a job.

Nearly 30 percent of 181 respondents took an internship or studied the practicum at a newspaper or magazine. About 25 percent worked at a non-profit or government agency. Nine percent chose a private company or hospital for their internship or practicum. Only 4 percent worked at an advertising or public relations agency, while nearly 17 percent had more than one internship (department rules forbid students from receiving more than three credits for internships, and do not allow students to receive credit for both an internship and practicum).

Career development

The department was interested in whether alumni believe the department's programs were instrumental in their entering and succeeding in their careers, that is, do alumni connect their educational and professional careers?

- Did the curriculum help you find a job after graduation

Eighty-two percent of respondents said they thought the journalism curriculum was helpful to them in finding a job, while 15 percent said the opposite was true. The rest did not respond to this question.

- Descriptions of present job duties

Current job duties of the alumni are quite diverse and often cross over different specialties. More than 16 percent perform editing/copy editing duties, while 14 percent are writers or reporters. Eleven percent are managers or supervisors of others, while 10 percent are employed in creative positions. Others include graphic design (10 percent), customer service/account management (8 percent), print production (7 percent), photography/visual (6 percent), and sales (6 percent). Twelve percent of the respondents said they had other duties than those specified above.

- Length of time in current positions

Almost half of the respondents have been in their current positions between less than 5 years. More than 21 percent of the respondents for 6-10 years, while twelve percent report being in the same position for 10 or more years.

- Post-undergraduate education

Nearly 7 percent (19 alumni) earned a second bachelor's degree after graduation. About 5 percent earned a master's degree, while only one alumna is pursuing a doctor's degree.

- Courses alumni judged to be helpful to them after graduation

The courses listed below are arrayed in decreasing order of frequency reported (current titles are used). Required journalism courses considered to have been helpful by graduates include News Writing, Editing, Advertising Copy, Layout and Production, Reporting, Law of Mass Communication, Feature Writing, Principles of Public Relations, Principles of Advertising, Public Relations Techniques, and Introduction to Journalism.

Elective journalism courses listed as helpful by graduates include Photography, Public Relation Practicum, Graphic Arts of the Print Media, Campaign Strategy in Advertising, Case Studies in Public Relations, Magazine Editing and Production, Media Ethics, History of Journalism in the United States, Advertising Media, Media Organization and Management, Internship, Media Research, Online Journalism, and Independent Study.

Alumni relations

Department-alumni relations was investigated by asking about alumni interest in reading a journalism newsletter, returning for an alumni gathering, sharing experiences with current students in a classroom or group setting or being an e-mail mentor for a current student.

Results show that more than three-fourth of alumni would enjoy reading a newsletter from the department. Only 5 percent of the alumni said they would not enjoy receiving a department's newsletter. More than 63 percent would like to receive an online version of the alumni newsletter, while 15 percent said they would not be interested in receiving an online form of the newsletter.

Nearly 50 percent of the alumni have returned or would return to campus for an alumni gathering, while 16 percent said they had not or would not like to return. More than 60 percent have returned or would return to campus to share their experiences with current students, while 16 percent are not interested in this interaction. About 56 percent of the alumni are interested in being an e-mail mentor for a current journalism student as opposed to 44 percent who choose not to be involved.

Alumni donations

Six percent of the alumni “strongly agree” that they would like to financially support the department, while nearly 23 percent “agree” on this subject. Nearly 23 percent of the alumni would not financially support the department. About half of the respondents maintain a neutral position.

Nearly 16 percent of the respondents, who said they wanted to give to the department, said they thought “\$10-\$25” is an appropriate amount to give. More than 29 percent of the alumni feel that “\$26-\$50” would be the right amount. Nearly 12 percent would be willing to contribute “\$51-\$75” to the program. Ten percent of the graduates feel that “\$76-\$100” is an appropriate amount, while 11 percent of the alumni would be contributing “more than \$100.” Twenty-two percent of the alumni are not interested in making any financial contributions.

An open-ended question asked the alumni, “if you had the chance to donate an item of equipment to the department, what would the item be?” Most of the answers appear to be computers and software, digital cameras, scanners, printers, and reference materials.
