

**University of Washington
Undergraduate Degree Recipients,
Five and Ten Years After Graduation:
Methodology and Response Frequencies**

OEA Assessment Group¹
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INTRODUCTION

Since 1978, the Office of Educational Assessment (OEA) has conducted regular surveys of University of Washington (UW) undergraduate and graduate/professional degree recipients.² Surveys have been conducted approximately one year after graduation and have gathered information on post-graduate activities (especially employment and continuing education) and general educational outcomes. These surveys have provided valuable information about UW educational programs, and are used by academic departments for program planning and improvement. The survey conducted in 1998 was expanded to include undergraduate degree recipients five and ten years after graduation. The purpose of surveying this particular group of alumni was twofold: they have had more time to apply the skills and knowledge gained in college to work and life in general than alumni only one year out of college; and they have had more time to reflect on the value of the UW experience. The survey was conducted as part of a comprehensive study examining student and alumni views regarding the benefits and value of their college education. In order to discern possible differences among students and alumni at various points in their educational career and post-UW life, different groups of students and alumni were surveyed. This report describes the methodology for the survey of alumni awarded undergraduate degrees during the 1992-93 and 1987-88 academic years (five and ten year alumni, respectively) and provides tables of response frequencies.

METHODOLOGY

Population

All students who received an undergraduate degree from the University of Washington during the 1987-88 (N=4626) and 1992-93 (N=5431) academic years were included in this study. As noted below, these numbers were reduced substantially due to the difficulties inherent in tracking individuals over time.

Instrument

The two-page booklet included items relating to several aspects of the students' current activities as well as their educational experiences at the UW. The first portion of the survey focused on obtaining information about students current activities in order to profile what UW Alumni are doing five and ten years after graduation. The second portion of the survey focused on what the students had learned while

at college in relation to their lives currently: self-rating of skill levels, the perceived necessity of those skills, UW's contribution to the skill development, and satisfaction with skill level. Additionally, the questionnaire included questions about how students learned and their level of preparedness for life beyond UW. Finally, the students who graduated UW five and ten years ago were queried about their contribution to society. All questions save one were closed-ended, forced-choice items, with the exception of written responses provided by respondents listing their current job and employer, or institution of continuing education. These written responses were manually entered into the survey database. An additional open-ended question asked this special group of UW alumni to reflect and comment at more length on the value of their University of Washington education. The questionnaire is provided in PDF format:

[Graduate Survey](#)

Alumni addresses

Locating graduates posed a special problem due to the amount of time that had elapsed since degrees were awarded. Two sources were used to obtain their addresses. The alumni database maintained by the UW Office of Development includes updated mailing addresses for all graduates, and addresses were also obtained from a commercial firm³ for 4836 (48.1%) of the 10,057 five and ten year graduates based on social security numbers. In a trial mailing to alumni on each list, fewer post-cards were returned as undeliverable when addresses were taken from the Development Office list than when the commercial list was used. Because the Development Office list seemed to be more accurate, and was more complete, this list was used as a starting point in contacting alumni.

First mailing

Questionnaires were mailed during the middle of June, 1998, along with a personalized cover letter signed by UW President Richard McCormick. This mailing also included a "UW Alumni" sticker donated by the UW Alumni Association and a self-addressed, stamped envelope for survey return. Questionnaires that were returned due to an incorrect address were resent to the corresponding address from the commercial list, when available. 421 (4.2% of the total) such mailings were made.

Follow-up mailing

A second copy of the questionnaire, a personalized letter and a return envelope were sent to all alumni who had not returned completed questionnaires within three weeks of the original mailing. Approximately six weeks following the second mailing, a post-card reminder was sent to all alumni who still had yet to complete and return a survey.

Survey Response

	Population N	Undeliverable ⁴	Completed Questionnaires	Percentage Returned
1992-3 Graduates (five-year)	5,431	387	1675	33.2%
1987-8 Graduates (ten-year)	4,626	341	1350	31.5%
TOTAL	10,057	728	3025	32.4%

RESPONSE FREQUENCIES

Response frequencies for each of the items on the Undergraduate Survey are provided in PDF format:

[Response frequency tables](#)

[Five-year vs. ten-year comparisons](#)

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² Basson, L. & Taggart, T. (1995). *Graduate Survey 1978-93: Education, Employment, and Unemployment*. **OEA Reports, 95-3**;

Gillmore, G.M. (1996). *The University of Washington Survey of Bachelor Degree Recipients: Summary of the Last Four Surveys*. **OEA Research Notes, N-96-6**.

³ Experian, a former subsidiary of the credit-reporting firm known nationally as TRW, provided addresses based on a list of alumni names and social security numbers.

⁴ The initial population was reduced by the number for whom addresses were unavailable or incorrect, and those who were deceased.