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**Survey Of Older Than Average Students  
At The University Of Washington**

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# SURVEY OF OLDER THAN AVERAGE STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

## Executive Summary

In spring of 1990, the Office of Educational Assessment conducted a survey of older than average students regarding their educational experiences at the University of Washington. The survey was approved in principal and jointly funded by the Associated Students of the University of Washington, the Graduate and Professional Student Senate, and the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs.

Questionnaires were mailed to a random sample of 556 undergraduate students who were at least 27 years of age (older than 84% of the general undergraduate population), and 460 graduate and professional students who were at least 30 years of age (older than 52% of the general graduate and professional student population). Completed questionnaires were returned by 246 undergraduates (44%) and 314 graduate students (68%). Responses to a survey of 3500 randomly selected undergraduate students conducted during spring quarter, 1988<sup>1</sup>, provided baseline data for some items on the questionnaire.

In general, the picture of older than average students suggested by the survey is one of greater independence and diversity than the general population. They are more varied in their educational preparation and goals, their general life experiences, and in their commitment to activities and interests outside the university. They carry heavier burdens in terms of finances, and in terms of maintaining stable relationships with a partner and children. More than half of the respondents were married, and about 40% had at least one child. These rates were five times as high as among the previously surveyed undergraduate group. Higher percentages of older students worked more than 20 hours per week, and expected to be significantly in debt upon graduation. Enrollment at the University was career-related for a large number of older students, and most were returning to school after a break in enrollment averaging slightly more than seven-and-one-half years.

By and large, older than average students appeared to be satisfied with their educational experiences at the University, and most older students rated the faculty as good, very good, or excellent. Respondents did not feel that they had experienced age discrimination by individuals, but many felt that the system itself was discriminatory, that is, it was geared to the needs of traditional students.

The special needs of older than average students derive from the diversity of their backgrounds and current involvements. Many have full-time jobs and can most conveniently come to campus for classes, meetings, and administrative paperwork in the evenings. Others can arrange their schedules around one or two day-time trips to campus each week, but can't make an every-day commitment. For some, full-time enrollment is impossible, yet their program may not accommodate the part-time student due to inflexibility in the quarter-to-quarter and year-to-year scheduling of classes. The way programs and campus resources are structured would seem to stand as a greater roadblock to the integration of the older student into the university community than do the attitudes and perceptions of individual students, faculty and administrators. The challenge facing the university is not only to accommodate the diverse needs of the older than average student but to embrace them as providing a source of enrichment for all members of the academic community.

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1. Gerald M. Gillmore, Quality of Undergraduate Student Life: A Survey, Educational Assessment Center, University of Washington, October, 1988.

# **SURVEY OF OLDER THAN AVERAGE STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON**

## **Introduction**

OTAS (Older Than Average Students) is a student group at the University of Washington interested in identifying and meeting the special needs of older students. In spring of 1990, OTAS requested that the Office of Educational Assessment conduct a survey to obtain a description of the educational experiences of such students at the University of Washington. The survey was approved in principal and jointly funded by the Associated Students of the University of Washington (ASUW), the Graduate and Professional Student Senate (GPSS), and the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs. This report summarizes responses to the survey and provides demographic information, and student evaluations of university academic and support programs.

## **Procedures**

A sample of 1016 older than average students was randomly selected from students enrolled at the University of Washington at the beginning of spring quarter, 1990. Included in the study were 556 undergraduate students who were born in 1962 or earlier (at least 27 or 28 years of age), and 460 graduate students, born in 1959 or earlier (at least 30 or 31 years of age).

Questionnaires and an accompanying cover letter were sent to all students on April 20, 1990. Samples of each are included as Appendices A and B, respectively. Completed questionnaires were returned by 246 undergraduates (44.2%) and 314 graduate students (68.3%).

For some items, comparison statistics were available from a larger survey on the "Quality of Undergraduate Student Life" conducted during spring quarter, 1988<sup>1</sup>. This survey polled 3500 randomly selected undergraduate students on their experiences at the University of Washington and provided an informal baseline against which responses from older-than-average students could be compared. Where data were available, they were incorporated in tables under a separate column labeled "QSL" for quality of student life.

## **Results**

### **DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

Students were randomly selected for inclusion in the study subject to minimum age levels. Undergraduates were considered to be older than average if they were at least 27 years of age. For graduate students, the cutoff was 30 years of age. Tables 1 and 2 show that the percentages of undergraduate and graduate students who returned questionnaires corresponded closely to the percentages in the sample for all age ranges, indicating that the group who returned questionnaires was representative of the sample with respect to age. Approximately one-fifth of the undergraduates were between 27 and 30, slightly less than half were between 30 and 35, and one-fifth were between 36 and 40. Slightly more than half of the graduate students were between 30 and 35, with declining percentages in the higher age ranges.

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1. Gerald M. Gillmore, Quality of Undergraduate Student Life: A Survey, Educational Assessment Center, University of Washington, October, 1988.

Respondents tended to feel older than other students of their own class standing. This was especially true for undergraduates; 93.3% of the students responding felt they were "somewhat" or "considerably" older than the general student population. (See Table 4.) This was less universally true for graduate students, although the majority still felt "older" or "considerably older" (75.6%).

**Table 4.**  
**Relative to the general student population at your class standing, do you feel that you are:**  
**(Percent)**

	<u>Undergraduate</u> (N=238)	<u>Graduate</u> (N=311)	<u>Total</u> (N=549)
Considerably older	29.4	17.7	22.8
Somewhat older	63.9	57.9	60.5
About average	6.3	22.5	15.5
Somewhat younger	.4	1.9	1.3
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0

As shown in Tables 5 and 6, females were somewhat more likely to return questionnaires than were males among both undergraduates and graduates. This bias exaggerated an existing difference in favor of undergraduate females in the sample, and reversed a small difference in favor of males among graduate students. Slightly more females than males responded to the Quality of Student Life (QSL) survey.

**Table 5.**  
**Sex Distribution of Undergraduates (Percent)**

	<u>Respondents</u> (N=245)	<u>Sample</u> (N=481)	<u>QSL</u> (N=3489)
Female	63.3	58.1	51.6
Male	36.7	41.9	48.4
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0

**Table 6.**  
**Sex Distribution of Graduate Students (Percent)**

	<u>Respondents</u> (N=314)	<u>Sample</u> (N=518)
Female	51.3	47.8
Male	48.7	52.2
TOTAL	100.0	100.0

Tables 7 and 8 compare the marital status of, and number of children supported by undergraduate, graduate, and QSL respondents. As can be seen from Table 7, a large proportion of older students were married, and the percentage was higher among graduate students than among undergraduates (57.6% and 49.2%, respectively). Equal proportions of undergraduate and graduate students had never been married (30.5% and 31.8%, respectively), while more undergraduate students had been previously married (20.3%) than were graduate students (10.6%). Respondents to the Quality of Student Life (QSL) survey were, for the most part, never married (88.8%).

In Table 8, nearly 40% of both undergraduate and graduate respondents reported that they were supporting at least one child, and 7% of the undergraduates and 5.5% of the graduate students were

**Table 9.**  
**Current living situation (Percent)**

	<u>Undergraduate</u> (N=246)	<u>Graduate</u> (N=313)	<u>Total</u> (N=559)	<u>QSL</u> (1308)
Undergrad. res. hall	.4	----	.2	20.5
Grad. res. hall or older-student housing	.4	1.0	.7	----
Off-campus	95.5	94.6	95.0	62.1
Sorority or fraternity	----	----	----	16.3
Univ. family housing	3.7	4.5	4.1	1.1
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

**Table 10.**  
**Do you live: (Percent)**

	<u>Undergraduate</u> (N=245)	<u>Graduate</u> (N=314)	<u>Total</u> (N=559)	<u>QSL</u> (N=1308)
Alone	18.8	21.7	20.4	9.0
With partner and/or children	61.6	66.2	64.2	14.1
With acquaintances	8.6	6.7	7.5	59.9
With parents	----	----	----	17.0
Other	11.0	5.4	7.9	
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 11 shows that fewer than 6% of the students, whether graduate or undergraduate, reported that they had been enrolled continuously in a post-secondary institution, and the average break in their college education reported by the two groups was nearly identical: 7.7 years for undergraduates, and 7.6 years for graduate students.

**Table 11.**  
**What is the longest break you have taken in your enrollment in higher education? (Percent)**

	<u>Undergraduate</u> (N=239)	<u>Graduate</u> (N=308)	<u>Total</u> (N=547)
0 years	5.9	2.9	4.2
1-3	19.2	21.1	20.3
4-6	27.6	26.9	27.2
7-9	11.7	18.5	15.5
10-12	17.2	14.0	15.4
More than 12 years	18.4	16.6	17.4
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0

Undergraduates and graduate students differed somewhat in their primary reason for attending the University, and in their areas of study. As shown in Table 12, a change in careers was cited as the primary reason for enrollment by the largest number of undergraduates (47.8%), whereas, for graduate students, a change in careers and upgrading current job skills were of equal importance (34.5% and 31.0%, respectively).

Table 15 shows the average percentage of the total cost of UW education coming from various sources. Personal savings was the largest source of funds for both older than average undergraduate and graduate students (average percentages of 22.1% and 19.4%, respectively). In contrast, parents constituted the primary source for the general undergraduate population (39.3%, as cited in the Quality of Student Life survey). The next largest source of funds for undergraduates and graduate students was work (17.4% and 15.6%, respectively), followed by spouse (17.3% and 11.6%, respectively), and guaranteed loans (10.9% and 11.5%, respectively). Scholarships was cited as a moderately large source of funding for graduate students (11.7%).

Table 16 shows that older than average students expected to be more in debt at the conclusion of their education than did the general undergraduate population. Only 9.0% of the undergraduates who responded to the Quality of Student Life (QSL) survey expected to be \$10,000 or more in debt, and 54.7% expected to have no debt. In contrast, 21.4% of the older than average undergraduates and 28.9% of the graduate students expected debt of \$10,000 or more, while 41.2% and 48.2%, respectively, expected no debt.

**Table 14.**  
**On average, how many hours per week do you work for wages while enrolled? (Percent)**

	<u>Undergraduate</u> (N=238)	<u>Graduate</u> (N=307)	<u>Total</u> (N=545)	<u>QSL</u> (N=1301)
0	30.7	26.1	28.1	30.6
1-5	5.0	3.6	4.2	5.5
6-10	7.6	8.1	7.9	9.1
11-15	6.3	5.2	5.7	15.3
16-20	17.2	21.5	19.6	17.7
21-30	11.3	10.4	10.8	13.1
More than 30	21.8	25.1	23.7	8.5
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

**Table 15.**  
**Average Percentage of the Total Cost of UW Education Coming from Various Sources**

	<u>Undergraduate</u> (N=246)	<u>Graduate</u> (N=314)	<u>Total</u> (N=560)	<u>QSL</u> (N=1291)
Scholarships	2.9	11.7	7.8	6.7
Federal or state grants	7.7	5.2	6.3	7.2
Guaranteed loans	10.9	11.5	11.2	7.1
Other loans	2.7	2.2	2.4	2.2
Work-study	1.3	2.0	1.7	1.2
Other work	16.1	13.6	14.7	18.7
Parents	4.4	2.6	3.4	39.3
Own savings	22.1	19.4	20.6	13.8
Spouse	17.3	11.6	14.1	in "Other"
G.I. Bill	2.4	.2	1.2	in "Other"
Disability	.6	.2	.4	in "Other"
Retirement pension	.5	.8	.7	in "Other"
Other	9.7	17.3	14.0	3.8

**Table 18.**  
**Mean Ratings of UW Experiences by Age Group**  
**(1 = "very positive," 5 = "very negative")**

	<u>&lt;30</u>	<u>30-35</u>	<u>36-40</u>	<u>41-45</u>	<u>&gt;45</u>
Mean	2.4	2.2	2.0	2.2	1.6

Similarly, mean ratings of experience were computed for groups of students who entered the university for various reasons. These means are shown in Table 19. As can be seen, students who attended UW for "personal development" felt more positive about their experiences than did students who came to "upgrade job skills" or for a "career change." Students who came for "other" reasons felt least positive about their experiences. Differences in ratings among the groups were statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ).

**Table 19.**  
**Mean Ratings of UW Experiences by Reason for Attending UW**  
**(1 = "very positive," 5 = "very negative")**

	<u>Upgrade Job Skills</u>	<u>Career Change</u>	<u>Personal Development</u>	<u>Other</u>
Mean	2.1	2.2	1.9	2.3

Although older than average students feel as positive about their university experiences as do general undergraduates, Table 20 shows that they feel less a part of the university community. Whereas 51.0% of the students who responded to the Quality of Student Life (QSL) survey stated that they felt "very much a part of the student community" or "more a part of the student community than not," this was true for only 22.1% of the older than average undergraduate students and 21.7% of the graduate students. At the same time, 44.7% and 39.0% of the older than average students (undergraduate and graduate students, respectively) reported that they "sometimes" or "often feel isolated from the student community," in contrast to 21.7% of the general undergraduate population.

The degree of isolation felt by older students was more similar to that found among "commuters" in the QSL study. When the QSL undergraduate sample was restricted to those who lived off-campus and worked more than 20 hours per week, 28.0% said they felt "very much a part" of the community, or "more a part than not." When the older student group was restricted according to the same criteria, the percentage dropped from 22.6% to 16.2%. This difference was due to the effects of working more than 20 hours, rather than living off-campus. When only working older students were included, 15.7% felt they were part of the community vs. 23.2% when only those living off-campus were considered.

**Table 20.**  
**To what extent do you feel you are a part of the University student community? (Percent)**

	<u>Undergraduate</u> (N=244)	<u>Graduate</u> (N=305)	<u>Total</u> (N=549)	<u>QSL</u> (N=1306)
Very much a part	3.7	3.7	3.8	15.2
More so than not	18.4	19.0	18.8	35.8
Neutral	33.2	38.0	35.9	27.3
Sometimes isolated	20.5	22.3	21.5	13.7
Often isolated	24.2	16.7	20.0	8.0
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

The majority of respondents stated that they had sought advice from faculty (75.0% of the undergraduates, and 85.2% of the graduate students), and approximately half of the respondents were satisfied with the advice they received (50.0% of the undergraduates, and 55.8% of the graduate students). Relatively few respondents indicated that they were uncomfortable seeking advice (16.8% of the undergraduates, and 14.8% of the graduate students), though a higher percentage stated that it was difficult to seek advice because of scheduling conflicts (38.3% of the undergraduates, and 25.3% of the graduate students). Very few students stated that they never felt a need to seek advice (8.6% of the undergraduates, and 6.2% of the graduate students). A somewhat higher proportion stated that they had not been encouraged by faculty to ask for advice (19.3% of the undergraduates, and 14.8% of the graduate students), and nearly a quarter of the students preferred to get advice from friends and colleagues (25.2% of the undergraduates, and 28.5% of the graduate students).

The number of respondents who specified "no opinion" varied from question to question. Students might choose this response if they felt ambivalent or uncertain about a particular question (for example, if it concerned something with which they were not familiar), if they felt indifferent about the subject matter, or if they might agree in some circumstances and disagree in others. In this set of questions, the highest percentages of "no opinion" responses were found with respect to questions which may not have a single, consistent answer for individual students, i.e., satisfaction with advice from faculty (30.5%, overall) and preference for advice from friends and colleagues (41.3%). The same student may have had some experiences which would lead him or her to agree with the statement, and other experiences which would lead him or her to disagree. In contrast, lower percentages of students responded "no opinion" when asked whether they had ever sought advice from faculty (10.6%, overall) or felt a need to seek advice (12.4%). These latter questions were easier to answer "agree" or "disagree."

**Table 23.**  
**I have sought advice from faculty. (Percent)**

	<u>Undergraduate</u> (N=244)	<u>Graduate</u> (N=310)	<u>Total</u> (N=554)
Agree	75.0	85.2	80.7
Disagree	12.3	5.8	8.7
No opinion	12.7	9.0	10.6
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0

**Table 24.**  
**I have been satisfied with the advice I have received from faculty. (Percent)**

	<u>Undergraduate</u> (N=240)	<u>Graduate</u> (N=310)	<u>Total</u> (N=550)
Agree	50.0	55.8	53.3
Disagree	16.3	16.1	16.2
No opinion	33.8	28.1	30.5
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0

## CAMPUS-WIDE STUDENT SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Five questions asked students to rate the adequacy of existing support programs for older than average students (Tables 30-34). A relatively large proportion of students, both undergraduate and graduate, indicated that they had no opinion on each of these questions (this percentage ranged between 31.7% and 61.9%). As noted above, students may respond "no opinion" for a variety of reasons. For this set of questions, the consistently high percentage of students with no opinion may indicate that campus-wide student support programs are not a central concern for a large proportion of older than average students.

Very few students felt that there was an adequate program to acclimate older students to campus life (5.9% of the undergraduates, and 6.2% of the graduate students). Approximately one-quarter agreed that there were no support groups for older students (27.2% of the undergraduates, and 27.4% of the graduate students). Many students wanted better counseling programs for older students, and this was true of a larger percentage of undergraduate students (50.4%) than graduate students (31.9%). More than half of the respondents stated that there is too little information on support programs for older students, and again, this was true of a higher percentage of undergraduates (64.2%) than graduate students (52.0%).

Slightly more than one-fifth of the students in each group agreed that existing recreation programs were adequate for older students (20.7% of the undergraduates, and 23.8% of the graduate students). A higher percentage of undergraduate students (30.7%) disagreed with this statement, than did graduate students (18.2%).

**Table 30.**  
**There is an adequate program to acclimate older students to campus life. (Percent)**

	<u>Undergraduate</u> (N=239)	<u>Graduate</u> (N=305)	<u>Total</u> (N=544)
Agree	5.9	6.2	6.1
Disagree	47.7	34.1	40.1
No opinion	46.4	59.7	53.9
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0

**Table 31.**  
**There are no support groups for older students. (Percent)**

	<u>Undergraduate</u> (N=239)	<u>Graduate</u> (N=307)	<u>Total</u> (N=546)
Agree	27.2	27.4	27.3
Disagree	17.2	11.4	13.9
No opinion	55.6	61.2	58.8
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0

**Table 32.**  
**There needs to be better counseling programs for older students. (Percent)**

	<u>Undergraduate</u> (N=240)	<u>Graduate</u> (N=307)	<u>Total</u> (N=547)
Agree	50.4	31.9	40.0
Disagree	5.8	6.2	6.0
No opinion	43.8	61.9	53.9
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0

**Table 35.**  
**Compared to Younger Students, Older Students Need More:**  
**(Percent Agreement)**

	<u>Undergraduate</u>	<u>Graduate</u>	<u>Total</u>
flexible class scheduling	75.9	72.4	74.0
flexibility in degree programs	71.8	68.4	69.9
evening courses	71.4	65.8	68.2
special scholarships and grants	72.6	61.1	66.2
financial aid options	69.4	62.7	65.7
flexible work-study positions	59.9	57.3	58.5
counseling on financial aid	60.0	50.5	54.4
flexible exam scheduling	49.6	51.8	50.8
special information networks	55.2	44.4	49.2
specialized counseling	52.9	35.7	43.3
social and recreational activities geared toward them	36.9	28.9	32.5
social support networks	30.0	24.0	26.7

#### STUDENT GOVERNMENT

The participation of older than average students in student government is fairly low (Tables 36-39). Very few students, whether undergraduate (3.3%) or graduate (5.9%) stated that they were involved in student government. More than half (59.0%) of the undergraduates indicated that they had had no encouragement to be involved in student government, compared to 49.2% of the graduate students. Similar percentages of undergraduate and graduate students said they had no interest in student government (59.3%, overall), and even more said that they knew little or nothing about student government (69.4%, overall).

The percentage of "no opinion" responses was relatively low for all questions in this set; students were fairly sure they had little interest in student government. The lowest percentage of "no opinion" responses was found with respect to the statement, "I am involved in student government" (13.6%, overall), and the highest with respect to "I have had no encouragement to be involved in student government" (28.7%).

**Table 36.**  
**I am involved in student government. (Percent)**

	<u>Undergraduate</u> (N=239)	<u>Graduate</u> (N=306)	<u>Total</u> (N=545)
Agree	3.3	5.9	4.8
Disagree	82.8	80.7	81.7
No opinion	13.8	13.4	13.6
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0

= 20.0) than did students who disagreed or had no opinion (means = 14.5 and 17.9, respectively). This difference was statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ). Number of hours worked was not related to any of the other three student government items.

## AGE DISCRIMINATION

Four questions asked whether respondents had experienced age discrimination on campus. Responses are shown in Table 41. Detailed responses to each item are shown in Appendix C.

Relatively few students reported that they had experienced discrimination from other "students" (8.9% of all respondents), from "faculty" (8.9%) or from "administrators" (7.9%). A higher proportion felt that they had been discriminated against by "the system itself" (25.2%), and this was true of a higher percentage of undergraduates (32.5%) than graduate students (19.4%). In general, undergraduate students tended to feel somewhat more discriminated against than did graduate students.

The percentage of students responding with "no opinion" was fairly low for the questions in this set; students did not feel unsure about whether they had experienced age discrimination. The lowest percentage of "no opinion" responses was found with respect to age discrimination by faculty (18.1%, overall), and the highest with respect to discrimination by administrators (22.2%).

**Table 41.**  
**As an Older Student, I Have Experienced Age Discrimination on Campus by:**  
**(Percent Agreement)**

	<u>Undergraduate</u>	<u>Graduate</u>	<u>Total</u>
students	12.0	6.5	8.9
faculty	12.0	6.5	8.9
administrators	9.1	6.9	7.9
the system itself	32.5	19.4	25.2

Feelings of discrimination varied by age, as shown in Table 42. Respondents in the middle age ranges were more likely to feel discriminated against by individuals than were older or younger students. Approximately 9-10% of the students between the ages of 30 and 40 felt discriminated against by other students, faculty or administrators. Additionally, 13.4% of the students between 41 and 45 felt that faculty discriminated against them. In general, this pattern was more pronounced for undergraduate students than for graduate students. Higher percentages of students in all age ranges felt discriminated against by the system. Between 17% and 24% of the graduate students in all age ranges felt such discrimination, as did undergraduates 30 years of age or younger. A much higher percentage of undergraduates who were older than 30 felt that the system discriminated against them (30.0%-38.9%).

**Table 42.**  
**Experience of Age Discrimination by Age Groups:**  
**(Percent Agreement)**

	<u>Age</u>				
	<u>&lt;30</u>	<u>30-35</u>	<u>36-40</u>	<u>41-45</u>	<u>&gt;45</u>
students	2.1	10.9	10.4	6.0	6.5
faculty	4.3	9.1	10.4	13.4	4.3
administrators	4.3	9.1	8.8	6.0	6.7
the system itself	17.4	26.2	27.2	23.5	28.3

I don't think older students need as much support - they're usually a little clearer on their goals & themselves.

Has not experienced age discrimination

Several students stated explicitly that they had not experienced age discrimination at the university.

I can't recall a single instance where I felt my age was a problem in contacts with faculty, other students or financial aid officers. And I feel comfortable with and well accepted by the students and faculty in the School of Communications. I'm very happy with my experience as an OTA student at UW all around.

Have experienced none to my knowledge.

**Feelings of Discrimination**

The numbers of undergraduate and graduate students who made statements relating to their feelings of discrimination are shown below. These statements reflect discrimination by individuals - other students, faculty or administrators.

Under- Grad	Grad	Total	
10	7	17	don't fit into student body
9	6	15	other students and faculty do not acknowledge special needs and/or skills of older students
<u>13</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>19</u>	not seen as serious student by faculty or other students -- younger students make better use of place in program
32	19	51	TOTAL

Don't fit into student body

Several students described ways in which they felt they didn't fit in with other students. Because they were not age contemporaries, they were not perceived as peers by other students, and sometimes felt "invisible" to students and faculty.

I am often left out of planning for anything. I hardly ever have a pal from class that I can call or who calls me.

It is very difficult to be in a study group, the younger students see me more as a parent, overseer, too smart, not smart enough, anything but equal. I understand their feelings but it makes the homework and learning much more difficult than necessary.

Perhaps "age discrimination" is too harsh of an expression. There have simply been a great deal of times that I have felt isolated and excluded, and that it can be very difficult to make social contacts because you are not given a chance to participate due to your age.

It is as if the older student is invisible to other students and the system.

I was quite surprised to find a rather hostile attitude among very few of the students (younger) I've met in discussion groups. I have attended evening classes for years without this feeling but day classes provide a higher percentage of younger students hence discrimination? Never anticipated encountering unkind behavior.

Other students and faculty do not acknowledge special needs and/or skills of older students

**Special needs of older than average students:**

The numbers of undergraduate and graduate students who made statements relating to special needs of older students are shown below. Many of these statements reflect discrimination by "the system" - how the needs of older students are not met because of the way in which academic offerings are structured.

Under- Grad	Grad	Total	
53	34	87	more flexibility in course times, in access to campus resources (library, administrative offices, faculty), and in program and course requirements (part-time vs. full-time, required course)
4	3	7	better access to parking
13	10	23	counseling directed to the special needs of older students, including orientation and career counseling
14	14	28	financial aid and housing inadequate
5	5	10	social events geared toward older adults
2	3	5	better accommodation of individual differences, especially different learning style of older adults
<u>4</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>10</u>	misc.- - includes daycare
95	75	170	TOTAL

More flexibility in course times, in access to campus resources, and in program and course requirements

The primary concern of the older than average students centered around their need for greater flexibility in academic programs and administrative services to allow them to meet commitments in areas of their lives outside of school. Traditional undergraduates are generally able to attend school full-time with possibly a part-time, non-career job on the side. Older than average students are often returning to school with established families and careers which take precedence over their school work. They are much more heterogeneous in the number and type of other commitments, and may have more highly defined goals. Because of their time constraints, they need a wider variety of times when they can attend class, meet with faculty members, or get paperwork processed. They may be less able to meet outside of regular class times for group projects, or extra requirements.

Education is expected to be a lifelong process. People now have multiple careers in their lifetimes. I want to see more attention to specific post graduate degree programs (especially PhD, JD, and MBA) which accommodate the full-time, working adult student.

I also cannot commit myself to full-time studies, as I am paying my own way. I feel that students should be given this option in all departments, particularly in Master's degree programs. Many of us also do not wish to give up our careers while attending school.

The Univ. of WA is geared almost exclusively towards a full-time 18-24 year old undergraduate program. The discrimination exists in the system itself. As demographics change so must the University. In Economics there are virtually no evening courses. In Business there are few upper division evening courses. Also the use of group projects is hard for working students as little time is available for group meetings.

I feel very strongly that evening courses need to be expanded. In fact, it would be very nice to have more graduate programs that are wholly evening oriented.

PSU school of Engineering has all senior and graduate course after 4 pm! That's a real good idea!

Finally, the parking situation is horrendous, too expensive and extremely inconvenient. I was shocked when I was told (I am supposed to rush to school from work, skip lunch, find parking, drive back) I could not park in Burke Museum area parking lot - it was not for students? Then who the hell is it for? How can someone waste 1/2 hour walking each way from Montlake parking? Why are parking permits so expensive?

#### Counseling directed to the special needs of older students

Several respondents felt that they needed a better orientation when they first enrolled to provide specific information about the University, and how to integrate school with their other commitments. They also felt that they needed better ongoing support services, and career counseling for individuals who were interested in changing careers, rather than entry level positions. In general, existing services were seen as directed toward the traditional student and as not taking the special needs of older students into account.

I would definitely have appreciated more info and orientation to the university as a whole, to feel more a part of the general student body.

Seems to be an unstated assumption that as an experienced adult, we have no need for guidance (we already know what we want), that we don't need clear expectations (we have our own agenda), and that we don't need lots of feedback (we can self-assess) or positive reinforcement/encouragement (we're not grade-schoolers anymore, so unnecessary to say we're doing well). Yet I'm no longer acquainted with academia after an absence of 16 years - so I'm not experienced in that arena, I'm not sure how I'm measuring up, or whether I'm doing what's expected.

Coming back to the University after being away for 10 years was a frightening and aggravating experience that I still resent.

The school does not take into consideration that many of us have been out of school for many years. Registering, financial aid, etc were often handled differently in those days. The school does nothing to help us to adjust when you get here. I was left with a feeling that the school had no care for it's students. It was most difficult to take a 180 degree turn in my life -- leave a career and return to school. UW has done little to help me with this adjustment. With the difficulties going on in my department, the poor education, the apparent lack of care for the older students I could not recommend this institution to other older students.

Hopefully, most students returning as older students have reached some degree of maturity and do not require "hand-holding." However, we often do need specific advice on classes and programs. My observation is that we know less than the regular student about the system, yet people think we know the answers already because we are older. Specific, logical advice is what we need. It is very difficult to go back, but for some, it is our only chance.

I feel there is inadequate academic encouragement and advice for older graduate students, who feel the need to achieve their degree goal, and resume their normal working life. The years that a student can be left alone "shopping around" the current research areas are a major frustration to those of us with jobs to return to, with deadlines to meet.

Although I consider it commendable that UW admits older students to its professional programs, and although there are individuals within the system who are sensitive and supportive, there are still serious gaps in the financial and academic services necessary to see the older student through the process.

We need special advising on career options & more help in job search.

go to work, our child had to go to full daycare, that cost also, causing the spiral to escalate. The housing office seemed indifferent. Twice I was told we were at or near the top of the list and could expect housing soon only to be pushed aside. I feel the system punishes and discriminates against white, older, married men. It's forced us into heavy debt and created family problems.

#### Social events geared toward older adults

Several students suggested that they would like to participate in social events more in keeping with their own interests.

Students in my age group are the biggest minority on campus & it would be nice if some social events were geared toward us. We are so rare that we seldom cross paths otherwise.

Older students need more support groups, especially for older women students, and older single parents.

Get some more family activities to integrate the family and student with UW.

Sometimes I feel that everything at the UW is geared toward the 19-22 year old student. I would like to have a place to go, like a lounge, where I didn't have to sit next to a bunch of snorting frat boys or fashion-victim girls. It would also be nice to have some kind of newsletter for older students so that we didn't have to depend on the daily for info about issues regarding OTAS - which is non-existent (the info, I mean).

#### Better accommodation of individual differences

Comments in this section are related to the lack of acknowledgement of special needs and skills among older students by other students and faculty. They have to do with the ability of individuals and "the system" to integrate the more diverse older student group into the relatively homogeneous traditional population.

The main problem that I have experienced is that there seems to be no adjustment to the way the mature mind changes in its learning style & learning need, i.e., as one ages fluid memory is in decline while cognitive ability increases. Our professors' teaching style remains glued to teaching young people.

Most significantly, little in the educational structure and method utilizes the learning styles and strengths of older students. As a group, we learn and achieve differently than we did as younger students, and differently than younger students in the class.

I find the patriarchy of this institution to be disrespectful of individual differences, needs, and development potential, particularly those of older students, who are more resistant to being treated like sheep.

#### Miscellaneous

Ten students made comments which didn't fit into the above response categories. Of these, five students requested that daycare be made available.

Older students are more likely to have children. The university should provide a quality drop-in center for preschoolers & babies so that parents can keep appointments with faculty etc. more easily. Childcare should be provided at the IMA building so that parents can utilize its important offerings in exercise and recreation

Would like aerobic exercise program geared for older people - low impact, more stretching time - less bouncy instructors.

Many students surveyed stated that they did not have opinions regarding the adequacy of five support services they were asked to evaluate. Nevertheless, about half of them agreed that better counseling services were needed for older students relative to younger students, and that there was too little information on special support programs, again reflecting the need for better sources of information and advice. These services were particularly important to older undergraduates.

Special needs identified by older than average students reflected their commitment to activities and interests outside of the University. High proportions of respondents agreed that older students, as compared to younger students, needed more flexible class scheduling, flexibility in degree programs, evening courses, special scholarships and grants, and financial aid options. These were considered much stronger needs than those for special information networks or specialized counseling. Social and recreational activities and social support networks were seen as relatively unimportant. A separate set of questions relating to student government showed fairly low interest in participation in this area.

Relatively few students reported that they had experienced age discrimination from other students, faculty or administrators (6.5-12.0%), although a higher proportion (approximately one-quarter) felt that they had been discriminated against by "the system itself." Discrimination by the system was reported by a much higher proportion of undergraduates than graduate students (32.5% vs. 19.4%, respectively).

Feelings of age discrimination were elaborated by students in open-ended comments at the end of the questionnaire. For the most part, these comments reiterated the information gathered by the closed questions throughout the earlier part of the questionnaire. Coded comments fell into three general categories: 1) statements about the advantages of being older than average, or lack of age discrimination (47 comments), 2) feelings of being discriminated against by individuals (51 comments), and 3) special needs of older students which are currently not being met (170 comments). The last category suggests ways in which older than average students are discriminated against by "the system."

In general, respondents felt that they were different than the general student population, and that they also were perceived as different. For some students, being seen as older had the advantage of engendering increased respect, but for most it led to feelings of isolation, of not belonging, or of being "invisible." Many students felt that because they were older, they had acquired experiences and perspectives which they would like to share but which were not valued by faculty or younger students. In fact, being older with interests and responsibilities outside of the university led other members of the academic community to discount their commitment to education.

Feelings of discrimination or of being different from the general population were more pronounced for undergraduates than for graduate students, as shown by responses to both closed and open-ended questions. Undergraduates were also more vociferous in their demand for accommodation of their needs. The undergraduates surveyed were in fact more "different" from other students of their own class standing than were the graduate students, in as much as the traditional undergraduate population is more homogeneous with respect to age and background (both academic and personal) than is the population of graduate students. Undergraduates may also be more varied in their career plans and their reasons for attending the university, because of the relatively stronger commitment to a field of study characteristic of graduate students.

The predominant need of older than average students is for more flexibility in course times, in access to campus resources, and in program and course requirements. Older students as a group are characterized by diversity in their outside commitments. Many have full-time jobs and can most conveniently come to campus for classes, meetings, and administrative paperwork in the evenings. Others can arrange their schedules around one or two day-time trips to campus each week, but can't make an every-day commitment. For some, full-time enrollment is impossible, but their program may

**APPENDIX A.**

**Survey of Older Than Average Students (Questionnaire)**