

1998 Senior Survey: Representativeness of the Respondent Sample

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OVERVIEW

In spring, 1998, the Office of Educational Assessment surveyed a random sample of 1500 Seattle-campus seniors regarding their perceptions of their college education (see [OEA Report 98-5](#) for specific methodology). The purpose of this report is to examine how representative the final sample of respondents is of the population as a whole.

Information on a variety of demographic and academic variables was obtained through the Office of Institutional Studies' student database. Complete information was available for most seniors, though there were a handful of variables (e.g., high school GPA) for which many cases had missing values. Respondents ($n = 628$) were then compared to the population as a whole ($n = 8472$) on these variables. It should be noted that seventeen of the survey respondents did not provide their student ID numbers and, therefore, their survey responses could not be matched to their demographic data. Because of this, in the following analyses, these seventeen cases are not classified as respondents (decreasing the maximum respondent-sample size to $n = 611$).

RESULTS

The sample of respondents was found to be significantly different from the entire population on four of fifteen study variables (using chi-square or z-tests, as appropriate), when a liberal significance criterion of $p < .05$ was employed (see [Table 1](#)). That number decreased to one out of fifteen under the more stringent criterion of $p < .003$, chosen to control for the probability of making Type I errors by taking into account the number of significance tests being performed. At this level of significance, respondents differed from the population as a whole only in the distribution of gender. As shown in [Table 2](#), men comprised only 42% of the survey sample, yet the senior population in 1998 was 50% male. This lower response rate among males is consistent with findings from other studies conducted by OEA.

CONCLUSIONS

A random sample of seniors at UW Seattle-campus were surveyed during Spring quarter, 1998; completed surveys were obtained from 7% of the population (or 43.5% of the original random sample). Though significant effects (at $p < .05$) were detected on four of the fifteen study variables, the differences tended to be small in magnitude. The largest effect was for gender, where the percentage of males in the respondent sample was 7.5% lower than in the senior population. Surprisingly, there was no effect for ethnicity, as has been the case in other surveys. In conclusion, the sample of respondents for the 1998 Senior Survey appears to be fairly representative of the population from which it was drawn.

TABLES

Table 1. Demographic Comparisons Between Survey Respondents and Entire Population of 1998 Seniors

Variable	Significance
ACT Composite Score	$p < .05$
Age (1998 - Year-of-Birth)	$p < .05$
Child of Alumnus	n.s.
Educational Opportunity Prog. student	$p < .05$
Ethnicity	n.s.
Gender	$p < .003$
High School GPA	n.s.
Honors student	n.s.
Running Start student	n.s.
SAT Math Score	n.s.
SAT Verbal Score	n.s.
Student Athlete	n.s.
Transfer student	n.s.
UW GPA for Bachelor's degree	n.s.
WA State Residency	n.s.

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Table 2. Gender Breakdown (Counts and Percentages) for Non-Respondents, the Respondent Sample, and the Entire Population

Gender	Completed Survey		Population
	No	Yes	
Male	3950 (50.2%)	254 (42.1%)	4204 (49.6%)
Female	3917 (49.8%)	349 (57.9%)	4266 (50.4%)
TOTAL	7867	603	8470

Note. For the difference between the distributions of the respondent sample and the entire population, $\chi^2 = 13.49$, $p = .0002$

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