

UW SOUL

University of Washington Study of Undergraduate Learning
Office of Educational Assessment

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SPRING 2000 INTERVIEWS: DID YOU ACCOMPLISH WHAT YOU SET OUT TO ACCOMPLISH THIS YEAR?

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“When I came here I just wanted to discover what I wanted and who I am—to learn about myself and my relation to the rest of the world, the people around me as well as the people I never meet.”

In Spring Quarter, 2000, we interviewed 134 UW SOUL participants who had just completed their first year at the University of Washington. Among the questions we asked them about their personal growth was the following:

Did you accomplish what you set out to accomplish this year? Why or why not?

This report presents our methodology and analysis of students’ responses to this open-ended question.

METHOD

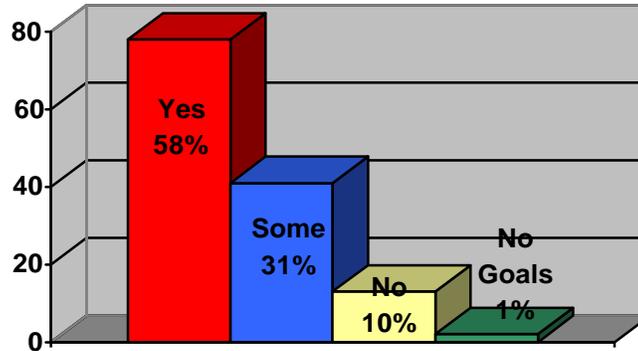
We first counted the number of “yes,” “no,” and “yes and no” responses. Then, we looked at what students said they had accomplished. We used an inductive process to generate categories from students’ responses that were mentioned more than once and counted the number of responses that fit those categories, as well as noting idiosyncratic comments. Then we used the same process to categorize the reasons students gave for whether they had accomplished their goals or not.

Please note that because the question was open-ended, we can assume that the number of times an idea or issue was mentioned is less frequent than the number of people who hold that view.

RESULTS

Figure 1 shows how many students felt that they had accomplished what they had set out to accomplish. A total of 78 students—or 58 percent—said that they had accomplished their own goals, while 13 (10 percent) said that they had not. Forty-one students (about

Figure 1: Students' Responses to Whether They Had Accomplished Their Goals



31 percent) said that they had accomplished some goals but not others. Two students (1 percent) said that they had no goals.

Students reported a wide range of goals, including academic goals, such as increasing their focus on schoolwork, getting a good GPA, and developing good study habits for a successful school year. Students also reported wanting to accomplish personal goals, such as balancing school and life, participating in non-school related activities, and becoming independent. Some students reported that they had accomplishments that they had not anticipated. For example, they spoke of changes in their lives, about learning to succeed, and about discovering a major by taking random classes. The main categories of responses and the number of students who gave those responses were as follows (note that students often mentioned more than one kind of goal):

- Accomplished academic goals: 84
- Accomplished social goals: 40
- Accomplished goals for personal growth/development: 33
- Accomplished goals for extracurricular learning: 23
- Other: 27

Along with the accomplishments listed, students also mentioned reasons why they had or had not accomplished their goals. Those reasons are discussed later in the report.

Accomplished Academic Goals

Eighty-four students, or 63 percent, spoke of accomplishing academic goals. Responses fit into three subcategories, listed below with the number of responses and quotations that illustrate those subcategories:

I did well in my classes and earned a good GPA (38)

“I was worried about being able to get A’s in college and I think I did except in one class. I am pretty proud of my GPA.”

“Winter quarter I worked a lot harder and studied and my goal was to make the dean’s list and I did that.”

I have a direction and/or a major (34)

“I’ve accomplished learning a lot about different fields, which is what I wanted to do, by taking classes in different departments and figuring out my major.”

“From the beginning of the year to this time now, my goals have changed tremendously but now I think I am on the right track.”

I wanted to leave classes having learned (12)

“I’ve learned a lot in my classes, I’ve found out the direction I want to go, and I’ve enjoyed what I’ve done this year.”

Accomplished Social Goals

Forty students (30 percent) described accomplishing social goals, including 30 who said that they wanted to meet new people and they had and 10 who said that they wanted to find a place where they felt that they “fit in.” Some quotations that illustrate success are:

“Some people are really welcoming here and I’m meeting a lot of new friends.”

“I really wanted to become accustomed to college as a whole to make it my home.”

“I like living in Seattle so much. It is nice to be in a place where nobody knows me off hand. Nobody is going to care if I am pierced or if my hair is purple.”

Accomplished Goals for Personal Development/Growth

There were students who not only concentrated on academic goals, but felt they had set out personal goals as well. About 25 percent of the students mentioned accomplishing goals related to personal development.

I made it through the year (19)

“I survived my first year of college and have a relatively good GPA.”

“Basically, I wanted to get through the first year of college with still having a head on my shoulders and some sanity.”

I've become independent (14)

“Mostly I wanted independence and I've done that. I feel I have grown up through my interaction with people. In some respects it has been a challenging thing but it has taught me more to think for myself and definitely be more independent.”

“I think I have become more independent, which was really my whole entire purpose. I figured out more about who I am, where I want to be, what I want to do in life.”

Accomplished goals for extracurricular learning

Twenty-three students, or 17 percent, said that they felt they had learned from activities outside their coursework. Two examples:

“I feel like I have learned a lot outside of class from going here...from my interaction with other students, I have learned a lot about different places, different culture..so many different things.

“I'm taking yoga through the Experimental College. Of course you want to learn in your courses, but I was hoping to get a really good solid foundation for the years to come.”

Other

In addition to the previous four categories of accomplishments, students also said that they felt they had accomplished goals in other areas, as well. These included:

- Being successful
- Being challenged
- Being able to manage money
- Becoming familiar with campus

Reasons for Success and Failure

A follow-up part of the interview question asked students why they felt they had met or failed to meet their goals. Table 1, below, lists reasons students gave in order of frequency. The reasons students gave for succeeding in meeting their goals and for failing to meet them are consistent with students' responses, both in UW SOUL focus groups conducted in winter 2000 and on UW SOUL surveys, to questions about what helps and hinders their learning. In those responses, as in these, students tended to credit their own efforts and the help of others—whether faculty or friends—in achieving success. However, when identifying reasons for why they did not succeed (academically or otherwise), students tended to take responsibility for their own failures, both in their responses to this interview question, as well as in responses to survey and focus group questions.

Reasons for Success	Reasons for Failure
<p>I have grown/matured. My goals were realistic. I had outside support (friends/family). I have a focus/direction. I have learned to balance social goals with academic goals.</p>	<p>I didn't do well in my classes. I procrastinated or I didn't try hard enough. My goals were unrealistic. I had/have bad study habits. There are too many outside demands on my time and attention. I was worried about finances. I had lost/not yet found a direction.</p>

IMPLICATIONS

Students' responses to the question of whether or not they had achieved their goals are consistent with responses to similar questions asked in UW SOUL interviews, focus groups, and on surveys.

First, students come to the UW with a wide range of goals—academic, social, and personal. This result is corroborated by students' entry interviews. However, when they talked about the goals they had accomplished in their first year at the UW, most of them singled out academic goals. Perhaps the dominance of academic goals in students' responses to this interview question says more about ease of measurement than it says about what students have actually accomplished. It is easier, after all, to “measure” whether one has succeeded academically than it is to know if one has succeeded in becoming more self-aware or more socially adept—two other kinds of goals students' said they had met.

Second, students' responses to this question show us that, for the most part, by the end of the first year, students had accomplished the goals they had set for themselves. Furthermore, they credited themselves, as well as help from family and friends, with helping them accomplish those goals. Finally, when students failed to accomplish their goals in their first year at the UW, they tended to blame themselves for that failure. These results are corroborated by both focus group and survey results. What is noticeably missing from both sides of the list in Table 1 is reference to classes, faculty, or TAs. It will be interesting to see if students perceive the UW as playing a more significant role in helping them accomplish their goals in future years.