

Graduating Student Assessment of Faculty and Curricula

Results from the 2014-15 Graduating Student Survey

Abstract

Every fall and spring graduating students are asked to take a survey that asks about their perceived growth in academic and student development areas at the undergraduate level, their perceptions of faculty and their departments, their overall satisfaction, and their activities while at Boise State. Results from the 2014-5 graduating student survey are largely similar to graduates' sentiments in the 2013-14 survey: A vast majority of graduates at the undergraduate and graduate levels felt faculty were interested in their students, taught well, and communicated well. While graduates at both levels felt they received sound academic advice, they were more critical of course timing and redundancy. Some students felt poor course timing hurt their time to graduation. There is little systematic evidence of cross-college differences in terms of satisfaction with faculty or departments, though the College of Education appears to stand out positively.

Overview

For almost twenty years, all students who are scheduled to graduate in fall or spring are asked by the Office of Institutional Research to complete a survey about their perceptions of their Boise State experience. The survey asks undergraduate students to compare their skill level on a series of learning outcomes at the beginning of their time at Boise State and again at the end. Graduates at both levels are asked about their perceptions of faculty, of their courses, and of their department. They indicate which in a series of activities they took part in, whether they transferred courses and if they had difficulty in doing so. Finally, graduates are asked about their satisfaction with their academic experience at Boise State University.

This is a report on findings from the 2014-15 survey. The survey was completed by 37% of graduating students, so it provides a fairly good view of graduates' perceptions. The report will address the following questions:

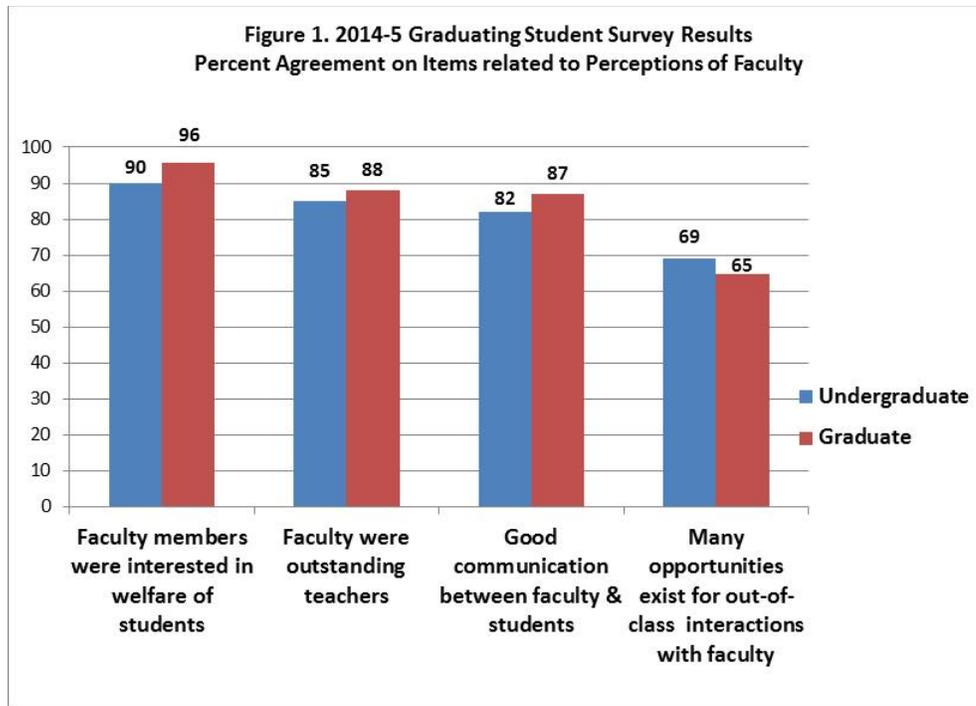
- How did students assess their experience with Boise State faculty?
- How did students assess their experience with course availability and content?
- Were there meaningful differences between transfer and non-transfer undergraduates?
- Did student assessments of faculty and courses vary significantly by college?
- How did student assessments of faculty and courses vary significantly by college at *both* levels of study?

Results

How did students assess their experience with Boise State faculty?

Both graduate students and undergraduates were asked about their perceptions of faculty, their peers and their departments. Figure 1 below shows the percent that agreed or strongly agreed with each of four statements related to faculty. Overall, graduate students had more positive perceptions of faculty members compared to undergraduates. The most positive ratings were found for (1) a genuine interest in the welfare of students and (2) outstanding teaching. The weakest agreement was found for out-of-class opportunities to

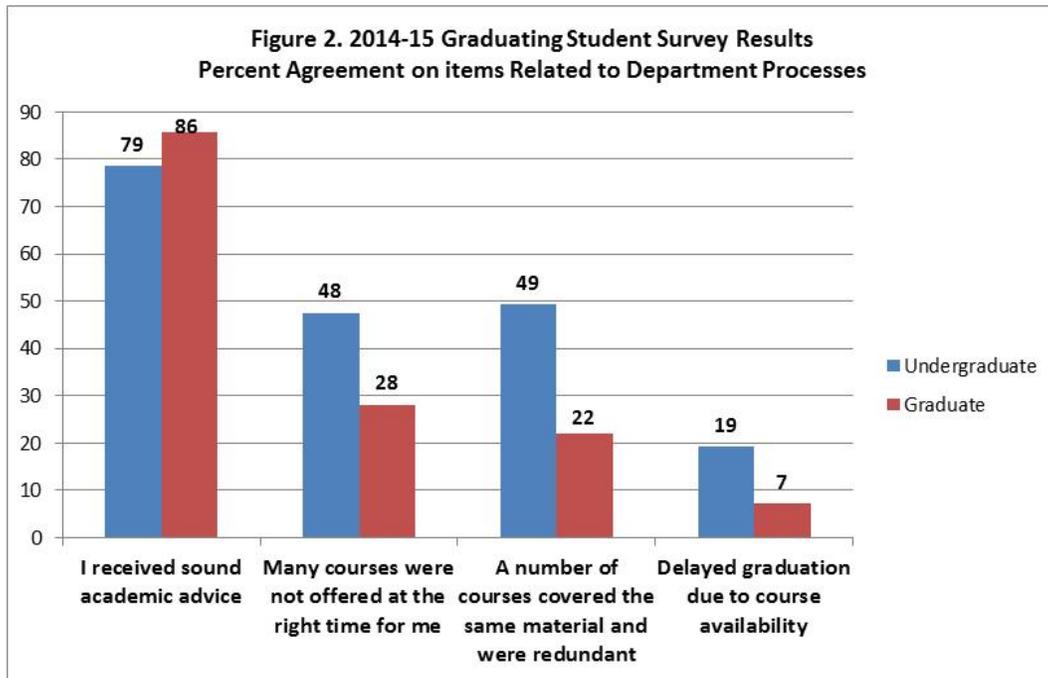
interact with faculty (69% agreement at the undergraduate level and 65% at the graduate level). Unlike in the 2013-14 survey, graduate student satisfaction on this point was *lower* than undergraduate agreement.



How did students assess their experience with course availability and content?

Graduating students were also asked about departmental processes such as advising, course scheduling, and course content (see Figure 2). Over 75% of undergraduates and 86% of graduate students felt they had received sound academic advising. Course scheduling was an issue, particularly at the undergraduate level, as almost half of graduates felt courses were not held at good times. A nearly identical percentage of undergraduates indicated their course material was redundant in some way.

Cross-tabulations further reveal that almost one-third of undergraduates indicated some level of agreement with *both* the course redundancy and course timing questions. Thus, a sizeable minority of undergraduates not only felt courses are offered at inconvenient times, but that some of these courses may also be redundant with other coursework. (In contrast, only seven percent of graduate students reported this problem.) The pattern of the variables in Figure 1 largely mirrors that from 2013-14, with the notable exception of a modest drop in perceived course redundancy among graduate students (2013-14: 27%). Undergraduates are still more likely than graduate students to report delayed graduation.



Are there meaningful differences between undergraduate transfer and non-transfer graduates?¹

Boise State faculty: Statistically, these groups did *not* differ with regard to any of the four measures in Figure 1. Another closed question asked graduates whether they had worked with faculty on a research, service, or a creative project; nearly the same percentage of transfer (27.6%) and non-transfer (27.8%) students reported doing so.

However, in responding to an open-ended question regarding recommending Boise State to others (or not), a sizable number of transfer students reported being quite satisfied with their professors/instructors. As several transfer students noted:

The faculty at BSU was the only redeeming aspect of my education. The administrative issues and seemingly random holds and policies were maddening and extremely discouraging.

Overall teachers and classes were good, the advising department could maybe be a little more helpful [...] All and all good value on a decent education.

All of the [...] professors I encountered were incredible. Each of them had a deep understanding of the subject matter and cared about student success. Further, all were available and willing to communicate outside of class, answered questions clearly and promptly, and brought a much appreciated level of experience and excellence to the classroom. I have learned so much from my [...] courses at Boise State. I will graduate ready to begin a career in my field. I strongly recommend this degree program to other students. [...] I believe the faculty do the best they can with the limited resources provided[.]

Some non-transfer undergraduates, by contrast, expressed concerns about the general learning environment – including quality of faculty instruction – even while praising other campus experiences. For example:

While BSU offered great classes once I was further in my degree, the general classes offered were taught by professors who often were not suited for the job. I felt like I was being cheated out of money - spending so much on inadequate faculty. Often time I felt frustrated and like I made the wrong decision in pursuing a degree at Boise State because of how the first two

¹ Transfer students defined as those who previously attended another higher education institution (Pyramid cohort codes of BACHXFER and ASSOCXFER). Graduates who had obtained dual enrollment credit or Advanced Placement/International Baccalaureate transfer credits are included in the non-transfer category.

years at the university were way below my expectations. Some professors didn't know the material they were covering well enough to teach it to others and some professors were lazy and didn't provide an adequate learning experience.

Thus, while both groups appear to have felt roughly equal in terms of faculty accessibility and communication, the two groups have divergent concerns about the quality of faculty.

Department processes: Neither group differed statistically from the other in terms of course timing, redundancy of course material, or reception of sound academic advice. However, among undergraduates who said they did *not* experience a delay in graduation due to course availability problems, *non-transfer* students were slightly more likely to report that course *timing* was an issue ($p = .011$).

Did student experience with faculty and courses vary significantly by college?

Overall, across graduates and undergraduate levels combined, there is limited evidence of some differences across colleges. Overall ANOVA tests indicate differences among the colleges for all questions, with the exception of interactions with faculty outside of class (all $p < .001$).

Faculty: In terms of faculty interest in student welfare, College of Education graduates reported better faculty *support* compared to students graduating from each other unit ($p \leq .015$). No other paired sets of college graduates were significantly different from each other. Did graduates differentially regard faculty as *outstanding teachers*? Education graduates ranked faculty higher than graduates of all other colleges except Public Service (all $p < .001$). Arts & Sciences graduates also felt better about teaching compared to Business/Economics graduates ($p < .01$), who reported lower satisfaction compared to graduates from Public Service ($p = .01$) and Health Sciences ($p < .05$). No other paired set of college graduates was significantly different from each other.

Education graduates also reported a better experience in terms of *communication* with faculty regarding student needs/concerns compared to every college but Public Service ($p < .01$). No other paired set of college graduates was significantly different from each other. There are no significant pair-wise differences among colleges with respect to opportunities for interaction with faculty outside of class.

Despite these patterns, it is important to emphasize that in absolute terms, the differences are relatively modest (see Table 1). For example, the score among Education graduates with respect to faculty interest in student welfare is 3.53 on a 1-4 scale, while the next closest colleges, Health and Public Service, come in at 3.25; all colleges scored above the midpoint on the scale. There is wider variation in rating faculty teaching, ranging from a low of 2.93 among Business/Economics graduates to a high of 3.45 among Education graduates.

Table 1. Mean scores on faculty measures by Boise State college. Source: 2014-15 Graduating Student Survey. Original scale is 1-4 where 1=disagree strongly, 4=agree strongly.

College	Welfare/ students	Outstanding teachers	Good communication	Out-of-class interactions
Arts/Sciences	3.21	3.15	3.00	2.85
Business/ Economics	3.12	2.93	3.02	2.82
Education	3.53	3.45	3.29	2.88
Engineering	3.19	2.98	2.97	2.87
Health	3.25	3.11	2.93	2.77
Public Service	3.25	3.23	3.12	2.90

Curricula:

What about graduates' feelings about curricular matters (Table 2)? First, reception of sound academic *advice*: Education graduates felt they received more of this than Health Science ($p < .05$), Arts/Sciences ($p < .01$), and Business/Economics ($p < .001$) graduates. No other pair of college graduate sets was significantly different from each other. Thus, there is little variation across colleges in terms of academic advising. Turning

to the *timing* of courses, the average Education graduate was distinct from the average graduate from each other college's graduates ($p < .05$). This variable is coded negatively, so a higher score means *worse* performance; Education graduates reported a significantly *lower* score on this variable. Health Science graduates reported better course timing compared to graduates in Arts/Sciences ($p < .001$).

With regards to the issue of *redundancy* of course material, Education graduates felt this was less of an issue compared to graduates from all other colleges except Engineering ($p < .001$). Engineering graduates were more satisfied with the uniqueness of their courses compared to Business/Economics and Health Science graduates (both $p < .001$), as well as Arts & Sciences ($p < .05$). Thus, the consistent pattern across these faculty and department variables is the relatively higher satisfaction of Education graduates in terms of faculty interaction/support and timing/uniqueness of courses in their degree programs.

Table 2. Mean scores on curricular measures by Boise State college. Source: 2014-15 Graduating Student Survey. Original scale is 1-4 where 1=disagree strongly, 4=agree strongly.

College	Sound academic advice	Course timing (lower = better)	Course redundancy (lower = better)
Arts/Sciences	3.01	2.65	2.50
Business/Economics	2.87	2.55	2.62
Education	3.29	2.12	2.00
Engineering	3.02	2.54	2.25
Health	3.05	2.38	2.60
Public Service	3.10	2.54	2.42

Did student experience with faculty and courses vary significantly by college at both levels?

Because undergraduate and graduate interactions with faculty and academic programs are so different in scope and nature, it is important to test whether college level differences manifest themselves in different ways at each level of study.

Undergraduates: Overall ANOVA tests were significant for faculty interest in students, course timing, course redundancy, outstanding teaching and academic advising. Of particular note is that the consistent strength of Education graduates in the above analysis would appear not to be driven by the undergraduate experience, as few pair-wise comparisons indicate a clear advantage for Education.

As shown in Table 3, Health Sciences graduates were more satisfied with faculty *interest* in students compared to Business/Economics graduates ($p < .05$). Health Sciences courses were also offered at better times compared to Arts & Sciences courses ($p < .001$) and Business/Economics ($p < .01$). Graduates of all colleges reported greater satisfaction with faculty *teaching* compared to Business/Economics ($p < .01$) and Engineering ($p < .05$) graduates). Finally, with respect to academic *advising*, the only significant pairing was greater Health Science graduate satisfaction compared to Business/Economics graduates ($p < .01$). Despite the overall significant ANOVA, no pair of colleges was significantly different with respect to redundancy of courses.

Table 3. Mean undergraduate scores on faculty measures by Boise State college. Source: 2014-15 Graduating Student Survey. Original scale is 1-4 where 1=disagree strongly, 4=agree strongly.

College	<i>Welfare/ students</i>	<i>Outstanding teachers</i>	<i>Good communication</i>	<i>Out-of-class interactions</i>
Arts/Sciences	3.18	3.13	3.00	2.84
Business/ Economics	3.06	2.89	3.02	2.82
Education	3.26	3.32	2.95	2.73
Engineering	3.07	2.89	2.83	2.89
Health	3.26	3.16	2.96	2.85
Public Service	3.22	3.27	3.07	2.88
	<i>Sound academic advice</i>	<i>Course timing (lower = better)</i>	<i>Course redundancy (lower = better)</i>	
Arts/Sciences	2.99	2.69	2.55	
Business/ Economics	2.83	2.67	2.68	
Education	2.97	2.68	2.29	
Engineering	2.92	2.66	2.42	
Health	3.12	2.38	2.67	
Public Service	3.08	2.50	2.48	

Graduate students: Overall ANOVA tests across the colleges for each question were each significant (faculty interaction, $p < .05$; all others $p < .001$). As shown in Table 4, Arts & Sciences ($p = .012$) and Education ($p < .001$) graduate students were more pleased with faculty *interest* in student welfare compared to Health Sciences graduate students. Education graduate students were more satisfied with faculty *communication* compared to Business/Economics ($p < .05$) and Health Sciences ($p < .001$) graduates. Engineering graduate students reported better communication with faculty compared to Health Sciences graduates ($p = .018$). In terms of *interactions* with faculty out-of-class, Education graduates reported more contact compared to Health Sciences ($p = .013$). There were also few differences with respect to outstanding *teaching*: Arts & Sciences graduate students felt relatively better about teaching compared to Health Sciences ($p = .015$). However, Education graduate students reported greater satisfaction compared to graduate students in Business/Economics and Health Sciences ($p < .01$). Thus, there is some evidence of the earlier Education results here.

Similarly, Education graduate students reported fewer problems with respect to timing of courses compared to Health Sciences ($p < .05$) and Public Service ($p < .01$) graduates. In terms of course *redundancy*, this was an issue in particular for Business/Economics graduates compared to Arts/Sciences ($p < .01$), Education ($p < .01$) and Engineering ($p < .01$) graduates. Arts & Sciences ($p < .01$), Education ($p < .001$) and Engineering ($p < .01$) graduates were more satisfied compared to Health Sciences graduates as well. Finally in terms of sound academic *advising*, graduates from Education ($p < .001$) and Engineering ($p < .05$) all reported greater satisfaction compared to Health Sciences graduates. Education graduate students were more satisfied compared to Business/Economics graduates ($p < .05$). Again, Education graduate students appear to be driving some of the results seen in the combined analysis above.

Table 4. Mean graduate student scores on faculty measures by Boise State college. Source: 2014-15 Graduating Student Survey. Original scale is 1-4 where 1=disagree strongly, 4=agree strongly.

College	<i>Welfare/ students</i>	<i>Outstanding teachers</i>	<i>Good communication</i>	<i>Out-of-class interactions</i>
Arts/Sciences	3.62	3.38	3.09	2.91
Business/ Economics	3.36	3.07	3.00	2.83
Education	3.62	3.50	3.40	2.93
Engineering	3.52	3.23	3.35	2.80
Health	3.20	2.94	2.83	2.50
Public Service	3.33	3.10	3.29	2.95

	<i>Sound academic advice</i>	<i>Course timing (lower = better)</i>	<i>Course redundancy (lower = better)</i>
Arts/Sciences	3.24	2.18	1.82
Business/ Economics	3.02	2.02	2.38
Education	3.39	1.93	1.91
Engineering	3.29	2.19	1.81
Health	2.82	2.37	2.38
Public Service	3.15	2.67	2.24

Summary and Conclusion

The quality of Boise State students' experience is partly rooted in the quality of faculty, departments and curricula, and the survey asks four questions about student welfare, instructional quality, student-faculty interaction and communication. Results from 2014-15 indicate that large majorities of undergraduates and graduate students alike reported satisfaction with regards to faculty interest, teaching quality and faculty-student communication. Work still remains to improve rates of satisfaction regarding out-of-class interactions with faculty. A large majority at both levels also reported satisfaction with advising, but undergraduates continue to report issues with timing and uniqueness of courses; some report problems with both issues simultaneously. There are few statistically meaningful differences between undergraduate transfer and non-transfer graduates; however, a vocal minority of both groups report problems with either quality of faculty instruction or administrative procedures/support in their academic programs.

When graduate students and undergraduates are considered together, College of Education graduates were frequently more satisfied with faculty and curricular matters compared to graduates from other colleges. There were no significant college-level differences in terms of interaction with faculty outside of class. In absolute terms, differences between colleges are modest, with the very largest differences being approximately one-half point on a 1-5 scale.

A similar pattern emerged with regards to curricular matters: Education students collectively reported more satisfaction compared to graduates from other colleges. Engineering students were particularly pleased with the uniqueness of their courses. Variability across colleges is someone larger with curricular items than with faculty items, as might be expected given the more program-specific nature of the former's wording.

Parsing out the analysis by level of study reveals Education's strengths are partly driven by its performance at the graduate level. Health Sciences undergraduates appear to be relatively satisfied with faculty in several areas. In sum, Education graduates stand out at the graduate level, while Health Sciences graduates report greater satisfaction at the undergraduate level. Overall, Boise State colleges appear to rise and fall together as a general group when it comes to student satisfaction.

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