



U N I V E R S I T Y O F
SOUTH CAROLINA[®]
A I K E N

Survey of USC Aiken Alumni
Classes of '00-'01 and '01-'02
Conducted in Spring 2005

Prepared by:

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University Mission

Founded in 1961, the University of South Carolina Aiken (USCA) is a comprehensive liberal arts institution committed to active learning through excellence in teaching, faculty and student scholarship, research, creative activities and service. In this stimulating academic community, USCA challenges students to acquire and develop the skills, knowledge, and values necessary for success in a dynamic global environment.

The university offers degrees in the arts and sciences and in the professional disciplines of business, education, and nursing. All courses of study are grounded in a liberal arts and sciences core curriculum. USCA also encourages interdisciplinary studies and collaborative endeavors.

Emphasizing small classes and individual attention, USCA provides students with opportunities to maximize individual achievement in both academic and co-curricular settings. The institution challenges students to think critically and creatively, to communicate effectively, to learn independently, and to acquire depth of knowledge in chosen fields. The university values honesty, integrity, initiative, hard work, accomplishments, responsible citizenship, respect for diversity, and cross-cultural understanding.

USC Aiken attracts students of varying ages and diverse cultural backgrounds who have demonstrated the potential to succeed in a challenging academic environment. In addition to serving the Savannah River area, USCA actively seeks student enrollment from all parts of South Carolina as well as from other states and countries.

As a senior public institution of the University of South Carolina, USCA combines the advantages of a smaller institution with the resources of a major university system. Located in beautiful, historic Aiken, South Carolina, USCA is an institution of moderate size (2,500-5,000 students) that offers baccalaureate degrees in a number of disciplines, completion baccalaureate degrees at University of South Carolina regional campuses, and master's degrees in selected programs.

The USCA World Wide Web Home Page is: <http://www.usca.edu>

The USCA Office of Institutional Effectiveness World Wide Web Home Page is: <http://ie.usca.edu>

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Executive Summary

This report details the findings from a survey of alumni from the University of South Carolina Aiken (USCA) who graduated between December 2000 and August 2002 about their experiences during and after college. This study is conducted every two years in part to comply with Section 59-101-350(B)(6), (C)(4) of the South Carolina Code of Laws, and selected findings have been reported to the South Carolina Commission for Higher Education in the 2005 Institutional Effectiveness Report (Hosch, 2005).

The response rate for the entire survey was 26.7% for all alumni graduating between 2000 and 2002, 29.9% for those who earned bachelor's degrees, and 25.4% for all alumni graduating in 2001-02, the highest response rate for any public institution in the state. The profile of respondents closely mirrors the demographic profile of graduates from this period. Major findings include:

- In terms of alumni satisfaction, USCA was third most highly rated public institution in South Carolina in terms of its overall academic program behind only Winthrop University and the College of Charleston. Clemson University and USC Columbia were ninth and eleventh, respectively, on the statewide survey, although differences between #3 and #11 were negligible.
 - 88.6% of USCA respondents indicated that they were very satisfied or satisfied with the overall academic program.
 - 92.6% indicated that their USCA education had definitely or probably improved their quality of life, regardless of the financial benefits of their college education.
 - 76.5% reported they would definitely or probably choose to attend USCA if they were to start college over again.
 - Despite these positive indicators, the percentage of alumni who reported they were very satisfied with USCA declined sharply from a high of 61.0% in 2001 to 48.3% in 2003 to 38.5% in 2005. Economic factors at the time of graduation may have influenced graduate satisfaction.
- Satisfaction among graduates with non-academic and co-curricular areas was in general ten to twenty percentage points lower than the level of satisfaction with the overall academic program.

- Job placement for USC Aiken alumni graduating in 2000-02 took longer than it did for alumni graduating in previous years, and fewer recent graduates reported that both their first and current jobs were less highly related to their college majors than did graduates from the 1990s.
- The estimated median salary of graduates in their first jobs following graduation in 2000-2002 was \$24,600, but 2-3 year later the estimated median salary of graduates had risen to \$35,100, a figure comparable to the median salary in South Carolina for individuals aged 25-34 with a bachelor's degree.
- Survey respondents reported that upon graduation they owed about \$10,000 for educational expenses and about \$8,400 for non-educational expenses. African-American or Black students reported owing an estimated \$16,770 for educational expenses, almost twice as much as the estimated \$8,623 owed by whites for educational expenses. Debts for non-educational expenses were about the same by race or ethnicity.
- A majority of graduates identified their abilities in a range of learning outcomes and competencies as above average or outstanding compared to other college graduates.
 - Most highly rated abilities were in broad areas critical for success after college, such as working independently, working as a member of a team, and learning on their own.
 - General education outcomes rated most highly were: understanding written information, thinking critically, and understanding the interaction between people and society.
 - General education outcomes least positively rated were: understanding and appreciating the arts, understanding and applying scientific principles, and speaking a foreign language.
- About three quarters (76.7%) of respondents indicated they had voted in most or all of the elections since graduation.
- Over a third (37.9%) of alumni reported they participated in volunteer, public, or community service weekly or monthly; four out of ten (40.1%) reported weekly or monthly participation in personal enrichment activities outside of their career areas; and just under half (47.6%) indicated they participated weekly or monthly in advanced education or training related to their careers.

Methodology

This survey of graduates from the University of South Carolina Aiken who completed their degrees between December 2000 and August 2002 was conducted in the spring of 2005 in part to comply with Section 59-101-350(B)(6), (C)(4) of the South Carolina Code of Laws, which requires USCA to ask alumni questions regarding their employment and general satisfaction with their college preparation.

In addition to the common questions asked by all public institutions in the state, a battery of supplementary questions were asked, including self-assessment of critical thinking skills, academic and personal growth, and intellectual and civic engagement. Questions from previous administrations of the survey were revised in Fall 2004 and presented to the USCA Academic Council for feedback. In all, the survey was shortened from 100 questions (six with two parts) to 70 questions (six with two parts) and formatted to fit on one double-sided page. These revisions were made both to provide more reliable data about alumni outcomes as well as to increase response rates.

This questionnaire was prepared by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness in Spring 2005 and was mailed to alumni who had earned degrees between December 2000 and August 2002, inclusive, based on addresses provided by the Alumni Relations Office. Among the 1,088 degrees awarded from December 2000 through August 2002, a total of 903 current mailing addresses were available.

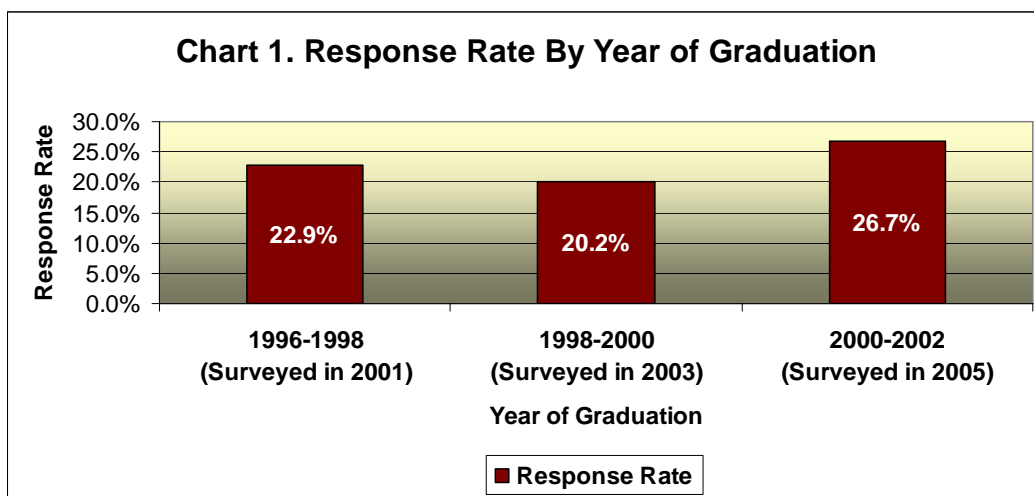
In a cover letter, alumni were invited to participate in the study by completing the one-page, double-sided questionnaire. A USCA alumni bumper sticker was enclosed as an advance thank-you gift for participating in the study. Participants were asked to return the completed survey to the IE Office in a postage-paid envelope. From the initial contact, 224 paper surveys were returned. Additional one-page surveys specific to the School of Nursing and the School of Education were mailed to graduates with degrees in those fields; results from those discipline-specific surveys are not reported in this study.

Table 1. Degrees Awarded December 2000 through August 2002 By Degree Level

Degree	2000-2001	2001-2002	Total
Associate's	67	56	123
Bachelor's	466	470	936
Master's	15	14	29
Total	548	540	1,088

To increase response rates, a follow-up postcard was sent to all alumni with valid postal addresses three weeks after the date requested for surveys to be returned.

This postcard requested that alumni return the paper survey or that they take the survey online, if they had not returned or could not find the paper version of the survey. Following this mailing, 17 responses were received from the online survey for a total of 241 valid responses. The 1.9% response rate for the online follow-up is similar to other similar studies that have used an online and paper survey format (Porter & Umbach, 2004). Given this relatively low response for the online survey, it seems likely that most if not all participants honored the request not to respond to the survey a second time. The overall response rate for this study or both classes of graduates was 26.7%, a significant increase from recent alumni surveys. For the alumni survey conducted in 2003, the response rate was just 20.2%. The six and a half percentage point increase from 2003 to 2005 represents an increase in the response rate of over 30%.



In the 2005 alumni study, the response rate was 29.9% for the 232 respondents who earned bachelor’s degrees. Sampling error for the survey is $\pm 5.4\%$. This level of response rate is similar to response rates of alumni surveys conducted across the nation; these rates have been declining since the 1960s (Porter, 2004; Dey, 1997). The inclusion of the bumper sticker as a thank-you gift and the shorter length of the survey likely contributed to this increase in response rates.

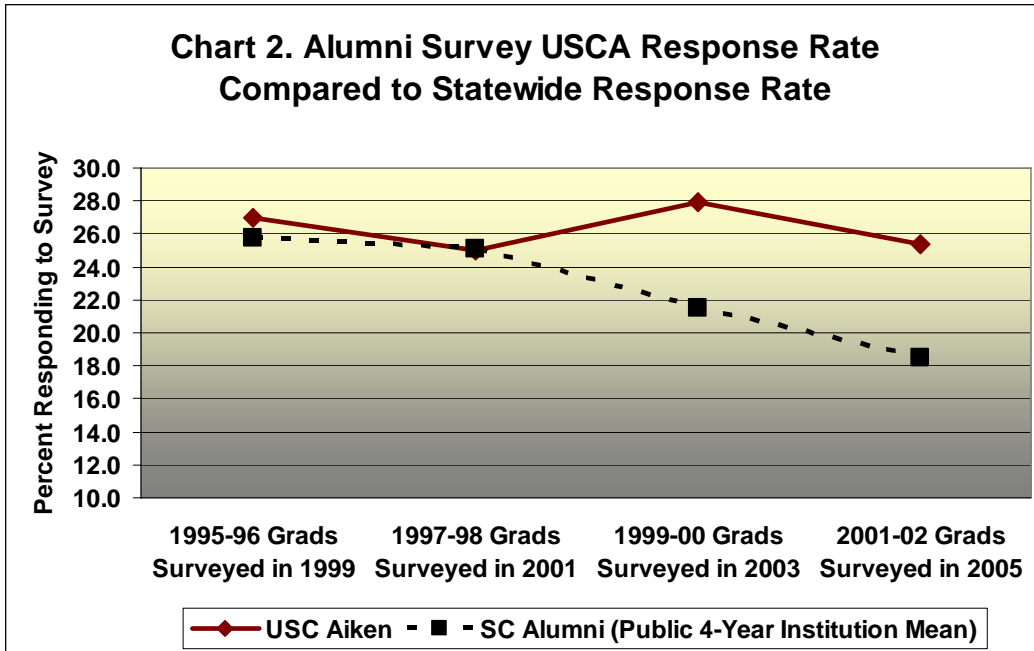
Results from paper surveys were scanned using a NCS Pearson Opscan 4U optical scanner and processed with Bubble Publishing Software. Web-based surveys were administered with CLT Silhouette and Flashlight Online survey tool. All results were exported to SPSS for analysis.

One-Year Survey Populations and State Benchmark Data

The South Carolina Commission on Higher Education (CHE) requires that some specific common questions are included on biannual alumni surveys administered by all public higher education institutions in the state. Data are collected and compiled by the CHE, however, only for students graduating every other year (1995-96, 1997-98, 1999-00, and for this survey 2001-02). USCA had 137

respondents in this group. When USCA results are compared to statewide data, only the respondents who graduated in 2001-02 are included.

It is notable that the statewide response rate on this survey has declined from 25.8% in 1999 to 18.5% in 2005, while the USCA response rate has consistently remained between 25% and 30% during this period. Even though the USC Aiken response rate of 25.4% for the one-year survey population in 2005 was one of the lower survey response rates over this period of time for the institution, USCA had the highest rate among all four-year institutions for the 2005 survey administration.



Comparisons to statewide data include graduates from 1995-96, 1997-98, 1999-00, and 2001-02 only

All statewide data included in this report were gathered from the annual CHE publication *A Closer Look at Higher Education in South Carolina* (Connolly, 2000; Raley, 2002; Raley, 2004; Raley, 2006).

Two-Year Survey Population

When USCA results are discussed without reference to statewide comparisons (such as in discussions of learning outcomes, income after college, and debt), respondents from alumni who graduated in the two-year period between December 2000 and August 2002 are included. There were 241 respondents total in this category. However, among this group, three participants indicated that they were USCA alumni with just an associate’s degree; four indicated they had earned their master’s degree from USCA; and three respondents did not indicate their degree status. In discussions of these students, only the 232 respondents who indicated their most recent degree from USCA was a bachelor’s degree are included in the analysis.

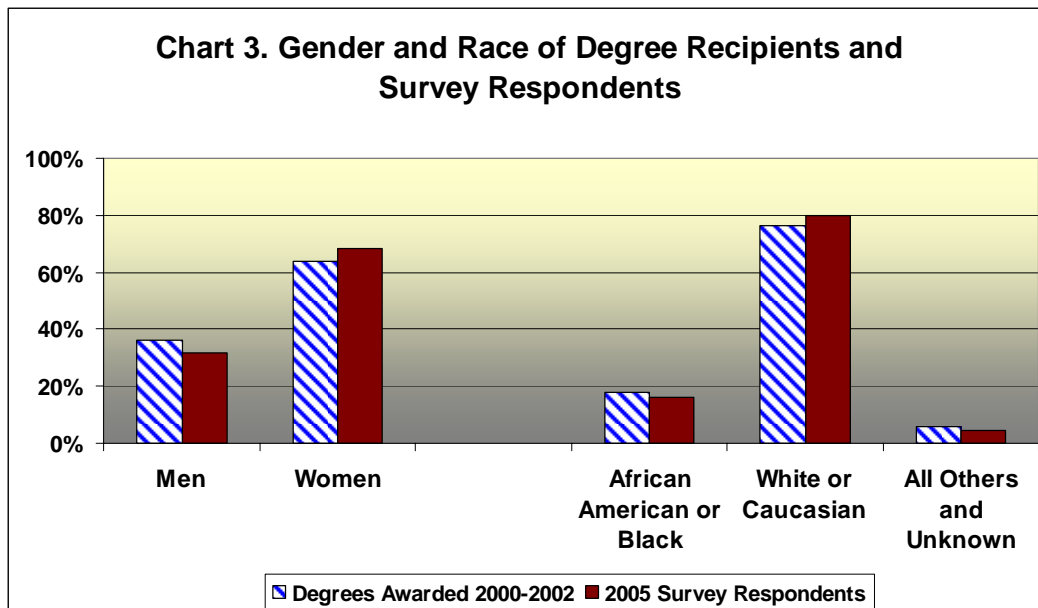
Respondent Profile and Demographics

The 232 bachelor's degree recipients in the 2005 alumni study more closely mirrored the demographic profile of the entire graduating class from 2000-2002 than did the study population in the previous alumni study. Among all graduates in 2000-2002, 36.2% were male, while 31.9% of the survey population indicated they were male, a gap of 4.3%. By contrast, in the 2003 study of alumni graduating in 1998-2000, 29.7% of the graduates were male, while just 21.7% of respondents were male, a gap of 7.9%.

Similarly, representation among Black or African American alumni increased significantly in the 2005 alumni study. Among the total population of graduates from 2000-2002, 17.8% were Black or African American, while 15.9% of survey respondents indicated they were Black or African American. This level of response is almost twice the proportion of Black or African American respondents in the 2003 study, in which only 7.9% of respondents indicated they were Black or African American, while 15.9% of graduates from 1998-2000 were Black or African American. Alumni who indicated they were members of racial or minority groups other than white or Black or African American again made up a very small proportion of respondents (4.4%), and the numbers of these alumni are too small for useful statistical analysis of their responses.

Table 2. Degrees Awarded, Survey Respondents By Gender and Race

	1998-2000				2000-2002			
	Bachelor's Degr. Awarded		Survey Respondents		Bachelor's Degr. Awarded		Survey Respondents	
	N	Pct	N	Pct	N	Pct	N	Pct
Gender								
Men	251	29.7%	44	21.8%	339	36.2%	74	31.9%
Women	594	70.3%	156	77.2%	597	63.8%	158	68.1%
Race								
African Amer. or Black	134	15.9%	16	7.9%	167	17.8%	37	15.9%
American Indian	2	0.2%	--	--	3	0.3%	0	0.0%
Asian or Pacific Isl.	13	1.5%	--	--	11	1.2%	3	1.3%
Hispanic	16	1.9%	--	--	14	1.5%	2	0.9%
White or Caucasian	659	78.0%	177	87.6%	714	76.3%	185	79.7%
Other and Unknown	21	2.5%	9	4.5%	27	2.9%	5	2.2%
Total	845	100.0%	202	100.0%	936	100.0%	232	100.0%

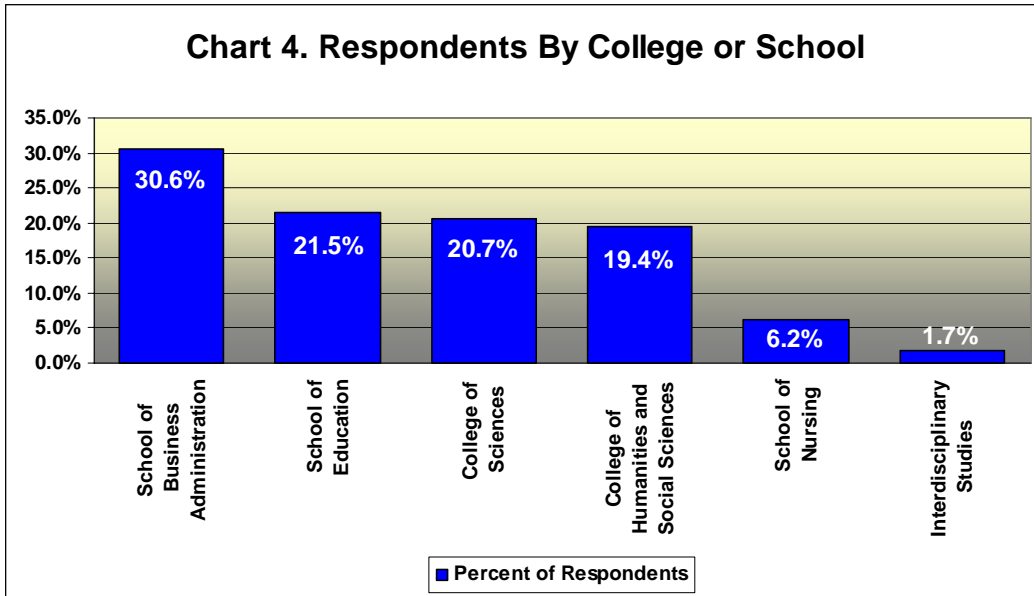


Given that proportions of respondents to the 2005 alumni survey closely mirror the demographic distribution of the entire population of graduates, the results of the study may be generalized within the sampling error of study. It is important to note, however that some differences in responses were again observed between White and African American or Black graduates, and these differences are noted where appropriate.

Table 3. Respondents By College/School and Major, Including Double Majors

Major, Including Double Majors	N	Pct
College of Humanities and Social Sciences	47	19.4%
Communications	7	2.9%
English	4	1.7%
Fine Arts	9	3.7%
History	7	2.9%
Political Science	1	0.4%
Sociology	19	7.9%
College of Sciences	50	20.7%
Biology	22	9.1%
Chemistry	3	1.2%
Mathematics & Computer Science	8	3.3%
Industrial Mathematics	1	0.4%
Psychology	16	6.6%
Interdisciplinary Studies	4	1.7%
School of Business Administration	74	30.6%
School of Education	52	21.5%
Education, Early Childhood	19	7.9%
Education, Elementary	9	3.7%
Education, Secondary	7	2.9%
Exercise & Sports Science	17	7.0%
School of Nursing	15	6.2%
(Double Majors)	(10)	4.1%
Total	232	100.0%

Almost one third (30.6%) of respondents who earned bachelors degrees from USCA graduated with a major in business administration, and another 21.5% graduated with a degree from the School of Education, with 14.5% in teacher education and 7.0% in exercise science. Just over a fifth (20.7%) graduated with a degree from the College of Sciences, and just under a fifth (19.4%) earned a degree from the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. Graduates with a four-year degree from the School of Nursing comprised 6.2% of the study population, and 1.7% had earned a degree in interdisciplinary studies.



Three out of four (73.6%) of alumni who had received bachelor's degrees from USCA between December 2000 and August 2002 reported that they planned to earn a degree beyond their bachelor's degree. About one out of nine (11.3%) of all respondents indicated that they had already completed a master's degree by March 2005 and 0.4% (one respondent) reported completion of a doctorate degree.

Alumni Satisfaction

Satisfaction with Academic Program

Satisfaction with USCA was high, with 88.6% of respondents indicating that they were very satisfied or satisfied with the overall academic program. Three-fourths (76.5%) reported they would definitely or probably choose to attend USCA if they were to start college over again. More than twelve out of thirteen respondents (92.6%) indicated that their USCA education had definitely or probably improved their quality of life, regardless of the financial benefits of their college education.

Compared to other public institutions in South Carolina, USC Aiken’s alumni indicated negligibly higher weighted levels of satisfaction on the 2005 alumni survey compared to alumni at all other institutions, except for Winthrop University and the College of Charleston. Using just responses for alumni graduating in 2001-02 (the only group for which state-wide benchmarking data are available), USC Aiken’s mean satisfaction rating was 5.28 on a scale of 1 to 6, with 6 being “Very Satisfied,” compared to the state mean of 5.23.

Table 4. Satisfaction of 2001-02 Graduates with Overall Academic Program at Public 4-Year Institutions in South Carolina Ranked By Mean (2005 Survey)

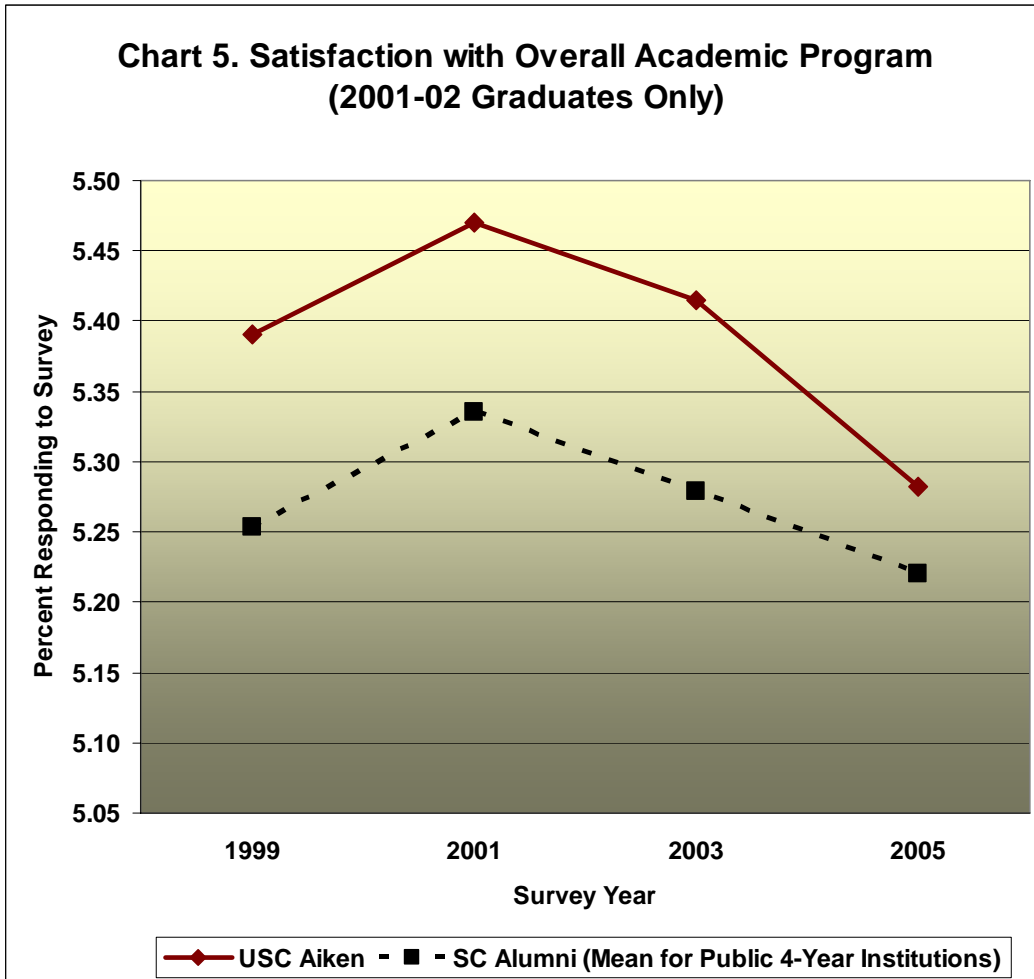
(6=Very Satisfied, 5=Satisfied, 4=Somewhat Satisfied, 3=Somewhat Dissatisfied, 2=Dissatisfied, 1 = Very Dissatisfied)

	Response Rate	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	% Very Satisfied + % Satisfied	Mean
Winthrop Univ.	16.3%	49.5%	44.3%	4.1%	1.0%	1.0%	0.0%	93.8%	5.40
College of Charleston	15.3%	46.7%	46.7%	5.4%	0.8%	0.4%	0.0%	93.4%	5.39
USC Aiken	25.4%	38.5%	51.9%	8.9%	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%	90.4%	5.28
Francis Marion Univ.	14.9%	44.5%	43.6%	8.2%	1.8%	0.9%	1.0%	88.1%	5.26
The Citadel	17.1%	37.5%	52.1%	8.3%	1.0%	1.0%	0.0%	89.6%	5.24
Lander University	23.7%	42.2%	43.3%	11.1%	1.1%	2.2%	0.0%	85.5%	5.22
USC Beaufort	13.4%	33.3%	55.6%	11.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	88.9%	5.22
USC Upstate	17.8%	34.0%	55.3%	6.4%	3.2%	1.1%	0.0%	89.3%	5.18
USC Columbia	23.5%	29.3%	61.1%	8.0%	0.9%	0.3%	0.3%	90.4%	5.17
Coastal Carolina Univ.	18.7%	30.1%	61.2%	6.8%	1.0%	0.0%	1.0%	91.3%	5.17
Clemson University	12.4%	42.5%	39.3%	10.6%	6.0%	1.0%	0.6%	81.8%	5.15
South Carolina State	23.9%	31.5%	37.0%	30.1%	0.0%	0.7%	0.7%	68.5%	4.97

(Raley, 2006)

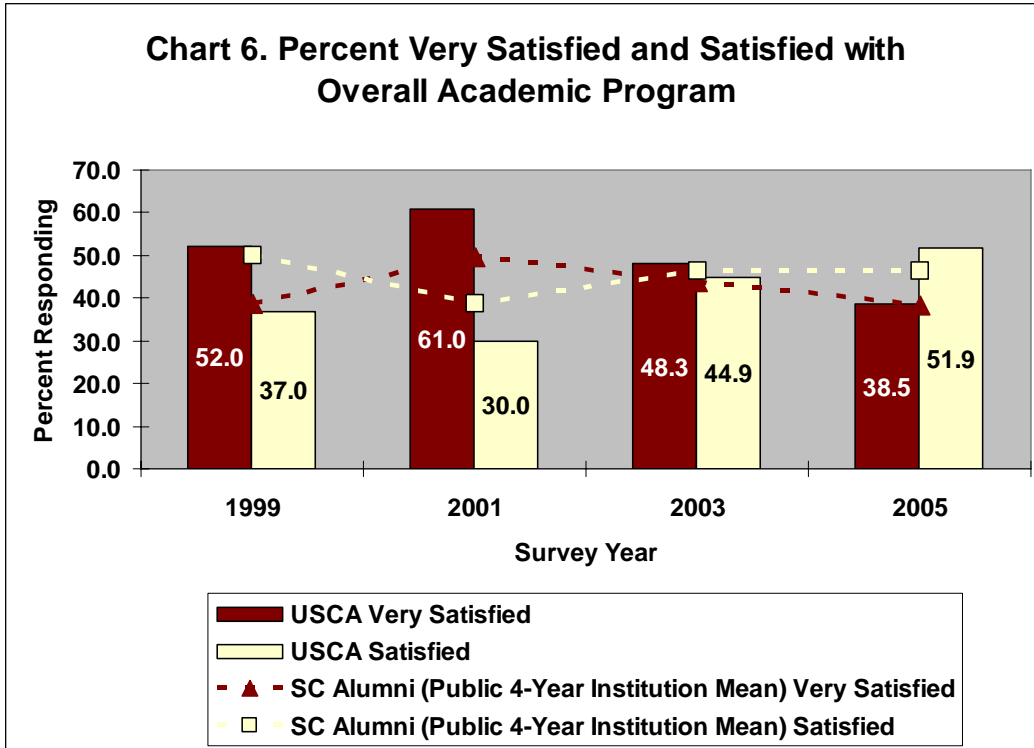
Sustained response rates at USC Aiken in face of declining response rates at other institutions may account for a larger drop in satisfaction rates at USC Aiken

observed in the 2005 survey administration, since less satisfied individuals are less likely to respond to surveys.



(Comparisons to statewide data include graduates from 1995-96, 1997-98, 1999-00, and 2001-02 only)

Decline in the mean satisfaction rating among USCA graduates represents a major shift that in college satisfaction, with fewer alumni reporting they were “Very Satisfied” and more alumni reporting they were “Satisfied” with their overall academic program. Indeed, the percentage of alumni who reported they were very satisfied with USCA declined sharply from a high of 61.0% in 2001 to 48.3% in 2003 to 38.5% in 2005. Economic factors at the time of graduation may have influenced graduate satisfaction. (see Chart 6). In addition to response rates, additional factors that may have prompted this decline include a weak job market at the time of graduation that resulted in more graduates reporting difficulty finding work quickly after graduation as well as difficulty finding a job that was directly related to their majors (see “Employment Following Graduation”).



(Comparisons to statewide data include graduates from 1995-96, 1997-98, 1999-00, and 2001-02 only)

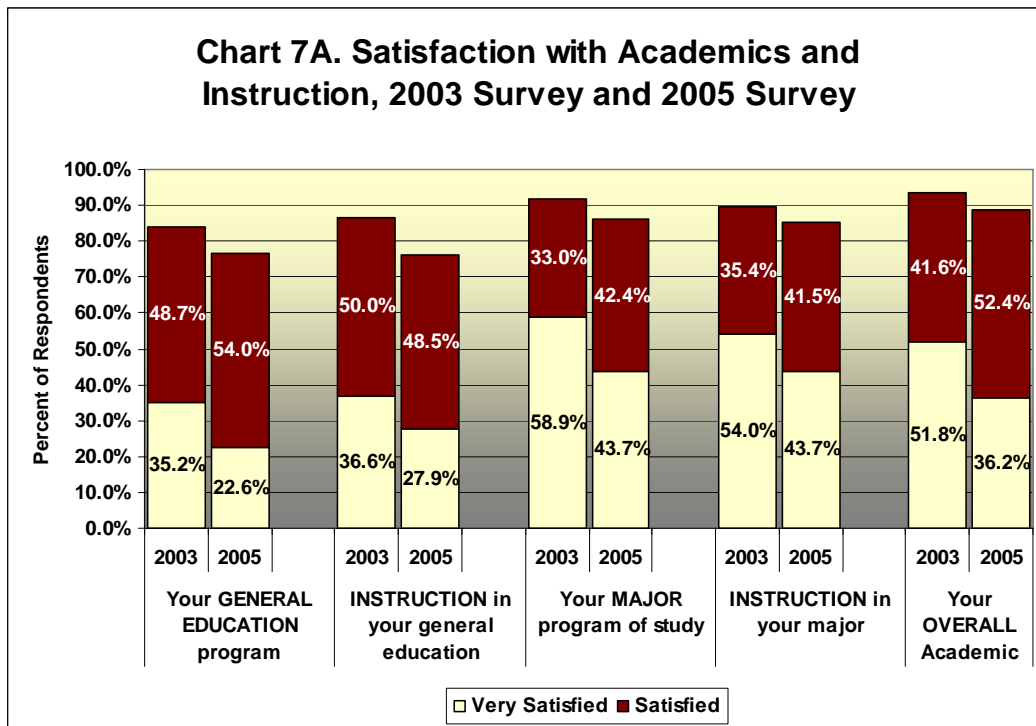
While these numbers are indicative of broad satisfaction among alumni, significantly fewer respondents reported highest levels of satisfaction with a wide range of programs and experiences than in previous years. For instance, while 73.2% of alumni in the 2003 study indicated that their USCA education had definitely improved their quality of life regardless of the financial benefits, just 67.4% of respondents in 2005 indicated this level of confidence. Similarly, 53.0% of alumni in the 2003 study reported they definitely would attend USCA if they were to start college over again and 41.4% reported they definitely would pursue the same major, but in 2005, 48.7% of respondents reported they definitely would attend USCA again, and just 35.7% reported they would definitely pursue the same major.

Along the same lines, 43.7% of 2005 respondents indicated they were very satisfied with instruction in their major program of study and 27.9% indicated they were very satisfied with instruction in their general education courses. Yet among 2003 respondents, these levels of strong satisfaction were about ten percentage points higher, with 54.0% reporting they were very satisfied with instruction in their major and 36.6% reporting they were very satisfied with instruction in their general education courses (see Table 5 and Chart 7A).

Table 5. Satisfaction with Academics and Instruction

Survey Item	2003		2005	
	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Satisfied
Your GENERAL EDUCATION program INSTRUCTION in your general education program	35.2%	48.7%	22.6%	54.0%
Your MAJOR program of study INSTRUCTION in your major	58.9%	33.0%	43.7%	42.4%
Your OVERALL Academic Program	51.8%	41.6%	36.2%	52.4%

(Includes bachelor's degree recipients only for 1998-2000 in 2003 study and 2000-02 in 2005 study)



(Includes bachelor's degree recipients only for 1998-2000 in 2003 study and 2000-02 in 2005 study)

Multiple factors may have influenced this observed decline in the reported levels of alumni satisfaction. Economic factors likely play a large role, given that most of these graduates completed their degrees during an economic downturn in 2001 and 2002, which resulted in higher unemployment in the state and across the nation. The price of tuition also rose significantly during this period, and so the perceived return on investment may depress satisfaction levels. Indeed, broad research on alumni indicate that college satisfaction correlates positively with satisfaction with the types of work graduates are performing after college as well as with their satisfaction with their compensation (Pace, 1979; Pike, 1993).

Differences in overall satisfaction between men and women were negligible. Differences by race were also small. Just over a third (35.1%) of African American or Black alumni and a similar proportion (36.8%) of white alumni

indicated that they were very satisfied with their overall academic program. But African American or black alumni responded they were satisfied (59.5%) at higher rates than whites (51.1%), although this difference was not observed to be statistically significant.

Additionally, the increase in response rate may also play a factor in changes in satisfaction levels. In previous USCA alumni studies, the six-page questionnaire may have disproportionately prompted graduates who were very satisfied to respond and discouraged less enthusiastic alumni from responding. By contrast, respondents in 2005 may have had to overcome a lower threshold of effort to respond to the one-page, double-sided form, and as a result, more modestly satisfied graduates responded to the survey. The presence of such an effect would suggest that higher education institutions have little to gain by encouraging higher response rates, since gathering responses of alumni less likely to respond to surveys would tend to have the effect of depressing reported satisfaction rates.

Satisfaction with Co-Curricular and Other Areas

Satisfaction among graduates with non-academic and co-curricular areas was in general ten to twenty percentage points lower than the level of satisfaction with the overall academic program. While almost nine out of ten (88.6%) of bachelor's degree recipients were very satisfied or satisfied with their overall academic program, about eight out of ten were very satisfied or satisfied with campus facilities (79.6%) and interactions with campus administrators (79.4%). Additionally, about three out of four were very satisfied or satisfied with university communications (77.9%), advising by faculty (75.9%), integration of computers or technology into course work (75.5%), and class scheduling (74.1%). Seven out of ten respondents reported they were very satisfied or satisfied with student life (71.7%) and opportunities for independent study or research (68.9%). Just over six out of ten (63.6%) indicated they were very satisfied or satisfied with extracurricular activities (see Table 6).

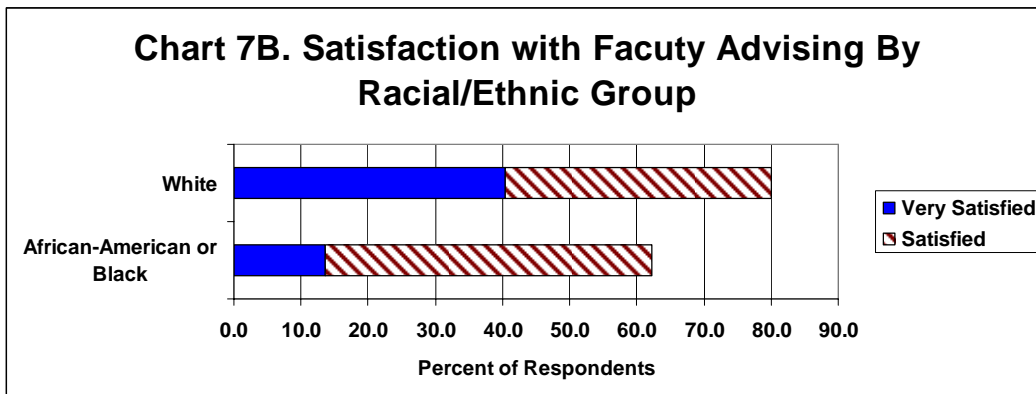
The lowest ranked item in terms of satisfaction was contact with other alumni, with which just 10.4% reported they were very satisfied and only another 30.2% reported they were satisfied. Additionally, 18.1% of respondents were somewhat dissatisfied, dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied with their contact with other alumni, suggesting that facilitating contact among USCA graduates may be an area where improvements could be made. It is important to observe, however, that recent efforts to energize outreach to alumni have not been in place long enough for this instrument to measure their effectiveness.

Table 6. Satisfaction with Academics, Instruction, and Other Areas, Ranked By Mean

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	%Very Satisfied + %Satisfied	Mean
Your OVERALL academic program	36.2%	52.4%	9.2%	1.3%	0.4%	0.4%	88.6%	5.21
Your MAJOR program of study	43.7%	42.4%	9.2%	1.7%	2.6%	0.4%	86.0%	5.21
Instruction in your major	43.7%	41.5%	10.5%	2.2%	1.3%	0.9%	85.2%	5.21
Availability of faculty	38.4%	43.7%	12.7%	3.5%	0.4%	1.3%	82.1%	5.12
Level of academic challenge	32.9%	50.0%	13.2%	3.5%	0.4%	0.0%	82.9%	5.11
Interactions with administrators	34.6%	44.7%	14.9%	1.8%	2.6%	1.3%	79.4%	5.03
Campus facilities	26.5%	53.1%	16.4%	2.7%	1.3%	0.0%	79.6%	5.01
INSTRUCTION in your general education program	27.9%	48.5%	21.0%	1.3%	1.3%	0.0%	76.4%	5.00
University communications	25.7%	52.2%	15.0%	5.3%	1.3%	0.4%	77.9%	4.94
Your GENERAL EDUCATION program of study	22.6%	54.0%	19.0%	2.2%	2.2%	0.0%	76.5%	4.92
Advising by faculty	35.5%	40.4%	14.0%	4.4%	2.2%	3.5%	75.9%	4.92
Integration of computers/technology into course work	24.9%	50.7%	18.3%	3.1%	2.6%	0.4%	75.5%	4.91
Class scheduling	24.6%	49.6%	20.2%	2.6%	2.2%	0.9%	74.1%	4.89
Student life	23.9%	47.8%	21.7%	3.1%	3.1%	0.4%	71.7%	4.85
Opportunities for independent study/research	20.4%	48.4%	25.3%	2.7%	2.2%	0.9%	68.9%	4.80
Extracurricular activities	21.3%	42.2%	25.3%	7.6%	3.6%	0.0%	63.6%	4.70
Contact with other alumni	10.4%	30.2%	41.4%	8.6%	6.3%	3.2%	40.5%	4.20

(Includes bachelor's degree recipients for 2000-02)

As the only statistically significant difference observed by race, African American or Black Alumni reported lower levels of satisfaction with faculty advising than did white students. While 40.3% of white graduates reported they were very satisfied with advising by faculty, just 13.5% of African American or Black graduates were very satisfied with the advising they received ($p < 0.01$).



Employment Following Graduation

Job Placement

USCA alumni graduating in 2000-02 took longer to find jobs than did alumni graduating in previous years. Additionally, fewer recent graduates reported that both their first and current jobs were highly related to their college majors compared to graduates from the 1990s.

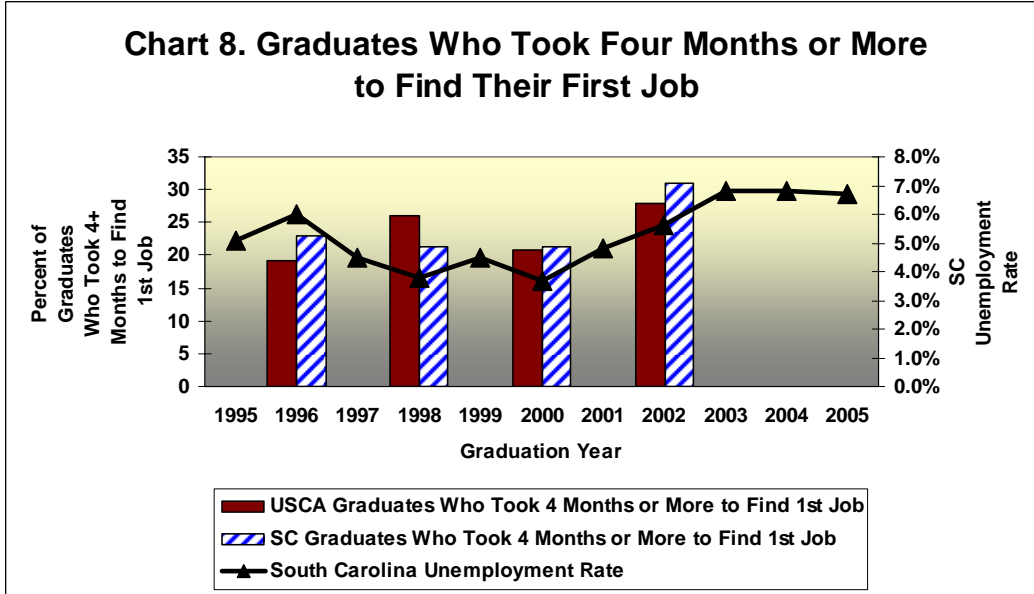
The amount of time it takes for a graduate to obtain his or her first full-time professional job following college is difficult to measure in a meaningful way. Numbers of part-time students who are employed full-time while attending college can distort interpretations of placement rates, and because of the formulation of the question (used by all public colleges in the state) students who choose to pursue graduate studies immediately following undergraduate school appear indistinguishable from students who chose not to seek a full-time job for other reasons, such as becoming a homemaker. These limitations aside, results from recent surveys appear to indicate a significant increase in the amount of time it took graduates to find employment. For alumni graduating in 1999-2000, two fifths (40.9%) of graduates reported having their first full-time job before leaving college, while for those graduating in 2001-02, only just over a quarter (27.8%) of graduates indicated they had obtained their first full-time job prior to leaving college. Similarly, while 20.0% of 1999-2000 graduates reported finding a full-time job within one month of graduation, only 14.8% of alumni graduating in 2001-02 found a full-time job in a similar time frame.

Table 7. Time to Obtain First Full-Time Job Following Graduation

Graduation Year	Survey Year	Institution	Prior to leaving college	Less than 1 month	1 to 3 months	4 to 6 months	7 to 12 months	Over 12 months	Not obtained FT job	Did not seek FT job
1995-96	1999	USC Aiken	37.5	16.7	20.8	11.7	2.5	4.2	0.8	5.8
		SC Mean	33.0	16.0	21.2	11.1	5.5	4.5	1.9	6.7
1997-98	2001	USC Aiken	34.0	19.0	13.0	11.0	7.0	6.0	2.0	8.0
		SC Mean	34.9	15.1	22.0	9.3	5.8	4.3	1.9	6.7
1999-00	2003	USC Aiken	40.9	20.0	15.5	8.2	7.3	2.7	2.7	2.7
		SC Mean	38.5	12.3	20.6	8.8	5.4	3.9	3.3	8.5
2001-02	2005	USC Aiken	27.8	14.8	20.9	10.4	7.0	7.0	3.5	8.7
		SC Mean	34.2	12.6	17.6	11.2	8.8	8.7	2.2	8.4

Conversely, the number of graduates who took more than six months to find a job or did not find a job at all also increased.

Economic factors likely play a role in the increased amount of time it took graduates to find jobs. Except for 1998, the percentage of students who took four months or longer to find their first job was observed roughly to track the unemployment rate in the state (see Chart 8).



Unemployment rates 1999-2004 from the South Carolina Budget and Control Board Office of Research and Statistics (2005); 2005 rate from South Carolina Employment Security Commission (2006).

Relationship of Employment to College Major

For graduates statewide, the percent of alumni who reported that their first jobs were highly related to their college majors declined from 49.8% for those graduating in 1995-6 to 43.3% for those graduating in 2001-02. For USCA graduates, however, this decline has been more dramatic. For USCA graduates between 1995-96 and 1999-2000, a relatively high 62-65% of alumni reported that their first jobs were highly related to the college majors. But for those graduating in 2001-02, only 41.6% of graduates reported their first jobs were highly related to their college majors. It is also worth noting that among the 2001-02 USCA graduates surveyed in 2005, that 2.2% fewer respondents reported their current jobs were highly related to their college majors, while typically this number is a few percentage points higher as graduates take some time moving into their fields of interest.

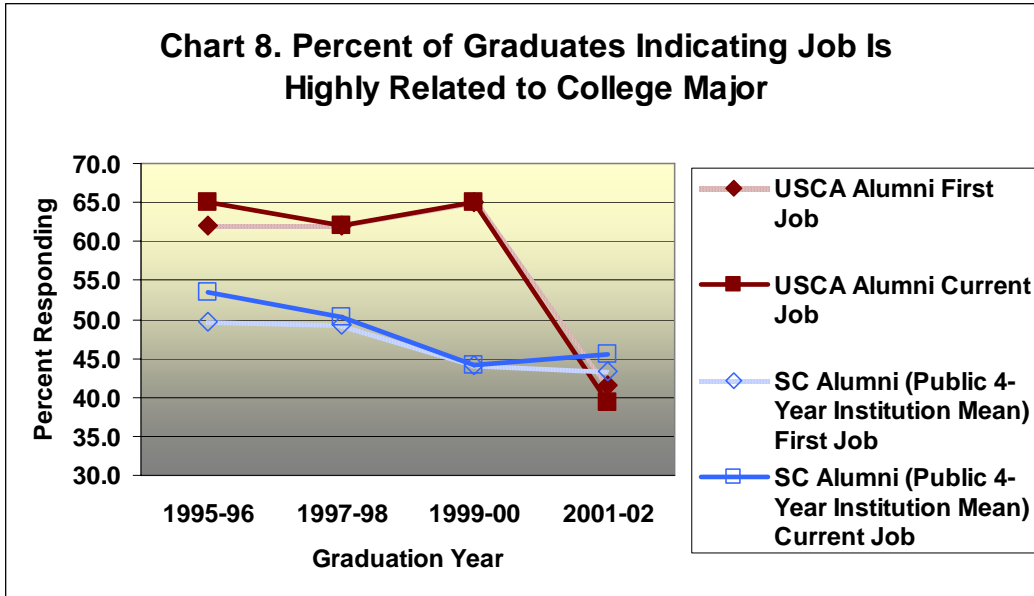
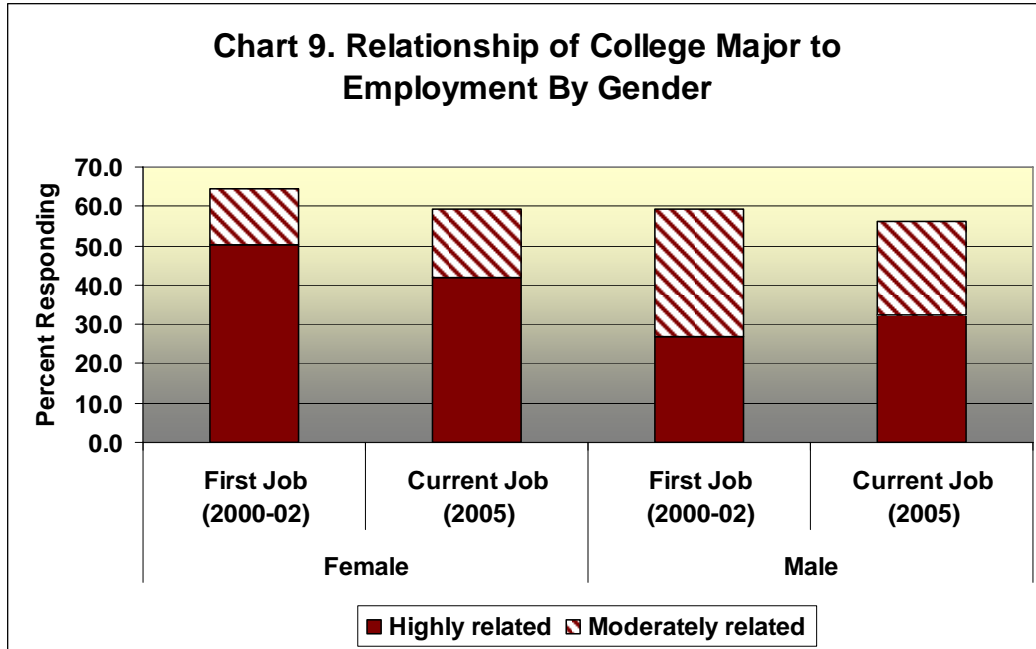


Table 8. Relationship of First and Current Job to College Major for USCA Alumni

Survey Year	Year of Graduation		Highly Related	Moderately Related	Slightly Related	Not Related	Not Employed
1999	1995-96	First Job	62.0	16.0	9.0	10.0	3.0
		Current Job	65.0	13.0	10.0	12.0	0.0
2001	1997-98	First Job	62.0	13.0	9.0	11.0	5.0
		Current Job	62.0	21.0	5.0	11.0	1.0
2003	1999-00	First Job	65.0	7.5	11.7	13.3	2.5
		Current Job	65.0	7.5	11.7	13.3	2.5
2005	2001-02	First Job	41.6	20.4	14.6	10.8	6.6
		Current Job	39.4	19.7	14.4	17.4	9.1

Some significant differences were observed between men and women in job placement and the relationship of their jobs to their college major. Among the female graduates from USCA between 2000 and 2002, just over half (50.3%) reported that their first job was highly related to their college major, although when asked about the relationship between their college major and current job in 2005, this proportion had declined to 41.9%. By contrast, only just over a quarter (27.0%) of male graduates during the same period reported their first jobs were highly related to their majors, and this proportion increased to 32.4% in 2005 when asked about the relationship between their current job and their college major.

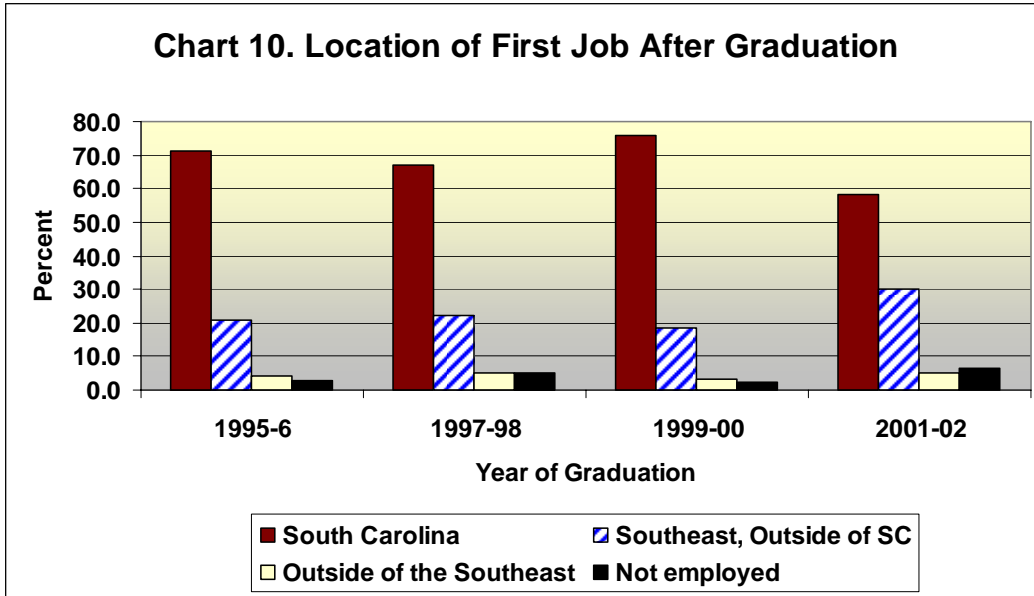


Geographical Location of First Job

USCA alumni graduating in 2001-02 reported that their first jobs were located outside the state of South Carolina at a higher rate than in previous years. While in previous years between 67.0% and 75.8% of graduates found their first job in the state of South Carolina, this percentage decreased to just 58.1% for alumni graduating in 2001-02. By contrast, those finding their first job in the southeastern United States but outside South Carolina increased from 18.3% among 1999-2000 graduates to 30.1% for 2001-02 graduates. In the context of other evidence presented in this study about rising unemployment rates and lower levels of graduates reporting their first job was highly related to their college major, this finding suggests that more graduates were forced to look outside the state to find employment appropriate for their credentials.

Table 9. Location of First Job by Year of Graduation

Graduation Year Survey Year	1995-6 1999	1997-98 2001	1999-00 2003	2001-02 2005
	Percent of Respondents			
South Carolina	71.0	67.0	75.8	58.1
Southeast, Outside of SC	21.0	22.0	18.3	30.1
Outside of the Southeast	4.0	5.0	3.3	5.1
Not employed	3.0	5.0	2.5	6.6



It should be noted that these percentages about job location vary widely among institutions for a variety of reasons, including the proportion of out-of-state students and the institution's proximity to the state border. While unemployment levels appear to have increased among the 2001-02 graduates from earlier years, this figure does not take into account that 10.4% of graduates indicated they were full-time students.

Median Earnings of Alumni

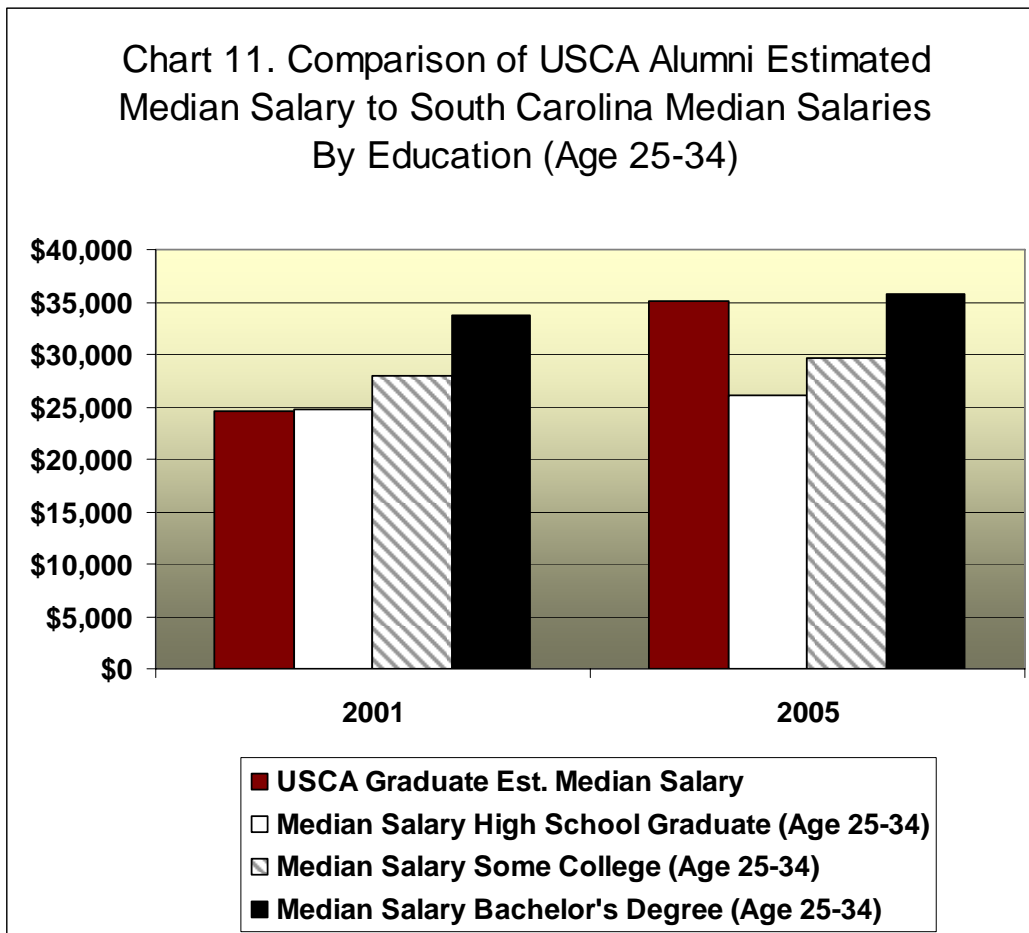
USCA graduates reported an increase in annual earnings of about \$10,000 from their first job after graduation in 2000-2002 to their current job in 2005. This finding, however, deserves significant qualification. First, response rates for questions about personal income were low (only about 50% of returned surveys provided salary data), and a variety of psycho-social factors of respondents may skew these findings, such as a reluctance of graduates with low-paying jobs to report their incomes or a feeling that personal earnings are private information.

Among respondents who answered these questions, the estimated mean salary for the first job after graduation was \$24,600, with about a quarter (24.0%) of respondents earning less than \$20,000 a year, and another quarter (26.8%) earning over \$30,000 a year. Over the course of two to three years, the mean salary of graduates rose to \$35,100, an increase of over 40%. This increase may also indicate a shift from part-time to full-time work.

Table 10. Estimated Mean Income from First Job in 2000-02 and Current Job in 2005

	First Job		Current Job	
	N	Valid %	N	Valid %
Less than \$10,000	13	13.4	5	5.6
\$10,000 to \$19,999	20	20.6	5	5.6
\$20,000 to \$29,999	38	39.2	29	32.2
\$30,000 to \$39,999	21	21.6	27	30.0
\$40,000 to \$49,999	3	3.1	8	8.9
\$50,000 to \$59,999	0		7	7.8
\$60,000 to \$69,999	0		3	3.3
\$70,000 or more	2	2.1	6	6.7
Estimated mean salary	\$24,600		\$35,100	

A comparison of these estimated median salaries of USCA graduates to state median salaries suggests that the financial benefits of earning a college degree may not have been felt immediately following graduation but instead took two to three years to realize. While this effect may again be related to the employment climate in the region, it likely also has an impact on college satisfaction.



South Carolina Median Salary Data from US Census Bureau (2004) and adjusted by CPI.

Debt Burden Following Graduation

Graduates were asked about how much debt they carried immediately following graduation related to academic expenses and non-academic expenses. This question was asked for the first time on the 2005 survey, and defined educational debt as loans for items such as tuition, fees, books, housing, and meals, while non-educational debt to include car loans, mortgages, and credit card debt for non-educational items.

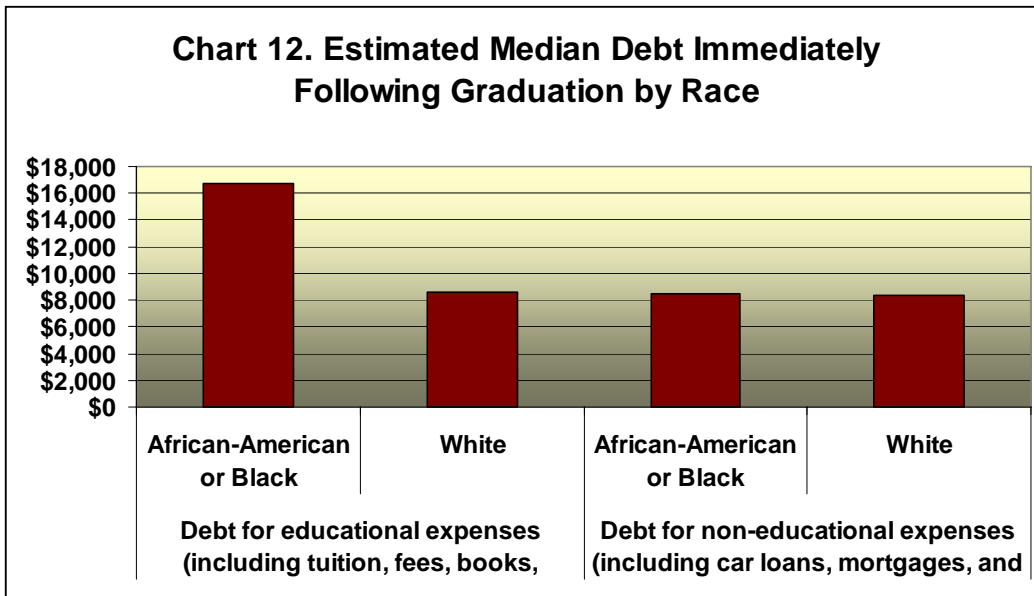
Just over one third of respondents (35.9%) reported that they had no educational debt at all following graduation from USCA, and another 17.3% of respondents indicated that their educational debt was under \$10,000. On the other hand, almost half (46.8%) of all respondents reported that they had \$10,000 or more of debt, and 13.6% reported owing more than \$25,000 in educational debt. The estimated median educational debt for all graduates who responded to the survey was \$9,993. It should be noted that characteristics of the respondent population of the survey will cause these figures to differ from actual debt burden.

Table 11. Educational and Non-Educational Debt Immediately Following Graduation

	Debt for EDUCATIONAL expenses (including tuition, fees, books, housing, and meals)			Debt for NON-EDUCATIONAL expenses (including car loans, mortgages, and credit card debt for non-educational items)		
	African-American or Black	White	Total	African-American or Black	White	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%
None	10.8	41.0	35.9	8.3	26.6	23.5
Less than \$1,000	2.7	3.3	3.2	22.2	10.7	12.7
\$1,000 to \$4,999	5.4	8.7	8.2	22.2	15.8	16.9
\$5,000 to \$9,999	8.1	5.5	5.9	13.9	13.6	13.6
\$10,000 to \$14,999	5.4	12.0	10.9	5.6	9.0	8.5
\$15,000 to \$19,999	13.5	8.2	9.1	8.3	4.0	4.7
\$20,000 TO \$24,999	21.6	11.5	13.2	8.3	1.7	2.8
\$25,000 or more	32.4	9.8	13.6	11.1	18.6	17.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Est. Median Debt	\$16,770	\$8,623	\$9,993	\$8,514	\$8,331	\$8,362

Estimated median debt for non-educational expenses immediately following graduation among all alumni was \$8,362, about \$1,700 less than debt for educational expenses, although, this figure may be inflated because of the inclusion of mortgage debt in this category. Less than a quarter (23.5%) of alumni reported graduating with no non-educational debt whatsoever, and about three out of ten (29.6%) reported graduating with less than \$5,000 of debt for non-educational expenses. Another 13.6% indicated that they graduated with between \$5,000 and \$10,000 of non-educational debt. Of more concern, however, were the 16% of graduates who reported having between \$10,000 and \$25,000 of non-educational debt. It is likely that a significant proportion of 17.4% of respondents who indicated they had more than \$25,000 of non-educational debt had included their mortgage in this category of debts.

African American or Black graduates reported carrying a significantly higher amount of educational debt than did white graduates, although the non-educational debt burden appeared to be about the same. About a third (32.4%) of African American or Black graduates reported educational debts of \$25,000 or more, and another 21.6% indicated they had educational loans that totaled between \$20,000 and \$25,000. By contrast, only 13.6% of white graduates reported owing more than \$25,000, and just another 13.2% of white graduates indicated they borrowed between \$20,000 and \$25,000 for educational expenses. The differences in these groups are reflected in the estimated median debt for educational expenses for each group. For African American or Black alumni, the estimated median debt immediately following graduation for educational expenses was \$16,770, while for white alumni, it was \$8,623. By contrast, estimated median debt for non-educational expenses was about equal at \$8,514 for Black or African American alumni and \$8,331 for white alumni.



Learning Outcomes

Similar to findings from the 2003 survey of graduates from 1999-2000, USCA alumni who graduated between 2000 and 2002 identified their largest strengths in broad areas that are critical for success after college, such as working independently, working as a member of a team, and learning on their own. Further, in all areas of learning, with the exception of just three outcomes (appreciating the arts, using scientific principles in everyday life, and speaking a foreign language), a majority of graduates indicated that their abilities were above average or outstanding (in the top 10%) compared to other college graduates.

Graduates rated their greatest strengths in the areas of working independently and collaboratively, as well as learning on their own. More than eight out of ten indicated that compared to other college graduates they were above average or outstanding (top 10%) in their abilities to work independently (86.1%), work cooperatively as member of a group or team (85.2%), following directions (85.2%), and learning on their own (82.8%). About three fourths of respondents rated their abilities in planning and carrying out projects (75.6%), organizing their time effectively (74.8%), and leading/guiding others (74.3%) as outstanding or above average when compared to other college graduates.

A significant majority of graduates also rated themselves outstanding or above average in many learning outcomes directly associated with USCA's general education program. About three out of four USCA alumni ranked themselves in the top ten percent of college graduates or above average in three of these general education areas: understanding written information (77.5%), thinking critically (76.1%), and understanding the interaction between people and society (73.9%). Interestingly, these areas represent cognitive capacities for thinking and understanding, rather than some of the application or skill-based areas, such as writing, on which slightly fewer graduates rated themselves above average or higher.

About two-thirds of respondents reported that they were above average or outstanding when compared to other college graduates in a variety of other areas, most of which were also related to general education. These areas were: understanding their rights, responsibilities, and privileges as a citizen (68.3 %); using computing and information technology (67.5%); caring for their own physical/mental health (67.1%); and writing effectively (67.0%). About six out of ten indicated their abilities were above average or outstanding in their capacities of understanding issues that affect them as consumers (61.3%), speaking effectively (60.0%), understanding graphs and charts (58.7%), and understanding philosophies and cultures different from their own (59.1%).

Although over half of graduates rated their abilities to use the library (54.4%) and to use mathematics (52.6%) as above average or outstanding, these were among the abilities that alumni perceived least positively. Rounding out this list of competencies in which fewer than half of the respondents considered themselves

outstanding or above average were understanding and appreciating the arts (43.9%), and understanding and applying scientific principles (40.8%).

By far the lowest rated competency, and the only one at which graduates assessed themselves as below average or poor when compared to other college graduates was speaking a second language. Only 11.5% of alumni indicated they were above average or outstanding in this area and almost two-thirds (65.2%) rated their abilities in a foreign language as below average or poor. While some of this assessment may be due to the fact that not all majors require foreign languages, when respondents who were in these majors were removed, the self-assessments did not improve significantly.

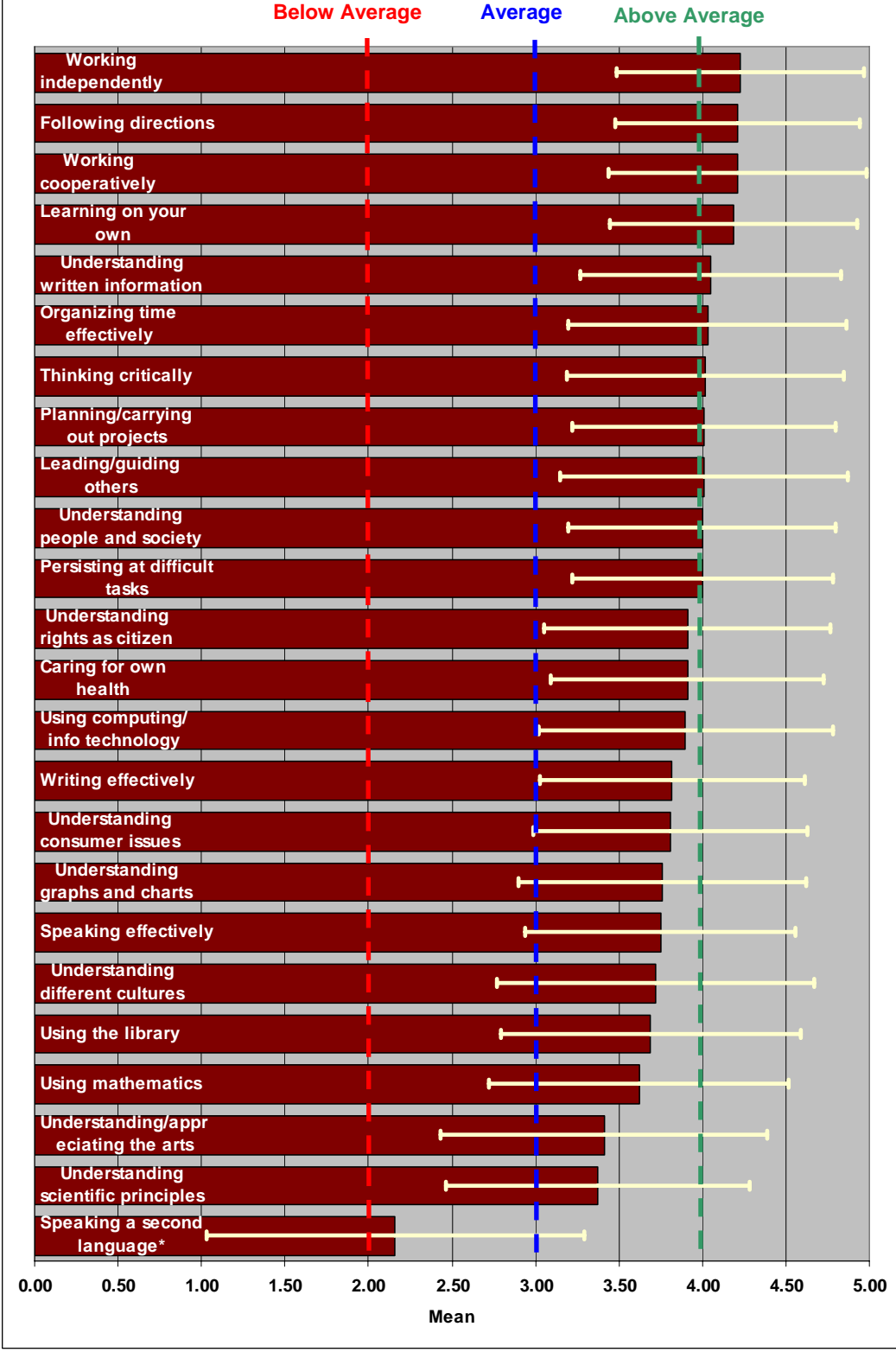
Table 11. Assessment of Learning Outcomes Ranked by Mean

Compared to other college graduates, rate your abilities in the following areas [5=Outstanding (Top 10%), 4=Above Average, 3=Average, 2=Below Average, 1=Poor (Bottom 10%)]

Rank	Learning Outcome	Outstanding (Top 10%)	Above Average	Average	Below Average	Poor (Bottom 10%)	Outstanding + Above Average	Mean	Std. Dev.
1	Working independently	39.1	46.5	13.0	0.9	0.4	85.7	4.23	0.74
2	Following directions	37.1	48.0	14.0	0.4	0.4	85.2	4.21	0.73
3	Working cooperatively as a member of a group or team	39.3	45.4	13.5	0.9	0.9	84.7	4.21	0.77
4	Learning on your own	37.4	44.8	17.4	0.0	0.4	82.2	4.19	0.74
5	Understanding written information	29.8	47.4	21.1	1.3	0.4	77.2	4.05	0.78
6	Organizing your time effectively	32.2	42.6	22.2	2.6	0.4	74.8	4.03	0.83
7	Thinking critically and analytically	30.0	45.7	21.7	1.3	1.3	75.7	4.02	0.83
8	Planning and carrying out projects	28.7	46.1	23.0	1.7	0.4	74.8	4.01	0.79
9	Leading/guiding others	31.9	41.9	22.3	3.1	0.9	73.8	4.01	0.86
10	Understanding the interaction between people and society	28.7	45.2	24.3	0.9	0.9	73.9	4.00	0.80
11	Persisting at difficult tasks	26.6	49.8	21.0	2.2	0.4	76.4	4.00	0.78
12	Understanding your rights, responsibilities, and privileges as a citizen	27.4	40.9	27.4	3.9	0.4	68.3	3.91	0.86
13	Caring for your own physical/mental health	26.8	40.4	30.7	1.8	0.4	67.1	3.91	0.82
14	Using computing and information technology	27.6	39.9	28.1	3.5	0.9	67.5	3.90	0.88
15	Writing Effectively	19.1	47.8	29.1	3.5	0.4	67.0	3.82	0.79
16	Understanding issues that affect you as a consumer	22.6	38.7	36.1	2.2	0.4	61.3	3.81	0.82
17	Understanding graphs and charts	21.7	37.0	37.4	3.0	0.9	58.7	3.76	0.86
18	Speaking effectively	18.7	41.3	37.0	2.2	0.9	60.0	3.75	0.81
19	Understanding philosophies and cultures different from your own	22.6	36.5	32.6	6.5	1.7	59.1	3.72	0.95
20	Using the library	21.9	32.5	38.6	6.6	0.4	54.4	3.69	0.90
21	Using mathematics	18.0	34.6	40.4	5.3	1.8	52.6	3.62	0.90
22	Understanding and appreciating the arts	14.8	29.7	38.4	15.3	1.7	44.5	3.41	0.98
23	Understanding and applying scientific principles	12.2	28.3	45.7	12.2	1.7	40.4	3.37	0.91
24	Speaking a second language*	4.8	7.0	22.9	30.0	35.2	11.9	2.16	1.13

* When removing graduates whose majors did not require foreign language, this average increases only to 2.35 (S.D. = 1.13)

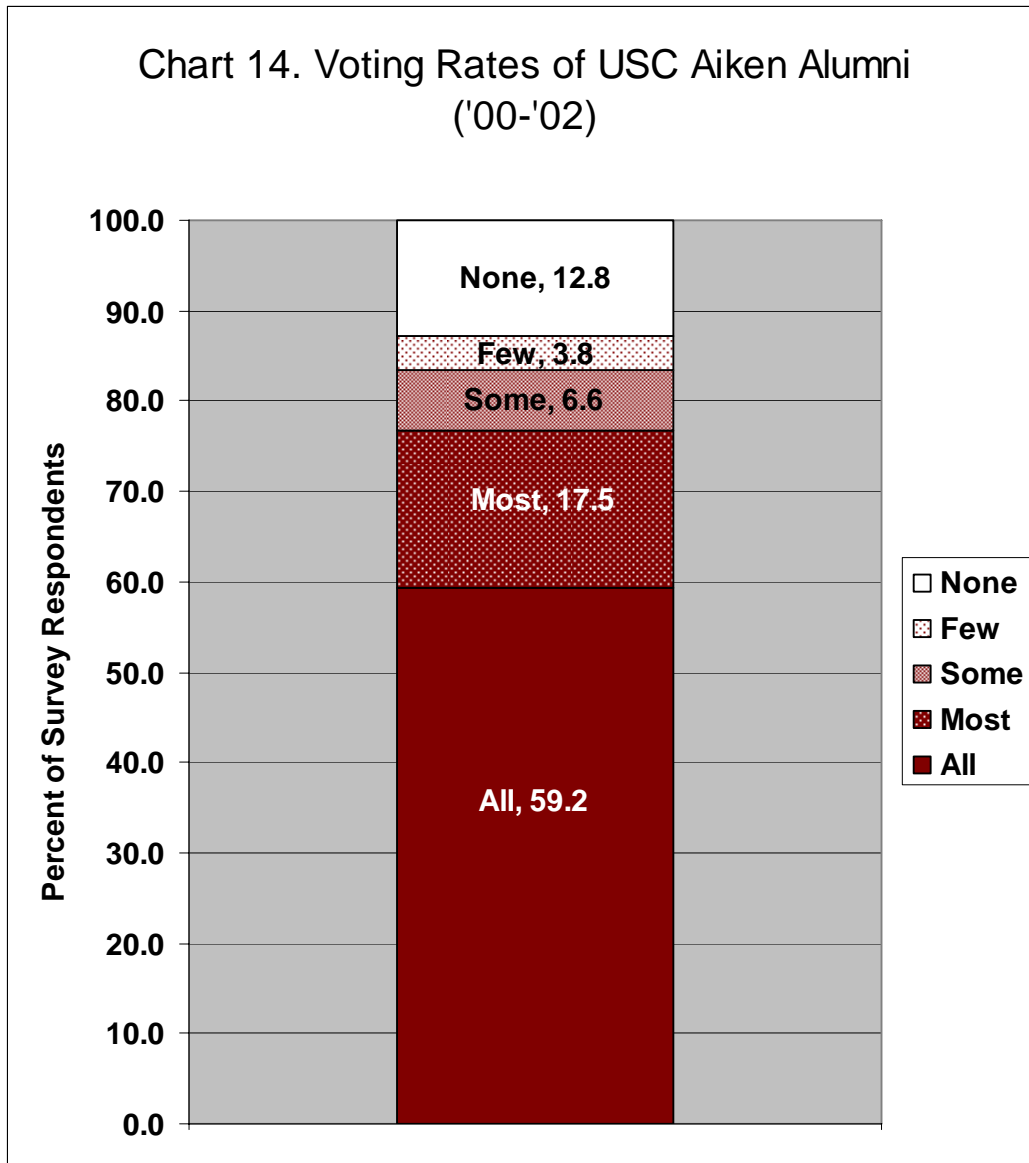
Chart 13. Learning Outcomes Ranked By Mean



Civic Engagement

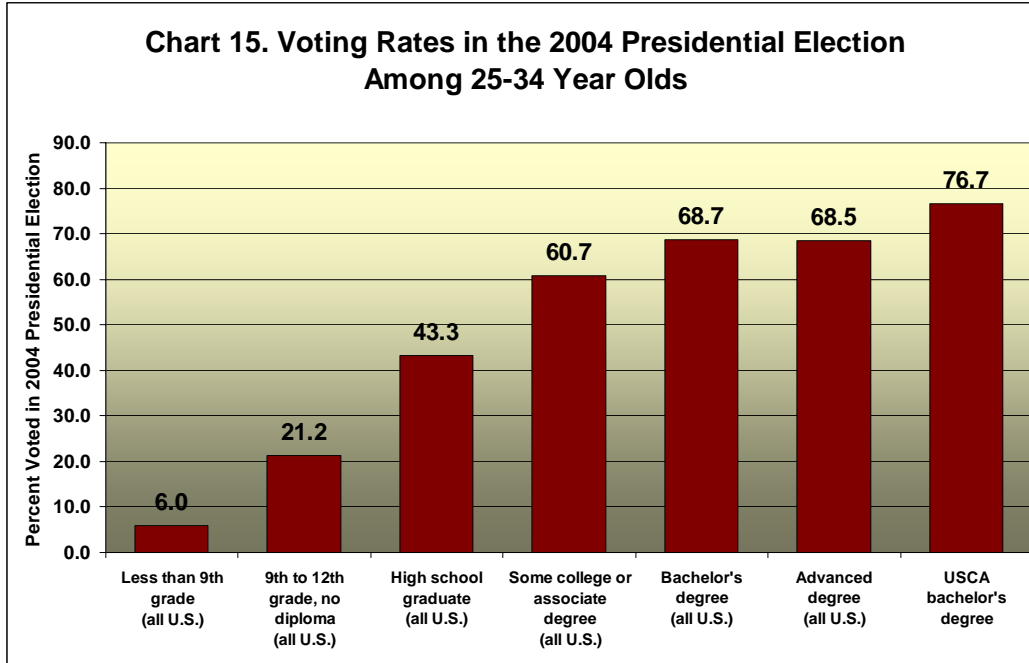
Voting Rates

More than three-fourths of USCA graduates responding to the survey reported that they had voted in all (59.2%) or most (17.5%) of the elections that had been held since leaving college.



This figure is about as high or higher than national voting rates among 25-34 year olds in the 2004 presidential election. In this election, just over four out of ten (43.3%) of U.S. citizens between 25 and 34 years old with only a high school diploma voted. By contrast, just over two thirds (68.7%) of U.S. citizens between 25 and 34 years old with a bachelor's degree or higher credential voted in the

presidential election. If one assumes that USCA alumni who reported voting in all or most of the elections since graduating between 2000 and 2002 also voted in the 2004 presidential election, then about three quarters of USCA graduates would have cast ballots in this election, outpacing the national voting rate of their counterparts with bachelor's degrees by almost ten percentage points.



(U.S. Census 2004b, USCA rate estimated by adding proportions voting in "all" or "most" elections since graduation in 2000-2002)

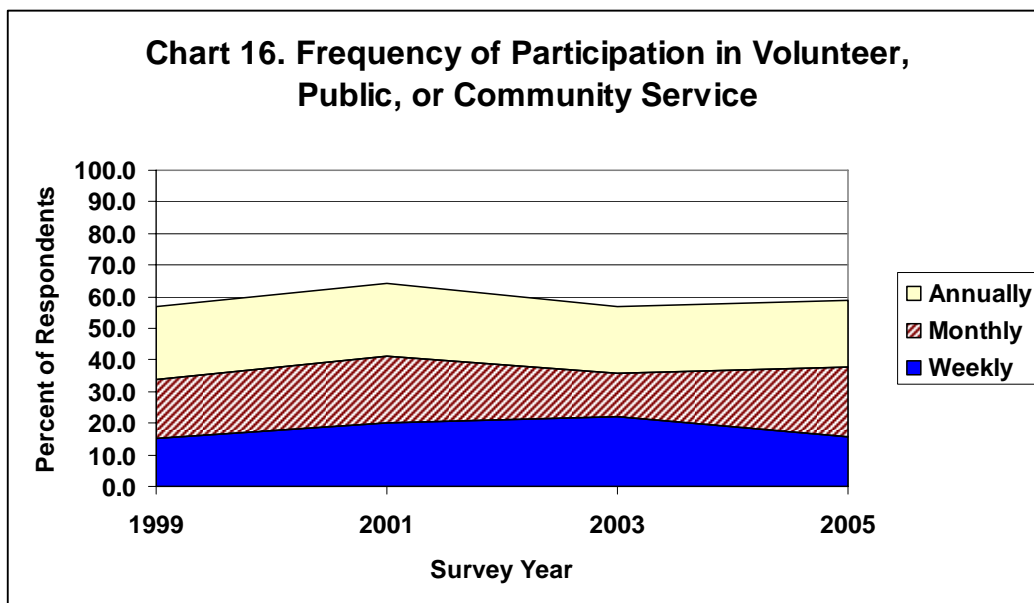
Volunteer Work

Proportions of USCA alumni who reported regular participation in volunteer, public or community service have remained reasonably constant since the 1999 administration of the alumni survey, with between about 34 and 41% reporting weekly or monthly participation. For the 2000-02 graduates, 15.6% reported they participated in volunteer, public, or community service every week, and another 22.3% indicated they volunteered every month. The proportion of graduates who reported that they never volunteer has declined slightly from 20% in 1999 when graduates from 1995-96 were surveyed to about 15% in the past two administrations of the survey.

Table 12. Frequency of Participation in Volunteer, Public, or Community Service

	1999	2001	2003	2005
	%	%	%	%
Weekly	15.0	20.0	22.0	15.6
Monthly	19.0	21.0	13.6	22.3
Annually	23.0	23.0	21.2	21.0
Less Often	23.0	20.0	28.0	25.9
Never	20.0	17.0	15.3	15.2
Total	100.0	101.0	100.1	100.0

(Include graduates from 1995-96, 1997-98, 1999-00, and 2001-02 only)



(Include graduates from 1995-96, 1997-98, 1999-00, and 2001-02 only)

Lifelong Learning and Continuing Education

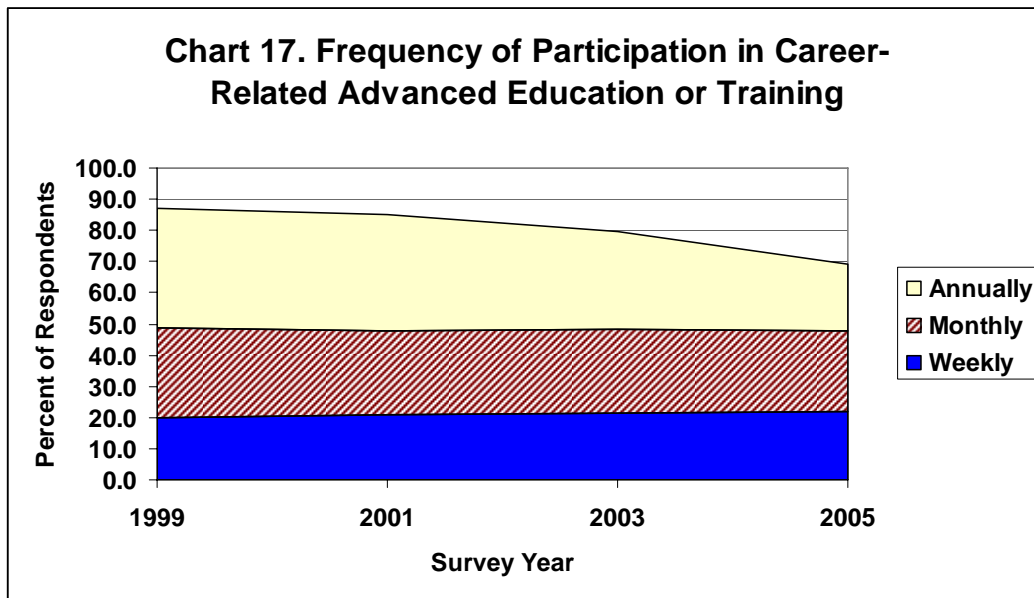
Almost four out of ten (38%) respondents indicated they were pursuing a graduate degree full-time (8.2%), were pursuing a graduate degree part-time (18.2%), or had already earned a graduated degree (11.6%) at the time of the survey administration in 2005. These experiences are likely included in respondents' descriptions of their participation in career-related advanced education and training. Indeed, almost a quarter (22.0%) of respondents reported that they participated in such activity on a weekly basis, and another quarter (25.6%) indicated they engaged in these activities monthly. The proportion of respondents who reported they participated in career-related advanced education and training on an annual basis was just 21.5%, however, down from 38.0% in 1999, and those who reported this sort of participation less often or never almost doubled in the same time period. These changes over time may be related to difficulty finding

employment discussed earlier or possibly a reduction in the number of employer-sponsored opportunities for ongoing development.

Table 13. Frequency of Participation in Career-Related Advanced Education and Training

	1999 %	2001 %	2003 %	2005 %
Weekly	20.0	21.0	21.2	22.0
Monthly	29.0	27.0	27.1	25.6
Annually	38.0	37.0	31.4	21.5
Less Often	10.0	7.0	11.9	15.2
Never	3.0	8.0	8.5	15.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.1	100.0

(Includes graduates from 1995-96, 1997-98, 1999-00, and 2001-02 only)



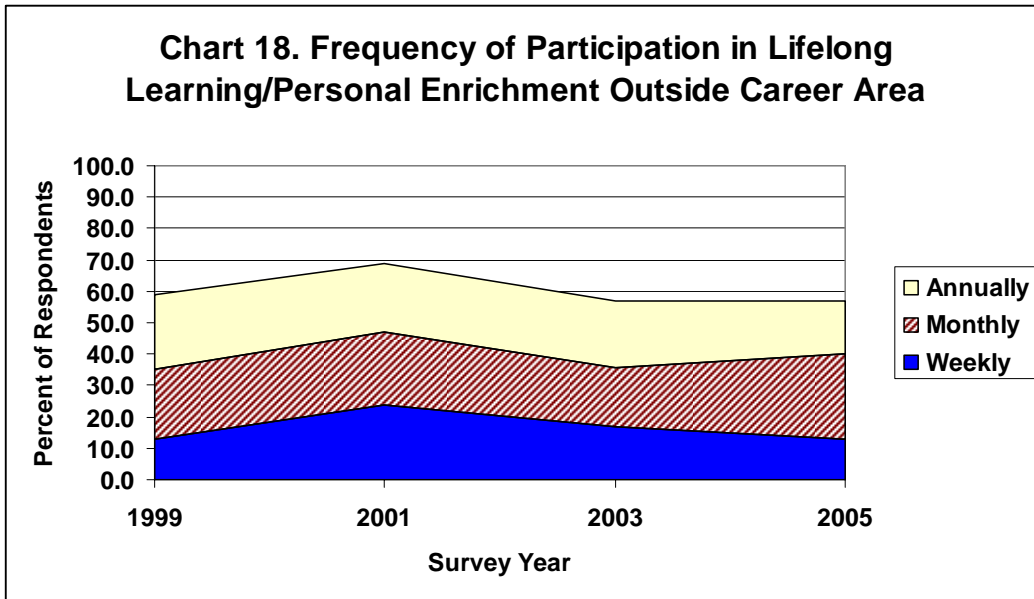
(Includes graduates from 1995-96, 1997-98, 1999-00, and 2001-02 only)

In addition to career-related training and education, regular participation in lifelong learning and personal enrichment outside of career areas were also popular among USCA graduates. About a quarter of respondents indicated they engaged in lifelong learning or personal enrichment experiences on a weekly basis, and another quarter indicated that they did these things about every month. In this area too, however, the proportion of respondents who reported never participating also increased. While in 1999, just 3% of respondents indicated that they never engaged in lifelong learning or personal enrichment outside of their career areas, in 2005, this proportion had increased fivefold to 15.7%.

Table 14. Frequency of Participation in Lifelong Learning/Personal Enrichment Outside of Career Area

	1999	2001	2003	2005
	%	%	%	%
Weekly	13.0	24.0	16.9	12.9
Monthly	22.0	23.0	18.6	27.2
Annually	24.0	22.0	21.2	16.5
Less Often	27.0	21.0	32.2	22.3
Never	14.0	11.0	11.0	21.0
Total	100.0	101.0	99.9	100.0

(Includes graduates from 1995-96, 1997-98, 1999-00, and 2001-02 only)



(Includes graduates from 1995-96, 1997-98, 1999-00, and 2001-02 only)

These data do not serve as unequivocal indicators about the University's effectiveness in promoting lifelong learning or other activities that might indicate that graduates are engaged in the fabric of their communities. However, some of the downward trends from 1999 to 2005, along with the proportions of graduates who never or rarely participate in such activities might suggest that further emphasis on the significance of civic engagement could be warranted.

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