

# Research Reports

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## ***BSU Services and Climate: Reactions From Graduates***

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***Marcia Belcheir, Ph.D.***

***Coordinator, Office of Institutional Assessment***

***Boise State University***

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### **ABSTRACT**

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This report provides use and satisfaction ratings on 25 BSU services, along with reactions to several general items asking for graduates' perceptions of BSU's quality and environment. Results are based on a survey of graduates who completed their degrees in 1992-93 or 1993-94. In most instances, it was possible to tell whether changes had occurred in the past three years by comparing current data to that gathered three years ago on a survey of 1986-92 graduates.

#### **Among the highlights of the report are:**

- The percentage using each service ranged from a high of 99% for the Registrar's office to a low of 8% for child care services.
- The library, used by 96% of respondents, had the highest satisfaction rating (80%).
- Internships, completed by 51% of graduates, had the second highest satisfaction rating (76%).
- Parking, used by 89% of respondents, had the lowest satisfaction rating (16%).
- Recent graduates were more satisfied with course registration processes, the credit-by-examination program, parking, library and tutorial services than graduates from 1986-92.
- Most graduates (80%) thought BSU's environment was warm and friendly, though this was slightly lower than the results from the prior survey of graduates.
- Almost one-fourth of graduates agreed that they had to delay graduation because courses they needed were not available.
- About 70% thought they had made the right decision in choosing BSU, while 18% had "no opinion" and 10%

disagreed.

## **BSU Services and Climate: Reactions From Graduates**

The classroom experience is the heart of the university. However, it is an experience that cannot exist without support. Students must register for the classes they take, pay for them, eat, and find

a place to park. They need to use the library and sometimes get help from tutors. They attend university events and read the student newspaper. In short, all these services are part of the overall college experience. And services can make or break the institution. If enrolling in classes, attending them, or completing assignments becomes too difficult, students will leave the institution. Even if they remain, they are likely to become graduates who are indifferent to BSU's welfare, who do not speak highly of their experience or encourage others to attend BSU.

This report is based on a 1995 survey of graduates who completed their degrees in 1992-93 or 1993-94. Some of the survey items asked graduates if they had used each of 25 services, and, if so, to indicate their level of satisfaction with the service. Graduates were also asked to respond to five general climate items regarding the University. These items asked about the friendliness of the environment, course availability, quality of the University, variety of activities available, and confidence in their decision to choose BSU for schooling. To answer the question of whether changes have occurred in either services or climate, results were compared to findings from a 1992 survey of graduates who earned degrees between 1986 and 1992. Further information on the survey and its methodology can be found in Appendix A.

## Findings

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**How Extensively Did Graduates Use BSU Services?** There were certain services that almost everyone indicated they had used. The registrar's office, admissions, library, parking, and academic advising were all services that more than 75% of graduates said they used. In addition, over half reported they had read campus newspapers, eaten on campus, applied for financial aid, visited the health center, asked for help in career planning and job placement, and participated in internship experiences. Between 30% and 40% reported using student employment, participating in social activities or recreational programs, taking continuing education, or utilizing counseling services. Almost 20% had taken honors courses and 12% had used distance education.

There were no large changes (over 5%) in reported usage of University services in the past three years. The following services, however, showed a drop in usage of three to five percentage points compared to three years ago: parking, career planning and job placement, student employment, college-sponsored social activities, recreational and intramural programs, cultural programs and activities, and the honors program.

### **Were Graduates Satisfied with BSU Services?**

Graduates who indicated that they had used each service were asked to indicate whether they were (1) very satisfied, (2) satisfied, (3) neutral, (4) dissatisfied, or (5) very dissatisfied with the service. The percentage who were satisfied or very satisfied with each service ranged from a high of 80% for the library to a low of 16% for parking. The percentage who were dissatisfied ranged from a low of 6% for continuing education programs to a high of 72% for parking. Other areas where at least 30% of graduates indicated they were dissatisfied were course registration processes, academic advising, financial aid, and career planning and job placement.

To gain a better idea of how satisfied students were with frequently used services, all services which were used by over half of graduates were selected, then ranked from high to low based on

the percentage of those who reported themselves satisfied with the service. The result is displayed in Figure 1. Over 75% of students were quite satisfied with the library and their internship experiences. Services in which less than half of graduates reported themselves satisfied included campus newsletters and newspapers, academic advising, career planning and job placement, and especially parking. Have Changes Occurred in Satisfaction with BSU Services Compared to Three Years Ago?

To see if satisfaction levels had changed for any of the services, mean satisfaction ratings were calculated for all services that graduates rated both in 1995 and in 1992. These means were tested for statistical significance; results are shown in Table 2. Note that since a "1" indicated the graduate was very satisfied with the service, lower mean ratings indicated greater satisfaction.

Improvement since 1992 was found for course registration processes, the credit-by-examination program, parking, library services, and tutorial services. Satisfaction ratings had slipped in two areas: veterans' services and campus newsletters/newspapers.

### **Were Graduates Generally Pleased with the Climate at BSU?**

Besides the evaluation of specific services, five items were included in the survey that were meant to tap more general characteristics of the University. Three of the items covered perceptions of the university. When graduates were asked if they thought BSU's environment was warm and friendly, 80% agreed. About the same percentage agreed that BSU was a fine university. Slightly over 70% thought they had made the right decision in choosing BSU. Statistical tests indicated that more recent graduates saw BSU as slightly less warm and friendly than prior graduates, but the other two items did not reflect a similar trend.

The remaining two questions asked about more specific activities: course scheduling and student activities. Almost one-fourth of graduates indicated that they had to delay graduation because courses they needed were not available. About the same percentage agreed that BSU needs a wider variety of activities and organizations for students; however, 48% had no opinion, indicating that this was not a burning issue for them. (See Table 3).

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

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The purpose of this study was to report on graduates' perceptions of specific services at BSU and the more general climate at the University. Some things came as no surprise. Finding that almost everyone reported using registration, admissions, library, parking, and advising services or that almost no one was satisfied with the parking situation fell into the category of "no surprise". There were surprises, too, though. These included finding that about one in eight students used distance education at BSU, 30% used continuing education, and a majority (51%) had internships. These are experiences that are often viewed as a more marginal part of the university experience.

The findings showed several service areas that should be especially recognized. The first area was the library. Over 95% reported using library services and 80% of those were satisfied, the highest satisfaction rating for any service area. A second area was internships. Over half reported

participating in internship experiences, and 76% of those were satisfied (the second highest satisfaction rating). A third area was parking. Although students were very negative about parking, usage was down and satisfaction (however low) was up compared to three years ago, perhaps indicating that some inroads have been made in improving the parking situation, even though there is a long way to go to reach the satisfaction level of any other service on campus.

While a good philosophy is probably that everything can be improved, there were also several areas where improvement efforts probably should begin because of the number of students using the service and the level of dissatisfaction. Parking was an obvious area since only 16% reported they were satisfied with the parking situation, by far the lowest satisfaction rating for any service. Course scheduling and registration was a second area. Almost one-fourth of graduates reported their graduation was delayed because courses were not available, and only 55% were satisfied with the registration process. This finding should be tempered by the knowledge that this group of graduates had attended BSU during a time of rapid growth. Perhaps the next survey will show better results simply because fewer students are now registering for a similar number of courses. Other areas to be targeted include advising (44% satisfied), career planning and placement (42% satisfied) and financial aid (52% satisfied).

In general, though, graduates were pleased with the climate at BSU. Most thought BSU was warm and friendly and that they had made the right decision in attending. Fine-tuning the service areas can only improve this perception.

## APPENDIX A

### SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The follow-up of graduates is a process implemented this year to provide information to departments, colleges, and university administrators on the success of BSU graduates and their perceptions of their BSU experience. The process will take place every other year and will include all graduates from the prior two years. This year, graduates from 1992-93 and 1993-94 were surveyed.

The process began in April with a review of several surveys that were already available (including the BSU survey administered in 1992). These were presented at the Deans' Council in May along with the request to notify the Coordinator of any particular data needs. A draft survey was then developed and distributed to Deans and Associate Deans for review. By mid-June, a finalized survey was ready for printing and mailing.

The survey was mailed the last of June along with a cover letter from BSU President, Charles Ruch, using addresses from an alumni file maintained by the Office of University Relations. In early August, a follow-up letter from the Coordinator of Institutional Assessment was sent. This was followed with a reminder postcard several weeks later. As shown below, based on the number of correct addresses, the response rate was 43%.

- Number of Surveys Mailed: 3,358
- Number returned due to Incorrect Information: 7
- Number of Surveys Returned: 1,456
- Percentage of Delivered Surveys Returned: 43%

The response rate differed depending on the College and program from which students received their degree. Only 29% of students in Applied Technology programs responded. The response rate for the other colleges ranged from 42% to 49%. This pattern of return indicates that some colleges and programs are over-represented in the general results. No attempt was made, however, to weight the responses, and findings are reported in simple percentages of the total number of responses.