

Old Dominion University

Alumni Survey

Office of Assessment

Alumni Relations

Student Engagement & Enrollment Services



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**Old Dominion University
Alumni Survey
Fall 2013**

Executive Summary

The 2013 Alumni Survey was administered during the fall 2013 semester to all Old Dominion University (ODU) alumni who had valid email addresses in the Alumni Association alumni tracking system (N= 59,635). The overall response rate was 5.4% (n = 3,202). Results were grouped by how long ago respondents graduated from ODU: 0-10, 11-20, and greater than 20 years. A random sample of responses from each degree year grouping (n = 653) was used in this report. While the following results are informative to internal discussions, they cannot be confidently generalized to the population of alumni.

Results were categorized into two areas that answered the following research questions:

1. How well did ODU prepare alumni for employment? [Workforce Preparation]
2. How connected do alumni feel to the University? [Connection to ODU]

Below is a high-level summary of the results that address these areas of interest. Detailed findings by degree year groupings are presented later in this report.

Research Question 1: Workforce Preparation

- Overall students were satisfied with their experiences at ODU (86%) and would choose to attend ODU again (92%) and recommend ODU to a friend (91%).
- The majority of alumni reported that academic experiences (72%) as well as their major (72%) helped them perform in the workplace. Social experiences were also a contributing factor for about half of alumni (47%).
- When asked “What was the first thing you did after graduating from ODU?” 92% reported that they were employed (81%) or attending graduate/professional school (11%).

Research Question 2: Connection to ODU

- When asked “To which of these do you feel the strongest personal connection?” the respondents’ top three choices, in order of frequency of response, were: academic department (24%), a particular professor or administrator (24%), and the University overall (23%). “The Athletic Program” had the fewest number of responses (7%).

- An athletic-based social event such as a reception before a game (29%) was the most appealing type of alumni program, followed by career networking events (18%).
- Almost all of the respondents (97%) indicated that they are proud to be ODU alumni.
- The majority of respondents (59%) have never made a financial contribution to the University.

Participants

The 2013 Alumni Survey was administered during the fall 2013 semester to all alumni who received their bachelors, masters, education specialists and doctorate degrees from ODU and had valid email addresses in the Alumni Association system (n= 59,635). The overall response rate was 5.4% (n = 3,204). While a substantial number of alumni responded to the survey, they represent only a small percentage of the population. Further the groupings of participants are not representative of their proportions in the population of alumni. Therefore, while we can learn from these results we must be very cautious about generalizing to the population of alumni.

Results were grouped by how long ago respondents graduated from ODU: 0-10, 11-20, and greater than 20 years. The percentages of respondents for each degree year group are reported in Table 1. As indicated in Table 1, graduates from 0-10 years were under-represented among respondents while graduates of more than 20 years ago were over-represented.

Table 1				
Response Rate by Years Since Graduation				
<u>Degree Year Group</u>	<u>Percentage of Respondents</u>		<u>Percentage of Graduates in the Population</u>	
	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Unknown	119	3.71%	4,473	7.20%
0-10 years	958	29.90%	23,546	37.88%
11-20 years	653	20.38%	13,212	21.25%
> 20 years	1474	46.00%	20,936	33.67%
Total	3204	100%	62,167*	100%

*2,532 emails were invalid or duplicate yielding a population of 59,635 potential respondents

The three degree year groupings provide a good comparison across responses as the campus has evolved dramatically over the past 20 years and respondents may have had significantly different experiences depending on how long ago they graduated. A random sample of responses from the 0-10

and greater than 20 years groupings (n = 653) was used to balance response numbers evenly across all three groups.

Research Questions

There were two primary research questions in this study.

1. How well did ODU prepare alumni for employment? [Workforce Preparation]
2. How connected do alumni feel to the University? [Connection to ODU]

Additionally, the alumni survey was designed to assess ODU graduates' perceptions and insights in the following areas:

- overall experience at ODU
- the contribution of their academic and social experiences to workplace performance
- employment status after graduation and salary levels
- personal connections to ODU
- participation in the Alumni Association

Results

Results were categorized into two areas that correspond to the study's two research questions: (1) workforce preparation and (2) connection to ODU.

Research Question 1: Workforce Preparation

Overall students were satisfied with their experiences at ODU (87%) and would choose to attend ODU again (93%) and recommend ODU to a friend (92%).

- Alumni were given to opportunity to rate their overall experiences at ODU by using 5 pictures ranging from a full smile 😊 to a complete frown 😞 . In general alumni were satisfied with their overall experiences at ODU (87% selected a smile picture) and ratings were consistent across all degree year groups.
- Ninety-three percent of alumni would choose ODU again (62% *yes definitely* and 31% *yes maybe*). There were no notable differences across degree year groups.
- When asked if they would recommend ODU to a friend, the majority of alumni (92%) responded *yes without reservations* (72%) or *yes but with reservations* (20%).

Alumni across degree year groups differed slightly on their perceptions of how their ODU experiences contributed to workplace performance.

- The majority of alumni in the 11-20 years (75%) and greater than 20 years (77%) groups indicated that to a *very great extent* or *great extent* academic experiences helped them perform in the workplace. About two-thirds of alumni in the 0-10 year group reported that to a *great extent* (39%) or *some extent* (29%) academic experiences helped them perform in the workplace.
- Sixty-two percent of alumni reported that to a *great extent* (27%) or *some extent* (35%) social experiences helped them perform in the workplace. There were no notable differences across degree year groups.
- When asked to what extent their major helped them perform in the workplace, 72% of respondents reported to a *very great extent* (39%) or *great extent* (33%). Slightly fewer alumni in the 0-10 degree year group (69%) indicated that their major helped them perform in the workplace.

With regard to employment, 69% of respondents reported the first thing they did after graduation was *work full time* followed by *working part time* (12%) and *attending graduate/ professional school fulltime* (9%). Responses differed slightly across degree year groups, with fewer alumni in the 0-10 year group (60%) reporting they *worked full time* after graduation. Furthermore, more alumni in the 0-10 degree year group reported *worked part-time* (14%) and *attended graduate /professional school full time* (13%) after graduation.

- Within 6 months of graduation, the majority of alumni (74%) obtained employment.
 - Thirty-eight percent of alumni in the greater than 20 degree year group reported they obtained full-time employment *immediately after graduation*, 20% reported they *had a full-time job before graduation and continued in that job*, and 18% obtained employment *within 6 months* of graduation.
 - Twenty-seven percent of alumni in the 11-20 degree year group reported they obtained full-time employment *immediately after graduation*, 33% reported they *had a full-time job before graduation and continued in that job*, and 20% obtained employment *within 6 months* of graduation.
 - Twenty-one percent of alumni in the 0-10 degree year group reported they obtained full-time employment *immediately after graduation*, 27% reported they *had a full-time*

job before graduation and continued in that job, and 18% obtained employment within 6 months of graduation.

- The alumni were presented with this survey item: “The average college graduate’s annual income in the United States is \$45,000. Given this information how would you rank your annual income?” Results varied greatly across degree year groups.
 - The majority of alumni (72%) in the greater than 20 degree year group ranked their annual income *significantly higher* (47%) or *somewhat higher* (25%).
 - Sixty-seven percent of the 11-20 degree year group ranked their annual income *significantly higher* (36%) or *somewhat higher* (31%).
 - Respondents in the 0-10 degree year group were somewhat evenly divided into two groups. Forty-one percent of the 0-10 year group ranked their annual income *significantly higher* (20%) or *somewhat higher* (21%) and 43% ranked their annual income *somewhat lower* (20%) or *significantly lower* (23%).

Research Question 2: Connection to ODU

Alumni were given a set of six responses and asked, “To which of these do you feel the strongest personal connection?” Overall the respondents’ top three choices, in order of frequency of response, were: academic department (24%), a particular professor or administrator (24%), and the University overall (23%). These were followed by “other” (11%), “a student organization I was involved with” (10%), and “the athletic program” (7%). There were slight differences between the degree year groups, with the 0-10 and 11-20 groups responding almost identically. Table 2 presents the three degree year groups and how respondents in these groups rated their feelings of personal connection with each of the six choices in order of frequency of response.

Table 2 Strongest Personal Connection – In Order of Frequency of Response		
<u>0-10 Degree Year Group</u>	<u>11-20 Degree Year Group</u>	<u>> 20 Degree Year Group</u>
professor or administrator	academic department	University overall
academic department	professor or administrator	academic department
University overall	University overall	professor or administrator
other	other	student organization
student organization	student organization	athletic program
athletic program	athletic program	other

Although the athletic program had the fewest number of responses associated with feelings of a strong personal connection, an athletic-based social event, such as a reception before a game, was the most appealing type of alumni program. Overall 29% of respondents identified “athletic event based social events (i.e., a reception before an ODU sporting event)” as a type of alumni event or program that they would find most appealing. This was followed by 18% of the respondents selecting a “career networking” alumni event. The 0-10 degree year group was the only group to select career networking (28%) over an athletic-based social event (25%).

Almost all of the respondents (97%) indicated that they are proud (67% were very proud) to be ODU alumni. There were no variations across the three degree year groups.

The alumni were also asked if they ever made a financial contribution to the University. Overall, the majority (59%) have never made a financial contribution. More alumni in the greater than 20 degree year group made a financial contribution within the past year (34%) than those in the 11-20 degree year group (16%), and the fewest number of respondents making a financial contribution in the past year (9%) were in the 0-10 degree year group.

Discussion and Next Steps

In a follow-up question on employment after graduation, the alumni were asked, “If not the first thing after ODU graduation, how long did it take you to obtain full-time employment in your major field?” A majority of alumni (74%) indicated they had done so within 6 months of graduation. Of particular interest are the respondents who answered, “Already had a full-time job before graduation and continued in that job.” These alumni represented 27% of graduates in the past 10 years, and 33% of those who graduated 11 – 20 years ago. These results may reflect the comparatively large cohort of

“nontraditional” students enrolled at ODU over the years. A relatively small number of respondents indicated that their first step after graduating from ODU was to attend graduate/professional school, either full or part-time. However for those who did choose this path, the greatest number were those graduates of the past 10 years.

Overall, a majority of ODU alumni reported a higher than average income across the demographic ranges. In response to the question “The average college graduate’s income in the United States is \$45,000. Given this information, how would you rank your annual income?” more than 40% of graduates within the past 10 years responded with “somewhat” or “significantly” higher. And in each additional decade beyond graduation, those numbers increased, as expected, with 72% of the most distanced alumni responding in a similar fashion. This may indicate that alumni are advancing in their careers as the years go by and consequently enhancing their salary. While initially there was debate as to whether or not to include a question related to income, it is worth noting that only 4% of respondents chose not to answer this question.

When asked to what they felt the strongest personal connection, respondents across degree year groups answered in a similar manner. Of the six choices offered, all groups responded with a strong affinity toward their academic department. Those who graduated 20 years ago or more gave a slight edge to an affinity with the University overall. In all three groups, including the most recent graduates, respondents selected the athletic program less frequently than all of the available options. While this does not imply that alumni “don’t care about sports,” it may come as a surprise, given the University’s long-standing athletic program, which includes academic excellence and national success.

When asked specifically about what event or program alumni would find most appealing, all groups indicated that “athletic event based social events” were of the greatest interest. Only career networking bested this slightly among the more recent graduates. The interest in social events related to sporting activities increased from the most recent graduates (25%) to those who graduated 20 or more years ago (33%). Although all groups reported a strong personal connection to their academic department, academic-based events did not reach the top two alumni event categories for any degree year group. In fact “other” was the second choice among those who graduated more than 20 years ago. When offered an opportunity to provide an open-ended response to what other alumni events would be of interest to respondents, very few specific suggestions were submitted, however there were references made to programming “outside of Hampton Roads.”

In line with national trends, the most recent graduates self-report the least amount of giving to the University. However, over time these numbers increase, with 34% of those who graduated at least 20

years ago reporting that they have made a financial contribution to the University within the past year. This lends credence to the idea of instilling a culture of philanthropy and giving – at any level – early on. These results suggest that a giving campaign might include a separate communications package/appeal that targets young alumni. A Young Alumni Committee might provide suggestions on a campaign giving goal, the language and images used, and serve as signatories of letters and appeals.

Overall, the survey provided some interesting insight into the perceptions of the alumni base and good information that can influence not only alumni programming, but other areas of advancement. For example, the data validates the alumni office realignment which occurred approximately five years ago. The realignment provided a staff position dedicated to establishing alumni relationships via the academic units at the program, department, and college level. Enhancing this effort should increase the appeal to all alumni, regardless of their graduation year. Additionally, a balanced schedule of opportunities to connect around sporting events, both home and away, should yield good results. Alumni who have been away from ODU the longest (i.e. 20 years ago or longer) should be engaged for their experience and perspective on programming related to career networking and career advice.

A majority of respondents indicated that they hear from the University with just the right frequency. The urge to “send more emails” should be resisted to avoid the risk of tipping that result into the “too much” range. Rather, communication vehicles such as publication mailers, event invitations and social media outlets can be used to better convey information and fill the knowledge gap the survey data suggests. It is not a far stretch to assume that perhaps one reason for alumni to be less involved in some volunteer programs is their indicated lack of knowledge about them. Since almost 50% of each degree year group indicated an awareness of their chapter/affinity group network, it would seem that utilizing communication pieces targeted to those groups might help share the information on how to become engaged in ways other than just chapter events.

Looking ahead, it is recommended that the alumni survey be conducted every three years. This timeframe allows for opportunity to implement new programs and communication methods suggested by the survey results. Three years will allow changes to manifest into results such as gifts to the University and attendance at alumni events.

In the next version of this survey a question should be included that complements that of “have you attended an alumni event?” The survey showed that overall 69% of alumni had never attended an alumni event. However, it may be that alumni have attended or been in some way engaged with non-alumni focused ODU events. The question of engagement is one that cannot be solely answered as the

question is posed. Is it recommended a question be added to include a list of broad categories of events so that respondents can indicate which ones they've attended in addition to alumni events.

Given the minimal number of respondents who chose not to answer the question related to income associated with the national average, it may be worth considering an open-ended response option which would allow individuals to share their income, should they choose to do so. Additionally, for those who answer that they have never made a gift to the University, a branch question as to why should be included, with a list of options from which respondents may choose. It might also be appropriate to include an additional response option to the giving question whereby the alumni can indicate "I have not made a gift but I intend [or plan] to" as this would show proclivity toward giving.

As an incentive to participate in this study, at the end of the survey the alumni respondents were given an opportunity to register in a drawing for a series of gift cards. To do so, the respondent had to provide their name. The respondents' names were kept separate from the other survey responses and held in confidence. Similarly, in the next iteration of this survey, the following item might be added: "I would like to become more involved/learn more about how to become involved." This would require respondents to provide name and contact information. This might provide a list of potential new volunteers. As with the survey incentive drawing, all personal and contact data would be held in confidence.

Overall, the survey provided a great opportunity to gain insight into the general perceptions of our alumni and their own sense of the impact that ODU had on them. Moving ahead, the data will provide a good benchmark against which we can gauge how well the institution continues to provide opportunities for success, engagement, philanthropy and volunteerism in the coming years.