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Results of the May 2008 Graduating Student Survey

University of San Francisco

Office of Institutional Research

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Executive Summary

The May 2008 USF graduating student survey, coordinated by the Office of Institutional Research, with the Registrar's Office assistance, was completed online by 1,757 students prior to graduation. This was the 20th consecutive survey, beginning in May 1997, which was conducted in conjunction with graduation. The survey instrument, connected to the online application to graduate, assessed students' education, work, and living experiences while at USF; attitudes about individual, ethnic, and religious differences; satisfaction with various USF facilities and services; attitudes about education at USF; volunteer services, internships, and community service learning at USF; and plans after graduation. The response rate was 98 percent.

Although the results varied somewhat by students' school or college, students overall indicated a high level of satisfaction with their learning experience while at USF. Among all the respondents, 92.4 percent "strongly agreed" or "agreed" with the following statement: "Overall, I was satisfied with my USF education." Likewise, 95.4 percent of those surveyed "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that "my instructors took an active interest in my learning," and 94.7 percent felt that instructors were "reasonably accessible outside of class." Comparing the responses on these items in May 2008 to the responses on the same items in the previous 19 surveys reveals considerable consistency over time. The overall responses on the items addressing satisfaction with the USF education, instructor interest in student learning, and instructor accessibility were all within seven percentage points over all 20 surveys. The overall satisfaction expressed by students was fairly consistent across schools and colleges as well. The following statement by a student, responding to an open-ended question on the survey, is representative of many: "For me, the professors at USF have pushed me to want to apply and engage myself more to my studies and areas of interest. I think the professors at USF are well chosen, and care about students at USF." Another student wrote that one of the positive aspects of USF was "the school's overwhelming interest in each individual and their learning experience." A third student simply stated, "that the Jesuit/Ignatian values are truly embedded in the overall education."

Overall, students were very satisfied with their major courses, core curriculum/general education courses, and elective coursework. In the May 2008 survey, the overall satisfaction with major courses was 92.3 percent, the overall satisfaction with the core curriculum/general education courses was 80.9 percent, and the overall satisfaction with elective courses was 78.2 percent. Over the prior 19 surveys, the overall satisfaction with major courses ranged from 86.0 to 92.6 percent, the overall satisfaction with core

curriculum/general education courses ranged from 64.0 to 82.4 percent, and the overall satisfaction with elective courses ranged from 64.0 to 84.2 percent.

Among the respondents to the May 2008 survey, 85.5 percent felt that at USF individual, ethnic, religious, and other differences were valued “very much” or “somewhat,” and 72.5 percent of the graduating students agreed “very much” or “somewhat” with the following question: “Did your appreciation of individual, ethnic, and religious differences *increase* at USF?” From May 1997 to May 2007, the overall percentage of students who felt individual, ethnic, religious, and other differences were valued at USF ranged from 77.0 percent to 86.1 percent. During this same time period, the overall percentage that felt that their appreciation of differences *increased* while at USF ranged from 61.0 percent to 72.0 percent. The results of the May 2008 survey showed the highest percentage of positive responses recorded in the 11 years of the survey’s administration on the item regarding increased appreciation of differences. On the open-ended question regarding “any specific aspects of your USF experience, or specific USF services, that had a particularly positive impact on you,” one student wrote: “Cultural diversity helped me to widen my personal as well as professional network on a global scale.” Similarly, another student wrote: “As an international student, I met people from different countries, cultures and religions. Spending time with them has helped me realize and understand things better.” In their responses to the survey questions, several students also commented on the university’s commitment to social justice. For example, one student wrote: “I received a deep understanding of social problems, worked as a liaison between service-learning and their professors, and helped service-learning students understand how their service connects with their coursework...the people in the Office of Service Learning/McCarthy Center are committed to USF and social justice, and they really speak to the Mission of USF.” A School of Education student wrote, “TEAMS/Americorps embraces social justice and diverse professional development. They are the main reason why I stayed at USF.”

On the item that asked how many May 2008 graduates had *not* worked while enrolled at USF, the responses were highly variable among the schools and colleges: from 28.0 percent in the School of Business and Management to 8.8 percent in the College of Professional Studies. Over the prior 19 surveys, the percentage of students who did *not* work while enrolled at USF has ranged overall from 10.2 percent to 16.0 percent, with 18.7 percent reporting in the May 2008 survey that they did not work while they were students.

On the items that asked students to evaluate services and facilities, there has been considerable variability in students’ responses across services within a given year, as well as a good deal of consistency over time. In the previous 19 surveys, library services received the highest percentage of positive responses among all USF services and facilities, with 59.0 percent to 80.2 percent of those surveyed responding that library services were either excellent or good. In May 2008, 78.7 percent of the students surveyed responded that library services were either excellent or good. For the eighth year in a row, computer services received the second highest percentage of excellent or good responses among all USF services. Other services that have consistently been in the top ten services with respect to the percentage of excellent or good responses include the registrar’s office and orientation programs. Four years ago, upon the recommendation of an advising subcommittee

composed largely of the associate deans from the USF schools and colleges, we subdivided the long standing item on academic advising on the graduating student survey into three components: academic advising-career advising, long-term academic advising within the major, and short-term academic advising by semester. The sole item on academic advising had received the highest percentage of “poor” responses on the previous eight surveys. In May 2008, the subdivided item on academic advising generated the three highest percentages of poor responses of any items on the survey, with 15.2 percent of the respondents evaluating academic advising-career advising as poor, 13.2 percent indicating that long-term academic advising within the major as poor, and 11.2 percent evaluating academic advising by semester as poor. It is important to note, however, that 49.6 percent of the students surveyed *did* evaluate long-term academic advising within the major as excellent or good, and that 51.1 percent of those surveyed described short-term academic advising by semester as excellent or good. These are the highest positive ratings yet recorded for these academic advising items and suggest that improvements are being made in academic advising at USF. Moreover, short-term academic advising was among the top 10 services rated either excellent or good for the first time in the four-year history of that item.

In the May 2008 survey, 34.4 percent of the graduating students reported participating in volunteer services while at USF. Business students were at the top of the range (48.7 percent), CPS students were at the low end (13.6 percent), and Arts and Sciences, Nursing, and Education students were in the middle (38.9 percent to 14.3 percent). With respect to internships, the variability among students by college was also great: from 34.1 percent in the School of Business and Management to 5.0 percent in CPS. Overall, 31.1 percent of USF’s graduating students participated in community service learning, ranging from 49.4 percent in business to 8.7 percent in education. What is perhaps most impressive about the overall percentage of USF students who participated in non-required volunteer programs is that students made the time for this kind of effort at all, given the reality that only 18.7 percent of USF students did *not* hold a paying job while enrolled at USF. Notwithstanding the demands of schoolwork and jobs, a sizeable percentage of our students did find the time to live out one of USF’s core values, articulated in the *Vision, Mission, and Values Statement*, and which calls for a “culture of service.”

The future plans of our students after graduation also varied by school or college. Not surprisingly, 61.0 percent of our Nursing students indicated that they would be looking for a job after graduation, whereas only 15.7 percent of CPS graduates indicated the same. Responses from students in the other schools ranged from 48.8 percent to 36.9 percent on this item. Overall, 18.7 percent of our graduating students said they planned to attend graduate school, with Arts and Sciences graduates at the top end of the range (27.4 percent).

This summary has highlighted the macro level of analysis of students’ responses to the May 2008 graduating student survey. In the full report, available on request, more detailed information can be found by focusing on a specific item or set of items within a school or college, or by looking at the responses of either graduate or undergraduate students within a college. In the College of Arts and Sciences, in the School of Business and Management, in the School of Nursing, and in the College of Professional Studies, we have segmented the

data by undergraduate or graduate status. We have also segmented the results among the regional campuses, and between on-campus and off-campus students. The full report also includes students' written comments to those open-ended questions we posed regarding positive USF experiences and negative USF experiences, segmented by school and college.

In the final analysis, the results of the graduating student survey provide one of the best windows we currently have into the minds of our students regarding their attitudes about USF. The large number of students who complete the long survey, as well as the time students spend writing often extensive and insightful comments, indicates that many students take our survey very seriously. The importance of our survey is also suggested by the increasing number of USF administrators who are using our survey results in applying for grants to external organizations, preparing for accreditation visits, and seeking to enhance the overall learning experience of our students. The results of the graduating student survey can inform USF 2028, help underpin USF's current Branding Project, and provide evidence that many of the core values of the *Vision, Mission, and Values Statement* of the University of San Francisco are being incorporated into the worldview of our students.