

## Chapter VIII: STUDENT INTERVIEW PROJECT

### **Student Interview Project**

*Who takes it?*

A random sample from the class that is selected by the University Assessment Committee. For the first three years of the program and in 1998 and 1999, juniors were selected; for 1996 and 1997, freshmen were selected.

*When is it administered?*

At the beginning of the Spring Semester.

*How long does it take for the student to complete the interview?*

About 30 minutes.

*What office administers it?*

University Assessment Committee plus additional volunteers which are primarily students and faculty along with some administrators. Each student interviewee is typically questioned by a pair (one of whom is a student and one of whom is a faculty or administrator).

*Who originates the questions?*

The University Assessment Committee.

*When are results typically available?*

At the end of the summer.

*What type of information is sought?*

The University Assessment Committee selects questions based on current curricular or co-curricular topics of interest to the university. For example, this year we were in the process of implementing the new LSP and chose to focus primarily on student description of what makes a course challenging. The survey also asked about students' best learning experiences, what made co-curricular experiences challenging, their expectations about taking challenging courses in the future, retention and assessment issues, time allocation practices, sense of community, computer literacy issues, knowledge about Truman's Honors and Assessment programs, course scheduling issues, and finally anything else the student would like to tell us.

*From whom are the results available?*

From the University Assessment Committee or the Chair of the Interview Project (currently Dr. David Gillette from the Division of Social Science).

*Are the results available by division or discipline?*

Currently, no. The sample size, around a 100, is too small.

*Are the results comparable to data of other universities?*  
No.

## Interview Project Report 1999

### Vice President's Advisory Committee on Assessment

#### Executive Summary

During the Spring Semester of 1999, the Vice President's Advisory Committee on Assessment, assisted by additional members of the Truman State University community, including faculty members, staff members, and students, conducted the seventh annual interview project. The first computer-generated random sample of 150 students was drawn, of which 134 had valid addresses and telephone numbers. Of the 134 valid students, 80 students came to be interviewed, for a response rate of sixty percent. Needing more students we drew, without replacement, a second sample of 150 students of whom we interviewed twenty-three. Fifty-three percent of the students interviewed were female; forty-seven percent were male. On average the students interviewed this year had an entering ACT score of 27, carried 14 credit hours this semester, and had a cumulative GPA of 3.2 on a 4 point scale.

With the exception of the staff and administrators who serve on the Assessment Committee, each student was interviewed by a faculty-student team of interviewers. Each interviewer independently coded the student's responses; following the interview coding decisions were compared and if discrepancies arose the two interviewers arrived at a consensus or referred the decision to the committee.

Note that the convention followed throughout this report is to round percentages to the nearest whole number.

#### Oral Survey Responses

##### Summary of Question 1:

*Describe your best learning experience so far at Truman (in or out of class) and why.*

Eight different categories of activities arose: courses (54%); co-curricular (14%); miscellaneous (13%); off-campus experiences (9%); university work or research (8%); independence (5%); athletics (4%); and socializing (2%). The reasons offered by the students included: interaction with others and interpersonal skills (37%); enjoyable or learned a lot (22%); relevance or real world application (22%); provided a sense of accomplishment (19%); a certain professor (18%); time management and organizational skills (12%); a sense of independence or being on one's own (10%); and other miscellaneous reasons (3%).

## **Summary of Question 2:**

*Is “challenging” a good, or a bad, thing? Why?*

Seventy three percent of students interviewed said that challenging was a good thing overall; twenty three percent said it had both good and bad aspects; and only four percent said it was a bad thing. A challenging course was considered a good thing when it made students think and learn more (44%), motivated them to work harder (32%), motivated them to surpass old standards or reconsider old views (24%), was satisfying or rewarding (20%), or course material was interesting or created interest (19%). A challenging course was considered a good thing if it was not too overwhelming (18%), promoted character growth or confidence (17%), or involved application for the future (9%). It was a bad thing when the material was boring (12%), there was a lot of busy work (8%), it was bad for grades or external perceptions (4%), or stressful (2%).

Nine percent of the students interviewed indicated that whether challenging was a good or a bad thing depended on the professor. Six percent said that a challenging course was good in the major and bad if not. Five percent of students indicated that a challenging course requires more time; for four percent of them more time was a bad thing.

## **Summary of Question 3:**

*Not all students agree on what makes a course challenging to them. What makes a course challenging to you?*

The most frequent response given was that a challenging course involved independent work and made students think (48%), followed by “it depends on the professor” (39%), the nature of the material (25%), and an unfamiliarity or weakness with the subject material (25%). Twenty five percent of the students responded that the professor’s performance expectations made a course challenging, either because they were high (15%) or because they were unclear (10%).

A challenging course also depended on the difficulty, type and number of tests and/or assignments (22%), use of comprehension skills instead of memorization (20%), current, future, or life application (20%), and time and work requirements (18%). Others indicated that interesting material (15%), motivation to work harder (13%), absence of busy work (13%), and the level of their own involvement (12%) made a course more challenging.

Additional aspects students mentioned included: requirements to surpass old standards or reconsider previously held views (11%), a feeling they learned more (11%), group project requirements (7%), research involvement (6%), lengthy reading assignments (4%), and that when a course was boring the challenge was simply to attend the class at all (2%).

#### **Summary of Question 4:**

*From **the core courses** you have taken through Truman State University, please describe the specific assignment or classroom experience that has challenged you the most so far. Please explain why.*

Responses to this question were mixed. Most students began by focusing on a specific course before discussing any particular assignment. Sixty percent of the students mentioned inexperience with the course material, subject difficulty, or finding themselves outside their comfort zone as making the challenge either good (45%) or bad (15%) in their minds. Students also responded that an assignment was challenging when it was a writing assignment or exam (31%), required analysis or critical thinking (27%), was a new or different type of assignment (19%), or involved a research component (17%). Twenty-nine percent of students noted time and work demands as challenging, either in a good (17%) or bad (12%) way. The professor's impact in core courses was also seen as contributing either in a good (2%) or a bad (16%) way to providing a challenge.

Other responses included: an enjoyable and interesting experience (12%), a dislike or lack of interest for the material (11%), if the course was satisfying, rewarding, or if they learned a lot (7%), if the course had current, future, or life application (7%), a presence of memorization or busy work (7%), and group dynamics (5%).

Students' most challenging types of assignments ranged from papers or projects (48%), to presentations (18%), homework or labs (10%), other assignments (10%), exams (8%), speeches (8%), and group activities (7%).

#### **Summary of Question 5:**

*From the courses **in your major** you have taken through Truman State University, please describe the specific assignment or classroom experience that has challenged you the most so far. Please explain why.*

The responses to this question were again somewhat mixed and focused more on courses than on specific assignments. The most frequent response included reference to a current, future, or life application (35%), followed by time and work demands in either a good (24%) or bad (7%) way. Students also mentioned inexperience with course material, subject difficulty, or finding themselves outside their comfort zone (21% good, 8% bad), analysis and critical thinking requirements (20%), new or different types of assignments (18%), writing assignments or exams (18%), enjoyable or interesting material (14%), and the presence of a research component (13%). Less frequently mentioned responses included: group dynamics (8%), high expectations of the professor (5%), and dislike or lack of interest (4%).

Papers or projects were again the most frequently cited assignments (62%), followed by homework or labs (17%), presentations (11%), group activities (9%), exams (9%), other (6%), and speeches (1%).

#### **Summary of Question 6:**

*From the co-curricular activities you have participated in while attending Truman State University, please describe the specific activity or experience that has challenged you the most so far. Please explain why.*

These activities were varied and wide-ranging, including service, professional, and social organizations, athletics and academics, paid and volunteer work, and some form of student government. Thirty two percent of the students described the challenges of time management and balancing multiple interests, twenty four percent related experiences of working with new and different types of people, and twenty two percent responded that the organizational requirements of an activity made it challenging. Other aspects of challenging activities included: personal growth and accomplishment (21%), leadership and responsibility (17%), successful new experiences (16%), and helping others (9%).

Students interviewed named the following types of activities as the most challenging: social organizations (20%), athletics (23%), academic or professional organizations (13%), work (12%), service organizations (11%), other organizations (9%), and other activities (9%).

### **Summary of Question 7:**

*a) Given the opportunity, please discuss the likelihood of your taking a challenging course in the future.*

A clear majority (86%) of the students interviewed responded that they would definitely take another challenging course, nine percent felt that they probably would, and five percent felt that it was unlikely. The reasons they gave included: a function of taking major classes (43%), a desire to learn more and be challenged (17%), it would depend on interest (16%) and on the professor (7%), GPA concerns (4%), sufficient time for the major (1%), and on their work load in general (1%).

*b) Given the choice between two sections of the same course in the core, would you choose the more or less challenging one? Why?*

Over half (57%) of the students interviewed felt they would choose the less challenging section of a core class rather than the more challenging one (11%), while thirty two percent were undecided. The primary reasons given for their responses were: the simple fact that it is in the core (35%), other time commitments and work load (33%), it depends on the professor (22%) and interest (17%), GPA concerns (15%), a desire to learn and be challenged (9%), and familiarity with material (7%).

*c) Given the choice between two sections of the same course in your major, would you choose the more or less challenging one? Why?*

The majority of students (60%) responded that they would likely take the more challenging course when it came to their major. The reasons they provided included: a desire to learn more and be challenged (41%), wanting the experience for their major and real world preparation (36%).

Seventeen percent of students felt they would take the less challenging course if they had a choice with well over half of those citing GPA effects as their major concern (10%). Fifteen percent of the students were undecided, and said it would depend on the professor (26%), course interest (7%), and their work load in general (2%).

### **Summary of Question 8:**

*a) Have you, or anyone you know closely, ever seriously considered leaving the university?*

Forty-seven percent of this year's sample had considered leaving the university and eighty-seven percent knew someone well who had also considered leaving. The primary reasons given were: academic difficulty and personal reasons (both 24%), not satisfied with their particular program (20%) or campus life (17%), too far from home (17%), a program not offered (16%), the town (13%), and other miscellaneous reasons (12%). Reasons mentioned less than ten percent of the time included: roommate or friend problems (9%), work load (8%), boy or girl friend (5%), and motivation issues (4%).

*b) If you, or anyone you know closely, has ever seriously considered leaving the university, why did you, or they, stay?*

The primary reasons for staying included: parents and costs (20%), friends (or an SA) who reached out (20%), "dealt with it" (18%), and the hassle of transferring (12%). Reasons mentioned less than ten percent of the time included: changed and did better in a new major (9%), the quality of their education (9%), the loss of a scholarship (8%), Truman's reputation (6%), other reasons (6%), a faculty member who reached out (4%), and athletics (1%).

### **Summary of Question 9:**

*How satisfied are you with your experience at Truman State University?*

On a scale of 1 (very satisfied) to 5 (very dissatisfied) students rated their overall Truman experience at 1.5. Over half were very satisfied (52%), followed by somewhat satisfied (33%) and neutral (6%). No students gave ratings of either somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

The reasons students gave for their satisfaction included: the education and school (38%), an enjoyable experience (19%), small school environment (17%), faculty (17%), friends (14%), other

– negative comments (12%), positive social experiences (11%), preparation for the future (6%), other – positive comments (6%), and financial stability (1%).

### **Summary of Question 10:**

*Would you like to know anything else about the University's assessment program?*

When students said yes, they either wanted to know what happens to the results of this survey (22%), commented or asked about other assessment tools (16%), or had other miscellaneous questions (5%).

### **Summary of Question 11:**

*Is there anything else you would like to tell us?*

Most of the responses to this question took the form of registering some kind of complaint. Twenty percent expressed negative feelings about some aspect of Truman, twelve percent commented on the faculty, and eleven percent expressed positive feelings about Truman. Other (negative) responses included comments about: parking (9%), assessment (6%), financial aspects (6%), time demands (4%), registration (3%), and academic advising problems (1%).

## **Written Survey Responses**

A component of the interview project consisted of a set of 16 questions administered in an anonymous questionnaire format, prior to the oral interview. This component has been a part of previous surveys and again this year, as in the last two years, included time allocation questions. All interviews were completed prior to Spring Break with the majority performed on Thursdays between the hours of 11 am and 2 pm; the remainder were conducted Wednesday evenings for those students who could not make the mid-day time slots on Thursdays.

### **Summary of Question 1:**

*Approximately how much time did you spend in the last 24 hours on each of the following?  
Classes, studying, sleeping, socializing, organized extra/co-curricular activities*

Students reported spending an average of 7.1 hours sleeping, (min. 5, max. 10); 3.9 hours studying (min. 1, max. 7.5); 3.8 hours in class (min. 2, max. 8); 3.3 hours socializing (min. 1, max. 11); and 2.2 hours in extra/co-curricular activities (min. 0, max 8.5); which leaves 3.8 hours unaccounted for.

### **Summary of Question 2:**

a) *Please list your most time consuming activity.*

Students reported spending the most time participating in some kind of exercise or sports activity (21%), closely followed by Greek Life involvement for twenty percent of the students. Other responses included: academic/professional organizations (15%), experiential work (14%), service organizations (11%), religious organizations (6%), other (4%), performance groups (3%), and the campus radio station (K-life) (1%).

*b) In which other co-curricular activities and organizations have you been involved?*

The students interviewed participate on average in three co-curricular activities. The activities they reported involvement in included: academic/professional organizations (58%), service organizations (25%), exercise and sports (22%), experiential work (13%), religious organizations (11%), and other activities (10%). Responses mentioned by less than ten percent of the students included student and residence hall governments (9%), Greek Life (6%), performance groups (5%), political organizations (5%), and the school yearbook (Echo) (1%).

### **Summary of Question 3:**

*In the last week how much time did you spend on each of the following?*

*On campus work and where      Off campus work and where*

Sixty six percent of students worked either on or off campus. Fifty six percent worked on campus, seventeen percent worked off campus, and eight percent worked both on and off campus. Students working on campus averaged 10.3 hours of work during the previous week while those working off campus averaged 11.4 hours of work.

The time students spent working on campus was distributed between: division and administrative offices (68%), professors (19%), and residence halls (14%). When working off campus their employers included: Kum 'n' Go, Bogies, HyVee, License Bureau, Maritz (Maurices?), Ponderosa, Head Start, Natural Resources Conservation Field Office, Victim Support Services, WalMart, Aileron's, Preferred Family Healthcare, Patty's Schlankeis Furniture.

### **Summary of Question 4:**

*Do you feel a part of the campus community? Why? Or why not?*

Eighty two percent of the students interviewed felt they were a part of the campus community and gave the following reasons as explanation, they: take part in many activities (32%), know a lot of people (21%), have a connection to a sub part (16%), are aware of what's going on (15%), spend a lot of time there (12%), attend classes (12%), and other (12%). Other students mentioned a personal effort (10%) and Greek life (2%).

On the other hand, eighteen percent of the students said they did not feel a part of the campus community. Five percent had no interest and didn't want to be a part of it, four percent each either weren't involved, weren't informed, or weren't on campus a lot, and three percent each felt

they had no connection to any sub part of the campus community or did not believe that a campus community even existed.

### Summary of Question 5:

*a) In the last week how many times did you discuss issues of societal, cultural, or intellectual significance with others outside of class?*

Only five percent indicated that they had participated in no such discussions during the past week. Ten percent had participated once, sixteen percent had participated twice, and seventy percent reported participating in several discussions regarding issues of societal, cultural, or intellectual significance with others outside of class during the previous week.

*b) If you did, what was one of the topics of discussion, where were you, and what time was it?*

Topics ranged from social issues (35%), to professors, courses, or course work (18%), Clinton (14%), politics, economics, or world affairs (14%), religion (13%), and other topics. Less frequently mentioned issues included: campus life (5%), literature (2%), and work (2%). A clear majority of the conversations took place at home (56%), with the other places mentioned including miscellaneous places (11%), other on campus (9%), the dorms (8%), cafeteria or restaurants (6%), three percent each for fraternity and sorority houses and phone or internet, and two percent each for driving or walking and work. Twenty eight percent of the discussions occurred in the evening between the hours of 5 and 10 pm, followed closely by nighttime hours after 10 pm (24%), afternoon between noon and 5 pm (20%), with the fewest discussions occurring in the morning between 6 am and noon (5%).

### Summary of Question 6:

*Describe your experience with each of the following areas of computer literacy:*

*Use a scale of None (0) Some (1) Experienced (2) Significant (3) Proficient (4)*

<i>a) using a computer to create a document in an appropriate format (acceptable for a class assignment)</i>	3.4
<i>b) retrieving and citing appropriately information from the World Wide Web</i>	2.4
<i>c) utilizing electronic means of communication</i>	2.9
<i>d) retrieving information from a bibliographic database (besides LUIS; e.g. WorldCat, Lexis-Nexis, First Search)</i>	1.9
<i>e) organizing, manipulating, and presenting numeric data in a document</i>	2.2
<i>f) saving, retrieving, copying, printing, and deleting files</i>	3.3
<i>g) recognizing unethical use of technology including copyright and privacy issues</i>	2.2
<i>h) use of presentation software</i>	1.7

Overall, the average student self-rating of computer proficiency was 2.5, midway between experienced and significant.

### Summary of Question 7:

*How many computers are there in your apartment?*

Students in our sample reported having 1.7 computers per apartment. Ninety-one percent of them reported having their own computer and ninety percent of their roommates had computers.

**Summary of Question 8:**

*Are you pursuing Truman's General Honors Program?*

Twelve percent of the students interviewed were pursuing General Honors. Twenty-eight percent said they did not know about the program or were not asked, twenty-five percent felt they had no time, nineteen percent had no interest or did not feel it would help them in the future, and seventeen percent believed it was unattainable or of secondary importance to stress and grades. Other responses included: other interests as explanations for not pursuing General Honors (8%), and as explanations for why they were pursuing them they offered good experience and resume builder (7%), and need or want of a challenge (5%).

**Summary of Questions 9-12:**

13. *How often have your core courses been challenging?*

(scaled from 1 for never to 4 for very often)

*never (3%), not very often (25%), often (54%), very often (13%),* average 2.8

14. *How often have your major courses been challenging?*

*never (0%), not very often (3%), often (43%), very often (51%),* average 3.5

15. *How satisfied are you with the faculty's enthusiasm for classes in the core?*

(scaled from 1 for very dissatisfied to 4 for very satisfied)

*very dissatisfied (1%), dissatisfied (13%), satisfied (75%), very satisfied (8%),* average 2.9

16. *How satisfied are you with the faculty's enthusiasm for classes in the major?*

*very dissatisfied (0%), dissatisfied (1%), satisfied (51%), very satisfied (46%),* average 3.5

### **Summary of Question 13:**

*For each of the following attributes, indicate the extent to which you either agree or disagree.*

Scaled from 1 for disagree to 5 for agree, students gave the following responses for:

*A challenging course is:*

a good thing (4.2), makes me struggle (3.8), is interesting (3.9), makes me do better (3.7), takes more time (4.6), is boring (2.2), is frustrating while taking the course (3.7), is rewarding after the course is over (4.2), makes me think more (4.2), is a bad thing (1.8), is satisfying afterwards (4.1), is overwhelming (3.5), makes me learn more (3.8), provides a meaningful accomplishment (4.0), contains a lot of busy work (2.8), builds character (3.6), is impossible to complete (1.7), requires critical thinking (4.1).

### **Summary of Question 14:**

*How important are each of the following in making a course more academically challenging?*

My interest in the subject (4.1), a positive professor (4.5), research papers (3.0), complex material (3.6), a professor with high expectations (4.0), assignments that build on each other (4.0), greater time requirements (3.4), learning a lot (3.9), group work (3.0), longer assignments (2.8), professor's interest in the course (4.4), my disinterest in the subject (3.2), long term projects (3.3), assignments requiring application of knowledge and theory to real world situations (4.0), assignments requiring students to go beyond comprehension of reading and lectures (4.1).

### **Summary of Question 15:**

*How much do you know about why the University assesses student learning?*

Student responded that they knew: nothing (7%), not much (37%), some (51%), or a lot (5%).

*Please check each of the following assessments of which you are aware.*

The following percentages of students knew of these assessment instruments: Freshman Testing (92%), Junior Testing (100%), Senior Exam in the Major (55%), Surveys (59%), Interview Project (63%), Liberal Arts and Sciences Portfolio (79%), Sophomore Writing Experience (99%), and the Capstone Course (42%).

### **Summary of Question 16:**

*How satisfied are you with your spring course schedule?*

The students responded that they were: very dissatisfied (3%), dissatisfied (10%), satisfied (70%), or very satisfied (18%).

Satisfied students reported that they got the courses they needed, were comfortable with their schedule, or had interesting courses or good professors (36%) and that their courses were either in or related to their major (24%).

Dissatisfied students referred to time constraints, hard classes, or registration or timing difficulties.

*How, if at all, did course availability impact your response to part a of this question?*

Sixty-four percent of the students indicated they had no problems with course availability, twenty-five percent had a few problems and ten percent experienced several problems. However, ten percent made explicit mention of the fact that “finally” they had not experienced any problems due to their junior class standing.