



**Graduating Seniors, 2010-11:
Perceptions of their Experiences at
USA**

Office of Institutional Research, Planning and Assessment

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I. Executive Summary

This report presents findings from the annual graduating senior survey for the 2010-11 academic year. The survey, conducted every semester with graduating seniors, is posted on the Office of the Registrar's Graduation website. 615 respondents completed the survey for 2010-11, resulting in a response rate of 35.9%.

Included in the Executive Summary, is an overview of how results from various surveys have been used to make improvements. The findings reveal that students are satisfied with the experiences at USA. Some of the highlights are listed below.

- Nearly 90% of respondents perceived their overall experiences at USA as either "excellent" or "good" and over 80% either stated if they had to do it over again, they would "definitely" or "probably" elect to attend USA.
- Approximately 75% stated that the advising received for their major was "excellent" or "good."
- Most respondents (add percentage in parenthesis) felt that their academic preparation had been either "excellent" or "good" and as a result, students felt they were prepared to meet the demands of their career and/or to further their education at some point in the future.
- In addition, the findings reveal that most respondents carried a full course load of 12 hours and worked while they were a student at USA.

The results from this survey indicate problematic areas concerning students' academic experiences. Nearly 20% of students evaluated their academic preparation to solve complex real world problems, contributing to the community, understanding of people of other races and ethnicities and using computing and technology as "only fair" or "poor." Students also expressed concerns about the quality of advising, particularly as it relates to career choices. In terms of social experiences, food services were identified by students as in need of improvement with nearly 50% stating that the services were "only fair" or "poor."

Use of Results

For the past three years, IRPA has collected information from graduating seniors every semester. The results of this survey and others such as the National Survey Student Engagement (NSSE) have been shared with University administrators and faculty as evidence for review of the academic and social experiences of students.

Some of the areas where changes have been implemented include:

1. Advising
 - The Deans Council approved mandatory advising for all first year students.
 - Advising services are also being monitored by individual departments and colleges through student surveys.
 - The Bulletin has been reviewed by the General Education committee in terms of consistency of general education advising materials. The Committee has made recommendations to add materials to the website and have Colleges/Schools review their materials for accuracy and consistency.
2. Academic Preparation
 - Some areas of academic preparation have been evaluated by students as in need of review. General Education committee developed a set of student learning competencies which will be linked to program-level student learning outcomes.
 - The Innovations in Learning Center (ILC) offers weekly workshops to promote faculty development in teaching and assessment.
 - The assessment process has been standardized on campus to include an annual review of assessment plans and reports emphasizing the importance of the use of results for improvements in student learning and campus experiences.
3. Service Learning
 - The Graduating Senior survey has also found that there is a need to increase awareness of service-learning among faculty and students. The results were shared with the Directors of the Center for Academic Service- Learning and Civic Engagement and included as part of the assessment for the Center. Specific actions will be outlined in this year's report.
 - The Directors also asked department chairs to include service-learning activities as part of their program assessment.
4. Social Experiences
 - A new Dining facility opened in Fall 2010.
 - A new Campus Recreation was opened Fall 2010.

- The Student Center is currently undergoing renovations.
- A new residence hall was opened in Fall 2011.

IRPA will continue to collect information from graduating seniors regarding their experiences and share with faculty and administrators. As indicated by the list above, student input is an important resource as the University works to improve the academic and social experiences for students.

II. Graduating Seniors, 2010-11

A. Introduction

The graduating senior survey is conducted every semester using a web link generated by Zoomerang and posted on the Office of the Registrar Graduation's website for the last 4 weeks of the semester. For the academic year 2010-11, 1,713 undergraduate degrees were awarded for a response rate of 35.9%.

The report is divided into two sections. In the first section, information is presented from graduating seniors who participated in the survey for Summer 2010, Fall 2010 and Spring 2011 semesters. The last section of the report offers comparisons for the years: 2008-09, 2009-10 and 2010-11 for select questions.

B. Demographic Overview of Survey Participants

The majority of respondents were female (67%) and White (74%). Nearly half of respondents were less than 24 years of age (48%). See Table 1 for a more thorough demographic overview of survey respondents.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Survey Respondents, 2010-11.

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	199	32.7
Female	410	67.3
Total	609	100.0
Age Category	Frequency	Percent
Less than 24	291	47.6
24-29	208	34.0
30-39	66	10.8
40-49	36	5.9
50 and older	10	1.6
Total	611	100.0
Race/Ethnicity	Frequency	Percent
American Indian/Alaskan Native	8	1.3
Asian	25	4.2
Black or African American	99	16.4
Hispanic or Latino	9	1.5
Multiracial	12	2.0
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	2	0.3
White	447	74.3
Total	602	100.0

Approximately three-fourths of survey participants worked 11 or more hours per week (76%) with over one-fifth of respondents reporting that they worked 30 or more hours per week while attending USA (see Table 2).

Table 2. Number of Hours Worked Per Week while a Student at USA, 2010-11.

Number of hours/week	Frequency	Percent
None	77	14.4
1-10 hours	54	10.1
11-20	162	30.2
21-30	123	23.0
More than 30 hours/week	120	22.4
Total	536	100.0

C. Academic Characteristics of Survey Participants

As detailed in Table 3, first time students accounted for 41% of respondents while slightly more than half of graduates entered USA as transfer students (52%). Approximately three-fourths of respondents began their studies at USA during the past five years (see Table 4).

Table 3. Admission Status, 2010-11.

Admission Status	Frequency	Percent
Earning a second Bachelor's degree	23	3.7
First time in college	253	41.1
Transfer with an A.A. or A.S. degree	115	18.7
Transfer without an A.A. or A.S. degree	204	33.2
Readmission	20	3.3
Total	615	100.0

Figure 1. Admission Status, 2010-11.

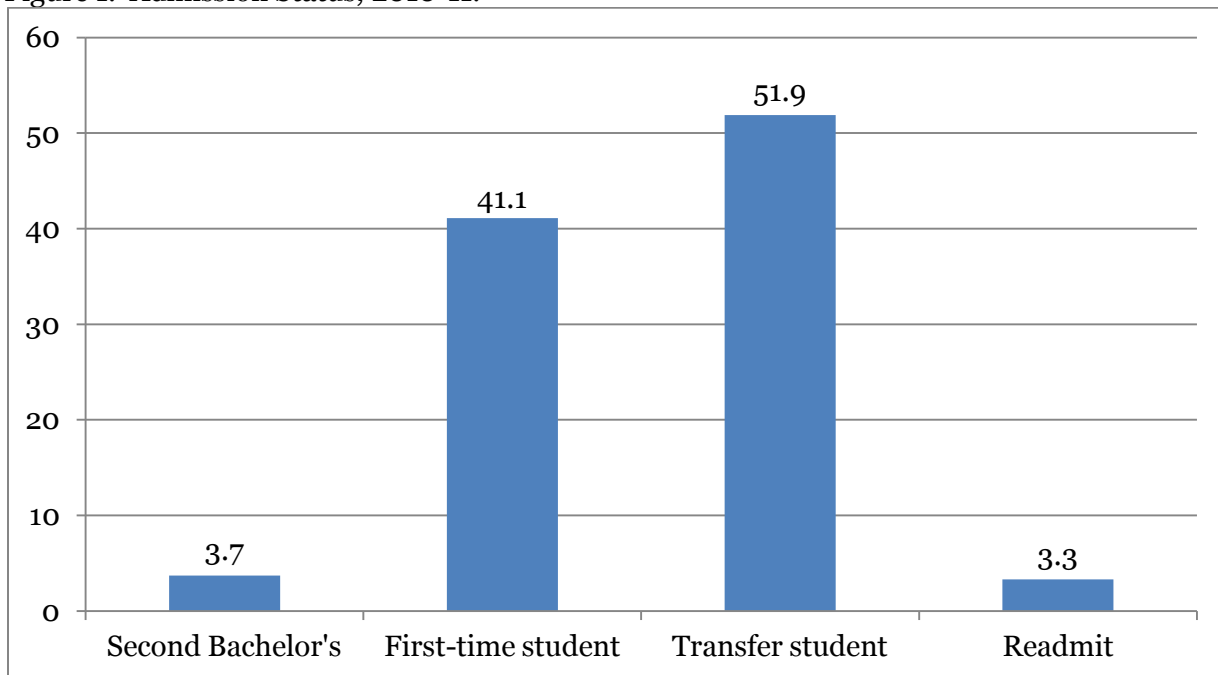


Table 4. Year First Began as a Student at USA, 2010-11.

Year	Frequency	Percent
1977	1	.2
1979	2	.3
1989	1	.2
1990	1	.2
1991	1	.2
1993	1	.2
1994	3	.5
1997	3	.5
1998	3	.5
1999	2	.3
2000	5	.9
2001	5	.9
2002	10	1.7
2003	13	2.2
2004	28	4.8
2005	66	11.4
2006	119	20.5
2007	142	24.5
2008	110	19.0
2009	58	10.0
2010	6	1.0
Total	580	100.0

An overwhelming majority of graduating seniors reported they were usually full-time student while attending USA (90%), see Table 5.

Table 5. Usual Student Status while a Student at USA, 2010-11.

Student Status	Frequency	Percent
Full-time (12 hours or more)	550	89.7
Part-time (less than 12 hours)	63	10.3
Total	613	100.0

The majority of respondents were enrolled in the College of Arts and Sciences followed by the College of Education and the Mitchell College of Business (Table 6). All other colleges/schools had participation rates of less than 10 percent. When comparing to senior enrollment for Fall

2010, the College of Education participation rates exceeded Fall, 2010 senior enrollment by 9% and for the College of Arts and Sciences, the participation rate exceeded senior enrollment by nearly 5%. Participation rates of other Colleges and Schools either fall below or mirror senior enrollment figures for Fall 2010.

Table 6. Comparisons by College/School of Senior Enrollment, Fall 2010 and Graduating Senior Survey Participants, 2010-11.¹

College/School	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
	<i>University Overall, Fall 2010</i>		<i>Respondents, 2010-11</i>	
AHP	330	10.1	43	7.1
AS	943	28.8	202	33.2
CIS	93	2.8	6	1.0
CESP	161	4.9	29	4.8
ED	460	14.1	142	23.4
EG	280	8.6	38	6.3
MCOB	476	14.5	97	16.0
NU	531	16.2	51	8.2
Total	3,274	100.0	608	100.0

D. Evaluation of Student Experiences by Survey Participants

Respondents report overall satisfaction with their educational experiences with most students viewing it as an excellent or good experience (88%) as presented in Table 7. Similarly, 80% stated they would definitely or probably attend USA, if they had it to do over again (Table 8). For those stating they would probably or definitely not attend USA if they had it to do again, reasons included problems with advising and support services, parking, lack of classes at night and the increasing costs.

Other students had positive comments about their experiences here:

“Absolutely awesome experience. The Social Work Department is loaded with fantastic instructors. They are tough, structured and determined to mold the students into future leaders. In addition, the instructors are compassionate and encouraging the students. Dr. Daley is a terrific department head and should be commended on the quality of the program. Furthermore, the instructors/professors compliment the department. I am proud to be a graduate.”

¹ Enrollment figures for Seniors by College were obtained from the 2010-11 FactBook, <http://www.southalabama.edu/irpa/highpriority/factbook1011.pdf>.

“I had a choice of three schools (UA, UAB or USA) . I had no ties whatsoever to USA but something told me that is where I needed to be. I have not doubted my decision to attend USA. I live 400 miles away from USA and for two years I drove every weekend to Mobile for class. This was not always easy on our bank account and being away from family (wife and newborn). Due to faculty, my classmates and campus, I choose to continue my education at USA. I feel the Dept. of EMS really worked with all of us so that we could keep our full-time jobs in our hometowns while attending USA. The faculty was understanding to situations that came up from time to time keeping us from class, while at the same time making sure we got the education we paid for. I am only one person but for once I feel USA worked around my schedule making it possible for me to keep my full-time job and get a quality education. Thank you all for what you do.”

“The faculty of Meteorology Department are amazing, very helpful, and very concerned about the well-being of their students.”

Table 7. Evaluation of Overall Educational Experience at USA, 2010-11.

	Frequency	Percent
Excellent	185	30.1
Good	357	58.1
Only fair	63	10.3
Poor	9	1.5
Total	614	100.0

Table 8. Responses to “If you had it to do over again, would you attend USA?” 2010-11.

	Frequency	Percent
Definitely yes	227	37.7
Probably yes	256	42.5
Probably no	91	15.1
Definitely no	28	4.7
Total	602	100.0

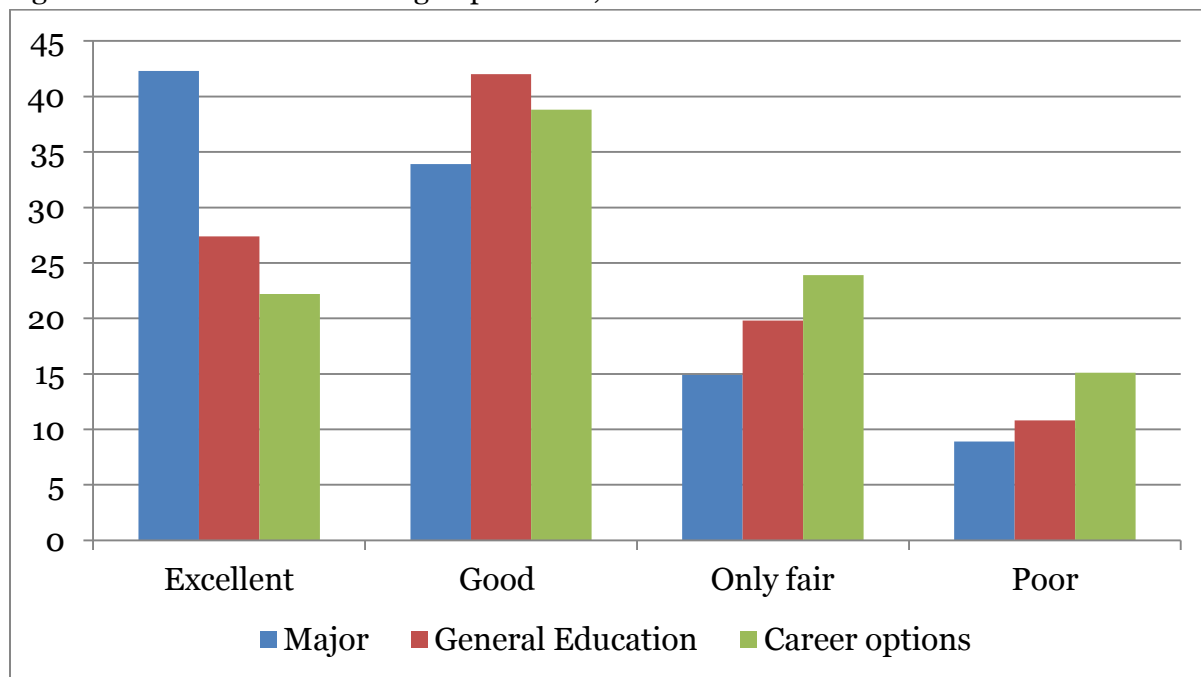
Survey participants’ perceptions of their advising experiences are presented in Table 9. Approximately 76% of survey participants reported they felt that the advising received for their major was either “excellent” or “good.” The survey results indicate there are opportunities for improving advising relative to General Studies and career options with nearly 40% of respondents evaluating their advising for career options as “only fair” or “poor.” Student

comments included: “I needed a better advisor. My advisor did not know me at all and wasn't interested in knowing me. But overall, I had a great experience at South.” “Advising needs to get much better. On multiple occasions, I have had to get a teacher or dean to clear my registration status because of something my advisor failed to tell me.”

Table 9. Evaluation of Advising Experiences, 2010-11.

Advising	Excellent		Good		Only fair		Poor		Total	
	<i>Freq</i>	%	<i>Freq</i>	%	<i>Freq</i>	%	<i>Freq</i>	%	<i>Freq</i>	%
Specific to Major	256	42.3	205	33.9	90	14.9	54	8.9	605	100.0
General Studies	162	27.4	248	42.0	117	19.8	64	10.8	591	100.0
Career options	132	22.2	231	38.8	142	23.9	90	15.1	595	100.0

Figure 2. Evaluation of Advising Experiences, 2010-11.



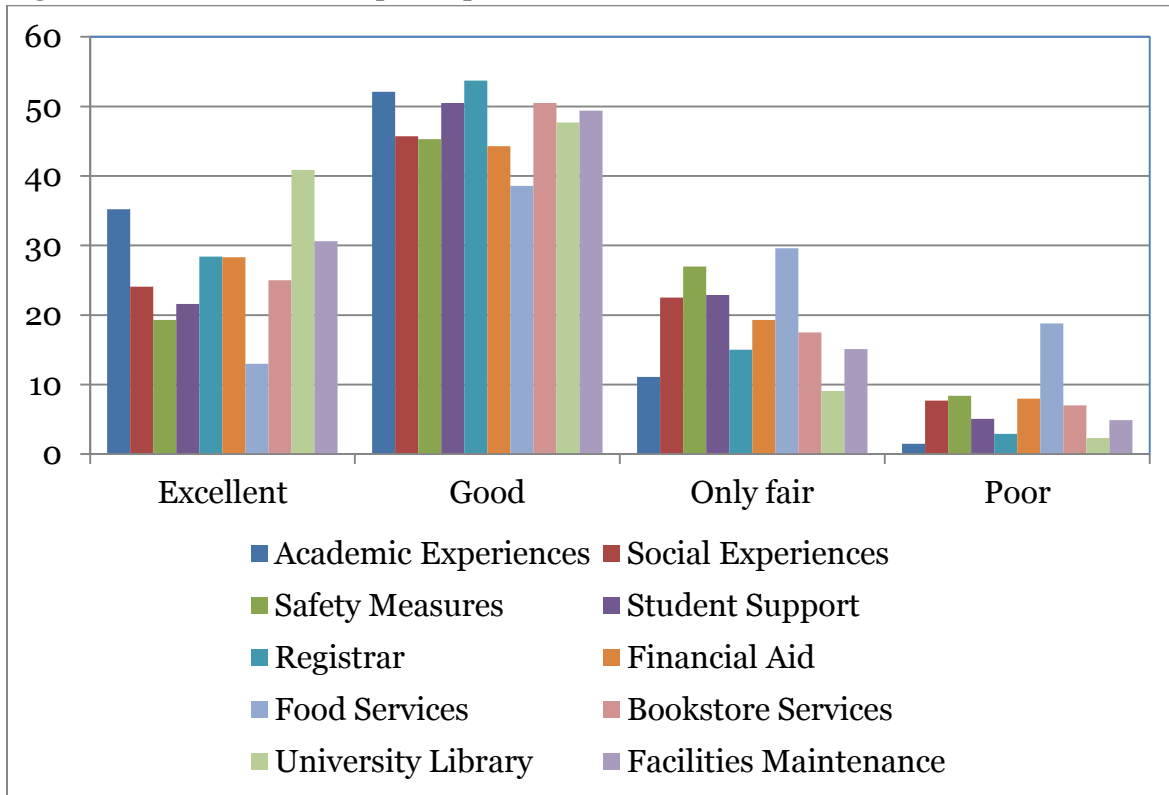
The majority of participants responded that their academic and social experiences were either “excellent” or “good,” with approximately 30% rating their social experiences while a student at USA as “only fair” or “poor.” Having safety measures in place and the evaluation of student support services, Office of the Registrar, Financial Aid, Bookstore services and Maintenance of Facilities were all viewed by the majority as being “excellent” or “good.” Food services received the lowest rating when compared to the other areas (52% “excellent/good” versus 48% “only

fair/poor”). Of the services listed, the University Library received the highest evaluation of either “excellent” or “good” (89% of those responding).

Table 10. Evaluation of Campus Experiences and Services, 2010-11.

	Excellent		Good		Only fair		Poor		Total	
	<i>Freq</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Freq</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Freq</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Freq</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Freq</i>	<i>%</i>
Academic Experience	215	35.2	318	52.1	68	11.1	9	1.5	610	100.0
Social Experience	138	24.1	262	45.7	129	22.5	44	7.7	573	100.0
Safety Measures	112	19.3	263	45.3	157	27.0	49	8.4	581	100.0
Student Support Services	118	21.6	276	50.5	125	22.9	28	5.1	547	100.0
Office of the Registrar	168	28.4	318	53.7	89	15.0	17	2.9	592	100.0
Financial Aid	145	28.3	227	44.3	99	19.3	41	8.0	512	100.0
Food Services	54	13.0	160	38.6	123	29.6	78	18.8	415	100.0
Bookstore Services	150	25.0	303	50.5	105	17.5	42	7.0	600	100.0
University Library	234	40.9	273	47.7	52	9.1	13	2.3	572	100.0
Maintenance of Facilities	176	30.6	284	49.4	87	15.1	28	4.9	575	100.0

Figure 3. Evaluation of Campus Experiences and Services, 2010-11.

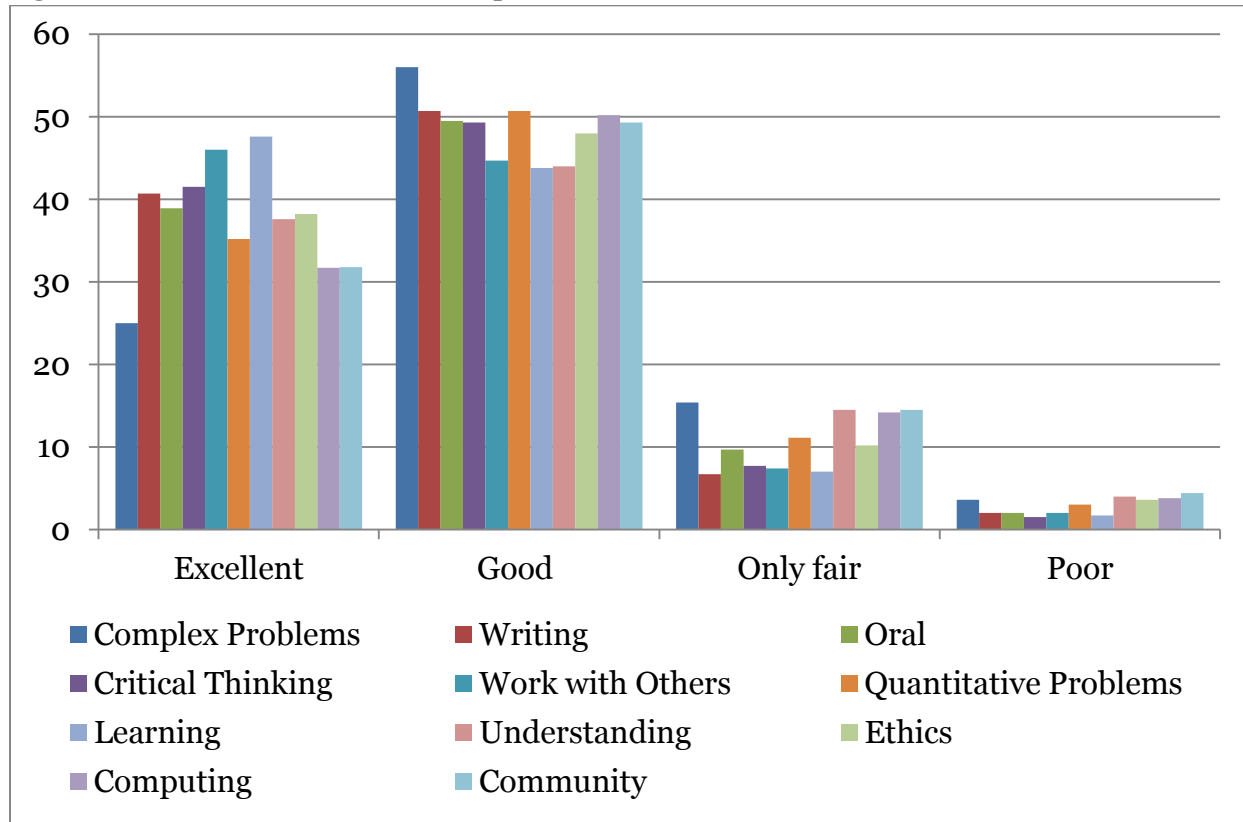


Students were asked to evaluate their academic preparation in detail along ten dimensions (see Table 11) with the majority evaluating their academic preparation as either “excellent” or “good.” Nearly half of graduating seniors reported that their preparation in regard to “working effectively with others” (46%) and “learning on their own” (48%) was excellent.

Table 11. Evaluation of Academic Preparation, 2010-11.

Preparation	Excellent		Good		Only fair		Poor		Total	
	<i>Freq</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Freq</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Freq</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Freq</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Freq</i>	<i>%</i>
Solving Complex Real World Problems	152	25.0	341	56.0	94	15.4	22	3.6	609	100.0
Developing Written Skills	248	40.7	309	50.7	41	6.7	12	2.0	610	100.0
Developing Oral Skills	237	38.9	302	49.5	59	9.7	12	2.0	610	100.0
Developing Critical Thinking Skills	252	41.5	299	49.3	47	7.7	9	1.5	607	100.0
Working Effectively with Others	280	46.0	272	44.7	45	7.4	12	2.0	609	100.0
Analyzing Quantitative Problems	212	35.2	305	50.7	67	11.1	18	3.0	602	100.0
Learning on your own	287	47.6	264	43.8	42	7.0	10	1.7	603	100.0
Understanding People of Other Races and Ethnicities	228	37.6	267	44.0	88	14.5	24	4.0	607	100.0
Developing a Code of Ethics	232	38.2	292	48.0	62	10.2	22	3.6	608	100.0
Using Computing and Information Technology	192	31.7	304	50.2	86	14.2	23	3.8	605	100.0
Contributing to Community	193	31.8	299	49.3	88	14.5	27	4.4	607	100.0

Figure 4. Evaluation of Academic Preparation, 2010-11.



Regarding quality of instruction and faculty relations (see Table 12), the majority of survey participants either agreed or strongly agreed that instruction in their major field was excellent and that faculty were concerned about them (91.2% and 84.9%, respectively).

Table 12. Evaluation of Faculty, 2010-11.

Instruction	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
	<i>Freq</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Freq</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Freq</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Freq</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Freq</i>	<i>%</i>
Instruction in major field was excellent.	271	44.8	281	46.4	47	7.8	6	1.0	605	100.0
Faculty were concerned about me.	256	42.6	254	42.3	69	11.5	22	3.7	601	100.0

E. Future Plans of Survey Participants, 2010-11

When asked about their principal activity after graduation, nearly two-thirds stated they would be working full-time and approximately 23% are planning to continue their education.

Approximately 40% of respondents plan to attend graduate school in the next year (see Table 14). More than half of respondents (58%) expected to obtain a Master's degree (see Table 15).

Table 13. Principal Activity upon Graduation, 2010-11.

	Frequency	Percent
Additional undergraduate coursework, full-time	4	0.6
Additional undergraduate coursework, part-time	2	0.3
Additional undergraduate coursework	5	0.8
Combination of employment and graduate school	9	1.5
Employment, full-time	394	64.5
Employment, part-time	20	3.3
Graduate or professional school, full-time	107	17.5
Graduate for professional school, part-time	22	3.6
Looking for a job	2	0.3
Sports career	1	0.2
Military service	15	2.5
No current plans	8	1.3
Start or raise a family	16	2.6
Travel	2	0.3
Unemployment	1	0.2
Volunteer	3	0.5
Total	611	100.0

Table 14. Future Educational Plans of Graduating Seniors, 2010-11.

	Yes		No	
	#	%	#	%
Plan to Attend Graduate School in the Next Year	214	40.2	318	59.8
Applied to Graduate or Professional School	113	20.8	429	79.2

Table 15. Highest Degree Eventually Expect to Obtain, 2010-11.

	Frequency	Percent
Certificate or professional license	19	3.4
Doctorate	122	17.3
Master's degree	301	58.0
Medical degree	20	3.7
Second Bachelor's degree	30	1.8
Specialist degree	24	5.3
Not sure	7	.2
No further study intended	85	10.4
Total	608	100.0

Table 16 reports that most survey respondents indicated they felt prepared for employment and to further their education.

Table 16. Perceived Preparedness for Future Employment or Academic Endeavors, 2010-11.

Future expectations	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
	<i>Freq</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Freq</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Freq</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Freq</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Freq</i>	<i>%</i>
Well-prepared for chosen career	236	39.5	283	47.3	64	10.7	15	2.5	598	100.0
Meet expectations of my future employer	303	50.8	247	41.4	41	6.9	6	1.0	597	100.0
Well-prepared to further my education	288	47.9	259	43.1	44	7.3	10	1.7	601	100.0

In 2010-11, questions were added to the Graduating Senior Survey regarding service-learning. The results indicate the vast majority (nearly three-fourths) of students have not heard about service-learning.

Table 17. First Source of Information Regarding Service-Learning

	Frequency	Percent
Before college	24	4.5
From a media source	2	0.4
From another student	28	5.3
From career services	1	0.2
From FaceBook	2	0.4
From my advisor	1	0.2
In another class besides Freshman Seminar	30	5.7
In Freshman Seminar where we did a service learning project	42	7.9
Student workshop	1	0.2
Through a student organization	11	2.1
I have not heard about service learning	387	73.2
Total	529	100.0

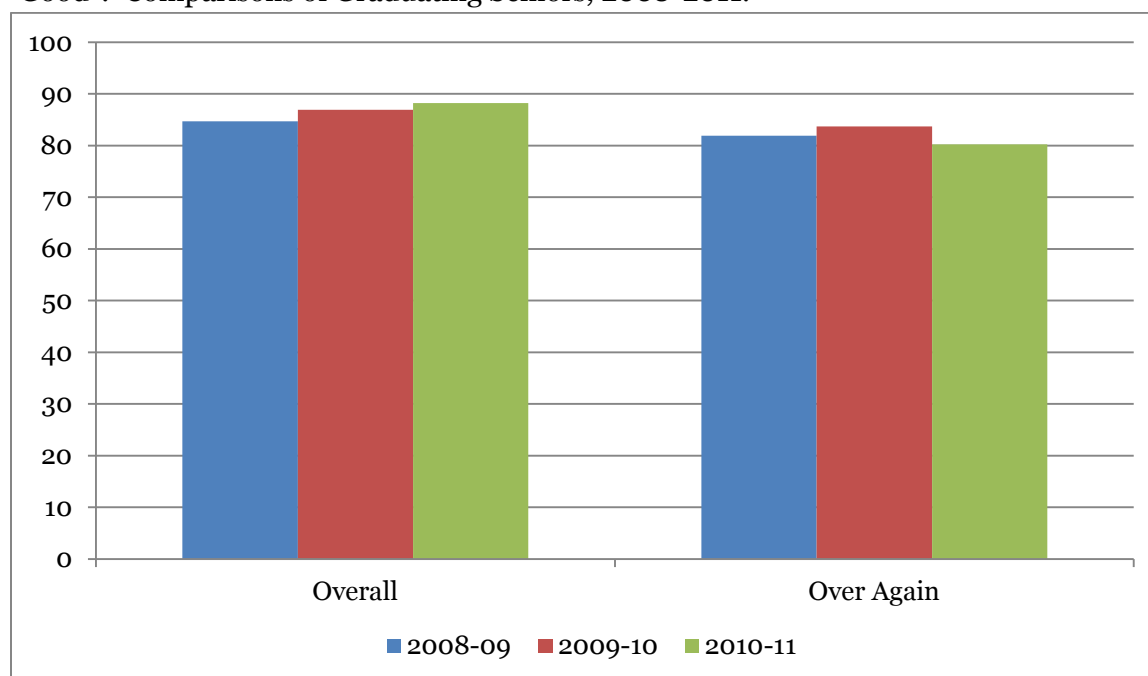
Table 18. Areas where Service-Learning had a Significant Effect on Student Experiences.

	Frequency	Percent
Made for an interesting Freshman seminar	25	4.1
Helped me to get more into my major	44	7.2
Helped me to become better connected to my community	35	5.7
Gave meaning to what I was learning in the classroom	37	6.0
Provided me with material to put on my resume	29	4.7
Provided relationships for letters of recommendations	20	3.3
Helped me to meet people and make friends	33	5.4
I enjoyed it	47	7.6
I did not do service learning at USA	399	63.4
I was an AmeriCorpsVISTA	1	0.2

IV. Comparisons between 2008-09, 2009-10 and 2010-11 Graduating Seniors for Select Items

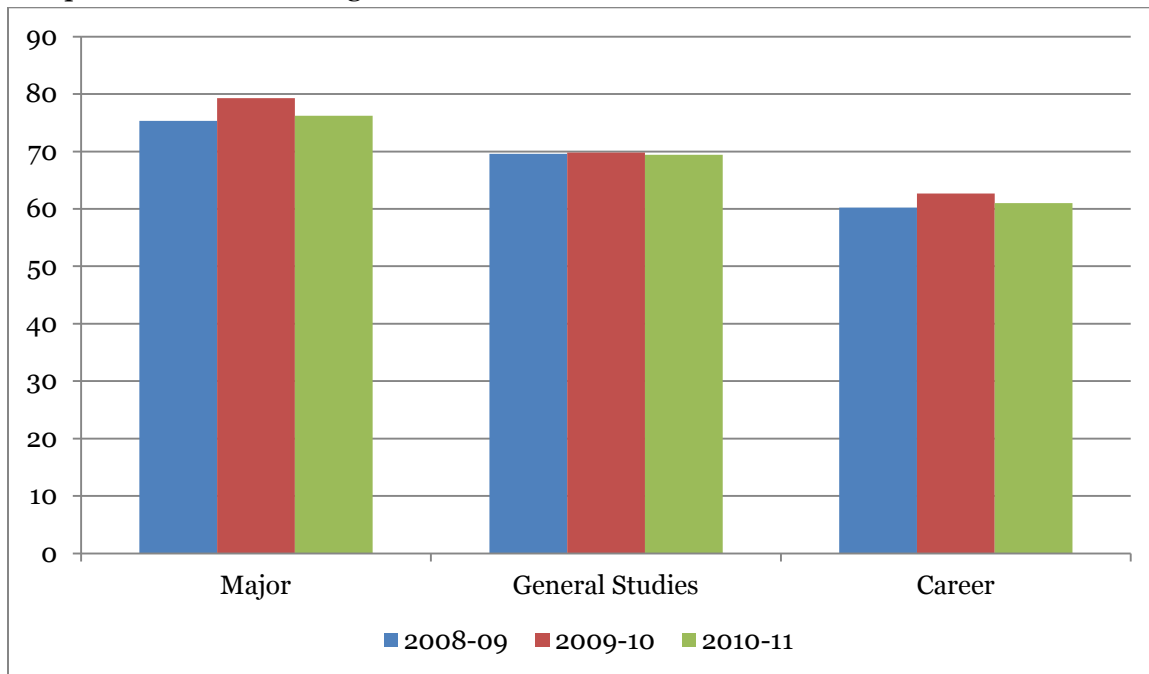
In this section, comparisons are made between graduating senior survey respondents from 2008-09 through 2010-11 for select questions. In Figure 5, “overall” corresponds to student perceptions of their overall educational experience, combining the categories of excellent and good. While the responses were similar for each year, slightly more students in 2010-11 reported their educational experiences were “excellent” or “good.” When asked, “If you had it to do over again, would you attend USA?”, the results are again, similar but slightly less respondents in 2010-11 reported they “definitely would” or “probably would” attend USA if they had to do it over again. Note the categories of “definitely would” and “probably would” are combined for each year.

Figure 5. Percent of Respondents Viewing Their Educational Experiences as “Excellent” or “Good”: Comparisons of Graduating Seniors, 2008-2011.



When comparing student perceptions of advising for their major, general studies and career options, there is very little difference between excellent/good response percentages from 2008 to 2011. The lack of change from 2008-20011, particularly in the area of career advising, indicates that advising is an area where improvements can be made through such efforts as faculty training and more frequent feedback from students.

Figure 6. Percent of Respondents Viewing Their Advising Experiences as “Excellent” or “Good”: Comparisons of Graduating Seniors, 2008-2011.

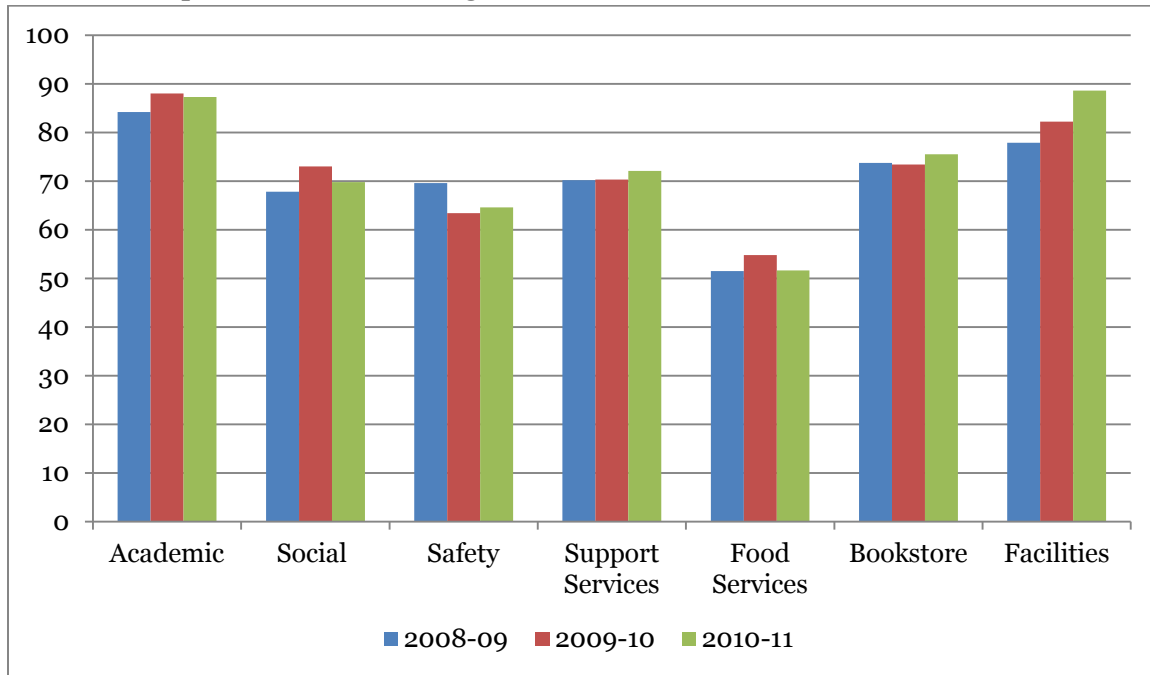


Students’ experiences were characterized along seven dimensions:

- Academic
- Social
- Safety
- Support Services
- Food Services
- Bookstore Services
- Facilities

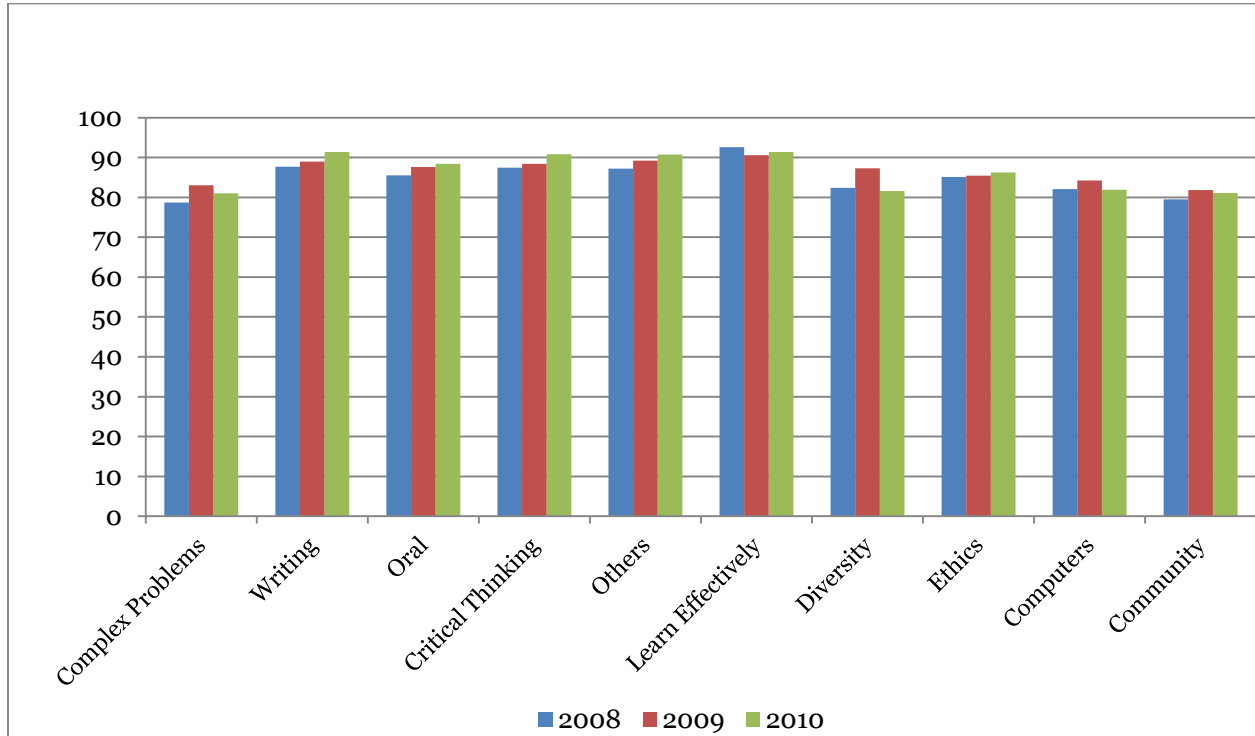
Responses for “excellent” and “good” were combined for this analysis. Student perceptions of their experiences are similar across years. Safety issues and food services continue to be the most problematic areas for students. Student perceptions of the facilities continues to improve.

Figure 7. Percent of Respondents Viewing Their Academic Experiences as “Excellent” or “Good”: Comparisons of Graduating Seniors, 2008-2011.



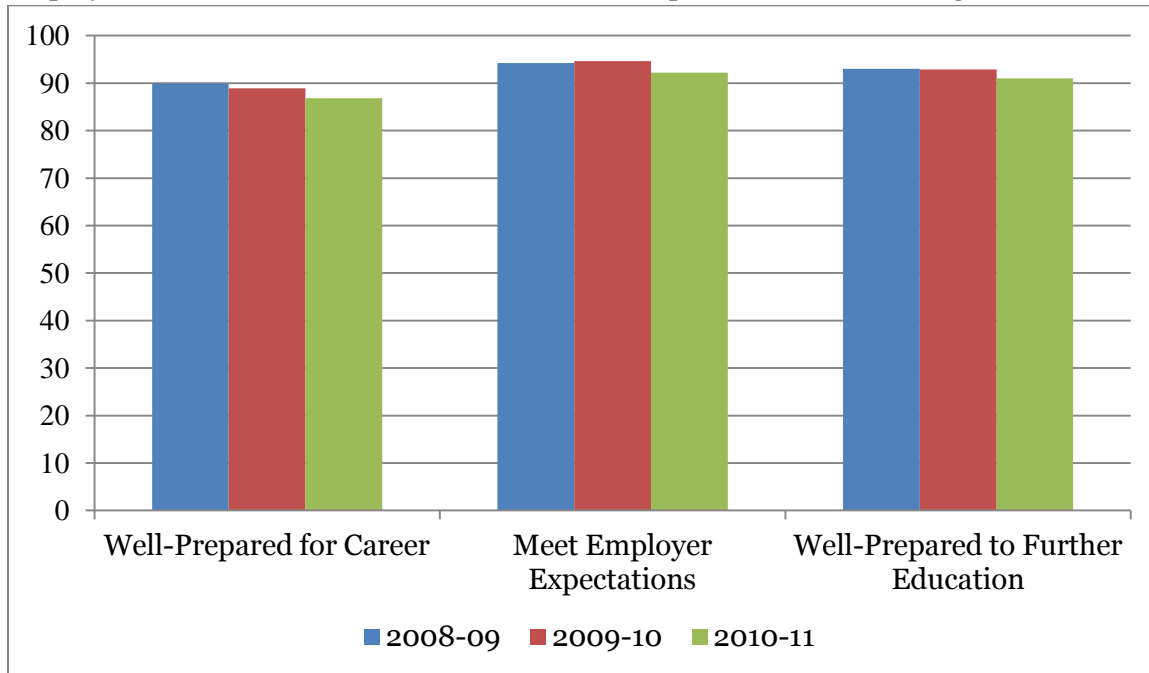
Graduating seniors continue to report high levels of academic preparedness along the ten dimensions shown in Figure 8. (Categories of “excellent” and “good” were combined.)

Figure 8. Percent of Respondents Viewing Their Academic Preparation as “Excellent” or “Good”: Comparisons of Graduating Seniors, 2008-2011.



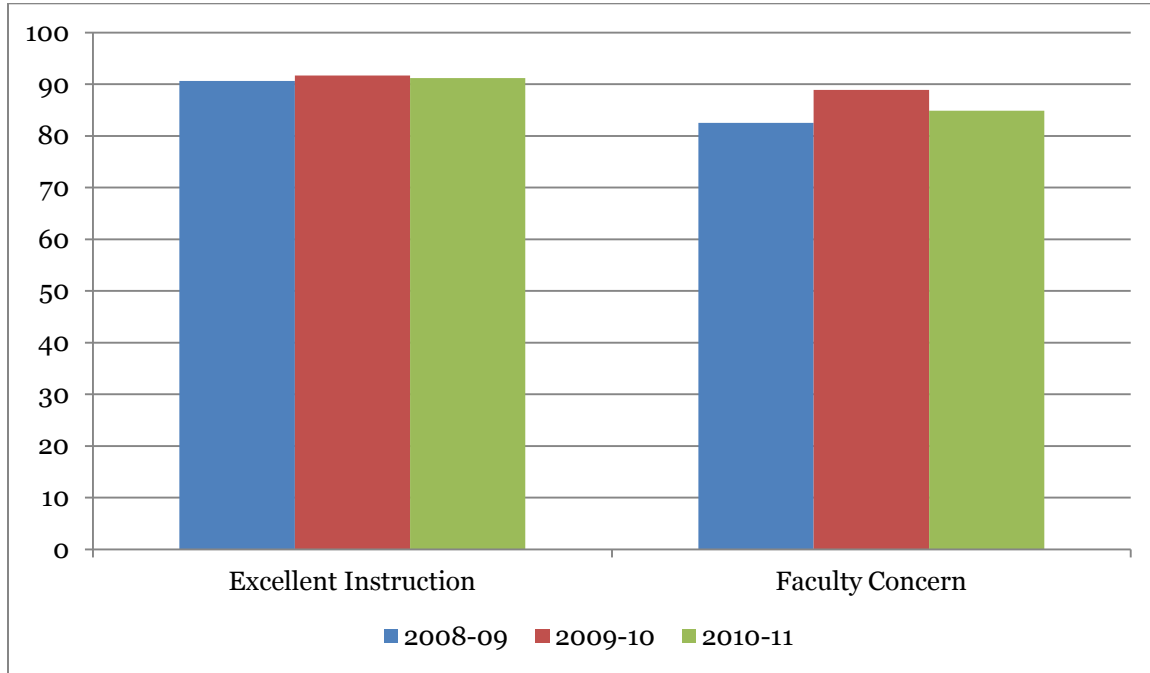
Over the past three years, similar percentages of graduating seniors agreed they were well-prepared for their career, to meet the expectations of their future employer and to further their education (see Figure 9).

Figure 9. Percent of Respondents “Strongly Agreeing” or “Agreeing” They are Prepared for Employment and to Further Their Education: Comparisons of Graduating Seniors, 2008-2011.



Graduating seniors in 2010-11 continued to agree they received excellent instruction and faculty were concerned about them.

Figure 10. Percent of Respondents “Strongly Agreeing” or “Agreeing” Their Instruction was Excellent and Faculty were Concerned about Them, 2008-2011.



V. Conclusions

The results of the 2010-11 graduating senior survey continue to demonstrate that survey participants were mostly satisfied with their experiences while a student at USA. Students reported they were academically prepared and had developed the skills necessary for a successful career and/or to further their education. Comparisons between 2008-09, 2009-10 and 2010-11 graduating seniors indicate that these results are generally consistent over the past three years.

The results of this survey and others will continue to be shared with administrators and faculty to monitor and improve student academic and social experiences at USA. The survey will also be reviewed for content and revisions made based on the changing needs of the University.