

NPS ALUMNI SURVEY REPORT 2010

INTRODUCTION

In August 2010, NPS issued the third annual Alumni Survey for 2000, 2005, and 2008 graduates. 2,951 alumni with valid emails were invited to take the survey online. Out of the three alumni cohorts asked to partake in the survey, 2,946 alumni were actual potential respondents (due to 5 survey invitations bouncing). From that group, 469 alumni responded, and 6 decided to “opt out”- marking a 16% response rate. However, analyses done on the survey results eventually lead to a total of 367 responses due to 102 responses being excluded from the result rates. This is because the survey responses were either prematurely submitted and thus did not meet necessary depth and completeness requirements and/or, the respondents were not degree seeking student’s intended to be a part of the survey. Given this, the **actual response rate is 13%**.

In **Table 1**, respondents are ranked according to graduating year and the School each attended.

NPS Schools are noted as follows:

- Graduate School of Business and Public Policy (GSBPP)
- Graduate School of Engineering and Applied Sciences (GSEAS)
- Graduate School of Operational and Information Sciences (GSOIS)
- School of International Graduate Studies (SIGS)

PROFILE OF STUDENT RESPONDENTS

The first survey question asked for the **student’s branch of service while enrolled at NPS**. (Table 2)

The following response rates of each respective service and school have been summarized in order from descending values:

| | |
|---|-------|
| United States Navy | 52.0% |
| United States Air Force | 15.3% |
| United States Marine Corps | 15.0% |
| United States Army | 13.6% |
| United States Coast Guard & Other Non-Military Service | 3.8% |
| Non U.S. Service | 0.3% |

Percentages varied by School:

81.8% of respondents in PROVOST were in the United States Navy

72.2% of respondents in GSEAS were in the United States Navy

53.9% of respondents in GSBPP were in the United States Navy

45.2% of respondents in GSOIS were in the United States Navy

36.2% of respondents in SIGS were in the United States Air Force

Retired and Active Duty officers were asked their current or highest rank. (Table 3)

The retired officers' alumni of 2008 had the highest percentage in Rank 06 (25.0%), collectively throughout all of the Schools. Active Duty alumni of 2000 had the highest rate of responses from Rank 05 (70.9%).

Sixty-six point seven percent of the AY 2005 officer alumni respondents retired from Rank 04. This finding is similar to last year's analysis, in which the majority of the survey responses were also from current or past Rank 04 members.

A large majority (82.8%) of respondents indicated that they **did not have a post-baccalaureate degree prior to attending NPS**. When asked what **their average grade was in their undergraduate college compared to their NPS average**, 76.8% had an A or A- average at NPS, compared to 32.7% in their undergraduate education.

When asked if students were **in-resident or part of a Distributed Learning (DL) program**, 79.3% of the respondents were resident students, 15.3% were Distributed Learning students, and 4.6% of respondents were a combination of both. (Table 4)

Analyses show that most of the Resident alumni respondents graduated from GSOIS. In fact, 29.9% of the GSOIS respondents were a Resident student- most within the AY 2005 cohort. This finding is similar to last year's results, in which the AY 1999 GSOIS alumni had the highest response rate for the aforementioned question (32.1%).

Overall, most of the alumni respondents graduated from GSBPP. With a combined Resident and DL response rate of 45.7%, the 2008 cohort had the highest response rate within GSBPP. This finding is also similar to the results stated in the AY 2009 Alumni Report, of which the GSBPP alumni had the highest response rate.

A detailed representation of **how the demographics of the respondents mirror the overall gender and ethnicity of enrollment** is shown in Table 5.

PRIMARY CURRICULA/DEGREES

The top degrees across all 3 year time spans for GSBPP were MBA's in Acquisitions & Contract Management and Financial Management.

GSOIS' respondents followed a trend of earning mostly MS in Operations Analysis degrees (AY 2000 and 2005), yet an MS in Special Operations was also another degree most conferred to the respondents (in AY 2008).

While in last year's Alumni Report it was seen that the top degree earned in SIGS was an MA in National Security Affairs (with an emphasis on Europe and Eurasia), this year's analyses reflected variant trends. For

instance within the 2000 cohort, an MA in Far East, Southeast Asian, Pacific Security Studies was the degree most earned.

The degrees most conferred upon the AY 2005 cohort's respondents were an MA in: Defense Decision-Making, Europe and Eurasia Security Studies, and Homeland Defense and Security Studies. Whereas again in 2008, the MA in Far East, Southeast Asian, Pacific Security Studies was the degree most conferred. This is an interesting observation as it may reflect shifting of interest towards certain geographical and spatial areas as a result of government policy and perceived need.

SUMMARY FINDINGS

Survey findings are organized into six sections by School and/or year where appropriate, supported by referenced Tables in the Appendix.

1. Adjustment to NPS and professional interactions.
2. The time graduates spent on their studies and other activities (Table 7a) plus frequency of use of services and facilities. (Table 7b)
3. Thesis-related questions. (Table 8)
4. Quality and importance of instruction, service and advising. (Tables 9 and 10)
5. NPS effect on abilities and skills. (Table 11)
6. NPS value to the graduate. (Table 12a,12b)
7. Influence of NPS, post-graduation

ADJUSTMENT TO NPS AND PROFESSIONAL INTERACTION

Ratings of transition and professional relationships were mostly overwhelmingly positive across all four Schools.

- 95.6% said that it was relatively easy to transition “socially” to NPS.
- 81.2% said that it was relatively easy to transition “academically” to NPS.
- 93.7% said that the amount of coursework was appropriate to their degree.
- 90.9% judged their coursework to have a high or moderate relevance to their military career.
- 85.8% rated faculty-to-student relationships as warm.
- 95.9% had a satisfactory relationship with their Curricular/Program Officer.
- 100.0% of the Ph.D. recipients found their advisors to be helpful or very helpful.

TIME SPENT

Graduates were asked the **number of hours spent on selected activities in a typical week of about 100 active hours.**

For example, when asked **how many hours student spent on outside employment**, 87.2% cited 10 or fewer hours. The majority of respondents, 94.0%, spent 10 or fewer hours partaking in **community service** and 41.1% spent 11-20 hours per week on **research.**

The graduates were also asked with **what frequency they had used facilities and services on campus.** (Table 7b)

GSBPP

- 47.8% used the library at least once a day
- 40.9% used a computer lab at least once a day
- 50.4% never used academic counseling

GSEAS

- 43.0% used the library at least once a week
- 62.0% used a computer lab at least once a day
- 43.0% never used academic counseling

GSOIS

- 34.6% used the library at least once a day
- 46.2% used a computer lab at least once a day
- 47.1% never used academic counseling

SIGS

- 51.7% used the library at least once a day
- 37.9% used a computer lab at least once a day
- 39.7% used academic counseling atleast once a quarter

THESIS

Graduates were asked **four questions about their thesis or dissertation.** (Table 8)

The majority of respondents across GSBPP, GSEAS and GSOIS said that their thesis/dissertation had a “moderate” relevance to their future career, whereas the majority of SIGS alumni reported that the overall relevance of their thesis was “high.”

When asked to rate the advising alumni received for thesis/dissertation projects at NPS, more than half (55.6%) rated the advice as “excellent” and only 1.9% reported not having sought any counsel for advisement. Amongst the 15 doctoral degree candidates, 53.3% rated the advice they received as “helpful” and 46.7% rated the advice as “more than helpful”- the combined ratings show a 12% increase in approval ratings from last year’s analyses results.

When asked about **whether the respondents had attended a thesis-related workshop:**

- GSBPP: 50.4% did not
- GSEAS: 65.8% did not

- GSOIS: 52.9% did not
- SIGS: 55.2% did not

The findings related to thesis workshop attendance are mostly similar to the results seen in the AY 2009 Alumni Survey, in that most of the alumni did not attend thesis related workshops. A noteworthy observation of SIGS alumni in comparison with the previous Alumni Survey, is that the majority (70.0%) from the previous year attended workshops to aide in thesis/dissertation work, whereas the majority of the current survey's cohorts did not.

QUALITY AND IMPORTANCE OF INSTRUCTION, SERVICE, AND ADVISING

Alumni were asked to rank the quality of the NPS facilities/services and content/instruction on a scale of "Adequate," "Less than adequate," and "More than adequate." (Tables 9 and 10)

- The results showed that all the faculty, content and instruction categories were rated with a generally positive perception, with an aggregated average rating of 69.8% across the "more than adequate" fields. **This shows a slight increase from the average AY 2009 Alumni Survey response rating (68.4%), demonstrating improved perception of faculty, content and instruction.**
- **Alumni gave higher ratings for general content and instruction categories compared to facilities/services.** The categories within the facilities/services section acquired a combined average rating of 30.3% across all the "more than adequate" fields and 65.1% across the "adequate" ratings.
- **SIGS** alumni gave the highest ratings for general content and instruction categories
- **Computer Services and Computer Access** had a majority collective "adequate" rating of 55.4%.
- Of the facilities, the **Library received the highest "more than adequate" rating.**
- Alumni rated their "Overall Experience" 75.1% "more than adequate," showing a generally **positive perception of NPS after graduation.**

NPS INFLUENCE ON ABILITIES AND SKILLS

Alumni were asked to rank the "importance" of 7 skills or abilities and then rank how NPS had "enhanced" those skills and abilities. (Table 11)

It is noteworthy to mention that a strong correlation was observed between the **importance of a skill/ability**, and a perceived **lack of enhancement to**, that skill/ability. For instance, *Leadership* had a high importance rate of 84.2%, yet only 16.9% of alumni deemed it has "highly enhanced." Similarly, *Ethics* yielded a "high importance" rate of 81.5%, but only 19.1% of alumni thought it was "highly enhanced." And, *Teamwork* was rated as "highly important" with an 81.7% rate, yet only 33.8% of alumni thought it was "highly enhanced."

Thus, it can be seen that those skills/abilities which were most valued by NPS alumni, also elicited the highest amount of expectations for improvement (and therefore fewer ratings on perceived enhancement). This may be why the results show a miscorrelation between the importance of, and enhancement to, certain fields.

Exceptions to this observation were seen in *Analytical Skill, Writing and Research*. An interesting observation in this study was that the high importance rating for *Research* was relatively low (33.8%), yet it was deemed one of the most highly enhanced skills. It is also interesting to note that the level of enhancement for *Research* far exceeded the expectations set out for it by alumni. This may allude to a high focus of NPS education on research and its applications. As such, this observation reflects a strong development of research skill amongst NPS students.

NPS VALUE TO ALUMNI

Alumni were **asked if they would recommend NPS to their peers**, and 97.8% said that they would. (Table 12a.)

Alumni were also given the opportunity to tell **what they valued most and least about NPS, as well as changes they would recommend**.

A majority of the respondents answered the least/most value question. A significant amount of alumni from all three graduation years valued faculty. Alumni remarks across all three years included valuing “access to” and the “quality of faculty.” Other topics which garnered much appreciation in the survey were the academic/educational quality of NPS and the opportunity to study in a diverse environment. Several comments mentioned appreciation for being able to study alongside students from various branches of the military as well as International allies. Overall, this aspect seemed to enrich the academic environment.

Another particularly interesting observation which ties back directly to analyses results was the amount of feedback which specifically mentioned how much alumni valued the development and honing of their analytical and critical skills. Case in point, when asked to indicate the extent to which their experience at NPS enhanced *Analytical Skill*, 73.3% affirmed that their skill set had been “highly enhanced.”

Guest speaker seminars, mandatory lecture attendance and Thesis issues were things alumni least valued about NPS. Issues with Distance Learning programs were also mentioned often, as things alumni least valued at NPS. Specific reasons as to why, ranged from students not having enough options to not having enough interaction with professors. Similarly, issues with Thesis projects were cited as not having enough interaction with faculty and/or time for adequate research.

It is noteworthy to mention that a fair amount of the alumni feedback related that attending NPS actually had a negative impact on careers. Alumni noted that having to take time off from active duty deeply hindered their chances of being promoted, and that there is a “negative stigma and impact on careers” in doing so. Perhaps this is an area of interest for future study and analysis.

Forty-six point three percent of the respondents recommended changes to NPS, primarily from the 2008 graduates (Table 12b). It is interesting to note that the majority of the recommendations came from the cohort which has most recently graduated. The need to advocate change may be due to the fact that the 2008 alumni remember certain details of curriculum and their overall experience better.

Generally, recommendations for curriculum/instruction and advice on how to improve DL programs were most noted. A significant amount of the alumni comments also expressed the desire for more integrated educational

opportunities and activities with Industry and community sectors outside of NPS. For instance, recommendations were made to:

- 1) Allow for study abroad/exchange student programs
- 2) Provide field trips to companies who share similar research goals
- 3) Allow for thesis research opportunities outside of NPS

Lastly, many comments suggested an overall sense of disappointment with not being able to use the education and skills set obtained from a NPS education, due to assignment placements. Suggestions were made to incorporate some type of coding system for specialty consideration of assignments or to adjust curriculum so as to better fit the needs of skill specific post-graduation assignments.

RELEVANCE OF NPS EDUCATION TO D.O.D CAREER

Military alumni were asked to rate **the extent to which they felt their course work at NPS was relevant to their military career**. Over half of the respondents (59.4%) felt that their coursework had a “high relevance” to their military career. This perception is correlated in two other areas of the survey.

For instance, when Military alumni were asked to **what extent their NPS education has been useful in subsequent *Operational* assignments**, 89.4% rated their education as “useful” to “more than useful.”

And, again, when alumni were asked to indicate **if they had served in a position which was or is appropriate to their NPS certificate or degree**, 79.3% affirmed that they had. Thus, it can be seen that despite some alumni being unsatisfied with the relevance of their education to their future assignments, a high majority of alumni deem the education and training they received at NPS as relevant and helpful to their careers.

CONCLUSION

The second online Alumni Survey for 2000, 2005, and 2008 graduates who have valid email addresses was issued; 2,946 alumni were successfully contacted to take the survey; 13% or 367 alumni responded.

The largest number of respondents represented the United States Navy, followed by the Air Force, Marine Corps, Army, Coast Guard & Other service, and then Non U.S. Service. Most of the AY 2010 Alumni Survey respondents were NPS Resident students, male, and of White or Unknown ethnicity. Though the majority of the respondents graduated from GSBPP, the most positive (as judged by response analyses) were from SIGS. As a whole, SIGS alumni had the highest amount of positive ratings across all of the general content and instruction categories. And, SIGS alumni were the only cohort to rate a “high” relevance of their theses to their future career.

Respondents gave the ease of transition to NPS on a “social” and “academic” level a 95.6% and 81.2% satisfaction rate, respectively. Professional relationships between students and faculty were ranked at an 85.8% - 95.9% satisfaction rate. With a “more than adequate” average rating of 53.8%, the *Library* was the highest ranked facility. A large majority of the alumni reported using the library at least once a day.

One-hundred percent of the alumni respondents whom received doctorates from NPS ranked advisors as being helpful. In fact, relationships with and access to faculty were among those things most often mentioned as valued components of NPS. The mandated lectures series attendance, aspects of curriculum workload (especially with regards to thesis research), and issues with Distance Learning were valued least.

With a “high importance” ranking rate of 91.0%, across all four Schools, *Decision Making* was ranked as the most important ability. When alumni from all three cohorts were asked to indicate the extent to which the skill of decision making was enhanced at NPS, 40.1% of them valued it as “highly enhanced.”

Conversely, the ability ranked to be the “least enhanced” by NPS alumni was *Leadership*. *Leadership* had a “high importance” rate of 84.2%, but was valued as the ability “least enhanced” at NPS with a 16.9% rate.

Analytical Skill was ranked as the ability most “highly enhanced” at NPS (73.3%). Analyses trends show that there was a strong correlation between how important ability was to students and the high expectation of having that skill/ability enhanced (as reflected in the overall low enhancement rates for those skills valued at high levels).

One interesting topic for future study may be why alumni have ranked character traits addressed in this survey, lower than educational pursuits. For instance, areas such as *Decision making*, *Leadership* and *Teamwork* were largely disparate between the valued importance and perceived enhancement ratings compared to areas such as *Writing* and *Research*. A reason for this may be a perceived lack of opportunity to assume leadership roles and partake in group activities at NPS.

Another topic for future study may be to evaluate the suggested “negative impact” taking time off from active duty has on promotion. Despite the majority of alumni attesting that their NPS education was relevant and useful to their DOD career, the fact that a fair amount of comments suggested otherwise, deems this subject matter as a serious topic of study.

Even with these findings, **almost all of the alumni respondents** would recommend NPS to their peers, reflecting an overall consensus that NPS provided a valuable service to its 2000, 2005 and 2008 alumni.