**Keene State College**

# Graduating Student Survey

## Class of 2004

**Quantitative Report**

Office of Institutional Research

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# Summary

The senior year is an optimal time to ask students how their college experiences have influenced their development. Students on the verge of graduation are reflecting on the experiences they are leaving and wondering about the new worlds they will be entering (Gardner and Van der Veer, 1998). It is an opportune moment to capture their views. (Ewell, 1983; Lingrell, 1992).

Keene State College has been surveying its graduating students since 1990. The responses from the 2004 graduating class have been analyzed within the context of the institutional mission, values and goals. The following paragraphs summarize the key findings.

## Student Satisfaction and Commitment

Students were pleased with their Keene State College education. Nearly 85% reported that they were satisfied to very satisfied with their overall experience. This is a positive improvement, compared to the previous two years. A substantial majority of students (62%) felt likely or very likely that they would choose Keene State College if they had to do it over again.

The variables that predict satisfaction and commitment represent different aspects of the KSC environment (these results replicate several well known studies). Overall student satisfaction is predicted by students' evaluation of their experiences in their major program of study. Students' commitment to re-choose KSC is predicted by their evaluation of the supportiveness of the academic environment and their engagement in the campus community.

## In-Depth Knowledge in Major Field of Study

Graduating students were extremely satisfied with the depth of knowledge they gained in their major field of study. Eighty-eight percent of the students felt they had gained 'a lot' to 'very much.'

## Learning Domains

The strength of students' learning gains was assessed in three areas:

- Critical and Creative Thinking and Expression
- Life Skills and Professional Adaptation
- Cultural Understanding and Social Engagement

Students reported the highest learning gain in the life skills domain, followed by critical and creative thinking. The lowest gains were reported in students' cultural understanding and social engagement.

## Academic Environment

Students' were satisfied with the faculty's concern about student learning, the level of preparation they received in their major, and the support the College provides for students with academic difficulties. Students were least satisfied with the opportunities for student/faculty interaction, the general education requirements, and the advising they received in their major.

## Elliot Center Advising

The opinions of the graduating students were favorable towards the advising they received when they were planning their general education goals. Students had less interaction with the Elliot Center when they were making post-graduation plans. Fourteen percent of the students did not use the Elliot Center when they were planning their general education program. The students who did not seek Elliot Center advising for their post-graduation plans increased to 26%.

## Academic Engagement

Students reported more active engagement in the classroom, and less engagement in the more personal activities that are included in the scale.

## Post-Graduation Plans

Keene State College participated in a University System of New Hampshire survey of alumni who graduated in 2002/2003. About one-fifth of these students were employed before they graduated from Keene State. Nearly 60% found positions within 6 months after graduation and another 12% were employed between 7 and 12 months. The 2004 graduating class reported their post-graduation plans a full month prior to graduation. The timing of the survey accounts for the large percentage of students who reported that they were uncertain about their plans.

## Methodology

Keene State College has been surveying its graduating students since 1990. This year, the Office of Student Affairs hosted an innovative 'Commencement Fair' which provided students an opportunity to celebrate and complete their graduation preparations in "one stop." Students were required to complete the Graduating Student Survey, on-line, prior to being admitted to the fair.

There were 947 students eligible for graduation and 87% of them completed the survey. This provided us with a sample of 768 baccalaureate graduates (students who were awarded *only* an associates' degree, and masters' degree students were not included in the analysis).

## Student Demographics

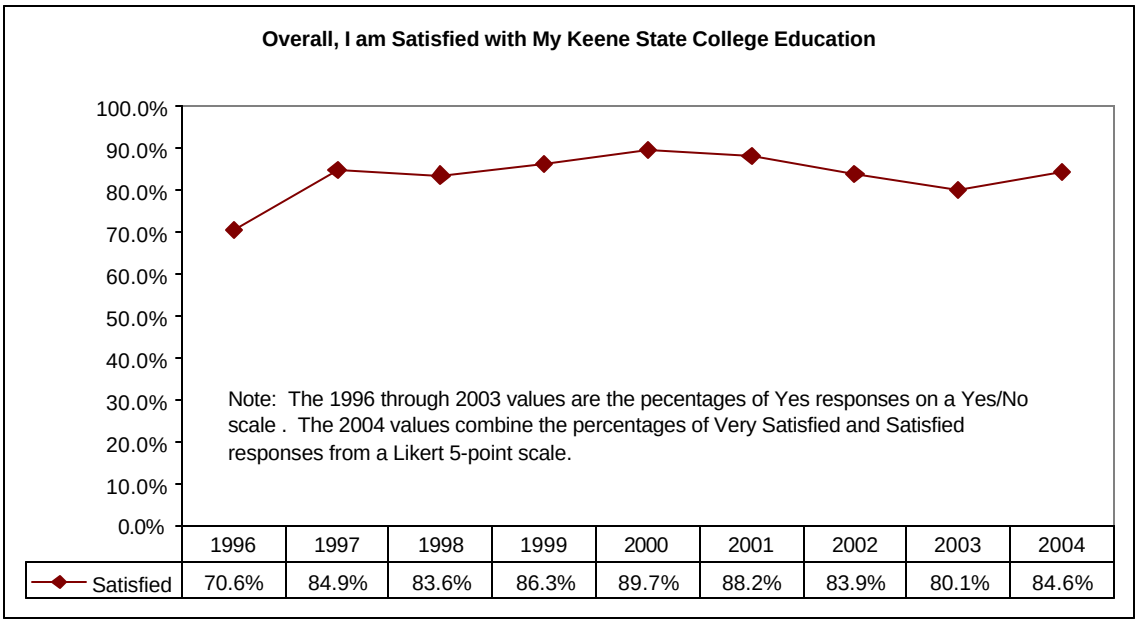
The graduating class was 64% female and 36% male. The average age of the students was 22.8 years. Their grade point average was 3.07. Thirty percent worked on campus an average of 11.6 hours per week. Sixty percent worked off campus an average of 20.9 hours per week. Ninety-four percent of the students spent an average of 15.6 hours per week studying. The following percentages of students participated in campus sponsored events:

- 60% attended social events 5.2 times per year;
- 81% attended a film, performance, or lecture 5.7 times per year
- 53% attended an athletic event 8.8 times per year.

The 768 students earned 812 bachelor's degrees. The number of degrees awarded within each department is reported in the following table.

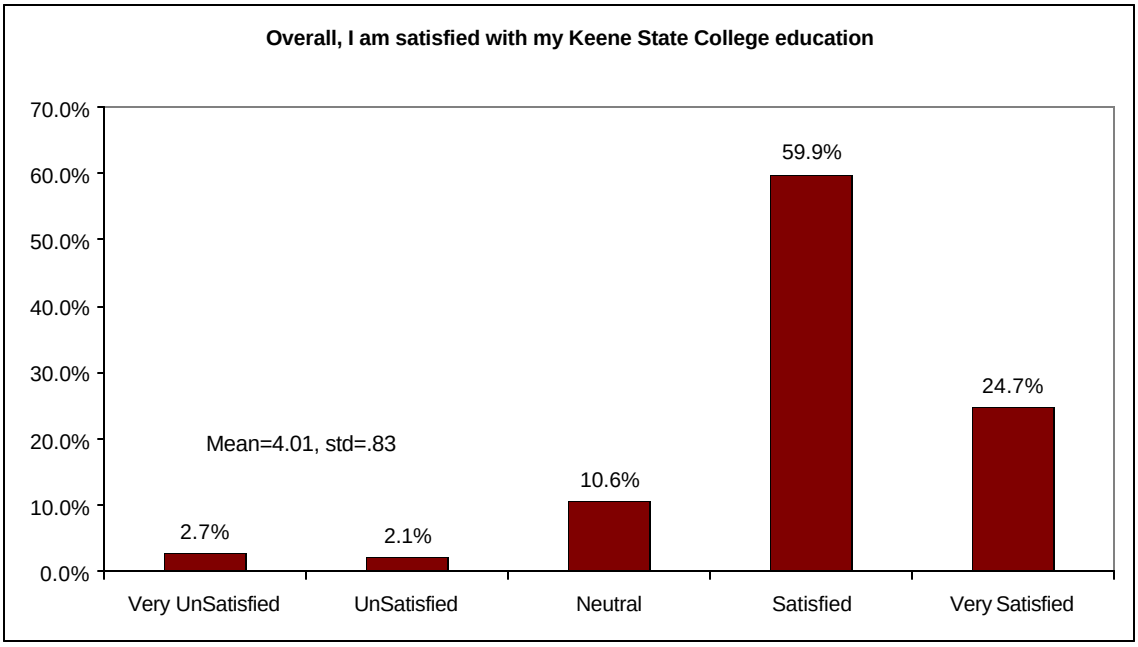
| Course | Degrees | Course | Degrees |
|---|---|---|---|
| Applied Computer Science | 35 | Health Science | 29 |
| American Studies | 2 | Individualized Major | 7 |
| Art | 39 | Journalism | 10 |
| Biology | 12 | Mathematics | 16 |
| Chemistry | 2 | Management | 78 |
| Communications | 72 | Modern Languages | 9 |
| Economics | 13 | Music | 12 |
| Education | 119 | Physical Education | 14 |
| English | 28 | Psychology | 88 |
| Environmental Studies | 17 | Safety Studies | 51 |
| Film Studies | 16 | Sociology | 62 |
| Geography | 7 | Social Sciences | 21 |
| Geology | 1 | Technology Studies | 19 |
| History | 14 | Theatre and Dance | 19 |

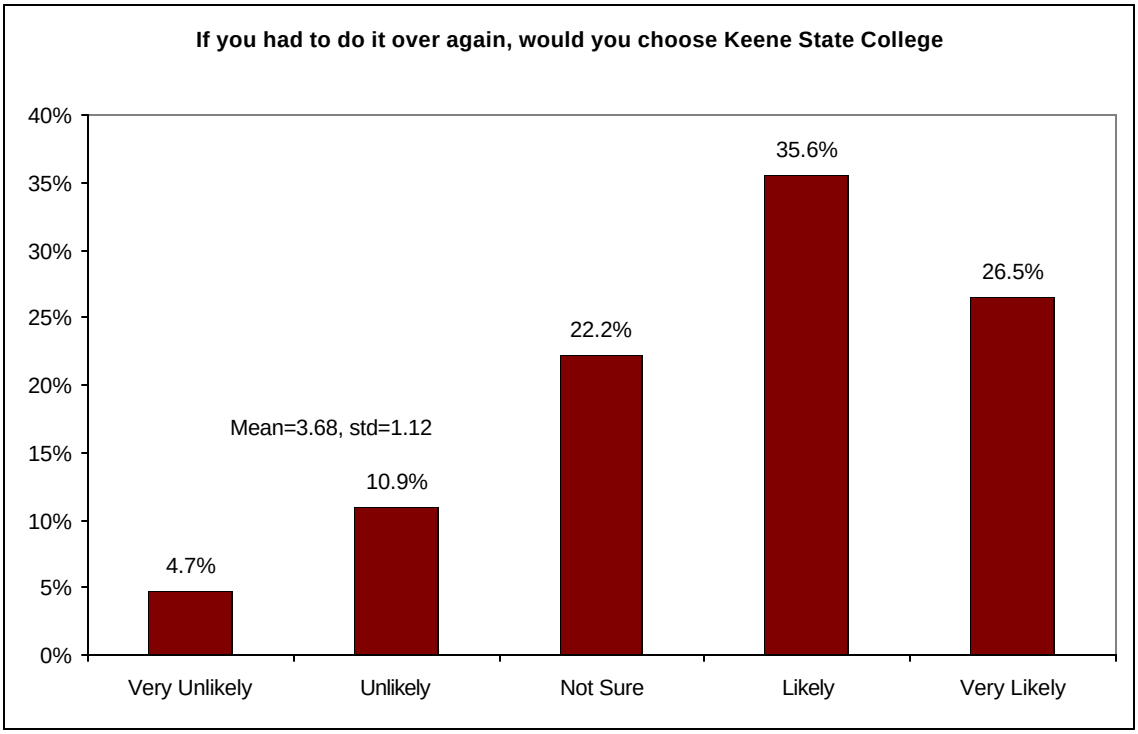
# Student Satisfaction and Commitment




| | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Satisfied | 70.6% | 84.9% | 83.6% | 86.3% | 89.7% | 88.2% | 83.9% | 80.1% | 84.6% |

Students were overwhelmingly satisfied with their Keene State College education. Even after taking into account that the survey scale was changed from a 2-point to a 5-point scale (to allow greater discrimination between student responses), the percentages of students who were satisfied or very satisfied with their overall education increased.






The graduating students were more discriminating when they answered the question: "If you had to do it over again, would you choose Keene State College?" By widening the scale from 2 to 5 points, students had greater latitude in their responses. Although this improved the potential usefulness of the data, it rendered the results non-comparable to data collected in previous years.

## Predictors of Student Satisfaction and Commitment

Multiple regression was used to identify the variables that influence students' evaluation of their overall satisfaction and their willingness to re-choose KSC[1]: The variables that were found to predict satisfaction and commitment reflect different aspects of students' college experiences. The results also replicate the findings of Astin, 1993; Delaney, 2004; Knight, 1994; and, Pascarella and Terrenzini, 1995.

Overall satisfaction is predicted by students' evaluation of their experiences in their major program of study. The items that entered into this model include:

- How well their coursework prepared them to accomplish their post-graduation goals
- Faculty concern about student learning and development
- The extent of their knowledge gain in their field of interest
- How much they enjoyed their coursework.

[1] The results of this analysis are available for the interested reader

Students' commitment to re-choose KSC is predicted by their assessment of the supportiveness of the academic environment and their level of engagement. The items that entered into this model include:

- The atmosphere at KSC encouraged academic development
- A general education curriculum should be required
- Their major department served them well in planning their program of study
- The college provides support for students with academic difficulty.
- Their likelihood to volunteer their time
- Their likelihood to remain on campus during the weekend

## Student Learning Outcomes

The Graduating Student Survey asked students to think about how their Keene State College experiences contributed to their growth in 26 learning domains. These items have been classified into five areas. The first area contains a stand-alone item: student's in-depth knowledge of their major field. The next 3 areas contain clusters of items that are inter-related[2], and represent reported growth in the liberal arts domains of: Critical and Creative Thinking and Expression, Life Skills and Professional Adaptation, and Cultural Understanding and Social Engagement. The fifth set of items represents knowledge and skills specific to students' majors.

Pascarella (2001) cautions that self-reported gains in growth do not permit the same level of internal validity as gains assessed through pretest-posttest research designs. For this reason, Keene State may want to consider revising its survey administration cycle to include instruments that measure students' openness or receptivity to educational experiences when they enter college. These measures would allow longitudinal studies of student learning.

### In-Depth Knowledge of a Field

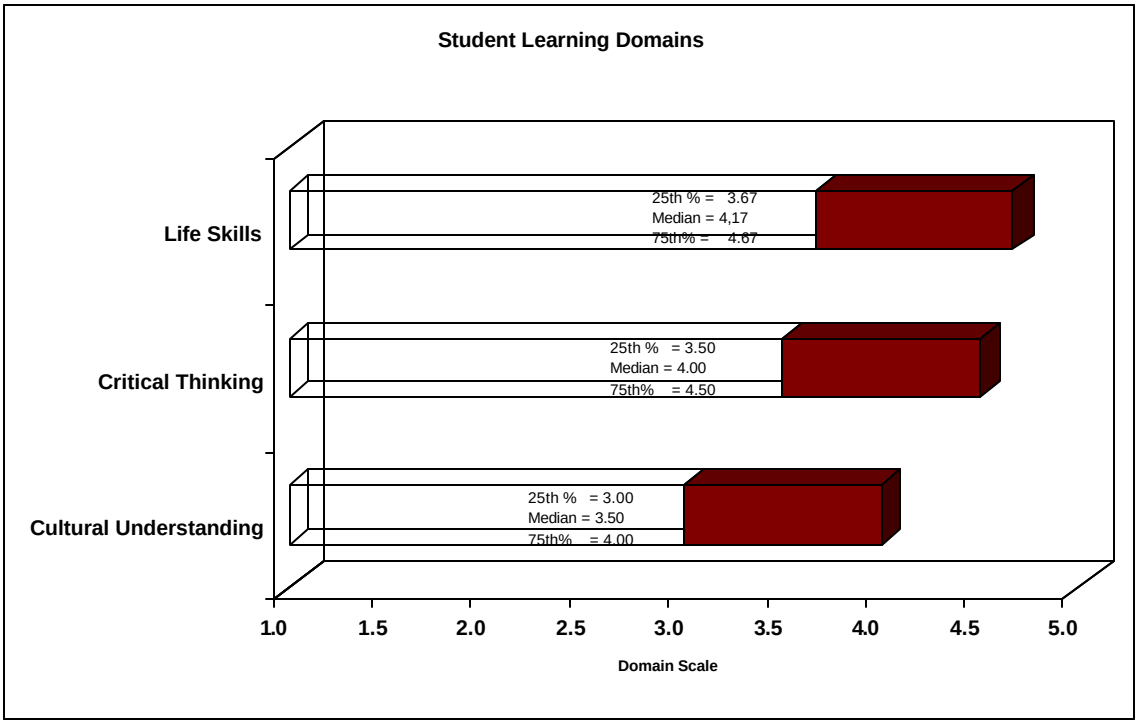
Eighty-eight percent of the graduating students felt positive about the depth of the knowledge they acquired in their major field of study. This compares favorably to past years, even though the scale was changed from a 4 to 5 points. The following table summarizes the frequencies of student responses for each item level.

| **In-Depth Knowledge of a Field (Major)** | |
|---|---|
| Gained Very Much | 54.6% |
| Gained a Lot | 33.5% |
| Some Gain | 9.4% |
| Very Little Gain | 1.4% |
| No Gain | 0.8% |

[2] Item clusters were identified through exploratory factor analysis. These results will be shared, upon request, with any interested reader.

Student Learning Domains

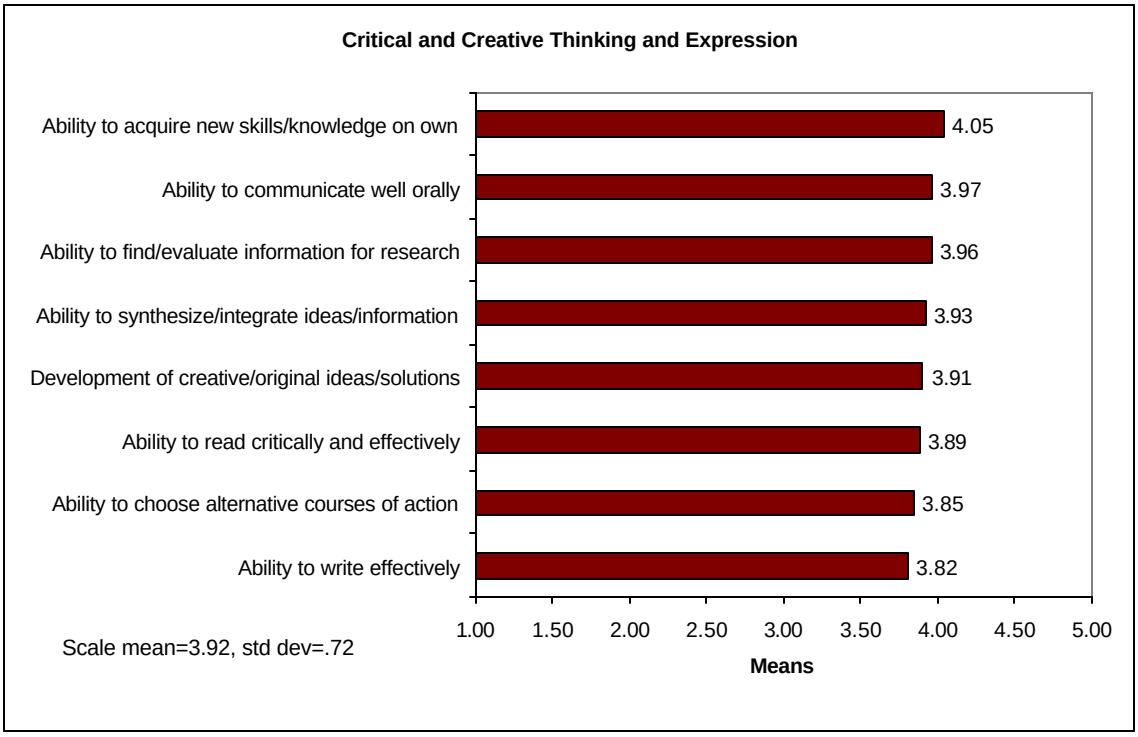
An exploratory factor analysis of 26 student learning gains revealed three conceptually distinct domains. The three are: Critical and Creative Thinking and Expression; Life Skills and Professional Adaptation; and, Cultural Understanding and Social Engagement. Students' experiential gains were highest for the life skills domain, followed by critical thinking. The interquartile ranges and medians for the three domains are depicted in the following chart.




Students reported the highest learning gain in the life skills domain, followed by critical and creative thinking. The lowest gains were reported in students' cultural understanding and social engagement.

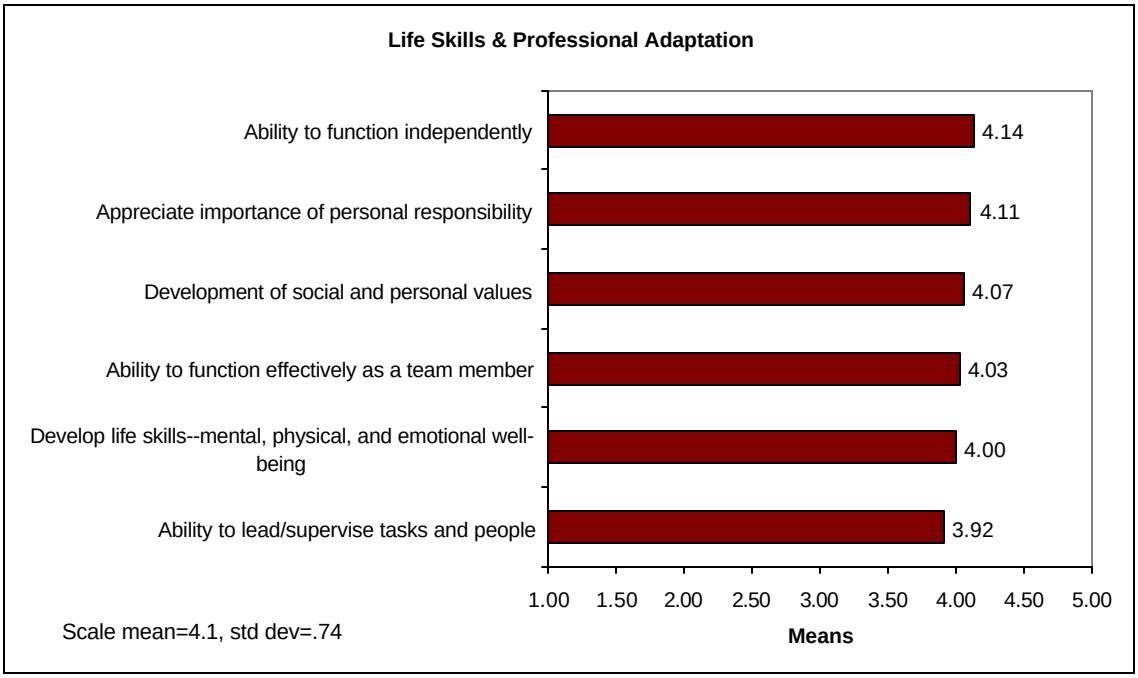
Critical and Creative Thinking and Expression

Eight inter-related items form the Critical and Creative Thinking and Expression domain. The means for these items are compared in the figure below. Students reported higher gains in their abilities to: acquire new skills and knowledge on their own, communicate well orally, and find and evaluate information for a research project. They reported lower gains in their abilities to: read critically and effectively, choose alternative courses of action, and write effectively.



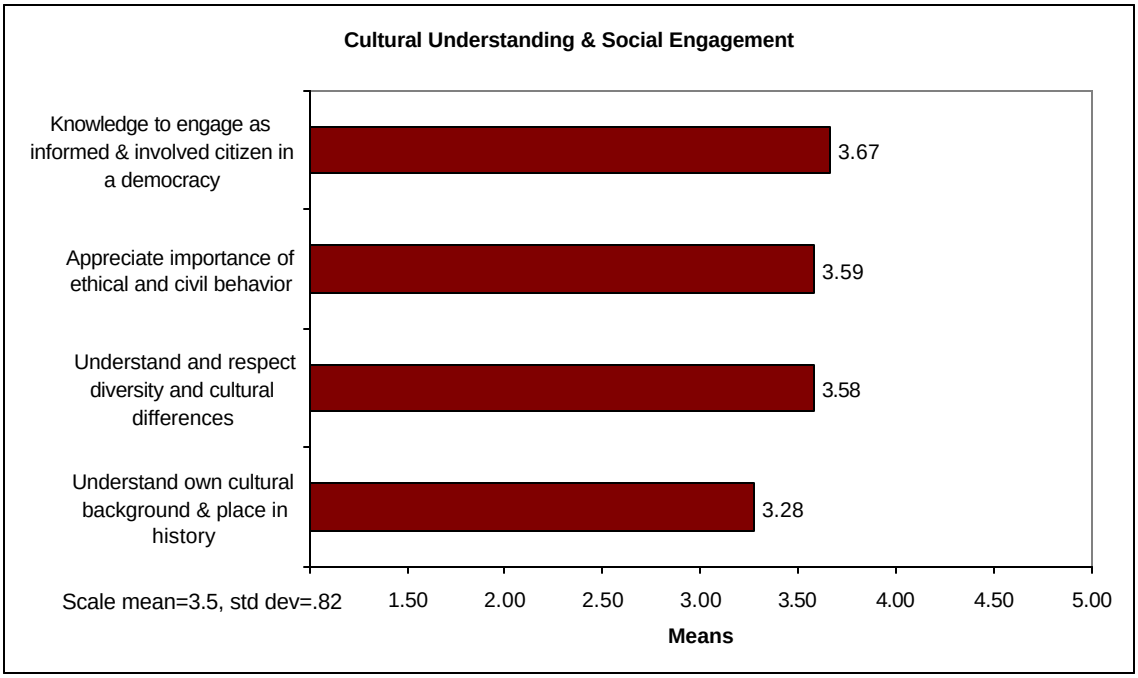
Life Skills and Professional Adaptation

Students reported high positive mean gains of 4.0 or above for all but one of the items that comprise this cluster. The only item that had a reported mean of less than 4.0 was the ability to lead and supervise tasks and groups of people.



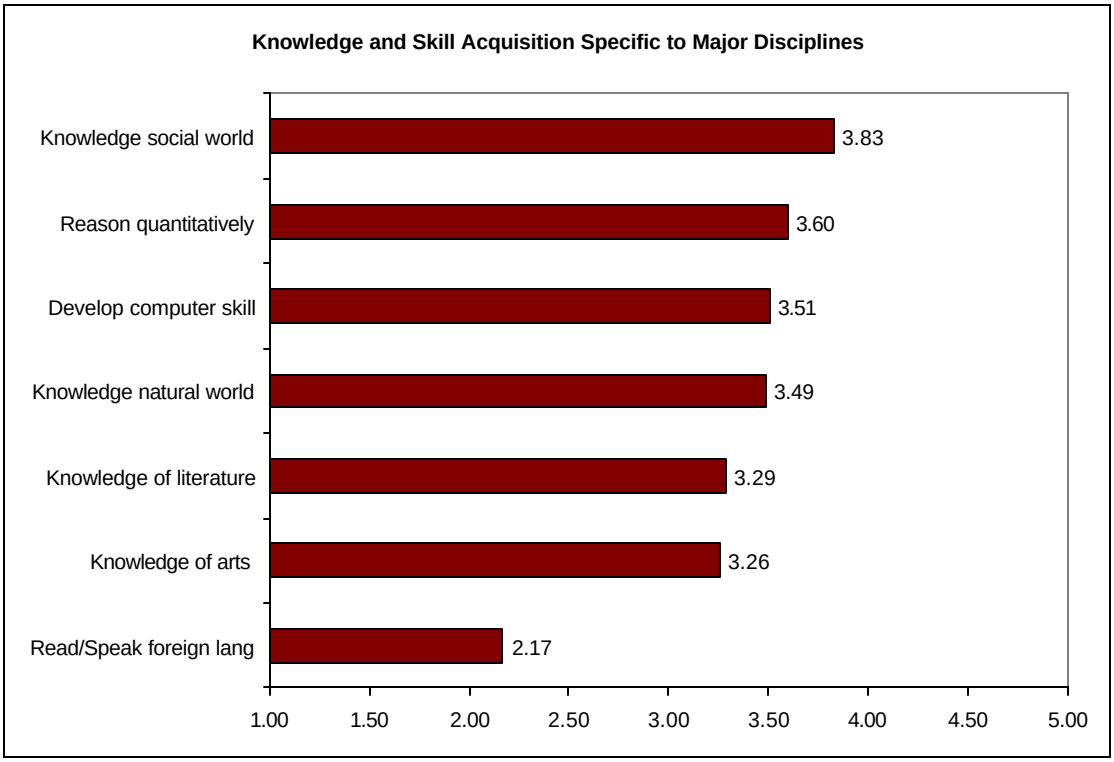
Cultural Understanding and Social Engagement

Students reported the highest gains in their knowledge and skills necessary to engage as an informed citizen in a democratic society, and the lowest gains in their understanding of their own cultural background and place in human history.



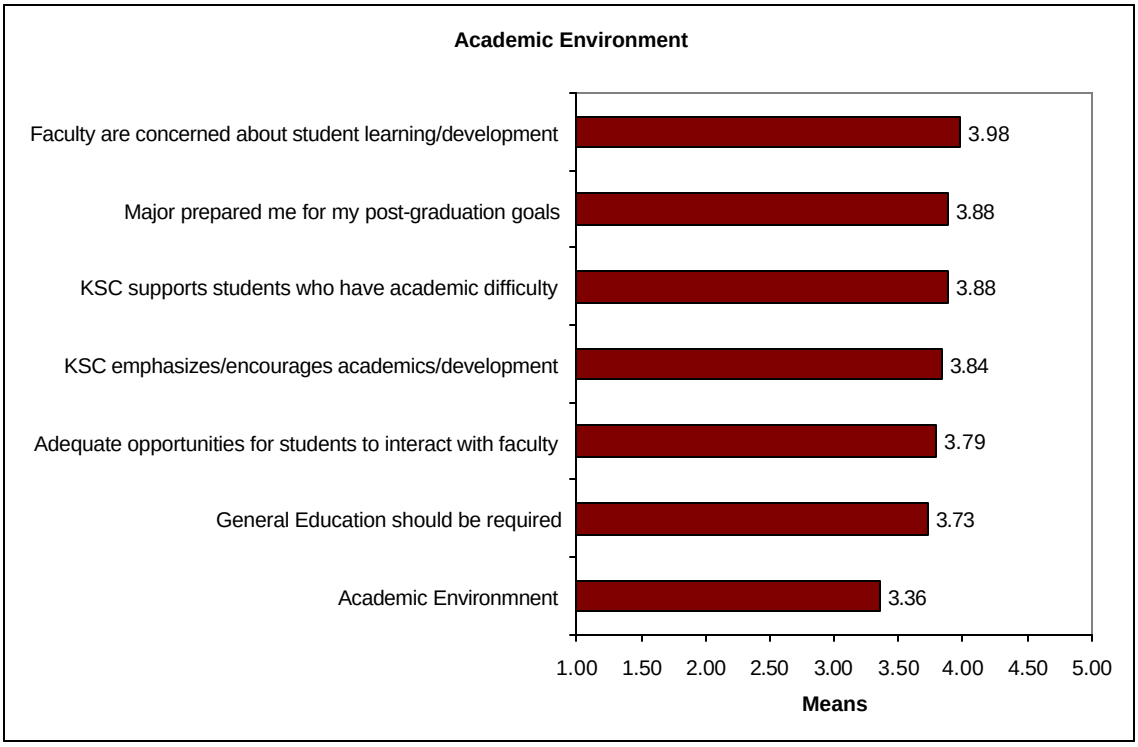
Knowledge and Skill Acquisition Specific to Major Disciplines

The students' reported gains for the items in this set reflect the learning emphasis in their chosen field of study. Although moderately correlated, the items are not presented as a 'domain'. They are included for departmental comparisons.



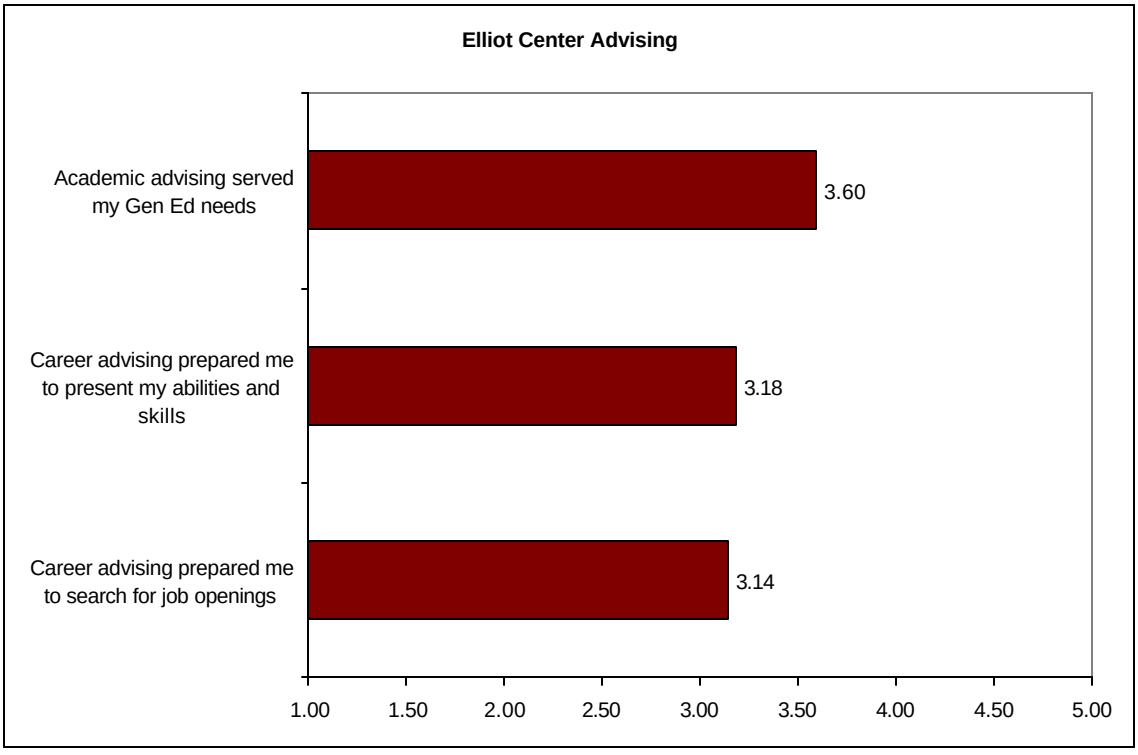
# Academic Environment

Students' evaluations of the learning environment at Keene State were most complementary regarding: faculty's concern about student learning, the preparation they received in their major, and the support KSC provides for students who are having academic difficulty. The mean value for each of these items was 3.9, or better, on a 5-point scale. Students were less complementary about the advising in their major, and the general education program requirements.



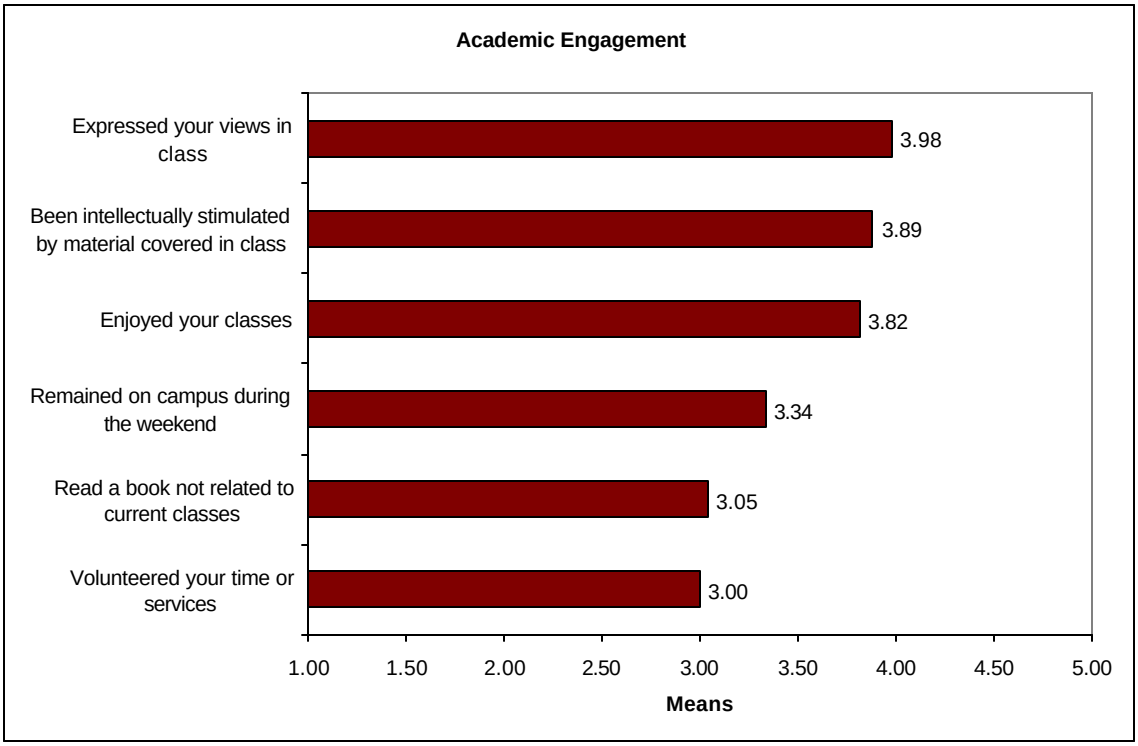
# Elliot Center Advising

The students' opinions of Academic and Career Advising suggest that they were useful to students in the earlier phases of their studies, when they were selecting their general education courses, but less useful as students began preparing for post-graduation. Students were less likely to seek advice from the Elliot Center when they were ready to pursue their career plans. Nearly fourteen percent of the students reported that they did not use the Elliot Center when they were planning their general education program. However, 26% reported not using the Elliot Center when they were preparing for their post-graduation plans.



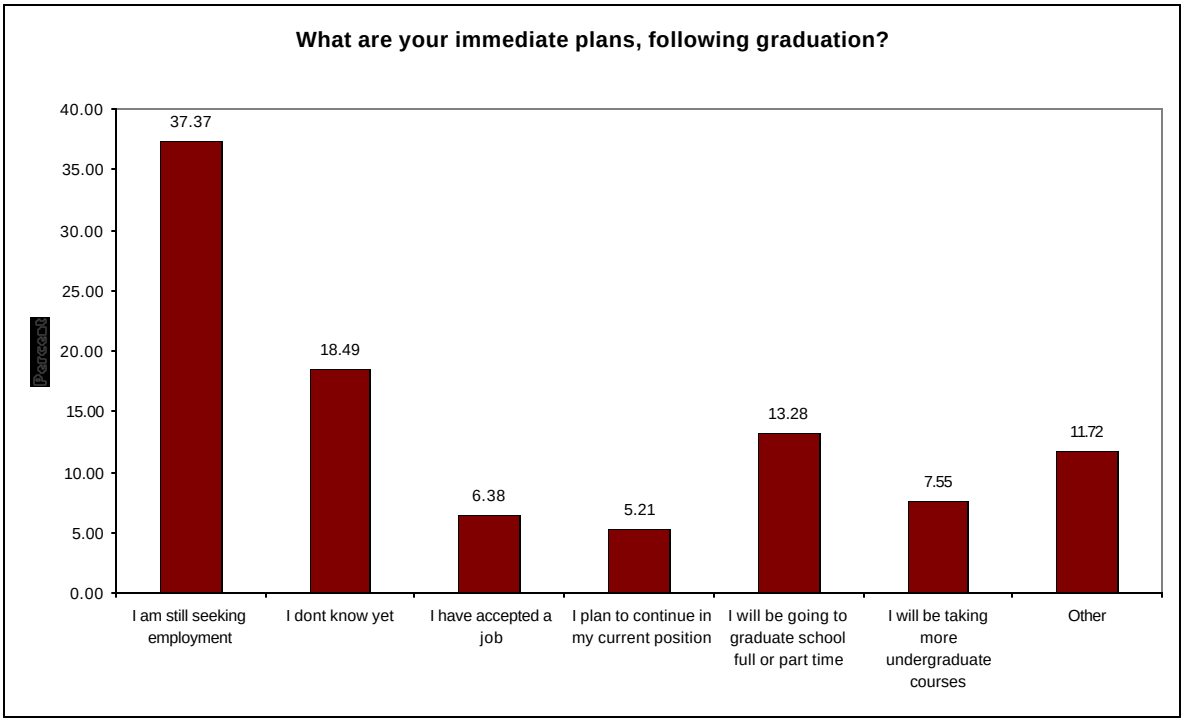
# Academic Engagement

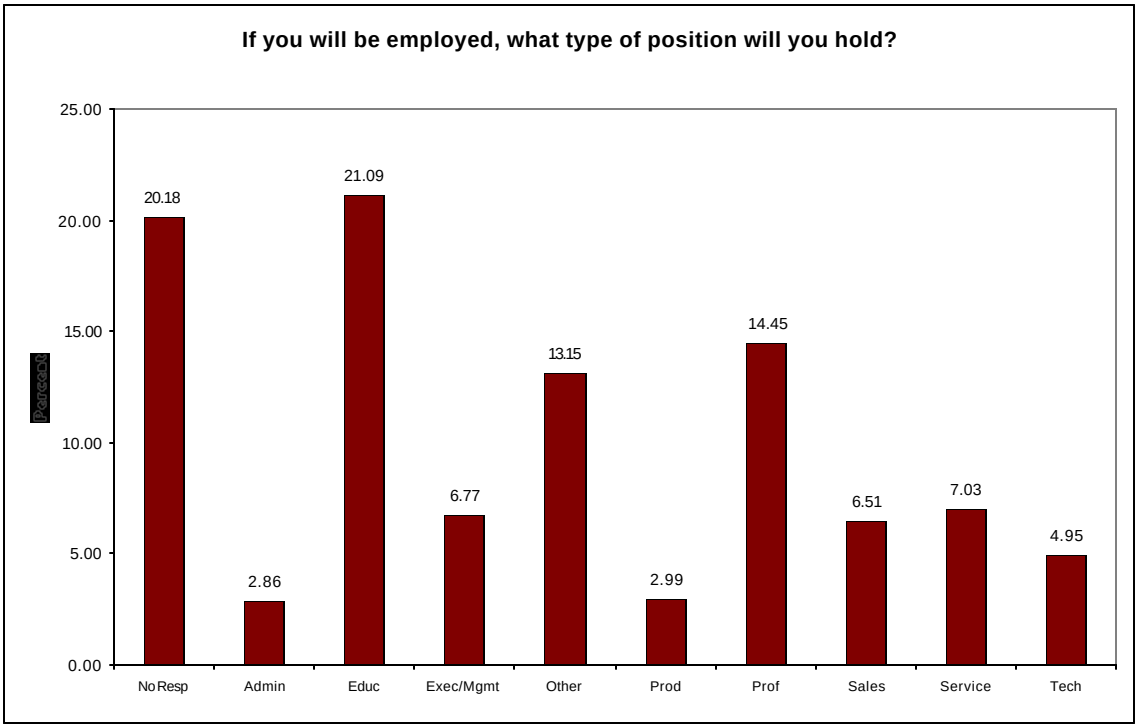
The means of student reported engagement in aspects of the academic environment were moderate. The higher aspects of engagement were related to in-class participation. The lower aspects were related to more personal activities outside of class.

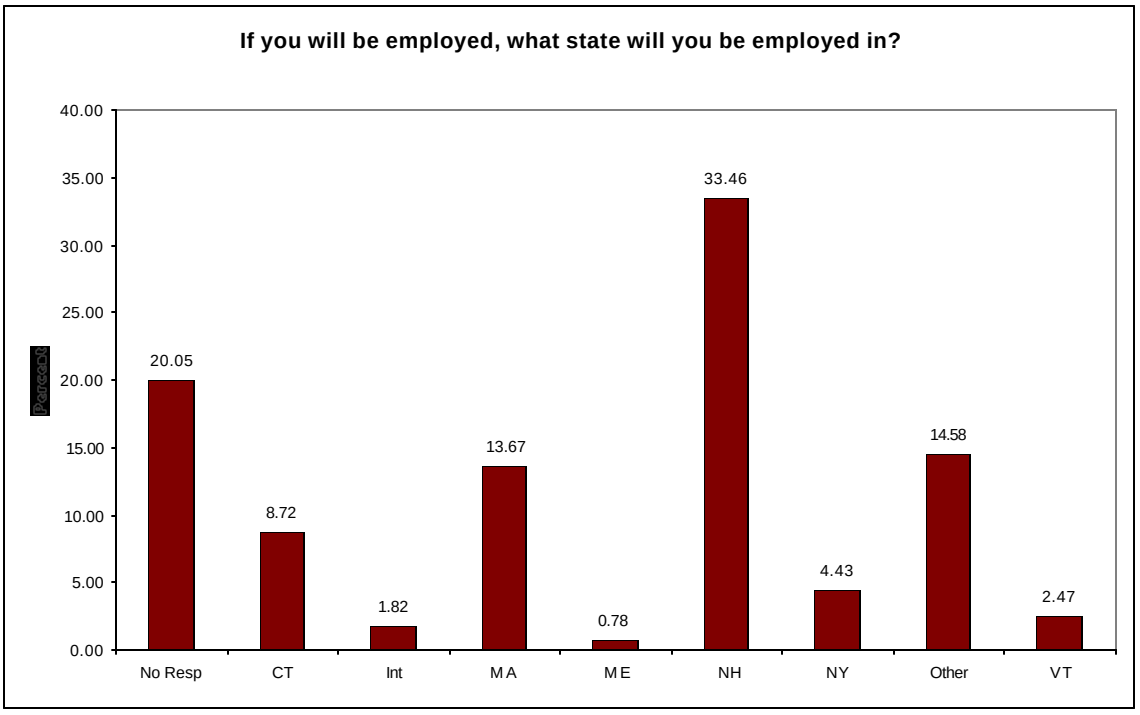


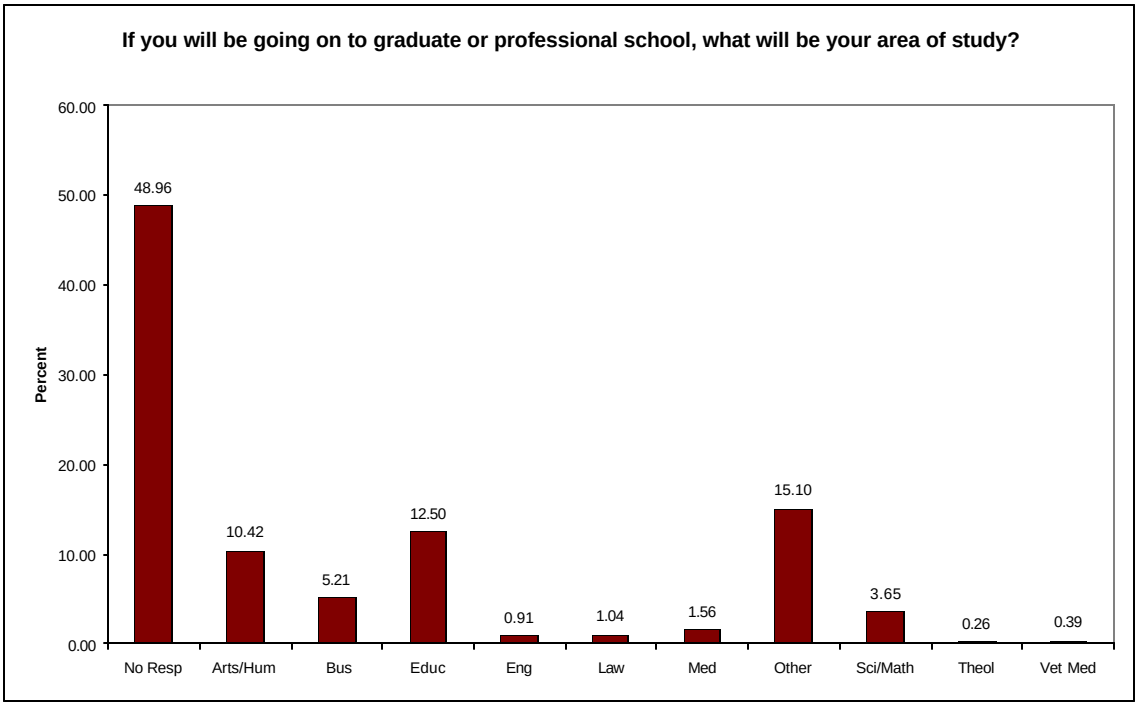
# Post-Graduation Plans

Keene State College participated in a University System of New Hampshire survey of alumni who graduated in 2002/2003. About one-fifth of these students were employed before they graduated from Keene State. Nearly 60% found positions within 6 months after graduation and another 12% were employed between 7 and 12 months. The 2004 class of graduating students responded to this survey question a full month prior to their graduating. This is the earliest that the survey has ever been administered. The timing of the question accounts for the large percentage of students reporting that they do not know what their immediate post-graduate plans are, or that they are still seeking employment.




If you will be employed, what type of position will you hold?
Percent
25.00
20.00
15.00
10.00
5.00
0.00
20.18
2.86
21.09
6.77
13.15
2.99
14.45
6.51
7.03
4.95
No Resp
Admin
Educ
Exec/Mgmt
Other
Prod
Prof
Sales
Service
Tech


If you will be employed, what state will you be employed in?
Percent
40.00
35.00
30.00
25.00
20.00
15.00
10.00
5.00
0.00
20.05
8.72
1.82
13.67
0.78
33.46
4.43
14.58
2.47
No Resp
CT
Int
MA
ME
NH
NY
Other
VT


If you will be going on to graduate or professional school, what will be your area of study?
Percent
60.00
50.00
40.00
30.00
20.00
10.00
0.00
48.96
10.42
5.21
12.50
0.91
1.04
1.56
15.10
3.65
0.26
0.39
No Resp
Arts/Hum
Bus
Educ
Eng
Law
Med
Other
Sci/Math
Theol
Vet Med

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