

# **Appendix A**

## **2001 Alumni Survey**

# **CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY LONG BEACH 2001 MPA ALUMNI SURVEY**

## **SUMMARY OF RESPONSES**

### **OVERVIEW**

As part of its efforts in program assessment, the MPA Program at California State University, Long Beach, periodically surveys its more than 1,600 graduates. In the summer of 2001, the decision was made to offer the survey on-line for the first time. A survey instrument was developed, based on previous CSULB MPA surveys, and the model alumni survey available on the NASPAA web site.

With the generous help of the campus' Academic Computing Center, the survey was coded into an on-line data base. A postcard was sent to all alumni on the mailing list kept by CSULB's Alumni Association, informing them of the web address for the survey, and inviting them to take part (<http://www.csulb.edu/~beachmpa>). The address is the same as the MPA Program's web page, where a button links directly to the survey.

There was a very good initial response to the survey. Within the first month, about 75 surveys had been completed. The responses received by the end of the month of July, 2001, were downloaded into an excel spreadsheet for analysis, in order to be included in the Self-Study for re-accreditation. The survey will remain active, however, through the end of the year, in order to allow time for more alumni to respond. At that time, a supplemental analysis will be undertaken.

### **ALUMNI CHARACTERISTICS**

The initial response to the on-line survey included alumni from throughout the program's history, including those who began the program in the 1970s (27%), the 1980s (21%), and the 1990s (52%). Responses were received from both male (59%) and female (41%) alumni. The average current age of the respondents was 43. Of those respondents who indicated their race, 80% were white, 8% black, 7% Hispanic, 3% Asian, and 2% other. Forty percent of the respondents indicated they had won an award or distinction in the MPA Program. These students, who were the early responders, may not be representative of all MPA alumni. However, comparisons of the responses of these alumni with those of the last survey (1994) reveals few significant differences. Table 1 compares the characteristics of the alumni who responded to the 2001 survey with those who responded to the previous survey done in 1994.

The majority of the alumni in the 2001 survey began the program as in-service students in the public sector (71%), with 15% from the private sector and 14% from another educational program. The majority undertook the program as part-time students (64%), with 30% as full-time students, and 6% in the Distance Learning MPA. Students averaged a total of almost nine years of previous employment, the majority of it in the public sector.

Two-thirds of alumni reported changing jobs after receiving the MPA, and 74% reported the new job was a step up from the previous job. The remainder reported the new job as the same level as the previous job; no one reported a step down. The most common salary before the MPA Program was reported as being between \$15,000 and \$30,000, while the most common salary after the MPA Program had risen to \$60,000 to \$90,000. Alumni reported being in their current jobs about 5 years on the average. Nearly all were very (44%) or moderately (44%) satisfied with their overall career success, with only 3% neutral, 7% dissatisfied, and 2% very dissatisfied.

**Table 1. Comparison of Alumni Survey Characteristics, 1994 and 2001**

Alumni Characteristics	1994 Survey	2001 Survey
Years of experience (total)	7.9	8.9
Sex Male Female	60% 40%	59% 41%
Student Status Full-time only Part-time Distance MPA	31% 69% n/a	30% 64% 6%
Ethnicity Asian Black Hispanic White Other	7.3% 6.8% 9.5% 75.5% 0%	3% 8% 7% 80% 2%
Sectoral Employment Local (City and County) State Federal Non-profit Private Sector Other	62.4% 4.2% 5.2% 7.0% 11.3% 9.9%	55% 8% 3% 12% 22% 0%
Completed an MPA internship	16.3%	19%

Most of our alumni work in the public sector and in local government, including 35% in city and 20% in county government. Another 12% work in non-profits. Fewer work in either state (8%) or national/international (3%) government. The most surprising finding was that 22% of alumni indicate they work in the private sector or are self-employed. Also interesting was the large size of the organizations in which our alumni work, including organizations with more than 1,000 employees (35%); 500 to 1000 (12%); 100 to 500 (31%); and 1 to 100 (22%).

Alumni work in a wide range of agencies, including education, public safety, public works, social services, technology, planning, development, law, research, and culture. The majority described their primary job responsibilities as managing and supervising (25%), along with developing, implementing, and evaluating programs (25%). Others listed analysis, budgeting, training, contracting, and providing services.

### **MPA PROGRAM ASSESSMENT**

The survey instrument used in our alumni survey in 2001 was much different than the instrument used in the previous survey in 1994. There was only one question which was similar enough to permit comparison, as shown in Table 2. The results are fairly consistent, with the majority showing overall agreement that the curriculum was helpful.

**Table 2. Curriculum Assessment in 1994 and 2001**

QUESTION	1994 Survey	2001 Survey
The curriculum met my needs:		
Strongly Agree	42%	42%
Agree	46%	53%
Neutral	9.5%	-
Disagree	2%	2%
Strongly Disagree	0.5%	3%

In the 2001 survey, the majority of alumni felt that the MPA degree was very (35%) or moderately (51%) important in their overall career success, with only a few saying it was not very (7%) or not at all (7%) important. The majority of 2001 alumni would either very strongly (47%) or moderately strongly (36%) recommend that other people seeking their current position obtain an MPA, while only a few would either recommend it weakly (12%) or not at all (5%).

Most of the questions on the survey instrument in 2001 sprang from the fact that we had recently undertaken a comprehensive review of our MPA curriculum and instituted a number of changes based on feedback from employers, students, alumni, and our practitioner faculty. The initial responses from the alumni survey were very gratifying, because they supported the reforms we had undertaken. A majority of the alumni strongly agreed (40%) or agreed (55%) that the core courses were helpful for their careers; only a few disagreed (3%) or strongly disagreed (2%). A similar pattern was observed for elective courses, with 37% strongly agreed, 53% agreed, 5% disagreeing, and 5% strongly disagreeing.

**Table 3. Areas of Importance to MPA Alumni**

AREAS	Highest two Ranks	Middle Rank	Lowest two Ranks
Problem-solving	93%	7%	0%
Written communication	89%	11%	0%
Decision-making	86%	12%	2%
Oral communications	84%	16%	0%
Leadership	82%	18%	0%
Organization behavior	77%	19%	4%
Ethics	77%	19%	4%
Working in Teams	69%	27%	4%
Personnel/HR	65%	24%	11%
Policy analysis	61%	28%	11%
Information/Data Mgt.	60%	27%	13%
Computers/technology	58%	39%	3%
Political system	57%	23%	20%
Budgeting	54%	31%	15%
Law/Legal system	51%	33%	16%
Diversity	49%	34%	17%
Contracting/grants	46%	29%	25%
Economics	44%	31%	25%
Research/statistics	39%	47%	14%
Non-profits	22%	26%	52%
Globalization	6%	16%	78%

We also asked alumni about the importance of specific areas to their careers. Table 3 shows the responses of MPA alumni, with the highest two rankings (extremely important and very important) combined, as well as the lowest two rankings (not very important and not at all important) combined. The middle ranking indicates a response of somewhat important.

Of the top ten areas, six are essentially skills, including problem-solving, written communication, decision-making, oral communication, leadership, and working in teams. The other four are organizational behavior, ethics, personnel, and policy analysis. These are closely followed by information and data management, and computers and other technology. The least important areas were indicated as non-profits and globalization.

While the alumni agreed with our curriculum on the areas that are important for their careers, how much did they get from the MPA program in these areas? Table 4 shows that alumni feel they gained more in some areas than in others.

**Table 4. How Much Alumni Gained from the MPA**

AREAS	Highest two Ranks	Middle Rank	Lowest two Ranks
Policy analysis	77%	19%	4%
Organization behavior	72%	24%	4%
Leadership	70%	25%	5%
Decision-making	69%	22%	9%
Problem-solving	68%	29%	3%
Written communication	63%	28%	9%
Research/statistics	60%	28%	12%
Personnel/HR	59%	36%	15%
Oral communications	53%	38%	9%
Working in Teams	51%	37%	12%
Budgeting	49%	25%	26%
Political system	47%	46%	7%
Ethics	45%	35%	20%
Diversity	30%	37%	33%
Information/Data Mgt.	28%	32%	40%
Law/Legal system	23%	48%	29%
Contracting/grants	19%	43%	38%
Economics	18%	44%	38%
Non-profits	16%	29%	55%
Computers/technology	10%	24%	66%
Globalization	2%	23%	75%

The top areas cited were quite similar to the previous areas identified as important to a public sector career: organization behavior, policy analysis, leadership, decision-making, problem solving, written communications, research and statistics, personnel, oral communications, and working in teams. Alumni said they gained little in the areas of computers and technology, even though this was rated as an important area for career success. Further analysis will be undertaken when more surveys are completed, to see if ratings of this area have become more favorable among more recent graduates.

Alumni also had the opportunity on the on-line questionnaire to enter qualitative comments about the most important and least important parts of the MPA program (Table 5).

**Table 5. Most and Least Important Aspects of the MPA Program**

COMMENTS	Number (%)
<b>MOST IMPORTANT ASPECTS</b>	
Mention of specific course	42 (48%)
Mention of individual faculty	17 (19%)
Mention of specific skill	15 (17%)
Networking	6 (7%)
Opportunity for personal growth	6 (7%)
Overall positive comment	2 (2%)
<b>LEAST IMPORTANT ASPECTS</b>	
Mention of specific course	14 (48%)
Mention of individual faculty	5 (17%)
Overall negative comment	5 (17%)
Comprehensive Exams	4 (14%)
Treatment of Ethnicity	1 (4%)

### RATING THE FACULTY

There were no comparable questions on the 1994 alumni survey. The majority of the responses for the 2001 survey rated the full-time faculty as excellent or good in all areas (Table 6). The full-time faculty were especially highly rated on treating the student with respect; expanding the student's knowledge; and exposing students to different views. The weakest areas for full-time faculty were in academic and career advising.

The ratings of the part-time faculty were similar (Table 7). The part-time faculty were especially highly rated on treating the student with respect; expanding the student's knowledge; and exposing the student to different views. The weakest areas for part-time faculty were again in academic and career advising.

**Table 6. Alumni Ratings of Full-Time MPA Faculty**

AREAS	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Treating me with respect	57%	36%	5%	2%
Expanding my knowledge	48%	48%	4%	0%
Exposing me to different views	46%	47%	7%	0%
Enforcing academic honesty	44%	47%	9%	0%
Teaching effectively	41%	50%	9%	0%
Using class time wisely	40%	53%	7%	0%
Accessibility outside class	36%	52%	9%	3%
Assigning work that taught skills	31%	57%	10%	2%
Academic/career advising	25%	37%	29%	9%

**Table 7. Alumni Ratings of Part-Time MPA Faculty**

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Treating me with respect	67%	29%	4%	0%
Expanding my knowledge	55%	41%	4%	0%
Exposing me to different views	50%	44%	6%	0%
Teaching effectively	50%	43%	5%	2%
Using class time wisely	47%	44%	7%	2%
Assigning work that taught skills	38%	50%	12%	0%
Enforcing academic honesty	37%	54%	9%	0%
Accessibility outside class	25%	49%	24%	2%
Academic/career advising	23%	45%	25%	8%

## RESPONSIVENESS TO STUDENTS

Two questions from both the 2001 and 1994 alumni surveys may be compared. In both cases, alumni responses were quite positive (Table 8).

**Table 8. Alumni Ratings of Course Scheduling**

QUESTION	1994 Survey	2001 Survey
Courses were scheduled at convenient times:		
Strongly Agree	67%	46%
Agree	27%	49%
Neutral	5%	-
Disagree	1%	5%
Strongly Disagree	0%	0%
I could get the classes I wanted:		
Strongly Agree	46%	39%
Agree	41%	49%
Neutral	11%	-
Disagree	2%	16%
Strongly Disagree	0%	2%

In the 1994 survey, the question was asked whether alumni felt they had adequate contact with women faculty and/or practitioners, as well as with minority faculty and/or practitioners. In the 2001 survey, the question was asked whether the program was responsive to women students, and to students of color (Table 9). The ratings in 2001 are substantially more favorable.

**Table 9. Alumni Ratings of Responsiveness to Women and Students of Color**

RESPONSIVENESS	1994 Survey	2001 Survey
Responsiveness to women students:		
Strongly Agree	21%	25%
Agree	27%	75%
Neutral	32%	-
Disagree	13%	0%
Strongly Disagree	7%	0%
Responsiveness to students of color:		
Strongly Agree	9%	24%
Agree	24.5	74%
Neutral	42%	-
Disagree	11.5%	2%
Strongly Disagree	13%	0%

Additional questions asked in the 2001 alumni survey revealed substantial agreement that the MPA Program supports students (Table 10). There was agreement that the MPA staff was helpful; that classrooms were adequate; that information was received in a timely manner; there was adequate exposure to full-time faculty; and that the University library was adequate. Program and career advising were less highly rated; and University computer facilities were least highly rated, although it was satisfactory to at least two-third of alumni.

**Table 10. Alumni Ratings of Student Support**

STUDENT SUPPORT	Strongly Agree or Agree	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
The MPA staff was helpful	96%	4%
University classrooms were adequate	96%	4%
I received information in a timely fashion	95%	5%
I had adequate exposure to full-time faculty	94%	6%
University library was adequate	88%	12%
I got the program advising I needed	84%	16%
I got the career advising I needed	75%	25%
University computer facilities were adequate	66%	34%

## INTERNSHIP

Although relatively few students undertake an internship as part of their MPA Program, those who rate it as a positive experience (Table 11). Students gave the highest ratings to the internship for helping to relate classroom theory to real-world practice, to providing experience that was valuable in their careers, and to helping understand ethics and professional obligations. The least highly rated aspect was the supervision given by the on-the-job supervisor.

**Table 11. Alumni Rating of Internships**

<b>INTERNSHIP</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
It helped me to relate classroom theory to real-world practice	100%	0%
It provided experience that was valuable later on in my career	92%	8%
It helped me to understand ethics and professional obligations	92%	8%
I was given good direction and support by the MPA advisor	80%	20%
It helped me to get a job	75%	25%
It helped me make career choices	75%	25%
I was given good direction and support by the job supervisor	64%	36%

## **CONCLUSIONS**

This preliminary analysis of the first responses to our 2001 on-line survey of MPA alumni reconfirmed some previous findings about our students, but also revealed some new trends. Compared to 1994, our students are still drawn from the public sector, and especially local (city and county) government. There are noticeable increases, however, in graduates who work in both the non-profit and private sectors. Most of our alumni report changing jobs to higher positions with more pay. While salaries have risen quite a bit since the first students graduated in the 1970s, on the average, alumni report gains of nearly \$30,000 in salary from before the MPA program to the present day.

Feedback from alumni about important curricular areas confirms our revised emphasis on cross-cutting skills such as problem solving, written and oral communications, working in teams, decision-making, leadership, and ethics. The pattern for what alumni gained from the MPA is similar, although at a lower level. Our program appears to be strong in policy analysis and research methods, where the amount that alumni gained from the area met or exceeded its level of importance to them. In the future, we will need to concentrate on providing students with the opportunity to gain more in the areas of most importance to them, especially in information and data management, and computers and technology.

The level of support provided to students was highly rated by alumni. Computer facilities were the least highly rated area, but both the College and the University have improved in this area recently, so a more detailed analysis will be undertaken to show changes over time. The one area which clearly needs improvement is academic and career advising. This was also the basic concern of internship students, who wanted more direction and support from the on-the-job internship supervisor.

Full-time and part-time faculty were rated as excellent or good in most areas by MPA alumni. This is consistent with the scores of MPA instructors on student evaluations of teaching effectiveness administered on a course-by-course basis each semester, which routinely fall in the range of 4.0 and above. For part-time faculty, accessibility outside class seems to pose problems for a sizeable number of students. For both part-time and full-time faculty, an improvement can be made in academic and career advising.

The findings from this preliminary analysis, while mostly positive, point to some areas where improvement is obviously needed. These findings also raise some intriguing questions, which cannot be answered with the limited number of responses obtained by the cutoff date for the self-study. These questions will be addressed once more responses have been received, and will not only establish a baseline against which to compare future survey findings, but also give us more information on which to base future decisions about the MPA Program.