Educational Goals: What’s Most Important?

By ChrisTina Leimer
Director, Institutional Research, Assessment and Planning

With the committee on the Characteristics of a Fresno State Graduate forming to determine what the most valuable characteristics of California State University, Fresno graduates should be, I examined full-time faculty responses to the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) Faculty Survey conducted in Spring 2005.

Fresno State faculty were asked to rate the importance of 16 educational goals for undergraduates. Using descriptive statistics, ANOVAs and T-tests, I analyzed the responses by academic rank, gender and race. Differences noted in this report are statistically significant at or below the .05 level. (For the complete methodology, see the longer report at the url listed at the end of this paper.)

Across academic ranks, the full-time faculty believes that the most important educational goals for undergraduates are developing the ability to think critically, mastering knowledge in a discipline, the ability to write effectively, and preparing for employment. (Table 1). These are the only goals that rate above 3.0 on a scale in which 4 means essential.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Goals 2005</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develop Ability to Think Critically</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>0.416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare for Employment</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>0.799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare for Graduate Education</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>0.703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop Moral Character</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>0.898</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide for Emotional Development</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>0.903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help Develop Personal Values</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>0.913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhance Self-understanding</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>0.878</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instill Commitment to Community Service</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>0.813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare for Responsible Citizenship</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>0.808</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhance Knowledge of Racial/Ethnic Groups</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>0.937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help Master Knowledge in Discipline</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>0.589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop Creative Capacities</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>0.804</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instill Appreciation of Liberal Arts</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>0.855</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhance Spiritual Development</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>0.850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote Ability to Write Effectively</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>0.629</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitate Search for Meaning/Purpose</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>0.941</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale:
1=not important, 2=somewhat important
3=very important, 4=essential
Goals scored above 2.5 but less than 3.0 include:
- Prepare for graduate education
- Develop moral character
- Help develop personal values
- Enhance self-understanding
- Prepare for responsible citizenship
- Enhance knowledge of racial/ethnic groups
- Develop creative capacities
- Instill appreciation of liberal arts

Women are more likely than men to find the following educational goals important.
- Enhance self-understanding
- Enhance knowledge of racial/ethnic groups
- Instill appreciation of liberal arts
- Promote ability to write effectively

Faculty of color are more likely than white faculty to find these educational goals important.
- Prepare for graduate education
- Develop moral character
- Instill commitment to community service
- Enhance knowledge of racial/ethnic groups
- Develop creative capacities

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See the full report that includes the methodology and additional tables at the IRAP website:

csufresno.edu/ir/data_research/reports_studies.shtml