

Harper College
2004 Transfer and Career Graduate Surveys
Executive Summary

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Teaming to serve research needs of the College
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This report presents highlights and significant findings from two surveys of Harper College's 2004 graduates¹. Overall, graduates reported that their experiences at Harper were positive and that they were successful in the next stage of their lives. Some key outcomes include:

- 99% of transfer graduates and 98% of career graduates said they would recommend Harper to friends and family;
- 94% of transfer graduates and 91% of career graduates said they would return to Harper in the future;
- 78% of transfer graduates and 86% of career graduates reported being employed at least part-time;
- 72% of employed career graduates were in a job related to their Harper program, and 84% reported being satisfied in their jobs;
- 74% of transfer graduates and 24% of career graduates reported being enrolled at least part-time in another institution;
- 79% of transfer graduates reported that all their Harper credits transferred to their new institution; 72% of transfer graduates were enrolled in a major related to their major at Harper; 57% of transfer graduates plan to achieve a graduate degree (Master's level or higher).

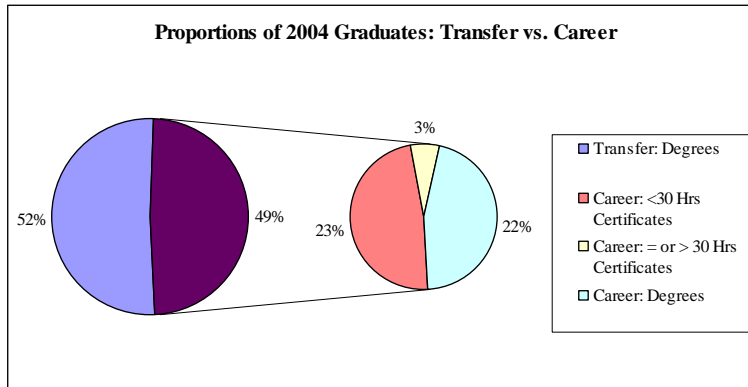
The purpose of this report is to compare and contrast these two sets of graduates and come to a better understanding of their similarities and differences. This report is organized into an Introduction, a Graduate Demographics section that discusses the characteristics of the graduates, a Graduate Ratings of Harper section that highlights key survey results, and a Summary section that recaps the main findings.

Graduate Demographics

Harper's 2004 graduates were approximately evenly split between career and transfer programs (see Chart 1, below). Among career program graduates, most had received either an AAS degree or a certificate of less than 30 credit hours. A relatively small proportion of graduates had received a certificate of 30 credit hours or more.

¹ Because different issues are relevant to graduates of transfer and career programs, these two groups of graduates were surveyed separately. Telephone surveys were conducted with Harper's 2004 graduates of career and transfer programs. This represents a change in practice from prior years. Detailed results for graduates of career and transfer programs can be found in the reports titled **Results of 2004 Career Graduate Survey** and **Results of 2004 Transfer Graduate Survey**, respectively. In addition, results for specific career programs can be found in the **Results of 2004 Career Graduate Survey – Program-Level Results**.

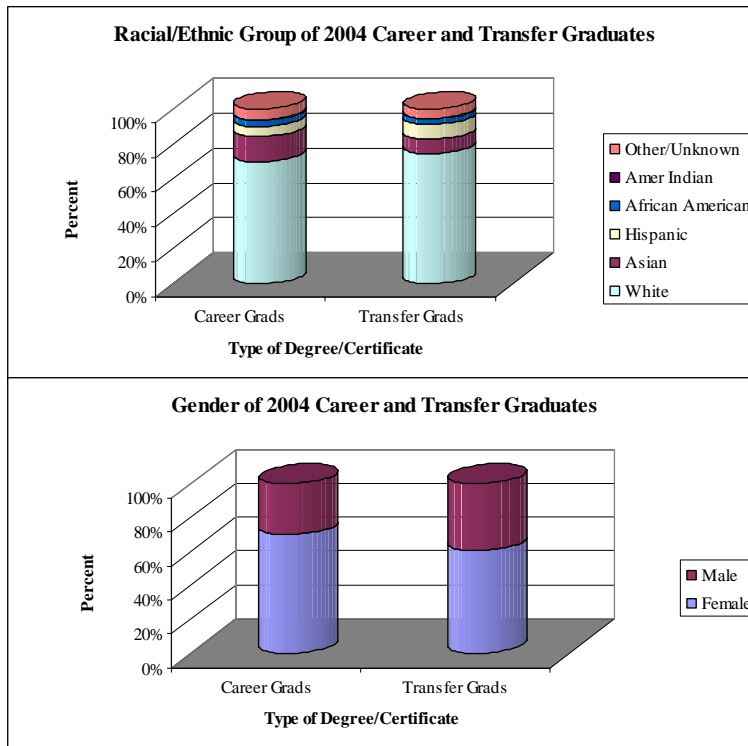
Chart 1: Proportions of 2004 Career and Transfer Graduates



In terms of gender and racial/ethnic group (refer to Chart 2 below), the 2004 graduates were generally comparable to the student body as a whole, although the specific makeup varied somewhat depending on type of program (career vs. transfer). Career program

graduates contained a slightly higher proportion of Asian/Pacific Islanders and females, as compared to transfer program graduates.

Chart 2: Demographics of 2004 Graduates



The charts (left) reflect the demographic characteristics of *all* graduates. Additional detail about the survey respondents is available in the specific reports. It is important to note that there was no response bias for either gender or for racial/ethnic group among the transfer graduates. For the career graduates, there was no response bias for gender, but it appeared that white graduates were slightly more likely to respond to the survey than Asian or Hispanic graduates². This leads to the survey results being somewhat more

representative of the opinions of white graduates and less representative of the views of Asian and Hispanic graduates.

² $\chi^2=12.82, df=5, p<.05$.

Graduate Ratings of Harper

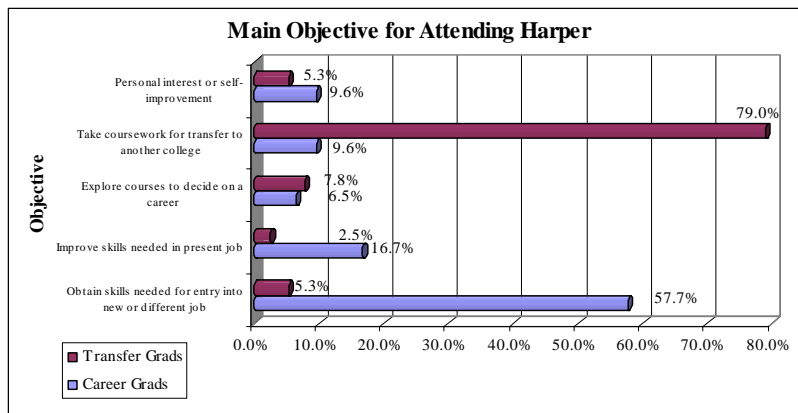
In 2004, there were 663 transfer graduates and 625 career graduates. Two hundred eighty-two transfer graduates and 293 career graduates responded to the surveys for response rates of 43% and 47%, respectively. This represents a substantial improvement over response rates from prior years (e.g., response rate for 2003 graduates was 26%; response rate for 2002 graduates was 25%).

The transfer and career surveys had different foci (e.g., the transfer graduate survey asked questions about graduates’ transfer institution, their major and their educational aspirations; the career graduate survey asked questions about graduates’ job satisfaction, work schedule and earnings), but they also shared common questions. The common questions asked graduates:

- for their objective for attending Harper;
- to rate the quality of instruction at Harper;
- to rate their satisfaction with support services;
- how likely they would be to recommend Harper; and
- how likely they would be to return for additional coursework.

In general, both transfer and career graduates had very positive things to say about their experiences at Harper. When rating instruction, 85% to 95% of graduates gave ratings of “excellent” or “good”. When rating services, 74% to 95% of graduates reported being “somewhat satisfied” or “very satisfied”. Importantly, when asked if they would recommend Harper to friends and family (a key measure of customer loyalty), 98% of career graduates and 99% of transfer graduates replied “yes” or “definitely yes”. When asked if they would return to Harper (another key customer loyalty metric), 91% of career graduates and 94% of transfer graduates replied “yes” or “definitely yes”.

Chart 3: Educational Objective



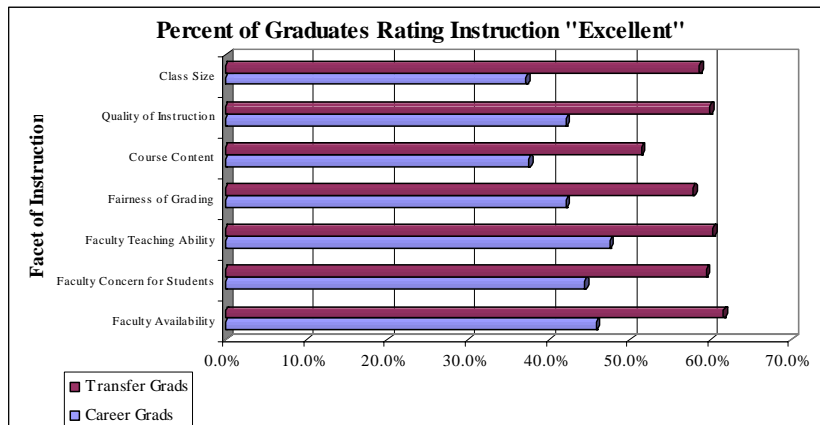
As we can see in Chart 3, most respondents reported that their main objective was either to take coursework for transfer or to obtain skills needed for a new job. Not surprisingly, these stated objectives aligned rather closely with the type of

program from which the students graduated³.

³ Transfer and career graduates’ responses to this question were significantly different ($\chi^2=314.97$, $df=4$, $p<.01$).

There were also differences among career graduates depending on the length of their program⁴. For example, the second most common objective for career graduates was to improve skills needed in their *present* job; this objective was more prevalent (26%) among graduates of less than 30 credit hour certificate programs. Among graduates of 30 or more credit hour certificate programs, a very large majority (87%) stated that their main objective was to obtain skills needed for a *new* job. Those career graduates earning a two-year degree had a broader range of objectives than other career graduates (e.g., 13% said they were taking courses for transfer to another college).

Chart 4: Ratings of Instructional Quality



Graduates rated the quality of various facets of instruction on a four-point scale (4=excellent, 1=poor). Chart 4 shows the proportions of 2004 graduates who gave ratings of “excellent” (the most positive rating) to each facet.

Over 80% of the career graduates and 90% of transfer graduates gave ratings of “excellent” or “good” to each facet of instruction. Therefore, we focus on the “excellent” ratings to highlight those graduates with the most positive experiences. There is precedent in this in the disciplines of quality/continuous improvement and market research. In continuous improvement circles, focusing on the most positive responses is a tool used when the goal is to move from “good” to “great”; it can be especially useful in cases like this, when nearly all respondents are providing positive ratings. Market research also often focuses on the most positive responses to questions (called the “top box” responses). The rationale is that only the respondents who give the most positive responses can be counted as truly loyal customers, and that people who say they will “definitely” do something are much more likely to actually follow through on their stated opinion.

As we can see in Chart 4, although career graduates had a very positive impression of instructional quality at Harper, the transfer graduates were even more positive⁵. Noting a difference between how career and transfer graduates perceive quality of instruction, the next question is *why*. The obvious difference between a career program and the transfer program is the type of curriculum. Another difference is the length of the programs. Transfer degrees are all Associate degrees (60-67 credit hours). Career certificates and degrees vary in length and are often broken down into three categories: less than 30 credit

⁴ Career graduates’ responses to this question varied by length of program ($\chi^2=26.15$, $df=8$, $p<.01$).

⁵ All differences were statistically significant ($p<.05$ or better).

hour certificates, 30 or more credit hour certificates and AAS degrees (a 60 credit hour Associate degree, with 42-45 of those credits coming from the specific technical courses).

In order to investigate the driving force behind the differences in ratings (curriculum type vs. length of program), two separate analyses were undertaken. The first examined only career graduates and looked for differences in ratings depending on the length of their program. The second examined only degree graduates (transfer graduates or career graduates with an AAS) and looked for differences in ratings depending on the curriculum type. Results are shown in Table 1 below; percentages shown in **bold** are significantly different within factor (i.e., length of program or curriculum type).

Table 1: Instructional Quality, Length of Program, and Curriculum Type

Rate the instruction at Harper College. (% “excellent” ratings)	Length of Program (Career Grads Only; N=296)			Curriculum Type (Degrees Only; N=406)	
	<30 creds	>30 creds	AAS	Career	Transfer
Class size ^{a, c}	39.1%	42.9%	34.5%	34.5%	58.6%
Quality of instruction ^d	39.5%	53.3%	43.2%	43.2%	59.9%
Course content	34.2%	33.3%	41.4%	41.4%	51.4%
Fairness of grading ^{b, e}	40.9%	53.3%	41.8%	41.8%	57.8%
Faculty teaching ability	49.1%	35.7%	47.3%	47.3%	60.3%
Faculty concern for students ^f	43.8%	53.8%	44.0%	44.0%	59.4%
Faculty availability ^g	43.8%	64.3%	45.5%	45.5%	61.6%

^a Responses were significantly different for length of program ($\chi^2=13.03$, $df=6$, $p<.05$).

^b Responses were significantly different for length of program ($\chi^2=12.96$, $df=6$, $p<.05$).

^c Responses were significantly different for curriculum type ($\chi^2=21.22$, $df=3$, $p<.01$).

^d Responses were significantly different for curriculum type ($\chi^2=13.98$, $df=3$, $p<.01$).

^e Responses were significantly different for curriculum type ($\chi^2=16.50$, $df=3$, $p<.01$).

^f Responses were significantly different for curriculum type ($\chi^2=12.16$, $df=3$, $p<.01$).

^g Responses were significantly different for curriculum type ($\chi^2=11.33$, $df=3$, $p<.01$).

As can be seen in Table 1, there were many more significant differences by curriculum type than there were by length of program. Interestingly, in many cases the graduates with a 30 or more credit hour certificate gave more positive responses than those with either shorter or longer programs; however, it is important to bear in mind that these graduates form a relatively small proportion of total career graduates (see Chart 1). It appears that, in general, an important driver of graduates’ ratings of instructional quality is the type of program they completed. There is insufficient data to determine a deeper cause of the difference. It may be, for example, that students entering career vs. transfer programs come to Harper with very different sets of expectations (e.g., “learn a concrete set of technical skills that will position me to get a better job” vs. “get a well-rounded general education that I can transfer to a four-year school”), and these initial expectations color their subsequent experiences.

Chart 5: Satisfaction and Usage of Support Services

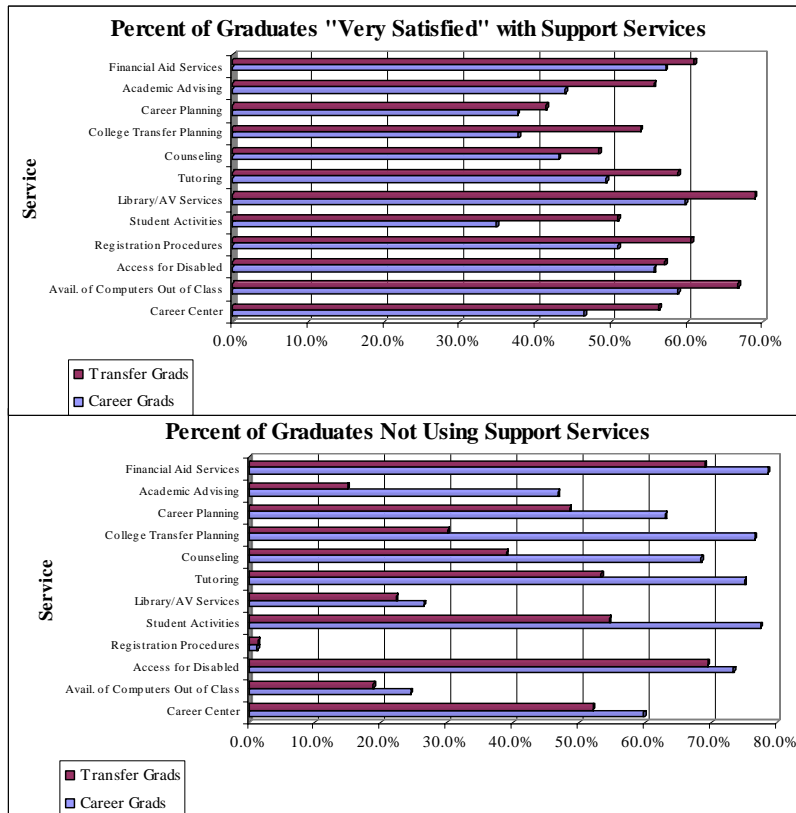


Chart 5 shows the proportion of graduates who rated themselves as “very satisfied” with support services and the frequency with which they reported that they did not use each service. Over 82% of transfer graduates and 73% of career graduates gave ratings of “very satisfied” or “satisfied” to each support service. Therefore, similar to Chart 4, we focus on the “very satisfied” ratings to highlight the graduates with the most positive experiences at Harper. As with the ratings of instructional

quality, graduates from transfer programs gave more positive ratings to the services, and were also less likely to say that they had not used a service. The following services were rated significantly differently by transfer graduates and career graduates: Academic Advising, Career Planning, College Transfer Planning, Counseling, Tutoring and Student Activities. Additional detail can be found in the specific reports.

Chart 6: Recommending and Returning to Harper

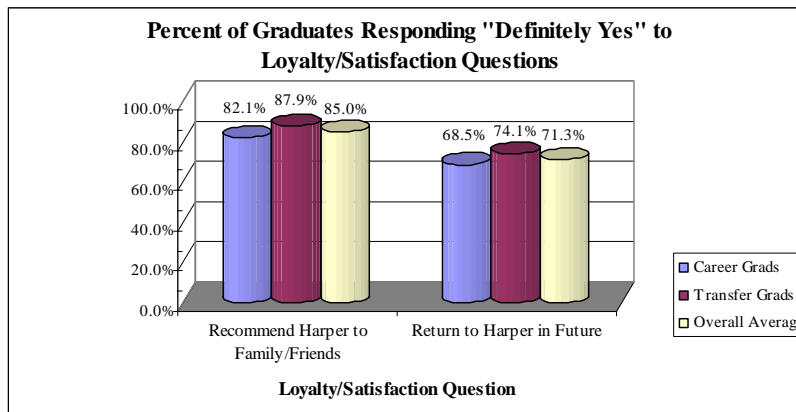


Chart 6 shows the graduates’ responses to two questions that are key measures of customer loyalty and satisfaction: “would you recommend Harper to your family and friends” and “would you return to Harper in the near future”. As

explained above, the chart shows the proportion of respondents who replied “definitely yes”; if we include those who replied “yes” as well, 98% of graduates replied that they would recommend Harper and 93% replied that they would return to Harper. These

results are quite strongly positive. It is important to note that there were no statistically significant differences between transfer and career graduates. Although transfer and career graduates may have had different reactions to specific facets of instruction or specific services, their overall reaction to Harper was very positive.

Graduates' decisions to recommend or return to Harper appear to be driven by different facets of their experience here. The main driver of the decision to recommend Harper appears to be the graduates' ratings of course content: graduates rating course content as excellent were 93% likely to highly recommend Harper (as opposed to 85% in the general sample). If these graduates were also very satisfied with student activities and the career center, they were 96% likely to highly recommend Harper. Those rating course content as good or average were 82% likely to highly recommend Harper, whereas those rating course content as poor were only 62% likely to highly recommend Harper.

Graduates who (a) rated course content as good or average, (b) were satisfied with access for the disabled, and (c) rated faculty availability as "excellent" were 95% likely to highly recommend Harper, but if they rated faculty availability as "good" (rather than excellent) their likelihood to recommend dropped to 77%. Graduates who rated course content as poor but rated fairness of grading better than average were 82% likely to highly recommend Harper, but if they rated fairness of grading as poor their likelihood to recommend dropped to 41%. How graduates' choices branch out from one another shows that it is possible to restore students' positive opinion of Harper through a variety of means: if students were less than highly satisfied with course content, for example, they may still have had a very positive experience if they felt their grades were fair and faculty were available.

The decision to return to Harper, in contrast, appears to be driven by fairness of grading rather than by course content. Overall, 71% of graduates replied that they would definitely return to Harper. If they rated fairness of grading as excellent, this percentage rose to 81%. If they rated fairness of grading as good or average, then the percent who would definitely return dropped to 64%. However, if these graduates rated faculty concern for students as better than average and rated faculty teaching ability as excellent, then the chance they would return rose to 74%. If they rated fairness of grading as poor, then only 53% would definitely return. But even among these graduates, if they were satisfied with the career center, the chances they would return rose to 76%. Similar to the pattern discussed above, it again appears that strengths in one area can more than counterbalance perceived shortcomings in another area.

It is also important to note that all of the most important factors discussed above are under Harper's control. Factors that exist "within" the student, such as goals, intentions, or demographic group membership did not appear to be strong drivers of the recommend and return decisions.

Respondents were also given the opportunity to share their comments on what they liked best about Harper, as well as any suggestions they might have on how to improve the College's instruction and services. When asked what they liked best about Harper,

transfer graduates noted the faculty, convenience, location, affordability and class size. Career graduates made mention of the faculty, curriculum, convenience, location and facilities. When asked how Harper could improve instruction, transfer graduates suggested becoming a four-year school, improving the availability of courses and improving the experience level of faculty; career graduates suggested improving the experience of faculty, adding specific programs and improving availability of courses. In terms of service improvements, transfer graduates suggested improving specific offices, improving parking and providing more information on the services available; career graduates suggested improving parking, improving specific offices and improving access to counselors and advisors. For both instruction and services, many graduates responded that no changes were needed. Additional detail can be found in the respective reports.

Summary

Both career and transfer graduates reported having positive experiences at Harper and attaining success after graduating:

- A high proportion (86%) of career graduates reported being employed at least part-time; 72% were in a job related to their Harper program, and 84% reported being satisfied in their jobs;
- A high proportion (74%) of transfer graduates reported being enrolled at least part-time in another institution; 72% of transfer graduates were enrolled in a major related to their major at Harper and 79% reported that all their Harper credits transferred to their new institution);
- A very high proportion of graduates (more than 80% of career graduates and more than 90% of transfer graduates) rated instruction at Harper as good or excellent in all areas;
- Although many graduates reported not using Harper's support services, most of those who did use the services (more than 74% of career graduates and 80% of transfer graduates) reported being satisfied;
- 99% of transfer graduates and 98% of career graduates said they would recommend Harper to friends and family;
- 94% of transfer graduates and 91% of career graduates said they would return to Harper in the future.

Career graduate ratings were quite positive, but transfer graduate ratings were more so. Career and transfer programs differ in at least two major ways: the length of the program (career programs vary from certificates requiring less than 30 credit hours to A.A.S. degrees, while transfer programs are all Associate degrees), and the type of curriculum (career vs. transfer). Based on the analyses conducted, it appears that the type of the curriculum has a greater impact than the length of the program when it comes to shaping graduates' perceptions of Harper.