

Harper College
2005 Transfer and Career Graduate Surveys
Executive Summary

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This report presents highlights and significant findings from two surveys of Harper College's 2005 graduates.¹ 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;
- 91% of transfer graduates and 93% of career graduates said they would return to Harper in the future;
- 74% of transfer graduates and 85% 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 88% reported being satisfied in their jobs;
- 79% of transfer graduates and 27% of career graduates reported being enrolled at least part-time in another institution;
- 74% of transfer graduates reported that all their Harper credits transferred to their new institution; 70% of transfer graduates were enrolled in a major related to their major at Harper; 62% of transfer graduates plan to achieve a graduate degree (Master's level or higher).

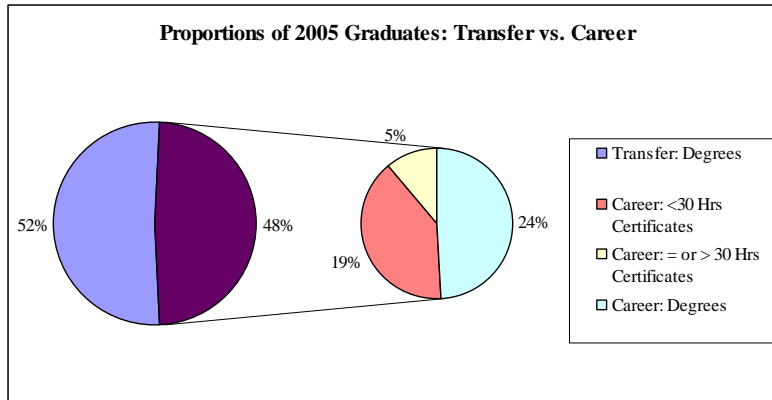
The purpose of this report is to compare and contrast these two sets of graduates and come to a better understanding of their similarities and differences. Comparisons to the responses of the 2004 graduates are also drawn when appropriate. This report is organized into an Introduction, a Graduate Demographics 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 2005 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.

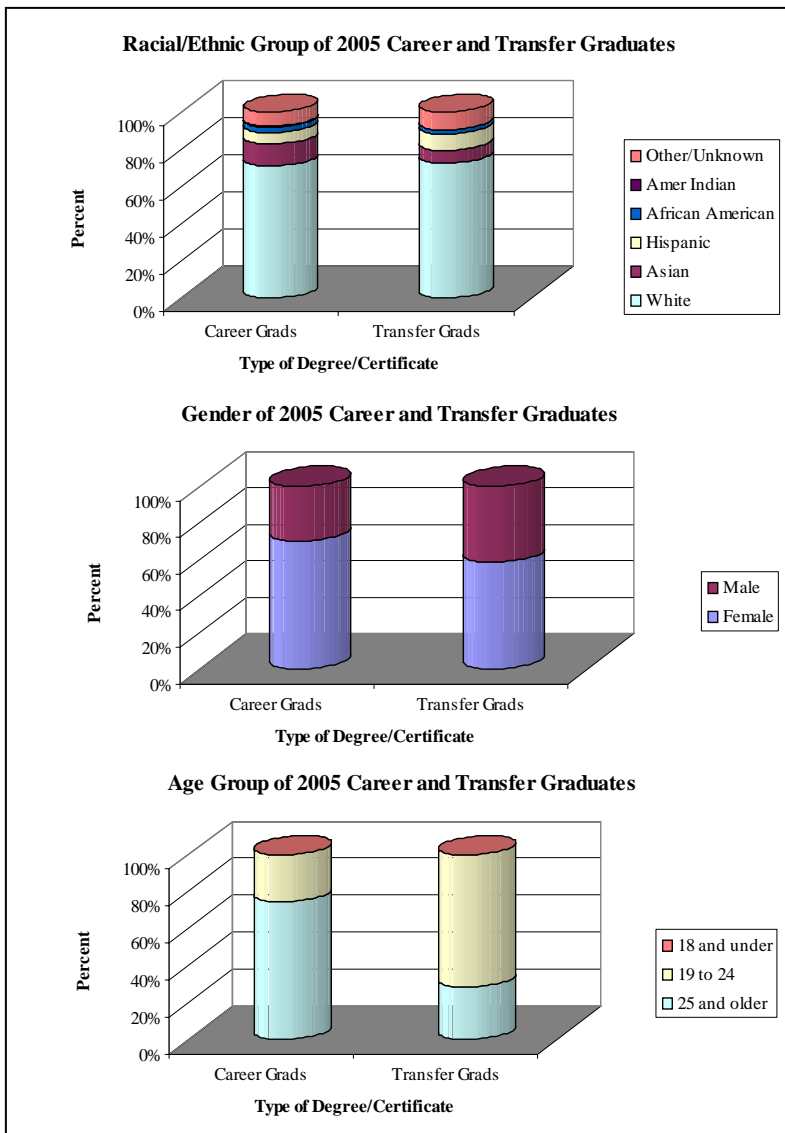
¹ Because different issues are relevant to graduates of transfer and career programs, these two groups of graduates were surveyed separately. Detailed results for graduates of career and transfer programs can be found in the reports titled *Results of 2005 Career Graduate Survey* and *Results of 2005 Transfer Graduate Survey*, respectively. In addition, results for specific career programs can be found in the *Results of 2005 Career Graduate Survey – Program-Level Results*.

Chart 1: Proportions of 2005 Career and Transfer Graduates



In terms of age, gender, and racial/ethnic group, (refer to Chart 2 below), the 2005 graduates were generally comparable to the student body as a whole. Compared to transfer graduates, the 2005 career graduates contained a slightly higher proportion of Asians, as well as higher proportions of females and adult students. The charts (left) reflect the characteristics of *all* graduates. It is important to note that there was no response bias for age, gender, or racial/ethnic group among the transfer graduates. For the career graduates, there was no response bias for gender or racial/ethnic group, but it appeared that older graduates (age 40 and over) were slightly more likely to respond to the survey than younger graduates.² When age was broken into Harper's usual categories (i.e., 18 and under, 19 to 24, and 25 and older) there was no response bias by age.

Chart 2: Demographics of 2005 Graduates



² $\chi^2=6.27, df=2, p<.05$.

Graduate Ratings of Harper

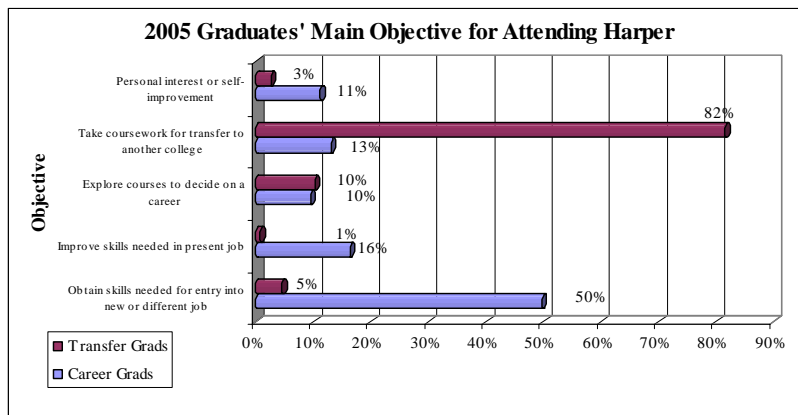
In 2005, there were 718 transfer graduates and 665 career graduates. Compared to 2004, this represents an increase of 8.3% in the number of transfer graduates and 6.4% in the number of career graduates. Three hundred seventy-four transfer graduates and 366 career graduates responded to the surveys for response rates of 52% and 55%, respectively. A change in the survey process for the 2004 graduates yielded a substantial improvement in response rates from prior years (45% for 2004 compared to 26% for 2003 and 25% for 2002) as well as a reduction in cycle time from two years to eighteen months. The survey of 2005 graduates achieved an additional improvement in response rate (54% for 2005 vs. 45% for 2004) and a further reduction in cycle time to 12 months.

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, 82% to 95% of graduates gave ratings of "excellent" or "good". When rating services, 75% 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), 93% of career graduates and 94% of transfer graduates replied "yes" or "definitely yes".

Chart 3: Educational Objective

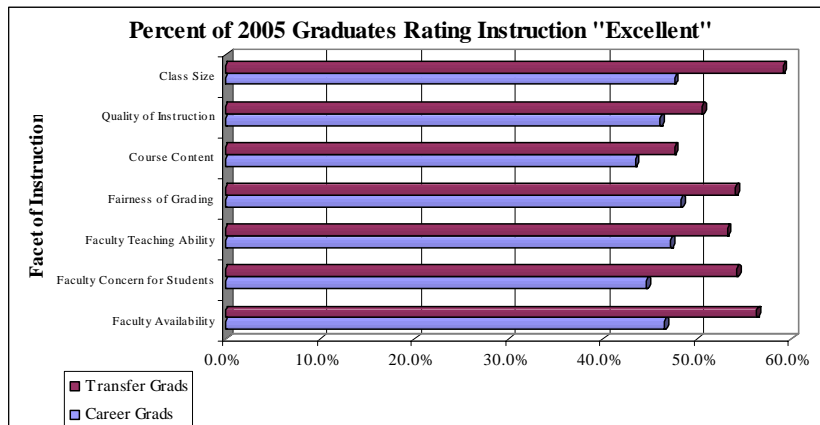


As we can see in Chart 3, most respondents reported that their main objective was either to take coursework for transfer or to obtain skills needed for a new job. Not surprisingly, these stated objectives aligned rather closely with the type of

program from which the students graduated.³

There were also differences among career graduates depending on the length of their program.⁴ Graduates of longer-term programs (i.e., A.A.S. or 30 or more credit hour certificates) were more likely (56%) to report that they were trying to obtain skills for entry into a new or different job than graduates with certificates of less than 30 credit hours (40%). The career graduates earning either a two-year degree or a short certificate (less than 30 credit hours) were more likely to report that they were taking courses for transfer (15%) than those earning a certificate of more than 30 credit hours (5%).

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 2005 graduates who gave ratings of “excellent” (the most positive rating) to each facet.

Similar to their peers from 2004, over 82% of the career graduates and 88% of transfer graduates gave ratings of “excellent” or “good” to each facet of instruction. We will focus on the graduates giving the most positive ratings (i.e., ratings of “excellent”). 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 positive. Transfer graduates rated class size, fairness of grading, faculty concern for students, and faculty availability more positively than career graduates ($p < .05$). Similar results were found in the survey of 2004 graduates, except the transfer graduates from 2004 gave more positive ratings to all facets of instructional quality. Noting a difference between how career and transfer graduates perceive quality of instruction, the next question is *why*. The obvious

³ Transfer and career graduates’ responses to this question were significantly different ($\chi^2=387.04$, $df=4$, $p < .01$).

⁴ Career graduates’ responses to this question varied by length of program ($\chi^2=19.46$, $df=8$, $p < .05$).

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 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).

Paralleling the investigation of the 2004 results, two separate analyses were conducted to investigate the driving force behind the differences in ratings (curriculum type vs. length of program). 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=358)			Curriculum Type (Degrees Only; N=541)	
	<30 creds	>30 creds	AAS	Career	Transfer
Class size ^e	53.8%	27.9%	47.6%	47.6%	58.9%
Quality of instruction ^a	49.0%	33.3%	47.1%	47.1%	50.4%
Course content	47.6%	30.2%	43.5%	43.5%	47.7%
Fairness of grading ^{b, f}	56.9%	28.6%	46.2%	46.2%	54.2%
Faculty teaching ability ^c	54.5%	28.6%	45.9%	45.9%	53.1%
Faculty concern for students ^g	50.0%	31.0%	43.7%	43.7%	54.1%
Faculty availability ^d	50.0%	30.2%	46.7%	46.7%	56.3%

^a Responses were significantly different based on length of program ($\chi^2=13.61$, $df=6$, $p<.05$).

^b Responses were significantly different based on length of program ($\chi^2=20.79$, $df=6$, $p<.01$).

^c Responses were significantly different based on length of program ($\chi^2=15.87$, $df=6$, $p<.05$).

^d Responses were significantly different based on length of program ($\chi^2=32.68$, $df=8$, $p<.01$).

^e Responses were significantly different based on curriculum type ($\chi^2=9.21$, $df=3$, $p<.05$).

^f Responses were significantly different based on curriculum type ($\chi^2=20.05$, $df=3$, $p<.01$).

^g Responses were significantly different based on curriculum type ($\chi^2=11.94$, $df=3$, $p<.01$).

As can be seen in Table 1, there were roughly the same number of significant differences based on length of program (four significant differences) and curriculum type (three significant differences). This is in contrast to the results found in 2004, which suggested that curriculum type was the stronger driver of rating differences. In general, the 2005 graduates of shorter (less than 30 credits) and longer (Associate's degree) programs tended to give higher ratings than graduates of medium-length (30 credits or more) programs. Graduates of transfer programs tended to give higher ratings than graduates of career programs. For the most part, there were no significant differences between the 2004 and 2005 graduates in terms of their ratings of instructional quality.

Chart 5: Satisfaction and Usage of Support Services

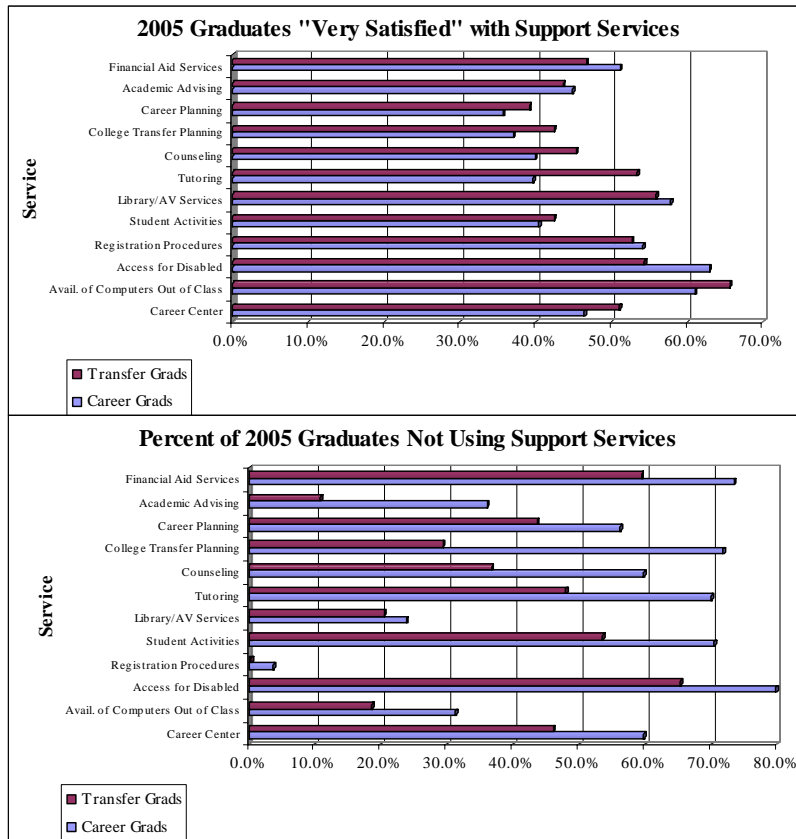


Chart 5 shows the proportion of graduates who rated themselves as “very satisfied” with support services and the frequency with which they reported that they did not use each service. Over 80% of graduates gave ratings of “very satisfied” or “satisfied” to each service. Similar to Chart 4, we focus on the graduates giving “very satisfied” ratings. As with the ratings of instructional quality, the transfer graduates tended to give more positive ratings to the services. However, the differences in positive

ratings were statistically significant only for Counseling and the Career Center. The transfer graduates were also less likely than the career graduates to say that they had not used a service; this was true for all services except library/AV services (the difference was not statistically significant). Comparing the ratings of the 2005 graduates to those given by the 2004 graduates, there were no statistically significant differences in terms of positive ratings. However, the 2005 graduates appear to have been more likely than the 2004 graduates to use academic advising services⁵ and less likely to use college computers outside of class.⁶

⁵ Responses of “did not use” of 36% in 2005 vs. 47% in 2004; $\chi^2=10.72$, $df=4$, $p<.05$.

⁶ Responses of “did not use” of 31% in 2005 vs. 25% in 2004; $\chi^2=9.61$, $df=4$, $p<.05$.

Chart 6: Recommending and Returning to Harper

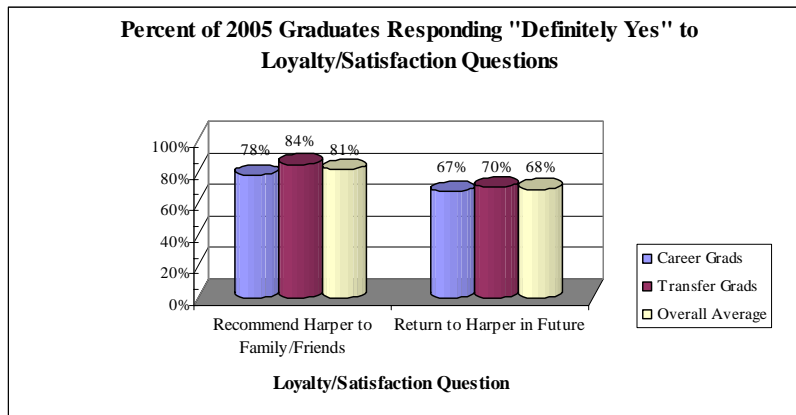


Chart 6 shows the graduates' responses to two questions that are key measures of customer loyalty and satisfaction: "would you recommend Harper to your family and friends" and "would you return to Harper in the near future". As

explained above, the chart shows the proportion of respondents who replied "definitely yes"; if we include those who replied "yes" as well, 99% of graduates replied that they would recommend Harper and 91% replied that they would return to Harper. These results are quite strongly positive. Transfer graduates were more likely than career graduates to report that they would definitely recommend Harper,⁷ but transfer and career graduates were equally likely to say that they would return to Harper. The responses of the 2005 graduates were not significantly different from the 2004 graduates in terms of their loyalty and remain quite strongly positive.

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, the convenience of the College, the small class sizes, and the low cost of attending. Career graduates made mention of the faculty, the convenience of the College, and the campus and facilities. When asked how Harper could improve instruction, transfer graduates suggested improving experience levels of faculty, becoming a four-year school, improving the availability of classes, and improving faculty interaction with students; career graduates suggested improving experience levels of faculty and improving the availability of classes. In terms of service improvements, transfer graduates suggested improving the quality of specific offices, improving parking, and improving access to advisors and counselors; career graduates suggested improving the quality of specific offices. 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:

⁷ Responses of "definitely yes" of 84% for transfer graduates vs. 78% for career graduates; $\chi^2=9.03$, $df=3$, $p<.05$.

- A high proportion (85%) of career graduates reported being employed at least part-time, 72% were in a job related to their Harper program, and 88% reported being satisfied in their jobs;
- A high proportion (79%) of transfer graduates reported being enrolled at least part-time in another institution, 70% of transfer graduates were enrolled in a major related to their major at Harper, and 74% reported that all their Harper credits transferred to their new institution);
- A very high proportion of graduates (more than 82% of career graduates and more than 88% 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 more than 81% of transfer graduates) reported being satisfied;
- 99% of transfer graduates and 98% of career graduates said they would recommend Harper to friends and family;
- 91% of transfer graduates and 93% of career graduates said they would return to Harper in the future.

Career graduate ratings were quite positive in their ratings of instructional quality, but transfer graduate ratings were more so in some areas. 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). Analyses conducted based on the responses of the 2004 graduates suggested 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. A parallel analysis of the responses of the current graduates yielded more mixed results, in that the type of curriculum and length of program appeared to be of roughly equal importance. The graduates with the least positive ratings appear to be those who graduated with career certificates requiring 30 or more credits; these individuals make up only five percent of the total number of graduates for 2005.

As noted above, both career and transfer graduates tended to give positive ratings to the services at Harper. In contrast to the 2004 graduates,⁸ the career and transfer graduates from 2005 rated services similarly; transfer graduates gave significantly more positive ratings only for Counseling and the Career Center. The 2005 graduates were also less likely to report that they had not used some services (i.e., Academic Advising and computers for out-of-class use).

In general, the results from the 2005 graduates closely paralleled those from the 2004 graduates. Where minor differences were found, it is too soon to tell if these differences are the beginning of a pattern or are merely the result of random fluctuations in individuals' responses.

⁸ Among the 2004 graduates, transfer graduates gave significantly more positive ratings to Academic Advising, Career Planning, College Transfer Planning, Counseling, Tutoring and Student Activities.