Opinions Matter
Evidence of, by and for Howard Stakeholders

Office of Institutional Assessment and Evaluation (OIAE)

We continually urge all stakeholders (administrators, faculty, students, parents and community supporters) to participate in assessment activities and to utilize available assessment information in order to help the institution to steadily improve and move forward. Your actions matter!

This volume focuses on data from the 2014 Howard University Undergraduate Student Exit Survey and the 2014 Graduate and Professional Graduating Student Exit Survey from spring 2014. A total of 840 students responded to the undergraduate version (210 male; 630 female) while another 500 students responded to the graduate student form (166 male; 334 female). Four items measuring student satisfaction with particular skill development were analyzed to address growing concerns of student preparation beyond Howard University: critical thinking and analysis, research skill development, verbal communication, and written communication.

Skill Development at Howard University

Higher order cognitive skills, such as the ability to think critically, are invaluable to students’ futures. They prepare individuals to tackle a multitude of challenges that they are likely to face in their personal lives, careers, and duties as responsible citizens. Moreover, by instilling critical thinking in students we groom individuals to become independent lifelong learners—thus fulfilling one of the long-term goals of education (Tsui, 2002). Howard University aims to foster a learning environment where all students are well developed critical thinkers, while honing other skills such as verbal communication and analysis.

Among the skills explored in this current volume, undergraduates reported higher levels of satisfaction with verbal communication, whereas graduate students reported higher levels of satisfaction with critical thinking and analysis skills. Overall, both undergraduate and graduate students are satisfied, on average, with their skill development at Howard University.

<table>
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<th>Skill Development: Average Ratings of Satisfaction</th>
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<td>Critical Thinking and Analysis</td>
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<td>Level of Satisfaction (1=Strongly Dissatisfied; 4=Strongly Satisfied)</td>
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Source: 2014 Undergraduate and Graduate and Professional Student Exit Surveys
Written Communication

Writing is an essential skill that students need in order to comprehend, analyze, and synthesize a variety of texts in a variety of disciplines. Effective writing is also a skill they will find indispensable in their professional lives beyond the undergraduate academic setting.

A total of 813 undergraduate students and 462 graduate students rated the level of satisfaction with their training in written communication at Howard University. The largest discrepancy between undergraduate and graduate students occurred on the “satisfied” rating. However, the majority of undergraduate and graduate students reported being “satisfied” with their training in written communication at Howard University.

"Writing helps clarify one’s thinking. It improves all other means of communication by enhancing vocabulary and promoting the ability to formulate thoughts in coherent and creative ways. It is a first cousin to public speaking because it helps frame the material in a fashion that makes it explicable and communicable" (Harman, 2013).

Engaged citizens rely on strong writing skills, whether they are exploring and developing their own ideas, responding fairly and responsibly to the ideas and perspectives of others, or crafting the polished, compelling and persuasive expression so often necessary in shaping and creating a diverse and just community.

"An unprecedented study that followed several thousand undergraduates through four years of college found that large numbers didn’t learn the critical thinking, complex reasoning and written communication skills that are widely assumed to be at the core of a college education" (Rimer, 2011).
Verbal Communication

According to the Job Outlook 2011 survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employment, employers agreed that new college graduates are entering the workforce with poor verbal communication skills. The implication here is that college and universities aren’t adequately training students in verbal communication. It is important to assess students’ satisfaction with their training in verbal communication. More than 90% of undergraduate and graduate students were satisfied or very satisfied with their training in Verbal Communication at Howard University.

Developing research skills is an important part of undergraduate and graduate training. Research skills assist personal development and improve students’ ability to undertake focused research and to present their work to a variety of audiences. Students also develop an understanding of the role of science in the wider world. As the chart below illustrates, the majority of Howard University students who rated their level of satisfaction with their research skill development indicated that they were either satisfied or very satisfied.
Critical Thinking and Analysis Skills

"Critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. In its exemplary form, it is based on universal intellectual values that transcend subject matter divisions: clarity, accuracy, precision, consistency, relevance, sound evidence, good reasons, depth, breadth, and fairness..." (Scriven & Paul, 1987).

A total of 818 undergraduate students and 469 graduate students rated the level of satisfaction with their development of critical thinking and analysis skills at Howard University. Undergraduate and graduate student satisfaction ratings were almost identical with the biggest discrepancy occurring on the “dissatisfied” rating. The majority of undergraduate and graduate students reported being “satisfied” with their development of critical thinking and analysis skills at Howard University.

Development of Critical Thinking and Analytical Skills

Source: 2014 Undergraduate and Graduate and Professional Student Exit Surveys

References


