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Student Involvement and Satisfaction

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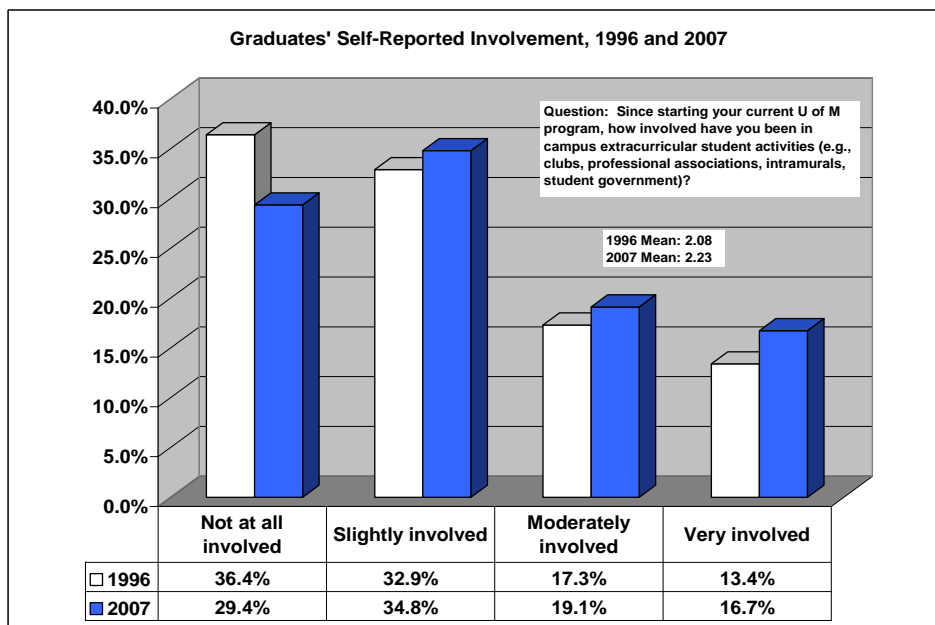
Introduction

It has been a long-standing tenet of American undergraduate education that students who are involved in campus life outside the classroom have a richer and more fulfilling college experience than do students who are not. When we surveyed recent bachelors graduates in 1996 (Matross, 1999), we found a clear linear relationship between overall satisfaction with the U of M and the extent to which students said they were involved in campus extracurricular activities. Those who said they were not at all involved were significantly less satisfied than those who said they were moderately or very involved. And these uninvolved students comprised over a third of the graduates.

In the 2007 Senior Exit Survey we repeated both the involvement and satisfaction questions, allowing us to look at differences between graduates more than a decade apart. We also examined other measures of satisfaction and the characteristics of those who were more and less involved. The 2007 survey received responses from 2,043 Twin Cities campus graduating seniors, 47% of the total class of 4,380.

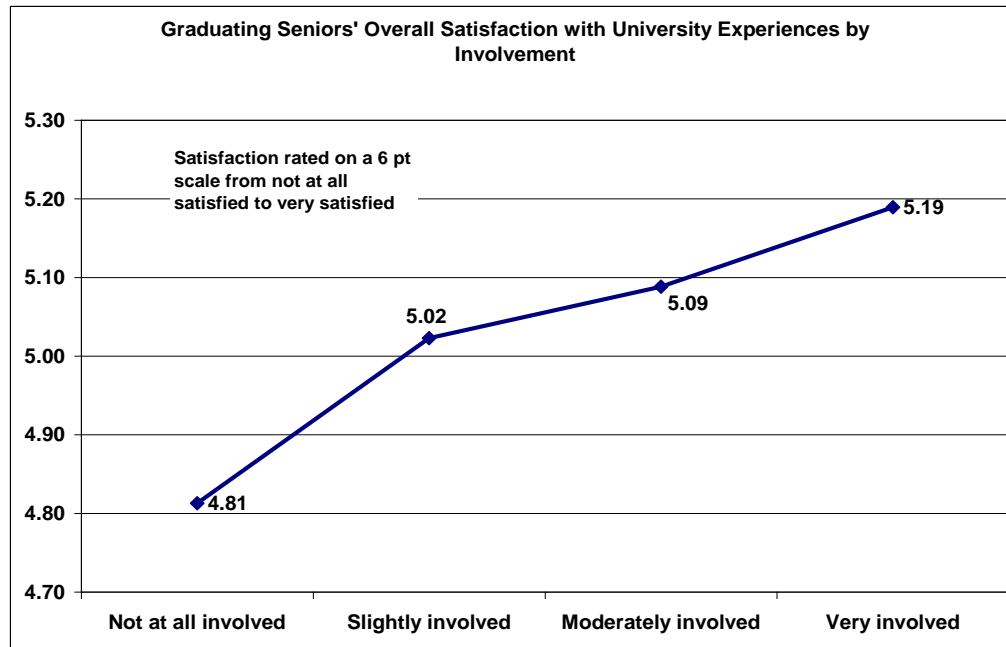
Changes in Involvement

Graduates in 2007 reported being more involved in campus activities than did those in 1996. Most notable was a drop in the number of students who said they were not at all involved from 36% to 29%.



**Involvement
and
Satisfaction**

In 2007, not only were the more involved students more satisfied than less involved students, they also experienced a greater sense of community at the U of M, were more likely to say that they would attend the U again, and more likely to recommend the U to other students like them (means statistically significant $p < .01$).



Graduates' Assessments of the U of M by Involvement (Means)

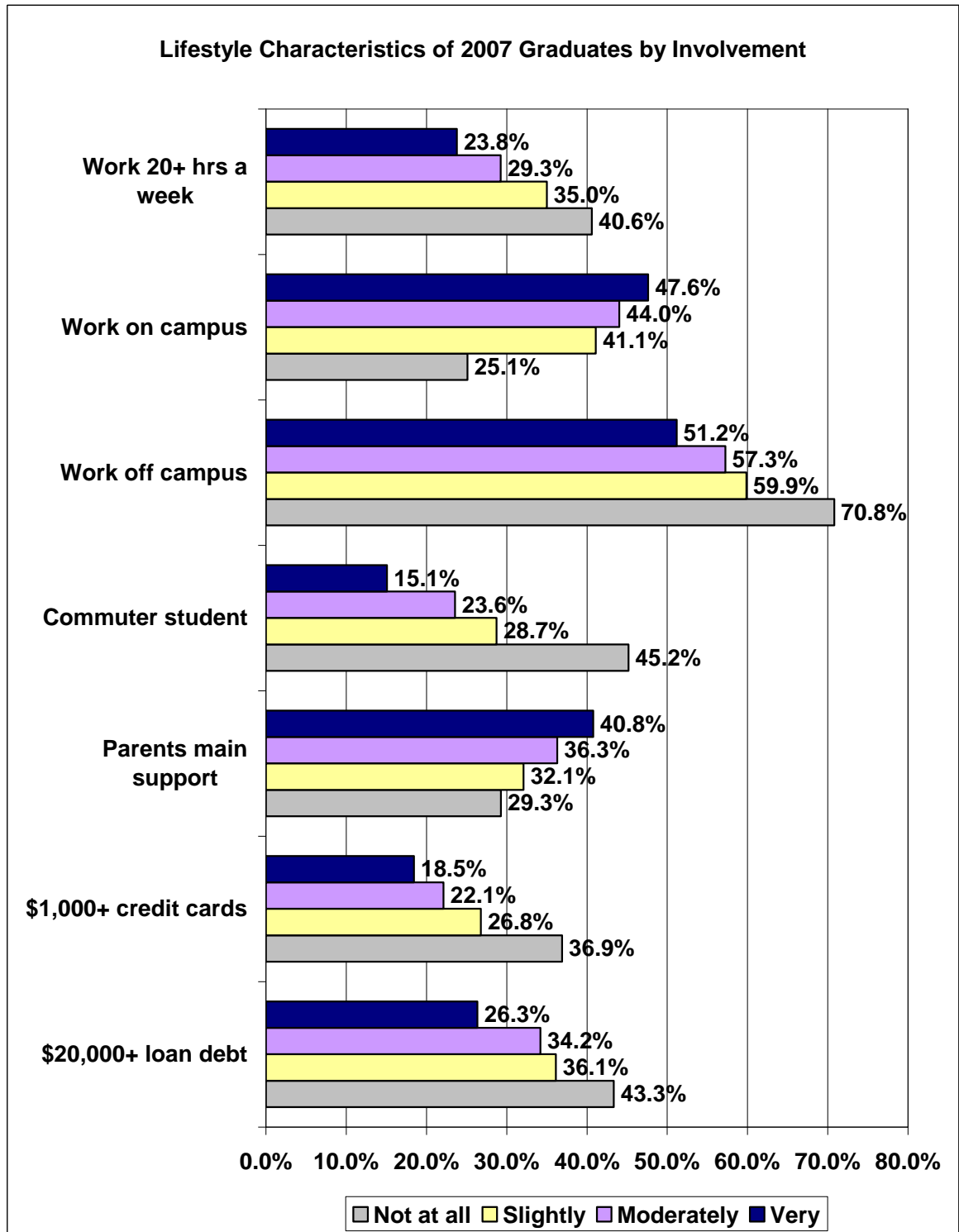
	Likelihood of Enrolling Again (5 pt scale)	Sense of Community at U (4 pt scale)	Likelihood of Recommending the U? (11 pt scale)
Not at all involved	3.20	2.50	7.31
Slightly involved	3.31	2.88	7.69
Moderately involved	3.39	3.16	7.91
Very involved	3.53	3.48	8.37

**Who Is
and Is Not
Involved**

Among the freshman admitting colleges, there are considerable differences in the degree to which their graduates were involved in extracurriculars. The Carlson School stands out in having 60% of its graduates either moderately or very involved. Design and Liberal Arts had the lowest percentages with 25% and 31% moderately or very involved.

	Involvement by College						
	CSOM	CEHD	IT	CBS	CLA	CDES	CFANS
Not at all involved	9.3%	35.0%	27.1%	21.3%	32.5%	34.5%	19.8%
Slightly involved	30.7%	27.4%	35.3%	35.3%	36.4%	40.5%	35.5%
Moderately involved	20.7%	19.7%	21.9%	22.7%	16.9%	19.0%	26.4%
Very involved	39.3%	17.9%	15.8%	20.7%	14.3%	6.0%	18.2%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Mean	2.90	2.21	2.26	2.43	2.13	1.96	2.43

Other characteristics associated with campus involvement suggest a pattern of circumstantial limitations. Those who were not at all or only slightly involved worked more, had greater loan and credit card debt, were more likely to be employed off campus, less likely to be employed on campus, more likely to be commuter students and less likely to have parental support as their main way to pay college expenses (all significant $p < .01$).



When we look at some demographics of those who are more and less involved, we find that students of color are somewhat more involved than other students, and men somewhat more involved than women ($p < .05$).

Involvement by SOC Status and Gender					
	Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	Very	Mean
SOC	24.2%	33.6%	22.7%	19.5%	2.38
Other	30.2%	35.0%	18.5%	16.3%	2.21
Women	30.6%	34.5%	17.4%	17.5%	2.22
Men	26.7%	35.6%	22.2%	15.5%	2.27

Discussion

Most of the University's undergraduate initiatives in the past few years, including more campus housing, freshman seminars, convocation, and the 13-credit minimum have sought to encourage students to engage the collegiate experience more completely. The data in this report support this goal. While not establishing cause and effect, the association between involvement and happiness is enough to tell us to keep encouraging extra-curricular, as well as curricular, involvement. And it should be remembered that the findings here are for successful students. A large body of theory and research suggests that less involved students are less likely to graduate (e.g., Astin, 1992).

While there are more students involved in extra curriculars than there were a decade ago, only 36% of 2007 graduates were moderately or very involved. To ground the terms used in the involvement question, we also asked students to tell us how many hours a week they spent in extra-curricular activities. For the "not at all involved" the average was .03 hours; for the "slightly involved" it was 1.6; for the "moderately involved" it was 3.8 and for the "very involved" it was 8.7 hours. Nearly two-thirds of U of M graduates spent two or fewer hours a week in campus extracurricular activities.

The barriers to increased campus involvement are substantial: Regardless of how involved they were, the majority of graduates worked off-campus. And a majority said that their parents were not their main source of money for college. On average, graduates reported working 18.5 hours a week. Yet despite these circumstances, a third of the surveyed students found the time to spend four or more hours a week in campus activities, and these students were happier with their U of M experiences.

The challenge for the University is how to further engage students in campus life, both academic and extra-curricular. Our data would suggest that more grant money, more campus jobs, and more encouragement of on-campus housing would all help reduce barriers to involvement. The recent strides the University has made in all these areas should pay off in better graduation rates and happier alumni, more willing to give back to their alma mater.

References

Matross, R.P. Involvement in the extracurriculum: an alumni perspective. *Discoveries*. Volume 4, No 1, University of Minnesota Office of the Vice President for Student Development and Athletics, Spring 1999.

Astin, A.W. *What matters in college: Four critical years revisited*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992.

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