

HEDS Alumni Survey - 2017
Skidmore College
Executive Summary
February 2018

About the Study & Methodology

The Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium ([HEDS](#)) consists of [140](#) private non-profit institutions across the U.S. The HEDS Alumni Survey asks graduates about the quality and impact of their undergraduate educational experiences and co-curricular activities. The survey asks them to evaluate the impact of their undergraduate education on their postgraduate critical thinking, problem solving, and other learning outcomes. It also asks about postgraduate employment, college satisfaction, college debt, etc. It classifies some of the questions into four dimensions of the undergraduate experience: Good Teaching and High-Quality Interactions with Faculty, Challenging Assignments and High Faculty Expectations, Interactions with Diversity, and Development of Social and Civic Engagement.

The survey is generally administered to graduates approximately 5 and 10 years after graduation. For Skidmore, the 5-year-out class surveyed graduated in 2011 and the 10-year-out class graduated in 2006. Graduates were invited to complete the instrument via postcard and email several times in June 2017. An incentive was offered for a chance to win one of two \$100 Amazon.com gift cards for responding. Due to a delay, Skidmore's classes were surveyed at the 6- and 11-year points (June 2017). Every HEDS institution selected its own dates to survey graduates during the 2016-17 academic year; therefore, the survey points for institutions vary, but all were within 5-6 years and 10-11 after graduation.

A key benefit to participating in this survey was the ability to obtain aggregated comparison figures for HEDS institutions that participated. Fifty-nine (59) institutions administered the HEDS Alumni survey and 16,803 alumni responded in the 2015-2016 and/or 2016-2017 academic years. Any institution that participated in at least one of those two years is included in the comparison group. The average response rate for all institutions was 27% and this is the group to which Skidmore's results are compared. A full list of participating institutions can be found at the end of the separate Summary Report. Skidmore's response rate was 31% overall (32% for the Class of 2011; 30% for Class of 2006) with 374 graduates responding.

Women are slightly overrepresented in the Skidmore response group: 67% of respondents from Skidmore's Class of 2011, compared with 61% for the total graduating class. For the Class of 2006, 65% of Skidmore's respondents were female, compared with 61% for the total class. Students of color represented 22% of Class of 2011 respondents and 20% of the total class. For the Class of 2006, students of color represented 9% of respondents and 13% of the total class.

Findings

This summary exclusively focuses on areas where Skidmore graduates differ the most from graduates of other HEDS institutions. There are three documents that comprise this study:

- a. Executive Summary
- b. [Summary Report](#) (a separate file with graphs)
- c. [Frequency Report](#) (a separate file with all frequencies, Ns, and the survey instrument)

The first part of the executive summary focuses on the Summary Report while the second half focuses on the Frequency Report. Page numbers prefaced with SR refer to the [Summary Report \(SR\)](#). Page numbers prefaced with FR refer to the [Frequency Report \(FR\)](#). For complete findings, please refer to those reports available on the Institutional Research website.

Class of 2011 – 5 years after graduation

- a. Post-College Activities
 - i. After 5 years (Class of 2011) compared to other HEDS graduates, Skidmore graduates were:
 - 1. less likely to be employed in 'Education and Library' (11% v. 18%)
 - 2. more likely to be employed in 'Art, Design, and Entertainment' (10% v. 4%) [SR pg 2]
 - 3. less likely to say their current job 'relates to my undergraduate major' (53% v. 61%) [SR pg 3]
 - 4. more likely to have 'no loans' (50% v. 35%) [SR pg 4]
- b. Academic Experience
 - ii. The percentage of Skidmore Class of 2011 graduates who reported experiencing high levels (≥ 70 on a 1-100 scale) of good practices at their alma mater was often lower than that of HEDS graduates 5 years after graduation. [SR pg 4]
 - 1. 'Good teaching and high-quality interactions with faculty' (70% v. 78%)
 - 2. 'Challenging assignments and high faculty expectations' (55% v. 63%)
 - 3. 'Development of social civic engagement' (29% v. 40%)
- c. Institutional Impact
 - iii. Class of 2011 Skidmore graduates were asked to report the extent that their undergraduate experiences at this institution contributed "very much" to their knowledge, skills, and personal development in a number of areas.
 - 1. Outcomes with the five highest percentages for Skidmore were: critical thinking, creative thinking, effective writing, careful reading, and integrative thinking [SR pg 5]
 - 2. For 'creating thinking,' Class of 2011 Skidmore grads were more likely to report this skill was enhanced (58%) than the comparison group (46%).
 - iv. They were also asked about the frequency of participating in activities at their institution while a student.
 - 1. For the Skidmore Class of 2011, activities with the greatest number of participants were: on-campus employment, community service, performing arts/music, study abroad, and internships. [SR pg 5]
 - 2. The percentage of the Skidmore class reporting that 'community service' work was high impact was lower than the comparison group (36% v. 47%).
 - v. The Skidmore Class of 2011, when compared to the comparison group, was less likely to report their undergraduate experience "very much" prepared them for:
 - 1. 'Graduate of professional school' (33% v. 46%)
 - 2. 'Continued learning on my own or outside of a degree' (27% v. 35%)
 - 3. 'Current career' (20% v. 32%)
 - 4. 'Interpersonal relationships and family living' (19% v. 27%)
 - 5. 'Social and civic involvement' (16% v. 25%)
 - 6. 'Responsibilities of post-undergraduate life' (7% v. 13%) [SR pg 5]

Class of 2006 – 10 years after graduation

- a. Post-College Activities
 - i. After 10 years (Class of 2006) compared to other HEDS graduates, Skidmore graduates were:
 - 1. less likely to be employed in 'Science, Technology, and Engineering' (3% v. 10%) [SR pg 7]
- b. Academic Experience
 - ii. The percentage of Skidmore Class of 2006 graduates who reported experiencing high levels (≥ 70 on a 1-100 scale) of good practices at their alma mater was often lower than that of HEDS graduates 10 years after graduation. [SR pg 9]
 - 1. 'Good teaching and high-quality interactions with faculty' (67% v. 78%)
 - 2. 'Challenging assignments and high faculty expectations' (53% v. 62%)
 - 3. 'Interactions with diversity' (18% v. 25%)
- c. Institutional Impact
 - iii. Class of 2006 Skidmore graduates were asked to report the extent that their undergraduate experiences at this institution contributed "very much" to their knowledge, skills, and personal development in a number of areas.
 - 1. Outcomes with the five highest percentages for Skidmore were: critical thinking, effective writing, creative thinking, integrative thinking, and information literacy [SR pg 10]
 - 2. For 'information literacy' however, Class of 2006 Skidmore grads were less likely to report this skill was enhanced (43%) than the comparison group (52%).
 - iv. They were also asked about the frequency of participating in activities at their institution while a student.
 - 1. For the Skidmore Class of 2006, activities with the greatest number of participants were: community service, on-campus employment, service organizations, independent study, and performing arts/music. [SR pg 10]
 - a. There were several areas where the Skidmore class was less likely than the comparison group to report an activity as being high impact. These include:
 - i. 'community service' (32% v. 44%)
 - ii. 'on-campus employment' (45% v. 57%)
 - iii. 'service organizations' (30% v. 41%)
 - b. The percentage of the Skidmore class reporting that 'performing arts/music' activities was high impact was greater than the comparison group (55% v. 48%).
 - v. The Skidmore Class of 2006, when compared to the comparison group, was less likely to report their undergraduate experience "very much" prepared them for:
 - 1. 'Graduate of professional school' (42% v. 53%)
 - 2. 'Continued learning on my own or outside of a degree' (30% v. 40%)
 - 3. 'Responsibilities of post-undergraduate life' (4% v. 12%) [SR pg 10]

Comparison of Skidmore's Classes of 2011 & 2006

- a. Pages 12-21 of the Summary Report compare the Skidmore Class of 2011 (5 years after graduation) to the Skidmore Class of 2006 (10 years after graduation). The second part of that section [SR pg 16-21] provides the order of importance for several of the key concepts measured. Please see the Summary Report for the full lists. Below are the items with the highest and lowest ratings.
 - i. For faculty interest in students, Skidmore grads rated faculty were 'genuinely interested in students' highest and 'interested in helping students grow in more than just academics' lowest [SR pg 16]. For interactions with faculty, Skidmore grads' highest score was for 'non-classroom interactions with faculty had a positive influence on personal growth.' The lowest score was for 'non-classroom interactions with faculty had a positive influence on my career goals.'
 - ii. When considering experiences in class, agreement was highest for Skidmore grads on 'wrote essays' and 'faculty posed challenging ideas in class.' The lowest rated items included 'used course content to address a problem not presented in class' and 'made oral presentations' [SR pg 17].
 - iii. For experiences at this institution, Skidmore grads' highest level of frequency was for 'had serious discussions with other students about lifestyles or customs.' Their lowest level of frequency was for 'had serious discussions with faculty/staff whose political, social, or religious opinions were different from my own' [SR pg 18].
 - iv. Regarding Skidmore's contribution to knowledge, skills, or development, areas with the highest contribution were 'critical thinking' and 'effective writing.' The two with the lowest contribution were 'civic engagement' and 'intercultural knowledge and competence' [SR pg 19].
 - v. Both classes felt Skidmore most prepared them for 'graduate or professional school.' They felt Skidmore least prepared them for 'responsibilities of post-undergraduate life' [SR pg 20].

Classes of 2011 & 2006 – Scales and Satisfaction

- a. Post-College Activities
 - i. Skidmore's Class of 2011 five years out was more likely than the comparison group to have reported 5 or more 'paying jobs after graduation' (24% v. 15%) [FR pg 7]. They were also less likely to have secured their 'first paying job' while still enrolled (22% v. 32%) [FR pg 12].
 - ii. The Skidmore Class of 2011 also reported that their 'first paying job after graduation' was less likely to 'allow me to continue to grow and learn' (60% v. 68%) and less likely to have 'paid health insurance benefits' (40% v. 51%). However, they were more likely to report their first job was in a 'desirable location' (73% v. 64%).
 - iii. Both Skidmore classes (2011 and 2006) were more likely to have 'no loans' with roughly one-half of Skidmore grads and one-third of the comparison grads reporting 'no loans' [FR pg 15]. For those with loans, graduates of both Skidmore classes were more likely than the comparison grads to report they are not personally responsible for paying them off.
- b. Scale: Good Teaching & High Quality Interactions with Faculty
 - i. Both Skidmore classes had small negative mean differences on this scale when compared to HEDS graduates (Class of 2011 – 4.17 v. 4.28; Class of 2006 – 4.15 v. 4.28). Skidmore graduates appear to be slightly less likely to "strongly agree" with several items that comprise the scale: faculty genuinely interested students, faculty interested in helping students grow in more than just academic areas, faculty providing prompt/useful feedback, non-classroom faculty interactions had a positive influence on personal growth/values/attitudes, non-classroom faculty interactions had a positive influence on intellectual growth/interest in ideas, non-classroom faculty interaction has positive influence on career goals/aspirations, and satisfaction with opportunities to meet/interact informally with faculty [FR pg 16-18].
- c. Scale: Challenging Assignments and High Expectations

- i. Both Skidmore classes had small negative mean differences on this scale when compared to HEDS graduates (Class of 2011 – 3.85 v. 3.99; Class of 2006 – 3.84 v. 3.97). Although it varies by class year, Skidmore graduates appear to be slightly less likely to indicate “very often” for many of the areas that comprise the scale including: faculty posed challenging ideas in class, faculty asked me to show how a particular course concept could be applied to an actual problem/situation, faculty asked me to point out any fallacies in ideas/principles/points of view presented in the course, faculty asked me to argue for or against a particular point of view, faculty challenged my ideas in class, students challenged each other’s ideas in class, completed assignments/projects in which I solved problems, made oral presentations, pointed out the strengths/weaknesses of a particular argument or point of view, and connected what I learned in multiple courses [FR pg 19-22].
- d. Scale: Interactions with Diversity
 - i. There was no significant difference on this scale between the Skidmore Class of 2011 and the comparison group (3.06 v. 3.13); however, there was a small negative mean difference for the Skidmore Class of 2006 and the comparison group (2.97 v. 3.15). The areas within this scale where Skidmore graduates were less likely to indicate “often” or “very often” were those involving serious discussions with: ‘other students about different lifestyles/customs’ (Class of 2006), ‘faculty or staff whose political/social/religious opinions were different from your own’ (both classes), ‘students whose political/social/religious opinions were different from your own (both classes)’ [FR pg 23-24].
- e. Scale: Development of Social and Civic Engagement
 - i. Both Skidmore classes had small negative mean differences on this scale when compared to HEDS graduates (Class of 2011 – 2.67 v. 2.87; Class of 2006 – 2.73 v. 2.83). The Skidmore Class of 2011, in particular, was less likely to select “very much” when asked if the following experiences contributed to their knowledge, skills, and personal development for all of the areas that comprise this scale: promoting the quality of life in a community through both political and nonpolitical processes; information, skills, and commitments that support effective and appropriate interactions in a variety of cultural contexts; and recognizing ethical issues, examining different ethical perspectives, and considering the ramifications of alternative actions. The Skidmore Class of 2011 was also less likely to report that the institution “very much” prepared them for ‘social and civic involvement’ versus the comparison graduates [FR pg 25-26].
- f. Satisfaction
 - i. Graduates were asked to report how connected they felt to the institution as well as how satisfied they were with the undergraduate education they received there. While there is no significant difference in these means when comparing both Skidmore Classes (2011 and 2006) to their respective comparison classes [FR pg 35]:
 1. the percent of Skidmore 2011 graduates reporting they were “very satisfied” (highest point on the scale) with their undergraduate institution was lower for Skidmore (48%) than HEDS graduates (56%) [SR pg 6].
 2. the percent of Skidmore 2006 graduates reporting they had a “very strong connection” (highest point on the scale) with their undergraduate institution was slightly lower for Skidmore (39.5%) than HEDS graduates (45%) [SR pg 11].
- g. Contribution to Knowledge, Skills, and Personal Development
 - i. As mentioned earlier, graduates were asked to report the extent that their undergraduate experiences at this institution contributed to their knowledge, skills, and personal development in a number of areas. Full results of those findings are found in the Frequency Report [FR pg 36-38]. When differences are found between Skidmore and the comparison groups, they largely involve a negative difference for the top scale value (i.e., 4 “very much”). For example, the Skidmore Class of 2011 was less likely than the comparison grads to report the contribution of their alma mater was “very much” for: ‘effective speaking,’ ‘teamwork,’ and ‘problem solving.’ The Skidmore Class of 2011 was more likely, however, to report “very much” for ‘creative thinking.’ The Skidmore Class of 2006 was less likely than the

comparison grads to report their alma mater contributed “very much” to: ‘careful reading,’ ‘information literacy,’ ‘quantitative literacy,’ and ‘problem solving.’ For the second highest scale value (i.e., 3 “quite a bit”), Skidmore graduates sometimes had a greater percentage for these outcome areas.

In Their Own Words

The survey asked two open-ended narrative questions where respondents were able to provide their own thoughts and comments. Two-thirds of respondents (236/374) provided at least one narrative comment.

1. **Question:** From the perspective you have gained since graduation, what do you especially value about your undergraduate experience at this institution?
 - a. Three primary themes emerge from the responses to this question.
 - i. *Relationships/Community:* Graduates frequently used such words as “small” and “supportive” to describe the Skidmore community. They also cited close interactions with friends and faculty, enjoying the social life, forming “longstanding friendships,” and the “individual attention” provided by “small classes.”
 1. “The incredible community that the College has developed. Skidmore allowed me to make incredible friends among students, but also with faculty and staff. Everyone, no matter what relationship I had with them, supported my journey as I grew academically and personally.”
 2. “I value the relationships I formed with both students and faculty.”
 - ii. *Skills & Liberal Arts:* Graduates frequently reported the skills that were enhanced while at Skidmore (E.g., critical thinking, problem-solving, writing, research, good citizenship, interdisciplinary work). One graduate succinctly says “learning how to think” is what she values most. Other graduates reported the value of a liberal arts education and several cited the concept of “creative thought matters” and how it is useful in their current life.
 1. “I discovered just how transformative a liberal arts education can be. I left Skidmore with the capacity to learn on my own terms.”
 2. “I am particularly glad that I chose to attend a liberal arts institution such as Skidmore, where I was able to dip into a wide variety of disciplines and, ultimately, light a transdisciplinary fire that has carried me towards a passionate and rewarding career (and life) path.”
 3. “The teaching and emphasis on creative thought.”
 - iii. *Faculty:* Many graduates reported the positive interactions they have had with faculty during and after their time at Skidmore. They mentioned advising, mentoring, quality of teaching, accessibility, intellectual challenge, and relationships.
 1. “I was fortunate to have truly incredible professors, who trained me, challenged me, and even fought for me to succeed.”
 2. “I valued the quality of my professors and the level of discourse in the classroom.”
 3. “How much the professors cared about our success.”
 4. “The passion of the teachers for their subjects and their availability to students.”
 5. “I now appreciate the small classes and the accessibility of faculty. I remember spending many hours in faculty offices parsing out ideas.”
 6. “Many of the faculty members pushed me out of my comfort zone during my time at Skidmore.”

2. **Question:** Please use this space to elaborate on any of your responses on this survey or on any aspect of your undergraduate experience at this institution.
- a. When graduates were not prompted with a very specific question, they were more likely to offer suggestions or criticism. Although there were many positive responses to this question, they largely fell into the groupings outlined above for the first open-ended question. When focusing on suggestions and criticisms, the following areas emerge.
- i. *Lack of preparation for “real-world challenges and responsibilities” after college:* The most frequently reported critique was that of feeling unprepared for life’s challenges after graduation. Sometimes this is solely related to “post-graduate employment assistance” but other times it is a desire for “more emphasis on practicality - managing personal finances, how to present at a job interview, how to write a resume, what kind of internships could help you on the path to a career” or simply a desire for “advanced training/workshops in Excel, Access, QuickBooks, etc.” Some graduates wished for more paid internships or better alumni connections.
1. “I didn't have a clear idea of what I wanted to study or do after college, and while I appreciated that Skidmore encouraged students to take their time in figuring out their path, I wish I was pushed to develop a clearer understanding of my strengths, skills and interests and how to use that moving forward in the ‘real world.’”
 2. “I really wish there had been some opportunity to learn about real-world challenges and responsibilities that we all face post-college. For instance, saving for retirement, taxes, apartment/home rental, and other super common aspects of adult life. It felt crazy to me that after 4 years at an acclaimed college I felt no more knowledgeable or prepared for ‘real life’ than any other person. Many of these things I am still trying to learn 6 years later. I suggest a series of evening or weekend workshops throughout the year to be made available to students.”
 3. “Teachers are there to be the ultimate cheerleaders in any decision you decide to make, but I wished they were better at encouraging students actively to suggest life tracks they saw best fit their students. When left to their own devices, some students had a hard time interpreting how their education was going to translate effectively into a career, so I wish teachers were able to be more concerned about the student's future rather than just how they performed at the school.”
 4. “In my post-collegiate life, I'd say the biggest gap in Skidmore's environment is preparation for the real world. Practical applications for my classes in the real world could be more readily used.”
 5. “Skidmore’s only shortcoming is in its lack of ‘real world’ preparation. A few 1 credit courses on business etiquette, resume writing, and salary negotiation would have gone a long way to helping me find a job outside academia.”
 6. “As a liberal arts major (English and French) I would have appreciated more opportunities to take courses or participate in internships that would prepare me for a related career.”
 7. “The one resource I missed from my Skidmore education was a dose of practical financial and career knowledge integrated into curricula. While I believe strongly in a liberal arts approach to higher education, I think in today's hyper-competitive and oversaturated job climate (which most graduates enter with substantial debt), it is vital that some of this information be passed down in a structured classroom environment. While a career center is an important resource, it is equally important to get some of this information from professionals in the applicable field, whether that takes the form of guest workshops or the professors themselves.”
 8. “After leaving Skidmore I felt thrust into adulthood with little preparation, no idea what career my courses were meant to prepare me for and no idea how to budget or clean my house.”
 9. “My one criticism is that I was ill prepared to enter the work world. Skidmore is an idealistic bubble; and I didn't even know that my current career existed!”
- ii. *Diversity:* Within this area a handful of graduates reported that Skidmore is not diverse enough. Others suggested that Skidmore needed to focus on more than just the numbers related to

diversity and address the difficulty of integrating (especially for international students). Last, some felt that Skidmore lacked “intellectual diversity” specifically related to “political ideologies.”

1. “I would like to see Skidmore emphasize diversity and inclusion initiatives outside of just trying to “diversify” the population. I would love it if Skidmore made diversity and inclusion education a priority. Maybe as some kind of required first-year seminar or workshop.”
 2. “I was rarely if ever in a class with someone I disagreed with socially or politically (including the professor). This left me with little belief in, and understanding of, different perspectives.”
 3. “The discourse level at Skidmore has always been very high. I experienced a unique depth to student conversations around social and political issues. However there is a bit of a self-selection to the fact that Skidmore is also a part of a liberal culture. I found that conservative values were rarely given the chance to see open discussion and debate, as the pervasive norm was that every person held progressive points of view. I would have benefited from having more of this exposure and from having nurtured experiences in approaching ‘the other side’ personally and professionally.”
- iii. *Lack of Challenge:* A handful of graduates reported feeling that “academic rigor fell short.”
1. “I can’t really remember feeling especially challenged or having my assumptions broken down often by professors. I can point to one class that really shook up my worldview and challenged me to think more deeply and critically. I wish faculty pushed students harder and expected more of us.”
 2. “The least impactful experiences I had at Skidmore were in the classroom. I loved many of my professors and thought they were ‘cool’ but I was rarely if ever challenged to think more critically about my point of view or to back it up with evidence.”
 3. “I think we learned a lot about problems and societal challenges but were not pushed as hard to step up and be a leader in tackling these issues.”
- iv. *Other:* A few graduates commented on the high cost of a Skidmore education. “Education was great, people were amazing. Cost was far too high.” A few also commented on the desire for more quantitative/computer/statistics/data work and the value of those concepts even for majors outside of those areas. “The only suggestion I would have is that more quantitative work should be required, not doing more statistics is a regret I have.”

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