

# WESTMONT COLLEGE'S ALUMNI SURVEYS, 2015

**Summary.** Westmont College conducted two alumni surveys in the spring of 2015: the *Recent Alumni Survey* and the *Westmont Attachment Survey*. Both surveys covered important issues for the College, including alumni satisfaction with their Westmont education, relationships with faculty and staff, and preparation for graduate school and/or future careers. There were several encouraging findings:

- 95 percent of alums were satisfied or very satisfied with their Westmont education.
- 51 percent of alums either hold an advanced degree or are currently working on one.
- 81 percent of alums felt their Westmont education prepared them for graduate school; 73 percent felt it prepared for their future careers.
- Westmont College alumni rated their professors much higher than the national average. Westmont alums were more likely to say that their professors made learning exciting (Westmont = 82 percent; National Avg., = 63 percent), cared about them as people (Westmont = 67 percent; National Avg., = 27 percent), and encouraged them to pursue their dreams (Westmont = 48 percent; National Avg., = 22 percent).

We also asked alumni to suggest areas where Westmont College could improve. The most common suggestions were that Westmont could do a better job helping students “launch” into their careers (26 percent) and that the College should work to increase diversity on campus (16 percent). We have found these and other comments from our alumni quite helpful in planning for the future of Westmont College.

**Methodology.** The two Westmont alumni surveys—the *Recent Alumni Survey* and the *Westmont Attachment Survey*— were administered in March and April of 2015 (see questionnaires in Appendices A and B). Both surveys were conducted in similar fashion. An email invitation was sent to Westmont alumni using contact information from the Alumni Office. Interested alums could then respond to questions asked in Lime Survey, a web-based survey instrument. Both surveys were voluntary, anonymous, and respondents were not compensated for their participation. The results were then analyzed by Political Science Professor Tom Knecht ([tknecht@westmont.edu](mailto:tknecht@westmont.edu)).

There are, however, several important differences between the *Recent Alumni Survey* and the *Westmont Attachment Survey* surveys. First, the target populations are different. The *Recent Alumni Survey* was only sent to graduates from the past decade (n=548), while the *Westmont Attachment Survey* was sent to all alumni (n=739). Second, each survey served a different purpose. The *Recent Alumni Survey* focused on how well Westmont College prepared its newly-minted graduates for life after college. This survey also included several demographic questions, which allows us to compare the experience alumni by race, gender, and year of graduation. By contrast, the purpose of the *Westmont Attachment Survey* is to compare the experience of Westmont alums to a nationwide average. The 2014 Gallup-Purdue Report, “[Great Jobs, Great Lives.](#)” explored the factors that led some individuals to flourish in college and in their career. That study found that “graduates who felt ‘supported’ during their time in college are six times

more likely to be emotionally attached to their alma mater.”<sup>1</sup> The *Westmont Attachment Survey* replicates several questions from the Gallup-Purdue study to see if Westmont alumni felt more or less supported than students from other colleges and universities.

It is important to note some threats to validity in both the *Recent Alumni* and the *Westmont Attachment* surveys. Web-based surveys are typically plagued by low response rates, and our 29 percent rate, while consistent with national averages, is certainly less than optimal. A low response rate then raises the possibility of response bias (i.e., the opinions of survey respondents are significantly different from the opinions of survey non-respondents). The most likely response bias in our two surveys is that those alumni who feel strongly about Westmont College—either positively or negatively—are more likely to respond to the survey, thereby skewing the results.<sup>2</sup> Finally, it is possible that asking different questions, or asking similar questions in a different way, could produce different results. Although it is important identify threats to validity and to think about how they might affect results, it is also important to point out that these are threats common to *all* surveys and there is little reason to expect our survey is particularly susceptible. With these caveats, let’s now turn to the results.

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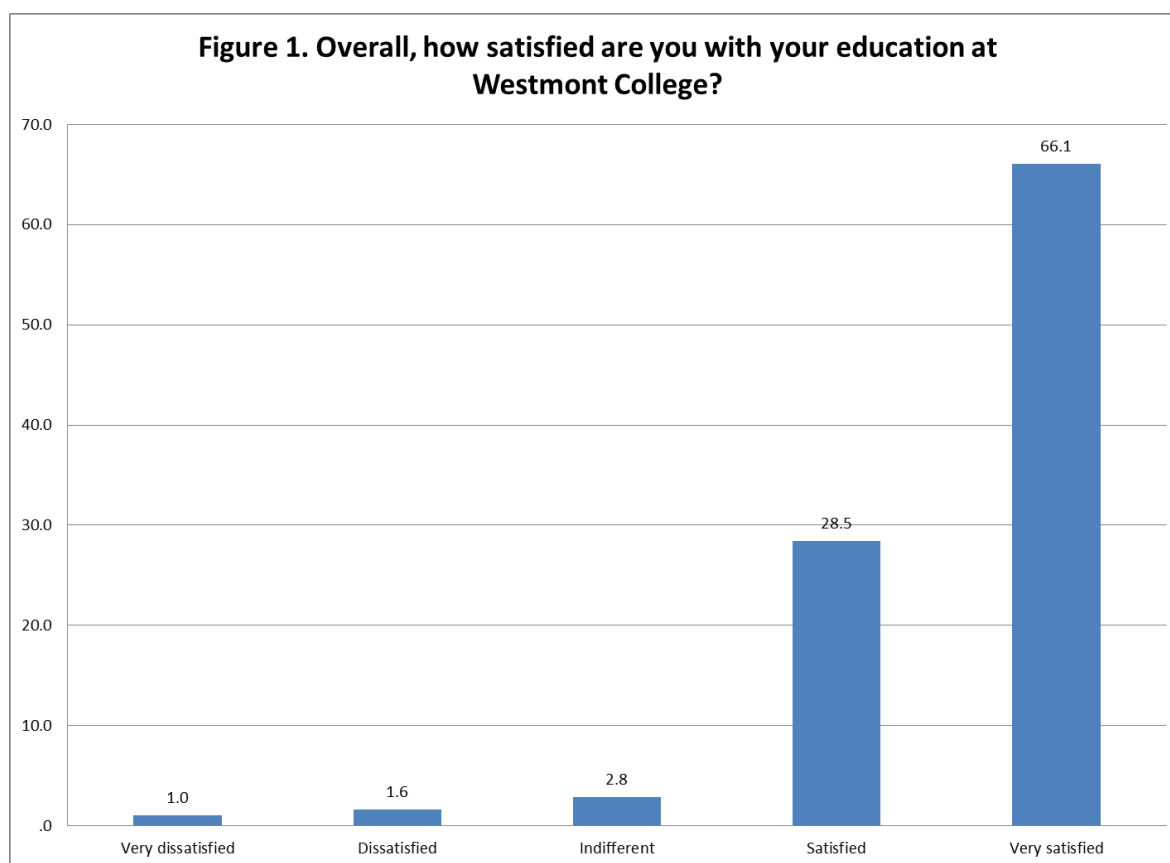
<sup>1</sup> “Great Jobs, Great Lives: A Study of More than 30,000 College Graduates Across the U.S.” The 2014 Gallup-Purdue Index Report, p. 7. <http://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/galluppurdueindex-report-2014.pdf>. Accessed April 29, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> This may be especially true since extremely dissatisfied alumni may have already asked to be removed from our alumni contact list, leaving a more supportive population in the contact list.

## The Recent Alumni Survey, 2015.

The *Recent Alumni Survey* polled Westmont alumni from the classes of 2004 to 2014. This survey is particularly interested in how alumni viewed their “launch” from Westmont into their careers/graduate studies and what the College can do to improve that experience. Of the 548 alumni who responded to the survey, 67 percent are female, 84 percent are white, and 44 percent graduated from Westmont within the past five years. We compared responses by these demographic categories and found, with one exception discussed below, that there were no significant differences in the way different groups answered the questions.

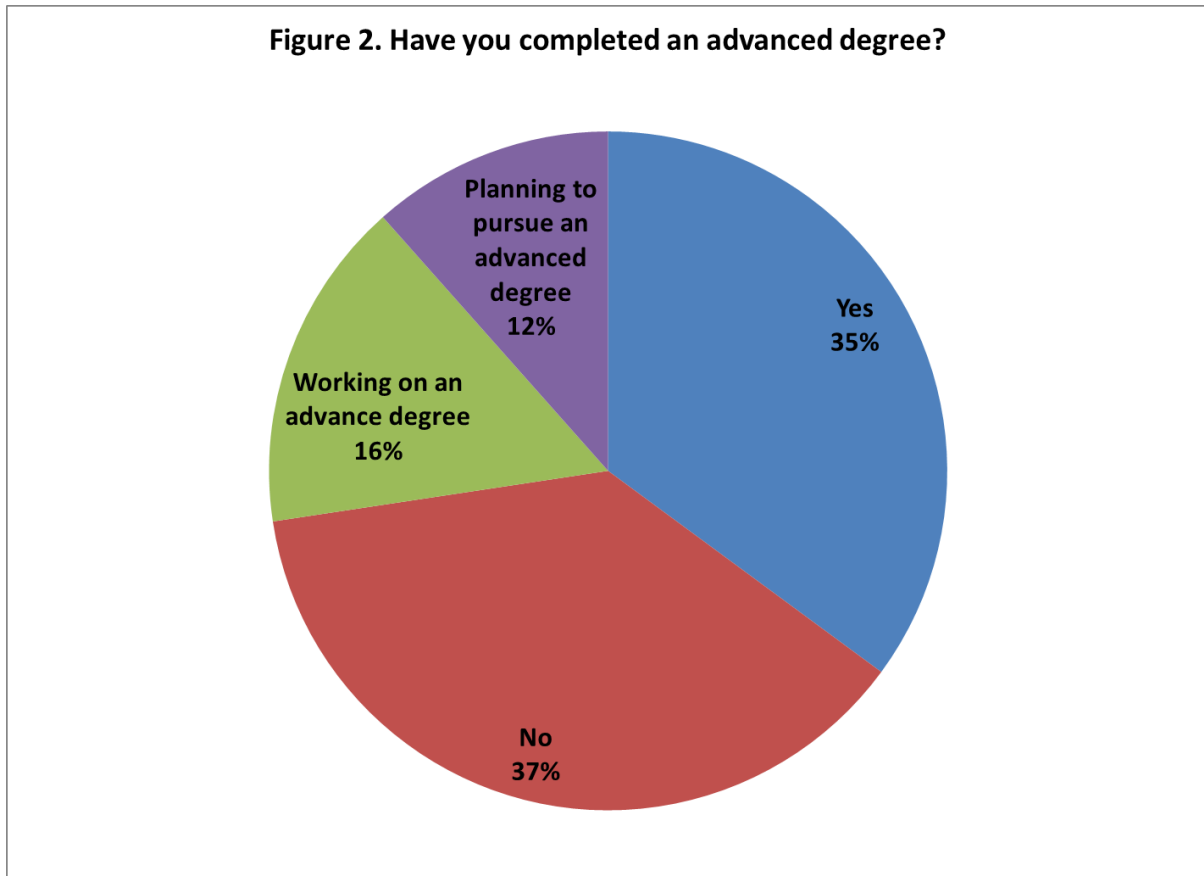
We first asked recent alumni how satisfied they were with their education at Westmont College. Figure 1 shows a strong majority (66 percent) of alumni are very satisfied with their Westmont education, while very few (3 percent) are either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.<sup>3</sup>



We then asked about graduate school. Figure 2 shows that 35 percent of alumni hold an advance degree (e.g., a Masters, J.D. PhD), 16 percent are currently working on one, and 12 percent are planning to earn an advance degree in the future. As one might imagine, those at least five years out of their Westmont graduation were more than twice as likely to hold an advance degree than

<sup>3</sup> There is no significant difference in satisfaction rates among various demographic groups.

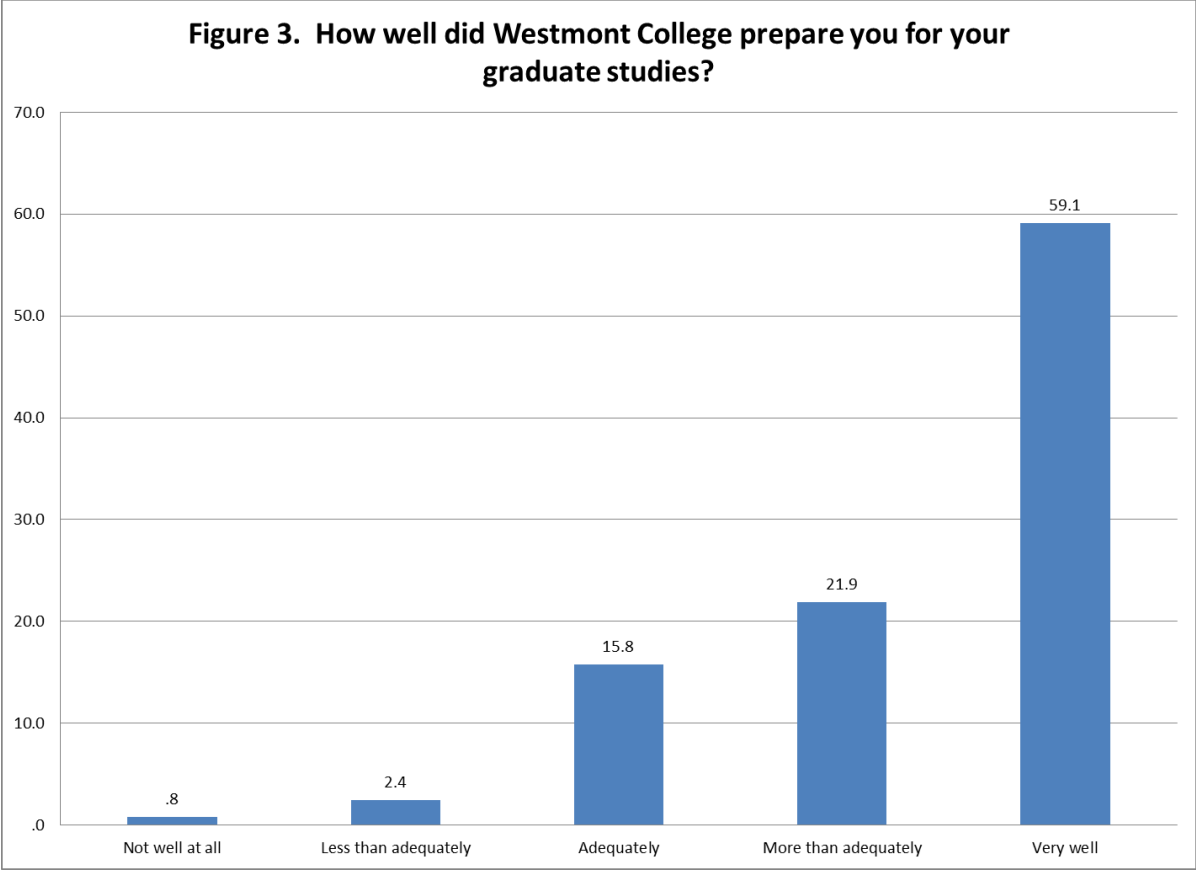
their younger counterparts (48 percent vs. 20 percent). Gender and race, by contrast, had no significant effect on earning an advanced degree.



We then asked alums who either completed their advanced degree or are currently working on one how well Westmont prepared them for graduate school. The results in Figure 3 show that 59 percent felt of alums felt that Westmont prepared them very well, while another 22 percent felt more than adequately prepared.<sup>4</sup>

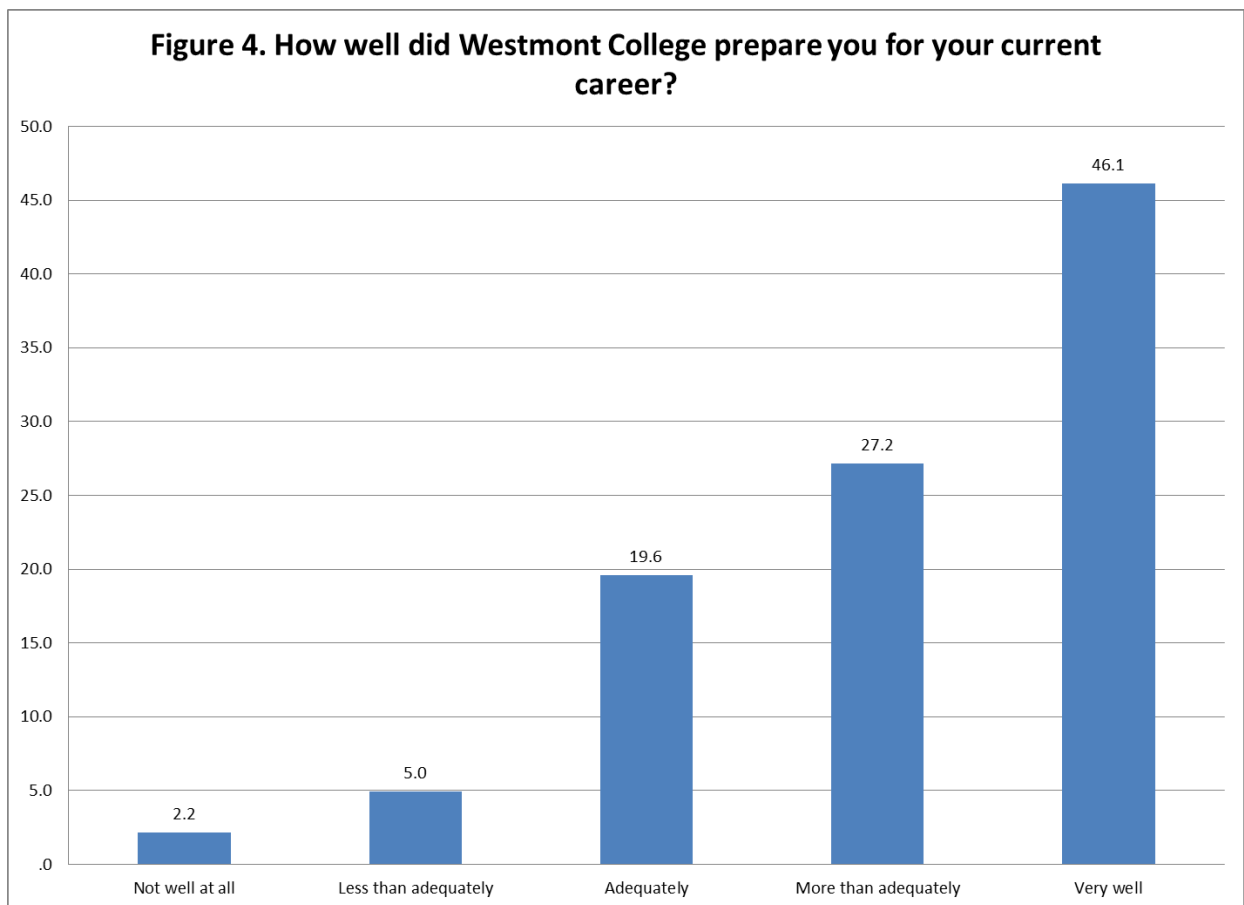
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<sup>4</sup> There is no significant difference in satisfaction rates among various demographic groups.



Alumni were also asked about their current occupation. Education was the most popular field for our alums (14 percent), followed by jobs in the high-tech industry (12 percent), and management positions (11 percent). Westmont faculty and staff frequently are asked: “What do you do with a liberal arts education?” Looking at wonderful diversity of jobs held by Westmont alumni, perhaps the more relevant question is: “What *can't* you do with a liberal arts education?” Many of our graduates go to hold, what one might consider, conventional jobs, such as doctors, lawyers, pastors, or teachers. But our alumni have also become linguistic consultants, movie producers, equine veterinarians, golf professionals, and sailors. Perusing the list of fascinating jobs held by Westmont alumni hold reinforces our belief that a liberal arts education broadens the horizon of opportunities.

We then asked alumni how well Westmont College prepared them for their current career. Figure 4 shows that over 73 percent of alumni thought that Westmont prepared them very well (46 percent) or more than adequately (27 percent) for their careers. We do note, however, that comparatively fewer alumni gave us the highest rating on career preparation (very well = 46 percent), than they did on preparation for graduate school (very well = 59 percent), or overall satisfaction with their education at Westmont College (very satisfied = 66 percent). As we discuss below, many alumni feel that Westmont College could do a better job helping them prepare for and navigate the job market. Westmont is committed to responding to this concern and ensuring that our alumni have the appropriate skills and resources to compete in today’s economy.



The survey also gave alumni the opportunity to write what they thought Westmont was doing well and what they thought Westmont could improve upon. We went through each of these comments and classified them by theme.<sup>5</sup>

Alumni were first asked: “What do you believe are the major strengths of Westmont College?” In these open-ended responses, 25 percent of alumni discussed the Westmont faculty as an asset to the College. Here are a few quotes:

- “Incredible faculty that make themselves available to chat after class, during lunch, during office hours, and even invite you into their lives.”
- “Teachers who are believers provide students with role models of people who live out their faith in their occupation.”
- “The faculty and their care for students is the biggest strength of Westmont. Not only does Westmont have amazing faculty, but their willingness to help students grow as people makes them invaluable.”

Westmont’s academic rigor and liberal arts tradition were also identified by alumni as major strengths (22 percent).

<sup>5</sup> Thanks to Economics and Business major Megan Litschewski for her outstanding work coding these responses!

- “Westmont teaches you how to think critically and solve problems in every aspect of their education. It challenges students to not merely believe but to be intellectually honest in both faith and life.”
- “The liberal arts and well-rounded education. As a software engineer I think this was even more evident, with all the writing, reading, philosophy, history, etc. required, but which has helped me immensely in communicating and just taking on all the tasks in my career that are not programming-related.”
- “Liberal arts education - exposure to a variety of fields of study rather than only obtaining experience in one or two fields of interest. This has benefited me as a person, giving me a broader foundation of knowledge and well-rounding academic understanding, as well as in the search for jobs.”

Westmont alumni also talked about the sense of community that Westmont provides (20 percent).

- “A strong community. The ability to get to know professors personally. The ability to discuss faith in non-traditional settings (ex. psychology or English courses). The small student population is conducive to getting extra attention/education from professors.”
- “Strong community environment and emphasis upon intellectual curiosity and learning.”
- “Westmont has done a great job creating an environment for students to be challenged and built up in community.”

In addition to these themes, alumni also noted as strengths Westmont’s Christian focus (14 percent), small class sizes (12 percent), and study abroad opportunities (5 percent).

Although it is gratifying to hear positive comments from alumni, it is perhaps more important to listen to ways in which Westmont could improve. Again, we looked for particular themes among alumni responses. The top suggestion (26 percent) was to strengthen the professional development of our students and alumni. Consider a few quotes:

- “I think more of an emphasis should have been made on the importance of internships, creating networks and reaching out to people for informational interviews. I think I sort of did that on an ad-hoc basis but had I had more structure and requirements, I would have grumbled, but I would have appreciated it and felt more prepared when I left college. Even hosting informational networking trips to LA, DC or other places outside of Santa Barbara would really allow the student body to broaden their scope of possibilities and know the steps they should be taking well before graduation.”
- “Westmont needs to better prepare students for life after college through more integration of career skills into classes, a stronger focus on work-related learning like internships, entrepreneurship, and side projects. Also, some basic competences in products that many job functions use like excel, adobe suite, data analysis, HTML, etc...”
- “As someone who wants to hire Westmont students, I find it a surprisingly fractured process. Everyone in town wants Westmont students. Job spot is an advance over a book of printed papers in the library, but it still doesn't quite meet the need. In this small town, the transition from college to job needs more attention from Westmont on a personal level. I couldn't understand why my business professors didn't reach out to local businesses to get their students involved. I think you would be amazed what would happen if you hired one person whose sole job description was to liaison between local

industry and Westmont juniors/seniors. The academics at Westmont are not lacking, the application, however, is.”

Although a number of alumni identified “community” as a strength of Westmont College, several others (16 percent) thought it a weakness. Several alumni lamented a lack of racial, ideological, or sexual diversity on campus. Consider the following:

- “I felt boxed-in and generally unaccepted, or accepted as a token oddity, as a woman and as an ethnic minority during my time at Westmont. Though Westmont has made great strides in moving to embrace students of color, the general ignorance of the majority of the student body makes for an isolating environment.”
- “Inclusivity and openness to students from different backgrounds, especially in regards to sexual orientation, gender identity, racial, and religious diversity.”
- “[More] diversity of student body, staff and political leanings.”

Finally, while Westmont’s academic reputation and focus on the liberal arts was seen by many alumni as a strength, other alumni (16 percent) saw room for improvement in these areas.

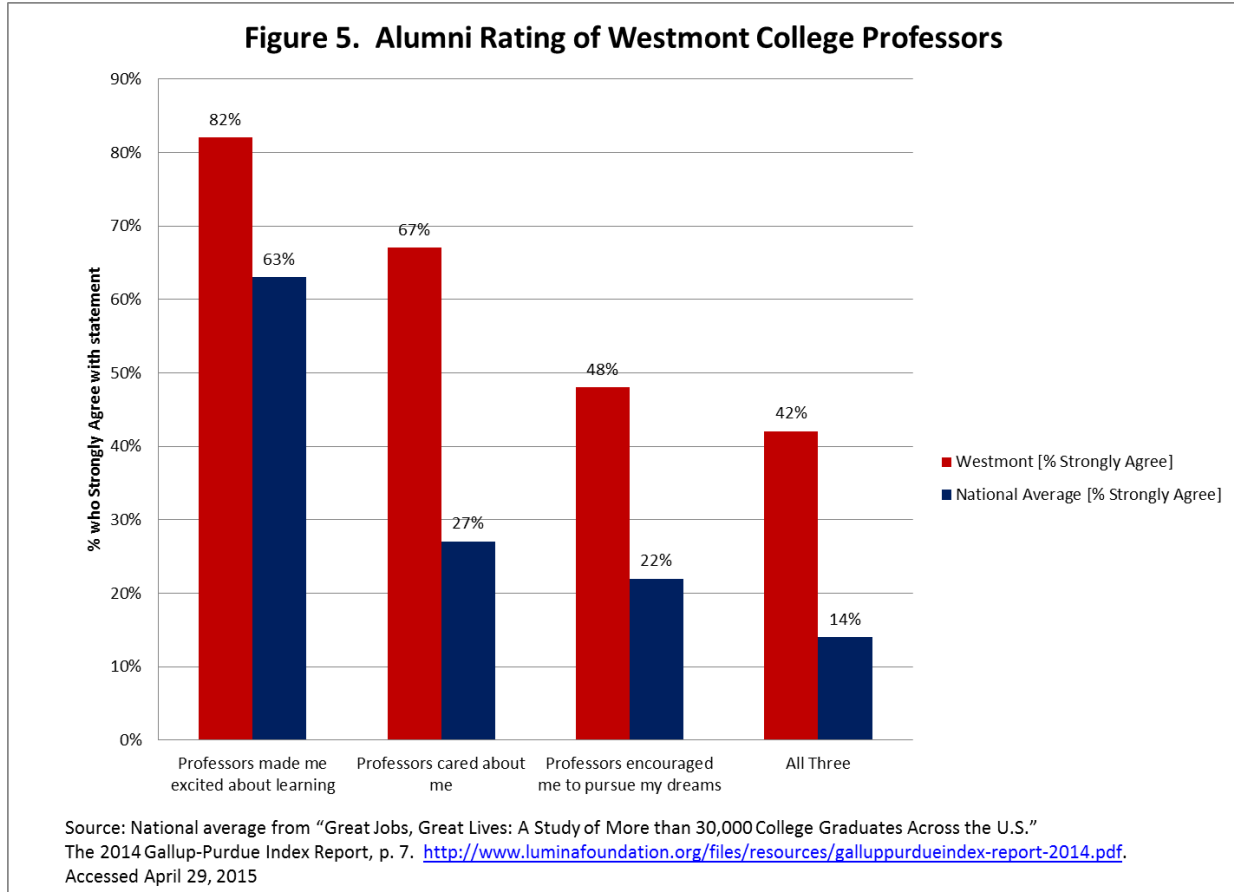
- “More academically rigorous. There is no consistency across the departments.”
- “Slight increase in academic rigor. Slight.”
- “I wish some of Westmont's classes focused more on the applicable versus theoretical, especially in the upper division of our major courses. I feel that I would have been extremely prepared for graduate school, but I chose to enter the workforce instead. Occasionally I feel like I know a lot about the theoretical aspects of my job, but occasionally struggle in knowing exactly how to technically apply it in a real-world scenario.”



## The Westmont Attachment Survey, 2015

**Overview.** The purpose of the *Westmont Attachment Survey* is to explore whether alums felt supported by Westmont during their undergraduate years. The 2014 Gallup-Purdue Report, “[Great Jobs, Great Lives.](#)” examined the factors that led some individuals to flourish in college and in their career. The study found that “graduates who felt ‘supported’ during their time in college are six times more likely to be emotionally attached to their alma mater.”<sup>6</sup> The *Westmont Attachment Survey* replicates several questions from the Gallup-Purdue study to compare the experience of 720 Westmont alumni with nearly 30,000 alumni across the United States.

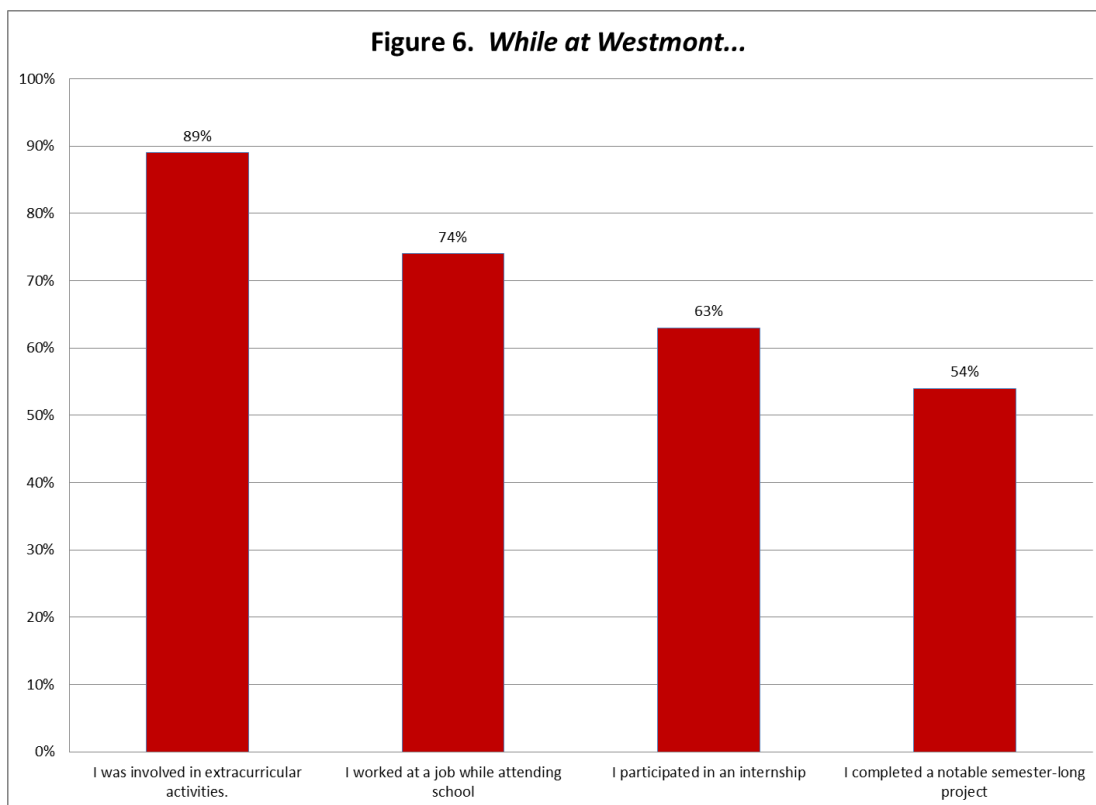
Westmont alumni were first asked to respond to three statements about their professors on a scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” The Gallup-Purdue poll asked the same questions, which facilitates a direct comparison. Figure 5 shows our alumni hold Westmont faculty in high regard. Compared to the national average, Westmont alums



<sup>6</sup> “Great Jobs, Great Lives: A Study of More than 30,000 College Graduates Across the U.S.” The 2014 Gallup-Purdue Index Report, p. 7. <http://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/galluppurdueindex-report-2014.pdf>. Accessed April 29, 2015.

were 19 percent more likely to say their professors made them excited about learning; 40 percent more likely to think their professors cared about them as a person; and 26 percent more likely to say their professors encouraged them to pursue their dreams. Moreover, 42 percent of Westmont alumni “strongly agreed” with *all* three statements about their professors, compared to just 14 percent of alumni nationwide. In short, we are gratified that alumni recognize and appreciate the Westmont faculty’s commitment to undergraduate education.

The Gallup-Purdue poll found that certain college learning experiences—holding an internship, completing a notable semester-long project, being engaged in extracurricular activities—better prepared graduates for life after college. A large majority of Westmont alumni noted their involvement in these types of experiential or “deep learning” activities. Figure 6 shows that 89 percent of alums were involved in extracurricular activities, 74 percent worked at a job while attending school, 63 percent held an internship, and 54 percent completed a notable semester-long project. In sum, a strong majority of Westmont students engage in the high-value, high-impact types of learning that prepare graduates for their future careers.

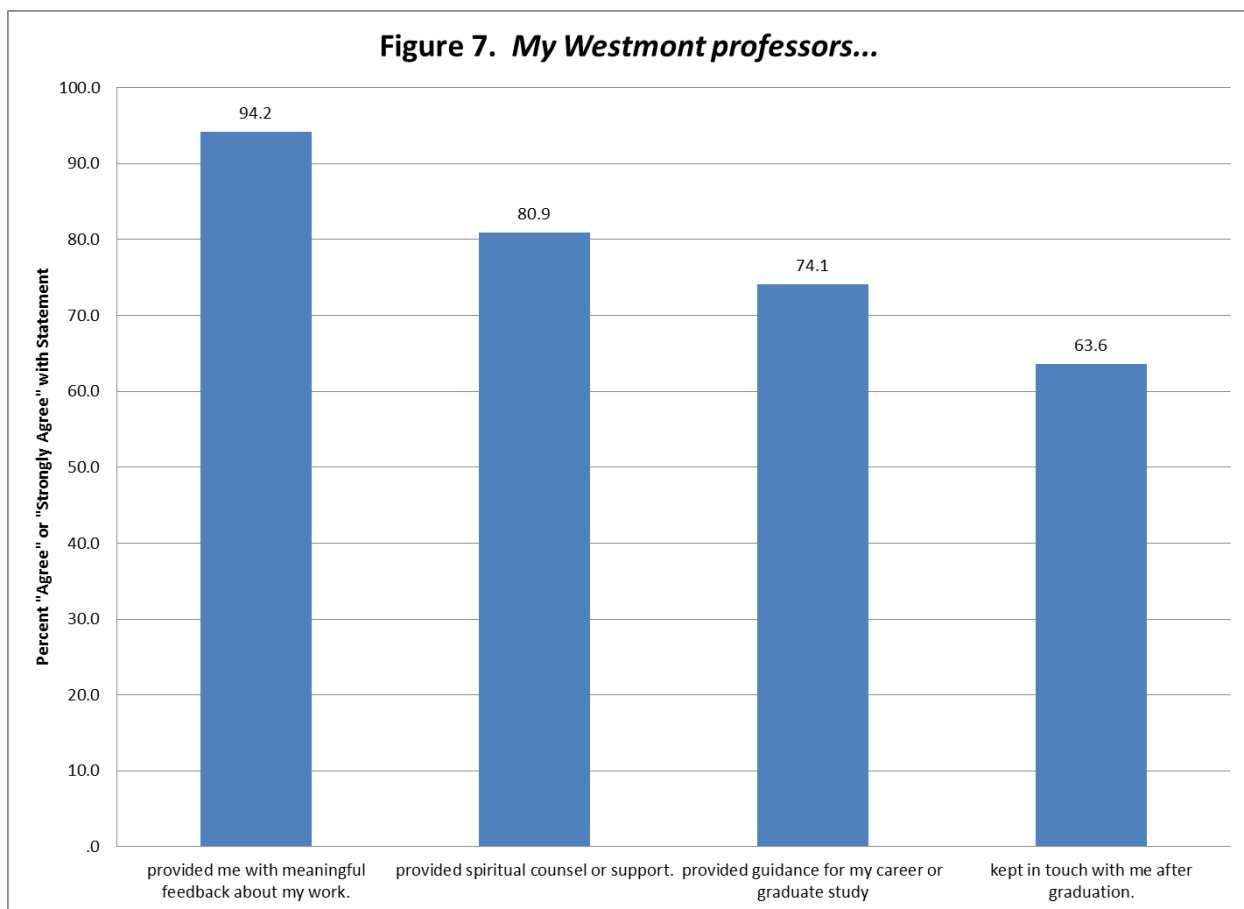


It is important to note that a direct comparison between Westmont alumni and the results found in the Gallup-Purdue study is difficult, if not impossible, given different question wording and different response categories between the two surveys.<sup>7</sup> With this important caveat in mind, the

<sup>7</sup> Consider the problem of response categories. The Gallup-Purdue study asked alumni to respond to statements on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” Our study, by contrast, only gives respondents the option to say “yes” or “no.” There is also the problem of question wording. The Gallup-Purdue survey asks for responses to the statements “I was *extremely* active in extracurricular activities *and organizations*

Gallup-Purdue study found that 32 percent of alumni nationwide “strongly agreed” that worked on a semester-long project while in college; 29 percent “strongly agreed” that they had an internship or job that allowed them to apply classroom material; and 20 percent “strongly agreed” that they were extremely active in extracurricular activities and organizations while attending college.<sup>8</sup>

We then asked alumni several questions about Westmont College support not featured in the Gallup-Purdue poll. Figure 7 again shows that a strong majority of alums felt supported during their time at Westmont. Looking at the percentage of alumni who “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with each statement, we see that 94 percent felt their professors gave meaningful feedback about their work; 81 percent had a professor provide spiritual support; 74 percent received guidance about their future career; and 64 percent kept in touch with a professor after graduation.



while attending [College]” and “I had an internship or job that *allowed me to apply what I was learning in the classroom.*” Our survey asks alums to respond to similar statements, but without the italicized words or phrases. The upshot is that there is enough difference between the two surveys that a direct comparison is inadvisable.

<sup>8</sup> “Great Jobs, Great Lives,” p. 10

*Summary.* The Gallup-Purdue study showed that the odds that an individual feels engaged at work is doubled if that person felt engaged at college.<sup>9</sup> Our *Attachment* survey was designed to see the extent to which our alumni felt engaged and supported at Westmont College. We are gratified to see that, by and large, students felt a connection with faculty and felt supported by the College. We are also pleased that a vast majority of Westmont students participated in high-impact, experiential educational activities that are so important to creating engaged citizens and life-long learners.

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<sup>9</sup> “Great Jobs, Great Lives: A Study of More than 30,000 College Graduates Across the U.S.” The 2014 Gallup-Purdue Index Report, p. 10. <http://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/galluppurdueindex-report-2014.pdf>. Accessed April 29, 2015.

## Appendix A: Recent Alumni Survey Codebook

### Gender

1. Male
2. Female

**Year. What year did you graduate from Westmont? Please include the full year (e.g., 1995).**

### Race

1. Native American/Alaskan Native
2. Asian
3. Black
4. Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
5. Hispanic/Latino
6. White
7. Decline to state
8. Multiracial
9. Other

**Occp. What is your current occupation?**

**OC\_1** [see [http://www.bls.gov/soc/major\\_groups.htm](http://www.bls.gov/soc/major_groups.htm)]

- 00-0000 All Occupations
- 11-0000 Management Occupations
- 13-0000 Business and Financial Operations Occupations
- 15-0000 Computer and Mathematical Occupations
- 17-0000 Architecture and Engineering Occupations
- 19-0000 Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations
- 21-0000 Community and Social Service Occupations
- 23-0000 Legal Occupations
- 25-0000 Education, Training, and Library Occupations
- 27-0000 Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media Occupations
- 29-0000 Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations
- 31-0000 Healthcare Support Occupations
- 33-0000 Protective Service Occupations
- 35-0000 Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations
- 37-0000 Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Occupations
- 39-0000 Personal Care and Service Occupations
- 41-0000 Sales and Related Occupations

- 43-0000 Office and Administrative Support Occupations
- 45-0000 Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations
- 47-0000 Construction and Extraction Occupations
- 49-0000 Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations
- 51-0000 Production Occupations
- 53-0000 Transportation and Material Moving Occupations

OC\_2 [see [http://www.bls.gov/soc/major\\_groups.htm](http://www.bls.gov/soc/major_groups.htm)]

**Ad\_D. Have you completed an advanced degree (MA, PhD, JD, etc...)?**

1. Yes
2. No
3. I am currently working on an advanced degree
4. I am planning to pursue an advanced degree, but currently do not hold one

**AD\_DE Which degree did you earn?**

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

° Answer was 'Yes' at question '5 [9]' (Have you completed an advanced degree (MA, PhD, JD, etc...)?)

1. Masters
2. Doctorate (e.g., PhD; EdD)
3. Professional degree (JD, MD, DDS, etc)
4. Teaching credential
5. Other

**AD\_DW. Which degree are you working on?**

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

° Answer was 'I am currently working on an advanced degree' at question '5 [9]' (Have you completed an advanced degree (MA, PhD, JD, etc...)?)

1. Masters
2. Doctorate (e.g., PhD; EdD)
3. Professional degree (JD, MD, DDS, etc)
4. Teaching credential
5. Other

**AD\_FUT. Which degree are you planning to pursue?**

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

° Answer was 'I am planning to pursue an advanced degree, but currently do not hold one' at question '5 [9]' (Have you completed an advanced degree (MA, PhD, JD, etc...)?)

1. Masters

2. Doctorate (e.g., PhD; EdD)
3. Professional degree (JD, MD, DDS, etc)
4. Teaching credential
5. Other

**9 [9d]Where did you attend graduate school?**

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

° Answer was 'Yes' at question '5 [9]' (Have you completed an advanced degree (MA, PhD, JD, etc...)?)

Please write your answer here:

**10. Grad\_S. Where do you attend graduate school?**

Open-ended

**11. Grad\_SC. Where are you attending graduate school?**

Open-ended

**12. Prep. How well did Westmont prepare you for your graduate studies?**

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

° Answer was 'Yes' or 'I am currently working on an advanced degree' at question '5 [9]' (Have you completed an advanced degree (MA, PhD, JD, etc...)?)

Please choose only one of the following:

1. Not well at all
  2. Less than adequately
  3. Adequately
  4. More than adequately
  5. Very well
- Satisfaction

**13. Sat\_WC. Overall, how satisfied are you with your education at Westmont College?**

1. Very dissatisfied
2. Dissatisfied
3. Indifferent
4. Satisfied
5. Very satisfied

**14. Car\_WC. How well did Westmont College prepare you for your current career?**

1. Not well at all
2. Less than adequately
3. Adequately
4. More than adequately
5. Very well
9. Not applicable

**15. Stren\_WC. What do you believe are the major strengths of Westmont College?**

**16. Imp\_WC. In what areas do you think Westmont College can improve?**



## Appendix B. Westmont Attachment Survey Codebook

I had one or more professors at Westmont who...

1. ...made me excited about learning.
  - a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Neither agree nor disagree
  - d. Disagree
  - e. Strongly disagree
  
2. ...provided guidance for my career or graduate study.
  - a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Neither agree nor disagree
  - d. Disagree
  - e. Strongly disagree
  
3. ...kept in touch with me after graduation.
  - a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Neither agree nor disagree
  - d. Disagree
  - e. Strongly disagree

Someone at Westmont (faculty or staff)...

4. ...encouraged me to pursue my dreams.
  - a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Neither agree nor disagree
  - d. Disagree
  - e. Strongly disagree
  
5. .... provided spiritual counsel or support.
  - a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Neither agree nor disagree
  - d. Disagree
  - e. Strongly disagree

I felt that my professors at Westmont...

6. ...cared about me as a person.
  - a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree

- c. Neither agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

7. ...provided me with meaningful feedback about my work.
- a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Neither agree nor disagree
  - d. Disagree
  - e. Strongly disagree

While at Westmont, I...

8. ... was involved in extracurricular activities.
- a. Yes
  - b. No
9. ... participated in an internship.
- a. Yes
  - b. No
10. ...worked at a job while attending school
- a. Yes
  - b. No
11. ...completed a notable semester-long project.
- a. Yes
  - b. No