



Executive Summary

Transition from College to Life and Career Survey

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Berea College Office of Institutional Research and Assessment

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Introduction

Alumni members of *Forum 40404* responded in April 2018 to a survey designed to explore their transition experiences after graduating from the College (or leaving before graduation). The purpose of this survey was to obtain feedback that could help the College improve its services to recent graduates and solicit creative ideas for how alumni could assist current Berea College students in making their transitions after graduation.

Forum 40404 is the name given to the group of 227 alumni who currently serve as a volunteer survey panel. The volunteers attended the College spanning over six decades (back to the 1950s). As a way to listen to alumni voices, the staff of the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment is designing brief surveys for the purpose of gaining alumni input. When *Forum 40404* members were asked why they volunteered for the survey panel, the most common reasons were 1) *to give back and stay connected*; 2) *to help current and future students*; and 3) *to be an alumni voice*.

The following is a summary of the results of the Transition from College to Life and Career Survey (101/227 or 44.5% response rate).

Results

The first section of the survey asked respondents: *What did you do immediately after graduating/leaving Berea College?*

The following table summarizes the responses by the decade or time period in which the respondent attended the institution. Two thirds of respondents indicated that they got a job while a third continued their education. Those who marked “Other” typically reported going into the military, completing internships or getting married/starting families.

| What did you do immediately after leaving/graduating Berea College? Check all that apply. | All Respondents (N = 101) | | 1950-1959 & 1960-1969 1970-1979 1980-1989 1990-1999 2000-2009 2010-2016 | | | | | | Did not graduate (N = 8) | | | | | | | |
|---|---------------------------|-------|---|-------|----|-------|----|-------|--------------------------|-------|---|-------|----|-------|---|-------|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | | | | |
| Got a job. | 67 | 66.3% | 13 | 72.2% | 10 | 71.4% | 13 | 76.5% | 8 | 57.1% | 9 | 64.3% | 10 | 62.5% | 4 | 50.0% |
| Continued my education. | 33 | 32.7% | 5 | 27.8% | 4 | 28.6% | 5 | 29.4% | 6 | 42.9% | 5 | 35.7% | 6 | 37.5% | 2 | 25.0% |
| Other, please explain. | 12 | 11.9% | 2 | 11.1% | 1 | 7.1% | 1 | 5.9% | 1 | 7.1% | 2 | 14.3% | 2 | 12.5% | 3 | 37.5% |

Survey respondents were asked: *After you left Berea College, briefly describe what you did in the first couple of years. Followed by: What was your first job after Berea?*

Survey respondents described a wide variety of experiences, mostly about going on to work as teachers, clerks, program directors, farmers, etc., and entering professional schools.

The survey then asked: *Did your first job require a college degree? Please explain.* Overall, nearly 40% said no.

| Did your first job require a college degree? Please explain. | All Respondents (N = 101) | | 1950-1959 & | | | | | | Did not graduate (N = 8) | | | | | | | |
|--|---------------------------|-------|--------------------|-------|--------------------|-------|--------------------|-------|--------------------------|--------------------|---|--------------------|----|--------------------|---|-------|
| | | | 1960-1969 (N = 18) | | 1970-1979 (N = 14) | | 1980-1989 (N = 17) | | | 1990-1999 (N = 14) | | 2000-2009 (N = 14) | | 2010-2016 (N = 16) | | |
| Yes | 59 | 58.4% | 15 | 83.3% | 8 | 57.1% | 11 | 64.7% | 7 | 50.0% | 8 | 57.1% | 5 | 31.3% | 5 | 62.5% |
| No | 40 | 39.6% | 3 | 16.7% | 6 | 42.9% | 6 | 35.3% | 7 | 50.0% | 5 | 35.7% | 10 | 62.5% | 3 | 37.5% |

Respondents were also asked: *When did you start your first job after graduation?*

The largest percentage (40%) started within a month of graduation while another 27% began a job within six months of graduation.

| When did you start your first job after graduation? | All Respondents (N = 101) | | 1950-1959 & | | | | | | Did not graduate (N = 8) | | | | | |
|---|---------------------------|-------|--------------------|-------|--------------------|-------|--------------------|-------|--------------------------|--------------------|---|--------------------|---|--------------------|
| | | | 1960-1969 (N = 18) | | 1970-1979 (N = 14) | | 1980-1989 (N = 17) | | | 1990-1999 (N = 14) | | 2000-2009 (N = 14) | | 2010-2016 (N = 16) |
| Within a month of graduation. | 40 | 39.6% | 8 | 44.4% | 6 | 42.9% | 7 | 41.2% | 6 | 42.9% | 4 | 28.6% | 9 | 56.3% |
| Within six months of graduation. | 27 | 26.7% | 6 | 33.3% | 4 | 28.6% | 6 | 35.3% | 2 | 14.3% | 6 | 42.9% | 3 | 18.8% |
| Within a year of graduation. | 7 | 6.9% | 1 | 5.6% | 1 | 7.1% | 2 | 11.8% | 1 | 7.1% | 0 | 0.0% | 2 | 12.5% |
| Longer than a year after graduation. | 18 | 17.8% | 3 | 16.7% | 3 | 21.4% | 2 | 11.8% | 5 | 35.7% | 4 | 28.6% | 1 | 6.3% |

The next question was: *What type of support did you receive from the College during your transition? How could it have been better?*

Over the decades of graduates and attendees, the most common response was “none” followed by examples of faculty support (recommendations letters, advice, etc.). For more recent graduates, many respondents cited help to pay for graduate exams, clothing allowances, and some use of services aimed at interviewing and resume writing. Examples follow (male responses are in blue type and females are in dark pink):

From recent graduate-- I received no support from the College, other than from specific professors with whom I had developed long-lasting relationships. It would have been useful to understand the job application process a little better, including salary expectations and work responsibilities, as well as a list of alumni who live in whichever city I would find myself in.

The college gave me money for professional clothes. That was nice when I started working in an office.

Grant for GMAT exam/ advice on graduate school application/ advice on resume building and interview prep.

My adviser was great during the transition. She pushed me to take advantage of opportunities. I set up a visit to U of M School of Social Work and an interview with their admissions office and was able to ask for funding from Berea for this trip. My labor supervisors were also very supportive of my transition and helped me review and edit applications and essays.

A recent graduate made a specific suggestion as follows: I think it would have been incredibly helpful if the College implemented a Professional Development course into the core curriculum. While I understand that the core curriculum is often full of other important topics, I think Berea students are particularly in need of this course. Being formally asked to reflect on what you've gained throughout your degree program and labor program is important. Additionally, learning about the process to apply to graduate school and how to conduct informational interviews may be instrumental in the success of many Berea students who do not have family and friends that are able to provide them with this important information. A class within the core would ensure that all students receive this information, regardless of the background or understanding of career development of their faculty members. Ultimately, helping students secure more appropriate first jobs would lead to increased capacity of alumni to financially support the mission of the College and increased recognition of the institution as a whole.

A structured item followed that asked for a rating of preparation for further education and starting a job. The average rating in both cases was near the top of the rating scale (over 4.5 out of 5).

| After leaving/graduating from Berea, how prepared were you for each of the following? | Well prepared (5) | | (4) | | (3) | | (2) | | Not at all prepared (1) | | Not applicable | | Missing | | Mean |
|---|-------------------|------------|-------|------------|-------|------------|-------|------------|-------------------------|------------|----------------|------------|---------|------------|-------------|
| | Count | Percentage | Count | Percentage | Count | Percentage | Count | Percentage | Count | Percentage | Count | Percentage | Count | Percentage | |
| Further education | 61 | 60.4% | 16 | 15.8% | 9 | 8.9% | 2 | 2.0% | 4 | 4.0% | 5 | 5.0% | 4 | 4.0% | 4.63 |
| Your first job | 53 | 52.5% | 18 | 17.8% | 14 | 13.9% | 4 | 4.0% | 2 | 2.0% | 5 | 5.0% | 5 | 5.0% | 4.52 |

The next item on the survey was: Describe how you think Berea College could help alumni make later career changes (after getting one's first job).

The most common responses alluded to creating networking systems followed by the development of continued education through on-line offerings. A few respondents wrote about the value of a liberal arts education. Following is one such thoughtful response from a 1960s graduate.

Even though all students choose a major or a career path--such as teaching--the liberal arts background provided by Berea, coupled with the work ethic obtained through the Labor program, prepares most students to be successful in any endeavor. The College could probably provide advisement upon graduation explaining to new alumni that if that first job isn't satisfactory that they should not be afraid to change course or veer from their chosen field. They should already have acquired the basic skills of success (hard work, completing tasks, initiative, first to arrive, last to leave, HUMILITY) that will make them a valuable employee to any company. If they didn't acquire these traits, the College failed them, or they wasted their time while attending. The

College should encourage as many graduates as possible to work toward eventually working for themselves or owning their own company.

Examples of responses suggesting networking opportunities follow:

Facilitate on line or through social networks a group of graduates who are holding the similar job in other places or who have gone to graduate school first before the job.

At alumni events, both regional and on campus, consider offering a fair, a seminar, a speaker for "2nd jobs," or "Now that you're considering graduate school." Maybe something like that would be helpful.

Encourage networking between alumni through training events and outreach efforts. Berea is and remains near to my heart, but I rarely experienced substantive outreach aimed beyond fundraising. In fact, this effort is the most substantial I can recall in years.

There could be a register developed of alumni in specific professional fields. This could be used to connect students or alumni looking to make a change with fellow Berean mentor already established in the field.

Examples of responses suggesting continuing on-line offerings follow:

If not available, offer courses at night or over the internet.

By offering online opportunities to participate in the further study or additional training through forums and lectures provided by professors or visiting lecturers.

Other types of responses included:

Providing opportunities to gain knowledge of opportunities available (seminar speakers from industry; support for travel to professional meetings; encouraging presentation at professional meetings). Provide courses that lay groundwork for future employment. For example, in chemistry, provide a course in Industrial Chemistry and another in Introduction to Polymer Science.

By describing the careers of other (successful) alumni - through College newsletters, etc. This is the best way!

The last question of the survey asked: *Is there anything that you, as an alumni, could do for students who are looking for work after graduation? If so, please describe what that would be.*

Many graduates who are now retired were generally still willing to provide guidance as illustrated in the following comments:

I have previously coordinated and arranged intern opportunities. However, as a retiree I can provide referral and contact info re: potential employers. In addition, I am also willing to advocate for the needs of new graduates by working closely with the local Alumni Chapter.

I would be willing to mentor a student in business. I had a successful career, business and ended up financially set prior to retirement age. I could help with career advice.

Others offered the following:

I was in Human Resource Management for 20 years. Interviewing skills. Work ethic. Coaching.

Adopt a student has been something I've approached administrators and others with ongoing relationships with students will create a natural helpful alumni student to gain work or grad school opportunities.

I would love to connect with students who may have career aspirations in my field and provide mentoring support, even if remotely/online. This could be as simple as connecting with them on LinkedIn, answering their questions by email and providing suggestions on interviewing and further education. It could possibly be structured to have regular Skype webcam sessions as well.

Respondent 55 - Provide mentoring opportunities. I would be glad to talk regularly with just graduated students and help them make connections in their chosen fields through personal recommendations or advice.

Invite alumni to speak or host a round table for junior and senior majors to learn about what to expect from grad school and what alternative careers are available beyond the traditional career path for the given profession.

I would be more than happy to help any way I could! I can suggest jobs in my area that I know are hiring or give advice on work after college.

Summary

Overall, almost all respondents spoke of their transition from College to life in a positive way. There was a commonly stated belief that the College wasn't expected to provide much in the way of transition services but they were grateful for the assistance they *had* received from faculty, labor supervisors, and staff at the Career Center.

While less than 70% of respondents indicated they had secured a job within six months of graduation, only 60% of respondents reported that their first job required a college degree. The alums/graduates may take these first jobs as they transition to finding more advanced positions.

Most graduates and attendees (about 70%) rated the College very highly (4s and 5s out of 5) for how well it prepared them for further education and for work.

Finally, respondents offered many suggestions for how they could personally be helpful to recent graduates (to find jobs or get accepted into graduate programs) and, by far, the most common suggestion to the College was to create a highly organized, accessible networking system that could match alumni and transitioning students.