

2013 PLS Alumni/ae Survey: Overall Evaluation of the Program

Summary

In the spring 2013, the Program of Liberal Studies conducted its first comprehensive survey of alumni/ae in several decades. The department announced the survey in its annual alumni/ae newsletter (*Programma*), on its social media sites (LinkedIn and Facebook), and via its e-mail list. A total of 676 alumni/ae completed at least part of the online survey, with 596 completing the entire set of questions. (Note: Until the 1980s, PLS was known as the “General Program of Liberal Education” – the original title – or the “General Program of Liberal Studies”. For simplicity’s sake, this report will use only the current name.)

The survey covered three main topics: a retrospective evaluation of the program, postgraduate employment history, and postgraduate education. This report shares results from the first of those topics.

Some core results of the retrospective evaluations include the following:

- 97% of respondents reported that they were Very Satisfied (71%) or Satisfied (26%) with their PLS education. Less than 1% described themselves as Unsatisfied, and no one was Very Unsatisfied.
- 87% said that they would be Very Likely (63%) or Likely (24%) to recommend PLS to current undergraduates. Only 5% stated that they would be Unlikely or Very Unlikely to do so. (The remainder were neutral.)
- When asked if PLS had helped them to find employment, 36% of respondents were neutral, while 46% agreed that it had and about 17% felt that it had not.
- When asked if their PLS education had helped them perform better in their professions, 94% of respondents Agreed (29%) or Strongly Agreed (65%). Likewise, 77% felt their education had helped them advance in their professions.
- Not surprisingly, the majority of alumni/ae felt that PLS had contributed to their personal growth in all categories where we requested assessments, including areas such as “participation in your family” and “participation in your community.” Four areas particularly stood out: 90% of respondents said PLS had made Very Valuable contributions to their intellectual formation and development; 69% reported Very Valuable contributions to self-knowledge; 73% said it had been Very Valuable to

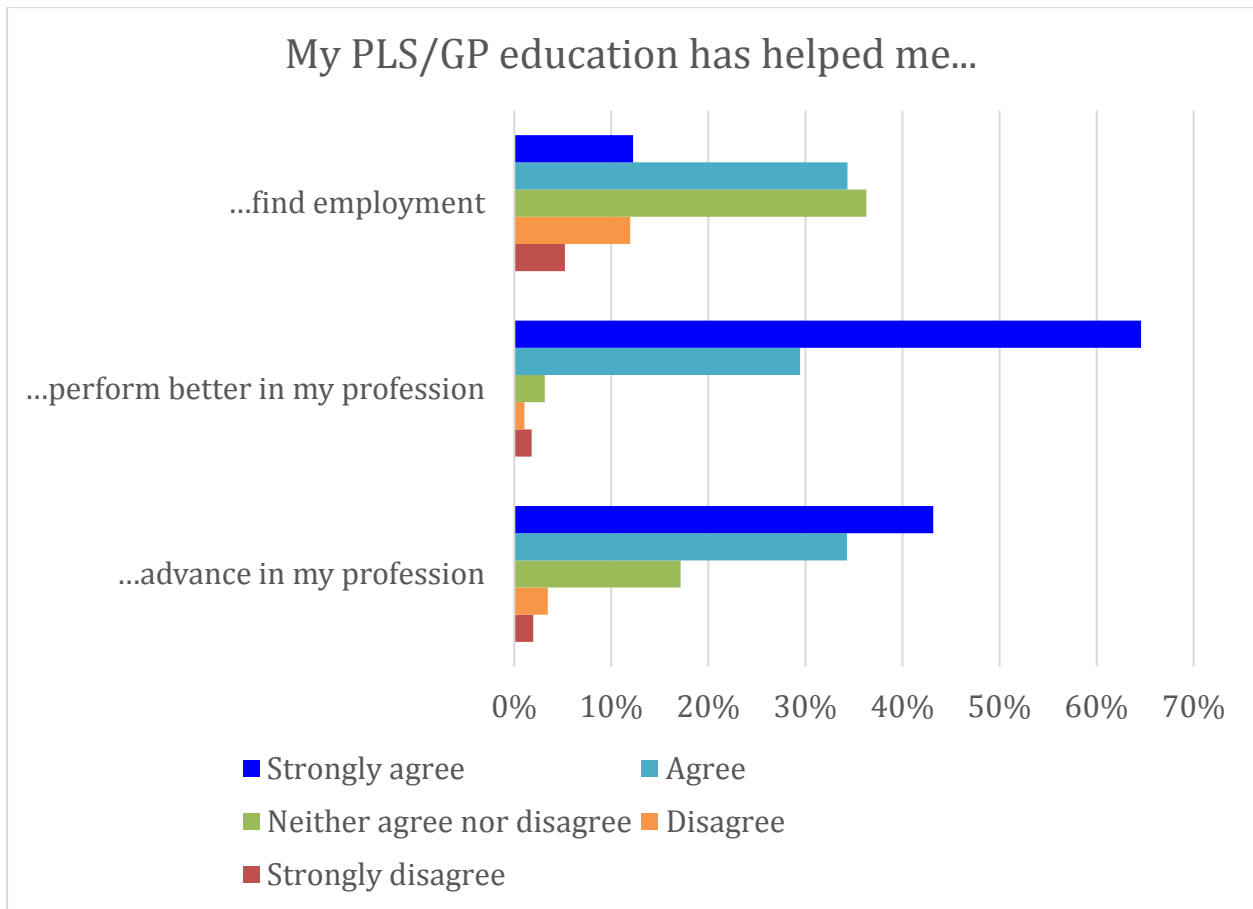
their ability to appreciate literature; and 75% stated that it had been Very Valuable for their commitment and ability to lead an examined life.

- Again, questions about contributions to cognitive development yielded very positive assessments. Roughly 70% or more of respondents stated that PLS had made them Much Stronger in each of the four skills we considered: writing effectively, communicating orally, thinking analytically, and thinking logically. Less than 2% reported no change in these skills, with the remainder reporting moderate or slight improvements.
- 73% of respondents felt the senior thesis / essay was a Very Valuable or Moderately Valuable experience.

Remarkably, PLS alumni/ae generally shared the same view of their experiences in the Program irrespective of when they graduated. Although it is difficult to draw definite conclusions from that convergence, it does suggest a striking degree of continuity in the core of the Program despite the curricular changes that have occurred since 1950. Of course, such continuity should probably not surprise us: the books and authors that remain at the heart of the Program have animated it since the beginning, and they would not be *great* books if they did not continue to speak to one generation after another.

The remainder of this report shares detailed results of alumni/ae views of PLS in relation to three broad areas: Employment, Personal and Intellectual Development, and Cognitive Skills. A fourth section shares respondents' overall satisfaction with their PLS education, and the fifth provides data on variance in responses by year of graduation.

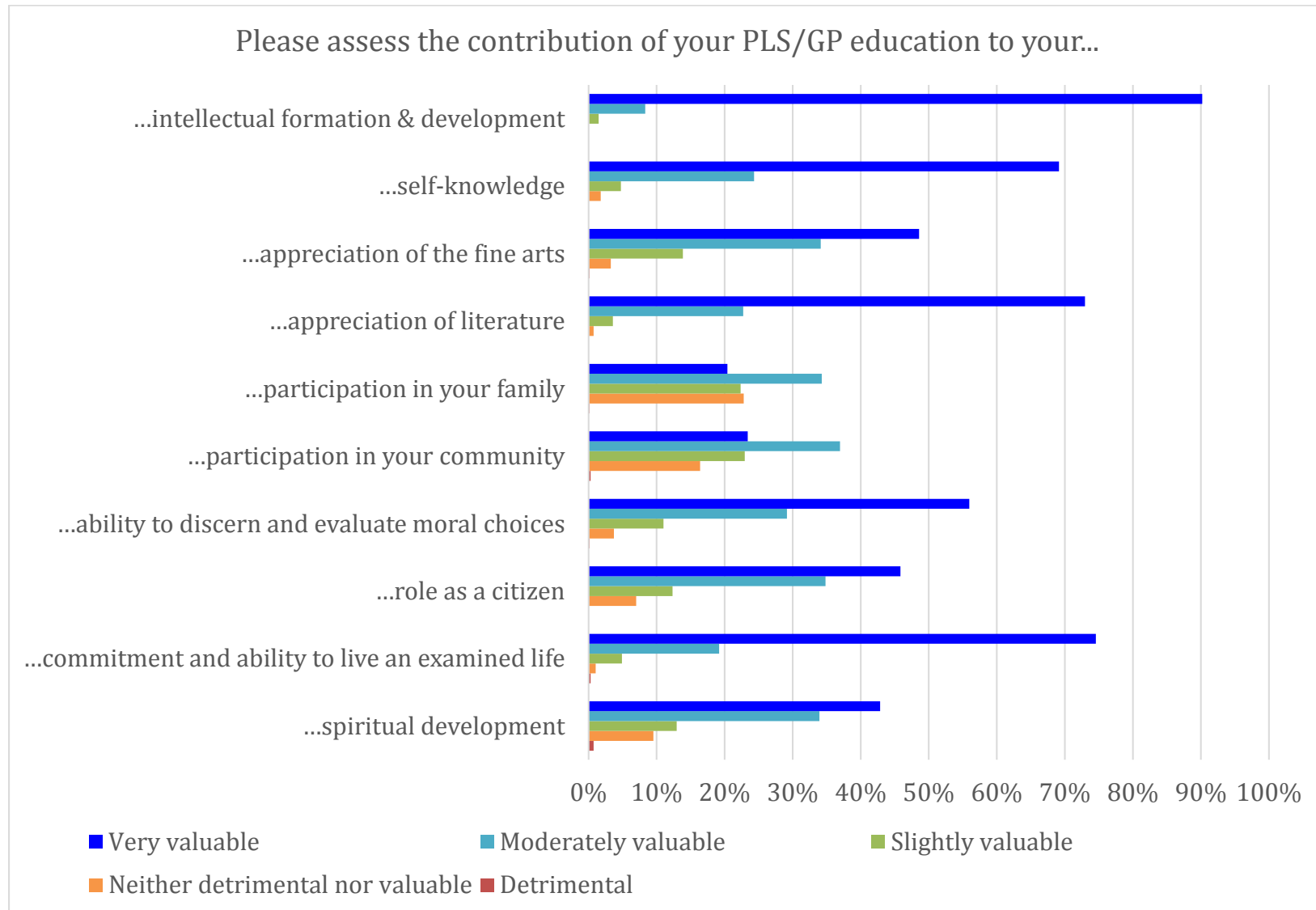
Employment



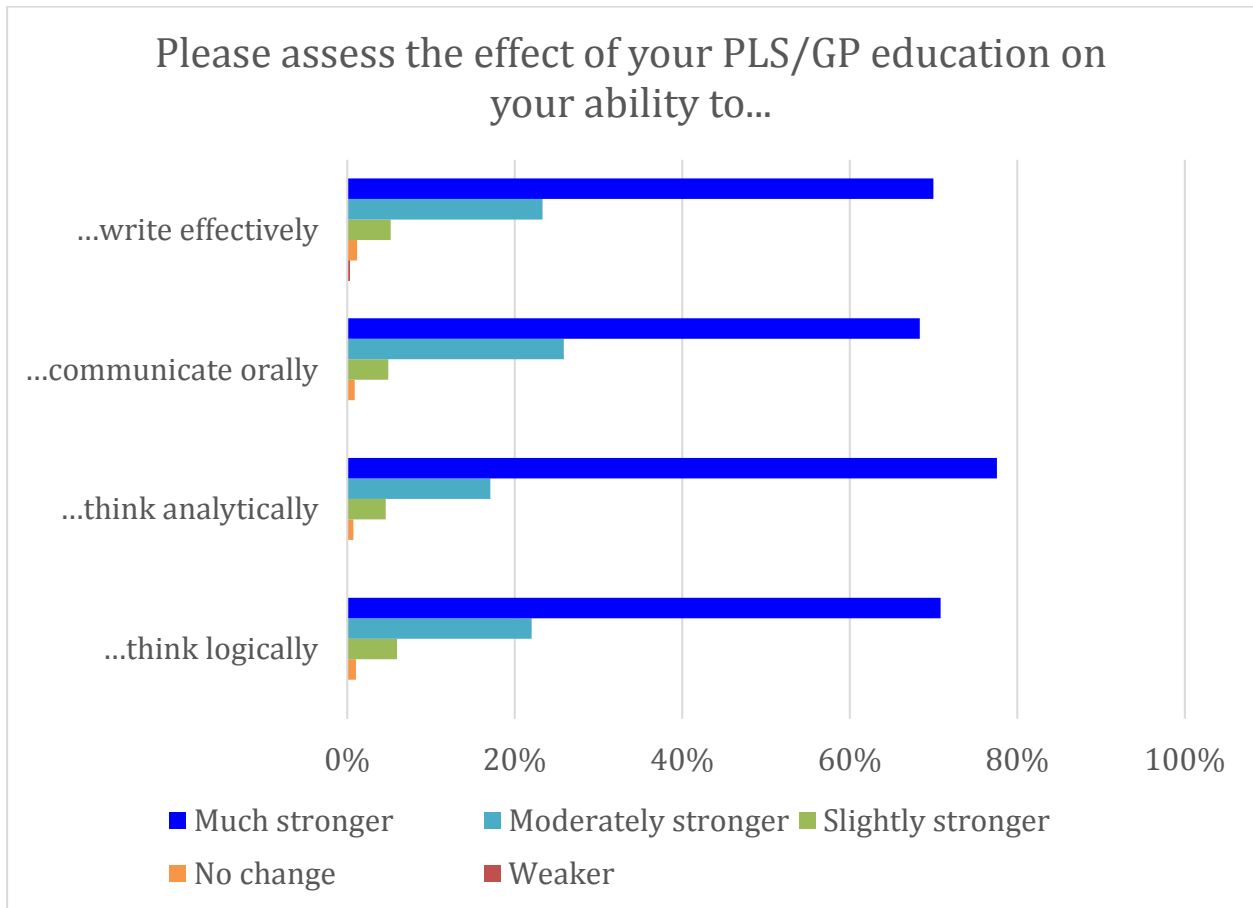
Not surprisingly, PLS alumni/ae were largely neutral or slightly positive about the connection between their PLS education and their initial ability to find a job. After all, “PLS” does not have a direct professional orientation (like Accounting or Marketing) nor is it a widely known disciplinary category like Philosophy or History. Nonetheless, only 2% of alumni/ae described themselves as “Not employed and seeking employment” one year after graduation, results consistent with those reported for the College of Arts & Letters as a whole.

As we would hope and expect, most PLS alumni/ae do believe that their education has helped them perform better in their chosen profession (with roughly 95% agreeing or strongly agreeing). Subsequent questions about employment history confirm that PLS alumni/ae have built successful careers in a wide range of areas, with 86% of currently employed alumni/ae describing themselves as Satisfied (45%) or Very Satisfied (41%) with their current position.

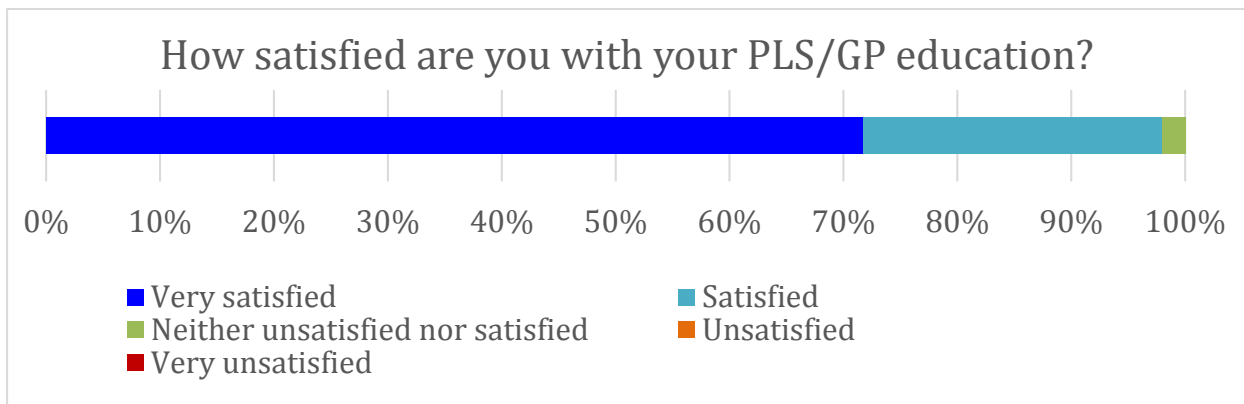
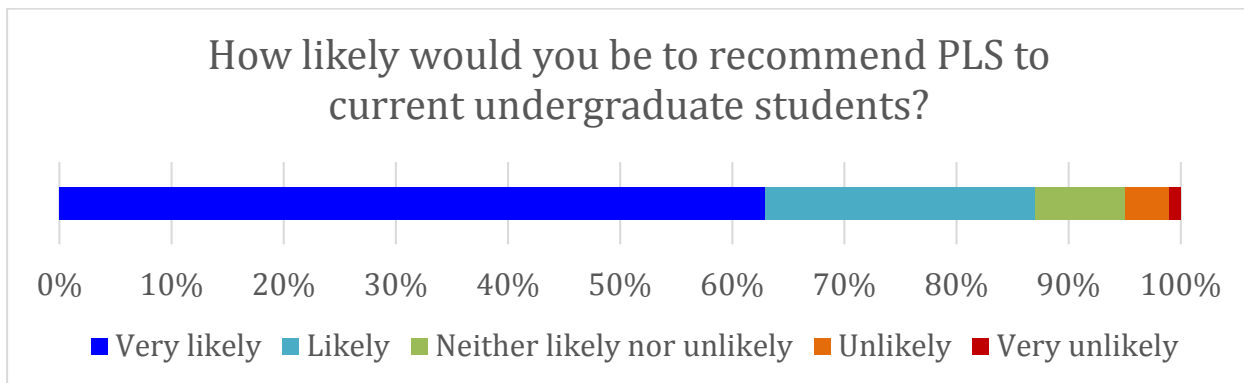
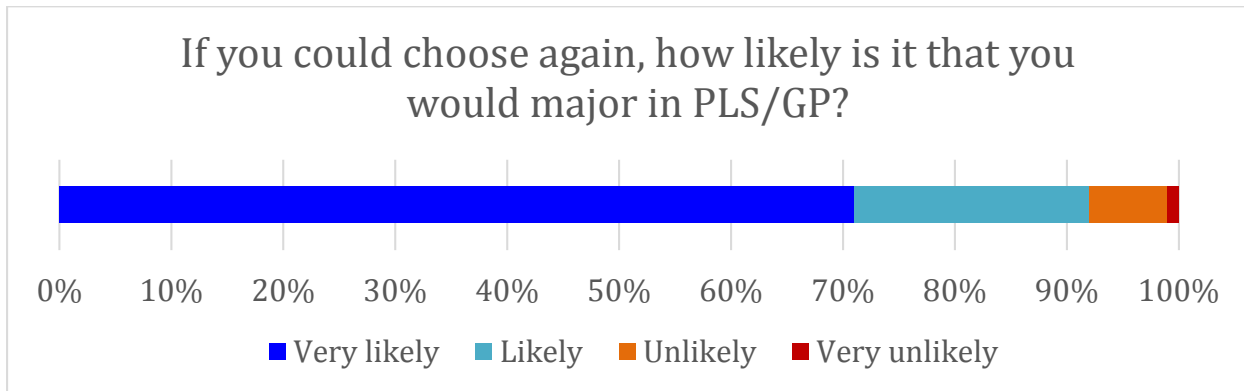
Personal and Intellectual Development



Cognitive Skills



Overall Satisfaction



PLS alumni/ae report high rates of satisfaction with their education (97% are either very satisfied or satisfied), and thus it is no surprise that the overwhelming majority (92%) state that they would be likely or very likely to choose PLS again were they able to restart their college education. A slightly lower percentage (87%) report that they would be likely or very likely to recommend PLS to current undergraduates, while only 5% say they would be unlikely or very unlikely to do so.

Variance in Responses by Year of Graduation

Of the 676 respondents to the survey, 601 provided their year of graduation, thereby allowing us to examine variation in responses based on the date of graduation.

Respondents were grouped into six different categories:

Years since graduation	1 - 5 years	6 - 10 years	11 - 20 years	21 - 30 years	31 - 40 years	41+ years
<i>Number of respondents</i>	82	76	113	125	83	112

As these data show, more recent alumni/ae had higher response rates. That may indicate that recent graduates have a tighter connection to the Program, but it may also simply reflect the accuracy of our alumni/ae database. Since this was an online survey, the most effective recruitment occurred via e-mail, and our e-mail lists are likely to be more accurate for more recent graduates.

The chart on the following page shows the average responses from each of these categories for the full set of quantitative questions about alumni/ae views of PLS. In general, all questions had a five-point scale (with higher numbers being more positive) *except* likeliness “to major in PLS/GP” which had a maximum value of four.

The averages track each other quite closely, with most variation between cohorts probably insignificant in relation to other possible sources of error. A few exceptions may be “ability to appreciate fine arts” (where the oldest cohort tracked substantially below the most recent); “advance in my profession” (where the two most recent cohorts had lower values, perhaps because they have not yet advanced very far!); and “likely to recommend PLS” (where the 31-40 group was slightly lower and the most recent cohort slightly higher). Yet I would be hesitant to attach much weight to any of these differences.

Average Response Values by Years Since Graduation

