Background
The Health Services Administration (HSA) Program at James Madison University (JMU) was officially approved by JMU’s Board of Visitors in 1990 and the program recruited its first students in that year. This new Health Services Administration Program graduated its first class of five students in May of 1991. Established as an undergraduate program within JMU’s Department of Health Sciences, it began with one full-time designated faculty member who served as the Program Coordinator.

The program became an associate member of the Association of University Programs in Health Administration- the national accrediting body for such programs- in 1994 and was advanced to full membership/full certification in 1998. The program has been re-certified in 2002 and 2007. JMU’s Health Services Administration Program is now one of only about 40 fully accredited/fully certified undergraduate programs in the United States and Canada. The program has four full-time program faculty members: Dr. Jon Thompson, Dr. Tony Bopp, Dr. David Cockley and Dr. April Temple.

Over the last several years, the program has grown to an average of 100 students majoring in the concentration and currently graduates an average of 25 students each year. As of September 2001 a total of 218 students have graduated from the program.

Survey Research
Program evaluation is important. To evaluate, to assess needs and to learn how the graduates are doing professionally, the program faculty developed an alumni survey in late 2001. This alumni survey included a cover letter from Dr. Jon Thompson, Program Director, and included four duplexed pages of questions focusing on program and course evaluation, career progress, continuing education, suggestions for program improvement and alumni relations. These questions were in likert-scale and open-ended answer formats.

Response Rate
A total of 218 surveys was sent out to their most recent address as of November 1, 2001. With an enclosed self-addressed envelope, 79 (36%) completed and usable surveys were returned over the next several weeks.

Findings

Respondents
Of the 79 respondents, 54 (68%) were women while 25 (32%) were men. These percentages reflect the composition of women and men in the program.

The age of the respondent ranged from 22 to 41 years. The average age of the respondent was 26 years. Most respondents were graduates from 1997 through 2000. While all of the graduates were sent a survey, few of the original graduates from years 1992 through 1996 responded. Many surveys sent to these earlier graduates were returned to the program as “not deliverable as addressed, unable to forward.”

While the respondents were asked to complete the survey in anonymity wherein identifying information and name were not asked, 39 (50%) respondents identified themselves.

JMU is a popular regional state-supported university in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Approximately seventy percent of all students who attend JMU are residents of Virginia, and most of the remaining thirty percent are residents of the middle-Atlantic states. This was fairly consistent with location of employment after graduation. Forty-two (54%) of the respondents reside in Virginia. Other major residences include Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey New York, Connecticut and Rhode Island. A small number now reside in Florida, North Carolina, Arizona, Texas, and California. One graduate lives in Japan.

Post Graduate Activities

Employment. One of the goals of the Health Services Administration Program is to prepare students for entry-level employment in health services administration. Of those responding to the survey, 62 (79%) are working in the profession, while the remainder have gone into a clinical health profession (e.g. dentistry, nursing, physical therapy), or have left the health industry for employment in other areas (computer systems sales, military or other government service, etc.).

Career and Employment Status. Graduates are working in a variety of organizations and a variety of capacities. Examples of employment include:

Titles and Work Settings

Account Manager, HMO
Accreditation Programmer, Hospital
Administrator, Nursing Home
Administrative Fellow, University Health Center
Billing Specialist, Medical Group Practice
Data Analyst, Consulting Firm
Director of Leadership Education, Hospital
Health Policy Analyst, Consulting Firm
Office Manager, Medical Group Practice
Pharmaceutical Sales Representative, Pharmaceutical Company
Quality Assurance Coordinator, Hospital
Salary History
The average annual salary for respondents in their first position after graduation was $28,000 with a range of $18,000 to $42,000. The median salary was $29,400 in their first job.

The current average salary is $49,000 with a range of $22,000 to $110,000. The median salary is $56,000. Those four respondents with salaries at and over $100,000 were in surgical equipment sales, pharmaceutical sales, and consulting. Those with salaries in the $18,000 to $29,000 range were employed with private non-profit clinics or small medical group practices.

Employment Placement
The average length of time to secure first employment upon graduation was 3 months after graduation. The length of time to find the first job had a range of “employment upon graduation” to nine months.

Program and Course Evaluation
To evaluate and improve the Health Services Administration Program and to get feedback about the program, several questions in the survey asked the respondent’s level of satisfaction with the program and courses in the program curriculum as they applied to their current employment.

Evaluations by Discipline. When asked about the overall quality of the Health Services Administration Program,

55 (70%) very satisfied
22 (28%) somewhat satisfied
0 neutral
2 (3%) dissatisfied
0 very dissatisfied

Core Courses. When asked about the HSA core courses,
56 (71%) very satisfied
22 (28%) somewhat satisfied
0 neutral
1 (1%) dissatisfied
0 very dissatisfied

HSA Internship/Field Work. When asked about the HSA internship,
54 (69%) very satisfied
22 (28%) somewhat satisfied
0 neutral
1 (1%) dissatisfied
0 very dissatisfied

Business Minor Courses. When asked about the Business Minor courses,
41 (52%) very satisfied
29 (37%) somewhat satisfied
6 (8%) neutral
2 (3%) dissatisfied
0 very dissatisfied

**Gerontology Courses.** When asked about the gerontology courses

29 (37%) very satisfied
30 (38%) somewhat satisfied
11 (14%) neutral
4 (5%) somewhat dissatisfied
2 (3%) very dissatisfied

**Computer Sciences Courses.** When asked about the computer sciences courses,

21 (27%) very satisfied
29 (37%) somewhat satisfied
16 (20%) neutral
6 (8%) somewhat dissatisfied
1 (1%) very dissatisfied

**Evaluation by Subject Matter.**

Courses evaluated as “very helpful” or “somewhat helpful” included:
75/77 (97%) Health Administration

66/76 (87%) Internship in Health Services Administration

61/74 (82%) Financial Accounting

61/76 (80%) Values in Health Care

60/76 (79%) Health Program Planning and Evaluation

The courses evaluated as “neutral,” “not helpful” or “not at all helpful” included:

31/75 (41%) Programs and Services for the Elderly
Suggestions for Ways to Better Prepare Graduates for Employment or Graduate School and Gaps in Education

Comments most frequently made were about including additional courses such as computer science, finance, and medical terminology.

While the internship was identified as one of the best learning experiences in the entire program, several suggested dividing the internship into two summer periods with one in the summer of the junior year and the second in the summer of the senior year. Students stated that had they understood the relevance and importance of their course work when they were in the classroom, they would have taken it more seriously.

When graduates were asked about “gaps in education,” most left the area blank. The most frequent comments that were made focused on an additional computer science course, a finance course and employment assistance. Several respondents suggested that the program faculty identify a way to assist graduating seniors prepare for the job market. Information about employment opportunities and networking contacts in the industry were also requested.

Advanced Degree Completion

Twelve (15%) have completed graduate degrees. Eight of these degrees are in health services administration. The degrees include the MHA, the MBA, and the MPH. Schools include Arizona State University, Pennsylvania State University, VCU’s Medical College of Virginia, the Medical University of South Carolina and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Four respondents went on to complete advanced degrees in nursing, physical therapy, dentistry, and counseling.

Continuing Education

While four students are attending graduate school in health services administration on a part-time basis, there are five students who are now in graduate school on a full-time basis. These JMU graduates are studying health services administration, law, counseling and health education.

When respondents were asked about their plans for graduate education, most indicated a desire to complete an MHA or an MBA in health services administration in the near future.

Alumni Relations Interest

Since program inception, no formal alumni relations activities have been provided for- or conducted by- graduates of JMU’s Health Services Administration Program. A total of 59 (75%) expressed a desire for establishing some type of alumni organization and alumni network.
Suggestions for alumni relations included quarterly newsletters, an alumni website for communication, email distribution list availability, and job placement postings on a website. Several students expressed an interest in communicating with their friends/colleagues from JMU classroom days.

Comments About Program
Nearly all of the comments about the Health Services Administration Program and faculty were positive. These comments focused on the excellent knowledge preparation for employment and graduate school, general satisfaction with their education at JMU and compliments to faculty members for their efforts. Many spoke fondly of their years at JMU.

Several comments focused on the importance of computer knowledge with respect to financial spread sheet software, presentation software and information systems. It was suggested that spread sheet software continue to be taught through the required Computer Science Department course and that it continue to be required in the Health Care Finance course. Learning Microsoft Access ©, a data base program, was also suggested.

Respondents suggested additional elective courses. These included health care marketing, health information systems, upper-level finance, medical terminology and diagnostic coding.

Some comments stated that, while a bachelor degree is good for entry-level employment, a masters degree in health services administration is necessary to advance to the mid- and upper-level positions in the industry.

Conclusions

1. There is satisfaction among the JMU Health Services Administration Program graduates with their education in the program and with the various components of the program. This satisfaction was in the areas of core program course work, the business minor and the internship experience. This survey confirmed that most of what the program is providing in terms of educational experiences is relevant and helpful to the graduates. It is also clear that our graduates are doing well in the “real world.”

2. While the vast majority of the courses were identified as “helpful” or “very helpful”, those courses ranked as “neutral”, “not helpful” or “not at all helpful” included the two gerontology courses taught by the JMU Department of Social Work, the economics and marketing courses taught by the business college, and the epidemiology course taught within the Department of Health Sciences. The gerontology courses may have not been seen as helpful because most of the graduates pursue employment in hospitals and acute care settings, in consulting firms and group practice settings. It should be noted that the second gerontology course, Programs and Services for the Elderly, was dropped by the Health Services Administration Program in 1999 as a required course and replaced with the Managed Care course. The four remaining courses need to be carefully monitored and evaluated.

3. Additional computer courses need to be considered.
4. There is a clear call for establishment of some form of network for alumni. Many offered to assist in establishing some type of alumni forum either web-based or in newsletter format. This will be further examined in the current academic year.

5. Graduates of the program are getting jobs in health care management and most of them within three months of graduation. They are employed in a variety of management capacities and other settings within the health industry. The salaries range from good to excellent.