Overview

- In spring 2013 the College surveyed alumni from the classes of 1994, 1998, 2002, 2008, and 2012, asking them to reflect on many aspects of their college experience, and how it may have impacted current activities. This report focuses on the employment and advanced education outcomes of these alumni based on the survey.

- About two-thirds of our graduates (68%, across the cross-section of classes) are working full-time, with an additional 12% working part-time. The unemployment rate (unemployed and seeking a position) for these graduates is 2.6%, below the national average (for individuals with a Bachelor’s degree or higher) of 3.9% at the time of the survey.  

- Consistent with our liberal arts mission, over a third of graduates (37%) are working in fields unrelated to their undergraduate majors, the same proportion work in fields related to their major, and a quarter (26%) are working in the field of their major.

- Most often, those alumni not currently employed are pursuing further education (12%).

- The rates at which Swarthmore graduates earn advanced degrees are very high. About three-quarters of those who graduated five years ago (Class of 2008) had either earned or were currently enrolled in a graduate degree program – and the rate was higher with each of the older classes surveyed, to a high of 90% of the Class of 1994. Across all classes (excluding 2012), 27% of the graduates had earned doctorates or were enrolled in doctoral programs at the time of the survey.

- While a slight majority of those doctorate earners who were employed full-time work in academia, many (45%) do not.

- Graduates work in a range of occupations, with the largest categories being scientists (18%, including six categories of scientists), teachers (13%), lawyers or judges (7%), college faculty (6%), and physicians (6%).

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1 Table A-1. Employment status of the civilian population by sex and age, April 2013, Bureau of Labor Statistic.
Survey

In spring 2013 the College surveyed alumni from the classes of 1994, 1998, 2002, 2008, and 2012. (The Class of 2012 received a much briefer version of the survey.) Along with a group of peer institutions, we conduct this survey about every 5 years, asking a cross-section of alumni to reflect on many aspects of their college experience, and how it may have impacted current activities. About half of the alumni in these classes responded to the survey (higher for the Class of 2012). Although this is a strong response rate, it is considerably lower (by about thirteen percentage points) than the last time we conducted the survey (2009)². This report focuses on the employment and advanced education outcomes of these alumni.

What are they doing now?

Across each of the classes, the majority of alumni are working full-time. Pursuing further education is the next largest category of activities for the younger classes (1 year out and 5 years out). Over a quarter of the Class of 2008 is pursuing further education, compared with 17% of the Class of 2012, and 6% of the Class of 2002. This finding is consistent with earlier surveys that showed that Swarthmore students often wait a year or more before attending graduate school. In contrast, members of the older classes who are not employed are more likely to be taking care of children or family. This is true for 6% and 5% of the Classes of 1994 and 1998, respectively. The unemployment rate (unemployed and seeking a position) for these graduates is 2.6%, which is below the national average (for individuals with a Bachelor’s degree or higher) of 3.9% at the time of the survey.³⁴

² Declining response rates to surveys nationally may be one reason for the drop. Another reason may be that this survey came on the heels of a number of other contacts from the College. A small working group is considering ways to better track contacts with alumni so that we can avoid overburdening them.
³ Table A-1. Employment status of the civilian population by sex and age, April 2013, Bureau of Labor Statistic.
⁴ The “Not Employed…” categories include respondents who are also seeking employment, but indicated caregiving or furthering education as their primary activity. “Other” includes those employed but on leave (total of 5 across all classes), and not employed but not seeking employment, for reasons other than family care or education.
Employment

The survey asked about the sector, industry, level, and occupation that reflected respondents’ jobs, and here we report on those alumni who indicated that they were employed (full-time, part-time, or on leave).

The occupation categories of alumni are presented above. The largest category is Scientist (18%) which combines the categories of Scientist: Life Sciences, Engineer, Scientist: Physical Sciences, Statistician, mathematician, actuary, or related analyst, Economist, and Social scientist or psychologist (excluding counselor and clinician). (Life scientists account for nearly a third of the category, but each of the other types of scientists account for at least 10% of it.) The next largest groups are Educator: Teacher or Instructor (13%), Lawyers or judges (7%), Educator: Faculty (tenured or tenure-track) (6%), and Physician or surgeon (6%). While the prevalence of college faculty and doctors increases with the older classes, several occupation categories reflect the reverse pattern. The proportion of alumni occupied as scientists decreases with the older class years. This is primarily driven by the number of individuals identifying themselves as Life Scientists in the younger classes (11% of the Class of 2012 and 8% of the Class of 2008). Another category in which
this occurs is *Lawyer or judge* where the proportion of alumni that selected it was lower for the oldest class (Class of 1994), at 5%, compared with 11% in the Class of 1998 and 10%

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scientist (combined category)</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educator: Teacher or Instructor</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawyer or judge</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educator: Faculty (ten. or ten.-track)</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physician or surgeon</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
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in the Class of 2002. Previous research suggests that this might not be just an anomaly of the particular cross-section of classes. A single class over time (the Class of 1989 surveyed in 2000, 2004, and 2009) reflected drops in this profession, from 13% to 9% to 7%. A follow-up study might be undertaken to examine the patterns of the multiple careers of alumni in classes surveyed longitudinally.

As a liberal arts institution we do not have strong expectations that jobs will be related to a student’s undergraduate major, but in this era of public pressure to relate education to employment it is a question often asked. The following chart shows the percentage of alumni within each division who indicated that their jobs were either related to their major or in the same field as their major. This is the case most often for alumni who had Natural Science and Engineering majors (across all classes 79% work in related or same fields), and least often for students with interdisciplinary majors (28% across all classes).
For all employed respondents the survey asked how well their undergraduate education had prepared them for their current career. Again, as a liberal arts institution, Swarthmore aims to prepare its students for a range of endeavors rather than for a particular career. But as the adjacent chart shows, most respondents felt that the College had prepared them well for their careers.

Graduate School

The table at the right presents the proportion of alumni from each class reporting that they have enrolled in graduate or professional school since graduating from Swarthmore, as well as the proportion that has earned an advanced degree (or is still enrolled in a program). These results are consistent with earlier surveys showing that the overwhelming majority of Swarthmore alumni pursue graduate level education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Ever enrolled?</th>
<th>Advanced Degree *</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>90%</td>
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* (earned or still enrolled)

The majority of advanced degrees earned (including current enrollment) were Master’s degrees, with Doctorates a close second. MBA’s were earned by increasingly more alumni with each older class. More than one in ten (12%) of alumni from the Class of 1994 had earned an MBA or were enrolled in an MBA program. Law and Medical degrees were earned by 11% and 9%, respectively, of all the alumni across these classes. (Alumni reported on all degrees earned, and so within an alumni class the types of degrees may sum to more than 100%.)
The percentage of alumni earning doctorates or enrolled in doctoral programs, across all classes except 2012, was 27% based on this survey. Since this includes students still enrolled in their programs, this finding is consistent with external data that estimates our doctorate attainment rate at about one in five, one of the highest rates in the country.\(^5\)

Doctorate earners work in a range of settings, in addition to academia. Slightly over half of those with doctorates working full time indicated that they worked in higher education. The remainder (45%) worked in many other industries, including:

- Education (K-12, adult)
- Science
- Medicine
- Biotech/Pharmaceutical
- Financial Services
- Military/Defense
- Politics, Public Policy, Advocacy

- Computer Science/Technology
- Environment
- Information Technology
- Engineering
- Social Services
- “Other”

The percentage of those with doctorates employed full-time who do work in higher education varied by the division of their undergraduate degree. Humanities majors were most likely to be working in higher education, and Natural Science and Engineering majors were least likely.

Respondents who had earned an advanced degree or were currently enrolled in graduate school (excluding the Class of 2012) were asked how well their Swarthmore education had prepared them. As the adjacent chart shows, for each of the classes, most responded that they were very well prepared.

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\(^5\) This is based on data from the NSF Survey of Earned Doctorates. The rate may vary slightly depending on which years are included in the analysis, but Swarthmore generally ranks third, behind Cal Tech and Harvey Mudd.
Across all classes, the largest group of alumni (37%) works in the for-profit sector, with non-profits a close second (33%). The percentage working at for-profits decreases with the older classes, as their percentages reporting that they are self-employed rises. Comparative national data on employment by sector is not routinely available, but estimates were made using data from several sources. As the chart shows, Swarthmore graduates work in the non-profit sector at a much higher rate than employees nationally.

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6 The primary source for separating non-profit employment from the total in the national data was the 2010 non-profit employee counts provided by the Johns Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies’ Non Profit Economic Data Project (which works with the Bureau of Labor Statistics), both in printed publications and in private email exchanges. The proportions self-employed versus employed in other for-profit proportions were estimated from 2009 data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.