

THE JOYS OF RETIREMENT SURVEY

A 2005 study of higher-education pensioners and their approach to retirement. The study was based on a random sample of 3,000 of the 30,000 State University Annuitants.

The Joys of Retirement Survey was conducted to gather basic information about retirees related to the questions: What is important in your life? What are your views about staying involved, particularly about volunteering? What can campuses do for you? Surveys were mailed to a random sample of 3,000 SURS pensioners with a return of 825.

Throughout higher education, presidents and chancellors express concerns about the tremendous loss of wisdom and experience that happens as a result of retirement. The study was prepared to gather information about retiree perceptions of remaining involved.

The preliminary findings support the research that says "asking" is a critical part of volunteer recruitment. Of those who are not currently volunteering, 68.3% said they would if asked; 86.1% said they would if asked to do something that interests them. In light of the fact that only 6.4% of those 65+ volunteer in the schools (2004 US Bureau of Labor Statistics), clearly we have an abundant resource that could impact learning at all levels of education.

What can campuses do for their retirees? They are interested in learning at all levels, but especially in guest speakers, how to workshops, opportunities for travel, wellness programs, opportunities to connect with others, and information on pension and financial interests. The Lifelong Learning Programs on most campuses are addressing many of these needs and are a source of growth and an opportunity for campus outreach to retirees.

Last, the retirees who responded are optimists. Nearly 80% have a positive view of the future, and 92% are happy with the way they are spending their days. The following is an overview of other findings. The final analysis will be on the website by September 1 (www.siu.edu/offices/iii).

Demographic summary of those who responded:

- Education level: 54.1% reported a graduate degree
- Gender: 55.1% female and 44.9% male
- Position: Faculty 39.7% Civil Service 31.2%
Administrative/Professional 29.1%
- Health: Excellent/very good 59.4% Fair or poor 14%
- Current employment: Working part time 22%
Working full time 3.7%
- Income: \$25,000 to \$50,000 27.1%
\$50,000- \$75,000 21.6% \$75,000 to \$100,000 19.4%
- Race/ethnicity: Caucasian 89.1% African Amer. 5.9%
- Attend religious services: Once a week or more 56.6%
Never 15.1%

Activities in retirement

Top Thirteen: Identified as important or most important

- Activities with family 90.7%
- Activities with friends 82.9%
- Reading 81%
- Recreation/exercise/fitness 75%
- Travel 73.7%
- Increasing knowledge or skills 73.3%
- Chores 65.6%
- Medical concerns 64%
- Community service/helping others 63.7%
- Hobbies 62.8%
- Religious or Spiritual Activities 58.9%
- Artistic 58.1%
- Caregivers of a spouse, children, or grandchildren 57%

Views on Volunteering

Most common volunteer settings

Church or religious organization 51.9%
Museum 29.1%
Community Organizations 28.9%
Hospital 25.1%
Library 21.9%

Educational settings didn't have a big draw, although volunteering for a university received the highest number of responses 16.5%; followed by grade school 15.8%; community college 14.9%; high school 7.3% and pre-school 6%.

Why do retirees volunteer?

Top Seven: Identified as important or most important reasons

I can do something for a cause that is important to me 77.4%
I am concerned about those less fortunate 77.3%
Volunteering makes life more satisfying 74%
I feel a personal responsibility to help others when they need it 73.8%
Volunteering keeps people active and connected 72.4%
Volunteering is important to my community 68%
Volunteering allows me to gain a new perspective 63.7%

Volunteering on campus

Academics (tutoring, research, teaching, mentoring) 21.1%
Programs that welcome retirees to campus 19.7%
Artistic or media events (plays, radio, TV) 18%
Sports events 15.2%
Gardening or campus beautification 12%
Recruiting new students 9.5%
Not interested in volunteering on campus 36.7%

Learning and Involvement on Campus

Retirees responded that universities and community colleges could enrich their lives through:

Periodic speakers on topics of interest (e.g. hobbies, using new technology, travel, great books) 43.7%
How to workshops (learning new skills) 40.8%
Opportunities for travel 39.3%
Wellness programs to foster good health 38.6%
Opportunities to connect with others who have similar interests 37.2%
Information on pension and financial issues 37.1%
Not interested in services from campus 17.4%

Communication

The best way to reach retirees is:

Mailed information 73.5%
Asked by friends or former colleagues 67.5%
Newspaper 51.9%
Information via e-mail or the internet 47.1%
Asked by neighbors, relatives 44.4%

Communication with relatives and friends

Many times a day 22.3%
Once a day 18.7%;
Several times a week 44.3%;
Once a week 9.2%;
Less than once a week 5.6%

View of the Future

Overall, the retirees viewed their future with optimism or cautious optimism 79.3%.

Mostly or completely satisfied in the way they are spending their days 92.9%

Have considerable energy or are vigorous 68.9%

Lack of energy or low energy 30.9%

Standard of living since retiring

Remains the same 45.2%

Improved 33.8%

Declined 12.9%

A hearty thank you to the Illinois Board of Higher Education and to members of the Board who reviewed the instrument and provided valuable feedback: Elmer L. Washington, Lucy A. Sloan, Addison Woodward Jr., Frances Carroll, Proshanta K. Nandi, and Cordelia Meyer. Also thank you to the State Universities Retirement System, the State Universities Annuitants Association, the Educational Psychology faculty and students in the SIU College of Education and Human Services, the ARC program, Department of Psychology, and particularly to Dr. Seymour Bryson, Associate Chancellor for Diversity, SIUC. For further information, contact Jane Angelis, intnews@siu.edu