



OFFICE OF INSTITUTIONAL  
EFFECTIVENESS

PEPPERDINE  
UNIVERSITY

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# RESEARCH BRIEF

## *Alumni Survey Results for Pepperdine University's Graduate Programs*

### **Key Findings**

*This study analyzes the results of the Alumni Survey for Pepperdine's Graduate Programs in terms of six primary outcome categories and their sub-categories, which were scored by respondents according to their perceptions and experiences while at Pepperdine. The results revealed that Pepperdine graduates report high scores on the following: faculty interest in teaching and students, overall satisfaction with their degree and experience, and preparation for alumni's current career. Graduate students' lowest scores were on preparation for social and civic involvement and exposure to diversity. Moreover, the average current annual income of respondents was at \$100,000-119,000, twice the amount they borrowed at \$40,000-\$59,000.*

*Results showed there were score differences across racial and ethnic populations for the six categories and their sub-categories. For example, Asian American alumni report lower scores for their graduate program in terms of academic experiences and perceptions, preparing them for their current careers and overall satisfaction. Among the schools, SPP alumni reported the highest scores on exposure to diversity. GSEP alumni reported the highest overall satisfaction with their Pepperdine graduate program, despite earning the lowest salaries. Graziadio alumni earn the highest current annual income. And between gender, females reported lower current annual income than males.*

### **I. Background**

In Spring 2012, Pepperdine University's Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) conducted the Alumni Survey for Pepperdine's Graduate Programs. This alumni survey measured alumni's attitudes and perceptions about their academic experience at Pepperdine University's graduate programs: the George L. Graziadio School of Business and Management (Graziadio), the Graduate School of Education and Psychology (GSEP), the School of Law (SOL), and the School of Public Policy (SPP). Several categories of inquiry were included in the survey, such as alumni's academic experiences and perceptions, their exposure to diversity during their time at Pepperdine, their perception of the academic preparation they received from Pepperdine in the areas of career and citizenship, and their inclination to support alma mater.

This survey was developed by the OIE for the alumni of graduate programs, to provide metrics for Pepperdine's Strategic Plan. It was based on a national survey given by the Higher Education Data Sharing (HEDS) Consortium. Since this survey was specifically developed for alumni of graduate programs at Pepperdine, there are no comparison groups outside of Pepperdine. This was the first time the survey was administered, so there are no data from previous years with which to compare.

The OIE distributed the survey to a total of 7,285 alumni, targeting those who

graduated from Pepperdine's graduate programs in 2002-2007. The response rate was low at only 6.5% (sample n=475). Of the 475 respondents, 226 came from Graziadio, 137 from GSEP, 84 from SOL and 24 from SPP (the remaining 4 did not identify their school). In terms of race/ethnicity, 274 respondents self-identified as White, 35 as Asian American, 32 as Black or African American, 39 as Hispanic or Latino, 34 as Other (includes American Indian or Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander and those with 2 races or more) and 17 as Nonresident aliens (the remaining 44 did not identify race/ethnicity). The male-female ratio was even.

## II. Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess the graduate programs of Pepperdine University examining alumni's perceptions and experiences while a student at Pepperdine University. The survey provided enough data to be able to assess the programs in the following six categories:

1. Academic experiences and perceptions
2. Exposure to diversity
3. Usefulness of graduate degree
4. Feeling of connectedness to Pepperdine as alumni
5. Affordability of degree and return on investment
6. Overall satisfaction with Pepperdine degree and experience

Four of the six categories cover broad areas and were further divided into sub-categories. This study will measure scores by alumni for each category and sub-category across Pepperdine's four graduate schools, revealing the strengths of these schools. Furthermore, this study will assess alumni scores across different racial and ethnic populations and gender.

## III. Review of Literature: Usefulness of Alumni Surveys

Alumni surveys have many uses in higher education institutions. Cabrera, Weerts, & Zulick (2005) found that alumni surveys guide institutional reform and benefit faculty and departmental leadership for the purpose of making curricular changes.

As Williford and Moden (1989) observe, a unique feature of alumni surveys (compared to surveys of enrolled students) is the capability of the surveys to document students' assessment of the quality of their educational experience tempered by their experiences since graduation. Alumni can potentially offer an objective perspective given their distance from involvement with the program (Khalil, 1990). Volkwein (2010) states, "When visiting campuses to discuss assessment, I always identify alumni studies as the most cost-effective way to begin a program of outcomes assessment. Compared to many other forms of data

collection, an alumni study, using a survey instrument, can be a relatively inexpensive way to gather an array of outcomes information that is useful at institutional and departmental levels alike."

Alumni surveys can lend legitimacy to claims made by the institution about itself (Volkwein, 2010). For internal stakeholders, alumni studies can be used for enhancing academic curricula, support programs, and administrative policy. For external stakeholders, alumni studies can support accreditation, accountability, recruitment, and fundraising (Volkwein, 2010; Borden, 2005).

## IV. Methodology

The survey contains 34 questions and sub-questions which resulted in more than 100 survey items. To identify trends and let the data tell a story that is useful for decision-making at Pepperdine, it is necessary to group together several survey items that have the same underlying factor. These groupings were tested and confirmed using factor analysis, resulting in the following four categories and sub-categories: (1) faculty interest in teaching and students, (2) student-faculty interaction outside of class, (3) classroom experience with faculty, and (4) exposure to diversity at Pepperdine. (See the Appendix for the question items that were collapsed into their respective categories and sub-categories.)

Moreover, the groupings were then tested for internal consistency and reliability using Cronbach's alpha.<sup>1</sup> Once factor analysis and Cronbach's alpha confirmed the statistical rationale for the groupings, the items were grouped together by using a simple weighted average.

The rest of the categories and sub-categories were more straightforward since they were one-item measures: preparation for current career, preparation for social and civic involvement, feeling connectedness to Pepperdine as alumni, amount borrowed to finance graduate education, current annual income, and overall satisfaction. Finally, regression analysis<sup>2</sup> and t-tests were used to determine if the differences in category/sub-category scores across schools, races/ethnic populations, and gender were statistically significant.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cronbach's alpha is a reliability coefficient that measures how closely a set of items are as a group. The closer to 1 this coefficient is, the better. For this study, the Cronbach's alpha for each group of survey items behind the above-mentioned categories and sub-categories ranged at a consistently high 0.90-0.92.

<sup>2</sup> Regression analysis is a statistical method to estimate the relationships among variables.

<sup>3</sup> The t-test determines whether the means of two groups are statistically different from each other. It assesses whether or not difference between the groups is not likely to have been a chance finding, at a certain confidence level. In the case of this study, the confidence level used is 95%.

**Table 1. Summary results for each data category, Spring 2012**

Categories and sub-categories	Average score for entire sample	Race/ethnicity	Gender
<b>I. Academic experiences and perceptions</b>			
• Faculty interest in teaching and students	4.2 out of 5	Asian Americans lowest*	No difference
• Student-faculty interaction outside of class	3.6 out of 5	Asian Americans lowest*	No difference
• Classroom experience with faculty	3.8 out of 5	Asian Americans lowest*	No difference
<b>II. Exposure to diversity</b>	3.1 out of 5	No difference	No difference
<b>III. Usefulness of graduate degree</b>			
• Preparation for current career	3.2 out of 4	Asian Americans lowest*	No difference
• Preparation for social and civic involvement	2.5 out of 4	No difference	No difference
<b>IV. Feeling of connectedness to Pepperdine as alumni</b>	2.8 out of 4	No difference	No difference
<b>V. Affordability of degree and return on investment (dollars amounts are shown for this section, rather than scores)</b>			
• Amount borrowed to finance graduate education	\$40k-\$59k	No difference	No difference
• Current annual income	\$100k-\$119k	Black/African Americans, Asian Americans lowest*	Female lower*
<b>VI. Overall satisfaction with Pepperdine degree and experience</b>	4.1 out of 5	Asian Americans lowest*	No difference

Notes:

- Score differences across school, race/ethnicity, and gender are tested for statistical significance (a statistical assessment of whether observations reflect a pattern rather than just chance) at 95% confidence level or higher.
- Factor analysis was used to combine several survey items (using weighted averages) to come up with a single factor for the following: “faculty’s interest in teaching and students,” “student-faculty interaction outside of class,” “classroom experience with faculty,” and “exposure to diversity”.
- Cronbach’s alpha was used to confirm the internal consistency or average correlation of items within the above-mentioned factors. The reliability coefficient for each group of survey items behind the factors ranged at a consistently high 0.90-0.92.
- Asterisks (\*) indicate that there is no statistically-significant difference across the rest of subgroups within this category.

**V. Findings**

Table 1 shows the key findings of this study, showing average scores for the entire sample as well as the results of within-group comparisons for races/ethnicities and gender. A quick glance at table 1 shows that Pepperdine graduates scored their experiences with “faculty interest in teaching and students” highest (4.2 out of 5) among all categories and sub-categories. Respondents also reported that on average their current annual income is twice the amount of loans they borrowed to finance their graduate education at Pepperdine. Among the racial and ethnic populations, Asian Americans scored the lowest in several categories and sub-categories. And except for annual income, there are no gender differences across the scores for categories and sub-categories.

Figure 1 shows the average scores for the categories and sub-categories (except for loans and salaries which were shown as dollar amounts in Table 1) for this study. The categories and sub-categories are arranged according to their scores, from highest to lowest. The scores were ranked noting the fact that the categories and sub-categories have different maximum scores (either 4 or 5). Alumni of Pepperdine graduate schools were most satisfied with “faculty interest in teaching and students.” The next highest scores were for “overall satisfaction with Pepperdine degree and experience” and “preparation for

current career.” These top-three categories and sub-categories correlate strongly with one another. All four Pepperdine graduate schools were similarly strong in these three areas. Scores were lowest for “preparation for social and civic involvement” and “exposure to diversity.”

Figures 2-7 show results that have statistically-significant differences across different racial and ethnic groups. This means that numeric differences in scores across groups were tested to ensure that the differences are real patterns, not merely chance, at a confidence level of 95% or higher.

Asian American alumni report lower scores than the rest of those surveyed in terms of the following:

- “faculty interest in teaching and students” (3.9 out of 5), Figure 2
- “student-faculty interaction outside of class” (3.3 out of 5), Figure 3
- “classroom experience with faculty” (3.5 out of 5), Figure 4
- “preparation for current career” (2.8 out of 5), Figure 5
- “overall satisfaction” (3.5 out of 5), Figure 7

Asian American alumni, as well as Black/African American alumni, also indicated that on average they earn lower current annual income than their counterparts (Figure 6).

When it comes to differences across schools, results are mixed. For student-faculty interaction outside of class, GSEP alumni report the statistically-significant highest scores among schools (Figure 8). SPP alumni, meanwhile, report the highest scores for quality of classroom experience with faculty (Figure 9). They also report the highest exposure to diversity in terms of discussions with fellow students and faculty on diverse and diversity issues (Figure 10).

Alumni from Graziadio report the lowest scores in terms of preparation for social and civic involvement (Figure 11). When it comes to loans, the SOL (followed by the GSEP) alumni report the highest loans (Figure 12). In terms of current income, GSBM alumni report the highest while GSEP alumni report the lowest (Figure 13).

Despite their high loan borrowings, GSEP alumni report (statistically-significant) high scores regarding their overall satisfaction (Figure 14).

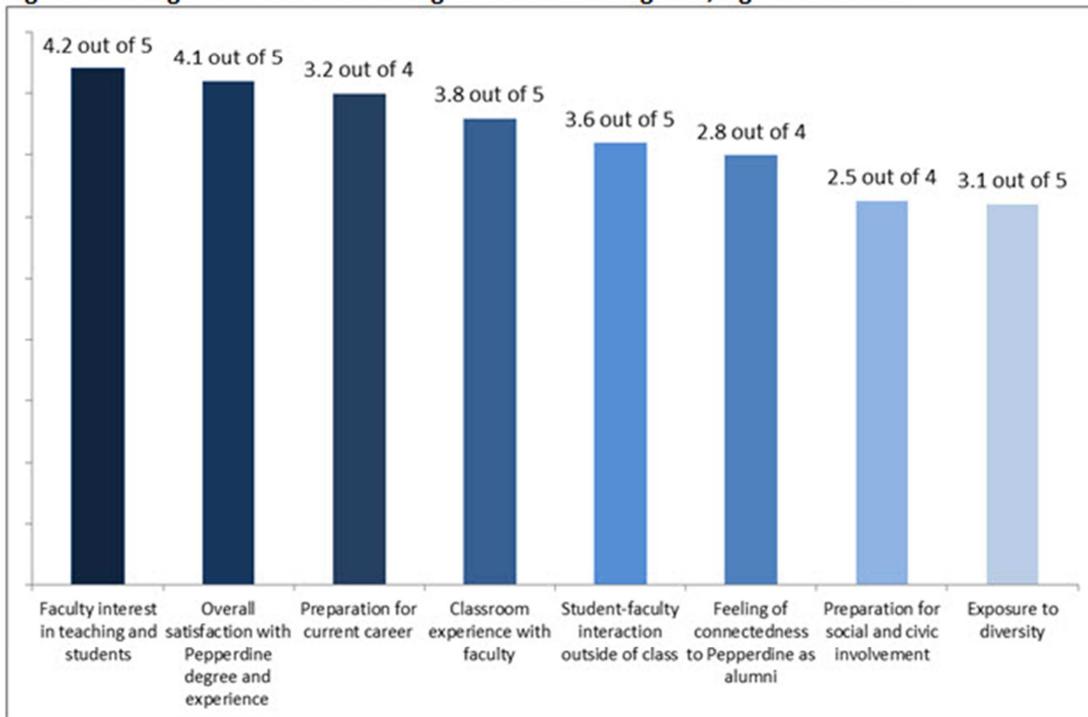
And finally, there is no statistically-significant difference between genders in terms of loans (Figure 15) and other categories discussed in this study. However, male alumni report much higher salaries (Figure 16).

## VI. Closing Discussion

The primary purpose of this study was to assess Pepperdine’s graduate programs from the perspective of the alumni. The graduate programs were assessed according to six categories: academic experiences and perceptions, exposure to diversity, usefulness of graduate degree, feeling of connectedness to Pepperdine as alumni, affordability of degree and return on investment, and overall satisfaction with Pepperdine degree and experience. Using alumni perceptions and experiences, this study measures alumni scoring of these categories and their sub-categories. Differences in results across the four Pepperdine graduate schools, racial and ethnic populations, and gender are also investigated.

Based on the Pepperdine alumni who responded to the survey, the findings reveal that alumni from across the four graduate schools report a 4.0 or higher rating (out of a maximum rating of 5) for overall satisfaction with their graduate education. The sub-category on “faculty interest in teaching and students” (under the category on “academic experiences and perceptions”) shows the highest overall score at 4.2 out of 5. The third highest score is by the sub-category on “preparation for current career” (under the category on “usefulness of graduate degree”) at 3.2 out of 4. Overall, alumni report the lowest scores on the sub-category “preparation for social and civic involvement” and on the category “exposure to diversity.”

**Figure 1. Average scores across the categories and sub-categories, highest to lowest**



Notes:  
The scores were ranked noting the fact that the categories and sub-categories have different maximum scores (either 4 or 5). To make the scores comparable, they were transformed into ratios with a uniform maximum score of 1. For example, a score of “4.2 out of 5” becomes the ratio 4.2/5 or 0.84. The score “3.2 out of 4” becomes 3.2/4 or 0.80. This transformation allows these two scores, previously incomparable because of their different maximum scores, to be comparable.

The study found some interesting differences in scores across schools. In terms of overall satisfaction as well as the sub-category “student-faculty interaction outside of class,” GSEP alumni report the highest degree of satisfaction among the alumni in the survey sample. Meanwhile, SPP alumni report the highest scores in terms of “classroom experience with faculty” and “exposure to diversity.”

In terms of affordability of degree and return on investment, respondents report an average loan amount of \$40,000-\$59,000 and a current annual income of \$100,000-\$119,000. In terms of amount borrowed to finance their graduate education, the alumni from the SOL, followed by those from GSEP, report the highest loans. However, alumni from Graziadio report the highest current annual income, while GSEP alumni report the lowest income. It is interesting to note that despite the apparent gap between “amount borrowed” and “current income” for GSEP, their alumni report the highest in overall satisfaction with their degree and experience.

Findings show no gender bias for the categories and sub-categories examined by this study, except for current annual income. Females report an annual income of \$80,000-\$99,999 while males report an annual income of \$120,000-\$139,999. An investigation of the survey data shows that 47% of the female respondents are alumni of GSEP. Interestingly, this is consistent with the fact that GSEP alumni reported earning the lowest salaries in the sample. The limitations of this study do not allow for conclusions to be drawn in this area. Further investigation would need to examine the relationship between salary and gender.

This study found that when comparing racial and ethnic populations, Asian American alumni report the lowest scores (at statistical significance of 95% confidence level or higher) in a number of categories and sub-categories, including satisfaction with faculty interest in teaching and students, student-faculty interaction outside of class, and classroom experience with faculty. These findings need further examination and analysis. Of the 475 respondents, 35 self-identified as Asian American. Asian American alumni in this survey sample are not concentrated in any one school or gender.

The survey data does not provide an explanation of why Asian American alumni report lower scores than other racial and ethnic populations throughout the survey. But the findings of the study are supported by the literature on student outcomes. Studies have found that Asian Americans

experience lower rates of student-faculty interaction than their peers (Chang, 2005; Kim, Park and Chang, 2006). However, Kim and Sax (2009) clarify that contrary to prevailing findings from literature, Asian American students *exceeded* all other racial groups of students in research-related faculty interaction, while they documented the lowest frequency of course-related interaction (the latter consistent with previous findings). Kim and Sax advise that faculty should also take note of the findings that Asian American students are less likely than other racial groups to talk, communicate, or interact with faculty both inside and outside of class, and that language heritage may be a unique barrier to faculty interaction for this population (Kim et al. 2006). Kim and Sax add that when faculty communicate or interact with Asian American students, they should keep in mind the group’s unique characteristics and try to apply diverse strategies to make themselves more approachable to Asian American students (e.g., individual rather than group meetings, outside rather than inside class contact, email rather than oral communication).

In summary, Pepperdine’s graduate program alumni report high scores across the survey categories, particularly for “academic experiences and perceptions” and “overall satisfaction with their degree and experience.” Scores in these categories show some differences across schools and races/ethnic population, as discussed above. Meanwhile, alumni report the lowest scores with regards to “exposure to diversity,” as well as the sub-category “preparation for social and civic involvement.” Additionally, the average current annual income of respondents at \$100,000-\$119,000 is twice the amount they borrow at \$40,000-\$59,000. Alumni report a moderately high score for “feeling of connectedness to Pepperdine as alumni,” and show no difference across schools, races/ethnic populations, or gender for this particular category.

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## Appendix

### Tables 2-5:

One category and three sub-categories were measured by grouping together survey items that had the same underlying factor. The survey items and their groupings are enumerated below:

**Table 2. Survey items under “Faculty interest in teaching and students”**

Survey items	Average score for the entire sample (maximum score is 5)
Genuinely interested in students.	4.4
Interested in helping students grow in more than just academic areas.	4.1
Good at providing prompt and useful feedback.	4.1
Genuinely interested in teaching.	4.4
Willing to spend time outside of class to discuss issues of interest and importance to students.	4.1
<b>“Faculty interest in teaching and students”</b>	<b>4.2</b>

#### Notes:

- Response range is 1-5, with 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree.
- Cronbach's alpha scale reliability coefficient: 0.9179
- Overall response n is 458.

**Table 3. Survey items under “Student-faculty interaction outside of class”**

Survey items	Average score for the entire sample (maximum score is 5)
Non-classroom interactions with faculty positively influenced personal growth, values, and attitudes.	3.8
Non-classroom interactions with faculty positively influenced intellectual growth and interest in ideas.	3.8
Non-classroom interactions with faculty positively influenced professional goals and aspirations.	3.7
Developed close, mentoring relationship with at least one faculty member.	3.2
Satisfied with opportunities to meet and interact informally with faculty members.	3.5
<b>“Student-faculty interaction outside of class”</b>	<b>3.6</b>

#### Notes:

- Response range is 1-5, with 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree.
- Cronbach's alpha scale reliability coefficient: 0.9171
- Overall response n is 457.

**Table 4. Survey items under “Classroom experience with faculty”**

Survey items	Average score for the entire sample (maximum score is 5)
Faculty posed challenging ideas in class.	4.1
Faculty asked how a particular course concept could be applied to an actual problem or situation.	4.0
Faculty asked students to point out any fallacies in ideas, principles, or points of view presented in the course.	3.6
Faculty asked students to argue for or against a particular point of view.	3.7
Faculty challenged my ideas in class.	3.8
Students challenged each other’s ideas in class.	3.8
<b>“Classroom experience with faculty”</b>	<b>3.8</b>

Notes:

- Response range is 1-5, with 1=never to 5=very often.
- Cronbach's alpha scale reliability coefficient: 0.9083
- Overall response n is 451.

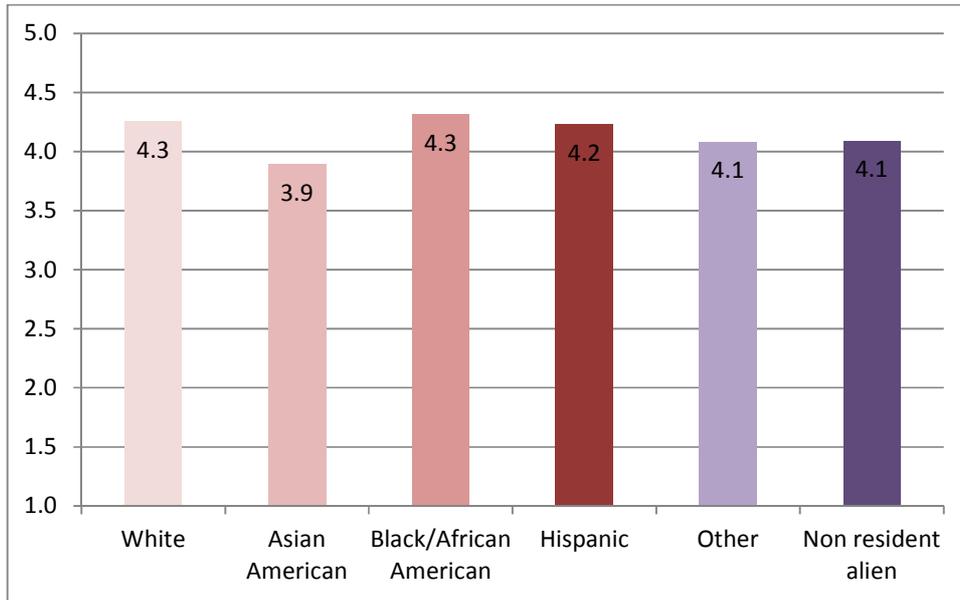
**Table 5. Survey items under “Exposure to diversity”**

Survey items	Average score for the entire sample (maximum score is 5)
Had serious discussions with other students about different lifestyles and customs.	3.5
Had serious discussions with faculty about different lifestyles and customs.	2.9
Had serious discussions with faculty whose political, social, or religious opinions were different from my own.	2.8
Had serious discussions with students whose political, social, or religious opinions were different from their own.	3.3
<b>“Exposure to diversity”</b>	<b>3.1</b>

Notes:

- Response range is 1-5, with 1=never to 5=very often.
- Cronbach's alpha scale reliability coefficient: 0.8974
- Overall response n is 451.

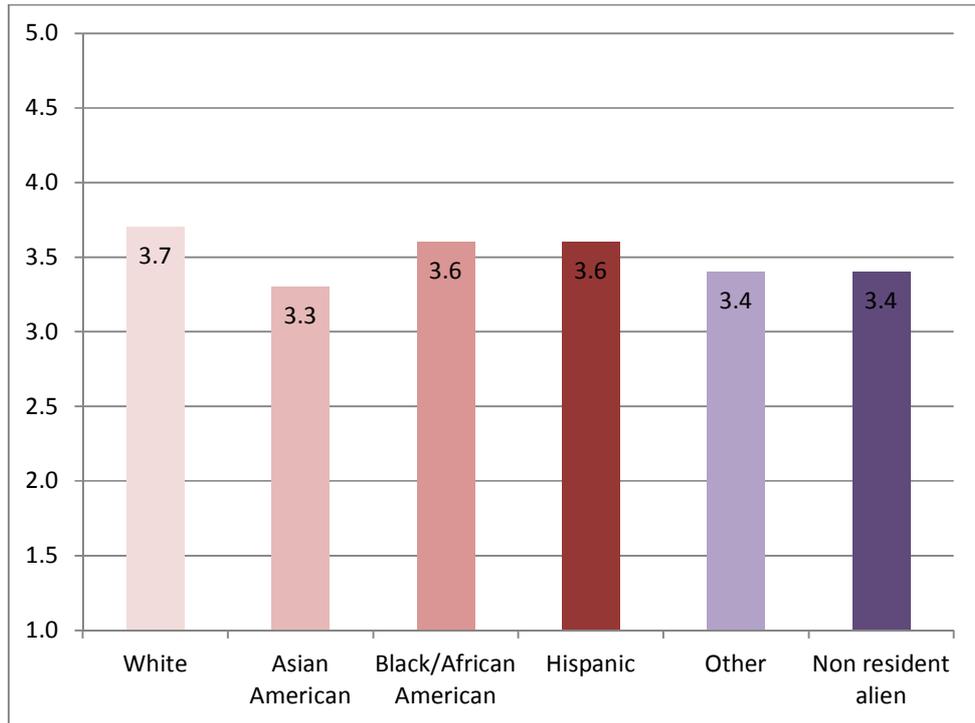
**Figure 2. Faculty interest in teaching and students, by race/ethnicity**



**Notes:**

- Score ranges from a low of 1 to a high of 5.
- Asian American alumni reported lower scores than the rest.
- Race/ethnicity “n” for entire survey: White=274, Asian American=35, Black or African American=32, Hispanic= 39, Other=34, Non-resident alien (non-US citizen)=17

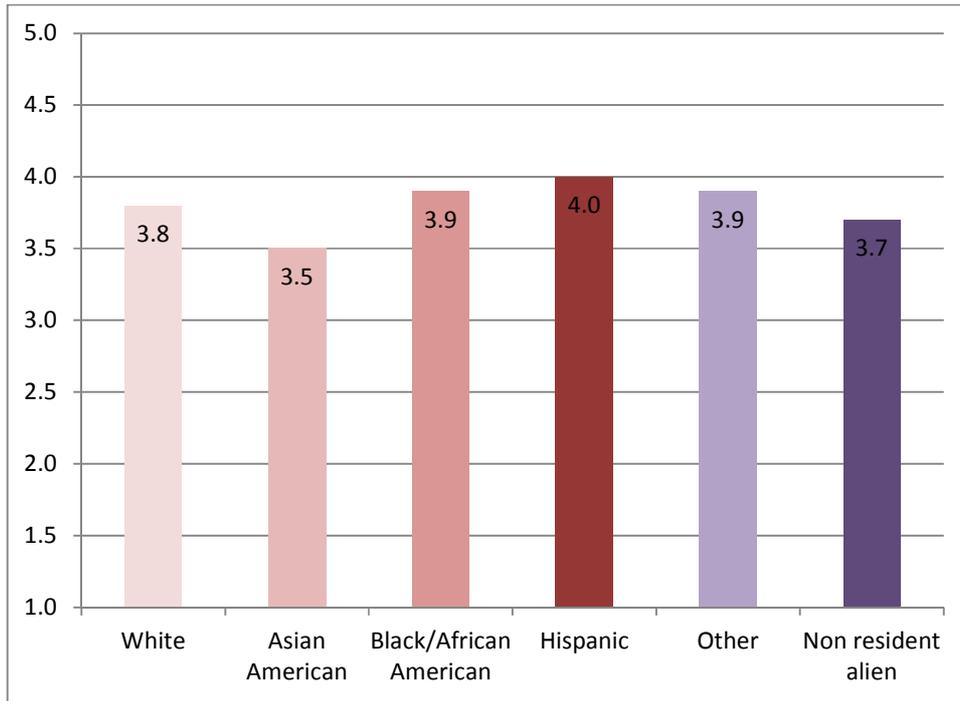
**Figure 3. Student-faculty interaction outside of class, by race/ethnicity**



**Notes:**

- Score ranges from a low of 1 to a high of 5.
- Asian American alumni reported lower scores than the rest.
- Race/ethnicity “n” for entire survey: White=274, Asian American=35, Black or African American=32, Hispanic= 39, Other=34, Non-resident alien (non-US citizen)=17

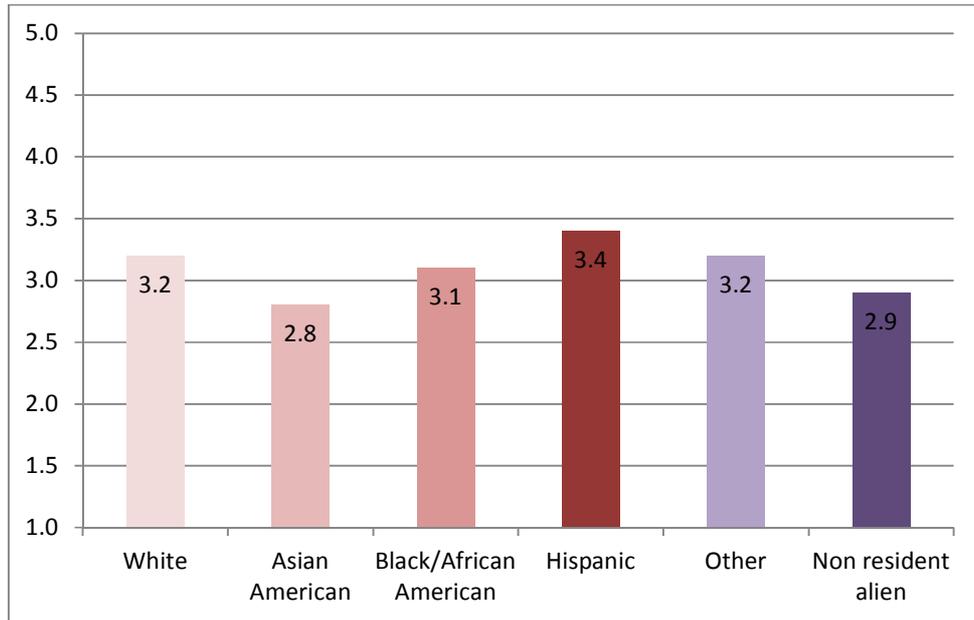
**Figure 4. Classroom experience with faculty, by race/ethnicity**



**Notes:**

- Score ranges from a low of 1 to a high of 5.
- Asian American alumni reported lower scores than the rest.
- Race/ethnicity “n” for entire survey: White=274, Asian American=35, Black or African American=32, Hispanic= 39, Other=34, Non-resident alien (non-US citizen)=17

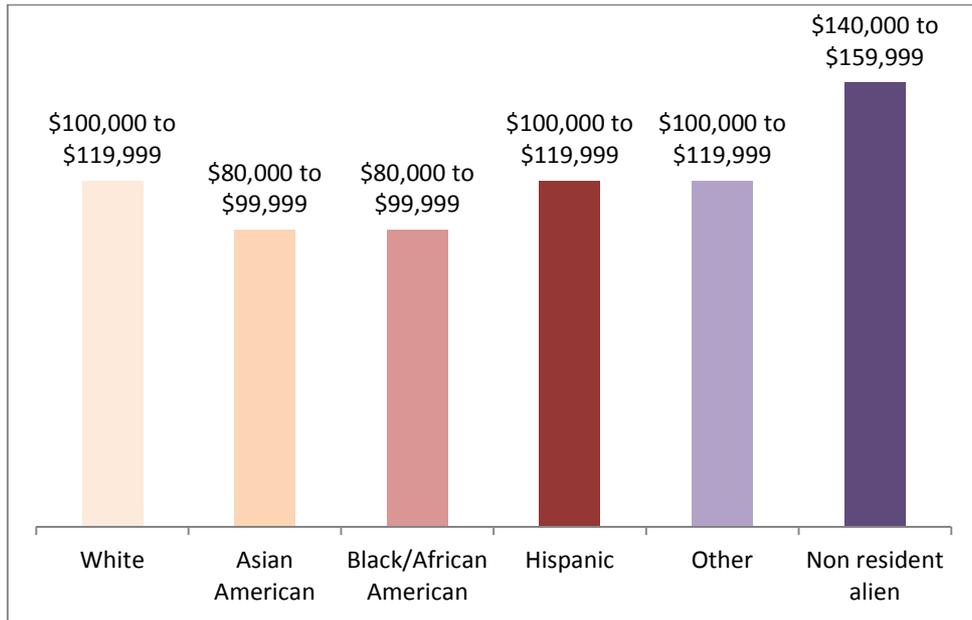
**Figure 5. Preparation for current career, by race/ethnicity**



**Notes:**

- Score ranges from a low of 1 to a high of 4.
- Asian American alumni reported lower scores than the rest.
- Race/ethnicity “n” for entire survey: White=274, Asian American=35, Black or African American=32, Hispanic= 39, Other=34, Non-resident alien (non-US citizen)=17

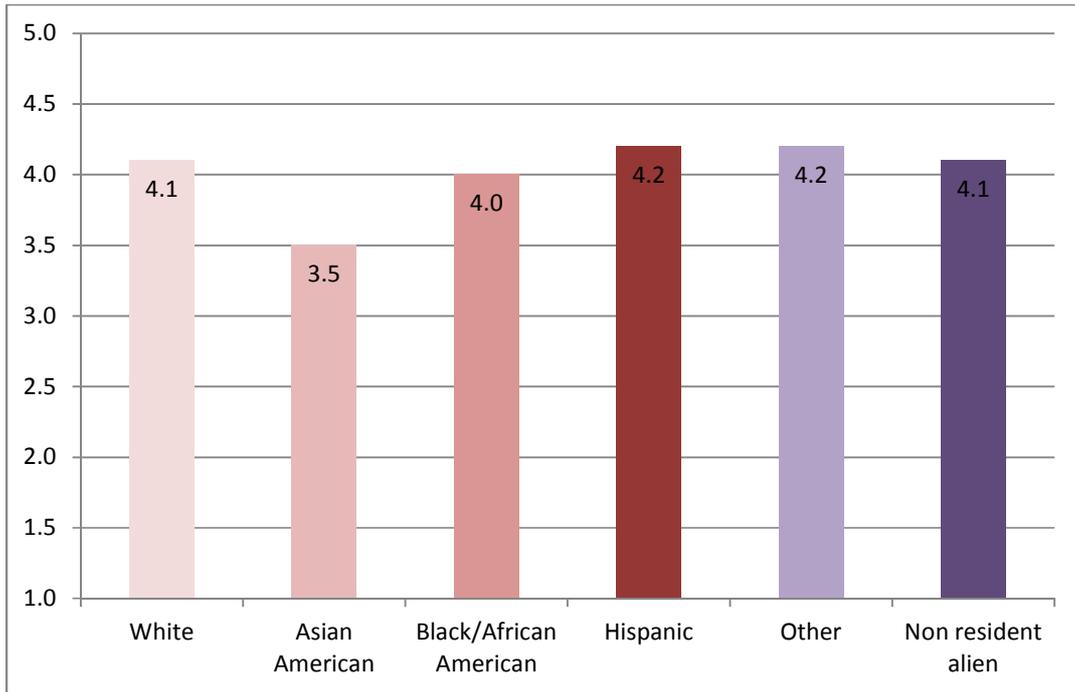
**Figure 6. Current annual income before taxes, by race/ethnicity**



**Notes:**

- Current annual income ranges from “no earned income” to a high of “more than \$250,000.”
- Black/African American and Asian American alumni have lower earnings across races/ethnicities.
- Race/ethnicity “n” for entire survey: White=274, Asian American=35, Black or African American=32, Hispanic= 39, Other=34, Non-resident alien(non-US citizen)=17

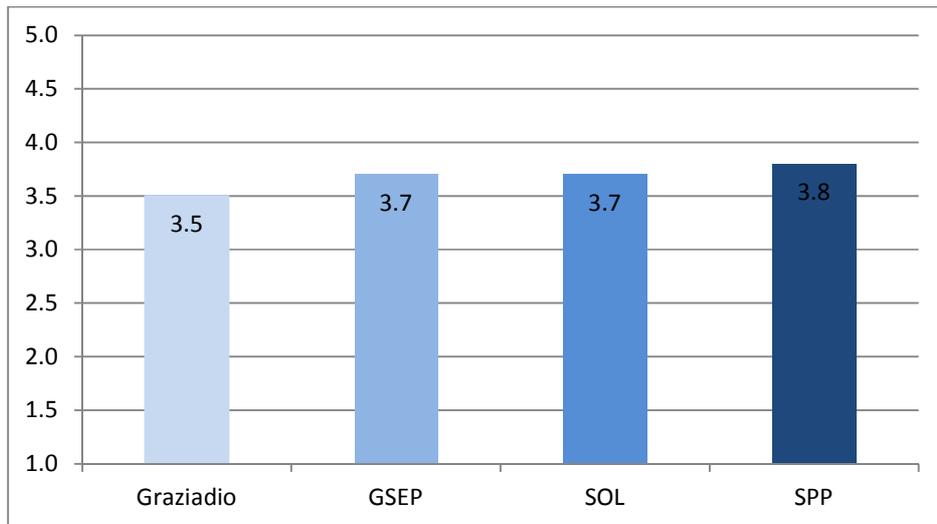
**Figure 7. Overall satisfaction with Pepperdine degree and experience, by race/ethnicity**



Notes:

- Score ranges from a low of 1 to a high of 5.
- Asian American alumni reported lower scores than the rest.
- Race/ethnicity “n” for entire survey: White=274, Asian American=35, Black or African American=32, Hispanic= 39, Other=34, Non-resident alien (non-US citizen)=17

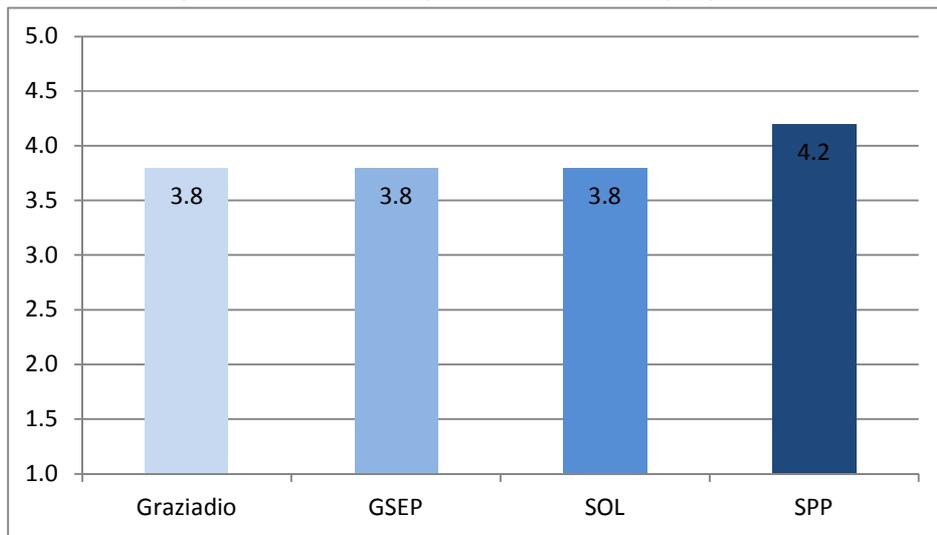
**Figure 8. Student-faculty interaction outside of class, by school**



Notes:

- Score ranges from a low of 1 to a high of 5.
- GSEP has the statistically-significant highest score across schools (despite SPP having the nominal highest score). (Statistical significance is a statistical assessment of whether observations reflect a pattern rather than just chance.)
- School "n" for entire survey: Graziadio=226, GSEP=137, SOL=84, SPP=24

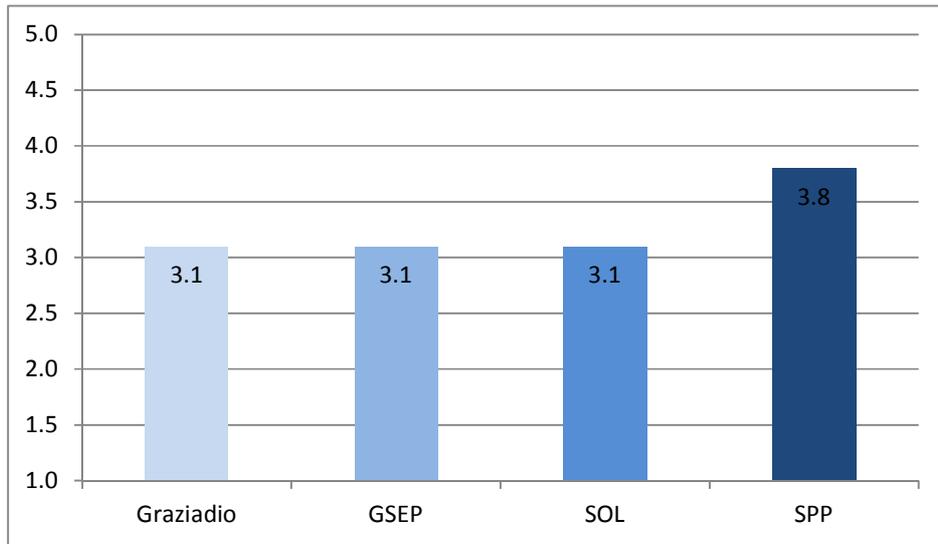
**Figure 9. Classroom experience with faculty, by school**



**Notes:**

- Score ranges from a low of 1 to a high of 5.
- SPP has the highest score across schools.
- School "n" for entire survey: Graziadio=226, GSEP=137, SOL=84, SPP=24

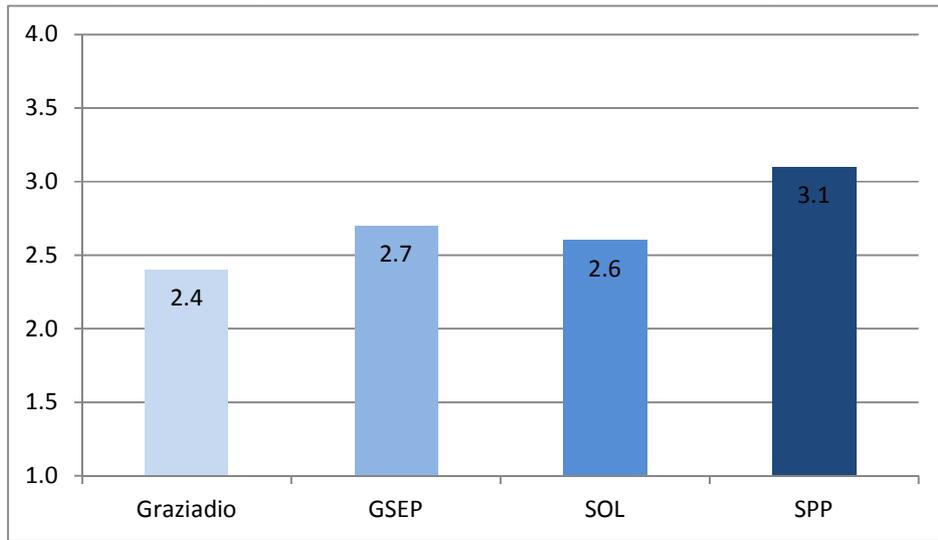
**Figure 10. Exposure to diversity, by school**



**Notes:**

- Score ranges from a low of 1 to a high of 5.
- SPP has the highest score across schools.
- School "n" for entire survey: Graziadio=226, GSEP=137, SOL=84, SPP=24

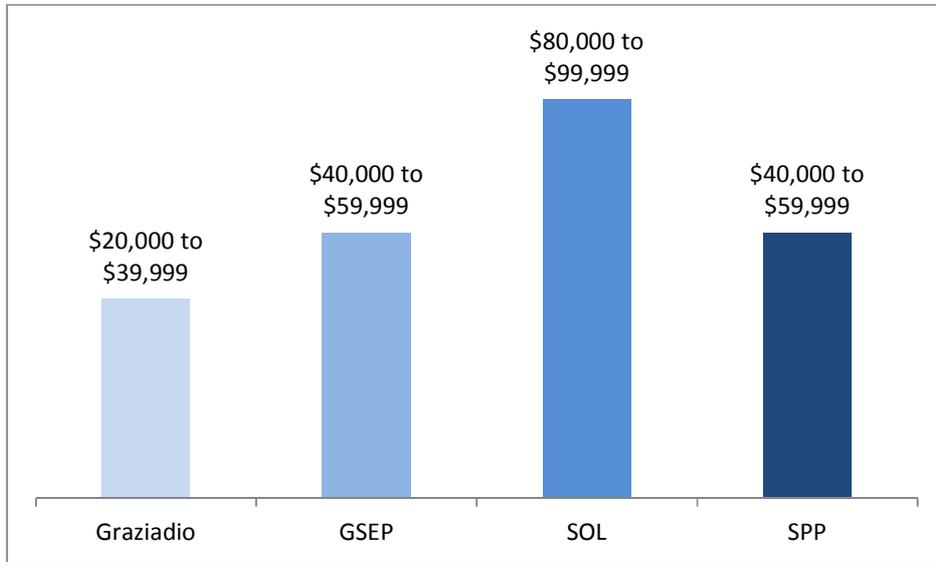
**Figure 11. Preparation for social and civic involvement, by school**



Notes:

- Score ranges from a low of 1 to a high of 4.
- Graziadio has the lowest score across schools.
- School “n” for entire survey: Graziadio=226, GSEP=137, SOL=84, SPP=24

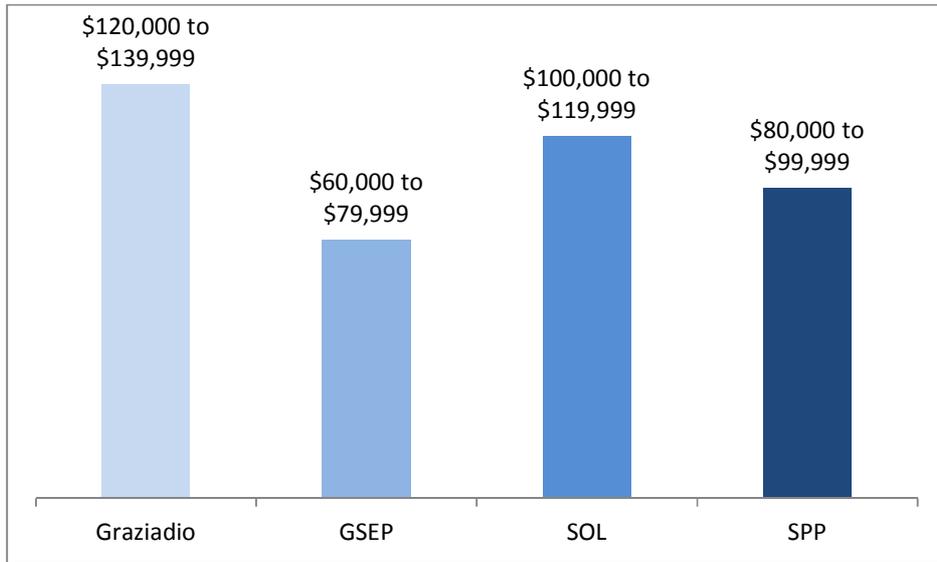
**Figure 12. Total amount borrowed to finance graduate education, by school**



**Notes:**

- Loan amounts range from “no loans” to a high of “more than \$120,000.”
- SOL alumni borrowed the highest amount to finance their graduate education.
- School “n” for entire survey: Graziadio=226, GSEP=137, SOL=84, SPP=24

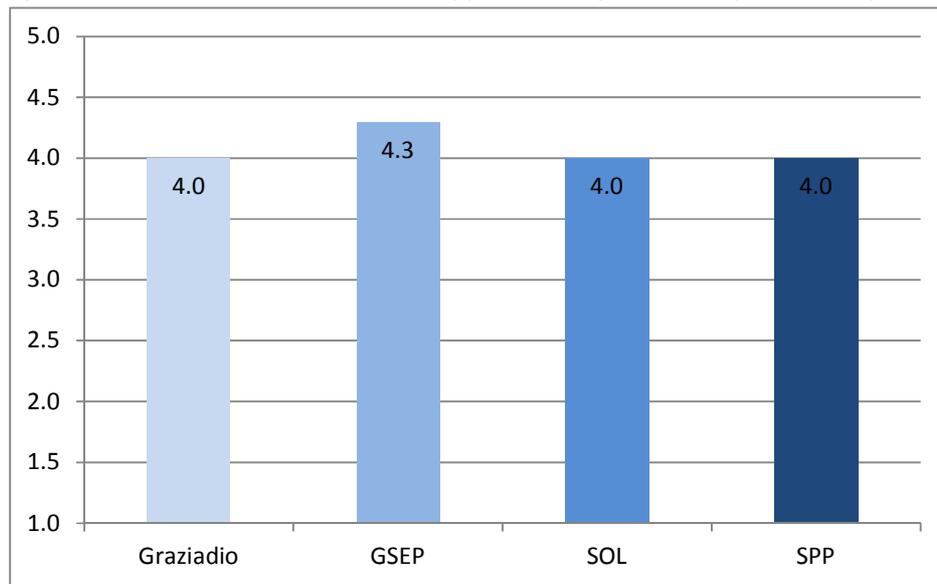
**Figure 13. Current annual income before taxes, by school**



**Notes:**

- Current annual income ranges from “no earned income” to a high of “more than \$250,000.”
- Graziadio alumni earn the highest current annual income across schools, GSEP alumni earn the lowest.
- School “n” for entire survey: Graziadio=226, GSEP=137, SOL=84, SPP=24

**Figure 14. Overall satisfaction with Pepperdine degree and experience, by school**



Notes:

- Score ranges from a low of 1 to a high of 5.
- GSEP has the highest score across schools.
- School "n" for entire survey: Graziadio=226, GSEP=137, SOL=84, SPP=24

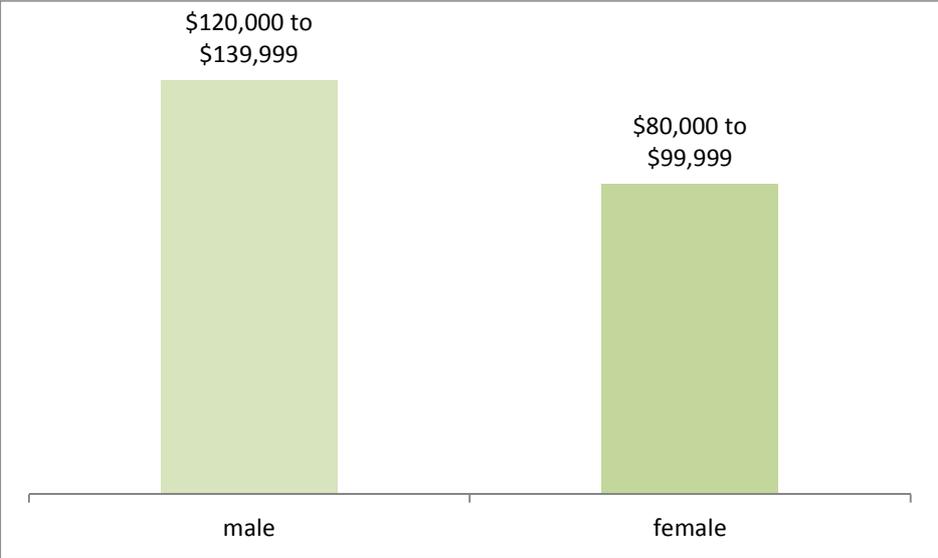
**Figure 15. Total amount borrowed to finance graduate education, by gender**



**Notes:**

- Loan amounts range from “no loans” to a high of “more than \$120,000.”
- There is no statistically-significant difference across gender.
- Gender “n” for entire survey: male=220, female=217

**Figure 16. Current annual income before taxes, by gender**



**Notes:**

- Current annual income ranges from “no earned income” to a high of “more than \$250,000.” Females have statistically-significant lower earnings than males.
- Of the 4 graduate schools, female respondents are most concentrated within GSEP (77% of GSEP respondents are female compared to 51% in SOL, 33% in Graziadio, and 27% in SPP).
- Gender “n” for entire survey: male=220, female=217