graduated during a substantial part of 1975. A summary of the survey responses from the first seventy-five graduates of the year is given in Table 2.

It is clear from the survey that the general response of participants was positive. The survey also reveals those subjects which the participants saw as most useful. An obvious gap in the data appears when we asked the question, “But what did the participants feel who failed to complete the course?” We have no ready answer for that question, though the reasons why people fail to complete the course will be treated later in the article.

Lessons Learned from the Marriage Preparation Course

In addition to the rather scant material data recorded in Tables 1 and 2, observations by the authors and other contributors to the course have yielded some very useful insights into the conduct of a program such as that being described here.

Group integrity is important to the quality and volume of participation in the class setting. We have noticed that during some monthly cycles the membership of the group remained fairly constant. During these periods, participants shared more freely and seemed to feel the classes were more rewarding. During other cycles there was a high rate of participant turnover. In effect, any couple who attended on a given night might find themselves in a totally new group from the previous meeting. We observed that this turnover inhibited free and open sharing and that the couples were accordingly less satisfied with the classes.

Additionally, the differences between the couples tend to influence the course’s effectiveness. During the same evening there might be a junior officer in the group with his intended spouse, who is a college graduate, and a private, E–1, with his 16-year-old fiancee. The same group might contain intelligent, highly-verbal couples along with dull, practically non-verbal couples. Obviously, this presents a difficult challenge to the instructor/facilitator. A great deal of flexibility is required if participatory learning methods are to be used. It was a surprise to some of the instructors to discover the high degree of sophistication among most couples in the physiological aspects of the sexual relationship. Often participating doctors found that they could tell couples almost nothing about the mechanics of sex which they didn’t already know. As a consequence, we shifted from talking about physiology and contraception to discussions about the mental and emotional outcomes of healthy sexual relationships. Participants responded positively to that change.

We had a great deal of difficulty determining why some couples failed to complete the Marriage Preparation Course. We have no numerical statistics to support our conclusions, but a partial follow-up indicated that many of the drop-outs also terminated their counseling relationships with the primary chaplains. Incidental conversations with some