

Reaccreditation Surveys of Alumnae/i & Students

Overview of Results, March 2008



GRINNELL COLLEGE

Grinnell College has since 1913 voluntarily sought and received accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA). Every ten years, the College seeks renewal of its accreditation through the Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality (PEAQ). This process involves a self-study, a site visit, and a report by the HLC. The College's next site visit is scheduled for September 15-17, 2008.

For the 2008 accreditation review, Grinnell College proposed and received authorization from the HLC to conduct a special emphasis self-study focused on a question central to its mission: **How can the College reinvigorate its traditional commitment to train leaders in public service and social justice as it enters the 21st century?**

To help answer this question, the 2008 Self-Study Steering Committee sponsored the *Alumnae/i Reaccreditation Self-Study Survey* and the *Current Student Reaccreditation Self-Study Survey*. These surveys were designed to explore attitudes about, and perceptions of, leadership, service, and the common good as they pertain to Grinnell's educational mission.

Survey methods and response

Overall, a quarter of the people who were invited to participate in these surveys submitted responses.

All current sophomore, junior, and senior students were invited to share their views through this survey. Alumni/ae were selected via random sampling procedures. Graduate records were split by class year to ensure a sufficient number of responses would be returned from the class years of 1998 through 2007 — students who graduated in the period of time since Grinnell's last reaccreditation self-study.

The initial survey invitations were sent to alumnae/i in November 2007. Electronic messages were delivered to current students in January 2008. Both print and electronic data collection methods were employed, and reminder messages were sent to non-respondents at intervals tailored to each group.

The survey instrument was pilot tested at the June 2007 Alumni Reunion.

Response Rates

	Invitees		Respondents		Response rate
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Row percent
Current students	1,064	34.7	313	40.4	29.4
Graduates, 1998-2007	1,000	32.6	250	32.3	25.0
Graduates, 1950-1997	1,000	32.6	212	27.4	21.2
Total	<u>3,064</u>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>775</u>	<u>100.0</u>	25.3

All figures are based on a 2/18/08 data snapshot. The online survey sites have not been closed and a small number of late responses continue to arrive. Invitee counts are not adjusted for 131 alumnae/i records with confirmed delivery issues or outdated contact information. Graduates from 1950-97 are separated into two groups in subsequent sections of this report.

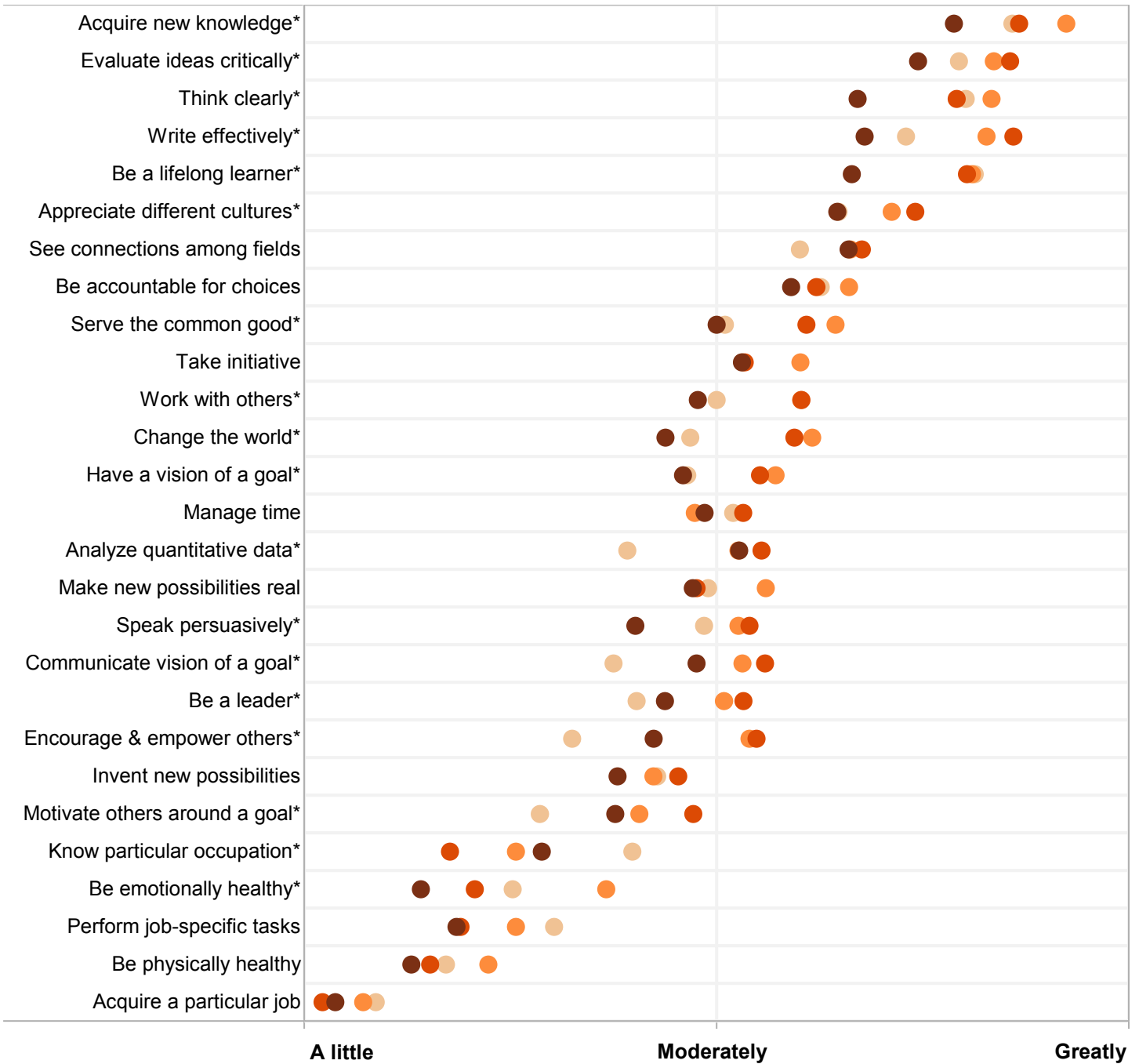
This report summarizes the survey results, following the basic format of the survey instruments themselves (i.e., question order and wording).

► **Think back to your very first day of classes at Grinnell College. Compare your skills and knowledge then to the skills and knowledge you developed by the time you finished your studies at Grinnell. Please indicate the extent to which Grinnell College enhanced your ability to...**

Respondents were presented a series of close-ended attributes such as *write effectively*, *speak persuasively*, and *analyze quantitative data*. For each statement participants were presented a response scale ranging from *Greatly* to *Not at all*. For current students the wording was presented as, "...developed at this point in your education." The results are illustrated in Figure 1.

- Students and graduates identified most strongly with aspects describing habits of mind, such as *acquiring new knowledge*, *evaluating ideas critically*, and *thinking clearly*. These are cornerstone goals of a Grinnell education as articulated in the Mission Statement.
- Occupational training, in terms of *acquiring a particular job immediately after graduation*, *performing job-specific tasks*, or *having knowledge for a particular occupation*, does not characterize a Grinnell education in the eyes of respondents. While the habits of mind (above) help describe what a Grinnell education *is*, the occupational items help describe what a Grinnell education is *not*.
- *Appreciating different cultures* and *seeing connections among different fields of endeavor* were frequently identified as strong suits of the College. These dimensions match up with current campus initiatives centered on internationalization and interdisciplinarity.
- Respondents identified *changing the world for the better* as an attribute enhanced by the Grinnell College experience more frequently than they identified with *being a leader*. This links to the special emphasis regarding the development of "socially concerned leaders dedicated to public service."
- The development of writing skill was highly regarded, but the enhancement of other communication skills received middling endorsements (*speaking persuasively*, *communicating a vision of a goal*). Self-reported development of oral communication skills tend to be weaker on other feedback devices as well (Tutorial evaluations, senior surveys, and reunion surveys).
- Emotional and physical health were not attributes commonly identified as being greatly enhanced by Grinnell College.

Figure 1: To what extent did Grinnell College enhance your ability to...



Legend

- **Current students**, classes 2008-2010, ages 18-24, n = 313
- **Recent graduates**, classes 1998-07, ages 23-32, n = 250
- **Midlife alumnae/i**, classes 1976-97, ages 33-54, n = 113
- **Seasoned alumnae/i**, classes 1950-75, ages 55-80, n = 99

Asterisks indicate significant group differences at $p < .05$.

► Please indicate how important each of the following items is to you personally.

Respondents were presented a series of items such as *working for social change*, *engaging in intellectual challenges*, and *being a lifelong learner*. For each statement participants were presented a response scale ranging from *Essential* to *Not important*. The results are illustrated below in Figure 2. Again, habits of mind come to the fore. Life stage differences are apparent, notably with respect to family and spirituality.

Figure 2: Self-rated importance of various activities



Legend

- **Current students**, classes 2008-2010, ages 18-24, n = 313
- **Recent graduates**, classes 1998-07, ages 23-32, n = 250
- **Midlife alumnae/i**, classes 1976-97, ages 33-54, n = 113
- **Seasoned alumnae/i**, classes 1950-75, ages 55-80, n = 99

Asterisks indicate significant group differences at $p < .05$.

► What does it mean for a person to be a “leader”?

This item was presented as an open-ended question. We received 424 responses from alumnae/i, and committee members read each one. In an initial debriefing session, the committee discussed general themes and shared observations. One of our initial observations was that the responses tended to be very people-oriented (versus power-oriented).

After the initial debriefing, the committee established a process to categorize and synthesize the comments. We built on the insights obtained from the trial run administered at the alumni reunion, which allowed us to test wording and to solicit feedback from the people being queried. We learned, for example, that once respondents are presented with the term “common good” they tend to pick it up and refer to it in subsequent responses. We also found that respondents who reflected on differences between 20th and 21st century public service and social justice tended to highlight international and environmental issues.

The aim of content analysis was the production of a dependable summary of themes. Three reviewers read the submissions independently and we worked to triangulate first-pass results. Simultaneously, we used mechanical tools to get a better feel for the language used by respondents to express their thoughts about leadership.

Figure 3 presents a list of frequently-used words with verbatim examples of their placement in sentences. This is a simple word count, and the words themselves may be used in very different contexts. Nonetheless, as an early step this proved useful for familiarizing us with the vocabulary. The *rates* listed refer to how often these words would appear if the frequencies of occurrence were applied to a hypothetical 1,000 word essay on leadership (roughly two single-spaced typed pages). For example, the word “inspire” might be used the equivalent of ten times in our imaginary two-page paper. Figure 4 extends this process by looking at frequently-used combinations of words, displaying the overall frequencies of occurrence.

Using these inductive procedures, we created a framework to categorize the responses. After modifications and refinement, we settled on the rubric depicted in Figure 5. The category names (in bold) are shorthand descriptions and were selected to indicate the general concept or direction of each theme. Additional details and “catch phrases” are listed under each category name.

With this framework we again reviewed each response to the question, “What does it mean for a person to be a leader?” Each response, now also including each of the 277 student submissions, was read in context and coded into these categories. While alternative approaches could yield different results, the iterative and duplicative nature of this process provided a satisfying step toward finding a stable, confirmable set of themes.

Figure 6 illustrates the results of this process. The findings are displayed as a concept map. Themes listed near the center indicate that concept was found more frequently among the survey responses. The numbers refer to the percentage of responses that were coded into each respective category. The map indicates, for example, that nearly 50 percent of the respondents spoke to the theme of “engaging people” when they described leadership. Items listed further from the center of the map were encountered less frequently in this set of survey responses.

Figure 7 breaks down the top five categories by respondent type. This figure shows that current students speak in terms of *engaging people* (inspiring, motivating, persuading) and *communication skills* less frequently than alumnae/i when describing leadership. Students are more likely to speak to aspects of *vision & planning*, which might be linked to the importance of organizing their time through four-year plans and extracurricular logistics at this stage of life. These results may be indicative of life experiences beyond Grinnell, and to the degree graduates have arrived at conclusions about leadership that current students have not yet encountered, readers may want to filter these patterns through a developmental lens.

Figure 3: Frequently-used words regarding leadership

	<u>Rate</u>		<u>Rate</u>
1. Others	33.8		
<i>focusing others on solutions</i>			
<i>help others imagine how</i>			
<i>a guide who helps others</i>			
2. Goal(s)	15.4		
<i>support of a goal and/or cause</i>			
<i>work toward meaningful goals</i>			
<i>thinks critically about goals and directions</i>			
3. Vision	12.2		
<i>visionary, visioning</i>			
<i>create a vision</i>			
<i>inspire a shared vision</i>			
<i>make these visions reality</i>			
4. Motivate	11.8		
<i>motivates, motivator, motivation</i>			
<i>organize, motivate, and coordinate</i>			
<i>someone who motivates action</i>			
<i>courage and motivation</i>			
5. Inspire	10.4		
<i>inspiring, inspiration, inspirational</i>			
<i>to be an inspiration</i>			
<i>the ability to inspire change in people</i>			
<i>vision, tools, and inspiration to get there</i>			
6. Common	6.8		
<i>(as in joint or shared)</i>			
<i>brings people with common goals together</i>			
<i>furtherance of a common cause or purpose</i>			
<i>promoting the common good</i>			
7. Idea(s)	6.6		
<i>synthesizing many ideas</i>			
<i>guides an idea into physical reality</i>			
<i>conduit for ideas to pass through</i>			
8. Example	6.3		
<i>living by example</i>			
<i>excellence through example</i>			
<i>being a good example for others</i>			
9. Ability	6.2		
<i>abilities</i>			
<i>knowledge and abilities</i>			
<i>ability to take in</i>			
<i>ability to carry out</i>			
10. Think	5.3		
<i>thinker, thinking</i>			
<i>think for themselves</i>			
<i>new ways of thinking</i>			
<i>thinks critically and outside the box</i>			
11. Listen	4.6		
<i>listener, listening, listens, listened</i>			
<i>encourage dialogue, listen</i>			
<i>worthy of being listened to, taken seriously</i>			
<i>listening to and incorporating the good ideas</i>			
12. Respect	4.0		
<i>respected, respectful, respectable</i>			
<i>people who command respect</i>			
<i>respects and is respected by their peers</i>			
<i>listens and is respectful of other's ideas</i>			
13. Decision(s)	3.9		
<i>decisive(ness)</i>			
<i>effective and thoughtful decision maker</i>			
<i>confidence to make decisions</i>			
<i>facilitate group decision-making</i>			
		14. Initiative	3.8
		<i>takes initiative to solve problems</i>	
		<i>taking the initiative to achieve</i>	
		<i>big-picture thinker who initiates positive change</i>	
		15. Responsibility	3.8
		<i>responsibilities, responsible</i>	
		<i>acceptance of the responsibilities</i>	
		<i>feel a deep responsibility for those people</i>	
		<i>sharing responsibility with a team</i>	
		16. Encourage	3.5
		<i>encouraging, encouragement</i>	
		<i>motivate, encourage, and guide others</i>	
		<i>management, encouragement</i>	
		<i>encouraging yourself and others</i>	
		17. Achieve	3.4
		<i>initiative to achieve the solution</i>	
		<i>voices to achieve that change</i>	
		<i>achieve a stated goal</i>	
		18. Communicate	3.4
		<i>clearly communicate the plan</i>	
		<i>being able to communicate the results</i>	
		<i>communicate effectively to others</i>	
		19. Accomplish	2.9
		<i>accomplished, accomplishing</i>	
		<i>work toward accomplishing the task</i>	
		<i>accomplish specific ends</i>	
		<i>more than could be accomplished individually</i>	
		20. Knowledge/knowledgeable	2.9
		<i>give others the knowledge that they need</i>	
		<i>having the requisite knowledge</i>	
		<i>knowledgeable and willing to share knowledge</i>	
		21. Model	2.7
		<i>modeling, models</i>	
		<i>being a role model</i>	
		<i>serve as a model and mentor</i>	
		<i>modeling the behavior you expect</i>	
		22. Team/teamwork	2.7
		<i>keep team focused on mission</i>	
		<i>getting the relevant team to work together</i>	
		<i>have mastered teamwork</i>	
		23. Together	2.7
		<i>bringing people together</i>	
		<i>helps everyone work together</i>	
		<i>achieve specific goals together</i>	
		24. Action	2.6
		<i>by words and action</i>	
		<i>both action and education</i>	
		<i>knowledge and demonstrable actions</i>	
		25. Confidence/confident	2.2
		<i>confident and fearless</i>	
		<i>confidence in themselves and others</i>	
		<i>enthusiasm and confidence is contagious</i>	

Figure 4: Common word combinations regarding leadership

Two-word combinations	<u>Freq.</u>
common goal	37
a vision	32
motivate others	25
to motivate	25
by example	23
to achieve	22
to inspire	19
inspire others	17
other people	15
to accomplish	15
toward a	15
to communicate	14
an example	13
inspires others	13
motivate people	13
to help	12
to see	12
responsibility for	11
role model	10
take initiative	8

Three-word combinations	<u>Freq.</u>
a common goal	34
group of people	12
inspires others to	11
motivate others to	11
inspire others to	10
others to follow	8
around a common	7
to motivate others	7
to motivate people	7
a role model	6
who inspires others	6
a shared vision	5
set an example	5
the big picture	5
those around you	5
a clear vision	4
a common cause	4
points of view	3
take responsibility for	3
the courage to	3

Four-word combinations	<u>Freq.</u>
toward a common goal	17
who inspires others to	10
be able to motivate	7
the ability to motivate	7
achieve a common goal	5
to do their best	5
around a common goal	4
inspires others to follow	4
someone who can motivate	4
to have a vision	4
a role model for	3
an example for others	3
be able to communicate	3
be able to inspire	3
for the greater good	3
is not afraid to	3
to set an example	3
willing to take risks	3
in the face of	2
see the big picture	2

Five-word combinations	<u>Freq.</u>
be able to inspire others	8
others toward a common goal	7
others to do their best	5
the ability to motivate people	4
to achieve a common goal	4
what needs to be done	3
able to inspire/motivate others	2
and being able to communicate	2
be able to show others	2
be willing to take risks	2
for what you believe in	2
leader must lead by example	2
others turn to for advice	2
people look to you for	2
plan and motivate others to	2
serve as a role model	2
show by example how to	2
someone who sets an example	2
to motivate others to perform	2
to take the initiative to	2

Figure 5: Classification framework for text responses to the question “What is leadership?”

Case No. _____

Check as many categories as apply. These items are listed in no particular order.

- Communication**
Listening, expressing or speaking, having or building relationships and networks, general communication skills
- Role modeling**
Being a role model, walking-the-walk, leading by example, setting an example for others, demonstrating, living your values
- Heart & humility**
Caring, being fair, compassion, humility, empathy, being approachable, looking after others
- Critical thinking**
Thinking outside-the-box, identifying issues, challenging the now, problem-solving, being a critical thinker
- Decisiveness**
Willing to make the call, being a decision-maker
- Vision & planning**
Having a vision, setting goals, planning, seeing how things fit together, connecting the dots, organizing in the sense of logistics, being intentional
- Internal motivation**
Being a self-starter, having initiative, willingness to take risks and make mistakes, entrepreneurial
- Strengthening others**
Empowering other people, teaching, guiding, serving others, enabling, building people up, service that goes beyond self-interest
- Engaging people**
Inspire, motivate, persuade, influence, engage others by imparting or projecting, organizing in a person-to-person sense, rallying through group or team embeddedness
- Authenticity**
Knowing yourself, self-discipline, standing up, self-confidence, being your own person, finding your passion, taking responsibility
- Structure**
Structural power, hierarchy, position, authority, management, making use of resources (human, financial, physical, social, etc.), establishment
- Specialized knowledge**
Technical knowledge, unique knowledge, specialized expertise, having a knowledge base
- Ethics & integrity**
Acting from a set of values, morals, integrity, stewardship, professional ethics, honesty

Figure 6: Concept map for “What does it mean for a person to be a leader?”

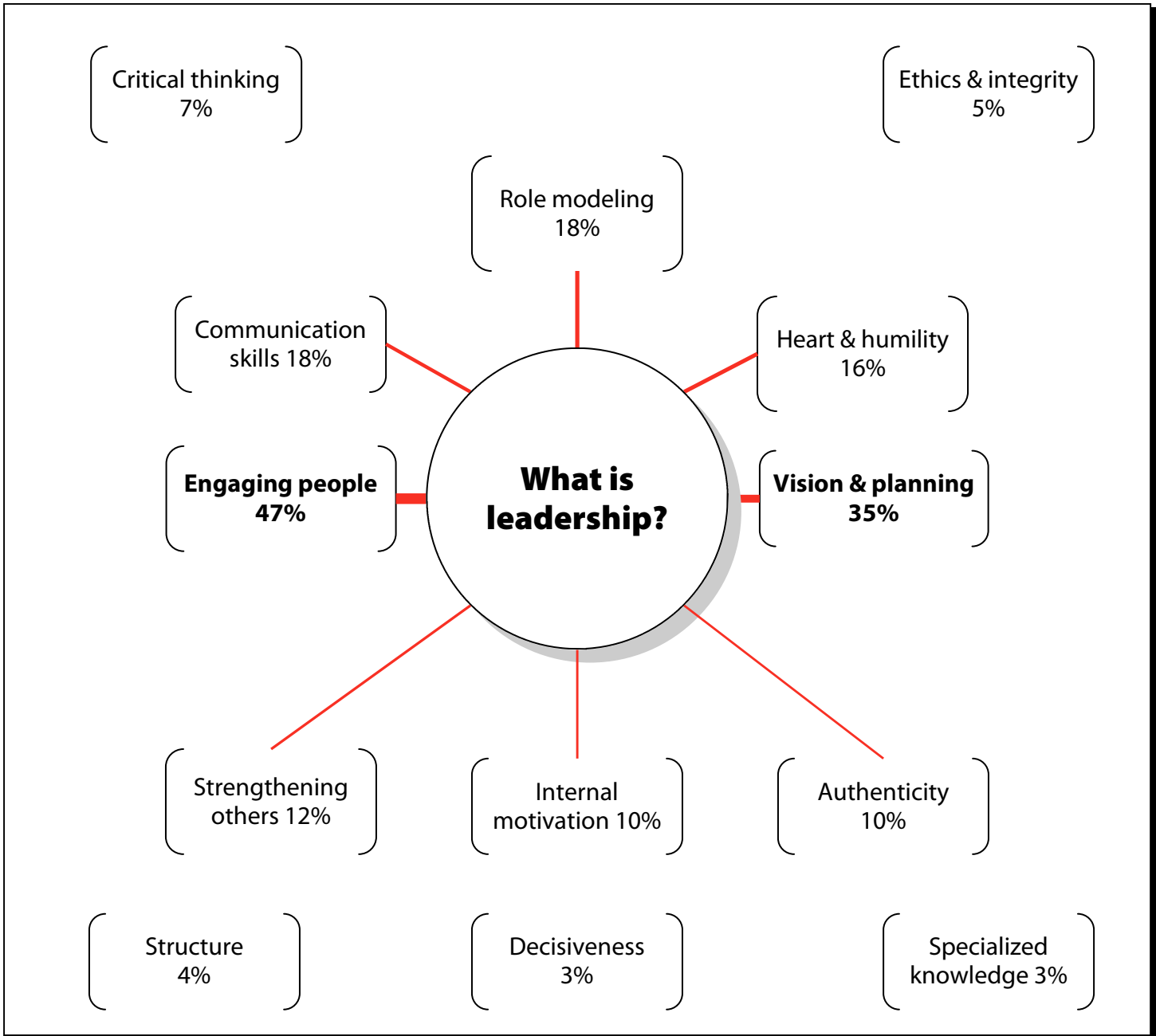
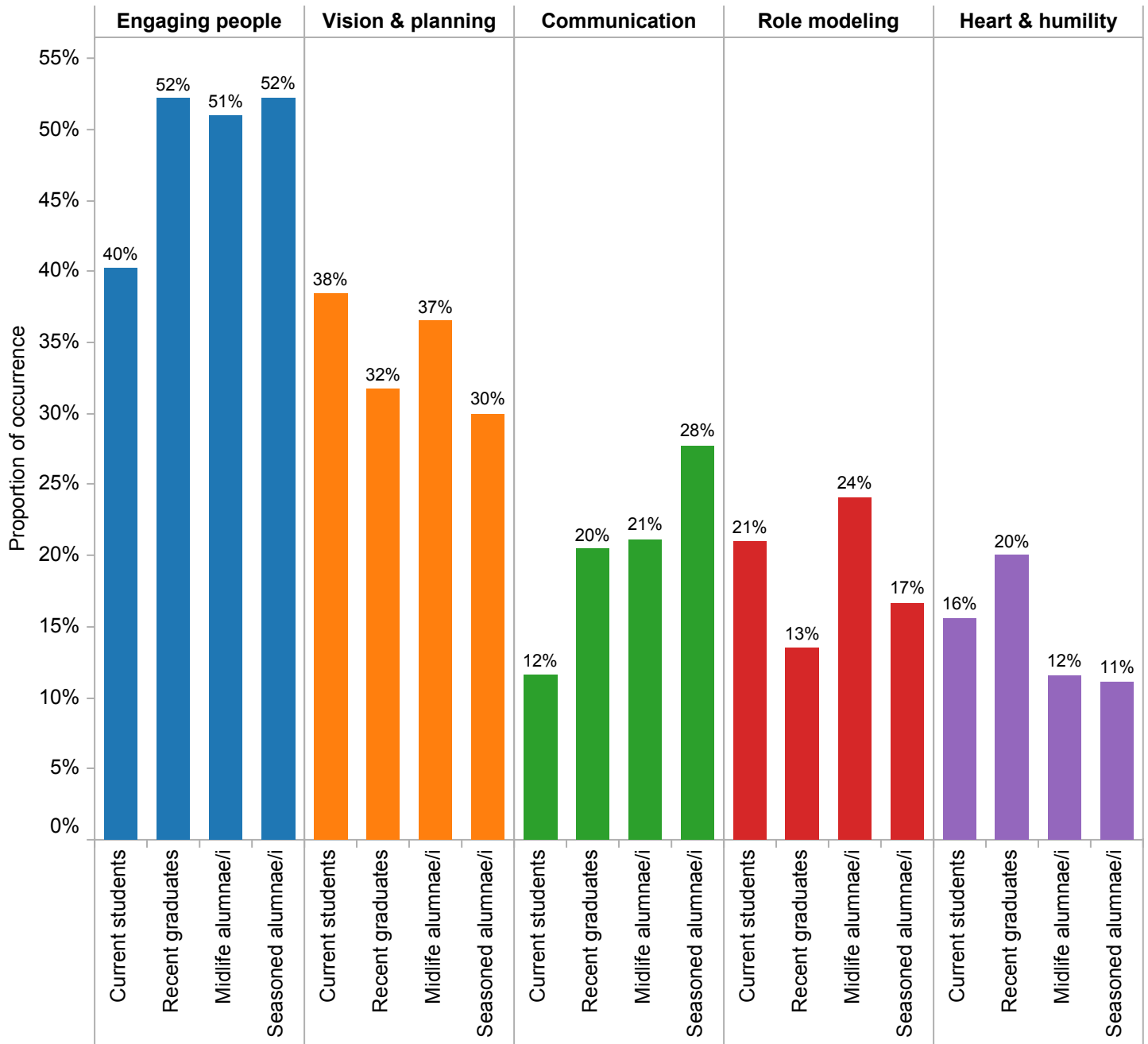


Figure 7: Leadership themes by respondent group



The proportion of occurrence for a given theme is the individual frequency divided by the total count of all responses.

► **Do you see yourself as a leader? Why?**

The majority of respondents identified themselves as leaders. Midlife alumnae/i most frequently labeled themselves as leaders, while students were less sure and seasoned alumnae/i more frequently said no.

	<u>Current students</u>	<u>Recent graduates</u>	<u>Midlife alumnae/i</u>	<u>Seasoned alumnae/i</u>
Yes	50.2 %	56.8 %	72.6 %	60.6 %
No	14.1	12.4	8.0	22.2
Not sure	32.3	29.2	16.8	14.1
No response	3.5	1.6	2.7	3.0

Alumnae/i examples

Yes. Although I don't tend to seek it out, I do find in my work, civic and daily life that others often look to me for leadership. I try to demonstrate leadership by practicing the qualities I've listed above: integrity, honesty, self-reflexiveness, compassion, and fairness. I do not, however, equate leadership with power at the level of the individual.

No. I see myself as an innovator, but not as a leader. I lead by example, in the choices I make as a consumer, and the moral decisions I make. However, I'm too private a person to want to lead a group of people, and far too humble to assume the decisions I make are the right choices for others.

Not sure. I'm interested in living meaningfully and planting positive seeds for the future. In situations where being a leader can help me accomplish that goal (in particular situations where there is a leadership vacuum), I try to develop my leadership qualities. In other situations being a leader is not so critical for accomplishing these goals, and I'm content to follow a great leader where I see one.

Student examples

Yes. I have been given the privilege while at Grinnell and throughout my life to develop goals and work with a team to accomplish these goals, and I have had success as a leader in attempting to accomplish these goals. I have an ability to persuade people that certain goals are worth time and effort...

Yes. I have developed my understanding of the needs and feelings of others throughout my time as a captain of a Grinnell sports team. Grinnell has also made me more confident and communicative.

Yes. I am not afraid of going against the grain or speaking out even when it might get me in trouble.

No. I prefer to work in the wings, and would rather be responsible for managing a given task of my own than directing others in various tasks.

No. I don't want to be a leader. I want to go where I want, literally and metaphorically, without having to answer to anyone, including those following me.

Not sure. I'm still developing myself, and I think one needs to really know oneself before leading others.

Not sure. I am a shy person and am often overly self-conscious and concerned with my own well-being rather than that of others. I often have difficulty expressing my ideas, making it difficult to be a leader because I can't clearly explain my views or my ideas.

Not sure. I want to be a professor eventually, but I still think I have a long way to go in becoming a person who could design and lead a class.

► **What does “serving the common good” mean in the 21st century? How do you see yourself serving the common good?**

To further our triangulation efforts, we asked an external analyst to summarize the responses to questions about the common good. Melinda Trembl of Fourth Dimension Consulting (Flagstaff, AZ), who specializes in grounded theory and organizational culture, processed the responses to these questions. The following paragraphs summarize her findings.

The responses to the question “What does it mean to serve the common good?” generally had four characteristics:

1. The group or population current students and alumnae/i identified as the “common.”
2. How they served the common good and/or the activities and actions they associated with such “service.”
3. How they personally related to the statement “to serve the common good.”
4. Complex, critical discernment about what it meant “to serve the common good.”

The group or population current students and alumnae/i identified as the “common”

In definitions of the common good, students and alumnae/i both discussed populations they viewed as “the common” — groups, people, or individuals who were served. A marked decrease was revealed across generations, as shown in the table below. Current students were more likely to identify who they were discussing when they spoke of the “common” good, whereas seasoned alumnae/i were least likely to identify the “common.”

Identification of the “common” by four generational groups

Current students	82 %
Recent graduates	74
Midlife alumnae/i	68
Seasoned alumnae/i	58

Of those who identified a specific group or population as the “common,” the following seven characteristics were primarily used:

1. Those around me (8%)
[Being considerate and thoughtful of] those around me
The lives of your friends and family
Peers and/or colleagues
2. The community (22%)
[To create or maintain a more hospitable and equal environment] in your community
[Helping out] people in your community
[Participating in] the local community
3. The world / global (29%)
[Give back to] the world
[Participating in] the global community
[Work towards the betterment of] humankind as a whole
4. “Others” (52%)
[Value] the lives of others
[For] people in general
[The betterment for] society as a whole

5. The disadvantaged or less fortunate (12%)
Help those in need
[For] those less fortunate than oneself
[Work for the betterment of] the least common denominator
6. Several areas of the above were frequently spoken of in relationship to each other
[Sustainability of] the community and the world
Act locally, think globally
[Whether it is in a] small community or large social system
Helping one's own community in a way that brings it closer to the global community
Balance among personal well-being local community well-being, national well-being and the well-being of the world
7. One's region, nation or country, was almost always described in relationship to other larger and smaller populations
The community, nation and world [can be thought of as being communities of their own]
Whether in your house your school, your town, your country, your world
Being conscious of worldwide affairs and how what happens in the US has repercussions around the world

How they served the “common good” and/or the activities and actions they associated with such “service”

Current students and alumnae/i both discussed different activities or areas that they associated with “serving” the common good. In the table below, it is clear that current students identified these areas far less frequently than alumnae/i.

**Identification of activities or actions associated with “service”
by four generational groups**

Current students	25 %
Recent graduates	47
Midlife alumnae/i	43
Seasoned alumnae/i	44

Of the individuals who discussed “service” in their definition of the common good, the following areas were frequently included in their definitions:

The Social Realm

Working in the areas of social justice
Educate others, especially children, to think critically
Valuing all human individuals and affording them the resources and support they need to feel they are fully functioning, well-valued citizens of the world

The Environment

Overcoming global climate change
Living in an environmentally responsible way
Working to counteract environmental damage

The Political Realm

Defending Democracy
Making well-informed choices in elections
Supporting war only as a last resort

The Economic Realm

That all have a legitimately fair chance to compete on the worldwide market
Sharing wealth and resources more equitably
Running an ethical business that treats employees well and contributes to the economy

Community Service or Philanthropy

Volunteering / Volunteer work
Doing community service
Contributing financially to charitable causes

Of the individuals who did *not* discuss the type of service or action that they would take to “serve the common good,” they frequently responded to the question in a more general fashion, as follows:

Helping make the world a better place
Do something that reduces or prevents pain and suffering in those around you
Helping people help themselves
Work to help others have a better life

How they personally related to the statement “to serve the common good”

About half of all current students and alumae/i identified how they personally related to the statement “to serve the common good.” No generational differences were discerned. Their responses took three primary forms:

Taking personal action, whether general or specific

Requires one spend a great deal of their own time serving/helping others
Knowing how to put one's values into action and doing it
Raising one's children to be tolerant and respectful of diversity
Pick problem areas where you have some affinity and expertise and then get off your [rear end] and do something about it

Thinking and acting beyond the self

Be unselfish toward others
Thinking about others outside our own sphere
Not being self-interested and looking out for others' wellbeing

Integration (or differentiation) of the self and the world; ranging from sacrificing one's self for another or a group, through balancing self-interest with common interest, to acting first for the self rather than for the “other” (altruism vs. self-interest)

Being willing to sacrifice a degree of personal comfort and autonomy for a more even distribution of resources and to live sustainably with limited resources
Serve others while earning an income for myself
Attend to our own needs before we can address the needs of others

Complex, critical discernment about what it meant to “serve the common good”

When current students and alumnae/i defined what it means to serve the common good, many turned to complex realms of discernment identified through the following three areas:

Have an awareness of the problem, consider its complexity and make decisions or find solutions in order to address the common good

Identify future problems before they become overwhelming
Thinking very clearly about the consequences of personal and national actions
Being aware of the world and the challenges currently facing the world: global warming, diseases, etc.
Go beyond current paradigms, create new approaches, shift from a focus on knowing to a focus on participating in creating

Seek out the different ideas and perspectives about an action one would take to serve the common good
Negotiating a seemingly-contradictory world of great challenges to try to benefit other living things
When everyone's wellbeing is taken into consideration, society as a whole will be better off
Paying attention to the context of a problem

Finding a solution or viewing the issue of serving the common good from the perspective of the long term
Thinking about the long-term implications of actions in terms of all populations of individuals
Be aware of how the past effects the present and how both affect the future
Improving life for the next generation

Occasionally, (less than 3% of any of the generational groups) a nihilistic view of the world emerged. In these responses, both current students and alumnae/i appeared to feel a sense of powerlessness to have a positive effect on the world and believed in humanity's potential destruction of itself:

[It means] nothing
Disseminating a sense of universal and infinite responsibility and guilt
Fixing one problem creates other problems of a different but related nature
Becomes overwhelming and apparently impossible
Stopping huge corporations from demolishing everything else

Issues, areas of interest, and activities in the professional life: A comparison

Sixty-eight percent of current students discussed different issues, areas of interest, or activities they foresee themselves carrying out to serve the common good. Nearly 80 percent of the alumnae/i discussed specific issue areas in the descriptions of their professional lives vis-à-vis the common good. The following categories emerged from the responses and are displayed with example passages.

Social Issues, Politics	
<p>Current Students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>AmeriCorps</i> - <i>Be a leading scholar of Japanese politics and society; establish think tanks to create ideas to make the world a better place; be a politician to create changes.</i> - <i>Clinical psychologist, providing mental health services to those in need.</i> - <i>Work in the field of social justice.</i> 	<p>Alumnae/i</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Serve the state legislature.</i> - <i>Researcher — publish on how contemporary media and telecommunications help and hinder human social relations.</i> - <i>Conducting professional psychological services for underserved populations.</i> - <i>Involved in public policy bringing quality healthcare for those who do not have it.</i>
International Social Work	
<p>Current Students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Work for Doctors Without Borders.</i> - <i>Peace Corps</i> - <i>Teach languages to foster communication on a global level.</i> 	<p>Alumnae/i</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Family doctor. Used my professional skills to go to Haiti.</i> - <i>Peace Corps — I teach underprivileged students in a small West African high school the knowledge that they will need to receive good enough test scores to get good jobs.</i> - <i>Serve U.S. and global interests by educating people on a variety of issues that are important to the lives of those in Afghanistan.</i>

Environment / Sustainability

Current Students

- Marine ecology — save sea animals through conservation.
- Looking into research in alternative energy sources like solar power.
- Become an architect [and] design environmentally friendly, cheap buildings.

Alumnae/i

- Marine lab that focuses on undergraduate education.
- Create new and sustainable ways to generate energy without releasing CO₂.
- Improving the efficiency of technologies to reduce energy costs which enables us to use our resources better.

Health / Medicine

Current Students

- Attend medical school, become some type of pediatric doctor.
- Do research about communicable diseases.
- Work in public health.

Alumnae/i

- Promote health and healthy lifestyles of patients; serve underserved populations.
- Child development lab and using primate models to help understand how developmental and behavioral diseases occur.
- Public health — address health concerns at the population level.

Education

Current Students

- Teach for America
- A professor, hopefully contributing to the field of religious studies and helping with religious pluralism...
- Teach high school math.

Alumnae/i

- Work with low-income kids from an urban area in a college access and leadership development program.
- As a clinical professor I have prepared and educated hundreds of students, many of whom serve society as psychologists and counselors, or live their lives in other careers.
- Specifically teach students to think critically; deal with the broader question of how to protect and preserve what we have.

Nonprofits

Current Students

- Work in the communications department of a nonprofit.
- Professional grant writing and organizing.
- I plan to eventually work in the nonprofit sector.

Alumnae/i

- As an executive director of a nonprofit, I engage the broader community in meeting the needs of elderly to remain in their homes and retain their dignity and independence.
- I worked in international development with a small nonprofit organization, then in governance building with the United Nations, and finally with at-risk youth who were in trouble with the law.
- My entire professional life has been spent in the nonprofit sector; I have wholly devoted my adult life to improving the greater Chicago community through my work.

A single issue area was only identified by alumnae/i and not by current students: the Economic Realm. Alumnae/i provided the following types of experiences from the Economic Realm:

I work in the area of community development lending at a small bank — helping my bank put resources into the community to support nonprofits, build affordable housing, build schools, etc. I also try to be an advocate internally for work/life balance and diversity issues.

My work as a CPA is essentially service work. I do work for clients, such as preparing financial statements or the returns that they are unable to do themselves. I see this as a valuable service, helping others analyze their businesses and comply with the tax laws.

In my business, I use recyclable materials and environmentally-friendly processes for dyeing and weaving.

I employ people and provide paychecks.

Finally, current students mentioned that they would pursue their professional lives / careers in two very important ways (ways in which alumnae/i described as general actions they took in their careers):

1. Through integrating their personal values into their careers and professional lives.

I hope to teach art to children and adults as a career while also developing my own art and music. Art is therapeutic and helps people think about life from different perspectives, which is a necessary step of personal development that leads to a well-minded balanced, conscious identity, and selfhood that is committed to serving the greater good.

I would like to continue working for peace and justice, in and out of the classroom, [in] my future occupation as a teacher.

Put good, creative ideas into practical usage.

2. Through actively assisting those around them.

Being a leader in my community and family.

I think that being nice to people is a really powerful way to impact people's lives in positive ways — giving everyone kindness and respect because everyone is deserving of kindness and respect.

I also want to use the money I will make as a doctor when I do practice medicine ... to help out non-profit organizations and to help my parents and family financially.

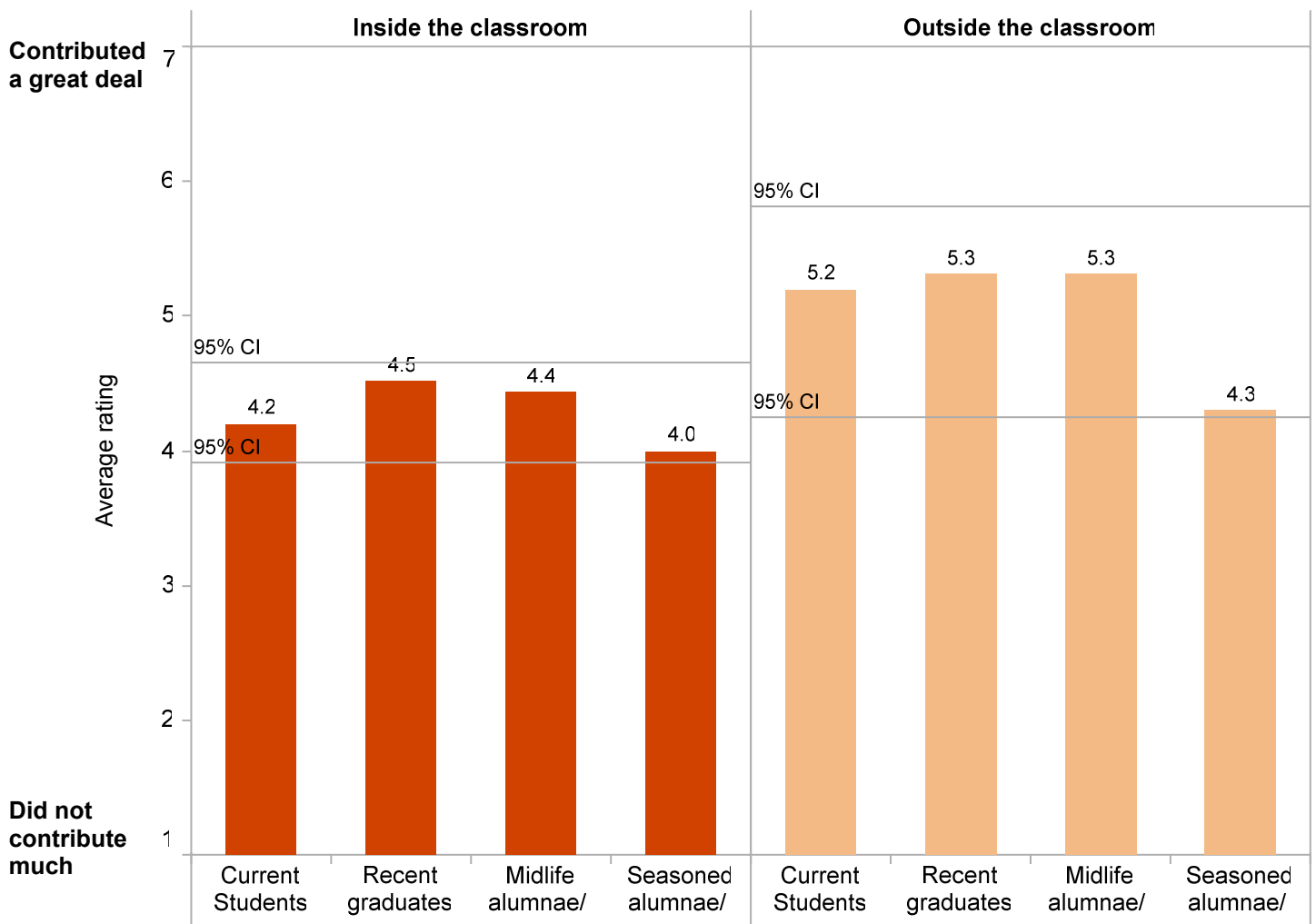
Always prioritize helping others.

- ▶ **As you look back on your days as a Grinnell College student, how much did the time spent on activities inside the Grinnell classroom motivate and prepare you to be a leader for social change?**
(This includes class work and other academic endeavors such as creative projects, research work, etc.)
- ▶ **As you look back on your days as a Grinnell College student, how much did the time spent on activities outside the Grinnell classroom motivate and prepare you to be a leader for social change?**
(This includes off-campus study, clubs, sports, employment, internships, living on your own, etc.)

For these questions, it is important to note that respondents were not asked to directly compare inside-the-classroom experiences with outside-the-classroom activities. Both questions were aimed at the notion of being a leader for social change, and there is overlap between the two (e.g., off-campus study was listed in the outside-the-classroom items but OCS involves a core academic component).

Current students often cited class discussions, MAPs, seminars, and readings to describe their experiences *inside* the classroom. Alumnae/i spoke of their class work, Tutorials, debates, and group work. Students referred to examples of activities *outside* the classroom in terms of clubs, athletics, internships, volunteer opportunities, tutoring and off-campus study. Alumnae/i listed similar examples, but more frequently included employment experiences. ❖

Figure 8: Preparing to be a leader for social change



CI refers to confidence interval. Paired sample difference significant at $p < .01$.

Addendum to the Reaccreditation Surveys of Alumnae/i & Students

Alumnae/i and student responses to questions regarding the most influential people they have interacted with at Grinnell and why.

In response to the question “Who are some of the most influential people, in terms of your vocation, you interacted with while you were at Grinnell and how did they influence you?” many alumni/ae mentioned professors, coaches, and friends. They also mentioned and pointed to specific ways that they were influenced by staff members. Among staff, virtually every office and type of position is represented (administrative, support & technical, and service & trade).

[Several staff members]—all of whom gave me an opportunity to work in [...], observing and interacting with them [...]. These experiences, and their tutelage, contributed enormously to my readiness for a lifetime of new experiences with persons of all stations and stripes.

[Staff member] for teaching me that someone who listens, smiles, and supports, is always appreciated and that kindness is free.

[My boss] gave me the independence to perform my job how I thought best. No other [person] affected my development as much as [she was] able to do. [She was] truly inspiring, and I don't think even realize it.

[My supervisors] were the best supervisors I had—I am a better supervisor thanks to them.

[A staff member] was very instrumental in helping me to see that I need to be aware of my responsibility to know my surroundings and that there is always a friendly face nearby to lend a helping hand.

[A staff member] was the kindest, sincerest person and truly believed in me. She believed that I could do anything and made me feel special. Her presence was calming and she always made me feel welcome and had a way of positively critiquing my [work] in a way that inspired me to [do] better and not give up.

Also working in the office of [...] taught me to be a kinder person. She was always so sweet at the face of adversity, that I now look at challenges with a smile, and hope to find solutions to any arising situation.

I worked in [...] office for [...] who was very encouraging and supportive when I looked for my first job after Grinnell.

[Two staff members] encouraged my continued development in this area and how [that kind of work] is a good place to work with equity and access issues.

[Supervisor who] mentored me as a [...], she was the first person who ever liked my [particular kind of work] enough to pay me, and therefore helped me to think of [it] as a potential career.

I also recall [...] one of the women who ran [an office] where I worked for a couple of years, was such a frank and normal person, so outside of the world of academia, that she inspired me to take a look at the whole wide world of work and really consider what I wanted to spend my days doing.

[...] helped mentor me in my volunteer activities and encouraged my leadership in [...].

Working for [...] gave me valuable experience talking with people I did not know about common values and commitments. I was empowered to unabashedly encourage them to support a cause [...] we both believed in and benefited from.

[...]—value of service with a smile, positivity.

[A variety of staff people, including] my former supervisors [...] all of these people have known me for a few years and were there to help me with any problems, encouraging me to go on when things don't work out for me. They were my confidantes.

[A staff member] took interest in me as a person outside of just academics.

[Staff members] Best Friends that grew to be College Mothers to me! Their support and encouragement fueled me to the finish line!

[A staff member] demonstrated thoughtfulness and trust in others daily

[A staff person] with whom I worked [...]. She kept me connected to the non-college life and was truly a great friend and co-worker. [She] encouraged me, recognized and celebrated my successes, and helped make my experience at Grinnell a memorable one.

I was very interested in [a certain career] and my boss [...] was wonderful. I also worked at [another site on campus] and I learned a tremendous amount there. Both how to be [a certain kind of professional] but just how to talk with people period. [The people who work there] are amazing and it is such a great resource.

Without a doubt, my supervisor in [...] was my most important influence at Grinnell. [...] He has an uncommon gift: the patience, diligence, selflessness, and enthusiasm that defines his persona, teaching philosophy and practice. He taught my fellow students and me to develop what is finest in ourselves through hard work and constant opportunities to learn through experimentation, through making mistakes and then rectifying them. All of us struggled with the challenges [...] at times during our careers at Grinnell, but [he] never let us fail; instead, he worked only harder to help us succeed. His optimistic enthusiasm and passion for what he does are infectious! No motivation was more valuable for us than seeing, on every occasion, his unwavering dedication to helping us achieve the high standards that you set for us, and more importantly, his commitment to helping us develop and expound the values of leadership, compassion, and magnanimous generosity that he embodies and that were so important to our growth and education at Grinnell. Under his exemplary leadership and sound counsel, we became better students [...] and better people in general. We cannot express how grateful we are to him for his willingness to fulfill any role, perform any function, and make any personal sacrifice, in order to further the interests or enhance the experience of the students in his care. May his irreplaceable talent, integrity, warmth, and generosity continue to transform the lives of [Grinnellians] for another lucky generation! I join a large and growing group of alumni to say: I am so proud to have learned from [him]!

Working for [...] was fun and also good preparation for my current job. [...] were wonderful too and tried to teach me about time management (I'm still learning).

[...] was also encouraging and supportive and taught me a ton about practical matters in my vocation.

My supervisors at [...] for the opportunities and trust they presented me with and for modeling professional roles that sparked my imagination.

[A staff member]. While I didn't interact with him much as an undergrad, he made himself available during my time working at the [...] office. This led me to seek out his advice during a job search during the year following graduation.

[...] was a very nice employer and a model Grinnell community member.

Working in the [...] under [...] gave me a good chance to work with students who had various [...] challenges, which definitely gave me a good background on which to build.

[Part-time employee.] He was my mentor and I still call him about once every 3 months to catch up. He [...] provided guidance and assistance when ever it was needed. When my mother was hospitalized during my junior year, he provided me with a shoulder to lean on. Currently, he has been helping me with my application process to Law School. He helped me to clarify my goals and aspirations.

[...] allowed me to take many leadership roles in service and was a mentor in helping me resolve peer conflicts. [The support person] was also very supportive.

[Staff person.] He helped me think about how I could use my life to make social change.

Among the off-campus influences, people mentioned include business owners, area religious organizations, employers, co-workers, internship supervisors, alumnae/i, and even clients that they served as volunteers.

[Director of the local institution where I worked]. Incredibly tolerant and understanding, she was the embodiment of compassion, even while being firm in her goals.

[A] volunteer at [a local non-profit] became my mentor and gave me the gift of my first semester's tuition for Grad School. [Owner of a local business] was my 'host father' and responsible for bringing me to Grinnell and advocating for me. Changed my life!!

[A variety of people and business owners] from the community are people I remember fondly—they went out of their way to make a difference in my life—and I continue to do that in my professional and personal life.

[Mentor-teacher who] more than any other person influenced the way I talk to students, the way I manage a classroom, and the way I interact with my colleagues.

[Religious leader] showed me ways to be religious, just, and judicious in both faith and social matters. [The religious community] also embodied a faith community that was a healthy and balancing counterpart to my dorm and cafeteria existence.

[A Grinnell alumna/us and volunteer coordinator of a non-profit] helped support and inspire me to be involved in [that type of] volunteer work and provided transportation to volunteer commitments on many a snowy day.

Volunteering at [...] It is interesting because I think that was one of my formative experiences in trying to understand the many issues around [...] in this country.

[...] These were my co-workers at [...]. They always supported me in any of my activities. They also introduced me to rural Iowa and the life of a farmer. [An internship supervisor.] She was my boss at [...]. She helped me to land my first job by acting as a reference and she was an inspiration in continuing my volunteer work. She also helped me to consider working for a non-profit after graduation [...].

[An alumna/us] helped me learn more about what it was to have a sense of community and care for the needs of others.

[Community member]—for showing me that you don't have to sell your soul to work in the system.

Comments similar to the alumni/ae's are provided by current students in their replies to "Who are some of the most influential people you have interacted with at Grinnell and how have they influence you?" Again, they mentioned professors, coaches, and classmates. They also mentioned and pointed to the influence of staff members and people who are off-campus. Again, virtually every office and type of position on campus is represented.

[...] is so amazing. She is great at keeping everyone who knows her sane.

[...] my supervisor [...] is a great boss and an amazing [...] who is constantly working to better serve the students. He is someone who everyone seems to enjoy working with [...] He makes me glad to come into work.

[My supervisor] helps me through tough times and has become a friend.

[...] with her ready smile.

[...] with her powerful and unassuming commitment to social justice.

[A department's] supervisors/staff are quite influential: they have to deal with [Grinnell students] and do so with a

smile on their faces. They work quite hard to provide for everyone and everyone fails to see and/or give them credit for that.

[Three staff members who] inspired me to study [...], and in time I became passionate about it and more or less proselytize it on others.

[A number of staff members] who keep the best interests of students at heart and work twice as hard as required to make a crucial part of this school strong (demonstrating the importance of work ethic, even when those around them were not as outwardly committed). [... A staff person,] a partner in several projects whose love for Grinnell and belief in its mission taught me that the spirit of Grinnell community and fellowship in my life will extend far beyond just those who have attended this college. [Another staff person,] my supervisor [...], whose genuine gratitude and constant sincere thanks taught me what it feels like to be appreciated and what it means to motivate coworkers through trust and encouragement. [...Another staff person] who helped me recognize that everyone has had an experience that qualifies them to contribute to the diversity, location, or community, and reminded me that anger is a sign of caring and potential, not impossibility. [An administrator,] a longtime collaborator on different projects, who revealed to me that the faculty and administration of this college care just as much about our culture as the students do (and thus, just because someone is in a position of authority doesn't mean they don't care about the same things as those they serve!). [...two alumni/ae] who gave me faith in post-Grinnell community that will last a lifetime.

[Staff member] was a role model for me in thinking about future careers.

[...] staff member—introduced me to geography, my passion.

[Two staff members] helped me gain confidence [...]

Everyone at [a particular office]—they have helped me SO MUCH over the past 3 years [...]. They've [...] helped develop my interests both personal and career-wise, and are always willing to squeeze me in [...] or work the extra hour with me—all with a smile. [Staff member] has been a great friend and mentor at Grinnell, always with a smile, a joke, and the sincerity of someone who genuinely enjoys working with students and loves his job. He's made me love my job, and helped me to understand the importance of townspeople in the Grinnell community instead of letting me get jaded by the Grinnell bubble. [... Another staff person] has helped me through many very hard times. I think in some ways she must have the hardest job in the school, and yet she is always so friendly and calm that she exudes a wonderful sense of peace to the students and faculty around her, which was the best thing I could have asked for in those situations. The school is very lucky to have her, and without her help, understanding and willingness to help students [...], I'm not sure I would have made it through.

[Two support-staff people] for their ability to converse with the average student and really encourage them in any endeavor they choose.

[My boss]—always puts a smile on my face and gives me a perspective—so kind and a pleasure to work for—can't say enough good things.

I got to know [a staff member] through visiting [a campus office] and also by babysitting for her. She welcomed me into her home and acted as a mother to me when I was going through a rough time. She also has a wonderful way of calming me down when I am going into [her department] stressed out. I always leave [...] feeling calm, collected and empowered. She makes me feel like I can do anything!

[A staff member] by taking pride in his work and continuing it even in the face of adversity.

[A staff member]. It's hard to find a more kind and generous soul at Grinnell College. He's helped me appreciate the all important, and not so visible, work the [service] staff does.

[A staff member] Inspired me to reach farther for my goals and never sell my self short.

My boss at [...] from first year was wonderful. She was always there to listen and very understanding as a boss. Also she gave me hope after Grinnell. She showed me what a twenty-something life was like, and it made me happy to grow up.

[A staff member] is great to just have an older person to talk to that is still familiar with college life, but also has adult experience too.

[A staff member] has been an inspiring person to learn about devoting your life to a single cause.

[A staff member.] Has anyone ever met this guy and thought he wasn't genuinely concerned with your well being and you as an individual member of his community?

[A staff member] is the one I look up to, who can keep the order without being too strict, who is very popular, charismatic, and hardworking, while also disciplined. I believe him to be the living example of how to be a good leader.

[A staff member] who works in [...] and makes an effort to interact with student is wonderful.

[A staff member and his wife] have shown me that good, caring people really do exist in this world. Together they do so much to offer help to anyone that might need it.

[A staff member]—encourages me to pursue my goals, an excellent role model.

One of the people I look up to in Grinnell is [a staff member. He ...]is known and loved by many. I've never worked in [his department,] but I still know him because he is the nicest and most friendly person I have ever met. He not only fulfills his job, but he is active in other parts of campus life because he volunteers [his resources... and] his time for [students....] He inspires me because he always has a positive attitude and goes beyond the call of duty.

[A staff member] in terms of creating community, caring about people, and setting boundaries.

[A staff member]: she comes every day to work REALLY early, and she is always incredibly kind and cheerful.

[A staff member and her husband]. Outstanding community members who helped me get through a tough roommate situation. [Another staff member] role model, employer, shows that I can do anything I set my mind to.

[My boss in an office on-campus] has been like a second mother to me while I'm here. She has attended my [...] performances and recorded them so that I could show my parents at home, and is always concerned with motherly things like staying warm and asking about my weekends, etc. She manages to do all this while still teaching me the ropes and getting me to work.

[A staff member]—demonstrates the ability to be cheerful and helpful at all times, motivates people to work.

[A staff member]. Most motivating man I have ever met. I spoke in depth with him in the Dining Hall, and I have never felt so encouraged in my life.

Current students also identified their work or interactions with people off-campus as very influential.

The locals at [an establishment in town] remind me not to get blinded by the Grinnell bubble every time I see them. My experience at Grinnell would not be the same without [that place.]

The [religious leader from a local organization] helped me realize that some congregations do in fact make an effort to correct social injustices. This reverses the cynicism about religion I learned in high school.

[...] a local farmer who taught me a lot about Grinnell as a wider place than the college. [A townperson] I babysat her daughter and she was a really inspiring figure for me to interact with, even in our brief interactions.

[A townperson] has taught me a lot about life, business and cooking.

[An alumna/us] leader, mentor, [...], encourages people in leadership, social justice, and generally serving others.

I have appreciated the town of Grinnell very much. This year I'm living downtown and enjoy going to the businesses downtown [identifying several].

Alumns who I met through a Grinnell Externship program.

[Religious organization] They keep me going.

Alumni have broadened my horizons, and also given great advice.

My co-workers from my previous internships have influenced me to love myself and know the power that I have in me to change the world and my community. [...] My church has taught me strength in God and in his will.

My boss [at a business in town]—I am constantly inspired by the way she does her work to help the local citizens get their [products] the most affordable and simplest way possible.

[...] is a resident of the town and an alumna. She welcomes [students] into her home and is unbelievably friendly and understanding.