

Grinnell College

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What We've Learned from Annual Student Surveys in the Late 1990s

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Every fall, Grinnell administers a national survey to new first-year students (the Higher Education Research Institute's CIRP), and every spring, one is given to graduating seniors (HEDS Senior Survey or HERI College Student Survey). When results from surveys administered in 1996-2000 are compared, they are remarkably stable. That is, different class years of Grinnell students in the late 1990s are all fairly similar. This report describes a variety of student survey data by combining results from different years. (Most numbers have been rounded off. When data were not very consistent, a range is given.) Sometimes identical questions were asked in different years (especially of first-years), while different senior surveys often asked differently-worded questions on the same topics. 85% response rates are typical here.

ACADEMICS

Compared to entering students at other highly selective colleges, Grinnell first-years:

- Arrive with average academic ability and preparation.
- Are typical in how they rate their own abilities and intellectual self-confidence.
- Are relatively used to getting good grades but are relatively unused to working hard. Half had a high school GPA of A or A+, while only 20% spent 15 or more hours per week studying during 12th grade.
- Display less drive to achieve, less competitiveness, and less desire to improve their skills.
- Are relatively unlikely to have life goals focusing on becoming an authority in their fields, obtaining recognition from colleagues, succeeding at their own businesses, or being well-off financially.

Most entering students (80-90%) say they came to college to gain a general education and learn about things that interest them. Relatively few see college as preparation for a career or as a way to get a better job. The number expecting to need remedial work (in all subjects) is rising over time. Fewer than 5% spent 10 hours per week reading for pleasure during 12th grade.

Surveys of graduating seniors show that:

- Satisfaction with academic programs and the quality of instruction, professors, and facilities is very high (85-98%).
- Overall satisfaction with the college (90%) and the education they received (93%) is consistently very high. 86% say they would choose Grinnell again.
- Satisfaction with class size and availability is somewhat lower (75%). (Remember that students' expectations in this area are very high.)
- Statistically, all academic factors contribute significantly to overall satisfaction and a willingness to choose Grinnell again.

What seniors say they did here:

- Nearly all have studied in groups and done group projects for class.
- 85% say they took an interdisciplinary course.
- 50% say they took an ethnic studies course.
- 40% say they took a women's studies course.
- 60% changed from their original intended major to something else.
- 40% used academic support services. 75% of those say they were satisfied with them.

Their study habits:

- Half have overslept and missed a class, but only 15% say they have ever been bored in class.

- 70% have been late with an assignment.
- 12% have done extra (non-required) work for a class.
- 75% say their professors have provided intellectual challenge.

What they say they learned:

- Three fourths say they became better able to put ideas together.
 - Two thirds say they became well-prepared for further education, and that they gained in general knowledge, critical thinking skills, and computer skills.
 - Half say they gained in writing and problem solving skills, in knowledge of a particular field and of literature and history, and in having creative original ideas.
 - One third say they improved their ability to evaluate alternatives, and that they gained in quantitative skills, foreign language skills, oral communication, arts appreciation, understanding of science, and understanding of technology.
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- 75% say they got better at understanding other people.
 - 60% say they made substantial gains in independence and self-understanding.
 - About half say they experienced significant moral and ethical development.
 - 30% say their interpersonal skills improved.
 - 30% say they gained in self-esteem and the ability to accomplish their goals.
 - 20% say their ability to work cooperatively improved.

STUDENT LIFE

Personal habits:

- 5-10% of new students smoke. This does not change in their time here.
- About 50% of first-years drank in high school. 90% of seniors drank while in college.
- 60% of male first-years, and 40-50% of female first-years, approve of casual sex. This rises to 80% of both sexes by graduation.
- Half of new students arrive thinking that marijuana should be legal. This increases while here.
- 40-50% of new students think that you should disobey laws that violate your personal values.

Mental health and social adjustment (most are “worse” than at similar colleges):

- About 10% of first-years and of seniors have recently been depressed.
- About 40% of both classes have felt overwhelmed.
- About 5% of first-years have recently taken anti-depressant medication.
- 75% say they lost their tempers sometime during the 12th grade.
- 50-60% of first-years rate their own emotional health as above average.
- 30-40% of first-years rate their own social self-confidence as above average.
- 20% of female first-years and 35% of males rate their own popularity as above average.
- 60% rate their leadership ability above average.
- On all these parameters, female students are more likely to have had problems and less likely to rate themselves as above average.

Social activities (all points refer to seniors except the first):

- New first-years spent relatively little time socializing with friends (20-30% spent 15+ hours/week), and a relatively large amount of time in student clubs (15% spent 10+ hours/week) compared to students at peer colleges.
- 75-90% of seniors say they are satisfied with campus social life.
- 70% say the sense of campus community is good.
- 60% say they feel that others here are concerned about them as individuals.
- About 60% have participated in campus clubs.
- 70% are satisfied with opportunities here for involvement in activities.
- 50% are satisfied with how student activity fees are used.

- About 20% have participated in student government, and 40% have voted in student elections.
- About 70% are satisfied with student government.
- 40-70% are satisfied with the student voice in college policies. (Note that expectations are probably unreasonable.)
- 40-80% have participated in residence hall programs. 70-80% are satisfied with those programs.
- About 15% say they have done leadership activities. 30% say their leadership skills have improved.

Community action:

25% of male first-years and 45% of females say it's very important to them to participate in community action. One third of new students say it's very important to them to be a community leader someday. About two thirds of seniors have done some kind of volunteer work while at Grinnell, and 75% of seniors are satisfied with community service opportunities here.

Campus satisfaction:

The campus is considered very attractive and very safe by seniors. About 60% are satisfied with housing. Satisfaction with the food service has been declining in recent years. About half the students have cars, and one third are satisfied with parking. Satisfaction with computer services has been declining (which might be accompanied by rising expectations). About 60% are satisfied with the bookstore, and 70% with the student union. About one third are satisfied with campus media, and 15% have worked on a newspaper or magazine.

About 90% of seniors are satisfied with recreational and intramural programs. About 60% are satisfied with the recreational facilities. 40% exercise regularly and use the recreational facilities. Only 30% say they have made significant gains in health and fitness while in college.

DIVERSITY

Socioeconomic Status

Compared to other highly selective colleges, Grinnell's entering students are relatively low-income and have lower levels of parents' education. About 35% report a family income of over \$100,000, 40-50% between \$50,000-100,000, and 25% below \$50,000. 10-15% say the ability to finance college is a major concern.

About 80% have both parents married and living together, which is typical. About 50% of fathers and 40% of mothers have a graduate degree. 10-15% of fathers, and the same number of mothers, have no college degree.

Religious Affiliation

Grinnell attracts typical numbers of Protestants (25%) and Catholics (15%). Compared to similar colleges, there are relatively few Jews (5-10%). 5% of new first-years describe themselves as "born-again Christians." About one third of seniors have attended a religious service during their college years, and about one third say they are satisfied with the religious activities on campus.

Political Views

Grinnell students are very liberal compared to students at most other highly selective colleges. 70% of first-years describe themselves as liberal or far left. Only 5% are conservative or far right.

- 90% of first-years approve of gay marriage, while 5% would prohibit homosexual relations.
- 5% of seniors would also prohibit homosexual relations.
- 75-90% of first-years say abortion should be legal. 50-60% would abolish the death penalty. Both these numbers increase by graduation.
- Two thirds of first-years say employers should be allowed to administer drug tests. 80-95% would like more handgun control. 75% would like to have national health care. 12% of males and 25% of females think it's okay for government to regulate the Internet.

35% of first-year males and 20% of females say it's an important personal goal to influence the political structure. 40-50% say it's important to keep up to date with politics. One third have an important goal of influencing social values. Two thirds say it's important to help others in difficulty. The number of students seeing these goals as important does not change by graduation.

25% of first-year males and 15% of females (lower than elsewhere) say that an individual cannot change society. By graduation, the women retain their faith in the potential for individual influence, but the number of men believing that individuals are powerless increases significantly.

Race and Ethnicity

Among first-years:

- Two thirds socialized in high school with members of another ethnic group.
- Two thirds think they have an above average ability to understand others.
- 40-50% (especially women) say promoting racial understanding is an important personal goal.
- Only 10% say that racial discrimination is no longer a major societal problem.
- One third of males and one half of females think colleges should prohibit racist and sexist speech.
- Half think that affirmative action in college admission should be abolished.

For seniors:

- 80% of seniors remember attending a college orientation, and 60% say they were satisfied with it. However, only one third remember attending workshops on diversity, sexual harassment, or substance abuse (these are major components of new student orientation).
- Between 40% and 80% of students see the local "climate for minorities" as positive. 80%, however, report "little or no discrimination" on campus.
- Almost everyone has dined, interacted, and studied with members of other ethnic groups.
- One third have roomed with, and one third have dated, someone of another ethnic group.
- About 20% have participated in a racial/ethnic organization.
- About 20% are satisfied with the ethnic diversity on campus.
- 25% say their knowledge of other ethnic groups has increased substantially during college.
- 20% say their acceptance of other ethnic groups has increased substantially during college.

SENIORS' CAREER GOALS

80% or more want their future job to:

- use creativity and initiative
- be interesting
- provide intellectual challenge
- involve interaction with colleagues and clients
- express their personal values

About half want their job to:

- provide stability and security
- allow them to keep their options open
- be in a good location
- involve limited supervision
- allow time for other activities

Fewer than 20% say they care about a high income or recognition and status.

More than 80% say they don't mind pressure, a long commitment, or lengthy training.