

Cornell University
Class of 1998 Senior Survey
Inter-Institutional Major Findings

This is the second of two general distributions of analysis from the Class of 1998 Senior Survey we administered last spring in conjunction with a group of highly selective private universities and colleges. The first analysis provided comparisons of Cornell's respondents to the survey within the institution based on gender, race/ethnicity, and college.

In this analysis we compare the results for Cornell as a whole, with three norm groups of universities that also participated in the 1998 Senior Survey. By agreement among the group, data is not shared in such a fashion to allow for identifying individual institutions. Hence, each comparative norm group had to include at least three comparators. Our three norm groups were selected on the basis of Cornell's admissions overlap group, as follows:

- Norm Group 1 The universities that participated in the 1998 Senior Survey that Cornell most often "loses" when in direct competition for commonly admitted undergraduates.
- Norm Group 2 Those institutions with which Cornell competes on a relatively even footing for commonly admitted undergraduates.
- Norm Group 3 Those institutions Cornell most often "wins" the direct competition for commonly admitted undergraduates.

There are two sections to the analysis enclosed:

1. An executive summary of the major findings; and
2. A set of tables that provide statistical comparisons of Cornell's overall results with those of the three norm groups.

These analyses are intended to serve as conversation starters, not as the final or definitive word on any particular aspect of students' undergraduate experiences at Cornell. There is a host of other important information and a wealth of institutional knowledge and experience that also needs to be brought to bear in deliberating the issues raised by the findings of this survey. Nevertheless, we believe that this is important information that deserves your consideration. To that end, we know, for example, that:

1. Bob Harris, Bob Cooke and their colleagues organizing conversations this spring in academic departments across campus relating to issues of campus climate will be utilizing portions of these analyses;
2. As it has in the past, we anticipate that elements of these analyses will be considered by the Academic Leadership Series at one or more of its upcoming meetings;

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3. As we begin to prepare for our decennial reaccreditation self-study with the Middle States Association/Commission on Higher Education, these data will play an integral role in our depiction of institutional assessment efforts;
4. Susan Murphy and her colleagues within Student and Academic Services will be using these analyses in their continuing efforts to understand more fully student perceptions of and satisfaction with the services they provide; and
5. Don Saleh, Nancy Meislahn, Tom Keane and their colleagues in Admissions and Financial Aid will be looking at these data in more detail seeking information to assist them with more accurately and effectively marketing the university to prospective students. They will as well, utilize this information to help them identify ways they can enhance services to those students who are admitted and eventually matriculate with financial need.

Questions, suggestions, requests for further assistance, and any other feedback should be directed to Heather Kim (hhk4@cornell.edu or 255-7015).

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Executive Summary

Satisfaction (Table 3 and Table 4)

- While clearly holding a high degree of satisfaction with their overall undergraduate experience, Cornell's 1998 graduating seniors comparatively expressed the least satisfaction, averaging 4.03 on a 5-point scale (1= very dissatisfied; 5=very satisfied). Norm Group 1 had a significantly higher mean of 4.18. Norm Group 3 (4.07) and Norm Group 2 (4.05) had much more similar averages to Cornell's.
- On a 4-point scale (1=very dissatisfied; 4=very satisfied), Cornell's seniors reported significantly higher degrees of satisfaction than their norm group comparators with the following aspects of their undergraduate experience: "library facilities and resources" (3.66); "campus security" (3.32); "foreign language facilities" (3.31); "food services" (3.20); and "opportunities for internship or study abroad" (3.20).
- Though not as strongly positive along the satisfaction continuum, Cornell also scored better than its three comparator groups on "social life on campus" (2.94); "natural science & mathematics courses" (2.93); "career planning/counseling (2.82 — see also Table 5); and "advising in the major" (2.79).
- On the other hand, Cornell's graduating seniors comparatively reported the lowest satisfaction among the comparison groups on the following factors: "sense of community on campus" (2.37); "student health services" (2.57); "climate for minorities" (2.63); "financial aid award" (2.63); "financial aid office (2.65); "ethnic/racial diversity on campus" (2.77); "size of classes" (2.91); "student employment programs" (2.97); and "out-of-class availability of faculty" (3.08).

Development of Knowledge & Abilities (Table 6)

- With respect to the development of a spectrum of knowledge and abilities the graduating seniors were queried about, Cornell students reported greater gains or enhancement during their undergraduate years (based on a 4-point scale with 1= no enhancement at all; 4= greatly enhanced) than the respondents in the comparator groups in the following areas: "communicate well orally" (3.06); "function effectively as a member of a team" (3.05); and "lead and supervise tasks and groups of people" (2.99).
- Conversely, Cornell's graduating seniors reported the least amount of gain in the following areas: "write effectively" (3.15); "relate well to people of different races, nationalities, religions" (2.75); and "develop an awareness of social problems" (2.71).

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Financial Matters (Table Set 8 and Table Set 10)

- There was very little difference between Cornell's graduating seniors and those of the other three norm groups with respect to their loan burdens at the time of graduation. For instance, the range of students who graduated with cumulative loans of \$15,000 or more ranged from a low of 28.7 percent (Norm Group 1) to a high of 31.4 percent for Cornell's graduates.
- For Cornell's graduates, as for those in the other three norm groups, parental resources were clearly the major source of financing their undergraduate education, followed by institutionally provided financial aid.
- Based on reported parental income, Cornell's graduating seniors -- along with Norm Group 3 -- were a more economically diverse group than either Norm Group 1 or Norm Group 2.
- Only 28.9 percent of Cornell students reported parental income at the upper end of the continuum (greater than or equal to \$125,000), in comparison to 40.4 percent for Norm Group 1 and 38.6 percent for Norm Group 2.
- At the lower end (parental income less than \$50,000) Cornell had substantially more students from this economic background (25.6 percent) as compared to 18.3 percent for Norm Group 1 and 21.9 percent for Norm Group 2, while more modestly trailing Norm Group 3 at 26.9 percent.
- Norm Group 3 had the largest proportion of students in the "middle class" (parental income ranging from \$50,000 to \$124,999) at 48.7 percent, followed closely by Cornell (45.7 percent), and then Norm Group 1 (41.1 percent) and Norm Group 2 (39.4 percent).

Aspects of Career or Future Lifestyle (Table 7)

- Cornell's respondents reported placing more importance than their norm group comparators (based on a 4-point scale with 1=not important; 4=essential) on: "having a secure and stable future" (3.36) and "being well-off financially" (2.93).
- Conversely, Cornell's graduating seniors attributed less importance than their norm group comparators on "working for social change" (2.36) and "leaving the world a better place" (2.86).

How They Spent Their Time (Table Set 9)

- With respect to how graduating seniors reported spending their time while undergraduates, Cornell students spent comparatively more time in "scheduled classes or labs" and less time involved with "intercollegiate sports," "clubs/organized groups," and "volunteer work."

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Cumulative Grade Point Average (Table Set 1)

- The prevailing conventional wisdom among Cornell students is that they have to work harder for worse grades than their friends at comparable institutions. Both "overall GPA" and "GPA in the major" comparisons from this research appear to support the latter part of this notion, in that Cornell's graduating seniors significantly trailed their norm group comparators on both GPA measures.
- Only 17.1 percent of Cornell's respondents reported an overall GPA of "A-" or better, while the other three norm groups ranged from 28.0 percent in Norm Group 1, to 25.3 percent in Norm Group 3, to 21.9 percent in Norm Group 2.
- As for GPA in the major, only 30.5 percent of Cornell students reported a cumulative GPA of "A-" or better, as compared to 44.3 percent for Norm Group 1, 40.8 percent for Norm Group 2, and 37.3 percent for Norm Group 3.