

Grinnell College

## Office of Institutional Research Newsletter

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### Report on CIRP Freshman Survey for Entering Class of Fall 1999 with Peer Comparisons

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The Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) conducts an annual national survey of entering first-year college students. This survey, known as the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), has been conducted nationally and at Grinnell for over thirty years. At Grinnell, as at most institutions, it is administered during New Student Orientation, so the students' responses are essentially unaffected by the culture of the college they will attend. The CIRP therefore provides excellent comparative and longitudinal information about the type of students who attend a particular college.

The CIRP survey asks a wide variety of questions, covering the student's academic and family backgrounds, the frequency of various high school pursuits and experiences, how they rate their own intellectual, social, and psychological characteristics compared to their peers, their academic, personal, and career goals, their reasons for attending college and for having chosen a particular college, their expectations of the college experience, and their political views.

At Grinnell, we administer the CIRP to all new first-year students except international students. In Fall 1999, 85% of these students completed the survey (253 of 298). Through our participation in the Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium (HEDS), we obtained results from every one of the colleges on our list of peers, and from Beloit College which was formerly on the list. This report uses the peer group to place Grinnell's results in a wider context. In one section of the report, Grinnell students are also compared to the average results for students from "very highly selective non-sectarian 4-year colleges," a group including all of our peer institutions but also other similar colleges.

#### What are Grinnell students like compared to students at our peer institutions?

Grinnell's peer institutions, used for all comparative purposes, include the following colleges: Amherst, Bowdoin, Carleton, Colorado, Davidson, Kenyon, Macalester, Oberlin, Swarthmore, Washington and Lee, and Williams. As mentioned above, Beloit is also included in this analysis.

**CAVEAT:** Because of our confidentiality agreement with the other HEDS institutions, no actual data from peer colleges are presented here and no explicit comparisons are made.

Compared to students entering the 12 peer colleges, Grinnell first-years received relatively high grades in high school, but got average SAT and ACT scores. An average number said this was their first choice institution, but very few had only applied here. They are more likely to plan on earning a PhD, but less likely to plan an MD or a law degree. Fewer come from high income families, and correspondingly more are seriously concerned about their financial situations. A relatively low number of their parents have graduate degrees.

Grinnell students are more likely to have been bored in class during high school, and to have discussed politics frequently with their peers. They are fairly average with respect to smoking, drinking, discussing religion, and socializing with members of other ethnic groups. Though more likely than their peers to have taken prescription anti-depressants, an average number of them felt depressed during high school, and they are actually less likely to have felt overwhelmed than students at our peer colleges. A typical number did volunteer work in high school, but they are less likely to have spent a large amount of time doing so. They spent more time than average in student clubs, but spent less time socializing informally with friends. They spent less time studying, and are less likely to have studied frequently with other students.

They rate their own math ability and intellectual self-confidence relatively high, but have an average opinion of their writing and general academic abilities. They are also typical of students at our peer schools in rating their own creativity, popularity, leadership skills, and competitiveness. Grinnell students have a relatively low opinion of a number of their other qualities, including emotional and physical health, self-understanding, understanding of others, social self-confidence, cooperativeness, initiative, and drive to achieve.

Not surprisingly, their political views are among the most liberal in the peer group. They are more likely than most of their peers to approve of abortion rights, gay rights, and the legalization of marijuana, and to approve of casual sex. They are less likely to support the death penalty or government regulation of the internet. They are more likely to describe their own political views as either liberal or far left. A relatively low number say that racial discrimination is no longer a serious problem, but a relatively high number would like to abolish the use of affirmative action in college admissions. An average number approve of speech codes prohibiting racist and sexist speech. They are more likely than others to believe in the power of an individual to change society.

Grinnell students are far less goal-oriented than their peers at the other colleges. In terms of what they want to get out of college, they have an average desire to learn more about things and to prepare for graduate school. They are less motivated than their peers to gain a general education, improve study skills, become more cultured, train for a career, or make more money.

In terms of personal goals, Grinnell students are more likely to want to influence the political structure, but are less likely to think it is important to keep informed about politics. They show an average level of concern with environmental clean-up, promoting racial understanding, participating in community action, and being well-off financially. They are less concerned than others with influencing social values, becoming a community leader, raising a family, being an authority in their chosen field, or gaining recognition from their future colleagues.

In choosing a college, they are more likely to say that money was a very important consideration (financial aid, low tuition, and not getting financial aid from their first choice schools). They gave an average amount of consideration to national rankings, academic and social reputation, size, prospects for graduates getting into top graduate schools and getting good jobs, and the information in college guidebooks. They were less likely than their peers to think about special programs offered by the school, and less likely to apply early decision.

Grinnell students are among the most likely to expect to change both their college major and their career choice. They also have higher than average expectations of getting a B average, getting a job to help with expenses, and seeking personal counseling while in college. They are slightly more likely than average to expect to drop out temporarily, need extra time to complete the degree, or transfer to another school. They are average in their expectations of getting a Bachelor's degree, graduating with honors, playing varsity sports, and doing volunteer work. They are less likely than most of their peers to expect to be satisfied with their chosen institution.

#### How do Grinnell men and women compare to each other and to national norms?

Grinnell men and women are alike in many respects. This summary will focus on the differences, with occasional references to the national context in which these patterns should be viewed. Although many of these differences are typical, in terms of goals, family background, and use of Early Decision, Grinnell students show greater gender differences than the national norms for very highly selective colleges. This category includes our peer institutions and others like them.

Grinnell women got higher high school grades than the men, and spent more time studying. They rate their own writing ability higher, and more expect to obtain a BA. They are more likely to have felt overwhelmed in high school (though they are low nationally in this respect), and are more likely than the men to expect to seek personal counseling. The women rate their own drive to achieve, initiative, and cooperativeness higher than the men, though all are low on a national scale. The women are more liberal on many issues, but are more likely to want speech codes and government regulation of the internet. They place a higher value on helping others, and are more likely to have done volunteer work. Their mothers are more likely to have graduate degrees. Women are more likely than men to

have studied with others (though still low on a national scale), and to have socialized with members of other ethnic groups. They rate their own self-understanding higher than do the men, though here also they are low nationally. They see themselves as more likely to change their major and their career choice. More interested than the men in national rankings, they are also more likely to say Grinnell was their first choice and to expect to be satisfied here. Though low on a national scale, they are more interested than the men in gaining a general education, becoming more cultured, improving their study skills, and preparing for graduate school.

Grinnell men rate themselves higher than the women in their intellectual self-confidence, math ability, and competitiveness. They are more likely to have their two parents still living together, to have wealthier parents, and to have applied Early Decision. The men are more interested in influencing the political structure of society, and to see it as important to keep up with politics, though they are less likely to think that an individual can change society. They are more likely than the women to think that racism is no longer a major problem, and to want to abolish affirmative action in college admissions. In high school, the men spent more time socializing with friends, working for pay, and discussing both politics and religion. They rate their own social self-confidence and popularity higher than do the women, and are more likely to play varsity athletics in college. In terms of their goals, the men are more likely to want to become authorities in their fields, to gain the recognition of their future colleagues, and to make money and succeed in their own businesses (though they rate low nationally on the last two goals).