

## The Effectiveness of a Women's College Education: Making the Case

### Using the Findings of the Hardwick~Day Comparative Alumnae Research Survey March 2008

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#### What the Findings Are

- The Hardwick~Day findings represent one point in Phase I of the Coalition's Research Agenda. The objective of the Research Agenda is to collect, interpret, and disseminate – on an ongoing basis – relevant and irrefutable data to make the case for the distinctive characteristics and effectiveness of a women's college education.
- The Hardwick~Day Comparative Alumnae Research Survey, which was commissioned by the Women's College Coalition, is distinctive in two ways.

First, Hardwick~Day's research design and survey instruments were devised to test – *based upon the perceptions, experiences, benefits and outcomes reported by alumnae* – the findings of earlier scholarly research. The Hardwick~Day Comparative Alumnae Research Survey is grounded in and organized around key factors that education researchers, including Astin, Pascarella and Terenzini, have identified as critical to both an effective undergraduate education and greater student satisfaction:

- Frequent, extensive formal and informal interaction between faculty and students
- A strong community and peer interactions both inside and outside the classroom
- A challenging, active classroom environment
- Participation in such intensive learning experiences as international study, internships, faculty-directed research and independent study
- Involvement and leadership in extracurricular activities

Second, unlike many alumnae studies that assess students shortly after graduation, the Hardwick~Day survey of alumnae from the classes of 1970 through 1997 assesses the *long-term impact* of the college experience on:

- Satisfaction with the undergraduate experience
- Career preparation and advancement

- Broad skill development
- Personal and professional values and attitudes
- Community involvement
- The key messages drawn from the findings of the Hardwick~Day Alumnae Survey focus on the areas in which women's college alumnae report outcomes that surpass the outcomes reported by alumnae of public and private institutions. (See Key Messages, p. 3)
- There also are areas in which the outcomes reported by women's college alumnae are less differentiated from those reported by alumnae of public and private institutions – the areas in which the outcomes reported are comparable and competitive.
- “If you've done a good survey, you should have more questions. They will be well-informed questions.” (John Pryor, Director, Cooperative Institutional Research Program [CIRP], AAC&U 2008 Annual Meeting)

The Hardwick~Day Comparative Alumnae Research Survey is a good survey. We have more questions and we will pursue them in our Research Agenda. (See Hard Questions, p. 12)

- The other points in Phase I are NSSE and CIRP. With these three points we will be able to describe – using nationally normed data – the women who come to our campuses, and what their experiences are from their perspectives as students and alumnae.
- Phase II of the Research Agenda will fill the gaps in existing research as well as provoke new research to be conducted, for example, by foundations and doctoral students.
- The Hardwick~Day findings strengthen an ongoing data- and market-driven conversation about women's colleges and the education and advancement of women. Other resources to draw upon as you make the distinctive and compelling case for your college include:
  - CIC's *Making the Case*, which focuses on the effectiveness of independent colleges and universities, including women's colleges, vis a vis public institutions. CIC's Case draws on data from diverse sources, including Hardwick~Day, NAICU, and NSSE.  
  
[http://cic.edu/projects\\_services/makingthecase.asp](http://cic.edu/projects_services/makingthecase.asp).
  - NAICU's *Twelve Facts That May Surprise You about America's Private Colleges and Universities*  
  
<http://naicu.edu/publications/twelve-facts-that-may-surprise-you-about-americas-private-colleges-and-universities>.
  - If you participate in NSSE, the most recent data for your campus
- If you are aware of research that should be considered for inclusion in our Case, please let Susan Lennon know ([susan.lennon@womenscolleges.org](mailto:susan.lennon@womenscolleges.org)).

## What the Findings Are Not

- The Hardwick~Day findings, in and of themselves, will not reverse the prevailing market trends in higher education toward large, public, professional, non-residential, urban and coeducational institutions. Nor will they mitigate the impact of the demographic, public policy, and economic challenges facing higher education during the next ten years.
- From the media's perspective, the Hardwick~Day findings, in and of themselves, are not news. *The stories that the findings can help tell, however – stories about relevant and compelling issues and trends – can be newsworthy.*
- The Hardwick~Day findings are based upon the perceptions, experiences, benefits and outcomes reported by alumnae; they are not objective proof. It is not possible to control for either entering student data (such as test score, grade point average, or class rank) or socioeconomic background. Hardwick~Day uses selectivity of the college (see slide 15) as a proxy for the former. More information about controls is provided on the Coalition website, on both the public ([www.womenscolleges.org](http://www.womenscolleges.org)) and member ([www.womenscolleges.org/members/default.htm](http://www.womenscolleges.org/members/default.htm)) pages.

## How to Use the Findings to Tell Your Stories

- **The Key Messages**

A women's college education ...

... **creates leaders, communicators, and persuaders.** Speaking out and speaking up – key components of leadership and civic engagement – are capacities actively developed at women's colleges. Women's college alumnae report more in-class experience with making presentations than their peers at other institutions and are more likely to gain leadership experience in student government and campus media.

... **develops critical skills for life and career.** As studies repeatedly underscore the need for critical thinking, global knowledge, intercultural competence, and real-world abilities, women's colleges surpass all public and private colleges in helping students learn to think analytically, bring social and historical perspective to issues, work as part of a team, write and speak effectively, make sound decisions, gain entry to a career, prepare for career change or advancement, and be politically and socially aware.

... **enables students to engage with top faculty and resources.** Women's college graduates attribute their success to interaction with "a high quality teaching-oriented faculty." They report strong benefits from mentoring, small classes and personal interaction with professors. At women's colleges, *all* of the resources, from sophisticated research equipment to preeminent athletics facilities to internship and fellowship funding, are focused on and available to women students.

... **proves its value over a lifetime.** Graduating from a women's college, versus a co-ed public or private college or university, significantly increases a woman's chances of earning a graduate degree. Women's college graduates succeed in entering a range of career fields and graduate programs, regardless of their undergraduate major. More than 95 percent of women's college alumnae believe the financial investment in their education was worthwhile and that the intellectual and personal capacities they gained are still extremely important to them.

- **The Data Set**

The Hardwick~Day findings can be organized in a variety of ways. For the purposes of presenting the findings to members of the Women's College Coalition, they are organized around the Key Messages with an additional section of characteristics that describe the alumnae who responded to the survey. The data set is mounted on our web site [www.womenscolleges.org](http://www.womenscolleges.org).

- **The Strategy**

While the Coalition is pursuing a strategy that we hope will result in national coverage, we are mindful that the findings, in and of themselves, are not news.

→ The rich and compelling stories about overarching issues and trends facing women come from member campuses – especially in the voices of students and alumnae. Imagine the buzz when 52 women's colleges in 23 states and Canada collectively discuss the education and advancement of women in opeds, articles, and interviews, etc. in local media outlets and other venues on a regular basis. This is something the national media might pick up.

Send us links to your pieces – we will mount them on the Coalition's web site.

→ Link your web site to the Coalition's web site.

→ Share other strategies you use. For example, Sweet Briar College is spreading the Key Messages on bookmarks printed in Sweet Briar's colors (pink and green).

→ Stay tuned for a recruitment tool kit and NACAC-related activities.

### **Food for Thought: Story Themes to Consider**

Why do the Hardwick~Day findings matter? Consider what is already in the news stream, what is pertinent to your campus, and how you can use these findings to make a distinctive and compelling case for your campus.

- **Economic Conditions – Adding Value to a College Education**

Slide

18 Graduated in four years or less (consider relationship with importance of earning graduate degree in timely manner in many fields)

80 Good academic facilities and equipment

81 High quality, teaching-oriented faculty

82 Personal interaction with professors

83 Many small classes with fewer than twenty students

84 Extensive classroom discussions

85 Faculty were interested in students personally as well as academically

86-87 Majorities of classes taught by professors

88 Professors often challenged them academically, but also personally helped them to meet those challenges

89 Conversations with professors outside of class

90 Found a mentor in college

91 A professor is most likely to be cited as a mentor in college

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- 92 Sense of community among students
- 93 Friendships that developed from classroom experience
- 94 Academic clubs and activities
- 95 Extracurricular activity
- 96 Balance between academics, social and personal life
- 97 Safe campus environment

- **Economic Conditions – Long Term Value**

Slide

- 99 Complete a graduate degree
- 100 Strong overall academic reputation
- 101 Strong reputation in their academic major
- 102 Reputation of the college played a role in being accepted to graduate school or finding a first job
- 103 Quality of references by faculty or staff played a role in being accepted to graduate school or finding a first job (consider slide 79: Many small classes with fewer than twenty students)
- 104 Selected major played a role in being accepted to graduate school or finding a first job (consider transferability of skills learned in any major in a quality liberal arts degree)
- 105 Overall quality and breadth of academic preparation played a role in being accepted to graduate school or finding a first job
- 106 Prepared for their first job
- 107 Prepared for career change or advancement
- 108 College network played a role in being accepted to graduate school or finding a first job
- 111 Completely satisfied with the overall quality of their education
- 110 Felt better prepared for life
- 109 Financial investment they made in college was worth it
- 40 Important to be well-off financially
- 41 Household income

- **Quality of Life**

Slide

- 80 Good academic facilities and equipment
- 81 High quality, teaching-oriented faculty
- 82 Personal interaction with professors
- 83 Many small classes with fewer than twenty students
- 85 Faculty were interested in students personally as well as academically
- 86-87 Majority of classes taught by professors
- 88 Professors often challenged them academically, but also personally helped them to meet those challenges
- 89 Conversations with professors outside of class
- 90 Found a mentor in college
- 92 Sense of community among students
- 93 Friendships that developed from classroom experience
- 96 Balance between academics, social and personal life

- **Building Community**

Slide

- 22 Involved with foundations or non-profit community organizations
- 23 Contribute to community
- 25 Financially support foundations or non-profit community organizations
- 49 Involved with community service
- 36 Involved in volunteer or community service activities
- 35 Involved in music or theater performances
- 24 Promote racial equality and other social justice issues
- 28 Involved with their undergraduate college or university
- 29 Serve in a leadership role with their undergraduate college or university
- 30 Financially support their undergraduate college or university

- **Values and Ethics in Modern Society**

Slide

- 72 Integration of values and ethics in classroom discussions
- 74 Emphasis on personal values and ethics
- 62 Develop moral principles that can guide actions
- 66 Important to consider the moral and ethical side of decisions
- 24 Promote racial equality and other social justice issues

- **The Global, Knowledge Based Economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Slide

- 51 Learn to solve problems and make effective decisions
- 52 Learn to relate to people of different backgrounds
- 53 Learn to think analytically
- 54 Learn to work as part of a team
- 55 Learn to write effectively
- 56 Learn to speak effectively
- 57 Learn to think creatively
- 58 Learn to be politically aware
- 59 Learn to appreciate the fine arts
- 60 Develop ability to learn new skills
- 61 Develop self-confidence and initiative
- 62 Develop moral principles that can guide actions
- 63 Place problems in social and historical perspective
- 64 Have a sense of purpose in life
- 65 Important to use best skills and abilities
- 66 Important to consider the moral and ethical side of decisions
- 67 Important to have the opportunity to learn new information and skills
- 68-71 Life Skills
- 72 Integration of values and ethics in classroom discussions
- 73 Perspective of women and minorities included
- 74 Emphasis on personal values and ethics
- 75 Participate in sponsored internships or other applied learning
- 76 Participate in international study or another off-campus study experience
- 77 Participate in faculty-directed research or independent study
- 78 Graded on essay exams and written reports
- 99 Complete a graduate degree

- **Educating Women for Leadership and Advocacy**

Slide

- 43 Student presentations in class
- 44 Involved with campus publications or student government
- 45 Leadership role in an extracurricular activity
- 46 Learn to be a leader
- 47 Provide direction to others through a leadership role
- 48 Have authority to make decisions
- 23 Contribute to community
- 49 Involved with community services

- **Messages to Our Daughters**

Why are we releasing these findings in March, in conjunction with Women's History Month?

Ret. Lt. Gen. Claudia Kennedy once said, "Women not only see things differently from men, but they see different things. That only adds strength to an organization." And yet, women remain underrepresented in leadership positions. When John Roberts filled the United States Supreme Court seat vacated by Justice Sandra Day O'Connor in 2006, Anna Quindlen wrote: "There is now only a single woman on the Supreme Court. Imagine the world if homes, businesses, schools, had only one woman for every eight men. It would be an odd sort of world, wouldn't it?"

What message does this send to our daughters?

- **Evidence of Learning that Really Matters: New Data on Employers' Views (AAC&U;** [http://www.aacu.org/advocacy/leap/documents/2008\\_Business\\_Leader\\_Poll.pdf](http://www.aacu.org/advocacy/leap/documents/2008_Business_Leader_Poll.pdf))
- **The Mentoring Gap for Women in Science, Inside Higher Education;** <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2008/02/28/mentor>
- **Writing the Next Chapter in Women's Education (AAC&U, On Campus with Women;** [http://www.aacu.org/ocww/volume36\\_3/feature.cfm?section=1](http://www.aacu.org/ocww/volume36_3/feature.cfm?section=1))
- For members with music programs, consider stories connecting the power of music and internationalization: **North Koreans Welcome Symphonic Diplomacy, The New York Times;** [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/27/world/asia/27symphony.html?\\_r=1&scp=1&sq=north+koreans+welcome+symphonic&st=nyt&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/27/world/asia/27symphony.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=north+koreans+welcome+symphonic&st=nyt&oref=slogin)
- For all, but especially members that prepare educators: **Should Boys and Girls Be Taught Separately, The New York Times (3/2/08);** <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/02/magazine/02sex3-t.html?scp=1&sq=elizabeth+weil&st=nyt>

## Food for Thought: Other Resources to Consider

- **What Millennials Want from College (GDA Integrated Services 2008)**

- To study with positive people
- To be challenged
- To be treated respectfully
- To learn new knowledge and skills
- To live and work in friendly environments
- To have flexible schedules
- To be recognized and/or rewarded
- To have fun

- **What 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills Are Most Important (GDA Integrated Services 2008)**  
(Speak Up for Students, Teachers & Parents 2007)

Parents

- Critical thinking
- Problem solving
- Work ethic

Teachers

- Critical thinking
- Problem solving
- Technology skills

Students

- Critical thinking and Technology skills (tied)

- **New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce 2007 (GDA Integrated Services 2008)**

- Knowing more about the world
- Thinking outside the box
- Becoming smarter about new sources of information
- Develop good people skills

- **Not Their Parents' Liberal Arts (GDA Integrated Services 2008)**

- Demand for agile workers is growing
- Technological change requires greater adaptability
- Global economy is shaping expectations
- Work relationships will see more flux
- New management model: move from managing, directing and controlling to negotiating, coordinating and facilitating

- **What Skills Are Extremely and Very Important to Students (GDA Integrated Services 2008)**

- Communication skills
- Professional skills (i.e., the traits, skills, and talents needed in all professions – ranging from time management skills to how to manage yourself in a job interview)
- Intellectual skills
- Social skills
- Leadership and management skills

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- Lifelong learning skills
  - Personal management skills (i.e., the skills needed to manage your financial, social, and physical lives after college)
  - Computer skills
  - Change skills (i.e., the flexibility needed for change and the ability to identify and create opportunities)
  - Values clarification
  - Multicultural skills
  - Citizenship skills
- **NSSE Skills That Are Extremely Important to College-Bound Women (GDA Integrated Services 2004)**
    - Writing and speaking effectively
    - Understanding yourself
    - Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds
    - Developing a personal code of values and ethics
    - Learning effectively on your own
    - Acquiring job-related knowledge and skills
    - Working effectively with others
    - Gaining leadership skills
    - Solving complex real-world problems
    - Thinking critically and analytically
    - Contributing to the welfare of your community
    - Acquiring a broad, general education
    - Using computer and information technology
    - Analyzing quantitative problems
- **Women's Reasons for Going to College (Stamats 2008)**
    - To learn more about things that interest me
    - To get training for a specific career
    - To be able to get a better job
    - Gain a general education/appreciate ideas
    - To be able to make more money
- **Women's Reasons for Selecting a Specific School (Stamats 2008)**
    - College has a good academic reputation
    - Graduates get good jobs
    - Wanted to go to a school about this size
    - A visit to campus
    - Offered financial assistance
- **Perceived Advantages of Large Universities (GDA Integrated Services 2008)**
    - More challenging and/or rigorous
    - Better for career preparation
    - Better for graduate/professional preparation
    - Offers stronger majors
    - More options for majors
    - More courses in major
    - Perceived as more fun
    - Greater diversity of students

- **More than 8 of ten college-bound students prefer a college that has an excellent major in their field of interest over a college that has many fields from which to choose. (GDA Integrated Services 2008)**

- **Extremely Important College-Choice Characteristics (Stamats 2008)**

School offers a strong program in what I want to study  
 Graduates of the college get good jobs or are accepted into good graduate programs/schools  
 Quality of faculty as teachers and mentors  
 Quality of academic resources such as classrooms, labs, computer resources, etc.  
 Overall academic reputation  
 The people on campus are welcoming and friendly  
 The school offers a fun college experience

- **Must Have or Very Important Characteristics of a College for Women (GDA Integrated Services 2004)**

Career preparation  
 A strong department in your major  
 Able to personalize your education to meet interests and needs  
 Accessible professors  
 Provides a supportive environment  
 Preparation for graduate or professional school  
 Concerned about the development of the whole person  
 Emphasizes ethics and values  
 Challenging courses  
 Opportunities for experiential, hands-on learning

- **What Makes A Strong Major (GDA Integrated Services 2004)**

Prepares you for a career  
 Respected by employers  
 Known for excellent teachers  
 Offers many courses in the field  
 The faculty are accessible to undergraduates  
 Respected by graduate and professional schools  
 Prepares you for graduate or professional school  
 Internships readily available  
 Major combines theory with hands-on learning  
 Able to customize major to meet your own special interests  
 Many professors who teach in the field  
 Off-campus learning opportunities encouraged  
 State of the art computer and technology equipment  
 Opportunities to research topics of interest to you

- **Role of Facilities in College Choice (Stamats 2008)**

A study by the Association for Higher Education Facilities Officers (Chronicle of Higher Education, 6/9/06) indicates that certain facilities appear to have a clear impact on students' decisions on where to attend college:

Students very/most interested in (top 5):

Facilities related to their major  
 Library (as a study hall, not a repository)

Sophisticated technology (often defined as “wireless”)  
Classrooms  
Residence halls

Contrary to popular wisdom that places wellness centers and dining complexes at the top of the list, these facilities ranked lower

- **Most Important Facilities During Visit (GDA Integrated Services 2008)**

Residence facilities  
Classrooms  
Library  
Facilities related to major  
Open space or quads  
Student union/center

- **What’s a Small College to Do? (GDA Integrated Services 2008)**

Link small classes and personal attention to challenges  
Use flexibility to demonstrate strong major fields  
Think of residential life as an educational advantage  
Prove development of the “whole person”  
Prove “career preparation”  
Become a leader in the “new” liberal arts  
Be intentional

- **The Small College Advantage (GDA Integrated Services 2008)**

Personal attention  
Opportunity to participate in the life of the college  
Easier to personalize your education  
Concern for development of the whole person

- **What Parents Want to Know Most about You (Stamats 2008)**

(Top choices from a list of 26 items)

Faculty are good teachers/mentors  
Program of interest to child is available  
Safe campus  
High academic quality  
Graduates get good jobs  
Known for its academics  
Availability of financial aid  
Availability of scholarships  
Value (high quality/good price)  
Reasonable cost tied with good technology resources

## The Hard Questions about the Findings

Draw upon your institution's data to build on responses to the following questions that might be raised:

- Women's college alumnae were more likely to complete a graduate degree. In what fields?
  - We will conduct additional research to determine the fields in women's college alumnae are earning master's and doctoral degrees.
- The alumnae who responded to the survey graduated from the classes of 1970 through 1997. The world has changed dramatically during the past forty years – socially, politically, economically and technologically.
  - We will conduct additional research to determine how the profile of current students and recent alumnae as well as how trends have changed, for example, in the areas of:

How students and families finance/financed their college education. Considerations include costs vis a vis who is primarily responsible vis a vis scholarships, grants, loans and work. Many women's colleges were leaders in providing access to non traditional students, from flexible programs to financial support.

The role that spirituality and religion plays/played in their college experience.

The role that athletics plays/played in their college experience.
- Fewer women's college alumnae reported transferring from another college. Does this mean that women's colleges are less friendly to transfer students, e.g., are the transfer credit policies restrictive?
  - On average, the profile of students at women's colleges is diverse, including transfer students, first generation students, and nontraditional students.

NSSE research reports that women's colleges are transfer friendly and that transfer students are as engaged as those who begin their college career at a women's college. We will conduct additional research to describe the diversity in the women's college student profile.
- Women's college alumnae reported that they benefited from a safe campus environment. What does this mean?
  - Coed liberal arts college alumnae also reported they benefited from a safe campus environment. There is a statistically significant difference between what these groups of alumnae reported and what the flagship public university alumnae reported.

We will conduct additional research to define the nuances of "safe campus environment" (e.g., physical safety vis a vis supportive environment in which a student can navigate her way out of her comfort zone, set higher expectations for herself and achieve greater goals).

- Women's college alumnae reported that they benefited from a high quality, teaching oriented faculty. Does this mean that women's college faculty are less research oriented or published?
  - Because of their size, women's colleges do not usually rank with major universities in the number of major research grants or the media attention they command. In order to become tenured, however, the faculty at women's colleges must and do conduct research and publish, often with the involvement of students, including co-authorship. The level of attention and mentoring in the colleges' research opportunities often gives students and alumnae an edge in applying to graduate school.
- Women's college alumnae reported that they benefited from interaction with other students with similar interests and values. Does this mean that the student bodies on the campuses of Women's Colleges are homogeneous and have little diversity?
  - The desire to affiliate with people of similar interests and values is not confined to women's colleges. Enrollment management strategies and curricular and co-curricular programs reflect the increasing diversity of the world in which we live and work – from differing viewpoints to customs.
- Women's college alumnae reported that they are less likely to work full time in private sector business and more likely to work for non-profits. Does this mean, since non-profits typically pay lower salaries, that women's college alumnae earn less money during their working years than other alumnae?
  - Women's colleges encourage students to follow their desired career path, to pursue their definition of success. This may lead to meaningful and rewarding careers that are less financially lucrative. Women's college alumnae include many who are senior managers in businesses of all kinds and have significant earned wealth of their own. We will conduct additional research to describe the work/life of women's college alumnae.
- Women's college alumnae reported that it is important to provide direction to others through a leadership role.
  - From the moment students walk on a women's college campus, they are expected to apply themselves intensely and succeed in their aspirations. Faculty challenge students inside and outside the classroom. Students challenge students.

Today's students are the next generation in a long tradition of women who have applied their education to make a difference. It is understandable, then, that women's college students feel prepared and expect to become leaders at home, in the community, in the workplace (including the public, private and nonprofit sectors) and around the world. (See Messages to Our Daughters, p. 7)