

**What Matters in College After College**  
**The Hardwick~Day Comparative Alumnae Research Study**  
**Prepared for the Women's College Coalition**

**Response to Questions Asked About Controls in the Methodology**

Hardwick~Day's research design and survey instrument were devised to test – based upon the reported experiences and perceptions of graduates – the findings of earlier scholarly research conducted by Astin, Pascarella, and Terenzini. Unlike many studies that assess alumni shortly after graduation, the Hardwick~Day study assesses the long-term impact of the college experience, using a random sampling of college and university alumni from the graduating classes of 1970 through 1997. Hardwick~Day has conducted its comparative alumni research for the Council of Independent Colleges; the Lutheran Educational Conference of North America; the National Catholic College Admission Association; the Minnesota Private College Council, Fund and Research Foundation; and the Annapolis Group.

Colleges and universities are unable to furnish objective entering student data such as test scores, grade point average, class rank and other indicators uniformly for graduates across this range of graduation years. To the extent they might be able to, the data would be incomplete and/or problematic. For example, it would be impossible to know objectively the socio-economic status of students whose families did not apply for financial aid even if institutions had digitized the data for older classes and maintained a database with the data. An alternative Hardwick~Day considered was asking respondents for a selection of these variables. This alternative was dropped as a result of testing; too many graduates could not remember reliably such things as SAT scores, high school GPA, or class rank. As a result, Hardwick~Day did not have access to reliable data about entering academic, economic, or aspirational profiles; this is an acknowledged limitation of the research for which the scholars and academics with whom Hardwick~Day has consulted cannot find a viable alternative. Hardwick~Day uses the selectivity of the college attended as proxy for these entering student factors reasoning that the reported experiences, benefits, and outcomes would vary with the ability of the institution to select its class and to not admit those students unable to handle the work or not suited for the particular institutional mission.

In the study commissioned by the Women's College Coalition, the group of alumnae respondents from the liberal arts colleges and flagship public universities attended institutions that were more selective as a group than the women's colleges. To the extent that selectivity is based on academic profile, this suggests rather strongly that the survey findings are not attributable to an academically elite incoming student profile.

Similarly, while Hardwick~Day does not have entering student family income, explaining the reported differences in experiences, benefits, and outcomes by virtue of privilege is suggested by the reported percentages who took out loans and worked during the college year. Hardwick~Day has tested this approach elsewhere in their data. In Minnesota, for example, separate research has demonstrated that the public flagship university enrolls a slightly higher family income profile of students than private colleges and other state universities. The same research conducted among graduates of Minnesota colleges and universities reveals results consistent with the findings of the Women's College Coalition research.

Hardwick~Day's research is not and has never been cast as offering objective proof of particular experiences, benefits, and outcomes. And yet, Hardwick~Day's findings are wholly consistent with the earlier controlled studies by higher education scholars as well as with NSSE data assessing the role of engagement in student learning.

Whether an institution is large or small, coeducational or single gender, engagement and interaction produce greater effectiveness and benefits for students. Hardwick~Day's research simply documents how frequently such engagement and interaction occurred for and benefited the graduates they surveyed, according to alumnae responses. Analysis of the reported responses shows that engagement and interaction occur far less frequently at large, public institutions. In the case of women's colleges, alumnae more frequently reported particular experiences, benefits, and outcomes than did women who graduated from either coeducational public universities or coeducational private liberal arts colleges. For women, women's colleges would seem to deliver what they promise.