

The National Coalition of Girls' Schools Alumnae Survey 2005

Final Evaluation Report

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The National Coalition of Girls' Schools Alumnae Survey 2005 Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION

The National Coalition of Girls' Schools (NCGS) is an association of girls' schools across the United States and abroad that supports and promotes the values and benefits of single-sex education, including:

- Girls' academic achievement,
- Encouragement in sex-typed subject areas (e.g., science and math),
- Career aspirations, and
- Positive sex-role attitudes and self-esteem.

The NCGS has an established history of commissioning research on the contributions of girls-only education to females' growth and development, both in and out of class. In 1999, NCGS contracted with Goodman Research Group, Inc. (GRG), an educational research firm, to survey NCGS alumnae from four academic cohorts who graduated from high school between 1983 and 1995.

Six years after the original study, NCGS contracted with GRG to survey alumnae who graduated from an NCGS member school in 2004, with a focus on the role that the girls' schools played in women's transitions to college. The primary goals of the survey were to examine:

- Alumnae's perceived outcomes associated with girls' school attendance, and
- Alumnae's perceptions of the effectiveness of their schools in preparing them for the academic and social transition to college.

Following a brief description of the evaluation method, this Executive Summary presents the key findings from the study. The full report provides a detailed description of the method, additional findings, and conclusions.

METHOD

GRG collected data from alumnae who graduated from an NCGS member school in 2004. Respondents completed a one-time retrospective Web survey consisting of 32 possible questions covering three areas of interest: (1) the girls' school experience, (2) alumnae's academic interests and career aspirations, and (3) the influence of NCGS member school attendance on academic and social transitions to college.

All NCGS member private schools in the United States having a program serving grades nine through twelve were invited to participate in the study.

Eighty-three schools were eligible to participate, and 61 schools ultimately participated by distributing the invitations and online survey to their alumnae. The school participation rate was 73%.

Contact information (either alumnae email address or parent's permanent mailing address) was available for 2,606 alumnae. Of the 2,606 possible respondents, GRG received completed surveys from 1,018 alumnae representing 61 schools. The estimated alumnae response rate was 39%.

The majority of respondents were 19-years old and Caucasian. The majority of respondents also attended a girls' school for some combination of elementary, middle and high school, and approximately one-third of the alumnae received financial aid from their schools.

KEY FINDINGS

Alumnae were very satisfied with their academic experiences at their girls' schools, and the vast majority would recommend others to attend their schools.

Nearly all respondents were *very* or *extremely* satisfied with their schools' ability to provide them with:

- Rigorous academic curriculums (95%),
- Individualized attention (93%), and
- Encouragement to develop their own interests (80%).

Ninety percent of respondents said they would *probably* or *definitely* attend a girls' school again, and 64% of respondents agreed that young women should be encouraged to attend girls' schools.

Alumnae experienced nurturing, supportive environments committed to their personal growth and development.

More than 80% of the respondents were *very* or *extremely* satisfied with how well their schools fostered students' self-confidence, and more than 85% of respondents were *very* or *extremely* satisfied with the amount of encouragement they received from their schools to pursue new challenges.

NCGS member schools were commended for fostering a sense of community and encouraging students to become involved with community service and leadership.

The majority of alumnae (87%) indicated that their schools excelled at fostering a sense of community at the schools, and most alumnae were impressed with their school's encouragement for students to seek out leadership positions (84%), and to become involved with community service (71%).

Alumnae were more satisfied with some aspects of their girls' school experience when they were the primary decision-makers in deciding to attend an NCGS school.

Compared to when parents made the decision that their daughter would attend a girls' school, when girls were the primary decision-makers (21% of the time), they held more positive opinions about their experiences. For example, alumnae who made the decision to attend were more satisfied with the schools' ability to foster self-confidence, more satisfied with the encouragement they received to pursue new challenges, and more likely to think that their schools fostered a "can do" attitude.

The greatest piece of advice that alumnae would offer to prospective girls' school attendees was to "go for it."

Alumnae's advice centered on a "go for it" attitude and encouraged prospective students to be active participants in the decision to attend the girls' school. Alumnae also advised prospective students to approach the experience with an open mind and to be reassured that an all girls environment had its advantages.

Financial aid recipients held more positive opinions about some aspects of their girls' school experience.

Compared to alumnae who did not receive financial aid, those who received financial aid (32% of respondents) reported more positive experiences with their girls' schools on several dimensions, including being more satisfied with the encouragement they received from their girls' schools to appreciate individual differences, to develop their own interests, and to become involved with community service.

Alumnae of color were slightly less satisfied with three aspects of their girls' school experience.

Regardless of race and ethnicity, alumnae were very satisfied with their girls' school experience. In fact, respondents consistently rated their school experiences above a 4.0 on the 1-5 scales. However, when direct comparisons were made between alumnae of color and Caucasian alumnae, the statistical analyses indicated that alumnae of color were slightly less satisfied with their schools' ability to foster a sense of belonging to a community, less satisfied with the amount of individualized attention they received, and less satisfied with the rigor of the academic curriculums.

Alumnae's college selections were driven by the college's reputation and alumnae wanting to attend a coed school.

The largest contributing factor to alumnae's college selection was the reputation (in particular, academic reputation) of the school. Although location, size of student body, and social climate weighed heavily on alumnae's decision, the majority of alumnae were also very interested in

selecting a coed college so that they could have an experience that mirrored the “real world” in terms of interacting with males.

Nearly all of the alumnae expected to have careers and professions, and the majority felt it was important to hold positions of leadership and to contribute to their communities.

Ninety-five percent of the respondents said that having a career and profession were *very* or *extremely* important to them, and three-quarters underscored the importance of leadership, community service, and volunteerism.

The most significant career influences for alumnae were their families, teachers, and advisors.

Alumnae were asked to describe who or what had been the greatest influence on their career aspirations. Thirty-eight percent indicated a family member, 20% specified that a teacher or advisor had influenced them, and 17% attributed their career aspirations to a specific life experience, such as an internship. An additional 10% of alumnae said that they were their own most significant influence and 8% cited specific non-familial people. Four percent said they either didn't know or that there had been no influences thus far.

Alumnae felt they were more prepared for the academic transition to college than their peers who attended coed high schools, but somewhat less prepared for interacting with men, both in and out of the classroom.

Overall, 93% of the respondents were *very* or *extremely* satisfied with how well their girls' school prepared them for the academic aspects of college, and 65% of respondents felt *somewhat more* or *much more* prepared than their coed peers for the overall transition to college.

Regarding specific academic skills, 84% of responding alumnae felt *somewhat more* or *much more* prepared for college writing, and 69% of respondents felt *somewhat more* or *much more* prepared for public speaking assignments. Approximately half of the respondents felt *somewhat more* or *much more* prepared with their math, science, and computer skills. Compared to other dimensions of preparedness, alumnae felt somewhat less prepared for dealing with gender bias in the classrooms and for academic and social interactions with men.

SUMMARY

In summary, this study of NCGS alumnae who were completing their first year of college found that NCGS member schools provided young women with high quality and rigorous academic experiences that prepared them well for the academic demands of college. Alumnae also reported that their schools were to be commended for fostering a sense of community and that the schools showed a commitment to fostering self-esteem and individuality.

In slight contrast to the very positive ratings associated with girls' academic experiences and preparation, alumnae reported feeling slightly less prepared for interacting with men, both in and out of the classroom. A common theme among these first year college students was that regardless of actual outcomes, they shared anxiety that they were not prepared enough for the "real world."