

**QUALITATIVE RESEARCH FOR THE ASSOCIATION OF  
AMERICAN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES**

**KEY FINDINGS FROM FOCUS GROUPS AMONG COLLEGE  
STUDENTS AND COLLEGE-BOUND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS  
IN WISCONSIN**

**MARCH 2005**

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## METHODOLOGY

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*On March 14, 2005, Peter D. Hart Research Associates conducted two focus group discussions for the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. One group was held among public high school seniors who plan to attend a four-year college or university, and the second one was conducted among rising college sophomores, juniors, and seniors at public and private institutions.*

*The discussions follow up similar focus groups conducted in July and August 2004, in which we explored students' hopes, concerns, expectations, and goals regarding college. Within this context, the research seeks to understand high school and college students' attitudes and perceptions concerning liberal education and the degree to which they recognize the value of a liberal education and its outcomes today.*

*With a few notable exceptions outlined in this memo, the most recent research yields insights similar to those of the previous qualitative research. Because this research is qualitative rather than quantitative, however, we caution against interpreting the findings as broadly representative of the country's high school and college student populations.*

## KEY FINDINGS

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**These college and high school students are very excited and upbeat about attending college. However, the college students seem more stressed about the demands of college than their peers did in the earlier sessions.**

The Wisconsin high school students mainly express excitement about the new experiences and opportunities that await them in college. They recognize that they will have to assume new responsibilities in college, but unlike the high school students in previous focus groups, these students express little apprehension about the impending challenges and responsibilities. Indeed, the chief sentiment that they express is excitement about soon being on their own. Nonetheless, while they expect to take on new responsibilities, several also anticipate that their time in college will be a transitional period that offers more freedom and independence than home while still providing shelter from many of the realities of post-college life in the “real world.”

“I just can't wait to be by myself, but on the other hand, I'll still miss it back here and everything, and part of me will want to stay, but part of me just wants to be on my own for a change and just see what happens then.”

–High school student

“I look at college as the time where I'll get to do exactly what I'm passionate about and what I want to do, before I actually have to think about the realities of adulthood, and so it's sort of like the in-between time between not yet being an adult but not quite being completely independent.”

–High school student

When asked to describe their feelings about college, the Wisconsin college students focus more than their peers did in previous research on the stress of balancing the many competing demands – especially the academic load – of college life. While most express positive views concerning their college experiences and some say that they are not at all anxious about the many requirements, they certainly express a greater degree of angst than did students in the earlier

groups about fulfilling their requirements and doing well in their courses. One factor affecting the Wisconsin students' seemingly higher level of stress may be that the research was conducted in the Spring semester, when seniors are trying to complete their graduation requirements and lower classmen are focused on completing the year. (By contrast, the previous sessions were conducted over the summer, when students were not in the midst of day-to-day college life and likely to be less focused on curriculum requirements.)

"Stressful . . . I'm just coming into my senior year, so I have all my finishing classes right now, so it's a lot of time."

–College student

"I spend a lot of time doing homework. . . . I think if you had just the subject matter, it wouldn't be too bad. I mean, if you just sat around . . . just studied all weekend – I mean, [my suite mates] thing for the weekend is a bag of popcorn and watching TV for an hour; they're not as stressed out, but they don't ever get out at all. . . . You could spend all of your time on school. People get stressed out because you add things to add another pastime to your life besides school, and then it piles up, and you run out of time."

–College student

"I think it would just be nice to go to work and then come home and be done. Whereas with school, you've got to go to classes all day and then you've got to come home and worry about what's going to be due and when you're going to find time to do something and do all of your homework."

–College student

**This round of research reveals a notable difference between Wisconsin high school students and their peers in the earlier research in the degree to which the students feel informed and prepared for the opportunities and challenges they will face in college. The current session's high school students are much more confident about their preparation for college – an outlook that may stem not only from their having completed the college application process, but also from most of them knowing which college they will enter in the fall. College students' recollections of their transition to college suggest that many of these high school students may be in for a rude awakening, as it is likely that they are nowhere near as prepared as they believe they are.**

These high school students give their high schools strong grades (A's and B's) for the job they have done preparing them for college. Indeed, most of these students feel confident that they are well prepared for the academic demands of college, and many credit Advance Placement or International Baccalaureate classes with giving them the necessary preparation.

"I feel pretty prepared for the workload – I mean, right now I'm in four Advanced Placement classes. I'm taking five Advanced Placement tests. I've got . . . track and a job and the play that I have to keep track of, and so budgeting my time is something that I'm pretty prepared to do. But there's a lot of other things I'm kind of not aware of . . . like housing, like I mentioned before, I'm scared about sharing a room with somebody else that I don't know."

–High school student

"In my school, we all have to take IB classes . . . , and our school works real close with Madison, and so our classes are like college classes you would normally take when you were in college or you can get college for. So basically since freshman year, I've been taking those kinds of classes, and you get a lot of homework. But you don't get it every day – you get like so many pages – but then you have to turn it in, all of it, on that one day, so you've got to learn how to budget your time plus also doing things outside the school too. You have to just know how to budget your time, how to use your time wisely and not be distracted by things that will hinder you from your goal, so I think I'm pretty ready when I go to college."

–High school student

Many high school students also cite marketing information from colleges (both accessed online and received in the mail), college campus tours, and discussions with friends who are in college as factors contributing to their sense of preparedness. The discussion suggests that going through the college application and admissions process is a major factor in high school students' confidence about being ready for college, even though the participants acknowledge that little of the information they learn during this process addresses what they might expect academically from the college curricula.

In addition to feeling prepared for college, most of these high school students reveal an intense focus on their intended majors and careers. Indeed, most have a career in mind, and nearly all think that they know what their major will be. One factor that may contribute to this more directed approach is that the research was conducted after these students had applied to college. Many participants report that their teachers, parents, and sometimes colleges stress the importance of focusing on a major before starting college, and many have clearly given the decision a lot of thought. College students recall getting the same sort of pressure to decide on a major prior to college from their parents, teachers, and guidance counselors.

As these students look back on their freshman year in college, they are divided on how prepared they were. While some feel that they were well prepared, several recall that they initially had a very difficult time balancing the exciting social opportunities and freedom of being on their own with the demands of their college coursework. They recount that once they settled down and learned how to better manage their time and responsibilities, they were much better off. But even those who had a turbulent adjustment period acknowledge that it comes down to an individual's maturity to balance the demands of college life and studies.

**These students – particularly those still in high school – are very career focused, and their top reasons for going to college are specifically and directly related to enhancing their opportunities for career success. It is encouraging that as they discuss their reasons, some participants articulate broader motivations for getting a college education which reveal that not all students have a strictly linear perception of how a college education leads to a job.**

When the focus group participants are provided with 10 reasons that people may give for attending college and asked to select the ones that are most and least important to them personally, they rate the following four reasons as their own most important motivations for going to college:

1. A college education will provide the specific skills and knowledge required in the field in which I hope to work;

2. College will help me gain more knowledge that will be helpful throughout life, both on and off the job;
3. A college education will provide me with the knowledge, capabilities, ethics, and values that are essential to having professional success;
4. A college education will help me to be a more critical thinker and problem-solver, better able to adapt in today's ever-changing society and economy.

High school students in particular (many of whom think that they know what profession they will enter after college) take a very focused approach in describing their reasons for going to college: they recognize that a college education is a basic requirement for entering the workforce in their area of interest. While college students also place a priority on getting the specific skills and knowledge required for the field in which they hope to work, they also describe college as an environment in which exposure to and exploration of various fields of study opens up new areas of interest and relevance to their education goals. Even some high school students articulate the broader goals of getting a well-rounded education and gaining the skills to adapt to the unexpected challenges and opportunities that life presents.

"I don't really hope for – nor expect right after going out of college – to have a job, know exactly what I want to do, be in a stable period that I'll be in for the rest of my life, or any of that. The only expectations I have going into college are that I will have an increased amount of information stored, maybe a little more common sense, . . . more experiences, and be more well-rounded, everything from maybe studying abroad with a college to joining the Triathlon Club – all sorts of different opportunities that I can have and things to experience – meeting new friends and at the same time getting a degree that I can apply to either further education, a later job, or something."  
–High school student

"I just want to be ready for whatever life throws at you. I mean, if something unexpected happens, you should be able to handle it."  
–High school student

"I think that having a broader thing is big . . . I'm in accounting class, and there's a newspaper article that said accounting is a big new job that everybody wants. It's big, it's going to end up paying a lot of money. So if the economy switches around, and the career that you originally wanted to do and study for is not making any money at the time, you have something else to fall back on."  
–High school student

"I just want to become more responsible, because I feel right now like I get my stuff done and I pretty much have my own schedule and time frame, but I'm definitely not at a point in my life where I could go out and be on my own and survive. I'm very dependent on my family and my support group, so I look at college as a time when I could kind of cut whatever I have here and move on to something else that will kind of force me to prepare myself better."  
–High school student

In describing what a college education means for an individual, many college students give an indirect endorsement of general education. They describe learning skills such as time management and effective communication, and gaining knowledge that, while not directly relevant to their major, has benefited them.

"They're more into teaching you how to learn. . . . You might take away something from the class like time management or organization."

–College student

"Writing skills: you might not need to write about whatever it is you're writing about in a specific class, but you're going to get a lot of skill out of writing papers, handing them in, and getting feedback from a teacher on what you did wrong. You're always going to improve that way."

–College student

"Well, it depends on what you major in. What I major in, I don't think nothing's going to be bad; I won't say, 'Well, I'm never going to use this again.' Even with illustration or Photoshop, it depends on what you major in. Even with my English class, I'm good at rhyming, but I'm bad with grammar, so it helps me if I have to write a proposal and stuff like this. . . . I think that everything will help you somewhere. If you read a book or something, you might base that book on your situations or your lifestyle – but not so much that you're going to talk to your co-workers about King Arthur, you know. It helps you to understand what King Arthur did, how he was able to make decisions."

–College student

**Wisconsin students' top priorities for a college education do not differ greatly from those of students in the previous sessions. They place greatest priority on gaining maturity, tangible business skills, strong work habits, teamwork skills, and self-discipline. And echoing the earlier groups, the students do *not* perceive these skills to be direct outcomes of the college curriculum, but the result of managing the responsibilities of college life.**

High school students in these sessions have difficulty articulating the specific outcomes they hope to attain from their college education. They talk about being more "well-rounded," "mature," and a "changed person." Many – except for the most career-focused – recognize the importance of gaining broad experience and knowledge, but they are not able to take the next step and outline the specific skills and knowledge gained from the college curricula that would yield these results.

College students more readily express a desire to gain specific outcomes from a college education, including knowledge and critical thinking skills, but even this more mature group has difficulty conveying the specific skills and knowledge they hope to get from college.

When asked what employers hope their applicants have gotten from their college education, students offer more specific outcomes, including knowledge in the field, a strong work ethic, confidence, responsibility, reliability, and the ability to work and get along with others, which also suggests a tolerance and understanding of cultural differences.

In each group, students were asked to select the five most critical and three least critical results of a college education from a list of 18 possible outcomes. (Thus, this ranking does not suggest that the bottom tier outcomes are entirely unimportant to students, rather that these are the least important outcomes of the items listed.)

This list of outcomes was slightly different from the list tested in earlier research, and it reveals slightly different priorities among Wisconsin students. The consistencies with previous research are striking, however, including the fact that key AAC&U priorities emerge at the bottom of the list. The following table presents the outcomes' overall rankings among Wisconsin students and students in previous research.

<b>Wisconsin Students (March 2005)</b>	<b>Indiana, Oregon, &amp; Virginia Students (July/August 2004)</b>
<p><b>Top-tier outcomes:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A sense of maturity and how to succeed on your own</li> <li>2. Tangible business skills, and a specific expertise &amp; knowledge in your field of focus</li> <li>3. Strong work habits</li> <li>4. Teamwork skills, and the ability to get along with and work with people different from yourself</li> <li>5. Self-discipline</li> </ol>	<p><b>Top-tier outcomes:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A sense of maturity and how to succeed on your own.</li> <li>2. Time-management skills.</li> <li>3. Strong work habits.</li> <li>4. Self-discipline.</li> <li>5. Teamwork skills, and the ability to get along with and work with people different from yourself</li> </ol>
<p><b>Mid-tier outcomes:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Strong writing and oral/speaking skills</li> <li>7. Independent and critical thinking/reasoning skills</li> <li>8. Time-management skills</li> <li>9. Sense of values, principles, and ethics</li> <li>10. Knowledge of and respect for people of other backgrounds, races, ethnicities, and lifestyles</li> <li>11. Improved ability to solve problems and think analytically</li> <li>12. Exposure to the business world</li> <li>13. Leadership skills</li> </ol>	<p><b>Mid-tier outcomes:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Tangible business skills, and a specific expertise and knowledge in your field of focus</li> <li>7. Independent and critical thinking/reasoning skills</li> <li>8. Strong writing and oral/speaking skills</li> <li>9. Improved ability to solve problems and think analytically</li> <li>10. Exposure to the business world</li> <li>11. Leadership skills</li> </ol>
<p><b>Bottom-tier outcomes:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>14. Greater commitment to being involved in the community, and more engaged and informed about contemporary social and civic issues</li> <li>15. Competency in computer skills and software</li> <li>16. Expanded knowledge of cultures and societies outside the United States</li> <li>17. Expanded knowledge of American culture and history</li> <li>18. Expanded understanding of science and its relevance to other areas of study.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Bottom-tier outcomes:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>12. Sense of values, principles, and ethics</li> <li>13. Tolerance and respect for people of other backgrounds, races, ethnicities, and lifestyles</li> <li>14. Competency in computer skills and software</li> <li>15. Expanded cultural and global awareness and sensitivity</li> <li>16. Appreciation of your role as a citizen and an orientation toward public service</li> </ol>

Compared with their peers in the first round of research, the seemingly more career-focused Wisconsin students place more emphasis on tangible business skills and only a slightly lower priority on time-management skills. Few recognize either of these outcomes or any of the

outcomes that they place in the top tier as products of their college coursework, however. Many see these as qualities or skills that individuals must acquire and hone on their own.

Even though the description of civic engagement was changed for the Wisconsin research, it still ranks as a bottom-tier outcome. Students in these sessions clearly understand the term before it is described to them, as they mention voting and getting involved and contributing to society, the community, neighborhood, or government as ways of becoming civically engaged. It is not a problem of students' misunderstanding the term, but more an issue of their not regarding this as among the most important outcomes of college. Most feel that individuals establish a sense of civic responsibility before college, and thus it is not something that they focus on as an outcome of a college education.

Another indicator of the gap between students' view of college and AAC&U's vision of liberal education is that students rank the following priorities toward the bottom of their list: expanded knowledge of cultures and societies outside the United States; expanded knowledge of American culture and history; and expanded understanding of science and its relevance to other areas of study. (Students who are not focused on a science-related major simply evince little desire to take science courses, and they cannot envision how such coursework might be relevant to their area of study or future success.)

It is worth noting that for a few college students, the discussion about values, principles, and ethics becomes a discussion of moral values and religious beliefs. Students' inability to elaborate and explain what values, principles, and ethics mean to them highlights the importance of more specifically defining this college outcome. Their perceptions clearly are affected by the current environment, in which the term "values" is frequently used to advance a point of view in a debate about a political, social, or religious issue.

**Echoing their peers in the previous research, some students' associations concerning liberal education come closer to its actual definition than do others, but the Wisconsin students do not really understand the concept.**

None of these students has heard the term liberal education before it is mentioned in the sessions. They voice a broad array of associations with the term, including broad exposure to and knowledge of various fields of study and viewpoints, student-directed study in which students may choose what to learn, and education that is politically aligned with the left. All of their associations focus on the general education component of liberal education; none of the participants recognizes that the curriculum of liberal education comprises *both* broad exposure to multiple disciplines *and* in-depth study in at least one field. In the following comments, some students describe what they think liberal education means.

"It is broad, encompasses a little bit of everything. I think people who go into this are a little unsure of what they want to do. For me, this would not be the type of education I want."

–High school student

"It is an education that requires the student to participate in studies not necessarily related to the major in order to give them a well-rounded education."

–High school student



"It makes me think about the knowledge I have and the critical thinking that takes place, as well. It is the ability to reason, understand, and make good decisions in life."

–College student

"[It means] knowledge in different fields from literature, writing, social sciences, and natural sciences, having a broader outlook on the world and people around you, along with different ideas and viewpoints."

–College student

"I have never heard of it. It is the freedom to study and educate yourself on what you want to do."

–High school student

"It is unknown to me, but has the following connotations: free choice, in many facets, or arranging previously de-emphasized topics and genres of intelligence."

–High school student

"[It is] far-out ways of applying education, getting away from standard forms of education, finding new ways to get points across to students."

–College student

"I do not remember learning of it, but I think it may mean being on your own and choosing everything you are doing in your education."

–High school student

"I think liberal education sounds sort of like independent study from high school, where one decides what they need to learn instead of following a typical classroom course and schedule."

–High school student

"It is education directed toward understanding alternative methods, most often political in nature. A liberal education would be the opposite of a conservative education. Conservative education focuses on a more individualistic approach to problem-solving, while liberal would focus more on a more communal approach to problem-solving."

–College student

"Initially, I thought and heard of liberal as in Democrats and politics. I am conservative, so my initial reaction was to brace myself, set up a defense of my values."

–College student

**These students' reactions to the concept of liberal education are more mixed than we found in previous sessions. While some participants are quite positive about the outcomes of a liberal education, several express concern that it would detract from their area of focus with required courses in fields that hold little interest for them and – in their opinion – no relevance to their major.**

When presented with a brief definition of liberal education, the high school students (who have not experienced liberal education directly) are divided on its merits, with those who are the most focused on a particular career being the least receptive to the concept.

"I know exactly what I want to do, I know exactly where I want to go, and I know exactly who I want to learn with. I basically have the next four years of my life planned completely out, and if I had to sit in classes that were meant to expand my horizons, I would be very upset because that's not my focus. . . . It's not that I don't want to learn that. It's just that I have very specific goals, and if I'm taking classes that aren't part of reaching that goal, then I feel that would be wasting my time."

–High school student

"I don't think I would like this very much, because . . . I know exactly what I want to do and I really don't want to waste my time with classes that are unnecessary towards furthering myself to what I want to do. And the liberating the mind from ignorance is kind of harsh, I think, because I don't think of myself as ignorant at all. I like to read books and I like to do a lot of research, and I can do that on my own instead of what I think would be wasting my time on learning things that aren't specific to what I'm going to do."

–High school student

"I think it's a dumb idea, because I kind of know basically what I want to do, and this will probably throw a bunch of stuff in there that has nothing to do with it."

–High school student

"I think this is a good idea for people who either aren't sure when they go to college – like they're going to college because they understand that there's a need for the degree and that it's a good idea to go, but they aren't quite sure that – they have some idea, but they might want to narrow their focus a little bit. But I think for people who know what they want to get out of college and have what they want to do for the rest of their lives . . . it's not such a good idea. It's sort of a distraction, I think."

–High school student

"I kind of agree with what the people are saying, like I know what I want to do, so I don't really feel that it's necessary to waste my time with some of these classes, like for example some sciences. I want to go into business, so I don't really see where that's relevant in my field of study, though I think it's good for some things just to have a broad knowledge. I would agree with whoever said freshman year this might be a good idea, but after that, kind of go into your more specific major."

–High school student

"I kind of identify with you on that, except for the only difference is, I'd like this because I don't want to only know one thing. I want to know about geography and chemistry and all this other stuff, and the college that I chose has that. Because when my kids are in middle school and high school, I want to be able to help them with their homework."

–High school student

"I kind of agree with her, because if it doesn't work out by any chance, you would have another thing to fall back on, and that's a big thing."

–High school student

"I think that I would be interested in this. . . . I find myself being in a class that I have to take and learning something, and then going to an elective that I'm taking, and they'll be talking about something, and I'd be like, 'I learned about that, I know what they're talking about.' It makes class a lot more interesting to me or understanding it more."

–High school student

The college students generally have quite positive feelings about liberal education, and most recognize that they are getting a liberal education at their school. However, while a few recognize that a liberal education provides them with broad exposure to multiple disciplines related and complementary to their major, others don't seem to grasp this connection. Some of

the positive impressions focus more on liberal education's broad exposure and knowledge in helping them to determine the right major or simply to explore fields of study unrelated to their major.

"I think that they're both equally important too. I think it's important that you saturate [yourself] with knowledge and skills. That's kind of what you went to school for. I think the other stuff is just as important. Half of college is discovering what you want to do, your interests, and probably 90% of people who go to college change their major twice."

–College student

"You have an option on what you can take. You can take whatever – those classes, the range is so broad – you can take classes within your own area if you really want to. I chose to take classes that I never would have taken normally, just because I had the opportunity to. I had to take something and I took classes that I wanted to."

–College student

"It gives you options."

–College student

"When I first started, I hated all my classes and I didn't do anything for them, but then the next month, I kind of got back on track. But I actually learned a lot from them, and I'm glad that they made us take them, because the classes that I take now – I see every single class that I've taken so far are education classes. I remember I had to take bio, and we learned about the brain and stuff like that, but now I'm working with kids with special needs, and some of them have the Hagel disturbances or emotional disturbances, and all of that stuff – I mean, we talk about stuff that's in their brain. And everything I've learned in my general education classes I've used in the last year, not even just in school. In the newspaper, I understand what's going on, like some politics stuff from my American Government and Politics class. I understand more and I'm glad that they made me take them, even though I hated them."

–College student

# **AAC&U FOCUS GROUPS**

**Milwaukee High School Seniors  
Milwaukee College Students**

**PETER D. HART RESEARCH ASSOCIATES  
FOCUS GROUP TALLIES  
#7554 AAC&U  
MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN  
MARCH 14, 2005**

**IDENTIFICATION OF MOST AND LEAST IMPORTANT REASONS TO GO TO COLLEGE  
RANKED BY HIGHEST NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS' CHOICE AS MOST IMPORTANT REASON**

	<u>Least important</u> #	<u>Most important</u> #
<b>A college education will provide me with the specific skills and knowledge required in the field in which I hope to work.</b>		
High school seniors	0	7
College students	1	6
<b><i>All participants</i></b>	<b>1</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>College will help me to gain more knowledge that will be helpful throughout life—both on and off the job.</b>		
High school seniors	0	4
College students	1	4
<b><i>All participants</i></b>	<b>1</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>A college education will provide me with the knowledge, capabilities, ethics, and values that are essential to having professional success.</b>		
High school seniors	1	4
College students	1	4
<b><i>All participants</i></b>	<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>A college education will help me to be a more critical thinker and problem-solver, better able to adapt in today's ever-changing society and economy.</b>		
High school seniors	2	5
College students	1	3
<b><i>All participants</i></b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Attending college will give me the opportunity to meet new and interesting people and experience new social situations.</b>		
High school seniors	1	4
College students	1	3
<b><i>All participants</i></b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>A college education will bring more career choices and a greater number of job opportunities.</b>		
High school seniors	2	3
College students	1	4
<b><i>All participants</i></b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>

<b>IDENTIFICATION OF MOST AND LEAST IMPORTANT REASONS TO GO TO COLLEGE</b> <b>RANKED BY HIGHEST NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS' CHOICE AS MOST IMPORTANT REASON</b>
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	<u>Least important</u> #	<u>Most important</u> #
<b>A college education will help to ensure that I make better, more informed decisions about my future, which will enhance my life in the long run.</b>		
High school seniors	0	3
College students	1	2
<b><i>All participants</i></b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Attending college will give me an opportunity to learn about and from people and cultures that are different from my own.</b>		
High school seniors	3	0
College students	1	2
<b><i>All participants</i></b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>A college degree will help to ensure a higher paying job.</b>		
High school seniors	6	0
College students	7	2
<b><i>All participants</i></b>	<b>13</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>A college education will prepare me for a life of civic responsibility and leadership.</b>		
High school seniors	5	0
College students	5	0
<b><i>All participants</i></b>	<b>10</b>	<b>0</b>

**IDENTIFICATION OF OUTCOMES OF A COLLEGE EDUCATION AS MOST OR LEAST  
CRITICAL TO A SUCCESSFUL LIFE  
RANKED BY HIGHEST NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS' CHOICE AS MOST CRITICAL OUTCOME**

	<u>Least important</u> #	<u>Most important</u> #
<b>A sense of maturity and how to succeed on your own</b>		
High school seniors	0	8
College students	0	4
<b><i>All participants</i></b>	<b>0</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Tangible business skills, and a specific expertise and knowledge in your field of focus</b>		
High school seniors	0	5
College students	0	5
<b><i>All participants</i></b>	<b>0</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Strong work habits</b>		
High school seniors	0	5
College students	1	5
<b><i>All participants</i></b>	<b>1</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Teamwork skills and the ability to get along with and work with people different from yourself</b>		
High school seniors	1	5
College students	0	5
<b><i>All participants</i></b>	<b>1</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Self-Discipline</b>		
High school seniors	1	7
College students	0	2
<b><i>All participants</i></b>	<b>1</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Strong writing and oral/speaking skills</b>		
High school seniors	1	3
College students	0	6
<b><i>All participants</i></b>	<b>1</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Independent and critical thinking/reasoning skills</b>		
High school seniors	0	2
College students	0	5
<b><i>All participants</i></b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Time-management skills</b>		

**IDENTIFICATION OF OUTCOMES OF A COLLEGE EDUCATION AS MOST OR LEAST  
CRITICAL TO A SUCCESSFUL LIFE  
RANKED BY HIGHEST NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS' CHOICE AS MOST CRITICAL OUTCOME**

	<u>Least important</u> #	<u>Most important</u> #
High school seniors	3	3
College students	2	4
<b><i>All participants</i></b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Sense of values, principles, and ethics</b>		
High school seniors	0	2
College students	2	4
<b><i>All participants</i></b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Knowledge of and respect for people of other backgrounds, races, ethnicities, and lifestyles</b>		
High school seniors	3	2
College students	1	3
<b><i>All participants</i></b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Greater commitment to being involved in the community and more engaged and informed about contemporary social and civic issues</b>		
High school seniors	3	1
College students	4	3
<b><i>All participants</i></b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Competency in computer skills and software</b>		
High school seniors	2	2
College students	4	1
<b><i>All participants</i></b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Expanded knowledge of cultures and societies outside the United States</b>		
High school seniors	4	2
College students	3	1
<b><i>All participants</i></b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Improved ability to solve problems and think analytically</b>		
High school seniors	1	1
College students	0	1
<b><i>All participants</i></b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Exposure to the business world</b>		



**IDENTIFICATION OF OUTCOMES OF A COLLEGE EDUCATION AS MOST OR LEAST  
CRITICAL TO A SUCCESSFUL LIFE  
RANKED BY HIGHEST NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS' CHOICE AS MOST CRITICAL OUTCOME**

	<u>Least important #</u>	<u>Most important #</u>
High school seniors	0	1
College students	2	0
<b><i>All participants</i></b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Expanded knowledge of American culture and history</b>		
High school seniors	7	1
College students	2	0
<b><i>All participants</i></b>	<b>9</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Expanded understanding of science and its relevance to other areas of study</b>		
High school seniors	2	0
College students	8	1
<b><i>All participants</i></b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Leadership skills</b>		
High school seniors	1	0
College students	1	0
<b><i>All participants</i></b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>

## WHAT DOES THE TERM "LIBERAL EDUCATION" MEAN TO YOU?

### **High school seniors**

It is broad, encompasses a little bit of everything. I think people who go into this are a little unsure of what they want to do. For me, this would not be the type of education I want.

It is an education that requires the student to participate in studies not necessarily related to the major in order to give them a well-rounded education.

It involves people, social skills, and working with people.

I have never heard of it. It is the freedom to study and educate yourself on what you want to do.

A radical way of teaching, different and out of the ordinary, with new ideas and new thoughts on how to do things.

It is unknown to me, but has the following connotations: free choice, in many facets, or arranging previously de-emphasized topics and genres of intelligence.

I have heard a lot about Madison having liberal education, but I think that is forward thinking. At least that is the definition of liberal. It is equal opportunity, regardless of race, creed, gender, money, free protest, encouragement to vote, speaking out against things you are opposed to, etcetera.

I do not remember learning of it, but I think it may mean being on your own and choosing everything you are doing in your education.

I think liberal education sounds sort of like independent study from high school where one decides what they need to learn, instead of following a typical classroom course and schedule.

### **College students**

It is teaching you that anything goes. Politicians are liberal or conservative, with different values.

It is education directed toward understanding alternative methods, most often political in nature. A liberal education would be the opposite of a conservative education. Conservative education focuses on a more individualistic approach to problem-solving, while liberal would focus more on a more communal approach to problem-solving.

Initially, I thought and heard of liberal as in Democrats and politics. I am conservative, so my initial reaction was to brace myself, set up a defense of my values. I am not really sure what is meant by this, although I believe I should because my minor is in education.

Liberal education is open-minded, swaying away from morals, abortion, doing what you want, different marriage rights, and changing the norm.

It makes me think about the knowledge I have and the critical thinking that takes place, as well. It is the ability to reason, understand, and make good decisions in life.

Knowledge in different fields from literature, writing, social sciences, and natural sciences; having a broader outlook on the world and people around you, along with different ideas and viewpoints.

A free (not better) way of teaching that is different than it used to be; things that were once considered bad are now considered acceptable.

Far out ways of applying education; getting away from standard forms of education; finding new ways to get points across to students.

Extremes of education; teachers teaching their own agenda.

Changing views; the opposite of a conservative education.