

# THE VALUE AND IMPACT OF THE COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

– A Comparative Study –

Research By  
**HARDWICK DAY**

Commissioned By  
**THE ANNAPOLIS GROUP**

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HARDWICK  DAY

## - OVERVIEW -

**The Annapolis Comparative Alumni Research** explores how graduates assessed those elements of their college experience that scholarly research has determined are the most educationally effective — mainly the level of engagement across academic, co-curricular and extracurricular programs, with professors and other students.

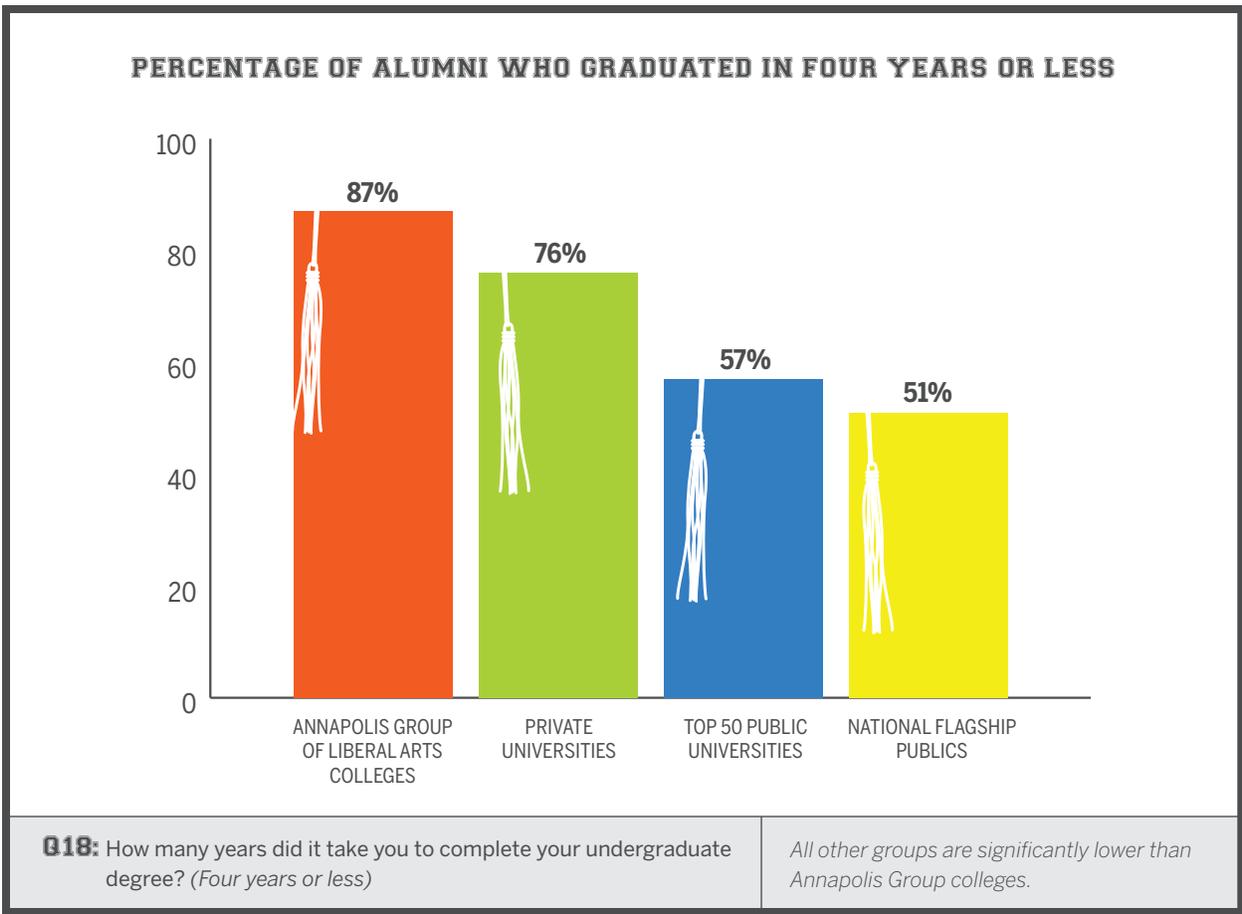
This survey of graduates simply gauges how alumni with degrees in liberal arts and sciences majors from different types and sizes of institution experienced and benefitted from their college experience.

How frequently do graduates say these things occurred, and how did they assess the degree of benefit to them from the distance of at least five years after graduation? Are there differences between types of institutions and are these differences large enough to depict

significant difference not only in the ethos of the campus — how intentionally the students and college pursue an engaged academic environment — but also in the worth of the educational experience as graduates see it?

The following slides depict survey results on the central measures of engagement and reported outcomes. At least according to graduates, the kind of education you get when you go to college matters a lot.

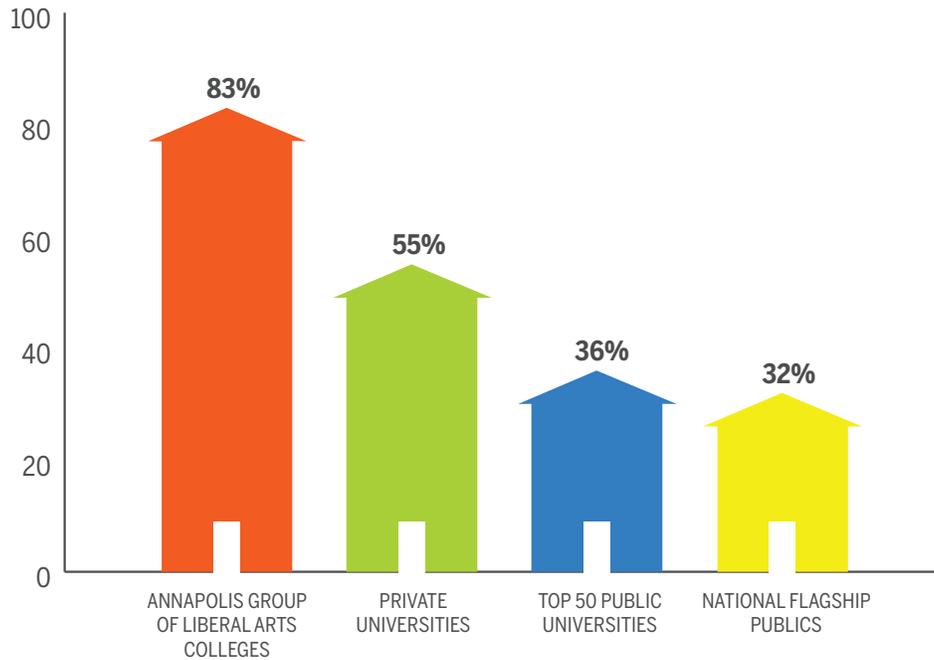
The notes accompanying these slides focus on a comparison of Annapolis Group college alumni to graduates of top 50 public flagship universities, but additional comparisons are available on each slide showing how alumni of larger private universities and graduates of the larger universe of national public flagship universities responded.



This slide depicts not the percentage of students who graduate but the percentage who report graduating in four years. A high four-year graduation measure is important (this is one of the President's chief higher education objectives) not only for the obvious cost implications to the family, but because of the high level of intentionality, engagement and coherence it reflects in both the college and the student.

The financial benefit of four-year graduation can equalize the cost-of-attendance of private and public colleges, and is a leg up of one, two or more years building a career or gaining graduate or professional credentials. As important is the energy, coherence and effectiveness of an education on a campus where virtually all students and faculty organize their effort around the expectation of a four-year graduation.

**PERCENTAGE OF ALUMNI WHO REPORTED LIVING ON CAMPUS FOR MOST OF THEIR COLLEGE YEARS**



**QK:** For most of your college years, did you live (on campus)?

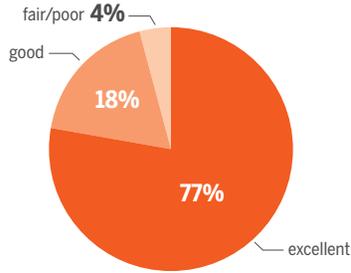
*All other groups are significantly lower than Annapolis Group colleges.*

A selective private college of the liberal arts and sciences is a residential college where students form and live in a community that supports their learning and their personal development as adults and citizens. Students on residential campuses live with and form friendships with students of many backgrounds and across majors and career aspirations. They're not simply in class with other interesting students;

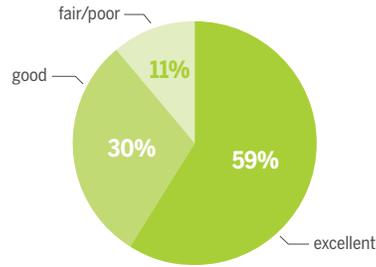
they form a campus community and develop socially and civically, as well as intellectually.

Eighty three percent of graduates from Annapolis Group member colleges lived on campus most of their four years, while only 36 percent of graduates of the Top 50 National Public Flagship universities reported this indicator of engagement.

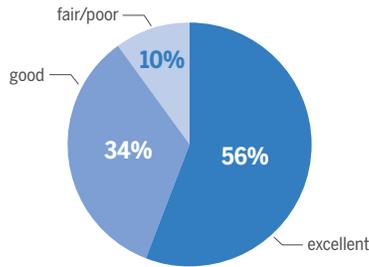
## RATINGS FOR THE OVERALL UNDERGRADUATE EXPERIENCE



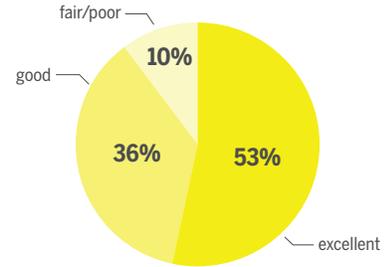
ANNAPOLIS GROUP OF LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES



PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES



TOP 50 PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES



NATIONAL FLAGSHIP PUBLICS

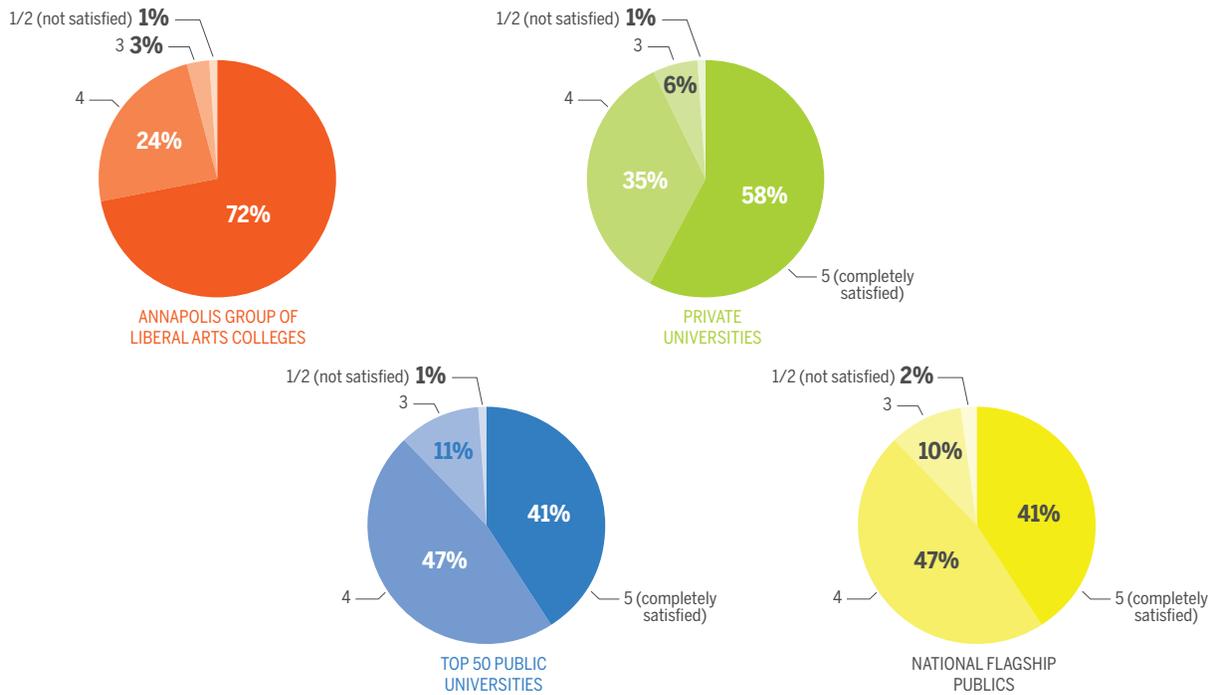
**Q29:** How would you evaluate your overall undergraduate experience?

*All other groups are significantly lower than Annapolis Group colleges.*

From popular press coverage, one might get the impression that a college education and the utility of colleges to society are suspect. Not in the minds of graduates. This is especially true of graduates of the member colleges of the

Annapolis Group, where 77 percent said their undergraduate experience was excellent. Again, this is a reflection of intentionality, engagement and cohesion on the part of both college and students.

## SATISFACTION WITH THE OVERALL QUALITY OF THEIR EDUCATION



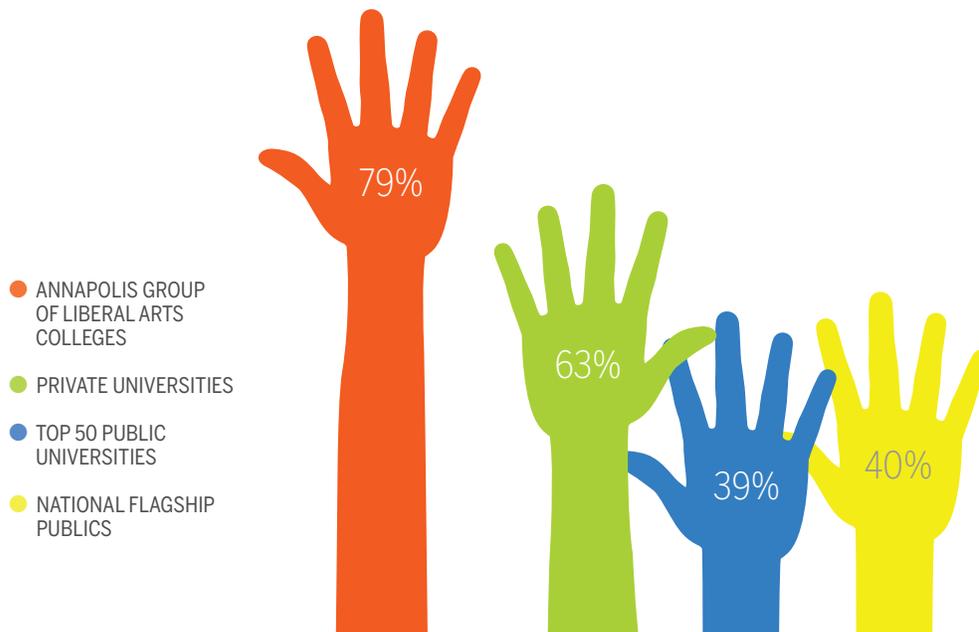
**Q7:** How satisfied are you with the overall quality of the education you received from your college? (rating on a 5-point scale, where 1 = not at all satisfied and 5 = completely satisfied)

*Annapolis Group is significantly higher than all other groups on “completely satisfied.”*

Asked about the extent to which they were satisfied with the quality of education received at their college, 72 percent of Annapolis Group college graduates gave the “top box” response

— five on a five point scale: completely satisfied. This is nearly double the percentage of graduates of Top 50 national flagship universities.

**PERCENTAGE OF ALUMNI WHO REPORTED BENEFITING “VERY MUCH” FROM HIGH-QUALITY, TEACHING-ORIENTED FACULTY**



**Q1:** Tell me how much you personally benefited from ... ?  
 (rating 5 on a five-point scale, where 1 = did not benefit at all and 5 = benefited very much)

*All other groups are significantly lower than Annapolis Group colleges.*

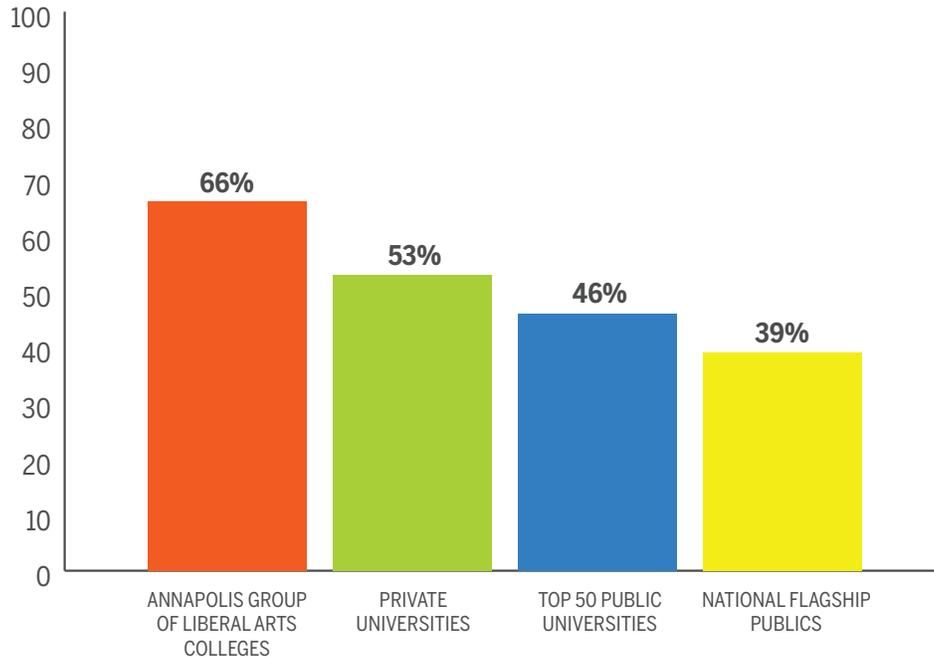
Slide by Bucknell University

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One element of this high level of satisfaction reported by alumni of Annapolis Group colleges was a “high-quality, teaching-oriented faculty,” from which 79 percent reported benefitting very much. Again, Annapolis Group graduates chose the “top box” on a five-point scale at a level roughly twice that of graduates of national public flagship universities.

We know from improvements on these measures over the years in responses from public university alumni that the public sector recognizes the importance of good teaching. Nevertheless, the realities of size, mission and the emphasis large research universities place on graduate students and publishing rather than teaching does define the undergraduate experience.

**PERCENTAGE OF ALUMNI WHO REPORTED BENEFITING “VERY MUCH”  
FROM A STRONG OVERALL ACADEMIC REPUTATION**



**Q1:** Tell me how much you personally benefited from ... ?  
(rating 5 on a five-point scale, where 1 = did not benefit at all and 5 = benefited very much)

*All other groups are significantly lower than Annapolis Group colleges.*

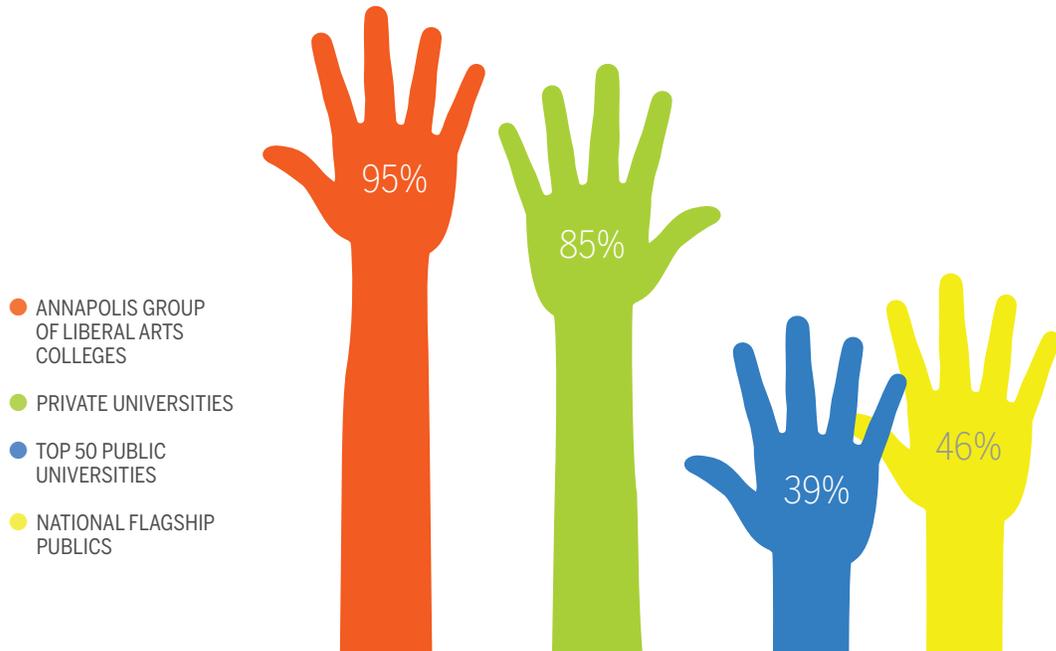
The smaller, private, liberal arts and sciences college is unique to America. Historically, this is the academic program people mean when they talk about going to college, the academic program that typified an educated and well-rounded person in our society. Today, the academic world has expanded and offers an increasingly specialized array of programs — for which a strong liberal arts and sciences education is still the preparation these programs seek in students at the graduate- and professional-school level.

And, increasingly, the best-known colleges and universities are those large universities with highly

visible medical and health science operations and Division I athletic programs. These schools are in the news one way or another almost daily.

For these reasons, a surprising finding is the differing percentage of graduates who report benefitting very much from a strong overall academic reputation. Here, 66 percent of graduates of Annapolis Group colleges report this compared to 46 percent of graduates of the top 50 national public universities.

**PERCENTAGE OF ALUMNI WHO REPORTED BENEFITING “VERY MUCH” FROM A MAJORITY OF CLASSES TAUGHT BY PROFESSORS**



**Q1:** Tell me how much you personally benefited from ... ?  
 (rating 5 on a five-point scale, where 1 = did not benefit at all and 5 = benefited very much)

*All other groups are significantly lower than Annapolis Group colleges.*

Slide by Bucknell University

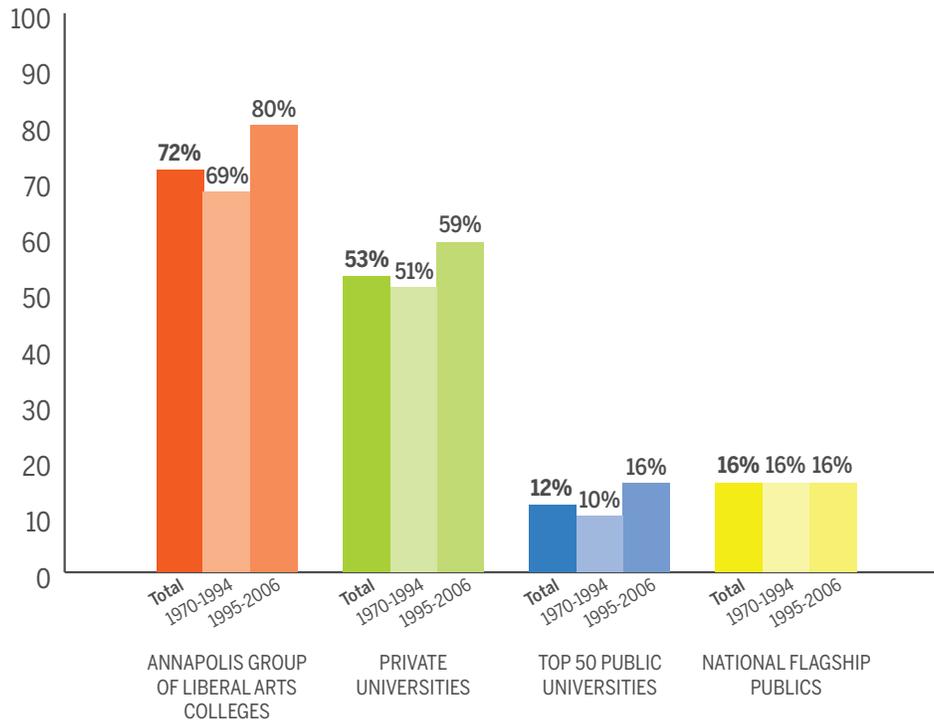
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This focus on teaching and learning for undergraduate students at Annapolis Group colleges is reflected in the benefit alumni reported from “a majority of classes taught by professors rather than teaching assistants.”

Again, comparing “top box” response, 95 percent of Annapolis Group college graduates reported

benefiting very much from this feature of their college experience, more than twice the frequency of this benefit reported by graduates to the nation’s top 50 public flagship university alumni, where the prevailing model still relegates students to lecture sections with graduate program teaching assistants.

**PERCENTAGE OF ALUMNI WHO SAID THEY BENEFITED "VERY MUCH" FROM MANY SMALL CLASSES WITH FEWER THAN 20 STUDENTS**



**Q1:** Tell me how much you personally benefited from ... ?  
 (rating 5 on a five-point scale, where 1 = did not benefit at all and 5 = benefited very much)

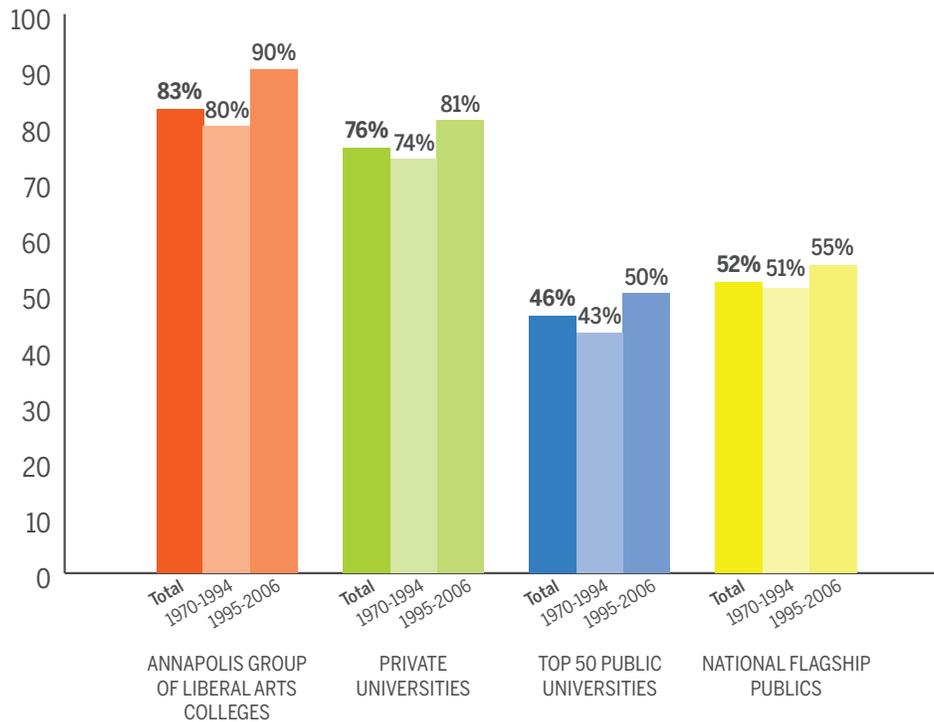
All other groups are significantly lower than Annapolis Group colleges.

Among colleges, the chief measures of academic quality and student-focus are average class size and student/faculty ratio. These are reported in such publications as *US News* and *World Report* as an element in their rankings, as well as on college websites. But, what is the actual experience of students? Do they actually experience and benefit from small classes?

the top rating on a five-point scale, from many small classes with fewer than 20 students. All colleges and universities know that smaller classes work better than larger ones. But there is a huge difference in how frequently this occurs and does so in highly beneficial ways despite what many colleges and universities report on their web sites and to ranking organizations.

This slide depicts, over time, the percentage of graduates who reported benefiting "very much,"

**PERCENTAGE OF ALUMNI WHO SAID THEIR PROFESSORS OFTEN CHALLENGED THEM ACADEMICALLY AND ALSO PERSONALLY HELPED THEM MEET THOSE CHALLENGES**



**Q2:** How often did your college experience include the following ... ?  
 (rating 4 or 5 on a five-point scale, where 1 = never and 5 = always)

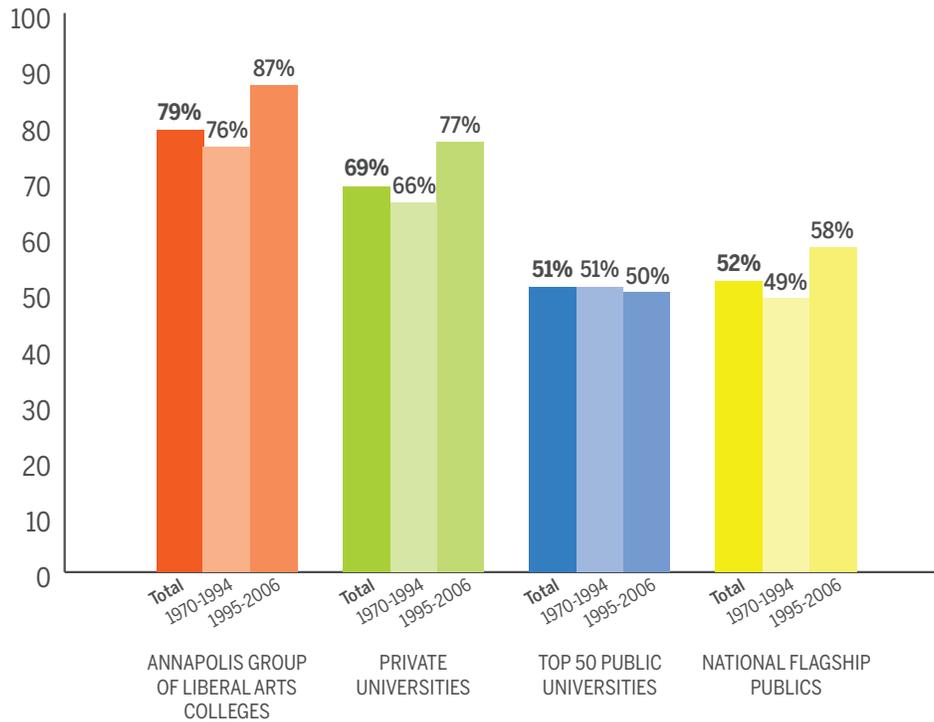
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The database of alumni survey responses is large enough to allow not only comparison between graduates of different types of institutions, but also to track differences in reported experience across decades.

Here, the finding that 95 percent of Annapolis Group college graduates from 1995-2006 say their experience included (top two boxes on a five-point scale) “professors who challenged

them, but helped them meet the challenge” is amplified because it also represents a significant improvement over a previously impressive result. This response is 10 percentage points higher for graduates of 1995-2006 than for graduates 1970-1994. There was improvement on the measure in the public sector as well, but not as much. As a result the performance gap widened on this measure of student/faculty engagement.

**PERCENTAGE OF ALUMNI WHO SAID THEIR EXPERIENCE OFTEN INCLUDED EXTENSIVE CLASSROOM DISCUSSIONS**



**Q2:** How often did your college experience include the following ... ?  
 (rating 4 or 5 on a five-point scale, where 1 = never and 5 = always)

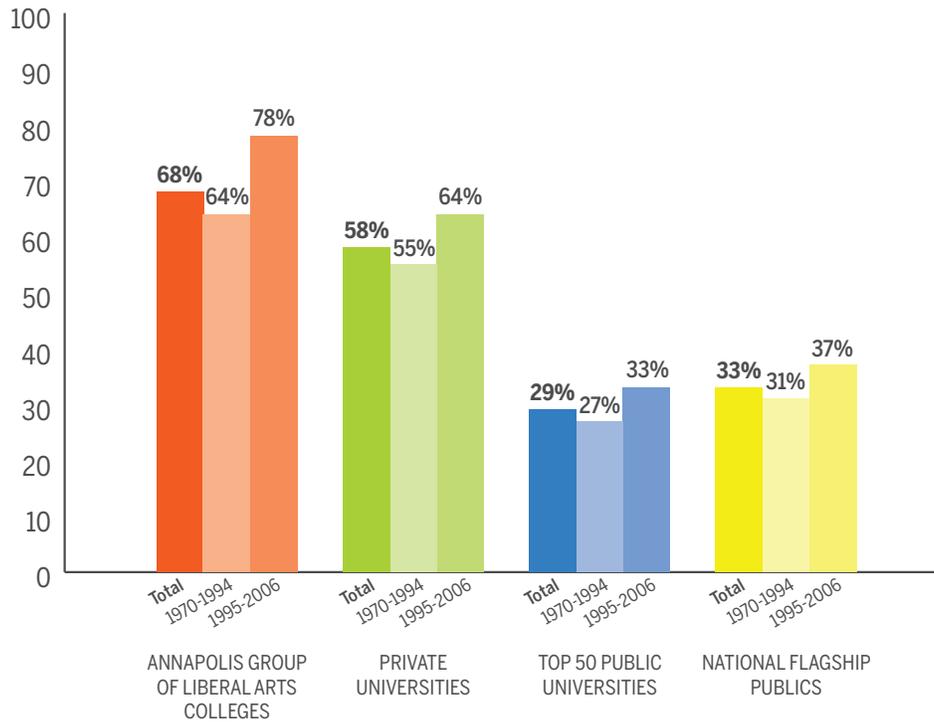
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If student/faculty engagement is an important ingredient in student success, and it is, it stands to reason that the lecture format is less effective than, say, a seminar format in which students have to be prepared to be active learners and discussion participants.

Eighty-seven percent of 1995-2006 Annapolis Group college alumni said their experience

often included classroom discussions, an improvement of more than 10 percentage points over what earlier graduating classes reported. This compares to 50 percent of more-recent graduates of top 50 national public flagship universities who reported that their experience often included classroom discussions, a finding that was not an improvement over earlier years.

**PERCENTAGE OF ALUMNI WHO SAID THEIR EXPERIENCE OFTEN INCLUDED CONVERSATIONS WITH PROFESSORS OUTSIDE OF CLASS**



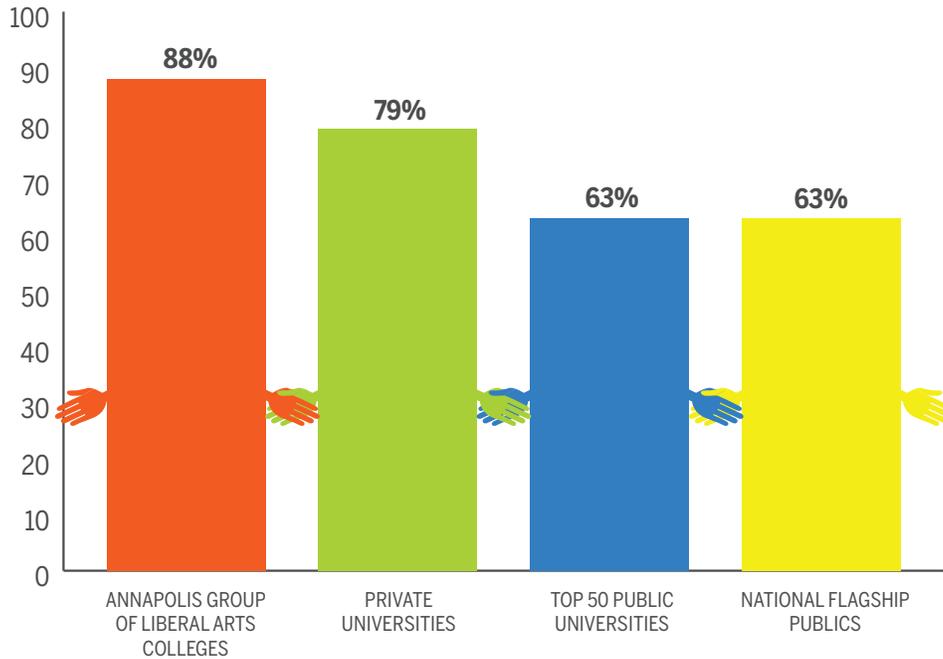
**Q2:** How often did your college experience include the following ... ?  
 (rating 4 or 5 on a five-point scale, where 1 = never and 5 = always)

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To make learning as effective as possible, professors need to know their students. And if they don't have conversations outside of class, students and professors remain at a distance that precludes professors from serving as mentors, makes student/faculty research unlikely and cannot result in the highly effective recommendation for graduate and professional school, or a first job, that can only come from a professor who really knows his or her students.

Seventy-eight percent of Annapolis Group college alumni from 1995-2006 report that their experience often included conversations with professors outside of class, a remarkable 14 percentage points higher than for earlier classes and 45 points higher than the incidence reported by 1995-2006 graduates of the top 50 national public flagship universities who reported this happened for 33 percent of them.

**PERCENTAGE OF ALUMNI WHO AGREED THERE WAS A SENSE OF COMMUNITY AMONG STUDENTS**



**Q12:** How much do you agree with the following statement ... ?  
 (rating 4 or 5 on a five-point scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree)

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Community and the values of a strong community provide a grounding for the broader goals of a college education: for students to become good citizens and to develop both leadership skills and social confidence; to understand and balance individual and social responsibilities.

The sense of community among students — whether and to what degree it exists on campus

— is a measure of both chicken and egg. A campus where a strong sense of community pertains is both an attraction to students and a successful result of that attraction. Eighty-eight percent of Annapolis Group college alumni reported a strong sense of community among students when they were in college compared to 63 percent of public sector alumni.

**PERCENTAGE OF ALUMNI WHO SAID THEY PARTICIPATED IN SERVICE LEARNING OR COMMUNITY SERVICE**



**Q5:** While in college, did you participate in ... ?

*All other groups are significantly lower than Annapolis Group colleges.*

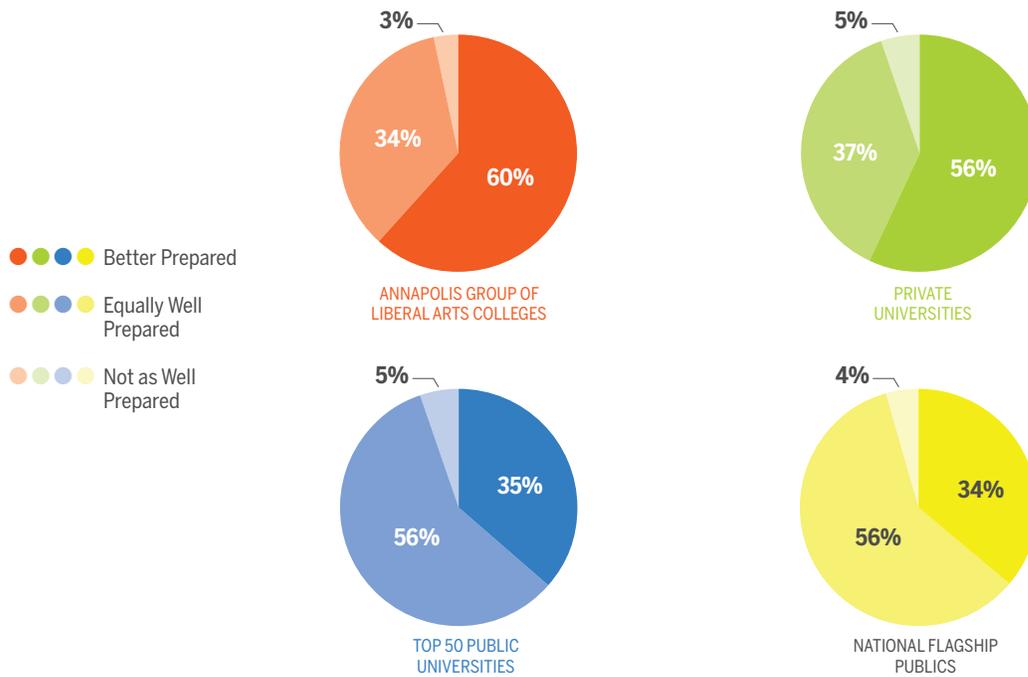
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The follow-on question to whether and to what extent a strong sense of community exists is whether that sense of community translated into community service. For 63 percent of

Annapolis Group college alumni, it did, compared to 32 percent of top 50 national public flagship alumni.

**PERCENTAGE OF ALUMNI WHO SAID THEY FELT “BETTER PREPARED” FOR LIFE AFTER COLLEGE THAN STUDENTS WHO ATTENDED OTHER COLLEGES**



**Q9:** How prepared were you for life after college, such as for graduate school or your first job, compared to students from other colleges?

*Annapolis Group is significantly higher for “better prepared” than the public university groups.*

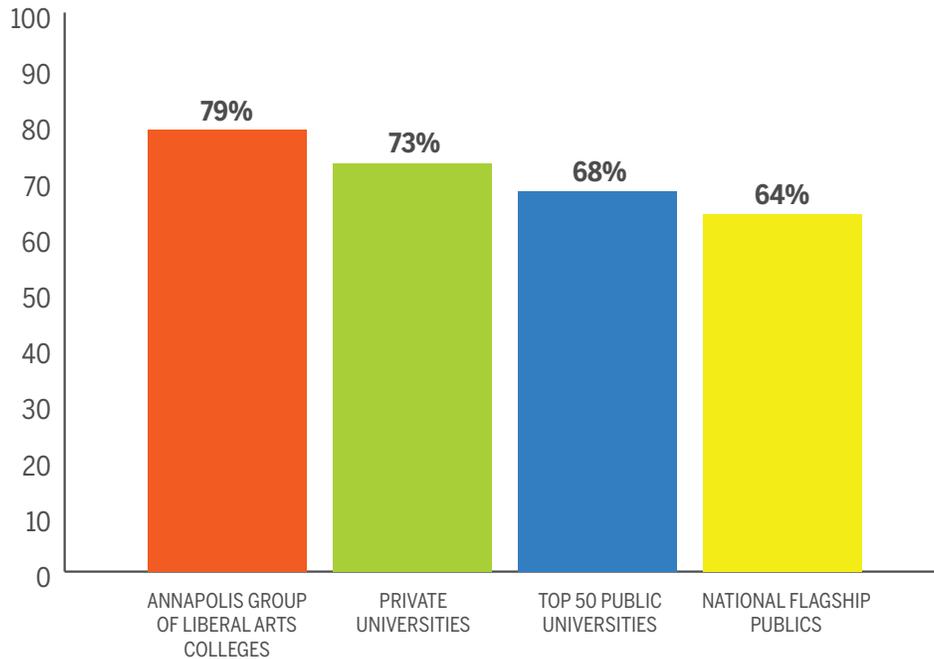
How well does college — or in this case specific groupings and types of colleges and universities — prepare students for life after college?

them, when they encountered graduates of other colleges in the marketplace following graduation?

There is no available objective proof. This research delineates very different levels of alumni-reported engagement on a range of factors we know to be crucial to educational effectiveness. What else might alumni tell us about their perception of how well prepared their college education made

Sixty percent of Annapolis Group college alumni said they felt better prepared for life after college than the graduates of other colleges they encountered. This was true for 35 percent of top 50 national public flagship alumni.

**PERCENTAGE OF ALUMNI WHO SAID OVERALL QUALITY AND BREADTH OF ACADEMIC PREPARATION PLAYED AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN BEING ACCEPTED TO GRADUATE SCHOOL OR FINDING A FIRST JOB**



**Q11:** Did any of the following factors play an important role in being accepted to graduate school or finding your first real job?

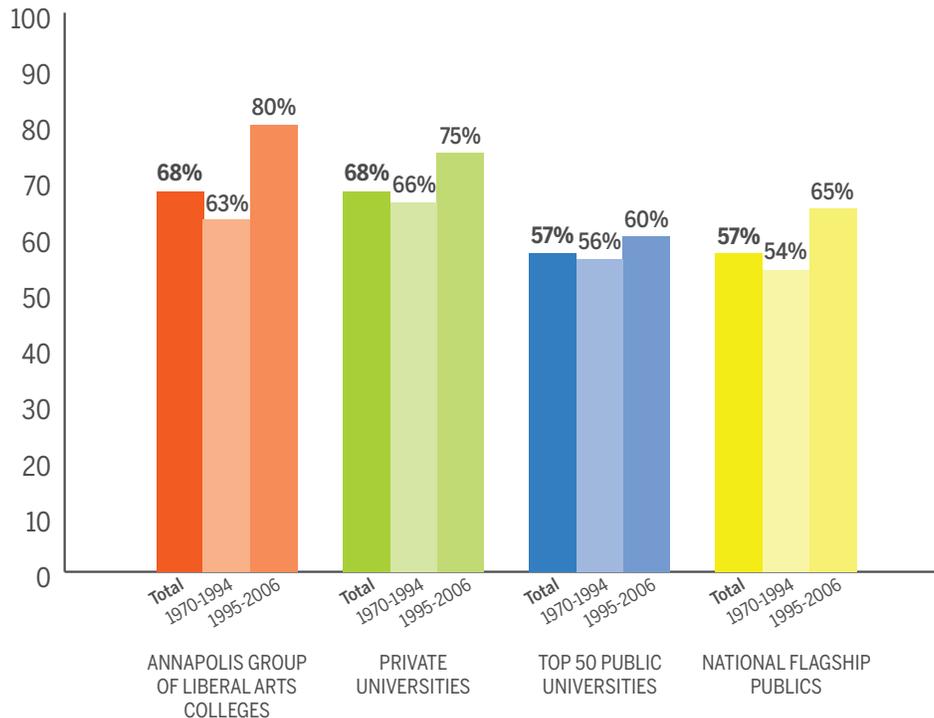
*The public university groups are significantly lower than Annapolis Group colleges.*

Graduates were asked, “Did any of the following factors play an important role in being accepted to graduate school or finding your first real job?”

For all alumni groups, the top response was “overall quality and breadth of my academic

preparation,” so there was widespread agreement about the importance of this factor. Seventy-nine percent of Annapolis Group college alumni cited this compared to 68 percent of graduates of top 50 public flagship universities.

### PERCENTAGE OF ALUMNI WHO GIVE THEIR COLLEGE A HIGH EFFECTIVENESS RATING FOR HELPING STUDENTS LEARN TO BE A LEADER



**Q10:** How effective was your college in helping you with ... ?  
 (rating a 4 or 5 on a five-point scale, where 1 = not at all effective and 5 = extremely effective)

*The public university groups are significantly lower than Annapolis Group colleges.*

We often see leadership as in short supply in our civic life, but it has always been something our society expects colleges and universities to provide our businesses, institutions and communities through their educational programs. Increasingly, leadership skills are fundamental to career preparation and advancement.

An astonishing 80 percent of Annapolis Group colleges graduates from the classes of 1995-2006 said their college was extremely effective (“top box” response) in helping them learn to

be leaders, an increase of 17 percentage points from the response of alumni who graduated from 1970-1994. Eighty percent compares to 60 percent of graduates of the top 50 public flagship universities from 1995-2006. Of course, this is not a measure of the number or percent who eventually became or will become leaders in particular areas of life. It is a measure of the extent to which alumni say their undergraduate college experience was extremely effective in helping them become leaders.

## **- POSTSCRIPT -**

The findings of this comparative alumni research study illustrate differences between the nature, effectiveness and perceived quality of the predominant college experience that occurs at different types of four-year colleges and universities. These differences are major and highly relevant because the engagement factors being measured are so critical to success in college. This is borne out by sector-by-sector analysis of the survey responses. Regardless of sector or grouping or type of institution, the graduates who reported the higher levels of engagement also reported stronger outcomes and satisfaction. It is also clear, that consistently high, sustained and even improved levels of student engagement, satisfaction and perceived preparation are the province of the private, residential colleges of liberal arts and sciences typified in these findings by the member colleges of the Annapolis Group.

Students and families should have high expectations for what a college education will mean for them. The college search should seek evidence of the opportunity and likelihood of an engaged college experience at a college that provides the best fit for students and their families. The evidence in this research is that students and families can have high expectations and can find colleges that will meet and exceed those expectations.

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