

Selected comments from the 2009 Alumni Survey

Alumni who responded to the 2009 survey provided several hundred pages of comments to a set of open-ended questions. As promised in the invitation to the survey, selected comments have been stripped of personally identifying information and have been shared with appropriate offices for analysis and action.

Here are just a few examples of what alumni said, sampled from across the class decades:

What are Carleton's distinctive qualities?

M, 1940s Its reputation is certainly stellar. When I was there in the 40's it was easy to get into, but tough once we were in - we played and worked hard. It seems to be tougher now and I don't know if anyone has any fun anymore- when I tell people I went to Carleton, they say ooh - but I couldn't get in now and I probably couldn't graduate either!

F, 1940s Carleton educates the entire person. The classes are only part of the whole, huge mass of education for life that the Carleton experience offers. It is true that when you become a part of Carleton, Carleton becomes a part of you. When I graduated I felt totally ready to take on whatever life had to offer and that notion has never failed me. I am proud, and grateful, to be a Carleton graduate.

F, 1950s Giving me the opportunity to become a critical thinker - to be concerned and connected to my life, my community and the diverse world I live in - and to make the intelligent connections in the arts, diversity of people, good understanding of global needs - the environment, health, etc.

M, 1950s Carleton's faculty and student body is much more diverse then it was when I attended. These are moves in the right direction. I am very glad to have this a part of the Carleton experience today. I wished that I could have had more of this, when I was a Carleton student.

M, 1960s Carleton provides an outstanding liberal arts education which is critical to help students decide what career they will like and wish to pursue. The broad knowledge helps to expand relationships with others. Carleton teaches how to think with a logical integrated approach to problems and future directions.

F, 1960s Carleton of today is vastly different from the Carleton I attended. Yes, it is still a small liberal arts college in "the city of cows, colleges and contentment" but the energy has changed. Students seem more engaged in life. Ivory towerism has diminished. Interdisciplinary majors exist. I sense that faculty devotion to teaching remains a high point.

M, 1970s Carleton is an outstanding liberal arts college without having too high of an opinion of itself. The school also has an institutional sense of humor that is absent in some of its peers.

F, 1970s Carleton exemplifies the type of college and the college experience that people strive for in the liberal arts experience. It has a deep commitment to the undergraduate experience, to professors who

teach and to allowing students to have the best intellectual experience possible. It is an excellent school that welcomes a wide range of students who share an intensity of experience that is rarely matched at other institutions.

F, 1980s Carleton encourages creative thinking and intellectual curiosity. I love Carleton's emphasis on exploring new areas, cultures, and ideas. Even more, I love how Carleton students are supportive of each other's pursuits and passions--there's such an air of mutual appreciation and respect. My memory of Carleton (and it seems to hold true today) is that it was a challenging yet relaxed and supportive place that enabled students to intellectually take flight. The college also encourages students to recognize their social and ethical responsibilities within the community and out in the world.

M, 1980s As a grad student, post-doc and professor I have been at 6 different schools and Carleton is unique. In addition to all of the very bright people at Carleton, both faculty and students, these are some things I have noticed. It is small enough to feel close-knit but not so small as to feel limited or stifling. It is big enough to provide plenty of room to explore without getting lost in the crowd. There is always something interesting going on without being overwhelming.

F, 1990s Quirkiness. Depth of character. Serious sense of responsibility. Varied/multifaceted/liberal artsy culture and individuals. Esoteric sense of humor. Un-ostentatiously interesting, brilliantly intelligent, think-outside-the-box, idealistic but grounded people who are just crazy about each other.

M, 1990s Unparalleled education ... for critical thinking, independence, social awareness, faculty-student interaction. The opportunity to attend Carleton has been the greatest gift of my life.

F, 2000s There's no other college in the country where the mix of silliness and scholarship, laughter and focus, intimacy and intelligence, and spirit and freedom of expression come together in just the way they do at Carleton. It's a college with more personality than any one person, and for the soul that fits there, it shapes you and holds you like no other community in the world.

M, 2000s Carleton is a community-oriented college, and the relationships I made there--those with students, those with faculty, those with members of the larger Northfield community--are among my most valued gifts from that time in my life. I think Carleton encourages a broad field of study, which is important in an age of increasing specialization, and Carleton's emphasis on personal wholeness--body, mind, spirit, the works--makes it a place less about career preparation and more about growing in maturity and even (should I go ahead and say it?) wisdom. Furthermore, Carleton attracts a particular kind of student and particular faculty: they are a little weird, but in the best ways, and they don't take themselves so seriously that they can't enjoy laughter at their own expense. More importantly, a sense of self-importance (much more dangerous than a sense of humor!) never impedes them from the serious business of learning. Carleton students are curious and intelligent; they are ambitious without being competitive; and they are socially conscious without being morally censorious. I am proud to have been in the company of so many excellent people.

What is the single most important thing that Carleton could do to better connect you to the College?

Short statements collected from all classes:

- Would like "The Voice" to have more in-depth articles on or by alumni and faculty. As time goes by, it is harder to relate to the student experience.
- Work to promote and support better regional Alumni groups.
- You are doing an outstanding job here. Carleton's alumni relations are the envy of most comparison schools. In fact, I think anything more would misconstrue the balance. Remember, the heart of any the truly great academic institutions lie not in their past, but in their future.
- Video stream.
- Use the internet more.
- Use my willingness to volunteer.
- Unsure. Though I do enjoy the annual calls from students during the Phone-a-thon.
- Use the web more in fun, savvy way that connect class years across the spectrum.
- Utilize me! As a high school teacher I talk Carleton up to my students all the time but I don't see any admissions people coming to our school.
- Web cams to see what is currently happening and invite me back to talk to students.
- What about a Facebook-type community for alums?
- What's going on today. Could you put the Carletonian on-line? [It is: <http://apps.carleton.edu/carletonian/>]
- What distance there is between me and Carleton has mainly to do with my change in life values and priorities.
- Work to make the CarlTown network robust and engaging.
- Worry less about competing with the Amhersts and the Swarthmores, even if that means falling in the national rankings.
- You are doing all the right things. Like many of my kind, I happen to be a typically over-booked mid-career professional who has little time for anything.
- We're living in an age where an undergraduate degree is incredibly common, so a small college needs to distinguish itself by connecting the liberal arts educational experience to the real world of work beyond the campus.
- We have just seen a class newsletter started - that helps. The Voice is a wonderful effort, and helps me see the school as it is now.
- Updates on faculty and students who were present during my years with the college.
- Um, send my unborn child an acceptance letter?
- Try some online broadcasting of outstanding classes and presentations.
- Treat alumni/donors as investors -- tell us how are money is used and involve in decisions about how best to use or money.
- Track people by their majors more than by the year they graduated. Then I could find people I spent time with.

- Time and distance make connection difficult, and there is not much that can be done about those things.
- Develop ways to deliver "the liberal arts" to alumni whose lives (like mine) have narrowed a little, or maybe a lot, since graduation.
- They could send more information via email.
- They could show themselves to be more aggressive on fundraising and improving the college's standing. If they show that they are serious, I will donate more.
- The only connection they even attempt is to try to get money. It might work if someone took the time to ask why I don't/won't give money.
- These days I spend so much time online... so maybe email updates that would direct me to specific areas of the Carleton website?
- The Voice is probably my primary connection to the institution itself at this point, and is an excellent publication. Keep it up!
- The reunion definitely helped me reconnect to a lot of people. Perhaps by asking me to be a local representative for admissions-- this would drive me to visit more often and be actively engaged in what's going on at Carleton.
- The recruitment efforts of Carleton, especially in a diverse population. What I mean by diverse is a student population is students who are underrepresented and from a lower socio-economic background. Those are the types of efforts that I am interested in learning how Carleton is tackling them.
- The networking aspects of Carleton are still not as good as many of its competitive schools, like Williams where our son attended. This is something the school should aspire to.
- The closest alumni activities are almost 3 hours away. So I don't participate. If there were alumni activities closer to home, I would probably have participated in some of them.
- Tell me what you are doing to foster community, faculty-student interaction, healthy competition and cooperation, and social action in Northfield and the world at large.
- Tell me directly how additional support would increase need-blind financial aid and access/sustained success at Carleton for previously less represented groups
- The Arts Union should have an independent web site posting student and faculty work with videos of the performing arts.
- The career center's new "engagement wanted" system seems like a wonderful way of connecting alums with current students.
- The most important thing Carleton could do is to stop bombarding me with fundraising materials. Carleton spends far more in trying to get me to donate than I could afford to donate. After a while, the calls/mailings/etc reach a point that feels like harassment. I enjoy contact with the college that informs me about the school and connects me with alumni, but I do not enjoy contact that makes me feel like Carleton values me for my checkbook.
- ...make very easily accessible the contact information of classmates and members of the six most adjacent classes with whom we were attending Carleton (three ahead of us and three behind us)

- I'm always interested in what my former classmates are up to, which is why I look forward to each Voice. Could there be a version of Class Notes on the web site too (in the alumni section)?
- The overall Carleton experience shaped my life, and I would like to be able to be a resource to current students or recently graduated students who would like mentoring in my career field. This is the gift I would like to return to the institution.
- They already do plenty. It's MY responsibility to connect better! As a teacher I am so swamped with work that I rarely take the time. None of that is Carleton's fault.
- They couldn't. I am connected with the community I live in and I focus my efforts here.... It's not lost on me that your efforts to "better connect me with the College" are closely tied to efforts to elicit monetary support, and I'm just not willing to give anymore to the college.
- Ties to my undergraduate school are not my main focus right now. I stay connected with some people and departments through Facebook.
- This questionnaire was a good move after 45 years.
- I'm enjoying the live camera feeds of the new dorm constructions.... and that alumni directory is handy but the log-in is impossible for me to remember. Maybe I'm just getting old?

Miscellaneous comments:

F, 1940s As a "pushing 90" senior, I have always been grateful to Carleton for encouraging a breadth of mind that can adapt to any problem I have encountered. The liberal arts education is a rare and valuable thing.

M, 1950s Carleton helps students understand that the value of individuals and their lives is not well measured in dollars. Thus Carleton alumni are possibly less intent on being affluent than those from other "top" schools.

F, 1950s Being with my former classmates at the 50th reunion allowed me to see the kind of people we became and I am sure that Carleton College contributed greatly to that. Its liberal, open atmosphere - even in the 50's- helped me to develop interests in philosophy and literature and love lifelong learning.

M, 1960s I find it troubling that the cost of one year at good private schools like Carleton is now in the range of \$48,000. Perhaps there is no way to harness these costs but it seems to me to have gone way beyond what the vast majority of our nation can even imagine to afford and at an extreme it may be an undoing of some private colleges.

F, 1960s Carleton remains as the most significant influence in my entire professional career and personal journey. I came to Carleton from a foreign country and was quickly immersed in an educational environment which demanded rigor and honesty in the pursuit of excellence. I consider myself extremely fortunate and remain forever grateful to this institution for what it has given me. I am a much better person thanks to those four years at Carleton.

M, 1970s The two most urgent priorities for the College are to increase its endowment and to increase the size of the applicant pool by increasing student awareness of the school on both the West and East coasts.

F, 1970s I'd like Carleton to do a better job (if possible) of increasing its national reputation and presence, and upgrade its - already high - student caliber.

M, 1990s A couple of years ago a student contacted me looking for a job as an intern. My company hired her. She was head and shoulders better than most of my colleagues. She was a walking advertisement for how great the school is, and I was proud to work with her.

F, 1990s While I don't know how legitimate the rankings are, as an alum being able to say I went to a school that's nationally ranked is helpful. I happen to live in MN so many people have heard of Carleton, but in other parts of the country they haven't.

M, 1990s Work with the online tools I use already. Facebook would be ideal. This is much easier for me to deal with than a new web site and magazine and the like.

F, 2000s Carleton helped me to become the confident, passionate person I am today. I'm doing very well in my graduate program and I think that is due to the strong foundation I received at Carleton. I hope the College always maintains its standard of excellence without being pretentious.

M. 2000s A Carleton education has been a great asset for me. However, I just wish that it has a much wider brand recognition beyond just academia. While I have every confidence that having Carleton on my resume would serve me well in graduate school application down the line, I don't believe that many people have heard of Carleton outside of academic setting in the professional world. I think Carleton would greatly benefit from additional brand marketing.