

2005 Alumni Survey of the Cornell Class of 1994

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Protocol

The 2005 Alumni Survey was administered to Cornell alumni of the class of 1994 in the spring semester of 2005. The Office of Alumni Affairs put together the sample frame, including 2,943 mailable alumni who chose to affiliate with the class of 1994. The survey was administered both over the web (with the first invitation to participate over the web going out March 1st) as well as with a paper instrument through regular mail (with the first survey mailing going out March 15th). The survey closed during the first week of May. There were a total of 1,347 responses (947 completed on the web, and 399 mailed), for a total response rate of about 46%. The response rate varied by residence, with New York State alumni being among the least likely to respond (see Figure 1). As is typical for surveys in general, women are substantially more likely to respond than men.

The 2005 Alumni Survey was part of a consortial data collection effort. Through a data sharing agreement, we are able to compare the responses of Cornell alumni with those of alumni from three “norm groups”:

- **“Preferred over Cornell”** institutions include a small number of highly selective universities that tend to “beat” Cornell in the admissions decisions of commonly admitted undergraduates
- **“Head-to-Head”** institutions include a group of highly selective universities which compete with Cornell on a relatively even basis for commonly admitted undergraduates
- **“Cornell Preferred”** institutions include a group of highly selective universities which more often “lose” when in direct competition with Cornell for commonly admitted undergraduates

Response rates varied across norm groups, with some institutions having as few as a quarter of their alumni responding; only two of the seventeen norm group institutions had response rates as high as Cornell’s. Readers should bear in mind that differences in response rates may affect norm group comparisons, as we might expect that samples resulting from lower response rates will be more select of alumni who maintain a connection to their alma mater.

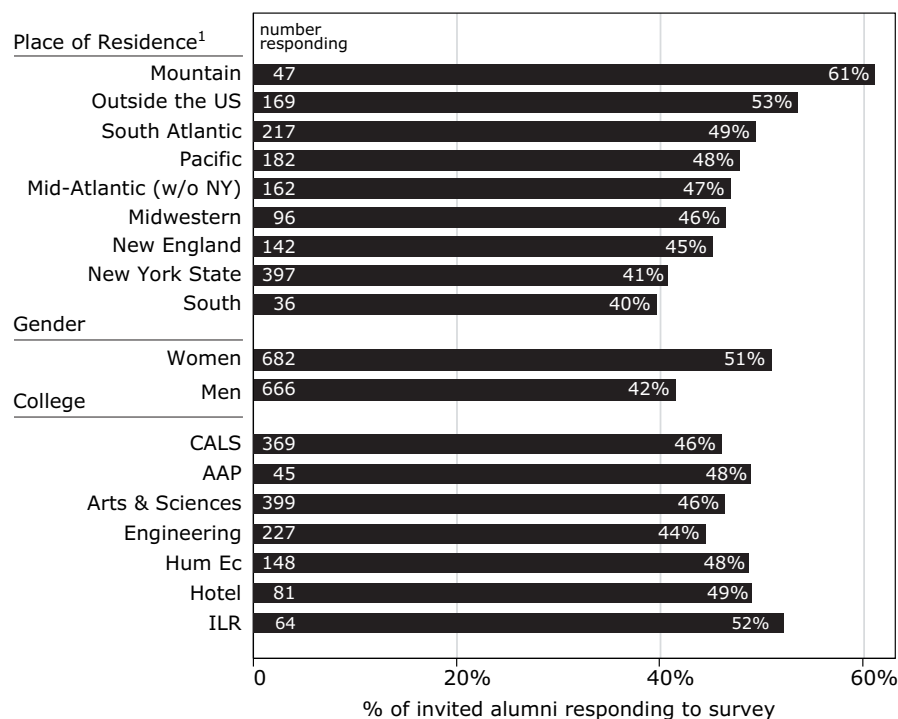
As a survey of a single class, 10-years out from graduation, the 2005 Alumni Survey may not be representative of all alumni.

Alumni’s Sense of Connection

Two questions on the survey instrument touch directly upon alumni’s present level of connection to their undergraduate institutions. The first of these asks, “Today, how connected do you feel with your undergraduate institution?” The modal response for this item is “somewhat connected,” with approximately 40% of alumni responding this way across Cornell and the norm group institutions. Thirty-two percent of Cornell alumni responded that they were “not very connected.” (This percentage was larger than the corresponding percentages in the norm groups.) Only 6.4% of 1994 Cornell alumni reported that they felt “very connected” to Cornell, as shown in Figure 2. (This is slightly lower than the percent of 10-year-out alumni in the 2000 survey; see Figure 2.) In some of the subsequent analyses, Cornell alumni are divided into two groups: those who feel “not very connected” and those who are at least “somewhat connected” (together comprising about 68% of responding alumni).

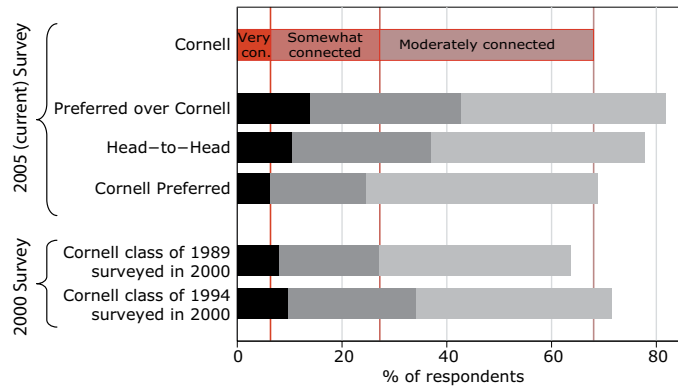
The second item inquires about the level of financial support. Slightly more than half of responding Cornell alumni reported making some contribution of any amount during 2004 (see Figure 3). As with the measure on connection, these self-reports are used to divide alumni into those reported contributing (54%) and those who did not (46%) for analysis purposes.

Figure 1. Cornell Alumni Survey Response Rates, by Residence, Gender and College



¹ Mountain: Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, New Mexico and Arizona
 South Atlantic: Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida and D.C.
 Pacific: California, Washington, Oregon, Alaska, and Hawaii
 Mid-Atlantic (w/o NY): New Jersey, Pennsylvania
 Midwestern: Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, N. Dakota, S. Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas
 New England: Massachusetts, Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Rhode Island
 South: Kentucky, Texas, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Tennessee

Figure 2. Level of Connection, by Norm Groups and Survey Year



These two questions—feeling of connectedness and financial contribution—are strongly related: 85% of those who feel “very connected” to Cornell contributed some amount of money in 2004, while 70% of those who reported that they feel “not very connected” made no contribution to Cornell in that year.

When asked “which of the following Cornell groups do you currently feel the strongest connection” 47% responded that they were “not especially connected to any one specific Cornell group”, 25% indicated “the class of 1994,” 13% “another Cornell Alumni Association”, 11% “my undergraduate college” and 4% “a Cornell Regional Club.” Those who were “not especially connected” to one specific group were slightly more likely to feel at least somewhat connected to Cornell.

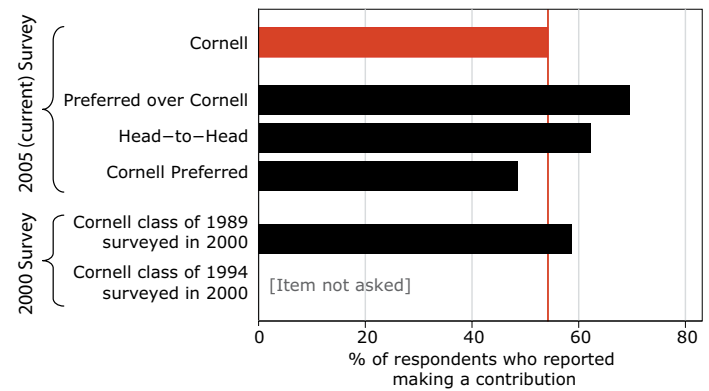
Cornellians were also asked about the friends with whom they keep in closest contact. Forty-one percent of alumni said that their closest Cornell friends were those they had met through their residential experiences, and another 23% indicated that it was those that they had met through sorority or fraternity involvement. There was not a significant difference in the level of connection of these different groups.

Responding alumni whose parents attended Cornell were only slightly more likely to feel connected or to contribute; indeed the difference was not statistically significant (results not shown).

Involvement in College

The survey instrument asked respondents to indicate their level of involvement during their undergraduate years in twenty-five different activities. Figure 3 illustrates the percent of respondents who indicated that they had some involvement at any level. Figure 4 illustrates the percent of respondents who indicated that they had some involvement at any level. Involvement with thirteen of the activities, illustrated with darker or colored bars in Figure 3, was associated with either sense of connection or

Figure 3. Contributor Status, by Norm Groups and Survey Year



making a contribution or both. Seven of the activities were associated with both:

- **Contact with campus staff other than faculty** (83% of contributors versus 77% of non-contributors had contact)
- **Community service** (65% of contributors versus 52% of non-contributors served)
- **Interaction with pre-major advisor** (60% of contributors versus 55% of non-contributors had interaction)
- **Fraternity/Sorority** (46% of contributors versus 32% of non-contributors were involved)
- **Inter-collegiate athletics** (31% of contributors versus 20% of non-contributors were involved)
- **Student publications** (20% of the connected versus 12% of the not-connected participated)
- **Student government** (18% of the connected versus 10% of the not-connected participated)

Figure 4. Involvement in Various Activities as an Undergraduate

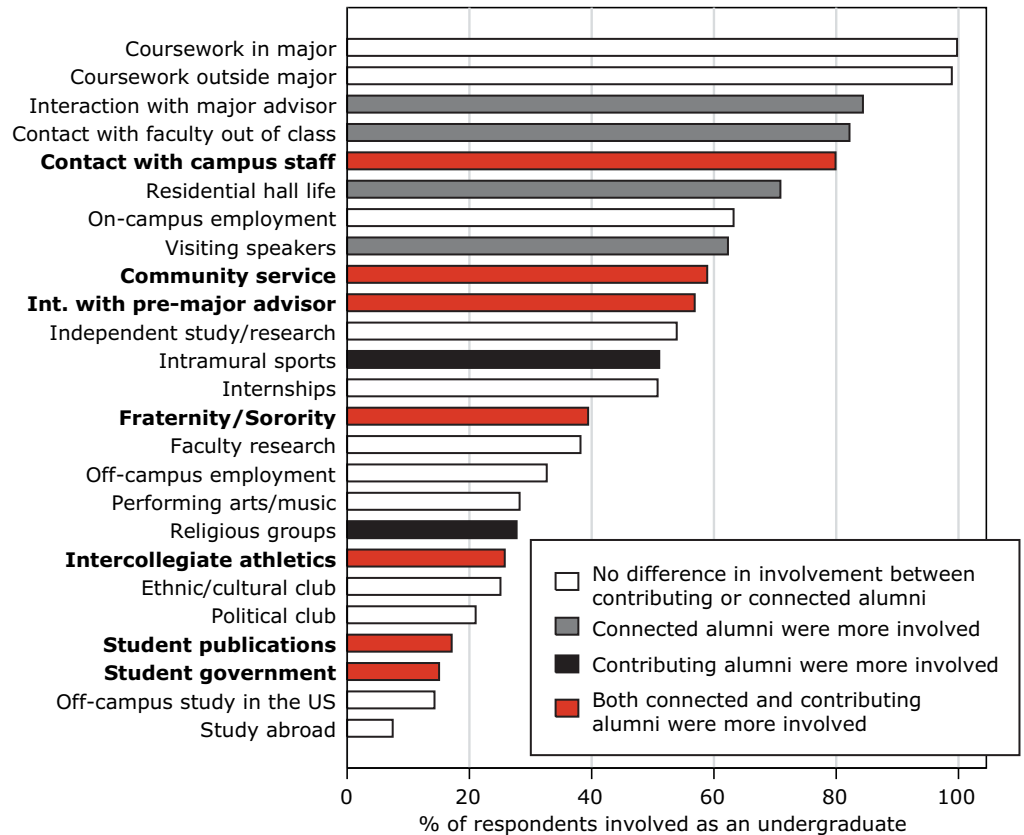
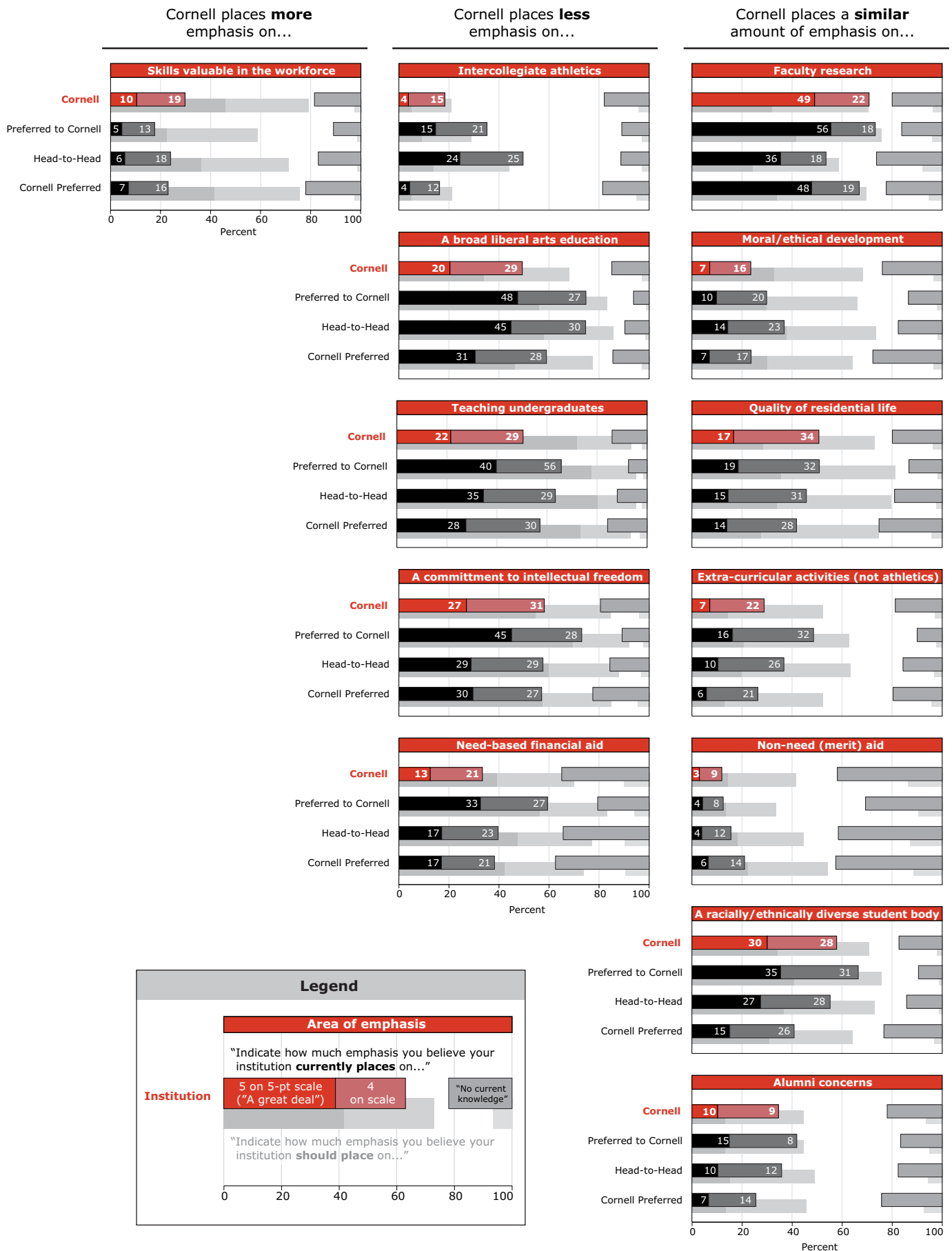


Figure 5. Ratings of Current Emphasis and What Emphasis Should Be in Various Areas, by Norm Group



Institutional Priorities

The survey questionnaire asked respondents to “indicate how much emphasis you believe your undergraduate institution *currently* places and how much it *should* place” on each of thirteen areas. Figure 5 illustrates responses to this two-part query for Cornell and norm groups, organizing the results by differences between Cornell alumni ratings and those from norm group institutions.

Cornell alumni are less likely than norm group alumni to indicate that their undergraduate institution places a high level of emphasis on intercollegiate athletics, a broad liberal arts education, teaching undergraduates, a commitment to intellectual freedom and need-based financial aid. On the other hand, Cornell alumni are more likely than norm group alumni to consider that their institution places a high degree of emphasis on skills valuable in the workforce.

In general, norm group differences in what undergraduates institutions *should* emphasize are smaller than norm group differences in what the institutions *do* emphasize.

For both Cornell as well as norm group institutions, the largest gaps between what alumni think the institution *should* and *does* emphasize were in the following areas:

- **Teaching undergraduates** (95% of respondents think Cornell should place more than a moderate emphasis, but only 51% think it does)
- **Skills valuable in the work force** (79% of respondents think Cornell should place more than a moderate emphasis, but only 29% think it does)
- **Moral and ethical development** (68% of respondents think Cornell should place more than a moderate emphasis, but only 23% think it does)

The only area in which Cornell alumni reported that the institution places more emphasis than it should was faculty research.

In all but one of the thirteen domains, Cornell alumni were more likely than alumni from “Preferred to Cornell” and “Head-to-Head” institutions to say they had “no current knowledge” regarding the current emphasis of their alma mater. The exception was the area of faculty research (see Figure 5), where Cornell alumni were less likely than norm group alumni to say that they had no current knowledge.

Resource Allocation

Each institution participating in the 2005 Alumni Survey had the opportunity to add twenty “local” or institution-specific questions to the questionnaire. The Cornell instrument included, “Please indicate how you feel resources should be allocated at Cornell University. Seven areas were listed, as illustrated in Figure 6.

Responses were on a five point scale ranging from decreased support to increased support, with the middle category corresponding to, “About the same as now.”

For six out of seven of the areas, the majority of responding alumni said that resources should be allocated about the same as now. The only exception was “Student and academic support (e.g. fitness, counseling, career services)”; on this item, 63% of alumni thought resources should be increased. The second most popular choice for increased resource allocation was “Cultural events and resources (e.g. concerts, recitals, films, exhibits)”; 39% of respondents felt there should be increased support. By contrast, only 13% of alumni thought resources for athletics should be increased, and 31% thought they should be decreased.

Communication with Alumni

Several questions from the 2005 Alumni Survey related to the nature and extent of communication to alumni. The first of these items is, “Do you feel that you are receiving sufficient communications from your undergraduate institution?” Compared with alumni from the norm group institutions, Cornell alumni were less likely to answer, “Yes, I am getting sufficient communications,” as illustrated in Figure 7. Indeed, even Cornell alumni who were connected and/or contributors to Cornell were less likely than alumni from norm group schools to say that the level of communication was sufficient.

Figure 6. Views on How Resources Should be Allocated in Various Domains

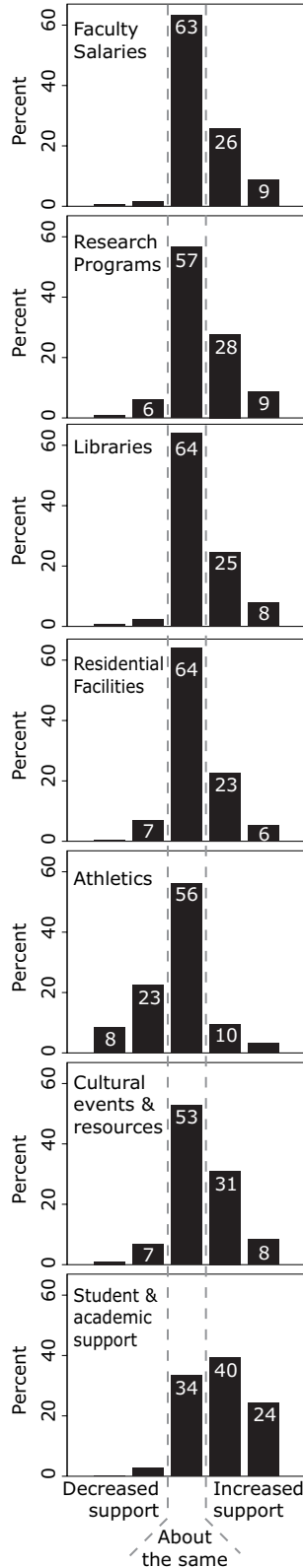
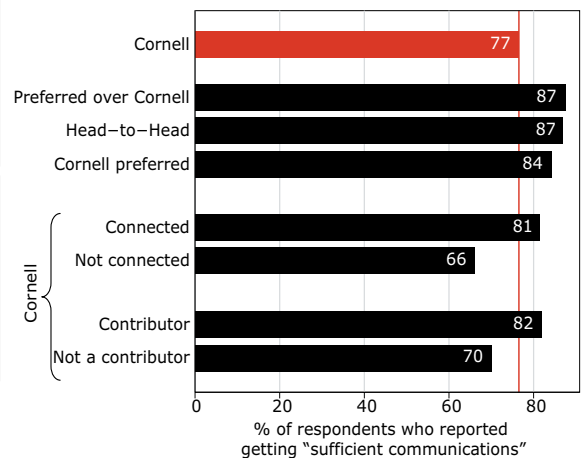


Figure 7. Sufficiency of Communications from Alma Mater, by Norm Group, Connection, and Contributor Status



Respondents who did not agree that they were getting sufficient communications could indicate whether they would like more regular mail; more email; more of both regular and email; or could mark “I am currently getting too much communication from my alma mater.” Consistent with pattern noted above and shown in Figure 7, Cornell’s alumni were less likely than norm group alumni to mark “I am getting too much communication” (results not shown).

For those who indicated a preference for increased communication, the mode of preferred contact varied by how the respondent responded to the survey: respondents who answered the survey over the web (who are therefore likely to maintain a valid email address with the University) were more likely to say that they would prefer more email: about 17% of web respondents but only 10% of the paper respondents want to receive more email from Cornell (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. Preferences for Communications from Alma Mater, by Mode of Survey Response



Alumni who did not feel connected to Cornell were less likely to report that the level of communication was sufficient (see Figure 7) and more likely to say it was *either* too much (11% of the not connected, versus only 2% of the connected) *or* not enough (with 23% of the not connected wanting more regular mail, email or both, as compared to 16% of the connected; results not shown).

The Cornell instrument asked alumni “which of the following do you find

most helpful in keeping up to date about Cornell?” The modal response was Cornell Alumni Magazine, with 40% of respondents indicating that choice. Approximately 20% of alumni marked each “college, class or other campus publication” and “off-campus contact with fellow Cornellians.” Fifteen percent of alumni indicated “Cornell websites.” Only 6% marked “visits to campus.”

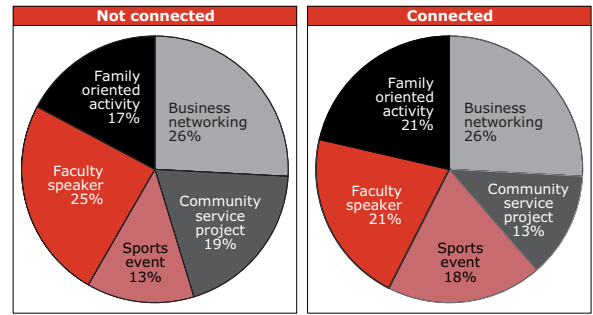
Cornell’s alumni were also asked to indicate which single method of communication was preferred from the following list: email newsletters, printed publications, Cornell websites, personal contact, or general update letters from the President’s office. An equal proportion of respondents (at 38% each) marked email newsletters and printed publications.

When asked what single topic they would like to receive communication concerning, 45% of alumni indicated that would like to receive updates on campus life; 28% marked “State of the University information”; and 14% indicated alumni achievements. Less popular were communication concerning faculty research (12%) and opportunities for financial support of Cornell (1%).

Alumni Involvement

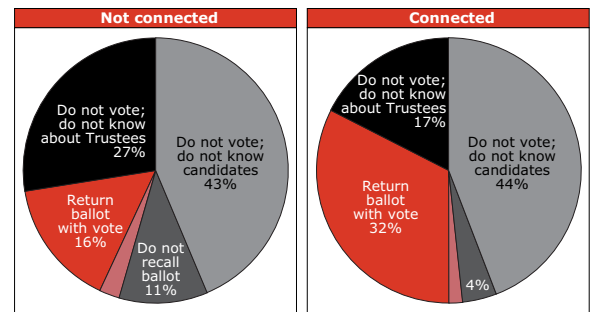
Respondents indicated the kind of alumni event they would be most likely to attend from a list of five choices, illustrated in Figure 9. The results suggest that the most popular types of events are business networking events (the choice of 26% of respondents) and Cornell faculty speaker presentations (with 22% making this choice). There are some differences in the kind of activity preferred by the level of connection; connected alumni were more likely than unconnected alumni to prefer family-oriented activities, while unconnected alumni were more likely to prefer community service projects and faculty speaker presentations (see Figure 9).

Figure 9. Preferred Alumni Event, by Level of Connection



The level of connection was also related to alumni’s reports on how they respond to the annual election of Cornell Alumni Trustees. Specifically, unconnected alumni were less likely to vote at all, and more likely to indicate that their reason for not voting was they “do not know anything about the Cornell Board of Trustees” (see Figure 10).

Figure 10. Response to the Alumni Trustees Ballot, by Level of Connection



As mentioned at the start of page 2, connected alumni are more likely to contribute. Indeed, unconnected alumni were more likely than connected alumni to indicate they were either “not interested” or “not able” to contribute to Cornell (see Figure 11). By contrast, connected alumni were far more likely to report that they are motivated by a desire to “give back to Cornell” for “an excellent education.”

Figure 11. Motivation for Making a Financial Contribution to Cornell, by Level of Connection

