



WHAT DO THEY DELIVER?

A Report on American Colleges and Universities

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Does post-secondary education play a formative role in helping students to **discern their vocation** and better understand their **moral obligations** toward others?

What are students' feelings of **connectedness and belonging**?

What kinds of activities within the life of the school **do they participate in**?

The way in which post-secondary institutions **model and embody various ways of interacting** may shape how students relate to friends, family, and fellow citizens in their lives beyond graduation.

WHAT IS THE VALUE OF HIGHER EDUCATION WHEN VIEWED THROUGH THESE LENSES?



IF NEWS REPORTS ARE AN INDICATION, skepticism is increasing in America about the value of higher education. This value is typically measured in monetary and instrumental terms. Is the cost of higher education recouped, and preferably exceeded, by a wage premium for college and university graduates? As important as this question is, there are other questions to ask about education's non-monetary value. For example, does post-secondary education play a formative role in helping students to discern their vocation and better understand their moral obligations toward others? In a cultural moment marked by eroding social fabric, what are students' feelings of connectedness and belonging with their peers, faculty, and other members of the campus community? What kinds of activities within the life of the school do they participate in? While these aspects of post-secondary education are not commonly measured, the way in which post-secondary institutions model and embody various ways of interacting may shape how students relate to friends, family, and fellow citizens in their lives beyond graduation. What is the value of higher education when viewed through these lenses?

Cardus Education sought to examine these questions by asking a nationally representative sample of 1,332 college-educated US adults in their twenties and thirties to reflect on their post-secondary experiences. In conjunction with Knowledge Networks, we fielded a survey from May to August of 2018, asking respondents about their relationships with other students and faculty, the kinds of activities they participated in, and other aspects of student life. We also asked them about financial issues, motivations for attending college, and a variety of outcomes such as degree attainment, employment, and values. We found several distinguishing features across public, private nonreligious, and private religious colleges and universities.

METHODOLOGY

Our survey methodology and analysis of the data follow those used in the Cardus Education Survey. Since 2010, Cardus has amassed an extensive collection of data and reports about the secondary-school experiences and life trajectories of young adults who graduated from public, private religious, and private nonreligious schools throughout the US and Canada. This report follows in the same vein, except we focus on describing the post-secondary experience as told through the perspective of alumni.

We disaggregated results by differentiating between alumni from the three predominant sectors of post-secondary colleges and universities—public, private religious, and private nonreligious institutions. In this report, we study each of the three types of institution in detail. Our sample contains 579 graduates of public institutions, 368 graduates of private religious institutions, and 385 graduates of private nonreligious

institutions. (Respondents were asked to provide the name of their alma mater and to identify it as “public or state,” “private religious,” or “private nonreligious.”) Our sample is also restricted to those who earned a four-year degree at their respective institutions, so our results do not speak to two-year institutions or professional schools.

Alumni’s campus experience, the nature of the relationships and connections that they formed, and their lives after graduation correlate with the particular values and emphases of their respective institutions. **There is no singular archetype of “the college experience.”**

Since we relied on oversamples of respondents who graduated from private institutions, we used sampling weights in our analysis to ensure that our results are nationally representative.

We found that alumni differ in their perceptions across the three sectors. Their everyday campus life, the campus experiences they took part in, the nature

of the relationships and connections that they formed, and their lives after graduation correlate with the particular values and emphases of their respective institutions. There is no singular archetype of “the college experience.” Instead, there is a plurality, depending among other things on the type of institution a student attends.

KEY FINDINGS

MOTIVATIONS FOR COLLEGE CHOICE. Graduates report varying reasons for choosing to enroll in public, private religious, and private nonreligious institutions. The patterns suggest that students recognize institutions to have their own respective characters, and this character matters for their choice. Two-thirds of alumni from private nonreligious schools report their top motivation as academic offerings and reputation, while slightly less than half of alumni from public and from private religious institutions report this as their top motivation. Although academics are the most popular priority for choosing an institution, there were other distinctive features of institutions that attracted students. The religious nature of the private religious institutions is a unique draw for a significant portion of their students. Relative to students from other types of institutions, those who attended public institutions were more likely to be drawn by cost and location.

CAMPUS LIFE AND EXTRACURRICULAR EXPERIENCES. Survey results reveal an alignment between students’ motivations for choosing their respective institutions, the kinds of activities they participated in, and the institution’s type. On the one hand, many private nonreligious schools have reputations as elite academic institutions. On the other hand, private religious schools often aim to impart values according to their religious tradition. Indeed, alumni of private nonreligious institutions are most likely to report that they collaborated with faculty on research projects or took graduate-level courses while an undergraduate. In contrast, alumni of private religious institutions

are most likely to report that they participated in community-service efforts, joined religious groups, or avoided risky behaviours associated with drugs, sex, and alcohol. With clear differences in campus life and the post-secondary experience, colleges and universities appear to deliver on what students expect them to offer.

STUDENT AND FACULTY RELATIONSHIPS. Graduates from private schools, whether they had a religious orientation or not, report that they had closer and more meaningful relationships with other students and faculty than do graduates of public schools. Private-school alumni report that they had a greater sense of belonging with their school community and were more likely to confide in faculty as mentors. Distinctive practices such as the requirement that students live on campus, or the campus norms that guide personal relationships, enhance the communal nature of these institutions. Unlike graduates from the other two sectors, however, graduates of private religious schools additionally viewed faculty as religious counsellors and mentors.

POST-GRADUATION EXPERIENCES. Graduates exhibit different understandings of vocation that have shaped their life trajectories. These understandings reflect the distinctive character and mission of the three institutional types. For example, alumni of private religious colleges are more likely than alumni of the other two to pursue a career that helps others, fulfills a religious calling, or is oriented toward social justice. Upward economic mobility seems to be prioritized more heavily by graduates from the other two sectors. Employment earnings were noticeably higher for graduates of public and nonreligious private schools, and rates of advanced-degree attainment were highest among graduates of private nonreligious schools. Religious-school alumni are additionally more likely to engage in unpaid community service, to be married, and to not have been divorced.



MOTIVATIONS FOR COLLEGE CHOICE

It is no secret that the decision to pursue a post-secondary education is complex. From early childhood, a variety of factors such as cost, family background, social networks, educational preparation, and goals influence students' post-secondary aspirations.¹ Even once they decide to pursue post-secondary education, students must consider which institution among many to attend.

1. Don Hossler and Karen Symms Gallagher, "Studying College Choice: A Three-Phase Model and the Implication for Policymakers," *College and University* 62, no. 3 (1987): 207-21.

School-choice research has documented a plurality of reasons for choosing particular types of primary and secondary schools (e.g., faith-based, progressive, charter, district-run).² We observe a similar diversity of reasons when it comes to selecting post-secondary institutions.

ACADEMIC ORIENTATION OF PRIVATE NONRELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS. As shown in figure 1, a high proportion of graduates from all three sectors indicate that the “academic reputation and quality” of an institution or whether an institution “possessed the desired academic program” were the most important reasons for choosing their respective institutions. However, these academic motivations were most commonly expressed by graduates of private nonreligious institutions compared to other graduates. This pattern is consistent with the reputation that many of these institutions have for rigorous academics, even if there certainly is variation in quality among those institutions. Over one-third of graduates from private nonreligious institutions report that academic reputation was their top reason for selecting their school. Another third of graduates from these institutions report that the school’s program offerings was their top motivation. These rates are 10 to 20 percentage points higher than for respondents from public and from private religious institutions.



RELIGIOUS ORIENTATION OF PRIVATE RELIGIOUS

INSTITUTIONS. One-tenth of graduates from private religious institutions report that the most important reason for selecting their schools was its religious identity, underscoring the distinct ethos of private religious institutions and the types of students who select them. Even though approximately half of religious-school graduates prioritize academics when choosing their institution, many of these graduates primarily seek institutions that also integrate elements of religious tradition that pertain to their formation. 55 percent of graduates from religious institutions indicated that the religious mission of the school carried at least some weight in their decision to attend the school.

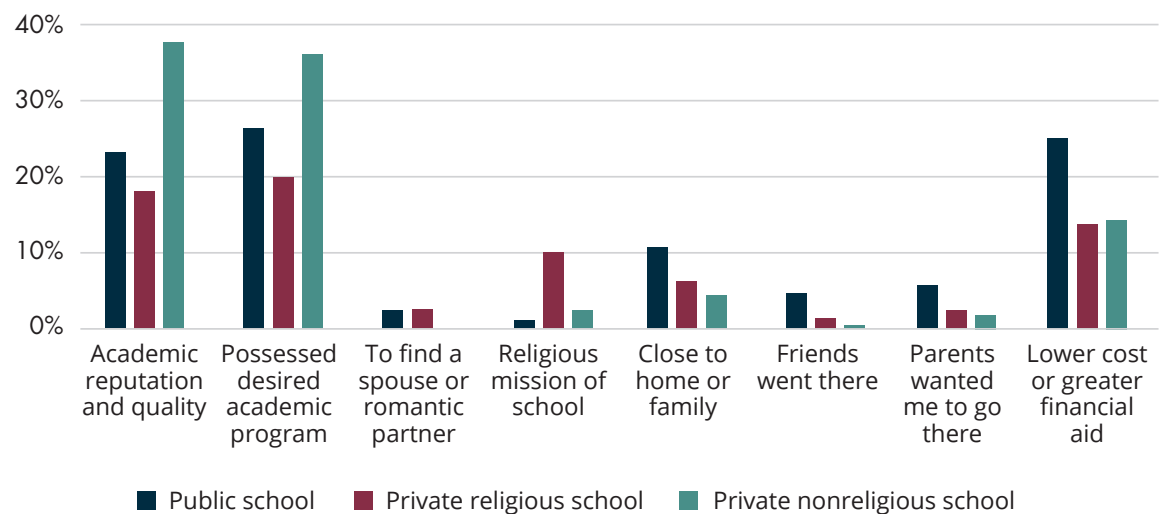
AVAILABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY OF PUBLIC

INSTITUTIONS. Public institutions, like other institutions, attract most students for academic reasons, but they also have distinctive draws. For example, 11 percent of alumni from

2. Heidi Holmes Erickson, “How Do Parents Choose Schools, and What Schools Do They Choose? A Literature Review of Private School Choice Programs in the United States,” *Journal of School Choice* 11, no. 4 (2017): 491–506, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15582159.2017.1395618>; Albert Cheng, Julie Trivitt, and Patrick J. Wolf, “School Choice and the Branding of Milwaukee Private Schools,” *Social Science Quarterly* 97 (2016): 362–75, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/ssqu.12222>.

public institutions report proximity to one’s home or family as a reason for their choice. This rate is three times higher than the rate for alumni of private nonreligious institutions. These rates are expected, given the smaller number of private nonreligious schools throughout the country and their concentration in particular geographic regions such as the northeast. Though the margin is smaller, students of private religious schools are also less likely than those of public schools to choose their institution primarily for its proximity to home and family. In other words, attending a private institution means departing from a community and moving to another part of the country, more often than is the case for students attending public institutions. Private-school alumni are less likely than public-school alumni to report selecting a school primarily because their friends were attending or because their parents wanted them to enroll there, but it is important to note that a small minority of graduates of all three sectors report having selected their school primarily on these bases.

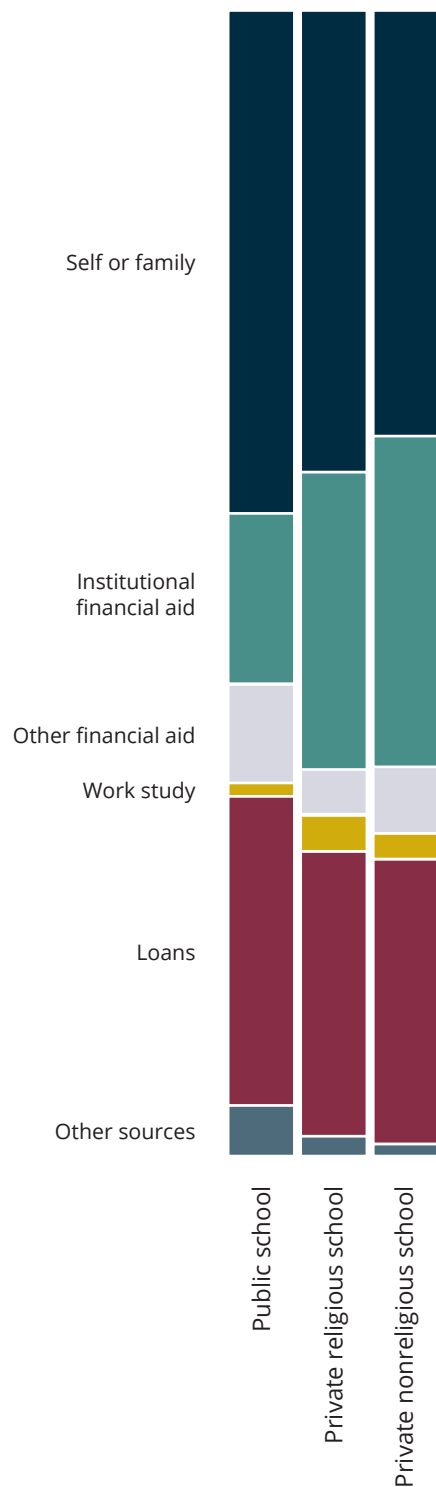
FIGURE 1: Primary reason for school choice



The influence of cost on college choice sets public institutions apart from private institutions. One-quarter of alumni of public institutions report selecting their school primarily because of lower cost, a rate that is 11 percentage points higher than that of alumni of private institutions. According data from the US Department of Education’s Integrated Postsecondary Education System, the average tuition and fees for attending a four-year public institution are about \$10,000 per year. For private nonreligious institutions, that figure is \$33,000. Incidentally, average tuition and fees for Catholic schools are just as high. At non-Catholic religious schools, however, average tuition and fees are nearly \$10,000 lower, at \$23,000 per year.

PAYING FOR COLLEGE. We asked respondents to describe how they paid for their post-secondary education. Figure 2 displays the percentage of tuition, fees, and room and board covered by family, loans, and other scholarships for the typical respondent from each sector. Families covered the largest share of college costs for all students.

FIGURE 2: Paying for school



For instance, families covered on average 44 percent of total costs for students at public institutions. The share of total costs that families covered is only slightly lower, at 40 and 37 percent, among graduates of private religious and nonreligious schools, respectively. However, financial aid from the institution played a greater role among private-school graduates: while institutional financial aid covered about 15 percent of total costs for the average public-school student, it covered more than one-quarter of the total cost for the average private-school student. Student loans covered about an additional quarter of the costs associated with tuition, fees, and room and board for graduates of all three types of institutions.

CAMPUS LIFE AND EXTRACURRICULAR EXPERIENCES

We now turn to the campus life and extracurricular experiences of alumni. These data points provide indications of the cohesion and formative potential of post-secondary institutions viewed as communities of persons sharing in a common life.

LIVING ARRANGEMENTS. Room and board constitutes a large part of post-secondary education costs. Many private colleges, whether religious or nonreligious, require students to live on campus as an essential aspect of student formation. It is therefore unsurprising to find that private-school students are much more likely to live in campus housing and much less likely to experience other living arrangements, in comparison to public-school students.

Figure 3 presents the proportion of alumni who report having ever used particular housing arrangements. Sixty percent of public-school graduates lived in dorms or other school-provided housing at some point during their post-secondary years. This is a large proportion of the student body, but it is significantly lower than the 75 and 80 percent of graduates of private religious and private nonreligious schools who report that they ever lived in housing provided by their institution.

Conversely, private-school graduates are less likely to have ever used non-school-provided housing. While 71 percent of public-school graduates ever lived in non-school-provided housing, less than half of private-school graduates have done so.

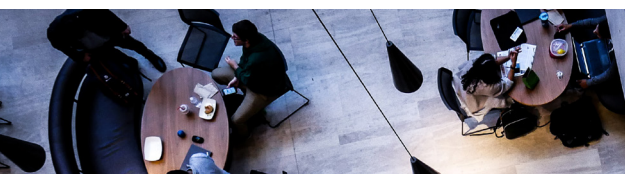
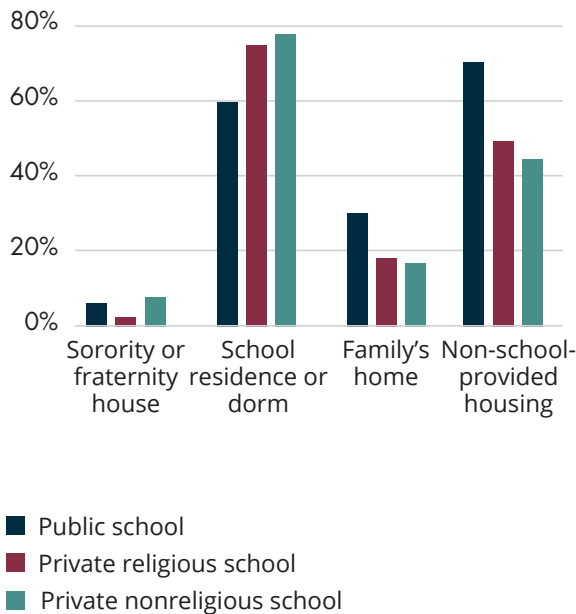


FIGURE 3: Living Arrangements



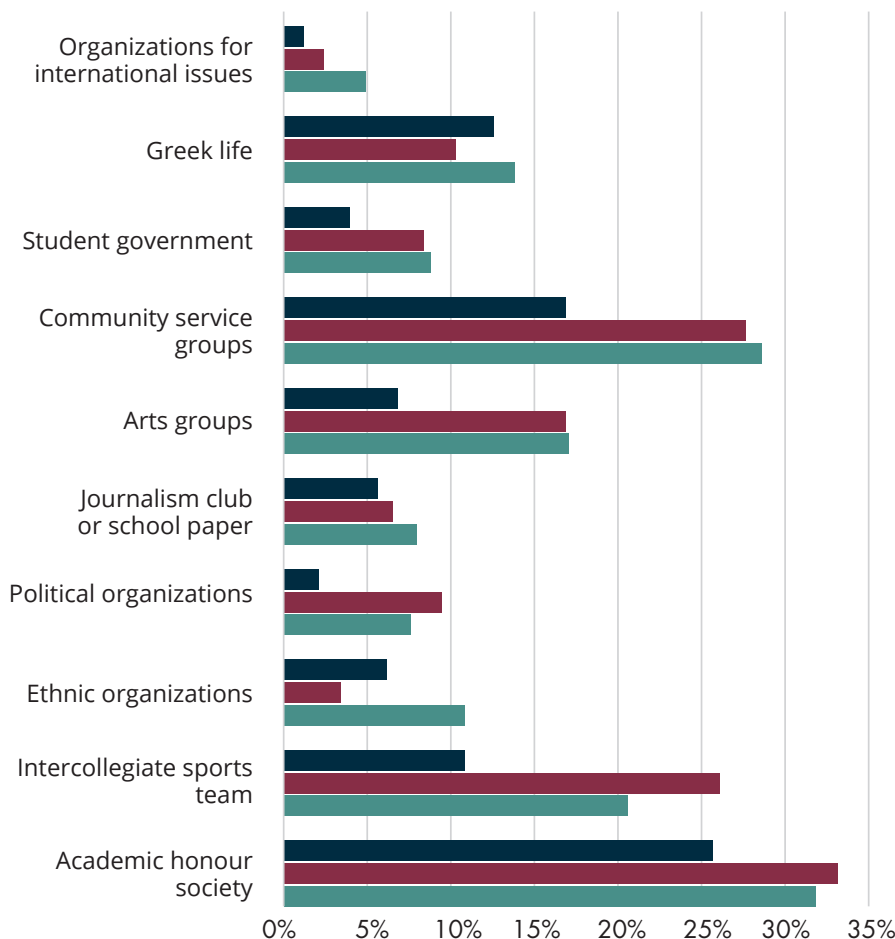
Moreover, 30 percent of public-school graduates lived in a family member’s home at some point during their post-secondary education, but less than 20 percent of private-school graduates ever did so.

Graduates of private religious schools are additionally distinguished from the graduates of public and private nonreligious schools because of their experiences (or lack thereof) with Greek life. Only 2 percent of graduates of private religious schools ever lived in a sorority or fraternity house. On the other hand, 8 and 6 percent of graduates of private nonreligious and of public schools, respectively, ever lived a sorority or fraternity house.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES. In general, a higher proportion of private-school graduates than public-school graduates report that they participated in non-academic extracurricular activities. These results are shown in figure 4. For example, nearly 30 percent of private-school graduates report participating in community-service groups, but only 17 percent of public-school graduates had the same experience.

There are two exceptions. Religious-school graduates are less likely to have been involved with ethnic organizations and in Greek life than graduates of public and private nonreligious schools.

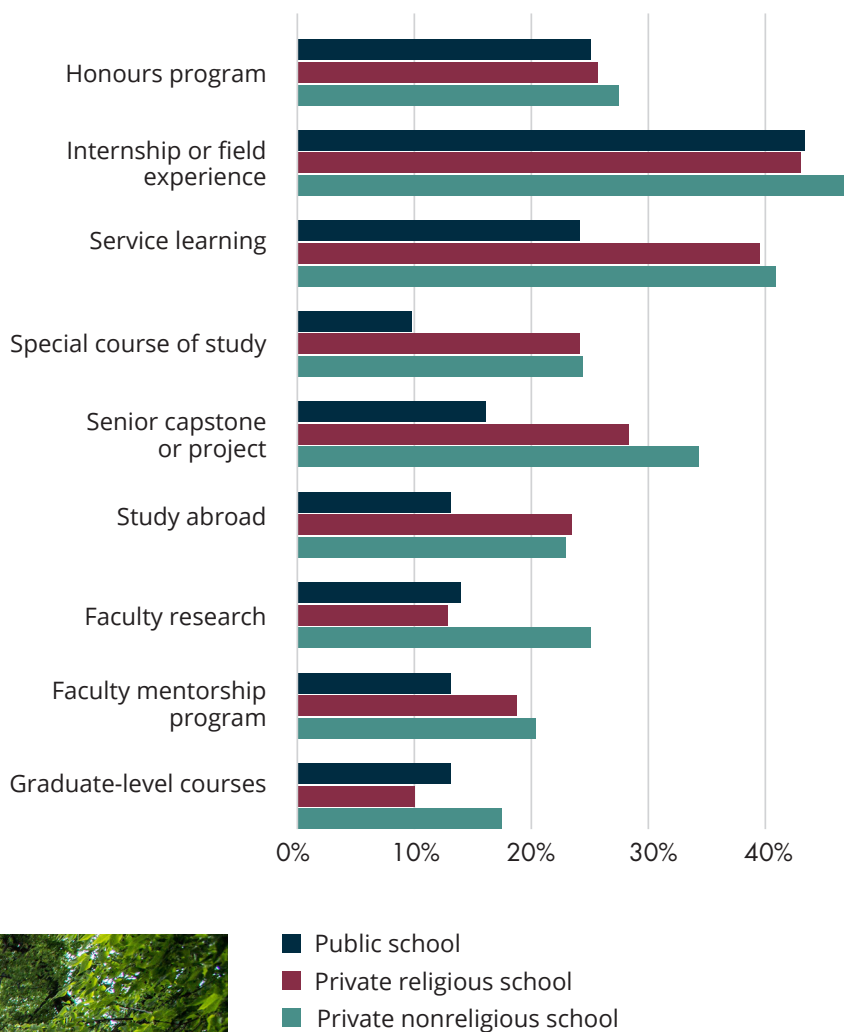
FIGURE 4: Non-academic extracurricular activities



We queried respondents about their involvement in academic extracurricular activities, as shown in figure 5. For some activities—honours programs, internships, service learning, or special courses of study—we did not observe significant differences in participation across the three types of institutions. This indicates not only that they each have similar offerings but that participation rates are similar as well.



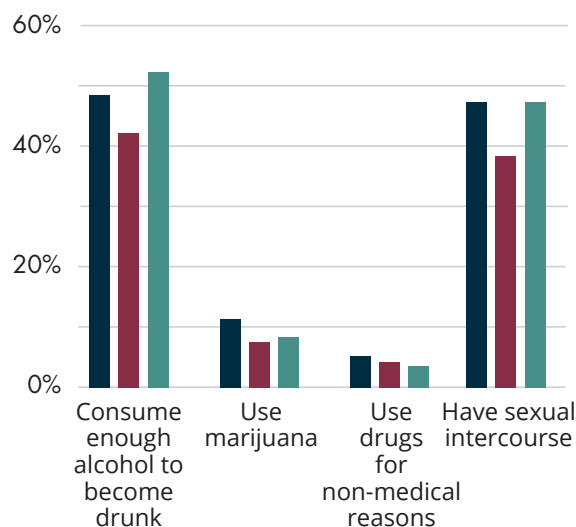
FIGURE 5: Academic extracurricular activities



We did find distinctive patterns of involvement in other academic extracurricular activities. For example, consistent with the academic orientation of many private nonreligious colleges and universities, graduates of these institutions are more likely to participate in faculty research. Alumni of private religious and nonreligious schools are more likely to complete a senior capstone project and have a study-abroad experience. They are also more likely to participate in faculty-mentorship programs, which may reflect the closer relationships that faculty may have with students at private colleges—a topic that we address further below. We also note that students at private nonreligious colleges are more likely than those at private religious colleges to take graduate-level courses while an undergraduate.



FIGURE 6: Risky Behaviour (percentage of students who have participated in this behaviour at least once during college)



RISKY BEHAVIOUR. Consistent with prior research on this topic, and correlating with the ethos of religious schools,³ the reported prevalence of risky behaviours with drugs, sex, and alcohol at these institutions is lower than that of public and private nonreligious colleges and universities. Figure 6 presents these estimates. The rates at which graduates of private religious schools report consuming enough alcohol to become drunk, or having sexual intercourse in college, are 5 to 10 percentage points lower than the rates for the other sectors. It is important to note, however, that 42 percent of graduates of private religious schools report ever consuming enough alcohol to become drunk, and 38 percent of them

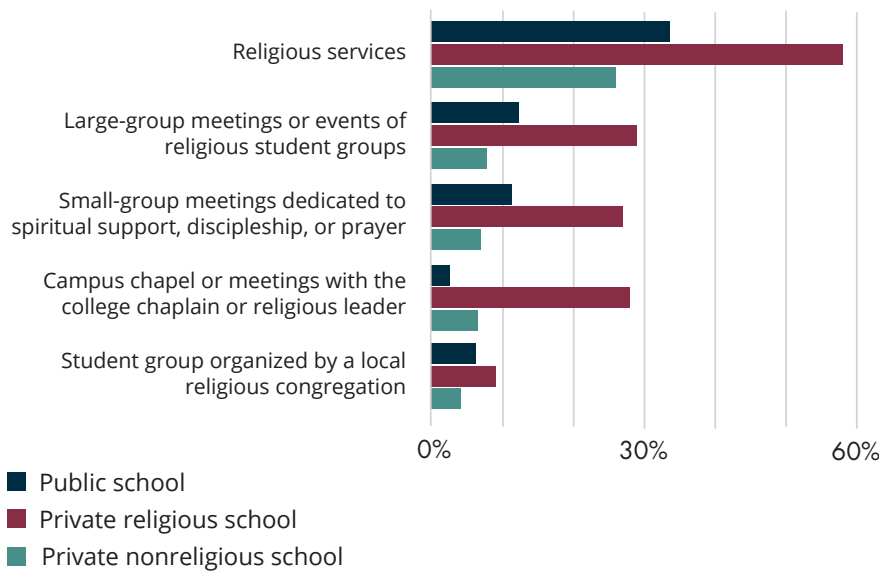
3. James R. Vanderwoerd, "Campus Violence and Moral Community," *Convivium*, September 19, 2017, <https://www.convivium.ca/articles/campus-violence-and-moral-community/>.



report that they had sexual intercourse at some point during the post-secondary years. Marijuana use is the least commonly reported form of risky behaviour regardless of school type, making comparison between school types difficult for this measure even if the rate in raw terms is highest among public-school graduates.

RELIGIOUS STUDENT GROUPS. The distinct ethos of private religious schools is evident in students' higher rates of participation in religious activities and groups. As shown in figure 7, almost 60 percent of graduates of such institutions report having regularly attended religious services at least once a month, a rate that is about twice as high as for graduates of the other two sectors. Notably, we additionally asked respondents how often they currently attend religious services. Rates of attending religious service at least once a month in college are similar to current rates among all respondents regardless of post-secondary school sector. So even though rates of regular attendance at religious services are much higher among religious-school alumni, it appears that graduating from a religious institution as opposed to another kind of post-secondary institution does not provide a particular advantage toward sustaining religious-service attendance in adulthood.

FIGURE 7: Religious activities
(graduates who attended at least once a month during college)



About 30 percent of graduates of private religious schools participated at least once a month in events organized by religious student groups; in smaller meetings dedicated to spiritual support, growth, and prayer; or in events organized by the campus chaplain or religious leader. In contrast, the proportion of alumni of public and private nonreligious schools who participated in such activities each month was at most 13 percent. Attendance at student groups organized by religious congregations off campus was less common among all respondents, perhaps suggesting the larger influence that parachurch ministries have on college campuses.

OTHER CAMPUS ACTIVITIES. Alumni of private nonreligious colleges and universities were most likely to report participation in the political life of their institution. In particular, 12 percent of these students protested or raised awareness of a college policy or decision, while 4 and 8 percent of students at public and at private religious institutions did the same. Moreover, 7 percent of students at private nonreligious institutions served as members of a committee or task force to work with their school's administration on shaping campus policies and programs. Although this rate is as

high among alumni of private religious schools, the rate is just 3 percent for those who attended public institutions.

Forty percent of alumni of public schools, and 45 percent of those of private religious schools, report attending college sporting events. Athletics are less salient at private nonreligious schools, for which 35 percent of alumni report attending a college sporting event. On the other hand, just over one-fourth of private-school graduates report attending a student concert or other performance, while 18 percent of graduates of public schools did so.

STUDENT AND FACULTY RELATIONSHIPS

The availability of a variety of student groups on campus may contribute to a greater feeling of identification with one's school community, even if the student does not choose to participate in them. Many institutions are increasing their efforts to nurture a greater sense of belonging in their students.⁴ Some research even suggests that one's sense of belonging contributes to persistence, graduation, and other markers of post-secondary success.⁵

In early 2018, Council for Christian Colleges & Universities president Shirley Hoogstra described Christian post-secondary institutions as places where students can “develop a deeper relationship with God, with their peers and professors, and with their surrounding communities.”⁶ Do alumni of private religious institutions differ from those of private nonreligious institutions on these measures?

FACULTY RELATIONSHIPS. We examined how alumni describe the nature of their relationships with faculty. We first aggregated the responses to a set of items measuring the extent to which alumni viewed faculty as mentors, friends, or religious counselors. The full set of items is listed in the appendix. We then divided this measure into quartiles and identified the set of alumni who rated their faculty in the upper quartile (i.e., within the top 25 out of 100). Figure 8 depicts the percentage of alumni who rate their faculty in the upper quartile for all three types of post-secondary institutions.

By this measure, alumni of private institutions are more likely than alumni of public institutions to have viewed their faculty as mentors. They were more likely to confide in them about personal problems, to seek them out for academic help, and to state that they had a major impact on their life's direction. Twenty-five and 30 percent of alumni

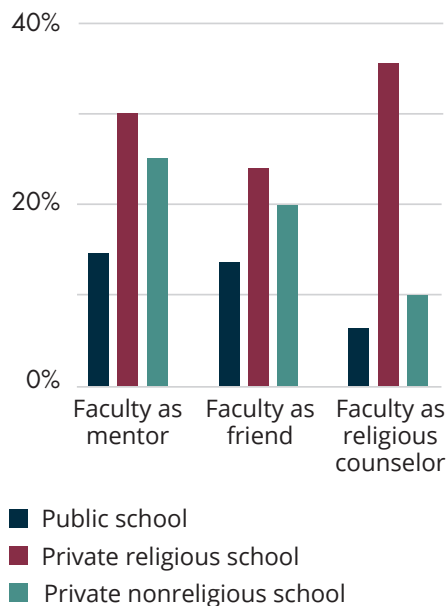
4. Kelly Field, “A Third of Your Freshmen Disappear. How Can You Keep Them?,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 3, 2018, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/A-Third-of-Your-Freshmen/243560>.

5. Marybeth Hoffman et al., “Investigating ‘Sense of Belonging’ in First-Year College Students,” *Journal of College Student Retention* 4, no. 3 (2002): 227–56, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.2190/DRYC-CXQ9-JQ8V-HT4V>.

6. CCCU, “Economic Impact of Christian Higher Education,” March 26, 2018, <https://www.cccu.org/news-updates/new-study-reveals-economic-impact-christian-higher-ed/>.



FIGURE 8: Student relationship with faculty (students who ranked their faculty in the top quartile)



from private nonreligious and private religious schools, respectively, rate their faculty in the upper quartile on this dimension. Only 15 percent of public-school alumni rate their faculty as high.

Private-school graduates are more likely to view their faculty as people with whom they had a personal relationship. Friendship more often characterizes the relationship between faculty and alumni at private institutions than they do at public institutions. At least 20 percent of private school graduates rate their faculty in the upper quartile on this dimension, compared to 15 percent of public school graduates.

We also find that faculty at private religious colleges and universities distinguish themselves on one dimension. Alumni of private religious schools are more likely to have viewed faculty as religious counselors than were alumni of other schools. No more than 10 percent of alumni from private nonreligious or public institutions rate their faculty in the top quartile for this dimension. However, over one-third of faculty are rated in the top quartile by religious-school graduates. True to their respective institutional mission, faculty at private religious colleges and universities appear to emphasize the faith formation of their students, relative to faculty at other institutions.

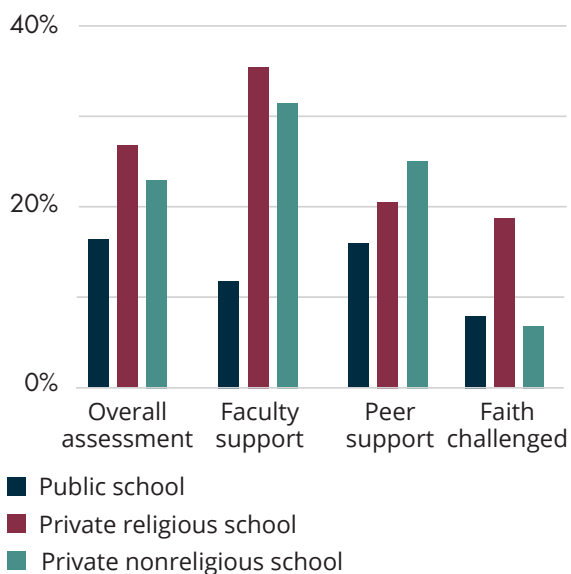
SENSE OF BELONGING. We measure sense of belonging using a well-known instrument designed by other higher-education researchers.⁷ The items are designed to assess three dimensions of sense of belonging: (1) an overall assessment of the school, (2) the perceived level of faculty support, (3) the perceived level of peer support. We added a fourth dimension to examine whether the students felt that they were challenged to deepen and grow in their faith. On this sense-of-belonging scale, students indicated their level of agreement with statements such as “The faculty really cared/care about me,” “I rarely talked to other students in my classes,” or “I feel/felt well supported by my school.” The full list of statements is shown in the appendix.

As in the way we measured and reported results for the previous section about faculty relationships, figure 9 presents the percentage of alumni who rate their institutions in the top quartile for each dimension of sense of belonging.

Almost without exception, private-school graduates report a greater sense of belonging on all dimensions than do graduates of public schools. About one-quarter of graduates of private religious and private nonreligious schools rate the overall

7. Hoffman et al., “Investigating.”

FIGURE 9: Sense of belonging
(students who ranked their institution in the top quartile)



school climate in the top quartile. The corresponding figure for public-school graduates is 15 percent. Private-school graduates indicate more positive relationships with other students and, to a much greater extent, faculty. Around one-third of private-school graduates' ratings of faculty support were in the top quartile, compared to only about 10 percent of public-school graduates' ratings. These results are consistent with the higher rates of self-reported participation in extracurricular activities and campus life in private schools compared to public schools.

Finally, graduates of private religious schools are more likely to report that they were challenged to deepen their faith. This finding reflects the aim among religious institutions to invest in their students' faith formation. In particular, it appears that religious colleges and universities provide a space not simply to shelter students from wrestling with their faith but also to critically examine their convictions and commitments.

POST-GRADUATION OUTCOMES

Do the distinct experiences that students have across the three types of post-secondary institutions lead to distinct life trajectories? Do graduates differ on these post-graduation measures? In this final section, we describe alumni lives since leaving their institution.

STUDENT DEBT. The US Department of Education estimates that 2016 graduates of public and private four-year institutions received, on average, \$28,000 and \$33,000 in loans while attending those schools.⁸ The amounts appear to reflect the higher cost of private colleges and universities. We found consistent patterns when we queried respondents about their student debt. On average, graduates of private religious schools owed about \$21,000, and graduates of public schools owed \$14,000. Graduates of private nonreligious schools owed the most: over \$25,000. Given the substantially higher annual costs of private post-secondary schooling discussed earlier in the report, the greater amount of money owed by private-school graduates is not surprising. On average, annual costs are over \$10,000 higher—a difference that does not appear to be completely covered by student loans.

We also found that the average student at private nonreligious schools worked eighteen hours per week at a job, about two to four hours per week less than students at the other two types of institutions. The majority of students at all types

8. US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Loans for Undergraduate Students," May 2019, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cub.asp.

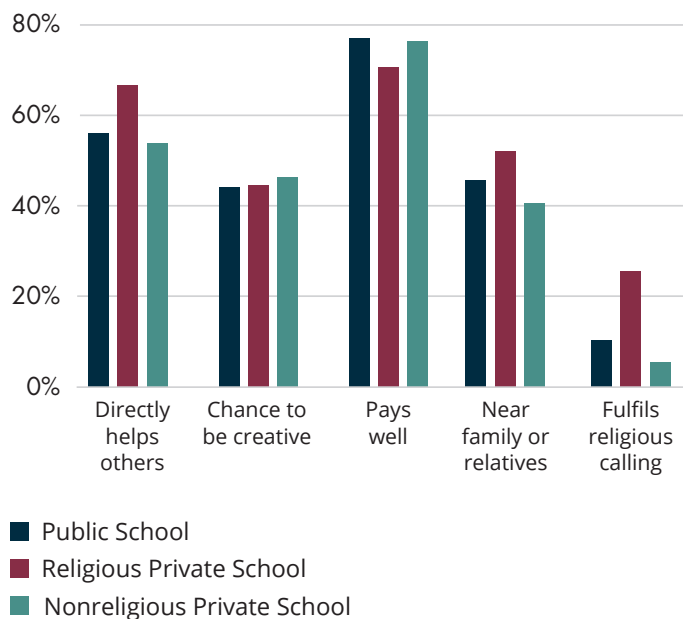
of schools worked during at least three years of their undergraduate career. One-third of private-school alumni held a work-study job to help pay for college, while 15 percent of public-school alumni did so.

EMPLOYMENT AND EARNINGS.

Respondents reported high levels of employment post-graduation, and we found no noticeable difference across the three types of institution. About 90 percent of all respondents reported being currently employed. The average household income of alumni of private religious schools when adjusted for age is about \$64,000, which is \$5,000 dollars less than that of public-school alumni. The average level of household income for graduates of private nonreligious institutions is about \$77,000.



FIGURE 10: Understanding of vocation (graduates ranking of job feature as very or extremely important)



UNDERSTANDING OF VOCATION.

The disparity in employment earnings may be partially explained by different conceptions of vocation, a subject that is reemerging in higher education.⁹ When asked about how important it is to have jobs with particular features, about two-thirds of graduates of private religious schools agreed that it is very or extremely important to have one that “directly helps others,” a rate that is 10 percentage points higher than the response of graduates of the two other types of institutions (see figure 10). Conversely, although 71 percent of graduates of private religious schools agree that it is very or extremely important to have a job that “pays well,” this rate is 6 percentage points lower than that for the other two types of institutions. Moreover, 26 percent of graduates of private religious schools state that it is very or extremely important to find a job that “fulfills my religious calling.” Six percent and 10 percent of the graduates of private nonreligious and of public institutions, respectively, selected these responses.

9. David S. Cunningham, “What College Students Need Most,” *Inside Higher Ed*, January 7, 2019, <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2019/01/07/importance-return-more-profound-meaning-vocation-al-education-opinion>.

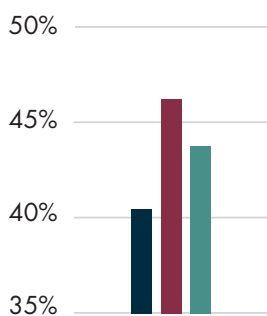
Alumni of private religious colleges and universities appear to be more connected to their broader family or to place,¹⁰ with 52 percent stating that they would prefer jobs near family and relatives. Forty-six and 41 percent of graduates of public and private nonreligious schools, respectively, said so.

MORAL OBLIGATIONS. Conceptions of vocation may be related to one’s sense of moral obligations. We asked respondents to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements about moral obligations. Figure 11 shows the percentage of graduates from each sector who agreed with the statements.

FIGURE 11: Moral obligations (percentage of students who agree)



FIGURE 12: Proportion of graduates who volunteer



When it comes to caring for the environment, participating in politics, and addressing injustice in the workplace or elsewhere, respondents from private religious and nonreligious institutions are more likely to agree that they view these as moral obligations.

Those who agree that they have a moral obligation to take action against injustice or to help people in poverty are also about 12 percentage points more likely to report that they volunteer for charitable organizations. According to our data, the rate of volunteering for graduates of the private religious and nonreligious sectors is 46 and 44 percent, respectively, compared to a 40 percent rate for graduates of public schools. These results are shown in figure 12.

Alumni of private schools are more likely to report having participated in community service during their post-secondary years (figure 4). Such participation may have instilled practices that carried beyond graduation.¹¹ The communal ethos found in

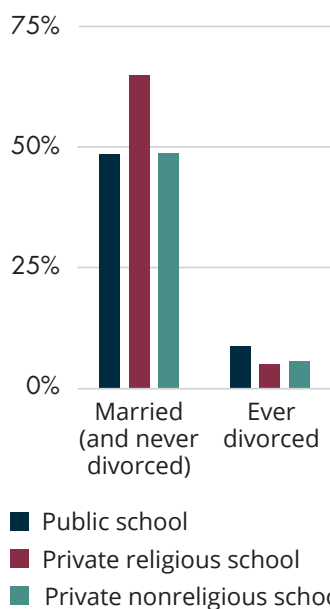
10. For a recent discussion of the role of higher education in shaping post-secondary students’ sense of place, see Jack R. Baker and Jeffrey Bilbro, *Wendell Berry and Higher Education: Cultivating Virtues of Place* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2020).

11. Nicholas Bowman et al., “Serving in College, Flourishing in Adulthood: Does Community Engagement During the College Years Predict Adult Well-Being?,” *Applied Psychology Health and Well-Being* 2, no. 1 (2010): 14–34, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1758-0854.2009.01020.x>.

many private institutions, especially religious ones, may play a lasting, formative role in this regard. According to our data, alumni are 20 percentage points more likely to volunteer as adults if they also volunteered during college, regardless of the type of institution they attended.

The ways in which individuals fulfill moral obligations are certainly not limited to participation in unpaid service. On this note, our data reveal that private-school graduates, whether from religious or nonreligious institutions, are more likely than graduates of public schools to agree that they have a moral obligation to participate in the political process (by voting, supporting a candidate or party, etc.). About 70 percent of private-school graduates share this view, compared to about 60 percent of those graduating from the public sector.

FIGURE 13: Marriage and divorce (proportion of graduates)

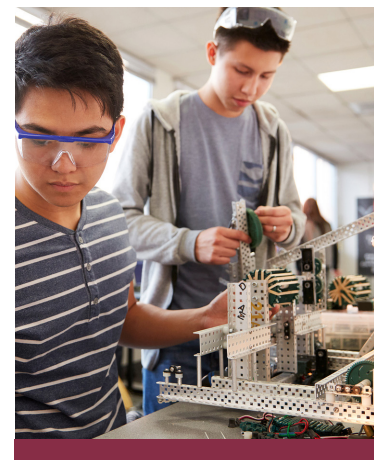


MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE. A large body of research underscores the importance of marriage and stable families for the well-being of the couple, the children, and the common good.¹² Our results reflect the distinct ethos of the three types of post-secondary institutions. As shown in figure 13, 65 percent of alumni from the private religious sector report being married and never divorced. This is about 16 percentage points higher than the rate for alumni of the other two sectors. Among respondents who have ever married, divorce rates are also lowest for alumni of private religious schools, although the rate for alumni from private nonreligious schools is similar, at about 5 percent. Nine percent of public-school alumni who were ever married report having had a divorce.

FURTHER EDUCATION. According to the 2018 Cardus Education Survey, graduates of evangelical Christian high schools are less likely than graduates of

public and of private nonreligious high schools to earn a degree beyond a bachelor's degree.¹³ Do similar patterns hold when considering graduates of the various post-secondary sectors?

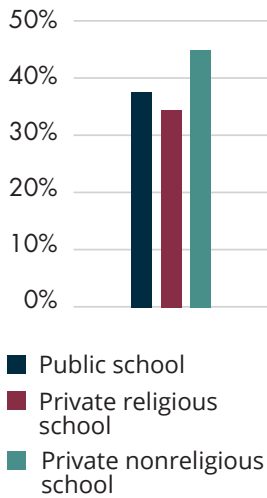
As shown in figure 14, graduates of public and of private religious college and universities are approximately equally likely to earn an advanced degree. Just over one-third of respondents



12. W. Bradford Wilcox, *Why Marriage Matters: Thirty Conclusions from the Social Sciences*, 3rd ed. (New York: Institute for American Values, 2011).

13. "Cardus Education Survey 2018: From the Classroom to the Workplace," Cardus, August 19, 2019, <https://www.cardus.ca/research/education/reports/cardus-education-survey-2018-from-the-classroom-to-the-workplace/>.

FIGURE 14:
Proportion of graduates earning an advanced degree



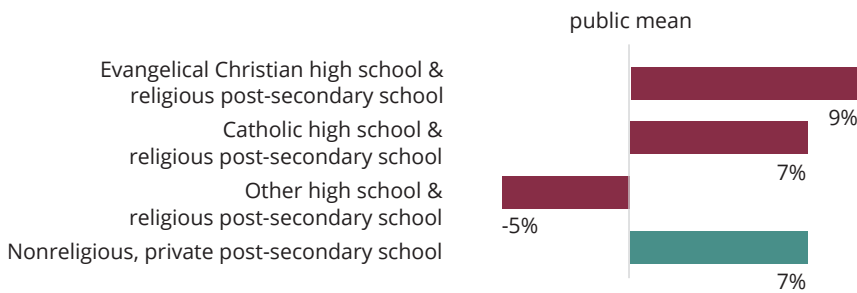
from these sectors do so. The proportion of alumni from private nonreligious institutions with an advanced degree is 7 percentage points higher.

Another finding of the 2018 Cardus Education Survey is that graduates of evangelical Christian high schools have a lower rate of advanced-degree attainment than do graduates of Catholic high schools. Thus, one might posit that the comparable rates of advanced-degree attainment of public and religious post-secondary institutions is driven more by Catholic than by graduates of evangelical Christian high schools.

In an attempt to test this hypothesis, we considered secondary and post-secondary experiences in tandem. Although we begin running into small sample sizes for each group, we do not find strong evidence that rates of advanced-degree attainment for graduates of religious private colleges and universities are primarily driven by those who attended Catholic secondary schools. In figure 15, we observe that respondents who graduated from evangelical Christian secondary schools and religious post-secondary institutions are 9 percentage points more likely than graduates of public post-secondary institutions to earn an advanced degree. The difference is 7 percentage points for respondents who graduated from Catholic secondary schools and religious post-secondary institutions.

In other words, adults who graduate from any religious secondary and post-secondary institutions earn an advanced degree at a rate at least as high as that of students

FIGURE 15: Likelihood of earning advanced degree (compared to graduates of public post-secondary schools)



who graduate from private nonreligious post-secondary institutions. As shown in the third bar of figure 15, it is the alumni of religious post-secondary institutions who did not attend a religious secondary school that are less likely to pursue education beyond the bachelor's level, relative to alumni of public post-secondary schools.



CONCLUSIONS

Alumni experiences are commensurate with the distinct ethos of each type of post-secondary institution. Beginning with a diverse range of educational goals and preferences, students initially elect to attend particular institutions because of their specific characteristics. For instance, private nonreligious schools are typically known for their academic quality, and students who are primarily seeking a strong academic program will more likely attend those institutions. Students whose primary motivations are to keep costs low and remain near their families will more likely attend public institutions. A significant proportion of students who attend religious institutions do so because they primarily want a religious environment for their post-secondary education.



From our data, it appears that, at least on some dimensions, institutions of each sector deliver on what they profess to be and to offer. Students who attend private religious institutions find opportunities to participate in the religious life of their community, whether by attending groups dedicated to this purpose or by discussing matters of faith with others. Similarly, students who attend private nonreligious institutions because of their academic reputation are more likely to have the opportunity to participate in academic extracurricular activities such as faculty research or a senior capstone project.

But there are some instances where differences are less pronounced, calling into question how distinctive some of these institutions are. Faculty and administrators at religious colleges may be surprised by our finding that the rate at which their students appear to engage in risky behaviours associated with alcohol, sex, and drugs, although lower in comparative terms, is not low in absolute terms. And even though the proportion of graduates who prioritized pay is slightly lower among religious-school graduates, a large majority (71 percent) stated that it was very or extremely important to find a job that paid well. Does this result indicate that most students regardless of sector view post-secondary education as a vehicle for upward economic mobility? Is this the perception of education that all post-secondary institutions wish to convey?

The communal orientations of private religious and nonreligious schools are also similar to one another, even if they were both perceived as more communal than those of the public sector. Rates of involvement in student groups and organizations, as well as a sense of belonging, are similarly high across private religious and nonreligious schools. The requirement to live on campus, present at many private institutions, perhaps helps to foster this sense of community. The homogeneity of the student body

with respect to religion or academic achievement may also help to build and sustain these communal bonds. Given the relatively high rate of students at private religious institutions who report that they looked to their professors as mentors or spiritual advisors, faculty and administrators at these institutions may wish to reflect further on the extent to which their faculty are being equipped to competently provide these forms of guidance.

This is not to say that public institutions are unequivocally worse in terms of fostering a community on campus. Although they face challenges in fostering a sense of belonging, they have means to encourage students to come together. For example,

intramural and intercollegiate athletics seem to be more widely available or more salient at public schools, as evidenced by student-participation rates.

We encourage faculty, administrators, and students who are members of campus communities to further reflect on the practices and rhythms that make up their common life.

How do they convey, embody, and uphold their ethos and values?

Part of the challenge that many public institutions face is their comparative size. According to the US Department of Education, nearly all private, non-profit, four-year colleges and universities

have fewer than five thousand students. About one-third of public institutions are of this size, and one-half of them enroll between five thousand and twenty thousand students. One-fifth of them enroll more than twenty thousand students, while only 1 percent of private institutions have a student body this large.¹⁴

But enrollment numbers do not explain all differences. Even holding size constant, the differences that we found across the three sectors persisted, only diminishing by small magnitudes. Smaller colleges and universities may be better positioned to create a more communal environment, but small size is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for doing so.

We encourage faculty, administrators, and students who are members of campus communities to further reflect on the practices and rhythms that make up their common life. How do they convey, embody, and uphold their ethos and values? How do they benefit not only individual students but also their immediate communities and the communities their students will one day join? Pondering these questions seems crucial for appraising and making the case for post-secondary institutions.

14. US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Characteristics of Degree-Granting Post-secondary Institutions," May 2019, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_csa.asp.

APPENDIX: MEASURES OF FACULTY RELATIONSHIPS AND SENSE OF BELONGING

FACULTY RELATIONSHIP QUALITY SCALE

Think about the three faculty members you were closest to while an undergraduate at [UNIVERSITY NAME].

How many of these three faculty . . .

- Did/do you feel comfortable seeking help with classes or academic questions?
- Did/do you feel very close to?
- Did/do you socialize with outside of class or visit in their home?
- Did/do you consider a role model or mentor?
- Did/do you talk to about your personal problems or concerns?
- Were/are sympathetic and sensitive toward you?
- Had/have a major impact on the direction of your life?
- Were/are similar to you in their beliefs about religion?
- Did/do you talk with about matters of religious belief and experience?
- Do you stay in touch with?

SENSE-OF-BELONGING SCALE

Thinking about your experience at [INSERT UNDERGRADUATE UNIVERSITY NAME], how much do you personally agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

Response options: Completely disagree, Somewhat disagree, Slightly disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Slightly agree, Somewhat agree, Completely agree

- I felt/feel a strong sense of belonging at [UNIVERSITY NAME]
- I enjoyed/enjoy going to [UNIVERSITY NAME]
- The faculty really cared/care about me.
- I was/am challenged academically.
- Faculty challenged my religious faith.
- The academic pressure was/is very stressful for me.
- I felt/feel well supported by [UNIVERSITY NAME].
- I rarely talked to other students in my classes.
- I developed personal relationships with other students in class.
- I felt comfortable asking an instructor for help if I did not understand course-related material.
- Instructors would take the time to talk with me if I needed help.



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