**Written Summary of the Data
of the Wellesley College
Class of 1971
50<sup>th</sup> Reunion Survey
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This report summarizes the information available in the Qualtrics Report of the Wellesley College Class of 1971 50th Reunion Survey, which was generated by the software that was used to conduct the survey of our class. We organized the material in that report into the following categories:

I.      Basic demographic information
II.     Marital status, children, parents and grandparents
III.    Education
IV.     Employment, pathbreaking and other activities
V.      Religion and politics
VI.     Life choices

There were six optional essays at the end of the survey. A summary of the answers to those questions are available in a separate report, entitled "Written Summary of the Essay Questions of the Wellesley College Class of 1971 50th Reunion Survey."

All the reports and summaries are available on our class website (https://alum.wellesley.edu/class-of-1971).

The survey was distributed to all members of the class for whom the College has email addresses (320). Of that group, 184 or 57.5% of those who received the survey completed all or part of the survey. We have no good way to know how representative our respondents were overall, so we caution that the results below pertain only to the respondents and may not be representative of the rest of the class. When the summary refers to "we" in reporting results, that term refers to the respondents as a group.

Each section below contains a summary of the statistical findings, occasional graphs of the data, tabulations of the text answers that accompanied some of the questions, and occasional quotes from longer text answers that illustrate common themes. The takeaways that we list are the ones the members of the committee generated based on their views of the data. You may have different ones.

**I. Basic Demographic Questions – Age, Places Lived, Race/Ethnicity, Sexual Orientation, and First Generation**

**Age**: The vast majority of us were born in 1949 (84%) with 4% slightly older (1948) and about 10% younger (1950 - 1952).
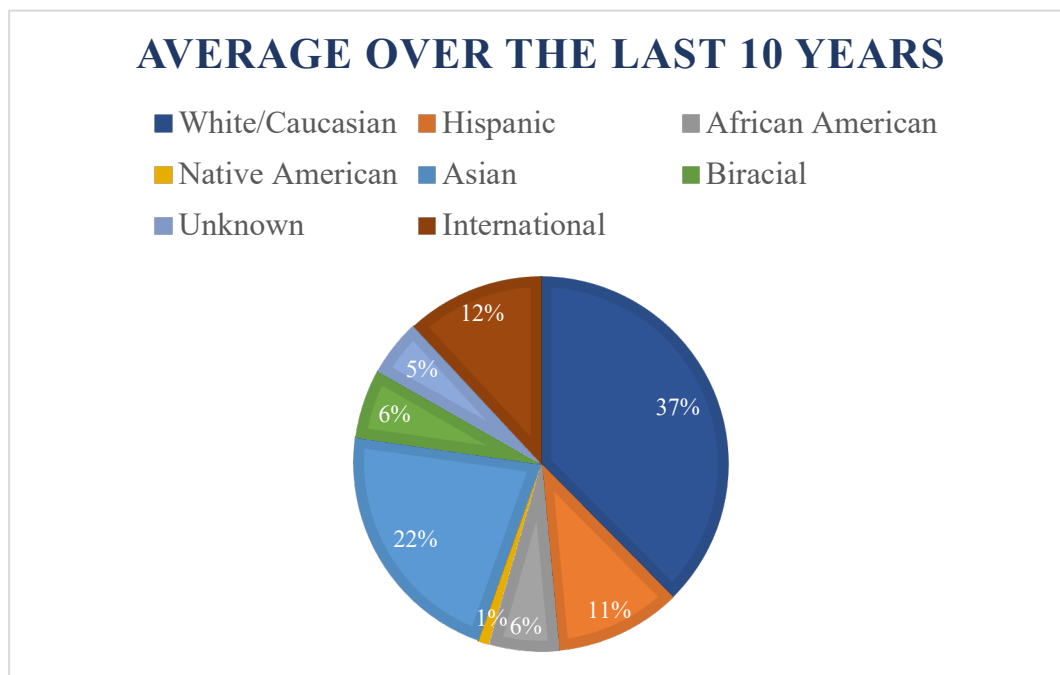
**Places lived:** We were born or have lived in at least 30 different states, including states in the South such as Arkansas, Georgia, North and South Carolina and Tennessee and in the Midwest such as Kansas, Missouri, and Minnesota.  During the first year after graduation, we tended to be more clustered in Massachusetts and the rest of the Northeast, New York, the Washington DC area, California and the Southwest. Although we now live in 36 different states, we still tend to cluster in Massachusetts and the rest of the Northeast, the DC area, and California and somewhat less so in the New York area. We have become less peripatetic: While 78% have lived in other states and 29% of us have lived abroad for 6 months or more, most of us have lived where we live now for over 30 years (68%).

Current Wellesley students are even more geographically diverse: diversity (see
https://www.wellesley.edu/international/international_student_statistics
for maps indicating the countries current Wellesley students hail from)

**Race/ethnicity**: We mostly consider ourselves to be white/Caucasian (89%), with small numbers identifying as Hispanic (1%), African American (0.5%), Native American (2%) or Asian (3%).
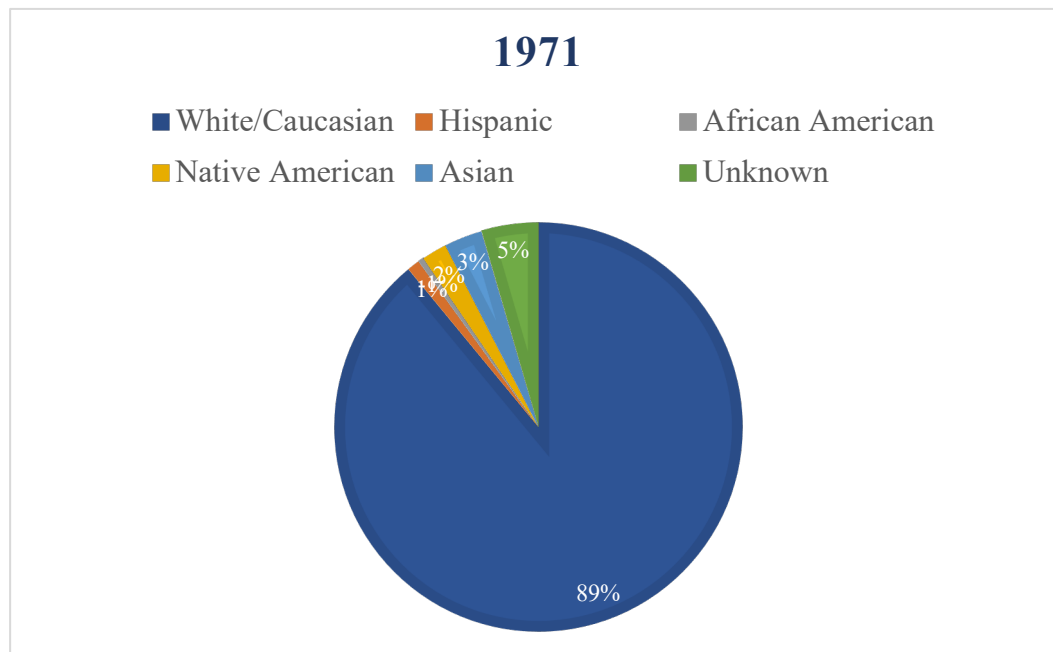
In comparison, over the last ten years, the student population at the college has been 38% white/Caucasian, 22% Asian, 12% International, 11% Hispanic, 6% biracial, 6% African American, <1% Native American, and about 5% unknown. (Factbook 2020:



**AVERAGE OVER THE LAST 10 YEARS**

■ White/Caucasian  ■ Hispanic  ■ African American
■ Native American  ■ Asian  ■ Biracial
■ Unknown  ■ International

12% · 5% · 6% · 22% · 1% · 6% · 11% · 37%

**Sexual orientation**: We largely identify as straight or heterosexual (85%), with 2% asexual, 4% bisexual, 2% lesbian and 3% of respondents choosing "I prefer not to answer."

Although the college does not appear to publish statistics about how the current student population identifies in terms of sexual orientation, it is worth noting that for quite a few years, the college has had an advisor to LGBQT+ students and there is a resource page for students in that group at the college: https://www.wellesley.edu/studentlife/intercultural/oice/lgbtq

**First-generation students:** Most of us had either both parents attend college (66%) or one parent (27%). 7% had neither parent attend college. A surprisingly high percentage also had one or more of grandparents who attended college (57%), in an era when only about 5% of 18-24 year olds were enrolled in colleges. (120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait, Nat'l Center for Education Statistics, p. 65, for the years 1910-1930).

In contrast, in the class of 2023, 18% of the students represent the first generation in their family to go to college. (https://www.wellesley.edu/admission/diversity)

**Takeaways**: When we were at Wellesley, the college prided itself on its geographic diversity and had students from most of the individual states as well as from abroad, a profile that our own history of places we have lived affirms. Nowadays, Wellesley prides itself not only on its geographic but also on its racial and ethnic diversity and its high proportion of first-generation students and it has, like many other colleges and universities, an active LGBTQ+ population.

The current student population is more diverse than we were and there are many more first-generation students than in our era, but it is a very talented population. (See the Education section below). The college is fully committed to developing the intellectual potential of all students and making sure that Wellesley women continue to demonstrate leadership in their communities and around the world.

**II. Marital Status, Children and Parents**

**How we chose our spouses/life partners and our satisfaction with those choices**: On average, we were between 25-26 years old when we married/committed to our spouses or life partners. We most likely met them through college dating (28%), through friends (18%), grad school dating (16%), on the job (15%), or family/community connections (12%). Other ways of meeting (11%) included high school romances, chance encounters and singles ads. Most of us knew our spouses 1-2 years (30%) or 3-4 years (32%) before we married.  Only13% married within a year and 7% after 7-8 years, and even smaller numbers after 9-12 or over 10 years (2% each).

Less than 1% of these relationships started via Internet dating. Our lack of reliance on Internet dating to find partners is very different from how current relationships appear to start. One source online (https://news.sky.com/story/finding-love-online-more-than-half-of-couples-set-to-meet-via-the-internet-11871341#:~:text=Statistics%2C%20examined%20how%20technology%20is,19%25%20between%202005%20and%202014.) stated: "Statistics examined how technology is changing social interactions. It found that around a third (32%) of **relationships started** between 2015 and 2019 **started online**, compared to only 19% between 2005 and 2014."

68% of us are currently married, 15% are single but previously married, and 11% are widowed.  About 5% are single and never married and only 1 person was separated. Of those not currently living with their spouses about 10% are living with a partner. Of those not currently married or living with a partner, about 20% are in a relationship.  Only one of these relationships was with a female partner. 130 of us have had one marriage, 34 two marriages and 3 three marriages.

Most of us have only been married once and our marriages/life partnerships have been long lived.   The vast majority have been married more than 35 years with many close to or exceeding 50 years. For those married more than one time, many of the second marriages have continued longer than the first.

When asked If they were not satisfied with the decision to marry and what effects that decision had, our classmates provided the following range of responses. Please note that there were multiple categories in many responses.

| Lessons from choosing wrong spouse/partner | # |
| --- | --- |
| Married too young | 14 |
| Used wrong selection criteria; should have emphasized kindness, stability, intellectual and emotional compatibility | 10 |
| Married in response to social/parental pressure | 7 |
| Should have ended relationship sooner | 5 |
| Should have lived together first/instead, because easier to end such a relationship if it doesn't work out | 4 |
| Should maybe have never married at all | 4 |
| Didn't know spouse/partner well enough | 3 |
| Didn't recognize anger/controlling/abuse issues | 3 |
| Experienced personal growth from marriage, divorce | 2 |
| Other | 2 |
| **Total responses (excludes non-responsive answers)** | **36** |

It is perhaps worth noting that many of those responding about social and parental pressures almost all said they didn't think those pressures would play the same role today.

About 24% of our respondents said that they had changed careers to facilitate changes that their partner or spouse wanted to make. The comments indicate that some of these choices were imposed upon the respondent by their spouses' demands for priority. Our tabulations of the written answers about the effects of these changes are below:

| Response type | Number of responses |
|---|---|
| Prevented/gave upon achievement of career goals | 5 |
| Had to modify, negatively impacted career advancement prospects, lower income | 8 |
| Had to modify, different trajectory, but satisfied with compromises (neutral) | 12 |
| Delayed but did not prevent achievement of goals | 2 |
| No impact on career | 14 |
| More productive, helped achieve goals (no change of direction) | 1 |
| Positive impact, change of direction led to better career | 6 |

As seen above, the outcome of these changes could be positive, neutral or negative. Below are some specific responses to this question:

Positive

*After I finished my PhD I went back to Law School, in part because there were no academic jobs available for me where my husband was teaching. Law School was one ofthe best decisions I ever made!*

*I was 48 years old. We moved and I didn't know if I would ever have as good a jobagain. It turned out that the employment shift I made was extremely helpful for my career.*

Neutral

*After 4 yrs. grad school. Never finished my PhD. Did all but dissertation (ABD). Significantly lowered future opportunities and earnings.*

*After children reached nursery school, ambitions pretty much eviscerated by at home years.*

Negative

*Deferred graduate school, followed different career path.*

*I left medical practice to teach part time at a medical school. At this time I had 2 small children and I chose to spend time raising them while fulfilling my desire to continue acareer in medicine.*

More than half of us were very satisfied with our decision to marry (54%) and about 20% were somewhat satisfied. 8% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and 11% were somewhat dissatisfied and 8% were very dissatisfied.

**Takeaways**: As a group, we appear to have met our spouses in traditional ways, to embrace marriage or partnerships for the long term and to be generally satisfied with our choices of partners. The principal exceptions are those classmates who felt that their first marriage took place when they were too young and were not happy with their choice of a first partner.

**Timing and number of children:** About 79% of us had children and the mean number of children we had is 2.2, which was average for 1971, but higher than the current national average of about 1.9 children per family. (See U.S. Fertility Rate 1950-2021 | MacroTrends). Only a few of us have either adopted children or stepchildren. On average, we had our first biological child at 31 years of age and our last when we were between 35-36 years of age, although some were in their 40s or even 50 when they either had a biological child or adopted. We have 2.6 grandchildren and step-grandchildren on average, although according to https://www.liveabout.com/grandparents-demographic-information-1695746 the average grandparent has 6 grandchildren.

Most of us expected to have children when we were in college and did (78%) but some who had thought not to have children changed their minds later (18%). A small group wanted children but didn't have any (4%). We generally thought that we wanted two children and for those whose expectations differed in college, about 21% decided that two was enough 14% couldn't have more, or spouse wanted a different number (8%). A small percentage said they couldn't afford more (4%). Surprisingly, about 49% of those who had a different number of children than expected cited other reasons. The timing of our first child was generally planned (79%) and 82% of us were either satisfied or very satisfied with that decision.

When asked if we would change the anything about the number/timing of our children, we generally would not. A few said that it might have been better to have their children closer together or have them at an earlier age, especially as a few later faced infertility problems. Some respondents reported having had miscarriages that affected timing. Interestingly, no one said that career demands prevented them from having the number of children they expected to have. Our tabulation of the above responses revealed the following pattern:

| Responses | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| No change | 6 | 16.67 |
| Had children when younger | 15 | 41.67 |
| Had children when older | 2 | 5.56 |
| Had children closer together | 6 | 16.67 |
| Had children farther apart | 0 | 0 |
| Had more children | 9 | 25.00 |
| Would have liked to avoid miscarriages | 1 | 2.78 |

Keeping in mind that most of us said that we would not change the timing of the births of our children, here are some remarks from classmates who would have made other choices:

*I would have had them about 2-3 years earlier—say, age 35 & 38–so I'd be younger for my eventual grandchildren.*

*Started earlier and had 2 children. But now I am extremely happy with one son and two adorable grandsons.*

*If we had had more money, I would have had more children.*

*I would have waited 3 years longer.*

*This is a hard question, because from the perspective of emotional maturity and financial stability, the timing was right.  But from the perspective of physical response to pregnancy/child-rearing and overall energy/stamina, I might have had my children 4-5 years earlier.*
*My husband and my family were very much against my risking having more children since I was over 35. Somewhat lightly, I have wondered what all my care in not getting pregnant in my twenties was all about.*

**Takeaways:** Most of us expected to have children in college and we did, although the number we planned was not always the number we wound up with. We were able to plan the arrival of our children for the most part and we were generally satisfied with that decision.  If there were any regrets, it was that we wished we could have changed the spacing or increase the number of children we had.

**Leaves and career changes to accommodate our life partners/ spouses or child rearing or eldercare**
About half of us (51%) did not take any short-term parental leave after the birth of our children.  During the 1980s, when most of us were having our children, many employers did not offer parental leave at all:  the Family and Medical Leave Act was not enacted until 1993.
For those who did take parental leave, most took up to 3 months (24%) although some took a bit longer 3-6 months (16%) 7-10 months (1%), 10+ months (7%).  According to the same site above "Approximately 70% of women report taking time off following pregnancy, with the average maternity leave lasting 10 weeks.

Most of us also did not leave the workforce or unpaid employment to care for children (63%).  For the 37% who did, 6% took up to one year, 9% took 2-5 years, 10% took 6-10 years, 2% took11-15 years, and 9% took more than 15 years. Covid has made clear that women are much more likely than men (28% vs. 10% to leave the workforce to care for children.

When we tabulated the responses from our classmates about the impact of the timing and number of children on their careers or their husbands, we found the following responses:

| Response type | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| No impact | 31 | 28.70 |
| Waited to have children until achieved career milestones, workedout well | 13 | 12.04 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Delaying children for sake of career worked for career butresulted in having fewer children than desired due to infertility issues | 1 | 0.93 |
| Always intended to say home to care for children | 2 | 1.85 |
| Becoming full timemother was good excuse to leave disliked career | 1 | 0.93 |
| Stayed home with children because of lack of good career options compared with spouse/partner'scareer | 1 | 0.93 |
| Modified career goalsafter having kids (neutral) | 14 | 12.96 |
| Spouse/partner equally adjusted for childcare needs (neutral) | 8 | 7.40 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Voluntarily went fromfulltime to part time employment or business after having children (neutral) | 7 | 6.48 |
| Having children delayed but did not prevent achievements in career | 5 | 4.63 |
| Having children negatively impacted career | 13 | 12.03 |
| Having childrenderailed career | 1 | 0.93 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Having children did not affect husband/partner's career, all impacts on respondents' career | 7 | 6.48 |
| Very stressful to juggle children and career | 3 | 2.78 |
| Positive effect | 1 | 0.93 |

Some representative quotes from our classmates' responses about the impact of children on their careers:

*It was challenging for both of us because both my husband and I were very involved parents and also each had demanding careers. But we were fortunately able to find good help in childcare.*

*I never advanced beyond the career level I'd achieved when I left to care for my kids, but I think my kids benefitted from my being there for them.*

*I elected to work part-time to allow more time for the nurture of my children.*

*I always intended to be the parent at home, so there was no impact.*

*very negatively impacted my career*

*Having children did not affect my husband's career but did affect mine. With my second child, after I told my boss that I was pregnant -- rather early because I was having complications -- he brought in a man over my head.*
*Was good timing - We built our careers before breeding.*

*It had no effect on my husband's career, but I completely changed my career because of our children. When I finally returned to workforce, it was to a different field from what I had studied at Wellesley.*

*Because of my career I delayed childbearing. This resulted in not being able to have more children due to unexpected infertility. I would have had children earlier if I had known I would have infertility.*

More people changed jobs/careers to accommodate childcare (37%) than to accommodate their husband's career (24%). The vast majority made these changes when the children were under 5 years of age (60%), although some did so with children up to 10 years old (32%) and some for children even older (9%). While some respondents indicated that these changes negatively impacted their careers, others reported finding new jobs or careers that proved more fulfilling. Some expressed resentment that their spouses or partners did not make equivalent career sacrifices, but others said the career adjustments were mutual. Almost all expressed satisfaction that the changes were worth it for the benefits for their children. About 31% of us have either lived with our adult children or are currently doing so. A small percentage of us (12%) have had or currently have our grandchildren or step grandchildren living with us.

At this point in our lives, 95% of us have lost our mothers or maternal figure, some as early as during our college years or even earlier but generally more since 1995. We have almost all lost our fathers (or paternal figures) (96%), a few of us before starting college, and several each year after we graduated, but more

generally more since 1981.  Only about 7% of us have had or currently have our parents or other elders live with us. But 9% currently take responsibility for the wellbeing of parents or other aging relatives and another 47% have done so in the past.  About 25% have spent as long as three months serving as a major caregiver for either our parents or parents-in-law.  Only about 10% changed jobs/careers to deal with eldercare responsibilities, and some relocated to be able to provide care.   Some respondents express regret at not having spent more time with their parents; many describe the difficulties of providing supportive care for elderly parents and understandable grief at their passing.

We found that we have provided caregiving for the following elders:

| Relative | Number | Percent |
|----------|--------|---------|
| Mother | 20 | 47.62 |
| Father | 5 | 11.90 |
| Both | 13 | 30.95 |
| In-laws | 2 | 4.76 |
| Other | 2 | 4.76 |

And most of us were 55 or older when we made career changes to balance eldercare responsibilities:

| Ages | Number | Percent |
|------|--------|---------|
| 55 and older | 12 | 75.00 |
| 45-54 | 2 | 12.50 |
| 44 and younger | 1 | 6.25 |
| Unknown | 1 | 6.25 |
| Total | 16 | 100 |

The small number of respondents who indicated that the change in career had an impact provided the reasons below:

| Responses | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| No real impact on career | 2 | 12.50 |
| Shifted career path (neutral effect) | 1 | 6.25 |
| Shifted career path (positive effect) | 5 | 31.25 |
| Shifted career path (negative effect) | 1 | 6.25 |
| Took early retirement (neutral effect) | 6 | 37.5 |
| Took early retirement (adverse financial effect) | 1 | 6.25 |

**Takeaways**: We made more adjustments to our work lives to care for our children than to accommodate our partners or parents.  We had less support for short-term leave than is currently available, but recent circumstances show that women still are more likely than their partners to leave the workforce to take long-term care of their children.

**Intergenerational financial support:** About half of us (49%) had our parents pay for our college education. Most of us also graduated with less than 10,000 debt (93%).

One Internet site said that $36,000 was the average current student debt for undergraduate study. (https://educationdata.org/average-student-loan-debt-by-year). Wellesley prides itself on not having its students have much debt at graduation, and I found this article, again from 2015, saying that Wellesley students have less debt than those from many other institutions. (https://www.wellesley.edu/news/2015/october/node/75416)

95% of us said that all of our children went to college.

Again, a large percentage of us paid for our kids' college education (46%), about the same percentage of us who had our parents pay for our educations.

Our children graduated with considerably more student debt than we did; 94% had more than $10,000, and 6% over $100,000.

Our parents helped us with the down payment for our houses for 43% of us and 40% of us helped our children with the down payment.

The support we give our adult children tends to be less than $15,000 a year (75%)

Most of us find our standard of living the same or higher than our parents (see graphics), but about 14% have a standard of living that is somewhat or substantially lower than that of their parents.

A side-by-side comparison of the data on our standard of living and that of our children shows that nearly 50% of us have a higher standard of living than our parents, 36% the same, and 14% lower.  Our children, however, are not doing nearly as well.  Only 26% have a HIGHER standard than we do, 51% the same, and 22% lower.

| Substantially higher than my parents | 19.18% | Substantially higher than me 6.85% | 6.85% |
|---|---|---|---|
| Somewhat higher than my parents | 30.82% | Somewhat higher than me | 19.18% |
| About the same as my parents | 35.62% | About the same as me | 51.37% |
| Somewhat lower than my parents | 10.96% | Somewhat lower than me | 14.38% |
| Substantially lower than my parents | 3.42% | Substantially lower than me | 8.22% |

**Takeaways:** We support our children at a level similar to the support we received from our parents, but our children so far have more debt and a lower standard of living than we experienced.

**III. Education**

**Choosing Wellesley – then and now**: Although 97% of those who answered the survey graduated from Wellesley, about 8% transferred to another college or university and graduated from Yale, Princeton, Stanford, Barnard, Boston University, Goddard or the University of Utah. About 3% of the respondents transferred into Wellesley College from another institution.
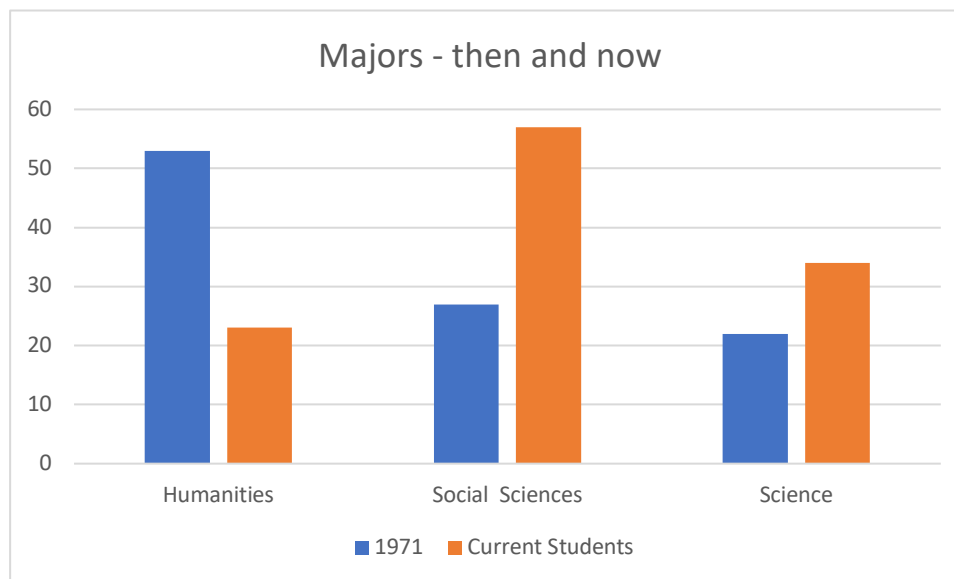
Most of us remain satisfied or very satisfied with our decision to attend Wellesley (90%). About 10% are either somewhat or very dissatisfied. If we were considering a college for ourselves today, we would consider Wellesley (73%). However, only 10% of our eligible children considered Wellesley, rejecting Wellesley mostly because their children wanted a co-ed college environment, with some indicating that Wellesley did not offer programs in their children's areas of interest of the kind available in a larger university setting. When asked about the pattern of legacy admissions to Wellesley, Joy St John, the current dean of admissions and financial aid, wrote: "The Admission Office reports the percentage of the applicant pool who are legacy (defined as anyone with a mother, grandmother, aunt, sister or cousin). We don't share admit rates for any subgroups but I can tell you their share of the applicant pool and the enrolled cohort. The most recent finalized data that I have is for last year's incoming class (the Class of 2024). Legacy applicants made up 5% of the applicant pool. Legacy applicants made up 11% of the enrolled student group. As the applicant pool has grown, legacy applicants make up a smaller share of the applicant pool but they have remained about the same percentage of the enrolling class, at least in my 11 years at the College."

Obviously, Wellesley continues to attract a very high number of qualified applications, and the pool of women attending college now surpasses the number of men. And fewer women's colleges remain available for those that would prefer them. Indeed, Wellesley's pool of applicants was the second highest it has ever been in 2020 (6581). Its current acceptance rate is currently around 20% and its current yield (the percentage of students offered admission who choose to come to Wellesley is over 43%. (Wellesley College Factbook https://www.wellesley.edu/oir/factbook/admission-statistics.)

Below are the reasons listed as to why our children didn't choose to apply to Wellesley:

| Categories | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Wanted co-ed school | 44 | 54.32 |
| Wanted majors not available/not a focus at Wellesley | 4 | 4.94 |
| Wanted different geographic location | 5 | 6.17 |
| Wanted larger school | 2 | 2.47 |
| Grades/scores weren't good enough | 3 | 3.70 |
| Too expensive/much cheaper alternatives | 3 | 3.70 |
| Other | 20 | 24.69 |
| Total | 81 | 100 |

**Our majors - then and now:** More than half of us (53%) majored in the humanities, 27% in the social sciences and 22% in science. In contrast, in 2020, 23% of the graduates majored in the humanities, 57% majored in the social sciences and 34% majored in the physical sciences. (Wellesley College Factbook https://www.wellesley.edu/oir/factbook/degree-conferralMajors): It may also be worth noting that there are many more students who double major or do a major and minor than in our day.



About a quarter of us (24%) changed majors in college, but ultimately 82% of us were either satisfied or very satisfied with our choice of majors

When asked what major they would choose today, our classmates gave the following responses:

| Major | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Foreign Language | 4 | 2.47 |
| Social Sciences | 18 | 11.11 |
| History | 31 | 19.14 |
| Other Humanities | 17 | 10.49 |
| Biological Sciences | 14 | 8.64 |
| Other Math/Sciences | 35 | 21.60 |
| Unsure/No Change | 52 | 32.10 |

**Takeaways:** As is the case in general in higher ed, we see a decline in the number of humanities majors, which most likely reflects pressures from the workplace for employable skills. It might be worth noting that while both our data and that of the current students reflects double majors, there are considerably more double majors at the college now than in the past, so that it is likely that many of the current humanities majors have a second major that may more easily lead to employment.

**Continuing our educations:** Most of us furthered our education after Wellesley, some by noncredit courses (4%) or credit courses for which they did not obtain a degree (4%). In terms of post grad education degrees, a master's (other than MBA, MPA, MPH, MSW or M Divinity) is the most common choice (28%), followed by MBA (13%) and MSW (3%). About 16% obtained a PhD or other doctorate, 15% obtained a JD or LLB and 7% an MD or other medical degree. About 5% did not further their education. Again, the most of us were either satisfied or very satisfied with our decision to choose our graduate field (90%).

Below are some of the answers our classmates gave as to what they hoped to achieve by going to grad school:

*obtain skills and degrees necessary to enter my profession and have flexibility in my practice*

*Satisfy curiosity, prepare for a profession-and then change professions midlife.*

*Credentials and training to do what I love doing.*

*The credibility of a business degree in the eyes of the male business hierarchy.*

*A satisfying and well-paid professional life.*

*Additional opportunities for research, ability to become a professor*

*Just something to do while I tried to think of something else I might want to do*

*Originally — qualification to teach. Then — credential to get a job in US Congress. In 1976, women typed*

Whatever we hoped to achieve by going to grad school, 86% of us thought we had achieved it.

Of those that did graduate work, more than half (58%) of us did not go straight to grad school. Those that did go directly from Wellesley were, however, mostly either satisfied or very satisfied with that decision (82%) and 76% would make the same decision to go directly to grad school if they were to make a choice today.

Similarly, of those that deferred graduate work, 84% were also either satisfied or very satisfied with that decision, but a larger percentage (90%) of those who deferred would make the same decision (compared to 76% of those who did not defer).

Those who deferred grad school engaged in a range of other activities as indicated by 80 text entries. Some of the entries listed multiple activities so the number of overall responses was closer to 100:

| Occupation/activity | # responses | % |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Taught school | 13 | 13 |
| Worked at jobs in fields of interest (e.g., research, academics, paralegal, finance, etc.) | 20 | 19 |
| Worked at miscellaneous jobs | 33 | 32 |
| Community service (CARE, VISTA, Peace Corps, local, volunteer) | 11 | 11 |
| Traveled, took time off | 6 | 6 |
| Studied abroad | 2 | 2 |
| Married (as reason for delay of grad school) | 12 | 12 |
| Raised children | 7 | 7 |

## IV. Employment, pathbreaking and other activities

**Careers:** Our first job: Our first jobs after college or post-graduate training clustered in teaching (17%), law (13%) and medicine (7

When we reviewed the "other" jobs identified in text responses, we realized that we should have included several types of jobs in the original set of choices. Here is the range of our first jobs:

| Jobs | Number |
| --- | --- |
| Teacher | 29 |
| Law, jurisprudence | 21 |
| Writing/editing | 15 |
| Physician | 11 |
| Administrative specializations | 8 |
| Finance | 8 |
| Museum, library | 7 |
| Professor | 5 |
| Consulting | 5 |
| Psychologist | 5 |
| Government/politics | 5 |
| Business/management | 4 |
| College administration | 4 |
| Clergy/religious organization | 4 |
| Secretarial/administrative assistant | 4 |
| Social services | 3 |
| Computer-related | 3 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Other health occupations | 3 | |
| Advertising/marketing | 3 | |
| Physical sciences | 2 | |
| Life/social sciences | 1 | |
| Architecture/engineering | 1 | |
| Arts/entertainment | 1 | |
| Volunteer | 1 | |
| Other (includes 7 who did not explain) | 8 | |
| Total responses | 163 | |

We tended to be satisfied or very satisfied with our decision to take that first job (79%). We are evenly split as to whether we ever changed our principal occupation(50%). Most of us (71%) have been employed in paid work for 35 years or more with another 17% employed in paid work 20-34 years. About 32% of us have started a business at some point.

These shifts are apparent when the responses to "first jobs" is compared with "most recent employment," though as one would expect, we have generally progressed from entry level positions to managerial and senior roles:

| Most Recent Employment | # Orig table | Comparison: "first jobs" list |
|---|---|---|
| Law, jurisprudence | 16 | 21 |
| Physician | 13 | 11 |
| Writing/editing | 11 | 15 |
| Professor | 10 | 5 |
| Teacher | 10 | 29 |
| Clergy/religious organization | 7 | 4 |
| Consulting | 7 | 5 |
| Business/management | 6 | 4 |
| Government/politics | | 5 |
| Accountant | 5 | 0 |
| Museum, library | 4 | 7 |
| Ed. Admin (not college) | 4 | 0 |
| Administrative specializations | 4 | 8 |
| Other managerial | 4 | 0 |
| Social services | 4 | 3 |
| Entrepreneur/business owner | | 0 |
| Volunteering | | 1 |
| Arts/entertainment | 3 | 1 |
| Psychologist | 3 | 5 |
| Other health occupations | 2 | 3 |
| Non-profit management | | 0 |
| Family caregiver | | 0 |
| Finance | 2 | 8 |
| Computer-related | 2 | 3 |
| Real estate | | 0 |
| Landscape design | | 0 |
| College administration | 1 | 4 |
| Architecture/engineering | 1 | 1 |
| Secretarial/administrative assistant | | 4 |
| Advertising/marketing | | 3 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Physical sciences | | 2 |
| Life /social sciences | | 1 |
| Other (includes 6 with no text explanation) | 42 | 8 |
| **TOTAL** | **161** | **163** |

Finally, we tabulated the answers for why people changed their occupations. The chart below shows what the most common reasons were:

| Reason | # |
|---|---|
| Desire for personal growth/interest in new field | 22 |
| Unexpected opportunities arose | 20 |
| Family circumstances (marriage, children, eldercare) | 8 |
| Lost job | 6 |
| Didn't like job | 6 |
| Relocation/geographic issues | 4 |
| Health problems required/inspired change | 4 |
| Higher salary | 2 |
| Promotion | 2 |
| Other (includes ambiguous/non-responsive) | 6 |
| TOTAL | 80 |

**Retirement:** Most of us are currently retired (70%) although some still work full time (14%) or part time (15%). About 8% retired before 55 years of age, with 12% retiring between 56-60, 22% retiring between 61-65, 24% retiring between 66-70 and 35% retiring after 70. On a scale of 1-10, where 1 is that our decision to retire is a big success and 10 is a big mistake, we average a 2.85, but with 65% of us answering 1 or 2.

Our respondents identified the following reasons for the success or failure of their retirement, with many offering multiple factors:

| Factors | # |
|---|---|
| Wanted more time with family, friends, hobbies, volunteering | 58 |
| Seemed like right time; could afford to do so | 31 |
| Wanted time to travel | 15 |
| Wanted less stress, fewer physical demands | 14 |
| Tired of/bored with/ finished with/burned out at job/problems at work | 14 |
| Needed to take care of ill, elderly family members, other family demands | 13 |
| Lost job, laid off, pandemic | 6 |
| Ability to retire gradually, continue part-time work or consulting | 5 |
| Wanted change of direction | 4 |
| Miss job, colleagues, prestige | 4 |
| Problems adjusting, finding activities, people, structure to provide meaning in retirement | |
| Disability/health forced early retirement | 2 |
| Inadequate income in retirement | 1 |
| Ambiguous or nonresponsive answers | 6 |
| Total responses | **110** |

Below are some of our classmates' comments on the pros and cons of retirement.

*I was tired of working, my husband, who is twelve years older than I, was retiring and I wanted to be able to travel with him, and I wanted the time to learn about investing in the stock market.*

*I love having free time to spend with family and friends, to travel, to read and to learn new things.*

*I retired when I was ready and have time now to pursue other interests.*

*I only characterize myself as retired because my husband is. It is not really possible to retire if you weren't working a paying job.*

*Financial freedom allows me to still consult in a private practice on my own schedule as well as travel and explore other learning and volunteer options.*

*Time to leave employment, enjoy other things and provide the increasing care and attention my mother needed until her death.*

*I was self-employed working from home, and so it was hard to separate home from work, and I worked days and nights. Since retiring, I no longer work in the evenings, and feel more relaxed in the evenings. I also worry less at night about deadlines and client commitments.*

*I was laid off at the preschool because they were losing money. I had the most seniority so they laid me off. I was devastated but found a position teaching French in various elementary schools part time and loved it.*

*Tough going from being very important to being invisible.*

*I miss the structure and social interaction of working.*

*This is a major transition, and I am still endeavoring to work it out. The pandemic has been huge disruption to my transition to retirement.*

When we tabulated the answers that respondents provided about what if anything they would have changed about the circumstances of their retirement, we found the following responses:

| Circumstances | # |
|---|---|
| Nothing | 55 |
| Wish had planned better, saved more | 8 |
| Should have retired sooner | 7 |
| Retired earlier than preferred due to job problems, changes | 7 |
| Would have liked more gradual process, part-time options, but not available | 6 |
| Retired earlier than preferred due to job loss | 5 |
| Wish spouse's/own health better; wish spouse alive to share retirement | 4 |
| Retired earlier than preferred due to health issues | 3 |
| Retired earlier than preferred due to pandemic | 2 |
| Wish employer had shown more appreciation upon retirement | 2 |
| Wish had located nearer family, potential future employment options | 2 |
| Miss colleagues | 1 |
| Other (ambiguous or nonresponsive; also excludes "pandemic") | 9 |
| **Total responses** | **110** |

In terms of how those of us who are retired to spend our time, reading (13%) was the most popular choice, followed by spending time with family and exercising, which were tied (12%), then traveling (10%) and spending time with friends (10%).

**Takeaways:** Most of us appear to have spent a great deal of time in the workforce and have had satisfying work lives. For those of us who have retired, the majority consider it to be a success.

**Household income.**

Household income

| Income range | Percentage |
|---|---|
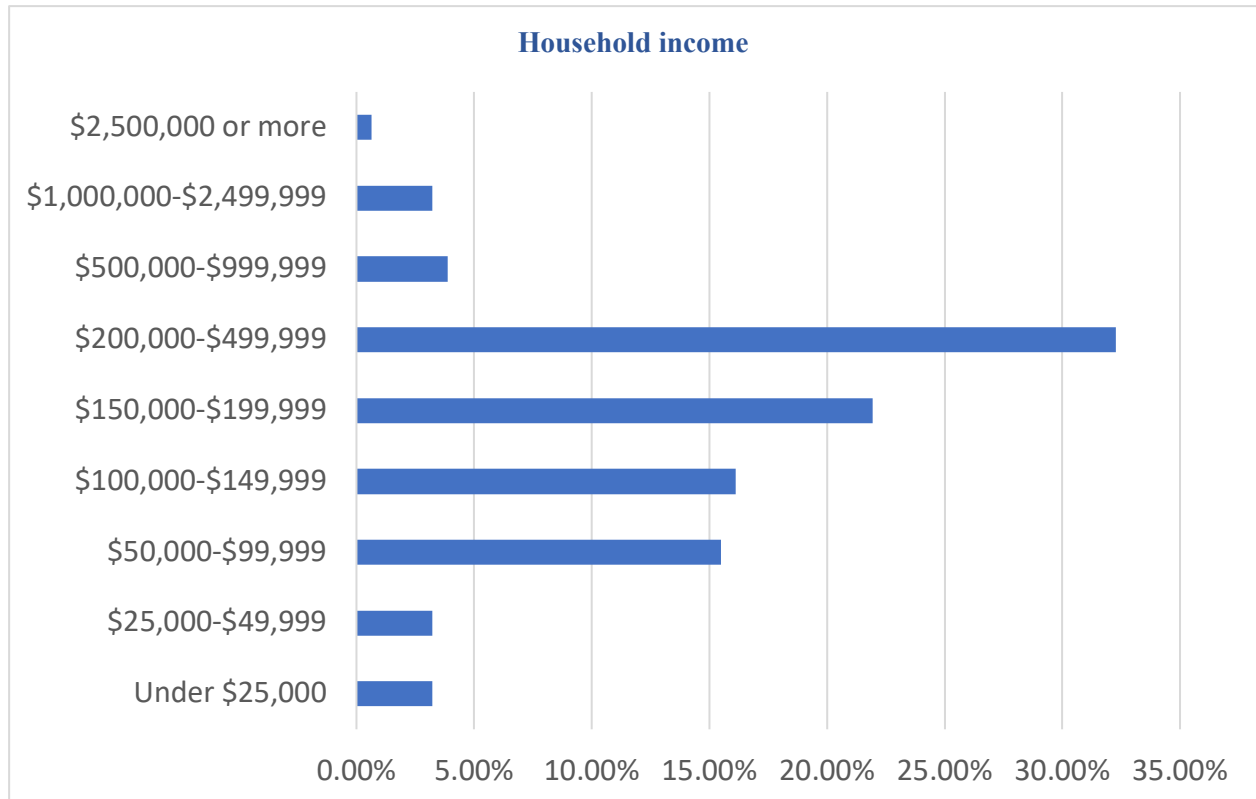


According to one source, median household income in the US in 2020 was $78,500 according to https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/il/il20/Medians2020r.pdf. Average household income was nearly $98,000 according to https://dqydj.com/average-median-top-household-income-percentiles/. To be in the top 1% in2020, a household needed to earn a little over $531,000 and to be in the top 10%, a household needed to earn a little over $200,000 according to https://dqydj.com/average-median-top-household-income-percentiles.

**Takeaways:** The majority of our classmates who responded are generally much better off than the US population as a whole.

**Pathbreaking**

About 32% of us have been pathbreakers as women, as "the first" or among the first. This compares to about a quarter of the class of 1968 respondents who said that they had been the first woman in their field. 3% of us have been pathbreakers for our race/ethnicity. Our tabulations of where these pathbreaking experiences occurred gave the following results:

| First/one of first woman to … | Number who were "first" | Number who were "one of the first" |
|---|---|---|
| Graduate from previously all-male university, graduate program or professional school (law, medicine, etc.) | | 5 |
| Be hired by organization in managerial/professional role | 10 | 5 |
| Be promoted by organization to senior/partner position | 11 | 10 |
| Be tenured in a particular dept of college/university | 1 | |
| Serve as religious leader in congregation or organization | 5 | 5 |
| Own a particular type of business/professional firm in geographic region | 3 | 2 |
| Serve as C-suite officer at company/professional firm | 4 | |
| Serve on exec committee, board of directors, or other senior exec roles in company/professional firm | 7 | 4 |
| Serve in high-level government leadership positions | 4 | 6 |
| Be chief of staff or other senior mgmt. role in hospital | 3 | 3 |
| Other (including responses such as "too many to list" | 4 | 5 |

We also tabulated the text responses about what impact the pathbreaking action had:

| Type of impact | # |
|---|---|
| Not much impact | 12 |
| Created opportunities and opened doors due to visibility | 17 |
| Made me proud | 7 |
| Made me stronger | 5 |
| Tough to deal with the extra pressure | 10 |
| Lack of role models made it tricky to figure out how to relate to colleagues, clients, and others | 8 |
| Very aware of anti-woman bias | 6 |
| Hard to gain credibility | 3 |
| Being first woman within organization to have children, modify schedule for family care hurt advancement | 3 |
| Had to work harder than men to succeed | 2 |
| Had to be exemplary model for women to follow | 2 |
| Had to fight to get equivalent salary | 1 |
| Other (excludes N/A or other non-responsive answers) | 5 |
| **Total responses** | **61** |

Below are some comments from our classmates on the effects pathbreaking had on them.

*You are always in the front of the pack so peer group is small, acceptance just beginning, mentoring limited, always the brunt of comments, proving your right to be in the room, breaking new norms. You never really relax.*

*Classic lonely at the top, few mentors, peer group distant. More conflict and opposition than subsequent generations experienced. Some denial of opportunities. Excessive expectations.*

*It was sometimes a struggle to be a female department head in a college led mostly by men, but it had pluses as well. I learned some things about my own potential to lead in a sometimes uncongenial atmosphere.*

*Complexly-- painful and difficult resentment and resistance from women and men; no guardrails or markers for measuring accomplishment or failure; little if any vertical mentorship or assistance with career advancement; expectations that were both too much and too little. Exhaustion at times.*

*It was harder to get jobs and respect.*

*Not an issue - I felt very qualified, and the bank made a real effort for me to succeed based on my efforts.*

*It increased my self-confidence and sense of accomplishment.*

*Since I did well, it helped move my career along.*

*I drew on the confidence and can-do attitude Wellesley instilled in me to stand up for myself and other women*

**Volunteering and other activities:** Most of us volunteer 1-20 hours a month (39%) although a sizeable percentage do 10-20 hours (23%). About 18% do not do volunteer work. And almost half of us who do volunteer are doing less because of the pandemic (49%).

The four domains that we tend to devote our volunteering to are: culture and the arts (15%), social services (12%), education (11%) and our professions (11%).

About 69% of us have served on the board of a non-profit organization and 11% of us have started a non-profit.

**Takeaways**: Most of us have found agreeable ways to spend our spare time, which also includes giving back to our communities.

**Discrimination**: Half of us have been discriminated against because of our gender, our ethnicity or religion, age, sexual orientation, or appearance and 43% have been the victim of sexual harassment, but only 19% have followed up on that sexual harassment.

91% of us believe that women and/or minorities still face discrimination or harassment.


**V. Religion and politics**

**Religious affiliations:** In college, the five highest religious affiliations that we listed were: Episcopal (18%), Roman Catholic (12%), No preference (12%), Jewish (11%), and tied for 5th at 10%, were Presbyterian and Agnostic/atheist.  The five highest current religious affiliations that we found were: No preference (15%), Episcopalian (14%), Jewish (11%), Unitarian/Universalist (10%) and Agnostic/Atheist (10%).  Nonetheless, 71% of us find having a spiritual component to our lives either somewhat or very important.

**Takeaways:** Our pattern of religious affiliation does not mirror what is found in our country, where a large percentage of older people identify as Evangelical Christians.  Our Jewish population at 11% of respondents is much higher than what is found in the country overall (about 3%). On the other hand, the shift in our religious preferences over time does mirror general religious change patterns seen in our country as a whole: a reduction in the percentage of people who identify as Protestant or Roman Catholic. https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/

**Politics: Our** parents were 48% Republican and 42% Democrat when we were at Wellesley.

We were more aligned with Democrats than our parents when we were at Wellesley (55%) and less aligned with Republicans (15%). We saw ourselves as largely moderate to extremely liberal (66%). Now we are 81% Democrat and 14% Independent but only 2% Republican. This is a significant shift. Agreed!

Currently a higher percentage of us consider ourselves moderate to extremely liberal (90%).

Most of us voted in all the elections we were eligible to vote in (88%).
68% of us voted for Humphrey.
84% of us voted for McGovern.
95% of us voted for Hillary Clinton.
96% of us voted for Biden.

Below is a tabulation of the above votes and our responses as our political affiliations at the start of college and now:

| Views (percentages) | Start of college | 1968 | 1972 | 2016 | 2020 | Now |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Democrat | 56 | 68 | 84 | 95 | 96 | 81 |
| Republican | 15 | 12 | 9 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| Independent/other | 17 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 15 |
| Not involved | 13 | 20 | 6 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Extremely liberal | 12 | | | | | 18 |
| Liberal | 31 | | | | | 47 |
| Moderately liberal | 23 | | | | | 26 |
| Middle of the road | 22 | | | | | 7 |
| Moderately conservative | 9 | | | | | 2 |
| Conservative | 3 | | | | | 1 |
| Extremely conservative | | | | | | 0 |

More than half of us thought ourselves moderately or very politically active at Wellesley (56%), but a surprising percent weren't at all involved. 54% percent currently consider ourselves moderately or very politically active.

When asked what changed our views to be more liberal, the answers were as follows:

| When/caused by: | # |
|---|---|
| During college: due to Vietnam War, anti-war movement, Civil Rights movement, general political scene, Hillary's example | 26 |
| During college: due to exposure to more diverse cultures and history via coursework and the community | 13 |
| During the 1980s: due to change in Republican Party during Reagan years | 3 |
| During past 2 decades: due to recognition of realities of racism, LGBTQ rights, labor rights, voting rights, income inequalities | 3 |
| During past 2 decades: due to changes in Republican Party values | 7 |
| Over time: due to life experience | 27 |
| Over time: due to changes in U.S. and the world | 4 |
| Over time: due to perspectives from living abroad | 2 |
| Other | 3 |
| **Total responses (excludes "no change" and non-responsive answers)** | **74** |

Below are some quotes about how we saw our transition to becoming more liberal.

*Exposure to political events and more diverse cultures, and the Viet Nam war while at Wellesley.*

*Participation in protests and political activities*

*During college.   I woke up.*

*Hillary Rodham [Clinton] spoke against the Vietnam war on the Chapel steps and I began to see the world differently.  My professors also helped open my eyes to what was going on.*

*During college years, I began to take an interest and to think for myself.*

*I became a Democrat when Reagan became President.*

*I am more aware of what politics means for people in general and my community in particular.*

*Changed in prior to the Obama election. Maturity.*

*Moving to Canada cemented Democratic over Republican ideas.*

*Living in Germany. Reading German newspapers, engaging in political discussions, being an "outsider" in Germany.*

*My affiliation changed because the Republican party changed.  I can no longer support its extremist views.*

*I became more conservative until the advent of Trump.  Recognizing the realities of racism in the United States has pushed me to the liberal side.*

## Percentage of Respondents Choosing Top 6 Politcal Issues
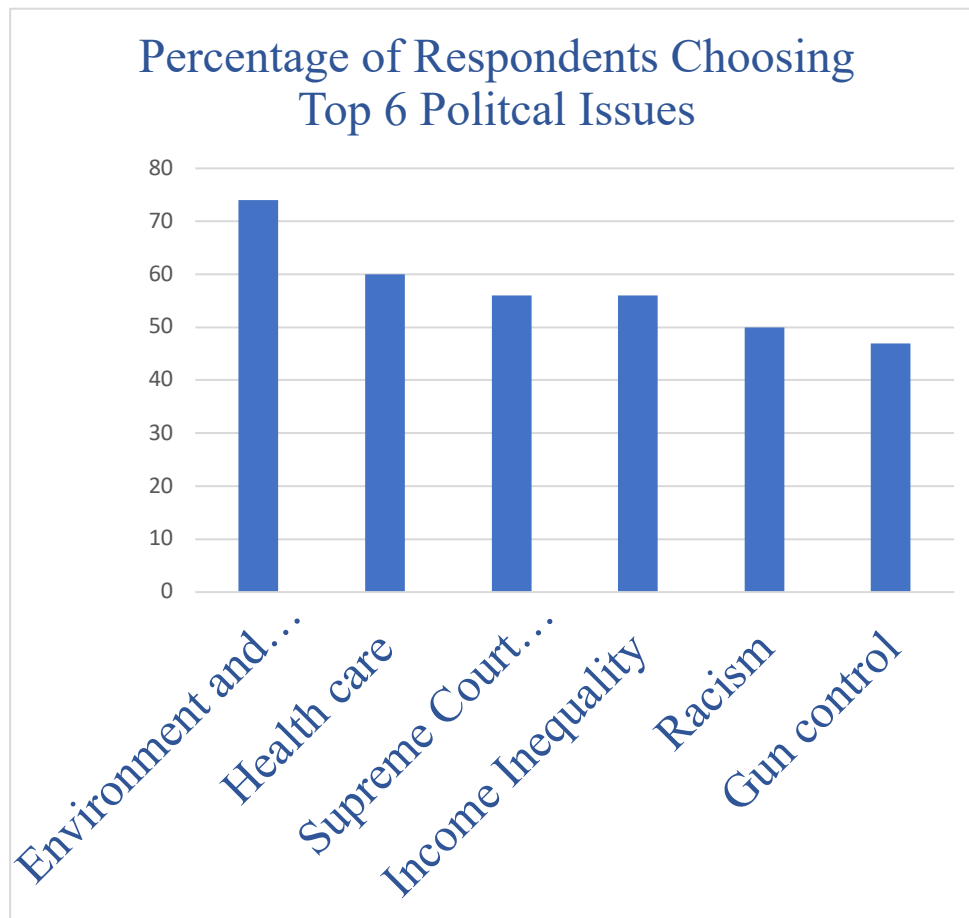


In contrast, in 2020, the top concerns of Biden Democrats as a group were health care (84%) and the coronavirus outbreak (82%) … and racial and ethnic inequality (76%) followed by climate change (68%), Supreme Court nominations (66%) and economic inequality (65%). (https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2020/08/13/important-issues-in-the-2020-election/pp_2020-08-13_voter-attitudes_4-02/) Not surprisingly, the top political issues for us mirror the top concerns of Democrats, although we order our concerns a bit differently.

**Takeaways**: We have bucked the trend that suggests that individuals become more conservative as they age; instead, we have become more liberal.

**VI. Life Choices**: We are most satisfied or very satisfied with our standard of living, our relationship with our children and grandchildren, our current employment status (which for many is retirement), and our current job (for those still employed).

## Top Five Areas of Satisfaction
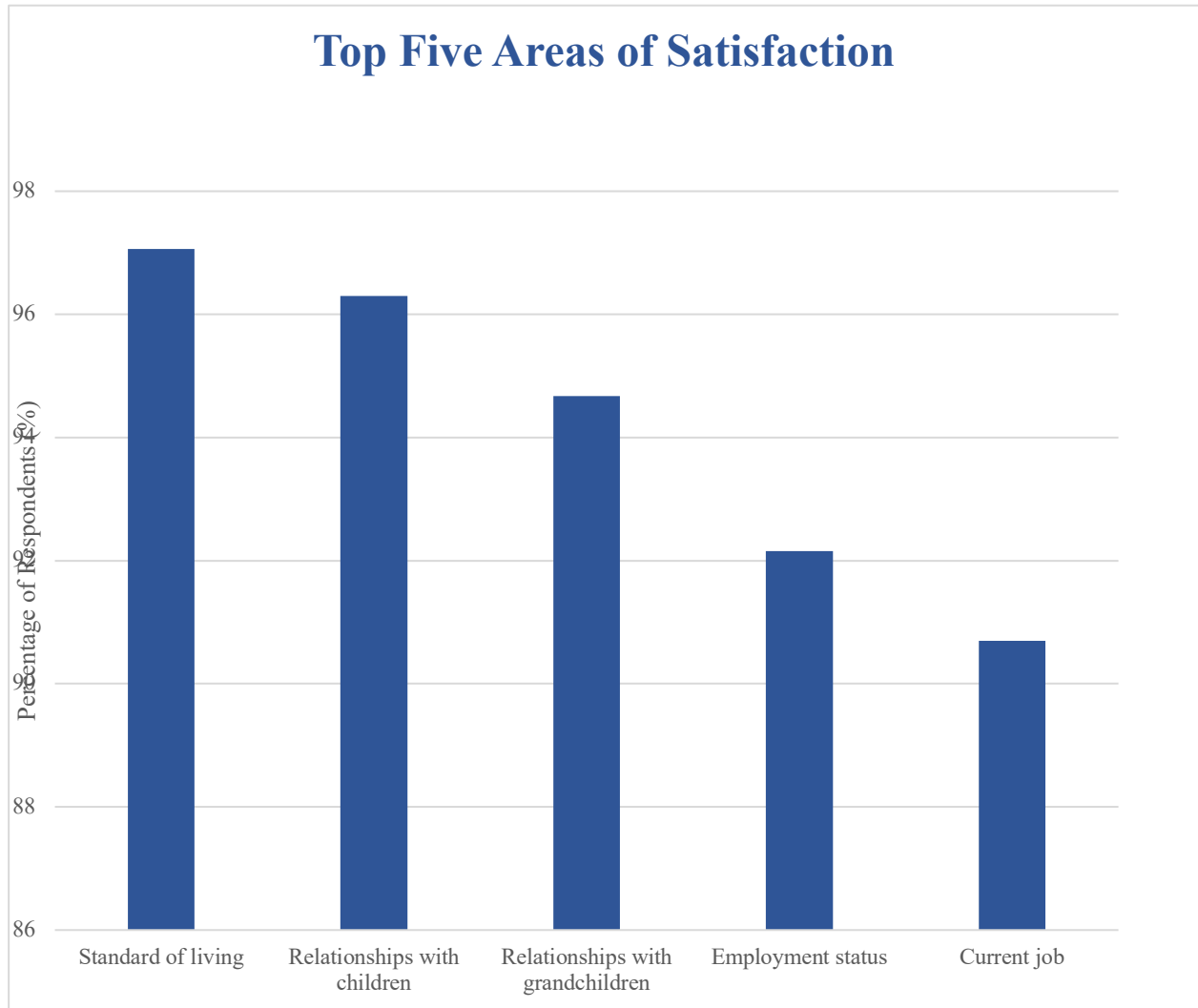


We are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with our physical appearance (14%), our sex lives (14%) and our health (12%),

When we tabulated the answers given to our best/worst decision (people gave multiple responses in both categories) and what we would change, we found the following:

| Decision | Best | Worst | Would change |
|---|---|---|---|
| Choice of college | 11 | 2 | |
| Choice of career (includes choice of grad school) | 27 | 7 | 6 |
| Letting parental/societal expectations determine life decisions | | | 4 |
| Failing to develop/express own voice | | 1 | 7 |
| Choice of spouse/life partner | 42 | 17 | 8 |
| Marrying too young | | 5 | 7 |
| Not pursuing work/career passions; not continuing career | | 7 | 10 |
| Having children | 35 | | |
| Delaying having children (should have had earlier) | | 1 | 5 |
| Not having children | 1 | | |
| Not having more children | | 2 | 2 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Choice to divorce | 2 | | |
| Timing of divorce/end of relationship (i.e., delayed too long) | | 2 | 3 |
| Choice to take a particular job | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| Choice to change job, career | 4 | 2 | 2 |
| Failing to fight harder for particular job opportunities, goals; take positive risks | | 2 | 3 |
| Staying in bad job, career too long | | 4 | 2 |
| Choice of geographic location in which to settle | 13 | 4 | 2 |
| Engaging in risky, bad behavior | | 5 | 1 |
| Choice to take care (or not) of health, well-being | 2 | 3 | 3 |
| Working too hard | | 6 | 3 |
| Not spending enough time with children, extended family | | 5 | 3 |
| Failing to develop hobbies; travel more | | 1 | 3 |
| Failing to manage money better | | 2 | 2 |
| Would change nothing | | | 48 |
| Other best/worst (excludes non-responsive or ambiguous answers) | 4 | 9 | 7 |

**The optional essay questions at the end of the survey are summarized in a document entitled:**
"Wellesley College Class of 1971 50th Reunion Survey Written Summary of Essay Questions."