

Who Are we Now?

Smith '69 50th Reunion



OUR ODYSSEYS

Introduction to survey presentation website version

This file contains both the slides shown at Reunion, summarizing the survey results, AND the notes – not visible during the presentation – from which we spoke in our discussion of the results.

So, for example, the slide before this one is the original “title slide.” The slide after this one contains notes on how we conducted the survey, the response rate, and so on.

Throughout the file, the notes are in red, just like this page, to make it easier to distinguish between the original slides and the added notes.

Questions? Comments? Contact the survey team: Kristi Andersen (andersen@syr.edu) and Judie Feins (j.d.feins@gmail.com)

To gather data from the Class of '69, we used the Survey Monkey platform. Out of 503 reachable classmates, there were 350 responses – mostly online, but a few paper surveys were also returned and entered. Response rate of exactly 69%!! THANKS!

At reunion, we presented a good portion of the results – c. 40-45 minutes. A more detailed listing of the question-by-question results is online, along with this file.

In the presentation, we make a few comparisons to other data, including our 25th reunion class survey (1994). But note that the response on that one was quite a bit lower (just 214 responses).

Some commonalities

- We mostly are or have been married (94%)
- We're on Facebook (70%)
- . . . But we still exercise and read (our top two non-work weekly activities)!
- We pursued education after Smith (virtually all of us)
- Most say that the religious or spiritual dimension of life is important – though we typically don't attend religious services regularly
- We are generally affluent, with 76% reporting family income of \$100,000 or more

Education: Among the 350 respondents were:

- **54 PhDs;**
- **the same number of law degrees;**
- **32 MBAs;**
- **10 MDs; and**
- **at least 175 Masters degrees of various kinds.**

Also all sorts of interesting professional certifications: family therapy, landscape design, emergency medical technician, facilitator, child and adolescent mental health, riding instructor, Montessori teaching. Lots of noncredit courses, too.

Re affluence: 43% of respondents reported a substantially or somewhat higher living standard than parents; 36% about the same; 21% lower than parents.

The women's movement

- In 1994 (25th reunion survey), almost 60% had “gotten involved with gender issues or acted as an advocate for women;” 76% believed Anita Hill.
- In 2019, we think these changes produced by the women's movement have had the most impact:
 - Broader educational and career choices (72%)
 - Increased economic opportunity & earning power (60%)
 - But NOT “greater voice” (22%)
- And nearly two-thirds of us (63%) have experienced sexual harassment/misconduct/assault

Assault/harassment: 40% more than once; most frequent location was the workplace

Public policy

- Almost all agree that these are “very serious problems” in the United States:
 - Global climate change (89%)
 - Economic inequality (80%)
 - Racism (72%)

We hold varied opinions on immigration policy:

Legal immigration to U.S. should be	
Kept at present level	24%
Increased	63%
Decreased	2%
Don't know	11%

Politics

In politics, do you consider yourself a (an)	1994	2019
Democrat	54%	72%
Independent	29%	21%
Republican	16%	7%



And not surprisingly, in 2016 we voted overwhelmingly for Hillary Clinton (86%) rather than Donald Trump (6%) or other candidates (3%)

Our 6% for Trump was exactly the same percentage as in the Wellesley class of 1968.


The 37 classmates who voted for Romney in 2012 broke this way in 2016: 15 voted for Trump, 10 for Clinton, 9 for another candidate, and 3 did not vote.

Political ideology

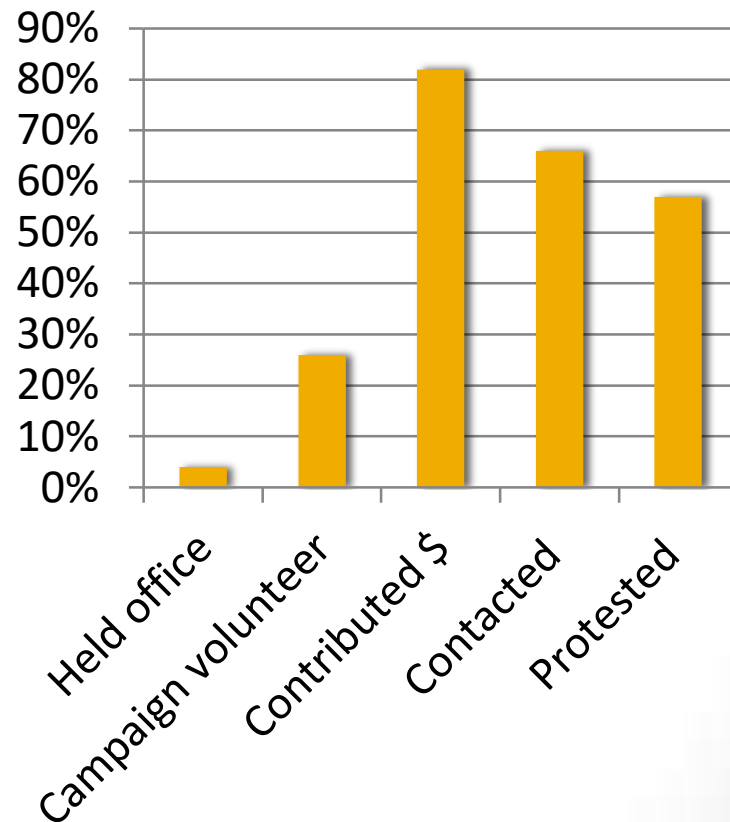
We lean strongly Democratic, with some variation in the ways we describe our political views

Most closely describes your political views	
Conservative/very conservative	1%
Moderately conservative	8%
Middle of the road	6%
Mod. liberal/progressive	25%
Liberal or progressive	42%
Very liberal/progressive	17%

Political participation

- 88% of us have voted in all presidential elections
- 12 classmates hold elective or appointive office
- 68% have taken 2 or more of 5 actions 

Political actions

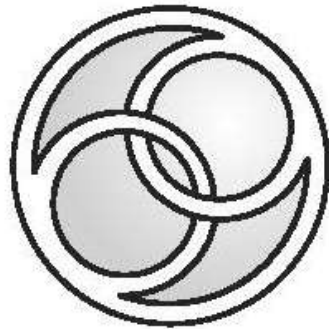


We are active politically:

The 2 or more actions is comparable to Pew Center 2008 findings for top two SES quintiles (in Unheavenly Chorus, ch. 5)

- **Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation Poll 2018: 20% have attended a rally or protest in past two years.**
- **National Research Center poll in 2014 found that only 19% of Americans had contacted local elected officials over a 12-month period**

How are we living our
lives now?

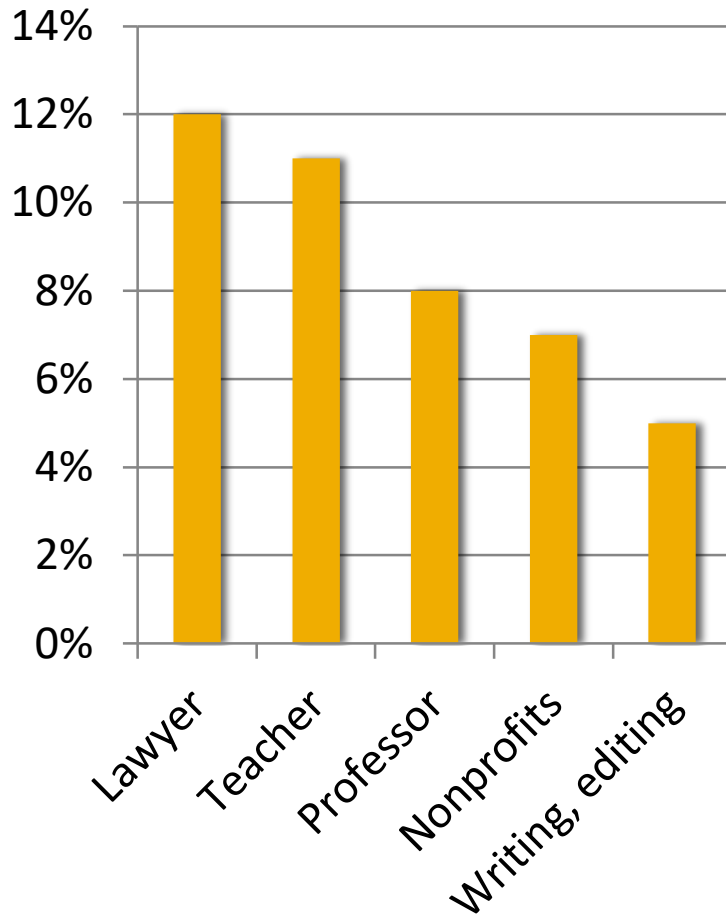


Work and retirement

- 86% of us worked for at least 20 years post-college (and 62% worked for 35 years or more)
- A third of us are still working full- or part-time.
- Of those now retired (65%), the average retirement age was 62.
- But of those still working, the expected average retirement age is 79!

For comparison: recent national data show, “The biggest spike in employment has gone to college-educated older workers; the share of all employees age 65 or older with at least an undergraduate degree is now 53 percent, up from 25 percent in 1985.”

Our working lives



And also . . .

- Farming & winemaking
- City planning
- Leading hikes
- Lobbyist
- Native American advocate
- Diplomat in U.S. Foreign Service
- Operating a ski resort

The 5 professions in the graph total to 43%. Responses mentioned museums, libraries, and varied other nonprofit organizations.

Also: managers, artists, bankers, psychologists and counselors, 9 physicians, five scientists, 10 business owners, 6 accountants.

And lots of interesting “others” (see right-hand list on slide).

Here's how we spend our time

- **In a typical week, our four most frequent activities are:**
 - Exercising (62%)
 - Reading (62%)
 - Spending time with family (54%)
 - Doing volunteer or community work (46%)
- **We do a wide range of volunteer work**

The top categories of volunteer work:

Culture/arts	35%	Social justice/advocacy	22%
Politics	27%	Religion	19%
Education	27%	Environment	18%
Related to profession	25%	Social services	18%

Average reading time per week = 2.9 hours

Average TV time per week = 2.2 hours

We should have asked average time on social media (Facebook, YouTube, Instagram all used), but we didn't ask average time on those.

Volunteer work table: respondents checked all that applied

We seem fairly satisfied with our lives now...

Most satisfied with:

- Relationships with our children and grandchildren
- Standard of living

Least satisfied with :

- Health & physical condition
- Physical appearance
- Sex life

Satisfaction was rated on a scale of 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied) with 3 being neutral

Top items in satisfaction (average 4.5) were:

Relationships with children and grandchildren
Standard of living

Bottom items were:

Health and physical condition	3.9
Physical appearance	3.7
Sex life	3.4

But we might have changed some things in the past . . .

- We asked: Would you do things the same way or would you do things differently?
- A majority of us are happy with our choices—56% to 76% for the 7 choices
- But there are certainly significant numbers who think they should have:
 - made different educational choices after Smith (24% probably, 16% not sure)
 - chosen a different career (17% probably, 18% not sure)

Even though most of us finished at Smith, went on to further degrees and certificates in a wide variety of fields, and worked for many years, the odyssey wasn't always along a clear path.

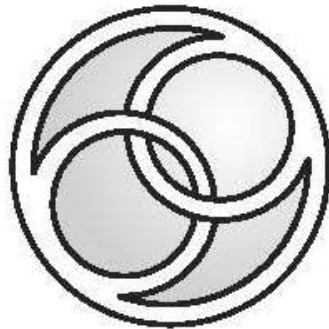
We're facing a range of challenges

- More than 50 of us (16.3%) are currently taking responsibility for the well-being of parents, in-laws, or other aging relatives or friends (and many others have done so in the past).
- Over a third provide significant ongoing financial support to children, and **all of us** with grandchildren do the same.
- Apart from setting aside resources for the future (bequests/trusts/savings accounts) for grandkids, 54% of us provide significant childcare for them now.

We've already experienced loss and difficult illness

- Forty-five of us (13%) have experienced the death of a spouse or partner
- Twenty-three (7%) have experienced the death of a child or grandchild
- And a quarter of us have had a prolonged or life-threatening illness.

Looking toward the future...

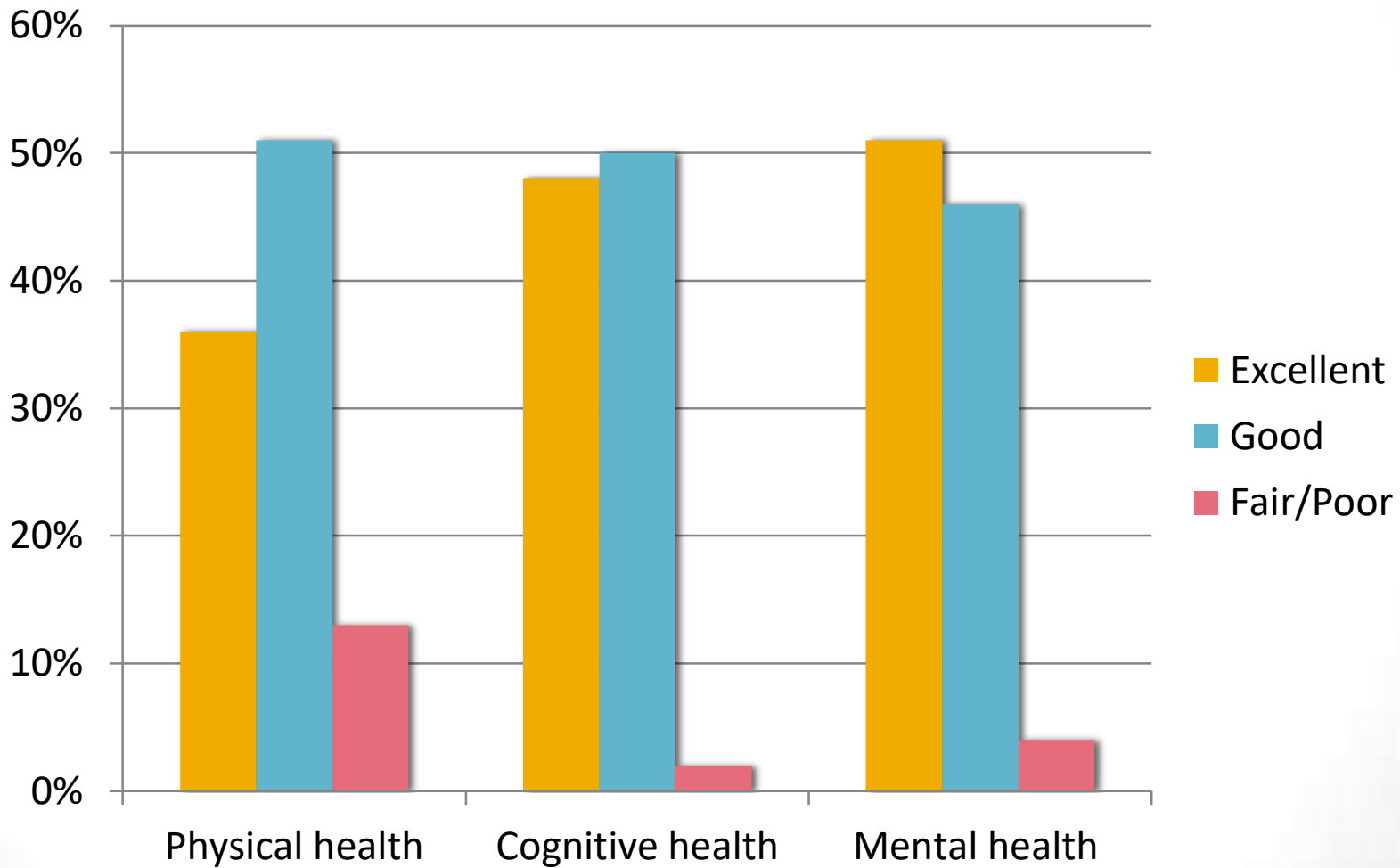


We are figuring out where to live the rest of our lives . . .

- We've mostly lived in the same place for a long time!
 - 49%: same house for more than 20 years
 - 57%: same city for more than 20 years
 - Only 10% changed cities in last 5 years

Expect to move/downsize as you age?	
Already have	12%
Yes	29%
Maybe	38%
No	12%

We feel good about our health now

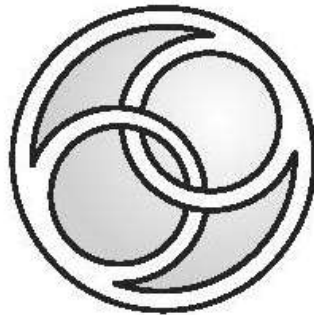


But more generally, aging does worry us . . .

Looking forward to the next decades, how concerned are you about . . .

	Very concerned	Somewhat concerned
Being lonely & isolated	4%	29%
No help if you need assistance	6%	28%
Not having sufficient finances	7%	28%
Being a burden to others	8%	40%
Losing physical capacity	19%	59%
Losing cognitive capacity	27%	48%

Our relationship to Smith



Choosing Smith, then and now

- 60% of us think we made a very good decision, and another 30% think selecting Smith was a somewhat good decision
- But if we could make that decision over, 22% now say they would make a different choice
- And 30 of our classmates reported experiencing sexual harassment, misconduct, or assault while at Smith.
- Even so, **among our current closest friends—the people we really care about outside our families—62% count someone we met here.**

28% of us considered transferring to another school.

We'd like to acknowledge our classmates who aren't here at reunion. We did ask people who weren't planning to attend why:

- **other obligations at that time (57),**
- **won't really know anyone there (44),**
- **“not feeling the love” (35),**
- **too expensive (23).**

We miss them!

How did Smith shape us?

- “If your time at Smith was significant in shaping your sexual identity, was it positive or negative?”
- Thoughts about sexual identity and homophobia
 - “Combination of personal respect and respect for sexuality.”
 - “Offered my first opportunities to identify/ respect gay women.”
 - “I was kept in the dark about my (and others’) lesbianism.”
 - “Smith was very homophobic when I was there....”
[more]

We got very thoughtful answers to the 2 big open-ended questions in the survey.

Q48 “If your time at Smith was significant in shaping your sexual identity, was it positive or negative?” Total answers 146 (42%).

First, the themes about sexual identity (slide 34), then the themes about women’s strength and value (slide 36).

[quote on slide continued] “... I didn't feel supported socially, nor did I fit it, because I am lesbian. I was reported by someone in my house to the Dean of Students for having a lesbian relationship. Even now, in this questionnaire, I detect strong currents of heterosexism. There are no questions pertaining to lesbians or trans folks. It is because of all these feelings, even after 50 years, that I have only been back to campus briefly once, and will never attend a reunion at Smith.”

More on how Smith shaped us

- Thoughts about women's lives & capabilities
 - “Being around brilliant women raised my level of confidence and inspired me to pursue difficult goals. “
 - “I loved the fact that all leadership roles & activities were done by women.”
 - “Girls could be both smart & sexual.”
 - “It did not help me have positive, equal relationships with men.”
 - “I was taught I was a human being. When I graduated, I was appalled that some workplaces (with men) treated me as a lower class of human being.”

“It just made me realize how powerful women were and how much better the world would be if women played a bigger role.”



Sharing concerns & challenges

- “I sometimes felt very out of it, with a lot of subtle put downs and even discrimination. I had no Peck & Peck cables, and I didn't play bridge or read the NYT or fit in the private school cliques.”
- “I received an excellent education at Smith that prepared me for graduate work, but I always felt that my Midwestern roots & more conservative views did not jibe with eastern liberal dogma.”
- “It was not a good fit. I had one great mentor & one great roommate who remains a friend. Otherwise I would have been happier at a different college. Students consistently confused me with other Asians: we all looked alike to the mostly white student body.”

Q58 was the other “big” open-ended question: “If there is anything about yourself—joys, concerns, challenges, experiences—that you would prefer to share anonymously, please add it here.” 67 responded (19%)

Many interesting responses had to do with people’s very clear and sometimes traumatic memories of their 4 years in Northampton:

“I continue to struggle with the sense that I lost a lot of self-confidence while at Smith. ...Whatever insecurities I may have had before arriving in Northampton in the Fall of ‘65, they increased and intensified during my time there. Having been the proverbial "big fish in a small pond", I found the experience of becoming "a little fish in a big pond" daunting.”

Others looked back and found the sources of their talents, interests, and strengths in those years.

Celebrating the positives

- “The best parts of my Smith education did not always come from the classroom; I think the interaction between students of all the classes, backgrounds, & philosophies as well as the opportunity to interact informally with professors broadened my understanding of what a real education means.”
- “As a black woman, my experiences at Smith richly prepared me for my life after graduation.”
- “A huge value of Smith was excellent woman role models.”
- “Smith taught me how to be a life-long learner. This has enriched my life enormously.”

Thoughts about life & the future

- “Life is what it is. Getting older sucks.”
- “I wish I could have more sex.”
- “Increasingly sad/preoccupied with fears about dying”
- “Joys=books, food, travel, clothes, grandchildren, dogs, theater. Concerns = arthritis, diabetes, osteoporosis . . . friends moving away.”



More thoughts about life & the future

- “Life has gone far too fast. I find myself staggered to realize that I am 72 . . . Where did it all go? Does that mean I wasn’t paying attention?”
- “In the lead-up to our reunion, I have thought about the many turning points in my life. Knowing that a different decision could have changed my subsequent life leaves me feeling very melancholy—neither happy or sad—but wishing I could speak to my younger self.”