Overview

The class of ’64 often didn’t follow the playbook while we were at Carleton. We still don’t. We’re supposed to be getting more conservative as we grow older, but we’re increasingly liberal. We’re expected to be getting more religious, but we’re becoming less religious. We’re even feeling increasingly optimistic about our health.

The proportion who describes ourselves as politically liberal has gone from less than two-thirds at our 25th to nearly eight in 10 of us now. Slightly more than half of us think we were politically liberal when we were at Carleton.

Now, 54 percent of us say we are not religious, compared to 45 percent five years ago.

We feel better about our health than we did five years ago. The proportion who says our health is “excellent” is 35 percent now, compared to 27 percent five years ago. Only 13 percent of seniors in a recent AARP survey rated their health “excellent.”

In many ways, we’re not acting our age. Two-thirds of us are now retired, compared to slightly more than half five years ago. However, most of those who are not retired say they will retire “when I have to” or “never.” Few of us live in a senior citizen community or characterize ourselves as “snowbirds.” We fill our time with a variety of activities, ranging from cattle ranching to political protest, and we belong to a wide assortment of groups, ranging from spiritual groups to the Peace Corps. Two-thirds of us have actively supported a cause within the last five years.

Confidence that living within our incomes is “easy” is on the increase. Slightly more than half said that at our 25th, and nearly two-thirds of us do now. Nine in 10 of us are either very or somewhat confident that we will have enough money to take care of our medical and living expenses in retirement, compared with seven in 10 in the AARP survey.

We are becoming more positive toward Carleton. The proportion that would go to Carleton if we had to do it again has gone from 65 percent at our 25th to 74 percent five years ago and 84 percent now. The proportions who feel Carleton is better now than when we were there and/or who feel our careers were “materially helped” by having attended Carleton also are increasing.

In the “blue book essay” portion of this survey, our class offered many provocative comments about what we like and don’t like about present-day Carleton, about the future of liberal arts education, and about why our class is becoming increasingly politically liberal.
How the survey was done

I conducted the survey of our class this year, as well as for our 45th and 25th reunions. This time, the questionnaire was emailed April 4, 2013, to all of our classmates for whom Carleton has an email address. Several email reminders were also sent. Snail mail questionnaires and reminders were sent to classmates for whom Carleton has no email addresses.

We closed the survey June 10. By then, 203 classmates had responded, a response rate of 65 percent. The response rate is high enough so that it’s unlikely that the results would differ much even if a complete census of our class had been taken. Response rates for the two previous surveys were comparably high. Another indication of the validity of the data is the stability of results over time for questions for which that would be expected. For example, three-fourths of us said we have graduate degrees in all three surveys.

Many of the questions were identical in all three surveys so that comparisons over time could be made. Some deemed no longer relevant were deleted this time, and others were added for the first time—particularly the “blue book essay” questions.

I’d be happy to try to answer any questions you have about the survey. I can be reached at kbmegr@yahoo.com.

It’s been fun and, of course, educational working on all three surveys.

Kris Serum McGrath ’64
Who we are

A typical member of the Carleton class of ’64 would be happily married to his or her original spouse and be the parent of two children. The classmate would be a homeowner living in a different part of the country than when he or she was at Carleton but the in the same location as five years ago and with no plans to move soon. Most of us are very satisfied with where we live. Nearly one-third of us own a second home, but very few now live in a senior citizen community or would classify ourselves as “snowbirds” (about 6% in each case). Three-fourths of us have one or more graduate degrees.

Some of our class doesn’t like to be thought of as typical, and of course there are exceptions. Here are some of those:

4% are single
4% have been married three or more times
7% had a child who is no longer living
5% still live in the same city or town as when they were at Carleton

Two-thirds of us are now retired, compared to slightly more than half five years ago. Those who are not retired are generally not ready to make the move. More than half say they will retire “when I have to” or “never.”

Nearly all of us say that living within our incomes is easy (63%) or only occasionally difficult (34%). The same proportion said “easy” five years ago, but that was up from 52 percent at our 25th. Nearly nine in ten of our class is either very confident (42%) or somewhat confident (47%) that we will have enough money to take care of our medical and living expenses in retirement. The one-tenth of us who are not confident of our financial futures compares with twice as many 65-and-older adults nationally who felt that way in a recent AARP survey.

Two-thirds of us (68%) say we weigh more than when we were at Carleton, but that’s only slightly more than said that in the 25th reunion survey (63%). About four in 10 of us (38%) said we are drinking more than when we were at Carleton, but that proportion has not changed appreciably in the past 25 years. One respondent said he is drinking “more and better.” Nearly all of us have quit smoking or never did smoke. About four in ten of us
are exercising more than when we were at Carleton, the same proportion as in our 45th and 25th reunion surveys. Nearly all of us say our health is at least good, and one-third says “excellent” (35%). Five years ago, 27 percent of us rated our health “excellent,” suggesting that our definitions of excellent health may be evolving. In a recent AARP survey, 13 percent of those 65 and older rated their health as “excellent.”

We are not becoming more religious as we age. In this survey, more than half of us said we are “not religious” (54%), compared to 45 percent who said that five years ago. Only one-tenth of us say we are “very religious,” compared to nearly one-fifth (18%) who said that five years ago. However, of those of us who are not specifically religious, nearly half say we are “following some kind of spiritual path,” either “strongly” (13%) or “somewhat” (35%). Most of us say we are about as religious as when we were at Carleton (59%), with 24 percent saying more religious and 17 percent saying less religious. There was no question about why so many of us are not religious, but one classmate offered this in the space for comments at the end of the survey: “During my stay at Carleton, we had required church on Sunday, which probably made for more agnostics and atheists in our group. The time could have been better spent in exposure to religion on an academic basis, which I did not choose amongst my course material. I hope that religion has made it back into the mainstream of academic thinking with the new generation needing more exposure to the teachings of Jesus and other Christian scholars as well as other religions of the world today.”

Most of us say we are more satisfied with our lives now than when we were at Carleton, and that proportion has increased slightly in the last five years (from 75% to 80%). Nearly everyone else said “about the same” in both surveys. In this survey, we also included an AARP question asking “how satisfied you are on a day-to-day basis” so that we could compare ourselves with 65-and-older adults nationally. Interestingly, our class is less likely to be “completely satisfied” (34% to 43%) and more likely to be “somewhat satisfied” (61% to 45%).
How we spend our time

Now that most of us are retired, what are we doing with ourselves? When asked which activities “are very important to you at this stage of your life,” here is how we responded:

- Physical exercise 71%
- Educational activities 70%
- Social activities 62%
- Cultural activities 61%
- Volunteer activities 50%
- Hobbies 45%
- Artistic activities 31%

One-fourth of respondents listed other “very important” pursuits. Several mentioned family activities, ranging from caring for ailing family members to spending time with grandchildren. Other mentions included “cattle ranch,” “political protest,” “working on a family history,” “teaching ballroom dancing,” “spiritual growth,” “solving problems,” “camping and fishing,” “bird watching,” “social justice philanthropy,” “spiritual path,” “canine rescue” and “changing the world.”

We are also “very active” in several kinds of organizations, somewhat more so now that more of us are retired. Here are the findings, compared to five years ago:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% who participate(d)</th>
<th>Now</th>
<th>At our 45th</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charitable or civic organization</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church or religious organization</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local or community group</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special interest group</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts organization</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service organization</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business or professional society</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political party</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appointed or elected gov’t office</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>not asked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor union</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We are particularly more likely to be very active in charitable or civic organizations, political parties and local or community groups than we were five years ago.

When asked to list other organizations in which we are “very active,” a couple of people mentioned environmental groups. Other mentions included “left-wing groups,” Sons of Norway, university as professor emerita, spiritual (yoga and meditation) groups, health clubs, Peace Corps, public library, foundation, museum, nonprofit organization, and Carleton volunteer work. One classmate commented, “I don’t do groups.”

We are more likely to say we have done several things in support of a cause than we were 25 years ago. These include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Now</th>
<th>At our 25th</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actively supported with volunteer time</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributed significant financial support</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marched, picketed or protested</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The two-thirds of us who have done something in support of a cause within the last five years were asked to say what we had done. Most mentioned giving time and/or money. Several mentioned a wide variety of specific causes, including prolife Republican candidates, worked to defeat a restrictive marriage amendment, Planned Parenthood, ACLU, protested against the N.D. governor signing anti-abortion bills, demonstrated against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and in support of immigration rights, active work in Haiti, railroad passenger organizations, scholarships for women, polio eradication, marched for universal health care, worked for Obama, environment, judicial independence, United Methodist Missions, hospice volunteering, local peace groups, Occupy Tacoma, international development projects, childhood enrichment programs, NRA, Nature Conservancy, National Trust for Historic Preservation, League of Women Voters, neighborhood redevelopment, and women’s education.
The Class of ’64 and the World

Contrary to the conventional wisdom that people become more conservative as they grow older, we have done just the opposite. More than three-fourths of us (78%) describe ourselves as liberal or radical, the same as five years ago and up considerably from the 64 percent who gave that answer at our 25th. In all three surveys, slightly more than half of us said we were liberal or radical when we were at Carleton.

Seven in 10 of us say we are Democrats now, the same as five years ago and up from 55 percent at our 25th. Those who say they affiliate with some other political party were asked to specify. The answers included socialist, “a dismayed Democrat,” “am a Democrat for want of a more radical viable choice,” left of the Democrats, revolutionary socialist, Canadian left independent, strong conservative, “wishing we had a strong third party,” “pretty disgusted with both parties,” “Democrat as a lesser evil,” and “socially liberal and economically conservative—a citizen without a party.” Not surprisingly, 8 in 10 of us said we voted for Obama.

Asked to choose from a list which are “the central issues facing the United States and its leaders,” here is what we chose:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environment issues</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic issues</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic and social issues</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-nuclear war/international terrorism</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear war/proliferation</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steady erosion of other governments</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The proportion who cited economic issues shot up to 81% five years ago and is now back to the same proportion as in the 25th reunion survey. The proportion citing environment issues is down about 10 points from the two previous surveys. For comparison purposes, the list has stayed the same for the past 25 years even though other important issues have emerged.
Not surprisingly, thirty-six classmates added other “central issues.” The most often mentioned of these were climate change, income disparity, moral issues, and educational decline. Respondents also wrote in “big business, big money, big greed,” erosion of civil liberties and freedom of the press, anonymous methods of war, dismantling of public education, private prisons, population decline, robotics and consequent unemployment, breakdown of our political system, continued trend toward oligarchy, fundamentalism and rigid thinking, energy, intolerance of differences, technology constantly outstripping social structures, gridlock of national government, immigration, water, “the creation of a large entitlement class that is incapable of work because of lack of motivation and/or ability,” and “U.S. propensity to go to war.”

The Class of ’64 and Carleton

Our attachment to Carleton, already strong, appears to be getting even stronger. More than 8 in 10 of us now would go to Carleton if we had to do it again, compared to three-fourths five years ago and less than two-thirds at our 25th. Here are the results:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If you had to do it again, would you…..</th>
<th>50th</th>
<th>45th</th>
<th>25th</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Go to Carleton?</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do the same graduate education?</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take the same first job?</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have the same (or most recent) job?</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We are also somewhat more likely than five years ago to say that our careers benefitted from having attended Carleton—50 percent now, compared to 43 percent five years ago. We are a little less likely than five or 25 years ago to say we have a great deal of interest in Carleton and its future—15 percent now, 21 percent five years ago and 20 percent at our 25th. However, in each instance, about six in 10 of us professed either a great deal or a moderate amount of interest in Carleton. Half of us now believe that Carleton is better now than it was in our time, a proportion that has not changed in the last five years. However, that’s up from one-third in our 25th reunion survey.
More than half of us (56%) keep in touch with people we knew at Carleton more than once a year and only 5 percent said we never do. Nearly half (46%) of those who responded have attended at least one mini-reunion.

We have stayed remarkably consistent in how we feel our experiences at Carleton helped us. The rank-order of responses has stayed almost exactly the same in all three surveys. Here are the rankings in the current survey, as well as the average rating on a scale of 1 to 3, where higher is better:

1. Background and preparation for further education 2.68
2. Increased critical thinking skills 2.65
3. Ability to think and act independently 2.37
4. Understanding of your own abilities and limitations 2.33
5. Development of self-confidence 2.14
6. Experience and skill in relating to other people 2.08
7. Clarification of moral perspectives 2.06
8. Choosing life goals 1.90
9. Development of leadership abilities 1.86
The “blue book” questions: Carleton, liberal arts and liberal politics

In addition to all of the multiple-choice questions, respondents were given the option of writing answers to questions dealing with their opinions of present-day Carleton, their thoughts about the future of liberal arts and their speculation as to why our class has become more politically liberal.

Opinions of Carleton

Classmates were asked: From what you know of Carleton today, what do you particularly like? What do you think should be changed? Ninety-nine of the 203 respondents answered this question. However, of these, one-fourth said they did not know enough about present-day Carleton to answer the question.

Those who did write answers had plenty to say, both in terms of what they like and what should be changed.

What they like:

- **Outstanding students:** “The students are still brilliant, if not more so.” “I enjoy the stories in the alumni magazine. These accounts make the kids sound creative, involved, very approachable and appealing.” “Love the sense of humor and high jinx.” “I like the camaraderie of bright, open-minded young people learning form the professors and from each other.” “It’s still a school where bright, caring people get to interact and grow a great deal.”

- **Continuing high academic standards:** “Carleton continues its long tradition of honing thinking skills.” “I particularly like the excellent teachers.”

- **More diversity:** (Note: There was no need to include a race question in our survey.) “I particularly like seeing the diversity of the students and the independence with which they approach their experience at Carleton.”

- **More international studies:** “I like the broader approach to education, including foreign study.” “Opportunities for international learning are important.”

- **Broader curriculum:** “There’s more of a push toward interdisciplinary studies, which is a good thing.”
• **Carleton is not as insular:** “It seems that students are more actively engaged in ‘the outside world’ than when I was there.”

• **Students have more freedom:** “Students are treated more as adults, no more ‘in loco parentis,’ special rules for women etc.” “More freedom, such as no more Sunday convocation, co-ed dorms…”

• **More emphasis on creativity:** “I like the availability of so many creative outlets in and out of the classroom.” “I am pleased that creativity and intellectual curiosity continues to be encouraged and that there are even more opportunities to exercise them than when we were students.” “It’s much more supportive of the arts than I remember, certainly in terms of facilities.”

**What classmates think should be changed:**

• **Carleton costs too much:** “I am concerned that fewer middle class children will be able to take advantage of the excellent experience.” “Tuition is too high; too much emphasis on non-critical areas of education and too high administrative costs.”

• **Carleton is too politically correct:** “I think it is going too far afield in gender and race emphasis. That is taking care of itself in society as a whole. Carleton should have a first rate education, not amorphous ‘feel good’ classes.” “There’s too much emphasis on outward show of diversity and political correctness and not enough on the real thing.” Carleton is too liberal: “There’s more racial diversity now, but less intellectual diversity. There is almost no discernable conservative thought among students or faculty.” “There should be more political balance among staff. It’s too one-sided.” “Too liberal”

• **The speech code should be abolished:** “I would love to see less political correctness and an end to the speech code”

• **Carleton should offer more job preparation:** “Students should be able to get a good job when they graduate and move ahead in whatever field they find interesting.” “Not enough real life and job preparation.”

• **Carleton education has gotten too diffuse:** “Perhaps the core curriculum has gotten too diffuse. We need to study new fields, but general survey courses in some departments have disappeared—to the detriment of liberal study.” “The course offerings in the areas of interest to me then and now have increased in
number and scope tremendously. I worry, however, that this may allow students
to over-specialize too early and miss the broad grounding that I think Carleton
offered when we were there.”

- Carleton may have gone too far in not providing training in civility. “Somehow,
students need instruction in old-fashioned civility—everything from table
manners and thank you notes to being sensitive to different norms of dress and
deportment in different places. Those who have learned civility either at home
or by instinct have a huge advantage over their less-socialized classmates.”

- Students are too pampered: “Students are pampered. It’s a boutique school.”
“I dislike that so much money has been spent on PE and recreation buildings.”

- Carleton has become too trendy: “I think it’s gotten a bit trendy in both staffing
and curriculum.” “I think over the years that Carleton has permitted students to
major in some faddish fields of study that, while intellectually interesting, may
not lead to careers in which they can actually financially support themselves.”

- Carleton needs more diversity in the president’s office: “It has always bothered
me that all Carleton presidents have been white males, mostly from the business
world or from pol sci and the like, and it doesn’t appear that other types of
people have been considered.”

- It would be hard to summarize such diverse opinions, but this quotation offers
at least a partial summary: “Carleton is more diverse and accessible, and it
offers many more experiences beyond the Ivory Tower. The world of the four-
year residential college experience will have to adapt to the changing needs of
society.”

**Relevance of a liberal arts education**

Classmates were asked: Do you think a liberal arts education will continue to be relevant
in the future? Why or why not? One-hundred forty-five of the 203 respondents replied to
this question.

As might be expected, our classmates strongly endorsed the ongoing value of a liberal arts
education. The reason cited most often was that a broad background helps people adapt to
change. Classmates also said that people need balance in their education, that they need communication skills, that a liberal arts education fosters critical thinking, that it follows a long and important tradition, that it provides people with a common framework to address issues and that it helps build a civil society. The few who had doubts about the future of liberal arts tended to cite high costs and perceived irrelevance.

The main reason people gave for the value of a liberal arts education is that a broad base of knowledge helps people adjust to a rapidly changing world. Here are some of our classmates’ comments on that point:

“The world changes too fast to have a technical education stay relevant. Learning how to think is more important.”

“Technology is changing faster than education can. A liberal education will help a person keep up better, be able to learn fast, and be able to switch gears better. A ‘specific’ education will be obsolete by the time you ‘graduate.’”

“There’s every reason to believe that life in the future will be more complex. A liberal education, with its exposure to many disciplines, is the best way to meet the future, understand it, and perhaps change it.”

“It is always relevant in terms of writing and critical thinking skills. In my experience, a broad liberal arts education gives you both personal and professional perspectives and flexibility that the current focus on ‘job skills only’ cannot.”

“The curriculum was a foundation for almost anything I have been interested in since graduation.”

“The ideas and approaches that have been the most valuable in professional development are far broader than those learned in a narrowly focused period of training. It has been sad to see so many smart and technically gifted individuals fail to be skeptical. Rather than being challenged by inconsistent ideas or data, they often discount or ignore it. I think I learned as much in challenging conversations with other students as in class. The process of defining and defending is far harder and far more valuable than memorizing and repeating.”
In addition to the value of a broad background, another frequent theme was the value of developing communication skills. As one classmate put it, “In a time when there is so much polarization and so many loud voices—often spewing lies or half-truths—in the public sphere, a liberal education is more important than ever in developing individuals who can think critically and express themselves articulately.”

The need to foster critical thinking was another common theme in the responses. One classmate said, “People who lack the ability to value anything end up as concentration camp guards or accountants who would sell their mothers to make a dime. So if we want to avoid concentration camp guard mentality, we’d better understand the value of a liberal arts education…To my mind it is important to get a critical mass of students exposed to the same curriculum so that they can talk to each other within a common framework and deal in the adult world with that framework as a resource. This does not mean they will think the same way. It does mean they might be aware of questions that need answering and have some sense that other equally competent people in the past have answered them—for good or bad.”

Another classmate commented, “I hope liberal arts will be relevant because it provides a foundation for lifelong learning and hopefully opens the mind to other points of view. I am not optimistic that this will be as relevant in the future because it is too easy and comfortable for people to educate themselves through media and other sources that reinforce a point of view rather than provide the opportunity to examine issues critically and evenhandedly.”

Other classmates were less optimistic. They often expressed hope that the liberal arts education has a future but worry that it will cost too much or be considered irrelevant. Here are some comments along those lines:

“A liberal arts education will be relevant but available to fewer and fewer people, regrettably, unless there are some dramatic changes in our economic and social structure.”

“There probably will be few liberal arts colleges because students feel so much pressure to prepare for work in a specific field. The economy, too few jobs, people being replaced by computers, and continued discrimination make attending a liberal arts school a luxury of time and broad learning few can afford. What a loss!”
“I worry that liberal arts education will become a luxury only available to the wealthy and thus irrelevant for most students because of unaffordability.”

“I think the rest of our nation devalues liberal arts as not being career relevant and therefore not worth pursuing. This will be a long term mistake for the nation.”

“I worry about the trend to devalue education that does not lead directly to marketable skills.”

“I have real fears about alternative online versions of education that are cheaper. They could replace the four year liberal arts college in a big hurry. That would be tragic.”

It’s difficult to choose a quotation that best sums up the opinions of our class about a liberal arts education, but this one is at least a candidate: “A liberal arts education exposes individuals to a spectrum of ways of doing, thinking and knowing. Experience with and exposure to these different approaches and perspectives will support the development of knowledge and skills to help current and future students adapt to a complex and changing world.”

**Our class and political liberalism**

Classmates were asked to respond to the following: The results of our 45th reunion survey showed that people in our class tend to be politically liberal and also that they have become more liberal over the years. Why do you think that is the case?

Since most of our class professes to be liberal, most of the comments, not surprisingly had a positive tone. A few were very negative, however. Among the more positive reasons:

- **The broad perspective we gained from Carleton leads to liberalism:** “As people age and grow, many become able to see beyond their own personal sphere, especially as their experiences broaden, many see the need for systemic change.” “People who learned to read and think critically and to care about people/causes beyond themselves will become increasingly aware of injustices that need remedying at a
societal level.” “I hope people have become more liberal because they continue to educate themselves and to see the bigger picture.”

- **Unlike the conventional wisdom about older people being more conservative, our class has aged naturally into increased liberalism:** “As we age we are more concerned about giving back and that is somewhat liberal.” “I think Carleton taught us to give back to our community, and at this stage in our life we have more time to do it. This often involves helping the less fortunate.” “I think of it as a natural consequence of the experiences we’ve had over the years. If you are skeptical, acceptance is not merely liking what someone says but agreeing with what they do. I presume that more in the class have found the extremely conservative positions and obfuscation on the far right even less tolerable than comes from the opposite side.” “A lot of us small Midwestern town-origin class members have been exposed to a whole lot of diversity since Carleton and learned from it by applying those critical thinking skills.” “Because we got smarter (and less convinced of our own brilliance) as we aged.”

- **Liberalism is more consistent with our moral values:** “I believe liberals tend to be more open-minded. I think Carleton graduates are usually not rigid, having an evolved set of moral values that include embracing and trying to better the many, not the few. But I’d be surprised if this position is specific to our class.”

- **We matured at a time of turmoil and became more liberal partly as a result:** “We have seen our political system become more fractured. The national sense of unity that was carried by our parents, who experienced the Great Depression and/or WWII, has been lost. We have seen rising inequality in our economic system and in our choices for where to live. We were not educated to see our lives in narrow vocational terms. With our education and in the turmoil of the decade after we graduated—civil rights, Vietnam, women’s rights—we were able to put our critical thinking skills into use as American society evolved to embrace a more pluralistic world and pluralistic country.” “We were in high school during the Eisenhower years, and we were pretty insulated from the outside world at Carleton. Starting with the influence of JFK, the civil rights movement and then the Vietnam War, we became more aware of what was really going on in our country and world. In the past few years, it has become apparent how little power most people have in this
country and how much more we need to do. The liberal ‘answers’ to these concerns just seem to make more sense and to be more morally defensible than the ‘answers’ of the conservatives.” “We were at Carleton at a transition point in the history of the country, from self-satisfied, conservative, white middle class 1950s to a period of heightened concern about war, racial injustice, the environment and economic inequality. Coming from our backgrounds, how could we not have become more liberal?”

- **Being open to new ideas leads to liberalism:** “The more you learn, the more you consider alternatives. Conservative philosophy emphasizes fixed beliefs. Liberal education promotes empathy and questioning of the status quo.” “If one of the characteristics of liberals is to be open to new ideas and accepting of new insights, then the fact that we were taught to receive and act on new information would explain some of our liberalism. We have also a respect for facts (I’m thinking specifically of liberal vs. conservative reactions to global warming, the theory of evolution, etc.). We have a certain sympathy for other human beings and can empathize with their problems (gay rights, other discrimination) as a result of our reading literature. We combine historical perspective with current understanding (e.g. the world of the militia as described by the 2nd Amendment is not the world of the militia today) and filter important truths through a contemporary lens.” “I think Carls are engaged people and have the skills to go beyond ‘news bites.’ If you believe that human beings need to take care of each other better, it’s not hard to get more liberal.”

- **People in our class can afford to be liberal:** “Most are financially secure enough to want to provide for those who are less fortunate. Idealism persists.” “Most of us came from relatively privileged backgrounds. As we have accumulated experience and wisdom we have achieved awareness of how privileged we are, how unmerited much of that privilege is, and how much we are obligated to share with others. This is a definition of politically liberal folks.”

- **Conservatives have gone too far:** “The economic, cultural and political polarization of our society have not left much middle ground. When forced to choose, we move to the left.” “(We have become more liberal) because the conservative arena increasingly does a poor job of providing an alternative to liberalism now that
Republicanism has been invaded by anti-science, pro-hate social groups. The bar for liberalism has become lower, so it takes less progressive thought to experience oneself as comparatively liberal.”

- The careers of many of us may have led us in a liberal direction: “A lot of us probably had careers that tended to make us more liberal, such as in academia or in a service occupation, such as medicine. Also, probably not many of us would feel threatened either personally or financially by holding liberal views.”

- In many ways, the negative comments about our class becoming more liberal were a kind of flip side to these more positive views.

- Liberals control schools and universities and suppress conservative thought: “Ever since liberals got control of schools and universities, they have systematically been squeezing out conservative representation, which makes it much easier to be a liberal. Liberals generally have honorable intentions but seldom produce measurable results. Compare the relative fiscal health of liberal controlled vs. conservative controlled states. Same with major U.S. cities. What happens when there is no longer enough money to support the big liberal spending program? Greece, Spain, Italy, France etc. We are headed down that path.” “The colleges promote only liberal thinking. Conservative ideas are shunned or mocked. TV/media supports this position as well. There is no balance presented. Both sides have important ideas. Liberals are not as open-minded as they think. Check out the laughter when Dave Letterman lists his top 10. For many, many years, it was all George Bush jokes. There is much to laugh at about Obama, but no one will do it, and no one will laugh.”

- There was social pressure at Carleton to be liberal: “There was sarcastic social pressure to be liberal in our class when we were at school. It was not the more tolerant group I have ever met.” “(We have become more liberal) because Carleton has hired so many liberal teachers and has caved in to students’ demands—starting way back with Paul Wellstone.”

- Being liberal serves many people’s self-interest: “I suspect the increased liberalism correlates highly with public employment and regular reading of the New York Times.” “Public employees know that Democrats butter their bread.”
• Many of our classmates have been continually socialized to be liberal: “They find themselves in academic environments where it is politically correct to be liberal.” “Read the New York Times and you see these unstated premises: 1. White men hold everyone back. 2. People who won’t/don’t work have the same right to the same income as people who do work. 3. All problems of black and Mexican poverty culture are the result of white racism. 4. Do what the NYT says and the world will be a kind and gentle place. 5. Because these goals are lofty, the Democratic Party can do no wrong. 6. Amnesia about past failures of their world view is complete.”

After all of those contrasting views, let’s end on this quote: “This country and the world in general, have become less inclusive at the same time that political and economic diversity has increased. However, there is a problem—the lack of knowledge about, understanding of, and intolerance toward the many points of view in the world today that are not our own. This promotes isolationist points of view, based on input mostly from those who are ‘like us.’ Maybe our class, with a great liberal arts education, is able to think more broadly and with an open mind about issues and about concerns across society as a whole. Economic issues (including equality of opportunity), environmental issues, healthcare issues, and safety issues all need to be inclusively addressed if the future of all of our children’s children is to be robust and rewarding.”