



# Young Alumni Survey Study

Citizens Advisory Committee

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## Study Objectives

1. Determine Wyoming graduates' preparedness for college, careers, technical training, employment, or the military.
2. Determine common themes evident from results of a graduate follow-up study of the Classes of 2014 through 2019.

## Methodology

A draft survey was created based on questions from a similar survey used by Madeira schools. Other questions came from school board members, administrators, high school staff, and parents. The survey was created in Google, and once adequate anonymity could be insured, the questions were pilot tested with the current senior class at Wyoming High School. The results from the current seniors were evaluated, and survey questions were further refined and sent to alumni from the last six graduating classes via the Wyoming Alumni Association's list of member email addresses, as well as alumni social media pages. A reminder message was sent 10 days later, and participants were urged to send the survey to other classmates. Respondents were assured of the anonymity of their survey answers. The survey was sent to 689 former students, and enrollment records indicate that 963 students have graduated since 2014.

Survey questions covered a wide range of topics from preparedness in specific curricular areas to perceptions of social-emotional support. Questions asked respondents to rate their views and experiences on a five point scale. All questions were followed by open-ended queries asking for additional thoughts and comments. Mean scores were calculated for all numeric scale questions (see appendix), and open-ended questions were summarized for content.

## Findings

Demographics: Of the 689 former students who received the survey, 69 alumni responded (45 female, 22 male, 2 nonbinary.) The vast majority of alumni who participated in the survey noted their racial background as white. Six participants described their ethnicity as non-white, including designations of African-American, Asian, and mixed. It was not statistically possible to make comparisons between white and nonwhite students,

therefore, open ended responses from nonwhite graduates were highlighted and considered wherever possible in summarizing survey results.

Notably, graduates from the earliest class, 2014, had the highest response rate. Among the other classes, rates of response were fairly similar to one another.

93% of survey participants indicated that they had taken at least some Honors or AP classes in high school. None of the respondents attended Scarlet Oaks or took vocational training. Thus it is important to note that our sample of former students is skewed towards the AP/Honors track.

Young alumni are currently in various stages of career development:

- Working on undergraduate degree: 60%
- Working on graduate degree: 7%
- Working in chosen career: 35%
- In career other than program studied: 4%
- Military: 0%
- Seeking employment: 7%

Analysis of rating scale questions and open ended responses: Graduates' responses to the survey reflect varying views of *Curriculum, Course Selection and Scheduling* and students' *Social/Emotional Experiences* during their time at Wyoming High School

**Curriculum:** Alumni perspectives on instruction in specific subjects varied notably by content area. Overall, a large percentage of students agreed that "Wyoming High School prepared me well for my post high school education and/or career" based on rating scale scores. Within specific subject areas, graduates rated their preparedness in math, social studies, English, written communication, oral communication, problem solving skills, creativity, and speaking confidently in groups with the highest scores (see appendix for graduates' mean scores in each subject area).

Over half of students surveyed were compelled to include additional comments on college/career preparedness and what they valued most about their Wyoming education. Frequent comments about these curriculum areas and valuable experiences included remarks such as:

“I am so proud of where I came from”

“I didn’t realize how great of an education I got until I experienced college”

“knowing how to work hard and seek help; feeling very prepared for college”

“(valued) opportunities for leadership”

“appreciated learning with top peers”

“BC Calculus and AP Statistics prepared me well for engineering (studies.)”

“well prepared in math”

“better prepared in English, History, Government than college peers”

“well prepared compared to college peers in writing”

Alumni rated their preparedness in research and analysis, group project work, technology, and world languages as slightly lower in quality. The curriculum area in which former students felt the least prepared was science (see appendix for mean scores). Specific remarks about science and technology instruction included the following types of comments:

“limited engineering curriculum compared to college peers”

“not enough scientific writing”

“more projects and less time spent preparing for standardized tests”

There were more comments related to these scores when alumni were asked “What types of resources, library facilities, or technology do you use now, or did you use in college, that you would have benefitted from in high school?” A large portion of former students specifically noted the need for access to scientific databases and academic journal articles. An even larger group of students specifically pointed to a need to learn Excel for a variety of data management purposes. Again, over half the respondents wrote detailed recommendations about how they could have been better prepared in scientific research and technology:

“more use of scientific data bases for research; more scientific and technical writing experience”

“writing real lab reports and understanding what a scientific abstract looks like would be very useful”

“maybe an intro to research class – or a way to teach that there are different scientific methodologies”

“perhaps an intuitive visualization software, like Tableau”

“software packages like MATLAB and R, or learning a coding language like these would have put me ahead in college”

“I was behind my peers in (computer) coding – would have been good to have an intro to micro controllers and simple coding in science classes”

“more coding languages, robotics, machine tools – I lag behind my college peers”

“need data analysis and more computer science”

**Course selection and scheduling:** When asked about satisfaction with the variety of course options at Wyoming High School, former students generally responded quite highly. However, they qualified their responses with a wide range of comments about scheduling flexibility, guidance department resources, and pressure to enroll in too many AP courses:

“need more electives”

“missed out on too many classes because of schedule conflicts”

“felt like I should take hard classes but that didn’t help me find my career interests”

“poor flexibility led to too many AP classes senior year (7)”

“class choices were limited – felt like white students were more encouraged to take AP courses”

“too much pressure to take AP and Honors courses”

“scheduling was very difficult – guidance department help was inconsistent”

“I would have liked the guidance department to be more involved in checking how my interests were evolving”

Students’ very lowest curriculum rating scores occurred when asked if they agreed that “There were enough opportunities for student input and feedback at Wyoming High School.” (See appendix for mean score.) Open comment responses repeatedly reflected the theme of:

“I don’t feel the school wanted to have any student feedback while we were students at WHS”

***Social/Emotional Experiences:*** A large number of survey questions were designed to assess former students' personal views of nonacademic aspects of their time at Wyoming High School. Encouragingly, the question that alumni responded to more favorably than all others was "At least one adult at WHS cared about my growth and development." Students were also asked to elaborate on what they valued most about their high school education, as well as what they would have changed about their high school experience. In their own words, students expressed a spectrum of views:

"(teachers) were passionate, phenomenal, dedicated, excellent, going out of their way to be supportive, caring"

"the close relationship with teachers who seemed by committed to helping me learn"

"teachers who really have passion for their work"

"people genuinely cherish one another and the community wants to see students live whole and flourishing lives"

"lifelong friendships, depth of relationships"

Also, students had very strong feelings about what they would have changed within their high school experience:

"would have liked more opportunities to incorporate community service/outside projects into the curriculum"

"more real life experiences"

"a kinder environment"

"prioritize my sleep and happiness... would have taken more art classes"

"I didn't value social bonds and development as much as I should have"

"more focus on 'skills for the future' – understanding and application rather than knowledge"

There was more of a mixed response when participants were asked if “the learning environment was safe for students of all ethnicities, gender identifications, sexual orientations, or abilities.” Similarly there were slightly lower scores in response to “my experiences at WHS prepared me to interact with people of a variety of ethnicities, orientations, and abilities.”

Regarding social interactions, alumni gave the very lowest scores to the question about “My experience at WHS helped develop my cultural awareness.” And when asked about their emotional health needs, students gave similarly poor ratings of “adequate resources and support for my emotional health needs.” (See appendix for mean scores.)

There tended to be a great deal of overlap between the open ended comments about emotional and social experiences at Wyoming High school. Both white and nonwhite students expressed a strong wish for more discussions and experiences that would lead to better cultural awareness. Alumni gave examples of racism and bullying that they experienced. There were several painful recollections of negative experiences:

“I personally witnessed racism, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination both by students and teachers”

“my friends were in the LGBTQ group and almost none of them felt safe at school”

“there weren’t a lot of opportunities to learn about different cultures”

“cultural awareness was not something even touched on in class or through experiences at WHS”

“people were mostly friendly but... (as an immigrant student) I felt it was difficult to be understood by my peers and teachers at times”

“wanted more diversity, understanding of people different than myself and the often homogenous Wyoming Community”

“emotional health issues caused my grades to decline at the end high school, and no one reached out to ask what had happened”

## **Summary and Recommendations**

### **KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION STEPS:**

Wyoming's young alumni report that they are generally well prepared for college and their careers, and that they are particularly satisfied with their instruction in math, social studies, English, oral communication and written communication. Former students felt that improvements in science, technology, and research instruction would most benefit future students. Difficulties in flexible course scheduling and the pressure to enroll in too many AP courses were also noted.

Furthermore, the vast majority of students strongly felt that high school staff truly cared about them. However, they noted a lack of cultural awareness and experiences that would increase students' understanding of people who were different than themselves. Finally, alumni expressed the need for more support of students' emotional health needs, as well as more opportunities for student input and feedback in the educational process.

Based on these survey findings, Wyoming High School might consider the following:

1. Continue offering a variety of non-AP course offerings
2. Incorporate more opportunities for scientific research and scientific writing into coursework
3. Offer more computer science and coding course options
4. Provide instruction in data analysis tools (such as Excel) and scientific database searching
5. Determine if there are paths to provide more flexibility in students' class scheduling and perhaps share feedback about scheduling and AP course concerns with guidance department personnel
6. Explore opportunities for increased cultural awareness and cultural exposure among both students and staff
7. Consider an increased focus on helping students balance academic achievement while managing stress and emotional health
8. Develop both formal and informal methods of seeking student feedback on both coursework and nonacademic experiences

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ONGOING GRADUATE FEEDBACK:

A good portion of Wyoming's alumni appeared eager to participate in this survey and provide feedback about their high school experiences and their preparedness for future endeavors. It is strongly recommended that the district make plans for collecting similar data from former students in the future. A number of measures would ensure robust response to a survey and would allow for analysis of changes in student perspectives over time.

9. Increase participation by nonwhite students in the survey process. Possible options might include identifying senior nonwhite students in leadership roles (for example, student council, teams, Brothers & Sisters United) to contribute input to future surveys, as well collaborate in seeking a variety of alumni to participate in future surveys
10. Utilize input from high school administrators and staff for determining important topics to cover in future surveys
11. Include the current questions in future surveys so that longitudinal comparisons could be made
12. Designate a location for storing the raw data from this current survey, which could be used to make comparisons to future survey data
13. Designate a staff member to collect future data at regular, but not necessarily yearly, intervals. Contacting former students two-three years after graduation and then five-six years after would allow for a range of perspectives on student preparedness and experiences without creating questionnaire fatigue
14. Establish a formal process for collecting students' email contact information upon graduation in order to increase participation in future surveys

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