Calderwood Seminars in Public Writing: Student Perspectives

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**I. Introduction**

As part of the evaluation of the Calderwood Seminars in Public Writing (CSPW) program, this report examines students’ perspectives on their seminar experience. The primary source of information is a survey of alumnae from the classes of 2014 and 2015 who completed a Calderwood Seminar in the first two years of the program. Additional information is from the annual Senior Survey administered by Wellesley College’s Office of Institutional Research (OIR). This survey includes several questions specifically for students who participated in a Calderwood Seminar.

The basic findings of this report are as follows:

* More than 8 out of 10 alumnae who completed a Calderwood Seminar rated it as among the best three courses taken at Wellesley.
* Students enroll in Calderwood Seminars to improve their writing and to work on public writing, skills they perceive as valuable after college.
* After completing a Calderwood Seminar, students recognize these courses as focusing on their writing but also as improving their understanding of their major field of study.
* Alumnae overwhelmingly identify Calderwood Seminars as courses where they felt intellectually engaged and where they learned to give and receive feedback from their peers, especially in comparison to other courses taken at the college.
* Many of the skills emphasized in Calderwood Seminars are the same skills the program’s alumnae find as very important to their activities one and two years after college.

**II. Data**

*A. The Alumnae Survey*

An online survey (via Survey Monkey) was sent to the 133 graduates of 2014 and 2015 who completed one of the 18 Calderwood Seminars offered in the program’s first two years. Fourteen of these alumnae took two Calderwood Seminars, resulting in 147 invitations. Eighty-four alumnae replied for a response rate of 57%. This response is comparable to other recent alumnae surveys administered by Wellesley College’s OIR. Surveys of Wellesley alumnae one year after graduation yielded response rates of 56-58% for the classes of 2011, 2012 and 2013.

Our Alumnae Survey (Appendix I) includes 11 close-ended questions and one open-ended question – “Is there anything more you would like to say about your experience taking this Calderwood Seminar?” – that allowed students to respond in their own words. In designing the survey, we received helpful comments from OIR and from several faculty who teach Calderwood Seminars. We pre-tested the survey by sending it to 23 students who took Economic Journalism, a precursor to the Calderwood Seminar course offered in the economics department, in 2011 and 2013. We revised some of the questions based on the feedback we received.

We surveyed program alumnae rather than current students for several reasons. First, we were interested in what CSPW alumnae think of their seminars one to two years after graduation. We also wanted to explore what relevance, if any, the skills learned in Calderwood Seminars have had to the post-college work and other experiences of recent graduates. Second, we did not want to duplicate surveys already being undertaken. Wellesley students complete course evaluation questionnaires (SEQs) at the end of each semester and seniors are asked to complete the Senior Survey shortly before graduation. By focusing on recent program alumnae we were hoping to reduce “survey fatigue,” and the low response rate that follows from it, had we surveyed current students.

Table 1 reports the response rate by seminar in our Alumnae Survey. There is considerable variation in the response rate by seminar, from 0% (no responses) in one seminar to 75% or higher in three seminars. Note that the number of eligible responses varies by seminar because: (a) several seminars were offered in both academic years covered by the survey with a maximum enrollment of 24 while others were offered only once in the two years with a maximum enrollment of 12; (b) some seminars enrolled more students each semester, mostly because they are offered in departments with a large number of majors; and (c) some seminars enrolled juniors (and even a few sophomores) who were not members of our target population (i.e., students in the classes of 2014 and 2015). While not strictly proportional to the enrollment in each seminar, we believe the responses offer good coverage of the entire program. In Appendix II, we examine in more detail the potential response bias in our sample.

*B. The Senior Survey*

Wellesley’s OIR conducts an annual on-line survey of seniors prior to graduation. In 2014, the first year of the Calderwood program, nine questions were added to the Senior Survey. Four questions were directed at all students (e.g., Did you take a Calderwood Seminar in Public Writing?) and the other five were asked only of those seniors who had taken a CSPW. The total number of questions fell to four in 2015. In 2016, the survey reinstated all but one of the questions from the 2014 survey plus one new question.

Table 2 presents the overall response rates to the Senior Surveys in each of the three years and for the subset of students (50-60 seniors per year) who had taken a CSPW. With the exception of 2015 when the survey response rate among Calderwood seniors was significantly greater than the overall response rate (81% vs. 63%), the two response rates have been quite similar: 75% and 78% in 2014, 64% and 62% in 2016.

**III. Findings**

If there is a bottom line from the surveys, it is that students express a high degree of satisfaction about their Calderwood Seminar experience. Question 6 of the Alumnae Survey asks, “Overall, how would you compare this Calderwood Seminar to other courses you took at Wellesley?” As reported in Table 3, 9% said it was the “Best course taken” and 76% rated their CSPW as “Among the 3 best courses.” We find this level of enthusiasm among recent alumnae strong endorsement for the program.

*This Calderwood Seminar was one of the best courses I took at Wellesley, and I wish I had the opportunity to take more Calderwood courses. It challenged me intellectually and helped me improve both my writing skills and ability to synthesize information. These skills are valuable no matter what major students are in and their future career paths. This course also gave me an opportunity to work with students in various other major that I may have never met otherwise.[[1]](#footnote-1) [Writing 390]*

The 2014 Senior Survey provides evidence of similar enthusiasm. Students who completed a Calderwood Survey were asked, “Would you recommend taking a Calderwood Seminar to current students?”[[2]](#footnote-2) The strongest possible endorsement of the course was “Definitely” with 75% of responses in this category; another 17% responded with the second highest endorsement “Probably.” Only 6% (3 students) responded, “Probably not.”

In order to understand why program alumnae and seniors have such a favorable opinion about their Calderwood Seminar experience, we can examine why students enrolled in these courses and what they got out of them.

*A. Why do students select Calderwood Seminars?*

Questions 3 and 4 of the Alumnae Survey offer students a list of factors that might have influenced their decision to enroll in a CSPW. Tables 4 and 5 present the results. A desire to improve their writing and an interest in public writing – skills perceived to have value in the work place or future schooling – dominated the responses.

*I wanted to learn how to write for the public about science, specifically, because there are not enough scientists who are able to communicate outside of their own fields.*

*[Biological Sciences 340]*

About one out of every two Calderwood alumnae responded that taking “a class with this professor” was *very* relevant in their decision. This may reflect the group of faculty who chose to develop Calderwood Seminars, many of whom have strong reputations as teachers. But with only 12% of respondents citing the professor as the *most* relevant factor in enrolling, the primary factor remains the students’ desire to work on their writing skills.

Recommendations to take a Calderwood Seminar either by a professor or another student also played a minor role. This may be because the program is relatively new. A question in the Senior Survey indicated that awareness of the program grew considerably between its first and third years. In the 2014 Senior Survey only 39% of Wellesley College seniors were aware of the program. By 2016, 69% were.

When asked if they enrolled in a Calderwood Seminar “hoping to gain a deeper understanding of my major,” only 10% of program alumnae cited this as the most relevant factor. However, these former students found their seminars to have focused not only on their writing but on their disciplines as well.

We asked both course alumnae and the faculty who taught them to describe the emphasis of their Calderwood Seminars. Table 6 reports the results. The vast majority of both alumnae (90%) and faculty (92%) rated the emphasis of their Calderwood Seminars to be either "50% writing/50% knowledge of field" or "75% writing/25% knowledge of field." Overall, the mean faculty assessment of relevant emphasis was 60% writing and 40% knowledge of the field. Among students, the mean assessment was almost exactly the same: 59% writing and 41% knowledge of the field.

In comparison to seminars in the social sciences (Economics 335, Environmental Studies 399, Political Science 319, *etc*.) or courses with largely social science content (Writing 390), Calderwood seminars in the humanities were seen by alumnae as more focused on writing. In Table 7, the three courses that alumnae rated as having the highest average writing emphasis were all in the humanities: Comparative Literature 359, Music 301, and English 390. Students in these three courses viewed them as having more than a 70% emphasis on writing. Faculty in the humanities were also more likely to place more of an emphasis on writing than faculty in either the sciences or social sciences.

*B. What do students gain from Calderwood Seminars?*

Several questions from the Alumnae and Senior Surveys were designed to gauge what students gained from taking a Calderwood Seminar. Table 8 tabulates self-assessed improvement in skills, knowledge, and self-confidence as a result of taking a Calderwood seminar and Table 9 reports how improvement in these areas compares with other courses taken at Wellesley. Two general findings emerge from these tables: (1) a majority of alumnae report substantial improvement across all ten areas that were asked about and, (2) a majority of alumnae view their Calderwood Seminars as a more or most effective course in helping them to improve in all but three of the ten areas. Taken together, Tables 8 and 9 are also a powerful endorsement of the Calderwood program.

The majority of students report “Substantial improvement” – the highest possible ranking – in seven of the ten dimensions we asked about. "Feeling intellectually engaged and inspired" garnered the most substantial improvement responses in Table 8 (80%) and, as Table 9 reveals, 83% of alumnae indicated that their Calderwood Seminar was the “most effective” or “more effective” course in doing so.

*It was the best class that I took at Wellesley, and I think it comes incredibly close to embodying the “ideal” class that Wellesley can offer. I came to understand a lot more about myself, working with others, and learning effectively. I left the class feeling completely inspired.[Economics 335]*

75% of alumnae thought they improved in “Writing clearly and effectively” with 86% finding their CSPW the “most effective” or “more effective” when compared to other courses. For a program designed to improve student writing, this was the result we hoped for and expected.

*A major focus of this course was learning how to translate our ideas from complicated, academic jargon into convincing, clear and concise arguments destined for a non-specialist audience. [Comparative Literature/French 359]*

Two-thirds of alumnae also reported substantial improvement in “Giving feedback to other students” and in “Receiving feedback.” These two categories were among the most prominent when compared to other courses. Workshopping of student work is a central feature in all Calderwood Seminars and improvements in this area validate this approach.

*The class developed an amazing culture—we were all there to get better at writing and we saw each other grow week by week. By the end we were able to give and receive feedback about our writing without getting ego in the way. Everyone was supportive and engaged. That environment was so liberating and the class is one of my fondest memories at Wellesley. The privilege of sitting in a room with a dozen women, talking about the process of writing and honing our critical thinking skills was something I will cherish for a long time to come. [Psychology 343]*

Results from the Senior Surveys complement these findings. Table 10 combines information from three questions on these surveys about what students learned in their Calderwood Seminars. Results are aggregated across the different survey years. They confirm that the overwhelming majority of students who took a Calderwood Seminar believe that they improved their writing[[3]](#footnote-3), their understanding of their field of study, and their ability to make their academic work more accessible and useful.

The Alumnae Survey also asked about the importance of various skills in current activities – for most alumnae (86%) this relates to current employment. Table 11 presents the tabulation. “Communicating Orally” had the highest ranking under “Very Important” and is not an area where Calderwood Seminars dominate relative to other courses. This result is a bit surprising because Calderwood alumnae also highlight the “substantial improvement” they perceive in giving and receiving feedback from classmates (Table 8 and 9). Some of this results from peer editing but it also results from the intensive in-class workshopping common to all Calderwood Seminars and less common in other courses. Perhaps for our alumnae, “communicating orally” was interpreted as referring to formal presentations before a group, something not practiced or at least not emphasized in Calderwood Seminars.

In most areas identified in Table 11 respondents to our survey perceive the skills developed in Calderwood Seminars as highly relevant to their current activities.

*I felt myself go from college student to professional writer in this seminar. Perhaps more importantly, I felt that it was possible to become a professional writer for the first time in my life. [English 390]*

*Communicating science to a public audience is an essential skill for an active and effective environmental scientist. This course gave me the skills to pinpoint necessary information and essentially translate it to a broader scale without taking away the depth of the concept. I often refer back to my writings and constructive criticism from this course to guide the issues and courses I am writing for now. [Environmental Science 399]*

**IV. Conclusion**

The findings presented in this report make a compelling case for the success of the Calderwood Seminars in Public Writing in the opinion of students who have taken them. Large majorities of seniors and alumnae regard their Calderwood seminar as one of the best and most intellectually engaging courses they took during college. Calderwood Seminars’ emphasis on active learning—writing and rewriting, editing the work of other students, discussing and workshopping student writing in class—appears to be a major factor behind the high levels of student engagement in these courses. Moreover, alumnae describe their Calderwood Seminars as one of their most effective college courses in building self-confidence and skills such as writing, synthesizing information, and communicating and collaborating with others. Many alumnae report that these skills have proven useful and relevant in their current jobs and graduate school programs.

**Appendix I: The Alumnae Survey**

1. Which of the following Calderwood Seminars did you take? If you took two Calderwood Seminars, you will receive a second survey to complete.
2. Calderwood Seminars emphasize working on writing skills and giving students an opportunity to acquire greater in-depth knowledge of a particular field. How would you assess the emphasis in this Calderwood Seminar that you took?
3. 0% writing and 100% knowledge of field
4. 25% writing and 75% knowledge of field
5. 50% writing and 50% knowledge of field
6. 75% writing and 25% knowledge of field
7. 100% writing and 0% knowledge of field
8. How relevant were each of the following factors in your decision to enroll in this Calderwood seminar? *Response options:* (i) *Not particularly relevant, (ii) Relevant, (iii) Very relevant*
9. I was hoping to gain a deeper understanding of my major.
10. I was interested in public writing.
11. I was hoping to improve my writing.
12. I felt the course would give me skills that I could use in my future schooling

and/or career.

1. I wanted to take a class with this professor.
2. I needed to take a capstone course to fulfill a requirement for my major.
3. I was not interested in the other 300-level courses being offered in my major that semester.
4. A professor recommended the class.
5. Another student recommended the class.
6. Other (please specify)
7. Of all these factors, which do you consider to be the MOST relevant in your decision to enroll in this Calderwood Seminar?
8. To what extent did this Calderwood Seminar help you to improve in the following areas? *Response options: (i) No improvement, (ii) Some improvement, (iii) Substantial improvement*
9. Writing clearly and effectively
10. Gaining in-depth knowledge in my major
11. Giving feedback to other students
12. Being comfortable receiving feedback from others
13. Communicating well orally
14. Thinking analytically and critically
15. Synthesizing and integrating ideas and information
16. Feeling self-confident in my writing
17. Feeling self-confident in my major
18. Feeling intellectually engaged and inspired
19. Overall, how would you compare this Calderwood Seminar to other courses you took at Wellesley? *Response options: (i) Best course taken, (ii) Among the 3 best courses* *taken, (iii) Average, (iv) Below average*
20. When compared to other courses you took at Wellesley, how did this Calderwood Seminar compare in helping you to improve in each of the areas listed below?

*Response options: (i) Less effective than other courses, (ii) Equally effective as other courses, (iii) More effective than other courses, (iv) Most effective course compared to other courses*

1. Writing clearly and effectively
2. Gaining in-depth knowledge in my major
3. Giving feedback to other students
4. Being comfortable receiving feedback from others
5. Communicating well orally
6. Thinking analytically and critically
7. Synthesizing and integrating ideas and information
8. Feeling self-confident about my writing
9. Feeling self-confident in my major
10. Feeling intellectually engaged and inspired
11. Are you enrolled in a graduate or professional degree program now? *Response options: (i) Yes, I am a full-time student, (ii) Yes, I am a part-time student, (iii) No*
12. Are you employed right now? *Response options: (i) Yes, employed full time. (ii) Yes, employed part time. (iii) No, but I am looking for employment at this time. (iv) No, and I am not looking for employment at this time. (v) Other (please specify)*
13. How important are each of these skills to your current activities (e.g., your graduate degree program, your job, your civic activities)? Response options: (i) Not important at all, (ii) Not too important, (iii) Pretty important, (iv) Very important
14. Writing clearly and effectively
15. Having an in-depth knowledge of the field that I majored in
16. Giving feedback to others
17. Responding constructively to feedback from others
18. Communicating well orally
19. Thinking analytically and critically
20. Synthesizing and integrating ideas and information
21. Other:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
22. If you included an “Other” skill at the end of the previous question, what was that skill?
23. Is there anything more you would like to say about your experience taking this Calderwood Seminar?

**Appendix II: How Representative are Responses to the Alumnae Survey?**

The validity of the results in this report would be in question if students responding to the Alumnae Survey and the Senior Surveys were reluctant to express negative opinions about their Calderwood seminars. Common survey practice, which both of these surveys followed, is to assure respondents that answers are confidential and individual-level data that could potentially identify them will not be publicly released.[[4]](#footnote-4) To the extent that alumnae and seniors may have been hesitant to criticize their Wellesley experiences on surveys conducted by Wellesley College administrators (Senior Surveys) and faculty (Alumnae Survey), these assurances hopefully alleviated some of their hesitation.

We suspect that if the results in this report suffer from some inaccuracy, it is more likely the result of survey nonresponse. In the remainder of this appendix, we focus on nonresponse in the Alumnae Survey because it is the primary data source used in this report.

As noted earlier, the Alumnae Survey had a 57% response rate. While comparable to alumnae surveys conducted by Wellesley College’s Office of Institutional Research—and substantially better than most surveys conducted by professional polling outfits like Gallup and social research organizations like Pew—the experiences and attitudes of the missing 43% could differ significantly from those who responded.

Nonresponse raises three questions: (1) Are percentages and other statistics derived from the sample biased?, (2) If biased, how large is the bias?, and (3) If biased, in what direction is the bias? What follows is our best attempt to shed light on these questions. While we cannot definitively answer any of them, we believe any existing bias does not repudiate our general conclusions.

*(1) Were respondents to the Alumnae Survey more likely than non-respondents to have taken a highly-rated Calderwood seminar? Answer: Yes.*

To address this question, we used information obtained from the Student Evaluation Questionnaires (SEQs) that Wellesley students are asked to complete at the end of every semester for every completed course.[[5]](#footnote-5) SEQs are collected by the college, have high response rates (typically 75% and higher), and are shared with course instructors. We focus here on one SEQ question asking students if they would recommend the course to others:

Using the following scale, please rate your recommendation of this course to other students whose academic preparation and program are similar to yours.

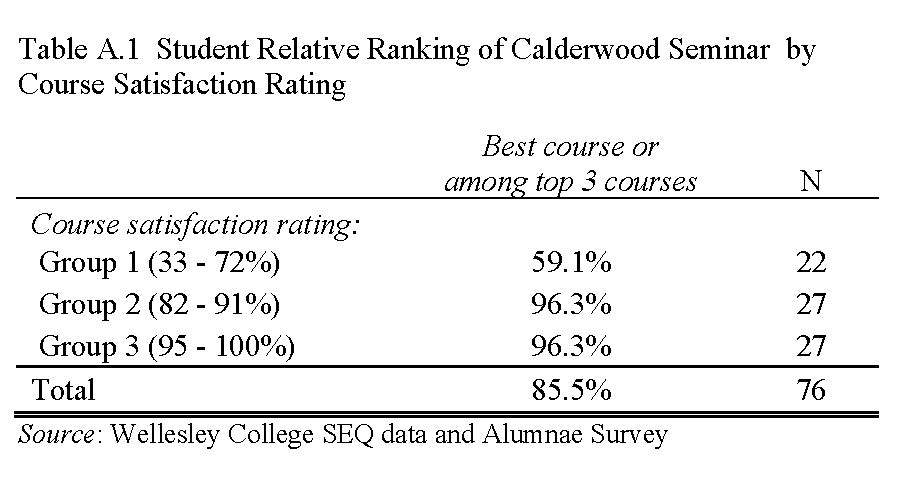
* 1. Strongly Recommend
  2. Recommend
  3. Neither Recommend nor Discourage
  4. Discourage
  5. Strongly Discourage

We constructed a course satisfaction rating for every Calderwood seminar by computing the percentage of students who checked “Strongly Recommend” to the above question. (Hereafter, for the sake of brevity, we will refer to this percentage as a course’s “satisfaction rating.”) The satisfaction ratings for the eighteen Calderwood seminars covered by our Alumnae Survey range from 33% to 100% with a mean of 78%.

Since we know the Calderwood seminar taken by all those who were asked to take the Alumnae Survey, we can compare the course satisfaction ratings of respondents with nonrespondents. If alumnae with more positive Calderwood experiences were more likely to respond to the survey, we would expect their course satisfaction ratings to be higher. They are. Among respondents, the average satisfaction rating for their Calderwood course is about 8 percentage points higher, 82% *vs.* 74%, than the average satisfaction rating among non-respondents. This gap does not strike us as large.

*(2) Did respondents who completed more highly-rated Calderwood seminars report more positive Calderwood experiences on the Alumnae Survey? Answer: Yes.*

Table A.1 groups respondents to the Alumnae Survey into three categories based on the satisfaction ratings of their seminars. These categories were chosen so that roughly a third of respondents fell into each one. An impressive 96% of alumnae who completed Calderwood seminars with course satisfaction ratings greater than 82% (Groups 2 and 3) considered their seminar to be either the best course or among the top three courses taken at Wellesley.



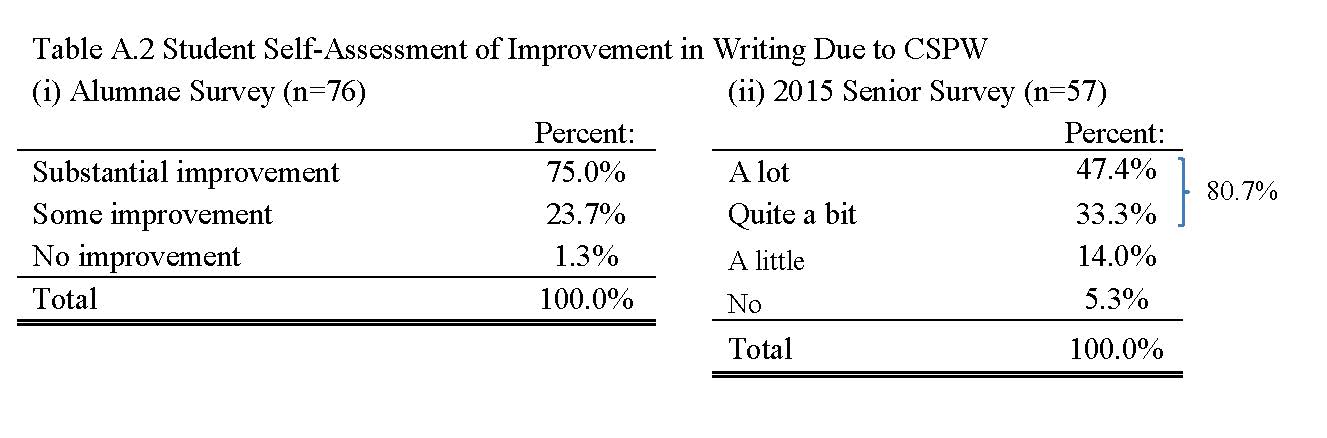
In Group 1, 59% of alumnae evaluated their seminars as “best” or “top three.” Because nonrespondents are more likely than respondents to be in Group 1, we presumably would have proportionally fewer “best course/top three” responses had more nonrespondents taken the survey. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that, even in Group 1, a majority of alumnae consider their Calderwood seminar to be either the best course taken at Wellesley or one of the top three.

*(3) Does the 2015 Senior Survey, with its high response rate among Calderwood students, suggest that the Alumnae Survey overstates favorable views of Calderwood seminars?*

*Answer: Maybe.*

If a disproportionate number of less satisfied students opted out of the Alumnae Survey, we would expect to see less favorable views regarding Calderwood seminars expressed in the 2015 Senior Survey. The latter’s response rate of 81% – 57 of the 70 seniors who graduated in 2015 and completed a Calderwood seminar responded – is 24 percentage points greater than the Alumnae Survey’s response rate.

The 2015 Senior Survey asked three close-ended questions about Calderwood seminars: (1) “Did you take a Calderwood seminar?” (2) “Did this course improve your writing?” and (3) “Did you want to take a Calderwood seminar but were unable to do so?” We can compare the second question with a similar one asked on the Alumnae Survey: “To what extent did your Calderwood seminar help you to improve in the following areas? (i) Writing clearly and effectively.”



In the Alumnae Survey, 75% of respondents reported “substantial improvement” in their writing. This compares to a considerably smaller percentage, 47%, in the 2015 Senior Survey who said their Calderwood seminar improved their writing “A lot” (Table A.2). The different number of response options makes for a less-than-ideal comparison. Note that the cumulative percentage of Senior Survey respondents who chose “A lot” or “Quite a bit” – 81% – is actually *greater* than the 75% of respondents who chose “Substantial improvement in the Alumnae Survey.

Although survey differences in the question wording, number of response options, and wording of response options complicates the comparison, the difference at the high end of the two distributions shown in Table A.2 suggests the possibility of some upward bias in our Alumnae Survey estimates.

*(4) Are late responders to the Alumnae Survey more negative about their Calderwood seminar experiences than early responders? Answer: No.*

To gauge nonresponse bias, some researchers suggest comparing early survey responders to late responders under the assumption that late responders and nonresponders may resemble one another on attributes that affect survey responses.

We defined early responders (n=23) to the Alumnae Survey as those who responded within 24 hours to the first email requesting their participation. Late responders (n=18) were those who required several reminders to participate and eventually submitted a complete or partially complete survey more than two weeks after receiving the first email. We found no evidence suggesting that late responders had less positive Calderwood seminar experiences than early responders: 91% of early responders and 89% of late responders rated their Calderwood seminar as the best course or one of the top three courses taken in college.

*Overall assessment*:

Based on the above evidence, it appears unlikely that any nonresponse bias in the Alumnae Survey would undermine or fundamentally alter our general conclusions about the success of the Calderwood Seminars program.

**Appendix III. Tables**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 1. Alumnae Survey Response Rates, by Calderwood Seminar** | | | |
|  | Responded: | Contacted: | Response rate (%): |
| Economics 335 | 17 | 22 | 77.3 |
| Psychology 343 | 10 | 13 | 76.9 |
| Comparative Literature / French 359 | 3 | 4 | 75.0 |
| American Studies 355 | 8 | 12 | 66.7 |
| Environmental Studies 399 | 8 | 12 | 66.7 |
| Writing 390 | 11 | 17 | 64.7 |
| Political Science 319 | 4 | 7 | 57.1 |
| Biological Sciences 340 | 6 | 14 | 42.9 |
| English 390 | 9 | 21 | 42.9 |
| Art History / Studio Art 301 | 5 | 12 | 41.7 |
| Spanish 340 | 2 | 6 | 33.3 |
| Music 301 | 1 | 4 | 25.0 |
| Cinema and Media Studies 327 | 0 | 3 | 0.0 |
| Overall | 84 | 147 | 57.1 |
| *Source:* Alumnae Survey (Q1) |  |  |  |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 2. Senior Survey Response Rates** |  |  |  |
|  | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 |
| [1] Total number of seniors | 607 | 542 | 584 |
| [2] Seniors who responded to Senior Survey | 454 | 344 | 373 |
| [3] Senior Survey response rate: [2] / [1] | 75% | 63% | 64% |
|  |  |  |  |
| [4] Number of seniors who took a CSPW | 63 | 70 | 94 |
| [5] CSPW seniors who responded to Senior Survey | 49 | 57 | 58 |
| [6] CSPW seniors response rate: [5] / [4] | 78% | 81% | 62% |
| *Source*: 2014-2016 Senior Surveys. Total number of seniors taken from the Wellesley College Factbook. | | | |
|  | | | |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 3. Calderwood Seminar Compared to Other Courses** | | |
|  |  |
|  | Percent: |
| Best course taken | 9.2 |
| Among the 3 best courses | 76.3 |
| Average | 11.8 |
| Below average | 2.6 |
| Total | 100.0 |
| *Source:* Alumnae Survey (Q6) |  |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 4. How relevant were each of the following factors in your decision to enroll in this Calderwood Seminar?** | | |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  | *Percent responding:* | | |
|  | Very relevant | Relevant | Not particularly relevant |
| I was hoping to improve my writing. | 70.9 | 25.3 | 3.8 |
| I felt the course would give me skills that I could use in my future schooling and/or career. | 67.1 | 30.4 | 2.5 |
| I was interested in public writing. | 54.4 | 31.6 | 13.9 |
| I wanted to take a class with this professor. | 46.8 | 36.7 | 16.5 |
| I was hoping to gain a deeper understanding of my major. | 27.8 | 43.0 | 29.1 |
| A professor recommended class. | 15.2 | 13.9 | 70.9 |
| I needed to take a capstone course to fulfill a requirement for my major. | 11.4 | 13.9 | 74.7 |
| Another student recommended the class. | 11.4 | 17.7 | 70.9 |
| I was not interested in the other 300-level courses being offered in my major that semester. | 7.7 | 11.5 | 80.8 |
| *Source:* Alumnae Survey (Q3) |  |  |  |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 5. Which do you consider to be the most relevant factor in your decision to enroll in a Calderwood Seminar?** | | |
|  |  |  |
|  | *Percent:* |  |
| I was interested in public writing. | 24.7 |  |
| I felt the course would give me skills that I could use in my future schooling and/or career. | 23.4 |  |
| I was hoping to improve my writing. | 19.5 |  |
| I wanted to take a class with this professor. | 11.7 |  |
| I was hoping to gain a deeper understanding of my major. | 10.4 |  |
| I needed to take a capstone course to fulfill a requirement for my major. | 2.6 |  |
| A professor recommended class. | 2.6 |  |
| Another student recommended the class. | 1.3 |  |
| *Source:* Alumnae Survey (Q4) |  |  |

**Table 6. Calderwood Seminar Emphasis: Writing vs. Knowledge of Field**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Students | Faculty |  |
| 0% writing and 100% knowledge of field | 0.0% | 0.0% |  |
| 25% writing and 75% knowledge of field | 6.0% | 8.3% |  |
| 50% writing and 50% knowledge of field | 54.2% | 41.7% |  |
| 75% writing and 25% knowledge of field | 36.1% | 50.0% |  |
| 100% writing and 0% knowledge of field | 3.6% | 0.0% |  |
| N | 83 | 12 |  |
| *Source:* Alumnae Survey (Q2) and an e-mail poll of Calderwood faculty. | | |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |

**Table 7. Calderwood Seminar Emphasis on Writing: Mean Student Rating *vs.* Faculty Rating**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  |
|  | Students | Professor | Average |
| Comparative Literature / French 359 | 75.0 | 75.0 | 75.0 |
| Music 301 | 75.0 | 75.0 | 75.0 |
| Cinema and Media Studies 327 | - | 75.0 | 75.0 |
| English 390 | 72.2 | - | 72.2 |
| American Studies 355 | 67.9 | 75.0 | 71.5 |
| Psychology 343 | 67.5 | 75.0 | 71.3 |
| Art History / Studio Art 301 | 60.0 | 75.0 | 67.5 |
| Political Science 319 | 68.8 | 62.5 | 65.7 |
| Biological Sciences 340 | 58.3 | 50.0 | 54.2 |
| Writing 390 | 54.5 | 50.0 | 52.3 |
| Environmental Studies 399 | 53.1 | 50.0 | 51.6 |
| Spanish 340 | 50.0 | 50.0 | 50.0 |
| Economics 335 | 45.6 | 25.0 | 35.3 |
| Valid N | 83 | 12 |  |

*Notes*: r = 0.865

*Source*: Alumnae Survey (Q2) and e-mail poll of Calderwood faculty.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 8. To what extent did your Calderwood Seminar help you to improve in the following areas?** | | | |
|  |  |  |  |
|  | *Percent responding:* | | |
|  | Substantial improvement | Some  improvement | No  improvement |
| Feeling intellectually engaged | 80.3 | 15.8 | 3.9 |
| Writing clearly and effectively | 75.0 | 23.7 | 1.3 |
| Synthesizing information | 68.4 | 28.9 | 2.6 |
| Giving feedback to other students | 64.5 | 32.9 | 2.6 |
| Receiving feedback | 63.2 | 34.2 | 2.6 |
| Thinking analytically | 60.5 | 36.8 | 2.6 |
| Feeling self-confident with writing | 55.3 | 40.8 | 3.9 |
| Feeling self-confident with major | 38.2 | 39.5 | 22.4 |
| Gaining in-depth knowledge in my major | 31.6 | 46.1 | 22.4 |
| Communicating orally | 30.3 | 60.5 | 9.2 |
| *Source:* Alumnae Survey (Q5). |  |  |  |

**Table 9. When compared to other courses you took at Wellesley, how did this Calderwood Seminar compare in helping you to improve in:**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | *Percent responding:* | | | |  |
|  | Most effective | More effective | Equally effective | Less effective |  |
| Receiving feedback | 53.9 | 34.2 | 11.8 | 0.0 |  |
| Writing clearly and effectively | 52.6 | 38.2 | 7.9 | 1.3 |  |
| Giving feedback to other students | 51.3 | 40.8 | 7.9 | 0.0 |  |
| Self-confidence with writing | 44.7 | 35.5 | 18.4 | 1.3 |  |
| Intellectually engaged | 38.2 | 44.7 | 15.8 | 1.3 |  |
| Synthesizing information | 35.5 | 43.4 | 19.7 | 1.3 |  |
| Thinking analytically | 19.7 | 35.5 | 43.4 | 1.3 |  |
| Self-confidence with major | 19.7 | 26.3 | 47.4 | 6.6 |  |
| Gaining in-depth knowledge in my major | 11.8 | 27.6 | 35.5 | 25.0 |  |
| Communicating orally | 9.2 | 39.5 | 51.3 | 0.0 |  |
| *Source:* Alumnae Survey (Q7). |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |

**Table 10. Students' Perceived Utility of Taking a Calderwood Seminar**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | *Percent responding:* | | | |  |
|  | A great deal | Somewhat | Very little | Not at all | N |
| Did this course add to your understanding of your field(s) of study? | 65.1 | 27.4 | 5.7 | 1.9 | 106 |
| Did this course enable you to make academic work more accessible and useful? | 71.7 | 20.8 | 5.7 | 1.9 | 106 |
| Did this course improve your writing? | 62.0 | 26.4 | 8.0 | 3.7 | 163 |

*Source*: Senior Surveys 2014-2016. Response categories were not consistent in the three surveys. We have recoded variables in the 2015 and 2016 surveys to parallel the four response categories—“a great deal”, “somewhat”, “very little”, and “not at all”—used in 2014.

**Table 11. How important are each of these skills to your current activities?**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  | *Percent responding:* | | | |
|  | Very important | Pretty important | Not too important | Not at all important |
| Communicating orally | 78.9 | 15.8 | 5.3 | 0.0 |
| Thinking analytically | 76.0 | 20.0 | 2.7 | 1.3 |
| Synthesizing information | 72.4 | 25.0 | 1.3 | 1.3 |
| Receiving feedback | 67.1 | 27.6 | 3.9 | 1.3 |
| Writing clearly and effectively | 53.9 | 35.5 | 6.6 | 3.9 |
| Giving feedback to others | 42.1 | 35.5 | 19.7 | 2.6 |
| Having an in-depth knowledge in my major | 19.7 | 30.3 | 34.2 | 15.8 |
| *Source:* Alumnae Survey (Q10). |  |  |  |  |

1. This quotation and the ones that follow below are drawn from responses to the final and open-ended question on the Alumnae Survey, “Is there anything more you would like to say about your experience taking a Calderwood Seminar?” Of the 84 responses to the survey, 55 students wrote something in response to this question. A few comments were negative but the vast majority was positive, often glowing, as is this one. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This question was not included in the 2015 and 2016 Senior Surveys. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In an earlier evaluation of the Calderwood Seminar program, a quasi-experimental design was employed to score student writing along a number of dimensions. Faculty involved in this exercise identified significant improvements when comparing assignments written at the beginning versus end of Calderwood seminars. See Wini Wood and David L. Lindauer, “Calderwood Seminars in Public Writing: Evaluation of Student Writing (September 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The chair of Wellesley College’s Institutional Review Board reviewed our initial proposal for this evaluation project and concluded that it was exempt from human subjects protections review. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Results from SEQs are confidential which is why we do not present any of these data. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)