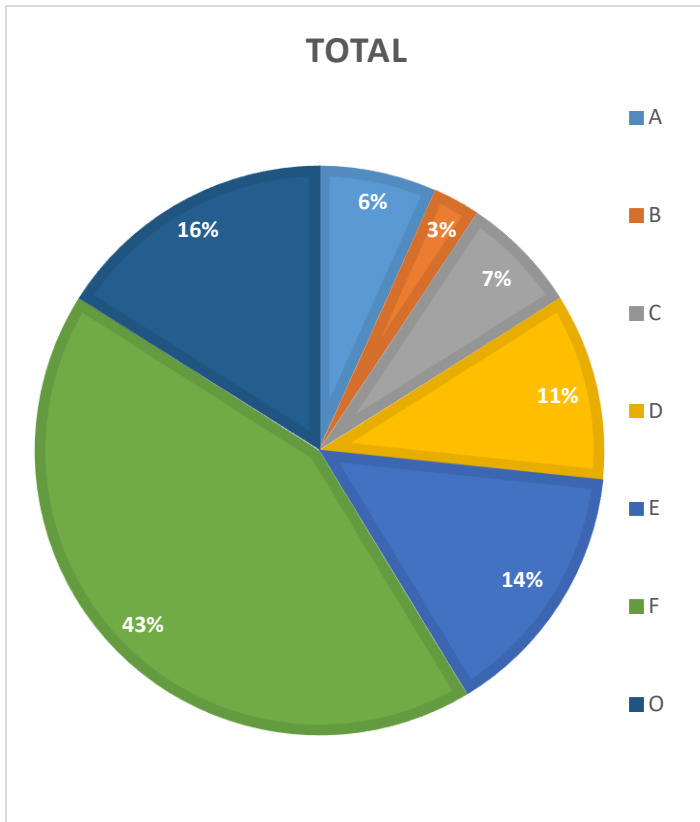


Survey Responses: The Purpose of Higher Education

This summary of the spreadsheet data from a formal (while unscientific—see below) survey of 75 faculty, staff, and administration at a Concordia campus offers one snapshot of the recurrent discussions about the purpose of higher education for the church. Other college and high school campuses may want to replicate the survey or vary it for their own interests.



75 responses from 120 requests

A (light blue) 6%: To shape students to co-exist peacefully in a diverse, multi-cultural society and world.

B (orange) 3%: To liberate students from the static traditions of the past and prepare them to discover and develop new information, truths, and meaning.

C (gray) 7%: To equip students with knowledge and skills necessary to function in our present economy.

D (gold) 11%: To impart to students the truth and meaning - and its corresponding information - already intact within the wisdom and tradition of previous generations.

E (medium blue) 14%: To challenge students to create their own personal meaning and identity and take responsibility for their own purpose in life.

F (green) 43%: To promote in students the attitudes, knowledge, and competencies necessary for citizenship and participation in society.

O (dark blue) 16%: Other—see Alt Responses section

A Key of Sorts (these orientations were not included in the survey)

A. (light blue): the diversity and multi-culturalism view

B. (orange): the Renaissance and Enlightenment

C. (gray): the essentialist employment view of pragmatism

D. (gold): the perennialist view, often related to the liberal arts

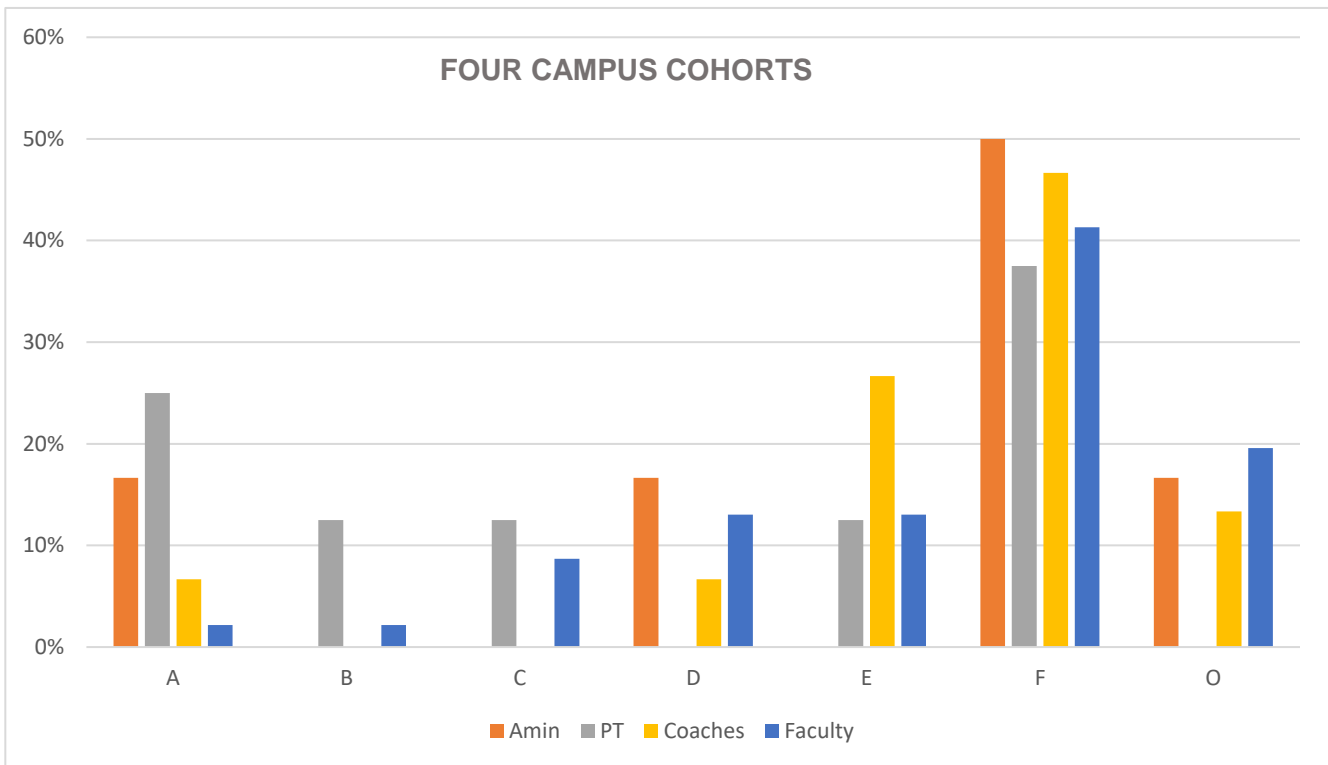
E. (medium blue): the existentialist view, often associated with individualism

F. (green): the progressive view of American democracy

Points to Consider

1. The six selections are the “usual suspects” in the literature and debates about the purpose of higher education.
2. The survey is not scientific (participants self-selected whether to respond) and is not intended to yield conclusions.
3. The aim of the survey is to sustain discussion among us regarding our identity and our Reformation ethos.

4. To what extent must we agree? What if we do not largely agree? What might this mean for students?
5. Who exactly determines the purpose of higher ed at _____? How so? On what basis? (This is the source and norm question.)
6. We may consider why the *citizenship and society* purpose (green) plainly received the plurality of responses.
7. Is our purpose for keeping the doors open largely the same purpose as found at the local state university or private college?
8. One out of six among us wrote her or his own response rather than selecting one of the standard six.
9. While some of the six overlap in some ways and some may be merged,
 - a. the rationale that guides such merging would be that person’s actual purpose of education.
 - b. in such merges, one of the themes or purposes typically emerges as dominant and “the lead sled dog.”
10. Without being prescriptive, is there a purpose of higher education that is somewhat more congruent with our Lutheran tradition than the other versions? How so?
11. What next steps or activities might we pursue to further inform our conversations and avoid the typical breakdowns that occur when faculty and universities talk about purpose, curriculum, general education, and college experiences?
12. _____



"Other" (O) — 13 Alternate Responses: (no special order)

1. To equip students to pursue knowledge - through presentation, reflection, question, discussion, debate, and experience - gain wisdom, and discover their calling, empowering them to live and act in awareness, furtherance and response to truth/the Truth.
2. All of the above!
3. It is a piece of all of these: To impart to students the truth and meaning - and its corresponding information. To equip students with knowledge and skills to thrive in an ever changing world. Challenging students to be critical thinkers who have the ability to shape and impact our world.
4. To teach students the skills and knowledge that will equip them to thrive in the Kingdom of the left, to employ reason prayerfully in their vocations, and to be [sentence not completed].
5. To equip students with knowledge and skills necessary to function in a diverse, multi-cultural society and economy.
6. I find some aspects of each of the above statements to be pertinent, especially numbers 4 and 6. However, it is challenging to distill the purpose of higher education to a short descriptor like this. Also, I think it is important to think of what the purpose of higher education is within our particular Lutheran Christian identity and our particular campus. For example, it would seem very important that a part of our purpose is to have students see the limits and fallibility of human reason and the significance of the Gospel in our fallen human condition. More could be said, but this is an example of what I mean.
7. Both to impart to students existing knowledge and to equip them with the skills to discover/create new knowledge.
8. To help students learn to evaluate claims, discover truth, synthesize their newly found knowledge, communicate it to others, and thus to contribute to society.
9. There is not one, single purpose to higher education. In some ways, parts of all of the above apply, and you may argue that the purpose is different for different programs.
10. To provide students with a nurturing, intellectually stimulating environment in which they and their peers can mature and grow while acquiring knowledge and habits, exploring vocational possibilities, forming lifelong friendships, developing marketable skills, and being enculturated by those with whom they interact.
11. The purpose of Lutheran higher education is to teach students the skills and knowledge they need to thrive in God's Kingdom of the left, prayerfully employing reason in their vocations and everyday lives, and to have knowledge of the infinite Kingdom of the Right, where God's salvation is revealed through Christ. The purpose of generic higher education is to equip people to lead rich and fulfilled lives, which can include skills training for vocation but also traditionally focuses on the teaching of knowledge and knowledge acquisition skills for lifelong enrichment. It would include all of the elements mentioned above, except possibly No. 2, to liberate students from static traditions, because as Hegel, Santayana and others have written, knowledge of the history of the past is essential for progress. So the traditions of the past always inform the development of new information, truths and meaning, like it or not.

12. The purpose of Christian Higher Education: To equip students to discern through critical reflection and a dialogical interaction of faith and learning, the truth of God's creation, redemption, and restoration in light of a multiplicity of worldviews; preparing them in core disciplines for steadfastness in faith and lives of vocation in church and world.

13. I think the purpose of higher education is similar to a liberal arts education- to train the mind to respond to a variety of experiences and to help them gain knowledge about the social and physical world and an appreciation for it. It is also about learning about themselves and place within society. It is learning how to learn and analyze information.