



Executive Summary

Resiliency Survey

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Berea College Office of Institutional Research and Assessment

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Introduction

Forum 40404 is the name given to the group of 339 alumni who currently serve as a volunteer survey panel. The volunteers attended the College spanning over six decades (back to the 1940s). The staff of the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment designs brief surveys for the purpose of gaining alumni input. When Forum 40404 members were asked why they volunteered for the survey panel, the most common reasons were 1) *to give back and stay connected*; 2) *to help current and future students*; and 3) *to be an alumni voice*.

In May 2019, Forum 40404 members responded to a survey designed to explore the development of *resiliency* in their lives. The survey/web interview began with the following introduction:

*Currently, a Berea College campus task force is working to 1) raise the consciousness of the campus community regarding students who have experienced trauma in their lives and 2) help all students further develop their resiliency in the face of challenging life conditions. **We are defining resiliency as the ability to bounce back from life challenges and/or trauma.***

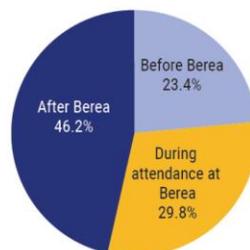
At this time, we ask that you share your personal experiences related to developing resiliency in your own life. We hope your examples will help us support our current students more effectively.

The following is a summary of the results of the Resiliency Survey (only half--171 out of 339 Forum members responded). The respondents were 56% female and 8% African American.

Results

The first question of the survey/web interview asked respondents about when their resiliency developed the most. The largest percentage of respondents indicated it was *after* their attendance at Berea College (46%). Another 30% indicated it developed mostly during their attendance at the College.

In general, when did your resiliency develop the most (your greatest period of growth in this area)?



The following table shows the results by decade of attendance. Except for the alumni from 2000-2009 and from the early years of 1940s-1950s, the most common time of resilience development was after attendance. For the 2000-2009 alumni it was split more evenly among the categories--before, during, and after attendance (36.7% of respondents marked both during and after attendance as the time of greatest resiliency development).

	All Respondents (N = 171)		1940-1949 & 1950-1959 (N = 8)		1960-1969 (N = 20)		1970-1979 (N = 31)		1980-1989 (N = 26)		1990-1999 (N = 22)		2000-2009 (N = 30)		2010-2018 (N = 27)		Did not graduate (N = 7)	
Before attending Berea College	40	23.4%	2	25.0%	6	30.0%	7	22.6%	6	23.1%	5	22.7%	8	26.7%	6	22.2%	0	0.0%
During your attendance at Berea College	51	29.8%	3	37.5%	3	15.0%	6	19.4%	9	34.6%	7	31.8%	11	36.7%	9	33.3%	3	42.9%
After attending Berea College	79	46.2%	3	37.5%	10	50.0%	18	58.1%	11	42.3%	10	45.5%	11	36.7%	12	44.4%	4	57.1%
Missing	1	0.6%	0	0.0%	1	5.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%

The next item was an open-ended question: *Was there a time in college when you thought about leaving and what and/or who helped you during that time?*

Most respondents wrote that they never considered leaving as an option because getting an education was so important to their families and themselves. Many of those who never considered leaving spoke of some difficult, even traumatic times while in school, but explained that they reached out to others (friends, family, and College employees) for support and guidance).

A female graduate from the 1960s wrote: *I never seriously thought about leaving. There were times when I was discouraged, but my family and my Christian faith helped me continue.* A male graduate from the 1970s wrote: *I did not consider leaving. I started a task and was determined to complete it.* A 1970s male graduate said: *I had plotted my course and Berea was a key part, I never considered leaving. It was the chance I had to be more than I could have ever imagined.* An African American male student from the early 2000s wrote: *My first semester was horrible. I had a .8 GPA. This is when I knew something needed to change. My mom was the biggest person who believed in me and told me not to give up.*

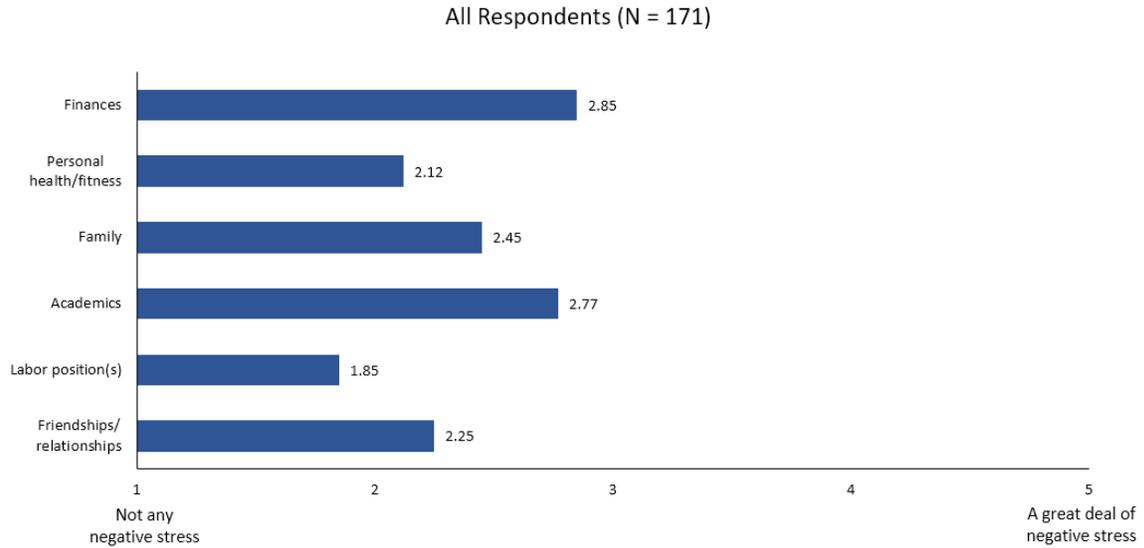
However, 30% of respondents stated clearly that they *had* thought about leaving while in college. The descriptions about what helped them stay are illustrated in the diverse comments below:

- **Male 1960s:** *I considered it briefly during the first semester. I missed home and friends, but as I made new friends and got adjusted better leaving was the last thing on my mind. Berea became home.*
- **Female 1970s:** *During my stay at Berea several people in town gave me a home base and had me into their homes often, specifically to eat, spend the night and so forth...they made a world of difference and became life time friends; also, my labor supervisor and family took me in as a life-time friend. Teachers were supportive especially once into the degree program of study.*

- Male 1980s: *Absolutely thought about leaving. I had so many family pressures, financial issues and some health issues. All that bundled up in my 3rd year at Berea and I considered leaving. I stayed because my advisors, dorm director, and some very influential teachers provided sound advice.*
- Male 1980s: *Berea was a new beginning for me. It was a safe environment free of hatred and mental and psychological abuse. As so many of us came from poverty and families with addictions and physical abuse...being at Berea was my way of “getting out.” Any time that I thought I could not make it or was going to leave, there were professors who were open and helpful. For me, I had two professors I felt close to as well as a number of folks at the Hutchins library who were like extended family as well. Of course there were students who were friends too...but the faculty and staff at that time, were my “go to” people.*
- Female 1990s: *I did think about leaving my junior year. My grandmother passed away. She had raised me. The grief was overwhelming at times, making it difficult to concentrate, to even get out of bed. It was a tough semester and I ended up on academic probation, but I pulled out of it.*
- Female early 2000s: *The hardest time for me was my first year when the difficulties of classes and workload felt like too much to handle. It helped connecting with upperclassmen student who had been through what I was going through and they encouraged me a lot and gave me tips on how to manage things. Also the social connection was very helpful in bringing some fun aspects to my college experience and camaraderie. I made connections from church and social setting like dance groups, work and just meeting people at lunch.*
- Male recent 2000s: *I was thinking about leaving Berea College because the institution didn't offer the coursework and major that I was interested in and I was being harassed and mocked for who I was at the time. I think a number of students had those same sentiments. What helped me during my years at Berea was a tight community of friends and my faith in God. When there are no genuine connections with others based on respect, mutuality, and transparency, there's no hope for the future. Every good deed in life between two or more people begins with a connection of some kind as the foundation. Strong and healthy relationships can grow and flourish because of that strong foundation.*

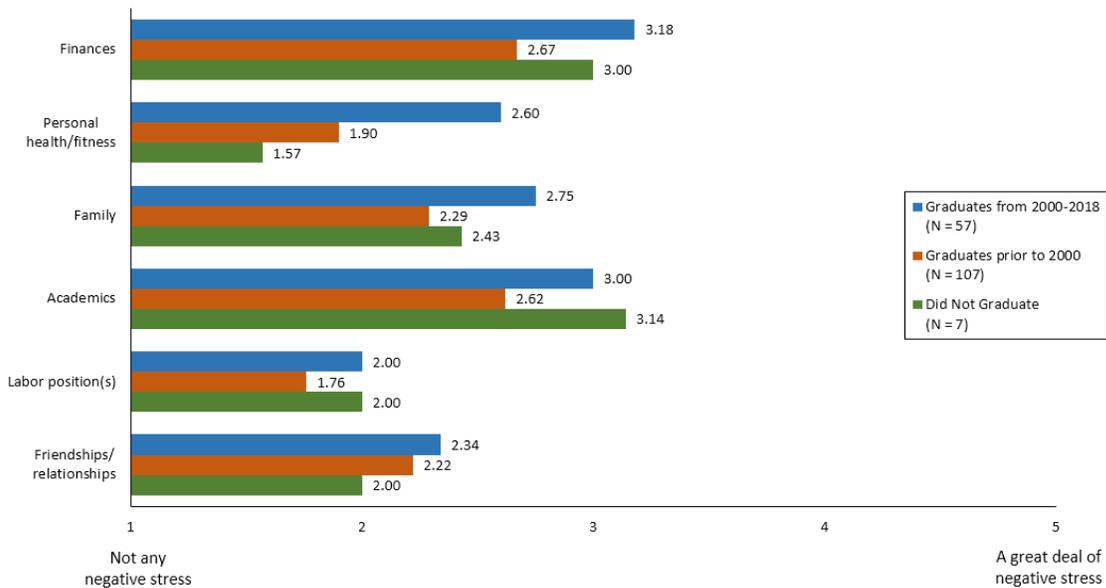
The next item on the survey asked respondents to rate how much negative stress came from a variety of sources while in attendance at Berea College. Finances followed by academics led the list but all the items fell at or below the neutral point of the scale.

Challenges to one's resiliency may come from many areas of life. Rate how much negative stress each of the following caused you while at Berea College.



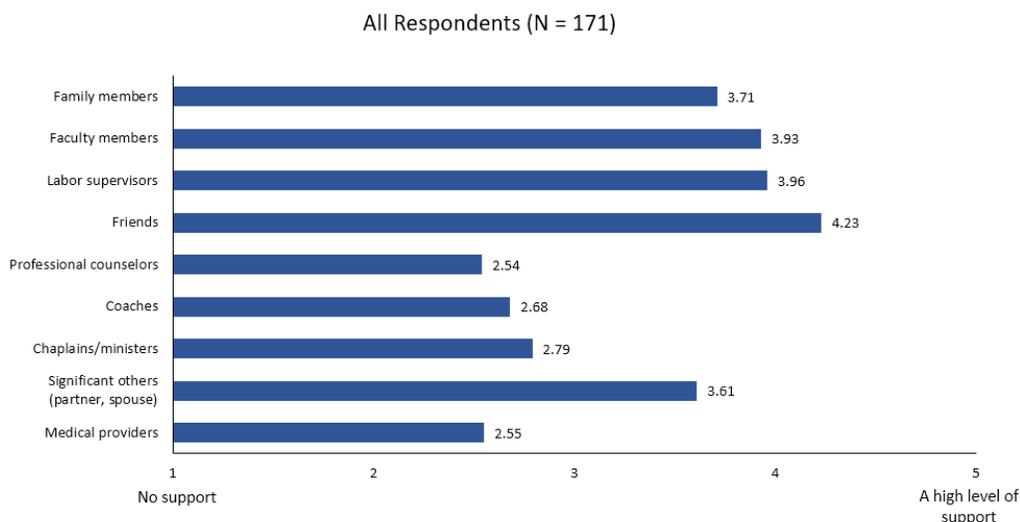
Comparing graduates before and after the year 2000 (and non-graduates), we found that the more recent graduates (as well as the non-graduates) reported higher levels of negative stress from every source listed. Refer to the following chart.

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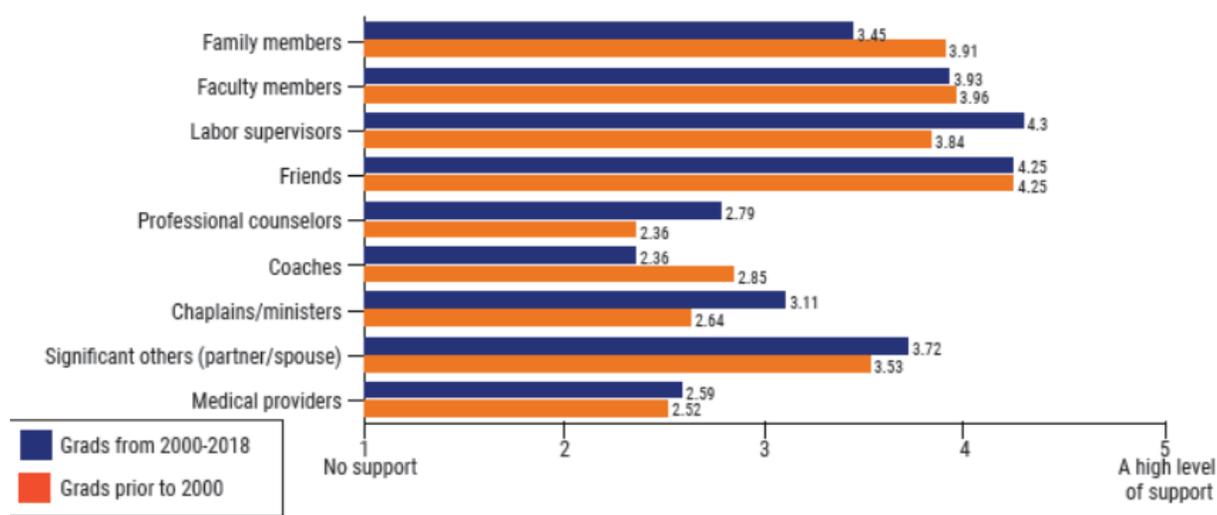
The next item asked respondents to rate the level of support they received from various people in their lives during their attendance at Berea College. Friends led the list followed by labor supervisors and faculty members. Family members were rated in fourth place.

Rate the level of support you received from each of the following people that helped increase your resiliency while in college.



Looking at the differences across the decades of attendance, we found that more recent graduates (those who attended since 2000) were substantially *more* likely to receive support from labor supervisors, professional counselors, and chaplains/ministers; and, less likely to receive support from family members than were graduates who attended before the year 2000.

The level of support you received from each of the following people that helped increase your resiliency while in college.



The last question asked: *What advice would you give current Berea college students to help them increase their resiliency?*

The most common piece of advice had to do with making social connections (friends) and getting involved with groups that offered positive and fulfilling activities. Almost as common was the advice to reach out to others for help (staff/faculty, chaplains, and counselors). Many respondents commented on how caring and helpful the employees of the College are. Other common themes focused on relying on one's self to get through, to endure, and be persistent (advising that the tough times would pass and current students could make it through to fulfil their goals). Other less common but regularly mentioned themes had to do with taking care of one's self—getting enough sleep, exercising, eating right, going outside when possible, and relying on one's faith and a belief in God.

Following are a variety of comments that illustrate the themes mentioned above.

Female 1940s-1950s: *Determine to use all available resources to continue in college. Believe in yourself. Remember many other students have walked those paths and had similar struggles. Be assure Berea's many financial supporters wish the best for you.*

Male 1940s-1950s: *Pursue a deepening spiritual relationship with God through Christ and guidance from the Holy Spirit. There is no better counselor.*

Male 1960s: *Reach out to friends, faculty, any available people whom you can trust. Get professional help if you need it.*

Male 1960s: *Do the best with what you have become well educated in many areas of life; math, music, literature and science. Never stop learning. Be honest with yourself and others. Base your decisions in life on facts and not religion. Help take care of our planet and its peoples.*

Female 1970s: *Sleep 7 or 8 hours every night; take breaks from studying, do not procrastinate, make friends who are on campus to get degrees, create study groups, go do some physical exercise daily, be patient, the success will come as you pace yourself and do the work.*

Male 1970s: *Get out of your room! Make friends, get involved.*

Female 1980s: *My advice is to remember we're all human; we all make mistakes but mistakes don't define a person. Our trials make us stronger in the end. The current situation you are in is temporary and although you may not see light at the end of the tunnel please know you will see*

light again. You make appear as a swan on a lake—gracefully making your life look easy, but no one know how hard you're paddling below the surface.

Male 1980s: *My best advice is to remember "this too shall pass." Sometimes you just have to duck your head, and plow on through difficulties.*

Female 1990s: *It's important to find and get help making connections early. Length of time thee added layer upon layer of connection. Join and be actively involved in at least one activity right from the start.*

Male 1990s: *Berea is a supportive place. Rely on the people around you and take advantage of the programs in place.*

Female early 2000s: *Berea College faculty and staff are incredibly caring and supportive of students. Find your person on campus who will be your go-to.*

Male recent 2000s: *Make a friend with someone you consider an elder, someone not from your generation. Talk to them, share with them your good and bad news, even if all they can do is just listen.*

One female African American respondent gave some direct advice to the College rather than to students: *I did not reach out to others for a number of reasons, lack of trust and not recognizing my need for help being at the top of that list. I would encourage Berea to regularly advertise resources available and sign/symptoms related to mental health issues. If a person is in the midst of a mental health crisis, being able to read about symptoms may trigger the person to recognize their need for help. Also, provide forums to normalize mental health issues, and provide easy access to counselors.*

Summary

Our survey/web interview findings show that the largest percentage (46%) of responding Forum 40404 members report that they developed resiliency *after* their college days. This is logical in that most have had many more years since college to have experiences that lead to resiliency development. About a quarter, however, indicated that most of their resiliency was developed before college. About 30% of respondents had thought about leaving college while in attendance but went on to describe how they made important connections and understood how critical it was to get a college degree. Finances followed by academic demands were most highly rated in terms of sources of negative stress while in college. Friends were rated the most highly for providing support. Families received a lower rating for support from more recent graduates compared to those who graduated from the College before the year 2000. The most common advice to current students was focused on making social connections (friends) and getting involved in activities the student would enjoy. Overall, respondents were highly positive about the help and concern that employees (staff and faculty) offered to students and recommended that current students make the most of the available support.