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Draft of Final Project

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**Why Grinnell?**

*Introduction*

Each year millions of students around the world go back to college, many of whom are stepping foot on campus for the first time. Whether it be for financial reasons, the location of the school, or as in Maria Walinski-Peterson’s case, an inherent “homing beacon” that switched on and told her to “go to Grinnell” with no apparent reason, there are countless motivations that drove these new college students to select the schools that they did.[[1]](#endnote-1) With so many different sized schools in almost every type of location imaginable, the reasons why a college was picked not only hints at the applicants’ preferences, but also says something about the schools themselves.

Through *Digital Grinnell*, Grinnell College has provided the oral histories of nearly 150 alumni to “better understand and share the history of Grinnell College.” [[2]](#endnote-2) Along that stated purpose, the Alumni Oral Histories afford us the opportunity to gain an initial understanding of why students have chosen Grinnell College out of so many other schools. This project takes these oral histories and analyzes them in order to find over-arching themes of why they selected Grinnell and whether or not those reasons had anything to do with the regions of the world that they came from. Digging into these alumni oral histories of those who attended a self-proclaimed “global” school serves the dual purpose of possibly identifying over-arching themes of why students have chosen Grinnell College was selected out of countless schools, but also explain how the identity of Grinnell has been over the time span of those interviewed.

*Potential Bias*

The potential for bias in any project dealing with primary sources must be addressed, and this one is no different. The participants in the alumni oral histories hosted by *Digital Grinnell* not only willingly chose to participate in the interviews, but also made the conscious decision to come back to Grinnell College for class reunions, where the interviews were conducted. That these decisions were made likely implies that the interviewees feel fairly strong connections to Grinnell College. Not that alumni who did not interview do not or those who did not attend the reunions do not, but for those who participated in the oral histories, some sort of larger sense of association with Grinnell is likely.

However, these probable deep ties to Grinnell do not necessarily impact the question we seek to answer. As stated, this project intends to determine if there are overall themes of reasons as to why Grinnell was chosen over other schools and if where the alumni came from has any correlation to those reasons. Along those lines, the project will also determine if these reasons give any hint to how Grinnell College was perceived by those who chose to attend school here. Given these questions, the answers are probably not swayed by the experiences while at Grinnell since the decision to come to Grinnell was made before any of that happened. The only possible complication to this is for those who came here because they saw how “worldly” Grinnell is; it is possible that hindsight is clouding their memories, though unlikely since Grinnell has a reputation for being worldly.

*Project Overview*

The trajectory of this project will begin by analyzing the various reasons why those who participated in the alumni oral histories came to Grinnell.

1. Maria Walinsi-Peterson, “Alumni Oral History,” *Digital Grinnell*, accessed November 29, 2018, https://digital.grinnell.edu/islandora/object/grinnell:alumni-oral-histories. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Grinnell College, “Alumni Oral History,” *Digital Grinnell*, accessed November 28, 2018, https://digital.grinnell.edu/islandora/object/grinnell:alumni-oral-histories. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)