HERI Research Brief

CIRP

HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH INSTITUTE AT UCLA
home of the COOPERATIVE INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH PROGRAM

January 2011

The American Freshman

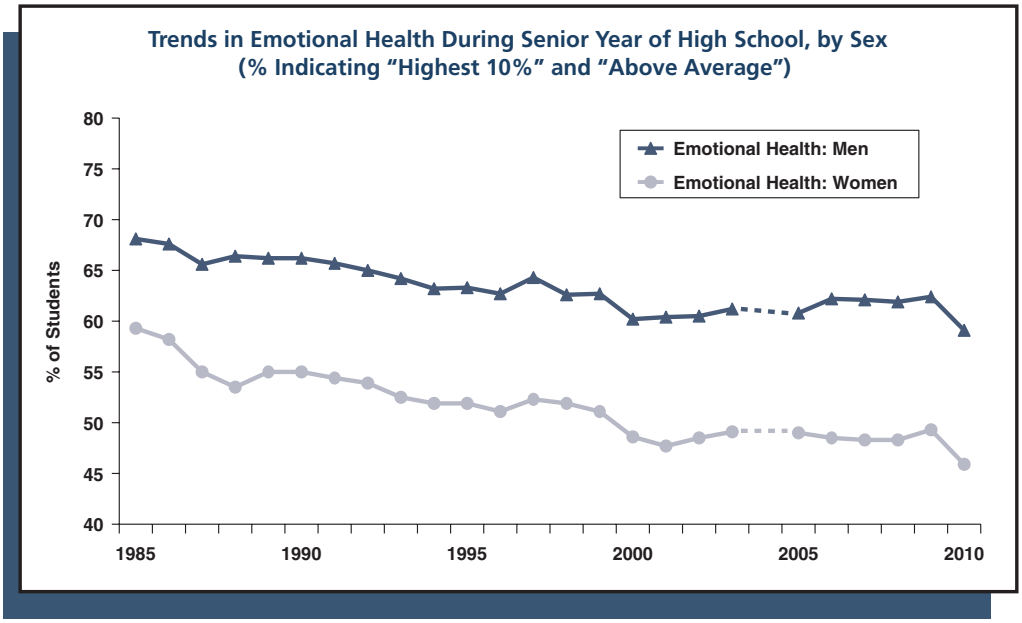
National Norms Fall 2010

The 2010 freshman norms are based on the responses of 201,818 first-time, full-time, first-year students at 279 of the nation's baccalaureate colleges and universities. The data have been statistically adjusted to reflect the responses of the 1.5 million first-time, full-time students entering four-year college and universities as first-year students in 2010.

STUDENTS' PERCEIVED EMOTIONAL HEALTH AT RECORD LOW

Self-rated emotional health for incoming first-year students is at the lowest point since we first asked the question 25 years ago in 1985. The percentage of students reporting that their emotional health was in the "highest 10%" or "above average" when compared to their peers dropped 3.4 percentage points from 2009, from 55.3% to 51.9%. Women were far less likely to report high levels of emotional health (45.9% versus 59.1%, a difference of 13.2 percentage points), although both dropped similar amounts from 2009. Students who rate themselves lower on emotional health were more likely to report being frequently depressed in high school. They were also less likely to think that they will be satisfied with college.

Following a similar pattern in this troubling direction are the numbers of students who report being frequently "overwhelmed by all I had to do" as high-school seniors, up two percentage points from 2009, moving from 27.1% to 29.1%. The difference between women and men in this case is even greater that with emotional health. Only 17.6% of men in the entering first-year class in 2010 reported frequently feeling overwhelmed. More than twice the number of incoming women, 38.8%, however, felt stressed in this manner.



Student responses show that at the same time that emotional health has been trending downward and feeling overwhelmed has been trending upward, self-ratings on academic ability and drive to achieve have been moving up. While these are traits we seek in college admissions as indicators of success, we must consider whether such pressures indeed influence emotional health and overwhelming levels of activity.

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FINANCIAL CONCERNS CONTINUE TO INFLUENCE STUDENTS

In the past two years we have seen the powerful influence of the economic downturn on incoming colleges students with respect to college choice, personal values, and expectations for college. Higher levels in the use of loans that we reported in 2009 continue in 2010, with 53.1% of incoming students using loans as part of the financial package needed to attend college. Perhaps in reaction to the continuing rise in the use of loans, more students also reported receiving grants and scholarships to attend college, as this figure moved up 3.4 percentage points from 70.0% in 2009 to 73.4% in 2010. This is a significant jump and the highest this figure has been since asked in 2001. This continues the movement towards using multiple sources and strategies to attend college as costs increase and the ability for families to pay declines.

In a new question we introduced in the 2010 CIRP Freshman Survey, almost two-thirds of incoming students reported that the "current economic situation significantly affected my college choice" (20.0% "agree strongly" and 42.1% "agree somewhat"). Students reporting an effect were more likely to also have "major" financial concerns about financing their education, to plan to live with family during school, and less likely to be going to a college more than 100 miles away. And, although both affected and not-affected students were just as likely to report being accepted by their first-choice institutions, those reporting that their college choice was impacted by the economic situation were much less likely to be attending their first-choice college. Much of this seems to be related to not being offered financial assistance from the first-choice college.

ECONOMY ALSO INFLUENCES POLITICAL VIEWS

The impact of the economic downturn for the incoming students of 2010 is not only reflected in students' college choices and personal financial concerns, but also in the overall views of public policy. Almost two-thirds (64.0%) of this year's entering first-year students agree with the statement that "Wealthy people should pay more taxes than they do now," a figure that has been on the rise since 2002 when it was at 50.1%. In addition, one-third (32.8%) of students agree that "The federal government should raise taxes to help reduce the deficit," which is the highest percentage reported since the item was introduced in 1985. Perhaps most significantly, a large percentage increase (from 66.2% in 2007 to 72.7% in 2010) occurred in students' views that "The chief benefit of college is that it increases one's earning power." This is the highest percentage ever reported by entering students since we started tracking this belief in 1971.

There are however, significant differences in such beliefs that are evident according to students' self-reported political orientation. Those who identify with the "liberal" and "far left" side are twice more likely to support raising taxes to reduce the deficit than those who identify with the "conservative" and "far right" side (45.7% versus 21.2%), and to believe that the wealthy should pay more taxes (80.3% versus 39.3%). There is also much more support among liberal students for another policy impacting the economic health care plan. Liberal-leaning students were substantially more likely to agree that a national health care plan is needed to cover everybody's medical costs than conservative-leaning students (84.4% versus 28.2%), although it should be noted that among the overall population of students support for national health care to cover everybody's medical costs dropped significantly from 70.3% in 2008 to 61.3% in 2010.

STUDENTS WITH ADHD AND OTHER "HIDDEN" DISABILITIES

In 2010 we updated the disability status question to reflect the growing attention on campuses devoted to serving college students with "hidden" disabilities such as attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and psychological disorders. More students self-identified as having ADHD (5.0%) or a psychological disorder (3.8%) than any other disability/condition. Learning disabilities, the other "hidden" condition, was the third most identified disability among first-year students, at 2.9%. As we noted with the 2008 American Freshman Report, the percentage of first-year students beginning college with a learning disability has steadily increased since we introduced the disability status question in 1983.

Incoming First-Year Students Reporting a Disability/Medical Condition, by Sex (percentages)

Disability/Medical Condition	Men	Women	All Students
Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)	6.4	3.8	5.0
Psychological disorder (depression, etc.)	2.6	4.9	3.8
Learning disability (dyslexia, etc.)	3.1	2.7	2.9
Physical disability (speech, sight, mobility, hearing, etc.)	2.7	2.7	2.7
Chronic illness (cancer, diabetes, autoimmune disorders, etc.)	1.3	2.1	1.8
Other	2.8	3.6	3.3
One reported disability/medical condition	11.9	11.9	11.9
Two or more reported disabilities/medical conditions	2.5	2.9	2.7

A significantly higher percentage of incoming first-year students reporting "hidden" disabilities drank alcohol during their senior year of high school. More than half of first-year students with "hidden" disabilities reported drinking wine or liquor "occasionally" or "frequently" during their senior year in high school and almost as many reported "occasional" or "frequent" beer consumption. This is higher than the overall student population figures of 43.3% for wine/liquor and 38.4% for beer.

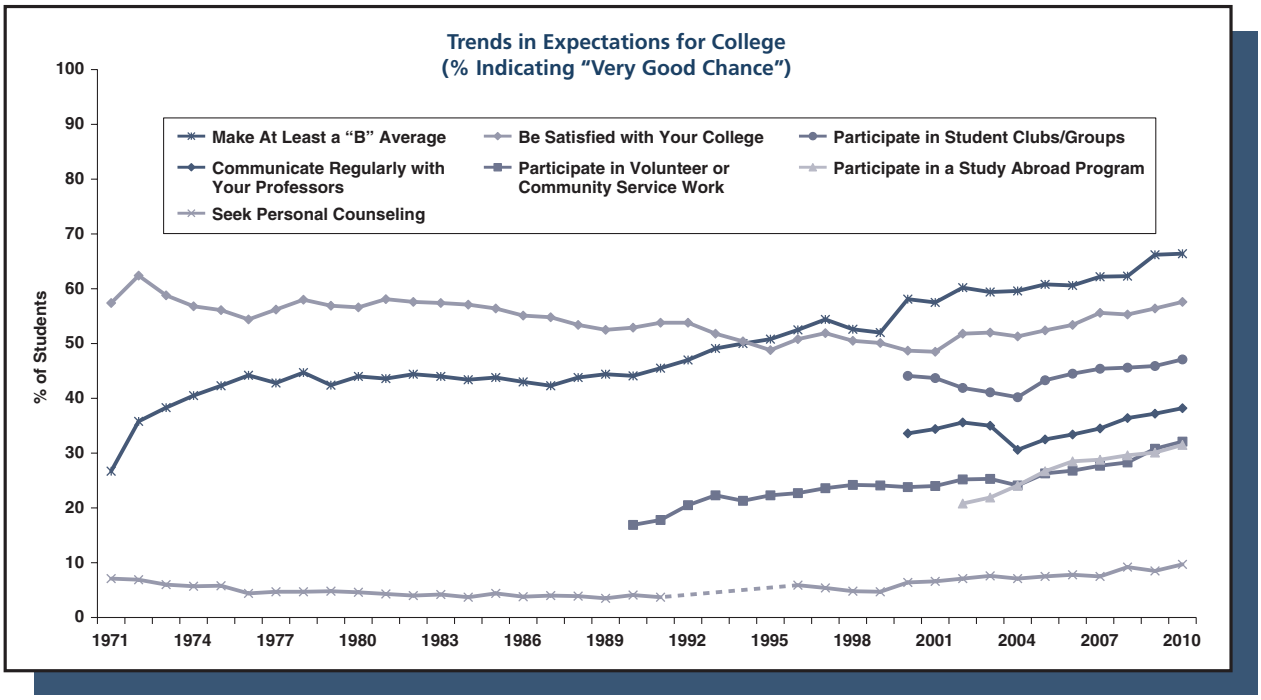
Students with ADHD, learning disabilities, and psychological disorders are also more likely than students in the overall population to expect to need tutoring in specific courses, to take longer to degree, and to receive personal counseling while in college. Colleges will continue to need to factor in these increased demands for services as we see more students with these needs entering our institution. Due to the importance of this issue in higher education, HERI will release a Brief Report that looks more closely at these survey results later in the year.

SUPPORT FOR GAYS' AND LESBIANS' RIGHT TO ADOPT

In recent years, we have seen increases in support for legal marital status for same sex couples, with approximately two-thirds of entering first-years indicating support for such rights. Because gay rights remain an important national issue, the 2010 CIRP Freshman Survey introduced a new question to further explore entering students' beliefs. The item assesses students' opinion regarding the legal right of gays and lesbians to adopt a child. Slightly more than three-fourths of entering students (76.5%) agree with the statement that "Gays and lesbians should have the legal right to adopt a child"; with 48.0% agreeing strongly and 28.5% agreeing somewhat. Even among students who identify as "conservative" or "far right," more than one half (51.7%) believe that gays and lesbians should have the legal right to adopt a child, whereas students who self-identify as "middle of the road" (80.1%) or "liberal" and "far left" (90.5%) show extremely high levels of support. Women support the right of gays and lesbians to adopt more than men regardless of political orientation. As institutions look to better understand the campus climate and ensure that they support all students, understanding the range of attitudes among different groups on campus allows them to engage students around areas of difference, and to better assist students in developing the skills that will allow them to contribute positively to a national and global society increasing in diversity.

EXPECTATIONS OF SATISFACTION AND PARTICIPATION IN COLLEGE ACTIVITIES AT RECORD HIGHS

Despite lower emotional health, feeling overwhelmed, and concern about the financial impact of college, students report record high expectations in many areas of college involvement, with six of the 23 areas we ask about hitting all-time highs in 2010. Approximately one third (32.1%) believe there is a "very good chance" they will participate in volunteer or community service work, a record high since this question was first asked in 1990, when the figure was substantially lower at 16.9%. More incoming first-years than ever also believe there is a "very good chance" they will participate in student



clubs or groups, at 47.1%, up from 44.1% when first asked in 2000. Study abroad has gained quite a bit in popularity among expectations of first-year students, with a record 31.5% believing there is a "very good chance" they will participate during college, compared with a much lower 20.8% when first asked in 2002.

Perhaps coupled with the decrease in perceived emotional health and increased pressures and the financial concerns students have, the expectation to seek personal counseling in college is also at an all-time high of 9.7%, almost one in ten, from when we first asked the question in 1971, when the figure was 7.1% (an increase of almost 50%). Given grade inflation at our high schools and colleges, the expectation of having at least a "B" average continues its steady rise to its highest point at 66.4% in 2010 as compared to 26.7% in 1971 when the question was first asked. More students do seem to know that communicating regularly with their professors is an important behavior to follow; with a record high of 38.2% believing that there is a "very good chance" they would do so (up from 33.6% when first asked in 2000).

Finally, despite all the various hopes, fears and determinations of the class entering college in 2010, optimism about their college education soars, with 57.6% believing there is a "very good chance" that they will be satisfied with college, the highest this figure has been in 28 years, since 1982, when it was also at 57.6%.

The data reported in this monograph are weighted to provide a normative profile of the American freshman population for use by individuals engaged in policy analysis, educational research, college administration, human resource planning and guidance and counseling. The data are also useful to the general community of current and future college students, their parents, and college faculty. The full report with expanded tables provides data separately for men and women, and for 26 different institutional groupings.

Please contact the Higher Education Research Institute for more information or to order your copy of the 2010 Freshman National Norms monograph.

Source: Pryor, J.H., Hurtado, S., DeAngelo, L., Palucki Blake, L., & Tran, S. (2010). *The American freshman: National norms fall 2010.* Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA.

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HERI

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CIRP

The Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) *is a national longitudinal study of the American higher education system. It is regarded as the most comprehensive source of information on college students. Established in 1966 at the American Council on Education, the CIRP is the nation's largest and oldest empirical study of higher education, involving data on some 1,900 institutions and over 15 million college students. The Higher Education Research Institute has administered the CIRP since 1973. The CIRP longitudinal program consists of* The Freshman Survey, Your First College Year Survey, the Diverse Learning Environments Survey, the College Senior Survey, *and the triennial* Faculty Survey. *Information on the* CIRP Freshman Survey, *research and publications based on these data, and other research projects conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute can be found on the HERI website at: www.heri.ucla.edu*

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