HERI Research Brief

CIRP

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

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Your First College Year Survey 2010

Developed by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) and the Policy Center on the First Year of College in 2000, the Your First College Year survey (YFCY) is administered annually through the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) at the University of California, Los Angeles. The YFCY was the first national survey designed specifically to measure student development in the first year of college, and is administered to students at the end of their first year of college. The YFCY was administered for the ninth time in the Spring of 2010. This year 31,337 first-time full-time students at 408 four-year institutions were part of the 2010 YFCY.

SATISFACTION WITH COURSES AND CAMPUS COMMUNITY

Students responded overwhelmingly positively to their first-year experiences. Of the first-year college students who responded, 79% were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their overall first year experience. On the whole, first-year students reported positive sentiments about their in-class experiences. Most were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the overall quality of instruction (80%), the size of their classes (77%), and the relevance of coursework to every-day life (62%).

Students also reported high satisfaction levels with their non-academic experiences on campus. A majority of students were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the overall sense of campus community among students (70%). In addition, 79% were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their interactions with fellow students, and 72% were this satisfied with the availability of campus social activities during their first year of college.

ADJUSTMENT TO COLLEGE

On the whole, the type of academic adjustment that was easiest for students was understanding their professors' academic expectations, with 83% finding it "somewhat easy" or "very easy" to do this. Other kinds of adjustment were relatively less easy. For example, about two-thirds of first-year students found it "somewhat easy" or "very easy" to adjust to the academic demands of college (65 %), or to develop effective study skills (63%). Fewer students reported having a "somewhat easy" or "very easy" (52%) managing their time effectively.

In terms of social adjustment, students reported great ease in establishing friendships with peers during their first year of college. Most students found it "somewhat easy" or "very easy" to establish friendships with male (78%) and female students (83%).

More than four in ten (45%) students reported that they took a course directed at helping students with their adjustment to college life, and the same percentage took a first-year seminar designed to help students adjust to college-level academics. Looking at these two groups together, 48% of students took no such first-year course, 7% took only a course designed to adjust to

Satisfaction/Adjustment During the First Year of College

	Percentage of Students Responding			
	Very Difficult	Somewhat Difficult	Somewhat Easy	Easy
Adjust to the Academic Demands of College	5%	30%	44%	21%
Understand what professors expect of you academically	1%	16%	56%	27%
Develop effective study skills	5%	32%	47%	16%
Manage your time effectively	9%	39%	38%	14%
Utilize campus services available to students	1%	11%	56%	32%
Develop close friendships with:				
Female students	3%	14%	40%	43%
Male students	6%	17%	38%	40%
Students of a Different Racial/Ethnic Group	4%	17%	43%	36%

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college-level academics, and another 7% took only a course designed to adjust to college life. Another 38% reported taking a class that was designed for both purposes.

HABITS OF MIND FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS IN COLLEGE

The *Habits of Mind* items on the CIRP surveys measure the behaviors and traits associated with academic success. These learning behaviors are seen as the foundations for lifelong learning.

Students reported exercising these behaviors to varying levels. The *Habits of Mind* behavior in which most students reported "frequently" engaging was the practice of revising papers to improve their writing (51%), followed by that of supporting opinions with a logical argument (49%), and accepting mistakes as part of their learning processes (47%).

Additional analyses were conducted to interpret potential differences in exercising *Habits of Mind* between subgroups of students. In this case it is helpful to look at the CIRP *Habits of Mind* Construct. CIRP Constructs create one unified measure from several questions designed to get at different aspects of the behaviors and beliefs being examined. They are especially useful in making comparisons between groups or longitudinal comparisons. In this case we were interested in if first-generation college students, given their differences in educational legacy, engage with *Habits of Mind* at different levels than students whose parents attended college?

The construct indicated that slightly fewer first-generation students are highly engaged in these behaviors compared to non-first-generation students: 22% of first-generation students versus 27% of non-first-generation students versus scored "high" on the *Habits of Mind* Construct.

A closer look revealed the largest differences within three *Habits of Mind*. Only 38% of first-generation students reported that they "frequently" supported their opinions using logical arguments, compared to 52% of their non-first-generation peers. Just 36% of first generation students versus 46% of non-first generation students "frequently" sought solutions to problems and then explained the solutions to classmates. Lastly, while a majority (55%) of first-generation students "frequently" integrated skills and knowledge from different sources and experiences, a larger proportion (65%) of non-first-generation students "frequently" did so.

ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

Engagement in academics is integral to the college experience. Students were asked about their participation in academic activities during their first year of college. Almost all students reported "frequently" or "occasionally" getting together outside of class to discuss course content with their peers (96%), or studying with other students (93%).

A majority of students (79%) also reported that they spent 11 hours or more a week attending class. More precisely, 67% of these students spent 11 to 20 hours a week attending class. However, this did not correlate to the time they spent doing homework. Only 37% of students reported that they spent 11 hours or more a week doing homework. Interestingly, the time spent attending classes did not vary highly by sex, but the time spent doing homework did. Slightly more female students (39%) reported spending more than 11 hours a week doing homework than their male peers (32%).

Students reported varying degrees of engagement with structured academic programs. About one in five students who responded (21%) indicated that they enrolled in an honors or advanced course. Meanwhile, just about one in eight students (12%) reported that they enrolled in a learning community.

Habits of Mind for Academic Success

Percentage of students reporting that in the past year they "frequently":	Total	First Generation	Non First-Generation
Revised your papers to improve your writing	51%	52%	49%
Supported your opinions with a logical argument	49%	52%	38%
Accepted mistakes as part of the learning process	47%	48%	47%
Sought feedback on your academic work	45%	46%	44%
Sought solutions to problems and explained them to others	44%	46%	36%
Evaluated the quality or reliability of information you received	40%	42%	37%
Sought alternative solutions to a problem	35%	36%	34%
Asked questions in class	37%	38%	31%
Looked up scientific research articles and resources	31%	32%	32%
Explored topics on your own, even though it was not required in class	29%	29%	27%
Took a risk because you felt you have more to gain	29%	29%	27%
Take notes during class	81%	83%	80%
Integrate skills and knowledge from different sources and experience	62%	55%	65%

Another CIRP Construct introduced in 2009 is *Academic Disengagement*, which measures the extent to which students engage in behaviors that are inconsistent with academic success. The construct takes into account individual items of measurement, such as falling asleep in class, skipping class, and turning in course assignments late. Male students exhibited higher levels of *Academic Disengagement* than female students after their first year of college; 34% of males scored "high" on *Academic Disengagement* compared to only 23% of females.

STUDENT- FACULTY INTERACTION

CIRP research has demonstrated time and time again that interaction with faculty is an important aspect of the first-year experience and tied to greater gains in multiple cognitive and affective areas. Overall, students were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the amount of faculty contact during their first year (71%). This may be related to the fact that 80% reported communicating regularly with their professors during this first year. About one in four students interacted weekly or more with professors during office hours (28%) as well as outside of both office hours and class time (25%).

First-year students indicated that they take advantage of their time with faculty to seek advice or guidance. A large majority asked a professor for advice after class (81%), and a similarly high proportion received guidance from their professors regarding their educational program (76%). Although a much lower percentage of first-year students reported working on a professor's research project, at 22%, this is not typically an activity that many first-year students have the opportunity to do.

SELF-REPORTED EFFECTS OF THE FIRST YEAR OF COLLEGE

The YFCY survey asks students to reflect on the changes they experienced over the first year of college. The responses indicate that their first year of college had an overwhelming impact across several indicators. Students indicated that they saw the most significant comparative differences in their knowledge of a particular field or discipline and in general knowledge; 92% and 92%, respectively, reported that they were "stronger" or "much stronger" in these areas. A majority of students also reported a "stronger" or "much stronger" ability to think critically (78%), problem-solve (75%), and conduct research (64%). Fewer, but still a majority, of respondents reported a positive effect of one year of college on their "stronger" or "much stronger" ability to work as part of a team (58%).

INTERACTIONS WITH DIVERSE PEERS

The YFCY survey asks students to report their levels of engagement with racially and ethnically diverse peers during their first year of college. Students were most engaged with diverse students in social settings. A large number of students reported "often" or "very often" dining or sharing a meal (54%) or socializing (49%) with racially or ethnically diverse students.

Students also engaged frequently with diverse peers in academic spaces. Almost half of students often or very often spent time studying or preparing for class (45%), or engaging in intellectual conversations outside of class (41%) with students from a different race or ethnicity.

Interactions with Diverse Peers

	Percentage of Students Responding				
	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
Dined or shared a meal	7%	14%	25%	24%	30%
Had meaningful and honest discussions about race/ethnic relations outside of class	18%	23%	28%	17%	14%
Shared personal feelings and problems	14%	17%	29%	24%	17%
Had intellectual discussions outside of class	13%	15%	30%	25%	17%
Studied or prepared for class	15%	14%	26%	23%	22%
Socialized or partied	10%	13%	28%	27%	22%

Compared to social and academic spaces, students least frequently engaged students of a different race or ethnicity in more intimate or sensitive interpersonal interactions. Just 41% of students "often" or "very often" shared personal feelings and problems. Similarly, 31% of students "frequently" had honest conversations about race or ethnicity outside of the classroom.

LINKING EXPECTATIONS WITH EXPERIENCES IN THE FIRST YEAR OF COLLEGE

Longitudinally linking student responses on the CIRP Freshman Survey (TFS) to responses on the YFCY allows for an assessment of the extent to which students develop and change over the first year of college. The longitudinal analysis gives insight to how expectations for college compared with reality, changes in time allocation between senior year of high school and the first year of college, growth in financial concerns, and changes in life goals. In general, students' expectations for these changes and growths matched their experiences, some of which we highlight here.

Students who had high expectations for their level of satisfaction in their chosen college were in fact satisfied. There were also many students who thought they would not be happy with their college choice but in actuality

were satisfied. A large majority (85%) of students who reported on the entering freshman survey that there was a "very good chance" that they would be satisfied with their college were actually satisfied when surveyed again at the end of the first year. Conversely, a majority (60%) of students who thought there was "no chance" they would be satisfied with their college were also pleased.

Students shifted their time allocation across academic and social activities from high school to college. For example, of the students who reported not spending any time socializing with friends in high school, 43% spent three to ten hours socializing in their first year of college. On the other end of the spectrum, only 38% of students who reported spending over 20 hours a week socializing with friends in high school spent this amount of time in college.

Most students who had confident expectations about their grades had those met. Of the students who thought they had a "very good chance" of making at least a "B" average in their first year of college, 84% were successful. Even students who underestimated their ability and thought there was "no chance" that they would attain at least a "B" average GPA, were successful, with 64% achieving a "B" average or higher. Regarding financial concern over paying for college, most students who had "some" or "major" concerns continued to show these concerns, and students who had no concerns prior to entering college showed the most growing concern. The majority of students who had no concern about financing college stayed the same, but about a third, 35%, now showed "some" concern. Of the students who entered their first year having just "some" concern, 73% maintain "some" concern, and 17% moved to now having "major" concerns. Of the students who entered college having "major" concerns about paying for college, 65% still had "major" concerns and 34% now had just "some" concern.

The differing levels of financial concern of students is not greatly impacting their plans to return to the same institution, attend a different institution, or not attend an institution at all for the Fall semester of their second year. However, there are some differences. For example, 93% of students who reported no financial concern planned to return to their same institution compared to 85% of the students who reported "major" financial concerns. Also notable is that slightly more students were still undecided about their college plans if they had "major" financial concerns compared to their peers who reported no financial concerns; 8% compared to 3%. It may be that the students with higher financial concerns were waiting to see how their financial situations changed or didn't change over the course of the summer months in order to make a determination about where and if to continue attending college.

Please contact the
Higher Education Research Institute
for more information on the
Your First College Year Survey.

HERI

The Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) *is based in the Graduate School of Education & Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. The Institute serves as an interdisciplinary center for research, evaluation, information, policy studies, and research training in postsecondary education.*

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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