

July 2009

The American College Senior

National Aggregates for Spring 2008

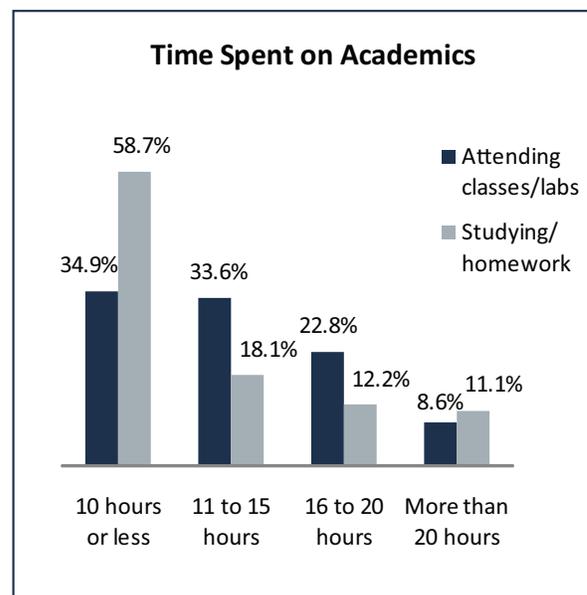
Developed by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) in 1992, the College Senior Survey (CSS) is administered annually through the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) at the University of California, Los Angeles. The CSS, which is typically administered to college seniors as an “exit” survey, offers valuable feedback on students’ academic and campus life experiences. Information from the CSS can be used for student assessment activities, accreditation and self-study reports, campus planning, research, and policy analysis.

In this report, a “graduating senior” is defined as a student who indicates that she or he will earn a Bachelor’s (B.S., B.A., etc.) degree as of June 2008, regardless of time of college entry. Of the 23,423 graduating seniors who participated in the survey, 65.3 percent were female, and nearly all (94.4 percent) were native English speakers. The overwhelming majority of respondents (80.0 percent) identified as White/Caucasian; fewer were Asian American/Asian and/or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (4.6 percent), Latino/a (3.7 percent), African American/Black (4.6 percent), American Indian/Alaska Native (1.4 percent) or Other/Multi-ethnic (6.9 percent). The following is an overview of the results of the 2008 administration of the CSS.

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES IN COLLEGE

Many college seniors spend a good portion of their week on activities such as attending classes and studying. In a typical week during senior year, almost two thirds of students attended classes/labs for more than ten hours (65.0 percent), and two out of five students (41.4 percent) spent just as much time per week studying or doing homework. Overall, seniors report being academically engaged in and out of the classroom during their college years. Over two-thirds of students (69.3 percent) indicate that since entering college they frequently discussed course content with their fellow students outside of class, and two in five (44.3 percent) frequently studied with other

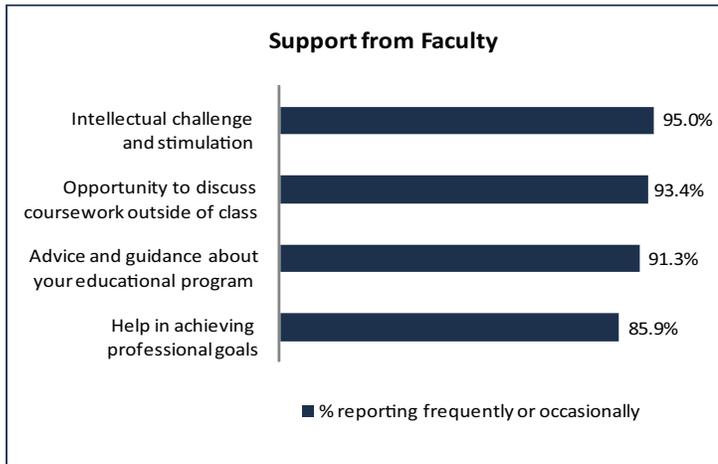
students. Slightly over one quarter of students (27.8 percent) report having participated in a study abroad program during college, and slightly more (30.8 percent) enrolled in honors or advanced courses. Perhaps as an indication of service-learning being incorporated into the curriculum, the majority of seniors (54.7 percent) also report having performed community service as part of a class. Since entering college over half of respondents joined a club or organization related to their major (58.4 percent) and/or participated in an internship program (52.4 percent).



INTERACTIONS WITH FACULTY

Some of the most important aspects of the college experience are the interactions that students have with faculty, and the CSS shows many different types of positive experiences with faculty. Almost every student reported that faculty either frequently or occa-

sionally provided them with intellectual challenge and stimulation (95.0 percent), and almost as many reported being provided with an opportunity to discuss coursework outside of class (93.4 percent). Nine out of ten (91.3 percent) received advice and guidance about their educational programs and almost as many (85.9 percent) reported receiving help in achieving their professional goals from faculty. In addition to such supportive interactions, 62.0 percent reported that they have frequently or occasionally challenged a professor's ideas in class.



GAINS IN COLLEGE

Nearly all of the seniors rated themselves stronger or much stronger in their knowledge of a particular field or discipline (98.0 percent) and general knowledge (97.0 percent). As a result of their college experience, an overwhelming majority of students felt that their ability to think critically (93.7 percent) and their analytical and problem solving skills (93.5 percent) were stronger or much stronger after college.

Nearly nine in ten seniors (87.5 percent) felt stronger or much stronger in their readiness to meet the challenges of employment after college. Most seniors plan to continue their education careers past their undergraduate years – 86.6 percent of students report some plans for graduate/professional school at some point in the future. When asked about how prepared they felt for graduate or advanced education compared with when they first entered college, 85.0 percent of seniors report that they felt much stronger or stronger in this area.

SATISFACTION WITH COLLEGE AND CAMPUS COMMUNITY

Students give overwhelming positive reviews of their college experience. The vast majority of graduating seniors (86.0 percent) report being satisfied or very satisfied with their overall college experience. Furthermore, almost as many (82.0 percent) would definitely or probably choose to re-enroll in their current school if they could make their college choice over again. Most students report that they are satisfied or very satisfied with the overall quality of instruction (87.5 percent) and the sense of community on their campus (74.2 percent).

EXPERIENCES WITH DIVERSITY

During college, students' encounter a wide range of diverse academic and social experiences. For example, more than a third (37.6 percent) students had a roommate of different race/ethnicity. From a curricular perspective, more students report taking an ethnic studies course (50.8 percent) than a women's studies course (27.1 percent). In terms of extra- or co-curricular programs, over one-third of students (35.1 percent) attended a racial/cultural awareness workshop and one in five (20.8 percent) participated in a racial/ethnic student organization. Across the board, students of color report greater levels of participation in these various courses and programs, and a higher occurrence of having a roommate of different race/ethnicity (61.5 percent vs. 31.9 percent for white students).

Compared with when they first started college, 76.0 percent of seniors report that their knowledge of people of different races/cultures is much stronger or stronger. Further, the majority of students (64.9 percent) rate themselves stronger or much stronger in

<i>Self-Rated Gains</i>	
Compared with when they first started college, percent of students rating themselves much stronger or stronger in terms of:	Percent
Knowledge of a particular field or discipline	98.0
General knowledge	97.0
Ability to think critically	93.7
Analytical and problem-solving skills	93.5
Interpersonal skills	87.9
Preparedness for employment after college	87.5
Preparedness for graduate or advanced education	85.0
Leadership abilities	82.9
Ability to manage your time effectively	79.4
Foreign language ability	43.8

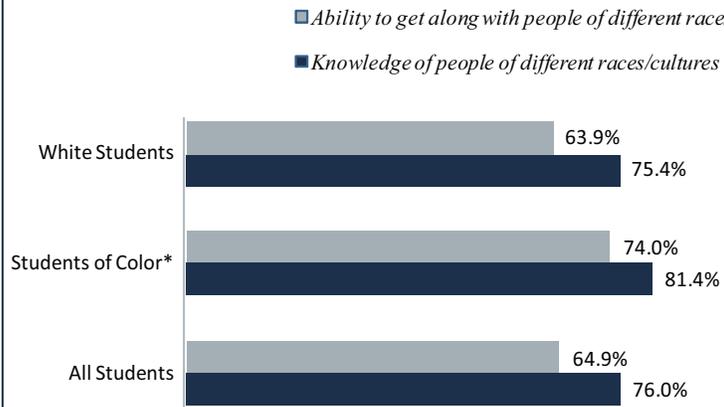
their ability to get along with people of different races/cultures. Students of color rate themselves more highly on both measures in comparison to their white peers.

For the most part, students' experiences with diversity seemed to be positive and productive; 40.5 percent of seniors often or very often shared personal feelings or problems with students of other races/ethnicities, and 35.1 percent often or very often had meaningful and honest discussions about racial/ethnic relations outside of class with a diverse peer group. Very few students report experiencing negative interactions with students of another race/ethnicity —12.4 percent report often or very often having had guarded interactions, but fewer than ten percent often or very often had tense/hostile interactions (7.2 percent) or felt insulted or threatened because of their race/ethnicity (5.7 percent). Although these numbers are fairly low, a different story of negative interactions is revealed by race. African American/Black students report a much higher percentage of often or very often having guarded, cautious interactions with students from a different racial/ethnic group (32.6 percent), followed by Asian American/Pacific Islanders (24.8 percent), Latino/a students (24.7 percent), American Indian/Alaska Native students (22.8 percent), and White students (9.2 percent). In general, students of color report greater instances of negative interactions with students of other races/ethnicities than their white/Caucasian peers.

CAREER CHOICE AND FUTURE PLANS

In terms of options for the fall immediately following graduation, 68.1 percent of seniors plan to be working

Compared with when they first started college, percent of students rating themselves stronger or much stronger in terms of:



* Includes students who marked African American/Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian American/Asian, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Mexican American/Chicano, Puerto Rican, Other Latino; does not include students who marked more than one race/ethnicity.

full-time and 13.1 percent plan to be working part-time. Of those students who plan to work next year, 21.7 percent have accepted an offer for employment. Over a quarter of students (26.0 percent) plan on attending graduate/professional school in fall 2008 and 15.9 percent of students report having accepted an offer of admission to graduate or professional school. Another 1.2 percent accepted but deferred graduate school admission. Other common planned activities include traveling (19.0 percent), volunteer work (17.0 percent), and participating in community service organizations (7.8 percent). As for the careers students report they plan to pursue, business is the most popular choice (17.4 percent), and education, art, and nursing round out the top five. However, one in five students chose an occupation other than one listed on the survey (20.0 percent), and 8.4 percent of the students are undecided as to their future career path.

Fall 2008 Plans/Accepted Offers and Probable Occupation

Percent of students reporting that in fall 2008 they plan to be:	Percent*	Percent of students reporting the following as their probable career/occupation:	Percent
Working full-time	68.1	Business	17.4
Attending graduate/professional school	26.0	Education (secondary)	7.1
Traveling	19.0	Education (elementary)	6.9
Doing volunteer work	17.0	Artist	6.8
Working part-time	13.1	Nurse	5.2
		Doctor (MD or DDS)	4.7
Percent of students with accepted offers for fall 2008:	Percent	Lawyer	4.5
Employment	21.7	Other choice	20.0
Graduate/professional school	15.9	Undecided	8.4

*Note: Sum of percentages for fall 2008 plans is greater than 100 because students may choose all that apply.

A LONGITUDINAL PERSPECTIVE ON COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

Because the CSS was designed in part as a follow-up instrument to the annual Freshman Survey (TFS), almost one-third of the items on the CSS questionnaire directly post-test items from the earlier instrument. One of the most valuable aspects of longitudinal data collection is the ability to move beyond just a “snapshot” of the student experience toward a more effective measure of change and development over time.

Expectations vs. Reality. On the TFS, students were asked to give their best guess as to the chances that they would engage in various activities during college. Seniors were asked about some of these same areas on the CSS in order to determine whether their freshman expectations matched their undergraduate reality. Students’ original expectations did reflect their actual college experiences in many instances. For example, of the students who reported as freshmen that there would be a very good chance they would play varsity/intercollegiate athletics, 80.8 percent of them did by senior year. Similarly, among those who expected in their freshman year that there would be a very good chance they would join a social fraternity or participate in a study abroad program, the majority did, in fact, do so by the time they were seniors (65.8 percent and 58.7 percent, respectively). However, for students who anticipated that there was a very good chance they would participate in student government, only 40.0 percent had done so by the senior year.

Change in Life Goals. The CSS and TFS surveys both ask student to rate the personal importance of a list of goals in life. Perhaps reflecting an increasing societal

ethos of environmentalism and sustainability, the largest change in the percent of students rating a given goal as very important or essential was the aim of becoming involved in programs to clean up the environment, which gained 14.3 percentage points from freshman to senior year (16.4 to 30.7 percent). The proportion of students believing that it is essential or very important to develop a meaningful philosophy of life also increased a fair amount (12.5 percentage points from 46.2 to 58.7 percent).

Change in political values. Time spent in college seems to correspond with a change towards liberal political values among CSS respondents. The proportion of students who characterize their political views as liberal or far left increased 9.3 percentage points from freshman to senior year (29.7 to 39.1 percent). Further, and perhaps not surprisingly, student attitudes regarding important national policies also liberalized over college—the proportion of students who believe that marijuana should be legalized, that same-sex couples should have the right to legal marital status, and/or that abortion should be legal all increased by more than ten percentage points between freshman and senior year.

For more information about the CSS, including a look at the current survey instrument, details about registration and administration, and to view examples of how to use CSS and Freshman Survey data, visit our website:

<http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri/css.html>

The complete results for all respondents, senior status, and/or comparison groups can be ordered via
<http://www.heru.ucla.edu/dsdownloads.php>



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.



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 13 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 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.heru.ucla.edu

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