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The American Freshman: National Norms Fall 2014

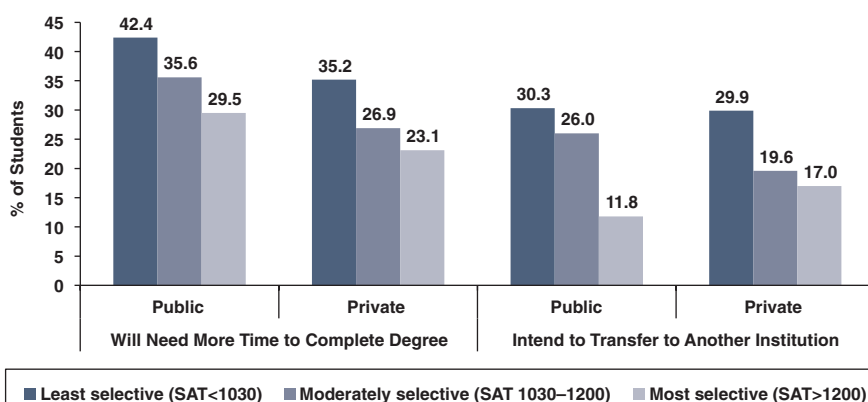
This research brief highlights findings from the 2014 CIRP Freshman Survey monograph; findings reflect analyses of data collected from 153,015 first-time, full-time students entering 227 four-year U.S. colleges and universities of varying levels of selectivity and type. The data have been statistically weighted to reflect the roughly 1.6 million first-time, full-time students who started college at one of 1,583 four-year institutions in the fall of 2014. As such, differences of one percentage point in the results published here reflect the characteristics, behaviors, and attitudes of more than 16,000 first-year students nationally.

STUDENT MOBILITY INTENTIONS VARY BY INSTITUTIONAL SELECTIVITY

Data from the 2014 CIRP Freshman Survey underscore why colleges and universities, particularly broad access and minority-serving institutions, are concerned about the U.S. Department of Education’s framework for a college ratings system. For years, the federal government has measured graduation rates for students at four-year institutions based on first-time, full-time students who earn a degree from their first institution within six years of enrollment. Findings from the 2014 CIRP Freshman Survey show that more students enter broad access, less selective institutions intending to transfer.

Nearly one-quarter (22.9%) of entering students at four-year institutions think there is either “some” or a “very good” chance they will transfer to another institution. Looking across institutions, we find that students enrolling at the least selective campuses are the most likely to intend to transfer. Figure 1 shows that 30.3% of students at the least selective public institutions and 29.9% of students at the least selective private institutions think there is either “some” or a “very good” chance they will transfer to another institution. By contrast, just 11.8% of students at the most selective public institutions and 17% of students at the most selective private institutions express a strong intention to transfer. If students follow through on these predictions, many campuses could be negatively evaluated on their graduation rates, especially those that provide access to higher education for diverse students.

Figure 1. Expectations of Needing More Time for Degree Completion and Transferring, by Institutional Control and Selectivity (% Indicating “Some” or “Very Good” Chance)

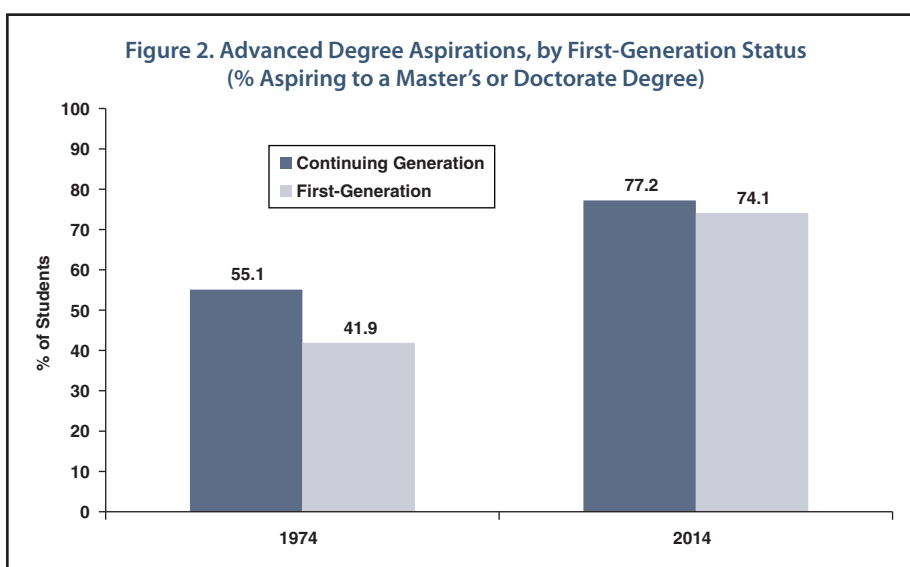


Many students also arrive at college anticipating that they may need extra time to complete their degree requirements. Just over one-third (33.7%) of students think there is either “some” or a “very good” chance they will need extra time to complete their degree requirements, and the proportion varies considerably by institutional control and selectivity. More than two out of five students (42.4%) at the least selective public institutions expect they will need extra time compared to 35.6% at moderately selective publics and 29.5% at the most selective public colleges and universities. Similarly, 35.2% of students at the least selective private institutions expect they will need additional time to earn their degree compared to 23.1% of their peers at the most elite private colleges and universities.

Students may need additional time due to choosing to double major, pursuing cooperative education experiences, or because they need to take developmental courses before enrolling in college-level courses. Data from the 2014 CIRP Freshman Survey show that students attending less selective colleges and universities felt they would need significantly more remedial education in the areas of math, English, reading, and writing compared to their peers at more selective campuses. Entering freshmen’s expectations and preparation levels vary considerably based on institutional selectivity, which can serve as a proxy for institutional resources.

ASPIRATIONS FOR ADVANCED DEGREES REACH NEW HIGHS

Although incoming students may anticipate taking additional time to complete their baccalaureate degree, they increasingly enter college thinking not just about their bachelor’s degree but also their master’s and even doctoral degrees. Whereas 40 years ago, more than half (50.8%) of incoming first-year students aspired to earn no more than a bachelor’s degree, less than one in four students in 2014 (23.4%) shared similar aspirations. Between 1974 and 2014, the percentage of students entering college with plans to earn a master’s degree as their ultimate degree objective increased from 28.1% to 43.6%, while students indicating their highest degree objective would be a doctorate or first professional degree (Ph.D., Ed.D., M.D., or J.D.) similarly increased from 21.1% to 32.9%.



Part of the increase aligns with rising participation rates and degree ambitions of female students. Today, women (36%) are more likely than men (29.4%) to express a desire to earn a doctorate or first professional degree, and women increasingly comprise a larger percentage of students at four-year institutions. In 1974, female students were much less likely (15.3%) to aspire to a doctorate or first professional degree compared to their male peers (26.3%). All students may also have higher degree aspirations due to the labor market, as many entry-level positions increasingly require a college degree; therefore, students may be recognizing that, in order to advance further, a graduate credential is necessary.

Another factor contributing to the increase in graduate degree aspirations is that over the past 40 years, the discrepancy between first-generation students’ degree ambitions and their continuing-generation peers has continued to shrink. In 1974, 41.9% of first-generation students aspired to graduate degrees compared to 55.1% of their continuing-generation peers (see Figure 2). In 2014, these differences were much less substantial. In 2014, 74.1% of first-generation students planned to earn a graduate degree compared to 77.2% of students with at least one parent who attended college. Though the gap in degree aspirations has diminished, it is important to continue examining the rates at which first-generation students and their peers ultimately earn undergraduate and graduate degrees.

EMOTIONAL HEALTH CONCERNS CONNECT WITH COLLEGE EXPECTATIONS

Previous CIRP research (Pryor et al., 2010) highlighted entering students’ declining emotional health over time and

its connection with student success. In 2014, students' self-rated emotional health dropped to 50.7% (rating themselves as "above average" or "highest 10%" compared to people their age), its lowest level ever and 2.3 percentage points lower than the entering cohort of 2013. Additionally, the proportion of students who "frequently" felt depressed rose to 9.5%.

Over time, institutions have been addressing the needs of students with various disabilities. Of those students who indicated being on the autism

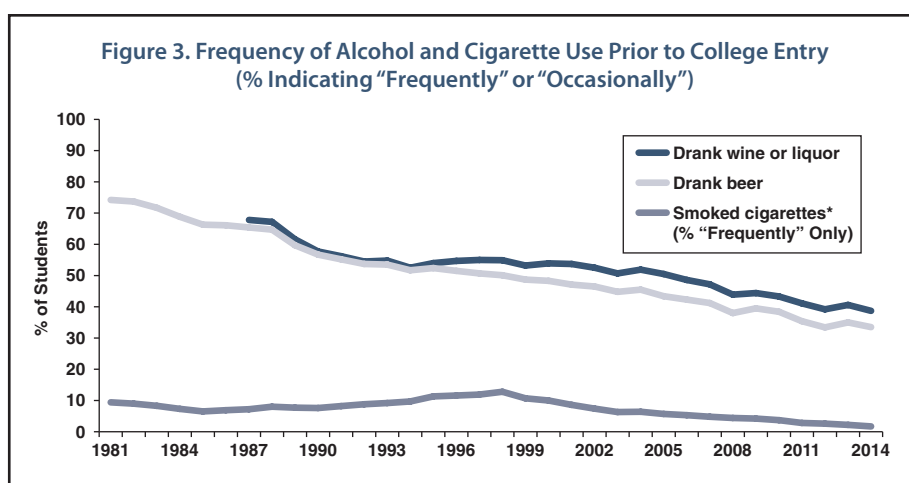
spectrum or having Asperger's syndrome, 22.4% reported being frequently depressed compared to 9.3% of those who did not report the disorder. Over 17% of students who reported having a chronic illness (17.5%), as well as those who indicated having Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD, 17.2%), were frequently depressed, in contrast to those who reported not having these conditions (9.2% and 9%, respectively).

Students who felt depressed more frequently reported behaviors reflecting disengagement. While these behaviors were not as widespread, students who were "frequently" depressed were about twice as likely to "frequently" come late to class (13.9%, compared to 7.2% for "occasionally" depressed and 5.5% for "not at all" depressed) and frequently fall asleep in class (14.1%, compared to 6.2% "occasionally" and 4.4% "not at all").

Previous research (HERI, 2014) suggests that students with lower levels of emotional health wind up being less satisfied with college and struggle to develop a sense of belonging on campus, even after four years of college. Students who felt frequently depressed were significantly more likely to report "some chance" or a "very good chance" that they would seek personal counseling. With counseling centers on campus reporting a record number of visits and increased wait times (Misner, 2014), it is clear that campuses have more work to do to assist students experiencing emotional health issues.

STUDENTS' ALCOHOL AND TOBACCO USE DROPS SUBSTANTIALLY

In 2014, students enrolling at four-year colleges and universities entered with the lowest self-reported rates of alcohol and cigarette use in over 30 years. Whereas 74.2% of students indicated they "frequently" or "occasionally" drank beer in



1981, the percentage of students in 2014 who had done so declined to 33.5%. Students' intake of wine or hard liquor during senior year of high school dropped from 67.8% in 1987 to 38.7% in 2014. Figure 3 shows the same trend for students who smoke cigarettes, with 9.2% of students in 1981 reporting "frequent" cigarette use compared to only 1.7% of students in 2014. Such declines reflect a number of social, medical, and legal changes over time, including changes to the legal age of alcohol and tobacco consumption in many states.

Despite declines in alcohol use among entering college students, statistics from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) reveal that many students likely explore alcohol for the first time while in college. It is clear that college students still drink significantly; however, students are arriving on campus with much less prior experience consuming alcohol than their peers from 20 or 30 years ago. Such changes may have important consequences for alcohol education and other prevention programs.

Among students who reported "frequently" consuming wine or liquor during their senior year of high school, 53% indicated that a "very important" reason for choosing their institution was its reputation for social activities, which compares to 44.8% of students who drank wine or liquor "occasionally" and 40.7% of students who did not drink at all. Additionally, students who drank frequently were less likely to think they would earn at least a B average in college and slightly less likely to think there was "a very good chance" they would participate in their institutions' student clubs or groups. Thus, students who drink in high school may be less likely to participate in postsecondary extracurricular activities, while simultaneously formulating lower expectations for academic success and engagement before even starting college.

STUDENTS' TIME PARTYING AND SOCIALIZING WITH FRIENDS HITS ALL-TIME LOW WHILE SOCIAL MEDIA USE RISES

Today's college students arrive on campus with different social experiences and expectations in comparison to students from the 1980s, 1990s, and even the 2000s. For example, in 1987, 37.9% of incoming college students socialized at least 16 hours per week with friends while 18.1% spent five hours or less. By 2014, 18.0% of students reported spending at least 16 hours per week socializing with friends (an all-time low) whereas 38.8% dedicated five hours per week or less to socializing (an all-time high).

Similarly, a declining percentage of students report spending time partying during their senior year of high school. Between 1987 and 2014, students who party less than an hour per week increased from 24.3% to 61.4%, with 41.3% reporting they did not party at all. Over the same time frame, students who report partying six hours or more per week declined from 34.5% to 8.6%.

At the same time that students report spending less time socializing with friends and partying, they are increasing interactions through online social networks. Since 2007, the percentage of students who spent less than one hour per week on online social networks declined from 31.9% to 21.7%, whereas the percentage of students dedicating six hours or more per week increased from 18.9% to 27.2%. Such increases may continue to influence how students conceptualize socializing with friends.

Even though socializing with friends has declined, students increasingly value institutional social offerings and environments during the college choice process. In 1982, 24.4% of students indicated that the institution's reputation for its social activities was a "very important" reason they chose their college. By 2014, 44.2% of students reported this was a "very important" part of their decision-making process. This may indicate that students are increasingly looking to institutions to provide social opportunities given their declining experience with less structured forms of socializing.

SOURCE:

Eagan, K., Stolzenberg, E. B., Ramirez, J. J., Aragon, M. C., Suchard, M. R., & Hurtado, S. (2014). *The American freshman: National norms fall 2014*. Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA.

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This report can be downloaded at <http://heri.ucla.edu/tfsPublications.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 administered by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA. CIRP is the oldest and most established study of American higher education, consisting of data on more than 15 million students from some 1,900 colleges and universities. CIRP continues to advance understanding of student learning and development in college through numerous books and publications and is the most comprehensive source of information on college students.

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