

Student Life Research

Center for Campus Life - Texas Tech University - Fall 2002

Insights into Class of 2005—Freshman Norms Evolve

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This newsletter represents findings from the thirty-sixth annual report of national normative data on characteristics of first-time freshman students attending American colleges and universities that began in the fall of 1966. The study is sponsored by the American Council on Education (ACE) and the University of California, Los Angeles, and has been identified as one of the most cited sources in higher education literature (Budd, 1990)¹. Following are summary information reflecting the 2001 freshman norms based upon responses of 281,064 students at 421 American four-year colleges and universities.

Taken from: **The American Freshman: National Norms For Fall 2001**

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College Freshmen More Liberal Politically

According to findings from the 2001 Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) freshman survey more entering college freshman, 30 percent², identified with a politically liberal position such as "far left" or "liberal" than those students who identified with "far right" or "conservative" than in the previous two decades. Overall the percentage of politically liberal students increased from 28 percent in 2000 and from 21 percent in 1981. The all-time high of 41 percent of politically liberal students was recorded in the 1971 CIRP study.

However, "middle of the road" is still the most popularly identified label at 49 percent, declining from last year's 52 percent. The move toward the liberal position in the 2001 report is attributed to freshman student attitudes toward a range of sociopolitical issues, including the death penalty, drug testing, and gay rights. In all of these areas freshmen reported more relaxed attitudes regarding legal repercussions for socially sensitive subjects.

Freshmen Show Interest in Political Extremes

Following what was viewed as a long-term decline in student's attention to politics, recent findings indicate a renewed interest in political issues and activism. Political discussion among students in the past year rose from 16 percent in 2000 to 21 percent in 2001 representing the largest increase in this area since the 1992 presidential election year. Students trying to keep up-to-date on political issues showed an increase from 28 percent

in 2000 to 21 percent in 2002. Students that responded strongly toward a particular political leaning (either to the "far right" or "far left") expressed the highest percent of interest.

Student Activism on the Rise

Freshman student activism and volunteerism showed increases with student involvement in demonstrations increasing from 45 percent in 2000 to 47 percent in 2001. Continued record levels of student volunteerism posted significant change from 81 percent in 2000 to 83 percent in 2001. This increase has somewhat of a carryover affect from required high school participation in volunteerism and community service activity for graduation. In 1998, required high school volunteerism was at 23 percent increasing to 28 percent in 2001.

Interracial Interaction Increases Among Freshman

The CIRP reported a record high with 70.0 percent of the nations freshman having "socialized with someone of another racial/ethnic group" in 2001, compared with 68 percent of previous year's freshmen. The 2001 increase reflects almost a twelve-percentage point increase from 1992. Women were more likely than men to socialize with people from different racial/ethnic backgrounds.

Agreement with the statement that "racial discrimination is no longer a major problem in America" continued to decline in 2001 down to 19 percent, with 2000 showing 21 percent and 1999 at 20 percent. Freshman students also indicated increased racial awareness by more individuals who are committed to "helping to promote racial understanding" at 31 percent in 2001 up from 30 percent in 1999. The highest percentage of freshman students who viewed this objective as important or essential peaked in 1992 at 46 percent.

Sense of Health and Wellness Continue to Decline; Gender Gap Persists

The self-ratings in physical and emotional health showed record lows in 2001. Students who rated their physical health as above average compared to others their own age declined to 55 percent in 2001, from 56 percent in 2000, and from the all time high of 64 percent in 1986. Emotional health ratings declined as well with 53 percent considering their health to be above average, compared to 54 percent in 2000, and the all time high of 64 percent in 1985. More students anticipated the possible need for counseling at 7 percent up from 6 percent in 2000, as compared to 3 percent in 1989.

Gender differences in the above areas were notable; two-thirds of men (67 percent) rated their physical health as above average, as compared with less than half of women (46 percent). Males indicated that they spend more time involved in physical activities (59 percent) compared to women (43 percent). Comparisons of emotional health stacked up in a similar fashion with men rating themselves emotionally healthy (60 percent) compared to women (48 percent). Female students often felt overwhelmed with all that they had to do (37 percent) as compared to males (17 percent).

The Student Life Research area is a new addition to the Center for Campus Life in the Division of Student Affairs. The goal of Student Life Research Newsletter will be to provide information about the contemporary American college student.



Record Numbers of Freshmen Report No Religious Preference

Current religious preference indicated an all time high for “none” at 16 percent in 2001, as compared with 15 percent in 2000, and 7 percent in 1966. This trend parallels the increase in percentages of students reporting no religious preference for at least one parent; 12 percent of freshmen describe fathers as having no religious preference, and a record high of no religious preference for mothers at 8 percent. In addition, frequent attendance at religious services shows a pattern of decline at 44 percent in 2001, compared with 44 percent in 2000, and the high of 54 percent in 1971.

Prayer or meditation time during the average week also declined from 68 percent in 2000 to 66 percent in 2001. Self-ratings for religiousness as compared to the average person of the same age found students ranking themselves at 32 percent above average or in the highest 10 percent. Religiousness

appear to be more academically disengaged in class than in previous years with 41 percent of students feeling “frequently” bored in class during their senior year in high school, as compared to 40 in 2000, and the record low of 29 percent in 1985. Lateness to class was at a record high of 65 percent in 2001, compared to 64 percent in 2000, and the record low of 48 percent in 1966. Oversleeping and missing a class or other type of appointment by freshman students rose from 35 percent in 2000 to 36 percent in 2001; this number nearly double the rate recorded in 1968 of 20 percent.

Students also reported less time spent studying with 35 percent of entering college students completing six or more hours per week in 2001; this is the lowest figure since this question was first presented in 1987 when 47 percent reported studying six or more hours per week. However, in spite of the lower hour commitment to study

ratings were the second-lowest self-rating figure among all of the 21 items in the section.

Boredom and Tardiness Signal Record Levels of Academic Disengagement

The 2001 freshmen

time, 44 percent of the entering freshman reported earning “A” averages in high school, up from 43 percent in 2000, and a low of 18 percent in 1968.

Increased Intrinsic Motivations For College Attendance

Intrinsic motivations to attend college have continued to increase; 78 percent of freshman listed wanting to “learn more about things that interest me” as one of the most important reasons for attending college, up from 77 percent in 2000. Getting a general education and developing an appreciation for ideas was thought to be very important to almost two thirds (66 percent) of entering freshman, compared with 64 percent in 2000. Wanting to become a “more cultured person” by attending college was up from 40 percent in 2000 to 42 percent in 2001.

Attending college to please parents showed a decline in importance down to 33.3 percent in 2001 from 36 percent in 2000. Parents continue to play a significant role in the decision making of students to attend college as compared to 1971 when only 23 percent cited parental wishes as an important influence. Value of a college education in helping students to get a better job after graduation declined to 70 percent, with not as many students viewing this as important, as compared to 72 percent in 2000 and 80 percent in 1993.

1. Budd, J. M. (1990). Higher education literature: Characteristics of citation patterns. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 61(1), 84-97.

2. All percentages from research findings are rounded to the nearest whole number.



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