

Texas Tech Students Deviate From CIRP National Norms

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Introduction

The Cooperative Institute Research Program (CIRP) has been surveying incoming college freshman nationally for the past 39 years in order to establish freshman norms. The 2005 CIRP Freshman Survey was the 39th Freshman Survey conducted by the Higher Education Institute at UCLA, and 14th administration at TTU. The survey is designed to provide community colleges, four-year colleges, and universities with a cost-effective method of collecting comparative data on entering students. The information is used in institutional decision-making, research, and assessment activity. A total of 385 universities and 263,710 freshman students participated in the 2005 CIRP study. Data for the "other public universities or the national cohort" as it is referred to have been statistically adjusted to reflect the responses of the 1.3 million full-time freshmen entering four year colleges and universities for the first time in 2005.

Background

The 2005 TTU CIRP study surveyed approximately 1,461 freshman students and was administered through various methods on the campus. Of the original n=883 returns, n=859 were deemed useable. Returns were generated from the following campus sources: IS-1100 Freshman Seminar Classes n=413; College of Human Sciences Freshman Seminar n=252; and Honors College Freshman Experience Course n=218. The useable questionnaires n=859 resulted in a 59 percent response rate (859/1461) from freshman seminar attendees; and represented 22.6 percent of the 3801 total 2005 TTU entering first-time full-time freshman (859/3801). Following are selected findings on decision making, alcohol use, religion and political affairs with comparisons to the national cohort.

The goal of the Student Life Research area is to provide information about the contemporary American college student with an emphasis on the Texas Tech student body. Research studies conducted provide data used to assist faculty and staff in understanding students, reporting/accreditation activity, graduate and undergraduate research projects, and to support on-going campus programs and services.

Rising Influence of Parents and Other Adults in Students College-Going Decisions

More students today report that they are attending college, in part, because their parents wanted them to go and this appears to be more important to TTU students than many participating incoming freshman that took the CIRP survey. Overall, 58.8 percent of the TTU incoming freshmen class cited parental influence as very important, as compared to 42.4 percent reported by the national cohort. This percentage of parental influence is up from responses of TTU students in 2004 at 50.8 percent, but is a less noteworthy change reported for students from all the participating universities at 41.2 percent. Apart from parental influence, encouragement from a mentor or role model has also become more important in influencing college-going decisions for a larger proportion of TTU freshman at 17.6 percent, compared to 15.8 percent of the national cohort.

The role of high school personnel in shaping college choice has gained importance for students who did not have the benefit of information from college-educated parents. Members of the 2005 entering freshman class from all participating universities were more likely than earlier counterparts to consider the advice of high school guidance counselors (6.7 percent) and teachers (4.5 percent) as very important in their choice of institution and decision-making process. However, TTU students were found less likely than the national cohort to be encouraged to

attend TTU by either their high school counselors (2.9%) or teachers (3.3%).

Drinking in High School

The percentage of entering college students who reported that they frequently or occasionally drank beer as high school seniors declined nationally to an all-time low, moving down 2.1 percentage points to 43.4 percent. In contrast, Texas Tech student drinking has continued to climb, increasing from 50.9 percent in the 2004 CIRP study to 56.3 percent in 2005. Interestingly, more men (46.6 percent nationally and 60.1 percent from TTU) than women (38.2 percent nationally and 53.7 percent from TTU) reported drinking beer during their senior year in high school. This trend in gender differences reverses, however, when students reported frequency of drinking wine or liquor. Males reported drinking less wine or hard liquor (48.3 percent nationally and 57.0 percent TTU), than females (48.8 percent nationally and 61.1 percent at TTU). While the CIRP pre-college beer drinking figures show a marked decline in the last two decades, the high-school experience has not translated into a decline in heavy episodic drinking once in college, a figure that has remained fairly stable nationwide at about 44 percent (Wechsler, Lee, Kuo, Seibring, Nelson & Lee, 2002). In 2005, the Division of Student Affairs, in partnership with the Health Science Center launched an alcohol education program (AlcoholEdu) at TTU for freshman and transfer students to combat this serious issue.

Religious Participation/Discussion

Overall participation in religious activities is high among American freshman but for TTU students, participation is even higher. With 79.6 percent of the national freshman cohort reporting they attended religious services during their senior year in high school, TTU students reported attendance at services was at 93.3% percent. And, while the national percentage of religious activity of incoming freshman taking the CIRP survey has fallen steadily since a high in 1997 (85.4 percent) and has now reported to have reached its lowest point, TTU students have maintained a consistent 90+ percentile of activity over the same period.

A similar trend is evident with respect to the time that students devote to prayer or meditation. This item was first included on the CIRP survey in 1996, when 66.9 percent of national cohort reported that they prayed or meditated on a weekly basis; by 2005 this percentage had declined to 61.6 percent. In contrast, 81.1 percent of the 2005 incoming TTU freshman students reported spending time in prayer each week with a less noticeable decline compared to 87.1 percent in 1997, the last year the CIRP data report was available to review.

The number of 2005 entering freshman from all participating colleges reporting "none" as a religious preference was at 17.4 percent, higher than the number reported by TTU students at 7.7 percent. Despite the declining trends in religious activity nationally however, in general more entering freshman reported spending time discussing religious subjects (35.0 percent in 2005 as

Table 1.

2005 Freshmen (Class of 2010)	TTU	National Cohort
<i>Political and World Views</i>		
Liberal	12.4%	28.4%
Middle-of-the-road	34.5%	43.4%
Conservative	48.5%	23.1%
Increase federal spending on Military	49.3%	32.1%
Volunteers only in Armed Forces	51.1%	63.4%
Dissent is a critical component of the political process	62.2%	65.2%
Keeping up with political affairs	40.3%	38.0%
Influencing political structure	18.1%	21.6%
<i>Political Activity in Last Year</i>		
Discussed Politics		
In class	42.6%	48.3%
With friends	27.0%	29.6%
With family	28.2%	27.3%
Worked on local, state or national campaign	11.4%	13.3%

compared to 23.8 percent in 2004). Though many students in the national cohort reported they frequently discussed religion during their senior year in high school, this total number was lower than the activity of their TTU counterparts (43.0% in 2005 compared to 32.6% in 2004) overall. Given the state of current events in the Middle East, national discussions concerning intelligent design and evolution, the increases may reflect contemporary issues related to discussions about the political implications of religion and society.

Support for Military Spending Wanes as Political Participation Increases (Table 1)

Freshman support for military spending is reportedly down nationally, perhaps reflecting larger public concerns about the costs of the current war in Iraq. However, incoming TTU students were more in

favor of military spending than the national cohort. A larger percentage of students in the national cohort than TTU students believed that "only volunteers should serve in the armed forces." A new item on the survey showed a shared perspective for the a national cohort and TTU students, it was a statement about political discussion, "dissent is a critical component of the political process." All incoming freshman students reported they believe it is important or essential to "keep up to date with political affairs," and, attempt to "influence the political structure." These opinions, along with the levels of political discussion activity during the last year of high school show more similarities of TTU students and the national cohort than differences. It appears that political issues are becoming more relevant to this age group.



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