The American Freshman National Norms for Fall 2006

Prepared by the Staff of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program

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This volume is dedicated to the memory of Berta Vigil Laden, a strong supporter of CIRP as a member of the Advisory Board, an advocate for community colleges and Hispanic-serving institutions in her scholarship, and an exceptional person and spirit. Her philosophy was in her email signature: "A candle loses nothing by lighting another candle." We will miss her light.

The CIRP Project Staff

The American Freshman

National Norms for Fall 2006

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THE AMERICAN FRESHMAN: NATIONAL NORMS FOR FALL 2006

This is the forty-first annual report of national normative data on the characteristics of students attending American colleges and universities as first-time, full-time freshmen. This series, initiated in Fall 1966, is a project of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), a continuing longitudinal study of the American higher education system housed at the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) in the Graduate School of Education & Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. During the past 41 years, the CIRP has generated an array of normative, substantive, and methodological research about a wide range of issues in American higher education. Recent publications provide a summary of the long-term trends generated by these data for college students (see Astin, Oseguera, Sax, & Korn, 2002; Sax, 2003; Allen, Jayakumar, Griffin, Korn, & Hurtado, 2005). The survey instrument (see Appendix B) is revised annually to reflect the changing concerns of the academic community and of others who use the information.

The data reported here are weighted to provide a normative profile of the American freshman population for use by individuals engaged in policy analysis, human resource planning, campus administration, educational research,

and guidance and counseling. The data are also useful to the general community of current and future college students, their parents, and college faculty.

A major purpose of the CIRP is to provide initial input information for longitudinal research. HERI annually conducts two additional CIRP surveys that enable institutions to follow up on their Freshman Survey respondents: Your First College Year (YFCY), which surveys students at the end of the first year of college, and the College Senior Survey (CSS), which surveys students during their last year in college. Longitudinal follow-up studies of CIRP students have been used in major studies of science students (Hurtado, Han, Saenz, Espinosa, Cabrera & Cerna, 2007), retention (Astin & Oseguera, 2002), community service and citizenship (Sax, 2004; Vogelgesang & Astin, 2000), institutional transformation (Astin, Keup, & Lindholm, 2001), first-year adjustment (Keup & Stolzenberg, 2004), the science pipeline (Sax, 1994, 2001), diversity in higher education (Hurtado, 2006; Chang, Denson, Saenz, & Misa, 2006; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002), and large-scale studies of student development (Astin, 1993).

The normative data presented here are reported separately for men and for women, and

for 26 different institutional groupings. The major stratifying factors are institutional race (predominantly black, predominantly white), control (public, private-nonsectarian, Roman Catholic, other religious), type (university,

four-year college), and "selectivity level" of the institution. (A complete discussion of the CIRP survey methodology, stratification scheme, and weighting procedures is presented in Appendix A.)

AN OVERVIEW OF THE 2006 FRESHMAN NORMS

The 2006 freshman norms are based on the weighted responses of 271,441 first-time, full-time students at 393 of the nation's baccalaureate colleges and universities. These data have been statistically adjusted to reflect the responses of the 1.3 million first-time, full-time students entering four-year colleges and universities as freshmen in 2006.

This year marks the 41st anniversary of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program's (CIRP) Freshman Survey, which was first administered in 1966. This spring, the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) will release a monograph that details the changes in the American Freshman over the last 41 years. The following narrative highlights the main findings for 2006.

Interest in Politics Increases as Students Move Politically from Center

For today's freshmen, discussing politics is more prevalent now than at any point in the past 41 years. More freshmen report that they discussed politics frequently as high-school seniors, moving up 8.3 percentage points to 33.8 percent in 2006 from 25.5 percent in 2004, the last time this question was asked. This increased interest in politics among freshmen is illustrated by the mid-term elections of November 2006 and what has been reported as

the largest voter turnout in 20 years by voters under 30 years of age (Szep, 2006).

When asked to characterize their political views, 43.3 percent of college freshmen identified as "middle-of-the-road," dropping 1.7 percentage points from 2005 to the lowest value since this was first measured by the CIRP in 1970. Both "liberal" (28.4 percent) and "conservative" (23.9 percent) each increased by 1.3 percentage points from 2005 (an increase of 16,900 students nationally). Not only is the percentage of students identifying as "liberal" at the highest level since 1975 (30.7 percent), but the percentage identifying as "conservative" is at the highest point in the history of the Freshman Survey. This indicates that freshmen are moving away from a moderate position in their political viewpoints.

In addition to being asked about their political ideology, incoming freshmen were asked if they agreed or disagreed with various statements concerning social and political issues. The issue that shows the greatest change from 2005 to 2006 is a decrease in support that "the federal government should do more to control the sale of handguns," down from 78.7 percent in 2005 to 73.8 percent in 2006. At the same time, fewer freshmen agree that "there is too much concern in the courts for the rights of criminals," moving from 57.9 percent in 2005

to 55.9 percent in 2006, the lowest this figure has been since 1975.

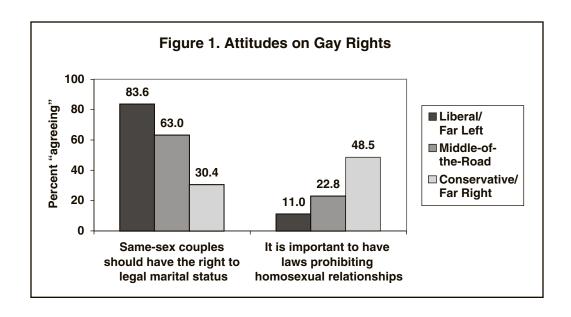
Greater support for gay rights is also evident among this year's entering freshmen. More students agree that "same sex couples should have the right to legal marital status" in 2006, at 61.2 percent, than in 2005, when that figure was 57.9 percent (an increase of 3.3 percentage points). Another question regarding student's opinions on the denial of rights to homosexuals garners little support, with only 25.6 percent agreeing that "it is important to have laws prohibiting homosexual relationships," a drop of 1.8 percentage points from 27.4 percent in 2005.

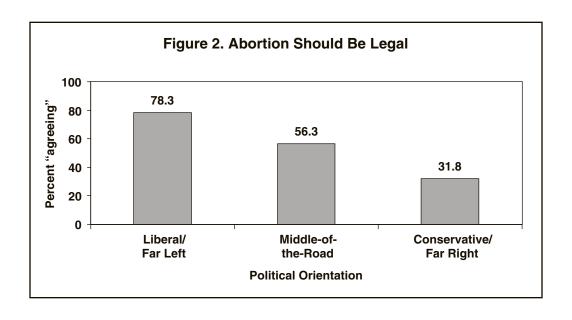
Liberals and Conservatives Divide on Gay Rights, But Not on Affirmative Action

While the majority of freshmen support gay rights, this issue also divides students along ideological lines. In fact, the issue that most

divides conservative and liberal freshmen is whether or not "same-sex couples should have the right to legal marital status." While 4 out of 5 (83.7 percent) liberals agree that same-sex couples should have this right, only 30.4 percent of conservatives believe the same. The middle-of-the-road freshmen are slightly more likely to hold points of view that are closer to the liberals than the conservatives on this issue at 63.0 percent. A similar discrepancy emerges when looking at who agrees that it is "important to have laws prohibiting homosexual relations." Although 48.5 percent of conservatives agree, only 11.0 percent of liberals do so. As with the other gay rights issue, the middle-of-the-road students tend to agree more with liberal students, with 22.7 percent agreeing with the statement.

Abortion is another polarizing issue. While 78.4 percent of liberal freshmen agree that "abortion should be legal," only 31.8 percent





of conservative students do so. Middle-of-theroad freshmen are truly close to the middle here, at 56.3 percent.

Abolishing the death penalty (liberals agree, at 48.0 percent, versus 22.5 percent of conservatives), legalizing marijuana (liberals, 52.5 percent versus conservatives, 23.5 percent), and supporting a national health plan (liberals, 83.9 percent versus conservatives, 57.0 percent) are also issues that show noticeable differences along ideological lines.

Interestingly, there is not much of a difference between liberals and conservatives on the issue of affirmative action in college admissions. Usually seen as a conservative issue, only 52.7 percent of conservative freshmen

agree that affirmative action in college admissions should be abolished. However, 44.6 percent of liberals also believe affirmative action in college admissions should be abolished.

In two of the twenty-one issues examined in the 2006 CIRP Freshman Survey we see very little difference between liberals and conservatives. Both liberals and conservatives agree in similar proportions that "dissent is a critical component of the political process" (liberals, 66.1 percent, compared to 63.2 percent of conservatives). When asked if "realistically, an individual can do little to bring about major changes in our society," liberals agree at 25.3 percent, as do 26.5 percent of conservatives.

Table 1. Percentage of Students Who Agree "Strongly" or "Somewhat" by Political Orientation

	Political Orientation		
Items	Liberal/ Far Left	Middle-of- the-Road	Conservative/ Far Right
The federal government is not doing enough to control environmental pollution	88.5	79.3	62.5
A national health care plan is needed to cover everybody's medical costs	83.9	74.2	57.0
Same-sex couples should have the right to legal marital status	83.6	63.0	30.4
The federal government should do more to control the sale of handguns	81.8	74.8	62.1
Abortion should be legal	78.3	56.3	31.8
Only volunteers should serve in the armed forces	73.0	62.1	53.6
Wealthy people should pay a larger share of taxes than they do now	71.6	57.8	42.2
Through hard work, everybody can succeed in American society	68.3	79.9	85.4
Dissent is a critical component of the political process	66.1	59.5	63.2
The chief benefit of a college education is that it increases one's earning power	59.6	68.8	70.8
Marijuana should be legalized	51.5	34.7	23.5
The death penalty should be abolished	48.0	31.7	22.5
Affirmative action in college admissions should be abolished	44.6	46.2	52.7
There is too much concern in the courts for the rights of criminals	43.2	58.3	67.6
Undocumented immigrants should be denied access to public education	34.0	47.5	61.4
The federal government should raise taxes to reduce the deficit	33.4	24.2	23.3
Colleges have the right to ban extreme speakers from campus	28.5	40.6	55.1
Realistically, an individual can do little to bring about changes in our society	25.3	28.2	26.4
Federal military spending should be increased	18.4	31.7	50.4
Racial discrimination is no longer a major problem in America	12.6	18.7	27.8
It is important to have laws prohibiting homosexual relationships	11.0	22.8	48.5

Concerns about College Finances

Two out of three (64.1 percent) students indicate that they have "some" or "major" concerns regarding their ability to finance the costs of their college education. The good news is that the percentage of students who report no concerns increased by 1.8 percentage points and the percentage of students who report major concerns decreased by 1.6 percentage points compared to 2005. The bad news is that a majority of the respondents indi-

cate that they have financial concerns. This is particularly true for students coming from families with lower incomes. While 23.8 percent of freshmen from families with incomes of less than \$50,000 have major concerns about financing college, a far lower percentage of families with incomes between \$50,000 and \$100,000 have major concerns, at 11.0 percent. Those with incomes greater than \$100,000 are least likely to have major concerns (3.2 percent).

Financial Decisions Impacting College Choice

Fewer freshmen are attending their first-choice institution, as this item is at its lowest level since 1988 (66.7 percent). In 2006, this figure has dropped to 67.3 percent from 69.8 percent in 2005. As the following graph illustrates, almost half of the freshmen attending their second choice institutions also had been accepted to their first choice colleges.

The CIRP Freshman Survey contains 20 questions on what influenced the student's choice to attend his/her particular college. The results illustrate that while financial concerns are not the most important considerations for those attending first-choice institutions, students attending less-than-first-choice institutions view financial concerns as more important.

For students attending their first choice institution, the top five important reasons influencing that decision are academic reputation, graduates getting good jobs, a visit to the campus, school size, and good social reputation. Looking at the same issues for those students attending a second choice institution, we see that the campus visit and social reputation drop off the top five and are replaced by two financial issues: being offered financial assistance and the cost of the college that was chosen. For the third choice college, not being able to afford the first choice is tied for fifth place. For those attending their less-than-third choice, not being able to afford their first choice becomes an even more important reason.

Fewer freshmen who are attending their first-choice college report that the cost of attending their particular college was a very important consideration (29.1 percent) than those attending their second choice (37.4 percent) and third choice (40.4 percent) colleges.

Students who were accepted to their firstchoice institutions but chose not to attend are

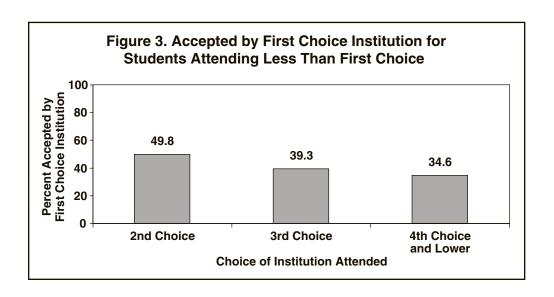


Table 2. Reasons for Attending this College by College Choice (percentages)

	Attending			
	1st Choice	2nd Choice	3rd Choice	4th Choice and Lower
"Very Important" Reason for Attending this College				
This college has a very good academic reputation	63.0*	49.9*	41.1*	30.5*
This college's graduates get good jobs	52.7*	44.9*	39.2*	31.3*
A visit to campus	43.1*	31.2	23.5	18.0
I wanted to go to a school about the size of this college	42.9*	33.6*	26.0	21.3
This college has a very good reputation for its social activities	35.6*	28.0	21.6	15.5
I was offered financial assistance	32.5	37.2*	39.6*	39.8*
This college's graduates gain admission to top graduate/professional schools	31.4	28.4	27.5*	23.8
The cost of attending this college	29.1	37.4*	40.4*	41.2*
I wanted to live near home	19.6	16.7	13.8	12.5
Information from a website	18.1	15.6	13.4	11.0
Rankings in national magazines	17.5	14.4	14.0	12.9
Admitted through Early Action/Decision program	13.4	6.4	5.0	3.7
My relatives wanted me to come here	11.2	12.3	12.1	12.6
High school counselor advised me	8.5	9.0	8.5	7.8
I was attracted by the religious affiliation/ orientation of the college	8.3	5.5	4.7	4.1
Recruited by athletic department	8.3	7.3	7.5	7.9
My teacher advised me	6.2	5.9	5.1	5.3
Could not afford my first choice	3.0	20.4	26.0	28.4*
Private college counselor advised me	2.9	2.8	3.0	3.4
Not offered aid by my first choice	2.3	13.2	18.2	21.4

Note: Asterisks (*) indicate top 5 reasons for attending this college within each college choice group.

more likely to report that financial concerns were important in choosing where they ultimately matriculated. Roughly one-third (34.0 percent) of those who were admitted and did not attend first choice schools report that they could not afford their first choice. Approximately one in five (20.7 percent) who did not go to their first choice had not received aid from that institution. The cost of attending college was important for more of those not attending their first choice (48.4 percent) than

those who were attending their first choice (29.1 percent).

Increased Reliance on Paid Work While in College to Help Meet College Costs

Consistent with previous years, aid for the first year of college from "parents, other relatives, or friends" is a substantial source, with 82.2 percent of freshman reporting that they received at least some aid from these sources. There is, however, a slight decrease in the

percentage of freshman using savings from summer work to help pay college costs compared to 2000 (the last year in which these expanded aid categories were examined). In addition, more students reported that they received aid from other savings (38.3 percent), up 6.3 percentage points. More students are relying on work to cover costs, as those anticipating a "part-time job on campus" increases 3.2 percentage points to 29.0 percent, a "part-time job off campus" increases 2.4 percentage points to 24.3 percent, and "full-time job while in college" more than doubles, from 2.7 percent in 2000 to 4.7 percent in 2006.

Racial/Ethnic Differences in Advanced Placement Course-Taking and Exams

An increasing number of freshmen indicate that they took at least one Advanced Placement (AP) course or AP exam in high school. In 2006, 61.6 percent indicated they took at least one AP course, which is up from 59.3 percent

when we first began asking this question five years ago. Only 6.3 percent of freshmen entering four-year colleges report that their high school did not offer AP courses. Though somewhat fewer students actually take an AP exam, which can provide an opportunity to gain credit for college courses, this number is increasing at a faster rate—51.0 percent report taking at least one AP exam, a percentage that is up from 45.0 percent among 2001 freshmen.

Table 3 shows distinct differences by race/ ethnicity among students taking AP courses and exams. Black students are more likely than other groups to report that their high school did not offer AP courses (7.4 percent). Almost half report taking at least one AP course (49.8 percent) but only 38.6 percent report taking AP exams. In contrast, 73.1 percent of Asian American/Pacific Islanders report taking at least one AP course and nearly two thirds (65.7 percent) took one or more AP exams in high school. At the high end of course rigor, Asian

Table 3. Percentage of Students Reporting Advanced Placement Courses/Exams Taken by Race/Ethnicity

	AP Courses Offered at My High School: None	Took 1 or More AP Courses	Took 1 or More AP Exams	Took 5 or More AP Courses
White	6.2	61.1	49.7	13.9
Black/African American	7.4	49.8	38.6	7.6
American Indian	6.5	62.1	48.7	31.7
Asian American/Pacific Islander	5.8	73.1	65.7	17.8
Latina/o	5.1	67.7	59.4	13.7
Other/Unknown	7.4	58.9	47.8	13.0
Total	6.3	61.7	50.9	14.9

Americans are more than twice as likely to report taking more than five AP courses in high school than Black students. These differences have implications for successful admission to the most competitive colleges.

Commitment to Service Continues and Civic Concerns are Highest at HBCUs

Last year we reported a significant increase in commitment to service among American freshmen—presumably due to natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina that marshaled national attention on local and global communities in need of assistance. It appears this was not a one-time phenomenon. Slight increases continued a trend in student interest in civic commitment and social responsibility.

Significantly higher proportions of freshmen with civic concerns appear to attend particular types of institutions. Approximately two-thirds (66.7 percent) of all freshmen report that "helping others in difficulty" is a "very important" or "essential" personal goal.

Three-quarters (75.0 percent) of students attending public and 79.0 percent of students attending private historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), however, report they highly value this personal goal. More than half (52.7 percent) of students attending HBCUs also indicate "becoming a community leader" is an "essential" or "very important" goal compared with 35.2 percent of students attending all baccalaureate-granting institutions. Student desire to "influence social values" also continues on an upward trend and is at its highest point since 1993. While 42.5 percent of all students indicate that this is an important value, larger proportions of students at HBCUs indicate that this is the case: 60.9 percent of students at private and 56.1 percent of students at public HBCUs. Overall student responses on many of these items are at the highest point in 10-12 years. It should be noted that students could be unsure how to enact these personal goals, as only about 11.3 percent of all students indicated the

Table 4. "Essential" or "Very Important" Objectives (percentages)

		Institutional Type				
	All Baccalaureate	All Black	Black	Colleges		
Items	Institutions	Colleges	Public	Private		
Helping others who are in difficulty	66.7	76.5	75.0	79.5		
Becoming a community leader	35.2	52.7	49.8	58.3		
Influencing social values	42.5	57.7	56.1	60.9		
Participating in an organization like the	11.3	15.2	15.3	15.0		
Peace Corps or AmeriCorps/VISTA						

importance of participating in organizations like Peace Corps, AmeriCorps, or Vista (and only 15.0 percent at HBCUs).

Racial Composition of High School and Neighborhood

For many students, coming to college provides a first opportunity to interact with socioeconomically and racially/ethnically diverse peers, as high schools and neighborhoods have become more racially and socio-economically segregated (Frankenberg et al., 2003; Orfield & Eaton, 1996; Orfield & Gordon, 2001; Massey et al. 2003). For many freshmen, college offers the first opportunity they might have to interact meaningfully with diverse peers.

The 2006 CIRP Freshman Survey reintroduced two questions about the racial composition of the high school students last attended and the neighborhood where they grew up. These questions had been previously asked three other times between 1983 and 1990, and the trends results will be further highlighted in the Forty Year CIRP Trends report (forthcoming, 2007). Students could characterize their high schools or neighborhoods on a scale ranging from "all" or "mostly" non-White to half-and-half to "all" or "mostly" White.

In 2006, 64.0 percent of entering freshmen report that their high school was all or mostly White, while slightly more students, 73.6 percent, report the same of the neighborhoods

where they grew up. On the other end of the scale, only 13.1 percent of students report that their high school was all or mostly non-White, and 14.2 percent of students report this about their neighborhoods. Students who attend all or mostly white high schools tend to live in all or mostly white neighborhoods, this in spite of an increasingly diversifying pool of students within the high school age population (NCES, 2006). In addition, slightly more men (66.0 percent) report attending "all" or "mostly" White high schools than women (62.3 percent).

Schools and neighborhoods are increasingly segregated along both racial and socioeconomic lines, and the evidence of this intertwining is most apparent when breaking out the results along both dimensions. Among students that report an annual family income of less than \$30,000, well over one-third (36.0 percent) report that their neighborhood was all or mostly non-White compared to only 6.2 percent of their peers in the \$100,000 or more income range. Similarly, among students in the lowest income range, 29.4 percent report that their high school was all or mostly non-White compared to only 7.3 percent of students in the highest income range. For students at the highest income level, nearly five in six (84.2 percent) report having grown up in a neighborhood that was all or mostly White, a significantly higher proportion than almost every other category displayed in this table.

Table 5. Racial Composition of High School and Neighborhood by Demographic Characteristics

	Racial Composition of					
	High School You Last Attended (%)		Neighborhood Where You Grew Up (%)			
	All/mostly non-White	Half & Half	All/mostly White	All/mostly non-White	Half & Half	All/mostly White
Total	13.1	22.9	64.0	14.2	12.2	73.6
Men	12.3	21.7	66.0	13.9	11.8	74.3
Women	13.8	23.9	62.3	14.5	12.5	73.0
Income Categories						
Less than \$30,000	29.4	25.0	45.6	36.0	16.1	47.8
\$30,000-\$59,999	15.9	23.8	60.3	18.2	14.0	67.8
\$60,000-\$99,999	10.1	22.6	67.3	10.0	11.7	78.3
\$100,000 or more	7.3	21.1	71.6	6.2	9.6	84.2
Race/Ethnicity						
White	5.0	20.4	74.6	3.8	9.0	87.2
Black	41.4	28.2	30.4	56.9	18.2	24.9
Asian/Pacific Islander	29.2	31.1	39.8	31.4	23.0	45.6
Latina/o	33.8	28.6	37.6	38.5	20.0	41.5
Native American	16.8	27.0	56.2	19.7	15.4	64.9
Other/Unknown race	17.3	24.5	58.2	18.4	15.1	66.5

Note: White refers to students of Caucasian descent; non-White refers to students from any racial/ethnic group other than White; Half & Half refers to half non-White and half White. Asian/Pacific Islanders are two separate groups that have been collapsed for purposes of this table. Latina/o includes Mexican American, Puerto Rican, and other Latinos.

Differences are also evident when examining these results along racial/ethnic lines. Almost 9 out of every 10 (87.2 percent) White students report that they grew up in a neighborhood that was all or mostly White, while 74.6 percent attended a high school with this same profile. Meanwhile, just over half (56.9 percent) of Black students report that they grew up in a neighborhood that was all or mostly non-White, while 41.4 percent attended a high school with this profile. Asian/Pacific Islanders and Latinas/os are more evenly distributed among the three racial composition categories

in terms of their last high school attended. Compared to the two prior peer groups, Asians/Pacific Islanders and Latinas/os tend to report growing up in more integrated neighborhoods. In particular, 45.6 percent of Asians/Pacific Islanders report that they grew up in an all or mostly White community, while 41.5 percent of Latinas/os report the same. Close to two-thirds of students in the other race (66.5 percent) and Native American (64.9 percent) categories also report growing up in an all or mostly White neighborhood, results that closely mirror those for the total sample.

Some scholars (Braddock, 1980; Trent, 1997) have noted in their research that college-bound students from more racially integrated high schools and neighborhoods are likely to seek out similar environments in their college choice, and that the converse is true as well. We examine these relationships in the current data, employing an aggregated race/ethnicity variable to determine the "per institution" percentage of White students within each incoming freshman cohort. This "per institution" ratio serves as a referent group with which to gauge the structural "diversity" of a student's chosen institution, a formula utilized in prior research (Chang, 1999).

Table 6 describes the mean percentage of White students in an incoming freshman cohort compared across racial composition of a student's high school and neighborhood.

Within the normative sample, the mean percentage of White students per institution for the entering freshman cohort is 67.0 percent, a figure that serves as a reference point to compare other student characteristics. For example, among students that attended an all or mostly non-White high school, the mean percentage of White students at their chosen institution is 49.0 percent, while the mean percentage for students from all or mostly White high schools is 72.1 percent. Similarly, for students that grew up in an all or mostly non-White neighborhood, the mean percentage of White students at their chosen institution is 48.5 percent, while the mean percentage for their peers from all or mostly White neighborhoods is 71.9 percent.

These descriptive results indicate that students from all or mostly non-White high

Table 6. Mean Percentage of White Students in Incoming Class by Racial Composition of High School and Neighborhood

	Percentage of White Students in Incoming Freshman Class at Student's Institution		
Racial Composition of High School Last Attended	Mean %	s.d.	
All/mostly non-White	49.0	28.5	
Half & Half	63.0	22.8	
All/mostly White	72.1	16.9	
Racial Composition of Neighborhood Where you Grew Up	Mean %	s.d.	
All/mostly non-White	48.5	29.3	
Half & Half	59.5	24.6	
All/mostly White	71.9	16.5	
Total	67.0	21.6	

Note: s.d. = standard deviation. Mean percentages are on a scale of 0 to 100 percent. For each separate racial composition item, all between group mean comparisons are significant at the p<.0001 level.

schools and neighborhoods are significantly more likely than their counterparts to choose colleges that are more racially diverse as measured by the percentage of White students within the institution's entering freshman class. Moreover, the percentage levels for students from all or mostly non-White high schools and neighborhoods are well below the national average (67.0 percent), a finding that corroborates prior research on this topic (Braddock,

1980; Trent, 1997). This further highlights how pre-college settings that are more racially integrated can influence students towards attending more racially and ethnically diverse higher education institutions. This is a critical point to understand within the current policy debates over desegregation in our K–12 schools as well as ongoing diversity efforts within our higher education institutions.

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