

January 2012

The American Freshman

National Norms Fall 2011

The 2011 freshman national norms are based on responses to the 46th CIRP Freshman Survey by 203,967 first-time, full-time students entering 270 four-year colleges and universities in the United States. These data have been statistically weighted to reflect the approximately 1.5 million first-time, full-time, first-year students entering 1,580 baccalaureate institutions across the country in 2011. Differences of one percentage point in the published results reflect the characteristics, behaviors, and attitudes of roughly 15,000 first-year students nationally.

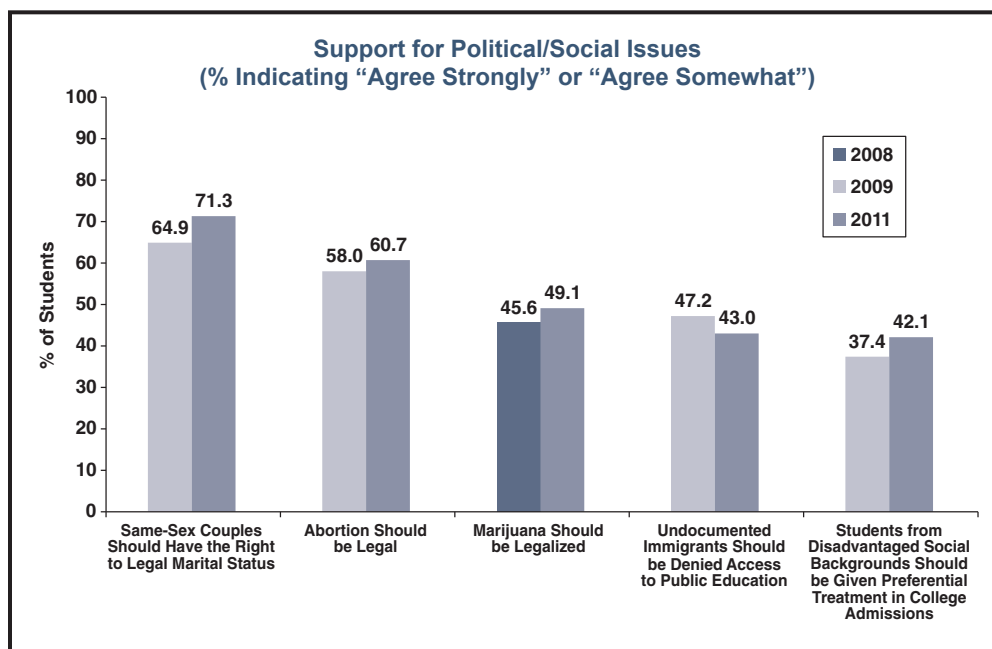
POLITICAL AND SOCIAL VIEWS DECIDEDLY MORE LIBERAL

This year's incoming first-year class expresses decidedly more liberal views than previous classes. The 2011 survey reflected this trend in five substantial changes, with the biggest percentage point change across the entire survey occurring in increasing support of same-sex marriage.

In 2011, the percentage of entering first-year students who either "agree somewhat" or "agree strongly" that same-sex couples should have the right to legal marital status moved up from 64.9% in 2009 to 71.3% in

2011—a remarkable increase of 6.4 percentage points. While male students lag behind female students (64.1% versus 77.3%), support among males rose 7.4 percentage points (from 56.7% in 2009); and even students who view themselves as conservative expressed support at the rate of 42.8%.

Opposition to access to public education for undocumented immigrants dropped 4.2 percentage points from 47.2% in 2009 to 43.0% in 2011, with 39.0% of self-described conservative students supporting access. In addition, more incoming first-year students support the statement that "students from disadvantaged social backgrounds should be



given preferential treatment in college admissions,” rising from 37.4% in 2009 to 42.1% in 2011. This 4.7 percentage point change marks an all-time high for support since the question was first asked in the survey in 1971.

Support for the legalization of marijuana has had a roller coaster history, falling from the high of 51.3% in 1977 to a low in 1989 of 16.7%, and climbing back up by 2011 to 49.1%, a level comparable to the 1970s.

Another indication that student social and political views are moving in a liberal direction is that support for legalized abortion has risen, going from 58.0% in 2009 to 60.7% in 2011, an increase of 2.7 percentage points. Self-described conservative students express support for legal abortion at a rate of 37.4% while liberal students weigh in at 79.4%.

Finally, support for the statement that “a national health care plan is needed to cover everyone’s medical costs” has not changed appreciably since 2010, when 61.3% were in support, compared to 60.5% in 2011, a drop of less than one percentage point. It is a polarizing issue among incoming students and, despite measurable trends toward more liberal politics among students responding, support has been in decline since 2007, when 74.5% of entering students supported national health care.

Given the influence of young voters in the last Presidential election, candidates for office should be aware of how college students’ views of civil rights are progressing and how increasing support for broader access to education and social services will influence the political climate on college campuses.

MORE ACADEMICALLY-ORIENTED STUDENTS ENTERING COLLEGE

In 2011, a year of intensified interest in academic rigor and graduation rates, the percentage of incoming first-year students taking at least one Advanced Placement (AP) course in high school went up 3.1 percentage points, from 67.9% in 2009 to 71.0% in 2011. Most of this growth seems to be in students’ taking five or more AP courses, moving from 18.7% in 2009 to 21.7% in 2011. More students also took the AP exams, with the percentage of incoming students that took at least one AP exam going up to 64.4% in 2011, from 60.2% in 2009. Those taking at least five AP exams also rose, from 15.5% in 2009 to 18.9% in 2011. Students

planning to major in a STEM field (science, technology, engineering, or math) were more likely to take AP classes than were those planning to major in business.

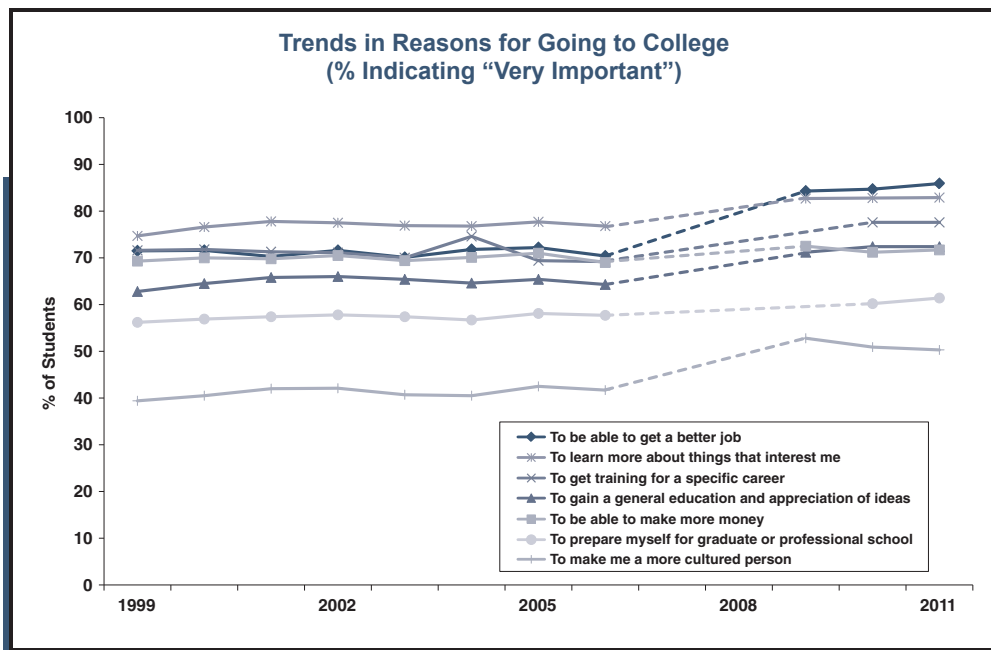
The rise in AP participation correlates with a decrease in behaviors and attitudes known to jeopardize academic success and degree completion, such as arriving late to class, frequently feeling bored in class, and high school “partying” and other non-academic activities that might interfere with academic gains. In addition, more students report that as high school seniors they “frequently” took notes in class (69.2%, up from 67.0% in 2010) and more of them expect that as college students they will discuss course content with students outside of class (48.8%, up from 46.9% in 2010), a practice we know from previous HERI studies is important for retention. Those who report that they studied 6 or more hours per week on average also moved up slightly, to 39.5%, compared to 37.3% in 2010.

MOST IMPORTANT REASON TO ATTEND COLLEGE IS TO GET A BETTER JOB

In 2011 85.9% of incoming students report that entering college “to be able to get a better job” is “very important” in their decision-making. It continues as the number one reason to attend college, but until 2006, before the current recession, “To learn more about things that interest me” held the top position. “To get training for a specific career” remains steady as the third most important reason to attend college.

Students who plan to major in different areas of study come to college for different reasons. Those intending to major in a STEM field or in business rate securing a better job as the most important reason to attend college (88.3% and 91.7%, respectively). Wanting to learn about things that interest them is the top priority for students intending to major in the social sciences (84.9%) or in humanities (89.6%), although for future social science majors, this reason ranks close to wanting a better job (83.0%).

The most striking differences are between probable business and humanities majors. Wanting a better job ranks fourth among those planning to major in humanities, with just 73.3% indicating it as “very important.” Gaining a general education and appreciation for ideas is second for humanities majors (74.7%), but fifth for business majors (69.9%). These differences show that these two groups want and appreciate different aspects of the experience and outcomes of college.



GROUP DIFFERENCES EVIDENT IN COLLEGE CHOICE

Since the question was first asked in 1974, the percentage of entering students attending their first-choice institution continues on a downward trend that began in 2006. In addition, the percentage of incoming students accepted at their first-choice college decreased from 78.9% in 2010 to 76.0% in 2011. Meanwhile, a stable gap remains between acceptances at first-choice institutions and actual attendance at those schools, at 18.1 percentage points in 2011 (18.4 percentage points in 2010).

CHANGING PATTERNS IN HOW STUDENTS PAY FOR COLLEGE

With fewer incoming students receiving scholarships in 2011, the dollar amount of scholarships trending downward, and average indebtedness for college graduates sharply on the rise, we should be concerned about how students can expect to pay for college. In 2011, 11.9% of students report major concerns about financing their education (compared to 11.1% in 2010) and 55.5% report some concerns (54.5% in 2010). Major concerns, however, continue to be most prevalent among students entering private historically black colleges and universities, with 22.1%—roughly one in five—not sure whether they can afford to complete college.

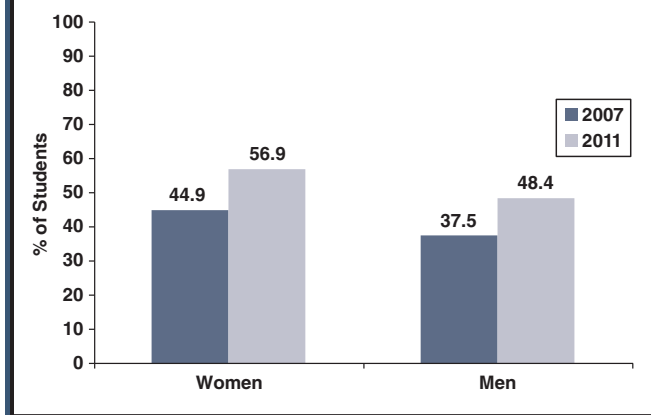
In 2010, 73.4% of students reported financing at least some of their first-year expenses through grants or scholarships but that has dropped in 2011 by 3.9 percentage points to 69.5%. Students receiving \$10,000 or more in this type of aid also declined, from 29.2% in 2010 to 26.8% in 2011, a drop of 2.4 percentage points. We have seen a substantial increase in students' using loans, moving up from 44.8% in 2001 to 52.5% in 2011, or 7.7 percentage points. In 2001, 5.6% of entering students reported that they expected to use \$10,000 or more in loans to help cover first-year college expenses. By 2011, this had more than doubled to 13.3%.

For first-generation college students, the gap between acceptance and attendance at first-choice institutions is larger (75.9% accepted, 54.8% attending, a gap of 21.1 percentage points) than for non-first-generation students (76.2% accepted, 58.9% attending, a gap of 17.3 percentage points), and the gap between acceptance and attendance is greatest for first-generation women (77.2% accepted, 54.0% attending, a gap of 23.2 percentage points)—5.1 percentage points greater than first-generation men (74.0% admitted, 55.9% attending, a gap of 18.1 percentage points). First-generation students are almost twice as likely as non-first-generation students (9.9% versus 5.1%) to specify that “my teacher advised me” was “very important.” These figures indicate that these influential high school guidance counselors and college admissions staff should be careful to provide extra support for first-generation students going through the college choice process.

SOCIAL NETWORK USE RISING

High school seniors who spent no time weekly with social media, such as Facebook, moved from 13.7% in 2007 down to 5.2% in 2011, indicating growing integration of such forums into the lives of entering college students. Incoming first-year women use social network sites more often than men, with 56.9% of women

**Time Spent on Social Networking as High School Seniors, by Sex
(% Spending 3 or More Hours Per Week)**



using such sites 3 or more hours per week, compared to just 48.4% of the men.

The data reported in the published monograph are weighted to provide a normative profile of the American freshman population for use by individuals engaged in policy analysis, educational research, college administration, human resource planning, and guidance and counseling. The data are also useful to the general

community of current and future college students, their parents, and college faculty. The full report with expanded tables provides data separately for men and women, and for 26 different institutional groupings.

The Higher Education Research Institute is making the 2011 National Norms monograph and other publications available as free downloads from the HERI website. Bound copies of new publications will also be available to order via print on demand.

Source: Pryor, J. H., DeAngelo, L., Palucki Blake, L., Hurtado, S., & Tran, S. (2011). *The American freshman: National norms fall 2011*. Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA.

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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 15 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 Diverse Learning Environments 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.heri.ucla.edu

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