



The American Freshman *National Norms for Fall 2006*

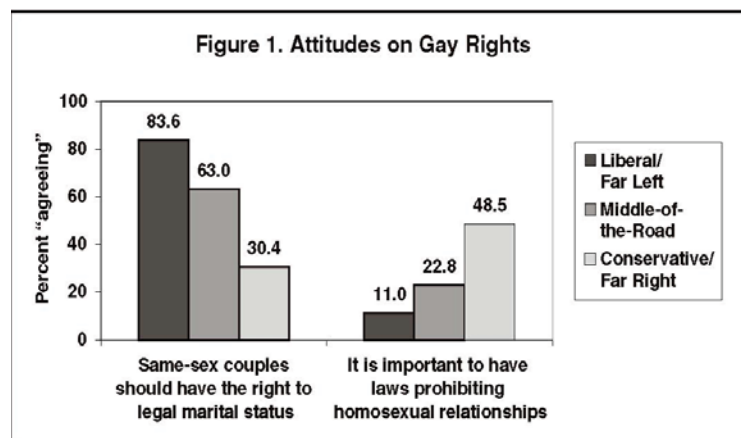
Politically-Charged Views, Service, & Racial Segregation

Greater Interest in Politics as Students Move Politically from Center

The entering freshman class of 2006 is discussing politics as high-school seniors more frequently than years before. With an increase of 8.3% from 2004, the increased interest in politics may be a result of the mid-term elections of November 2006, which has been reported as the largest voter turnout in 20 years by voters under 30 years of age. 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 Freshman Survey 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 CIRP Freshman Survey. This indicates that freshmen are moving away from a moderate position in their political viewpoints.

The polarization of political ideology is also reflected on politically-charged issues like gay rights. In fact, 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. 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. Abortion is another polarizing issue. While 78.4 percent of liberal freshmen support legalized abortion, only 31.8 percent of conservative students do. Middle-of-the-road freshmen come in at 56.3 percent. Yet there is not a great difference

between liberals and conservatives on the issue of affirmative action in college admissions. A small majority — 52.7 percent — of conservative freshmen say that affirmative action in college admissions should be abolished, while 44.6 percent of liberals agree.



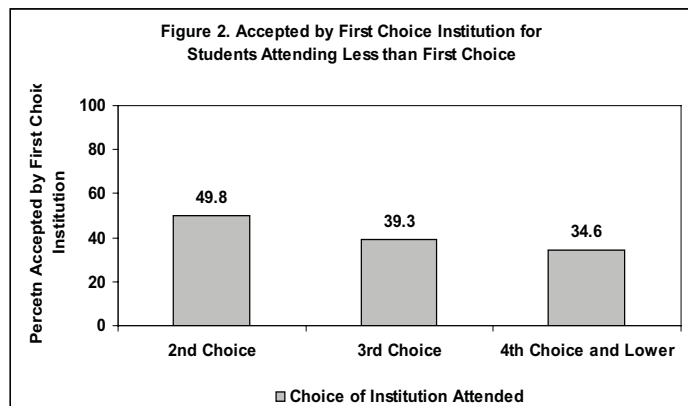
Financial Concerns Affect College Choice and Involvement

A majority of freshmen indicate that they have financial concerns when it comes to paying for college. Two out of three students (64.1 percent) say that they have “some” or “major” concerns about their ability to finance the costs of their college education. And almost half of freshmen attending a second-choice institution had also been accepted to their first-choice college.

As in previous years, aid for the first year of college from “parents, other relatives, or friends” is a substantial source, with 82.2 percent of freshmen 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.



Most 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 Composition in Schools/Neighborhoods

For many students, coming to college provides a first opportunity to interact with socio-economically 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.

Table 1. Percentage of White Students in Incoming Freshman Class at Student’s Institution

Racial Composition of High School Last Attended	Mean %
All/mostly non-White	49.0
Half & Half	63.0
All/mostly White	72.1
Racial Composition of Neighborhood Where you Grew Up	Mean %
All/mostly non-White	48.5
Half & Half	59.5
All/mostly White	71.9

AP Course Participation

The number of black students who reported taking one or more AP (Advanced Placement) courses in high school (49.8 percent) was less than any other single racial or ethnic group. Asian students held the majority at 73.1 percent, while white students were at 61.1 percent. Black students also were more likely than other groups to report that their high school did not offer AP courses (7.4 percent).

Table 2. AP Courses/Exams by Race/Ethnicity

	AP Courses/Exams Taken (row %)		
	None offered at my high school	Took 1 or More AP Courses	Took 1 or More AP Exams
White	6.2	61.1	49.7
African American	7.4	49.8	38.6
American Indian	6.5	62.1	48.7
Asian Am./Pac Isl.	5.8	73.1	65.7
Latina/o	5.1	67.7	59.4
Other/Unknown	7.4	58.9	47.8
Total	6.3	61.7	50.9

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.

Commitment to Service Continues and Civic Concerns are Highest at HBCU’s

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

Table 3. “Essential” or “Very Important” Objectives (percent)

Items	Institutional Type			
	All Bacc. Institutions	All Black Colleges	Black Colleges Public	Black Colleges 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 Peace Corps or AmeriCorps/VISTA	11.3	15.2	15.3	15.0

The CIRP Freshman Survey

The CIRP Freshman Survey has been conducted annually since 1966, and this fall’s administration marked the 40th anniversary of this research program. The data in this CIRP trends report come from responses of over 12 million students at over 1,800 of the nation’s baccalaureate colleges and universities over the last forty years. Results of the CIRP Freshman Survey provide a comprehensive portrait of the changing character of entering students and American society at large. 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 (www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri/heri.html) or via email to heri@ucla.edu.

Additional reports for campuses can be requested by contacting the HERI Data Services at heridata@ucla.edu.

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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 now the nation’s largest and oldest empirical study of higher education, involving data on some 1,900 institutions and over 12 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 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.gseis.ucla.edu/heri.

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