

Embargoed for Use Until
12:01 a.m. (PST), Jan 24, 2008

Survey finds most college freshmen satisfied with close parental involvement

Most say parents involved 'right amount,' but many Latinos say 'too little'

Kathy Wyer, wyer@gseis.ucla.edu
(310) 206-0513

While college officials nationwide say they have seen an increase in parents who are heavily involved in the college experiences of their children, a strong majority of today's college freshmen believe their parents are involved the "right amount," according to UCLA's annual survey of the nation's entering undergraduates.

The CIRP Freshman Survey is part of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) and is administered by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA's Graduate School of Education & Information Studies.

The report suggests freshmen show a dependency on parents when making college-related decisions.

"When parents intervene in their children's college life and decision-making, students may not necessarily develop their own problem-solving skills, which may limit developmental gains in their learning experiences," said John H. Pryor, a co-author of the report and director of CIRP.

A majority of freshmen considered their parents' participation in their college careers to be the "right amount," with 84 percent reporting the "right amount" of parental involvement in their decision to go to college, 80.5 percent in their decision to attend the college at which they enrolled and 77.5 percent in dealing with college officials.

Conversely, nearly one in four freshmen (24 percent) report that their parents displayed "too little" involvement in helping them select college courses, and 22.5 percent say their parents were not involved enough in helping choose college activities.

A comparison of students of different racial origins shows that white students were far less likely than students of other races or ethnicities to indicate "too little" parental involvement in dealing with college officials: 12.1 percent of whites report "too little" involvement in this area, compared with 32.2 percent of Latinos. In selecting college courses, 43.5 percent of Latino students report "too little" involvement from parents, compared with 18.6 percent of white students, and 43.3 percent of Latinos report "too little" involvement in choosing college activities, compared with 16.1 percent of whites.

"This is a real concern, because Hispanics and Latinos historically have had the largest proportion of first-generation college students, and the process of applying to college is unfamiliar to these parents," said Sylvia Hurtado, a co-author of the report and director of the Higher Educational Research Institute. "It places the onus on students to apply for admissions and financial aid, and makes counselors or programs to advise students more essential for this population."

Reasons to attend college

Academic quality remained the top reason for choosing a college, cited by 63 percent of students — a 5.6 percentage-point jump from 2006 and the highest this figure has been in 35 years. And college affordability is now more than ever a priority for students, with the importance of being awarded financial assistance increasing 5.1 percentage points from 2006 to 39.4 percent in 2007, also the highest this figure has been in 35 years.

"College accountability and affordability have been key issues in the debate over higher education this year, and it seems as if those discussions have impacted how students are making choices about college," Pryor said.

'Habits of mind' for learning

The report identifies a troubling pattern in students' study habits for lifelong learning. While a large majority of freshmen report that they use the Internet on a daily basis to seek information, only a few within the classroom are cultivating the essential "habit of mind" of checking the accuracy and reliability of the information they receive.

While 75.9 percent of freshmen indicate that they used the Internet frequently for research or homework, 44 percent report that they frequently read news sites and 34.2 percent said they frequently read blogs, only 35 percent — or slightly more than a third — report frequently evaluating the quality or reliability of information they receive, and just 29 percent report frequently exploring topics on their own, even when it was not required for class. A slim 21.2 percent indicate that they frequently look up scientific research articles and resources.

"Students' frequent use of the Internet shows a preference for information that is easily accessible, but that information is not necessarily reliable and accurate," Hurtado said.

"Learning how to evaluate knowledge claims is an essential part of a liberal education, and

we expect that colleges will have to be more intentional about integrating information literacy in the education of college students today."

Impact of social networking sites

While the popularity of social networking Web sites such as Facebook and MySpace runs high — 86.3 percent of incoming freshmen report that during the last year of high school they spent at least some time on such sites each week — students still spend relatively more time in an average week studying, working and "live" socializing. About half (49.3 percent) report typically spending one to five hours per week on such sites. Only 18.9 percent indicate that they spent six or more hours a week on these sites as high school seniors.

Time spent on social networking sites appears, however, to be related not to less "live" socializing but to more time spent in other social activities. Students who used social networking Web sites more often were also more likely to socialize with friends and attend parties. This did not seem to have any significant impact on the number of hours a week students spent studying.

"Students are using social networking sites as a natural outgrowth of their off-line social lives," Pryor said. "Although incoming freshmen aren't demonstrating negative academic effects at this stage, time management, which can impact academic performance, can be an issue for students who spend a lot of time on such activities."

Issues of diversity

Attitudes about diversity continue to change among incoming first-year students: 36.7 percent of students expressed the personal goal of helping to promote racial understanding, a 2.7 percentage-point increase from 2006 and the highest this figure has been since 1994. Not surprisingly, the figure escalates among students at black colleges and universities, where 64 percent see this as an essential or very important personal goal.

Interest in the global community is advancing as well. When this item was first placed on the questionnaire in 2002, following the attacks of Sept. 11, 43.2 percent of students reported that they had an interest in improving their understanding of other countries and cultures; in 2007 that proportion became a majority, at 52.3 percent.

"It is especially encouraging to see more students interested in the global community," said Carol Geary Schneider, president of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, which advocates for liberal education and the development of essential skills for the 21st century. "Our shared futures will depend on the next generation of college students having a much more sophisticated understanding of global interconnections than previous generations. Our own recent research for our Liberal Education and America's Promise campaign indicates that global knowledge is also one of the areas where business leaders are least satisfied in terms of the skills recent graduates are bringing to the workforce."

The CIRP Freshmen Survey report is released at the annual meeting of the Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Freshman support for same-sex marriages has expanded steadily, from 50.9 percent 1997 to 63.5 percent in 2007. The issue, however, reveals a wide gender gap: 55.3 percent of male freshmen report that same-sex couples should have the right to legal marital status, compared with 70.3 percent of female students. Gender differences appear on other issues, as well: More than half of all males (53.7 percent) agree with the statement that undocumented immigrants should be denied access to public education, compared with 43.5 percent of all female students; 43.3 percent of males and 39.2 percent of females at black colleges agreed.

The 2007 freshman norms are based on the responses of 272,036 first-time, full-time students at 356 of the nation's baccalaureate colleges and universities. The data have been statistically adjusted to reflect the responses of the 1.4 million first-time, full-time students entering four-year colleges and universities as freshmen in 2007.

Since 1966, the first year the survey was conducted, more than 13.4 million incoming first-year students at 1,708 colleges and universities nationwide have participated. The CIRP Freshmen Survey is the largest and longest-running survey of American college students.

To view a summary or order a copy of the survey, "The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 2007" (J.H. Pryor, S. Hurtado, W.S. Korn and J. Sharkness), visit www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri.

The Higher Education Research Institute is widely regarded as one of the premier research and policy organizations on postsecondary education in the country. Housed in UCLA Graduate School of Education & Information Studies, the institute serves as an interdisciplinary center for research, evaluation, information, policy studies and research training in postsecondary education.