



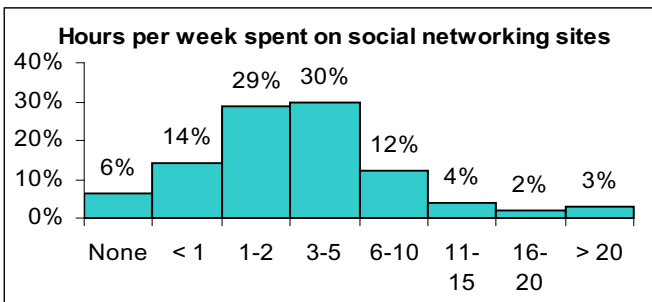
College Freshmen and Online Social Networking Sites

Social network web sites have become influential factors in how students communicate. In order to examine this phenomenon, HERI added a new item to the “time diary” section of the CIRP Your First College Year (YFCY) survey asking students how much time they typically spent each week on online social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook.

Time spent on social networking sites

Almost every first-year student, 94 percent, spent at least some time on social networking websites in a typical week. As Figure 1 shows, the majority of students (almost 60 percent) spent between one and five hours on online social network websites in a typical week during their first college year. Nine percent reported that they spent more than ten hours a week on them.

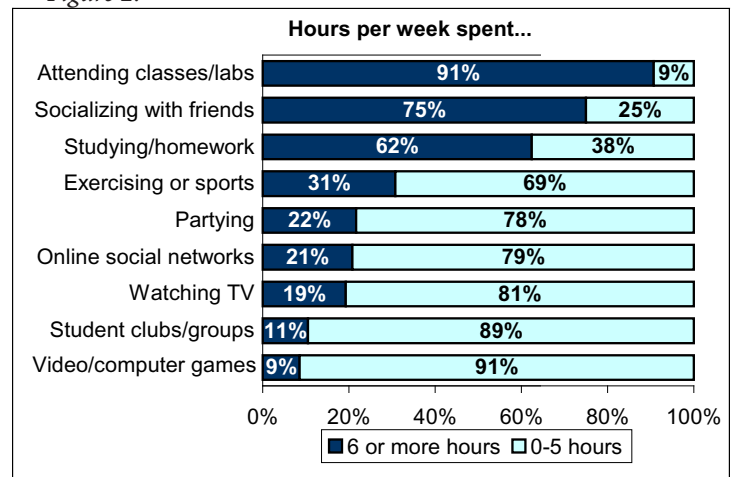
Figure 1.



In comparison to other activities (Figure 2), time spent on online social networking was less than academic pursuits (such as classes and homework) and “live” socializing. Students spent the most time attending class and labs (91 percent reported spending six or more hours a week in class), socializing with friends (75 percent reported spending six or more hours a week doing this) and studying/homework (62 percent reported spending six or more

hours a week studying). Far fewer (21 percent) spent six or more hours per week on social networking sites. Further, approximately the same proportion of first-year students reported spending more than six hours a week partying (22 percent) and/or watching TV (19 percent).

Figure 2.



Who is spending the time on social networking sites?

In general, fewer freshman male students used social network sites: 73 percent of male first-year students reported that they spent more than one hour per week on such websites each week, compared to 84 percent of females. Female first-year students also spent more time than their male counterparts on online social networking sites with almost a quarter of females, 23 percent, reporting spending six or more hours each week on social networking sites, compared to just 17 percent of males.



Students of different racial/ethnic backgrounds tended to report spending similar amounts of time on social networking sites, although African-American students were somewhat more likely than students of other race/ethnicities to spend six or more hours per week on such sites (29 percent, compared to 20 percent-22 percent).

Where does the time go?

Paradoxically, students who spent more time per week on online social network sites did not seem to spend less time on any other activity, as Table 1 shows. (At least they are not doing so on any other activity asked about on the YFCY. It might be that we are not capturing data on whatever activity is displaced by social networking.) Students who reported spending more time on online social networking sites than their peers tended to spend about the same amount of time in class and doing homework as these peers, and more time on real-life social activities, such as partying or socializing with friends.

Table 1.

Percent spending six or more hours...	Typical weekly time spent on online social networks		
	0-1 hour	1-5 hours	>6 hours
Attending classes/labs	87%	91%	92%
Studying/homework	60%	63%	62%
Socializing with friends	58%	77%	87%
Partying	12%	21%	33%
Watching TV	15%	17%	31%
Student clubs and groups	7%	10%	15%

These results imply that students might use social networking sites as an extension of their real social lives, with students who spend more time socializing and partying spending more time on social sites. This impression is supported by other survey responses as well. For example, students who spent more time each week on social networking sites also reported interacting more with their friends. Specifically, as can be seen in Table 2, first-year students who spent more time on social network sites were much more likely to report that they interacted daily with close friends at their institution and those not at their institution. By contrast, about the same proportion of all students reported that they interacted daily with their family, regardless of time spent on social network websites.

Table 2.

Percent reporting interacting daily with...	Typical weekly time spent on online social networks		
	0-1 hour	1-5 hours	>6 hours
Your family	40%	39%	42%
Close friends at this institution	69%	82%	84%
Close friends from your high school	19%	25%	32%
Close friends not at this institution	27%	32%	40%

We indicated above that first-year students who spent more time on social network sites also reported spending more time partying. These students also reported drinking more often (Table 3). Interestingly, the main difference in reported drinking rates seemed to be between students who spent less than an hour a week on social networking sites and those who spent more than an hour—the difference between these groups of students was far larger than that between the students who spent one to five hours or six or more hours per week on social network sites.

Table 3.

Percent reporting that...	Typical weekly time spent on online social networks		
	0-1 hour	1-5 hours	>6 hours
They occasionally or frequently drank beer	44%	54%	56%
They occasionally or frequently drank wine or liquor	48%	61%	65%
They had five or more alcoholic drinks in a row one or more times in the past two weeks	29%	40%	46%

Overall, students who spent more time on social network sites were more likely to be satisfied with their social life—almost a third of students who spent six or more hours per week online reported they were “very satisfied” with their social life, compared to just one-fifth (20 percent) of those who spent less than one hour on such sites. This is not surprising, since the heavy social-network users tend to be more social in general.

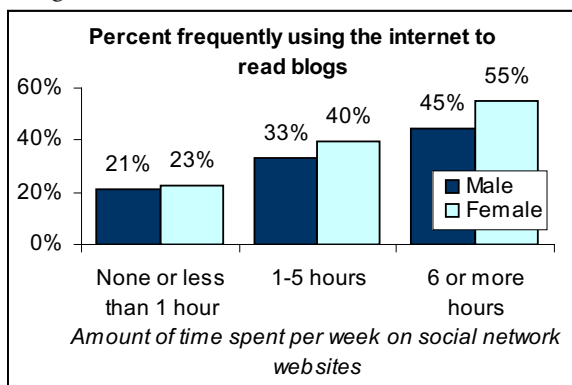
Social network sites and blogging

First-year students who reported that they spent a lot of time on social networking sites were more likely than those who didn't to also report that they frequently used the internet to read blogs. As illustrated in Figure 3, this pattern was shown for both men and women, but it was stronger for women. Among females, over half (55 percent) of



those who reported that they spent six or more hours per week on social networking sites reported that they “frequently” used the internet to read blogs, while ten percent-age points fewer males, 45 percent, did so.

Figure 3.



Consequences of time spent on social network sites?

Although students who spent more time on social networking sites did not report spending less time on critical academic activities such as going to class and doing homework, they did report having more difficulty managing their time and developing effective study skills (Table 4). Specifically, students who spent more time socializing online were more likely than those who spent less time to report that their social life interfered with their schoolwork occasionally or frequently, and that it was somewhat difficult or very difficult to develop effective study skills and to manage their time effectively.

Table 4.

Percent reporting that...	Typical weekly time spent on online social networks		
	0-1 hour	1-5 hours	>6 hours
Their social life interfered with their schoolwork <i>occasionally</i> or <i>frequently</i>	58%	72%	76%
It was <i>somewhat difficult</i> or <i>very difficult</i> to develop effective study skills	35%	40%	45%
It was <i>somewhat difficult</i> or <i>very difficult</i> to manage their time effectively	48%	52%	56%

Summary

An impressive 94 percent of first-year students reported spending time on online social networking websites during a typical week. It seems as though students utilize these online spaces as another way to socialize with their peers. Interestingly, there is little difference between the reported amount of time spent on academic endeavors between those students who spend less than one hour on online social networking and those who spend more than six hours. However, those students who spent more time on these online spaces tended to report slightly higher levels of difficulty in managing their time and developing effective study skills.

Dataset

The YFCY dataset consists of 31,500 first-year students at 114 colleges and universities in the United States

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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.

Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) Staff

Sylvia Hurtado, *HERI Director*
 John H. Pryor, *CIRP Director*
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 Lynette Schumann, *Asst. to the Associate Director*
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