

March 2014

The American Freshman: National Norms Fall 2013

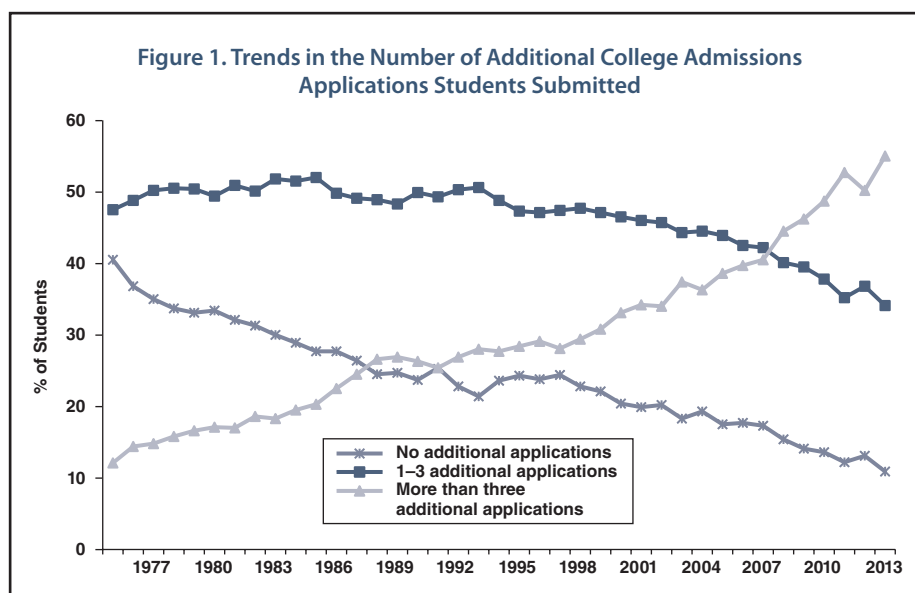
This research brief highlights findings from the 2013 CIRP Freshman Survey monograph, and findings reflect analyses of data collected from 165,743 first-time, full-time students entering 234 four-year colleges and universities of varying levels of selectivity and type in the U.S. The data have been statistically weighted to reflect the roughly 1.5 million first-time, full-time first-year students who started college at one of 1,583 four-year institutions in the fall of 2013. This means that differences of one percentage point in the results published here reflect the characteristics, behaviors, and attitudes of more than 15,000 first-year students nationally.

STUDENTS SUBMITTING MORE COLLEGE APPLICATIONS

The proportion of students submitting applications to more than three additional colleges jumped substantially in 2013. Figure 1 shows that more than half (55%) of incoming students in 2013 applied to more than three colleges in addition to the application they submitted to their current institution—up more than 10 percentage points in the last five years (44.5% applied to three additional colleges in 2008). Just more than one in ten (10.9%) students reported that they did not apply to any other institutions for the fall 2013 admissions cycle—their one and only application was submitted to the institution in which they enrolled, which is down substantively from the 40.5% of students entering college in 1975.

It may be that students have perceived stronger competition in

the college admissions process and thus are applying more broadly to increase their likelihood of being admitted to at least one campus. The increase in the number of applications may also be due to services such as The Common Application making the process of applying to multiple institutions less burdensome for students. Just in the last 10 years, institutional membership in The Common Application has more than doubled, while the proportion of students submitting applications to more than three other campuses has risen by nearly 20 percentage points. Many state systems also enable prospective students to apply to multiple institutions within the system using a single application, and several of these state systems offer application fee waivers for students with demonstrated financial need. Thus, the number of college applications students submit continues to increase as systems and agencies make the process less burdensome and less costly for students.



FEWER STUDENTS ENROLL IN THEIR FIRST-CHOICE INSTITUTION

As students apply for admission at increasing numbers of colleges and universities, fewer students are enrolling at their first-choice institution. Just 56.9% of incoming students in 2013 enrolled at their first-choice campus, which is down 2.4 percentage points from 2012 and is the lowest since we began asking the item in 1974. By contrast, more than three-quarters (75.5%) of incoming students were admitted to their first-choice campus in 2013.

The top reasons why students who are accepted to their first-choice institution opt to enroll elsewhere mostly center around cost. Roughly a quarter (25.7%) of students accepted to their first-choice institution chose to enroll elsewhere because they were not offered aid by their first-choice campus. Just over 40% of students said that being unable to afford their first-choice college was a “very important” consideration in deciding not to enroll in an institution other than their first-choice college.

INCREASING IMPORTANCE OF COST AND FINANCIAL AID IN STUDENTS’ COLLEGE CHOICE

The top reasons for choosing a particular college continue to be the institution’s “very good” academic reputation (64% indicating “very important” in 2013) and the college’s graduates getting good jobs (53.1% indicating “very important” in 2013); however, cost considerations increasingly weigh on students’ enrollment decisions. As shown in Figure 2, the percentage of students indicating that the cost of attending their current institution was a “very important” factor in their college choice process is at its highest point (45.9%) in the 10 years we have asked the question—nearly a 15-point increase from 2004.

Similarly, the percentage of students indicating their financial aid packages as a “very important” factor in their college choice decision is also at its highest point in the

42-year history of the item. Nearly half (48.7%) of students reported that their current institution’s financial aid offer was a “very important” factor in their decision to enroll at that campus—up from 33.7% in 2004.

Parsing the data by education levels of students’ parents reveals that college costs and financial aid packages are particularly salient for first-generation students (i.e., students in families where neither parent attended any college). More than half (53.9%) of first-generation students indicated that the cost of attendance at their current institution was a “very important” factor in their decision to enroll at that college. By contrast, 43.8% of continuing generation students rated cost of attendance as being “very important” in their enrollment decision—a 10.1-point gap.

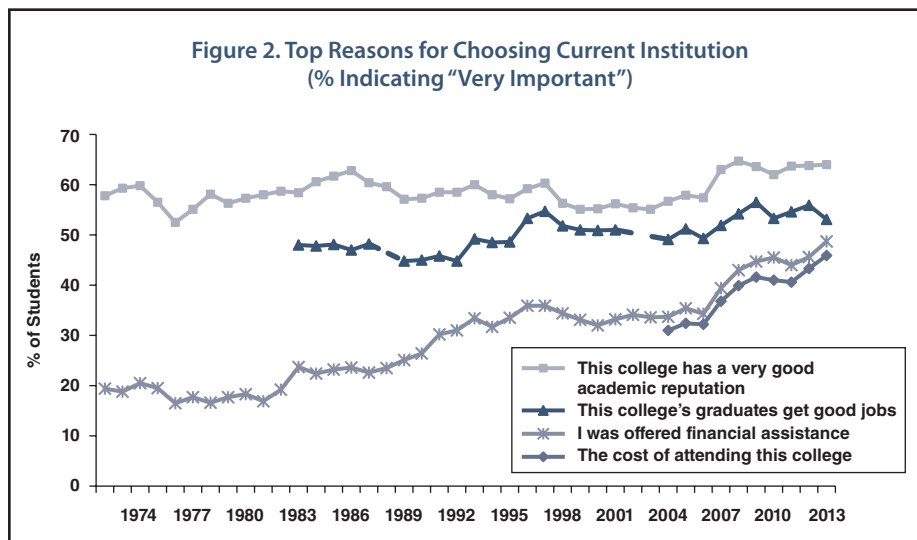
Financial aid is even more important than college cost in first-generation students’ college choice process, as more than 60% of first-generation students reported that being offered financial aid was a “very important” consideration in deciding to enroll at their current institution. Less than half (46%) of continuing generation students expressed a similar sentiment. The trends regarding the role of financial aid and college costs in students’ college choice process should signal to institutions that they must continue their efforts to simultaneously constrain costs and craft financial aid packages that adequately address students’ financial needs.

ONLINE EDUCATION

Recent years have seen a push for online access to education; as a result, there has been a significant development of Open Educational Resources (OER) through sites such as Khan Academy and MIT OpenCourseWare, and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) through providers such as edX, Udacity, and Coursera. The 2013 CIRP Freshman Survey included new items asking students to report the frequency with which they “used an online instructional website (e.g., Khan Academy, Coursera): as assigned for a class; or to learn something on your own.”

About four out of ten (41.8%) incoming students frequently or occasionally used an online instructional website as assigned for a class in the past year. Students were, however, much more likely to utilize these resources independently—almost seven out of ten (69.2%) incoming first-year students have used such sites frequently or occasionally to learn something on their own.

As colleges and universities across the country have been increasing online course offerings to



accommodate larger enrollments and constrain costs, the 2013 CIRP Freshman Survey also included two new items asking incoming students whether they expected to take a course exclusively online either at their institution or at a different institution. Overall, few incoming first-year students indicated there is a “very good chance” that they will enroll in online courses while attending college (6.5% at their institution and 2.9% at a different institution). Students who have used an online instructional website in the past year are more likely to be drawn to taking courses online while in college. Nearly 30% of incoming first-year students who used an online instructional website frequently in the past year indicate there is either “some chance” or a “very good chance” they will take a course exclusively online at their institution.

TAKING STOCK OF STUDENTS’ VIEWS ONE YEAR AFTER OBAMA’S RE-ELECTION

Freshmen started college in 2013 slightly less than a year after Barack Obama was re-elected for a second term; the year since his re-election featured a great deal of political wrangling both in Washington, D.C. and in the states. Given many of the widely publicized political debates around gay rights, immigration reform, taxes, and gun control, we examined students’ political views related to these issues.

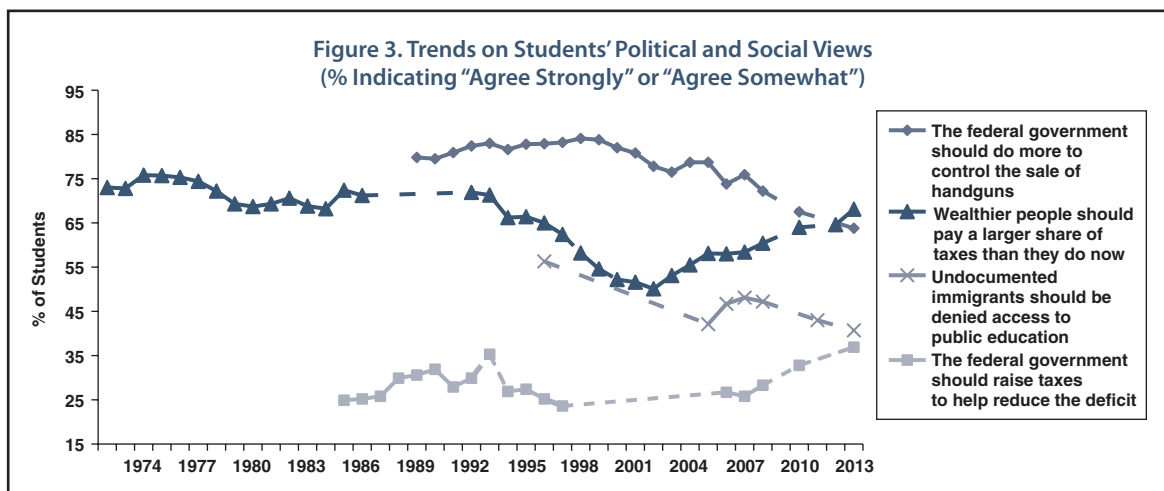
Gays’ and lesbians’ rights to adopt a child. The vast majority of first-year students were supportive (83.3%) of gays’ and lesbians’ rights to adopt a child. Results showed that while both men and women have increased their support since 2010, women continue to be considerably more supportive than men. In 2013, 86.8% of women and 79.2% of men endorsed the rights of gays and lesbians to adopt children, compared to 2010 when 82.1% of women and 69.8% of men supported this sentiment.

Undocumented students and access to public education. The freshman cohort of 2013 posted the lowest level

of support for the idea that undocumented immigrants should be denied access to public education since the question was first asked in 1996. Figure 3 shows that support for denying educational access to undocumented students has fallen steadily—15.6 points—since its peak of 56.3% in 1996. Students attending institutions located in the Far West (69.4%) and the Plains states (64.7%) were the most likely to support allowing undocumented students to access public education. These regions include California, Kansas, and Nebraska, all states that have passed measures supportive of undocumented students being granted access to education. By contrast, students at colleges and universities in the Southwest (48.5%) and Rocky Mountains (49.7%) were among the most likely to support the notion of denying access to public education for undocumented students.

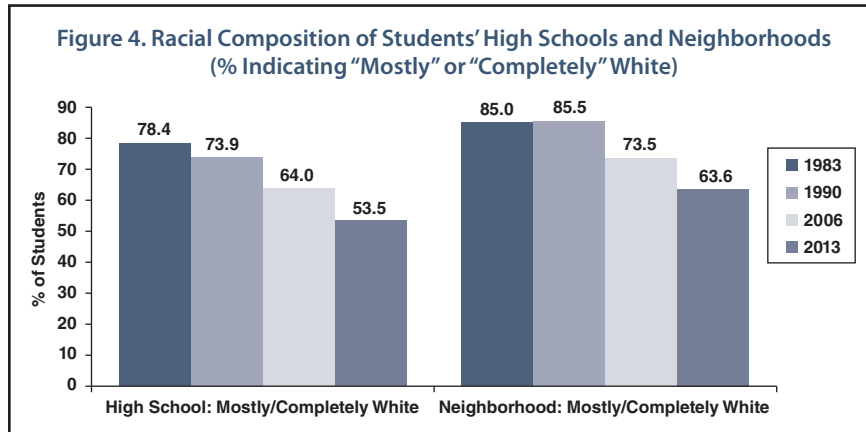
Raising taxes. Incoming freshmen’s support of raising taxes to reduce the deficit has reached its highest level since this question was first asked in 1985, with over a third (36.9%) of incoming students in agreement (see Figure 3). Last year we reported on the substantial increase in students’ agreement that wealthier people should pay more taxes, and support for this idea jumped another 3.5 percentage points in 2013. Now more than two-thirds (68.1%) endorse the idea that wealthier people should pay a larger share of taxes than they do now. Economic populism appears to be resonating with this year’s college freshmen.

Control of handguns. Since 1989 first-year students have responded to an item on the CIRP Freshman Survey regarding their level of agreement with a statement that the federal government should do more to control the sale of handguns. Support peaked in 1998 with over eight out of ten students (84.1%) supporting the federal government in controlling handgun sales (see Figure 3). In 2013, just over six out of ten students (63.8%) supported stronger gun control from the federal government, an overall drop of 20 percentage points from this item’s 1998 peak.



STUDENTS' HIGH SCHOOLS AND NEIGHBORHOODS INCREASINGLY DIVERSE

Freshmen in 2013 came from some of the most diverse high schools and neighborhoods ever reported on the CIRP Freshman Survey. Figure 4 shows four data points: 1983, 1990, 2006, and 2013. In the 23 years spanning 1983 to 2006, the proportion of incoming students indicating that their high school was mostly or completely White dropped 14.4 percentage points. In the seven years spanning 2006 to 2013,



that figure has dropped another 10.5 percentage points, with just more than half (53.5%) of students indicating their high school was mostly or completely White.

Similarly, neighborhoods are rapidly becoming more racially diverse. Between 1983 and 2006, the proportion of students indicating that their neighborhood was mostly or completely White dropped 11.5 points from 85% to 73.5%. In the seven years since 2006, the proportion of students indicating they came from a neighborhood that was mostly or completely White fell nearly 10 more percentage points to 63.6%.

SKILLS FOR A DIVERSE WORKPLACE

The 2013 CIRP Freshman Survey had a new set of response options for items developed from research on preparing college students for a diverse workplace and democracy. This research identifies the college experiences associated with gains students make while in college on a set of cognitive and interpersonal skills that compose the pluralistic orientation scale. Freshmen, in general, believe they have the ability to work cooperatively with others and tolerate others of different beliefs; however, freshmen scored themselves lowest on their openness to having their own views challenged.

Students attending mostly or completely White high schools are least confident across all the skill measures of perspective-taking, tolerance, openness, ability to discuss controversial issues, or cooperation with diverse people. For example, only one quarter (24.6%) of students at predominantly White high schools indicate openness to having their own views challenged as a "major strength," compared with 31.5% of students at non-White and 29.1% of students from roughly half non-White high schools. These different experiences and skills become evident in classrooms and interactions on college campuses, requiring faculty and staff to be attentive to students' backgrounds and how they can move students from their own embedded worldviews.

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SOURCE

Eagan, K., Lozano, J. B., Hurtado, S., & Case, M. H. (2013). *The American freshman: National norms fall 2013*. Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA

This report can be downloaded at <http://heri.ucla.edu/tfsPublications.php>.

HERI The Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) is based in the Graduate School of Education & Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. The Institute serves as an interdisciplinary center for research, evaluation, information, policy studies, and research training in postsecondary education.

CIRP The Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) is administered by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA. CIRP is the oldest and most established study of American higher education, consisting of data on more than 15 million students from some 1,900 colleges and universities. CIRP continues to advance understanding of student learning and development in college through numerous books and publications and is the most comprehensive source of information on college students.

Research Directors

Sylvia Hurtado, HERI Director
Kevin Eagan, Interim CIRP Director
Ellen B. Stolzenberg, CIRP Assistant Director

Affiliated Scholars

Walter R. Allen, Allan Murray Cartter Professor of Higher Education
Alexander W. Astin, Founding Director and Senior Scholar
Helen S. Astin, Senior Scholar
Mitchell J. Chang, Professor
Kevin Eagan, Assistant Professor in Residence
Patricia M. McDonough, Professor
Linda J. Sax, Professor
Rick Wagoner, Assistant Professor
Victor B. Sáenz, Assistant Professor, University of Texas at Austin