

RESEARCH BRIEF

HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH INSTITUTE AT UCLA



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2018 YOUR FIRST COLLEGE YEAR SURVEY

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Developed by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) and the Policy Center on the First Year of College in 2000, the Your First College Year survey (YFCY) is administered annually through the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) at the University of California, Los Angeles. The YFCY was the first national survey designed specifically to measure student development in the first year of college, and it is distributed to students at the end of their first year. Twenty-three institutions participated in the 19th administration of the YFCY in the Spring of 2018. The sample consists of 5,204 first-time, full-time students at these institutions.

ACADEMICS IN THE FIRST YEAR

The transition from high school coursework to college coursework can be daunting, but students are overwhelmingly satisfied with college academics in their first year. Nearly three quarters (73.8%) are satisfied or very satisfied with general education and core curriculum courses. Similarly, 79.2% are satisfied or very satisfied with their overall academic experience. This high degree of satisfaction is further confirmed by 86.3% of students reporting that they would recommend their college to others.

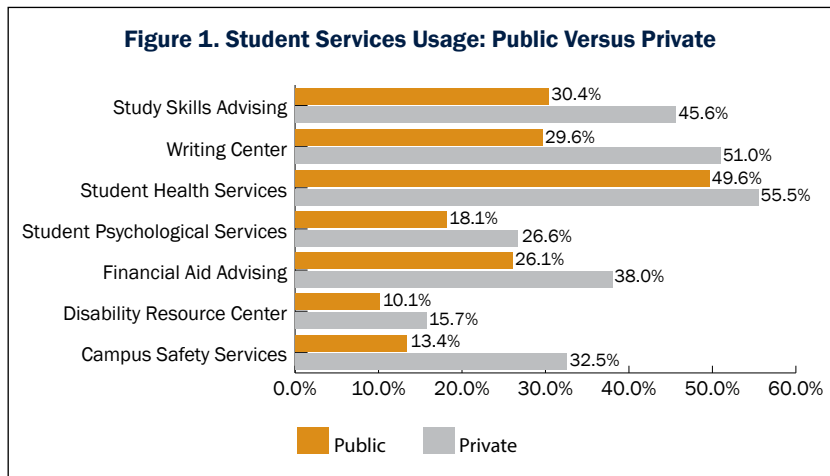
Upon closer examination, faculty involvement is strongly related to academic satisfaction. Amongst students who were satisfied or very satisfied with their overall academic experience, 86.1% reported that at least one faculty member had taken an interest in their development. Conversely, for students who were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their overall academic experience, only 63.3% reported that a faculty member had taken an interest in their development. Faculty members' classroom conduct also is associated with students' satisfaction. Nearly all (97.0%) satisfied and very satisfied students shared that faculty encouraged them to ask questions and participate in discussions compared to only 83.3% of students who were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their academic experiences. Similarly, 95.4% of satisfied or very satisfied students felt that faculty provided them with feedback that helped them assess their progress in class compared to only 75.0% of dissatisfied or very dissatisfied students. Faculty-student interaction outside of class is also correlated with academic satisfaction. Student use of faculty office hours is also associated with high satisfaction with the overall academic experience. Amongst students who were

satisfied or very satisfied, 91.6% interacted with a faculty member during office hours at least one to two times per term while 86.7% of students who were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied visited office hours at least once per term. . It is clear that attention from faculty plays an important role in the academic experience of first-year students.

STUDENT SERVICES

While academics and classroom experiences are a key part of college, students have needs and interests that fall outside of the scope of the classroom. This is where student services play a crucial role in assisting students in developing skills outside of a traditional classroom environment and first-year students are taking advantage of these services. Over half (54.4%) have used student health services and one-quarter (24.9%) have used student psychological services. Students are also using services to advance their skills in the classroom, with 42.7% using study skills advising and 46.9% using the writing center. More than one-third (35.8%) have used financial aid advising and 14.6% have used the disability resource center. Finally, 28.9% have used campus safety services.

Student services usage differs when students at public institutions are compared to students at private institutions, as demonstrated in Figure 1. Students at private institutions use these services at higher rates than students at public institutions. Study skills advising was utilized at a rate that was 15 percentage points higher amongst students at private colleges and universities (45.6%) than students at public colleges and universities (30.4%). As for writing center services, 51.0% of private school students compared to 29.6% of public school students



reported using these services. The difference in usage is slightly smaller for student health services, with roughly half of students at either institution type, 55.5% of private school students versus 49.6% of public school students, reporting usage. The difference once again increases when examining student psychological services usage, with 26.6% of first-year students at private institutions reporting usage compared to 18.1% of those at public institutions. This notable gap holds true for financial aid advising also, with 38.0% of private school students compared to 26.1% of public school students reporting they used this service in their first year. Students use disability resource center services at roughly the same rate, 15.7% for those at private colleges and universities and 10.1% at public institutions. Finally, private school students use campus safety services at more than twice the rate (32.5%) of public school students (13.4%).

HOW STUDENTS SPEND THEIR TIME

Students enrolled full time dedicate a lot of time to academics. Almost all students (95.9%) spend three or more hours a week attending classes or labs. They put even more time into studying and homework, with 94.8% of students spending six or more hours on these endeavors.

They also have numerous demands on their time outside of class. Some of this is related to extracurricular activities, such as the 76.7% who participate in student clubs/groups, but other time commitments are more personal. A significant proportion of students are employed, with 21.5% working off campus and 27.6% working on campus. One third (34.0%) of these working students feel that their job responsibilities interfere with schoolwork. Students who perform household or childcare duties for three or more hours a week account for 10.1% of students. One-third (34.0%) of students overall felt that family responsibilities interfered with their schoolwork at least occasionally. Students who spend

three or more hours a week performing household or childcare duties felt that family responsibilities interfered with their schoolwork frequently or occasionally at a rate that was more than 20 percentage points higher (54.6%) than students who spent less than three hours per week on household or childcare duties (31.6%). Commuting can also drain students' time, with 13.1% reporting that they commute three or more hours per week.

Despite their demanding schedules, students still find ways to unwind. Nearly all students (98.7%) regularly socialize with friends in person. In fact, a surprisingly

high proportion of students (42.2%) report socializing with friends in person for an average of 11 or more hours per week. Watching TV/online video content such as Netflix or Hulu is another common activity, with 94.8% of students reporting that they do this on a regular basis. Students are also exploring wellness-related ways to relax, with 45.0% engaging in prayer or meditation and 88.5% exercising or playing sports.

In general, students who work off campus regularly socialize with friends in person at equal rates compared to those who do not (98.8% and 98.7%, respectively). Differences emerge as students spend more time socializing. For example, students who work off campus (33.9%) are less likely to socialize with friends in person for an average of 11 or more hours per week than those who do not (44.7%). Amongst students who do not work off-campus, one-third (33.4%) report watching six or more hours per week of TV/online video content. Students who work off-campus between less than one and five hours a week watch six or more hours of TV/online video content at a lower rate (26.4%) than those who do not work off-campus. Interestingly, the highest rate of viewership for watching six or more hours per week of TV/online content was from students who work off campus, for whom nearly half (46.4%) watch this amount weekly.

As for wellness-related practices, students who work off campus report engaging in prayer or meditation at higher rates (60.1%) than their peers who do not work off campus (40.9%). Though not as glaring a difference, students who work off campus also report regularly exercising or playing sports at higher rates (91.7%) than students who do not work on campus (87.6%)

CAREER PLANNING

Even during the first year of college, students are thinking

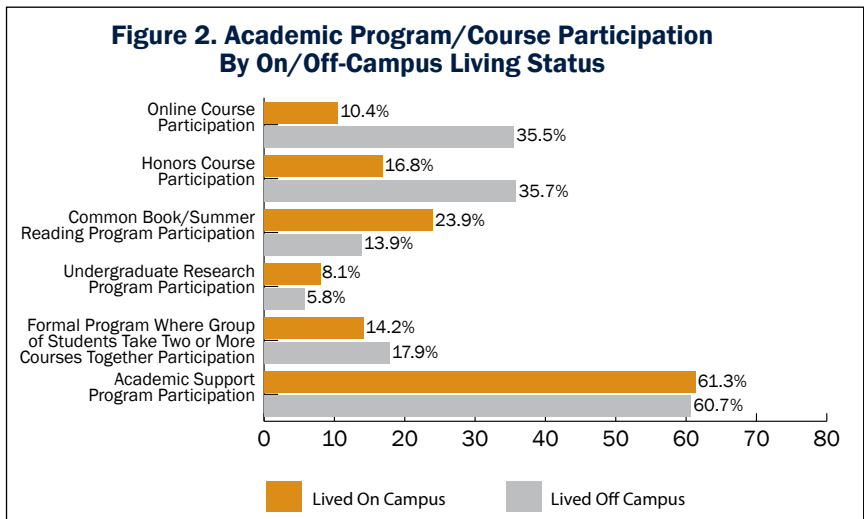
about their careers and how their college studies relate to career goals. The majority of students (95.6%) believe it is important to think about their career path after college. Students have a high level of confidence in navigating their career, with 69.0% sharing that they have a clear idea of how to achieve their career goals. Regarding the convergence of coursework and career goals, 63.3% of students are satisfied or very satisfied with the relevance of coursework to their career plans. Students are also seeking out student services related to career planning, with 41.6% reporting that they have used career services. Over half of these students (56.6%) say they were satisfied or very satisfied with career services while 36.9% report feeling neutral and 6.5% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Students are also engaging in career exploration, with one-third (33.5%) reporting that they changed their career choice by the end of their first year. Higher levels of financial concern have a negative relationship with perceptions of career readiness of first-year students. For example, 71.1% of students with no concerns about their ability to finance college strongly agree or agree that they have a clear idea of how to achieve career goals. This declines slightly amongst students who reported some financial concerns, with 68.6% believing they know how to achieve their career goals. Finally, students who reported major financial concern report the lowest rates of confidence in achieving career goals at 64.8%. Career services usage was relatively similar across level of financial concern, although there was also a progressive decline in usage as financial concern increased. Students with no financial concern used career services at least once at a rate of 42.2%. Students with some financial concern used career services at a rate of 41.3%. Finally, students with major concern used career services at a rate of 39.8%.

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

The first year of college is also a time for students to explore new academic experiences. Close to one-fifth (18.6%) have taken an honors course. A relatively small proportion of students (12.7%) have taken a course exclusively online. Nearly two-thirds of students (60.2%) have taken a course or first-year seminar designed to help students adjust to college. Students also reported participating in academic programs such as those where a group of students take two or more courses together (14.7%) and academic support programs (16.0%). Slightly over one-fifth (22.9%) of first-year students participated in a common book or summer reading program. A small segment of students (7.9%) report participating in an

undergraduate research program. As for major choice, over one-third (35.6%) of students decided to pursue a different major and nearly one-third (31.2%) of first-year students remained undecided about a major.

Whether or not first-year students explore some of these goals and opportunities varies by whether or not they live on campus, as demonstrated in Figure 2. For example, students living off campus took online courses at more than three



times the rate (35.5%) of students living on campus (10.4%). Students living off campus also took honors courses at higher rates (35.7%) than students living on campus (16.8%). However, students living on campus reported common book/summer reading program participation at a rate that was ten percentage points higher (23.9%) than off-campus students (13.9%). Students living on campus only slightly outpaced off-campus students in undergraduate research program participation, 8.1% and 5.8%, respectively. Finally, participation in formal programs where students take two or more courses together and academic support programs were similar, with off-campus students reporting slightly higher participation rates.

FOLLOWING UP ON 2017 FRESHMEN

Pairing responses between the 2017 CIRP Freshman Survey (TFS) and the 2018 YFCY allows us to longitudinally track students during their first year of college. There were 2,646 first-time, first-year, students who responded to both surveys for the 2017-2018 academic year. A key story in the 2017 TFS Monograph examined incoming students' desire to pursue science-related research careers (Eagan et al, 2018). Amongst students who responded both to the 2017 TFS and the 2018 YFCY, there was a slight drop in students reporting that they would "probably" or "definitely" pursue a science-related research career from the beginning of the first year

(23.3%) to the end of the first year (19.8%). Nonetheless, the higher likelihood of female students reporting that they will pursue a science-related research career remained consistent for those who took both surveys. At the beginning of the year, 24.9% of women compared to 20.6% of men said they would pursue this career path. At the end of the first year, 21.2% of female students compared to 17.3% of male students indicated they would pursue this career path

At the end of the first year, Black students are most likely to report that they will "probably" or "definitely" pursue a science-related research career at 28.7%. This is followed by students who reported that they were a race other than what was listed at 25.0%. Over one-fifth of Latino/a students (22.9%) and Asian students (21.2%) report that they intend to pursue a science-related research career. Multiracial (19.1%) and White students (18.8%) are the least likely to pursue science-related research careers at the end of the first year. While there were no Native American students who responded to both the TFS and the YFCY, 27.0% of Native American students indicated that they intended to pursue a science-related research career in TFS.

REFERENCE

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The Higher Education Research Institute

(HERI) is one of the premier research and policy organizations on postsecondary education in the country. Housed in the Graduate School of

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HERI administers the national Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) surveys, including the CIRP Freshman Survey, Your First College Year survey, Diverse Learning Environments survey, College Senior Survey, Staff Climate Survey, and the triennial HERI Faculty Survey. CIRP has collected data on over 15 million college students from more than 1,900 colleges and universities since 1966.

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