

INTRODUCING MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY'S FALL 1999 FRESHMAN CLASS: A SUMMARY OF THE CIRP FRESHMAN SURVEY

Academic Characteristics and Senior Year Activities of Entering Full-Time Freshmen

This is the second in a series of Institutional Research reports summarizing the results of the national CIRP Freshman Survey that Montclair State University participated in this summer. The survey is extensive and questions ranged from demographic background information to students' political views, high school behaviors and college expectations. This second report focuses on the questions respondents were asked about their high school academic achievements and high school senior year activities. As in the first report, if there are significant differences between MSU freshman responses and those from other four-year medium-selective public institutions, the comparative percents are also included.

Respondents were asked what was their average grade in high school? Twenty-five percent had between A- and A+ averages; but more females than males reported their grades were in the A- to A+ range, 28 and 20 percent, respectively.. Comparable four-year medium-selective public institutions reported 35 percent of entering freshmen had A range high school average grades. Slightly over 80 percent reported they had a B or better high school average. CIRP researchers cited this as an example of continuing high school grade inflation at the national level.

Thirty-six percent of MSU freshmen had some special tutoring or remedial work while in high school: 11.8 percent in mathematics, 6.4 percent in English, 5.7 percent in reading, 5.5 percent in science, 4.0 percent in foreign languages and 2.9 percent had help with social studies. Asked if they felt they would need any special help or remedial work in college, 22.9 percent said they felt they would need help in mathematics; 14.5 percent thought they would need help with a foreign language; 9.8 percent with English; 9.6 percent with reading; 9.4 percent with science and 3.9 percent with social studies. Female respondents are more likely to feel they will need help with math, 25.3 percent compared to 19 percent for males. Male students expect to find language studies somewhat more of a challenge, 18.3 compared to 12.1 percent for females.

Freshmen were asked how much time they spent in a typical week doing a range of activities from studying/doing homework to socializing with friends during their last year in high school. Table 1 summarizes the time spent in each activity. Freshmen were engaged in a variety of activities outside of the classroom in their last year of high school. Eighty percent worked for pay, with nearly 44 percent indicating they worked 16 or more hours per week. Nearly everyone socialized with friends; 39 percent reported they spent more than 16 hours a week with their friends. Sixty-two percent reported they spent some time volunteering. Female students engaged in volunteer activities more frequently than male students; 65.4 percent of females and 56.1 percent of males volunteered during the senior year. While most watched TV, less than half played video games. Male respondents were much more likely to play video games than females. Forty-three percent of students report they talked with teachers outside of the classroom for an hour a week. Perhaps reflecting the slower pace of senior year in high school, most students put less than five hours a week into studying and doing homework; only 28.7 percent reported they studied for six or more hours a week. CIRP researchers, in their summary of the national data, point to this last item as one of the indicators of student academic disengagement.

Table 1 Percent of Freshmen Spending Time in Activities in a Typical Week During the Last Year of High School

Activities:	% of Hours Spent:							
	None	< One	1 to 2	3 to 5	6 to 10	11 to 15	16 to 20	Over 20
Studying/homework	4.5 %	16.4%	22.2%	28.2%	16.4%	5.7%	3.6%	3.0%
Socializing with friends	0.8	2.4	5.6	16.1	19.6	16.6	11.0	28.0
Talk w/ teachers outside of class	10.2	42.6	26.6	11.4	3.9	2.9	0.6	1.8
Exercise or sports	6.8	9.9	17.0	21.2	13.1	12.3	7.7	12.0
Partying	15.2	10.2	15.5	22.4	17.3	8.3	3.8	7.2
Working (for pay)	19.5	2.3	3.0	5.4	10.8	14.9	20.3	23.8
Volunteer work	38.0	16.5	21.7	12.4	4.8	3.2	0.9	2.4
Student clubs/groups	24.7	13.7	24.1	18.3	10.0	4.5	2.0	2.7
Watching TV	5.1	12.5	21.3	27.9	15.5	6.8	3.2	7.8
Housework/childcare	18.6	16.9	28.1	19.1	7.9	3.8	2.0	3.6
Reading for pleasure	23.8	28.2	22.1	14.2	5.6	3.6	0.9	1.7
Playing video games	54.7	17.1	13.6	6.1	3.9	2.3	0.9	1.4
Prayer/meditation	34.1	32.6	18.3	6.8	2.9	1.8	0.5	3.2

MSU freshmen and those from other four-year medium-selective public institutions are relatively similar in the amount of time they spend in the designated activities. The only significant difference between the two groups is that more MSU freshmen have had some experience participating in student clubs or groups. Seventy-five percent of our freshmen reported they spent some amount of time in this activity compared to 66 percent for the comparative institutions.

Respondents were also asked if they had participated frequently, occasionally or never during the past year in a list of activities. Table 2 summarizes these responses. (Percentages reported to MSU by HERI, the Institute that processes the surveys, are for those responding frequently or occasionally. Where indicated by an asterisk, *, responses are for only those responding frequently). Three broad areas are highlighted: computer proficiency, academically-related activities/behaviors and health or student well-being issues.

Table 2 Percent of Freshmen Indicating They Participated in Activity During the Past Year

Activities:	% Frequently/Occasionally Participating:			Other 4-Yr Medium- Selective
	Montclair State University Male	Female	Total	Total
Studied with other students	79.0%	84.7%	82.6%	86.8%
Attended a religious service	72.5	81.9	78.5	81.5
Attended a public recital or concert	71.5	75.5	74.0	76.1
Performed volunteer work	66.9	76.4	72.9	76.0
Read the editorial page in the daily newspaper	63.9	59.0	60.8	59.2
Came late to class	65.3	57.1	60.1	65.6
Visited an art gallery or museum	53.9	59.1	57.2	51.6
Drank wine or liquor	53.6	57.1	55.8	53.0
Participated in organized demonstrations	51.5	56.4	54.6	49.5
Tutored another student	45.9	51.9	49.7	47.9
Performed community service as part of a class	46.4	51.0	49.7	51.0
Drank beer	52.5	46.4	48.6	48.6
Played a musical instrument	41.9	34.6	37.3	35.6
Played chess	53.4	24.6	35.1	33.2
Overslept and missed class or an appointment	40.1	28.0	32.5	35.4
Was a guest in a teacher's home	25.4	25.1	25.2	26.2
Took a prescribed anti-depressant	8.3	7.0	7.5	4.4
Socialized with someone of another racial/ethnic group *	72.6	80.3	77.5	64.2
Used a personal computer *	59.2	55.0	56.6	63.3
Used the Internet for research or homework *	52.1	52.5	52.3	56.3
Communicated via e-mail *	47.0	46.1	46.5	51.0
Was bored in class *	39.0	40.3	39.9	41.1
Other Internet use *	41.3	33.6	36.4	37.0
Felt overwhelmed by all I had to do *	20.3	37.9	31.4	30.5
Discussed religion *	26.8	25.6	26.0	25.3
Participated in Internet chat rooms *	27.7	24.0	25.3	22.4
Asked a teacher for advice after class *	24.0	24.7	24.5	22.1
Played computer games *	29.9	19.0	23.0	25.2
Voted in a student election *	23.3	19.4	20.8	20.6
Checked out a book or journal from the school library *	15.8	20.2	18.6	17.4
Discussed politics *	17.7	11.1	13.5	13.4
Felt depressed *	11.7	13.9	13.1	7.9
Smoked cigarettes *	9.1	13.9	12.1	12.5

Over half, 56.6 percent, report they frequently used a personal computer and 52.3 percent frequently used the Internet for research or homework. (In contrast, 18.6 percent said they frequently checked out a book or journal from the school library.) Respondents also frequently communicated via e-mail, 46.5 percent. Slightly more freshmen at other medium-selective colleges are starting college with the experience of using personal computers.

Eight out of ten respondents reported they studied with other students frequently or occasionally. Almost half tutored another student or performed community service as part of a class during the past year. Over three-quarters of our freshmen reported they frequently socialized with someone of another racial/ethnic group. This is a significantly larger percent than the 64.2 percent for similar medium-selective four-year colleges.

As well, 60 percent said that they occasionally or frequently came late to class and 40 percent said they were frequently bored in class during the past year. The national summary put out by CIRP cited these last two factors as indicators of student academic disengagement.

Respondents were also engaged in a number of extracurricular activities during the past year. They frequently or occasionally attended a public recital or concert, 78.5 percent; read the editorial page in the daily paper, 60.8 percent; and visited an art gallery or museum, 57.2 percent.

Almost a third, 31.4 percent, said they felt overwhelmed by all they had to do. Mirroring the national trend, a larger percent of female respondents reported this than male respondents, 37.9 percent and 20.3 percent, respectively. A smaller percentage, 13.1, said they frequently felt depressed and 7.5 percent reported they frequently or occasionally took a prescribed anti-depressant.

Over half, 55.8 percent, drank wine or liquor and slightly under half, 48.6 percent, drank beer frequently or occasionally during the past year. While there were some differences between males and females they were not large. Entering MSU women are consuming alcohol in nearly the same amounts as men. MSU's results are similar to those in the national survey trends analysis. Nationally, 53.8 percent report drinking wine or liquor frequently or occasionally and 50.7 percent drank beer with the same frequency. The national study reports that these figures are a continuation of a downward trend in student drinking.

Students were also asked to compare themselves to the average person of his or her age on a range of academic and personal traits such as academic ability, intellectual self-confidence, social self-confidence, etc. At the national level the authors point out that there is a record level of "academic self-confidence" among freshmen. Table 3 shows the percent of MSU freshmen rating themselves above average or in the highest 10 percent for these various skills and abilities. MSU's freshmen mirror the national summary results.

Table 3 Percent of Freshmen Rating Themselves Above Average or in Top 10 Percent

Ability/traits:	% Above Average or in Top 10 Percent			
	Montclair State University			Other 4-Yr Medium- Selective
	Male	Female	Total	Total
Academic ability	61.8	55.9	58.1	61.6
Artistic ability	35.9	29.9	32.1	26.3
Computer skills	38.4	22.6	28.4	30.8
Competitiveness	71.5	45.2	54.9	55.1
Cooperativeness	73.5	69.4	70.8	73.7
Creativity	64.4	52.9	57.1	54.1
Drive to achieve	71.0	67.8	69.0	67.1
Emotional health	60.7	42.4	49.1	54.1
Initiative	49.4	44.8	46.5	49.2
Leadership ability	63.7	50.1	55.1	57.7
Mathematical ability	46.5	32.5	37.6	37.6
Physical health	62.0	39.6	47.7	56.0
Popularity	54.1	32.9	40.6	38.8
Public speaking ability	38.1	31.5	33.9	33.5
Self-confidence (intellectual)	66.0	47.1	54.0	56.3
Self-confidence (social)	57.3	41.2	47.1	51.8
Self-understanding	64.9	51.1	56.2	54.6
Spirituality	44.6	41.0	42.3	42.4
Understanding of others	65.3	66.1	65.8	65.4
Writing ability	44.6	45.9	45.4	42.6

There are differences in how males and females rate themselves. For all but two abilities or traits (writing ability and understanding of others), male students rated themselves more frequently as above average or in the top ten percent than female

students. For some abilities such as computer skills, competitiveness, creativity, emotional health, leadership ability, mathematical ability, intellectual and social self-confidence and self-understanding the differences in self perceptions are more than minor ones.

Next Report: Admission Choices, Personal Objectives, College Expectations and Expenses

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