

**CIRP FRESHMAN SURVEY
CORNELL UNIVERSITY CLASS OF 2004
INTRA-INSTITUTIONAL ANALYSIS
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY REPORT**

SURVEY DESCRIPTION

- The Freshman Survey, developed by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) and sponsored by the American Council on Education and by the Graduate School of Education & Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles, is administered annually to freshmen at over 1000 colleges and universities. At Cornell University, the survey was administered to approximately 3220 freshmen on the first day of their university orientation period in August 2000. The overall response rate was 76.9%.

CHARACTERISTICS OF FRESHMAN RESPONDENTS

- The majority of freshman respondents were male (53%), white (59.6%), and U.S. citizens (87%) (Table 1). Because of respondent reluctance to provide specific identifying information on the survey response sheet, college affiliation of responding freshmen could be determined for only 45%. Given this relatively small number of identifiable college affiliations, analysis of responses according to college was not conducted.

CHARACTERISTICS OF FRESHMAN PARENTS

- Most students (82.4%) reported that their parents are alive and living with each other (Table 2). This characteristic was reported more often by males and by Asian American and international freshmen. Underrepresented minority (URM) freshmen were more likely to report their parents as living apart.
- According to responding freshmen, most parents (80.5% of fathers, 75.4% of mothers) have earned a college or graduate degree (Table 3).
- Freshman estimates of parental income revealed that most parents (63%) earn \$75,000 or more annually (Table 4). White freshmen were more likely than other racial/ethnic groups to estimate their parents' income at over \$100,000.

PREVIOUS FRESHMAN ACTIVITIES

- When asked to indicate the frequency of their involvement in a number of activities during the past year, freshmen most often reported having "frequent" involvement with the following activities (Table 5):

- ❖ Personal computer use (92.8%)
- ❖ Communication via e-mail (85.0%)
- ❖ Internet use for research of homework (78.5%)
- ❖ Socialization with someone of another racial/ethnic group (74.6%)
- ❖ Other Internet use (65.3%)

Low frequency rates were reported for:

- ❖ Drinking beer (12.2%)
- ❖ Drinking wine or liquor (11.1%)
- ❖ Feeling depressed (6.3%)
- ❖ Smoking cigarettes (4.5%)

Males were more likely to have participated in Internet use for functions other than research or homework. Females were more likely to have communicated via e-mail and to have socialized with a person of another racial/ethnic group. Asian American freshmen were more likely than other racial/ethnic groups to have reported frequent computer use, communication via e-mail, Internet use for research or homework, and other Internet use. URM freshmen more frequently reported socialization with members of other racial/ethnic groups.

- During their last year in high school, freshmen spent most of their time (16 or more hours per week) on the following activities (Table 6):
 - ❖ Socializing with friends (28.6%)
 - ❖ Studying or doing homework (21.6%)
 - ❖ Exercising or playing sports (17.7%)
 - ❖ Working for pay (13.7%)

Males were more likely to report frequent exercising/playing sports and working for pay, while females were more likely to report frequent studying or doing homework. Freshmen of "other" racial/ethnic groups were more likely to report using their time for employment.

FRESHMAN SELF-RATINGS

- When asked to rate themselves on a number of personal traits, freshmen gave themselves highest ("above average" or "highest 10%") ratings for the following (Table 7):
 - ❖ Academic ability (94.2%)
 - ❖ Drive to achieve (82.9%)
 - ❖ Mathematical ability (73.1%)
 - ❖ Self-confidence (intellectual) (71.5%)
 - ❖ Cooperativeness (70.7%)

With the exception of "academic ability," male and female self-ratings differed in content and rank:

Males		Females	
Academic ability	95.5%	Academic ability	92.8%
Mathematical ability	82.7%	Drive to achieve	85.8%
Drive to achieve	80.4%	Cooperativeness	72.8%
Self-confidence (intellectual)	78.8%	Understanding of others	69.1%
Cooperativeness	68.9%	Initiative	69.0%

There were large differences (greater than 15%) between several male and female self-ratings, with males consistently rating themselves higher:

	Males	Females
Mathematical ability	82.7%	62%
Self-confidence (intellectual)	78.8%	63.2%
Competitiveness	67.1%	54.1%
Computer skills	58.7%	24.5%

Male and female perceptions regarding their mathematical abilities were in agreement with differences in self-reported mean SAT math scores: 721 for males, 684 for females.

All racial/ethnic groups gave highest self-ratings to the trait of "academic ability." Asian Americans were more likely to rate themselves highly on "mathematical ability" and "cooperativeness." White freshmen were more likely to rate themselves highly on "self-confidence (intellectual)." There were large differences (greater than 15%) in self-ratings by racial/ethnic group:

	Highest		Lowest	
Mathematical ability	Asian	78.6%	URM	54.3%
Initiative	URM	71.4%	Asian	52.8%
Leadership ability	URM	76.8%	Asian	47.9%
Physical health	White	64.8%	Asian	44.7%
Writing ability	White	62.5%	Int	46.2%
Self-confidence (social)	URM	54.8%	Asian	37.4%
Popularity	Int	52.4%	Asian	28.5%
Public speaking	URM	50.8%	Asian	26.0%
Spirituality	URM	54.5%	White	33.9%

- Only 29-38% of freshmen rated themselves as “excellent” on selected abilities (Table 8). Males rated themselves higher on “think analytically and logically” and “acquire new skills/knowledge on own.” Females rated themselves higher on “relate well to people of different races, nations, and religions” and “identify moral/ethical issues.” White freshmen gave higher self-ratings on “think analytically and logically.” URM freshmen gave higher self-ratings on “relate well to people of different races, nations, and religions.”

POLITICAL/SOCIAL VIEWS AND GOALS

- A large proportion (40.3%) of freshmen described their political orientation as “middle of the road” (Table 9). Another large number of freshmen identified themselves as being “liberal” or “far left” (43.2%) as opposed to “conservative” or “far right” (16.5%). Males were more likely to identify themselves as “conservative” or “far left” than females. Asian American and international freshmen were more likely to identify themselves as “middle of the road.”
- When asked their views on a broad range of political/social topics, freshmen were most likely to agree or strongly agree with the following five views (Table 10):
 - ❖ Federal government should do more to control the sale of handguns (86.1%)
 - ❖ Same sex couples should have the right to legal marital status (73.8%)
 - ❖ Abortion should be legal (73.2%)
 - ❖ Employers should be allowed to require drug testing of employees / applicants (67.7%)
 - ❖ Wealthy people should pay a larger share of taxes (57.1%)

The greatest difference between male and female views was in regard to “if two people really like each other, it’s all right for them to have sex even if they’ve known each other for only a very short time,” with 60.4% males agreeing vs. 41.7% females.

There were several large differences (greater than 15%) between racial/ethnic groups in terms of their agreement with the various views:

	Highest		Lowest	
Legal marital status for same sex couples	White	77.2%	URM	61.9%
Abortion should be legal	White	77.6%	URM	55.2%
Employers can require drug testing	URM	82.7%	Int	60.4%
Colleges should prohibit racist/sexist speech	Int	76.4%	White	50.9%
Abolish affirmative action in college admissions	White	63.5%	URM	22.3%
Too much concern for rights of criminals	Int	67.9%	Other	49.5%
Sex is OK if people like each other	Other	57.4%	URM	38.5%
Marijuana should be legalized	Other	50.8%	Asian	24.8%
Individuals can do little to change society	Int	44.6%	White	24.8%

- The five goals rated most “essential” or “very important” were (Table 11):
 - ❖ Raising a family (68.3)
 - ❖ Being very well off financially (67.7%)
 - ❖ Becoming an authority in my field (63.9%)
 - ❖ Helping others who are in difficulty (58.4%)
 - ❖ Obtaining recognition from colleagues (55.5%)

Although there were statistically significant differences between males and females regarding goals, the differences were not as great as with self-ratings or political/social views. One unexpected finding was that males were more likely than females to consider “raising a family” as an essential goal. There were large differences (>15%) between racial/ethnic groups regarding importance of the following goals:

	Highest		Lowest	
Helping others who are in difficulty	URM	73.3%	White	54.7%
Becoming successful in own business	Int	53.0%	White	36.6%
Integrating spirituality into my life	URM	57.4%	White	31.0%
Helping to promote racial understanding	URM	62.6%	White	23.8%
Influencing social values	URM	46.4%	White	28.8%
Participating in community action program	URM	37.6%	White	21.5%

COLLEGE: CHOICES, PLANS, AND CONCERNS

- Freshmen reported the following as the most important reasons for deciding to go to college (Table 12):
 - ❖ To learn more about things that interest me (84.2%)
 - ❖ To gain a general education and appreciation of ideas (75.2%)
 - ❖ To prepare myself for graduate/professional school (68.4%)
 - ❖ To be able to get a better job (62.6%)
 - ❖ To be able to make more money (60.9%)

Females gave higher importance ratings to most of the reasons for going to college. The greatest differences between gender groups were for “to gain a general education and appreciation of ideas” (81.4% for females, 69.6% for males) and for “to make me a more cultured person” (60.4% for females, 45.4% for males).

Ethnic/racial group ratings of reasons for going to college differed the most for “to make me a more cultured person” (62.5% for URM freshmen, 48.2% for international freshmen) and for “to get away from home” (24.9% for URM freshmen, 8.3% for international freshmen).

- The number of applications to colleges other than Cornell tended to be either zero (20.4%) or seven to ten (24.9%) (Table 13). White freshmen were more likely to have applied to two or fewer other colleges. Asian American and URM freshmen were more likely to have applied to six or more other colleges.
- The majority of freshmen (92.5%) plan to earn post-graduate degrees (Table 14):
 - ❖ Master's degree 38.5%,
 - ❖ Ph.D. 29.4%,
 - ❖ Law or medical degree 24.6%

More females than males expressed interest in earning a medical degree. More international freshmen plan to obtain master’s and doctoral degrees. More URM freshmen plan to earn law or medical degrees.

- A large number of freshmen (49.6%) reported that they have “some concern” about their ability to finance their college education, while a smaller group (40.3%) reported having “no concern” about financing their college education (Table 15). Females, URM freshmen, and “other” freshmen were more likely than other groups to have “major concern” about financing their college education.

CORNELL: CHOICES, NEEDS, AND EXPECTATIONS

- Cornell was the college of first choice for 68.5% of responding freshmen (Table 16). Females and white freshmen were more likely than other groups to identify Cornell as their first choice. Asian American and international freshmen were more likely than other groups to identify Cornell as their second, third, or less than third choice college.
- Freshmen rated the following reasons as being most important in their decision to come to Cornell (Table 17):
 - ❖ Good academic reputation (85.7%)
 - ❖ Graduates get good jobs (73.2%)
 - ❖ Graduates go to top graduate schools (60.5%)

The rankings of these top reasons were consistent across gender and racial/ethnic groups. URM freshmen gave higher importance ratings than did other groups to the following reasons:

- ❖ “I was offered financial assistance” (55.1%)
 - ❖ “I was offered a need-based scholarship” (48.7%)
 - ❖ “This college offers special programs” (39.7%)
- Freshmen most often reported having had remedial work in the following areas (Table 18):
 - ❖ Mathematics (6.5%)
 - ❖ English (5.6%)
 - ❖ Writing (4.2%)

They expressed a need for remedial work in additional areas:

- ❖ Writing (9.0%)
- ❖ Mathematics (8.6%)
- ❖ Science (5.5%)
- ❖ Foreign language (5.5%)

Males were more likely to express a need for work in English and writing, while females expressed a greater need for work in mathematics and science. Asian American freshmen were more likely to indicate a need for work in writing and English. International freshmen were more likely to report a need for work in writing, foreign language, English, reading, and social studies. URM freshmen were more likely to indicate a need for remedial work in all areas.

- When asked to rate the likelihood of their having certain future experiences or events at Cornell, freshmen were most likely to choose the following (Table 19):
 - ❖ Get a bachelor’s degree (83.1%)
 - ❖ Develop close friendships with other students (76.1%)
 - ❖ Socialize with someone of another racial/ethnic group (74.0%)
 - ❖ Make at least a “B” average (58.8%)
 - ❖ Be satisfied with this college (56.8%)
 - ❖ Participate in student clubs/groups (54.6%)

Females were more likely to indicate a “very good chance” of these events occurring, with the exception of “make at least a ‘B’ average,” which was chosen more often by males. White freshmen

were more likely than other racial/ethnic groups to anticipate developing close friendships with other students. Asian American, URM, and "other" freshmen were more likely to expect socializing with someone of a different racial/ethnic group. URM freshmen anticipated getting a job to help pay for college expenses and participating in volunteer/community service work.

- Freshmen rated the importance of various factors or services to the outcomes of their undergraduate experiences at Cornell (Table 20). "Accessibility of faculty members" was rated "very important" by 63.8%, followed by "academic advising" (49.5%). Females gave higher importance ratings to all factors/services. Asian American freshmen rated "research opportunities" as their second most important factor/service. URM freshmen rated "financial aid" as their second most important factor/service.
- Over 50% of responding freshmen felt that Cornell should place "a great deal" of emphasis on the following (Table 21):
 - ❖ Skills valuable in the workforce (69.8%)
 - ❖ Teaching undergraduates (68.1%)
 - ❖ Quality of residential life (63.8%)
 - ❖ Academic advising (59.4%)

Females were more likely than men to want a great deal of emphasis placed on each of the listed items. Asian American and international freshmen wanted the most emphasis placed on "teaching undergraduates." URM freshmen wanted the most emphasis placed on "a racially/ethnically diverse student body."

- Most freshmen (84.1%) expect "a great deal" in return for their investment of time, effort, and money at Cornell (Table 22). Females had higher expectations of return on their investment.