

Cornell University 1999 Cycles Survey Inter-Institutional Major Findings

The following is the third of three general distributions of analysis from the 1999 Cycles Survey Office of Institutional Research and Planning (IRP) administered last spring in conjunction with a group of highly selective, private, Research I universities. This year's Cycles Survey was administered as a web-based survey at Cornell for the first time. The survey targeted the entire freshman and sophomore classes, resulting in 2,163 respondents. The overall response rate was 36%; 39% for freshmen and 32% for sophomores.

In this analysis we compare the results for Cornell as a whole, with three norm groups of highly selective, private, Research I universities that also participated in the 1999 Cycles Survey. We selected our norm groups on the basis of the position of the comparator universities among Cornell's admissions overlap group, as follows:

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| Norm Group 1 | Those institutions Cornell most often “loses” when in direct competition for commonly admitted undergraduates. |
| Norm Group 2 | Those institutions with which Cornell competes on a relatively even footing for commonly admitted undergraduates. |
| Norm Group 3 | Those institutions Cornell most often “wins” the direct competition for commonly admitted undergraduates. |

There are two sections to the analysis:

1. A two page executive summary of the major findings; and
2. A set of tables that provide statistical comparisons of Cornell's overall results with those of the three norm groups.

As in the past, these distributions are intended to serve as conversation starters, not as the final or definitive word on any particular aspect of students' undergraduate experiences at Cornell. There is a host of other important information and a wealth of institutional knowledge and experience that also needs to be brought to bear in deliberating the issues raised by the findings of this analysis. We believe, however, that this is important information that deserves further consideration. And in fact, we know, for example, that:

1. As we prepare for our decennial reaccreditation self-study for the Middle States Association/Commission on Higher Education, these data will play an integral role in our depiction of ongoing institutional self-examination efforts;
2. Susan Murphy and her colleagues within Student and Academic Services will be using these data in their continuing efforts to understand more fully student perceptions of and satisfaction with the services they provide;

**Cornell University
1999 Cycles Survey
Inter-Institutional Major Findings**

3. These data will play a role in helping to inform Cornell's participation in an American Academy of Arts and Sciences sponsored symposium on the educational inputs of the changing demographics of higher education that Susan Murphy, Kathy Abrams, and Michael Matier are participating in; and
4. As it has in the past, we anticipate that portions of these data will be considered by the Academic Leadership Series at an upcoming meeting.

We expect there will be many other possible venues for discussing this information. Please know that our office is prepared to assist you in framing such conversations with the appropriate components of these data, as well as to consider with you how to most effectively have the necessary debate and dialogue.

Your questions, suggestions, requests for further assistance, and any other feedback are welcomed, and I can be reached at hhk4@cornell.edu or 255-7015.

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Office of Institutional Research and Planning
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Cornell University
1999 Cycles Survey
Executive Summary of Inter-Institutional Major Findings

Satisfaction with Services, Facilities, and Various Aspects of College (Table 2)

- While Cornell's freshmen and sophomores had a high degree of satisfaction with their overall undergraduate experience with a mean of 3.39 on a 4-point scale (1 = very dissatisfied; 4 = very satisfied), our peers saw even higher degrees of satisfaction. Norm Group 1 (3.49) and Norm Group 3 (3.48) had significantly higher means. Norm Group 2 (3.41) had an average more similar to Cornell's.
- Cornell's freshmen and sophomores reported having significantly higher degrees of satisfaction than their norm group comparators with the following aspects of their undergraduate experience: "resources in the libraries" (3.53); "services provided by the libraries" (3.45); "security on campus" (3.32); "registrar's office" (3.11); "career development office" (3.07); and "dining service" (3.04).
- Although not as strongly positive along the satisfaction scale, Cornell's freshmen and sophomores expressed higher level of satisfaction than their Norm Group counterparts on "counseling service" (2.99) and "academic advising" (2.79).
- Conversely, Cornell's freshmen and sophomores were less likely to be satisfied than the students in the comparison groups with the following factors: "financial aid package" (2.46); "residential life office" (2.71); "size of classes" (2.92); "accessibility of faculty members" (3.09); and "academic experience" (3.18).

Development of Abilities and Knowledge (Table 3)

- In terms of the development of a variety of abilities and knowledge the freshmen and sophomores were asked about, Cornell students reported having greater gains or progress during their college experience so far (based on a 4-point scale with 1 = very little; 4 = very much) than the respondents in the peer institutions in the following areas: "ability to think analytically and logically" (2.85); "quantitative thinking" (2.62); "organizing your time effectively" (2.61); "understanding nature of science and experimentation" (2.59); "career preparation" (2.55); and "leadership skills" (2.43).
- On the other hand, Cornell's freshmen and sophomores reported making less progress than the other norm groups in the following areas: "aware of different philosophies, culture, and ways of life" (2.62) and "gaining a broad general education" (2.69).

Perceptions about and Experiences with Campus Climate (Table 4, Table 5, & Table Set 6)

- Regardless of norm group category, the survey respondents (Norm 3 = 3.22; Cornell = 3.15; Norm 2 = 3.06; Norm 1 = 2.80) viewed "alcohol use" as the most serious problem on their campuses among various issues listed on the questionnaire (based on a 5-point scale with 1 = to a very little extent; 5 = to a very great extent).
- Cornell's freshmen and sophomores expressed somewhat higher degrees of concerns than the students in the norm groups about the following problems on campus: "racial harassment" (2.48); "drug use" (2.45); and "cheating in academic work" (2.05).
- However, Cornell students reported less concern than their peers in the comparator groups about the following issues on campus: "eating disorder" (2.26); "lack of racial or ethnic diversity" (1.98); and "discrimination on the basis of social class" (1.89).
- While positioned on the positive side along the scale (based on 5-point scale with 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree), Cornell's freshmen and sophomores were less

**Cornell University
1999 Cycles Survey
Executive Summary of Inter-Institutional Major Findings**

Perceptions about and Experiences with Campus Climate (Continued)

likely to agree than the students in the comparison groups with the following statements about their institution: "I feel valued as a person at this institution" (3.02); "This institution places high value on the individual" (3.10); "Students and faculty have similar views about purpose of this institution" (3.15); "Students have a clear sense of why they are here" (3.20); "Faculty members have been responsive to my needs" (3.28); "Most people at this institution treat each other respectfully" (3.64); "Most people respect the rights of the others here" (3.67).

Writing Assignments and Computer Work (Table Set 7)

- With respect to how much writing the students were required to do across their courses during the Fall 1998 semester, Cornell's freshmen and sophomores reported comparatively greater amounts of writing than the students in the comparator groups, averaging 2.54 on a 5-point scale (1 = 0 to 25 pages; 5 = more than 75 pages).
- Likewise, Cornell students reported spending a greater amount of time than their peers in the norm groups in using a computer for "word processing" (4.62) and "programming, graphing, and calculations" (3.02) (based on a 6-point scale with 1 = none; 6 = more than 10 hours).
- Though not strongly positive along the satisfaction continuum, Cornell's freshmen and sophomores expressed a higher degree of satisfaction than the students in the comparison groups with "computer services and support" (2.96) on a 4-point scale (1 = very dissatisfied; 4 = very satisfied).

Cost of Books and Financial Aid (Table Set 8)

- On a 5-point scale (1 = \$150 or less; 5 = more than \$300), Norm Group 3 (4.37) reported the highest amount of book cost, followed by Cornell (4.17), Norm Group 1 (4.00), and Norm Group 2 (3.87).
- Overall, financial aid was not a major source of the respondents' college expenses in any of the comparison groups. However, Cornell students were more likely to finance their college expenses with financial aid than their peers in the norm groups, averaging 1.78 on a 4-point scale (1 = none; 4 = all).