

**The Academic and Co-Curricular Experiences of UCSD  
Freshmen Students  
2004-2005  
Evidence from the Your First College Year Survey**

The academic, cognitive, and psychosocial adjustment of freshmen students who began at UCSD in fall, 2004 was measured in spring 2005 using both “single-shot” and longitudinal survey methods. These data were gathered for a sample of incoming freshmen students who were given the both the CIRP Freshman survey at entry during college orientation and Your First College Year (YFCY) survey during spring quarter. Although this summary will focus on the cross-sectional YFCY survey findings, longitudinal change in student responses to similar items from the CIRP-YFCY surveys will be noted when these data help to illuminate certain important findings.

**Method**

The HERI Freshman Survey was administered to 3,539 first time students during new student orientation conducted at the six UCSD undergraduate colleges. The entering freshmen cohort was surveyed during the during the fourth, fifth, and sixth week of the spring 2005 quarter using the YFCY survey. Due to differences in administration, the response rate

(N=1,161) for the YFCY was smaller than that obtained for the Freshman survey. The Freshman survey was administered in a proctored setting during the Freshman Orientations conducted at each of the six undergraduate colleges at UCSD. while the YFCY was administered as a web-based survey to all first time students both on- and off-campus. Students receiving the email invitation to participate in the YFCY were given the survey on the web using a unique log-in code provided to them in the email message. Three email reminders were sent over the three week period and participants were offered incentives to participate in the survey. For new freshmen, these efforts resulted in approximately 1,161 YFCY surveys returned out of the 3,539 sampled for a response rate of approximately 33%. Survey responses from the 1,161 YFCY surveys were matched to responses from the Freshman survey to examine changes in student beliefs and behaviors along the same dimensions using similar items.

### **The First College Year and Student Outcomes**

The impact of the first college year on student development has been long noted by scholars in higher education (Feldman & Newcomb, 1994; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Astin, 1975). Although educational preparation has been found to exert the strongest effect on successful

transition to college, data on college impact suggest that student activities, behavior, and self-perceptions also have significant effects on the academic and cognitive outcomes of the first college year. The first year experience has also been found to affect the retention and grades of students throughout the collegiate experience (Astin, 1993). Increasingly, students admitted to highly competitive research universities are entering college with less confidence in their ability to succeed than in years past. Despite a steady rise in high school grades, self-ratings in both academic and social self-confidence have remained stagnant or declined over the last several years. The proportions of incoming students that rated themselves as being “above average,” or in the “highest 10%” in academic ability, intellectual self-confidence, mathematical ability, writing ability, and oral communication have grown smaller.

### **The Your First College Year Survey (YFCY)**

As part of a national study on the first year experience, the YFCY enables comparisons of the first year college experiences of UCSD students with national norms from selective public universities, and all other public and private colleges and universities in the study. When used in conjunction

with the Freshman Survey, the YFCY provides longitudinal data on the cognitive and psychosocial development of our freshmen. This report provides a summary of the major findings of the 2005 administration of the YFCY. In the following paragraphs, references to page numbers are given for the YFCY tables in the full data report. These data can be viewed at the UCSD Student Research and Information website in the “Surveys” section at <http://ugr8.ucsd.edu>.

### **YFCY Sample Demographics**

The UCSD YFCY sample was generally similar to the entering UCSD freshmen class with respect to race/ethnicity, income, and home location. The YFCY sample had a somewhat higher proportion of females than the overall UCSD freshman cohort, Although other groupings tended to reflect the distribution of the social demographics of the entering freshmen cohort of the 2004 UCSD freshmen class, analysis by certain sub-groupings was limited by the number of students identified by race, ethnicity, and income.. Although the overall response rate to the YFCY was approximately 30% (N=1,181), the response rates of students from certain traditionally under-represented student groupings such as African- and Native-American students were insufficient to allow analyses for these student groupings.

## **Interaction with the Campus Community**

UCSD freshmen report lower levels of interaction with faculty during office hours than their counterparts at other public universities and all public and private universities in the national sample. Approximately 27% of UCSD freshmen report never visiting faculty during office hours compared with 17% of freshmen at other public universities and 10% of freshmen at all of the public and private universities in the national norms. UCSD freshmen tend to interact with faculty outside of office hours at a lower rate than other public university freshmen (55% report never attending office hours compared to 40% at all public universities. p. 1: YFCY). Although first-year transfer students report a somewhat higher frequency of interaction with faculty and staff compared with first-time freshmen, transfer students report significantly lower frequency of daily or weekly interaction with “close friends at this campus.” (Transfers: 64%, Freshmen 83%).

UCSD freshmen also tend to report lower levels of interaction with other college personnel such as Academic Advisers compared with their peers at other public and private universities in the YFCY national sample. For example approximately 19% of UCSD freshmen report “never” interacting with an academic advisor or counselor during the first year of college compared with 10% of freshmen at other public and private

universities. (page 1: YFCY). As might be expected from attending a large public research university such as UCSD, our freshmen report higher levels of interaction with graduate students and teaching assistants (TA's) than freshmen at other public and private universities. For example, approximately 23% of UCSD freshmen report interacting with TA's and graduate students at least 2-3 times per week compared with 17% at public colleges and 10% at private colleges. (p. 2: YFCY)

### **Satisfaction Indicators**

There do not appear to be significant differences in the ratings of various campus services between UCSD freshmen and freshmen at other public institutions. UCSD freshmen tended to rate such services as library, academic advising, tutoring, student housing, financial aid, career center, student health, psychological counseling and the registrar's office at similar rates of satisfaction with other public university freshmen. There are some differences between the ratings given by UCSD freshmen and freshmen attending private universities. For example, UCSD freshmen tended to rate library services higher than their counterparts at private universities (87% of UCSD freshmen report being "very satisfied" or "satisfied" compared with 77% of private university freshmen). With respect to satisfaction with

Recreational Facilities, UCSD freshmen reported significantly higher levels of satisfaction (87%) than private university freshmen (70%). (p. 2: YFCY)

### **Inter-Group Relations and Experiences**

UCSD students report much higher levels of interaction with students of different racial and cultural backgrounds compared with freshmen at the comparison public and private institutions beginning with the community they grew up in and continuing through high school. The higher level of interaction with ethnic minority students in high school is shown where approximately 8% of UCSD freshmen report that the composition of students in their high school were “all or nearly white.” This contrasts sharply with the high school experiences of other public university freshmen who reported that their high school was “all or nearly all white” at a rate of 27%, while 29% of private university attendees reported a similar demographic composition. A similar pattern can be noted with respect to the neighborhood or community where the student grew up. UCSD freshmen report a much more diverse community of neighbors and community members compared with their public and private university counterparts. (p. 3: YFCY).

UCSD freshmen also report higher levels of inter-group participation with respect to “informal study groups.” For example, approximately 10%

of UCSD freshmen indicated that their informal study groups were either “mostly white,” or “all or nearly all white,” while freshmen from other universities in the YFCY sample indicated that approximately 45% of their study groups were predominately “white” in racial composition. (p3:YFCY)

A similar pattern of greater inter-group diversity was also found with respect to student clubs and organizations in which the respondent participated. Approximately 14% of UCSD freshmen indicated that their student club or organization was all white, compared with 42% of freshmen from other colleges and universities.

UCSD freshmen also report higher levels of inter-group interaction than their peers at either public or private universities. For example, approximately 71% of UCSD freshmen report dining or sharing a meal with students from a racial or ethnic group other than their own compared with approximately 48% of freshmen from other public and private universities. UCSD freshmen also tended to engage in inter-group dialogue outside of the classroom concerning race relations at higher rates than freshmen at other public and private universities. UCSD freshmen also report significantly greater levels of inter-group interaction with respect to intellectual discussions, studying, and socializing compared with the national freshmen sample.



UCSD freshmen did not differ however from their peers in the national YFCY sample with respect to amount of tension, or the “climate” experienced on campus as part of a racial or ethnic grouping. For both the UCSD and national YFCY sample, approximately 5% of respondents indicated that they had felt “threatened or insulted because due their particular race or ethnicity” (p. 7: YFCY). UCSD freshmen also did not differ from the national YFCY sample with respect to “having guarded, cautious relationships” with students from different racial groupings. (p. 7: YFCY).

With respect to cultural and language diversity, approximately 71% of UCSD students report English as their native language, while approximately 90% of freshmen at the comparison institutions report English as their native language (p. 3: YFCY). This may be a reflection of the increasing ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity of California, and in particular, the metropolitan regions of Los Angeles and San Francisco that tend to be the primary home locations of a plurality of UCSD freshmen.

### **Academic and Social Adjustment**

The responses of the UCSD freshmen respondents tend to reflect the generally competitive nature and context of a large, highly ranked national

Research I university. As reflected in the CIRP (Freshman Survey) findings, UCSD freshmen at entry to the university tend to exhibit higher levels of anxiety with respect to academic performance compared with peers at other public and private universities. This finding of generally higher levels of academic anxiety is also noted in the UCSD YFCY data. For example, approximately 26% of UCSD freshmen respondents report that they were “completely successful” in “understanding what professors expect of you academically.” The proportion reporting this level of success in academic adjustment from other public universities was 39% and in private universities, 42%. (p. 4 YFCY). Differences of greater than 10 % were found on several items pertaining to academic adjustment such as “developing effective study skills,” time management, and “getting to know faculty” (p. 4: YFCY). However, UCSD freshmen tended to use campus services at the same rate as their peers in the YFCY sample.

During the freshmen year, UCSD respondents tended to drink alcohol and smoke cigarettes at a lower rate than their counterparts in the public and private university freshmen in the YFCY sample (p. . On o ther measures of health and physically active lifestyle indicators such as “maintaining a healthy diet” and “missing class due to illness,” UCSD freshmen were

generally similar to their counterparts in the national YFCY sample. (p. 5: YFCY).

This study has several implications for educational planning and programming to enhance the first year experience of students at the Research University. The investigation illuminated a growing sense of anxiety among entering students with respect to their self-perceived ability to compete and achieve in the research university environment. Despite higher levels of academic preparation, students in 2002 expressed much greater needs for personal, academic, and career counseling along with special support services such as remedial or supplemental instruction in writing, science, and mathematics. This information has provided the University with an incentive to enhance and devote greater attention to this growing need. Although the impact of the environmental variables was of little practical significance, some variables did demonstrate a significant positive relationship with the dependent variables of self-perception, and first year GPA. The academic engagement variables were found to have a significant impact, particularly for students entering with lower academic credentials such as high school GPA. This study suggests that enhancing and providing greater opportunities for academic engagement in the form of small seminars, greater interaction with the faculty outside of class, internships,

and working on research projects have a significant impact on student outcomes, particularly for those students predicted to have lower first year grades.

## References

Astin, Alexander W. (1993). *What matters in college? : Four critical years revisited*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Astin, Alexander W. (1991) *Assessment for excellence: The philosophy and practice of assessment and evaluation in higher education*. New York: Macmillan.

Astin, Alexander W. (1975). *Preventing students from dropping out*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Feldman, Kenneth & Newcomb, Theodore (1994). *The impact of college on students*. New Brunswick, N.J. : Transaction Publishers.

Pascarella, Ernest T. & Terenzini, Patrick T (1991). *The impact of college on students: Findings and insights from twenty years of research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Pascarella, Ernest T. & Terenzini, Patrick T.. Student-Faculty Informal Relationships and Freshman Year Educational Outcomes. *Journal of Educational Research*; 71, 4, 183-9, Mar-Apr 78. 1978