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# A PROFILE OF THE FALL, 1999, FRESHMAN CLASS AT WESTERN: COMPARATIVE TRENDS AND PATTERNS WITH A NATIONAL SAMPLE

Prepared by Gary R. McKinney and Joseph E. Trimble,

## INTRODUCTION

Commonly known as Western's *Freshman Survey*, Western's study on first-time, incoming freshmen utilizes the Student Information Form questionnaire, developed by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), which is administered nationally by the Higher Education Research Institute located in the Graduate School of Education & Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles.

The CIRP (or Freshman) Survey was first administered at Western in 1971. Through 1989, the CIRP was administered every four or five years. Beginning in 1991, the CIRP has been administered annually. In the fall, 1999, Western received 983 completed survey forms. In-coming freshmen received CIRP questionnaires in their admissions packets prior to SummerStart, Western's summer freshmen orientation program.

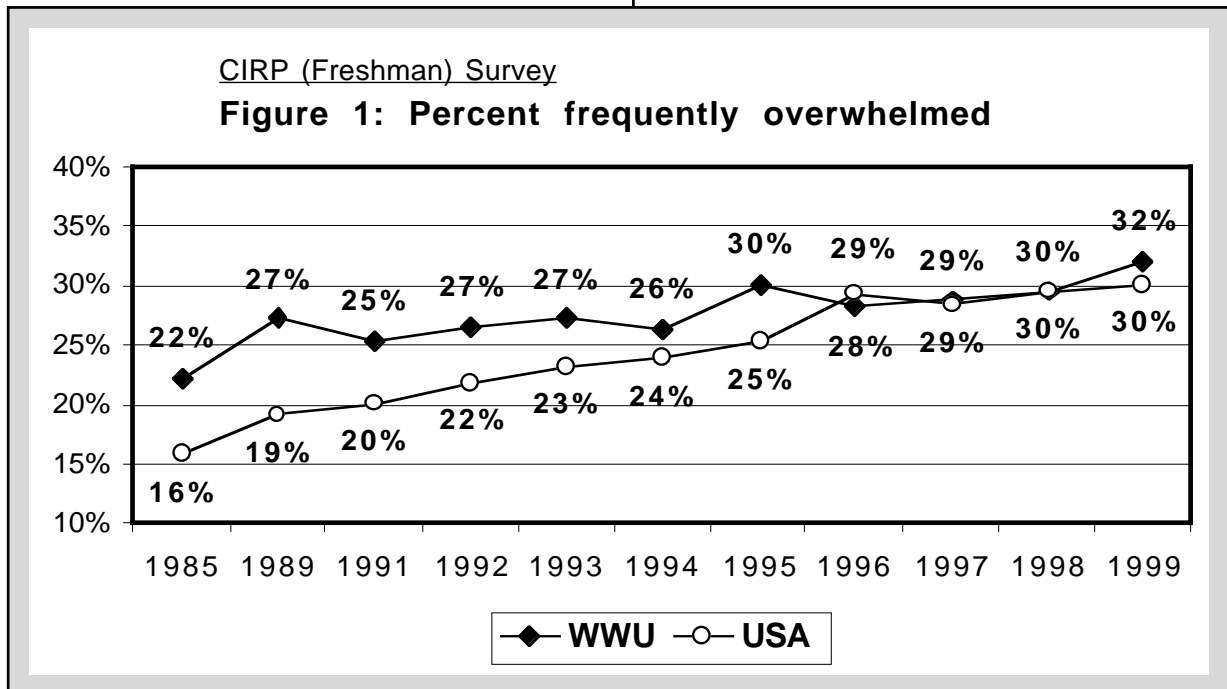
Though fall quarter orientation programs also promoted freshmen survey participation, the majority of completed questionnaires were received during SummerStart.

Nearly all CIRP Survey participants were 18 or 19 years old (98.9%). Females were more likely to have filled out the surveys than males (66.0% females vs. 34.0% males). Most indicated their ethnicity as "White/Caucasian" (91.3%). The actual ratio of freshman males to females in the fall of 1999 was 58.2% females and 41.8% males, and the actual ratio of white freshmen versus freshmen of color was 83.7% versus 16.3%. Thus both males and students of color were under represented in the findings.

The following pages describe a brief profile of 1999 Western freshmen, sometimes compared and contrasted to previous classes of Western freshmen, and sometimes compared and contrasted to freshmen nationally.



## FRESHMEN MORE STRESSED THAN EVER



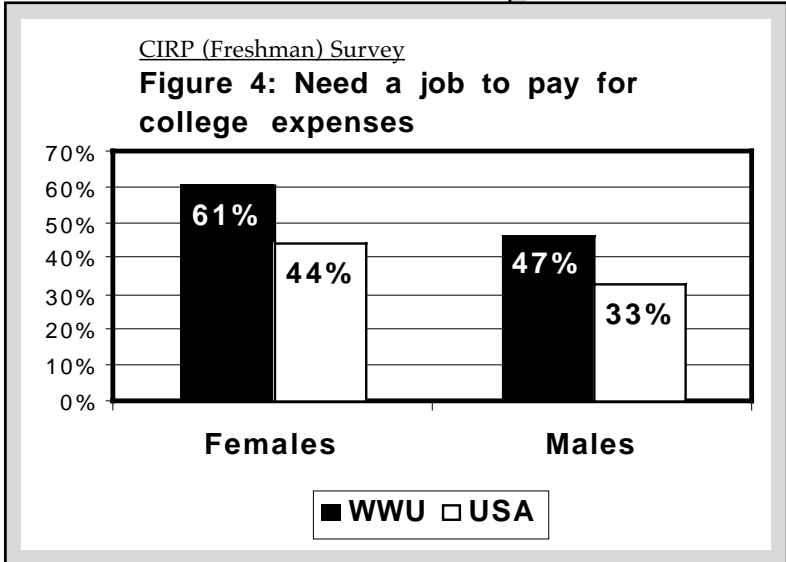
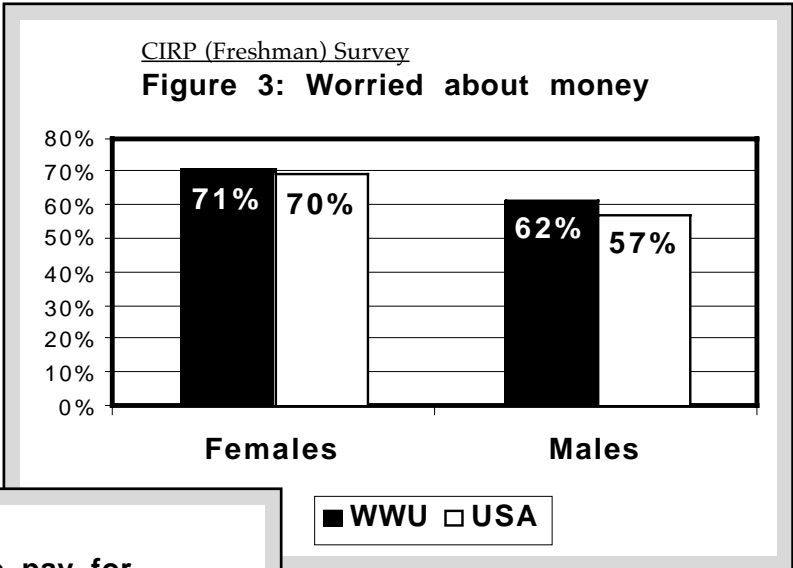
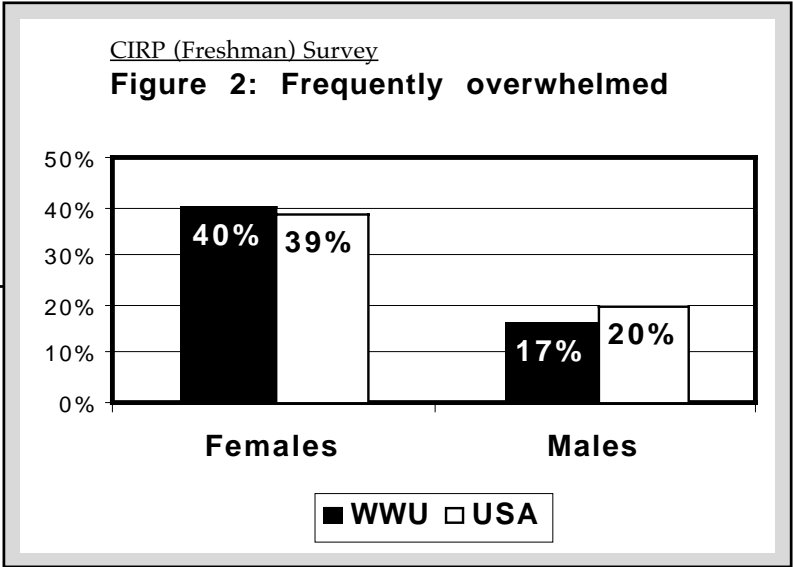
As noted in Figure 1, in 1999, the percent of incoming freshmen reporting they frequently “felt overwhelmed by all (they) had to do” reached record levels—both nationally and at Western—when comparing figures back to 1985. Although it has been typical of incoming freshmen to report occasionally feeling overwhelmed, the rise in percent of freshmen reporting frequently feeling overwhelmed is a recent development.

Historically, Western’s incoming freshmen have been more likely to report feeling stressed than freshmen nationally (as can be noted in Figure 1). However, the percentage increase ( $A - B / A = X$ ) between the years 1985 and 1999 for Western freshmen is 31%, but 47% for freshmen nationally. In other words, nationally there has been a more pronounced change in the percentage of freshmen feeling stressed than at Western.

**WOMEN MORE STRESSED THAN MEN**

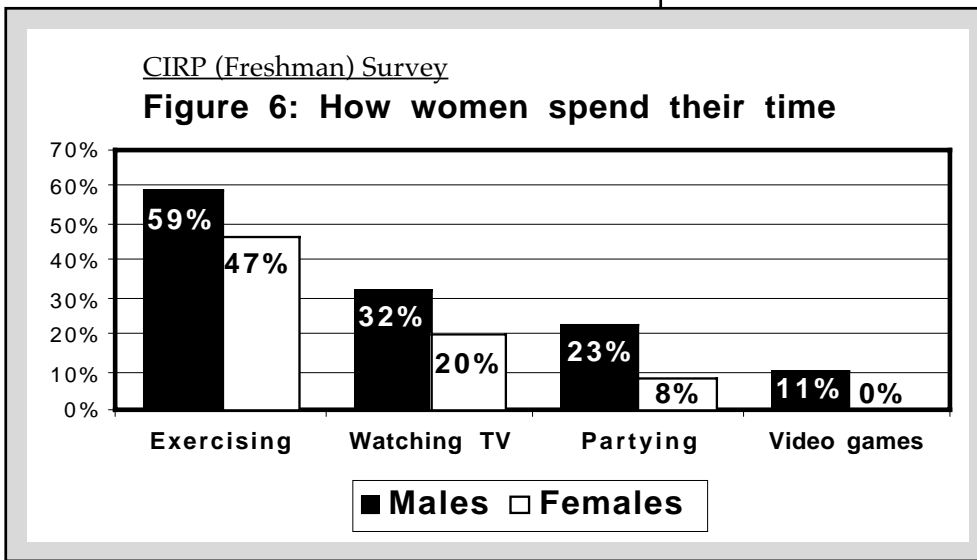
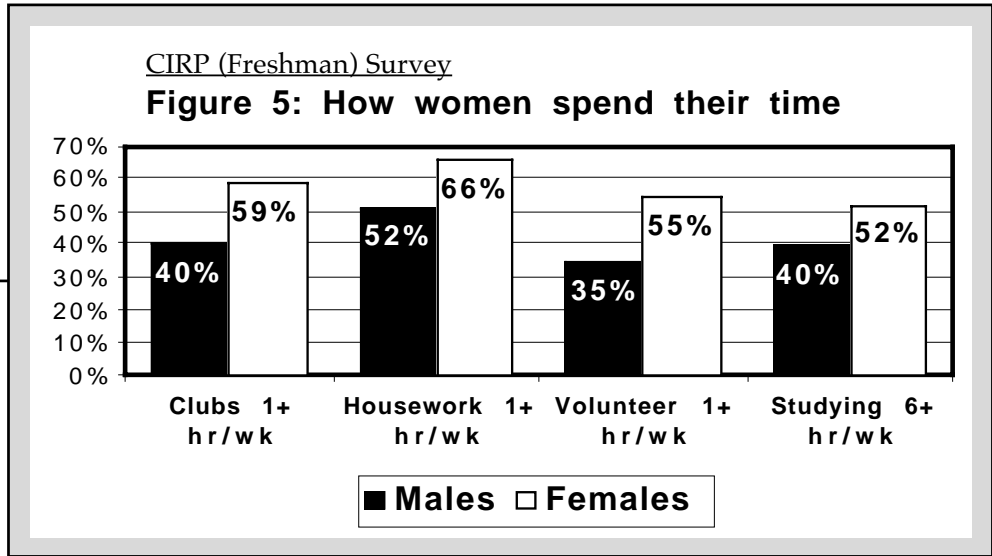
**STRESSED, BUT NOT DEPRESSED**

Although Western freshmen, and especially women, indicate feeling more stressed, they do not appear to be feeling any more depressed. Specifically: in 1985, 9.0% of Western freshmen indicated they had frequently felt depressed, while in 1999 that figure was 7.2%



*Here are a couple of possible reasons why women may be more likely to feel overwhelmed by all (they) have to do" than men.*

**How  
WOMEN  
SPEND  
THEIR  
TIME**

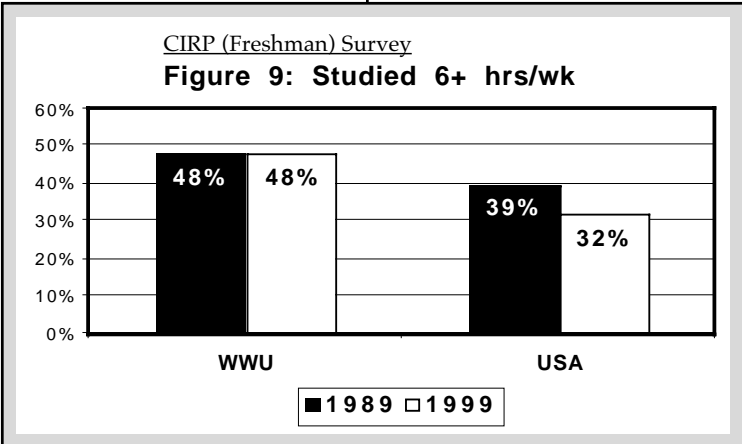
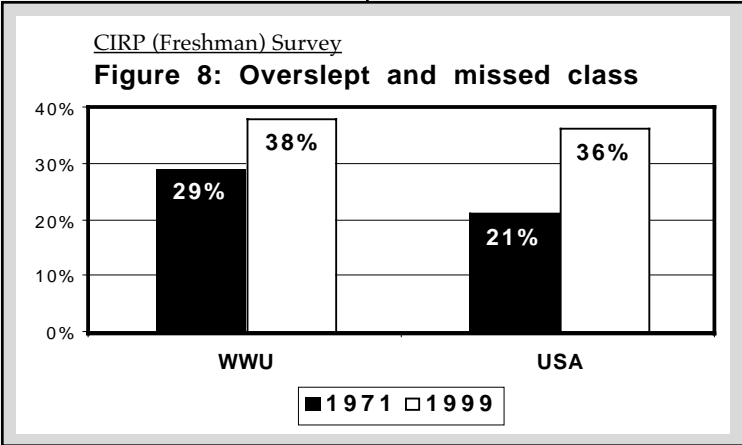
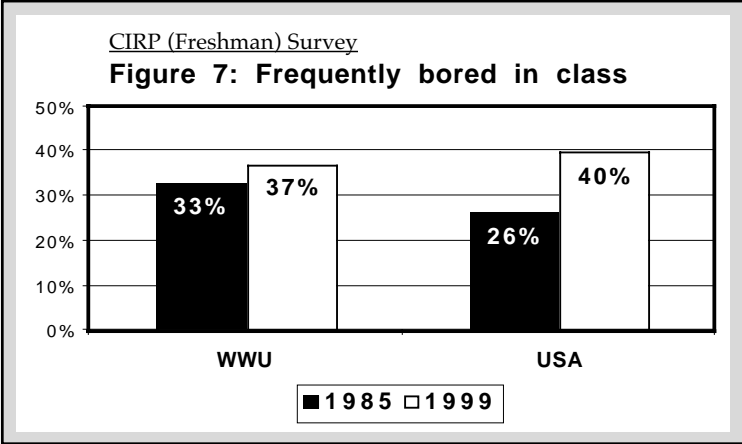


**How  
MEN  
SPEND  
THEIR  
TIME**

**WHAT THIS MIGHT MEAN**

Compared to men, women spend significantly more time studying, performing volunteer work, participating in clubs and groups, and doing housework/childcare chores; compared to women, men spend significantly more time exercising, watching TV, partying, and playing video games. These findings suggest that women spend more time on goal-oriented—and potentially more stress-producing—activities, while men spend more time on recreational—and potentially stress-relieving—activities.

# ACADEMIC DISENGAGEMENT: OBVIOUS NATIONALLY, LESS SO AT WESTERN



Nationally, in-coming freshmen continue to exhibit an apparent lack of interest in school—or academic disengagement, as indicated by the following:

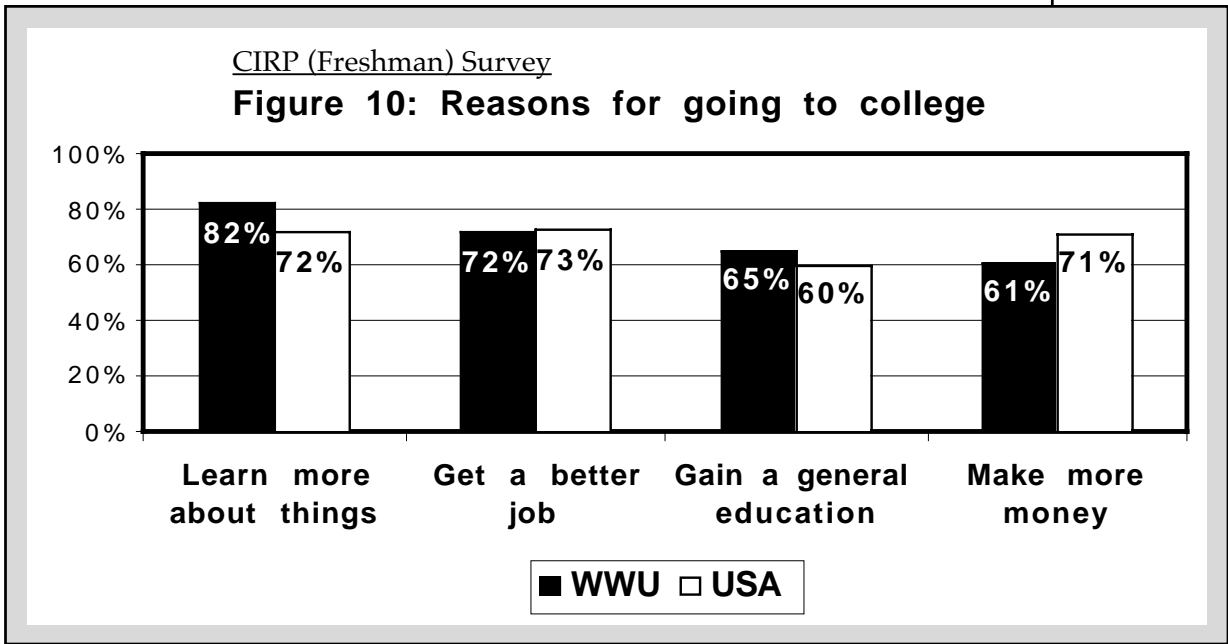
- A record high 40% indicated they had felt “bored in class;”
- The percentage who “overslept and missed class or appointment” rose to 36%; and
- The percentage of freshmen reporting they had studied six or more hours a week reached a record low 32%.

Nationally, there has been a more pronounced change in the percentage of freshmen feeling academic disengagement than among Western freshmen, as indicated by the following:

- Bored in class: the percentage increase between 1985 and 1999 was 11% at Western, compared to 35% nationally;
- Overslept: the percentage increase between 1971 and 1999 was 24% at Western, compared to 42% nationally; and
- Studied 6+ hrs/wk: did not change between 1989 and 1999 at Western, compared to a percentage decrease of 22% nationally.

Recent years have seen an increase in the percentage of in-coming freshmen listing “to make more money” and “to get a better job” as their reasons for attending college. National researchers suggest that this trend is an aspect of increased academic disengagement, with students exhibiting a practical rather than scholarly approach to their education. Western’s in-coming freshmen, however, continue to be more likely than their national counterparts to list “to gain a general education” and “learn more about things” as the reasons they decided to attend college.

**WHY  
FRESHMEN  
OPT FOR  
COLLEGE**



**PARENTAL INFLUENCE ON COLLEGE ATTENDANCE**

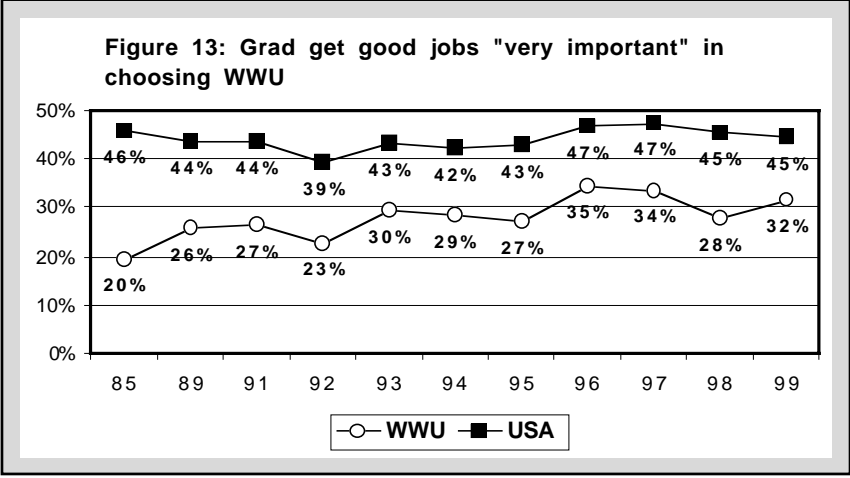
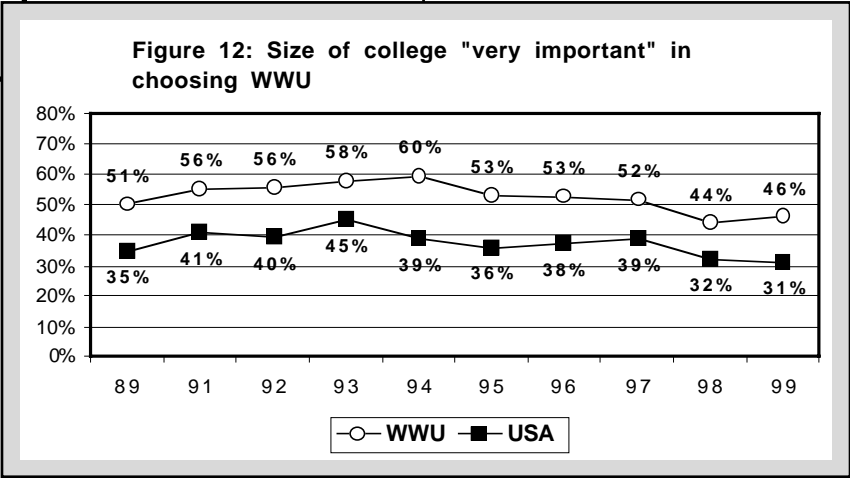
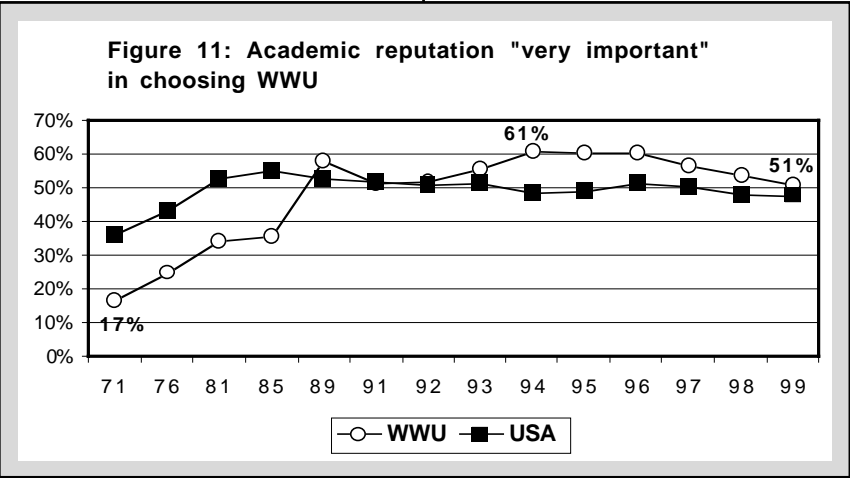
In 1971, only 16.2% of in-coming Western freshmen opted for college “because my parents wanted me to go.” In 1999, that figure was 28.9%. Concurrently, the percentage of parents of Western freshmen with a Bachelor’s degrees rose: for fathers from 39.4% to 59.6%; and for mothers from 26.2% to 53.5%. Moreover, the percentage of in-coming freshmen receiving \$1500 or more in financial support rose from 48.0% in 1981 to 78.2% in 1999.

**WHY  
FRESHMEN  
OPT FOR  
WESTERN**

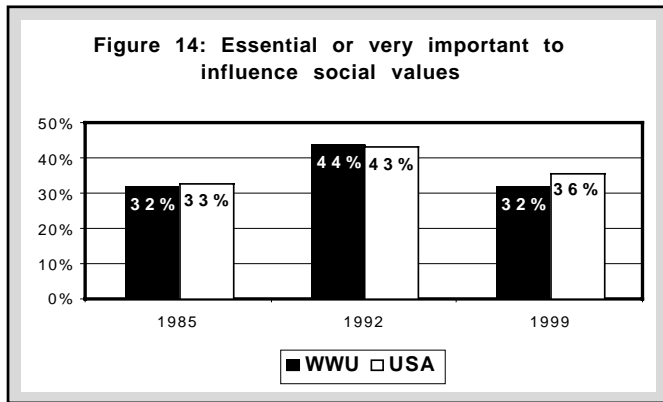
**A TREND OF  
NOTE**

After rising steadily from 1971, reaching a peak of 61% in 1994, the percentage of incoming freshmen indicating they chose Western because of its academic reputation has, over the last five years, steadily declined: to 51% in 1999, an actual decrease of 10%, but also a percentage decrease of 20%.

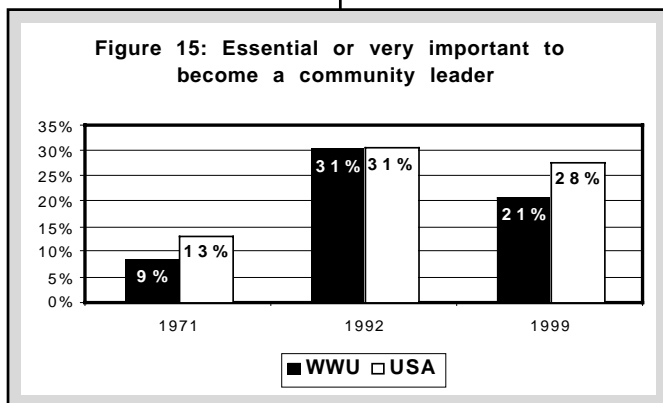
CIRP (Freshman) Survey





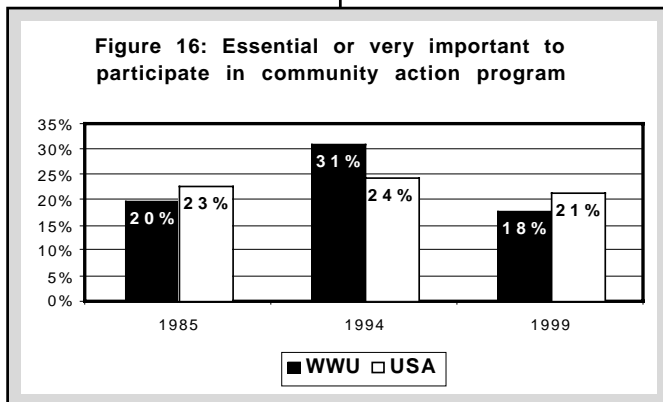


## INTEREST IN SOCIAL ACTIVISM CONTINUES TO DECREASE

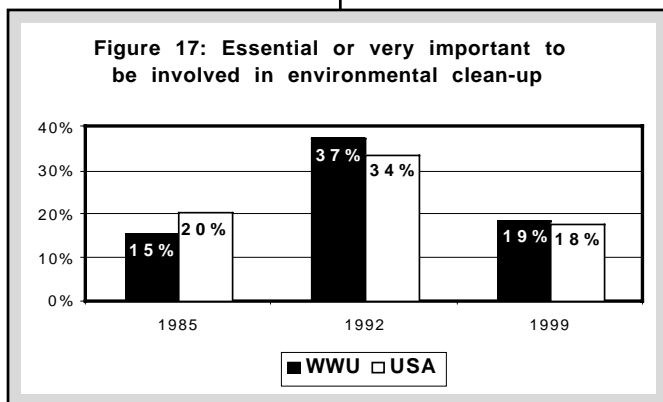


National researchers have noticed a continuing decrease in the interest in social activism, a trend apparent in Western findings as well. For example incoming freshmen indicated it was essential or very important :

- to influence social values:  
1992 = 44%; 1999 = 36%;
- to become a community leader:  
1992 = 31%; 1999 = 21%;
- to participate in a community action program  
1994 = 31%; 1999 = 18%;
- to be involved in environment clean-up  
1992 = 37%; 1999 = 19%.



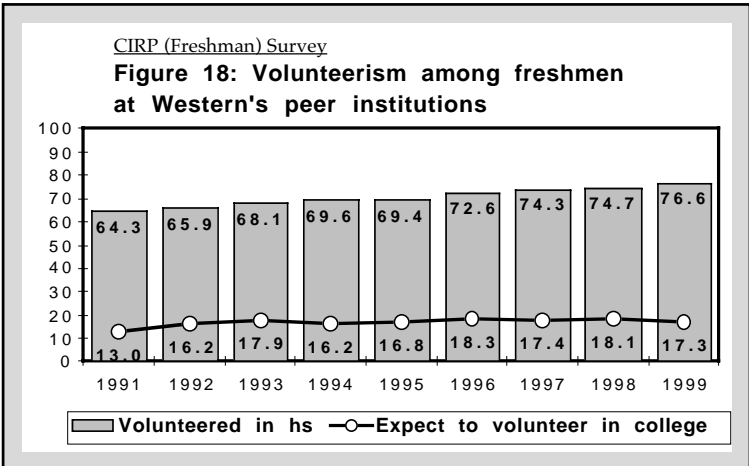
## LACK OF INTEREST IN PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING



In 1992, 48% of incoming freshmen indicated it was essential or very important to promote racial understanding, but only 26% in 1999; in other words, close to half as many students as did only 8 years ago consider the promotion of racial understanding important.

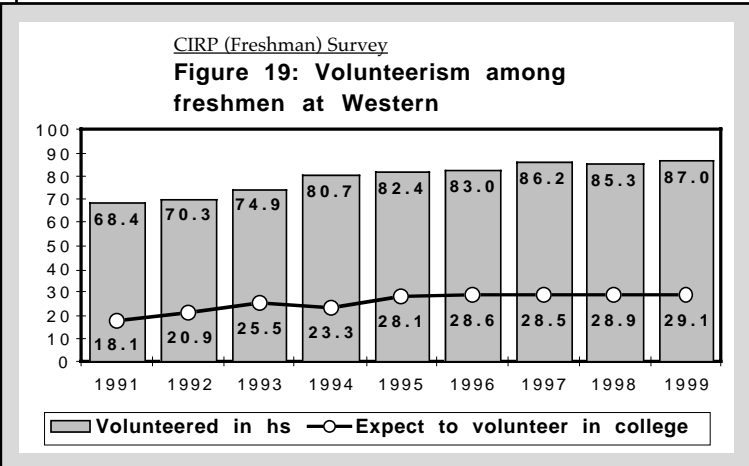
Volunteerism continues to increase. Nationally, the percentage of freshmen who volunteered while in high school increased from 64% in 1991 to 75% in 1999. Among Western freshmen, the increase was from 68% in 1991 to 87% in 1999. Some speculate this is due to volunteerism as a graduation requirement. Nationally, 30% of incoming freshmen indicated their schools had such a requirement, up from 21% in 1998. At Western 30% had such a requirement, about the same as in 1998.

## VOLUNTEERISM INCREASING



## A CULTURE OF VOLUNTEERISM?

Far fewer incoming freshmen anticipate they will volunteer while in college: 29% at Western, and 17% nationally. Nevertheless, the culture of high school volunteerism is having an effect, particularly at Western, where the percentage increase in high school volunteerism between 1991 and 1999 increased 22% (15% nationally), contrasted to a percentage increase of 38% (28% nationally) for those incoming freshmen anticipating they will volunteer while in college.



### WESTERN FRESHMEN ALSO VOLUNTEERING MORE REGULARLY

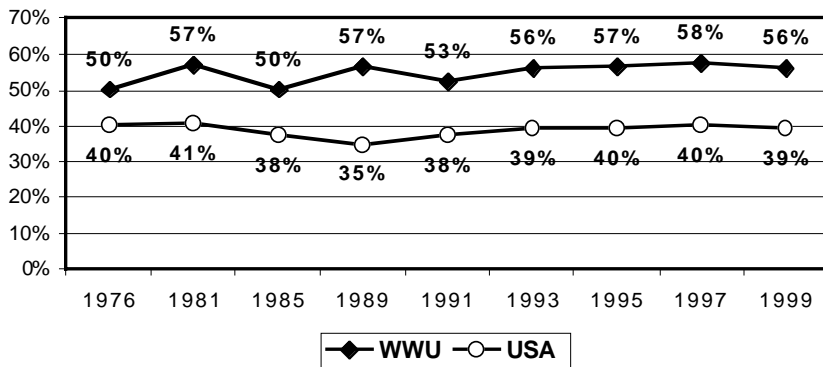
In 1989, 3.3% of Western's incoming freshmen noted they had volunteered six or more hours a week; by 1999, that figure more than tripled, to 10.1%.

## WESTERN FRESHMEN PLAN ON WORKING (AND HAVE SINCE THE 1970's)

More Western incoming freshmen than freshmen nationally have anticipated they would work while in college since as far back as the question was asked, 1976. On the other hand, few freshmen anticipate they will have to work full-time, although freshmen nationally (6.9%) are more likely to feel they will have to work full-time than Western freshmen (2.7%).

CIRP (Freshman) Survey

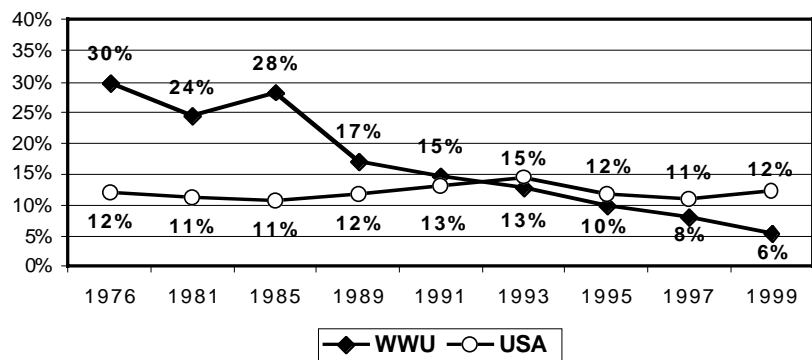
Figure 20: Percent of incoming freshmen who plan "on getting a job to help pay expenses"



Unlike the national trends—which have remained relatively stable—the percentage of Western's incoming freshmen who anticipate they will transfer to another college has plummeted dramatically over the 25 years. In 1976, nearly a third (30%) of Western freshmen anticipated they would transfer. By 1999, that figure was only 6%.

CIRP (Freshman) Survey

Figure 21: Percent of incoming freshmen who plan "to transfer to another college"

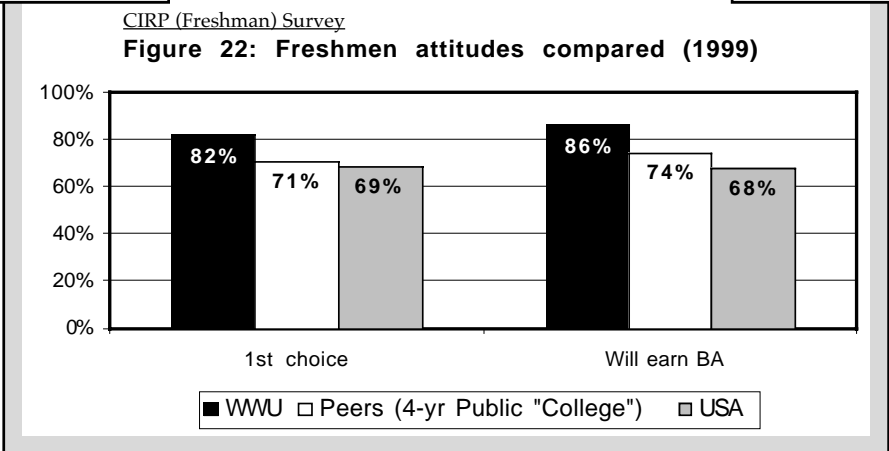


## WESTERN FRESHMEN HERE TO STAY

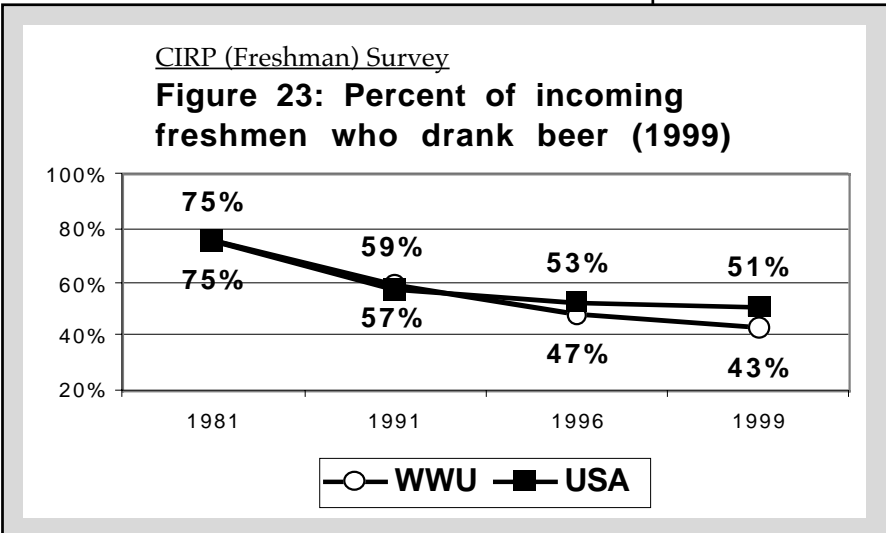
**WESTERN FRESHMEN CHOOSE WESTERN FIRST**

- Only 67% of Western freshmen planned on earning a BA in 1976; it was 77% in 1992.
- In 1985, Western was first choice for only 72% of freshmen.

**WESTERN FRESHMEN PLAN TO EARN BACHELOR'S**



**LESS BEER DRINKING IN HIGH SCHOOL**



- Few 1999 incoming Western Freshmen smoked while in high school: only 5%, compared to 14% nationally.
- The percent of freshmen who drank *wine or liquor* was also an all-time low: 45%, in 1999 compared to 55% in 1993.

## SUMMARY

Both nationally and at Western, incoming freshmen appear more stressed than ever, with females feeling more stressed than males; for instance, females were more likely to worry over money than males. Males, on the other hand, were more likely to spend time on stress-relieving activities such as exercising.

Nationally, incoming freshmen exhibited a trend toward academic disengagement (i.e., a lack of interest in school); at Western, the trend was less compelling—in other words, compared to their counterparts, Western's freshmen do not appear as academically disengaged. Relatedly, Western's freshmen were more likely to choose college because they wanted to learn more about things, while freshmen nationally were more likely to choose college they wanted to make more money. The number one reason Western's incoming freshmen gave for choosing Western was its academic reputation; however, even though it was the number one reason, the percentage fell for the fourth straight year (from 61% in 1993 to 51% in 1999).

Western freshmen plan on working their way through college, and have since the mid-70's. However, unlike the mid-70's, Western's incoming freshmen no longer plan on transferring to other schools (from 30% in 1976 to 6% in 1999). Moreover, in 1999, Western was the first choice for most of its incoming freshmen (82%, compared to 72% in 1985). Most freshmen also plan on earning their BA (86% in 1999, compared to only 67% in 1976).

The 1999 CIRP Survey had 364,546 participants from 683 two- and four-year colleges and universities. National norms were based on the responses of 261,217 participants from 462 two- and four-year colleges and universities. The data were statistically adjusted to reflect the responses of the 1.6 million first-time, full-time freshmen entering college in the fall of 1999.

1999 marks the thirty-third annual national CIRP report on the characteristics and attitudes of students entering colleges and universities as first-time, full-time freshmen. Western began participating in the CIRP Survey in 1971. Since 1991, it has administered the CIRP survey annually. The Office of Institutional Assessment and Testing maintains complete records of CIRP Surveys administered at Western.



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