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A PROFILE OF THE FALL, 2000, FRESHMAN CLASS AT WESTERN: COMPARATIVE TRENDS AND PATTERNS WITH A NATIONAL SAMPLE

Prepared by Gary R. McKinney

INTRODUCTION

Commonly known as Western's *Freshman Survey*, Western's study of first-time, in-coming 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 (HERI) located in the Graduate School of Education & Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles.

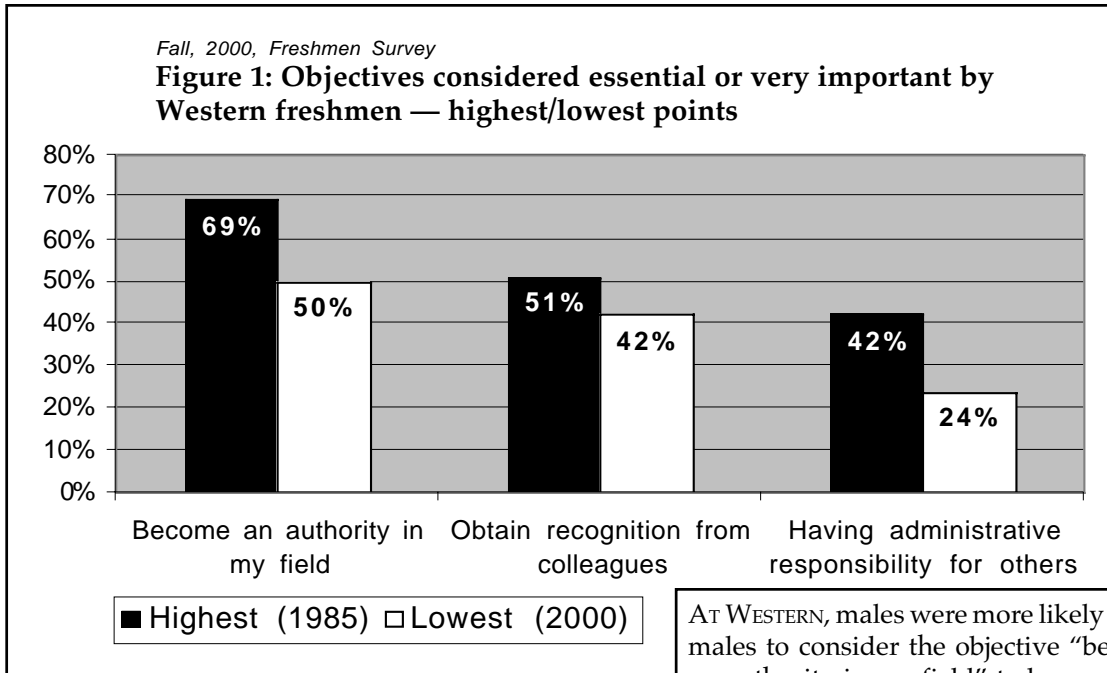
The CIRP/Freshman Survey was first administered to Western's in-coming freshmen in 1971. Through 1989, the CIRP was administered every four or five years. Beginning in 1991, the CIRP has been administered annually. In the fall, 2000, Western received 600 completed survey forms. In-coming freshmen received 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 (99.0%). Females were more likely to have filled out the surveys than males (68.2% females vs. 31.8% males). Most indicated their ethnicity as "White/Caucasian" (91.7%). The actual ratio of first-time, in-coming freshman males to females in the fall of 2000 was 61.0% females and 39.0% males, while the actual ratio of white freshmen versus freshmen of color was 85.2% versus 14.8%, thus both males and students of color were under represented in the findings.

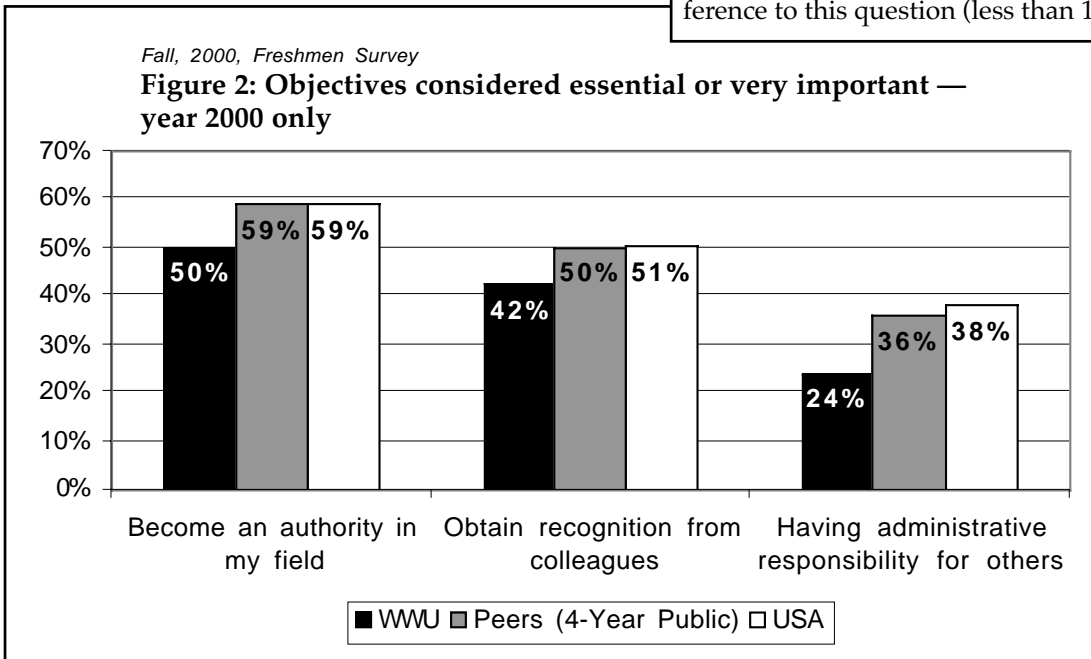
The following pages describe a brief profile of 2000 Western freshmen, sometimes compared and contrasted to previous classes of Western freshmen, and sometimes compared and contrasted to freshmen nationally.

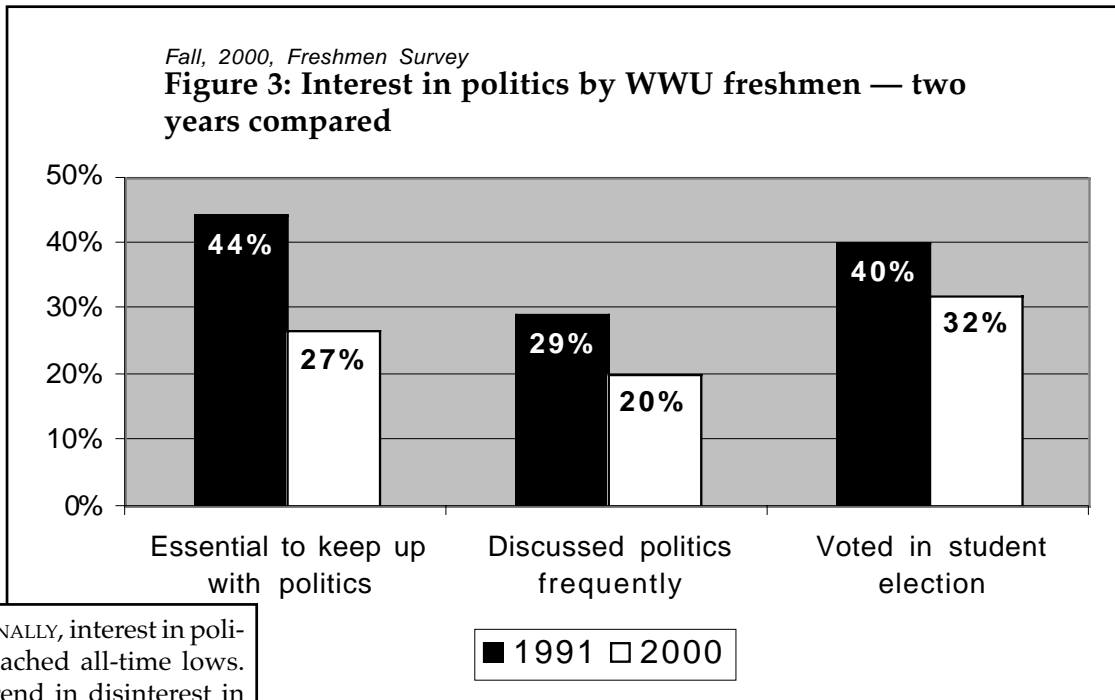




FRESHMEN LESS DRIVEN BY STATUS

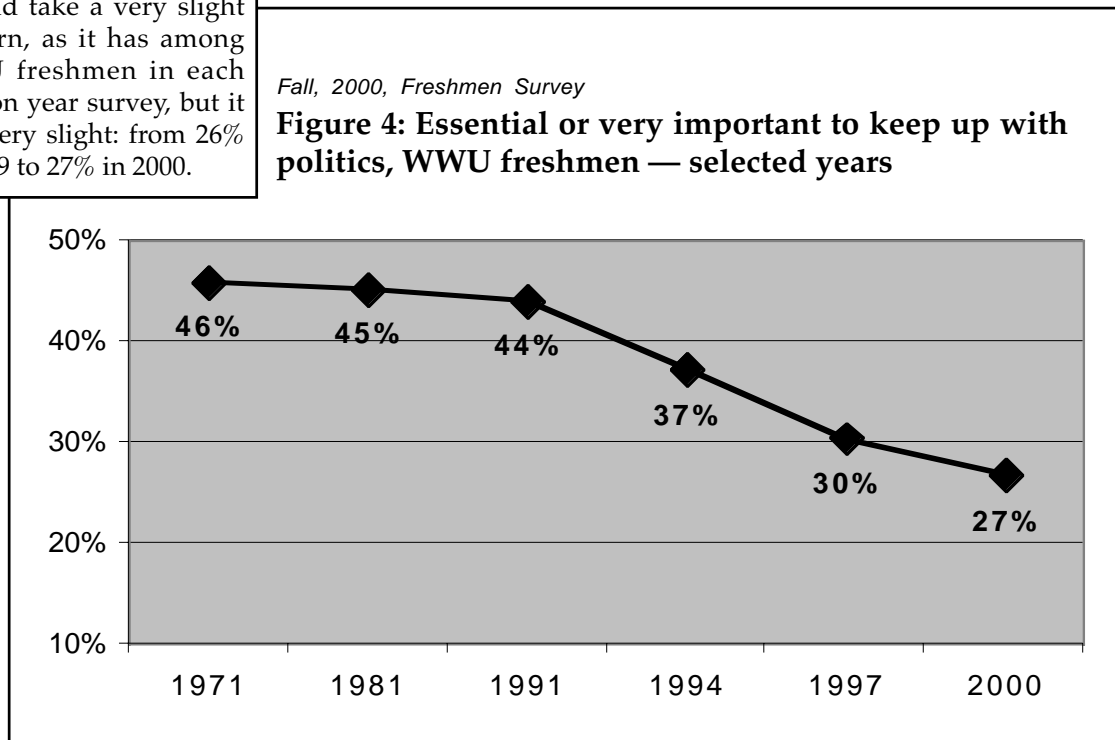
At WESTERN, males were more likely than females to consider the objective “becoming an authority in my field” to be essential or very important (59% males versus 46% females, a 13% difference). NATIONALLY, the difference between males and females was less than half that much (6%). At WESTERN, females were slightly more likely to consider the objective “obtaining recognition from colleagues for contributions to my special field” to be essential or very important (43% females versus 40% males, a 3% difference). NATIONALLY, there was little if any gender difference to this question (less than 1%).





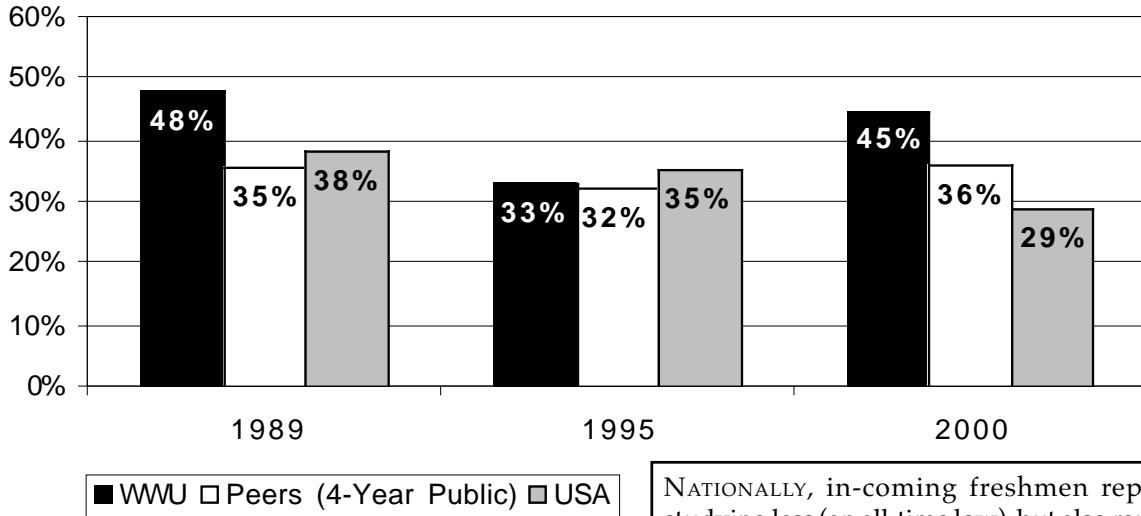
NATIONALLY, interest in politics reached all-time lows. The trend in disinterest in politics has been going on since the early 1990's, but what made this year's finding of special note was that interest in politics usually increases in an election year. At WESTERN, interest in politics did take a very slight up-turn, as it has among WWU freshmen in each election year survey, but it was very slight: from 26% in 1999 to 27% in 2000.

ELECTION YEAR INTEREST IN POLITICS HITS ALL-TIME LOW



Fall, 2000, Freshmen Survey

Figure 5: Percent of in-coming freshmen spending 6+ hrs/wk studying or doing homework — three years compared

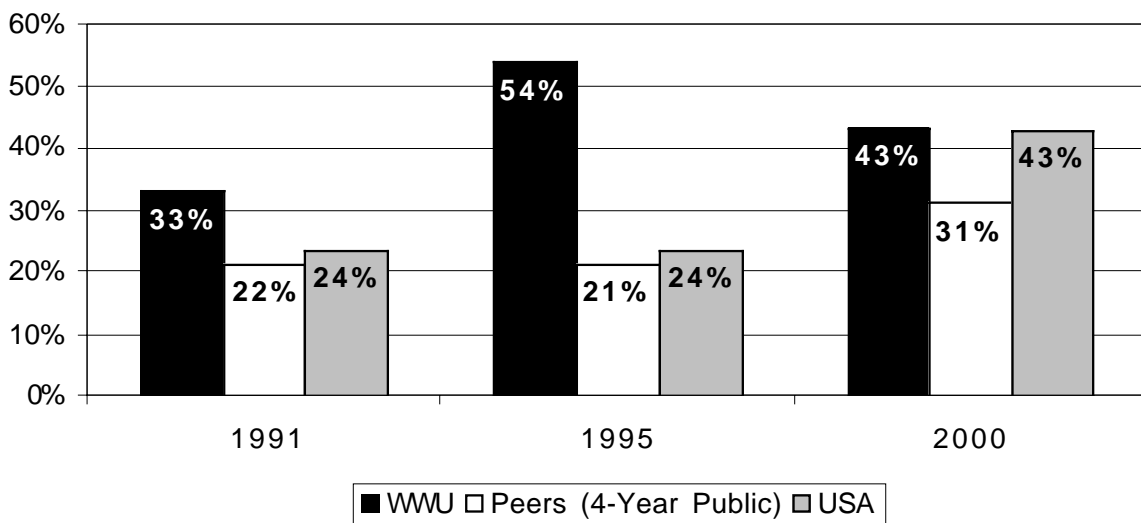


STUDY TIME AND GRADE ISSUES

NATIONALLY, in-coming freshmen reported studying less (an all-time low), but also reported earning better grades. At WESTERN, the trend toward less studying and earning higher grades was true in 1995, but not in 2000, when Western's in-coming freshmen reported studying more than they did in 1995, but also reported earning lower grades. NATIONALLY, more freshmen than ever anticipated they would graduate from college with honors (21% compared to 18% in 1999). At WESTERN, this was true as well (16% compared to 13% in 1999).

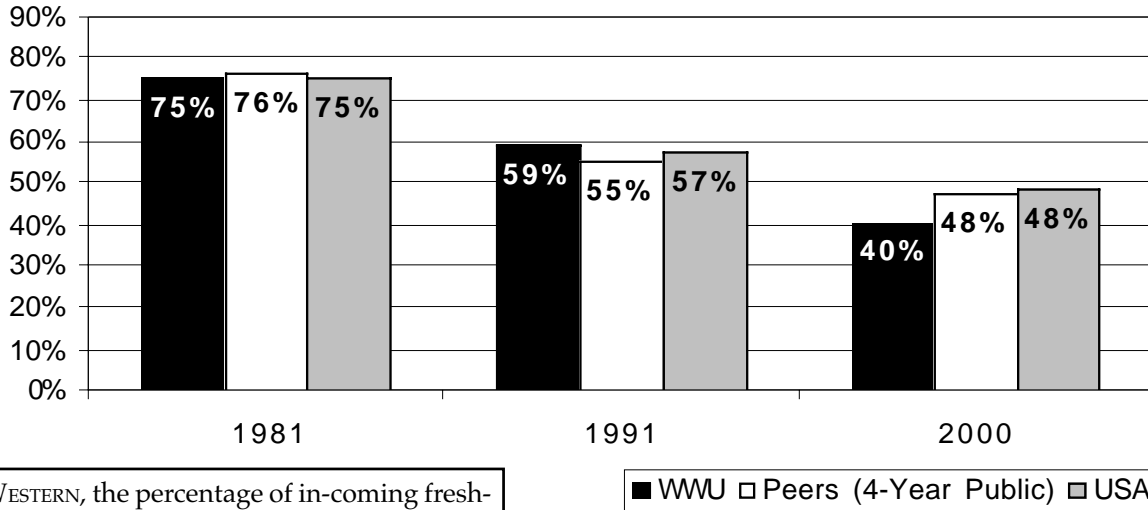
Fall, 2000, Freshmen Survey

Figure 6: Percent of in-coming freshmen earning an "A" average in high school — three years compared



Fall, 2000, Freshmen Survey

Figure 7: Percent of in-coming freshmen indicating they drank beer in the past year — three years compared

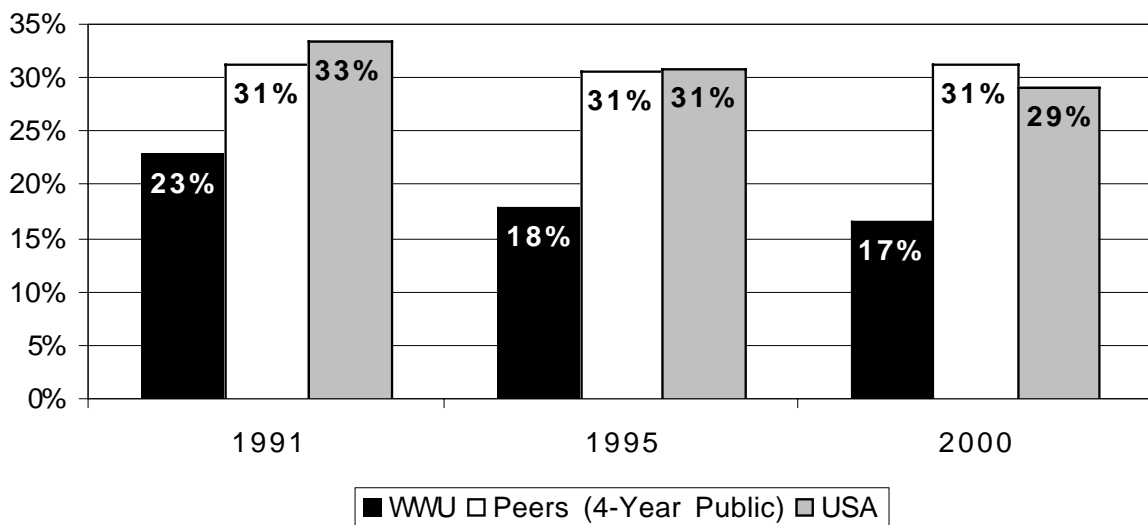


AT WESTERN, the percentage of in-coming freshmen who reported partying 6+ hours a week in the last year (senior year in high school), though lower than in many years past and lower than national findings, was actually higher in 2000 than in 1999, when it 13.2%. NATIONALLY, fewer in-coming freshmen reported smoking (10% in 2000 compared to 11% in 1999 and 15% in 1967). AT WESTERN, the percent of in-coming freshmen who reported smoking was even lower (5% in 2000, compared to 5% in 1999 and 16% in 1971).

**BEER DRINKING,
PARTYING DOWN**

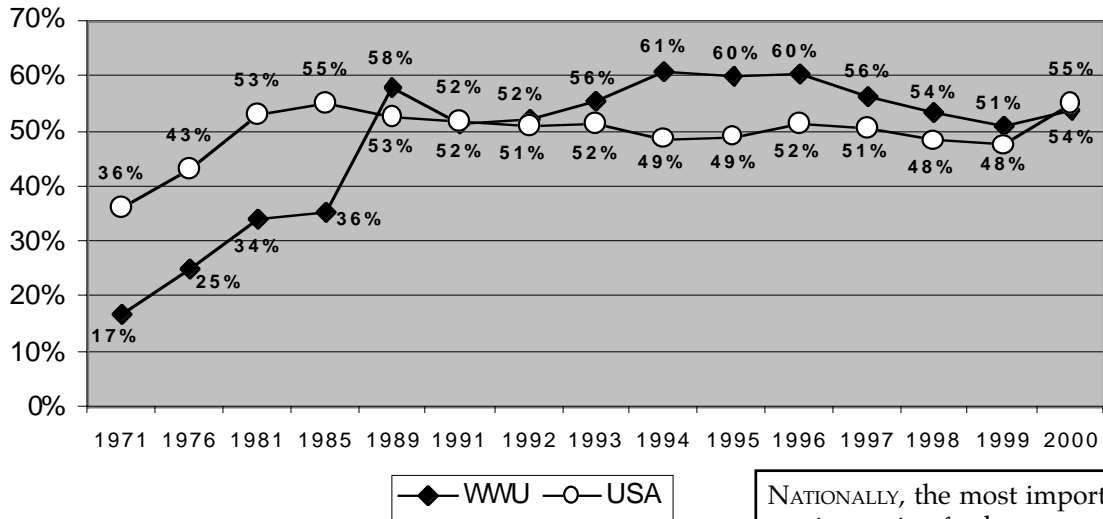
Fall, 2000, Freshmen Survey

Figure 8: Percent of in-coming freshmen indicating they partied 6+ hrs/week in the past year — three years compared



Fall, 2000, Freshmen Survey

Figure 9: Percent of in-coming freshmen indicating they chose their college for its academic reputation

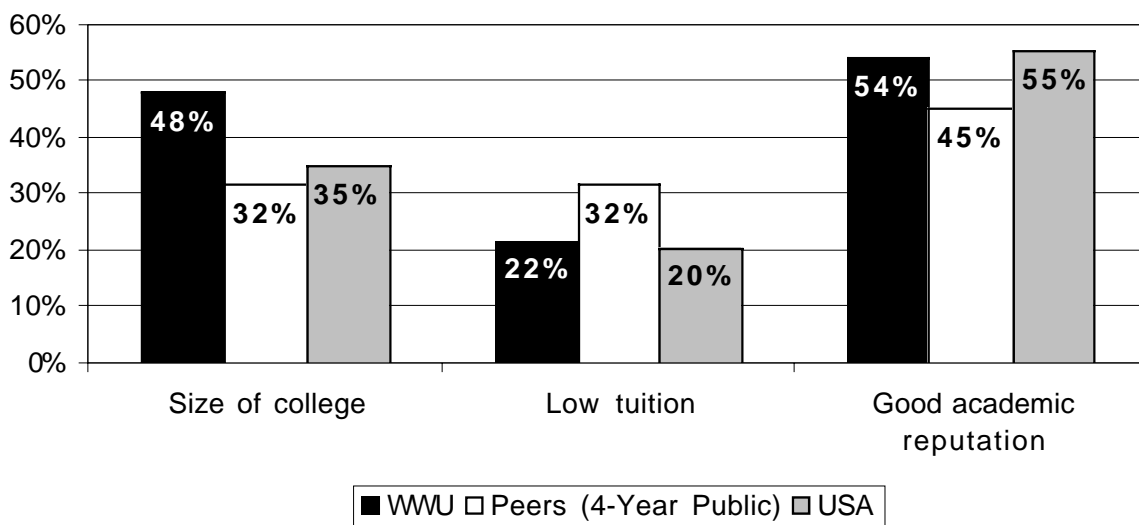


REASONS FROSH CHOSE THEIR COLLEGES

NATIONALLY, the most important reason in-coming freshmen gave for going to college was to "learn more about the things that interest me" (77%). At WESTERN, this was also the most frequently cited reason, although it was higher than the national finding (86%). The second most important reason for going to college, whether nationally or at Western, was to "be able to get a better job" (72% both nationally and at Western).

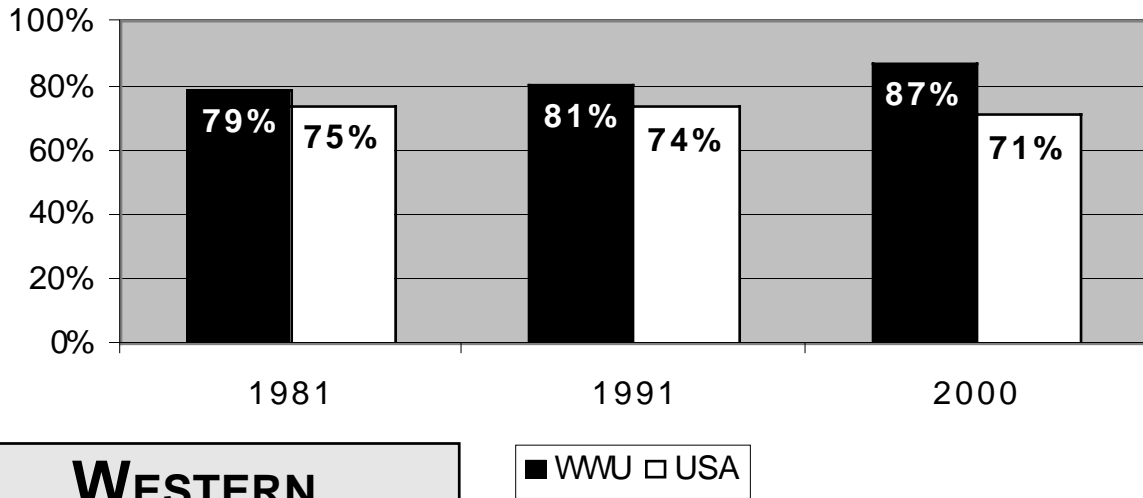
Fall, 2000, Freshmen Survey

Figure 10: Reasons in-coming freshmen chose the schools they are now attending — year 2000 only



Fall, 2000, Freshmen Survey

Figure 11: The college they are attending is in-coming freshmen's first choice— three years compared

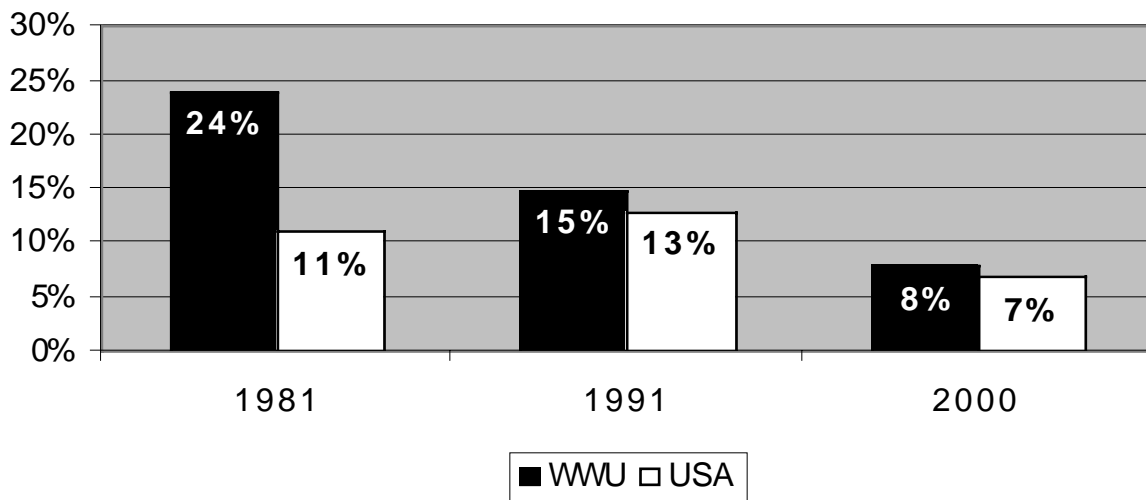


**WESTERN
FRESHMEN CHOOSE
WESTERN FIRST**

**WESTERN
FRESHMEN HERE TO
STAY**

Fall, 2000, Freshmen Survey

Figure 12: Percent of in-coming freshmen anticipating transferring to another college — three years compared



SUMMARY

- ◆ Both nationally and at Western, in-coming freshmen appeared less driven by status than in years past, with Western's in-coming freshmen appearing even less status driven: for all indicators, Western's figures were lower than national figures.
- ◆ Interest in politics among in-coming freshmen reached all-time lows nationally, and were low at Western as well. What makes these findings interesting is their timing. Usually in a presidential election year interest perks up.
- ◆ Nationally, incoming freshmen continued to exhibit what HERI researchers call academic disengagement (i.e., a lack of interest in school—specifically high school, as in-coming freshmen generally take the survey before they actually start college classes). For instance, nationally the percentage of in-coming freshmen who studied six hours or more per week fell to an all-time low in 2000. This trend was not so apparent at Western. For instance, the early 1990's did see a lower percentage of Western freshmen who studied six hours a week or more, but the percentage has been rising since. Granted, the 2000 figure fell slightly from 1999, but was still only three percent under.
- ◆ Partying as an activity among in-coming freshmen was low in 2000. Among Western's in-coming freshmen, the figure has been traditionally much lower than national findings, and such was again the case in 2000.
- ◆ The number one reason Western's in-coming freshmen gave for choosing Western was its academic reputation. Relatedly, a record percentage of in-coming freshmen (87%) indicated Western was their first choice (compared to 71% of freshmen nationally).
- ◆ The 2000 CIRP Survey had 269,413 participants from 434 two- and four-year colleges and universities. The data were statistically adjusted to reflect the responses of the 1.1 million first-time, full-time freshmen entering college in the fall of 2000. The 2000 survey marks the thirty-fifth 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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