



4-1-1996

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Recommended Citation

Trimble, Joseph E. and McKinney, Gary (Gary Russell), "Profile of the 1995 Freshman Class at Western Washington University: Comparative Trends and Patterns with a National Sample" (1996). *Office of Survey Research*. 482.
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The Office of Institutional Assessment and Testing • Western Washington University

Volume 1, Issue 4

April, 1996

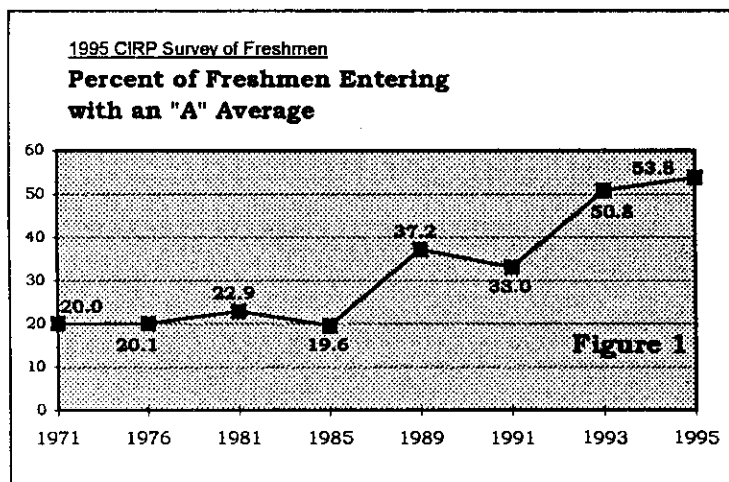
Profile of the 1995 Freshman Class at Western Washington University: Comparative Trends and Patterns with a National Sample

Prepared by Gary R. McKinney and Joseph E. Trimble

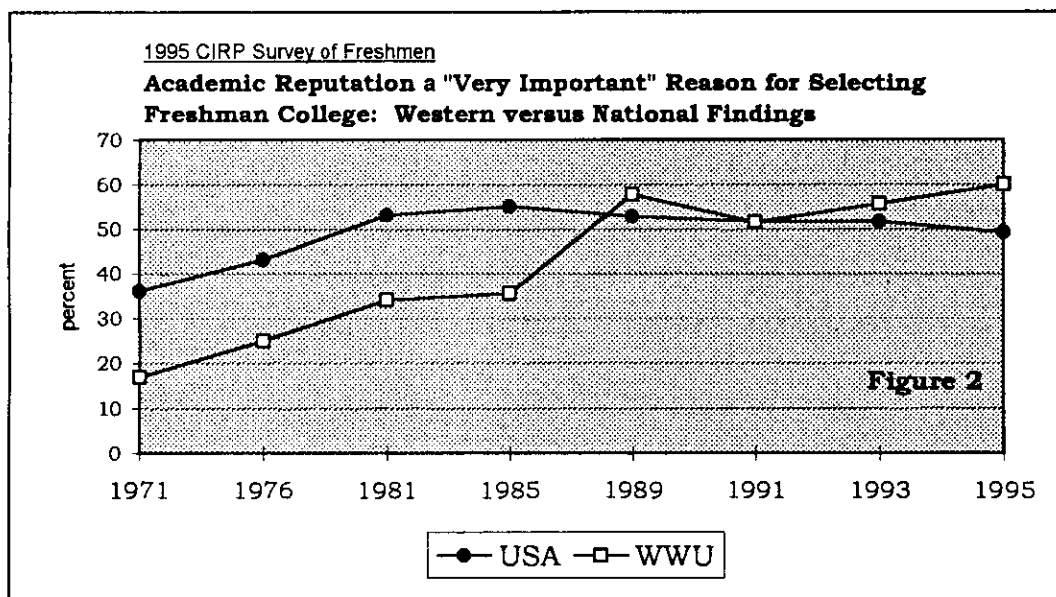
The Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) survey series is a continuing longitudinal study of college freshmen. It is sponsored by the American Council on Education, and the Graduate School of Education & Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. Survey data profiles the characteristics, attitudes, values, educational achievements, and future goals of first-time, in-coming freshmen. Western has participated in CIRP administrations since 1971. Below is a brief profile of 1995 Western freshmen contrasted to previous classes of Western freshmen, as well as sections that contrast and compare Western freshmen with freshmen nationally.

WESTERN FRESHMEN IN 1995 BETTER PREPARED AND HAVE DIFFERENT REASONS FOR ATTENDING WESTERN THAN PREVIOUS CLASSES

Freshmen are arriving at Western with better high school grades than ever (53.8% indicated they had "A" averages in 1995 compared to 20.0% in 1971), as well as higher academic expectations (83.6% indicated they planned to earn a Bachelor's degree in 1995, compared to 66.9% in 1976). (See Figure 1.) This may be due to strong parental influence. In 1971, only 39.4% of the fathers and 26.2% of the mothers had earned college degrees (Bachelor's or better); by 1995, those figures had risen to 66.1% of fathers and 55.8% of mothers.



High school students are increasingly drawn to Western because of its academic reputation. When 1995 CIRP survey respondents were asked why they chose Western, 60.1% indicated that its academic reputation was a "very important" reason. This finding was 35.6% in 1985 and only 16.9% in 1971. (See Figure 2.) In-coming freshmen also indicated that Western's size was important (53.2%), as well as its low tuition (25.7%). Despite the rising cost of a higher education, Western apparently remains a bargain: only 6.5% of freshmen in 1971 and 18.6% in 1985 indicated that low tuition was a very important reason in choosing Western.



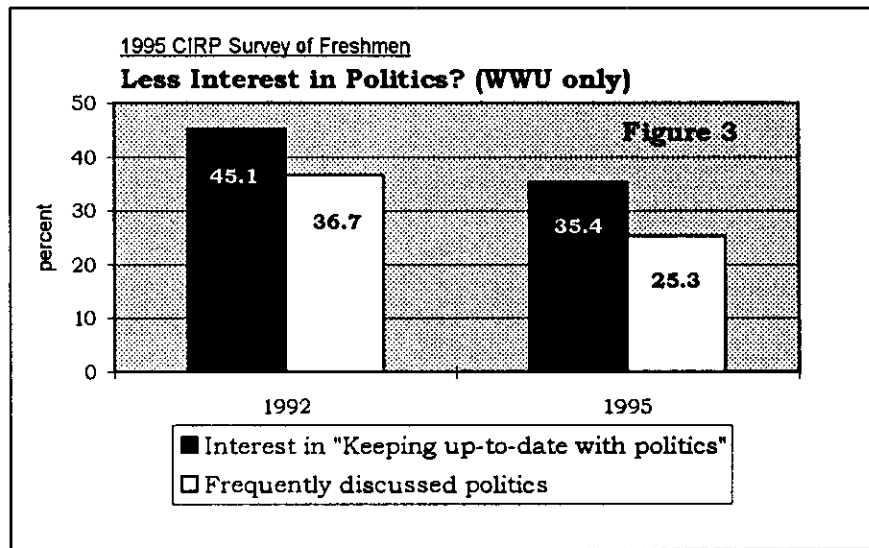
Though Western has long been the first college of choice among its in-coming freshmen (84.0% in 1976 and 82.3% in 1995), it is no longer seen by many as a stopover college. In 1976, for instance, 29.8% of freshmen thought the chances were very good that they would transfer to another college. By 1995, that figure was down to 9.8%. Moreover, fewer freshmen than ever consider it likely that they will drop out, either temporarily or permanently (from 8.3% in 1976 to 2.5% in 1995).

ARE 1995 FRESHMEN SHOWING LESS INTEREST IN POLITICS?

According to national researchers, in-coming freshmen showed a waning interest and engagement in politics. For instance, two findings reached all-time lows: the percentage of freshmen interested in *keeping up with politics* (28.5% compared to 36.9% in 1992) and the percentage who *frequently discussed politics* (14.8% compared to 24.6% in 1992). Moreover, a lower percentage of in-coming 1995 freshmen were less interested than they were just three years ago (in 1992) in working to clean up the environment (22.5% vs. 33.6%), influencing social values (38.2% vs. 43.3%), influencing the political structure (17.2% vs. 20.1%), promoting racial understanding (33.4% vs. 42.0%), and participating in community action programs (23.0% vs. 26.1%).

National researchers also pointed to one last finding consistent with what they felt was an increasing political apathy found in 1995 freshmen: the percentage indicating they agreed with the statement that “an individual can do little to change society” rose to a ten-year high of 33.6%.

At Western, too, the trend toward more political apathy was noted--though Western freshmen remained more engaged in politics than their national counterparts. For instance, while the percentage of Western freshmen interested in *keeping up with politics* fell to a local all-time low of 35.4%, that percentage was still higher than the national figure of 28.5%. Similarly, while the percentage of Western freshmen who had *frequently discussed politics* fell to 25.3%, this figure was nearly 10% higher than the national figure of 14.8%. Nor was the Western figure its lowest; that figure was 22.0% in 1994. (See Figure 3.)



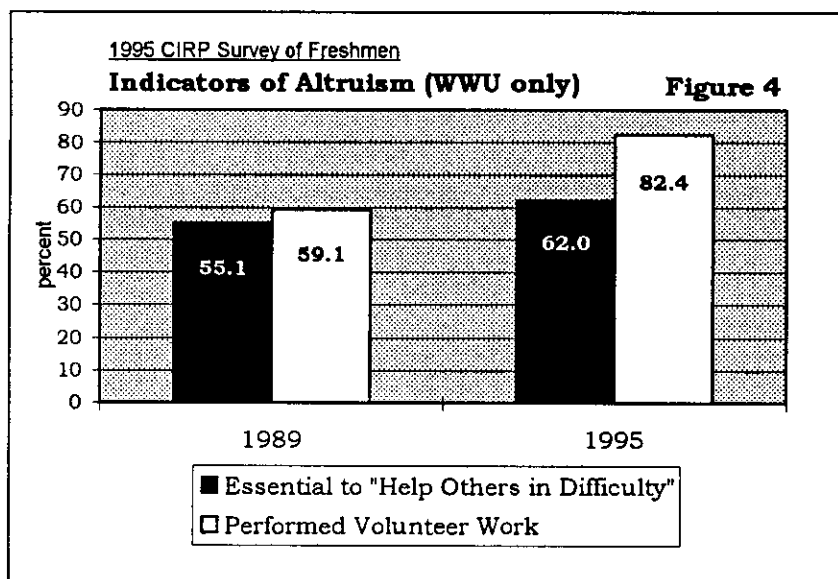
When it came to *specific* political issues, findings for Western freshmen mirrored the 1995/1992 comparison utilized by national researchers--though again, local percentages were usually higher than those found nationally. A lower percentage indicated an interest in working to clean up the environment (30.4% vs. 37.3%), influencing social values (40.2% vs. 43.7%), influencing the political structure (17.0% vs. 19.7%), promoting racial understanding (36.5% vs. 48.1%), and participating in community action programs (26.4% vs. 27.3%).

The finding most at odds with the idea of Western freshmen becoming politically apathetic was the percentage of students agreeing with the statement that “an individual can do little to change society.” Unlike the national finding of 33.6%, *a ten-year high*, the Western finding was 20.6%, *an all-time low* (down from 43.7% in 1976)--meaning that fewer Western freshmen than ever felt powerless to change society; or, conversely, that more felt it was within their power to effect societal change. With so many figures indicating less interest in politics, do Western’s 1995 freshmen have some notions of societal empowerment that run outside the usual political channels? If they do, what might they be?

Some possibilities could be found in trends found elsewhere in the CIRP data; for instance, maybe 1995 freshmen felt they could effect change through creative endeavors. There were twenty- to

thirty-year highs in the percentage of Western freshmen indicating that it was essential or important to accomplish in performing arts (13.7% vs. 11.3% in 1985) to create artistic work (16.9% vs. 16.7% in 1981), and to write original works (17.5% vs. 16.9% in 1976). A related finding suggests that Western's 1995 freshmen may have felt they could effect change through scientific research: an all-time high of 19.2% indicated that it was essential or very important to make a theoretical contribution to science (19.2% vs. 7.8% in 1971).

Yet though they may have lost some interest in politics, Western's 1995 freshmen certainly have not lost their sense of altruism. Indeed, a near all-time high (62.0%) indicated that it was essential or very important to help others in difficulty (compared to 55.1% in 1989). Moreover, while the percentage of 1995 freshmen who had, as high school seniors, participated in demonstrations was down (26.9% vs. 42.0% in 1989), the percentage who had performed volunteer work was up to an all-time high (82.4% vs. 59.1% in 1981). Furthermore, the percentage of Western freshmen who anticipate they will perform volunteer work and/or participate in community action programs while in college, at 28.1%, was the highest ever. (See Figure 4.)



Some figures do appear to indicate that Western freshmen have lost some interest in politics--at least as defined by the usual indicators. Yet rather than political apathy, it may be that Western freshmen have redefined their *form* of political action. Rather than discussing or keeping up-to-date with politics, they may be approaching their political agendas indirectly: through volunteerism and a reemerging interest in artistic endeavors and theoretical science.

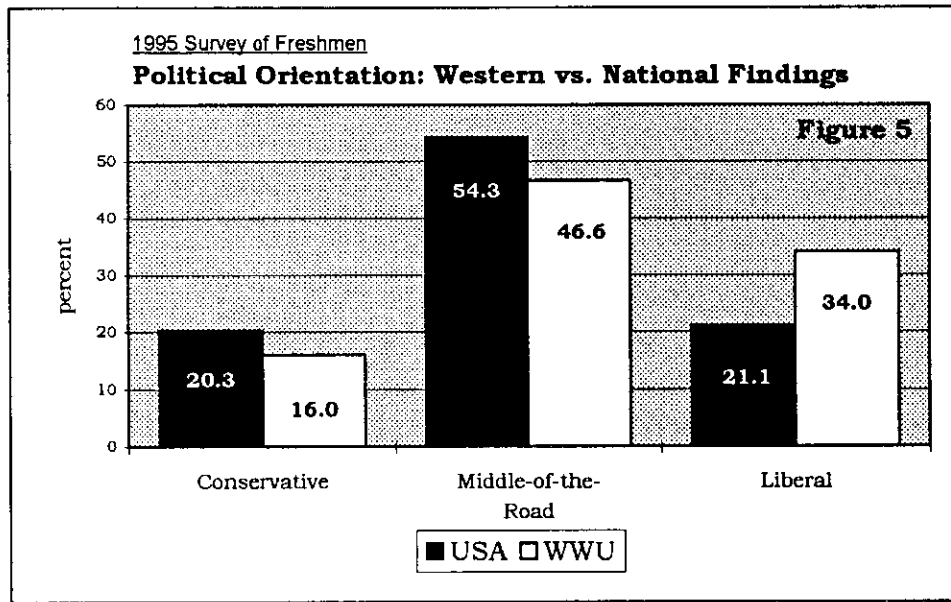
NATIONALLY, FRESHMEN ATTITUDES RUN GAMUT OF LIBERAL AND CONSERVATIVE; WESTERN DISPLAYS A MORE LIBERAL BIAS

National researchers contended that the attitudes of 1995 freshmen ran a gamut of liberal and conservative biases. First reflected in the increasing percentage of freshmen indicating middle-of-the-road as their political point of view (54.3%, up from 49.9% in 1993), this trend continued into specific issues. Reflecting a conservative bias was the decreasing percentage of freshmen agreeing that abortion should remain legal (58.4%, down from 64.9% in 1990) and that

“If two people like each other, it’s all right for them to have sex even if they’ve known each other for a very short time” (42.7%, down from 51.9% in 1987).

Reflecting a liberal bias was the increasing percentage of freshmen agreeing that marijuana should be legalized (33.8%, up from 16.7% in 1989), and the decreasing percentage agreeing that mandatory drug testing should be allowed (77.3%, down from 80.6% in 1994), and that laws should exist prohibiting homosexual relationships (30.6%, down from 53.2% in 1987).

Western freshmen, however, were less likely to indicate their political viewpoint as middle-of-the-road (46.6% versus 54.3% nationally) and more likely to indicate their political viewpoint as liberal (34.0% versus 21.1% nationally). (See Figure 5.)



Western freshmen were also less likely to indicate conservative biases towards specific issues. For instance, the percentage of Western freshmen agreeing that abortion should remain legal remained high (72.6%) and has changed very little since 1985. In addition, Western freshmen were also more strongly opposed to the idea of prohibiting homosexual relationships (with only 14.8% agreeing, compared to 30.6% nationally), and less inclined to favor mandatory drug testing (74.1% agreeing, compared to 77.3% nationally). Furthermore, Western freshmen were far more in favor of legalizing marijuana (44.2% in favor, compared to 33.8% nationally).

Yet Western freshmen, a group with a more liberal bias than freshmen nationally, were also apparently a bit less likely to condone civil disobedience--an activity that at one point in recent American history had a decidedly liberal bias. When asked if they agreed or disagreed with the statement that “People should not obey laws which violate their personal values,” slightly fewer Western freshmen than freshmen nationally agreed (35.2% versus 37.6%).

FRESHMEN NATIONALLY TAKING ACADEMICS LESS SERIOUSLY; WESTERN FRESHMEN NOT AS BLASÉ

National researchers noted that during their senior year in high school, freshmen appeared to spend less time on academic-based activities than they have in the past. For instance, the percentage of freshmen indicating they had spent 6 or more hours a week on homework has fallen from 43.7% in 1987 to 35.0% in 1995. Freshmen also spent less time talking with teachers outside of class (47.0% indicating an hour or more a week, down from 62.0% in 1989), and less time as guests in teacher's homes (26.4% indicating occasionally or frequently, down from 37.3% in 1967). Moreover, the highest percentage of freshmen ever reported that they had been bored in class (33.9%).

Conversely, freshmen nationally appeared to have spent more time on non-academic activities. A higher percentage worked for pay (38.7% spent 16 or more hours a week, up from 35.0% in 1992), as well as exercised or played sports (19.1% spent 16 or more hours a week, up from 15.8% in 1989).

Certain of the trends noted nationally were apparent in Western findings as well. For instance, though they did spend more time on homework than their national counterparts, Western freshmen also reported less time spent on homework (39.9% spent six or more hours a week, down from 48.0% in 1989).

On the other hand, in-coming freshmen at Western were no more or less likely to report that they had been bored in class than in any CIRP survey year, though at 37.2% they were more likely to report being bored in class than their national counterparts. Finally, 48.9% of Western freshmen reported that they had spent at least an hour talking with a teacher outside of class, slightly higher than the 47.0% reported by freshmen nationally.

Unlike their national counterparts, the percentages of Western freshmen reporting more hours spent on non-academic activities did not increase. Fewer reported working 16 hours or more a week for pay (34.7% vs. 37.0% in 1992), or spending 16 hours or more a week exercising or playing sports (12.1% vs. 16.1% in 1992).

NATIONALLY, MALES AND FEMALES SPENT THEIR TIME DIFFERENTLY; AT WESTERN, MALES AND FEMALES SPENT THEIR TIME DIFFERENTLY THAN THEIR NATIONAL COUNTERPARTS

National CIRP researchers noted that for many activities males and females were likely to allocate their time quite differently. For instance, as high school seniors, freshmen males were more likely than freshmen females to indicate they had spent six or more hours a week *exercising or playing sports* (61.5% vs. 41.1%), *partying* (35.5% vs. 26.5%), *watching TV* (35.6% vs. 25.2%), or *playing video games* (9.1% vs. 1.0%).

As high school seniors, freshmen females were more likely than freshmen males to indicate they had spent six hours or more hours a week *studying or doing homework* (40.8% vs. 28.2%), *participating in student groups or clubs* (45.2% vs. 32.3%), *reading for pleasure* (42.7% vs.

33.8%), performing volunteer work (33.2% vs. 24.8%), doing housework or providing child care (53.0% vs. 38.2%), or talking with teachers out of class (44.7% vs. 38.7%).

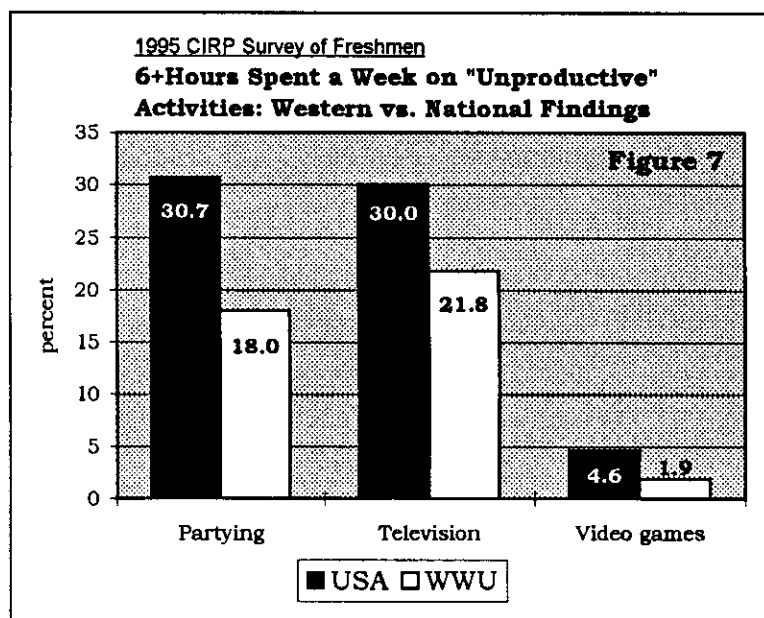
Apparently, freshmen males spent quite a bit of their time pursuing relatively “unproductive” leisure activities while freshmen females, if they weren’t reading for pleasure (rather than watching TV or playing video games), spent more time pursuing “productive” activities: studying or doing homework, working for student groups, performing volunteer work, etc.

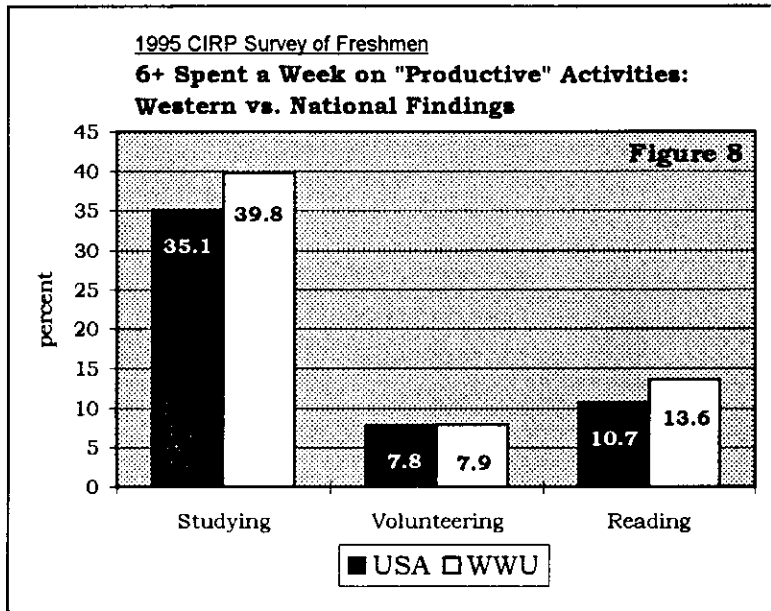
These figures may not surprise researcher Tom Mortenson, publisher of *Postsecondary Education Opportunity*, who has studied carefully demographic changes in college achievement by gender. He notes that: “. . . (W)hile the proportion of women between the ages of 25 and 29 that had completed four years or more of college had increased by 3.9% between 1976 and 1994, the proportion for men had decreased by 5.0%.”¹

If, as high school seniors, males are spending more time partying and less time studying than females, the figures noted by national CIRP researchers may provide some clue as to why fewer males, yet more females, are succeeding at college. On the other hand, there is apparently somewhat of a price to pay for freshmen females spending their time more “productively” than males: as high school seniors, freshmen females were nearly twice as likely than freshmen males to report that they had felt “overwhelmed by all they had to do” (32.5% vs. 16.6%).

Are national trends reflected in Western data? They are somewhat, though not nearly so dramatically. For instance, nationally a nearly 20% gap existed between the percentages of males and females reporting exercising or playing sports six hours or week or more (61.1% of males vs. 41.1% of females). This percentage gap was less than ten percent at Western (52.8% of males vs. 42.4% of females).

Indeed, for all national measures, the trend found above was similar: 1) Western freshmen, male *and* female, spent less time on “unproductive” activities like partying, playing video games or watching television; 2) spent more time on “productive” activities like studying, volunteering, or housework; and 3) the gaps found between male and female percentages were always smaller than found nationally. (See Figures 7 and 8.)





Relative to their age and experience, it appears that Western freshmen are a serious group of students. This trend may be driven by some or all of the following: at Western specifically, the school's increasingly strong academic reputation and rising admissions standards; for college-bound students generally, the spiraling cost of higher education combined with tighter money.

The average high school grade point average for 1995 Western freshmen was 3.56--the highest ever for an in-coming class. Interestingly, this standard has not been set arbitrary, but driven by admissions portfolios; simply put: more qualified students than ever have chosen to apply to Western, thus admissions pool standards have changed by default. Moreover, nearly all Western freshmen were accepted to other colleges (94.4%), yet chose to come here, most of them having indicated that Western was their first college of choice (82.3%). Thus, when a large number of highly-qualified students vie for a limited number of admissions spots, the students who finally gain admittance might certainly be expected to have spent more time participating in the "productive" activities and less time in the "unproductive" activities listed in the CIRP survey.

WESTERN FRESHMEN MORE CONCERNED THEN EVER WITH THE COST OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The idea that the cost of education is rising and that money is tight almost needs no supporting evidence, yet there is plenty in CIRP data alone. For instance, in 1995 a record percentage of Western freshmen indicated some concern or a major concern about financing college (55.8% and 20.5% respectively, and about the same as national findings). Furthermore, more Western freshmen than freshmen nationally anticipated that they would have to get a job to help pay for college expenses (56.9% vs. 39.5%). Western freshmen have traditionally anticipated that they would work, but the percentage for 1995 was the second-highest on record. Moreover, for nearly every type of financial aid available--eleven areas in all--the percentages of freshmen receiving \$1500 or more from such aid were up to all-time highs, for example: from parents (76.3% vs. 70.7% in 1994), summer jobs (17.6% vs. 14.8% in 1994), other savings (12.3% vs. 9.8% in 1994), and other college loans (7.4% vs. 2.1% in 1994).

In light of findings reported from Western's 1994 CIRP data, the financial stress on parents must be particularly strongly felt. Since 1971, the adjusted median income of parents of Western freshmen had increased a minuscule 0.5%, while "between 1979 and 1993, \$14.2 billion of previous federal and state taxpayer support has been shifted to students: \$4.5 billion at the federal level by substituting loans for grants, and \$9.8 billion at the state level by diverting state tax

resources to other budget priorities and charging students higher tuitions to make up the difference.”ⁱⁱ

FRESHMEN NATIONALLY LESS INTERESTED IN RELIGION; INTEREST AT WESTERN ABOUT THE SAME

National CIRP researchers noted that more freshmen than ever indicated they had no religious preference (15.0%). This logically followed the trend of freshmen indicating their parents had no religious preference, which rose for both mothers and fathers: since 1978, from 2.9% to 7.1% for mothers, and from 6.4% to 11.2% for fathers. Furthermore, more freshmen than ever indicated that as high school seniors, they had never attended a religious service (19.4%).

Such was not the case for Western freshmen, who appear about as religious as they ever have. Though the percentage of Western freshmen indicating they had no religious preference was much higher than the national figure (32.6% vs. 15.0%), and also slightly higher than the previous high of 32.1% in 1993, the percent of Western freshmen indicating no religious preference has hovered around one-third since the late 1980's.

Similar trends were noted when freshmen were asked to indicate their parents' religious preference. For their mothers and fathers, the percentages indicating no religious preference have remained stable since the late 1980's. Moreover, the percentage of Western freshmen indicating they had never attended a religious service while high school seniors has, since 1971, remained relatively constant at about one-quarter.

NATIONAL RESEARCHERS CONTEND 1995 FRESHMEN SUPPORT USE OF RACE IN COLLEGE ADMISSIONS--DOES THE DATA REALLY SUPPORT THIS CONTENTION?

According to national researchers, in-coming 1995 freshmen supported the idea of using race as a factor in college admissions, and that this finding indicated a tacit support for the tenets of affirmative action.ⁱⁱⁱ The source of this conclusion came from a series of questions asking 1995 freshmen if any special consideration should be given low-income students, athletes, high-achieving students, children of alumni, and five race categories, including African-American, American Indians, Asian-Americans, Hispanics/Latinos, and Whites/Caucasians.

National researchers pointed out that approximately 70% of 1995 freshmen indicated that “some” or “a lot” of consideration should be given by race--thus by default they were also supporting the tenets of Affirmative Action. Oddly, what is not mentioned is the fact that race-based support was extended equally to Whites/Caucasians, also for whom approximately 70% of 1995 freshmen indicated should receive special consideration. Affirmative Action was enacted to combat inequitable hiring practices regarding ethnic-minorities and women. By indicating that Whites/Caucasians should receive the same “special considerations” as other races, rather than supporting the essence of Affirmative Action, CIRP survey respondents actually appear to be undermining it. If all groups receive the same “special consideration” then no such thing exists. Moreover, when asked directly if they felt affirmative action should be abolished in college admissions, 56.3% agreed strongly or somewhat that it should be.

Survey respondents were actually much less in favor of race-based considerations than they were traditional achievement-based considerations. Nearly all 1995 CIRP respondents (94.6%) felt that

special consideration should be given high-achieving students, compared to less than 70% favoring special consideration by race. Income-based considerations, too, outweighed those based on race (94.3%). Students were also more likely to favor extending special considerations for college admissions to athletes and foreign students than they were to race (82.4% and 82.6% respectively).

In-coming Western freshmen were even less likely than their national counterparts to support race-based considerations for college admissions, with less than 60% indicating that "some" or "a lot" of consideration should be extended by race. Western freshmen were more adamant than freshmen nationally that high-achievement be given special consideration (96.3% Western vs. 94.6% nationally), but were less adamant about special consideration based on income (90.1% Western vs. 94.3% nationally).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Nationally, well over 300,000 freshmen responded to the 1995 CIRP survey. Of these, nearly 250,000 questionnaires from 473 institutions, those deemed as having the most representational samples, were used to compute the national norms. The first CIRP survey was conducted in 1966, and 1995's administration marks the survey's 30th year. Western has utilized the CIRP since 1971. A complete listing of data from Western's CIRP participation is available through the Office of Institutional Assessment and Testing (see publishing information on facing page).

ⁱ Mortenson, Tom, editor (February, 1996). *Freshman-to-Sophomore Persistence by Institutional Level, Control and Academic Selectivity*. Postsecondary Education Opportunity (Number 44). Iowa City, Iowa. Page 15.

ⁱⁱ Mortenson, Tom, editor (April, 1995). *Anxiety about Affordability*. Postsecondary Education Opportunity (Number 34). Iowa City, Iowa. Page 1.

ⁱⁱⁱ Sax, Linda J., Astin, Alexander W., Korn, William S., & Mahoney, Kathryn M. (December, 1995). *The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 1995*. Higher Education Research Institute, Graduate School of Education & Information Studies, University of California, Los Angeles. Los Angeles, CA. Page 2.

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