



# New Students

## September 2004

### INTRODUCTION

The focus of this survey is on first-year students' initial transition to University Park. Included in the survey are questions concerning students' first impressions of Penn State; their involvement in and the effectiveness of the First-Year Testing, Counseling and Advising Program (FTCAP), Convocation, and Orientation; and their familiarity with the Penn State Principles. This survey, conducted by Student Affairs Research and Assessment, was administered by phone and by Web.

In total, 859 students responded to the survey. By phone, 814 responded for a 42.3% response rate, and, of those contacted, 77.6% participated. By Web, 45 responded for a 30.4% response rate. The confidence interval for the total sample is +/-3.05%.

Of the respondents, 99.5% are between 18 and 19 years of age, 50.7% are male, 89.0% are White/Caucasian, 95.3% live on campus, and 23.2% began summer semester. For additional information on the Pulse methodology, please visit <http://www.sa.psu.edu/sara/qa.shtml>.

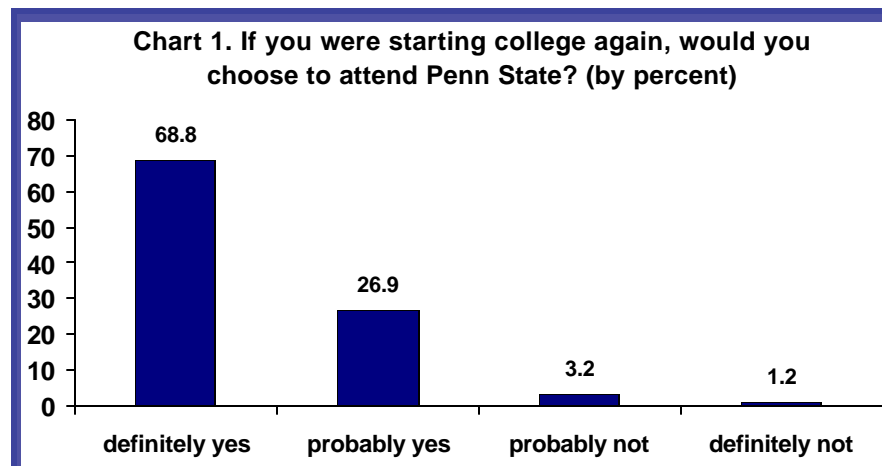
### FINDINGS

#### Overall Impressions

In general, students responded positively to their initial experiences at Penn State:

- 92.1% were either "somewhat satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their experiences at Penn State (data not shown), and
- 95.7% said if they were starting college again, they would probably or definitely choose to attend Penn State (see Chart 1).
- However, 56.6% felt that new student orientation was either "substantially" or "extremely" effective in assisting in their transition to Penn State (data not shown).

The focus of this survey is on first-year students' initial transition to University Park.



For more information please visit Student Affairs Research and Assessment at <http://www.sa.psu.edu/sara>



Penn State Pulse is a project of Student Affairs Research and Assessment.

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Division of Student Affairs

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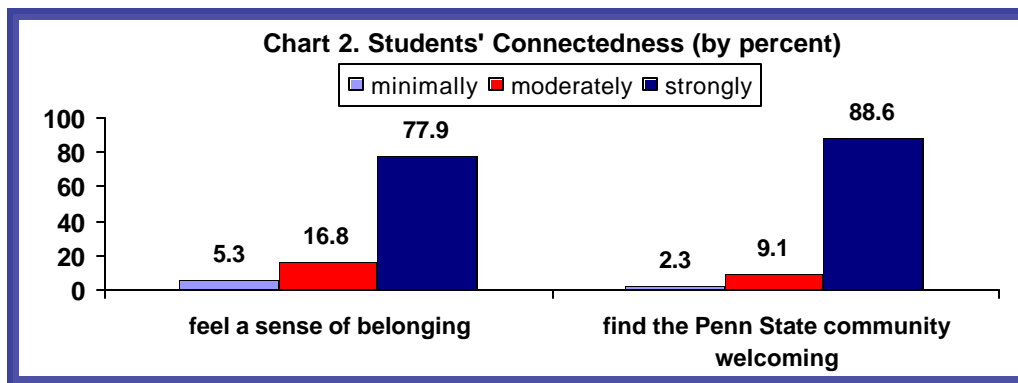
## Interpersonal Progress

Several questions focused on students' transition to Penn State based on their feelings of interpersonal connectedness to the University. Research (such as work by Tinto, Upcraft, and Astin) reveals that students' personal connection to other students, faculty, and staff is critical in their success at an institution.

- Within their first weeks at Penn State, 77.9% reported feeling a strong sense of belonging at the University, and 88.6% felt strongly<sup>1</sup> that Penn State is a welcoming community (see Chart 2).
- Moreover, 78.7% reported they had been at least "substantially" successful in establishing friendships with other students, and 52.9% had gotten involved to a great extent<sup>1</sup> in campus events and activities (see Table 1).
- However, relatively few students reported having made substantial progress in interacting personally with faculty members/instructors and with staff members (see Table 1).
- Students living off campus were significantly less connected to the Penn State community (data not shown).
- When asked what would have made their initial transition to Penn State easier, the majority commented on needs and/or programs related to their social connections on campus. Numerous students suggested more events in the residence halls, and others noted the need for programming for commuter students.

**Table 1: Personal Connections**

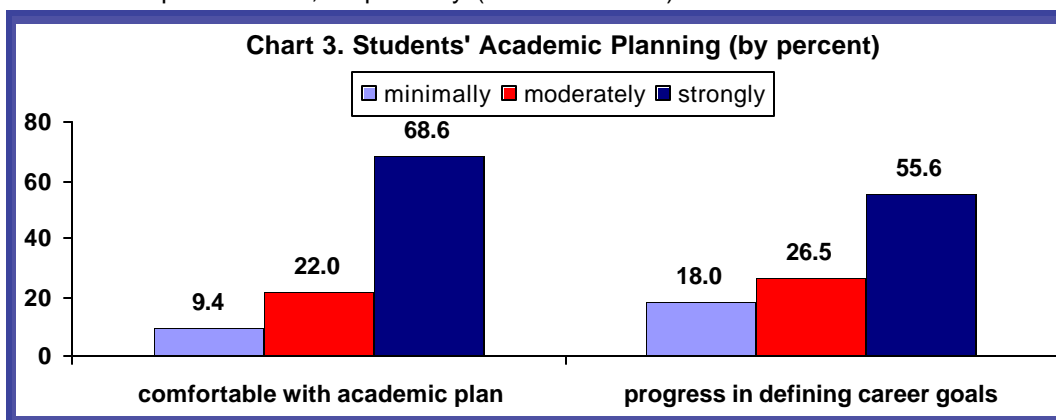
To what degree have you:	percent <sup>1</sup>
Established friendships with other students	78.7
Gotten involved in campus events and activities	52.9
Interacted on a personal level with faculty members and instructors	31.8
Interacted on a personal level with staff members	24.3



## Academic Planning

Another important aspect of students' transition to college is developing an academic plan.

- Approximately half (51.0%) of first-year students reported they had not met with their academic advisor other than during FTCAP; 42% met with their academic advisor between one and two times (data not shown).
- At the same time, 62.5% reported they had not determined what classes they need to take during the spring semester (data not shown).
- However, 68.6% reported being comfortable with their academic plan (including choosing a major and knowing what classes to take), and 55.6% felt strongly<sup>1</sup> that they had made progress in defining their career goals (see Chart 3).
- Men and on-campus students reported being more comfortable with their academic plan than did women and off-campus students, respectively (data not shown).



<sup>1</sup> Percent who indicated "substantially" or "extremely."

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## **Penn State Principles**

Part of becoming a member of the Penn State community is understanding the values that are embodied in the Penn State Principles. Hence, a goal of new student programming is to educate first-year students about the Principles. Overall, students indicated they were less familiar with the Penn State Principles than they were with each of the values espoused in the document.

- Only 53.7% indicated they were either “substantially” or “extremely” familiar with the Penn State Principles, whereas over 84% responded similarly to each of the espoused values (see Table 2).
- Women and white students reported being more aware of the Principles and of each of the expectations encompassed in the Principles than did men and students of color, respectively (data not shown).

**Table 2: Penn State Principles**

To what degree has the University been successful in communicating the expectation of:	Percent <sup>2</sup>
Practicing academic integrity	92.0
Maintaining individual responsibility for your academic progress	88.4
Respecting the dignity of everyone in the PSU community	86.6
Maintaining social and personal responsibility	84.8

## **FTCAP, Convocation, and Orientation Events**

Students were asked a series of questions about their participation in a variety of programs for new students as well as specific questions about the effectiveness of certain events (see Table 3).

- White students were significantly more likely to attend FTCAP than were students of color (data not shown).
- Women were significantly more likely to attend the college Dean’s Meeting, Be a Part From the Start, and orientation events in the residence halls than were men (data not shown).
- On-campus students were more likely than students living off campus to attend events for new students (data not shown).

**Table 3. Attendance at Events for New Students**

Events	Percent who attended
FTCAP	96.4
Fall Convocation	62.1
Dean’s Meeting	48.9
Late Night (after Convocation)	44.0
Be a Part from the Start	54.9
Late Night (after pep rally)	25.7
Real Life Choices	22.6
Residence Hall House Meeting*	93.4
Residence Hall Orientation Events*	27.1

\* Students who live on campus

Of students who attended FTCAP:

- 82.8% agreed FTCAP assisted in clarifying Penn State’s academic requirements,
- 77.3% agreed FTCAP assisted in preparing them for their first semester at Penn State,
- 58.3% agreed the video in the introductory session demonstrated the importance Penn State places on the appreciation of diversity,
- 61.1% agreed the Real Life Choices discussion helped them to develop a plan for safe socializing, and
- 75.2% agreed the Real Life Choices discussion helped them to prevent acquaintance rape and sexual assault (data not shown).

Of students who attended New Student Convocation in the fall:

- 73.9% agreed the event welcomed them into the Penn State community, and
- 75.9% agreed the speakers clarified what is expected from students as members of the Penn State community (data not shown).

Of students who attended the Dean’s Meeting:

- 81.2% agreed the Dean’s Meeting provided them with information related to the college’s programs, activities, and resources, and
- 79.4% agreed the meeting provided them with information related to academic advising (data not shown).

Of students who lived on campus and attended their house meetings during Orientation week:

- 76.9% felt strongly the meeting was helpful in sharing useful information about policies, resources, and upcoming events, and
- 73.5% felt strongly the meeting was helpful in providing an opportunity to meet others on their floor (data not shown).

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<sup>2</sup> Percent who indicated “substantially” or “extremely.”

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## **Students Beginning in the Summer**

Approximately 1,000 first-year students began in the summer semester. Hence, certain questions focused on their experiences, and comparisons were made between students beginning in the summer and fall (data not shown).

- Three quarters (73.4%) of students attended the summer convocation.
- Of those, 80.1% agreed the convocation welcomed them into the Penn State community,<sup>1</sup> and 75.6% agreed the speakers clarified what is expected from students as members of the Penn State community.
- There were no differences between students who were admitted in the summer and those admitted in the fall with regard to their overall satisfaction with Penn State, their sense of connectedness at Penn State, and their comfort with their academic plan.
- With the exception of Real Life Choices and orientation events in the residence halls, students beginning in the summer were less likely to attend the fall events.
- Several students commented how beginning in the summer was/would have been helpful. “I think coming over the summer made it easy for me; I already know a lot of people, and now it’s too big.”



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