



First-Year Experience March 2005

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this survey is on students' first year at Penn State University Park and their academic and social integration into the Penn State community. Included in the survey are questions concerning students' satisfaction, their academic and social adjustment to college, the encouragement they received to engage in campus life, and others. This survey, conducted by Student Affairs Research and Assessment, was administered by phone and also by Web¹ at the request of the First-Year Experience Committee.

In total, 534 first-year students responded to the survey. By phone, 505 responded for a 25.6% response rate and, of those contacted, 59.1% participated. By Web, 29 responded for a 17.8% response rate. The confidence interval for the total sample is +/-4.03%.

Of the respondents, 57.6% are female; 50.9% are 18 years old, 47.5% are 19, and 1.5% are 20; 84.1% are white/Caucasian, and 94.5% live on campus. For additional information on the Pulse methodology, please visit <http://www.sa.psu.edu/sara/qa.shtml>.

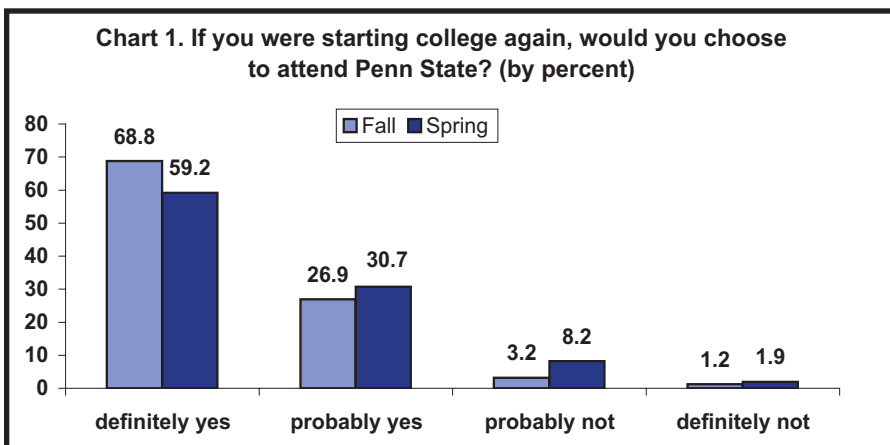
FINDINGS

Overall Satisfaction

Students were asked a series of questions about their satisfaction with their first year at Penn State.

- Approximately 90% of first-year students replied that, if starting college again, they would definitely or probably choose to attend Penn State (see Chart 1), and the same percentage reported being satisfied with their overall experience at Penn State (see Table 1).
- Compared to their initial experiences reported in the fall (New Students Survey, 2004), students were less likely to reply they would "definitely" choose Penn State if they were starting college again than when asked the same question at the end of their first year (see Chart 1).

The focus of this survey is on students' first year at Penn State University Park.



¹ The Web survey administration is utilized in order to account for students for whom local phone information was unavailable.

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



- While 80.7% of students were satisfied with their academic experience and 70.1% with their professors or instructors, 86.7% were satisfied with their social life (see Table 1).
- White students were significantly more satisfied with their first year than were students of color (data not shown).
- With regard to their plans for next year, 92.5% responded that they would “definitely” return to Penn State in the fall (data not shown).

Table 1: Satisfaction with the First-Year Experience

| Overall, how satisfied are you with your: | percent satisfied | average |
|--|-------------------|-------------|
| Experience at Penn State | 89.8 | 4.38 |
| Social life at Penn State | 86.7 | 4.35 |
| Academic experiences at Penn State | 80.7 | 4.09 |
| Penn State professors or instructors (including TA's) | 70.7 | 3.85 |
| Overall Average for Satisfaction with the First-Year Experience | | 4.17 |

Scale: 1=very dissatisfied; 5=very satisfied

Adjustment to College Life

Students were also asked about their social and academic adjustment to college life.

- Approximately 86% of respondents agreed they had made connections with people at Penn State, and 84.6% agreed they fit in at Penn State (see Table 2).
- The percentages dropped when asked about their academic adjustment with 71.2% agreeing they received the grades they expected, and 77.1% agreeing they successfully balanced their academic work and their extracurricular/social activities (see Table 2).
- White students and women, when compared to students of color and men respectively, reported higher levels of Adjustment to College (data not shown).

Table 2: Adjustment to College Life

| Agreement with the following statements: | percent agreed | average |
|---|----------------|-------------|
| I made connections with people at Penn State. | 86.2 | 4.33 |
| I fit in at Penn State. | 84.6 | 4.32 |
| I successfully balanced my academic work with my extracurricular/social activities. | 77.1 | 3.98 |
| I received the grades I expected during college. | 71.2 | 3.83 |
| Overall Average for Adjustment to College Life | | 4.12 |

Scale: 1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree

Academic Preparedness and Improvement

Related to students' academic adjustment, the survey addressed issues of students' Academic Preparedness and Academic Improvement.

- Approximately 80% felt they were adequately prepared for college. However, only 39.3% reported they *did not* underestimate the amount of study time needed to succeed in college (47.1% *did* underestimate amount of study time), and 31.5% *did not* find college course work more challenging than expected (43% *did* find it more challenging) (see Table 3).
- At the same time, 80.6% reported they had improved their ability to successfully complete college-level work. Approximately 60% reported they had improved their writing skills and their note-taking skills (see Table 4).

Table 3: Academic Preparedness

| Agreement with the following statements: | percent agreed | average |
|---|----------------|-------------|
| I felt adequately prepared for college. | 79.5 | 4.06 |
| I [did not] underestimate the amount of study time needed to succeed in college.* | 39.3 | 2.89 |
| I [did not] find college course work more challenging than expected.* | 31.5 | 2.85 |
| Overall Average for Academic Preparedness | | 3.27 |

Scale: 1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree

* Questions reversed

Table 4: Academic Improvement

| Agreement with the following statements: | percent agreed | average |
|--|----------------|-------------|
| I improved my ability to successfully complete college-level work. | 80.6 | 4.05 |
| I improved my writing skills. | 61.7 | 3.64 |
| I improved my note-taking skills. | 60.4 | 3.63 |
| Overall Average for Academic Improvement | | 3.78 |

Scale: 1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree

Student Engagement

Students' level of engagement in campus life was assessed through questions pertaining to the extent to which they felt encouraged to participate and the actual interpersonal and campus engagement behavior of students.

- Overall, the majority of students felt encouraged to engage in most of the out-of-class opportunities. For example, 81.0% agreed they were encouraged to attend sporting events, concerts, and plays, and 68.5% agreed they were encouraged to participate in clubs and organizations (see Table 5).
- Less than half (43.9%) reported feeling encouraged to participate in community service activities (see Table 5).
- In addition, 63.6% agreed they had discussed their future career or academic plans with their academic advisor (data not shown).
- Women reported higher levels of Encouragement to Engage in Campus Life than did men (data not shown).

Table 5: Encouragement to Engage in Campus Life

| Agreement that they were encouraged by Penn State to: | percent agreed | average |
|---|----------------|-------------|
| Attend campus sporting events, concerts, plays, speakers, or art exhibits | 81.0 | 4.15 |
| Participate in campus clubs or organizations | 68.5 | 3.86 |
| Attend programs or services offered by student affairs | 64.1 | 3.76 |
| Attend programs or activities offered by academic resources units | 60.8 | 3.59 |
| Participate in recreational/intramural, club, or varsity sports | 53.1 | 3.42 |
| Participate in community service activities | 43.9 | 3.17 |
| Overall Average for Encouragement to Engage in Campus Life | | 3.66 |

Scale: 1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree

- Most students reported considering at least one Penn State student their close friend (95.8%) and hanging out with a group of Penn State students on a regular basis (95.7%) (see Table 6).
- While 94.2% reported interacting positively with at least one person from a different cultural, ethnic, or racial background than their own, 14.6% reported having at least one negative interaction with someone different from them. This number was significantly higher for students of color (28.0%) compared to white students (12.0%) (data not shown).
- With regard to students' actual engagement in campus life, 65.0% reported being an active member in at least one club or organization, and 51.0% participated in at least one community service activity (see Table 7).

Table 6: Interpersonal Engagement

| Students who: | percent "yes" |
|--|---------------|
| Considered at least one Penn State student your close friend | 95.8 |
| Hung out with a group of Penn State students on a regular basis | 95.7 |
| Interacted positively with at least one person from a different cultural, ethnic, or racial background than your own | 94.2 |
| Felt at least one professor or instructor cares about you as a person | 86.9 |
| Interacted with at least one professor or instructor outside the classroom | 79.5 |
| Discussed their future career or academic plans with at least one professor or instructor | 62.5 |
| Felt at least one Student Affairs staff member cares about them as a person | 61.3 |
| Interacted with at least one Student Affairs staff member | 60.6 |

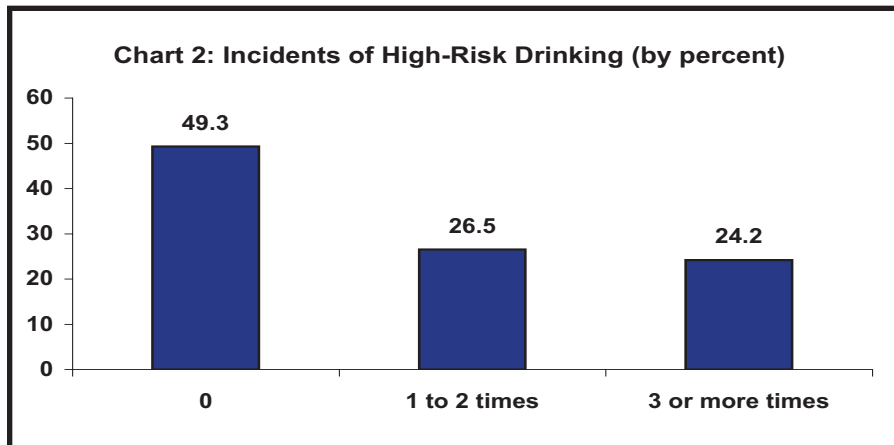
Table 7: Campus Engagement

| Students who: | percent "yes" |
|---|---------------|
| Attended at least one campus event such as a sporting event, concert, play, speaker, or art exhibit | 96.4 |
| Attended at least one program or activity offered by Student Affairs | 68.6 |
| Attended at least one program or activity offered by academic resources | 66.0 |
| Were active members of at least one campus club or organization | 65.0 |
| Participated in at least one recreational/intramural, club, or varsity sport | 55.4 |
| Sought information from Student Affairs at least once | 53.9 |
| Participated in at least one community service activity on campus or within the State College area | 51.0 |

Drinking Behavior

As an ongoing issue on college campuses, high-risk drinking² is related to a number of academic, social, and physical consequences. Assisting students in making responsible choices is an important aspect of their transition to college.

- Approximately 51% of first-year students reported engaging in high-risk drinking behavior (see Chart 3), a slightly lower percentage than the 55.2% of Penn State undergraduate students who reported such behavior in 2004 (Student Drinking Survey, 2004).
- While 38.2% of students reported they do not drink during a typical week, students averaged 5.33 drinks in a week (data not shown). This average is also less than reported in the Student Drinking Survey (2004) in which the average was 7.8.



² High-risk drinking is defined as having five or more drinks in a row for men or four or more drinks in a row for women over a two week period.
