



New Students September 2005

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 awareness of the Penn State Principles. This survey, conducted by Student Affairs Research and Assessment, was administered by phone and by Web. A similar survey was conducted in 2004; comparisons are provided.¹

In total, 1,684 students responded to the survey. By phone, 1,047 responded for a 36.7% response rate, and, of those contacted, 79.6% participated. By Web, 637 responded for a 25.5% response rate. The confidence interval for the total sample is +/-2.08%.

Of the respondents, 99.3% are between 18 and 19 years of age, 55.8% are female, 86.7% are White/Caucasian, 98.0% live on campus, and 13.9% began summer semester. For additional information on the Pulse methodology, please visit <http://www.sa.psu.edu/sara/qa.shtml>.

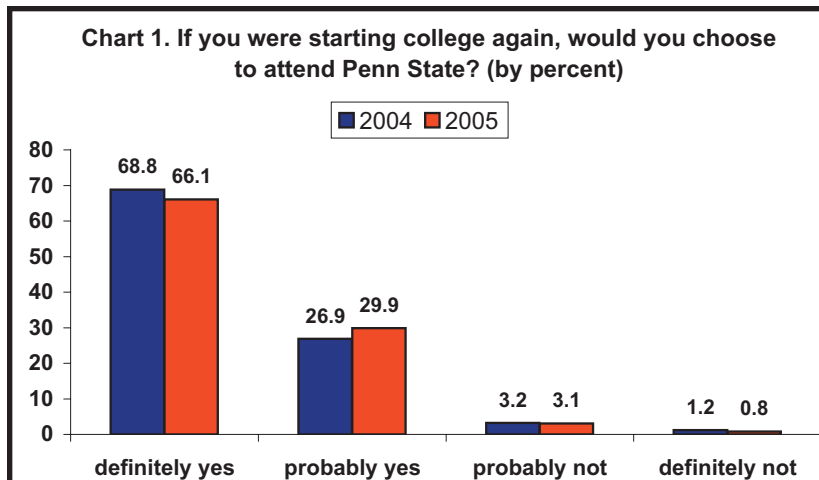
FINDINGS

Overall Impressions

In general, students responded positively to their initial experiences at Penn State, and their responses were similar in 2004 and 2005:

- 91.5% were either "somewhat satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their experiences at Penn State (compared to 92.1% in 2004; data not shown), and
- 96.0% said if they were starting college again, they would probably or definitely choose to attend Penn State (compared to 95.7% in 2004; see Chart 1).
- However, 49.5% (compared to 56.6% in 2004) felt that new student orientation was either "substantially" or "extremely" effective in assisting in their transition to Penn State (data not shown).

This survey focuses on first-year students' initial transition to Penn State, University Park.



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

¹ In addition, the study of students' first year at University Park will continue with the tracking of approximately 1,300 of the respondents throughout the year.



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

For further information, please contact Dr. Andrea Dowhower.
222 Boucke, University Park, PA 16802, (814) 863-1809, ald101@psu.edu

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 to their success at an institution.

- Within their first weeks at Penn State, 76.3% reported feeling a strong sense of belonging at the University, and 87.5% felt strongly that Penn State is a welcoming community² (compared to 77.9% and 88.6% respectively, in 2004; see Chart 2).
- Moreover, 75.2% reported they had been at least "substantially" successful in establishing friendships with other students, and 52.9% had gotten "substantially" involved 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).
- Generally, students responded similarly in 2004 and 2005.
- Students who arrived during the summer were significantly more likely than students who arrived during the fall to report having personal interaction with faculty members and instructors (data not shown).

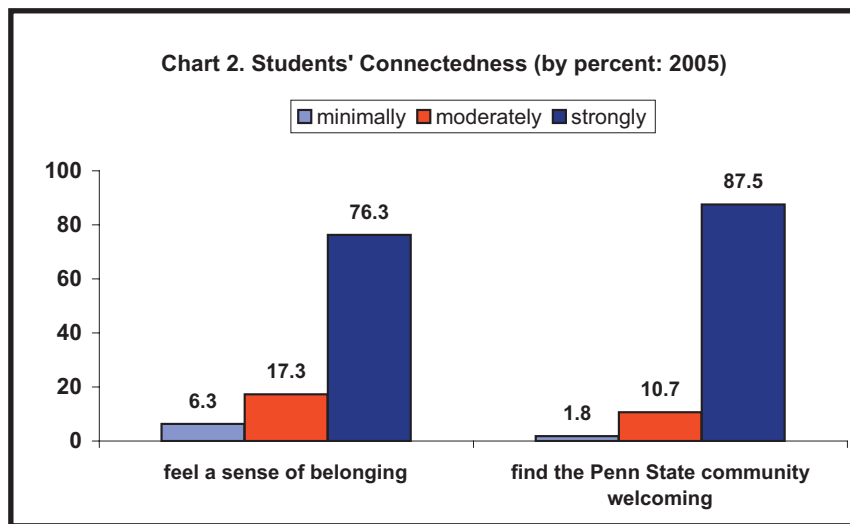


Table 1: Personal Connections

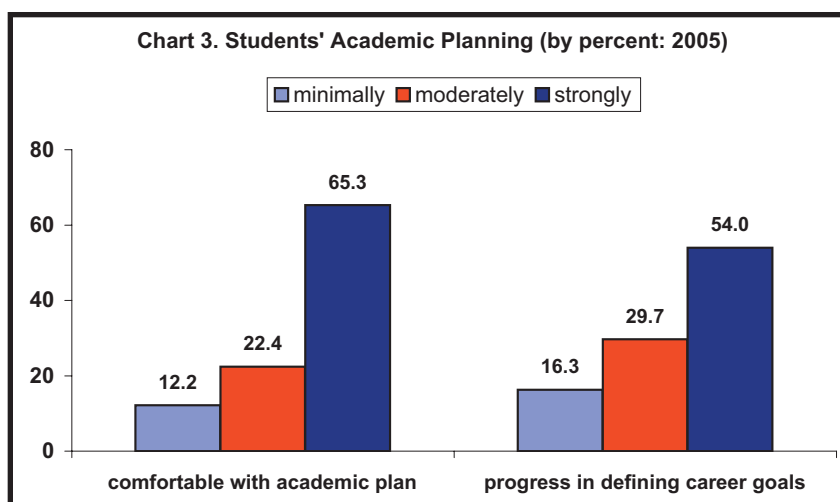
To what degree have you:	percent ² 2004	percent ² 2005
Established friendships with other students	78.7	75.2
Gotten involved in campus events and activities	52.9	52.9
Interacted on a personal level with faculty members and instructors	31.8	30.9
Interacted on a personal level with staff members	24.3	25.3

Academic Planning

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

- Half (50%) of first-year students reported they had not met with their academic advisor other than during FTCAP (compared to 51.0% in 2004); 43.4% had met with their academic advisor between one and two times (data not shown).
- At the same time, 65.8% reported they had not determined what classes they need to take during the spring semester (compared to 62.5% in 2004; data not shown).
- However, 65.3% reported being comfortable with their academic plan (compared to 68.6% in 2004), and 54.0% felt strongly that they had made progress in defining their career goals (compared to 55.6% in 2004; see Chart 3).
- Men reported being more comfortable with their academic plan than did women. White students and students of color responded similarly (data not shown).
- Students who began in the fall were more likely to feel comfortable about their academic plan and to have made progress in defining their career goals than those who began in the summer (data not shown).

² Percents represent those who indicated "substantially" or "extremely."



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 on the Principles. Overall, students indicated less familiarity with the Penn State Principles than they were with each of the values espoused in the document.

- Only 57.8% (compared to 53.7% in 2004) indicated they were either “substantially” or “extremely” familiar with the Penn State Principles (data not shown), whereas over 85% responded similarly to each of the espoused values (see Table 2).
- In 2005, students were more likely to be aware of the expectations that they maintain individual responsibility for their academic progress and for their social and personal behavior than they were in 2004 (see Table 2).
- Women and white students reported being significantly more aware of 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 ³ 2004	percent ³ 2005
Practicing academic integrity	92.0	91.5
Maintaining individual responsibility for your academic progress	88.4	90.2
Respecting the dignity of everyone in the PSU community	86.6	89.6
Maintaining social and personal responsibility	84.8	85.9

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.

- Evidence suggests that in 2005 new students were more engaged in the opening activities than they were in 2004 (see Table 3). For example, in 2005, 75.6% attended the President’s Convocation compared to 62.1% in 2004.
- Women and men were equally likely to attend the first-year events. Notably, with the exception of FTCAP and Real Life Choices, attendance by both groups increased in 2005 (data not shown).
- White students were significantly more likely to attend FTCAP, President’s Convocation, the Dean’s Meeting, and the residence hall house meetings than were students of color. Students of color were more likely to attend Late Night after the pep rally and Real Life Choices than were white students (data not shown).

Table 3: Attendance at Events for New Students

Events	percent who attended 2004	percent who attended 2005
FTCAP	96.4	95.8
President’s Convocation	62.1	75.6
Dean’s Meeting	48.9	65.0
Late Night (after Convocation)	44.0	55.2
Be a Part from the Start	54.9	59.3
Late Night (after pep rally)	25.7	30.4
Real Life Choices	22.6	18.3
Residence Hall House Meeting*	93.4	95.6
Residence Hall Orientation Events*	27.1	28.8

* Students who live on campus

³ Percents represent those who indicated “substantially” or “extremely.”

Of students who attended **FTCAP**:

- 78.2% agreed FTCAP assisted in clarifying Penn State's academic requirements (compared to 82.8% in 2004),
- 72.3% agreed FTCAP assisted in preparing them for their first semester at Penn State (compared to 77.3% in 2004),
- 68.3% agreed the video in the introductory session demonstrated the importance Penn State places on the appreciation of diversity (compared to 58.3% in 2004),
- 64.7% agreed the Real Life Choices discussion helped them to develop a plan for safe socializing (compared to 61.1% in 2004), and
- 76.7% agreed the Real Life Choices discussion helped them to prevent acquaintance rape and sexual assault (compared to 75.2% in 2004; data not shown).

Of students who attended **President's Convocation** in the fall:

- 84.2% agreed the event welcomed them into the Penn State community (compared to 73.9% in 2004), and
- 79.0% agreed the speakers clarified what is expected of students as members of the Penn State community (compared to 75.9% in 2004; data not shown).

Of students who attended the **Dean's Meeting**:

- 80.8% agreed the Dean's Meeting provided them with information related to the college's programs, activities, and resources (compared to 81.2% in 2004), and
- 78.2% agreed the meeting provided them with information related to academic advising (compared to 79.4% in 2004; data not shown).

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

- 77.0% felt strongly the meeting was helpful in sharing useful information about policies, resources, and upcoming events (compared to 76.9% in 2004), and
 - 67.7% felt strongly the meeting was helpful in providing an opportunity to meet others on their floor (compared to 73.5% in 2004; data not shown).
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