

Research in BRIEF

A Newsletter of the Institutional Research Office

CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY

CIRP 2004 FRESHMEN SURVEY

Executive Summary

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The Cooperative Institutional Research Program's (CIRP) Freshmen Survey, administered by the UCLA Higher Education Research Institute, is completed every year by thousands of new college students across the United States as part of a national study of higher education. Since 1966, over 10 million freshmen across the nation have participated in the CIRP, establishing it as the nation's largest and oldest empirical study of higher education. Last summer, Chapman University (Orange Campus only) participated in the Freshmen Survey for the 38th consecutive year—one of 694 institutions that participated in the 2004 administration. Chapman University freshmen were administered the survey during freshmen orientation (August 2004) in a proctored setting. Exactly 635 first-time, full-time freshmen completed the survey. This edition of *Research in BRIEF* highlights some of the results and compares the characteristics of Chapman University's first-time, full-time freshmen to a comparable national normative sample of freshmen from institutions of similar type—4-year private colleges (nonsectarian) of "high" selectivity.¹

Sample Representation

Almost 77% of Chapman University's Fall 2004 first-time, full-time freshmen population participated in the Freshmen Survey.

2004 Student Population and Sample	ORANGE CAMPUS FALL '04 First-Time, Full-Time Freshmen	
	Chapman Population* (n = 829)	Survey Sample (n = 635)
GENDER		
Male	38.7%	37.6%
Female	61.3%	62.4%
RACE/ETHNICITY		
African-American/Black	3.0%	2.5%
Asian-American/Pacific Islanders	8.9%	12.9%
White/Caucasian	64.2%	66.0%
Hispanic or Latino	10.1%	11.3%
Native-American/Alaskan Native	1.1%	1.6%
International Student	2.3%	n/a
Other/Unknown+	10.4%	5.6%

* First-time, full-time population only; no transfers as of census.
+ Includes Multi-ethnic
n/a Not applicable since it was not an option.

As would be expected given their numbers on the Orange Campus, the survey sample is composed mostly of White students. The gender distribution for the survey sample closely matches that of the Chapman population. Given that the majority of the first-time, full-time freshmen population was sampled, the results presented in this summary should closely reflect the perceptions and views of the majority of the Fall 2004 first-time full-time, freshmen population of Chapman University (Orange Campus only).

Background Characteristics

Almost all of the first-time, full-time freshmen identified themselves as U.S. citizens (97.6%), as well as native English speakers (94.9%). While 69% of the respondents reported being residents of California, only 40% indicated that their permanent home was 50 miles or less from Chapman University. Findings reveal that 56.1% of the students come from homes where the total parental income is \$75,000 or more. Findings also show that 16.7% of the 2004 entering first-time, full-time freshmen are first-generation college students—students whose parents never attended college.

When asked to characterize their political views, 38.2% identified as "far left" or "liberal," 36.8% "middle-of-the-road," and 25% "conservative" or "far right." National data indicates that Chapman University freshmen are just slightly more conservative than other students at like institutions. Freshmen were also asked to identify their current religious preference from a list of twenty; over 27% indicated "none." However, this figure may include students who wished not to identify their religious preference. According to student record data, 18% of the incoming freshmen "decline to state" their religious preference on the application.

FINDINGS

Admission-Related Issues

A large proportion of the students indicated that Chapman University was their first (69.5%) or second (20.7%) college choice. About 5% of the freshmen did not apply for admission to any other college. These findings suggest that

the majority of freshmen are here because they want to be here. Other data from this survey reveal that even before students start at Chapman University and have the opportunity to immerse themselves on campus, 59% percent of the first-time, full-time freshmen report that there is a “very good chance” that they will be satisfied with their college choice.

Students were asked to rate how important certain factors were in influencing their decision to attend college. Data reveal that Chapman University freshmen, when compared to freshmen at like institutions, appear to be slightly more interested in the learning and knowledge they will gain from attending college, as well as the financial benefits a college education will be able to afford them. As can be seen in the table below, 84.5% of the Chapman freshmen identified “to learn more about things that interest [them]” and 64.3% identified “to make more money” as “very important” reasons why they are attending college—compared to the national norm of 82.0% and 62.5%, respectively. Interestingly, these data also suggests that for Chapman University freshmen, making more money is secondary to learning, gaining a general education, and an appreciation of ideas. Compared to their counterparts, our freshmen also appear to be more interested in obtaining training in a specific career.

In deciding to go to college, how important to you was:	Chapman University		Private 4-Yrs. High Selectivity	
	Rank Order	%	Rank Order	%
To learn more about things that interest me	1	84.5	1	82.0
To get training for a specific career	2	70.2	4	67.4
To be able to get a better job	3	67.4	2	68.6
To gain a general education and appreciation of ideas	4	67.0	3	68.0
To be able to make more money	5	64.3	5	62.5

% = indicating “very important” reason

The survey also asked freshmen to reveal which reasons influenced their decision to attend Chapman University. The top two reasons selected were, “I was offered financial assistance” (65.2%) and “This college has a good academic reputation” (58.1%). Findings suggest that financial assistance is much more important to Chapman University freshmen than other students at like institutions.

While it was not the top reason, also influencing over half the freshmen was the desire to attend a small college such as Chapman University. Despite the great deal of construction that was going on at that time, about 50% of the freshmen indicated that “a visit to the campus” was very important in their decision to come to Chapman University.

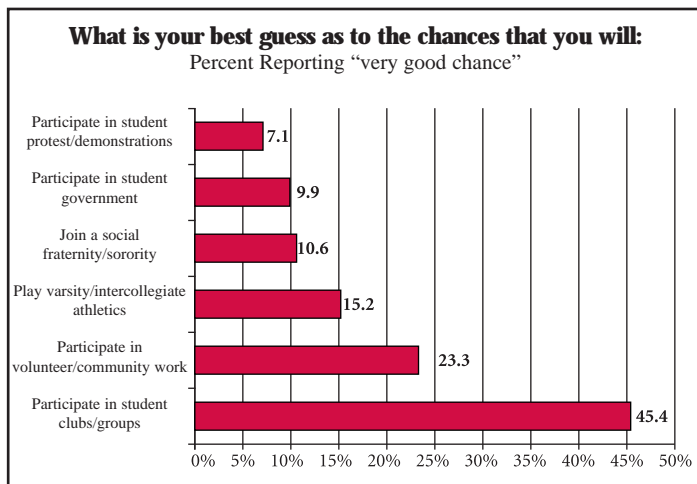
How important was each reason in your decision to come here?	Chapman University		Private 4-Yrs. High Selectivity	
	Rank Order	%	Rank Order	%
I was offered financial assistance	1	65.2	4	49.8
This college has a good academic reputation	2	58.1	1	67.0
I wanted to go to a school about the size of this college	3	52.3	5	46.2
A visit to the campus	4	49.5	3	52.2
This college’s graduates get good jobs	5	43.4	2	56.5

% = indicating “very important” reason

Other findings indicate that incoming freshmen were more influenced by information on Chapman’s website than information provided in national ranking magazines. For example, while 22.2% of the freshmen indicated that “information from a website” was a “very important” reason for attending Chapman University, only 13.7% of the freshmen indicated that “rankings in national magazines” had the same importance in their decision.

Activities while at Chapman University

Chapman University freshmen enter college with the proclivity of becoming involved in a wide variety of extra-curricular activities. Using a 4-point scale from “no chance” to “very good chance,” freshmen were asked to take their best guess as to the chances they would get involved in a variety of academic and non-academic activities.

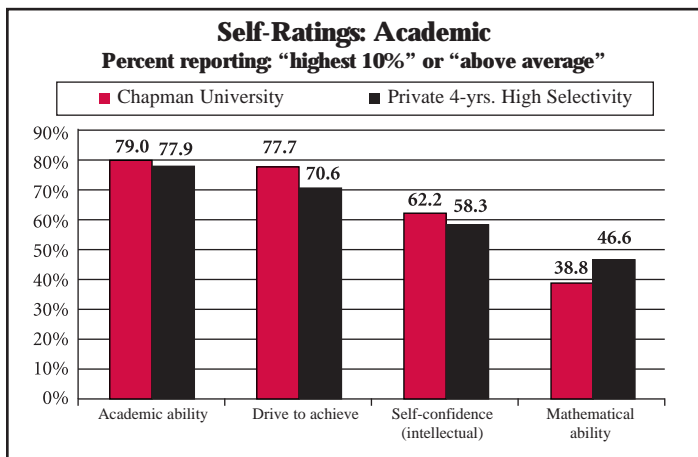


Close to half of all entering freshmen indicated that there was a “very good chance” that they would participate in a student club/group and over 20% indicated that it was probably very likely that they would volunteer or participate in community work. Between ten to fifteen percent also indicated that they planned to get involved with student government, sororities/fraternities, or intercollegiate athletics. Interestingly, just over 7% of the entering 2004 freshmen indicated that they anticipated participating in a student protest or demonstration.

Other findings also show that 44.6% of the incoming 2004 freshmen indicated that they planned to study abroad.

Academic Self-Confidence

Findings show that the majority of freshmen begin college with positive perceptions of their academic skills. The Freshmen Survey asks students to rate themselves on several characteristics (as compared to the average person their age) using a five-point scale from “highest 10%” to “lowest 10%.”



The bar graph illustrates that compared to their peers, Chapman University freshmen are just as confident in their academic ability and slightly more secure in their drive to achieve and intellectual self-confidence. Chapman University freshmen, however, were less likely to rate themselves as favorably with regard to their mathematical ability. Other findings reveal that compared nationally, a sizable proportion of Chapman University freshmen also arrive with strong perceptions of their leadership ability and communication skills (i.e., writing and public speaking).

Academic and Career Aspirations

Data reveal that most Chapman University freshmen arrive with graduate degree aspirations. Students were asked to indicate the highest academic degree they intended to obtain at any college.

	PERCENT	
	Chapman University	Private 4-Yrs. High Selectivity
Bachelor's degree	22.6	18.6
Master's degree	48.7	43.8
Ph.D. or Ed.D.	15.4	20.4
M.D., D.O., D.D.S., D.V.M.	3.7	9.0
J.D. (Law)	7.0	5.1
Other	1.7	1.8

Findings reveal that 74.8% of Chapman University freshmen arrive with the aspiration of someday attaining a Master's, doctorate, medical, or law degree.

When compared to their peers nationally, Chapman University freshmen are slightly more likely to aspire to Master's degrees. Interestingly, almost twice as many Chapman University females as males reported that they aspired to obtain a J.D degree (8.6% women, 4.4% men).

	PERCENT			
	Chapman University		Private 4-Yrs. High Selectivity	
	All	Men	Women	All
Actor or Entertainer	11.7	11.9	11.6	2.4
Business Executive (management, administrator)	9.8	13.7	7.6	5.3
Lawyer or Judge	5.6	2.3	7.6	3.8
Artist	5.1	5.5	4.9	5.0

Over 22% of all freshmen expressed interest in continuing their graduate/professional studies at Chapman University.

When asked about their probable career occupation, Chapman University freshmen were more likely than their peers to select careers such as actor/entertainer, business executive, lawyer/judge, or artist. As would be expected, the most popular probable careers selected by incoming freshmen reflect several of the more popular programs at Chapman University.

Freshmen Survey data also reveal that Chapman University's males were more likely to select business executives as a probable career, while females were slightly more likely to select lawyer or judge.

Important Future Goals

Knowing students' future goals gives us an idea of what students value, what motivates them, as well as what activities they may be interested in pursuing while in college.

How important was each reason in your decision to come here?	Chapman University		Private 4-Yrs. High Selectivity	
	Rank Order	%	Rank Order	%
	Being very well off financially	1	72.1	2
Raising a family	2	68.6	1	70.2
Becoming an authority in my field	3	65.5	4	55.8
Helping others who are in difficulty	4	58.3	3	61.2
Obtaining recognition from my colleagues for contributions to my special field	5	55.3	6	49.8
Improving my understanding of other countries and cultures	6	54.6	5	50.2
Developing a meaningful philosophy of life	7	52.2	7	46.8

% = indicating goals were "very important" or "essential"

Findings suggest that the majority of Chapman University freshmen, very much like students at similar types of institutions nationwide, are interested in attaining financial security and recognition, as well as developing a meaningful philosophy of life. However, among all the goals listed, it was “being well off financially” that the majority of students found “most important” or “essential,” “raising a family” following closely. While prestige and financial security may motivate students to excel in their chosen field or discipline, the desire to help others who are in difficulty, improve their understanding of other countries and cultures, and bring meaning into their life may prompt them to search for campus activities that nurture these outcomes.

Spiritual Development

Some CIRP findings suggest that spiritual development is important to a good number of entering freshmen. About 7% of the Fall 2004 freshmen reported that the religious affiliation/orientation of the university was a “very important” reason influencing their decision to enroll at Chapman University. Over 40% of the Fall 2004 freshmen indicated that they considered “integrating spirituality into my life” as an “essential” or “very important” personal objective. However, when asked, using a 4-point scale from “no chance” to “very good chance,” as to the chances they would strengthen their religious beliefs/convictions, only about 25% indicated that there was a “very good chance” that it would happen.

CONCLUSION

What do we know about Chapman University’s 2004 entering freshmen class? Data from the CIRP Freshmen Survey reveal that the majority of Chapman University’s 2004 first-time, full-time freshmen enter with healthy perceptions of their academic skills, have high degree aspirations, are driven to achieve, and plan to get involved while in college. Also evident is that Chapman University is well respected among the freshmen class. Over 58% of the 2004 freshmen cohort indicated that they are attending Chapman University because of its “good academic reputation.” In fact, the majority of the 2004 first-time, full-time freshmen selected Chapman University as their first or second choice college.

While data reveal that Chapman University freshmen may be slightly more interested in the financial benefits of a college education than their counterparts at similar U.S. institutions, they are also more interested in learning, gaining a general education, growing spiritually, and developing a meaningful philosophy of life. At Chapman University, students have the opportunity to graduate with a valuable degree, as well as with a well-rounded education. As stated in the Chapman Plan², we are a university committed to helping each student develop as a whole person, represented in the traditions of Chapman’s “four pillars” symbolizing intellectual, spiritual, social, and

physical growth. It appears that the goals and aspirations of the majority of our incoming freshmen are aligned with what Chapman University deems important. Regardless of whether this occurred by design—some freshmen, in part, selected Chapman University because they knew we are an institution committed to these values—or it happened haphazardly, we are in an exceptional position to serve our students well.

IMPLICATIONS

While it is important to know how we compare nationally to our counterparts, the value of this survey lies in the opportunity it provides us to understand our student population. It is only in this way we can best plan to meet the needs of our students. For example, Admission and Financial Aid might be interested in knowing that a large proportion of the 2004 first-time, full-time freshmen choose Chapman University because they were offered financial assistance. Those individuals responsible for outreach, recruitment, and marketing might find it valuable to know the reasons why students decided to attend college in the first place. Student Affairs may find it helpful to know what activities freshmen would like to get involved with while at Chapman University. The Center for Global Education may find it useful to know how many incoming freshmen are interested in the Study Abroad program. Since knowing students’ expectations, goals, and aspirations can be used to better understand the type of academic programs and extracurricular activities our students may be more apt to participate in, administrators might be able to use such information to better anticipate students’ needs.

Dey and Hurtado (1994)³ propose that “although we have a tendency to think of students in one of several unidimensional ways, a more complete view is one in which the relationship between students and the college environment is seen as both reciprocal and dynamic” (p. 265). Fortunately, Chapman University is in a position to be true to its mission and values and at the same time to focus on how it can change to better meet the needs of the students it serves.

¹ Selectivity is an estimate of the mean score of entering freshmen on the verbal plus mathematical portions of the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). Private four-year colleges (non-sectarian) with “high” selectivity levels are those institutions with entering freshmen with 1100-1249 SAT composite scores. (See *The American Freshmen: National Norms for Fall 2004* by Sax, Hurtado, Lindholm, Astin, Korn, & Mahoney, 2004.)

² Chapman University: The Chapman Plan. (September, 2001).

³ Dey, E. L. and Hurtado, S. (1994). College students in a changing context. In P.H. Altbach, R.O. Berdahl, and P.J. Gumport (Eds.), *Higher Education in American Society* (Third Edition). Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.