

# Research in BRIEF

A Newsletter of the Institutional Research Office

CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY

March 2009

Vol. 5, No.14

## CIRP FRESHMAN SURVEY 1998-2008 TRENDS REPORT

### Orange Campus

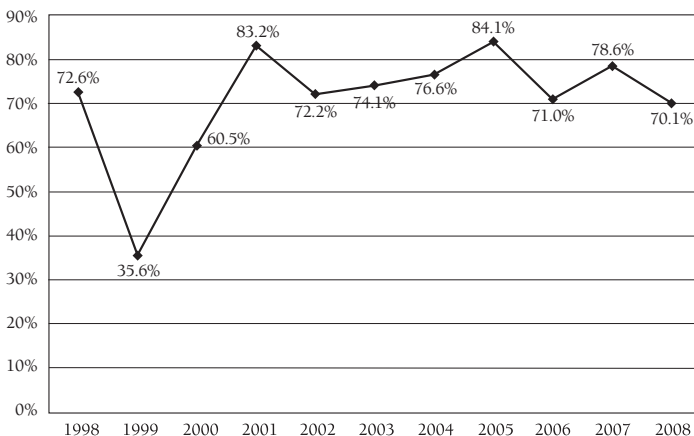
(Administered Annually Fall Semester)

The Cooperative Institutional Research Program's (CIRP) Freshman Survey, administered by the UCLA Higher Education Research Institute (HERI), is completed every year by new college students across the United States as part of a national study of higher education. The Freshman Survey contains over 100 items inquiring how undergraduates spend their time in high school, how they view themselves in comparison to other students, and their goals, opinions, and future plans. Last summer, Chapman University participated in the Freshman Survey for the 42nd consecutive year. Chapman University freshmen were administered the survey in-person during freshmen orientation. The accumulation of data over time allows for an opportunity to track longitudinal trends among Chapman freshmen. This edition of *Research in BRIEF* highlights notable trends between 1998 and 2008.<sup>i</sup>

### Response Rate and Survey Sample

The table below displays the percentage of all first-time, full-time (FTFT) freshmen who completed the Freshman Survey between 1998 and 2008. Only the response rate in 1999 is unusually low at 35.6%. Otherwise, the response rate has been 60% or higher in the last decade.

Freshman Survey Response Rate: 1998-2008

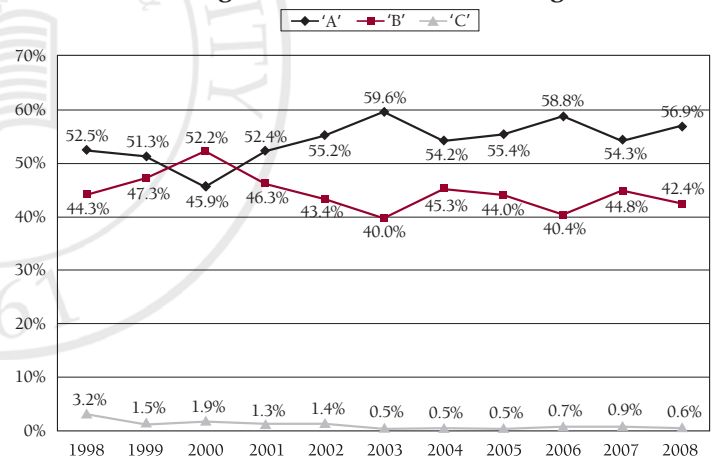


## FINDINGS

### High School Academic Performance

Freshmen were asked to report their average grade in high school.<sup>ii</sup> The findings show that the vast majority of incoming freshmen averaged either "As" or "Bs" during high school. The percentage of "A" students has consistently outnumbered the percentage of "B" students except in 2000.

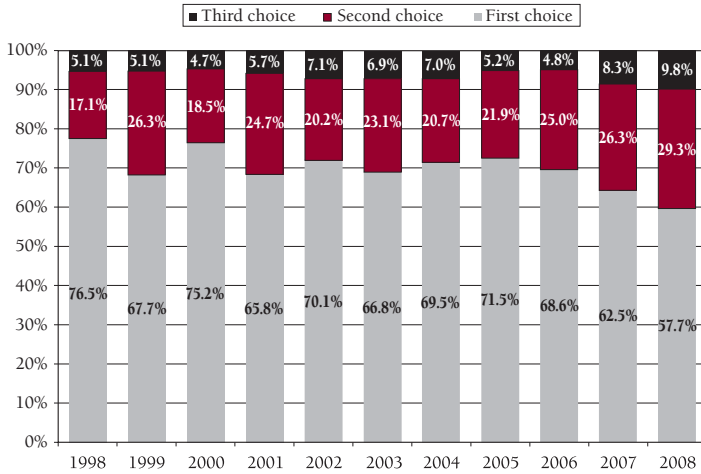
High School Grade Point Average



### Coming to Chapman University

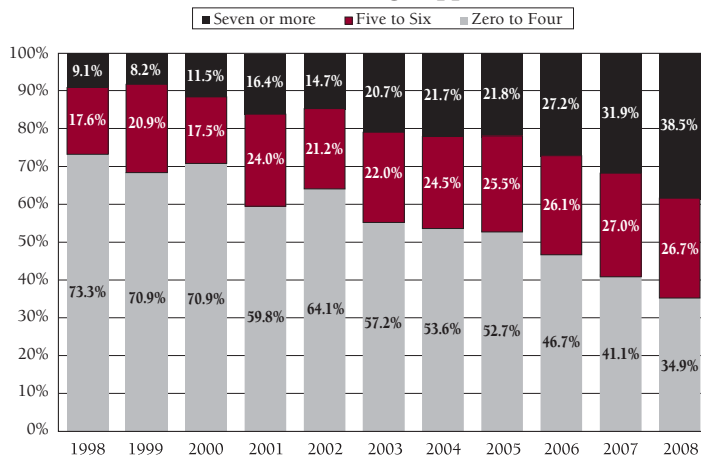
Freshmen were asked to indicate their rank preference for Chapman University when deciding which college to attend.<sup>iii</sup> While the percentage of freshmen selecting Chapman as their 1st choice has declined from 76.5% in 1998 to 57.7% in 2008, national HERI data shows that the percentage of freshmen attending their 1st choice college is declining at the national level and is currently at a 34-year low.<sup>iv</sup> The findings also show that percentage of students selecting Chapman as their 2nd or 3rd choice has undergone small gains in the last ten years. However, this increase has also coincided with the university becoming more selective and admitting more academically prepared students who usually have more choices.

### Preference for Chapman University



While the percentage of freshmen choosing Chapman University as their first choice has been declining since 2005, the number of colleges freshmen have been applying to also increased in the last ten years. Freshmen were asked to report the number of schools at which they applied for admission. The steady increase in the number of applications in the last decade may suggest that the recent decline in the percentage of freshmen selecting Chapman as their first choice college may be influenced by expanding choices.

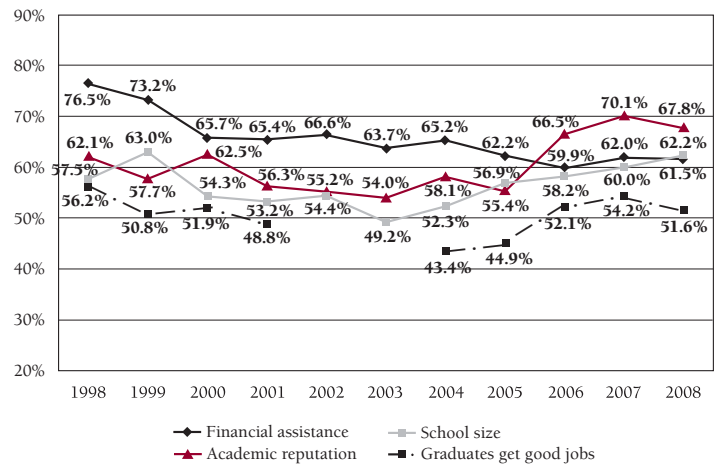
### Number of College Applications



Freshmen were asked to indicate the level of importance they assign to various factors when deciding to attend Chapman University. The findings show that financial assistance, school size, academic reputation, and job placement success have been the most important reasons freshmen have noted for coming to Chapman during the last ten years. The percentage of freshmen citing financial assistance as “very important” has slightly decreased from the mid-70% range ten years ago to the lower 60% range in the recent past. In contrast, Chapman’s academic reputation has been gaining increasing recognition from freshmen since 2005. Between 2005 and 2008, academic reputation increased from 55.4% to 67.8%. Likewise,

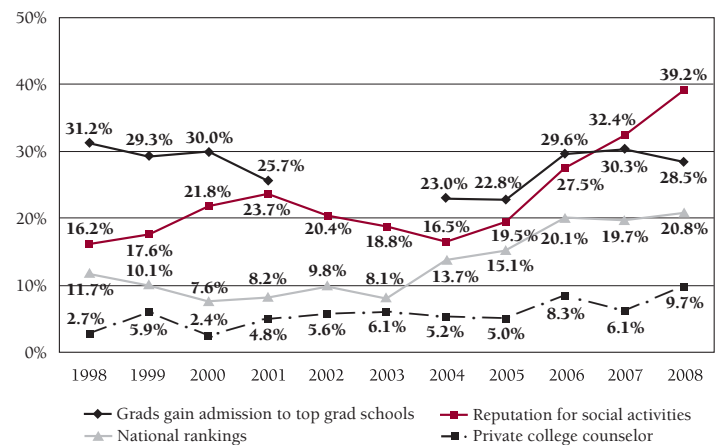
freshmen have increasingly reported school size and job placement as important reasons for attending Chapman.

### Top Reasons for Attending Chapman University Percent Reporting “Very Important”



The next chart presents four other cited reasons for attending Chapman University. Graduates’ ability to gain admission to top graduate schools is cited by about a third of incoming freshmen over time. The popularity of this reason dipped a bit between 2001 and 2005 before trending toward previous levels. The other three reasons have gained small but increasing support in the last decade. In particular, Chapman’s rankings in national magazines and its reputation for social activities have taken a strong upwards turn in the last five years.

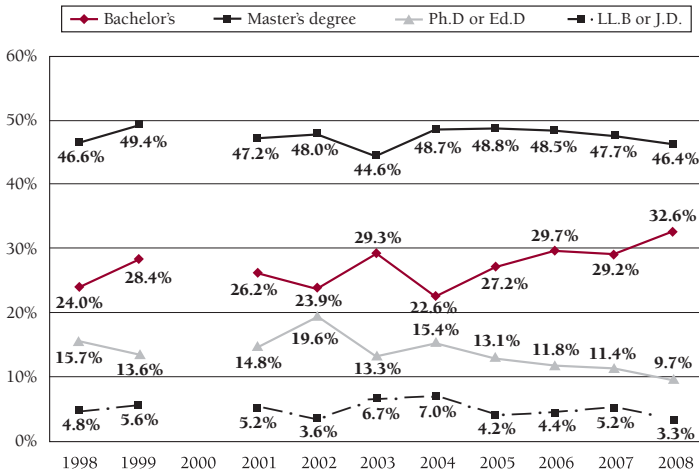
### Other Reasons for Attending Chapman University Percent Reporting “Very Important”



### Highest Academic Degree Desired

Freshmen were asked to indicate the highest degree they wish to obtain at any institution. The appeal of a Ph.D. has slightly declined since 2004, while the attractiveness of a bachelor’s degree has increased by about 10% between 2004 and 2008. The percentage of freshmen desiring a master’s degree has remained steady in the 40% range during the last decade.

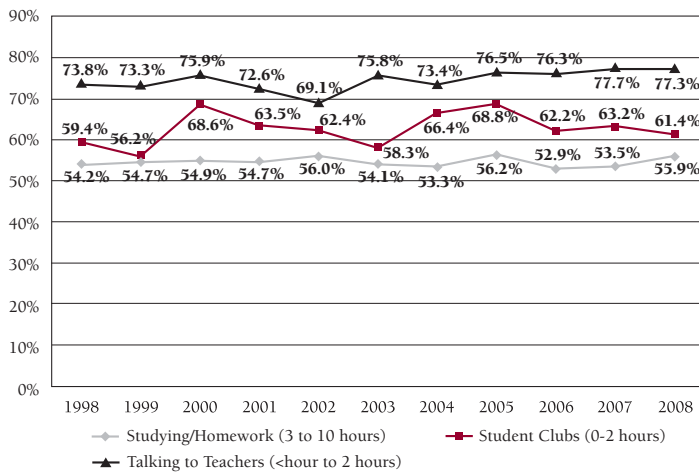
### Highest Academic Degree Desired



### Academic Involvement and Self-Rating

Freshmen were asked to report the number of hours they spent per week on student clubs, talking with teachers, and studying/doing homework during high school.<sup>v</sup> Except for a small dip in 2002, about 75% of freshmen reported talking to high school teachers between less than an hour to two hours a week during the last decade. The percentage of freshmen reporting spending zero to two hours a week in student clubs during high school fluctuated a bit between 1998 and 2008 but mostly stayed in the 60% range. In contrast, the percentage of students reporting spending three to ten hours a week studying or doing homework stayed consistently in the lower 50% range.

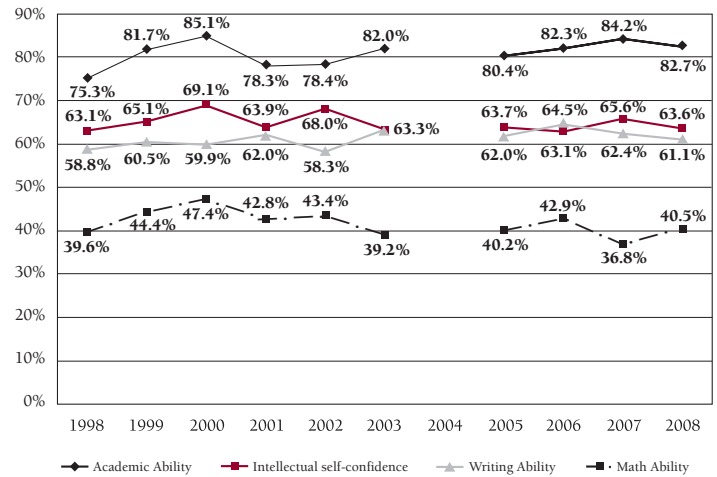
### Academic Involvement



Freshmen were asked to rank themselves in comparison to other students on various academic measures. Freshmen's self-ratings of their academic ability have remained stable during the last decade. The vast majority of freshmen express a high degree of confidence in their "academic ability." Freshmen report noticeably lower self-confidence in their mathematical skills in comparison to their writing, intellectual, and academic abilities, but this is a national trend rather than a characteristic specific to Chapman.

### Academic Self-Rating

#### Percent Reporting "Above Average" or "Highest 10%"

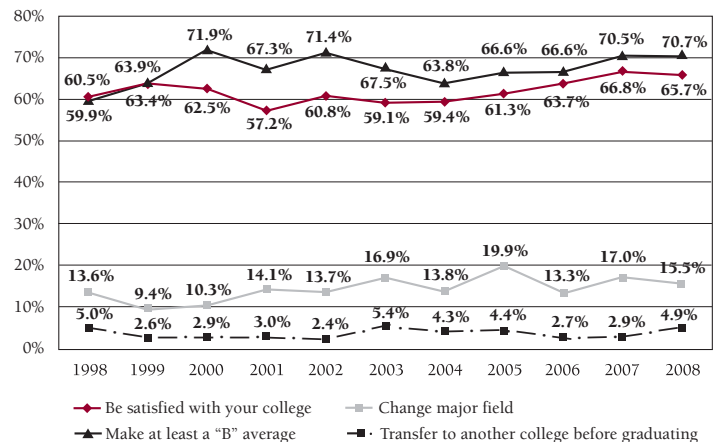


### Academic Commitment

Freshmen were asked to estimate their likely academic commitment to Chapman University. The findings do not show any noticeable upward or downward trends. The majority of freshmen expected to earn at least a "B" average in college and to be satisfied with Chapman. Only a very small percentage of freshmen reported a "very good" chance of transferring from Chapman. Likewise, the percentage of students anticipating a "very good" chance of changing majors was less than 20% throughout the last decade.

### Academic Commitment

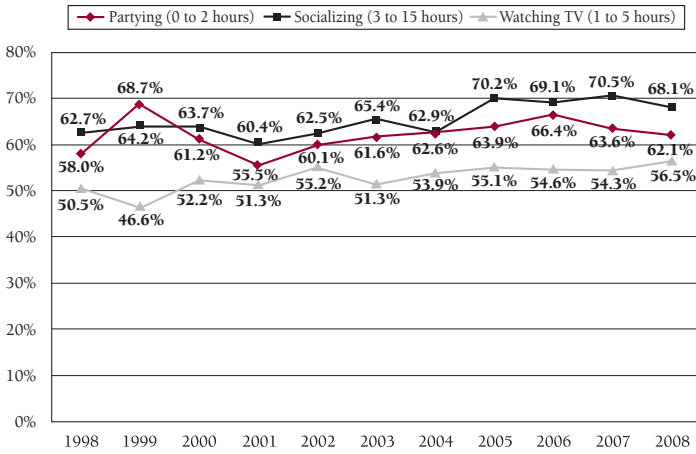
#### Percent Reporting "Very Good" Chance



### Leisure Activities and Academic Disengagement

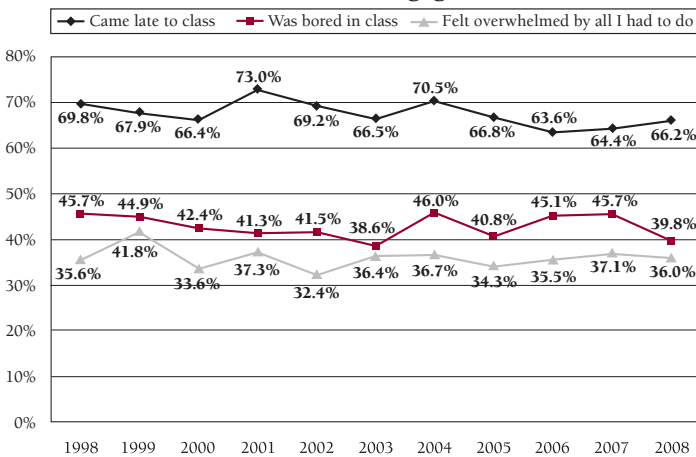
Freshmen were asked to report the number of hours spent per week for three non-academic activities.<sup>vi</sup> The findings show that the majority of freshmen spent one to five hours per week watching TV. This percentage has been increasing steadily in the last decade. The findings also show that most freshmen spent little time partying in high school, but at least 60% of freshmen spent between three to ten hours per week socializing with friends between 1998 and 2008.

### Leisure Activities



Freshmen were asked to indicate how often they engaged in activities considered detrimental to academic engagement during high school. The percentage of freshmen reporting feeling “bored in class” or “overwhelmed by all I had to do” include students who answered “frequently” during the last year. The percentage of students reporting “came late to class” includes both “frequent” and “occasional” responses during the last year.

### Academic Disengagement

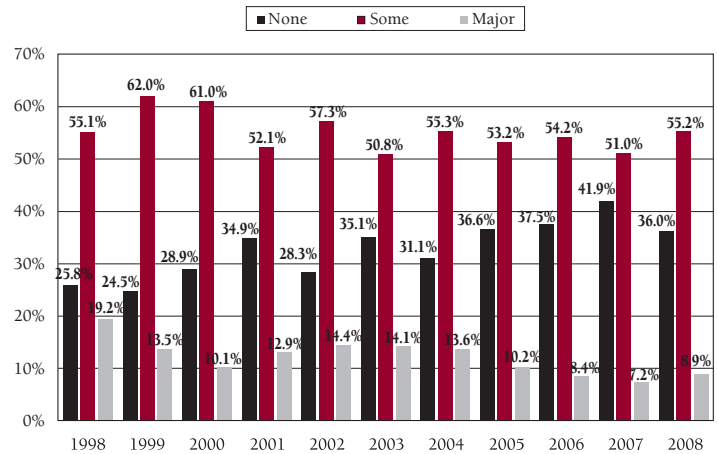


The results show that over 60% of freshmen reported engaging in class tardiness during the last ten years. The percentage of freshmen reporting boredom in class declined to 39.8% in 2008 after hovering around 45% in 2006 and 2007. Other than 1999, the percentage of freshmen who “felt overwhelmed” has been around the mid-30% range in the last decade.

### Financial Security

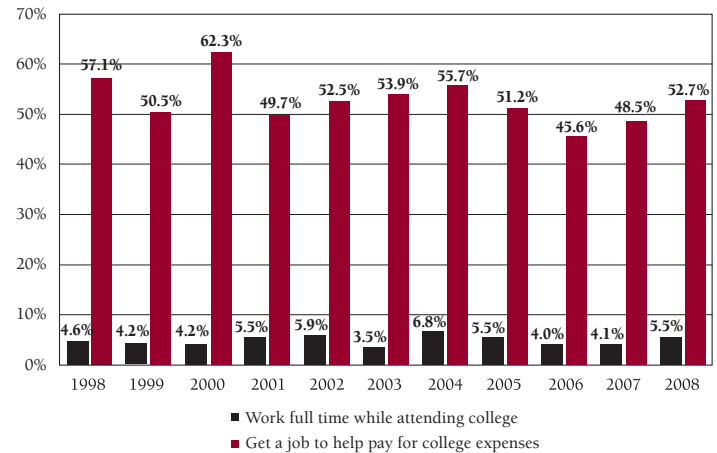
Freshmen were asked to indicate their level of concern over paying for college. The percentage of students reporting no concern has slowly increased after 2000 before dipping back down to 36% in 2008. Overall, the majority of incoming freshmen report “some” financial concerns between 1998 and 2008.

### Financial Concern



Freshmen were also asked about their intended employment plans in college. While the percentages fluctuate a bit during the examined period, almost half of freshmen reported the need to obtain a job in order to help pay for college expenses. These students will most likely seek part-time employment since only a small percentage of freshmen desire full-time employment.

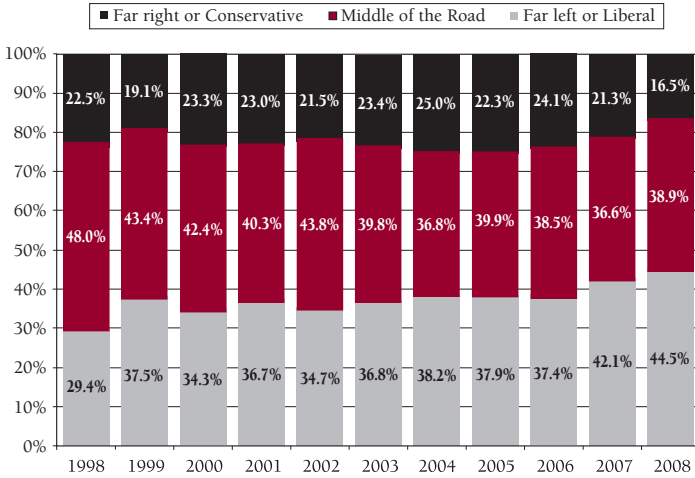
### Working During School Percent Reporting “Very Good” Chance



### Political Orientation and Attitudes

Freshmen were asked to indicate their political orientation using five categories ranging from “far left” to “far right.” Between 2006 and 2008, the percentage of freshmen reporting liberal attitudes increased from 37.4% to 44.5%, while conservative attitudes decreased from 24.1% to 16.5% among freshmen.

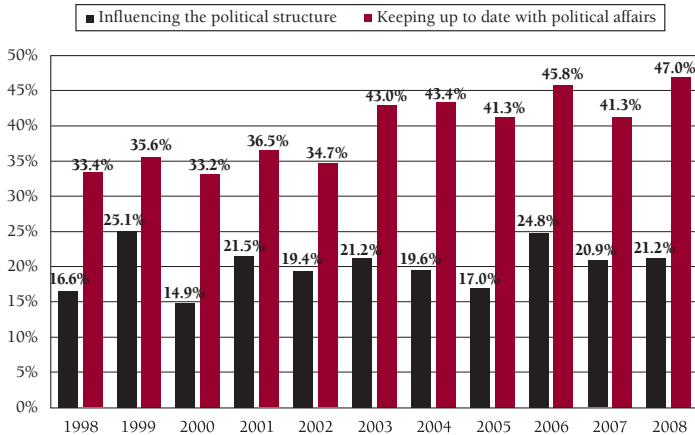
### Political Orientation



Freshmen were asked to indicate their level of interest in political affairs. The percentage of freshmen interested in “keeping up with current political affairs” increased between 1998 and 2008. Between 1998 and 2002, around 34% of freshmen assigned importance to keeping up with political affairs before increasing to the lower 40% range after 2002. The other survey question, influencing the political structure, fluctuated throughout the last decade but never rose above 25.1%.

### Political Attitudes

Percent Reporting “Essential” or “Very Important”

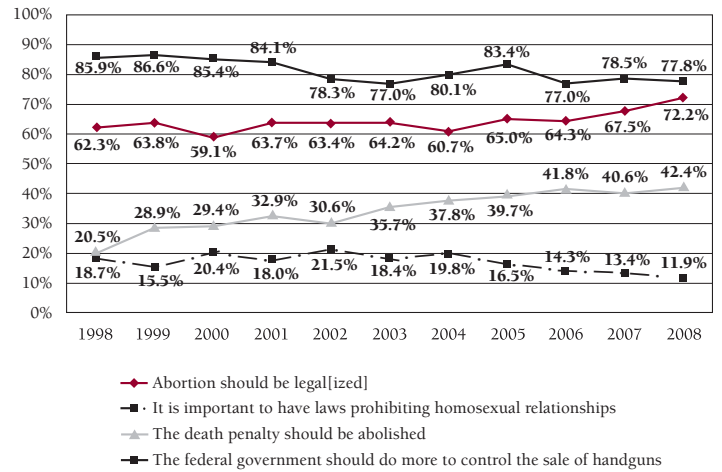


### Attitudes on Key Political Issues

Freshmen were asked to indicate their level of support on four widely discussed social issues in contemporary American society. Support for the abolishment of the death penalty has steadily increased over time. Between 1998 and 2008, support for the abolishment of the death penalty increased from 20.5% to 42.4%. Freshmen have given slightly more support for the legalization of abortion in the last four years. In 2008, the vast majority of freshmen expressed their support for the legalization of abortion (72.2%).

### Key Political Issues

Percent Reporting “Strongly” or “Somewhat” Agree



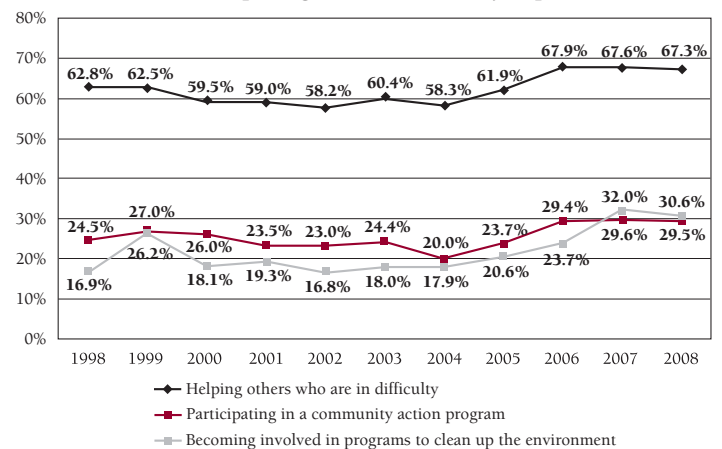
Findings also show that Chapman freshmen have not supported legislation prohibiting homosexual relationships in the last decade. Only 11.9% of freshmen supported such legislation in 2008 and support has been declining since 2004. In contrast, freshmen report wide support for federal action over handgun control. At least 77% of freshmen in the past ten years have agreed that “The federal government should do more to control the sales of handguns.”

### Attitudes Toward Civic Responsibility

Freshmen were asked to indicate the level of importance they attach to the following three activities: helping others in difficulty, participating in community action programs, and helping to clean up the environment. The amount of importance freshmen placed on “helping others in difficulty” underwent small gains from 58.3% in 2004 to 67.3% in 2008. Similarly, interest in community action programs and cleaning up the environment rose after 2004, but only about 30% of freshmen viewed these activities as important in 2008.

### Civic Attitudes

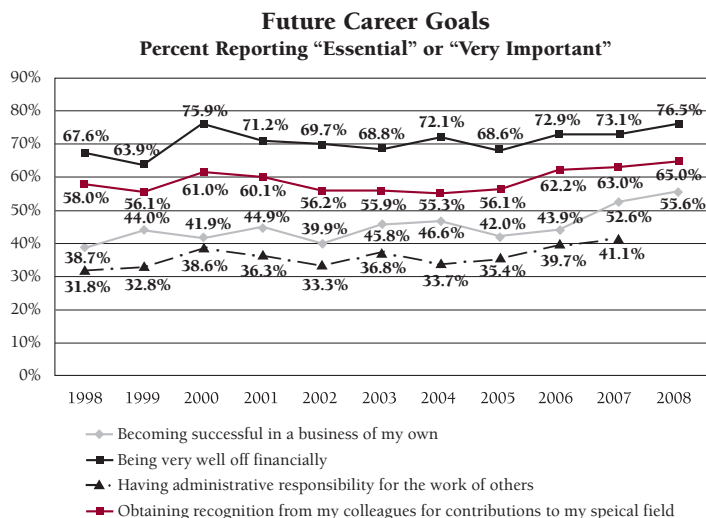
Percent Reporting “Essential” or “Very Important”





## Career Objectives

Freshmen were asked about their career goals. The findings show that “being well off financially” is consistently the most desired goal followed closely by “obtaining recognition from my colleagues.”



The other two items drew less attention from freshmen, but they have been trending upwards since 2005. In 2007 and 2008, over 50% of freshmen viewed becoming successful in their own business as an important goal. Over 40% of freshmen reported “having administrative responsibility for others” as an important goal in 2007, the highest figure in the last ten years.

## CONCLUSION

Findings from the Freshman Survey from the past decade show evidence of Chapman’s growing academic reputation. Freshmen are increasingly citing Chapman’s rise in national rankings as an influential draw factor. Financial assistance, school size, and job placement have also been the important stated reasons for coming to Chapman. Given that the majority of incoming freshmen identify themselves as “A” students in high school, it follows that most freshmen report confidence in their ability to succeed at Chapman as measured by their intellectual self-confidence and perceived ability to earn a “B” average in college.

The vast majority of incoming freshmen identify themselves as either middle-of-the-road or liberal politically. Not surprisingly, then, most freshmen support the legalization of abortion while a small minority supports laws prohibiting homosexual relationships. Freshmen placed increasing importance on helping others in difficulty, participating in community action programs, and helping to clean up the environment between 2004 and 2006 before leveling off in 2007 and 2008. Importance placed upon political activities

may have increased due to the 2008 presidential election. National HERI data show that the percentage of freshmen who frequently discussed politics in the last year reached a 40-year high in 2008 (35.6%).<sup>vii</sup> Financial success and obtaining recognition from colleagues are two widely cited future career goals. While the appeal of earning a Ph.D. has declined recently, a master’s degree was reported as a desirable degree by almost half of freshmen in the last decade.

## IMPLICATIONS

Longitudinal data from the Freshmen Survey can serve as a useful tool to help direct resources in order to attract the highest caliber of students and anticipate university needs. Given the top reasons that attract students to Chapman University, structural issues such as class size, faculty to student ratio, job placement resources, and financial aid are all influential focal points. The historical consistency of these factors underscores their durability.

The consistent and wide popularity of master’s degrees may serve as a note of interest in deciding to expand graduate programs at Chapman. Combined with the tough current economic conditions, interest in graduate programs may expand even further in the near future and the dwindling interest in Ph.D. programs may soon reverse. Finally, the recent increased interest in civic activities suggests an influx of students arriving on campus eager to participate in such activities. If this interest translates into action, service learning opportunities could be in high demand. For example, interest in cleaning up the environment has grown rapidly and may serve as a starting point in planning service learning activities.

<sup>i</sup> Some questions were not asked every year, resulting in missing data. Consequently, certain charts will have gaps in select trend lines.

<sup>ii</sup> To make the data more presentable, plus and minus grades (e.g., “B+”) were all consolidated into a single grade. The data line for the grade “D” was removed since this category contained less than 1% of freshmen in each year.

<sup>iii</sup> The question also includes a “less than third choice” option, but the results are not reported because only a small percentage of respondents chose this option.

<sup>iv</sup> See *The American Freshman: National Norms Fall 2008*.

<sup>v</sup> Response categories were collapsed in order to capture the range of hours that the majority of students fell under.

<sup>vi</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>vii</sup> See *The American Freshman: National Norms Fall 2008*.