

2007 YFCY NATIONAL SURVEY
RESULTS FOR FIRST-TIME
FULL-TIME COLLEGE FRESHMEN

An Analysis of Survey Responses

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The “Your First College Year” (YFCY) national survey was developed by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA in collaboration with John Gardner’s Policy Center on the First Year of College at Brevard College. The survey focuses on the experiences and attributes of first-time full-time college freshmen, captured during the spring term of their first-year in college. KSU participated in the 2007 YFCY survey and garnered 539 survey responses from its full-time first-year freshmen. Those responses were compared to a national sample of respondents to the 2007 YFCY survey from public four-year colleges (referenced as peer institutions in this analysis). KSU had also participated in the 2003 YFCY national survey four years ago, and some of the more notable 2007 comparisons with those earlier results are also cited in this analysis.

The 2007 YFCY survey results suggest that the experiences and characteristics of KSU’s first-year college students are more similar to than different from their counterparts nationally. Out of the nearly 250 different questions that first-year college respondents to the YFCY survey addressed, the responses of KSU students to over 90% of the items were not substantially different (i.e., not more than 10 percentage points apart) from their counterparts’ responses at other public four-year universities. Although small percentage differences between KSU freshmen and freshmen elsewhere on some survey items might be statistically significant if tested, such small differences were not considered to be meaningful or useful enough to be spotlighted in this analysis. A few notable differences will be reviewed after similarities in the results are presented. Following that analysis, implications for the improvement of first-year programming will be presented.

SIMILARITIES OF THE KSU EXPERIENCE WITH PEERS NATIONALLY

Freshman Satisfaction with the Overall College Experience is High

Eight out of ten (84%) freshmen at KSU and peer institutions reported being satisfied with their college overall. Seven out of ten expressed satisfaction with their overall college experience. High percentages of the freshmen had plans to re-enroll at their current institution in the following fall (84% and 87% respectively). When asked if they would enroll in their current institution if they could make their college choice over, 73% of KSU freshmen and 78% of their peers elsewhere indicated they would make the same choice.

Freshman Satisfaction Levels are High on Most Dimensions of the Academic Experience

Four out of five freshmen at KSU (78%) and nationally (79%) reported being satisfied or very satisfied with their overall academic experience in their first year of college. High percentages of KSU freshmen were satisfied with overall quality of instruction (75%) and class size (72%). Satisfaction ratings were equally high in the educational support areas at

KSU of classroom facilities (89%), computer facilities/labs (86%), library facilities and services (79%), laboratory facilities and services (77%) and availability of internet access (75%). In contrast, first-year student satisfaction was substantially lower in relation to quality of computer training/assistance (62%) academic advising (56%), tutoring or other academic assistance (56%), relevance of coursework to future career plans (55%), and relevance of coursework to everyday life (49%). Similar satisfaction levels were reported at peer institutions in all cases except for advising which was rated more highly elsewhere (66%). In addition, only a little more than half of KSU freshmen (56%) and their counterparts at peer institutions (59%) reported being satisfied with their amount of contact with faculty.

Freshmen Satisfaction Levels are Moderate for Most Student Services

A high percentage of respondents (73%) were satisfied with KSU's recreational facilities. Levels of satisfaction were lower and moderate for most other student services such as availability of campus social activities (65%), orientation for new students (62%), student housing facilities (61%), student leadership opportunities (53%), community service opportunities (53%), financial aid package (49%), and the financial aid office (47%). In a couple of support areas, satisfaction was relatively low, specifically the student housing office and services (38%) and psychological counseling services (33%). Respondents marking "Can't rate/No experience" were not included in these results. Similar satisfaction levels were reported at peer institutions for all student services except student housing offices, which were rated satisfactory by more freshmen at peer institutions (51%).

Financial Costs of Attending College are Not an Issue for Most Freshmen

For both the KSU freshmen and their counterparts elsewhere, only 15% of the respondents reported having a major concern about not having enough funds to complete college.

Substantial Numbers of Freshmen Report Student Behaviors that Undermine Their Potential for Academic Success

Eight out of ten KSU freshmen (79%) reported having skipped class occasionally or frequently. Four out of ten (43%) reported having fall asleep in class. Four out of ten (44%) turned in course assignments late, and eight out of ten (83%) turned in course assignments that did not reflect their best work. Only two out of ten (23%) spoke up frequently in class, three out of ten (29%) studied or prepared often for class, three out of ten (31%) received tutoring, and four out of ten (40%) discussed course content with students outside of class. A third of the freshmen reported having witnessed academic dishonesty or cheating. These percentages were comparable to those reported by freshmen at peer institutions nationally. Furthermore, even though all respondents were full-time students taking at least 12 hours of credit per semester, two-thirds of KSU's freshmen (67%) reported spending less than five hour per week on studying/homework. At peer institutions, a little more than half of the freshmen (53%) reported similarly low

commitments to studies outside of class. The traditional notion that college students must spend twice as much time as they do in class on studying/homework is not supported by these local or national data.

Social Life Competes Most with Schoolwork

First-year students at KSU (76%) and nationally (70%) reported that their social life interfered with their schoolwork more than employment responsibilities (61% at KSU, 46% elsewhere) or family responsibilities (44% at KSU, 39% elsewhere). Two-thirds of the freshmen at KSU (70%) and at peer institutions (69%) reported spending over six hours per week socializing with friends; 17% locally and nationally committed over 20 hours per week to social activity (only 2% of freshmen at KSU and 4% nationally studied more than 20 hours per week). Socializing was not synonymous with partying. The distribution of time spent weekly on socializing was much more heavily weighted than the time spent partying, both at KSU and peer institutions.

Freshmen Watch More Television than Read for Pleasure

Two-thirds of the freshmen at KSU (63%) and at peer institutions (64%) reported reading for pleasure less than one hour per week (most, not at all). In contrast, only a small percentage of the freshmen at KSU (13%) and at peer institutions (19%) limited their TV watching to less than one hour per week. The distribution of weekly time commitments of freshmen to watching television were comparable to those for studying and homework.

Time Management Tops the List of Academic Adjustment Challenges for Freshmen

More than half of KSU's freshmen (55%) and their peers elsewhere (53%) reported having difficulty with effectively managing their time. Half of KSU's freshmen (50%) and nearly that many elsewhere (42%) frequently felt overwhelmed by all they had to do. Among the other challenges KSU's first-year students face, the fewest freshmen reported difficulty understanding what professors expect academically (17%), getting to know faculty (37%), adjusting to the academic demands of college (39%) and developing effective study skills (40%). Similar results were found in the sample from peer institutions.

KSU Freshmen are Comparable to Peers in Declaring and Changing Majors in the First Year

During the first college year, a third of the freshmen at KSU (39%) and at peer institutions (34%) changed their career choice and their major (36% at both KSU and peer institutions). A fourth of the freshmen at KSU and peer institutions remained undecided about a major (23% at both).

Racial Tension and Feelings of Discrimination are Low

Only 7% of KSU freshmen and 10% of their counterparts elsewhere perceived a lot of racial tension on their campuses. Small percentages of KSU freshmen felt discriminated against because of their race/ethnicity (8%), socio-economic status (8%), gender (10%), religion (12%), or sexual orientation (4%). At peer institutions, feelings of discrimination were also low and comparable to those of KSU freshmen. However, fewer than half of the freshmen (45% at KSU and elsewhere) reported having frequent social interaction with students from a racial/ethnic group other than their own. Only 12% of KSU freshmen reported attending events sponsored by racial/ethnic groups other than their own. Only one in five (21%) reported having had meaningful and honest discussions about race/ethnic relations outside of class.

Global Learning is Not Advancing Greatly Among First-Year Freshmen at KSU

KSU freshmen (82%) and freshmen at peer institutions (79%) reported that their college experiences had exposed them to diverse opinions, cultures and values. However, few KSU freshmen (16%) as well as their counterparts at peer institutions (14%) reported that their knowledge of people from different races and cultures was much stronger since college entry. Similarly, only 18% of first-year students at KSU and 12% elsewhere at peer institutions reported that their understanding of global issues was much stronger since starting college. Ironically (shades of Lake Wobegon), two-thirds of KSU's freshmen as well as freshmen elsewhere rated themselves as above average in "ability to see the world from someone else's perspective" (68% at KSU), "tolerance of others with different beliefs (72% at KSU) and "ability to work cooperatively with diverse people" (74% at KSU).

Values of Freshmen Reflect a Focus on Family and Financial Success

Eight out of ten freshmen at KSU cite raising a family (84%) and being very well off financially (75%) as very important if not essential personal objectives. Over half aspired to be an authority in their field (67%), to be recognized for their contributions in their field (60%), to have administrative responsibility over the work of others (53%), and to become successful in a business of their own (51%). Even though eight out of ten freshmen stated that they highly value helping others who are in difficulty (82%), only one in three aspired to become a community leader (31%), participate in community action programs (31%), help promote racial understanding (33%), become involved in programs to clean up the environment (29%), or influence the political structure (23%). Freshmen at peer institutions expressed similar patterns of priorities for personal objectives and values.

A FEW DISTINCTIVE DIFFERENCES IN THE KSU EXPERIENCE

Academic Advising Continues to Get Lower Marks at KSU

Twice as many KSU freshmen (37%) than their peers elsewhere (18%) reported never having interacted with academic advisors/counselors since entering college. This represents some improvement since the 2003 survey in which 47% of KSU students compared to 17% elsewhere reported never interacting with academic advisors/counselors. In addition, fewer KSU first-year students (56%) than their counterparts elsewhere (66%) were satisfied with academic advisement. The level of reported satisfaction with academic advising at KSU had not improved since the 2003 YFCY survey when it also stood at 55%.

Employment Continues to Compete with Studies More at KSU

More first-year students at KSU (24%) than students elsewhere (14%) work for pay off campus over 20 hours per week. The gulf between KSU students (34%) and students elsewhere (56%) who are not employed off-campus is substantial. About half of KSU freshmen (48%) compared to a third of freshmen elsewhere (37%) reported that “their school work interfered with their job responsibilities.” Despite those differences, these results reflect some improvement since the 2003 YFCY survey in which 40% of KSU’s freshman reported working more than 20 hours a week and only 22% reported not working at all off-campus. Work in the household also competes with studies more at KSU. Substantially more KSU students (80%) than counterparts elsewhere (61%) reported having household/childcare duties. Consequently, it is not surprising that substantially fewer KSU freshmen (14%) compared to their counterparts elsewhere (34%) reported spending 16 or more hours a week in class. That has not changed appreciably since the 2003 survey when only 12% of KSU’s respondents reported likewise.

Engagement in First-Year Learning Communities is Substantially Greater at KSU

Substantially more KSU freshmen (50%) than peers elsewhere (29%) had enrolled in learning communities. Substantially more KSU freshmen (75%) than freshmen elsewhere (57%) had taken a first-year seminar course designed to facilitate adjustment to college. Substantially more first-year students at KSU (44%) than their counterparts elsewhere (26%) had performed community service as part of a class.

Reports of Frequent Boredom in First-Year Classes are Higher at KSU

In the 2003 survey, comparable percentages of KSU freshmen (42%) and their peers elsewhere (45%) reported frequently feeling bored in class. Four years later in 2007, substantially more KSU freshmen (60%) than freshmen elsewhere (44%) reported being frequently bored in class.

KSU Continues to Have Proportionally More Commuters & Fewer On-Campus Residents

Fewer KSU freshmen (27%) than freshmen nationally (39%) reported living in on-campus student housing. More first-year students at KSU (68%) than their counterparts at other public four-year universities (58%) spend time commuting to campus. Shifts toward more traditional patterns at KSU have occurred -- four years ago, the percentage of KSU freshmen commuting to campus was substantially higher at 87%.

Reports of Impersonal Treatment and Isolation from Campus are Higher at KSU

Despite relatively high ratings of student satisfaction with KSU in general, two-thirds of KSU freshmen (62%) compared to less than half of freshmen elsewhere (44%) reported that they felt like they were “just another number on this campus.” (Unfortunately, a comparable item did not exist on the 2003 YFCY survey.) From the perspective of most KSU freshmen (and their peers elsewhere), the faculty and staff were reported to be interested in the students’ academic problems (86% and 79% respectively), but fewer than half that number felt that faculty and staff were interested in the students’ personal problems (45% and 47% respectively). Furthermore, more KSU first-year students (60%) than their counterparts elsewhere (50%) reported feeling isolated from campus since entering college life. The proportion of KSU respondents feeling isolated from campus four years ago was only 40%. Widespread feelings of isolation from the campus were contradicted somewhat by widespread assertions of KSU freshmen that they felt a sense of belonging with the college (70%) and were satisfied with the overall sense of community among students (58%).

Freshmen Engagement in Student Clubs and Groups Continues to be Lower at KSU

More KSU freshmen (68%) than respondents at peer institutions (59%) reported having no involvement in student clubs and groups. There has been some improvement here since the 2003 survey in which 77% of the respondents reported having no involvement in student clubs and groups.

Use of Technology is Higher at KSU

More KSU first-year students (90%) than first-year students elsewhere (79%) reported frequently using the internet for research or homework. Furthermore, all of the KSU respondents to the YFCY (100%) completed the survey over the Web compared to only 40% who did likewise at other institutions.

Engagement of Freshmen in Alcohol Education Programs is Substantially Less than Peers

The reported alcohol consumption of KSU freshmen was comparable to that reported by peers elsewhere. KSU freshmen participation (23%) was comparable to that of peers

elsewhere (27%) in small group discussions about alcohol. However, only 6% of KSU freshmen compared to 24% of their counterparts elsewhere participated in an on-line alcohol program sponsored by the university; only 12% of KSU's freshmen compared to 32% of their peers participated in a live presentation about alcohol by college officials; only 9% of KSU's freshmen compared to 26% of freshmen elsewhere participated in a live presentation about alcohol by college students; and only 27% of KSU freshmen compared to 38% of freshmen elsewhere received written material about alcohol from the university.

KSU Students Are Somewhat More Politically Conservative and Religious

Over a third of KSU's first-year students (39%) compared to a quarter of students elsewhere (26%) consider themselves to be conservative or far-right politically. Only a third of KSU's first-year students (32%) compared to nearly half elsewhere (47%) reported spending no time in prayer/meditation each week. Two-thirds of the freshmen at KSU (66%) compared to half elsewhere (51%) reported attending religious services since entering college. More KSU freshmen (60%) than freshmen elsewhere (49%) considered it very important or essential to integrate spirituality into their lives.

IMPLICATIONS FOR KSU'S FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE PROGRAMMING AND RPG IMPROVEMENT

These findings suggest that academic advising for first-year college students at KSU continues to function below the levels of peer institutions, perhaps topping KSU's list of the needed improvements. Since only two-thirds of the first-year students are moderately satisfied with academic advising at peer institutions and satisfaction at KSU is less, there is substantial room for improvement on this important dimension of the first-year experience if high levels of student satisfaction are to be achieved. Greater attention to career development advising in particular is needed, given the substantial number of first-year students who change their career directions and majors or remain undecided about a major during their first year at KSU.

More proactive strategies to change existing patterns of first-year student behavior that undermine positive academic success are needed. Even though KSU freshmen are not substantially different from freshmen at peer institutions in this regard, the behavior changes needed for increased academic success for freshmen everywhere include: improving time management with a greater focus on academics; spending more time studying; spending less time socializing and watching television; reducing absenteeism in class (and staying awake); preparing for and being actively engaged in classes; using study groups and tutoring services outside of class; upgrading KSU's alcohol education program; etc.

Increased attention is also needed at KSU to address the higher levels of reported isolation from campus life and greater feelings of impersonal treatment at KSU than at peer institutions. Focus group discussions on these particular survey results could be pursued in KSU 1101 sections in an attempt to clarify these student concerns and identify

specific deficiencies in the KSU experience that may be contributing to them. Increased engagement of first-year students in clubs, organizations, and co-curricular activities is also needed. Greater interaction with faculty and support staff on a personal as well as academic level is needed. Shortages of on-campus housing relative to availability at peer institutions may also be contributing to feelings of isolation from campus for freshmen who must live off-campus. Building or acquiring additional student housing may be vital for addressing this issue.

Using group discussions in KSU 1101 about the exceptionally high number of freshmen reporting boredom in first-year classes at KSU might also be instructive for the formulation of strategies to address improvements in that regard. Given the stronger enrollments of KSU freshmen in first-year learning communities and freshmen seminar courses than their peers elsewhere, a focus on how those curricular interventions could be made more interesting and engaging may be warranted. Improvements in the perceived value and relevance of the first-year curriculum are also needed.

If civic engagement and community leadership are to join the mainstream of KSU's educational outcomes, substantial efforts will be needed to change the values orientation of typical first-year students who currently place a low priority on those objectives. Such changes may be difficult to achieve given our society's bent toward financial, career, and personal success. Using the results of this survey about the values orientation of freshmen as a focal point for KSU 1101 class discussions on value clarification might be productive.

Survey results also point toward the need to increase global learning opportunities for first-year students, especially those that will frequently and/or meaningfully engage freshmen with others from different races and cultures. First-year freshmen need more experience and practice "walking-the-talk" of their openness to and effectiveness in diverse settings and group situations. Perceived educational gains in global learning should be raised.

Regardless of how positive KSU's first-year students may be about the university and their overall college experience, KSU's first-year retention rates, progression statistics and six-year graduation rates underscore the need for substantial institutional improvement. The 2007 YFCY survey results converge with data from other recent assessments to spotlight potentially productive directions for improvement initiatives.