



National College Health Assessment Report

Graduate Student Data

2000, 2001, and 2002

*Health Promotion and Prevention Services
University Park Health Center
A Division of Student Affairs
University of Southern California*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	3
Introduction	5
Methods	5
<i>Questionnaire design</i>	5
<i>Procedure</i>	5
<i>Representativeness</i>	5
<i>Analytic strategy/data preparation</i>	5
Demographics	6
Impediments to Academic Performance	7
Health Information and Safety	8
<i>General Health</i>	8
<i>Health Maintenance and Self-Care</i>	8
<i>Health Topic Information from USC</i>	9
<i>Sources of Health-related Information</i>	9
<i>Believability of Information</i>	9
<i>Seatbelt Safety and Helmet Usage</i>	10
<i>Safety Helmet Usage</i>	10
<i>Physical Fights or Assaults</i>	10
Mental and Clinical Health Issues	11
<i>Mental Health</i>	11
<i>Depression Diagnosis and Treatment</i>	11
<i>Abusive Relationships</i>	12
<i>Unwanted Sexual Advances or Assault</i>	12
<i>Reported Frequency of Health Problems</i>	12
Sexual Behavior and Contraception	13
<i>Unintended Pregnancy and Emergency Contraception</i>	13
<i>Contraceptive/Birth Control Methods</i>	13
<i>Condom Use</i>	13
<i>Number of Sexual Partners v. Perceptions</i>	13
<i>Sexual Partners</i>	13
Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs	14
<i>Substance Use v. Perceptions of Use</i>	14
<i>Protective Drinking Behaviors</i>	14
<i>Designated Drivers</i>	14
<i>Alcohol Consumption v. Perceptions of Alcohol Consumption</i>	15
<i>Consequences of Drinking Alcohol</i>	15
<i>Drinking and Driving</i>	15
Weight, Nutrition, and Exercise	16
<i>Weight</i>	16
<i>Weight-related Behaviors</i>	16
<i>Fruit and Vegetable Intake</i>	17
<i>Exercise Habits</i>	17
<i>Strengthening and Toning Exercises</i>	17
<i>Exercise Habits</i>	17
Limitations	18
Conclusion	18
References	19
Acknowledgments	19

Executive Summary

The National College Health Assessment (NCHA) was conducted by Health Promotion and Prevention Services on the University Park Campus in the spring semesters of 2000, 2001, and 2002. The resulting data provides a picture of the health-related attitudes, perceptions and behaviors of USC graduate students on a variety of topics, such as safety, mental and physical health, sexual behaviors, substance use, and nutrition.

The following report includes a number of key findings:

Health Information and Safety

Believability of Information – The source of health related information for graduate students comes mostly from the internet (62.8%), parents (62.2%), and friends (61.1%). Graduate students stated that they are most likely to believe information from health center medical staff (89.8%), health educators (87.7%), and faculty of coursework (62.8%). Graduate Students stated that they are least likely to believe information from friends (21.7%), religious centers (20.6%), and television (18.0%).

Helmet Usage – Among those who rode a bicycle in this sample, 56.5% never wore a helmet. Among those who used in-line skates, 74.9% never wore a helmet. Also among those who rode a motorcycle, only 9.3% never wore a helmet.

Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs

Alcohol Consumption – Among respondents, 85.4% had 0 to 4 drinks the last time they partied, although 42.4% of the respondents perceived that the typical USC student had 5 or more drinks the last time they partied. More specifically 27.6% had zero drinks while students perceived that only 3.8% had the same amount.

Consequences of Drinking Alcohol – As a consequence of drinking, 3.7% of graduate students who drank within the time period of the data, reported that they physically injured themselves. In addition, 3.0% of the graduate student respondents indicated that they drove after having 5 or more drinks within the last 30 days.

Cigarette Smoking – Among respondents, 11.1% of graduate students reported that they smoked cigarettes within the last 30 days with an additional 3.9% who reported that they smoke on a daily basis. Although most graduate students never smoked cigarettes (70.2%), the perception was that 86.9% of typical USC students smoked cigarettes one or more days or on a daily basis in the past month.

Sexual Behavior and Contraception

Sexual Behaviors – 87% of graduate students have had either zero or one sexual partner within the last school year. However, 76.4% of graduate students perceived that the typical USC student has had two or more partners. In addition 35.5% of graduate students used a condom the last time they had vaginal intercourse.

Weight, Nutrition, and Exercise

Within the last 30 days, graduate students reported that they exercised (46.9%), dieted (27.1%), vomited or took laxatives (1.3%), or took diet pills (3.2%). In addition 37.0% of graduate students considered themselves to be slightly or very overweight.

Mental and Clinical Health Issues

Mental Health – Among respondents, 43.8% of graduate students reported having felt so depressed that it was difficult to function at least once during the last school year. 6.4% of the graduate students seriously considered attempting suicide during that same year.

Clinical Health – The most frequently cited health problems experienced by graduate students within the last school year were back pain, allergy problems, sinus infections, and depression. However 91.3% of the graduate students described their general health as being excellent, very good, or good.

Impediments to Academic Performance

Among the graduate students, the four factors which most negatively impacted their academic functioning were stress, cold/flu/sore throat, concern for a troubled friend or family member, and depression/anxiety/seasonal affective disorder.

Perceptions of the Typical Student

In addition to self-reported behaviors USC graduate students were asked about their perceptions regarding the behaviors of the typical USC student. There were a number of misperceptions held by USC graduate students, such as those involving alcohol, cigarettes, marijuana, and cocaine. For instance, 23.6% of graduate students perceived that the typical student drank on a daily basis during the last 30 days when only 0.3% of respondents actually reported having engaged in this behavior.

If you have any additional questions regarding the data provided in this report, please contact Paula Swinford, Director of Health Promotion and Prevention Services at 213/740-4777 or swinford@usc.edu.

Introduction

If the true mission of any college health program is to “advance the health of students,” data describing the health behaviors and status of the student population is a necessary tool. This data helps to inform policy makers, administrators, faculty, staff and students about current health behaviors and helps to set programmatic priorities.

The National College Health Assessment (NCHA) is a national research initiative coordinated by the American College Health Association (ACHA), to assist institutions of higher education in collecting data about the health of their students. The NCHA allows each campus to generate prevalence rates for a variety of health issues at the institution, such as alcohol and tobacco use, sexual behavior, body weight, and mental health.

The goal of this assessment is to provide data on the prevalence and perceptions of student health behaviors. In addition, this survey can provide current information on students’ health status, misperceptions about student behavior, and identify concerns and strengths within the campus community. This data can aid the campus by providing a firm basis for planning and evaluating services that can positively impact students’ safety, well-being and academic performance.

This report provides data on the population of graduate students at the University of Southern California whose numbers are equally proportionate on the campus.

This report summarizes key points from the survey. Due to the length of the survey not all data points have been included. Analyses of additional questions as well as copies of the instrument are available for interested readers through Health Promotion and Prevention Services in the University Park Health Center at 213/740-4777.

Methods

Questionnaire design. The NCHA questionnaire consists of fifty-eight questions divided into seven sections:

- demographic characteristics
- impediments to academic performance
- health information and safety
- mental and clinical health issues
- sexual behavior and contraception
- alcohol, tobacco and other drugs
- weight, nutrition, and exercise

Procedure. The survey was conducted at the University of Southern California in the spring semesters of 2000, 2001, and 2002 and distributed to randomly selected graduate students. A numerical coding system was used to maintain the confidentiality of respondents. Graduate students were also mailed a postcard alerting them to the forthcoming survey, as well as two subsequent mailings after receiving the survey in an effort to increase the return rate. During the three years, the number of returned graduate student surveys was 787. Students who returned the survey were given the option of entering a raffle to win one \$500 gift certificate and two \$250 gift certificates to the USC bookstore as incentives. A numerical coding system was used to maintain the confidentiality of respondents.

Analytic strategy/data preparation. This report focuses on the surveys that were conducted in 2000, 2001, and 2002. Data have been aggregated for the three-year period. Appropriate descriptive statistics have been performed.

Graduate Student Demographics

Descriptor	Category	Percent (n=787)
<i>Age</i>	Under 21	0.1
	21-29	68.9
	30 and higher	31.0
<i>Female</i>		57.0
<i>Full-time student status</i>		84.1
<i>Ethnicity</i>	White – not Hispanic (includes Middle Eastern)	43.4
	Black – not Hispanic	3.3
	Hispanic or Latino	7.3
	Asian or Pacific Islander	39.7
	American Indian or Alaskan Native	0.2
	Other	2.8
<i>International student status</i>		26.7
<i>Membership in fraternity or sorority</i>		8.5
<i>Current relationship</i>	Single	45.7
	Married/domestic partner	27.2
	Engaged/committed dating relationship	25.6
	Separated	0.4
	Divorced	1.1
	Widowed	0.0
		0.0
<i>Sexual orientation</i>	Heterosexual	94.9
	Gay/lesbian	2.0
	Bisexual	1.4
	Transgendered	0.0
	Unsure	1.7
<i>Living situation</i>	Campus residence hall	1.2
	Fraternity or sorority house	0.0
	Other university housing	2.9
	Off-campus housing	76.2
	Parent/guardian's home	9.4
	Other	10.3
<i>Paid hours worked per week</i>	None	37.2
	1 to 19	25.6
	20 or more	37.1
<i>Volunteered 1 or more hrs/week</i>		29.8

All results are reported as percentages.

Impediments to Academic Performance

“Within the last school year, have any of the following affected your academic performance?”

Refer to Question 44 of the survey.

	Received lower grade on exam or project %	Received lower grade in course %	Received incomplete or dropped course %
Alcohol use	1.0	0.1	0.0
Allergies	2.1	0.3	0.0
Assault (physical)	0.0	0.0	0.0
Assault (sexual)	0.1	0.0	0.0
Attention Deficit Disorder	1.4	0.9	0.3
Cold/Flu/Sore throat	9.6	1.2	0.0
Concern for a troubled friend or family member	7.0	1.7	0.3
Chronic illness	1.0	0.1	0.5
Chronic pain	0.9	0.4	0.4
Death of friend or family member	3.1	1.6	0.5
Depression/Anxiety Disorder/Seasonal Affective Disorder	5.8	2.2	0.3
Drug use	0.7	0.3	0.0
Eating disorder/problem	0.7	0.0	0.0
HIV infection	0.0	0.0	0.0
Injury	0.4	0.1	0.5
Internet use/computer games	5.3	0.9	0.0
Learning disability	1.3	0.3	0.1
Mononucleosis	0.0	0.3	0.0
Pregnancy	0.6	0.6	0.3
Relationship difficulty	8.3	1.6	0.4
Sexually transmitted disease	0.3	0.0	0.0
Sinus infection/ear/bronchitis/strep	2.6	0.7	0.4
Sleep difficulties	6.5	1.2	0.1
Stress	13.6	4.2	0.3
Other	5.1	1.9	0.9

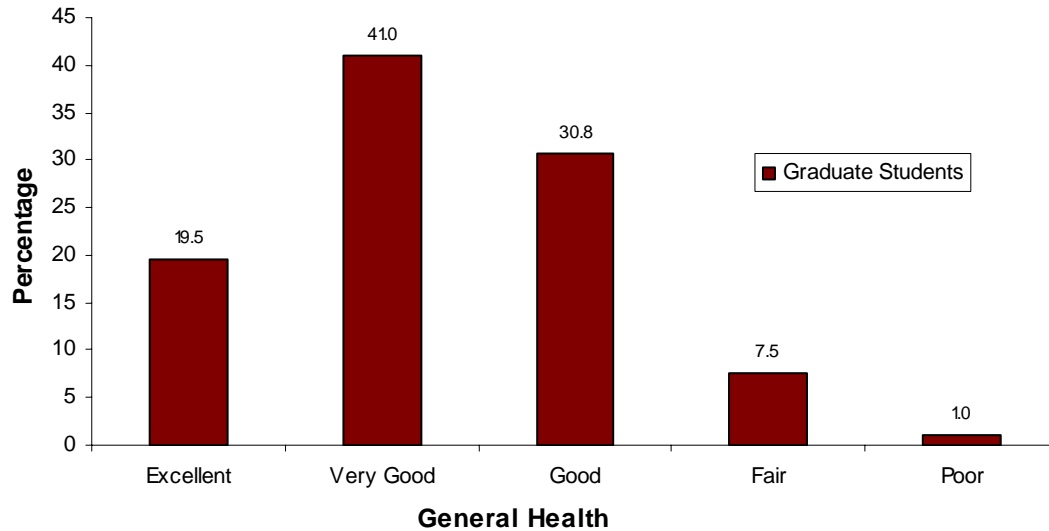
Bolded items represent the top eight items of interest.

Health Information and Safety

General Health -

Refer to Question 1 of the survey.

“Considering your age, how would you describe your general health?”



Health Maintenance and Self-Care -

Refer to Question 42 of the survey.

	Graduate Students %
Dental exam and cleaning in the last year	66.9
Routine GYN exam in the last year (females)	67.1
Breast self-exam in the last month (females)	39.4
Testicular self-exam in the last month (males)	23.0
Vaccinated against varicella (chicken pox)	52.8
Vaccinated against influenza (the flu) in the last year	52.8
Vaccinated against measles mumps, rubella	90.1
Vaccinated against hepatitis B	60.4
Vaccinated against meningococcal meningitis	19.7
Had blood pressure checked in last 2 years	91.4
Had cholesterol checked in last 5 years	49.5
Used sunscreen daily	24.8

Health Topic Information from USC -

Refer to Question 2 of the survey.

“On which of the following health topics have you ever received information from your college or university?”

	Graduate Students %
AIDS or HIV infection prevention	22.6
Alcohol and other drug use prevention	20.9
Dietary behaviors and nutrition	12.3
Injury prevention and safety	11.8
Physical activity and fitness	16.5
Pregnancy prevention	13.1
Sexual assault/relationship violence prevention	18.4
Sexually transmitted disease (STD) prevention	20.3
Suicide prevention	6.6
Tobacco use prevention	12.3
Violence prevention	11.1

Columns sum to more than 100% because multiple responses were possible.

Drug free schools document is mailed out to all students, faculty and staff each academic year.

Sources of Health-related Information -

Refer to Question 4 of the survey.

“Do you usually get health-related information from any of the following sources?”

	Source %	Believability %
Parents	62.2	54.9
Magazines	60.1	27.3
Friends	61.1	21.7
Leaflets, pamphlets, flyers	53.7	58.5
Health center medical staff	54.0	89.8
Internet/world wide web	62.8	24.2
Television	50.2	18.0
Health educators	46.1	87.7
Campus newspaper articles	24.5	42.2
Faculty/coursework	35.5	62.8
Resident assistants/advisors	7.9	25.7
Campus peer educators	9.2	32.7
Religious center	8.4	20.6

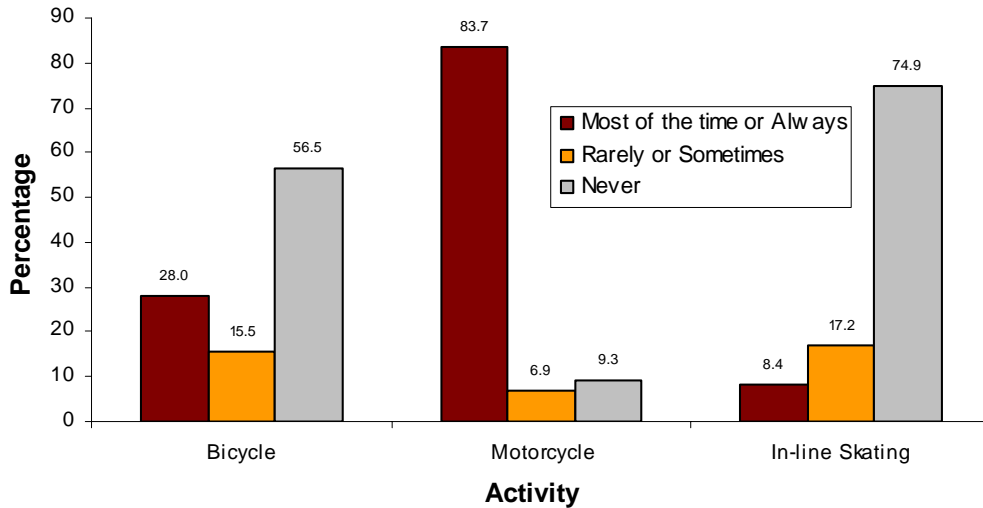
Columns sum to more than 100% because multiple responses were possible.

- **Seatbelt Safety** – 98.2% of graduate students surveyed wore a seatbelt *most of the time* or *always* when riding in a car within the last school year.
Refer to Question 5 of the survey.

Safety Helmet Usage -

Refer to Question 5 of the survey.

[If you rode a bike, motorcycle, or used in-line skates] “within the last school year, how often did you wear a helmet?”



- **Physical Fights or Assaults** – Within the last school year, 2.3% of graduate students surveyed (3.1% male, 1.9% female) reported being involved in a physical fight. Within the last school year, 1.9% of graduate students (0.9% male, 2.6% female) reported that they were physically assaulted (does not include sexual assault).
Refer to Question 6 of the survey.

Mental and Clinical Health Issues

Mental Health -

“Within the last school year how many times have you...?”

Refer to Question 40 of the survey.

	Graduate Students	
	%	
	1-6 times	7 or more
Felt so depressed that it was difficult to function	34.7	9.1
Seriously considered attempting suicide	5.8	0.0
Attempted suicide	0.3	0.3

Depression Diagnosis and Treatment -

Refer to Question 41 of the survey.

“If you have been diagnosed with depression in the past...”

	% Yes	
	Male	Female
Have you been diagnosed within the last school year?	7.1	20.0
Are you currently in therapy for depression?	8.9	23.3
Are you currently taking medication for depression?	15.6	19.8

- **Depression History** – 11.2% of the graduate students surveyed (5.8% male, 15.0% female) responded yes to “Have you ever been diagnosed with depression?”
Refer to Question 41 of the survey.

Abusive Relationships and Unwanted Sexual Advances or Sexual Assault -

Refer to Question 7 and Question 8 of the survey, respectively.

“Within the last school year, have you experienced...?”

	Male %	Female %	Total %
Verbal threats for sex against your will	1.3	2.6	1.9
Sexual touching against your will	0.9	5.4	3.4
Attempted sexual penetration against your will	0.0	0.9	0.6
Sexual penetration against your will	0.0	0.7	0.4

“Within the last school year, have you been in a relationship that was...?”

	Male %	Female %	Total %
Emotionally abusive	6.3	10.2	8.5
Physically abusive	0.6	1.2	1.2
Sexually abusive	0.3	0.5	0.4

Reported Frequency of Health Problems -

Refer to Question 43 of the survey.

	<i>“Within the last school year, have you had any of the following?”</i>	<i>“Have you ever been diagnosed with any of the following?”</i>
	% Graduate %	% Graduate %
Allergy problems	40.8	38.8
Anorexia	0.9	1.7
Anxiety disorder	7.2	6.0
Asthma	7.3	11.4
Back Pain	42.1	20.5
Bronchitis	6.4	19.5
Bulimia	1.0	1.2
Carpal Tunnel Syndrome	5.1	5.2
Chlamydia	0.3	2.8
Chronic Fatigue Syndrome	2.4	1.8
Depression	14.9	11.3
Diabetes	0.5	0.7
Ear Infection	6.5	22.8
Endometriosis	0.8	1.3
Fracture	2.6	15.9
Genital herpes	2.5	3.3
Genital warts/HPV	0.5	3.9
Gonorrhea	0.1	0.5
Hepatitis B or C	1.2	2.8
High blood pressure	3.3	4.8
High cholesterol	4.2	6.5
HIV infection	0.3	0.5
Mononucleosis	0.4	6.1
Pelvic Inflammatory Disease	0.1	0.7
Seasonal Affective Disorder	1.8	1.3
Sinus infection	15.6	25.3
Strep infection	7.1	26.6
Substance abuse problem	1.0	1.2
Tuberculosis	0.7	3.6

Columns sum to more than 100% because multiple responses were possible.

Discrepancies between reported frequency of health problems within the last school year and lifetime diagnosis may be due to self-diagnosis v. professional health care provider diagnosis.

Sexual Behavior and Contraception

- **Unintended Pregnancy** – Among respondents who have had vaginal intercourse, 2.4% have unintentionally become pregnant or gotten someone else pregnant within the last school year.
Refer to Question 30 of the survey.
- **Emergency Contraception** – Among respondents who indicated that they are sexually active, 5.6% have used or had a partner who used emergency contraception (“morning after pill”) within the last school year.
Refer to Question 29 of the survey.

Contraceptive/Birth Control Methods -

Refer to Question 28 of the survey.

“If you have had vaginal intercourse, what method did you or your partner use to prevent pregnancy the last time?”

	Graduate %
Condoms (male or female)	35.4
Birth control pills	31.1
Withdrawal	16.0
Nothing	4.1
Spermicide (e.g. foam)	6.6
Fertility awareness (calendar, mucous, basal body temperature)	4.0
Depo Provera (shots)	1.9
Other method	1.8
Diaphragm/Cervical cap/Sponge	0.8
Norplant (implant)	0.1

Columns sum to more than 100% because multiple responses were possible.
15% of graduate students surveyed reported not having had vaginal intercourse.

Condom Use -

Refer to Question 25 of the survey.

“Within the last 30 days, if you are sexually active, did you use a condom the last time you had oral sex, anal intercourse, or vaginal intercourse?”

	Never did this sexual activity %	No %	Yes %	Don't know/ Don't remember %
Oral sex	21.9	72.6	4.5	1.1
Vaginal intercourse	19.6	44.2	35.5	0.7
Anal intercourse	79.3	13.6	6.2	0.8

Reported as percentages

- **Sexual Partners** – While 87.0% of students have 0-1 sexual partners, 98.0% of students perceive that the typical student has had 2 or more partners.
Refer to Question 20 and Question 22 of the survey, respectively.

Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs

Substance Use v. Perceptions of Use -

Refer to Question 9 and Question 10 of the survey, respectively.

Within the last 30 days:							
Substance	Actual Use: How many days did you use the following substances?				Perception of Use: How often do you think the typical student at your school used the following substances?		
	%				%		
	Never	Not in last 30 days	One or more days	Used daily	Never	One or more days	Used daily
Cigarettes	70.2	14.9	11.1	3.9	13.1	66.8	20.1
Cigars	85.4	13.5	1.2	0	56.8	41.6	1.6
Smokeless tobacco	95.2	4.0	0.8	0	63.3	34.9	1.8
Alcohol	22.5	16.9	60.3	0.3	3.8	72.6	23.6
Marijuana	76.0	16.6	7.1	0.3	33.5	60.0	6.6
Cocaine	94.9	4.6	0.5	0	73.6	25.3	1.1
Amphetamines	92.1	6.2	1.4	0.3	56.4	40.1	3.4
Rohypnol, GHB, Liquid X	97.8	1.9	0.3	0	75.9	23.3	0.8
Other drugs	90.1	7.5	2.0	0.4	55.9	42.7	1.4

All results are reported as percentages.

Protective Drinking Behaviors -

Refer to Question 17 of the survey.

“During the last school year, if you “partied/socialized, did you...?”

	Don't Drink %	Always %	Never %
Use a designated driver	25.0	30.2	10.7
Keep track of how many drinks you were having	25.5	37.3	7.0
Avoid drinking games	26.0	35.6	6.6
Eat before and/or during drinking	23.7	27.0	3.0
Determine, in advance, not to exceed a set number of drinks	23.9	22.8	17.8
Pace your drinks to 1 or fewer per hour	25.8	17.1	13.2
Have a friend let you know when you've had enough	27.7	10.4	32.4
Choose not to drink alcohol	18.8	9.0	5.5
Alternate non-alcoholic with alcoholic beverages	23.8	9.5	15.2
Drink an alcohol look-alike (non-alcoholic beer, punch, etc.)	22.6	3.1	39.3

Since multiple responses were possible, more than 100% may be indicated. Students responded to a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from “never” to “always”, only always and never are reported for simplicity.

- **Designated Drivers** – Of those who drink, 48.6% reported that they *always* or *usually* use a designated driver.

Refer to Question 17 of the survey.

Alcohol Consumption v. Perceptions of Alcohol Consumption -

Refer to Question 13 and Question 15 of the survey, respectively.

“The last time you ‘partied’ or socialized, how many alcoholic drinks did you have?”

“How many alcoholic drinks do you think the typical student at your school had the last time he/she ‘partied’ or socialized?”

	Actual %	Perceived %
0 drinks	27.6	3.8
1-4 drinks	57.8	53.9
5-7 drinks	9.6	34.9
8 or more drinks	4.9	7.5

Consequences of Drinking Alcohol -

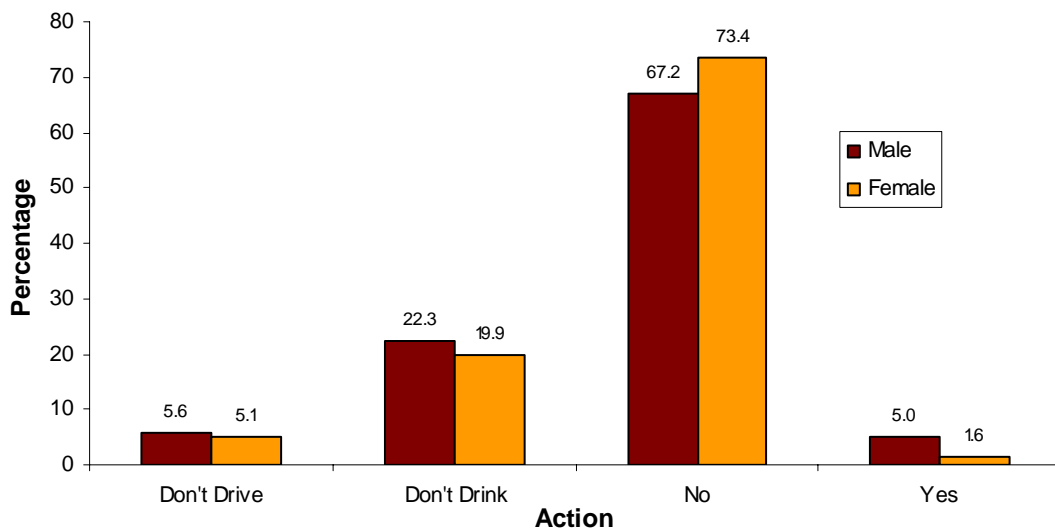
Refer to Question 18 of the survey.

“If you drink alcohol, within the last school year, have you experienced any of the following as a consequence of your drinking?”

	N/A – don’t drink %	% Who Drank	
		No	Yes
Physically injured yourself	25.8	95.1	4.9
Physically injured another person	25.4	99.5	0.5
Been involved in a fight	25.5	98.9	1.1
Did something you later regretted	25.4	83.1	16.9
Forgot were you were or what you did	25.4	87.3	12.7
Had someone use force or threat of force to have sex with you	25.6	99.6	0.4
Had unprotected sex	25.5	91.7	8.3

“Within the last 30 days, did you...

Drive after having 5 or more drinks?”

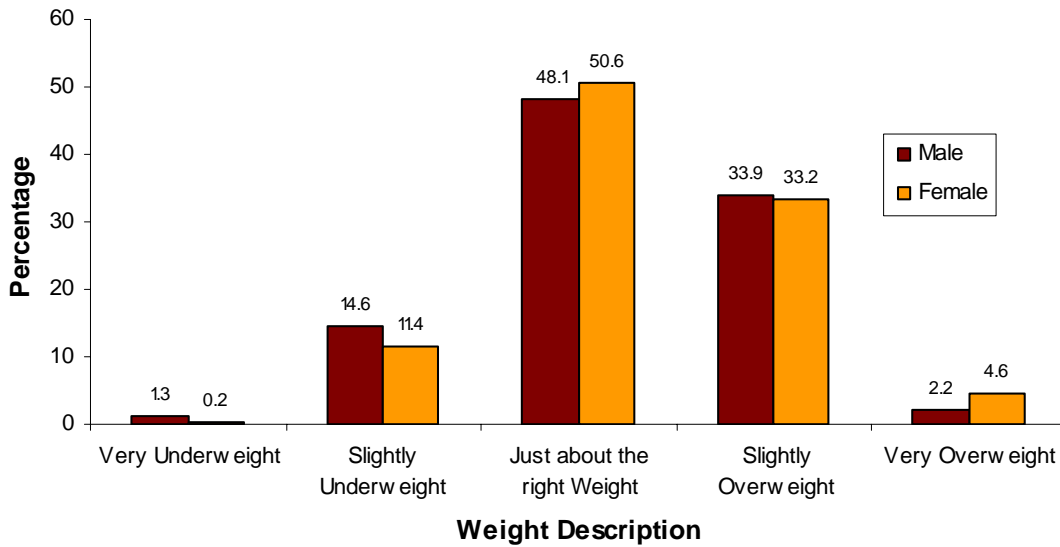


Weight, Nutrition, and Exercise

Weight -

Refer to Question 35 of the survey.

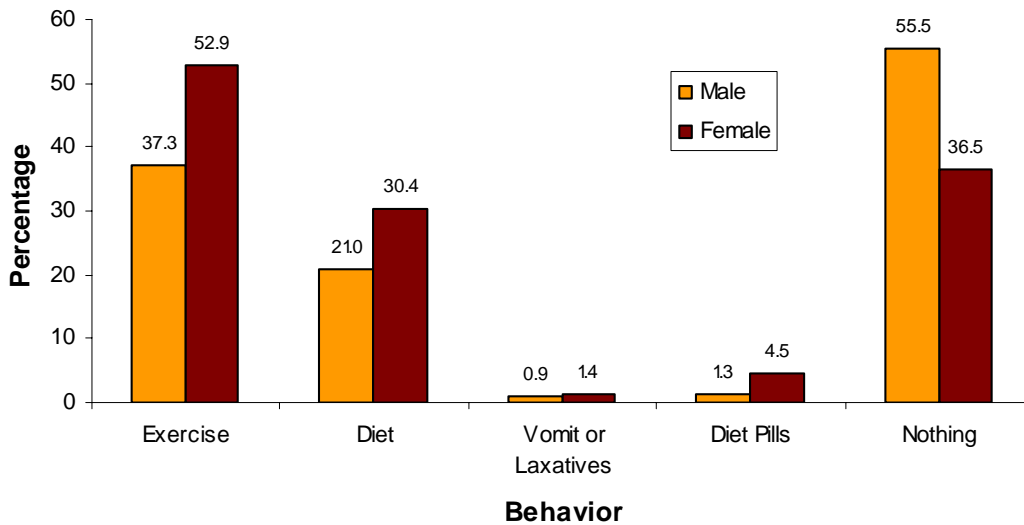
"How do you describe your weight?"



Weight-related Behaviors -

Refer to Question 37 of the survey.

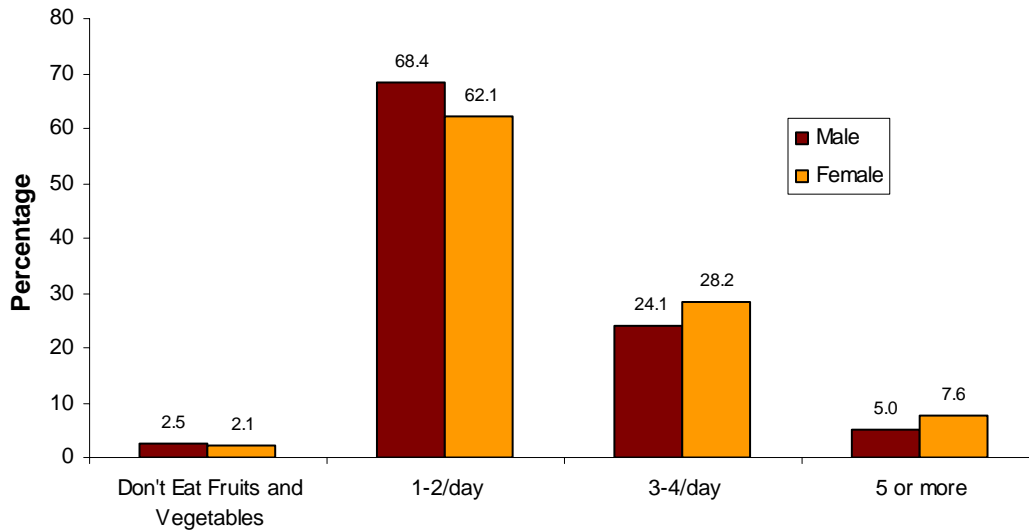
"Within the last 30 days did you do any of the following?"



Fruit and Vegetable Intake -

Refer to Question 38 of the survey.

“How many servings of fruits and vegetables do you usually have per day?”



Exercise and Rest -

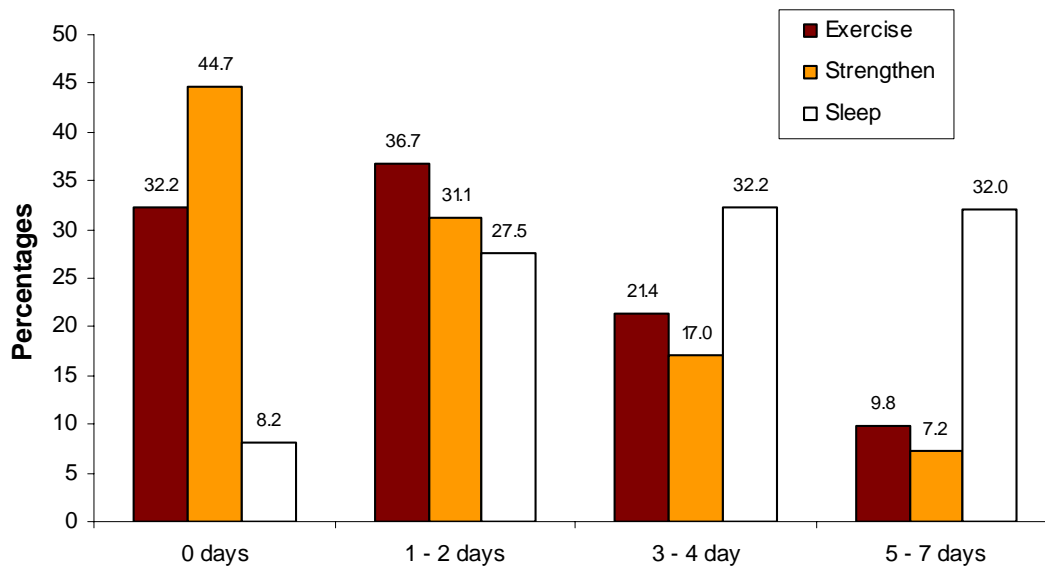
Refer to question 39 of the survey.

“On how many of the past 7 days did you...

Participate in vigorous exercise for at least 20 min. or moderate exercise for 30 min.?

Do exercises to strengthen or tone your muscles?

Get enough sleep so that you felt rested when you woke up in the morning?”



Reported as percentages

Limitations

Surveys are only useful to the extent that they reflect the opinions of the population. While we have established that the sample is representative of the USC University Park Campus in terms of demographics and college major, the degree of representativeness in terms of health-related attitudes and opinions is unknown. The survey results do correlate to similar studies completed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American College Health Association. When a survey includes questions on sensitive subjects such as drug use and sexuality, there is always the possibility that a response bias has influenced the results. However, the literature shows that an anonymous health behavior survey, such as the NCHA, gives the responder an opportunity to share more accurate information than would otherwise be provided. In general, the best way to minimize the chances of a response bias is to achieve a high response rate. The response rate of approximately thirty percent achieved in these surveys, while typical of USC surveys, is not of sufficient size to ensure representativeness on all important factors. It is therefore recommended that the results described in this report be thought of as preliminary until further research is done.

Conclusion

A student's health has a great impact on their academic functioning and performance. Therefore, this data can be utilized by various departments and organizations on campus to form partnerships and collaborations in order to provide a more integrative approach to advancing the health of the students.

Most students reported their general health as being excellent, very good, or good. However, there are a number of specific health issues such as stress, sleep, depression and anxiety that negatively impact the lives of students and should continue to be addressed in programmatic ways by faculty and staff. The rate of depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation experienced by both undergraduate and graduate students underscores the need for continued resources, education, and support in the area of mental health. Finally, with respect to the misperceptions held by students around the behaviors of their peers, continued efforts by the campus community to create and support an accurate picture of USC students are greatly needed.

The mission of the University of Southern California is the "development of human beings and society as a whole through the cultivation and enrichment of the human mind and spirit." In order to truly facilitate this mission, the health of students must be a top priority. The data provided by the National College Health Assessment is a tool for all departments and organizations to use in order to advance the health of our students and aid in their growth as well-functioning individuals in society.

References

ACHA-NCHA website: http://www.acha.org/projects_programs/assessment.cfm

USC University Park Student Health Center website:
http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/Health_Center/

Health Promotion and Prevention Services website:
http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/Health_Center/promotion/index.html

Counseling Services website:
http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/Health_Center/counseling/index.html

If you have any questions about this document and/or the data presented please contact HPPS at 213/740-4777.

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