

2004 USC Freshman Survey

February, 2005

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Every year, USC conducts a survey of its entering class. This survey, part of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), is known by most people as the Freshman Survey. However, at USC, we also make an effort to survey our entering transfer students. The most recent Freshman Survey was conducted in summer 2004. Here are some of the highlights of this year's survey, which are discussed in more detail on inside pages of this newsletter:

- Why go to college? The percent citing parental influence is the highest in four years.
- Why USC? The percent citing USC's academic reputation is the highest ever but the percent citing USC's reputation for social activities is *also* the highest ever.
- Health. For the first time ever, over 50% report exercising five or more hours per week. In addition, smoking has reached an all-time low. Alcohol consumption, which is relatively low by national standards, rose to its highest point since 2000.
- More freshmen than ever report that they volunteered in high school, but the percent planning to volunteer at USC is the lowest it has been since 1998. One possible reason for this is an increase in mandatory high school service requirements.
- Compared to freshmen, transfer students have a lower perception of their academic ability but have a stronger drive to achieve and better time management skills.

More information about this survey, including full results for both freshmen and transfers, long-term trends, procedure, response rate, and representativeness, can be found on the Student Outcomes Research web site at <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/sor>.

How is USC unique among selective private schools?

Early in this decade, USC moved into the most selective freshman survey peer group (those with an average entering SAT score of 1310 or above). How do our freshmen compare to students in this peer group? One difference is that USC freshmen tend to be more career- and success-focused than students at peer institutions:

Important reasons for attending college	USC '04	Peers
To get training for a specific career	70.7	55.4
To be able to make more money	70.0	59.9
To prepare for graduate or professional school	65.0	70.0

Geography is one area of increasing similarity. Almost 50% of students at selective private institutions live at least 500 miles away from school. While USC will always continue to draw large numbers of students from Southern California, the percent who say they live at least 500 miles away is now at 34%, almost twice as it was ten years ago.

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Points of interest

- This newsletter highlights the 2004 freshman survey, including transfer students.
- 2243 freshmen and 194 transfers participated in this year's survey.
- For more information, see our website at www.usc.edu/student-affairs/sor.
- The next issue, which will come out in June, will highlight results from past Senior Surveys and will also provide an advance look at the 2005 Senior Survey, which is currently under way.

2004 USC Freshman Survey

Is it true? A look at how closely USC freshmen reflect national trends

Every February, the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) issues a press release highlighting trends reflected in the most recent freshman survey. How accurately do these trends reflect the responses of USC students? The answer, for this year as well as for most years is...it depends. Some of the trends seem to 'fit' more than others. Let's look at some of the trends identified by HERI for the 2004 survey to see how accurately they describe the responses of USC freshmen for 2004:

Trend 1: Interest in politics grows while support for military spending declines.

Mostly true. Although there was a slight drop in 2004 in the percent of USC freshmen who indicate that keeping up with politics is very important, the percentage who felt this way (49%) is up from the low of 42% in 1998. Support for military spending has dropped from 35% in 2002 (right after 9/11, the first time the question was asked) to 25% this year.

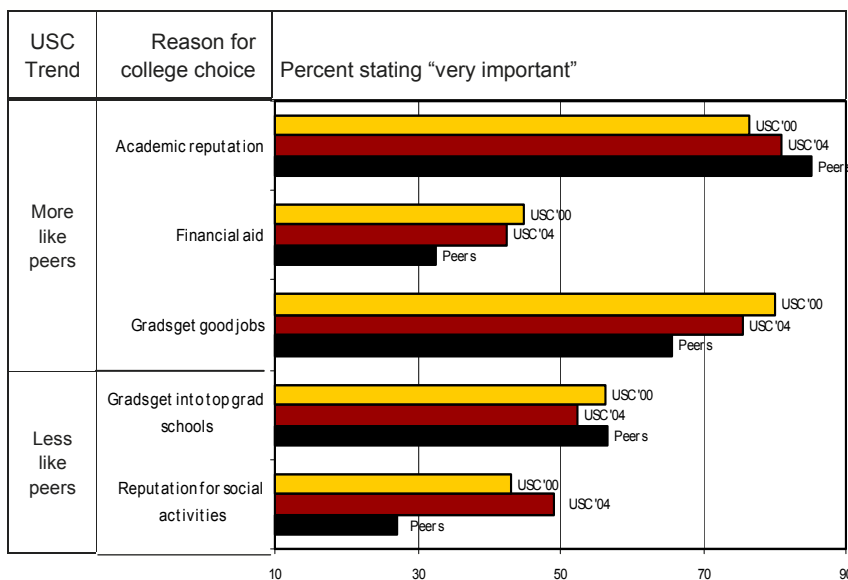
Trend 2: African American and Latino freshmen continue to have less experience with computers than other students.

NOT true! This pattern, which is often called the "Digital Divide," is simply not true at USC. In fact, there are virtually no ethnic differences among USC freshmen in self-reported computer usage during high school.

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How is USC Unique? *(Continued from page 1)*

Turning to the reasons that students give for making their college choice, the Table below shows that USC's freshman class is becoming more similar to other selective private schools on some factors and less similar on others.



Perceived academic reputation is clearly a primary factor in deciding to enroll at selective private institutions. At such institutions, financial aid is less necessary as an incentive. Due in part to higher parental income, many students at such schools apparently feel like employment will take care of itself.

USC is most unique among elite institutions in terms of the large (and increasing) number of students who value social activities in addition to academic reputation. USC freshmen want a "full" undergraduate experience including activities such as student organizations, volunteering, the greek system, intramural sports, and intercollegiate sporting events.

The "Distant Student" issue. The finding that gaining admission to a top graduate school has become slightly less important reason for selecting USC is somewhat at odds with other findings. Usually, elite institutions attract students who have ambitious graduate school aspirations. A partial answer comes from characteristics of the 'distant' students that USC is attracting. Despite high academic qualifications, they are less interested than local students in pursuing a graduate degree and are also less interested in getting into a 'top' graduate school. The shift from a campus dominated by local students to one with a significant representation of 'distant' students has important pedagogical implications as well. Our distant students are less sure of their career path (more likely to transfer, change major and change career choice) than local students. See the Student Outcomes Research web site for additional discussion about the differences between local and distant students and about how USC students are unique.

2004 USC Freshman Survey

How does the 2004 freshman class compare to previous classes?

The 2004 Freshman class is quite different from previous classes in several respects including factors related to self-concept, behavior, and goals/expectations.

Self-concept. The 2004 class is near all-time highs in perceived academic and artistic ability, but is lower on several other dimensions including intellectual self-confidence, self-understanding, spirituality, physical health, and emotional health. All-time highs on these factors occurred three to seven years ago, prior to the recent dramatic increase in academic quality.

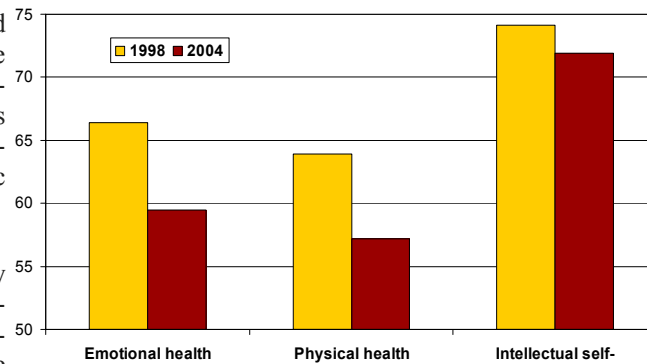
Behavior. Major, mostly positive changes have occurred in freshman behavioral patterns. Cigarette smoking has reached an all-time low. On the other hand, all-time highs were reported in time spent on studying, exercising, volunteer work, tutoring, student clubs/ organizations, reading for pleasure, and playing a musical instrument. A less positive health-related result—a small increase in alcohol consumption. Finally, this class reported less work experience than any class on record.

Goals and expectations. The future for the 2004 freshman class is not uniformly clear and positive. While the percent who expect to be satisfied with their USC experiences is near the all-time high, confidence in academic success (the percent who expect to earn at least a “B” average)

dropped from 75% last year to 70% this year. In terms of the clarity of student plans, Furthermore, the percent of students who expect to change their career choice and seek personal counseling have reached all-time highs. Other changes in expectations include all-time lows in interest in joining a fraternity/sorority and participating in student government and decreases in the percent who plan to work and to engage in volunteer activity. The latter result is surprising given the increase in high school volunteer work.

In terms of long-term objectives, interest in becoming successful in business has increased to a 10-year high. On the other hand, concern with the public ramifications of that success (e.g., recognition from colleagues, becoming an authority in one’s field) has decreased.

Changes in self concept:
Percent that perceive self to be above average



These decreases reflect national trends among college students regardless of the selectivity of the institution.

Is it True? (Continued from P. 2)

Trend 3. Women manage time better but feel more overwhelmed than men.

True! On a new item, it was revealed that the percentage of women who say they are above average in time management is higher than it is for men (48% versus 41%). Given this result, it is a bit surprising that over twice as many USC women than men say that they feel overwhelmed by all they have to do (41% versus 20%).

Trend 4. Interaction across racial/ethnic groups is declining.

Not true. Over 84% of USC freshmen indicated that they interacted at least occasionally with members of other ethnic groups. This percentage has been very stable for over 10 years and is considerably higher than for college students in general.

Trend 5. More freshmen feel that discrimination is no longer a problem; fewer care about promoting racial understanding.

True, with qualifications. For one thing, the described trends can be partly attributed to a lack of events similar to the 1992 L.A. riots over the past dozen years. Second, although USC students' responses do reflect the same long-term patterns, the absolute percentages for USC freshmen on both questions reflect greater levels of sensitivity and concern about racial issues than at the national level.

The full HERI press release for 2004 is available at: http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri/04_press_release.pdf.



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Student Outcomes Research Update

- *Want to know more?* Additional details about the 2004 Freshmen Survey are available on the SOR web site. One report explains the differences between local and distant students in greater detail. Another explains some of the similarities and differences between the freshman and transfer portions of the 2004 entering class. The web site also includes responses to all questions on the 2004 survey as well as long-term trends.
- *2005 Senior Survey.* As this newsletter goes to print, preparations are being made for the 2005 Senior Survey, which will be conducted via the web. This year's survey will cover all aspects of the undergraduate experience and has been specifically designed to address some of the priorities identified in the Division of Student Affairs' new Strategic Plan.
- *2005 Health Survey.* This survey is being conducted this semester by Health Promotion and Prevention Services.
- *2005 Graduate Student Survey.* Following up on the survey conducted in 2002-03, a new survey of all grad students will be conducted this fall.
- *New publishing schedule.* In the future, Survey Insights will be published three times a year: in February, June, and October.

About Student Outcomes Research

A variety of surveys are regularly administered as part of the Student Outcomes Research Program. Information gathered in these surveys is disseminated widely on campus through reports, the *Daily Trojan*, the *USC Chronicle* and via the Student Outcomes Research Web site. Survey results are included in USC's Annual Data Portfolio, and are also used by such diverse bodies as the Student Affairs Council, the Council of Deans, individual academic units and the Student Senate as a basis for performance assessment, program and services development, policy formation and, not infrequently, well-earned self-congratulation.

As a service to the Division of Student Affairs and approved student organizations, Student Outcomes Research also generates reports, lists and analyses using information stored in student databases.

Calendar

2005 Survey Schedule:

Spring '05:	Senior Survey
Summer '05:	Freshman Survey
Fall '05:	Ad Hoc Surveys including a new Graduate Student Survey

Spring '06 Satisfaction Survey

Topics for upcoming newsletters:

June '05:	Senior Survey—Special Topics
October '05:	2005 Senior Survey
February '06:	2005 Freshman Survey

Calendar