

NASPA CONSORTIUM: Profile of Today's College Student, 2008

Key Findings:

The Profile of Today's College Student (PTCS) was administered at the University of Utah in spring, 2008 to random sample of undergraduate students (n=1197; 15% response rate). The PTCS focuses on students perceptions on a wide range of topics and includes an extensive demographics section that presents wider range of characteristics about our students than is typically requested and offers the opportunity to consider students' lives from a multiple-roles perspective. This presentation focused on University of Utah data only and each topic area was discussed with the audience.

Basic Demographics. Of the respondents, 51% were female, 49% were male. Seventy-eight percent of the students identified as White/Caucasian, 7% as Asian/Pacific Islander, 5% Latino, and 3% multiracial/ethnic. Less than 1% identified as Black/African-American, American Indian/Native American and 5% of the sample preferred not to identify. Thirteen percent indicated that they are first-generation college students. Of the sample, 78% were full-time and 39% were transfer students. The sample was fairly evenly distributed across class standing. The top five majors in the sample were Social Sciences (16%), Business (15%), Health Sciences (15%), Engineering (10%) and Humanities/Liberal Arts (10%). Seventeen percent of the sample indicated that they live on campus. Fifty-six percent are single, 41% married/partnered and 15% of the sample have children.

Work Habits. Data from the PTCS suggest that the majority (79%) of students work for pay during the academic year and that 26% of students work more than one job. More than half of University of Utah students (57%) are working more than 20 hours per week. Fifty two percent of students work to pay for some or all of their college and personal expenses, while 28% work to support themselves and their families. Only 5% of students work to gain experience to help with finding a job after graduation.

Why the U of U? The majority of students responding to the survey (83%) indicated that the University of Utah was their first choice. Fifty-six percent of students applied only to the University of Utah. The top five factors related to college choice in order of importance were: Academic reputation, campus location, choice of major, cost and financial aid. Location was the top factor in college choice for both transfer and first generation students. Among students of color, 60% indicated that diversity was an important factor.

Academic Expectations. When asked how the difficulty of coursework matched their expectations, 46% of students indicated that it matched their expectations, 34% expected greater difficulty and 20% expected less difficulty. When asked if students felt prepared for the academic demands for their first year at this institution, 71% of students indicated that felt prepared and 66% indicated that they had the skills to be successful. Interestingly, no differences were found for either first-year students or transfer students for these items.

Learning Preferences. Students indicated that they prefer to learn through class discussions (51%), lectures (27%), small group work (13%), and experiential activities (9%). It is interesting to note that while only 9% of students indicated that they have a preference for experiential learning, 21% of students believe that they learn the most via experiential learning. Additionally, only 1% of respondents perceived that experiential learning is the most common approach used in their classes overall. The majority of students (81%) felt that class discussions are the most common approach. In terms of class attendance, 47% of students responding to the survey rarely miss/skip class and 32% of students sometimes miss/skip class.

Communication. Students communicate frequently with their parents. Forty-six percent indicated that they speak to their parents/guardians daily and 32% indicated that they speak to their parents/guardians a few times per week. Both first-year and female students were more likely to speak to their parents on a daily basis. When asked what students speak to their parents about, 51% indicated “Life in general,” and 33% indicated “Everything. There is nothing that I do not talk about with them.” Another prevalent form of communication is text-messaging. Eighty percent of students use text messaging with 40% indicating that they send many texts daily. Of the students who use text messaging, 67% indicated that they send text messages during class.

In terms of communication on campus, the majority (56%) of students communicate with faculty outside of class, with 63% indicating that they prefer to communicate with faculty via email. According to 51% of students, flyers/posters/banners/chalking are the most common way that they learn about campus events followed by 13% by word of mouth, 10% by campus newspaper and 3% on the web with 10% indicating that they are unaware of campus events.

Opinions, Involvement and Issues. Students were asked to rate agreement on a variety of questions about social issues and campus involvement. Most students agreed/strongly agreed that they are concerned with social issues (68%), that they believe that it is important to make a difference in the world (89%) and that it is important to give back to their community (87%). In addition, 87% of respondents believe that interacting with people from diverse backgrounds will help them after college. A large majority of students agree/strongly agree that racial and gender discrimination still occurs in the US (91% and 83% respectively). In terms of campus involvement and leadership, 46% of students attend campus activities with only 3% of students reporting that they actively participate. In contrast 55% of students would like to be more involved in campus activities.

Goals and Aspirations. Students were asked what the highest degree is that they planned to earn. Forty-two percent of students indicated that they planned to earn a master’s degree, 31% plan to earn a doctorate or professional degree and 27% plan to earn bachelors. Both women and transfer students were more likely to endorse that a bachelor’s degree was the highest degree that they planned to earn while first-generation and students of color were more likely to indicate that they planned to earn doctorates or professional degrees.

Actions Taken:

The findings from this survey have been presented in many different settings. An overview of the data was provided to Student Affairs Directors and Leadership. Individual departments including: Bennion Center, Career Services, Financial Aid, Student Recruitment and High School Services have also requested presentations to their staff. This data has also been presented at University of Utah conferences and retreats as well as at professional conferences.