

Research in BRIEF

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CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY

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CIRP 2011 FRESHMAN SURVEY

Executive Summary (Administered Summer 2011)

In August of 2011, Chapman University's first-time, full-time freshmen were administered the Cooperative Institutional Research Program's (CIRP) Freshman Survey during orientation in a proctored setting. UCLA Higher Education Research Institute distributes the Freshmen Survey to thousands of colleges across the United States as part of a national study of higher education. The survey instrument is four pages long and asks students to report their activities and opinions on variety of issues such as student engagement, career plans, self-perception, and political attitudes. Exactly 991 first-time, full-time freshmen completed the survey last August. This edition of *Research in BRIEF* highlights some of the survey results and compares them to "peer" institutions selected by senior staff and the Institutional Research Office.¹

Sample Characteristics

About 78% of Chapman University's Fall 2011 first-time, full-time freshmen population participated in the Freshman Survey.

2011 Student Population and Sample

	FALL 2011	
	First-Time, Full-Time Freshmen	
	Chapman Population (n = 1,272)	Survey Sample (n = 991)
GENDER		
Male	42.1%	41.7%
Female	57.9%	58.3%
RACE/ETHNICITY		
African-American	1.8%	2.4%
Asian/Pacific Islander [^]	9.8%	18.0%
White/Caucasian	61.6%	79.8%
Hispanic/Latino ⁺	15.1%	14.6%
Native-American	.2%	2.8%
Other/Unknown #	11.6%	5.4%

+ In Freshmen Survey includes Mexican American, Puerto Rican, and Other Latino. ^ In Chapman data includes Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. # In Chapman data includes multiple races, unknown and international.

The racial/ethnic categories between the Chapman's records and the sample are not completely comparable.

Findings show that the percentages associated with the White and Asian categories are higher on the Freshmen Survey. But the sample is predominantly white like the population and the other racial categories match the population reasonably well. The gender distribution for the survey sample closely matches the population.

Background Characteristics

Almost all of the first-time, full-time freshmen identified themselves as native English speakers (91.3%) and U.S. citizens (94.8%). The survey questions about family background reveal that only 6.9% percent of entering freshmen are first-generation college students (i.e., students whose parents never earned a college degree). About 31% of incoming freshmen come from homes that are 50 miles or less from Chapman University and 70.0% of these homes earn a total parental income of \$75,000 or more. When asked to characterize their political views, 36.9% identified as "far left" or "liberal," 41.7% as "middle-of-the-road," and 21.4% as "conservative" or "far right." In comparison to data from a national sample of freshmen, about 30% of freshmen identify themselves as liberal in comparison to 36.9% at Chapman University.

FINDINGS

Admission-Related Issues

The vast majority of incoming freshmen identify Chapman University as their first (57.1%) or second (26.9%) college choice. This finding suggests the high level of school pride freshmen bring to Chapman University. Other data from the Freshman Survey reveal that only 10.1% of entering freshmen reported "major" financial concerns about paying for college.

The survey asked freshmen to reveal which reasons influenced their decision to attend Chapman University. The top two reasons selected were: "I was offered financial assistance," (66.9%) and "This college has a very good academic reputation," (65.4%). Graduates' ability to get good jobs and its small size were other attractive

features. In 2007, 70.1% of entering Chapman freshmen indicated that academic reputation was “very important,” the second highest percentage ever reported. Since then the percentage for this item has declined to 69.9% in 2009 before dropping to 65.4% this year. A small decline though is expected given the historical high in 2007.

Top 5 Reasons For Deciding To Go to “This” College

	Chapman University		Peer Group	
	Rank Order	%	Rank Order	%
I was offered financial aid.	1	66.9%	3	56.5%
This college has a very good academic reputation.	2	65.4%	1	71.0%
I wanted to go to a school about the size of this college.	3	54.1%	4	52.8%
A visit to the campus.	4	53.1%	5	52.3%
This college's graduates get good jobs.	5	53.0%	2	63.2%

% = indicating "very important" reason

In comparison to the peer group, freshmen in the peer group placed more importance on a college’s academic reputation and graduates’ ability to get a good job and less importance on financial aid.

Academic Expectations & Self-Confidence

The results show that Chapman freshmen enter college with high degree aspirations. The majority of students intend to pursue a master’s (46.4%) or doctorate (12.2%) degree. When compared to their peers, Chapman freshmen are slightly more likely to aspire to a master’s degree, but less likely to pursue other post-secondary degrees.

Highest Academic Degree Planned Anywhere

	Percent	
	Chapman University	Peer Group
Bachelor’s degree	28.0%	18.2%
Master's degree	46.4%	42.0%
Ph.D. or Ed.D.	12.2%	17.4%
M.D., D.O., D.D.S, D.V.M.	6.2%	12.6%
J.D. (Law)	5.9%	7.0%
Other	0.9%	1.7%

Besides ambitious degree aspirations, 74.2% of Chapman freshmen expected to achieve at least a “B” average and only 4.6% of freshmen expected to take extra time to complete their degree requirements. Likewise, expected satisfaction with Chapman University was high (67.0%) and the vast majority of freshmen expected to communicate regularly with their professors and stay at Chapman University rather than transferring (82.4% of respondents reported “no” to “very little” chance of transferring elsewhere in the survey). While not as high as the previous items, about 24% of freshmen expected to work on a research project with a professor.

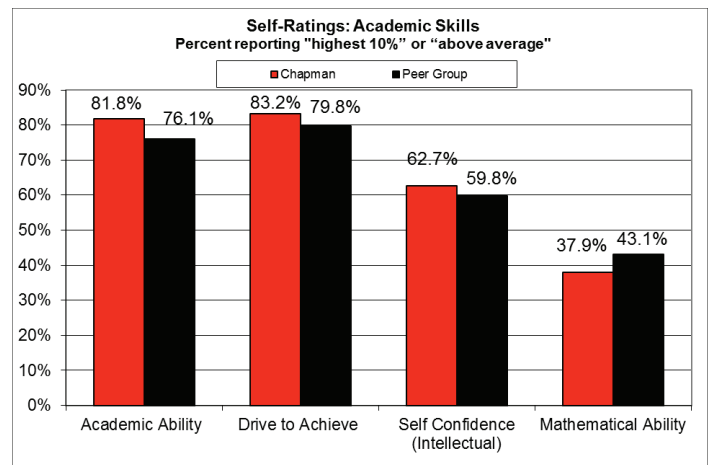
Chapman freshmen reported a strong sense of focus as indicated by the small percentage of respondents reporting a “very good” likelihood of changing their major (13.3%) or career choice (12.0%). The peer group data show that Chapman freshmen and their peers reported similar expectations about changing majors or career choice, working full-time, and needing extra time to complete a degree. However, the percentage of freshmen who reported making a “B” average, being satisfied with their enrolled institution, and expected regular communication with professors was about 4-5% higher among Chapman freshmen. The “work on a professor’s research project,” item was the only question where a higher percentage of freshmen in the peer group expressed more interest.

Chapman University Freshmen Academic Expectations

	Percent	
	Chapman University	Peer Group
Make at least a "B" average	74.2%	70.4%
Be satisfied with your college	67.0%	62.6%
Communicate regularly with your professors	48.1%	43.3%
Work on a professor's research project	24.2%	29.1%
Change major field	13.3%	12.3%
Change career choice	12.0%	12.0%
Work full-time while attending college	6.7%	5.6%
Need extra time to complete your degree requirements	4.6%	5.1%

% = indicating "very good chance"

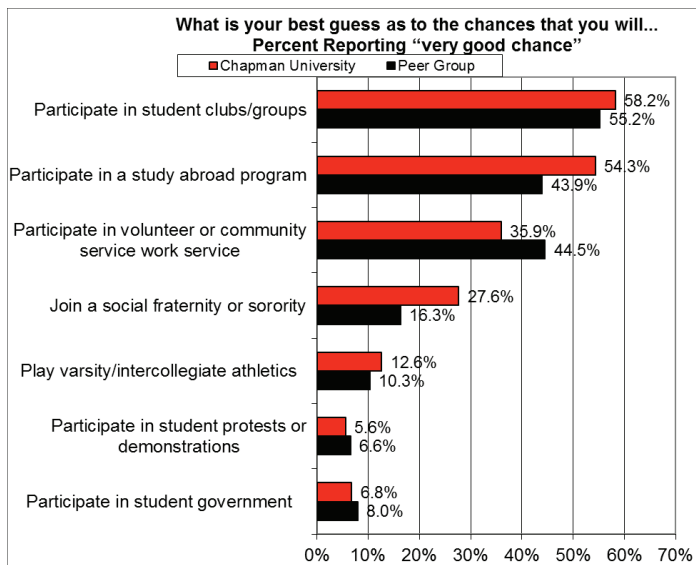
The Freshman Survey asks students to rate themselves on several characteristics (as compared to the average person their age) using a five-point scale from “highest 10%” to “lowest 10%.” Findings show that the majority of freshmen begin college with very positive perceptions of their “drive to achieve” and “academic skills.”



In comparison to the peer group, the bar graph illustrates that Chapman freshmen are more secure in their academic ability, drive to achieve, and intellectual self-confidence. However, Chapman freshmen reported lower confidence in their mathematical ability. Other self-rating items not reported in the bar graph show that Chapman freshmen view themselves as highly collegial. About 77% and 74% of freshmen rated themselves in the “highest 10%” or “above average” on “cooperativeness” and “understanding of others” items. The “creativity” item shows that 27.6% rated themselves in the “highest 10%” in comparison to 16.3% in the peer group.

Anticipated Activities at Chapman University

Using a 4-point scale from “no chance” to “very good chance,” freshmen were asked to take their best guess as to the chances they would get involved in a variety of academic and non-academic activities.



About 58% and 54% of Chapman freshmen indicated that there was a “very good chance” that they would participate in a student club/group and a study abroad program respectively. Participation in community service and Greek life also drew a respectable amount of interest at 35.9% and 27.6% respectively. The rest of the items in the chart attracted 12% of interest or less. The findings from the peer group data reveal similar levels of reported interest for most of the survey items. However, about 10% more of Chapman freshmen expressed interest in participating in a study abroad program, but they reported about 10% less interest in community service. The historical data shows that the percentage of students who reported interest in Greek life has steadily increased from 7.9% in 2007 to 27.6% in 2011.

Political Attitudes

The findings show that Chapman freshmen reported liberal attitudes on various social issues. Chapman freshmen

reported strong support for the legalization of abortion, same-sex marriage, federal intervention to fix global warming, and national health care coverage. But support for the national health care item has been declining from 72.5% in 2007 to 58.5% in 2011. A similar decline has occurred for the global warming item. The item declined from 80.6% percent in 2007 to 65.1% in 2011. While the majority of freshmen still support federal intervention to address these social issues, support is waning with each passing cohort. A new item to the Freshmen Survey, “Undocumented immigrants should be denied access to public education,” show that 40.7% of freshmen agree with this statement. Chapman freshmen reported similar attitudes as the peer group except for the abortion item. For this item, 71.6% of Chapman freshmen favor abortion compared to 58.5% in the peer group.

Political Attitudes

	Percent	
	Chapman University	Peer Group
"Strongly Agree" or "Somewhat Agree"		
Same sex couples should have the right to legal marital status.	77.7%	71.3%
Abortion should be legal.	71.6%	58.5%
The chief benefit of a college education is that it increases one's earning power.	69.5%	69.3%
Addressing global warming should be a federal priority	65.1%	62.3%
A national health care plan is needed to cover everybody's medical costs.	58.5%	56.8%
Undocumented immigrants should be denied access to public education.	40.7%	43.5%

Post Graduation Goals

When asked about their probable occupation, Chapman University freshmen were much more likely than their peers to select a career in the arts. Given that 14.5% of students chose “other career,” the Freshmen Survey’s classification scheme does not adequately capture the range of occupational choices preferred by a small portion of Chapman freshmen.

Top Four Probable Careers

	Percent			
	Chapman University			Peer Group
	All	Men	Women	All
Other Career	14.5%	13.5%	15.2%	8.6%
Undecided	12.3%	12.2%	12.3%	13.9%
Business Executive	11.3%	15.3%	8.3%	11.2%
Actor/Entertainer	8.6%	7.9%	9.1%	1.6%

Other surveyed occupations not reported in the table above attracted no more than 4% interest. The findings also reveal that Chapman University’s males were more likely to express an interest in artistic or business careers than females. HERI also provides aggregated career results that are not reported in the table above but combines groups of occupations into one category. Besides “other” and “undecided,” the “artist” and “business” categories are the most popular categories at 25.5% and 17.5% respectively. Only 7.8% of respondents in the peer group reported an interest in an “artist” career. Growing enrollment in the Dodge College of Film and Media Arts and the College of Performing Arts is most likely driving this difference.

The Freshman Survey asks respondents to assign a level of importance to a series of future objectives. Findings suggest that the majority of Chapman University freshmen are interested in “raising a family” and “attaining financial security,” as well as “helping others who are in difficulty.” The peer group data show that Chapman freshmen and their peers rank order future objectives in an identical manner. But a higher proportion of freshmen at peer institutions assign more importance to helping others in difficulty. This finding is consistent with the earlier results showing that a higher percentage of freshmen at peer institutions report an interest in participating in community service. However, a higher proportion of Chapman freshmen reported placing more importance on developing a meaningful philosophy of life.

Top 7 Future Objectives

	Chapman University		Peer Group	
	Rank	%	Rank	%
Being very well off financially	1	77.4%	1	79.0%
Raising a family	2	71.6%	2	76.9%
Helping others who are in difficulty	3	66.6%	3	74.6%
Becoming an authority in my field	4	64.8%	4	60.7%
Obtaining recognition from my colleagues for contributions to my special field	5	60.1%	5	57.3%
Improving my understanding of other countries and cultures	6	60.1%	6	56.7%
Developing a meaningful philosophy of life	7	56.6%	7	50.8%

% = indicating goals were “very important” or “essential”

CONCLUSION

Overall, the results show that the majority of the incoming freshmen ranked Chapman University as their first choice because of generous financial aid, the school’s academic reputation, and Chapman’s size. Freshmen enroll with high

self-confidence in their “academic ability” and a strong belief in their ability to work and empathize with others. Like most other freshmen, Chapman freshmen view themselves as being liberal and express liberal attitudes on several issues such as same sex marriage and abortion. Once arriving at Chapman University, freshmen expect several academic outcomes such as long term enrollment at Chapman University, regular interaction with their professors, at least a “B” grade point average, and participation in study abroad programs and student clubs. After leaving Chapman University, freshmen value certain broad goals such as financial success, raising a family, gaining the respect of colleagues, and developing a life philosophy. And freshmen report “artistic” and “business” as desirable career fields but no particular occupation attracted more than 12% of interest.

From a policy standpoint, the results show that financial aid is becoming increasingly important to freshmen. As Chapman University looks to attract the best students, financial aid packages will continue to be an important feature even more so today. The percentage of freshmen who noted this reason as “very important” has increased from 59.9% to 66.9% between 2007 and 2011. In addition, academic reputation and graduates’ ability to get “good” jobs continue to be important reasons. The Strategic Marketing and Communication Department may find this information helpful when deciding which types of information to feature in their promotional channels.

In structuring future co-curricular activities, the results show strong and increasing interest in student clubs and study abroad. Reported interest in student clubs increased from 53.2% in 2007 to 58.2% in 2011, while the study abroad item increased from 51.7% to 54.3% during the same time frame. Expanding study abroad opportunities could also fulfill reported desire among freshmen to improve their understanding of other countries and cultures. In order to improve student involvement, efforts to expand student clubs to include more recreational sport options may be an effective strategy. The results are not reported above, but 60.2% of Chapman freshmen reported an interest in playing “club, intramural, or recreational sports.” The expansion of athletic club options could represent another strategy to improve retention through improving student integration.

¹ The list of schools includes University of the Pacific, Pepperdine University, University of Redlands, Quinnipiac University, Loyola University of Chicago, Seton Hall University, Fordham University, Texas Christian University, Seattle Pacific University, and Bryant University.