

## 1998 College Student Survey (CSS): Methodology and Response Frequencies

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### INTRODUCTION

For the past several years, the Office of Educational Assessment (OEA) has conducted annual surveys of University of Washington (UW) seniors. These surveys have asked a variety of questions about UW undergraduate educational programs, but have had no frame of reference outside of this institution. To provide a national, norms-based context for the [1998 Senior Survey](#), the College Student Survey (CSS) of the [Cooperative Institutional Research Program \(CIRP\)](#) was administered to a randomly chosen sample of UW seniors. The CSS provides normative profiles of UW seniors in comparison to seniors across the nation, and augments information on UW seniors with measures that are not included in the 1998 Senior Survey. In addition, some of the items from the CSS (such as measures of aspirations, self-concepts, and volunteer/service work) coincide with similar items found on the 1998 Senior Survey, allowing the CSS to act as a validity check for the University of Washington's internal assessment of 1998 seniors. The CSS was added as a companion to the Senior Survey as part of a larger UW project evaluating the worth of a college education at the UW and overall. This report describes the methodology used for the 1998 College Student Survey.

### METHODOLOGY

#### Sample

In spring, 1998, questionnaires were sent to 500 randomly selected seniors (6% of the 8472 total). For the purposes of this study, seniors were defined as those students who had earned 135 or more credits towards graduation and who were enrolled at the Seattle campus during spring quarter, 1998. Many, but not all, of these students graduated at the end of that quarter. Students who were sent the 1998 Senior Survey were not eligible for inclusion.

#### Instrument

Since 1966, the nationally recognized Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) has conducted annual surveys of entering college freshman and follow-up surveys of the same students for longitudinal analyses. The purpose of this on-going research project is to "assess the effects of college [over time] on students"<sup>2</sup> and to compile normative profiles of college students. The program is housed at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) within the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies and is sponsored by UCLA and the American Council on Education.<sup>3</sup>

The Annual Freshman Survey (also known as the Student Information Form or SIF) provides information on students prior to any college exposure.<sup>4</sup> Information collected on the SIF includes: basic demographic and biographical data; plans and aspirations; high school achievements and activities; and beliefs, goals and self-concept.<sup>5</sup> The College Student Survey (CSS) is designed to profile students during their enrollment, either as a follow-up to the SIF or as an independent measure. It includes items relating to students' academic and social experiences at college as well as their future goals and aspirations, and is most often used as a senior-exit survey. CIRP surveys provide norms-based profiles of American college students utilized by a number of diverse campus constituents: administrators in strategic or resource planning, student affairs, educational research and assessment, counseling services. Future and current college students, their parents, and college faculty also find the normative profiles from the CIRP data to be informative. All questions on the SIF and CSS are in closed-ended, forced-choice format and the survey instruments are revised annually.

The UW has previously participated in the CIRP program. The SIF was administered to samples of entering freshmen during 1990 and 1991,<sup>6</sup> but the CSS has not been administered at this institution prior to the current survey.

### **First mailing**

Questionnaires were mailed at the beginning of May, along with a personalized cover letter and a self-addressed, stamped envelop for survey return. Students in one-half of the sample were also sent a UW "Husky" sticker to test the effectiveness of such enclosures as an incentive to return the survey. A total of 98 (20%) students completed and returned the survey from the first mailing. Of those who had been sent a sticker, 59 (23.6%) returned a survey compared to 39 (15.6%) of those who had not been sent a sticker. The additional 8.0% response corresponds to the 7.6% increase found with the Senior Survey mailing and seems well worth the use of this type of incentive.

### **Follow-up mailings**

Two follow-up mailings were sent to students who had not returned a completed survey. The first of these, conducted three weeks after the first mailing, consisted of another copy of the questionnaire, a personalized letter, and a return envelope. Two weeks later a post-card reminder was mailed to all those who still had not returned a completed survey. A total of 161 questionnaires were returned, yielding an overall response rate of 33.3% (adjusted by reducing the total number of questionnaires sent by the 17 returned as undeliverable).

## RESPONSE FREQUENCIES

Response frequencies have been taken from a report provided by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP). Also included in these tables are national comparative frequencies.

### PAGE 1

Number of students  
Year entered first college  
Year entered current college  
Degree earned by June 1998  
Highest degree planned anywhere  
Average undergraduate grade

### PAGE 3

General activities in the past year  
Activities with member of different racial/ethnic groups  
Racial background  
Plans for fall 1998

### PAGE 5

Hours per week in the last year spent on:  
Working (for pay)  
Volunteer work  
Clubs/Groups  
Watching TV  
Household/Childcare duties

### PAGE 7

Students reporting much stronger abilities and skills in 1998  
Student rated self above average or highest 10% in...  
Professors frequently provided...

### PAGE 9

Major reported in 1998  
Planned graduate major

### PAGE 2

Events since entering college  
Academic activities since entering college

### PAGE 4

Hours per week in the last year spent on:  
Studying/Homework  
Socializing with friends  
Talking w/faculty outside class  
Exercising/sports  
Partying

### PAGE 6

Hours per week in the last year spent on:  
Reading for pleasure  
Using a personal computer  
Commuting  
Classes/Labs  
Arcade/Video games

### PAGE 8

College activities noted very satisfactory or satisfactory  
Re-enroll at this college?  
Student native English speaker?

### PAGE 10

Any community service/volunteer activities noted?  
How was service performed?  
Kind of service performed  
In connection with community service, student...  
Religious preference in 1998

**PAGE 11**

Probable career in 1998  
Student objectives noted as very important or essential

**PAGE 13**

Probable career noted in 1998  
(disaggregated responses)

**PAGE 15**

Major reported in 1998  
(disaggregated responses, 2nd page)

**PAGE 17**

Probable graduate major  
(disaggregated responses, 2nd page)

**PAGE 12**

Political orientation  
Agrees strongly or somewhat...  
Permission to use SSN

**PAGE 14**

Major reported in 1998  
(disaggregated responses, 1st page)

**PAGE 16**

Probable graduate major  
(disaggregated responses, 1st page)

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<sup>2</sup> Sax, L.J., Astin, A.W., Korn, W. S., & Mahoney, K.S. (1996). **The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 1998**. Los Angeles, California: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies.

<sup>3</sup> Astin, A.W. (1991). **Assessment for Excellence: The Philosophy and Practice of Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education**. Washington, D.C.: MacMillan.

<sup>4</sup> Astin, A.W. (1991). p. 153.

<sup>5</sup> Astin, A.W. (1991). p. 161.

<sup>6</sup> Gillmore, G.M. & Lowell, N. (1991). *The Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Survey of University of Washington Freshmen: 1990 Results*. **OEA Reports, 91-2**;  
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