

Report on the 2001 Senior College Student Survey
At Messiah College

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The College Student Survey (CSS), developed by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA, was administered to seniors on 150 campuses during the spring of 2001. The total size of the sample was 40,424 students. Messiah College participated in this project and had 152 seniors complete the survey. Of these seniors, we have corresponding data from a similar first year survey for 129 respondents (Cooperative Institutional Research Project) which was given to these students at the beginning of the fall term in 1997. Thus, we have two groups of seniors represented: those for whom we have freshman year and senior year responses and those for whom we only have senior year data. The total number of variables in the CSS is in excess of 500 items, which provides a rich source of data on senior students at Messiah.

It is possible to make several comparisons based on the CSS data. First, UCLA provides a number of national comparative groups. The two groups closest to Messiah in the sample are "Protestant Colleges" and "All Private Colleges". This comparative data is available in the national report published by the Higher Education Research Institute. We will use the Protestant Colleges as our comparison group. Second, we can compare freshmen responses with seniors to note certain changes (the CIRP and CSS are designed to have a number of items with identical wording). In this report we will proceed by first reporting the highlights of the data for the total senior sample (n=152), then we will summarize some of the important changes noted between freshmen and senior years (n=129). In the statistics, below the numbers in [brackets] represent the Protestant College data.

Background Data: Sample

The seniors had a gender breakdown of 23.7% [35.6%] male and 76.3% [64.4%] female, indicating the predominance of women students at Messiah and among Protestant schools. All students were full time (100.0% [92.6%]) and most came from Caucasian ethnic backgrounds (97.4% [78.4%]). About 14.5% [22.8%] indicated that they had actually started college earlier than 1997. The number of students reporting transferring from another college was 11.2% [21.9%]. In planning for fall 2001, approximately one in five students planned on graduate study (19.1% [24.4%]), while almost 88% [78%] planned on working either part time (9.2% [17.0%]) or full time (78.3% [61.0%]). Other more commonly cited plans include travel, volunteer work and work in non-profit organizations.

Student Activities

The CSS reports a number of types of student activities: general events since entering college; academic activities since entering college; general activities during the past year and activities with members of different racial or ethnic groups.

Activities since entering college: Of the 23 different “events” since entering college, the following were the most common activities:

	MC	Protestant
Had a part time job on campus	81.6%	56.4%
Took ethnic studies course	75.0	42.1
Voted in state/national election	69.5	71.5
Had a part time job off campus	45.4	57.9
Internship program	41.4	41.5
Participated in racial awareness workshop	32.9	25.6
Participated in leadership program	25.0	24.9

Other interesting highlights of this section (events since entering college) include the fact that about 23.0% [22.3] of the students participated in intercollegiate sports (all sports) while 61.7% [46.0%] participated in intramural sports; and only 5.3% [6.0%] of the students got married during their college years.

Academic activities since entering college: Many students reported *frequent* peer interaction in connection with academic activities: group projects in class (53.6%); studying with other students (42.1%); and discussing courses with other students (76.8% [69.4%]). Many students were guests in professors’ homes (79.4% [55.7%]) and felt that the faculty took a personal interest in them (89.5%). Yet, over half (59.2% [58.7%]) had the experience of feeling that the faculty “didn’t take me seriously”. Other common activities included interdisciplinary studies courses (93.3% [57.4%]), independent study projects (52.3% [62.9%]), and challenging a professor’s ideas in class (72.4% [75.4%]). Less common was taking honors or advanced courses (7.9% [19.4%]).

General activities in the past year: This category summarizes a number of personal behavioral issues which profile areas of student life concerns. Alcohol use during the past year was reported by a minority of students but still represents a significant level of use: drinking beer (28.9% [56.0%]); drinking wine or liquor (48.0% [67.5%]). Significant numbers of students have experienced occasional or frequent homesickness (75.7% [54.9%]) and depression (68.3%). Almost one half of the students (46.7% [35.2%]) reported *frequently* feeling overwhelmed. Many students discussed politics (92.1%), and did volunteer work (91.4% [80.1%]).

Hours Per Week in Different Activities

The CSS gathers information on the “time log” of students. Respondents are asked to estimate the number of hours per week they spend in a variety of social and academic activities. The answers are grouped in categories of one to two hours, three to five hours, six to ten hours, etc. Data are reported in percentages of students in each category. Thus, precise estimates of actual hours are not available. However, it is possible to *estimate* the time distribution in the various categories. Here are the estimated times in various activities ranked from most time spent to least time spent:

	MC (2001)	Protestant	MC (2000)
Studying/homework	14.35hrs	9.90hrs	13.45hrs
Classes/Labs	13.51	11.42	14.08
Socializing with friends	10.45	10.63	11.47
Working for pay	9.00	11.31	10.29
Using a personal computer	7.63	7.18	5.92
Exercising/sports	3.90	5.23	4.39
Watching TV	3.43	4.17	4.51
Prayer/Meditation	2.86	2.29	n/a
Volunteer work	2.00	2.14	2.59
Student clubs/groups	1.84	2.10	2.69
Talking w/faculty outside of class	1.75	1.90	1.31
Household duties/child care	1.68	2.32	2.27
Reading for pleasure	1.45	1.73	1.74
Commuting	1.17	2.60	2.62
Partying	1.13	3.54	2.14
Arcade/video games	0.34	0.90	2.53
Estimated total	76.19	79.36	82.0

Self Report of Student Abilities and Skills

The CSS includes several sets of questions that tap student self reports of their abilities and skills. One set of questions asks students to decide if their abilities are “stronger” in a certain area than when they entered college. While this may not mean that students have actually acquired stronger abilities in these areas, this information is an important depiction of how these seniors *perceive* their own development during their college years. Below are the top six areas where students report themselves as stronger as well as the bottom six areas (e.g., the six areas where they report the least progress).

Top six areas perceived as “much stronger” in 2001 (percent reporting):

	MC	Protestant
Knowledge of a particular field of study	77.6%	60.3%
General knowledge	52.0	44.3
Computer skills	42.8	34.1
Religious beliefs & convictions	41.4	22.8
Critical thinking ability	39.5	35.2
Interpersonal skills	34.9	32.2

Bottom six areas perceived as “much stronger” in 2001(percent reporting):

	MC	Protestant
Ability to work cooperatively	21.7%	23.3%
Acceptance of different races/cultures	20.4	21.3
Understanding community problems	19.1	19.2
Reading speed/comprehension	11.2	17.5
Mathematical skills	8.6	11.2
Foreign language ability	7.2	11.0

Another set of questions asks students whether or not they would rate themselves “above average” or “in the highest 10%” in 15 different areas. Here are the top six and bottom six rankings of these self reports:

Top six areas where students rank themselves as above average or top 10%:

	MC	Protestant
Academic ability	75.0%	73.7%
Cooperativeness	70.2	73.6
Religiousness/religiosity*	67.3	43.3
Understanding of others	67.1	70.1
Leadership ability	67.1	66.0
Drive to achieve	59.9	74.8

* new in 2001

Bottom six areas where students rank themselves as above average or top 10%:

	MC	Protestant
Creativity	44.4%	56.0%
Competitiveness	42.8	57.3
Physical health	39.5	50.2
Public speaking ability	36.8	47.5
Mathematical ability	34.2	33.1
Artistic ability	25.7	31.4

Interactions with Faculty (Professors)

Students are asked to evaluate how “frequently” their professors provided certain kinds of interaction with them. There are a number of interesting items in this section which give a sense of the quality of relationships between faculty and students at Messiah. Generally, there is a positive profile of this interaction. For example, only 2.0% [7.1%] of the students said that faculty frequently gave them negative feedback about their abilities. On the other hand, 64.5% [62.1%] of the seniors reported that faculty frequently “treated them like a peer” (e.g., with respect). Here are some additional examples of areas regarding faculty. It is perhaps a bit surprising that only about 1/3 of the students experienced frequent encouragement for graduate studies.

Professors *frequently* provided:

	MC	Protestant
Provided respect	64.5%	62.1%
Intellectual challenge/stimulation	54.6	46.8
Opportunity to discuss course work	52.0	44.3
Encouragement to grad/prof school	34.9	36.2
Advice about educational program	31.6	35.7
Emotional support/development	26.3	33.8

Satisfaction with college experience

The senior survey has a significant number of questions (approximately 28) that tap student satisfaction with a wide array of college experiences. Over 84.1% [77.0%] of the students indicate that they “definitely” or “probably” would choose their college if they had the choice to do over again. The following are the top six areas of satisfaction (“satisfied or very satisfied”) as well as the bottom six areas of satisfaction.

Top six areas of satisfaction with college experience:

	MC	Protestant
Class size	93.4%	86.7%
Interaction with other students	92.8	85.5
Amount of contact w/faculty	91.4%	82.3%
Overall college experience	90.8	82.4
Availability of internet resources	90.1	73.6
Courses in major field (tie)	87.5	87.1
Overall quality of instruction (tie)	87.5	82.5

Bottom six areas of satisfaction with college experience:

	MC	Protestant
Humanities courses	61.0%	70.4%
Financial aid services	60.9	57.5
Tutoring	60.7	56.4
Job placement services	52.6	47.4
Campus health services	49.0	46.7
Quality of computer training	42.6	45.2

Service Activities

Reflecting a national movement to encourage volunteer activities and service-learning, the CSS in 2001 included several questions designed to uncover the degree to which these activities were part of the student experience. Students were asked whether or not any of their college courses included “community service/service learning.” In response to this, 35.3 % [51.9%] of Messiah students indicated that they had no course that included this opportunity while 44% [25.6%] noted that *two or more* courses included this option. For a large majority of the students, service learning is optional. Only 16.2% [33.9] reported that the community service/service learning was required. Those who participated in service said that they *frequently*:

	MC	Protestant
applied course material to their service work	47.5%	38.8%
felt that the experience increased understanding of academic course material	56.6	42.1
felt that their service “made a difference”	55.6	50.3

In sum, it appears that Messiah College are more likely to have the opportunity for service learning than their Protestant counterparts and they are more likely to see it as frequently enhancing their educational experience.

Objectives Noted as Important to Students

In examining those objectives that are important to students, it appears that the values of Messiah students are somewhat different from students at the Protestant colleges. Students are asked to rate a variety of objectives as either “very important” or “essential.” From a group of nineteen objectives, here are the top six objectives for Messiah students:

	MC	Protestant
Help others in difficulty	85.5%	77.3%
Raise a family	80.3	78.2
Develop a philosophy of life	62.3	56.8
Influence social values	60.5	51.2
Become an authority in their field	42.8	65.6
Keep up to date on political affairs	39.1	42.7

On the other hand, these are the six lowest ranked objectives:

	MC	Protestant
Be involved in environmental issues	13.8%	23.9%
Achieve in a performing art	13.2	16.0
Create artistic work	11.2	18.1
Write original works	9.9	18.9
Be successful in own business	9.9	33.6
Make a contribution to science	3.9	14.0

Social/Political Issues

For many years, HERI and UCLA have been tracking changes in student opinions on a wide variety of social/political issues. The freshmen survey (CIRP) is particularly helpful in tracking the changes in student opinions over thirty years. By including the same questions in the senior survey it is possible to see how the opinions of a specific cohort of students change over their college careers. In a subsequent section we will examine some of these freshman /senior changes. However, in this section we can simply report some examples of student opinion (there are 17 social/political issues).

In order to make sense of some of the opinions, it is helpful to note how students identify themselves as far as *political orientation*. Here is how Messiah seniors self-identify politically:

	MC	Protestant
Far left	0.7%	2.1%
Liberal	13.9	26.7
Middle of the road	31.8	41.2
Conservative	53.6	28.9

Far right 0.0 1.1

The following opinions represent a mixture of conservative and moderate views. The percentages are the number of students agreeing with the statement.

	MC	Protestant
There is too much concern for criminals	58.8%	58.0%
Abortion should be legal	14.6	52.9
Sex is ok if people like each other	4.6	38.3
Prohibit homosexual relationships	37.7	28.7
Fed. gov. should control sale of handguns	74.8	80.2
National health care plan needed	67.1	73.6

Some of these views are reflective of the religiously and politically conservative framework embraced by most students (e.g., views on abortion, sexuality and crime). On the other hand, there is significant support for views that might not be associated with more conservative political self-identification (e.g., gun control, national health care, conservation of energy). While they prefer to use the label “conservative,” these students might more accurately be depicted as moderates or “middle of the road”.

Supplementary Questions - Spring 2001

Seniors were asked to respond to a set of twenty additional questions concerning their experiences in their major. These questions were used in spring 2000 with seniors as part of the College Student Experiences Questionnaire. They were repeated in 2001 to give additional information on how Messiah College students rate their experiences in their majors. Below are the twenty statements ranked from high to low in terms of “strongly agree” or “agree” responses combined.

My major....

Percent agreeing or strongly agreeing....

	Spring 2001 (n=152)	Spring 2000 (n=162)
introduced me to the major issues in the field	95.4%	94.4%
enabled me to become competent to <i>discuss</i> theoretical and practical problems in the field	90.8	88.2
the professors in my major were normally available and very helpful	90.1	88.9
in my major the student/teacher rapport was very good	90.0	84.2*
helped prepare me for my career objectives	87.4	75.3*
I would highly recommend this major to interested students	83.4	78.4*

My major....**Percent agreeing or strongly agreeing....**

	Spring 2001 (n=152)	Spring 2000 (n=162)
contributes to Messiah College's mission of preparing alumni for "lives of service, leadership and reconciliation in church/society"	83.4	79.0
internships should be an important part of the total program of my major	82.8	90.7*
overall, the professors in my major rank among the best I have every had	78.8%	79.6%
the professors in my major effectively integrated learning and Biblical truth	76.2	80.9
overall, the courses in my major rank among the best I have ever taken	76.1	77.1
expanded my world view in distinctive ways	73.5	63.0*
was well organized with clear objectives	72.2	71.0
interdisciplinary study should be an important part of my major	70.9	63.8*
helped me to learn how to accept and work effectively with diverse people	68.9	61.1*
has enriched my day to day living	67.6	68.5
made a unique contribution to my Christian development	67.5	69.1
helped me to know how to develop healthy interpersonal relationships	64.9	61.7
introduced me to issues that involve the church today	59.6	66.7*
contributed significantly to my involvement in Christian service	40.4	37.9

The responses for the two groups of seniors are relatively similar. In some ways, the seniors of 2001 are somewhat more positive than those in 2000. This could simply be a reflection of differences between the samples. The items marked with a * reflect items which have a greater than 5% difference between the two samples.

Freshmen - Senior Differences (1997 - 2001)

As noted earlier in this report, it is possible to see some of the changes that have taken place for students finishing their studies in 2001. Out of the larger sample (n=152), some 129 students have matching data from both a freshman survey (CIRP) given in the fall of 1997 and the senior survey (CSS) filled out during the spring of 2001. We will focus on five of the matching sets of data available for these students. The overarching observation is that *stability* rather than change marks these items. For the many of the measures the freshmen-senior differences are *less than five percentage points (5%)*. This is exceptionally important to note given the tendency to overemphasize the impact of the college years. In fact, particularly in the areas of values and personal commitments, students are often resistant to change. Depending on the issues, this can be seen as either something good or something to be lamented. In the sections below we will examine these areas: General Activities, Self Ratings, Political Orientation, Objectives, and Social/Political Issues. It should be noted that the freshmen data (from CIRP) refers to what students said *during the first week or two of their freshmen year*. Thus, the percentages under “freshmen” in the listings below reflect activities in the year prior to beginning college.

General Activities refer to a wide-ranging set of items from religious activities to emotional experiences.

	Freshmen	Seniors(2001)	Seniors(1998)
Drank beer	10.9%	28.7%	28.4%
Drank wine or liquor	14.8	48.1	46.6
Felt overwhelmed	27.1	47.3	38.6
Overslept and missed class	22.5	49.6	52.5
Participated in demonstrations	38.6	13.2	10.2

Self-Ratings. This category includes areas that students are asked to rate themselves as “above average” or in the “top 10 percent”. Here are some areas of self rating:

	Freshmen	Seniors(2001)	Seniors(1998)
Mathematical ability	52.7%	36.4%	36.7%
Public speaking ability	39.5	36.4	41.8
Self Confidence (intellectual)	61.2	57.4	61.0
Self Confidence (social)	38.0	45.0	48.6
Writing ability	52.3	55.8	56.0

Objectives. Students were asked to rate various objectives as either “very important” or “essential” from their point of view. It would seem that a number of these changes are in a positive direction (e.g., helping others, promoting racial understanding).

	Freshmen	Seniors(2001)	Seniors(1998)
Be well off financially	24.2%	18.6%	18.2%
Create artistic work	5.4	11.6	10.8

	Freshmen	Seniors(2001)	Seniors(1998)
Develop philosophy of life	49.6%	63.6%	60.6%
Help others in difficulty	80.6	87.6	85.2
Promote racial understanding	19.4	39.1	41.5

Political Orientation. One of the common findings in research on changes during college is that students typically become “more liberal” in their political views. This is hardly true of Messiah students. However, there are modest shifts in political self-identification (in the section below it does appear that social political opinions, when they do change, shift toward a more moderate, less conservative position). Here is a comparison of how these students identified themselves politically as freshmen and then as seniors:

	Freshmen	Seniors (2001)	Seniors(1998)
Far left	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Liberal	5.8	14.8	9.3
Middle of the road	23.3	31.2	44.2
Conservative	70.0	53.9	46.5
Far right	0.8	0.0	0.0

Social/Political Issues. For many years HERI/UCLA has been asking students their opinions on a wide-ranging set of social and political issues. This may be one of the most interesting aspects of the many years of data that have been amassed on students since it reflects both the social cultural milieu and how students fit in that context. For the 2001 senior students, there were 17 statements that were directly comparable between freshmen and senior years. Of these statements, seven had changes of ten percent or more. Here are some of the social and political items including those that reflect this magnitude of change (percent *agreeing* with statement):

	Freshmen	Seniors(2001)	Seniors(1998)
Prohibit homosexual relations	68.5%	39.8%	42.8%
Death penalty should be abolished	32.0	48.4	47.4
Married women best at home	23.8	14.1	12.6
National health care plan needed	47.6	64.3	52.6
Too much concern for criminals	76.7	57.9	73.0
Abolish affirmative action	66.7	46.5	53.3
Race discrimination no problem	19.5	6.3	13.7

As noted above, the general direction of these changes is toward a more moderate or liberal stance in that students opt for greater individual freedom from government intrusion in personal issues (e.g., homosexuality) but greater government action in areas where private interests may be harming individuals (e.g., health care, consumer protection).

Summary

Data from the 2001 College Study Survey (CSS) reveal a number of encouraging trends. In addition, there are some areas of continuing concerns. Like the national college student population, the majority of our graduating seniors are women. About one in eight seniors plans on immediate graduate study while the majority plan on working either full or part time after graduation. Nine out of ten seniors are very satisfied with their college experience, especially their major course work, the overall quality of instruction and the overall college experience. About eight in ten students say that they would choose Messiah College again.

Students report positive experiences with faculty who invite them into their homes, provide intellectual challenge, honest feedback and emotional support. However, some students feel that faculty don't take them seriously. Their time on academic activities (classes and studying) is approximately 28 hours per week -- somewhat higher than the Protestant comparison group. During their college years over 30% of the students who did not use alcohol begin to use alcohol. Another area of concern is the fact that seniors, especially women, continue to note that they sometimes are depressed and feel overwhelmed.

Messiah students are politically and socially conservative in many areas. Yet, the profile is complex in that on some issues (e.g., sexuality, abortion) these students are more conservative than the national population but on other themes (e.g., government involvement) they reveal a mixture of more moderate or even liberal views much closer to their peers at other colleges and universities.

Messiah students are graduating with a strong desire to help others in difficulty, to be involved in raising a family, and to continue working on a philosophy of life. They report greater intellectual self confidence, above average drive to achieve and a greater than average interest in cooperating with and understanding others. Reflecting a national movement to emphasize service in various forms, over 90% of these seniors indicate that they have been involved in some sort of volunteering or service activity during their college years. Overall, the picture of Messiah College seniors (class of 2001) is positive and should be a source of encouragement.

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