

Report on the 1998 Senior College Student Survey
At Messiah College

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**[Part of the “Taking Values Seriously” Project. Additional information may be found on
the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities website: cccu.org]**

Taking Values Seriously at Messiah College: Report on the 1998 Senior College Student Survey

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The College Student Survey (CSS), developed by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA, was administered to seniors on 52 CCCU campuses during the spring of 1998. The total size of the sample was 7065 students. Messiah College participated in this project and had 177 seniors complete the survey. Of these seniors, we have corresponding data from a similar first year survey for 153 respondents (Cooperative Institutional Research Project) which was given to these students at the beginning of the fall term in 1994. 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 schools in the CCCU are "Protestant Colleges" and "All Private Colleges". This comparative data is available in the national report published by the Higher Education Research Institute. However, the closest comparison is the group of 52 CCCU campuses who used this survey. Thus, we will use the CCCU sample 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=177), then we will summarize some of the important changes noted between freshmen and senior years (n=153). In the statistics below the numbers in [brackets] represent the CCCU data.

Background Data: Sample

The seniors had a gender breakdown of 29.9% [37.6%] male and 70.1% [62.4%] female, indicating the predominance of women students at Messiah and among CCCU schools. Nearly all students were full time (95.6% [89.1%]) and most came from Caucasian ethnic backgrounds (93.8% [90.8%]). About 5.6% [30%] indicated that they had actually started college earlier than 1994. The number of students reporting transferring from another college was 12.4% [29.5%]. In planning for fall 1998, approximately one in eight students planned on graduate study (13.6% [20.3%]), while almost 90% [85%] planned on working either part time (15.8% [8.5%]) or full time (69.6% [81.4%]). 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 over 25 different “events” since entering college, the following were the most common activities:

	MC	CCCU
Took ethnic studies course	75.7%	38.3%
Had a part time job on campus	73.4	62.5
Voted in state/national election	62.1	64.9
Had a part time job off campus	55.9	61.2
Internship program	44.6	44.9
Participated in racial awareness workshop	32.2	26.8
Participated in leadership program	31.1	31.3

Other interesting highlights of this section (events since entering college) include the fact that about 33% [29%] of the students participated in intercollegiate sports (all sports) while 56.0% [50.5%] participated in intramural sports; and only 1.7% [13.2%] 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 (62.3% [51.0%]); studying with other students (37.5% [40.8%]); and discussing courses with other students (78.9% [73.2%]). Many students were guests in professors’ homes (83.0% [68.6%]) and felt that the faculty took a personal interest in them (96.6% [97.4%]). Yet, over half (64.6% [55.1%]) had the experience of feeling that the faculty “didn’t take me seriously”. Other common activities included interdisciplinary studies courses (89.3% [72.6%]), independent study projects (65.8% [66.1%]), and challenging a professor’s ideas in class (69.7% [74.3%]). Less common was taking honors or advanced courses (12.4% [21.8%]).

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 (28.4% [32.3%]); drinking wine or liquor (46.6% [45.1%]). Significant numbers of students have experienced occasional or frequent homesickness (69.4% [60.1%]) and depression (74.4% [66.3%]). Almost all students (96.0% [94.8%]) reported occasionally or frequently feeling overwhelmed. Many students visited museums or galleries (70.9% [74.2%]), discussed politics (76.2% [77.9%]), and did volunteer work (89.1% [81.8%]).

Activities with members of different racial/ethnic groups: Although the CCCU students attend largely homogeneous campuses with relatively few racial/ethnic minority groups they do, nevertheless, report significant levels of interactions with members of these groups. The following are the percentages of Messiah seniors and CCCU seniors who said they frequently or occasionally engaged in these activities with members of other groups:

	MC	CCCU
Studied...	60.8%	65.8%
Dined....	83.0	80.3
Dated...	15.4	21.0
Interacted...	97.7	93.2
Roomed with...	30.5	27.8

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	CCCU
Working for pay	10.29	13.18 hours per week
Classes/Labs	14.08	13.17
Studying/homework	13.45	10.72
Socializing with friends	11.47	10.07
Using a personal computer	5.92	5.75
Exercising/sports	4.39	4.65
Watching TV	4.51	4.23
Household duties/child care	2.27	3.83
Commuting	2.62	3.65
Volunteer work	2.59	3.03
Student clubs/groups	2.69	2.79
Partying	2.14	2.51
Arcade/video games	2.53	2.15
Reading for pleasure	1.74	2.09
Talking w/faculty outside of class	1.31	1.48
Estimated total	82.0	83.3

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 1998 (percent reporting):

	MC	CCCU
Knowledge of a particular field of study	78.5%	71.2%
General knowledge	55.9	54.3
Interpersonal skills	37.8	33.9
Critical thinking ability	36.2	40.0
Religious beliefs & convictions	32.2	38.5
Problem solving skills	29.9	35.3

Bottom six areas perceived as “much stronger” in 1998 (percent reporting):

	MC	CCCU
Acceptance of different races/cultures	16.9%	19.2%
Understanding community problems	16.4	17.0
Ability to work cooperatively	14.7	20.3
Reading speed/comprehension	10.7	16.1
Mathematical skills	6.2	8.6
Foreign language ability	5.6	9.6

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	CCCU
Cooperativeness	75.5%	76.6%
Academic ability	68.9	72.6
Understanding of others	67.8	75.0
Drive to achieve	61.6	71.3
Leadership ability	56.2	64.8
Self confidence (intellectual)	55.6	66.0

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

	MC	CCCU
Writing ability	56.0%	57.5%
Creativity	45.2	53.7
Competitiveness	41.8	52.7
Public speaking ability	41.8	47.0
Mathematical ability	36.7	35.6
Artistic ability	22.1	29.3

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 5.1% [5.2%] of the students said that faculty frequently gave them negative feedback about their abilities. On the other hand, 57.6% [65.1%] 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	CCCU
Intellectual challenge/stimulation	59.1%	59.6%
Provided respect	57.6	65.1
Opportunity to discuss course work	43.2	47.0
Advice about educational program	38.4	39.0
Honest feedback about abilities	35.6	43.3
Encouragement to grad/prof school	32.8	35.4
Emotional support/development	31.1	41.2

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. A number of these questions can provide similar data to that being generated in the CCCU Retention Project which can be reviewed on the CCCU website (www.cccu.org). Over 82% [85%] 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	CCCU
Interaction with other students	91.5%	91.1%
Courses in major field	91.0	90.3
Class size	89.9	89.9
Overall college experience	89.8	89.5
Overall quality of instruction	85.3	89.9
Recreation facilities	85.0	57.9

Bottom six areas of satisfaction with college experience:

	MC	CCCU
Campus health services	50.8%	54.2%
Tutoring	49.4	62.9
Financial aid services	47.2	58.3
Job placement services	37.8	49.9
Ethnic diversity of the faculty	35.6	35.3
Ethnic diversity of the students	30.5	39.8

Service Activities

In response to a growing movement in higher education to emphasize service-learning, HERI has included a number of questions probing service. Students are asked about their level of involvement in service, the settings in which service was performed and the types of learning activities associated with service. In the Messiah sample a majority of students (85.9% [82.6%]) reported that they had, at some point in the college experience, been involved in community service/volunteer activities. The most common sponsorship was through college-sponsored activities (64.4% [54.5%]) but a good number were connected with a non-college organization (46.3% [60.3%]) and course work (41.2% [47.5%]). Clearly, service/volunteer activities are part of the experience of Messiah students. The most common types of service were:

	MC	CCCU
community cleanup/building	42.9%	40.6%
tutoring/teaching	35.0	47.1
providing child care	24.3	26.9
providing homeless shelter/support	20.3	21.0
personal counseling/mentoring	18.1	26.5

Students most frequently reported discussing their experience with other students (92.0% [85.9%]), while more than half discussed their experience with a professor (64.6% [61.6%]). Almost a half of the students kept a journal about their service/volunteer activities (46.2% [39.5%]).

Objectives Noted as Important to Students

Of special relevance to the focus on *values* is a section of questions that asked students to identify which of nineteen possible objectives were “very important” or “essential” to the respondent. This provides insight into some areas that might distinguish CCCU seniors from other college and university seniors. The top six important or essential objectives for Messiah students were:

	MC	CCCU
Help others in difficulty	85.2%	83.3%
Raise a family	78.9	81.9
Develop a philosophy of life	60.6	62.8
Influence social values	53.4	58.9
Promote racial understanding	48.5	37.2
Become an authority in their field	43.2	58.4

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

	MC	CCCU
Influence political structure	12.5%	14.7%
Write original works	11.9	16.2
Create artistic work	10.8	15.6
Achieve in a performing art	9.1	14.5
Be successful in own business	7.9	21.0
Make a contribution to science	7.4	8.2

Some of the lower ranked objectives may be perceived as major-specific in nature, but several could theoretically have wider application (e.g., influence political structure).

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 23 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	CCCU
Far left	0.0%	0.7%
Liberal	9.3	11.4

	MC	CCCU
Middle of the road	44.2%	32.4%
Conservative	46.5	53.7
Far right	0.0	1.9

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

	MC	CCCU
There is too much concern for criminals	73.0%	70.4%
Abortion should be legal	10.4	17.0
Sex is ok if people like each other	1.7	8.0
Prohibit homosexual relationships	42.8	50.0
Fed. gov. should control sale of handguns	82.9	76.3
National health care plan needed	52.6	55.1
Discourage energy consumption	81.0	67.7

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 (slightly) to use the label “conservative,” these students might more accurately be depicted as moderates or “middle of the road”.

Questions Added by the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities

Colleges are invited by HERI to add their own questions. In response to this opportunity, the CCCU encouraged all participating colleges to add the same questions asked of these students as entering freshmen. Several questions were also included in the Faculty survey (1995 and 1998).

Percent responding “often” or “sometimes” to these questions:

	MC	CCCU
Maintained daily, personal devotions	88.2%	87.3%
Shared faith with another person	85.9	87.9
Attended religious services	97.3	91.9
Met with a small group for prayer/Bible study	77.9	75.5

Percent “agreeing” with these statements:

I have a personally meaningful relationship with God	95.5%	91.8%
My relationship with God contributes to my sense of well-being	96.1	92.9

	MC	CCCU
The way I do things from day to day is often affected by my relationship with God	95.4%	91.2%
Even if the people around me were opposed to my Christian convictions, I would still hold fast to them	98.3	87.8
I feel like I need to be open to consider new insights about my faith	96.6	91.6
I feel that identifying and using my spiritual gifts is <i>not</i> really important	3.6	16.9

Freshmen - Senior Differences (1994 - 1998)

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 1998. Out of the larger sample (n=177), some 153 students have matching data from both a freshman survey (CIRP) given in the fall of 1994 and the senior survey (CSS) filled out during the spring of 1998. 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
Drank beer	9.2%	28.4%
Drank wine or liquor	15.2	46.6
Felt overwhelmed	22.2	38.6
Overslept and missed class	23.4	52.5
Participated in demonstrations	32.2	10.2
Visited art gallery or museum	67.7	70.9

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
Mathematical ability	51.6%	36.7%
Public speaking ability	28.1	41.8
Self Confidence (intellectual)	55.6	61.0
Self Confidence (social)	27.6	48.6
Writing ability	51.6	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
Be well off financially	27.0%	18.2%
Create artistic work	6.5	10.8
Develop philosophy of life	51.6	60.6
Help others in difficulty	76.9	85.2
Promote racial understanding	26.3	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
Far left	0.0%	0.0%
Liberal	5.5	9.3
Middle of the road	28.2	44.2
Conservative	63.8	46.5
Far right	2.7	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 1998 senior students, there were 21 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
Prohibit homosexual relations	71.1	42.8
Death penalty should be abolished	26.1	47.4

	Freshmen	Seniors
Govt. not protecting the consumer	52.9%	68.5%
Govt. discourage energy waste	70.3	81.0
Married women best at home	23.2	12.6
National health care plan needed	41.1	52.6
Too much concern for criminals	84.1	73.0
Control AIDS by mandatory tests	41.2	30.9

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).

CCCU Questions / Faith / Religious Activities.

On religious activities there is considerable consistency between freshmen and senior year responses. Whatever modest changes that do occur are generally in slightly lower levels of activity. In fact, on some attitude items there is a bit greater agreement among the seniors. Attendance at religious services shows some decline as well as participation in small groups. Note that these comparisons are between *all* the freshmen (n=571) and *all* the senior respondents (n=177). Thus, the changes are likely a result of a change in the sample rather than longitudinal changes for the individual senior students.

Percent responding “often” or “sometimes” to these questions:

	Freshmen	Senior
Maintained daily, personal devotions	89.0%	88.2%
Shared faith with another person	91.9	85.9
Attended religious services	99.8	97.3
Met with a small group for prayer/bible study	90.0	77.9

Percent “agreeing” with these statements:

	Freshmen	Senior
I have a personally meaningful relationship with God	97.9%	95.5%
My relationship with God contributes to my sense of well-being	96.0	96.1
The way I do things from day to day is often affected by my relationship with God	94.5	95.4
Even if the people around me were opposed to my Christian convictions, I would still hold fast to them	96.2	98.3
I feel like I need to be open to consider new insights about my faith	91.6	96.6
I feel that identifying and using my spiritual gifts is <i>not</i> really important	7.5	3.9

Summary

Data from the 1998 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. Students spend more time working for pay than any other activity. Their time on academic activities (classes and studying) is approximately 28 hours per week -- somewhat higher than the CCCU 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.

In the four years between entering and leaving college (1994-1998), these students have resisted change in many areas but also experienced some change. In the area of faith, there is a great deal of consistency between freshmen and senior years. On many of the items dealing with religious faith and practice there is a high level of continuing spiritual vitality with only modest declines in such areas as attendance at religious services and involvement in small group Bible studies. Over 90% of the students, as seniors, say that they have a personally meaningful relationship with God which contributes to their sense of well-being. Almost 90% maintain some sort of daily devotions and share their faith with others.

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 80% 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 1998) is positive and should be a source of encouragement.

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