

As this issue of *Metropolitan Universities* arrives in the mail, most of our readers will be in the midst of the annual spring ritual of universities and colleges: budget planning for the next academic year. Depending on your state, you may simultaneously be involved in a legislative session that is raising prickly topics such as levels of institutional support, performance measures, and accountability. In the midst of such a stressful time, we faculty and administrators are not the only people in academia feeling stress. A recent (fall 1999) national survey conducted by UCLA's Graduate School of Education & Information Studies reports that an all-time high of 30.2 percent of freshmen feel "frequently overwhelmed by all I have to do."

UCLA has conducted this nationwide survey of freshmen since 1973 and they say it is the longest-standing assessment of entering students. The study, called the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), reports findings from 261,217 students at 462 institutions that were statistically adjusted to be representative of all of the nation's 1.6 million freshmen that entered college as first-time, full-time students last fall. Although some researchers are less confident than the survey team about how representative the subjects were, the sheer volume of responses suggests the survey may highlight large trends or shifts in student attitudes and behaviors.

My attention was drawn to this year's summary because it seems to affirm anecdotes from colleagues at more traditional, largely residential institutions. These anecdotes from our nonmetropolitan counterparts include complaints about the growing number of students who work while attending school, the increased percentage who start out full-time but soon shift to part-time enrollment patterns, a decrease in time spent studying, and an apparently single-minded focus on the career potential of their education as opposed to interest in acquiring a broad base of knowledge in the liberal arts. "We're dismayed that our students don't make college their highest priority" is an increasingly typical complaint.

The survey findings from CIRP seem to confirm growing suspicions about changes in the nation's students—they are, in sum, becoming more and more like the types of students urban and metropolitan universities have been serving for years.

For example, the survey reported that an all time high of nearly a quarter of the respondents said they would work full-time while in college. Among women, 44.1% find it very likely they will work to help pay college expenses. The proportion of students entering at age 19 or older is the highest ever reported, and there are increases in the number of students who shown signs of being academically underprepared. More respondents are first generation students in postsecondary education settings.

While many of the findings seemed surprising, if not discouraging, to the researchers interpreting them, much of this is not new for urban and metropolitan institutions. Our institutions have for many years struggled to serve employed, older, first-generation, often part-time students for whom college is one of many competing energy and time demands. However, some of the survey results are new to all institutions and call

for strategic responses from our organizations. As they always have, student profiles evolve and change with each generation, and the 1999 survey highlights some troubling features that will affect the learning capacity of this new generation of entering student.

As I mentioned earlier, the survey report highlights as its most significant finding that the level of stress among students is at an all-time high. The authors suggest that the stress is connected to student pressures about paying for college, and to the greater amount of time students are giving to employment, but it is clear that these alone cannot fully explain the increase in student stress. Of special concern is that the level of stress among women is nearly twice as high as among men. The researchers suspect this gender difference may be caused in part by how much more worried women seem to be about having enough money to finish college, and in part by how differently they spend their time. Men spend much more time than women exercising, playing sports, watching television, partying, and playing video games. Women may spend less time on those more recreational, or stress-reducing, activities because they report devoting more time to studying, volunteering, housework and child care responsibilities than the male respondents.

Many of the survey questions asked students to report on their activities during the last year of high school before entering college. An incredible 40.2 percent of freshmen said they studied fewer than three hours a week during their last year of high school, and 17.1 percent studied less than one hour per week! A record high of 39.9 percent of students report feeling frequently bored in class, two-thirds said they frequently came late to class, and almost as many reported that they had cut class. Half reported they spent less than an hour reading for pleasure each week. Only 18.1 percent said they checked a book out of a library during the previous year. Thirty-six percent did not socialize with someone of a different racial/ethnic group.

Not all the news is negative: for example, students are partying, drinking and smoking less. Interest in teaching careers is at its highest level in 30 years and there is a growing interest in arts and humanities studies and careers. Students assess their own creativity more highly than in prior surveys. More than half tutored another student, and 83.7 percent studied with other students. High school grades and expectations of success in college are both up over prior years, but the researchers say that that can be explained by strong evidence of high school grade inflation revealed by the high number of remedial courses students take while still in high school. Grade inflation gives students an unrealistic assessment of their preparedness for college.

Given that our metropolitan universities place a high value on the links between our institutions and our cities, it is sad to note that the percentage of freshmen who feel it is very important or essential for them to influence social values or to participate in community action programs fell to its lowest in more than a decade. This was accompanied by declines in factors related to helping others, caring for the environment, or interest in becoming a community leader. Social awareness of attitudes about race also shows a decline. The percentage of students committed to promoting racial understanding declined for the third consecutive year.

Some colleagues have suggested that maybe we more senior academics are reacting with dismay at some of these findings because we are imposing the educational and

lifestyle values of our generation on today's college freshmen. For example, while few respondents apparently checked materials out of libraries, a bit more than half reported using the Internet to do homework. (Of course, it's also worth noting that the Internet provides information of highly variable quality.) While we may sometimes overlook the new approaches to learning through technology and the reality of evolving personal values, we cannot deny that long-term research shows that many of these attitudes and behaviors about use of time, setting of priorities, and choice of activities are strongly associated with academic success. We must be concerned about the obvious academic disengagement of our entering students and respond with academic strategies to match or enhance their time management skills and academic priorities if we are to prepare them to be true lifelong learners as we know they must be for future personal, career, and citizen success in the knowledge age. In fact, urban and metropolitan universities are in a strong position to be leaders in modeling community-based learning strategies that help re-engage these students through direct personal application of knowledge to practical issues. Our metropolitan environments offer rich opportunities to transform students through experiences that show them that through learning, they can make a difference in their community.

During the conference of the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan University in Boise in October 1999, papers from which represent the theme of this issue of the journal, there was much talk about the fact that our institutions truly are advanced and experienced models for dealing with the learning characteristics commonly associated with commuting students who have competing demands on their energy and attention. Student traits that more traditional campuses are now complaining about are factors most of our member institutions have been coping with since the day their doors opened for classes. To be honest, many of us would have to admit we have been achieving varying amounts of success, but among us there is valuable collective wisdom about effective institutional responses and strategies to promote student success.

This most recent survey suggests that while the nation's college student profiles are generally looking more like those of our urban and metropolitan students, there are new signals of a deeper problem that requires our immediate attention: a lack of commitment to learning among new students. Given that it is budget planning season, you may wish to allocate funds for campus-based research that helps shed light on the characteristics and attitudes of your students, and an assessment of the effectiveness of curricular and academic support strategies intended to increase student academic persistence and success. In addition, investments in faculty development activities to promote the introduction of new pedagogies and learning strategies can assist faculty as they work with these new student populations.

Faculty are our largest investment and most powerful resource in responding to changes in the characteristics of students. However, most faculty were prepared to be scholars of their discipline more than scholars of the art of teaching. Few of them have opportunities to read or hear about new trends in teaching and learning strategies, and few campuses do a good job of keeping faculty well-informed about changes in student traits. Institutions of all types are finding it helpful to support faculty development opportunities that engage faculty in collective exploration of new research on student

characteristics, learning styles, the use of instructional technology, and the effects of different pedagogies, among other topics. Historically, most institutions have given low priority to faculty development, or perhaps focused on development primarily as it relates to individual success as a scholar of a particular academic discipline. Given new views of faculty work as a more balanced mix of the roles of teaching, research, and service, many institutions have found it valuable to support several levels of faculty development. First, faculty do need sufficient support to be successful in their disciplinary communities, especially as most disciplinary societies are now giving strong attention to the role of teaching as well as venues for disseminating research. Second, faculty development at the school/college level gives deans a tool to promote interdisciplinary scholarship or teaching, to build teams to develop grants or institutes, or to support planning for interdisciplinary degree programs. Third, at the overall institutional level, faculty development helps direct the attention of the faculty workforce to the central mission of the institution, and prepares them to deliver a coherent and consistent, across-the-curriculum learning experience for all students.

Institutional support for faculty development units, often called centers for teaching and learning, are springing up across higher education in institutions of all types. These centers give faculty members opportunities to learn about new research on teaching and learning, to participate in seminars and discussions about curriculum and student learning, to attend national conferences on teaching or civic engagement (often presenting their own teaching strategies or research on teaching), or to acquire skills in new pedagogies or assessment techniques. The rewards for effective faculty development can be many, including greater career satisfaction for faculty, and improved retention and academic success for students who are obviously presenting us with significant new challenges.

Note: Copies of the 34th annual report, "The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 1999," by L. J. Sax, A. W. Astin, W. S. Korn, and K. M. Mahoney, are available for \$25 (pre-paid plus \$4.79 for the first book and 40 cents for each additional book for shipping) from the Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA Graduate School of Education & Information Studies, 3005 Moore Hall, Box 951521, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1521.