

Diverse Experiences

2014 Your First College Year

Introduction

In spring 2014, we asked first-year students at Case Western Reserve University (CWRU) to participate in the *Your First College Year survey* (YFCY). The survey was administered by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA in conjunction with the Office of Planning and Institutional Research. It is a follow-up to *The Freshman Survey* (TFS) which was administered in fall of 2013 and the YFCY administered in spring 2013. Due to the low response rate, results should be interpreted with caution.¹ This report provides information about students' social attitudes and experiences around diversity.

Constructs

The results include 16 constructs derived from multiple items on the survey instrument. The constructs are designed to capture the experiences and outcomes that institutions are often interested in but find challenging to measure because of their complex and multifaceted nature. Constructs are particularly helpful in examining trends over time and making comparisons to other institutions. ***Construct scores should not be converted into percentages or compared to other constructs.***

Pluralistic Orientation

The *pluralistic orientation construct* measures students' skills and dispositions for living and working in a diverse society. CWRU's score on *pluralistic orientation* did not change significantly from 2013 to 2014 (53 vs. 53). When compared to peer institutions², CWRU students scored significantly lower on this construct (53 vs. 54, $d=-.193$). First-year students who took both The Freshman Survey (TFS) and YFCY showed no improvement in pluralistic orientation.



¹ Of the 1,217 students who received the survey, 24% (n=296) submitted responses.

² The private university comparison group included Benedictine, Boston College, Caltech, Fordham, Loyola University-Chicago, Polytechnic Institute of New York University, Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, Seton Hall University, Southern Methodist, Tulane, University of Notre Dame, University of Rochester, University of Southern California, University of the Pacific, Vanderbilt, Wake Forest.

³ All significant differences highlighted are at a $p<.05$ level. Cohen's D, a measure of effect size, was included in this report and indicates the magnitude of difference between two means. Effect sizes of .1 would be considered small, .3 medium, greater than .5 would be large, and .8 and up would be very large (http://nsse.iub.edu/pdf/effect_size_guide.pdf).

Positive Cross-Racial Interactions

The *positive cross-racial interaction* construct measures students' level of positive interactions with students from a racial/ethnic group other than their own. Similar to *pluralistic orientation*, CWRU's score on *positive cross-racial interaction* did not change significantly from 2013 to 2014 (55 vs. 55). CWRU was no different than peer institutions on this measure. This measure was not included on TFS.



When compared to peer institution, CWRU students were more satisfied with the following:

- Racial/ethnic diversity of faculty: 57% vs. 48%, $d=.16$
- Racial/ethnic diversity of the student body: 62% vs. 47%, $d=.34$

Negative Cross-Racial Interactions

Negative cross-racial interaction measures students' level of negative interaction with diverse peers. CWRU score on *negative cross-racial interactions* did not change significantly from 2013 (53 vs. 53). CWRU was also no different on this measure when compared to peers.

When compared to peer institutions, CWRU students were significantly less likely to agree that there was a lot of racial tension on campus (11% vs. 18%, $d=-.27$) and that they heard faculty express stereotypes based on race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or religious affiliation (16% vs. 22%, $d=-.24$).

Differences by Race/Ethnicity

One-way anova⁴ was used to analyze differences on construct scores between white, Asian and under-represented minority (URM) students⁵. When compared to white students, URM students had significantly higher scores on pluralistic orientation (52 vs. 58, $\eta^2=.048$). URM students scored significantly higher on civic awareness when compared to both white and Asian students (55 vs. 48 vs. 48, $\eta^2=.036$). White students had significantly better academic adjustment scores when compared to Asian students (48 vs. 44, $\eta^2=.039$). There were no significant differences detected between group scores on other constructs including *sense of belonging*, *satisfaction with courses*, *academic disengagement*, *faculty interaction* and *overall satisfaction*.

⁴ Tukey's HSD post hoc test with bootstrapping was used to compare means. Eta squared is included and reflects effect size of race/ethnicity status on the outcome variables, where $\eta^2 \sim .02$ is small, $\sim .13$ is medium, and $>.26$ is large.

⁵ Underrepresented minority students include Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaskan Natives. International, multi-racial, and "unknown" students were excluded from the analysis.

Sexual Orientation

This year, the CWRU YFCY included an item pertaining to students' sexual orientation⁶. Of the 236 students who answered the item, 88% of students identified as straight, 5% identified as Lesbian, gay or homosexual, 5% identified as bisexual, and 3% identified as unsure. In order to improve statistical power, students who self-identified as heterosexual/straight were compared to the students who identified as something else (LGBQ). Despite combining groups there was not sufficient power to detect differences between LGBQ students and straight students on construct scores. Because this item was only included on the CWRU version of the survey, there is no comparison data.

Religion/Spirituality

The YFCY asked several items pertaining to religion and spirituality. Less than half of CWRU students (42%) indicated they were in the highest 10% or above average in their spirituality. CWRU students were significantly less likely to have discussed religion frequently or occasionally when compared to peers (84% vs. 90%, $d=-.35$). Fewer CWRU students indicated their religious convictions have been strengthened in college when compared to peers (27% vs. 43%).

Political Diversity

Students were asked to identify themselves on the political spectrum. Most students identified themselves as 'liberal' (42%) or 'middle of the road' (33%). About one in five students (21%) identified themselves as conservative and less than 1% of students identified themselves as 'far-right'. Students who identified as 'far-left' made up 4% of the population. There was no change in terms of political orientation from *The Freshman Survey* for those students who completed both surveys. Compared to peer institutions, CWRU students put significantly less importance on the following (percentages reflect those indicating the following as essential or very important):

- Influencing the political structure: 18% vs. 27%, $d=-.24$
- Influencing social values: 40% vs. 52%, $d=-.33$
- Helping to promote racial understanding: 36% vs. 47%, $d=-.27$
- Keeping up with political affairs: 39% vs. 50%, $d=-.27$
- Becoming a community leader: 19% vs. 49%, $d=-.24$
- Improving my understanding of other countries and culture: 53% vs. 66%, $d=-.35$

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⁶ Sexual orientation and gender identity are distinct concepts. While this item assessed sexual orientation, the instrument did not allow students to self-report gender identity/expression in ways that could identify students as transgender, trans-sexual, or trans. After internal discussions, an item that included these categories was ultimately excluded from the instrument a) in an effort to reduce survey burden b) a likely lack of variation in responses and c) insufficient numbers of students who identified as transgender to do meaningful analysis on this population. This decision should not indicate that such difference is not valued at CWRU.