



Mental Health: Results from the 2010 Cooperative Institutional Research Program Freshman Survey

During the summer of 2010, the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Freshman Survey was sent electronically to first-year students at 279 colleges and universities across the United States. The survey results were collected and compiled by the Higher Education Research Institute. At Case Western Reserve University (CWRU), 1,021 first-year students received the survey and 453 responded (44%).

According to the Higher Education Research Institute, first-year students across the nation (and females in particular) were feeling more overwhelmed and depressed during the past year than at any other time during the past 25 years¹. This report provides an overview of the CWRU 2010 class' responses about their emotional health and compares the current class to (1) the class entering in 2007 and (2) first-year students enrolling at other highly selective private universities² in 2010.

Participant Demographics and Sample Quality

Of the students who were asked to complete the survey, 44% of the students responded (51% of all females; 38% of all men). The majority of participants were Caucasian (63%) and Asian American (16%). Other ethnic groups included Asian/Indian Subcontinent (6%), African-American or Black (5%), Hispanic or Latino (4%), Unknown Ethnicity (4%), and American Indian or Alaskan Native (1%). Overall response rates did not differ significantly among minority and majority participants.³

Similarly, participants did not differ significantly by intended major. Respondents to the survey had a significantly higher high school index⁴ on average (99) than did non-respondents (97). While respondents and non-respondents did not differ from each other on SAT Math, SAT Writing, or ACT Composite scores, respondent scores were higher on SAT Verbal scores (659 vs. 647).

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CWRU 2010 First-Year Profile

Approximately 85% of first-year participants reported feeling overwhelmed with all they had to do during the past year (occasionally: 54%; frequently: 31%) and over half of the participants reported suffering from depression (occasionally: 44%; frequently: 9%).

1 The Higher Education Research Institute, University of California, Los Angeles (January 2011). *The American Freshman: National norms fall 2010*. Retrieved from:

http://www.heru.ucla.edu/PDFs/pubs/briefs/HERI_ResearchBrief_Norms2010.pdf

² Highly selective private institutions in the 2010 comparison group include: Boston College, California Institute of Technology, Cornell University, Dartmouth College, Duke University, Emory University, Northwestern University, Rice University, University of Chicago, University of Pennsylvania, University of Southern California, and Vanderbilt University.

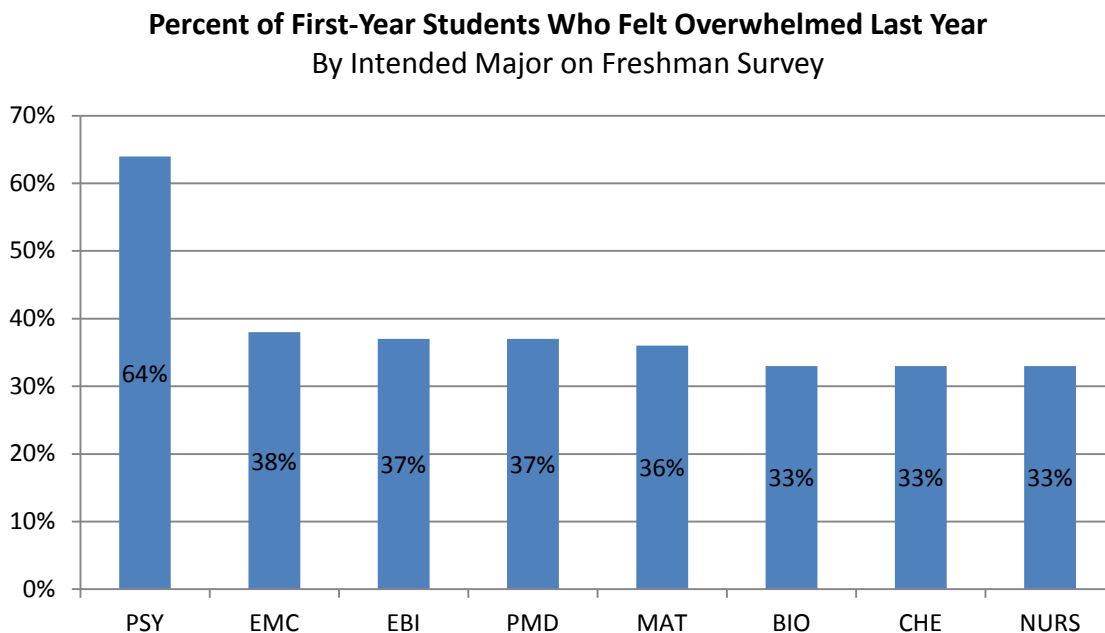
³ "Majority" students include the Asian/Indian Subcontinent, Asian American, and Caucasian or White ethnic groups.

"Minority" students are made up of the Hispanic or Latino, African-American or Black, and American Indian or Alaskan Native ethnic groups.

⁴ High school index is calculated by dividing the students' GPA by his/her high school's GPA scale and multiplying by 100.

Thirty-two percent (32%) of participants drank beer, wine, or liquor in the past year. Only 5% of participants reported smoking cigarettes. Six percent (6%) of CWRU participants reported having a psychological disorder, the most common disability among CWRU participants. Although the majority of participants felt overwhelmed and depressed within the last year, a majority (58%) also rated their emotional health as “average” or higher in comparison to other people their age. When asked whether or not they planned to seek personal counseling, 9% of participants said there was a “very good chance” and 37% said there was “some chance” they would do so.

The intended majors with the highest percentage of first-year participants who reported feeling overwhelmed during the past year are listed in the graph below:



The majors with the highest percentage of participants who reported feeling depressed during the past year were:

- Psychology (27%);
- Nursing (13%);
- Engineering (undecided) (12%);
- Pre-medicine (10%); and
- Biology (9%).

Results of a correlational analysis suggest that the more often students reported feeling overwhelmed during the past year, the more frequently they reported feeling depressed, and vice versa. In regard to funding their education, the more students felt overwhelmed and/or depressed, the more likely they were to report:

- Concerns about their ability to finance their college education;
- A lower family income;

- Plans to get a job to help pay for their college expenses; and
- That their choice of college was significantly affected by the current economic situation.

In terms of academics, the more participants reported feeling overwhelmed and/or depressed, the more likely they were to:

- Rate their intellectual self-confidence lower;
- Believe they would need extra time to complete degree requirements;
- Expect to change their major field; and
- Expect to change their career.

The results also indicate that the more often students reported feeling overwhelmed during the past year, the more likely they were to:

- Rate their academic ability, mathematical ability, and physical health lower;
- Use personal resources to pay for college; and
- Seek tutoring during college.

Likewise, the more a student participated in exercise and sports in a typical week during the past year, the less likely he/she was to feel overwhelmed or depressed.

Comparisons by Gender and Race/Ethnicity

Significantly fewer males than females reported feeling “frequently” overwhelmed (20% vs. 43%) or depressed (6% vs. 13%) within the past year. Likewise, a significantly higher percentage of males said their physical health was “above average” or in the “highest 10%” in comparison to their peers (66% vs. 48%). On average, male participants also spent more time per week exercising or playing sports (6 to 10 hours vs. 3 to 5 hours). There were no significant differences between male and female responses to questions about drinking beer, wine, or liquor, smoking cigarettes, having a psychological disability, or planning to seek personal counseling while in college.

Their emotional health self-ratings were also significantly similar. Minority and majority participants did not differ significantly in terms of feeling overwhelmed, depressed, smoking cigarettes, or drinking beer, wine, or liquor during the past year.

Comparison to 2007 CWRU First-Year Class

Students who took the Freshman Survey in 2010 were no more likely than those who participated in 2007 to report feeling overwhelmed or depressed. That said, participants in 2010 were significantly more likely than their 2007 peers to say that there was some chance or a very good chance that they would seek personal counseling (46% in 2010, 30% in 2007).

Students who participated in the survey in 2010 were significantly less likely than their 2007 peers to say that they had consumed beer, wine, or liquor in the past year (32% in 2010, 50% in 2007) and were less likely to have smoked cigarettes (5% in 2010, 12% in

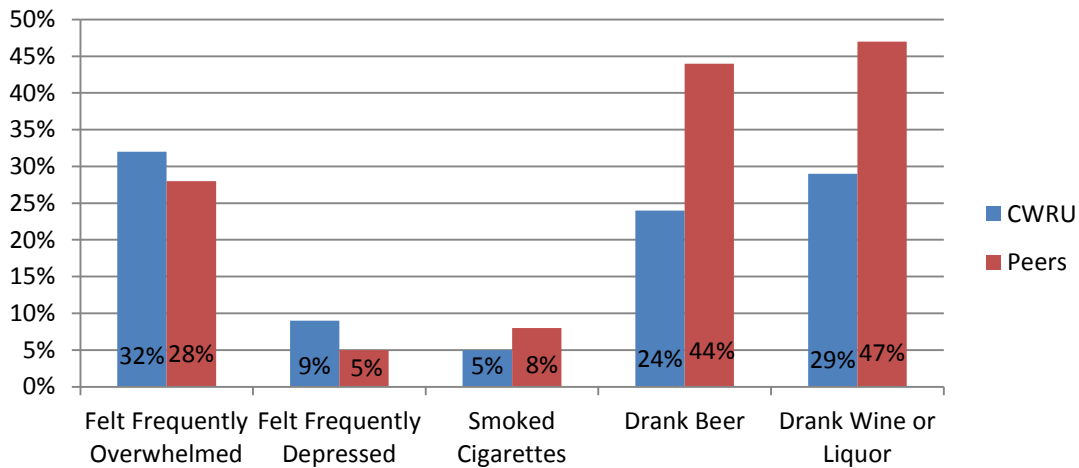
2007). Note that women made up a significantly higher percentage of the sample (48%) in 2010 than they did in 2007 (41%). Similarly, Asian/Asian-American participants made up 22% of the 2010 sample but were only 17% of the 2007 group.

Comparison to Other Highly Selective Private Institutions

In comparison to participants at other highly selective private institutions, this year's CWRU freshman class has a smaller proportion of Asian respondents (18% vs. 23%) and a larger proportion of Caucasian respondents (74% vs. 64%). The percentage of CWRU participants was fairly equal to the percentage of participants at other highly selective private institutions in terms of other ethnic groups, age, native language, citizenship status, and veteran status. Forty-eight percent (48%) of the survey respondents in the comparison group were male and 52% were female whereas CWRU's survey participants were exactly opposite, 52% male and 48% female.

The graph below summarizes student responses to feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and engaging in drinking alcohol and smoking cigarettes during the past year:

**Percent of First-Year Students Who Reported
Negative Feelings and Unhealthy Habits Last Year**
CWRU and Peer Responses on the Freshman Survey



Compared to other highly selective private institutions, more CWRU participants rated their emotional health as below average or in the lowest 10% (10% vs. 7%); however, students were no more likely to seek counseling than their peers. CWRU participants also rated their physical health lower than their peers (average or lower: 43% vs. 36%).

The majority of CWRU participants spent 5 hours or less exercising or playing sports during the past year (56%) whereas the majority of their peers spent 6 or more hours exercising or playing sports (56%).

Additional Information

If you would like additional information about this report, please contact us at (216) 368-1500. To submit a request for data, please visit our website at: <http://www.case.edu/president/cir/cirhome.html>.

