

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**  
**Plattsburgh State University**  
***CIRP FALL 2001***

***Background***

PSU has implemented an internal freshmen and transfer survey to summer orientation participants for many years. A longitudinal report covering 1996, 1997, 1999, and 2000 participants was developed and distributed in September 2000. After reviewing the report, a decision was made to survey summer 2001 orientation participants using the Cooperative Institutional Research Program Survey (CIRP).

The Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA, directed by Alexander Astin, has administered CIRP since 1966. Well over 1700 colleges and universities, and in excess of 10 million freshmen have participated. Annually, more than 350,000 students complete the CIRP at over 700 colleges and universities nationwide. The vast majority of participating institutions implement CIRP during their freshmen orientation programs.

The 4-page survey provides information on a broad array of topics, including demographic characteristics, expectations for college experience, secondary school experiences, degree goals and career plans, college finances, attitudes-values-life goals, and reasons for attending college. Results of CIRP are reported in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, and select analyses are widely circulated in a variety of national publications.

HERI categorizes institutions by combined SAT scores. According to HERI, **PSU is a high select institution** and is in the same category as the following 2001 participating SUNY institutions: College of Environmental Science & Forestry, Fredonia, Geneseo, New Paltz, Oswego, and Purchase. Other participating SUNY institutions are listed in the following categories: low select—Old Westbury, and medium select—Brockport, Buffalo State, Cortland, and Potsdam. Appendix A provides a list of all other participating 4-year public institutions by their selection categories. Appendix B is a copy of the 2001 CIRP survey questionnaire.

This report contains data by item for PSU freshmen and transfer students who agreed to participate in the survey during the summer 2001 orientation sessions. The table in Section 1 presents data on participating PSU full-time freshmen with comparative percentage data for low, medium and high select public 4-year colleges, all 4-year public colleges, and all 4-year colleges. Tables in Sections 2 and Section 3 present PSU data by gender with similar institutional category comparisons. Since HERI does not provide any comparative data on transfer students, Section 4 lists data for PSU transfer students with a comparison to PSU freshmen by gender and total percentage categories. In addition to the comparative data, HERI sends participating institutions a SPSS survey file. Thus, it is possible to study a variety of interactions among any number of variables. After reviewing the questionnaire, kindly contact the Office of Institutional Research about specialized interests you may have including data for individual PSU majors.

The study methodology, return rates, and caveats are located at the end of this summary.

### ***Overview PSU Freshmen Participants***

The following percentage summaries for select individual items in the survey are intended to provide an overview of demographic characteristics, high school preparation and related activities, ratings on select traits, activities noted in the past year, college educational expenses, probable major choices, reasons to attend college, PSU admissions decisions, objectives considered to essential or important, chances are participants will be involved in an activity, and political views.

**On many items, participants were asked to choose as many responses as were appropriate. Thus, percentages in some areas add up to more than 100%. Please see the survey in Appendix B.**

#### **Select Items in “Demographic Characteristics”:**

- *The overwhelming majority of PSU freshmen graduated from high school in 2001 (97.7%).*
- Approximately 72.2% were 18 while 23.8% were 19 years old.
- The majority of respondents were white (91%).
- 62.7% of the respondents were female while 37.3% were male.
- Most respondents indicated they lived between 101 to 500 miles from campus (63.4%).
- Over 67% indicated their combined parental income was over \$50,000.
- 70.8% of their parents were alive and living with each other.
- 45.6% of the participants were Roman Catholic, 21.6% indicated no religion, 5.5% were Methodist, and 4.3% were Jewish.
- 36.2% of the respondents’ fathers and 30.4% of their mothers had a high school degree or less.
- Regarding parents occupation, 22.1% of fathers were in business, 6.6% were in elementary or secondary education, 10.4% were skilled workers, 38.2% were employed in “other” occupations, with the remaining 22.7% spread out over a number of occupational categories; 17.1% of mothers were employed in business, 15.3% were in elementary or secondary education, 10.5% were in nursing, and 26% were employed in “other” occupations, with the remaining 31.1% spread out over a number of occupational categories.

#### **Select Items in “High School Preparation and Related Activities”:**

- *24% of the respondents indicated a high school average of A/A- while 59.1% indicated B+/B average.*
- *95% of the respondents graduated from a public high school.*
- During their high school careers, respondents indicated they met or exceeded the following high school courses: 4 years of English—99.4%, 3 years of Mathematics—97.3%, 2 years of Foreign Language—93.5%, 2 years of Physical Science—47.1%, 2 years of Biological Science—31.4%, 1 year of History/American Government—99.4%, 1/2 year Computer Science—51.4%, and 1 year of Arts and/or Music—89.8%.

- 11% indicated they had some type of special tutoring in mathematics while 22.5% indicated they felt a need for some type of mathematics special tutoring in college.
- 59.5% indicated they had not taken advanced placement courses while 70.7% had not taken advanced placement exams.
- 71.7% of their high schools did not require community service for graduation while 28.3% did.
- 25.5% indicated they studied 6 hours or more a week during their last year in high school, while 43.7% indicated they talked with teachers outside of class 1 hour or less a week.
- 50.9% indicated they were involved with 1 or more student clubs/groups a week
- 74.3% worked for pay more than 6 hours a week
- 78% indicated they socialized more than 6 hours a week with friends while 56.1% indicated they partied more than 3 hours a week
- 52% indicated they watched more than 3 hours of TV a week while 69.3% indicated they exercised over 3 hours a week.
- 60.6% of the respondents played less than 1 hour or no video/computer games a week while 55.4% prayed or meditated less than one hour a week.
- 56% of the respondents either did not read, or read less than 1 hour a week for pleasure
- 58.4% of the respondents did less than one hour or less a week of volunteer service.

**Select Items in “Participant Ratings on Select Traits”:**

Respondents rated themselves above average or in the highest 10% as compared with the average person of her/his age on the following traits:

- Academic ability (46.1%)
- Competitiveness (42.5%)
- Cooperativeness (65.6%)
- Creativity (49.6%)
- Drive to achieve (53.8%)
- Emotional health (41.9%)
- Leadership ability (48.3%)
- Persistence (47.2%)
- Intellectual self-confidence (42.1%)
- Social self-confidence (40.7%)
- Self-understanding (43.8%)
- Understanding of others (60.7%)

The following traits had less than a 40% rating by respondents:

- Artistic ability (25.3%)
- Computer skills (31.9%)
- Physical health (40.0%)

- Popularity (32.5%)
- Public speaking ability (28.6%)
- Religiousness (13.9%)
- Writing ability (35.5%)
- Spirituality (20.5%)

**Select “Activities Noted in the Past Year”:**

Respondents were involved in the following activities during the year prior to the orientation session:

- Attended a religious service (72.8%)
- Studied with other students (84.6%)
- Drank beer (67.7%), drank wine or liquor (72%)
- Performed volunteer work (57.9%)
- Socialized with someone of another racial/ethnic group (59.8%)
- Came late to class (67.4%)
- Attended a public recital or concert (84.3%)
- Visited an art gallery or museum (61.7%)
- Communicated via e-mail (67.8%)
- Other internet use (54.9%)
- Performed community service as part of a class (58%)
- Used a personal computer (79.1%).

**Select Items in “Educational Expenses”:**

- 75.4% of the respondents expected to receive some type of assistance from family resources to cover first year expenses.
- 62.9% expected to finance their education from their own resources.
- 56.8% expected to receive some type of aid that would not need to be repaid. Conversely, at least 56.3% indicated they expected to receive aid that must be repaid.
- 31.9% were not concerned about their ability to finance their college education while 55.1% were somewhat concerned and 13% had a major concern.

**“Probable Major”:**

Respondents indicated a wide range of probable majors including:

- Arts & Humanities (10.6%)
- Biological Science (7%)
- Business (12.9%)
- Education (24.5%)
- Engineering (1.4%)
- Physical Science (2%)
- Professional (8.3%)
- Social Science (9.9%)
- Technical (1.2%)
- Undecided (10.2%)
- Other fields (11.5%).

**Select Items in “Reasons to Attend College”:**

- 28.4% because their parents wanted them to go
- 5.2% because they could not find a job
- 25.6% because they wanted to get away from home
- 71.9% to get a better job
- 67.2% to gain a general education and appreciation of ideas
- 45.8% to improve reading and study skills
- 3.1% there was nothing better to do
- 41.9% to make me a more cultured person
- 68.1% to be able to make money
- 78.2% to learn more about things that interest me
- 58.8% to prepare myself for graduate school
- 10% a mentor/role model encouraged me to go
- 74% to get training for a specific career

**Select Items in “Decision to Attend Plattsburgh State University”:**

- 65.6% of the respondents indicated PSU was their first choice, 25.5% their second choice, 6.4% their third choice, and 2.5% less than their third choice.
- 12.9% indicated they did not apply to any other colleges, 10.4% to one, 16.9% to two, 19.4% to three, 17.8% to four, 9.7% to five, 7% to six, 5.1% seven to ten, and .8% eleven or more.
- 5.7% came to PSU because a relative wanted them to come
- 3.5% because a teacher advised them
- 45.3% because the college has a very good academic reputation
- 32.1% because the college has a good reputation for social activities
- 22.9% because they were offered financial assistance
- 25% because the college offers special educational programs
- 41% because the college has a low tuition
- 7.9% because a high school counselor advised them
- .8% because a private counselor advised them
- 9.6% because they wanted to live close to home
- 7.4% because they were not offered aid by their first choice
- 25.5% because PSU graduates gain admission to top graduate schools
- 48.9% PSU graduates get good jobs
- 34.1% because of the college size
- 2.8% were not accepted elsewhere
- 2.8% because of national magazines
- 6.9% from a website
- 4.2% though an early decision program
- 5.8% because friends are attending
- 14.2% because they were offered a merit-based scholarship
- 8.1% because of a needs based scholarship.

**Select Items in “Objectives considered to be essential or very important”:**

- 55.6% indicated becoming an authority my field
- 54% obtaining recognition from colleagues for contributions to my special field
- 17.3% influencing the political structure
- 38.1% influencing social values
- 62.4% raising a family
- 70.7% being very well off financially

- 56.2% helping others who are in difficulty
- 18.3% writing original works
- 20.6% becoming involved in programs to clean up the environment
- 39.8% developing a meaningful philosophy of life
- 22.8% participating in a community action program
- 32.5% helping to promote racial understanding
- 26.5% keeping up to date with political affairs
- 26.2% becoming a community leader
- 22.6% integrating spirituality into my life.

**Select Items in “Chances are very good that participant will”:**

- 15.8% indicated chances are very good they would change their major
- 12.6% change career choice
- 17.3% will graduate with honors
- 52.7% get a job to help pay for college expenses
- 15% play varsity sports
- 54.9% would make at least a B average
- 74.8% would get a Bachelor’s degree
- 43.3% would be satisfied with PSU
- 9.3% would transfer
- 22.2% participate in volunteer or community service work
- 71.4% develop close friendships with other students
- 30.9% communicate regularly with their professors
- 66.3% socialize with someone of another racial/ethnic group
- 38% participate in student clubs/groups

**Select Items in “Political Views”:**

- 34.3% indicated they were liberal, 50.4% were middle of the road, 9.4% conservative, 1.3% far right, and 4.6% were far left.
- 60.3% indicated there is too much concern in the courts for the rights of criminals
- 67.8% felt abortion should be legal
- 51.8% felt it was all right for two people that knew each a short period of time and really liked each other to have sex
- 53.2% felt marijuana should be legalized
- 61% felt employers should be allowed to require drug testing

- 84.7% felt the federal government should do more to control the sale of handguns
- 58.9% felt wealthy people should pay a larger share of taxes than they do now
- 66.6% felt colleges should prohibit racist/sexist speech on campus
- 75.3% felt same-sex couples should have the right to legal marital status
- 49.8% felt affirmative action in college admissions should be abolished.

### ***Study Methodology***

HERI documents include a disclaimer to be read to survey participants prior to administration. The disclaimer explains the substance of the survey and states “all individual responses will be used only for research purposes and will be kept in the strictest confidence,” and indicates individuals do not have to participate. An application was made to the PSU Human Subjects Committee and approved. A short presentation on the survey and its rationale was made to orientation leaders and their support and encouragement were solicited. Copies of the survey, plus #2 pencil were sent to the orientation personnel for distribution to orientation groups. The disclaimer was read prior to each implementation. The survey was distributed and collected. At the end of orientation, the surveys were tallied and sent to HERI for processing. The results were received by PSU in January 2002.

### ***Return Rates***

The Office of Institutional Research received 683 returns from the summer 2001 orientation implementation. Of that total 533 were first-time full-time freshmen, 5 were first-time part-time freshmen, and the remaining 145 were full-time transfer students. That compares with 845 first-time full-time freshmen returns received from the summer 2000, and 756 from the summer 1999 PSU surveys. There were 210 full-time transfer returns from summer 2000, and 152 in summer 1999 from the PSU surveys. Two reasons were provided for the lower returns: 1) fewer students attended orientation in summer 2001; and 2) when given an option, more students choose not to participate than in previous years where they were not given this option.

## *General Caveats*

The following general caveats apply to the study as a whole with an emphasis on the PSU CIRP first-time full time freshmen respondents as compared to the PSU entire freshmen cohort:

1. The 533 useable returns represent a 52.9% of the 1006 freshmen first-time full-time students enrolled fall 2001. Approximately 42.8% of the entering freshmen were men while 58.2% were women. However, 37.3% of the PSU CIRP respondents were male while 62.7% were female. Thus, there is an internal gender skew in the PSU responses.
2. 4 year-public high select CIRP participating institutions had 45.8% male and 54.2% female respondent breakdown. Thus, the gender disparity between PSU and the 4-year public high select category could be a due to gender perceptual differences and comparisons should be viewed with caution.
3. PSU enrolled 101 first-time full-time international students during the fall 2001 semester. Based upon the HERI report, the vast majority of those students did not participate in the survey.
4. While PSU is able to generate the actual useable number of responses for each item (N), HERI does not supply the number of actual useable survey returns for the various items by institutional category. Thus, it is difficult to ascertain if any true statistical differences exist. Concurrently, all PSU participants did not respond to every survey item. It is impossible to determine what impact those missing responses have on the overall returns.
5. HERI is designed to track the freshmen cohorts to ascertain if any visible trends occur in attitudes or demographic characteristics based on percentage differences between PSU and other institutions. This was the first administration of CIRP at PSU. Thus, longitudinal PSU CIRP data does not exist.
6. The survey was administered at the end of the day. The previous activity was the “General Education Assessment Instrument.” CIRP is a perceptual survey. Survey length and administration time of day may influence responses. There are any numbers of confounding variables that could have influenced the respondents’ immediate perceptions from fatigue to the “halo effect” of the first college experience. (All participating institutions received e-mail from HERI asking if surveys had been administered prior to September 11, 2001. They were concerned that events may have influenced surveys distributed after that date. PSU implementation occurred prior to September 11.)
7. Approximately 1/3 of the participants choose not to list their social security numbers on the survey. Thus, the Office of Institutional Research cannot track those individuals or determine their fall 01 Plattsburgh State University enrolled major.

## *Comparative Caveats*

When comparing the PSU responses to other public high select 4-year institutions, please be cognizant of the following caveats that might bias interpretations:

1. A review of other high select participating institutions indicates PSU has a substantially higher percentage of female respondents by at least 8%. That gender difference may influence overall comparative percentage ratings.
2. 89.9% of the PSU respondents indicated they planned to live in a dormitory. Only 80% of the high select participating institutions indicated they planned to live in a dormitory.

3. 72.2% of the PSU participants were 18 years old compared to 66.8% in public high select category. Concurrently, 91% of the PSU participants were white compared to 86.7% in the public high select category. 25% of the PSU participants had an A/A- average grade in high school compared to 49% of the high select participants. 70% of the PSU participants lived more than 100 miles from campus compared to 50.5% of the high select participants. 95% of the PSU participants graduated from a public high school compared to 86.6% of the high select category. 45% of the PSU participants were Roman Catholic compared to 30.3% of the high select participants. 65.5% of the PSU participants listed Plattsburgh State University as their first college choice while 75.8% of the high select participants listed their institution as their first choice. 59.5% of the PSU participants had not taken any advanced placement courses compared with 39.3% of the high select participants, and 70.7% of PSU participants had not taken any advanced placement exams compared to 57.1% of high select participants. These demographic and high school characteristics can impact perceptions and should be taken under advisement when drawing conclusions about comparative item percentage ratings.

### ***Select Comparisons: CIRP 2001 to the PSU 2000 Freshmen and Transfer (F&T) Surveys***

CIRP 2001 and the PSU 2000 Freshmen and Transfer Survey has several overlapping items. A brief analysis follows:

- CIRP respondents constitute 52.9% of the fall 2001 first-time full-time PSU freshmen class while the F&S had an 86.3% representation.
- CIRP respondents indicated 36.2% of the fathers and 30.4% of their mothers had a high school diploma or less compared to F&T responses of 28.3% for fathers and 29.4% of mothers.
- CIRP respondents indicated 13% had a major concern, 55.1% somewhat concern, and 31.9% no concern for financing their education compared to F&T responses of 21.1% major concern, 58.3% somewhat concern, 20.6% no concern.
- CIRP respondents indicated 73.1% studied five hours or less a week in high school compared to F&T responses of 30.1%.
- CIRP respondents indicated 65.6% had PSU as their first college choice compared to F&T responses of 60.7%.
- CIRP respondents indicated 22.9% choose to attend PSU because they received financial aid compared to F&T responses of 22.1%.
- CIRP respondents indicated the three most important reasons to go to college were 1) to learn more about things that interest me, 2) to get training for a career, and 3) to be able to get a better job compared to F&T responses of 1) to prepare for a career, 2) to become a better educated person, and 3) to improve my ability to make money.

There are similarities in the construction of several additional items. The scoring scales between those items are different making comparisons invalid.