

Introduction

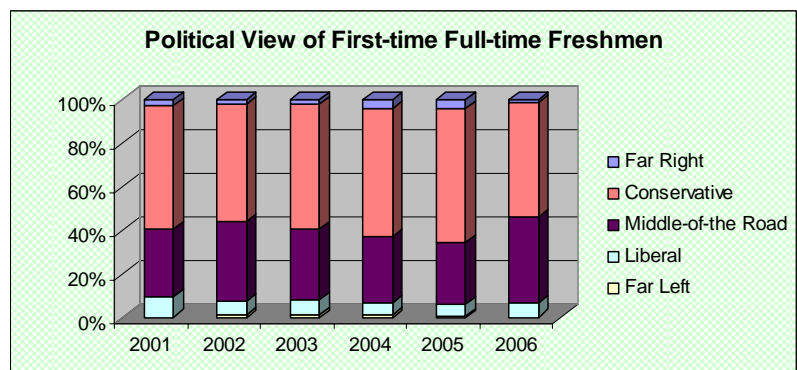
In its forty-first annual publication entitled *The American Freshman*, the Higher Education Research Institute's Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), sponsored by the American Council on Education (ACE) and the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles, report national normative data on the characteristics of first-time, full-time freshmen attending American colleges and universities. The 2006 freshman norms are based on the weighted responses of 271,441 students at 393 of the nation's baccalaureate colleges and universities. These data have been statistically adjusted to reflect the responses of the 1.3 million first-time, full-time students entering four-year colleges and universities as freshmen in 2006. There were 460 full-time, first-time freshmen who responded to the survey at Point Loma Nazarene University (PLNU). Five points of interest are highlighted in *The American Freshman*, including politics, finances, advanced placement courses and exams, service, and racial composition of high school and neighborhood.

Interest in Politics and Social Issues

For today's freshmen, discussing politics is more prevalent now than at any point in the past 41 years. More freshmen report that they discussed politics frequently as high-school seniors, moving up 8.3 percentage points to 33.8 percent in 2006 from 25.5 percent in 2004, the last time this question was asked. This increased interest in politics among freshmen is illustrated by the mid-term elections of November 2006 and what has been reported as the largest voter turnout in 20 years by voters less than 30 years of age (Szep, 2006). A slightly higher percentage of students at PLNU report frequently discussing politics; however, the pattern of growth is nearly identical to the national group. In 2006, 39.6 percent of students report that they frequently discussed politics, an 8.1 percent increase from 31.5 percent in 2004.

When asked to characterize their political view, 43.3 percent of college freshmen identified as "middle-of-the-road," dropping 1.7 percentage points from 2005 to the lowest value since this was first measured by the CIRP in 1970. Both "liberal" (28.4 percent) and "conservative" (23.9 percent) increased by 1.3 percentage points from 2005. Not only is the percentage of students identifying as "liberal" at the highest level since 1975 (30.7 percent), but the percentage identifying as "conservative" is at the highest point in the history of the Freshman Survey. This indicates that freshmen are moving away from a moderate position on their political viewpoints.

Conversely, at Point Loma Nazarene University the shift is toward middle-of-the-road and away from the typical response of conservative. The number of students identifying as "conservative" is at its lowest point in six years at 51.9 percent. Those indicating "middle-of-the-road" increased 10.9 percent from 28.5 percent in 2005 to 39.4 percent in 2006. The response of "Liberal" increased 0.9 percent.

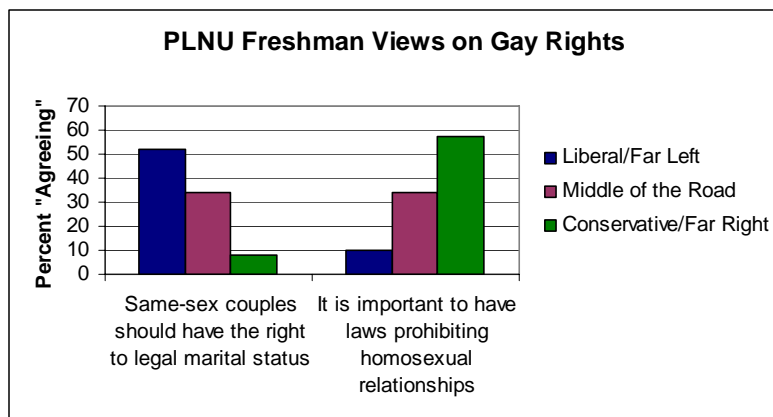


In addition to being asked about their political ideology, incoming freshmen were asked if they agreed or disagreed with various statements concerning social and political issues. Nationally, the issue that shows the greatest change from 2005 to 2006 is a decrease in support that “the federal government should do more to control the sale of handguns,” down from 78.7 percent in 2005 to 73.8 percent in 2006. At the same time, fewer freshmen agree that “there is too much concern in the courts for the rights of criminals,” moving from 57.9 percent in 2005 to 55.9 percent in 2006, the lowest this figure has been since 1975.

At Point Loma Nazarene University, the issue that shows the greatest change is the support for the statement: “it is important to have laws prohibiting homosexual relationships,” decreasing to 44.7 percent, 17 percentage points lower than in 2005. The second greatest change echoes that of the national trend; the support of the statement, “the federal government should do more to control the sale of handguns,” decreased 10.2 percent in 2006 to 64.4 percent. The agreement at PLNU that “there is too much concern in the courts for the rights of criminals has decreased from 65.9 percent in 2005 to 61.8 percent in 2006.

The considerable change in the support of gay rights by entering freshmen at PLNU is also seen nationally at a smaller scale. More students agree that “same sex couples should have the right to legal marital status” in 2006, at 61.2 percent, than in 2005, when that figure was at 57.9 percent. PLNU freshmen responded in 2006 at 20.8 percent support; an increase of 6.4 percent from 14.4 percent in 2005. Another question regarding students’ opinions on the denial of rights to homosexuals gains little support, with only 25.6 percent agreeing that “it is important to have laws prohibiting homosexual relationships,” a drop of 1.8 percentage points from 27.4 percent in 2005.

As a Christian institution and having a typically conservative freshman population, it is not surprising that the percentage of incoming students supporting gay rights is significantly lower than the national average. Those opposed to gay marriage at PLNU make up approximately forty percent more of the freshman population than the freshmen nationally. Last year the difference was about the same for those supporting laws against homosexual relationships; however, with the significant decrease this year, the difference is nearly cut in half to approximately 20 percent.



The issue is clearly divided among political ideologies nationally as well. The issue that most greatly divides conservative and liberal freshmen is whether or not “same-sex couples should have the right to legal marital status.” While 4 out of 5 (83.7 percent) liberals agree that same-sex couples should have this right, only 30.4 percent of conservatives believe the same. The middle-of-the-road freshmen are slightly more likely to hold points of view that are closer to the liberals than the conservatives on this issue at 63.0 percent. A similar

discrepancy emerges when looking at who agrees that it is “important to have laws prohibiting homosexual relations.” Although 48.5 percent of conservatives agree, only 11.0 percent of liberals do so. As with the other gay rights issue, the middle-of-the-road students tend to agree more with liberal students, with 22.7 percent agreeing with the statement.

At Point Loma Nazarene University, the division on these issues is just as profound. Nearly all (92.6 percent) of those who state “conservative” or “far-right” oppose same-sex couples legal right to marital status, while the same view of those stating “liberal” or “far-left” only constitutes just under half of the group (48.3 percent). Two-thirds (65.7 percent) of the middle-of-the-road incoming freshmen disagree with the statement. The related topic of the importance of having laws that prohibit homosexual relationships divides about the same on the other side. The liberal students disagree at 90.0 percent, the conservative students disagree at 42.8 percent, and those who are middle-of-the-road disagree at 66.1 percent.

Abortion is another polarizing issue nationally and among entering freshmen at PLNU. While nationally 78.4 percent of liberal freshmen agree that “abortion should be legal,” only 31.8 percent of conservative students do so. Middle-of-the-road freshmen are truly close to the middle, at 56.3 percent. At PLNU, 51.7 percent of liberal freshmen agree that abortion should be legal, 21.6 percent of middle-of-the-road freshmen, and only 9.4 percent of conservative freshmen agree. Overall, students at Point Loma Nazarene University agree on the issue approximately 30 percentage points less than freshmen nationally.

The table below shows that abolishing the death penalty, legalizing marijuana, and supporting a national health plan are also issues that show noticeable differences along ideological lines. Interestingly, there is somewhat less difference between liberals and conservatives on the issue of affirmative action in college admissions.

Items	Political Orientation					
	Liberal/Far Left		Middle-of-the-Road		Conservative/Far Right	
	Nat'l	PLNU	Nat'l	PLNU	Nat'l	PLNU
<i>The death penalty should be abolished</i>	48.0	53.3	31.7	32.4	22.5	22.6
<i>Marijuana should be legalized</i>	51.5	27.6	34.7	18.0	23.5	9.5
<i>A national health care plan is needed to cover everybody's medical costs</i>	83.9	79.3	74.2	61.5	57.0	43.0
<i>Affirmative action in college admissions should be abolished</i>	44.6	33.3	46.2	45.8	52.7	57.7

Usually seen as a conservative issue, only 52.7 percent of conservative freshmen nationally agree that affirmative action in college admissions should be abolished. However 44.6 percent of liberals also believe affirmative action in college admissions should be abolished. The conservative freshmen at Point Loma Nazarene University share the same views with the national group, with 57.7 percent agreement that affirmative action should be abolished in college admissions. Only one-third (33.3 percent) of the liberal PLNU freshmen agree.

In two of the twenty-one issues examined in the national 2006 CIRP Freshman Survey there is very little difference between liberals and conservatives. Both agree in similar proportions that “dissent is a critical component of the political process” (liberals 66.1 percent, compared to 63.2 percent of conservatives). When asked if “realistically, an individual can do little to bring about major changes in our society,” liberals agree at 25.3 percent, as do 26.5 percent of conservatives. At PLNU, the difference is greater on the view of “dissent is a critical component of the political process,” with liberals agreeing at 39.1 percent and conservatives at 68.1 percent. There is only a small difference between groups’ views on the question that there is little difference an individual can make. Liberals agree with the statement at 13.3 percent and conservatives at 14.7 percent. Overall, ten percentage points more of PLNU students than freshmen nationally believe that an individual can bring about major change in society.

Concerns about College Finances

Two out of three (64.1 percent nationally, 67.8 percent at PLNU) students indicate that they have “some” or “major” concerns regarding their ability to finance the cost of their college education. It is interesting that the percentage of students who report no concerns increased by 1.8 percentage points (0.7 points at PLNU) and the percentage of students who report major concerns decreased by 1.6 percentage points (0.9 points at PLNU) compared to 2005. However, there is still a majority of respondents indicating that they have financial concerns. This is particularly true for students coming from families with lower incomes. While 23.8 percent (26.3 percent at PLNU) of freshmen from families with incomes of less than \$50,000 have major concerns about financing college, a far lower percentage of families with incomes between \$50,000 and \$100,000 have major concerns, at 11.0 percent (15.0 percent at PLNU). Those with incomes greater than \$100,000 are least likely to have major concerns (3.2 percent nationally, 6.0 percent at PLNU).

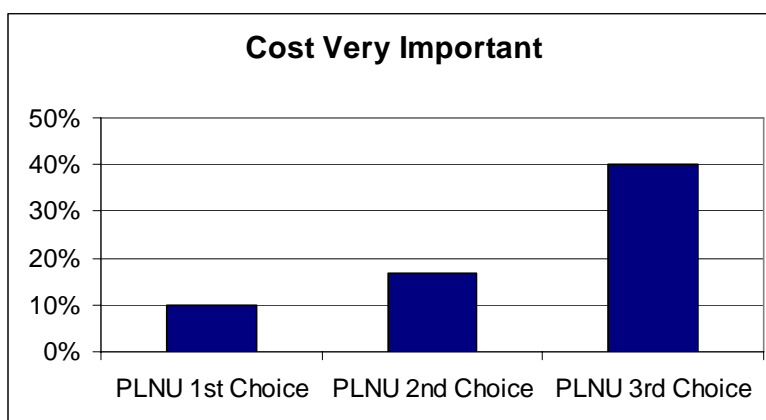
Financial Decisions Impacting College Choice

Fewer freshmen are attending their first-choice institution, as this item is the lowest at the national level since 1988 (66.7 percent). In 2006, this figure has dropped to 67.3 percent from 69.8 percent in 2005. Almost half of the freshmen attending their second choice institutions had also been accepted to their first-choice colleges. Point Loma Nazarene University was the first choice institution for 87.1 percent of entering freshmen, a slight decrease from 88.3 percent in 2005. With only a couple of exceptions (81.0 percent in 1992 and 90.9 percent in 1998) the number of respondents claiming PLNU as their first choice has remained between 86 and 88 percent since 1991, when the survey was first conducted at the University.

The CIRP Freshman Survey contains 20 questions on what influenced the student's choice to attend her or his particular college. The results illustrate that while financial concerns are not the most important considerations for those attending first-choice institutions, students attending less-than-first-choice institutions view financial concerns as more important.

The top five reasons of the students across the country for attending their first-choice institution are: academic reputation, graduates getting good jobs, a visit to the campus, the institution's size, and good social reputation. At Point Loma Nazarene University, the top five reasons are the religious affiliation/orientation of the college, PLNU's size, a visit to the main campus, academic reputation, and graduates getting good jobs. Nationally, the top five differ for second choice institutions, with campus visit and social reputation being replaced by: being offered financial assistance and the cost of the college.

Fewer freshmen who are attending their first-choice college report that the cost of attending their particular college was a very important consideration (29.1 percent) than those attending their second choice (37.4 percent) and third choice (40.4 percent) As PLNU is the first-choice institution for most students, this is seen in that the most common response on the questions regarding finance was "not that important." For those who selected PLNU as their first choice, 10.0 percent agreed that cost was a "very important" factor, this number increasing to 40.0 percent for those claiming PLNU as their third choice.

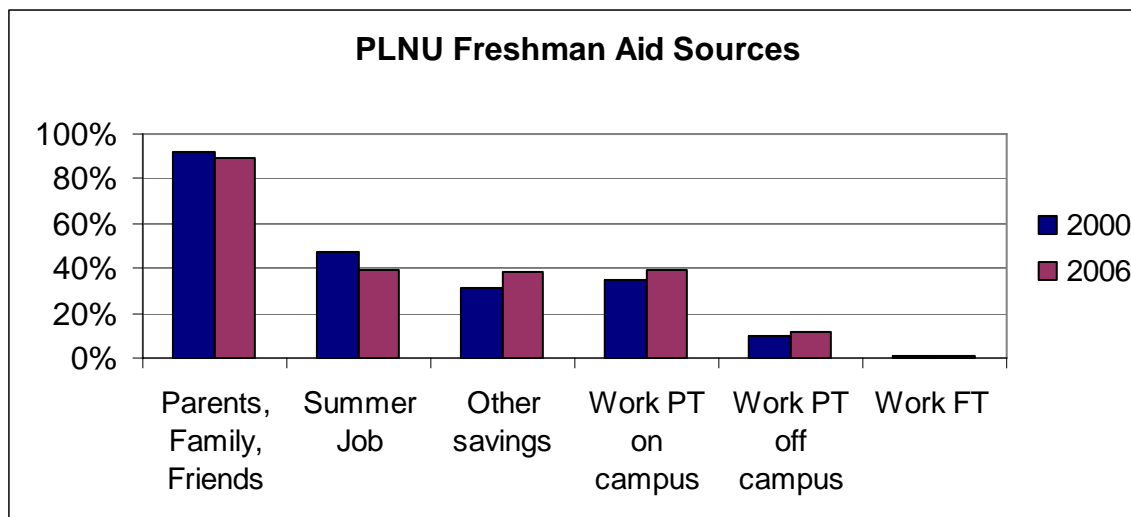


Students who were accepted to their first-choice institutions but chose not to attend are more likely to report that financial concerns were important in choosing where they ultimately matriculated. Roughly one-third (34.0 percent) of those who were admitted and did not attend first choice colleges report that they could not afford their first choice. Approximately one in five (20.7 percent) who did not go to their first choice had not received aid from that institution. The cost of attending college was important for more of those not attending their first choice (48.4 percent) than those who were attending their first choice (29.1 percent).

Increased Reliance on Paid Work

Consistent with previous years, aid for the first year of college from "parent, other relatives, or friends" is a substantial source, with 82.2 percent of freshmen reporting that they received at least some aid from these sources. At PLNU, this number is a little higher at 88.9 percent. There a slight decrease in the percentage of freshmen, nationally and at PLNU, using savings from summer work to help pay college costs compared to 2000 (the last year in which these expanded aid categories were examined). In addition, more students report that they received aid from other savings (38.3 percent) up 6.3 percentage points. At PLNU the number of students receiving aid from other savings increased as well, from 31.1 percent in 2000 to 38.5 percent in 2006, an increase of 7.4 percent. More students, both nationally and at PLNU, are relying on work to cover costs. Those anticipating a "part-time job on campus" increased 2.4

percentage points to 24.3 percent, and “full-time job while in college” more than doubles, from 2.7 percent in 2000 to 4.7 percent in 2006. At Point Loma Nazarene University, the number of students planning to work part-time on campus increased even more, from 34.8 percent in 2000 to 39.3 percent in 2006, an increase of 4.5 percent. The number of PLNU students working full-time jobs however decreased 0.4 percent to 0.7 percent in 2006.



Advanced Placement Courses and Exams

An increasing number of freshmen indicate that they took at least one Advanced Placement (AP) course or AP exam in high school. In 2006, 61.6 percent of students nationally indicated that they took at least one AP course, which is up from 59.3 percent when the question was first asked five years ago. Only 6.3 percent (4.4 percent at PLNU) of freshmen report that their high school did not offer AP courses. Though somewhat fewer students actually take an AP exams, which can provide an opportunity to gain credit for college courses, this number is increasing at a faster rate – 51.0 percent report taking at least one AP exam, a percentage that is up from 45.0 percent among 2001 freshmen.

At PLNU, these numbers have also increased. In 2001, 66.6 percent of freshmen indicated they took at least one AP course and in 2006, 77.2 percent report taking an AP course. The number taking exams has also increased, from 53.1 percent of students indicating they took at least one AP exam in 2001, to 67.5 percent in 2006. The large increase in students taking AP courses and exams before attending PLNU may likely be explained by the enrollment cap recently established at the University and its effect on the academic standards of incoming freshmen. Other scholarly indicators, SAT scores and grade-point averages (GPA's), of the PLNU's freshmen have also increased over the last five years.

(See <http://www.pointloma.edu/Assets/Accreditation/DataTables/1.2.1-UGPreparationLevels.pdf>)

The following table shows distinct differences by race/ethnicity among students taking AP courses and exams. Black students are more likely than other groups to report that their high school did not offer AP courses (7.4 percent nationally and 7.7 percent at PLNU). Nationally, almost half report taking at least one AP course (49.8 percent) but only 38.6 percent report taking AP exams. At Point Loma Nazarene University, this group remains the least likely to have taken AP courses or exams, however the percentage which did take courses or exams is higher than the national percentage, with over two-thirds (69.2 percent) taking an AP course, and over half (58.3 percent) taking an AP exam. In contrast to the national percentage of Black students taking AP courses and exams, 73.1 percent of Asian American/Pacific Islanders report taking at least one course and nearly two thirds (65.7 percent) took one or more AP exams in high school. The percentages at PLNU are again higher; nearly three-fourths (73.1 percent) of Asian students took at least one AP course, and the same percentage (73.3 percent) also took at least one AP exam. At the high end of course rigor, nationally Asian Americans are more than twice as likely to report taking more than five AP courses in high school than Black students. This is not

the case however at PLNU; although Asian American/Pacific Islanders are on the high end, black students are only 1.5 percentage points below. Interestingly, White students are on the low end, with only 20.6 taking more than five AP courses. Those with a race/ethnicity of other are the only group lower at 17.4 percent.

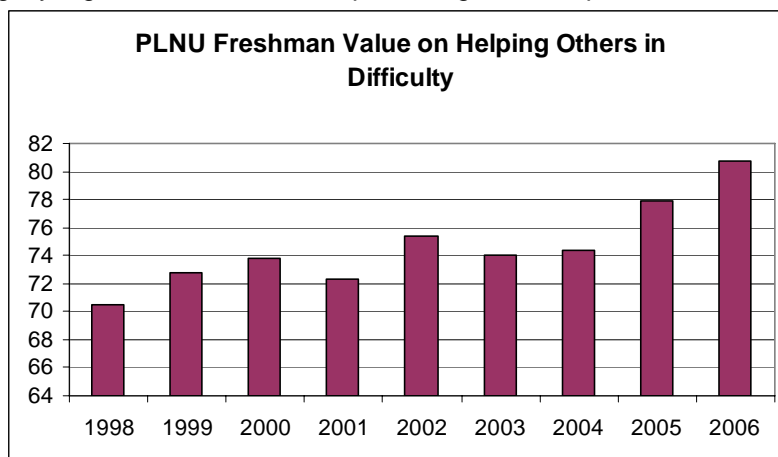
Percentage of Students Reporting AP Courses/Exams Taken by Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	No AP Courses Offered		Took 1+ AP Courses		Took 1+ AP Exams		Took 5+ AP Courses	
	Nat'l	PLNU	Nat'l	PLNU	Nat'l	PLNU	Nat'l	PLNU
White	6.2	5.3	61.1	78.1	49.7	67.2	13.9	20.6
Black/African American	7.4	7.7	49.8	69.2	38.6	58.3	7.6	30.8
American Indian	6.5	0.0	62.1	83.3	48.7	61.1	31.7	27.8
Asian American/Pacific Islander	5.8	0.0	73.1	87.1	65.7	73.3	17.8	32.3
Latina/o	5.1	0.0	67.7	84.2	59.4	71.4	13.7	22.6
Other/Unknown	7.4	4.3	58.9	91.3	47.8	80.0	13.0	17.4
Total	6.3	4.2	61.7	78.7	50.9	68.1	14.9	21.9

Commitment to Service Continues

Last year a significant increase in commitment to service was reported among American freshmen – presumably due to natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina. It appears that this was not a one-time phenomenon. Slight increases continued a trend in student interest in civic commitment and social responsibility.

Significantly higher proportions of entering freshmen with civic concerns appear to attend particular types of institutions. Approximately two-thirds (66.7) of all freshmen report that “helping others in difficulty” is a “very important” or “essential” personal goal. Three-quarters (75.0 percent) of students attending public and 79.0 percent of students attending private historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs); however, report they highly value this personal goal. At Point Loma Nazarene University 80.8 percent of freshmen report that “helping others in difficulty” is a “very important” or “essential” goal. More than half (52.7 percent) of those attending HBCUs also indicate “becoming a community leader” is an “essential” or “very important” goal compared with 35.2 percent of students attending all baccalaureate-granting institutions. PLNU students are only slightly higher than the national percentage at 39.2 percent. Student desire to “influence social values” also continues on an upward trend and nationally is at its highest point since 1993. While 42.5 percent of all students indicate that this is an important value, larger proportions of students at HBCUs indicate that this is the case: 60.9 percent of students at private and 56.1 percent of students at public HBCUs. At PLNU however, it is at the lowest point in six years at 52.3 percent, yet still ten percentage points higher than the national average and only slightly lower than the HBCUs.



The CIRP report, *The American Freshman*, speculates that these students are unsure on how to carry out their goals; however it could be that the students’ involvement extends past the type of organizations suggested in the survey. Only about 11.3 percent of all students indicated the importance of participating in organizations like Peace Corps, AmeriCorps, or Vista; at HBCUs, this percentage is at 15.0 percent and at 9.5 percent at PLNU. It is possible that students may plan to become involved in other non-profit

organizations and at a Christian University many students may plan to carry out their goals through missions and the church or rather than non-religious organizations.

Racial Composition of High School and Neighborhood

The 2006 CIRP Freshman Survey reintroduced two questions about the racial composition of the high school students last attended and the neighborhood where they grew up. Students could characterize their high schools or neighborhoods on a scale ranging from “all or “mostly” non-White to half-and-half to “all” or “mostly” White.

In 2006, 64.0 percent of entering freshmen across the country report that their high school was all or mostly White, while slightly more students, 73.6 percent, report the same of the neighborhoods where they grew up. On the other end of the scale, only 13.1 percent of students report that their high school was all or mostly non-White, and 14.2 percent of students report this about their neighborhood. At Point Loma Nazarene University, 56.4 percent of students report that their high school was “all” or “mostly” White and report the same about their neighborhood at 70.7 percent. Again the national trend is reflected at PLNU, with only 13.6 percent reporting their high school was “all” or “mostly” non-White and their neighborhood 10.3 percent. Students who attend all or mostly White high schools tend to live in all or mostly White neighborhoods, this in spite of an increasingly diversifying pool of students within the high school age population (NCES, 2006). In addition, slightly more men (66.0 percent) report attending “all” or “mostly” White high schools than women (62.3 percent) nationally. At PLNU, while not statistically significant, this difference is even greater, with 60.5 percent of men reporting “all” or “mostly” White high schools and 54.1 percent of women reporting the same.

Percent of PLNU Freshmen Reporting on Racial Composition of Neighborhood and High School by Ethnicity and Income Level

	Neighborhood			High School		
	All or Mostly Non-White	Half and Half	All or Mostly White	All or Mostly Non-White	Half and Half	All or Mostly White
<i>White</i>	5.4	16.3	78.2	10.5	30.7	58.7
<i>Black/African American</i>	33.3	25.0	41.7	30.8	30.8	38.5
<i>American Indian</i>	16.7	16.7	66.7	5.6	50.0	44.4
<i>Asian American/Pacific Islander</i>	29.0	25.8	42.5	25.8	41.9	32.2
<i>Latina/o</i>	21.7	28.3	50.0	19.4	29.0	51.6
<i>Other/Unknown</i>	8.7	17.4	73.9	4.2	25.0	70.8
<i>Less than \$30,000</i>	33.3	30.3	36.4	21.2	39.4	39.4
<i>\$30,00-\$59,999</i>	14.3	18.2	67.5	23.1	24.4	52.6
<i>\$60,000-\$99,999</i>	5.3	18.9	75.8	7.1	36.7	56.1
<i>\$100,00 +</i>	6.8	16.9	76.3	10.4	28.4	61.2

Schools and neighborhoods are increasingly segregated along both racial and socio-economic lines, and the evidence of this intertwining is most apparent when breaking out the results along both dimensions. Among students that report an annual family income of less than \$30,000, well over one-third (36.0 percent, 33.3 percent at PLNU) report that their neighborhood was all or mostly non-White compared to only 6.2 percent (6.8 percent at PLNU) of their peers in the \$100,000 or more income range. Similarly, among students in the lowest income range, 29.4 percent report that their high school was all or mostly non-White compared to only 7.3 percent in the highest income range. For students at the highest income level, nearly five in six (84.2 percent) report having grown up in a neighborhood that was all or mostly White, a significantly higher proportion than almost every other category. The numbers are slightly less dramatic at PLNU, with 21.2 percent of students in the low income range reporting their high school as all or mostly non-White and 10.4 percent of students in the high income range reporting the same. Just over three-quarters (76.3 percent) of PLNU students in the highest income range report they had all or mostly

White neighborhoods. Those reporting the same in the mid income ranges of \$30,000-\$59,999 and \$60,000-\$99,999 were not much lower at 67.5 and 75.8 percent respectively.

Differences are also evident when examining these results along racial/ethnic lines. Nationally, almost 9 out of every 10 (87.2 percent) White students report that they grew up in a neighborhood that was all or mostly White, while 74.6 percent attended a high school with this same profile. At Point Loma Nazarene University just over three-quarters (78.2 percent) of the White freshmen report their neighborhood was all or mostly white, and just over half (58.7 percent) report the same of their high school. Just over half (56.9 percent) of Black students across the country report that they grew up in a neighborhood that was all or mostly non-White, while 41.4 percent attended a high school with this profile. At PLNU, one third (33.3 percent) of the Black students report their neighborhood as all or mostly non-White and nearly the same, 30.8 percent, report this of their high school. On the national level, Asian/Pacific Islanders and Latina/os are more evenly distributed among the three racial composition categories in terms of their last high school attended. Compared to the two prior peer groups, Asians/Pacific Islanders and Latinas/os tend to report growing up in more integrated neighborhoods. At PLNU, this is fairly true for the Asian/Pacific Islanders, but not for the Latinas/os, half (50.0 percent) of whom report growing up in all or mostly White neighborhoods. Close to two-thirds of students in the other race (66.5 percent nationally, 73.9 percent at PLNU) of students and Native American (64.9 percent nationally, 66.7 percent at PLNU) categories also report growing up in an all or mostly White neighborhood, results that closely mirror those for the total sample.

Szep, J. (2006) Youth turnout in election biggest in 20 years. *Reuters.com*. Retrieved December 14, 2006, from <http://elections.us.reuters.com/top/new/usnN08342322.html>.