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## Introduction

In its fortieth annual publication entitled *The American Freshman*, the Higher Education Research Institute's Cooperative Institutional Research Program, 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 2005 freshman norms are based on the weighted responses of 263,710 students at 385 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 2005. There were 480 full-time, first-time freshmen who responded to the survey at Point Loma Nazarene University (PLNU). Six points of interest are highlighted in *The American Freshman*, including social and civic responsibility, military support and political participation, drinking, religion, gender differences in motivations for attending college, and intrinsic motivation concerning college attendance. The UCLA study concludes with a focus on first-generation college students. This article summarizes how Point Loma Nazarene University's entering freshmen in August of 2005 compare to these national norms.

## Social and Civic Responsibility

Nationally, the entering class of 2005 shows a distinctive and widespread rise in attitudes reflecting social concerns and civic responsibility behaviors compared with previous cohorts. This is perhaps a reaction to the worst global and national disasters witnessed in their lifetime. The Indian Ocean tsunami occurred during their high-school senior year and Hurricane Katrina hit the southern Gulf Region in August as many students began college. Two out of three (66.3 percent) entering freshman report they believe it is essential or very important to help others who are in difficulty, the highest the figure has been in the last twenty-five years. The percentage of PLNU incoming freshmen report a higher percentage, over three-fourths (77.9 percent), responding in kind. While this number is higher than it has been, the increase is not great. On average 74 percent of incoming freshmen over the previous four years responded they believed it was very important or essential to help others in difficulty.

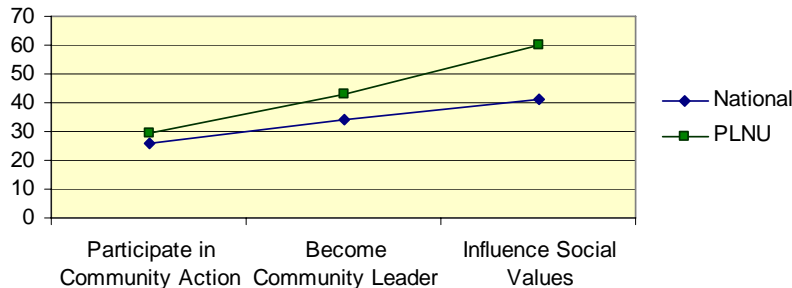
Entering freshmen show a strong commitment to action. Nationally, at an all-time high, 83.2 percent report that they volunteered at least occasionally during their high-school senior year and 70.6 percent report that they typically volunteered on a weekly basis. At PLNU, 92.6 percent reported volunteering at least occasionally and 81.8% typically volunteered on a weekly basis. Also at a national high is the percent who believe there is a very good chance that they will participate in volunteer or community service in college, at 26.3 percent. The number is significantly higher at Point Loma Nazarene University, at 41.1 percent. Nationally, adding those who believe there is some chance they will volunteer, the figure rises to 67.3 percent; only 8.2 percent believe there is no chance they will do so. At PLNU, adding those who believe there is some chance they will volunteer, the number rises to 82.6 percent, with only 3.6 percent believing there is no chance they will volunteer.

Students are not only interested in helping others through service; they believe it is personally important to take action at different levels. Approximately one in four students nationally (25.6 percent) reports that it is essential or very important for them to participate personally in a community action program. Slightly more, 29.6 percent, of PLNU students responded in kind. An even larger number of students nationally, 33.9 percent, find the goal of becoming a community leader essential or very important. Students entering PLNU responded approximately ten percentage points higher at 42.7 percent. Larger still is the percentage of students who believe it is essential or very important for them to influence social values

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(43.3 percent). Point Loma Nazarene University students continue to be above the national norm, over 15 percentage points above the norm at 60.1 percent.

### Community Service Responses; National vs PLNU



## Military Support and Political Participation

Nationally, one third of freshmen (34.2 percent) agree with the statement that “federal military spending should be increased,” and 63.1 percent agree with the statement that “only volunteers should serve in the armed forces.” Students entering PLNU have slightly different views. More students, 44.4 percent, agreed with the statement regarding an increase in federal military spending; less, 56.4 percent, of PLNU students agreed that only volunteers should serve in the armed forces. One new item on the survey revealed that 63.0 of freshmen nationally believe that “dissent is a critical component of the political process.” Students at PLNU responded nearly the same at 64.1 percent. In addition, nearly half (49.7 percent) of students nationally report that they participated in an organized demonstration during high school, the highest percentage in the survey’s history. Slightly more, 52.3 percent of PLNU students reported the same. However, the focus of such demonstrations is unknown.

More than a third (36.4) percent of freshmen report they believe it is important or essential to “keep up-to-date with political affairs.” The students at Point Loma Nazarene University responded with a slightly higher percentage of 40.2 percent. Some of the political involvement may be due to the 2004 and 2005 election activity, as 12.0 percent nationally, and 14.0 percent at PLNU, report they worked in a local, state, or national political campaign during high school.

## Drinking

The percentage of entering college students who report that they frequently or occasionally drank beer as high school seniors dropped to an all-time low in 2005, to 43.4 percent. Students entering Point Loma Nazarene University were much less likely to drink however, at 18.5 percent. While the numbers are lower, PLNU matches the national trend of men being more likely to drink than women.

	Male	Female
<i>Nationally</i>	49.1%	38.8%
<i>PLNU</i>	26.2	13.2

National studies have noticed that the decline in high school drinking has not affected the amount of drinking a student does in college, as that percentage has remained fairly stable.

## Religious Participation and Discussion of Religion

Overall participation in religious activities is high among American freshmen but there is evidence of decline in a number of areas. While 79.6 percent of freshmen report that they attended religious services frequently or occasionally during their senior year in high school, this percentage has fallen steadily since a high in 1997 (85.4 percent) and has now reached it lowest point. A similar trend is evident with respect to the time that students devote to prayer or meditation. This item was first included on the survey in

1996, when 66.0 percent of students reported that they pray or meditate on a weekly basis; in 2005, this percentage declines to 62.6 percent. In addition, there has been an increase in the percentage of freshmen reporting “none” for religious preference; this percentage for those entering in 2005 was at 17.4 percent.

Point Loma Nazarene University students do not mirror this trend. Their percentages regarding religious participation are high and have been consistently high over the years. In 2005, 99.8% reported attending a religious service frequently or occasionally during their high school senior year. Almost as many, at 98.5 percent, reported praying on a weekly basis. Only 1.5 percent reported having no religious preference.

Despite declining national trends in religious activities, more of the 2005 entering freshmen are spending time discussing religion, as 35.0 percent report that they frequently discussed religion during their senior year in high school, an increase of 5.4 percentage points over 2003, when this item was last asked. Students entering PLNU are discussing religion in the senior year of high school more than the average freshman, with 69.1 percent reporting that they do so frequently. This number is slightly higher than the 2003 percentage of 68.1 percent.

## Men and Women Differ in Motivations for Attending College

The primary reasons to attend college differ for men and women. Men are more likely than women to report that they are attending college to be able to make more money (73.5 percent vs. 69.0 percent). PLNU proportions reflect the same at lower percentages (64.8 percent vs. 47.3 percent). While money is the top reason for men nationally, at PLNU the top response from men is to be able to get a better job (68.2 percent). Nationally, women’s top reasons include “to learn more about things that interest me (81.4 percent), followed by getting training for a specific career (73.1 percent). The top reason for PLNU female students is the same at 88.2 percent; however following this is to gain a general education and appreciation for ideas at 79.7. Those desiring to get training for a specific career are next at 75.1 percent.

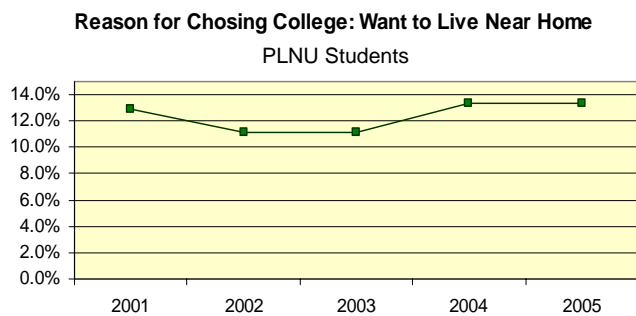
<b>Reason to Attend College</b>	<b>National Men %</b>	<b>National Women %</b>	<b>PLNU Men %</b>	<b>PLNU Women %</b>
<i>To be able to make more money</i>	73.5	69.0	64.8	47.3
<i>To be able to get a better job</i>	72.1	72.2	68.2	63.9
<i>To gain a general education and appreciation of ideas</i>	58.3	71.1	63.6	79.7
<i>To make me a more cultured person</i>	35.3	48.3	36.9	57.1
<i>To find my purpose in life</i>	44.6	57.4	56.2	59.6
<i>To prepare for graduate/professional school</i>	51.3	63.5	54.4	49.6

The biggest gender differences in students’ college-going motivations are most prominent with respect to aspects of personal and intellectual development, with women more likely than men to cite gaining a general education and appreciation of ideas, becoming a more cultured person, and finding a purpose in life. This is true of students both nationally and at PLNU. (See table for percentages.) Nationally, substantial differences are also evident in the extent to which women and men prioritize attending college to prepare for graduate or professional school. Though nationally more women report going to college to prepare for graduate/professional school, at Point Loma Nazarene University more men report this. The difference between the percentages of men and women at PLNU, however, is not significant.

## Influence of Parents and Other Adults in Students’ College-Going Decisions

More students today report that they are attending college in part because their parents wanted them to go. Overall 43.7 percent cite this factor as very important, up from 41.8 percent last year. About five percentage points less of PLNU students respond this way, at 37.6 percent. Slightly less, 35.6 percent responded the same in 2004. (Due to the smaller sample size at PLNU, this two percent difference is not significant as is the national change.) In addition, in 2005 more students than ever before indicate that living near home was a very important reason in selecting a college (18.7 percent). This number at Point Loma Nazarene University is lower than the national number, at 13.3 percent, and has been fairly steady

over the last five years. At the same time, the proportion of students who indicate that their desire “to get away from home” is a compelling reason for college-going remains at approximately 22 percent. The percentage at PLNU is 19.2 percent. This was lower than the percentage in 2004 of 24.3 percent.



Apart from parental influence, encouragement from a mentor/role model has become very important in influencing college-going decisions for a larger proportion of students today (15.8 percent) than ever before. There were even more students at PLNU reporting they were influenced to go to college by a mentor/role model (18.8). This number is higher than the last reported, in 2003, at 14.9 percent. High school guidance counselors and teachers are also influencing students to a lesser degree at 8.0 percent and 5.4 percent nationally, and 2.5 percent for both groups at PLNU.

## A Focus on First-Generation College Students

First-generation college students are defined as those students whose parents have no college or university experiences. The likelihood of attending and graduating from college is strongly correlated with parents' education. Thus, first-generation students face challenges unlike their peers in traversing through the higher education pipeline. In spite of these challenges, the goal of increasing baccalaureate attainment rates necessitates a better understanding of first-generation college students' pre-college characteristics, including their reasons for choosing their respective college, and their expectations about work and family in the early college years. The CIRP freshman norms data are uniquely situated to profile the college-going attitudes and behaviors of first-generation college students.

Items	First-Generation Student?			
	National Yes %	National No %	PLNU Yes %	PLNU No %
“Very important” Reason for Going to College:				
My parents wanted me to go	47.0	43.1	29.0	38.2
A mentor/role model encourage me to go	20.5	14.9	25.8	18.3
“Somewhat or very important” Reason to Go to This College:				
My teacher advised me	40.9	33.7	25.2	22.0
High School counselor advised me	44.2	36.4	25.2	22.2

Within the 2005 norms data, about one in six (15.9 percent) students falls under the definition of first-generation college student, including 16.9 percent of all female students and 14.7 percent of all male students. At Point Loma Nazarene University, 6.7 percent of students are first-generation, including 6.7 percent of all female students and 6.5 percent of all male students. Nationally, first-generation students are more concentrated at public institutions (17.5 percent) than private institutions (12.8 percent) and at four-year colleges (18.5 percent) than at universities (11.9 percent). First-generation students come from homes with lower family incomes: 29.4 percent report annual family incomes below \$25,000 compared to only 9.2 percents of their non-first-generation counterparts. The same is true at PLNU; one out of three (33.3 percent) first-generation students report their parents make less than \$25,000 while only 6.6 percent of non-first generation students report the same. First-generation students also report lower high school grades, with 37.4 percent reporting a high school GPA of “A- or higher” while 48.3 percent of their peers report this same GPA category. The difference at Point Loma Nazarene University is not as great; first-generation students are actually reporting higher GPAs than non-first-generation students (68.9 percent vs. 65.3 percent).

Relative to their peers, first-generation students generally report that parents, role models, teachers, and high school counselors were all important influences on their decision to attend college. Specifically, encouragement from a role model or mentor was a very important reason for going to college for first-

generation students (20.5 percent) as compared to their peers (14.9 percent). The same was true at PLNU with 25.8 percent of first-generation students reporting the influence of a mentor/role model compared to 18.3 percent of their peers.

Items	First-Generation Student?			
	National Yes %	National No %	PLNU Yes %	PLNU No %
“Very Important” Reason for Going to College:				
To be able to get a better job	77.3	71.2	67.7	65.3
To be able to make more money	76.4	70.0	38.7	55.3
“Very Important” Reason for Going to <u>This</u> College:				
I was offered financial assistance	41.4	34.3	25.0	34.8
The cost of attending this college	38.8	31.2	25.0	30.8
Wanted to live near home	26.6	17.2	25.0	12.4
“Very Good Chance”				
Get a job to help pay for college expenses	55.1	45.2	41.9	50.8
“Some or Very Good Chance”				
Work full-time while attending college	36.7	24.7	19.4	18.9
Have a “Major” concern about ability to finance college education	22.7	11.4	32.3	13.0
Distance of college from student’s permanent home (50 miles or less)	49.9	35.5	40.0	19.6

Nationally, advice from a teacher or a high school counselor was shown to be more important for first-generation students (40.9 percent and 44.2 percent) than their peers (33.7 percent and 36.4 percent) in choosing their respective institution. This was not the case at PLNU, with nearly the same percentage in all groups marking the influence of a teacher or counselor as part of their college choice decision. Nationally, and in some areas at Point Loma Nazarene University, these descriptive data indicate that first-generation students are placing more importance on the influence of others in their lives in deciding whether and where to go to college.

In comparison to their peers, first-generation college students are more likely to report that their ability to get a better job (77.3 percent vs. 71.2 percent) and make more money (76.4 percent vs. 70.0 percent) were very important reasons for going to college. Similarly, more first-generation students cite the cost of college and being awarded financial assistance as important reasons in determining which college they will attend. However, this is not the case at PLNU. Only slightly more first-generation students report their ability to get a better job is a very important reason to attend college (67.7 percent vs. 65.3 percent). Attending college to make more money is cited more as a reason by non-first-generation students than first-generation students (55.3 percent vs. 38.7 percent). The cost of college and financial aid trends were also different at PLNU. Fewer first-generation students said these items were more important than their peers, by approximately seven percentage points. Nationally, first-generation students are more likely than their peers to think that there is a very good chance they will get a job to pay for college expenses (55.1 percent vs. 45.2 percent) and expect that there is some or a very good chance they will work full-time while attending college (36.7 percent vs. 24.7 percent). However, nearly ten percent less of first-generation students at PLNU are planning to get a job to pay for college expenses than their peers (41.9 percent vs. 50.8 percent). There are slightly more first-generation students indicating there is some or a very good chance they will work full-time (19.4 percent vs. 18.9 percent). Despite PLNU first-generation students’ confidence in financial matters, they are significantly more likely to state that finances are a major concern (32.3 percent vs. 13.0 percent).

Also noteworthy is that half (49.9 percent) of first-generation students chose to attend an institution within 50 miles of their permanent home, compared to only 35.5 percent of their peers. This trend is true at PLNU as well, with 40.0 percent of first-generation students living within 50 miles of their permanent home, compared to only 19.6 percents of their peers. In addition, almost one-third (30.7 percent) of first-generation students nationally plan to live-off campus during their first year of college, compared to only 16.0 percent of their peers. This is not the case at PLNU, where residential life is strongly emphasized, with the same percentage of students in both groups planning to live on campus at 96.9 percent. The

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strong expectations of first-generation students nationally to work and live off campus do not portend well for enhancing the quality of their college experiences during the critical first few years on campus. First-generation students arrive in college with a unique set of concerns and expectations, and it is important for institutions to acknowledge the exceptional needs of this student population in order to best facilitate a successful college experience. Understanding and validating their needs and concerns is an important first step toward the process of helping these students navigate the transition to college and helping them achieve their educational goals.