

# studentPOLL

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*Campus safety is now a significant factor in college choice; students and parents are equally concerned about safety at college.*

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## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Like most communities today, even those in the most bucolic settings, colleges and universities are no longer safe havens. According to a recent study cited in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, nearly a million college students may now be carrying weapons. Stricter federal reporting laws for campus crime statistics; stepped up security and police patrols around college and university campuses nationwide; the proliferation of campus programs and communications solely dedicated to personal safety and crime prevention — all are telling signs that crime and safety are now paramount concerns in academe.

Not surprisingly, campus safety now looms much larger as a factor in college choice as well. With this in mind, we scrapped our plans to focus the spring issue of *studentPOLL* on student diversity and internationalism (a topic we will now cover in our summer issue) in favor of reporting what we believe are more urgent and timely findings.

These findings sound a clear warning to colleges and universities about market perceptions of the risks of college. For example, both students and parents believe that life on a college campus will be more dangerous than life in their hometown.

Our findings also defy the conventional wisdom frequently heard in academe: that parents are more concerned than students about campus safety. *studentPOLL* reveals that, in reality, they are equally concerned. Even more interesting, students think their parents are more concerned about the risks of college than their parents actually report.

Equally important, the findings call into question institutional credibility on crime and safety. For example, a sizable portion of parents and students *do not* believe institutions report their own crime statistics honestly.

The concerns enumerated in *studentPOLL* are so prevalent and clear that it would be foolish for any institution, even those that see themselves as fortified from crime, to ignore them. Hopefully, this issue of *studentPOLL* will provide insights that will help guide your institution in addressing these issues.

Richard A. Hesel  
*Publisher*

# 1. The perceived safety of a college campus is an extremely important factor in college choice.

**C**ampus safety is very much on the minds of parents and students today in college selection. In fact, among the selection criteria we evaluated, it was equal in importance to academic reputation and prestige. Only “high quality facilities” received a higher importance rating from both parents and students.

Specifically, some 64 percent of parents and 57 percent of students rated a safe campus as “very important” in their choice of a college. (Table 1a)

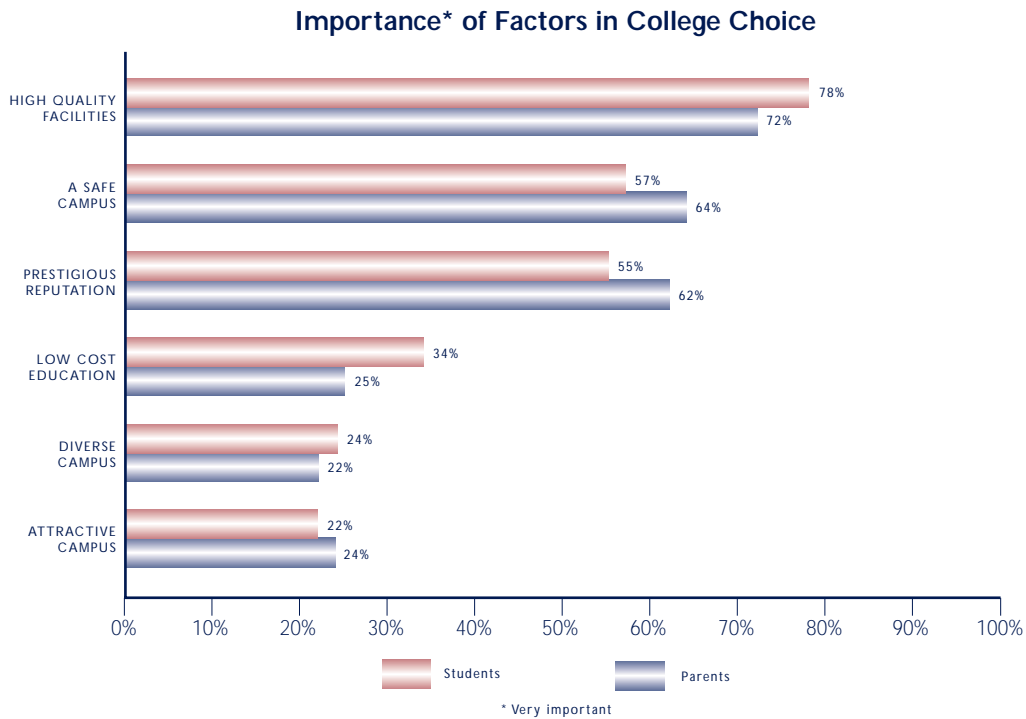
Nearly all respondents rated a safe campus as either “very” or “somewhat” important (90 percent of parents and 94 percent of students).

A safe campus is especially consequential for female students. Seventy-two percent indicated that a safe campus was very important in college choice, compared to only 43 percent of male students. (Table 1b)

## ADVISORY

IF YOUR CAMPUS IS DIVIDED BY PUBLIC STREETS OR IS NOT SELF-CONTAINED, PAY SPECIAL ATTENTION TO LANDSCAPING, SIGNAGE, PLAZAS, AND OTHER DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS THAT CREATE A FEELING OF COHESION AND COMMUNITY.

Table 1a.



## SURVEY METHODOLOGY

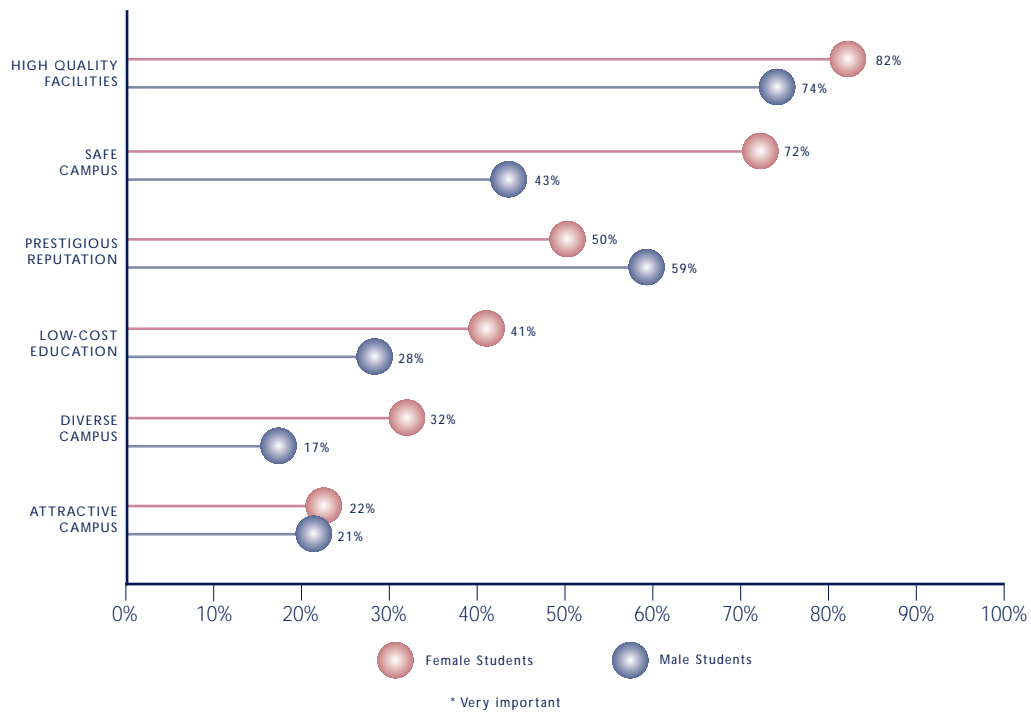
**T**he findings reported in this issue of *studentPOLL* are based on in-depth telephone interviews with a random national sample of 400 high school seniors who plan to enroll in four-year colleges in the

fall of 1997 and 400 parents of high school seniors who had enrolled in a four-year institution in the fall of 1996. To qualify for an interview, respondents (or their sons or daughters) must have achieved a combined, re-centered SAT score of 1050 or higher. The study sample

was drawn to represent the national distribution of students with qualifying SAT scores by geography, gender, intended major, and income. Questions about survey methods, findings, and other matters should be addressed to Art & Science Group, Inc.

Table 1b.

Importance\* of Factors in College Choice, by Gender



ABOUT ART & SCIENCE GROUP

*student*POLL is published by Art & Science Group, Inc., a national leader in providing market intelligence to higher education and the non-profit sector. The firm provides services in the following areas:

- Student recruitment marketing and enrollment management
- Tuition pricing, financial aid, and net tuition revenue management
- Planning and communications for capital campaigns, other large fundraising efforts, and alumni relations programs
- Overall institutional advancement and marketing

Within these broad areas, the firm provides a number of supporting services:

- Strategic marketing and communications planning
- Quantitative and qualitative market research
- Econometric analysis of financial aid awards
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190 West Ostend Street, Suite 216  
Baltimore, MD 21230-3797  
Phone 410-962-1300  
Fax 410-962-1315

112 Swift Avenue  
Durham, NC 27705-4800  
Phone 919-286-4821  
Fax 919-286-4932

**E-mail:**  
consult@artsci.com

**World Wide Web:**  
www.artsci.com

ABOUT *student*POLL

*student*POLL is an authoritative national survey that measures the opinions, perceptions, and behavior of high-ability, college-bound high school students and their parents. Available only by subscription, it is

published quarterly by Art & Science Group, Inc., leading institutional marketing consultants to higher education and the non-profit sector. Information about Art & Science Group and how to order subscriptions

to *student*POLL can be found on pages 3 and 4 of this report.

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## 2. Students and parents are equally likely to be concerned about the risk of crime at college.

To better understand parents' and students' perceptions about the risk of crime at college versus the risk of crime where they now live, we asked both populations to rate the risk of campus crime on a scale of 1

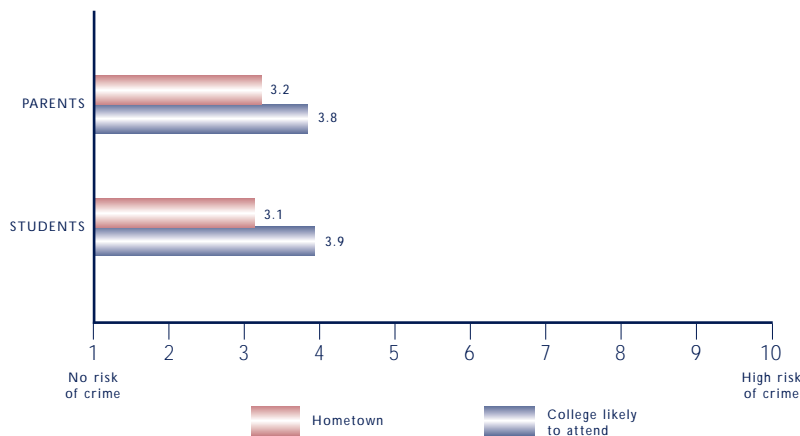
to 10. A higher score was associated with higher crime risk. Overall, both parents and students rated the risk of crime at college greater than the risk at home.

Specifically, the mean risk of crime at home assigned by parents and students was virtually the same —

3.2 and 3.1 respectively. The mean crime risk assigned to college was also the same for the two populations surveyed. Although risk ratings were relatively low for both the student's hometown and the college he/she is likely to attend, there was significantly more risk associated with the latter: 3.8 for parents and 3.9 for students. (Table 2).

Table 2.

Crime at Home vs. College  
mean rating



### ADVISORY

**DON'T ASSUME SAFETY**  
INFORMATION SHOULD ONLY BE  
DIRECTED AT PARENTS.

Make sure messages about campus safety and security are also provided to students in admissions, orientation, and student life materials, in campus visits, and through personal contacts.

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Subscriptions to *student*POLL, published quarterly, are \$295 for a non-profit individual subscription and \$595 for a non-profit institutional subscription (up to six recipients).

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### 3. Parental concern about the risks of college is actually lower than students imagine.

**W**e were interested in understanding the variance between what prospective students surmise about the extent and nature of their parents' concerns about campus crime and other personal risks and parents' actual concerns. To measure the possible differences, we asked students to rate the level of concern they thought their parents would have about their exposure to different risks at college, then asked parents to rate their actual concerns about many of the same risks.

In a nutshell, students imagine that their parents are more concerned about various risks than they in fact are. While excessive drinking,

presence of weapons, drug abuse, physical violence, and sexual abuse and exploitation were the issues of greatest concern to a majority of parents, the proportion of parents saying they were very or somewhat concerned about most of these risks was lower than students predicted.

For example, 31 percent of students thought their parents would be very concerned about exposure to weapons in college. In fact, 22 percent of parents actually expressed this concern. Similarly, 19 percent of parents indicated they were very concerned about physical violence compared to 28 percent of students who had anticipated this would be an issue of great concern for their parents. (Table 3)

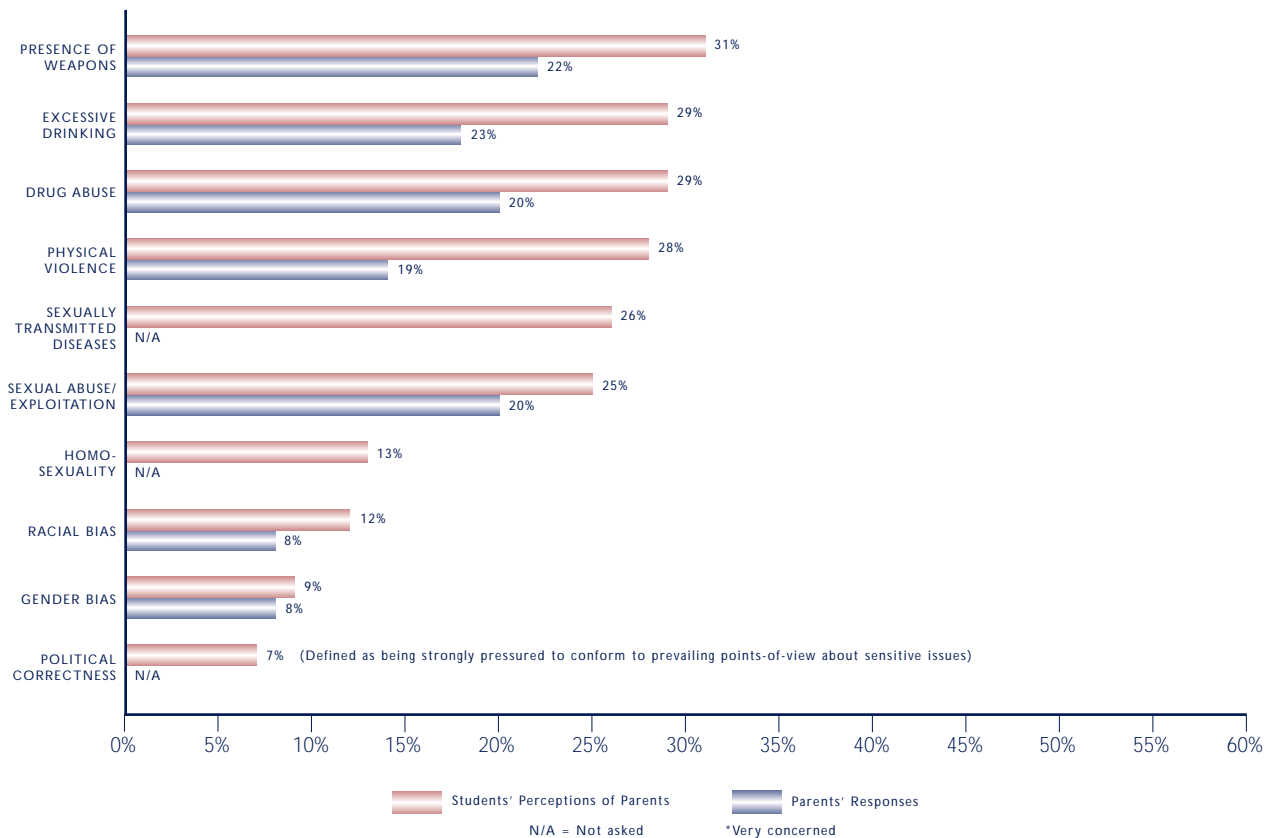
**A D V I S O R Y**

**ADOPT CLEAR, CONSISTENT, AND FIRM STANDARDS TO DEAL WITH DRUNKENNESS, DRUG ABUSE, POSSESSION OF WEAPONS, PHYSICAL VIOLENCE AND INTIMIDATION, AND OTHER THREATS TO CAMPUS SAFETY AND SECURITY AND THE PERSONAL WELFARE OF STUDENTS.**

Ensure that the standards are upheld by enforcing them vigorously, with clear and certain consequences for infractions.

Table 3.

**Specific Risks: Students' Perceptions vs. Parents' Actual Concern\***



## 4. Students are most concerned about exposure in college to weapons and sexually transmitted diseases. Parents are most concerned about excessive drinking.

To better understand student and parent anxieties about various perils or personal concerns in college, we presented respondents with a list of possible exposures and asked them to tell us whether they were “very,”

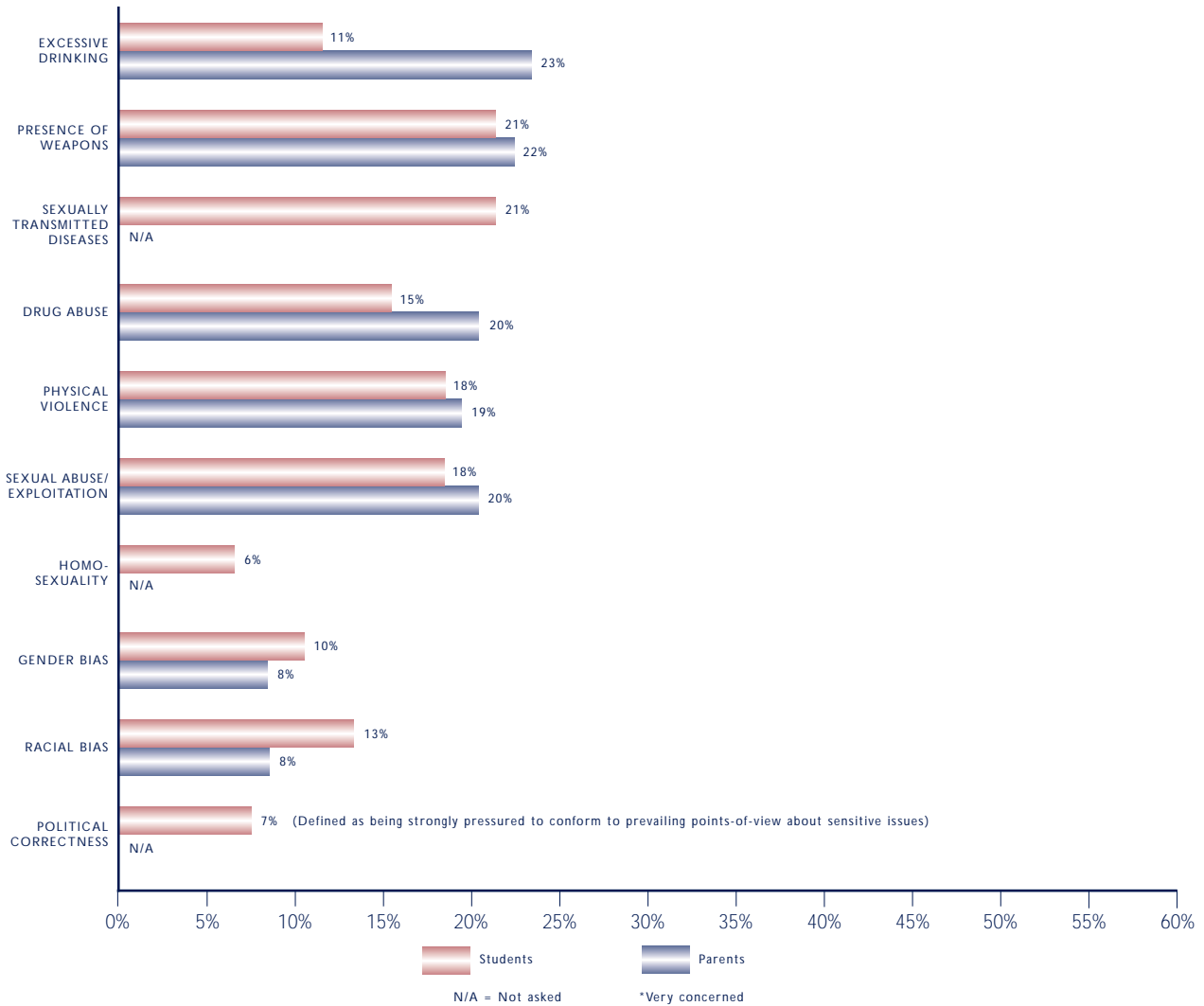
“somewhat,” “not too,” or “not at all” concerned about each. There were both similarities and differences in their responses.

Students were most concerned about being exposed to the presence of weapons and sexually transmitted diseases — for both, one-fifth reported

being “very” concerned. (Table 4a) Based on the evidence about the presence of weapons on campus documented in the study cited in the June 26, 1997 issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, the concern about weapons on the part of prospective students seems fully justified.

Table 4a.

Specific Experiences Students and Parents are Concerned\* About



The exposure of greatest concern to parents was excessive drinking, with 23 percent indicating they were very concerned compared to 11 percent of students. Parents and students were equally concerned about sexual abuse and exploitation (20 percent of parents and 18 percent of students).

Gender bias, political correctness, and homosexuality were the exposures of least concern. Roughly one out of ten students (and, where asked, parents) reported being very concerned about exposure to such attitudes or behaviors. (Table 4a)

African-American parents were far more likely than their Caucasian

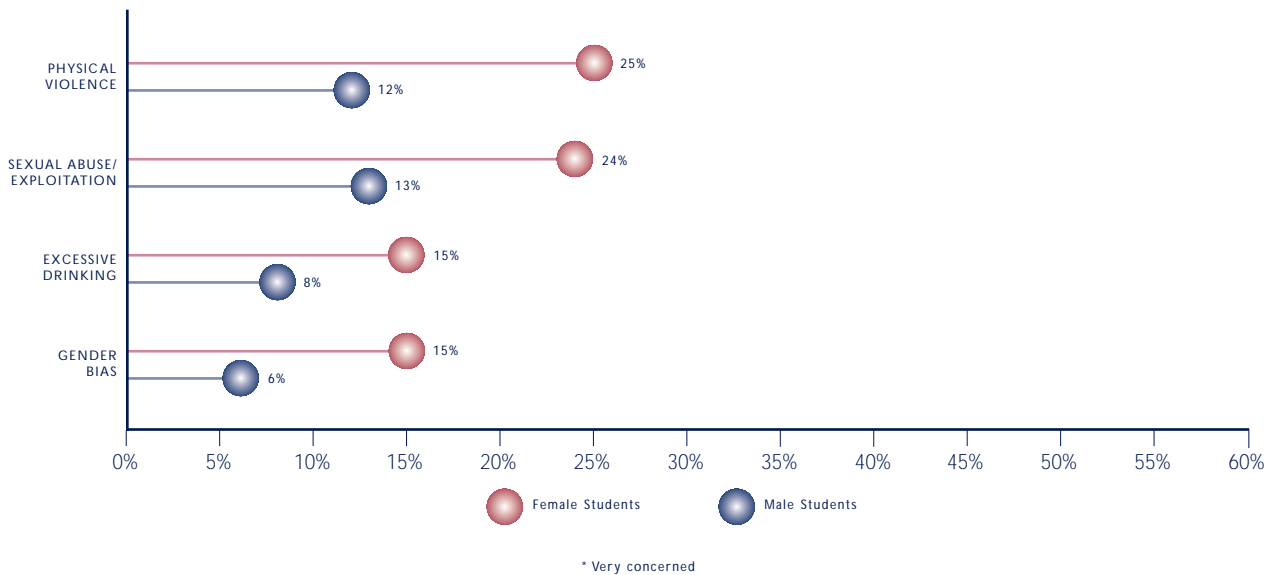
counterparts to indicate concern for racial bias and physical violence. Twenty-one percent were very concerned about racial bias (versus 7 percent of Caucasian parents).

For their part, female prospects were far more likely than males to express concern for physical violence and sexual exploitation. In fact, about twice as many female students are very concerned about experiencing sexual abuse or exploitation and physical violence at college compared to male students (25 percent versus 12 percent, and 24 percent versus 13 percent, respectively). (Table 4b)

IN COMMUNICATIONS TO STUDENTS AND PARENTS, HIGHLIGHT SUCH FEATURES AS A CLOSED CAMPUS, CAMPUS SECURITY, ESCORT SERVICE, AND OTHER ASPECTS OF THE CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT MOST ASSOCIATED WITH LOW CRIME.

Table 4b.

Specific Experiences Concerned\* About, by Gender



## 5. Compared to their hometowns, students believe that college will result in greater exposure to alcohol abuse, homosexuality, and sexually transmitted diseases.

**W**e asked students if they thought it would be “much more likely,” “somewhat more likely,” “about the same,” or “less likely” that they would be exposed to these situations at college.

Approximately one-fifth of students surveyed think it is much more likely that they will experience excessive drinking, homosexuality, and sexually transmitted diseases in college. Roughly half of students surveyed report they will be either much or somewhat more likely to be exposed to these situations in college

compared to the place where they now live. (Table 5)

To put things in perspective, we should point out that a sizable proportion of respondents believe their exposure to these “risks” will be about the same as it now is. For example, well over 40 percent think their exposure to physical violence, drug abuse, racial bias, sexual abuse and exploitation, and political correctness will be about the same, and almost 60 percent anticipate that their experience with gender bias in college will be about the same.

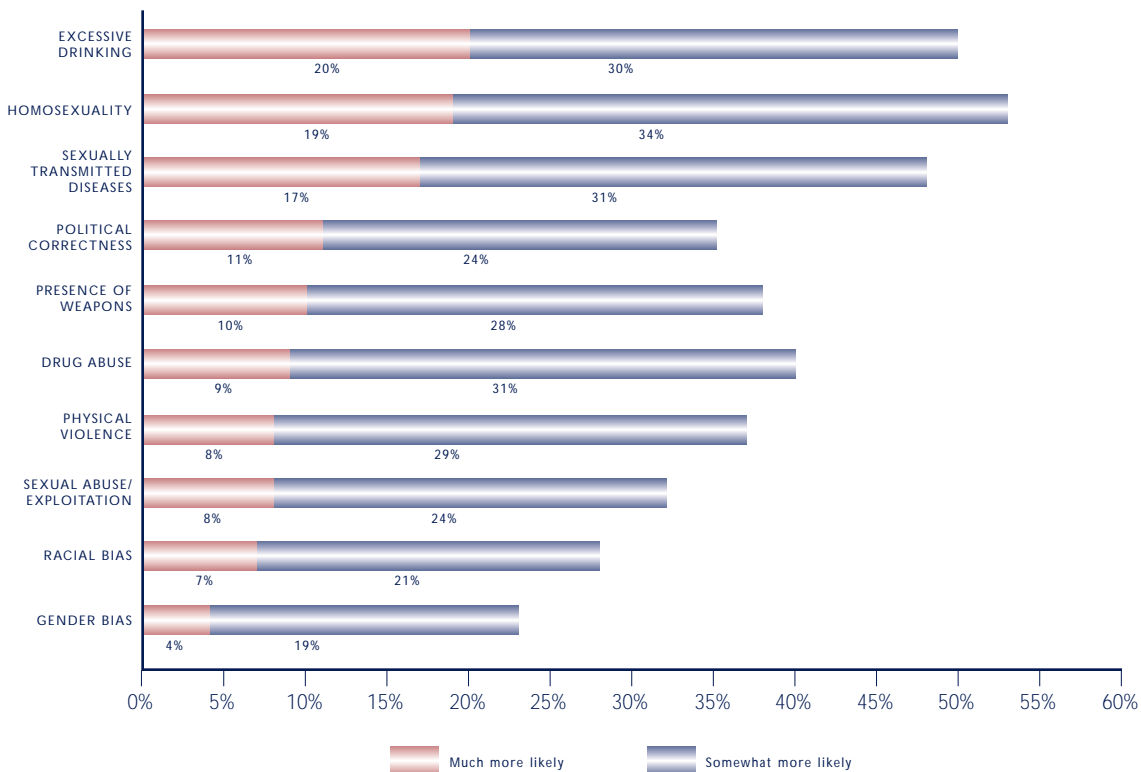
### A D V I S O R Y

**IF YOUR CAMPUS IS SERVED DIRECTLY BY PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION, PAY SPECIAL ATTENTION TO THE APPEARANCE AND SECURITY OF BUS STOPS, SUBWAY AND TRAIN STATIONS, AND OTHER MAJOR ACCESS POINTS.**

Even though these facilities may not be part of the campus, they often serve as gateways that create first impressions for visitors.

Table 5.

Likelihood of Exposure to Different Situations at College vs. Home, According to Students





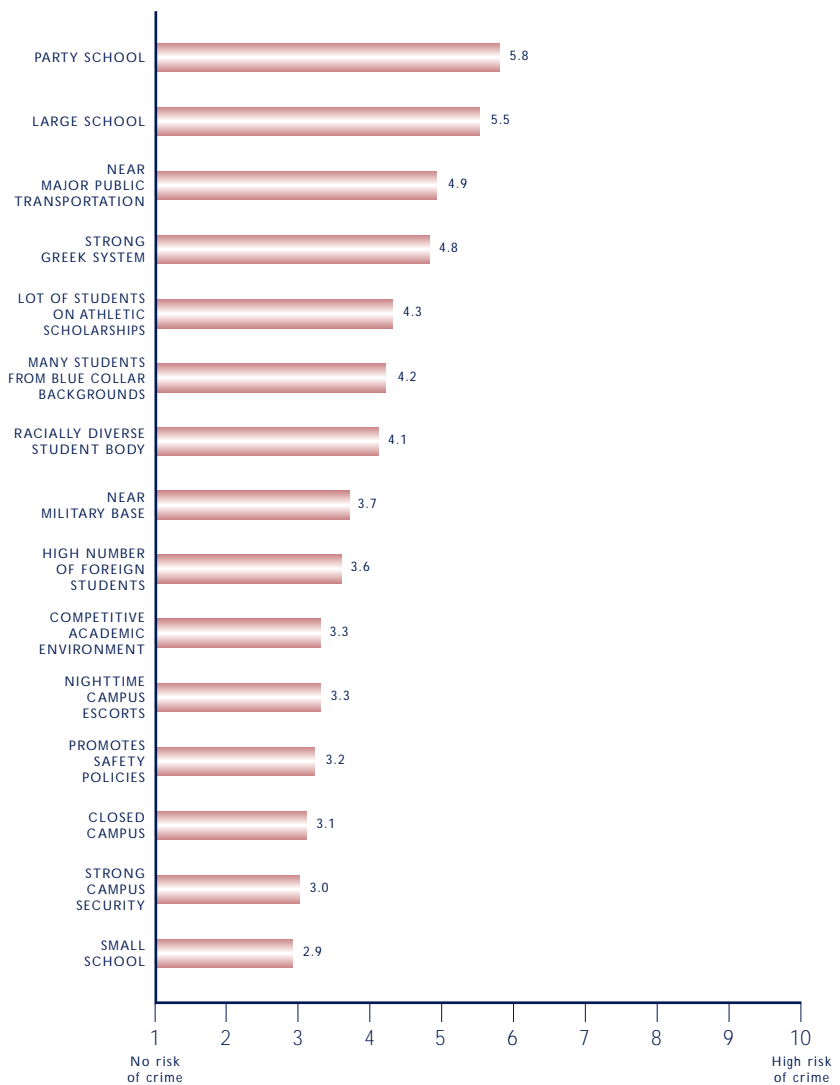
## 6. A reputation as a party school and large size are characteristics students most strongly associate with higher risk of crime at colleges and universities.

**W**e read students a list of different characteristics and asked them to rate the extent to which they associated each with high or low risk of crime at a college. Party school image and large size were the factors students most strongly associated with higher risk of crime. To a lesser extent, being near public transportation and having a strong fraternity and sorority system were also associated with higher campus crime rates.

In contrast, those characteristics or factors least associated with crime included small size, followed closely by strong campus security, a closed campus, and nighttime escorts — an indication that having stronger security measures does not connote a higher risk of crime to students. (Table 6)

Table 6.

**Extent to Which Different Factors are Associated with Crime, According to Students**  
mean rating



**A D V I S O R Y**

**ENSURE THAT MEMBERS OF FRATERNITIES AND SORORITIES AND STUDENT ATHLETES ARE HELD TO THE SAME STANDARDS OF BEHAVIOR AS OTHER STUDENTS, AND BE ON GUARD AGAINST FAVORABLE TREATMENT THAT CREATES THE APPEARANCE OF A DOUBLE STANDARD.**

## 7. Campus visits and discussions with faculty and students are the sources of information most widely used by students and parents to evaluate campus safety.

Students and parents were read a list of information sources and asked which ones they had used to evaluate the safety of the colleges they considered. The findings reveal that students and parents both rely heavily on first-person impressions to make judgments about the safety of colleges.

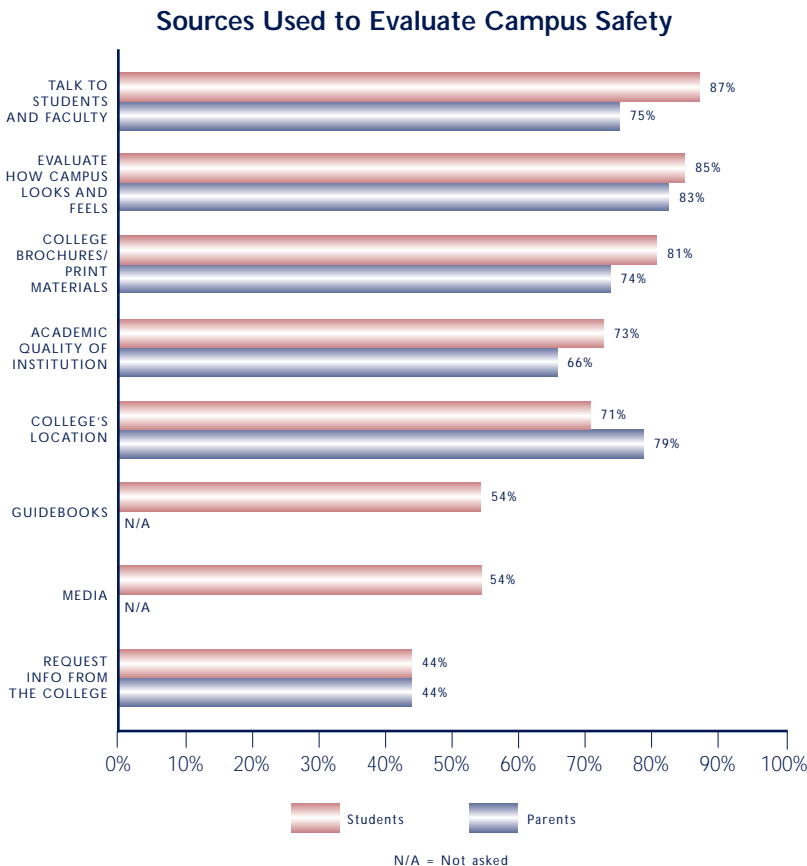
The visual appeal of a campus and the information conveyed by its

community to prospective students are critically important in evaluating the safety of a college and other aspects of its character and culture. Three-fourths or more of parents evaluated safety based on how the campus looked and felt (83 percent), the college's location (79 percent), talking to students and faculty (75 percent), and brochures or other print materials (74 percent). By comparison, students rely most heavily on

discussions with students and faculty (87 percent) and how the campus looked and felt (85 percent), brochures or other print materials (81 percent) and academic quality of the institution (73 percent). (Table 7)

While a higher proportion of students and parents most frequently used internal information sources (e.g., discussions with faculty and students, and statistics provided in print materials produced by the college) to evaluate the safety of an institution, a sizable segment of respondents relied upon outside sources of information. For example, more than half of students surveyed have or plan to use information about safety provided in guidebooks (54 percent) or obtain information from the news and other print and electronic media (54 percent).

Table 7.



### ADVISORY

**THE APPEARANCE OF A SAFE CAMPUS MAY BE JUST AS IMPORTANT TO PERCEPTIONS OF SECURITY AS THE ACTUAL SAFETY MEASURES IN PLACE.**

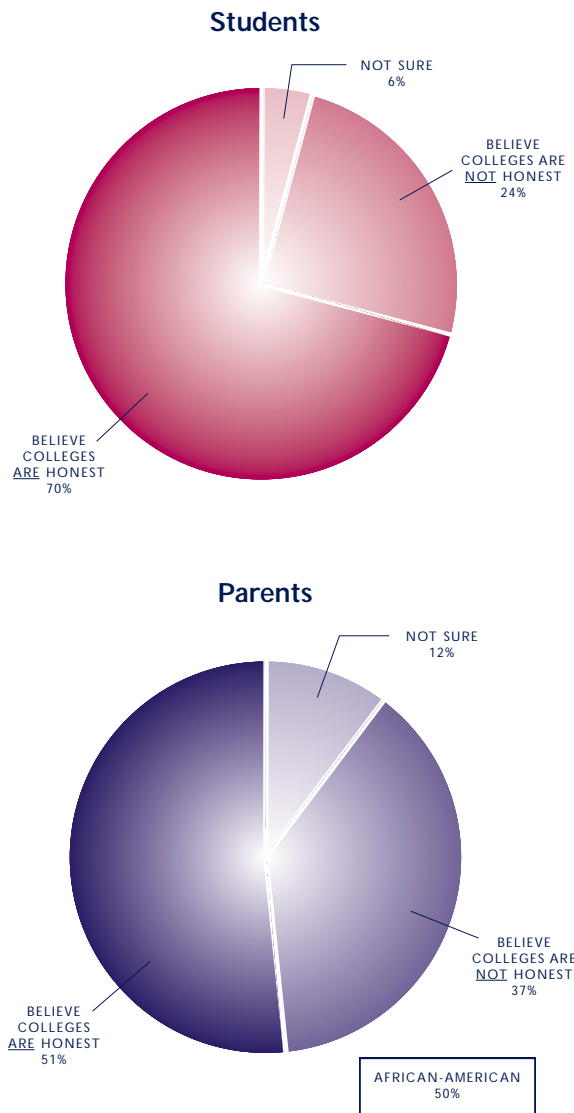
A run-down campus is likely to be perceived as an unsafe campus. Pay close attention to the visibility of campus security features as well as the overall attractiveness and maintenance of campus grounds and buildings.

## 8. A substantial portion of parents and students think colleges report campus safety statistics dishonestly.

**W**hile a majority of parents and students think colleges honestly report campus crime and safety statistics, the large minority that distrusts these institutional claims is noteworthy. More than one-third of parents and nearly one-quarter of students surveyed do not believe colleges are honest in reporting this information. African-American parents are even more distrustful: 50 percent indicate that colleges are not honest about campus safety compared to 35 percent of Caucasian parents. (Table 8)

Table 8.

### Credibility of College-Reported Statistics on Safety



#### ADVISORY

**IF REQUESTED, PROVIDE STUDENTS AND PARENTS WITH NATIONAL CRIME AND SAFETY STATISTICS THAT GIVE THEM A BROADER PERSPECTIVE ON THE ISSUE.**

Include, as appropriate, federal crime statistics published for colleges and universities of similar size, location, and character.

*9. Parents believe that their children will enjoy greater independence in college than they have at home. Moreover, the level of independence colleges are believed to provide is consistent with parents' own desires.*

**W**e were interested in learning whether parents believed that colleges afforded their children more independence and freedom than the parents themselves desired. First, we asked parents to rate the level of

independence their college-bound child had enjoyed at home during the last year. Then, we asked them to rate the level of independence they thought the child would have in college. Both ratings were on a ten-point scale, with one representing complete independence and ten complete structure.

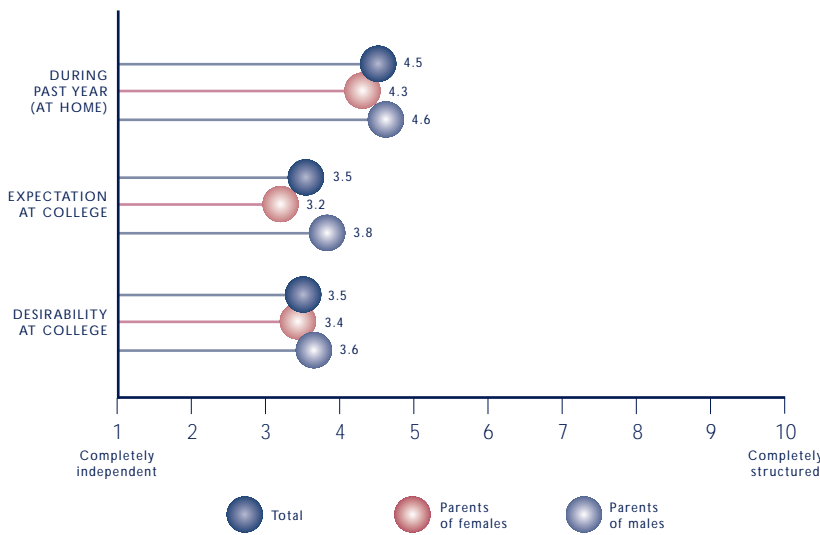
The findings demonstrate that parents anticipate that their children will enjoy more freedom in college than they have had at home: parents gave an average rating of 4.5 to the level of independence provided their children at home and a average of 3.5 to the level of independence they expect for their children in college. (Table 9)

Finally, using the same scale, we asked parents to rate the level of independence they desired for their children in college. The average rating of desired independence was 3.5 — the same rating for the level of independence parents expect their children to have in college.

As a final note, we should point out that the findings suggest that parents both provided at home and expect in college greater independence for daughters than for sons. For example, the average rating of independence enjoyed at home was 4.6 for sons and 4.3 for daughters (a lower score indicates greater independence). Likewise, the average anticipated level of independence in college was 3.8 for sons and 3.2 for daughters. (Table 9)

Table 9.

**Independence at Home vs. College**  
mean rating



HIGHLIGHTS OF UPCOMING ISSUES OF *student*POLL

**Summer 1997: Student Diversity and Internationalism.**

Multiculturalism has become an article of faith in the marketing of many colleges. This issue will focus on parents' and students' perceptions and attitudes regarding the importance of student diversity and internationalism on college campuses.

**Fall 1997: Parents update on the *US News & World Report* rankings.**

The premier issue of *student*POLL, published in the fall of 1995, produced much-discussed findings documenting that news-magazine rankings do not strongly influence students' college choices. At the time, many in higher education

claimed that the rankings have much greater influence on parents. This issue will determine whether the claims are right.