

student POLL

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While variety of academic offerings ranks as the most important form of diversity in college choice, racial and other forms of student heterogeneity are a significant factor.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

In almost every instance, when diversity is discussed in higher education it means the racial and ethnic kind. But there are many other types of diversity (intellectual, for example, or curricular) that might describe a given institution's attributes. We and many of our readers have been curious about the impact of various kinds of diversity on college choice, so in this issue of *student POLL* we decided to try to provide some insights about what matters.

The findings indicate unequivocally that the kind of diversity students seek most is the academic variety — courses, majors, and other academic programs. But colleges and universities have typically given the strongest public emphasis to racial and socioeconomic diversity. In fact, most institutions have made racial diversity an explicit recruitment goal and promoted its virtues in contacts with prospective students.

Apparently, the market has been listening: an overwhelming proportion of above-average students tell us they want to attend a college with a diverse student body. Of course, whether they truly believe in the idea

or are merely echoing an oft-repeated theme is a matter of speculation.

In our research we also explored other aspects of multiculturalism, including the appeal of various dimensions of study abroad and the acceptance of international students. Our data suggest a strong interest in international learning and people. But the findings also contain what we and many readers may see as depressing news: nearly half the students surveyed oppose the idea of affirmative action in admission.

The sizable segment of students opposing affirmative action may simply reflect current public opinion, which has been shaped by widespread unfavorable media coverage of the issue and the controversy swirling around the dismantling of affirmative action programs in public universities by legislatures and courts in California, Texas and other states. For institutions that remain committed to the goals of affirmative action, renewed efforts may be needed to convince prospective students, parents, and others (especially public officials) of the important educational and societal merits of these programs.

Opposition to programs that seek to redress previous racial inequities or biases is mounting across our society,

and politicians and judges cannot fail to read these cultural and political tea leaves. The actions in Texas and California are turning back virtually overnight the striking gains in the enrollment of minority students at public universities in these states. In fact, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* recently reported that of the 196 African-Americans who applied to the medical school at the University of California San Diego, *none* was admitted. In our view, this is a tragedy not only for the students now being denied access, but for the privileged majority whose own lives will be diminished by this myopic narrowing of the human family on some of our nation's leading campuses.

Richard A. Hesel
Publisher

1. Academic diversity weighs more heavily in college choice than the diversity of the student body.

Recognizing that there are many forms of diversity that might affect college choice, we set out to measure which kinds respondents considered the most influential. In order to minimize the possible bias politically correct responses would generate, we read students a series of statements that paired, in random order, eleven different forms of diversity in each possible combination. Students were asked to choose the form of diversity in each paired statement that most influenced their

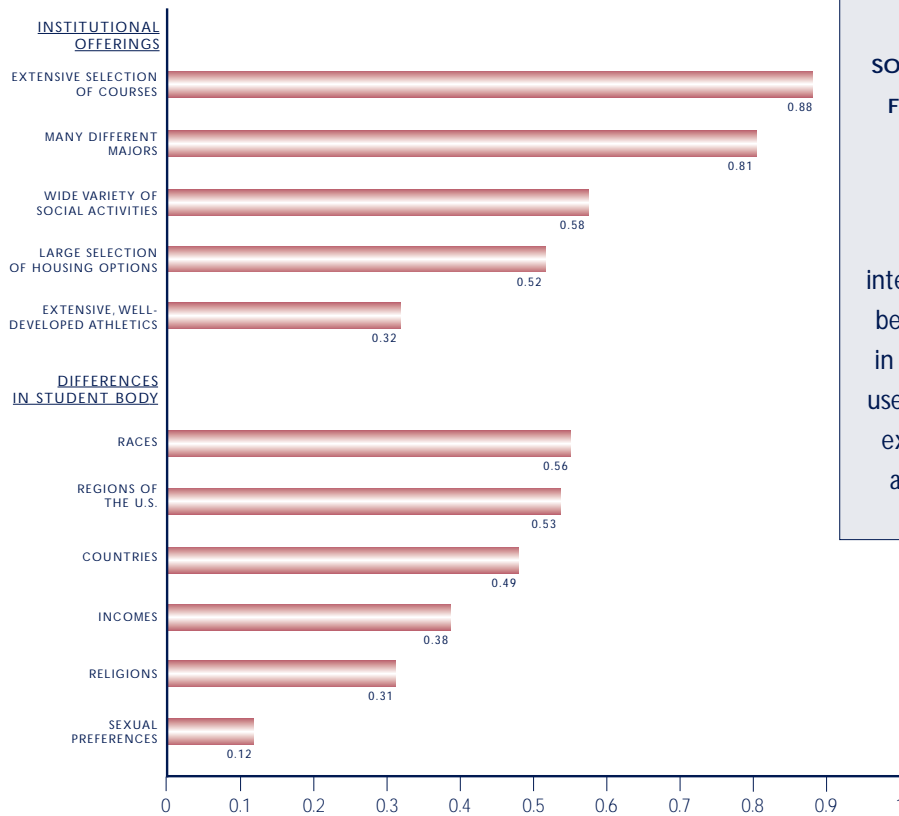
choice of a college. Using multi-variate analytical techniques we were then able to create an importance index for each form of diversity.

Our findings reveal that extensive course offerings and many different majors — in short, academic diversity — were most important to students in the college selection process. Specifically, extensive course offerings received a .88 importance rating, on a scale from 0 to 1, compared to a .56 importance rating for a racially diverse student body.

However, these findings should not minimize the importance of human

diversity: racial and geographic heterogeneity were rated virtually equal in importance by respondents as having a wide variety of social activities and many housing options at college. Diversity in the student body, while not a singular factor in college choice, matters substantially. (Table 1)

Table 1.
Importance of specific types of diversity



NOTE: Importance index based on presentation of items as paired comparisons

A D V I S O R Y

MAKE THE CASE FOR RACIAL, INTERNATIONAL, AND SOCIOECONOMIC DIVERSITY NOT FOR THEIR OWN SAKE, BUT IN TERMS OF PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS' SELF-INTEREST.

Point out and explain the intellectual, professional, and social benefits that come from learning in a multicultural community and use real examples drawn from the experiences of students, faculty, and alumni to make the point.

2. An overwhelming majority of students prefer a college that has a diverse student body.

Whether simply expressing what they believe to be the socially acceptable response or truly embracing diversity, an overwhelming proportion of students say they would choose a college that has a diverse student body over a more homogenous one.

Specifically, we asked students whether they preferred a college that had a broad mix of students in terms

of racial, ethnic, cultural and social backgrounds, or a school where students came from a background similar to their own. Some 77 percent of respondents preferred the former. (Table 2a)

An even higher proportion of African-American students indicated a preference for attending a diverse campus (88 percent) compared to Caucasian students (74 percent). Preference for a diverse campus also correlated directly with SAT scores:

the higher the SAT score, the higher the proportion of students interested in attending a college with a broad mix of students. Among students with SAT scores below 1200, some 65 percent indicated a preference for attending a diverse college compared to 73 percent for students with SATs in the 1200-1290 range and 83 percent for students reporting SATs of 1300 or above. (Table 2b)

Table 2a.
Preferences for students from different backgrounds

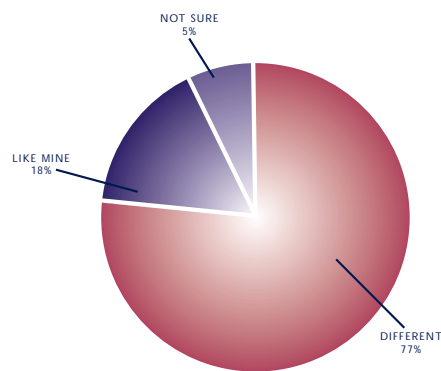
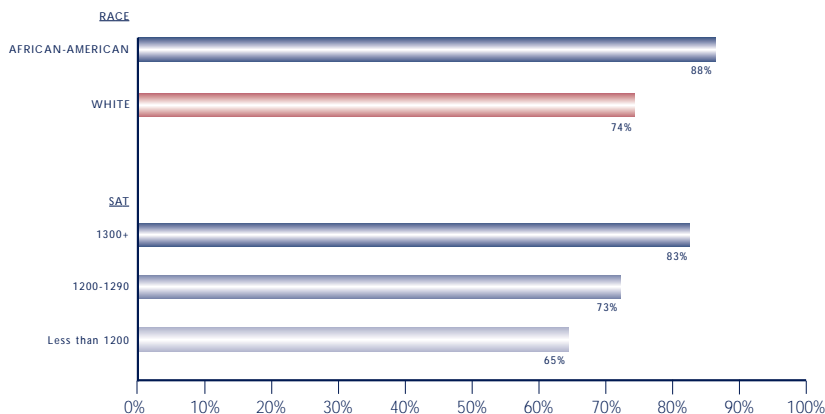


Table 2b.
Preference for students from different backgrounds, by subgroups



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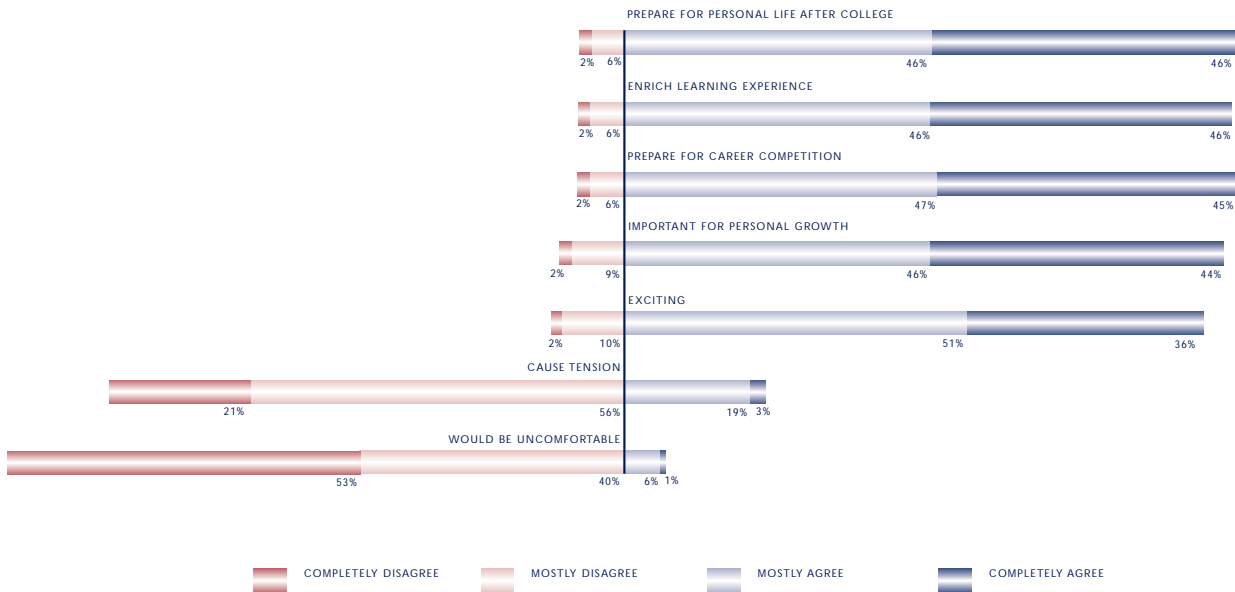
3. Nearly all students agree that a college with a broad mix of students enriches the learning experience.

We were interested in understanding the ways in which prospective students view the benefits and liabilities of attending a college with a broad mix of students. Nearly all students surveyed voiced strong agreement with the benefits we put before them. For example, 92 percent of respondents either completely or mostly agreed that a diverse student body would prepare

them for their personal life after college, enrich the learning experience, and prepare them for career competition. There was virtually no difference in the extent to which students agreed with these and other positive statements tested. Even when we asked if they thought having students of different backgrounds would cause campus tension or make them uncomfortable, 78 percent and 93 percent, respectively, completely or mostly *disagreed* with

these statements. Only 7 percent agreed they would be uncomfortable on a campus with a diverse student body. Of the two negative statements tested, the possibility of campus tension was acknowledged by the 22 percent of students who mostly or completely agreed that a diverse student body would cause unrest. (Table 3)

Table 3.
Agreement about the effect of attending college in a diverse environment



4. In the choice of a freshman roommate, nearly all students are enthusiastic about or tolerant of differences. The exception: having a roommate with a different sexual preference.

Concerned that general questions about their interest in diversity might elicit what respondents thought were socially correct answers, we constructed a second set of questions about the choice of a roommate that were designed to reveal tendencies toward politically correct responses. We asked respondents a series of questions about how they would feel if their freshman roommate were different from them in a number of ways. In exploring these differences, we asked respondents to indicate whether they were enthusiastic, accepting, concerned, or not sure how they felt about, for example, a roommate from a different country.

Our findings on roommate choice provide evidence of a high degree of tolerance among students in embracing or accepting cultural, geographic, and racial differences among the students with whom they live and study. In fact, a sizable proportion of students was enthusiastic about rooming with someone different from himself or herself.

While nearly all students were either accepting or enthusiastic about rooming with someone from a different area of the United States, country, and/or race (100 percent, 97 percent, and 99 percent respectively), the proportions indicating enthusiasm about those differences are far more revealing. For example, students are less enthusiastic about a racially different roommate than one from a

different country or region in the U.S. (Table 4)

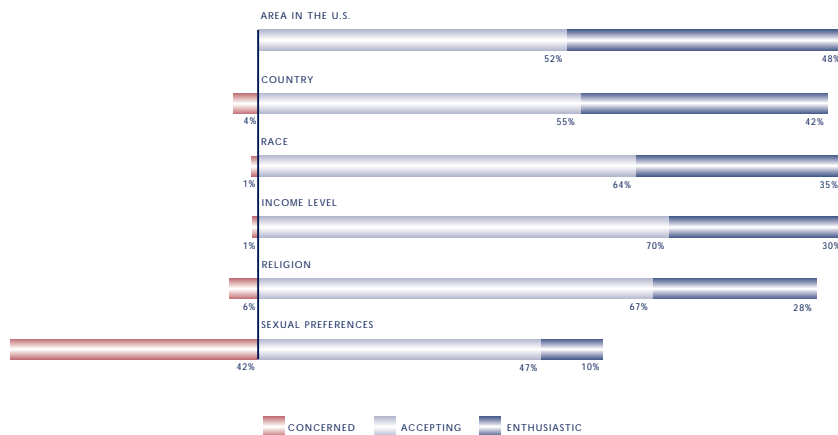
For some forms of diversity, students are only tolerant or accepting of a roommate different from them — 64 percent were accepting of race, 70 percent of income level, and 67 percent of religious differences. The only difference that a sizable segment of students viewed as a *concern* was having a freshman roommate of a different sexual orientation (42 percent of respondents). Yet roughly the same number (47 percent) were accepting of sexual differences.

ADVISORY

DON'T WAIT FOR THE FEDERAL OR STATE COURTS TO REVERSE THE CURRENT TRENDS AGAINST FORMAL INSTITUTIONAL EFFORTS TO ENSURE GREATER RACIAL DIVERSITY THAT IN APPEARANCE OR REALITY GIVE PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT (IT MAY BE A LONG WAIT).

Develop imaginative approaches to create race-neutral admissions and financial aid policies that foster student diversity without the use of racial preferences. For example, de-emphasize test scores in admission and put greater stress on other measures or indicators of potential achievement or success. Since they are at the cutting edge of the issue, watch closely what steps law schools take to ensure greater racial diversity without running afoul of the law.

Table 4.
Degree of acceptance of a roommate from a different background



5. Nearly half of the market opposes affirmative action, and a significant proportion opposes economic and race-based scholarships.

To gauge students' attitudes about affirmative action, we asked respondents several questions including whether they favored or opposed affirmative action and scholarships based on race, ethnicity, and economic need. We were genuinely surprised by the lack of support among students for affirmative action. For example, 45 percent of respondents oppose affirmative action while 47 percent favor it only *somewhat*. Only 7 percent strongly favor affirmative action. (Table 5a)

Here, gender difference emerges: Only 40 percent of female students oppose affirmative action compared to 50 percent of male students. The findings also reveal that a higher proportion of African-American students favor affirmative action than Caucasian students, but the proportion is lower than might be expected. In point of fact, only 19 percent of African-American students surveyed strongly favor affirmative action and 21 percent actually oppose it. (Table 5b)

When students were asked how they felt about colleges giving special scholarships to students from certain racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds, one-third opposed such scholarships. In fact, only 12 percent of respondents in total strongly favored scholarships designed to give preference to students from a particular racial or economic background over other qualified candidates. (Table 6)

In a related question, students who were supportive of affirmative action or special scholarships were asked to indicate what minority groups they thought deserved special consideration. Multiple responses

were accepted. African-Americans (40 percent), Native Americans (35 percent), and Latinos (30 percent) were rated as groups most deserving of special consideration under affirmative action by those surveyed. (Table 7a)

By race there are interesting similarities and differences. Both African-American students and Caucasian students rate African-Americans as most deserving of special consideration (38 percent and 41 percent, respectively). Yet among

Table 5a.
Support for affirmative action

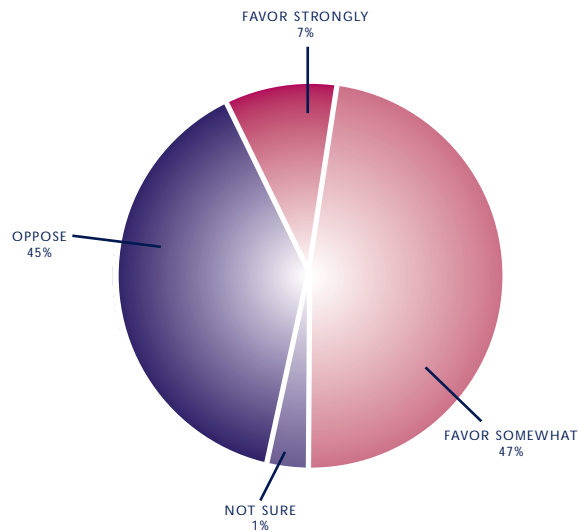
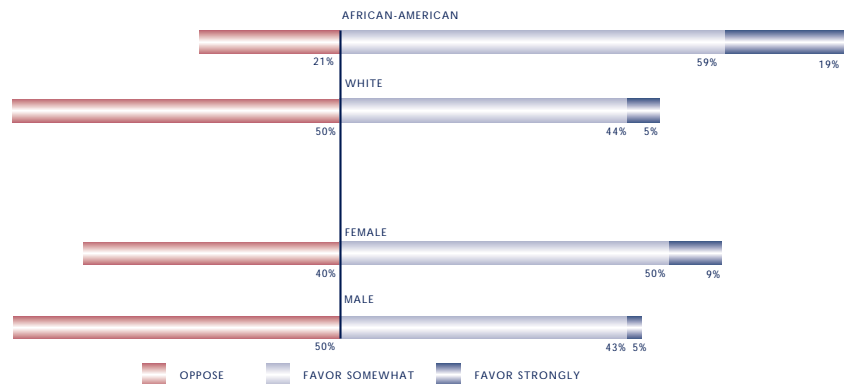


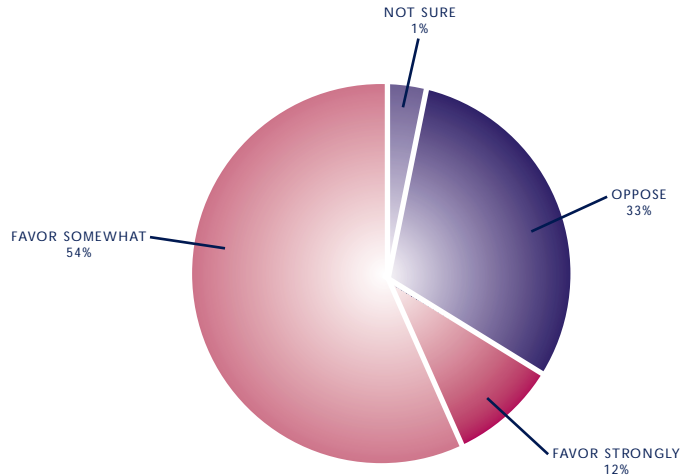
Table 5b.
Support for affirmative action, by subgroups



African-American students, compared to their white counterparts, there is a greater tendency to consider Native Americans and a clear inclination to consider women as deserving of special consideration under affirmative action. For example, 35 percent of African-Americans think women deserve such consideration, compared to 21 percent of Caucasian students. (Table 7b)

It is also worth noting that students with higher SAT scores were more likely to believe African-Americans and Latinos deserve special consideration under affirmative action. Forty-six percent of students with SATs of 1300 and above rated African-Americans as most deserving of preferential treatment under affirmative action compared to 27 percent of respondents reporting SATs below 1200. (Table 7c)

Table 6.
Support for scholarships based on race, ethnic or economic background



A D V I S O R Y

RACIAL, GEOGRAPHIC, AND INTERNATIONAL DIVERSITY IS AN ASSET IN STUDENT RECRUITMENT AND CAN PROVIDE A COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE IN THE COMPETITION FOR PROSPECTS, ESPECIALLY THOSE OF HIGHER ACADEMIC ABILITY.

If your institution's student body is more homogeneous than that of key competitors, successful efforts to make it more diverse should benefit overall recruitment efforts.

A B O U T *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 can be found on page 12 of this report.

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Table 7a.

Groups deserving special consideration under affirmative action
(among those supportive of affirmative action or special scholarships)

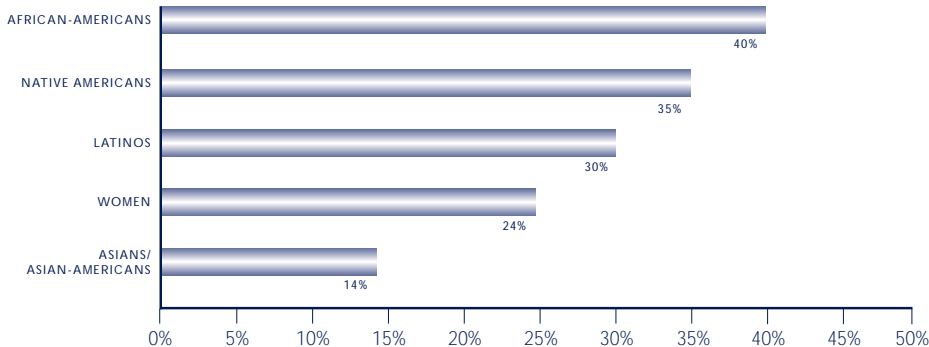


Table 7b.
by race

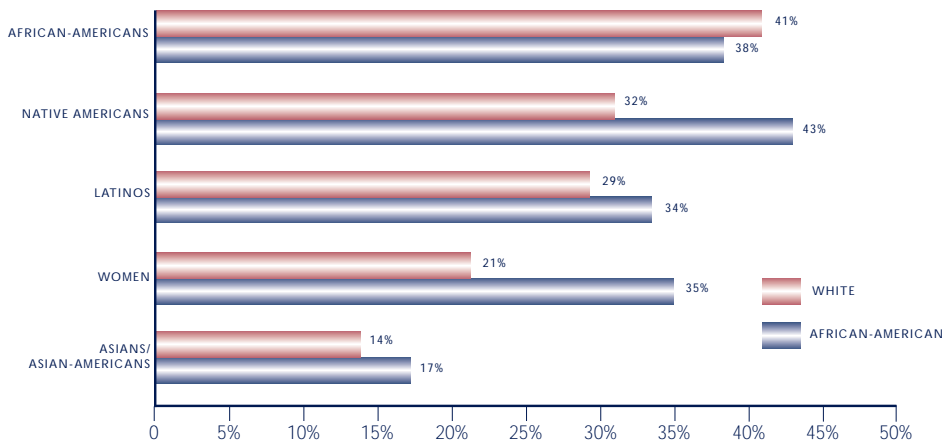
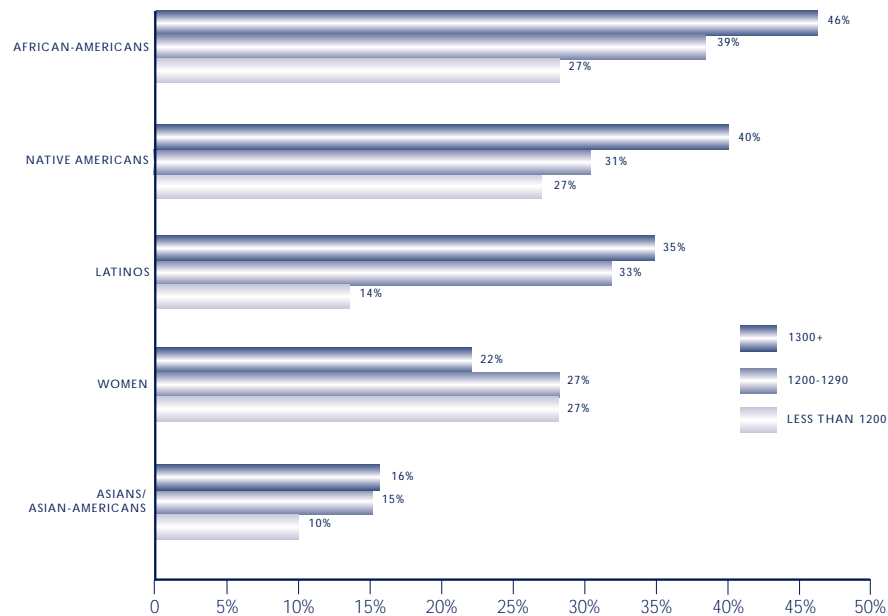


Table 7c.
by SAT



6. Foreign languages, international courses, and being surrounded by students from around the world are international learning experiences students most desire on college campuses.

As evidenced by our findings, there is considerable interest among students in taking advantage of international learning experiences on college campuses. To understand the appeal of such experiences, we explored the extent to which students were very interested, somewhat interested, not too interested, or not at all interested in accomplishing or being exposed to a variety of intellectual and personal benefits that might be associated with an international learning experience.

Interestingly, 39 percent of students, whether or not they intend to study abroad, are *very* interested in gaining proficiency in another language. In addition, 30 percent are very interested in taking courses on

international issues and cultures, and an equal percentage are very interested in being part of an internationally diverse student body. Of lesser interest are taking courses in international business and economics (33 percent are either not too or not at all interested) and having the opportunity to work in another country (35 percent expressed little or no interest). (Table 8a)

The extent to which these findings are driven by gender is striking. More than half (52 percent) of female students are very interested in proficiency in another language compared to 27 percent of male students. Similarly, 54 percent of females are very interested having a diverse student body while only 21 percent of males expressed this same level of interest. (Table 8b)

ADVISORY

IF YOUR INSTITUTION HAS LIMITED INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES, CONSIDER DEVELOPING ALLIANCES OR PARTNERSHIPS WITH OTHER CAMPUSES OR INSTITUTIONS.

This will enable you to expand the number of language courses, study abroad programs, and other international educational activities offered to students.

Table 8a.
Interest in international learning experiences

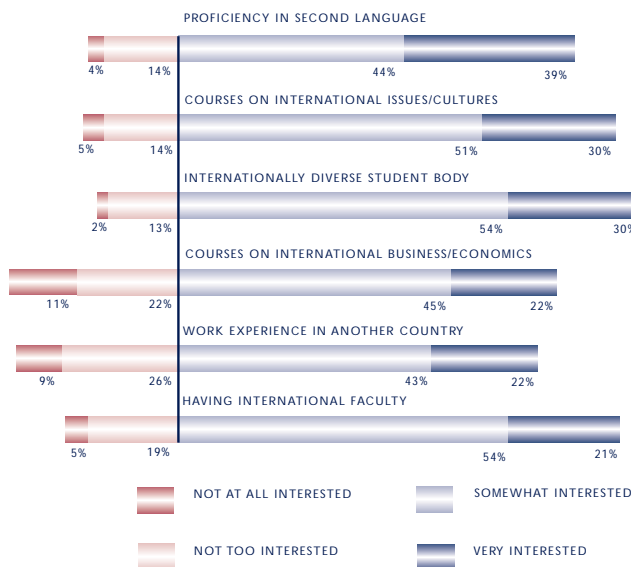
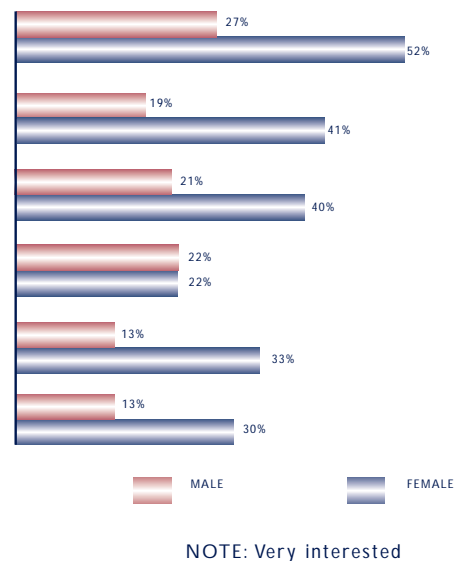


Table 8b.
by gender



7. Nearly two-thirds of respondents want to study abroad during college, and an even higher proportion of female students desire an international experience.

For colleges and universities that have developed strong study abroad programs and devoted resources to building partnerships or alliances with educational institutions in other countries, student interest in these opportunities appears strong. Of those we surveyed, 60 percent would like to study abroad while in college. (Table 9a) There is particular interest among female students (71 percent) as well as those from the Northeast (70 percent) or West (65 percent). (Table 9b) Among those expressing an interest in study abroad, 54 percent want to study in another country for a semester, 24 percent for a year, and 19 percent for a summer.

It appears that all the conventional arguments for study abroad, and perhaps the same reasons why students of previous generations opted for an international experience during college, still resonate with students today. Half of the students interested in studying abroad affirmed that the desire to study things they could not learn in the U.S. (53 percent), learn a different language (50 percent), travel and see the world (50 percent), and expand their horizons (50 percent) are primary objectives for studying abroad.

Among the 36 percent of the market reporting that they did not want to study in another country while in college, a lack of interest (48 percent), concern about the cost (13 percent), and fear about going (14 percent) were the leading reasons cited on an unaided basis.

Table 9a.
Interested in studying abroad in college

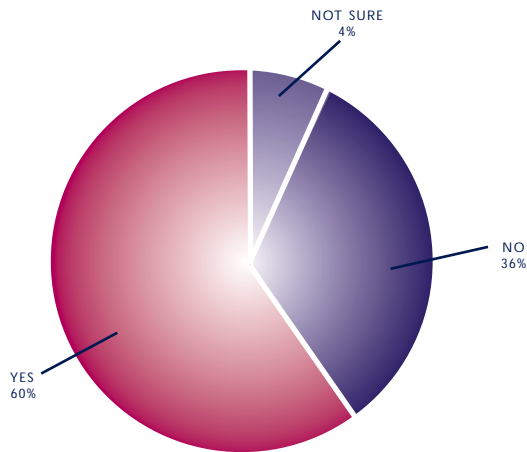
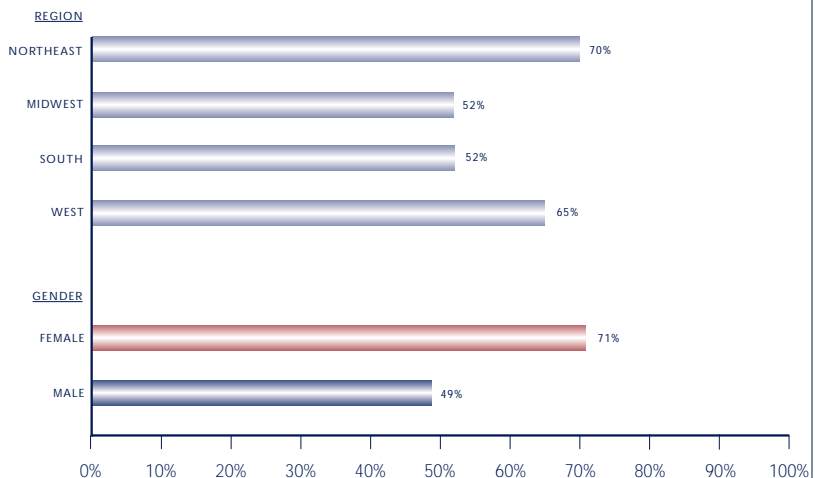


Table 9b.
Interested in studying abroad in college, by subgroups



8. While proficiency in a second language is appealing to students, paradoxically, many students want the courses they take in other countries to be taught in English.

Our line of questioning also pursued respondents' level of interest in various pedagogical elements of study abroad programs.

First, we asked students if they would prefer studying in a program run and taught by faculty of their own college, faculty in a foreign country, or both. Nearly two-thirds (63 percent) would prefer learning from foreign faculty, while roughly one-quarter (26 percent) prefer being taught by faculty from their own college or university. (Table 10)

Next we asked whether they would prefer taking their courses in English or in the language of the country where the program is offered. Consistent with students' professed

desire to undertake study abroad so that they can learn another language, more than one-third of those interested in studying abroad (36 percent), would prefer programs that are taught in the country's native language.

Still, 45 percent of students interested in studying abroad prefer courses be taught in English. It seems that while students want to be proficient in a second language, they may, nonetheless, be anxious or concerned about having their language skills tested in the classroom and a determinant of their academic success. (Table 11)

ADVISORY

COLLECT INFORMATION ABOUT STUDENT INTEREST IN INTERNATIONAL STUDY EARLY IN THE ADMISSIONS PROCESS.

Target direct mail and other personal contact to these students that, among other messages, emphasizes the institution's unique international resources, programs, and initiatives.

HIGHLIGHTS OF UPCOMING ISSUES OF *student*POLL

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 newsmagazine 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.

We are beginning to plan next year's survey research and welcome suggestions from our readers about issues or topics you would like to see covered in the research and in future issues of *student*POLL. Please e-mail your ideas to us at consult@artsci.com.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The findings reported in this issue of *student*POLL are based on in-depth telephone interviews with a random national sample of 400 high school seniors who are enrolling in four-year colleges in the fall of 1997. To qualify for an interview, respondents 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.



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Table 10.
Preferences for faculty teaching courses abroad

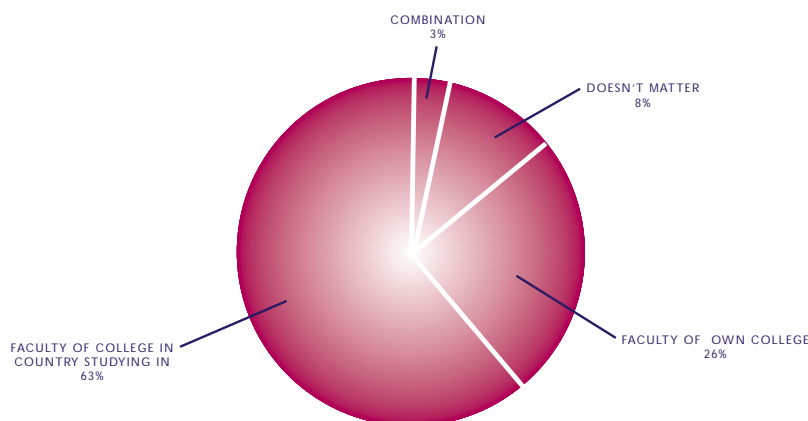
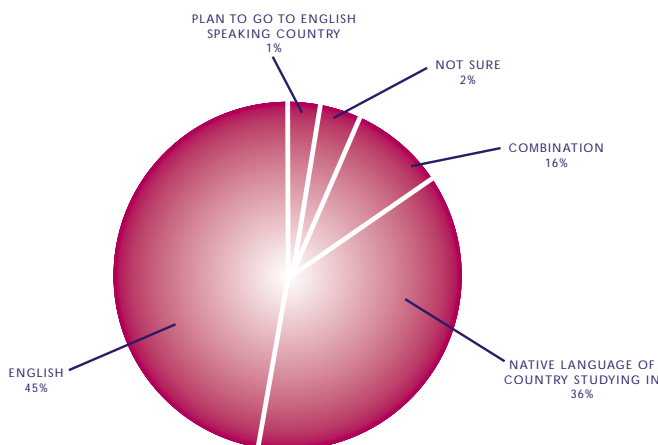


Table 11.
Preferences for language used for courses taught abroad



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

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