

student POLL

MARKET INTELLIGENCE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

A high majority of college-bound high school seniors with above-average academic ability plan to work their way through college.

With the cost of college escaping the reach of more and more American families and career objectives dominating student motivations for attending college, we thought it would be useful to explore students' intentions and motivations about work while in college.

Our findings, drawn from a sample of 500 high school seniors with SAT scores above 1050, indicate unequivocally that a high majority of students plan to "work their way through college," seeking employment to help defray their college expenses and gain career-related work experience. While the evidence we have gathered provides no consolation for critics who see the current college generation as slackers, it does provide some cause for alarm to faculty and administrators concerned about the time students are giving to their studies.

The number of hours students plan to devote to work each week – about 15 during their freshman year and 18 thereafter – appears to present a considerable conflict with academic demands. In fact, data reported in *The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 1997* by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) indicates that college freshmen devoted twice as much time in high school to work as they did to their studies: 11.4 hours to work and 5.3 hours to study per week. If this pattern holds up in college, our findings suggest that the average college freshman would devote 7 hours per week to academic study and 15 hours to a job.

Other findings confirm our long-held suspicion that cooperative education has been poorly marketed and is, therefore, poorly understood by prospective college students. Given the mounting difficulty of affording a college education and the predominance of career motivations in college choice, logic would dictate that cooperative education should be enjoying a boom. It isn't. While

the reasons are complicated (for example, many faculties are loathe to take cooperative education seriously, seeing it as a drag on their particular institution's academic stature and a distasteful demand on their workload), our evidence suggests that poor marketing shares a significant part of the blame. Take, for example, the name "cooperative education," which is likely to be confusing and misleading.

The evidence reported here documents unequivocally that students' desire to work to pay for college is a reality that presents serious problems and interesting opportunities for both college faculties and enrollment managers. But dealing with this reality will take more imagination and innovation than the academy has demonstrated so far.



Richard A. Hesel

Publisher

1 A majority of high school seniors currently work, averaging eight hours on the job per week.

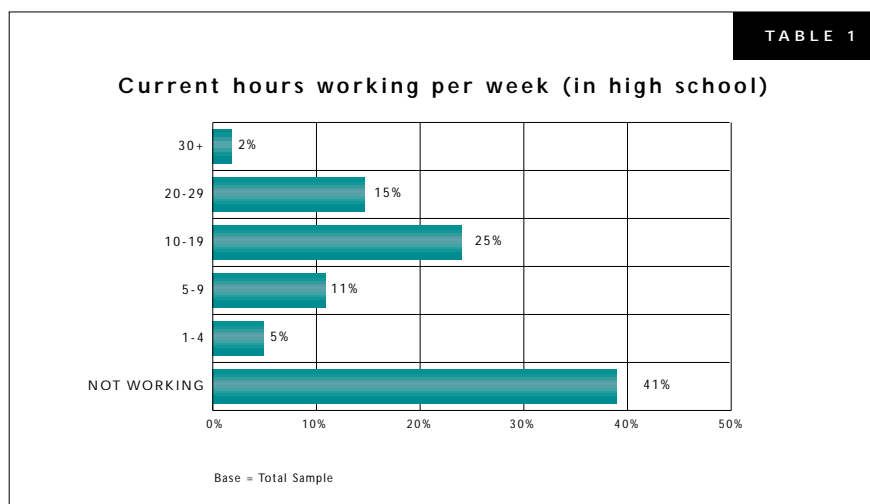
Our study explored work patterns among high school seniors with above-average academic ability. We also explored their expectations regarding work while in college and the motivations that would lead them to seek employment as a college student.

We began by asking respondents if they currently were working and, if so, the number of hours worked per week. Among working and non-working students, 25 percent reported working 10 to 19 hours, 15 percent 20 to 29 hours, and 11 percent 5 to 9 hours per week. On average,

students holding jobs work about 14 hours per week. (Table 1)

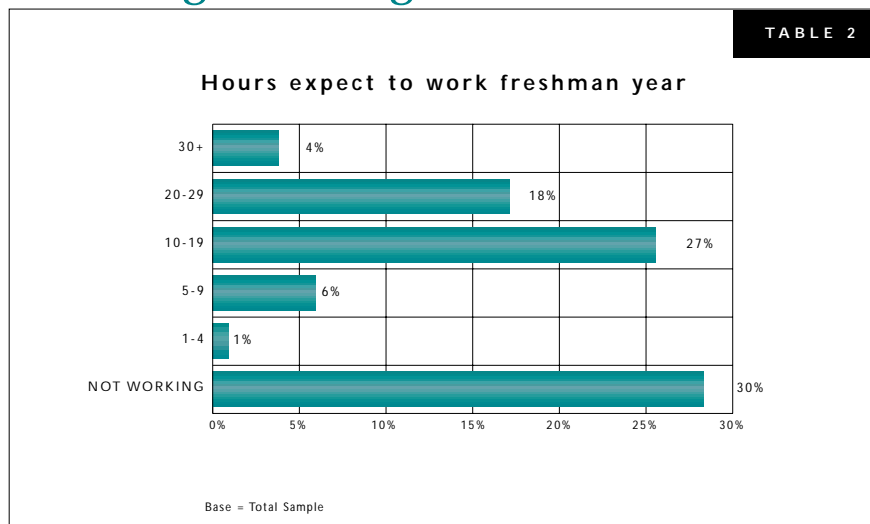
These findings are consistent with those reported in *The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 1997* by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP). In that study, college freshmen at all institutional types reported working an average of about 11 hours per week in high school. In contrast, in the same study, students reported that they studied an average of only five hours per week in high school.

Not surprisingly, students from lower income households work more hours than those from higher income households; 33 percent of those from households with incomes of less than \$50,000 work 20 or more hours per week compared to 14 percent of those from households with higher incomes.



2 A majority of college-bound high school seniors expect to work in the first year of college, with the average hours worked per week nearly doubling from high school.

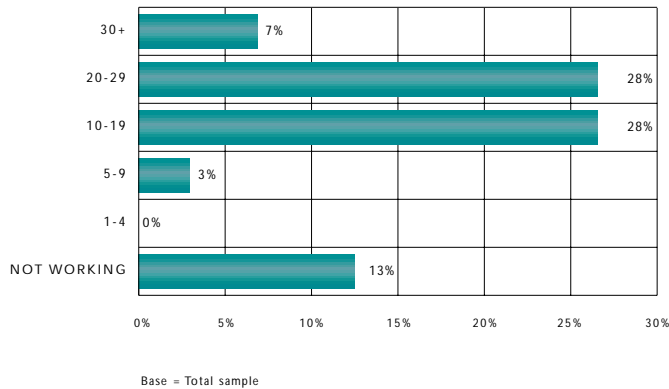
Next, we asked respondents about their expectations for employment during their freshman year of college. Some 60 percent of respondents anticipate working in their first year of college. Among all respondents, 27 percent indicated they plan to work 10 to 19 hours per week. Another 18 percent expected to work 20 to 29 hours per week. On average, students planning to work in college anticipate spending about 15 hours per week on the job – about the same workload they are now carrying in high school. (Table 2)



3 As they progress through college, more students not only expect to work, but to work a greater number of hours per week.

TABLE 3

Hours students expect to work after freshman year



We next asked respondents about their employment expectations in college beyond their freshman year. An even higher percentage anticipates working after the first year. Moreover, the number of hours working students plan to spend on the job each week is considerably higher in subsequent years. Seventy-four percent of respondents anticipate working after freshman year, and 35 percent expect to be on the job 20 hours or more a week. The average number of hours students expect to work is 18 – higher than for freshman year. (Table 3)

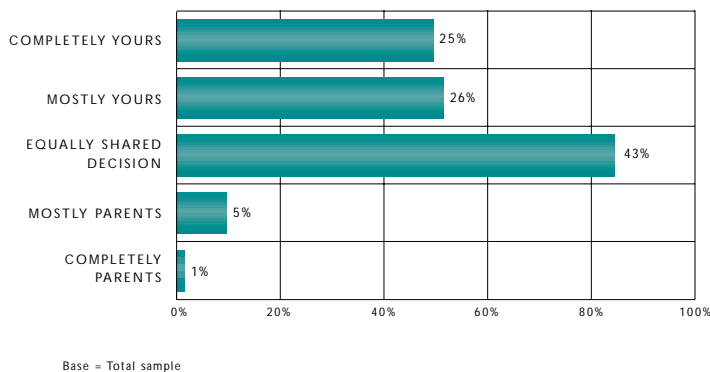
ADVISORY

Integrate paid, career-related work experiences for students more fully into financial aid packages, financial aid counseling, and the promotion of financial aid.

4 The decision to work in college is shared with parents.

TABLE 4

Decision to work during college



Our findings indicate that the decision whether to work during college frequently is made with parental assistance. Forty-three percent of the high school seniors we surveyed reported that the decision was shared equally with their parents. Another six percent indicated the decision rested mostly or entirely with their parents. Students from the South (59 percent) were more likely than those in the Northeast or the Midwest to say that the decision was made together with their parents. Women (48 percent) were also more likely than men (38 percent) to indicate that it was a decision they shared equally with their parents.

On the flip side, some 25 percent of students reported that the decision to work in college was completely their own; another 26 percent reported it was mostly their own. (Table 4)

5 Earning money to pay for college is the primary motivation for work, followed closely by the desire for career experience.

We were curious about what motivated students to conclude that they would have to seek employment in college. We asked those respondents who said they were planning to work to rate a number of factors that might have motivated them to seek employment as either a primary motivation, a secondary motivation or not a motivation. Multiple responses were accepted.

The majority of students (60 percent) rated paying for tuition as the primary factor leading them to work in college. As might be expected, a slightly higher proportion of students (70 percent) from families with incomes less than \$50,000

cited tuition expense as their primary motivation compared to students with household incomes above \$100,000 (50 percent). Fifty-eight percent of respondents cited books and other college expenses as a primary motivation. Paying for campus room and board (40 percent) and off-campus rent and food (45 percent) were also frequently cited as primary motivators. (Table 5)

Surprisingly, more than half of students surveyed (51 percent) were also primarily motivated to work during college to gain career-related experience. Those from public high schools (55 percent) and those inclined to join a Greek organization (59 percent) were more likely

to indicate that this was a primary motivation than those from private schools (35 percent) and those not interested in joining Greek organizations (46 percent). Another 36 percent of respondents cited career-related experience as a secondary motivation for planning to work.

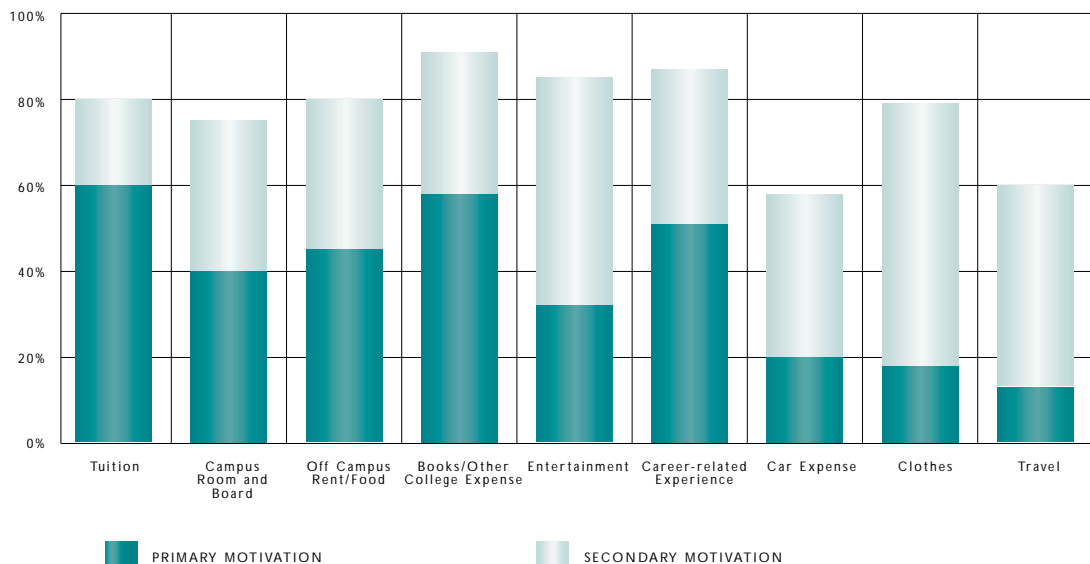
Other secondary motivational factors cited most frequently by respondents included clothing (61 percent), social life or entertainment (53 percent), and travel (47 percent).

ADVISORY

Focus aspects of institutional strategic and enrollment planning on enhancing programs that provide both an income and career-related work experience to students.

TABLE 5

Motivation for working during college



Base = Those who plan to work in college

6 A sizable proportion of students believe that working during college will make it easier to find a suitable job after graduation.

We were interested in how students feel about their decision to work during college. We asked respondents if they completely agreed, mostly agreed, mostly disagreed or completely disagreed with a list of statements we provided.

Forty-five percent completely agreed with the statement that they wanted to do their part to pay for college. Forty-two percent completely agreed that they wanted their college job to be in the career field of most interest to them. Twenty-eight, 27, and 26 percent, respectively, completely agreed that working would make it easier to find a job after graduation, easier to find a job in their chosen career field, and that they would be able to find an enjoyable job in college.

Over half (54 percent) either completely or somewhat agreed that they were anxious about having a job in college and keeping up with their school work. Women were more likely than men to express this concern with 63 percent of them agreeing completely or somewhat compared to 45 percent of men.

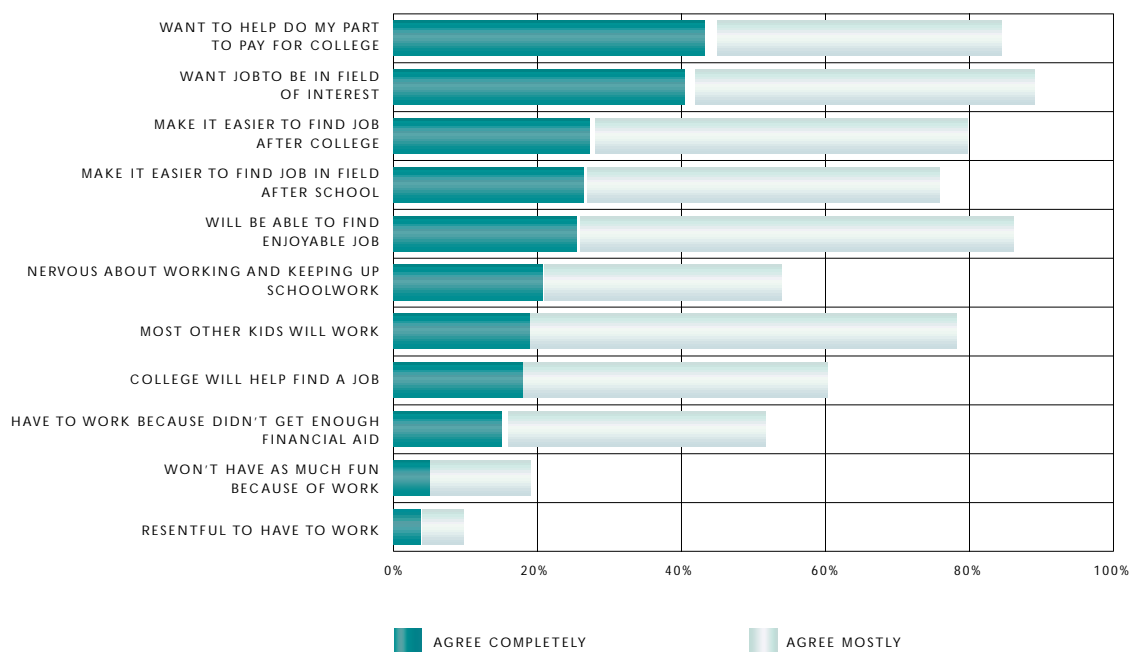
Just 5 percent indicated that they completely agreed that they were resentful of having to work in college and a similarly small number completely agreed that they would not be able to have as much fun in college because they have to work. (Table 6)

ADVISORY

Recognize the strong financial imperative that motivates students to work. Build stronger placement and counseling programs to help ensure that their work experiences are more closely integrated with their academic and career objectives.

TABLE 6

Feelings about working during college



Base = Those who plan to work in college

7 A high percentage of students are unfamiliar with cooperative education and do not understand its purposes and objectives.

Even with the strong interest in work and the high prevalence of the expectation that college employment should lead to a better job after college, respondents' knowledge of cooperative education, which directly addresses these

concerns, is extremely poor. While 57 percent of respondents professed to have at least heard of cooperative education, only about half of those could accurately describe anything about it on an unaided basis. (Table 7)

The rest apparently knew only the name but nothing else. Students in the South (86 percent) were more likely to say that they had heard of cooperative education than were those from other parts of the country.

To elaborate, we asked those who said they had heard of cooperative education to define on an open-ended basis what it meant. Twenty-two percent did not know how to describe it. Only 30 percent defined cooperative education as "school arranges for you to work in your field." Twelve percent of those surveyed described it as "work one semester, go to school one semester" and another four percent cited it was "people helping to educate each other." Eleven percent cited it was "work to help pay for education" and another nine percent assumed it was "work for school credit that was graded by employer." (Table 8)

TABLE 7

Familiar with cooperative education

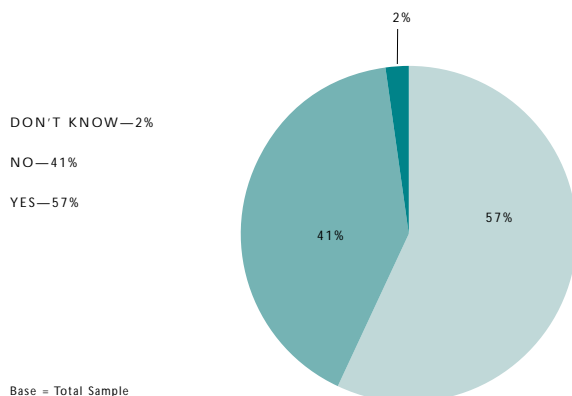
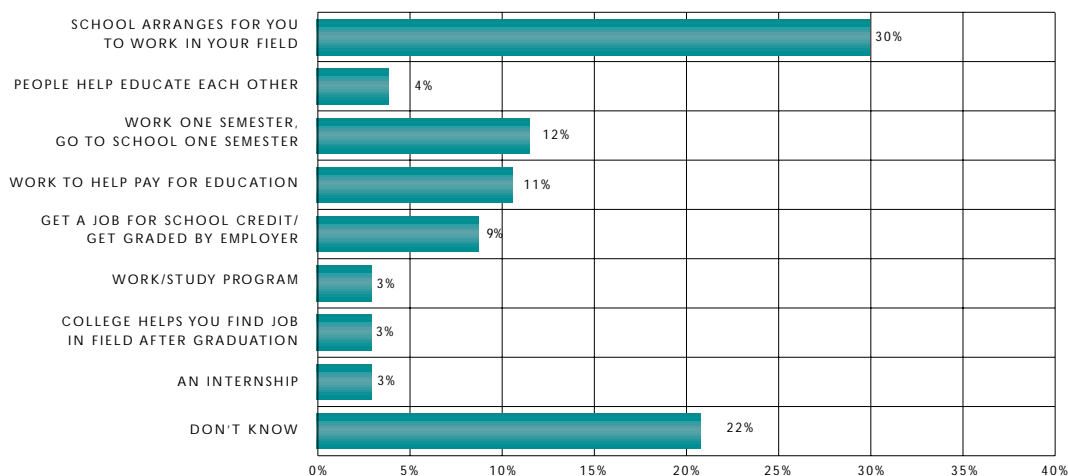


TABLE 8

Descriptions of cooperative education



Base = Respondents indicating they had heard of cooperative education
Multiple responses accepted
Mentions of 3% or more

8 When cooperative education is adequately explained and understood, 2 in 5 high school seniors say they are much more likely or somewhat more likely to apply to a college offering a cooperative education program.

After assessing respondents' top-of-mind impressions, we then read them a description of cooperative education and asked them to tell us how it might affect their interest in attending a college that offered it.

Interviewers read the following description of cooperative education, randomizing the order in which the descriptive points were listed:

"Now I'm going to read to you a description of co-ops, or cooperative education. It...

- Integrates classroom learning and work experience;
- Gives students the opportunity to put to use knowledge gained in the classroom;
- Allows students to experience different careers before graduation;
- Provides good, career-related jobs that help students pay for a substantial part of their education;
- Extends the time it takes to graduate, BUT gives students a head start in establishing a career after graduation;
- Substantially reduces the students' debt;
- Provides connections to potential future employers."

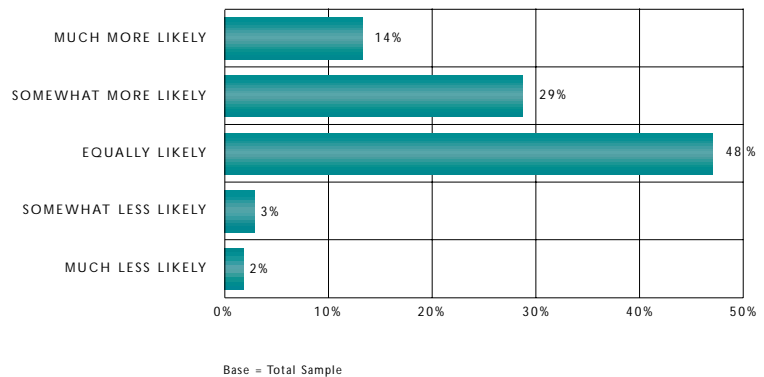
After hearing this description, 43 percent of students surveyed said they would be somewhat or much more likely to apply to a college offering cooperative education, with 14 percent saying they would be much more likely to apply. Only five percent said they would be somewhat or much less likely to apply to a school offering cooperative education. (Table 9)

An even higher proportion of minority students (53 percent) and

those with a household income of less than \$50,000 (61 percent) said they would apply to institutions offering cooperative education. Not surprisingly, those students who indicated that they were planning to work in college said they were more likely to apply to a college that offered cooperative education than were those who were not planning to work in college (47 and 24 percent, respectively).

TABLE 9

Likelihood of applying to college offering cooperative education



ADVISORY

Examine the way you market and promote internships, cooperative education, and other programs that provide both a career experience and income to students. Avoid the cliches common to the marketing of many of these programs and ensure that their benefits are clearly explained.

9 Students who participate in cooperative education programs are viewed very favorably by their peers and are generally perceived as better prepared for life and career following graduation.

Critics of cooperative education, particularly college faculty, tend to fear that it is associated primarily with students of lesser academic ability and will therefore reflect poorly on the academic standing of their institution. We found no such evidence.

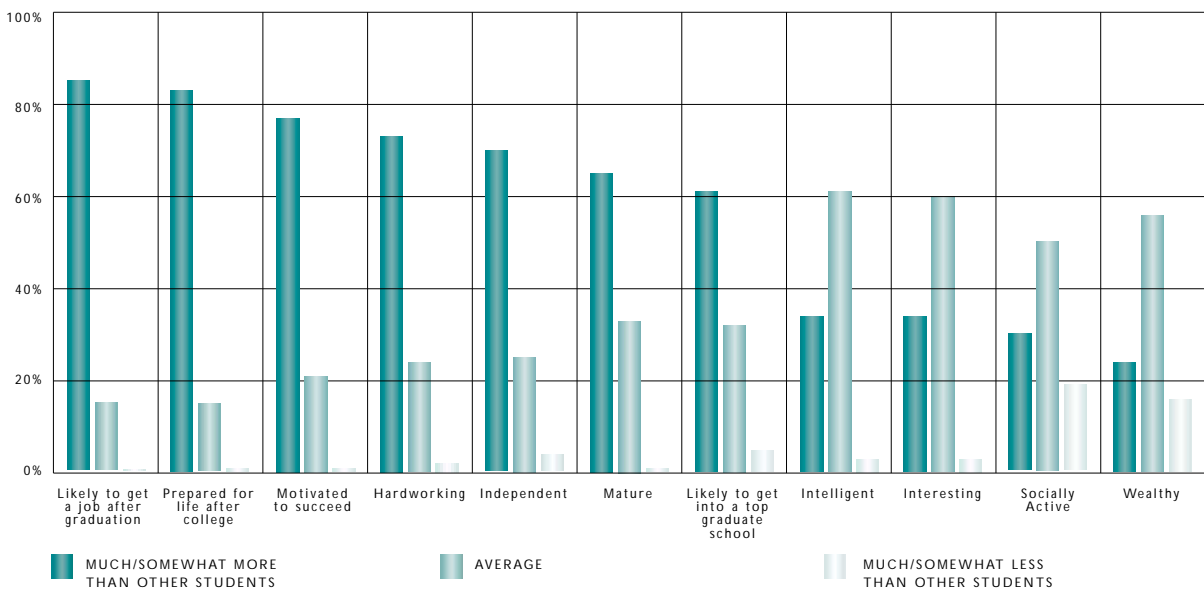
To explore potential stereotypes about cooperative education, we asked respondents to rate their perception of students who participate in cooperative education as compared to non-participating students. Perceptions were very favorable. An overwhelming majority of

respondents (85 percent) viewed co-op students as more likely to get a job after graduation and an equally high percentage (83 percent) perceived them as better prepared for life after college than other students. Co-op students also were perceived as more likely to get into a top graduate school by 61 percent of respondents. Seventy-seven percent of those surveyed view co-op students as more motivated to succeed, 73 percent see them as more hard-working, and 70 percent view them as more independent than other students. (Table 10)

ADVISORY
Build stronger relationships with employers in your region who may be a fruitful source of career-related, paid work experience for your students. Base these relationships first on an assessment of how student workers may meet the employers' needs and involve faculty in these assessments.

TABLE 10

Perceptions of characteristics of cooperative education participants



Base = Total Sample
NOTE: Mentions 5% or more
Multiple Responses Accepted

*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 the back cover of this report.

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SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The findings reported in this issue of *student*POLL are based on in-depth telephone interviews with a random national sample of 500 high school seniors who plan to enroll in four-year colleges in the fall of 1998. To qualify for an interview, respondents must have achieved a combined, SATI score of 1,050 or higher. The study sample was drawn and weighted 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.

H O T T O P I C

An overwhelming percentage of students believe they will complete their degree in four years, although few anticipate living on campus for their entire college career.

Increasingly, students are extending their length of study at undergraduate institutions beyond the once-common, four-year period. Given this trend, we wanted to learn how quickly high-ability high school seniors think they will complete their undergraduate studies and where they believe they will live during that time.

In a nutshell, students' expectations are seriously at odds with reality. A large majority (86 percent) expect to graduate within four years. Only one in ten students anticipates that it will take five years or more to graduate. Males (14 percent) are somewhat more likely than females (9 percent) to indicate that they

expect to attend college for 5 or more years. Students who intend to work (12 percent) are more likely than those who intend not to work (5 percent) to indicate that they expect to attend college for 5 or more years. Just two percent of students surveyed anticipated graduating in less than four years.

At the same time, only about a third of students (35 percent) intend to live on campus for the entire four years of study. Only three percent expect to live on campus for a longer period of time. The majority of students (54 percent) believe they will live in residential housing for less than four years.

A D V I S O R Y

Develop residential housing plans that anticipate sharp attrition in the percentage of students intending to live on campus and increase the number of on-campus living options that provide the benefits of commercial alternatives off-campus.

A D V I S O R Y

Since the vast majority of students expects to graduate in four years, don't expect much marketing benefit from "guarantees" of graduation in four years or other such marketing ploys focusing on time to graduation. Instead, devote the necessary physical, financial, and academic resources to assist students in keeping their anticipated academic progress on course.

H O W T O S U B S C R I B E T O S T U D E N T P O L L

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Art & Science Group, Inc.
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Fax: 410-962-1315