# Technology Update: No Digital Divide

**Publisher's Note**

There is no digital divide among prospective students planning to enroll in four-year colleges and universities.

The digital divide—the presumed disadvantage of racial minorities in access to and use of digital technologies—has been a hotly debated topic. In 2001, StudentPoll published the first comprehensive research findings documenting that there was no digital divide among students applying to four-year colleges and universities. Not surprisingly, these findings, even though they were the first reliable data on this subject, were treated with skepticism in some quarters.

Since the survey sample for the previous study included only 100 interviews with students of color of all racial backgrounds, to answer the skeptics and to achieve more statistical precision, our current survey included an oversample of 100 African American students.

Our findings from this study are essentially the same. In no major respect—access to and ownership of hardware, Internet capability, frequency of Internet use—are there any significant differences between Caucasians and African Americans. In fact, the evidence suggests that African American students may use digital technologies in the college search more frequently than their Caucasian counterparts.

For those who insist on believing that African Americans are disadvantaged in a way our data refutes, may we dare to suggest that such attitudes may very well be a subtle and unintentional form of racism. While such disadvantages may very well exist among African Americans who are not college bound or enroll in community colleges, it is quite clear that digital technologies are very much a fact of life for African Americans planning to enroll in four-year colleges.

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**Q** How does computer and Internet access differ among Caucasians and African Americans?

**A** When we asked these different populations if they had access to a computer at home, access was essentially the same (97 percent of white students and 94 percent of black students). There was only a marginal difference in Internet access too.

In terms of access at school, white students were slightly more likely to have access to a computer at school than their African American counterparts which may, in part, simply be a reflection of the fact that a higher proportion of white students attend more affluent schools with greater technology resources.

In terms of Internet access, the differences are marginal. Some 89 percent of African Americans surveyed have access to the Internet at home compared to 94 percent of Caucasian students. Similar to the findings reported for computer access at school, slightly more white students (81 percent) had Internet access at school compared to 70 percent of black students.
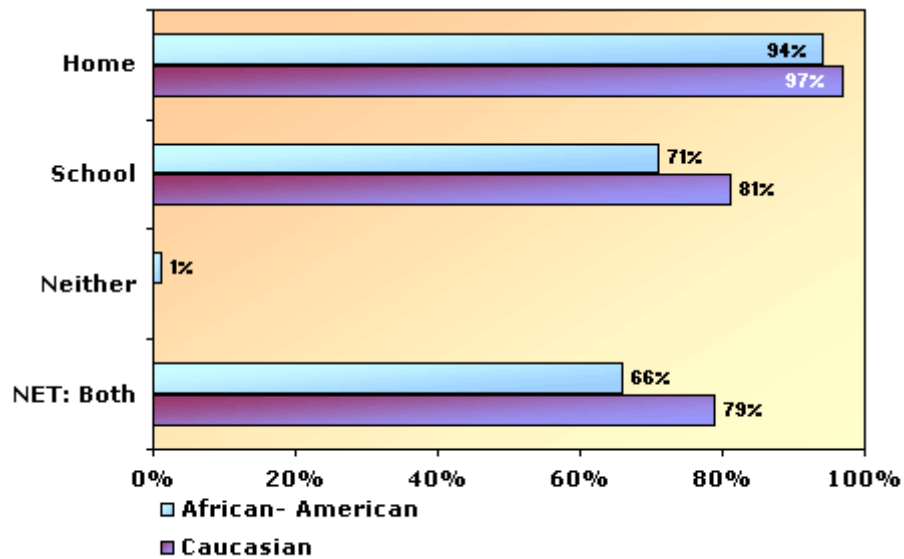
**Chart 1 data:**

| Category | African-American | Caucasian |
|---|---|---|
| Home | 94% | 97% |
| School | 71% | 81% |
| Neither | 1% | |
| NET: Both | 66% | 79% |

Legend: ☐ African- American ■ Caucasian

**Chart 1:** Computer Access at Home or School (N=500)

**Chart 2 data:**

| Category | African-American | Caucasian |
|---|---|---|
| Home | 89% | 94% |
| School | 70% | 81% |
| Neither | 1% | 1% |
| NET: Both | 61% | 76% |

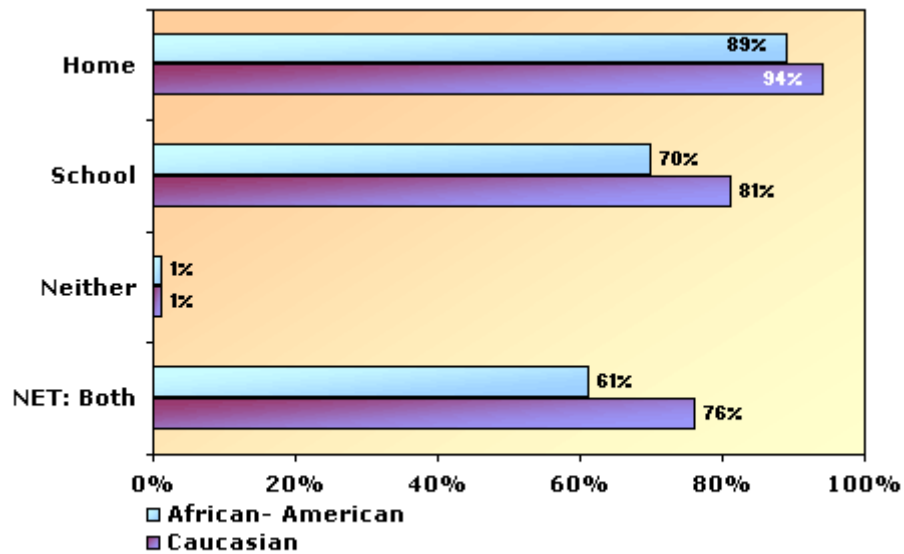Legend: ☐ African- American ■ Caucasian

**Chart 2:** Internet Access at Home or School
base=those who have access to a computer at home and/or school (N=498)

**Q** Are Caucasian students more likely to have their own computer? Do they, in general, have more computers in their home than African American students?

**A** No and yes since a higher proportion of Caucasian students have four or more computers at home.

When we asked students if they had their own computer at home, 52 percent of African Americans responded yes, compared to 50 percent of Caucasian students interviewed. In terms of the number of computers in the home, the mean number of computers at home was almost identical for both students of color and Caucasian students (1.8 and 1.9 respectively). However, a higher proportion of African American students had one computer in the home compared to Caucasian students while a larger segment of Caucasian students reported having four or more computers in the home compared to African American students
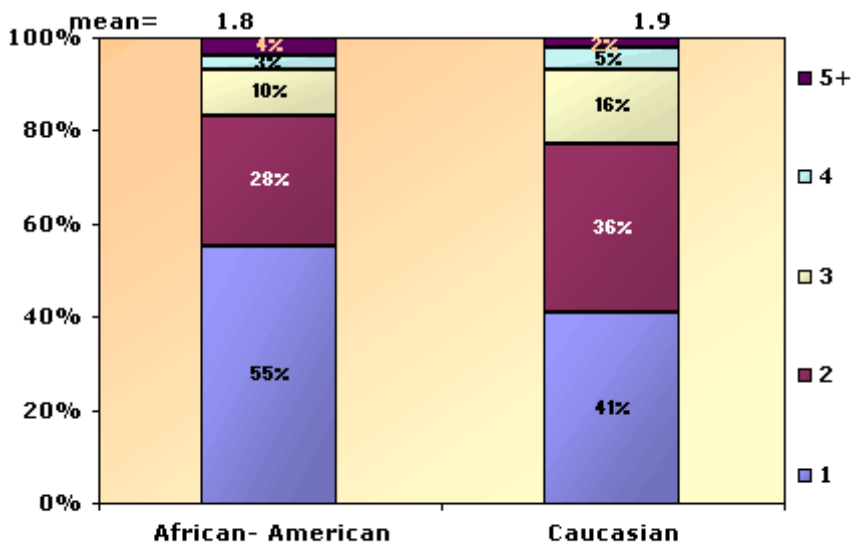
100%

4%
3%
10%

80%

28%

60%

40%

55%

20%

0%

African- American

2%
5%
16%

36%

41%

Caucasian

■ 5+

□ 4

□ 3

■ 2

□ 1

**Chart 3:** Number of Computers at Home
base=those who have access to a computer at home (N=484)

100%

80%

52%                    50%

60%

40%

48%                    50%

20%

0%

African- American          Caucasian

□ Yes

□ No
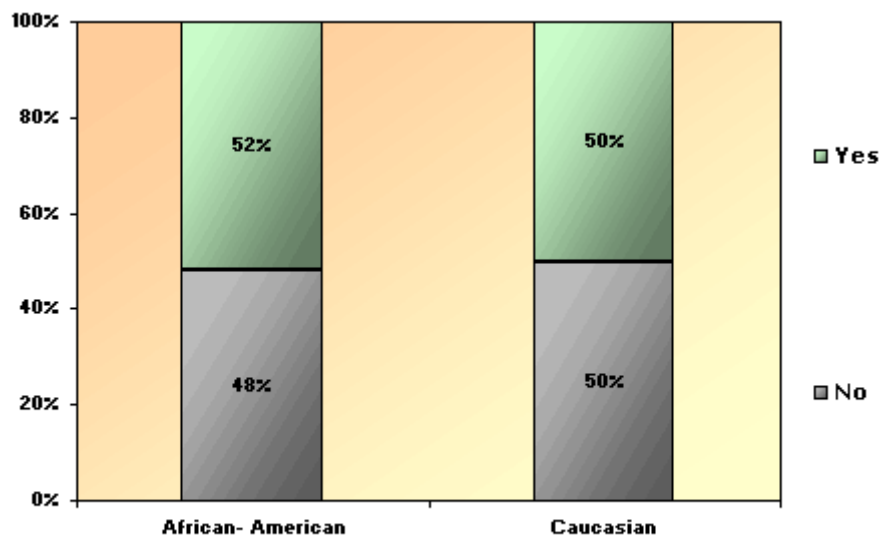
**Chart 4:** Have Their Own Computer at Home
base=those who have access to a computer at home (N=484)

**Q** Are there any differences in Internet use by students of color compared to white students?

**A** Only a slight difference. In terms of weekly Internet use, black students tended to use the Internet more frequently than their white counterparts.

While 55 percent of African American students and 57 percent of white students reported using the Internet 1-5 hours per week, 19 percent of black students indicated that they used the Internet 11 or more hours per week compared to 14 percent of white students.
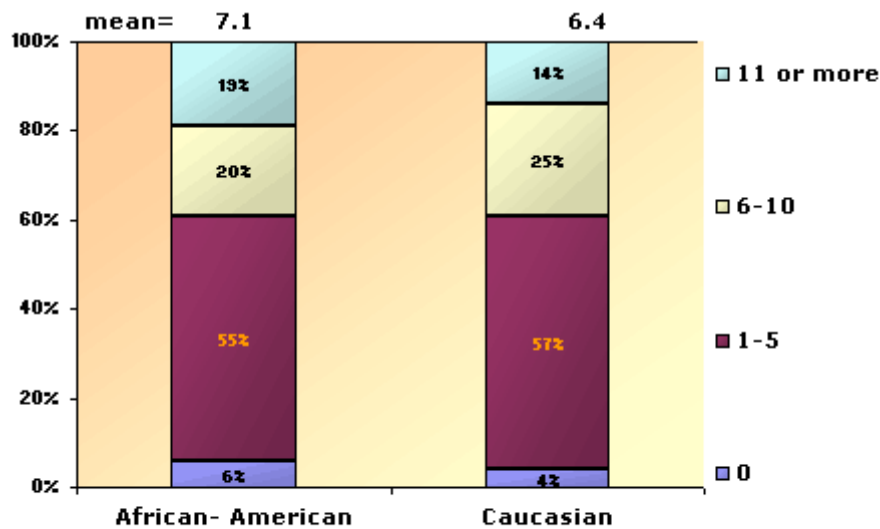
mean=    7.1                    6.4

**Chart 5**: Hours on the Internet Each Week
base=those who have access to the internet at home and/ or school (N=494)

What are the primary reasons these populations of students are using the Internet?

A  For both African American and Caucasian students, an overwhelming majority reported using the Internet to send or receive email (59 percent versus 67 percent respectively).

When we asked students the primary reasons they were using the Internet, multiple answers were accepted. In addition to using the Internet to send or receive email, 54 percent of African American students and 49 percent of white students are using it for research or homework. The notable difference is that 18 percent of African Americans said they used the Internet to search for college or career information compared to 8 percent of Caucasian students. On the other hand, a slightly higher proportion of white students indicated they used the Internet for on-line discussions or chat groups.
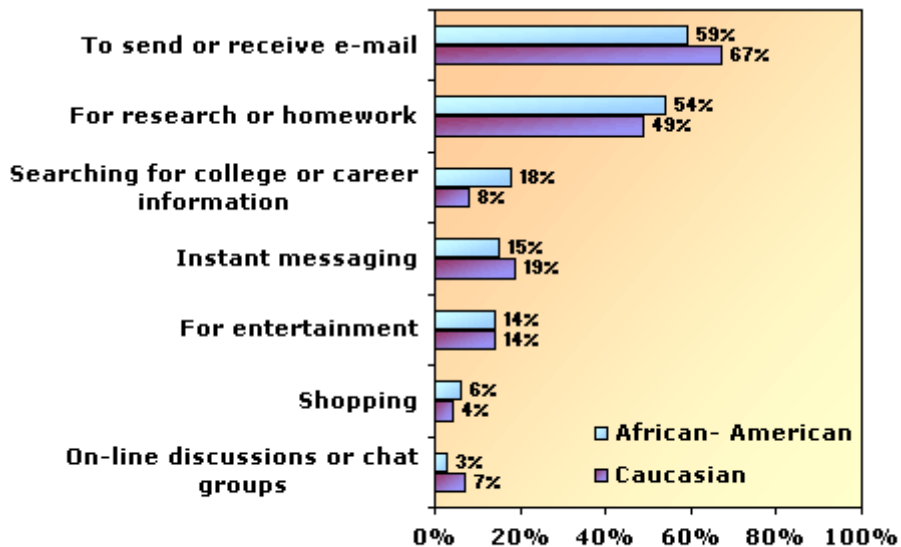


**Chart 6**: Primary Reasons for Using the Internet (multiple reasons accepted) base=those who have access to the internet at home and/or school (N=494)

Q  What proportion of these students are searching college web sites or using other web-based information about colleges.

A  Thirty-six percent of African American students and 31 percent of Caucasian students are visiting individual college web sites to obtain college information. It is interesting to note, however, that a slightly higher proportion of African American students reported using college portal sites such as the College Board's College Quickfinder and FastWeb.
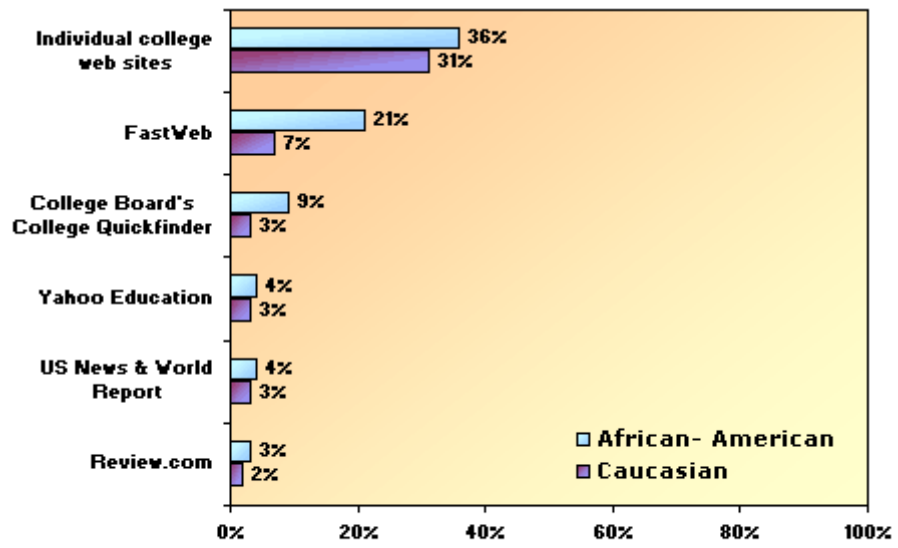
**Chart 7:** Web Sites Visited by Students
base=those who have access to the internet at home and/ or school (N=494)