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# Seniors Assess their Experience at Western Washington University: Senior Survey (CSS) Results from 1999

Gary (Gary Russell) McKinney  
*Western Washington University*

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# SENIORS ASSESS THEIR EXPERIENCE AT WESTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY: SENIOR SURVEY (CSS) RESULTS FROM 1999

Prepared by Gary R. McKinney

## INTRODUCTION

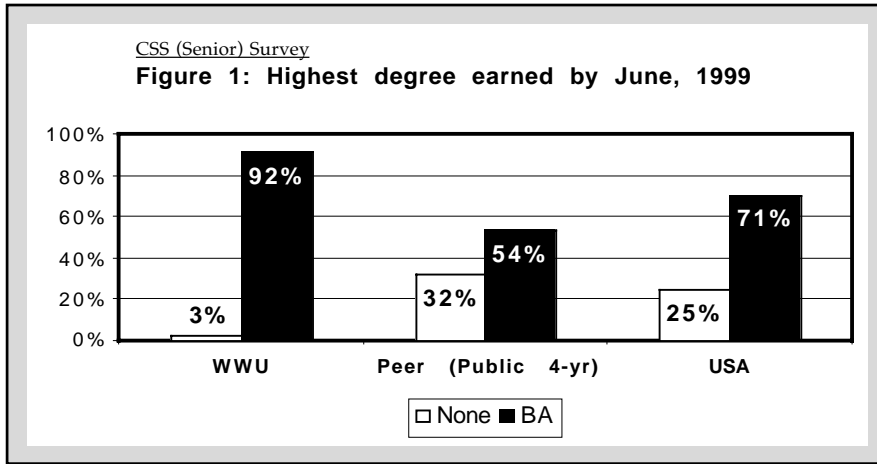
This report presents findings from the 1999 Senior Survey, administered during each of the four academic quarters: beginning winter, 1999, and concluding fall, 1999. Every Western senior who applied for graduation in 1999 was mailed a College Student Survey (CSS), developed by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) of the Graduate School of Education at the University of California, Los Angeles. Altogether, 990 usable survey forms were returned, for an approximate return rate of 41%.

The CSS was designed to serve as a follow-up to the Student Information Form—the first-year, in-coming student questionnaire also developed by HERI—or to stand alone as a separate instrument. Both the senior and freshmen surveys profile student characteristics, attitudes, values, educational achievement, and goals.

In 1999, overall, 139 institutions and 38,486 respondents participated in the CSS. In this report two comparisons are made: 1) within the category assigned to Western by HERI: public, 4-year institutions of higher education not granting Ph.D.'s, (peers); and 2) overall findings (USA). In 1999, the public 4-year category had only six participants. (Please note other demographic differences between Western and its "peers" on the next page.)

The 1999 administration marks the first year that Western researchers have attempted to survey all graduating seniors. Previously, the CSS was administered in the spring only, and only to Western seniors who had previously completed a Freshmen Survey. The reason for the change is to be able at some point to report findings to smaller units, at least to the college level, if not departmental, depending on size.

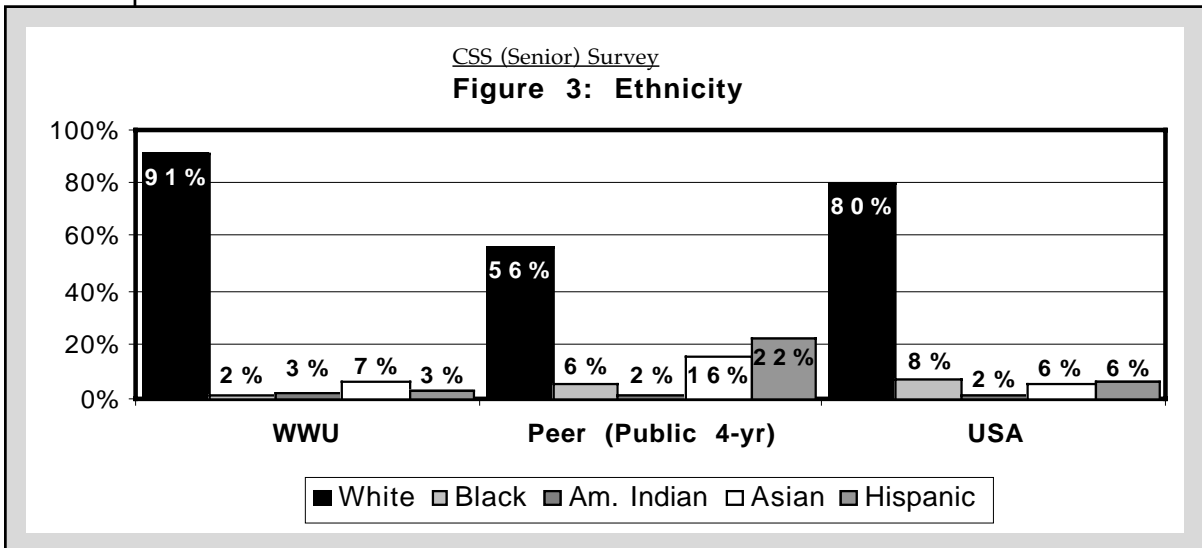
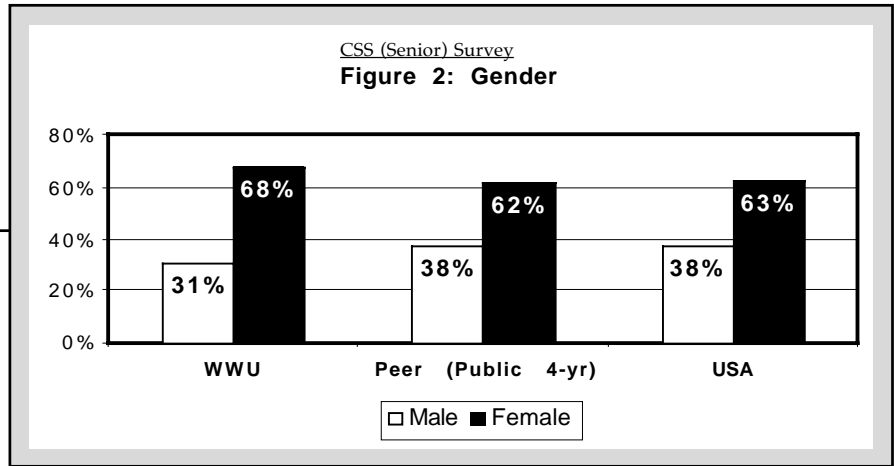
CSS SURVEY OF 1999 GRADUATING SENIORS



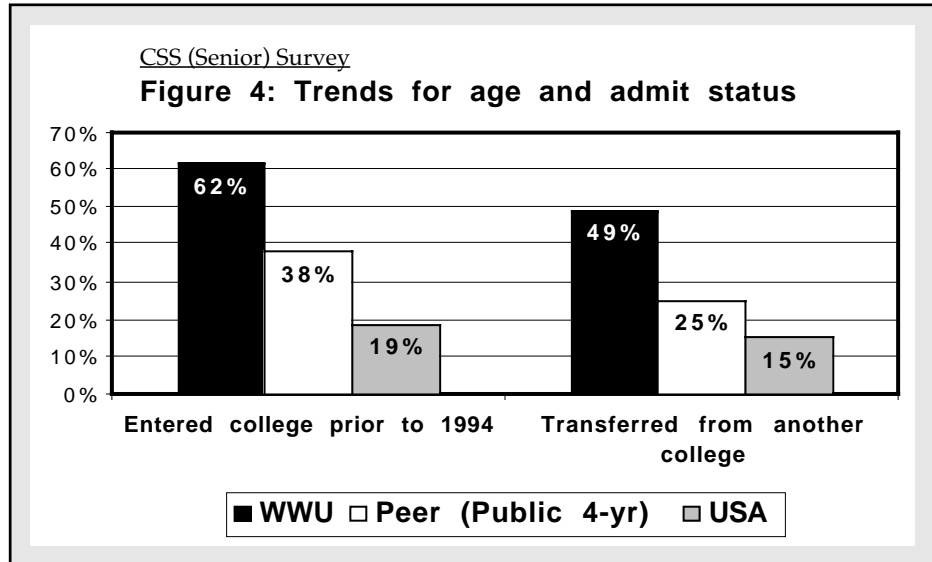
**WHY ISN'T WESTERN'S FIGURE 100%?**

Western administered the CSS each quarter to students who had applied for graduation. Thus Winter and Spring graduates had not technically received their degrees by the June, 1999, date mentioned in the survey form.

**WESTERN'S SENIORS DEMOGRAPHICALLY DIFFERENT FROM NATIONAL COHORTS OF 1999 CSS RESPONDENTS**



As soon-to-be graduates, Western CSS respondents were more likely to be going to work full-time within the next 6 months: 78% vs. 47% peers and 52% USA.

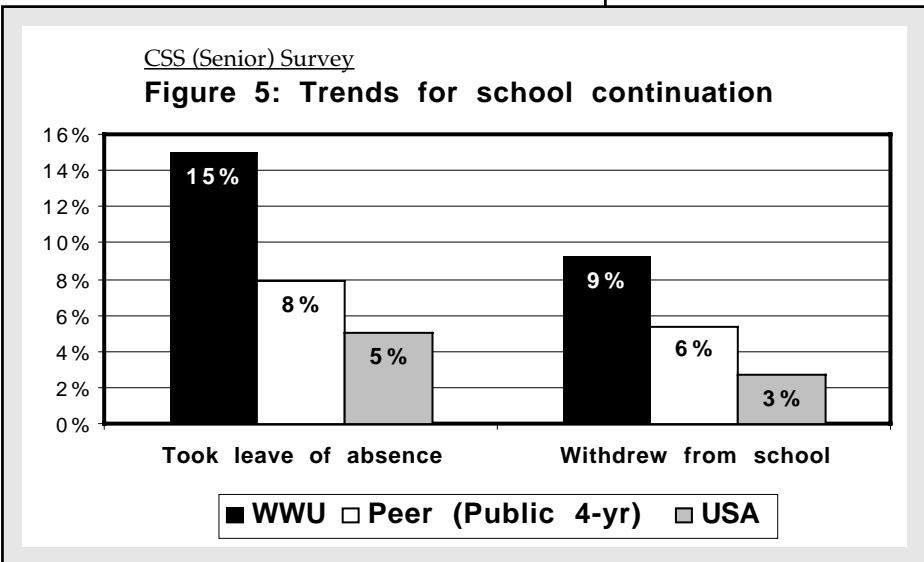


**WESTERN'S SENIORS OLDER, MORE LIKELY TO BE TRANSFERS**

Western's CSS respondents were less likely to be attending full-time: 84% WWU vs. 87% peers and 93% USA.

Western's CSS respondents were more likely to have gotten married: 11% WWU vs. 9% peers and 4% USA.

**WESTERN'S SENIORS MORE LIKELY TO HAVE TAKEN SOME TIME OFF**

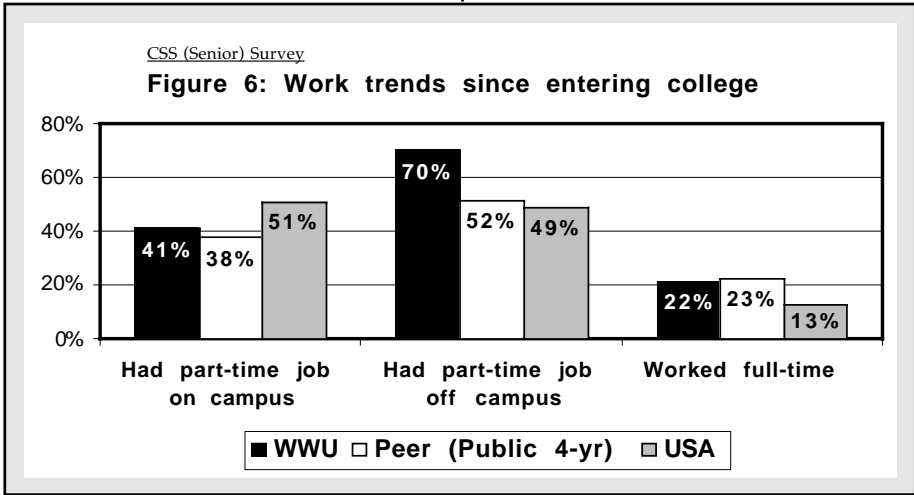


As soon-to-be graduates, Western CSS respondents were more likely to be traveling, hosteling, or backpacking within the next 6 months: 23% vs. 13% peers and 11% USA.

**WESTERN SENIORS  
WORKED THEIR WAY  
THROUGH COLLEGE**

**WORK PATTERNS  
SET EARLY**

Even as freshmen, Western students planned on working their way through college. Since 1976, 55% of incoming Western freshmen planned on working, compared to 39% of incoming freshmen nationally.

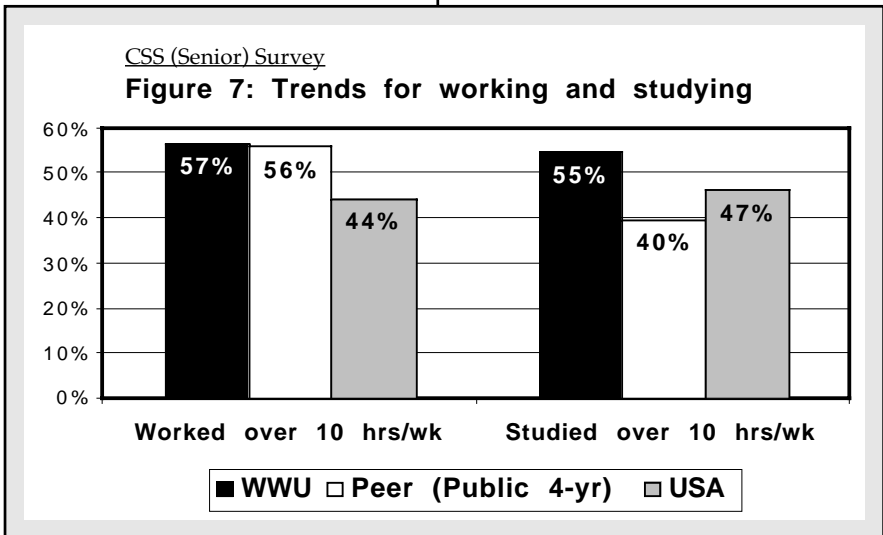


*Busy Western seniors also found time to perform volunteer service (68%).*

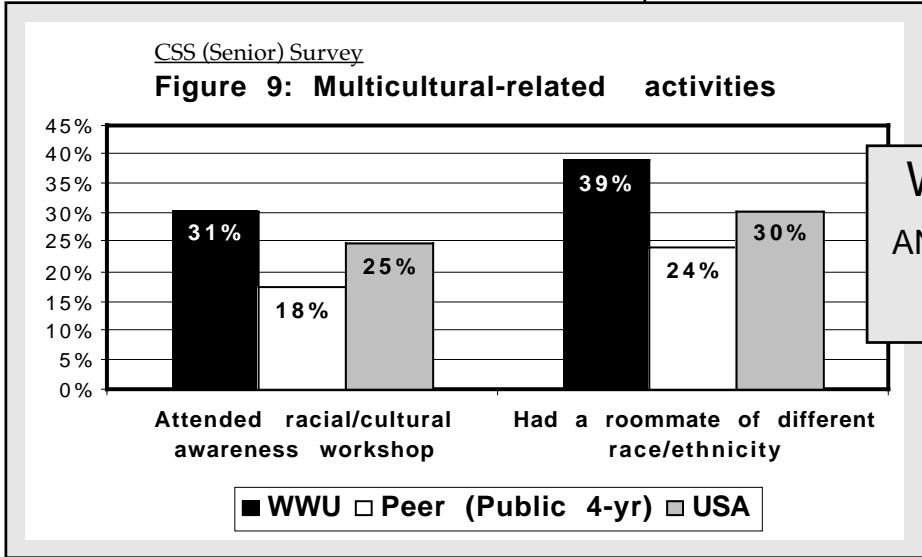
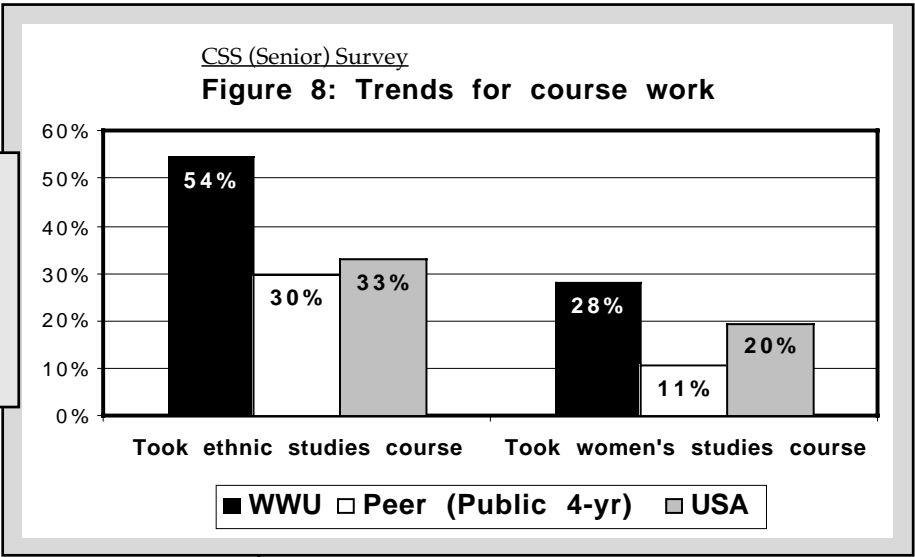
**GOOD HABITS  
LEARNED EARLY**

For incoming freshmen nationally, the percentage that study 6+ hrs/wk or more has decreased. For Western incoming freshmen, the percentage is not only consistently higher, it has remained consistent. For instance, in both 1989 and 1999, 48% reported studying 6+ hrs/wk.

**IN THE PAST YEAR, WESTERN SENIORS  
NOT ONLY WORKED, THEY STUDIED**



**WESTERN SENIORS TOOK ETHNIC AND WOMEN'S STUDIES COURSES**



**WESTERN SENIORS AND MULTI-CULTURAL EXPERIENCES**

SURVEY RESPONDENT AGREES THAT "RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IS NO LONGER A PROBLEM IN AMERICA":

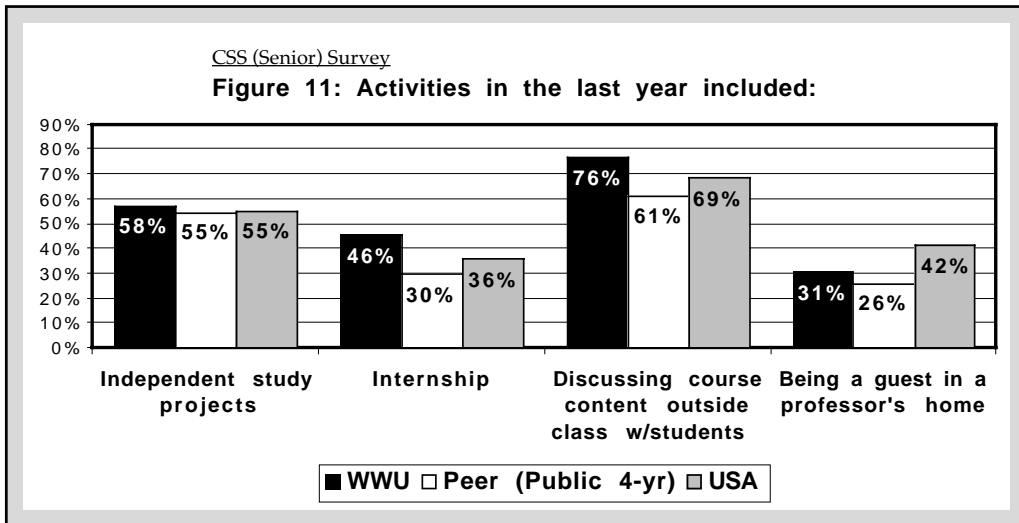
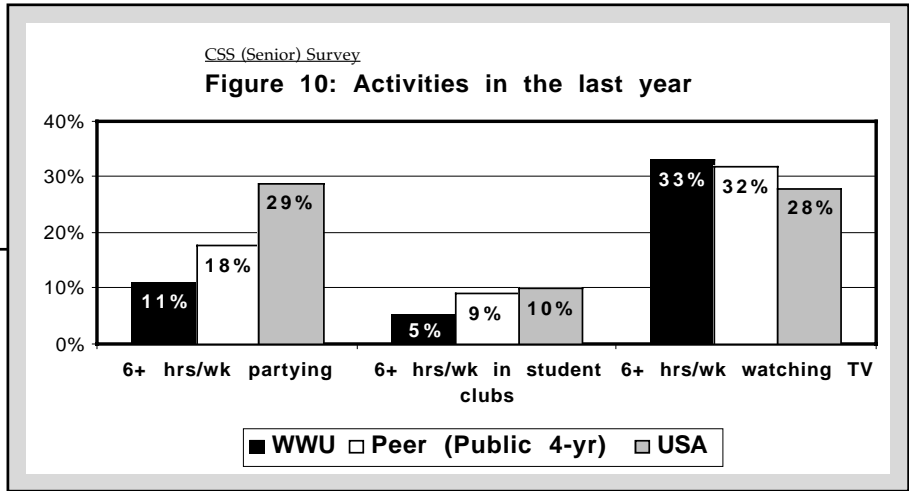
**WWU = 8%**  
**PEERS = 18%**  
**USA = 15%**

**WESTERN SENIORS HOLD DIFFERENT OPINIONS REGARDING RACIAL ISSUES**

SURVEY RESPONDENT AGREES THAT "AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IN COLLEGE ADMISSIONS SHOULD BE ABOLISHED":

**WWU = 40%**  
**PEERS = 51%**  
**USA = 53%**

**WESTERN SENIORS PARTIED LESS, WATCHED TV ABOUT THE SAME**



**OTHER WESTERN SENIOR ACTIVITIES**

WESTERN SENIORS SPENT LESS TIME TALKING WITH FACULTY OUTSIDE CLASS THAN DID PEERS OR CSS RESPONDENTS OVERALL (3 OR MORE HOURS PER WEEK)

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**WWU = 9%**  
**Peers = 10%**  
**USA = 13%**

WESTERN SENIORS WERE LESS LIKELY TO BE SATISFIED WITH LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES THAN WERE PEERS OR CSS RESPONDENTS OVERALL

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**WWU = 41%**  
**Peers = 53%**  
**USA = 65%**

MOST SURVEY PARTICIPANTS USED THE INTERNET FOR RESEARCH OR HOMEWORK (AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK IN THE PAST YEAR

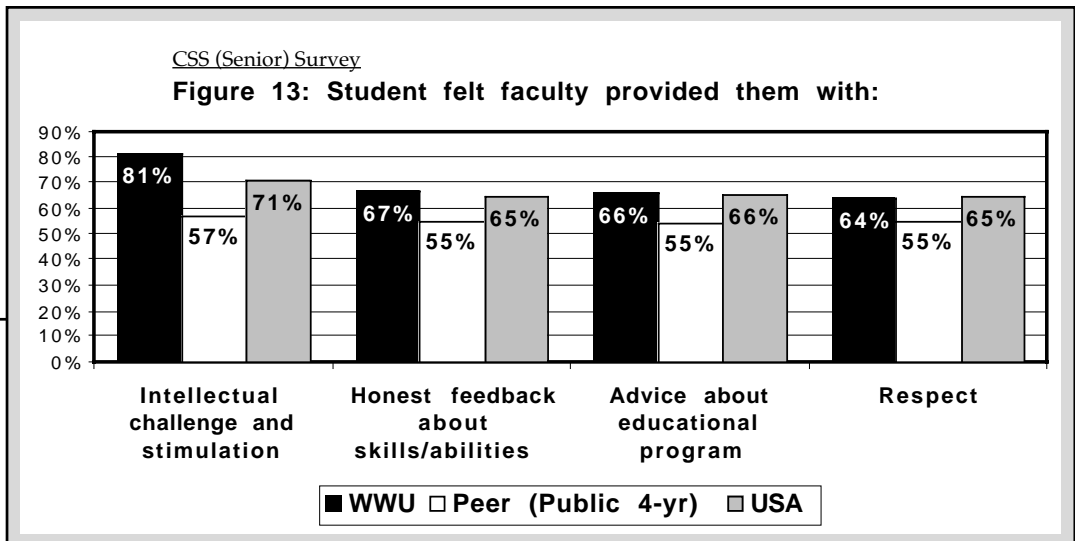
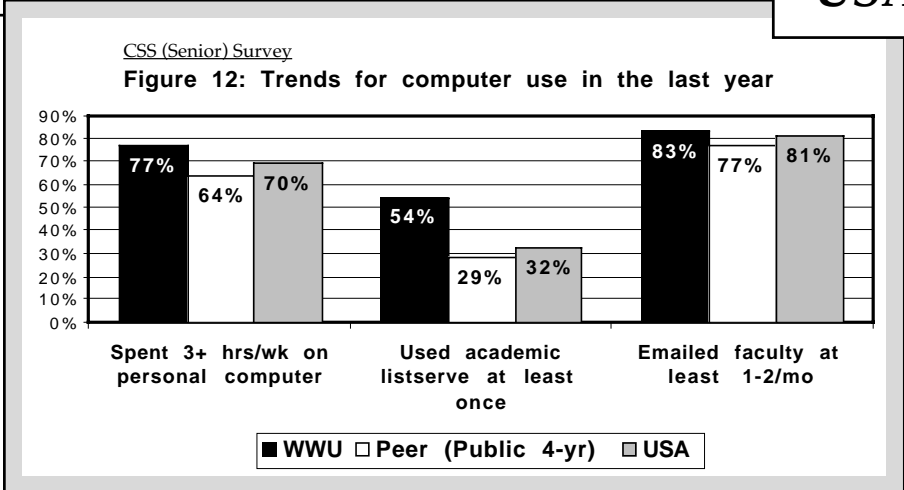
**WWU = 73%**  
**Peers = 74%**  
**USA = 73%**

**WESTERN SENIORS AND COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY**

WESTERN SURVEY RESPONDENTS WERE MORE LIKELY TO HAVE RECEIVED COURSE ASSIGNMENTS VIA THE INTERNET

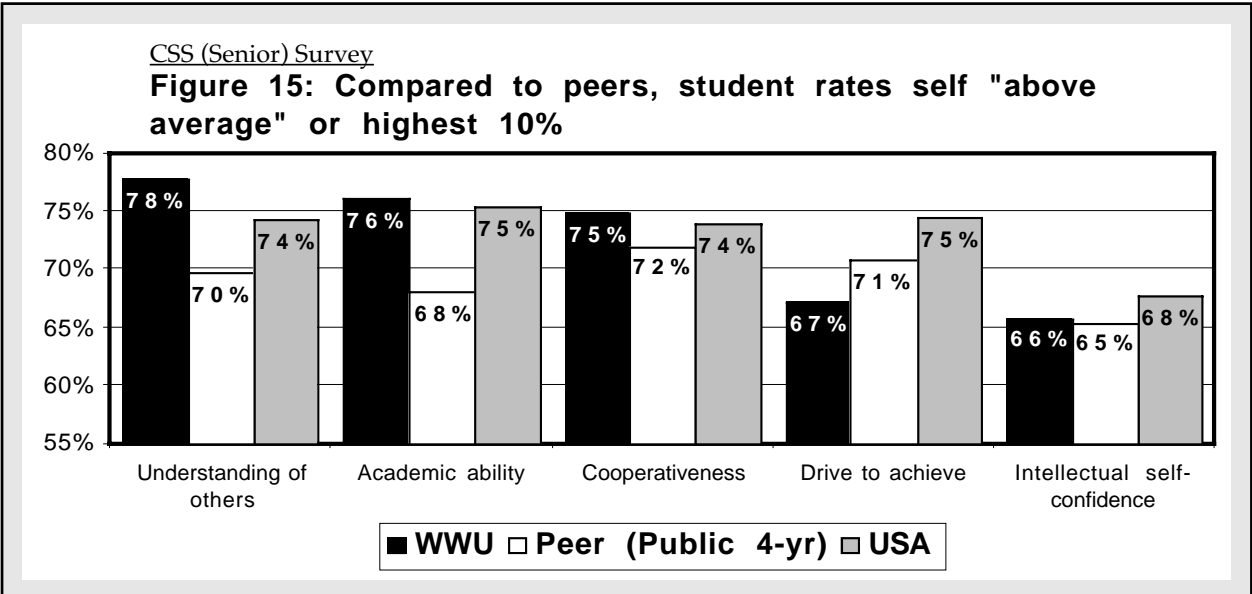
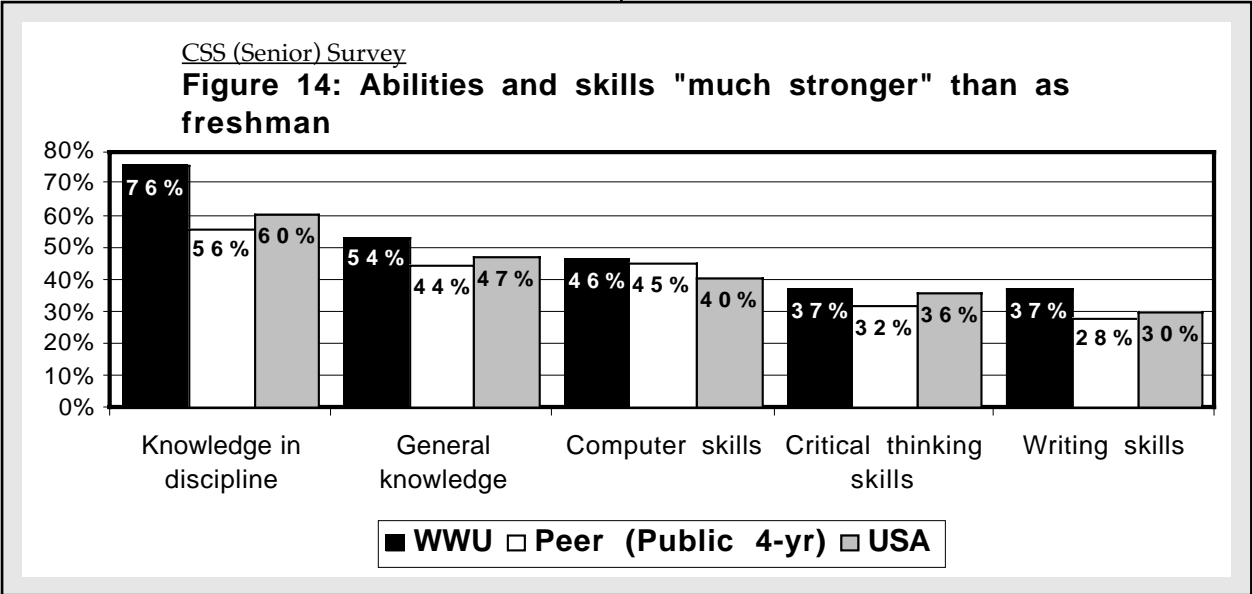
**WWU = 68%**  
**Peers = 56%**  
**USA = 62%**

SENIORS RESPECTED, CHALLENGED BY FACULTY





**WESTERN SENIORS REPORT  
IMPROVED SKILLS**



**WESTERN SENIORS RATE THEIR  
SKILLS**

CSS SURVEY OF 1999 GRADUATING SENIORS

**WESTERN SENIORS  
REPORT MAJOR**

TABLE 1: REPORTED MAJOR

	Males	Females	Total
Biological Science	12%	9%	<b>10%</b>
Business	19%	16%	<b>17%</b>
Education	6%	15%	<b>12%</b>
Engineering	6%	1%	<b>3%</b>
English	3%	7%	<b>6%</b>
History or Political Science	9%	5%	<b>6%</b>
Humanities	3%	7%	<b>6%</b>
Fine Arts	7%	4%	<b>5%</b>
Mathematics	1%	1%	<b>1%</b>
Physical Sciences	4%	2%	<b>2%</b>
Social Sciences	13%	25%	<b>21%</b>
Other	17%	8%	<b>11%</b>

**WESTERN SENIORS  
REPORT CAREER**

TABLE 2: REPORTED CAREER

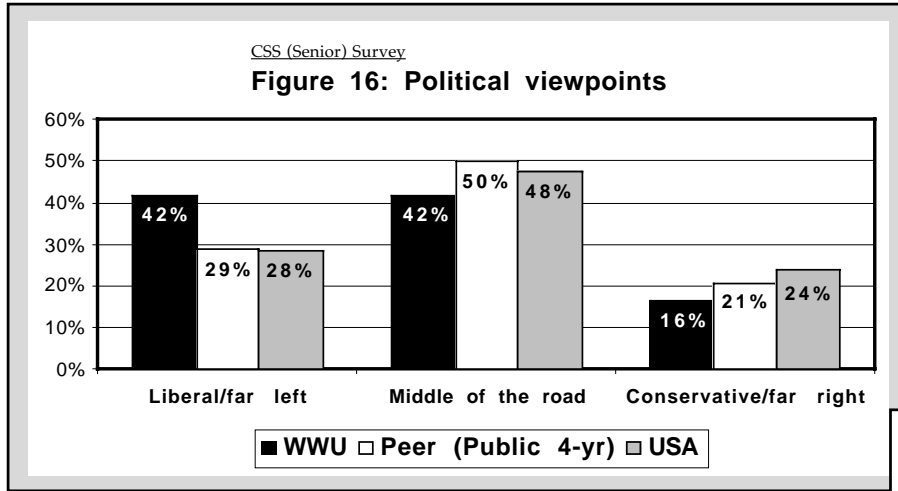
	Males	Females	Total
Artist	7%	6%	<b>6%</b>
Business	17%	19%	<b>19%</b>
Clergy	3%	0%	<b>1%</b>
College teacher	2%	3%	<b>3%</b>
Doctor	2%	1%	<b>1%</b>
Education	11%	24%	<b>20%</b>
Engineer	6%	1%	<b>2%</b>
Health professional	3%	3%	<b>3%</b>
Lawyer	2%	2%	<b>2%</b>
Research Scientist	7%	3%	<b>5%</b>
Social/rec worker	4%	9%	<b>7%</b>
Other	30%	21%	<b>24%</b>

**WESTERN SENIORS  
WOULD ENROLL  
AT WESTERN  
AGAIN**

TABLE 3: WOULD YOU CHOOSE TO ENROLL AT YOUR CURRENT SCHOOL AGAIN?

	WWU	Peers (4-yr public)	USA
Yes	85%	79%	81%
No	13%	16%	15%
Don't Know	3%	5%	4%

Half of Western's graduating seniors (50.2%) plan on earning a Master's Degree.



**WESTERN SENIORS POLITICALLY MORE LIBERAL**

Nearly half (48%) of Western seniors want to "influence social values."

**WESTERN SENIORS MORE LIKELY TO HAVE DISCUSSED POLITICS:**

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**WWU = 24%**  
**Peers = 12%**  
**USA = 16%**

**WESTERN SENIORS MORE LIKELY TO "KEEP UP WITH POLITICAL AFFAIRS."**

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**WWU = 43%**  
**Peers = 38%**  
**USA = 41%**

**WESTERN SENIORS MORE LIKELY TO HAVE VOTED IN A STATE OR NATIONAL ELECTION**

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**WWU = 75%**  
**Peers = 57%**  
**USA = 52%**

TABLE 4: STUDENT AGREES STRONGLY OR SOMEWHAT

	WWU	Peers (4-yr public)	USA
Abortion should be legal	76%	67%	69%
Marijuana should be legalized	57%	36%	37%
It is important to have laws prohibiting homosexual relationships	11%	23%	21%
Racial discrimination is no longer a problem in America	8%	18%	15%
Affirmative action in college admissions should be abolished	40%	51%	53%

<b>TABLE 5: ACTIVITIES NOTED AS "VERY SATISFACTORY" OR "SATISFACTORY"</b>			
	<b>Western</b>	<b>Peers (Public 4- year)</b>	<b>USA</b>
Courses in major field	86%	84%	87%
Overall college experience	83%	77%	84%
Overall quality of instruction	79%	76%	82%
Computer facilities	72%	67%	67%
Social science courses	71%	59%	71%
Lab facilities and equipment	70%	53%	63%
Humanities courses	68%	61%	72%
General Education	66%	68%	79%
Amount of contact with faculty	66%	66%	75%
Class size	61%	70%	81%
Ability to find faculty or staff member	60%	61%	72%
Science and mathematics courses	57%	64%	63%
Campus health services	55%	52%	48%
Recreational facilities	51%	64%	66%
Financial aid services	50%	54%	51%
Student housing	44%	40%	53%
Tutorial or other academic assistance	42%	53%	60%
Sense of community on campus	40%	48%	58%
Quality of computer training/assistance	38%	47%	48%
Academic advising	38%	53%	58%
Career counseling and advising	35%	46%	50%

## AFTERWORD AND SUMMARY

When reviewing these findings, it is important to keep in mind who the survey participants were: Western students who had applied for graduation in 1999, beginning in the winter quarter, 1999, and ending in the fall quarter, 1999—in other words, not the usual fall to summer academic year, but the actual year, 1999. This differs from many research cohorts. Graduation rates, for instance, are based on fall-to-fall cohorts, thus encompassing months in two different years. Furthermore, the female-to-male ratio of survey respondents was more predominately female than the actual ratio of graduates (68% female/31% male survey respondents vs. 59% female/41% male graduates).

Western's survey respondents differed also from the national cohort. Western's cohort was slightly older, were more likely to be transfers, and were more likely to list their ethnicity as "White". Partially, these differences were due to how Western began administering the CSS in 1999. In prior years, it was more common among schools using the CSS to administer the survey to seniors, whether they were on the verge or graduating or not. Indeed, Western used this methodology, too. (In fact, Western only administered the CSS to seniors who had previously taken the in-coming freshman survey, so transfers were nonexistent in the cohorts prior to 1999.) There is nothing intrinsically wrong with the previous methodology, except that the numbers of completed forms received was small. Using the larger numbers that a year-long survey administration will garner, Western researchers hope eventually to report at least to the college level. Indeed, numerous institutions are changing to the full-year model.

Different, too, was the small number of participating schools within Western's classification: public 4-year colleges. (For research purposes, HERI makes a distinction between Colleges—no Ph.D.'s granted—and Universities.) This fact skewed somewhat the ethnicity ratios within the public 4-year college category, as some of the schools had quite large populations of students of color. In addition, most 1999 CSS participants overall were private, Catholic, or protestant colleges and universities. There were only six 4-year public colleges (excluding Western, whose findings were not included in the national norms), and eight public universities.

To summarize the findings, Western's 1999 CSS survey participants have at least one strong common connection: they are all succeeders, our best students, the ones who "made it." Therefore, it comes as no surprise that they came to Western with good study habits, and studied hard while they were here. They did not party as often as their national peers, and were more likely to have worked outside jobs. These students generally felt respected and challenged by their professors, and were adept at the new computer technologies. Although certain services (notably academic advising) and certain conditions (the sense of community on campus) were rated lower by Western seniors than their peers nationally, most Western seniors (85%) said that if they had it to do over again, they would still choose to enroll at Western.



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Western Washington University, 516 High Street MS:9010, Bellingham, WA 98225

Phone: (360) 650-3409; FAX: (360) 650-6893; e-mail: garyr@cc.wwu.edu

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