

# Freshmen's Concerns About Quality, Cost at 35-Year High

By [ERIC HOOVER](#)

Freshmen are more concerned about academic quality and affordability than they have been in decades, according to an annual survey conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California at Los Angeles ( [see tables](#)).

Sixty-three percent of students said academic reputation was a very important factor in selecting a college, an increase of 5.6 percentage points from 2006. Thirty-nine percent cited financial-aid offers as key to their selections, a rise of 5.1 percentage points. And 52 percent listed "graduates get good jobs" as a top reason for their college choices, up 2.6 percentage points.

All those figures were the highest they have been in 35 years.

Concerns about costs may have kept many freshmen from attending their dream colleges. In 2007, 80.6 percent of freshmen were admitted to their first-choice colleges, but only 64.1 percent ended up enrolling in them.

"Students may be keying in," said John H. Pryor, the survey's director, "to national debates about affordability and accountability."

More than 270,000 freshmen at four-year institutions completed UCLA's comprehensive survey last fall, answering hundreds of questions on their values, habits, and finances. The survey is a widely cited source of data on college demographics and attitudinal trends.

One preoccupation for this year's freshmen: going green. Nearly 27 percent of students said they believed it was essential or very important to participate in cleaning up the environment, an increase from 22.2 percent last year and the highest level in more than a decade.

Other findings this year challenged the conventional wisdom about students' behaviors

in several areas. Despite anecdotal reports of more and more high-school students filing numerous college applications, for example, only about a quarter of current freshmen said they had applied to more than five institutions. Nearly a third had applied to just one or two colleges.

The 2007 survey also complicated the popular conception of "helicopter parents" as nuisances: Sizable percentages of freshmen reported that their parents had too little involvement in some college decisions, particularly after they had matriculated ( [see related story](#)).

Also, a new set of questions on this year's survey revealed that while students frequently use Facebook or MySpace, they are not necessarily devoting less time to other pursuits.

Students who spent six or more hours a week on social-networking sites, for example, spent the same amount of time as their peers studying or doing homework, and more time socializing, reading for pleasure, and watching television.

Those who spent the most time online had received tutoring or remedial work in high school at a slightly higher rate than their peers. They were also more likely to anticipate needing extra help in college.

Among different racial and ethnic groups, Hispanic students spent the least amount of time on social-networking sites, with 33.4 percent spending less than one hour per week.

Another new set of questions on this year's survey attempted to capture habits and traits that ensure academic success. Most freshmen, 58 percent, said they frequently support opinions with logical arguments, and 54 percent said they frequently ask questions in class. Nearly half frequently revise papers to improve their writing (women were significantly more likely to do so than men).

Other results from the survey's "Habits of Mind" questions indicate that many students lack an appetite for sound information. Although three-quarters of students frequently use the Internet for research or homework, for instance, just 39 percent said they frequently evaluate the quality or reliability of information they obtain. "The lack of motivation for such an evaluation may indicate a preference for information that is more easily attainable ... rather than information that is accurate," according to a report on this year's survey.

Information about the report, "The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 2007," is available on the institute's [Web site](#).