

Survey: College Freshmen Study Less

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LOS ANGELES (AP) -- College freshmen are technologically savvy and receive higher grades than past students but they study less, according to a nationwide survey released Monday.

Freshmen also seem to have little interest in politics and are smoking and drinking less, according to a study conducted last fall by the University of California, Los Angeles, in conjunction with the American Council on Education.

The survey was based on responses by 269,413 students at 434 colleges and universities.

A record 78.5 percent of students said they frequently used computers before attending college -- a figure that has nearly tripled since 1985, when the question was first asked.

Men were twice as likely than women to rate their computer skills as above average. Men were also five times more likely to pursue careers in computer programming -- 9.3 percent compared to 1.8 percent of women -- and said they spent far more time on the Internet.

"Research has shown that women feel computers and technology is a male domain," said survey director Linda Sax, a UCLA education professor. "In a work force increasingly dependent on technological proficiency, women's relative lack of computing confidence is likely to place them at a disadvantage."

The survey also found the freshmen were more liberal in their politics -- more approved of gay rights and opposed the death penalty -- but less interested than ever in the political process.

Only 28.1 percent had an interest in political affairs -- a new record low, beating the 28.6 percent figure of 1999. The survey's peak figure of 60.3 percent came in 1996.

The percentage usually doesn't drop during a presidential year, but Sax noted that the survey was conducted before the disputed November election.

Some 27.7 percent of freshmen identified themselves as "liberal" or "far left," up slightly from 1999. The "middle of the road" percentage shrank slightly to 51.9 percent, while those identifying themselves as "conservative" or "far right" remained fairly constant at 20.3 percent.

Students also said they were studying less but getting better grades. Only 36 percent of incoming freshmen spend six or more hours a week doing homework, yet nearly 43 percent said they had "A" averages in high school, up from 42.7 percent in 1999. About 18 percent of students in 1968 said they earned top grades.

More college prep courses and easier grading by high school teachers may be stoking the increase, education experts said.

Beer drinking and cigarette smoking continued to decline in 2000, but there was a slight increase in wine consumption.

Only 48.3 percent of freshmen last fall said they drank beer frequently or occasionally, compared to 48.6 percent in 1999. The percentage of students who smoke cigarettes dropped from 10.7 percent to 10 percent. Just over half of students said they drank wine or liquor occasionally or frequently, up fractionally from 1999.

As for goals, about 73 percent of the freshmen listed being "very well off financially." About the same figure cited raising a family.