

The 'Promising' Class of 2013 and How Their Characteristics Reflect the Transformational Changes at Keene State College

Introduction

The academic traits, attitudes, goals, and beliefs of students who are entering college for the first time continually change and evolve. The Freshman Survey, developed by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the University of California, Los Angeles for their Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), has been capturing the changes in the experiences and behaviors of America's first-year college students for over forty years. Keene State College has been using the Freshman Survey to study the characteristics of its incoming freshman classes since 1978.

One of the strongest predictors of student success at an institution is the interaction between what the student brings to the college and what the college environment has to offer in return (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991). Retention is affected more by the interaction between student characteristics and environmental variables than any other college outcome measure (Astin, 1993). The Freshman Survey responses given by Keene State College's Class of 2013 are qualitatively different from those provided by the students who entered the College in fall 2006. The fall 2009 class embodies the attributes of the "promising students" who are prepared to "think critically and creatively" and "engage in active citizenship," that the College has been positioning itself to attract. This 'student transformation' can be attributed to the work of the faculty and staff who have been committed to academic and environmental change; and, to the exemplary work of the Admissions' staff who have been communicating the value of a liberal arts education at Keene State College to prospective students and their parents.

This report describes the characteristics that demonstrate a closer alignment between the fall 2009 entering class and the College's mission and values. The discussion has been categorized into four areas: the reasons students gave for choosing KSC; their established academic behaviors; their expectations toward active citizenship; and their attitudes toward diversity. An additional area explores the heightened concerns that the current class has about their ability to finance their college education. The strength of the 'student transformation' will be assessed by comparing the survey responses from the Fall 2009 entering class against those provided by the fall 2006 cohort. The distinguishing characteristics of the students who choose KSC will be highlighted by comparing their responses against the student responses from a set of peer institutions (the institutions in this group, which was configured by HERI based on Carnegie Classification and institutional selectivity, are listed at the end of the report).

Freshman Survey Results

Seventy-two percent of KSC's entering first-time; full-time students completed the Freshman Survey prior to the start of the fall 2009 semester. This response was significantly higher than the 54% of incoming freshmen who completed the survey in fall 2006. The following discussion focuses on the areas where there were significant differences ($p < .001$) in the responses provided by the KSC and peer cohorts.

Students' Reasons for Choosing Keene State College

Keene State College was the first choice of 67% of the fall 2009 entering class, which is 10% higher than the proportion of students who made a peer institution their first choice. The most important reason that the fall 2009 class gave for choosing KSC was their campus visit. Sixty-seven percent of the fall 2009 cohort rated the campus visit as ‘very important’ in their college choice, compared to 52% of the students in the fall 2006 cohort and 38% of the students in the peer cohort. This success is attributable to the time that prospective students and their parents spend with Admissions’ counselors and student guides during campus tours and open houses. During these events, the students who choose to come to Keene State are able to see themselves ‘fitting into’ the campus environment.

Six additional reasons that the fall 2009 class rated as ‘very important’ more often than the fall 2006 class are summarized in the following table. Additionally, the importance of the size of the college was rated significantly higher by KSC students compared to students entering peer institutions.

Reasons for Students' College Choice	KSC Fall 2009	KSC Fall 2006	Peer Fall 2009
This college has a very good reputation	56%	46%	ns
I wanted to go to a school about the size of this college	55%	50%	38%
The cost of attending this college	54%	43%	ns
This college has a good reputation for its social activities	47%	37%	ns
This college's graduates get good jobs	47%	35%	ns
I was offered financial assistance	34%	25%	ns

‘ns’ indicates no significant differences between the fall 2009 KSC and peer cohorts

Established High School Behaviors and Academic Expectations

The entering class of 2009 was stronger than the 2006 cohort with respect to the positive behaviors they had established during their last year in high school. And, while these students rated themselves lower, overall, on their academic ability, compared to the students from the peer institutions, their work ethic and their anticipated academic success were higher. The fall 2009 students not only saw how well they would fit in to the campus environment, but were overwhelmingly confident about how satisfied they would be with Keene State College.

High School Behaviors and Academic Expectations	KSC Fall 2009	KSC Fall 2006	Peer Fall 2009
Less frequently bored in their high school classes	27%	40%	38%
Less likely to have skipped high school classes	<1%	na	3%
Spent more time studying and doing homework in high school	3 to 5 hours per week	2 to 3 hours per week	2 to 3 hours per week
Feel they will make at least a “B” average	76%	46%	64%
Feel that they will be satisfied with their college	71%	48%	49%

‘na’ indicates that the question was not asked in 2006

KSC's 2009 entering students reported that there was a 'very good chance' that they would spend more time in academically engaging behaviors than either the fall 2006 KSC cohort or the fall 2009 peer cohort.

Academically Engaging Behaviors	KSC Fall 2009	KSC Fall 2006	Peer Fall 2009
Communicate regularly with their professors	57%	27%	32%
Participate in student clubs or groups	49%	31%	37%
Participate in a study abroad program	35%	na	23%
Discuss course content with students outside of class	48%	na	36%
Work on a professor's research project	35%	na	31%

'na' indicates that the question was not asked in 2006

Active Citizenship and Environmental Activism

The students who choose KSC in 2009 were significantly stronger in their desire to participate in activities to improve the lives of others and protect the environment compared to either the 2006 KSC cohort or the 2009 peer cohort. The percentages in the table represent the proportion of students who rated their participation in service activities as either 'important' or 'essential'.

Service Activity	KSC Fall 2009	KSC Fall 2006	Peer Fall 2009
Helping others who are in difficulty	76%	59%	67%
Becoming involved in programs to clean up the environment	31%	18%	24%
Adopting "green" practices to protect the environment	48%	na	39%
Participating in a community action program	34%	22%	26%
Participating in volunteer or community service work	80%	60%	65%

'na' indicates that the question was not asked in 2006

Diversity

Seventy four percent of the students entering KSC in fall 2009 felt that there was a 'very good chance' that they would socialize with someone from another racial or ethnic group—a 14% increase over the fall 2006 group. Eighty-two percent of KSC's fall 2009 class felt there was a very good chance that they would have a roommate from a racial or ethnic group that was different from their own, compared to 64% of the students who were entering peer institutions.

Financial Concerns

The Freshman Survey asks students if they have any concerns about their ability to finance their college education. A higher percentage, 79%, of the fall 2009 freshman cohort expressed concerns, compared to 72% of the 2006 freshman cohort and 70% of the peer cohort. The fall 2009 students also reported that there was a 'very good chance' that they would need to get a job to help pay for their college expenses. This percentage, 71%, was significantly higher than the students in the fall 2006 cohort (49%) and those in the peer cohort (57%). As mentioned earlier, there was also an

increase in the importance of the cost of the college and the availability of financial assistance as reasons for choosing KSC.

Summary

The characteristics of Keene State's entering Class of 2013 are distinctly different from past entering cohorts and the students who choose one of the peer institutions. For more information, please contact Cristi Carson, in the Office of Institutional Research at 8-2117, or at ccarson@keene.edu.

References

Astin, A. (1993). *What Matters in College? Four Critical Years Revisited*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Pascarella, E. T. & Terenzini, P. T. (1991). *How College Affects Students*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Appendix

Public Four Year Colleges - Medium Selectivity

Bridgewater State College	MA
California State University-Long Beach	CA
Castleton State College	VT
Eastern Michigan University	MI
Eastern Washington University	WA
Maine Maritime Academy	ME
Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts	MA
Montclair State University	NJ
Oakland University	MI
Radford University	VA
San Jose State University	CA
Sonoma State University	CA
SUNY College at Buffalo	NY
University of Central Oklahoma	OK
University of Michigan-Flint	MI
University of Montevallo	AL
University of Pittsburgh-Bradford	PA
University of Pittsburgh-Johnstown	PA
University of South Carolina-Aiken	SC
University of South Florida-Saint Petersburg	FL
Valdosta State University	GA
Wayne State College	NE
N=10,728 students	