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Office of Institutional Research

2015 CIRP Freshman Survey: Financial Strain

In summer 2015, Keene State College asked incoming first-year students to complete the CIRP Freshman Survey during Orientation. Usable responses were received from 882 first-time, full-time first-year students (95% response rate). Results from this survey will be shared in a series of reports on clusters of related survey items. This report summarizes the CIRP responses that relate to financial stress. National comparison data are not yet available for 2015, so national comparison data that are reported here come from 2014.

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KEY FINDINGS

- KSC students are somewhat less likely than their peers to report being confident that they have sufficient funds to finance their college education (24% of KSC students report this confidence, vs. 29% nationally). However, fewer KSC students reported "Major" financial concerns (11%) than did their national peer group (15%).
- The self-reported family income of KSC first-year students exceeded that of their national peers. The median estimated family income range for KSC students is $75,000-$99,999; the median nationally is $60,000-$74,999.
- KSC students rely more heavily on family resources to pay for first-year expenses than do students from other public 4-year colleges (40% of KSC students say their families will contribute $10,000 or more in the first year, vs. only 19% nationally).
- KSC students are also more likely use loans to pay for first-year expenses (32% of KSC students say they will borrow $10,000 or more in the first year, vs. 10% nationally).
- These findings suggest that the combination of higher-than-average levels of family income and New Hampshire's comparatively low level of support for higher education results in less need-based scholarship availability and greater reliance on family support and loans. As a result, even though most KSC students are not experiencing immediate financial difficulty, the substantial family contributions and loan debt required of them are long-term sources of concern and potential barriers to degree completion.

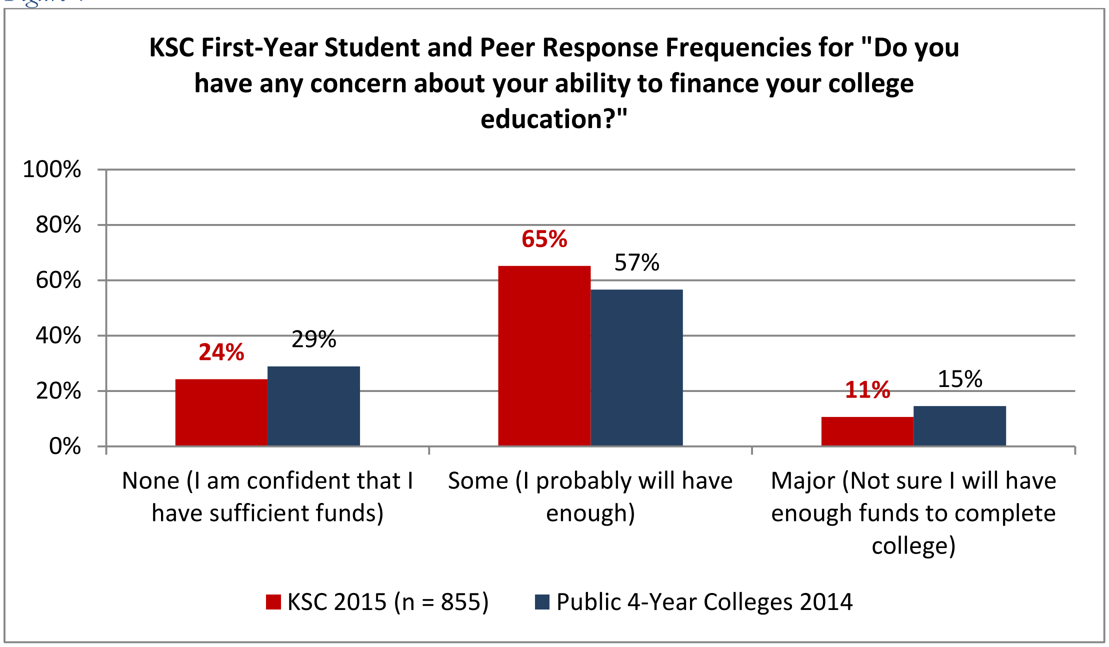
Report prepared by George Smeaton, Ph.D., Associate Director for Assessment, October 2015

Detailed Findings

KSC First-Year Student Financial Resources

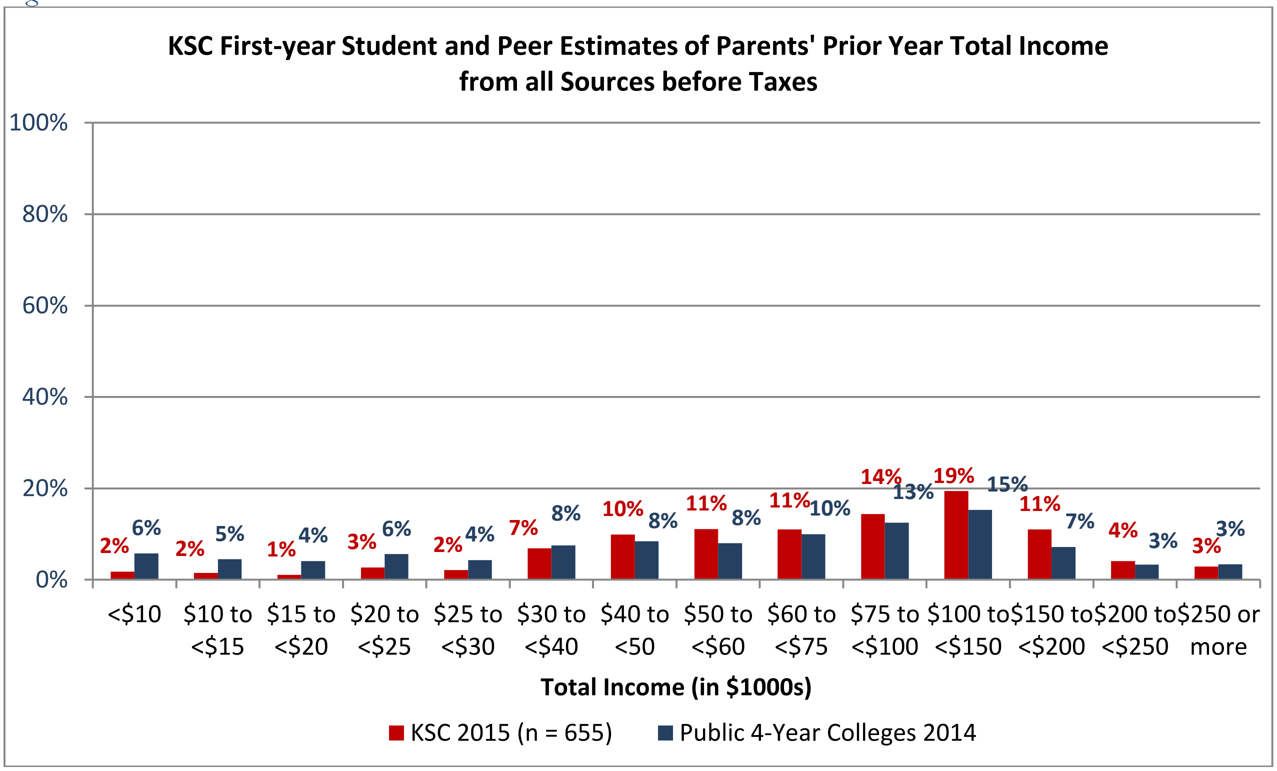
Figure 1 shows the percentage of students who have concern about their ability to finance their college education going forward. Although fewer KSC students reported "Major" financial concerns than did their national peer group, the combined percentage of KSC students reporting either "Some" or "Major" concerns (76%) exceeded that of their peer group (71%).

Figure 1



Despite being more likely to report financial concerns than their national peers, KSC students' self-reported parental income was higher than the public 4-year college average (Figure 2). The median estimated family income range for KSC students is $75,000-$99,999; the median nationally is $60,000-$74,999. Moreover, the percentage of KSC students reporting a family income less than $25,000—the current federal poverty level for a family of four[1] (7%) is much lower than that of the national peer group (20%). Although it should be noted that student estimates of parental income are likely to be subject to error, there is no reason to believe that the estimates made by KSC students' are more inaccurate than those of their peers at other institutions.

Figure 2



First-Year Expense Funding Sources

The final two graphs show how much KSC students and their national peers expect to use from each of the two major sources of funding for first-year expenses: family resources and loans. Compared to their national peers, substantially fewer KSC students reported using less than $1,000 of family resources for first year expenses (Figure 3). For each of the higher contribution levels, KSC percentages exceeded those from the national peer group. A similar pattern was obtained for loans (Figure 4). Greater levels of family support are consistent with KSC students' higher family income levels. Higher-than-average reliance on loans may be attributable to the relatively low level of state support for higher education provided by New Hampshire.

[1] *Federal Register* / Vol. 80, No. 14 / Thursday, January 22, 2015 / Notices

Figure 3

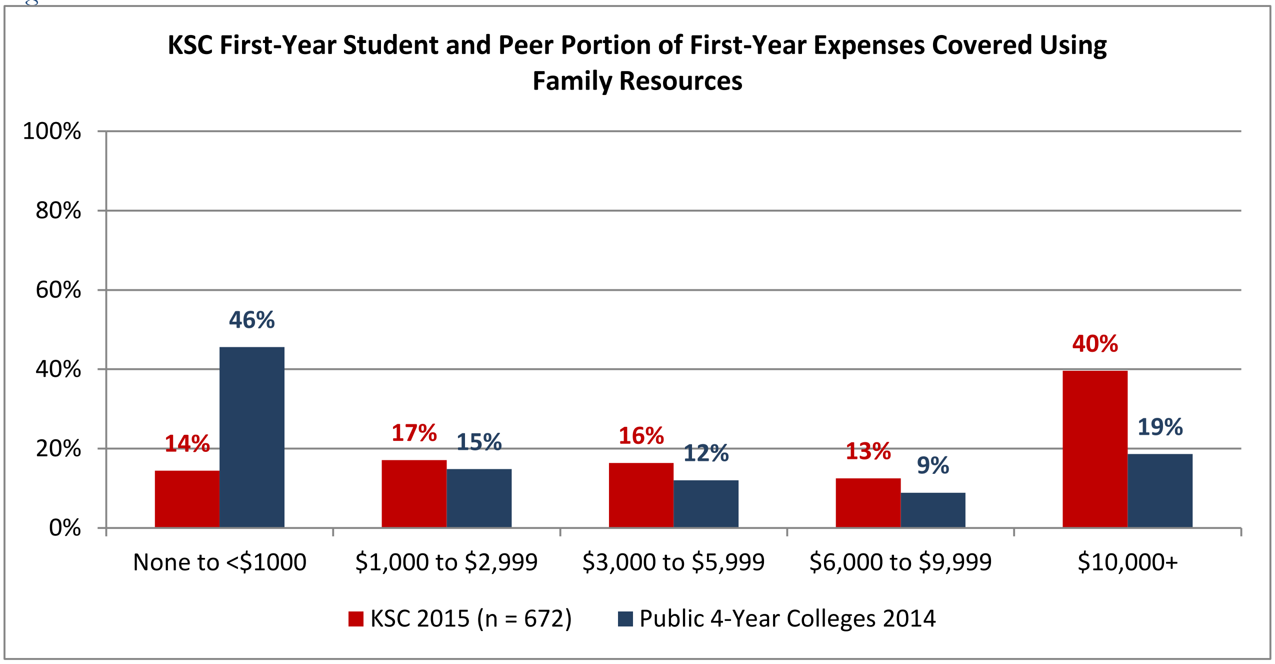


Figure 4