

A snapshot of the Class of 2004: results from the Freshman Survey

Introduction

For most of the past thirty years, incoming first year students at Sweet Briar College have participated in a survey sponsored by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the UCLA. Given prior to the start of classes, the survey takes a snapshot of young people on the verge of their college career. Students from large institutions and small, and public and private, answer questions about their family background, high school record, activities, interests and attitudes, academic and social strengths and weakness, why they chose to attend college, how they chose their college, and most important of all, their expectations for the next four years and beyond.

The results of the survey include comparisons with peer institutions, as well as a nationwide comparison that includes the responses of hundreds of thousands of students representing hundreds of institutions. HERI, the sponsoring agency, has been tracking the results and publishing trends among these students since the survey began in the late 1960s.

The results of the survey, administered last fall to the Class of 2004, provide a snapshot of a group of young women filled with self-confidence, open to and eager for new experiences, and excited to be just where they are, at Sweet Briar College. Following is a sampling of responses to some of the survey questions by Sweet Briar's first-year students compared with first-year female students at peer schools and at schools nationwide.

Two-thirds of this year's cohort rated themselves as above average or top ten percent in intellectual self-confidence.

This year's response reinforces what has traditionally been the case among Sweet Briar women - they are a group of **very confident** women, motivated to succeed. Two-thirds of this year's cohort rated themselves as above average or top ten percent in intellectual self-confidence, compared with just a little over a half of students at other institutions.

Why do students attend Sweet Briar?

Three out of four students (76%) entering in fall 2000 indicated that Sweet Briar's academic reputation played a big role in their decision to attend, compared with only

59% of their peers nationwide sharing that same feeling about their chosen institution. Also considered to be very important factors were financial aid award (60%) and the desire to attend a small college (68%).

Average high school GPA	3.46	Academic Skills
Percent with GPA 3.30 - 3.69	32	
Percent with GPA 3.70 - 4.00+	33	
Top 10% of high school class	35	
Average Verbal SAT	592	
Average Math SAT	547	

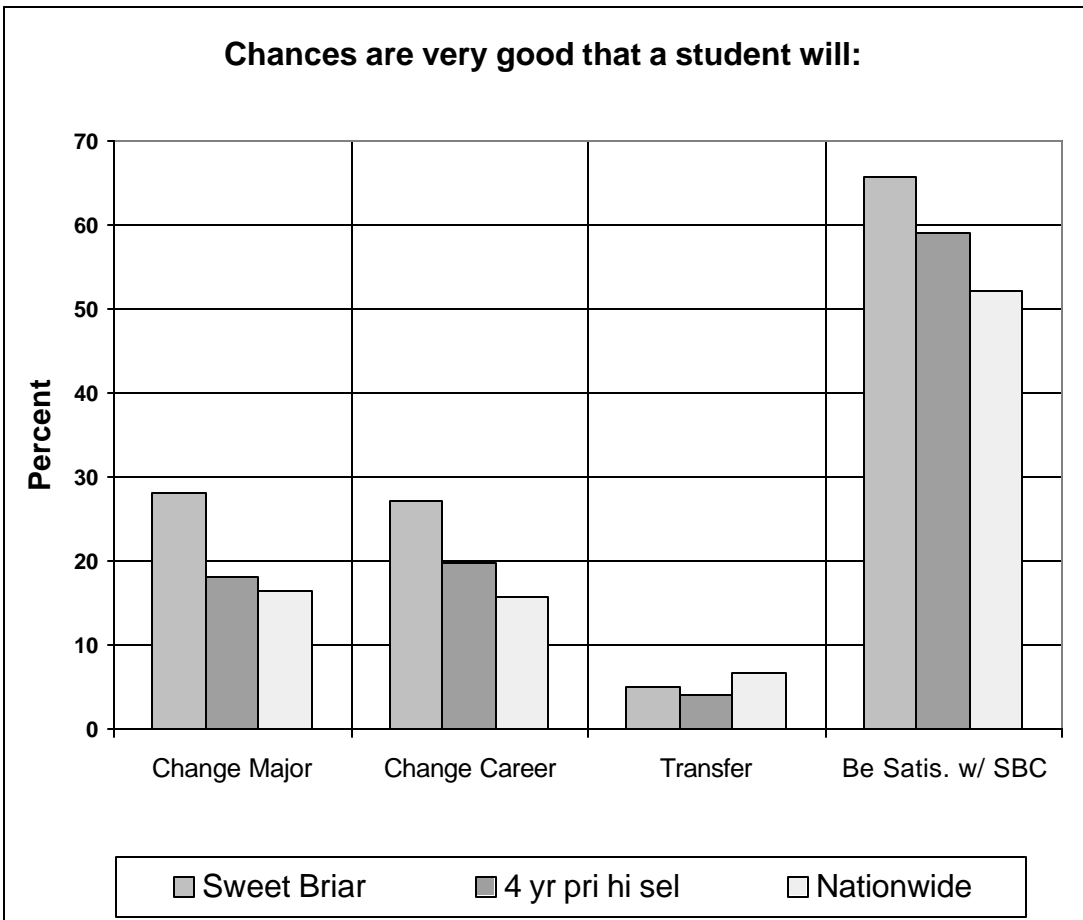
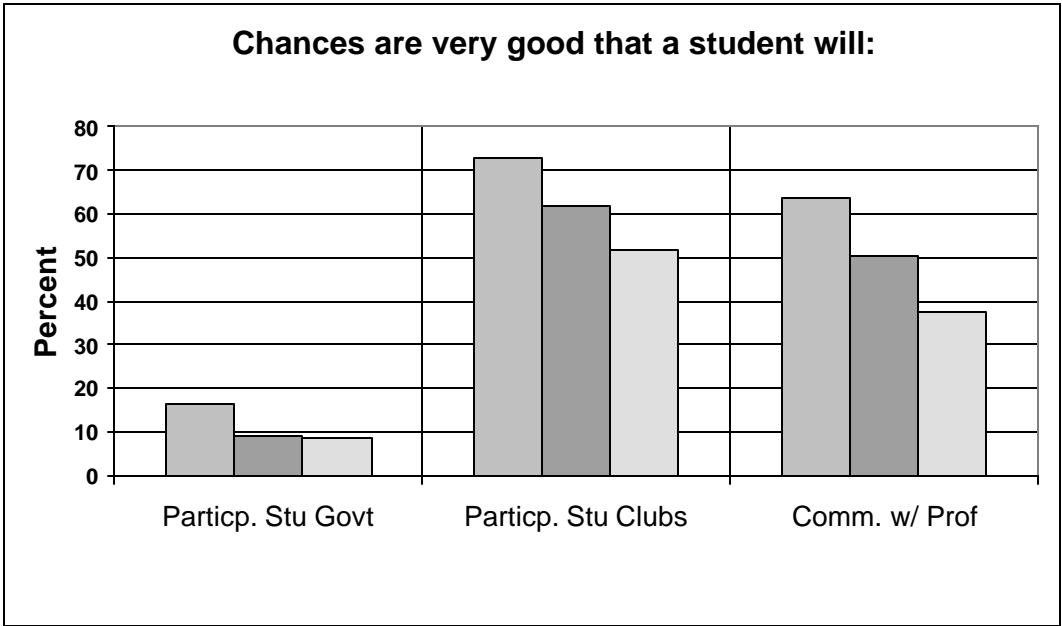
...a vast majority (94%) of this year's entering class intend to pursue post-graduate studies.

Several survey questions aimed at gauging students' confidence in their decision to attend a particular college, indicate that most first-year students (64%) are ***pleased with their decision to attend Sweet Briar***, with only 5% indicating that would likely transfer to another college. Their satisfaction with the decision to attend Sweet Briar may be tied to their sense that they will have regular communication with their professors, with 64% of students believing that will be the case, compared with 50% of students at peer institutions and only 37% of students nationwide.

Additional highly-rated factors included Sweet Briar's reputation for graduates obtaining good jobs (71%) while 57% of students thought their choice of college would help them gain admission to top graduate schools. The intention to pursue post-graduate studies was a goal shared by a vast majority - 94% of this year's entering class - compared to 89% at peer institutions and 84% nationwide.

Political interests

Another characteristic that sets this group of students apart from their peers is their ***interest in political affairs***. Compared to students at other institutions, more than half, 51% of Sweet Briar students considered keeping up with political affairs an important objective. Less than a third of students at peer institutions, 31% felt the same way and only 25% of students nationwide considered this an important objective. Also, 26% of Sweet Briar students considered influencing the political structure an important objective compared to only 15% of students nationwide. Becoming a community leader was considered important by 44% of Sweet Briar students, compared to 30% of students nationwide.

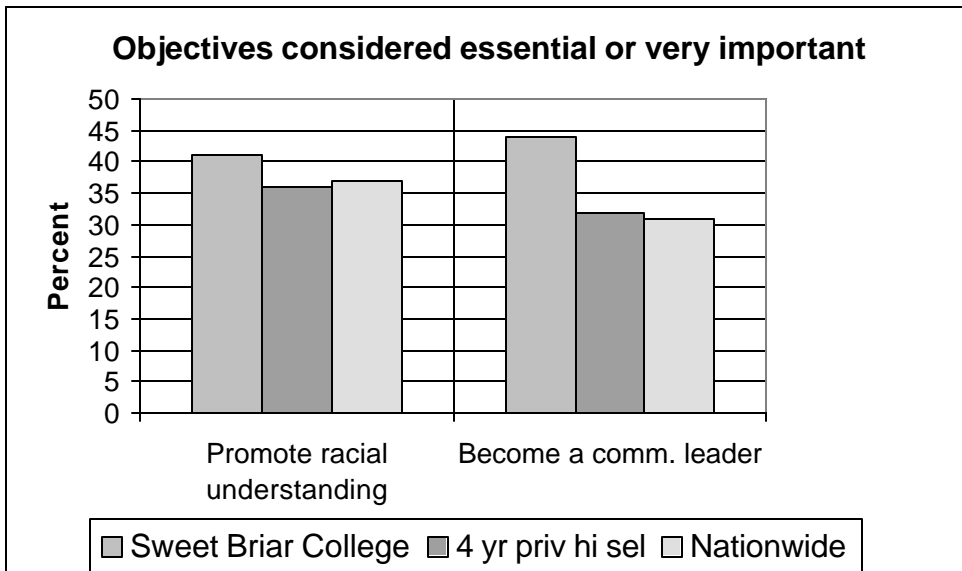
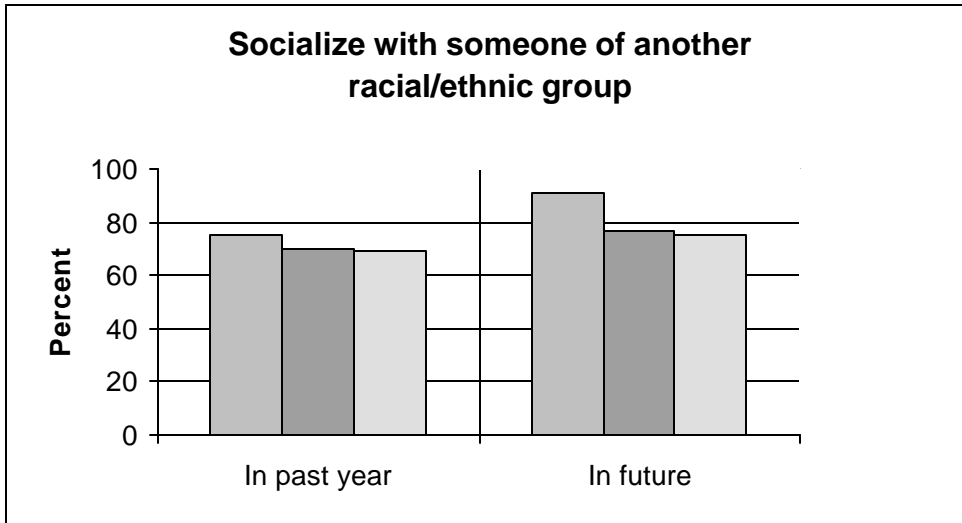


When asked to indicate activities they had participated in within the last year, 36% of Sweet Briar students reported that they had discussed politics, compared with 14% of students nationwide. This is also reflected in the numbers of students who indicated their

interest in participating in student government, 16 % at Sweet Briar, compared to 9% at peer institutions and 8% nationwide, and students who had voted in student elections, 33% of Sweet Briar students had done so, compared to 26% at peer institutions and 24% nationwide.

Open minds

Compared to their peers, Sweet Briar students also demonstrated an overwhelming anticipation of, and openness to, new experiences, both academic and social: 91% of Sweet Briar students indicated that they fully expected to socialize with someone of another racial or ethnic group, compared to 71% of students nationwide.



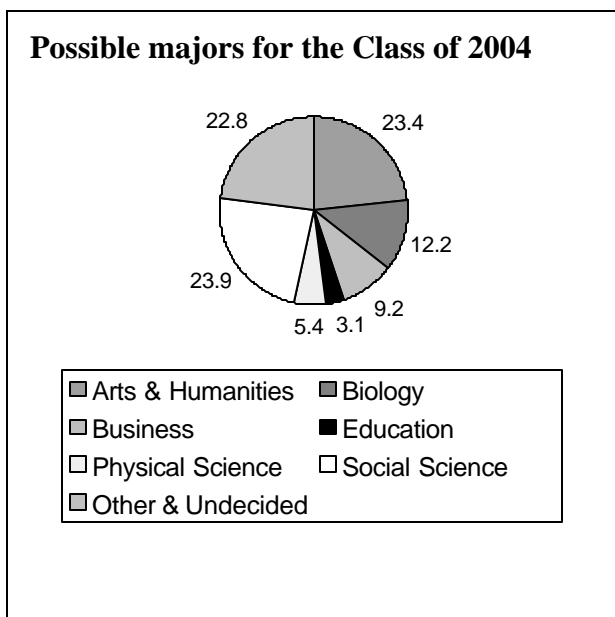
In addition, 75 % of the students indicated that one important reason to attend college is to gain a general education and appreciation of ideas. Only about half of the students, 54%, thought that an important reason to attend college was to get training for a specific career, compared to 74% of students nationwide. Furthermore, more than 25% of Sweet Briar

students expected that they would change their minds about majors and careers while in college, compared to 16% of students nationwide.

Personal goals of Class of 2004	% Answering "essential" or "very important"
Become authority in own field	69
Be well off financially	69
Help others in difficulty	64
Develop meaningful philosophy of life	57
Raising a family	55
Follow political affairs	51
Integrating spirituality into my life	50
Becoming a community leader	44
Promote racial understanding	41
Influencing social values	40
Creating artistic work	28
Writing original work	27
Helping to clean up environment	26
Influencing political structure	26

Computer use and interest

Recent additions to the survey have included questions aimed at students' use of computers, and not surprisingly, the responses over the past few years indicate that computer use continues to increase among the students. Sweet Briar students are in line with their peers nationwide, with 70% using the internet for research or homework, compared with 69% of first-year females nationwide, and 62% using the internet for non-research or homework compared to their peers' rate of 48%. There does appear, however, to be a gender gap between males and females with regard to "computer self-confidence", with 46% of male students nationwide rating themselves as above average or top 10% in computer skills and only 23% of female students nationwide rating themselves similarly. Sweet Briar women reported a slightly higher confidence level in computer skills at 30%, compared to their female peers nationwide. Further evidence of the gender gap in computer confidence is indicated by the fact that nationwide 9% of male students indicated interest in a career as a computer programmer or analyst, compared to 2% of female students. No Sweet Briar students, or 0%, indicated an interest in a



computer related career. There does not appear to be a single predominate career or major choice among Sweet Briar students, although 23% selected disciplines in the arts and humanities as probable majors, 12% biological sciences, 10% psychology, 9% political science, 5% physics, chemistry or engineering, and 8% undecided.

Artistic concerns

Finally, another interesting characteristic shared by the Class of 2004 is their interest in creative and artistic endeavors. Comparing themselves to other young people as above average or top 10% in creativity, 69% rated themselves as such, compared to 55% of their peers nationwide, with 58% considering their writing ability similarly, compared to 47% of female students nationwide. Compared to an average of 15% of their peers nationwide, more than a quarter of the Sweet Briar students (28%) considered writing original pieces of fiction and creating artistic works, to be important objectives, an almost two to one margin.

...more than a quarter of the Sweet Briar students (28%) considered writing original pieces of fiction and creating artistic works, to be important objectives, an almost two to one margin.

Conclusion

The profile that emerges of the Sweet Briar College Class of 2004 is one of a group of young women eager to take full advantage of the college experience - whatever that may be - and continue beyond the next four years working on issues important to them: influencing social values, promoting racial understanding, becoming involved in programs to clean up the environment, continuing their education, achieving financial security, and developing a meaningful philosophy of life.

A Profile of the Class of 2004

Race	%
White	86
African American	4
Asian American	4
American Indian	2
Hispanic	2
NRA	2

Residency	%
Virginia residents:	40%
A majority of out-of-state students are residents of Calif., Fla., Md., Mass., N.C., Pa., S.C., Tx., and W.V.	

Mother	%
Has graduate degree	23
Has college degree	39
Professional occupation (Most in business & education)	43

Father	%
Has graduate degree	32
Has college degree	37
Professional occupation (Most in business, engineering & law)	49