

# Beyond the SAT: The Class of 2006

Last year, first-year students participated in two surveys, both conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) of the University of California at Los Angeles. The first survey, Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), is an annual survey of entering college students. Each year, over 400,000 students at some 700 colleges and universities nationwide complete this survey, providing one of the most reliable sources about college freshmen nationwide.

The survey covers a wide range of student characteristics including the usual demographic data as well as items such as beliefs, aspirations, and self-evaluations.

The second survey, Your First College Year (YFCY), was developed in 2000 and measures the academic and personal development of students at the end of their first year.

Theoretically, institutions can track the development of individual students by correlating their CIRP data with their YFCY data. At the end of their academic careers, students will participate in the College Student Survey (CSS), which will provide even more longitudinal information.

This information is especially useful for first year assessment and retention planning purposes. Some of the findings are highlighted here. The full report may be viewed online at [www.ir.sbc.edu](http://www.ir.sbc.edu).

## Factors Affecting Retention

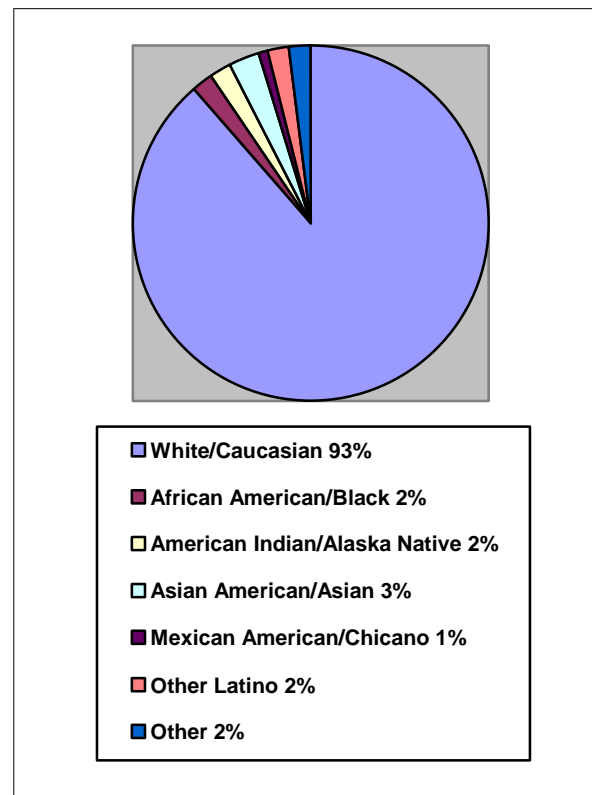
It has been shown that two-thirds of the variation in degree completion rates among institutions is not necessarily due to the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of their programs, but to the differences in the types of students admitted. Alexander Astin, Director of HERI, came up with a model showing that academic outcomes are dependent on the students' personal characteristics prior to the onset of their postsecondary careers as well as on the educational environment. Therefore, a student's racial group, SAT/ACT scores, grade-point average in high school, and self-assessment play as important a role as

academic engagement and participation in co-curricular activities in determining retention rates.

## Diversity

Increasing the diversity of the student body has been an important goal to both students and faculty alike. The survey of the Class of 2006 reveals that more work is necessary in obtaining a truer representation of the U.S. populace. \*Ninety-three percent of Sweet Briar students classify themselves as White/Caucasian. This is much higher than the eighty-two percent reported at comparable nonsectarian four-year colleges (Peer Group 1).

The racial makeup of the entire class is as follows:



\* Percentages sum to more than 100 as some respondents marked more than one ethnic group.

Ninety-eight percent of students report English as their native language. Sixty percent report having socialized with someone of

another racial/ethnic group on a frequent basis while forty-five percent wish to help promote racial understanding.

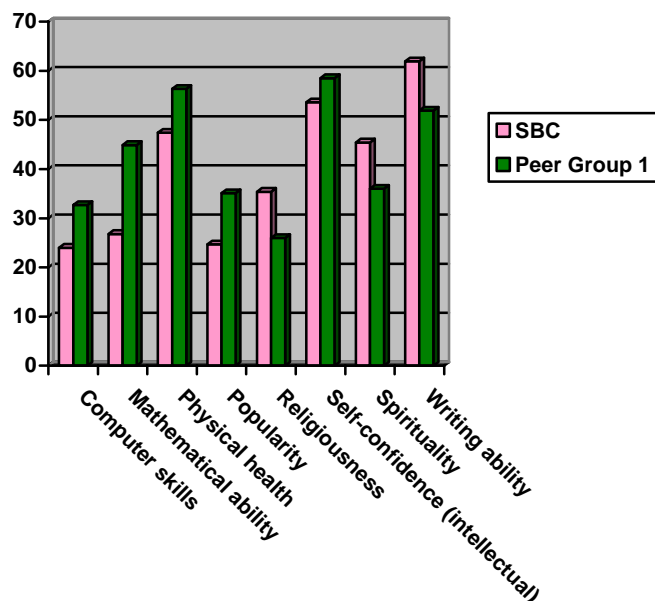
### Report Card

Thirty percent of students claimed an “A” average in high school. The percentage maintaining an “A” average throughout their first year at SBC dropped to fifteen percent. This was a higher drop in percentage than at peer schools.

Grade	High school average	Current college grade average	Change
A (3.75-4.0)	29.5	14.7	-14.8
A-,B+ (3.25-3.74)	44.2	30.5	-13.7
B (2.75-3.24)	16.8	35.8	19.0
B-,C+ (2.25-2.74)	7.4	13.7	6.3
C (1.75-2.24)	2.1	5.3	3.2
C- or less (below 1.75)	0.0	0.0	0.0

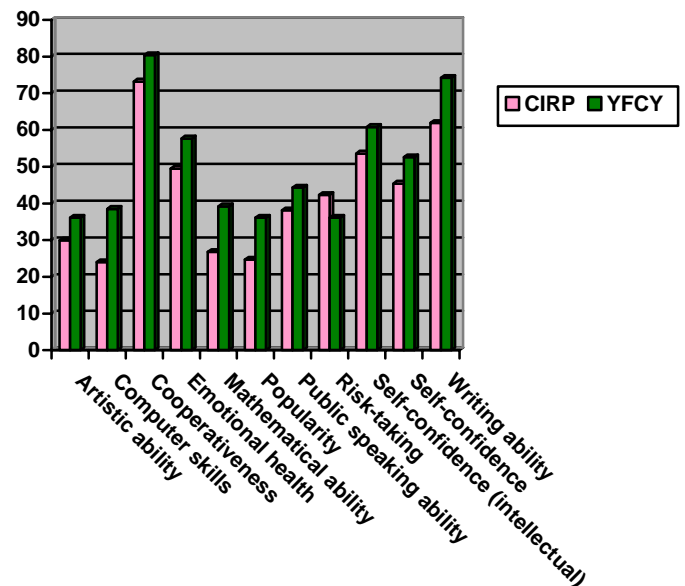
### Self-Assessment

Students were asked, both before and after their first years at Sweet Briar, to rate



themselves with the average person their age in categories ranging from “Academic ability” to

“Understanding of others”. The results for several of the categories prior to the start of their academic careers and in comparison to NFYC and APFYC are shown above. The results show that those who are admitted to Sweet Briar tend to rate themselves lower than students at other schools in math and computer skills and higher in creative areas and spirituality. Changes in attitudes and self-assessment by the end of their first year at Sweet Briar were more evident among the following categories:



By the end of their first year, the number of students rating themselves as “above average” increased in all categories except “Academic ability” and “Risk-taking”. Self-ratings on “Computer skills” and “Mathematical ability” went up, although numbers were still below those from the comparison schools.

### The Sweet Briar Difference

Fifty-six percent of the students surveyed reported that they would choose SBC if they had to make a college choice all over again, while twenty-five percent said they probably would. Students were particularly pleased with classroom, computer and library facilities and more than half felt that they were completely successful at understanding what their professors expected of them academically. Most felt they were also completely successful at adjusting to the academic demands of college and developing close friendships with other students. Numbers were lower when

Since entering this college, how often have you:	Sweet Briar %	Peer Group 1 %
Felt bored in class*	31.7	35.9
Smoked cigarettes*	9.9	10.1
Drank beer	46.5	58.2
Drank wine or liquor	58.4	66.9
Felt overwhelmed by all you had to do*	46.5	45.0
Felt depressed*	12.0	14.6
Came to class late	69.3	62.9
Felt that your job responsibilities interfered with your schoolwork	23.0	24.0
Felt that your family interfered with your schoolwork	13.0	17.6
Felt that your social life interfered with your schoolwork	42.0	48.7

\* Percentage marking "Frequently" only. All other results represent the percentage marking "Frequently" or "Occasionally".

asked how successful they felt at developing effective study skills and managing their time effectively.

Ninety percent of students noted that they were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their amount of contact with faculty. Most students took advantage of faculty during office hours one or two times per term. They also visited faculty outside of office hours, academic advisors and other college personnel at the same frequency. Not surprisingly, most students made time for friends and family on a daily basis.

### Homesickness?

According to YFCY data, fifty-six percent of students reported having felt lonely or homesick since entering Sweet Briar, yet thirty-nine percent felt a need to break away from family in order to succeed at college. Another thirty-six percent felt worried about meeting new people.

Academic disengagement is typically lower at SBC than at the comparison colleges in both

categories. See the following table for some examples.

The students were also asked to estimate the amount of time they spent each week doing various engagement and disengagement activities.

Students' favorite disengagement activities are socializing with friends and working (for pay) on campus. Despite a more-or-less average amount of time spent surfing (the net, that is) and im'ing, Sweet Briar women are actively engaged.

### Speaking Up and Out

Since entering Sweet Briar, sixty-five percent of first-year students spoke up in class and forty-four percent participated in organized demonstrations. The class of 2006 showed their sensitive side by participating more than students at other colleges in volunteer or community service work.

Outside the classroom, they discussed politics and religion, course content and used the internet for research or homework quite a bit (eighty-nine percent marked "Frequently"). The same percentage reported studying with other students. Thirty-two percent even worked with a professor on a research project (compared to twenty percent at Peer Group 1 schools). They were also more likely to seek tutoring or other academic assistance than students at other schools.

In the classroom, eighty-three percent of students reported frequently participating in group discussions. This is much higher than the fifty-seven percent reported at comparable colleges. Whether through these discussions, formal lecturing, or field experiences, eighty-seven percent of Sweet Briar women felt their courses inspired them to think in new ways. Ninety-two percent (compared to seventy-eight percent) were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the overall quality of their instruction, and eighty-one percent (compared to sixty-eight percent) felt that their coursework was relevant to their future career plans.

With regards to the future, students were asked to rate what objectives were "essential" or "more important" when considering their college tenure and beyond. The results, following, highlight some of the more noticeable trends.

As in the past, raising a family has not been a high priority for Sweet Briar women.

Becoming a community leader, however, is an objective more desirable to SBC students than to women at other colleges.

Objectives	Sweet Briar %	Peer Group 1 %
Becoming an authority in my field	75.2	69.9
<b>Obtaining recognition from my colleagues for contributions to my special field</b>	<b>73.0</b>	<b>62.2</b>
Influencing social values	54.0	50.9
<b>Raising a family</b>	<b>65.3</b>	<b>75.4</b>
Being very well off financially	70.3	65.8
Helping others who are in difficulty	75.2	77.3
<b>Making a theoretical contribution to science</b>	<b>26.0</b>	<b>15.2</b>
Developing a meaningful philosophy of life	53.5	52.8
<b>Keeping up to date with political affairs</b>	<b>58.0</b>	<b>47.4</b>
<b>Becoming a community leader</b>	<b>51.0</b>	<b>38.5</b>
Integrating spirituality into my life	57.4	47.0
<b>Improving my understanding of other countries and cultures</b>	<b>72.7</b>	<b>62.8</b>

## 2003 YFCY:

### Fast Facts and Figures

- ◆ 32,424 students responded to the 2003 survey.
- ◆ 20,360 respondents to the 2003 YFCY also completed the 2002 CIRP, thereby providing a valuable, national longitudinal dataset.

### Financing the Future

Although sixty-two percent of students marked “satisfied “ or “very satisfied” with Financial aid services, the fact remains that more than seventy-five percent of students have either “some” or “major” concerns about financing their education. Still, thirty-three percent did not work for pay on campus, and eighty-nine percent did not work for pay off campus. Only twenty-six percent reported having worked six to ten hours per week.