



Understanding the Entering Class of 2024

Key Insights from The CIRP
Freshman Survey 2024

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**Understanding the Entering Class of 2024:
Key Insights from The CIRP
Freshman Survey 2024**

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INTRODUCTION

The CIRP Freshman Survey (TFS) 2024 captures the perspectives and experiences of today's incoming freshman class before they officially begin college. With nearly 60 years of history, TFS remains the longest-running survey of incoming college students in the United States. The 2024 survey continues to explore key areas such as students' backgrounds, academic preparedness, decision factors for college choice, values and goals, financial concerns, expectations for college, and interactions with peers and faculty.

This year's report—a collaborative effort between the American Council on Education and the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST), where the survey is housed, and the UCLA School of Education and Information Studies (UCLA Ed&IS)—analyzes 2024 survey data to help higher education leaders, educators, researchers, and policymakers better understand the students who are starting higher education and respond to their needs in meaningful ways.

Data from 24,367 incoming students underscore the increasing diversity of the freshman class, particularly across race and ethnicity, gender identity and sexual orientation, language, and socioeconomic background. Instead of summarizing the entire survey, this report highlights key insights and notable findings that capture the depth and scope of the data. The analysis focuses on specific subgroups such as racial and ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ students, low-income students, first-generation students, and military learners to bring attention to the most significant findings within these populations.

METHODOLOGY

TFS has evolved in content, institutional participation, and respondent diversity since its inception in 1966. To date, the survey has been completed by more than 15 million students from over 1,900 colleges and universities. This report analyzed the responses of 24,367 incoming freshmen across 55 higher education institutions. Each respondent represented in the sample completed at least 10 percent of the 2024 survey. It is important to note that the percentages analyzed in this report are not nationally representative; they reflect the sample of freshman students who completed the survey.

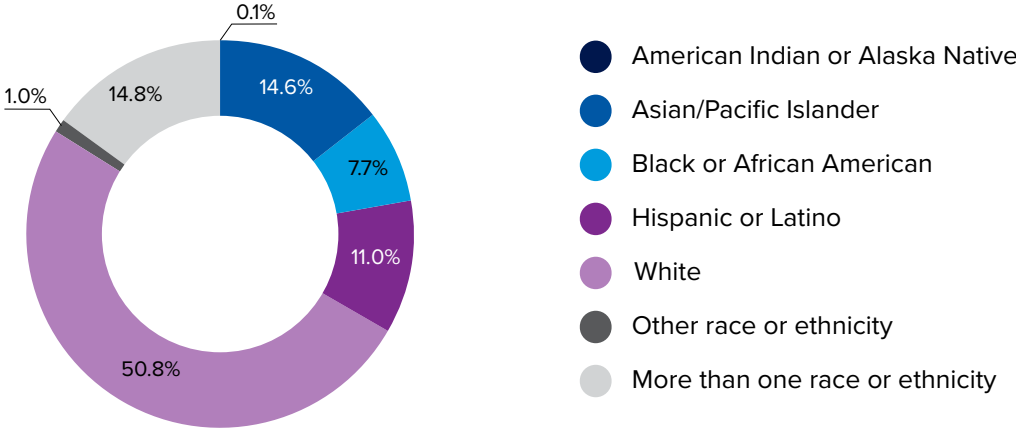
TFS is carefully designed to balance tracking trends over time with adapting to new research priorities. By using advanced psychometric methods such as item response theory, the survey combines related questions into meaningful constructs that capture key aspects of students' experiences and characteristics. Each year, the survey is reviewed and updated by HERI in collaboration with researchers, institutions, and other key stakeholders, making it a trusted and essential resource for understanding the needs and priorities of incoming college students.



The freshman class of 2024 had rich diversity in terms of its demographic and personal characteristics.

Institutions of higher education have become increasingly diverse not only in terms of race and ethnicity but also with respect to linguistic and socioeconomic background and sexual orientation.¹ While over half of survey respondents (50.8 percent) identified as White, significant proportions identified as more than one race (14.8 percent), Asian/Pacific Islander (14.6 percent), Hispanic or Latino (11.0 percent), or Black or African American (7.7 percent), with smaller percentages of students who identified as other race or ethnicity and American Indian or Alaska Native (1.0 and 0.1 percent, respectively) (see figure 1).

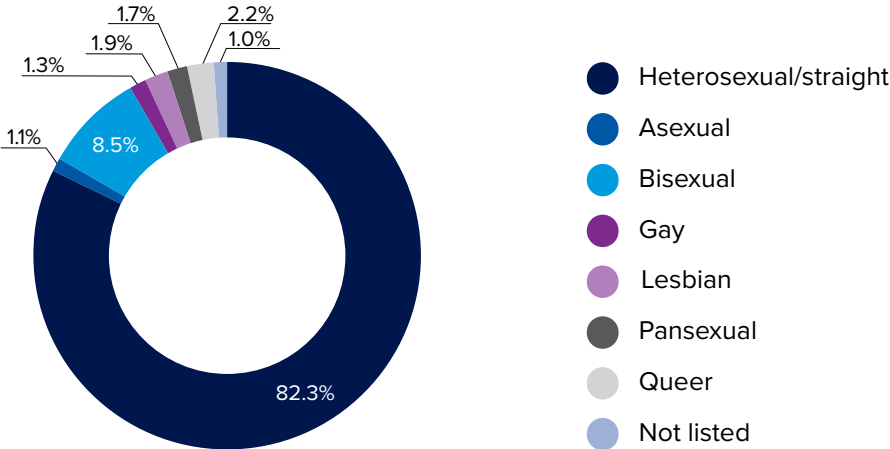
FIGURE 1. Incoming Freshman Class of 2024, by Race and Ethnicity



¹ The race and ethnicity categories presented in this report were aligned with those used by the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)—American Indian or Alaska Native, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, White, and more than one race—excepting the categories of Asian and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander. Due to collected sample sizes, the data for Asian and Pacific islander students were combined into one category (Asian/Pacific Islander) for analysis.

Additionally, the entering class of 2024 displayed a rich linguistic diversity. Nearly 10 percent of surveyed students (9.7 percent) reported that English was not their primary language, the largest share of whom were U.S. citizens (46.0 percent). Survey responses also highlight growing diversity in sexual orientation among students. While 82.3 percent identified as heterosexual, bisexual was the second-most common orientation at 8.5 percent. Smaller percentages identified as queer (2.2 percent), lesbian (1.9 percent), pansexual (1.7 percent), gay (1.3 percent), asexual (1.1 percent), or an identity not listed (1.0 percent) (see figure 2). The willingness to respond to this question shows growing comfort among students in disclosing their sexual orientation.

FIGURE 2. Incoming Freshman Class of 2024, by Sexual Orientation



Furthermore, roughly one-fifth (18.9 percent) of the respondents were classified as low income, which is defined in this study as those who reported a family income of less than \$60,000. First-generation students—defined as those whose parents or guardians did not have any college experience—made up 12.4 percent of the overall population but constituted over one-third (35.4 percent) of the low-income group, and military students represented 8.0 percent of the population and 3.1 percent of the low-income group (see figure 3). While these subgroups were presented separately in this analysis, it is important to note that there was significant overlap between these demographic characteristics. For instance, students of color were disproportionately represented within the low-income subgroup. While 7.7 percent of respondents identified as Black or African American and 11.0 percent as Hispanic or Latino, these groups composed 16.0 percent and 27.5 percent of the low-income sample, respectively. The findings in this report break down trends by specific subgroups, yet it is essential to recognize the interconnected nature of these categories, which emphasizes the growing diversity of the freshman class of 2024.

FIGURE 3. Incoming Freshman Class of 2024: Characteristics of Low-Income Students

\$ 18.9%

of respondents were classified as low income (family income less than \$60,000 annually)

1 12.4%

of respondents were first-generation students who made up **35.4%** of the low-income group

★ 8.0%

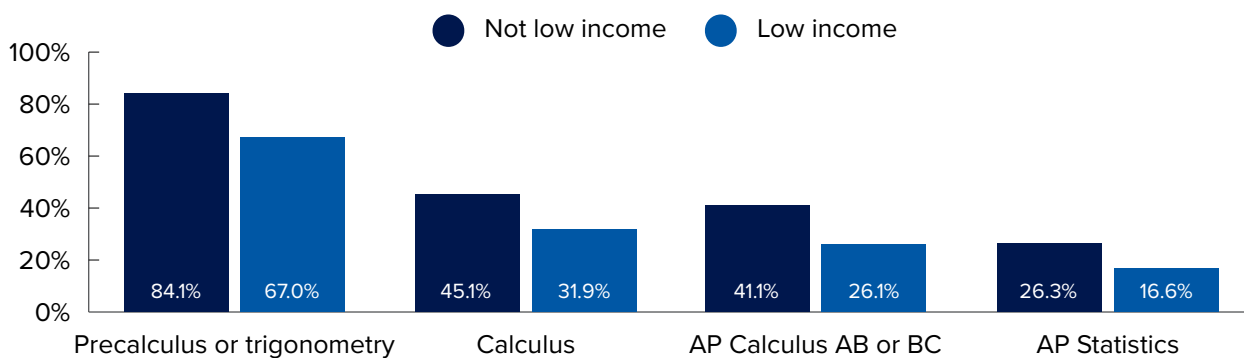
of respondents were military students who represented **3.1%** of the low-income group

While full course offerings were not collected in the survey data, unequal access to high school courses might affect college and career readiness—especially for low-income students.

Classes students take in high school can prepare them for certain majors or career paths in college. Not all high schools are able to offer the same courses; even when they are available, students may lack access due to unmet prerequisites or not having the knowledge about the role these courses play in college preparation and career training. With respect to math courses, nearly all low-income students (96.4 percent) and students from higher-income backgrounds (98.8 percent) took at least three years of math in high school.

However, differences emerged in the types of courses they took. Students from higher-income backgrounds had higher participation rates in courses such as precalculus or trigonometry (84.1 percent), calculus (45.1 percent), Advanced Placement (AP) Calculus AB or BC (41.1 percent), and AP Statistics (26.3 percent) (see figure 4). In contrast, their low-income peers had lower participation rates in these courses, with 67.0 percent who took precalculus or trigonometry, 31.9 percent who took calculus, 26.1 percent who took AP Calculus AB or BC, and only 16.6 percent who took AP Statistics.

FIGURE 4. Percentage of Students Who Completed Levels of Math, by Income



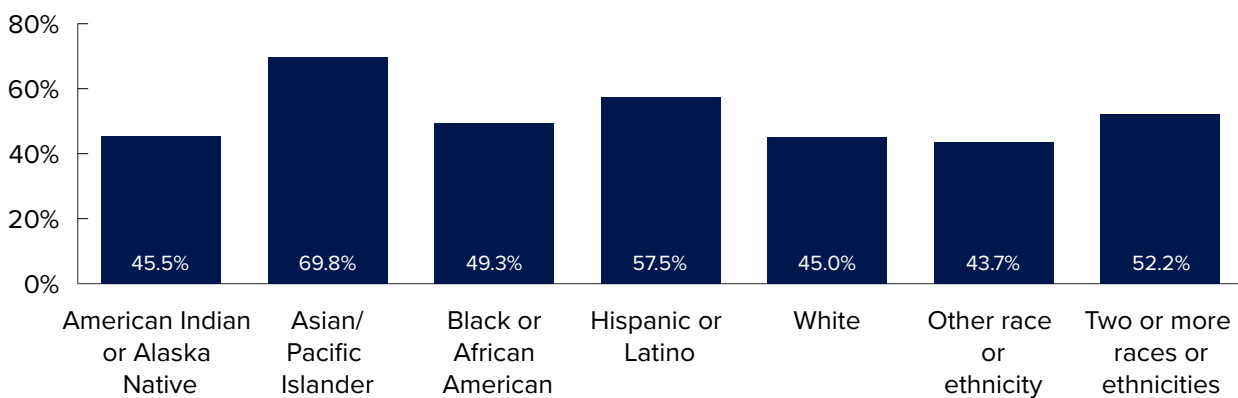
For some low-income students, there may be a disconnect between their career goals and degree aspirations. For example, among students who aspired to a medical career (doctor, dentist, or veterinarian), 81.3 percent of higher-income students selected a medical degree (MD, DDS, or DVM) as their ultimate degree objective. By contrast, only 68.7 percent of low-income students in this group chose similarly. More in-depth analyses of students who aspired to a career in medicine (doctor, dentist, or veterinarian) revealed interesting findings. Even though low-income students reported that they had taken fewer years of biological sciences in high school, those who aspired to medical careers indicated that they were likely to major in one of the biological sciences (78.6 percent)—particularly biology (general) (43.0 percent)—compared with their peers from higher-income backgrounds (73.6 percent and 35.1 percent, respectively). With respect to academic preparation, low-income students who aspired to medical careers had taken at least three years of math (97.1 percent) at similar rates as their higher-income peers (98.8 percent). However, when framed within the context of those who had taken calculus (19.1 percentage point difference) and AP Calculus AB or BC (23.9 percentage point difference) courses, the gap between low-income and higher-income students with medical career aspirations was even wider than that among the sample as a whole (13.2 percentage point difference for both courses).



Navigating the college application process is complex, with notable racial and ethnic disparities in application patterns, first-choice acceptance, and enrollment decisions. For gender and sexual minority students, considerations about state politics and legislation had more weight in their college choices.

Applying for and choosing a college has become increasingly complex as students consider several factors that vary in importance based on priorities, background, and aspirations. Over half of all survey respondents (51.4 percent) applied to seven or more institutions in addition to the one they chose to attend. The experience varies by demographic characteristics, including racial and ethnic background. Nearly seven in 10 (69.8 percent) Asian/Pacific Islander students applied to seven or more institutions, compared with 43.7 percent of students who selected other race or ethnicity and 45.0 percent of White students (see figure 5).

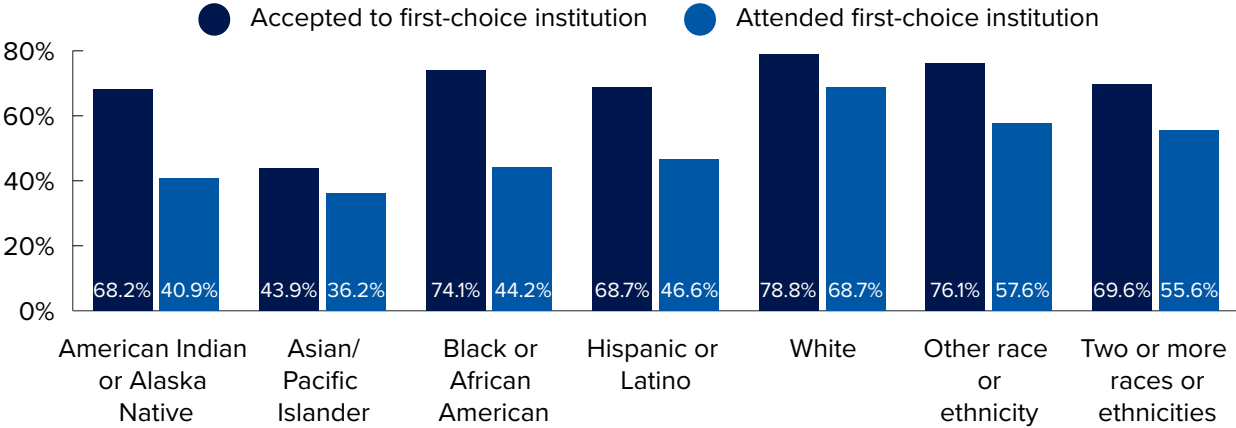
FIGURE 5. Percentage of Students Who Applied to Seven or More Institutions, by Race and Ethnicity



Not all students were admitted into their first-choice institution, and further, competition for places in entering classes has continued to increase. Asian/Pacific Islander students submitted more applications than students of other backgrounds, but only 43.9 percent were admitted by their first-choice college—a share that was nearly 25 percentage points lower than that of any other group. White students (78.8 percent), students who selected other race or ethnicity (76.1 percent), and Black or African American students (74.1 percent) were the largest proportions of students to have been accepted by their first-choice institutions.

Once admitted, students take a lot of factors—including financial aid, distance from home, academic programs, and reputation—into consideration when deciding on a college. Even if students were admitted to their top choice, it did not mean they would attend. White students were the most likely to be accepted to their first-choice college as well as to attend their first choice (see figure 6). By contrast, high proportions of Black or African American students (74.1 percent) and Hispanic or Latino students (68.7 percent) were admitted to their first-choice institution, but these groups attended their first-choice institution in lower rates (44.2 percent and 46.6 percent, respectively).

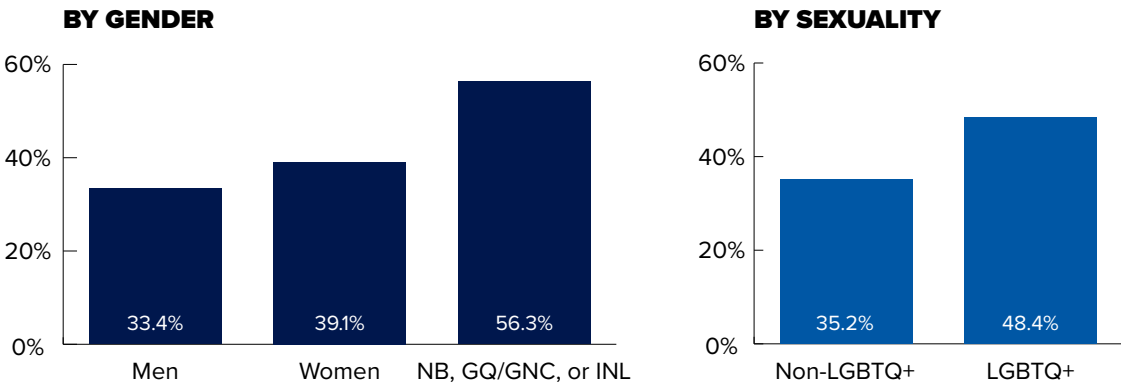
FIGURE 6. Percentage of Students Who Were Accepted to and Attended Their First-Choice Institution, by Race and Ethnicity



The state environment, shaped by specific policies and legislation, significantly influences the college experience at higher education institutions. For some students—such as those who identify as gender or sexual minorities—these factors add another layer of complexity to the college selection process.

Recognizing this, a newly added survey item asked respondents about the importance of state politics and legislation in their college decisions. The results revealed notable differences across gender identities. About one-third of men (33.4 percent) and just over a third of women (39.1 percent) considered politics and legislation to be somewhat or very important in their decision of where to go to college (see figure 7). In contrast, over half (56.3 percent) of students who identified as nonbinary (NB), genderqueer/gender nonconforming (GQ/GNC), or identity not listed (INL) considered the politics and legislation of a college’s state as somewhat or very important to their decision. Similarly, more students who identified as members of the LGBTQ+ community (48.4 percent)—defined in this report as those who identified with a sexual orientation other than heterosexual or straight as well as those who identified as transgender, regardless of their sexual orientation—than their peers who were not members of the LGBTQ+ community (35.2 percent) considered the state’s politics and legislation as somewhat or very important to their choice of college.

FIGURE 7. Percentage of Students Who Considered State Politics and Legislation to Be Somewhat or Very Important in Their College Decision, by Gender and Sexuality

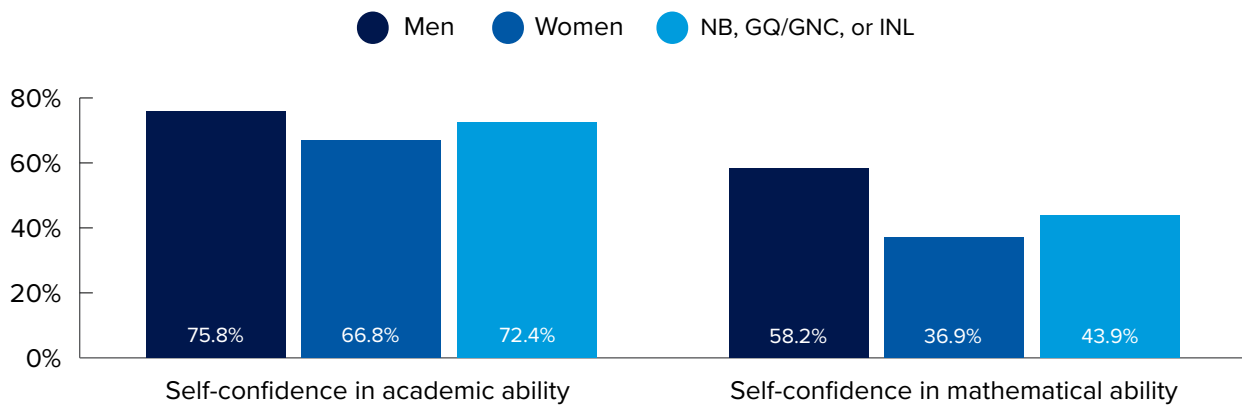




Women demonstrated strong academic performance before entering college but struggled with confidence in their mathematical and intellectual abilities.

Understanding how students perceive and rate their own abilities is critical, as these self-assessments deeply impact their motivation, engagement, and success in college. Survey findings revealed differences by gender (see figure 8). Women, who made up 55 percent of the sample, were less likely than men to see themselves as having strong academic ability; 66.8 percent of women rated their academic ability as above average or in the highest 10 percent, compared with 75.8 percent of men and 72.3 percent of students who identified as NB, GQ/GNC, or INL on the survey. Moreover, women were more collaborative in their academic approach, with 42.2 percent who frequently studied with peers during their last year in high school, compared with just 33.8 percent of men and about 30 percent of NB, GQ/GNC, or INL students who did so.

FIGURE 8. Percentage of Students Who Rated Their Self-Confidence in Their Academic or Mathematical Abilities in the Top 10 Percent, by Gender



The pattern persists when it comes to mathematical ability. Only 36.9 percent of women and 43.9 percent of NB, GQ/GNC, or INL students saw themselves as above average or in the highest 10 percent for mathematical ability, compared with 58.2 percent of men. This disparity extends to intellectual self-confidence; just 45.9 percent of women and 49.8 percent of NB, GQ/GNC, or INL students rated themselves as above average or in the highest 10 percent when compared with 66.4 percent of men who did so. Interestingly, NB, GQ/GNC, or INL students (36.2 percent) and women (34.9 percent) reported that they felt more frequently challenged by their coursework, compared with 24.8 percent of men who stated that their studies pushed them intellectually.

Despite these gaps in self-perception, women, on average, excelled academically before entering college. A higher percentage of women (78.8 percent) earned grades of A-, A, or A+ in high school, compared with 72.1 percent of men and 72.5 percent of NB, GQ/GNC, or INL students. These findings suggest that while most women begin college with a strong academic track record and a collaborative approach to learning, they may still struggle with self-confidence in specific areas such as academic ability, mathematics, or overall intellectual confidence.

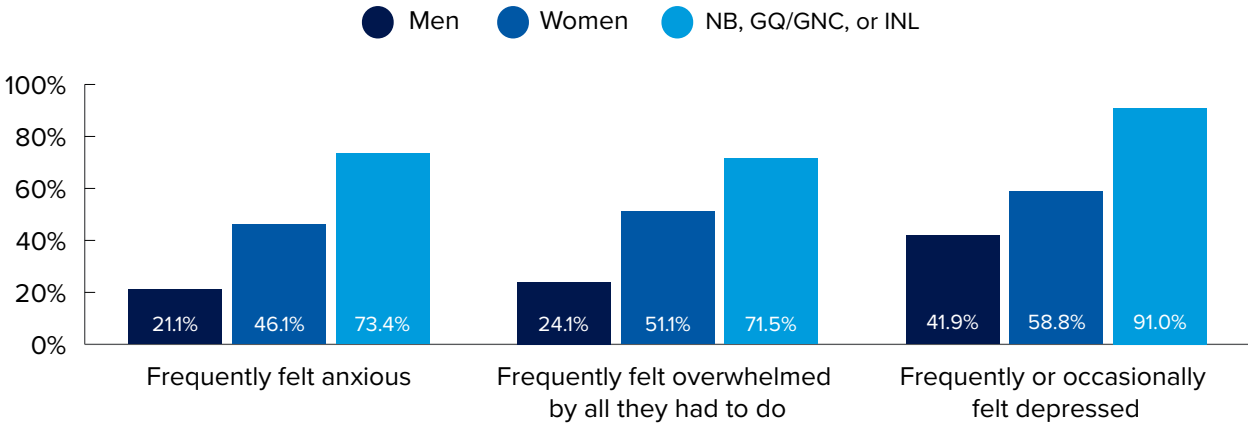
Students’ emotional health revealed stark disparities: Women reported more challenges than men, while students who identified outside of the gender binary faced the greatest struggles with well-being and mental health support.

Exploring students’ emotional well-being has provided valuable insights into their identities and how they navigate the transition into their college experience. Mental health and well-being are impacted by different events, including global disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Traditional-age students in the entering class of 2024 were finishing junior high or middle school when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, so their early high school years were likely the most impacted.

While TFS does not directly measure the pandemic’s effects on mental health, its findings do shed light on emotional health. Women consistently reported more emotional health challenges than men did. For example, the number of women who reported that they had frequently felt overwhelmed by all they had to do (51.1 percent) and anxious (46.1 percent) during their last year in high school was more than double that of men (24.1 percent and 21.1 percent, respectively) (see figure 9). A larger share of women (58.8 percent) than that of men (41.9 percent) reported that they had felt depressed at all over the past year.

Further, students who identified outside of the gender binary faced additional challenges related to identity, belonging, and well-being. It is important to note that almost half of this group (47.4 percent) identified as transgender. Nearly three-quarters of NB, GQ/GNC, or INL students indicated that they had frequently felt overwhelmed (71.5 percent) or anxious (73.4 percent) during this past year. Finally, almost all NB, GQ/GNC, or INL respondents reported that they had frequently or occasionally felt depressed (91.0 percent) during their last year in high school.

FIGURE 9. Percentage of Students Who Felt Overwhelmed, Anxious, or Depressed in the Past Year, by Gender



When asked how they compare with their peers on emotional health, men showed the most confidence; 48.5 percent rated themselves as above average or in the top 10 percent. By contrast, only 35.2 percent of women and just 16.6 percent of students who identified outside of the gender binary rated themselves as above average or in the top 10 percent.



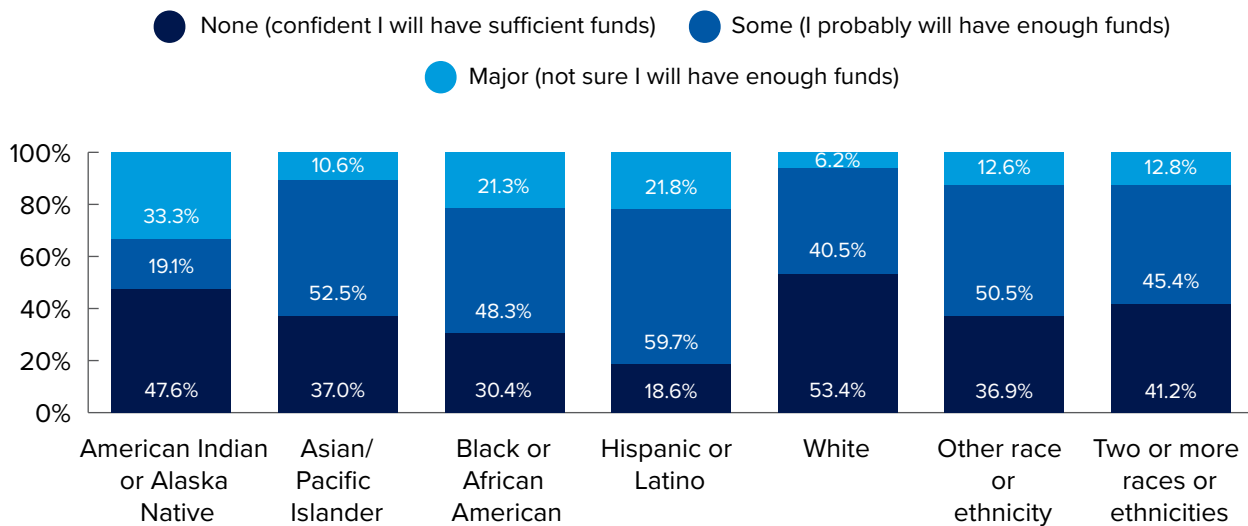
Regarding utilization of mental health services offered at their institutions, more than four in five (83.9 percent) NB, GQ/GNC, or INL students anticipated some chance or a very good chance that they would seek personal counseling while in college. Nearly two-thirds of women (62.8 percent) and half of men (48.0 percent) expected the same.

Students have increasingly disclosed psychological and neurological conditions, and doing so can have significant influence on student engagement with institutional personnel and services. A very small percentage of men (2.7 percent) and women (1.5 percent) identified as having autism spectrum disorder. By contrast, one-quarter (25.2 percent) of students who identified outside of the gender binary reported being on the autism spectrum. Finally, more than three in five (61.3 percent) NB, GQ/GNC, or INL students identified as having a psychological disorder (depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, etc.), compared with 20.4 percent of women and just 7.6 percent of men.

Financial pressures impacted students of color disproportionately and shaped how they finance and perceive the value of higher education.

Financing education remains a major challenge for college students, with notable disparities across racial and ethnic groups. While 56.4 percent of respondents expressed some or major concern about paying for college, this figure is much higher among Hispanic or Latino students (81.4 percent), followed by Black or African American students (69.6 percent) and students from other racial or ethnic groups (63.1 percent) (see figure 10). To help cover education costs, some need-based grants and scholarships were particularly important for students of color. For instance, 64.4 percent of Latino or Hispanic and 56.9 percent of Black or African American students relied on need-based grants and scholarships, compared with just 29.6 percent of White students. Similarly, Pell Grants were disproportionately used by Hispanic or Latino students (59.4 percent), American Indian or Alaska Native students (52.6 percent), and Black or African American students (49.5 percent), highlighting substantial financial need within these groups to finance higher education.

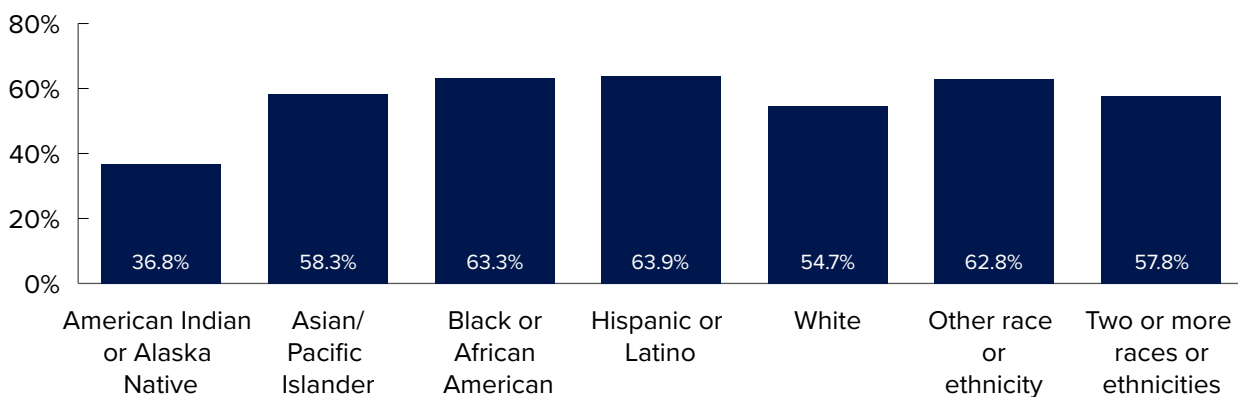
FIGURE 10. Percentage of Students Who Had Concerns About Their Ability to Finance Their College Education, by Race and Ethnicity



Additionally, some students also relied on work-study programs to help cover education costs. Hispanic or Latino (43.6 percent), American Indian or Alaska Native (31.3 percent), and Black or African American (29.8 percent) students reported that they had received aid through work-study at higher rates than were reported by other racial and ethnic groups. When asked about loans, higher rates of Black or African American (11.8 percent), multiracial (11.2 percent), and White students (11.0 percent) than those of other racial and ethnic groups reported that they had taken out loans above \$15,000—highlighting the different approaches and financial pressures students experience to pay for higher education.

Financial pressures not only impacted how students fund their education, but they also influenced students’ future steps to cover the costs and their attitudes toward the value of higher education. For example, 65.0 percent of Hispanic or Latino students reported that they were very likely to get a job to help pay for college expenses—a significantly higher proportion than that of students who identified as more than one race (52.2 percent) and those of Black or African American (50.0 percent), Asian/Pacific Islander (47.4 percent), White (45.7 percent), and American Indian or Alaska Native (41.2 percent) students. Across racial and ethnic groups, many students strongly believed in the economic value of a college education despite financial challenges. The majority of Hispanic or Latino students (63.9 percent) (see figure 11) strongly agreed that the main benefit of earning a degree is higher earning power. This view was also shared by 63.3 percent of Black or African American students, 62.8 percent of students from other racial or ethnic groups, 58.3 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander students, 57.8 percent of those who identified as more than one race, 54.7 percent of White students, and 36.8 percent of American Indian or Alaska Native students.

FIGURE 11. Percentage of Students Who Strongly Agreed That College Education Increases Earning Power, by Race and Ethnicity

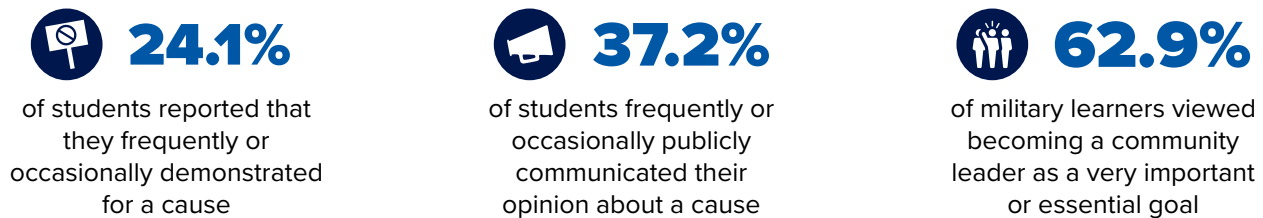




Incoming students brought different civic engagement styles, including activism and advocacy as well as leadership and service.

Incoming first-year students had already engaged in civic activities and activism in various ways (see figure 12). In the entire survey sample, 24.0 percent of the students reported that they had frequently or occasionally demonstrated for a cause and 37.2 percent had frequently or occasionally publicly communicated their opinion about a cause. Nearly half (45.4 percent) of LGBTQ+ students reported that they had frequently or occasionally demonstrated for a cause in the past year, and over half (55.1 percent) had frequently or occasionally publicly communicated their opinion about a cause—larger shares when compared with those of non LGBTQ+ students (20.2 and 34.1 percent, respectively).

Figure 12. Civic Engagement Behaviors Across Select Student Populations



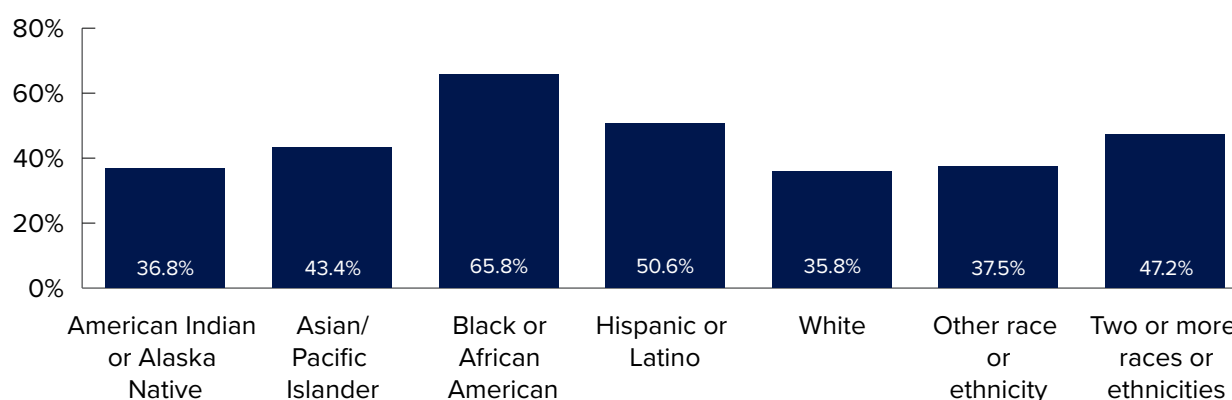
Additionally, 59.0 percent of LGBTQ+ students expressed a strong inclination toward future activism, compared with 25.4 percent among non-LGBTQ+ students, indicating some or a very good chance of participating in student protests or demonstrations during college. While LGBTQ+ students were slightly less focused on traditional forms of civic leadership—only 40.4 percent viewed becoming a community leader as very important or essential, compared with 44.5 percent of non-LGBTQ+ students—they still exhibited a strong dedication to community service; 84.5 percent indicated that they were likely to engage in volunteering or community service work in the future, compared with 80.7 percent of non LGBTQ+ students.

Turning to another subgroup of students, military learners demonstrated a strong commitment to civic engagement, particularly through traditional activities such as volunteering and voting. Many military learners took an active role in their communities; 41.0 percent had frequently volunteered during their last year in high school, compared with 31.8 of nonmilitary learners. Further, 88.5 percent reported some chance or very good chance of voting in a local, state, or national election in the future, compared with 81.2 percent of nonmilitary learners. Not surprisingly, leadership and service were important for this group—62.9 percent identified becoming a community leader as very important or essential to them, compared with 42.7 percent among nonmilitary learners, and 86.7 percent rated themselves as above average or in the top 10 percent of leadership ability, compared with 62.3 percent among nonmilitary learners.

Survey data revealed strong commitment to addressing social and gender inequalities among marginalized groups, with Black, LGBTQ+, and low-income students at the forefront.

The survey results highlighted widespread disagreement with the statement that racial discrimination is no longer a major problem in America, with 42.4 percent of respondents who strongly disagreed and 37.4 who somewhat disagreed. Not surprisingly, opinions varied significantly across racial and ethnic groups. Black or African American students reported the highest level of strong disagreement at 65.8 percent, followed by Hispanic or Latino students (50.6 percent) and students of more than one race (47.2 percent) (see figure 13). White students, in contrast, had the lowest rate of strong disagreement (35.8 percent).

FIGURE 13. Percentage of Students Who Strongly Disagreed with the Statement That Racial Discrimination is No Longer a Problem in America, by Race and Ethnicity



In another section of the survey, students were asked about their goals related to social and gender inequalities. Working to correct social inequalities emerged as a priority for many, particularly among marginalized racial and ethnic groups. Black or African American students placed the highest importance on this goal, with 67.2 percent who identified it as very important or essential. They were followed by American Indian or Alaska Native (58.2 percent) and students of other race or ethnicity (53.8 percent). Hispanic or Latino students also showed strong engagement (57.8 percent), compared with that of White students (40.8 percent).

Similarly, large shares of LGBTQ+ students (64.3 percent), low-income students (56.2 percent), and first-generation students (56.0 percent) also considered correcting social inequalities as very important or essential. This contrasts with 43.9 percent of non-LGBTQ+ students, 44.9 percent of non-low-income students, and 45.8 percent of non-first-generation students who indicated the same.

When it comes to working to achieve greater gender equity, Black or African American students again expressed the strongest commitment, with 33.6 percent who marked it as essential. Students of other race or ethnicity (28.4 percent) and Hispanic or Latino students (26.9 percent) followed closely. American Indian or Alaska Native (17.6 percent) and Asian/Pacific Islander (19.9 percent) students also showed significant interest, while White students reported the lowest level of prioritization at 15.3 percent.

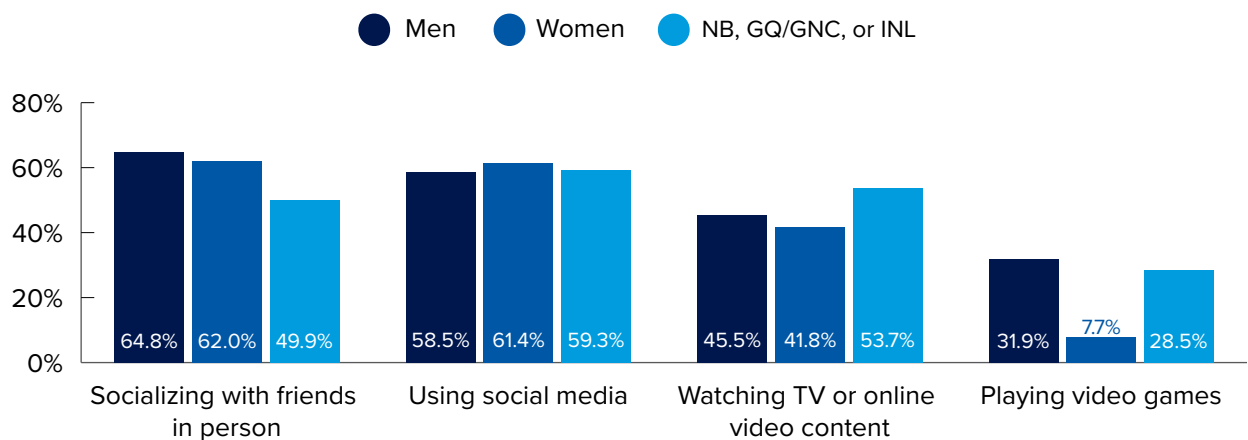


Cultural and economic factors played a role in how students spent their time outside of class, such as studying, doing homework, socializing with friends, working for pay, and performing household or childcare duties.

Social behaviors represent another important dimension of the freshman class of 2024 and offer valuable insights into their experiences and dynamics. Military learners had spent more time studying or doing homework during their last year in high school; 60.2 percent had studied at least six hours per week, compared with 50.1 percent of nonmilitary learners. Fewer first-generation students (42.1 percent) than their continuing-generation peers (53.1 percent) had studied for at least six hours per week. They also had socialized with friends in person for less time—only 27.3 percent had done so for at least six hours per week, compared with 36.0 percent of their peers whose parents had some college experience.

Men and women reported at similar rates that they had socialized with friends in person for at least six hours per week, with 64.8 percent of men and 62.0 percent of women who did so (see figure 14). By contrast, only 49.9 percent of students who identified as NB, GQ/GNC, or INL on the survey reported that they had socialized with friends in person at least six hours per week. When it comes to using social media, this difference dissipated; similar shares of men (58.5 percent), women (61.4), and NB, GQ/GNC, or INL students (59.3 percent) reported social media usage of at least six hours per week. Though social media usage is similar, other forms of digital media use differ by gender. Fewer women had watched TV or online video content (41.8 percent) at least six hours per week, compared with men (45.5 percent) and NB, GQ/GNC, or INL students (53.7 percent). Additionally, fewer women indicated that they had played video games (7.7 percent) at least six hours per week, compared with NB, GQ/GNC, or INL students (28.5 percent) and men (31.9 percent) who reported this activity at similar, higher rates.

FIGURE 14. Percentage of Students Who Spent Six or More Hours per Week on an Activity, by Gender



Cultural and economic factors played a role in how students spent their time outside of class, especially while they were still in high school. Low-income students had spent less time exercising or playing sports (39.2 percent at least six hours per week) than their higher-income peers (61.7 percent) did. While only a slightly higher proportion of students from lower-income backgrounds than that of their higher-income peers had spent at least six hours per week working for pay (41.3 percent versus 38.6 percent, respectively), this difference was twice as high for students who had spent at least six hours per week performing household or childcare duties (26.8 percent, compared with 13.3 percent, respectively).

Looking at race and ethnicity, American Indian or Alaska Native (50.0 percent) and White students (43.7 percent) were the largest shares of students who had spent at least six hours per week working for pay (see figure 15). White students were also most likely to have spent at least six hours per week exercising or playing sports, compared with only 37.7 percent of Hispanic or Latino students who did so. In contrast, more Hispanic or Latino students had spent at least six hours per week performing household or childcare duties (28.8 percent), followed by students who selected other race or ethnicity (25.8 percent) and Black or African American students (22.8 percent). The lowest proportions who had spent their time performing household or childcare duties were that of White and American Indian or Alaska Native students (11.8 percent for each group).

FIGURE 15. Percentage of Students Who Spent Six or More Hours per Week on an Activity, by Race and Ethnicity

