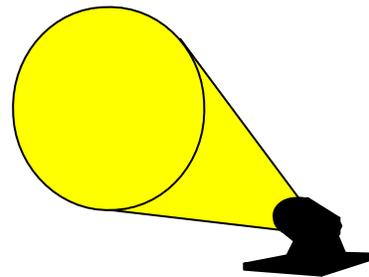


SPOTLIGHT ON OU



Student Stress is Rising

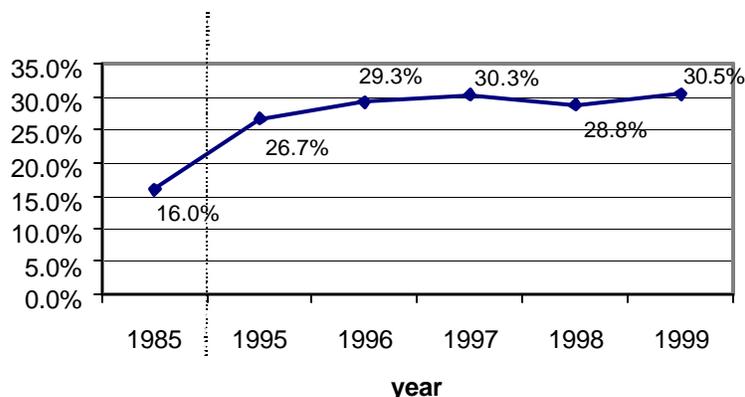
Prepared by Taeko Yokoyama

“Student Stress Is Rising, Especially Among Women,” said a recent headline in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (January 28, 2000). The article summarized findings of the 1999 Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Freshman Survey. The survey has been administered annually since 1966, and Oakland University (OU) has been a participant since the beginning. The 1999 norms are based on the responses of 261,217 students at 462 two-year and four-year institutions¹; Oakland University respondents included 1,424 (514 males and 910 females) first year students.

“Felt overwhelmed by all I had to do”

In 1985, when this question was first asked, 16% of students reported that they felt

**Chart A: Felt overwhelmed by all I had to do
National**



frequently “overwhelmed by all I have to do.” In 1999, responses to this question increased up

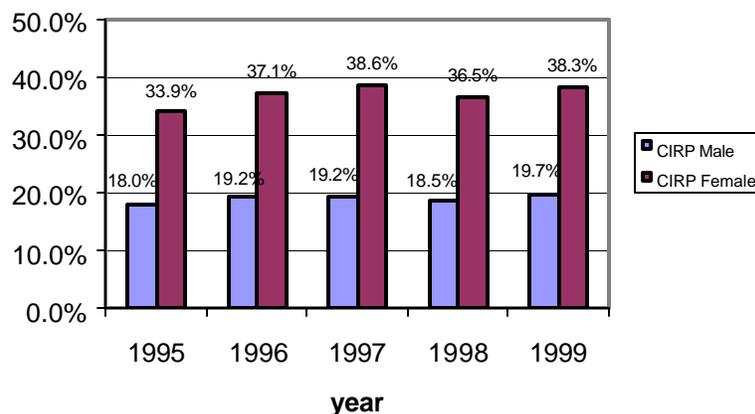
¹In this report, 4 year Public-Middle University selected data is used for the CIRP data to compare to OU data.

to a record-breaking 30.5% (see Chart A). Linda J. Sax, director of this survey, states, “this is a reflection of an increasingly fast-paced society. Students feel more competition.” Also, Sax commented that “the increasing pressure may be related to students’ plans during college.” The CIRP data shows 25% (9% higher than 1982 when the question was first asked) of students report “some” or a “very good” likelihood to get *full-time* jobs to pay for college while attending school.

Women report being frequently overwhelmed almost twice as much as men do (38.3% to 19.7%) (see Chart B). Some of this gender gap reflects concern about paying for college. 10% more female students answer “some” or a “very good” to the likelihood of getting a job to pay for college expenses than men (39.5%). In addition, the CIRP report suggests that “stress levels may reflect how men and women spend their time.” The CIRP data shows that women tend to spend more time than men studying, doing volunteer work, participating in student clubs or groups and tending to housework or child-care responsibilities, while men spend more time than women exercising, playing sports, watching television, partying or playing video games. Hence, as stated in the CIRP report, “women spend time on goal-oriented and potentially stress-producing activities . . .”

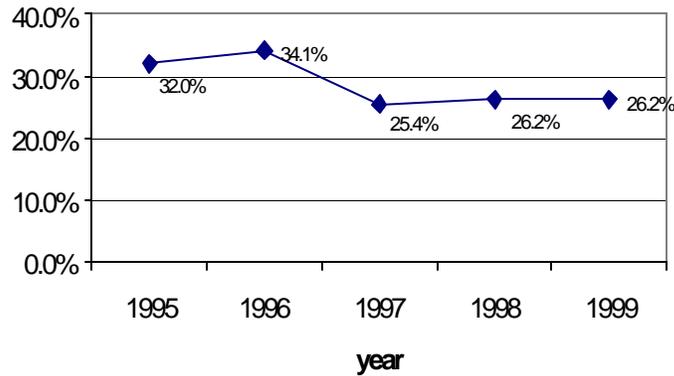
In contrast to the national data, OU students’ responses to the statement “felt

**Chart B: Felt overwhelmed by all I had to do
National**



overwhelmed” have decreased from a high of 34.1% in 1996 to 26.2% in 1998 and 1999, 4% less than the national norm (see Chart C). In addition, fewer OU students express

**Chart:C Felt overwhelmed by all I had to do
Oakland University**

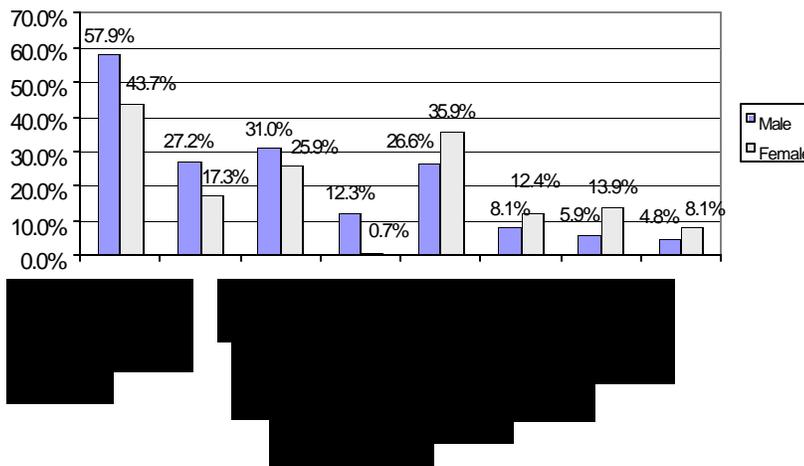


“some” or “major” concern about financing college than the national norm (60.3% versus 66.1%). However, OU students are still more likely to say they plan to get *full-time* work while attending college than national norm (32.2% versus 25%).

When it comes to stress by gender, OU students are in line with the national trends. Female students tend to feel “overwhelmed by all I had to do” more than men do (31.3% to 17.1%). As in the CIRP report, OU women report that they spend more time in “goal-oriented and potentially stress-producing activities” than men (see Chart D). Also, 53% of women expect “some” or “very good chance” to work during college compared to 44% of men.

Although OU students’ report high levels of stress, it does not seem to be the case that their stress is rising to the same extent as national norms.

Chart D: Activities which OU students spent 6 or more hours per week in last year



Drinking and smoking continue their decline

According to the CIRP report, students' smoking and drinking have not gone up as the stress level has increased. Students who smoked cigarettes dropped from 14.7% in 1998 to 12.5% in 1999, drinking beer dropped to 48.6%, which is at the lowest level in the history of the survey, and drinking wine or liquor dropped to 53.0%. OU students continue to report even lower levels of smoking and drinking than national norms (see Table1).

Table 1

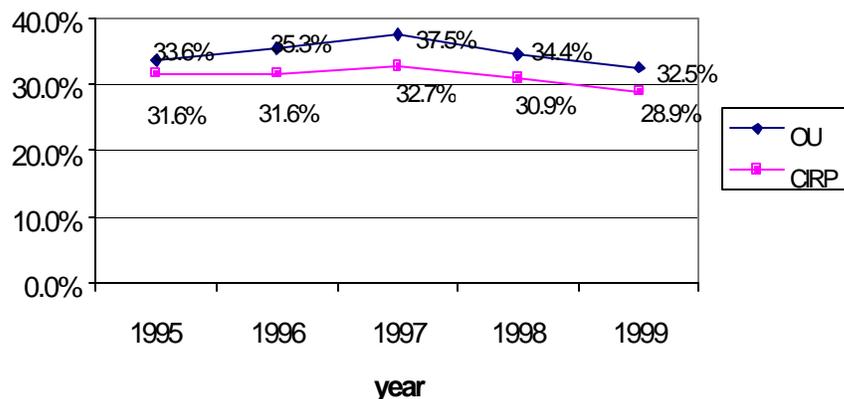
	1998		1999	
	CIRP	OU	CIRP	OU
Smoked cigarettes	14.7%	14.2%	12.5%	11.3%
Drank beer	51.2%	40.5%	48.6%	35.0%
Drank wine or liquor	55.8%	48.7%	53.0%	43.8%

Academic disengagement continues to rise

A consistent theme of the CIRP reports in recent years is the growing level of academic disengagement reported by first year students. A record-high 41.1% of freshman respond that they were frequently "bored in class" in their high school year. "Came late to class" marks an all-time high 65.6% and "overslept and missed class or appointment" is at 35.4%, up 1% from last year. Supporting the notion of disengagement, students also report a decrease in the number of hours per week spent studying. 28.9% of freshman report they spent 6 or more hours a week studying or doing homework during their last year in high school, down from 43.7% in 1987.

OU students' responses track closely to the national data. 67% of students "came late to class", and 34.5% of students "overslept and missed class or appointment."

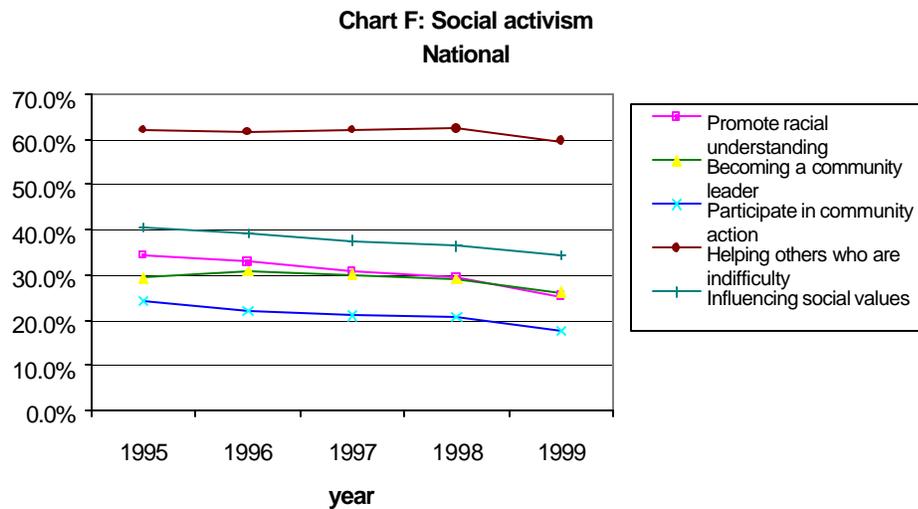
Chart E: Studying or doing homework
(6 or more hours per week)



However, fewer (36%) OU students reported having been “bored in class” compared to 41% nationally. Although OU students’ responses follow a similar pattern to the national trend, a slightly higher percent of OU FTIACS report having studied 6 or more hours per week (see Chart E).

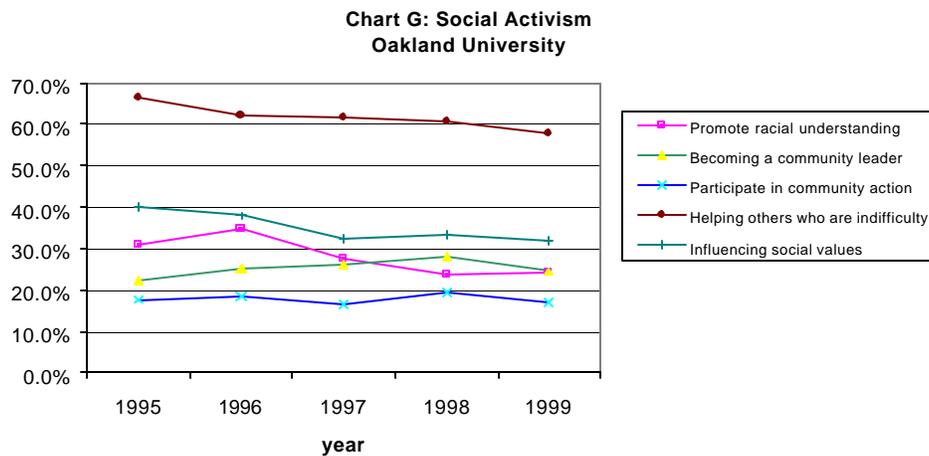
A decline in social activism

The CIRP report observes that students are disengaging from other areas as well as academics. “Freshmen continued to avoid a commitment to social activism—particularly in terms of race relations, the environment, and helping others who are in difficulty.” 24.3% (the lowest level since 1986) of students consider “helping to promote racial understanding” is essential or very important, and its proportion declined for the third consecutive year. Moreover, 21.7% of freshmen agree that “racial discrimination is no longer a major problem in America” (the highest proportion since the question was first asked.) The importance of “influence social values,” “participate in community action,” “helping others who are in difficulty,” and “becoming a community leader” has also dropped (see Chart F).



Fewer OU students also report “promote racial understanding” as a goal 24.3% (compared to 25.3% nationally). This is down from 31% just 4 years ago. On the other hand, 22% believe that “racial discrimination is no longer a problem” up from 19% in 1995. It is hard to say whether the decline in the desire to promote racial understanding is directly related to a declining activism or to a naïve perception that discrimination is no longer a problem. Another disturbing trend shown in Chart G, the OU data, is the recent

sharp drop in the percent of OU students indicating that “help others who are in difficulty” and “influencing social values” are important goals. After many years of being above the national norms, helping others, dropped from over 66% in 1995 to 58% in 1999, while “influencing social values” went from 40% to 32% in the same period.



Implications for OU

In conclusion, the data for OU students generally reflects similar tendencies and attitudes as the national data. Differences between OU responses and those of students nationally tend to be in degree rather than kind. Oakland students have been ahead of the curve on stress levels in prior years, generally reporting higher levels of stress than the national norms. In recent years, the OU trend has been toward less reported stress, while the national responses catch up and surpass OU students’ levels of stress. On the other hand, **more OU students continue to say that they plan to work, and to work *full-time***, even though they report higher levels of family income and less concern about how they will pay for college. Both the levels of reported stress, and the expected rates of employment continue to be red flags for those concerned with the success of Oakland University students.

More work needs to be done to understand the apparently growing phenomenon of academic disengagement cited in the CIRP report and reflected in the OU student data. For example, what is the relationship of academic disengagement to faculty reports that they perceive students entering in the past few years to be less well prepared for college than in prior years? Average High School GPAs and ACT scores do not reflect a decline

in the quality of students being admitted, in fact both have increased slightly over the past two to three years (See Appendix B and C in the Fall 1999 Enrollment Memo, April 4, 2000.) Does academic disengagement help to explain some of what is going on in the classroom? And if so, what can faculty and others concerned with student success do to counter this trend?

Finally, does the apparent decline in commitment to the promotion of racial equality signal that students have become desensitized to the continuing presence and effects of discrimination in American culture? Or do they not understand these issues? What can Oakland University do to counter these trends as well?