

NC STATE UNIVERSITY

2020 Incoming First-Year Student Survey Executive Summary

Introduction

NC State conducted its annual survey of incoming first-year students during the summer of 2020. Generally, students are invited to participate in the survey after attending New Student Orientation. However, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, New Student Orientation was held virtually. Students were e-mailed an invitation to participate in the survey on August 5, after all virtual Orientation sessions concluded. The first day of classes was August 10, but due to the increasing number of COVID-19 positive cases among undergraduate students, all undergraduate classes were switched to online delivery on August 24. On August 31, the decision was made to have most students begin moving off campus. The survey closed on September 4, meaning that while some students completed the survey just prior to or shortly after arriving on campus, others completed it either after all classes moved online, or, for a relatively few, after they had left campus.

The online survey achieved a 58.7 percent response rate, with 2,785 of the 4,747 incoming first-year students eligible to have their responses recorded and included in analyses submitting the survey. Forty-three percent of respondents took the survey on a mobile phone (42.7%). Agricultural Institute respondents are excluded from analyses presented in the following reports so that the data presented reflects the views and circumstances of students pursuing a four-year baccalaureate degree.

Due to their higher response rates, women are slightly overrepresented among survey respondents. In addition, students from the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and the College of Engineering are slightly overrepresented when analyzing results by college. The racial/ethnic breakdown of respondents generally mirrors that of the enrolled first-year student population at the time of the University's Census.

Experiences Prior to Enrolling at NC State

Three-fourths of respondents reported that they had applied to at least four colleges/universities, including NC State, with eight percent applying to ten or more (8.2%). About four percent reported that NC State was the only school to which they applied (3.7%). Incoming first-year students applied to an average of 5.1 colleges/universities.

Nearly two-thirds of incoming first-year students said NC State was their top choice university to attend (65.5%), with three percent saying NC State was their "only choice" (2.7%). One-in-ten enrolled first-year students participating in the survey said NC State was their third choice or below (9.6%).

A plurality of respondents rated "academic reputation" (24.3%) as being the *single most influential factor in deciding to attend NC State*, followed by "availability of program" (19.1%), "level of support for my intended major" (12.3%), and "cost" (9.8%). "Future career opportunities" (8.0%) and "location" (7.5%) were also rated as the most influential factor by a sizable number of incoming students. They were most likely to say that *future career opportunities* (86.6%), *academic reputation* (86.2%), and *availability of program* (86.0%) had a "very strong" or "strong influence" on their decision to attend NC State. *Communications from NC State, excluding from the Admissions Office* (48.8%), *communications from the NC State Admissions Office* (46.9%), and *attendance at a College Fair or high school visit* (46.2%) were the factors least likely to be influential in incoming students' decisions to attend NC State, as these factors had the highest reported rates of having either a "weak" or "very weak influence."

More than 95 percent of incoming first-year students said they were either “very” (46.1%) or “moderately satisfied” (49.6%) with the NC State admissions process. Over 40 percent of respondents said they received some *communication from outside the Admissions Office* (42.7%) after applying for admission; fewer students reported that they had received a phone call from *a current NC State student* (13.5%), *an NC State faculty or staff member* (12.9%), or *a graduate of NC State* (5.3%).

Goals

About half of respondents said their primary goal/objective for attending NC State was to obtain a “bachelor’s degree or certificate in preparation for a career” (49.2%), and just under half said it was to earn a “bachelor’s degree for graduate school preparation” (46.2%).

Incoming first-year students overwhelmingly said that they intended to complete their bachelor’s degree in either four years (79.9%) or less than four years (15.8%). Over 60 percent reported that they intend to earn a degree beyond a bachelor’s degree (61.5%), with one-fourth of all respondents reporting they plan to pursue a doctoral or professional degree (26.3%).

More than three-fourths of incoming first-year students reported that they were either “very certain” (31.8%) or “certain” (45.4%) in their choice of college major. Levels of certainty, however, varied by college. Students in the College of Design and the Wilson College of Textiles were most likely to be sure about their choice of major, with over 90 percent in each college saying they were either “very certain” or “certain” about their choice (95.0% and 93.2%, respectively). Aside from University College students – who come by definition having not declared a major -- where over half of respondents reported levels of uncertainty (51.8%), those entering in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences (25.9%) and the College of Natural Resources (23.6%) were the most likely to report being either “uncertain” or “very uncertain” in their choice of college major.

Incoming first-year students overwhelmingly reported that it was likely they would participate in a Study Abroad program while an undergraduate student at NC State, with 44 percent saying they either “definitely” (19.1%), or “probably will” (24.9%) participate. Five percent said they would “definitely not” participate in a Study Abroad program (5.1%).

While only 16 percent of incoming first-year students said that after graduation they will be seeking work “in North Carolina only” (16.0%), 45 percent said they would seek work “anywhere in the USA” (45.5%). The remaining respondents reported that they would seek work “anywhere – location is not important” (37.3%) or “outside the USA only” (1.2%).

General Education, Personal Development, and World View Goals

Incoming first-year students were asked about their current level of development and importance of 49 goals that NC State has pertaining to general education, personal development, and world views. Students consistently gave a higher average rating of importance compared to their current level of development of each goal. One-third or more of respondents reported that their current level of development was “excellent” for just 19 of the 49 goals, while at least half of respondents rated all but three of the goals asked about as being “very important.” However, goals that ranked relatively high in importance tended to also be ranked relatively high in respondents’ perceived current level of development. Notable exceptions include *time management*, which despite having the second lowest average rating of all 49 goals in terms of current level of development, had the highest average rating of importance. Other goals that rated significantly higher in importance than development include *ability to manage ongoing stressors*; *gaining clarity in my future career direction*; and *recovering from emotional setbacks*. Some goals, such as *appreciating differences in sexual orientation*; *believing more time and effort will lead to increased learning*; *sensitivity to issues associated with gender equity*; and *valuing learning as a lifelong process* were rated as less important than others, but incoming first-year students felt they were relatively better prepared in these areas compared to others.

General Education Goals:

At least three-fourths of respondents said that their current level of development was “excellent” or “good” on 16 of the 22 general education goals asked about. They were most likely to say that their current level of development was “excellent” for *ability to plan and carry out projects independently* (39.1%), *using technologies appropriate to my discipline* (39.1%), *listening attentively* (37.2%), and *understanding the need for sustainability as the pursuit of balanced, ethical solutions that are economically viable, environmentally sound, and socially just* (37.0%). Conversely, *speaking effectively* (42.6%) and *the capacity to engage with/respond to artistic works and evaluate their significance* (39.1%) were most likely to be either rated as “fair” or “poor” by incoming students.

Over 90 percent rated 19 of the 22 general education goals as being “very important” or “moderately important” to themselves. They were most likely to rate *listening attentively* (80.7%), *comprehending written and oral information* (80.5%), *ability to plan and carry out projects independently* (78.4%), and *considering all options when solving a problem and thinking through the implications of selecting one alternative over another* (77.4%) as being “very important” to them. Respondents were most likely to consider *capacity to engage with/respond to artistic works and evaluate their significance* (23.6%), *appreciating the humanities* (14.8%), *applying social science methods to understand human behavior* (12.5%), and *applying scientific methods of inquiry* (9.0%) to be “slightly” or “not at all important.”

Personal Development Goals:

At least two-thirds of respondents gave a rating of “excellent” or “good” to 15 of the 19 personal development goals asked about. They were most likely to say that their current level of development was “excellent” for *believing more time and effort will lead to increased learning* (46.7%), *taking responsibility for my own behavior* (46.1%), and *valuing learning as a lifelong process* (43.1%). Conversely, at least one-third of respondents gave a rating of “fair” or “poor” to their development of a number of personal development goals, including *time management* (40.6%), *ability to manage ongoing stressors* (39.8%), *being involved in public and community affairs* (36.5%), *gaining clarity in my future career direction* (33.5%), and *recovering from emotional setbacks* (33.1%).

Over 95 percent of incoming first-year students rated all but one of the 19 personal development goals as being “very” or “moderately important” to them. In particular, a large majority said that *time management* (87.6%), *taking responsibility for my own behavior* (84.6%), *ability to set and accomplish goals* (82.7%), *ability to manage ongoing stressors* (82.6%), *experiencing personal growth* (82.5%), *seeing projects through completion* (82.1%), and *working effectively as part of a team* (81.6%) were “very important” to them. The only item which more than five percent of respondents indicated as being “slightly” (6.4%) or “not at all important” (0.6%) was *being involved in public and community affairs*.

World View Goals:

At least 80 percent of respondents said their current level of development of each of the eight goals related to their world view was either “excellent” or “good.” Incoming first-year students were most likely to say that their current level of development was “excellent” for *ability to work with people from diverse backgrounds* (57.1%), *appreciating differences in sexual orientation* (46.7%), and *sensitivity to issues associated with racial equity* (44.1%). Respondents were most likely to rate their current level of development as “fair” or “poor” for *understanding issues and problems facing the world* (20.0%).

Over 90 percent of respondents rated all eight of the listed world view goals as “very” or “moderately important” to them, with over 95 percent giving these ratings to seven of the eight goals. A rating of “very important” was given by at least three-fourths of respondents to *ability to work with people from diverse backgrounds* (85.2%), *understanding and respecting diverse cultures, values, and perspectives* (80.4%), *understanding issues and problems facing the world* (79.9%), *sensitivity to issues associated with racial equity* (79.0%), and *understanding the commonality of human problems globally* (75.5%). Respondents were most likely to say that *appreciating differences in sexual orientation* (8.5%) and *sensitivity to issues associated with gender equity* (5.9%) were either “slightly” or “not at all important.”

Finances and Paying for College

Almost half of respondents reported that \$10,000 or more of their first-year educational expenses would come from *family resources* (46.5%). While well over half of incoming first-year students said they would not have any loans (aid that must be repaid) for their first year of school (54.0%), one-third reported having \$3,000 or more in loans (33.4%), with nine percent saying they will have \$10,000 or more in loans (8.8%). Students themselves were least likely to be covering college expenses with their own money, with over two-thirds saying they themselves would be contributing nothing at all (30.8%) or less than \$1,000 (37.5%) to their first year educational expenses. However, a small number of students reported that they would be contributing \$10,000 or more of their own resources to pay expenses (3.0%). Finally, a notable number of students (62.2%) said they are receiving at least some aid that does not need to be repaid, such as grants or scholarships, with 20 percent receiving \$10,000 or more in such aid for their first-year expenses.

About three-fourths of those from families with incomes of \$100,000 or less were using at least some of their own money to cover their first year expenses, compared to less than two-thirds of those from families with annual incomes over \$150,000. Nearly 60 percent of those with families earning \$100,000 or less reported having aid that must be repaid (loans, etc.), compared to only about one-fourth of those families with incomes of over \$200,000. However, students from families earning between \$50,000 and \$150,000 reported having the largest amount of first year debt, with almost one-fourth having \$6,000 or more in aid that needs to be repaid.

A majority of incoming first-year students said they were receiving grants and scholarships (52.8%), while 43 percent said that they received loans (42.9%) to help pay for their education. Fewer students reported they were receiving some other type of financial aid (11.0%). Nine-in-ten respondents reported that they had submitted the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) (89.7%).

Over one-third of respondents reported that they would be employed during their first year of college (36.0%) – a significantly lower percentage than past years, potentially due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Employed respondents were nearly equally as likely to say they would be working on campus (40.8%) than off campus (43.1%). Sixteen percent of students planning on being employed said they would be working both on and off campus (16.2%). About half of students planning on working said they would be working 10 hours or less per week (54.7% of those working on campus, and 49.8% of those working off campus). Respondents who said that they would be working off campus were slightly more likely than those planning to work on campus to report working more than 20 hours per week (12.8% vs 7.0%, respectively). Nearly 40 percent of those who have jobs both on and off campus said that they will be working 1-10 hours at each of their jobs (38.9%), while 20 percent said they would work 11-20 hours at each (20.6%). Four percent said they would work more than 20 hours at each of their on campus and off jobs campus during their first year at NC State (4.0%).

Nearly half of those coming from a family with a combined income of \$50,000 or less (46.0%) and just over 40 percent of those from a family with a combined income of \$50,001-\$100,000 (41.8%) reported they will be working during their first year at NC State. In comparison, just 30 percent of those from a family with a combined income over \$200,000 planned on being employed (30.3%).

Satisfaction with NC State Services

When asked to evaluate the NC State Admissions website, 86 percent of respondents gave a rating of “excellent” (28.3%) or “good” (57.7%), and when asked to evaluate the NC State Academic Advising Services website, over three-fourths gave a rating of “excellent” (22.3%) or “good” (55.3%).

Respondents were also asked to rate their satisfaction with the NC State financial aid process. Overall, incoming students were satisfied, with 82 percent saying that they were either “very” (24.2%) or “moderately satisfied” (58.2%) with the financial aid process.

New Student Orientation

When asked about their interactions with their college/department prior to attending New Student Orientation, at least 80 percent of respondents said that they either “strongly agree” or “agree” that they were *provided an opportunity to get answers to their academic questions* (86.8%), that they were *satisfied with the attention they received prior to Orientation* (83.6%), and that the *information/advice they received prior to Orientation helped them to plan their fall schedule* (82.4%).

When asked the same questions about their college/department interactions during Orientation, over 80 percent said they either “strongly agree” or “agree” that they were satisfied with the *time spent with their college/department to get answers to their academic questions* (89.0%), satisfied with the *attention received from their college/department during Orientation* (88.8%), and that the *information/advice they received from their college/department helped them to plan their fall schedule* (82.1%).

More than nine-in-ten incoming students agreed that New Student Orientation provided useful information about a number of different policies, practices, and resources asked about. They were most likely to “strongly agree” that they got useful information about *the prohibition of sexual violence, relationship violence, and stalking at NC State* (55.2%), *the resources available to me if I need help preventing or reporting sexual violence* (52.3%), and *the tactics I can use to be an active bystander to prevent or disrupt violence* (51.8%).

Nearly all incoming students also agreed that New Student Orientation had achieved the program’s goals of helping prepare students to enter and be successful at NC State, with over 90 percent of respondents saying they either “strongly agree” or “agree” to all but one item asked about. They were most likely to “strongly agree” that as a result of attending Orientation they are *excited to start my first semester at NC State* (50.1%)

Demographic and Family Background Characteristics

Just over half of respondents reported that they felt they were “very well” prepared for college by their own efforts (51.5%), while a little under half said that high school prepared them “very well” for college (46.4%). However, respondents were twice as likely to report that they were “not very well” prepared for college by their high school as compared with their own efforts (8.8% vs 4.4%).

When asked about the hometown they came from, more than one-third of incoming first-year students responding to the survey reported that they were from a “rural area” (11.4%) or a “small town” (25.7%), while three-in-ten came from a “large city” (11.5%) or an “urban area” (18.1%).

Over 80 percent of incoming first-year students had at least one of their parents/guardians earn a college degree (82.7%).

Over 55 percent reported that their family’s 2019 combined pre-tax income was over \$100,000 (56.7%), with 32 percent reporting it was over \$150,000 (32.0%), and 18 percent reporting it was over \$200,000 (17.7%). Just over 15 percent reported that their family income was \$50,000 or less (15.6%).

Two-thirds indicated that they came from a household with four or more members financially supported by their parents/guardians, including themselves and their parents/guardians (66.7%). Three percent reported that only one person in their household was financially supported (3.4%).

Just under two-thirds of incoming first-year students said that they were the only dependent in their household currently enrolled in college (63.2%), while 32 percent said they were one of two dependents in college (31.8%), and six percent said they were one of three or more (5.8%).

Residence and Internet Connectivity

Eighty-five percent of incoming first-year students reported that they originally intended on living on campus during the Fall 2020 semester (85.2%) – most students in this group began moving off campus on August 31. Fifteen percent reported that their original plans were to live off campus: 13 percent said that they would be living at their permanent residence (i.e., the residence of their parents/guardians) and either commuting to campus or taking all online courses (12.9%), while the remaining two percent were living off campus in temporary housing (i.e., a rental house or apartment) (1.9%).

While one-fourth of first-year students reported having a “very strong/stable” (25.9%) internet connection at their permanent residence, eight percent described it as either “weak/unstable” or “very weak/unstable” (8.1%).

In Their Own Words: Anticipating Life at NC State

Respondents were given the opportunity to answer two open-ended questions pertaining to what they are most excited about and most concerned about in coming to NC State. Students were most likely to mention being excited about various aspects of social life, learning, independence of being a college student, adapting to NC State, campus life, and classroom instruction. Some of the most common categories that students mentioned in being excited about were also mentioned as being the most concerned about. Students were most likely to mention being most concerned about various aspects of their academic performance, the COVID-19 pandemic, classroom instruction, social life, independence of being a college student, adapting to NC State, and time management.

At the end of the survey, students were asked a separate question about how the COVID-19 pandemic affected their preparations for college; however, many students also talked about the COVID-19 pandemic in their responses to what they are most concerned about. They mentioned concerns such as having to move back home after just moving in to NC State and adjusting to a fully-remote learning environment for the rest of the semester.

For more information on the 2020 Incoming First-Year Student Survey, contact:

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