

# STUDENT Research C E N T E R

Fall 1998 / Report 4

## Campus Climate Survey

# How Do We Treat Our Freshmen? A Comparison of Freshmen and Sophomore Responses

**PURPOSE:** To compare Freshmen and Sophomores on measures indicating how they perceive they are treated at Cal State Fullerton.

**HISTORY:** We have administered the Campus Climate survey yearly since 1995. The 1997 survey was a slightly modified version of previous assessments. See the March 1998 Campus Climate Survey report for more details.

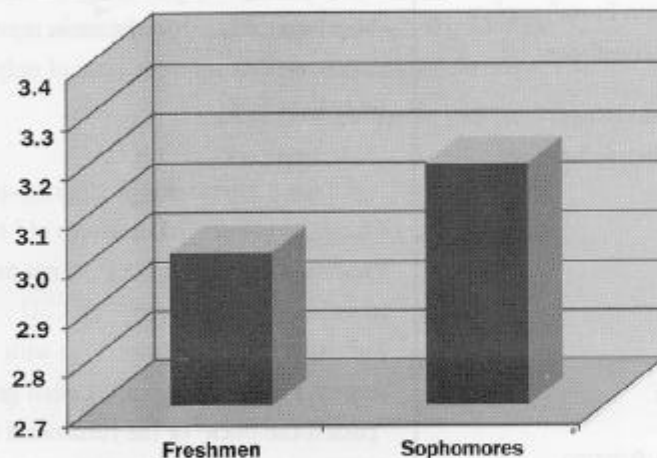
**IN BRIEF:** In a random sample of 448 Freshmen and Sophomores, no differences were found in perceptions of treatment between Freshmen and Sophomores, with one exception and one possible (marginally significant) exception: Sophomores felt that they got "passed the buck or the runaround" more than Freshmen, and Freshmen felt they received more "respect and courtesy" from staff than did sophomores, as shown in the charts on the back page.

### How do we treat our Freshmen?

Student affairs professionals have expressed concern about how our newest

students are treated at Cal State Fullerton. To examine the hypothesis that Freshman are treated differently than Sophomores, we contrasted responses of Freshmen to those of Sophomores on the attitude items

### "I Often Get 'Passed the Buck'"



**NOTE:** 5 = Strongly Agree; 4 = Agree; 3 = Neutral, Don't Know, Don't Care; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly Disagree; Ns = 199 for Freshmen and 250 for Sophomores.

CAL STATE FULLERTON

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**Student affairs research is a major priority.** This research report reflects the Student Affairs commitment to a continual focus on research relating to student affairs.

**The mission of the Student Research Center** is to administer and support research on students, including campus climate assessment.

#### Directions for Future Research:

- Sense of community at Cal State Fullerton
- Freshman computer familiarity survey
- "Where Do They Come From" application, admission and enrollment by high school of origin
- Readiness for computer technology

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relevant to perceptions of treatment in the December 1997 Campus Climate survey database. Those measures are shown in Table 1.

**METHOD:** In December of 1997 we presented the Campus Climate survey to 466 students in 11 sections of the GE track of required courses. This sampling can be regarded as a random sampling of lower-division students. Of the total sample, there were 250 sophomores and 199 Freshmen. With these sample sizes, very precise estimates may be obtained of attitudes, and attitude differences between Freshmen and Sophomores would be easily revealed.

Response rate exceeded 97 percent of students present in those 11 classes. This near-perfect response means that non-response bias is practically eliminated, a point of particular importance in the investigation of negative attitudes. Specifically, one way to show negative attitudes is to not cooperate by filling out the survey. Thus, this particular database is more likely to capture negative evaluations by students than the more typical survey with its response rates of only 30% to 40%.

Of the 23 items on the Climate survey, 16 can be considered measures of "how Freshmen are treated," e.g., "I am proud to attend CSU Fullerton," "At CSU Fullerton, staff have treated me with respect and courtesy," and "I often get 'passed-the-buck' or the runaround when I require services here." All items were assessed on the same scale where 5 = Strongly Agree and 1 = Strongly Disagree. This allows means or ranges on one item to be validly compared with mean

responses or ranges on any another item.

**RESULTS:** We contrasted the average responses of Freshmen with those of Sophomores across the items assessing treatment at CSU Fullerton, and tested for the statistical reliability of any differences using the test for differences of independent groups, Student's *t* (actually *z* with these sample sizes). Results are shown in Table 2.

On all items assessing student perceptions of how they are treated, there are no differences between Freshmen and Sophomores in their ratings, except for the item "Staff have treated me with respect and courtesy,"  $p = .03$ . On that measure, Freshmen average 3.89 on the scale of 1 to 5, where 5 = Strongly Agree, and Sophomores average 3.69; Freshmen therefore reported **better** treatment than did Sophomores, as shown in the chart on the back page.

The item "I often get 'pass(ed) the buck' or the runaround when I require services here,"  $p = .08$ , may show a difference. The level of statistical significance is marginal. If we continue to stretch the rules for Type I error there is a suggestion of a difference on the items "I feel a sense of community on this campus" and "Students have treated me with respect and courtesy,"  $ps = .16$ .

**CONCLUSIONS:** Overall, no evidence exists that Freshmen have more negative perceptions of how they are treated at CSU Fullerton than Sophomores. The absolute level of agreement with all the attitude items is in the "Agree" to "Neutral" range. The only  $p < .05$  difference occurred on the item "Staff have

**Table 1**

**Sixteen Attitude Statements About Campus Climate: Freshmen V. Sophomores**

There are adequate opportunities for student involvement in making key decisions at Cal State Fullerton. Freshmen: $M = 3.29$ ; $sd = .92$ ; Sophomores: $M = 3.36$ ; $sd = .92$ .	I am proud to attend Cal State Fullerton. Freshmen: $M = 3.88$ ; $sd = .98$ ; Sophomores: $M = 4.00$ ; $sd = .85$ .
Students can count on the relevance of courses to the work world. Freshmen: $M = 3.59$ ; $sd = .84$ ; Sophomores: $M = 3.55$ ; $sd = .83$ .	I often get "pass-the-buck" or the runaround when I require services here. Freshmen: $M = 3.01$ ; $sd = 1.10$ ; Sophomores: $M = 3.19$ ; $sd = 1.14$ .
Faculty and Staff seem to visit or gossip with one another more than work together on solving problems. Freshmen: $M = 2.62$ ; $sd = .82$ ; Sophomores: $M = 2.61$ ; $sd = .91$ .	I feel well-informed about campus policies and procedures. Freshmen: $M = 3.01$ ; $sd = 1.05$ ; Sophomores: $M = 3.04$ ; $sd = 1.07$ .
There is an air of complacency at Cal State Fullerton. Freshmen: $M = 3.25$ ; $sd = .84$ ; Sophomores: $M = 3.30$ ; $sd = .80$ .	I feel well-informed about student government activities. Freshmen: $M = 2.38$ ; $sd = .99$ ; Sophomores: $M = 2.40$ ; $sd = .92$ .
My department resolves issues constructively for the good of students. Freshmen: $M = 3.37$ ; $sd = .79$ ; Sophomores: $M = 3.40$ ; $sd = .79$ .	I feel a sense of community on this campus. Freshmen: $M = 2.67$ ; $sd = 1.10$ ; Sophomores: $M = 2.82$ ; $sd = 1.11$ .
Students can count on consistent information about what is required of them in their courses and programs. Freshmen: $M = 3.68$ ; $sd = .95$ ; Sophomores: $M = 3.63$ ; $sd = 1.04$ .	At Cal State Fullerton, <i>instructors</i> have treated me with respect and courtesy. Freshmen: $M = 4.19$ ; $sd = .84$ ; Sophomores: $M = 4.15$ ; $sd = .80$ .
When my department designs schedules, students are considered first. Freshmen: $M = 3.11$ ; $sd = .79$ ; Sophomores: $M = 3.05$ ; $sd = .85$ .	At Cal State Fullerton, <i>students</i> have treated me with respect and courtesy. Freshmen: $M = 4.05$ ; $sd = .82$ ; Sophomores: $M = 3.94$ ; $sd = .77$ .
The departments of the college function and cooperate with one another. Freshmen: $M = 3.24$ ; $sd = .87$ ; Sophomores: $M = 3.30$ ; $sd = .80$ .	At Cal State Fullerton, <i>staff</i> have treated me with respect and courtesy. Freshmen: $M = 3.89$ ; $sd = .98$ ; Sophomores: $M = 3.69$ ; $sd = .97$ .

**NOTE:** 5 = Strongly Agree; 4 = Agree; 3 = Neutral, Don't Know, Don't Care; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly Disagree;  
Ns = 199 for Freshmen and 250 for Sophomores. M: Arithmetic average; sd: standard deviation

treated me with respect and courtesy," and Freshmen agree more than Sophomores; thus Freshmen are perceiving more favorable treatment by staff.

Freshmen also indicate that other students treat them better than do sophomores on the item "Students have treated me with respect and courtesy," marginal  $t$ . The item on getting the runaround is worded negatively, so agreement with it indicates bad treatment, but both groups are virtually Neutral in their responses.

The differences between groups on the item "I often get the runaround" indicates that Sophomores, not Freshmen, are perceiving less favorable treatment: Sophomores agree more than Freshmen that "they get the 'pass(ed) the buck' or the runaround."

## About the Survey

The Campus Climate survey consisted of 22 short questions, like "I am proud to attend CSU Fullerton" and "Staff have treated me with respect and courtesy." Only four demographic items were included. Students responded on 5 point Likert-type scales. Students heard these instructions during survey administration:

*This survey will aid us in assessing our university. It is anonymous; no one will know what your responses are because we will not ask you to identify yourself except for some demographics. We base policy decisions in part on student input; it is extremely important that you give this survey the utmost seriousness. We value your opinions and we appreciate your assistance. If you have any questions later on feel free to contact Dr. Vernon Padgett at 714 278 2591.*

**Table 2**

## Significance Tests on Differences Between Freshmen and Sophomores' Attitudes

I often get "passed-the-buck" when I require services here.

$$t = 1.75, p = .08.$$

I feel a sense of community on this campus.

$$t = 1.41, p = .16.$$

At Cal State Fullerton, students have treated me with respect and courtesy.

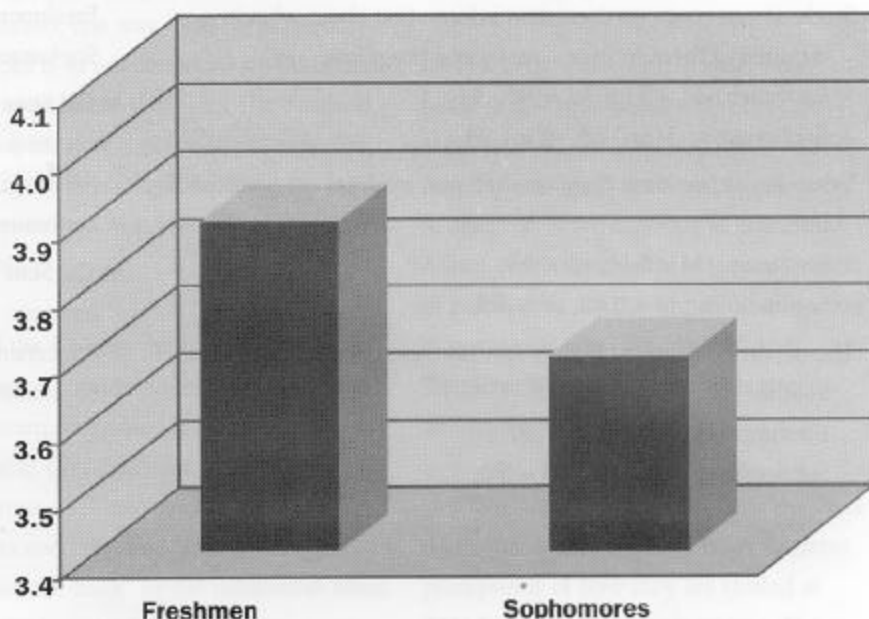
$$t = -1.41, p = .16.$$

At Cal State Fullerton, staff have treated me with respect and courtesy.

$$t = 2.18, p = .03.$$

**NOTE:** All tests were two-tailed.  $t$ : Students'  $t$  statistic;  $p$ : Type I probability level

### "At Cal State Fullerton, staff have treated me with respect and courtesy."



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