



**Age, Sex, and Ethnic Differences
on the General College
Student Survey - Fall 1980**

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Method and Results

As part of the registration process, students new to the General College are asked to complete a questionnaire focusing on demographic variables and student needs (The General College Student Survey). During fall 1980 approximately 1000 students completed this instrument. The results by question for the entire sample will be presented in a future report. This report deals with differential responding on the basis of three status variables measured by the survey instrument. The three variables are age, sex, and ethnic status.

Age was dichotomized into students equal to or less than 22 years of age and those older than 22. Of the 1006 students reporting their age, 828 or 82.3% were classified as younger (22 or under) and 178 or 17.7% as older (greater than 22). Of the 956 students reporting their sex, 548 or 57.3% were classified as male, and 408 or 42.6% as female. Of the 959 students reporting their ethnic status, 765 or 79.8% were classified as white, and 194 or 20.2% indicated minority group membership (these students were pooled and labeled minority). Minority students (31.4%) were more likely than white students (13.3%) to be 22 years of age or over.

Responses to each question on the survey instrument were presented in a crosstabulation format for each of the status variables. These tables are available on request from the authors. Significance tests were performed to determine if students differed on the basis of sex, age, or ethnic status in their responses to the questionnaire. If differences had a less than one in twenty probability of occurring by chance ($p < .05$) they are reported in this paper.

The first item showing differential responding on the basis of a status variable was the question as to whether students were on financial aid. There were no sex differences, but 72.1% of older students compared to 44.8% of younger students and 73.9% of minority students, compared to 43.4% of white students reported receiving financial aid. Minority and older students then, were overrepresented in receipt of financial aid compared to whites and younger students.

The next question showing differential responding was the one asking if students planned to work. Older students were overrepresented only in the category asking whether they intended to work 36 or more hours per week. Nearly 12% of older students said so, compared with 2.9% of younger students.

The only differential responding on the question asking whether students planned to transfer from GC occurred for older students. More of them (13.5%) compared to younger students (5.6%) said they did not plan to transfer. Older students (18.2%) were also more likely than younger students (5.7%) to say they had completed two years of college, and were more likely than younger students (10.2% versus 2.4%) to have earned a G.E.D. Older students (70%) were also more likely than younger students (7.7%) to say that it's been more than three years since they last attended school.

Students were asked whether they felt 1) very well, 2) fairly well, or 3) not well prepared in twelve skill areas. Females responded significantly different from males for mathematical skills, with 6.9% of females and 15.1% of males saying they were very well prepared, and 50% of females and 34.7% of males saying they were not well prepared. Females were less likely (10.9%) than males (20.8%) to say they were not well prepared in writing skills, and

females were less likely (34.9%) than males (50%) to say they were not well prepared in musical and artistic skills. Females were less confident in their science abilities than males with 8.5% of females and 16.7% of males saying they were very well prepared, 44.5% of females and 59% of males saying they were fairly well prepared, and 47% of females and 24.2% of males saying they were not well prepared. Females (24.2%) compared with males (15.3%) as well as minorities (32.6%) compared with whites (14.9%) said they were not well prepared in history and social sciences. Finally, 27% of females versus 17.4% of males said they were very well prepared in art, music, and literature appreciation and 26.2% of females versus 37.4% of males said they were not well prepared.

Students were asked to indicate whether they thought counseling would be helpful to them in any of several areas. Minorities (58.7%) were more likely than white (30.9%) to indicate they needed counseling on financial matters. Females (21.4%) were more likely than males (11.2%) and minorities (23.8%) were more likely than whites (12.2%) to say they needed counseling on test or speech anxiety.

Students were asked to indicate what they were planning to major in and males (24.1%) were more likely than females (10.8%) to be planning a major in business and males (23.2%) were more likely than females (4.4%) to be planning a major in math or science.

Students were asked to indicate the amount of education obtained by their parents. There were age and ethnic differences with minority students (17.5%) more likely than white students (1.8%) and older students (17.8%) more than younger students (2.8%) more likely to say their mother had an eighth grade education or less. Minority (22%) more than white (4.6%) and older (22.5%) more than younger students (5.2%) were likely to say this of their father as well.

DISCUSSION

The above results show age, sex and ethnic differences among our students that are relevant to the organization and practices of the General College. Some of the differences found suggest that on the variables examined, GC students reflect what has been historically perceived as differences between male and female academic competencies. Females perceived themselves as less well prepared in math and science compared to males, while males report feeling less confident with writing and artistic skills. Female and minority students were also more likely to admit counseling needs compared to males, and males indicated interest in traditionally male-dominated college majors compared to females.

These results suggest that sub-groups of GC students have educational needs which may need to be specifically addressed. As more information is collected on student sub-groups, particular programs and services may need to be developed for them. For example, women students could be better informed as to opportunities for them in traditionally male-dominated occupations such as engineering and business, and males could be educated about nursing and elementary education as possibilities. Students older than 22 years old could be informed about baccalaureate degrees both within and outside the College since transfer seems to be less likely for older students. Counseling outreach activity to students who express needs in certain areas is another advantage of identifying issues related to student sub-groups.

This paper represents an effort to begin to examine the difference among selected GC student sub-groups. Future research could focus on other sub-groups (e.g., a particular ethnic group and older white males) as a

means to better serve them. As the College continues to define its future goals and mission, the needs of selected groups of students should be considered as they may be very different from the more typical student.