

**Assessment corner**

# Survey shows freshmen value academic quality, selection

More than 37 percent of the CU-Colorado Springs freshmen class chose the university because of its academic reputation, according a survey administered by the Office of Institutional Research.

The Student Assessment Committee, the Student Success Center and Institutional Research joined forces this fall to ask students about their backgrounds, aspirations and their expectations of college.

The data gleaned from 425 new student responses will help the university better understand student needs and make the university more accountable, according to Veronica Gardner, professional research assistant, Office of Institutional Research.

“Assessment at CU-Colorado Springs is not viewed purely as an external demand but instead as an institutional priority – a way of life for the university,” Gardner said. “The campus is committed to meaningful program assessment that results in program improvement and responsiveness.”

The top reasons freshmen chose the university, according to the survey, were:

- The university offered the major I wanted (59 percent)
- The school was cost competitive (42 percent)
- The school’s academic reputation (37 percent)
- I could live in parent’s home while attending the university (32 percent)

Of particular interest to Gardner was a more than 10 percent increase in the number of students who said the university offered the major they desired. Last year’s freshman survey showed that 48.3 percent of those surveyed chose the university because it offered the major they wanted. Additionally, 63 percent of this year’s freshman plan to stay at the university to complete their degree — a more than 20 percent increase from five years ago.

“Prospective students are paying more attention to the academic programs available here,” Gardner said, “and we appear to be attracting a higher proportion of students who intend to stay.”

New freshmen also were asked to rate their abilities. Fully 76 percent of freshmen rated their multicultural awareness



as good or excellent. Most (66 percent) cited their oral communications skills as good or excellent and 61 percent cited their writing skills as either good or excellent. In contrast, the areas freshmen said they may experience “more than a little difficulty” include spelling (15 percent), paying attention (14 percent) and computer use (13 percent).

Gardner pointed out that the statistics show signs of improvement. In 1996, fully 24 percent of freshmen were concerned about their computer use skills.

The survey also showed that students value hands-on practical experience in the community. Of those who responded, 71 percent said they believed it important to gain practical experience within the community as part of their education.

The survey drew a response of 425 from a freshman class of 815, Gardner said, and closely mirrored known statistics about the class. About 65 percent of the respondents were female and the average age was 18. Slightly more than half of the respondents were enrolled in a major within the College of Letters, Arts and Sciences, 20 percent were engineering majors, 20 percent were business majors, and 8 percent were nursing majors. Eighteen percent of entering freshmen said they were members of ethnic minority groups.

The Assessment Corner will be a regular *Communique* feature. For more details of the survey, contact Gardner, Institutional Research, 262- 4186.

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UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO-COLORADO SPRINGS

Tom Hutton, *director, Office of University Relations*  
Margo Baker, *assoc. director, Office of University Relations*  
Jane Wampler, *contributor*  
RoxAnne Krute, *graphic designer*

Office of University Relations  
1420 Austin Bluffs Parkway P. O. Box 7150  
Colorado Springs, CO 80933-7150  
(719) 262-3439 Fax: (719) 262-3683