



TO: Lauren Noble, Executive Director – William F. Buckley, Jr. Program at Yale
FROM: Jim McLaughlin and Rob Schmidt, McLaughlin & Associates
Re: National Undergraduate Study – Executive Summary
Date: October 22, 2019

Below are the key findings from our fifth annual national study of undergraduates on behalf of the William F. Buckley, Jr. Program at Yale.

Part I – The Constitution, First Amendment and Free Speech

Strong majorities of students believe the Constitution and the First Amendment are important and still need to be followed and respected. A majority continues to oppose speech codes on campus.

- By a greater than two to one margin, students believe the Constitution is a very important document for our country that serves as the indispensable rulebook for honest government (63%) rather than it being an outdated document and that amending the Constitution is too slow and difficult of a process (27%).
 - Conservative students are more likely to believe in the Constitution’s importance, 83% to 13%, while liberal students are less likely and more divided, 51% to 40%.
 - Men are more likely than women to say the Constitution is important, 71% to 57%, respectively.
 - Just slightly more than half, 53%, of Social and Behavioral Sciences majors say the Constitution is important, while 31% say it is outdated.

- When it comes to the First Amendment, 84% of students say it is an important amendment that still needs to be followed and respected while just 12% say it is outdated and can no longer be applied in today’s society. This is slightly improved from last year, when 79% said the First Amendment was important and 17% said it was outdated. In fact, this year’s 84% “important” response ties an all-time high from 2016 and the 12% “outdated” response ties an all-time low from 2017.

- Notably, there are 21% of students who believe the Constitution is outdated, but say the First Amendment is important and still needs to be followed and respected. Compared to the entire undergraduate population, these students are more likely to be Democrats (52%), self-identified liberals (61%) and female (66%).

- A majority of students, 55%, opposes their college or university having speech codes to regulate speech for students and faculty. Greater than one in three, 35%, favor speech codes. This is similar to last year, when 38% favored speech codes and 54% opposed them.
 - Students who attend a state school are slightly more likely than those in a private school to oppose speech codes, 57% to 51%, respectively.
 - By self-described ideology, conservative students are most likely to oppose speech codes (63% to 33%). The majority of liberals (56% to 37%) and moderates (51% to 35%) also oppose speech codes, albeit by smaller margins.
 - A slight plurality of African American students favors speech codes, 49% to 44%. Six in ten (61%) Hispanic students oppose speech codes, as do 59% of white students.

Part II – Intellectual Diversity on Campus

Most students share the same opinions and political beliefs as their friends or have an equal number of friends with similar and dissimilar opinions and beliefs. Half say they have felt intimidated in sharing their ideas, opinions or beliefs in class because they were different than their professors or classmates.

- Forty-three percent (43%) of students say they share the same opinions and political beliefs as all or most of their friends and 41% say they have an equal number of friends with similar and dissimilar opinions and beliefs. Just 11% say they have different opinions and political beliefs than most or all of their friends. This is largely unchanged from last year when 46% had friends with the same beliefs, 41% had an equal number of friends with similar and dissimilar beliefs and 10% had friends with different beliefs. In a follow-up question, 57% of students say this social dynamic is a good thing, 36% say it makes no difference and only 3% say it is a bad thing.
 - Among students in private schools, 48% have friends with the same beliefs and 36% have an equal number of friends with similar and dissimilar beliefs. By contrast, a slight plurality of students in state schools say “equal” (44%) and 41% say “same.”
 - Liberal students are most likely to say they have friends with the same beliefs, at 55%, compared to 44% of conservatives. Moderates are most likely to say “equal,” at 53%. Conservatives are most likely to say they have friends with different beliefs, at 17%.

- Exactly half, 50%, of students say they have often felt intimidated in sharing their ideas, opinions or beliefs in class because they were different than those of their *professors*. Forty-six percent (46%) say this does not occur often. This is similar to last year when 53% said they were often intimidated and 45% were not often intimidated.
 - Conservative students are most likely to say they have often felt intimidated, at 61%.
 - By major, students studying Humanities are most likely to often feel intimidated, at 58%.

- A slight majority, 51%, of students say they have often felt intimidated in sharing their ideas, opinions or beliefs in class because they were different than those of their *classmates or peers*. Forty-six percent (46%) say this does not occur often. This has changed slightly from last year, when 54% often felt intimidated and 44% were not often intimidated.
 - In this case, there is not as large of a difference in intimidation by conservatives and liberals, 57% to 53%, respectively.
 - Women (56%) are more likely than men (45%) to say they often feel intimidated.

- When asked about those with whom they disagree, 63% of students say that most of the people they disagree with are good people who just see the world differently and these fundamental disagreements do not impact how they feel about them. By contrast, 29%, say that a person's views impact how they see them and they cannot help but think negatively of a person if they hold viewpoints that are perceived as uninformed, intolerant or bigoted.
 - Students in private schools are more likely than those in public schools to say disagreements impact their views on others, 35% to 26%, respectively.
 - By ideology, liberals are least likely to say those with different opinions are good people, 53% to 41%. Seven in ten moderates (70%) and 75% of conservatives say those with opposing views are good people.

Part III – Hate Speech

Students are now much more divided on whether hate speech is technically protected under the First Amendment as free speech. Three in ten students believe it is appropriate to shout down or disrupt a speaker on campus and that physical violence is justified to prevent a person from using hate speech.

- Thirty-two percent (32%) agree that it is sometimes appropriate to shout down or disrupt a speaker on campus, while 61% disagree. This is a 16-point change from last year when students were more likely to agree with this statement, 41% agree to 54% disagree.
 - By ideology, liberal students are most likely to agree with this statement, 40% to 55%. Seventy-four percent (74%) of conservatives disagree, as do 62% of moderates.
 - Mathematics and Engineering majors are most likely to agree with this statement, 45% agree to 51% disagree. Social and Behavioral Sciences majors are least likely to agree, 28% agree to 62% disagree.

- Students divide, 48% agree to 45% disagree, on whether hate speech – no matter how racist or bigoted it is – is still technically protected under the First Amendment as free speech. This is also a 16-point change from last year when students were more likely to agree with this statement, 57% agree to 38% disagree.
 - Private school students are more likely to agree with this statement than public school students, 53% to 46%, respectively.
 - The majority, 51%, of liberal students disagree with this statement while 66% of conservative students agree. Moderates divide evenly, 45% agree to 45% disagree.
 - By race, African American students are most likely to agree with this statement, 58% to 37%. Hispanic students agree by a 52% to 43% margin while white students divide evenly, 46% agree to 46% disagree.
 - Male students agree with this statement 60% to 35%, while female students disagree by a 52% to 40% margin.

- Thirty-one percent (31%) agree that physical violence can be justified to prevent a person from using hate speech or making racially charged comments, while 62% disagree. This is mostly unchanged from last year when 33% agreed and 60% disagreed.
 - By class, Freshmen are most likely to agree with this statement, at 40%.
 - Thirty-six percent (36%) of liberals agree compared to 22% of conservatives and 30% of moderates.
 - Men are more likely than women to agree with this statement, 36% to 26%, respectively.
 - Mathematics and Engineering majors are most likely to agree with this statement, at 42%.

Part IV – Issue Analysis

A majority favors eliminating the Electoral College. While a plurality favors the Green New Deal and two-thirds favors Medicare for All, less than half would be willing to pay more in taxes to support these programs. Greater than eight in ten acknowledge that the national debt is a problem and six in ten support forgiving student debt and making college free.

- By a 54% to 31% margin, students favor eliminating the Electoral College and electing the President through a direct popular vote. Fifteen percent (15%) are unsure.
 - Seventy-three percent (73%) of liberal students favor this proposal, while 60% of conservative students oppose it. Half (50%) of moderates favor it and 31% oppose it.
- Students favor the Green New Deal by a two to one margin, 43% to 22%, however a sizeable 35% are unsure.
 - Nearly six in ten (58%) of liberal students favor this proposal. The plurality, 46%, of conservative students oppose it, but a noteworthy 28% favor it.
- Two-thirds, 66%, favor Medicare for All while 24% oppose it.
 - Eighty-five percent (85%) of liberals favor Medicare for All, as do 62% of moderates. The majority, 54%, of conservatives oppose Medicare for All, but 41% favor it.
 - By race, Hispanics are most likely to favor Medicare for All, 82% to 13%.
- Forty-seven percent (47%) would be willing to pay more in taxes personally to support programs like Medicare for All and the Green New Deal. Thirty-two percent (32%) would not and another 21% are unsure.
 - Sixty-three percent (63%) of Hispanic students would be willing to pay more in taxes as would 55% of African American students. Whites are much more divided, 41% yes to 38% no.
- Interestingly, there are 15% of students who favor either the Green New Deal or Medicare for All, but would not be willing to pay more in taxes personally to support these programs. Compared to the entire undergraduate population, these students are more likely to be Republicans (30%) and self-identified Conservatives (29%).
- Just 37% of students believe Social Security will be available to them when they retire. Slightly more, 39%, don't believe it will be available to them and another 24% are unsure.

- Forty-three percent (43%) believe the national debt is a huge problem that needs to be addressed immediately, either through spending reforms or revenue raising measures. An identical 43% believes that while the national debt is a problem, there are other issues that need to be addressed more immediately, such as combatting climate change and reducing income inequality. Just 6% say the national debt is not a problem that concerns them.
 - By ideology, 58% of conservatives say the national debt is a huge problem compared to 54% of liberals who say there are other issues that need to be addressed more immediately.
 - There are noteworthy differences by major. Pluralities of Social and Behavioral Sciences majors and Humanities majors say other issues need to be addressed more immediately, 46% and 48%, respectively. Comparatively, the majority, 52%, of Business majors say the national debt needs to be addressed immediately.

- When given a choice, 60% of students say they shouldn't have to go broke to pay for a quality education and we should forgive student debt and make college free. By contrast, 32% say students and families need to be more responsible when choosing a school within their means and forgiving students loans isn't the answer because someone has to pay for it.

- However, there is a divide when it comes to the fairness of increasing taxes on individuals who never attended college. Forty-six percent (46%) believe it is fair for those who never attended college to pay more in taxes to make college more affordable for others or forgive loans for former students. A similar 45% say it is unfair.
 - Sixty-three percent (63%) of liberals say this is fair, but they are the only ideological group where the majority holds this opinion. Sixty-one percent (61%) of conservatives say it is unfair as do 53% of moderates.
 - The plurality of Business majors, 49%, says this is unfair while the majority, 53%, of Humanities majors says this is fair.

- There are 24% of students who support forgiving student debt and making college free, but believe it is unfair for those who never attended college to pay more in taxes. Compared to the entire undergraduate population, these students are more likely to be between ages 18 and 19 (39%) and moderate (47%) and are less likely to be white (47%) and Republican (14%).

- After graduating college, 37% of students anticipate needing financial assistance from their parents, while 44% do not. Nineteen percent (19%) are unsure.
 - Forty-five percent (45%) of liberal students anticipate needing financial assistance while 55% of conservative students do not.
 - Women are more likely than men to anticipate the need for financial assistance, 40% to 33%, respectively.

Part V – Capitalism and Socialism

Pluralities of students prefer socialism to capitalism and believe socialist principles have the potential to be good for America. However, high numbers of students were also indecisive.

- When given a choice, 37%, prefer democratic socialism and 30% prefer capitalism. One in three (33%) were unsure.
 - Fifty-five percent (55%) of liberals prefer democratic socialism and 62% of conservatives prefer capitalism. Moderates slightly prefer democratic socialism, 30% to 25%, however, 45% are unsure.
 - Pluralities of African American and Hispanic students prefer democratic socialism, 46% and 42%, respectively.
 - Pluralities of Humanities majors and Social and Behavioral Sciences majors prefer democratic socialism, 46% and 43%, respectively.

- A slight plurality, 40%, says that socialist principles have the potential to be good for America because they promote fairness and give more opportunities to the less fortunate and those who struggle in our society. Thirty-seven percent (37%) say that while capitalism isn't perfect, it has promoted freedom and opportunity for millions in America and across the world and socialism is too radical. Nearly one in four, 23%, were unsure.
 - Fifty-three percent (53%) of liberals say socialist principles have the potential for good while 65% of conservatives say socialism is too radical.
 - By race, African Americans are most likely to say socialism has the potential for good, 52% to 28%. Hispanics slightly favor the socialism argument, 43% to 39%, while whites favor the capitalist argument, 40% to 35%.
 - Forty-eight percent (48%) of men say socialism is too radical compared to the plurality, 41%, of women saying socialism has the potential to be good.
 - Pluralities of Humanities majors and Social and Behavioral Science majors say socialism has the potential to be good, 53% and 43%, respectively. By contrast, pluralities of Business majors and Mathematics and Engineering majors say socialism is too radical, 47% and 45%, respectively.

Part VI – Political Preferences and Activity

Greater than eight in ten Republican students support President Trump and the Republican Party. Bernie Sanders is the top choice in the Democratic Primary and most prefer a candidate who is a strong progressive instead of focus solely on defeating President Trump.

- Republicans, Independents and minor party respondents were asked about President Trump and the Republican Party.
 - Among the four choices provided, 40% of Republican students said they strongly support the policies of President Trump and the Republicans followed by another 45% who support Trump and Republicans more than they do the Democratic Party. Just 10% say they previously supported Republicans in the past and can no longer do so now since Trump has become President. A mere 2% say they have always opposed Republicans and Trump has just made it worse.
 - On the other hand, one in four Independent students support Trump and the Republicans, including 3% who strongly support Trump and the Republicans and 22% who support Trump and the Republicans more than the Democrats. The plurality, 37%, says they used to support Republicans but can no longer do so now since Trump has become President and another 20% say they have always opposed Republicans and Trump has just made it worse.

- Democrats and Independents were asked about their preferred candidate in the Democratic presidential primary. Among all Democrats and Independents, 93% said they would vote in the contest, with Bernie Sanders leading at 22%, followed by Joe Biden at 15%, Elizabeth Warren at 9%, Andrew Yang at 7%, Beto O'Rourke at 5% and Pete Buttigieg at 5%. None of the other announced candidates breaks 3%. Twenty-one percent (21%) are undecided.
 - Sanders' support increases to 27% among Democrat students, as does Biden's to 18%. Sanders and Biden are statistically tied among Independents, 14% to 11%, respectively, with the plurality, 31%, undecided.
 - Among liberal Democrats and Independents, Sanders' vote share increases to 25%. Biden's support is unchanged between liberal Democrats and Independents and moderate Democrats and Independents, 16% to 15%, respectively.
 - Sanders' support is highest among Hispanic Democrats and Independents, at 35%. He also leads Biden 24% to 16% among African American Democrats and Independents. Among Asian Democrats and Independents, Andrew Yang's support rises to 18%.

- Democrats and Independents care more about electing a strong progressive than solely defeating President Trump. By a two to one margin of 60% to 31%, Democrat and Independent students say it is more important to have a candidate who is a strong progressive and has the support of the grassroots than believing that the most important thing is defeating Trump, regardless of who the nominee is.

- One in four, 24%, have attended a rally or protest that advocated for a particular political cause in the last two years. Seventy-one percent (71%) have not. This is a decrease in participation from last year when 33% said they had attended a rally and 62% hadn't.
 - One-third, 33%, of liberal students have attended a rally or protest, while only 17% of conservative students have.
 - By race, African American students are most likely to have attended a rally, at 35%, followed by 29% among Hispanic students and 20% among white students.
 - By race, Humanities majors are most likely to have attended a rally, at 34%.

- Thirty-six percent (36%) of students have personally made a financial contribution to a service organization or charity in the last year. Six in ten, 60%, have not.
 - By ideology, liberal students were most likely to have made a financial contribution, at 41%. Moderates and conservatives were less likely, 34% and 33%, respectively.

Methodology: McLaughlin & Associates conducted a national survey of 802 undergraduate students from October 11th to 17th, 2019. All student participants were under the age of 25 and attend either a four-year private or public college or university on a full-time basis. This study's universe is the "typical" four-year undergraduate, therefore excluding undergraduates who either – attend a two-year school, technical school, junior college or trade school, are over the age of 24 or attend on a part-time basis.

All interviews were conducted online and respondents were carefully selected and screened from a nationwide representative platform of individuals who elect to participate in online surveys. Data for this survey have been stratified by age, race/ethnicity, gender and geography using the most recent National Center for Education Statistics Report (2017) to reflect the actual demographic composition of four-year, full-time undergraduate students in the United States. According to the NCES Statistics, there are 8,142,688 undergraduates who fall within these parameters.

Because the sample is based on those who initially self-selected for participation rather than a probability sample, no estimates of sampling error can be calculated. However, a confidence interval of 95% was calculated in order to produce an error estimate of +/- 3.5% for the 802 respondents. This error estimate should be taken into consideration in much the same way that analysis of probability polls takes into account the margin of sampling error. The error estimate increases for cross-tabulations. Totals may not add up to exactly 100% due to rounding, refusals and the ability for respondents to give multiple answers to certain questions. All surveys may be subject to multiple sources of error, including, but not limited to question wording and ordering, sampling error, coverage error and measurement error. This study is the fifth iteration of our undergraduate research on behalf of the William F. Buckley, Jr. Program at Yale.

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