

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: September 22, 2020

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

Part I – Coronavirus Impacts

Students are almost just as likely to be taking classes completely remote as they are through a hybrid model. Most say their school is doing a good job responding to the coronavirus.

- Greater than eight in ten (84%) believe their school is doing a good job on keeping students and faculty safe during the coronavirus.
- There is a divide as 41% of students are in a hybrid class format and 44% are currently taking all of their courses remotely. Only 13% are fully in the classroom.
 - Students in state schools (50%) are more likely to be fully remote compared to students in private schools (35%).
- Among sophomores, juniors and seniors, 84% were taking all of their classes in-person on campus prior to the coronavirus.
- There is a noticeable divide when it comes to preference, though, among these students as 38% still prefer to be in the classroom, 32% prefer a hybrid approach and 28% prefer fully remote.
 - Private school students (45%) are more likely to prefer in person compared to students in state schools (35%).
 - Conservative students (54%) are more likely to prefer in person compared to moderate (43%) and liberal (30%) students.
 - Male students (45%) are also more likely than female students (33%) to prefer in person.

Part II – The Constitution, First Amendment and Free Speech

While majorities of students believe the Constitution and the First Amendment are important and still need to be followed and respected, support for these positions are lower than in years past. A plurality now favors speech codes on campus.

- A slim majority, 52%, now says the Constitution is a very important document that needs to be followed and respected, compared to 36% who say it is outdated. This is a noticeable shift from last year when 63% said the Constitution is important and only 27% said it is outdated.
 - The plurality of liberal students (47%) says the Constitution is outdated, while majorities of moderates (58%) and conservatives (78%) say it is very important.
- Greater than seven in ten (72%) say the First Amendment is an important amendment that still needs to be followed and respected compared to 20% who say it is outdated and can no longer be applied in today's society. Despite the large margin in favor of the First Amendment's importance, this is the lowest reading in six years.
- The plurality (48%) favors speech codes, while 41% opposes them. This has changed from last year when 55% opposed speech codes and statistically tied with our 2015 poll, which was the only other instance when a plurality favored speech codes.

Part III – Intellectual Diversity on Campus

The majority of students now share the same opinions and political beliefs as their friends. Half say they have felt intimidated in sharing their ideas, opinions or beliefs in class because they were different than their professors or classmates – both of which are slightly higher than last year.

- The majority of students (52%) now say they share the same opinions and beliefs as all or most of their friends – a record high and the first time this has been over 50%. A third (33%) says they have an equal amount of friends with the same and different opinions and only 10% say they have different opinions than all or most of their friends.
 - As has been the case in years past, liberal students (65%) are most likely to say they share the same opinions as all or most of their friends. Fifty-seven percent (57%) of women have friends with similar beliefs as well.

- Fifty-three percent (53%) say they have often felt intimidated in sharing their ideas, opinions or beliefs in class because they were different than those of their professors, while 43% have not often felt intimidated. This gap has widened slightly from last year when 50% often felt intimidated and 46% did not.
 - Conservative students (59%) are most likely by ideology to say they have felt intimidated.
- A similar 54% have often felt intimidated in sharing their ideas, opinions or beliefs because they were different than their classmates or peers, while 42% have not often felt intimidated.
 - This is again a slightly wider margin than last year (51% to 46%) and conservative students (67%) are most likely by ideology to say they have often felt intimidated.

Part IV – Hate Speech

Students continue to be divided on whether hate speech is technically protected under the First Amendment as free speech. More students now 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.

- A slight majority (51%) disagrees that it is sometimes appropriate to shout down or disrupt a speaker on campus, while 40% agree. However, the “disagree” number is at its lowest point in four years.
 - A slight plurality of liberal students agree (46% to 45%).
- By a 47% to 45% margin, students agree that hate speech – no matter how racist or bigoted it is – is still technically protected under the First Amendment as free speech. These are similar to last year’s findings.
 - The majority of liberal students (52%) disagree while majorities of moderates (53%) and conservatives (58%) agree.
- Nearly four in ten (39%) agree that violence can be justified to prevent a person from using hate speech or making racially charged comments, while 51% disagree. This is the highest “agree” number in four years and an eight-point increase from last year.

Part V – Coronavirus Issues

Most students do not feel they are getting the same educational value in light of the coronavirus and nearly seven in ten are more concerned about finding employment opportunities after graduating. Two-thirds support mandatory mask wearing. The majority believes political demonstrations should be limited to help stop the spread of the coronavirus.

- The plurality (43%) says they feel more comfortable expressing their views during remote learning compared to when they are in the classroom. Thirty-five percent (35%) are less comfortable.
 - Liberal (46%) and moderate (44%) students say they feel more comfortable while a slight plurality of conservative students say they feel less comfortable, 41%.
- Only 31% feel they are getting the same educational value for the tuition during the coronavirus, while 57% say they are not.
 - Students in private schools (36%) are more likely than students in state schools (28%) to say they are getting the same educational value.
- Nearly seven in ten (69%) are more concerned about finding employment opportunities after graduating in light of the coronavirus.
 - By class year, seniors are most concerned at 78%.
- Students continue to be divided on whether the national debt is a huge problem that needs to be addressed immediately (44%) or is a problem, but other issues are more important (44%). Only 4% say the national debt is not a problem that concerns them.
 - Liberal students say other issues are more important, 51% to 38%, while 50% of moderates and 55% of conservatives say it needs to be addressed immediately.
- Two-thirds (64%) say masks are effective in stopping the spread of the coronavirus and support mandatory mask wearing. One in four (24%) believe they are effective, but do not support mandatory mask wearing. Only 8% say masks are not effective.
- The majority (56%) says in-person political demonstrations should be limited to help stop the spread of the coronavirus while 32% say they are necessary in these difficult times and can still happen safely.
 - Even 56% of liberal students say demonstrations should be limited.

- Thirty-seven percent of students have attended a rally or protest in the last two years – up 13-points from last year.
 - Liberals (37%) and non-white students are most likely to have attended a rally or protest.
- Seven in ten (70%) favor sending every registered voter in the United States a ballot so they can vote by mail.
 - Liberal students favor this 82% to 11%, as do moderates 68% to 20%. Even the majority of conservatives are in favor – 52% to 34%.

Part VI – Race Issues

A slight majority says America is inextricably linked to white supremacy, two-thirds say those who do not speak up about racism are perpetuating injustices and a majority favors defunding police departments. However, students divide on whether Yale University should change its name.

- By a 51% to 40% margin, students believe America is inextricably linked to white supremacy and most minorities remain excluded from the American promise of equality rather than believing America is moving forward and the promise of equality continues to be extended to more people.
 - Two-thirds of liberal students (67%) say America is inextricably linked to white supremacy.
- Two thirds (64%) agree that individuals who choose not to speak up about systemic racism are perpetuating the injustices that many Black and Brown Americans face.
- A similar 64% agree that due to systemic racism and the wrongful targeting of Black Americans by police officers, the recent rioting and looting is justified to some degree. Almost three in ten (28%) disagree.
 - Women (69%) are more likely to agree than men (57%).
- By a 52% to 40% margin, students believe we should defund police departments because they are failing many communities rather than believing we can reform the criminal justice system, but defunding police departments is a mistake.
 - Women (56%) are more likely than men (47%) to support defunding the police.
 - Nearly seven in ten conservatives (68%) believe defunding police departments is a mistake.

- The majority (52%) favors the U.S. government providing reparations to the descendants of slaves, while 31% oppose. A notable 17% were unsure.
- Despite a majority favoring reparations, students divide on whether Yale University should change its name – 41% to 40% – with a notable 19% unsure.
 - The majority of liberals (54%) want Yale to change its name while 65% of conservatives do not.
 - By major, only Social and Behavioral Sciences majors have a plurality (47%) believing Yale should change its name.

Part VII – Miscellaneous Issues

A larger plurality now says socialist principles have the potential to be good for America. Most do not trust the news media to report the facts accurately and want the press to do a better job of following journalistic standards.

- A slight plurality (44%) says socialist principles have the potential to be good for America while 37% say socialism is too radical. This is a slightly wider margin than last year when 40% said socialist principles have the potential to be good and an identical 37% said socialism is too radical.
 - Male students say socialism is too radical, 47% to 41%, while female students say socialist principles have the potential for good, 46% to 30%.
- Nearly six in ten (59%) do not trust the news media to report the facts accurately, while only 34% trust the media.
 - Trust is highest among liberals (40%) and distrust is highest among conservatives (76%).
- By a 51% to 39% margin, students believe the press needs to do a better job getting back to following journalistic standards rather than believing the press must take a more active role in combatting false stories.
 - Liberals divide, 45% to 46%, while two-thirds of conservatives (66%) say the press needs to do a better job getting back to following journalistic standards.
- Joe Biden leads President Trump 54% to 21% in the presidential horserace.
 - Biden wins more liberals (80%) than President Trump win conservatives (62%). Moderates vote for Biden 42% to 19%.
 - There is a noteworthy gender gap as Biden leads by 17-points with men (46% to 29%) and 47-points with women (61% to 14%).

Methodology: McLaughlin & Associates conducted a national survey of 800 undergraduate students from September 12th to 17th, 2020. 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 800 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 sixth iteration of our undergraduate research on behalf of the William F. Buckley, Jr. Program at Yale.

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