

# WHAT FLORIDA STUDENTS THINK

## Florida Leader's Annual Statewide Opinion Survey

This summer, *Florida Leader* conducted the second annual "What Florida Students Think" statewide survey of student opinion. *Florida Leader* surveyed campus leaders for their thoughts on critical issues facing students and the state. As of

press time in early September 1998, 257 students had participated, representing 59 colleges and universities. Students from nine of 11 state universities are included, as are students from 26 of 28 community colleges and 22 of 39 private colleges and universities.

The completed surveys were tabulated by Perceptive Market Research, Inc. in Gainesville, and the unexcerpted article and analysis are available at *Florida Leader's* web site, [www.floridaleader.com](http://www.floridaleader.com).

### Who Are You?

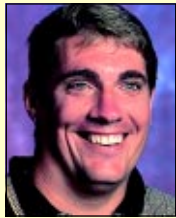
The survey respondents are some of Florida's top campus leaders, including 25 student body presidents and 94 other student government officers and members. Many others are deeply involved in Phi Theta Kappa, Omicron Delta Kappa, fraternities and sororities, orientation and ambassador programs, or as resident assistants. Nearly all of the

campus leaders surveyed juggle numerous leadership roles while working and attending class.

**Academic Matters.** The average Grade Point Average is 3.01, with 35 percent maintaining a 3.75 or higher. Seven percent have perfect 4.0 GPAs.

### Campus Leadership

As Student Regent, J.R. Harding, a Ph.D. student at Florida State University, says, "Student leaders owe it to themselves and to the leaders that come after them to maintain focus and commitment from year to year. They must work collaboratively and not against one another."



### Community Service

Maricela Langelier, student representative to the Postsecondary Education Planning Commission, says, "I don't think it should be mandatory, but I believe in getting involved in your university. That's the only way for changes to take place. It can be hard, because a lot of people are nontraditional students and they're working and they have families."



### Ethics Equals Success

Matt Yarber, 1997-98 student member of the State Board of Community Colleges, believes that honesty and integrity are critical for life-long success. "The key thing is to build relationships—it's not who you know, it's who knows you. In the long run, being unethical will catch up to you. On the success ladder of life, the people you step on are the ones you'll meet on the way back down."



**How Old Are You?** Florida's most visible campus leaders still are traditional-aged students, which explains the 71 percent of respondents who are 24 and younger. In the 1997 survey, 74% were under 24. Twenty percent report being over 30, with the oldest at age 56.

**Diverse Students.** Florida's campus leaders remain as diverse as the Sunshine State's continually growing population. While 59 percent call themselves white/caucasian, 13% identify themselves as African American/black, and 13% say they're Hispanic. Two percent are Asian.

**Going Grad.** Seventy-nine percent say they'll pursue advanced degrees, with 34% planning to enroll in MBA programs, 9% in medicine, and 8% in law. Of these high achievers, 45% plan to stay in Florida to attend graduate school, while 34% still are undecided.

**A Matter of Faith.** Florida's campus leaders have a spiritual side, with 84 percent acknowledging a religious affiliation. Of the major denominations represented, 29% are Catholic, 17% are Baptist, and 4% are Jewish.

**Staying Put.** Worries about a "brain drain"—grads leaving the state to work elsewhere—seem premature, as 43 percent of the respondents plan to live and work here after graduation. Eleven percent say that's because they have family here, and 10% say it will depend on their job offers and opportunities. Only 15 percent definitely will be saying "sayonara" after graduation.

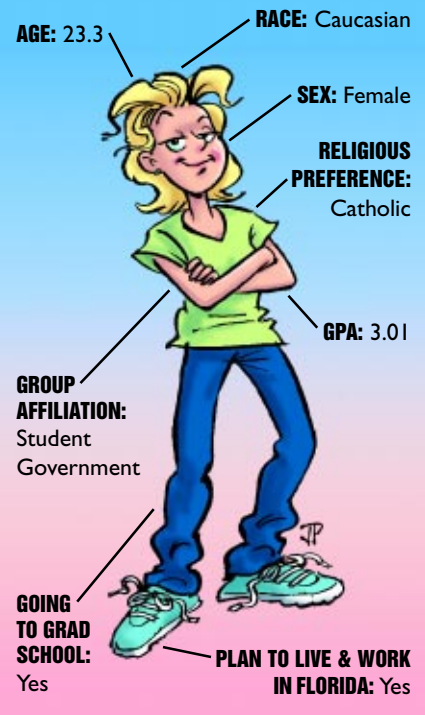
**Deciding on College.** Twenty-eight percent rated location as the number-one reason for picking their school, with affordability next at 22%. An institution's overall reputation (14%) and selection of majors offered (13%) were next important.

**Who Feels Safe?** Florida collegians are convinced their schools already are taking the necessary steps to protect them, as an overwhelming 98 percent say they feel safe on campus. "We have 24-hour security," says Lindsay Moyer, SGA vice president at Warner Southern College in Lake Wales, "and I know almost everyone since it's a small school." At the University of South Florida, SG Comptroller David Armstrong says students get their peers involved in providing for their safety.

"USF has several excellent programs to deter crime, such as the SAFE Team," Armstrong says.

At the University of Tampa, Diplomats President Samantha Swann says having safety conventions, a Laser Team, and campus security officers reassure her. Even when students know there are crimes on campus or nearby, some still don't fear becoming a victim. "Although it's urban and there is some crime, I believe God takes care of me," says Natalie Kirk, an admissions counselor at Palm Beach Atlantic College.

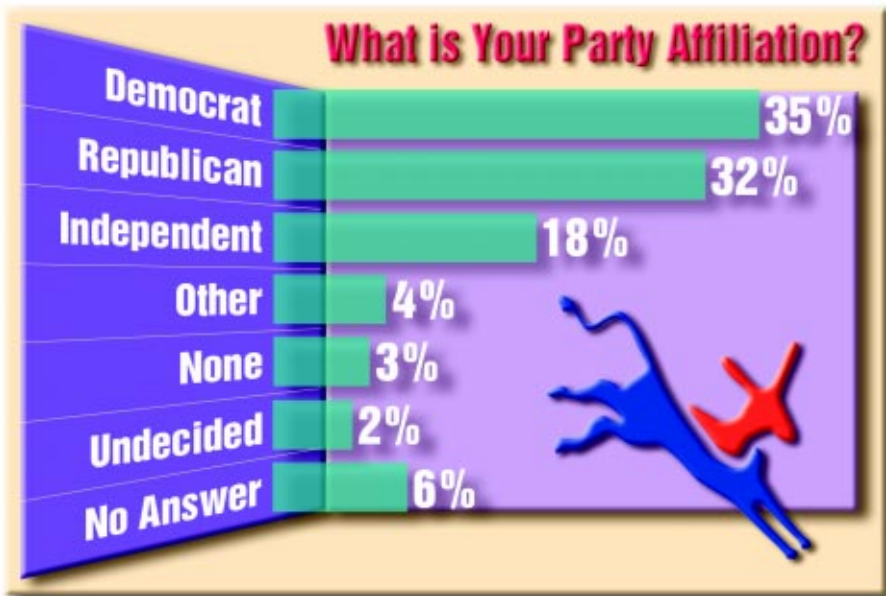
### WHO ARE YOU? (Typical Respondent)



**What's Your Problem?** Apathy again appears to be the biggest headache on campuses across Florida, but college leaders may be making some headway. While 28 percent say they constantly struggle to get students involved, that's down from the 32% in 1997 who said apathy was their toughest challenge. The next most bothersome problem is finding a parking spot (18%). Other campus troubles include the cost of college (13%) and course availability and variety (9%).

**We're Concerned.** About 34 percent worry most about their finances and how they're going to pay for school. Studying also causes some tension, not to mention lost sleep, as 18% of students surveyed say they're stressed about their grades.

Get the complete survey results at [www.floridaleader.com](http://www.floridaleader.com)



**The Political Landscape.** According to the second annual “What Florida Students Think” survey, the state’s future leaders aren’t leaning more to the left or right. This election year’s results match exactly what *Florida Leader* learned about student leaders in 1997. One quarter still call themselves conservative, with slightly fewer liberals making up 22% of respondents. Despite the wide show of hands from the crowd of moderates—who make up 41% of the bunch—32% are affiliated with the GOP and Democrats make up 35% of the respondents. Another 18% of students acknowledge they’re Independent, with the remainder shrugging that they’re undecided or simply “other.”

**Choosy Kids.** Students plan to make their votes count this fall, with an overwhelming 69 percent of survey respondents claiming they’ll march to the polls. Only 14% say they don’t plan to participate in the fall election, with just as many who haven’t yet made up their minds. Students are more enticed by this year’s candidate picks than last year’s group. In 1997, only 59% of students said they “always” vote, and 24% said they visit the polling booth “sometimes.”

**Survey Says...** Of the respondents who revealed their pick for governor, Jeb Bush has the most support from student leaders surveyed with 40 percent, while Buddy McKay runs second among candidates with 18%. About two percent each say they’ll check Josephine Arnold’s or Elizabeth Cueves-Nuender’s name on the ballot, and 20% have their eyes on other candidates. The good news for all vying to

lead Florida is there’s still a chance to sway the 18% of student voters who remain undecided. This year’s figures are consistent with those who projected their choice for governor in the 1997 survey results, in which 15% supported Bush over the 6% who championed McKay.

**The First Item of Business.** More than 100 respondents are adamant about Florida’s politicians addressing the quality of education. This top concern for 41 percent of student leaders surveyed—is up from 26% last year. This emphasis speaks loudly and creates a wide gap this year between students’ top choice and other issues they care about. Falling behind improvements to education, 18% feel candidates for governor should make crime a top priority in their platforms, while the cost of education runs a close third with 17% of campus leaders who feel that their wallets are pinched. Fourth on students’ minds is a concern for Florida’s precious environmental resources (13%). Health care, taxes, and welfare are other items important to Florida’s emerging leaders.

Last year’s ranking of the top five most important issues for Florida is identical to the 1998 results, with the exception of 1997’s number-four pick “poverty and homelessness,” which this year is surpassed by students’ concern about taxes. Among the 67 different issues students want candidates to address is “the morality of people in power,” “reforming lobbyists and campaign funding,” and “police abuse of power.”

**Open Forum.** With more than two-thirds of student leaders planning to vote this fall, gubernatorial candidates are

responding to students’ concerns. “Education is the most important thing we do as a state,” Jeb Bush says. “Every student should come to college prepared for higher learning.”

On the importance of the college electorate, Bush says, “I am energized by the enthusiasm showed by college students. I think they understand the importance of this election—that it represents the direction Florida will go in the next century.” Bush adds that he hopes to position the state as a leader nationally as well. “College students want high-paying jobs to be available when they graduate, quality schools for their children, and safe neighborhoods to live in. Strong, vibrant leadership is necessary for all these.”

For Lt. Governor Buddy McKay: “Career success today tracks successful post-secondary education. That is why my plan calls for assisting students who dream of a college education by increasing need-based scholarship funding, supporting affordable student loans, and providing special college-prep courses for students.”

In response to the issues student leaders indicated were important to them, McKay recalls his leadership on protection of the Everglades, the Greenways Program, Water Resource Protection, and Ecosystem Management. “I support a systems approach to environmental protection which will encourage and reward a conservation ethic and sustainable lifestyle in Florida’s businesses and citizens,” he says.

**The Future President?** Since so many of the respondents *Florida Leader* heard from are involved in student government, it seems odd that only 7 percent plan to one day pursue running for public office. But perhaps campus elections discouraged a few, since 38% say they might one day put their names in the hat, and 53% claim they have no aspirations to be career politicians. However, some campus leaders say they’ve already gotten their feet wet—18% have worked on a local, state, or national political campaign.

#### On the Campaign Trail

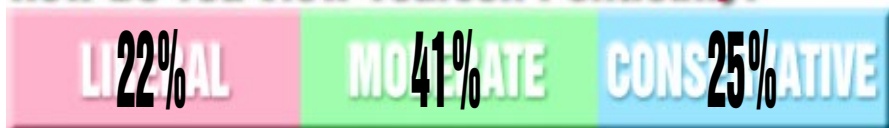
“I was involved in a mayor’s campaign at the St. Pete level. I was watching television and took note of a city council person who I thought had some very good ideas on how to run the city. I volunteered for the candidate, managing the campaign. I scheduled forums, including one at my college that featured all candidates.

“I learned that when you support candidates, you need to support them on more than one issue. You need to look broadly at how well the candidate would do in office. Also, I learned that by becoming involved, you can more easily affect the views of the candidate following the campaign, because they grow to respect and listen to their volunteers and managers. Sometimes you need to be close to a candidate to know whether you want to support that person, and becoming involved is the best way. Oftentimes, unless you really work with the person, you can’t be sure you know their whole agenda. Even then it’s sometimes difficult to decide if they’re the one who should be in office.

“Working for campaigns helps us to grasp issues and to learn everything about what’s important to families and our community. That in itself makes me more interested in someday becoming a candidate. I want to stand for something important and keep my promises, because we get elected based on what we promise, and the most important thing is to uphold those promises for the people and the community.”

—David Rodrigues, SG President,  
University of South Florida,  
St. Petersburg campus

### How Do You View Yourself Politically?



# Do You Volunteer in the Community?

**YES**  
78%

**NO**  
20%

**A Lifetime of Leadership.** When it comes to leading at college, students say managing their time (30%) and combating apathy (20%) are their two biggest challenges. Forty-four percent say influencing student issues and volunteering to serve are the best parts of being a campus leader. "It's really neat to see changes take place that you've helped implement," says Alyson Dion, vice president of judicial affairs in Nova Southeastern University's Undergraduate SGA. "When you come back 10 years from now, you can see things in place that you helped to put in motion." Getting management experience and networking run a close third (13%) and fourth (12%) as the main reasons students enjoy leading.

**Give of Yourself.** Despite the trend toward service-learning curricula and required community service, only 41 percent say volunteering should be mandatory for Florida students, while 55% say it shouldn't be required. At Palm Beach Community College-Central campus, Student Government President Jill Littlefield says, "To force students may be detrimental to both students and the community." Adds Angela Fernandez, a sophomore at Broward Community College, "Obligation would only cause resentment—help that isn't sincere isn't worth anything."

In support of required service hours, Katherine Catob, a member of the Medical Community Club at Manatee Community College, says, "It teaches students how to be part of a team, and it broadens a student's experience for life in general." Specifically, some feel that

volunteering can strengthen students' resumes while broadening their view of the world. "Working in the community can give the experience that you need for a political job," says Eugene Lee, sophomore class president at Florida Memorial College. According to 1996-98 Florida Board of Regents Student Member J.R. Harding, "Florida is supporting the students' education—two to five hours per week is reasonable gratuity." Of the 257 students surveyed, 78% indicate that they volunteer, while 20% said "no." Of those who don't volunteer regularly, 9% say "they don't have time," and 2% "can't find opportunities."

One of Florida's leaders in the service-learning movement isn't surprised that most students aren't interested in mandatory volunteering. "That's understandable," says Roger Henry, director of the Center for Service Learning at Brevard Community College. "But if you put enough incentives and support structures in place, you don't need to require service." Henry believes in making students eligible for service-learning experiences, which benefit the student and the community through objectives and critical reflection. "Once they taste what this does for the community and for themselves, they're committed. I've seen it thousands of times."

Kitty Gretsch, staff writer at the Florida Office of Collegiate Volunteerism, a statewide clearinghouse for college-level community service, says, "Most people feel like mandatory volunteerism is an oxymoron. Students

seem to like having a choice about whether to volunteer, and more are making the choice to do so. Many people who have never volunteered will be more than happy if you just ask them, which is very different from just signing them up without their permission."

**Ready for the Work Force?** As Florida students who are nearing graduation turn their focus to polishing resumes, they reflect on how well college has prepared them for corporate America. "It has given me the work experience and the social skills I needed to compete in the job market," says Stephanie Loftus, yearbook editor at Warner Southern College. Adds Eddie Ruiz, SGA President at Valencia Community College, "It has prepared me in a great way. I am ready to take on the world because of the leadership, knowledge, and friendships I've made."

**Contracts on the Table.** Only nine percent of students surveyed already have a job waiting, with networking (16%) and career fairs (15%) being the most prevalent job-search tools used by Florida students, followed by browsing the classifieds (13%), searching on-line (12%), and reading college newspapers and magazines (12%). In their first full-time positions, 25% expect to earn between \$25,000 and \$30,000, and 29% anticipate making \$35,000 to \$50,000 in their first full-time jobs.

For students entering the work force, having little or no experience (20%) and dealing with entry-level salaries

(15%) are the most frustrating aspects of the job market, yet only 20% believe they'll have difficulty in finding a job.

Of the 74% of students who predict they won't have trouble landing their first position, "having the necessary skills or experience" and "having chosen a field in high demand" tie for the top reasons students feel so confident, with 29% each. Planning to "be as prepared as possible" and "a very competitive job market" rank as numbers three and four for reasons Florida collegians are ready for the bookbag-to-briefcase transition.

## Virtue vs. Victory

### Is it more difficult to succeed if you're ethical and honest?

"While some do climb the corporate ladder unethically, eventually their dishonesty catches up with them."

—Erin Dunn, vice president, Student Accounting & Business Organization, University of South Florida, Bayboro Campus

"If you are totally ethical and honest, you will always succeed. It is the people who are not committed to ethics and honesty that have problems."

—John Nardolilli, SG treasurer, Palm Beach Community College

"As SG president, I often put my reputation on the line to make sure the right thing got done. Telling people the truth when it is not something they want to hear can make you seem tyrannical and feel alienated."

—Matthew Grieco, 1997 president, Student Alliance, New College of the University of South Florida

"It has been my experience that honest and ethical individuals truly protect themselves from scandals. Unethical people find only difficulty in achieving their goal."

—Taryn Fielder, SGA director of communication, Eckerd College

"It's possible to succeed in the long run this way, but for short-term satisfaction, ethics do little."

—Nicole Evans, member, West Indian Student Association, Florida International University

## As a Leader, What Do You Find Most Challenging?



## And the Survey Says...

Agree Disagree

59%	40%	The federal government isn't doing enough to control environmental pollution.
5%	93%	The federal government should raise taxes to reduce the deficit.
50%	49%	There is too much concern in the courts for the rights of criminals.
46%	52%	Abortion should be legal.
16%	83%	The death penalty should be abolished.
13%	86%	The activities of married women are best confined to the home and family.
20%	79%	Marijuana should be legalized.
14%	84%	It is important to have laws prohibiting homosexual relationships.
75%	23%	Employers should be allowed to require drug testing of employees or job applicants.
69%	29%	The federal government should do more to control the sale of handguns.
53%	46%	A national health-care plan is needed to cover everybody's medical costs.
10%	88%	Racial discrimination is no longer a major problem in America.
12%	86%	Realistically, a person can do little to bring about changes in our society.
41%	58%	Wealthy people should pay a larger share of taxes than they do.
40%	59%	Colleges should prohibit racist/sexist speech on campus.
13%	86%	People shouldn't obey laws that violate their personal values.
34%	65%	Affirmative action in college admissions should be abolished.
34%	65%	Undocumented immigrants should be denied access to public education.
28%	70%	All official federal and state documents should be printed in English only.

The above statements consist of previously published material authored by Sax, L.J., Astin A.W., Korn W.S., Mahoney, K.T. (1996). *The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 1996*. Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA.

**Tube Tops.** Even though hundreds of media outlets fight for attention, 48 percent of students still watch television as their number-one source of news. Local newspapers (15%) and radio (12%) fall second and third as the main ways collegians stay informed. More than half of the student respondents spend one to two hours per day to keep up-to-date using all news sources, including campus newspapers (3%), major dailies (8%), and news magazines (2%). The three most popular magazines and newspapers among students were *Newsweek* (13%), *Time* (12%), and the *St. Petersburg Times* (11%), followed by the *Tampa Tribune* (9%) and *People Weekly* (7%).

**www.news.com.** Nearly 10 percent of respondents say most of their information comes from the internet—more than double the 4% of students who got most news from the net last year. “It’s the easiest way to get information, because it’s a worldwide service,” says Daniel Alvareda, a Phi Theta Kappa member at Broward Community College. “At BCC, we have a free internet. I can get a New York newspaper, the *Herald* right here in Fort Lauderdale, or newspapers from my country, Argentina, by getting into the different sites,” says Alvareda, who connects at least once each day. “Any

research paper I do for classes, I always go to the internet first.”

Adds Heidi Hunt, president of SHAPE (Student Health Advocates of Peer Education) at Florida International University, “I use e-mail to communicate long distance with friends, and I’m on a few mailing lists for health issues. I see the internet as a wave of the future. It’s all in how you look at it. We hear a lot of negative connotations regarding the internet in the newspaper and the media—I have to delve in and get the positive things from it.”

**Is That PC?** As colleges integrate computer literacy into the classroom, 85 percent of student leaders say they’re on-line, up from 67% last year. More than half say they log-in at least once daily, while 35% can’t shake the habit—they dial-up several times each day. Only 6% of students could really live without the Net, because they only hook up monthly or even less frequently.

**Whatcha Doin’ There?** So, what do students do on the web? Twenty percent get connected for e-mail, followed by research (17%) and web browsing (15%). Other on-line activities include recreation (12%), downloading files (8%), chat rooms (5%), and maintaining a web page (3%). Less than one percent of students each said they use the internet for shopping, job-related

activities, and scholarship searches.

Another 6% of students say they use the internet for the conveniences of course registration, class assignments, and to check grades. “Our students can get their transcripts on the web and apply for admission for credit programs,” says John Stewart, registrar at Miami-Dade Community College, Kendall campus. “They can also get open and closed classes, and there are links to the instructor’s home page and room number with a map of the building that the class is in.” Stewart says he sees the growth of internet technology as an important factor in the development of on-line student services.

“When you’re offering them a look at what classes are available, the web is absolutely the way to go,” says Stewart, who is involved in an on-line degree audit project, in which M-DCC is slated to be a pilot school. “We’re definitely moving in that direction.”

**Net? Not!** Of the 14 percent who aren’t on-line, the most common reason is that students “don’t have the equipment” (44%), while another 15% say it’s “too expensive” and 10% report they “don’t know enough about it.” Only 5 students who responded haven’t gotten caught in the web because they say it’s a waste of time, boring, or too time consuming.

At the University of South Florida, Gloribel Medina says she isn’t on-line because costs have prevented her from really getting into computers. “I don’t have my own,” says Medina, who is co-chair of the Homecoming Carnival. “I just use it when I do papers or look something up.” Medina says she doesn’t feel like she’s missing out and even enjoyed making her own web page in a computer-based English course in which papers were submitted via the Web. “Whenever I have money, I would love to have a computer and be on-line. It’s not my number one priority, but computers are going to be a necessity the way technology is moving.”

### On-line All the Time

“E-mail is quick and convenient, and it’s cheap for long distance. My primary use probably is e-mail and then secondary is maintaining the KAO web page. At work, I’m constantly connected, and at home, I probably connect 2 to 3 times a day.

“I use it for educational purposes, not just for school, but for personal learning. If I’m interested in something, I’ll look it up and figure out how to do it.

“I’ve taken three classes on-line, including an algebra class where you could take practice tests, and it took you through sections of the chapter and had all the homework problems. It was kinda like a lab. I think you still need the teacher-student interaction, though.”

—Keith Whittaker, 97-98 treasurer, Kappa Alpha Order, University of West Florida, [www.uwf.edu/~kappa](http://www.uwf.edu/~kappa)

### Keep Up-to-Date

“I’ve got one running in my office all the time. I wouldn’t call it an addiction but more of a necessity. It is a link between myself and the Student Representative Board. For those that weren’t in town over the summer it helped me to keep them up-to-date. In the past, the SGA members that went out of town seemed to get off track and didn’t know what was going on. It took them a while to get things going. It’s helped me to let them know what was going on over the summer.”

—Rob Papandrea, SGA Vice President, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University

## Are You Online?

85% **Y**

14% **D**