

BGSU First Year Students: Twenty-Five Year Trends

**Office of Institutional Research
January 1999**

Content:

Abstract

Background and Methodology

Results:

1. Enrollment Management-Related Information

How many other colleges besides BGSU did you apply to?

How many other colleges besides BGSU admitted you this year?

Among colleges to attend, was BGSU your . . .

How important were each of the following in your decision to attend college in general?

How important were each of the following in your decision to attend BGSU?

2. Demographic Information

How many miles from BGSU is your permanent home?

What is the highest degree you plan to obtain at BGSU?

What is your best estimate of your parents' income?

Your Probable Occupation

Your Father's Occupation

Your Mother's Occupation

What is the highest level of formal education obtained by your father?

What is the highest level of formal education obtained by your mother?

3. Expectations and Values Information

How concerned are you about your ability to finance your college education?

What is your estimate of the chance that you will . . .

How important are each of the following to you?

Summary and Conclusions

References

Abstract

This report describes twenty-five year trends among first year students at the main campus. While most of the enrollment management-related and demographic information remained unchanged, several differences over time were found among students' expectations and values. These trends are compared and contrasted with national norms.

Background and Methodology

Bowling Green State University has collected descriptive information about its new first year students since 1973. This was done via the "Freshman Survey" developed by Dr. Alexander Astin and coordinated by the American Council of Education/University of California at Los Angeles between 1973 and 1979 and between 1990 and 1995, the locally-developed "BGSU Freshman Survey" administered between 1980 and 1989, and the locally-developed "BGSU First Year Student Questionnaire" which has been used since 1997. Many of the survey items are comparable across the twenty-five year interval and they group into three areas: enrollment management-related information, demographic information, and expectations and values information. These results have been used to develop descriptive profiles of the main campus freshman class (serving as a supplement to the data collected during the admissions process) and also to predict student outcomes such as retention.

This report arrays trend information from these freshman surveys. Significant changes over time and their implications are discussed. Comparisons with the results of a similar study carried out by Astin (1998) using national norms are also provided.

Results:

1. Enrollment Management Information

As shown in Table One and Figure One, first year students report applying for admission to a greater number of other institutions besides BGSU in recent years than they did earlier; the majority applied to no other college besides BGSU in 1973, but roughly equal proportions applied to none other, one, two, and three or more other in 1998.

Other enrollment management-related trends have remained more stable, as arrayed in Tables and Figures Two through Five. Most first year students were admitted to no other institution besides BGSU or to just one other. The University is the overwhelming first choice among colleges to attend. The most important reasons first year students offer for attending college in general remained "to be able to get a better job", "to learn more about things that interest me", "to be able to make more money", and "to gain a general education and appreciation of ideas."

The most important reasons first year students give for choosing to attend BGSU have consistently been "BGSU's academic reputation", "the cost of tuition at BGSU", and "BGSU offers unique educational programs." The University's academic reputation was a

considerably more important reason than the other two in 1973, but the importance given to the three reasons was more nearly equal by 1998. Similar to the BGSU results, Astin (1998) notes the growing importance of "the cost of tuition" as a reason for attending one's institution of choice.

Table 1. How Many Other Colleges Besides BGSU Did You Apply To?

	1973	1978	1983	1988	1994	1998
None	55.7%	42.4%	33.7%	28.7%	29.4%	31.0%
One	23.9%	20.5%	28.3%	26.9%	23.3%	25.0%
Two	13.2%	18.5%	21.9%	21.9%	22.5%	22.0%
Three or more	7.2%	18.5%	16.1%	22.6%	24.7%	22.0%

Figure 1

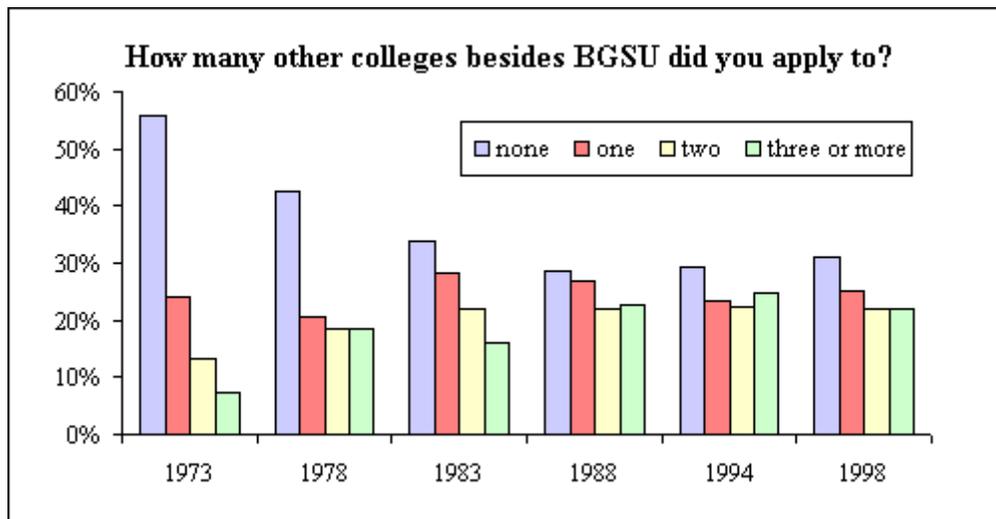


Table 2. How Many Other Colleges Besides BGSU Admitted You This Year?

	1973	1978	1983	1988	1994	1998
None	49.0%	13.4%	NA	31.2%	NA	39.0%
One	28.4%	37.2%	NA	30.1%	NA	31.0%
Two	15.4%	27.1%	NA	20.1%	NA	17.0%
Three (or more)	7.2%	22.3%	NA	17.8%	NA	13.0%

Figure 2

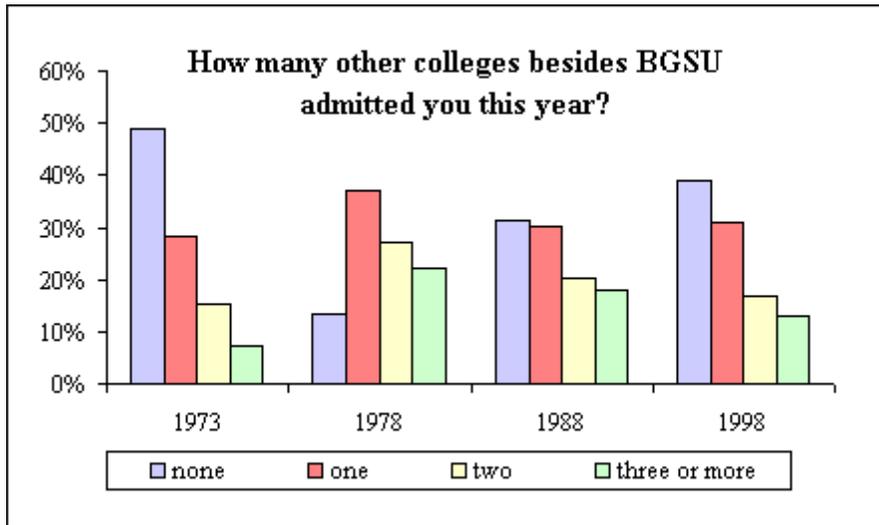


Table 3. Among Colleges To Attend, Was BGSU Your...

	1973	1978	1983	1988	1994	1998
First Choice	NA	83.5%	81.9%	77.3%	82.5%	85.0%
Second choice	NA	14.5%	15.8%	20.1%	15.4%	14.0%
Third choice or less	NA	2.0%	2.3%	2.6%	2.1%	2.0%

Figure 3

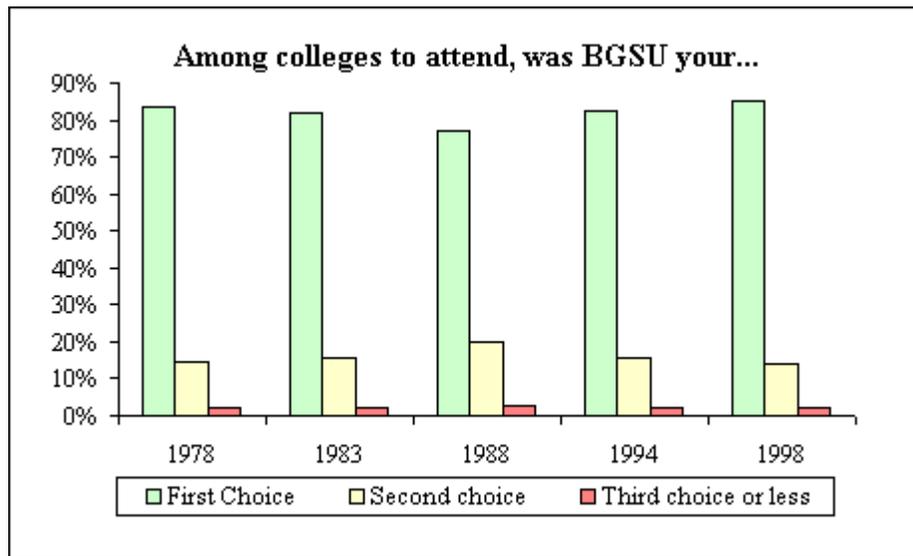


Table 4. How Important Were Each Of The Following In Your Decision To attend College In General? (Percent "Very Important")

	1973	1978	1983	1988	1994	1998
A mentor/role model encouraged me to go	NA	NA	NA	NA	9.7%	19.0%
I wanted to get away from home	NA	10.2%	14.5%	16.6%	19.8%	24.0%
My parents wanted me to go	NA	26.8%	19.7%	22.2%	29.7%	31.0%
Prepare for graduate/professional school	NA	31.3%	31.6%	41.2%	45.1%	NA
To be able to get a better job	NA	78.0%	83.7%	85.7%	84.6%	83.0%
To be able to make more money	NA	55.1%	62.7%	68.0%	75.1%	69.0%
To gain a general edu. & appreciation of ideas	NA	66.4%	65.8%	63.0%	54.8%	64.0%
To improve my reading and study skills	NA	34.2%	38.0%	34.7%	34.1%	35.0%
To learn more about things that interest me	NA	69.5%	71.5%	74.0%	75.2%	74.0%
To make me a more cultured person	NA	29.8%	NA	NA	34.2%	43.0%
To meet new and interesting people	NA	63.7%	65.6%	66.5%	NA	NA

Figure 4

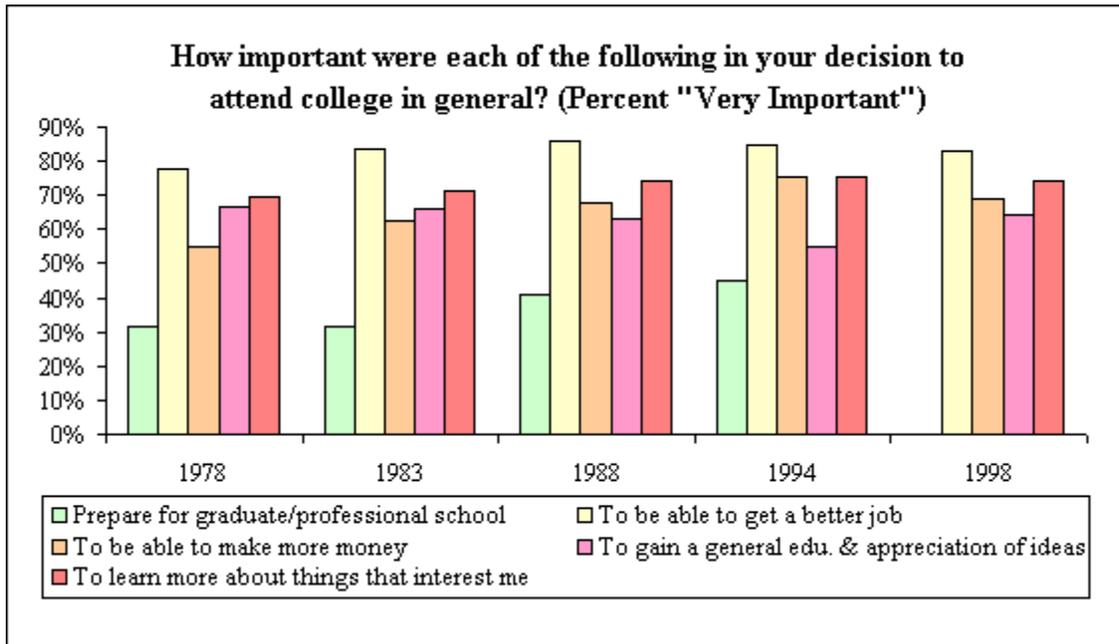
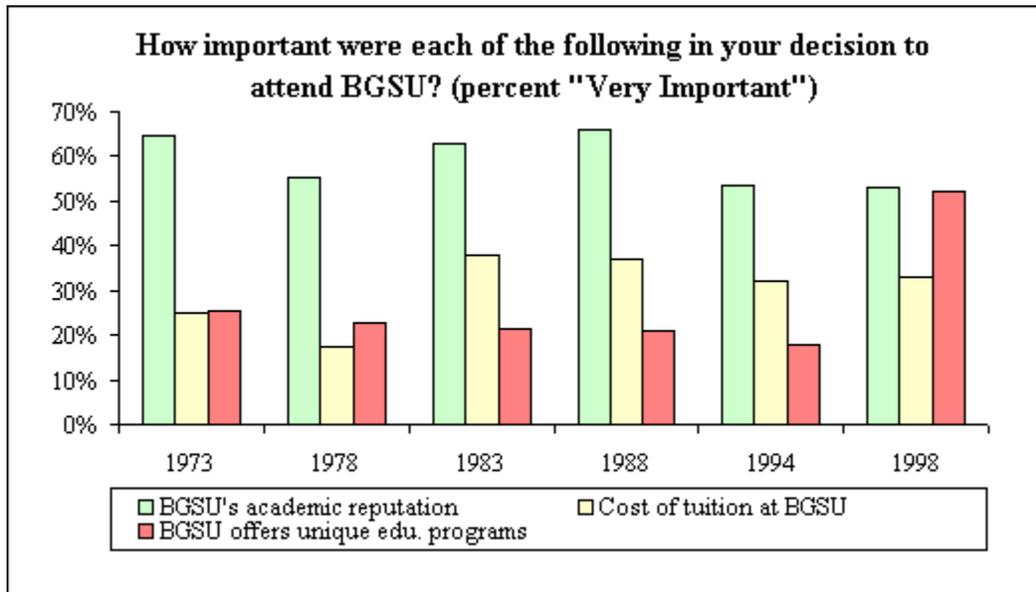


Table 5. How Important Were Each Of The Following In Your Decision To Attend BGSU? (Percent "Very Important")

	1973	1978	1983	1988	1994	1998
A friend suggested attending	NA	7.1%	20.8%	19.5%	10.1%	13.0%
A teacher advised me	6.0%	3.4%	3.4%	2.9%	3.0%	11.0%
BGSU has an attractive campus	NA	NA	45.1%	45.8%	NA	39.0%
BGSU offers unique educational programs	25.5%	22.9%	21.4%	21.0%	18.0%	52.0%
BGSU's academic reputation	64.6%	55.2%	63.0%	65.8%	53.7%	53.0%
BGSU's graduates gain admis. to top grad. / Prof. schools	NA	NA	NA	NA	16.8%	49.0%
BGSU's graduates get good jobs	NA	NA	NA	NA	42.5%	63.0%
BGSU's social reputation	NA	NA	27.4%	28.3%	25.4%	36.0%
Cost of tuition at BGSU	25.0%	17.2%	37.7%	37.1%	32.0%	33.0%
I wanted to attend a school of BGSU's size	NA	NA	23.1%	24.7%	39.8%	40.0%
I wanted to live near home	NA	NA	NA	NA	13.1%	23.0%
I was offered financial assistance	7.9%	7.9%	13.3%	14.7%	15.9%	33.0%
My relatives wanted me to come here	5.7%	4.0%	6.9%	8.0%	5.2%	12.0%

Figure 5



2. Demographic Information

Trends in demographic information are presented in Tables and Figures Six through Thirteen. The majority of students consistently reported that their home is between 101 and 500 miles from BGSU. A Bachelor's Degree remained the highest degree planned at this institution for most first year students. As would be expected due to inflation, there has been a substantial change in students' reports of their parents' income; while 89% of first year students in 1973 said their parents' incomes were below \$30,000, 70% of those in 1998 tell us that their parents' incomes are \$50,000 or more.

Business, education (teacher or administrator), and undecided remained the most popular occupational choices of first year students across the twenty-five year interval. While the rise in the percentage of students who are undecided about their occupation is also noted by Astin (1998), his finding of substantial increase in interest in business and substantial decrease in interest in education is not seen in the BGSU results (Table and Figure 9).

The most often reported occupations of first year students' fathers (business, skilled worker, engineer, unemployed, and teacher) have remained largely unchanged. The decrease in homemaker and increase in business as the occupations of BGSU first year students' mothers (see Table and Figure 11) is a trend also found by Astin (1998). Parents' highest educational levels (most frequently high school graduate, college degree, and some college) have remained largely the same over time, although the percentage of mothers with some college or a college degree has risen.

Table 6. How Many Miles From BGSU Is Your Permanent Home?

	1973	1978	1983	1988	1994	1998
10 or less	2.6%	2.6%	2.5%	NA	3.0%	3.0%
11 to 50	18.5%	21.0%	18.1%	NA	21.9%	23.0%
51 to 100	21.8%	23.0%	17.7%	NA	19.7%	18.0%
101 to 500	54.4%	51.5%	60.1%	NA	52.8%	54.0%
Over 500	2.7%	1.9%	1.5%	NA	2.5%	2.0%

Figure 6

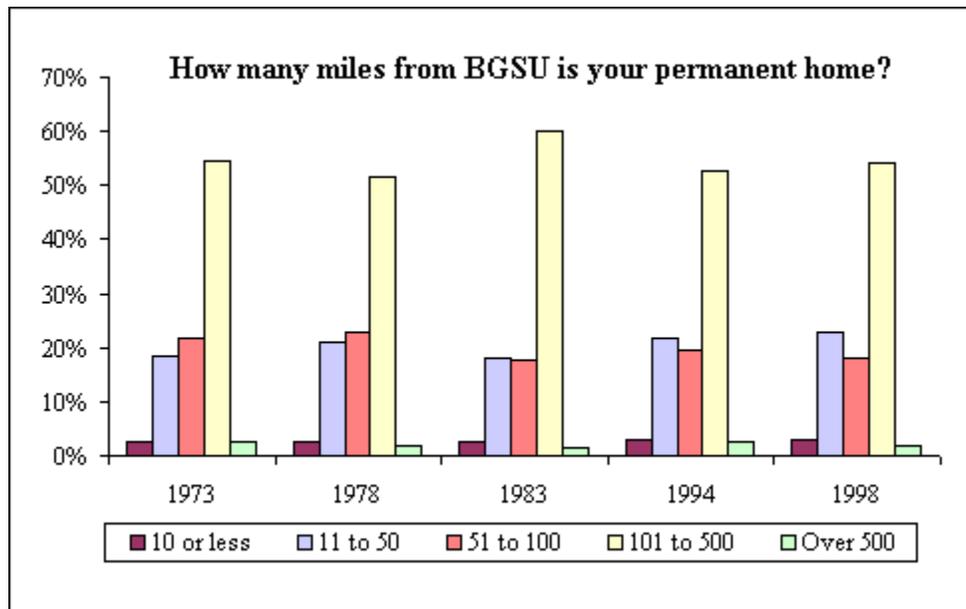


Table 7. What Is The Highest Degree You Plan To Obtain At BGSU?

	1973	1978	1983	1988	1994	1998
Associate (or equivalent)	3.1%	2.3%	0.5%	5.9%	1.3%	
Bachelor's (B.A., B.S., etc.)	77.3%	76.3%	74.0%	72.5%	73.7%	75.0%
Master's (M.A., M.S., etc)	13.7%	15.5%	16.8%	21.0%	20.3%	22.0%
Ph.D. or Ed.D.	1.2%	1.1%	1.6%	3.2%	2.3%	1.0%
M.D., D.D.S., D.M.V. (Doctor); LL.B. or J.D. (Law)	0.9%	0.7%	1.5%	1.8%	1.2%	1.0%
Other	3.3%	4.2%	2.6%	3.0%	1.2%	0.0%

Figure 7

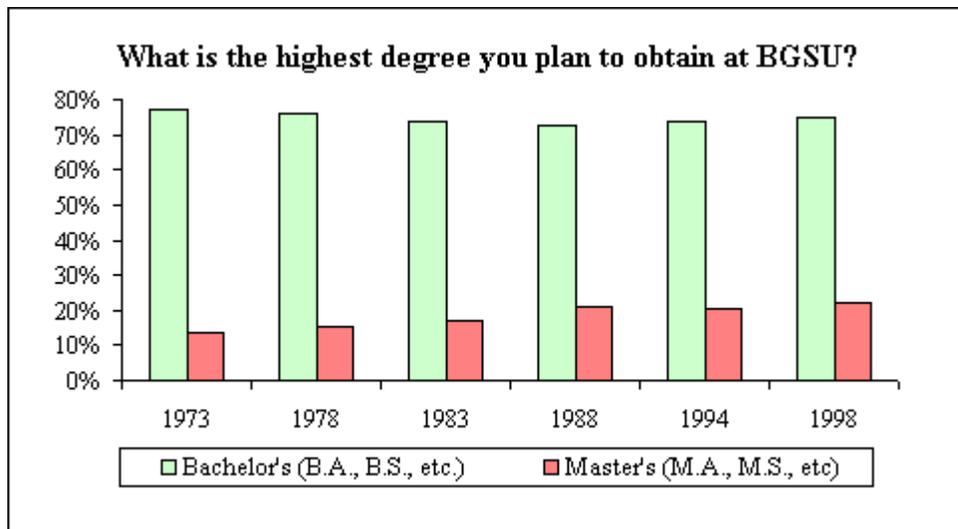


Table 8. What Is Your Best Estimate Of Your Parents' Income?

	1973	1978	1983	1988	1994	1998
less than \$20,000	68.5%	38.6%	20.1%	9.1%	6.7%	
\$20,000 to \$29,999	20.9%	32.7%	23.6%	14.1%	8.3%	10.0%
\$30,000 to \$49,999	8.6%	22.3%	40.8%	43.7%	26.1%	20.0%
\$50,000 or more	2.3%	6.5%				
\$50,000 to \$74,999					37.2%	36.0%
\$50,000 to \$99,999			13.5%	29.3%		
\$75,000 to \$ 99,999					12.0%	19.0%
\$100,000 or more			2.0%	4.0%	9.8%	15.0%

Figure 8

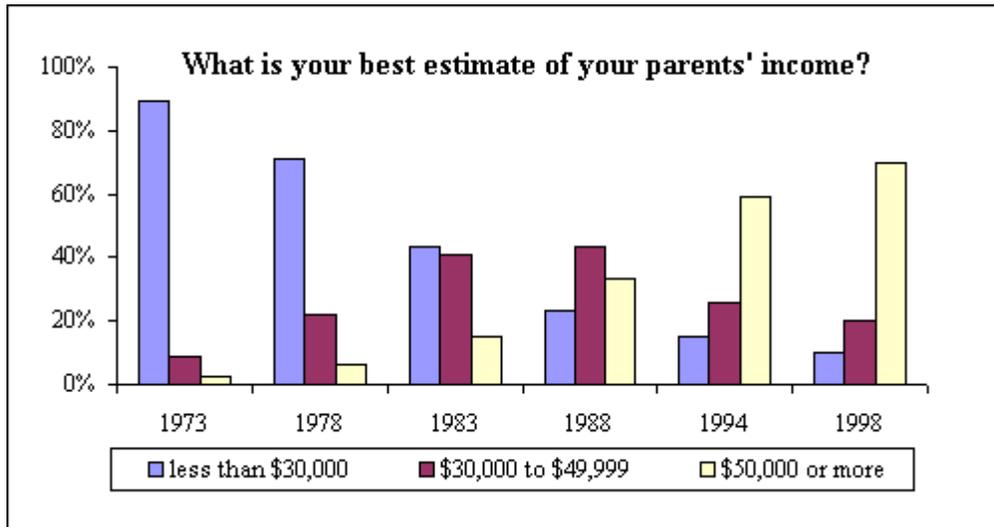


Table 9. Your Probable Occupation (More Than 5% of Respondents)

	1973	1978	1983	1988	1994	1998
Teacher or Administrator	19.8%	12.4%	NA	NA	16.7%	18.0%
Undecided	10.5%	9.2%	NA	NA	16.4%	17.0%
Business	17.7%	21.1%	NA	NA	12.3%	12.0%
Unemployed	0.0%	NA	NA	NA	NA	6.0%
Actor, Artist, or Musician	4.7%	5.5%	NA	NA	5.0%	5.0%
Therapist	NA	2.7%	NA	NA	8.8%	5.0%

Figure 9

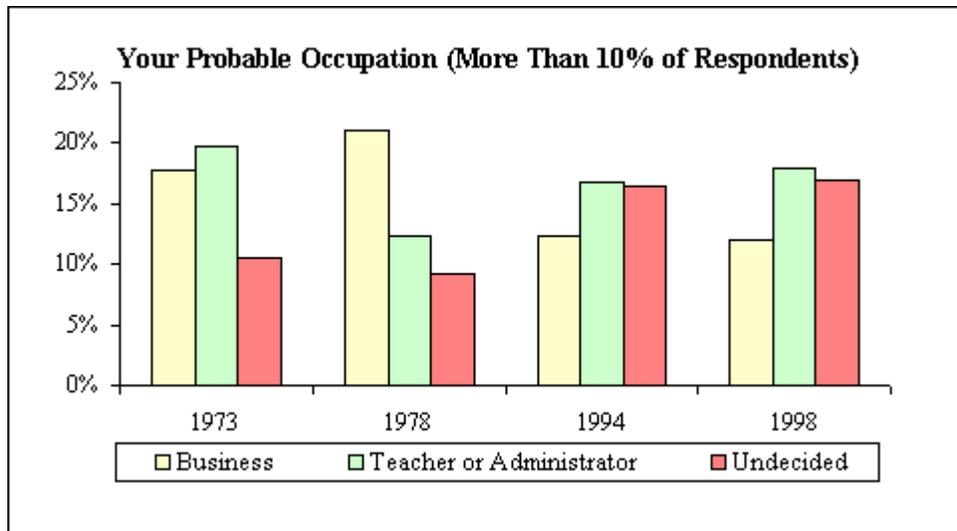


Table 10. Your Father's Occupation (More Than 5% of respondents)

	1973	1978	1983	1988	1994	1998
Business	NA	37.9%	NA	NA	31.9%	28.0%
Skilled or Semi-Skilled Worker	NA	15.2%	NA	NA	18.7%	14.0%
Engineer	NA	9.3%	NA	NA	6.9%	7.0%
Unemployed	NA	1.1%	NA	NA	2.1%	6.0%
Teacher or Administrator	NA	5.1%	NA	NA	8.1%	2.0%

Figure 10

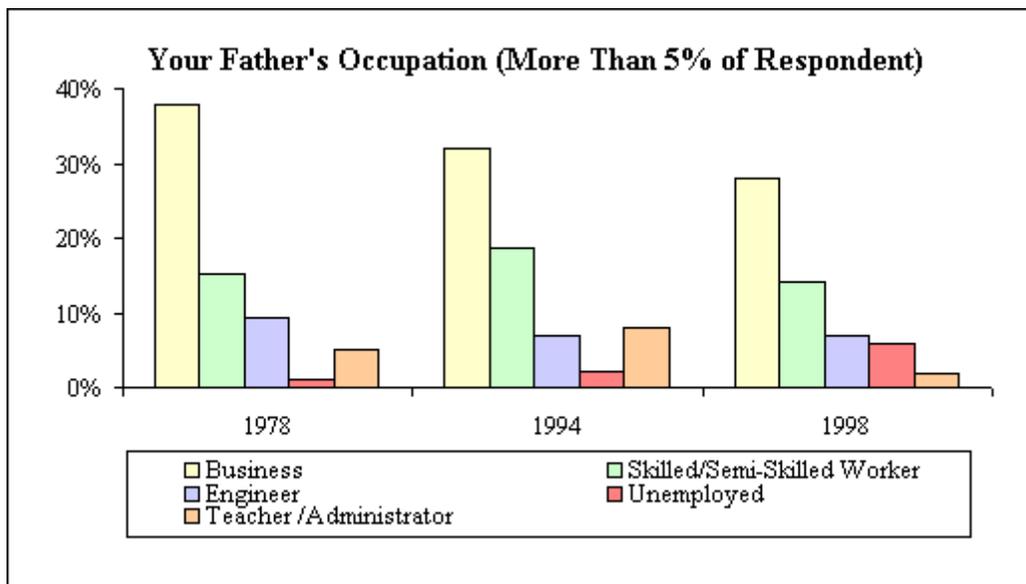


Table 11. Your Mother's Occupation (More Than 5% of respondents)

	1973	1978	1983	1988	1994	1998
Business	NA	18.5%	NA	NA	26.9%	21.0%
Teacher or Administrator	NA	10.4%	NA	NA	14.8%	13.0%
Unemployed	NA	6.1%	NA	NA	3.2%	12.0%
Homemaker (full-time)	NA	33.5%	NA	NA	13.9%	9.0%
Nurse	NA	0.8%	NA	NA	9.5%	8.0%

Figure 11

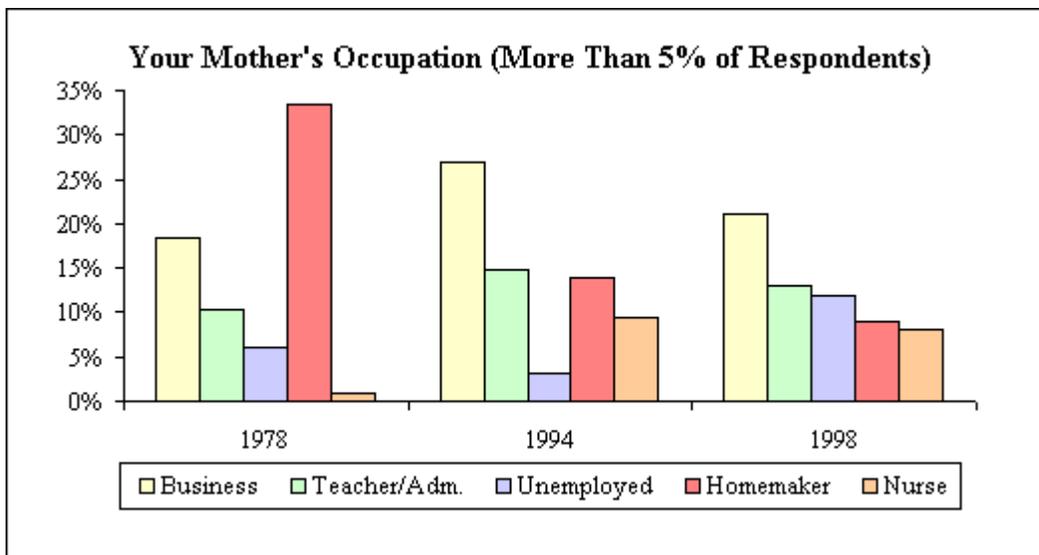


Table 12. What Is The Highest Level Of Formal Education Obtained By Your Father?

	1973	1978	1983	1988	1994	1998
Elementary school or less	1.8%	2.6%	NA	NA	1.1%	0.0%
Some high school	8.6%	6.8%	NA	NA	2.8%	2.0%
High school graduate	33.5%	30.3%	NA	NA	30.9%	28.0%
Postsecondary school other than college	5.4%	4.2%	NA	NA	4.8%	5.0%
Some college	16.1%	15.3%	NA	NA	16.9%	20.0%
College degree	21.8%	26.5%	NA	NA	26.4%	31.0%
Some graduate school	2.8%	2.5%	NA	NA	2.5%	3.0%
Graduate degree	10.0%	11.9%	NA	NA	14.6%	11.0%

Figure 12

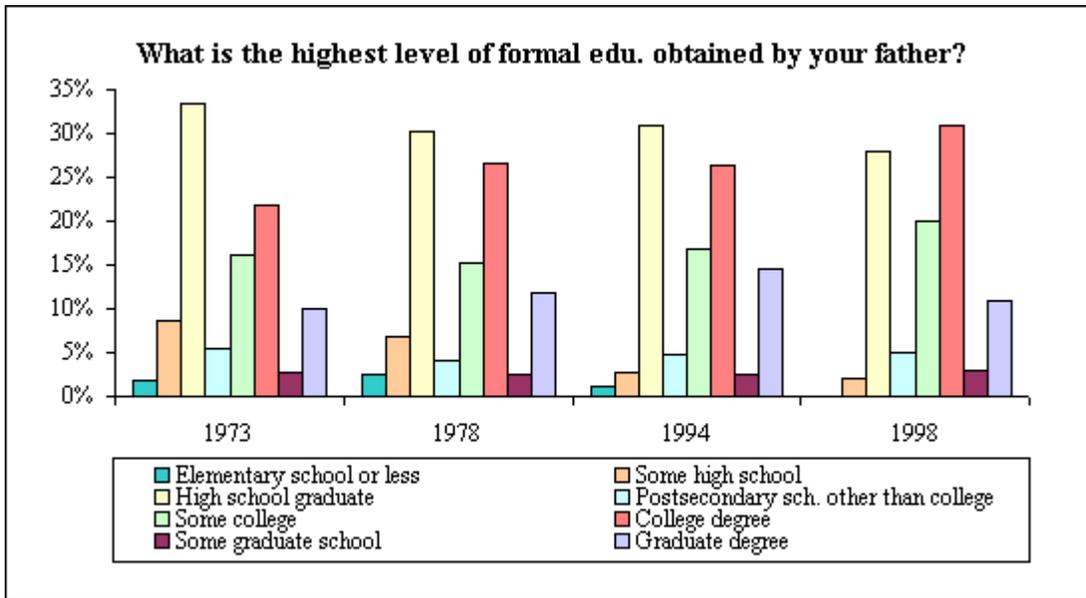
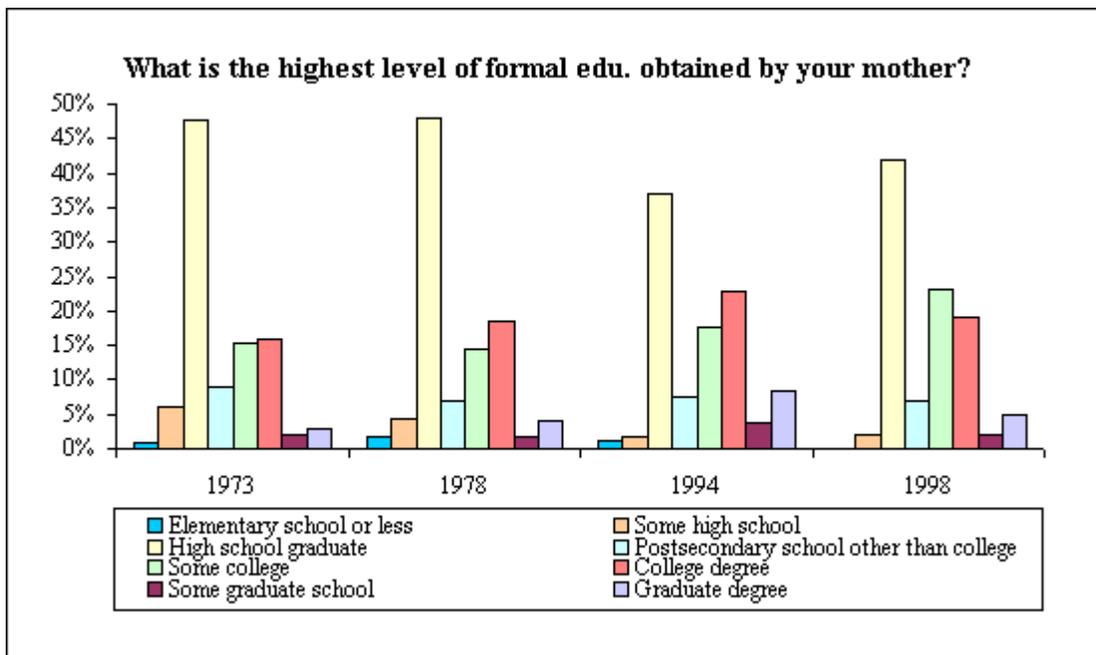


Table 13. What Is The Highest Level Of Formal Education Obtained By Your Mother?

	1973	1978	1983	1988	1994	1998
Elementary school or less	0.9%	1.7%	NA	NA	1.2%	0.0%
Some high school	6.0%	4.4%	NA	NA	1.8%	2.0%
High school graduate	47.7%	48.0%	NA	NA	36.9%	42.0%
Postsecondary school other than college	9.1%	6.9%	NA	NA	7.4%	7.0%
Some college	15.4%	14.5%	NA	NA	17.7%	23.0%
College degree	15.9%	18.6%	NA	NA	22.8%	19.0%
Some graduate school	2.0%	1.7%	NA	NA	3.8%	2.0%
Graduate degree	3.0%	4.1%	NA	NA	8.5%	5.0%

Figure 13



3. Expectations and Values Information

First year students' level of concern about their ability to finance their college education has remained similar since 1973; most have some concern; this differs from Astin's (1998) finding of rising levels of concern across the thirty years of national norms data.

As shown in Table 15 and Figure 15, there has been a substantial increase in the percentage of students who expect to be elected to an academic honor society, to graduate with honors, and to make at least a "B" average; these trends were also noted by Astin (1998). The increase in the percentage of students at BGSU who expected to need to get a job to help pay college expenses was not as large as the one found by Astin.

Some of the trends which have varied most over time and which differ most with national norms can be found in the values information arrayed in Table and Figure 16. The substantial increase in the importance given to being very well off financially and the decrease in the importance of keeping up to date with political affairs was also reflected in the national norms. The decrease among BGSU students in the importance given to developing a meaningful philosophy of life was not great as was found by Astin (1998) nationally. Interestingly, several other areas where Astin noted decreasing interest in the national norms were not replicated at BGSU; these included becoming a community leader, becoming involved in programs to clean up the environment, helping to promote racial understanding, and participating in a community action program; the importance attributed to these items remained stable or even increased here. Finally, while Astin notes a substantial decrease in the percentage of first year students nationally who felt that raising a family is very important or essential, the importance given to raising a family has significantly increased among BGSU students.

Table 14. How Concerned Are You About Your Ability to Finance Your College Education?

	1973	1978	1983	1988	1994	1998
None (I am confident that I will have sufficient funds)	31.1%	36.8%	27.6%	29.0%	27.5%	28.0%
Some (but will probably have sufficient funds)	53.2%	51.4%	55.5%	55.5%	55.8%	58.0%
Major (not sure I will have sufficient funds to complete college)	15.7%	11.8%	16.9%	15.5%	16.6%	14.0%

Figure 14

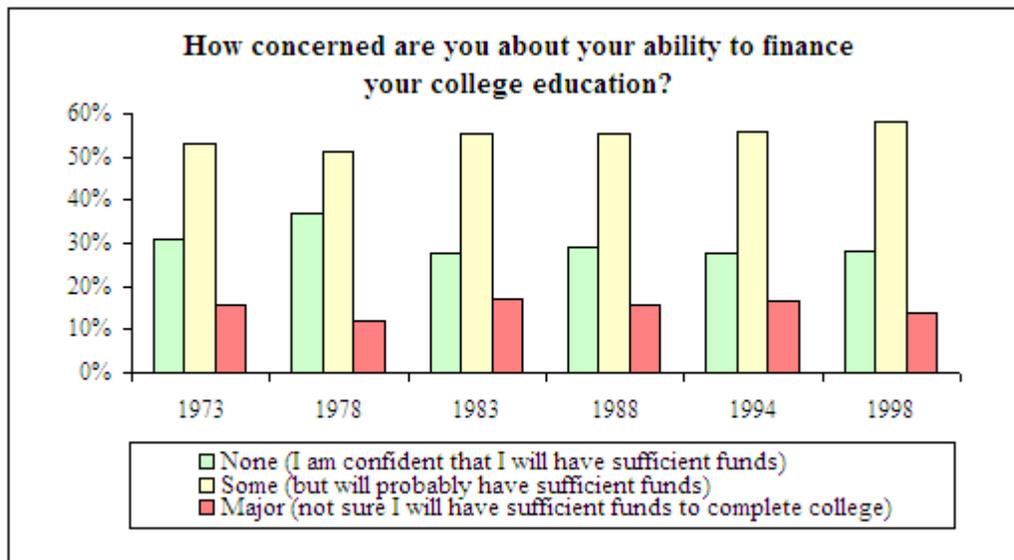
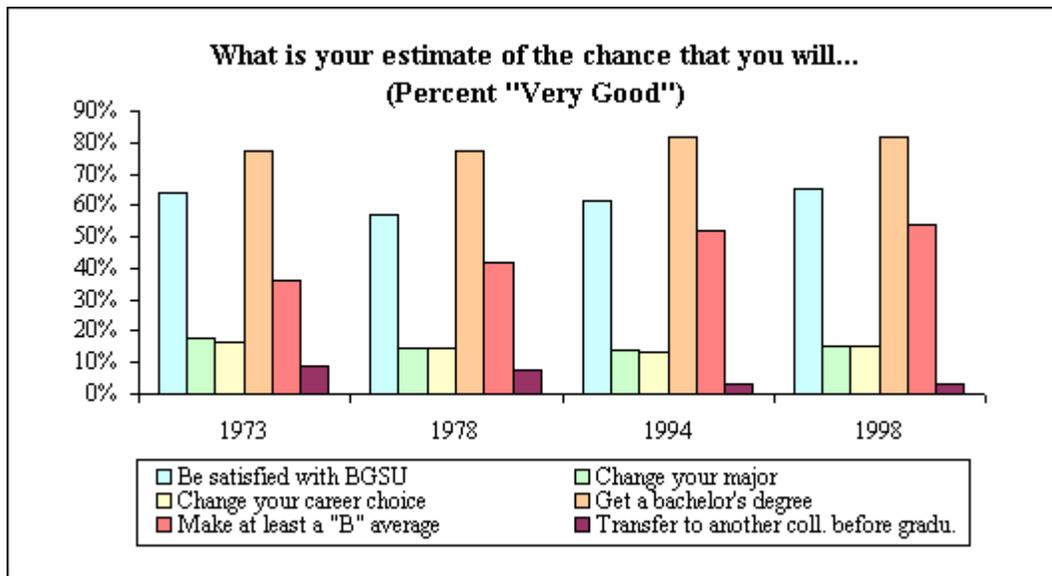


Table 15. What Is Your Estimate Of The Chance That You Will ... (Percent "Very Good")

	1973	1978	1983	1988	1994	1998
Be elected to a student office	0.9%	1.2%	NA	NA	1.8%	2.0%
Be elected to an academic honor society	3.0%	4.8%	NA	NA	7.3%	9.0%
Be satisfied with BGSU	64.2%	57.3%	NA	NA	61.3%	65.0%
Change your major	17.5%	14.5%	NA	NA	14.0%	15.0%
Change your career choice	16.7%	14.8%	NA	NA	13.1%	15.0%
Drop out of college permanently	0.7%	0.6%	NA	NA	0.4%	0.0%
Drop out of college temporarily	1.4%	1.1%	NA	NA	0.3%	0.0%
Fail one or more courses	1.6%	1.2%	NA	NA	0.5%	0.0%
Find a job in your major field after graduation	57.8%	68.6%	NA	NA	NA	74.0%

Get a bachelor's degree	77.2%	77.5%	NA	NA	81.9%	82.0%
Get a job to help pay for college expenses	NA	48.3%	NA	NA	57.0%	57.0%
Get married while in college	8.0%	5.1%	NA	NA	2.6%	2.0%
Graduate with honors	5.7%	6.3%	NA	NA	12.5%	13.0%
Join a social club, fraternity, or sorority	19.1%	18.8%	NA	NA	16.5%	21.0%
Join a student professional or stu. govern. org.	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	8.0%
Make at least a "B" average	36.3%	41.7%	NA	NA	52.0%	54.0%
Need extra time to complete your degree	3.1%	4.0%	NA	NA	7.2%	6.0%
Participate in student protests/demonstrations	NA	1.5%	NA	NA	4.4%	4.0%
Participate in volunteer/community service work	NA	NA	NA	NA	16.6%	24.0%
Play varsity/intercollegiate athletics	NA	NA	NA	NA	12.2%	12.0%
Transfer to another college before graduation	9.0%	7.7%	NA	NA	3.2%	3.0%
Work full-time while attending college	NA	NA	NA	NA	3.5%	3.0%

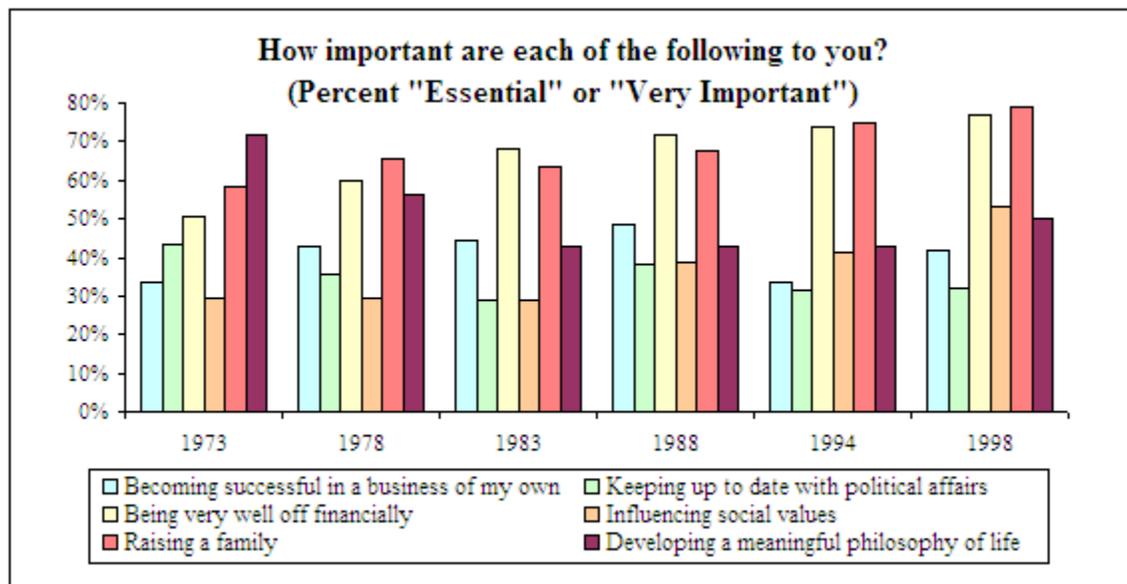
Figure 15



**Table 16. How Important Are Each Of The Following To You?
(Percent "Essential" or "Very Important")**

	1973	1978	1983	1988	1994	1998
Becoming a community leader	28.8%	NA	NA	NA	28.0%	29.0%
Becoming accomplished in the performing arts (acting, etc.)	20.7%	13.4%	9.8%	11.0%	11.0%	18.0%
Becoming an authority in my field	64.4%	75.2%	78.2%	82.3%	65.9%	64.0%
Becoming involved in programs to clean up the environment	25.6%	20.6%	NA	NA	22.6%	29.0%
Becoming successful in a business of my own	33.4%	42.7%	44.2%	48.3%	33.6%	42.0%
Being very well off financially	50.8%	59.7%	67.9%	71.7%	73.7%	77.0%
Creating artistic work (painting, etc.)	NA	14.4%	10.1%	11.0%	11.6%	21.0%
Developing a meaningful philosophy of life	71.7%	56.0%	42.7%	42.9%	43.0%	50.0%
Having administrative responsibility for the work of others	23.2%	35.2%	44.2%	44.9%	37.8%	43.0%
Helping others who are in difficulty	65.4%	65.2%	60.4%	64.7%	65.2%	73.0%
Helping to promote racial understanding	NA	28.3%	17.0%	21.1%	32.0%	38.0%
Influencing social values	29.3%	29.6%	28.7%	38.6%	41.5%	53.0%
Influencing the political structure	10.6%	9.8%	8.3%	13.5%	13.8%	18.0%
Keeping up to date with political affairs	43.5%	35.7%	29.0%	38.2%	31.6%	32.0%
Making a contribution to science	NA	7.9%	8.7%	8.9%	10.4%	18.0%
Obtaining recognition from my colleagues for my contributions	NA	49.5%	53.6%	57.4%	55.3%	53.0%
Participating in a community action program	NA	26.0%	20.7%	22.3%	19.7%	32.0%
Raising a family	58.2%	65.7%	63.7%	67.4%	74.7%	79.0%
Writing original works (poems, novels, etc.)	NA	11.9%	9.5%	11.9%	10.1%	19.0%

Figure 16



Summary and Conclusions

This study describes trends among twenty-five years of survey results from BGSU main campus first year students. Within the category of enrollment management-related information, the only substantial change noted was that recent students are applying to admission to a greater number of other institutions besides BGSU than had been the case previously. As paralleled by national trends, a greater percentage of first year students are undecided about their occupations, their mothers are more frequently in business occupations and less often homemakers, and their mothers' highest level of education is increasingly a college degree and less often high school graduation.

The expectations and values information showed the greatest changes over time and the largest area of divergence from national norms. Unlike the norms, BGSU first year students' level of concern about their ability to finance their college education has remained similar since 1973; most have "some" but not "major" concern. Similarly, the percentage of students at BGSU who expected to need to get a job to help pay college expenses, while somewhat increased over time, did not increase as much as for students nationally. Students' expectations about their academic success at the University have definitely increased over time; as is the case with national norms, the percentages of students who expect to be elected to an academic honor society, to graduate with honors, and to make at least a "B" average increased substantially between 1973 and 1998.

Like those nationally, first year students at BGSU in more recent years view being very well off financially as increasingly important and keeping up to date with political affairs as increasingly less important. They were less likely over time to think that developing a meaningful philosophy of life is important, although the decline was not as great as for students nation-wide. While becoming a community leader, becoming involved in programs to clean up the environment, helping to promote racial understanding, and participating in a community action program were found to be increasingly less important to students throughout the United States; the importance attributed to these items remained stable or even increased here. The importance given to raising a family has significantly increased among BGSU students over twenty-five years, although it decreased nationally.

The fact that undergraduate grade point averages, the percentage of students graduating with honors, and the number of students in academic honor societies has remained generally unchanged over twenty-five years at BGSU, when coupled with increasing academic expectations on the part of first year students, suggests that students, on average, may be having a more difficult time in recent years making the academic adjustment to college. In the same vein, students' expectations about financing college (which may be overly optimistic at the time of matriculation), when contrasted with the increasing need for part-time employment and for students to take out large loans, may place even greater stress on students during their college years and after. The increasing need for greater academic and financial efforts on the part of students may be contributing to their increasingly customer-oriented behavior. The trend towards increased occupational uncertainty may be yet another source of stress for students. On

the positive side, the fact that BGSU first year students have not shown the trend toward self-directedness found among their peers nationally suggests that the University has an opportunity to facilitate students' altruistic interests – if it can attend to their academic and financial needs at the same time.

It should be remembered that none of the changes over time can be attributed to policies and practices at BGSU; they represent students' characteristics and beliefs as they enter the University. The task of the institution is to structure its activities to respond to these trends in a positive way. The task of the Office of Institutional Research, as it develops its research agenda, is to examine how students change during the period of their enrollment and how these changes relate to institutional actions.

As always, the Office of Institutional Research welcomes questions, comments, and suggestions for improvement concerning this report and its other products and services.

References

Astin, A. W. (1998). The changing American college student: Thirty-year trends. Review of Higher Education, 21(2): 115-135.