

Fall 1999 to Spring 2002

New Student Survey
Report



Prepared by

Dr. Barbara Astone
Office of Institutional Research
LaGuardia Community College
The City University of New York

September 2002

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Executive Summary

- ❖ LaGuardia's diversity is evident in the high number of foreign-born students among the new student population, who are in the majority at 65 percent. Of these, 49% have been in the U.S. for less than five years. Nearly half of foreign-born students indicate that their ability to read and write in their native language is very good, and almost as many rate themselves as average in this regard.

- ❖ About 38% of entering students were in high school just before entering the college; the largest number, 47%, were at work; 8% were looking for work; and about 6% were homemaking.

- ❖ Forty-five percent of new students have jobs, and most of these, 63%, say they work more than 20 hours a week. Another 29% of new students want to work. Only 11% indicate they do not plan to work while attending LaGuardia.

- ❖ 19% of new students have children of their own. Two thirds of the children are under six years old.

- ❖ Students' reasons for going to college cluster around opportunities for direction, self-development, and social and economic advancement. More than three quarters say that discovering their personal and career goals was a very important reason for coming to college. Almost as many students are also motivated by opportunities "to become an educated, cultured person" and for increased earning power and better employment.

- ❖ Success in college, according to many students, depends largely on having good teachers, attending every class, and getting guidance in deciding upon a future career.

- ❖ The great majority of new students are worried about having enough time to keep up with their studies; more than 80% indicate this to be a very important concern. The second-highest number are very concerned about having enough money. Also clearly on the minds of many students was the possibility of having trouble with difficult courses. Among students with children, nearly half are concerned about being able to arrange child care. To more than one-third of new students, getting moral support from family and friends is also very important.

- ❖ LaGuardia students have high educational aspirations. Only 15% plan to stop at the associate's degree; 38% say they are aiming for a baccalaureate; and 48% already have plans for an advanced degree.

- ❖ Students' plans regarding LaGuardia are tentative to some extent. A large number, 35%, do not have firm plans to stay until they graduate; 15 percent plan *not* to stay and 20 percent are not sure. For 41%, LaGuardia was not their first-choice college. At the same time, fully one-third of students were not enrolled in their desired major.

- ❖ While the great majority of new students expect to complete their degree, and most students do not anticipate skipping semesters, students are less certain about their academic performance. Less than half say there is a very good possibility of making a B average, and 20% of students anticipate needing extra help in courses.

- ❖ Among the 80% of students who say they plan to continue their education, 53% are planning to go to a CUNY college – 28% do not know yet where they will go.

Introduction

The LaGuardia New Student Survey is administered each semester to supplement our knowledge about students at a critical moment, the very beginning of their college career at LaGuardia. Two practical and important uses of such information are to include student perspectives in the ongoing processes of academic and institutional planning, and to provide insight into the various ways students' lives may be changed as a result of their attendance here. The survey provides valuable information about what students themselves bring to their college experiences.

Although there are several sources of student information already maintained at the college, the New Student Survey provides the most direct link with the broadest base on matters that concern what students think and feel – their educational and occupational plans, expectations for college, recent experiences, worries and concerns, self perceptions, and hopes for the future. It also fills some of the gaps in our knowledge about students' personal and academic backgrounds for a more complete understanding of their social and economic circumstances.

This report covers a three-year time period, 1999 to 2002. We hope these findings will inform the processes described above, and ultimately, the many programs and initiatives that have been established at LaGuardia to serve our students' needs and interests.

For additional information about the survey or its findings, please contact Dr. Barbara Astone in the Office of Institutional Research at 718-482-6130, or email BarbaraA@lagcc.cuny.edu.

Methodology

Questionnaires were distributed by faculty to 8,243 students in New Student Seminar classes during Fall 1999, Spring 2000, Fall 2000, Spring 2001, and Spring 2002†. Students were asked to complete the questionnaires either on the spot or within the next few days. Thirty-four percent were returned; the 2,803 usable responses provide the basis for this report. These responses represent 25.4 percent of all 11,046 degree-seeking entrants from the study period.

In order to evaluate the extent to which the survey respondents were representative of the new student population, key background and academic characteristics were examined in both groups. As shown on page *vii*, survey respondents are within one or two percentage points of new students on most characteristics, although there are slightly higher numbers of Asian students, 18-year-olds, and students in ESL programs in the sample. Despite these relatively minor differences, we can be confident the sample provides reliable information about LaGuardia's new students.

†The survey was not administered in Fall 2001

Comparison of Survey Respondents to All New Degree Students on Selected Variables

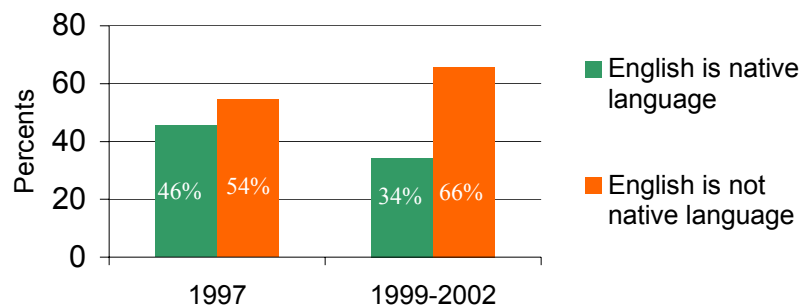
	Respondents (percents)	All New Degree Students (percents)
Gender		
Females	62.9	60.0
Males	37.1	40.0
Valid responses	2,803	8,241
Age		
17	0.7	0.6
18	14.1	9.2
19	15.2	14.0
20	12.9	11.9
21-25	28.4	31.4
26-35	19.8	19.0
36 and over	8.9	13.6
Median age	21	22
Valid responses	2,803	8,240
GED recipient		
Valid responses	9.4	9.7
	2,803	8,240
Ethnic Origin		
Asian	19.6	16.5
Black	18.6	19.7
Hispanic	42.4	40.6
White	13.7	17.8
Other	5.6	5.5
Valid responses	2,425	6,888
High School Average		
Less than 70	16.7	18.0
70 to 79	57.7	59.9
80 to 89	20.9	18.1
90 to 100	4.5	3.8
Valid responses	1,967	4,645
Writing Score		
Mean score on scale of 2 to 10	5.8	5.9
Valid responses	2,648	7,009
Math Score		
Mean score on scale of 1 to 40	23.4	23.0
Valid responses	2,594	6,886
ESL		
Valid responses	30.6	25.0
	2,803	8,243

Section I

Demographics and Socio-Economic Background

English Language Skills

Between 1999 and 2002, non-native-English speakers made up about two-thirds of entering classes, up from 55 percent in 1997. The self-reported ability in native-language reading and writing, according to most new students, is good to average: Only 12 percent rate themselves as having difficulty, while about half say they have a very good ability. Fewer than half of non-native English speakers say they use English “a lot” in their daily activities.



Percent of non-native-English-speaking students where:

English is usually used at home	7.9
Native language is usually used at home	58.3
Both English and native language are used about equally	33.8
Very good ability to read and write in native language	48.9
Average ability to read and write in native language	38.9
Read and write in native language with difficulty	9.2
Do not read and write in native language	3.1

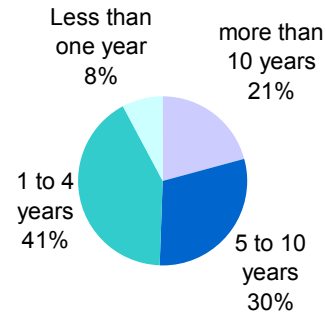
Use of English:*

At work	60.1
In daily activities	42.9
With friends	35.3

*Percent responding “a lot”

Length of Time in U.S.

The number of recent immigrants has increased in recent years. Also, in the past three years as many as 50 percent of foreign-born new students said they arrived in the U.S. less than 5 years earlier.

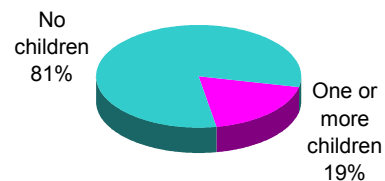


Time in the U.S.:

Always (born here or came as very young child)	34.7
Of foreign-born:	
more than 10 years	20.7
5 to 10 years	29.8
1 to 4 years	41.7
Less than one year	7.7

Parenthood

Close to one-fifth of new students are parents, down only slightly from 1997. Of those who are, nearly two-thirds have a child under six years old, and almost half have a school-age child.



No children	81.1
One or more children	18.9

Percent of new students who are parents with:

Children under six years old:

None	36.4
One	49.4
Two	11.8
Three or more	2.4

Children between 6 and 18 years old:

None	48.7
One	30.0
Two	16.0
Three or more	5.3

Religious Affiliation

About 57 percent of new students report having a religious affiliation, while 43 percent say they do not. Of those who do, about half indicate they are Catholic. The second largest group indicate a religion other than the denominations listed.

Percent indicating religious affiliation:

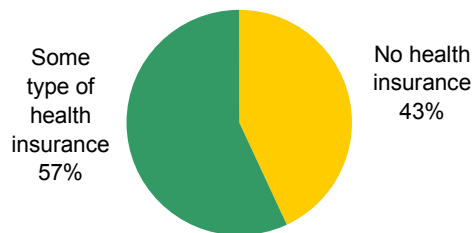
Yes	57.1
No	42.9

Of students indicating a religious affiliation:

Catholic	49.7
Other religion	25.5
Islamic	10.4
Protestant	9.9
Jewish	2.6
Buddhist	1.8

Health Insurance

A growing number of new students report having no health insurance. Between 1999 and 2002, that number was 43 percent, up 2 points from 1997.

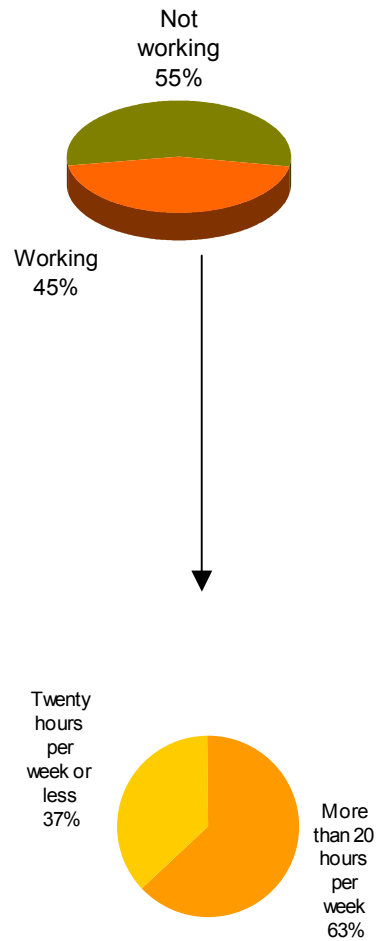


Some type of health insurance	57.0
No health insurance	43.0

None	43.0
HMO	15.2
Private	12.0
Medicare or Medicaid	14.3
Not sure of the type	15.6

Employment

The proportion of new students who are employed has increased slightly since 1997, from 52 percent to 55 percent. Of those who are employed, about 63 percent work more than 20 hours a week.



Student employment:

Not working	55.3
Working	44.7
More than 20 hours per week	62.8
Twenty hours or less per week	37.2

Expectations regarding work during first term:

Working more than half time	33.0
Working less than half time	24.5
Not employed but want to work	29.2
Not employed and do not plan to work	10.8
Homemaker	2.5

Parents' Education

The mothers and fathers of respondents are differently educated, with slightly more fathers having a higher education. In general, approximately one third of parents did not complete high school, one third have a high school diploma or GED, and one third have some college or a college degree.

	<u>Father</u>	<u>Mother</u>
Some schooling but didn't complete high school	31.5	36.8
Completed high school or GED	32.5	30.8
Some college	14.5	15.3
Completed College	21.5	17.2

Parents' Occupation

The largest single occupation group for both fathers and mothers is factory worker, trade worker, or service employee. About 27 percent of fathers, but only 15 percent of mothers, are business or administrative managers. About one-third of mothers are homemakers. Twelve percent of fathers and 10 percent of mothers are professional employees.

	<u>Father</u>	<u>Mother</u>
Factory or trade worker, office or service employee	58.7	42.7
Business or administrative manager	27.3	14.6
Professional	11.5	9.7
Homemaker	2.6	33.0

College Generation

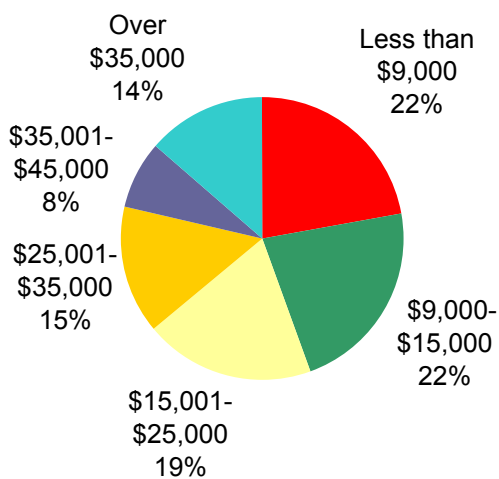
Nearly two-thirds of respondents were the first in their families to attend college.

Of students whose parents did not attend college, there are:

No sisters or brothers with college experience	63.3
Sister(s) or brother(s) who attend(ed) college	36.7

Annual Household Income

Sixty-four percent of new students report their family income to be less than \$25,000 per year; 45 percent indicate less than \$15,000.



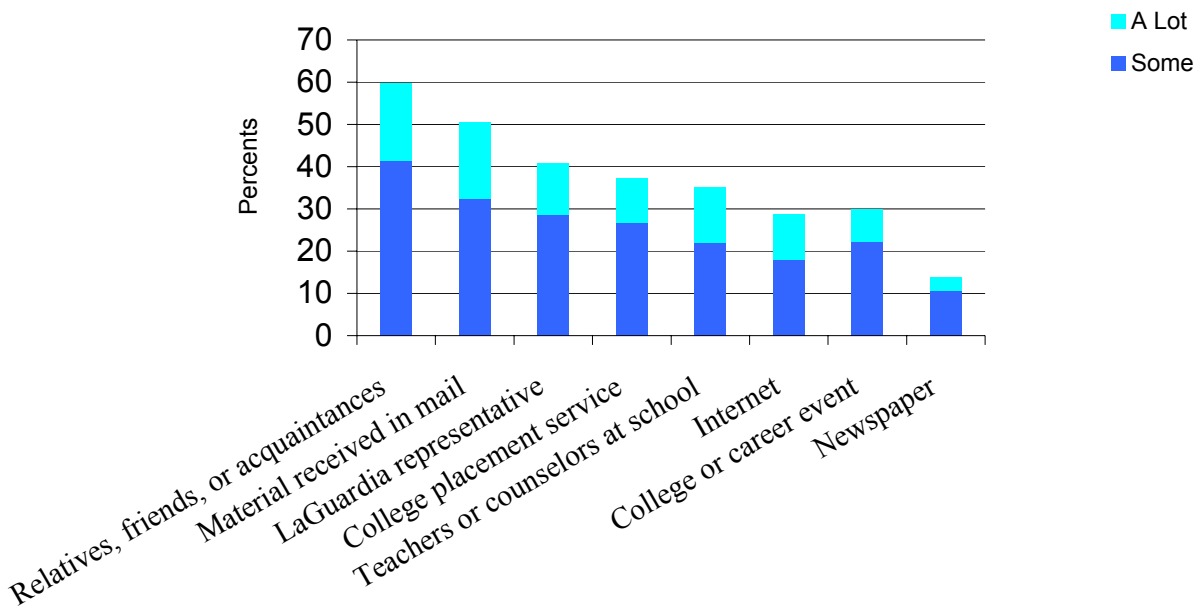
Less than \$9,000	22.1
\$9,000 to \$15,000	22.4
\$15,001 to \$25,000	19.2
\$25,001 to \$35,000	14.9
\$25,001 to \$45,000	7.6
\$45,001 to \$55,000	4.8
\$55,001 to \$65,000	3.8
Over \$65,000	5.1

Section II

Selecting LaGuardia Community College

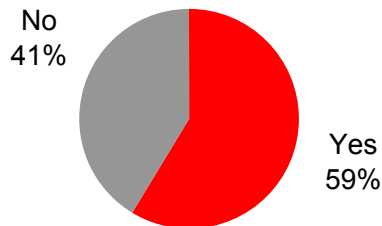
How did you hear about LaGuardia?

Most new students say they heard about LaGuardia from friends or acquaintances or from information received in the mail.



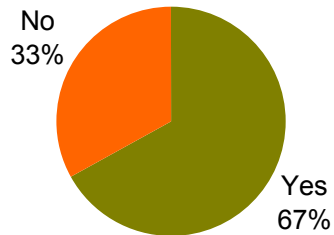
Was LaGuardia Your First Choice?

Three out of five new students say LaGuardia was their first choice college.



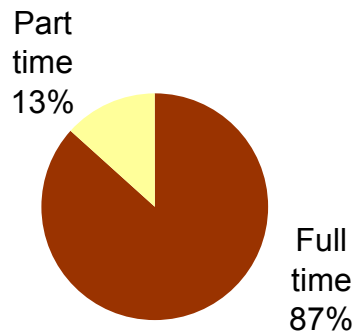
Are you starting out in the major you want?

Most new students are enrolled in the major they want, but at least one-third are not.



Will you attend mostly full time or part time?

The overwhelming majority of new students believe they will attend mostly full time.



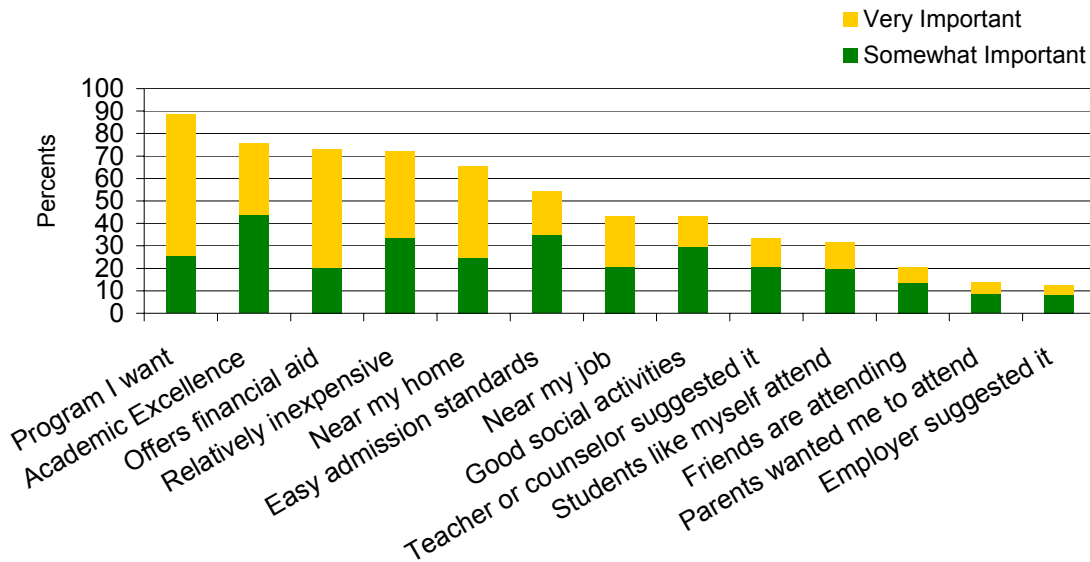
How Will You Finance Your Education?

Nearly 50 percent of new students said they will rely primarily on financial aid to pay for college. About 23 percent will rely primarily on parents or other relatives.

Financial aid through college	49.3
Parents or relatives	22.5
Work	15.5
Savings	10.3
Other assistance	2.4

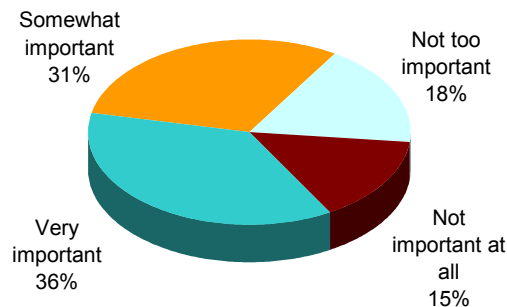
Reasons for Attending LaGuardia

The reasons why most new students come to LaGuardia are, they say, first, it has the program they want; second, it offers financial aid; third, it is near their home; and fourth, it is relatively inexpensive.



Cooperative Education

A little less than one-third of new students had knowledge of LaGuardia's Cooperative Education program before enrolling. Of those who did, more than two-thirds said it was an important factor in their decision to attend.

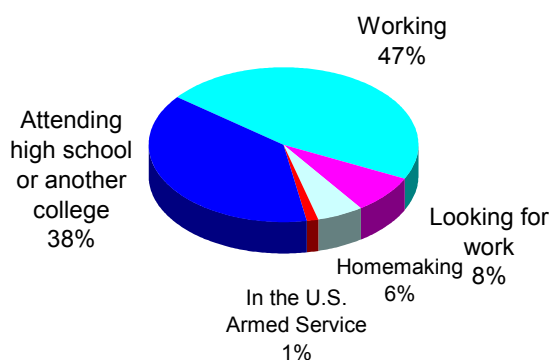


Section III

Recent Experiences and Activities

Recent Experiences

In the year before entering LaGuardia, nearly half of new students were in school or attending another college; another 40 percent were working. During that time, more than half had frequently socialized with people of other races or ethnic backgrounds; only a third had frequently read for pleasure; and less than a third had frequently written more than a page. More than half of entering students had used a computer frequently, and most had used the Internet.



Recent Activities

	<u>Freq.</u>	<u>Occ.</u>	<u>Not at all</u>
Socialized with someone of another race or ethnic group	56.4	34.0	9.6
Used a computer	55.8	36.6	7.7
Accessed the Internet	51.7	35.0	13.3
Read for pleasure	33.4	50.9	15.8
Read newspapers or news magazines	29.0	57.6	12.5
Expressed myself in writing (a page or so)	27.4	44.5	28.1
Attended religious service	21.1	39.9	38.9
Found it difficult to study at home	19.6	44.9	35.5
Asked a teacher for advice after class	19.1	57.4	23.5
Studied together with other students	16.0	51.1	32.9
Felt bored in school	11.7	53.2	35.1
Played a musical instrument	11.2	23.8	65.0
Performed volunteer work	10.4	33.9	55.7

Time Spent on Activities in Senior Year

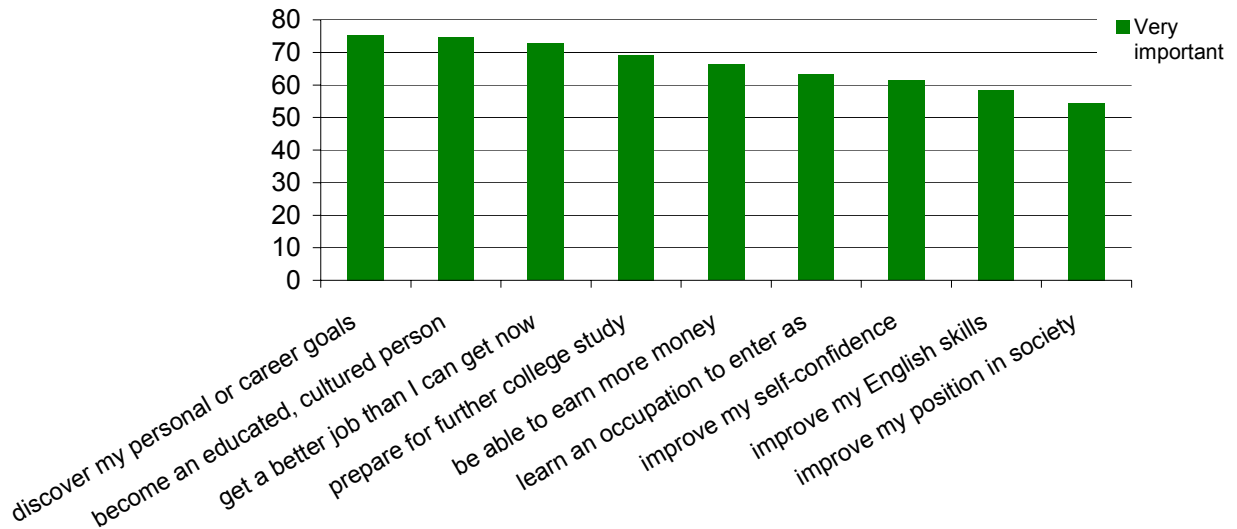
Only a small portion of entering students spent a lot of time studying or doing homework during their senior year in high school, but of all the activities listed, that was the one most students dedicated the most time to. While students spent time watching TV, only a small portion watched more than 7 hours a week. Little or no time was spent by most in volunteering, participating in clubs or community groups, taking lessons, or playing sports.

	(hours per week)			
	<u>8 or more</u>	<u>4 to 7</u>	<u>1 to 3</u>	<u>none</u>
Studying or doing homework	20.6	27.4	45.1	6.9
Volunteering to doing community work	4.7	7.7	24.1	63.4
Participating in community, school, or church clubs or groups	5.5	10.3	27.9	56.3
Watching TV	16.7	26.0	43.8	13.4
Socializing or partying with friends	17.8	24.4	40.3	17.6
Taking lessons and practicing, such as dance or a musical instrument	4.9	7.7	20.8	66.6
Hanging around	10.5	15.6	36.0	37.9
Doing a hobby	10.1	17.8	45.9	26.1
Playing at sports or doing other physical activities	11.5	18.6	40.8	29.0

Section IV Reasons for Attending College

Three quarters of entering students indicated that to discover their goals in life and to become an educated, cultured person were very important reasons for attending college. Nearly as many students were also highly motivated by the opportunity college provides to get a better job.

Reasons for attending college...



Very Important

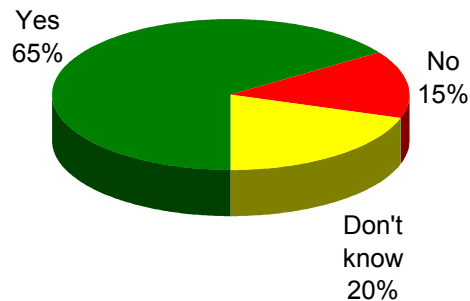
to discover my personal or career goals	75.3
to become an educated, cultured person	74.7
to get a better job than I can get now	72.7
to prepare for further college study	69.3
to be able to earn more money	66.3
to learn an occupation to enter as soon as I leave LaGuardia	63.2
to improve my self-confidence	61.4
to improve my English skills	58.4
to improve my position in society	54.4
to understand the world better	40.0
to advance in my current job	34.7
to be able to change to a new career	33.6
to use my time productively since I could not find a job	26.6
to meet people with similar goals	22.7
to do what people expect me to do	17.3
to make new friends	14.0
to get away from home	10.6

Section V

Plans and Expectations

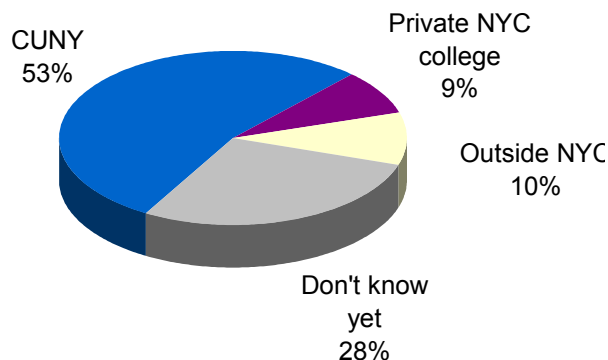
Virtually all of the new students who responded to the New Student Survey were planning to get a degree (97%), but only 65 percent said they planned to stay at LaGuardia until they graduated. With only 14 percent of students planning for an Associate's degree and one percent planning for a Certificate, an apparently large majority aspire to advanced degrees: thirty-eight percent aspire to a Bachelor's, 33 percent to a Master's, and 14 percent to a Doctorate or Professional degree.

Plans to Stay at LaGuardia



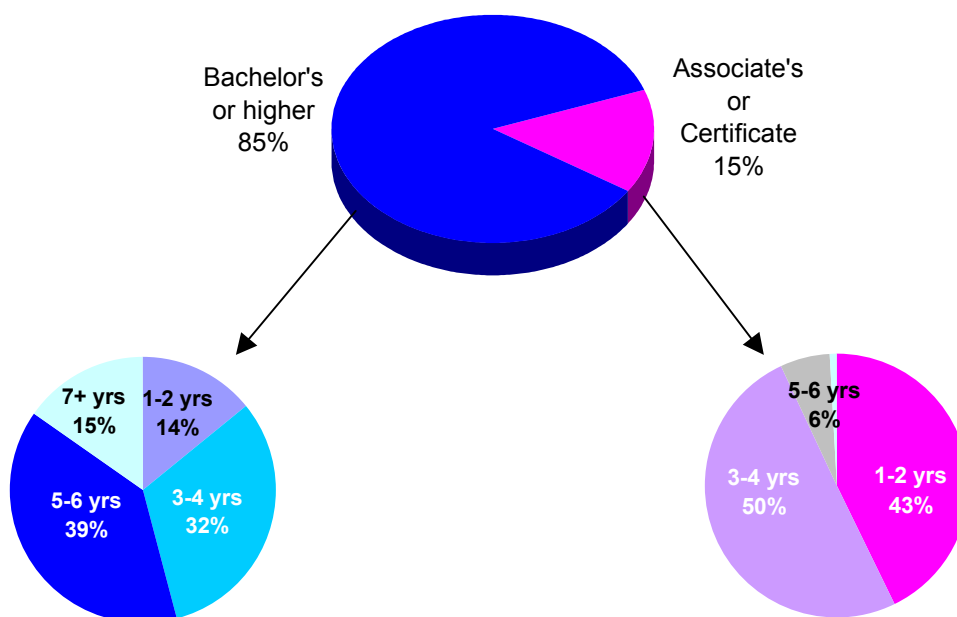
Transfer Plans

Most students said they planned to transfer to a senior college in the future (73%), and a bit more than half of those said they planned to stay within CUNY; many – 28 percent – said they did not know yet where they would transfer.



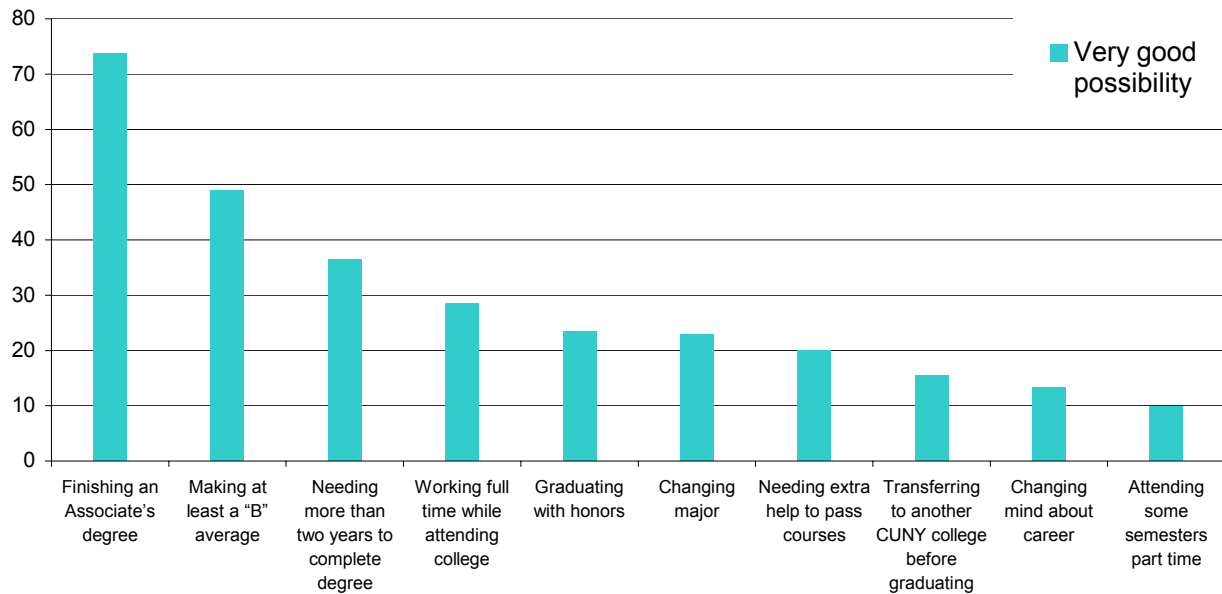
Degree Goals and Perceptions of Time Needed

New students have high educational aspirations. Only 15 percent indicate that their ultimate goal is an Associate's degree, while 85 percent say they plan to obtain a Bachelor's or higher. Many students believe they will achieve their goals in the standard timeframe. Forty-six percent of those aiming for a Bachelor's or higher perceive they will need four years or less to obtain that goal. Forty-three percent of those aiming for an Associate's perceive they will need two years or less.



Anticipated Experiences in College

While 74 percent of new students anticipate completing at least an Associate's degree, nearly 40 percent say there is a very good possibility they will transfer before graduating. More than half are less than confident about making a B average, and about 20 percent anticipate needing extra help in courses. Only 13 percent of new students are not firm in their career goal, although a higher number say that changing majors is a very good possibility.



Perceived chances for experiencing...

Very good possibility

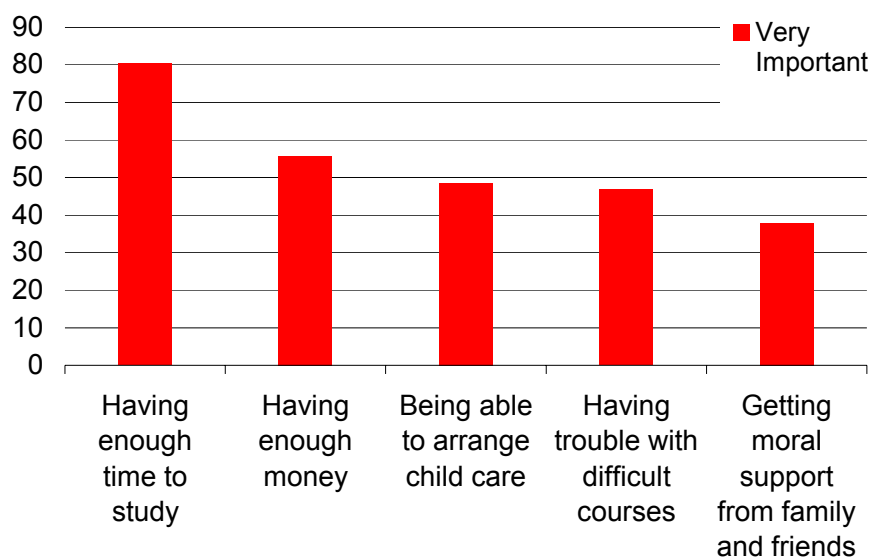
Finishing an Associate's degree	73.7
Making at least a "B" average	48.9
Needing more than two years to complete degree	36.5
Working full time while attending college	28.5
Graduating with honors	23.4
Changing major	22.8
Needing extra help to pass courses	19.9
Transferring to another CUNY college before graduating	15.4
Changing mind about career	13.3
Attending some semesters part time	9.9
Transferring to college outside CUNY before graduating	6.5
Getting married while in college	6.1
Skipping a semester now and then	5.9
Failing one or more courses	5.4
Being elected to student office	4.4
Dropping out of college permanently	1.7

Section VI

Concerns and Perceptions of Success

Matters of Concern

Most students are worried about having enough time to keep up with their studies. Nearly all indicate this to be either a very important or a somewhat important concern. The second-highest number of students are very concerned about having enough money, and more than half of students with children are very concerned about being able to arrange child care. The ability to do college work was also clearly on the minds of many students.



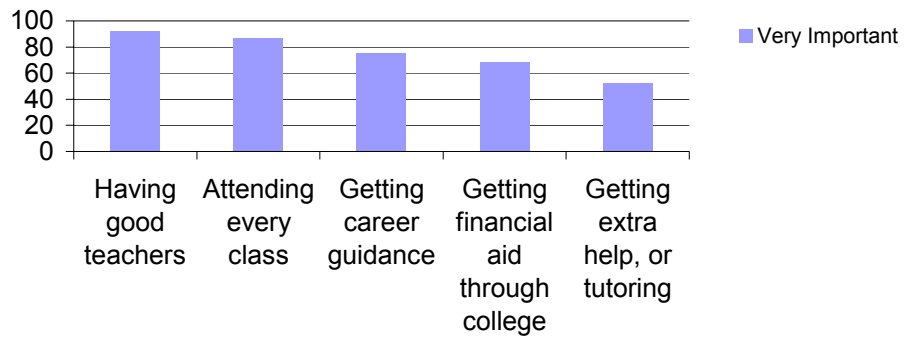
Very Important

Having enough time to study	80.4
Having enough money	55.8
Being able to arrange child care	48.5*
Having trouble with difficult courses	46.8
Getting moral support from family and friends	37.8
Having difficulty with English (since not native language)	29.7
Having personal problems (health, family, etc.)	27.2
Being liked by teachers	18.2
Being liked by fellow students	12.4

*Of students with children

Factors Important to Success

When ranking items for their importance to success, students rated classroom and career items the highest: Having good teachers, attending every class, and getting career guidance were ranked highest overall. Getting extra help or tutoring was also considered very important by most students.



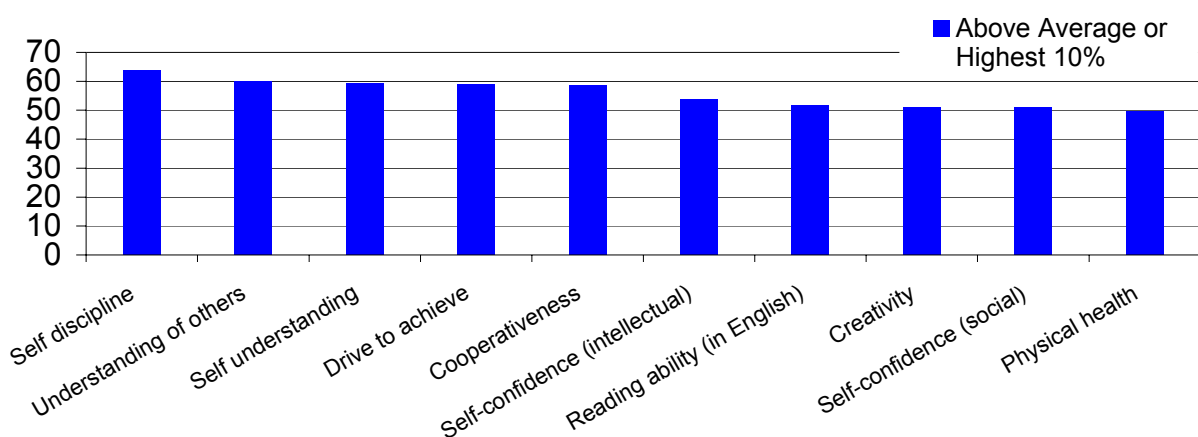
Very Important

Having good teachers	92.4
Attending every class	86.7
Getting career guidance	75.6
Getting financial aid through college	68.6
Getting extra help, or tutoring	52.6
Spending time on class work beyond classroom hours	46.0
Getting financial support from family	42.3
Classes with students of similar interests or backgrounds	40.8
Getting help with personal problems	31.2

Section VII

Self-Perceptions

New students' self-perceptions are generally quite positive. Although some of this may be the effect of a natural tendency to rate oneself as at least *average*, about three-fifths of new students rated themselves as *above-average* or *among the highest 10% of people my age* in self discipline, understanding of others, self understanding, drive to achieve, and cooperativeness. Compared to other areas, more students gave themselves below-average rankings in artistic, mathematical, and writing ability.



Self discipline	63.7
Understanding of others	60.0
Self understanding	59.3
Drive to achieve	59.0
Cooperativeness	58.7
Self-confidence (intellectual)	53.6
Reading ability (in English)	51.8
Creativity	51.2
Self-confidence (social)	50.8
Physical health	49.6
Spirituality	46.7
Competitiveness	46.6
Leadership ability	46.5
Academic ability	44.7
Verbal communication ability (in English)	43.6
Mathematical ability	36.1
Writing ability (in English)	35.4
Artistic ability	35.3
Popularity	30.0

Summary

In many ways the profile of students who come to LaGuardia is similar to that of students at public community colleges in urban centers around the country. For the most part, students are working-class people, many of color, who come from families with no college tradition. Most enjoyed few educational resources before coming to college and did not excel in school. Median age is about 22, and as a result, many are entering college with some previous experience of the work world. Family income is quite low, and perhaps as a corollary, many students have no health insurance. They express uncertainty about future possibilities, and concern, perhaps doubt, about their ability to perform well in college. Most seek guidance at college, and hope to find opportunities to develop their minds as well as prepare for satisfying and well-paying work.

In other ways LaGuardia students are remarkably different from those at other community colleges. For example, the student body here is far more international. Perhaps nowhere else in the country is there such an extraordinary mix of foreign-born and U.S.-born students of different races and ethnic backgrounds, cultures, languages, and experiences. That aspect of LaGuardia must make our institution one of the most complex and distinctive of colleges anywhere.

Among the large number of non-native English speakers at LaGuardia, most, but not all, read and write in their native language with ease, if not proficiency. Exposure to English is important, however, since most do not use English at home or socially, or, in many cases, even at work.

LaGuardia students are also unlike their peers in their notably high educational aspirations. For example, only one percent of students here are in Certificate programs, compared to a national average of 14 percent; and 85 percent of students at LaGuardia aspire to degrees beyond the Associate's, compared to only 25 percent nationally (U.S. Dept. of Education, NCES, BPS1989-94).

LaGuardia students' high educational aspirations, however, do not correspond with their being confident in their academic abilities. Fewer than half believe there is a *very good possibility* of making at least a "B" average, and more than half believe that getting extra help or tutoring is *very important* to their success. Just under half say they are concerned about having trouble with difficult courses.

But together with the hesitations and uncertainties expressed in this survey, LaGuardia students possess as well a buoyant sense of optimism and resiliency. These qualities are apparent not only in high educational goals, but also in their self-perceptions and expectations for college. A majority of new students, for example, rate themselves as being *above average* in self-discipline, understanding of others and themselves, drive to achieve, and cooperativeness, while many others give the same rating also to reading ability and creativity.

Students' estimations of the pace at which they will advance through their studies are, in a word, optimistic. Fewer than 10 percent of students believe they will attend some semesters part-time, and only about one-third expect to need more than two years to finish the degree. Nearly 75 percent say there is a *very good possibility* they will complete the Associate's degree. While these positive expectations for timely progress may be understandable among new initiates, they do not correspond with the actual outcomes many students ultimately come to experience.

With respect to the personal lives of new students, in addition to being involved at work and, for some, also caring for family members, it appears that new students have had somewhat limited experience with people and activities that extend much beyond the neighborhood, or that entail regular interaction with groups other than family and immediate friends. Nearly half, for example, say they have not spent much time with people from races or ethnic backgrounds different from their own, an important observation since most new students come from Queens, the most ethnically diverse borough in New York. Many have spent little or no time participating in clubs or school or church groups; do not have hobbies or participate in sports; do not volunteer in the community; and do not use the Internet with any frequency. Most students do not take lessons or spend time practicing activities such as dance or playing a musical instrument. Academically, most students are relatively unaccustomed to studying or doing much homework, and they do not study together with other students; few are accustomed to talk with teachers outside of class. For the most part, they are only occasional readers and even more occasional writers. In short, at the time students enter LaGuardia they have had relatively little exposure to or experience in activities that optimize personal, social, and financial growth and development.

But these enrichments are clearly what students desire. When asked to rank their reasons for attending college, along with identifying practical opportunities that will lead to solid, satisfying, and lucrative work lives, three-quarters of entering students say they came to college *to become an educated, cultured person*. As noted earlier, it is evident from the survey that most students expect to achieve these aims through ever-more-advanced education.

A reflection of their busy work and home lives, the single most important concern students cite as they begin college is having enough time to study. This is followed by having enough money, having trouble with difficult courses, and getting moral support from family and friends. For those with children, nearly half worry about being able to arrange child care. Such practical, day-to-day concerns serve to emphasize the very small margin for error that most students are constrained to work within in order to survive at college. If students are expected to flourish, practical concerns such as these will need to be resolved.

It is important to recognize that a fairly large number of students say they did not initially select LaGuardia as their first-choice college. Although specific reasons were not addressed, we can assume from stated educational aspirations that some would have preferred to attend a senior college but were unable to qualify.

The reasons why students come to LaGuardia as opposed to another community college, however, are fairly clear: LaGuardia offers a program they want, financial aid is available, and it is close to home. It seems the college's unique Cooperative Education program is not generally known among new students, however, and this may be a missed opportunity for the college. For the most part, students who were aware of the program said it was an important influence in their decision to attend. Most students learned about LaGuardia from friends or from college outreach mailings, but school visits by college representatives, college placement services, and school teachers or counselors were not insignificant sources of information.

As was also the case in 1997, there is a cluster of findings that may be an indication of some discontent. From an enrollment standpoint, high educational goals among new students do not necessarily translate into potentially high graduation rates for the college. Nearly 22 percent of entering students say there is a *very good possibility* they will transfer before graduating. Even among students who aim for an Associate's as their highest degree, 7 percent do not plan to stay at LaGuardia and 14 percent are uncertain. Together with the findings that 41 percent say LaGuardia is not their first-choice college and 33 percent say they are not enrolled in their desired major, the survey provides some evidence that students' tenuous commitment to LaGuardia might be part of a larger issue concerning satisfaction with the college itself.

If one were to construct an image of the student who enters LaGuardia in 2002, he or she might look like many urban young adults, a little street-smart perhaps, but still sheltered within the psychological boundaries of family and neighborhood traditions. The sheen of youthful optimism, hope for the future, and bright expectations would be counterpoised by some evidence of self-doubt, a cautious wariness, and an uncertain direction. Time would be a scarce and valuable resource, and long-term commitment, such as to the process of higher education, and especially to a specific institution, would likely be reserved until tangible progress could affirm the investment.