



Institutional Research Reports

University of Kentucky - Lexington Campus

Profile of First-Time Freshmen

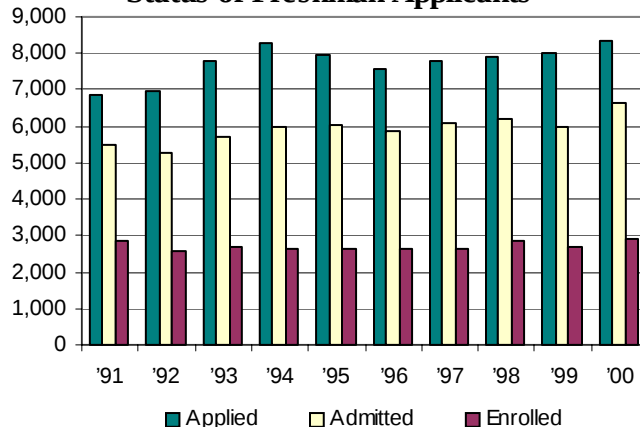
March 2001

The second edition of UK Institutional Research Reports profiles freshmen who began their studies at the University during fall 2000. This year's freshman class—one of the largest ever to start at the University—resembles those of a decade ago in terms of its gender, race, and residency status. Academically, the current group of freshmen earned slightly lower high school grade point averages and ACT Composite scores than the previous freshman class. But the first-semester grades achieved by these students are among the highest earned by a freshman class at the University. Moreover, the percentage of students from this year's class who returned for a second semester is noticeably higher than in previous years.

The admissions office now faces major challenges in selecting new students to attend the University. The Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) has set ambitious enrollment and retention goals for colleges and universities in the Commonwealth. To qualify for awards from the Council's Enrollment Growth and Retention Program, universities must enroll more students and ensure that those students stay in college and eventually earn degrees. Efforts to recruit increasing numbers of students must inevitably target less academically prepared students. But research shows that students with weaker academic credentials are often less likely to persist until graduation.

Colleges and universities can no longer afford to admit at-risk students without offering them programs and services to maximize their chances of success. To respond to this challenge, UK is now piloting a program designed to give freshmen on academic probation the attention needed to place them on an upward trajectory. Moreover, special freshman seminars and orientation programs are engaging our newest students in academic life from the outset of their college careers. Hopefully, these efforts will pay off in improved retention and graduation rates, greater numbers of successful students, and—in a couple of decades—a higher level of educational attainment in the Commonwealth.

Status of Freshman Applicants



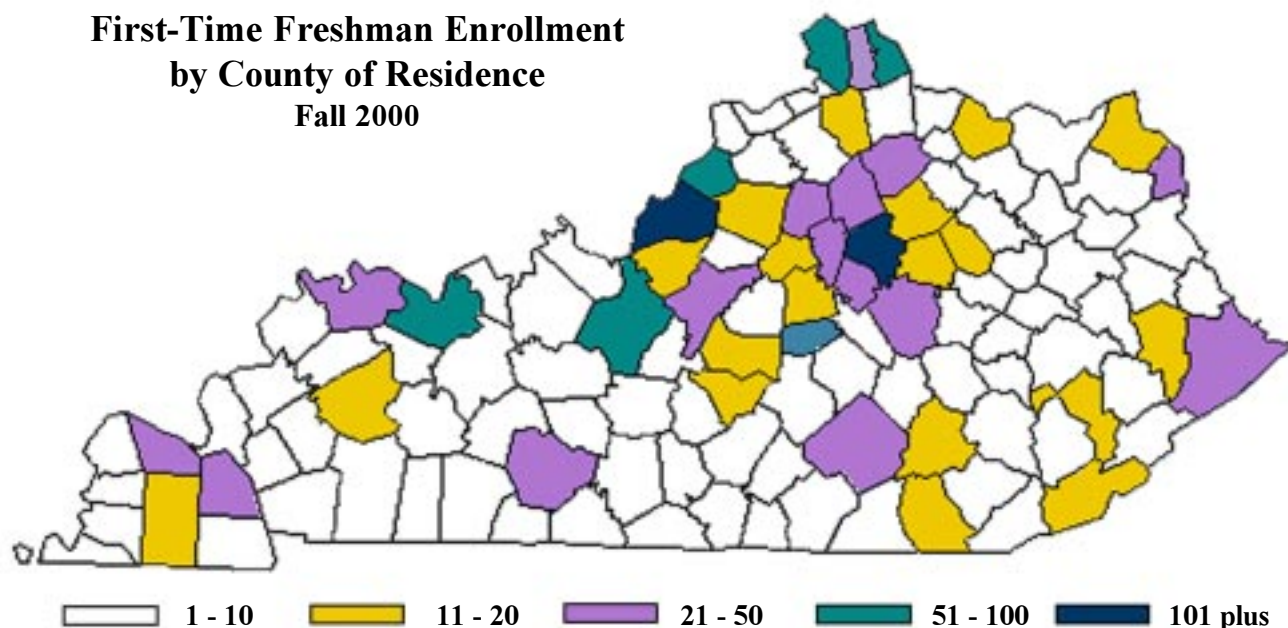
- Last fall, 2,928 students began their college careers at UK, which ties a record set in 1988 for the largest freshman class.
- Over 8,300 high school students applied for admission in 2000.
- From 1991-2000, the percentage of applicants accepted for admission ranged from 72 percent to 80 percent.
- The percentage of admitted students who later enrolled at UK ranged from 43 percent to 52 percent during this period.

Characteristics of First-Time Freshmen

Student Group	Fall 1991	Fall 2000
Female	51%	53%
Male	49%	47%
White	89%	89%
African American	7%	7%
Other	4%	4%
KY Resident	78%	81%
Out-of-State	22%	19%

Students in this year's freshman class greatly resemble those who enrolled at UK a decade ago. Just over half of our new students are female. And roughly nine of ten students are white. Today, nearly one of five freshmen comes to the University from another state. Other universities in the Commonwealth have enrolled increasing numbers of older adult students in recent years. But less than one percent of the first-time freshmen enrolled at UK over the past decade have been over the age of 21.

First-Time Freshman Enrollment by County of Residence Fall 2000



- Jefferson and Fayette counties provide the greatest number of students to UK.
- The majority of freshmen come from Central and Northern Kentucky—the so-called ‘golden triangle.’ The Eastern and Southern regions send the fewest students to UK.
- Six of ten out-of-state students are from border states, and nearly half of those come from Ohio.

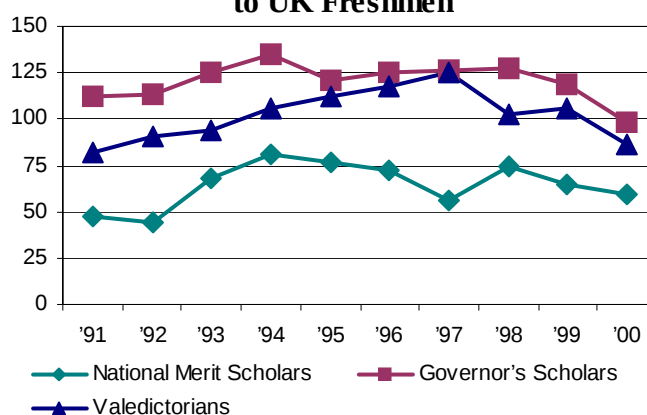
Top 10 Feeder High Schools to UK Fall 2000

High School	City	No. of Students	Avg. ACT
Paul Lawrence Dunbar	Lexington	83	25.1
Tates Creek	Lexington	71	24.4
Lafayette	Lexington	64	24.2
Saint Xavier	Louisville	61	24.3
Henry Clay	Lexington	59	23.4
Assumption	Louisville	50	23.4
Dupont Manual Magnet	Louisville	47	25.5
Male Traditional	Louisville	42	22.7
Ballard	Louisville	39	23.6
Woodford County	Versailles	39	23.1

Source: ACT 2000 Freshman Class Profile Report

The top nine high schools furnishing the greatest number of students to UK are located in Lexington and Louisville. The ACT Composite scores earned by UK-bound students at these high schools are well above the state norm of 21.2.

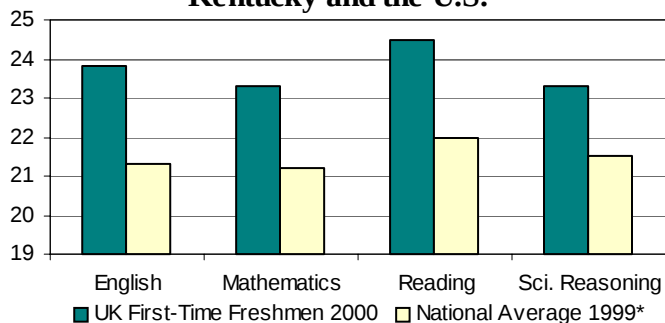
Scholarships and Honors Awarded to UK Freshmen



Source: Office of Undergraduate Admissions Recruitment

The number of National Merit Scholars and Governor's Scholars attending UK as freshmen peaked in 1994. Since that time, the number of UK freshmen awarded these two honors has decreased by 27 percent. The number of high school valedictorians who enrolled at the University as freshmen rose steadily from 1991 to 1997, but has declined by 31 percent over the last three years.

2000 ACT Score Comparison Kentucky and the U.S.



*National 2000 data are unavailable.

Source: ACT 2000 Freshman Class Profile Report

Over the past 10 years, average ACT Composite Scores for freshmen have shown little variation, ranging from 23.9 to 24.9. The average score for the current freshman class is 24.3*, two-tenths of a point below the previous class. Nationwide, the average Composite score for college freshmen was 21.6 in 1999.

It is informative to compare the performance of UK freshmen with national norms on the four sub-tests comprising the ACT Assessment. The graph shows that freshmen who came to UK in fall 2000 earn significantly higher scores on each sub-test than a group of national test takers. The performance advantage of UK freshmen is greatest in English (+2.5) and reading (+2.5). But UK students hold a slimmer edge over their peers in mathematics (+2.1) and science reasoning (+1.8).

The ability of our students to reason scientifically may be strengthened in the near future by revisions to the Pre-College Curriculum. The CPE recently increased the number of units of science and social studies that a student needs to be admitted unconditionally to a state-supported university. Beginning in 2002, high school students wishing to earn a baccalaureate degree at a public university will need to take three years of science and three years of social studies. Currently, students need to take only two years of course work in these disciplines. State policy makers are also debating whether to require high school students to take a fourth year of math. An additional year of math would reduce the need for remediation that is prevalent at other universities in the system and also bolster the foundational skills of many UK freshmen.

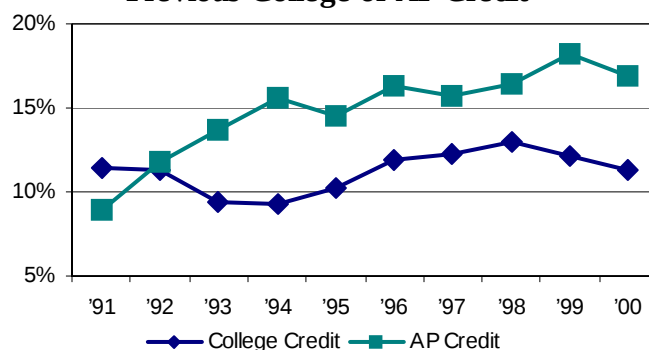
*The average ACT Composite for UK freshmen includes SAT scores that have been converted to ACT scale scores.

Efforts to Enroll High School Students in College-level Courses

State policy makers have voiced concerns about Kentucky's relatively low college-going rates and the lengthy amount of time many college students take to earn a bachelor's degree. Encouraging students to take college courses while they are still in high school is one strategy that addresses both problems. Last year, the CPE deregulated its policy on dual credit courses, which simultaneously award college and high school credit. This action should make it easier for students around the state to take such courses. Advanced Placement (AP) and dual credit classes offer students a taste of the college experience and bring them a little closer toward fulfilling future degree requirements.

The CPE is now negotiating with the Kentucky Department of Education on two key performance indicators designed to measure the state's success in promoting college-level courses for high school students. The first indicator tracks the number of AP exam scores with a '3 or better.' The second indicator focuses on the number of college-level courses taken. At this point, the two performance indicators are intended to measure the performance of the state's secondary and postsecondary education systems rather than individual schools or colleges.

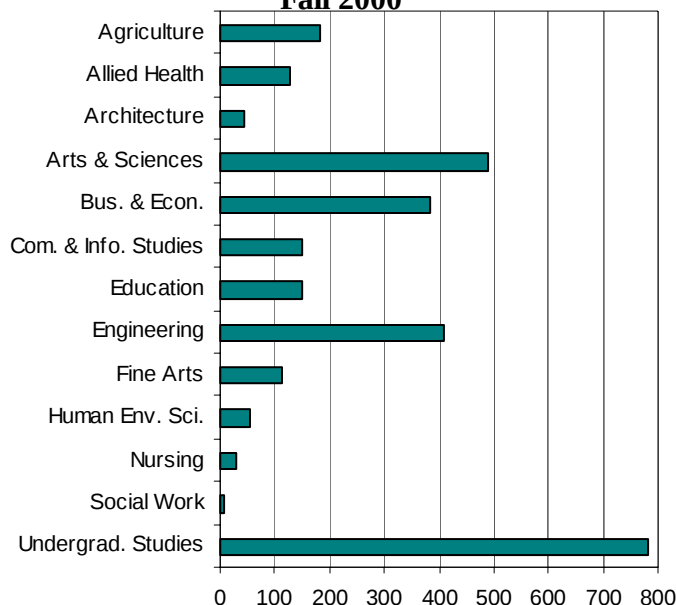
Percentage of First-Time Freshmen with Previous College or AP Credit



The above graph tracks the percentage of UK freshmen who took college-level courses while still in high school. The percentage of students with AP credits on their high school transcripts increased from nine percent in 1991 to 17 percent in 2000, a gain of eight percentage-points. (Over the same period, the average number of AP exams taken by AP students rose from 2.5 to 2.7.) Despite minor fluctuations, the percentage of freshmen earning other types of college credit is virtually the same now as it was in 1991.

First-Time Freshmen by College

Fall 2000

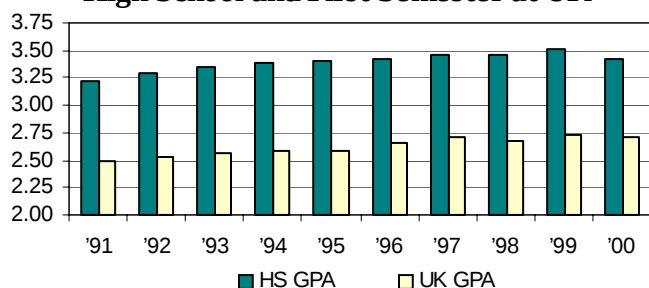


The accompanying graph shows the colleges in which freshmen enrolled during their first semester at the University. Nearly one in four freshmen does not declare a major and is subsequently enrolled in the Undergraduate Studies program. The colleges with the largest number of freshmen are Arts & Sciences, Engineering, and Business & Economics. Together, these three colleges account for over 40 percent of the freshman enrollment.

Forecasting the Retention Rate of this Year's Freshman Class

High school grades earned by UK freshmen have generally increased over the past decade. The rise in students' grades parallels national trends and can be attributed, in part, to widespread grade inflation. Average high school grades for this year's class declined slightly with respect to the previous class (3.42 versus 3.51)—the first time this has occurred in more than a decade.

First-Time Freshman GPA's High School and First Semester at UK



One might be inclined to predict that fewer freshmen will return to UK next fall than in past years, based on their somewhat poorer high school grades and ACT scores. But it may be too early to make such a prediction.

First-Semester and First-Year Retention Rates of First-time Freshmen: 1991 - 2000

Cohort	No.	Fall-to-Spring	Fall-to-Fall
1991	2,836	89.9%	76.0%
1992	2,567	90.4%	76.6%
1993	2,673	91.8%	78.7%
1994	2,625	90.3%	77.5%
1995	2,610	90.6%	78.4%
1996	2,637	91.1%	77.9%
1997	2,626	91.5%	79.6%
1998	2,849	91.2%	78.5%
1999	2,682	91.5%	80.1%
2000	2,928	92.8%*	NA

* note: based on a preliminary analysis of enrollment data by the Office of Assessment and Institutional Data

Our newest students earned first-semester grades that were roughly equivalent to the previous freshmen class (2.72 versus 2.73) and among the highest ever earned by a new class at UK. Finally, preliminary analysis reveals that 92.8 percent of this year's freshman class returned to college for a second semester, which appears to be a UK record for the highest fall-to-spring retention rate.



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