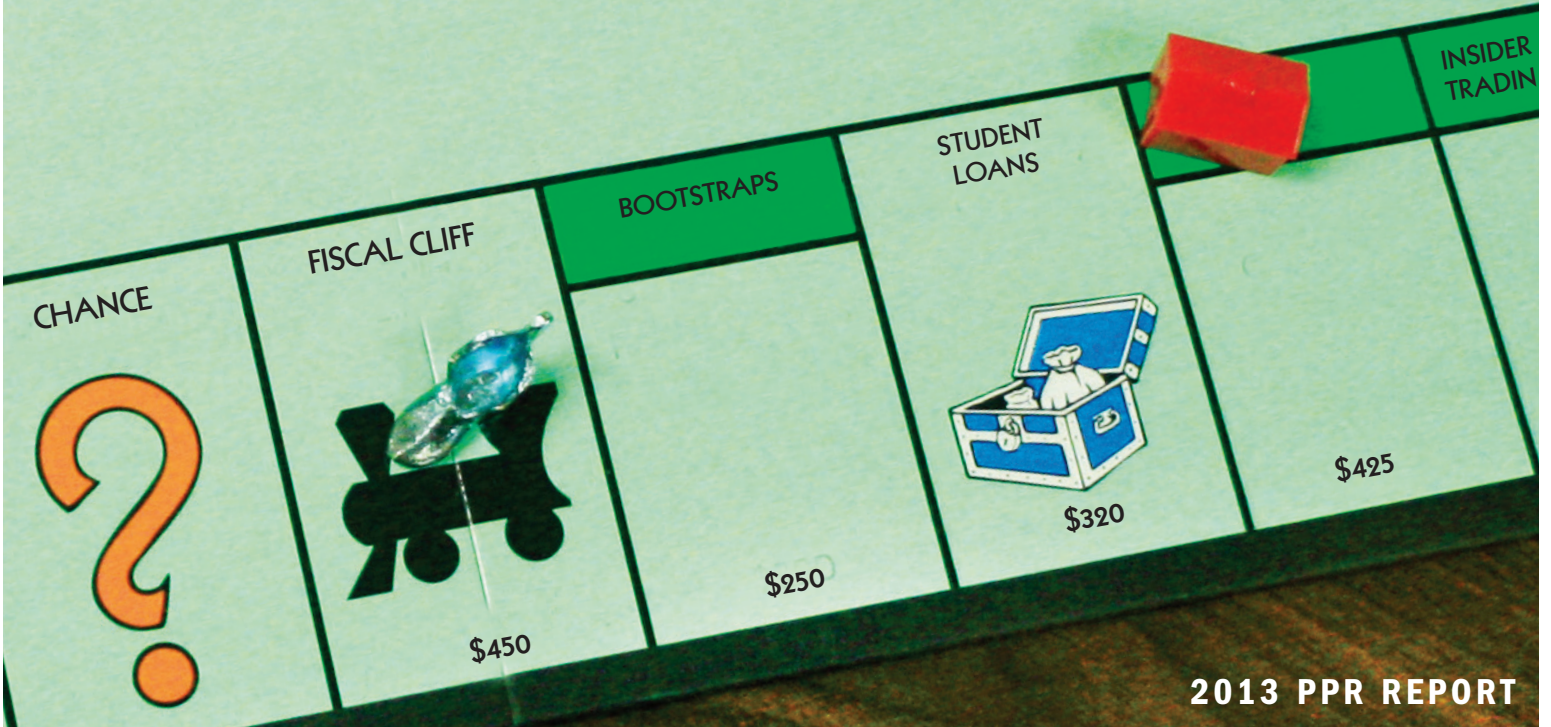


The 2013 PossePlus Retreat

WHAT'S YOUR WORTH?

Class, Power & Privilege
◆ in America ◆





ORIENTAL AVENUE

READING RAILROAD

INCOME TAX

GENTRIFICATION

BOARDWALK

INHERITANCE

FISCAL CLIFF

CHANG

COLLECT \$200 SALARY AS YOU PASS

GO

\$650

\$450

POSSE



THE POSSE FOUNDATION

Posse started in 1989 because of one student who said, “I never would have dropped out of college if I had my posse with me.” The Posse Foundation identifies public high school students with extraordinary academic and leadership potential who may be overlooked by traditional college selection processes. The Foundation extends to these students the opportunity to pursue personal and academic excellence by placing them in supportive, multicultural teams—Posses—of 10 students. The Foundation’s partner colleges and universities award Posse Scholars four-year, full-tuition leadership scholarships.

PROGRAM COMPONENTS

1) RECRUITMENT

From September to December each year, Posse conducts the Dynamic Assessment Process (DAP), a unique evaluation method to identify young leaders who might be missed by conventional admissions criteria but who can excel at selective colleges and universities. Using nontraditional forums to evaluate potential, DAP offers students an opportunity to demonstrate their intrinsic leadership abilities, their skill at working in a team setting, and their motivation and desire to succeed. DAP has proven an effective tool for identifying outstanding young leaders with the potential to excel in college. Through a three-part process, including large-group and individual interviews, Posse staff and partner college and university administrators ultimately select a diverse group of 10 students for each institution, thus forming a Posse.

2) PRE-COLLEGIATE TRAINING PROGRAM

From January to August of their senior year in high school, Posse Scholars meet weekly with staff trainers and their Posse peers for two-hour workshops. The training program consists of workshops that address four areas: 1) team building and group support, 2) cross-cultural communication, 3) leadership and becoming an active agent of change on campus, and 4) academic excellence. The goal of the training program is to prepare Scholars for leadership roles on campus and for the high-level academic expectations at their colleges.

3) CAMPUS PROGRAM

The Campus Program works to ensure the retention of Posse Scholars and to increase the impact of Posse on campus. Posse staff members visit each college and university four times a year for meetings with Posse Scholars, campus liaisons and mentors. During a Posse’s first two years on campus, Scholars meet with their mentor each week as a group and every other week individually. In addition, Posse facilitates an annual weekend-long PossePlus Retreat attended by members of the larger student body, faculty and administration with the goal of discussing an important campus issue identified by Posse Scholars.

GOALS

1. To expand the pool from which top colleges and universities can recruit outstanding young leaders from diverse backgrounds.
2. To help these institutions build more interactive campus environments so they can become more welcoming for people from all backgrounds.
3. To ensure that Posse Scholars persist in their academic studies and graduate so they can take on leadership positions in the workforce.

4) CAREER PROGRAM

The Career Program supports Posse Scholars as they transition from being leaders on campus to becoming leaders in the workforce. Posse plays an integral role in the professional development of these young people by providing them with the tools and opportunities necessary to secure highly competitive and career-enhancing internships and jobs. One of the ways Posse achieves this is by partnering with exceptional companies and organizations, both nationally and abroad. The Career Program has three core components: 1) The Internship Program, 2) Career Counseling Services and 3) The Alumni Network.

5) POSSE ACCESS

Posse Access is an online database designed to give Posse partner colleges and universities exclusive access to unselected student nominees to consider for regular admission. Through Posse Access, hundreds of finalists nationwide who are not selected can opt to have their application profiles made available to each of Posse’s partner institutions. By identifying candidates through the Posse Access database, partner schools benefit from Posse’s holistic approach to evaluating student potential and see a much broader pool of highly qualified students.



EACH SPRING SEMESTER, THE POSSE FOUNDATION AND ITS PARTNER COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES HOST A SERIES OF OFF-CAMPUS, THREE-DAY RETREATS—CALLED POSSEPLUS RETREATS (PPRS)—THAT ADDRESS AN IMPORTANT SOCIAL ISSUE. ATTENDEES INCLUDE POSSE STUDENTS AS WELL AS MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL STUDENT BODY, FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATION. EMPLOYING A SERIES OF SPECIALLY DESIGNED WORKSHOPS, THESE EVENTS ARE INTENDED TO STRENGTHEN CAMPUS COMMUNITIES BY ENGAGING PARTICIPANTS IN MEANINGFUL DISCUSSIONS THAT EXPLORE THE COMPLEXITIES OF THE ISSUE AS A COMMUNITY.

In 2013, 37 Posse partner colleges and universities hosted more than 3,500 participants at PPRs entitled “What’s Your Worth? Class, Power and Privilege in America.” Using both small and large group workshops, the PPRs enabled participants from across the country to explore the ramifications of socioeconomic status, wealth distribution, and the American Dream—and to relate these to their own lives, their campus communities, and the country at large.

The research arm of The Posse Foundation, The Posse Institute, used a 102-question survey to poll attendees about their perspectives on these topics at the start of the retreats. The survey was completed anonymously by 3,159 students and 318 faculty members and administrators.

THE POSSEPLUS RETREAT IS A UNIQUE SPACE WHERE STUDENTS, FACULTY AND STAFF COME TOGETHER FOR A WEEKEND OF POWERFUL DIALOGUE ABOUT A TOPIC RELEVANT TO THEIR CAMPUS COMMUNITY.

Participants expressed a variety of views, concerns and feelings about class, power and privilege in the United States. Responses revealed that most students believe the following.

- Economic inequality is inevitable in American society.
- The American Dream is not achievable for those in the lower class.
- Corporate America has too much influence over the government.
- Society should help the poor as much as possible.
- The middle class needs to be restored.
- They would be willing to pay more taxes if the money went to programs for the public good.
- Socioeconomic class divides people on their campuses.
- They do not consider class when it comes to dating or marriage.
- Being college educated is more important than being wealthy.
- One day they will be in a higher economic class than their parents.

This report explores these survey findings in greater detail.



GROUP CHARACTERISTICS

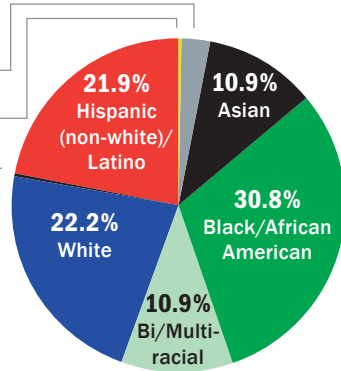
The data and charts below show the demographics of the students who attended the retreats.

AVERAGE AGE: 19.7 years

BORN IN THE UNITED STATES: 80.7 percent

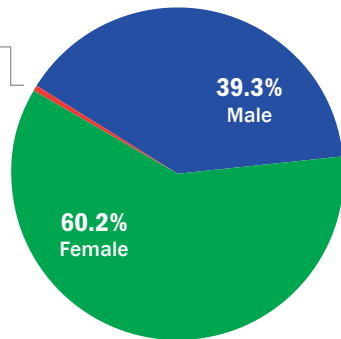
RACE/ETHNICITY

- 2.8% Other
- 0.4% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- 0.1% American Indian/Alaskan Native



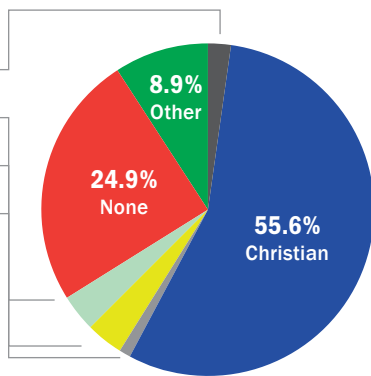
SEX

- 0.5% Other



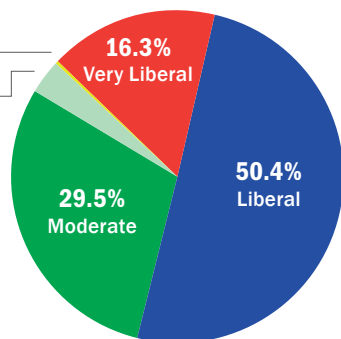
RELIGION

- 2.3% Buddhist
- 3.4% Muslim
- 3.8% Jewish
- 1.0% Hindu



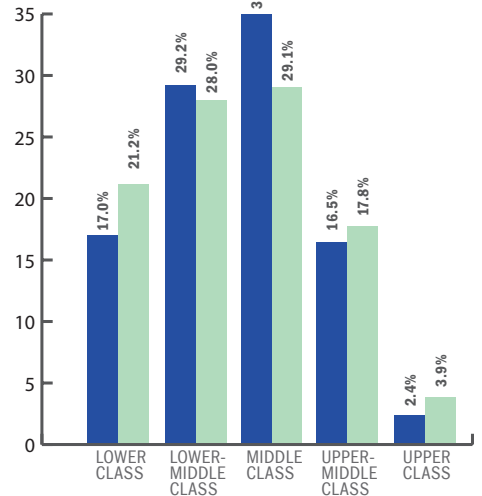
POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

- 0.4% Very conservative
- 3.4% Conservative

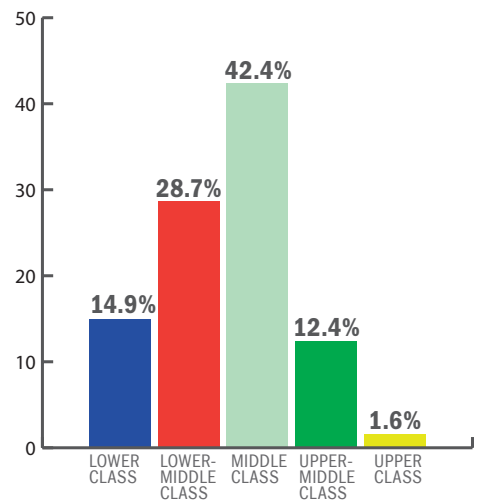


HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS OF:

- YOUR IMMEDIATE FAMILY
- THE COMMUNITY YOU GREW UP IN

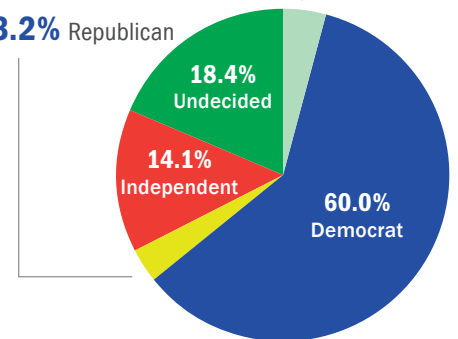


WHAT SOCIOECONOMIC CLASS DO YOU MOST IDENTIFY WITH NOW?



POLITICAL AFFILIATION

- 4.4% Other
- 3.2% Republican





AT THE BEGINNING OF THE RETREATS, PARTICIPANTS WERE INTRODUCED TO THE TOPIC WITH THE FOLLOWING CONTEXT-SETTING DESCRIPTION.

Whether we like it or not, class is everywhere. It's in the foods we eat, the homes we live in, the neighborhoods where we grow up. It's in the schools we attend, the jobs we hold, the places we shop, who we date and who we marry. It influences how we spend our leisure time, the opportunities available to us and our children. It affects our health and longevity.

Yet, in America, class can be a taboo topic. Because we don't usually talk about class, we generally don't know how to talk about it. The mere utterance of the words "poor" and "rich" are enough to stir up controversy:

"I've had to work twice as hard as you."

"You were born with a silver spoon in your mouth."

"I'm tired of people taking advantage of the system."

"My parents worked their way up from nothing. Why can't you do the same?"

And just like that, our class conversation stalls. Rather than deep dialogue about class, we're left with a 24-hour news cycle that tends to fan resentment and confusion. Wall Street is pitted against Main Street, the free market against big government, the 1 percent against the 99 percent. One news segment reports that jobs are being shipped overseas and another blames undocumented workers for stealing jobs and driving wages down for citizens. Women are reminded they still earn less than men, while men are warned that they're losing ground to women in the race for wealth and status. Today, talk of "restoring" the middle class has become popular to the point that we neglect to even mention the poor. And for some of us, we've either bought more than we can afford or gone to extreme lengths to disguise what we have and where we come from.

And what of the American Dream? We're told that talent, pluck and a little bit of luck are

all it takes to rise from poverty to prosperity, to make it in America—and for the 272 self-made American billionaires this has been true.ⁱ In fact, the United States is home to more billionaires than any other country—almost five times as many as the country with the second most billionaires, Russia. But we also have the greatest income inequality, lowest social mobility, and highest poverty rate in the industrialized world.ⁱⁱ The richest 20 percent of Americans hold 85 percent of the wealth.ⁱⁱⁱ Seventy-four percent of students attending top colleges are in the upper socioeconomic quartile.^{iv} And 16 percent of the country—some 49 million people—lives in poverty.^v

How do we reconcile these extremes? Is this the best we can expect? Are our current policies and practices just? Is the system rigged? Do those with more have any responsibility to those with less?

As college students—who are fortunate to be able to pursue that golden ticket to the American Dream, a college degree—what responsibility do we have to this society, to our communities, to ourselves? What does class mean to you? Is it just about money? Did it influence your decision to attend college or your major or career choice? And how does class express itself on campus? If there is one, where would you fall in the campus pecking order? Is class cultural? Is it about who gets to decide what's in and out, what's ghetto or sophisticated? Have you earned what you have? Have you had things handed to you? Have you been lucky? Does it matter? Are you comfortable in your class or is it something you hope to break free from and rise above? What's your worth?

These are big questions and at this year's PossePlus Retreat we hope to tackle them. We'll engage in real conversations about class, power and privilege in America, and explore the subtle and not-so-subtle ways this issue affects our country, our campus and our personal lives.

COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY PARTNER RETREAT PARTICIPANTS

- BABSON COLLEGE
- BARD COLLEGE
- BOSTON UNIVERSITY
- BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY
- BRYN MAWR COLLEGE
- BUCKNELL UNIVERSITY
- CARLETON COLLEGE
- CENTRE COLLEGE
- COLBY COLLEGE
- THE COLLEGE OF WOOSTER
- CONNECTICUT COLLEGE
- DENISON UNIVERSITY
- DEPAUW UNIVERSITY
- DICKINSON COLLEGE
- FRANKLIN & MARSHALL COLLEGE
- GRINNELL COLLEGE
- HAMILTON COLLEGE
- KALAMAZOO COLLEGE
- LAFAYETTE COLLEGE
- LAWRENCE UNIVERSITY
- MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE
- MOUNT HOLYOKE COLLEGE
- OBERLIN COLLEGE
- PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY
- POMONA COLLEGE
- SEWANEE: THE UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH
- SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY
- TRINITY COLLEGE
- TULANE UNIVERSITY
- UNION COLLEGE
- UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY
- UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES
- UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA
- UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
- UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
- VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY
- WHEATON COLLEGE

PERCEPTIONS OF CLASS, WEALTH AND EQUALITY IN THE UNITED STATES

Since this country's founding, the American Dream—the idea that any citizen can prosper through hard work and determination—has been a cornerstone of the nation's identity. The story of America is replete with accounts of industrious men and women who managed to transcend strictures of class, religion, race and gender to achieve a better life. The prevalence of these success stories may explain the nation's historical optimism about the possibility of upward mobility. Perhaps it is why the United States has been commonly characterized, accurately or not, as a model meritocracy and land of opportunity.

This distinctive national ethos has survived many inauspicious periods in American history. But what about today? How has the American Dream been affected by the current economic climate? With the ever-widening disparity of wealth in the United States, what has happened to the idea that everyone has the opportunity to succeed? The following sections examine retreat respondents' views on the American Dream, socioeconomic class, the current state of the economy, and income disparity in the United States.

SOCIOECONOMIC CLASS IN THE UNITED STATES

In the 2013 PossePlus Retreat survey, the majority of student respondents defined "class" by wealth or income. While there are no officially defined income thresholds for various socioeconomic classes in the United States, the median household income is approximately \$52,000 per year,^{vi} and, for a family of four, \$75,000 per year.^{vii}

Students were asked what they believed to be the income ranges for a family of four for "lower," "middle" and "upper" socioeconomic classes. Their averaged responses are below.

- LOWER CLASS: \$0 to \$36,115
- MIDDLE CLASS: \$40,558 to \$243,032
- UPPER CLASS: \$275,838 and above

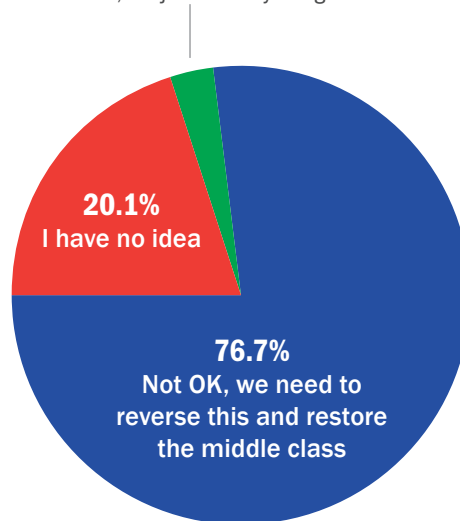
In 2012, *The New York Times* created an online database that compiles household income in the United States by percentile. When the average responses were entered into the database, the student range estimates for class income levels show largely varying percentile distributions. When it comes to trying to define class by income, student sensibilities are all over the map. Student estimates for the lower class, for example, ranged from the 1st to the 36th percentile of all household incomes; those in the middle class from the 40th to the 97th percentile; and those in the upper class from the 97th to the 99th percentile (representing only the top one to three percent of households).^{viii}

In 2013, the federal government determined the poverty threshold for a family of four as an income of \$23,550 per year. This amount lies toward the upper range of what retreat respondents considered lower class, putting most of what they consider to be lower-class households at or below the poverty level. Students also cited a large range for what they consider the middle class. Interestingly, their top income for this class is very close to \$250,000, a demarcation for the middle

class used by both Governor Mitt Romney and President Barack Obama during the 2012 election. Since then, a national debate has ensued in the media over just what and who constitutes the middle class, and the notion of a "shrinking" middle class has taken hold as the disparity between rich and poor continues to increase. When asked if these trends are acceptable, 77 percent of the survey respondents responded, "Not ok, we need to reverse this and restore the middle class" (see Chart 1.1).

CHART 1.1 THE DISPARITY BETWEEN RICH AND POOR IS INCREASING AND THE MIDDLE CLASS IS SHRINKING. THIS IS:

3.2% OK, it's just the way things are



While student definitions of income for lower, middle and upper socioeconomic classes were extremely varied, their perceptions of the qualitative characteristics that define these classes were much more uniform. When asked which classes they associated with power, prestige or social capital, the large majority chose only the upper class. Students were asked to name five positive characteristics they associated with each of these classes; there was very little overlap. For the upper class, the top characteristics were being rich/wealthy, well-educated and powerful; for the middle class, being hardworking, educated/smart and comfortable/content; and for the lower class, being hardworking, humble and determined/driven/persistent (see Table 1.1).

TABLE 1.1 TOP THREE POSITIVE CHARACTERISTICS STUDENTS ASSOCIATE WITH EACH CLASS:

	LOWER CLASS	MIDDLE CLASS	UPPER CLASS
1.	Hardworking	Hardworking	Rich/Wealthy
2.	Humble	Educated/Smart	Well-educated
3.	Determined/Driven/Persistent	Comfortable/Content	Powerful

MERITOCRACY AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

The concept of a meritocracy is a core value of American society, and achieving the American Dream has long been a standard marker of success. The retreat survey captured participants' views about these fundamental tenets.

Student retreat participants seem to have traditional definitions of the American Dream. Of five images proposed to represent the American Dream, 65 percent of students chose a picture of a family with a dog standing in front of a house. Additionally, the two words chosen most often as the best representations of the American Dream were “wealth” and “opportunity” (see Chart 1.2). When students were asked specifically what it meant to be successful in America, many of their responses coincided with their ideas about the American Dream. Many respondents define success and the American Dream by citing ownership of a home, a car, a TV, land, and the autonomy to freely follow one’s passions and desires. Many also mentioned financial stability (the absence of debt), the assurance of health care and a comfortable retirement, and the chance to pass on any wealth to future generations, including paying for one’s children’s education. While most of the responses match historical definitions of the American Dream, many students also cited “power” as being connected to the definition of success—a seemingly more current association.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN AMERICA?

“A white picket fence, a house, a car, 2.5 kids and a dog.”

“Be able to live in a relatively safe neighborhood and adequately provide for your family.”

“It means to be happy and to have the doors of opportunity open to you, regardless of age, race, sex, sexuality, etc.”

“To have a high paying job that you may or may not enjoy and then get married, have children and continue to enjoy financial wealth enough to support your family.”

“By my standards, your own happiness. By society’s standards, money, power, education.”

“Capitalism, exploitation, competition, disadvantaging others for one’s own gain.”

“Money, power, education.”

“Being healthy.”

While most of the students’ definitions of the American Dream seem to have changed little over time, the majority of survey respondents (68 percent) do not believe that upward mobility is a possibility for every American. They challenge the idea that the United States is a meritocracy. Sixty-four percent of respondents do not believe that there is equal opportunity for everyone to become rich, even if one works hard. Some respondents challenged the notion of the American Dream, referring to enormous inequities resulting in only a few achieving great wealth and material prosperity. Students also seem to believe that certain critical life opportunities are limited based on one’s class. While most believe the American Dream is achievable for members of the upper and middle classes, less than half (48 percent) say it is achievable for those belonging to the lower class (see Chart 1.3). Nonetheless, many respondents still associate working hard with succeeding in America and simultaneously believe that luck plays a role as well (see Charts 1.4 to 1.7).

LESS THAN HALF OF STUDENTS BELIEVE THE AMERICAN DREAM IS ACHIEVABLE FOR MEMBERS OF THE LOWER CLASS.

The vast majority of student respondents (91 percent) do not believe everyone in the United States has an equal chance to succeed (see Chart 1.8). In fact, most of the students believe that economic inequality is “inevitable in our society.” Eighty-five percent do not believe that every child born in the United States has an equal chance to go to college. When it comes to gender, their perception of inequality in America is clear: 85 percent believe it is easier for men to achieve financial success, while only 13 percent said opportunity for success was equal between the sexes (see Chart 1.9). Finally, many students believe success in America is inextricably linked to being part of a specific demographic. Responses from these students stated that success in America means: “[A] white middle-class male” or “To be rich, powerful, white and a man.”

72 PERCENT OF STUDENTS BELIEVE THAT ECONOMIC INEQUALITY IS INEVITABLE IN OUR SOCIETY.

CHART 1.2 THE AMERICAN DREAM IS PRIMARILY ABOUT (CHOOSE UP TO TWO):

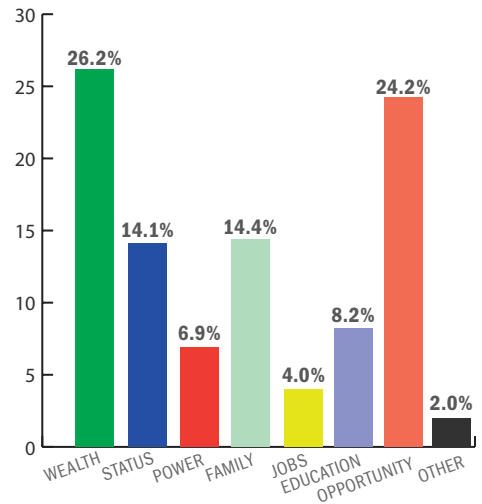


CHART 1.3 DO YOU BELIEVE THE AMERICAN DREAM IS STILL ACHIEVABLE FOR:

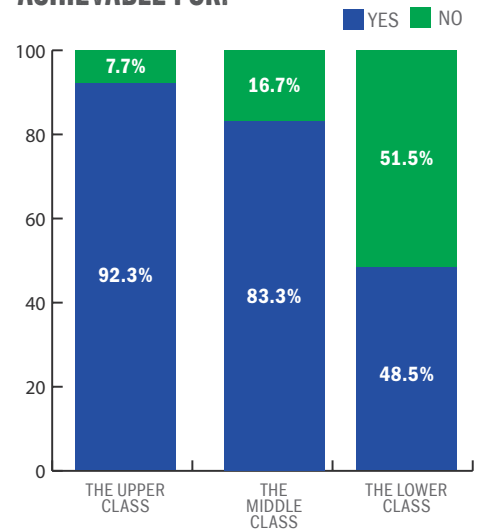




CHART 1.4 IS UPWARD MOBILITY POSSIBLE FOR EVERYONE IN THE U.S.?

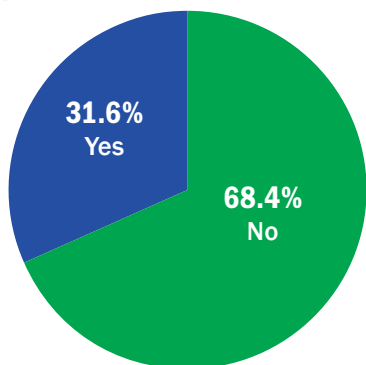


CHART 1.5 CAN ANYONE, IF THEY WORK HARD ENOUGH, BECOME RICH?

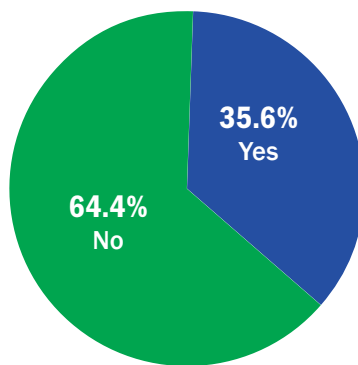


CHART 1.6 HOW MUCH IS FINANCIAL SUCCESS BASED ON HARD WORK?

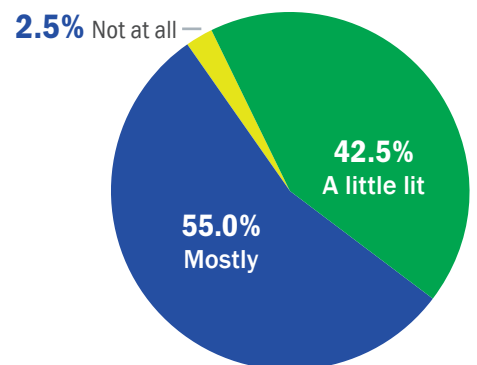


CHART 1.7 HOW MUCH IS FINANCIAL SUCCESS BASED ON LUCK?

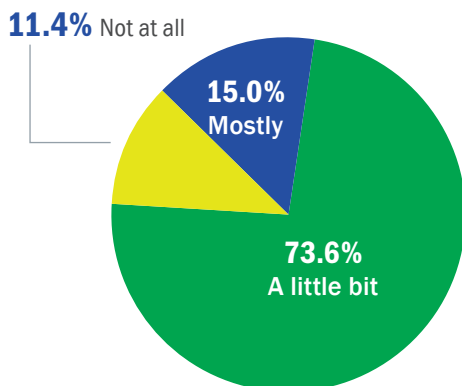


CHART 1.8 DO YOU THINK EVERYONE IN THE U.S. HAS AN EQUAL CHANCE TO SUCCEED?

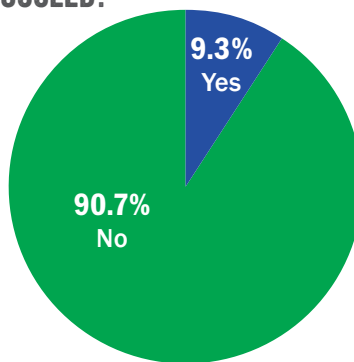
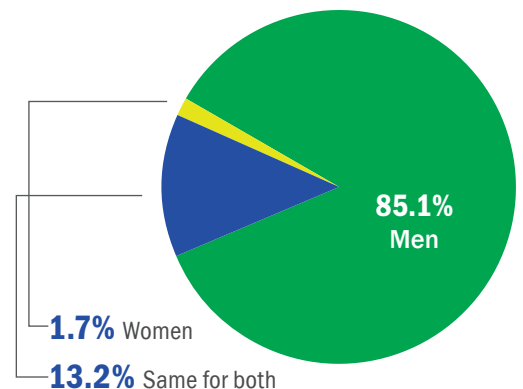


CHART 1.9 IS IT EASIER FOR MEN OR WOMEN TO ACHIEVE FINANCIAL SUCCESS?





Beginning in 2011, the “Occupy” movement focused public attention on economic inequality in the United States and on corporate influence on government. The protesters’ slogan, “We are the 99 percent,” reflects the enormous gap in wealth that separates the richest 1 percent and the rest of the population in today’s America.

When asked for their views on the Occupy movement, almost half (47 percent) responded that it is “a good idea, but ineffective” (see Chart 1.10). Forty-two percent said the statements made by the Occupy movement represent their own concerns, while 46 percent “don’t know” (see Chart 1.11). Of respondents, 76 percent think that corporate America has too much influence over the United States government, a core grievance of the Occupy movement (see Chart 1.12).

76 PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS THINK CORPORATE AMERICA HAS TOO MUCH INFLUENCE OVER THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT.

When asked about their views of the top 1 percent, 43 percent said they believe they “do not deserve what they have,” while 42 percent said they believe “they are too demonized.” Only 15 percent replied that the richest Americans “deserve what they have” (see Chart 1.13). When respondents were asked if they felt they deserve what they have, over half of students in the upper class said no. Their reasons for seeing themselves this way included believing their success was a result of their parents’ success or was a result of being lucky. This is in line with the belief, held by 77 percent of student respondents, that people who earn their wealth deserve it more than people who inherit their wealth.

QUOTES FROM UPPER-CLASS STUDENTS WHO DO NOT FEEL THEY DESERVE WHAT THEY HAVE

“I’ve been given so much because of my father’s hard work, not my own hard work.”

“I didn’t do anything to be born with the privileges I have.”

“I got beyond lucky to be born under the circumstances I am in.”

“I have done nothing my entire life worth the amount my parents have spent on me.”

“God is good. I don’t deserve anything, but God is gracious.”

CHART 1.12 THE INFLUENCE THAT CORPORATE AMERICA HAS OVER THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT IS:

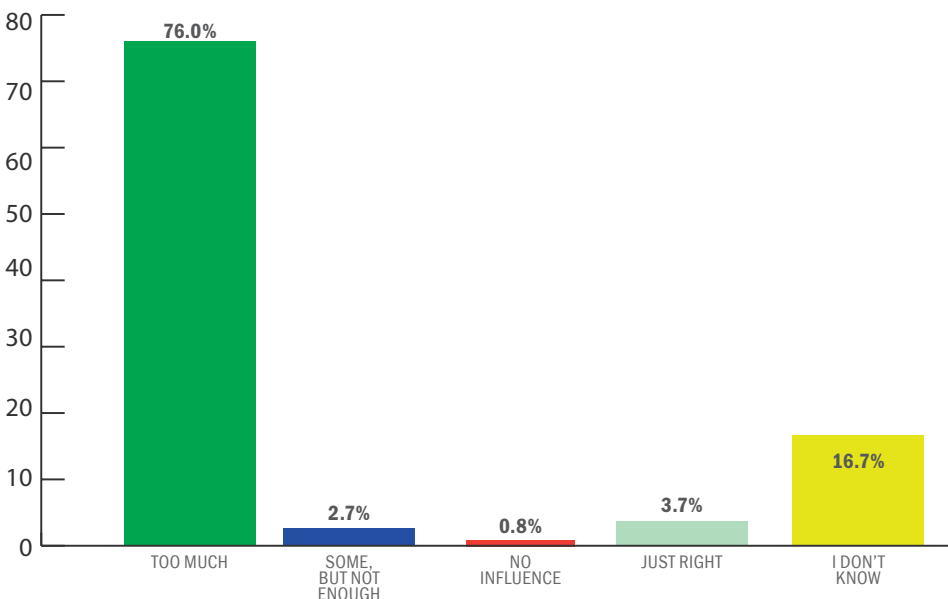


CHART 1.10 WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING WOULD BEST DESCRIBE YOUR VIEW OF THE OCCUPY MOVEMENT?

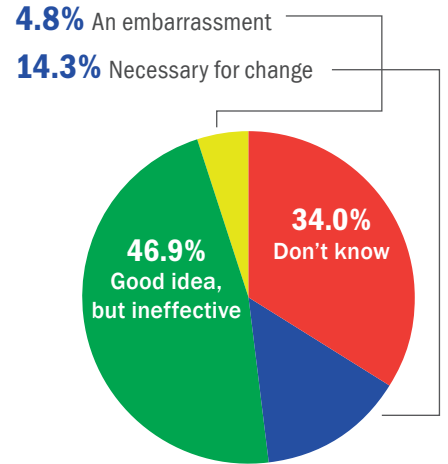


CHART 1.11 MANY STATEMENTS MADE BY THE OCCUPY MOVEMENT REPRESENT MY CONCERNS.

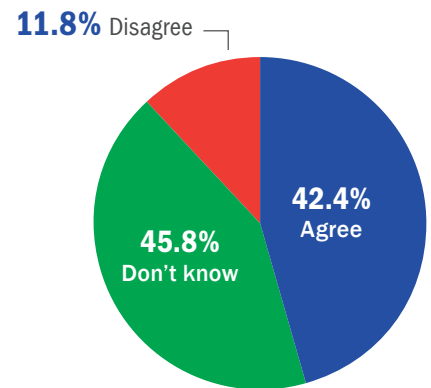
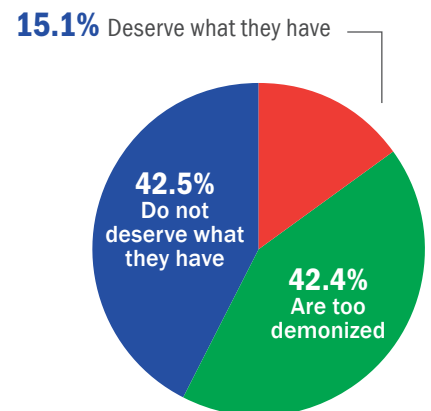


CHART 1.13 I BELIEVE THAT THE TOP 1 PERCENT:





QUOTES FROM STUDENTS WHO DON'T KNOW IF CAPITALISM IS THE BEST SYSTEM FOR THE U.S.

"I don't think there is any foolproof system for any country, but there are problems with our society that need to be resolved."

"I'm not exactly sure what this country needs but it needs something good soon."

"I don't know enough about capitalism to make a decision."

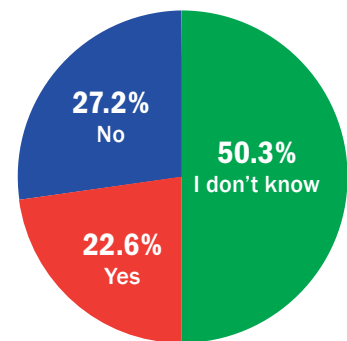
"I would say yes, but the corruption we've seen is destructive."

"I think that capitalism has many issues but there also has not been any other system that has proven not to cause problems either."

These responses indicate that students may find fault with how wealth is acquired in the United States. This sentiment was illuminated when survey participants were presented with a question about capitalism. When asked if they believe it to be the best system for the United States, 50 percent of students admitted that they “don’t know.” Of the remaining half, most believe capitalism is not the best system (see Chart 1.14).

In qualifying their answers, students who were unsure most commonly stated that capitalism is faulty but they do not know what other systems could work, that they don’t know enough about capitalism, and that capitalism in the United States needs to be improved. The 27 percent of students who said “no” to capitalism pointed to disparities in the system, proposed that the United States needs a new or modified system, and believe that capitalism over-promotes greed and individualism. Despite these responses, the majority of students (81 percent) do not believe there should be a cap on how much money a person can have in the United States.

CHART 1.14 IS CAPITALISM THE BEST SYSTEM FOR THIS COUNTRY?



QUOTES ON CAPITALISM

"People should get what they earn. America is based on the fact that one can live the American dream and make as much as they can."

"People work for their money, so if you work hard you deserve that amount."

"People shouldn't be limited for being ambitious and working hard for their wealth."

"Your money is your money...just remember to give it back to the community."

"But the more they make, the more I expect they give back."

"It's [the United States] a capitalist country, you're rewarded for how much work/education you put in."

"I think government regulation on how much someone can make would be overstepping boundaries and rights and [lead] us to a socialist system."

"People's work and their incentives to do so are important to economic markets."

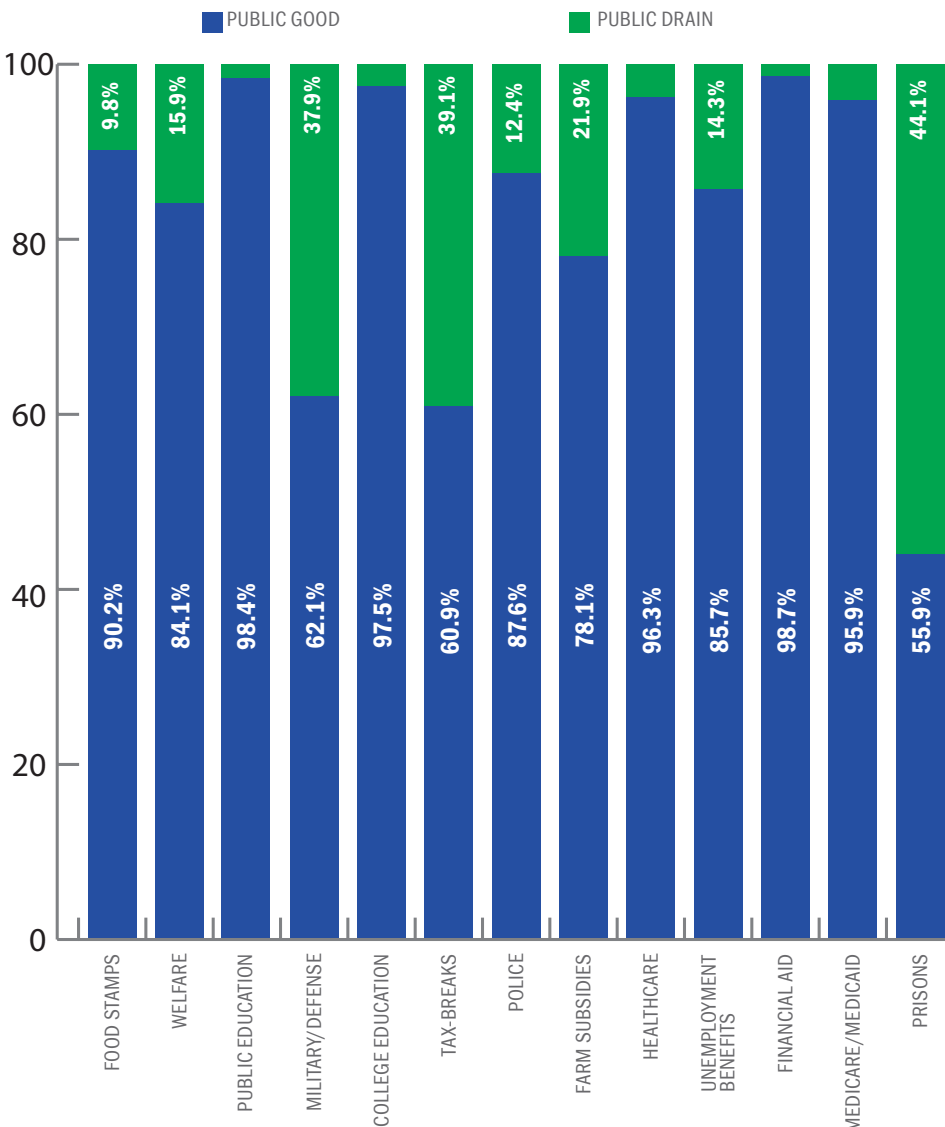


GOVERNMENT AID AND THE PUBLIC GOOD

The survey asked participants to respond to questions related to the United States government and social programs. In general, student responses revealed a deep sympathy for the poor and a belief that the government should support social programs to serve them. The overwhelming majority believes that society should help the poor as much as possible (see Chart 1.15). In addition, 98 percent disagreed with the statement, “Poor people are poor because they are lazy,” and 69 percent disagreed with the statement, “Poor people could better their situation if they worked harder.”

The respondents have specific ideas about government aid and where it is most needed. When asked to mark items on a list of government-supported entitlements and programs as either “public drain” or “public good,” most deemed social programs benefitting the poor as public goods. Overall, the majority regarded food stamps, welfare, public education, military defense, college education, tax-breaks, police, farm subsidies, healthcare, unemployment benefits, financial aid and Medicare/Medicaid all as public goods. Of the public goods, those with the highest support were public education and financial aid (98 and 99 percent), and those with the lowest support were military defense and tax breaks (62 and 61 percent). The prison system was the only government funded item marked a public drain by most participants (56 percent) (see Chart 1.16).

CHART 1.16 IF YOU HAD TO PICK, DO YOU CONSIDER GOVERNMENT SUPPORT OF THE FOLLOWING TO BE A PUBLIC DRAIN OR A PUBLIC GOOD?



QUOTES FROM STUDENTS ABOUT THE WEALTHY

“The wealthy have more capital and resources than [the] less fortunate... The social obligation would be to help out others.”

“With great power comes great responsibility.” (Quoted by many respondents.)

“They have the funds and social power to effectively help a large amount of people.”

“If you have money, you have power to create more change.”

CHART 1.15 HOW MUCH SHOULD WE HELP THE POOR?

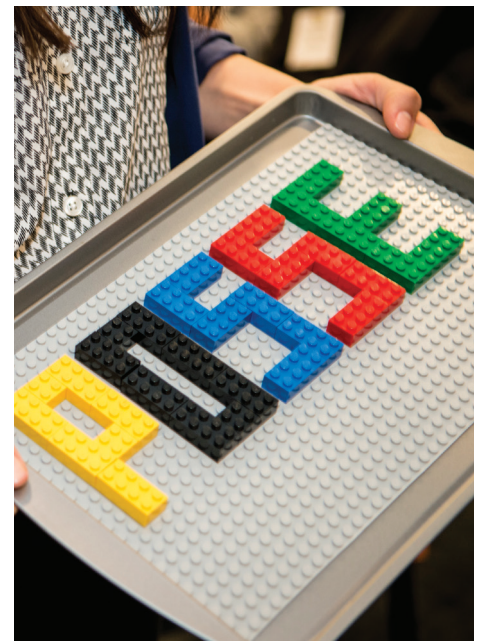
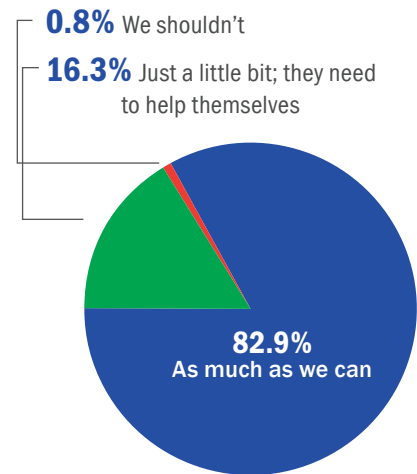
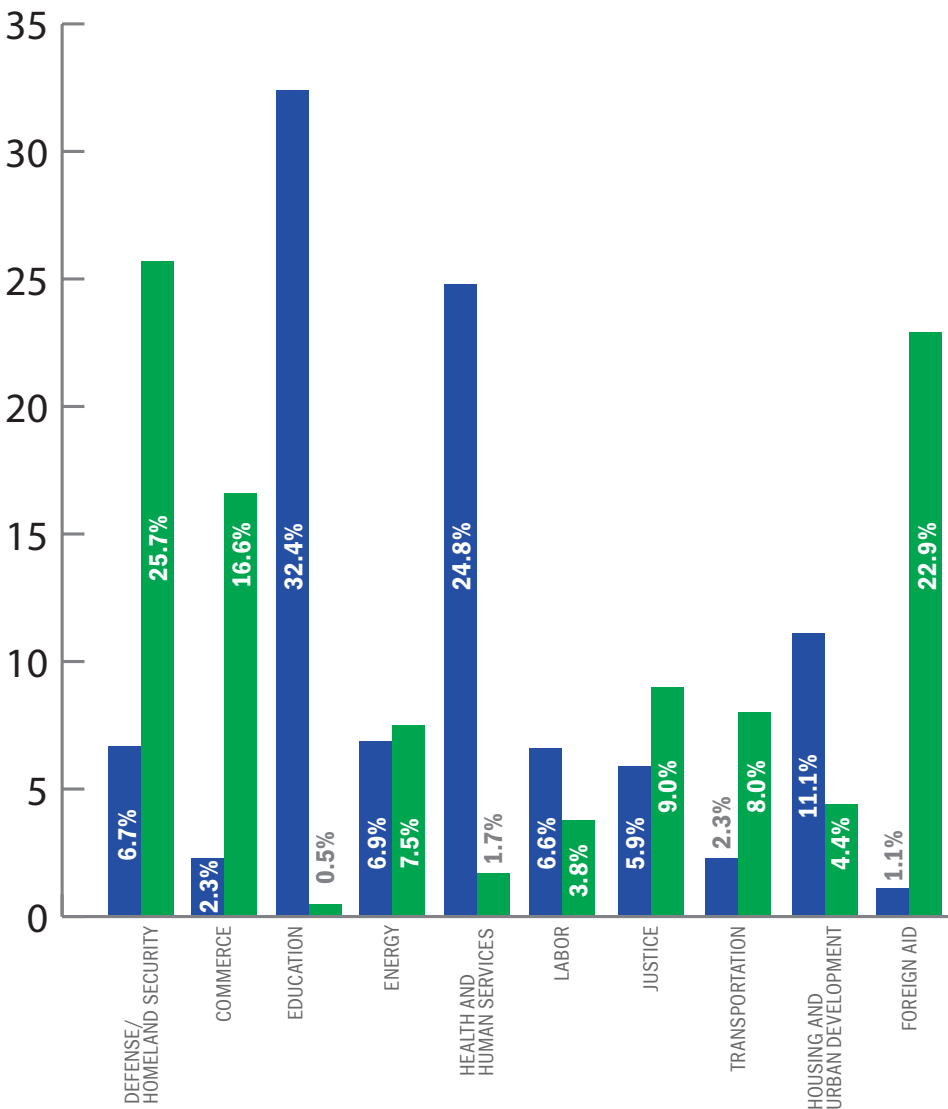


CHART 1.17 STUDENTS' VIEWS ON THE MAKE-UP OF THE FEDERAL BUDGET

■ WHAT SHOULD TAKE UP THE LARGEST PART OF THE FEDER BUDGET? (RESPONDENTS CIRCLED THEIR TOP 3).

■ IF YOU HAD TO REDUCE THE NATIONAL BUDGET, WHICH THREE AREAS WOULD YOU REDUCE?



In terms of the federal budget, student participants believe that funding for social causes should represent the largest portion. The top three areas they listed that should receive the most funding were education, health and human services, and housing and urban development. The top three areas where students felt funding should be reduced were defense/homeland security, foreign aid and commerce (see Chart 1.17).

The students surveyed say that they themselves would accept even more financial responsibility to benefit the greater good and would require those who are more fortunate to do the same. Seventy-five percent stated that they would pay more taxes to fund programs for the public good (see Chart 1.18). In addition, the majority of students believe those who are most fortunate should give more than those who are less fortunate. Eighty-nine percent think the wealthy should be taxed at higher rates than the middle and lower classes, and most believe the wealthy should be required to give back and have more social responsibility than the poor (see Charts 1.19 to 1.21). The majority of respondents who said the wealthy have more social responsibility maintain that wealth is accompanied by power and greater access to social and economic resources. They think the wealthy therefore have a greater obligation to be charitable.

75 PERCENT OF STUDENTS WOULD PAY MORE TAXES IN ORDER TO FUND PROGRAMS FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD.

CHART 1.18 WOULD YOU PAY MORE TAXES IF THE MONEY WENT TO PROGRAMS FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD?

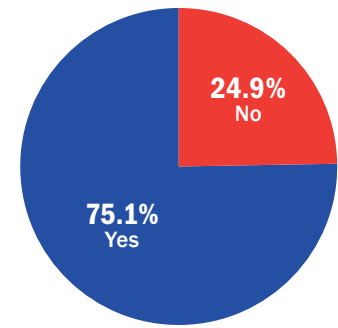


CHART 1.19 DO YOU BELIEVE THE WEALTHY SHOULD BE TAXED AT HIGHER RATES THAN THE MIDDLE AND LOWER CLASS?

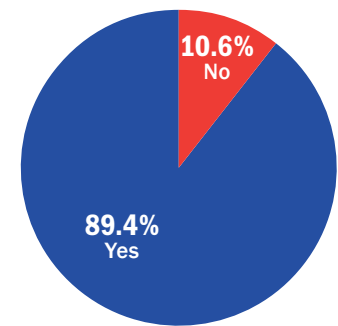


CHART 1.20 SHOULD THE WEALTHY BE REQUIRED TO GIVE BACK?

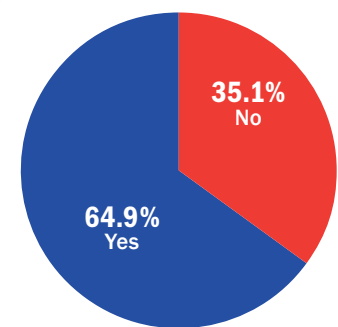
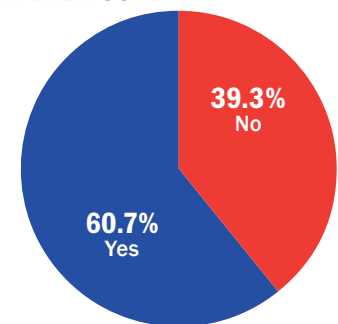


CHART 1.21 SHOULD THE WEALTHY HAVE MORE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY THAN THE POOR?





CLASS, WEALTH AND FUTURE GOALS

The lenses through which student respondents understand the politics of class and privilege in the United States are influenced by their experiences as members of particular socioeconomic classes, as members of campus communities with varying degrees of socioeconomic diversity, and as individuals engaged, to various extents, in critical analysis of these issues. The following sections examine students' perspectives on 1) their own socioeconomic status and that of their families, 2) the ways in which class, power and privilege are manifested on their campuses, and 3) their personal financial and social goals for the future.

CLASS AND PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Most of the students surveyed say they know their parents' salary and classify their immediate families as members of the middle or lower-middle class (see on page 5). When asked which socioeconomic class students most identify with, as compared to the class of their immediate family, fewer identified with the lower and upper classes and more with the middle class (see chart on page 5 and Chart 2.1).

When asked if they are ever proud of their family's socioeconomic status, 77 percent said yes, with more of those in the middle, upper-middle and upper classes feeling this way (see Chart 2.2). Some students (26 percent) say they have been embarrassed by their own or their family's socioeconomic status, with higher percentages of the lower- and upper-class students admitting this. Only 17 percent of middle-class students say they have ever felt embarrassment while much higher percentages of lower-, lower-middle, upper-middle and upper-class students admit the same (see Chart 2.3). When asked if they have ever lied about the socioeconomic class they belong to, 40 percent of upper-class students admitted to lying about their class versus 21 percent or fewer of those in other classes (see Chart 2.4). Those in the upper class who have lied about their class stated they mostly did so to try to hide or downplay their class, or to avoid judgment.

A solid majority of respondents (77 percent) worry about supporting their parents financially, either now or in the future. This worry, however, is far more prevalent among respondents in the lower and lower-middle classes than the middle to upper classes (see Chart 2.5). Furthermore, the majority of lower and lower-middle class students, and over 40 percent of middle class students, have already had to help their families financially (see Chart 2.6). Finally, while virtually all students surveyed have a bank account (98 percent) and many have a credit card (39 percent), the source of the money in their accounts or the money used to pay off their credit cards varies by students' socioeconomic status (See Charts 2.7 and 2.8).

51 PERCENT OF STUDENTS HAVE ALREADY HAD TO HELP THEIR FAMILIES OUT WITH MONEY AND 77 PERCENT WORRY ABOUT SUPPORTING THEIR PARENTS FINANCIALLY.

CHART 2.1 COMPARED TO THE SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS OF THEIR IMMEDIATE FAMILIES, STUDENTS NOW PERCEIVE THEMSELVES TO BE IN:

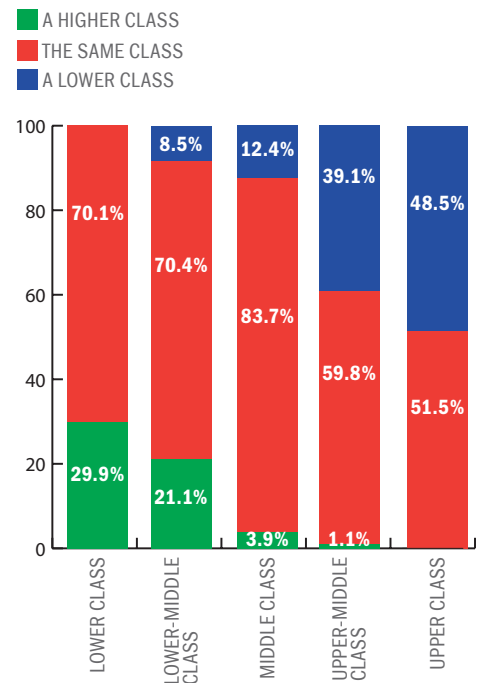


CHART 2.2 ARE YOU PROUD OF YOUR/YOUR FAMILY'S SOCIOECONOMIC CLASS?

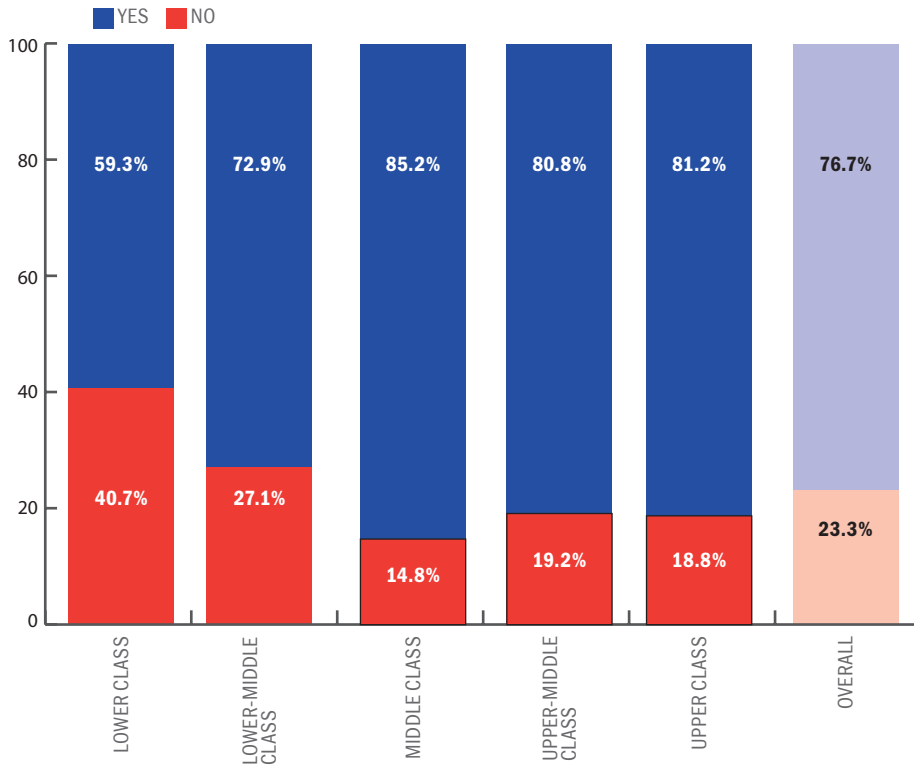
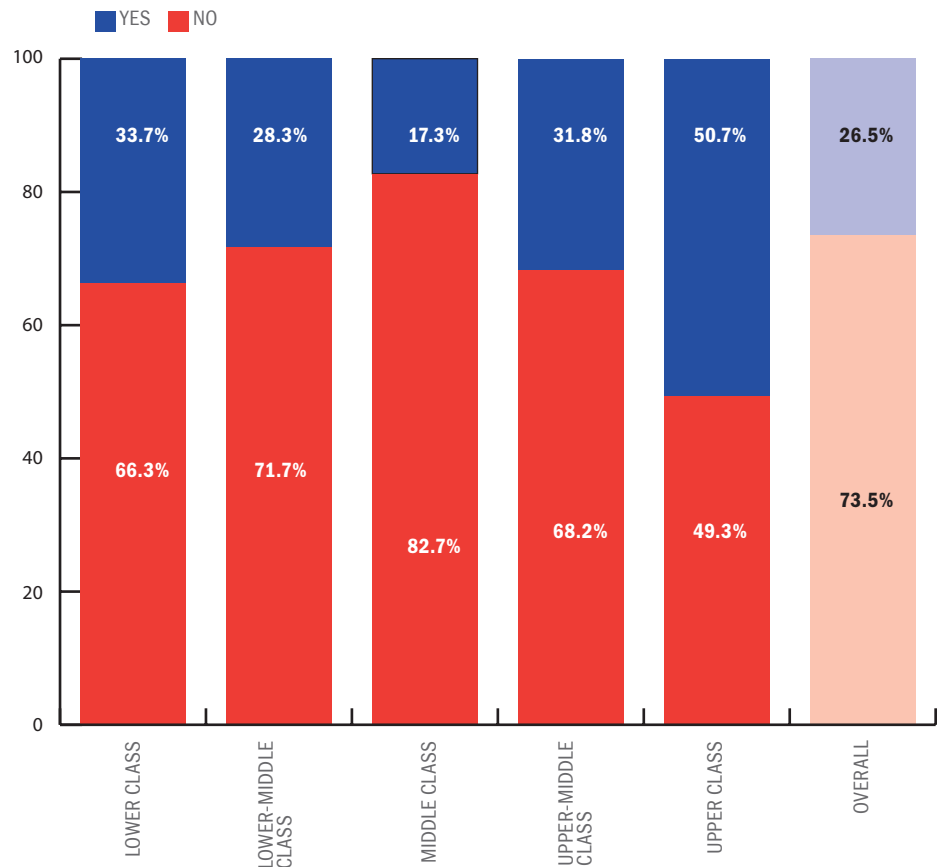


CHART 2.3 ARE YOU EVER EMBARRASSED BY YOUR/YOUR FAMILY'S SOCIOECONOMIC CLASS?



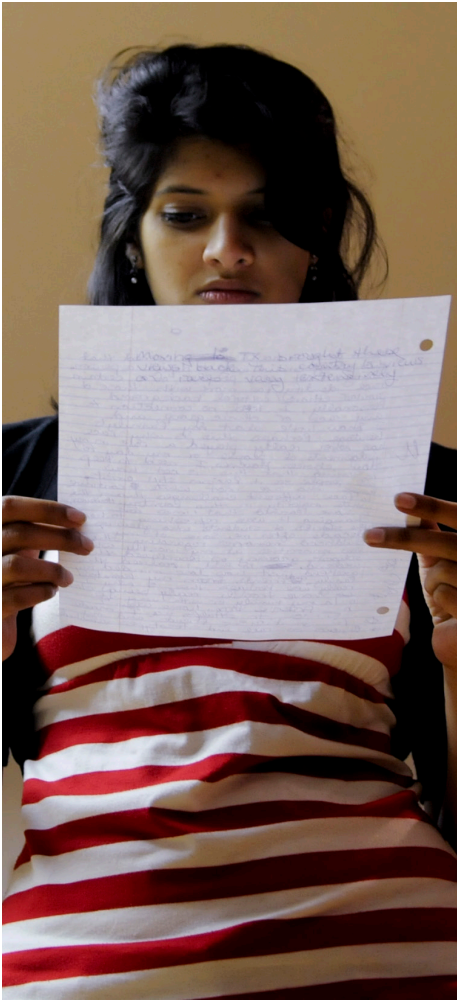


CHART 2.4 HAVE YOU EVER LIED ABOUT WHAT SOCIOECONOMIC CLASS YOU BELONG TO?

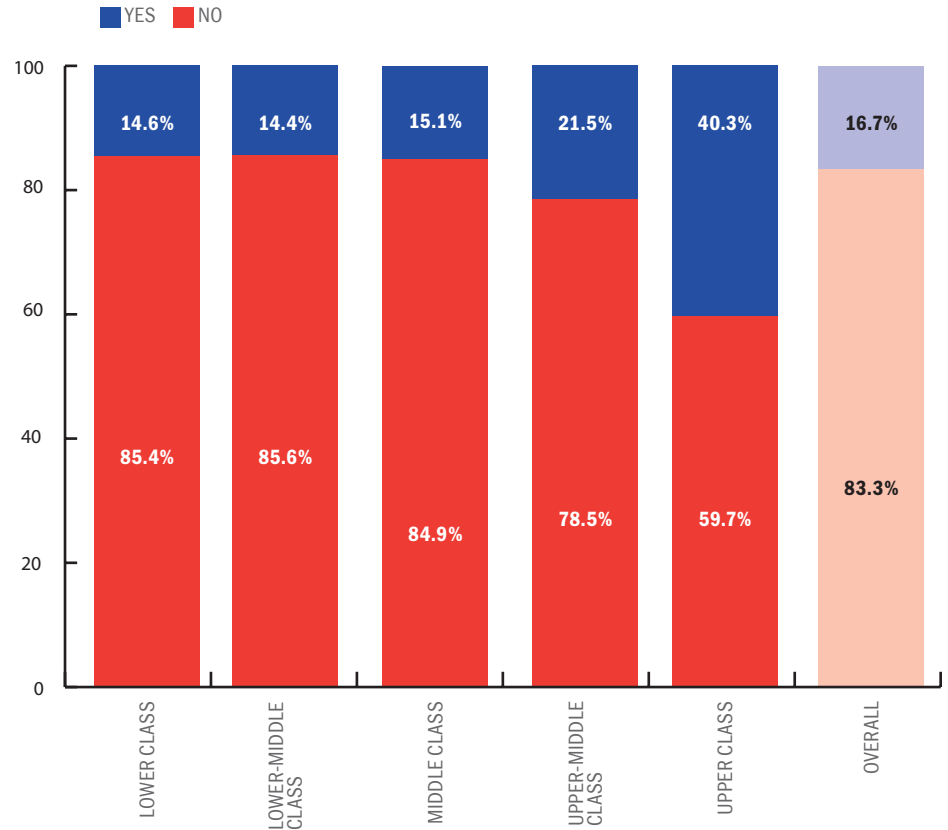


CHART 2.5 DO YOU WORRY ABOUT SUPPORTING YOUR PARENTS FINANCIALLY?

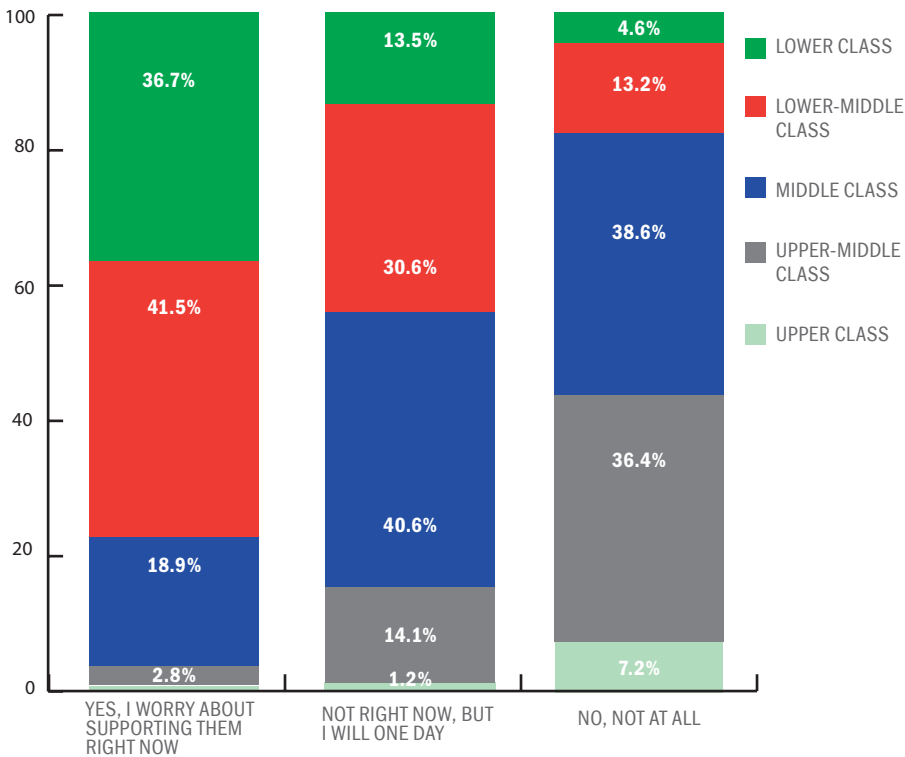


CHART 2.6 HAVE YOU EVER HAD TO HELP YOUR FAMILY OUT WITH MONEY?

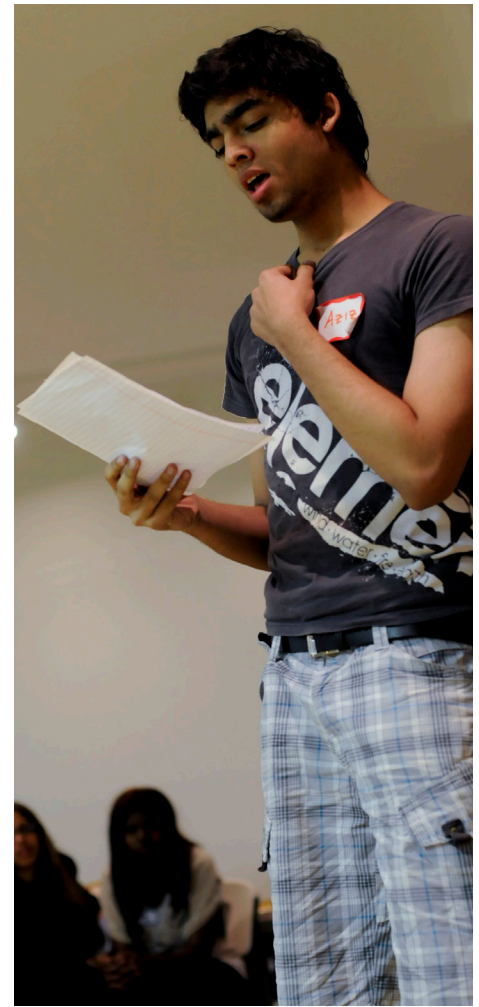
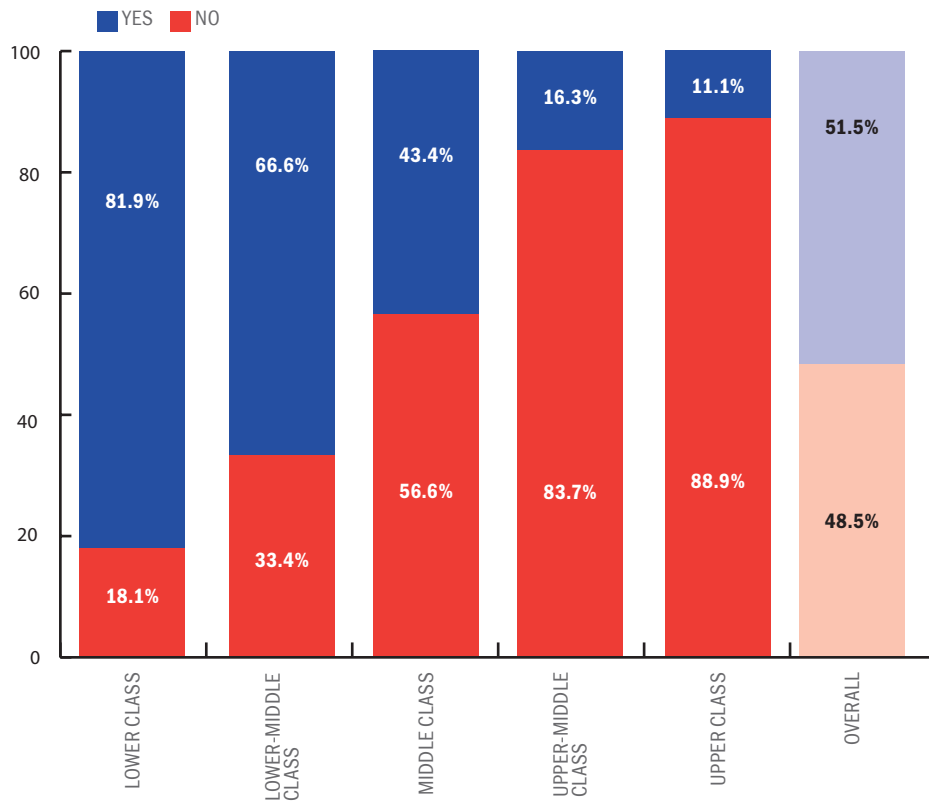


CHART 2.7 IF YES (YOU HAVE A BANK ACCOUNT), WHO PUTS MONEY IN YOUR BANK ACCOUNT?

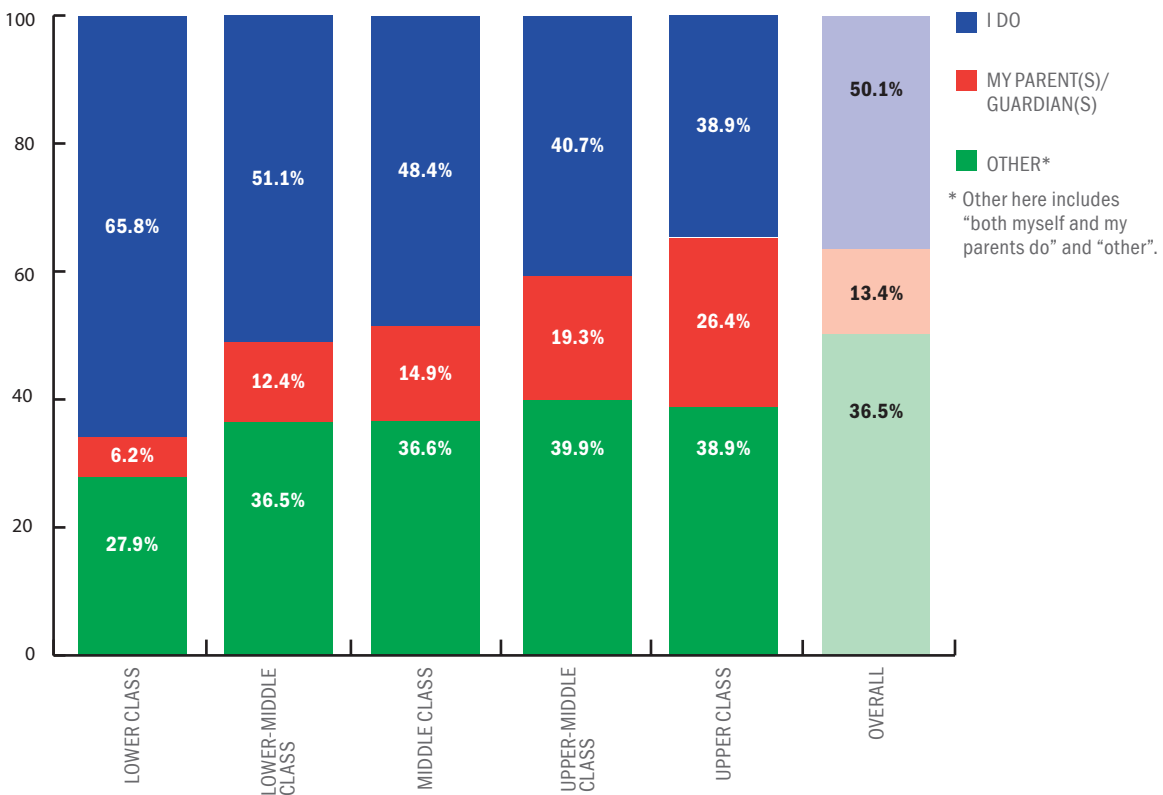
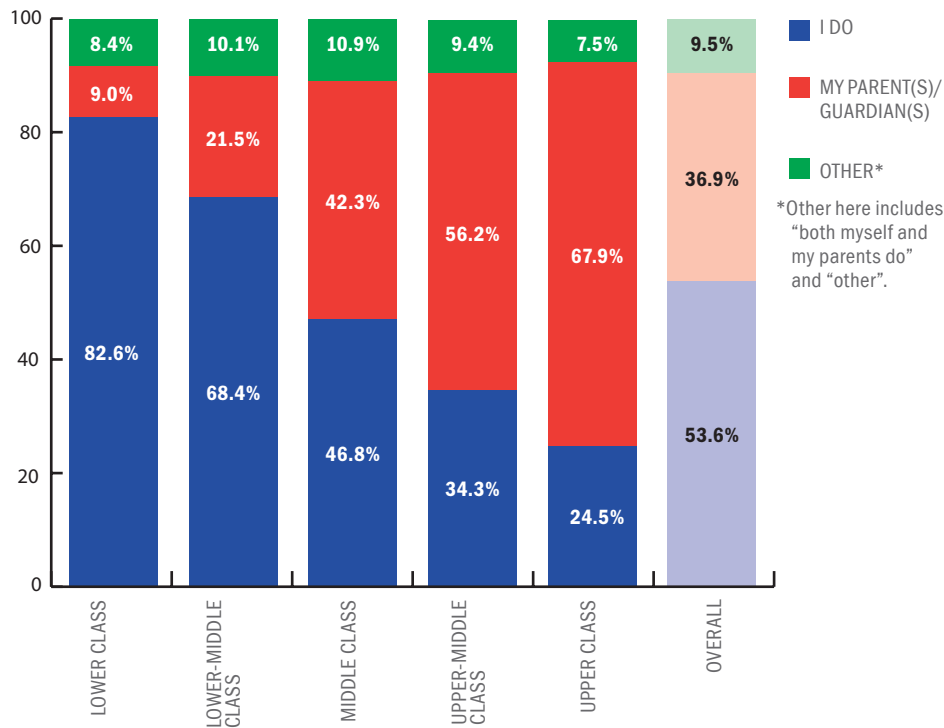


CHART 2.8 WHO PAYS YOUR CREDIT CARD BILL?



CLASS AND WEALTH ON CAMPUS

The experience of students on campus is likely affected by their own socioeconomic background. While most upper-middle- and upper-class students do not worry about paying for books, for example, a majority of lower- to middle-class students do. When it comes to traveling home during school breaks, far fewer lower- and lower-middle-class students can afford to do so (see Charts 2.9 and 2.10). A larger percentage of students from the lower classes than the higher classes also hold paying jobs (see Chart 2.11). Furthermore, a far higher percentage of lower-, lower-middle- and middle-class students received financial aid and/or student loans compared to the upper-middle- and upper-class students (see Chart 2.12).

Eighty-two percent of the students believe socioeconomic class matters greatly at their colleges, and the majority (74 percent) view it as a cause of social division on campus. When reflecting on the social relationships that are formed in college, half of the respondents indicated that their own socioeconomic class played a role in the friendships they have formed in college. More than 60 percent believe students on campus "hang out" with mostly people that belong to the same class.

74 PERCENT OF STUDENTS BELIEVE THAT SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS DIVIDES PEOPLE ON THEIR COLLEGE CAMPUS.

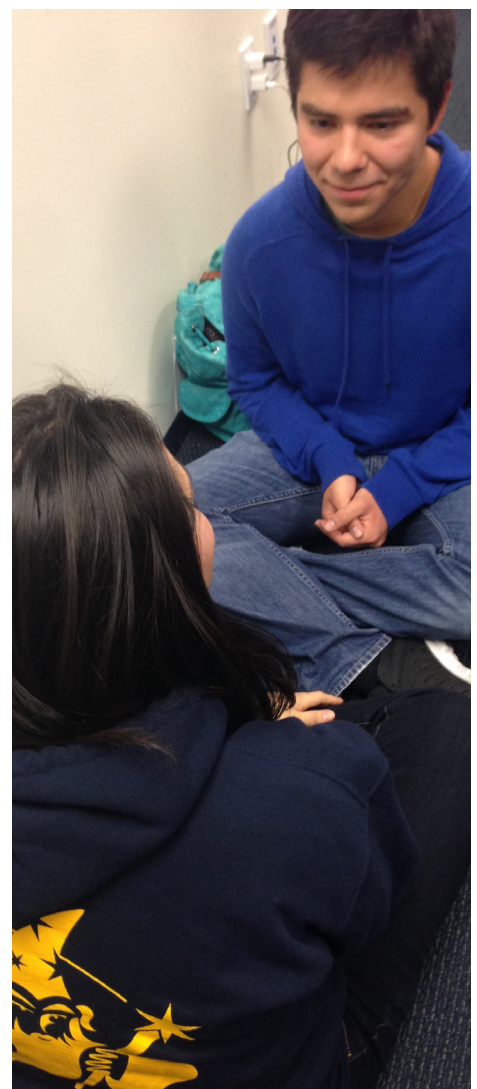


CHART 2.9 HAVE YOU EVER WORRIED ABOUT PAYING FOR BOOKS IN COLLEGE?

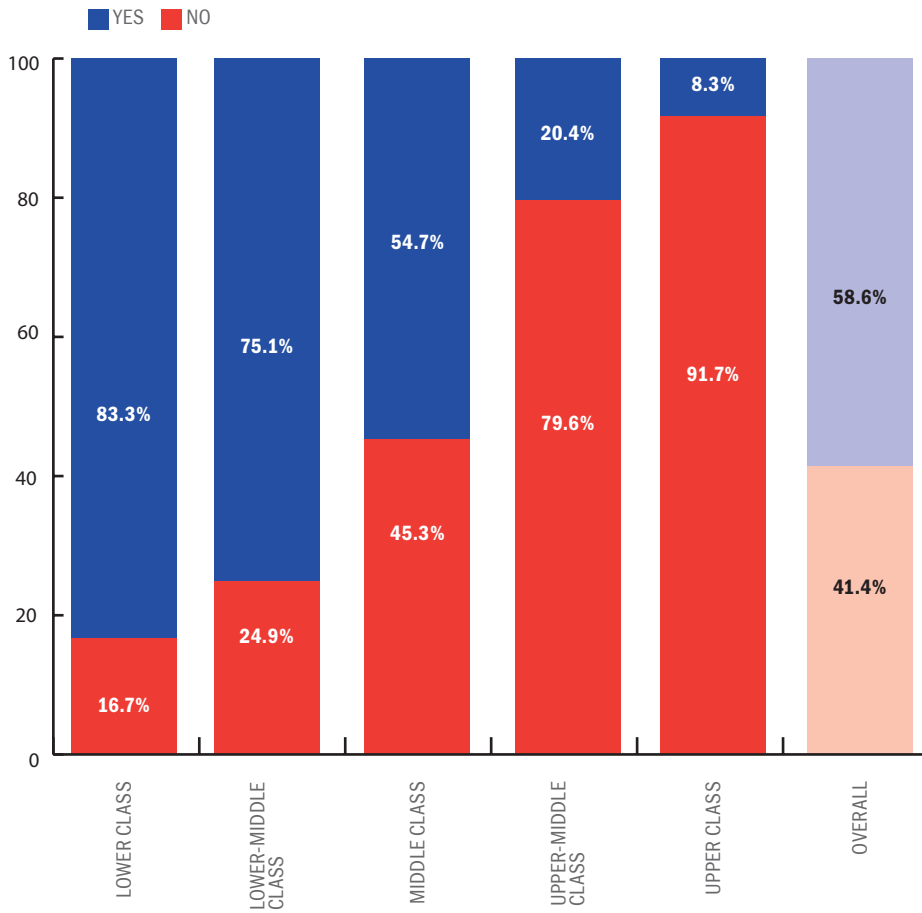


CHART 2.10 CAN YOU AFFORD TO GO HOME DURING EVERY SCHOOL BREAK?

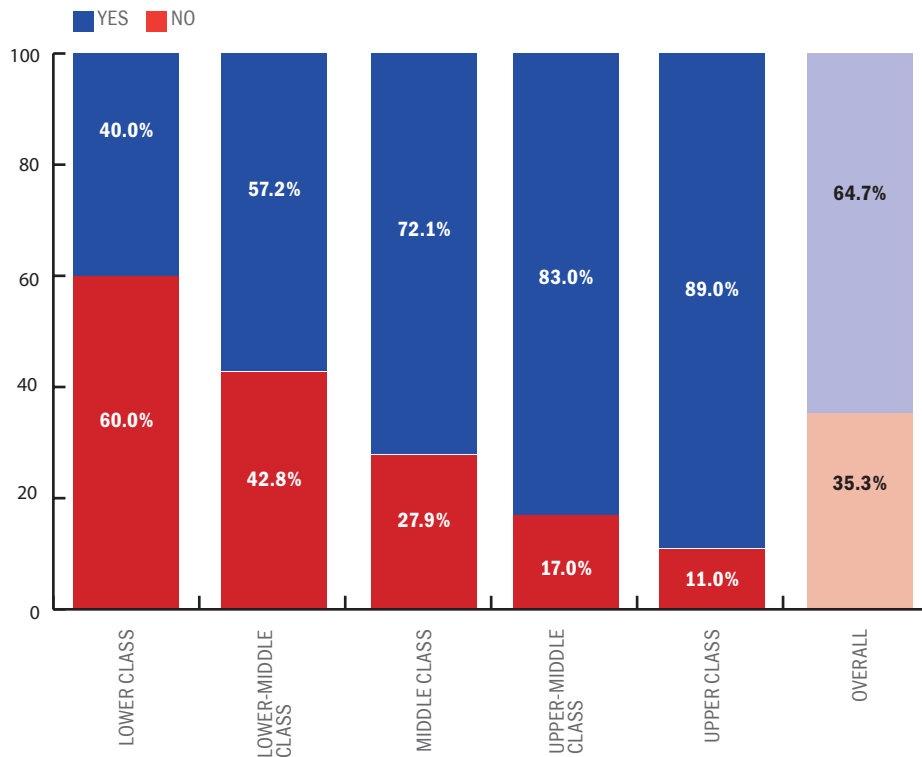


CHART 2.11 DO YOU CURRENTLY HOLD A PAYING JOB?

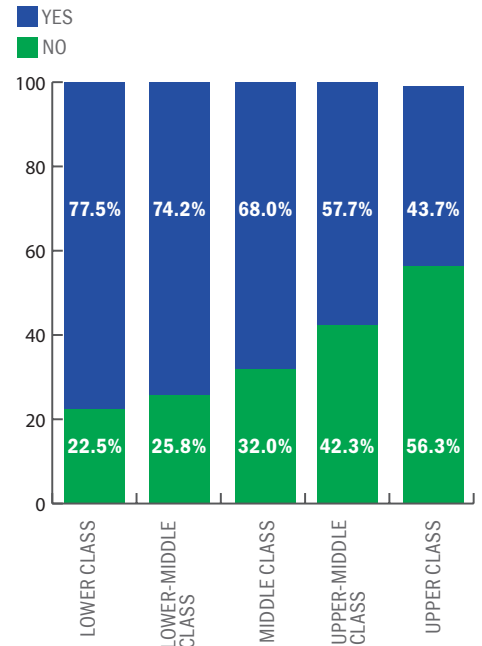
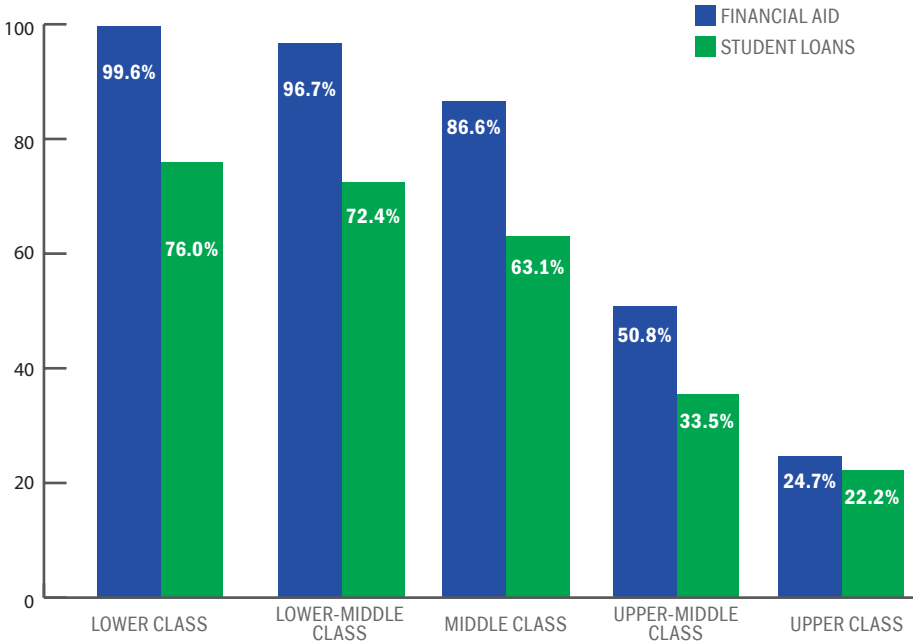


CHART 2.12 STUDENTS WHO RECEIVE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE BY SOCIOECONOMIC CLASS

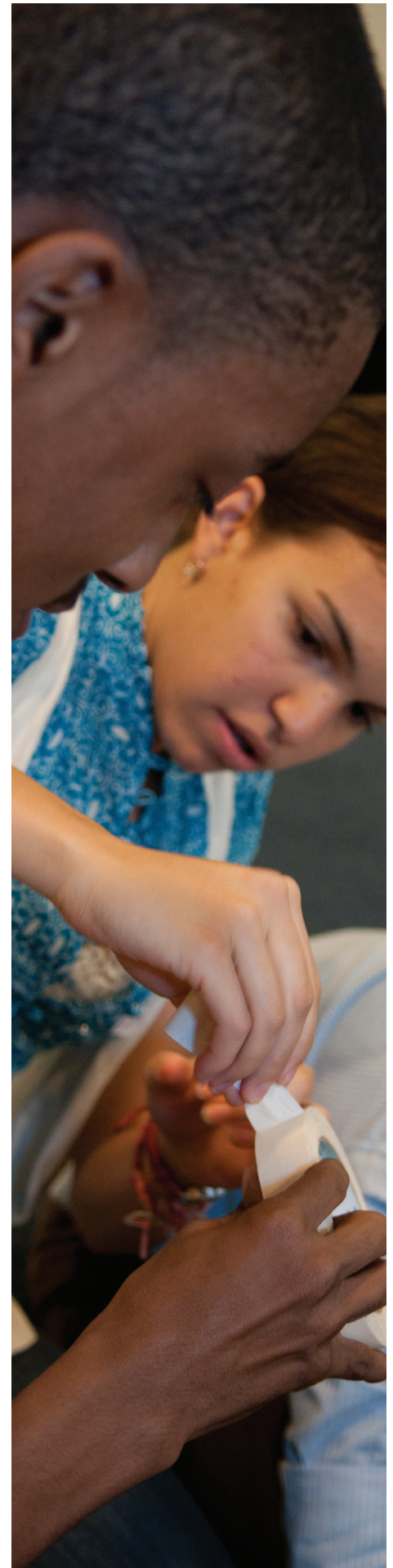
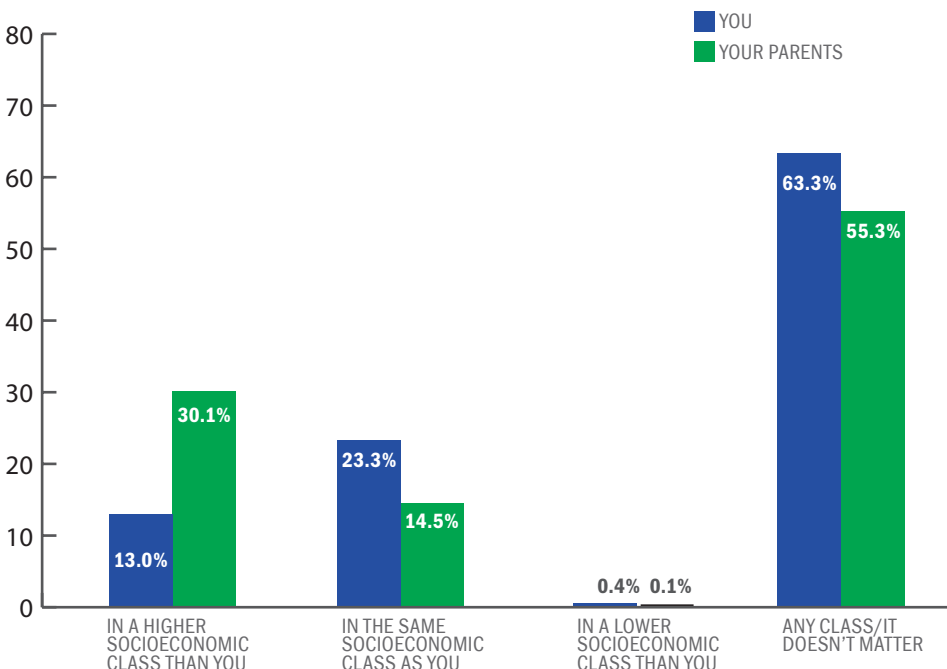


WEALTH AND LOVE

Money does not appear to play a factor in the romantic relationships students pursue. Seventy-two percent of respondents agree with the statement, “When it comes to love, money doesn’t matter.” When replacing “money” with “class” in the same statement, a similar percentage said class doesn’t matter (74 percent).

Most students also disregarded class when considering a future spouse. Over 60 percent stated they would marry someone who is rich, poor or middle class. When asked if they would rather marry someone from a lower, higher or the same socioeconomic class, over 63 percent said it does not matter. Fewer students believed their parents held the same preference (see Chart 2.13).

CHART 2.13 WOULD YOU RATHER MARRY SOMEONE WHO IS/WOULD YOUR PARENTS RATHER YOU MARRY SOMEONE WHO IS:





WEALTH, CLASS AND CAREER

When it comes to their studies, most students (60 percent) do not view future wealth as a reason to pursue their academic major. In addition, over 75 percent of students think it is more important to be college educated than wealthy, and only 35 percent said they would drop out of college if they had the opportunity to get rich without completing their degree (see Charts 2.14 and 2.15).

However, when asked if “making a lot of money” is an important factor in the career they will eventually pursue, more than half said yes. Furthermore, over 90 percent claim that wealth is at least somewhat important to them (see Chart 2.16). Nevertheless, when asked to rank in order of importance four potential reasons for choosing a career, most students ranked “pursuing a personal passion/interest” first and almost half placed “making a lot of money” fourth.

76 PERCENT OF STUDENTS THINK IT'S MORE IMPORTANT TO BE COLLEGE EDUCATED THAN TO BE WEALTHY.

CHART 2.16 HOW IMPORTANT IS WEALTH TO YOU?

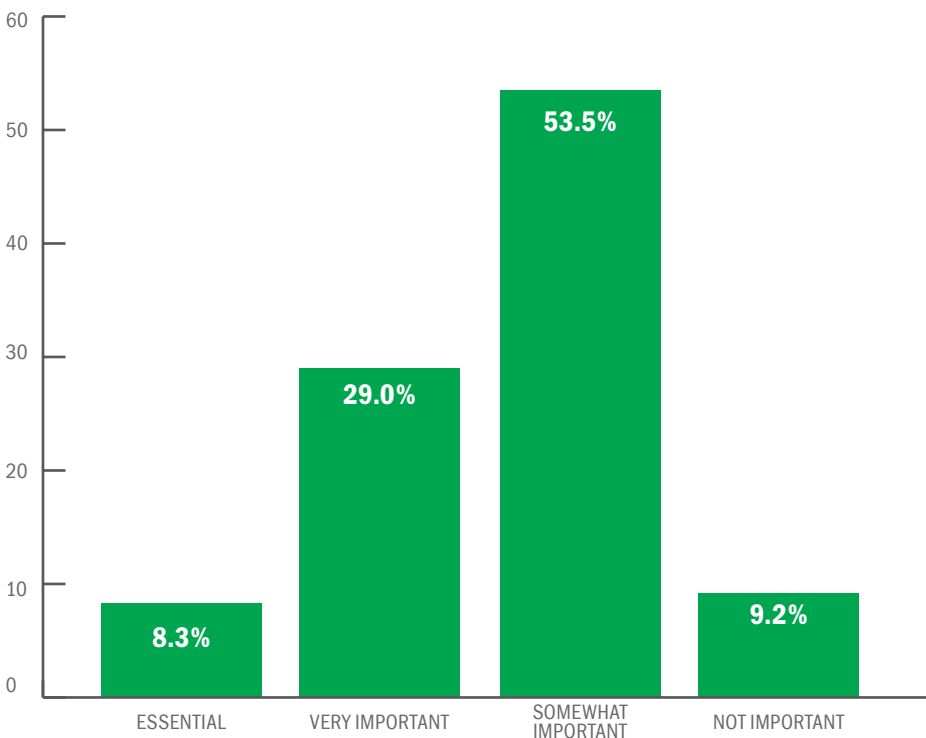


CHART 2.14 WHICH IS MORE IMPORTANT TO YOU?

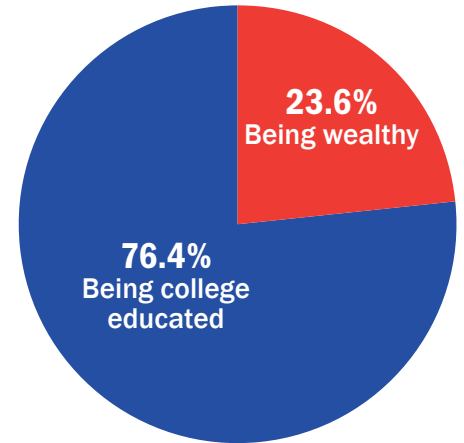


CHART 2.15 IF YOU HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO GET RICH WITHOUT FINISHING YOUR COLLEGE DEGREE WOULD YOU DROP OUT?

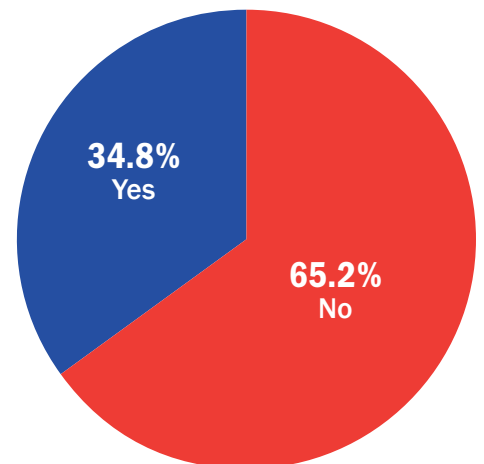
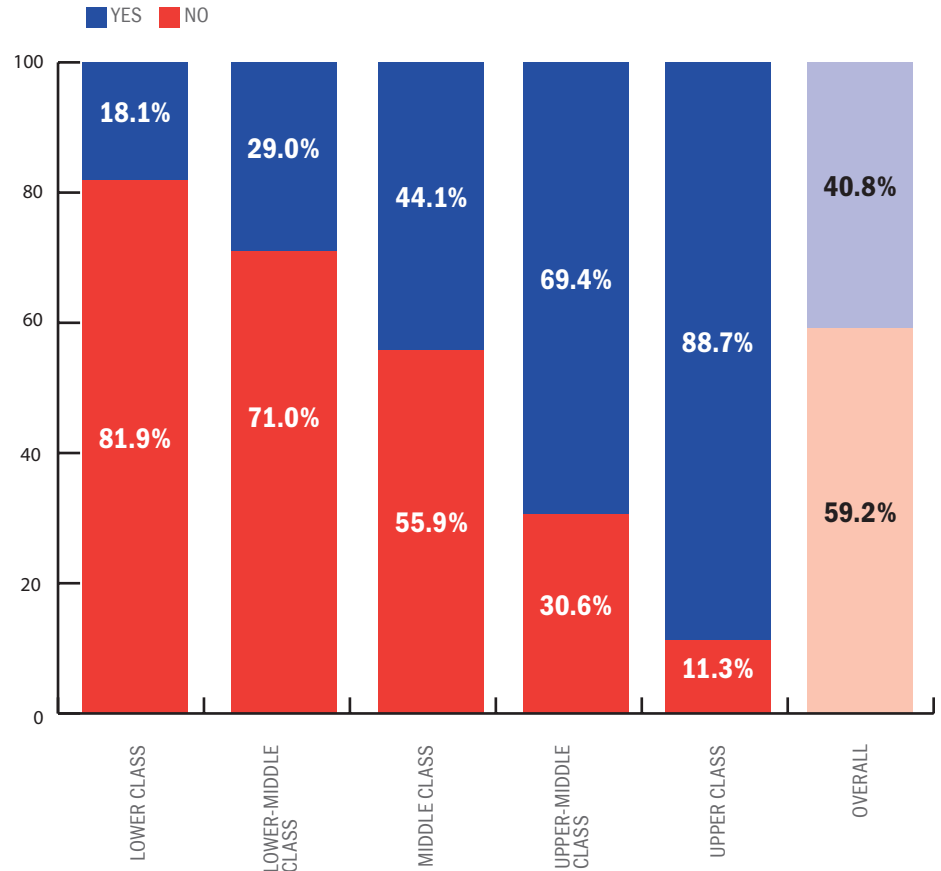




CHART 2.17 DO YOU OR SOMEONE IN YOUR IMMEDIATE FAMILY KNOW SOMEONE WHO COULD INTRODUCE YOU TO A SENIOR EXECUTIVE AT A COMPANY?



While 59 percent of respondents do not have family contacts who could introduce them to a senior company executive, the responses of those who do varied greatly by class. Only 18 and 29 percent of lower and lower-middle class students, respectively, said they had family contacts. The numbers jump to 69 and 89 percent when looking at responses from upper-middle and upper class students, respectively (see chart 2.17). Despite this gap, most students (67 percent) believe it is fair to get a job interview based on a personal or family connection. They are more negative, however, about the notion of actually securing a job based on similar connections. Only 43 percent of students think receiving a job based on a connection is fair. More than half (55 percent) believe getting a job should be based solely on merit.

Despite their perceptions of growing inequality, the country's uncertain economic future, and the limited scope of upward mobility, student respondents seem largely optimistic about their own futures. The large majority (81 percent) believe that they will one day be in a higher economic class than that of

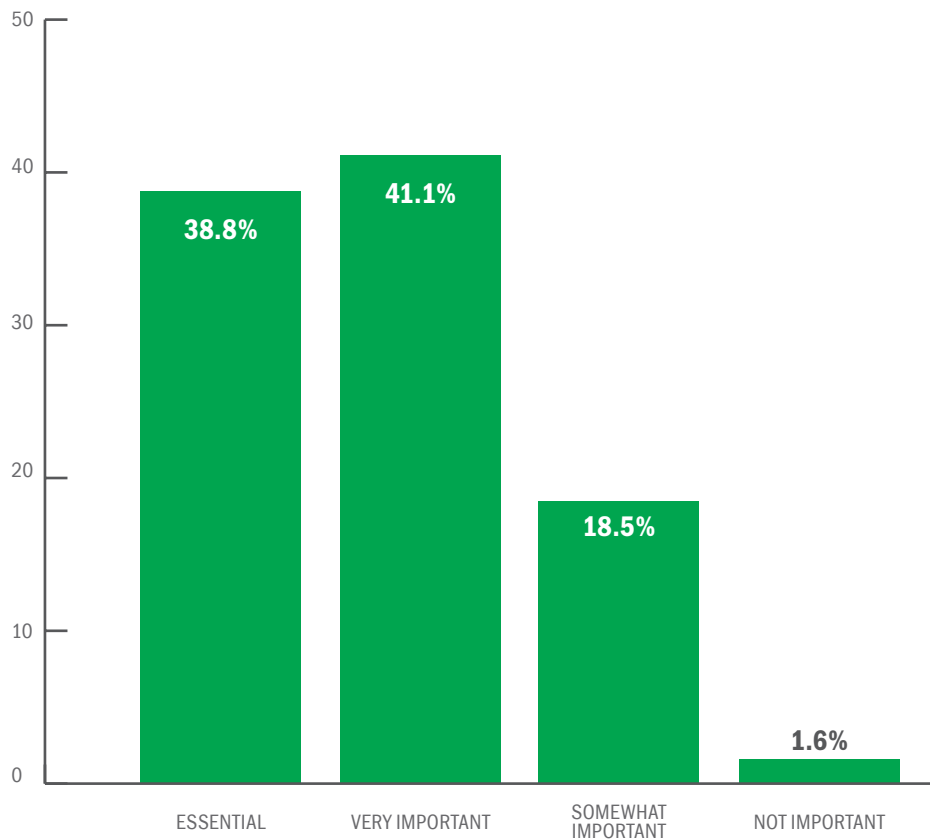
their parents. This is in contrast with current predictions that the millennial generation overall will be worse off financially than their parents' generation.^{ix} Yet a majority of respondents (80 percent) strongly believe in a college degree's power to provide financial opportunities (see Chart 2.18).

81 PERCENT OF STUDENTS BELIEVE THEY WILL ONE DAY BE IN A HIGHER ECONOMIC CLASS THAN THAT OF THEIR PARENT(S)/ GUARDIAN(S).

Their optimism notwithstanding, most students (78 percent) are worried about getting a job once they graduate from college, and more than half expect to move back in with their parents after graduation for at least a short period of time. In fact, recent data has shown that 45 percent of new college graduates live with family.^x And while the unemployment rate for college graduates is lower than for non-college graduates, the economy continues to affect job prospects for degree holders. Of college graduates who have jobs, almost half are working in positions that require less than a college degree.^{xi}



CHART 2.18 HOW IMPORTANT IS A COLLEGE DEGREE TO FINANCIAL SUCCESS?



CONCLUSION

The responses from this survey indicate that this student population is well aware of the weakened economy and more tenuous promise of the American Dream today. They would like to see an improved and more equitable America in the future—one that would channel most federal funding to programs and causes with public benefits. In their own lives, while not indifferent to the importance of wealth, they value a college education more and believe it to be important for achieving financial success. And while differences in class among students on campus may affect some social aspects of their lives, most look beyond class when it comes to their romantic lives and even their future spouses. Despite what students think of the floundering economy and of the uncertain job market upon graduation, they are optimistic about their own futures. They hope that their college education will continue to hold the value it once assured.



END NOTES

ⁱ Evans, K. (2010). America's Richest Entrepreneurs. *Forbes*. Retrieved from <http://www.forbes.com/2010/11/03/richest-self-made-american-billionaire-entrepreneurs-gates-buffett-self-made-10-entrepreneurs.html>

ⁱⁱ Speth, J. G. (2011). We're Number One! Americans are number one in quite a few areas—but they're not all accomplishments to be proud of. *YES! Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://www.yesmagazine.org/people-power/on-american-superiority>

ⁱⁱⁱ Jacobs, D. L. (2011). Occupy Wall Street And The Rhetoric of Equality. *Forbes*. Retrieved from <http://www.forbes.com/sites/deborahljacobs/2011/11/01/occupy-wall-street-and-the-rhetoric-of-equality/>

^{iv} Share of entering classes at top universities and community colleges coming from families in various socioeconomic fourths. (2012). *State of Working America*. Retrieved from <http://stateofworkingamerica.org/chart/swa-mobility-figure-3n-share-entering-classes/>

^v Census: U.S. Poverty Rate Spikes, Nearly 50 Million Americans Affected. (2012). CBS DC. Retrieved from <http://washington.cbslocal.com/2012/11/15/census-u-s-poverty-rate-spikes-nearly-50-million-americans-affected/>

^{vi} Press Release: Household Income Down by 4.4 Percent Overall Post Recession -- Many Groups with Larger Income Declines. (2013). *Sentier Research*. Retrieved from http://www.sentierresearch.com/pressreleases/Sentier_PressRelease_PostRecessionaryHouseholdIncomeChange_June2009toJune2013_08_21_13.pdf

^{vii} US Census Bureau, Data Integration Division. Table H-11AR. Size of Household, All Races, by Median and Mean Income: 1975 to 2012. *U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplements*. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/data/historical/household/>

^{viii} What Percent Are You? (2012). *The New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2012/01/15/business/one-percent-map.html?_r=1&gwh=6CEE8622417BC5138DF07C0D52120FE1&gwt=pay

^{ix} Steuerle, Eugene, McKernan, Signe-Mary, Ratcliffe, Caroline, Zhang, S. (2013). Lost Generations? Wealth Building among Young Americans. Urban Institute. Retrieved from <http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/412766-Lost-Generations-Wealth-Building-Among-Young-Americans.pdf>

^x Weissmann, J. (2013). Here's Exactly How Many College Graduates Live Back at Home. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2013/02/heres-exactly-how-many-college-graduates-live-back-at-home/273529/>

^{xi} Vedder, R., Denhart, C., Robe, J. (2013). Why Are Recent College Graduates Underemployed? University Enrollments and Labor-Market Realities. *Center for College Affordability and Productivity*. Retrieved from <http://centerforcollegeaffordability.org/uploads/UnderemployedReport2.pdf>

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