

at the cinema house
FRUITVALE STATION

REVOLT? RETHINK?

POSSEPLUS RETREAT 2014 REPORT

REFORM?



INTRODUCTION

Each spring semester, The Posse Foundation, along with its partner colleges and universities, hosts a series of three-day, off-campus retreats focused on a single theme. These PossePlus Retreats (PPRs) afford a unique opportunity: Thousands of college students from dozens of colleges and universities across the country engage in discourse on a social or political issue that is important to them. Posse believes their voices are important because these young people are the future leaders of the United States—in government, NGOs, and private industry—and will soon influence the direction of the country.

The topic for the PPRs is chosen by Posse Scholars themselves, with but one criterion: social significance. Posse retreat facilitators use special workshops and activities to promote dialogue and engage the participants, who include Posse Scholars, members of the general student body, faculty members and administrators.

In 2014, more than **4,100 participants** from **44 Posse** partner colleges and universities attended PPRs. Titled “Revolt? Rethink? Reform?,” the retreats examined past social and political movements and their relevance to present-day society. The Posse Institute—the research department within The Posse Foundation—used a 52-question survey at the start of the retreats to gather participants’ perspectives. This survey was completed anonymously by **3,712 students and 356 faculty members and administrators.**

This report summarizes the results of the 2014 PPR survey. Seven major points emerged as most representative of the views and knowledge of the student retreat participants. In summary, they are:

- Participants feel strongly that social and political movements remain necessary today and relevant to today’s issues.
- Participants are dissatisfied with the status quo and think that it is important to challenge it despite the potential for backlash.
- Despite the common practice in higher education of maintaining a neutral position on social and political issues, participants think college and university presidents bear a responsibility to promote social justice.
- Despite overall progress, participants believe their campuses still face real challenges related to race, class and other biases and prejudices.
- Participants list that they are most passionate about addressing issues around race, equality, gender bias and LGBTQ rights.
- Participants believe in themselves and their power to make a positive difference on their campuses, in this country and in the world.
- Participants believe that while protests, marches and other mass gatherings are important, Internet outlets and social media are today’s most powerful vehicles to spread the word on issues of importance.

POSSEPLUS RETREATS are three day, off-campus gatherings of Posse Scholars, students, faculty and staff designed to encourage dialogue on a current issue and to strengthen the bonds between members of the college or university community.

COLLEGE + UNIVERSITY PARTNER RETREAT PARTICIPANTS

Agnes Scott College

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

Cornell University

Denison University

DePauw University

Dickinson College

Franklin & Marshall College

Grinnell College

Hamilton College

Hobart and William Smith Colleges

Kalamazoo College

Lafayette College

Lawrence University

Middlebury College

Mount Holyoke College

Northwestern University

Oberlin College

Pepperdine University

Pomona College

Sewanee: The University of the South

Syracuse University

Texas A&M 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 Texas at Austin

University of Wisconsin-Madison

Vanderbilt University

Vassar College

Wheaton College

CONTEXT

Posse facilitators kicked off the retreats with the following narrative.



Fifty years ago, hundreds of thousands of Americans marched on Washington in one of the largest rallies this country has ever seen. Our grainy black and white images of Martin Luther King and the masses assembled that August day represent only one of many movements in this nation's dynamic history. Abolitionism. Women's Suffrage. The Labor Movement. The Anti-War Protests. These are just a few, well-known movements that have helped secure some of our rights and freedoms, movements whose leaders and supporters fought against what they saw as unjust. Today, many ask how yesterday's activism speaks to the current and future generations of this country. Some ask if we need any change or movements anymore. Are the days of sit-ins and strikes gone? It's true—segregation signs no longer hang over water fountains, colleges are more diverse than they were 10 years ago, and same-sex couples can get married. Many argue that we have one of the most tolerant societies on the planet. Yet, war rages on, women make less on the dollar than men and our prison population has exploded. In 2014, we face our share of complex issues—privacy, drone strikes, clean energy, citizenship, income disparity, gun control, healthcare, the list goes on.

The first line of the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution states, "We the people, in order to form a more perfect Union . . ." Words that provide each of us with a charge to "establish justice" and "to secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity." One can argue that these words are at the heart of every sociopolitical movement that has extended the liberties our constitution originally only granted to a select few. In 1788, women, indentured servants, landless white men, slaves, and Native Americans could not vote. As a result of social movements and people willing to risk their lives, this is no longer true. But as we move further into the 21st century what will future movements in this country look like? Will they look like the Arab Spring or The Tea Party? Will they look like the NRA or the Occupy Movement? Will they resemble The Dreamers or the anti-abortion movement? Or, are collective movements still even necessary in a hyper-connected age, where you can influence and mobilize multitudes online?

In the past, students were the kindle to the fire of many historic movements. Young people played key roles to make this country, and this world, a better place. Is this true today? Are young people still moving the needle forward? Do they, do you, still have passion for causes central to human rights? Is it fair to expect the same of you today? What does 'change' mean to you? Have you ever considered yourself to be someone who could make a real difference where you live, where you come from, or at your college? Do the possibilities of action inspire you, or do the problems just seem overwhelming? How have movements affected your life or your family's life? How do your values and your upbringing shape how you define activism and engagement? How does your identity influence what you care about or what you may be indifferent to? What are you willing to stand up for?

For this year's retreats, Posse Scholars voted for Social and Political Movements. They wanted to explore what movements looked like in the past, what they look like now, and what they may look like in the future. It doesn't take much to realize that we live in a nation steeped in a deep history of social movements that have transformed it. But we want to know, is this period of history over? Will we see any significant change in our lifetime? What does it mean to Revolt, to Reform, or to Rethink?

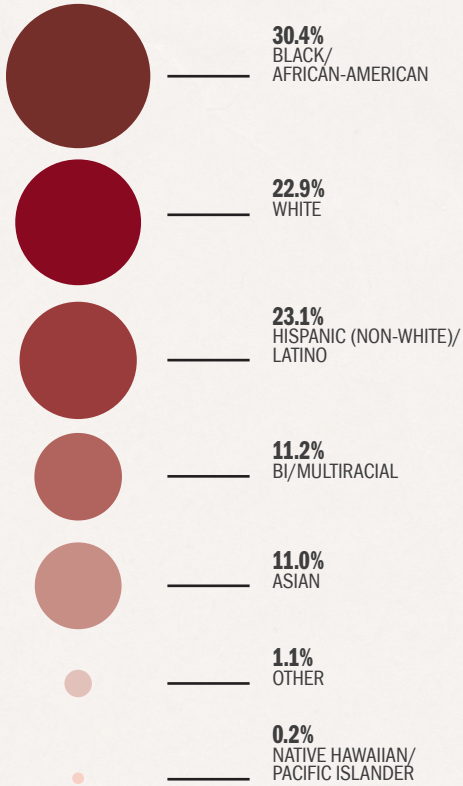


GROUP CHARACTERISTICS

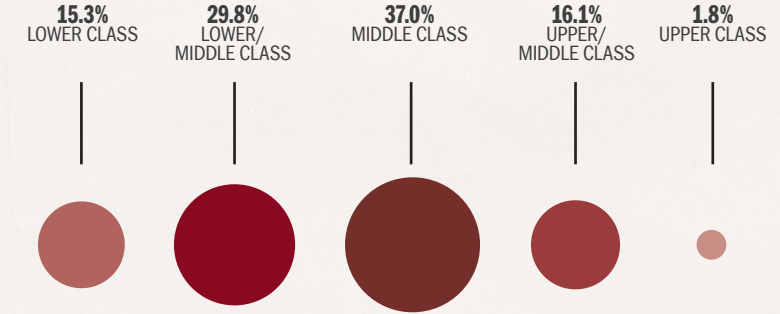
DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENTS RESPONDING TO THE SURVEY ARE AS FOLLOWS:

- Average age: **19.8 YEARS**
- Born in the U.S.: **79.7%**
- Sex: **39.0% MALE, 60.6% FEMALE, 0.4% OTHER**

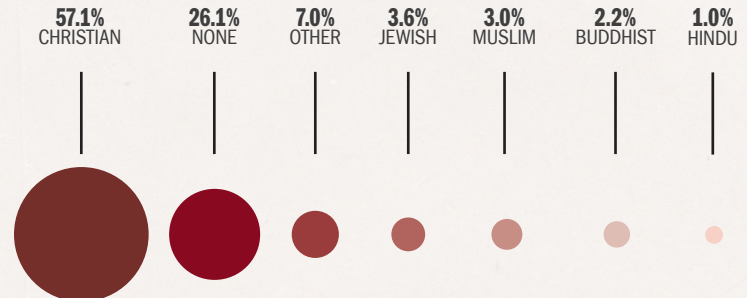
RACIAL/ETHNIC BREAKDOWN BASED ON SELF-IDENTIFICATION



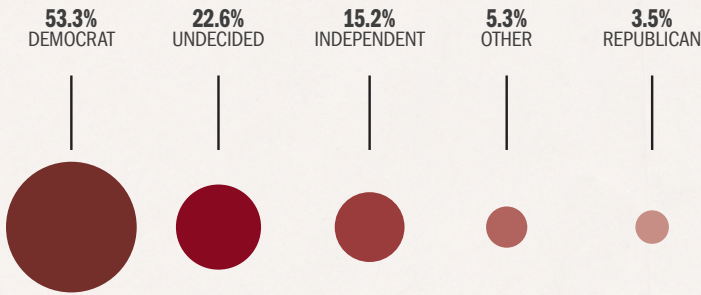
SOCIO-ECONOMIC CLASS



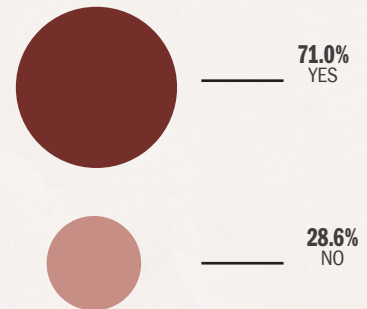
RELIGION



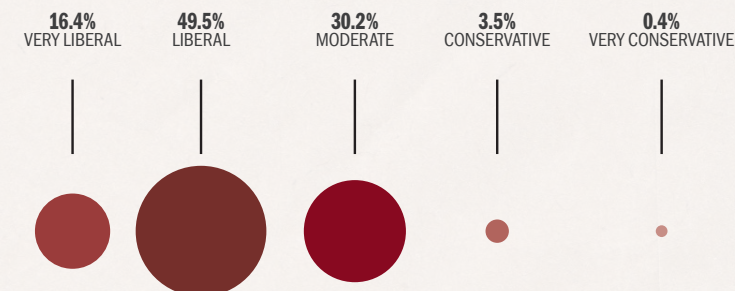
POLITICAL AFFILIATION



ARE YOU REGISTERED TO VOTE?



POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY



PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL MOVEMENTS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The year 2015 marks the 50th anniversary of the civil rights march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama. It seems a good time to ask: What has changed over the last half-century? Are Americans' rights and freedoms secure? Are social and political movements still needed today? Does today's generation believe they can create change?

In general, almost all students surveyed believe that social/political movements are still necessary today and are relevant to today's issues (see charts 1.1 and 1.2). When asked to explain why, the majority of respondents pointed to the many social and political issues that have yet to be confronted in the world today, and that movements are a powerful way for voices to be heard and can raise awareness about particular issues. The students also noted that movements are needed to create change, because if people don't act, no progress will be made. Those surveyed identified several issues that they believe have yet to be resolved, including poverty, racism, income disparity, globalization, education reform, gender inequality and LGBTQ rights.

Many students equated the notion of a "movement" with collective, physical action, in contrast to debate and discussion through various technology and social media outlets. However, when asked about the power of current trends and technology for movements, 61 percent of students considered social media and technology to be more powerful ways for change-making than the social and political movements of the past. The use of technology to promote social and political agendas has increasingly become popular in society today. A recent study by the Pew Research Center found that 34 percent of American adults who use social media post comments about social and political issues and 31 percent have used social media to encourage others to act on issues important to them.¹

97 PERCENT OF STUDENTS FEEL THAT MOVEMENTS ARE STILL NECESSARY TODAY.

CHART 1.1
ARE MOVEMENTS STILL NECESSARY TODAY?

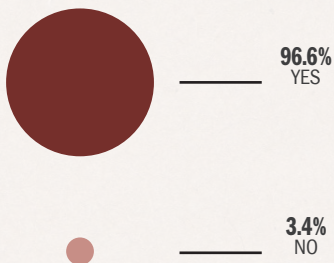
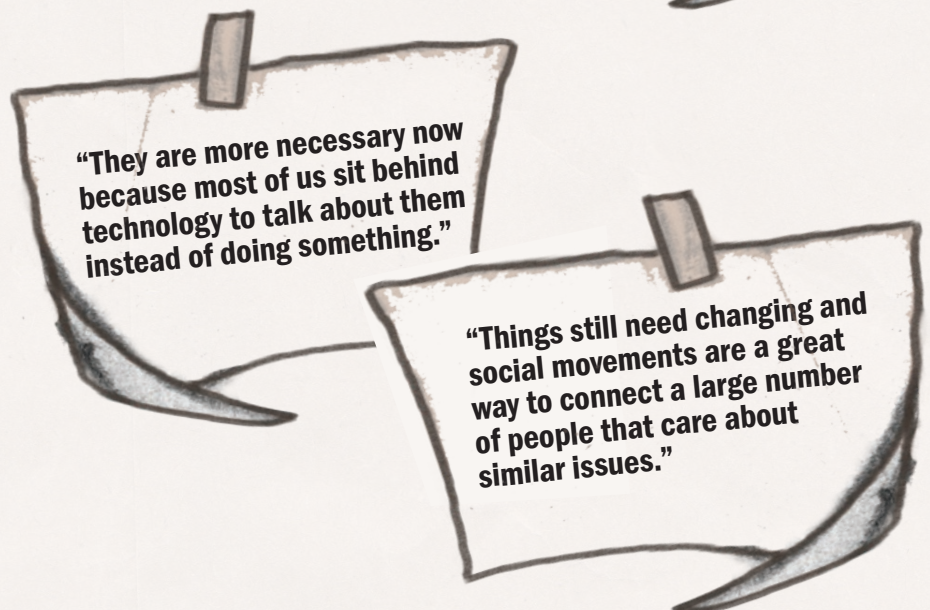
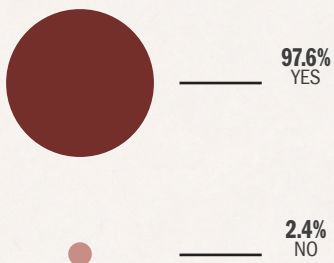


CHART 1.2
ARE SOCIAL/POLITICAL MOVEMENTS RELEVANT FOR TODAY'S ISSUES?



Most students believe the word “activist” to be positive (see Chart 1.3). Moreover, a majority view activism as heroic and a current social imperative (see Chart 1.4). When asked to name someone who stands out as a leader of a movement today, most respondents named President Barack Obama, defining him as a positive contributor to society. Other leaders frequently cited by both students and faculty/administrators included Michelle Obama, Hillary Clinton and Malala Yousafzai (see Tables 1.1 and 1.2 and corresponding charts). In general, students were more likely to name entertainers, such as Beyoncé and Oprah Winfrey, as leaders of movements, than the faculty and administrators.

CHART 1.3
IS THE WORD ACTIVIST A
POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE WORD?

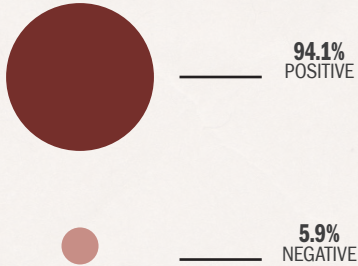
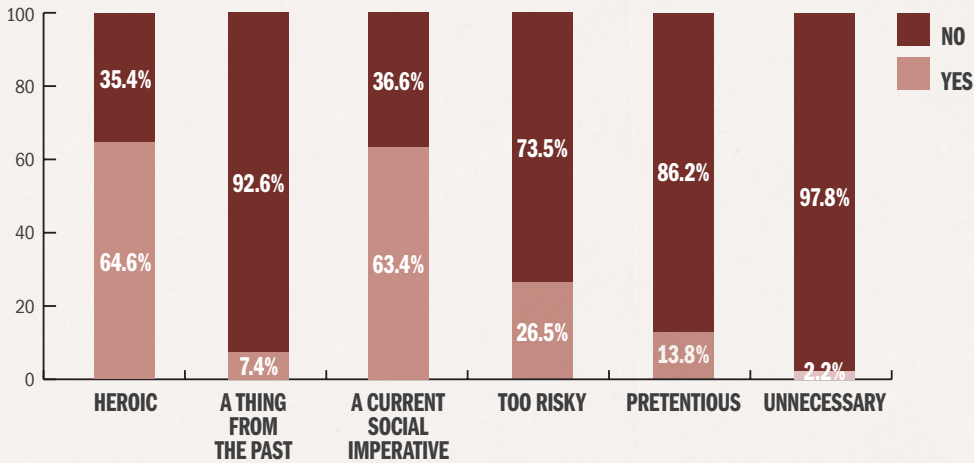


CHART 1.4
IS BEING AN ACTIVIST:



A MAJORITY VIEW ACTIVISM AS HEROIC AND A CURRENT SOCIAL IMPERATIVE.



TABLE 1.1
IS THERE ANYONE TODAY WHO STANDS OUT AS A LEADER OF A MOVEMENT?

MOST FREQUENT RESPONSES:

STUDENTS	#	%
BARACK OBAMA	492	24%
MICHELLE OBAMA	109	5%
BEYONCÉ	84	4%
MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.	73	4%
NELSON MANDELA	66	3%
HILLARY CLINTON	60	3%
OPRAH WINFREY	59	3%
EDWARD SNOWDEN	50	2%
POPE FRANCIS	50	2%
MALALA YOUSAFZAI	47	2%

DO YOU BELIEVE THIS MOVEMENT LEADER TO BE A POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE CONTRIBUTOR TO SOCIETY? (FOR STUDENTS' TOP RESPONSES)

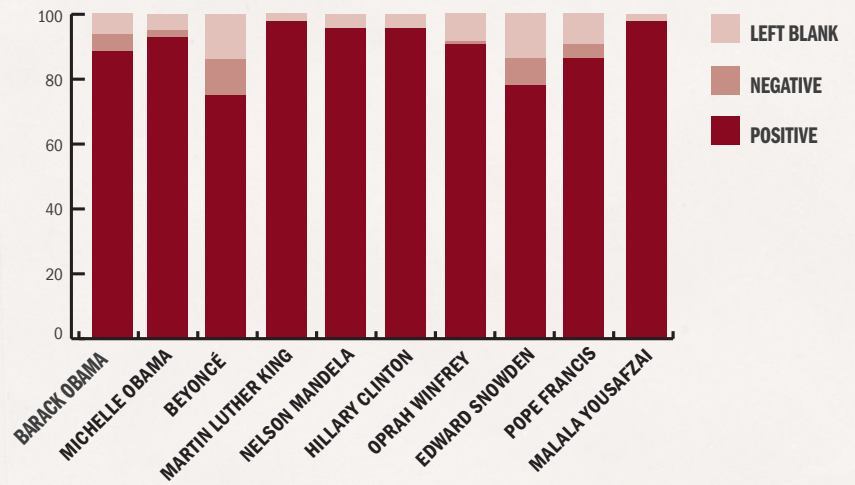
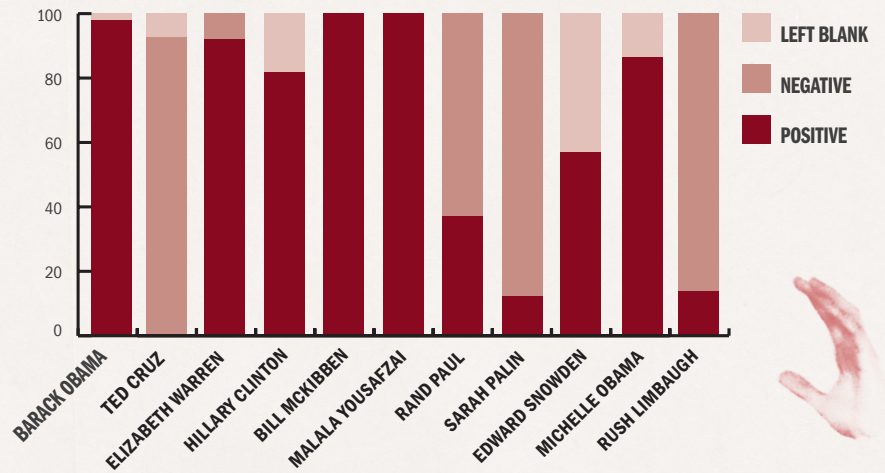


TABLE 1.2
IS THERE ANYONE TODAY WHO STANDS OUT AS A LEADER OF A MOVEMENT?

MOST FREQUENT RESPONSES:

FACULTY MEMBERS / ADMINISTRATORS	#	%
BARACK OBAMA	41	23%
TED CRUZ	13	7%
ELIZABETH WARREN	12	7%
HILLARY CLINTON	11	6%
BILL MCKIBBEN	8	4%
MALALA YOUSAFZAI	8	4%
RAND PAUL	8	4%
SARAH PALIN	8	4%
EDWARD SNOWDEN	7	4%
MICHELLE OBAMA	7	4%
RUSH LIMBAUGH	7	4%

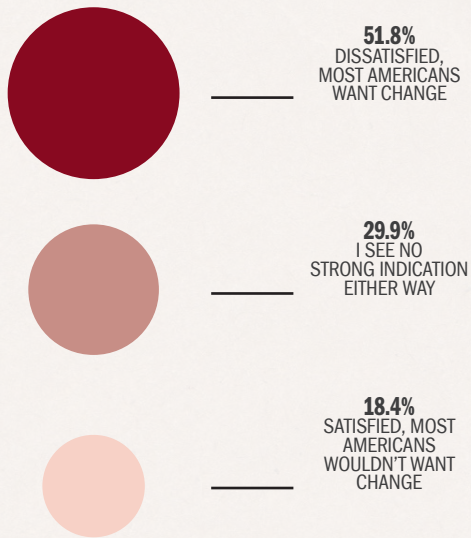
DO YOU BELIEVE THIS MOVEMENT LEADER TO BE A POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE CONTRIBUTOR TO SOCIETY? (FOR FACULTY MEMBERS/ADMINISTRATORS' TOP RESPONSES)



VIEWS ON THE STATUS QUO

More than half of students think Americans are dissatisfied with the status quo, and an even greater number (81 percent) feel it is important to change it (see Charts 1.5 and 1.6). This was true despite most (85 percent) believing they would experience backlash if they did challenge the status quo in the U.S. Most students believe it is not okay to be content with the status quo and commented that it is unacceptable to be complacent or apathetic because so many political, social, and economic issues remain unresolved. Many wrote that inequality still defines the lives of too many Americans and also fear that people's contentment reflects complacency and apathy. Some respondents in particular noted that people who lead comfortable lives cannot justify ignoring problems in the world. The majority of those not content with the status quo wrote that everyone should continually strive to improve and progress as a country and society.

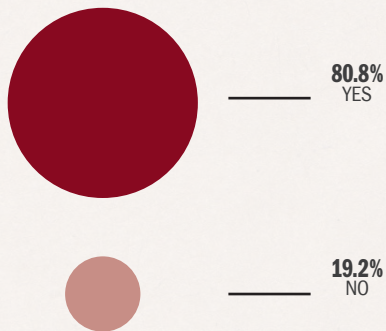
CHART 1.5
HOW SATISFIED ARE AMERICANS WITH THE STATUS QUO IN THE U.S.?



"On a personal level, being okay with the status quo ignores large populations of people who are still disadvantaged or ignored. Being okay with the status quo perpetuates this idea of apathy that exists. It also shows, in most cases, a lot of fear of change."

"We all have a responsibility to change our society, and our inaction actually gets in the way of others' action."

CHART 1.6
IS IT IMPORTANT TO YOU PERSONALLY TO CHANGE THE STATUS QUO IN THE U.S.?



"Though the status quo is good for some, others are still not getting these benefits. More work needs to be done for the marginalized."

85 PERCENT OF STUDENTS BELIEVE THEY WOULD EXPERIENCE SOME BACKLASH IF THEY CHALLENGED THE STATUS QUO IN THE UNITED STATES.

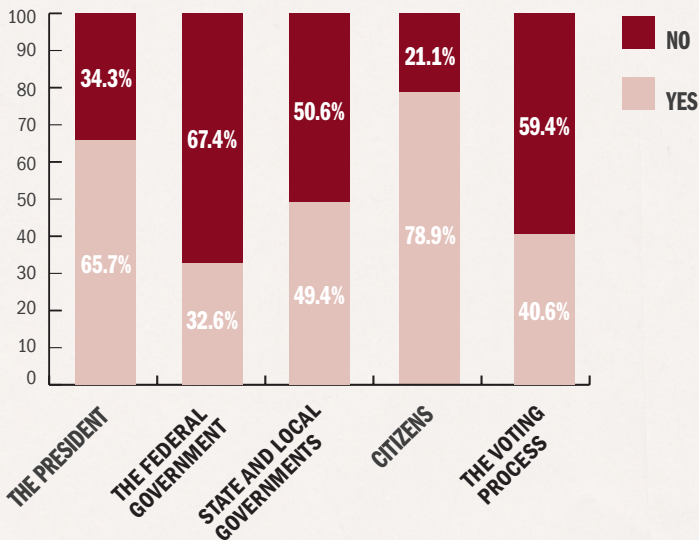
ASSESSMENT OF THE UNITED STATES' HANDLING OF SOCIAL/POLITICAL ISSUES

Social and political movements are initiated, driven and supported by a variety of individuals and entities. Students were asked a number of questions to assess how they believe social and political issues are handled in the U.S. While there are some individual leaders that students have confidence in, they are wary and even cynical about government institutions.

In general, most students indicated they trust citizens (79 percent) and the president (66 percent) to work toward making the country better, but less than half of students, trust the federal government (33 percent) or the state and local government (49 percent) to do the same (see Chart 1.7). When asked to what extent they have faith in certain political entities to effect positive change when necessary, students shared that they have “a lot of faith” or “a good amount of faith” in social and/or political movements to effect positive change. Far fewer students have “a lot of faith” or “a good amount of faith” in the president, federal government, or state and local government to do the same. Only 41 percent of students trust that the voting process will work toward making the country better, while 49 percent of students have “no faith” or “a little faith” in the power of the voting process to effect positive change when necessary (see Chart 1.7).

With respect to how well the current United States government addresses important social issues and problems, protects the security of citizens, and represents the interests of the people, more students indicated that the government was doing “ok” or “not well” as opposed to “well” or “very well” (see Chart 1.8). They shared a similar assessment of today’s state and local governments. Students voiced overwhelming consensus that there is room for improvement in how the country handles social and political issues. The most prevalent comments were that the general population in the U.S. is politically and socially apathetic; change takes too long; there is much discussion on big issues, but not enough action; and the government is mostly ineffective. Many students answered that the country does a poor job of confronting political and social issues and that not enough is being done. Others wrote that, depending on the issue, the country is performing “decently.” Respondents also stated that the U.S. is so polarized that political and social change are hindered. They cited political partisanship, media bias and social media as major contributors to the extreme divisions and general apathy in the U.S population. Finally, students stated that the upper class has an unfair influence over politicians and political parties.

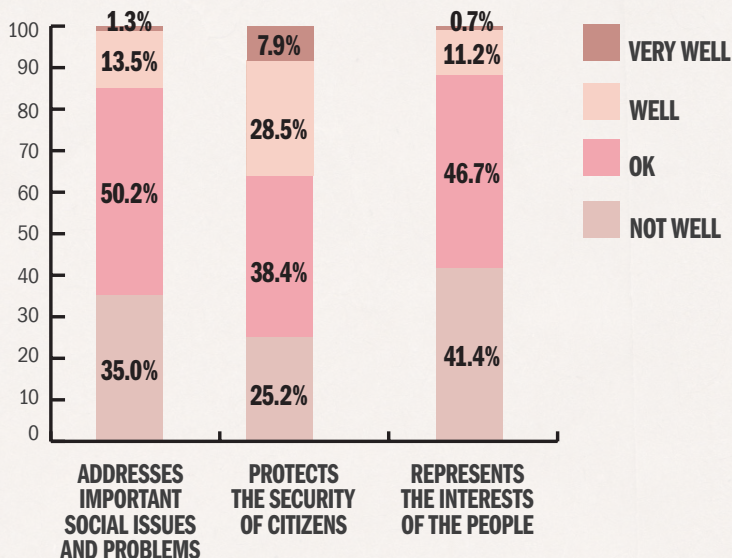
CHART 1.7
DO YOU TRUST THE FOLLOWING TO WORK TOWARDS MAKING THE COUNTRY BETTER?



The students surveyed rarely pointed to any particular entities or people as being responsible for this lack of progress. Both Congress and President Obama were referenced only a few times in over 2,000 responses to the question, "What is your assessment of how this country is handling/addressing social and political issues today?" Students spoke more to the American population as a whole.

Like most of the student respondents, a majority of faculty members and administrators believe there is room for improvement in the way this country handles social and political issues. About half stated that the United States is not doing very well to address these issues. Some asserted that the country is reactionary, and that little deep, systemic change takes place. Faculty and administrator participants also voiced concerns over the effects of political polarization in the United States, and that partisanship and a biased media could keep the country from making progress.

CHART 1.8
HOW WELL DO YOU THINK TODAY'S U.S. GOVERNMENT DOES THE FOLLOWING?



"There are important changes that need to be made and people willing to make the changes, but not enough government productivity to make lasting change."

"We have a Congress that can't get beyond politics to act, so states are doing a better job on some issues. Overall, I'd say some issues are being addressed, others not at all."

"Social issues often get a lot of attention and often overshadow issues that I believe are more important - government/business corruption, poisoning of our food (GMO), erosion of constitutional rights."

"They take a Band-Aid approach. Systemic and institutional change rarely occur."

ACTIVISM AND THE “ME GENERATION”

The current generation of college-aged students has often been described by the press and others as the “me generation,” focused more on themselves than on others. Interestingly, most of the student survey respondents agree with this description. They also see their generation as more apathetic than past generations (see Charts 2.1 and 2.2).

In keeping with these perceived generational differences, 74 percent of students considered older people to be more politically aware than younger people. A 2008 Posse Institute survey on social responsibility supported this conclusion—most students were unable to answer basic questions about local and national politics or global affairs.² A study by the Pew Research Center (2010) provides additional corroboration, finding that people aged 18 to 29 were less aware about current political affairs than older people.³ A more recent 2014 study also found that older adults are generally more knowledgeable about key facts in the news.⁴

CHART 2.1
YOUR GENERATION HAS BEEN DESCRIBED AS THE “ME GENERATION,” FOCUSED MORE ON YOURSELVES THAN ON OTHERS. IS THIS TRUE?

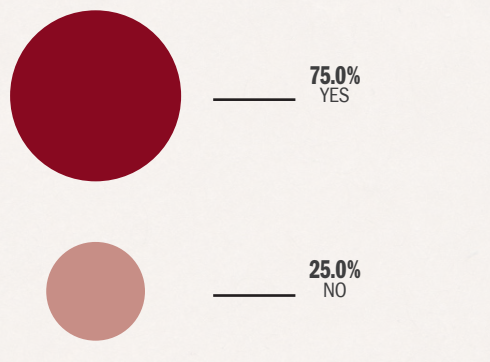
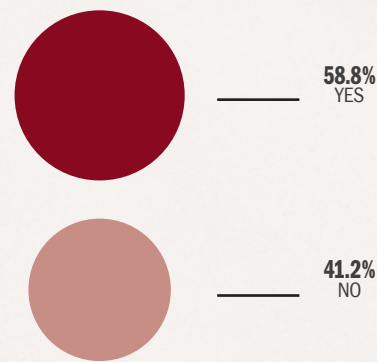


CHART 2.2
DO YOU SEE YOUR GENERATION AS MORE APATHETIC THAN PAST GENERATIONS?

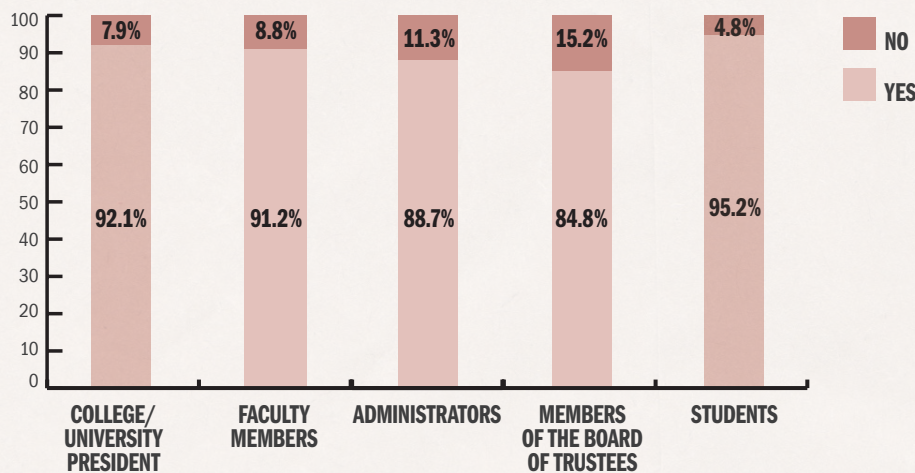


INVOLVEMENT OF COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES IN SOCIAL JUSTICE

A majority of students believe that a college/university should do more than provide the best possible education for its students. They want these institutions to produce socially responsible students and/or take a stand on social justice issues. Eighty-three percent felt that these institutions should produce socially responsible students and 60 percent that they should actually take a stand on social justice issues.

Almost all student respondents believe that college students themselves have a responsibility to promote social justice. Regarding other members of the college/university community, 85 to 92 percent of respondents believe that the college/university president, faculty members, administrators and members of the Board of Trustees have the same responsibility (see Chart 2.3). Overall, most students (63 percent) believe that academic leaders should not be neutral when it comes to broad social justice issues beyond the campus.

CHART 2.3
DO THE FOLLOWING MEMBERS OF YOUR COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO PROMOTE SOCIAL JUSTICE?



95 PERCENT BELIEVE THAT COLLEGE STUDENTS HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO PROMOTE SOCIAL JUSTICE.

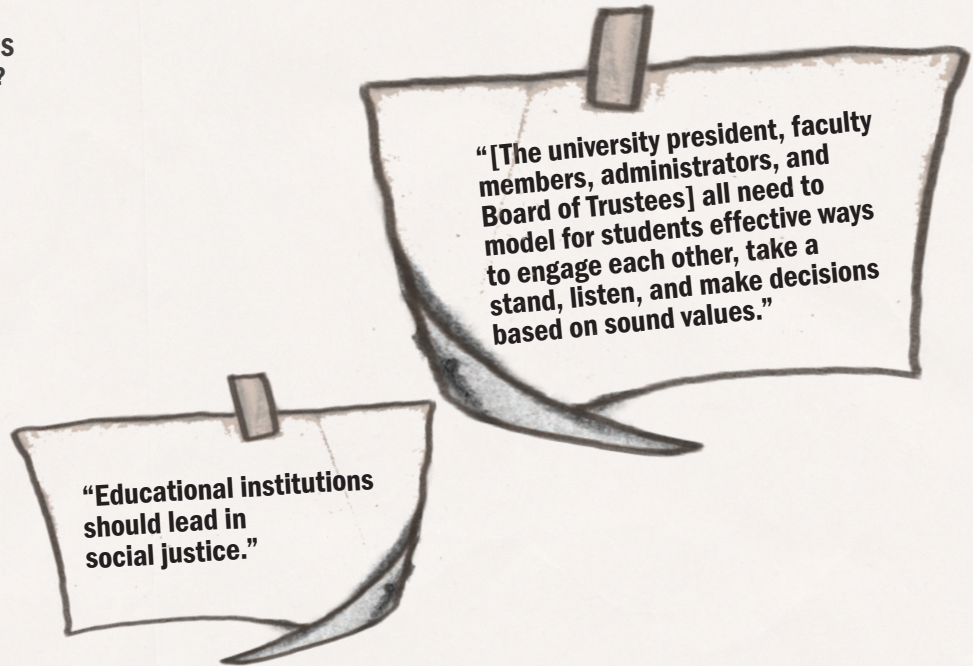
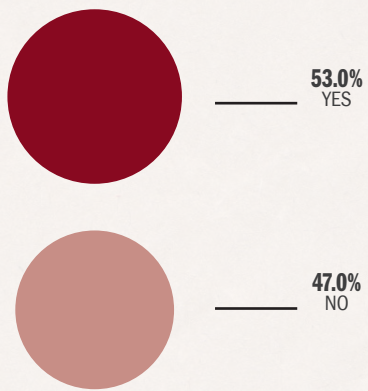
While most students believe that the university should promote social justice and foster a progressive atmosphere for students, many felt that their schools failed to do this. Instead, students stated that many of the academic leaders felt it was more important to remain moderate. Others lamented that students at their school lived in too much of a “bubble” and needed to be more concerned with the outside world.

The large majority of respondents declared that it was everybody’s responsibility on campus to promote social justice, and that without mass participation, true change is impossible. Students also acknowledged that many people fail to act on that responsibility on campus and are apathetic about social justice issues. In addition to student perception of apathy among academic leadership, only half of students believe that most students on their campus care about what is happening in the world (see Chart 2.4).



Like student respondents, many of the faculty and administrators agreed that everybody at their college/university had a responsibility to promote social justice. They argued that universities should model social justice advocacy for their students and the rest of the world. The majority (65 percent) believe that a college/university should take a stand and support social justice issues. Only 13 percent indicated that college and university representatives should maintain neutrality when it came to broad social justice issues beyond the campus.

CHART 2.4
DO YOU THINK MOST STUDENTS ON YOUR CAMPUS CARE ABOUT WHAT’S HAPPENING IN THE WORLD?



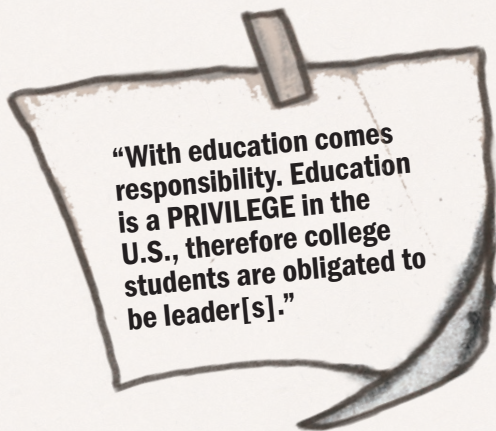
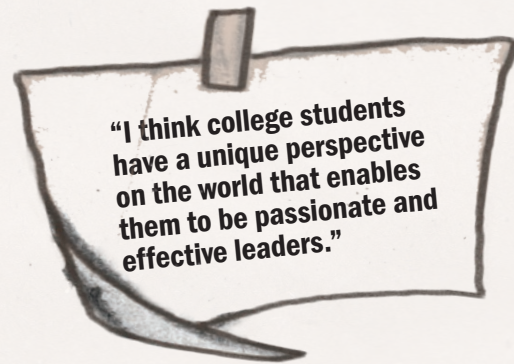
STUDENT ACTIVISM ON CAMPUS

In the prime of college activism in the 1960s and '70s, from Berkeley and Columbia to Kent State and Jackson State, struggles on college campuses have defined a cutting edge of social activism. In this survey, 84 percent of students said it is fair to expect the same from college students today. Faculty and administrators also believe it is fair to expect college students to play a major role in social and political action. Many students noted an overwhelming need for change in the world through political and social activism. They also emphasized that education is a privilege and provides students with valuable resources and knowledge.

Colleges and universities foster an environment that allows students to think about change and challenge themselves, which adds to their responsibility to be socially and politically active. While students admitted that student activism looks different today than in decades past, in large part due to social media, many agreed that as emerging adults and leaders of the next generation, students are responsible for advocating for change. "If students don't fight for change, who else will?" was one common comment expressed.

84 PERCENT OF STUDENTS FIND IT FAIR TO EXPECT COLLEGE STUDENTS TO PLAY A MAJOR ROLE IN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ACTION.

47 PERCENT OF STUDENTS LISTED ISSUES OF RACE AND RACISM AS NEEDING TO BE ADDRESSED ON CAMPUS.



When asked about the social justice issues on campus that they believe need to be addressed, concerns about race and issues of socioeconomic disparities dominated respondents' lists. Respondents repeatedly called for more diversity, cultural awareness and respect on campus. Many wrote that segregation is still an issue at their school, along with stereotyping and racial profiling. A significant number of respondents indicated they would like to see more diversity among faculty and administrators. Anxieties over socioeconomic disparities were also evident in the survey, and appeared to be troubling to student respondents on college campuses across the country.

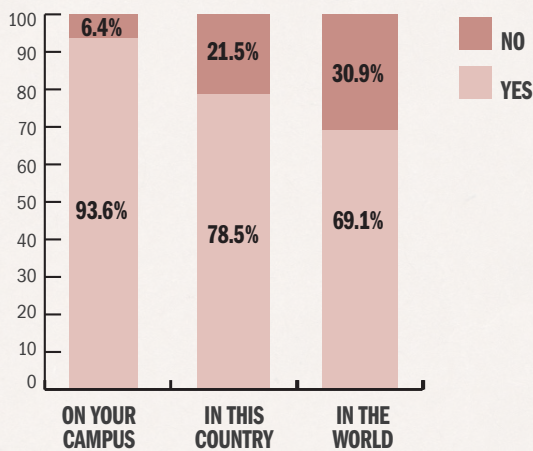


In addition, many students wish campuses would push for more social acceptance and inclusion of other cultures, trans-individuals, the LGBTQ community in general and those with disabilities. These students also voiced concern over divisions by race and class, gender bias by academic discipline, the divide between domestic and international students, and the gulf between those who participate in Greek life and those who do not. Furthermore, they reported that sexual assault and rape culture on their campuses need to be addressed.

Given the broad variety of campus issues identified, it is encouraging that 94 percent of students feel that they identified personally can make a positive contribution or difference on their

campuses. Most also believe that they can make a difference in this country or in the world (see Chart 2.5). A 2012 survey by Net Impact and the Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University found that 65 percent of university students “expect to be able to make some positive social or environmental difference through their work” and 70 percent consider it essential or very important to be able to make an impact on issues important to them through their job.⁵ On campus, more than half of students are involved in community organizing or social or political organizations. They view their involvement in these organizations as a form of activism (see Charts 2.6 and 2.7).

CHART 2.5
DO YOU THINK YOU PERSONALLY CAN MAKE A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION/DIFFERENCE IN THE FOLLOWING PLACES?



94 PERCENT OF STUDENTS FEEL THAT THEY CAN MAKE A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION/DIFFERENCE ON THEIR CAMPUS.

CHART 2.6
ARE YOU INVOLVED IN ANY COMMUNITY-ORGANIZING OR SOCIO-POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS ON CAMPUS?

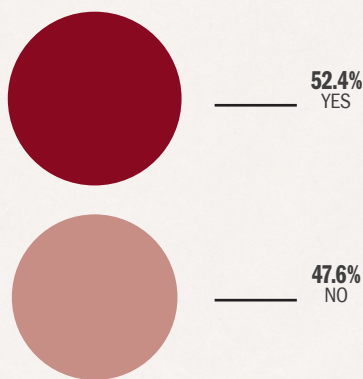
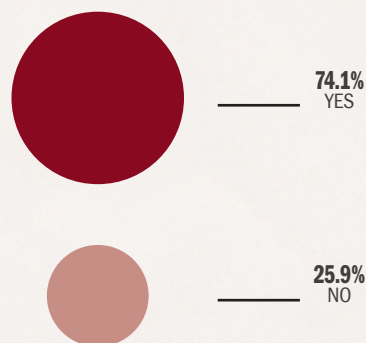


CHART 2.7
IF YES, DO YOU FEEL THAT YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN THESE ON-CAMPUS ORGANIZATIONS IS A FORM OF ACTIVISM?





ACTIVISM AND ISSUES OF INTEREST FOR SURVEY RESPONDENTS

When asked to name the issues they cared about most, faculty/administrators and students shared four of five of their top responses (see Table 2.1). The most frequently listed issue for both groups was education, with 50 percent of faculty and administrators and 39 percent of students placing it on their list.

Most students believe that the civil rights movement, Occupy Wall Street, the gay rights movement and the labor movement are still needed today. In their view, the issues surrounding these movements remain unresolved in the U.S., and more progress needs to be made.

Others added that it remains important to strive for equality through organized movements. A minority of students did question whether some contemporary movements are still needed, notably Occupy Wall Street and the women’s movement. They commented that Occupy was disorganized and ineffective. Others wrote that other movements, including the women’s movement, have met their objectives and served their purpose.

TABLE 2.1
LIST UP TO 5 ISSUES YOU CARE MOST ABOUT

TOP 5 MOST FREQUENT RESPONSES		
STUDENTS		
	#	%
EDUCATION	1268	39%
LGBTQ RIGHTS/EQUALITY	1016	32%
RACISM	987	31%
IMMIGRATION RIGHTS/REFORMS	689	21%
ENVIRONMENT	669	21%
FACULTY MEMBERS/ADMINISTRATORS		
	#	%
EDUCATION	155	50%
LGBTQ RIGHTS/EQUALITY	101	32%
INCOME/SOCIOECONOMIC INEQUALITY	92	30%
ENVIRONMENT	91	29%
RACISM	82	26%



On average, most students spend up to two hours each day talking about social and political events/news outside of class (see Chart 2.8). This seems to be their ideal way to express their views and get involved, as almost 70 percent indicated that speaking with friends is a preferred forum for making their voices heard. This was followed closely by speaking in class (56 percent) and using the Internet/social media (53 percent). According to the Pew Research Center, 34 percent of American adults on social media have used this forum to post comments about social and political issues, and 31 percent have used it to encourage others to act on issues important to them.¹ Voting, writing letters or articles and attending marches or rallies were ranked lower as forums students used to make their voices heard.

What causes these students to go from thinking about an issue they care about to acting on it? Most (57 percent) say the issue itself moves them to find a way to act. For 39 percent of students, the opportunity to join an existing group is what leads them to act.

CHART 2.8
ON AVERAGE, ABOUT HOW MUCH TIME OUTSIDE OF CLASS DO YOU SPEND EACH DAY TALKING ABOUT SOCIAL AND/OR POLITICAL EVENTS/NEWS?

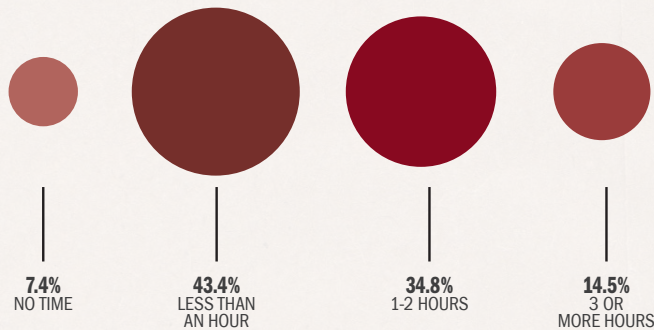
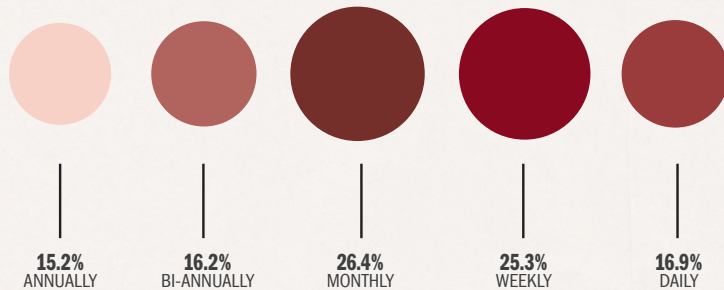


CHART 2.9
ON AVERAGE, HOW OFTEN DO YOU ACT ON ISSUES YOU CARE ABOUT?



In terms of frequency of engagement, 69 percent of students say they act at least monthly (see Chart 2.9).

When students were asked how they would spread the word about an issue or movement important to them, Internet outlets and social media rose to the top of the responses. A vast majority of respondents said they would draw attention to an issue through Facebook or other social media, like Twitter or Instagram, in conjunction with simple word-of-mouth messaging. Students also mentioned blogging, posting to online news sites and blogs, email, online petitions, and Internet campaigns as ways they might spread the word.

Outside the Internet, students said that they would hand out flyers and hang posters on campus, write for newspapers and speak with campus organizations to publicize issues they care about. Some students also wrote that they would create educational programs or host meetings, rallies and protests. Overall, the idea of continued discussion about an issue, whether online or in person—through letters, phone calls, text messages, social media, or face-to-face dialogue—was prevalent throughout the responses.



Like the students, a majority of faculty/administrator respondents wrote that they would use Facebook and other social media outlets or blogs to spread the word about an issue. But many faculty responses focused on engaging networks of friends and colleagues in other ways as well: emailing contact lists, conversing with colleagues and students, text messaging, writing books, and attending events, lectures, and social gatherings.

Seeking to identify issues that may drive students to act and how much they would be willing to risk for those causes, the survey asked students to identify any issues they would rate as a “10” on a 10-point scale of importance. The majority of students (72 percent) identified at least one issue as being at the top of the scale (a 10), notably education, race, equality in general, gender equality and LGBTQ rights. Most students who listed an issue of such high importance to them would be willing to support it on Facebook, sign a petition, attend a rally, join a boycott, donate money, state their view in class, or argue their view among friends who hold a different view (see Chart 2.10). Fewer students are willing to risk more serious repercussions, such as going to jail, confronting police or alienating friends and family, even for the issue they feel most strongly about (see Chart 2.11).

A significant number of students (42 percent) feel pressure to care about certain issues that do not actually concern them. In particular, they feel most pressured to care about issues related to LGBTQ rights, foreign affairs (including genocide and conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine), discrimination (including racism and ableism) and environmental issues (see Table 2.2). Many students further commented that it is not so much that they don’t care about these issues, but that they feel indifferent, helpless, too far removed or inadequately prepared to talk about them. Students mostly cited their friends or peers as the source of this pressure. Others revealed a fear of seeming unintelligent and complacent if they didn’t care about social and political issues. And some students noted that they feel pressured simply because of their identity. For example, black students said that they often feel pressured to care about issues involving race.

CHART 2.10
IF THERE IS AN ISSUE THAT YOU FEEL IS A 10 ON A 10-POINT SCALE OF IMPORTANCE TO YOU, WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO DO THE FOLLOWING TO SUPPORT THAT ISSUE?

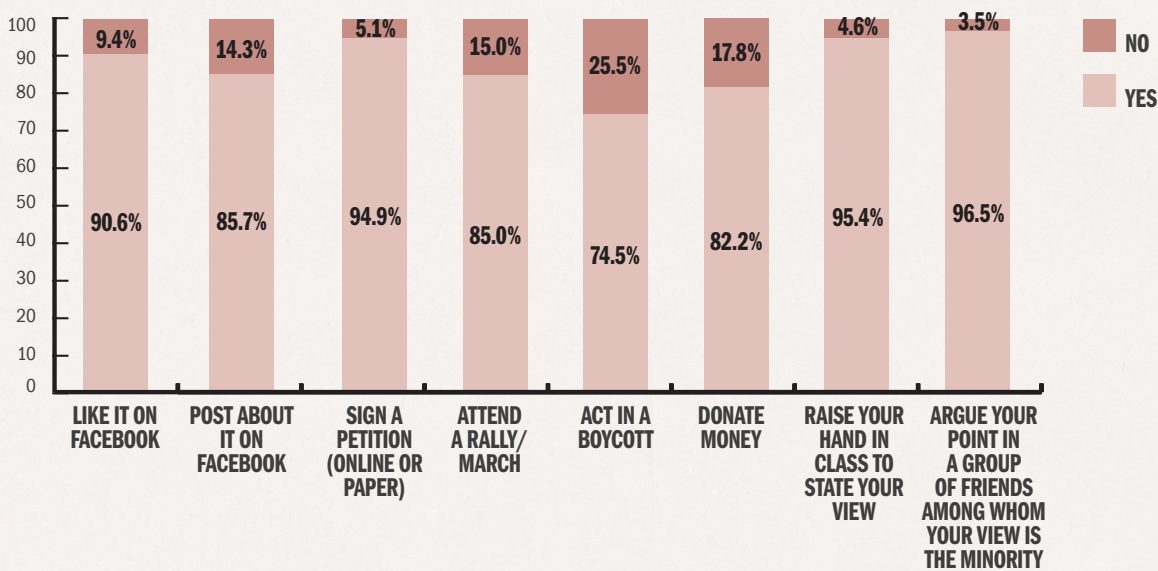
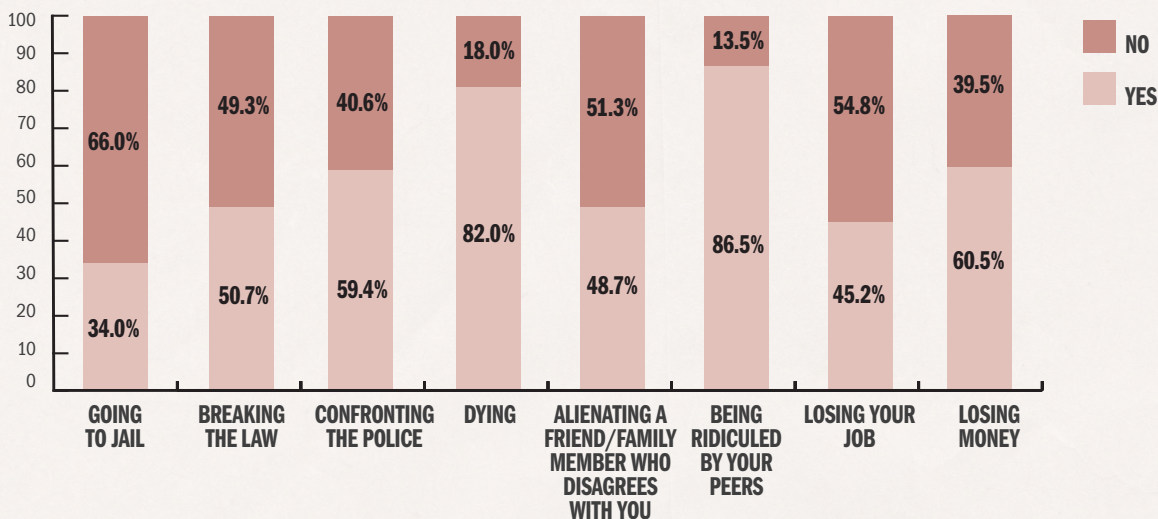


CHART 2.11
IF THERE IS AN ISSUE THAT YOU FEEL IS A 10 ON A 10-POINT SCALE OF IMPORTANCE TO YOU, WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO RISK THE FOLLOWING TO SUPPORT THAT ISSUE?



"I am a woman. I don't feel as though I am treated with less respect than men. Women pressure me to fight for something I don't see [or] feel!"

"I am not against gay marriage or the use of marijuana but the emphasis that is put on these issues by my generation does not match my level of interest."

"It's positive pressure. I feel pressured to be educated about things I know less about."

"Because if you don't care, you come across as uncultured, uninformed, and inactive. Less intelligent."

"Because students at my school are so vocal I feel like I should take a stand, and I want to."



There are also some issues that students (24 percent) do wish to support, but feel uncomfortable doing so. Those include LGBTQ rights, pro-life or pro-choice rights, race and diversity, feminism, and immigration (see Table 2.3). Many explained that they were uncomfortable supporting these causes because they conflicted with family or religious beliefs, particularly in regard to gay marriage and abortion.

Other students wrote that they were embarrassed to take more conservative stances, such as being opposed to gay marriage or

abortion, because of pressure from their peers or fear of judgment from others. In regard to race, diversity and standing against discrimination, some respondents wrote that they felt barred from voicing their opinions on these issues because of their own race or class. Some of the issues that students feel uneasy supporting overlap with those that students believe to be risky or dangerous to support in this country, including LGBTQ rights, pro-life/pro-choice rights, race and diversity and immigration (see Table 2.4).

TABLE 2.2
DO YOU FEEL PRESSURE TO CARE ABOUT CERTAIN ISSUES THAT YOU'RE NOT GENERALLY CONCERNED WITH? IF YES, WHAT ISSUES?

5 MOST FREQUENT STUDENT RESPONSES		
	#	%
LGBTQ RIGHTS	265	27%
FOREIGN AFFAIRS	102	10%
ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES	102	10%
DISCRIMINATION	94	9%
IMMIGRATION	67	7%

TABLE 2.3
IS THERE A CAUSE YOU WISH TO SUPPORT, BUT FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE DOING SO? IF YES, WHAT CAUSE(S)?

5 MOST FREQUENT STUDENT RESPONSES		
	#	%
LGBTQ RIGHTS	192	32%
ABORTION*	64	11%
RACE AND DIVERSITY	54	9%
FEMINISM	32	5%
IMMIGRATION	30	5%

*INCLUDES ANTI-ABORTION, PRO-CHOICE, AND PRO-LIFE

TABLE 2.4
NAME UP TO 3 ISSUES OR CAUSES THAT YOU BELIEVE ARE RISKY OR DANGEROUS TO SUPPORT IN THIS COUNTRY: (LEAVE BLANK IF YOU FEEL THERE ARE NONE.)

5 MOST FREQUENT STUDENT RESPONSES		
	#	%
LGBTQ RIGHTS/EQUALITY	826	42%
ISSUES INVOLVING RACE	444	22%
ABORTION*	378	19%
IMMIGRATION	355	18%
GUN CONTROL/GUN RIGHTS	224	11%

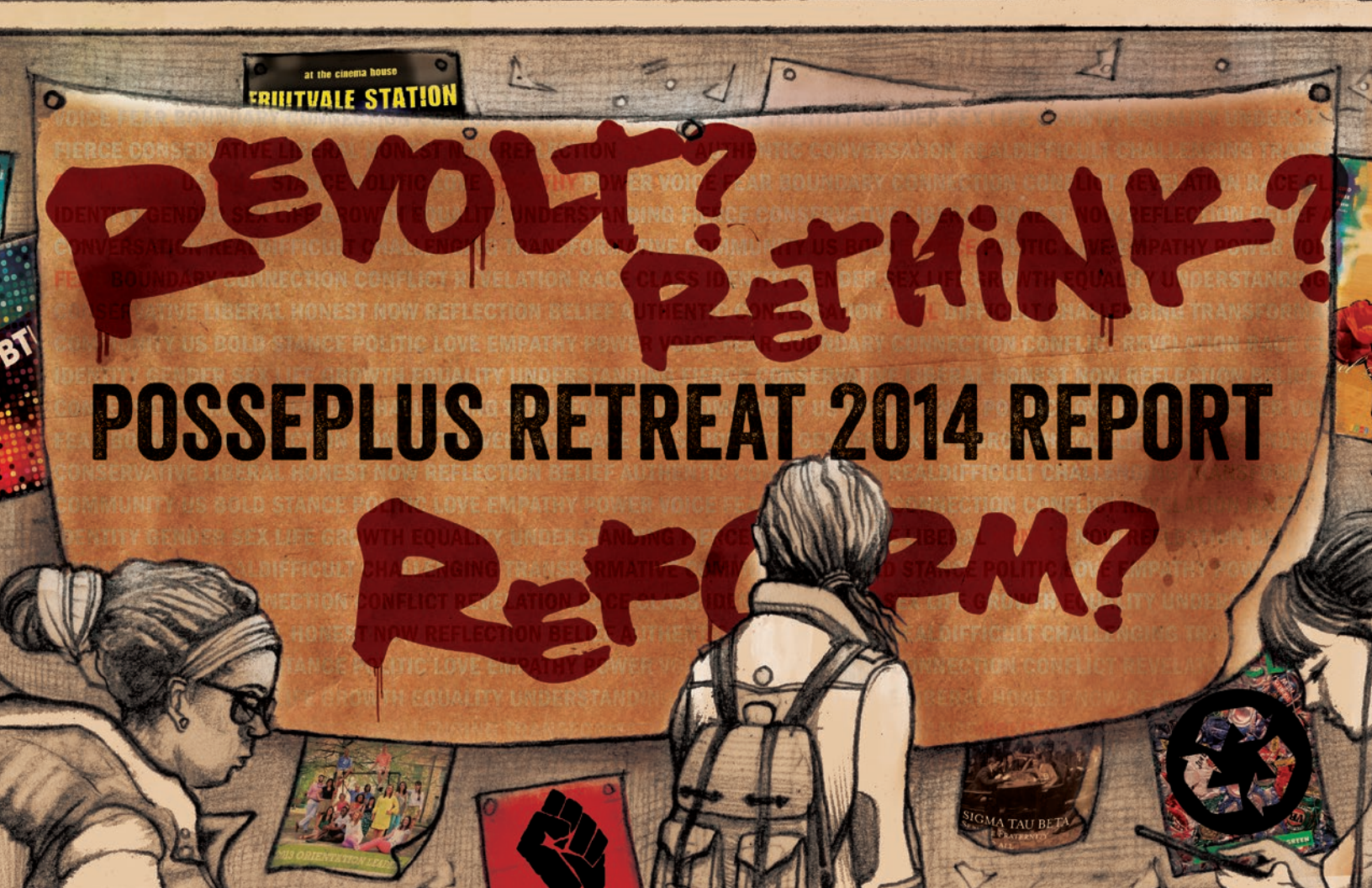
*INCLUDES ANTI-ABORTION, ANTI-PRO-LIFE, PRO-CHOICE, AND PRO-LIFE

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AFFECT WHICH ISSUES 39 PERCENT OF STUDENTS CARED ABOUT.

CONCLUSION

The students attending the 2014 PossePlus Retreat overwhelmingly believe that social and political movements are necessary and relevant today. Despite the consequences they think they would face from standing up to controversial issues, and despite their belief that members of their generation are more concerned with themselves than others, these students think it is better to challenge the status quo and act rather than remain complacent. They are particularly passionate about issues around education, race, equality, gender bias and LGBTQ rights, and most use the Internet and social media to spread the word about these issues and get others involved. They are optimistic about their own personal role in activist causes and believe that they personally can make positive contributions on their campuses, in the country and in the world.

The majority of retreat participants not only expect college students to play a major role in social and political action, but also believe that administrators, faculty and others on campus should be significantly involved with social and political activism. In general, most students believe that a college or university should not be neutral—that it should take a stand on and support issues of social justice. In the larger world, while these students perceive President Barack Obama as a movement leader and positive contributor to society, many have doubts about the ability of the president and of federal, state and local governments to effect positive change. The students place more trust in citizens and social/political movements to improve the country.



END NOTES:

¹Rainie, L., Smith, A., Schlozman, K.L., Brady, H., & Verba, S. (2012). Social Media and Political Engagement. *Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project*. Retrieved from <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Political-engagement.aspx>

²Who Cares? The Weight of Social Responsibility: 2008 PossePlus Retreat Report. (2008). *The Posse Foundation, Inc.*
Retrieved from http://www.possefoundation.org/m/PPR_Report_2008.pdf

³Public Knows Basic Facts about Politics, Economics, But Struggles with Specifics. (2010). *Pew Research Center*.
Retrieved from <http://www.pewresearch.org/2010/11/18/public-knows-basic-facts-about-politics-economics-but-struggles-with-specifics/>

⁴From ISIS to Unemployment: What Do Americans Know? (2014). *Pew Research Center*.
Retrieved from <http://www.people-press.org/2014/10/02/from-isis-to-unemployment-what-do-americans-know/>

⁵Zukin, C., & Szeltner, M. (2012). Talent Report: What Workers Want in 2012. Net Impact. Prepared for *Net Impact* by the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. Retrieved from <https://www.netimpact.org/sites/default/files/documents/what-workers-want-2012.pdf>