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# How Well are Students Prepared for College?

## The Perception Gap Between High-School Teachers and College Professors

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CIC Conference - January 5, 2008

# The Surveys

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- ***The Chronicle of Higher Education* retained Maguire Associates to gather the opinions of college faculty and high-school teachers regarding the preparedness of students for college.**
- **A random sample of faculty members in public and private colleges offering Bachelor's degrees and of teachers in public high schools were contacted on a national scale.**
- **The surveys were conducted on line (a paper survey was offered as an alternative).**
- **Completed surveys were received from 1,098 faculty and 746 high-school teachers.**
- **Mapping of the characteristics of the respondents over the larger samples indicated a high level of representativeness.**
- **40% of the faculty members who completed the survey work within private colleges and universities.**

# Highlights of the Results

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- **Overall Preparation**
- **Preparation Today versus the Past**
- **Writing Ability**
- **Math Readiness**
- **Homework and Motivation**
- **Academic Expectations**



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## Overall Preparedness

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### High-School Teacher:

**“Students don’t work hard enough because they are not pushed hard enough. Teachers don’t stretch students like they should because students respond so negatively to such high demands, as do their parents. In general, the respect for learning and academic pursuits has diminished dramatically. It is beyond the grasp of the high-school teacher to correct.”**

### College Faculty:

**“Students need to understand that they are responsible for their learning and must be taught how to do this and then be required to do it—long before they get to the post-secondary level. They must be active learners, not passive vessels.”**

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# Overall Preparedness

- 84% of faculty members (compared with 65% of teachers) believe high-school graduates are either *not well prepared* or are only *somewhat well prepared* for college.
- Almost one-fourth of faculty members (versus 12% of teachers) say flatly that students are not prepared.
- Conversely, more than twice the proportion of teachers as compared with faculty members (36% versus 15%) report that students are either *very or extremely well prepared*.

How well prepared are your students for college-level work?		
	High-school teachers	College professors
Extremely well	■ 5%	■ 2%
Very well	■ 31%	■ 13%
Somewhat well	■ 53%	■ 60%
Not well	■ 12%	■ 24%

**Not well**-- large gaps in preparation, struggling.  
**Somewhat well** -- there are some gaps.  
**Very well** -- students are generally able to do what is expected.  
**Extremely well** -- they are prepared for almost anything.



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## Preparation Today vs. the Past

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### **High-School Teacher:**

**“Writing skills and critical thinking skills have greatly decreased over the course of my career... If teachers had a firmer grasp on what skills are necessary to succeed in college, our students would be better prepared for, and more successful in, college and beyond.”**

### **College Faculty:**

**“I think high school graduates are more attuned to the ‘satisfied customer’ model of education than was the case ten, or even five, years ago.”**

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# Preparation Today vs. the Past

- Nearly half of faculty members (45%) indicate that they feel today's students are not as well prepared as their counterparts of 10 years ago.

How academically well prepared are students at your institution now in comparison to the past?	
<b>Compared to five years ago students are:</b>	
Better prepared	16%
Prepared about the same	61%
Not as well prepared	23%
<b>Compared to 10 years ago students are:</b>	
Better prepared	22%
Prepared about the same	33%
Not as well prepared	45%



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# Writing Ability

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## **High-School Teacher:**

**“Crutches are always in style, but the ball is in the student’s court.”**

## **College Faculty:**

**“I think the single biggest problem in terms of academic preparation is students’ lack of training in writing. Even our brightest, most well-prepared students need remedial education in virtually every aspect of writing.”**

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# Writing Ability

- Professors and teachers differ significantly in their assessments of students' writing ability:
  - 44% of faculty members believe students are not well prepared for college-level writing.
  - This view is held by only 10% of the high-school teachers.
  - Just 6% of professors (compared with 36% of teachers) view students as very well-prepared writers.

Students' preparation for college-level demands					
	Not well prepared	Somewhat well prepared	Very well prepared	Don't know	
Oral communication	14%	55%	26%	5%	High school
	18%	64%	15%	3%	College
Science	8%	44%	38%	11%	High school
	20%	32%	5%	42%	College
Mathematics	9%	46%	37%	7%	High school
	32%	32%	4%	32%	College
Writing	10%	49%	36%	4%	High school
	44%	47%	6%	3%	College



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## Math Readiness

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### High-School Teachers:

**“Four years of math – back to basics – drill, drill, and drill.”**

**“I would really want to know what colleges expect from math students that come out of high school. I am very interested in finding out changes in the teaching approach of math concepts especially with the advent of technology.”**

### College Faculty:

**“Require more math classes for high-school graduation...There should also be an expectation that everyone can learn math, instead of an acceptance that some people ‘just aren’t good at math.’”**

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# Math Readiness

- There is a large gap in views of mathematics readiness:
  - 32% of faculty members say students are *not well prepared* in math, a judgment shared by 9% of high-school teachers.
  - 37% of teachers say students are *very well prepared* in math, compared with only 4% of faculty members.

Students' preparation for college-level demands					
	Not well prepared	Somewhat well prepared	Very well prepared	Don't know	
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	18%	64%	15%	3%	College
Science	8%	44%	38%	11%	High school
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	32%	32%	4%	32%	College
Writing	10%	49%	36%	4%	High school
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# Homework and Motivation

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## High-School Teachers:

**“Motivation seems to be a key concern. Even in accelerated courses, students exhibit qualities of laziness. Students tend, on the whole, to do the least that is required of them. A good amount of the lack of motivation or interest stems from our digital society where students cannot focus on a task for more than 10 seconds.”**







**“There seems to be a general apathy on the part of both student and parent about the work ethic (or lack thereof) when preparing for college. It has become more an entitlement than an incentive or reward for hard work.”**

**“Most of my students have a do-just-enough-to-get-by mentality. I don’t assign homework because I will never get it back.”**

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# Homework and Motivation

- 28% of high-school teachers expect students to spend 2 hours or less on *all homework* per week.
- 65% of faculty members and 66% of teachers say students *do less than* they would like them to do.

Hours of work outside of class expected of students per week		
	High-school teachers	College professors
6 or more	 17%	 48%
3 to 5	 55%	 46%
None to 2	 28%	 6%



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## Academic Expectations

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### High-School Teacher:

**“Colleges need to communicate with high-school teachers about what skills are lacking in the students who enroll in their universities, so that we high-school educators can work to improve this situation.”**

### College Faculty:







**“If we at the college level start listening more to high-school teachers and stop thinking we are the know-it-alls of academics, then our opinions might be taken more seriously by teachers.”**

**“I think schools must stop shying away from making students work hard. I think that “No Child Left Behind” should be used to wrap fish.”**




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# Academic Expectations

- More than two-thirds of the teachers say academic expectations in college are made *somewhat to very* clear to them.
- Nearly one-third of faculty members believe their institutions are *not at all* successful in making academic expectations clear to teachers.
- More than one-third of faculty think high schools are *not at all* successful in conveying to students what colleges expect from them.

Are colleges generally successful in making their academic expectations clear to high-school teachers?		
	High-school teachers	College professors
Very much so	 11%	 5%
Somewhat	 60%	 62%
Not at all	 29%	 31%

Do you believe that public secondary schools are adequately conveying to their students what colleges will expect of them academically?	
Not at all	 37%
Somewhat	 60%
Very much so	 2%

# Key Take-Aways

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- Overall, college faculty are much more concerned than high-school teachers (who also are quite concerned) with students' lack of preparation for college-level academic demands, especially regarding their writing ability, study habits, and willingness to work hard.
- Students are perceived as trying to “get by.” The demands made by teachers and college faculty outside of class are not high and most students are not meeting even these expectations.
- Teachers and faculty agree on an urgent need for better communication and greater interaction among high-school teachers and college faculty to clarify what is expected of students in preparing for college.



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