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Students Want Stronger Focus on Social Responsibility, Survey Finds

By [PAULA WASLEY](#)

Colleges and universities could do more to educate students in personal and social responsibility, according to the results of a survey released on Thursday by the Association of American Colleges and Universities.

The association, a leading advocate for liberal-arts education, surveyed 23,000 undergraduates and 9,000 faculty members, administrators, and student-affairs professionals at 23 institutions about their perceptions of how well their campuses taught traits such as personal and academic integrity, moral reasoning, and openness to differing perspectives.

The findings of the survey, called the Personal and Social Responsibility Institutional Inventory, are heartening, researchers said, but also suggest room for improvement.

Setting Priorities

The results show that, while most students felt that developing personal and social responsibility *should be* a major focus of their college education, many felt that such instruction was not a priority on their campuses.

Only 30 percent of the respondents, for example, said they "strongly agree" that their campuses emphasized refining ethical and moral reasoning. In the category of "striving for excellence," only 30 percent of students and 40 percent of campus professionals thought that was a major focus at their institution.

The report also suggests that students became more critical of their institution's orientation toward personal and social responsibility as they progressed through their academic careers.

While 60 percent of first-year students strongly agreed that their institutions fostered the development of a sense of personal and academic integrity, only 46 percent of seniors felt the same way. Among faculty members, 44 percent thought it was a major focus.

Differing Views

Perceptions also diverged in how much college was making a difference in preparing moral and civic-minded graduates.

More than half of the students surveyed expected to leave college with a stronger "capacity to learn from diverse perspectives" and "understanding of personal integrity." Campus professionals, however, were less positive in their assessments. Only 40 percent strongly agreed that graduating students had made progress in those areas.

"Nearly all colleges and universities publicly profess their commitment to such issues as academic integrity and civic engagement," said Carol Geary Schneider, the association's president, in a written statement. "This survey demonstrates clearly that we have much work to do to turn these aspirations into achievements for many more students."

The 23 participating institutions are all members of the association's Core Commitments Leadership Consortium, an initiative sponsored by the John Templeton Foundation that promotes educational programs and practices that prepare students for responsible citizenship.

The [full report](#), "Should Colleges Focus More on Personal and Social Responsibility?," is available at the group's Web site.