

# The University of Arizona: A Student Centered Research University

## A Survey of Students' Views of the Importance of Nine Descriptors

Summary of a Class Project for AED 410/510 (FS 410/510)  
Leadership Concepts and Contexts

Fall Semester, 1999

**STUDENT CONTRIBUTORS:** E. Chadd, C. Charette, C. Clark, M. Cosgrove, K. Ellingson, S. Fernandez, A. Gerber, B. Green, A. Greig, L. Guibor, J. Hume, M. Johns, J. Kettler, B. Koosmann, S. Lewis, J. Lynch, S. Marcinko, M. Molina-Garcia, J. Moreillion, J. Munak, A. Nixon, S. Ramirez, S. Sauberman, J. Spillett, A. Stelmach, K. Suhling, S. Takimoto, G. Urkov, E. Westover, S. Zayon.

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Throughout the fall semester, our class (Leadership Concepts and Contexts taught by Dr. Nancy Huber) had been developing leadership skills and learning ways in which we all can become effective leaders. We learned to look within ourselves and find our reason to lead and then we developed our own personal philosophy of leadership. During this process, we were expected to design a class project that would provide an opportunity for everyone in the class to practice our leadership skills and to apply the concepts we talked about during the semester.

After President Likins visited our class and talked about his views concerning a vision for the University of Arizona as a student centered research university, we decided to learn more about what that might mean. We thought it would be useful and enlightening to do some research about what students believe a student centered research university would be like.

### **THE SURVEY:**

Working from a draft prepared by the Strategic Planning and Budget Committee (SPBAC), we created a survey instrument to determine the extent to which a cross-section of students agreed with the nine descriptors outlined in their document. Our Project Survey included all nine items verbatim. Student respondents were asked to rate each statement according to its importance to them. In addition, we collected demographic data to assure that our survey included responses from a broad sample of the student body. And finally, the survey included an open-ended question so that students could add comments or ask questions.

Each class member was responsible for administering and collecting at least twenty surveys. Together, we decided who would cover each college to make sure our sample would be representative of the University. We chose classes which would assure that we reached freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors as well as graduate students. Most of the professors we contacted to ask permission to distribute the survey in their class were very helpful and were interested in our project.

More than six hundred surveys were collected. The data entry team worked hard to keep up with all the information to be recorded, and we ended up spending part of one class in the computer lab where we all pitched in to get the data entered. Although time did not permit a thorough analysis before the class ended, work has continued beyond the class to prepare a report to share with the University community. We invite you to take a look at what we have discovered.

### **FINDINGS:**

In general, we found that most students agree that the nine items listed on the SPBAC document are important. The two which they ranked as most important are:

Descriptor Five:

“Provide all admitted students with timely and ready access to the counseling, courses, and progress reports they need to proceed steadily toward their learning goals (including, but not limited to, the degrees they seek.)”

Descriptor Six:

“Make certain that all students have both the advising and mentoring they need, with the faculty having ultimate responsibility for both, aided by effective staff and technological support, in a manner that enables academic progress and opens avenues to postgraduate possibilities with potentials for lifelong learning in them.”

The two items deemed least important by the respondents to our survey are:

Descriptor Four:

“Involve students in faculty-driven and student-initiated research and creative activity, so that they can be active collaborators and contributors in the creation, as well as the transmission, of knowledge.”

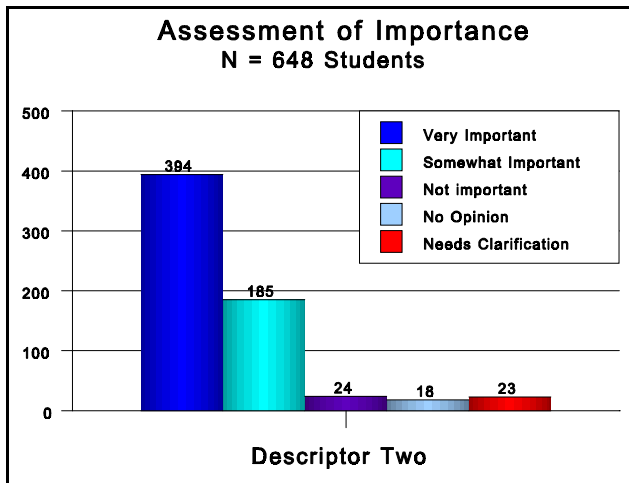
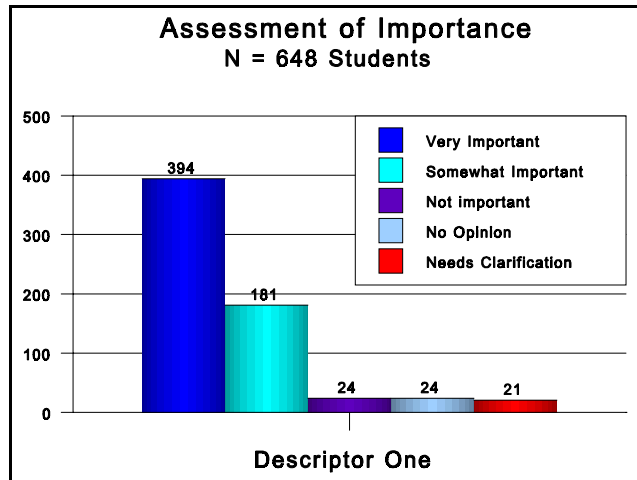
Descriptor Seven:

“Develop a system of incentives, consequences, and support for faculty that truly rewards and enables devotion to students and effective teaching, right alongside achievement in research and creative endeavor, with especially high rewards for those who do all of these well in a way that combines them to promote student learning.”

A complete set of the data concerned with students' views of the importance of each of the nine descriptors has been charted for easy comparison.

## Descriptor One

The University of Arizona will: foster a climate that welcomes students to an invigorating, as well as challenging, enterprise of discovery in which the focus is on active learning in and out of the classroom (including engagement with the community) within an atmosphere of mutual respect, cordiality, ethical treatment, and taking of appropriate responsibility by all parties.

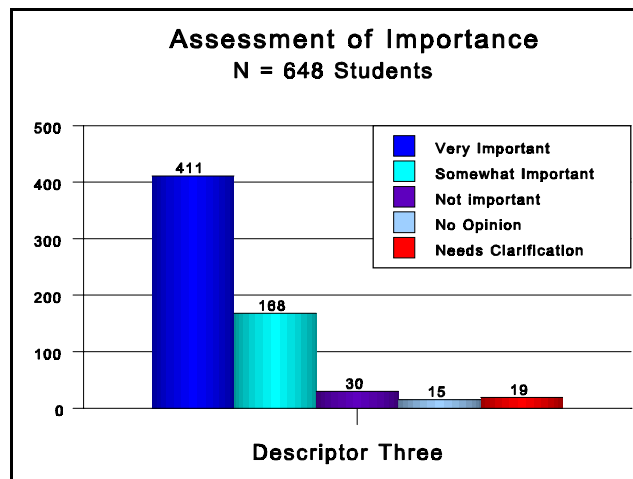


## Descriptor Two

The University of Arizona will: design and conduct its curricula at all levels toward what students need to learn from them and the competencies we want all students to have for lifelong learning after they leave the University.

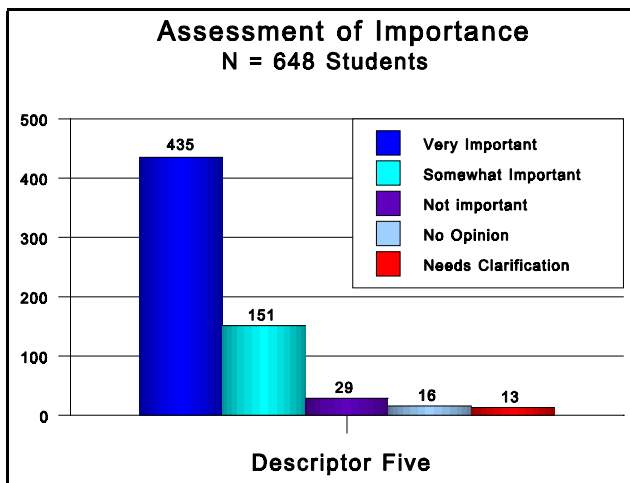
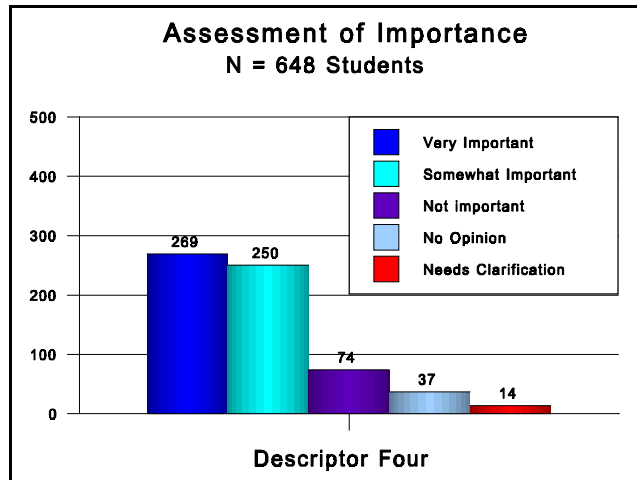
## Descriptor Three

The University of Arizona will: place students, once they attain some basic proficiencies, in consistent contact with faculty who care deeply about the education and well-being of both graduate and undergraduate students while also being leaders in their field.



## Descriptor Four

The University of Arizona will: involve students in faculty-driven and student-initiated research and creative activity, so that they can be active collaborators and contributors in the creation, as well as the transmission, of knowledge.

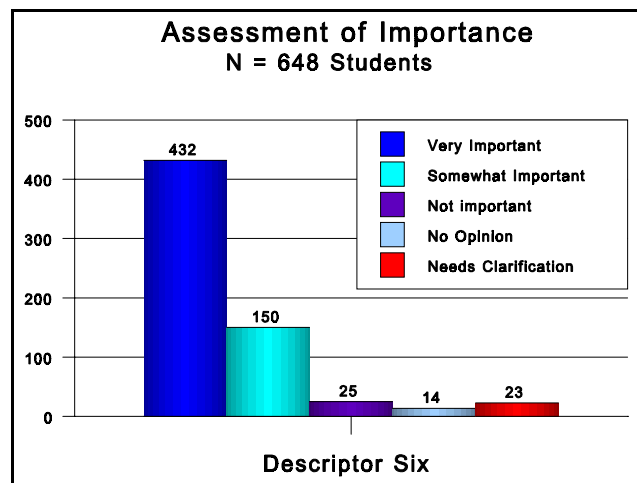


## Descriptor Five

The University of Arizona will: provide all admitted students with timely and ready access to the counseling, course, and progress reports they need to proceed towards their learning goals (including, but not limited to, the degrees they seek.)

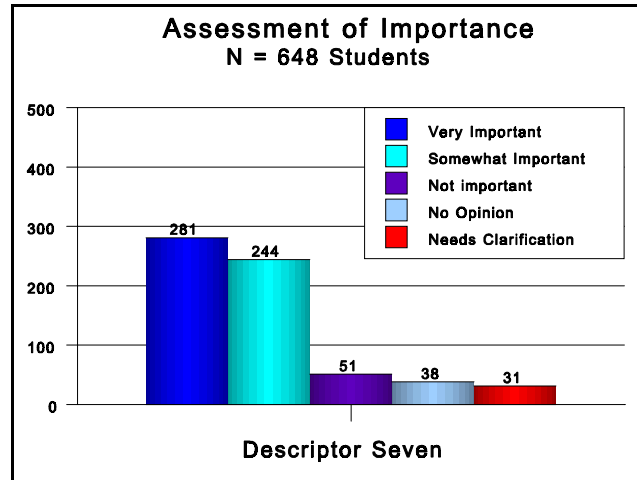
## Descriptor Six

The University of Arizona will: make certain all students have both the advising and mentoring they need, with the faculty having ultimate responsibility for both, aided by effective staff and technological support, in a manner that enables academic progress and opens avenues to postgraduate possibilities with potentials for lifelong learning in them.



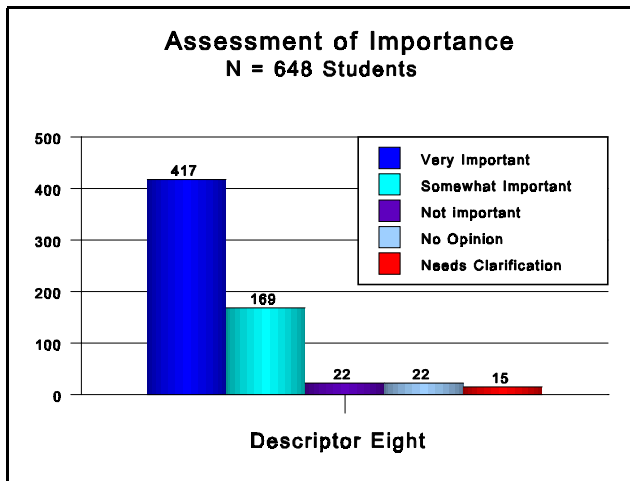
## Descriptor Seven

The University of Arizona will: develop a system of incentives, consequences, and support for faculty that truly rewards and enables devotion to students and effective teaching, right alongside achievement in research and creative endeavor, with especially high rewards to those who do all of these things well in a way that combines them to promote student learning.



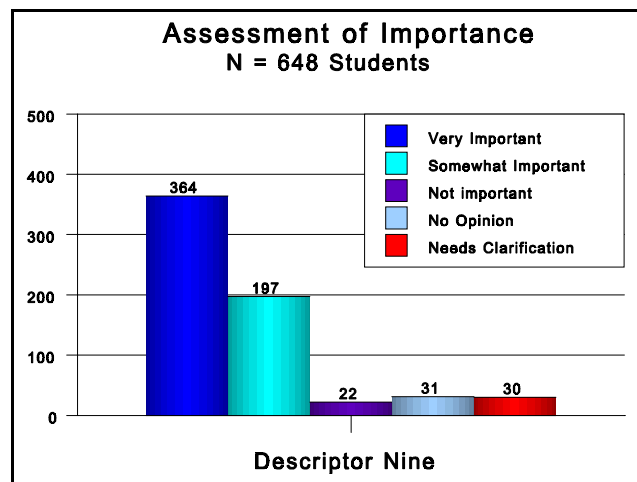
## Descriptor Eight

The University of Arizona will: ensure a high quality support structure of friendly office staff, accessible technology, clean and working classrooms and laboratories, and safe and supportive residence halls, all focused on creating a campus life which fosters continuous learning, celebrates diversity, and promotes a sense of community in which each person feels valued and respected.



## Descriptor Nine

The University of Arizona will: maintain a program of extensive and focused assessment that makes sure all these aims are really being pursued and accomplished.



## **RESPONDENT COMMENTS:**

Respondents to this survey had the opportunity to share comments or questions on the back of their survey forms. Seventy-two individuals elected to offer comments; thirteen asked questions. The open-ended comments were divided into eight categories. There were ten responses that focused on teaching and two on course evaluations. Ten discussed advising. Fourteen people wrote about the term "student-centered." The campus environment was addressed by eleven comments. Six comments centered on student responsibility for learning or students' competency. The content of the actual survey was the focus of seventeen responses. A few were categorized as angry comments. Thirteen questions posed by respondents to our survey are listed at the end of this discussion.

Of the seventy-two open-ended comments, ten focused on teaching and two discussed teacher evaluations. With some overlap in individual responses, the teaching comments could be divided into three broad categories: valuing research over teaching, rewarding quality teaching, and teaching practices. Of the ten, four expressed the opinion that professors value their research more than they value their students and/or their teaching. One student said, "I don't understand how teachers can be available to help and mentor students when they are focused on research." Another comment raised the question of how a professor should divide his/her time between teaching and research and how that could be monitored. Three comments addressed the issue of rewards for quality teaching. These felt that as long as the reward system is tied to research, professors have no incentive to study and/or improve their teaching practices. Said one, "Until this University learns to award top teachers for their contributions rather than mostly award researchers, it will not be." Three students talked about teaching practices. "The manner by which a professor presents the material is truly the difference between achieving an 'A' or an 'F.'" One student suggested that teachers take workshops to improve their teaching. Two students mentioned classes as simply avenues to "weed" out less-capable students. In the two comments that discussed evaluations, the respondents were interested in using teacher evaluations to weed out the "bad" professors. Teachers with repeatedly poor evaluations should not be teaching. One person suggested posting teacher evaluations on the Web.

Of the ten comments that discussed advising, four focused on the idea of making advising more easily available. The other six focused on having better advising. All of these students agreed with the general idea that advising is not as easy to get nor is it as helpful as it should be. The four that agreed that there needs to be more advising available also had other general comments about it. One student thought that there need to be more advisors available because their advisors' schedules always seem to be full. Another student thought that advising should be conducted on a more personal level to help the student know what they need as individuals. The five students who thought that there needs to be better advising felt that they were not getting the help they deserve. One student said that he was told to take the wrong classes. The other students did not feel that their advising had been at all helpful and that the advisor really did not care.

Of the seventy-two written comments, fourteen addressed the concept of a student centered university. These responses could be divided into three general categories: the importance of student learning, the current lack of student-centeredness on our campus, and the meaning of a student-centered research university. With the general theme of stressing student learning over research, three comments made a case for the importance of student learning on campus. One student commented: "If the UA wants to become a student-centered university

then the first thing that must happen is to get faculty, staff, and students excited about learning." Eight students wrote about various aspects of the University that fail at this time to meet the definition of a student-centered campus. Many of these responses dealt with the failure of the university to focus its resources on students. Three students did not understand the meaning of the term "student-centered" and asked for clarification.

Eleven of the seventy-two comments were directed at the campus environment and the quality of interaction in the community. Of these, two students commented on the faculty/staff relationship. Both felt that there were not enough interactions among the groups. One student expressed anger at the interaction with a particular faculty member, or more precisely, the lack of interaction, outside the classroom. These students' comments indicated that student/faculty interactions were quite important, and this commitment was not being met. The other comments in this category were more randomly dispersed. Two students felt that there were not enough computer facilities and where there was access, the system was too confusing. One student felt that administration was negative toward students and their needs. Another student felt that freshmen who live off campus were not aware of activities and were not incorporated into the campus community. Yet another student felt that community outside the campus was not relevant at all. The Greek system was criticized by one respondent as too powerful. One student felt that parking was too expensive and limited, and a different student felt that tickets to sporting events were not accessible enough to students. Finally, one student felt that the campus "caters to the minority population." Additionally, there were a few very angry comments/accusations made by individual respondents.

Of the six comments that dealt with student responsibility, three responses dealt directly with that topic and the other three focused on student competency. The three that mentioned descriptor six from the survey felt that students themselves need to be more responsible for their learning. The three that addressed student competency felt there are problems with students in certain classes who are not prepared. They felt that the entrance requirements should be raised so that everyone who gets accepted can handle their classes. They also felt that if a student is not making it in their area of study that they should be weeded out.

Seventeen comments focused on the nine statements from the actual survey document. These comments could be divided into four categories: suggestions, betterment of the university, general comments, and negative comments. Out of all of these comments, five offered suggestions. They suggested the nine survey statements should be made briefer, that some of the statements are too vague, and some could be combined. Another said the statements need to be a shorter and more concise. Three of the comments had to do with bettering the university – implementing the ideas listed. One said: "Dr. Likins will be more easily able to implement his plans if these goals are met." Another suggested publicizing these student-centered statements. Six of the comments were general statements such as "these ideas are nice" or that "this survey is important." One did not appreciate the demographic questions and suggested not segregating students into different categories like race. A number of the document comments were decidedly negative. Respondents wrote about not ever seeing these ideas carried out, about feeling the university is doing a poor job implementing the mission statement, and about concerns that the survey only poses one point of view.

In addition to the comments discussed above, respondents posed a number of questions. They are presented *in toto* and unedited in the box below.

- What exactly would this entail in terms of changes for student responsibility?
- On #6, why does the faculty have ultimate responsibility?
- Why are you wasting class time for this? I paid to learn, not do your survey.
- Is the University actually going to work on this? The U of A really needs to change some things soon.
- Why does it seem like thieves and wife-beaters are allowed to do anything they want as long as they play football?
- Why are you always so worried about ethnicity?
- OK, like what is this stuff?
- Why do top administrators, who produce nothing but hot air, get paid more than professionals do?
- Could intramural athletics be changed so Sunday would not be a day of competition?
- How long would it take for these ideas to go into effect?
- Can you do anything about the Gen Ed requirements? They're ridiculous.
- What is "Leadership Concepts and Contexts?"
- Shouldn't a student centered university be decided by students and not a budget committee?

Since the survey did not require respondents to identify themselves, we have no way of responding to these questions, nor do we have answers to most of them. However, they are included in our report verbatim for whatever they might contribute to discussion of the University's vision of becoming a student centered research university.

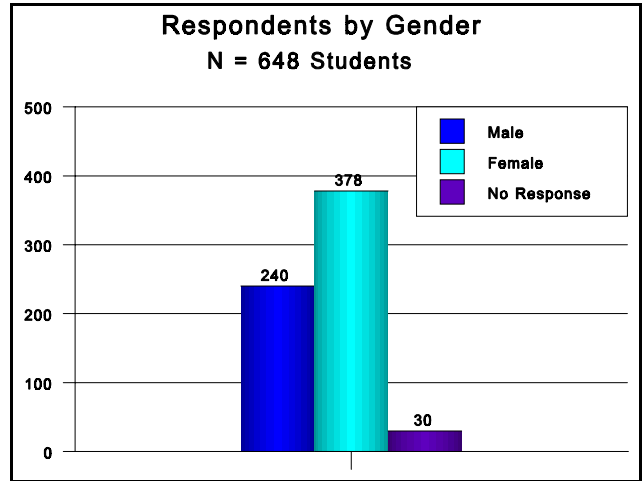
## WHO RESPONDED TO OUR SURVEY?

Our class worked diligently to reach a broad representative segment of the campus with the survey. Many faculty helped willingly by allowing us to administer the survey during class time and we appreciate their support. A total of 648 students participated in the survey.

### GENDER

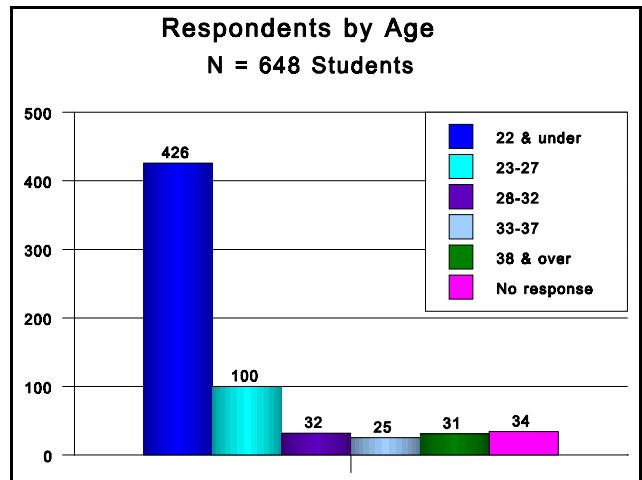
37% of the survey respondents are men and 58%, women. 5% of the students responding to the survey did not respond to this question.

The UA student population as a whole is comprised of 48% men and 52% women.



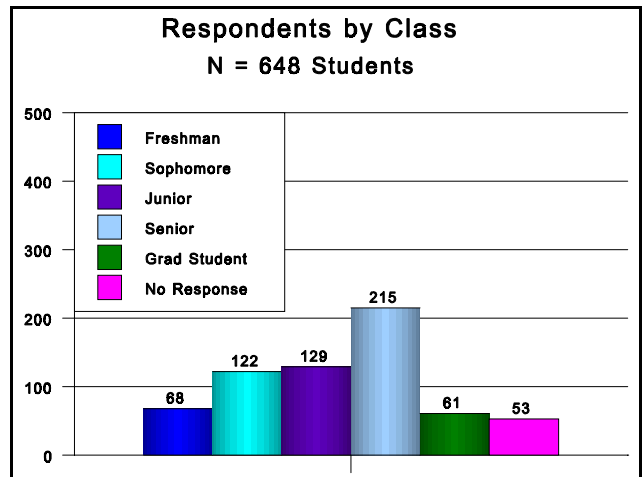
### AGE

Nearly two thirds of the students responding to the survey regarding each of the student centered university descriptors fell within the 18- to 22-year-old category. Almost five per cent were aged 40 or older.



### CLASS

Respondents were asked to indicate their class affiliation to determine the extent to which survey participants represented freshmen, undergraduates, and graduate students. No attempt was made to discover the number of non-degree-seeking students.

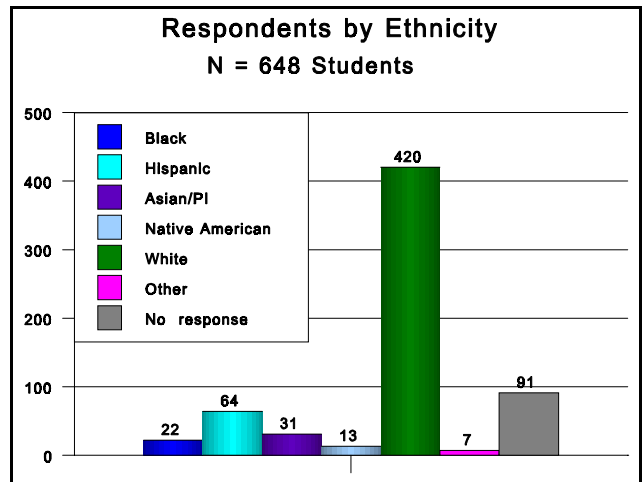


## ETHNICITY

Respondent sample compared to the UA Student population below:

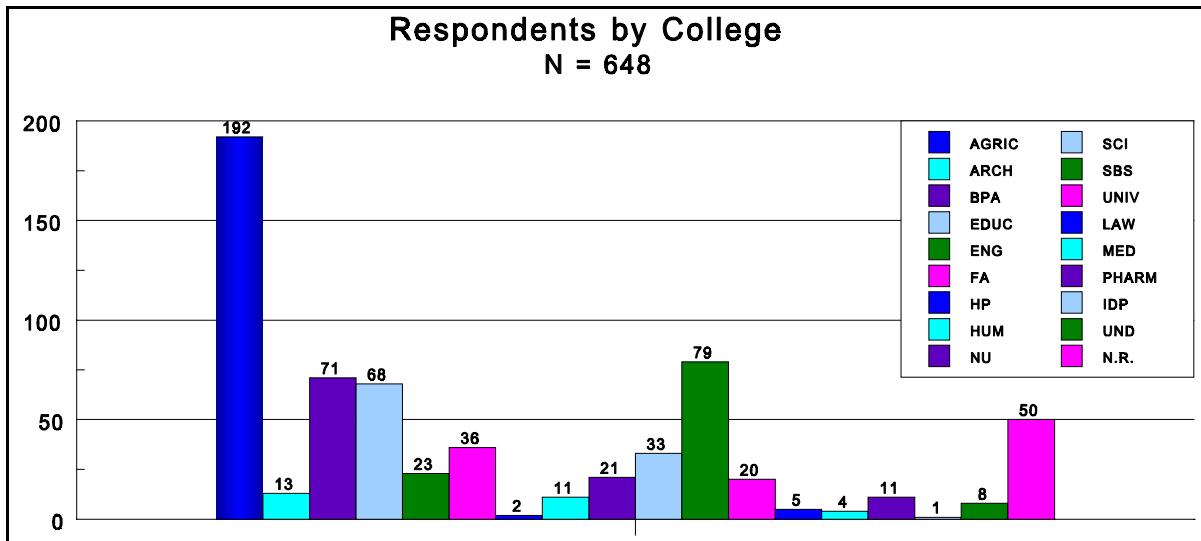
Ethnicity	Respondents	UA Student Body
Black	3.4%	2.7%
Hispanic	9.9%	12.9%
Asian/PI	4.8%	5.2%
Nat Am.	2.0%	2.2%
White	64.8%	67.6%

Note: Demographic data used for comparison found in The University of Arizona Fact Book.



## COLLEGE AFFILIATION

Since “Leadership Concepts and Contexts” is a course offered through the College of Agriculture, the sample of respondents is skewed toward that college. Efforts were made to reach every college, but there were no respondents from Arizona International College and four colleges had five or fewer students participating in the survey.



Key: AGRIC = Agriculture  
 ARCH = Architecture  
 BPA = Business & Public Administration  
 EDUC = College of Education  
 ENG = Engineering and Mines  
 FA = Fine Arts  
 HP = Health Professions  
 HUM = Humanities  
 NU = Nursing

SCI = Science  
 SBS = Social & Behavioral Sciences  
 UNIV = University College  
 LAW = Law  
 MED = Medicine  
 PHARM = Pharmacy  
 IDP = Interdisciplinary Program  
 UND = Undecided  
 N.R. = No Response

## SUMMARY:

Through our class project, we had the opportunity to be leaders and to actually do what leaders do. This experience was essential to our development individually as leaders, encouraged us to learn and practice shared leadership, and contributed to the creation of a sense of community in the classroom. Our action research project was intended to broaden the discussion of what it means to be a student centered research university by including the student voice in a meaningful and appropriate way.

We are grateful to President Likins for visiting with our class and presenting his views on the University of Arizona vision for becoming a student centered research university. We offer our class project to those who make decisions about the future of our campus community with the hope that it will contribute in a positive way to the process of becoming what we envision.

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## REFLECTIONS – comments by Dr. Nancy Huber:

The concept of reflective practice is central to the philosophical basis from which Leadership Concepts and Contexts (AED 410/510) is taught. It integrates learning while leading, creating shared meaning, and praxis. Students are encouraged to reflect on what happens during the class project and to draw from it new meaning about their role as leader within the campus community. At the end of the semester, students were asked to share some of their reflections on the final exam. Here are some of their comments:

- ✓ “Reflecting on the process of creating and implementing a class project, several elements of that context provided opportunity to learn and practice leadership skills applicable to my growth as a leader.”
- ✓ “The class project enabled all of us to practice our skills as leaders. The basic premise of leadership is that it should involve a shared vision that promotes positive change in the community. The class project was just that...a shared vision of not only the class but also the University as a whole.”
- ✓ “The class project was a hands-on experience, like a snapshot of the lifelong learning process...The assessment and summary of the survey brought about the feeling of accomplishment and closure.”
- ✓ “This opportunity to experience leadership concepts will probably take on greater meaning as I become more actively involved in the leadership process.”
- ✓ “By initiating our survey of UA students with regard to the SPBAC statement, we had the opportunity to practice leadership and take advantage of the timing to provide administrators with the student view of their espoused student centered values...The fact of the survey, regardless of the data, serves as a reminder that extending the conversation into the campus community is invaluable in formulating a mission in which all stakeholders can believe and in building a community that works together to achieve shared goals.”

It was rewarding for me to see students shift their point of view from that of declaring their **right** to be involved in the conversation about what it means to be a student centered research university, to recognizing (and acting on) their **responsibility** to have a voice in the discussion.

N. S. Huber  
March, 2000

**THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA AS A STUDENT-CENTERED RESEARCH UNIVERSITY**

The **Leadership Concepts and Contexts** class (AED/ FS 410/510) is interested in leadership and how it brings about change. This semester we have focused on the University of Arizona and how it can become a more student-centered research University. We feel that it is imperative for students, staff, faculty, and administrators to all have a say in these changes. Therefore, we are asking you to take a few minutes to complete the following survey. You will be contributing your voice, and enhancing the future of the University of Arizona. This is your chance to be heard.

The University of Arizona Strategic Planning and Budget Committee has drafted the following to explain and describe what it means for the U of A to be a student-centered, research University. Please circle the **ONE** response that reflects how important you feel each statement is. Please use the back of the page for additional questions or comments and include demographic information about yourself.

1= very important  
 2= somewhat important  
 3 = not important  
 4 = no opinion  
 5 = needs clarification

The University of Arizona will:

foster a climate that welcomes students to an invigorating, as well as challenging, enterprise of discovery in which the focus is on active student learning in and out of the classroom (including engagement with the community) within an atmosphere of mutual respect, cordiality, ethical treatment, and the taking of appropriate responsibility by all parties;	1	2	3	4	5
design and conduct its curricula at all levels towards what students need to learn from them and the competencies we want all students to have for life-long learning after they leave the University;	1	2	3	4	5
place students, once they attain some basic proficiencies, in consistent contact with faculty who care deeply about the education and well-being of both undergraduate and graduate students while also being leaders in their fields;	1	2	3	4	5
involve students in faculty-driven and student-initiated research and creative activity, so that they can be active collaborators and contributors in the creation, as well as the transmission, of knowledge;	1	2	3	4	5
provide all admitted students with timely and ready access to the counseling, courses, and progress reports they need to proceed steadily towards their learning goals (including, but not limited to, the degrees they seek);	1	2	3	4	5
make certain all students have both the advising and the mentoring they need, with the faculty having ultimate responsibility for both, aided by effective staff and technological support, in a manner that enables academic progress and opens avenues to postgraduate possibilities with potentials for life-long learning in them;	1	2	3	4	5
develop a system of incentives, consequences, and support for faculty that truly rewards and enables devotion to students and effective teaching, right alongside achievement in research and creative endeavor, with especially high rewards for those who do all of these well in a way that combines them to promote student learning;	1	2	3	4	5
ensure a high-quality support structure of friendly office staff, accessible technology, clean and working classrooms and laboratories, and safe and supportive residence halls, all focused on creating a campus life which fosters continuous learning, celebrates diversity, and promotes a sense of community in which each person feels valued and respected; and	1	2	3	4	5
maintain a program of extensive and focused assessment that makes sure that all these aims are really being pursued and accomplished.	1	2	3	4	5

**OVER PLEASE**

Do you have any questions or comments?

The following information will help us assure a representative cross-section of the student body. Your answers will be confidential. Please fill in the blanks or circle the appropriate response.

Gender: Male Female

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_

Year in School: Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior Grad

College: \_\_\_\_\_ Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Residence: On Campus Off Campus

Thank you very much for your time!

If you would like a copy of the results of our survey, please add your name and email address.

[Return to start of Report.](#)