

The Ohio State Commuter Student Experience

Off-Campus Student Services

January 2011

INTRODUCTION

Off-Campus Student Services and Student Life Research & Assessment conducted a survey in Spring, 2010, among students who live outside the University District.

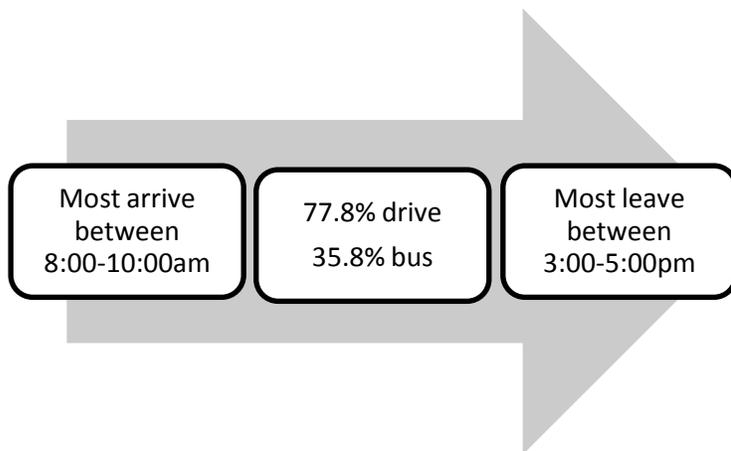
Respondents included 270 undergraduates and 229 graduates, yielding a 20% response rate. The survey covered topics of commuting logistics, campus life, and support.

Commuters are defined as students who do not live in university-owned or -managed housing and who live outside of the 43201 zip code area, essentially beyond walking distance.

The purpose of the research project was to begin to develop an understanding of the commuter student at The Ohio State University. Approximately 55% of Ohio State students commute to campus. With such a large percentage of the student body represented by commuter students, more information is needed to gauge their experiences and their perceived barriers to success. The following information is a profile of the commuter student at The Ohio State University.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **24.2%** of commuters live with non-related roommates, **22.6%** by themselves, and **20.6%** with parents
- **52.7%** attend major campus events
- **60.9%** are not involved in student organizations
- **32.7%** hold leadership positions on or off campus
- Activities of most interest to commuters (in order of strength of interest) include *discount tickets, free food, concerts, and movies*
- **59.1%** of commuters feel they are a member of the Ohio State community
- **81.2%** of the commuters feel confident that they will succeed at The Ohio State University



Roles Supporting Commuter Experience

- Parent
- Dependent
- Group member in class

Roles Conflicting with Commuter Experience

- Employee
- Primary Household Caregiver
- Primary Financial Provider

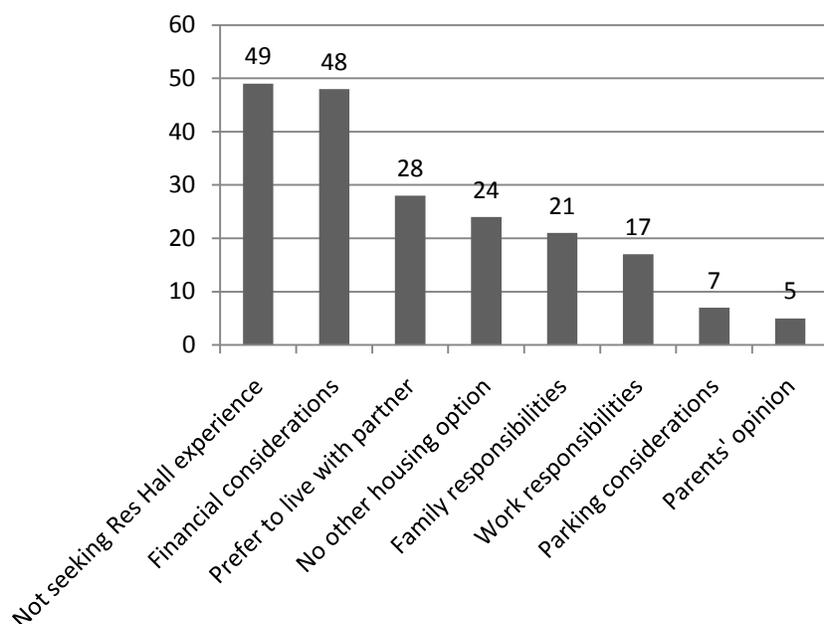
- **79.6%** of commuters would recommend Ohio State to other students
- **91.7%** of commuters are confident navigating campus

*Percentages reflect number of respondents who answered Agree or Strongly Agree.

FINDINGS

The following analysis provides more details about commuter students and their relationship with The Ohio State University. This brief includes a basic description of who commuters are and the major elements that influence their experience at Ohio State.

WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO COMMUTE?*



The most popular reasons commuters choose to commute are that they are *not seeking a residence hall experience* and/or for *financial considerations*.

However, among undergraduates only, *financial considerations* was more popular than *not seeking a residence hall experience* as reasons for choosing to commute.

Parents' opinion was considered the least important reason for choosing to commute.

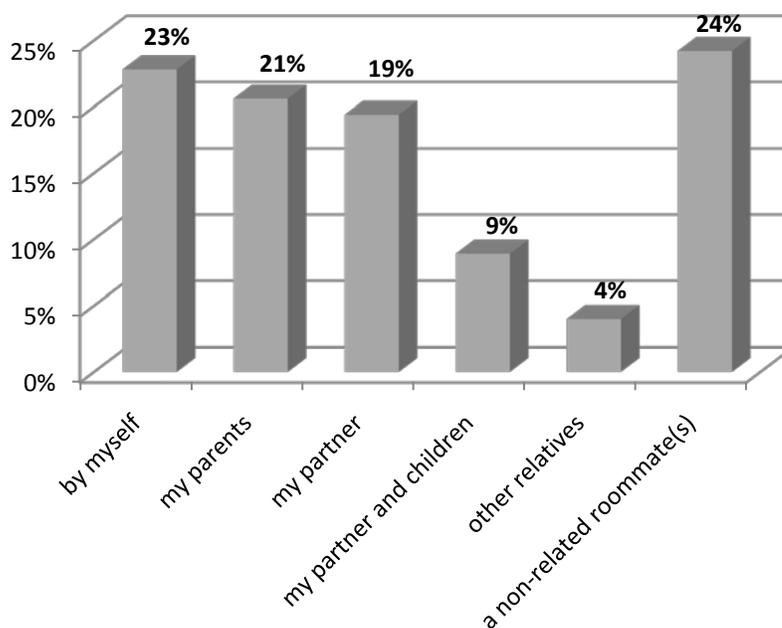
* Respondents could choose more than one answer; numbers are percentages.

WHAT BEST DESCRIBES YOUR LIVING ARRANGEMENT?

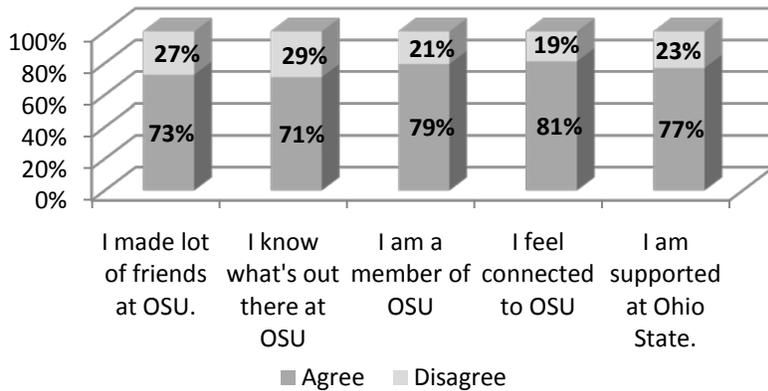
The most common living arrangement among commuters is *live with non-related roommates*, followed closely by *live by myself*.

Among undergraduates who commute, *live with parents* is the most popular living arrangement, followed by *live with non-related roommates*.

Very few students reported that they live with a *partner and children* and even fewer reported living with a non-parental relative (*other relatives*).



CONNECTION WITH OHIO STATE



The data show that, although commuters are not as close to campus as those who live in residence halls, they feel connected to Ohio State and know the campus well.

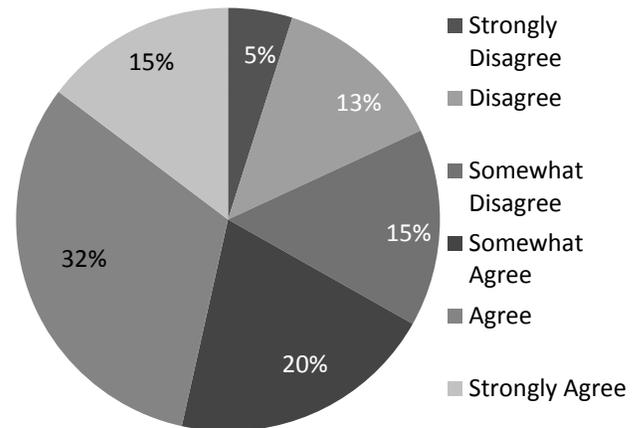
Agree is comprised of Somewhat Agree, Agree and Strongly Agree; Disagree is comprised of Somewhat Disagree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree.

INFORMATION AND SERVICES

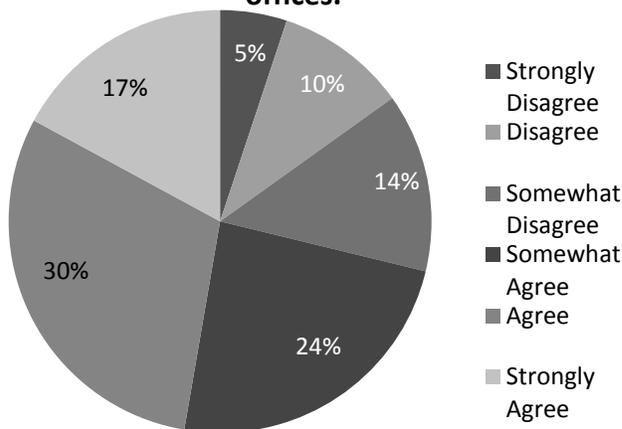
Some commuters feel that information regarding student activities related to their needs is easy to find (46.5% strongly agree and agree), with an additional 20.3% saying they somewhat agree.

Commuters get most of their information regarding campus events and programs via websites (65%), followed by their friends (58.8%) and emails (56.5%). Postings in buildings and staff were in the mid-range of responses. CABS postings, faculty and visiting offices were the least indicated means by which commuters say they get information regarding campus events and programs.

Information about Student Activities is easy to find.



It is easy to access personal support offices.

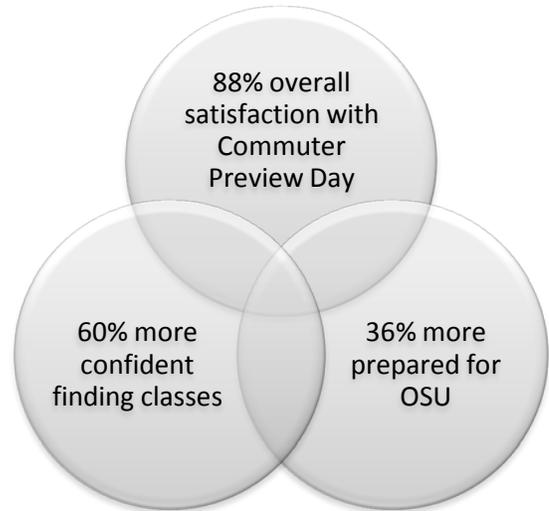


Commuters get most of their information regarding Student Life offices and services via websites (58.4%), emails (53.2%) and friends (34.0%). Postings in buildings were moderately identified.

Although most commuters indicate that they are not involved in student organizations or hold leadership positions on or off-campus, a fair number of commuters do attend major campus events.

CURRENT ASSETS FOR COMMUTER EXPERIENCE AT OHIO STATE

- ✓ Summer orientation experience: Commuter Discussion Session
 - The NFQF Commuter Discussion Session facilitated by Off Campus Student Services received over 90% satisfaction ratings; one of the most highly rated student life sessions at Orientation
- ✓ Successful Commuter Preview Day:
 - 88% overall satisfaction with the program
 - 60% increase in feeling confident finding classes
 - 36% increase in feeling prepared for first days as a commuter at Ohio State
- ✓ New Ohio Union
 - Lounge & restaurant facilities
 - Kitchen and locker facilities
- ✓ OCSS provides support for commuter inquiries via email, telephone, and walk-ins
- ✓ Weekly email updates are sent to OCSS commuter
 - distribution list (approximately 600 commuters);
 - commuters continue to visit the OCSS website each week to sign up for this distribution list
- ✓ Quarterly newsletter created by OCSS is distributed via email to approximately 600 commuters
- ✓ In October 2010, OCSS launched the new Facebook page “Commuter Students at The Ohio State University” (www.facebook.com/osucommuters); currently has 180 members
- ✓ Commuter Student Organization



IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

BETTER OUTREACH – Since commuters are most likely on campus between 10:00 am and 3:00 pm, programs targeted to commuters should take place between those times; thus increasing the possibility that commuter students will attend. Student Life should reach out to commuters through our websites and emails. The University could be encouraged to require local address information so that commuter students can be better identified. Student Life could reach out to commuters during the summer orientation experience (the Commuter Discussion session), continue through the Commuter Preview Day program, and be available to commuter students throughout the year. A commuter student services effort, unique from Off-Campus Student Services, might be explored.

PROGRAMMING – An ambassador-type program, which has been successful in the off-campus area, could be successful for commuter students. Commuter students could be engaged as community builders and outreach liaisons to the greater commuter population. There is probably little need to start *new* programs. Instead, a group of Student Life staff members could be selected to examine the data further and make recommendations for specific ways commuters can be better incorporated into the programs and services Student Life already offers.

BENEFITS – Commuters could benefit from support aimed at helping them to connect with Student Life services and programs. They could benefit from more opportunities to meet other students and make friends, connect to campus, and build community. Student Life needs to find ways to provide additional support to commuters who are parents and/or commuters who work; programming should draw upon the support provided by commuters' parents, families, and classes. Effective ways to involve families of commuters could be through partnerships among Student Life offices.