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National News

Freshmen are more conservative

By Kalpana Srinivasan
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Aside from the predictable bags of unwashed clothes and as yet-to-be-read books, this year's college freshmen may have also brought home some surprises for spring break: conservative views on casual sex, abortion and other issues.

A comprehensive survey of this year's college freshmen finds a host of areas where young adults are taking decidedly different turns on issues than previous generations of students. From the lowest support ever for casual sex and keeping abortion legal, to questions of law and order and even their goals in life, the differences are sometimes wide.

"We have members who are more conservative than their parents," says Chris Gillott, chairman of Pennsylvania State University's Young Americans for Freedom.

Gillott says some of his peers go home and "come out of the conservative closet" to their families, igniting heated discussions on topics from Social Security to affirmative action.

Young adults are looking for a return to religious or more traditional moral values after the legacy left by the baby boomers, he says.

A few examples:

—Only 40 percent of freshmen agree that it's OK for two people who like each other to have sex, even if they have only known each other a short while. That's down from 42 percent in 1997, and an all-time high of 52 percent in 1987, according to the study by the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles.

—In 1970, 56 percent of the freshmen surveyed showed

strong opposition to capital punishment. By 1998, less than a quarter of them believed the death penalty should be abolished. Seventy-three percent of freshmen said there is too much concern for criminals — an almost 50 percent increase since the early 1970s when only about half of those surveyed felt that way.

—Only half of this year's freshmen backed efforts to keep abortion legal — a record low figure after six years on the decline. Support for laws protecting abortion peaked in 1990 at 65 percent.

"We have pro-choice students on our campus who still say they would never have an abortion," says Ryan Gruber, a senior at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, who used to head the school's college Republicans. "Even if they don't want to push their message on others, there is less tolerance on a personal level."

Wendy Shalit, a 23-year-old author who lashes out against random college hookups and sexual encounters in a new book, says it's no surprise young adults are turning away from the values of the generations that preceded them.

"Their parents are the ones who sort of believed in this liberation through promiscuity and experience," said Shalit, whose book, "A Return to Modesty: Discovering the Lost Virtue," came out in January. But some kids today are "embracing the codes of conduct that their own parents rejected."

Shalit pointed to the rise in ballroom dancing as one sign of how young adults are looking for new ways to relate to each other.

Even views on the grand scheme of things can shift considerably in a few generations. Near-

ly three-quarters of the Class of 2002 consider being well-off financially among their highest objectives.

Their parents had different goals when they were freshmen: In the late 1960s, more than 80 percent wanted to develop "a meaningful philosophy of life." Today, only 40 percent of incoming college students find that objective compelling.

A record low 26 percent of freshmen believe that "keeping up to date with political affairs" is a very important or essential life goal. In 1966, interest in politics was at its height, with a record 58 percent of freshmen considering important in their lives.

But some say these results don't necessarily signify apathy among today's students. Instead, activism and civic-mindedness may turn up in different forms, like volunteering and community service.

"These activities are political in the sense that they are trying to change the system we have," says Kendra Fox-Davis, a 1998 UCLA college graduate who now is vice president of the U.S. Student Association in Washington.

She added that while students today may not be as likely to demonstrate or march in protest like their parents, young adults are active on a host of issues from decreasing tuition to raising attention to sweatshop labor conditions.

The 1998 freshmen norms are based on the responses of 275,811 students at 469 of the nation's two- and four-year colleges and universities. Colleges were chosen to represent a cross-section of the student population nationwide.

UCLA's research institute has conducted the survey annually since 1966.

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Expanded hate crime laws proposed

By Sandra Sobieraj
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Hoping to ride the momentum of headlines from Kosovo, Laramie and Jasper, President Clinton asked Congress on Tuesday to extend federal hate crime laws to include offenses based on sexual orientation, gender or disability.

The United States, Clinton said, is as vulnerable as Kosovo — "old, even primitive hatreds," Clinton said.

"It's very humbling. We should remember that each of us almost wakes up every day with the scales of light and darkness in our own hearts, and we've got to keep them in proper balance. And we have to be, in the United States, absolutely resolute about this."

The president also ordered the Education Department to begin collecting data on hate crimes on college campuses. "We have significant problems there and we need to shine a light on that," he said without elaborating.

An MTV: Music Television survey released Tuesday found that 91 percent of 12 to 24-year-olds describe hate crimes as a "very serious" or "somewhat serious" national problem. Nearly two in 10 young people said they know a victim of a gender-based hate crime.

Overall, more than 8,000 hate crime incidents were reported in the United States in 1997. For 1998, the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs reported a 108-percent increase in gay-bashing violence that left victims

hospitalized. Assaults and attempted assaults with firearms against gays and lesbians rose 71 percent, the report found.

"We're talking about whether people have a right, if they show up and work hard and obey the law and are good citizens, to pursue their lives in dignity free of fear, without fear of being abused," Clinton said.

Current hate crimes laws bans only race-, ethnicity- and religion-based crimes. The Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 1999, which Clinton endorsed, would add three protected categories — sexual orientation, gender and disability — and make the prosecution of hate crimes easier by deleting the stipulation that the victim is targeted for engaging in certain federally protected activities, such as serving on a jury, voting or attending public school.

More than 40 states have hate crimes laws but only 21 cover sexual orientation, 22 cover gender and 21 cover disability.

Clinton endorsed a partnership among AT&T, Court TV, Cable in the Classroom, the National Middle Schools Association and the Anti-Defamation League working with the Justice and Education departments to develop middle-school curricula to combat intolerance.

Robert H. Knight of the Washington-based Family Research Council denounced it all as a "homosexual agenda."

"We cannot allow the law to designate less protection for some people than others," said Knight.

He called the middle-school program an attempt at "re-educating America's children away from traditional morality under the guise of 'tolerance.'"

Clinton's effort to revive the legislation, which went nowhere in the House and Senate last year, comes on the heels of several high-profile cases:

—Matthew Shepard, a gay college student pistol-whipped and strung up to die on a prairie fence in Laramie, Wyoming.

—James Byrd Jr., the black man killed as he was dragged by a chain behind the pickup truck of white supremacists.

—Billy Jack Gaither, a gay textile worker in Alabama beaten to death then burned atop a pile of tires.

Such headlines improve the legislation's chances in Congress, White House press secretary Joe Lockhart said. "Unfortunately when you have incidents like we've had in our country over the last year, it sometimes tends to galvanize public interest and support for something like this."

The Rt. Rev. Jane Holmes Dixon, suffragan bishop of Washington who participated in the White House announcement, said Shepard's "crucifixion in the Wyoming winter" made the legislation's necessity "horrifyingly clear."

"While we watch what is unfolding in Kosovo with ever increasing horror, we must not let those distant hate crimes distract us from the hate crimes here on our own soil," Dixon said.

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