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Wi-Fi helps college students get better grades, survey says

And it's a perk they look for when deciding which school to attend

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October 6, 2008 ([Computerworld](#)) Can Wi-Fi make you smarter?

College students seems to think so. Nearly 75% of the students who took part in a recent poll said Wi-Fi access on their college campuses helps them get better grades.

In fact, college students like Wi-Fi so much that 48% said they would give up beer before giving up Wi-Fi, according to the survey, which was conducted by Wakefield Research for the [Wi-Fi Alliance](#). A total of 501 U.S. college students from both large and small schools were given the survey in September, the organization said.

The survey appears to confirm what college CIOs in the U.S. and Canada have been saying for the past two years: Incoming freshmen seek out schools with Wi-Fi capability. Nearly 60% of the students surveyed said they wouldn't attend a college that didn't offer free Wi-Fi. And 79% said that without Wi-Fi access, college would be a lot harder.

"Wi-Fi has become a universal expectation among college students," Edgar Figueroa, executive director of the Wi-Fi Alliance, said in a statement. He noted that students respond to the quick access to information that Wi-Fi makes possible, including access to academic information, university schedules and events or the ability to connect with friends via [Facebook](#) or [MySpace](#), the alliance said.

The survey also found that students use Wi-Fi during classes. Although professors at some universities can decide whether to allow Wi-Fi use during class -- typing out instant messages can annoy some people -- IT managers have reported that it is difficult to impose such policies.

More than half of the students in the survey said they have checked MySpace or Facebook or sent or received e-mail while using a laptop in class, and nearly half had sent an instant message to a friend.

The survey also found how and where students reach Wi-Fi. Students log in at coffee shops or restaurants (55%), in parks (47%) or in their cars (24%) in addition to libraries and laboratories. A total of 43% also said they had reached Wi-Fi using a handheld device instead of a laptop or desktop computer.

Fully 90% believe Wi-Fi access is as essential to an education as a classroom or a computer.

Wi-Fi has become so prevalent on college campuses that [ABI Research](#) said Wi-Fi penetration should reach 99% of all campuses by 2013. Colleges worldwide spent about \$137 million in 2007 on Wi-Fi access points and controllers, a figure that's expected to grow to \$837 million in 2013, according to ABI. For lower grades, between kindergarten and grade 12, Wi-Fi equipment sales were about \$47 million in 2007. That figure is expected to hit \$644 million in 2013, ABI said.

The Wi-Fi Alliance survey did not explore how campus CIOs feel about Wi-Fi, although some universities [have grappled with ways](#) to keep the service consistent and widely available, as well as secure. At Concordia University in Montreal, for instance, officials in January reported that [moving to faster 802.11n Wi-Fi](#) was considered important in keeping students satisfied.

[In a recent interview](#), Jorge Mata, CIO for the Los Angeles Community College District, which serves 140,000 students in nine colleges, said that students often ask for better Wi-Fi coverage, not faster throughput. "From an educational standpoint, I agree with them, because we know that the longer students are on campus, the greater their chances of success," he said. All of the colleges in the district serve commuters.