



Newspaper Readership February 2005

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this survey is on the effectiveness of the Student Newspaper Readership Program at Penn State. Topics include newspaper readership, use of the newspaper in the classroom, outcomes related to newspaper readership (including measures of civic engagement), use of the Newspaper Readership Program, newspaper recycling, and satisfaction with the program. This survey was conducted by Student Affairs Research and Assessment and Educational Benchmarking, Inc. as a national pilot. It was administered by Web to students at the 20 Penn State undergraduate campuses as well as to students at six other institutions.

In total, 3,615 students at Penn State responded to the survey (including graduate and undergraduate students) for an 18.0% response rate and a confidence interval for the total sample of +/-1.58%.¹

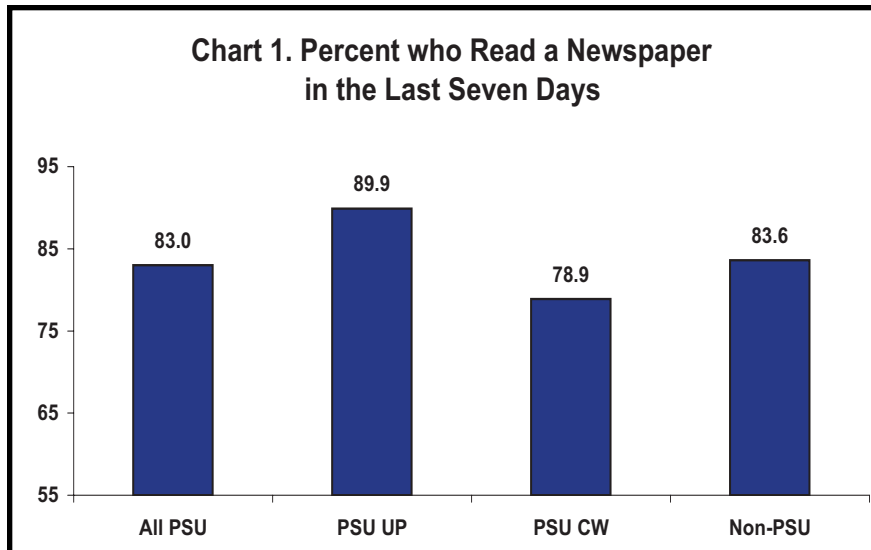
Of the Penn State respondents, 37.0% are from University Park; 93.0% are undergraduate students; 55.1% are 20 and younger, 32.8% are between 21 and 25 years of age, and 12.1% are 26 or older; 81.8% are White/Caucasian; and 69.3% live off campus. For additional information on Pulse, please visit <http://www.sa.psu.edu/sara>.

FINDINGS

Newspaper Readership

Students were asked several questions regarding their newspaper readership behavior.

- Approximately 90% of University Park students and 80% of Commonwealth campus students read the newspaper at least once in the last seven days (see Chart 1).



¹ Response rates for campuses ranged from 26.9% to 6.8%.

This project examines the effectiveness of the Student Newspaper Readership Program and outcomes related to readership.

For more information please visit Student Affairs Research and Assessment at <http://www.sa.psu.edu/sara>



Penn State Pulse is a project of Student Affairs Research and Assessment.

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- Approximately 83% of University Park students read the *Daily Collegian* (see Table 1).
- Close to 70% of Commonwealth campus students read the local/regional paper compared to 52% of University Park students (see Table 1).
- Of University Park students, 47.2% read the *New York Times* and 43.3 % read *USA Today* (see Table 1).

Table 1. Newspapers Read (by percent)

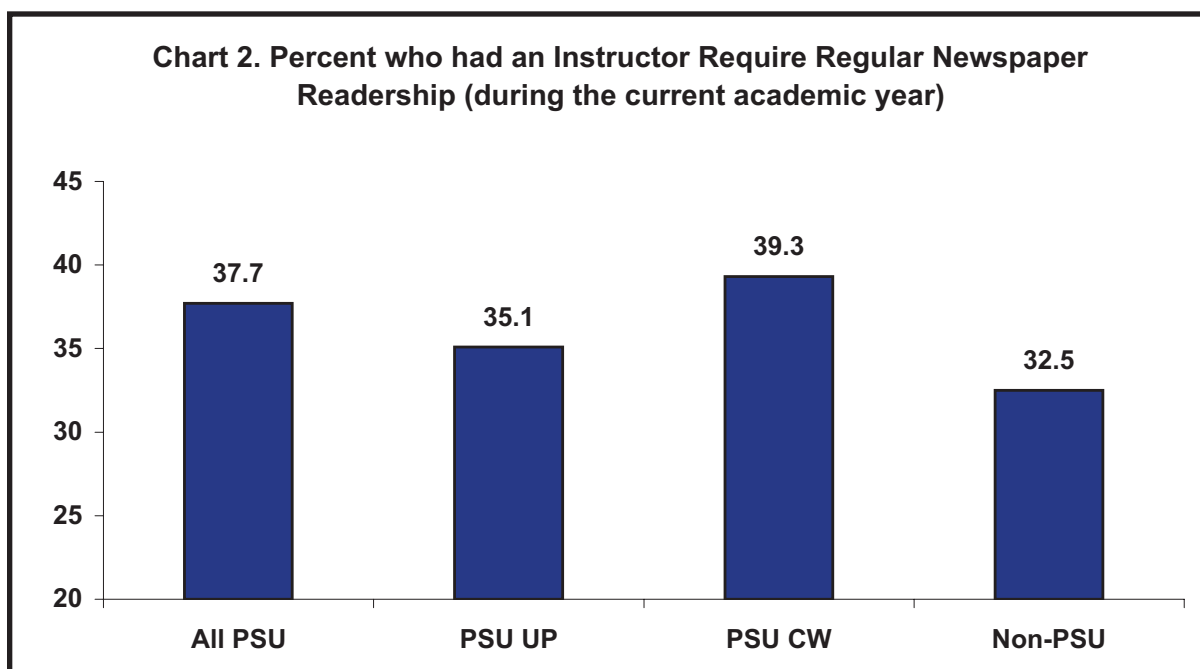
	Overall PSU (n=3,609)	PSU UP (n=1,334)	PSU CW (n=2,275)	Non-PSU (n=7,645) ²
Campus student newspaper ³	57.1	83.4	41.7	77.4
Local/regional paper	63.1	51.8	69.7	54.2
<i>New York Times</i>	40.6	47.2	36.7	41.8
<i>USA Today</i>	41.6	43.3	40.7	27.9
<i>Wall Street Journal</i> ⁴	15.6	14.6	16.2	14.2

Classroom Use

Several questions addressed the utilization of the newspaper in the classroom; 35.1% of University Park students and 39.3% of Commonwealth campus students indicated they had at least one instructor require regular newspaper readership as part of class (see Chart 2).

Of Penn State students who had an instructor who required newspaper readership:

- 59.6% were required to read the *New York Times*; 31.8% the local/regional paper; 26.6% *USA Today*; and 23.2% the *Wall Street Journal* (data not shown);
- most commonly, students indicated the papers were used to provide current examples of class topics and for class assignments (data not shown); and
- 66.7% indicated that reading the newspaper for class, at least “moderately” enhanced their learning (data not shown).



² The readership programs of the non-PSU campuses vary. For example, one school only offers the *New York Times* and most only offer the paper to their residence hall students.

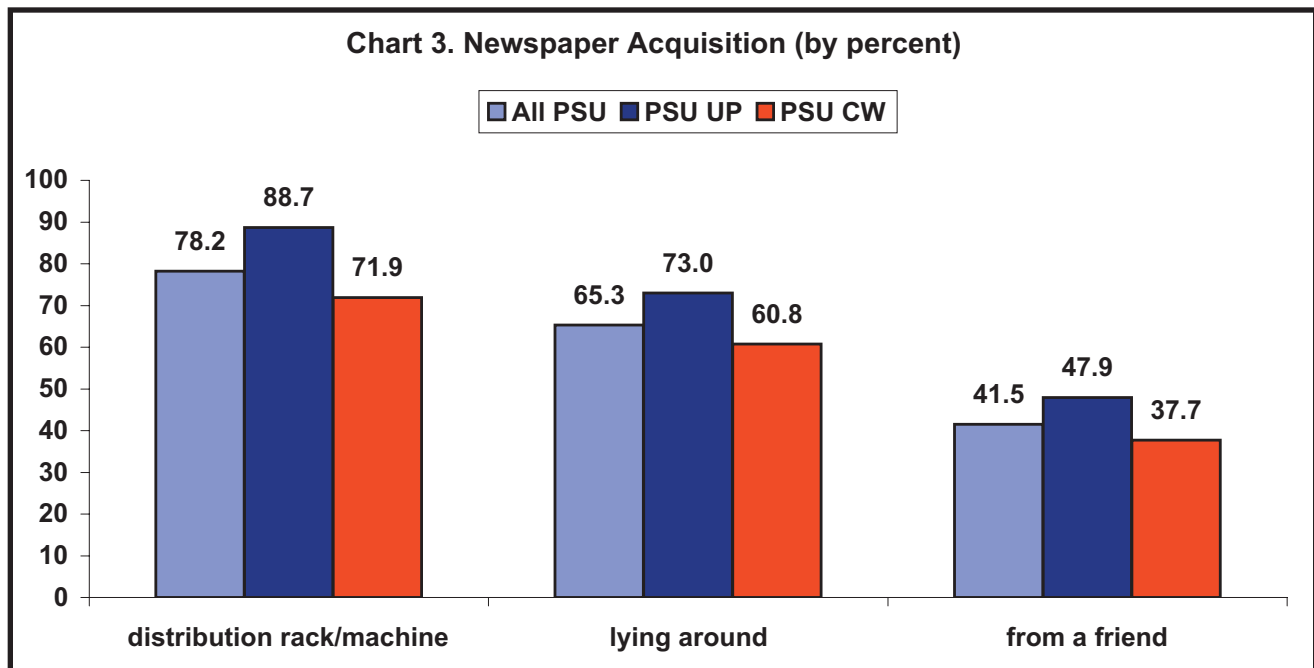
³ University Park offers a daily student newspaper compared to some of the Commonwealth campuses that do not have a student paper or only publish once a week.

⁴ The *Wall Street Journal* is not part of the Student Newspaper Readership Program.

The Newspaper Readership Program: Use and Satisfaction

Students were also asked about their awareness of the Student Newspaper Readership Program, their use of the program, and their satisfaction with the program.

- Almost 98% of Penn State students were aware of the Student Newspaper Readership Program (data not shown).
- On a weekly basis, 88.7% of University Park students and 71.9% of Commonwealth campus students picked up a paper directly from the newspaper readership distribution racks or machines (see Chart 3).
- In addition, across the Penn State system, 65.3% of students picked up a paper that was lying around and 41.5% acquired one from a friend, denoting indirect use of the newspaper readership program (see Chart 3).
- Furthermore, when combining students' direct and indirect use of the program, 95.7% of University Park students and 86.1% of Commonwealth campus students utilized the program (data not shown).



- Approximately 86% of University Park students and 72% of Commonwealth campus students expressed satisfaction with the program (data not shown).
- Ninety-two percent of Penn State students agreed the newspaper distribution boxes are conveniently located (data not shown).
- Of Penn State students, 62.5% had never encountered a mechanical problem with the newspaper distribution units, and 26.2% had experienced mechanical problems one or two times (data not shown).
- Of Penn State students, 31.4% had never encountered a supply problem with one of the distribution units, and 40.9% had experienced a supply problem one or two times (data not shown).
- Moreover, 91.1% of University Park students and 77.5% of Commonwealth campus students indicated that the availability of free newspapers increased their newspaper readership at least "sometimes" (see Chart 4) (48.8% of University Park students responded "always").

News Sources

Also important in understanding students' newspaper readership behavior is awareness of their preferred news source and where/how they typically receive news (see Table 2).

- Most commonly, students at the Commonwealth campuses prefer television newscasts (35.8%) and students at University Park prefer the Internet (32.9%).
 - While 31.5% of University Park students indicated their preferred source of news is newspapers, this percentage dropped from 38.2% in 2004 (and the Internet increased from 28.7% to 32.9%).
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- Over 67% of students frequently (three or more times a week) received news by word of mouth.
- Approximately 80% of University Park students indicated they receive news via the newspaper at least three times a week, whereas 73.6% of Commonwealth campus students received news through television newscast at least three times a week.

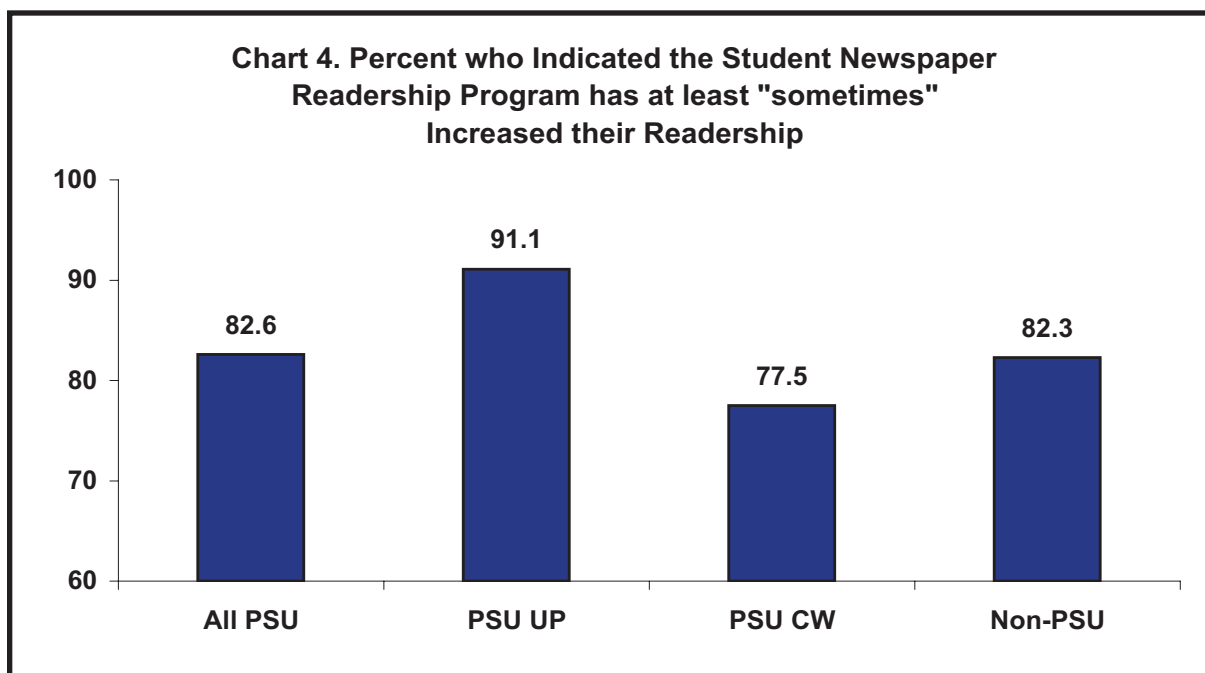


Table 2. News Sources (by percent)

	Preferred News Source			Source of News (3 or more times a week)		
	Overall PSU (n=3,615)	PSU UP (n=1,339)	PSU CW (n=2,276)	Overall PSU (n=3,615)	PSU UP (n=1,339)	PSU CW (n=2,276)
TV newscasts	32.4	26.5	35.8	70.1	64.1	73.6
Internet/Web	30.4	32.9	28.9	71.3	75.2	69.0
Printed newspapers	25.3	31.5	21.7	69.8	79.9	63.8
Radio newscasts	4.5	2.3	5.7	32.5	17.6	41.3
News magazines	2.2	2.2	2.2	23.2	21.5	24.2
Word of mouth	3.7	3.9	3.6	67.5	67.6	67.4
None/other	1.6	0.7	2.1	16.0	13.7	17.2

Recycling Efforts

Coordinating and promoting recycling is an important component of the Student Newspaper Readership Program at Penn State.

- Of Penn State students, 74.6% indicated they at least “sometimes” recycle their newspaper; 81.7% of University Park students indicated the same (data not shown).
- Approximately 62% and 72% of University Park students saw advertisements to recycle their newspapers in the *Daily Collegian* and in the HUB, respectively. Of those, 67.2% indicated the advertisements led them to regularly recycle their newspapers (data not shown).

Student Engagement

In addition to measuring students’ readership behavior and use of the program, another goal of the survey was to measure the relationship between readership and behavior measures such as civic and campus engagement.

- Approximately 50% of students had participated in at least one political activity during the current academic year, and over 70% had voted in the November presidential election (see Table 3).

Table 3. Civic Engagement (by percent)

Percent who participated at least once during the current academic year	Overall PSU (n=3,609)	PSU UP (n=1,334)	PSU CW (n=2,275)	Non-PSU (n=7,645)
Attended cultural events	63.1	67.9	60.2	67.6
Participated in political activities	49.9	51.6	48.9	49.3
Participated in a community event/organization	39.9	40.7	39.5	44.7
Volunteered on campus or in the community	53.1	57.3	50.7	56.5
Voted in the November election ⁵	72.7	74.6	71.6	75.3

- Approximately 57% of University Park students had volunteered on campus or in the community at least once during the current academic year (see Table 3).
- Within a week of completing the survey, 62.0% of University Park students and 46.9% of Commonwealth campus students had participated at least once in campus clubs or organizations (see Table 4).

Table 4. Campus Engagement (by percent)

Percent who participated at least once in the last seven days	Overall PSU (n=3,609)	PSU UP (n=1,334)	PSU CW (n=2,275)	Non-PSU (n=7,645)
Discussed/debated current events outside of class	84.3	86.5	83.0	83.9
Participated in class discussions	84.8	82.1	86.4	82.7
Participated in campus clubs or organizations	52.5	62.0	46.9	59.5

Learning Outcomes

In the following section, more complex analyses are presented related to the learning outcomes associated with newspaper readership. The data overwhelmingly support the relationship between newspaper readership and developing cognitive skills; increasing one's awareness, understanding, and ability to articulate views on current issues; and developing civic-mindedness. In addition, there is a strong relationship between newspaper readership and student engagement both on campus and in the community. The evidence also suggests that utilizing the newspaper in the classroom promotes newspaper readership and further extends the learning outcomes articulated in the survey. With students reporting high levels of satisfaction with the program and that the Student Newspaper Readership Program increases their readership, the findings of this survey firmly support the educational value of providing a newspaper readership program on college campuses.

Factors

The goals of the program include enhancing the learning environment on campus; increasing students' knowledge of community, national, and world events; and creating more engaged citizens. These goals shaped the survey, which included questions asking students to rate themselves on a variety of skills and the knowledge that may be associated with newspaper readership. In addition, they were asked to rate the degree to which reading a newspaper enhanced their learning and improved their understanding of current issues. These questions, and some of the questions included in the previous sections, were combined to make 12 factors, many of which are also learning outcomes (see Table 5).

- Students at University Park reported higher levels of readership of local, national, and international news and of social and entertainment news than did Commonwealth campus students or students from the non-Penn State institutions (see Table 5).
- Interestingly, readership of the sports and business sections was not related to readership of the other sections. In other words, the data suggest students who read the business and/or sports sections are not reading the rest of the paper (data not shown).
- While University Park students reported higher levels of feeling informed about issues and of developing civic-mindedness, Commonwealth campus students reported higher gains in cognitive skills as a result of newspaper readership (see Table 5).

⁵ The election inquired about is the presidential election of 2004.

- Overall, University Park students rated the effectiveness of the newspaper readership program the highest when compared to Commonwealth campus students and students from the non-Penn State campuses (see Table 5).

Table 5. Factor Means

Newspaper Readership Factors - Means	Overall PSU	PSU UP	PSU CW	Non-PSU
Readership: Local, National and International News	3.94	4.06	3.86	3.81
Readership: Social and Entertainment News	2.73	2.87	2.64	2.77
Outcomes: Informed about Social and Local Issues	3.77	3.93	3.68	3.72
Outcomes: Informed about National and International Issues	3.51	3.56	3.47	3.41
Outcomes of Newspaper Readership: Develop Civic-Mindedness	3.91	4.12	3.79	3.88
Outcomes of Newspaper Readership: Develop Cognitive Skills	3.72	3.69	3.73	3.57
Behavior: Classroom and Campus Engagement	2.78	2.83	2.75	2.75
Behavior: Civic Engagement	2.19	2.24	2.16	2.27
Newspaper Acquisition per Week	1.95	2.04	1.89	1.99
Outcomes from Newspaper Readership: Increased Understanding	3.68	3.72	3.66	3.59
Outcomes: Articulation of Views on Major Issues	4.14	4.24	1.08	4.07
Overall Effectiveness of Newspaper Readership	4.48	4.65	4.38	4.37

7-point scale: 1 = not at all, 4 = moderately, 7 = extremely; or 1 = 0, 2 = 1-2, 3 = 3-4, 4 = 5-6, 5 = 7-8, 6 = 9-10, 7 = more than 10

Comparisons Based on Readership

To provide evidence of the relationship of newspaper readership to the outcomes, comparisons were made between students who had read the newspaper and those who did not and between those who had at least one instructor require newspaper readership for a class and those who did not (see Tables 6 & 7). Although the data presented are from all Penn State students, similar findings were found when separately examining the responses of University Park students, Commonwealth campus students, and students from non-Penn State institutions.

- Overwhelmingly, the evidence suggests a very strong relationship between newspaper readership and outcomes such as developing civic-mindedness and cognitive skills, civic engagement, and being informed and able to articulate views on current issues (see Table 6).
- Most notably, students who read the newspaper reported being more informed than were students who did not read the paper about national/international issues and about social and local issues, as well as being able to articulate their views on major issues (see Table 6).
- In examining the effectiveness of the use of the newspaper in the classroom, comparisons between students who had at least one faculty member require regular readership and those who did not demonstrate a very strong relationship between the intended outcomes and use of the newspaper in class (see Table 7).

Table 6. Factor Comparisons by Newspaper Readership (Penn State Respondents)

Factors - Means	Did read	Did not read	Sig.+
Outcomes: Informed about Social and Local Issues	3.86	3.38	***
Outcomes: Informed about National and International Issues	3.60	3.08	***
Outcomes of Newspaper Readership: Develop Civic-Mindedness	4.07	3.08	***
Outcomes of Newspaper Readership: Develop Cognitive Skills	3.85	3.04	***
Behavior: Classroom and Campus Engagement	2.84	2.49	***
Behavior: Civic Engagement	2.25	1.89	***
Newspaper Acquisition per Week	2.06	1.39	***
Outcomes from Newspaper Readership: Increased Understanding	3.81	2.99	***
Outcomes: Articulation of Views on Major Issues	4.23	3.69	***
Overall Effectiveness of Newspaper Readership	4.68	3.47	***

7-point scale: 1 = not at all, 4 = moderately, 7 = extremely; or 1 = 0, 2 = 1-2, 3 = 3-4, 4 = 5-6, 5 = 7-8, 6 = 9-10, and 7 = more than 10

+ Significant differences at the .001 level

- The significant differences also provide evidence that classroom use also promotes a newspaper readership habit and student engagement (see Table 7).
- Arguably, “use in the classroom” mitigates (or controls for) existing differences between students who read a newspaper and those who do not, providing greater evidence that readership leads to the intended outcomes of the program.

Table 7. Factor Comparisons by Classroom Use (Penn State Respondents)

Factors – Means	Used in Class	Not Used in Class	Sig.+
Readership: Local, National and International News	3.97	3.78	***
Readership: Social and Entertainment News	2.71	2.82	***
Outcomes: Informed about Social and Local Issues	3.85	3.70	***
Outcomes: Informed about National and International Issues	3.60	3.35	***
Outcomes of Newspaper Readership: Develop Civic-Mindedness	4.34	3.71	***
Outcomes of Newspaper Readership: Develop Cognitive Skills	4.05	3.36	***
Behavior: Classroom and Campus Engagement	2.98	2.65	***
Behavior: Civic Engagement	2.45	2.17	***
Newspaper Acquisition per Week	2.14	1.93	***
Outcomes from Newspaper Readership: Increased Understanding	4.05	3.40	***
Outcomes: Articulation of Views on Major Issues	4.25	4.02	***
Overall Effectiveness of Newspaper Readership	4.80	4.22	***

7-point scale: 1 = not at all, 4 = moderately, 7 = extremely; or 1 = 0, 2 = 1-2, 3 = 3-4, 4 = 5-6, 5 = 7-8, 6 = 9-10, and 7 = more than 10

+ Significant differences at the .001 level

Relationships Between Factors

In addition to comparisons based on readership, the analyses included correlations between factors to provide further evidence of the outcomes of newspaper readership, and hence, the Student Newspaper Readership Program. In all cases, the relationships between factors are positive and statistically significant at the 99.9% level.

In Tables 8 and 9, selected Pearson Correlation Coefficients⁷ are presented for the factors related to readership of local, national, and international news and to the overall effectiveness of newspaper readership.

- Readership of local, national, and international news is closely related to students’ development of or increase in the following: civic-mindedness, cognitive skills, being informed about national/international news, understanding issues, and the ability to articulate their views on major issues.
- Students’ ratings of the overall effectiveness of newspaper readership is very strongly related to developing civic-mindedness, developing cognitive skills, and increasing understanding of issues.

Table 8. Relationship to Readership: Local, National, International News (Penn State data)

Factor	Correlation
Outcomes: Informed about National/International Issues	0.54
Outcomes of Newspaper Readership: Develop Civic-Mindedness	0.55
Outcomes of Newspaper Readership: Develop Cognitive Skills	0.48
Outcomes of Newspaper Readership: Increased Understanding	0.51
Outcomes: Articulation of Views on Major Issues	0.41
Overall Effectiveness of Newspaper Readership	0.49

Table 9. Relationship to Overall Effectiveness of Newspaper Readership (Penn State data)

Factor	Correlation
Readership: Local, National, International News	0.49
Outcomes: Informed about National/International Issues	0.45
Outcomes of Newspaper Readership: Develop Civic-Mindedness	0.71
Outcomes of Newspaper Readership: Develop Cognitive Skills	0.66
Outcomes of Newspaper Readership: Increased Understanding	0.79
Outcomes: Articulation of Views on Major Issues	0.47

⁷ Correlation scores range from -1.0 to 1.0 and demonstrate both the strength and direction of the relationship between two variables.

Overall Impact

Almost 70% of University Park students indicated that reading the newspaper has at least moderately enhanced their overall educational experience, and 61.4% indicated it motivated them to become involved in issues (see Chart 5).

