



Newspaper Readership February 2008

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. It was also administered in 2005 allowing for comparisons over time.

In total, 1,666 students at Penn State responded to the survey (including graduate and undergraduate students) for a 20.8% response rate and a confidence interval for the total sample of +/-2.37%. At University Park, 1,011 students responded for a 25.3% response rate, and at the Commonwealth campuses, 655 students responded for a 16.4% response rate.

Of the respondents, 60.7% are from University Park; 50.3% are female; 90.2% are undergraduate students; 72.5% are 21 or younger; 79.3% are White/Caucasian; and 61.4% live off campus.

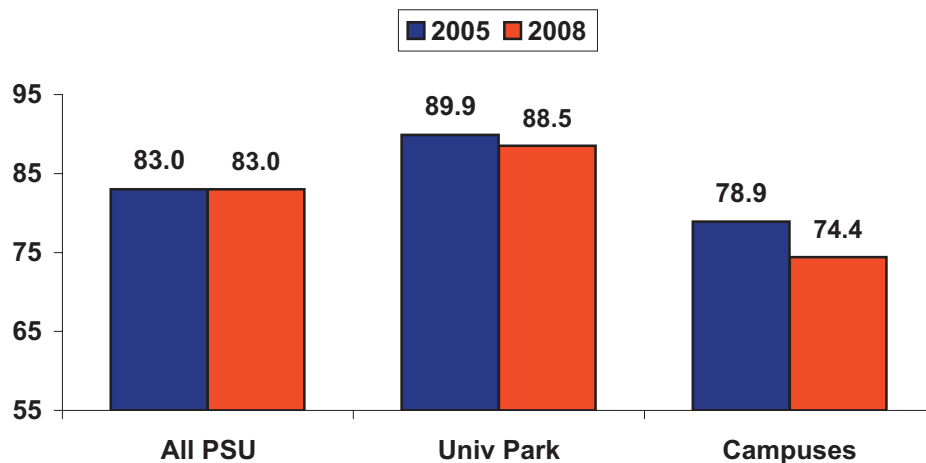
FINDINGS

Newspaper Readership

Students were asked several questions regarding their newspaper readership behavior.

- Approximately 89% of University Park students and 74% of Commonwealth campus students read the newspaper at least once in the last seven days (see Chart 1).

Chart 1. Percent who Read a Paper in the Last Seven Days



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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Division of Student Affairs
U.Ed. STA 09-004

- Approximately 85% of University Park students read *The Daily Collegian* (see Table 1).
- Close to 65% of Commonwealth campus students read the local/regional paper compared to 45% of University Park students (see Table 1).
- Of University Park students, 44.3% read *The New York Times* and 40.7 % read *USA Today* (see Table 1).
- Of students who did not read the paper, 48.4% indicated it was because they didn't have time and 34.6% indicated it was because they don't enjoy reading the paper (data not shown).

Table 1. Newspapers Read (by percent)

	Overall PSU ¹		Univ Park		Campuses	
	2005 (n=3,609)	2008 (n=1,666)	2005 (n=1,334)	2008 (n=1,011)	2005 (n=2,275)	2008 (n=655)
Campus student newspaper ²	57.1	68.3	83.4	84.5	41.7	43.1
Local/regional paper	63.1	52.9	51.8	45.2	69.7	64.6
<i>New York Times</i>	40.6	41.3	47.2	44.3	36.7	36.7
<i>USA Today</i>	41.6	38.8	43.3	40.7	40.7	35.9
<i>Wall Street Journal</i> ³	15.6	15.4	14.6	14.9	16.2	16.2

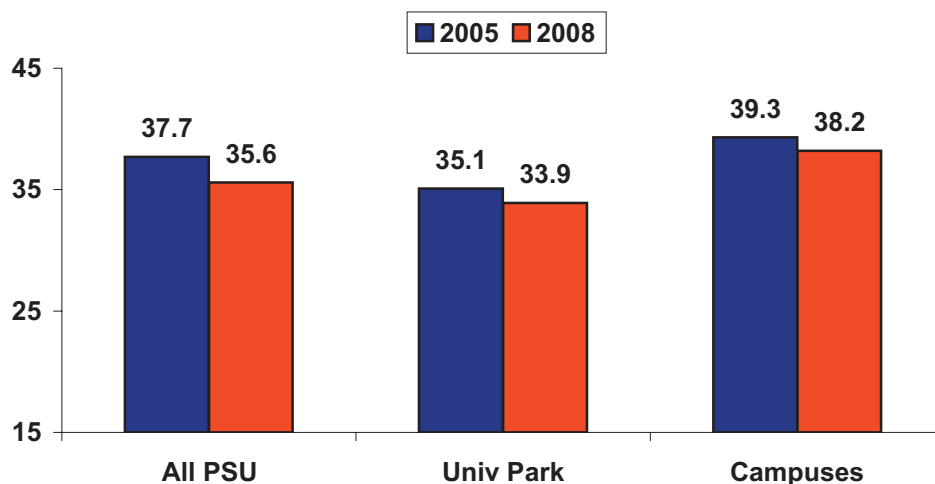
Classroom Use

Several questions addressed the utilization of the newspaper in the classroom; 33.9% of University Park students and 38.2% 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:

- 59.3% were required to read *The New York Times*; 36.6% the local/regional paper; 30.7% *USA Today*; and 23.6% *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 discussions (data not shown); and
- 72.2% indicated that reading the newspaper for class, at least “moderately” enhanced their learning (data not shown).

Chart 2. Percent who had an Instructor Require Regular Newspaper Readership (during the current academic year)



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.

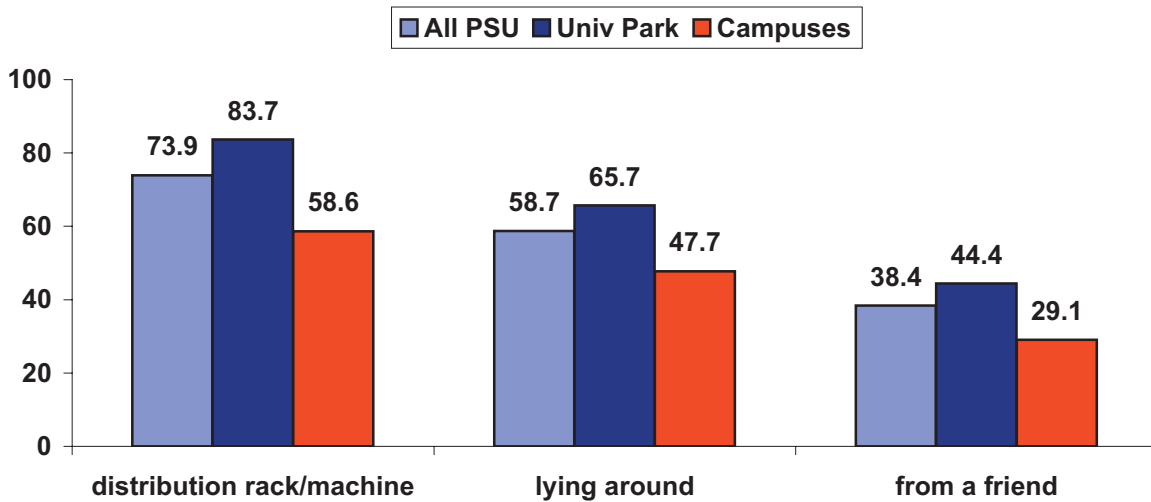
¹ These percentages are not weighted. Hence, differences between the two years at the University-wide level are related to the change in the proportion of respondents from University Park and Commonwealth campuses.

² 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.

³ The Wall Street Journal is not part of the Student Newspaper Readership Program.

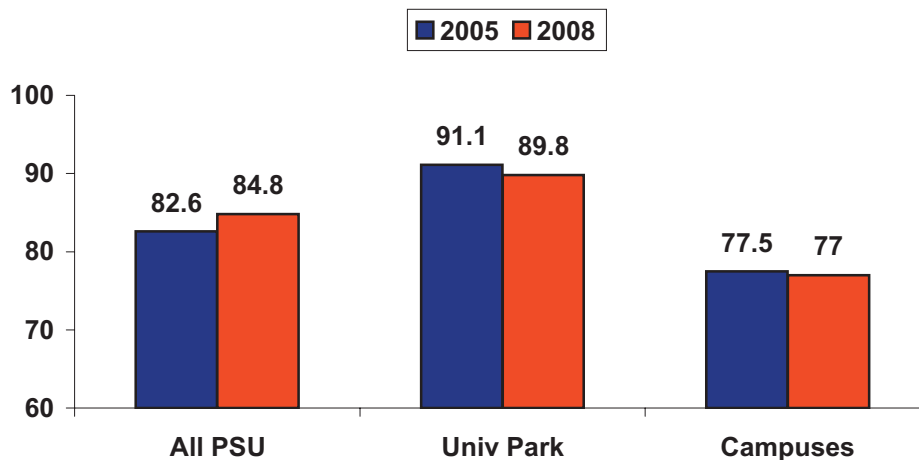
- Ninety-eight percent of Penn State students were aware of the Student Newspaper Readership Program (data not shown).
- On a weekly basis, 83.7% of University Park students and 58.6% of Commonwealth campus students picked up a paper directly from the newspaper readership distribution racks or machines (down from 88.7% and 71.9% in 2005, respectively) (see Chart 3).
- In addition, across the Penn State system, 58.7% of students picked up a paper that was lying around (down from 65.3% in 2005), and 38.4% acquired one from a friend (down from 41.5% in 2005), denoting indirect use of the newspaper readership program (see Chart 3).
- Furthermore, when combining students' direct and indirect use of the program, 86.7% of University Park students (down from 95.7% in 2005) and 69.6% of Commonwealth campus students (down from 86.1% in 2005) utilized the program (data not shown).

Chart 3. Newspaper Acquisition (by percent)



- Ninety-three percent of Penn State students agreed the newspaper distribution boxes are conveniently located (data not shown).
- Moreover, 89.8% of University Park students and 77.0% of Commonwealth campus students indicated that the availability of free newspapers increased their newspaper readership at least "sometimes" (see Chart 4) (46.5% of University Park students responded "always").

Chart 4. Percent who Indicated the Student Newspaper Readership Program has at least "sometimes" Increased their Readership



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 Tables 2A and 2B).

- Most commonly, students indicated they prefer the Internet for their news source (see Table 2A).
- While 25.7% of University Park students indicated their preferred source of news is newspapers, this percentage dropped from 31.5% in 2005 and 38.2% in 2004 (and the Internet increased from 28.7% in 2004 to 32.9% in 2005 to 51.6% in 2008) (see Table 2A).
- Eighty-eight percent of Penn State students indicated they frequently (at least three or more times during an average week) received news via the Internet, an increase from 71.3% in 2005 (see Table 2B).
- Approximately 81% of University Park students indicated they receive news via the newspaper at least three times a week, whereas 73.7% of Commonwealth campus students received news through television newscasts at least three times a week. These percentages are similar to what was reported in 2005 (see Table 2B).

Table 2A. The Three Most Preferred News Sources (by percent)

Preferred News Source	Overall PSU		Univ Park		Campuses	
	2005 (n=3,615)	2008 (n=1,666)	2005 (n=1,339)	2008 (n=1,011)	2005 (n=2,276)	2008 (n=655)
Internet/Web	30.4	49.9	32.9	51.6	28.9	47.3
TV newscasts	32.4	19.0	26.5	15.7	35.8	24.2
Printed newspapers	25.3	23.1	31.5	25.7	21.7	19.1

Table 2B. News Sources (by percent)

Source of News (3 or more times a week)	Overall PSU		Univ Park		Campuses	
	2005 (n=3,615)	2008 (n=1,666)	2005 (n=1,339)	2008 (n=1,011)	2005 (n=2,276)	2008 (n=655)
Internet/Web	71.3	88.3	75.2	88.5	69.0	88.0
Printed newspapers	69.8	74.3	79.9	80.7	63.8	64.4
TV newscasts	70.1	68.2	64.1	64.8	73.6	73.7
Radio newscasts	32.5	31.6	17.6	21.2	41.3	47.5
News magazines	23.2	30.5	21.5	25.9	24.2	37.6
Word of mouth	67.5	82.2	67.6	80.4	67.4	84.9
None/other	16.0	25.2	13.7	22.0	17.2	30.0

Recycling Efforts

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

- Of Penn State students who read the paper, 74.4% of Commonwealth campus students indicated they at least "sometimes" recycle their newspaper; 87.3% of University Park students indicated the same (data not shown).
- In addition, 40.8% of Penn State students who read the paper indicated they "never" throw the newspaper away in the trash, and 39.8% "never" leave the newspaper somewhere (i.e., in a classroom, in the cafeteria) (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 (see Table 3), and 61.2% vote regularly in national/local elections (data not shown).
- In 2008, 61.5% of University Park students had volunteered on campus or in the community at least once during the current academic year, an increase from 57.3% in 2005 (see Table 3).
- Within a week previous to completing the survey, 65.4% of University Park students and 50.5% of Commonwealth campus students had participated at least once in campus clubs or organizations (see Table 4).
- Evidence suggests an increase in civic and campus engagement between 2005 and 2008. (While the percentage of students who participated in political activities remained consistent between the two years, it should be noted that the 2005 survey was preceded by a highly contested presidential election.)

Table 3. Civic Engagement (by percent)

Percent who participated at least once during the current academic year	Overall PSU		Univ Park		Campuses	
	2005 (n=3,609)	2008 (n=1,666)	2005 (n=1,334)	2008 (n=1,011)	2005 (n=2,275)	2008 (n=655)
Attended cultural events	63.1	70.0	67.9	72.2	60.2	66.6
Participated in political activities	49.9	50.0	51.6	51.4	48.9	47.8
Participated in a community event/organization	39.9	44.4	40.7	42.4	39.5	47.4
Volunteered on campus or in the community	53.1	59.7	57.3	61.5	50.7	57.0

Table 4. Campus Engagement (by percent)

Percent who participated at least once in the last seven days	Overall PSU		Univ Park		Campuses	
	2005 (n=3,609)	2008 (n=1,666)	2005 (n=1,334)	2008 (n=1,011)	2005 (n=2,275)	2008 (n=655)
Discussed/debated current events outside of class	84.3	92.2	86.5	92.7	83.0	91.4
Participated in class discussions	84.8	89.1	82.1	86.2	86.4	93.7
Participated in campus clubs or organizations	52.5	59.5	62.0	65.4	46.9	50.5

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 advances 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 at Penn State.

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 factors based on learning outcomes (see Table 5).⁴

- Evidence suggests that University Park and Commonwealth campus students increased their self-reported gains in being informed about issues and their ability to articulate their views of major issues as well as their level of campus engagement between 2005 and 2008 (see Table 5).
- Overall, University Park students rated the effectiveness of the newspaper readership program higher than Commonwealth campus students (see Tables 5 & 6).

Table 5. Outcomes: Factor Means for All Students

Factors - Means	Overall PSU ⁴		Univ Park		Campuses	
	2005	2008	2005	2008	2005	2008
Outcomes: Informed about Social and Local Issues	3.77	4.32	3.93	4.36	3.68	4.26
Outcomes: Informed about National and International Issues	3.51	4.19	3.56	4.22	3.47	4.14
Behavior: Classroom and Campus Engagement	2.78	3.15	2.83	3.14	2.75	3.16
Behavior: Civic Engagement	2.19	2.28	2.24	2.31	2.16	2.23
Outcomes: Articulation of Views on Major Issues	4.14	4.61	4.24	4.63	4.08	4.58
Overall Effectiveness of Newspaper Readership	4.48	4.59	4.65	4.79	4.38	4.27

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

Table 6. Readership Outcomes: Factor Means for Students who Read the Paper

Newspaper Readership Factors – Means ⁵	Overall PSU	Univ Park	Campuses
Outcomes of Newspaper Readership: Develop Civic-Mindedness	4.25	4.35	4.08
Outcomes of Newspaper Readership: Develop Cognitive Skills	3.97	3.94	4.02
Outcomes from Newspaper Readership: Increased Understanding	4.21	4.24	4.17

7-point scale: 1=not at all, 4=moderately, 7= extremely

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 7 & 8). Although the data presented are from all Penn State students, data suggest similar findings when examining the responses of University Park students and Commonwealth campus students separately.

- Overwhelmingly, the evidence suggests a very strong relationship between newspaper readership and outcomes such as being informed and being able to articulate views on current issues as well as being engaged on campus and in the community (see Table 7).
- These relationships between intended outcomes and newspaper readership are consistent in 2005 and 2008 and for students at University Park and at the Commonwealth campuses (data not shown).

⁴ Factors are a series of questions that both statistically and theoretically “hang together” to form a larger concept. Factors serve as a more reliable measure of the concept and serve to reduce the data for comparison purposes.

⁵ These averages are not weighted. Hence, differences between the two years at the University-wide level are related to the change in the proportion of respondents from University Park and Commonwealth campuses.

⁶ In 2008, these questions were only asked of students who indicated they had read the paper in the last seven days negating the ability to make comparisons to 2005 data.

- In addition, when asked a series of knowledge questions (used with permission from the Pew Research Center News IQ), students who read the paper scored significantly better than those who did not (non-readers scored a 53.1% compared to a 60.9% for readers) (data not shown).

Table 7. Factor Comparisons by Newspaper Readership (by averages)

Factors – Means	Read in the last 7 days (n=1,347)	Did not read in the last 7 days (n=271)	Sig.+
Outcomes: Informed about Social and Local Issues	4.42	3.81	***
Outcomes: Informed about National and International Issues	4.32	3.55	***
Behavior: Classroom and Campus Engagement	3.23	2.76	***
Behavior: Civic Engagement	2.34	2.01	***
Outcomes: Articulation of Views on Major Issues	4.73	4.02	***
Overall Effectiveness of Newspaper Readership	4.78	3.61	***

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
 + Significant differences at the .001 level

- 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 8).
- While classroom readership significantly increased newspaper acquisition, it did not significantly increase readership (see Table 8).
- 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 8. Factor Comparisons by Classroom Use (by averages)

Factors – Means	Used in Class (n=540)	Not Used in Class (n=952)	Sig.+
Readership: Local, National and International News *	4.34	4.24	NS
Readership: Social and Entertainment News *	2.96	2.86	NS
Outcomes: Informed about Social and Local Issues	4.45	4.24	***
Outcomes: Informed about National and International Issues	4.31	4.13	**
Outcomes of Newspaper Readership: Develop Civic-Mindedness *	4.47	4.12	***
Outcomes of Newspaper Readership: Develop Cognitive Skills *	4.31	3.75	***
Behavior: Classroom and Campus Engagement	3.41	3.01	***
Behavior: Civic Engagement	2.51	2.16	***
Newspaper Acquisition per Week *	1.92	1.62	***
Outcomes from Newspaper Readership: Increased Understanding *	4.54	4.02	***
Outcomes: Articulation of Views on Major Issues	4.69	4.56	NS
Overall Effectiveness of Newspaper Readership	4.77	4.49	***

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
 + Significant differences: *** at the .001 level; ** at the .01 level; NS not significant

* These questions were only asked of students who had read the paper in the last 7 days.

Overall Impact

- Almost 70% of Penn State students indicated that reading the newspaper has at least moderately enhanced their overall educational experience (see Chart 5).
- In addition, 85.9% rated the time spent to the information gained from reading newspapers as at least “good” (data not shown).

