

SUNY New Paltz students
smarter than ever
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SUNY class best ever

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New Paltz – They're smarter than ever, they're more carefully selected and there are more of them than ever before.

Say hello to the latest batch of new SUNY New Paltz students, who bear increasingly less resemblance to the entering classes of yore.

Nearly 2,000 freshmen and transfer students begin classes today. According to the numbers, they're the best and brightest students to attend the school in its history.

For the 15th year in a row, the college has led all SUNY university colleges in total applications received (14,500), total freshman applications (11,500) and total transfer applications (3,000).

Those numbers allow the college to be more selective, according to officials. Freshmen have an average SAT score of 1160. By contrast, New York's average SAT score in 2004 was 1007 and the national average was 1026.

Not only are the test scores better, students are staying at SUNY New Paltz longer. The school's retention rate for this semester (the number of students who return to school) is 85 percent, compared with 76 percent seven years ago.

And one-fifth of the freshman class hails from what the college calls "historically under-represented groups."

Numbers like these make David Eaton a happy man. Eaton is the college's vice president for enrollment. He remembers when things were not so bright.

A generation ago, the college was perceived as an anything-goes kind of place with a double-edged reputation as "the Berkeley of the East."

Dorms were half-filled in the late '70s as the college's reputation morphed gradually into one where the partying never stopped.

"We really had a reputational hole to dig ourselves out of at the time," he said yesterday.

Back in the '60s, he said, it was still possible to make it into the middle class without a college diploma.

"Now, it's not, and guess what – the students know it," he said.

Eaton also cites a little-known statistic:

"We had 20,000 people – parents and students – visit the campus this year. Apparently, we made a good impression."

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Class of 2009 'Mindset List'

So, what do all those incoming freshmen think? Well, here are some excerpts from the "Mindset List" for the Class of 2009, most of whom were born in 1987.

- ▶ Starbucks has always been right around the corner.
- ▶ Freshmen don't remember when "cut and paste" involved scissors.
- ▶ A man named George Bush has been president for more than half of their lives.
- ▶ They're more familiar with Greg Gumbel than with Bryant Gumbel.
- ▶ Voice mail has always been available.
- ▶ "Whatever" is not part of a question.
- ▶ They have always had the right to burn the flag.
- ▶ Bill Gates has always been worth at least a billion dollars.
- ▶ The Starship Enterprise has always looked dated.
- ▶ Les Miserables has always been on stage.
- ▶ Snowboarding has always been a popular winter pastime.
- ▶ They do not remember "a kinder and gentler nation."
- ▶ They never saw the shuttle Challenger fly.
- ▶ Airports have always had upscale shops and restaurants.
- ▶ Black Americans have always been known as African-Americans.
- ▶ They never saw a Howard Johnson's with 28 ice cream flavors.
- ▶ Lyme disease has always been a concern in the woods.
- ▶ They have always been challenged to distinguish between news and entertainment on cable TV.

Source: Annual Beloit, Wis., College "Mindset List"

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