

Project Pulse

SARIS
Student Affairs Research, Information and Systems
University of Massachusetts Amherst

Health Survey (F98-H)

Executive Summary: Four-fifths of respondents currently use the Internet for uses unrelated to school or work. Most Internet users (94%) believe that Internet use does not significantly interfere with their school-work. About two-thirds of respondents said they always wear seatbelts in motor vehicles. One-quarter of respondents report that they smoke tobacco. In the last month, approximately one-quarter of respondents have missed a class, appointment, or work because they felt too sad or unhappy to go. Whereas 13% of respondents believe that they know a UMass undergraduate who they thought was considering suicide, over 40% know a student who they believe has an eating problem or disorder. Over 80% of respondents have engaged in sex at least once this year. They report an average of 1.76 different partners. Condoms are the most commonly used method for protection against both pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Almost three-quarters of women report having had a gynecological exam in the past year. Three-fifths of women reported doing at least one breast self-exam in the same year, whereas slightly less than one-quarter of men report having done at least one testicular self-exam in the past year.

On Tuesday, November 24, 1998, Project Pulse conducted a telephone survey for University Health Services to investigate various student behaviors related to personal safety and to mental and sexual health. Pulse interviewers attempted to contact 906 students who were randomly selected by computer from the entire undergraduate population in the University's database. Of these, 526 were successfully contacted and 410 (77.9%) agreed to be interviewed. See Table 1 for the final disposition of the sample and Table 2 for a demographic summary of the respondents. The response rate for the survey was 45.3%. Sampling error is plus or minus approximately five percentage points.

Table 1. Final disposition of the sample.

	N	% of Total	% of Contacted
Response rate (In & cooperated)	410	45.3	77.9
In, declined interview	116	12.8	22.1
Not in	380	41.9	
Totals	*906	100.0	100.0

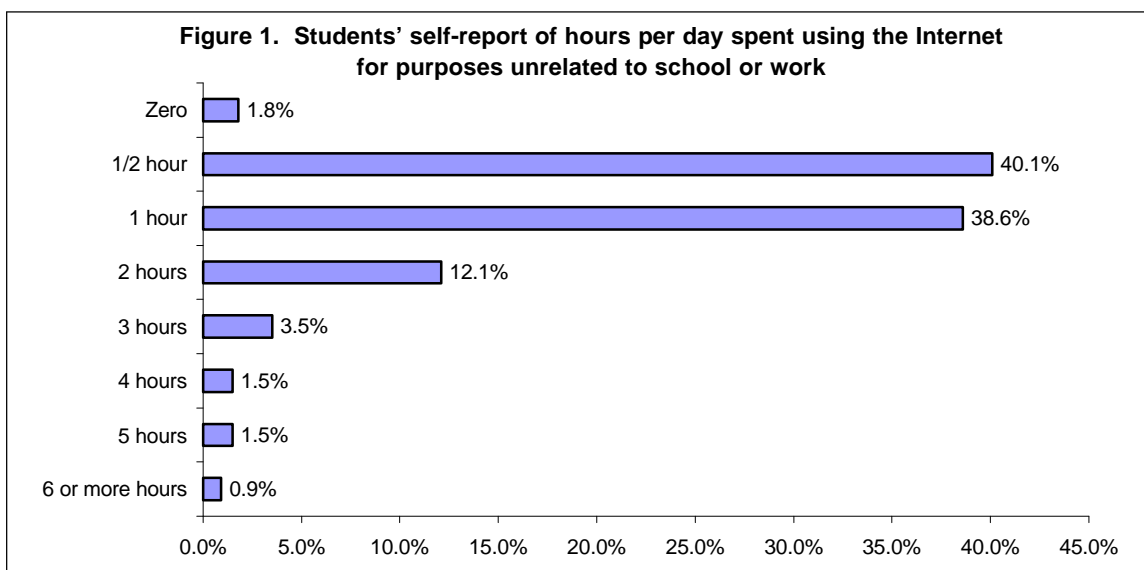
*Excludes 55 sampled students with unobtainable phone numbers.

Table 2. Demographic summary of the respondents

	%		%
Female	57.1	First-year	27.5
Male	42.9	Sophomore	24.5
		Junior	25.6
Average Age	20.4 yrs.	Senior	22.4

INTERNET USE

The first battery of questions dealt with students' patterns of Internet use. Four-fifths of the respondents (80.3%, n=346) reported that they use the Internet for "e-mail, newsgroups, web browsing, or chat other than for schoolwork or work." The users estimated that on a daily basis they spend a mean of 1.1 hours doing so. Figure 1 details students' self-report of Internet use which is not related to school or work. Men reported spending a significantly longer period of time on the Internet in a typical day than did women (1.3 hours vs. .99 hours; $F=8.47$, $p=.004$). Most users (92.5%, n=319) reported that in the last month they had not missed any class, appointment, or work because they were using the Internet instead; 4.6% (n=16) said that they had missed one such commitment. Most users (94.0%, n=325) felt that their recreational use of the Internet interferes with their work or schoolwork to a "little" or "very little" extent.



USE OF PERSONAL SAFETY EQUIPMENT

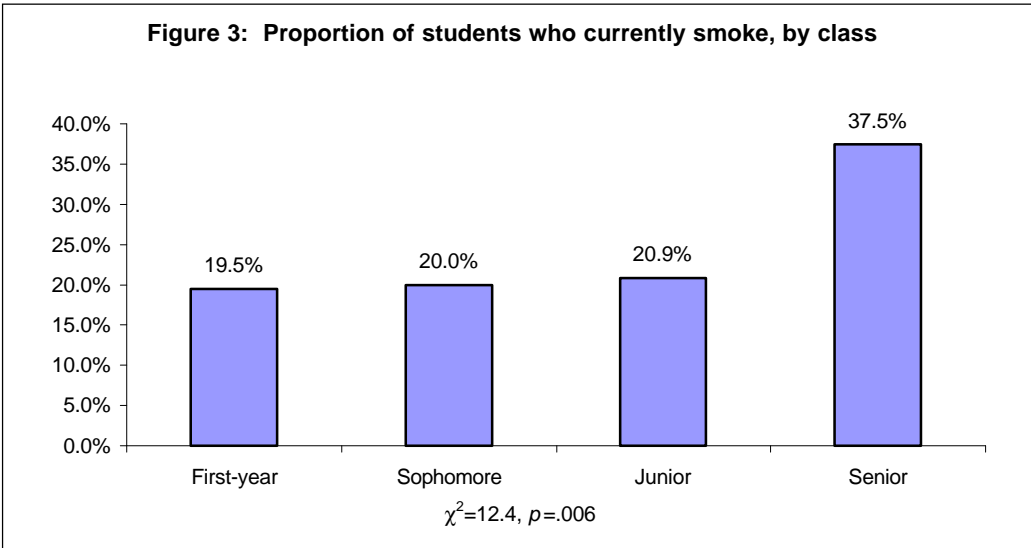
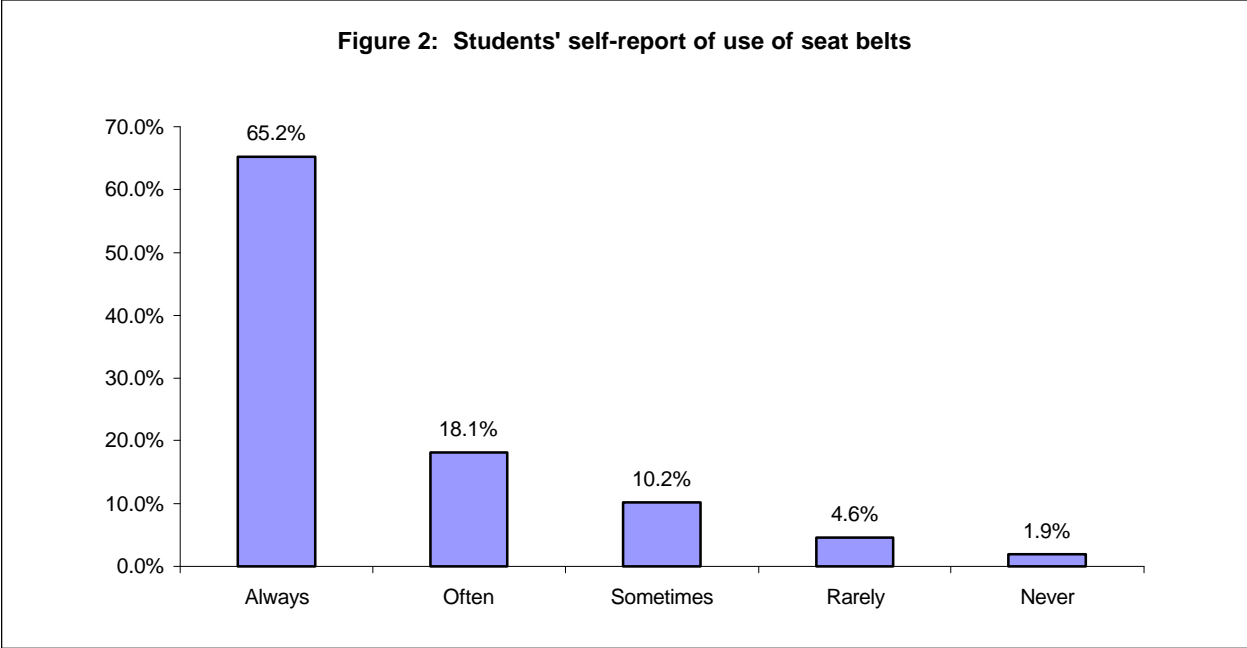
Next, respondents were questioned about personal safety issues. Most students (83.3%, n=159) reported that they "always" or "often" wear a seat belt while in a motor vehicle (see Figure 2). Students also were asked about use of helmets when biking, roller blading, or skateboarding. Of the 59.2% (n=255) of respondents who bike, 18.0% (n=46) report that they "always" or "often" wear a helmet. Much smaller proportions of respondents roller blade (34.3%) or skateboard (7.7%). Of those who do, 9.5% (n=14) "always" or "often" use helmets when rollerblading and 3.0% (n=3) use them when skateboarding.

EXPOSURE TO SUN

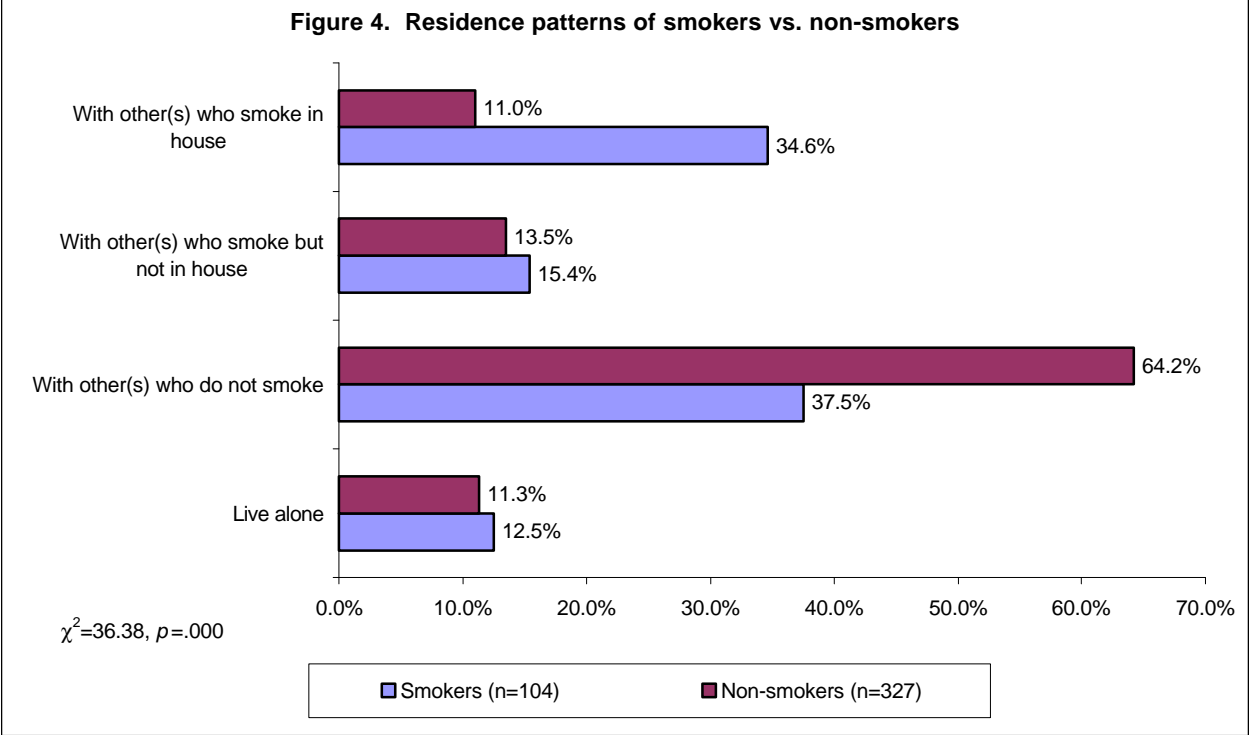
When asked about the use of sunscreen or sun block for outdoor activities last summer, roughly equal proportions of students reported that they "always" (18.1%, n=78) or "never" (19.8%, n=85) used these products. Women were significantly more likely than men (24.8% vs. 9.2%, $\chi^2=35.63$, $p=.000$) to report that they "always" used sunscreen. Most students (85.6%, n=368) reported that they had not visited a tanning salon in the past year. Men were significantly more likely than women (96.2% vs. 77.6%, $\chi^2=29.36$, $p=.000$) to report that they had not visited a tanning salon in the past year.

TOBACCO USE AND EXPOSURE TO SMOKE

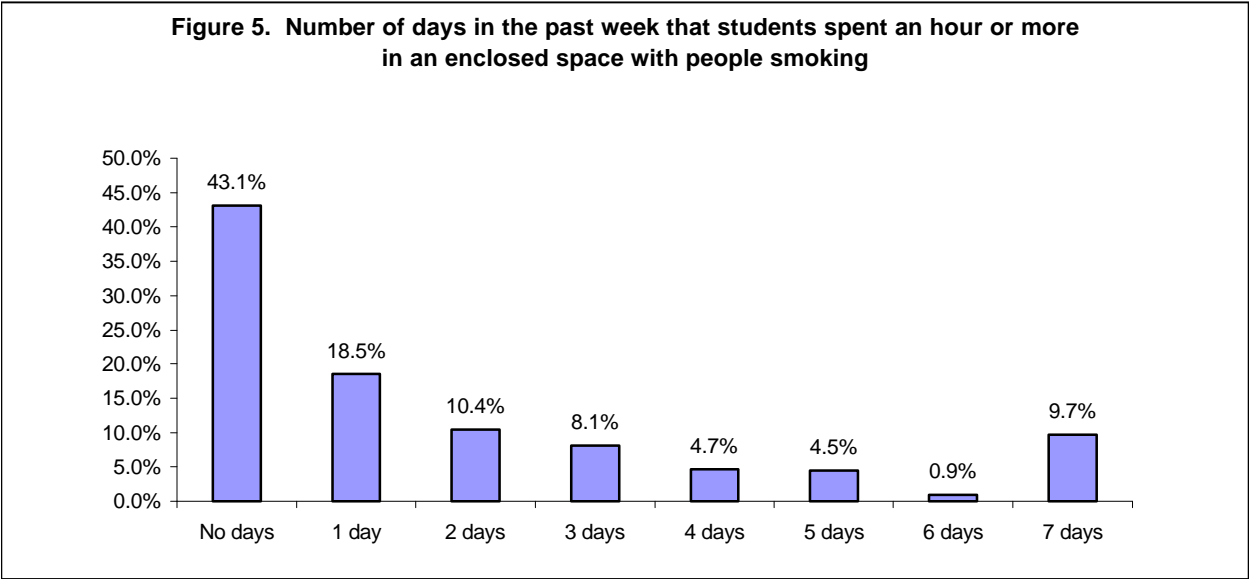
Students were asked a series of questions about their experience with smoking. One-quarter of the respondents (24.1%, n=104) reported that they currently smoke tobacco. Seniors were almost twice as likely to smoke as members of other academic classes (see Figure 3).



The largest proportion of respondents (57.8%, n=249) live with one or more others who do not smoke. Other living situations include living with one or more others who smoke in the house (16.7%, n=72), with one or more others who smoke but not in the house (13.9%, n=60), or alone (11.6%, n=50). There is a significant difference in residence patterns between those who smoke and those who do not. Non-smokers are significantly more likely than smokers to live with others who do not smoke, and smokers are more likely than non-smokers to live with others who smoke in the house (see Figure 4).



Students were asked, "In the past week how many days did you spend an hour or more in an enclosed place where people were smoking?" Students reported spending an average of 1.8 days per week in an enclosed place where people were smoking (see Figure 5).



MENTAL HEALTH

Next, respondents were asked a series of questions about their experiences with sadness or unhappiness. Students were asked how many times in the past month they had missed a class, an appointment, or work because they felt too sad to go. Three-quarters of the students (76.1%, $n=328$) reported that they had not missed any commitments due to sadness, whereas 7.7% ($n=33$) said that they had missed one commitment, 7.7% ($n=33$) had missed two, and 8.7% ($n=37$) has missed three or more. When asked how many times in the past month they had not prepared an assignment or studied for an exam because of feelings of sadness, about three-quarters of respondents (73.5%, $n=316$) reported that they had not, whereas 12.1% ($n=52$) had had one such episode, 7.0% ($n=30$) had had two, and 7.4% had had more than two. When asked how many times in the past month they had been too sad to “carry out daily functions such as getting out of bed, preparing a meal, or running errands,” 88.1% ($n=379$) reported that they had not had such an experience, 3.5% ($n=15$) said they had one experience, 4.0% ($n=17$) reported two experiences, and 4.4% reported three or more experiences.

Students were asked whether, in the past year, they had reason to believe that an undergraduate they know at UMass was thinking of committing suicide: 13.3% ($n=57$) reported knowing a person they thought was suicidal. A much larger proportion, 41.1% ($n=177$), reported knowing an undergraduate at UMass who “was either too preoccupied with food, had an eating disorder, or had been dieting excessively.” Women were significantly more likely than men (51.2% vs. 27.6%, $\chi^2=24.41$, $p=.000$) to report knowing someone in this situation.

SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

The next series of questions asked about aspects of sexual behavior. For the purposes of this survey, sex or sexual activity was defined for participants as “pertaining to vaginal intercourse, oral or anal sex, or genital to genital contact.” Most of the respondents (83.5%, $n=354$) reported that they had engaged in sex at least once in the past year. Those who said that they had had sex at least once reported having a mean of 1.76 different sexual partners during the past year. Men were significantly more likely than women (41.4% vs. 28.0%, $\chi^2=6.96$, $p=.008$) to report having had more than one sexual partner in the past year. Men reported having a mean of 2.09 partners, and women a mean of 1.5 partners, in the past year ($F=10.08$, $p=.002$).

Sexually active students were asked what method they or their partner used for pregnancy prevention the last time they had sex. As illustrated in Figure 6, the largest proportion of students used condoms, followed by a combination of methods and the birth control pill.

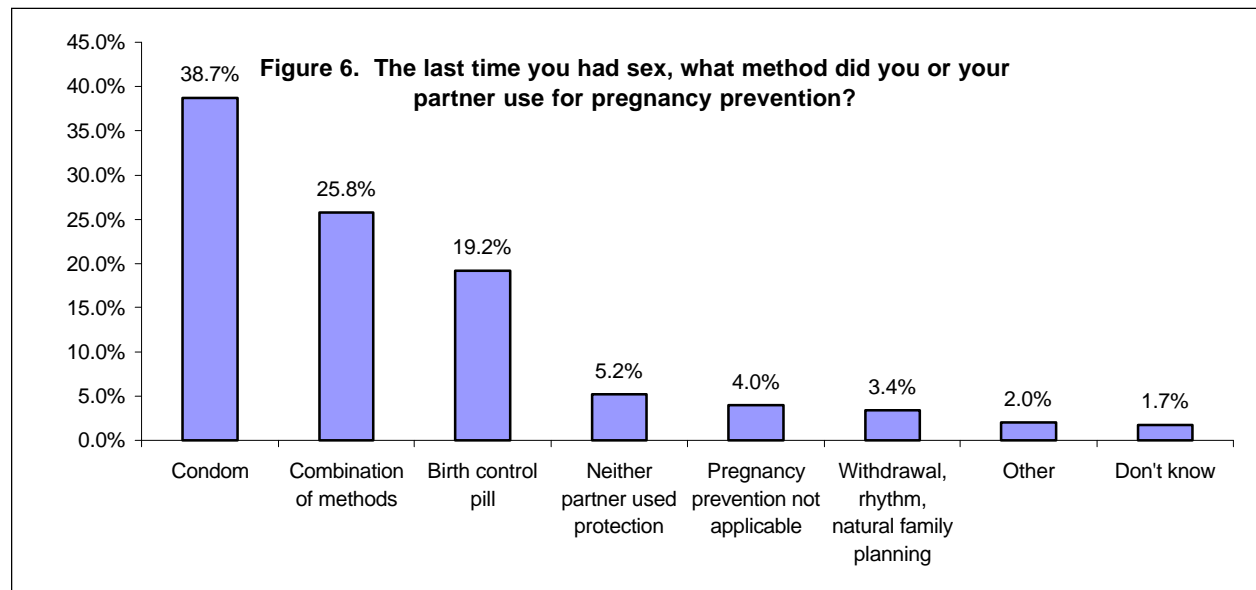
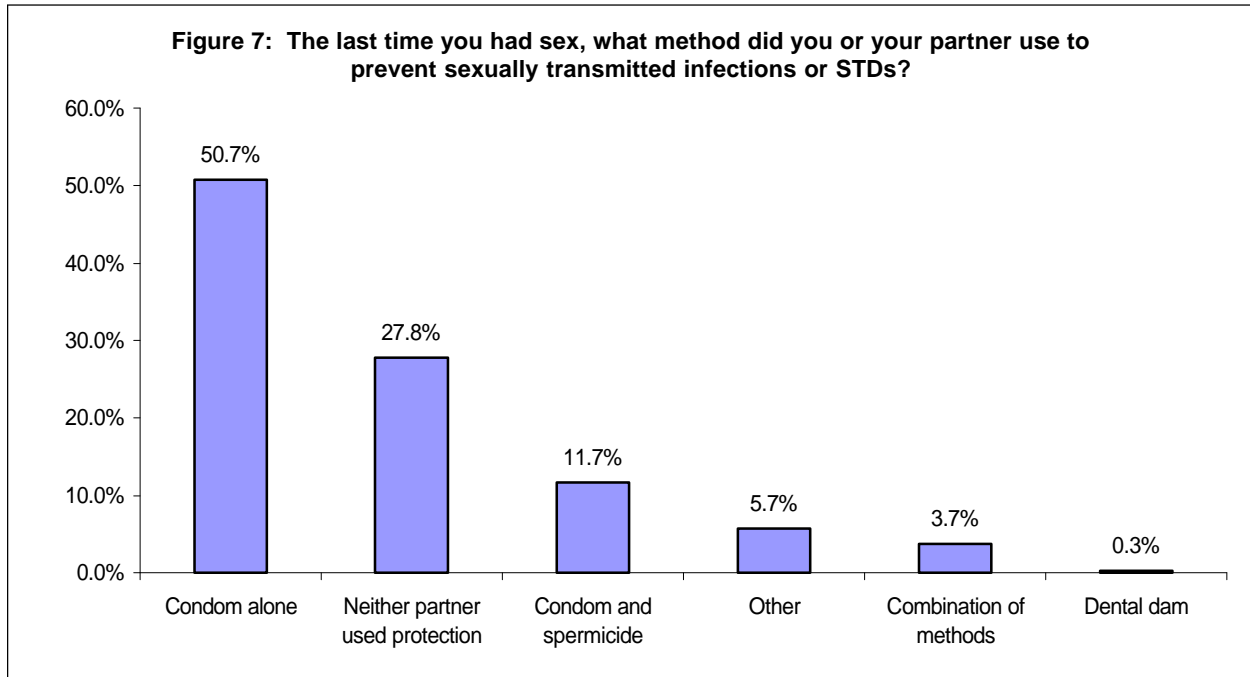
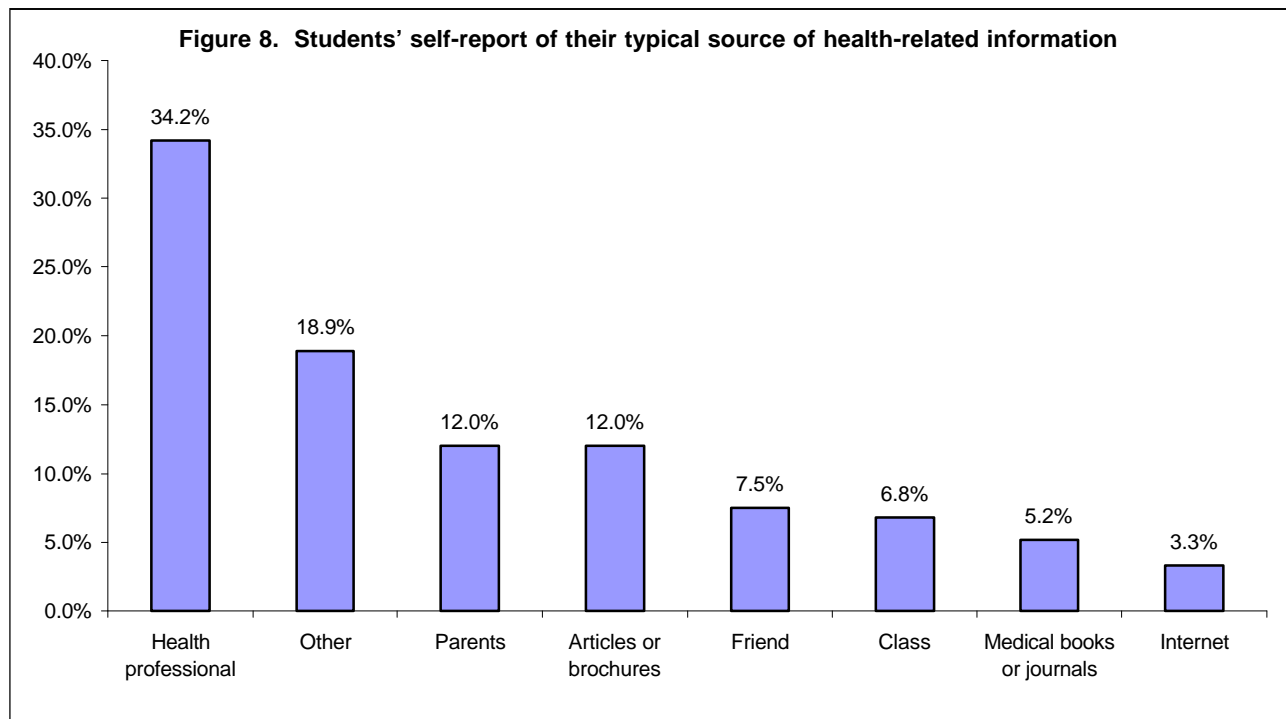


Figure 7 illustrates students' methods of preventing sexually transmitted diseases/infections. As illustrated, more than one quarter of sexually active students reported that neither they nor their partner used protection.



HEALTH INFORMATION AND AWARENESS

Next, students were asked a series of questions about health knowledge and information. About one-third (34.2%, n=145) of respondents reported that they typically get health-related information from a health professional (see Figure 8).



Almost three-quarters (71.6%, n=174) of the female respondents reported having a gynecological exam within the past year. The women were asked how many times they had done a breast self-exam during the same one-year period. The average number of self-exams reported was 2.6. Two fifths of the female students (39.8%, n=96) reported that they had not done any self-exams in the past year.

More than three-quarters of the male respondents (76.4%, n=136) said that they had not done a testicular self-exam in the past year. The average number of self-exams reported by male respondents was 0.7.

All respondents were asked if they were aware that Ovril can be used after unprotected sex to prevent pregnancy. Most of those responding (86.7%, n=373) were aware of this "morning after" pill. Women were significantly more likely than men (94.3% vs. 76.8%, $\chi^2=28.17$, $p=.000$) to be aware of Ovril. When asked if they had ever used Ovril, most females (93.5%, n=215) said "no."

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the item-by-item](#)

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT PROJECT PULSE AT 229 WHITMORE, 545-1390
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