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Editors:

Peter Griffin
Gareth Olds
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Alex Robinson
Karl Storchmann

THE ECONOMIC POTENTIAL OF
WHITMAN COLLEGE STUDENTS
ON DOWNTOWN WALLA WALLA

Karl Storchmann, Keith Cushner,
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WHITMAN COLLEGE



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**Karl Storchmann, Keith Cushner, Peter Griffin, Shawn Kelly, Andrew Knox,
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I. DEMOGRAPHICS

(1) Basic Demographics

We interviewed a total of 350 Whitman College students. Figure 1 summarizes the main demographic features.

The majority (64%) of interviewed students are freshmen (111=31.7%) and sophomores (113=32.3%). Since the socio-economic traits of freshman and sophomores are distinctively different from those of juniors and seniors, we report figures for separately each class.

Overall, the fraction of female students in our sample is equal to 52.6%. This fraction ranges from 60% (freshmen) to 40% (juniors).

Since the age of 21 is a threshold for the consumption of alcohol and entering bars, Table 1 displays the fraction of students being 21 or older in each class. While only 3.6% of all freshmen are beyond this threshold, 100% of all seniors are at least 21. Similarly, the fraction of students living on campus declines with age/college year. While all freshmen live on campus (there are no freshmen living in either fraternity houses or off-campus) this fraction steadily decreases to 8.2% for seniors. Parallel to this development, the fraction of students living off-campus grows from 0% (freshmen) to 83.6% (seniors).

Table 1
Basic demographics of our sample of Whitman College students

	freshman	sophomores	juniors	seniors	total
	absolute				
students (sample)	111	113	65	61	350
of which female	67	60	26	31	184
21+ year old live	4	8	43	61	116
on campus	111	95	12	5	223
in frat house	0	16	14	5	35
off campus	0	2	39	51	92
	in %				
students (% of total)	31.7	32.3	18.6	17.4	100.0
of which female	60.4	53.1	40.0	50.8	52.6
21+ year old live	3.6	7.1	66.2	100.0	33.1
on campus	100.0	84.1	18.5	8.2	63.7
in frat house	0.0	14.2	21.5	8.2	10.0
off campus	0.0	1.8	60.0	83.6	26.3

(2) Meal plan and flex dollars

Whitman College students can be on a (non-mandatory) meal plan which, depending on the kind of plan, covers all or some meals. In addition, each student can have a debit account which he/she can redeem in dining halls and cafeterias on campus. The money deposited on this account is called *Flex dollars*; *Flex dollars* can be bought from the college’s dining hall caterer *Bon Appetit*. Details about meal plans and *Flex dollars* are provided at <http://www.whitman.edu/content/catalog/charges>

As shown in Table 2, the fraction of students being on a meal plan decreases substantially with seniority and ranges from 99.1% (freshmen) to 8.2% (seniors). The high fraction of meal plan students in early semesters (freshman and sophomores) is a substantial constraint for the purchase of off-campus meals. Therefore, the purchase of a substantial number of off-campus meals can only be expected from juniors and seniors.

In addition, freshmen and sophomores hold significantly higher amounts of *Flex dollars* than do upper classmen (see Table 2). While freshmen hold an average of \$410 *Flex dollars* per semester (in addition to their meal plans), seniors’ *Flex dollars* per semester average at only \$62. Also, while every freshman in the sample owned *Flex dollars*, most

seniors do not have any *Flex dollar* accounts. Similar to the meal plans, *Flex dollars* can only be redeemed on campus and, therefore, constrain off-campus spending.

Table 2
Meal plans and *Flex dollars*

	freshmen	sophomores	juniors	seniors
fraction of students on a meal plan	99.1%	77.9%	18.4%	8.2%
Flex dollars				
minimum	\$50	\$0	\$0	\$0
maximum	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$2,500	\$500
average	\$410.46	\$399.12	\$186.51	\$68.42

(3) Student jobs

Table 3 displays the number and the percentage of students having a job. Overall, 57.1% of our student sample work a job. Breaking up the sample and differentiating by seniority shows that the fraction of students having a job steadily increases with age. While only 48.6% of all juniors have a job, more than 70% of all seniors work aside from their studies.

The overwhelming majority of student jobs is located on campus. In total, only 7.7% of all students work off-campus (i.e., 13.5% of all student jobs are located off-campus). The percentage of students working off-campus jobs increases with seniority by more than the overall percentage of jobs. As a result, the share of students working off-campus jobs (compared to all students) grows from 2.7% (freshmen) to 15.4% (juniors).

Table 3
Jobs of Whitman College students

	freshmen	sophomores	juniors	seniors	total
	number of students working jobs				
on-campus job	51	59	28	35	173
off-campus job	3	6	10	8	27
total jobs	54	65	38	43	200
	in %				
on-campus job	45.9	52.2	43.1	57.4	49.4
off-campus job	2.7	5.3	15.4	13.1	7.7
total jobs	48.6	57.5	58.5	70.5	57.1

(4) Mobility and Transportation

As reported in Table 4, about 30% of all Whitman College students do not have any access to a car while about 69% reported having either regular or occasional access to a car (1.4% did not answer this question). Broken up by seniority, we see that freshmen exhibit the lowest mobility level while juniors enjoy the highest automobile access levels.

Table 4
Whitman College students and automobile availability

	freshmen	sophomores	juniors	seniors	total
access to a car?			number of students		
yes	26	36	33	27	122
sometimes	43	45	15	16	119
no	41	30	15	18	104
			in %		
yes	23.4	31.9	50.8	44.3	34.9
sometimes	38.7	39.8	23.1	26.2	34.0
no	36.9	26.5	23.1	29.5	29.7

Table 5
Whitman College students and the Walla Walla airport

	freshmen	sophomores	juniors	seniors	total
do you use the airport?			number of students		
yes	15	15	7	6	43
sometimes	30	33	18	24	105
no	66	65	39	30	200
			in %		
yes	13.5	13.3	10.8	9.8	12.3
sometimes	27.0	29.2	27.7	39.3	30.0
no	59.5	57.5	60.0	49.2	57.1

As shown in Table 5, when traveling to Whitman College most students (57.1%) do not use the Walla Walla airport.

(5) How much do Whitman College students spend?

We received a total of 322 responses to the question “Excluding *flex dollars* and rent, how much money do you have to spend each month.” We thus asked for the amount of money that can potentially be spent in downtown Walla Walla.

The average Whitman College student spends \$147.60 per month in addition to *Flex dollars*, meal plan and rent. However, due to the fact that juniors and seniors are underrepresented in our sample, the average per-student amount spent is likely higher than \$147.60. According to Whitman College’s official *Current Enrollment Report* (http://www.whitman.edu/content/institutional_research/) the actual fraction of juniors and seniors is higher than suggested by our sample. Using the actual figures as weights we compute an average monthly spending per student is \$159.32. For all 1456 currently enrolled Whitman students this translates into a total purchasing power of approximately \$232,000 per month (in addition to rent, meal plans and *Flex dollars*). Assuming an academic year of about 8 months and considering the fact that many senior students, the class with the highest per capita expenditure, stay over breaks in Walla Walla, this is equal to an annual amount of approximately \$2 million.

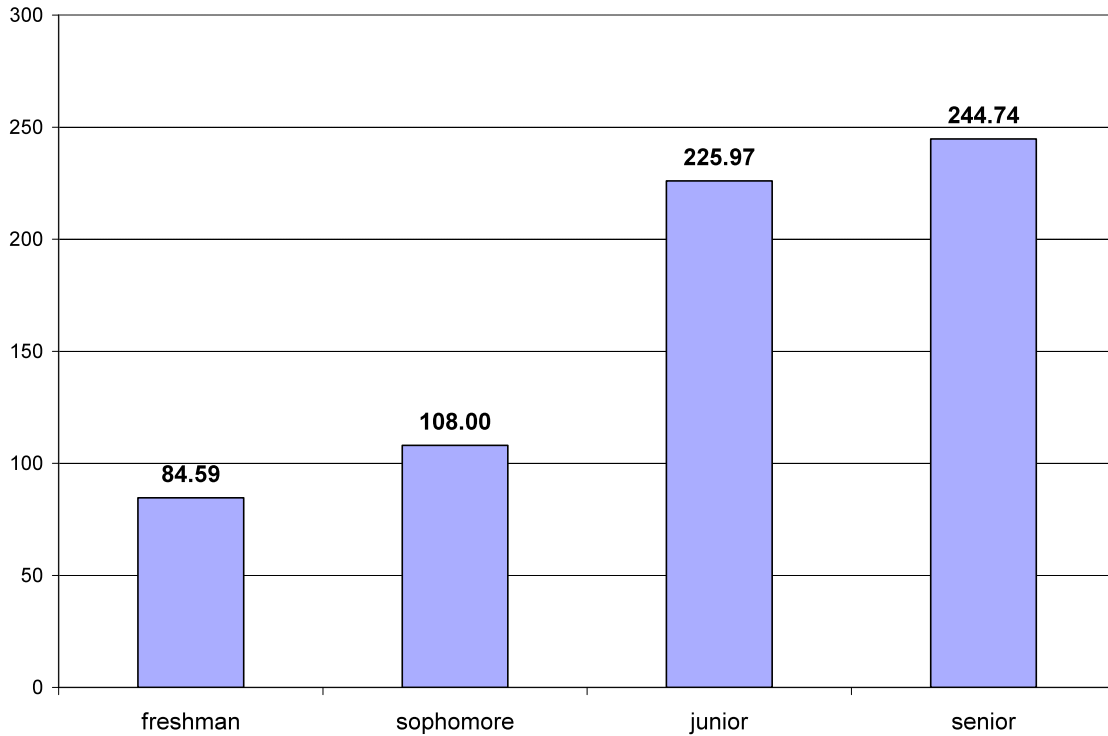
Table 6 summarizes the results by seniority and shows that there is a wide variance in each group. Figure 1 displays the average values only and shows that there are virtually two spending clusters, freshman and sophomore on the one hand and juniors and seniors on the other hand. It appears as though this pattern squares with the housing pattern (but not with the job pattern!). When moving off-campus students’ spending budgets experience a substantial boost.

Table 6
Students’ monthly spending
in addition to flex dollars and rent

	min	max	mean
freshmen (n=98)	0	400	84.59
sophomores (n=105)	0	1000	108.00
juniors (n=62)	0	2000	225.97
seniors (n=57)	0	1500	244.74
total (n=322)	0	2000	147.60
corrected total ¹	0	2000	159.32

¹ weighting freshmen, sophomores, juniors and senior according to official Whitman College enrollment data (http://www.whitman.edu/content/institutional_research/).

Figure 1
Average monthly amount spent in addition to flex dollars and rent



II. CURRENT DOWNTOWN ACTIVITY

(6) How often do Whitman College students go downtown?

As reported in Table 7, only 3.8% of all Whitman College students visit downtown Walla Walla on a daily basis. More than 30% go to downtown less than once a week.

However, Table 7 also conveys that downtown visits are a function of seniority. While less than 15% of all seniors go to downtown less than once a week, this is more than 30% for all other classes. The senior class frequents downtown Walla Walla substantially more than any other class.

Table 7
Frequency of downtown visits

	freshmen	sophomores	juniors	seniors	total
	number of students				
(almost) daily	2	2	5	4	13
2-4 times a week	26	30	12	32	100
once a week	41	44	24	16	125
1-2 times a month	37	32	21	9	99
once a semester	4	4	1	0	9
	in %				
(almost) daily	1.8	1.8	7.7	6.6	3.8
2-4 times a week	23.4	26.6	18.5	52.5	28.9
once a week	36.9	38.9	36.9	26.2	36.1
1-2 times a month	33.3	28.3	32.3	14.8	28.6
once a semester	3.6	3.5	1.5	0.0	2.6

(7) How much time do Whitman students spend in downtown Walla Walla?

The time spent in downtown Walla Walla reflects the frequency of downtown visits. On average, a Whitman College student spends 2.3 hours (i.e., 2 hours and 18 minutes) in downtown. While the downtown time of freshmen and sophomores is less than 2 hours, seniors spent more than 3 ½ hours downtown.

Table 8
Time spent in downtown Walla Walla
hours per week

	min	max	mean
freshmen (n=109)	0	9	1.90
sophomores (n=108)	0	16	1.89
juniors (n=63)	0	20	2.55
seniors (n=58)	0	30	3.57
total (n=338)	0	30	2.30

(8) When do Whitman College students go downtown?

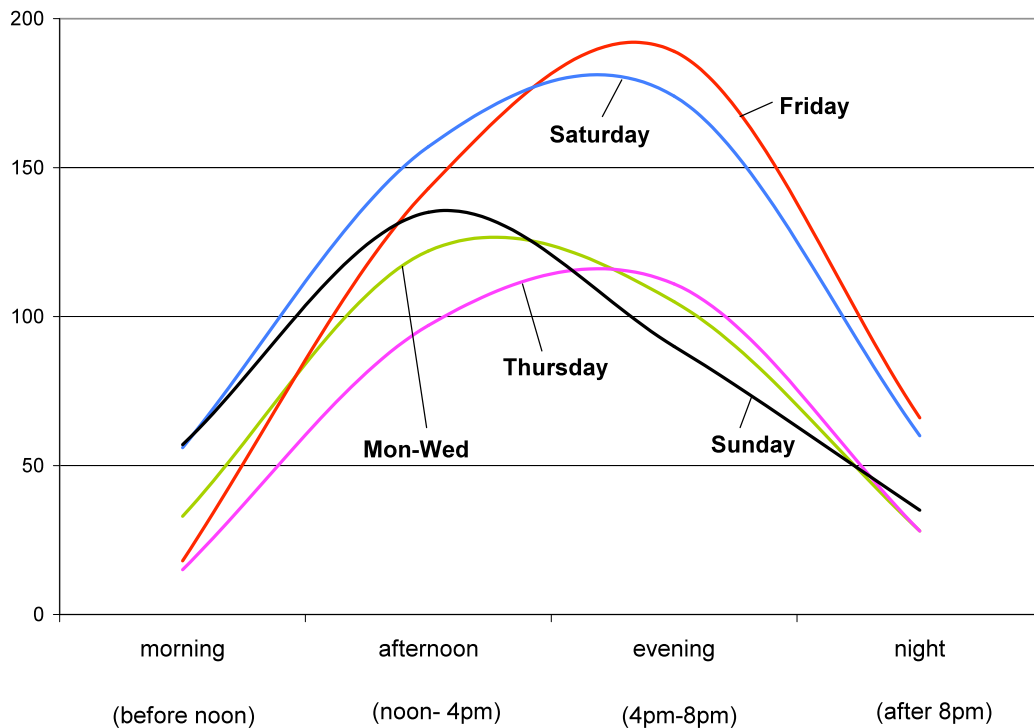
We are interested not only in the level of downtown visits but also in their diurnal distribution. As displayed in Figure 2, the number of downtown visits varies substantially with the day of the week and the time of the day.

First, the number of downtown visits on Friday and Saturdays is significantly higher than on weekdays and on Sundays. Second, the number of visits of Friday and Saturday increase substantially over the day and reach a high peak in the evening (Thursday also peaks in the evening). In addition, Friday and Saturday exhibit the largest number of night visits.

The patterns of Whitman students shown in Figure 2 share the main features with those of Walla Walla residents at the TOUR and FEAST events. However, there are also some differences.

First, unlike the FEAST and TOUR analyses, Saturdays exhibit the same pattern as Fridays and are one of the most frequented days. Second, the number of visits on Sundays is not significantly lower than those on weekdays. In fact, the number of Sunday morning and afternoon visits are higher than on weekdays. This might indicate some potential for the evening and night hours.

Figure 2
Diurnal patterns of downtown visits
number of entries

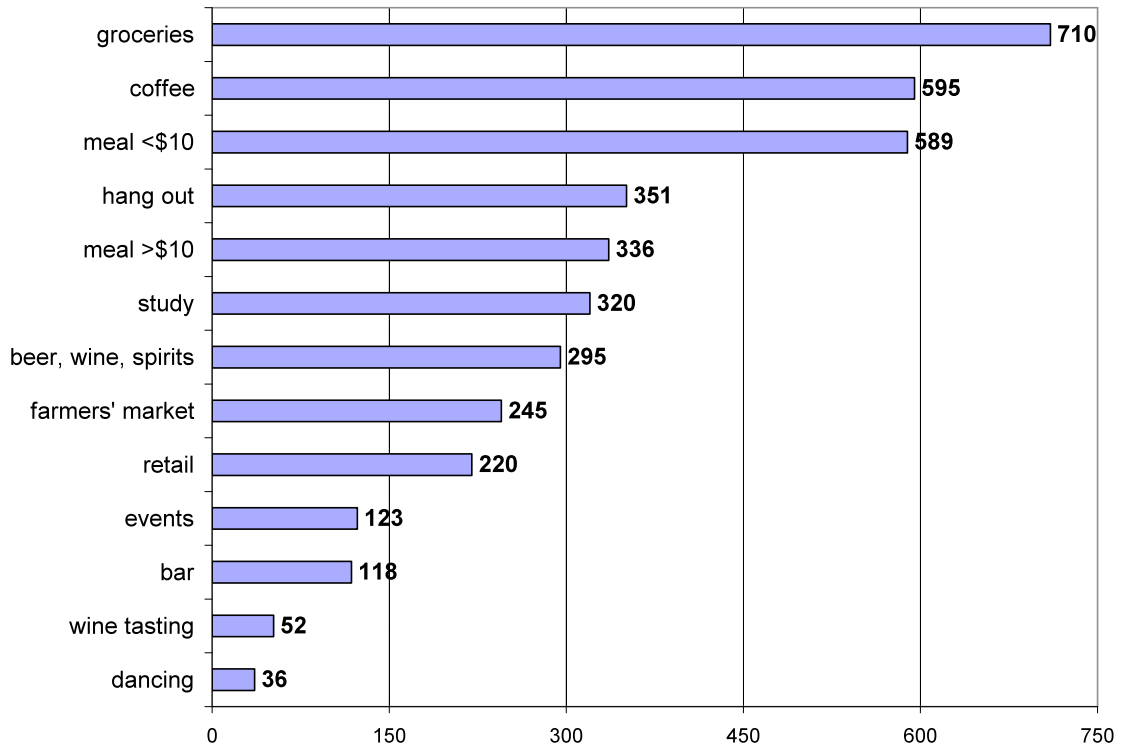


(9) How often do you go downtown for a certain purpose?

Not all interviewees answered this question in its entirety. Since it is *a priori* unclear how to assess missing entries we do not compute a purpose-specific average visitation frequency. However, we are able to assign weighted frequency values to each purpose and can rank the purposes. In this manner, we assigned 5 points for *daily*, 4 points for *2-4 times per week*, 3 points for *once a week*, 2 points for *1-2 times per month* and 1 point for *once in 6 months*. We treated the entry *almost never* like a missing entry and disregarded it. As shown in Figure 3, *grocery shopping* is by far the most common downtown activity followed by *coffee shop* and *restaurant (<\$10)* visits. The fourth popular downtown activity is *hanging out*.

The least common activity on the list is *dancing*. However, since Figure 3 is not a normative listing but merely a positive description, we cannot infer that *dancing* is unpopular among Whitman College students. In fact, this result might simply reflect the lack of opportunity (interviewed students mentioned this point numerous times).

Figure 3
Downtown visits by purpose
weighted entries

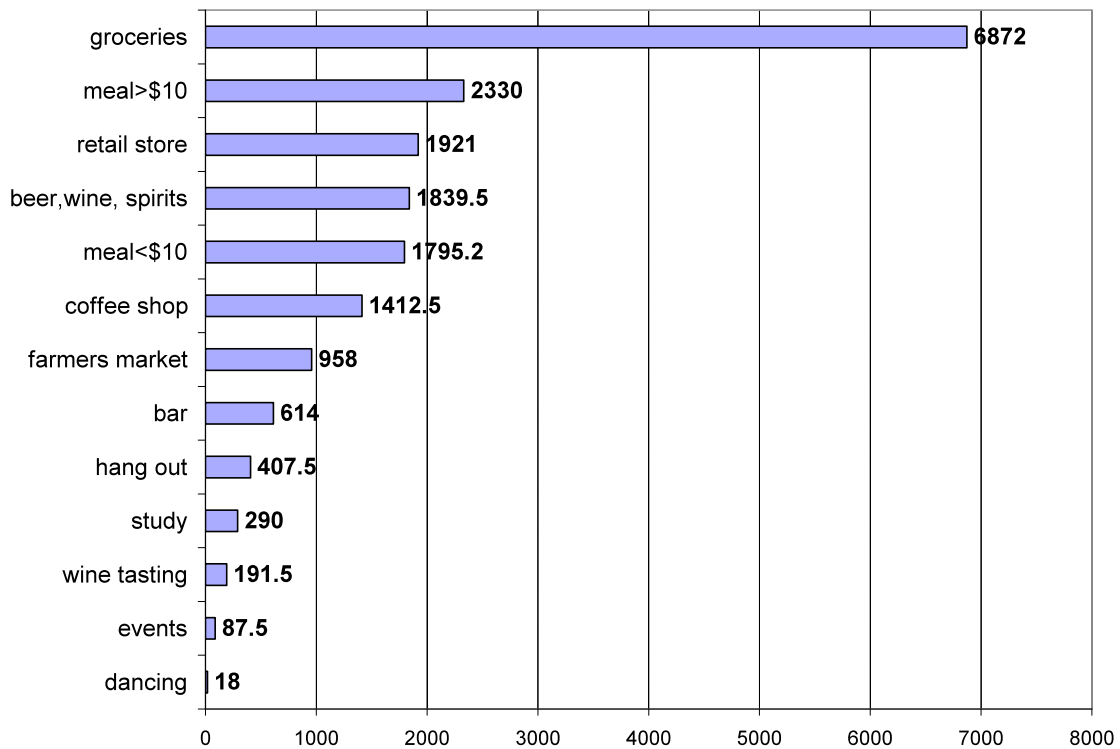


(10) Money spent by purpose

This question relates to the preceding. Since some answers are incomplete we added up all reported amounts and computed a ranking as displayed in Figure 4. Due to the many missing entries the dollar amounts reported in Figure 4 do only express the dollar amounts spent by students who answered the question (not by the entire sample, let alone all Whitman College students). It can thus only be interpreted as an ordinal ranking.

Accordingly, groceries is the most dollar-intensive downtown activity followed by restaurant visits (>\$10), retail shopping and buying alcohol (*wine, beer, spirits*). When weighted with dollar amounts, coffee shop visits and restaurant visits (<\$10) drop from rank 2 and 3 to rank 6 and 5, respectively.

Figure 4
Downtown spending by purpose
cumulative dollar amounts of all responses



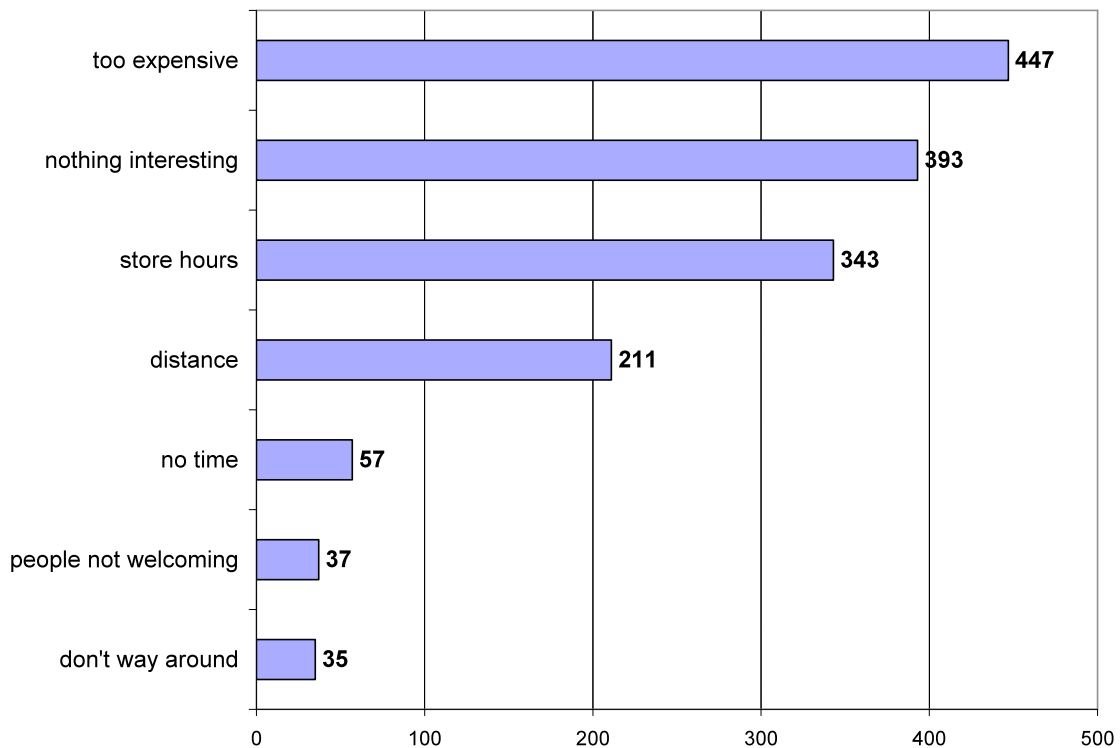
(11) Main deterrents from visiting downtown Walla Walla more often

When we asked this question, students could rank their main three deterrents. We weighted the entries linearly and gave the main deterrent 3 points, the second important one 2 points and the third important one 1 point. The sum of points can be interpreted as a weighted index.

Figure 5 displays these weighted sum of points. Accordingly, *too expensive* is the main deterrent followed by *nothing interesting* and *inconvenient store hours*. Many students explicitly mentioned that the existing supply of stores and entertainment does not meet their demands. Suggestions for improvements ranged from movie theatre to dance club (we revisit this point below). Under store hours many students mentioned that most stores are closed when they could go downtown (Sundays and weekdays after 6pm).

Initial suspicions that Whitman College students do not feel welcomed by local store owners or customers turn out to be unsubstantiated.

Figure 5
Main deterrents from going downtown
sum of weighted entries



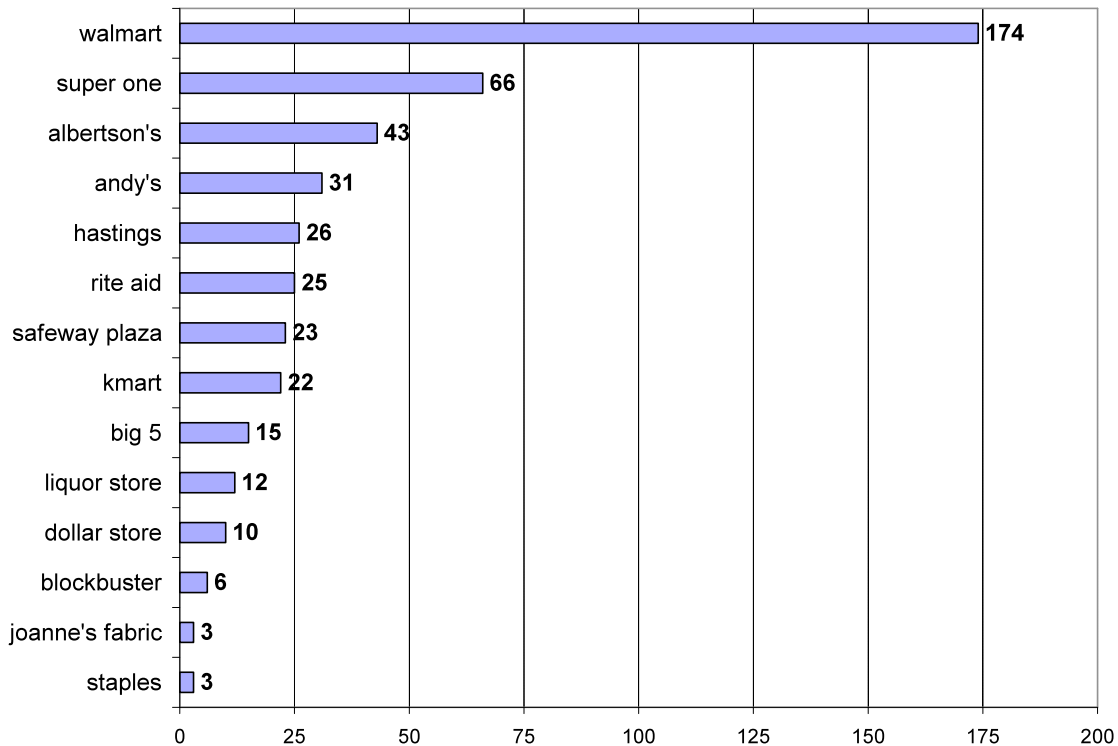
(12) When you shop outside of downtown, where do you typically go?

Since multiple answers were possible for this question we added up all entries and computed the sum (without any weighting scheme). Figure 6 reports this sum for all stores with at least three entries.

Accordingly, for Whitman College students *Walmart* is by far the most popular shopping destination outside of downtown Walla Walla. With a total of 174 entries it is more popular than the four next popular stores, i.e., *Super One*, *Albertson's*, *Andy's* and *Hastings*, combined. We interpret this as reflection of the pronounced price consciousness of Whitman College students.

The students' high price-elasticity is also reflected in the high number of entries for the *Dollar Store* which, from a student perspective, is the 11th popular shopping location outside of downtown. In our FEAST and TOUR survey, the *Dollar Store/Tree* was never mentioned.

Figure 6
Shopping outside of downtown
number of entries



(13) How much do you typically spend per week outside of downtown?

Many students did not answer this question, others entered a zero. Disregarding missing entries but including zero values we compute an average expenditure of \$14.38 per week and student.

III. CHANGES IN DOWNTOWN ACTIVITY

The following three questions are aimed towards likely changes in students' time and money spent in downtown Walla Walla. We try to evaluate the role of supply changes (more opportunities, longer store hours), price discounts and the acceptance of *Flex dollars*.

(14) Changing consumption by offering more opportunities

One of the main deterrents for downtown visits by students is the lack of interesting stores. We asked “*If there were more opportunities to (see activities below) I would increase the time and money I spend downtown*”. Possible answers were (a) *not at all*, (b) *slightly*, (c) *moderately* and (d) *by more than double*.

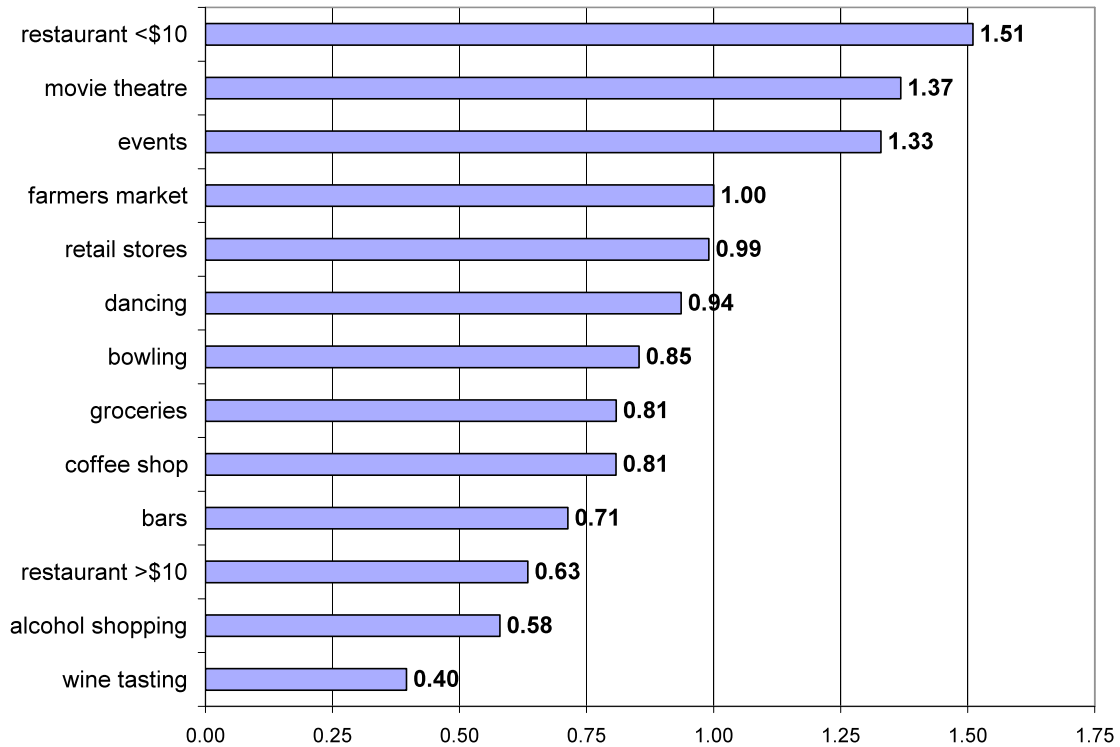
Table 9 and Figure 7 summarize the answers by activity. Accordingly, students will increase time and money spent between *slightly* and *moderately* in response to a better supply of low price restaurants (index 1.51). Also, movie theatres (1.37) and events (1.33) will benefit from a sheer increase in supply. On the other hand, the demand for alcohol shopping, wine tastings and high-priced restaurants appears to be not very responsive to supply changes.

Table 9
Would you increase time and money spent
if there were more opportunities?
number of entries

	not at all	slightly	moderately	by more than double	mean ¹
groceries	146	122	61	10	0.81
farmers market	114	125	66	24	1.00
alcohol shopping	205	58	46	12	0.58
wine tasting	233	45	34	4	0.40
coffee shop	149	111	50	18	0.81
restaurant <\$10	57	102	118	54	1.51
restaurant >\$10	168	109	35	8	0.63
retail stores	122	112	61	29	0.99
events (incl. concerts)	79	105	96	45	1.33
bars	189	59	49	24	0.71
dancing	153	81	58	37	0.94
bowling	135	123	51	18	0.85
movie theatre	72	112	105	45	1.37

¹ zero means no change and 3 means by more than double

Figure 7
Impact of more opportunities on
consumption



0=no change, 1=slight increase, 2=moderate increase, 3=increase by more than double

(14) Changing consumption by longer and/or more convenient store hours

In order to assess the impact of store hours on student consumption we asked “*I would increase the time and money I spend downtown if stores...if stores were (1) open later and (2) open on Sundays.*” Again, possible answers were (a) *not at all*, (b) *slightly*, (c) *moderately* and (d) *by more than double*.

Table 10 shows that later store hours as well as open stores on Sundays may induce more than just a slight increase in time and money spent (over all purposes). The impact factors of 1.39 and 1.36, respectively, are comparable with those for a movie theatre in Table 9 and Figure 7.

Table 10
Would you increase time and money spent
if stores were open later or on Sundays?
number of entries

	not at all	slightly	moderately	by more than double	mean ¹
open later	67	118	104	47	1.39
open on Sundays	68	123	98	45	1.36

¹ with 0=no change, 1=slight increase, 2=moderate increase, 3=increase by more than double

(14) Changing consumption by accepting *Flex dollars* or giving a discount

At present, students' *Flex dollars* are accepted on campus only. We asked students if they would increase time or money spent if their *Flex dollars* were accepted in downtown Walla Walla. Like in the previous paragraphs, possible answers were (a) *not at all*, (b) *slightly*, (c) *moderately* and (d) *by more than double*.

Table 11 shows that the effect of accepting *Flex dollars* by far exceeds those of changing supply or store hours. Weighted averages of 2.20 and 2.01, respectively, indicate that the effect will be higher than *moderate*. As expected, the effect is slightly stronger for restaurants than for other stores.

Under (5) on page 5 we report that the annual purchasing power of all Whitman students is about \$2 million. This does, however, not include *Flex dollar*. If the downtown stores can find an arrangement with Whitman College regarding the acceptance of *Flex dollars* another \$800,000 can be added to Whitman College students' downtown spending potential.¹

¹ From the figures reported in Table 2 in conjunction with the enrollment data provided by Whitman College at http://www.whitman.edu/content/institutional_research/ we can compute an average *Flex dollar* holding of \$275.85 per student and semester which equals \$803,000 per year.

Table 11
Would you increase time and money spent
if stores accepted *Flex dollars* or granted a student discount?
 number of entries

	not at all	slightly	moderately	more than double	mean
flex \$ in restaurants	39	31	94	178	2.20
flex \$ in other stores	46	54	91	148	2.01
10% discount in restaurants	6	70	148	123	2.12
10% discount in other stores	14	72	140	116	2.05

¹ with 0=no change, 1=slight increase, 2=moderate increase, 3=increase by more than double

In many college towns or neighborhoods stores grant a general 10% student discount on food and merchandise. We asked the Whitman College students how a discount would affect their time and money spent in downtown Walla Walla. In the lower two lines of Table 11 we show that the effect of a discount is comparable to that one of *Flex dollar* acceptance and may induce an increase in spending that exceeds *moderate*.

Overall, accepting *Flex dollars* and granting student discounts appears to be a very effective way to further the ties between Whitman College students and downtown Walla Walla. We deem it ideal to combine these two policies, i.e., granting a discount on *Flex dollars*.

IV. PARENTS AND BIG ITEMS

(15) How often and with what mode of transportation do your parents visit Walla?

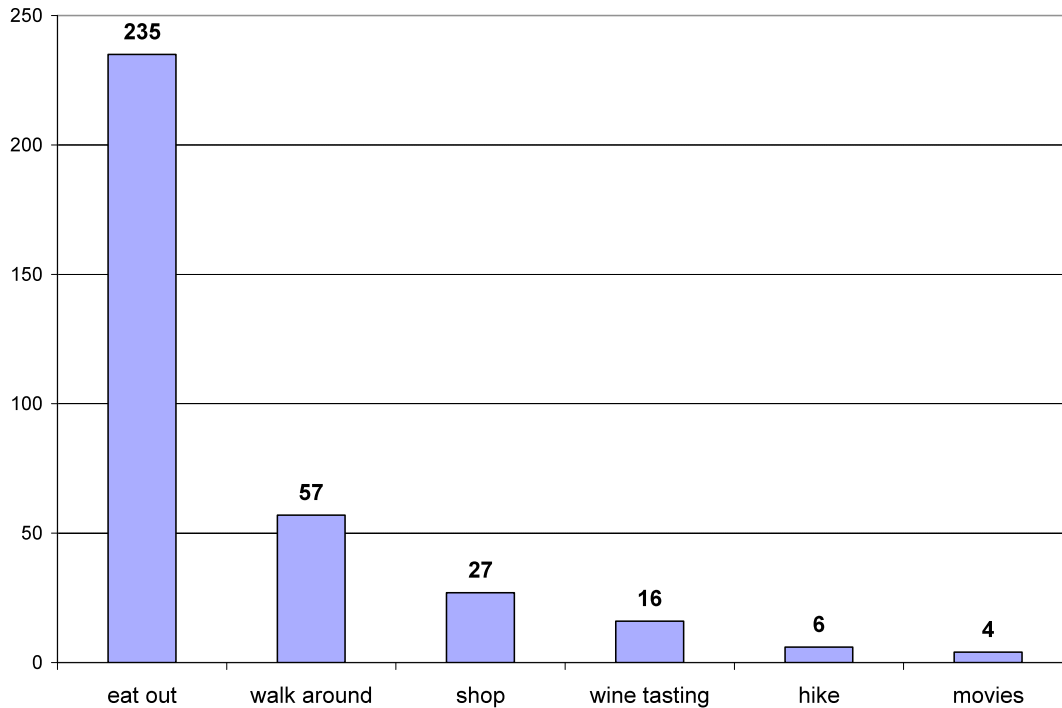
On average, parents visit the Whitman College campus 1.82 times per year, i.e., a bit less than once a semester. However, there is a wide variance ranging from zero to 12 visits per year.

In 68.9% of these visits the main mode of transportation is the car, in 31.1% of all cases this is the airplane.

(16) What do you do with your parents when they visit?

Since we did not provide the interviewees with prepared answers we received a wide range of responses; examples are *nothing*, *chill out*, *play sports* etc. However, the by far most mentioned activity is “eat out.” Eat out (or going to a restaurants, go to dinner etc.) was mentioned 235 times, i.e., more than all other answers combined. As distanced second, third and fourth, *walking around*, *shopping* and *wine tasting* are the next ranked activities (see Figure 8).

Figure 8
Popular activities with parents

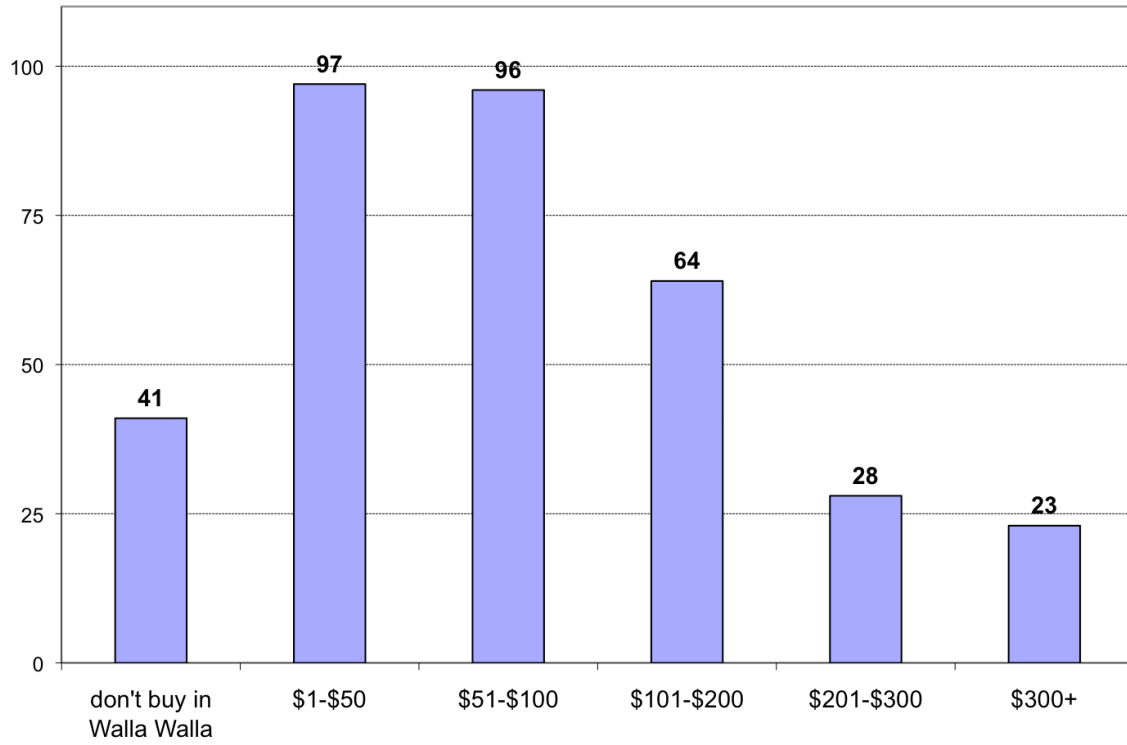


(17) Big expenditures

Unrelated to the parent-context, we asked students how much of their ‘big expenditures’ for their dorm/house such as clothes, furniture do they buy in Walla Walla.

Table 9 reports the main results. 41 students (11.7%) do not buy any of their big items in Walla Walla. 193 students (55.3%) do not spend more than \$100 in Walla Walla. Only 23 students (6.6%) spend more than \$300 on ‘big items’ in Walla Walla.

Figure 9
Spending on big items in Walla Walla



I. Demographics Please circle or fill in the appropriate answer.

1. Year:	First year	Sophomore	Junior	Senior
2. Age:	Under 21	21 or older		
3. Sex:	Male	Female		
4. Where do you live?	On-Campus	Fraternity House	Off-Campus	
5. Are you on a meal plan?	Yes	No		
6. How many flex dollars did you get this semester (including your meal plan)?	\$ _____			
7. Do you have a job?	Yes, on-campus	Yes, off-campus	No	
8. Do you have access to a car?		Yes	Sometimes	No
9. When you travel to Whitman, do you fly into the Walla Walla airport?	Yes	Sometimes	No	
10. Excluding flex dollars and rent, how much money do you have to spend each month	\$ _____			

II. Current Downtown Activity

1. How often do you go downtown? Please circle the appropriate answer.

(almost) 2-4 times 1 time 1-2 times Once a (almost) Other
 daily per week per week per month semester never _____

2. How much time do you spend downtown per week on average? _____ hours

3. When you do go downtown, what time of day do you typically go? Check all boxes that apply.

	Monday-Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Morning (before noon)					
Afternoon (12pm-4pm)					
Evening (4-8pm)					
Night (after 8pm)					

4. How often do you go downtown to... Check one box in each row and fill in a dollar amount.

	(almost) daily	2-4 times per week	1 time per week	1-2 times per month	once a semester	(almost) never	How much do you spend per week on this?
Shop for groceries or necessities							\$ _____
Go to the Farmers Market							\$ _____
Buy beer, wine, or spirits							\$ _____
Go wine tasting							\$ _____
Go to a coffee shop							\$ _____
Eat a meal for < \$10							\$ _____
Eat a meal for > \$10							\$ _____
Shop at a retail store							\$ _____
Attend events (e.g., concert, parade)							\$ _____
Go to a bar							\$ _____
Go dancing							\$ _____
Study							\$ _____
Hang out							\$ _____
Other:							\$ _____

5. Which, if any, of the following things deter you from going downtown?

Please rank your top 3 deterrents, using numbers 1, 2, and 3 (1= biggest deterrent)

- | | |
|---|--|
| ___ Distance | ___ People are not welcoming to students |
| ___ Too Expensive | ___ I don't know my way around |
| ___ Store hours are inconvenient/inconsistent | ___ Nothing interests me |
| ___ Other: _____ | |

6. When you shop outside of downtown, where do you typically go?

Please list stores below (e.g. Walmart, Big 5, Hastings, Supermarkets – except the Safeway on Rose).

7. How much do you typically spend per week outside of downtown? \$ _____

III. Changes in Downtown Activity Mark one box in each row based on your expectations.

1. If there were more opportunities to (see activities below) I would increase the time and money I spend downtown...

I would increase my time and money...	Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	By more than double
Shop for groceries or necessities				
Go to the Farmer's Market				
Buy beer, wine, or spirits				
Go wine tasting				
Go to a coffee shop				
Eat a meal for \$10 or less				
Eat a meal for more than \$10				
Shop at a retail store				
Attend events (e.g., concert, parade)				
Go to a bar				
Go dancing				
Go bowling				
See a movie				
Study				
Other:				

2. I would increase the time and money I spend downtown if stores...

I would increase my time and money...	Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	By more than double
Were open later				
Were open on Sundays				

3. I would increase the time and money I spend downtown if I could...

I would increase my time and money...	Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	By more than double
Pay with flex dollars at restaurants				
Pay with flex dollars at other stores				
Receive a 10% student discount at restaurants				
Receive a 10% student discount at other stores				

IV. Parents

1. How many times do your parents typically visit in one academic year? _____

2. When your parents visit, how do they travel to Whitman? By car _____ by plane _____ other _____

3. When your parents visit, what do you typically do with them? _____

4. If you have made big expenditures for your dorm/house (e.g., lots of clothes/jackets, furniture), how much did you spend in Walla Walla? Circle the appropriate answer

- \$0-50 \$51-100 \$101-200 \$201-300 \$300+