White students at the University of Massachusetts' Amherst campus overwhelmingly voice strong support for racial integration, but they are much less supportive of affirmative action or other policies that they believe could affect their own chances of success, according to a survey conducted last spring.

Female students showed significantly greater support for egalitarianism and less of what the survey takers called "backlash" against measures to promote racial equality.

Two sociology graduate students designed the random survey of 628 white students in response to past racial unrest on the Amherst campus. Conducted by the UMass Office of Student Affairs Research, Information and Systems in February and March, the telephone poll has a margin of error of 4 percent.

Ninety-eight percent of students surveyed said they supported the right of black people to live in white neighborhoods, 95 percent said blacks and whites have equal intelligence, and 99 percent said they believed in integrated schools.

But 76 percent opposed "preferential treatment" for blacks in admission to UMass, 48 percent said the UMass administration responded more to the concerns of black students than other groups and 31 percent agreed it was likely that white students would be denied jobs or promotions because of preferential treatment for minorities. One-fifth of white students supported preferential admissions treatment for children of alumni but not for black applicants.

Other studies have found a similar gap in attitudes when whites are questioned about racial principles and then about implementation.

"It represents the complexity of the issue," said Charles V. Willie, a professor at Harvard University who has studied race relations. "We need to have combined efforts to deal with attitudes and actions."

In other surveys, women have also voiced more liberal views on social issues. In the UMass poll, 3 percent of women versus 7 percent of men said whites have more intelligence than blacks, and 47 percent of women but only 30 percent of men said UMass should make more efforts to recruit black students.

After analyzing the results, Philip N. Cohen, a master's degree candidate who designed the survey with Eric Mader, suggested that colleges should encourage women to take more leadership positions in campus life and that administrators should place less emphasis on student sensitivity training and more on teaching whites they have little to fear from policies to reduce racial inequalities.

"It is relatively easier to change expressed attitudes on civility or tolerance than to really instill those values," said Cohen. "To the extent that resistance to policy initiatives is motivated by self-interest, sensitivity doesn't help. But students could be educated to realize that losing their jobs to blacks is not a real threat in most cases."

Grant Ingle, director of the UMass Office of Human Relations, said a plan is being weighed to have freshman orientation include a focus on living in a diverse world.