

Trends

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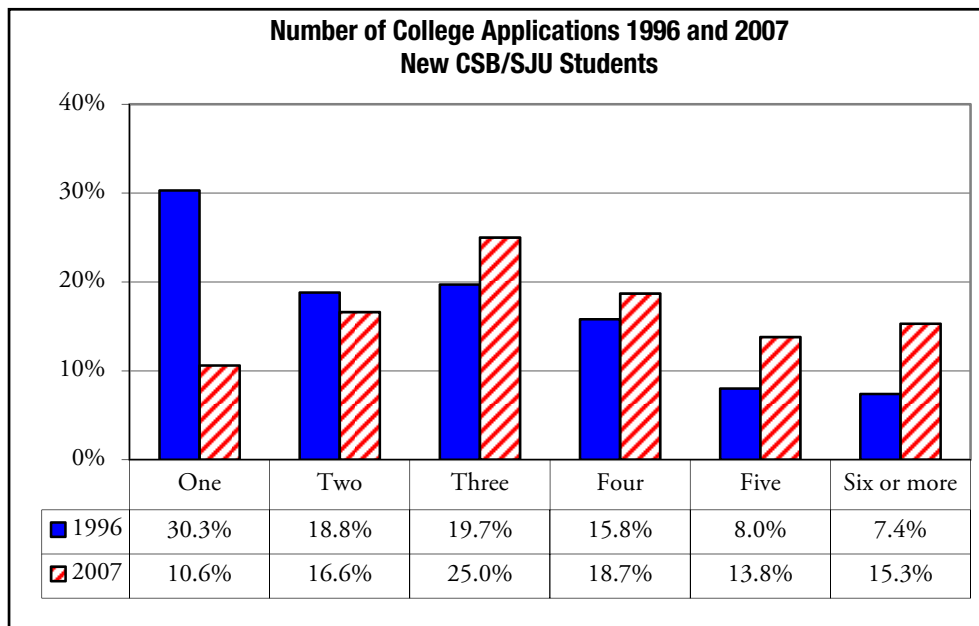
A Research Newsletter Prepared by Enrollment, Planning and Public Affairs

New Students' College Choice Characteristics

Close to 950 new entering CSB/SJU students, representing 90% of the class, completed the *New Entering Student Survey* this fall. The survey provides the colleges with an opportunity to identify student characteristics, experiences, and expectations. The data that follow summarize the key characteristics influencing new students' college choice.

Choosing a College

- *College Applications.* As the academic profile of new CSB/SJU students has improved, and as on-line admission applications have simplified the college admission process, the number of new students applying for admission to multiple colleges continues to rise. Almost three-fourths (72%) of all new Saint Benedict and Saint John's students in fall 2007 applied to three or more colleges and fully one-quarter (29%) applied to five or more colleges. Only one in ten new students this fall applied only to CSB or SJU. By comparison, in 1996, nearly one-third (30%) of all new CSB/SJU students applied only here, while only 7% applied to five or more colleges.



*Note: Data from 1997 are not available.

- *College Choice.* Consistent with prior years, the overwhelming majority of new CSB/SJU students this fall (81%) identified the College of Saint Benedict or Saint John's University as their first choice institution. CSB and SJU were similarly ranked by students of all academic abilities. Saint Benedict and Saint John's students have been much more likely than their peers at other types of institutions nationally to indicate they were attending their first choice college. Typically, only 70% of all new students nationally – across all institution types – indicate that they enrolled at their first choice college.

New entering students at CSB/SJU were looking for a college with a good academic reputation where people were friendly, and graduates were able to get good jobs.

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COLLEGE OF
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UNIVERSITY

- *Gender as Choice Factor.* Very few new students indicate a preference for a single-gender college at the time they begin their college search. Just over one percent of all Minnesota private college admission applicants cited a preference for a single-gender institution at the time they took their college entrance exam. Among new students in fall 2007, only 10% of students at Saint Benedict and Saint John's indicated that the opportunity to attend a college for women or a college for men was a very important factor influencing their enrollment decision.
- *Liberal Arts as Choice Factor.* Student responses were mixed when asked about the importance of attending a liberal arts college. Forty-two percent said it was of little or no importance, while 58% said it was somewhat or very important. Responses were less mixed when students were asked about the importance of specific outcomes associated with a liberal arts education. The majority of students agreed that writing clearly and effectively, speaking clearly and effectively, thinking clearly and analytically, and developing quantitative or mathematical skills were somewhat or very important college outcomes.

Why the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University?

Students were asked (on the *New Entering Student Survey*) to indicate how important certain characteristics were in their college selection process. They were then asked to rate CSB/SJU in those areas. Analysis of their responses reveals that students consider a number of factors when selecting a college and that Saint Benedict and Saint John's excel in many of those areas. (See charts at the end of this article.)

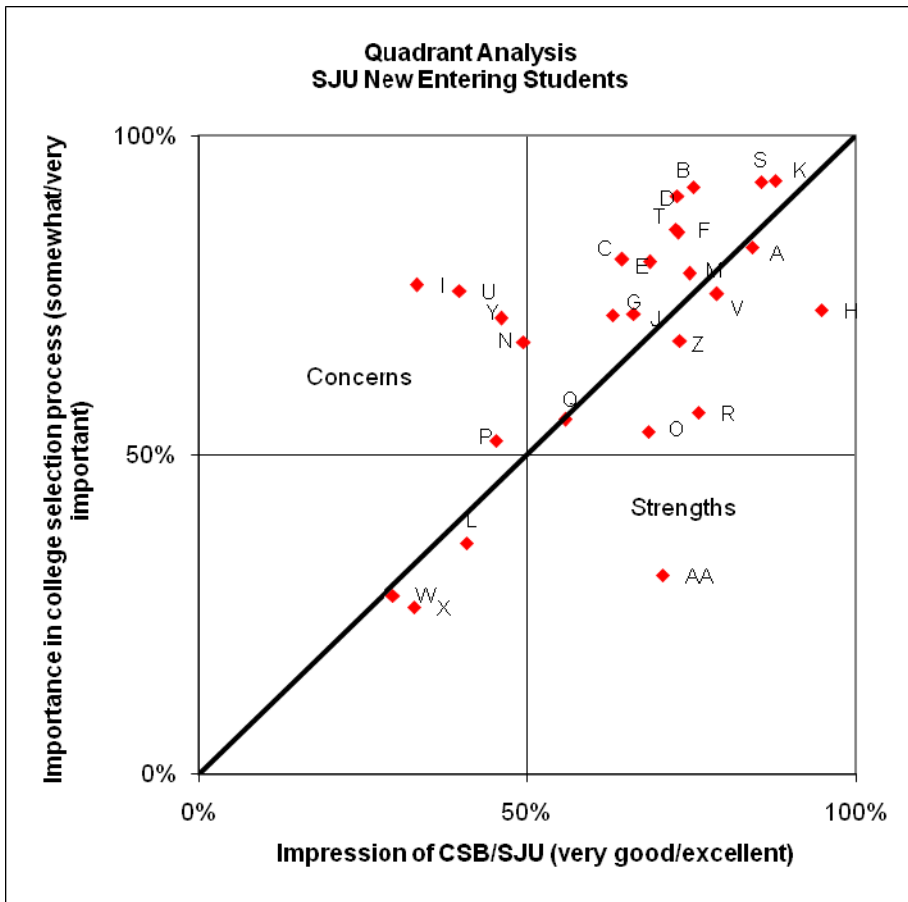
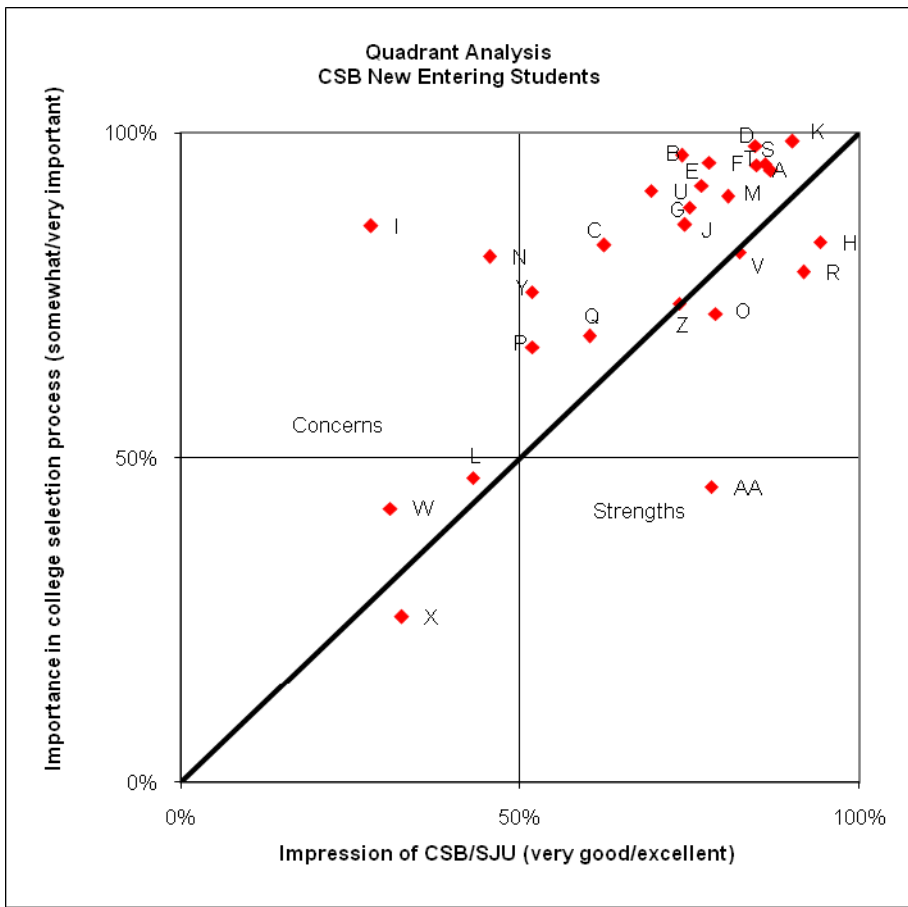
The following five characteristics were cited as somewhat or very important by over 90% of new entering students at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University:

- *Friendly people on campus.* This characteristic was most frequently cited as somewhat or very important in new students' college selection process; fully 96% of all new entering students indicated that friendly people on campus were important in their college selection process. New entering students also indicated that people were friendly at CSB/SJU; 89% said that their impression of the friendliness of people at CSB/SJU was very good or excellent. The importance of this characteristic is reinforced by students' propensity to describe themselves and the schools as friendly elsewhere on the survey.
- *Graduates get good jobs.* Over 71% of new entering students cited the ability of graduates to get good jobs as a very important factor in the college selection process. Almost three-fourth of all new entering students agreed that CSB/SJU graduates have excellent or very good ability to get good jobs. The importance of this characteristic echoed throughout students' survey responses. Nearly 99% of all new students said that career preparation was a somewhat or very important college outcome. Fully 98% said that acquiring job or work-related knowledge and skills was a somewhat or very important expectation for their Saint Benedict and Saint John's experience.
- *Academic reputation.* Nearly 94% of survey respondents indicated that academic reputation was an important factor in their college decision. Eighty-eight percent indicated that CSB/SJU has a very good or excellent academic reputation. In connection with academic reputation, eight in ten new students indicated that learning in an environment that stressed academic rigor was important.
- *Access to support to help them succeed academically.* Ninety-four percent of students indicated that this was important. Nearly 8 in 10 students indicated that CSB and SJU perform very well or excellently in providing access to support to help its students succeed academically. Accessible faculty members are a substantial source of academic support; three in four new students rated the accessibility of professors at CSB and SJU as very good or excellent.
- *Quality of academic facilities.* Nine in ten students indicated that this was an important factor in their college selection process. Overall, almost 80% of new students indicated that CSB/SJU's academic facilities were excellent or very good.

The quadrant charts that follow also point to areas needing improvement – areas where the percentage of students with positive impressions of CSB/SJU did not match the percentage who viewed the area as very important in their college selection process. In general, points to the left of the 45 degree line on the quadrant graph indicate areas where improvement is needed (“concerns”) and points to the right of the 45 degree line are areas where CSB/SJU are overachieving students expectations (“strengths”). Points on the line represent areas where CSB/SJU are exactly meeting students expectations of quality.

When separated by campus, quadrant analyses reveal that new CSB and new SJU students do not have identical expectations or impressions of Saint Benedict and Saint John’s. Data from new students on both campuses indicate a need for improvement in quality or a need for improvement in *articulation of quality* at CSB/SJU in a number of areas:

- *Cost.* While eight in ten new entering students said that cost to their family (after financial aid) was an important factor in their college selection process, less than one-third indicated that their impression of the cost of a CSB/SJU education was very good or excellent.
- *Quality of campus residence halls.* Eight in ten new entering students said that the quality of campus residence halls was important to their college decision, yet only 55% of students indicated that the quality of residence halls at CSB/SJU were very good or excellent. Men and women gave significantly different responses to this question. Men were less likely than women to say that the quality of residence halls was important and much less likely to say that the residence halls at SJU were excellent or very good. Still, a gap between importance and impression of quality at CSB/SJU existed among students at both schools.
- *Technology in the classroom.* This characteristic was important to nearly 74% of new entering students, but a large percentage (28%) indicated that they had no impression at all of CSB/SJU in this area. This may be an area where articulation of quality to prospective students could influence the college selection process.
- *Ability of graduates to get into top graduate or professional schools.* Three in four new entering students indicated degree aspirations other than a Bachelor’s Degree. Given those aspirations, it is not surprising that the ability of graduates to get into top graduate or professional schools was important to 82% of new entering students. Only 63% of those students, however, indicated that their impression of CSB/SJU graduates’ ability to get into such schools was very good or excellent.
- *Opportunities to experience cultures and traditions different than your own.* The mediocre impression of Saint Benedict and Saint John’s students in this area is somewhat surprising given students’ positive impression of international education opportunities. Student response may be related to the geographic location of the schools and the general lack of racial and ethnic diversity in the area.
- *Opportunities for internships.* The majority of CSB and SJU students (75%) reported that this characteristic was somewhat or very important in their college selection process. However, women and men gave significantly different responses with more women than men placing importance on internship opportunities. Only 1 in 2 new CSB and SJU students (47%) rated their impression of CSB/SJU as very good or excellent. This area may be another in which we could improve the quality of articulation to prospective students. Nearly one-third of students reported that they “don’t know” about internships at these institutions.



A	A sense of campus community
B	Ability of graduates to get good jobs
C	Ability of graduates to get into top graduate or professional schools
D	Access to support to help you succeed academically
E	Access to support to help you thrive socially
F	Accessible professors
G	An environment that stresses academic rigor
H	Beauty of the campus
I	Cost to your family (after financial aid)
J	Emphasis on developing personal values and ethics
K	Friendly people on campus
L	Geographic diversity of the student body
M	My campus visit
N	Opportunities for internships
O	Opportunities for spiritual growth and development
P	Opportunities to experience cultures and traditions different from your own
Q	Opportunities to meet students whose beliefs, opinions, and values are different from your own
R	Opportunities to study internationally
S	Overall academic reputation
T	Quality of academic facilities, such as the library, laboratories, and classrooms
U	Quality of campus residence halls
V	Quality of extracurricular programs such as athletics, student clubs, performing arts, etc.
W	Racial and ethnic diversity of the student body
X	Rankings in national magazines and guidebooks
Y	Technology in the classroom
Z	The college's social reputation
AA	The religious identity of the college