

# Trends

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## Active, Collaborative and Experiential Learning

Findings from the most recent *National Survey of Student Engagement* show that students learn more when they are intensely involved in their education and when they are asked to think about what they are learning both inside and outside of the classroom. The findings also suggest that when students collaborate with others to solve problems, they are more prepared for the complicated, unscripted problems they will encounter after college.

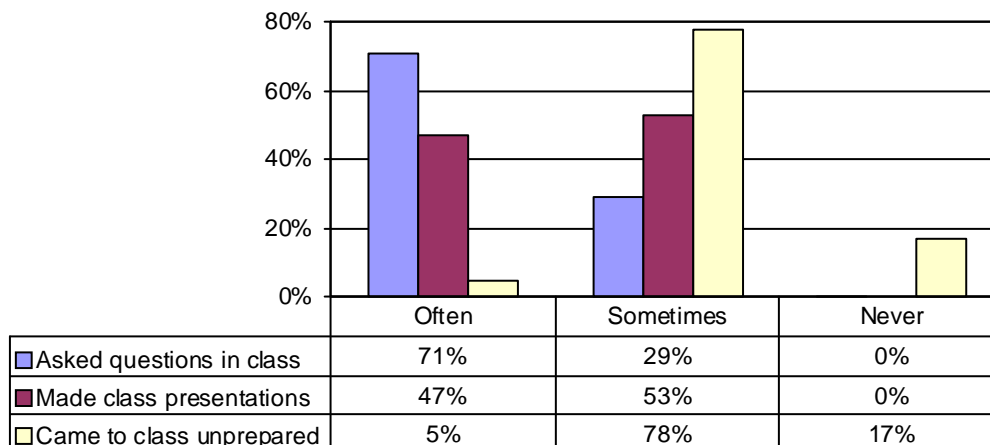
On the *2007-2008 CSB/SJU Senior Survey*, students at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University generally describe an active, collaborative and engaged learning experience, both inside and outside of the classroom.

- ❑ **Classroom Participation.** Fully seven in ten CSB/SJU seniors indicate that they frequently ask questions in class or contribute to classroom discussions. Men and women are equally likely to contribute to class in this way. CSB/SJU students are as likely as their peers at liberal arts colleges nationally to indicate that they participate in classroom discussions (100% vs. 99%).

The vast majority of CSB/SJU students report that they typically come to class prepared to contribute, though fewer than 2 in 10 indicate that they always complete their assigned work before coming to class. Men are more likely than women to come to class without completing their reading or assignments. Seniors majoring in the Fine Arts are significantly more likely than their peers to frequently come to class without completing assigned work.

About half of all Saint Benedict and Saint John's seniors say that they frequently make in-class presentations. CSB seniors are more likely than their SJU colleagues to indicate that they very often made a class presentation, but all CSB/SJU seniors indicated that they presented in class at least sometimes. Nationally, 2% of students at liberal arts colleges indicate that they never make in-class presentations.

**Classroom Participation Indicators, CSB/SJU Senior Responses**



Students at CSB/SJU describe an active, collaborative and engaged learning experience, both inside and outside of the classroom.

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- ❑ **Collaborative Learning.** CSB/SJU students are as likely as their peers at liberal arts colleges nationally to indicate that they work with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments. Fully six in ten CSB/SJU seniors indicate that they frequently work in groups or on group projects, though women here are more likely than men to say that they “often” do group work.

Saint Benedict and Saint John’s seniors majoring in the Humanities are the most likely to report working frequently on group projects outside of class (67%), while students in the Fine Arts were the least likely (28%).

Nearly 7 in 10 CSB/SJU seniors report that they at least sometimes tutor or teach other students. This percentage is higher than that reported by seniors at liberal arts colleges nationally (65%). Saint Benedict and Saint John’s students are equally likely to indicate that they tutor other students.

CSB/SJU students majoring in the Natural Sciences are the most likely to indicate that they frequently tutor or teach other students (23% compared to an average of 17% for all other divisions).

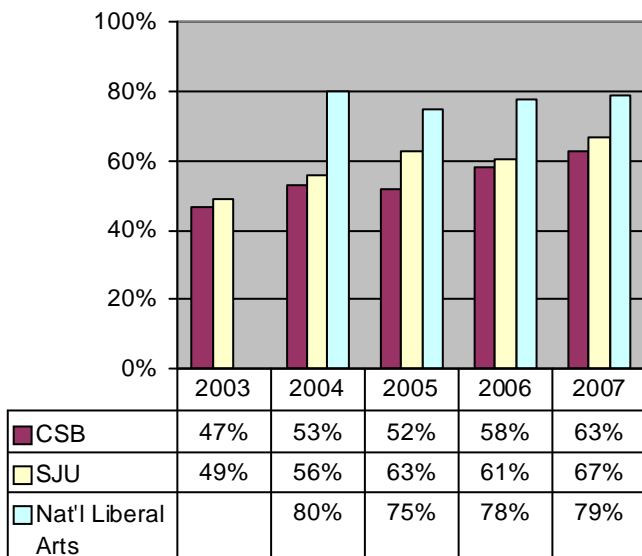
- ❑ **Integrative Learning.** Approximately six in ten CSB/SJU students indicate that they frequently put together ideas from different courses when completing assignments or participating in classroom discussions. Women are more likely than men to indicate that they very often integrate ideas from different courses.

Not surprising at residential colleges, classroom discussions often continue after class. Nearly 4 in 10 seniors indicate that they frequently discuss ideas from their reading or classes outside of class. CSB and SJU seniors majoring in Fine Arts and Humanities were the most likely to report having frequent conversations about their reading or classes outside of the classroom, while seniors in the Social Sciences were the least likely (56% vs. 36%).

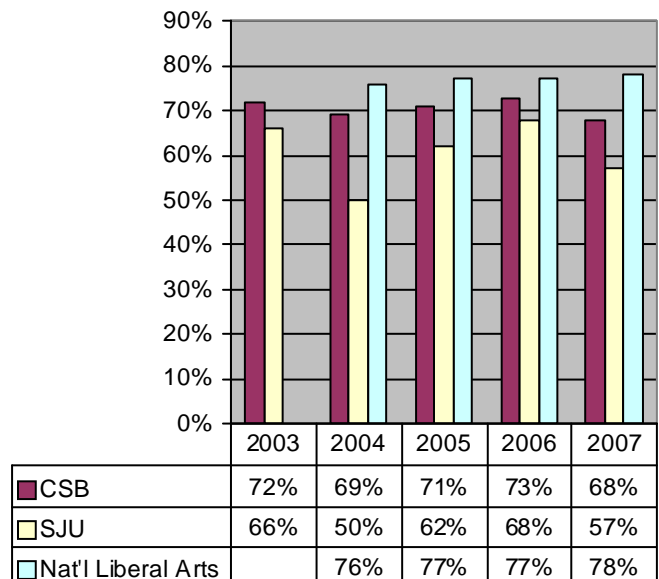
- ❑ **Experiential Learning Experiences.** Fully 9 in 10 Saint Benedict and Saint John’s students agree that their experiences outside of the classroom improved or enhanced the quality of their academic experience. About 4 in 10 (36%) senior students indicate that Saint Benedict and Saint John’s strongly emphasize (“very much”) learning outside of the classroom or in non-academic experiences. Women are more likely than men to indicate that CSB/SJU emphasize experiential learning.

Fully six in ten seniors complete clinical assignments, internships, or practicum. Students with majors in the Social Science division are most likely to engage in these learning experiences. Almost two-thirds of all seniors indicate that these experiences are very important to the CSB/SJU experience.

**Percentage of Students Participating in...  
Culminating Senior Experience**



**Practicum, Internship, or  
Clinical Assignment**



Nearly 7 in 10 senior students have participated or will participate in a culminating senior experience, such as writing a thesis or taking a capstone course. Fully one-third of all CSB/SJU seniors have engaged in a semester-long research or creative activity in which they developed new knowledge or original work. The number of students participating in a culminating senior experience has increased over the past five years, though the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University continue to lag behind the national liberal arts average in this area (65% at CSB/SJU vs. 79% nationally).

- Study Abroad.** International education is one of the most popular experiential learning programs at CSB/SJU. Ninety-eight percent of new students in fall 2004 indicated that there was at least some chance they would study internationally while at CSB/SJU. Four years later, 53% of senior students indicate that they studied abroad as a part of their college experience. Participation rates are even higher than the survey responses suggest; for the 2004 cohort, 67% of Saint Benedict students who graduated or remained enrolled four years later and 43% of Saint John's students in the same cohort studied abroad. More women than men continue to study abroad on semester-long and summer term trips.

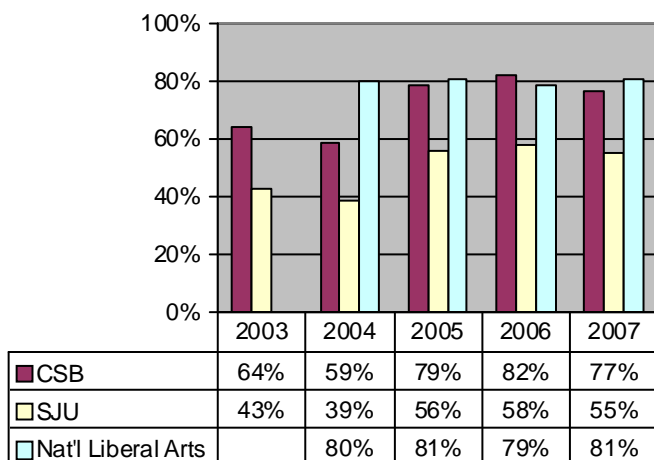
The College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University are ranked number one nationally among baccalaureate institutions because of the high number of their students who take part in semester-long study abroad programs, according to the annual report on international education, *Open Doors 2007*, published by the Institute of International Education. Nationally, only 39% of senior students at undergraduate liberal arts institutions study abroad or plan to do so before they graduate.

Almost 7 in 10 CSB/SJU seniors indicate that international education opportunities are very important to the CSB/SJU experience. However, men were almost twice as likely as women to indicate that study abroad programs are of no importance to their experience at CSB/SJU.

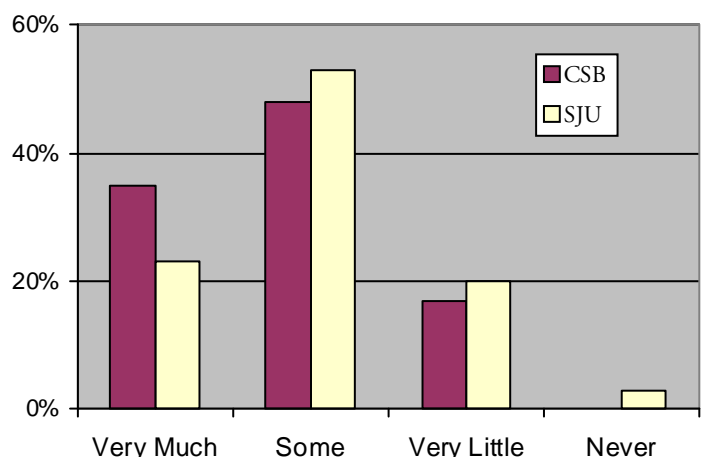
- Community Service Experiences.** Over six in ten senior students indicate that they plan to or have already participated in a community service or volunteer program. Women were much more likely than men to volunteer, a trend that has persisted since the inception of the *CSB/SJU Senior Survey* in 2001. As new students in fall 2004, men and women were equally likely to report plans for community service while in college, although 77% of women participated in or plan to participate in a volunteer program and only 55% of men have done so or intend to do so.

Reflecting the difference between men and women in eagerness to do community service, women are more likely than men to take a course with a service learning component. Overall, one-third of CSB/SJU seniors completed a service learning course. Students in the Humanities and Social Sciences were twice as likely as students in the Fine Arts and Natural Sciences to have taken a course with a service learning component.

**Percentage of Students Participating in...  
Community Service or Volunteer Work**



**To What Extent Does CSB/SJU Emphasize  
Engaging in Community Service?**



Differences in the way students perceive an institutional emphasis on volunteering was also evident. Students were asked about the extent to which CSB and SJU emphasize engagement in community service. Saint Benedict students were more likely to report that CSB/SJU “very much” emphasize community engagement than Saint John’s students (35% vs. 23%). Only 3% of SJU seniors reported that the institutions “never” emphasized community service.

CSB/SJU rates of volunteerism significantly exceed national and regional averages. According to the Corporation for National and Community Service, 35% of all college students in the Midwest and 30% of college students nationally had volunteered in 2007 (compared to 67% of CSB/SJU seniors). Nationally, the most popular volunteer activities for students are tutoring and mentoring programs.

- ❑ **Extracurricular Experiences.** Fully 84% of CSB/SJU seniors indicate that they spend some time each week participating in co-curricular activities such as student organizations, clubs, campus publications, or student government. A higher percentage (94%) spends time each week exercising, though fewer (58%) participate in intercollegiate athletics or intramurals at least one hour per week. Saint Benedict and Saint John’s students spend similar amounts of time each week participating in co-curricular activities and exercising, although SJU seniors were twice as likely as CSB seniors to participate in intercollegiate athletics or intramurals.
- ❑ **Gender-Specific Experiences.** Only 7% of CSB/SJU seniors indicate that they frequently participated in gender-specific programs or activities while in college. Similarly, only 12% of CSB/SJU students indicate that the opportunity to attend a single-sex college was very important to them, though an additional 30% say the opportunity was somewhat important. Women are more likely to indicate that they participated in gender-specific activities and that attending a single-sex college was important.

The data collected on the *CSB/SJU Senior Survey* not only describe students at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John’s University; they also help inform academic and co-curricular planning and decision-making. For additional detail from the *Senior Survey*, please contact Laura Hammond at 320-363-5452 or [lhammond@csbsju.edu](mailto:lhammond@csbsju.edu).

Past issues of the *Trends* research newsletter are available at <http://www.csbsju.edu/institutionalresearch/trends/>.