

# Trends

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## Spiritual and Religious Engagement among New Entering CSB/SJU Students

Spiritual development, vocational reflection, and the search for meaning are key mission commitments at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University. *Strategic Directions 2010* sets the colleges on a course to provide a nationally distinctive program for students of all faiths to engage deeply in spiritual inquiry and development. Our mission commitments and aspirations are consistent with national research findings about student interests. A recent study conducted by UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute indicated that the majority of new college students today express a strong interest in spirituality and describe spiritual development as a key life objective. The data that follow summarize the religious characteristics, commitments, engagement, and expectations of fall 2004 new entering CSB/SJU students.

### Student Profile

Similar to prior years, the overwhelming majority of new entering CSB/SJU students last fall identified a denominational religious affiliation. Nearly two-thirds said they were Catholic – a higher percentage than at Catholic colleges nationally, but significantly less than historic highs twenty years ago (when fully 9 in 10 new students were Catholic). Most of the remainder (60%) cited a Protestant religious affiliation (most often Lutheran). Only 1 in 20 new students cited no religious affiliation at all.

Nearly half of all new students last fall (51% at CSB and 41% at SJU) said the Catholic identity of the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University was an important factor influencing their decision to enroll – though only 17% cited it as a “very important” factor. The colleges' religious identity was more important to Catholic students than to non-Catholic students. Nearly two-thirds of all Catholic student said the religious identity of the college was somewhat or very important in their enrollment decision, compared to just 15% of non-Catholic students.

When given the opportunity to select from a list of adjectives that could be used to describe CSB/SJU, nearly 60% of all new students last fall chose “spiritual.” New CSB students were significantly more likely than their SJU colleagues to describe the colleges as spiritual (64% vs. 53%).

### Religious and Spiritual Commitment and Engagement

The 2004 CSB/SJU New Entering Student Survey included nearly 20 questions on spirituality and spiritual commitment and engagement. There were significant differences between men and women on nearly every measure. New Saint Benedict students, on average, indicated more interest in spirituality and spiritual development, more often described themselves as spiritual, and more frequently engaged in spiritual or religious activities than new Saint John's students.

#### Spirituality and Spiritual Interest

- Fully one-third of all new students in fall 2004 (41% at CSB and 26% at SJU) indicated they had a significant interest in spirituality. Nearly 40% said that the phrase “searching for meaning and purpose in life” described them to a great extent.
- Four in ten new CSB students, and more than one-quarter of all new SJU students, described opportunities for spiritual growth and development as very important expectations of their college experience.

Though there are wide gaps between women and men, most new students describe themselves as spiritual and spiritually engaged.

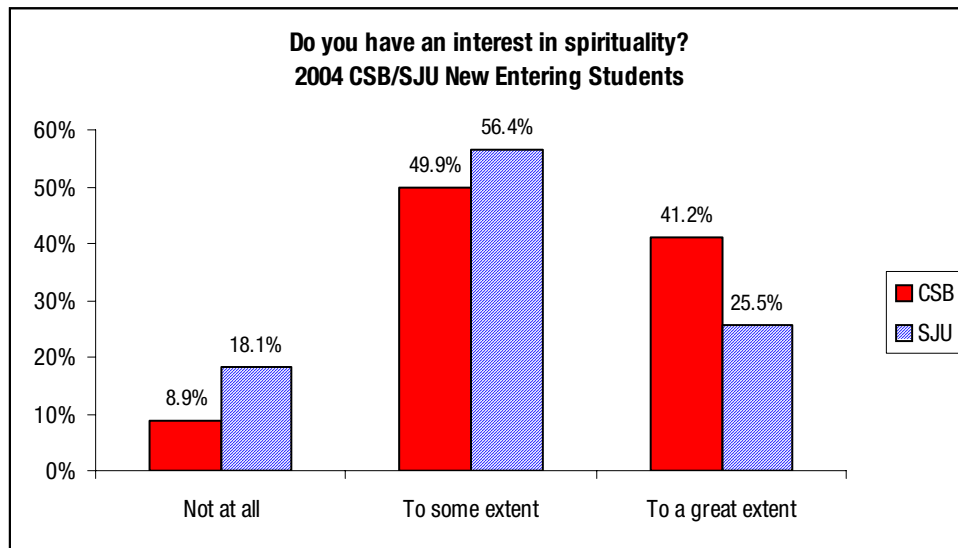
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- Half of all new entering students reported that integrating spirituality into their life was a very important or essential life objective. However, there were wide gaps among women and men. Nearly 60% of all new Saint Benedict students described spirituality as a key life objective, compared to just 40% of all new SJU students.



- More than 75% of all new students last fall indicated that there was at least some chance they would strengthen their religious beliefs and convictions during their time at CSB/SJU. Women were significantly more likely than men to expect their beliefs would be strengthened during college. Almost half (45%) of all new Saint Benedict students said that chances were “very good” their convictions would be strengthened while in college, compared to only 25% of all new Saint John’s students.

### The Spiritual or Reflective Self

- Most new entering CSB/SJU students viewed their spirituality and religiousness as similar to or better than their peers. Nearly 4 in 10 students (43% at CSB and 34% at SJU) described their spirituality as above average in relation to their peers.
- Catholic students were more likely than their non-Catholic colleagues to describe their spirituality or religiousness as above average. Nearly 6 in 10 non-Catholic students rated their religiousness as below average (compared to just 25% of Catholic students). Similarly, more than 40% of all non-Catholic students also rated their spirituality as below average (compared to only 21% of Catholic students).
- Fully one-third of all new Saint Benedict students, and one-quarter of all new Saint John’s students, described themselves as very engaged in self-reflection.

### Spiritual and Religious Engagement

- Almost 90% of all new entering students last fall reported they had at least occasionally attended religious or church services in the last year. More than half said they regularly attended worship services. Nearly 6 in 10 new CSB students, and half of all new SJU students, described themselves as regular church goers.
- Most new students also reported an active prayer life. The majority of new entering CSB and SJU students said they prayed at least weekly in the last year. Only 1 in 9 said they never prayed. New CSB students engaged in prayer more frequently than new SJU students. Almost 60% of new Saint Benedict students said they prayed several times a week or daily, compared to 38% of new Saint John’s students.
- Students typically not only prayed but also talked with others about religion or spirituality. Three quarters of all new SJU students, and almost 90% of all new CSB students, said they had occasionally or frequently discussed religion or spirituality with their family or friends in the last year.