

# Trends

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## Academic Challenge at CSB/SJU

In October 2006, the annual *CSB/SJU Senior Survey* was administered to Saint Benedict and Saint John's seniors. The survey provides students with an opportunity to describe and evaluate their experiences at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University. This fall, 554 students, representing 72% of the senior class, completed the online survey (a response rate higher than ever before).

Student responses on the *CSB/SJU Senior Survey* are grouped into nine indicators of academic and campus engagement. The first, level of academic challenge, measures the intensity and scope in which students engage their studies. Students were asked about the difficulty of their classes and the type of coursework emphasized. They were also asked about the amount of time they spent preparing for class. The data that follow summarize how students evaluated and described the level of academic challenge at CSB/SJU.

### Academic Challenge Indicators

- ❑ *Challenging Environment.* In fall 2006, nearly nine in ten senior students (88%) indicated that they frequently ("often" or "very often") felt challenged in their classes. Nearly three-quarters of all students described the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University as "academically challenging" when asked to select from a list of adjectives.

Saint Benedict students were statistically more likely than their peers at Saint John's to describe the schools as academically challenging and to indicate that they frequently felt challenged in class. Their effort in response to that challenge paid off in academic performance; the median college grade point average for Saint Benedict seniors is 0.14 points higher than for Saint John's seniors (3.37 vs. 3.23).

Students majoring in allied health fields were the most likely to indicate that they were frequently challenged; all students majoring in nursing, dietetics and nutrition reported that they frequently felt challenged in their classes. Additionally, fully nine in ten (94%) seniors in the natural science division responded that they frequently felt challenged in their classes. Seventy-seven percent of fine arts majors, 82% of accounting and management majors, 84% of humanities majors and 88% of social science majors said the same.

- ❑ *Reaching Instructors' Expectations.* Six in ten senior students (61%) indicated that they frequently worked harder than they thought they could in order to meet their instructors' expectations. This response is comparable to the response given by seniors at baccalaureate liberal arts colleges nationally (57%).

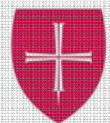
Saint Benedict students were much more likely than Saint John's students to indicate that they had frequently worked harder than they thought they could (72% vs. 48%). Similar differences between men and women are reported nationally.

- ❑ *Emphasizing Academics.* Eighty-one percent of CSB/SJU seniors (compared to 85% of seniors nationally) indicated that Saint Benedict and Saint John's strongly emphasize ("very much" or "quite a bit") spending significant amounts of time studying and working on academics. Saint Benedict

Saint Benedict and Saint John's students described and evaluated the level of academic challenge at CSB/SJU quite differently.

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COLLEGE OF  
Saint Benedict



Saint John's  
UNIVERSITY

students answered this question quite differently than Saint John’s students. While nearly 36% of women students indicated that the colleges emphasize academics “very much,” only 20% of men responded similarly.

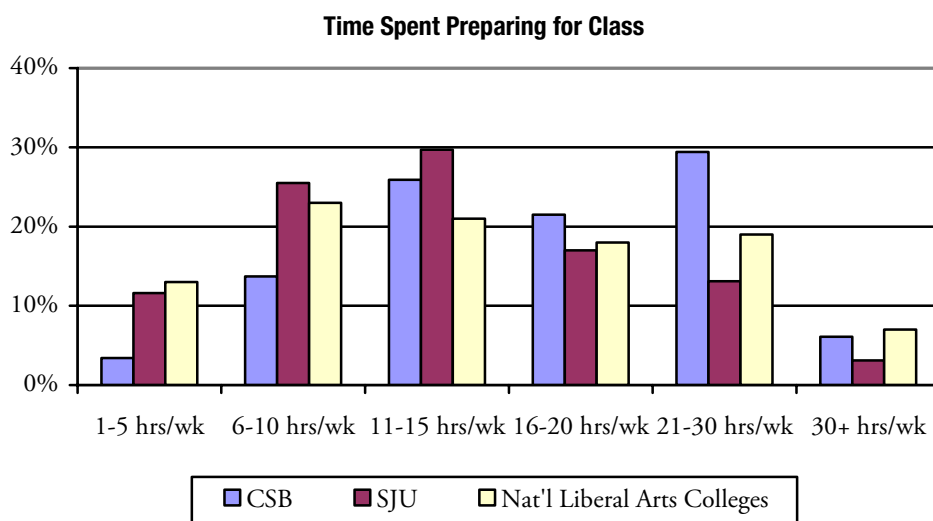
- ❑ *Academic Rigor.* Overall, nearly nine in ten (87%) of seniors agreed that the academic rigor of their experience was about right. However, women were statistically more likely to describe the academic rigor of the institution as “too demanding” whereas men were more likely to say that their academic experience was not demanding enough.

Fully two-thirds of all seniors described CSB/SJU as “intellectual.” Men and women were equally likely to select this adjective.

Seniors appear to be happy with the challenging academic experience at CSB/SJU; fully 86% of senior students rated their overall academic experience to be “excellent” or “good.” Even more students (93%) rated their academic experience in their major field of study to be “excellent” or “good.”

- ❑ *Time Spent Preparing for Class.* CSB/SJU academic advising recommends spending 2 hours on homework for every hour of class. For a typical student, this equates to about 25 hours of class preparation per week. Many senior students indicate that they spend substantially less time preparing for class than is recommended. Nearly 14% of Saint Benedict seniors and more than one-quarter of Saint John’s seniors indicated that they study ten hours per week or less. Still, CSB/SJU senior students spend more time preparing for class than most students nationally.

At CSB/SJU and nationally, women spent more hours per week preparing for classes than men.



### Gender Differences

College of Saint Benedict and Saint John’s University students describe and evaluate the level of academic challenge at CSB/SJU quite differently. All indicators of academic challenge show that collegiate women are systematically more engaged academically than their male peers. The causes of differential engagement levels and their effects on coeducational classrooms warrant further study.

Regardless of gender differences, the overwhelming majority of both men and women at CSB/SJU gave their overall academic experience a positive rating. While men and women may have different criteria for determining a challenging and quality academic experience, both genders appear to be satisfied with the experience provided at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John’s University.

For additional information about the 2006-2007 CSB/SJU Senior Survey or a complete summary of survey results please contact Kathryn Enger at 5452 ([kenger@csbsju.edu](mailto:kenger@csbsju.edu)). If you would like to read past issues of the *Trends* research newsletter, please visit our website at <http://www.csbsju.edu/institutionalresearch/trends/default.htm>.