

Trends

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Academic Challenge at CSB/SJU

In October 2007, 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, 493 students, representing 71% of the senior class, completed the online survey (a response rate nearly mirroring last year's highest ever response rate).

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 2007, seven in ten senior students indicated that they "often" felt challenged in their classes. Exactly two-thirds 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. When given that same list as new entering students, fewer (roughly 50%) described CSB and SJU as academically challenging.

Similar to results on the survey in year's past, Saint Benedict students were significantly 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 appears to have paid off in academic performance; the median college grade point average for Saint Benedict seniors is 0.19 points higher than for Saint John's seniors (3.45 vs. 3.26).

Fully eight in ten (85%) seniors in the natural science division responded that they frequently felt challenged in their classes. Students majoring in Biology were the most likely to indicate that they often felt challenged. Fifty-six percent of fine arts majors, 65% of accounting and management majors, 73% of humanities majors and 58% of social science majors also said they frequently were challenged.

- ❑ *Reaching Instructors' Expectations.* Nearly five in ten senior students (47%) indicated that they frequently worked harder than they thought they could in order to meet their instructors' expectations. This response is lower than the response given by seniors at baccalaureate liberal arts colleges nationally (56%). 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 (55% vs. 38%).
- ❑ *Emphasizing Academics.* Ninety-six percent of CSB/SJU seniors indicated that Saint Benedict and Saint John's emphasize ("very much" or "somewhat") spending significant amounts of time studying and working on academics. Saint Benedict students responded quite differently than Saint John's students. 57% of women indicated that the colleges emphasize academics "very much," compared to only 39% of men.

CSB and SJU students had different criteria for determining a challenging and quality academic experience; however, both appear to be satisfied with their experiences at CSB/SJU.

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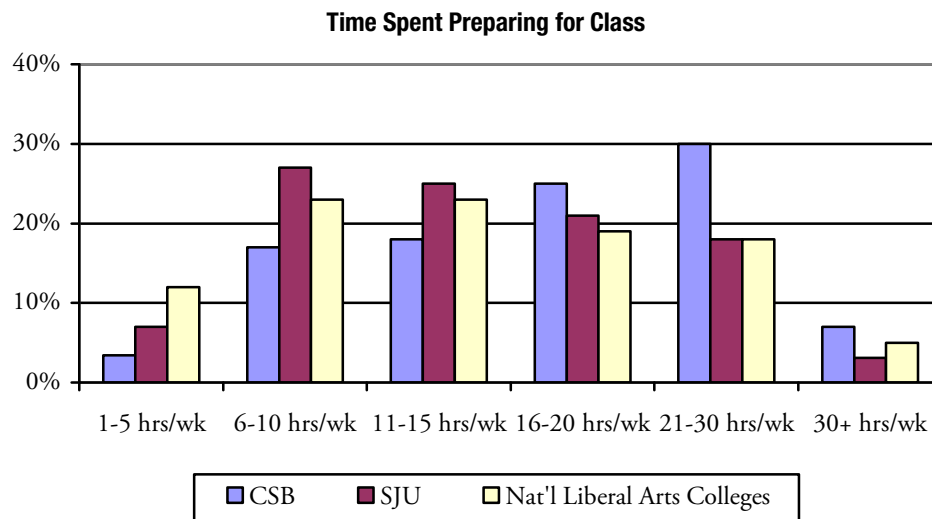
- ❑ *Academic Rigor.* Overall, just over eight in ten (81%) of seniors agreed that the academic rigor of their experience was about right. Men and women were equally likely to describe the academic rigor of the institution as “too demanding” (approximately 10% of both) whereas men were at least twice as likely to say that their academic experience was not demanding enough (10% of men versus 5% of women).

Six in ten seniors at both CSB and SJU described the campuses as “intellectual.” Men and women were almost equally likely to describe the colleges that way. As new entering students, only 50% of CSB and SJU seniors described CSB and SJU as intellectual.

Seniors appear to be happy with the challenging academic experience at CSB/SJU; fully 94% of senior students rated their overall academic experience to be “excellent” or “good.” An equal number of students 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 two 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 indicated that they spend substantially less time than that preparing for class. Twenty percent of Saint Benedict seniors and more than one-third of Saint John’s seniors indicated that they study ten or fewer hours per week on average.

Despite spending less time each week than is recommended for class preparation, CSB and SJU seniors have remarkably improved their study habits since entering college. Compared to their responses on the *2004 New Entering Student Survey*, in which nearly 75% of students reported studying less than one hour per day in high school, seniors have increased their study time significantly. Three-quarters of all CSB/SJU seniors are now studying at least one hour per day with the highest percentage (30%) indicating that they spend over 20 hours per week.



Gender Differences

College of Saint Benedict and Saint John’s University students described and evaluated 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. This trend is consistent with data CSB/SJU seniors provided as new entering students. During high school, SJU seniors were more likely to report being bored in class and were less likely than their CSB peers to study with other students. Additionally, St. John’s seniors were more than twice as likely as CSB seniors to report a high school grade-point average under 3.50 (13% vs. 5%).

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 had 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 *2007-2008 CSB/SJU Senior Survey* or a complete summary of survey results please contact Laura Hammond at 5452 (lhammond@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>.