

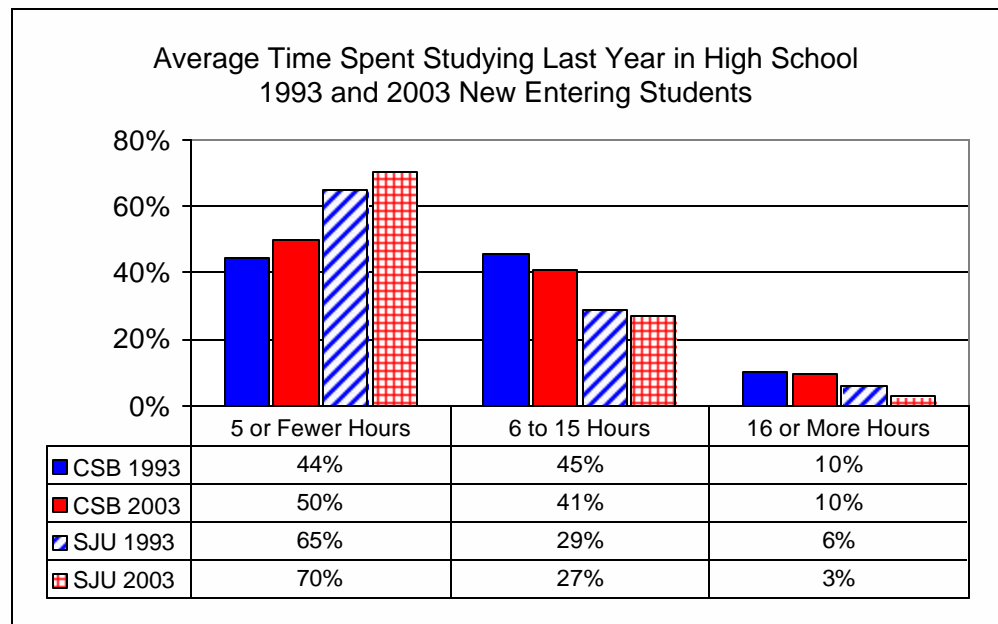
Most new college students do not arrive on campus with a well-developed academic or intellectual ethos

Academic Engagement of new CSB/SJU Students

Saint Benedict and Saint John's both enroll high achieving new students. They most often are among the top students in their high schools and are among the top college entrance exam scorers in the country. Nonetheless, a number of key indicators suggest they arrive without a well-developed academic or intellectual ethos. While they expect to excel academically in college, and are typically quite certain of their academic and intellectual ability, a significant number report having been only marginally engaged – or challenged – by their high school academic experience.

Academic Engagement Indicators

- ☑ *Study time remains low.* Both the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University enroll more high achieving students today than they did a decade ago. Though the achievement profile has leveled off in recent years, average ACT entrance exam scores and high school grade point averages of new CSB/SJU students increased by nearly 7% between fall 1993 and fall 2003. However, in spite of earning higher grades and better board scores, the average amount of time our new students spent studying in high school did not change over the ten year period. The typical new CSB/SJU student in both 1993 and 2003 studied five or fewer hours per week during their last year of high school. Fewer than 1 in 5 new students in either year reported regularly studying at least 10 hours per week. On the other hand, last fall, 16% of all new CSB students and a remarkable 40% of all new SJU students said they studied two or fewer hours per week in high school. Our students' study habits are similar to those of students attending highly selective Catholic colleges nationally. Nearly 4 in 10 new entering men attending selective Catholic colleges last fall, and 21% of new entering women, said they typically studied two or fewer hours per week during their last year of high school.



Not surprisingly, grades and amount of time allocated for study are related. Students who reported a high school grade average of "A" or higher were more than twice as likely as those with grades below an "A" to report studying at least ten hours each week (27% vs. 12%). New students who earned an "A" average or better also were about one-third less likely than their peers to study just five or fewer hours per week.

More hopefully, more than 90% of all new students reported that they studied at least occasionally with other students. And more than half said they had tutored another student while in high school.

- ☑ *Students report frequent boredom.* Similar to what new students reported a decade ago, fully one-third of all new CSB/SJU students in fall 2003 said they frequently were bored in their high school classes. The classroom experiences of new Saint Benedict and Saint John's students are similar to those reported by new students attending private colleges nationally. New SJU students were significantly more likely than their CSB peers to report frequent boredom in their high school classes (42% vs. 28%). In total, more than 95% of all new Saint Benedict and Saint John's students reported being at least occasionally bored in class during their senior year in high school.

Though many said they were often bored in their high school classes, many also reported they were frequently "overwhelmed by all I had to do." More than 90% of all new students reported being at least occasionally overwhelmed and nearly 30% said they frequently felt overwhelmed. Young women were fully twice as likely as young men to say they frequently felt overwhelmed in high school (38% vs. 19%).

- ☑ *Ready or not, most expect a positive and successful academic experience.* Nearly three-quarters of all new entering CSB/SJU students last fall said the academic reputation of the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University was a very important factor influencing their decision to enroll. Reflecting their success in high school, two-thirds of all new students report that they expected to achieve at least a "B" grade average while in college and a similar percentage describe their academic ability and intellectual self-confidence as above average or "in the top 10%" compared to their peers. However, hopes and aspirations notwithstanding, their commitment to or understanding of a rigorous college experience is mixed. Only 44% of new CSB/SJU students in fall 2003 described challenging academic courses as very important. And only 42% also indicated that chances were "very good" that they would regularly communicate with faculty.

Questions and Implications

The high school academic experiences reported by new entering CSB/SJU students are similar to experiences reported by new private college students nationally, including those attending selective postsecondary institutions. The data do not suggest that our students are not bright or capable, but rather that many of them frequently were not challenged or engaged in high school, which raises a number of important questions:

- What is our role and responsibility in creating a culture of academic engagement inside and outside of the classroom?
- How can we create a value for academic engagement and the life of the mind where it may not already exist?
- What insights can be gleaned from the seeming incongruity of academic success, frequent classroom boredom, and a feeling of being overwhelmed?

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