

Trends

A Monthly Research Newsletter

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CSB/SJU Student Profile: 25 Year Trends

New students at CSB/SJU today are more likely to indicate a desire for high levels of income after graduation than they were in 1975

The College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University have participated in the ACE-sponsored *American Freshman* survey for most of the last 25 years. The survey is the longest continuously running research project in American higher education and provides participating colleges with an opportunity to identify and evaluate significant changes in their students' characteristics, experiences, and expectations. The data that follows summarizes key changes and trends in the educational objectives of our students over the past 25 years. This issue of *Trends* represents the second in a three-part series that has already discussed changes in family characteristics. The final issue will examine the changing academic profile and characteristics of our students.

The Economics of Higher Education. Expanding labor market opportunities and rising economic returns have provided powerful incentives for college enrollment over the last 25 years. As more jobs have required a college degree, and as the economic rewards associated with the degree have increased, higher education participation rates have risen. The rising economic value of a college education appears to have altered, or at least re-focused, the educational objectives and aspirations expressed by new entering students – across the country and at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University. Reflecting national trends, a significantly greater percentage of new Saint Benedict's and Saint John's students today cite the opportunity to make more money and a desire to be very well-off financially as priority outcomes of their college education.

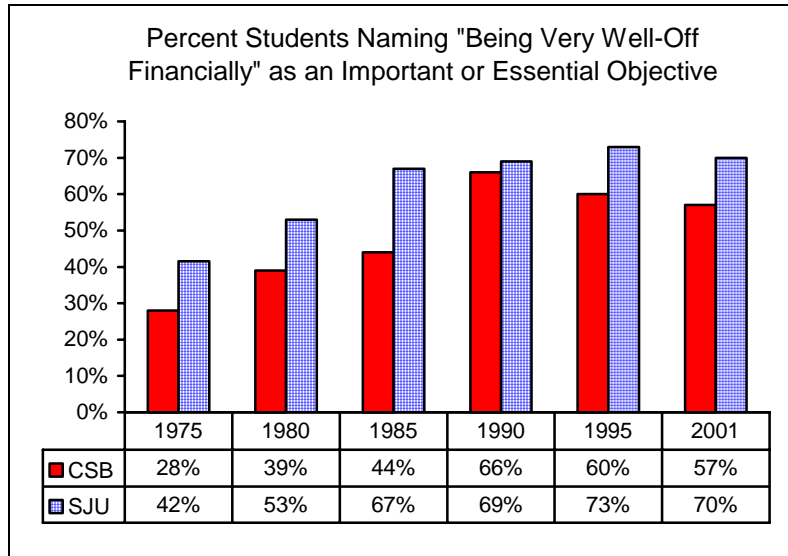
- Using a college education as a spingboard for employment always has been an important consideration for new students. In both fall 1976 and fall 2001, about 70% of all new entering Saint Benedict's and Saint John's students said that the opportunity to get a better job was a very important reason for going to college. Men and women have been equally likely to cite improved employment opportunities as an important reason for pursuing a college education.
- Almost certainly responding to economic signals, CSB and SJU students today are much more focused on the economic rewards associated with their college education than they were twenty-five years ago. In fall 2001, nearly two-thirds of all new students at Saint Benedict's and Saint John's said that the ability to make more money was an important reason for going to college – compared to just 40% of all new students in fall 1976. Though both men and women today are significantly more likely to point to the importance of money than they were a quarter century ago, men historically have been more likely than women to stress the money-making opportunities associated with a college education.
- Students' interest today in the economic returns associated with their college education does not appear to have come at the expense of their interest in a general education. Almost three-quarters of all new students this fall indicated that the ability to gain a general education and appreciation of ideas was an important reason for going to college, nearly identical to responses from new students in fall 1976. And half of all new CSB/SJU students in fall 2001 said the opportunity to become a more cultured person was an important factor influencing their decision to go to college, compared to just 37% twenty-five years earlier.

Changing Aspirations. As the economic value of a college education has changed, so too have our students' post-college aspirations. The number of students indicating a desire to be very well-off financially has risen dramatically since 1975, while the importance of other non-financial life objectives has declined.

- Nearly two-thirds (63%) of all new entering students at Saint Benedict's and Saint John's last fall indicated that being very well-off financially was an important or essential life objective. Raising a family is the only life objective that consistently ranks higher than financial well-being among new students. Men were more likely than women to point to the importance of financial well-being. Almost 70% of all new entering SJU students said that being very well-off financially was important or essential, compared to only 57% of all new CSB students. Students today are significantly more likely to identify financial well-being as a key life objective than they were twenty-five years ago. In 1975, only 41% of all new SJU students, and just 28% of all new CSB students, identified "being very well-off financially" as an important or essential life objective.

Prepared by Jon McGee, Vice President for Institutional Planning, Research and Communication and Shane Hoefler, Intern

- Though new students today continue to value the opportunity to gain a general education and to become more cultured, it is not altogether clear how or if they link those opportunities to important life objectives:
 - In 1975, fully three-quarters of all new entering students at Saint Benedict’s and Saint John’s said that developing a “meaningful philosophy of life” was an important or essential life objective. By fall 2001, fewer than half of all new students (47%) responded similarly.
 - In 1975, 73% of all new students said that “helping others in difficulty” was a key life objective, compared to 65% in 2001.
 - Though more new students today arrive having participated in community service than did students twenty-five years ago, they are considerably less interested or engaged in larger scale political change and action. Only 30% of all new students last fall identified political engagement as an important or essential objective, compared to 44% in 1975.



Questions and Issues

The changing objectives and aspirations of new students attending the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John’s University by and large mirror changes nationally. These trends raise several important questions for consideration at CSB/SJU:

1. Is the concern or interest in financial security real, and, if so, how does it manifest itself inside and outside of the classroom and in student choices?
2. Are students less idealistic than they were a generation ago, or are they simply more focused on or aware of the demands of an increasingly market-driven world?
3. How do Saint Benedict’s and Saint John’s reconcile both their liberal arts values and their Catholic and Benedictine values with the values of a more market-driven generation of students? How do we insure that our core values remain important and relevant to this new generation of students?

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