

Memorandum

TO: Members of the Saint Mary's College Community

FROM: Mark Figueroa, Director of Institutional Research

DATE: February 2, 2007

SUBJECT: CIRP "Freshman" Survey, Fall 2006

In an effort to begin to better understand our incoming student population, the survey results from our participation in the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) 2006 "Freshman" survey are presented here. What follows is a summary of some variables that stood out when looking at the differences between our students' responses compared to students at selected peer institutions, highly selective (based on a average SAT of 1075 or higher) Catholic colleges, and all Catholic colleges who participated in the survey. Additionally, comparisons by gender within SMC's student population are presented where differences were found.

The CIRP "Freshman" survey is an instrument utilized to collect a broad array of information about first-time, first-year students at four-year institutions. This year's administration represents responses from over 271,000 students from 393 institutions. Items surveyed include : demographic characteristics, expectations of the college experience, secondary school experiences, degree goals and career plans, college finances, attitudes, values, and life goals, reasons for attending college. (A copy of the survey instrument is included at the end of this memo). For more detailed information regarding the survey and methodology, please visit the Higher Education Research Institute website at: http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri/cirp_po.html

For this year's survey administration, we were able to select a "Peer Group". Our selected "Peer Group" includes: Loyola Marymount University, Pepperdine University, Santa Clara University, University of Portland, University of San Diego, University of San Francisco.

Demographic Characteristics

Overall, the data reveals that St. Mary's freshman class of Fall 2006 is very similar to that at other Catholic colleges (low, mid and highly selective) and the institutions in our selected peer group. Most of the students (St. Mary's 98.9%, others 98.7%) entered college immediately following graduation from high school.

Ethnicity

St. Mary's is more diverse than other Catholic colleges (Table 1). St. Mary's has a larger percent of black students than our peer group and selective Catholic institutions, but a smaller percent than all Catholic colleges. St. Mary's also has a larger percent of Mexican American and Latino students than all other Catholic institutions and the institutions from our peer group, but a lower percent of Asian Americans than at our peer institutions.

Table 1

You are:	SMC	Peer Group	Highly Selective Catholic	All Catholic
White	66%	76.6%	89.2%	77.9%
Black	5.5%	4.7%	3.3%	8.5%
American Indian	1.9%	2.7%	1.5%	1.7%
Asian American	10.5%	12.9%	3.8%	3.9%
Native Hawaiian	5.2%	3.6%	0.9%	1.1%
Mexican American	18.5%	8.7%	1.5%	4.9%
Puerto Rican	0.6%	0.4%	1.4%	2.5%
Other Latino	9.4%	4.4%	2.9%	4.7%
Other	10.2%	5.4%	2.6%	3.5%

High School Academic Performance

A larger percentage of SMC students (54.9%) reported (Table 2) having average high school grades of B or B+ , as compared to our selected peer group, highly selective Catholic colleges and all Catholic colleges, 24.9%, 40.7%, and 44.8%, respectively. In contrast, a higher percentage of students from the aforementioned comparison groups reported greater percentages of average high school grades of A/A+ or A-.

Table 2

What was your average grade in high school?				
	SMC	Peer Group	Highly Selective Catholic	All Catholic
A or A+	12.3%	27.5%	23.1%	19.2%
A-	18.6%	35.3%	30.6%	24.4%
B+	22.1%	22.7%	24.1%	23.7%
B	32.8%	12.2%	16.6%	21.1%
B-	9.0%	1.9%	4.2%	7.0%

Family Background

A majority of students (SMC and 3 comparison groups) attended schools within 500 miles from home. St. Mary's had a larger population of students coming from over 500 miles away (St. Mary's 19.5%, All Catholic colleges 8%). However, students from our selected peer institutions were twice as likely to live over 500 miles from home (SMC 19.5%, Peer group 41.1%).

A large percent (45.6%) of St. Mary's students reported that their family income (Table 3) is above \$100,000 a year. However, nearly one in four (23.5%) SMC students reported having family income's below \$49,000/year, compared to 13.6% for our peer institutions and 17.9% for highly selective Catholic colleges. By comparison, 21% of SMC students, compared to 31.4% of our peer group student, reported family incomes above \$200,000 versus 16.9% for highly selective Catholic colleges and 10.8% for all Catholic colleges.

Table 3

What is your best estimate of your parents' total last year? Consider income for all sources before taxes.				
	SMC	Peer Group	Highly Selective Catholic	All Catholic
Less than \$49,000	23.5%	13.6%	17.9%	29.1%
\$50,000 to \$99,000	30.9%	23.9%	33.7%	35.8%
\$100,000 to \$149,000	15.4%	20.8%	20.8%	16.7%
\$150,000 to \$199,000	9.2%	10.3%	10.6%	7.7%
\$200,000 to \$249,000	4.6%	7.4%	5.5%	3.8%
\$250,000 or more	16.4%	24%	11.4%	7%

When looking at their parent's education (Table 4) there were some slight differences between SMC students and students from our peer group. Compared to our peer group, fewer students from St. Mary's had parents who had undergrad or graduate degrees.

Table 4

What is the highest level of formal education obtained by your parents?				
	SMC	Peer Group	Highly Selective Catholic	All Catholic
Father				
College Degree	24.9%	32.4%	32.9%	27.7%
Some graduate school	3.1%	3.8%	3.1%	2.1%
Graduate degree	23.7%	35.3%	28.9%	20.0%
Mother	SMC	Peer Group	Highly Selective Catholic	All Catholic
College Degree	29.6%	37.4%	38.2%	31.3%
Some graduate school	3.0%	5.0%	3.8%	2.7%
Graduate degree	19.2%	24.5%	21.9%	16.3%

Approximately 60% of St. Mary's students reported (Table 5) coming from mostly white or completely white neighborhoods and/or high schools, lower than rates for our peer group, highly selective Catholic colleges and all Catholic colleges.

Table 5

How would you describe the racial composition of the:				
	SMC	Peer Group	Highly Selective Catholic	All Catholic
High School you last attended				
Mostly White	52.6%	57.2%	66.8%	57.4%
Completely White	6.1%	5.7%	12.0%	10.3%
Neighborhood where you grew up				
Mostly White	47.6%	55.5%	54.9%	48.9%
Completely White	15.0%	16.7%	29.2%	24.4%

There were differences among students at SMC and those at our peer institutions with regard to courses taken in high school. More males at SMC and students from peer institutions reported having taken two physical science classes (SMC: males 62.2%, females 51.3, total 55.8% and peers 69.1%) and two biological science classes (SMC: males 44.8%, females 38.8, total 41.3% and peers institutions 53.9%). There were gender differences among students at SMC on two measures, one feeling overwhelmed (M 21.3%, F 45.4%) and second, asking a teacher for advice outside of the classroom (M 23.5%, F 34.7%).

Expectations of the College Experience

A high percentage of St. Mary’s students rated their skills (Table 6) as above average on a number of questions. Other than in response to mathematical ability, slightly more St. Mary’s students rated themselves above average than students from all Catholic school on a number of measures. However, students from our peer group and the highly selective schools were slightly more likely than students from SMC to rate themselves above average or in the highest ten percent on these measures.

Table 6

Student rated self "above average" or "highest 10%" as compared with the average person of his/her age in:				
	SMC	Peer Group	Highly Selective Catholic	All Catholic
Academic ability	65.4%	84.9%	74.0%	63.2%
Cooperativeness	74.7%	78.9%	77.6%	74.9%
Creativity	58.0%	60.3%	54.0%	53.1%
Drive to achieve	76.6 %	84.0%	76.8%	74.1%
Emotional health	57.3%	63.6%	58.1%	53.6%
Leadership ability	65.9%	69.6%	63.7%	60.2%
Mathematical ability	35.2%	52.0%	42.7%	37.2%
Physical health	60.1%	64.9%	61.2%	56.4%
Self-confidence (intellectual)	63.8%	66.6%	59.0%	55.5%
Self-confidence (social)	56.0%	59.6%	52.2%	51.6%
Self-understanding	59.6%	66.0%	55.4%	53.6%
Understanding of others	71.9%	73.6%	68.5%	67.4%
Writing ability	48.2%	57.1%	50.9%	45.9%

College finances, life goals, attitudes, and values

While most students from SMC and peer institutions reported (Table 7) similar plans to pay for college there were some slight differences. Male students at SMC were almost twice as likely to report having no concerns about financing college (No Concern: SMC M 48.3%, F 28.6%).

There were several measures that students reported that there was a good chance they would accomplish while in college.

Table 7

Student estimates chances are "very good" that he/she will:				
	SMC	Peer Group	Highly Selective Catholic	All Catholic
Get a job to help pay for college expenses	41.5%	43.7%	42.7%	44.4%
Make at least a "B" average	51.5%	69.5%	65.1%	63.4%
Be satisfied with your college	54.7%	66.6%	59.7%	53.7%
Participate in volunteer or community service work	35.8%	41.5%	36.2%	31.4%
Socialize with someone of another racial/ethnic group	68.8%	77.8%	63.2%	62.4%
Participate in student clubs/groups	48.8%	53.8%	51.5%	45.6%
Participate in a study abroad program	47.4%	49.6%	39.5%	29.9%

Over half of all students reported (Table 8) that to become an authority in their field, to obtain recognition in their field, to influence social values, to raise a family, to be very well off financially, help others in difficulty, and to improve their understanding of other cultures and countries as being very important. Men and women responded similarly to most questions however, data from three questions reveal some differences of concern among students at SMC.

Table 8

Objectives considered to be "essential" or "very important"						
	SMC Male	SMC Female	SMC Total	Peer Group	Highly Selective Catholic	All Catholic
Being very well off financially	80.3%	69.0%	73.5%	70.2%	72.2%	76.4%
Helping others who are in difficulty	64.2%	74.6%	70.5%	72.0%	69.9%	70.7%
Becoming successful in a business of my own	61.3%	38.2%	47.5%	48.2%	39.8%	41.6%

Over 50% of St. Mary's students agreed that abortion should be legal, that same sex marriage should be legal, that the federal government should control the sale of hand guns, that only volunteers should serve in the armed forces, that national health care needs to cover the costs for everyone, that through hard work everyone can succeed in America, and that the chief benefits of college is to increase your earning power (Table 9). These findings were similar for students from all institutions.

Table 9

Student agrees "strongly" or "somewhat"						
	SMC Males	SMC Females	SMC Total	Peer Group	Highly Selective Catholic	All Catholic
The death penalty should be abolished	30.3%	41.9%	37.1%	41.1%	41.5%	37.9%
Marijuana should be legalized	48.3%	33.8%	39.8%	36.9%	35.1%	33.1%
It is important to have laws prohibiting homosexual relationships	30.1%	11.3%	19.1%	20.2%	21.6%	22.5%
Racial discrimination is no longer a major problem in America	21.9%	11.2%	15.6%	16.9%	17.1%	17.4%
Realistically, an individual can do little to bring about changes in our society	30.3%	13.3%	20.4%	20.4%	22.2%	24.8%
Same-sex couples should have the right to legal marital status	59.9%	71.4%	66.7%	63.6%	64.0%	63.1%
Federal military spending should be increased	33.6%	21.5%	26.6%	24.6%	33.0%	33.9%
The federal government should do more to control the sale of handguns	62.5%	84.4%	75.0%	76.4%	78.3%	79.0%
The federal government is not doing enough to control environmental pollution	70.4%	82.1%	77.2%	79.9%	78.4%	78.0%
Undocumented immigrants should be denied access to public education	48.6%	32.7%	39.3%	42.3%	46.9%	45.1%
Colleges have the right to ban extreme speakers from campus	46.2%	31.4%	37.8%	46.2%	43.2%	41.7%
The chief benefit of a college education is that it increases one's earning power	69.0%	50.5%	58.5%	59.7%	63.2%	66.9%

The major differences were among males and female students at SMC. Female students at SMC reported (Table 10) being more liberal and their political beliefs are reflected in their response differences to a number of questions.

Table 10

How would you characterize your political views?						
	SMC Males	SMC Females	SMC Total	Peer Group	Highly Selective Catholic	All Catholic
Far left	2.2%	1.0%	1.5%	1.4%	1.9%	1.9%
Liberal	20.3%	42.7%	33.3%	29.8%	25.9%	26.1%
Middle-of-the-road	45.7%	35.4%	39.7%	40.4%	45.0%	47.3%
Conservative	31.2%	18.8%	23.9%	27.0%	25.7%	23.2%
Far right	0.7%	2.1%	1.5%	1.3%	1.5%	1.5%

Reasons for Attending College

The top reasons students chose to attend college were because of their parents, to get a good job, to gain a general education, to be a more cultured person, to make money, to learn about their interests, to prepare for graduate school and/or for a specific career. Two- third of St. Mary's and students from all the institutions reported that they were attending their first choice school. St. Mary's students reported applying to more schools than other students (23% applied to seven to ten schools). Although slightly lower percentages than students from peer institutions, nearly half of SMC students reported that the reputation of the institution (56.3% SMC, 69.9% peers) and a campus visit (41.5% SMC, 55.5% peers) influenced their decision to attend their institution.

A copy of the actual survey instrument follows. If you have any questions regarding the data or would like to obtain additional data as you review the instrument, please do not hesitate to contact Mark Figueroa at mfiguero@stmarys-ca.edu or x4754.