

Memorandum

TO: Members of the Saint Mary's College Community

FROM: Mary McCall, Interim Director of Institutional Research

DATE: March 30, 2009

SUBJECT: CIRP "Freshman" Survey, Fall 2008

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) 2008 "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 those from students at selected peer institutions—highly selective (based on a average SAT of 1075 or higher) Catholic colleges, and all other 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 400,000 incoming students from over 700 institutions. The results that follow represent responses from SMC (n=589), highly selective Catholic colleges (n=13,210), and all other Catholic colleges (n=20,619).

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, and reasons for attending college. For more detailed information regarding the survey and methodology, please visit the Higher Education Research Institute website at: <http://www.heri.ucla.edu/>.

Demographic Characteristics

Overall, the data reveals that the SMC freshman class of Fall 2008 is similar in many ways to students at other Catholic colleges, but with some marked differences that will be discussed further. Most of the students (SMC 99%, all others 98.5%) entered college immediately following graduation from high school.

Ethnicity

One outstanding difference between SMC and other schools is SMC is much more racially/ethnically diverse than other Catholic colleges (Table 1). SMC has a larger percent of African American/Black students than highly selective Catholic institutions, but a smaller percent than all other Catholic colleges. SMC also has a larger percent of Mexican American/Chicano and Latino students than all other Catholic institutions, as well as a larger percent of Asian American/Asian students. Additionally, 12% of SMC's incoming students have a native language other than English, as compared to 4.8% at highly selective Catholic colleges and 6.9% at all other Catholic colleges.

Table 1

	SMC	Highly Selective Catholic	All Catholic
White	61.2%	86.8%	74.0%
African American/Black	6.3%	4.1%	13.8%
American Indian/Alaska Native	3.7%	1.5%	1.7%
Asian American/Asian	10.1%	4.7%	5.0%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	5.4%	1.2%	1.6%
Mexican American/Chicano	19.5%	2.8%	4.5%
Puerto Rican	0.7%	1.2%	2.0%
Other Latino	9.0%	3.7%	4.0%
Other	8.0%	3.0%	3.5%

High School Academic Performance

A larger percentage of SMC students (54.1%) reported (Table 2) having average high school grades of B or B+, as compared to highly selective Catholic colleges (42.7%) and all Catholic colleges (44.3%). 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	Highly Selective Catholic	All Catholic
A or A+	11.5%	21.7%	19.1%
A-	20.9%	29.4%	24.4%
B+	24.9%	24.3%	22.9%
B	29.2%	18.4%	21.4%
B-	8.4%	4.4%	7.1%

Family Background

A majority of all students surveyed (SMC, highly selective Catholic colleges, and all other Catholic colleges) attended schools within 500 miles from home. SMC had a larger population of students coming from over 500 miles away (SMC 17.8%, highly selective Catholic colleges 13.6%, all Catholic colleges 11.5%).

A large percent (42.7%) of SMC students reported that their family income (Table 3) is above \$100,000 /year. However, nearly one in three (28.7%) SMC students reported having a family income below \$49,000/year, similar to students from all other Catholic colleges (30.6%), but higher than students from highly selective Catholic colleges (19.8%). By comparison, 20.4% of SMC students reported family incomes above \$200,000 versus 14.4% for highly selective Catholic colleges and 9.7% 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	Highly Selective Catholic	All Catholic
Less than \$49,000	28.7%	19.8%	30.6%
\$50,000 to \$99,000	28.4%	35.0%	35.2%
\$100,000 to \$149,000	14.1%	20.4%	16.6%
\$150,000 to \$199,000	8.2%	10.5%	7.8%
\$200,000 to \$249,000	5.5%	5.2%	3.7%
\$250,000 or more	14.9%	9.2%	6.0%

When looking at their parent's education (Table 4) there were some slight differences between SMC students and students from the other colleges. Compared to highly selective Catholic colleges, fewer students from SMC had parents who had undergrad or graduate degrees.

Table 4

What is the highest level of formal education obtained by your parents?			
	SMC	Highly Selective Catholic	All Catholic
Father			
College Degree	24.1%	32.1%	26.9%
Some graduate school	3.0%	2.5%	2.1%
Graduate degree	23.6%	25.0%	19.2%
Mother			
College Degree	28.1%	37.4%	31.9%
Some graduate school	3.8%	3.2%	2.5%
Graduate degree	16.1%	19.8%	16.4%

Approximately 57% of SMC students reported (Table 5) coming from mostly White or completely White neighborhoods and/or high schools, lower than rates for highly selective Catholic colleges (79%) and all Catholic colleges (68%).

Table 5

How would you describe the racial composition of the:			
	SMC	Highly Selective Catholic	All Catholic
High School you last attended			
Completely non-White	2.6%	1.4%	4.1%
Mostly non-White	11.3%	5.9%	11.2%
Roughly half non-White	30.9%	16.7%	19.1%
Mostly White	49.8%	65.0%	56.5%
Completely White	5.3%	11.1%	9.2%

Neighborhood where you grew up			
Completely non-White	5.4%	2.4%	6.8%
Mostly non-White	14.8%	5.9%	10.6%
Roughly half non-White	21.2%	10.1%	12.3%
Mostly White	48.3%	54.5%	47.4%
Completely White	10.3%	27.2%	22.9%

Expectations of the College Experience

A high percentage of SMC students rated their skills (Table 6) as above average on a number of questions. Other than in response to overall academic ability, mathematical ability, and physical health, more SMC students rated themselves above average than students from highly selective Catholic college and all other Catholic colleges on a number of measures.

Table 6

Student rated self "above average" or "highest 10%" as compared with the average person of his/her age in:			
	SMC	Highly Selective Catholic	All Catholic
Academic ability	62.7%	71.7%	65.4%
Cooperativeness	80.0%	77.2%	75.1%
Creativity	58.9%	53.5%	53.8%
Drive to achieve	79.7%	76.5%	76.2%
Emotional health	59.2%	55.5%	53.4%
Leadership ability	65.4%	63.5%	61.5%
Mathematical ability	32.6%	42.5%	39.4%
Physical health	58.8%	59.3%	56.8%
Self-confidence (intellectual)	61.7%	58.3%	57.6%
Self-confidence (social)	57.7%	51.3%	52.0%
Self-understanding	65.6%	57.1%	56.6%
Spirituality	46.3%	38.6%	40.0%
Understanding of others	76.2%	68.8%	67.2%
Writing ability	50.3%	50.1%	46.6%

College Finances

Most students from SMC and the other Catholic colleges (both highly selective and all others) reported similar plans to pay for college (i.e.—family resources, personal resources, and financial aid). As compared to students from highly selective Catholic colleges and all other Catholic colleges, though, SMC students reported the highest levels of concern regarding their ability to finance their college education. 16.9% of all SMC students (12.7% of men and 19.2% of women) reported that they have a

“major” concern regarding college finances and are not sure they will have enough funds to complete college, as compared to 9.5% at highly selective Catholic colleges and 11.9% at all other Catholic colleges.

Life Goals, Attitudes, and Values

A high percentage of SMC students rated their values regarding tolerance and openness (Table 7) as above average. In all of these measures, SMC students reported higher levels of agreement than students from both the highly selective Catholic colleges and all other Catholic colleges.

Table 7

Student rated self "above average" or "highest 10%" as compared with the average person of his/her age in:			
	SMC	Highly Selective Catholic	All Catholic
Ability to see the world from someone else’s perspective	74.9%	64.7%	62.4%
Tolerance of others with different beliefs	82.8%	73.8%	71.1%
Openness to having my own views challenged	65.1%	56.5%	56.1%
Ability to discuss and negotiate controversial issues	71.0%	62.0%	60.1%
Ability to work cooperatively with diverse people	88.0%	79.1%	77.5%

There were several goals that students reported that there was a good chance they would accomplish while in college. Interestingly, though more SMC students reported financial concerns, fewer reported they would be likely to get a job to help pay for expenses. Fewer SMC students, compared to other students, expected they would achieve at least a B average.

Table 8

Student estimates chances are "very good" that he/she will:			
	SMC	Highly Selective Catholic	All Catholic
Get a job to help pay for college expenses	47.7%	52.7%	52.2%
Make at least a "B" average	53.9%	67.2%	65.7%
Be satisfied with your college	61.5%	61.0%	57.6%

Participate in volunteer or community service work	42.2%	38.3%	33.8%
Socialize with someone of another racial/ethnic group	75.8%	65.1%	63.4%
Participate in student clubs/groups	52.1%	51.9%	46.5%
Participate in a study abroad program	51.8%	40.9%	32.2%

Some interesting gender differences were found in several questions related to life goals/objectives that students have for themselves. In the areas of professional development, personal development and civic concerns, men and women rated them differently in terms of importance (Table 9).

Table 9

Objectives considered to be "essential" or "very important"					
	SMC Male	SMC Female	SMC Total	Highly Selective Catholic	All Catholic
Becoming an authority in my field	61.1%	54.1%	56.5%	57.9%	60.5%
Obtaining recognition in my field	63.4%	53.6%	57.0%	56.1%	58.7%
Influencing social values	56.2%	49.0%	51.5%	48.4%	48.5%
Developing a meaningful philosophy of life	66.8%	55.5%	59.5%	51.7%	50.4%
Improving my understanding of other countries and cultures	56.8%	63.4%	61.1%	54.7%	52.1%
Adopting "green" practices to protect the environment	44.3%	58.4%	53.5%	47.0%	45.3%

There were also interesting similarities and differences between SMC students and other college students in terms of social attitudes and beliefs. In areas that range from attitudes about homosexual relationships and rights to the role of government and law in the courts, gun control, armed service and environmental concerns, as well as abortion, SMC students, and in some cases, more women than men, generally reveal more liberal attitudes and beliefs (Table 10). This overall gender difference can be found in terms of self-reported broad political views, where there were major differences among male and female students at SMC. Female students at SMC reported (Table 11) being more liberal and their political beliefs are reflected in their response differences to a number of the above questions.

Table 10

Student agrees "strongly" or "somewhat"					
	SMC Males	SMC Females	SMC Total	Highly Selective Catholic	All Catholic
Abortion should be legal	62.1%	61.4%	61.7%	54.0%	51.6%
The death penalty should be abolished	41.4%	41.1%	41.2%	40.9%	37.9%
Marijuana should be legalized	48.0%	41.6%	43.9%	40.9%	38.2%
It is important to have laws prohibiting homosexual relationships	24.3%	12.2%	16.4%	21.5%	22.9%
Racial discrimination is no longer a major problem in America	25.6%	15.1%	18.8%	19.0%	19.2%
Realistically, an individual can do little to bring about changes in our society	30.2%	19.8%	23.5%	24.1%	27.2%
Same-sex couples should have the right to legal marital status	67.3%	79.5%	75.1%	67.3%	66.5%
Federal military spending should be increased	26.4%	20.4%	22.6%	27.3%	28.6%
The federal government should do more to control the sale of handguns	64.0%	76.3%	71.9%	74.1%	75.8%
The federal government is not doing enough to control environmental pollution	76.5%	82.5%	80.4%	78.9%	79.1%
Undocumented immigrants should be denied access to public education	40.3%	37.8%	38.7%	49.0%	47.2%
Colleges have the right to ban extreme speakers from campus	41.3%	35.7%	37.7%	44.4%	42.9%
Addressing global warming should be a federal priority	71.2%	79.8%	76.7%	75.1%	75.8%

Table 11

How would you characterize your political views?					
	SMC Males	SMC Females	SMC Total	Highly Selective Catholic	All Catholic
Far left	2.0%	3.6%	3.0%	2.5%	2.5%
Liberal	30.3%	43.0%	38.5%	29.7%	29.3%
Middle-of-the-road	42.8%	36.6%	38.8%	42.5%	45.7%
Conservative	22.9%	15.2%	17.9%	23.5%	20.8%
Far right	2.0%	1.7%	1.8%	1.9%	1.7%

Reasons for Attending College

The top reasons that students reported as influencing their decision to attend a particular college were: parents, the college's reputation (academic and social), financial aid, to prepare for graduate school, the size of the college, and a visit to the campus. Fifty-four percent of SMC students and 61.5% of students from all the other colleges reported that they were attending their first choice school. SMC students reported applying to more schools than other students (32.7% applied to seven or more schools vs. 15-20% of students at other schools).

If you have any questions regarding the data presented here or would like to obtain additional data from this survey instrument, please do not hesitate to contact Mary McCall at mmccall@stmarys-ca.edu or x4754.