

The College Student Survey (CSS) developed by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA and administered through the Cooperative Institutional Research Program was designed to permit individual campus across the country to conduct follow-up studies of their students. Saint Mary's College has participated in the instrument on a biennial basis since 1999, surveying students in their sophomore and senior years. The survey covers a variety of areas, including:

- Satisfaction with the college experience;
- Student involvement;
- Student values, attitudes, and goals;
- Degree aspirations and career plans;
- Use of campus services, physical facilities, and computing resources.

In addition, the CSS contains optional questions which the College uses to gather information on campus-specific topics. For example, optional questions were used in 2001 to evaluate student awareness of and satisfaction with the Leaders of a New Indiana (LONI) Project funded by the Lilly Endowment. Typically, however, items solicit perceptions of unique College experiences (intellectual life, religious vitality, cultural diversity, etc.)

Consistent use of this national, externally-validated, norm-referenced instrument permits The College to analyze changes in student perceptions over time, both between cohorts and within students' academic careers. We are able to chart the changes in students perceived abilities and skills as they move from their sophomore to senior year in a wide variety of cognitive and affective areas.

One precaution should be taken in analyzing these results. Since this questionnaire is completed on a voluntary basis, response rates in some survey administration years have been quite low. In general, we obtain higher response rates among seniors than sophomores—in part due to the challenges of administering such an instrument to students in study abroad who are primarily of sophomore standing. Given this limitation, caution should be taken in interpreting anomalous results in any one year or cohort. We can place greatest confidence in responses that are consistent over time.