

Results from annual Mount Mercy Longitudinal Study on Student Growth

2022–2023

This year’s study focused on whether Mount Mercy students developed in their ability to demonstrate reflective judgment. This outcome was assessed using an instrument that assesses students’ growth in cognitive complexity (a proxy measure for reflective judgment). To accomplish this task, all incoming undergraduate students were contacted and asked to complete a pretest measure assessing their precollege (i.e., pre-Mount Mercy) levels of cognitive complexity. Of the 324 undergraduates who started their studies at Mount Mercy in the fall 2021 term, pretest data were collected from 219 students (68% of the entering class). Students who were still enrolled at Mount Mercy at the end of the spring 2022 term were asked to complete the parallel cognitive complexity posttest and a battery of student experiences survey questions. After eliminating those who withdrew from the university, a total of 103 students completed all measures (a response rate of 57%). Satisfaction with teaching and advising were the strongest predictors of students’ gains in cognitive complexity. Satisfaction with the overall college experience also predicted gains in cognitive complexity, though the association was only marginally significant ($p < 0.10$). Thus, the results of this study suggest that net of student background characteristics (e.g., race, sex, first-generation and transfer status, and a pretest measure of the outcome), students’ satisfaction with certain experiences (teaching, library, and the institution overall) was associated with growth in their cognitive complexity/reflective judgment.

Highlights from 2022–23	Notable patterns and examples
Students’ growth in the Mount Mercy goal of reflective judgment was assessed.	Students were followed from the beginning to the end of their first year at Mount Mercy. Respondents exhibited gains in cognitive complexity (a proxy to estimate students’ growth in the university goal of reflective judgment). ¹ Specifically they increased from 2.81 to 2.99 (on a four-point scale). Furthermore, the following Mount Mercy educational experiences were associated with gains in this important measure: satisfaction with the overall Mount Mercy experience, satisfaction with teaching, and satisfaction with library services.

(Data collected and analyzed by Chad Loes, Director of Student Outcomes Research.)

¹ It is important to note that the longitudinal design allows one to estimate actual gains in the outcome measure. This has been demonstrated empirically elsewhere, e.g., Pascarella, E.T., Wolniak, G.C., & Pierson, C.T. (2003). Explaining student growth in college when you don’t think you are. *Journal of College Student Development*, 44(1),122–126. doi: 10.1353/csd.2003.0007