

Results from annual Mount Mercy Longitudinal Study on Student Growth

2023–2024

To explore whether students at Mount Mercy changed in their “positive attitudes toward literacy” during their first year at the institution, data were collected from all incoming students new to the university during the 2023-2024 academic year. The measure of “positive attitudes toward literacy” captures students’ enjoyment in literacy activities including reading poetry and literature, reading scientific and historical material, and expressing ideas in writing, for example. This measure taps into Mount Mercy’s institutional goal of “Strategic Communication.” Parallel pretest and posttest data were collected at the beginning (222 out of 274 incoming students [81%]) and end of students’ (188 out of 274 students [68.6%]) first year at Mount Mercy. In addition, a battery of student experience data was also collected at the end of the academic year in an effort to determine which student experiences influence gains in the outcome measure.

Mirroring the 2012-2013 academic year data collection on the same outcome measure, respondents decreased in their levels of positive attitudes toward literacy from the beginning to the end of their first year at the institution (3.44 to 3.41, respectively). This finding also parallels multiple longitudinal national studies exploring college students’ attitudes toward literacy. Also noteworthy, a remarkable 88% of students were exposed to at least one high-impact practice (HIP) during their first year at Mount Mercy. Among these HIP, 79% took a Portal (i.e., freshman seminar) course, 10% wrote at least one 20-page paper, 40% participated in service learning, and 15% worked on a research project with a professor.

Finally, results from multivariate analyses suggests that—even after accounting for a variety of potential confounding influences—visits to the institution’s career services office and satisfaction with services provided by the campus library were associated with gains in students’ attitudes toward literacy. Expectedly, respondents who reported writing a 20-page paper during their first year at the institution exhibited declines in their attitudes toward literacy.

Highlights from 2023–24	Notable patterns and examples
Students’ growth in the Mount Mercy goal of Strategic Communication was measured by assessing changes in their levels of Positive Attitudes Toward Literacy.	There was a slight decline in students’ attitudes toward literacy from the beginning to the end of this academic year (3.44 to 3.41, respectively). This decline mirrors findings from the 2012-2013 academic year (and also multiple national studies). Despite this decline, the following Mount Mercy educational experiences led to gains in this important measure: visiting the career services office and satisfaction with the services provided by the Busse library. In contrast, the high-impact practice of writing a 20-page paper was negatively associated with positive attitudes toward literacy.