

Student Experiences and Outcomes at MMU: Longitudinal Evidence

2015–2016

To explore whether students at Mount Mercy changed in their openness to diversity during their first year at the institution, data were collected from all incoming students new to the university during the 2015-2016 academic year. Openness to diversity is described as “students’ interest in exploring diversity in culture, ethnicity, perspectives, values, and ideas.” This measure taps into Mount Mercy’s goal of “Promoting a Purposeful Living,” (to wit, social development). Parallel pretest and posttest data were collected at the beginning (289 out of 393 incoming students [73.5%]) and end of students’ (158 out of 289 students [55%]) first year at Mount Mercy. Additionally, 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.

Consistent with national studies, there was a slight decline in the openness to diversity measure from the beginning to the end of the academic year (4.11 to 4.03, respectively). Compared to data from other national studies or previous years’ cohorts of Mount Mercy students, those responding to the current year’s surveys exhibited higher averages than their counterparts in terms of curricular diversity (1.22 and .78 out of 4, respectively) and interactional diversity experiences (3.44 and 3.14 out of 5, respectively). The extent to which students were exposed to active and collaborative learning in 2015-2016 (2.87 out of 5) is slightly lower than the last time data were collected on this measure in 2013-2014 (3.08 out of 5). Next, students generally perceive Mount Mercy to have a non-discriminatory racial environment (4.04 out of 5). Importantly, however, racial and ethnic minorities feel more strongly than Whites that Mount Mercy has a non-discriminatory racial environment (4.11 and 4.02 out of 5, respectively). Lastly, results from a regression analysis suggests that—even after accounting for a variety of potential confounding influences—exposure to active and collaborative learning is associated with gains in openness to diversity. Lastly, additional analyses suggest that exposure to active and collaborative learning leads to greater levels of interactional diversity, which in turn leads to more openness to diversity.

Highlights from 2015–16	Notable patterns and examples
Students’ growth in the Mount Mercy goal of Promoting a Purposeful Living was measured by assessing changes in their levels of Openness to Diversity.	Although there was a slight decline in Openness to Diversity among all students from the beginning to the end of this academic year (4.11 to 4.03, respectively), the following Mount Mercy educational experiences led to gains in this important measure: Exposure to active and collaborative learning, interactional diversity, and perceiving Mount Mercy as having a non-discriminatory racial environment.