

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) Mount Mercy University 2012**

Findings the 2012 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) reinforce Mount Mercy University's continued success in providing a solid undergraduate educational experience valued by students. The findings from this year's National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) show Mount Mercy University is continuing to provide a sound academic environment in which students are both challenged and supported.

Mount Mercy freshmen (93%) and seniors (90%) are highly consistent in rating their overall experience at Mount Mercy as good to excellent. Nearly as many (88% of freshmen and 87% of seniors) indicate they would choose Mount Mercy if making their decision again. These results are similar overall to the three comparison groups (a set of regional private institutions, those in the same Carnegie classification, and the 545 other schools participating in NSSE 2012.)

#### ***What are some key areas of strength based on this survey?***

Looking at the largest comparison group, consisting of all other students taking NSSE 2012, areas where our results stand out favorably include:

- Strong emphasis on active and challenging learning.  
Our students, especially seniors, more often say they make class presentations, ask questions and contribute in class. They also read comparatively more assigned books related to class. Our seniors more often say their exams have challenged them to do their best work, with first year results closer to NSSE overall. Mount Mercy seniors also are more likely to have participated in a culminating experience (e.g. capstone course, project or thesis.)
- Clear focus on service and community engagement  
Our first year students are much more likely to have participated in community service or volunteer work. Our students overall, and especially first years, also are much more likely to participate in service learning as part of a regular class. Mount Mercy students, especially seniors, say the University influenced them in relation to contributing to the welfare of their community. In another mission-related finding, our students, especially first years, more often say their experience has contributed to developing a deepened sense of spirituality.
- Sense of support for their success, especially academically  
Our students report somewhat more positive relationships with other students, faculty, and administrative personnel and offices. They also are more likely to say there's an institutional emphasis on providing the support they need to succeed academically. Our first year students more often talk with faculty members or advisors about career plans, and are much more likely to have participated in a learning community.

## About the survey

The 2012 survey was completed online. The freshman (FY) response rate was 53%, with seniors (SR) at 42%. This was our first year using the online-only format, and results remained well ahead of national averages (31% and 33% respectively.)

NSSE establishes several types of comparison groups, and for 2012 three key sets of comparative findings are available to help inform interpretation:

- Plains Private – 32 private institutions in the same geographic region and sector
- Carnegie Class – 88 private institutions sharing our Carnegie Classification
- NSSE 2012 – the 545 other current year U. S. participant institutions

Applying research on factors contributing to institutional effectiveness, five Benchmarks to Effective Educational Practice are used by NSSE: Level of Academic Challenge, Active and Collaborative Learning, Student-Faculty Interaction, Enriching Educational Experiences, and Supportive Campus Environment.

## Highlights from the five Benchmark areas

### Level of Academic Challenge

- Mount Mercy first-year students (FY 55.8 mean) and seniors (SR 60.8 mean) both report somewhat higher ratings for Level of Academic Challenge than all but one of comparison group, namely Plains Privates/first year results.
- Mount Mercy FY students (52%) report preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, homework, etc.) between 6 to 15 hrs per week. Percents in the comparison groups ranged from 45% to 47% for this amount of preparation time.
- Both Mount Mercy FY students (77%) and SR students (69%) report reading 5 to 20 assigned textbooks, books or packets during the year compared with the benchmarking groups' average of FY (61%) and SR (57%).
- 16% of Mount Mercy FY students report writing at least one 20-page paper in the year versus the comparison groups (22%, 20%, 19%) respectively. Mount Mercy SR students (44%) report writing at least one 20-page paper in the year versus the comparison groups (50%, 50% and 49%) respectively. On writing at least one paper of 5 to 19 pages in length, both Mount Mercy's FY students (95%) and SR students (98%) were higher than the comparison groups FY (88%, 85%, 85%) and SR (94%, 91%, 90%) respectively.
- 81% of Mount Mercy FY students indicated the institution emphasizes 'quite a bit' or 'very much' spending significant amount of time studying and on academic work. This is somewhat less than the comparison groups' average of 84%.
- 62% of FY and 62% of SR students at Mount Mercy often or very often work harder than they thought they could to meet instructor's standards or expectations.

## Active and collaborative learning

- Both FY (49.5 mean) and SR (54.5 mean) students at Mount Mercy engage in more active and collaborative learning than comparison schools in the benchmarking groups.
- At Mount Mercy, SR students (78%) give more class presentations often or very often than Mount Mercy FR students (49%). Both groups at Mount Mercy exceeded the comparisons groups.
- Mount Mercy SR students (61%) often or very often worked with other students on projects during class while the comparison groups did so less often (48%, 53%, 51%) respectively.
- Mount Mercy FR students (53%) often or very often worked with other students on projects outside of class while the comparison groups did so less often (40%, 47%, 46%) respectively.
- Half of the Mount Mercy SR students (50%) at some time tutored or taught other students.
- Significantly more FY students (94%) at Mount Mercy have at some time in the year participated in a community-based project than those in the comparison groups (44%, 47%, 41%) respectively.
- Mount Mercy FR students (52%) discussed ideas from class with others outside of class somewhat less than the benchmarking groups with an average of 60%.

## Student-Faculty Interaction

- The Mount Mercy first year (FY) mean in this category was 37.9, with 40.8 for Seniors. This is similar to FY findings in comparison groups overall, but somewhat lower for seniors.
- Mount Mercy FY students less frequently said they 'very often' discussed, grades or assignments with an instructor, compared to the benchmarking groups (23%, 25%, 22%) respectively.
- Mount Mercy FY students (87%) sometime to very often have talked with a faculty member or advisor about their career plans. This is more than the average of the benchmarking groups FY students (79%).
- 70% of Mount Mercy SR students discussed ideas from class with faculty members outside of class sometime to very often during the year. This is similar to comparison groups.
- 54% of FY students and 53% of SR students at Mount Mercy at least occasionally worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework.
- 59% of FY students and 72% of SR students at Mount Mercy, indicate they receive often or very often, prompt written or oral feedback from faculty on their academic performance.
- By the senior year, only 13% of Mount Mercy SR students report having completed work on a research project with a faculty member outside of course or program requirements. This is significantly lower than the benchmarking groups' average of 19%.

## Enriching educational experiences

- Mount Mercy FY students (29.3 mean) participated in more enriching educational experiences than their counterparts. However, Mount Mercy SR students (34.2 mean) had significantly fewer experiences than the average mean of the comparison groups (39.9 mean).
- Significantly more of Mount Mercy FY students (83%) participated in co-curricular activities of at least one hour than the comparison groups (57%, 57%, 60%) respectively.

- 78% of Mount Mercy FY students plan to participate in an internship, field experience or practicum and 51% of Mount Mercy SR students had completed an internship, field experience or practicum by their senior year.
- 95% of Mount Mercy FY students either planned to do or had already participated in community service or volunteer work which was significantly higher than their counterparts in the benchmarking groups (80%, 80%, 82%) respectively.
- Significantly fewer Mount Mercy SR students (10%) reported completing foreign language coursework compared to an average of 33.7% of the seniors in the benchmarking groups.
- 43% of Mount Mercy SR students completed a culminating senior experience and 43% were planning to do so.
- 23% of Mount Mercy FY students report never having had a serious conversation with a student of a different race or ethnicity than their own. This is higher than the benchmarking groups' average of 18%.
- Only 7% of Mount Mercy FY students report never having had a serious conversation with a student who varies from them in terms of religious beliefs, political opinions or personal values. This is much lower than the benchmarking groups' average of 15%.
- 51% of Mount Mercy FY students and 48% of Mount Mercy SR students feel Mount Mercy encourages quite a bit or very much, contact among students from different economic, social or racial backgrounds.

### **Supportive campus environment**

- Mount Mercy students found the campus environment about as supportive (FY mean 66.1, SR mean 62.2) as the comparison groups' students, somewhat lower than regional comparison group but above national NSSE figures.
- 87% of Mount Mercy FY students report the campus environment either quite a bit or very much provides the support they need to succeed academically.
- Mount Mercy FY students (43%) indicated the campus environment either quite a bit or very much helped them cope with non-academic responsibilities, which was comparable to the benchmarking groups (45%, 44%, 41%) respectively.
- 58% of Mount Mercy FY students indicated the campus environment either quite a bit or very much provided them with the support needed to thrive socially; this was slightly higher than the comparison groups.
- Mount Mercy FY students (36%) rated the quality of their relationships with administrative and office personnel as helpful, considerate and/or flexible; this was significantly lower than the benchmarking groups (56%, 45%, 38%) respectively.
- 66% of Mount Mercy SR students rated the quality of their relationships with faculty members as available, helpful and/or sympathetic; this was comparable to the benchmarking groups.