CHARACTERISTICS AND ATTITUDES OF ST. JOHN’S FRESHMEN
RESULTS FROM THE CIRP FRESHMAN SURVEY

The CIRP Freshman Survey, initiated in fall 1966, is a project of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), a continuing longitudinal study of the American higher education system housed at the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) in the Graduate School of Education & Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. The survey is designed to collect data on characteristics, attitudes, values, and self-concept of entering freshmen. About 75% of our freshmen generally participate in the survey administered during the orientation period.

Following are some highlights of St. John’s 10-year trend data (2001-2010). Analysis of the data reveals that our incoming students are very similar to their comparison (peer) group of participating private universities (medium selectivity) in most areas. Results have been generally consistent over the years, with gradual changes in a few areas.

HIGHLIGHTS

The reasons for attending St. John’s have remained fairly constant over the past 10 years, with approximately 60% of students indicating the following as the top reasons: being offered financial assistance; good academic reputation; and our graduates get good jobs. Similarly, the reasons for attending college have remained fairly consistent. For about 90% of our students, the top reason is to get a better job. Other top reasons (80%) are to make more money, receive training in a specified career, and learn more about things; followed by (70%) to gain a general education and prepare for graduate school.

On the other hand, there has been a steady decline (about 20 percentage points), over the past 10 years in the percentage of students who identify their institution as their first choice. The decline was from about 65% to 45% for the Queens campus and from about 75% to 50% for the Staten Island campus and for peer institutions. At the same time there has been a steady increase in the percentage of students who applied to six or more colleges: from about 25% to 45% for the Queens campus, and from about 15% to 35% for Staten Island, and from about 20% to 40% for peers.
When asked to indicate the importance to them personally of each of about 20 items, the top responses for St. John’s were similar to their peers: being very well off financially (85%); raising a family (75%); and helping others who are in difficulty (70%). Students were also asked to provide self-ratings (above average / highest 10%) on about 40 items with some items dropped from the list and others added over the period. Self-ratings were fairly constant, and comparable between St. John’s and peers, for most items, including the following which consistently received ratings above 70%: drive to achieve; cooperativeness; and understanding of others. A few items where there were changes as well as differences by campus and /or between St. John’s and peers are identified below.

- **Ability to work cooperatively with diverse people** (added to the survey in 2008) received the highest self-rating in 2010 (82%) from Queens students, comparable to peers (79%) and significantly higher than Staten Island (67%).

- **Tolerance of others with different beliefs** (added to the survey in 2008) received the next highest self-rating in 2010 (78%) from Queens students, 73% from peers and significantly lower in Staten Island (60%).

- Between 2001 and 2010 the proportion of St. John’s students who rated their academic ability as above average/highest 10%, increased from 65% to 72% for Queens and 57% to 70% for Staten Island. The peer group remained fairly constant at about 77% from 2001 – 2009 and declined to 69% in 2010.

Other interesting results about our incoming freshmen from the 2010 data include:

- About 80% of students had frequently used the Internet for research or homework during the past year.

- Slightly more than one-third spent six hours or more on social networks (MySpace, Facebook etc.) during the past year.

- One-quarter identified themselves as first-generation college students.