

Freshman Survey Results, Fall 2020

Baccalaureate TUG and Associate TUG First-Year Students

BACKGROUND

Mount Saint Mary's University participates in a national study about incoming college students. Developed by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) at the Higher Education Research Institute of UCLA, the **CIRP Freshman Survey** collects important information about the background, experiences, and expectations of first-year college students. Out of the 370 freshmen invited to take the survey, 153 responded, yielding a response rate of 41%. This report summarizes the data for 19 Associate and 134 Baccalaureate TUG freshmen respondents enrolled at MSMU in Fall 2020.

The survey provides comparisons to the responses of students at other similar Catholic 4-year colleges. The comparison group is based on MSMU's institution type, control, and selectivity. A list of the schools used for comparison is provided in Appendix B.

DEMOGRAPHICS AND BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS

- 83% of the respondents are women, 4% are men, 3% are non-binary and 11% stated their gender identity was not listed.
- 99% of the respondents graduated high school in 2020.
- 86% of the respondents live within 50 miles of campus, and 32% live within 10 miles from campus.
- 48% of all respondents' average high school grades were A+/A/A- grades, while 49% averaged B+/B/B- grades, and 3% averaged C+/C.

College Choice

Over 52% of the MSMU freshmen who responded to the survey indicated they applied to six or more institutions. Forty-nine percent (49%) of MSMU freshmen said MSMU was their first choice in 2020.

Financial assistance and academic reputation were the most important factors in the decision to attend MSMU. When asked to rate the importance of various factors in their decision, more than 76% of the freshmen identified being offered financial assistance and the university's good academic reputation as "very important."

On average, MSMU TUG freshmen were more likely than their peers at similar participating Catholic colleges to identify financial assistance's availability as an important factor in their decision to choose MSMU. A visit to the Campus was significantly less important to the MSMU TUG freshmen than at similar participating Catholic colleges. While not being offered aid by their first choice, living close to home and the cost of attending was significantly more important (see Table 1).

Table 1: Importance of Factors in College Choice

How important was each reason in your decision to attend here?	MSMU			Comparison Group
	Very + Somewhat (%)	Very (%)	Somewhat (%)	Very + Somewhat (%)
I was offered financial assistance ◊◊◊	99.1	76.9	22.2	83.0
This college has a very good academic reputation	96.6	73.5	23.1	98.1
This college's graduates get good jobs	94.0	79.5	14.5	95.6
The cost of attending this college ◊◊	93.2	62.4	30.8	82.6
The academic reputation of my intended major ◊	93.1	70.9	22.2	90.0
This college's graduates make a difference in the world	88.9	46.2	42.7	86.1
This college has a good reputation for its social and extracurricular activities	81.2	38.5	42.7	92.3
I wanted to go to a school about the size of this college	80.4	51.3	29.1	87.1
This college's graduates gain admission to top graduate/professional schools	79.5	36.8	42.7	82.1
A visit to this campus ◊◊◊	75.0	38.8	36.2	85.7
I wanted to live near home ◊◊	76.0	42.7	33.3	66.7
My parents/relatives wanted me to come here	68.4	23.1	45.3	64.7
Communication with a professor	65.0	38.5	26.5	58.0
I was attracted by the religious affiliation/orientation of this college	57.2	22.2	35.0	50.6
Rankings in national magazines	56.4	12.8	43.6	60.0
I was admitted through an Early Action or Early Decision program	53.9	26.5	27.4	45.0
High school counselor advised me	49.6	12.8	36.8	47.2
Not offered aid by first choice ◊◊	48.7	16.2	32.5	32.0
My teacher advised me	45.3	9.4	35.9	41.3
Could not afford first choice	42.2	15.5	26.7	29.6
Private college counselor advised me	33.6	8.6	25.0	30.2

Note: The ◊ indicates MSMU students were significantly different from their peers at similar participating Catholic colleges; ◊ indicates a significant difference, ◊◊ indicates a higher difference, and ◊◊◊ indicates areas of greatest difference.

Financing a College Education

Two of the top five factors affecting college choice for MSMU freshmen were related to net cost (see Table 1 above). At MSMU, 64% of students rated cost as a “very important” factor.

After carefully exploring their options and choosing to attend MSMU, over 91% of freshmen have concerns about their ability to pay for college, compared to 68% of the freshmen at similar participating Catholic colleges (see Table 2).

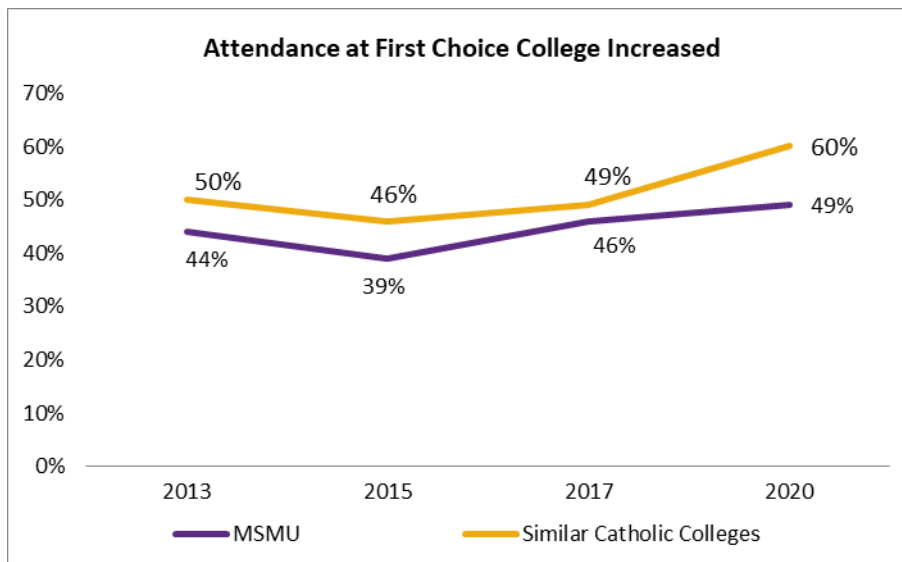
Table 2: Concerns about Financing College

Do you have any concerns about your ability to finance your college education?	MSMU %	Comparison Group %
None (I am confident that I will have sufficient funds)	8.8	31.9
Some (but I probably will have enough funds)	66.4	56.6
Major (not sure I will have enough funds to complete college)	24.8	11.5

A Few More Attending Their First Choice

In 2020, MSMU was the first choice for 49% of MSMU freshmen TUG respondents, increasing from the previous three surveys in 2013, 2015, and 2017. There was a similar increase at other similar participating Catholic colleges across the nation (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Year-over year comparison of attendance at first choice college



Students' Self-Perceptions

When asked to rate themselves relative to an average person their age, over half of MSMU freshmen rated themselves above average in terms of their understanding of others, compassion, drive to achieve, and leadership abilities. Compared to their peers at similar participating Catholic colleges, MSMU students rated themselves slightly higher in understanding others, compassion, spirituality, and artistic ability. However, MSMU freshmen had significantly lower perceptions of their academic ability, physical health, math, and intellectual

confidence than did students at similar participating Catholic colleges (see Table 3).

Table 3: Self-Ratings

Rate yourself on each of the following traits as compared with the average person your age.	MSMU Freshmen TUG			Comparison Group
	Highest 10% + Above Average (%)	Highest 10% (%)	Above average (%)	Highest 10% + Above Average (%)
Understanding of others	80.8	30.8	50.0	78.2
Compassion	80.8	35.0	45.8	78.9
Drive to achieve	70.8	28.3	42.5	77.1
Leadership ability	53.3	15.0	38.3	60.8
Creativity	43.3	15.8	27.5	48.0
Academic ability ◊◊◊	43.3	8.3	35.0	67.7
Spirituality	35.9	9.2	26.7	35.5
Writing ability	35.9	6.7	29.2	45.9
Risk-taking	34.2	7.5	26.7	36.3
Self-confidence (social)	31.6	8.3	23.3	38.9
Artistic ability	30.0	6.7	23.3	27.5
Self-confidence (intellectual) ◊◊	29.2	6.7	22.5	45.0
Public speaking ability	28.3	10.0	18.3	34.3
Emotional health	29.2	10.0	19.2	36.2
Physical health ◊◊◊	24.2	6.7	17.5	48.3
Mathematical ability ◊◊	22.5	2.5	20.0	39.4

Note: The ◊ indicates MSMU students were significantly different from their peers at similar participating Catholic colleges; ◊ a significant difference, ◊◊ indicates a higher difference, and ◊◊◊ indicates areas of greatest difference.

Students' Wellness

On the questions regarding student's wellness (see Table 4), very few freshmen indicated that they regularly drank alcohol or smoked. However, compared to their peers at similar participating Catholic colleges, a significantly higher percentage of MSMU freshmen TUG students indicated they felt overwhelmed and felt anxious or depressed in the past year. A smaller number responded they did not always have enough money for food (see Table 4).

Table 4: Student Wellness

In the past year, how often have you:	MSMU Freshmen TUG			Comparison Group
	Frequently + Occasionally (%)	Frequently (%)	Occasionally (%)	Frequently + Occasionally (%)
Felt overwhelmed by all I had to do ◊◊◊	99.2	69.4	29.8	90.3
Felt anxious ◊◊◊	95.9	52.4	43.5	84.4
Felt depressed ◊◊	70.2	21.8	48.4	58.1
Felt hungry but did not eat because I didn't have enough money for food	15.3	2.4	12.9	13.1
Consumed wine or liquor ◊◊◊	10.5	0.00	10.5	27.2
Consumed beer ◊◊◊	6.5	0.00	6.5	21.1
Vaped/used e-cigarettes ◊	3.2	0.8	2.4	8.9

Note: The ◊ indicates MSMU students were significantly different from their peers at similar participating Catholic colleges; ◊ a significant difference, ◊◊ indicates a higher difference, and ◊◊◊ indicates areas of greatest difference.

Expectations for College

When asked about their expectations for college (see Table 5), most freshmen TUG students estimated that there was a “very good” chance that they would get a job to help pay for college expenses (62%), and vote in a local, state, or national election (82%).

A significantly higher percentage of MSMU freshmen TUG students stated there was at least some chance they would get tutoring help in specific courses, participate in a student protest or demonstration, join a sorority, and take courses from more than one college simultaneously than students at similar participating Catholic colleges. A significantly lower percentage of MSMU freshmen TUG students stated they expected to work on a professor’s research project, change career choice, and change major field than students at similar participating Catholic colleges.

On the previous CRIP Freshman Survey in 2017, 28% of MSMU freshmen TUG expected to transfer to another college before graduating; this dropped considerably in Fall 2020 when only 9% of the respondents indicated they expected to do so.

Table 5: Expectations for College

What is your best guess as to the chances that you will:	MSMU Freshmen TUG			Comparison Group
	Very Good + Some Chance (%)	Very Good Chance (%)	Some Chance (%)	Very Good + Some Chance (%)
Vote in a local, state, or national election ◊	97.4	81.7	15.7	91.0
Get tutoring help in specific courses	90.4	48.7	41.7	86.0
Get a job to help pay for college expenses	88.7	61.7	27.0	87.4
Participate in volunteer or community service work	88.7	47.0	41.7	87.8
Participate in student clubs/groups	87.8	53.9	33.9	89.7
Participate in student protests or demonstrations ◊	71.3	32.2	39.1	62.5
Take a course exclusively online	69.5	39.1	30.4	69.2
Seek personal counseling	66.1	29.6	36.5	63.3
Participate in a study abroad program	62.6	28.7	33.9	67.9
Work on a professor's research project ◊	49.6	18.3	31.3	65.9
Take courses from more than one college simultaneously ◊◊◊	39.1	13.0	26.1	16.3
Participate in student government	35.6	2.6	33.0	36.8
Join a social fraternity or sorority ◊◊◊	33.9	6.1	27.8	17.4
Change career choice ◊◊◊	33.3	6.3	27.0	54.5
Change major field ◊◊◊	27.8	3.5	24.3	45.6
Transfer to another college before graduating	8.7	0.9	7.8	12.5
Take a leave of absence from this college temporarily	7.0	0.0	7.0	5.6

Note: The ◊ indicates MSMU students were significantly different from their peers at similar participating Catholic colleges; ◊ a significant difference, ◊◊ indicates a higher difference, and ◊◊◊ indicates areas of greatest difference.

Goals and Future Achievements

The two most important potential goals and future achievements for MSMU freshmen were helping others in difficulty (96%) and being very well off financially (92%), which ranked significantly higher by MSMU students than students did at similar participating Catholic colleges. Compared to students at similar participating Catholic colleges, MSMU freshmen also ranked integrating spirituality into their life, influencing the political structure, creating artistic works and becoming accomplished in one of the performing arts significantly higher (see Table 6).

Table 6: Future Achievements Considered Essential and Very Important

Please indicate the importance to you personally of each of the following:	MSMU Freshmen TUG			Comparison Group
	Essential + Very (%)	Essential (%)	Very important (%)	Essential + Very (%)
Helping others who are in difficulty ◊	95.7	63.5	32.2	89.4
Being very well off financially ◊◊	92.9	67.8	24.3	87.1
Improving my understanding of other countries and cultures	77.4	37.4	40.0	71.2
Helping to promote racial understanding	77.4	32.2	45.2	68.4
Raising a family	74.8	48.7	26.1	77.1
Integrating spirituality into my life ◊	60.0	34.8	25.2	49.3
Influencing social values	59.1	22.6	36.5	55.2
Keeping up to date with political affairs	53.0	22.6	30.4	51.7
Obtaining recognition from my colleagues for contributions to my special field	51.3	16.5	34.8	52.1
Participating in a community action program	45.3	15.7	29.6	45.3
Developing a meaningful philosophy of life	44.3	16.5	27.8	47.6
Becoming involved in programs to clean up the environment	42.6	19.1	23.5	41.9
Becoming a community leader	41.7	19.1	22.6	46.0
Becoming successful in a business of my own	34.0	15.7	18.3	39.0
Influencing the political structure ◊	32.2	12.2	20.0	26.7
Becoming an authority in my field	49.5	13.0	36.5	51.8
Making a theoretical contribution to science	24.4	9.6	14.8	24.8
Creating artistic work (painting, sculpture, etc.) ◊	24.3	7.8	16.5	16.5
Writing original works (poems, novels, etc.)	18.2	7.8	10.4	16.1
Becoming accomplished in one of the performing arts (acting, dancing, etc.) ◊	15.6	7.8	7.8	13.3

Note: The ◊ indicates MSMU students were significantly different from their peers at similar participating Catholic colleges; ◊ a significant difference, ◊◊ indicates a higher difference, and ◊◊◊ indicates areas of greatest difference.

Implications

The data suggest that the entering freshman class of 2020 includes highly engaged students and striving for ambitious and fulfilling life goals. Seventy percent (70%) of MSMU students rated their drive to achieve as above average, 96% reported that they want to help others who are in difficulty, and 88% selected the choice they plan to volunteer or perform community service work. At the same time, the data reveal some patterns that warrant careful attention and planning. The list below sheds light on a few challenges and opportunities to serve the incoming class in 2020. The factors identified as “challenges” are among a more extensive set of factors associated with attrition in other research.

Challenges

- 69% indicated they have frequently felt overwhelmed by all they have to do. This finding is similar to the MSMU internal survey results administered in Fall 2020 (see [Virtual Learning Fall 2020- Freshmen](#)), which indicated that 61% of the freshmen who responded felt overwhelmed in general.
- 71% indicated they have felt depressed in the past year.
- 76% feel their physical health is average or below average compared to their peers.
- 52% indicated that MSMU was not their first choice.
- 37% expect no financial assistance from family resources, and 25% have significant concerns about their ability to finance their college education.

Opportunities

- The majority of freshmen who responded indicated it was very important that the university has a good academic reputation (75%) and that the MSMU graduates get good jobs (79%).
- 68% plan to pursue graduate degrees.
- 77% indicated that the university’s offer of financial assistance was very important in choosing MSMU.
- The majority of MSMU freshmen who responded received scholarship money; 79% received merit-based grants or scholarships, and 58% received need-based grants or scholarships.
- Fewer intend to transfer, falling from 28% in 2017 to 9% in 2020.

Appendix A

Special Focus on COVID-19

COVID-19 Effects

The HERI research team developed COVID-19 pandemic-related questions for the Fall 2020 CIRP Freshman Survey. Following are the results of these focused questions. HERI did not provide comparative data.

When asked if they enrolled in a different college than expected due to the pandemic, most (92%) indicated they did not. Moreover, when asked if they still considered a college degree worthwhile given the pandemic and the economy. A large percentage (70%) indicated they feel it is to some extent. A portion of the freshmen, 18%, stated that they did not think it was worthwhile at all (see Figure 2 and Figure 3).

Figure 2: Enrollment expectation

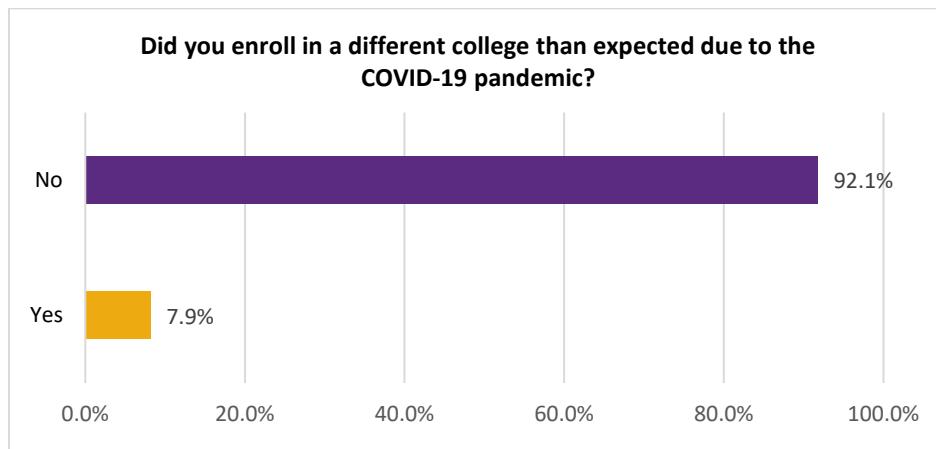
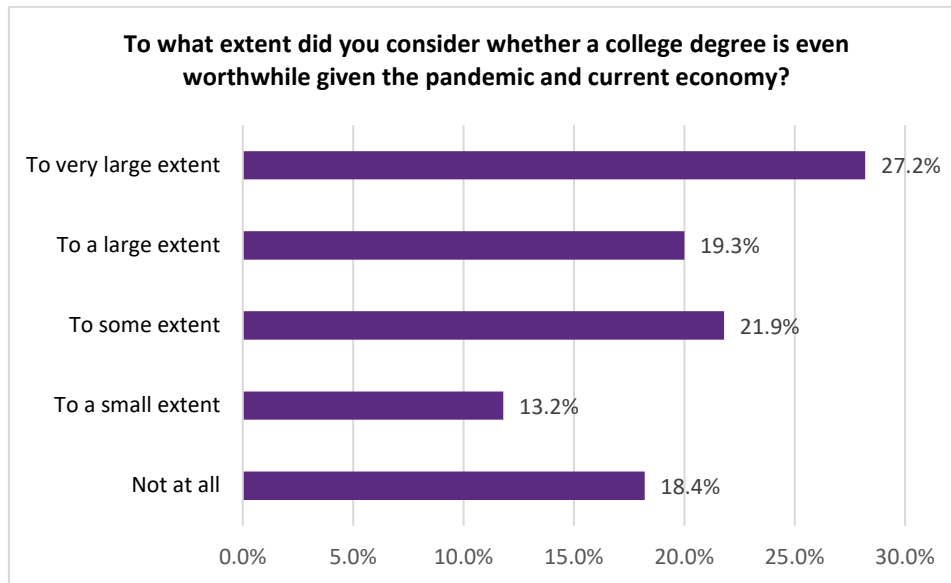


Figure 3: Extent that a college degree seems worthwhile



Satisfaction

The MSMU freshmen rated their satisfaction with the institutional response to the COVID-19 pandemic highly, particularly the communication from the outreach/admissions office, with 86% indicating they were very satisfied or satisfied. Most of the students showed a high level of satisfaction with the timeliness of communication concerning campus operations for the Fall 2020 term and staff availability to answer questions. Nineteen percent (19%) indicated dissatisfaction with the availability of on-campus housing, but many (47%) selected they could not rate this/had no experience (see Table 7).

Table 7: Satisfaction with institutional response to COVID-19 pandemic

How satisfied are you with the following institutional responses to the COVID-19 pandemic?	MSMU Freshmen TUG				
	Very satisfied (%)	Satisfied (%)	Dissatisfied (%)	Very Dissatisfied (%)	Can't Rate/No Experience (%)
Communications from outreach/ admissions office	27.2	58.8	6.1	3.5	4.4
Availability of staff to answer your questions	30.7	47.4	14.9	0.9	6.1
Timeliness of communications concerning campus operations for the Fall 2020 term	14.0	62.3	14.0	3.5	6.1
The availability of on-campus housing for Fall 2020	4.4	29.8	15.8	3.5	46.5

Stress

The MSMU freshmen ranked the sources of stress since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Mental health

ranked the highest, with over 90 percent of the students choosing it as a source of stress for them to a large or very large extent. The students also showed concern about their preparedness for higher education. They ranked completing high school requirements, preparing for the transition to college, and being academically prepared all as stressors to a large extent. The freshmen expressed the least concerns for the health of loved ones and not being able to hangout/socialize in person; 60% and 35% respectively selecting it is of small or no concern (see Table 8).

Table 8: Source of stress since the start of COVID-19 pandemic

Rate the extent to which each of the following has been a source of stress for you since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic:	MSMU Freshmen TUG				
	To a very large extent (%)	To a large extent (%)	To some extent (%)	To a small extent (%)	Not at all (%)
Mental health	47.4	44.7	3.5	0.9	3.5
Completing high school diploma requirements	28.9	57.9	10.5	1.8	0.9
Funds to purchase basic necessities (e.g. food, toilet paper)	40.4	43.0	6.1	5.3	5.3
Preparing for the transition to college	20.2	64.0	13.2	0.0	2.6
Being academically prepared for college due to an abbreviated final year in high school	19.3	62.3	12.3	0.9	5.3
Physical health	18.4	53.5	22.8	3.5	1.8
Household members I am/was with during “stay at home” orders	12.3	58.8	14.9	1.8	12.3
The extent to which others adhere to social, physical distancing guidelines while out in public	7.0	57.9	22.8	8.8	3.5
Cancellation of culminating events (e.g., high school graduation, prom, Grad Night, high school athletic championships)	8.8	45.6	26.3	9.6	9.6
Access to internet	10.5	41.2	33.3	10.5	4.4
Uncertainty about the status of instruction at my institution for the Fall 2020 term	22.8	26.3	34.2	7.9	8.8
Developing skills in college that will make me employable in any economic condition	13.2	15.8	29.8	21.1	20.2
Not being able to socialize/hang out with my friends in person	6.1	16.7	41.2	28.9	7.0
Health of loved ones	3.5	13.2	22.8	53.5	7.0

Appendix B

Similar Catholic Colleges that participated in the Fall 2020 Freshman Survey

College or University	State
College of the Holy Cross	MA
Dominican University	IL
Marywood University	PA
Regis College	MA
Saint Mary's University of Minnesota	MN
Villa Maria College	NY