



Educational Benchmarking Inc. Climate Assessment Spring 2008 Summary: St. John's University

St. John's University participated in Educational Benchmarking Inc.'s (EBI) Climate Assessment survey for the first time in spring 2008, only the second consecutive year that EBI conducted the survey. Including our institution, there were nine participating schools and none from our Carnegie Class. The survey was sent to a random sample of 3,500 St. John's students (3,000 undergraduate, 500 graduate), and 577 students completed the survey (499 undergraduate, 78 graduate). In subsequent years, we expect a larger pool of institutions as well as historical data for comparison.

EBI highlighted five top priorities in their main report for St. John's based on the impact of these factors on the overall satisfaction of the students surveyed. Impact is determined by the regression value, measuring the percentage that a factor accounts for the variation of scoring in overall satisfaction. Percentage is given in parentheses following each factor.

Analysis of Top Predictors: All Institution Comparisons

	Impact on Overall Satisfaction	St. John's	All Institutions *	All Institution Rank (N=9)
Overall Evaluation of Institution		5.19	5.63	7
Diversity Experiences Impacted: Learning and Development (<i>Top predictor</i>)	12 %	5.16	4.89	1
Classroom Environment: Inclusive Environment (<i>Second predictor</i>)	11%	5.30	5.59	7
Academic Achievement and Personal Development (<i>Third predictor</i>)	10%	5.29	5.46	7
Peer Relationships (<i>Fourth predictor</i>)	6%	5.33	5.48	7
Diversity Programs and Policies: Special Consideration for Minorities (<i>Fifth predictor</i>)	5%	4.33	4.00	2

NOTE: The means, which also serve as the performance descriptive, are calculated from qualitative responses with assigned values from 1 (lowest performance) to 7 (highest performance).

*Weighted mean calculated without St. John's data included.

Although our performance in all five categories is rated either "Excellent" or "Good" as defined by EBI, any improvements in these areas would theoretically have an extreme impact on our students' overall satisfaction. EBI rates performance as "excellent" with a mean score greater than 4.5; however, St. John's considers 4.5 to be a baseline, because our institution strives for a higher standard of excellence. It is also worth noting that St. John's ranked number one out of all participating institutions in Learning and Development and number two in Special Consideration for Minorities; however, St. John's ranked seventh in the other three top factors and overall satisfaction.

The pool of respondents is composed of 68% female and 31% male compared with the student body of 58% female and 42% male. Another discrepancy between respondents and the student body was found in the percentage of Asians: 25% and 14% respectively.

Highlights

Upon evaluation of the responses, certain trends were noticeable, particularly the difference in the mean response of various ethnic groups. Black students had the highest mean response in overall satisfaction as well as in all but one factor discussed within this report. In contrast, Asian students (including Pacific Island and Middle Eastern students) had the lowest mean response in overall satisfaction as well as in most factors. Differences in overall means could also be seen by gender and by campus. Females consistently rated St. John's higher than males, and students at the Staten Island campus rated our institution higher than ones at the Queens campus. Students with GPA's above 3.00 generally have higher means than their contemporaries who fall below a 3.00 GPA. In 4 of the top 5 factors, resident students have higher means than commuters.

Among respondents to the survey, 12% reported having felt harassed while at St. John's. These students had a significantly lower mean (4.68) in overall satisfaction than those students who did not report harassment (5.26).

Another section devoted to questions written by St. John's specifically for our students appears below in this report. There were five such questions, three of which were related to diversity. In response to these three questions, there was a significant difference between Black and Hispanic students versus white students.

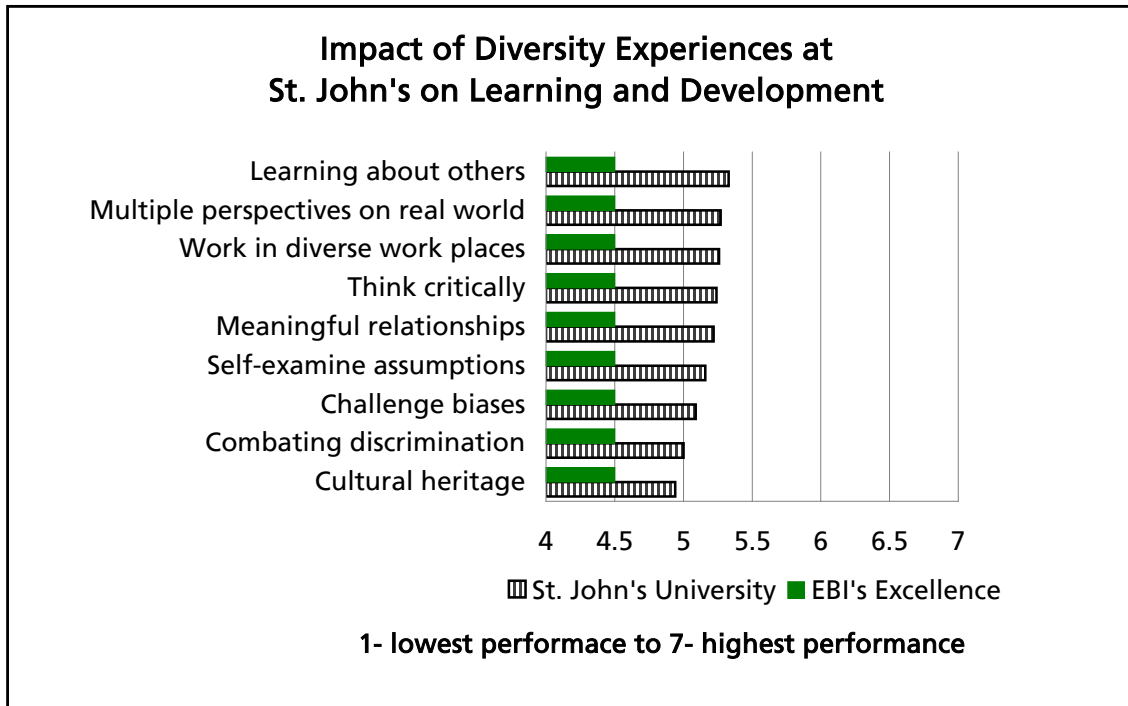
Besides our institution-based questions, the last three questions on the survey were all open-ended, asking about diversity and campus environment. Although these responses have not been analyzed by race and ethnicity, race was a recurring theme in response to all three questions. Clubs and organizations were also frequently cited as having had the greatest positive or negative impact and also as an area to improve. Often race and student activities were mentioned together, so our students clearly conceive of the two as going hand in hand.

Results of the Survey

Diversity Experiences Impacted: Learning and Development

EBI has listed this factor as the top predictor of the overall satisfaction of students at St. John's University. This factor is measured by evaluating the extent to which diversity experiences at St. John's enabled students to develop:

- A belief that learning about others who are different from them is valuable
- A personal commitment to combating discrimination
- A belief that differences do not have to interfere with meaningful relationships
- An awareness of their own cultural heritage
- A willingness to self-examine their assumptions about others
- The ability to challenge, when necessary, their biases toward people who are different
- An ability to think more critically
- Prepare for work in diverse work places
- An ability to consider real world problems from multiple perspectives

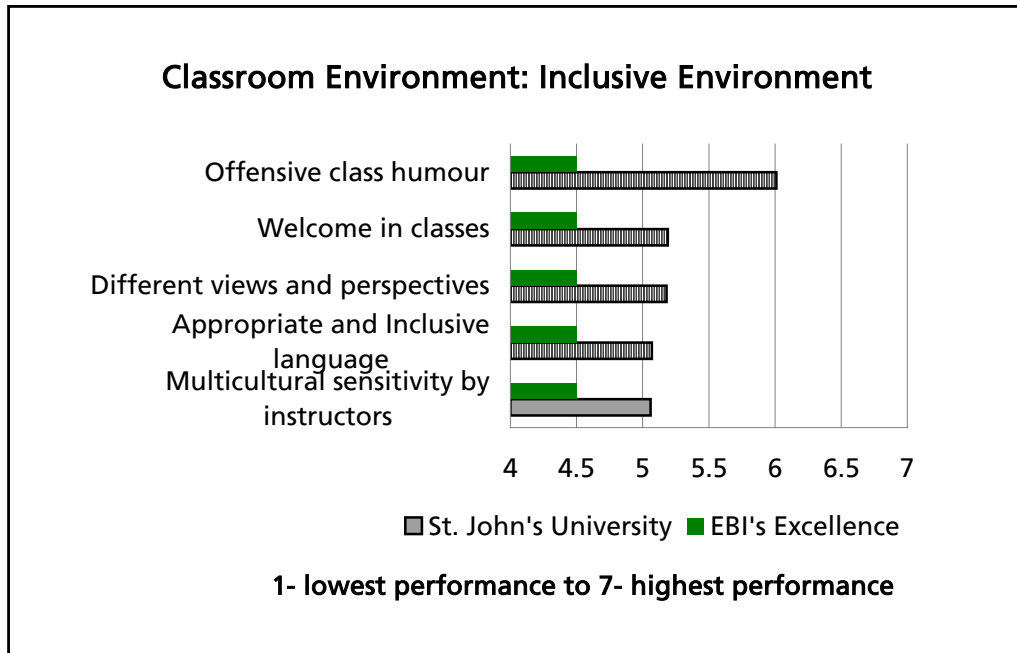


The benchmark for excellence given by the EBI has been surpassed by St. John's; however, there is still room for improvement where diversity experiences at this institution.

Classroom Environment: Inclusive Environment

The second predictor for St. John's University was the inclusive environment of its classrooms which was measured by the extent to which students felt:

- Welcome in classes
- Appropriate and inclusive language is used in the classroom
- Instructors model multicultural sensitivity
- Different views and perspectives are encouraged in class
- Classroom humor is offensive

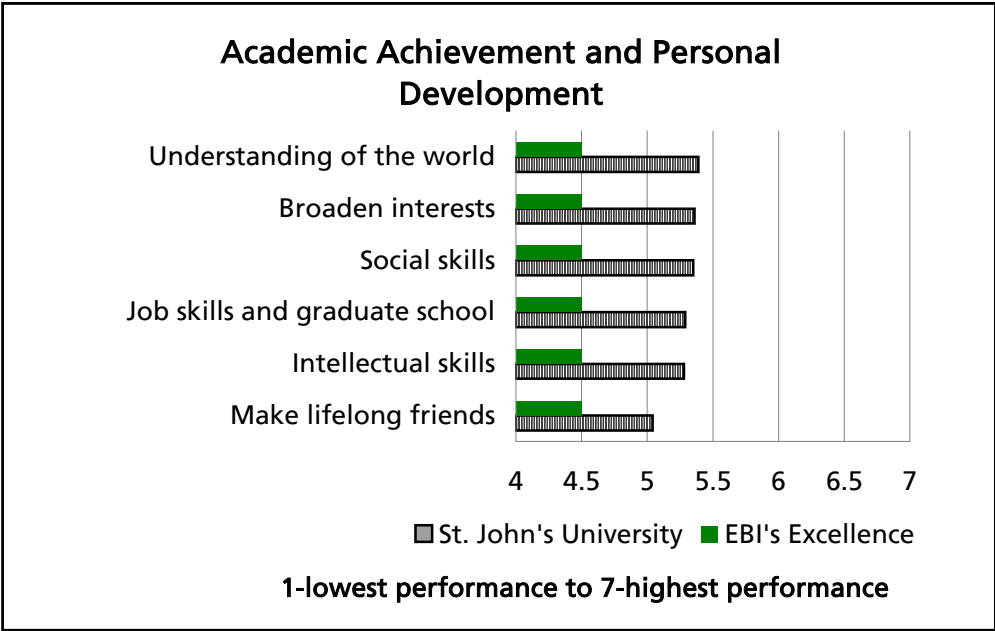


According to student perceptions, offensive classroom humor is seldom heard in the classroom and classes at St. John's are welcoming to students. The University's performance at making the classrooms more inclusive and welcoming has been highly rated by the students, however, it is apparent that more needs to be done to reach the highest performance mark of 7.

Academic Achievement and Personal Development

Academic Achievement and Personal Development has the third highest impact on overall satisfaction. This factor encompassed the extent to which the educational experience at St. John's University enabled students to:

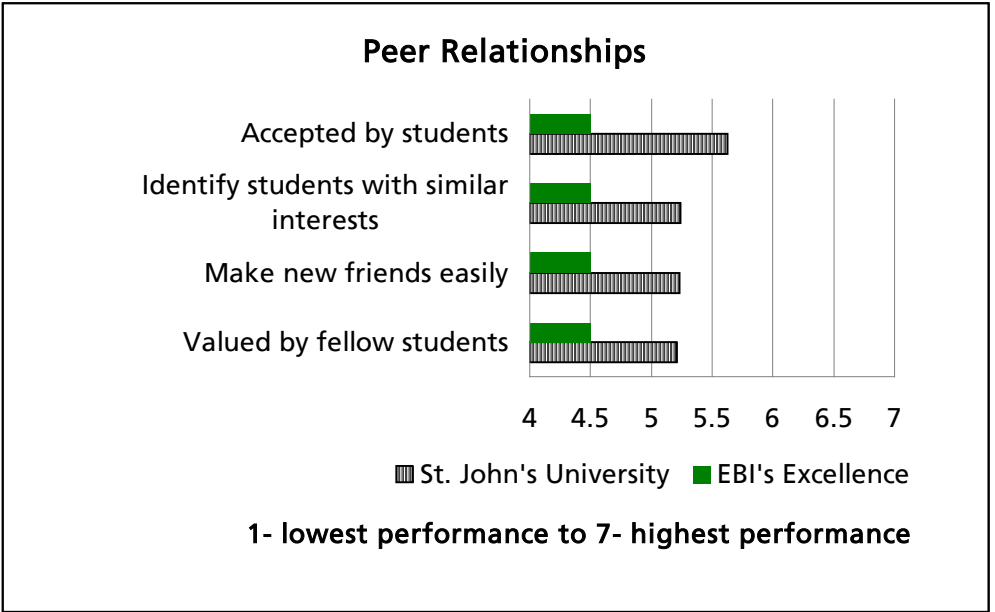
- Develop their intellectual skills
- Develop skills to enter the job market or graduate school.
- Understand the world and the people in it
- Broaden their interests
- Develop social skills
- Make lifelong friends



Peer Relationships

While Peer Relationships is ranked fourth in the list of predictors, it received the highest average for its performance. This predictor sought to evaluate how students felt:

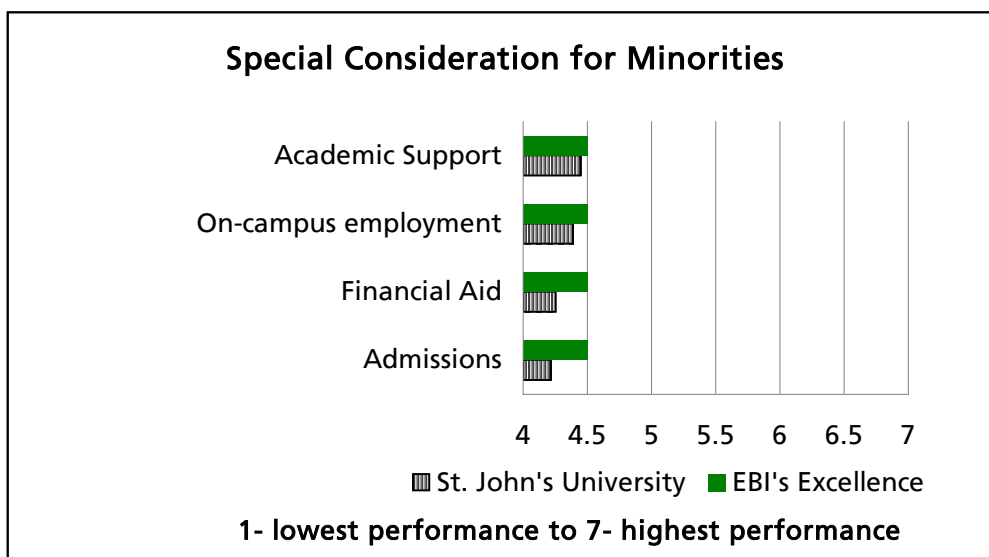
- They were accepted by students at this college/ university
- They were able to make new friends easily
- They were able to identify other students with similar interests
- They were valued by their fellow students



Diversity Programs and Policies: Special Consideration for Minorities

Special consideration for minorities ranks as the fifth predictor, and of the five top priority factors, it was the only factor in which St John's did not excel. This factor evaluated students' opinions on whether special consideration for minorities should be given with regards to

- Admissions
- Financial Aid
- Academic Support
- On campus employment opportunities.



The mean responses reflect a student body that has neutral attitudes. Our mean score, 4.39, falls just above "neutral" (4) on a scale from "highly resentful" (1) to "highly support" (7). Thus, although there is a definite statistical relationship between this factor and overall satisfaction, it cannot be assumed that this is a reflection of St. John's special consideration toward minorities or other students. St. John's gives equal consideration to all students, and these results indicate that our students are in line with the values of our institution. Black and Hispanic students were significantly more supportive of special consideration given to minorities in all four categories: on-campus employment (47% of black students and 45% of Hispanic students selected 6 or 7 v. 20% of white students), academic support (49% and 44% v. 20%), financial aid (49% and 44% v. 19%) and admissions (42% and 33% v. 18%). However, students of all race/ethnic backgrounds were least supportive of special consideration in admissions.

St. John's University - Additional Questions

In addition to the survey composed by EBI, each participating institution is allowed to contribute a set of questions specifically for their students. St. John's added seven questions to the survey. In future years, we will revise and add to these questions as necessary. Two questions asked the student's campus and school; the other questions and their results are given in the table below:

	Agree strongly/somewhat	Disagree strongly/somewhat	Don't know
1. Faculty are interested in students' personal problems.	63%	29%	8%
2. Racial and ethnic diversity should be more strongly reflected in the curriculum.	50%	31%	20%
3. Faculty feel that most students are well-prepared academically.	63%	28%	10%
4. St. John's should hire more faculty of color or from underrepresented populations.	44%	29%	28%
5. There is a lot of campus racial conflict here.	17%	72%	11%

Like attitudes toward special consideration for minorities, there were noticeable differences in the responses by race/ethnicity to statements 2 and 4. In response to statement 2, 70% of black students and 67% of Hispanic students agreed compared with only 35% of white students. Likewise, 79% of black students and 62% of Hispanic students agreed with statement 3 compared to 26% of white students. There is smaller but also noticeable discrepancy in the rate at which students disagreed with statement 5: 68% of black students, 67% of Hispanic students and 80% of white students.

Analysis of Comments

St. John's Students Responses to Open-Ended Questions

Three open-ended questions at the end of the survey asked our students to comment on diversity and campus environment. The questions were:

1. What experience has had the greatest **positive** impact on you with regard to diversity?
2. What experience has had the greatest **negative** impact on you with regard to diversity?
3. The questions of this survey have raised a number of issues. From your perspective, please offer suggestions on how this campus/university might improve the campus environment. Additional comments or observations are also welcome.

Our students cited all aspects of campus life as having had the greatest positive impact with regard to diversity. Recurring themes in response to this question were exposure to a diverse community and building friendships across differences. Students spoke of diversity in terms of religious affiliation, race and ethnicity, political ideology, gender and age; however, no one discussed sexual orientation or class background.

Besides an overall diverse community at our institution and in New York City, students primarily encountered diversity in three main environments: clubs and organizations, the classroom and residence life. Students who were involved listed numerous organizations and credited them with opening their minds to other perspectives; several of these students also specifically mentioned leadership opportunities and events as having shaped their understanding of diversity. In terms of the academic experience, several students specifically cited Discover New York and study abroad as having the single most positive impact. For these students, the classroom was a place to interact with students from diverse backgrounds and broaden their understanding of different religions, cultures and more. Finally, other students said that living on campus had the greatest positive impact and that they made lifelong friends in the residence hall. Some specifically mentioned roommates from entirely different backgrounds whom they would not have met otherwise. For these students the residence halls foster friendship and acceptance of diversity.

Whereas for greatest positive impact students listed specific clubs, courses and experiences, the responses to greatest negative impact were in general about perceived tensions and inequality. A few students did cite specific incidents that negatively impacted their attitude toward diversity. The themes that arose in this section were largely repeated in greater detail in response to the final question, which is discussed in detail below. Besides a large number of students who responded "none" or similarly, the majority discussed the tendency of students to socialize predominantly with students of similar backgrounds. There was a perception by some that minorities are given preferential treatment at our institution in admissions, financial aid and even clubs and organizations (greater funding, more event support). While race was cited most frequently, other students commented on age, gender, religious affiliation and sexual orientation. There was a sense that the administration did not care and was doing nothing to institute positive change.

Several themes emerged in the responses about how to improve the campus environment. Most responses can be grouped in to one or more of three main categories: diversity, student life and activities, and education.

There was a large overlap between diversity and student life and activities. Students perceived a lack of true multicultural exchange, especially in regards to race and ethnicity. Several respondents pointed to the formation of groups around shared identities and the exclusion of students who "don't belong," inhibiting a truly diverse dialogue of ideas and beliefs. Fraternities and sororities were also seen as culprits in a culture of exclusion, making it hard for some students to find a welcome place in campus life. There was a call for greater acceptance of "differences" from sexual orientation to religious affiliation to political ideology.

Besides greater multicultural exchange, students also advocated for more programming from sports to residence hall activities to programs for commuters. There was one recommendation for a lounge specifically for commuters to use. Another student requested more support for non-traditional students. There were also a couple of comments that there is little interaction between the students on different campuses. Also falling under student life, a few respondents were concerned with campus safety, recommending swiping StormCards to enter all buildings, a 24/7 convenience store or dining hall on campus, and a stronger security presence on campus.

Finally, there were several comments regarding academic life. The comments were more scattered in this group. There were a few students who advocated for higher admission standards to improve the quality of the student body. Otherwise, comments ran the gamut from longer hours of operation at the library to more language courses to fewer core courses. Most of these comments pertained indirectly to the campus environment.

Strengths and Challenges

Classroom Environment: Value of Contributions

The assessment indicates that one of the strengths of the university is the “value of contributions” in the classroom environment which investigates whether students ever felt their class contributions devalued because of their

- Race/ Ethnicity
- Gender
- Religious Identification
- Sexual Orientation
- Political/Social Ideology
- Disability/Ability
- Age

This does not have an impact on overall satisfaction but is the only factor, with a performance rating of 6.07, in which St. John's University scored over 6. EBI recommends maintaining the performance of the university in this area.

Challenges Expressions of Insensitivity and Prejudice: Students

This factor evaluates how often students hear disparaging remarks on people of differing:

- Ages
- Disability
- Financial Standing
- Religion
- Political Ideology
- Gender
- Sexual Orientation

While this is not a predictor of overall satisfaction, it should be of concern to the University that students have heard on occasion negative remarks on the differences of others. With a mean score of 4.38, St. John's University fell below the baseline of 4.5, making this one of the lowest scoring factors of the report.

Harassment

Sixty-five respondents, 12% of all students surveyed, answered “yes” to “Have you ever felt harassed while attending St. John's?” Of these 65 students, 74% are commuters and 69% are women (versus 85% and 58% of the student body respectively). A follow-up question asking the predominant form of harassment indicated that 56% reported verbal comments, 13% stares and 11% “other” (unspecified). When asked what the harassment was based on, 39% responded “other” (unspecified), 23% race/ethnicity and 18% gender. The mean response

rate of students who experienced harassment at the other institutions was also 12%. The predominant form of harassment reported at these institutions was also 56% verbal comments. However, the basis of harassment was broken down by 33% "other," 25% gender and 16% race/ethnicity.

At St. John's, the mean overall satisfaction of these students (4.68) was significantly lower than those who did not report harassment (5.26).