



The Freshman Survey 2015

Institutional Research and Institutional Effectiveness Office

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Executive Summary

Mount Vernon Nazarene University (MVNU) utilizes two companion surveys from UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) to gauge the profiles of expectations and experiences of entering students, and then to compare similar survey questions when the student completes MVNU's traditional undergraduate program four years later. *The Freshman Survey (TFS)*, utilized every four (4) years in a rotational survey sequence, was administered to incoming students in August 2015 as one portion within the New Student Transition program. Its companion, College Senior Survey (CSS), will be administered to the same cohort of students in spring 2020, enabling the University to estimate the amount and direction of change during the college experience and to compare that change with similar religious colleges and with the broader spectrum of liberal arts colleges. Thus, the *TFS* results serve as a baseline and benchmark for determining MVNU's impact on graduates through the *CSS*.

As a cohort, freshmen entering MVNU's traditional undergraduate program in 2015 reflect many of the characteristics common in students graduating from public (non-charter and non-magnate) high schools. Yet, they appear to be more homogeneous and less diverse in attitude, values, and experience than their peers who have enrolled in other religious 4-year colleges and universities. MVNU's freshmen are more likely to be white, to come from mostly or exclusively white neighborhoods, or to enroll in college immediately after or within one year of graduating from high school; MVNU's freshmen were more likely to enroll full-time and their families display a more narrow range of financial wealth. They are less likely to originate from very low-income or very high-income families. They expect to work part-time while attending college.

MVNU's freshmen evidence a high level of altruistic motivation; they prefer to exercise that value in one-on-one or small group settings; they shy away from effecting change through policy development work and through clearly political means. They are a-political or non-political in orientation. Their preliminary selection of majors reflects a service career perspective. They value a moderate level of financial security for raising their families, but they do not aspire for high incomes, recognition as authorities in their field, or success as entrepreneurs.

As a group, MVNU's incoming freshmen demonstrate high engagement in and the valuing of spirituality and religiosity. MVNU's religious affiliation and orientation were one of the primary influences on the student's choice of MVNU; four in ten reported applying to two or fewer schools for admission. Nearly 97% reported being accepted to the college of first choice.

Introduction

Mount Vernon Nazarene University (MVNU) regularly surveys key constituencies related to needs, profile characteristics, and educational outcomes to inform planning and evaluation activities. The evaluation survey schedule provides for the administration of a nationally normed survey to incoming students every four years; the survey selected for this purpose is *The Freshman Survey (TFS)*, a highly regarded tool developed by the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) Higher Education Research Institute (HERI). When that entering cohort is enrolled in its senior year, MVNU administers HERI's companion survey, the *College Senior Survey (CSS)*. *The Freshman Survey* and *College Senior Survey* are administered every four (4) years and sequenced so that the incoming cohort that completed the former survey also complete the latter; this design facilitates a before-after (pre-post) comparison, profiling the change in the group that occurs over the normal four years of attendance typical of baccalaureate degree programs. The surveys share many items that span curricular and co-curricular experiences; thus, the results inform program review and planning across the academic and student services spectrum.

Incoming students participate in *The Freshman Survey* as one of the organized activities of the new student institute. Graduating seniors in MVNU's traditional undergraduate complete the *College Senior Survey* during the spring semester as one portion of the required assessments, which includes an assessment of the student's major(s). The 2015 incoming cohort was surveyed with *The Freshman Survey* in August 2015, and will complete the *College Senior Survey* in spring 2020. MVNU's Test Center staff members organize and administer the surveys.

HERI provides multiple options for institutional comparisons (norming groups); eventually HERI will publish the details in a monograph specific to *TFS* and its 2015 administration. The applicable groups for 2015 are:

- Other religious 4-year colleges – medium selectivity; and
- Other religious 4-year colleges.

It is also well to acknowledge the limitations of surveys; they are self-reports and self-reflections over time. As indirect measures subject to selective presentation, memory dysfunctions, etc.; they correlate with actual behavior only moderately. Nevertheless, survey data constitutes perceptions and opinions.

In addition to a series of demographic questions, *TFS* and *CSS* inquire about a number of behaviors or opinions. Individual responses are ordered into themes and broader constructs. The themes are:

- *College choice* – areas students may have considered in choosing to attend college in general and a particular college
- *Financing college* – financial issues associated with attending college
- *Academic disengagement* – extent to which students engage in behaviors that are inconsistent with academic success
- *Academic preparation* – academic skills and experiences students bring to college
- *Interaction with faculty* – time spent and types of interactions with high school teachers
- *Active and collaborative learning* – furthering knowledge of course materials through interaction with faculty and other students
- *Academic enhancement experiences* – participation in programs and initiatives that relate to student learning
- *Written and oral communication* – written and oral communication skills and how these compare to peers
- *Leadership* – leadership opportunities and how students compare to peers in leadership-related skills and abilities
- *Civic engagement* – levels of engagement and satisfaction with community and volunteer work in high school and items that reflect a future orientation toward volunteer and community service
- *Diversity* – social attitudes and experiences with diversity
- *Health and wellness* – behaviors, attitudes, and experiences with wellness issues
- *Spirituality/religiosity* – religious and spiritual practices and beliefs
- *Career planning* – career plans and preparation for future careers

The individual questions are further organized by means of cross-cutting constructs that provide an alternate means of understanding the meaning hidden in the breadth of the questions. Constructs seek to evaluate an extensive and expansive view of higher education’s impact on students, especially in traditional, residential settings. The eight (8) constructs embedded in the *TFS* are:

- *Habits of mind* – a unified measure of the behaviors and traits associated with academic success and the foundation for life-long learning
- *Academic self-concept* – a unified measure of student beliefs about their abilities, confidence, and drive in an academic environment
- *Social self-concept* – a unified measure of student beliefs about their leadership and public speaking abilities and self-confidence in a social environment
- *Pluralistic orientation* – skills and dispositions for living and working in a diverse society
- *Civic engagement* – the extent to which students are motivated and involved in civic, electoral, and political activities
- *Social agency* – the extent to which students value political and social involvement as a personal goal
- *College reputation orientation* – the degree to which students value academic reputation and future career potential as a reason for choosing this college
- *Likelihood of college involvement* – a unified measure of students’ expectations about their involvement in college life generally

The summary follows the HERI practice of reporting results as percentages of respondents selecting a response and as a mean (average) on Likert-type scaled responses on a continuum. What is included in this report is based on the composite average or typical response by MVNU’s freshmen and may not describe any specific individual or subpopulation.

Cohort Demographic Profile

To serve MVNU freshmen well through the curricular, co-curricular, and residential programs, it is critical and fundamental that MVNU administrators, faculty, and staff recognize the experiential profile of the entering class. In many respects, the 2015 first-time-in-college freshmen are more homogenous than the wider society. Over 97.7% of the entering freshmen were born in 1996 or afterward, and 97.2% graduated from high school in spring 2015. All of MVNU’s freshmen in fall 2015 were enrolled as full-time students. Fully 2 of 3 freshmen’s permanent home is 100 miles or less from MVNU’s main campus. Over 98% report English as their native language.

Gender

The gender distribution of MVNU’s entering freshmen that of the comparison institutions; for every two males, three females enroll.

Gender	MVNU Percent	Other Religious 4-Year Colleges (Medium Selectivity) Percent	Other Religious 4-Year Colleges Percent
Female	58.6	58.3	57.2
Male	41.4	41.7	42.8

Ethnicity

MVNU’s traditional undergraduate student body is largely white and Caucasian, with racial or ethnic minorities generally being underrepresented. MVNU’s pattern and the comparison group profiles are detailed in the table below.

Race/Ethnicity Group	MVNU Percent	Other Religious 4-Year Colleges (Medium Selectivity) Percent	Other Religious 4-Year Colleges Percent
American Indian	0.0	0.1	0.3
Asian	0.9	2.6	3.9
Black	2.8	8.7	13.0
Hispanic	1.1	4.6	5.8
White	85.8	73.5	65.4
Other	0.3	0.7	0.7
Two or more races/ethnicities	9.1	9.8	10.9

The cohort’s racial profile reflects the general pattern of the high school attended.

Racial Composition of High School Last Attended	MVNU Percent	Other Religious 4-Year Colleges (Medium Selectivity) Percent	Other Religious 4-Year Colleges Percent
Completely white	10.9	6.8	7.0
Mostly white	70.4	56.2	51.0
Roughly half non-white	13.5	24.5	26.6
Mostly non-white	4.6	9.6	12.5
Completely non-white	0.6	3.0	3.0

In general the high school’s racial composition images that of the residential neighborhoods.

Racial Composition of the Home Neighborhood	MVNU Percent	Other Religious 4-Year Colleges (Medium Selectivity) Percent	Other Religious 4-Year Colleges Percent
Completely white	23.2	19.2	17.7
Mostly white	59.1	54.1	51.3
Roughly half non-white	9.9	13.2	14.4
Mostly non-white	6.4	9.6	10.9
Completely non-white	1.4	3.9	5.7

Three of four MVNU freshmen attended a public (not charter or magnet) high school; one in six attended a private religious or parochial school, and one in fourteen was home-schooled. Both of the latter exceed the rates in peers. One in five reported being the first generation in college, very similar to peers. Like their peers nine of ten MVNU freshmen anticipate graduating with a baccalaureate degree from their current college in four years.

Characteristics Shared with National Peers

HERI administers *The Freshman Survey* to over 200,000 students annually. With this large sample HERI provides multiple sets of norms from which institutions can select in making appropriate peer-to-peer comparisons (e.g., all baccalaureate institutions, 4-year colleges, public versus private, non-sectarian, Catholic, other religious types, etc.). HERI develops similar norming group information related to the *College Senior Survey*. It is reasonable to suspect that MVNU students would be similar to the larger national group because they share a common national, economic, and educational environment. Accreditation standards and shared concepts of best practice across the higher education provider spectrum in the United States also contribute to some common senior characteristics.

Constructs

MVNU's entering freshmen reflect their religious college peers in many dimensions, and reported similarities with their peers in how often in the previous years they engaged in specific behaviors.

Construct	MVNU Average	Other Religious 4-Year Colleges (Medium Selectivity)	Other Religious 4-Year Colleges
Habits of the mind	47.2	48.1	48.1
Social self-concept	50.0	50.4	50.7
College reputation orientation	53.7	54.0	54.0

Note: MVNU's freshmen were not statistically different from their peers on these opinions or behaviors practiced in the previous year.

Themes

MVNU's incoming freshmen reflected commonalities with their peers from the religiously oriented institutions:

- MVNU's freshmen engaged in a similar college selection process as their peers.
- MVNU freshmen bring similar academic habits, academic ability, and social confidence as their peers to the collegiate environment; yet MVNU freshmen reported lower levels of academic self-concept and academic self-confidence.

See Appendix A for additional details on specific survey items that contribute to the themes.

Distinctive Characteristics

However, the subcultures from which MVNU students come, their personal values and preferences, their reasons for selecting a specific college and academic program, etc. should yield some distinctive characteristics in the entering class. This section focuses on statistically significant differences between the MVNU averages and those of the comparison groups.

Themes

The number and breadth of specific items organizing the theme make it difficult to articulate an accurate and meaningful summary of each theme. Some of most broad brushstrokes findings include the following:

- MVNU freshmen were more likely to apply to only one college, accepted by the college of choice, and are attending the college of first choice than their religious college peers. Religious affiliation and orientation was much more important in the choice by MVNU freshman than for their peers. College reputation and rankings were less important to MVNU freshmen than their peers in other religious institutions. MVNU freshmen were less motivated by the importance of a good salary after graduation or the cost of colleges

than their peers or preparation for graduate or professional skills. MVNU’s freshmen reported less influence by high school counselors or teachers than their peers in college choice.

- MVNU freshmen generally reported lower academic disengagement (i.e., coming late to class, skipping class or school, or falling asleep in class) during the senior year in high school than their peers in religious institutions.
- In academic preparation as measured by the ACT and SAT, MVNU students are similar to peers attending other religious institutions. However, MVNU freshmen are less confident in their academic abilities, especially in mathematics, and were less assertive in pursuing academic improvement.
- On most dimensions, MVNU freshmen interacted with their high school teachers in the classroom in a similar pattern as those attending 4-year religious colleges. MVNU freshmen reported being less influenced by high school teachers and talking with teachers outside of class.
- MVNU freshmen reported less experience with tutoring other students and less studying with other students in high school than did their peers.
- MVNU freshmen projected they will be less likely to participate in a study abroad program, but more likely to enroll in an online course at MVNU.
- In the areas of leadership, MVNU freshmen expressed lower levels of social self-confidence and desire to become a recognized leader in one’s field than their peers.
- On most expressions of civic engagement, MVNU freshmen mirrored their peers. However, they expressed less confidence that they will participate in efforts to promote racial understanding or student protests or demonstrations (e.g., diminished levels of political engagement).
- On most measures of diversity (e.g., socializing with diverse races, tolerance of different beliefs, openness to challenging views, negotiating controversial issues, having a roommate of a different race, etc.), MVNU freshmen reported lower rates of previous experience and projections into the future.
- MVNU freshmen reported lower levels of consumption of beer, wine, or liquor, or spending significant time partying during the past year than did their peers. They reported more frequent feelings of being overwhelmed with what needs to be done and lower levels of physical health. Only one in twelve indicated there is a “very good chance” they will seek personal counseling while at college.
- On all measures of religious belief or practice, MVNU freshmen reported higher levels of spirituality and religiosity than their peers attending religiously affiliated institutions.
- MVNU freshmen approached college choice and attendance with a strong career orientation and direct entry in baccalaureate level fields. Their motivation for college enrollment was lower for getting a general education, appreciating of ideas, becoming a more cultured person, or making more money than their peers. Fewer anticipated attending graduate or professional schools than peers. Similarly, they did not anticipate changing majors or career choices.

Constructs

MVNU’s mission statement, public persona, and messaging highlight its distinctive aspects; MVNU freshmen select MVNU because of these distinctive values and programming.

Construct	MVNU Average	Other Religious 4-Year Colleges (Medium Selectivity)	Other Religious 4-Year Colleges
Academic self-concept	47.8	49.0**	49.3***
Pluralistic orientation	46.5	48.1**	48.3***
Social agency	48.8	49.6	50.1**
Civic engagement	48.5	49.4*	49.4*
Likelihood of college involvement	45.0	46.8***	47.4***

Note: Statistically significant difference between MVNU average and comparison average (* < .05, ** < 01, and *** < .001).

Several gender differences were observed from the construct findings; it is important for MVNU employees to consider how the ongoing MVNU socialization process should intervene as corrective mechanisms in program design and program implementation.

- MVNU females scored lower in habits of the mind than females from other religious colleges (47.0 vs. 48.3, $p < .05$).
- MVNU males reported lower academic self-concepts than males from other religious colleges (48.3 vs. 50.1, $p < .01$).
- MVNU females also reported lower academic self-concepts than their female peers (47.5 vs. 48.7, $p < .05$).
- MVNU freshmen reported lower motivation for political and social involvement in their communities than did peers; this difference is most pronounced for MVNU females (48.1 vs. 50.1, $p < .01$). MVNU freshmen, both females and males, indicated a strong importance to raising families (3.41 vs. 3.10, $p < .001$).
- Similarly, MVNU female freshmen reported lower motivation for involvement in civic, electoral, or political activities (48.8 vs. 49.9, $p < .05$).
- Therefore, it is no surprise that MVNU freshmen women expect to be involved at lower levels in general campus life (46.1 vs. 49.3, $p < .001$).

Altruism is strong, but application is in a one-on-one or small group contexts; organizing movements, advocating for policy change, and other engagement at the mezzo- or macro-levels is less common and motivating. Volunteerism is predicted to show engagement in micro-social contexts or setting and in environments that are a-political or non-political.

Appendix B presents specific items constituting the themes and how MVNU's entering freshmen are differentiated positively and negatively from their peers in other religious institutions.

Appendix A: Selected Commonalities with Religious Peers

Item	Theme(s)	MVNU Average	Other Religious 4-Year Colleges (Medium Selectivity)	Other Religious 4-Year Colleges
In deciding to go to college, how important was to learning more things that interest me (very important)	College choice, career planning	2.77	2.79	2.80
How important was it that my parents/relatives wanted me to come here (very important)	College choice	1.84	1.81	1.80
... this college has a very good academic reputation (very important)	College choice	2.55	2.62*	2.59
... this college has a good reputation for its social activities (very important)	College choice	2.25	2.30	2.28
... I was offered financial assistance (very important)	College choice	2.57	2.64*	2.59
... the cost of attending this college (very important)	College choice	2.22	2.24	2.18
... this college's graduates get good jobs (very important)	College choice	2.50	2.47	2.46
... I wanted to go to a school about the size of this college (very important)	College choice	2.42	2.42	2.38
Best guess as to the chances that will work full-time while attending college (very good chance/some chance)	Financial college	2.00	2.07	2.05
Failed to complete homework on time in last year (frequently/occasionally)	Academic disengagement	1.57	1.59	1.57
How often in the past did you seek feedback on academic work (frequently)	Interaction with teachers	2.49	2.44	2.43
Performed community service as a part of a class last year (frequently/occasionally)	Active and collaborative learning	1.69	1.73	1.72
Rate yourself compared to the average person your age on drive to achieve (highest 10%/above average)	Leadership	4.04	4.09	4.11
... on leadership ability (highest 10%/above average)	Leadership	3.71	3.76	3.79
... on social self-confidence (highest 10%/above average)	Leadership	3.33	3.34	3.39
How important is it to you to become a community leader (essential/very important)	Leadership, civic engagement	2.17	2.23	2.27
Best guess as to chances you will participate in student government (very good chance/some chance)	Leadership, civic engagement	2.01	2.04	2.07
How important is it to you to influence social values (essential/very important)	Civic engagement: participation, awareness, and values	2.41	2.44	2.45
... participate in volunteer or community service work (very good chance)	Civic engagement: participation, awareness, and values	2.97	3.05	3.04

Colleges should prohibit racist/sexist speech on campus (agree strongly/agree somewhat)	Diversity	3.06	3.01	2.99
How important it is to you to improve my understanding of other countries and cultures (essential/very important)	Diversity	2.54	2.62	2.31
Best guess as to your chances to social with someone of another racial/ethnic group (very good change)	Diversity	3.54	3.57	3.54
Smoked cigarettes in the last year (frequently)	Health and wellness	1.07	1.09	1.09
Felt overwhelmed by all I had to do (frequently)	Health and wellness	2.30	2.29	2.25
Felt depressed (frequently)	Health and wellness	1.58	1.63	1.60
Rate your emotional health (highest 10%/above average)	Health and wellness	3.52	3.47	3.49
Rate your physical health (highest 10%/above average)	Health and wellness	3.55	3.61	3.67
How important is it to you to develop a meaningful philosophy of life (essential/very important)	Spirituality/religiosity	2.31	2.35	2.41

Appendix B: Selected Differences from Religious Peers

Item	Theme(s)	MVNU Average	Other Religious 4-Year Colleges (Medium Selectivity)	Other Religious 4-Year Colleges
In deciding to go to college, how important is it to be able to get a good job (very important)	College choice, career planning	2.73	2.81**	2.81***
... to gain a general education and appreciation of ideas (very important)	College choice, career planning	2.55	2.67***	2.68***
... to make me a more cultured person (very important)	College choice, career planning	2.26	2.36**	2.36**
... to be able to make more money (very important)	College choice, career planning	2.45	2.61***	2.63***
... to get training for a specific career (very important)	College choice, career planning	2.82	2.75*	2.74**
... to prepare myself for graduate or professional school (very important)	College choice, career planning	2.18	2.35***	2.39***
How important was it that my teacher advised me to come here (very important)	College choice, interaction with teachers	1.22	1.44***	1.42***
... high school counselor advise me to come here (very important)	College choice	1.24	1.45***	1.44***
... this college's graduates gain admission to top graduate/professional schools (very important)	College choice, career planning	1.83	2.01***	2.05***
... that I was attracted by the religious affiliation/orientation of this college (very important)	College choice	2.53	1.79***	1.75***
... that this college had rankings in national magazines (very important)	College choice	1.27	1.58***	1.59***
Best guess as to the chances you will get a job to help pay for college expenses (very good chance/some chance)	Financing college	3.45	3.34*	3.28***
Was bored in class last year (frequently)	Academic disengagement	2.18	2.26*	2.26**
Came late to class last year (frequently/occasionally)	Academic disengagement	1.43	1.52**	1.54***
Skipped school/class last year (frequently/occasionally)	Academic disengagement	1.19	1.28***	1.28***
Fell asleep in class last year (frequently/occasionally)	Academic disengagement	1.36	1.48***	1.48***
How often in the past year did you take a risk because you felt you had more to gain (frequently)	Academic preparation	2.17	2.24*	2.27**
... look up scientific research articles and resources (frequently)	Academic preparation	1.87	2.00***	1.99**
Rate yourself on academic ability (highest 10%/above average)	Academic preparation	3.66	3.78**	3.89***
Rate yourself on intellectual self-confidence (highest 10%/above average)	Academic preparation	3.46	3.57*	3.64***
How much last year did you typically spend talking with teachers outside of class (11 or more hours)	Interaction with teachers	2.52	2.77***	2.75***

Tutored another student last year (frequently/occasionally)	Active and collaborative learning	1.52	1.61*	1.63**
Studied with other students last year (frequently/occasionally)	Active and collaborative learning	2.09	2.17*	2.19**
Used an online instructional website (e.g., Khan Academy, Coursera) to learn something on your own (frequently)	Academic enhancement experiences	2.23	2.12**	2.19
Participate in a study abroad program (very good chance)	Academic enhancement experiences	2.59	2.88**	2.87***
Take a course exclusively online at this institution (very good chance)	Academic enhancement experiences	2.14	1.93***	1.96***
Take a course exclusively online at a different institution (very good chance)	Academic enhancement experiences	1.58	1.69*	1.75***
How important is it to you to become an authority in the field (essential/very important)	Leadership	2.51	2.64*	2.67**
How often in the past year did you demonstrate for a cause (e.g., boycott, rally, protest) (frequently/occasionally)	Civic engagement: participation, awareness, and values	1.13	1.23***	1.22***
Rate yourself on tolerance of others with different beliefs (a major strength/somewhat strong)	Civic engagement: participation, awareness, and values; diversity	3.89	4.05**	4.07***
. . . openness to having my own views challenged (a major strength/somewhat strong)	Civic engagement: participation, awareness, and values; diversity	3.53	3.70**	3.73***
. . . to discuss and negotiate controversial issues (a major strength/somewhat strong)	Civic engagement: participation, awareness, and values; diversity	3.70	3.85**	3.87**
How important it is to you to help others who are in difficulty (essential/very important)	Civic engagement: participation, awareness, and values	3.23	3.09**	3.05***
. . . to participate in a community action program (essential/very important)	Civic engagement: participation, awareness, and values	2.01	2.10	2.15**
. . . to help to promote racial understanding (essential/very important)	Civic engagement: participation, awareness, and values	2.08	2.27***	2.31***

... to keep up to date with political affairs (essential/very important)	Civic engagement: participation, awareness, and values	2.09	2.17	2.21*
... participate in student protests or demonstrations (very good chance)	Civic engagement: participation, awareness, and values	1.76	2.04***	2.11***
How much in the past year did you socialize with someone of another racial/ethnic group (frequently)	Diversity	2.56	2.66***	2.66***
Racial discrimination is no longer a major problem in America (agree strongly/agree somewhat)	Diversity	1.98	1.86**	1.81***
Same-sex couples should have the right to legal marital status (agree strongly/agree somewhat)	Diversity	1.93	2.89***	2.94***
Students from disadvantaged backgrounds should be given preferential treatment in college admission (agree strongly/agree somewhat)	Diversity	2.44	2.51	2.53*
Best guess as to have a roommate of different race/ethnicity (very good chance)	Diversity	2.78	2.94**	2.96**
Drank beer in the last year (frequently)	Health and wellness	1.12	1.30***	1.31***
Drank wine or liquor in the last year (frequently)	Health and wellness	1.13	1.36***	1.38***
Rate yourself in self-understanding (highest 10%/above average)	Health and wellness	3.54	3.62	3.67**
Best guess as to chances you will seek personal counseling (very good chance)	Health and wellness	2.25	2.46***	2.45***
Attended a religious service within the last year (frequently/occasionally)	Spirituality/religiosity	2.78	2.24***	2.23***
Discussed religion within the last year (frequently/occasionally)	Spirituality/religiosity	2.48	2.19***	2.19***
Rate yourself on spirituality compared to the average person your age (highest 10%/above average)	Spirituality/religiosity	3,65	3.37***	3.34***

Note: Statistically significant difference between MVNU average and comparison average (* < .05, ** < 01, and *** < .001).