

Results from annual Mount Mercy Longitudinal Study on Student Growth

2024–2025

To explore whether students at Mount Mercy changed in their “Openness to Diversity and Challenge” during their first year at the institution, data were collected from all incoming students new to the university during the 2024-2025 academic year. The measure of Openness to Diversity and Challenge assesses the degree to which students are willing to interact with people from different backgrounds and to have their beliefs and values challenged. This outcome aligns with Mount Mercy’s institutional goal of “serving the common good.” A total of 163 students began their studies at Mount Mercy in the fall 2024 term. Of the 141 students still enrolled at the end of the academic year, 81 completed the posttest measure, which is a 57.45% response rate. In addition to the pretest and posttest data collected from these 81 students, a set of student experience data was also gathered at the end of the academic year to determine which experiences influenced the outcome measure.

Respondents showed no change in their Openness to Diversity and Challenge scores from the beginning to the end of the academic year; students averaged 4.05 out of 5 at both data collection points. Importantly, many longitudinal studies of college students find that such scores on this outcome often decline or remain unchanged over time. Also noteworthy, this score suggests that students arrive at Mount Mercy already relatively open to diversity and challenge. Though lower than in previous years, 53% of students reported participating in at least one high-impact practice. Notably, 22% of students completed a portal course (i.e., freshman seminar), and 21% participated in service learning.

Lastly, results from multivariate analyses suggest that, even after adjusting for various potential confounding influences, the following experiences were associated with increases in Openness to Diversity and Challenge by the end of the first year: satisfaction with academic advising and satisfaction with library services.

Highlights from 2024–25	Notable patterns and examples
Students’ growth in the Mount Mercy goal of serving the common good was measured by assessing changes in their levels of Openness to Diversity and Challenge.	Students scored an average of 4.05 (out of 5) on both the pretest and posttest Openness to Diversity and Challenge measure. The fact that scores did not change is unsurprising, as several other studies have found declines in this measure in longitudinal investigations. Nonetheless, students who reported satisfaction with academic advising and library services were more likely to exhibit gains in this important outcome.