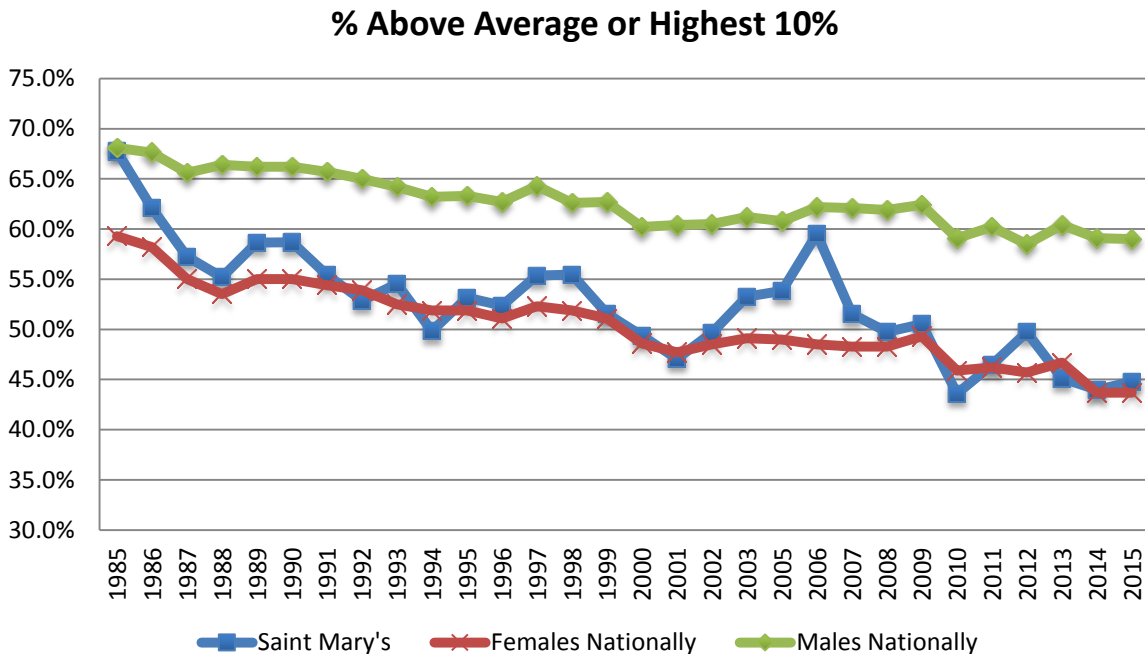


**Institutional Research Update (August 2016)**

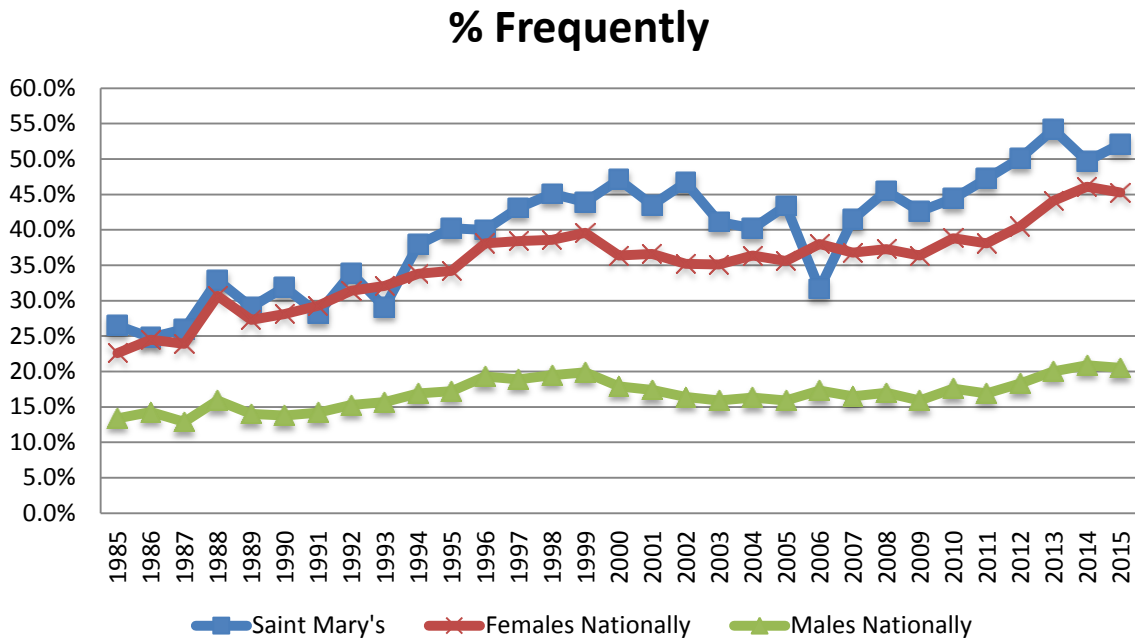
This month's update takes a long-term look at entering first-year undergraduates' emotional and physical well-being as they enter college. This note draws on longitudinal data from the Higher Education Research Institute's (HERI) CIRP Freshman Survey of first-year students. Saint Mary's has participated in this widely used national survey in every year but two since 1973. The survey is administered to first-years prior to beginning classes in August of each year. Results suggest that entering first-year self-assessment of emotional well-being has declined since the mid-1980's for Saint Mary's first-years and first-years nationally. Likewise, far more first-years are reporting they feel overwhelmed by all they have to do in their final year of high school. This is especially true of female first-years, including entering Saint Mary's students. While the decline is not as steep, first-year students also rate their physical health lower in 2015 compared to 1985. Despite this decline in self-assessment of physical health, positive changes benefitting physical health are documented with significantly fewer first-years smoking and increases reported in hours spent exercising or engaging in sports. These results, especially the decline in the share of first-years rating their emotional health as above average or in the highest 10%, are an important trend for us to keep in mind especially in light of recent evidence suggesting increases in use of mental health services on college campuses nationally (Rivera, 2015).

**Chart 1: Self-Rated Emotional Health of Entering First-Year Undergraduates**



Source: CIRP First-Year Survey

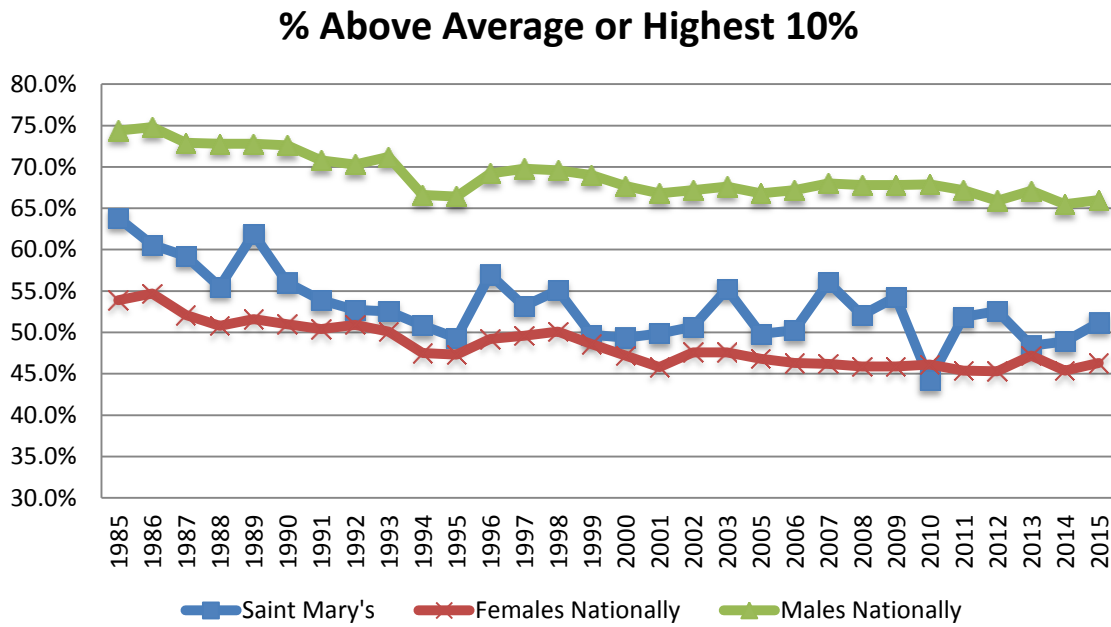
**Chart 2: First-Year Undergraduates Frequently Feeling Overwhelmed by all they had to do in Past Year of High School**



Source: CIRP First-Year Survey

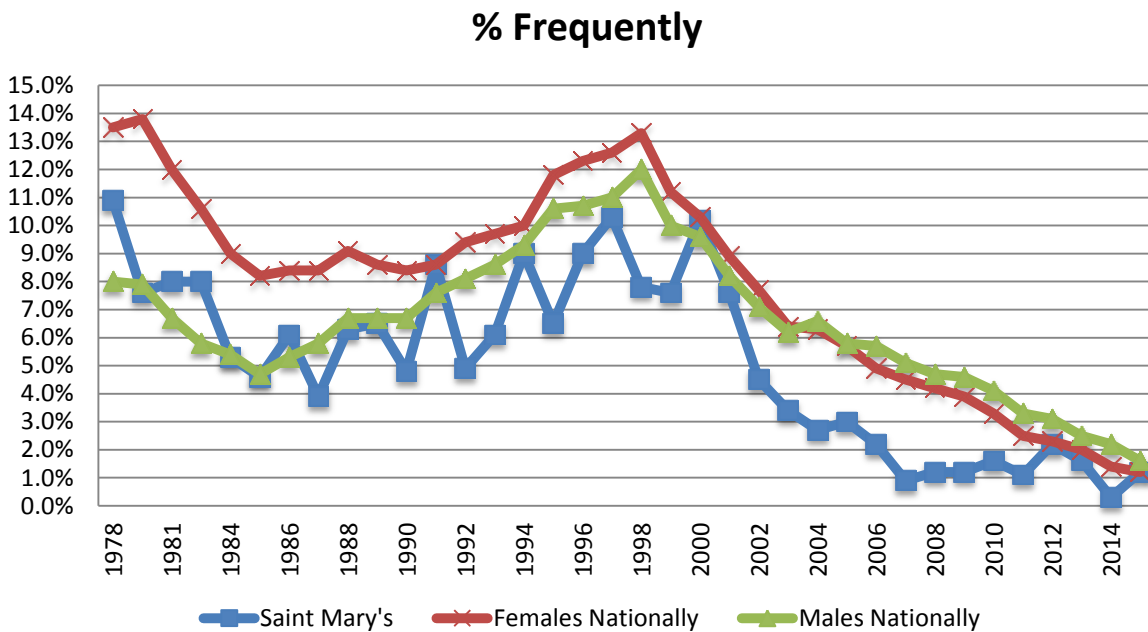
- In 1985, 68% of Saint Mary’s first-years rated their emotional health compared to their peers as above average or in the highest 10%. This declined to 45% in 2015, a 23 percentage point decline. Likewise, female first-years nationally declined from 59% in 1985 to 44% in 2015, a fifteen percentage point drop.
- Males nationally experienced a smaller decline (9 percentage points). Overall, females self-assessment of emotional health declined 1.5 times more than for males nationally.
- Just over a quarter of Saint Mary’s first-years in 1985 indicated they frequently felt overwhelmed by all they had to do in their final year of high school. This has risen to just over half (52%) saying the same in 2015.
- The proportion of female first-years nationally indicating they frequently felt overwhelmed by all they had to do also increased substantially from 23% in 1985 to 45% in 2015.
- As with emotional health, the increase is smaller for males nationally over this same period of time increasing from 13% to 21% reporting they frequently felt overwhelmed by all they had to do in their final year of high school.

Chart 3: Self-Rated Physical Health of Entering First-Year Undergraduates



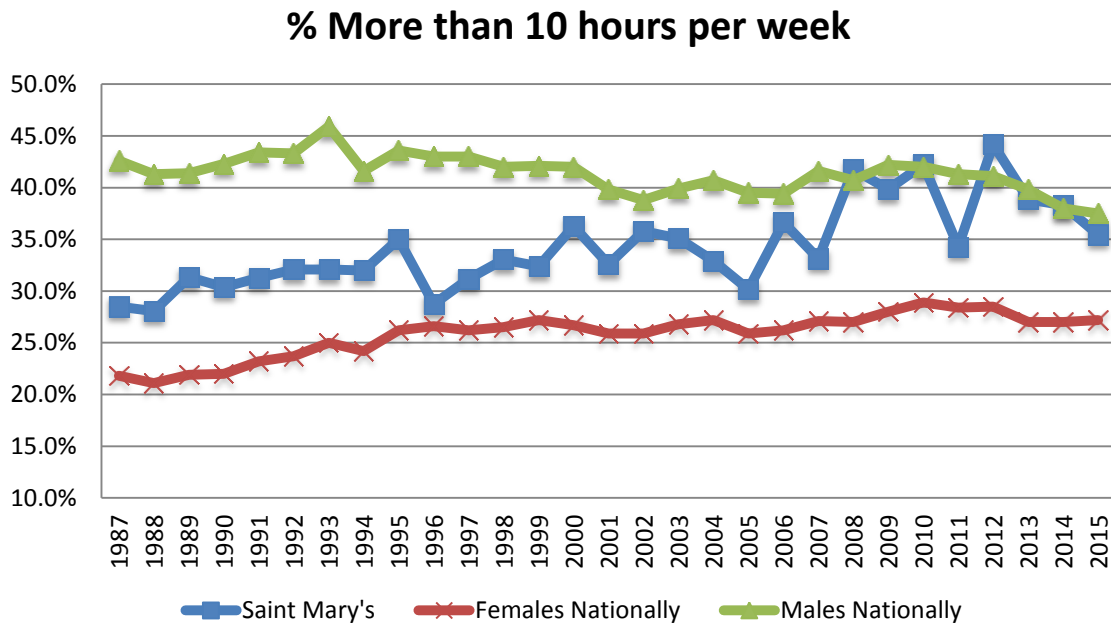
Source: CIRP First-Year Survey

Chart 4: First-Year Undergraduates Frequently Smoking Cigarettes in Past Year of High School



Source: CIRP First-Year Survey

Chart 5: More than 10 hours per week spent exercising or in sports



- The percentage of Saint Mary’s first-years rating their physical health as above average or in the highest 10% compared to peers decreased from 64% in 1985 to 51% in 2015. Similar decreases, though not quite as steep, were seen for both male and female first-years nationally.
- Male first-years more frequently rate their physical health as above average or in the highest 10% compared to their peers (66% vs. 46% for female first-years nationally).
- Despite these declines in self-assessment of physical health, trends likely to have a positive impact on physical health have emerged. Rates of smoking have plummeted for all first-year populations, including Saint Mary’s first-years. In 1978, 11% of Saint Mary’s first-years reported smoking frequently compared to just over 1% in 2015.
- First-years at Saint Mary’s are more likely than female first-years nationally to report having engaged in exercise or sports more than 10 hours per week during their final year of high school. In recent years, Saint Mary’s first-years have matched or even exceeded males nationally who reported engaging in exercise or sports more than 10 hours per week.
- The gap nationally between males and females who say they spent more than 10 hours per week exercising or in sports during their last year of high school has declined in the last 28 years. In 1987, the gap was 21 percentage points but by 2015, it was just 10 percentage points reflecting increased engagement nationally of females in exercise and sports while males engaging this frequently has actually decreased slightly.

Rivera, C. (2015, September). What colleges are doing to address students’ unprecedented levels of stress. Los Angeles Times. Retrieved from <http://www.latimes.com/local/education/la-me-higherlearning-college-20150930-story.html>.