Assessing Mission-focused Personal Development at St. Norbert College

Introduction
Following these introductory remarks are two papers, each of which could stand alone and be read without reference to the other. They are coupled here because of their complementary nature. Both papers address the topic of mission-based affective outcomes, learning outcomes that are conceptually complex and refractory to commonly-employed assessment procedures.

The first—and longer—paper (Student Learning Outcomes: The Personal Sphere) chronicles the efforts of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (with the assistance of the Student Life Division) to initiate a research program with the twin goals of (1) clarifying the conceptual bases of our Mission-based affective learning outcomes and (2) exploring the relationships between these outcomes, the St. Norbert educational environment, and the personal characteristics students bring to our ‘educational table.’ Despite its length, the reader of this paper will see, at completion, that it summarizes only the initial steps of what will be a lengthy exploration.

The length of the exploration is consistent with the complexity of the mission-based learning outcomes themselves. The justification for the exploration is based on integrity: Institutional Mission Statement learning outcomes should reflect the core identity of an institution, what it sees as its uniquely valuable contribution to the larger society of which it claims to be an important member. To neglect or avoid the assessment of such ideologically crucial learning outcomes is hypocritical, if not irresponsible.

Assessing mission-based learning outcomes, particularly in the affective (personal) domain, is difficult work. In part, the difficulty comes from a sense that one is exploring uncharted educational territory, territory with few landmarks and no roads. The second paper (Positive Psychology and the Return of Virtue) is intended to dispel this depressing (and false) belief.

The recently-elaborated field of positive psychology (which addresses human strengths and positive coping resources) provides affective outcomes assessment with a research-based conceptual framework that enriches our understanding of personal sphere outcomes. And positive psychology also gives us a rich array of assessment tools and methods developed over decades of study in the field of human personality. What’s not to like?

Exciting learning opportunities (for us) that contribute to enhanced learning (for students) await. Let’s begin!

-Jack Williamson, OIE
Student Learning Outcomes: The Personal Sphere
Part 1: Understanding the Four Personal Sphere Outcomes

Introduction
In its Mission Statement and related documents the College has stated the outcomes it expects will result from the curricular and cocurricular educational experiences it offers its students. These student learning outcomes are gathered under three dimensions, namely, intellectual outcomes, personal outcomes, and spiritual outcomes.

In the area of personal development, St. Norbert lists four expectations. As a result of their St. Norbert education, the College expects that its students will:

1. Clarify and develop their own personal goals.
3. Gain a deeper level of self-understanding.
4. Become open, honest, and trusting in relationships with others

The original discussions which led to the listing of these four goals, and the rationale for their selection over other possible competitors, are no longer readily accessible. However, the goals had been part of the College Catalog for at least ten years and included on the College’s Current Student Survey for an equal amount of time. They continued until 2004 to reflect the College’s view of what are important outcomes in the personal sphere.

Of course, the personal development of students—at St. Norbert or any other higher education institution—is not limited to the four areas listed above. However, at the time of the research reported here these four outcomes represented the areas of personal growth to which the College committed its educational resources.

What is in this report?
This report summarizes what St. Norbert students tell us about their growth in the four areas of personal development. This information comes from two primary sources: responses to surveys administered by the College and a series of focus groups conducted by the St. Norbert Survey Center in Spring, 2003.

---

1 The text of this report refers to St. Norbert Mission Statements prior to February, 2004. A revised Mission Statement was approved at that time.

2 The Mission Statement approved in 2004 lists new personal sphere goals that are similar in nature to those discussed in this document. These new goals are: identify, test, and strengthen moral convictions, act with personal integrity, develop meaningful personal goals, and build relationships based on mutual respect.
The surveys were administered to students while in attendance at the College; comparable surveys have been completed by recent alumni. The surveys used were the College’s *Current Student Survey* (1994-2002), the *CIRP* (freshmen) and *College Student Survey* (seniors) from UCLA (2000-2003), and the *St. Norbert Alumni Survey* (administered to graduates from 1994-1999).

**The Beginning**

The four personal learning outcomes are stated without definition or elaboration in the previous Mission Statement and in the surveys listed above. Yet students appear to respond in some meaningful way to survey items in which they appear.

The chart below, for example, follows the pooled entering freshman cohorts of 1996-1999 through four years of responding to the St. Norbert *Current Student Survey* item, “To what extent has the College helped you with…. [Mission Statement personal sphere goal]?

There are several features of this chart worth noting. One of the most obvious is that there is a gradual increase in the percent of the cohort group indicating the College helped them with the achievement of the four personal goals listed. That is a gratifying (although unexplained) finding. Second, note that, with the exception of “self-understanding,” there appears to be a kind of plateau between the sophomore and junior years, as if not much change is occurring during that time.

The third factor of note is that the four personal sphere goals are differentiated. That is, the students are distinguishing among them and not giving identical positive ratings to all four. From the students’ perspective, the College helps most with “Clarify and develop personal goals” and least with “Become open,
honest, and trusting in relationships with others.” “Achieve a sense of self-worth” and “Gain a deeper level of self-understanding” are intermediate (and virtually identical to each other) in gains from the freshman to senior years. Throughout the four years, the “relationships” goal clearly lags behind (by about ten percentage points) the other three in student ratings of College helpfulness.

The Current Student Survey is administered in November of the academic year, during the academic advisement period. That means less than three months intervene between matriculation and survey completion. It is impressive—but puzzling—that so many freshmen (minimally more than 65%) believe the College has contributed to the achievement of these four goals from the personal sphere in so short a time.

It remains to be determined whether—and to what extent—the College really has made that kind of contribution so quickly. What is clear is that students report changes from freshman through senior year. What is not clear is the accuracy of student perception that the College has had an impact on the changes. Are they making the fundamental empirical error captured by the phrase, “Correlation is not causality”? That is, just because the perceived changes occur while the students are attending St. Norbert (correlation), that is not compelling evidence they occurred because of some aspects of St. Norbert (causality).

We conclude from the chart above that something “meaningful” (empirically reliable) is taking place with regard to the four goals of the personal sphere. But interpretation should halt with that relatively bland conclusion, since many questions remain. Two obvious examples: what do students have in mind when faced with survey items with the four personal goals embedded in them? And what do they think the College does that contributes to their personal development in this area? We decided to ask.

**Findings from Focus Groups**

In order to obtain additional information on student understanding of the four personal goals, the Student Life Assessment Committee and the Office of Institutional Effectiveness commissioned the St. Norbert College Survey Center to conduct focus groups of SNC students. The groups (one comprised of randomly-selected freshmen and sophomores, the other of juniors and seniors, both with men and women) were asked to define what the outcomes meant to them. In addition, students were asked about the ways they believed the College supported their development in the four areas.

The focus groups were conducted in March, 2003, with summaries of student comments available shortly thereafter. These comments became the first step in the College’s efforts to understand what students might be thinking when they respond to our survey items related to the four personal outcomes. In the next section we look at what students told us about their understanding of our four
personal sphere goals. Then we summarize how they say the College helps them.

Personal Sphere Outcome 1:  
**Personal Goals**

- **Freshmen** and **Sophomore** focus groups members emphasized the following personal goals:

1. Excel in academics.
2. Prepare for the future through exploration of options and experiences while in college.
3. Balance social and academic commitments.
4. Develop relationships with students different from self.

- **Junior** and **Senior** focus group members emphasized the following personal goals:

1. Prepare for career or graduate school.
2. Build self-satisfaction and self-confidence by doing your best and/or helping others.
3. Enjoy life by an appropriate balance of financial security, lasting relationships with friends and family, work, and fun.
4. Spread God’s message and maintain one’s integrity.

Personal Sphere Outcome 2:  
**Self-Worth**

- **Freshmen** and **Sophomore** focus groups members emphasized the following perspectives on self-worth:

1. Accepting oneself, even with imperfections.
2. Acting in ways consistent with central values and beliefs, no matter what.
3. Seeing oneself as a competent, capable person.
4. Having a positive influence or impact on others.

- **Junior** and **Senior** focus group members emphasized the following perspectives on self-worth:

1. Satisfaction with past personal accomplishments and confidence accomplishments will continue in the future.
2. Contributing to the welfare of others.
3. Accepting oneself and others as individuals.

Personal Sphere Outcome 3: **Self-Understanding**

- **Freshmen** and **Sophomore** focus group members emphasized the following perspectives on **self-understanding**:

  1. Understanding one’s life goals and what matters most to you.
  2. Understanding one’s central beliefs and moral values.
  3. Understanding one’s personal strengths and weaknesses.

- **Junior** and **Senior** focus group members emphasized the following perspectives on **self-understanding**:

  1. Understanding one’s personal strengths and weaknesses.
  2. Being satisfied with one’s unique self.
  3. Resisting pressure from others to change in ways inconsistent with one’s values.
  4. Using lessons from past experiences to take the initiative in achieving future goals.

Personal Sphere Outcome 4: **Becoming more open, honest, and trusting in relationships.**

- **Freshmen** and **Sophomore** focus group members emphasized the following perspectives on becoming more open, honest, and trusting:

  1. Being able to say what you feel without being judged.
  2. Respecting the different opinions of others.
  3. Mutual caring is necessary.

- **Junior** and **Senior** focus group members emphasized the following perspectives on **becoming more open, honest, and trusting**:

  1. Taking responsibility for your actions by being honest about them.
  2. Not being judged negatively because of your beliefs.
The comments of the focus group participants provided some clarification to our understanding of what students might be thinking when they respond to survey items from the personal sphere. But they did not provide an indication of how widespread the various meanings for each personal sphere goal might be among our students. To determine that, we subsequently added questions to the St. Norbert College 2003 Current Student Survey that included what we judged to be the main response options from our focus groups. We then tabled and charted the results by year in school.

The First Mission-based Outcome: Clarify and develop one's personal goals

Let's take a look at student responses to the 2003 item, “Which one best describes an important goal for you this year”?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Freshman</th>
<th>Sophomore</th>
<th>Junior</th>
<th>Senior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Obtain the best grades I can</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn to balance academic and social life</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make new friends with different backgrounds</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take courses that prepare me for my career after college</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Become more independent and self-sufficient</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The highlighted cells in the table indicate the cell in each column with the largest percentage of responses. All cells are in the chart below the table, arranged by class year.

Some highlights: doing well academically is important, particularly for freshmen and sophomores. Taking courses that contribute to career preparation is important for juniors and seniors. Learning to balance academic and social dimensions of college life is the second most important goal for freshmen and sophomores, with good grades the second choice of juniors and seniors.
The personal goals selected by our respondents are not surprising. They correspond to what are the likely demands and pressures perceived by students as they move from the lower biennium to upper-class status. The results also provide suggested targets for institutional programming—academic-focused for freshmen and sophomores, career-focused for juniors and seniors.

The second Mission-based Outcome: Self-worth

The second outcome in the College’s Mission Statement indicated students would “achieve a sense of self-worth.” Self-worth would seem to be a rather opaque concept. Our focus group respondents provided meanings for it, however, and—following their lead—we followed up with our 2003 Current Student Survey question, “Which one of the following best describes what having “self-worth” means to you”? Results, tabled and charted, are below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accepting myself for the person I am with imperfections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting in ways consistent with my central values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeing myself as a competent capable person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a positive impact on people I know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being accepted and liked by the people I care about</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q 46: "Which best describes what having 'self-worth' means to you"?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Accepting myself for the person I am with imperfections</th>
<th>Acting in ways consistent with my central values</th>
<th>Seeing myself as a competent capable person</th>
<th>Having a positive impact on people I know</th>
<th>Being accepted and liked by the people I care about</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Accepting myself for the person I am with imperfections” was the clear choice of the majority of students from all class years. But a minority of respondents selected options related to acting in ways consistent with their values or having a sense of competency. There were differences between male and female students, however, as the next table/chart combination shows.

Women students clearly favored the accepting self option, while just under half of men did so. A quarter of male respondents selected the consistent values option, and about one in six, the competency choice.
College programs directed at helping students improve self-worth could usefully take these differences into account. Female students are more likely to be attracted to interventions related to addressing self-acceptance, males somewhat less so. Conversely, programming focused on developing a sense of personal competence and/or retaining integrity under pressure may be ways of helping men.

Keep in mind there was no universally accepted definition of self-worth selected by respondents. Regardless of the gender differences noted above, there are subgroups of both sexes who should be responsive to interventions addressing any of the definitional options.

**The Third Mission-based Outcome: Gain a deeper level of Self-Understanding**

You might recall from the chart on the page 2 that “self-worth” and “self-understanding” were closely aligned, almost like twins. The two concepts are related, although not identical.

We used focus group comments to construct this item on our 2003 St. Norbert Current Student Survey: “Which statement best reflects the term, “self-understanding.””

No response option was selected by a majority of any class year, although the first choice was most-selected by every class. The first three response options
collectively were chose by over 90% of students from each class. Note that the first choice ("goals") decreased in popularity by class year. This finding suggests that, by the junior and senior years, one’s notion of what self-understanding means is broadening somewhat. Since we forced students to choose only one response, however, and did not permit multiple selections or ranking of responses, that is a little unclear.

Goals, beliefs and values, and strengths and weaknesses are all important dimensions of self-understanding for our students. Life goals clarification appears to be somewhat more central to freshmen and sophomores than upper-class students, as one might expect, but all of the three are worthy targets of institutional programming.

Although life goals extend beyond career, it makes sense that Career Services would play a significant role in helping students here. And Campus Ministry is the obvious choice for leadership in supporting student clarification of beliefs and values; via its emphasis on “vocation,” it also contributes to life goal clarification too. Our current Freshman Seminar is certainly an early academic home for life purposes clarification, while leadership training is one obvious program for assessment of personal strengths.

Our information is cross-sectional rather than longitudinal. That is, we are not tracking a single cohort from freshman through senior year. Ours is a one-time sample—a snapshot of enrolled students during a given academic year. These remarks are a prefatory caution to the finding (from the third option) that more freshmen and seniors selected the “personal strengths” choice as best than did...
sophomores or junors. If this finding is not the result of sampling error, it suggests that students making a transition into a new environment (college for freshmen, world of work for seniors) are more sensitive about knowledge of their personal competencies and should be attracted to curricular and cocurricular programs aimed at enhancement of personal strengths (the use of a program such as StrengthsQuest, for example).

The Fourth Mission-based Outcome: Open, honest, trusting Relationships.

We noted earlier that, of the four Mission-based personal sphere outcomes, students rate the level of college assistance with “Becoming more open, honest, and trusting in relationships with others” lowest (see chart, page 2). Let’s see how students view the meaning of this outcome.

Q 47: “Which is most important for having open, honest, and trusting relationships with others”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feeling free to say what you think and feel without fear of rejection</th>
<th>Freshman</th>
<th>Sophomore</th>
<th>Junior</th>
<th>Senior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Showing you care about people if they will care about you</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having respect for the opinions/ideas of others, even if you disagree</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being consistent in statements to different people; not &quot;two-faced&quot;</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being willing to admit mistakes to others; accepting responsibility</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For all classes, the most frequently selected option was, “Feeling free to say what I think and feel without fear of rejection” as the most important factor in open, honest, and trusting relationships. But the complement to feeling free to say what one thinks is the second most frequently selected choice, “Having respect for the opinions and ideas of others, even if you disagree.”

This is the Golden Rule in action, doing unto others as you would like done with you, exemplifying just what the other should do so you feel free yourself. Of course, the question not answered by these data is whether the respondents see the connection, grasp the idea that--to have a sense of freedom of expression for themselves—they have to create a climate of respect for the communications of others. And even if the answer to the hypothetical question just-posed is “yes,” it
is not obvious that the intention to show respect is matched by a corresponding set of skills.

Herein may lie a clue as to why students rate the College lowest in its assistance with this Mission-based outcome. Would an inventory or audit of College programs and practices show that (a) senior members of our College community generally model respectful behaviors with each other and with students and (b) that the curriculum (e.g., Communications) and cocurriculum (e.g., Leadership, Counseling, Residential Life) provide students with opportunities for learning and practicing the communications skills needed to create a climate of mutual respect?

The answer awaits, as they say, “further study.” But it is possible the College has taken the matter of respect of its members, one for the other, somewhat for granted. The College’s Human Dignity Statement is a profession of intention and a statement of fundamental institutional values. But it is not a road map to a behavioral destination where the skills needed to make the Statement an observable reality can be found. That is a step that may yet need to be taken—with the same zeal with which the Statement itself was embraced. Perhaps it is time to do that “further study.”

Summary of Part 1
We began with the observation that St. Norbert students reliably report increased help from the College with four Mission-based personal sphere outcomes as they move from freshmen to senior year. Our students also distinguish among the four outcomes, reporting greater assistance from the College with clarification of personal goals and least help with becoming more open, honest, and trusting in relationships. Assistance with achieving a sense of self-worth and deepening self-understanding were intermediate in ratings.

Although it was gratifying to have St. Norbert students indicate the College contributes to their achievement of its Mission-based personal outcomes, it is not clear why they do so, or even what they understand the outcomes to mean to them personally. We tried to address the latter question by conducting focus groups to see what students have in mind when considering the personal outcomes and then following with appropriate survey items to further clarify student perceptions. The results are reported above.

In Part 2 of this report, we will look at some supportive evidence that student ratings indicating the College helped them make gains in the four personal sphere outcomes have some validity. That is, we have evidence the ratings may reflect more than “maturation” which would have occurred in our young adults anyway.
Part 2: Supportive Evidence the College makes a Contribution

In the first part of this report, we provided information on St. Norbert College students’ perceptions of the four personal sphere goals from the College’s Mission statement: as a result of their St. Norbert Education, students will.....

- Clarify and develop their own personal goals
- Achieve a sense of self-worth
- Gain a deeper level of self-understanding
- Become open, honest, and trusting in relationships with others

We showed that increasing percentages of students from class cohorts tracked from freshman to senior year report that the College has helped them, either “to some extent” or “to a great extent,” to achieve the four goals above. However, we did not have any clear ideas about how students defined the above goals when providing us with this report. We decided to find out, first by asking students in focus groups, and then using their responses to devise multiple choice items for the College’s Current Student Survey.

The percentage of students selecting each of the response options for our items in the 2003 Current Student Survey could be tabulated to give us an informal idea of how widespread each possible definition was among survey respondents. This information, in turn, suggests possible interventions to encourage further growth in each of the four areas. We mentioned a few in Part 1; more on this topic in Part 3.

In Part 2 we want to provide some additional information to support the hypothesis that St. Norbert does have an impact on student development in the four personal sphere goals. Recall that in the first section of this report, we made note of the fact that “correlation is not causality.” That is, the fact that an increasing number of students report the College has helped them as they move from freshman to senior year is, at best, evidence that students perceive changes in the four personal sphere outcomes over time and attribute at least part of this change to some aspects of their St. Norbert experience. This “correlation” does not demonstrate that the College actually made any contribution, only that students associated perceived growth with some (unknown) aspects of their education at SNC.

Demographic information from our Current Student Survey provides us with an opportunity to see if there is any support for the hypothesis that the College actually does have an impact. Here’s how.

There is ample research support for the fact that the impact of college on students is linked to some degree with their involvement (Alexander Astin) or engagement (George Kuh) with the institution. The more “connected” students
are to their college or university, the more they are influenced by what they experience there. This same research shows that students who reside at a college typically are more involved than commuter students; they participate in cocurricular experiences and organizations with greater frequency, graduate at higher rates, and report greater satisfaction with the overall college experience.

These findings, which mirror what common sense would suggest, have led colleges to design ways to make students more involved or engaged. Freshman seminars, on-campus work experiences, a residency requirement, and similar interventions are some examples.

But ways to involve commuter students are limited. They often work off-campus, may have family responsibilities, and find it difficult to build the on-campus relationships with faculty, staff, and peers that residents can do with relative ease.

Thus, with commuting students, a college is more limited in opportunities for impact. The implication is that the goals a college might have for its students are also likely to be less evident in a group of commuter students than in a corresponding group of students in residence.

Does this implication hold for St. Norbert? If it does, then fewer commuter students who complete our Current Student Survey should indicate St. Norbert had a major influence on the four personal sphere outcomes than their residential classmates do.

We looked at the average percentage of commuter and residential students in each class for survey years 1995-2002 (eight years total) who reported that, for the goal indicated, St. Norbert had helped achievement “to a great extent.” We decided to use “great extent” rather than combining the responses of “some extent” and “great extent” since our hypothesis was that most students would be willing to give the College “some” credit. On the other hand, (involved, engaged) residents should report “great” impact more often than commuters, given their greater exposure to the St. Norbert College experience.

We lacked information that would allow us to make differential predictions about the amount of influence attributed to the College among our four personal sphere outcomes. So our prediction was a general one, namely, that all four goals should have a greater percentage of residential students reporting the College helped them “to a great extent.”

The results, in chart form, are on the next two pages.
Residents vs. Commuters: Personal Goals
Percent SNC Survey respondents reporting College helped “to a great extent.”

Residents vs. Commuters: Gain a deeper level of Self-Understanding
Percent SNC Survey respondents reporting College helped “to a great extent.”
Residents vs. Commuters: Achieve a sense of Self-Worth
Percent SNC Survey respondents reporting College helped "to a great extent."
SNC Current Student Survey, Average of 1995-2002 survey years

Residents vs. Commuters: Open, Honest, Trusting Relationships
Percent SNC Survey respondents reporting College helped "to a great extent."
SNC Current Student Survey, Average of 1995-2002 survey years
As can be seen, for all four personal sphere learning outcomes, a greater percentage of students in residence report the College helped “to a great extent.” This finding is supportive evidence for the hypothesis that the St. Norbert experience is, in some fashion, having an impact on achievement of the four personal sphere goals of the Mission Statement.

Visual inspection of the charts above suggests that not all of the goals are similarly-affected by the College. Note, for example, that the distance between the two data lines for residents and commuters is quite small for the personal goals outcome and larger for the other three.

Another way to have an idea of College impact is to note the number of Survey years in which the percentage of residents reporting help to a “great extent” exceeds the percentage of commuters so-reporting. The table below gives this information for the four personal sphere outcomes by year in college. Since there were eight years total, the maximum number for any one cell in the table is eight (e.g., Juniors with self-understanding).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Outcome</th>
<th>Fresh.</th>
<th>Soph.</th>
<th>Junior</th>
<th>Senior</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Goals</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Worth</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-understanding</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Personal Goals* showed the smallest difference between residents and commuters, with 18 of a possible 32 comparisons in favor of residents (tied years are excluded). Conversely, *Relationships* and *Self-understanding* have the largest gap favoring residents.

Because the table and the charts are based on the same raw data, the overall conclusion (i.e., that more residents rate College assistance with achievement of the Mission-based outcomes as “great”) is the same for both. But the table shows more clearly several findings of note.

First, look at the “open, honest, and trusting relationships” Mission goal. Although this outcome was lowest in student ratings of College help in its achievement (see chart, p. 2), residents consistently perceive more assistance from the College than do commuters—uniformly, over all four class years. Virtually the same conclusion holds for the personal sphere outcome of *self-understanding*.

Conversely, College assistance with the *meaningful personal goals* outcome had the greatest number of favorable student ratings overall (chart, p. 2), but showed little difference between resident and commuter at the “great extent” assistance level (Table 1, above). There is a suggestion here that whatever impact the College may have on clarification and support of the personal goals of students, it is coming from what residents and commuters share—contacts with professors.
or academic advisors, perhaps, or with Career Services. A less strong, but similar, tentative conclusion may be made about the sense of self-worth outcome.

On the other hand, relationships and self-understanding appear to be supported best in the context of a college experience that includes residential living. At least with regard to relationships, this conclusion makes sense. Residents much more than commuters have opportunities to test and build new relationships with peers who begin as strangers and may end as roommates or the best of friends. Living and socializing with new peers—literally rubbing shoulders—while away from family and high school friends forces one either into loneliness or into the adventure of creating relationships from scratch.

It is a little less clear why the residential experience seems to enhance self-understanding more than the experience of commuting. As an early speculation, we note that most college students (and St. Norbert Students are no exception here, as we have other data to show) nominate peer relationships as a primary influence during their college years.

Recall from page 5 that our students equate self-understanding with knowing life goals, awareness of central beliefs and values, and recognition of strengths and weaknesses. All these dimensions of self-understanding may become clearer in conversations (bull sessions) with peers, and could also be consequences of taking advantage of opportunities in the cocurriculum—both harder for commuting students to do.

**Conclusion, Part 2**

The information on resident and commuting student differences in ratings of College assistance on the four personal sphere goals suggests St. Norbert does have an impact on these Mission-based student outcomes. Findings from Part 1 and Part 2 of this report provide the beginnings of an exploration of the relationships between what the College does and what its students learn about themselves in the personal sphere.

In Part 3, we will add to our understanding of these relationships by returning to our focus groups and looking at what the students report are ways the College helps them in the Mission’s four dimensions of personal development. We also asked our focus group participants to suggest additional ways the College could be helpful, and we will include those responses as well.
Part 3: How St. Norbert helps students with Personal Sphere Goals:
What our students tell us.

We didn’t just ask our focus group participants to provide us with their understanding of our Mission-based personal outcomes, discussed in Part 1. We also explored their ideas about how the College helps students achieve the four personal goals, and asked them to consider what additional things St. Norbert could do to enhance that achievement. As in Part 1, participant responses are grouped by upper and lower biennium status—freshmen and sophomores first, followed by the summary comments of juniors and seniors.

It may be important to recall that a focus group is not a task force. That is, the comments recorded on the next pages were spontaneous, off-the-cuff, and not the result of prior reflection or dialog from previous meetings. Thus they are wide-ranging, uneven in quality or potential for application, and have a “first draft” character to them.

In at least one sense, however, the focus group responses are very useful. They provide some insight into what initial thoughts come to mind when first faced with responding to a question about how the College assists students in their personal development in the four goal areas. The initial thoughts—the “gut reactions”—can provide clues about what general dimensions of their experience at St. Norbert appear helpful to them.

For example, student comments about “personal goals” (next page) show the importance of faculty and curricular opportunities in addressing needs in this area, while opportunities for interaction with peers dominate comments about how the College helps with “achieving a sense of self-worth” and developing “open, honest, and trusting relationships.” “Self-understanding” is enhanced by both the curriculum and cocurriculum.

The comments under each of the personal sphere outcomes dealing with additional ways the College could be helpful are often quite specific. Some of the suggestions appear implementable with relatively modest effort, while others may not be practical for the near future. Still, all provide clues about what our focus group respondents believed would help them and thus are good starting points for discussions about program initiation or revision.

Each of the four personal sphere outcomes is on a separate page and follow next. As in Part 1, respondent comments from freshmen and sophomores are given first, followed by those of juniors and seniors.
Personal Sphere Outcome 1:  
**Personal Goals:**  
How the College Helps

- **Freshmen** and **Sophomore** focus groups members emphasized the following ways St. Norbert helps them achieve their personal goals:

  5. The availability of teachers, advisors, and coaches makes it possible to discuss goals.
  6. Small classes encourage participation and dialog
  7. Internships and “Choosing your Major” workshops help clarify goals.
  8. Study Abroad experiences expand horizons for those interested.

The College could provide additional assistance by……..

  1. Upgrading library resources in support of academic performance.
  2. Making it easier for freshmen to get needed classes.
  3. Providing more career and job assistance to non-business majors.
  4. Teaching writing that is more marketable.

- **Junior** and **Senior** focus group members emphasized the following ways St. Norbert helps them achieve their personal goals:

  5. College’s good reputation enhances degree.
  6. Internships, practica, and research opportunities are good preparation.
  7. Accessibility of professors, coaches, staff who are willing to help.
  8. Freshman Seminar, social, and other groups help build social skills.
  9. Internships, service projects, co-curricular activities, and sports expand personal horizons.

The College could provide additional assistance by……..

  1. Creating more research opportunities, especially in the sciences.
  2. Advertising more aggressively opportunities available on campus.
  3. Posting a more detailed activities calendar.
  4. Enhancing communication between academic departments and student majors.
Personal Sphere Outcome 2:  
**Self-Worth:**  
How the College Helps

- **Freshmen** and **Sophomore** focus groups members emphasized the following ways St. Norbert helps them achieve greater *self-worth*:

| 5. | One-on-one time spent by professors enhances self-worth. |
| 6. | Social and service groups provide a sense of value to members. |
| 7. | Small campus encourages good peer relationships. |
| 8. | College’s encouragement of student involvement/management of e.g., College’s newspaper and other institutional programs shows value of students. |

The College could provide additional assistance by……..

| 1. | Increasing faculty and staff involvement in on-campus projects and groups (e.g., the student newspaper). |
| 2. | Advertising more broadly campus-sponsored activities, projects, and service opportunities (esp. to commuters). |

- **Junior** and **Senior** focus group members emphasized the following ways St. Norbert helps them achieve greater *self-worth*:

| 4. | Respect accorded students by faculty and staff makes for a supportive community. |
| 5. | Open discussions in classes improves communication skills. |
| 7. | Leadership opportunities are available. |

The College could provide additional assistance by……..

| 1. | Treating upper classmen more as adults, with fewer restrictions in residence halls, for example, and less focus on attendance in classes. |
| 2. | An increase in the willingness of the Administration to listen to student opinion. |
Personal Sphere Outcome 3:  
**Self-Understanding:**  
How the College Helps

- **Freshmen** and **Sophomore** focus group members emphasized the following ways St. Norbert helps them achieve greater *self-understanding*:

| 4. | The variety of courses and General Education encourage self-exploration. |
| 5. | Cocurricular programs also encourage expansion of self-knowledge. |

The College could provide additional assistance by…….

| 1. | Creating more classes and majors. |
| 2. | Encouraging professors to facilitate more class discussion rather than lectures. |
| 3. | Diversifying the range and types of extra-curricular activities. |

- **Junior** and **Senior** focus group members emphasized the following ways St. Norbert helps them achieve greater *self-understanding*:

| 5. | Advisors and professors offer guidance with career/life path decisions. |
| 6. | The cocurriculum offers a wide range of opportunities to learn about oneself. |
| 7. | Freshman Seminar, internships, and the diversity of courses allow students to clarify and define their interests. |

The College could provide additional assistance by…….

| 1. | Broadening academic opportunities. |
| 2. | Increasing the number and types of diversity students. |
| 3. | Linking classroom learning to everyday life. |
| 4. | Making Freshman Seminar available to all freshmen. |
Personal Sphere Outcome 4:  
**Becoming more open, honest, and trusting in Relationships:**  
*How the College Helps*

- **Freshmen** and **Sophomore** focus group members emphasized the following ways St. Norbert helps them become more open, honest, and trusting:

  4. College’s open lines of communication to students re: negative campus experiences (assaults, burglaries, etc.) emphasizes the need for good relationships with fellow students.
  5. Residence Hall staff members model and help with conflict resolution.
  6. Religious and other “retreats” encourage honesty and trust in relationships.

The College could provide additional assistance by…….

  1. Encouraging professors to be more accepting of student opinions and discussion in class.
  2. Being more candid about the reasons for restricting off-campus living.
  3. Increase diversity.

- **Junior** and **Senior** focus group members emphasized the following ways St. Norbert helps them become more open, honest, and trusting:

  3. Small size of campus and classes encourages recognition of fellow students by name.
  4. The Freshman Seminar experience and Campus Ministry retreats build community and openness.

The College could provide additional assistance by…….

  1. Increasing openness about tuition increases and the reasons for them.
  2. Reviewing need for locked doors on residence halls.
  3. Stating actual cost-basis for residence hall repairs.
  4. Evaluating whether the Honor Code ironically encourages duplicity and dishonesty.
  5. Discussing openly reasons for restrictions on off-campus living.
  6. Promoting more forcefully the religious dimension of the College.
As noted earlier in this section, comments from focus group respondents are spontaneous, based on minimal reflection and little or no prior preparation. They may not be representative, either of the “final” thoughts of participants or of the perspectives of the student body. However, the comments above represent a place to begin institutional reflection on the ways we appear to support student achievement of our Mission-based personal sphere outcomes or could support such achievement with some new initiatives or modifications of current programs.

In addition, the comments could be cast into survey items (as was done with respondent reflections on the meaning of the personal sphere outcomes, discussed in earlier sections of this report). Used in this way, the comments become more useful, since they can be cross-referenced with other demographic variables, such as gender, year in school, GPA, resident vs. commuter status, etc. Then institutional interventions can be targeted to specific segments of our student body.

An additional benefit of casting the focus group comments into survey items is that it is now possible to correlate individual choices with whatever other items may be in the survey or, even better, with other kinds of information about an individual student (this assumes surveys are administered as confidential, not anonymous). These correlations enrich our understanding of student preferences for personal sphere assistance and give them meaning not otherwise obtainable.

For example, open, honest, and trusting relationships can be supported, our focus group respondents say, by “encouraging professors to be more accepting of student opinions and discussions in class.” We could correlate student self-rated openness in relationships (and the extent to which they say the College helps) with our customary teaching evaluation items related to encouragement of class discussion, expecting to find a positive (albeit modest) relationship—the more classes a student took with faculty rated highly on encouragement, the more likely a higher rating on self-reported openness and on how much SNC helped develop this openness.

Keep in mind we are on a relatively long exploration here, cumulating evidence along the way, exploring promising tributaries, but realistically not expecting to find a City of Gold anywhere. We are more like naturalists than treasure hunters, using relationships among the dimensions of our data to gradually chart our educational ecosystem, discovering the relationships between what the College intends, what it does, and what students learn.
Part 4

Alumni Voices

A survey administered to alumni, graduates from 1994-1999, asked for information which paralleled similar requests from our annual Current Student Survey. It is interesting to view the perspectives of these recent graduates regarding the extent to which St. Norbert helped them achieve the four outcomes from the personal sphere.

The first chart shows the percentage of 1994-1999 alumni (~570 respondents) who reported the College helped them to “some” or a “great extent.”

With the exception of “open, honest, and trusting relationships,” over four out of five alumni respondents believe St. Norbert helped them in their personal development. As was true for enrolled students, the “relationships” outcome ranks lowest (refer to chart on page 2), although three of four respondents to this item expressed the belief that the College was of assistance in helping them.

The percentages are probably an overestimate. The alumni survey was conducted through the mail and completion was voluntary. Such surveys typically
have low response rates and are prone to response bias. Typically, respondents who have a positive attitude toward the surveying organization are the most likely to take time to complete a survey (the occasional returned survey with appended piece-of-my-mind tirade against one or more institutional representatives or characteristics is the exception that proves the rule). Thus, the above numbers are probably a “best case” alumni view.

A second *caveat* is a reminder of a caution first mentioned in Part One, namely, that a respondent’s assertion that the College provided assistance is not particularly powerful evidence that it did. It is *suggestive*, not *persuasive*, and certainly not *conclusive*. But such assertions are at least beginning points for further exploration and offer some encouragement to those committed to St. Norbert’s Mission-based learning goals.

There are some apparent gender differences in the most positive (“great extent”) ratings, although they are relatively modest and nonexistent for the “relationship” outcome; the other three outcomes show a greater percentage of women favorable:

The finding, by the way, that women provide more positive ratings than male peers (or conversely, men provide lower ratings) is a typical finding when we look
at perceptions of St. Norbert. The phenomenon is so pervasive, one is tempted
to say it can be attributed to “response bias”—a general tendency to be more
positive in ratings of the College (women) or more critical (men).

The theoretical importance of this hypothesized response bias has to do with its
presumptive locus. Does the fact that women generally rate St. Norbert higher
than do men (true for enrolled students and alumni) tell us something about
general rating tendency differences between the sexes? Or, is the “bias” a
reflection of the fact that women are generally—across the board—benefiting
more from their educational experiences at St. Norbert than males? If the latter
hypothesis is correct, the College needs to devote more attention to how better to
educate our men. At this point, we do not know which of the two possibilities is
supportable with good evidence.

**Conclusion, Part 4**
The ratings provided by our alumni sample indicate, at the least, that positive
beliefs in personal sphere support by the College persist after graduation. A
comparison of the charts on page 2 (for SNC currently-enrolled students) and
1994-1999 alumni (page 24) suggests alumni may be less positive about
assistance with personal goals than enrolled students (82% vs. 90%). This
finding could be an artifact of sampling differences, of course, but it may also
reflect the complex realities of post-graduation life experiences, realities for which
alumni discover they were not as well prepared as they thought.

We have just begun the exploration of alumni perceptions of the gains they made
while students at St. Norbert. This is important work, since the vast majority of
students, their parents, and the broader society view college as preparation for
life after graduation, with the benefits of a college education to be reaped there.
We need to show that our students “carry the College with them” as they meet
the responsibilities and challenges of post-graduate adulthood.
Part 5: Searching for Self-Worth at St. Norbert: An Illustrative Next Step

In previous sections of this report on Mission-based personal sphere outcomes, we explored student perceptions that some (not yet clearly known) dimensions of their St. Norbert education helped them achieve the four personal sphere outcomes of clarifying personal goals, achieving a sense of self-worth, increasing self-understanding, and becoming more open, honest, and trusting in relationships with others.

We also provided information on the ways students define these four outcomes, and their views on what the College does that is helpful and what more the institution could do. And we showed that student perceptions the College helps in goal achievement in the personal sphere persisted into early alumni-hood.

Personal sphere outcomes at the mission statement level are usually broad (some might say, “vague”) concepts that seem to resist clarification and are, therefore, often left undefined…and unassessed. Some educators call them “ineffable” ideas that, however grand, simply are not amenable to measurement.

In an earlier section of this report, however, we showed that students are willing to provide meanings to our four personal sphere concepts. In this section we explore further the meaning of what is probably the most ineffable of all personal sphere outcomes—self-worth.

As an intended educational outcome, “achieving a sense of self-worth” has a squishy, syrupy connotation to it that makes the outcome a poor candidate for inclusion in a list of higher education fundamental learning outcomes. However, defined (as it is by our students) as (1) self-acceptance with knowledge of personal failings, or (2) acting in ways consistent with core values, or (3) demonstrating competence, the concept is closely linked with a sense of agency—an awareness that one is capable of acting despite internal or external limitations.

A sense of agency is certainly an attractive outcome for everyone, and it would be desirable, therefore, to understand more about its conceptual cousin, self-worth. This understanding, in turn, is likely to provide suggestions for institutional interventions that could support growth in self-worth and a sense of agency.

One method for increasing understanding is to look at the statistical relationships between self-reported self-worth and a variety of other personal characteristics and biographical experiences. This is a sophisticated version of “tell me who your friends are, and I will tell you who you are,” an approach that does, indeed, accept the notion that “birds of a feather flock together.”
As a continuation of our attempt to understand and support growth in the personal sphere outcome of self-worth, we explored the relationships between student ratings of their self-worth (as compared with peers) and their self-ratings on some twenty+ other personal skills or attributes (again, as compared with peers). Our goal was to determine which of the other skills/attributes had the greatest statistical association (correlation) with a student’s sense of self-worth.

We looked at data from our 2003 freshman class obtained after they completed the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Student Information Form (SIF). The SIF includes items asking for self-ratings of over twenty traits. The items require respondents to “Rate yourself on each of the following traits as compared with the average person your age.” The choices are:

- Highest 10%
- Above Average
- Average
- Below Average
- Lowest 10%

As one might guess, self-ratings (“self-worth” in the chart below) are highly skewed toward the positive (“above average”) end of the scale. Partly, of course, this has to do with the desirability of seeing oneself in a favorable light (who wants to be “average,” much less below average?). But there is some justification for the skewed responses in that students attending college are often more highly endowed (on the “traits” listed in the SIF) than the “average person your age.” Further, respondents provide differential ratings, i.e., they do not give themselves the same rating for each item. This suggest discrimination, not blanket bravado.
The series of three tables (total, female, male) that follow below show the relationship between self-rated “sense of self-worth” and other traits. The first column provides the list of traits. The second column shows the percent of respondents who rated themselves “in the highest 10%” on both sense of self-worth and the trait shown. This percentage gives some indication of the number of freshmen who viewed themselves as excellent on self-worth and the other traits, a commonsense statistic of a desirable state of affairs.

The third column gives the *Spearman rho* correlation (a measure of relationship for data that are rank ordered, as these survey items are) between responses to “sense of self-worth” and each of the other traits. A correlation coefficient ranges from +1.00 (a perfect positive statistical relationship) through 0.00 (absolutely no relationship) to –1.00 (perfect negative relationship).

We expected only positive relationships between self-worth and the other desirable traits. There are no negative correlations, so our expectation was confirmed. And we were realistic enough to expect that none of our correlations would come close to 1.00. Such a result is very rare in the social sciences. If obtained, a correlation above, say, .80 or .90 suggests the two phenomena correlated are virtually identical, no matter they have different labels or names.

For the purposes of this comparison, correlations around .40-.50 are “high,” suggesting a substantial relationship between self-worth and the other trait(s). On the other hand, correlations lower than .20 suggest a modest relationship at best.

Do not make too much of small differences among the correlations (or top 10% numbers, either). No measurement is perfect, and that is certainly true with survey data. Measurement error can account for small differences among our tabled numbers, both percentages and correlations.

Our first table shows data for all the freshmen who completed the *CIRP* (~475 respondents). The order shown is based on the percentages from the second column, ranked from highest to lowest. Note that this ranking is not identical to that obtained by ordering the *Spearman rho* correlations from highest to lowest. The two measures (percentages based only on responses in “top 10%” vs. correlations based on responses to all choices) are not identical.

The five highest correlations are in bold face; they become our “top five” and are, in order of magnitude of correlation, *understanding myself, self-understanding, self-confidence (social), having clear personal goals*, and emotional health. “Self-understanding” was our locally-added item (along with the others in our personal sphere) and, it turns out, only moderately correlated with “understanding myself.” They should be synonyms, but our freshmen (somehow) interpreted them as different. So, both are included.
Our later focus is on the top five relationships, but it is also of interest to look at the “bottom five” briefly. It appears as if specific, somewhat specialized abilities or talents are not strongly related to a sense of self-worth, at least for groups of freshmen students: *artistic ability, mathematical ability, creativity* and even *writing* and *academic ability* are not highly related. For freshmen, at least, self-worth is most closely tied to understanding oneself, clear purposes, interpersonal self-confidence, and emotional stability—more “personal” attributes, in contrast to more impersonal abilities.

Do these associations hold for both male and female freshmen? Turn the page for a look at our freshmen women, followed by the men.

---

**Correlates of Self-worth**

2003 CIRP (Freshmen)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-rated Ability/skill</th>
<th>Top 10% in both</th>
<th>Spearman’s rho</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-understanding</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>.532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-confidence (social)</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>.471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public speaking skills</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>.327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding myself</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>.564</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-confidence (intellectual)</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>.391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional health</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>.412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills needed to live in 21st century</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>.327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistence</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>.352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>.274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popularity</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>.268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work cooperatively in groups</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>.340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to work on my own</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>.322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Have clear personal goals</strong></td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>.452</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiousness</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>.199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership ability</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>.396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Skills</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>.134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open, honest relationships</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>.330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of others</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>.309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think logically and solve problems</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>.302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>.111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding Judeo-Christian heritage</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>.202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing moral issues</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>.311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk-taking</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>.171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperativeness</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>.201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drive to achieve</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>.235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical health</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>.260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic ability</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>.154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artistic ability</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>.145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematical ability</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>.038</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Correlates of Self-worth (Females)  
2003 Freshman CIRP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-rated Ability/skill</th>
<th>Top 10%</th>
<th>Spearman's rho</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Popularity</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>.364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-understanding</strong></td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>.557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-confidence (social)</strong></td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>.521</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional health</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>.415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills needed to live in 21st century</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>.357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-confidence (intellectual)</strong></td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>.429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding myself</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>.592</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public speaking</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>.330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistence</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>.368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work on my own</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>.283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>.215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work cooperatively in groups</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>.376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical health</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>.258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiousness</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>.154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Having clear personal goals</strong></td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>.502</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer skills</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>.164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk-taking</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>.153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think logically and solve problems</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>.260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>.412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of others</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>.316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open relationships</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>.298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>.113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperativeness</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>.265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding Judeo-Christian heritage</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>.161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drive to achieve</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>.306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing moral issues</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>.326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing ability</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>.135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artistic ability</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>.192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic ability</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>.192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematical ability</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>.010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Self-confidence (intellectual)” edges “emotional health” for the “top five” for our freshmen women, but the two items are so close (in size of correlation) they could be viewed as tied for fifth rank.

Note, too, that “popularity” (first in percentage) has only a relatively modest relationship with self-worth (correlation=.364) over the full range of responses. The percentage finding does suggest, however, that freshman women who view themselves as very popular are likely to also feel very good about their self-worth.

Now, what about men?
The top five relationships for our male freshmen are identical to the combined group. What makes the results interesting is the percentage column. Note that male ratings in the joint top 10% category are lower (only the first listed above over 50%, with the rest below, while women have the first six ratings above 50% joint top 10%). And “popularity,” highest for women (71%) is quite low for men (28%). The exploration of gender differences such as these may provide clues for institutional interventions designed to improve the sense of self-worth of our freshmen.

Do the correlates of self-worth persist to the senior year?
The emphasis on intra- and interpersonal correlates of self-worth appears to persist through the undergraduate experience. Our 2004 seniors responded to
the same items as did our 2003 freshmen, above. The table below shows the correlations between self-rated abilities and skills, and reported self-worth for the two groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-rated Ability/skill</th>
<th>2004 Seniors Spearman’s rho</th>
<th>2003 Freshmen Spearman’s rho</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-understanding</td>
<td>0.479</td>
<td>0.532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-confidence (social)</td>
<td>0.461</td>
<td>0.471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have clear personal goals</td>
<td>0.452</td>
<td>0.452</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional health</td>
<td>0.444</td>
<td>0.412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership ability</td>
<td>0.388</td>
<td>0.396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-confidence (intellectual)</td>
<td>0.417</td>
<td>0.391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to work on my own</td>
<td>0.369</td>
<td>0.322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing moral issues</td>
<td>0.398</td>
<td>0.311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of others</td>
<td>0.296</td>
<td>0.309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think logically and solve problems</td>
<td>0.335</td>
<td>0.302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popularity</td>
<td>0.273</td>
<td>0.268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drive to achieve</td>
<td>0.221</td>
<td>0.235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic ability</td>
<td>0.187</td>
<td>0.154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>0.111</td>
<td>0.111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematical ability</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.038</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that the four first-ranked and four last-ranked abilities maintain the same order for the two groups. And there are only slight shifts in rank order for the seven abilities in the middle of the two lists. It is reasonable to conclude that self-worth remains primarily a personal/interpersonal concept throughout the undergraduate experience, despite the academic and intellectual nature of the formal institutional environment.

Findings from our focus groups, discussed in an early section of this paper, also are consistent with an emphasis on the personal and interpersonal dimensions of the concept. Recall that when we asked students how the College helps enhance their self-worth, responses were consistent with findings shown in the table of correlations, above. Their comments are repeated here for convenience.

- **Freshmen** and **Sophomore** focus groups members emphasized the following ways St. Norbert helps them achieve greater self-worth:
  - One-on-one time spent by professors enhances self-worth.
  - Social and service groups provide a sense of value to members.
  - Small campus encourages good peer relationships.
• College’s encouragement of student involvement/management of e.g., College’s newspaper and other institutional programs shows value of students.

• **Junior** and **Senior** focus group members emphasized the following ways St. Norbert helps them achieve greater *self-worth*:

  - Respect accorded students by faculty and staff makes for a supportive community.
  - Open discussions in classes improves communication skills.
  - Spiritual development encouraged by Common Prayer, service projects, liturgies.
  - Leadership opportunities are available.

Given these student comments, one might expect that self-worth would be enhanced by positive interactions with peers and faculty. Students rating themselves high on self-worth should also report spending more time with peers and, possibly faculty as well.

With regard to contacts with peers, analyses of responses from the *College Student Survey* completed by our 2004 seniors show the following.

Positive changes in self-worth from freshman to senior year were modestly--but positively--associated with:

  - Number of hours/week *socializing with friends* (correlation=.132, \( p < .05 \))
  - Number of hours/week in *student groups/clubs* (correlation=.141, \( p < .05 \))

But *not*, for example, with:

  - Number of hours/week *studying* (correlation=.064, \( p > .05 \))
  - Number of hours/week *watching TV* (correlation=.070, \( p > .05 \)).

Of particular interest are contrasts between seniors who rated themselves “much stronger” in self-worth since freshmen year (about 25% of our 2004 seniors) and those who indicated “no change” or “weaker” in the same time frame (also about 25% of the 2004 seniors).

The following contrasts (shown in simple chart form) come from 2004 senior responses to the *College Student Survey* and show percentages taken from selected cells in contingency tables whose associated chi squares all have \( p < .05 \). These contrasts are consistent with statements from focus group
members that the College supports student self-worth through positive contacts with faculty and opportunities to spend time interacting with peers.

The chart above suggests that satisfaction with peer and faculty relationships is associated with self-perceived positive changes in self-worth. At this early stage of construct validation, establishing associations such as these forms the bases for later efforts to explore possible causal relationships.

Although causality cannot be inferred from the associations between contacts with faculty or peers and changes in self-worth, it is worthwhile noting that they are consistent with our student focus group reports of “what helps” improve self-worth. This consistency is indirectly suggestive of a possible causal relationship.

The chart on the next page explores the “Contact with Faculty” satisfaction item, above, in more detail. On the four dimensions of faculty support of students shown, higher self-worth students report more favorable contacts with faculty.

Again, a causal relationship flowing from frequency of faculty contacts to increases in self-worth is not established merely by the association between the two. It is possible, for example, that students with higher self-worth feel confident enough to initiate and maintain contacts with faculty more so than their lower self-worth peers. But the correlation is intriguing and worth pursuing.
It would be discouraging—if not surprising—if no relationship was found between faculty-student interactions and differences in self-worth as defined by our students. As a small liberal arts college, St. Norbert supports small class sizes and encourages both in-class instructor/student dialog and informal extra-class contacts, with the expectation these enhance and support student learning outcomes.

**Faculty "frequently" Assisted Students with...**
(2004 Seniors who rate Self-Worth as "weaker/no change" or "much stronger")

---

**Self-Worth and Social Responsibility**
As an affective learning outcome, “self-worth” does not appear to have the prosocial cache of an outcome such as “responsible citizenship.” The concept seems so—well--self-focused.

But appearances, as they say, can be deceptive. Note the percentage differences in senior ratings of “very important” or “essential” for the three Current Student Survey objectives shown in the chart on the following page. For each objective, the proportion of seniors with “much stronger” self-worth is greater than the proportion of their “weaker/no change” counterparts.
Self-Worth and Good Deeds
At least some seniors seem willing to put good intentions into action. Our last chart, below, shows the percentage of our 2004 seniors who say they intend to do volunteer work shortly after graduation. Again, note the contrast between our upper quarter and lower quarter self-worth groups.

Of course, the intention to do something at a future time and actualizing that intention are not the same. It would be reasonable to expect some shrinkage when intention is translated into deed (as a planned alumni survey follow-up, for example, is likely to show). Our expectation, however, is that—shrinkage or no—the number of our seniors with greater reported changes in self-worth will still continue to outdo their peers.
Summary and Conclusions
The combined sequential analysis of survey responses and findings from focus groups appears to be a useful method to initiate the assessment of broad affective learning outcomes. These outcomes often have a central place in educational mission statements but are notoriously resistant to direct assessment.

The approach taken here views affective outcomes as “constructs.” As such, they are assessable by methodologies developed by psychologists and statisticians to validate other behavioral science constructs such as “character,” “ego strength,” “authoritarianism,” and so on. Collectively, the methodologies comprise tools for construct validation.

Our demonstration project illustrates the early stages of this validation process for the seemingly ephemeral affective outcome (construct) of self-worth. Hopefully, it also provides at least suggestive support for the twin assertions that (1) broad affective outcomes are assessable and (2) that findings obtained in such assessments can provide evidence which bears on mission fulfillment.

--Jack Williamsen, Office of Institutional Effectiveness
St. Norbert College
May, 2005
Epilogue

Strategies, Tactics, Interventions: Some Suggested Next Steps

Based on what we know about St. Norbert mission-based affective learning outcomes at this point in our research program, here are a few suggested next steps.

With regard to increasing conceptual understanding of our affective outcomes....

• Repeat the cycle of survey--focus group--follow-up survey discussed in this paper with our revised Mission-based learning outcomes.

• Explore the relationships between the outcomes and St. Norbert experiences as detailed in our Current Student Survey and Senior Survey as first steps in showing the impact of the College on these outcomes. Take gender into account.

• Initiate Alumni Survey with items designed to obtain alumni perceptions of the relationship between personal sphere outcomes and their experiences at the College. Make sure they parallel items in surveys of current students.

• Focus any additional assessment efforts on the Freshman (greatest impact) and Senior (soon alums) years, years of transition when changes are most likely.

With regard to programmatic interventions designed to support personal development....

• Develop a concordance between current curricular/cocurricular offerings and focus group student-identified helpful institutional interventions. Use this concordance to (1) intensify relevant curricular/cocurricular offerings followed by assessment of change and (2) initiate pilot programs where “gaps” are noted, followed by assessment of change.

• Select most promising (have highest correlations) institutional programs and experiences associated with affective outcomes discovered in survey analyses. Design intensifications of them intended to support outcome(s); assess.

• “Keep you eye on the prize.” Don’t dissipate human and financial resources on new (or current) programs/experiences that have no demonstrable direct or indirect relationship to mission-based learning outcomes--unless they are necessary for institutional survival.

• Seek allies; build relationships with members of the College community who are dedicated to the College’s Mission and who are willing to champion its components. Explore with them ways to support student outcomes which exemplify the ideals and identity of St. Norbert College.

• Every day, intentionally and deliberately do one thing that furthers the Mission.

—Jack Williamson, OIE