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CLEVELAND, OH — At Saint Joseph Academy, students are empowered to become compassionate leaders in a global society. Graduates of all-girls schools like Saint Joseph Academy, the only all-girls Catholic high school in the City of Cleveland, have a definitive edge over their coeducated peers. This week, the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA) released the results of a study that shows statistically significant advantages for girls’ school graduates as they enter their college/university years. Commissioned by the National Coalition of Girls’ Schools (NCGS), Fostering Academic and Social Engagement: An Investigation into the Effects of All-Girls Education in the Transition to University was prepared by principal investigator Dr. Tiffani Riggers-Piehl, Assistant Professor of Higher Education at the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC), in collaboration with HERI. This new data analysis is an update of a 2009 report, also published by HERI.

These two major peer-reviewed studies spanning Generations Y and Z compare the self-confidence, academic achievement, political engagement and aspirations of girls’ school graduates to their coeducated peers. Drawing data from the well-known Freshman Survey conducted by HERI, both studies used the same sophisticated multilevel modeling to separate the effect of an all-girls education from other influences including socioeconomic differences, race/ethnicity, parent education and the characteristics of the high schools attended. Dr. Riggers-Piehl and her colleagues note the data reveals “a consistent portrait of girls’ school graduates who are more engaged academically and socially than their coeducated peers, findings which align with the profile outlined in the aforementioned report in 2009.”

The study identified several key areas in which all-girls schools are better preparing their students for success in colleges/universities and beyond. Based on the data, researchers concluded that when compared to their female peers at coed schools, girls’ school graduates:

- Have stronger academic skills
- Are more academically engaged
Demonstrate higher science self-confidence
Display higher levels of cultural competency
Express stronger community involvement
Exhibit increased political engagement

Specifically, the research report identifies more than 80 statistically significant differences that favor graduates of all-girls schools when compared to female graduates of coed schools, including the following:

- Girls’ school alumnae are 5% more likely than their coeducated peers to say they frequently seek alternative solutions to a problem and more frequently explore topics on their own, even when not required. More than 2/3 of girls’ school graduates report frequently supporting their arguments with logic, whereas coed school female graduates are 7% less likely to report this academic skill. Saint Joseph Academy curriculum is structured to develop critical-thinking and problem solving skills.

- Graduates of girls’ school are 7% more likely to frequently tutor other students and 6% more likely to frequently study with others. Saint Joseph Academy offers peer tutoring to its students, as well as serving as mentors and tutors to younger girls, which helps to encourage collaborative learning and teamwork.

- Girls’ school graduates, compared to students from coed schools, are 4% more likely to report they are “very confident” or “absolutely confident” in their understanding of scientific concepts and ability to explain the results of a study and use technical science skills such as tools, instruments and techniques. Students at the Academy have access to a range of creative technology tools available for individual and class exploration, design, innovation and discovery. Additional, the Academy’s academic programs, with more than 120 course offerings, include 30 Honors and 18 Advanced Placement (AP) courses, and Engineering classes that include CAD work, 3D printers, programming and architectural design. 77% of the Class of 2018 took an AP course. The Health Sciences Honors Program and Engineering & Design Honors Program also help incorporate hands-on learning while using the latest advanced technology (including our Anatomage Table and Makerspace innovation lab) to delve deeper into these courses and techniques.

- When asked about their ability to work and live in a diverse society, alumnae from all-girls schools are nearly 10% more likely to have the goal of helping promote racial understanding and 75% value improving their understanding of other countries and cultures, compared to 70% of their coeducated peers. Half (50%) of girls’ school graduates, compared to 45% of female students from coed schools, count their tolerance of others with different beliefs as a strength. Girls’ school alumnae are 6% more likely to note their ability to work cooperatively with diverse people as a strength. The World Languages Department helps foster internationally minded students with offerings including three levels of Chinese, French, Latin and Spanish, as well as AP levels for advanced learning. Through our “Character of a Saint Joseph Academy Graduate” statement, students are passionate about “Empathetic Justice, devoted to doing justice with compassion and respect for others, working for systemic change to bring about global equality.” Students
also have the opportunity to go on cultural trips, learning more about a different country's customs and its culture through art, travel, food, the people and more. Countries that our students have visited include Italy, Spain, Netherlands, Belgium, France, China, England, Ireland, Wales, El Salvador and the Dominican Republic.

- Girls’ school graduates are 8% more likely to have a goal of participating in community action programs and are 5% more likely to think it is "very important" or "essential" to become involved in environmentally minded programs. Alumnae of all-girls schools more frequently participate in volunteer work compared to their coeducated peers—52% versus 47%. Through four years of spiritual development that enables students to embody the qualities of a “Character of a Saint Joseph Academy Graduate,” Saint Joseph Academy students and alumnae are women who live Unifying Love through Empathetic Justice, Service to the Dear Neighbor without Distinction, Personal Integrity and Emerging Wisdom. In the 2017-18 school year, Saint Joseph Academy students completed more than 29,000 hours of service with 74% of students surpassing the required 20 hours of service.

- Women who attended all-girls schools are 5% more likely than coeducated graduates to plan to vote in elections and to publicly communicate their opinion about a cause. Considering their political engagement, graduates from all-girls schools are 7% more likely to think it is “very important” to have the goal of keeping up-to-date with political affairs. The Academy offers clubs like Model United Nationals, Mock Trial and Debate to engage students in the current political climate. In 2018, two Saint Joseph Academy students demonstrated the charism of the Sisters of the Congregation of St. Joseph by organizing the Cleveland “March for Our Lives” rally, which attracted an estimated 20,000 people and Seniors in Government classes participated in volunteering at election polls. Alumna Bride Sweeney ’10 is the youngest elected official at the Ohio Statehouse, and the first woman to represent her District.

As the data shows, girls’ school graduates rate themselves as more successful and engaged in areas where men have historically seen greater representation: science and politics. Reflecting on the totality of the findings, the researchers noted, “these statistically significant results demonstrate differences in areas of critical importance in the twenty-first century for women as they enter university and beyond, thus emphasizing the contribution of all-girls schooling for women’s success.”

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Now in its 128th year, Saint Joseph Academy is the only all-girls Catholic high school in the City of Cleveland. With a current enrollment of 725 young women, Saint Joseph Academy is rooted in the spirituality of the Congregation of St. Joseph and works to foster unifying relationships with God and all creation. Each young woman is empowered to achieve academic excellence, and inspired to a life of compassionate leadership and service in a global society. Saint Joseph Academy is located at 3470 Rocky River Drive in Cleveland. For more information, visit www.sja1890.org or call 216.251.6788.