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## Benefits and challenges of diversity

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## Quad 136

### Benefits and Challenges of Diversity

[Previous](#) [Next](#)

## Benefits and Challenges of Diversity

An interesting [new study](#) by economists Sara Ellison and Wallace Mullin explores the impact of gender diversity in the workplace. The *Boston Globe* succinctly summarizes the [results](#):

*Women, would you rather work only with other women?*

*Men, are you in a better mood at the office when you're surrounded by male colleagues?*

*Yes and yes, according to a recently published study on gender diversity in the workplace. It found employees are happier when they work with people of the same sex. The slightly puzzling flip side? Single-sex workplaces aren't nearly as productive as those where men and women earn their livings side by side.*

While the *Globe* writer found the results puzzling, they are completely consistent with an [earlier study](#) that found benefits of diversity in a very different place—on the soccer pitch.

These results suggest that “having a broad range of viewpoints and experience provides more tools to complete a task, leading to a healthier bottom line, Ellison noted,” even if it can lead to some discomfort for employees.

This empirical analysis is yet another argument for a liberal arts education which emphasizes the benefits of “uncomfortable learning,” where students are challenged to examine different perspectives, explore news subjects and test alternative world views. It also provides support for the benefits of diversity on residential campuses as students interact with peers from many different backgrounds, both in and out of the classroom. Though the research also acknowledges that diversity can create frictions as well.

New undergraduate pedagogies that emphasize group work (which have their impetus in both education theory and the demands of the 21st century workplace) provide students with both the opportunity to see the benefits of diverse viewpoints, but might well ease some of the discomfort reported by the subjects in this study. Presumably the earlier and more often college students are encouraged (or even forced) to encounter differences, the more likely they will become comfortable with diversity and be better colleagues in the professional world after graduation.

An interesting reflection for those of us at the College of Saint Benedict (all women) and Saint John's University (all men). Could our unique (singular?! ) model truly be the best of both worlds: the productivity benefits of an academic experience that is gender diverse combined with the happiness benefits of single sex living arrangements? It's a thought...

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Michael Hemesath is the 13th president of Saint John's University. A 1981 SJU graduate, Hemesath is the first layperson appointed to a full presidential term at SJU. You can find him on Twitter [at] [PrezHemesath](#).