

## Fall 2000 Freshman Survey Results

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### I. Introduction

For the first time in over 25 years, George Mason University administered the CIRP Freshman Survey to all entering freshmen in summer 2000 during orientation. Of the 2,169 entering freshmen, 1,753 full-time freshmen completed the survey, for a response rate of 81%. The CIRP is a continuing longitudinal study of the American higher education system sponsored by the American Council on Education and the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at UCLA. The full report sent by the UCLA researchers is available in the Office of Institutional Assessment. This "In Focus" summarizes the more salient features of the survey results and includes a comparison between GMU freshmen excluding honors freshmen (n=1,583), honors freshmen (n=170), and public university freshmen from all over the country (unweighted n=269,413).

*All responses are reported in percentages. Due to rounding and because students were often allowed to select more than one response, numbers may not add to 100.*

### II. Diversity

Compared with public university students, George Mason students are ethnically and linguistically diverse. George Mason also has a substantially larger proportion of non-U.S. citizens.

### *Ethnicity, Citizen Status, English Language, Sex*

	Mason Freshmen	Mason Honors	Public Universities
<b>Ethnicity</b>			
African American	9%	4%	7%
Asian American	18%	17%	10%
Hispanic American	9%	7%	5%
Native American	2%	2%	2%
White American	63%	74%	79%
Other	8%	4%	3%
<b>Citizenship Status</b>			
U.S. Citizen	89%	94%	96%
Permanent Resident	9%	5%	4%
Neither	2%	1%	1%
<b>Is English your native language?</b>			
Yes	79%	88%	92%
No	21%	12%	8%
<b>Sex</b>			
Male	47%	38%	47%
Female	53%	62%	53%

### III. Student Background and Experience

#### *Time Spent During Senior Year in High School*

There are important differences between the two groups of Mason freshmen in how time was spent during the senior year. Honors freshmen were less likely to work, far more likely to do volunteer work, more likely to join student organizations and much more likely to read for pleasure. Indeed, Mason freshmen are more like public university freshmen than Mason honors freshmen in how they spent their time.

Proportion who spent at least one hour per week:	Mason Freshmen	Mason Honors	Public Universities
Working for pay	76%	62%	71%
Doing volunteer work	45%	52%	46%
Watching TV	79%	75%	79%
Student club/groups	55%	63%	59%
Reading for pleasure	46%	60%	47%
Playing video/computer games	44%	41%	39%
Prayer/meditation	31%	34%	31%

#### *Experiences, Grades, Community Service, Parents' Income*

Taking advanced placement (AP) courses in high school is usually an important indicator of potential student success in the first year of college. It demonstrates that students are willing to challenge themselves and are probably capable of college-level work. However, excluding Mason honors students, more than one-third of George Mason freshmen and students at public universities nationally do not take AP classes. Further, only a small percentage (16%) of George Mason freshmen reported an average grade of "A" in high school. George Mason honor students, however, tend to resemble public university students in self-reported high school grade distribution.

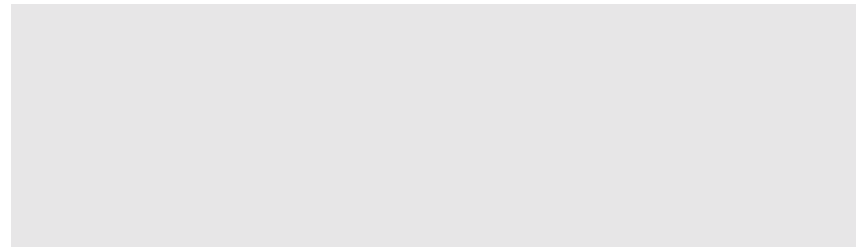
How many Advanced Placement Courses did you take in High School?	Mason Freshmen	Mason Honors	Public Universities
None	36%	19%	37%
1-4	60%	63%	52%
5 or more	4%	18%	12%

How many Advanced Placement Exams did you take in High School?	Mason Freshmen	Mason Honors	Public Universities
None	48%	27%	52%
1-4	49%	62%	41%
5 or more	3%	12%	8%

High School Grade Point Average	Mason Freshmen	Mason Honors	Public Universities
A+, A, A-	16%	46%	50%
B+	25%	21%	21%
B	42%	23%	19%
B-	11%	5%	6%
C+, C	7%	5%	4%

High School Required Community Service	Mason Freshmen	Mason Honors	Public Universities
Yes	41%	32%	24%
No	59%	68%	76%

Parents' Estimated Income	Mason Freshmen	Mason Honors	Public Universities
\$29,999 or less	12%	9%	15%
\$30,000—49,999	16%	11%	16%
\$50,000—74,999	22%	24%	25%
\$75,000—99,999	20%	21%	16%
\$100,000 or more	30%	34%	29%



### IV. College Choices, Decisions and Motivations

Compared with freshmen at public universities, Mason freshmen are far less likely to say that Mason is their first choice college. Also, compared to students at public universities, George Mason students are twice as likely to have their permanent homes located within 50 miles of the university. Not surprisingly, with freshmen living so close to campus, a very large number live with family or relatives compared to public university freshmen, 81% of whom live on campus.

Is this college your:	Mason Freshmen	Mason Honors	Public Universities
First choice	53%	45%	73%
Second choice	30%	32%	19%
Third choice	12%	15%	5%
Less than third choice	5%	8%	3%

To how many colleges, other than this one, did you apply?	Mason Freshmen	Mason Honors	Public Universities
None	16%	12%	23%
One	12%	15%	14%
Two	20%	21%	16%
Three	22%	22%	17%
Four or more	29%	29%	30%

Where do you plan to live during the fall term?	Mason Freshmen	Mason Honors	Public Universities
Family or relatives	42%	30%	12%
Private home, apt. or room	3%	2%	5%
College dormitory or other campus housing	55%	67%	81%
Fraternity, Sorority House/Other	>1%	1%	2%

How many miles is college from your permanent home?	Mason Freshmen	Mason Honors	Public Universities
5 or less	9%	10%	4%
6 - 10	16%	18%	4%
11 - 50	45%	32%	22%
51 - 100	8%	10%	20%
101 - 500	19%	24%	42%
Over 500	3%	7%	8%

### V. Top Five Reasons for Attending College

George Mason freshmen and honors students and public university freshmen all select the same top five reasons (among a list of 13 reasons), for attending college. With one exception, each group even ranks their choices in the same order. However, when asked about reasons for selecting this particular college, the three groups have different priorities. For example, Mason honors students list financial assistance and merit-based scholarships among their top 5 reasons (among a list of 23 reasons), unlike Mason freshmen in general or students at public universities.

Top 5 reasons “very important” in deciding to go to college	Mason Freshmen	Mason Honors	Public Universities
To learn more about things that interest me	75%	83%	77%
To be able to make more money	75%	67%	72%
To get training for a specific career	72%	63%	72%
To be able to get a better job	71%	63%	72%
To gain a general education and appreciation of ideas	63%	70%	64%

<b>Top 5 reasons “very important” for attending this particular college</b>	<b>Mason Freshmen</b>	<b>Mason Honors</b>	<b>Public Universities</b>
Very good academic reputation	41%	43%	56%
Graduates get good jobs	40%		51%
Low tuition	27%	38%	
Wanted to live near home	26%		
Good reputation for social activities	23%		32%
Graduates gain admission to top grad schools			30%
Size of college is right			25%
Offered a merit-based scholarship		35%	
Offered financial assistance		33%	
Offers special educational programs		32%	

<b>Student rated self above average or highest 10% as compared with the average person of the same age</b>	<b>Mason Freshmen</b>	<b>Mason Honors</b>	<b>Public Universities</b>
Cooperativeness	72%	72%	73%
Understanding of others	68%	75%	66%
Drive to achieve	63%	69%	72%
Academic ability	63%	85%	75%
Creativity	63%	75%	57%
Intellectual self-confidence	58%	69%	63%
Self-understanding	57%	64%	58%
Leadership ability	56%	69%	62%
Competitiveness	55%	55%	58%
Physical health	54%	50%	58%
Emotional health	53%	54%	56%
Social self-confidence	52%	49%	53%
Initiative	50%	54%	55%
Writing ability	47%	65%	47%
Spirituality	45%	49%	44%
Computer skills	45%	40%	37%
Popularity	40%	37%	43%
Public speaking ability	39%	44%	39%
Mathematical ability	39%	51%	51%
Artistic ability	35%	42%	30%

<b>Differences of at least 10% among three freshmen groups</b>	<b>Mason Freshmen</b>	<b>Mason Honors</b>	<b>Public Universities</b>
Academic ability	63%	85%	75%
Creativity	63%	75%	57%
Writing ability	47%	65%	47%
Mathematical ability	39%	51%	51%
Artistic ability	35%	42%	30%

## VI. Student Self-Perceptions and College Plans

George Mason freshmen see themselves as cooperative and understanding of others, much like freshmen nationally. But, with the exception of honors freshmen, Mason freshmen apparently see themselves as having lower abilities than public university freshmen in 13 of the 20 skill areas listed, particularly in academic ability and mathematical ability. Conversely, Mason freshmen rate themselves higher in some areas, such as computer skills and creativity. Honors students rate themselves higher than Mason freshmen on 16 skills, especially on academic ability, creativity, intellectual self-confidence, leadership ability, writing ability and mathematical ability.

**Tutoring**

Among all freshmen, including honors students and public university freshmen, mathematics is identified by the largest percentages of students as an area where they will need tutoring.

<b>Needed tutoring in high school</b>	<b>Mason Freshmen</b>	<b>Mason Honors</b>	<b>Public Universities</b>
English	6%	5%	5%
Reading	5%	5%	4%
Mathematics	17%	13%	10%
Social Studies	3%	2%	3%
Science	5%	3%	4%
Foreign Language	8%	10%	4%
Writing	4%	4%	4%

<b>Expect to need tutoring in college</b>	<b>Mason Freshmen</b>	<b>Mason Honors</b>	<b>Public Universities</b>
English	11%	5%	8%
Reading	5%	1%	4%
Mathematics	30%	15%	21%
Social Studies	4%	1%	3%
Science	11%	7%	10%
Foreign Language	13%	8%	10%
Writing	12%	5%	9%

**Learning Disabilities**

Although the proportions are small, George Mason has a higher percentage of entering freshmen identifying themselves as having a learning disability than is the case at public universities.

<b>Learning disability</b>	<b>Mason Freshmen</b>	<b>Mason Honors</b>	<b>Public Universities</b>
	4%	6%	2%

**Student Expectations**

Despite the fact that students have, in recent years, been taking longer to graduate, most students do not expect to need extra time to graduate. Regarding work, just over one-third of Mason freshmen expect to have to get a job to pay for college. (Over 80% of graduating seniors actually do work.) There is a striking difference between Mason freshmen and honors freshmen and their public university counterparts regarding expected satisfaction with their college. Approximately one-third of Mason students expect to be satisfied compared to nearly half of public university freshmen.

<b>Chances are very good that student will:</b>	<b>Mason Freshmen</b>	<b>Mason Honors</b>	<b>Public Universities</b>
Get a bachelor's degree	77%	82%	78%
Socialize with someone of another racial/ethnic group	66%	78%	65%
Develop close friendships	61%	72%	73%
Make at least a "B" average	44%	68%	59%
Get a job to pay for college	36%	36%	42%
Participate in clubs/groups	39%	57%	44%
Satisfied with your college	35%	36%	49%
Volunteer/community work	16%	36%	21%
Need extra time to complete degree	8%	7%	7%

**VII. Political and Social Views**

More freshmen nationally see themselves as middle-of-the-road rather than liberal or conservative, although Mason freshmen and honors freshmen describe themselves as "far left" or "liberal" more frequently than their national counterparts. But with a few notable exceptions (e.g., Mason honors are more in favor of legal abortion and less in favor of anti-gay laws), all three groups of freshmen tend to have fairly similar points of view regarding political and social issues.

**Political Views**

Freshmen describe themselves as:	Mason Freshmen	Mason Honors	Public Universities
Far Left/Liberal	32%	42%	28%
Middle-of-the-road	50%	41%	52%
Conservative/Far Right	18%	17%	21%

**Political and Social Issues**

Student agrees strongly or somewhat	Mason Freshmen	Mason Honors	Public Universities
Abortion should be legal.	59%	67%	55%
Marijuana should be legalized.	35%	37%	34%
Important to have laws prohibiting homosexual relationships.	27%	18%	28%
Federal government should do more to control the sale of handguns.	83%	82%	80%
Racial discrimination is no longer a major problem in America.	23%	23%	22%
Wealthy people should pay a larger share of taxes than they do now.	48%	57%	51%
Colleges should prohibit racist/sexist speech on campus.	65%	59%	59%
Affirmative action in college admissions should be abolished.	50%	57%	52%
Activities of married women are best confined to the home and family.	25%	17%	22%

**VIII. Questions asked only of George Mason Students**

An additional 20 questions were asked of George Mason students concerning a broad range of issues from sources of information about the university to experiences outside the U.S. to expectations regarding grades.

**Choosing George Mason**

The majority of Mason freshmen and honors freshmen live in this area, and for most students, being near Washington, D.C., being in Northern Virginia, and being close to home are “very or somewhat important.” The most useful source of information about Mason (“very useful”) for both groups of freshmen is the website, followed closely by the viewbook.

Approximately half of both groups “strongly agree” that they are “pleased” about the decision to attend Mason, but honors students are far more likely to “strongly agree” that they are “prepared academically” for their first year in college and that they expect Mason to be an “academically challenging institution.”

How did you first find out about Mason?	Mason Freshmen	Mason Honors
I live in the area and just know about Mason	61%	56%
High School counselor	4%	2%
Mason Admissions representative	3%	3%
Family member or friends	24%	28%
Other	9%	12%

How important were each of the following reasons for you to choose George Mason?	Mason Freshmen		Mason Honors	
	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Very Important	Somewhat Important
Location near Washington, D.C.	31%	38%	45%	28%
Location in Northern VA	36%	40%	36%	34%
Being close to home	36%	34%	32%	31%
Being far from home	9%	20%	10%	22%
Friends attending Mason	12%	35%	9%	33%

How useful were the following sources of information in choosing George Mason?	Mason Freshmen		Mason Honors	
	Very Useful	Somewhat Useful	Very Useful	Somewhat Useful
Mason website	35%	45%	39%	44%
Viewbook and application	29%	50%	29%	52%
Multi-college guidebook, e.g. US News, Peterson's	15%	33%	11%	31%

Indicate the extent to which you agree with the following:	Mason Freshmen		Mason Honors	
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree
Getting a college degree is very important to me.	88%	10%	86%	12%
I am pleased about my decision to attend Mason.	50%	44%	53%	42%
I am well prepared academically for my first year in college.	32%	59%	52%	44%
I have strong computer/technology skills.	26%	45%	35%	34%
I use e-mail frequently.	54%	30%	61%	28%
I expect George Mason to be an academically challenging institution.	40%	54%	52%	40%

**Experiences outside the country**

Nearly one-quarter of George Mason freshmen have lived outside of the U.S. for more than a year.

Which statement best describes your experience?	Mason Freshmen	Mason Honors
...spent more than a year outside the U.S.	23%	17%
...spent more than 3 but less than 12 months outside the U.S.	6%	9%
...spent between 1 and 3 months outside of the U.S.	12%	12%
...spent time outside the U.S., but for less than 1 month	30%	34%
...never spent time outside the U.S.	30%	28%

**Expectations**

Twenty percent of Mason freshmen and 17% of honors students do not plan to be at George Mason longer than four semesters.

Mason freshmen and honors students differ significantly in their grade expectations. Less than one quarter (24%) of freshmen expect to get mostly As, while nearly half (47%) of honors students expect mostly As.

The hours these two groups of students plan to work are similar, with honors students a little less likely to work or, if they work, then do so for fewer hours. If honors students do work, it's more likely to be for incidental expenses than is the case for Mason freshmen. Otherwise, both groups have fairly similar reasons for working, the most important of which is to "pay for college expenses" and to "earn money for incidentals."

How many semesters do you intend to be enrolled at Mason?	Mason Freshmen	Mason Honors
1 or 2 semesters	10%	9%
3 or 4 semesters	10%	8%
5 or 6 semesters	4%	4%
7 or 8 semesters	60%	63%
9 or more semesters	15%	17%

How many hours each semester do you intend to be enrolled while attending Mason?	Mason Freshmen	Mason Honors
6 hours or fewer	2%	3%
7-12 hours	11%	7%
13-15 hours	49%	30%
16 or more hours	16%	46%
It will vary each semester	22%	15%

What overall grade do you expect to get in your Mason classes?	Mason Freshmen	Mason Honors
Mostly As	24%	47%
Mostly Bs	70%	49%
Mostly Cs	5%	4%
Mostly Ds	1%	0%

<b>How many hours each week do you intend to work during your first year at George Mason?</b>	<b>Mason Freshmen</b>	<b>Mason Honors</b>
I do not intend to work during my first year	31%	38%
1-10 hours	36%	36%
11-20 hours	27%	22%
More than 20 hours	6%	4%

<b>If you intend to work during the first year, what is your primary reason?</b>	<b>Mason Freshmen</b>	<b>Mason Honors</b>
To pay college expenses	33%	29%
To pay living expenses, e.g. rent/dorm fees, food, etc.	17%	18%
To earn money for incidentals, e.g. eating out, movies, etc.	29%	37%
To pay significant personal expenses, e.g. car, travel	18%	15%
To reduce the amount of post-graduation debt	4%	2%



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