

## Fall 2001 Freshman Survey Results

### I. Introduction

Freshmen entering George Mason in fall 2001 completed a freshmen survey during summer orientation. Of the 2,146 first-time freshmen enrolled, 1503 (full-time), completed the survey, a response rate of 70%. The survey, Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Freshman Survey, is a continuing longitudinal study of collegiate freshmen sponsored by the American Council on Education and the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at UCLA. The full report is available in the Office of Institutional Assessment. This summary compares full-time freshmen in the Mason Honors program, in New Century College (NCC), in the Mason Topics program, all other full-time Mason freshmen who responded to the survey, and public university freshmen from across America. This report is also available at <http://assessment.gmu.edu>.

References to “Mason students” or “Mason freshmen” refer to survey respondents exclusive of students in Honors, New Century and Mason Topics. To find out more about these Mason programs, go to: [honors.gmu.edu](http://honors.gmu.edu), [www.ncc.gmu.edu](http://www.ncc.gmu.edu), and [masontopics.gmu.edu](http://masontopics.gmu.edu). **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

Freshmen at George Mason University are ethnically and linguistically diverse when compared to their counterparts nationally. For example, Mason students are substantially less likely to report that English is their native language than students at public universities.

Mason students are also diverse in terms of religious preference. In particular, Mason has a strikingly higher proportion of Islamic students than is found at public institutions nationally.

Table 1.

	Mason Total	CIRP Respondents				
	All first-time Mason Freshman (2146)	Mason Freshmen (1082)	Honors (113)	NCC (112)	Topics (196)	Public Universities
<b>Ethnicity</b>						
African American	8	11	4	15	7	7
Asian American	19	18	16	17	20	10
Hispanic American	7	9	5	2	6	5
American Indian/Pacific Islander	0.3*	2	6	1	2	2
White American	62	57	73	63	62	77
Other	3	7	3	4	7	3
<b>Citizenship Status</b>						
U.S. Citizen		88	90	92	90	95
Permanent Resident		10	10	7	9	4
Neither		2	0	1	1	1
<b>Is English your native language?</b>						
Yes		79	82	88	80	92
No		21	18	12	20	9
<b>Sex</b>						
Male	45	45	43	43	42	47
Female	55	55	58	57	58	53

\*Includes only Native Americans

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<http://assessment.gmu.edu>

Table 2.

Student's Current Religious Preference	Mason				Public Universities
	Freshmen	Honors	NCC	Topics	
Baptist	12	4	19	12	9
Buddhist	3	4	1	4	1
Eastern Orthodox	1	4	1	1	1
Episcopal	2	7	5	4	2
Islamic	7	10	4	6	1
Jewish	1	0	3	2	3
LDS (Mormons)	1	1	0	0	3
Lutheran	2	3	2	2	8
Methodist	5	7	6	5	7
Presbyterian	3	1	6	7	4
Quaker	<1	1	0	0	<1
Roman Catholic	27	24	22	27	28
Seventh Day Adventist	<1	1	1	1	<1
United Church of Christ	1	0	0	1	1
Other Christian	10	15	11	5	11
Other religion	7	6	6	7	4
None	18	14	15	18	17

Seven percent of Mason full time freshmen are Islamic compared to 1% at public universities. Roman Catholicism remains the single largest religious group.

### III. Student Background and Experience

Hours spent studying —time on task— are positively associated with student success. Yet, approximately 15% of Mason students and students at public institutions nationally, spent less than one hour per week studying/doing homework during their senior year of high school; about one third spent over 5 hours per week studying. Further, about half of all seniors spent over 10 hour per week working. Of these, 18% of Mason students and 17% of public university students worked over 20 hours per week.

As high school seniors, George Mason students spent more time working and less time studying (with the exception of Honor students) than their national counterparts although for both groups, working time is substantial and studying time is minimal.

Table 3.

**During the last year of high school proportion who spent over 10 hours per week working for pay**

	Mason Freshmen	Honors	NCC	Topics	Public Universities
Working for pay	52	53	53	55	49

Table 4.

**During the last year of high school proportion who spent over 5 hours per week studying/doing homework**

	Mason Freshmen	Honors	NCC	Topics	Public Universities
Studying/homework	31	41	29	33	36

Time spent interacting with faculty is also positively associated with student success in college. But more than half of Mason freshmen and public university freshmen spent less than one hour per week talking with teachers outside of class. While this same proportion report less than one hour per week reading for pleasure, surprisingly well over half said they spent less than one hour per week playing video/computer games.

Table 5.

**During the last year of high school, proportion who spent less than one hour per week:**

	Mason Freshmen	Honors	NCC	Topics	Public Universities
Working for pay	27	28	21	21	29
Volunteer work	59	42	46	53	54
Watching TV	21	22	18	24	22
Talking with teachers outside of class	56	46	53	50	54
Exercise or sports	22	18	23	18	14
Studying/homework	15	14	17	13	13
Reading for pleasure	59	46	52	53	53
Playing video/computer games	58	56	65	63	60

Other indicators of success in college include the number of Advanced Placement (AP) courses and exams students take. (There is no question on the CIRP regarding International Baccalaureate—IB—courses that are available in one third of Fairfax County high schools.) Mason students, with the exception of Honors students, take a very limited number of AP courses compared with students at public universities. Nationally, 21% of freshmen entered college with four or more AP courses; only 8% of Mason students did so. However, thirty-one percent of Honors students have taken at least four AP courses.

Table 6.

Number of Advanced Placement (AP) Courses taken in high school	Mason				Public Universities
	Freshmen	Honors	NCC	Topics	
None	38	18	40	39	34
1-3	54	51	51	53	45
4 or more	8	31	8	9	21

Number of Advanced Placement (AP) Exams taken in high school	Mason				Public Universities
	Freshmen	Honors	NCC	Topics	
None	46	25	52	45	49
1-3	48	52	40	50	37
4 or more	6	24	8	5	15

High school GPAs, usually highly correlated with academic success, are considerably different for Mason students and public university students. Nationally, 53% of student at public institutions report a GPA of A- or better; only 17% of Mason students report this. Again, compared to all other groups, more Honors students report an A- or better (54%).

Table 7.

High School Grade Point Average (GPA)	Mason				Public Universities
	Freshmen	Honors	NCC	Topics	
A+, A, A-	17	54	7	17	53
B+	27	21	30	28	21
B	40	17	39	40	18
B-	10	5	16	12	5
C+, C	6	5	8	3	3

Table 8 contains the curricular recommendations for high school students made by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. According to these standards, Mason students, while having lower GPAs and fewer AP courses, match or exceed public university students in completing the recommended curriculum in all subject categories with the exception of computer science and arts and music. NCC is particularly noteworthy in that it has the smallest proportion of freshmen that completed the recommended computer science course of study and the highest proportion that completed the recommendations for arts and music.

Table 8.

Student met or exceeded recommend years of high school study*:	Mason				Public Universities
	Freshmen	Honors	NCC	Topics	
English (4 yrs)	99	100	100	100	98
Mathematics (3 yrs)	99	100	98	99	99
Foreign Language (2 yrs)	97	100	98	98	92
Physical Science (2 yrs)	69	80	76	71	61
Biological Science (2 yrs)	45	45	40	48	45
History/American Government (1 yr)	100	100	100	100	99
Computer Science (1/2 yr)	55	63	49	52	61
Arts and Music (1 yr)	72	73	82	74	80

A full 85% of Mason freshmen say that during the last year of high school, they frequently socialized with someone of another racial/ethnic group; this was true for 67% of public university freshmen.

\*based on the curriculum recommendations of the National Commission on Excellence in Education

## IV. College Choices, Decisions and Motivations

Increasingly, more incoming freshmen are saying that Mason is their first choice school—58% in 2001 compared to 48% in 1991. The comparable figure for public university freshmen has been in the upper 60 to lower 70 percent range since at least 1987.

Table 9.

Is this college your:	Mason Freshmen	Honors	NCC	Topics	Public Universities
First choice	58	60	57	47	72
Second choice	29	29	32	33	20
Third choice	10	11	7	15	5
Less than third choice	4	1	5	5	3

In 1991, 48% of Mason freshmen said that Mason was their first choice; The 2001, percentage is 58%

Table 10.

To how many colleges, other than this one, did you apply?	Mason Freshmen	Honors	NCC	Topics	Public Universities
None	16	13	17	13	23
One	14	12	13	4	14
Two	19	31	17	21	16
Three	20	25	27	25	17
Four	14	9	12	15	11
Five or more	17	11	16	23	20

Mason students are far more likely to live with family than are public university students. Consequently, the permanent home for a quarter of Mason freshmen is within 10 miles of campus compared to 9% of public university freshmen. Another 41% of Mason freshmen live within 50 miles of campus.

Table 11.

Where do you plan to live during the fall term?	Mason Freshmen	Honors	NCC	Topics	Public Universities
Family or other relatives	41	35	36	33	12
Private home, apartment or room	2	2	1	1	4
College dorm/other campus housing	57	63	63	65	83
Fraternity/Sorority	<1	0	0	0	1

Table 12.

How many miles is college from your permanent home?	Mason Freshmen	Honors	NCC	Topics	Public Universities
5 or less	9	8	11	5	4
6 - 10	17	13	8	16	5
11 - 50	41	34	39	41	23
51 - 100	8	11	16	6	19
101 - 500	22	31	22	29	41
Over 500	3	4	5	4	8

The permanent home of 67% of Mason freshmen is within 50 miles of campus; 32% of freshmen at public universities nationally live within 50 miles of home.

## V. Top Five Reasons for Attending College

All groups chose the same top five reasons among a list of 13 for deciding to go to college, although the order of importance differed by group. However, when asked to select “very important reasons” that influenced the student’s decision to attend “this particular college,” there were distinct differences. Among all students, “graduates get good jobs” and “very good academic reputation” were the two top choices. However, among all the Mason groups, less than half chose these two, unlike public university freshmen who selected these two reasons at much higher rates, particularly “academic reputation” which 60% chose.

Mason freshmen entering in fall 2001 chose the same top five reasons that influenced their decision to attend George Mason as did the freshmen in 2000.

Table 13.

<b>Top 5 reasons “very important” in deciding to go to college</b>	<b>Mason Freshmen</b>	<b>Honors</b>	<b>NCC</b>	<b>Topics</b>	<b>Public Universities</b>
To learn more about things that interest me	75	76	69	74	79
To be able to make more money	71	66	75	66	71
To get training for a specific career	70	64	60	70	71
To be able to get a better job	69	67	60	64	72
To gain a general education and appreciation of ideas	63	67	59	61	65

Table 14.

<b>Top 5 reasons “very important” in influencing decision to attend this particular college*</b>	<b>Mason Freshmen</b>	<b>Honors</b>	<b>NCC</b>	<b>Topics</b>	<b>Public Universities</b>
Graduates get good jobs	41	36	34	45	54
Very good academic reputation	40	49	38	44	60
Wanted to live near home	26	(20)	(23)	25	(15)
Low tuition	26	29	28	(24)	25
Good reputation for social activities	23	23	28	26	31
Graduates gain admission to top grad schools	(20)	(21)	(17)	(23)	33
Size of college is right	(19)	25	24	27	(25)

\*Parentheses around a number indicate this was not among that group’s top five.

## VI. Student Self-Perceptions and College Plans

With the exception of Honors freshmen, all Mason groups rate themselves lower on academic ability than public university freshmen. All Mason groups rate themselves on computer skills similar to or even higher than public university freshmen. Sixty percent of Honors students rate themselves highly on writing ability, above the public university percent of 48. More Honors freshmen also rate themselves highly on mathematical ability compared to other Mason groups. About one third of each group rates themselves high in artistic ability.

Table 15.

<b>Student rated self above average or highest 10% as compared with the average person of the same age on several key areas:</b>	<b>Mason Freshmen</b>	<b>Honors</b>	<b>NCC</b>	<b>Topics</b>	<b>Public Universities</b>
Academic ability	64	84	58	68	76
Self-confidence (intellectual)	56	65	59	60	62
Computer skills	46	52	37	37	38
Writing ability	45	60	41	45	48
Mathematical ability	39	52	35	43	52
Public speaking ability	34	34	44	41	37
Artistic ability	32	36	30	33	31
Physical health	50	41	50	50	57
Emotional health	54	53	53	55	55

This year, the CIRP program reports that self-ratings on physical and emotional health, in a continuing trend, have hit an all-time low. It is worth noting that only about one half of any George Mason group ranks their health either above average or among the highest 10% of their peers.

Typically, in CIRP public universities, about 5% of incoming freshmen, in any given year, think their chances are very good that they will transfer. (The higher the selectivity of the institution, the lower the probability that they will transfer.) Nine percent of Mason freshmen feel this is likely. Fewer Honors freshmen (7%) say this, but more NCC freshmen (11%) say that chances are very good that they will transfer.

The CIRP survey also asks incoming freshmen whether the chances are very good that they will “be satisfied with your college.” At public universities, only 49% feel that chances are very good that they will be satisfied with their college. This has been a fairly stable percentage for the last four years. Mason students, however, have even lower expectations with only 39% thinking that chances are very good that they will be satisfied, up four

percentage points from last year. Mason Honors and Topics students are somewhat more optimistic.

Across the country, nearly half of all public university students (45%) think they will get a job to help pay for college. Fewer (40%) George Mason freshmen think chances are very good that they will get a job to help pay for college.

Table 16.

Chances are very good that student will:	Mason		NCC	Topics	Public Universities
	Freshmen	Honors			
Transfer to another college	9	7	11	9	5
Be satisfied with your college	39	44	34	42	49
Need extra time to complete your degree	5	7	5	6	7
Participate in student clubs/groups	38	47	39	41	44
Develop close friendships with other students	61	71	70	66	73
Socialize with someone of another racial/ethnic group	74	80	75	73	67
Get a job to help pay for college	40	46	42	42	45

Approximately three quarters of each Mason group expects to socialize with someone of another racial/ethnic group. About two thirds of public university freshmen have this expectation.

## VII. Questions asked only of George Mason Students

An additional 19 questions were asked of only George Mason students. These 2001 incoming students were asked the extent to which they agreed with six statements. As might be expected, all groups overwhelmingly agree that getting a college degree is very important to them. They are also overwhelmingly in agreement that they are pleased with their decision to attend George Mason, although only about half of any group strongly agrees with this statement. These percentages are very similar to the entering class of 2000.

Students in all groups agree that they are well prepared academically and have strong computer skills, but there are large differences between those who strongly agree and those who simply agree. Indeed, no group has more than 41% saying they strongly agree with these two items. Using email is becoming common among high school students and over half of George Mason freshmen strongly agree that they use email frequently.

While each group overwhelmingly agrees that they expect George Mason to be an academically challenging institution, less than half in each group strongly agree with this expectation.

Table A.

Indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the following statements:	Mason Freshmen		Honors		NCC		Topics	
	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Agree
Getting a college degree is very important to me.	90	9	91	6	84	11	93	5
I am pleased with my decision to attend George Mason University.	54	42	53	42	52	38	52	42
I am well prepared academically for my first year in college.	28	64	41	54	18	71	33	59
I have strong computer/technology skills.	28	46	33	49	22	52	22	48
I use email frequently.	60	27	68	23	59	30	58	27
I expect George Mason to be an academically challenging institution.	40	57	41	57	47	46	36	58

At least two thirds of the 2001 Mason freshmen indicate that the location of George Mason near Washington, DC, the location in Northern Virginia and being close to home are important considerations in choosing Mason. These figures are similar to those of the 2000 entering freshmen class. About one fifth of Mason freshmen did not use the website in deciding whether to enroll at George Mason, but 60% said it was at least somewhat important.

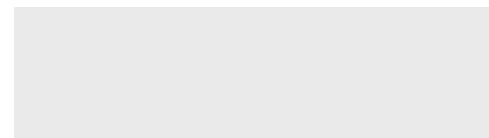
Table B.

<i>Reasons for choosing George Mason</i>	Mason Freshmen		Honors		NCC		Topics	
	Very important	Somewhat important	Very important	Somewhat important	Very important	Somewhat important	Very important	Somewhat important
Location near Washington, DC	32	36	37	41	36	46	32	36
Location in Northern Virginia	37	36	32	44	30	41	31	40
Being close to home	38	30	31	32	37	33	33	33
Being far from home	10	18	9	22	8	28	8	22
Friends attending George Mason	11	36	10	37	9	32	8	34

Table C.

*How important was the website in helping you to decide to enroll at Mason?*

	Mason Freshmen	Honors	NCC	Topics
Very important	17	20	15	22
Somewhat important	43	37	40	45
Not important	17	23	18	17
I didn't use the website to help me decide.	23	19	26	15



Seventeen percent of Mason freshmen plan to be enrolled at George Mason for less than five semesters. This is nearly double the percentage who say that it is highly likely that they will transfer. At least 15% in each of the other three groups have the same plan. Most students expect to be enrolled for a minimum of 12 hours each semester and, with the exception of Honors freshmen, expect to get mostly Bs in their classes.

About one third of Mason students do not intend to work during their first year, but those who do give as their primary reasons for working to pay college expenses and to earn money for incidentals.

Table D.

*How many semester(s) do you intend to be enrolled at George Mason?*

	Mason Freshmen	Honors	NCC	Topics
1-2	8	6	8	8
3-4	9	11	7	10
5-6	3	2	5	6
7-8	64	70	68	62
9 or more	16	12	13	14

Table E.

*While attending George Mason University, how many credit hours do you intend to be enrolled for each semester?*

	Mason Freshmen	Honors	NCC	Topics
Less than 12	2	2	6	0
12-14	34	18	19	29
15	36	37	24	37
More than 15	14	27	40	14
It will vary each semester	15	17	12	20

Table F.

*What overall grade do you expect to get in your George Mason classes?*

	Mason Freshmen	Honors	NCC	Topics
Mostly As	23	53	23	31
Mostly Bs	73	46	73	64
Mostly Cs	3	1	4	5
Mostly Ds	<1	0	0	0

Table G.

*How many hours a week do you intend to work for pay during your first year at George Mason?*

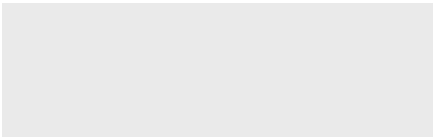
	Mason Freshmen	Honors	NCC	Topics
I do not intend to work during my first year.	32	30	30	34
1-10 hours a week	32	32	28	29
11-20 hours a week	32	35	32	30
More than 20 hours a week	4	4	10	7



Table H.

*If you intend to work during the first year, what is your primary reason?*

	Mason Freshmen	Honors	NCC	Topics
Pay college expenses	33	24	26	35
Pay living expenses	14	20	24	16
Earn money for incidentals	32	34	33	34
Pay significant personal expenses	17	18	15	11
Reduce the cost of post-graduate debt	3	4	3	3

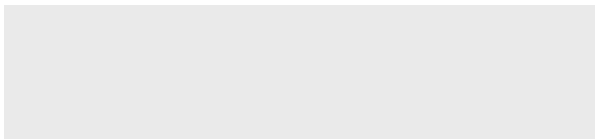


And finally as one measure of the international experience of Mason students, freshmen were asked about living continuously, not intermittently, outside the U.S. Fourteen percent of Mason freshmen have lived abroad for more than three years. Approximately the same percentages of Honors and Mason Topics freshmen have also lived abroad for more than three years. Over three fourths of Mason freshmen have never lived continuously abroad for more than six months, if at all.

Table I.

*Lived continuously, not intermittently, outside the United States?*

	Mason Freshmen	Honors	NCC	Topics
More than 3 years	14	15	3	13
2-3 years	5	6	13	6
12-23 months	3	0	2	2
6-11 months	1	1	4	1
NA	77	78	79	79



**The Office of Institutional Assessment**  
**703-993-8834**  
**assessmt@gmu.edu**

Karen M. Gentemann, Ph.D.  
 Director  
 genteman@gmu.edu

Ruth L. Green, Ph.D.  
 Assistant Director  
 rgreen1@gmu.edu

Emily C. Yance  
 Programmer/Analyst  
 eyance@gmu.edu

Anne Rose  
 Program Technician  
 arose2@gmu.edu

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