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Fall 1998 Linked Courses Report Results from Pre- and Post-Course Questionnaires

I. Introduction

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Linked courses combine English 101 with at least one other subject matter course for the purposes of creating curricular connections between the courses and building academic and social community among students. In fall 1998, Mason offered a variety of two and three-way linked course combinations enrolling approximately 560 students and linking English 101 with other freshmen courses ranging in subject matter from Anthropology to Engineering to Philosophy.

This report shares data collected on pre- and post-course questionnaires distributed to students in their linked courses. A total of 494 Linked students (88%) responded to the pre-course questionnaire and 399 (71%) responded to the post-course questionnaire.

II. About Students Enrolled In Linked Courses

Students enrolled in linked courses were asked some demographic questions about their sex, ethnicity, residence plans for fall 1998, what language they learned to speak first, and what choice Mason was among those schools they really wanted to attend. In Table 1, Linked students are compared to fall 1998 GMU freshmen enrolled in English 101 (non-linked courses), those enrolled in Honors and NCC. The public university comparison includes freshmen enrolled at public universities across the United States. (For a full report on these latter students, see ["In Focus," Vol. 4, No. 2.](#))

Table 1. Ethnicity, English Language, Sex, Place of Residence, What Choice was GMU?

Ethnicity	Public University %	Mason %	NCC %	Honors %	Linked %
African American	7	13	18	5	9
Asian American	7	19	18	28	16
Hispanic American	4	9	10	3	10
Native American	2	2	3	3	<1
White American	83	59	58	68	58
Other	2	7	4	5	8

Student native speaker of English?	Public University %	Mason %	NCC %	Honors %	Linked %
Yes	94	73	79	81	88
No	6	27	21	19	12
Sex	Public University %	Mason %	NCC %	Honors %	Linked %
Male	45	49	42	30	45
Female	55	51	58	70	55
Place of residence, Fall 1998	Public University %	Mason %	NCC %	Honors %	Linked %
Campus dorm	82	41	60	51	47
Off campus, parent/relative	10	51	36	48	51
What choice was Mason? ⁺	Public University %	Mason %	NCC %	Honors %	Linked %
First choice	74	53	59	61	51
Second choice	19	31	31	16	36
Third or lower choice	8	16	10	24	13
*Percentages may exceed 100 due to students' selecting more than one category.					
⁺ "What choice was Mason among those colleges/universities you really wanted to attend?"					
Data on public university students, Mason, NCC and Honors are derived from the 1998 UCLA/CIRP Freshman Survey.					

III. Learning About Linked Courses

Students were asked how they first learned or heard about linked courses. Two-thirds (67%) indicated a general GMU orientation session, 27% said from the Schedule of Classes or course catalog and 20% said from an advisor or faculty member.

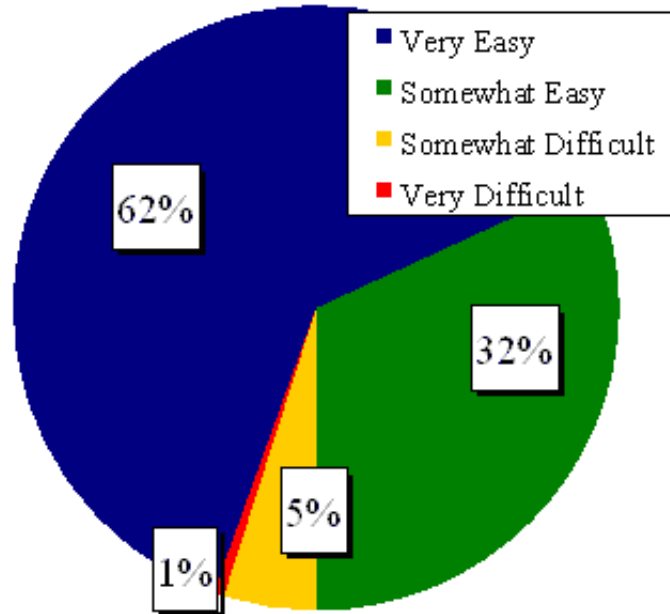
Table 2. Source of Information About Linked Courses*

Where did you hear about Linked Courses?	Percent
A GMU orientation session	67
Mason Schedule of Classes	27
An advisor/faculty member	20
Another student	12
Course pamphlet sent in mail	10

At an admissions interview	6
Mason web page	1
<i>*Total sums to more than 100% because students selected as many sources as appropriate.</i>	

IV. How Easy Was It to Enroll in Linked Courses?

Overwhelmingly, students thought it was "very easy" (63%) or "somewhat easy" to enroll in Linked Courses (32%). Only 5% found it "somewhat difficult," while less than 1% found it "difficult."



*Table 3. How Easy Was It to Enroll in Linked Courses?
Fall 1998 Linked Courses Students*

V. Reasons for Enrolling In Linked Courses

Most often, students' reasons for enrolling in the Linked Courses were that they thought they would learn more or better with linked courses (47%). On the post-course questionnaire one student wrote, "I just wanted to have classes that related to each other to make my first semester somewhat easier." Other reasons for enrolling in the Links were that these courses were the only ones open or available at the time of registration (27%), they were recommended by someone (24%), the smaller class size might allow students to get to know other students better (23%) and linked courses might lighten the work load (21%).

While a number of students indicated on the post-course questionnaire that the linked courses "helped with studying" and "eased the transition to college," they did not necessarily "lighten the work load." One student said, "I was told linked courses were easy, but they weren't."

While only 8% of the Linked students said that "easing the transition to college" was a reason for signing up for the courses, a number of students commented on this benefit on the post-course questionnaire. Specifically, one student wrote that the Links were a "very good transition to college, helped me a lot." Another said, "Helped me adjust to college easier." Another said, "I think having two classes with some of the same students helped develop friendships and study groups which may not have developed otherwise."

Table 4. Reasons for Enrolling in Linked Courses

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Why did you enroll in a linked course?*	Percent
Would learn more/better with linked courses	47
Only courses open/available at registration	27
Recommended by someone	24
Smaller class size, may get to know students better	23
Might lighten the work load	21
Smaller class size, may get to know faculty better	12
May ease transition to college	8
<i>*Total sums to more than 100% because students selected as many sources as appropriate.</i>	

VI. Primary Reasons for Enrolling in the Subject Matter Course

The primary reasons for enrolling in the non-English course of the Links were that the students had an interest in the subject matter (69%) and that the course was required for their major (47%).

VII. Academic and Social Community in Mason's Linked Courses

Students were asked to rate the extent of their agreement or disagreement (strongly agree=4, agree=3, disagree=2 to strongly disagree=1) with several statements regarding academic and social community in Mason's linked courses. Students were most likely to agree (strongly or somewhat) that it was easier to achieve a sense of community (either academic and social) in their smaller linked courses (81%) and that a social community (i.e., friendships) did develop (80%). One student wrote, "I thought it [Links] was easier because I had people to depend on if I needed it." Freshmen were more modest in their agreement that an "academic community (e.g. study groups) formed between students" (52%), but some students did form academic community. As one student wrote, "With the linked courses I met lots of people and it became easier for me to have study groups."

Table 5. Academic and Social Community in Mason's Linked Courses

	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Total %
It was easier to achieve a sense of community (either academic or social) in my smaller linked courses.	41	40	81
A "social community" developed in my linked courses.	40	40	80
A sense of community (either academic or social) carried over to my larger linked class.	19	43	62
I experienced a closer relationship with linked faculty than with faculty teaching other courses.	27	33	60
The linked courses helped make the transition to college easier.	23	35	58

As a result of the link, I was more comfortable in my larger linked class(es).	21	37	58
An "academic community" (e.g., study groups) formed between students.	18	34	52

VIII. Curricular Connections in Linked Courses

On the post-course questionnaire, students agreed (strongly and somewhat) that they expected a great deal of curricular connections between courses when they enrolled in the linked program (92%). They also agreed that faculty opinions and views may differ depending on their academic discipline (73%) and that the linked courses did make curricular connections (67%). One student noted, "It [Links] helped connect two subjects which I love, communication and government." Freshmen were least likely to say that, because of the links, they were able to make curricular connections in other, non-linked courses (38%).

Table 6. Curricular Connections in Mason's Linked Courses

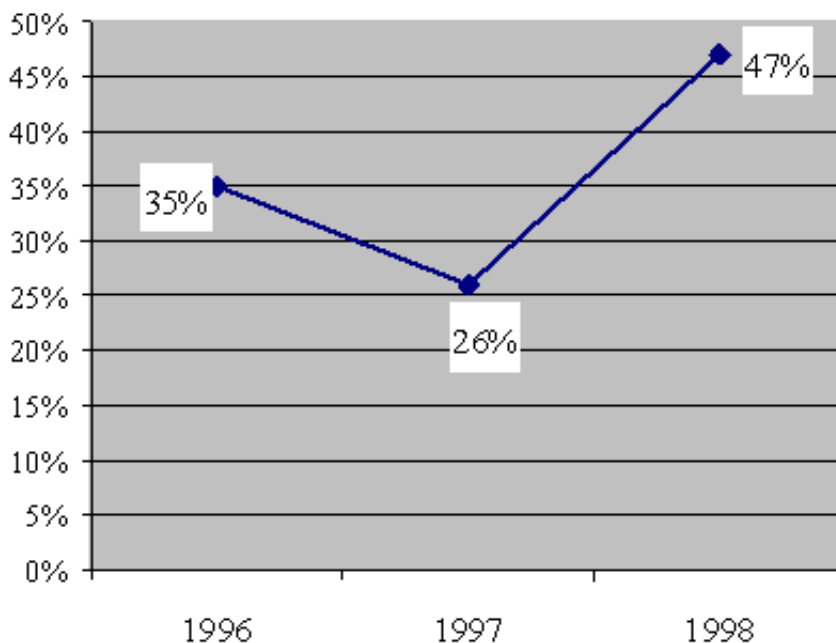
	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Total %
When I enrolled in the Links, I expected a great deal of curricular connections between courses.	52	40	92
Faculty opinions and views may differ depending on their academic discipline.	21	52	73
My linked courses did make curricular connections.	20	47	67
The number of curricular connections were appropriate.	18	47	65
Curricular connections helped me see subject matter/educational relationships.	16	45	61
Because of the Links, I began to make curricular connections in other, non-linked courses.	9	29	38

IX. Trends Over Time

Students in Linked courses have been surveyed for a number of years. A few recent trends suggest that students are increasingly expecting curricular connections between courses. For example, 92% of fall '98 students said they expected a great deal of connections compared to 83% in 1987 and 85% in

1996. Over the last three years, approximately the same proportion agreed that a social community formed in their Linked courses with agreement ranging from 80% to 83%. Similar results were noted with academic community in which 56% to 52% agreed with this statement over the same time period.

The expectation for learning more or better with linked courses has increased substantially in the last three years as a reason for enrolling in the Links. For example, in 1996, 35% said this was a reason for enrolling, while 26% indicated this in 1997 and yet, in 1998 almost half (47%) selected this as a reason for enrolling. Further, word about linked courses continues to spread among campus constituents as "recommended by someone" as a reason for enrolling rose from 15% in 1996 to 24% in 1998. This is consistent with the 1998 data in which 67% of linked students said they heard about linked courses at a Mason orientation session where word about the Linked Courses Program is often shared.



*Table 7. Reason for Enrolling in Links, 1996-98
"May Learn More/Better with Linked Courses"*

X. Overall Satisfaction at Mason and the Role of Links



At the end of the semester, linked students were asked to rate their satisfaction with their Mason experience. Ninety percent of students reported either being "very" or "somewhat satisfied." One student commented on his/her satisfaction saying, "Great environment, great people, teachers are understanding and fair." Another said, "Mason has been a great learning experience for me."

Finally, Linked students were asked, "how important

was your linked courses experience in your satisfaction with your Mason experience?" Eighteen percent of students said Links were "very important," while another 50% said Links were "somewhat important" to their overall satisfaction at Mason. One student wrote, "I thoroughly enjoyed participating in a linked course. It enriched the experience I had in both (courses)." Another student said, "I like the idea of linked courses and would look for them in the future." Generally, those who were more satisfied with George Mason University also tended to value the linked course experience.

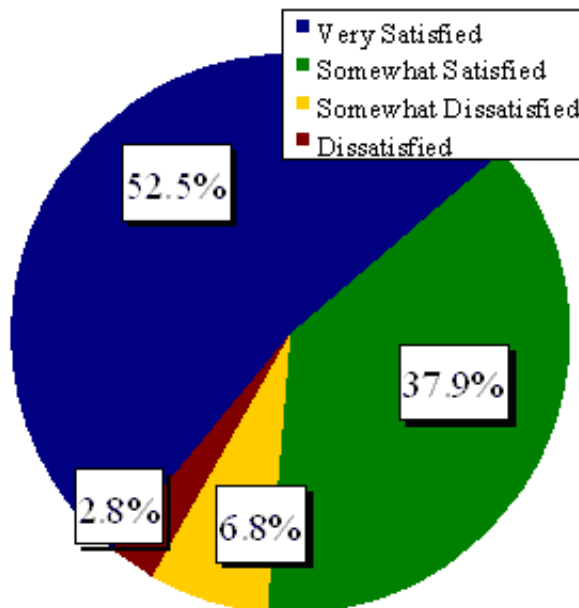


Table 8. Satisfaction with Mason Experience - Fall 1998 Linked Courses Students

For a full listing of students' comments regarding their satisfaction at Mason and the role of Linked Courses in that satisfaction, please contact the Office of Institutional Assessment.

Office of Institutional Assessment, April 1999

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