

The 2005 Alumni Survey

Baccalaureate Degree Recipients 1999-2000

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I. Introduction

The Office of Institutional Assessment (OIA) has conducted alumni surveys seeking feedback on undergraduate experiences at Mason since 1992. The current survey report represents the sixth alumni survey conducted by OIA. Response rates for these surveys have never been particularly high—by far, the highest was in 1999 when 56% responded. This year, despite numerous contacts and incentives, the response rate was 16% (N=376). This is an unacceptable response rate to generalize to the alumni class of 2000. Making such a generalization even more difficult is that those who responded were more likely to be female than the general population, and the proportion of white respondents was much higher than their proportion in the population. Further, those who entered Mason as first-time freshmen were disproportionately more likely to respond than transfer students.

Given these discrepancies, the following report must be viewed as a report of 376 individuals who graduated with a baccalaureate degree between August 1999 and May 2000. Their responses do not necessarily represent those of their classmates. Nonetheless, this report presents us with some feedback regarding baccalaureate graduate experiences with work, education, and preparation for both.

To remedy the problem of low response rates, future alumni surveys conducted by OIA will be done at the department level as part of the academic program review process. Each survey will be customized with the department chair's signature and department-specific questions. We are hopeful that this approach will result in greater participation by our graduates.

Because of rounding, not all percentages equal to 100% in this report.

II. Highlights

Post-Baccalaureate Study

- Forty-one percent of these alumni are currently enrolled or have graduated from a post-baccalaureate degree program; in contrast, 48% of them said they planned to do so on the 1999-2000 Graduating Senior Survey.
- Nearly half (48%) of those who pursued post-baccalaureate study say their undergraduate major prepared them "very well" for further study; 40% say they were "somewhat" prepared.

Employment

- Eighty-three percent of those responding are employed full-time; another 10% are employed part-time.
- Of those employed, the overwhelming majority feel they were either "very well-prepared" (41%) or "adequately prepared" (51%) for work compared to other college graduates in their places of employment who graduated at about the same time.
- Most of these alumni feel that, given their training and degree, their job is "advanced" (8%) or "appropriate" (62%) for their level. Nine percent feel they are "definitely" working beneath their level.

Educational Experiences at Mason and Satisfaction

- When asked to rate Mason’s contributions to a set of 14 educational goals, the alumni rated most of them highly. In particular, they feel the following are significant contributions: ability to work independently, critical thinking, in-depth knowledge in the major, ability to work in groups, problem-solving skills and writing.
- Forty-four percent of these alumni agreed that they were encouraged to be involved in community affairs while they were at Mason; 44% say they are currently at least “somewhat” involved in community affairs and 13% say they are involved a great deal.
- The overwhelming majority of these alumni say they would attend Mason again if they were starting all over (78%) and would encourage others to attend Mason (50% say “definitely yes” and 40% say “probably yes”).
- Over one-third “strongly agree” that they feel a sense of pride in Mason; another 47% “agree.”

III. Post-Baccalaureate Education

Nearly all Mason seniors complete a Graduating Senior Survey before graduation. Among the 376 alumni who completed the 2005 Alumni Survey, 314 also completed the 1999-2000 Graduating Senior Survey. In 1999-2000, they were asked whether they planned to pursue additional education within one year of graduation: **48%** said they planned to enroll full-time or part-time in a graduate or professional school. Five years later, **41%** of the same respondents have completed or are currently enrolled in a degree program. As Figure One shows: 37% of alumni have completed or are currently enrolled in master’s programs, 4% in doctoral programs and 6% in professional degree programs. Approximately 5% have completed one post-baccalaureate degree and are studying for another one.

Among the alumni who have completed or are currently enrolled in a master’s program, one third chose to continue their education at George Mason University. Our alumni are also likely to enroll in the following universities for master’s programs (reported by at least three alumni):

- George Washington University
- Columbia University
- Virginia Tech
- Georgetown University
- Marymount University
- American University
- University of Virginia
- University of Maryland System
- Webster University
- Virginia Commonwealth University

Among the respondents who have pursued post-baccalaureate study, 48% say their undergraduate major prepared them very well for further study, another 40% say they were “somewhat” prepared.

Figure One: Type of Degree Programs Completed or Currently Enrolled

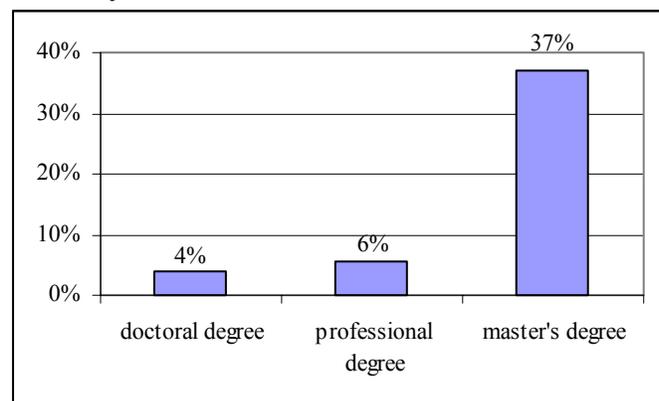
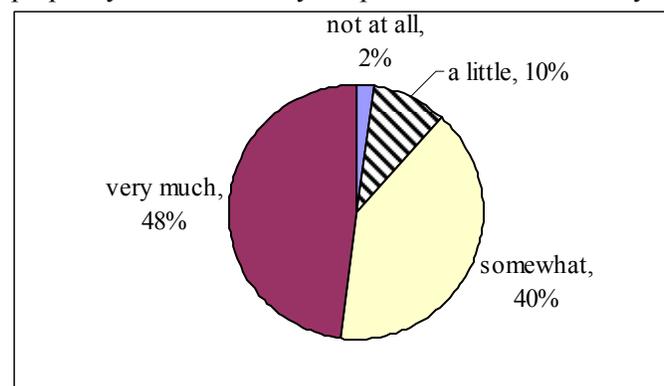


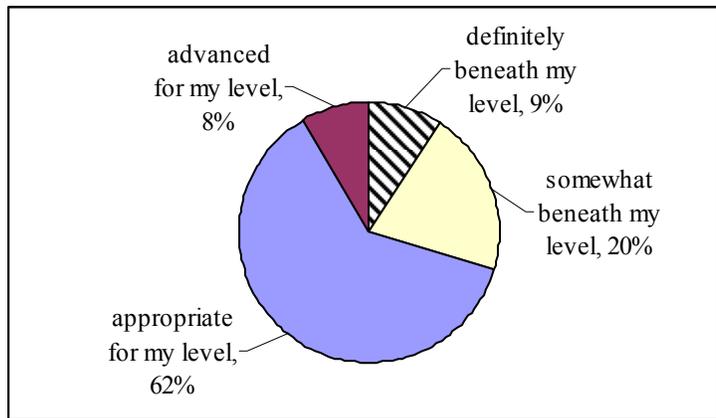
Figure Two: To what extent did your undergraduate major prepare you academically for post-baccalaureate study?



IV. Post-Mason Employment

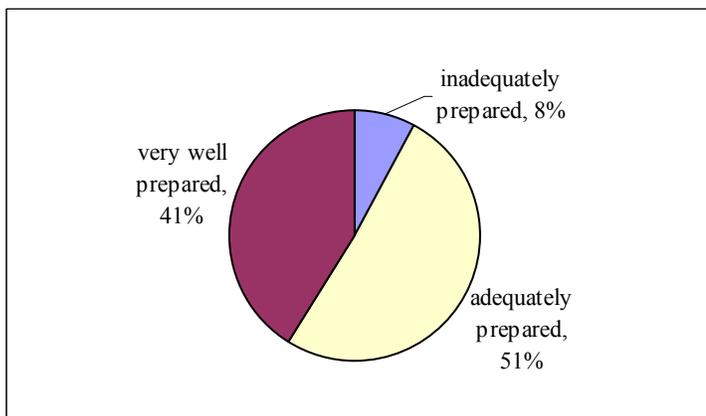
Eighty-three percent of the respondents have full-time paid employment; another 10% are working part-time and the remaining 7% are not working for pay. Among those who are working, 6% indicated that the question regarding the level of their employment was not applicable for them. For the remaining respondents (see Figure Three), 8% say their job is “advanced” for their level and 62% say their job is “appropriate” for their level, given their training and degree. A total of 29% have a job either “somewhat” or “definitely” below their level.

Figure Three: Level of Employment



Among the alumni who are working either full-time or part-time, 10% reported that the question regarding Mason’s preparation for their work was not applicable. For the remaining respondents (see Figure Four), 41% feel they were “very well prepared” for work, compared to other college graduates in their place of employment who graduated about the same time that they did. Another 51% feel they were “adequately prepared” and 8% think they were “inadequately prepared.”

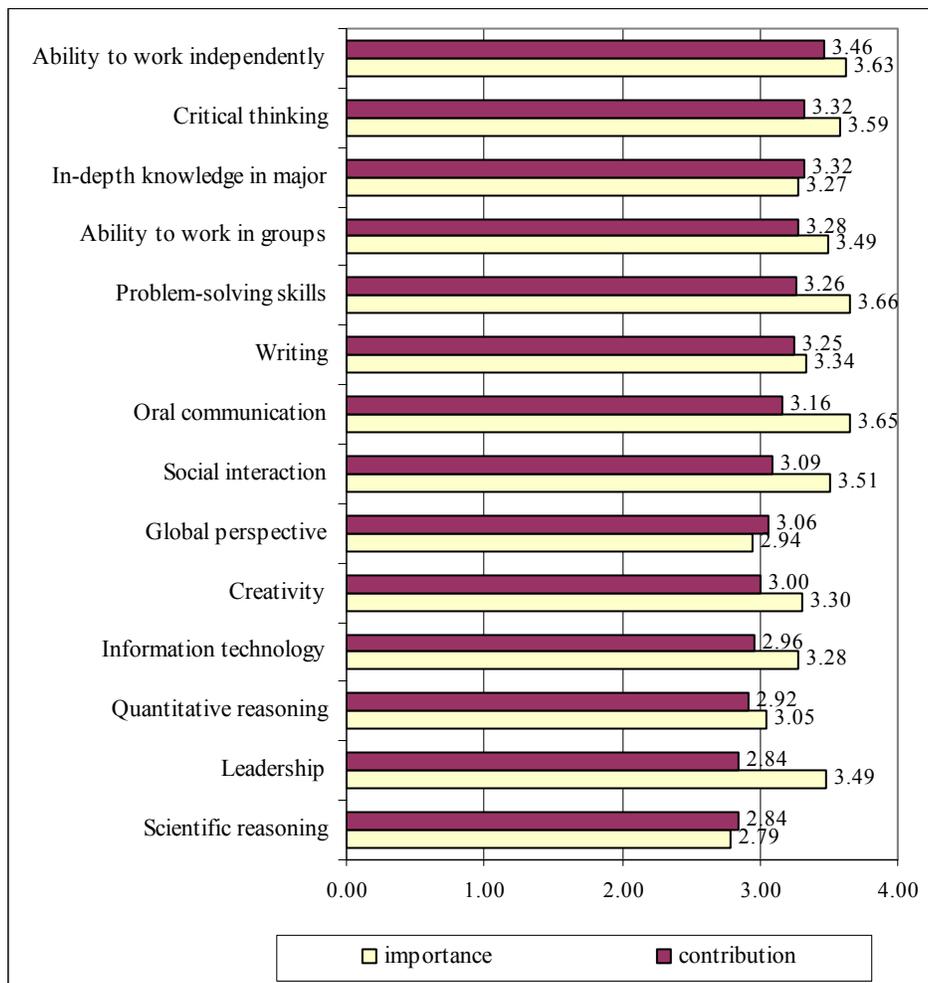
Figure Four: Preparation for Work



V. Mason Educational Goals

Given a list of fourteen educational goals of the University, the alumni were asked to rate Mason’s contribution to these goals and the importance of these goals to what they are doing now. On a scale of 1-4 (4=very much and 1=not at all), the alumni feel Mason has made a substantial contribution in most areas; the “ability to work independently” was rated the highest. Although most of the 14 skills are considered important, “the ability to work independently,” along with “problem-solving skills” and “oral communication” are considered the most important skills for what they are doing now.

Figure Five: Mason’s Contribution and Current Importance: Mean Comparison



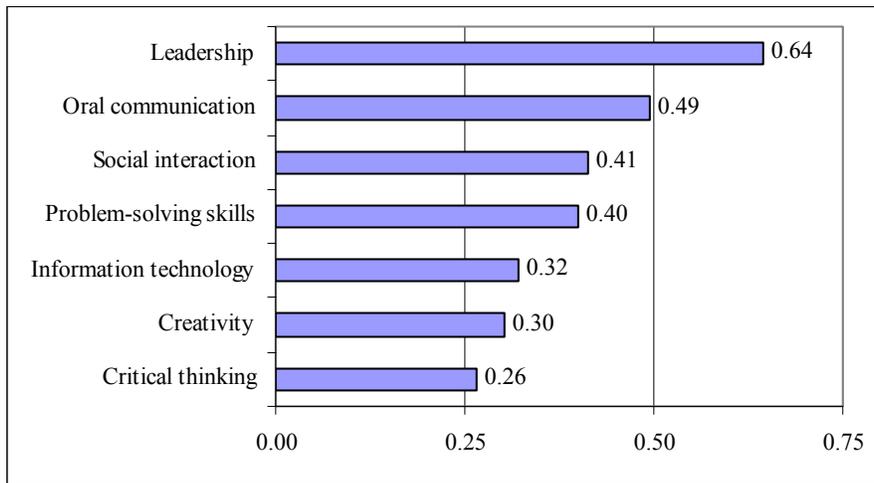
The difference between mean ratings on contribution and importance, defined as a *performance gap score*, reflects how Mason meets students’ needs in a particular area. In the past, we have defined the following criteria on performance gaps:

- A large performance gap: the performance gap score for a particular item is $\geq .75$
- A moderate performance gap: a performance gap score is between $.25$ to $.74$
- A minor performance gap: a performance gap score is $< .25$

As shown in Figure Five, Mason has met graduates’ needs in the following areas: “global perspective,” “scientific reasoning,” and “in-depth knowledge in a particular field or major.” Keep in mind that these alumni graduated before a new general education curriculum was introduced in 2001.

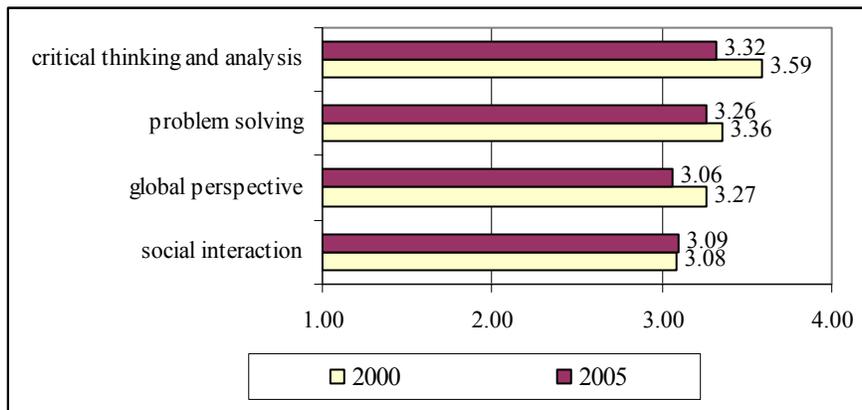
Figure Six shows the areas where Mason has moderate performance gaps. Overall, no large performance gap is found for the 14 educational goals included in the Alumni Survey. Moderate performance gaps are found in seven areas with the widest gaps in “leadership,” “oral communication,” “social interaction” and “problem-solving skills.” Moderate performance gaps are also found in the areas of “information technology,” “creativity,” and “critical thinking.” It should be noted that although there are several areas of performance gaps, it is not unusual for “importance” to be rated higher than the perceived contribution. Also, with the exception of “leadership” and “information technology” skill, all others where there is a performance gap are rated at 3.0 or above in terms of Mason’s contribution.

Figure Six: Moderate Performance Gaps



There are four common learning goals on the 2005 Alumni Survey and the 1999-2000 Graduating Senior Survey: critical thinking, problem solving, social interaction and global perspective. When these alumni were graduating seniors, they were more likely to say that Mason contributed “very much” to their growth in critical thinking, problem solving and global perspective. The mean ratings on these three areas were significantly higher on the Graduating Senior Survey, especially for critical thinking and global perspective. The average rating on social interaction is the same as five years ago.

Figure Seven: Mason’s Contribution: Comparing Ratings in the 2000 Graduating Senior Survey and the 2005 Alumni Survey*



* This comparison includes only those who responded to both surveys, N=314.

Forty-four percent of alumni “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with the statement that when they were at Mason, students were encouraged to become involved in community affairs. Currently, 13% of the respondents are involved in community affairs “a great deal,” 44% “somewhat” involved, 27% “rarely” involved and the remaining 16% are not involved at all.

Figure Eight: “While I was at Mason, students were encouraged to become involved in community affairs.”

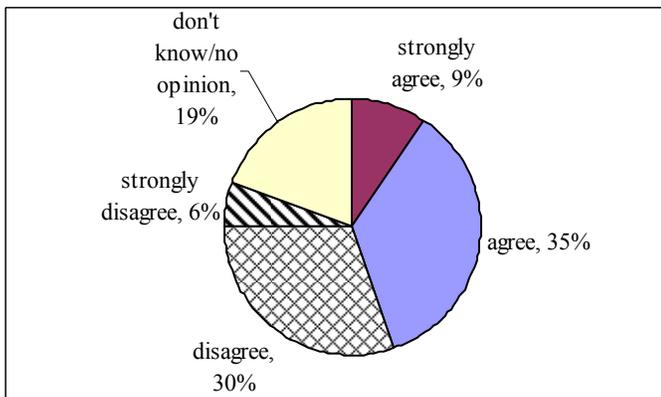
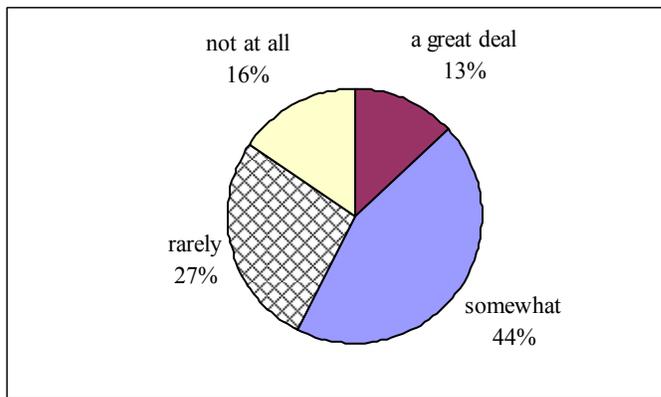


Figure Nine: Current Involvement in Community Affairs



VI. Overall Satisfaction with Mason Experiences

A total of 78% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that if they had to make their undergraduate college choice over again, they would choose to attend Mason (Figure Ten). When asked whether they would recommend that others attend Mason, 90% said yes (Figure Eleven). Eighty-five percent feel a sense of pride in Mason (Figure Twelve).

Figure Ten: “If I had to make my undergraduate college choice over again, I would choose to attend Mason.”

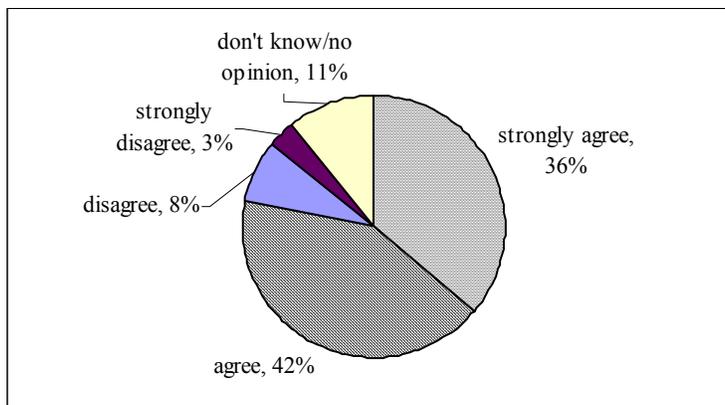


Figure Eleven: “Would you encourage others to enroll at Mason?”

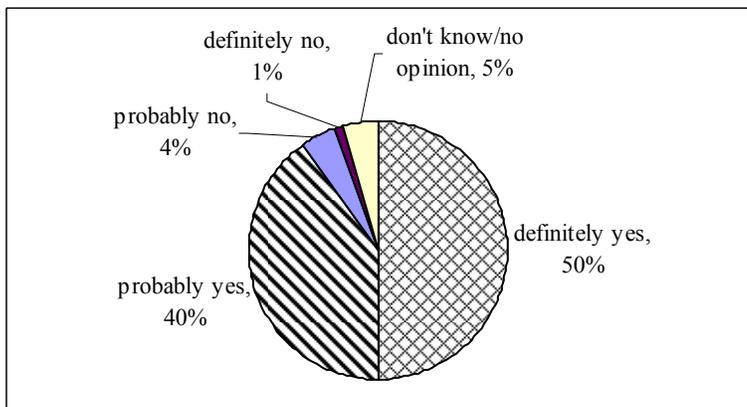
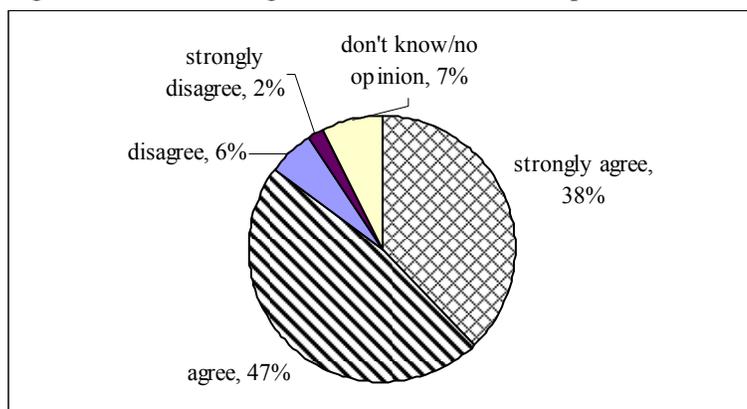


Figure Twelve: “As a graduate, I feel a sense of pride in Mason.”



VII. Keeping in Touch

Alumni are more likely to say that they still keep in touch with other Mason students or alumni rather than faculty or staff; 46% keep frequent or occasional contact with Mason students/alumni. Twenty percent of alumni frequently or occasionally contact a faculty member at Mason and 18% keep frequent or occasional contact with members of a Mason organization they belonged to. Thirty-five percent keep in touch with the Alumni Association, although most say the contact is limited.

Table One: Maintaining Contact with Mason

Are you still in contact with:	Frequently/ Occasionally	Very little	Not at all
Mason students/alumni	46%	17%	37%
Faculty	20%	12%	68%
Members of a Mason organization I belonged to	18%	9%	73%
Staff in my department/school/college	11%	7%	81%
Alumni Association	9%	26%	65%
Advisor	6%	9%	85%
Staff in University Life/Student Services	4%	5%	91%

VIII. Positive Impact

When asked to indicate one person or department who had an especially positive impact on them, over 70% of these alumni responded to this question. Some alumni named their instructors, advisors, or counselors; and some mentioned their program, department or school; some could not remember the names of the people who had positively influenced them. In this report, we will not list the names of the people or units; instead, we have selected comments, under headings created for this purpose, to demonstrate in what way these people or units have made a positive impact on students.

In what way can a professor make a positive impact on his/her students?

1. **Good teaching:** “Prof. XX had a very positive impact on me because she was always enthusiastic and encouraging in her classes. Her energy was motivating and class topics were engaging. She has a clear passion for her line of work and enjoys sharing it with students. Her exams were challenging and her grading was fair. She and I have kept in contact and she has continued to be supportive.” “...she was a Biology professor. That class was the best class in my school career! It was just Biology 104 but it made such an impact on my life.”

“Professor XX had a positive impact on me because of his teaching style and his ability to get me to think outside my normal habits to analyze the subject matter he was teaching. His class on the Presidency was very interesting and informative and there are portions of what I learned that I can still relate to real world leadership situations from my workplace to government.”

2. **Challenging students:** “My experience in XX’s class challenged me to perform to the best of my capabilities... he helped me realize what I could do when I exerted maximum effort.” “XX challenged his students to follow their own way in interpreting their subjects, but would not settle for half-baked, inarticulate renderings or work that was sloppy or hasty. He was a polarizing figure and you either liked or respected him. He helped me to personally raise my own bar for whatever I did artistically.” “The reason I enjoyed him as a professor is that he challenged us to really dig deep within ourselves, through his various group and solo projects, and learn to develop the interpersonal leadership skills necessary in management.”
3. **Providing academic and personal support:** “Prof. XX was compassionate and creative and appreciated and respected our opinions. She challenged us in enjoyable ways and supported us. She supported me specifically; in an independent study project my senior year and that project helped me in my initial career.” “Whenever I encountered some difficulties with my writing assignments, she was willing to give me the opportunity to do rough drafts and give more in-depth feedbacks on how I can improve myself.” “I was greatly impacted by the University Scholars program with XX and others. I don't think I would have finished my degree without her help. She encouraged me and was always there to meet with me and help me connect with the Mason Community and faculty. She always helped me to pursue my goals.” “He has provided invaluable guidance and instruction to me through the formative years of my professional life. I am a music teacher, and everyday I find myself using knowledge gained from his instruction as I teach the next generation of musicians.
4. **Caring for students:** “Prof. XX: Full-time employee, yet full-time Mom and family member. Very inspirational and cared about her students; we were not just a number, but she remembered all of our faces and names and encouraged us to push ourselves to our limits and do our very best.” “She honestly gave her time to her students, during hours and after hours. She wouldn't hesitate to send an email out to her students; if you had a question, her response was phenomenal. She would even call you up if you were absent and ask what you were doing and if you were okay. She also was a great teacher, knowing her subject well and if she didn't have the answer for you then by next class she would know it forwards and backwards.”
5. **Being inspiring:** “XX strongly influenced my world view and how I analyze new information. I read his syndicated column every week still.” “Dr. XX, Robinson professor. The single person in my entire life that has changed me in more positive ways than anybody else. In a single semester I grew as much as I should have in High School by learning how to think critically, organize an argument, learn about art and culture and society and government. I basically learned what college was offering, how to take advantage and how to continue my education during the rest of my life.” “His enthusiasm and creativity for Irish drama and others gave me a better insight into these areas and encouraged further study.”

In what way can an academic unit make a positive impact on its graduates?

1. My department – “the courses I took at George Mason were especially helpful when I graduated from school to pursue my career in PR. I've worked at the top PR agencies in DC and feel the internship program at GMU played a key role in my successful career path.”
2. My department “consistently provided outstanding, inspirational teachers that simply changed my life.”
3. “I learned a lot from every faculty member I encountered there [in my program]. There was no standout, they are truly a team.”
4. My school “really was very organized and tried to help all the students. I had a situation where I had to go back to my home country and all the professors helped me pass my classes even though I missed a few classes.”
5. My college “allowed and encouraged me to learn in the ways that were best suited to my learning abilities. I am unable to focus in large groups, my college promoted creative projects and smaller group experiences. Most likely, I would not have graduated had I not been enrolled in the college.”
6. My college “made the most positive impact on my educational career. I loved the innovative and challenging education that I received. It has truly made a mark on the kind of teaching that I do today.”

7. "The math tutoring center was a great resource and it taught me it was ok to seek help to try and understand something."

In what way can University Life and services professionals make a positive impact on students?

1. Career Counseling: Ms. XX "was a superb career counselor. She made me feel pumped up, positive and focused on interpreting job skills orally and in writing. Ms. YY is an [another] awesome career counselor. She took all of my ideas and experience and really made it presentable in an interview situation. She is quite capable at giving confidence and focus to students transitioning into the workforce."
2. "Student Organizations, Activities and Leadership and the Director of Student Activities in particular had a huge impact on my development at Mason. The experience I attained there has assisted me in all my endeavors since graduating from Mason as well as my current career path."
3. Dr. XX "from the former Black Peer Counseling Program. I used to work for that office, and his advice, mentorship and encouragement had a tremendous impact on my ties and connections to the Mason community as well as led me to pursue my Master's degree."

IX. What about Mason are you most proud of?

Many alumni say they are most proud of the cultural and ethnic diversity of Mason. In this diverse environment, they interacted with students from different cultures, gained understanding and knowledge, and had an enriching learning experience. The alumni take pride in the growth of the University: its vision and advances in becoming a first-rate institution, its improving academic reputation, and the continuing recognition of the University in the nation.

The alumni are also proud of the quality of education, the quality of their department/program and the quality of faculty at Mason. Many say that they have had knowledgeable, experienced, and truly inspiring faculty. They felt a sense of community on campus even though they themselves were commuting students. Those who enrolled as working adults are very grateful for the support they have received from Mason. Beautiful and well-maintained campus, state-of-art technology and facilities, new buildings, new dormitories, diverse student clubs and organizations, enriching campus life, and intercollegiate athletics are among the list of things the alumni take pride in. The following section contains selected comments from the alumni.

Diversity

- Multi-culturalism, not only tolerance but acceptance of ALL people! I've never seen it anywhere else; at least not that enthusiastically and honestly.
- The ethnic diversity! As an older student that had been in the workplace for 10 years, I already had acquired much of my "corporate" sensibility and knowledge. The diversity at Mason helped me become a more aware, tolerant and well rounded individual. I feel so enriched as a result.
- I like the cultural/ethnic diversity and I'm proud that people of all different kinds of backgrounds can study together and pursue common interests, exchange ideas, and form friendships.
- I'm proud of the wealth of opportunities to be involved in campus life in so many different ways. My years at Mason opened up to so many experiences of different cultures, personalities, and ways of life that I grew as an adult just as much outside of class as inside.

Growth of the University and its Reputation

- The growth of the university is amazing. The technology available to students is fantastic. The new dorms look very nice.
- [I am proud of] Being part of a growing community of competent professionals. Mason has made amazing strides in becoming a school known for its academic achievements.
- The up and coming reputation due to the high quality of education more and more people are becoming aware of. I take pride in the fact that Mason is quickly getting the attention of educators and the community.
- George Mason is an up and coming school. I hear professors from it frequently giving commentary on talk radio as well as being quoted in the newspaper.
- I think I'm most proud that the university is finally beginning to gain some of the recognition it deserves, not only in the state but throughout the country.

Quality of Education and Quality of Faculty

- I had the opportunity to work with talented, thoughtful faculty who took a genuine interest in their students and did their best to ensure that their students emerge from George Mason well-educated.
- Many of the faculty and staff are so dedicated, and CARE about the students, and the well being of the institution.
- I feel like I got a very well rounded education that I could leave and take it with me to any job market. I felt like I was very prepared to enter the working world and that through my education at Mason I learned strong personal working skills that have allowed me to adapt to many different working cultures. I'm proud of the education I received.
- I believe that GMU's location in the suburban DC area is ideal for a well-rounded education. Students who attend GMU will experience real-life situations through internships and interaction with faculty who live and work in such a diverse location. This is especially true of student interaction with adjunct faculty who are actively 'doing' the jobs that Mason students aspire to.

Sense of Community and Being Supportive to Non-Traditional Students

- I am most proud of the community. The faculty, the staff, the administration, and most especially, the students, are extraordinarily accepting of each other and embrace the learning environment.
- Mason understood the challenges that older working students faced - I did not feel out of place there.
- I started Mason after being away for years and being a single mom. I felt so proud to be getting my degree and I never felt out of place by being an older student. I felt embraced by the school and students and I feel that my education has brought me far in a short time.
- I am proud of the fact that Mason serves the needs of so many in our area - making it a possibility for working adults to continue their education.

Campus Life and Athletics

- On campus there are various clubs and organizations to get involved in and each member of Mason's diverse population can find their niche.
- I find most of my pride to be in the improved basketball program. It gives us a name outside of the DC area.
- I think there has been such growth and development in the area of student services. I am almost jealous of incoming freshman, because their opportunities to get involved, and their options, are so much more evolved. They have the option of having the undergrad experience I wanted. I also think the current University Life group is doing a phenomenal job making students aware of what goes on on-campus.

X. What advice would you give to current students enrolled in your degree program?

At the end of the survey, the alumni were asked to give advice to current students enrolled in their degree programs – three fourths of them made a variety of suggestions. The following are the highly recommended areas:

- Taking your study seriously. Attending classes and asking questions. Working in groups.
- Interacting with faculty, talking with advisors, and building relationships with them.
- Improving writing and communication skills in college.
- Taking an internship or other practicum before graduation. For students in some majors, taking a second major is important for future employment.
- Interacting with students and building networks.
- Taking every opportunity Mason offers you. Involving yourself in extracurricular activities and using the Writing Center and the Career Counseling Center.

For more alumni comments please visit our website: [http:// assessment.gmu.edu](http://assessment.gmu.edu)

Appendix One: Background Information

Category	Survey Respondents Summer, 2005		All Graduates Class 2000		Percentage
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	
Total Respondents	376	100%	2742	100%	13.7%*
Sex					
Female	247	65.7%	1639	59.8%	15.1%
Male	129	34.3%	1103	40.2%	11.7%
Race					
African American	34	9.0%	222	8.1%	15.3%
Asian American	42	11.2%	499	18.2%	8.4%
Hispanic American	25	6.6%	183	6.7%	13.7%
Native American	3	0.8%	16	0.6%	18.8%
White American	237	63.0%	1513	55.2%	15.7%
Other/Unknown American	27	7.2%	189	6.9%	14.3%
Non-Resident Alien	8	2.1%	120	4.4%	6.7%
Admissions Status**					
Freshman	174	46.5%	943	35.7%	18.5%
Transfer (Total)	200	53.5%	1699	64.3%	11.8%
Freshman Transfer	12	3.2%	No data	No data	
Sophomore Transfer	72	19.3%	No data	No data	
Junior Transfer	106	28.3%	No data	No data	
Senior Transfer	10	2.7%	No data	No data	
GPA					
3.501-4.000	106	28.2%	617	22.5%	17.2%
3.001-3.500	107	28.5%	885	32.3%	12.1%
2.501-3.000	137	36.4%	1032	37.6%	13.3%
2.000-2.500	18	4.8%	208	7.6%	8.7%
Missing data	8	2.1%	--	--	
Academic Unit/College***					
College of Arts and Sciences	188	49.9%	1270	46.3	14.8%
College of Nursing and Health Science	18	4.8%	164	6.0	11.0%
Graduate School of Education	13	3.4%	73	2.7	17.8%
Institute of the Arts	8	2.1%	63	2.3	12.7%
New Century College	41	10.9%	217	7.9	18.9%
School of Information Technology and Engineering	26	6.9%	228	8.3	11.4%
School of Management	81	21.5%	730	26.6	11.1%
Unknown	2	0.5%	--	--	

* Due to outdated contact information, we were not able to reach all the graduates of the 1999-2000 academic year. For the 2375 alumni we contacted, the response rate was about 15.8%.

** Information on *Admissions Status* was self-reported by the survey respondents. All the other information in this table was obtained from the 1999-2000 Degree File prepared by the Office of Institutional Research and Reporting.

*** This category reflects the academic structure of the year 1999-2000. One student who received two degrees from two colleges is counted twice in this category.

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