

**Freshmen from Immigrant Backgrounds  
at George Mason University:  
A Special Report of the 2003 CIRP Freshman Survey**



**Office of Institutional Assessment  
June 2005**



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## Highlights

This study identified three groups of Mason freshmen based on their immigrant backgrounds:

- The first group, “**Native Freshmen**,” is comprised of children of U.S. born parent(s) (n=798);
- The second group, “**Immigrant Family Freshmen**,” includes students born in the U.S. to foreign-born parents and students who immigrated to the U.S. before age six (n=210);
- The third group, “**Immigrant Freshmen**,” consists of students who immigrated at or after age six (n=116).

We found significant differences between immigrant freshmen, immigrant family freshmen and native freshmen at Mason.

1. Twenty-nine percent of Mason freshmen report that both of their parents are foreign-born.
2. The majority of immigrant freshmen and immigrant family freshmen are Asian/Pacific Islander and another 12% are Latino. Thirty-six percent of immigrant freshmen are the first in their immediate family to attend college.
3. Immigrant freshmen and immigrant family freshmen are more likely to come from areas local to George Mason University.
4. More immigrant freshmen come from families with lower parental income than immigrant family freshmen and native freshmen.
5. In high school, immigrant freshmen studied longer and had better grades than the other two groups.
6. Immigrant and immigrant family freshmen have higher educational aspirations than their native peers.
7. Immigrant and immigrant family freshmen are more likely to enroll at Mason because their relatives wanted them to come here.
8. Immigrant freshmen spent less time socializing with friends, doing exercises or sports, and working for pay in high school than their native peers.
9. “Being well off financially” is one of the most important personal objectives of all freshmen regardless of immigration status, although immigrant family freshmen feel this more strongly than others.
10. Students with immigrant backgrounds are more likely than their native counterparts to say that they will “transfer to another college” before graduation.
11. Freshmen from immigrant backgrounds expect to study for longer hours in college than their native peers.
12. Immigrant family freshmen (38%) are the most likely to say that it is “essential” for them to attend a college with a multi-ethnic student body, compared with 31% of immigrant freshmen and 22% of native freshmen.

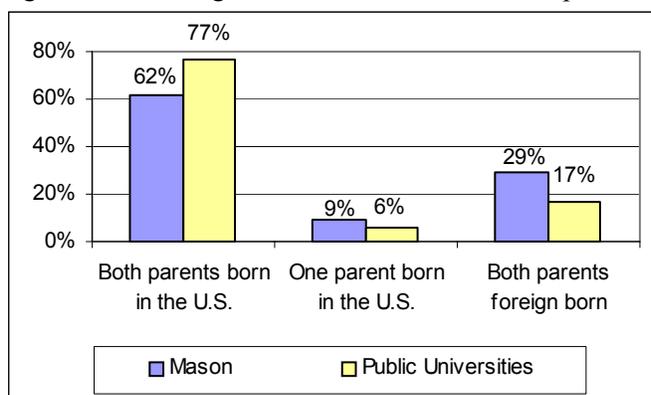
# I. Introduction

“The foreign-born population in the United States increased by more than half between 1990 and 2000.” (Malone, Baluja, Costanzo & Davis, 2003) According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in March 2002, the civilian noninstitutionalized population in the United States included 32.5 million foreign born, representing 11.5% of the U.S. population (Schmidley, 2003). While more than half of the foreign born live in California, New York and Texas, every state in the union, with the exception of Maine, has seen growth in the percent of the total population that is foreign born (Malone, et al, 2003).

Much of the current and future population growth in the U.S. is expected to come from immigrants and their offspring (Bouvier, 1992). Hernandez and Charney (1998) estimate that one out of five children in the U.S. has at least one foreign-born parent and the percentage will keep increasing, in part because the proportion of the foreign-born who are at child-bearing age is so much larger than that of the native population. School systems from kindergarten through college are and will be effected by these changing demographics.

According to the Freshman Survey of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), among the 2003 first-time full-time freshmen enrolled in all public universities, 8.4% were born outside of the United States, 17% said both parents were foreign born and another 6% said one parent was foreign born (as shown in Figure 1). At George Mason University, the percentage of freshmen with immigrant backgrounds is much higher than the average for public universities. Twenty-nine percent of Mason freshmen said both of their parents were foreign-born, 12 percentage points higher than the average for public universities. Another 9% of Mason freshmen have one parent who was born outside of the U.S.

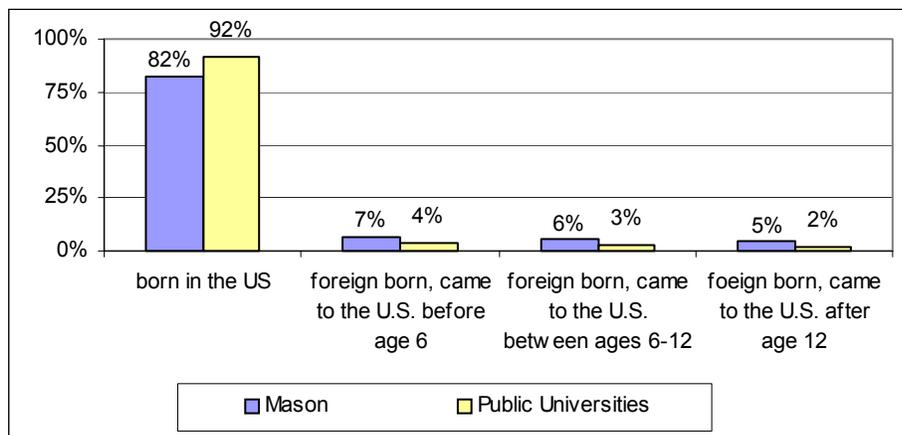
Figure 1. Percentage of students with U.S.-born parents



Eighty-two percent of Mason freshmen were born in the U.S., compared with 92% of their counterparts in public universities. A total of 18% of Mason freshmen were born outside of the U.S.: including 7% who came to the U.S. before age six, 6% who came between the ages of six to twelve, and 5% who came after age twelve.

Figure 2. Student birth places

*A total of 18% of the 2003 first-time full-time freshmen at Mason were born outside of the U.S.: including 7% of freshmen who came to the U.S. before age six, 6% who came between the ages of six to twelve, and 5% who came after age twelve.*



Immigrants and their children face a number of obstacles in seeking access to and academic success in higher education. A 1996 RAND report on immigration and higher education stated that “The weak English language skills of some immigrant students pose the most serious impediment to success within higher education.” (Gray, Rolph & Melamid, 1996) Furthermore, immigrant students may face other problems such as acculturative stress, lack of information of the American education system, inadequate academic preparation, the need to balance study with family and work responsibilities, and discrimination. The purpose of this study is to identify differences and commonalities between native-born freshmen and foreign-born freshmen at Mason regarding their high school experiences, educational aspirations, academic preparation, college expectations, and attitudes about their own abilities and goals.

The data for this analysis come from a CIRP<sup>1</sup> Freshman Survey administered to 2003 incoming freshmen. Mason freshmen entering in fall 2003 were asked to complete the survey during summer orientation. Out of 2,192 first-time full-time freshmen enrolled, 1,139 completed the survey for a response rate of 52%. The racial and sex composition of the Mason respondents is very close to the actual composition of the 2003 entering first-time full-time freshman class.

The immigrant status of the respondents was identified by examining whether the respondents and their parents were born in the U.S. The study compares three groups of students:

- The first group, “**Native Freshmen**,” is comprised of children of U.S. born parent(s) (n=798);
- The second group, “**Immigrant Family Freshmen**,” includes students born in the U.S. to foreign-born parents and students who immigrated to the U.S. before age six (n=210);
- The third group, “**Immigrant Freshmen**,” consists of students who immigrated at or after age six (n=116).

The study finds significant differences between these three groups of freshmen in educational aspirations, college academic preparation, high school behaviors, reasons to go to college, expected experiences in college, personal objectives and self-perceptions.

*For more information on the results of the CIRP 2003 Freshman Survey, please refer to two earlier publications from the Office of Institutional Assessment:*

1. *Fall 2003 Entering Freshmen: CIPR Freshman Survey (May 2004)*
2. *The Freshman Survey 2003: A Comparison Report (July 2004)*

*These reports are available on-line at <http://assessment.gmu.edu>.*

**Percentages throughout this report may NOT add to 100% due to rounding.**

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<sup>1</sup> **The Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP)** is a national longitudinal study of the American higher education system conducted by the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). George Mason University participated in the CIRP Freshman Survey in 2000, 2001 and 2003.

## II. Demographic and Social Characteristics

Immigrant students and students from immigrant families bring a perspective to the university community that enriches and broadens the experiences of all students. As Table 1 shows, among the native freshmen at Mason, 84% are white, 97% are between the ages 18-19, and 99% are native English speakers. The immigrant freshmen and immigrant family freshmen are more ethnically and linguistically diverse. Between 59% to 61% of them are Asian/Pacific Islander, and another 12% are Hispanic. All freshmen from immigrant families are of traditional college age – age 19 or younger. Among the freshmen from immigrant families, 48% said English was not their native language. Almost all immigrant freshmen said English was not their native language.

Immigrant freshmen and immigrant family freshmen are more likely to come from areas local to George Mason University – at least 88% of either cohort live within 50 miles of Mason. In contrast, 47% of native freshmen live more than 50 miles away from the university. Thirty-six percent of immigrant freshmen are the first in their immediate family to attend college, 12 percentage points higher than native freshmen and immigrant family freshmen.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics

| Demographic characteristics       | George Mason Respondents |                           |                    | All freshmen in public universities |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------|
|                                   | Native freshmen          | Immigrant family freshmen | Immigrant freshmen |                                     |
| <b>Sex</b>                        |                          |                           |                    |                                     |
| Male                              | 47%                      | 47%                       | 43%                | 47%                                 |
| Female                            | 53%                      | 53%                       | 57%                | 53%                                 |
| <b>Race/Ethnicity*</b>            |                          |                           |                    |                                     |
| White/Caucasian                   | 84%                      | 10%                       | 12%                | 75%                                 |
| Black                             | 6%                       | 4%                        | 5%                 | 7%                                  |
| Asian/Pacific Islander            | 5%                       | 59%                       | 61%                | 13%                                 |
| Latino                            | 4%                       | 12%                       | 12%                | 5%                                  |
| Other                             | 5%                       | 14%                       | 10%                | 4%                                  |
| <b>Age (as of Dec. 2003)</b>      |                          |                           |                    |                                     |
| 17 or younger                     | 2%                       | 2%                        | 6%                 | 2%                                  |
| 18                                | 72%                      | 82%                       | 54%                | 67%                                 |
| 19                                | 25%                      | 16%                       | 31%                | 30%                                 |
| 20                                | 1%                       | 0%                        | 7%                 | 1%                                  |
| 21-24                             | 0%                       | 0%                        | 2%                 | 0%                                  |
| <b>Native English Speaker</b>     |                          |                           |                    |                                     |
| Yes                               | 99%                      | 52%                       | 3%                 | 90%                                 |
| No                                | 1%                       | 48%                       | 97%                | 10%                                 |
| <b>Miles from College to Home</b> |                          |                           |                    |                                     |
| 10 or less                        | 18%                      | 47%                       | 37%                | 9%                                  |
| 11-50                             | 35%                      | 42%                       | 51%                | 24%                                 |
| 51-100                            | 10%                      | 3%                        | 7%                 | 18%                                 |
| More than 100                     | 37%                      | 8%                        | 5%                 | 50%                                 |
| <b>First-Generation Student</b>   |                          |                           |                    |                                     |
| Yes                               | 23%                      | 24%                       | 36%                | No Data                             |
| No                                | 77%                      | 76%                       | 64%                | No Data                             |

\*Percentages may NOT add to 100% due to rounding and multiple selections.

Students with immigrant backgrounds also have diverse religious preferences. Six percent of all Mason freshmen are Islamic, and all of them are either from immigrant families or are immigrant freshmen. Almost all Mason Hindus (2% of the 2003 cohort) and Buddhists (4% of the 2003 cohort) are from immigrant backgrounds as well. Almost all Jewish, Lutheran, and Methodist freshmen are native freshmen.

Table 2: Religious preferences

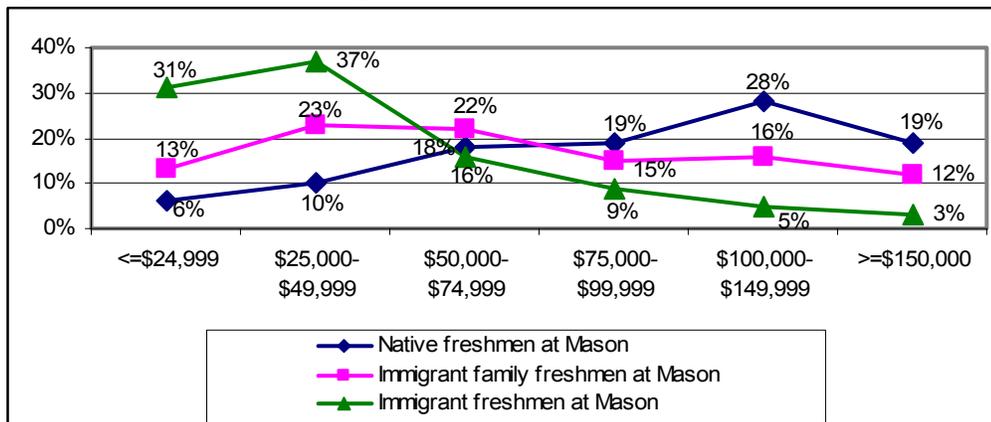
| Religious Preferences | George Mason University, 2003 |                           |                    |                       | Public Universities freshmen |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|
|                       | Native freshmen               | Immigrant family freshmen | Immigrant freshmen | ALL freshmen at Mason |                              |
| Baptist               | 10%                           | 2%                        | 2%                 | 8%                    | 10%                          |
| Buddhist              | 1%                            | 9%                        | 15%                | 4%                    | 2%                           |
| Episcopal             | 4%                            | 1%                        | 2%                 | 3%                    | 2%                           |
| Hindu                 | 0                             | 9%                        | 6%                 | 2%                    | 1%                           |
| Islamic               | 0                             | 23%                       | 18%                | 6%                    | 1%                           |
| Jewish                | 3%                            | 0                         | 0                  | 2%                    | 3%                           |
| Lutheran              | 4%                            | 1%                        | 0                  | 3%                    | 6%                           |
| Methodist             | 8%                            | 0                         | 0                  | 6%                    | 7%                           |
| Presbyterian          | 3%                            | 4%                        | 4%                 | 4%                    | 5%                           |
| Roman Catholic        | 27%                           | 24%                       | 19%                | 25%                   | 27%                          |
| Other Christian       | 14%                           | 11%                       | 16%                | 14%                   | 15%                          |
| Other Religion        | 3%                            | 3%                        | 2%                 | 2%                    | 3%                           |
| None                  | 23%                           | 16%                       | 17%                | 21%                   | 20%                          |

Previous research found that immigrant parents, on average, are poorer and less educated than U.S.-born parents according to U.S. standards. This is confirmed by our data. For one third of immigrant freshmen (31%), their parents earn less than \$25,000 a year; and for another one third (37%), their parents make between \$25,000 and \$50,000 annually; no immigrant freshmen think their parents' income is more than \$200,000 a year. More native freshmen, on the other hand, are from wealthier families: 47% think their parents make more than \$100,000 a year. It should be noted that student self-reported family income may not be reliable and we do not know whether there are cultural differences regarding knowledge of family income.

Table 3: Parental income

| Parental Income                | George Mason University |                           |                    | Public Universities |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
|                                | Native freshmen         | Immigrant family freshmen | Immigrant freshmen |                     |
| Less than or equal to \$24,999 | 6%                      | 13%                       | 31%                | 11%                 |
| \$25,000 to \$49,999           | 10%                     | 23%                       | 37%                | 17%                 |
| \$50,000 to \$74,999           | 18%                     | 22%                       | 16%                | 22%                 |
| \$75,000 to \$99,999           | 19%                     | 15%                       | 9%                 | 16%                 |
| \$100,000 to \$149,999         | 28%                     | 16%                       | 5%                 | 18%                 |
| \$150,000 or more              | 19%                     | 12%                       | 3%                 | 15%                 |

Figure 3. Parental income comparison

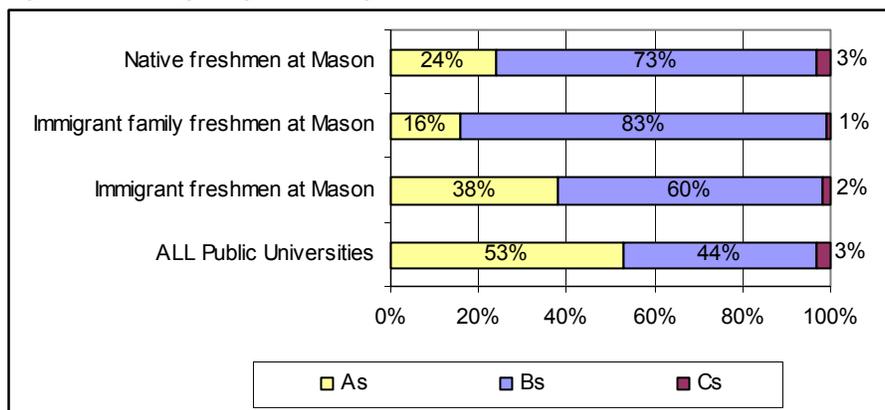


*Immigrant freshmen at Mason are more likely to report lower parental income than their peers: 31% think their parents earn less than \$25,000 a year, compared with 13% of immigrant family freshmen and 6% of native freshmen.*

### III. Academic Preparation and High School Activities

Most Mason freshmen are “B”-average students in high school. Immigrant freshmen are more likely to have higher grades in high school, 38% had an “A” average – 14 percentage points higher than native freshmen and 22 percentage points higher than immigrant family freshmen. However, the proportion of immigrant freshmen who attended and graduated from a U.S. high school is unknown.

Figure 4. Average high school grades



*Thirty-eight percent of immigrant freshmen at Mason were “A” average students in high school, compared with 16% of immigrant family freshmen and 24% of native freshmen. These figures are well below the average for all public universities, which is 53%.*

Immigrant freshmen needed substantially more tutoring or remedial work in English, reading, social studies and writing in high school than either native or immigrant family freshmen (see Table 4). More immigrant freshmen expect that they will need tutoring/remedial work in these areas again in college. It is striking that a large number of immigrant freshmen who have not had any remedial work in high school think that they WILL need such work in college. For instance, only 11% of immigrant freshmen had remedial work in English during high school, but 28% think they will need it in college. Similarly, only 9% of immigrant freshmen had remedial work in writing in high school but 31% think they will need it in college.

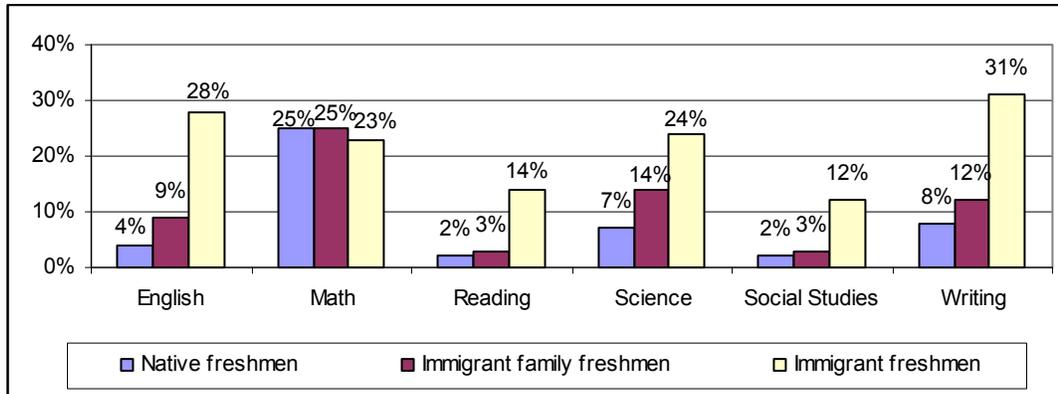
Table 4. Percentage of students who had tutoring/remedial work in high school

| Tutoring/remedial work in high school | George Mason University |                           |                    | Public Universities |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
|                                       | Native freshmen         | Immigrant family freshmen | Immigrant freshmen |                     |
| <b>English*</b>                       | 5%                      | 6%                        | 11%                | 4%                  |
| <b>Reading*</b>                       | 3%                      | 4%                        | 8%                 | 4%                  |
| <b>Math</b>                           | 13%                     | 15%                       | 9%                 | 10%                 |
| <b>Social Studies**</b>               | 2%                      | 2%                        | 7%                 | 3%                  |
| <b>Science</b>                        | 3%                      | 5%                        | 6%                 | 4%                  |
| <b>Writing**</b>                      | 3%                      | 6%                        | 9%                 | 4%                  |

*The responses of three groups of freshmen are statistically significant at the following levels: \* p<.05; \*\* p<.01; \*\*\* p<.001.*

Immigrant freshmen are less confident with their academic preparation, especially their language skills. As Figure 5 shows, with the exception of math, in every area significantly more immigrant freshmen think they will need remedial work in college than their counterparts do. The most difficult subject for immigrant freshmen is writing, followed by English, science and math. The most difficult subject for immigrant family freshmen and native freshmen is math – 25% think they will need remedial work. What is particularly striking is how much more immigrant family freshmen resemble native freshmen than they do immigrant freshmen in terms of self-reported academic competence.

Figure 5. Percentage of students who will need tutoring/remedial work in college



During their last year of high school, immigrant freshmen spent more time studying and less time socializing with friends, doing exercise or sports, and partying than immigrant family freshmen and native freshmen did. As Table 5 shows, an average immigrant freshman spent about 8.1 hours a week studying or doing homework during the last year of high school, compared with 6.6 hours for immigrant family freshmen and 4.7 hours for native freshmen.

In contrast, native freshmen spent about 11.2 hours a week socializing with friends, 2.4 hours more than immigrant family freshmen and 3.6 hours more than immigrant freshmen. Native freshmen spent almost twice as much time as immigrant freshmen on exercise or sports. Native freshmen also spent more time working for pay – 8.9 hours per week; while most freshmen from immigrant backgrounds worked less than 8 hours a week.

Immigrant freshmen spent more time watching TV (an average of 5.9 hours per week) than native freshmen (4.7 hours) and immigrant family freshmen (3.9 hours). The three groups of students spent similar amounts of time on the following activities: talking with teachers outside of class, volunteer work, student clubs/groups, household/childcare duties, reading for pleasure, and playing video/computer games.

Table 5: Student use of time during last year of high school\*

| Hours per week doing the following activities: | Native freshmen | Immigrant family freshmen | Immigrant freshmen | ALL Mason freshmen | Sig.** |
|--|-----------------|---------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------|
| <b>Studying/homework</b>                       | 4.7             | 6.6                       | 8.1                | 5.4                | .000   |
| <b>Socializing with friends</b>                | 11.2            | 8.8                       | 7.6                | 10.4               | .000   |
| <b>Exercise or sports</b>                      | 7.1             | 4.9                       | 3.7                | 6.3                | .000   |
| <b>Partying</b>                                | 3.9             | 3.3                       | 2.1                | 3.6                | .001   |
| <b>Working for pay</b>                         | 8.9             | 7.6                       | 7.2                | 8.5                | .023   |
| <b>Watching TV</b>                             | 4.7             | 3.9                       | 5.9                | 4.6                | .003   |

\*The original question provides the following categories: none, less than one hour, 1-2 hours, 3-5 hours, 6-10 hours, 11-15 hours, 16-20 hours, and over 20 hours. The average hours were calculated using the mid-point of each category when appropriate. For the last category “over 20 hours,” 20 was used as the estimated hours a week.

\*\*Indicates whether and at what level the differences in mean values between groups are statistically significant.

Adolescents from immigrant families are less likely to have used drugs and alcohol, to have had sex, and to have engaged in violent and delinquent behavior than those from U.S.-born families (Harris, 1999). Fuligni and Yoshikawa (2003) argued that children from immigrant families tend to avoid problem behaviors which could threaten the ability of the family to stay in the country. Table 6 compares drinking and smoking behaviors of the three groups of freshmen at Mason. Immigrant freshmen and immigrant family freshmen are less likely to report smoking and drinking behaviors in high school.

Table 6. Drinking and smoking behaviors during last year of high school

| During the past year, percentage of students who “FREQUENTLY”... | George Mason University |                           |                    |
|--|-------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|
|  | Native freshmen         | Immigrant family freshmen | Immigrant freshmen |
| <b>Drank beer***</b>   | 10%                     | 4%                        | 1%                 |
| <b>Drank wine or liquor***</b>                                   | 9%                      | 4%                        | 2%                 |
| <b>Smoked Cigarettes*</b>  | 7%                      | 2%                        | 3%                 |

The responses of these three groups of freshmen are statistically significant at the following levels: \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 7 lists all the high school behaviors on which the responses are significantly different among the three groups of students. Immigrant family freshmen, followed by native freshmen, are more likely than immigrant freshmen to report that they have “frequently” socialized with someone of another racial/ethnic group in high school. Half of the native freshmen and 40% of immigrant family freshmen were “frequently” bored in class, compared with 26% of immigrant freshmen. Native students are more likely to have “frequently” attended a religious service, discussed religion and politics, and played a musical instrument. Immigrant freshmen are more likely to have “frequently” studied with others in high school, and freshmen from immigrant families are more likely to perform community service and be a guest in a teacher’s home.

For some behaviors during the last year of high school, the responses from the three cohorts of freshmen are not significantly different, such as feeling overwhelmed by all I had to do, feeling depressed, oversleeping and missing class or appointment, and coming late to class. Approximately 28% of ALL freshmen frequently felt overwhelmed by all they had to do, 10% frequently came late to class, 9% felt depressed frequently, and 3.5% frequently overslept and missed class/appointment.

Table 7. Selected behaviors during last year of high school

| Percentage of students who “FREQUENTLY” engaged in the following activities during last year of high school | George Mason University |                           |                    | Public Universities 2003 |
|---|-------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
|   | Native freshmen         | Immigrant family freshmen | Immigrant freshmen |                          |
| <b>Socialized with someone of another racial/ethnic group*</b>  | 81%                     | 85%                       | 73%                | 68%                      |
| <b>Was bored in class***</b>  | 49%                     | 40%                       | 26%                | 42%                      |
| <b>Attended a religious service*</b>  | 39%                     | 34%                       | 30%                | --                       |
| <b>Discussed politics***</b>  | 38%                     | 25%                       | 19%                | 23%                      |
| <b>Discussed religion***</b>  | 32%                     | 22%                       | 13%                | 29%                      |
| <b>Played a musical instrument**</b>  | 24%                     | 15%                       | 18%                | --                       |
| <b>Studied with other students*</b>   | 22%                     | 25%                       | 31%                | --                       |
| <b>Performed community service as part of a class**</b>   | 19%                     | 24%                       | 18%                | --                       |
| <b>Was a guest in a teacher’s home***</b>   | 4%                      | 8%                        | 2%                 | --                       |

- The responses of these three groups of freshmen are statistically significant at the following levels: \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .
- ‘--’ indicates that the data was not available.

## IV. Educational Aspirations and College Choice

### 1. Educational Aspirations

Most studies that have compared immigrant and U.S.-born attitudes toward education find greater emphasis on educational success and higher aspirations for educational attainment among immigrant parents (Fuligni, 1997; Kao and Tienda, 1995; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995). Education is seen by many immigrant parents as the key to the future economic success of their children. Immigration families, therefore, emphasize the development of instrumental skills and credentials that will ensure economic stability for their families and children (Fuligni & Yoshikawa, 2003).

Freshmen from immigrant backgrounds tend to have higher educational aspirations than their native counterparts (see Table 8). A significantly lower number of immigrant freshmen (11%) at Mason plan to earn just a bachelor’s degree, compared with 18% of immigrant family freshmen and 25% of native freshmen. More immigrant freshmen (29%) aspire for doctoral degrees than immigrant family freshmen (20%) and native freshmen (13%). More immigrant students (16%) plan to study for a medical degree, four times as high as native freshmen (4%). Native-born freshmen and immigrant family freshmen are more likely to study for a law degree (9% and 8% respectively), four times as high as immigrant freshmen (2%). Researchers have found that the tendency for immigrant parents and their children to have higher educational aspirations than their American-born counterparts often becomes more pronounced after controlling for factors such as parental success (Kao and Tienda, 1995).

Table 8. Educational aspirations

| Highest degree planned to achieve at ANY institution | George Mason University |                           |                    | Public Universities 2003 |
|--|-------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
|  | Native freshmen         | Immigrant family freshmen | Immigrant freshmen |                          |
| Associate degree or less                             | 0%                      | 1%                        | 1%                 | 1%                       |
| Bachelor’s degree                                    | 25%                     | 18%                       | 11%                | 22%                      |
| Master’s degree                                      | 48%                     | 40%                       | 41%                | 39%                      |
| Ph.D. or Ed.D.                                       | 13%                     | 20%                       | 29%                | 19%                      |
| M.D., D.O., D.D.S., or D.V.M.                        | 4%                      | 12%                       | 16%                | 12%                      |
| LL.B. or J.D. (Law)                                  | 9%                      | 8%                        | 2%                 | 5%                       |
| Other  | 1%                      | 1%                        | 0%                 | 2%                       |

### 2. Reasons to Go to College

Fuligni and Yoshikawa (2003) noted that the emphasis on education in immigrant families may be based on the perceived usefulness of schooling and educational credentials for occupational mobility and economic success, rather than a more abstract, humanistic value of education for self-exploration and improvement. Our study found that learning, future economic success and occupational training are the most important reasons Mason freshmen cited for going to college. The following are the top reasons for attending college cited by Mason freshmen (as shown in Table 9):

- *to learn more about things that interest me*
- *to be able to make more money*
- *to get a better job*
- *to gain a general education and appreciation of ideas, and*
- *to prepare myself for graduate or professional school*

It should be noted that the most important reason for immigrant freshmen to go to college is to “prepare myself for graduate or professional school” – the figure is 73% compared with 51% for native freshmen and 66% for

immigrant family freshmen. A significantly high percentage of immigrant students (61%) expect to improve reading and study skills in college – compared with 40% of immigrant family students and 37% of native students. Previous research found that many immigrant parents made the immigration decision out of consideration for their children’s education; therefore, parental pressure on college education is very strong among freshmen with immigrant backgrounds. At Mason, immigrant family freshmen (54%), rather than immigrant freshmen (46%), are more likely to say that they go to college because “my parents wanted me to go;” the percentage falls to 34% for native freshmen. In contrast, one of four native freshmen goes to college in order to “get away from home” – this figure is significantly higher than for immigrant freshmen (7%).

Table 9. Important reasons to go to college – Frequency comparison

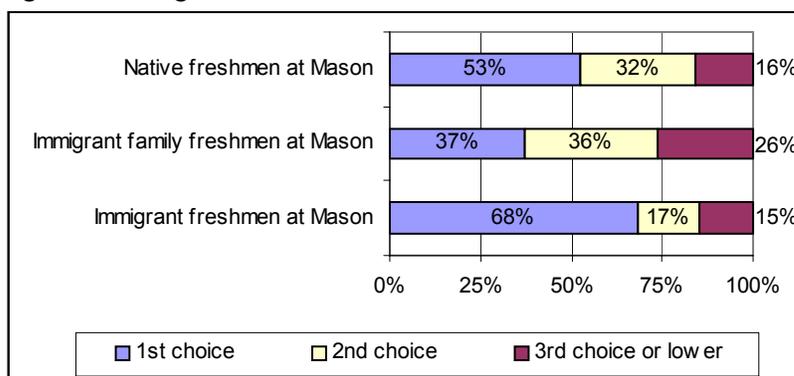
| Percentage of students who noted the following reasons as “Very Important” in deciding to go to college | George Mason University |                           |                    | Public Universities 2003 |
|---|-------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
|   | Native freshmen         | Immigrant family freshmen | Immigrant freshmen |                          |
| To learn more about things that interest me*  | 77%                     | 69%                       | 69%                | 77%                      |
| To be able to make more money   | 71%                     | 69%                       | 62%                | 72%                      |
| To get a better job   | 70%                     | 63%                       | 66%                | 72%                      |
| To get training for a specific career   | 66%                     | 69%                       | 71%                | 70%                      |
| To gain a general education and appreciation of ideas   | 62%                     | 60%                       | 66%                | 65%                      |
| To prepare myself for graduate or professional school***  | 51%                     | 66%                       | 73%                | 60%                      |
| To make me a more cultured person   | 41%                     | 44%                       | 48%                | 40%                      |
| To improve my reading and study skills***   | 37%                     | 40%                       | 61%                | 39%                      |
| My parents wanted me to go***   | 34%                     | 54%                       | 46%                | 35%                      |
| I wanted to get away from home***   | 25%                     | 12%                       | 7%                 | 22%                      |

The responses of these three groups of freshmen are statistically significant at the following levels: \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

### 3. Reasons for Attending Mason

Immigrant freshmen are the most likely to identify Mason as their first choice college (see Figure 6). Sixty-eight percent of immigrant freshmen said Mason was their first choice, compared with 53% of native freshmen and 37% of immigrant family freshmen. Twenty-six percent of immigrant family freshmen said Mason was their third choice or even lower, 10 percentage points higher than native freshmen and immigrant freshmen.

Figure 6. College choice



Native freshmen and immigrant family freshmen applied to more colleges for admission than immigrant freshmen did. Between 20% and 22% of the former two groups applied to more than four colleges other than Mason for admission, compared with 12% of immigrant freshmen. Nineteen percent of immigrant freshmen said they did NOT apply for admission to any college other than Mason (see Table 10), compared with 12%-13% of native freshmen and immigrant family freshmen who said so.

Table 10. Number of colleges other than Mason to which students applied for admission

| To how many colleges other than Mason did you apply for admission this year? | Native freshmen | Immigrant family freshmen | Immigrant freshmen |
|--|-----------------|---------------------------|--------------------|
| None   | 12%             | 13%                       | 19%                |
| 1-2 colleges   | 30%             | 30%                       | 34%                |
| 3-4 colleges   | 38%             | 35%                       | 35%                |
| 5 colleges or more   | 20%             | 22%                       | 12%                |

When asked about reasons for attending Mason, most freshmen think the good academic and the good social reputations of Mason are the most important reasons. Native freshmen are more likely to say that a visit to campus and the size of the campus are “very important” factors for their enrollment decision (34% and 23% respectively). Immigrant freshmen, in contrast, are the most likely to say that they want to live near home: 44% of immigrant freshmen identified this reason, compared with 27% immigrant family freshmen and 21% of native freshmen. Financial aid and low tuition are important factors for all freshmen, but especially strong for immigrant freshmen. Special education programs are more likely to be a draw for immigrant freshmen as well. Immigrant freshmen are strongly influenced by other people’s recommendations: they are more likely to admit that the advice from their relatives (24%), high school teachers or counselors (16%) were “very important” reasons. For immigrant family freshmen, advice from relatives is also important.

Table 11. Top “most important” reasons that influenced the decision to attend Mason

| Percentage of students who noted the following reasons as “Very Important” in deciding to attend Mason | George Mason University |                           |                    | Public Universities 2003 |
|--|-------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
|  | Native freshmen         | Immigrant family freshmen | Immigrant freshmen |                          |
| <b>This college has a very good academic reputation.</b>   | 45%                     | 41%                       | 45%                | 57%                      |
| <b>A visit to the campus. ***</b>  | 34%                     | 14%                       | 18%                | 32%                      |
| <b>This college has a good reputation for its social activities.</b>                                   | 24%                     | 23%                       | 31%                | 31%                      |
| <b>This college has low tuition. ***</b>   | 23%                     | 33%                       | 37%                | 24%                      |
| <b>The size of this college is right for me. *</b>   | 23%                     | 17%                       | 18%                | 24%                      |
| <b>I wanted to live near home. ***</b>   | 21%                     | 27%                       | 44%                | 15%                      |
| <b>Information from a website.</b>   | 16%                     | 12%                       | 11%                | 11%                      |
| <b>I was offered financial assistance. ***</b>   | 15%                     | 22%                       | 33%                | 25%                      |
| <b>This college offers special educational programs. ***</b>   | 15%                     | 13%                       | 27%                | 19%                      |
| <b>Rankings in national magazines.</b>   | 11%                     | 12%                       | 12%                | 15%                      |
| <b>My relatives wanted me to come here. ***</b>  | 7%                      | 19%                       | 24%                | 8%                       |
| <b>High school counselor advised me. ***</b>   | 6%                      | 5%                        | 16%                | 5%                       |

The responses of these three groups of freshmen are statistically significant at the following levels: \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

#### 4. Choice of Major Field of Study

Emphasis on the economic usefulness of education among immigrant families can also be seen in the type of postsecondary majors immigrant freshmen and immigrant family freshmen select. On average, children from immigrant families are more likely to pursue technical and business degrees that have a clearer link to future jobs than degrees in the social sciences and humanities (Tseng, 2001). As Table 12 shows, business is the most popular field for all freshmen, but particularly among immigrant family freshmen (23%) and immigrant freshmen (22%). Engineering, biological science and health professions are also very popular among immigrant freshmen. Sixteen percent of immigrant freshmen intend to study engineering and 15% of them intend to study biological science, compared with 7% and 5% of native freshmen. Native freshmen, in contrast, are more likely to choose political science, social sciences and other fields as their major. Slightly more immigrant family students (12%) say they haven’t decided their major, compared with 10% of native freshmen and 8% of immigrant freshmen.

Table 12. Student probable field of study

| Percentage of students who will probably study the following fields: | George Mason University |                           |                    |
|--|-------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|
|  | Native freshmen         | Immigrant family freshmen | Immigrant freshmen |
| <b>Agriculture</b>   | 0%                      | 0%                        | 0%                 |
| <b>Biological Science</b>  | 5%                      | 9%                        | 15%                |
| <b>Business</b>  | 16%                     | 23%                       | 22%                |
| <b>Education</b>   | 4%                      | 1%                        | 2%                 |
| <b>Engineering</b>   | 7%                      | 12%                       | 16%                |
| <b>English</b>   | 1%                      | 2%                        | 1%                 |
| <b>Health Profession</b>   | 7%                      | 6%                        | 12%                |
| <b>History/Political Science</b>                                     | 11%                     | 7%                        | 9%                 |
| <b>Humanities</b>  | 4%                      | 1%                        | 1%                 |
| <b>Fine Arts</b>   | 6%                      | 6%                        | 2%                 |
| <b>Math/Statistics</b>   | 0%                      | 0%                        | 0%                 |
| <b>Physical Science</b>  | 1%                      | 2%                        | 1%                 |
| <b>Social Sciences</b>   | 9%                      | 4%                        | 1%                 |
| <b>Other Technical fields</b>  | 9%                      | 6%                        | 9%                 |
| <b>Other fields</b>  | 10%                     | 9%                        | 2%                 |
| <b>Undecided</b>   | 10%                     | 12%                       | 8%                 |

Among the freshmen who HAVE chosen a major field, 81% of native freshmen said their choice was influenced by their own personal interest, compared with 66% of immigrant family freshmen and 63% of immigrant freshmen. The latter two groups are more likely to say that their choice was influenced by the potential for employment and by their parents or a family member. Among the freshmen who HAVE NOT chosen a major, the most likely reason is that students are unsure about the competencies and qualifications necessary to do well in their interested majors (see Table 14).

Table 13. Reasons for choosing a particular major field of study

| Percentage of students who “strongly agree” with the following statements:       | George Mason University |                           |                    |
|--|-------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|
|  | Native freshmen         | Immigrant family freshmen | Immigrant freshmen |
| <b>I was influenced to choose my major by the potential for employment. *</b>    | 35%                     | 39%                       | 40%                |
| <b>I was influenced to choose my major by my parents or a family member. ***</b> | 11%                     | 20%                       | 23%                |
| <b>I was influenced to choose my major by my own personal interest. ***</b>      | 81%                     | 66%                       | 63%                |

The responses of these three groups of freshmen are statistically significant at the following levels: \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 14. Reasons for NOT having chosen a major field of study

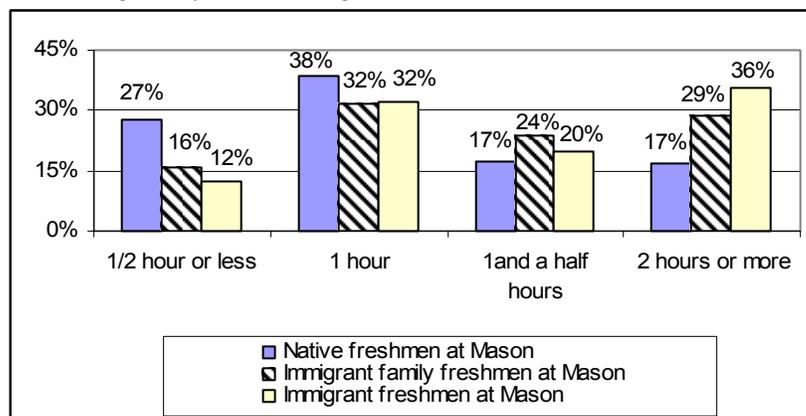
| Percentage of students who “strongly agree” with the following statements:  | George Mason University |                           |                    |
|---|-------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|
|   | Native freshmen         | Immigrant family freshmen | Immigrant freshmen |
| <b>I am unsure about the competencies and qualifications necessary to do well in the majors in which I am interested.</b> | 15%                     | 21%                       | 23%                |
| <b>I don't know enough about the various majors to make a decision now.</b>   | 15%                     | 17%                       | 15%                |
| <b>I really have no idea about what major to choose.</b>  | 15%                     | 15%                       | 7%                 |

## V. College Expectations

### 1. Estimated Study Time

High school graduates from immigrant families are as likely to go on to college and to perform as well academically as their peers from American-born families, according to a study funded in part by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) (Fulgini & Witkow, 2004). Mason freshmen from immigrant backgrounds are more likely than their native peers to study for longer hours in college. About one third of Mason freshmen estimate that they will spend one hour studying for each hour spent in class or labs during the first year of college. Twenty-seven percent of native freshmen think that they will spend half an hour or less studying for each hour spent in class or labs, compared with 16% of immigrant family freshmen and 12% of immigrant freshmen. Immigrant freshmen (36%) and immigrant family freshmen (29%) are more likely to say that they will spend two hours or more studying for each hour in class or labs than the native freshmen (17%).

Figure 7. Student expected study time for each hour spent in class or labs during first year of college

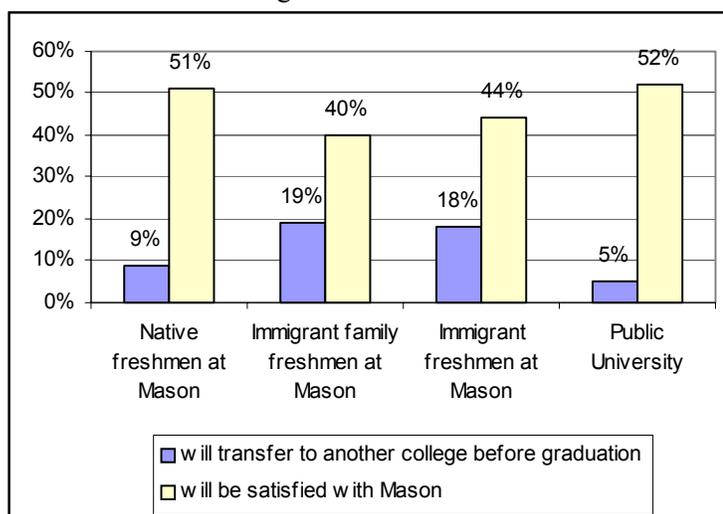


### 2. College Academic Plans

Native freshmen are more likely to say that they will be satisfied with this college (51%), 7 percentage points higher than immigrant freshmen and 11 percentage points higher than immigrant family freshmen. In part, this may be related to the fact that more native students chose Mason because of a campus visit or the college size while more of their counterparts chose Mason because of its location, low cost or advice of relatives.

Regarding their academic plans for college, there is little difference among freshmen at Mason. Most of them expect to get a bachelor's degree from Mason (84%) and make at least a B average (57%). Very few of them feel the chances are "very good" that they will change majors, change career choice, work full-time while attending college, or drop out of college. Students with immigrant backgrounds are more likely than their native counterparts to say that they will transfer to another college before graduation, which is likely related to their lower expectations for satisfaction with Mason.

Figure 8. Percentage of freshmen who think the chances are "very good" that they will be satisfied with Mason or they will transfer to another college



### 3. Expected Interaction with Faculty

Mason freshmen, regardless of their immigrant backgrounds, expect to have opportunities to interact with professors outside of class (as shown in Table 15). Twenty-six percent of immigrant freshmen expect to receive such information “weekly,” compared with 13% of native freshmen and 22% of immigrant family freshmen. Almost half (46%-48%) expect that each professor will contact them about course-related information outside of the classroom “a few times” during their first semester. Seven to eight percent of native freshmen and immigrant family freshmen do NOT expect to be contacted by their professors during the first semester.

Almost all freshmen think they need to meet with their academic advisor during the first semester. The majority of Mason freshmen expect to meet with their academic advisors “a few times during the semester.”

Table 15. Expectations for student-faculty interaction

| Average level of agreement with the following statements (Rated on a 1-4 scale: 1=disagree strongly; 4=agree strongly) | George Mason University |                           |                    |
|--|-------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|
|  | Native freshmen         | Immigrant family freshmen | Immigrant freshmen |
| I expect to talk with my professors outside of class.  | 3.22                    | 3.20                      | 3.17               |
| The ability to talk with my professors outside of class is important to me.  | 3.32                    | 3.32                      | 3.29               |

Table 16. Expected frequency of interaction with faculty and academic advisor

| During your first semester, how often do you expect each professor to contact you about course-related information outside of the classroom?*** | George Mason University |                           |                    |
|---|-------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|
|   | Native freshmen         | Immigrant family freshmen | Immigrant freshmen |
| Weekly  | 13%                     | 22%                       | 26%                |
| A few times during the semester   | 47%                     | 48%                       | 46%                |
| Once  | 16%                     | 15%                       | 16%                |
| Never   | 8%                      | 7%                        | 1%                 |
| I don't know.   | 16%                     | 7%                        | 11%                |
| During your first semester, how often do you expect to meet with your academic advisor?   | Native freshmen         | Immigrant family freshmen | Immigrant freshmen |
| Weekly  | 12%                     | 19%                       | 17%                |
| A few times during the semester   | 69%                     | 62%                       | 73%                |
| Once  | 11%                     | 12%                       | 6%                 |
| Never   | 1%                      | 1%                        | 0%                 |
| I don't know.   | 6%                      | 5%                        | 4%                 |

The responses of these three groups of freshmen are statistically significant at the following levels: \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

### 4. Expectations for Social Life in College

Students' plans for social life in college, in contrast, are different according to their immigrant backgrounds. As Table 17 shows, more native freshmen estimate that chances are “very good” that they will develop close friendships with other students, join a social fraternity or sorority, participate in student protests or demonstrations, and play varsity/intercollegiate athletics. Immigrant freshmen, on the other hand, are more likely to say they will participate in volunteer or community service work or seek personal counseling in college.

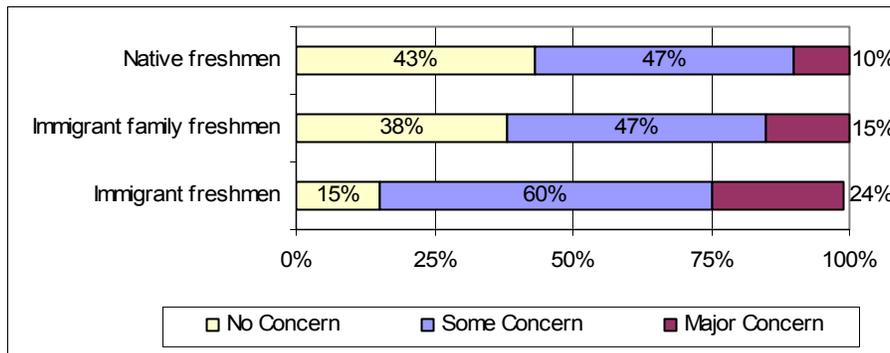
Table 17. Expectations for social life in college: Mean comparison

| Student's estimates: chances are "very good" that he/she will... (Rated on a 1-4 scale: 1=no chance; 4=very good chance) | George Mason University |                           |                    |                    | Sig. |
|--|-------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|------|
|  | Native freshmen         | Immigrant family freshmen | Immigrant freshmen | ALL Mason freshmen |      |
| Develop close friendships with other students  | 3.71                    | 3.60                      | 3.53               | 3.67               | .004 |
| Participate in volunteer or community service work   | 2.79                    | 2.62                      | 2.82               | 2.77               | .050 |
| Join a social fraternity or sorority   | 2.25                    | 1.98                      | 1.88               | 2.16               | .000 |
| Seek personal counseling   | 2.22                    | 2.04                      | 2.46               | 2.21               | .000 |
| Participate in student protests or demonstrations  | 2.21                    | 2.00                      | 1.92               | 2.15               | .000 |
| Play varsity/intercollegiate athletics   | 2.09                    | 1.85                      | 1.88               | 2.02               | .004 |

## 5. Financial Concerns

Since immigrant students are more likely to be from low-income families, they are more concerned about their ability to finance their college education. As Figure 9 shows, 43% of native freshmen and 38% of immigrant family freshmen have no concern about their ability to finance their college education, compared with 15% of immigrant freshmen. One out of four immigrant freshmen has a major concern about paying for college, compared with 10% of native freshmen and 15% of immigrant family freshmen.

Figure 9. Student concerns about their ability to finance college education



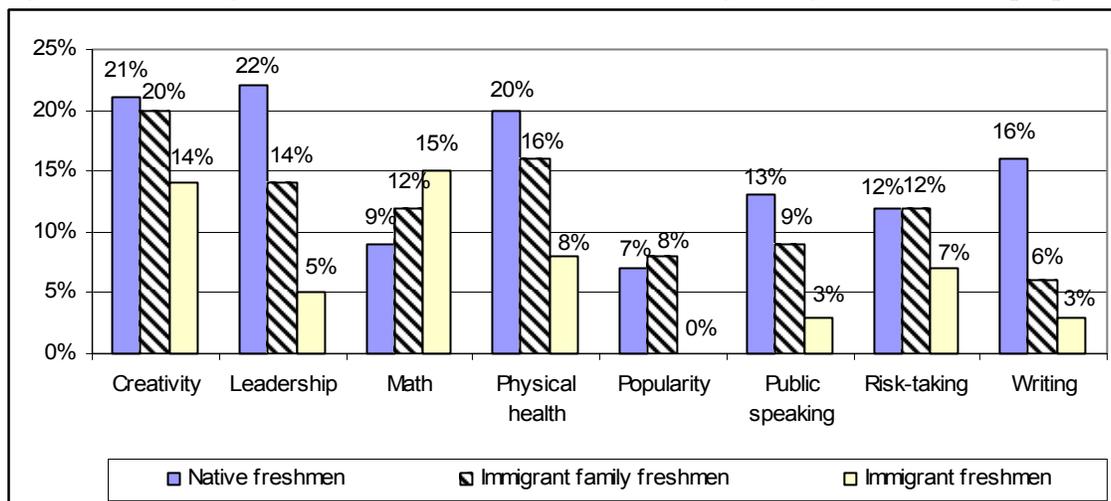
## VI. Self-Perceptions and Personal Objectives

Our cohorts of freshmen rate themselves similarly on many personal traits, such as academic ability, artistic ability, computer ability, cooperativeness, drive to achieve, emotional health, persistence, religiousness, self-confidence, self-understanding, spirituality, and understanding of others. Table 18 shows eight areas in which they rate themselves differently. In these eight areas, with the exception of mathematical ability, immigrant freshmen rate themselves much lower than their counterparts. On math, more immigrant freshmen (15%) see themselves among the top 10% of people of their age than native students do (9%). Immigrant freshmen tend to think they are weak in writing ability and even weaker in public speaking ability – only 3% think they are among the highest 10% of people of their age. In the area of popularity, NO immigrant freshman thinks he/she is among the top 10%. Native students and immigrant family students give themselves equal ratings on popularity. Native students and immigrant family students give themselves equal ratings on popularity. Native students tend to give themselves high ratings on creativity, leadership ability, physical health, writing ability, risk taking and public speaking ability.

Table 18. Differences on self-perceptions: Mean comparison

| Student Self-Ratings<br>(Rated on a 1-5 scale: 1=lowest 10%; 5=highest 10%) | George Mason University |                           |                    |                    | Sig. |
|---|-------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|------|
|   | Native freshmen         | Immigrant family freshmen | Immigrant freshmen | ALL Mason freshmen |      |
| <b>Creativity</b>   | 3.76                    | 3.68                      | 3.46               | 3.71               | .003 |
| <b>Leadership ability</b>   | 3.70                    | 3.47                      | 3.17               | 3.61               | .000 |
| <b>Physical health</b>  | 3.64                    | 3.54                      | 3.43               | 3.60               | .029 |
| <b>Writing ability</b>  | 3.59                    | 3.30                      | 3.04               | 3.48               | .000 |
| <b>Risk-taking</b>  | 3.43                    | 3.32                      | 3.08               | 3.38               | .000 |
| <b>Popularity</b>   | 3.31                    | 3.32                      | 3.02               | 3.28               | .001 |
| <b>Public speaking ability</b>  | 3.24                    | 3.12                      | 2.58               | 3.15               | .000 |
| <b>Mathematical ability</b>   | 3.18                    | 3.39                      | 3.62               | 3.26               | .000 |

Figure 10. Percentage of freshmen who rate themselves among the highest 10% of the people of their age



On a list of 21 personal objectives, the three groups of freshmen responded similarly to the following goals:

- *becoming accomplished in one of the performing arts,*
- *becoming an authority in my field,*
- *influencing the political structure,*
- *influencing social values,*
- *raising a family,*
- *helping others,*
- *writing original works,*
- *creating artistic work,*
- *developing a meaningful philosophy of life,*
- *becoming a community leader, and*
- *integrating spirituality into my life.*

However, for the remaining ten goals listed in Table 19, there are significant differences among the three groups. Being well off financially is one of the most important personal objectives of all freshmen regardless of immigration status, although immigrant family freshmen feel this more strongly than others. On eight goals in Table 19, immigrant students rated their importance much higher than native freshmen and for most goals much higher than immigrant family freshmen. The one exception to this is keeping up to date with political affairs which native students rank higher.

Table 19. Differences on personal objectives: Mean comparison

| Importance Ratings of Personal Objectives<br>(Rated on a 1-4 scale: 1=not important;<br>4=essential) | George Mason University |                           |                    |                    | Sig. |
|--|-------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|------|
|  | Native freshmen         | Immigrant family freshmen | Immigrant freshmen | ALL Mason freshmen |      |
| <b>Being very well off financially</b>   | 3.10                    | 3.39                      | 3.07               | 3.15               | .000 |
| <b>Obtaining recognition from colleagues</b>   | 2.59                    | 2.75                      | 2.82               | 2.64               | .008 |
| <b>Improving my understanding of other countries and cultures</b>                                    | 2.52                    | 2.66                      | 2.84               | 2.58               | .002 |
| <b>Keeping up to date with political affairs</b>   | 2.44                    | 2.28                      | 2.12               | 2.38               | .003 |
| <b>Having administrative responsibilities</b>  | 2.29                    | 2.42                      | 2.47               | 2.33               | .046 |
| <b>Becoming successful in a business of my own</b>   | 2.17                    | 2.63                      | 2.69               | 2.31               | .000 |
| <b>Helping to promote racial understanding</b>   | 2.13                    | 2.42                      | 2.54               | 2.23               | .000 |
| <b>Participate in a community action program</b>   | 1.89                    | 1.98                      | 2.24               | 1.95               | .001 |
| <b>Becoming involved in programs to clean up the environment</b>                                     | 1.80                    | 1.83                      | 2.10               | 1.84               | .001 |
| <b>Making a theoretical contribution to science</b>  | 1.63                    | 1.67                      | 2.09               | 1.69               | .000 |

## VII. Student Political Views

Immigrant freshmen show a higher level of agreement with the following statements than their native peers:

- *More governmental control on handgun sales*
- *Prohibition of racist/sexist speech on campus*
- *Higher taxes for wealthy people*
- *An individual can do little to bring about changes in society*
- *Abolishment of death penalty*
- *Prohibition of homosexual relationships*
- *Married women best confined to the home and family*

On the following issues, native freshmen show a higher level of agreement than the other two groups:

- *Abolishment of affirmative action*
- *Granting legal marital status to same-sex couples*
- *Legalizing abortion*
- *Increasing federal military spending*
- *Legalizing marijuana*

It is not clear whether religious beliefs or cultural differences or other factors are the major reasons for the differences on these political issues. The statement that “the activities of married women are best confined to the home and family” is the least popular statement for all freshmen.

Table 20. Differences on political views: Mean comparison

| Level of Agreement with the following statements:<br>(Rated on a 1-4 scale: 1=disagree strongly; 4=agree strongly) | Native freshmen | Immigrant family freshmen | Immigrant freshmen | ALL Mason freshmen | Sig. |
|--|-----------------|---------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|------|
| <b>The federal government should do more to control the sale of handguns.</b>                                      | 3.01            | 3.21                      | 3.36               | 3.08               | .000 |
| <b>Affirmative action in college admissions should be abolished.</b>   | 2.93            | 2.36                      | 2.39               | 2.77               | .000 |
| <b>Same-sex couples should have the right to legal marital status.</b>   | 2.85            | 2.77                      | 2.61               | 2.81               |      |
| <b>Abortion should be legal.</b>   | 2.72            | 2.62                      | 2.44               | 2.67               | .042 |
| <b>There is too much concern in the courts for the rights of criminals.</b>  | 2.64            | 2.58                      | 2.69               | 2.63               |      |
| <b>Colleges should prohibit racist/sexist speech on campus.</b>  | 2.63            | 2.84                      | 3.04               | 2.71               | .000 |
| <b>Wealthy people should pay a larger share of taxes than they do now.</b>   | 2.49            | 2.60                      | 2.91               | 2.55               | .000 |
| <b>Federal military spending should be increased.</b>  | 2.47            | 2.12                      | 2.19               | 2.38               | .000 |
| <b>Marijuana should be legalized.</b>  | 2.24            | 1.91                      | 1.74               | 2.13               | .000 |
| <b>People should not obey laws which violate their personal values.</b>  | 2.17            | 2.28                      | 2.25               | 2.19               |      |
| <b>Realistically, an individual can do little to bring about changes in our society.</b>                           | 2.01            | 2.10                      | 2.43               | 2.07               | .000 |
| <b>Racial discrimination is no longer a major problem in America.</b>  | 1.99            | 1.86                      | 2.00               | 1.97               |      |
| <b>The death penalty should be abolished.</b>  | 1.97            | 2.12                      | 2.41               | 2.04               | .000 |
| <b>It is important to have laws prohibiting homosexual relationships.</b>  | 1.74            | 1.85                      | 2.09               | 1.79               | .002 |
| <b>The activities of married women are best confined to the home and family.</b>                                   | 1.63            | 1.85                      | 1.83               | 1.69               | .003 |

## VIII. Additional Questions Asked Only of Mason Students

Comparing the three groups of freshmen, no differences are found regarding the frequency of using email or instant message, word processor and presentation software packages. However, more immigrant freshmen think it is very important for them to increase their technology skills in college. The majority of freshmen expect their professors to use technology in class and include technology in assignments.

Table 21. Technology expectations of Mason freshmen

| Level of Agreement with the Following Statements (Rated on a 1-4 scale: 1=disagree strongly; 4=agree strongly) | Native freshmen | Immigrant family freshmen | Immigrant freshmen | ALL freshmen | Sig. |
|--|-----------------|---------------------------|--------------------|--------------|------|
| I want to increase my technology skills in my classes at George Mason.   | 3.27            | 3.37                      | 3.49               | 3.32         | .005 |
| I expect professors will use technology as part of their classes.  | 3.32            | 3.24                      | 3.36               | 3.31         |      |
| I expect technology to be included in assignments in most of my courses.                                       | 3.17            | 3.10                      | 3.10               | 3.15         |      |

Fifty-four percent of immigrant freshmen think it is “essential” for them to be at least moderately fluent in a language other than their native one. Considering that 97% of them are not native English speakers, we are not sure whether they were talking about English or a third language when answering this question. In contrast, 28% of native freshmen think it is “not important” for them to be moderately fluent in a language other than English. Immigrant family freshmen (38%) are the most likely to say that it is “essential” for them to attend a college with a multi-ethnic student body, compared with 31% of immigrant freshmen and 22% of native freshmen. Sixteen percent of native freshmen regard it as “not important” to enroll in a college with a diverse student body.

Table 22. Other importance ratings

| Level of Importance  | George Mason University |                           |                    |              |
|--|-------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|--------------|
|  | Native freshmen         | Immigrant family freshmen | Immigrant freshmen | All freshmen |
| <b>It is important to me to be at least moderately fluent in a language other than my native language. ***</b> |                         |                           |                    |              |
| Essential  | 17%                     | 29%                       | 54%                | 23%          |
| Very important   | 16%                     | 27%                       | 32%                | 20%          |
| Somewhat important   | 38%                     | 34%                       | 10%                | 34%          |
| Not important  | 28%                     | 11%                       | 4%                 | 22%          |
| <b>It is important to me to attend a college with a multi-ethnic student body. ***</b>                         |                         |                           |                    |              |
| Essential  | 22%                     | 38%                       | 31%                | 26%          |
| Very important   | 28%                     | 30%                       | 28%                | 28%          |
| Somewhat important   | 34%                     | 27%                       | 38%                | 33%          |
| Not important  | 16%                     | 5%                        | 3%                 | 13%          |

The responses of these three groups of freshmen are statistically significant at the following levels: \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

## IX. Summary of Findings

This study found significant differences between immigrant freshmen, immigrant family freshmen and native freshmen at Mason.

1. Immigrant freshmen and immigrant family freshmen bring a diverse cultural perspective to the university community. The majority (59%-61%) are Asian/Pacific Islander; and another 12% are Latino. For most of them, English is not their native language. Immigrant freshmen are more likely to have less educated parents, with 36% being the first in their immediate family to go to college. Six percent of Mason freshmen are Islamic, 4% Buddhist, and 2% Hindu – almost all of these students come from immigrant families or are immigrants themselves.
2. Immigrant freshmen and immigrant family freshmen are more likely to come from areas local to George Mason University – at least 88% of either cohort live within 50 miles of Mason. In contrast, 47% of native freshmen live more than 50 miles away from the university.
3. More immigrant freshmen come from families with lower parental income than immigrant family freshmen and native freshmen. Their family economic situation influences their college choice and causes some financial pressure as well. Our study found that the most important reasons for immigrant freshmen to enroll in Mason are the following: the reputation of the college, the desire to live near home, low tuition, and financial assistance offered by Mason. Most immigrant freshmen (60%) have some concerns and 24% have major concerns about their ability to finance their college education.
4. In high school, immigrant freshmen studied longer and had better grades than the other two groups. An average immigrant freshman spent 8.1 hours a week studying, whereas an immigrant family freshman spent 6.6 hours and a native freshman 4.7 hours a week. Immigrant freshmen took substantially more tutoring or remedial work in English, reading, writing and social studies. Among all freshmen enrolled at Mason, immigrant freshmen reported much higher average high school grades than native freshmen and, particularly, immigrant family freshmen.
5. Immigrant freshmen are less confident with their languages skills and academic preparation for college than native freshmen and immigrant family freshmen. A substantially higher percentage of immigrant freshmen think they will need tutoring or remedial work in college on the following subjects: English, reading, writing, social studies, and science. They rate themselves lower on writing ability and public speaking ability but higher on mathematical ability than their native peers.
6. Partially due to a lack of confidence in English language skills and a desire to achieve financial success through higher education, immigrant freshmen and immigrant family freshmen are more likely to select business, engineering and sciences as their major, rather than social sciences and humanities. At Mason, business is the most popular major for all freshmen. Biological science and health sciences are very popular among immigrant freshmen – a total of 27% of immigrant freshmen will “probably” major in these fields, compared with 15% of immigrant family freshmen and 12% of native freshmen.
7. Immigrant and immigrant family freshmen have higher educational aspirations than their native peers. Twenty-nine percent of immigrant freshmen plan to get a doctoral degree and another 16% a medical degree, figures much higher than those for immigrant family freshmen and native freshmen. This explains why the most important reasons for immigrant freshmen to go to college are to “prepare myself for graduate or professional school” and to “get training for a specific career.” Whereas, native freshmen and immigrant family freshmen are more likely to identify with the reason “to learn more things that interest me.”
8. Parental influence may be another reason for the higher educational aspirations of immigrant freshmen. Most studies that have compared immigrant and U.S.-born attitudes toward education find greater emphasis on educational success and higher aspirations for educational attainment among immigrant

parents (Fulgini, 1997; Kao and Tienda, 1995; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995). In our study, we found that immigrant and immigrant family freshmen are more likely to say they go to college because their parents wanted them to go; and they enrolled at Mason because their relatives wanted them to come here.

9. Immigrant freshmen spent less time socializing with friends, doing exercises or sports, and working for pay in high school than their native peers. They were also less frequently involved in the following activities: smoking, drinking, discussing politics/religion, and being a guest at a teacher's home. In college, they are the least likely to say that they will join a social fraternity or sorority, play varsity/intercollegiate athletics, and participate in student political activities. They rate themselves low on creativity, popularity, leadership ability, and physical health.
10. "Being well off financially" is one of the most important personal objectives for all freshmen regardless of immigration status, although immigrant family freshmen feel this more strongly than others. "Obtaining recognition from my colleagues" and "improving my understanding of other countries and cultures" are also rated as essential personal objectives by more immigrant freshmen than their native and immigrant family peers.
11. As freshmen at Mason, native students are more likely to say that they will "be satisfied with this college" (51%), 7 percentage points higher than immigrant freshmen and 11 percentage points higher than immigrant family freshmen. In part, this may be related to the fact that more native students chose Mason because of a campus visit or the college size while more of their counterparts chose Mason because of its location, low cost or advice of relatives.
12. Regarding their academic plans for college, there is little difference among freshmen at Mason. Most of them expect to "get a bachelor's degree from Mason" (84%) and "make at least a B average" (57%). Very few of them feel the chances are "very good" that they will "change majors," "change career choice," "work full-time while attending college," or "drop out of college." Students with immigrant backgrounds are more likely than their native counterparts to say that they will "transfer to another college" before graduation, which is likely related to their lower expectations for satisfaction with Mason.
13. Freshmen from immigrant backgrounds expect to study for longer hours in college than their native peers. Immigrant freshmen (36%) and immigrant family freshmen (29%) are more likely to say that they will spend two hours or more studying for each hour in class or labs than native freshmen (17%).
14. Compared with their peers, immigrant freshmen are more likely to say that it is very important for them to increase their technology skills and to be at least moderately fluent in a language other than their native language.
15. Immigrant family freshmen (38%) are the most likely to say that it is "essential" for them to attend a college with a multi-ethnic student body, compared with 31% of immigrant freshmen and 22% of native freshmen. Sixteen percent of native freshmen regard it as "not important" to enroll in a college with a diverse student body.
16. Nearly half of the freshmen expect their professors to contact them regarding course-related information outside of the classroom for "a few times" during the first semester. On average, 68% expect to meet their academic advisors "a few times" during the first semester.

## X. Discussion

This study found significant differences between native freshmen and immigrant freshmen in several areas including educational aspirations, confidence with language skills, high school behaviors, reasons to go to college, reasons for enrolling at Mason, college expectations, self-perceptions, personal objectives and political views. Immigrant family freshmen are caught between the two borders. In some areas, such as educational aspirations, they resemble immigrant freshmen; while in some others, such as confidence with language skills, they resemble native freshmen. This study has several limitations. Due to the small sample size of immigrant freshmen and immigrant family freshmen, we are not able to compare freshmen from different cultural backgrounds. Previous research has reported substantial cultural variability among immigrants. For instance, parents from Asian countries generally place more value on studying and doing well in school than their counterparts from Latin American countries. Even within Asian immigrants, researchers have found Chinese and Indian immigrant parents tend to place a more consistently strong value on education than parents from the Philippines (Fuligni, 1997; Kao & Tienda, 1995). Although this study did not examine these cultural differences, they should not be overlooked.

Findings from this report only represent the differences in entering characteristics of Mason freshmen. A continuous study of students from immigrant backgrounds is needed to provide a more complete picture. Fuligni and Witkow (2004) found that youth from immigrant families demonstrated the same level of postsecondary educational progress as their peers from American-born families across a broad array of indicators. Variability among those from immigrant families does exist: youth from families with higher incomes, higher levels of parental education, and East Asian backgrounds were more likely to enroll and persist in postsecondary schooling as compared with their peers. Little is known regarding the retention, academic success and college experiences of students from immigrant backgrounds at Mason.

The different ethnic and cultural backgrounds that students bring with them enrich the university community and provide an excellent opportunity for students to learn from each other. However, they pose a series of challenges to the University:

1. How can faculty be prepared for classroom issues related to lower English language skills? Should faculty grade non-native speakers by the same standards or give them a break on grammatical errors?
2. How do we ensure that students from immigrant backgrounds have ample opportunities to improve their reading, writing and speaking skills? These are skills that many faculty think most students need help with, but immigrant students are especially vulnerable.
3. How should we meet the needs of first-generation students? These are students who are least likely to have parents who can help them navigate the higher education system.
4. What are the best ways to reach commuter students with support services? Eighty-eight percent of freshmen from immigrant backgrounds live within 50 miles of Mason and they are more likely to be commuter students. Previous student surveys found that commuter students at Mason are the least likely to use campus services and be involved in campus activities. How do we effectively provide the academic advising and support (especially tutoring) that they feel they need?
5. How should we involve the socially less active immigrant students in various campus activities? Researchers have found that being involved in campus life contributes to student retention and graduation.
6. How do we demonstrate our respect for religious differences? What about religious holidays when students don't come to class?
7. How can we best meet the financial needs of these students? Can we develop more campus-based jobs?
8. Can we support the good study habits of immigrant students?
9. Are counselors and student life staff prepared for the conflict that may occur between these students and their families when they make independent choices and become more Americanized?
10. How can we increase interaction between native and non-native groups? One of the advantages of having a multi-cultural campus is the potential for students to learn about different cultures and ways of seeing the world, but if they don't interact, that opportunity is diminished.

## XI. References

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