

In Focus

March 2004

Volume 9, Number 2

A Publication of the Office of Institutional Assessment, George Mason University

Graduate Student Exit Survey Report, 2002 – 2003

I. Introduction and Highlights

The 2002-2003 Graduate Student Exit Survey includes all the questions in the 2001-2002 survey with some slight modifications. It reflects the work of the Graduate Student Assessment Committee, organized by the Office of Institutional Assessment and comprised of faculty from a variety of disciplines. Program level reports are available at <http://assessment.gmu.edu>.

In 2002-2003, George Mason University awarded 2,088 graduate and law degrees. Eighty-six percent (n=1,785) of graduate students completed the 2002-2003 Graduate Student Exit Survey. With so many students completing the survey, we can feel confident that the results reported here reflect the views of the class of 2003. A few highlights of the 2002-2003 survey include:

- 41% of graduates enrolled primarily full-time; 78% said Mason was their first choice among the graduate schools they considered.
- 46% of students graduate with no debt; 7% owe \$30,000 or more.
- Over 91% of them would recommend their academic programs to others, the highest percentage in four years.
- 86% agree that they had sufficient opportunities to participate in quality research; only 22% of students had an assistantship and 37% had an internship.
- Many students would like Mason to improve its library resources, computer access, Internet connections, and parking.

<Please note that because of rounding, percentages throughout this report may not sum to 100%.>

II. Demographics for All Post Baccalaureate Graduates

Table 1. Ethnicity of All Graduates

	1998-1999	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003
African American	5%	6%	6%	6%	8%
Asian American	7%	6%	7%	7%	6%
Hispanic American	2%	4%	4%	3%	3%
Native American	0.1%	0.2%	0.4%	0.3%	0.2%
Non-Resident Alien	10%	9%	9%	13%	13%
Other/Not specified	3%	3%	3%	4%	4%
White American	73%	73%	70%	67%	67%

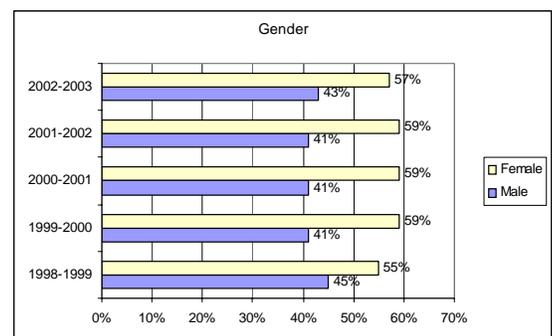
Table 2. Domicile of All Graduates

	2001-2002	2002-2003
Virginia	80.5%	81.9%
Out of State	19.5%	18.1%

Table 3. Age of All Graduates

	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003
26 or lower	14%	15%	15%	18%
27-34	45%	43%	46%	43%
35+	42%	42%	39%	39%

Graph 1. Sex of all Graduates



III. Academic Program Characteristics

Students were given a list of 19 statements about their graduate programs and were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement (Table 4). Over 95% of students either “strongly agree” or “agree” with the following statements:

- “I have learned a great deal as a student in the department/program.”
- “Interactions among students and faculty are characterized by mutual respect.”
- “My program was intellectually challenging and stimulating.”

The statement with the lowest level of agreement (68%) is “There are many opportunities outside the classroom for interaction among students and faculty.” Similar ratings occurred with George Mason first-year students and seniors on the 2003 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). On a benchmark scale comprised of six questions and entitled, “Student Interactions with Faculty,” Mason students scored below the average for doctoral-intensive institutions, doctoral extensive institutions, and for all NSSE 2000-2003 institutions.

Table 4. To what extent did students agree/disagree with the following statements about their own graduate programs?

Program Characteristics*, 2002–2003

	Strongly agree	Agree	Mean	Std. Dev.	2001-02 Mean
Students					
I have learned a great deal as a student in the department/program.	45%	51%	3.4	.59	3.4
The courses I took were valuable for me.	38%	57%	3.3	.60	3.3
The intellectual caliber of students in the program is high.	31%	61%	3.2	.61	3.2
Faculty					
Interactions among students and faculty are characterized by mutual respect.	42%	54%	3.4	.60	3.3
Faculty in my department work together to achieve program goals.	36%	57%	3.3	.63	3.2
Faculty members prepare carefully for their graduate courses.	35%	58%	3.3	.60	3.3
Faculty in my department were interested in the welfare and professional development of graduate students.	35%	53%	3.2	.70	3.2
The courses I took were well taught.	29%	64%	3.2	.59	3.2
There is good communication among faculty and students regarding student needs, concerns, and suggestions.	32%	52%	3.1	.74	3.1
**My department was helpful and supportive in my search for professional employment.	28%	47%	3.0	.84	2.9
There are many opportunities outside the classroom for interaction among students and faculty.	20%	48%	2.9	.78	2.8
Academic Program					
My program was intellectually challenging and stimulating.	42%	54%	3.4	.59	3.4
I would recommend my graduate program to prospective students.	44%	47%	3.3	.70	3.3
If I were starting over, I would enroll in this program again.	41%	45%	3.2	.76	3.2
I believe that my program provided me with very good preparation for my future career.	38%	53%	3.3	.65	3.3
My graduate school experiences (courses, internships, projects) were very relevant to my career goals and direction.	38%	55%	3.3	.61	3.3
My program provided me with very good preparation for my future personal and civic life.	31%	54%	3.2	.69	3.1
I felt a part of a graduate university learning community.	27%	59%	3.1	.69	3.1
Courses listed in the catalog are offered frequently enough for timely completion of the degree requirements.	23%	54%	3.0	.78	2.9

*Percentages were calculated excluding “Not applicable” and “Don’t know” categories.

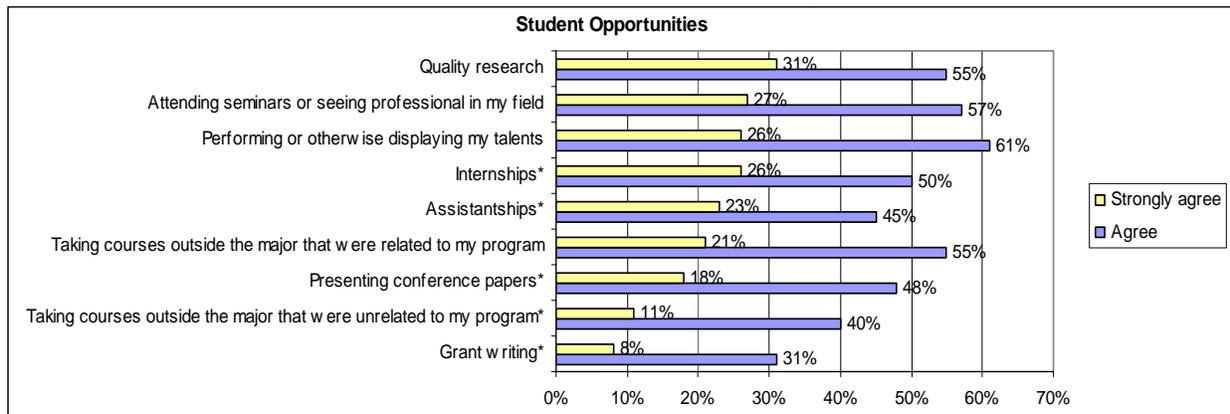
** About 29% of respondents selected “Not applicable” for this item and another 7% selected “Don’t know.” All the other items have lower than 9% (most of them have lower than 5%) of “DKs” and “NAs” combined.

Office of Institutional Assessment

In Focus, Volume 9, Number 2, March 25, 2004

Students were also asked to indicate their level of agreement with nine questions regarding their opportunities as graduate students. Graph 2 presents their responses in descending order of those who most “strongly agree” to those who least “strongly agree.” Most students agree that they had sufficient opportunities in “performing or otherwise displaying my talents” and engaging in “quality research” (87% and 86% respectively, after combining “strongly agree” with “agree”). About 52% of respondents said the question regarding “grant writing” opportunities is not applicable to them and another 9% know nothing about it. Between 37% and 44% of students said the questions regarding “assistantships”, “internships”, “presenting conference papers”, and “opportunities to take courses outside the major that were unrelated to my program” are not applicable; another 5-10% know nothing about these questions either. The reason may be that the majority of our graduates are master’s students or part-time students and writing proposals and presenting conference papers are not part of their course of studies. Only 22% of students have had an assistantship and 37% have had an internship (Graph 3). Of those who did, most (86%-90%) agree that an assistantship/internship contributed a great deal to their academic development (Table 5).

Graph 2. *Students had sufficient opportunities to participate in the following experiences in their graduate programs*



*Between 37-52% of respondents to these five questions said “Not applicable” and an additional 5-10% said “Don’t know.” The percentages in this graph were calculated excluding “Don’t know” and “Not applicable” categories.

Graph 3. *Student participated in Internship/assistantship programs*

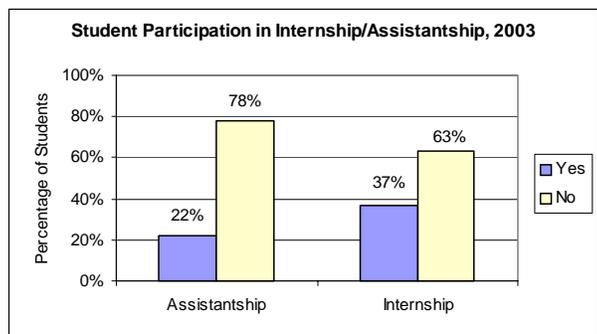


Table 5. *The Internship/assistantship contributed a great deal to student’s academic development (includes only those who participated in an internship/assistantship)*

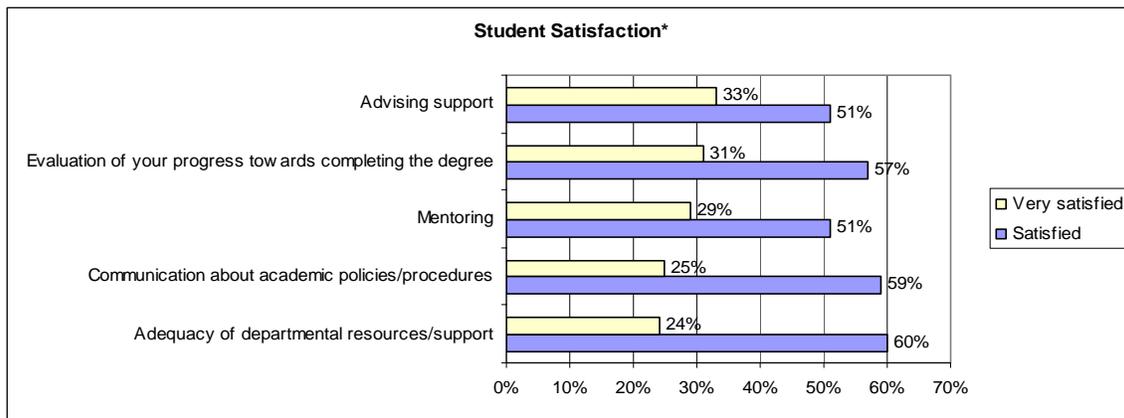
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Assistantship	54%	32%	9%	5%
Internship	67%	23%	7%	4%

Students were given space to add any comments they wished. The great majority of these were directed at their individual programs. These verbatim responses can be found for each program at <http://assessment.gmu.edu/results/index.shtml>

IV. Satisfaction

Students were asked to rate their satisfaction with five areas related to academic support. Between 6-15% of students chose “don’t know” and these students were excluded from the calculation of percentages and means. As Graph 4 shows, 80-84% of students are either “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with these areas. One third of the students are “very satisfied” with the advising support they have received, which includes guidance on academic requirements, thesis/dissertation, and designing programs of study.

Graph 4. *How satisfied are you with the following:*



*“Very satisfied” and “Satisfied” percentages were calculated excluding “Don’t know” responses.

Examining the trends for student satisfaction with advising and mentoring, we see an increase of 5-6% of students who are “very satisfied” from 2002 to 2003 (see Table 6). Over a six-year period, more and more students are “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with advising and mentoring.

Table 6. *Student Satisfaction with Advising and Mentoring*

	Advising			Mentoring		
	Very satisfied	Satisfied*	Combined very/satisfied	Very satisfied	Satisfied*	Combined very/satisfied
1998 -1999	34%	42%	77%**	27%	41%	68%
1999-2000	43%	39%	82%	33%	42%	75%
2000-2001	39%	41%	80%	33%	42%	75%
2001-2002*	27%	54%	81%	24%	54%	78%
2002-2003	33%	51%	84%	29%	51%	81%**

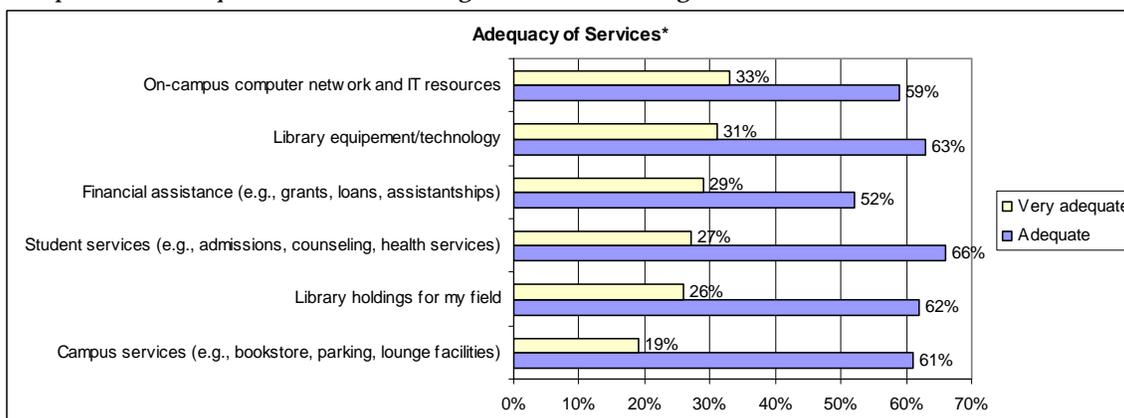
*Prior to 2001-2002, this response category was “Somewhat satisfied.”

**This percentage does not equal the addition of the appropriate percentages in Table 6, due to rounding.

V. Resources

When asked about the adequacy of various services on campus, approximately 80-94% of students say these services are adequate (combining “very adequate” and “adequate”); about one-third of students feel that “on-campus computer network and information technology resources” and the “library equipment and technology” are “very adequate.” Not surprisingly, since dissatisfaction with parking appears on several undergraduate surveys, graduate students, too, are less likely to feel that campus services such as parking, lounge facilities, bookstore, etc. are “very adequate” (19%).

Graph 5. *How adequate were the following services for meeting student’s needs:*



* “Very adequate” and “Adequate” percentages were calculated excluding “Didn’t need” responses.

Students were asked if there were other services that they would have liked. There were many responses to this question and most tended to group in the following categories, not necessarily in this order:

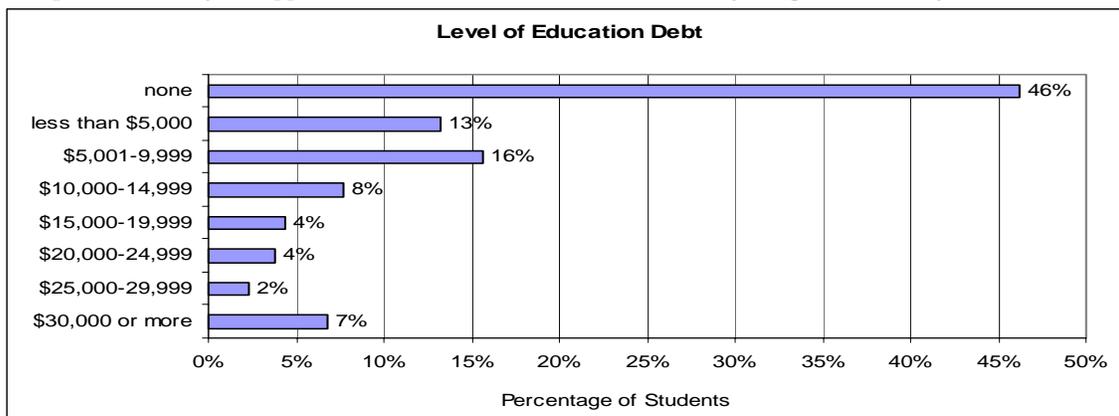
- Improved library resources, including additional books and journals, increased computing availability, hookups for laptops, quiet space for groups, etc.
- Improved Arlington campus resources in general, but especially a fitness center
- Better computer access and additional software, more internet connections both on and off campus, better email access from off campus
- Facilities (libraries, computer labs, bookstore) with longer hours on all campuses and during all seasons
- Tutoring support, dissertation writing support and computer training seminars
- More copy machines and free printing
- Better communication between administrators, faculty and students
- Financial support
- More lounge space
- Graduate housing
- More spaces, lower costs for parking
- Better academic advising
- On-line registration or 24-hour registration
- Career services and job hunting support

The verbatim responses can be found for each program at this website:
<http://assessment.gmu.edu/results/index.shtml>

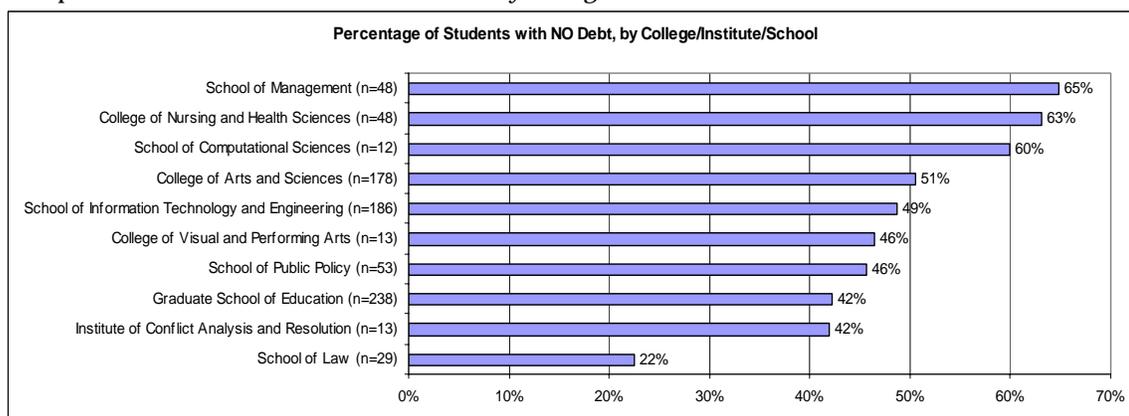
VI. Debt, Enrollment Status and Employment

Close to half (46%) of graduating graduate students report having no educational debt; another 13% have a debt less than \$5,000 (Graph 6). These percentages are fairly consistent with the findings from the 2001-2002 Survey. Like last year, graduate students are more likely to graduate with little or no debt than undergraduates. (In 2003, 41% of seniors reported no debt and 11% reported debt less than \$5,000.) Nonetheless, between 12-13% of both graduate and undergraduate students owe \$20,000 or more upon graduation. These proportions vary considerably by school (Graphs 7 and 8).

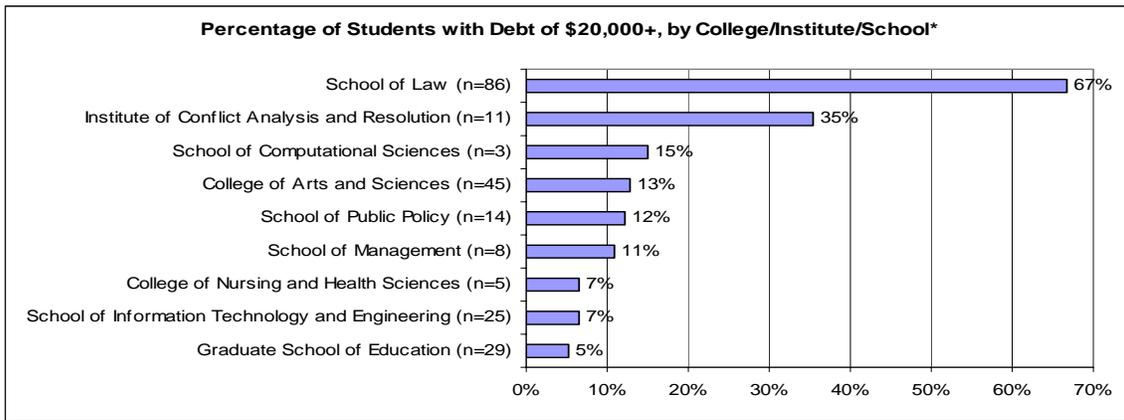
Graph 6. *What is your approximate level of indebtedness related to your graduate study?*



Graph 7. *Percent of Students with No Debt by College/Institute/School*



Graph 8. *Percent of Students with Debt of \$20,000 or more by College/Institute/School*



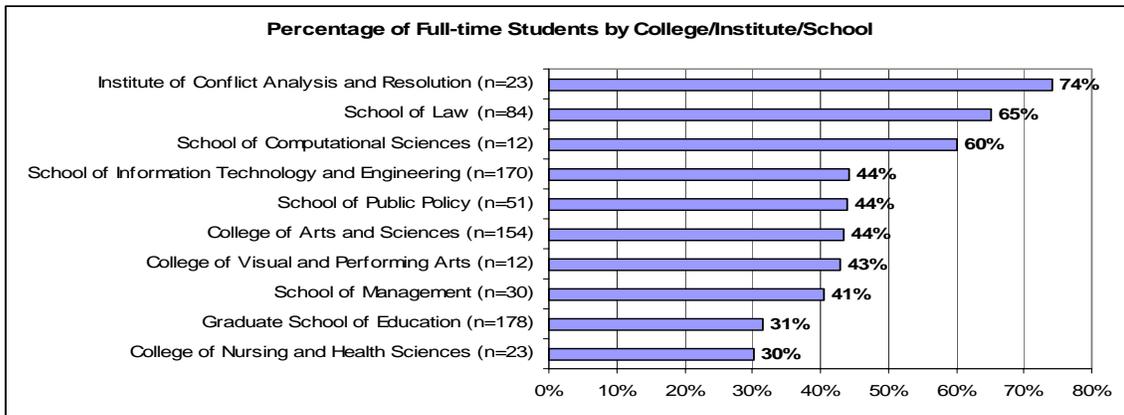
*College of Visual and Performing Arts has less than 3 cases, and thus is not reported in order to protect the identity of the students.

The relatively low level of debt incurred by graduate students is likely related to the fact that so many of them are part-time and working. Since 1998-99, approximately 60% of Mason students have been primarily part-time students. Again, the proportions vary considerably by school (Graph 9).

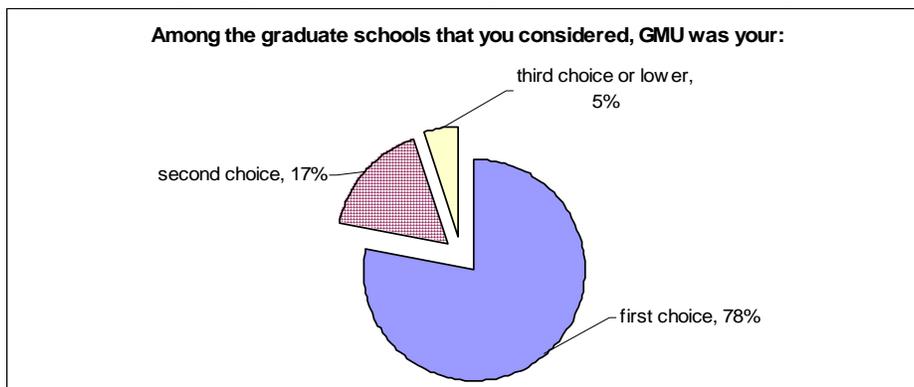
Table 7. *Did student pursue graduate degree primarily full time or part time?*

	1998-1999	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003
Full time	41%	36%	39%	42%	41%
Part time	59%	64%	61%	58%	59%

Graph 9. *Percent of Full-time students by College/Institute/School*



Graph 10. *Among the graduate schools that you considered was GMU your:*



This year, we asked students to indicate, among the graduate schools they considered for admission, whether GMU was their first choice. Over 78% of students said Mason was their first choice, and another 17% said it was their second choice. (Graph 10).

About 59% of students indicated that they would continue with their current employers in a current or new position after graduation, an increase of 3% from 2002. Assuming many others worked for employers with whom they did not intend to remain, the proportion of working students is well above half of all students. In previous years, this percent ranged from 81% to 84%. Another 36% of students will look for a new position. Very few of them (3%) will return to their previous employers.

Table 8. *What are employment plans after completing graduate degree*

	2001-2002	2002-2003
Looking for a new position	40%	36%
Continue with current employer in current position	39%	41%
Continue with current employer in new position	17%	18%
Return to previous employer in a new or previous position	2%	3%
Not looking for employment	2%	2%

Post-graduation, 26% of the 2003 graduates expect to work in a “professional service” and another 26% intend to teach – an increase of 4% over the previous year.

Table 6. *What does student hope will be the primary activity in job following completion of degree*

	2001-2002	2002-2003
Professional Service	25%	26%
Teaching	22%	26%
Administration or Business	19%	16%
Scientific or Technical Service	11%	9%
The Arts	9%	--*
Research and Teaching (approximately equal)	6%	8%
Research	6%	4%
Further study or training	2%	4%
Other	--*	7%

* --Indicates the choice was not available in that year's survey.

Table 9. *College Affiliation of All Graduates*

College of Arts and Sciences	19%
College of Nursing and Health Sciences	4%
College of Arts and Sciences	2%
Graduate School of Education	30%
Institute of Conflict Analysis and Resolution	2%
School of Information Technology & Engineering	22%
School of Law	9%
School of Computational Sciences	1%
School of Management	4%
School of Public Policy	6%

OIA

Office of Institutional Assessment

Director
Karen M. Gentemann, Ph.D.
genteman@gmu.edu
703-993-8836

Assistant Director
Ying Zhou, Ph.D.
yzhou@gmu.edu
703-993-8832

Programmer/Analyst
Ramesh Gali, M.S.
rgali@gmu.edu
703-993-8876

Program Support
Anne Rose, B.S.
arose2@gmu.edu
703-993-8834

This *In Focus* and earlier issues of this publication can be found at our website.
Also available on the website are reports for each degree program.
<http://assessment.gmu.edu>

George Mason University