Graduating Senior Survey 2016 to 2019: Selected Results on Competency
Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Planning | George Mason University
January 2020

The Graduating Senior Survey (GSS) is administered to all graduating seniors each academic year at Mason. This document presents students’ self-reported competencies based on the survey results from academic years 2015-16 to 2018-19. The survey response rates for the four years are summarized in Table 1.

Item-level percentages of responses overall and by transfer status are presented in Table 2. Trend analysis results are displayed in Table 3 to highlight change in each competency area over time. Complete GSS results for the university, by college/school, and by department are available at https://ira.gmu.edu/.

Table 1. GSS Response Rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Year*</th>
<th>Number of Graduates</th>
<th>Response Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>5,086</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>5,270</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>5,506</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>5,710</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*For purposes of this report, each academic year begins with the summer term and ends with the spring semester (i.e., 2016 refers to summer 2015, fall 2015, and spring 2016).

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Percentage of Responses

- Overall, the majority of respondents (at least 76%) reported that courses in their major contributed “a great deal” or “a fair amount” to their competencies in the areas measured by the GSS, a consistent finding across the four years, with noteworthy results in the following areas (see Table 2):
  - Critical Thinking and Analysis received the highest positive response (91-93%)
  - Conducting Research within Your Field/Major received the lowest positive response (76-80%)

- Looking across the four years, the 2018 percentages of positive responses (i.e., “a great deal” and “a fair amount” combined) were lower compared to those of 2017 and 2019 in several areas, a finding more noticeable among native students compared to their transfer counterparts (73-91% vs. 82-93%, respectively, see Table 2).

Trend Analysis

- Overall, there was a general trend of improvement in students’ self-reported competency between 2016 and 2019 despite a drop in 2018.

- Compared to the 2016 graduating class, graduates in subsequent year(s) reported a significantly higher level of competency in the following areas (see Table 3):
  - Critical Thinking and Analysis in all subsequent years
  - Connecting Concepts across Disciplines in 2017 and 2019
  - Identifying and Assessing the Validity of Assumptions within Your Field/Major in 2017 and 2019
  - Conducting Research within Your Field/Major in 2017
  - Identifying, Locating, Evaluating and Managing Information Resources within Your Field/Maj in 2017

- Between 2017 and 2018, there was a significant decrease in self-reported competency in the following areas (see Table 3):
  - Identifying, Locating, Evaluating and Managing Information Resources within Your Field/Major
  - Identifying and Assessing the Validity of Assumptions within Your Field/Major
## PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES

**Table 2. Percentage of Responses Overall and by Transfer Status**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent did courses in your major contribute to your competence in the following areas:</th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>Native</th>
<th>Transfer Status</th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>Native</th>
<th>Transfer Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinking and analysis</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>1733</td>
<td>1599</td>
<td>1600</td>
<td>2021</td>
<td>771</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A great deal</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A fair amount</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting concepts across disciplines</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>1727</td>
<td>1591</td>
<td>1600</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A great deal</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A fair amount</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducting research within your field/major</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>1728</td>
<td>1585</td>
<td>1595</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A great deal</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A fair amount</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing within your field/major</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>1723</td>
<td>1589</td>
<td>1593</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A great deal</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A fair amount</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying, locating, evaluating and managing information resources within your field/major</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>1726</td>
<td>1586</td>
<td>1598</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A great deal</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A fair amount</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying and assessing the validity of assumptions within your field/major</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>1727</td>
<td>1590</td>
<td>1596</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>771</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A great deal</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A fair amount</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating with others in personal and professional contexts (oral communication only)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>1600</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>742</td>
<td>942</td>
<td>858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A great deal</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A fair amount</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unless specified otherwise, the numbers represent percentages. Grey area: No data available. Transfer status classification is based on institutional data.
## TREND ANALYSIS

Table 3. Average Scores on a Scale from 1 (not at all) to 4 (a great deal)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>Trend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinking and analysis¹</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting concepts across disciplines²</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducting research within your field/major³</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing within your field/major</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying, locating, evaluating and managing information resources within your field/major⁴</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying and assessing the validity of assumptions within your field/major⁵</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating with others in personal and professional contexts (oral communication only)⁶</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Significant change overtime at p < 0.001, ANOVA. Post hoc comparisons: 2016 < 2017, 2018, and 2019, all significant at .01.
² Significant change overtime at p < 0.05, ANOVA. Post hoc comparisons: 2016 < 2017 and 2019, both significant at .05.
³ Significant change overtime at p = 0.05, ANOVA. Post hoc comparison: 2016 < 2017, significant at .01.
⁴ Significant change overtime at p < 0.01, ANOVA. Post hoc comparison: 2016 < 2017; 2017 > 2018, both significant at .05.
⁵ Significant change overtime at p < 0.01, ANOVA. Post hoc comparison: 2016 < 2017 and 2019; 2017 > 2018, all significant at .05.
⁶ The item was added in 2018 so there was no data on this item prior to 2018.