

SNAPSHOT

CAWG

of
Student Experiences**Advice to
Undergraduates from the
Graduating Class of 2010****“It wasn’t until after I graduated
that I realized...”**

This Campus Assessment Working Group (CAWG) Snapshot contains reflections from recent alumni on their undergraduate experiences as reported in the 2011 University of Maryland Alumni Survey of 2010 graduates. Eight hundred thirty-seven recent alumni completed the survey, with an overall sample comparable to the UMD student population (with a slight over-representation of female and white students, and a slight under-representation of male and Asian students). Seventy-three percent of respondents began as freshmen at UMD, while 27% transferred from another institution. Included and summarized here are their words. The following analyses reflect responses from the portion of the total sample (50%) who responded to the open-ended questions. Given that the total sample represents 14% of the graduating class of 2010, use caution when generalizing results beyond this group of respondents.

Student Experiences

Participating alumni responded to survey questions prompting them to reflect upon their UMD undergraduate career, and to provide insight into what they could have done differently to improve their experience. In retrospect, respondents wished they had engaged more in the experiences listed below. This was reflected both in their ratings on survey questions and in their open-ended responses. The remainder of this snapshot is organized into sections based upon the four themes listed in the left column of the following table.

Looking back at their undergraduate experience, the following percentages of responding UMD alumni wished they had more opportunities to...

Mentoring	Establish a mentoring relationship with a UM faculty/staff member	64%
Broad Experiences	Increase academic knowledge outside your major	54%
	Gain an understanding of global issues	46%
	Understand diverse perspectives	31%
	Work with others who are different from you	28%
Real-World Skills	Develop your ability to speak effectively	48%
	Develop your leadership skills	46%
	Develop your ability to write effectively	41%
	Apply what you have learned to other situations	40%
	Present a persuasive argument	40%
	Revise your thinking based on new information	34%
Preparation for the Future	Prepare for your current educational or professional position	59%
	Develop a sense of professional ethics	34%

Establish a Mentoring Relationship

Responding alumni wished they had had more opportunities for mentorship, which they described as a relationship extending beyond the classroom, in which professors, advisors, and other University staff members offer general guidance. Mentorship was also characterized as conversations about students' range of interests.

"I could have more actively pursued both formal and informal opportunities that were provided by my professors. Many of them were happy to sit and work with me on issues beyond the simple scope of the class [...]."

"[...] really delving into my interests and commitments and helping me discover what direction would best suit me."

"I could have been more active in seeking out advice and/or assistance from my professors in both an educational and advice-seeking way."

CAWG has previously defined a mentor as...

"...a UM faculty/staff member who takes an active interest in your academic, personal, and/or professional development."

See the October 2010 CAWG snapshot "Perceptions of Mentoring"

Why would you want a mentor?

Responding alumni indicated that it would have been beneficial for them to establish a relationship with a faculty or staff mentor who could offer guidance as they prepared for life after graduation. Respondents specifically mentioned the desire for mentors who could provide networking opportunities, recommendation letters, and general career advice.

"I could have developed more of a rapport with the professors in my major. They could have really helped me in writing recommendations to grad school. But since it was not a priority at the time I was enrolled at UM to look up to specific professionals in my field of study, it might come to affect me if and when I decide to return to school for a graduate degree."

"[I could have] sought out professors for networking and mentoring."

"I wish I had been able to form more concrete relationships with the faculty and staff. Now that I am out of school I don't have any contact with any professional or someone I feel could advise me about future education."

Establish a Mentoring Relationship (continued)

How do you find a mentor?

Respondents reported that they could have taken more initiative to reach out and request mentorship from faculty members by participating more actively in class, going to office hours, and seeking out co-curricular activities such as research assistantships.

“I think I could have become more involved with class activities and participated in class [...] to help myself stand out amongst the other students so that I could have established better relationships with professors.”

“As far as relationships with faculty, I could have taken initiative to meet with professors, go to more office hours, and participate more in class.”

“As for establishing mentoring relationships with my professors, I don't think it would have been difficult to have attended more of [my college's] extracurricular programs and networking events. This would have allowed me to spend time with my professors in a more casual environment and could have resulted in the relationships I would have liked to have forged with some of them.”

“[I could have] stayed after class and introduced myself to the professors.”

What are the challenges?

Many responding alumni expressed that they had limited access to faculty mentorship. Some perceived that faculty members were either too busy or uninterested in taking on a mentorship role. Responding alumni also expressed uncertainty about how much time, willingness, and responsibility faculty/staff members have to devote to undergraduate students.

“[I could have been] actively engaged in seeking out faculty members who can work as my mentor. Based on my experience, faculty members are rather accessible but they are also quite busy [...] it is at times difficult to have enough access.”

“I could have reached out to senior faculty members requesting their guidance and support. That being said, I wasn't sure if that was their role.”

Respondents also mentioned the large class and academic major size as a barrier to reaching out to faculty.

“Part of the problem of [...] a large school with lots of people and large class sizes is it is harder to make a connection.”

“I should have made more of an effort to try and get to know some of my professors no matter how large the classes were.”

Some respondents reported that their already-busy schedules made mentorships difficult to form and maintain.

“I tried harder to meet with professors in my free time, but I was working two jobs throughout college, and was involved in [other] activities.”

Broaden Your Experiences: Reach Outside Your Shell

Responding alumni emphasized the value of a broad college experience in addition to what is required for their major. This included exploring different academic areas, global issues, and gaining exposure to other points of view.

How do you broaden your experience?

Respondents mentioned a range of co-curricular activities in which they either engaged or would have liked to engage during their time at UMD. These activities included on- and off-campus jobs, off-campus experiences (i.e., study abroad and community service), social life (i.e., student groups and clubs), academic activities on campus (i.e., lectures and workshops), and networking/professional development opportunities (i.e., job fairs, internships/externships, and research).

“I would have taken more classes outside of my major and looked for job experience/research experience earlier than I did.”

“I could have signed up for more classes in certain semesters to expose myself to other areas of interest.”

“I wish I had taken advantage of a study abroad semester. The courses that UMD offers are fantastic, but nothing compares to experiencing another culture for an extended period of time.”

Responding alumni wished they could have learned about “global issues” in and outside of the classroom.

“I could have also been more active in clubs/student government to increase my understanding of global issues or diverse perspectives.”

What are the challenges?

Many respondents communicated some regret about taking few classes outside of their majors and not pursuing co-curricular experiences, citing curricula with limited flexibility.

“[...] it was up to me to take more writing and global issues related courses, but being a transfer student, I had to focus on completing my required courses.”

“In regards to studying abroad, I really don't know if there was anything I could have done without knowing I had to properly plan ahead starting the very first time I registered for classes during the summer before matriculation at orientation.”

“I could have gotten involved in research as I became more familiar with the faculty and school. But as time went on and classes became more intense, time was limited with working to pay for college and still join clubs and activities.”

Develop Real-World Skills

Responding alumni stressed the importance of honing their writing, speaking, leadership, and time management skills during their undergraduate careers.

“I could have focused [...] more on fine tuning my writing skills.”

“[I could have] time managed more effectively.”

“I wish I had taken more opportunities to practice public speaking.”

How could you build those skills?

Respondents mentioned that taking classes and seeking co-curricular opportunities that emphasized certain skills would have been beneficial to strengthen their abilities in those areas.

“I could probably have sought out more writing classes.”

“I could have taken a speech course as an elective on my own time.”

“I could have gone to the Writing Center to develop my writing skills beyond the professors’ expectations.”

“I wish that I had picked one of the student organizations to become more involved in and perhaps worked towards a leadership position in that organization so that I could have had more practice with that sort of thing going into the work place.”

“I probably could have gotten more involved in extracurricular activities that promoted things like small team leadership.”

What are the challenges?

Responding alumni expressed difficulty in identifying skill-building classes within their majors, and were hesitant to explore these options in other departments.

“I was not aware of any options available in [my] program, and familiarizing oneself with the classes offered through [another] department seemed a little daunting.”

Prepare for the Future

Responding alumni had the insight to look back and realize that in order to prepare for future educational and career positions, they could have taken advantage of available services and resources on campus.

“If I had taken the time to do an internship or work part-time at a job that was related, I might have a job related to my major now instead of trying to gather experience through internships and volunteer opportunities.”

“I think a part of me expected that receiving a degree would have been sufficient to express my competency, but that is not the case in the current job market.”

“The university gives us a sense of stability when we are students, but after graduation, each student is on their own and it’s hard.”

Prepare for the Future (continued)

Why prepare for the future?

Responding alumni who did not pursue these opportunities themselves explained that there were consequences for not being prepared for post-undergraduate life.

“I, for example, never felt able to do an internship and did not have a strong faculty advisor relationship because I did not realize that [this] would influence grad school possibility for me.”

How could you prepare for the future?

Respondents commented that they wished they had taken advantage of internships and other career enhancing activities while they were undergraduates to help them develop professionally.

“I would have tried looking for an internship with a sense of urgency early in college.”

“[I could have] taken more time to meet with [someone from] the career center and interact more with my professors.”

“I should have sought out people working in my field sooner than I did.”

“It's important to be more forward thinking as a student. Most students are thinking in the short term, but many of these opportunities are going to benefit them for the rest of their lives. I should have thought more big-picture in choosing classes, extracurricular activities, or taking advantage of activities and events and networking that I never did.”

“[I could have] taken advantage of what was available to me in terms of professional opportunities, i.e. job fairs etc.”

“I could have been more proactive in seeking these opportunities out and taking my future into my own hands and not trusting that the education I received, albeit a good one, was enough to help get me where I wanted to be post-graduation.”

What are the challenges?

Engaging in co-curricular activities presented challenges for respondents as well. They reported issues with finding opportunities and time to engage in activities.

“[My major] is a particularly demanding major and usually doesn't allow for a ton of free time. It's a balancing act.”

“I could have probably searched for more opportunities in research labs but I felt like I didn't know where to look.”

“I had to work and I lived far away from campus, so I was unable to apply for an internship.”

“Having a full-time job while being a full-time student in order to afford school in the first place resulted in a myopia about my college experience that I would not have time for internships, clubs, activities and other interests that would have helped me in finding a major-related career or put me on the path toward grad school.”

Don't Stop Here!

Responding alumni mentioned an array of opportunities in which they wished they had engaged, such as mentorships, and experiences to gain real-world skills and develop themselves professionally. Based on their advice, here are a few of the campus resources and services available to help you get the most out of your college experience and graduate with fewer regrets.

Maryland Center for Undergraduate Research - www.ugresearch.umd.edu

Provides resources for finding research opportunities and establishing faculty-student mentor relationships.

University Career Center and President's Promise - www.careercenter.umd.edu

Provides career classes, career counseling, job search and interview strategies, internship and career fairs, and a career resource library.

Education Abroad - www.international.umd.edu/studyabroad/

Provides information on how you can take advantage of the opportunity to study abroad for a few weeks, a summer, a semester or an entire academic year. Scholarship support for study abroad is available.

Leadership and Community Service Programs - www.thestamp.umd.edu/lcsl/

Provides opportunities for students to develop leadership and community service skills.

Counseling Center's Campus Resource Directory - www.counseling.umd.edu/infodata/

Provides a comprehensive overview of campus resources and services.

Your departmental advisor or your college advising office can also be a rich source of information for opportunities both in and outside the classroom.

Concurrent Issue:
Alumni Reflections on the UMD
Undergraduate Experience

Campus Assessment Working Group
(CAWG)
www.umd.edu/cawg