

SNAPSHOT

CAWG

of
Student Experiences

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

2012 - ISSUE 4

SEPTEMBER

Academic Engagement

This Campus Assessment Working Group (CAWG) Snapshot represents the first analyses from a longitudinal project aimed at enhancing the campus community's understanding of student curricular and co-curricular experiences at the University of Maryland. Future CAWG analyses will investigate changes in students' curricular experiences after implementation of the new General Education curriculum.

This Snapshot summarizes results from the Beginning Student Survey (BSS) 2010 and the University of Maryland Student Survey (UMSS) 2011 and contrasts freshman hopes and junior/senior experiences. The BSS is administered in introductory courses such as ENGL101 and UNIV100 to freshmen eight weeks into their first semester. The UMSS is administered to juniors and seniors in Professional Writing courses during the spring semester. For the BSS10, out of 3933 first-time, full-time freshmen, 1869 (48%) completed the survey. For the UMSS11, out of 2450 students enrolled in Professional Writing, 1693 (69%) completed the survey. The data below represent responses of survey respondents, not all Maryland students; therefore, use caution when generalizing.

Hopes for and Engagement in the Learning Experience

Ideally I hope to ...

In the BSS10, freshmen were asked whether they ideally hope to engage in a series of particular academic experiences during their time at UMD. The following table presents the percentages of freshman respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that they hope to participate in each activity.

In my academic experiences at UMD, ideally I would hope to (regardless of whether it is possible) ...	Agree/ Strongly Agree %
Participate in an internship related to my course of study.	94
Seek out educational opportunities to expand my knowledge.	90
Select courses out of interest rather than because they are required.	89
Take a course outside of my eventual chosen field of study.	87
Consider other classmates' perspectives.	86
Take a course I am genuinely interested in, despite perceived rigor.	86
Learn for the sake of learning.	79
Participate in community service as part of my academic experience.	72
Participate in a study abroad program.	71
Take courses from different departments to explore a specific topic.	69
Argue an academic point of view contrary to my own.	61
Present research at an academic conference.	43

- ◆ The vast majority of freshman respondents (94%) reported hoping to participate in an internship related to their course of study. Almost three-quarters reported hoping to participate in a community service program (72%) and/or a study abroad program (71%).

Hopes for and Engagement in the Learning Experience (continued)

- ◆ Over three-quarters of freshman respondents (79%) indicated hoping to engage in the broad experience of learning for the sake of learning. Specifically, they indicated that they hope to seek out educational opportunities to expand their knowledge (90%), to select courses out of interest rather than because they meet requirements (89%), and/or to take a course they are genuinely interested in, despite perceived rigor (86%).
- ◆ Although 86% of freshman respondents indicated hoping to consider other classmates' perspectives, 61% hope to argue an academic point of view contrary to their own.
- ◆ Freshmen appear to recognize the value of interdisciplinary education. For instance, 89% of our respondents reported hoping to take a course outside their eventual chosen field of study and 69% hope to take courses from different departments to explore a specific topic.
- ◆ Over a third of respondents reported that they hope to participate in the academically challenging activity of presenting research at an academic conference (43%).

Question to consider:

Freshmen hope to participate in many of these activities; how can we help them make room for these experiences in their four-year plan?

I was most engaged when ...

In the UMSS11, juniors and seniors were asked to report in which of the same activities they felt "most engaged in their learning experience." The table below presents the percentages of junior and senior respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that they were "most engaged" when participating in each of the following activities.

Throughout my academic experiences at the University of Maryland, I was most engaged in my learning experience when I ...	Agree/ Strongly Agree %
Participated in a study abroad program.*	96
Gained practical value from coursework.	83
Took a course to explore my career.*	78
Selected courses out of interest rather than because they are required.	76
Participated in an internship related to my course of study.*	75
Sought out educational opportunities to expand my knowledge.	72
Learned for the sake of learning.	63
Considered other classmates' perspectives.	56
Took courses from different departments to explore a specific topic.	55
Conducted or participated in undergraduate research.*	55
Took a course outside of my eventual chosen field of study.	54
Participated in community service as part of my academic experience.*	43
Argued an academic point of view contrary to my own.	43
Presented research at an academic conference.*	41

*Percentage represents the portion of students who did not answer "Not Applicable." Also, study abroad responses were verified with institutional data and non-study abroad participants were removed from analyses.

Hopes for and Engagement in the Learning Experience (continued)

At least three-quarters of juniors and seniors reported being most engaged in their learning experiences when pursuing practical opportunities such as:

- ◆ Gaining practical value from coursework (83%)
- ◆ Taking a course to explore their career (78%)
- ◆ Participating in an internship (75%)

Juniors and seniors reported varying levels of engagement in broader learning experiences, including:

- ◆ Selecting courses out of interest rather than because they are required (76%)
- ◆ Seeking out educational opportunities to expand their knowledge (72%)
- ◆ Learning for the sake of learning (63%)
- ◆ Taking a course outside their eventual field of study (54%)

Question to consider:

How can we enhance these experiences to foster students' development of cognitive complexity?



In addition, 56% reported being most engaged in their learning experience when they considered other classmates' perspectives, and 43% indicated being most engaged when arguing an academic point of view contrary to their own.

Those respondents who participated in specialized undergraduate experiences reported varying degrees of learning engagement. For instance, students reported being most engaged in their learning experience when taking part in the following activities:

- ◆ Participating in a study abroad experience (96%)
- ◆ Conducting or participating in undergraduate research (55%)
- ◆ Participating in community service as a part of their academic experience (43%)
- ◆ Presenting research at an academic conference (41%)

Questions to consider:

What can we do to increase the learning potential of the above experiences?

How might students' responses to these items change after implementation of the new General Education curriculum?

Comparison of hopes and engagement

The following four figures report the percentages of freshmen and juniors/seniors who agreed or strongly agreed with each item in the figures below.

Seek out educational opportunities to expand my knowledge.



- ◆ Whereas 90% of freshman respondents indicated they hope to seek out educational opportunities to expand their knowledge, 72% of juniors and seniors reported being most engaged when doing so. Similarly, 94% of freshman respondents hope to participate in an internship related to their course of study, and 75% of juniors and seniors reported being most engaged in their learning experiences when doing so.

Hopes for and Engagement in the Learning Experience (continued)

Comparison of hopes and engagement (continued)

Learn for the sake of learning.

Ideally I would hope to ...

79%

■ Freshmen

I was most engaged in learning when I ...

63%

■ Juniors/seniors

- More than three-quarters (79%) of freshman respondents hope to learn for the sake of learning, and 63% of junior/senior respondents felt most engaged in their learning experience when doing so.

Consider other classmates' perspectives.

Ideally I would hope to ...

86%

■ Freshmen

I was most engaged in learning when I ...

56%

■ Juniors/seniors

- Although 86% of freshman respondents hope to consider other classmates' perspectives, just over half (56%) of junior/senior respondents felt most engaged in their learning experience when doing so.

Questions to consider:

How can we structure the learning experience at UMD to better promote debate and discussion among students in the classroom? Additionally, how can we ensure that the exchange of ideas is an engaging learning experience?

Will the new General Education curriculum better promote this exchange of ideas?

Take courses for interest, despite perceived rigor or requirements.

Ideally I would hope to ...

86%

■ Freshmen

I was most engaged in learning when I ...

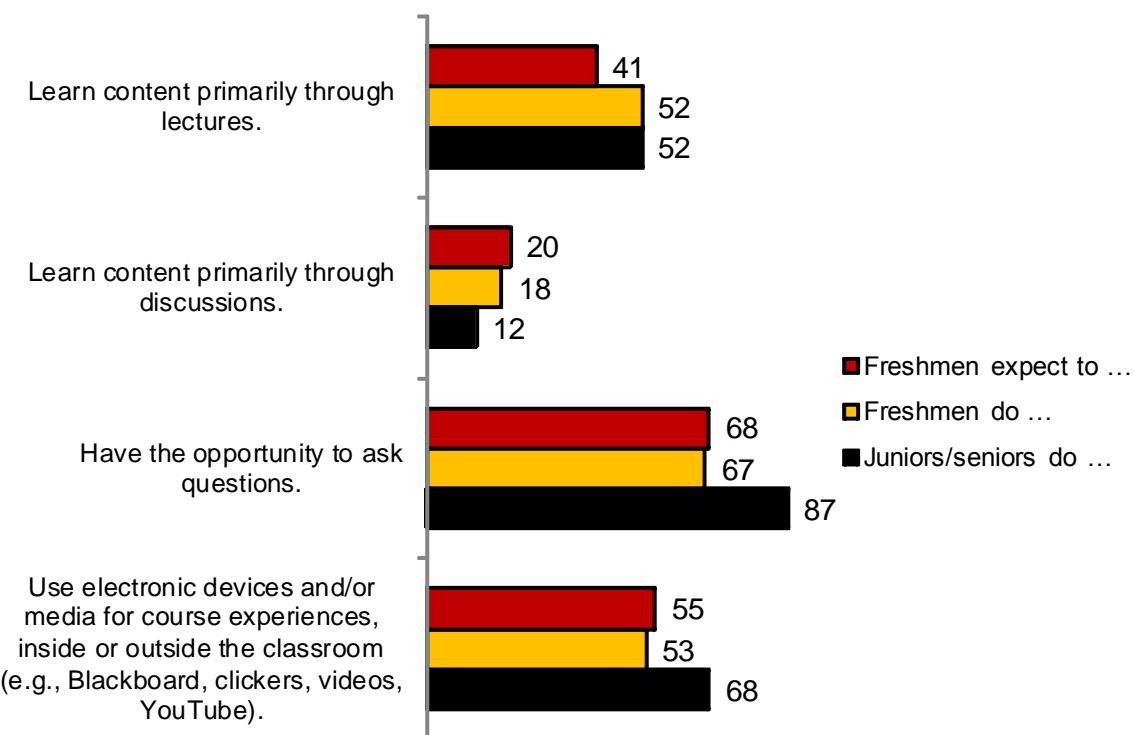
76%

■ Juniors/seniors

- Eighty-six percent of freshmen said they hope to take courses they are genuinely interested in, despite perceived rigor. In a similar item, about three-quarters (76%) of juniors and seniors reported being most engaged when completing courses they selected out of interest rather than because they were required.

Expectations and Experiences in Class

The next series of figures makes three comparisons: They compare the academic expectations of first-semester freshmen, the academic experiences of first-semester freshmen, and the experiences of juniors and seniors. Freshmen were asked in how many of their courses they *expect to* do the following (see graphs below). Freshmen and juniors/seniors were also asked to report in how many of their *current courses* they do the following. The percentages reported in these figures include: (a) freshmen who expect to do the following in *Most/All* of their courses; (b) freshmen who do the following in *3+ courses*; and (c) juniors/seniors who do the following in *3+ courses*.



- ◆ About half of the respondents from both cohorts reported that they learn content primarily through lectures in most of their classes. Far fewer reported learning content primarily through discussion, with the juniors and seniors even less than the freshmen (12% vs. 18%).
- ◆ The juniors and seniors reported using electronic devices and/or media for course experiences and having the opportunity to ask questions with higher frequency than their freshman counterparts.

Questions to consider:

Only 12% of juniors and seniors reported learning content primarily through discussion. Why is that?

What types of discussion opportunities are students offered?

How do juniors and seniors conceptualize “discussion”?

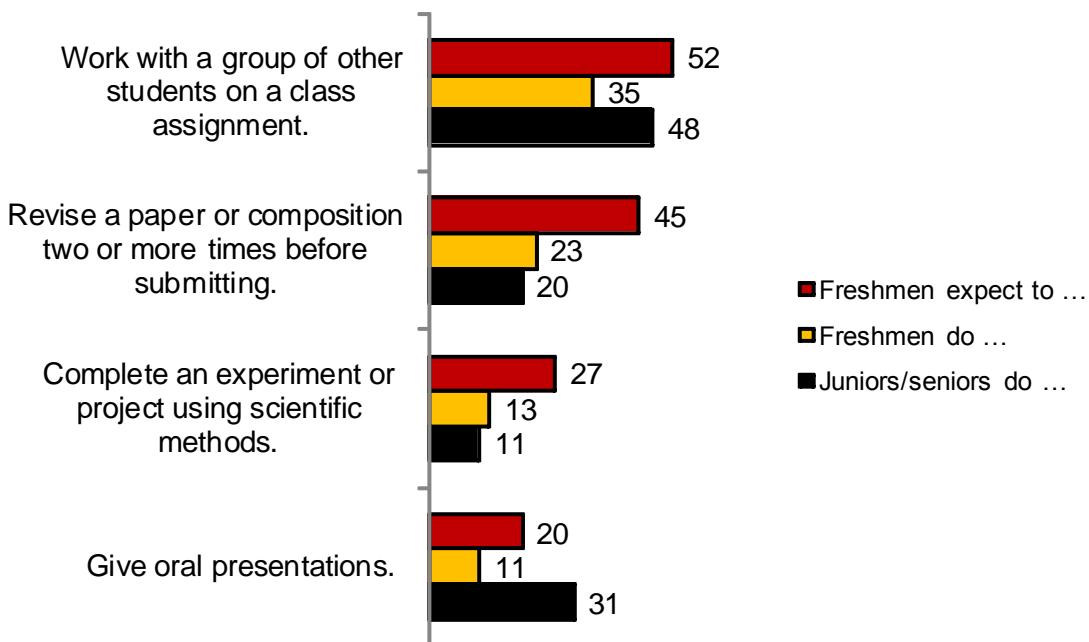
Continued on next page

Recent Snapshot Issues:

Advice to Undergraduates from the Graduating Class of 2010
Alumni Reflections on the UMD Undergraduate Experience

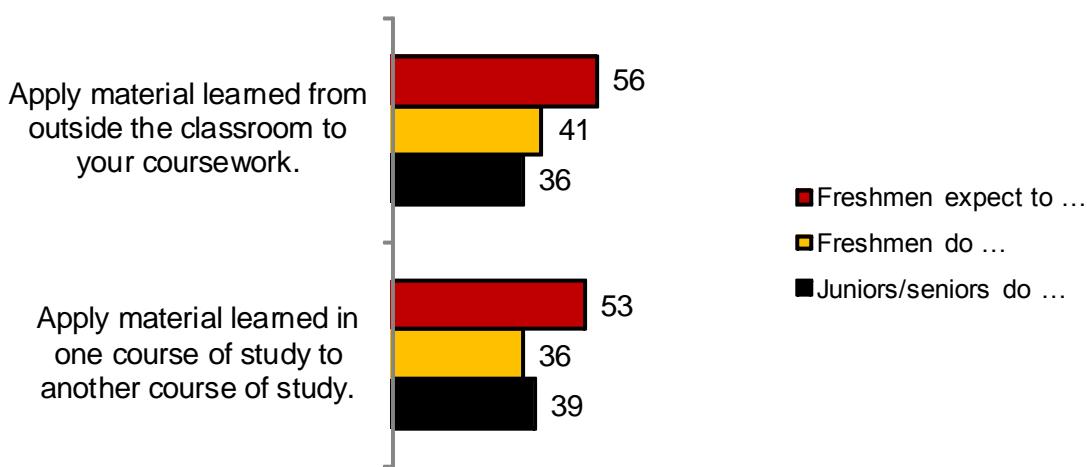
Campus Assessment Working Group
(CAWG)
www.umd.edu/cawg

Expectations and Experiences with Coursework



- ♦ Freshman respondents expected to revise papers or compositions and to use the scientific method more than either cohort reported experiencing in their current classes.
- ♦ While just over half of the freshmen (52%) expected to work with a group of other students on a class assignment in most of their classes, only 35% reported doing so in their current courses. Just under half of the juniors and seniors (48%) reported doing so in most of their classes.
- ♦ Almost a third of the upperclassmen (31%) reported giving oral presentations in most of their classes, whereas only a fifth of the freshmen expected to do so while at Maryland.

Transfer of Knowledge



- ♦ More than half of the freshmen reported expecting to apply material learned in one setting to other settings; however, just over a third of both cohorts reported having these opportunities.