



First-year students' engagement with UMD during the COVID-19 pandemic

This report, written by the Campus Assessment Working Group (CAWG) Beginnings subcommittee, discusses first-year students' sense of connection to the University of Maryland (UMD) in Fall 2020, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of the global disruptions the pandemic caused, this cohort began their college career in a different environment from the "traditional" college experience: most classes were taught online, and students on campus had to follow safety guidelines, such as social distancing and mask wearing.

This report uses data from the 2020 Beginning Student Survey (BSS). The BSS was administered online to new, first-time undergraduates (including Freshmen Connection) in select courses from October 19 - November 6, 2020.¹ The survey had a 20% response rate (n = 1,080 out of 5,445 new, first-time undergraduates). The distribution of respondents by race/ethnicity was similar to that of the population. Female students were slightly over-represented (56% of respondents versus 50% of the population). About three-fourths of respondents (78%) said that when in-person classes began, all their coursework was online, and the remaining 22% said they had a mix of in-person and online classes. Most respondents self-reported living either in an on-campus residence hall (42%) or off-campus with family/guardians (51%). The other seven percent lived elsewhere (e.g., in a fraternity or sorority house, off campus alone or with roommates).

Overall, respondents had similar perceptions of UMD as they have had in the past.

- About half of respondents said UMD was their first choice for college, and 83% said they had a positive attitude towards the university. These results are similar to previous cohorts (Figure 1).

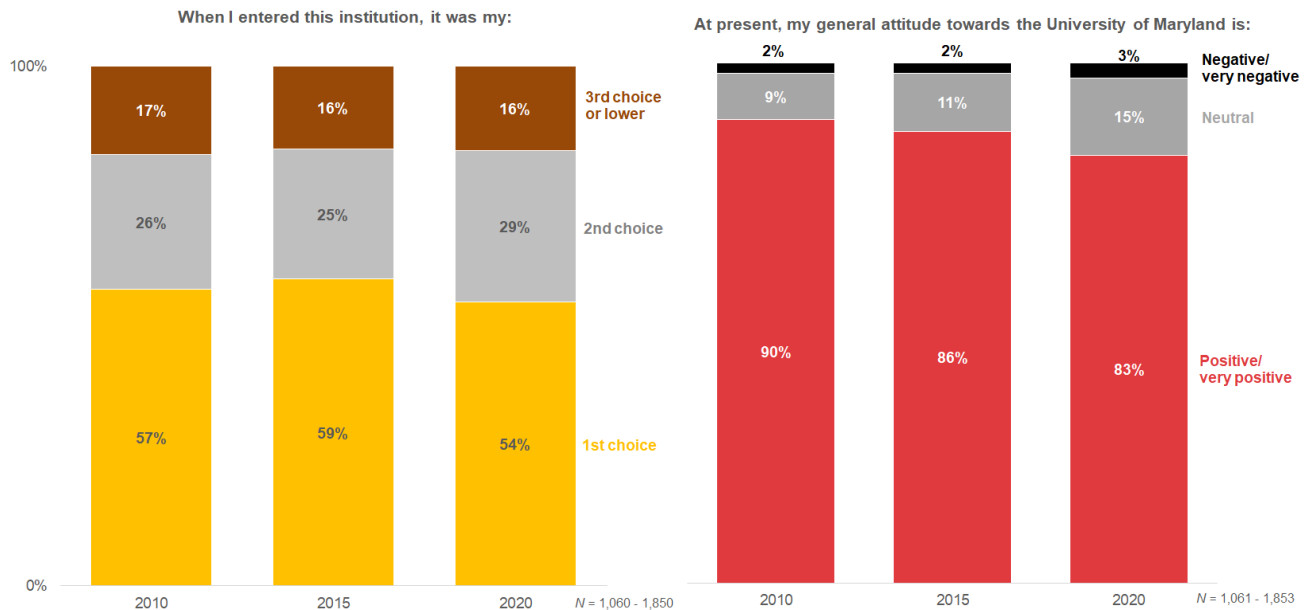


Figure 1. Items on institution choice (left) and attitude towards UMD (right), BSS10, BSS15, and BSS20

¹ The survey was administered in ENGL101, UNIV100, GEMS100, BSCV181, HNUH100, IDEA1010, and TLPL288D. The first two weeks of the fall semester were completely remote. On November 5, UMD announced all courses would transition online after Thanksgiving. Although UMD transitioned to remote instruction the week of November 16, this announcement may have influenced some students' responses.

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However, respondents felt disconnected from the UMD community, especially those living off campus.

- In Fall 2020, 72% agreed or strongly agreed that they feel comfortable at UMD, and 62% agreed they feel they belong at UMD. This marks a decrease of about 20 percentage points from the last time these questions were asked on a BSS survey, in 2014 (Figure 2).
- In addition, nearly a third of respondents (29%) this year agreed they feel like “just a number” on campus.

Indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following: In general...

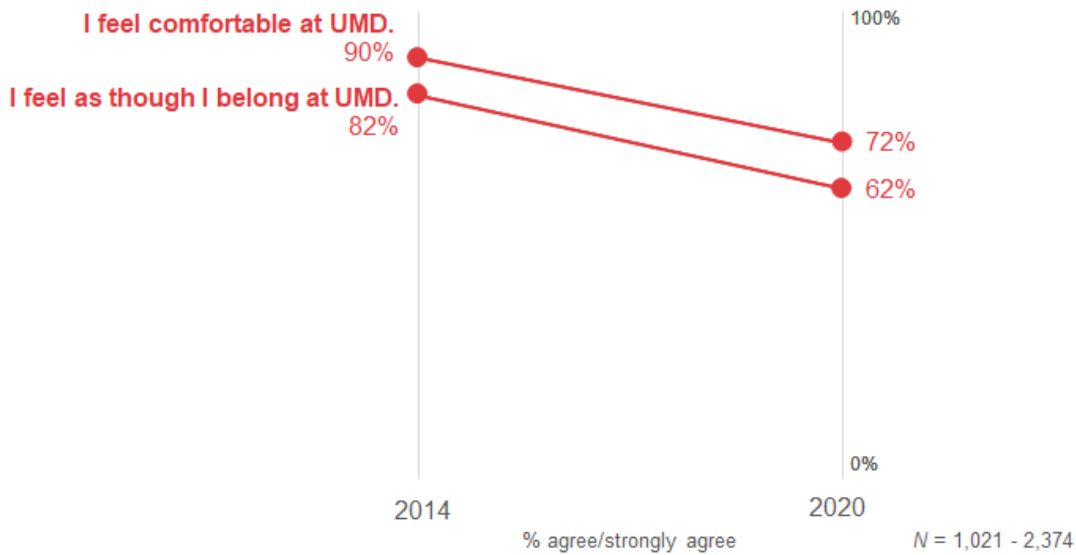


Figure 2. Percent of respondents who agreed/strongly agreed with items, BSS14 and BSS20

Respondents who said they lived on campus reported feeling connected to UMD more than their peers who lived off-campus with family/guardians.

- Eighty-four percent of respondents living on campus said they feel comfortable at UMD, compared to 62% of their peers living at home (Figure 3).
- Similarly, 76% of respondents who lived in residence halls agreed they feel they belong at UMD, compared to half of their peers living at home (Figure 3).

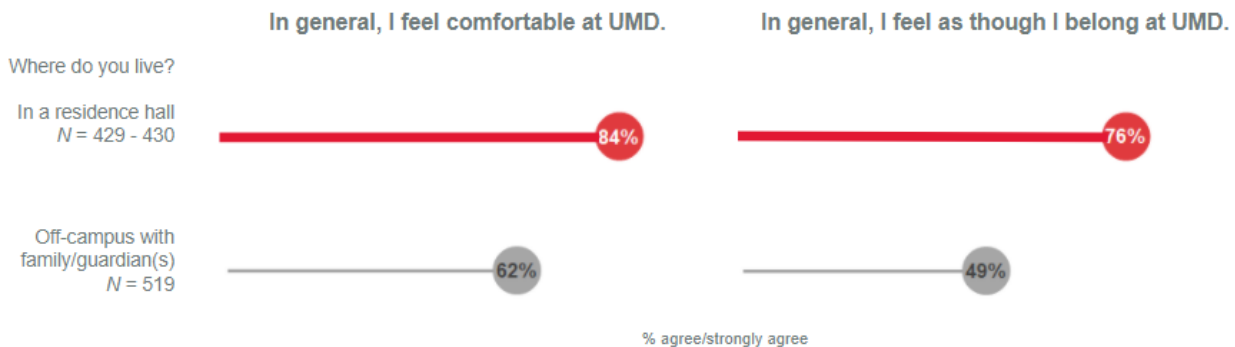
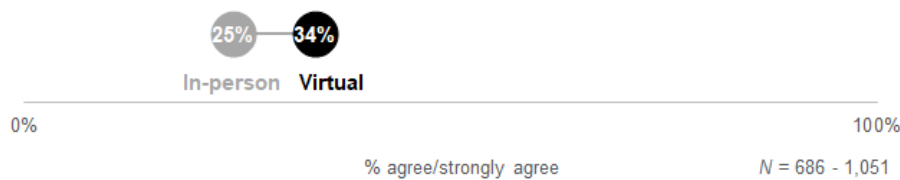


Figure 3. Percent of respondents who agreed/strongly agreed with items by housing type, BSS20

As expected, there was limited engagement with social activities during the Fall 2020 semester. Still, respondents were interested in participating in more in-person activities.

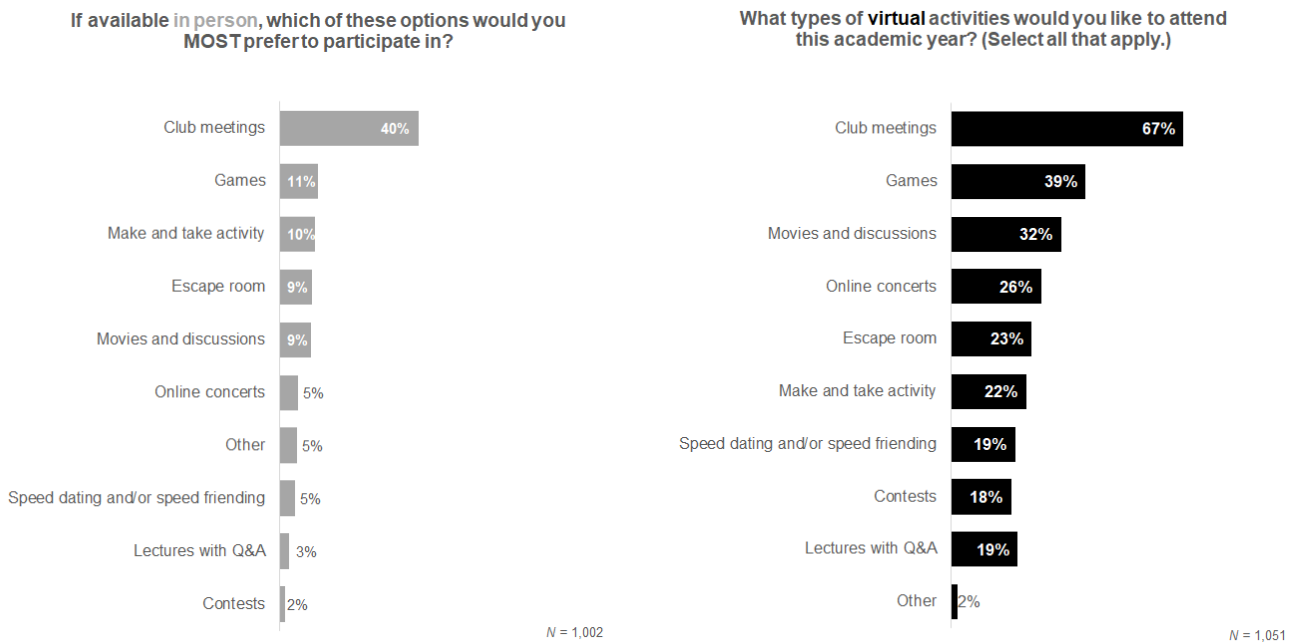
- In equal measure, respondents liked the online and in-person activities that UMD offered in Fall 2020: About a third said there were university-sponsored activities they liked, both in-person and online (32% in-person, 35% virtual).
- Most respondents said they wanted to be more involved in social activities. Only 34% said they were as involved in virtual social activities as they wanted to be, and a quarter said the same of in-person activities (Figure 4).
- Respondents were interested in the same types of virtual and in-person activities. Club meetings and games were the most popular choices (Figure 5).² Those same activities were most popular among the subset of respondents who said they were not as engaged as they wanted to be.

I am as involved in university-sponsored in-person and virtual social activities as I want to be.



Note: Respondents who selected “not applicable” to the item about in-person activities are excluded from this figure.

Figure 4. Percent of respondents who agreed/strongly agreed with items about engagement in virtual and in-person programming, BSS20



Note: This figure displays responses from respondents who answered items about their interest in in-person and virtual programming. In the figure on the left, respondents who selected “not applicable” to the item about in-person activities are included. In the figure on the right, responses will not sum to 100%, because respondents could select multiple answers.

Figure 5. Respondent interest in in-person and virtual university-sponsored activities, BSS20

² Only respondents who answered the questions about their involvement in university-sponsored activities are shown in Figure 5.