



## **Juniors and Seniors' Pre-Pandemic Perceptions of the Value of their UMD Education**

March 2022

This report was written by the Campus Assessment Working Group (CAWG) ACES subcommittee. The 2020 University of Maryland Student Survey (UMSS 20) was administered in class from March 2 - March 9, 2020, to juniors and seniors enrolled in Professional Writing courses. However, because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the paper administration of the survey, this report was delayed until now. This report summarizes initial findings on students' perceptions of the value of their education.

In March 2020, 1,298 students completed the paper survey (34% of all students enrolled in these courses).<sup>1</sup> Research shows that motivation (students' energy and ability to focus on meeting their scholastic goals) and perception (students' thoughts and beliefs) can impact a student's academic and career preparation. To understand motivation and perception more completely, we analyzed responses based on racial/ethnic and gender differences.<sup>2</sup>

### **In general, respondents reported they were engaged in their classes at UMD and are prepared for their personal and professional futures.**

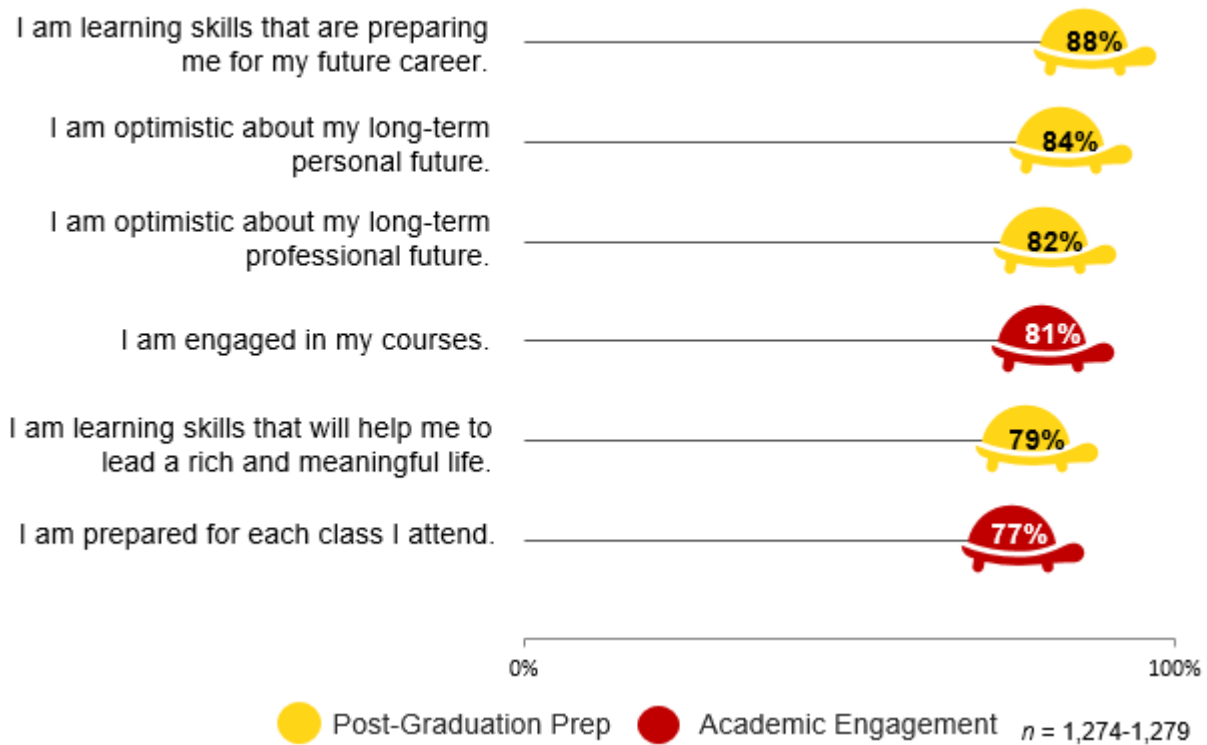
- In general, respondents were optimistic about their current coursework and about their future. For example, 88% of respondents said they were learning skills that are preparing them for their future careers, and 77% said they were prepared for each class they attend.
- There were no significant racial/ethnic and gender differences among these questions.

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<sup>1</sup> The distribution of respondents by race/ethnicity and gender was similar to that of the UMD population. The university records reflect current reporting guidelines for gender and only include male and female as options.

<sup>2</sup> An ANOVA, through a structure equation modeling approach, was conducted to find group differences in dichotomous response items. Visit this site for more information <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20172130>. Besides Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic, and White students, all other groups were excluded because the sample size was too small to provide any meaningful results.

Percentage of respondents who generally felt that:



**Figure 1.** Distribution of respondents who said “yes” to statements about their preparedness, engagement, and future prospects, 2020.

**Behind the Findings**

- CAWG collected these results in the weeks before the COVID-19 pandemic when instruction was primarily in-person.

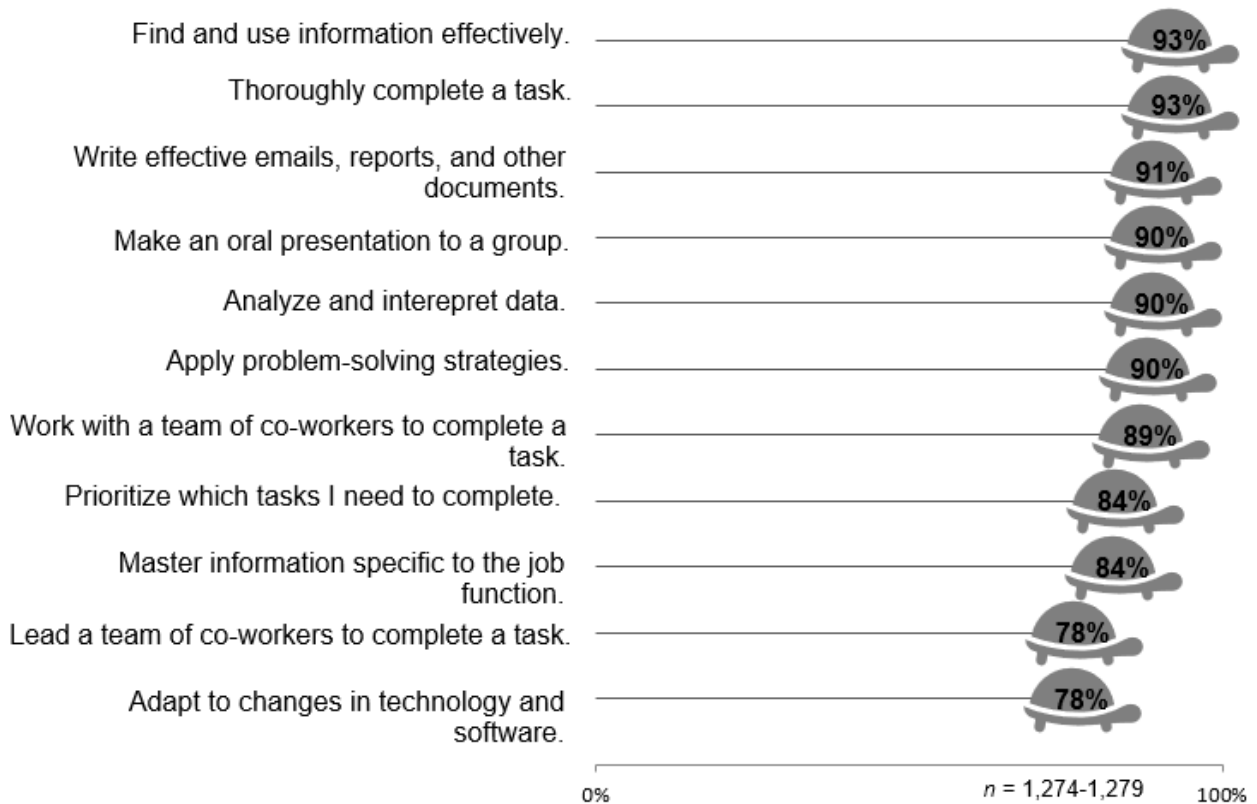
**Questions to Consider**

- How might the COVID-19 pandemic have impacted students’ optimism about their career preparation and future prospects?
- Are students as engaged in their classes and campus activities as they were before the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Considering that one in five respondents don’t feel prepared or engaged, how does UMD increase class preparation and engagement?

**Overall, respondents reported UMD was teaching them the skills needed for their careers.**

- A large percentage of respondents agreed that UMD readied them for a career, including across the different racial/ethnic and gender groups. The items with the lowest levels of agreement were “lead a team of co-workers to complete a task” (78%) and “adapt to changes in technology and software” (78%; see Figure 2).
- Gender differences emerged for two items.
  - A significantly lower percentage of male respondents (74%) said UMD prepared them to lead a team of co-workers to complete a task than female respondents (82%).
  - A significantly lower percentage of male respondents (86%) said UMD prepared them to work with a team of co-workers to complete a task than female respondents (92%).

**Percentage of respondents who felt that UMD is preparing them to do the following after graduation:**



**Figure 2.** Distribution of respondents who said “yes” to statements about whether UMD prepared them to meet specific career readiness competencies, 2020.

### **Behind the Findings**

The [National Association of College and Employers](#) (NACE) is a professional association that provides resources, research, standards, and advocacy to college career centers and employers. NACE outlines eight [career readiness competencies](#) that graduating students are expected to master to succeed in the workplace.

The questions discussed above (see Figure 2) align with the career readiness competencies for communication, critical thinking, professionalism, leadership, teamwork, and technology.

#### Communication

- Write effective emails, reports, and other documents
- Make an oral presentation to a group

#### Critical Thinking

- Apply problem-solving strategies
- Find and use information effectively
- Analyze and interpret data

#### Professionalism

- Prioritize which tasks I need to complete
- Master information specific to the job function

#### Leadership

- Lead a team of co-workers to complete a task

#### Teamwork

- Work with a team of co-workers to complete a task

#### Technology

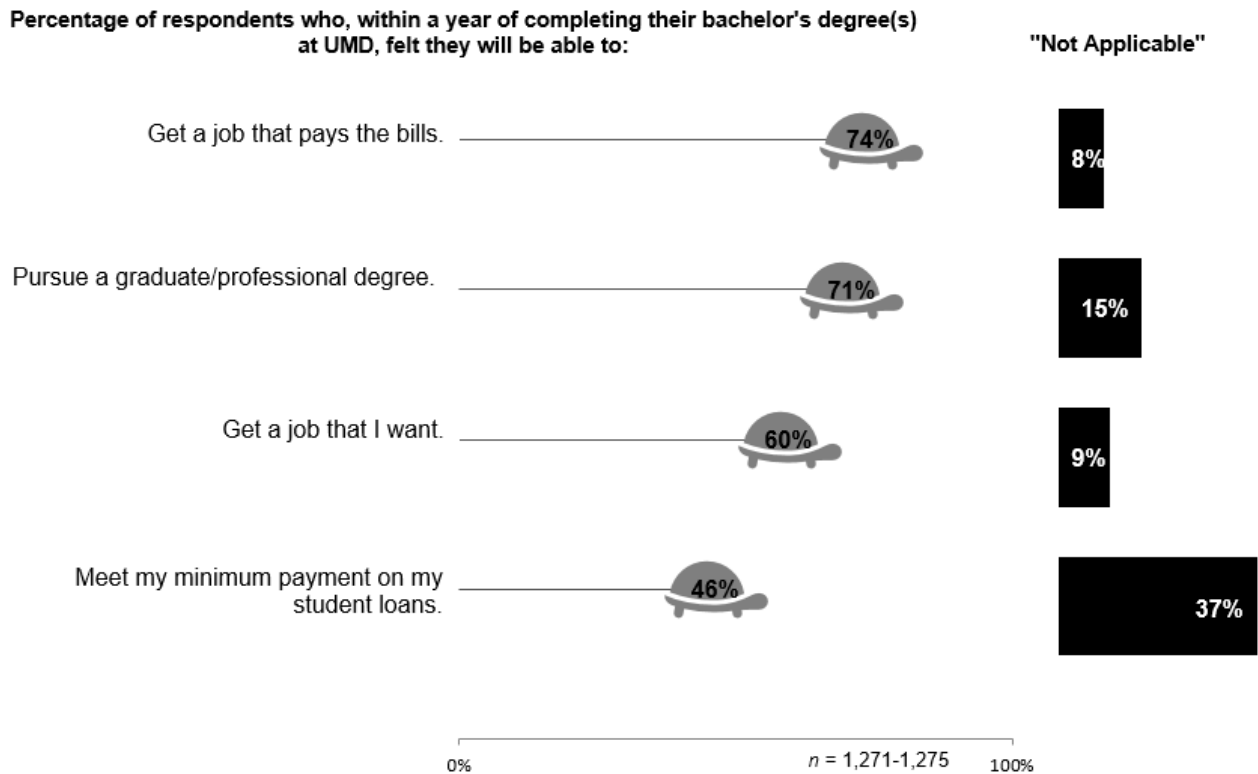
- Adapt to changes in technology and software

### **Questions to Consider**

- Do males and females have different expectations of themselves for preparedness and different understandings of leadership?
- How does the university teach various aspects of leadership—through leadership courses, other courses, and/or co-curricular experiences, internships, and programs?
- How do the responses in Figure 2 reflect NACE competencies in areas where students feel prepared or underprepared?
- Are there disconnects between what competencies employers want and what UMD is providing?
- Are fewer males reporting that UMD prepared them to lead or work with a team because it was a skill they felt they already had?

**Respondents said they were confident about their one-year outlook after receiving their bachelor’s degree. However, many indicated they would not be able to meet the minimum payment on their student loans.**

- Seventy-four percent of respondents said they would be able to get a job that pays the bills (Figure 3).
  - Of those where getting a job that pays the bills within a year of completing their degree was applicable, male respondents (87%) were more likely to answer “yes” than female respondents (75%).
- About half (47%) of respondents said they could meet their minimum payments on their student loans within a year of completing their bachelor’s degree. Another 37% of respondents said that it did not apply to them (Figure 3).
  - Of those where making minimum student loan payments within a year of graduation was applicable, male respondents (69%) were more likely to answer “yes” than female respondents (60%).
- Of those who did not respond “N/A” to these sets of questions, there were no racial/ethnic group differences.



**Figure 3.** Distribution of respondents who said “yes” and “N/A” to items about their ability to do specific tasks within a year of receiving their bachelor’s degree, 2020.

**Behind the Findings**  
 Please see the [2020 Graduation Survey](#) and this CAWG Beginnings subgroup [2020 report](#) on students’ financial well-being and interest in developing their financial literacy skills for more information about student career-related outcomes.

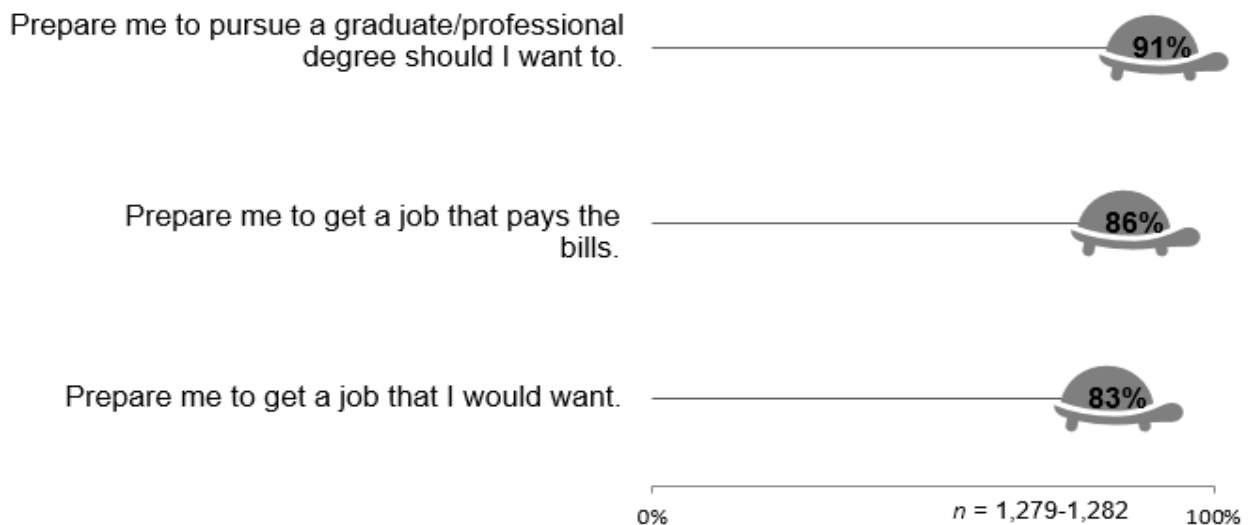
### Questions to Consider

- Three-fourths of respondents are confident they can get a job that pays the bills, but only 47% said they are confident they can meet their minimum student loan payments. Does this indicate some financial disconnect -- as if student loans aren't part of their bills?
- What can UMD do to reach students who do not feel confident they can get a job that they want? Do students need more engagement with the career center, career exposure opportunities, or is this about general economic uncertainty?
- What might UMD do to help inform students of their current financial situation and student loan debt?

### Overall, respondents see the value of their UMD degree. However, racial/ethnic and gender differences exist.

- Eighty-three percent of respondents said that their UMD degree would prepare them to get the job they wanted (Figure 4).
  - Female respondents (85%) were more likely to agree than male respondents (81%).
  - White respondents (87%) were more likely to agree than respondents from other racial/ethnic groups (Hispanic 79%, Asian 80%, African American 82%).
- Female respondents (95%) were more likely to respond "yes" that their UMD degree would prepare them to pursue a graduate/professional degree if they chose to pursue one than male respondents (89%).
- Asian respondents (88%) were less likely to respond "yes" that their UMD degree would prepare them to pursue a graduate/professional degree if they chose to pursue one compared to any other racial/ethnic group (Hispanic 91%, African American 92%, and White 93%).

#### Percentage of respondents who overall, felt that their UMD bachelor's degree(s) will:



**Figure 4.** Distribution of respondents agreeing "yes" to feeling that their UMD bachelor's degree(s) will prepare them to be competent in the workforce, 2020.

### Behind the Findings

Students appear more optimistic about their long-term future than their immediate career prospects might indicate. For example, 74% of respondents said they are confident they can get a job that pays the bills within one year, but 86% of respondents said that overall, UMD prepared them to get a job that pays the bills -- without the same time limitation. This aligns with research on students' optimism and self-perceptions of future prospects.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See: [Hart Research Associates. 2015](#); [Haynes, Ruthig, Perry, Stupnisky, & Hall. 2006](#); [Ruder & Noy. 2017](#)

### **Questions to Consider**

- When asked about their immediate career prospects, male students were more likely to respond with optimism, but when asked about their long-term future, female students appeared more optimistic. What could this indicate? Why might some students think that, in the long run, they will succeed, but in the short-term, they are less confident?
  - See this [2014 ACES report](#) to compare how students responded to similar questions in 2014.
- In what ways—and for how long—will the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath influence students' confidence in their ability to get jobs that they want and/or go to graduate school?

### **Conclusions**

The data presented here represent juniors and seniors' perceptions before the beginning of an extraordinary year. Furthermore, this survey did not capture all aspects of what UMD would consider a successful career outcome (e.g., a career aligned with students' values, their interests, their skills). Further studies of this issue with this population may increase our understanding of students' career prospects and outcomes.