Examining the First Semester Experiences of New Freshmen: An IR Approach

INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH, PLANNING & ASSESSMENT

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

Purpose
Moving Beyond the Freshman Profile

Our inspiration for this project was **Beloit College's "Mindset List,"** which frames the incoming freshman class within cultural references their professors understand, e.g., from the Class of 2015 Mindset List:

"Ferris Bueller and Sloane could be their parents."

We sought to provide digestible data points on the first-semester experience that would be useful not only for prospective freshmen, but also the broader campus and the University's strategic goals, such as STEM and Time-to-Degree.

Telling the Story
With IR and Assessment Data

To develop a narrative of the first-semester experience, we took stock of the data we had available in our warehouse, as well as our annual survey of freshmen, and compiled complimentary metrics from both.

From The Warehouse:
- Aggregated student data for the Fall 2009, 2010, and 2011 freshmen cohorts
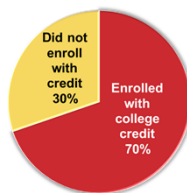- Includes application and registration data

From Surveys
- Self-reported data from the Fall 2010 and 2011 freshmen cohorts on their perceptions of their academic and social experiences on campus, as well as degree completion expectations
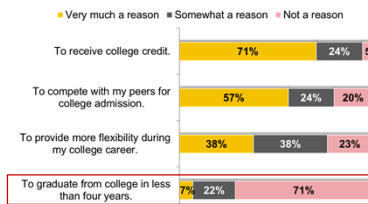
Key Findings

Entry

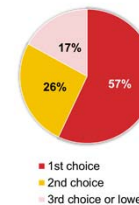**70% of freshmen enter with college credit...**

Did not enroll with credit 30%
Enrolled with college credit 70%

...and 1 in 10 freshmen enter with enough credit for sophomore standing...

but freshmen reported graduating in less than 4 years was not a major reason for earning credit.
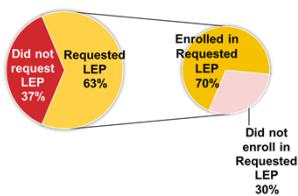
Very much a reason / Somewhat a reason / Not a reason

To receive college credit. — 71% / 24% / 5%
To compete with my peers for college admission. — 57% / 24% / 20%
To provide more flexibility during my college career. — 38% / 38% / 23%
To graduate from college in less than four years. — 7% / 22% / 71%

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

The majority of surveyed freshmen reported that UMD was their first choice when they entered

17%
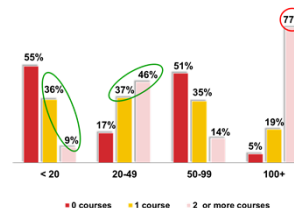26%
57%

- 1st choice
- 2nd choice
- 3rd choice or lower

Enrollment

Contrary to campus lore, many freshmen desiring a limited enrollment program* (LEP) enroll in the major of their choice

Did not request LEP 37%
Requested LEP 63%
Enrolled in Requested LEP 70%
Did not enroll in Requested LEP 30%

*Limited Enrollment Programs are competitive majors at the University of Maryland that control enrollment numbers to maintain program quality.

Overall, nearly half of freshmen enroll in a LEP major...

48% LEP / 52% non-LEP

...and over one third of freshmen begin in a STEM major—in line with UMD's goal of more STEM degrees

38% STEM / 62% non-STEM

While most freshmen take at least two courses with 100 or more students, 83% take a course with fewer than 50

< 20: 55% / 36% / 9%
20-49: 17% / 37% / 46%
50-99: 51% / 35% / 14%
100+: 5% / 19% / 77%

0 courses / 1 course / 2 or more courses

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Nearly 90% of surveyed freshmen reported feeling positive about UMD in their first semester

9% / 2% / 89%

- Positive or Very Positive
- Neutral
- Negative or Very Negative

Academics & Involvement

70% of freshmen earn at least a 3.0 GPA at the end of their first semester

4.0: 13%
3.5-3.99: 27%
3.0-3.499: 30%
2.3-2.99: 19%
< 2.3: 10%
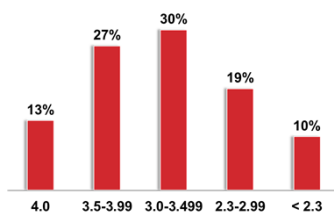
Likewise, the majority of surveyed freshmen reported feeling adjusted to and prepared for college work, but less than half were happy with their grades

Overall, my courses are intellectually stimulating. — 82%
I'm adjusting to the academic work of college. — 81%
I understand the purpose of the CORE (general education) program. — 76%
I feel adequately prepared for the academic demands here. — 75%
I am earning the grades I want. — 44%
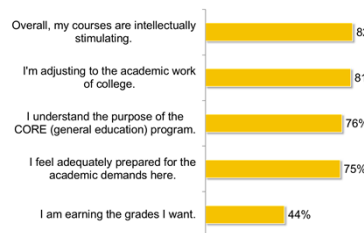
Most surveyed freshmen want to engage in research, international, and internship opportunities—activities UMD encourages

Living-learning programs — 31% / 25%
Research — 6% / 63%
International Experiences — 2% / 77%
Internships — 3% / 92%

- I am currently participating.
- I would like to participate.
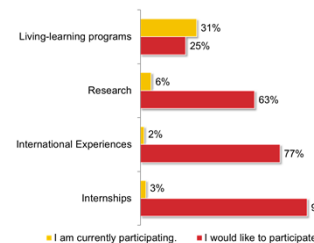
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Data Constraints and Outcomes

Completing this project required overcoming a few data challenges:
- **Challenges in our warehouse**
  - No flag for limited enrollment program applicants
  - Compartmentalization of student course data made it difficult to link to class size
- **Assessment Data Challenges**
  - Survey data is not longitudinal
  - Unable to query students' course evaluations

These challenges yielded two positive outcomes:
- Uncovered course data issues
- Led to warehouse improvements

Recommendations

Evaluate your data and determine which questions you can answer

Utilize existing campus surveys to complement IR data

Leverage campus surveys to inform your institution's strategic goals

Share your findings in a digestible format that is easy to comprehend for non-data/technical audiences

Anticipate the needs of your campus and conduct proactive analyses
"A lot of times, people don't know what they want until you show it to them." – Steve Jobs

Contact

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