

The James Madison University Student: Before, During, and After Enrollment 1993 to the Present

The Office of Institutional Research (OIR) at James Madison University (JMU) has recently concluded a series of studies to learn ways in which JMU's students have changed since the early 1990s. The first study explored changes in JMU students prior to their enrollment. The second study examined the changes in students after they enrolled and before they graduated. The third study reviewed what is known from alumni surveys about our graduates. The purpose of this paper is to summarize the findings of these three studies.

OIR undertook these historical studies to shed light on changes that usually occur over a period of years. Annual changes are normally small, but changes when viewed from a vantage of 10 to 15 years, can be significant. A variety of information sources were used. Data from official reports (enrollment census files, graduation files, etc.) were used as well as annual surveys (*First Year Survey* (formerly the *Freshman Survey*), *Continuing Student Survey*, and *Alumni Survey*).

Prospective Students

This study examined changes in student demographics and expectations prior to their enrollment. The major sources for this study were the admissions data files sent to the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) and the annual *First Year Survey* taken by students prior to their enrollment. Below are the major findings, with updates through Fall 2006.

- The number of applied, accepted and enrolled first-time freshmen increased significantly from Fall 1993 to Fall 2006. Applications increased 58 percent, accepted freshmen increased 111 percent and enrolled freshmen increased 88 percent. Overall, the freshman class grew from 2,082 to 3,748.
- JMU's acceptance rate increased from 47 percent in Fall 1993 to 68 percent in Fall 2005.
- Between Fall 1995 and Fall 2006, JMU's average SAT combined decreased slightly from 1,186 to 1,140.
- The percentage who reported in the *First Year Survey* that their average grade in high school was in the 'A' range increased from 43 percent to 55 percent. This positive indicator was associated with the increase of freshman women. Within specific skills, students reported increased preparation in study habits, computer skills and vocational skills. There was also a decline in the percentage that stated they were very well prepared students in mathematics and a slight decline in foreign languages preparedness.
- Virginia Tech remains the in-state school that respondents are most likely to report that they applied to and were admitted to. Out of state schools most likely applied to are the University of Delaware, Pennsylvania State University and the University of Maryland at College Park.
- Application trends indicate that male interest in JMU has increased in a similar way to female interest. However, acceptance rates for women increased 30 points over the past 13 years while the rates for men increased slightly after six years of decline that began in Fall 1996.
- The increase in the percentage of women in the freshman class was associated with trends in the *First Year Survey* questions that vary by gender. For example, analysis of the annual survey has found that men are more likely to adopt a vocational philosophy of education and this historical study found that the percentage of students that selected this philosophy declined over the past ten years. On the other hand, women tend to hold a social philosophy of education and the percentage that selected this philosophy increased over time.
- There has been a slight decline in the percentage of non-white students over the past 13 years. African-American freshman enrollment dropped from 167 in Fall 1993 to 61 in Fall 2004, but has increased to 184 by Fall 2006. Overall, non-white enrollment decreased, from 14 percent in Fall 1993 to 11 percent in Fall 2006.
- The geographic representation of freshmen was basically steady from Fall 1993 to Fall 2006. The 13-year average enrollment for out-of-state freshmen was 34 percent. This percentage varied from 30 percent to 38 percent without a trend over the 13-year period. Within Virginia, 45 percent of the in-state freshmen have come from the Northern Virginia region.

Current Students

This study examines the changes in student demographics (majors, enrollment, etc.) and attitudes over this period. This study does not examine individual changes, but aggregate change over the years. The major sources for this study were the headcount data files sent to SCHEV and the annual *Continuing Student Survey* taken by students in classes during the Fall term. Below are the major findings with updates through Fall 2006.

- Total on-campus enrollment grew 53 percent, from 11,343 in Fall 1992 to 17,393 in Fall 2006.
 - Undergraduate degree-seeking enrollment grew 60 percent, from 9,787 to 15,653.
 - The undergraduate portion of total enrollment grew from 86 percent to 90 percent.
 - Graduate degree-seeking enrollment decreased from 866 in Fall 1992 to 733 in Fall 2000. Enrollment has since increased to 1,138 in Fall 2006. The overall increase was 31 percent.
 - The graduate degree-seeking and non-degree-seeking portion of total enrollment declined from 10 to 8 percent.
 - Non-degree-seeking student enrollment varied without trend from 690 to 584, with a high of 888 in Fall 1998.
 - The non-degree-seeking portion of total enrollment varied between 3 and 6 percent.
- For undergraduate students, the following major changes and trends were found:
 - JMU maintained both a highly selective reputation and high graduation rate. By gender and race/ethnicity, graduation rates were better than national figures for selective institutions.
 - Gender diversity decreased. Female enrollment increased almost twice as much as male. The female portion of undergraduates grew from 55 percent to 61 percent.
 - Racial/ethnic diversity decreased. Asian/Pacific Islanders, Hispanics and Nonresident Aliens grew. African-Americans declined through Fall 2004, and American Indian/Alaska Natives continued in small numbers.
 - Out-of-state undergraduate enrollment grew from 25 percent to 29 percent.
 - Full-time undergraduate enrollment grew from 96 percent to 97 percent – highest among college and universities in the United States with enrollments over 15,000.
 - Baccalaureate degrees conferred grew 60 percent, from 2,187 to 3,501 in 2005-06.
 - One-year retention and six-year graduation rates dipped slightly over the period, then returned to 92 percent and 80 percent, respectively. African-American graduation rates increased from 55 percent for the Fall 1992 cohort to 73 percent for the Fall 1999 cohort, reducing the dropout rate by more than one-third.
 - Most popular majors remain somewhat constant: psychology, biology, interdisciplinary liberal studies and media arts and design (formerly mass communications).
 - Students remain middle class as indicated by their responses to questions regarding family income, parents' formal education and personal achievements, philosophies and values.
- For graduate students, degree-seeking and not, the following major changes and trends were found:
 - Out-of-state graduate enrollment grew from 15 percent to 25 percent.
 - Gender diversity varied without trend between 61 and 69 percent female.
 - Racial/ethnic diversity increased. Although the number of minorities was small, they increased from 8 percent to 12 percent of graduate student enrollment. African-Americans were the largest minority group with 39 students in Fall 2006.
 - Full-time graduate enrollment grew from 40 percent to 56 percent.
 - Average credit hours taken per semester by full-time graduate students increased slightly from 10.49 to 10.92.
 - Graduate degrees conferred (Master's, Educational Specialist and Doctoral) grew 78 percent, from 295 to 526.
- Changes and trends in student attitudes from the *Continuing Student Survey* were:
 - JMU student characteristics and attitudes toward the university remain remarkably positive, and in many instances, have improved. For example, the percentage of students that express high levels of satisfaction with JMU in general has remained at 94 percent since 1990.

Alumni

This study examined what has been learned about alumni within two years of their graduation. The major data sources for this study have been the alumni studies conducted by the Center for Assessment and Research Studies (CARS), Academic Advising and Career Development (AACD) and OIR. Below are the major findings.

- Nearly all JMU alumni report being satisfied with their JMU experience. This trend has been consistently high from 1996 to 2006.
- Nearly all alumni respondents are likely to recommend JMU to a colleague, friend or relative.
- The majority of alumni are satisfied with the cost of their JMU undergraduate education.
- Alumni have been consistently satisfied with campus life, intellectual and cultural environment/extra-curricular activities.
- New graduates are successful in finding employment, and the longer they are out of school the better the employment opportunities reported.
 - On average, 70 percent of alumni who graduated within the last year are employed.
 - Ninety percent of alumni who are two to five years from graduation are employed.
 - On average, 61 percent of new graduates are employed in-state. Fifty-four percent of alumni who are two to five years from graduation are employed in-state.
- In general, the longer the timeframe since alumni completed their undergraduate degree, the more likely they are to have taken graduate coursework.
 - Forty-four percent of alumni who are five years from graduation are taking or have taken graduate-level courses; whereas about 28 percent who are two-years from graduation and 18 percent who are up to one-year from graduation have done so.
 - There is an increase of 7 percent of alumni from 2004 to 2005, who are up to 60 days from graduation, who have taken graduate coursework.
- There exists a consistently high rating for the JMU undergraduate major helping performance in the workplace.
- JMU alumni believe that JMU prepared them academically to attend graduate school.
- There has been an increase in the ways that alumni plan to keep (or have kept) in touch with JMU.
 - In 2002, at least 50 percent of alumni favored the JMU website and visits to campus.
 - The 2005 alumni favored the JMU website, homecoming, visits to campus, alumni association website, email or phone to former faculty or staff, the alumni association at JMU, and the college website as ways to keep in touch with JMU. This may indicate changes going on internally to JMU to increase outreach.
 - Overall JMU alumni, regardless of how long they have been away from JMU, report that networking and internet resources helped them find professional employment.
- General Education (GenEd) at JMU has had a positive influence on JMU alumni in many ways.
 - Ratings are consistently high to moderate in assessing for the influence of GenEd on alumni in the following areas: communication skills, information literacy, critical thinking skills, development of awareness of both physical and emotional wellness, problem-solving skills in science and mathematics, and understanding the development of western civilization and its interaction with other traditions within the global community.