

FIRST-YEAR STUDENT SURVEY February 2021

The First-Year Student Survey report shares information with the university community about the incoming James Madison University (JMU) freshmen students' attitudes, values, perceptions and experiences. We hope that through sharing this information a better understanding will develop about the JMU student.

JMU requested incoming students to complete the First-Year Student Survey online. The survey collects responses to questions about respondents' decision to attend college and, more specifically, James Madison University; their experiences in high school; and their attitudes, values and beliefs. Demographic data were also requested.

This report displays data obtained via the 4,274 usable surveys from the incoming freshmen during March, April, May, June, and July.

DEMOGRAPHIC COMPOSITION OF INCOMING FRESHMAN CLASS

Similar to previous years, the incoming freshman class is predominately female (58%), Caucasian-American/White (77%), and 18 years old or younger (Tables 1-3). First-year students were asked to indicate their political preferences (Table 4). Thirty-six percent of the respondents indicated a liberal preference and thirty-four percent reported a middle of the road preference, while thirty percent indicated a conservative preference. Racial minorities were more likely than Caucasians to report being politically liberal.

ACTIVITIES AND EDUCATION IN HIGH SCHOOL

Over half of incoming students reported graduating in the top twenty-five percent of their high school class (62%) and obtaining average grades of A- and higher (61%) (Tables 5 & 6). Like in previous years, more than one-half of this year's respondents report that they feel very well prepared from high school in the areas of reading and social studies (Table 7). Female students said more often than male students that they were very well prepared in reading, composition, foreign languages, artistic skills, study skills, and time management. Males more often said they were very well prepared in social studies, computer skills, and mathematical skills. Both males and females responded almost equally that they feel very well prepared from high school in the areas of science, musical skills, and vocational skills.

First-year students were also asked to indicate the areas in which they felt they would need special tutoring or remedial work while in college (Table 8). Fifty-three percent indicated a need for special tutoring or remedial work in mathematics, thirty percent in foreign languages, and twenty-nine percent in science.

Similar to results in previous years, more than one-half of this year's students said they were very active in organized athletics, and school and community service (Table 9). Female students stated more often than male students that they were very active in extra-curricular activities including academic clubs, foreign language/international clubs, fine arts groups, part-time work, school spirit clubs, religious groups, publications, and school and community service, while male students were more active in the areas of recreational sports and organized athletics.

ATTENDING COLLEGE/ACADEMIC GOALS/EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHIES

Similar to past respondents, three-fourths or more of this year's first-year students said that the following were very important in their decision to attend college: to learn more about the things that interest them, to be able to get a better job, to meet new and interesting people, to gain a general education and appreciation of ideas, and to be on their own and make their own decisions (Table 10). Male students responded more often than female students that to be able to make more money (42%) and do what friends were doing (50%) were very important reasons in deciding to attend college. Females responded more often than males that the following were very important reasons in deciding to attend college: to meet new and interesting people (64%); to gain a general education and appreciation for ideas (64%); to learn about things that interest me (62%); to be on their own and make their own decisions (64%); to develop a global awareness (69%); to become more cultured (67%); to get a better job (62%); to improve reading and study skills (67%); and to prepare themselves for graduate school (70%).

The majority of first-year students applied to two or more colleges (Table 11). Thirty-four percent applied to and twenty-two percent of respondents were accepted to six or more other colleges (Table 12). Eighty percent of students reported that JMU was their first choice of colleges (Table 13). At least two out of three of this year's respondents plan to pursue a degree beyond the baccalaureate (Table 14). Twelve percent of respondents reported that they were first-generation students (Table 15). First-generation students were more likely to report that a doctoral degree is the highest academic degree they intend to obtain while non-first generations students were more likely to report that master's degree is the highest academic degree they intend to obtain.

Incoming freshmen were asked to indicate their own philosophies concerning the emphasis of higher education (Table 16). Forty-nine percent of this year's respondents said they hold a vocational philosophy of education, which is viewed as preparation for an occupation. Twenty-nine percent of respondents hold a social philosophy of higher education, where social life and loyalty to college is emphasized. Following at fourteen percent was intellectual philosophy, where emphasis is placed on scholarly pursuit of knowledge. Eight percent of the respondents have an artistic philosophy viewed as having an emphasis on ideas, art forms, and individuality.

PERCEPTIONS OF AND REASONS FOR CHOOSING TO ATTEND JMU

Similar to prior years, more than half of students reported that campus visits were the most important means for learning about JMU (Table 17). The supportive atmosphere of JMU, the academic reputation, and the extracurricular opportunities and social life at JMU were cited as the most important reasons for choosing JMU by almost ninety percent of the incoming first-year students

(Table 18). Over eighty percent stated that the appearance and setting of the campus, the offering of majors of interests, and reputation of JMU's graduates obtaining desirable jobs were all very important in their decision to attend JMU. Sixty percent or greater of the respondents said that the reputation of JMU's graduates attending top graduate schools; the size of JMU; being able to identify with fellow students; ability to live on campus; range and availability of student services were very important reasons for choosing JMU. Ninety percent or more of the respondents view JMU as friendly, good, supportive, open and accessible, (Table 21). Racial minorities were more likely to view JMU as not diverse.

Listed in the following tables are summaries of data collected in 2020 (2019, 2018 and 2017 figures, when available, are in parentheses).

For more information about this survey, please contact the Office of Institutional Research via phone: 540.568.7208, or email: ask-oir@jmu.edu.

Table 1	Gender of the Respondents
	2020 (2019/ 2018/ 2017)
Females	58%(59%/ 60%/ 59%)
Males	41%(40%/ 40%/ 41%)
Transgender	0%(0%/ ---/ ---)
Non-binary/Non-conforming	0%(0%/ ---/ ---)
Other	0%(0%/ ---/ ---)

Table 2	Race of the Respondents
	2020(2019/ 2018/ 2017)
Caucasian-American/White	77%(80%/ 80%/ 80%)
Hispanic	8%(5%/ 5%/ 5%)
African-American/Black	5%(5%/ 5%/ 5%)
Multiracial	5%(4%/ 4%/ 4%)
Asian/Pacific Islander	4%(6%/ 6%/ 5%)
Unreported	1%(1%/ 1%/ 1%)
Native American	0%(0%/ 0%/ 0%)

Table 3	Age of the Respondents
	2020(2019/ 2018/ 2017)
18 years or younger	94%(93%/ 94%/ 94%)
19 years or older	6%(7%/ 6%/ 6%)

Table 4	Political Preference
	2020(2019/ 2018/ 2017)
Liberal	36%(35%/ 36%/ 34%)
Middle-of-the-Road	34%(38%/ 35%/ 34%)
Conservative	30%(28%/ 29%/ 33%)

Table 5	Average Grade in High School
	2020(2019/ 2018/ 2017)
A or A+	22%(22%/ 22%/ 21%)
A-	39%(37%/ 39%/ 35%)
B+	29%(29%/ 29%/ 32%)
B	9%(11%/ 9%/ 12%)
B-	1%(1%/ 1%/ 1%)
C+	0%(0%/ 0%/ 0%)
C	0%(0%/ 0%/ 0%)

Table 6	Approximate High School Rank in Graduating Class
	2020(2019/ 2018/ 2017)
Top ten percent	19%(18% 19%/ 18%)
Top twenty-five percent	43%(44% 49%/ 48%)
Top fifty percent	36%(35% 31%/ 32%)
Bottom fifty percent	3%(3% 2%/ 2%)

Table 7	Areas Very Well Prepared from High School
	2020(2019/ 2018/ 2017)
Reading	56%(54%/ 61%/ 60%)
Social Studies	56%(51%/ 55%/ 53%)
Composition	50%(47%/ 53%/ 50%)
Science	45%(39%/ 43%/ 43%)
Time management	35%(34%/ 41%/ 40%)
Mathematical skills	31%(32%/ 37%/ 38%)
Study habits	31%(30%/ 36%/ 34%)
Vocational skills	29%(27%/ 29%/ 27%)
Computer skills	27%(27%/ 28%/ 29%)

Foreign languages	23%(21%/ 21%/ 18%)
Musical skills	23%(19%/ 21%/ 20%)
Artistic skills	23%(18%/ 21%/ 19%)

Table 8 Need for Special Tutoring or Remedial Work

	2020(2019/ 2018/2017)
Mathematics	53%(54%/ 53%/ 53%)
Foreign language	30%(25%/ 28%/ 29%)
Science	29%(31%/ 28%/ 28%)
Writing	22%(19%/ 19%/ 19%)
English	13%(12%/ 12%/ 10%)
Social studies	8%(8%/ 8%/ 8%)
Reading	7%(7%/ 6%/ 6%)

Table 9 Areas Very Active During High School

	2020(2019/ 2018/2017)
Organized athletics	61%(60%/ 62%/ 63%)
School and community service	53%(49%/ 57%/ 56%)
Part-time work	49%(50%/ 50%/ 49%)
Recreational sports	42%(39%/ 41%/ 41%)
School spirit clubs cheer-leaders, pep, drill, etc.	32%(31%/ 31%/ 32%)
Academic clubs	28%(28%/ 28%/ 27%)
Fine arts groups	22%(20%/ 22%/ 21%)
Religious clubs	17%(16%/ 18%/ 18%)
Foreign Language International Clubs	12%(11%/ 11%/ 11%)
Publications	6%(6%/ 6%/ 7%)

Table 10 Reasons Considered Very Important in Deciding to Attend College

	2020(2019/ 2018/2017)
Learn more about the things that interest me	90%(90%/ 90%/ 90%)
Be able to get a better job	87%(87%/ 87%/ 87%)
Meet new and interesting people	86%(84%/ 85%/ 83%)
Gain a general education and appreciation of ideas	82%(84%/ 82%/ 81%)
Be on my own and make my own decisions	81%(80%/ 80%/ 79%)
Be able to make more money	62%(65%/ 67%/ 69%)
Make me a more cultured person	62%(60%/ 61%/ 56%)
Prepare myself for graduate or professional school	59%(62%/ 64%/ 67%)
Improve reading and study skills	59%(62%/ 60%/ 59%)
Developing a global awareness	55%(54%/ 54%/ 51%)
Enhance my social life	42%(40%/ 41%/ 39%)
Please my parents	22%(23%/ 22%/ 26%)

Meet my future spouse	8%(9%/ 9%/ 10%)
Do what my friends are doing	4%(4%/ 4%/ 4%)

Table 11 Number of Other Colleges – Applied

	2020(2019/ 2018/ 2017)
None	6%(4%/ 4%/ 4%)
One	8%(7%/ 7%/ 6%)
Two	11%(12%/ 11%/ 12%)
Three	13%(15%/ 16%/ 17%)
Four	15%(16%/ 17%/ 17%)
Five	14%(15%/ 15%/ 14%)
Six or more	34%(32%/ 31%/ 29%)

Table 12 Number of Other Colleges – Accepted

	2020(2019/ 2018/ 2017)
None	0%(0%/ 0%/ 0%)
One	20%(20%/ 19%/ 17%)
Two	16%(18%/ 18%/ 19%)
Three	16%(18%/ 20%/ 20%)
Four	15%(15%/ 14%/ 16%)
Five	11%(12%/ 12%/ 11%)
Six or more	22%(18%/ 16%/ 18%)

Table 13 JMU as Choice Among Other Colleges

	2020(2019/ 2018/ 2017)
First Choice	80%(80%/ 78%/ 80%)
Second Choice	17%(16%/ 18%/ 17%)
Third Choice	3%(4%/ 4%/ 3%)

Table 14 Highest Academic Degree Respondents Intend to Obtain

	2020(2019/ 2018/ 2017)
Baccalaureate degree	35%(31%/ 34%/ 31%)
Master’s degree	44%(46%/ 44%/ 46%)
Specialist degree e.g., Ed.S.	1%(1%/ 1%/ 1%)
Doctoral degree e.g., Ph.D., Ed.D., D.B.A.	10%(12%/ 11%/ 11%)
Professional degree e.g., medicine, law, theology	10%(11%/ 11%/ 12%)
Not a degree seeking student	0%(0%/ 0%/ 0%)

Table 15 First Generation Status

	2020(2019/ 2018/ 2017)
No	87%(---/ ---/ ---)
Yes	12%(---/ ---/ ---)
Unknown/Unreported	0%(---/ ---/ ---)

	2020(2019/ 2018/ 2017)
Vocational philosophy education viewed as preparation for an occupation	49%(49%/ 50%/ 52%)
Social philosophy social life and loyalty to college emphasized	29%(28%/ 25%/ 24%)
Intellectual philosophy emphasis on scholarly pursuit of knowledge	14%(17%/ 18%/ 19%)
Artistic philosophy emphasis on ideas, art forms, individuality	8%(7%/ 7%/ 5%)

	2020(2019/ 2018/ 2017)
Campus visits	67%(66%/ 68%/ 65%)
Relatives	30%(28%/ 30%/ 32%)
Alumni	21%(21%/ 21%/ 18%)
Friends	19%(19%/ 17%/ 19%)
People at my high school	15%(14%/ 12%/ 10%)
JMU web-site	15%(13%/ 12%/ 13%)
JMU representative	12%(11%/ 10%/ 12%)
Material I received in the mail	9%(9%/ 6%/ 6%)

	2020(2019/ 2018/ 2017)
Supportive atmosphere of JMU	89%(89%/ 87%/ 88%)
JMU has good extracurricular opportunities and social life	89%(87%/ 86%/ 87%)
JMU has a good academic reputation	88%(88%/ 87%/ 89%)
Appearance and setting of JMU	86%(87%/ 88%/ 87%)
JMU offers a major of interest to me	86%(90%/ 89%/ 88%)
Reputation of JMU's graduates obtaining desirable jobs	86%(84%/ 83%/ 83%)
Live on the campus	68%(67%/ 67%/ 67%)
Reputation of JMU's graduates attending top graduate schools	68%(67%/ 67%/ 68%)
Range and availability of student services	68%(61%/ 58%/ 56%)
Size of JMU	65%(65%/ 64%/ 61%)
Identify with fellow students	65%(61%/ 61%/ 60%)
Change in scenery or location	57%(51%/ 50%/ 47%)
Someone who had been here before advised me to attend	42%(44%/ 40%/ 40%)
JMU has low tuition	36%(36%/ 33%/ 35%)
Friend suggested attending	28%(29%/ 27%/ 25%)
Offered financial aid	20%(20%/ 17%/ 18%)
Employers' suggestion	15%(8%/ 8%/ 8%)
Relatives wanted me to come here	15%(15%/ 15%/ 16%)
Guidance counselor advised me	12%(13%/ 11%/ 12%)

My teacher advised me	9%(9%/ 8%/ 7%)
To help retain my current employment	7%(5%/ 5%/ 4%)
JMU representative recruited me	4%(5%/ 4%/ 4%)
Not accepted anywhere else	3%(4%/ 3%/ 3%)
I wanted to live at home	3%(3%/ 3%/ 3%)

	2020(2019/ 2018/ 2017)
Enthusiastic about JMU	95%(95%/ 93%/ 94%)
Happy to be at JMU	94%(93%/ 91%/ 93%)
Sense of belonging	86%(89%/ 89%/ 90%)
See myself as a member of the JMU community	83%(85%/ 85%/ 86%)
Feel a part of the JMU community	80%(85%/ 83%/ 85%)
Believe JMU is one of the best schools in the nation	80%(82%/ 80%/ 81%)

	2020(2019/ 2018/ 2017)
Relationships with other students, student groups and activities	62%(57%/ 55%/ 55%)
Development of academic scholarly/intellectual qualities	60%(59%/ 58%/ 60%)
Personal growth self-awareness	60%(58%/ 56%/ 58%)
Personal development as citizen	55%(53%/ 52%/ 52%)
Personal relevance and practical value of your courses	52%(49%/ 48%/ 47%)
Development of vocational and occupational competencies	50%(45%/ 44%/ 45%)
Development of aesthetic, expressive, and creative qualities	47%(43%/ 42%/ 43%)
Being critical, evaluative and analytical	46%(48%/ 46%/ 47%)

Table 21**Student Perceptions of JMU**

		2020(2019/2018)
Good	Neutral	Bad
97%(96%/96%)	3%(3%/ 4%)	0%(0%/ 0%)
Friendly	Neutral	Cold
96%(97%/96%)	4%(3%/ 4%)	0%(0%/ 0%)
Supportive	Neutral	Non-Supportive
95%(95%/95%)	5%(4%/ 5%)	0%(0%/ 1%)
Open and Accessible	Neutral	Closed and Inaccessible
91%(92%/91%)	8%(8%/ 8%)	1%(1%/ 1%)
Progressive	Neutral	Regressive
89%(89%/89%)	11%(11%/11%)	0%(0%/ 1%)
Intellectual	Neutral	Nonintellectual
88%(88%/88%)	11%(11%/11%)	1%(1%/ 1%)
Flexible	Neutral	Rigid
86%(87%/95%)	13%(12%/12%)	1%(1%/ 1%)
Emotionally Healthy	Neutral	Causing Anxiety & Frustration
83%(84%/85%)	16%(15%/13%)	2%(2%/ 2%)
Right Size	Neutral	Too Large
83%(83%/82%)	13%(13%/14%)	4%(3%/ 4%)
Integrated	Neutral	Fragmented
79%(80%/80%)	20%(19%/19%)	2%(2%/ 2%)
Challenging	Neutral	Not Challenging
68%(76%/78%)	29%(22%/20%)	3%(3%/ 2%)
Sensitive	Neutral	Indifferent
62%(67%/68%)	35%(31%/29%)	3%(3%/ 3%)
Diverse	Neutral	Not Diverse
62%(61%/61%)	25%(24%/24%)	13%(15%/15%)
Traditional	Neutral	Experimental
43%(44%/47%)	44%(42%/41%)	12%(14%/12%)

Table 22**Studies Abroad Intentions**

	2020(2019/ 2018/ 2017)
I plan to attend a JMU Studies Abroad Program	49%(54%/ 58%/ 56%)
I do not plan to study abroad	47%(42%/ 39%/ 40%)
I plan to pursue an international internship	3%(3%/ 3%/ 3%)
I plan to attend a foreign university with an international exchange program	1%(1%/ 1%/ 1%)

Table 23**Costs of Attending JMU Paid Directly by the Student and His/Her Family**

	2020(2019/ 2018/ 2017)
80-100% of the total costs	57%(56%/ 61%/ 58%)
60-79% of the total costs	12%(15%/ 12%/ 11%)
40-59% of the total costs	12%(11%/ 11%/ 12%)
20-39% of the total costs	7%(8%/ 7%/ 7%)
0-19% of the total costs	11%(10%/ 10%/ 12%)

Table 24**Type of Internet Access Utilized from Parents' Home**

	2020(2019/ 2018/ 2017)
Cable Modem	75%(72%/ 71%/ 71%)
Satellite	11%(13%/ 13%/ 12%)
DSL-ADSL	8%(9%/ 10%/ 11%)
ISDN	3%(4%/ 4%/ 4%)
Do not use internet access from parent's home	2%(2%/ 2%/ 2%)
Dial-Up	0%(0%/ 1%/ 1%)

Table 25**Computer Usage on Campus**

	2020(2019/ 2018/ 2017)
I will bring a laptop computer or tablet computer	85%(86%/ 87%/ 89%)
I will bring a computer but do not know what type	8%(7%/ 6%/ 5%)
I will bring a desktop and laptop computer or tablet computer	5%(5%/ 5%/ 4%)
I will bring a desktop computer	2%(2%/ 2%/ 1%)
I do not plan to bring a computer	1%(1%/ 1%/ 1%)

Table 26**Printer Needs on Campus**

	2020(2019/ 2018/ 2017)
I will use a printer supplied in a lab	62%(60%/ 55%/ 55%)
I will bring a printer to campus	31%(34%/ 38%/ 40%)
I will use a friend's printer	5%(5%/ 6%/ 4%)
I do not need a printer	2%(2%/ 1%/ 1%)

Table 27**Positive Work Ethics Most Like Me**

	2020(2019/ 2018/ 2017)
I am a hard worker	53%(54%/ 54%/ 53%)
I am diligent	42%(43%/ 42%/ 42%)
I have achieved a goal that took years of work	39%(38%/ 38%/ 36%)
I have overcome setbacks to conquer an important challenge	34%(35%/ 35%/ 33%)
I finish whatever I begin	29%(31%/ 31%/ 31%)
Setbacks don't discourage me	16%(16%/ 17%/ 17%)

Table 28**Negative Work Ethics Most Like Me**

	2020	(2019/	2018/	2017)
I become interested in new pursuits every few months	13%	(12%/	12%/	11%)
New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones	12%	(10%/	10%/	9%)
I have difficulty maintaining my focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete	9%	(8%/	8%/	7%)
I have been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest	8%	(7%/	7%/	6%)
My interests change from year to year	7%	(7%/	7%/	7%)
I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one	4%	(4%/	3%/	4%)

