

# SNAPSHOT

CAWG

of  
Student Experiences

Our 2009 Student  
Respondents said:

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND  
NOVEMBER, 2009  
ISSUE 1

Each spring the Assessing Campus Experiences Subgroup (ACES) administers the University of Maryland Student Survey (UMSS) to juniors and seniors. The most recent version (2009) was administered in Professional Writing classes in Spring 2009. Of about 2,560 students enrolled in Professional Writing, 1,996 (78%) completed the survey, yielding 1,654 usable responses. Use caution when generalizing.

## I AM HERE TO LEARN, BUT OTHERS...

There was a wide gap between respondents' assessment of their own commitment to learn and their assessment of others' commitment. The vast majority agreed or strongly agreed that they want to be here to learn (89%) and come prepared for class (83%). Yet only 52% agreed or strongly agreed that others want to be here to learn, (a gap of 37%), and only 37% agreed or strongly agreed that others come prepared for class, (a gap of 46%).

One alternative to learning is "partying." While only 25% reported that they want to be here to party, 67% agreed or strongly agreed that others do (a gap of 42%).

Related to this finding, 41% said they seek substance-free social interactions, but only 13% indicated that others do (a gap of 28%).

% Agree/Strongly Agree	I...	Most Students...	% Gap (I vs. Most)
Come prepared for class.	83	37	46
Want to be here to party.	25	67	-42
Want to be here to learn.	89	52	37
Seek substance free Interactions.	41	13	28

### Questions to consider:

- ⇒ Could social desirability bias be a factor in the gap in responses to questions about being here to learn or to party? Perhaps respondents are more likely to give a socially desirable answer for themselves ("be here to learn") than for others ("be here to party").
- ⇒ Can research on social norms marketing, which suggests that perceptions of peers can alter personal behavior, be applied in this situation? For example, when students perceive there is a campus culture of heavy drinking, they may be more likely to drink more<sup>1</sup>. In this case, if students perceive others as less serious about their academics, what effect might this have on their own studying and partying habits?

<sup>1</sup>Wechsler, H., Nelson, T.F., Lee, J.E., Seibring, M., Lewis, C., & Keeling, R.P. (2003). Perception and Reality: A National Evaluation of Social Norms Marketing Interventions to Reduce College Students' Heavy Alcohol Use. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, 64.

### IN UPCOMING ISSUES:

- Academic Challenge at UM
- Sustainability
- Diversity



**I AM HERE TO LEARN, BUT OTHERS...** (CONT. FROM P. 1)

% Agree/Strongly Agree	Transfer	Direct Admit	Women	Men	UM Affiliated Housing	Non-UM Affiliated Housing
I want to be here to learn.	90	89	<b>92</b>	<b>87</b>	91	88
Most students want to be here to learn.	<b>58</b>	<b>49</b>	54	51	<b>48</b>	<b>54</b>
I want to be here to party.	<b>17</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>23</b>
Most students want to be here to party.	<b>62</b>	<b>69</b>	66	68	<b>73</b>	<b>64</b>

Differences in these items exist by admission status, gender and residence. Generally, transfer respondents seem to perceive that UM students are more studious than direct admits. The same pattern exists for students in non-university housing when compared to those in university housing. Transfers and students in non-university housing were more likely to indicate *others* are here to learn and less likely to agree that both *themselves* and *others* are here to party (see Table).

Women and men respondents differed in their perceptions of their own engagement, but generally had similar perceptions of other students' engagement. A greater proportion of women (92%) agreed they want to be here to learn compared to the proportion of men (87%), and a greater proportion of men (32%) wanted to be here to party compared to women (19%). Differences by race were examined but no consistent pattern emerged.

Note: **Bold** indicates significant difference between two groups (Transfer v. Direct Admit, Women v. Men, UM Affiliated v. Non-UM Affiliated Housing)

**WHERE AND HOW DOES LEARNING HAPPEN?**

The vast majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed they want to be here to learn (89%) and come prepared for class (83%). However, the data suggest few students were partaking in some activities that facilitate learning. For example, few students reported they engage in some of the traditional forms of learning outside the classroom. Only 33% agreed they interact with faculty outside class and 38% agreed they engage in academic discussions outside class. Additionally, it appears respondents did not prefer some of the more interactive ways of learning. Only 48% enjoy group work as part of classes and only 37% like online course assignments.

% Agree/Strongly Agree	I...
Want to be here to learn.	89
Come prepared for class.	83
Find the classroom environment challenging.	61
Enjoy group work as part of class.	48
Regularly engage in academic discussion with peers outside of class.	38
Like on-line course assignments.	37
Interact with faculty outside of class.	33

**Questions to consider:**

- ⇒ Do respondents like the idea of learning but do not behave accordingly? Or do they demonstrate a desire to learn in forms not examined in our survey?
- ⇒ The data suggest few respondents were engaged in learning-facilitating behaviors outside the classroom. Do respondents extend learning outside the classroom in other ways? If not, where does learning happen? Do students take a more compartmentalized approach, where they see learning as a task for in-class time?
- ⇒ Less than 2/3 (61%) think they or most students find the classroom environment challenging. Would more feel challenged if they were participating in learning behaviors such as outside the classroom faculty interactions and peer discussions on academics?