

***Graduate Student Exit Survey Report, 2005-2006***

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***I. Introduction***

George Mason University awarded 2,632 graduate degrees (excluding law degrees and graduate certificates) to 2,626 graduates in the 2005-2006 academic year. Five graduates received two master's degrees and one graduate received one master's and one Ph.D. degree. Eighty-seven percent of the graduates (n=2,278) completed the 2005-2006 Graduate Student Exit Survey when they applied for graduation. They are representative of the 2006 graduating class in sex, ethnicity and age composition. Among the respondents:

- 134 received a doctoral degree (for a response rate of 82%)
- 2,144 received at least one master's degree (for a response rate of 87%)

The Survey includes five sections: *academic program evaluation, degree emphases, thesis/dissertation experience, student satisfaction, and student background information*. This *In Focus* reports the University-level results from the 2006 Survey, including a three-year trend analysis. It categorizes respondents into two groups, master's and doctoral students, and compares student responses accordingly. Detailed information on college and program level results is available at <http://assessment.gmu.edu/Results/GraduatingGrad/2006/index.cfm>.

**<Percentages throughout this report may not sum to 100% due to rounding!>**

- *Unlike previous years, students from the Mason Law School did not complete the 2005-06 Graduate Student Exit Survey. A separate exit survey for law students was administered instead, and the results will soon be available.*
- *For trend analyses, all the University-level results prior to 2006 were recalculated to exclude law students.*

***II. Highlights******Academic Program Evaluation***

- Doctoral students rated their academic programs *significantly higher* than master's students on 15 out of 19 statements. Two thirds of doctoral students "strongly agreed" that they met their advisors at appropriate intervals to discuss their program of study – the figure is 28% for master's students.

***Degree Emphases***

- Significant differences exist between what students say is the emphasis of their degree programs and what they think should be emphasized. Specifically, both master's and doctoral students indicate that their programs already place a high emphasis on connections between ideas and practices, theoretical knowledge, research, and applied research, but they feel these areas should be emphasized even more.

***Thesis/Dissertation Experience***

- Only 38% of master's students responded to the questions about thesis experiences mainly for two reasons: no thesis was required for their program or they had not completed one when they filled out the survey.
- Students who answered these questions had very good experiences with their thesis/dissertation advisors.

### ***Student Satisfaction***

- Doctoral students are significantly *more satisfied* than master's students with three areas: communication about academic policies and procedures, academic advising, and mentoring.
- Satisfaction with advising has slightly, but steadily dropped among master's students since 2003. About 15-19% of master's students were dissatisfied with academic advising in the past four years.
- 95% of students are "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their overall Mason experiences, and levels of satisfaction do not vary by degree type.

### ***Choice of Graduate School***

- Over the past three years, about 80-82% of master's students have said Mason was their first choice among all the graduate schools they had considered; the percentage was between 70-78% among doctoral students.

### ***Enrollment, Working and Debt***

- For three consecutive years, there has been a decrease in the percentage of master's students who said they pursued their graduate degrees primarily full-time (36% for 2006).
- Among the 2006 graduating class, 39% of doctoral students had a part-time graduate assistantship for most of the time during graduate school, compared to 7% of master's students.
- 44% of master's students and 58% of doctoral students had NO educational debt upon graduation.

## ***III. Academic Program Evaluation***

Students were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with 19 statements regarding their graduate programs (see Table 1). On 15 statements, the ratings of doctoral students are *significantly higher* than those of master's students. Trend analyses (as shown in Tables 2 and 3) also reveal that the 2006 doctoral graduates are the most satisfied cohort in the past three years.

### **1. Faculty and Teaching, 2006 Results**

As Table 1 shows, over 90% of both master's and doctoral respondents "strongly agreed" or "agreed" with the following statements about faculty in their programs:

- # 1. Faculty members were well qualified to teach their courses (96% of master's students and 100% of doctoral students either "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with this statement)
- # 2. Interactions among students and faculty are characterized by mutual respect
- # 3. Faculty members prepare carefully for their graduate courses
- # 4. Faculty in my department were interested in the welfare and professional development of graduate students
- # 5. Faculty in my department work together to achieve program goals
- # 6. The courses I took were well taught

Except for statement #5, the average ratings for doctoral students are *significantly higher* than those for master's students, because *more doctoral students* selected "strongly agree" for these statements than master's students. For statement #7 (see Table 1), "There is good communication between faculty and students regarding student needs, concerns and suggestions." 86% of all respondents either "strongly agreed" or "agreed," and there is no statistically significant difference between master's and doctoral students.

Compared to the previous 7 statements, statements #8-10 received relatively lower ratings from master's students:

- # 8. Faculty in my department were helpful and supportive in my search for professional employment: over 30% of the respondents selected "don't know" or "not applicable" for this statement. In the *Comment* section, some students said they didn't need such support, while others said such support did NOT exist in their program.
- # 9. There are many opportunities outside the classroom for interaction between students and faculty: it received the *lowest* average rating from doctoral students among all 19 statements. Still, one third of doctoral students selected "strongly agree" and half selected "agree."
- # 10. My advisor and I met at appropriate intervals to discuss my program of study: it received the *lowest* average rating from master's students and the *highest* rating from doctoral students among all 19 statements. Given the nature of doctoral study, this finding is not surprising.

Table 1. Academic Program Evaluation, 2006 Ratings by Degree Type

To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements about your graduate program? (Rated on a 1-4 scale: 4=strongly agree; 1=strongly disagree) <sup>a</sup>	Master's Students (n=2144)			Doctoral Students (n=134)		
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Mean	Strongly Agree	Agree	Mean
<b>Faculty and Teaching</b>						
1. <sup>b</sup> **Faculty members were well qualified to teach their courses.	45%	51%	3.40	55%	45%	<b>3.55</b>
2. **Interactions among students and faculty are characterized by mutual respect.	42%	55%	3.37	54%	44%	<b>3.51</b>
3. *Faculty members prepare carefully for their graduate courses.	36%	59%	3.29	47%	49%	<b>3.43</b>
4. *Faculty in my department were interested in the welfare and professional development of graduate students.	37%	56%	3.28	48%	48%	<b>3.43</b>
5. Faculty in my department work together to achieve program goals.	33%	62%	3.26	42%	53%	3.34
6. *The courses I took were well taught.	29%	62%	3.20	39%	55%	<b>3.33</b>
7. There is good communication between faculty and students regarding student needs, concerns, and suggestions.	32%	54%	3.16	41%	44%	3.25
8. <sup>c</sup> *Faculty in my department were helpful and supportive in my search for professional employment.	34%	48%	3.11	43%	46%	<b>3.30</b>
9. **There are many opportunities outside the classroom for interaction between students and faculty.	23%	50%	2.94	35%	49%	<b>3.17</b>
10.***My advisor and I met at appropriate intervals to discuss my program of study.	28%	42%	2.86	63%	32%	<b>3.58</b>
<b>Students</b>						
11. There are students from different social, cultural, racial and ethnic backgrounds in my program.	54%	40%	3.48	58%	36%	3.51
12. I feel that I am part of a graduate university learning community.	36%	53%	3.23	47%	43%	3.35
13. The intellectual caliber of students in the program is high.	30%	61%	3.21	31%	60%	3.23
<b>Academic Programs</b>						
14. **I would recommend my graduate program to prospective students.	44%	48%	3.35	59%	34%	<b>3.53</b>
15.***My program was intellectually challenging and stimulating.	40%	54%	3.34	58%	41%	<b>3.56</b>
16. **If I were starting over, I would enroll in this program again.	42%	45%	3.27	55%	38%	<b>3.48</b>
17.***I believe that my program provided me with a good preparation for my future career.	36%	55%	3.27	53%	45%	<b>3.50</b>
18.*My program provided me with a good preparation for my future personal and civic life.	33%	56%	3.21	44%	48%	<b>3.36</b>
19.***Courses listed in the catalog are offered frequently enough for timely completion of the degree requirements.	24%	53%	2.95	36%	51%	<b>3.22</b>

<sup>a</sup> Percentages and mean values were calculated excluding “not applicable” and “don’t know” categories.

<sup>b</sup> Some items are marked with asterisks and the means are in bold type to indicate the differences in mean values between master’s and doctoral respondents are statistically significant at the following levels: “\*” = $p < .05$ ; “\*\*” = $p < .01$ ; “\*\*\*” = $p < .001$ .

<sup>c</sup> For this item, 37% of the respondents selected either “not applicable” or “don’t know,” and were excluded from the calculation of mean and frequency for this item.

## **2. Students and the Academic Program, 2006 Results**

On statements #11-13 (in Table 1), the respondents gave very high ratings and there is no significant difference between master’s and doctoral students. About 94% of the students agreed that their programs are socially, culturally, and ethnically diverse; 91% thought the intellectual caliber of students in the program is high, and most felt that they were part of a graduate university learning community (89%).

A high level of agreement on statements #14-18 further indicates that most graduate students had a good experience in their graduate programs. For example, over 90% found their program was intellectually challenging and stimulating, their graduate school experiences have prepared them well for future career and personal and civic life, and they would recommend their graduate program to prospective students. Doctoral students are more likely to agree with the above statements than master's students. For years, the item, "Courses listed in the catalog are offered frequently enough for timely completion of the degree requirements," has consistently received low ratings, especially from master's students. In part, this is likely a reflection of the time crunch experienced by part-time working students.

### **3. Three-Year Trend Analyses**

**Master's level.** 2006 sees a downward trend on master's students' evaluation on three items about faculty in the program, as shown in Table 2. Two items are about student interaction with faculty: good communication between faculty and students regarding student needs, concerns and suggestions, and regular meetings between students and their advisors. What has caused this downward trend is the decreased percentage of master's students who selected "strongly agree" for these three items in 2006 and/or 2005 compared to 2004, although the percentages who selected "agree" increased accordingly.

Table 2. Academic Program Evaluation – A Three-Year Trend Analysis for Master's Students

Mean Comparison (Rated on a 1-4 scale: 4=strongly agree; 1=strongly disagree)	2006	2005	2004	Sig.*
Faculty in my department work together to achieve program goals.	3.26	3.31	3.28	.039
There is good communication between faculty and students regarding student needs, concerns, and suggestions.	3.16	3.20	3.23	.013
My advisor and I met at appropriate intervals to discuss my program of study.	2.86	2.90	2.95	.031

\* This column shows the test results from Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). A result <.05 indicates that the mean values are significantly different across three years.

**Doctoral level.** Compared with the 2005 and 2004 graduating classes, more 2006 doctoral students agreed upon the following two items: interactions among students and faculty are characterized by mutual respect, and faculty were interested in the welfare and professional development of graduate students. The upward trend is caused by the increased percentage of doctoral students who selected "strongly agree" in 2006 compared to 2005 and 2004.

Table 3. Academic Program Evaluation – A Three-Year Trend Analysis for Doctoral Students

Mean Comparison (Rated on a 1-4 scale: 4=strongly agree; 1=strongly disagree)	2006	2005	2004	Sig.*
Interactions among students and faculty are characterized by mutual respect.	3.51	3.39	3.28	.010
Faculty in my department were interested in the welfare and professional development of graduate students.	3.43	3.36	3.22	.038

\* This column shows the test results from Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). A result <.05 indicates that the mean values are significantly different across three years.

## ***IV. Degree Program Emphases***

For the second consecutive year, the Survey included a set of questions asking students what their degree program emphasizes and what their degree program SHOULD emphasize. The results are summarized by degree level.

### **1. Master's Programs**

Between 94-96% of master's students say their academic programs emphasize theoretical knowledge and connections between ideas and practices (see Table 4). About 88-89% of them say their programs emphasize research and applied research. When asked what their programs *should* emphasize, connections between ideas and practices received the highest level of agreement, followed by applied research, theoretical knowledge and research. When comparing student ratings on *perceived* emphases and *desired* emphases, we found students would like to see *more* emphasis on applied research, connections between ideas and practices, and research in their degree programs. The 2004-2005 master's degree recipients responded the same to these questions.

Table 4. Master's-Level Program Emphases

Rated on a 1-4 scale: 4=strongly agree; 1=strongly disagree (N=2,144)	Perceived Emphasis (My program emphasizes)		Desired Emphasis (Should emphasize)		Mean Difference	Sig.*
	Agree/Strongly Agree	Mean	Agree/Strongly Agree	Mean		
Connections between ideas and practices	94%	3.33	99%	3.60	0.27	.000
Theoretical knowledge	96%	3.34	95%	3.35	0.01	NS
Research	89%	3.24	93%	3.33	0.09	.000
Applied Research	88%	3.19	94%	3.41	0.22	.000

\* This column indicates the test result when comparing two means on the same row. "NS" means the difference in mean values is NOT statistically significant.

## 2. Doctoral Programs

Between 93-96% of doctoral students think their program already emphasizes the four items included in the survey (as shown in Table 5), but they desire an even greater emphasis on these four items. The mean for *desired* emphasis for every item is *significantly higher* than the mean for *perceived* emphasis.

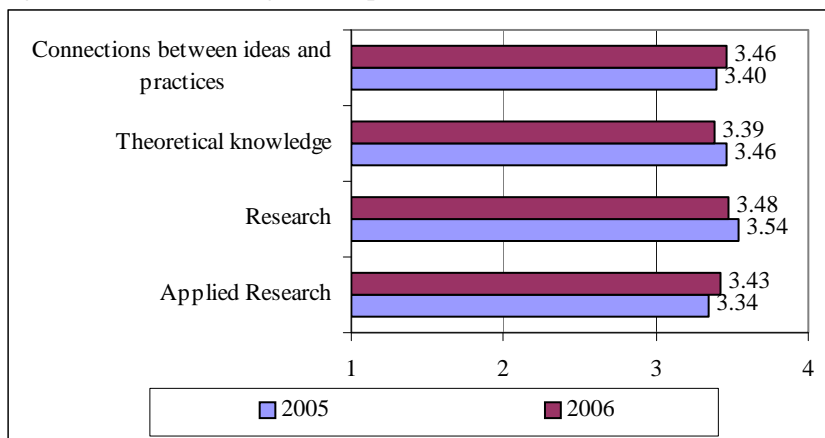
Table 5. Doctoral-Level Program Emphases

Rated on a 1-4 scale: 4=strongly agree; 1=strongly disagree (N=134)	Perceived Emphasis (My program emphasizes)		Desired Emphasis (Should emphasize)		Mean Difference	Sig.*
	Agree/Strongly Agree	Mean	Agree/Strongly Agree	Mean		
Connections between ideas and practices	94%	3.46	98%	3.65	0.19	.001
Theoretical knowledge	93%	3.39	97%	3.55	0.16	.001
Research	95%	3.48	100%	3.61	0.13	.003
Applied Research	96%	3.43	99%	3.66	0.23	.000

\* This column indicates the test result when comparing two means on the same row.

Compared to the 2005 doctoral students (see Figure 1), the 2006 doctoral students are significantly *more* likely to “agree” or “strongly agree” that their programs emphasize connections between ideas and practices and applied research. Concomitantly, the 2006 students perceived significantly *less* emphasis on theoretical knowledge and research than their 2005 counterparts.

Figure 1. Perceived Program Emphases of Doctoral Students, 2005 vs. 2006



## V. Thesis/Dissertation Experience

The 2005-06 survey included a new set of questions about students' experiences with their principal thesis/dissertation advisors. ALL doctoral respondents completed these questions. However, the results for master's students should be interpreted with caution for the following reasons:

1. Some master's programs do NOT require a thesis for graduation. Alternative requirements include a portfolio, a final individual/group project or a comprehensive exam. A few students did answer these questions based on their interaction with their principal advisors for a portfolio or a final project.
2. Some master's students filled out the survey before they finished their thesis, thus, were not able to answer all the questions.

Overall, 60% of master's students skipped all nine items in this section and 2% answered 4 items or less. Responses from these students are excluded. To improve data quality, this set of questions was modified and included again in the 2007-08 Graduate Student Exit Survey.

## **1. Thesis Experience**

(Note: Results are based on 38% of the total master's respondents who answered at least 5 out of 9 questions, N=816.)

Between 88-94% of master's students "agree" or "strongly agree" with the eight statements about their principal thesis advisors as shown in Table 6. Master's students are most likely to say that their advisors were knowledgeable about the degree requirements and were interested in their goals and projects.

The following are a few unsolicited comments from students about their thesis advisors:

- *Being knowledgeable in the subject matter of the program*
- *Reviewing student work thoroughly and providing thoughtful and complete critiques and suggestions*
- *Supporting students to submit scholarly work to professional societies*
- *Being a mentor who truly cared*
- *Respecting students as a person*
- *Challenging, encouraging and understanding students*

Table 6. Thesis Experiences (Master's Students)\*

To what extent are the following applicable to your principal thesis advisor? (N=816)	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
Was knowledgeable about my degree requirements	43%	51%	5%	2%	3.35
Was interested in my goals and projects	44%	48%	5%	2%	3.34
Critiqued my work in ways that helped my work progress	42%	48%	7%	2%	3.31
Was accessible	40%	51%	7%	2%	3.29
Returned my work in a timely manner	40%	49%	8%	2%	3.27
Was supportive in my search for professional employment	41%	48%	8%	4%	3.25
Spent the time necessary to advise me on academic matters	36%	53%	8%	2%	3.23
Discussed my research with me on a regular basis	34%	54%	11%	2%	3.19

\* Frequency and mean exclude "don't know" and "not applicable" responses. Mean values are calculated on a 1-4 scale: 4=strongly agree; 1=strongly disagree.

## **2. Dissertation Experience**

Doctoral students had even more positive experiences with their principal advisors than master's students. Two thirds of them "strongly agree" with the eight statements as shown in Table 7. Almost all of them agreed that their advisors were interested in their goals and projects. In addition, some students wrote down the following about their advisors:

- *Always flexible, always available, helping students to become ... stronger researcher[s]*
- *Providing effective and timely advising*
- *Being a wonderful person to work with*

Table 7. Dissertation Experiences\*

To what extent are the following applicable to your principal dissertation advisor? (N=314)	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
Was interested in my goals and projects	77%	22%	1%	1%	3.74
Critiqued my work in ways that helped my work progress	68%	28%	2%	2%	3.63
Spent the time necessary to advise me on academic matters	66%	31%	3%	1%	3.61
Was accessible	69%	26%	3%	2%	3.61
Was supportive in my search for professional employment	69%	24%	6%	2%	3.60
Was knowledgeable about my degree requirements	65%	29%	5%	1%	3.58
Returned my work in a timely manner	64%	30%	5%	2%	3.55
Discussed my research with me on a regular basis	62%	29%	8%	1%	3.53

\* Frequency and mean exclude "don't know" and "not applicable" responses. Mean values are calculated on a 1-4 scale: 4=strongly agree; 1=strongly disagree.

## VI. Student Satisfaction

### 1. Results by Degree Type, 2006

When asked about their satisfaction with five aspects of support in their departments, doctoral students are significantly *more satisfied* than master's students with three areas: communication about academic policies and procedures, academic advising, and mentoring. On adequacy of departmental resources and support, there is no statistically significant difference between doctoral and master's students. On career counseling, almost 40% of the respondents found this item "not applicable." Among the students who did respond to this item, about one fourth expressed dissatisfaction.

Table 8. Satisfaction with Academic and Non-academic Support

How satisfied are you with the following in your department? (Rated on 1-4 scale: 4=very satisfied, 1=very dissatisfied) <sup>a</sup>	Master's Students			Doctoral Students		
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Mean	Strongly Agree	Agree	Mean
Adequacy of departmental resources and support	26%	62%	3.11	40%	41%	3.15
<sup>b</sup> *Communication about academic policies and procedures	25%	62%	3.07	37%	50%	<b>3.22</b>
<sup>***</sup> Academic advising	27%	55%	3.04	43%	50%	<b>3.36</b>
<sup>*</sup> Mentoring	25%	55%	3.02	42%	45%	<b>3.22</b>
<sup>c</sup> Career counseling	20%	57%	2.91	33%	44%	3.04

<sup>a</sup> Percentages and mean values were calculated excluding "not applicable" and "don't know" categories.

<sup>b</sup> Some items are marked with asterisks and the means are in bold type to indicate the differences in mean values between master's and doctoral respondents are statistically significant at the following levels: "\*" =  $p < .05$ ; "\*\*\*" =  $p < .01$ ; "\*\*\*\*" =  $p < .001$ .

<sup>c</sup> For this item, 38-40% of the master's and doctoral respondents selected either "not applicable" or "don't know."

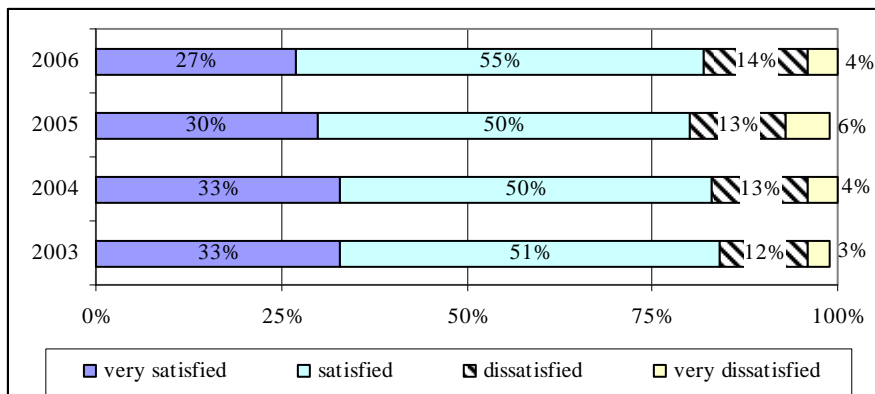
### 2. Three-Year Trend Analysis

(Note: Career Counseling is a new item on the 2006 survey. No trend analysis is available.)

**Doctoral students.** Level of satisfaction with each of the four areas in Table 8 (Satisfaction with Academic and Non-academic Support) has been consistent since 2003.

**Master's students.** Except for academic advising, levels of student satisfaction with the other three areas have been consistent since 2003. Satisfaction with advising, however, has slightly, but steadily dropped since 2003. The percentage of 2006 master's students who are "very satisfied" with advising dropped by another three percentage points compared to 2005, and is now six percentage points lower than what it was in 2003. At the same time, the percentage of students who selected "satisfied" has increased. Between 15-19% of master's students have been dissatisfied with academic advising over the past four years.

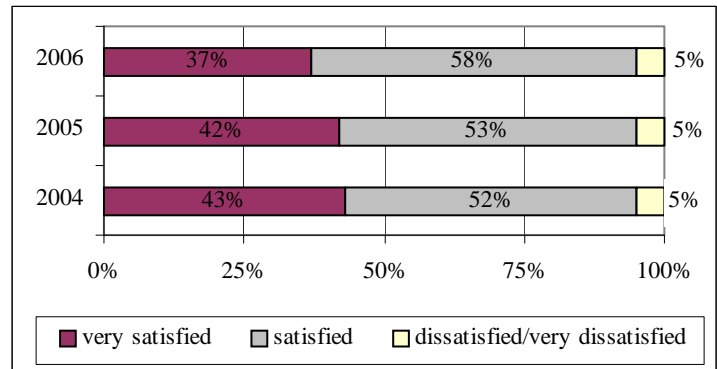
Figure 2. Four-Year Satisfaction Ratings on Advising – Master's Students



### 3. Overall Satisfaction with the Mason Experience

The same decreasing trend in the percentage of master's students who selected "very satisfied" for overall Mason experiences is apparent in Figure 3. Compared to 2004, the percentage of students who are "very satisfied" dropped by six percentage points to 37% in 2006, while the percentage who are "satisfied" increased accordingly. This trend was not observed for doctoral students.

Figure 3. Overall Satisfaction – Master's Students



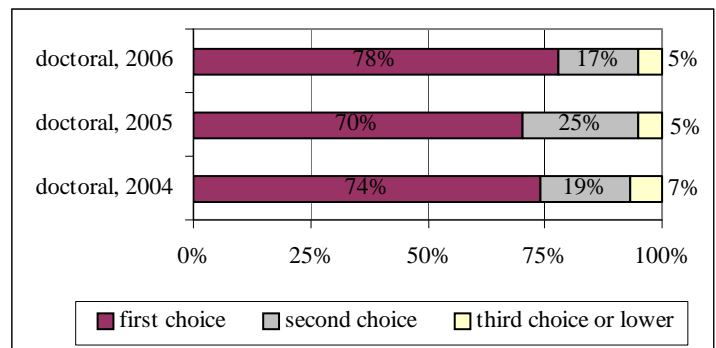
## VII. Background Information

### 1. Choice of Graduate School

**Master's students.** Over the past three years, between 80-82% of master's students said Mason was their first choice among all the graduate schools they considered. Another 15-16% said Mason was their second choice. These figures have been consistent during this time period.

**Doctoral students.** A large variance is observed from the doctoral students' responses to this question (see Figure 4). In 2004, 74% of doctoral students said Mason was their first choice, the figure dropped to 70% in 2005 but bounced back to 78% in 2006. Consequently, the percentages of doctoral students who said Mason was their second choice also varied, while the percentages who said Mason was their third choice or lower fell from 7% to 5% between 2004 and 2006.

Figure 4. Among the graduate schools you considered, GMU was your:

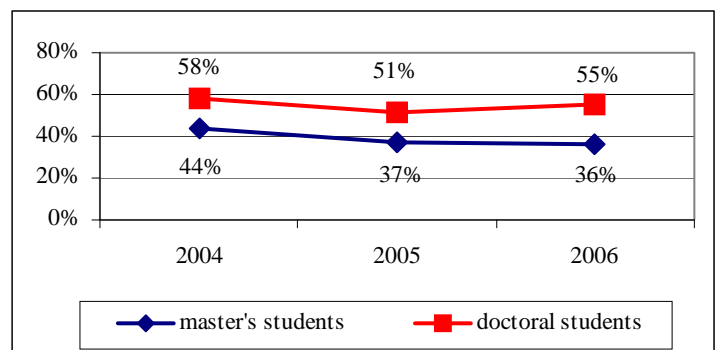


### 2. Primary Enrollment Status during Graduate School

**Master's students.** For three consecutive years (Figure 5), there has been a decrease in the percentage of master's students who said they pursued their graduate degrees primarily full-time. Thirty-six percent of 2006 graduates studied primarily full-time, a drop of eight percentage points from 44% in 2004.

**Doctoral students.** The percentage of doctoral students who primarily enrolled full-time dropped to 51% in 2005, but bounced back to 55% in 2006.

Figure 5. Percentage of Students who Enrolled Primarily Full-time in Graduate School, 2004-2006



### 3. Primary Employment Status during Graduate School

In the 2006 survey, the question on primary employment status during graduate school was modified by separating "part-time job" to two options: "part-time graduate assistantship" and "other part-time job." This change had little impact on master's student responses but significantly affected the responses from doctoral students (see Table 9).

**Master's students.** Compared to 2005, the figures for master's students did not change at all in 2006. Three out of four students worked full-time for most of the time during graduate school, 16% worked part-time and 10% worked



occasionally or did not work. This result is not surprising given the fact that only 36% enrolled primarily as full-time students during graduate school (see Figure 5). About 7% of master's students worked as a graduate assistant for most of their graduate education at Mason.

**Doctoral students.** Almost 40% of doctoral students had a part-time graduate assistantship for most of the time during graduate school, and another 8% held other types of part-time jobs. Significantly fewer doctoral students selected "full-time job" or "worked occasionally/did not work" in 2006. Forty-four percent of doctoral students said they worked full-time most of the time, a drop of nine percentage points from 2005; and 8% said they worked occasionally or did not work, down by 11 percentage points from 2005. However, we can not conclude whether these changes in 2006 were caused by the change in the survey item or by an increased numbers of assistantships available to doctoral students.

Table 9. Primary Employment Status during Graduate School, 2004-2006

What was your employment status for most of your graduate education?	Master's			Doctoral		
	2006	2005	2004	2006	2005	2004
Full-time job	74%	74%	67%	44%	53%	50%
* Part-time graduate assistantship	7%	16%	18%	39%	29%	29%
Other part-time job	9%			8%		
Worked occasionally/ Did not work	10%	10%	15%	8%	19%	21%

\* Prior to 2006, the two shaded options were combined as "Part-time job."

#### **4. Educational Debt**

The response options for this question were modified in the 2006 survey (as shown in Table 10): the original option "more than \$20,000" was split into two options: "\$20,001-30,000" and "more than \$30,000." The results show that, compared to 2005, more students in 2006 reported an educational debt of over \$20,000. About 4% of master's students and 14% of doctoral students have a debt of over \$30,000. Compared to 2005, the percentage of 2006 students who have NO debt decreased only by 1-2 percentage points: 44% among master's students and 58% among doctoral students.

Table 10. Educational Debt, 2004-2006

	Master's			Doctoral		
	2006	2005	2004	2006	2005	2004
None	44%	45%	46%	58%	60%	50%
\$5,000 or less	14%	14%	14%	11%	13%	8%
\$5,001 - 10,000	14%	17%	14%	6%	7%	10%
\$10,001 - 15,000	9%	10%	9%	2%	4%	8%
\$15,001 - 20,000	7%	7%	7%	5%	4%	4%
\$20,001 - 30,000	8%	8%	9%	3%	12%	20%
More than \$30,000	4%			14%		

#### **5. Employment Plans after Graduation**

The survey question on employment plans after graduation was modified in 2006 based on the results from previous years (see Table 11). A new option, "beginning a new position with a new employer," was added to the question, which may have caused a significant drop in the percentage of students who selected a related option – "looking for a new position." The new option has little impact on the other options of the same question. The percentages of 2006 students who would continue with current employer, who would return to a previous employer or who would not look for a job upon graduation are comparable to those of 2005.

**Master's students.** In 2006, 61% of master's students indicated that they would continue with their current employer, either working in a current position (46%) or a new position (15%). About 19% said they would be looking for a new position and 17% would begin a new position upon graduation.

**Doctoral students.** One third of the doctoral students indicated that they would continue with their current employer in a current position, one fourth would begin a new job, and one fourth would be in the job market upon graduation.

Compared to 2005, the percentage of doctoral students who would continue with their current employer in a new position dropped by four percentage points to 14% in 2006.

Table 11. Employment Plans after Graduation

What are your employment plans after completing your graduate degree?	Master's			Doctoral		
	2006	2005	2004	2006	2005	2004
Continuing with <b>current</b> employer in <b>current</b> position	46%	47%	40%	33%	33%	37%
Continuing with <b>current</b> employer in <b>new</b> position	15%	16%	16%	14%	18%	16%
Returning to <b>previous</b> employer in a new or previous position	1%	2%	2%	2%	2%	4%
* Beginning a <b>new</b> position with a <b>new</b> employer.	17%	--	--	26%	--	--
Looking for a <b>new</b> position	19%	33%	40%	25%	44%	41%
Not looking for employment	2%	2%	3%	2%	3%	2%

\* This option was added to the 2006 survey based on students' responses in previous years. Due to this change, the percentage of students who selected "looking for a new position" decreased drastically in 2006.

### VIII. Student Verbatim Comments on Dissatisfactory Experiences at Mason

Students were given a chance to write down the reasons they checked "dissatisfied" or "very dissatisfied" with any of the following five areas: advising, mentoring, evaluation of academic progress, adequacy of departmental resources and support, and communication about academic policies and procedures. The following sample of citations came directly from students. Please visit the following website for more student comments by academic program on both positive and negative aspects of their Mason experiences:

<http://www.assessment.gmu.edu/Results/GraduatingGrad/2006/index.cfm>.

#### **Advising:**

Major reasons for student dissatisfaction with advising include the following: 1) no advisor or lack of access to advisors, 2) delayed response or no response from advisors, 3) lack of respect or consideration to advisees, 4) misinformation and lack of knowledge about degree requirements.

- There was a lot of confusion in the beginning about who was our cohort advisor, then when one was established, she left. It took another couple of months before we finally got a new one. By that time, my entire cohort felt lost and uninformed about a lot of requirements for the program.
- [My advisor] has neglected to tell me important information and when he does it is last minute. I met with him last summer about what classes to take for the 2004-2005 school year. I took what I was told and then out of the blue he told me WEEKS before the graduation ceremony I have to take another course because he "just looked through my records..."
- I can't express enough how frustrating and angry I have been this past year because of my graduate advisor. His negligence has cost me time, money, and almost caused me not to graduate this summer because of his lack of knowledge of GMU's graduation process.
- When we first started the program we were told certain things and almost halfway into the program we found out it was inaccurate and new requirements were issued. It was frustrating and very scary. We also were without an academic advisor for quite a while.
- I only met with my adviser once and that was when I forced myself upon him - he had no interest in talking with me and wanted me to see someone else for my questions.
- I read somewhere on the GMU website within information for my degree program that you are supposed to see your advisor first before registering for classes; I attempted to do this and when I walked into my advisor's office, he told me that I didn't need to see him for anything and hurriedly rushed me out of his office, which was very unfavorable to me.

#### **Mentoring:**

"Non-existent" and "no opportunity" are frequently used by students who are dissatisfied with mentoring. Students, particularly master's students, perceived their faculty to be "too busy" to mentor students.

- It was my experience that few faculty members went beyond their work as academic professors to reach out and give work/professional advice; [faculty] only performing as academic mentors rather than in addition serving as professional and career mentors.
- There isn't enough opportunity for students to develop a rapport with faculty, although that interaction (mentoring opportunity) is crucial.
- No mentoring of master's students by staff, nor does [the program] create those opportunities. Faculty are overworked and often unwilling to engage in mentorship of students.

### **Adequacy of Departmental Resources and Support**

*Lack of assistantships, financial support, office/study/research space, access to computer labs are among the issues regarding departmental resources and support with which students are most dissatisfied. A few students were also dissatisfied with insufficient numbers of full-time faculty in their academic programs.*

- There were too many students in this program with too few instructors. There was no time or opportunity to get to know my fellow students and instructors on a more personal and intellectual level. I believe I and my fellow students would have benefited much more from smaller class sizes and more intensive and explorative classroom discussions in which the professor could steer conversations in appropriate and challenging directions. The lack of professors also created significant problems with class scheduling and class variety.
- I am most dissatisfied with the level of financial support and resources available to graduate students. The teaching stipend is totally inadequate to live on, and there is no incentive to do a good job because no one in the department ever looks at the type of job we do or offer incentives for a good job.
- The assistantships are not adequate for expensive Northern Virginia, especially for the nonresident students. Comparable schools in more affordable places offer much better assistantships. Furthermore, while I've been in the program, the workspace at the Fairfax campus is being reduced and is becoming uncomfortable. Important equipment has broken down and has not been repaired or replaced.
- We had some very small or noisy rooms at the Arlington campus (in the basement).
- There is close to zero reserved space for graduate students to work, research, study or have constant computer access.
- The removal of the computer lab in Robinson made my work MUCH more difficult to complete. I found myself going to the library to do research, walking to the Johnson center to type it, and often having problems with finding a working printer and available computer. The Robinson lab was a great resource and I was very disappointed to see it closed.

### **Communication about Academic Policies and Procedures**

*Major reasons for student dissatisfaction include the following: 1) lack of or delayed communication about program requirements and recent changes, 2) variations in interpretation of academic policies and procedures, 3) inadequate information on the program website.*

- While there is a firm written policy on the order in which classes must be taken, there is great variation in the interpretation of this policy. Advisors are providing different information to their group of advisees.
- When I had a question, I frequently encountered difficulty obtaining an answer from those in charge. Either my inquiries received no response, or the answers varied widely and it seemed no one was quite sure of the policies, deadlines, procedures.
- Too many students and too few program assistants to communicate and handle paperwork and answer questions. Need more office staff to process student requests and answer questions. Also need a single website with signed policies on all aspects of program.
- Communication between the Department and the students at remote sites is poor. Information regarding long range plans for course offerings and curriculum changes did not automatically flow to the students. The student "grapevine" was the best source of program info.
- Resources on website are hard to find, and/or out of date.

## Career Counseling

*"Inadequate" is frequently used by students to describe the career counseling they had received. Students would like to receive more information about career opportunities related to their program and degree level.*

- I am not familiar with where people work after graduation. What type of jobs have people graduating from my department attained? There has not been much communicated to the students on these issues.
- Although I appreciate the work of the career services department, the newsletter for "career" opportunities tended to show mostly internships, or openings for faculty positions at Universities that are not applicable. In addition, some postings for positions were clerical/admin positions that I feel was not related to our students' goals.
- When I went in to talk with [career counselors], they told me to go to "patriotjobs" and look around for opportunities. I really don't consider that career counseling. They did look over my resume and give me comments but I was hoping to be connected with alumni in the area that I wanted to work and/or connections within businesses. They did not seem very connected to the outside world.
- Overwhelming majority of career services are aimed at master's students or students with no previous employment experience. Too much emphasis placed on entry-level positions or internships. Not sufficient focus on employment opportunities for PhD grads.

At the end of the Survey, students were given space to add any comments they wished. The great majority of these were about their individual programs. These verbatim responses can be found for each program at <http://assessment.gmu.edu/Results/GraduatingGrad/2006/index.cfm>.

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*This In Focus and earlier editions of this publication can be found on our website:  
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