

# Results from the 2017 Survey of Incoming Freshmen

## Summary Report

### Survey Background

A web-based survey was administered in summer 2017 to all incoming first-time, first-year students at Virginia Tech. This survey was designed and administered by Assessment and Evaluation in the Office of Academic Decision Support in consultation with a group of faculty members experienced in working with undergraduate students. The purpose of the survey was to provide information regarding incoming students' previous learning experiences and perceptions of their future collegiate learning and engagement. The survey was designed to incorporate what faculty and staff need to know about incoming students in order to facilitate their learning, and provide an institutionally-focused set of questions rather than the more generic questions that appear on national instruments such as the CIRP and the NSSE. Student participation in the survey was voluntary and approval was obtained from Virginia Tech's Institutional Review Board prior to administering the survey.

### Participants

- Of the 6,713 incoming students invited to participate in the survey, 3,193 responded, resulting in a response rate of 47.6%.
- Of those students who completed the survey's demographic questions, 52.3% were male; 72.7% identified as White (non-Hispanic), and 11.3% as Asian/Pacific Islander.
- 60.6% of students indicated that they will be transferring at least four credit hours into Virginia Tech. Of those students, 19.6% indicated that they would be transferring more than 16 credit hours.
- Of the students responding, 1,880 (78.6%) indicated that they anticipate graduating with their undergraduate degrees in four years. An additional 247 students (10.3%) anticipate a longer timeline than four years, while 265 students (11.1%) anticipate finishing their degrees in less than four years.
- The top ten intended majors for first-time freshmen entering Virginia Tech in August 2016 are:
  1. Mechanical Engineering – 10.3% (256 responses)
  2. Computer Science – 6.0% (150 responses)
  3. Biological Sciences – 5.9% (147 responses)
  4. Aerospace Engineering – 5.5% (137 responses)
  5. Civil and Environmental Engineering – 4.1% (102 responses)
  6. Business Information Technology – 3.8% (93 responses)
  7. Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise – 3.2% (80 responses)
  8. Chemical Engineering – 3.2% (80 responses)
  9. Electrical Engineering – 3.2% (79 responses)
  10. Computer Engineering – 3.1% (77 responses)

## Limitations

Since student participation in the survey was voluntary, the results may not be generalizable to the population of incoming freshmen who did not choose to participate. Many responses indicate what incoming students *intend to do* while they are at Virginia Tech, rather than what students may *actually do* while on campus.

## Results: What Students Hope to Gain by Coming to Virginia Tech

- 48.2% of students reported that their **primary reason for pursuing an undergraduate degree** at Virginia Tech was to help them get a job. An additional 37.2% of students indicated that **their primary motivation was to develop a strong foundation for success in graduate or professional school.**
- Along similar lines, 54.2% of students reported that they anticipated their **principal activity upon graduation** to be employment, while 38.9% planned to attend graduate or professional school. The next most frequent response was military service with 4.4%.
- When students were asked **which skills and abilities (up to three) they need to improve upon** the most to be successful, the five most frequent responses were oral communication skills (12.9%), computer/technology skills (10.6%), knowledge of global issues (9.2%), critical thinking/analysis skills (9.0%), and written communication skills (8.9%).
  - In contrast, the five least frequent responses were ethical reasoning (2.5%), quantitative reasoning (4.7%), information literacy/library skills (4.8%), scientific reasoning (6.0%), and ability to communicate with people different from myself (7%).
- When incoming freshman were asked **what excited them the most about coming to Virginia Tech**, many students talked about meeting new people, the Hokie environment, and having new experiences.
- When incoming freshman were asked **what concerned them most about entering Virginia Tech**, many students talked about social concerns (especially “fitting in”), missing family, time-management and other academic concerns.

## Results: Openness to Challenge and Change

- As a group, students who participated in the survey believe they will be challenged more intellectually than socially at Virginia Tech.
  - A total of 92.3% of respondents indicated that they **expect to be challenged intellectually** “often” or “all of the time” while at Virginia Tech.
  - In contrast, 54.3% of respondents indicated that they **expect to be challenged socially** “often” or “all of the time.”
- When asked **“Do you think you will be the same person or a different person by the time you complete your degree?”** 56.2% of students reported that they expect to change while at Virginia Tech.
  - More specifically, 9.3% reported that they expect to be a “different” person by the time they complete their undergraduate degree; 10.0% anticipated they would be a “mostly different” person; 36.9% selected “more different than the

same”; 31.5% selected “more the same than different”; 11.4% selected “mostly the same”; and 0.9% selected “the same.”

- When students were asked to report their **level of confidence to successfully complete a challenging task in a high school class**, a substantial majority, 72.7%, reported that they felt “confident” or “extremely confident.”
  - An additional 24.5% reported that they felt “somewhat confident,” Only 1.4% of students reported that they were “not at all confident,” while another 1.4% of students reported that they never had a challenging task in high school.

### **Results: High School Experiences and Anticipated University Involvement**

- All students indicated that they finished high school with a GPA above 2.76. Of those students, 79.4% indicated that they graduated with a 3.76 or better.
- When students were asked about instructional methods used in their high school classes, the most commonly reported method was teacher lecture. 82.9% indicated that teacher lecture was used more than 50% of the time in their high school classes, with 58.7% indicating that teacher lecture was used more than 75% of the time.
  - The second most commonly used instructional method was projects using technology. 57.1% of students reported that this instructional method was used in their high school classes more than 50% of the time, with 36.0% indicating that projects using technology were used more than 75% of the time.
  - All student responses to this question are provided in Table 1 on page 4.
- When asked about expectations for their future participation at Virginia Tech, students indicated that they were most likely to participate in (1) Organizations or clubs designed for people in my primary major; (2) Organization focused on special interest/hobby; and (3) Intramural sports.
  - In contrast, students indicated that they would be least likely to participate in (1) University learning community (e.g. Galileo, Hypatia, Da Vinci, Residential Leadership); (2) Study abroad at least a semester; and (3) Student Government.
  - Table 2 on page 5 shows student responses for each activity listed in the survey.

### **Additional Information**

For more information on the 2017 Survey of Incoming Freshmen, please contact Bethany Bodo, Director, Assessment & Evaluation, Office of Academic Decision Support, [bbodo@vt.edu](mailto:bbodo@vt.edu) or 540-231-6003.

**Table 1. Participant responses to “What percent of time were the following instructional methods used in your high school classes?”**

Instructional Method Used in High school	Percentage of Time Used						
	less than 10%	10 – 25%	26 – 50%	51 – 75%	76 – 90%	More than 90%	More than 50%*
Discussion and debate	17.07%	31.00%	21.97%	16.03%	9.52%	4.41%	30.0%
Student presentations	16.46%	30.28%	20.21%	17.57%	9.98%	5.49%	33.0%
Teacher lecture	0.66%	4.00%	12.46%	24.22%	33.75%	24.92%	82.9%
Role plays	71.33%	18.14%	5.62%	2.41%	1.50%	1.00%	5.0%
Art and drama activities	64.05%	21.88%	6.72%	3.49%	2.28%	1.58%	7.3%
Projects using technology	5.54%	16.57%	20.83%	21.12%	20.41%	15.54%	57.1%
Group projects	4.38%	18.26%	25.73%	25.61%	18.46%	7.56%	51.6%
Research projects	10.62%	24.16%	24.82%	19.33%	14.25%	6.82%	40.4%
Case studies	48.82%	24.06%	13.25%	7.83%	3.73%	2.32%	13.9%

\*This column shows the total percentage of students reporting that a particular instructional method was used in their high school classes either 51-75%, 76-90%, or more than 90% of the time.

**Table 2. Participant responses to “In which of the following do you think you will participate while at VT?”**

<b>Type of Activity</b>	<b>Not likely</b>	<b>Probably yes</b>	<b>Definitely yes</b>
University learning community (e.g., Galileo, Hypatia, Da Vinci, Residential Leadership)	30.26%	5.28%	9.18%
Study abroad - at least a semester	23.36%	10.14%	7.62%
Student government	17.75%	6.28%	2.39%
Organization related to cultural or ethnic heritage	17.01%	6.44%	4.25%
Intercollegiate sports	16.11%	6.97%	5.23%
Study abroad - break week or short-term	16.00%	12.56%	9.80%
Arts organization (music, theatre, dance)	15.69%	6.78%	7.03%
Social fraternity or sorority	14.50%	8.09%	7.90%
Research project with a faculty member	10.43%	16.92%	8.06%
Give a talk or exhibit work at a professional, scholarly, cultural, or artistic conference or meeting	9.39%	15.41%	7.64%
Community service/volunteer work outside of course requirements	7.60%	13.03%	15.38%
Intramural sports	6.40%	12.61%	21.08%
Attend a professional or scholarly meeting or conference	6.23%	16.67%	11.50%
Community service/volunteer work as part of a course	4.53%	14.28%	16.04%
Organization focused on special interest/hobby	1.91%	18.90%	20.95%
Internship, field experience, co-op, or practicum	1.59%	11.12%	22.42%
Organizations or clubs designed for people in my primary major	1.23%	18.52%	23.53%