

## 1998 FIG/Freshman Survey

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### OVERVIEW

In autumn 1998, a survey was conducted of all students enrolled in the Freshman Interest Group (FIG) Program, and a random sample of 1000 freshman student not enrolled in a FIG. The purpose of the study was to identify program outcomes and to suggest ways in which the program might be improved. Both FIG and non-FIG students tended to feel comfortable using different information technologies, and approaching and talking with UW academic advisers, faculty and staff. Both groups knew where to find information about academic departments and classes, and would choose UW if they had to make their college choice over again. FIG students seemed to make more personal connections with their peers than did non-FIG students and felt more a part of the UW community. FIG students were also more familiar with a variety of campus resources. Based on the results of this study, program staff made recommendations regarding program content and direction, and identified areas in which additional information would be useful

### INTRODUCTION

At the end of autumn quarter, 1998, New Student Programs and the Office of Educational Assessment undertook a survey of all students enrolled in the [Freshman Interest Group \(FIG\) Program](#), and of a random sample of 1000 freshmen students not enrolled in a FIG. The purpose of the survey was to obtain student assessment of the FIG program, to compare experiences of students enrolled in the program with those of students not enrolled, and to provide a follow-up to surveys conducted of entering students at the beginning of summer orientation and a few weeks later (see [OEA Report 98-7](#)).

## METHODOLOGY

### **FIG students**

Students enrolled in the Freshman Interest Group (FIG) program in autumn, 1998, were asked to complete a questionnaire about their experiences at the UW during the previous three months, their comfort level with various aspects of instructional technology, and the degree to which they had become integrated into the campus community. These students were also asked specific questions about the FIG program. Responses were obtained on a five-point scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*, with the addition of open-ended questions to clarify closed responses. The questionnaire was administered to students in class at the end of the quarter, and 1581 students (85.7% of the 1844 enrolled in the program) returned completed surveys.

[FIG Student Questionnaire 1998, first side](#)

[FIG Student Questionnaire 1998, second side](#)

### **Non-FIG students**

For the purpose of comparison, 1000 new freshmen who were not enrolled in the FIG program were randomly selected and sent a similar questionnaire, excluding questions particular to the FIG program. The questionnaire, with cover letter and return envelope, was mailed four weeks prior to the end of the quarter. A second copy of the questionnaire, also with cover letter and return envelope, was sent approximately two weeks later. Completed surveys were returned by 373 (37.3%) of the students surveyed.

[Freshman Questionnaire 1998](#)

## FINDINGS

Item responses of FIG and non-FIG students are summarized below on a modified version of the questionnaire. Means are provided for scaled items and differences between groups were tested using chi-square or t-test, as appropriate. A second table facilitates comparison of FIG and non-FIG mean ratings by listing items according to the magnitude of non-FIG means.

[Item Responses](#)

[Item Mean Comparisons](#)

### Residence and Computer Access

A specific question of interest was whether student access to computers differed according to place of residence. Respondents were asked to specify their current living situation, and to indicate whether they had their own home computer and used it for most of their computing and (as a separate question) whether they used the campus computing labs as their primary computing environment. Responses of FIG and non-FIG students were compared.

- The majority of both FIG and non-FIG respondents reported that they were currently living in UW residence halls (59.6% and 57.0%, respectively, [Figure 1](#)). However, FIG students were more likely than non-FIG students to live in fraternities or sororities (22.8% vs. 10.3%, respectively) and less likely to live with parents or other relatives (13.0% vs. 20.3%) or in a private home, apartment or room (4.3% vs. 10.8%).
- More than three-quarters of all respondents indicated that they had their own home computer and used it for most of their computing (77.0% *Agree* or *Strongly Agree*), whereas only one-fifth of the respondents relied primarily on the computer labs (21.2% *Agree* or *Strongly Agree*). FIG and non-FIG students did not differ in their responses to these questions.
- As shown in [Figure 2](#), computer usage was influenced to some degree by type of residence. Students living in fraternities or sororities were somewhat less likely to use their own computers than were students in other living situations, perhaps because they relied on shared computers in their residence. Students who lived in a home or apartment (other than with parents) were somewhat more likely to use campus computing labs than were other groups. Although statistically significant, differences by type of residence were relatively small.

### FIG/non-FIG comparisons

The FIG and non-FIG questionnaires had 28 scaled items in common (excluding the two questions regarding primary computing environment). All items were posed as positive statements about various aspects of student participation in the campus community, and average responses of FIG and non-FIG students were compared using t-tests. Significant differences were found on seventeen of these 28 scaled items.

- **Similarities:** Both FIG and non-FIG students tended to feel comfortable using different information technologies, including email and the world wide web, and used email to communicate with their instructors. They felt comfortable in campus computing labs but tended to use their own home computers most often. FIG and non-FIG students were equally

comfortable approaching and talking with UW academic advisers, faculty and staff, and knew where to find information about academic departments and classes. Both groups would choose UW if they had to make their college choice over again. (See [Table 1.](#))

- **Differences:** FIG students seemed to make more personal connections with their peers than did non-FIG students. They used email more frequently to communicate with classmates, and were more likely to have gotten to know many students from different backgrounds and make friends with many other students in their classes. They met more frequently to study with other students from both inside and outside of their classes. They were more comfortable finding help for a class or participating in class discussions and felt more a part of the UW community. FIG students were also more familiar with a variety of campus resources including where to go for academic and/or career planning, how to use library resources or find out about student clubs and activities, internships and volunteer opportunities, and ways to become involved in student government or faculty research. (See [Table 2.](#))
- The pattern of response shown in Tables 1 and 2 suggested that FIG students had a higher sense on "belonging" to the university community than did non-FIG students. To test whether this was partially due to place of residence (more FIG than non-FIG students reported living in a fraternity or sorority), all items were re-examined considering only those students who lived in residence halls. There was no change in the pattern of similarities and differences, supporting the primary effect of the FIG program on integrating entering freshmen into the campus community.
- The FIG experience seemed to increase students' awareness of and comfort with aspects of campus life to which they would otherwise not be exposed. FIG student ratings were consistently higher (i.e., more positive) than were ratings by non-FIG students, and these differences tended to be significant on the lower-rated rather than higher-rated items. This pattern is shown in [Figure 3.](#)

## FIG Assessment

Nine items on the FIG student questionnaire were directed at the impact of the program on students' academic performance and the performance of the Peer Instructors (PI's).

- Students perceived the FIG program as having a moderate to strong impact on their academic success. The majority (63.9%) of the students *Agreed* or *Strongly Agreed* that they were better prepared to be a successful student because of their participation in the program, and slightly less than half (47.2%) *Agreed* or *Strongly Agreed* that their academic performance was improved ([Figure 4](#)).
- Seven items on the questionnaire specifically addressed the quality of the mentoring and instruction provided by the Peer Instructor. Overall ratings of Peer Instructors (PI's) were very high, particularly in facilitating group interactions. As shown in [Figure 5](#), nearly all students (92.1%) *Agreed* or *Strongly Agreed* that they would recommend their PI to lead a FIG again. Most students (90%+) *Agreed* or *Strongly Agreed* that their PI was easy to approach, provided opportunities for FIG students to get together outside of class, and was well organized and prepared. Somewhat fewer (80-90%) *Agreed* or *Strongly Agreed* that their PI presented information in a clear and interesting manner, selected useful class topics, and provided useful guidance on how to succeed academically.

## CONCLUSIONS / RECOMMENDATIONS

### Technology

- Because more than three-quarters of incoming freshmen have their own home computer, FIG staff should think about how best to utilize technology to achieve FIG goals. At the same time, we must keep in mind that 20 to 25% of students will **not** have home access, and we do not want to isolate those students by making the FIG curriculum technology-intensive.
- FIG program coordinators need to be aware of how many peer instructors have computer access from home. Skills among FIG leaders fall along a continuum -- we could do more to make sure everyone has a clearly defined baseline of skills.

### Information Literacy and Beyond

- The FIG program needs to continue to work on information literacy (broadly defined).
- It is clear that library skills are being gained through the FIG program -- can we make the same kind of progress with experiential learning, in particular service-learning? Some experiments with service-learning FIGs and a FIG "Service Day" in 1999 will give us more information.

### Community Building and Academic Performance

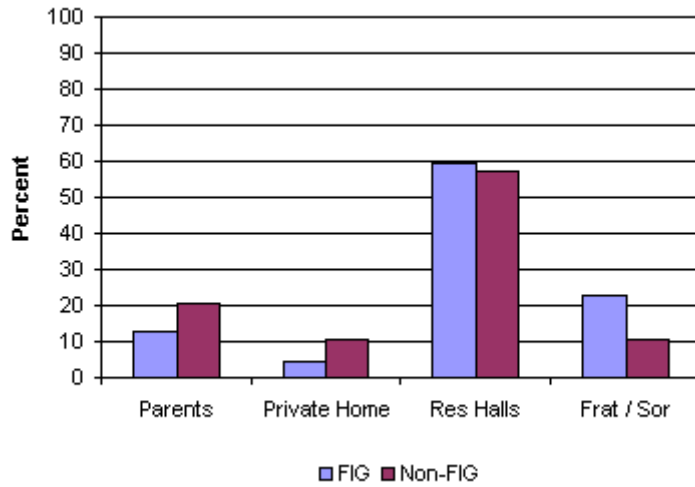
- Students are clearly making strong personal connections in the FIGs. We need more research on whether some of these connections (studying together, willingness to search out help for a course, etc.) contribute to improved academic performance.
- Students perceive the FIG program as having a positive effect on their academic performance -- does it? We need to look at some of the data related to GPA, major choice, time to degree, etc.
- The program should make an effort to recruit more commuter students into FIGs, since FIGs seem to help students become integrated into the campus community. Since commuters traditionally have fewer avenues for becoming integrated, FIGs could play a strong role. (This would be counter to the direction taken by some other institutions, many of which are moving toward a residential FIG model.)

### General Studies 199 and FIG Peer Instructors

- On the whole, FIG students clearly thought highly of their Peer Instructor. The program has tended to ask about the peer instructors' helpfulness and approachability -- more work needs to be done (in future surveys) to identify which aspects of the GEN ST 199 curriculum were most helpful/useful.
- It seems that students enrolled in FIGs may be slightly isolated from other support services -- this is another aspect that could be more closely examined in the future.

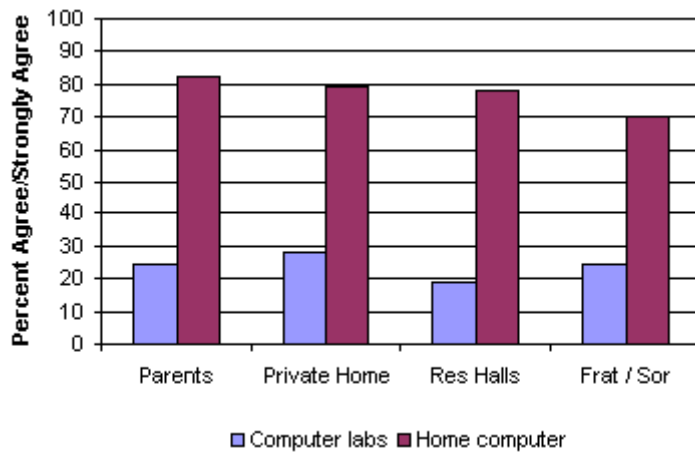
## FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 1. Residence by group



  
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Figure 2. Primary computing environment by residence



  
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**Table 1. Items rated the same by FIG and non-FIG students  
(Ordered from highest to lowest level of *agreement* by non-FIG students.)**

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- 13. I use email to communicate with friends.
  - 10. I feel comfortable using different information technologies (email, the web, word processing).
  - 17. I feel comfortable searching for information via the world wide web.
  - 26. If I had to make my college choice over again, I would choose to attend the UW.
  - 15. I use email to communicate with instructors and/or other UW staff.
  - 27. I know how to find information about academic departments and particular classes.
  - 9. I feel comfortable in the campus computing labs.
  - 36. I feel comfortable approaching and talking with UW academic advisers.
  - 37. I feel comfortable approaching and talking with UW faculty.
  - 34. I feel comfortable approaching and talking with UW staff.
  - 3. I feel comfortable with UW faculty expectations.
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**Table 2. Items rated more highly by FIG students  
(Ordered from highest to lowest level of agreement by non-FIG students.)**

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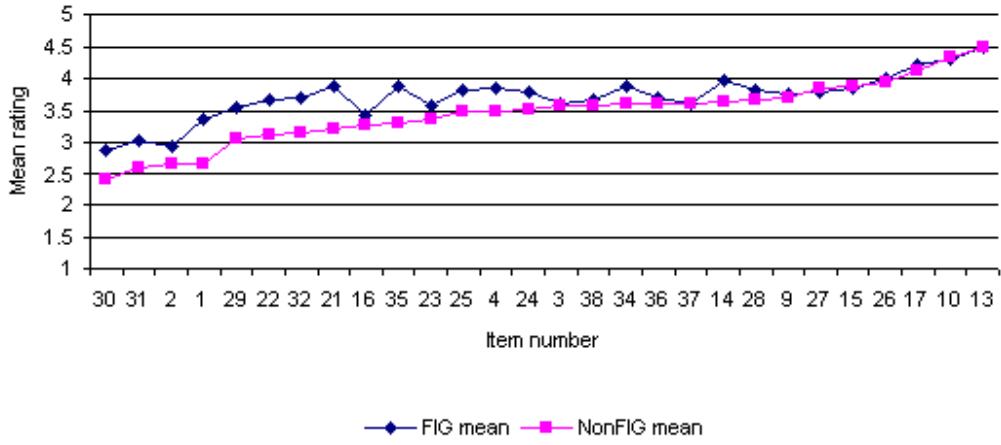
28. I know where to go to talk about academic and/or career planning.
14. I use email to communicate with classmates.
34. I have gotten to know many students from different backgrounds at UW.
24. I feel comfortable finding help for a class when I need it.
4. I feel comfortable participating in class discussions.
25. I feel as though I am part of the University of Washington community.
23. I have used the UW home page to find out about campus resources and opportunities.
35. I have made friends with many other students in my classes.
16. I feel comfortable searching for information using library resources, such as the catalog, databases, indexes, etc.
21. I have learned a lot about campus resources this quarter.
32. I know where to find out about student clubs and other activities.
22. I have learned a lot about ways to become involved on campus.
29. I know where to go to find out about internships and volunteer opportunities.
1. I met frequently with other students in my classes to study.
2. I met frequently with students outside of my classes to study.
31. I know where to find out about student government.
30. I know how to become involved in research with a faculty member.



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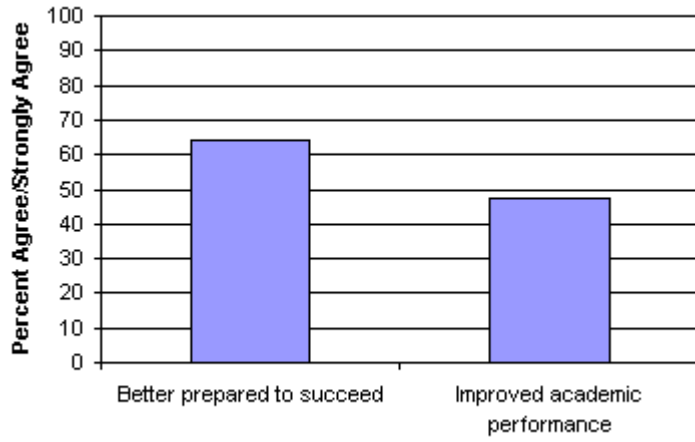


**Figure 3. Item means by group**



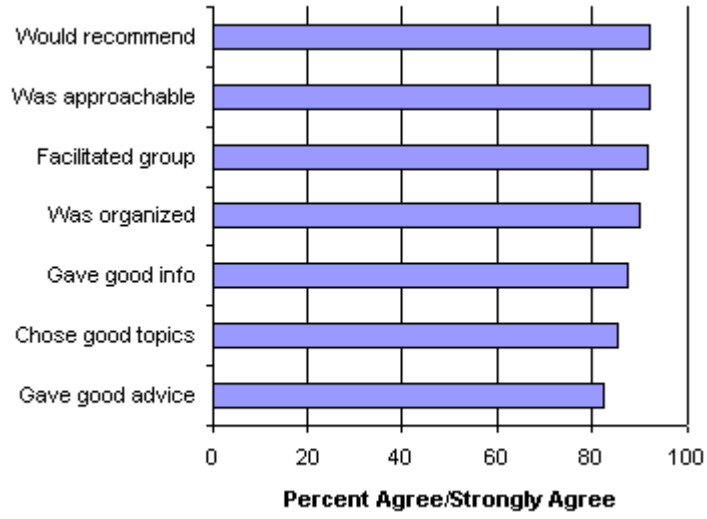
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**Figure 4. FIG contribution to academic performance**



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**Figure 5. Overall ratings of peer instructors**



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