



MARYLAND HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

**SURVEY OF COLLEGE PLANS OF
MARYLAND HIGH ABILITY STUDENTS**



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Introduction

Since 1979, the Maryland Higher Education Commission has conducted annual surveys of talented Maryland high school seniors to learn about their college plans. The intentions of these students are important to Maryland postsecondary institutions, since the reputation of a college or university is based in part on its ability to attract students with strong scholastic credentials. Until 1987, the survey included just National Merit or National Achievement Semifinalists, who represent the top 2 percent of all high school graduates academically. In that year, the study was expanded to include recipients of Maryland Distinguished Scholar awards--both for academic achievement and talent in the arts.

This report focuses on the results of the survey of high ability students who graduated from a Maryland high school in Spring 1998. Survey participants were asked to identify:

- the postsecondary institution they planned to attend;
- the reasons that were most important in arriving at their decision;
- their intended academic major; and
- their financial aid package.

Comparisons with the results of studies in previous years were made as appropriate.

Methodology

Questionnaires were mailed in June 1998 to all 585 Maryland high school seniors who were named National Merit or National Achievement Semifinalists or were Maryland Distinguished Scholar recipients. The Commission staff conducted the survey at this time to maximize the number of students who had firm college plans. The response rate of the survey was 60 percent. A copy of the survey instrument is in Appendix A.

General Findings

Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Women comprised 57 percent of the high ability students who responded to the survey. Nearly three-fourth of the respondents (74 percent) were white; 14 percent, Asian; 7 percent, African American, and 1 percent, Hispanic (see Table 1). Montgomery County was identified as the residence of 34 percent of the respondents, followed by Baltimore (15 percent), Howard (9 percent) and Harford (7 percent) counties.

Table 1.
Maryland High Ability Students Choice of College
By Ethnicity and Gender

| | Out-of-State | | Maryland | | Percent of Total |
|--------------------------|--------------|---------|----------|---------|------------------|
| | Public | Private | Public | Private | |
| Ethnic Background | | | | | |
| African American | 0.0% | 50.0% | 36.4% | 13.6% | 6.6% |
| White | 8.1% | 48.4% | 30.9% | 12.6% | 73.9% |
| Asian | 4.2% | 72.9% | 18.8% | 4.2% | 14.4% |
| Hispanic | 0.0% | 75.0% | 0.0% | 25.0% | 1.2% |
| Other | 7.7% | 30.8% | 46.2% | 15.4% | 3.9% |
| Gender | | | | | |
| Female | 6.3% | 52.6% | 27.6% | 13.5% | 56.6% |
| Male | 8.8% | 49.7% | 32.7% | 8.8% | 43.4% |

Source: Maryland Higher Education Commission, Survey of The College Plans of High Ability Students, 1998

Choice of College

Of those students who responded to the survey, 99 percent chose to continue their education beyond high school. Those students who chose not to attend college cited the opportunity to study abroad for a year or the opportunity to work with professional dance companies as reasons for their decision not to continue their education.

The percentage of high ability students who plan to attend a Maryland college or university is provided in Table 2. Although a majority of National Merit and National Achievement Semifinalists in Maryland selected a college or university outside the State, one-third of these highly selective and sought after students chose a Maryland campus. **This is the highest percentage since the survey began in 1979.**

Furthermore, a greater percentage of the students who were offered a Maryland Distinguished Scholar award stayed in the State than has been the case for National Merit or National Achievement Semifinalists. However, a majority of the students who were offered Maryland Distinguished Scholar awards for academic ability still chose an out-of-state institution. This year, nearly 73 percent of students who were offered a Maryland Distinguished Scholar award for their artistic talent planned to attend a Maryland college or university -- **the highest percentage since 1987.**

Table 2.
Maryland High Ability Students
Percentage Who Plan To Attend a Maryland College or University
1990 to 1998

| Year | National Merit Semifinalist | Maryland Distinguished Scholar | |
|------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------|
| | | Academic | Talent-Arts |
| 1990 | 24.2% | 42.7% | 64.9% |
| 1991 | 26.0% | 33.5% | 61.9% |
| 1992 | 21.4% | 42.9% | 66.7% |
| 1994 | 29.9% | 36.0% | 58.2% |
| 1995 | 28.9% | 44.4% | 58.8% |
| 1996 | 29.0% | 39.7% | 59.5% |
| 1997 | 28.2% | 50.3% | 55.1% |
| 1998 | 33.1% | 39.8% | 72.7% |

Note: The high ability student survey was not conducted in 1993.

Source: Maryland Higher Education Commission, Survey of The College Plans of High Ability Students, 1998.

A majority of the 1998 high ability students (51 percent) selected an independent out-of-state institution. The campuses chosen most frequently include:

- Yale University
- Princeton University
- Brown University
- Harvard University
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Forty-one percent of Maryland's high ability students decided to enroll at a Maryland public or independent institution in 1998 compared to 35 percent in 1990. Maryland public four-year colleges and universities enrolled 30 percent of these students; independent institutions, 10 percent; and community colleges, 1 percent. These figures are presented in Table 3.

University of Maryland, College Park continues to recruit the largest percentage of high ability students of any Maryland institution. The figure has risen from 17 percent to 22 percent since 1990.

Table 3.
Colleges and Universities Selected by High Ability Students
Selected Years: 1990 and 1998

| Segment | 1990 | 1998 |
|---|--------------|--------------|
| <i>Community Colleges</i> | | |
| Anne Arundel | 0.2% | 0.3% |
| Baltimore City | 0.2% | - |
| Hagerstown | 0.2% | 0.3% |
| Harford | - | 0.3% |
| Montgomery | 0.2% | - |
| Prince George's | 0.2% | - |
| Subtotal - Community Colleges | 0.9% | 0.9% |
| <i>Four-Year Public</i> | | |
| Frostburg | 0.5% | 0.3% |
| Salisbury | 1.4% | 1.8% |
| Towson | 2.3% | 3.2% |
| UMBC | 2.9% | 2.1% |
| UMCP | 17.0% | 21.5% |
| Morgan | - | 0.3% |
| St. Mary's | 1.4% | 0.6% |
| Subtotal-Four-Year Public | 25.5% | 29.8% |
| <i>Independent Institutions</i> | | |
| Capitol | - | 0.3% |
| Goucher | 0.5% | 0.6% |
| Hood | 0.4% | 0.3% |
| Johns Hopkins | 2.1% | 3.8% |
| Loyola | 1.6% | 1.5% |
| MD Institute of Art | 1.6% | 1.5% |
| Notre Dame | 0.4% | - |
| Peabody | - | 0.6% |
| Villa Julie | - | 0.3% |
| St. Johns | 0.2% | - |
| Washington Bible | 0.2% | - |
| Washington College | 0.5% | - |
| Western Maryland | 1.1% | 1.2% |
| Subtotal-Independent Colleges | 8.6% | 10.1% |
| Total- All Maryland Institutions | 35.0% | 40.8% |
| U.S. Naval Academy | 0.7% | 0.9% |
| <i>Other States</i> | | |
| Public | 15.4% | 7.4% |
| Private | 48.9% | 51.2% |
| Total Other States | 64.3% | 58.6% |

Source: Maryland Higher Education Commission, Survey of The College Plans of High Ability Students, 1998

Academic Plans

Almost all the respondents indicated that they had selected a major. A majority of the high ability students intend to study engineering (23 percent), biological science (14 percent) or fine and applied arts (12 percent). Science and technology related fields (especially engineering) have been the most popular majors throughout the history of the survey. Of the students who planned to study engineering, mathematics, business or physical science, most selected an out-of-state institution. A majority of students who chose computer science, architecture, languages or health as their major picked a Maryland public institution (Table 4).

Table 4.
Maryland High Ability Students Choice of College
By Intended Major

| Intended Major | Out-of-State | | Maryland | | Percent of Total |
|---------------------|--------------|---------|----------|---------|------------------|
| | Public | Private | Public | Private | |
| Architecture | - | 20.0% | 80.0% | - | 2.2% |
| Biological Science | 6.5% | 29.0% | 51.6% | 12.9% | 13.9% |
| Business | 15.8% | 47.4% | 31.6% | 5.3% | 8.5% |
| Communications | - | 50.0% | 50.0% | - | 2.7% |
| Computer Science | - | 31.3% | 62.5% | 6.3% | 7.2% |
| Engineering | 9.8% | 62.7% | 19.6% | 7.8% | 22.9% |
| Fine & Applied Arts | 3.8% | 30.8% | 50.0% | 15.4% | 11.7% |
| Languages | - | 33.3% | 66.7% | - | 2.7% |
| Health | 7.7% | 38.5% | 53.8% | - | 5.8% |
| Home Economics | - | 100.0% | - | - | 0.4% |
| Law | 100.0% | - | - | - | 0.4% |
| Letters | - | 66.7% | 16.7% | 16.7% | 2.7% |
| Mathematics | 40.0% | 20.0% | 20.0% | 20.0% | 2.2% |
| Physical Science | 7.1% | 50.0% | 35.7% | 7.1% | 6.3% |
| Psychology | - | 75.0% | 25.0% | - | 1.8% |
| Social Science | 21.1% | 50.0% | 5.6% | 22.2% | 8.1% |
| Total | 9.0% | 44.4% | 36.3% | 9.0% | 100.0% |

Source: Maryland Higher Education Commission, Survey of The College Plans of High Ability Students, 1998

Financial Aid

High ability students who selected a Maryland public campus have consistently had much more of their first year's college costs covered by financial aid than have talented students who have gone out-of-state. In 1998, 39 percent had all their first year college costs covered.

Most of the students who chose an out-of-state college or university or a Maryland independent institution had a much smaller percentage of their initial year's cost covered by financial assistance. In nearly every year, a majority of the students attending an out-of-state institution (either public or private) had no more than 25 percent of their first year costs covered by financial assistance.

Table 5.
Maryland High Ability Students
Percentage of First-Year Educational Costs Covered by Financial Aid

| Percentage of Educational Costs Covered | Out-of-State | | Maryland | | All Students |
|---|--------------|---------|----------|---------|--------------|
| | Public | Private | Public | Private | |
| 0% to 25% | 52.0% | 64.5% | 12.9% | 23.5% | 43.4% |
| 26% to 50% | 8.0% | 10.5% | 14.9% | 17.6% | 12.3% |
| 51% to 75% | 12.0% | 12.2% | 21.8% | 17.6% | 15.6% |
| 76% to 99% | 12.0% | 9.9% | 11.9% | 26.5% | 12.3% |
| 100% | 16.0% | 2.9% | 38.6% | 14.7% | 16.5% |

Source: Maryland Higher Education Commission, Survey of The College Plans of High Ability Students, 1998

Reasons for Choice of Institution

What are the factors that high ability students indicated were important in their choice of a college? To identify some of the most important reasons why these high ability students made the decisions they did, students were asked to indicate the degree of importance of 24 factors that may have contributed to their choice of college. Students could respond that a particular factor was very important, somewhat important, or not important in their selection process.

Table 6 contains the percentage of respondents who ranked each item as "very important" to their decision. The reasons that were instrumental in attracting the greatest number of students were the quality and selectivity of the school and the students' planned academic program:

- Overall reputation of the college (73 percent)
- Superior program in intended major (67 percent)
- Faculty commitment to good teaching (66 percent)
- Success of graduates in finding a job or gaining admission to graduate or professional school (62 percent)
- Quality of student body (55 percent)
- Appearance or atmosphere of the college (52 percent)

Forty percent cited financial assistance and a good faculty/student ratio as key considerations, and 30 percent or more mentioned good impressions of the school, special programs, college social life, and the size of the student body.

Table 6.
Maryland High Ability Students
Percentage Who Rated Certain Factors As Very Important
To Their Decision to Attend a College or University
By Type of Institution

| Factors | Out-of-State | | Maryland | | All Students |
|--|--------------|---------|----------|---------|--------------|
| | Public | Private | Public | Private | |
| Reputation of school | 80.0% | 82.8% | 50.0% | 81.1% | 72.9% |
| Superior program in intended major | 68.0% | 68.0% | 67.6% | 61.1% | 67.2% |
| Faculty commitment to good teaching | 62.5% | 72.8% | 49.5% | 80.6% | 65.9% |
| Graduates are successful | 66.7% | 68.4% | 43.0% | 80.6% | 62.2% |
| Quality of student body | 54.2% | 77.6% | 23.0% | 38.9% | 54.9% |
| Appearance of campus | 58.3% | 59.2% | 38.0% | 52.8% | 52.2% |
| Better financial assistance offered | 37.5% | 19.0% | 75.2% | 47.2% | 40.4% |
| Good faculty/student ratio | 16.7% | 46.8% | 23.2% | 66.7% | 39.5% |
| School made a good impression | 36.0% | 37.4% | 20.4% | 47.2% | 33.4% |
| Special programs for acad. talented | 36.0% | 22.8% | 54.0% | 19.4% | 32.6% |
| Social life at the college | 33.3% | 38.2% | 20.0% | 36.1% | 32.0% |
| The size of the student body not too large | 29.2% | 36.2% | 10.1% | 55.6% | 30.0% |
| Wanted to live away from home | 29.2% | 36.8% | 13.0% | 19.4% | 26.8% |
| Tuition cost are less | 29.2% | 7.0% | 61.0% | 16.7% | 26.1% |
| Diversity of the student body | 4.2% | 28.7% | 16.0% | 8.3% | 20.6% |
| Good graduate program in major | 29.2% | 17.9% | 17.3% | 16.7% | 18.8% |
| Parent(s) felt it was the best choice | 16.7% | 19.1% | 20.0% | 11.1% | 18.0% |
| College location | 12.5% | 18.4% | 11.1% | 19.4% | 15.7% |
| Knew more about it than other college | 16.0% | 6.4% | 21.2% | 16.7% | 12.8% |
| Wanted to attend college close to home | 8.3% | 2.3% | 14.0% | 25.0% | 8.6% |
| Friends recommended it | 0.0% | 10.3% | 8.0% | 8.3% | 8.6% |
| Teacher or counselor recommended it | 8.3% | 10.5% | 5.1% | 5.6% | 8.1% |
| Sports/athletics program | 12.5% | 5.7% | 5.1% | 11.1% | 6.8% |
| Religious/ethnic considerations | 0.0% | 7.5% | 4.0% | 5.6% | 5.7% |

Source: Maryland Higher Education Commission, Survey of The College Plans of High Ability Students, 1998

In contrast, economic considerations emerged as a strong force for students selecting Maryland public colleges and universities. Seventy-five percent of these students cited better financial assistance and 61 percent cited lower tuition costs as major reasons for their decision to go to a public campus in Maryland. Economic considerations were not as significant for those students enrolling in out-of-state colleges. In addition, a greater proportion of the seniors enrolling at a Maryland public institution than all respondents (54 percent to 33 percent) stressed the availability of special programs for academically talented students. Many of these students indicated in written comments that the Honors and

Gemstone Program at College Park were strong influences in their decision to attend that institution.

Maryland Distinguished Scholar recipients were asked whether the award played an important role in determining their college choice. The proportion who deemed it very important has ranged between 18 and 29 percent since 1990. More than 40 percent of the 1998 Distinguished Scholar recipients indicated that the award was not important in influencing their selection of a college.

Students attending an out-of-state institution were asked to suggest changes or improvements they thought would make Maryland's public colleges and universities more attractive to academically talented students. Frequent recommendations included: improving the academic reputation of and programs offered by in-state schools, decreasing the size of UMCP's student body, and enhancing the quality of the student body and selectivity at Maryland public institutions.

APPENDIX A

Maryland Higher Education Commission
16 Francis Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401-1781

Survey of
Academically Talented High School Seniors

Please fill in blanks or circle the number next to the most appropriate response.

1. Do you plan to attend college next fall?
 1- Yes If Yes, continue with question 2
 2- No If NO, please explain why below
 3- Undecided Please explain why below

If you do not plan to attend college next fall or are undecided, you should stop here. The rest of the questionnaire does not apply to you. Please return the questionnaire in the postage-paid envelope.

We thank you for your help and time.

2. Have you decided which college you will attend next fall?
 1- Yes
 2- No If No, skip to question 7.

In responding to questions 3 and 4, if referring to a multi-campus university, specify which campus. For example, instead of writing "University of Maryland" you should write "Univ. of Md-College Park", or "Univ. of Md.-Balto Co.", etc.

3. Which college or university do you plan to attend next fall?

4. To which other colleges or universities did you actually apply?

5. Approximately what proportion of your first year college costs (tuition and fees, room and board) will be covered by the financial aid package you have been offered at the college you plan to attend next fall?

- 1- 0-25% 4- 76-99%
 2- 26-50% 5- 100%
 3- 51-75%

6. Please rate how important was each of the factors listed below in your choice of a college or university. Using the following scale, write the appropriate rating in the blank next to each factor:

- 1- Very important
 2- Somewhat important
 3- Not important

- a. Overall reputation of the college _____
 b. Had a superior program in your intended major _____
 c. Better financial assistance offered _____
 d. Wanted to live away from home _____
 e. Attracted by the quality of the student body _____
 f. Parent(s) felt it was the best choice _____
 g. Wanted to attend college close to home _____
 h. Attracted by the diversity of the student body _____
 i. Tuition costs are less _____
 j. Teacher or counselor recommended it _____
 k. Knew more about it than other college _____
 l. Wanted to go to school in the area in which the school is located _____
 m. Friends recommended it _____
 n. Special programs for academically talented students _____
 o. The size of the student body not too large _____
 p. Contacts by the school made a good impression _____
 q. Had a good graduate program in your intended major _____
 r. Good campus athletics or sports program _____
 s. Impressed by the appearance or atmosphere of the campus _____
 t. Graduates have reputation for success in finding a job or getting into graduate/professional school _____
 u. Social life at the college _____
 v. Good faculty/student ratio _____
 w. Faculty commitment to good teaching _____
 x. Religious or ethnic considerations _____
 y. Other reason(s): _____

7. a. Have you decided what undergraduate program or major you will pursue?
 1- Yes
 2- No
 b. If Yes, what is this major?

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8. Have you been offered a Maryland Distinguished Scholar Award and, if so, how important was it to your college choice?
- 1- No
 - 2- Yes, very important
 - 3- Yes, somewhat important
 - 4- Yes, not important
9. a. Have you been actively recruited by any public colleges or universities in Maryland?
- 1- Yes, I have been sent unsolicited literature about a college
 - 2- Yes, I have been contacted personally by a representative from a college
 - 3- Yes, both of the above
 - 4- No, I have not been actively recruited
- b. If yes, which colleges or universities?

13. a. If you plan to attend a public college or university in Maryland, please share with us your overall reasoning for making that decision, especially why you chose a public Maryland institution over other colleges and universities.
- b. If you plan to attend an out-of-state institution or a private institution in Maryland, please suggest changes or improvements that you think would make Maryland's public colleges and universities more attractive to academically talented students like yourself.

10. What is your sex?
- 1- Female
 - 2- Male
11. What is your race/ethnic origin?
- 1- Asian
 - 2- Black
 - 3- Hispanic
 - 4- White
 - 5- Other
12. In what county do you live? _____

(Please use number corresponding to county.)

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| 1- Allegany | 19. Somerset |
| 2- Anne Arundel | 20. Talbot |
| 3- Baltimore County | 21- Washington |
| 4- Calvert | 22- Wicomico |
| 5- Caroline | 23- Worcester |
| 6- Carroll | 24- Baltimore City |
| 7- Cecil | 25- Out-of-state |
| 8- Charles | |
| 9- Dorchester | |
| 10- Frederick | |
| 11- Garrett | |
| 12- Harford | |
| 13- Howard | |
| 14- Kent | |
| 15- Montgomery | |
| 16- Prince George's | |
| 17- Queen Anne's | |
| 18- St. Mary's | |

Thank you very much for your help and time. If you would like to receive a copy of the survey report when it is completed, please fill in your name and home address below:

Name _____

Street _____

City/State/Zip _____

Please mail this survey in the enclosed postage-paid envelope.

