# Student Involvement Undergraduate Assessment:

# Pre- and Post-Pandemic Trends in Communication Preferences, Participation Barriers, Activity Engagement, and Involvement Satisfaction

University Life Faculty Fellow Report
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Submitted by:

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# Introduction

### *Background*

The University Life (UL) Faculty Fellows Program is designed to connect faculty interests and expertise with UL departments to provide enrichment opportunities that further UL goals and address student needs. These partnerships allow for innovative co-curricular initiatives that benefit students through engagement and leadership development while advancing university objectives.

The fellowship summarized in this report represents a collaborative partnership between the Tourism and Events Management program, housed in the College of Education and Human Development (CEHD), and Student Involvement, through which hundreds of campus events are managed and implemented annually. This partnership was designed to strengthen Student Involvement's data analysis and reporting techniques, promote academic engagement, cultivate career-ready graduates, and inform future programming. Faculty Fellow Maggie Daniels mentored an undergraduate research team with support from Student Involvement Executive Director Lauren Long, Associate Director Phil McDaniel, and Associate Director Hope Miller.

### *Goals*

The fellowship was initiated through the identification of three overarching goals that shaped the fellowship activities:

- **Goal 1**: Students will statistically analyze Student Involvement Undergraduate Assessment data.
- **Goal 2**: Students will interpret Student Involvement Undergraduate Assessment data.
- **Goal 3**: Students will present Student Involvement Undergraduate Assessment findings and recommendations at select research outlets.

### *Outcomes*

The outcomes of this fellowship empowered the undergraduate students, strengthened the relationship between Student Involvement and the Tourism and Events Management program, and will inform strategic actions for Student Involvement to apply to future programming. Students learned both the value of and processes inherent to analyzing assessment data while gaining a deeper appreciation of the undergraduate experience at George Mason. They gained confidence and leadership proficiency while honing their presentation skills by giving three research presentations to diverse academic audiences. Collectively, these outcomes align with the University Life core values of leadership for positive change, strategic transformation, and collaborative community.

# Process and Methodology

Figure 1 outlines the 5-step process that was followed for the implementation of the fellowship.

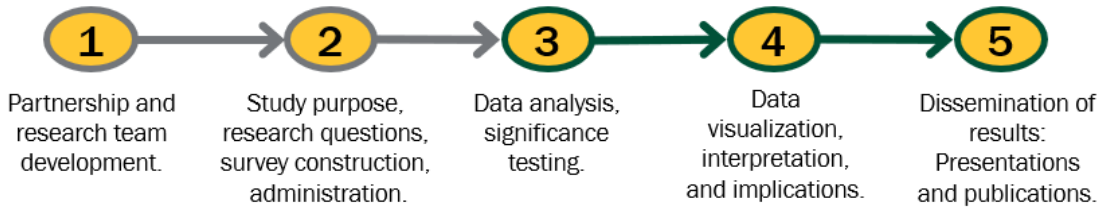



Figure 1: Fellowship implementation process

***Step 1: Partnership and research team development***

Lauren Long and Maggie Daniels collaboratively developed the fellowship partnership between Student Involvement and the Tourism and Events Management Program, identifying a project that would allow for cross-disciplinary interpretation of Student Involvement Undergraduate Assessment data while instilling primary research and career readiness skills for undergraduate students. Student Involvement leaders selected three undergraduate students to participate as paid undergraduate research assistants.

***Step 2: Study purpose, research questions, survey construction and administration***

At the onset of the fellowship, the research team learned that Student Involvement Undergraduate Assessment findings were available from 2007 and 2019, while the 2026 survey was administered during the fellowship period. In conducting an item-by-item analysis, it was determined that the 2007 questionnaire differed to such an extent that comparative analyses would not be possible. The findings from this questionnaire were removed from further analysis. The 2019 questionnaire included sufficient overlap with the 2026 questionnaire to allow for statistical comparisons. This discovery piqued the interest of the undergraduate researcher team, whose personal experiences with the pandemic led them to question how the COVID-19 pandemic may have influenced trends in student involvement. The ensuing discussions informed the following study purpose:

- The purpose of this study is to shed light on George Mason undergraduate extracurricular and co-curricular involvement, pre-pandemic and post-pandemic, as related to communication preferences, barriers to participation, activity engagement, and involvement satisfaction.

Four research questions (RQs) guided the comparisons (2019 and 2026) of undergraduate student respondents:

- **Research Question 1:** What communication platforms are most frequently utilized by undergraduate students to gain information about George Mason activities?
- **Research Question 2:** What barriers prevent undergraduate students from participating in George Mason activities?
- **Research Question 3:** What are the levels of involvement of undergraduate students in specific George Mason activities?
- **Research Question 4:** How satisfied are undergraduate students with their overall level of involvement and involvement with specific George Mason activities?

Survey construction for the 2026 Undergraduate Student Involvement Assessment was largely complete at the onset of the fellowship. Associate Director Phil McDaniel allowed the research team to make minor changes to the 2026 questionnaire to facilitate comparisons to the 2019 data, as feasible. Researchers were also permitted to test the Qualtrics questionnaire software prior to the survey launch. All George Mason undergraduate students were invited to complete the questionnaire, with prize drawings offered as an incentive for completion. Data collection took place from February 2026 – March 2026 (n = 1629), which reflected the previous data collection period of February 2019 – March 2019 (n = 2499).

***Step 3: Data analysis and significance testing***

Data sets were managed in Excel and analyzed in SPSS using quantitative statistical techniques. The data sets were downloaded from Qualtrics to Excel to create a compiled file of variables that were included in the analyses. The compiled file was then moved to SPSS to allow for significance testing. Chi-square analyses were used to address Research Questions 1, 2, and 3 while a t-test and rankings were used to answer Research Question 4.

***Step 4: Data visualization, interpretation, and implications***

Data visualization was developed using PowerBI, Excel, SPSS, and Microsoft Word. Tables and figures were created to make the data readily understandable to non-technical users. Visualization allowed for a simplified summary of the significance testing results, showcased trends, and enhanced the communication of the study implications to diverse audiences.

***Step 5: Dissemination of results***

The undergraduate research team designed a research poster that they presented at the 2026 CEHD Student Research Symposium, where they were the recipients of the *Outstanding*

*Bachelor's Poster Presentation Award*. On April 28, they presented their findings via PowerPoint to University Life Faculty Fellows Spring Showcase, in collaboration with Maggie Daniels. Finally, on May 5, they presented their research poster at the 2026 OSCAR Celebration of Student Scholarship. While the Spring 2026 fellowship is complete, dissemination efforts will continue, including the University Life Student Success Symposium, an external conference presentation, and a peer-reviewed journal article. Together, these efforts will expand outreach to the broader student involvement professional community. The undergraduate researchers will be offered the opportunity to contribute to these submissions and encouraged to apply for OSCAR undergraduate student travel funds to support the external conference presentation.

# Results and Discussion

### *Research Question 1*

Research Question 1 was specific to the communication platforms that are most frequently utilized by undergraduate students to gain information about George Mason activities.

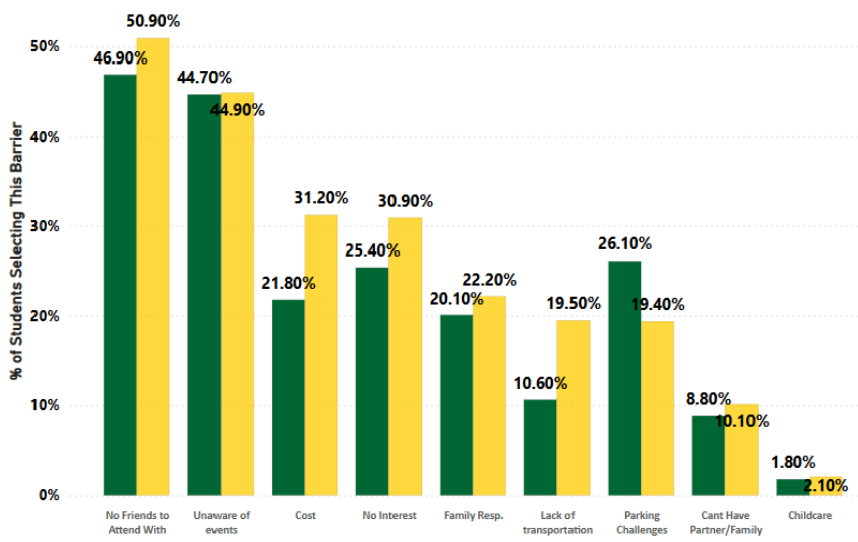
| Table 1 Communication Type | 2019 (%) n = 2499 | 2026 (%) n = 1629 | %Δ | χ2 | p-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Email | 68.4% | 78.6% | 14.91% | 51.51 | 0.001 |
| Mason360/GetConnected | 8.9% | 51.2% | 475.28% | 927.47 | 0.001 |
| Instagram | 20.1% | 43.5% | 116.42% | 260.03 | 0.001 |
| Blackboard/Canvas | 28.4% | 37.1% | 30.63% | 34.94 | 0.001 |
| Word of Mouth | 20.4% | 29.1% | 42.65% | 41.42 | 0.001 |
| Paper Flyers | 16.1% | 24.9% | 54.66% | 47.8 | 0.001 |
| Website | 6.2% | 11.1% | 79.03% | 31.17 | 0.001 |
| LinkedIn | 1.2% | 5.5% | 358.33% | 62.31 | 0.001 |
| Snapchat | 4.1% | 3.3% | -19.51% | 2.044 | 0.153 |
| Today@Mason | 4.2% | 2.3% | -45.24% | 9.93 | 0.002 |
| Fourth Estate Student Newspaper | 0.9% | 2.1% | 133.33% | 10.73 | 0.001 |
| Twitter/X | 9.4% | 1.9% | -79.79% | 92.69 | 0.001 |
| Facebook | 15.6% | 1.8% | -88.46% | 207.46 | 0.001 |
| WGMU Radio | 0.2% | 0.3% | 50.00% | 0.978 | 0.323 |
| Mason Cable Network | 0.2% | 0.2% | 0.00% | 0.373 | 0.542 |

When considering the fifteen communication platforms assessed, twelve of them showed statistically significant differences in terms of usage patterns, when comparing 2019 to 2026 (Table 1). Platforms where usage increased statistically included email, Mason360, Instagram, Blackboard/Canvas, word of mouth, paper flyers, website, LinkedIn, and the Fourth Estate. Statistically significant decreases were found with Snapchat, Twitter/X, and Facebook. Statistically significant changes were not observed in usage of Snapchat, WGMU, and Mason Cable Network. The most notable increase was specific to Mason360, which went from 8.9% usage in 2019 to 51.2% in 2026. The most notable decrease was related to Facebook, which plummeted from 15.6% in 2019 to 1.8% in 2026.

***Research Question 2***

Research Question 2 prompted an exploration of the barriers that prevent undergraduate students from participating in George Mason activities. Nine barriers were analyzed, with five showing statistically significant change when comparing 2019 and 2026 (Table 2).

**Table 2 Barriers to George Mason Activity Participation: 2019 vs. 2026**




| Barrier | 2019_% | 2026_% | Percent Change | χ2 | p_Value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Don't want to go alone | 46.9% | 50.9% | 8.53% | 6.16 | .013 |
| Not aware of events/programs | 44.7% | 44.9% | 0.45% | 0.03 | .861 |
| Cost of event | 21.8% | 31.2% | 43.12% | 46.04 | <.001 |
| Lack of interest | 25.4% | 30.9% | 21.65% | 14.77 | <.001 |
| Family responsibilities | 20.1% | 22.2% | 10.45% | 2.46 | .117 |
| Lack of transportation | 10.6% | 19.5% | 83.96% | 64.53 | <.001 |
| Parking challenges at Mason | 26.1% | 19.4% | -25.67% | 24.33 | <.001 |
| Inability to have partner | 8.8% | 10.1% | 14.77% | 2.18 | .140 |
| Lack of childcare | 1.8% | 2.1% | 16.67% | 0.43 | .511 |

Barriers that were statistically higher in 2026 included “Don’t want to go alone,” “Cost of event,” “Lack of interest,” and “Lack of transportation.” Not wanting to go alone implies a lack of friends who are available, willing, or able to go. The growing pervasiveness of this barrier suggests that the social isolation outcomes of the pandemic continue to impact students’ ability to forge connections. With over half (50.9%) of students indicating this barrier, this finding presents a growing concern that can be addressed with concerted marketing efforts that encourage participation as a means of making new friends. The fear of showing up alone can be combatted if activities lend themselves to organic networking opportunities.

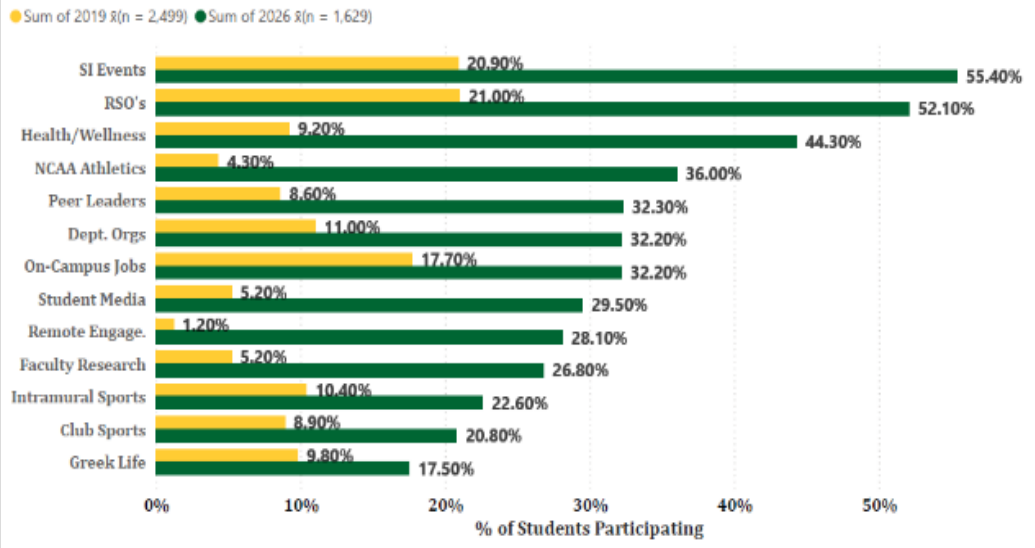
Close to one-third (31.2%) of students indicated that cost is a barrier to participation, up from 21.8% in 2019. The current instability in US job market, the increased cost of living in the DMV, and global inflation are likely contributors to this result. Lack of interest also increased significantly, from 25.4% to 30.9%, as did lack of transportation, from 10.6% to 19.5%.

The one barrier that decreased significantly was lack of parking, which went from 26.1% to 19.4%. While all other barriers did not change significantly, that does not lessen their relevance. In particular, lack of awareness maintains a ranking of the second most prominent barrier, at 44.9% in 2026. The findings from Research 1 can be used to address this barrier, as knowledge of communication platforms that are most commonly utilized allows for targeting campaigns designed to increase awareness.

***Research Question 3***

Research Question 3 pertains to undergraduate involvement in specific George Mason activities. Thirteen activities were listed, all of which showed statistically increased levels of involvement when comparing 2019 and 2026 data (Table 3). Looking specifically at the 2026 findings, the top three areas of engagement include Student Involvement events (such as Mason Day), at 55.4%, registered student organizations (52.1%), and health/wellness activities (44.3%). The highest jump in participation, when comparing 2019 to 2026 relates to remote engagement opportunities, which jumped from 1.2% to 28.1%. The marked increase in remote engagement can be directly attributed to the pandemic, as online activities were necessitated when in-person engagement was curtailed.

**Table 3 Undergraduate Participation in George Mason Activities: 2019 vs. 2026**




| Activity | 2019 x̄(n = 2,499) | 2026 x̄(n = 1,629) | % Δ(2019→2026) | $\chi^2$ | p-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SI Organized Events | 20.90% | 55.40% | 165.10% | 520.62 | <.001 |
| Registered Student Orgs (RSO) | 21.00% | 52.10% | 148.10% | 427.00 | <.001 |
| Health / Wellness Activities | 9.20% | 44.30% | 381.50% | 681.49 | <.001 |
| NCAA Athletics | 4.30% | 36.00% | 737.20% | 709.00 | <.001 |
| Peer Leader Position | 8.60% | 32.30% | 275.60% | 377.32 | <.001 |
| Departmental Organizations | 11.00% | 32.20% | 192.70% | 281.61 | <.001 |
| On-Campus Employment | 17.70% | 32.20% | 81.90% | 114.63 | <.001 |
| Student Media | 5.20% | 29.50% | 467.30% | 463.17 | <.001 |
| Remote / Distance Engagement | 1.20% | 28.10% | 2241.70% | 686.67 | <.001 |
| Faculty-Sponsored Research | 5.20% | 26.80% | 415.40% | 389.57 | <.001 |
| Intramural Sports | 10.40% | 22.60% | 117.30% | 112.65 | <.001 |
| Club Sports | 8.90% | 20.80% | 133.70% | 118.48 | <.001 |
| Social Fraternity / Sorority | 9.80% | 17.50% | 78.60% | 52.13 | <.001 |

### *Research Question 4*

Research Question 4 pertained to overall satisfaction with involvement opportunities and involvement satisfaction with specific George Mason activities. A comparison of average overall satisfaction ratings (scaled from 1-5) showed a statistically significant increase in 2026 (3.94) in comparison to 2019 (3.64) (Table 4). This finding indicates that a growing appreciation for involvement opportunities across the board and aligns with the concerted efforts being made to improve both the quantity and quality of extracurricular and co-curricular activities.

When reviewing individual activities, rankings were used (Table 5) rather than statistical testing, as the 2019 questionnaire wording was not identical in 2026. Looking at the 2026 rankings, what is notable is the high level of satisfaction in six areas, all of which had ratings above 3.90, including on-campus employment (4.01), health/wellness activities (3.98), registered student organizations (3.96), Student Involvement organized events (3.95), NCAA athletics (3.95), and

intramural sports. Notably, only two areas had average ratings lower than 3.80 in 2026, including social fraternity / sorority (3.77) and remote / distance engagement (3.62). Although involvement in remote / distance engagement activities has increased dramatically, satisfaction with such engagement remains low. A comprehensive review of remote / distance engagement opportunities is warranted to pinpoint methods of improving student satisfaction. Ad hoc evidence suggests that students have a short length-of-stay threshold if the activity does not draw them in immediately.

**Table 4.**
***Overall level of satisfaction with involvement opportunities at George Mason: 2019 vs. 2026***

| Category | 2019 x̄ (*n* = 2280) | 2026 x̄ (*n* = 1537) | *t-test* | *p-value* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Overall level of satisfaction with involvement opportunities at George Mason** | 3.64 | 3.94 | 9.32 | <.001 |

**Table 5.**
***Involvement satisfaction with individual activities: Average ratings rank ordered by year***

| Category | 2019 x̄ | Category | 2026 x̄ |
|---|---|---|---|
| **GMSI organized events** | 3.72 | On-campus employment | 4.01 |
| **Departmental organizations** | 3.67 | Health / wellness activities | 3.98 |
| **Peer leader position** | 3.64 | Registered student organizations | 3.96 |
| **Faculty-sponsored research** | 3.62 | GMSI organized events | 3.95 |
| **Registered student organizations** | 3.62 | NCAA athletics | 3.95 |
| **Health / wellness activities** | 3.61 | Intramural sports | 3.91 |
| **On-campus employment** | 3.60 | Club sports | 3.87 |
| **Intramural sports** | 3.57 | Departmental organizations | 3.86 |
| **NCAA athletics** | 3.55 | Faculty-sponsored research | 3.82 |
| **Club sports** | 3.53 | Peer leader position | 3.80 |
| **Student media** | 3.47 | Student media | 3.80 |
| **Remote / distance engagement** | 3.29 | Social fraternity / sorority | 3.77 |
| **Social fraternity / sorority** | 3.19 | Remote / distance engagement | 3.62 |

***Associated involvement levels in Table 1. *t-tests* not conducted for individual activities due to year-over-year variation in question wording.**

# Conclusion

University student involvement departments are charged with facilitating the undergraduate journey by offering diverse opportunities outside the classroom that encourage participation and contribute to student learning and well-being. Student involvement professionals must be responsive to students' preferences to support personal growth, identity development, and psychological well-being (Haber-Curran & Pierre, 2023; Kilgo et al., 2016; Tillapaugh, 2019). Systematically derived student feedback allows for the creation of evidence-based program development strategies.

At George Mason University, the availability of pre-pandemic (2019) and post-pandemic (2026) assessment data offered a unique opportunity to compare and contrast George Mason undergraduate student experiences over time. By understanding their communication preferences, barriers to involvement, activity preferences, and involvement satisfaction, George Mason Student Involvement leaders can fine-tune current offerings while introducing new engagement opportunities. The 2026 Undergraduate Student Involvement Assessment report will build upon this research through additional analysis of variables that were unique to the 2026 questionnaire.

# Images

Image 1: CEHD Student Research Symposium, April 22, 2026

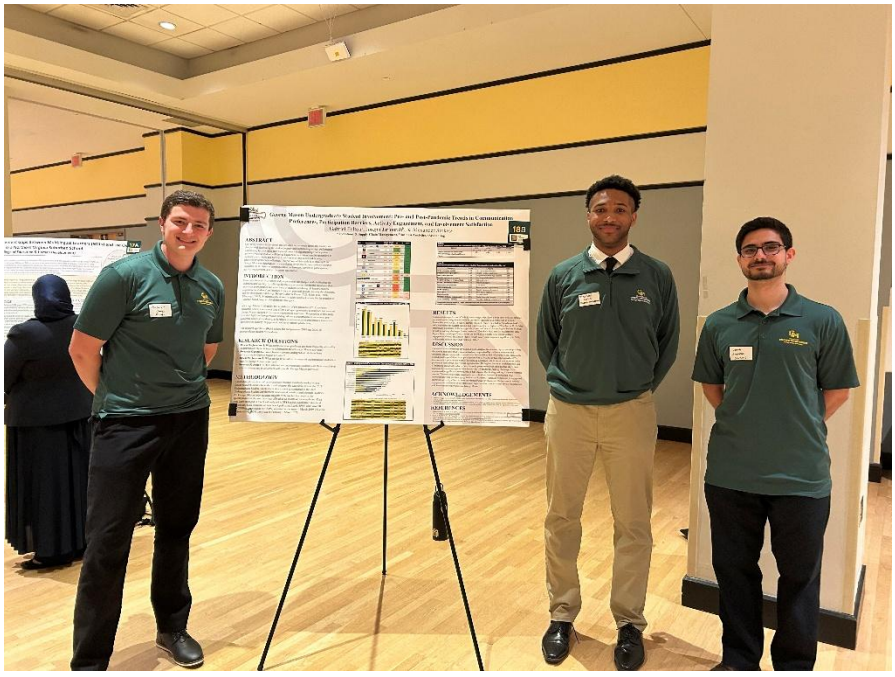


Image 2: CEHD Student Research Symposium, April 22, 2026

Image 3: CEHD Student Research Symposium, April 22, 2026

Image 4: University Life Faculty Fellows Spring Showcase, April 28, 2026

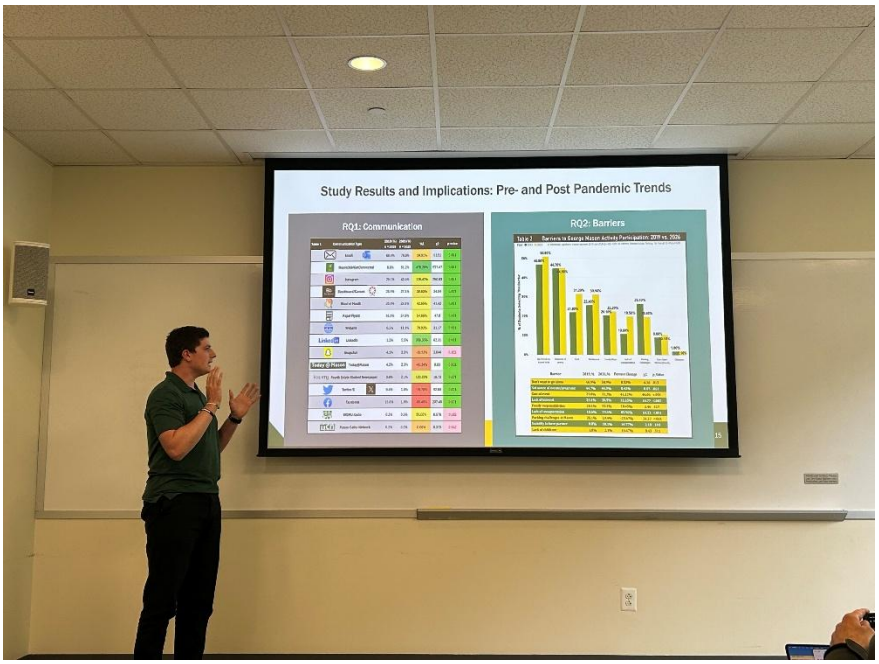



Image 5: University Life Faculty Fellows Spring Showcase, April 28, 2026

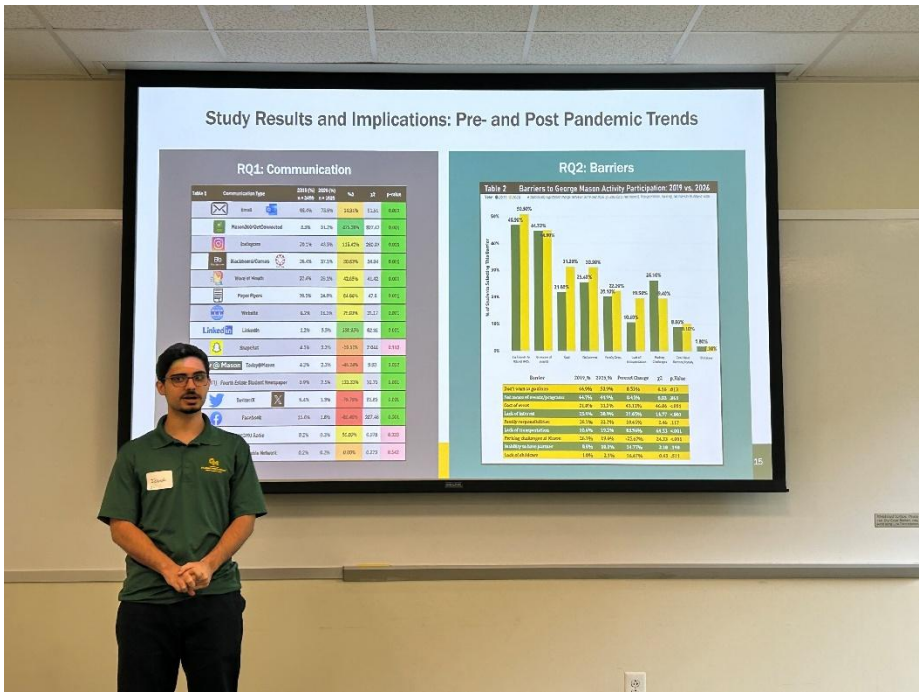



Image 6: University Life Faculty Fellows Spring Showcase, April 28, 2026

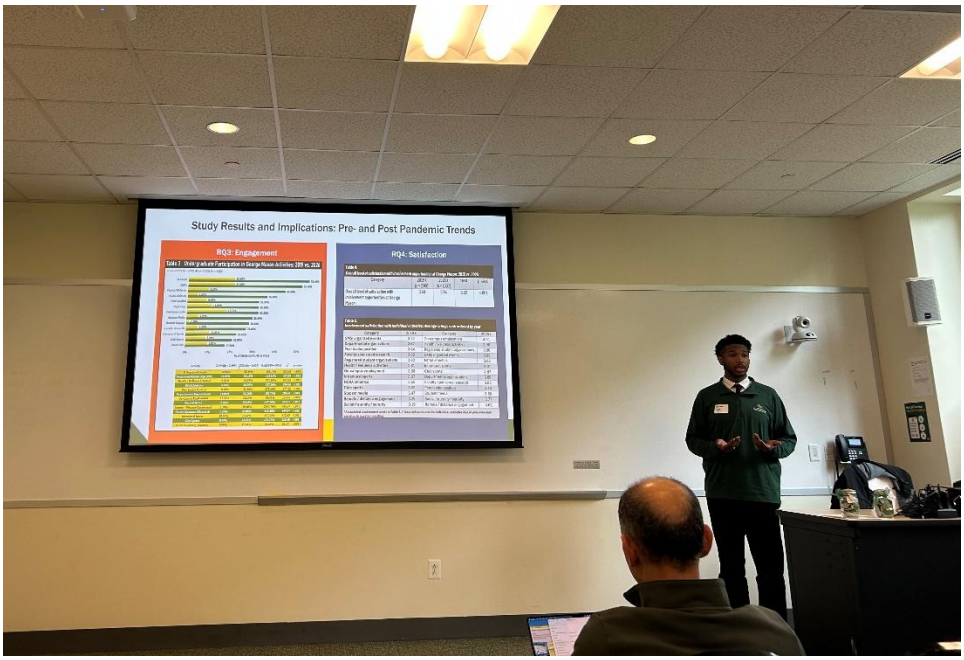



Image 7: University Life Faculty Fellows Spring Showcase, April 28, 2026

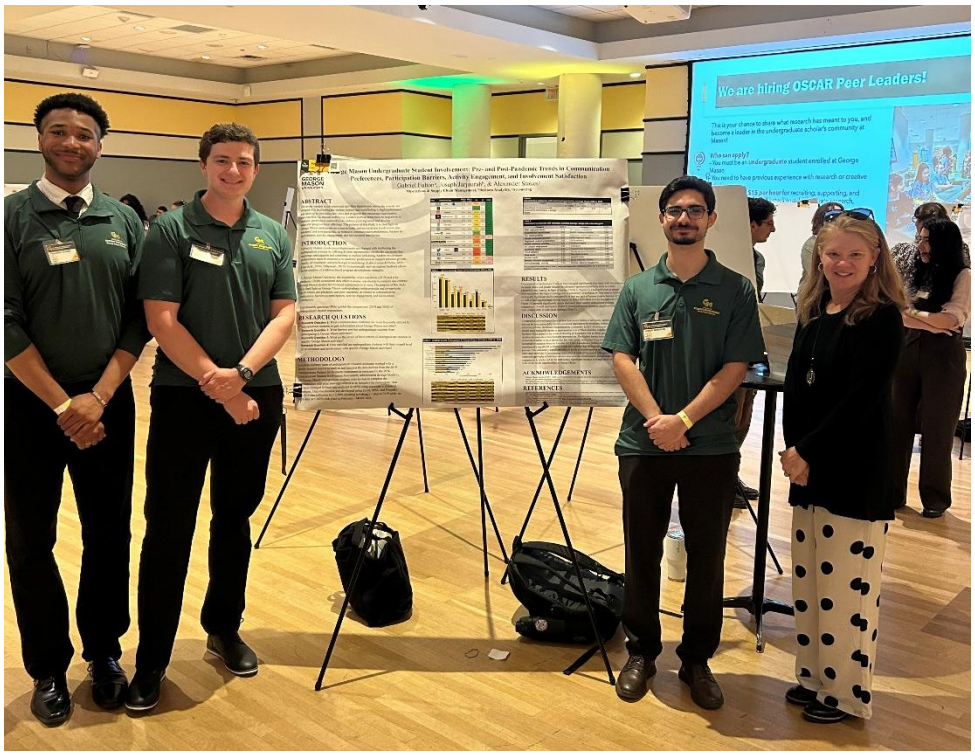



Image 8: OSCAR Celebration of Student Scholarship, May 5, 2026

Image 9: OSCAR Celebration of Student Scholarship, May 5, 2026

Image 10: OSCAR Celebration of Student Scholarship, May 5, 2026

# References

Haber-Curran, P., & Pierre, D. E. (2023). Student involvement as a catalyst for leadership identity. *New Directions for Student Leadership, 178*, 75-86. https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.20556.

Kilgo, C.A., Mollet, A.L., & Pascarella, E.T. (2016). The estimated effects of college student involvement on psychological well-being. *Journal of College Student Development 57*(8), 1043-1049.

Tillapaugh, D. (2019). Student involvement and engagement. *In* E. S. Abes, S. R. Jones, and D. L. Stewart (Eds.) *Rethinking College Student Development Theory Using Critical Frameworks*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003446835