

First Destination Survey – FAQ, Overview & Policies

OVERVIEW:

This guidance document supports the First Destination Survey (FDS) system at Gwynedd Mercy University. The FDS is new as of 2026 and replaces the previous Career Outcomes Survey (COS) as the primary instrument at the university level for understanding experiences for recent alumni as they navigate the job market to secure their first (or next) professional role after graduation or seek continuing education through a graduate school program or other educational experience.

The FDS expands on the COS by improving institutional understanding and assessment of initial career outcomes for recent alumni as well as for related outcomes such as underemployment, internship access, issues with the job market, trend differences by industry, and average starting salary changes for an industry overtime. These as well as similar variables affecting job and career attainment support ongoing efforts by faculty, staff, and administration at GwyrddU to improve programs and support the University's mission.

The First Destination Survey is a widely used instrument by colleges and universities across the country to assess employment and career-related outcomes for college graduates. **The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE)** is the preeminent national organization focused on the employment of the college educated. NACE has established best practices as well as recommended policies, procedures, and minimum standards to guide institutions in the administration of their own FDS.

In collaboration with the Office of Institutional Research and The Office of Assessment & Evaluation, The Office of Career Development has utilized the 'Standards and Protocols for Collecting and Reporting Career Outcomes for College Graduates' as the basis for developing the new FDS system for GwyrddU. You can see NACE's guidance [here](#).

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

Question: Why should I respond to the survey? How do I access it? Is this survey required for me to be able to graduate? When should I complete the survey?

Answer: Figuring out life after graduation isn't easy, nor is navigating the job market or finding the right graduate program for you. The FDS is a great opportunity to not only share and celebrate your experiences after graduation with faculty from your major or program but also to ensure that your experiences can be combined with other recent alumni and used to support other students in your major or program.

- Career Development is administering the survey using Handshake. Handshake is the career management platform for the university and is the easiest place to find internships and pre-professional work experiences while still in college or entry level professional roles requiring a Bachelor's degree after you graduate.
- **You can use this link to access the survey.**
- No, the FDS is not required for graduation. The survey will close for responses at the end of the year (December 31st) and you should respond to the survey when you have decided on your plans for further education or graduate school or when you have been hired to a job.

Question: What if I haven't gotten a job yet or haven't started applying for graduate programs or made other educational plans yet?

Answer: The FDS is ideally designed to capture new alumni's experiences between 3-6 months after graduation. If you've not yet accepted a job offer or decided on a graduate or continuing education program, you can come back prior to December 31st to submit your response to the survey.

- Select "Still Looking" if you haven't yet found a job or haven't found a graduate program
- **Remember:** It is normal and many recent alumni are still looking 3-6 months or even more after graduation and selecting 'Still Looking' helps GMercyU to better understand where you are in the process and any issues you're experiencing.
- If someone is still looking for a job or having issues in the job market, the FDS allows Career Development to reach out to provide better support to recent alumni. You don't have to do it all on your own!
 - Use this link to make an appointment with Career Development.
- **NOTE on "Not Seeking":**
 - Only select 'Not Seeking' as your response on the survey if you are *not* currently working a job and are *not* currently looking for a job and are *not* in a graduate program or other continuing education program. Recent alumni who *should* select Not Seeking include: Those on a mission trip, pursuing religious life, spending time taking care of family, those taking a gap year, or similar experiences that are not working.

Question: Should only undergraduate alumni respond to the FDS? What about recent alumni from master's or doctoral graduate programs or associate's or certificate programs?

Answer: No. The FDS is for any student (new alumni) recently graduated who was enrolled, whether part-time or full-time, in credit-bearing courses that allowed them to complete a program of studies at Gwynedd Mercy University.

Question: How do I know which graduating class year I'm in?

Answer: Each class year includes any students who graduated in May (the traditional time of graduation), December, or Summer. As an example, the Class of 2027 is comprised of students who graduated in Summer of 2026, December of 2026, and May of 2027.

Question: How can I access the report and results for my graduating class year?

Answer: Career Development produces an executive summary after June 30th every year with the aggregate trends across the entire graduating class of the prior year. Access it with [this link](#).

Question: What is the 'career outcomes rate' for a graduating class year and how is it calculated? What is the 'knowledge rate' and how is it calculated?

Answer: NACE defines the career outcomes rate as the number of graduates who have landed in any of the employment categories, plus continuing education divided by the number of students for whom an outcome is known. It excludes those graduates not seeking an outcome or for whom no data is available.

NACE defines the knowledge rate as the percentage of the graduating class for whom an outcomes destination is known. It includes the sum of all the employment categories, plus continuing education, plus the number of students still seeking an outcome. It excludes those students for whom no information is available or who are not seeking employment or continuing education at this time.

Question: Is the survey anonymous? How are the responses I submit going to be stored and utilized by GMercyU?

Answer: No, while the FDS is not anonymous, your responses are confidential. The Office of Career Development collects, stores, and manages FDS response data, on behalf of the university, in Handshake. Identifying information is stored along with the responses to allow Career Development to better assist those who may be having a difficult time navigating aspects of the job market. Individual identifiable responses are not shared nor reported externally. Only anonymized aggregate data is made available to the broader campus community and publicly accessible on gmercyyu.edu or shared with professional organizations such as NACE.

Question: Is the survey anonymous? How are the responses I submit going to be stored and utilized by GMercyU? (continued)

Answer: Your responses are confidential. Response data from the First Destination Survey is managed primarily by the Offices of Career Development, Institutional Research and Analytics, and Assessment & Evaluation. Narratives and trends identified in the data are shared to support continuous program improvement and help faculty identify opportunities for their respective programs. Individual response data is not made available to support fundraising efforts.

No individual response data is published, made available or reported externally. Any data made available in reports or publications to be disseminated internally or externally is grouped or aggregated, such as through counts or averages. See more on FERPA & other policies [here](#).

In addition to FDS data being used to support alumni and inform institutional effectiveness and program assessment, aggregate data is used to identify trends for individual graduating classes and across time to help improve employer relationship building, career attainment and develop initiatives that enhance career readiness for both students and alumni.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE ON SURVEY ITEMS:

Question: Do I have to give my personal email address?

Answer: To login to Handshake you need to either use your gmercy portal username and password or login using a personal email address. Adding your personal email address ensures that even if you forget your gmercyu username and password, you'll still be able to come back and access Handshake.

Some examples of why you may wish to use Handshake as an alumni:

- Set up an appointment with the Office of Career Development (use [this link](#))
- Find out about upcoming employer, career, or alumni related events - both on-campus and virtual ([link here](#))
- Become an alumni mentor for current students in your major or program (email cd@gmercyu.edu for more details)
- Access useful guides and career resources on topics such as: salary negotiation, asking for a raise, and new resources coming soon such as:
 - Advice from other alumni on how to reach management level roles
 - Resources to support and guide your entrepreneurship
 - Salary ranges for different positions, recorded trainings, and much more!

Career Development makes some information and resources available publicly on gmercyu.edu but reserves more in-depth resources and research-informed guides to support students and alumni only on Handshake.

Question: How should I respond to 'What are you primarily doing after graduation'?

Answer: Select one of the options on the screen:

- **Working** - Select this if you have either:
 - Accepted a job or position
 - Started a new job or position since graduation
 - Were already previously working in a position before graduation that you are continuing to work in after graduation
- **Volunteering** - Select this if you are pursuing an unpaid role, volunteer position, Peace Corp, FOCUS missionary, or similar opportunity that is not an hourly paid or salaried role
- **Continuing Education** - Select this if you're continuing your education in some capacity, regardless of degree level (ex: Bachelor's, Master's, Doctorate, or a Certificate program)
- **Military** - Select this if you're serving with the military or National Guard after graduation
- **Fellowship** - Select this if you've received and expect to start in a fellowship after graduation, whether as part of a graduate program or as part of your job
- **Still Looking** - Select this if you are currently still seeking and have not yet accepted a job or position
- **Not Seeking** - Only select this if none of the above applies - examples: gap year, pursuing the priesthood or religious life, taking care of family, going on vacation or traveling in another country

Question: How should I respond to 'What is your position'?

Answer: This is asking for the position title of your job that you're working in after graduation.

Question: How should I respond to 'How are you compensated'? Do I have to give my salary, what should I put?

Answer: The salary section is optional and is not required to be submitted to complete the survey.

- However, keep in mind, Career Development will aggregate what you input as your 'Base Salary' with other alumni in your field or industry so as to be able to identify an average salary range for entry level professional positions in your field!
- This information is critical to being able to understand changes in average salary in your industry around Greater Philadelphia so that you and other alumni can better negotiate your salary or know when you should be asking for a raise!

Have a question you don't see in the FAQ - email cd@gmercyyu.edu

ADMINISTRATION & REPORTING TIMELINES:

Each year the First Destination Survey will be administered to the graduating class of students from that year with the initial email invitation sent to students in early September. Data collection will run through the end of the year with the survey closing by the end of the first week of January.

Please see the sequence below for a full breakdown of the survey methodology using 2026 as an example:

- Students for a given class year graduate in Summer 2025, December 2025, and May 2026
- Institutional Advancement provides data from Colleague with contact info for the 2026 graduating class to Career Development & Institutional Research during Summer 2026
- While the Standard Question Set for the survey does not change year to year, Career Development works collaboratively with campus partners to assess any additional questions that should be added to the FDS
 - Final additional question set is determined by August 2026
- Initial FDS invitation emails are sent to both @gmercyu.edu and personal emails for graduates
- Additional emails as well as phone calls are conducted from September 2026 through mid December 2026 to encourage responses
- Career Development sends a list of non-respondents, for a program, to the department chair in prior to Thanksgiving so faculty can be recruited to help encourage recent alumni to respond
- In mid to late January, following data collection, Career Development uses Handshake's Sourced Outcomes tool to identify any work or continuing education outcome(s) available on any non-respondents public LinkedIn profile
 - These sourced outcomes are added to generate the total knowledge rate for a given class year
- The final career outcomes rate for the graduating class year is reported to Marketing to be communicated to key stakeholders across the institution
- Career Development evaluates survey results and produces an executive summary and accompanying report for that class year by July 1st, 2027

NACE'S STANDARD QUESTION SET FOR THE FDS:

NACE has established a standard set of questions they recommend be asked on any institution's FDS. Every year NACE requests institution's to submit anonymized results from their FDS to contribute to NACE's understanding of national trends and showcase the impact and value of higher education across the country.

- You can use [this link](#) to see the standard set of questions GMercyU asks in the FDS.
- You can access national FDS reporting for a given class year from NACE with [this link](#).

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS:

- Do you feel like you got the type of internship, clinical, or other work experience you wanted to get while in college to prepare you for getting a job after graduation?
 - Lykert scale 1-5 (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree)
- How satisfied would you say you are with how things have been going with your post-college career or continuing education plans?
 - Lykert scale 1-5 (Strongly Dissatisfied to Strongly Satisfied)
- Are there any concerns or issues you've been running into during your job search (or search for continuing education program)?
 - *Short Answer Entry*
- If you have already gotten a job, how long did it take you to get the job?
 - Under a Month
 - 1-2 Months
 - Under 3 Months
 - More than 3 Months
 - More than 6 Months
- Overall how satisfied would you say you are with how your time at Gwynedd Mercy University prepared you to obtain a professional role or continuing education in the career of your choice after college?
 - Lykert scale 1-5 (Strongly Dissatisfied to Strongly Satisfied)
- What aspects of your experience at Gwynedd Mercy University do you feel best prepared you for your current employment or continuing education? Why?
 - *Short Answer Entry*
- In what ways could your experience at Gwynedd Mercy University have better prepared you for your current employment or continuing education? Why?
 - *Short Answer Entry*
- Which of these experiences during your time at GMercyU would you say have most helped to prepare you for your life after college? (Please select all that you would rate a 4 or 5 out of 5 in terms of how helpful they were to you)

- | | | |
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| • Academic Advising | • Your General Education courses | • Residence Life |
| • Academic Tutoring | • Your Griffin Edge E-Portfolio | • Service Learning or Volunteering |
| • Alternative Spring Break | • Honors Program | • Student Activities |
| • Athletics/Sports | • Your Leadership Roles | • Student Government Association |
| • Capstone Project | • Your Major (or degree program) | • Student Organizations |
| • Career Development | • The Mercy Center | • Study Abroad |
| • Clinicals or Internships | • Your Relationships with Faculty or Staff | • Research Opportunity You Had |
| • Distinctive Mercy Experience | | • Other |
| • First-Year Experience | | |

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY QUESTIONS:

- Which best describes your current position?
 - Currently employed in OT practice area
 - Other healthcare area or position
 - Other teacher, school, or educational area or position
- What is your primary population or area of practice? (Choose more than one if you need to)
 - With Children under 18
 - With Young Adults
 - With working adults or professionals
 - With elderly
 - With those with physical disabilities
 - With those with autism or other special needs or intellectual disabilities
 - Other
- Please indicate how satisfied you are with your compensation and benefits package?
 - Lykert Scale 1-5 (Strongly Dissatisfied to Strongly Satisfied)
- How well do you feel you were prepared for your clinicals?
 - Lykert Scale 1-5 (Not Prepared At All to Very Well Prepared)
- Have you passed your boards?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Signed up and waiting to take or waiting to hear results
- Please indicate how satisfied you are, overall at this point in time, with your new career and work in the OT field?
 - Lykert Scale 1-5 (Strongly Dissatisfied to Strongly Satisfied)

PUBLIC HEALTH QUESTIONS:

- Have you seen any jobs or positions you're interested in pursuing in the next 3-5 years that require or desire a Master's Degree in Public Health?
 - Yes
 - No
- Are you considering or planning to pursue a Master's Degree in Public Health?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Not Sure Yet

TEACHER EDUCATION QUESTIONS:

- Are you working or seeking a job in your certification area? (Ex: Had PreK-4 cert and now have a job as a 2nd grade teacher, etc.)
 - Yes, I Obtained (or Still Seeking) a job in my cert area
 - No, Obtained (or Still Seeking) a position outside cert area
- What type of Teaching or Education system did you get a job in?
 - Public School System
 - Private School
 - Catholic School
 - Charter School
 - Other



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