

**The Academic and Co-Curricular Experiences of  
UCSD Seniors  
Selected Findings from the 2006 UCSD Graduating Senior Survey**

The academic, cognitive, and behavioral experiences of UCSD seniors were measured with the administration of the UCSD Graduating Senior Survey in spring 2006. As part of our continuing assessment and evaluation of the undergraduate experience at UCSD, the Graduating Senior Survey (GSS) focused on the cumulative experiences and activities of students who had attended UCSD for at least four years as entering freshmen in 2002, or two years as entering transfers in 2004. These data were gathered to improve our understanding of the UCSD undergraduate experience, and inform our efforts at improving the quality of student life for our undergraduates. Although all seniors were invited to participate, particular emphasis was placed on gathering data from students participating in the UCSD Freshmen survey when they first matriculated to gather longitudinal data on student development. This research brief presents selected findings obtained from the entire sample of respondents-both longitudinal and cross-sectional. The longitudinal responses of seniors based on comparisons with their responses as first year students can be found at the Student Research & Information (SR&I) website:  
<http://studentresearch.ucsd.edu/sriweb/Surveys/CSS2006/All.pdf>.

**Method**

In spring 2006, SR&I sent email and postcard invitations to approximately 4,500 students that included the 2002 freshmen and 2003 transfer cohorts. Two electronic invitations were sent and postcards mailed to off-campus addresses to encourage

participation. At the close of the survey period in June 2006, we received complete responses from 688 students for a response rate of approximately 15%, of which over 90% were students who began as freshmen at UCSD in 2002. Although the response rate was not optimal due to incorrect home or email addresses, the resulting sample was deemed sufficiently representative to enable reliable inferential data about the UCSD undergraduate experience.

### **Selected Findings and Highlights (see accompanying tables)**

In the following paragraphs, references to page numbers are given for the GSS tables in the full data report. These data can be viewed at the UCSD Student Research and Information website in the “Surveys” section at <http://ugr8.ucsd.edu>.

### **GSS Sample Demographics**

The UCSD GSS sample was generally similar to the overall profile of fourth year students with respect to race/ethnicity, income, and home location. The GSS sample had a somewhat higher proportion of females than the overall UCSD fourth year cohort. Although other groupings tended to reflect the distribution of the social demographics of the 2006 graduating cohort, analysis by certain sub-groupings was limited by the number of students identified by race, ethnicity, and income. The response rates of students from certain traditionally under-represented student groupings such as African- and Native-American students were insufficient to allow separate analyses for these student groupings.

### **Engagement and Interaction with the Campus Community**

The survey findings suggest that a relatively high proportion of UCSD students participate in a variety of campus groups, organizations, and sponsored activities during

their undergraduate years. For example, approximately 28% indicated participation in an ethnic/racial student organization, 26% participated in a cultural awareness workshop, 14% were members of a fraternity or sorority, 11% participated in student government (p. 1), 22% participated in leadership training, and over 20% performed community service as a part of a course requirement (p. 2).

Many respondents indicated participation in academic and co-curricular activities to supplement and broaden their academic experience. One-quarter of the respondents had enrolled in honors or advanced courses, 44% participated in an internship program, 55% worked on independent study projects, and 23% participated in study abroad programs as undergraduates. (p. 2)

A relatively high proportion of UCSD students participate in recreation activities, physical exercise, and competitive sports as an integral part of their undergraduate experience. For example, almost one-half (47%) of the GSS respondents participated in intramural sports (p. 2), 17% report participation in varsity or inter-collegiate athletics (p. 1), and almost 60% exercise or participate in physical activities at least 3 hours per week (p. 6). Respondents also indicated a high degree of satisfaction (75%) with the quality of UCSD recreational facilities (p. 5).

These data on campus engagement suggest that UCSD undergraduates have a wide offering of activities and experiences, and that many students take advantage of these opportunities in a variety of areas to enhance and broaden their academic experiences and personal development. However, UCSD seniors are less satisfied than their counterparts at other public universities in the GSS sample with respect to the “availability of campus social activities.” Although not displayed in the attached tables,

comparison with the GSS national norms indicate that approximately 39% of UCSD seniors reported being satisfied or very satisfied on this aspect of campus life compared with 62% in the GSS national norms. (for reference see:

<http://studentresearch.ucsd.edu/sriweb/Surveys/CSS2006/All.pdf>.)

### **Ratings of Campus Services**

Students were asked to rate their satisfaction with various campus support services such as career and personal counseling, academic advising, (p. 3), student housing, financial aid, opportunities for community service, job placement, student health services (p. 4), educational enrichment programs (e.g., UCDC, independent study, internships, faculty mentoring), and learning assistance programs (e.g., OASIS) (p. 12). The ratings for these services varied considerably depending on the level of recognition and usage. Services that received a 60% or higher satisfaction rating included student health, recreation programs and facilities, transportation, residence halls and campus apartments, and undergraduate college academic advising. There were other programs that likely would have met or exceeded the 60% satisfaction rate such as internships, education abroad, and academic enrichment, if participation or recognition rates were higher.

With respect to national norms, there do not appear to be significant differences in the ratings of various campus services between UCSD seniors and seniors at other public institutions. UCSD students tended to rate such services as library, academic advising, tutoring, student housing, financial aid, career center, student health, psychological counseling and the registrar's office at similar rates of satisfaction with other public university students.

## **Perceptions of Academic Experiences**

As has been found in prior surveys, UCSD students were generally satisfied with the quality of faculty instruction, quality of teaching by graduate TA's, availability of courses for general or breadth requirements, availability of courses needed for graduation, faculty and departmental advising on academic matters, and opportunities for independent research under faculty guidance (pp. 8-9). When compared with national norms, UCSD students however indicated lower levels of interaction with faculty outside of class, and tended to have lower levels of satisfaction with their ability to "get to know faculty."

## **Inter-Group Relations and Experiences**

UCSD students report much generally high levels of interaction with students of different racial and cultural backgrounds compared with freshmen at the comparison public universities (<http://studentresearch.ucsd.edu/sriweb/Surveys/CSS2006/All.pdf>). As indicated earlier in this report, almost 30% participated in an ethnic/racial student organization, 26% participated in a cultural awareness workshop (p. 1), 80% had a roommate from a different ethnic or racial background, and almost 98% report having "socialized with someone of another racial/ethnic group" as an undergraduate (p. 13). Approximately 76% indicated satisfaction with the campus climate for the "expression of diverse beliefs (p. 15), 87% believed that the campus community accepted and embraced diversity (p. 17). Similar findings were found with respect to the questions regarding acceptance of gender and religious diversity. As was found in the freshmen survey for this cohort of students, they have had much higher levels of interaction with students from different ethnic and social backgrounds than the students in the national norms, and

a majority of respondents did not regard the climate at UCSD to be hostile or intolerant of diversity. This was confirmed by comparison of the UCSD responses with the national norms.

### **Academic and Social Adjustment**

The responses of the UCSD respondents tend to reflect the generally competitive nature and context of a large, highly ranked national Research I university. As reflected in the CIRP (Freshman Survey) findings, UCSD freshmen at entry to the university tend to exhibit higher levels of anxiety with respect to academic performance compared with peers at other public and private universities. This finding of generally higher levels of academic anxiety is also noted in the UCSD GSS data. For example, approximately 40% of UCSD respondents report that they “frequently felt overwhelmed” by academic and social demands as undergraduates (p. 13).

With respect to various indicators of campus climate such as “sense of community among students,” overall social experience, availability of campus social activities, and overall college experience, UCSD students tended to be less satisfied with these dimensions of campus life than other university students. Approximately 38% were satisfied with the availability of campus social activities compared with 62% nationally, and 36% were satisfied with the sense of community among students (p. 14) compared with 63% nationally. On a semantic differential ranging from “caring” to “impersonal”, approximately 28% of UCSD students regarded the climate as caring (p. 17) compared with approximately 54% of the national respondents. Approximately 75% of UCSD students were satisfied with their “overall college experience” compared with 86% of respondents in the national sample.

This survey has several implications for educational planning and programming to enhance the UCSD undergraduate experience. Although UCSD is comparable on many dimensions of campus academic life with other public universities, satisfaction with the social activities and opportunities for participation in social events is lower. However it should be noted that these differences are less pronounced when comparing UCSD with other large Research I institutions. These responses may also be affected by the relatively high proportion of commuter students in the UCSD sample compared with the national norms.