

# **The University of California Undergraduate Experiences Survey, 2003 (UCUES, 2003)**

## **Selected Findings for the UCSD and UC Comparison Samples**

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### Background

The University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES) is part of a major research effort in support of the Student Experience in the Research University in the 21st Century (SERU21) project. Established in summer 2001, SERU21 is based at the Center for Studies in Higher Education at UC Berkeley and is a collaborative project involving all the UC campuses. The first phase of SERU21 is jointly funded by the UC Office of the President and by campus student affairs divisions from each of UC's general undergraduate campuses. There are two primary objectives of the SERU21 Project:

- To develop new data that can assist policy development and improve the undergraduate experience, and
- To create a new resource to promote scholarly research and reflection in this field.

The study included the UCUES instrument to investigate the condition and changing nature of undergraduate education at the University of California's undergraduate campuses. A "dress rehearsal" of the web-based survey instrument was done at all eight UC general campuses in the spring, 2002 quarter. These data were presented to the UCSD campus community in reports given to the Academic Senate, Student Affairs meetings, and presentations to staff at each of the UCSD colleges. The data from the 2002 UCUES are available from the "Surveys" section of the UCSD Student Research and Information website: <http://ugr8.ucsd.edu/>.

The first UCUES survey contained approximately 200 questions and identified five domains or categories to assess student academic and social engagement and to organize the content of the survey. The five domains of student engagement included academic, intellectual and cultural, social, civic, and personal or private. There were four versions or modules of the survey. Each module had a core set of questions, while the modules focused on the various domains separately.

The most recent UCUES instrument (spring, 2003) was revised and shortened based on information gathered from the spring, 2002 administration. The second UCUES survey was administered using web-based survey procedures, with each campus submitting a randomly selected sample of 2,000 students to survey.

The survey was coordinated locally by UCSD Student Affairs and the office of Student Research and Information (SRI) who worked with the Principal Investigator's (PI) of the SERU21 project to identify the sample and provide logistical support on the campus. UCSD Student Research and Information acted as the local PI and obtained human subjects approval for the project because of the confidential nature of the student data and responses that would be merged with survey data from the other UC campuses.

## Design and Method

The population of interest in this study was a randomly selected group of 2,000 UCSD undergraduate students who were contacted by email and asked to participate in the study by logging on to the UCUES website. Of the 2,000 UCSD students selected to participate in the UCUES, 686 completed the survey for a response rate of approximately 34%. As shown on page 1 of the attached tables, the UCSD response rate was somewhat lower than the UC system-wide response rate of approximately 42%. Among the campuses, UC Berkeley, UC Davis, and UC Irvine had response rates at or above 50%. These differences in part reflect local campus policies governing email and student use of their assigned campus accounts. In accordance with recommendations from the UCSD Institutional Review Board (IRB), we selected only those students over the age of 18 for the sample and, of those, selection was limited to students who did not indicate on their application for admission that they did not wish to be contacted, have their email addresses forwarded, or listed in campus directories. This had the effect of reducing the initial sample available for the survey.

One of the goals of UCUES was to examine the possibilities and limitations of email contact to conduct a survey using a large, representative sample. In the 2003 administration of the UCUES, approximately 16,000 UC undergraduates were selected across all eight general campuses. Selected students were sent at least three reminders to complete the survey, and a selected number were also contacted by telephone to complete the survey. The UCUES instrument was available to the respondents by using a password on the UCUES project's website which also provided instructions and informed consent information for the respondent. As a result of these efforts, 6,658 UC undergraduates completed the survey for a total response rate of approximately 42%. There was some degree of variation by campus due to differences in email address accuracy, local IRB restrictions, extent of local publicity, and timing. . Also included on page 1 of the attached tables is the aggregation of the respondents from the other UC campuses (UC Norm). UC norm is the combined total for the non-UCSD students included in the UCUES study and is used for comparison purposes with the UCSD student responses.

## Sample Characteristics

Data presented on page 1 of the attached tables provide a comparison of the proportion of respondents disaggregated by class level (freshman, sophomore, etc.). These data are included because of the importance of time spent or class level of the respondent at a particular campus with respect to several of the items on the UCUES instrument. When analyzed by class level, there does not appear to be a great difference between UCSD and the UC Norm comparison groupings. Many of the items on the UCUES reflect the amount of time a student has spent on a campus, thus many of the attached tables present results for both "new" (first time freshmen and transfers) and "continuing" (all other students). A similar breakout was identified for the UC system-wide sample grouping.

## Selected Findings

The attached tables present survey responses for the UCSD respondents and the UC sample norm group. This summary provides some comparison data between the UCSD responses, and the norms for the UC system on the same items. In general, the UCUES findings reflect relatively minor differences between UCSD and the UC Norm groupings, however, there are some items where differences between UCSD and UC Norm comes close to or exceeds 10% either positively or negatively. These items and the pages containing these data are identified in this brief narrative.

## Allocation of Time

UCSD students appear to allocate their time among academic, vocational, and avocational pursuits in much the same way as their UC peers (pp. 2-3). For example, approximately 19% of UCSD students and 20% of the UC Norm group report spending 1-5 hours per week preparing for class. As shown on page

3, UCSD students however, appear to spend less time on “family responsibilities,” (54% spend one hour or less per week) compared with non-UCSD students with 43% reporting spending one hour or less per week.

#### Skill Development (pp. 4-5)

Minor differences between the UCSD sample and the UC Norm group were found in the various areas of self-reported skill development such as writing, research, analytical thinking, interpersonal, and leadership skills. Although there appear to be some differences with the reported gains of new students (new freshmen and transfer students) between the UCSD and UC groupings, these differences narrow when analyzed by continuing students. For example, approximately 63% of new UC Norm students report making “some” or “a great deal” of progress in research skills compared with approximately 53% of UCSD new students. However, for continuing students, approximately 75% of the UC Norm group report similar gains compared to approximately 70% of UCSD continuing students. A similar pattern can be found with respect to self-reported gains in “basic science and math skills.” Approximately 64% of the UC Norm group students report making some or a great deal of progress in these areas, compared with approximately 70% of the new UCSD students. For continuing students, approximately 69% of the UC Norm group and 73% of the UCSD group report similar gains in science and mathematics skills.

#### Academic Engagement and Effort (pp. 6-8)

Several items on the UCUES instrument focused on the amount of involvement, effort, and satisfaction with various aspects of the academic experience and student involvement with faculty and teaching assistants. As was found in other domains of the survey, although there were some differences in the self-reported experiences and behaviors between the new UCSD and UC Norm groups, these differences became less pronounced for continuing students. For example, among new UCSD students, approximately 21% reported taking classes where the faculty member “refers to his or her own research,” while approximately 30% of the UC Norm group reports such activity. For continuing students, the proportions reporting this activity are the same at 44%. The remainder of the items in this section does not show any differences of practical significance between the UCSD and UC Norm groupings. The data on page 8 of the attachment also suggest the relationship between the self-reported amount of academic effort such as completion of assigned readings and time spent on coursework with the dependent variable of satisfaction with UC grade point average. Nor surprisingly, students who report spending the “right amount” of time on course work or completed assigned readings were significantly more satisfied with their GPA than students who felt they did not devote enough time and energy to course work.

#### Faculty Engagement (p. 9)

As was found in the previous UCUES data (although the questions used slightly different language), first-time UCSD students appear to interact or directly engage with faculty at a lower rate than the UC Norm group. For example, on page 9 of the attached tables, fewer first-time UCSD students indicate having taken a class where the “professor knows your name,” (33% for UCSD, 17% for the UC Norm) compared with their non-UCSD counterparts, although this has improved since a similar item was asked on the UCUES 2002 instrument (38% to 19%, respectively). A smaller proportion of UCSD students compared with the UC Norm group report sending email to faculty and in turn, receiving individual email from a faculty member. Approximately 35% of new UCSD students report “never” having taken a class “where a professor grades your work,” compared with 18% of the UC Norm group. However, this proportion has changed since the first administration of the UCUES when approximately 40% of new UCSD students compared with 24% of the UC Norm group report never having a class where a professor evaluated their work. Although it is difficult to determine at this point, perhaps the addition of the Freshman Seminars courses at UCSD and other UC’s during the 2002-2003 academic year affected student responses to this question.

On other measures of academic engagement and activities, comparatively fewer UCSD continuing students report having made a class presentation in the past year (p. 10). This proportion is approximately

twice that of the UC norm group of continuing students. For most of the faculty engagement items, the major differences appear to be related to class level (first-time and continuing students) and thus reflect opportunities to engage faculty or take upper division courses and research seminars.

#### Recognition, Use, and Satisfaction with Academic and Support Services

Both new and continuing UCSD students expressed significantly higher levels of satisfaction with both campus recreational facilities and UCSD's recreational programs compared to the UC norm (p. 12). UCSD students also expressed significantly higher levels of satisfaction with services provided by the Cashier's Office and the UCSD Career Services Center compared with their counterparts at other UC campuses. Levels of satisfaction were higher for both new and continuing UCSD students with respect to the value of "New Student Orientation," "Personal Safety Programs," and "Residential Life Programs." (p. 13). By approximately a 30% margin, UCSD students also indicated significantly higher levels of satisfaction with Campus Transportation Services (p. 14). First-time UCSD students expressed a somewhat lower level of satisfaction with "tutoring and learning assistance services" compared with the UC Norm group (p. 14).

#### Perceptions of Overall Experience at UC (p.16)

There are some differences between the perceptions of UCSD students and the UC Norm group regarding selected aspects of their experience at the campus. The UCSD student sample in general indicated somewhat lower levels of satisfaction compared with their peers in the sample on some academic and social domains covered in the survey. Although the level of satisfaction with the overall academic experience at UC is approximately the same for UCSD and the UC norm group (approximately 85%), UCSD students appear to be significantly less satisfied with the "overall social experience" while attending UCSD. Also it appears that the satisfaction level for the "Overall UC Experience" is significantly lower for UCSD students compared with the UC norm grouping. This was found for both new and continuing students. These findings will be explored in greater detail to attempt to identify areas that contribute to lower satisfaction levels with the UCSD "social" experience.

#### Demographic and Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Sample

The UCUES instrument also gathered background data from the respondents such as first language learned, year their family moved to the United States, self-reported social class level, political views and academic and career intent (pp 17-18). The demographic data suggest dramatic shifts taking place in California with respect to immigration, ethnicity and culture and the impact of these changes on the composition of the UC student body. For example, approximately 57% of the UCSD sample, and 55% of the UC Norm group report that English is the language first learned in the home while approximately 43% and 45%, respectively, learned some other language first, or both languages together. Among the languages other than English learned by the respondents, Chinese and Taiwanese were reported at the highest rates (34%). Spanish was reported by approximately 15% of the UCSD sample and approximately 19% of the UC Norm group as the first language learned or learned at the same time as English. Approximately 78% of the sample report having been born in the United States, however approximately 58% report that one or both of their parents were born outside of the United States. Approximately one-half of the respondents indicate that they had no biological grandparents born in the United States. Similar proportions were found for the UC Norm grouping.

Political views were predominantly liberal to "middle of the road," with approximately 15% of respondents identifying themselves as "conservative." There were few differences between the UCSD and UC Norm group with respect to income and self-reported social class. Most respondents identified themselves as middle class or professional with respect to family economic and career background and this is reflected in the self-reported family income data. With respect to academic intent, approximately 84% intend to pursue a degree beyond the baccalaureate. The intended careers chosen by the respondents varied tremendously, and included the health professions (physician, pharmacist, dentist, and technical), business, engineering and education. Approximately 12% of the sample had not identified a career field as yet.