

# **The Contribution of First-Generation College Students to the University of California Learning Environment: Preliminary Results from the Spring 2003 University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES)**

With financial support from the Office of the President and campus Student Affairs Vice Chancellors to Berkeley's Center for Studies in Higher Education (CSHE), the web-based University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES) was administered in spring 2003 to a random sample of 2000 students drawn from each UC undergraduate campus (a total of 16,000). The response rate for the survey was 42 percent (6658 students).

UCUES respondents provide us with more detailed demographic information on University of California undergraduates than previously available. For example, we now know that more than half of all enrolled University of California undergraduates who responded are of "immigrant origin", i.e., either were not born in the United States or have at least one parent not born in the United States. UCUES has more complete parental income data than previous available and provides us with the estimate that 23 percent of our undergraduates have parental incomes under \$35,000. The UCUES results, in short, provide us with extensive information on the cultural and socio-economic diversity of University of California undergraduates.

This brief report provides some key preliminary results for a population for whom the University of California represents a dramatic opportunity for demonstrated high achievement and social mobility, namely, **students who are the first generation in their family to have any experience whatsoever with higher education.** Because their experiences are significantly different (as preliminary analyses of the UCUES results has confirmed), results for students who entered the university as freshmen and those who transferred (the vast majority from California community colleges) will be examined separately. Among the 5052 freshmen entrants for whom parental education information is available, 882 or 17.5 percent report that neither parent had any college experience whatsoever. For the 1264 transfers for whom parental education information is available, the number is 302 or 23.9 percent. For the first time, we have extensive survey data on a large number (almost 1200) of first-generation college undergraduates at the University of California. What do the results tell us about students who are admitted to the University of California with significantly less family educational background than their peers?

## **1. Compared to other students, how do first generation students report spending their time in a typical week?**

- First-generation students spend more time studying and preparing for class
- First-generation students spend more time in paid employment
- First-generation students spend somewhat more time in community service
- First-generation students spend about the same time in student clubs
- First-generation students spend much less time partying and in other forms of leisure activities

	Hours per Week (%)	Freshman Entrants		Transfers	
		1st Gen	Other	1st Gen	Other
Studying	11 or more	54.0	48.4	63.0	55.5
Working on campus	6 or more	32.0	24.3	15.6	16.8
Working off campus	16 or more	13.5	11.6	27.7	20.6
Community service	3 or more	29.1	22.8	22.7	19.1
Student clubs	1 or more	41.2	42.8	26.8	27.4
Partying	3 or more	29.6	38.5	20.0	28.8

**2. Compared to other students, what gains do first generation students report on important student learning and related outcomes?**

- A slightly higher percentage of first generation students report that skill development in the following areas both is important and that some or considerable progress has been made in that development: writing, science and math, well-rounded general education, and awareness of culturally diverse viewpoints.
- A slightly lower percentage of first generation students report that skill development in analytical and critical thinking both is important and that some or considerable progress has been made in that development.

	Important & Progress Made % Some or More	Freshman Entrants		Transfers	
		1st Gen	Other	1st Gen	Other
Writing skills		86.4	85.2	84.4	83.1
Science, math skills		73.1	68.8	67.1	61.1
Research skills		66.1	69.7	79.4	75.4
Analytical, crit. thinking		86.5	87.0	86.3	88.5
Well-rounded gen. ed.		84.1	82.1	82.3	78.6
Cultural diverse views		78.9	77.1	79.4	76.0

**3. Do first generation students feel that the University of California is the right university for them?**

- First-generation students are as likely to agree as other students that, “I feel like I belong at this campus.”
- First-generation students are slightly more likely than other students to say that, “Knowing what I know now, I would still choose to enroll at my UC campus.”

	Strongly Agree/Agree %	Freshman Entrants		Transfers	
		1st Gen	Other	1st Gen	Other
Feel I belong		82.8	83.5	80.2	79.7
Chose UC again		87.6	83.5	83.7	83.6

**4. How satisfied are first generation students with their academic experience at the University of California?**

- First-generation students are significantly less satisfied with their UC GPA
- First-generation students, however, are only slightly less satisfied with the quality of faculty instruction and the overall academic experienced
- First-generation students are just slightly more satisfied with faculty advising
- First-generation students are about equally satisfied with their overall UC experience

	Satisfied/ Very Satisfied %	Freshman Entrants		Transfers	
		1st Gen	Other	1st Gen	Other
Own UC GPA		39.3	53.6	53.7	59.6
Faculty Instruction		78.9	83.1	82.6	82.3
Academic Experience		81.2	85.9	82.5	82.9
Faculty Advising		76.6	74.6	77.9	79.2
UC Experience		87.1	88.7	84.9	83.2

**5. What are the post-baccalaureate aspirations of first generation students?**

- Despite entering the University of California with no family history of higher education, the same percentage (83-84%) of first generation students aspire to a post-baccalaureate degree as their peers.

**Conclusion**

The University of California (UCUES) results suggest that first generation college students at the University of California make a significant positive contribution to the University of California learning environment. In addition to contributing an important element of socio-economic diversity to the student body, the profile of first generation college students is a very positive one. These are students who report dedicating more of their time to their studies while more likely to be working on or off campus and contributing to community service. First generation students report spending significantly less time “partying”. Significantly greater rates of dissatisfaction with their UC GPA is consistent with this serious of purpose. First generation students ascribe as much or more importance and report as much or more significant progress as their peers in a number of critical student learning outcome areas. Their post-baccalaureate degree aspirations are as high as those of non-first-generation students; expressed differently, relative to parental educational attainment, first generation students may in fact have higher education aspirations than their peers.

At the same time, the University of California appears to be providing a hospitable learning environment for students with relative educational disadvantage. First generation students are as likely as other students to report that they feel that they belong at the University of California and, based on their experience, would choose to enroll again. Despite more dissatisfaction with their own

UC GPA, first generation almost match or in fact do match their educationally advantaged peers in levels of satisfaction with faculty instruction and advising and their overall undergraduate experience at the University of California.

These preliminary UCUES results suggest, therefore, that the enrollment of first generation college students at the University of California provides significant advantage and opportunity for these students and the university alike.