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Office of the President

TO MEMBERS OF THE ACADEMIC AND STUDENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE:

DISCUSSION ITEM

For Meeting of January 19, 2022

UPDATE ON SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

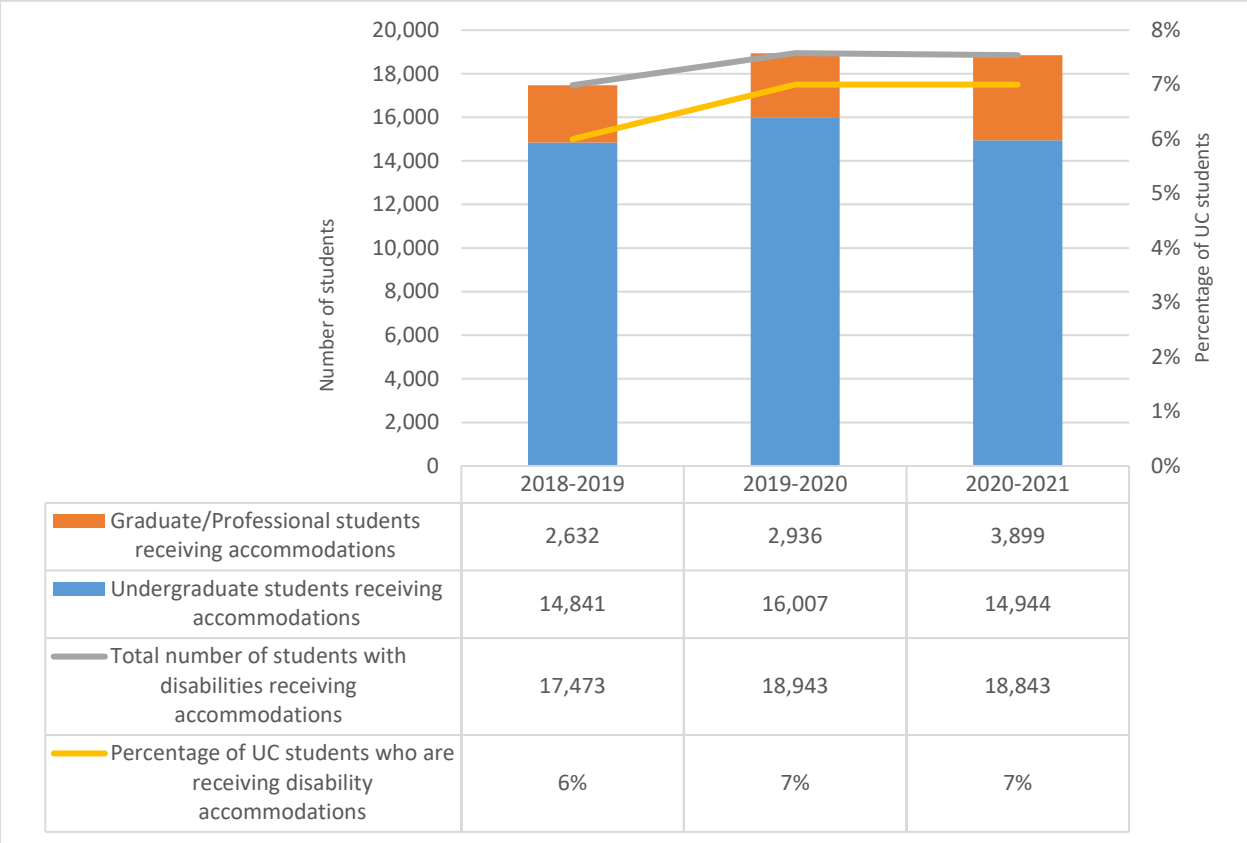
This item is an update to the November 18, 2020 discussion item on supporting students with disabilities. This update addresses student learning in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, provides information on accessible facilities at the University, and describes approaches UC is taking to support students with disabilities. This includes the newly created Systemwide Advisory Workgroup on Students with Disabilities, a group of UC subject matter experts, students, and faculty who are responsible for making recommendations to campus and systemwide leaders on policy changes and/or programmatic improvements to better support students with disabilities.

STUDENT LEARNING AND BELONGING

The population of students with disabilities at UC has risen steadily in recent years. During the 2019–20 academic year, nearly 19,000 students with disabilities (or roughly seven percent of UC's undergraduate and graduate student population) received accommodations from campus Disabled Student Services (DSS) offices.[1] Analysis of data collected from DSS offices for the 2020–21 academic year (the full academic year with remote learning) reveals that the overall number of students receiving accommodations remained about the same, at seven percent of the total UC student population. However, there are sharp differences between undergraduate and graduate students from 2019–20 to 2020–21 (see Figure 1). Specifically, graduate/professional students receiving accommodations increased by 32 percent, while undergraduate students receiving accommodation declined by almost seven percent. According to the DSS directors, a possible reason for the increase in accommodations among graduate/professional students is the result of targeted outreach and additional programming tailored to this student population during the pandemic. Conversely, the DSS directors attribute the decrease in undergraduate accommodations to the decrease of students on campus.

[1] The names of campus programs that provide student disability services vary by campus; this item refers to these programs as "disabled student services" or DSS.

Figure 1: UC Students Receiving Accommodations, 2018–2021



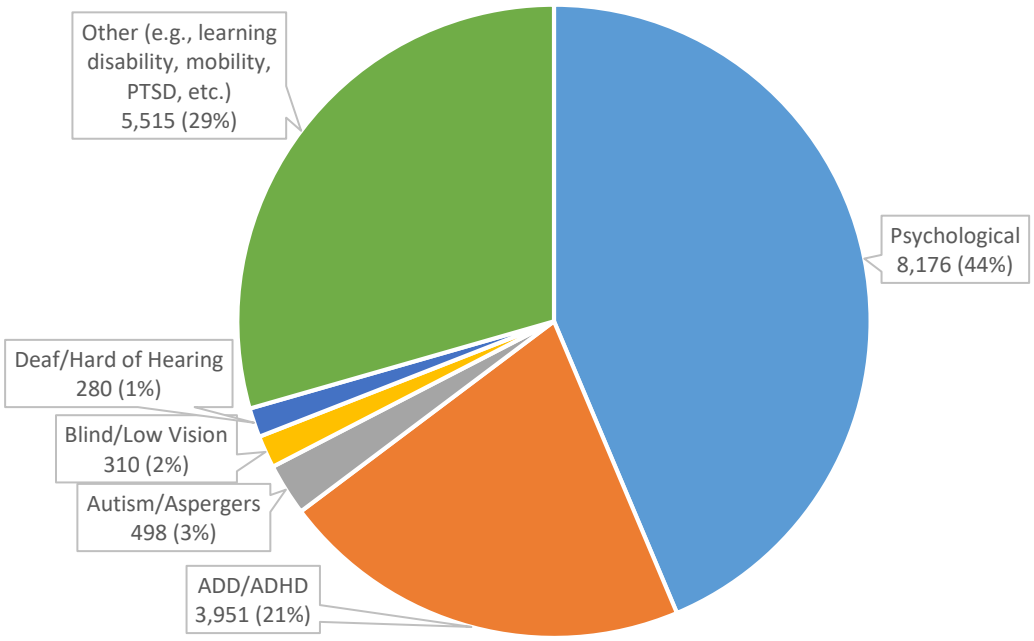
	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021
Graduate/Professional students receiving accommodations	2,632	2,936	3,899
Undergraduate students receiving accommodations	14,841	16,007	14,944
Total number of students with disabilities receiving accommodations	17,473	18,943	18,843
Percentage of UC students who are receiving disability accommodations	6%	7%	7%

Types of Disabilities

The types of disabilities under discussion remained relatively the same for the 2020–21 academic year. With the omission of UCSF data, Figure 2 reflects the number of undergraduate and graduate/professional students receiving accommodations by disability category.[2] As in the previous year, the most frequent accommodation is psychological, at 44 percent, followed by others, including learning disabilities at 29 percent.[3]

[2] At the time of writing, UCSF only had aggregate data of total accommodation in 2020–21 but not type.
[3] For definitions of disability types, see Americans with Disabilities Act Title III Regulations, Section 36.105 (https://www.ada.gov/regs2010/titleIII_2010/titleIII_2010_regulations.htm#a105)

Figure 2: UC Undergraduate and Graduate Students by Type of Disability, 2020–21



Satisfaction and Sense of Belonging: Areas for Improvement

Undergraduate students

Undergraduate and graduate/professional students with disabilities report lower levels of satisfaction and belonging at UC. According to 2020 University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES) data, 66 percent of respondents who reported any disability were at least somewhat satisfied with their overall social experience compared with 78 percent of their no disability peers.[4] Seventy-four percent of undergraduate respondents with any disability at least somewhat agreed with the statement that they feel that they belong at their UC campus, compared with 86 percent of students who reported no disability. (See Figure 3).

While undergraduate students with disabilities had lower rates of satisfaction and sense of belonging, their time-to-degree progress is only slightly lower than their non-disabled peers. Freshman cohorts who graduated in spring 2019 graduated in 4.07 years for any disability and 4.01 years for no disability.[5] Of this same group, students with neurodevelopmental/cognitive

[4] For UCUES "any disability" can include: physical disability, learning disability, neurodevelopmental/cognitive disability, emotional or mental health concern, or other disability or condition.
[5] University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES) 2018 data "Time to degree for freshman cohorts who graduated in spring 2019."

disability or condition (e.g., autism, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, brain injury) took the longest at 4.16 years.

Figure 3: UC Undergraduate Experience Survey 2020

UCUES Question	Any Disability	No Disability
Satisfied with my overall social experience [6]	66%	78%
Belong at my campus [7]	74%	86%

Graduate/professional students

Among graduate/professional students, similar trends occur. In general, graduate/professional students with a disability report lower levels of inclusion in their program of study.[8] Eighty-two percent of graduate/professional students with any disability or condition at least somewhat agree with the statement that they feel included by peers within their graduate program compared to 91 percent of their peers with no disability or condition.[9] Seventy-six percent of graduate/professional students with any disability or condition at least somewhat agree with the statement that they feel included by faculty within their graduate program compared to 88 percent of their peers with no disability or condition.

When asked, graduate/professional students felt that they have the space and resources needed to succeed academically, only 67 percent of students with any disability or condition at least somewhat agreed compared to 85 percent of their peers with no disability or condition. Both student groups also had differences in response to the statement that they feel they are on track to complete their degree program on time, 82 percent of respondents with any disability or condition at least somewhat agreed with the statement, compared to 92 percent of students with no disability. (See Figure 4).

[6] UCUES Respondents choices: very dissatisfied, dissatisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, satisfied, very satisfied.
[7] UCUES Respondents choices: strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree, agree, strongly agree.
[8] University of California Graduate Student Experience Survey (UCGSES) 2021.
[9] For the UCGSES, "any disability or condition" can include: physical disability, learning disability, neurodevelopmental/cognitive disability, emotional or mental health concern, chronic health condition, or other disability or condition.

Figure 4: UC Graduate Student Experience Survey 2020

UCGSES Question	Any Disability or Condition	No Disability or Condition
I feel included by my peers in my program [10]	82%	91%
I feel included by the faculty in my program [11]	76%	88%
I have the space and resources needed to succeed academically[12]	67%	85%
I feel on track to complete my degree program on time[13]	82%	92%

The Systemwide Advisory Workgroup on Students with Disabilities, described later in this item, will include both in-the-classroom and outside-the-classroom experience. Examination of UC culture and practices will be a significant focus of their work to address many of the issues outlined and to recommend strategies for closing gaps.

COVID-19 Pandemic

The global pandemic continues to affect life on UC campuses. While the majority of students have returned to campus, disabled student services (DSS) directors report that some are hesitant to return to in-person learning out of concern for their personal health and well-being. Because the pandemic continues, albeit at more controlled levels, the directors also report an increase in requests for accommodation for remote learning. This is occurring among students previously registered for accommodation as well as students who are new to the process. Campuses are evaluating requests for these accommodations on a case-by-case basis and are adhering to established protocols for documenting a disability. Requests for remote learning in association with disabilities are placing a new workload strain on offices already managing large caseloads with limited staffing. Moreover, some students who requested and did not receive remote learning accommodations are reporting dissatisfaction and frustration.[14]

UNIVERSITY FACILITIES

In addition to classroom engagement, the ways in which students physically interact with the University environment also contribute to their overall college experience. This physical interaction includes the ability for students with mobility limitations to traverse specific locations at the campuses; identifiable signage for access locations such as ramps, elevators and parking; and accessibility to maneuver powered chairs.

[10] UCGSES Respondents choices: strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree, agree, strongly agree.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Salanga, J.M. "New generation of disabled UC students revives activism." *Cal Matters.* Sept. 23, 2021

Per the University of California Facilities Manual, "The University is responsible for enforcing compliance with the California accessibility standards. For University projects funded in whole or in part with state funds, the Division of the State Architect (DSA-AC) has plan approval authority for disabled access code compliance. For University projects with no state funding, the Facility may elect to use a Certified Access Specialist (CASp) for plan review in lieu of the DSA-AC. Each Facility is also responsible for compliance with the American Disabilities Act (ADA)."

The Americans with Disabilities Act became law on July 26, 1990. This civil rights law prohibits discrimination against any "qualified individual with a disability." Title II, Subpart A, applies to the University:

> No qualified individual with a disability shall, by reason of such disability, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of the services, programs, or activities of a public entity or be subjected to discrimination by any such entity. (See ADA Title II.[15])

Congress then passed the ADA Amendments Act of 2008 that clarified and expanded the scope of the ADA. In 2016, the Department of Justice issued a series of regulations implementing the ADA and the ADA Amendments Act.[16] The University is also required to comply with the accessibility requirements found in Title 24, Part 2 of the California Code of Regulations.[17]

All new construction and renovations to existing University facilities must comply with applicable federal and State requirements relating to persons with disabilities. Where possible, the University exceeds these minimum requirements to provide maximum accessibility for all users.

It should also be noted that many of the University's facilities are a half-century old or older, adding to the challenges of renovation. The majority of improvements to these facilities occur as part of larger capital improvement projects. Resources for unplanned improvements are extremely limited.

BETTER SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Assistive Learning Technology

To support student learning accessibility in the classroom, the UC Office of the President issued a request for proposal (RFP) for assistive technologies in spring 2020 and recently executed contracts with five assistive technology suppliers in speech recognition, notetaking, literacy tools, and screen readers/magnifiers. Prior to centralizing access to suppliers through this RFP process, each campus negotiated terms including costs, length of contract, and delivery of services with individual suppliers. Such individual contracts are generally more expensive and

[15] See https://www.ada.gov/ada_title_II.htm
[16] See 28 C.F.R Part 35 - https://www.ada.gov/regs2010/titleII_2010/titleII_2010_regulations.htm#title2regs
[17] See https://www.dgs.ca.gov/BSC/Codes and https://codes.iccsafe.org/content/CBC2019P4.

laborious to negotiate. Now, campuses may enter into individual contracts with selected suppliers to purchase assistive technologies, goods, and services at a discounted price. The technology acquired through these services also has broad applications; for example, speech recognition can be used by the general campus community for meetings, conferences, and events.

Toward a New Vision for Inclusion

To address the needs and concerns of students with disabilities, the University has established the Systemwide Advisory Workgroup on Students with Disabilities. The workgroup will assist UC leadership in determining how to better support students with disabilities through a new framework for inclusion. The charge of the workgroup is to:

- Review existing systemwide policies and practices related to:
    - Academic accommodations for students with disabilities including assistive technologies,
    - Physical accommodations for students with disabilities, including on-campus housing, classrooms, laboratories, other facilities, and
    - Universal design as a tool to increase accessibility and expand inclusion in campus life experiences.
- Analyze existing data sources and, if necessary, recommend new collection of data, to facilitate a deeper understanding of the needs and experiences of students with disabilities.
- Ensure that analyses are inclusive of intersecting identities and that they address students' sense of belonging.
- Make recommendations to campus and systemwide leaders on policy changes and/or programmatic improvements that better support students with disabilities.

The workgroup comprises students, faculty, and staff. Student representatives include undergraduate and graduate students familiar with the disabled student experience. Staff representatives include ADA compliance directors, academic advisors, residential staff, diversity and equity professionals, legal counsel, and disabled student services directors. Faculty were selected by the UC Academic Council and have extensive knowledge on supporting students with disabilities and/or disability rights.

CONCLUSION

The University remains committed to meeting an expanding population whose members have growing needs: students with disabilities. Focus on this particular student population is essential in order for the University to offer them welcoming experiences and equitable outcomes. The Systemwide Advisory Workgroup on Students with Disabilities is a resource that can lay out the work ahead for UC.

KEY TO ACRONYMS

ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
CASp	Certified Access Specialist
DSA-AC	Division of the State Architect
DSS	Disabled Student Services
RFP	Request for Proposal
UCUES	University of California Student Experience Survey
UCGSES	University of California Graduate Student Experience Survey