

Office of the President

TO MEMBERS OF THE ACADEMIC AND STUDENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE:

DISCUSSION ITEM

For Meeting of March 19, 2025

UPDATE ON SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This item provides an update on efforts to support students with disabilities across the University of California. The University of California (UC) has long been committed to ensuring that individuals with disabilities receive equal and equitable opportunities. The provisions of services and supports for UC students with disabilities is essential in creating inclusive and accessible environments in which students can thrive and succeed personally, professionally, and academically. This item describes how UC is making progress towards implementing recommendations provided by the Systemwide Advisory Workgroup on Students with Disabilities, including funding updates, systemwide efforts, and campus efforts.

BACKGROUND

The population of students with disabilities continues to rise. According to the weighted responses to the 2024 Undergraduate Student Experience Survey (UCUES), 29 percent (N=65,802) of undergraduate students report having any disability.¹ In addition, 31 percent (N=18,390) of graduate/professional students report having a disability, based on weighted data as reported by the 2023 Graduate Student Experience Survey (UCGSES).² Currently, all ten UC locations have dedicated disability services offices staffed by specialists. They work closely with campus partners to provide students with services and supports to meet their individual needs of accommodations. Services include, but are not limited to:

- Individual accommodation support
- Reading services
- Note-taking services
- Dictation and transcription
- Deaf and hard-of-hearing services
- Course-design accommodations
- Housing and dining accommodations
- Transportation accommodations

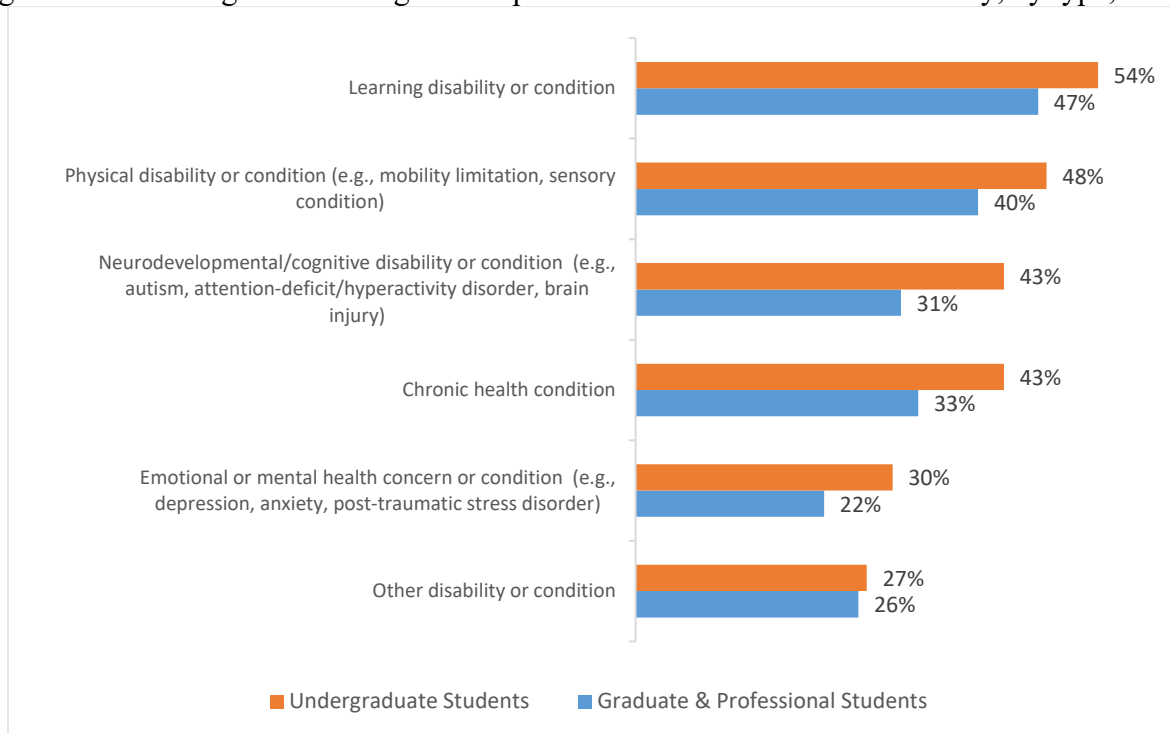
¹ UC Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES), <https://www.ucop.edu/institutional-research-academic-planning/services/survey-services/UCUES.html>

² UC Graduate Student Experience Survey (UCGSES), <https://www.ucop.edu/institutional-research-academic-planning/services/survey-services/uc-graduate-student-experience-survey.html>

- Test-taking accommodations
- Peer support

The UCUES and UCGSES also capture the type of disabilities students report. Figure 1 demonstrates the percentage of students who reported having a disability, by disability type, for undergraduate and graduate/professional students.

Figure 1: UC undergraduate and graduate/professional students with a disability, by type, 2024



The data show that the top three disability types for undergraduate students are learning disability or condition, physical disability or condition, and neurodevelopment/cognitive disability or condition. In addition, the top three disability types for graduate and professional students are learning disability, physical disability or condition, and chronic health condition. While learning disability is the number one disability type for both student populations, anecdotal evidence from disability service offices suggests that student survey respondents tend to pick this disability type as it is the one that is most familiar to them; also, there may be stigma associated with reporting other disability types such as neurodevelopmental/cognitive disability or emotional or mental health concern or condition.

During the 2023–24 academic year, 23,472 undergraduate students with disabilities (approximately ten percent of UC’s undergraduate student population) and 5,110 graduate and professional students with disabilities (approximately eight percent of UC’s graduate student population) received accommodations, as reported by the campus disability service offices. According to the UCUES, of the undergraduate students who report any disability, 31 percent reported receiving an accommodation. UCGSES results indicate that, of the graduate students who report any disability, 23 percent reported receiving an accommodation. These data suggest

that the number of students who have a disability is higher than the number of students who receive an accommodation. There are various reasons why a student with a disability may not seek an accommodation. For example, a student with a learning disability may never seek an accommodation because they may develop or have identified supports (e.g., digital tools and technology) to manage their needs. However, this may also suggest that some students may not know about services and supports or may not seek accommodations due to stigma and perceived barriers. Table 1 shows the percentage of UC undergraduate student satisfaction with their experience by disability status. Table 2 shows the percentage of UC graduate and professional student perception of program climate and progress towards degree completion by disability status.

Table 1: UC Undergraduate student satisfaction by disability status, 2024

UCUES Question	Any Disability	No Disability	Percentage Point Difference
Satisfied with my overall academic experience	87%	93%	6
Satisfied with my overall social experience	74%	83%	9
Belong at my campus	78%	87%	9
UC is a welcoming campus	83%	92%	8

Table 2: UC Graduate and professional student perception of program climate and progress towards degree completion by disability status, 2023

UCGSES Question	Any Disability	No Disability	Percentage Point Difference
I feel included by my peers in my program.	85%	93%	8
I feel included by the faculty in my program.	78%	91%	12
I have space and resources needed to succeed academically.	74%	90%	16
I feel on track to complete my degree program on time.	86%	94%	8

Undergraduate data from Table 1 suggests that students with any disability report slightly lower satisfaction comparative to students with no disability, with “overall social experience” and sense of “belong[ing] at my campus” as the two areas with the highest difference (nine percentage points). In addition, UC graduate and professional students with any disability report having less access to “space and resources needed to succeed academically” (16 percentage points) and “feel[ing] included by faculty in my program” (12 percentage points) than students with no disability. The Systemwide Advisory Workgroup on Students with Disabilities identified recommendation to address these student needs.

Update to Systemwide Advisory Workgroup Recommendations

In January 2024, the UC Systemwide Advisory Workgroup on Students with Disabilities released its report, *Transforming Culture and Practice: Serving Students with Disabilities at the University of California*.³ The report included a strategic framework and recommendations centering campuswide efforts to support students with disabilities, inclusive of intersecting identities and fostering students' sense of belonging. The report includes the following recommendations for the Board of Regents, University leaders, and faculty:

For the Board of Regents

- Revise Regents Policy 4400, Policy on the University of California Diversity Statement, to more emphatically position disability access as a diversity issue.

For University Leaders

- Undertake a review of Policies Applying to Campus Activities, Organizations and Students (PACAOS) 140.00: Guidelines Applying to Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability to ensure that it is up to date for the current context.
- Strengthen guidance and support for civil rights at UC campuses.
- Make Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) coordinators full-time positions and consider appointing UC chief accessibility officers to oversee the holistic approach of disability services.
- Confirm that all University media segments can meet accessibility standards.
- Develop student services strategic plans that include processes to achieve and sustain appropriate ratios of students to disability specialists, to reduce wait times, and to resolve bottlenecks and barriers for requesting and receiving accommodations.
- Create inclusive spaces on each campus wherein students with disabilities can gather and share a sense of identity, culture, and belonging.
- Update each campus ADA transition plan and remediation schedule.
- Establish/strengthen chancellor-appointed advisory committees.
- Create a disability-inclusive emergency evacuation plan with procedures for each campus, and train key staff members on how to safely evacuate people with disabilities.

³ See <https://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/regmeet/jan24/a2attach1.pdf>

- Institutionalize data collection for students with disabilities, to create a systemwide dashboard on graduation rates per the Multi-Year Funding Compact with the State.
- Develop and sustain a professional learning environment for faculty and staff to learn and apply best practices to interacting with persons with disabilities.
- Investigate using common systems and data collection practices.

For Faculty

- Make inclusive courses accessible during the design or redesign phase rather than midcourse or later.
- Designate and support formal faculty liaison(s) to improve communication between faculty, disabled student services, and teaching and learning centers.
- Undertake review of Academic Senate regulations for incomplete grades and academic standing/progress policies more broadly to ensure that their local application does not have an unintended disparate impact on undergraduate, graduate, and professional students with disabilities.

Funding to Support Recommendations

The Budget Act of 2023 (Senate Bill 101) appropriated \$1.5 million in State funding on an ongoing basis to support students with disabilities, with a focus on increasing the number of professional staff serving disabled students and reducing their associated caseload. Campuses matched the \$1.5 million with local resources to increase staffing levels in support of students with disabilities. In addition, the UC Office of the President (UCOP) and campuses earmarked funding to support the implementation of systemwide recommendations. The Office of the President allocated \$8 million in one-time campus funding to support the implementation of systemwide recommendations with an expectation that campuses match funding. Table 3 shows the new funding allocations by campus, which is supplemental to existing campus resources.

Table 3: New campus funding for students with disabilities, 2023–24

Campus	Budget Act of 2023 (ongoing)	Campus Match (ongoing)	UCOP Systemwide Workgroup (one-time)	Campus Match Systemwide Workgroup (one-time)	Total
Berkeley	150,000	150,000	1,486,400	1,486,400	3,272,800
Davis	150,000	150,000	905,600	905,600	2,111,200
Irvine	150,000	150,000	800,000	800,000	1,900,000
Los Angeles	150,000	150,000	1,011,200	1,011,200	2,322,400
Merced	150,000	150,000	324,800	324,800	949,600
Riverside	150,000	150,000	641,600	641,600	1,583,200
San Diego	150,000	150,000	641,600	641,600	1,583,200
San Francisco	150,000	150,000	377,600	377,600	1,055,200
Santa Barbara	150,000	150,000	905,600	905,600	2,111,200
Santa Cruz	150,000	150,000	905,600	905,600	2,111,200
Total	1,500,000	1,500,000	8,000,000	8,000,000	19,000,000

Campuses have earmarked funding to increase staffing, to grow and expand services, and to support infrastructure to address equity needs for students with disabilities. In 2023–24, campuses reported a total of 56 full-time equivalent (FTE) career staff who serve as disability specialists. In addition to these FTE positions, campuses report having a diverse staffing arrangement of administrators, administrative staff, coordinators, student staff, contract disability specialists to cover staffing gaps, and contractors to assist with captioning and American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation. All these staff are critical to the operations of the disability student services offices. Currently across the system, campuses report a total of seven vacant positions, with campuses actively recruiting to fill these positions.

Campuses report using the ongoing funds to invest in hiring additional staff to meet the growing needs of students. These positions significantly enhance the departments’ capacity to support students and manage caseloads effectively. In 2023–24, disability student services offices provided accommodations to nearly 28,582 total students across the system. This number does not reflect the total number of students who request an accommodation and are waiting to receive an accommodation, which affects caseload and capacity to see more students. Additionally, many campuses report a growing increase in the complexity of accommodations because of multiple disability factors.

Campuses report using one-time funds to support high-cost initiatives to ensure equal access and support for students with disabilities. The funding has been crucial in covering comprehensive psychoeducational evaluations, accessible technology and equipment, adaptive devices, specialized software, and accessible facilities. In addition, one-time funding has offered campuses the flexibility to hire contract specialists to assist with specialty needs such as

captioning and ASL interpretation, which can be costly. Funds have also been used for dedicated inclusive spaces, ADA remediation, and emergency preparedness evacuation plans and procedures. Campuses report working closely with campus partners to prioritize emergent campus needs and address systemwide workgroup recommendations.

Systemwide Updates

Systemwide Office for Civil Rights

The University has made progress towards the recommendation to “strengthen guidance and support for civil rights at UC campuses.” In April 2024, UC established the Systemwide Office of Civil Rights (SOCR), with plans to house the Disability Rights Office. In February 2025, SOCR posted and currently has an active search for UC’s inaugural systemwide Disability Rights Director. In addition, SOCR is assisting with the review of PACAOS 140.00: Guidelines Applying to Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability to ensure that it is up to date for the current context. In addition, SOCR will assist in developing an anti-discrimination training and a disability access and compliance training program (DACTP) that meets the prescribed requirements of Assembly Bill 2821, which requests that the University provide this training as part of existing college personnel onboarding.

Regents Policy

A key recommendation from the students with disabilities workgroup report was to “better reflect the evolution of how diversity is described at the University, acknowledging the intersectionality of identities in pursuit of greater equity and inclusion.” The University of California Graduate and Professional Council (UCGPC) president proposed amendments to the Regents Policy 4400: Policy on University of California Diversity Statement to incorporate additional language about disability. The Academic Senate conducted a systemwide review of the amendments and in June 2024, the Assembly of the Academic Senate endorsed several amendments. In November 2024, the Board of Regents approved these amendments to Regents Policy 4400: Policy on University of California Diversity Statement.⁴

Emergency Management Procedures

All UC locations have building evacuation plans in place, outlining the processes for safely evacuating all occupants, including those who have disabilities, from campus buildings. However, not all individuals are able to self-evacuate, and the development of additional procedures is necessary to support and assist these individuals with exiting a building during an evacuation. The workgroup recommendations include “creating a disability-inclusive emergency evacuation plan with procedures for each campus and training key staff members how to safely evacuate people with disabilities.” All ten UC campus locations have designated a trained campus representative responsible for this work. In addition, all ten UC campus locations are actively working on campus procedures to address the various goals associated with the

⁴ See <https://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/regmeet/nov24/gov11.13.pdf>

recommendation, including developing of an individualized emergency evacuation plan (IEEP) and ensuring that emergency evacuation chairs are provided for individuals with disabilities. Lastly, all health and medical center locations have been making progress towards compliance.

Academic Senate Review of Grading Policies

In May 2024, the Academic Senate reviewed the report issued by the UC Systemwide Advisory Workgroup on Students with Disabilities.⁵ The report recommended a review of Senate regulations to ensure that the local application of “Incomplete” (“I”) grades and academic standing/progress policies do not have an unintended disparate impact on undergraduate, graduate, and professional students with disabilities.⁶ Senate Regulation 778 delegates authority to each Senate Division for specific grading policies and procedures, including “I” grades. Divisional Senate policies prioritize fairness and consistency in handling “I” grades, often allowing students to appeal them or to request extensions. Individual campuses report that their “I” grade policies are, in general, working well for students and instructors. Notably, the UCLA Senate Division recently adjusted its policy to enhance inclusivity as proposed by student leaders. The systemwide Academic Senate encourages Senate divisions to periodically review policies around “I” grades and assessments of students’ academic standing to ensure not only equitable policy implementation for students with disabilities, but also alignment with other student needs and institutional goals. The Academic Senate is committed to continued collaborations among faculty, administrators, and students to develop inclusive and effective policies at the campus level.

State Compact

Under the Multi-Year Funding Compact between Governor Newsom and UC, the University has prioritized advancement of student-focused shared goals. Specifically, UC expanded programs designed to eliminate graduation rate gaps and to support student academic success in the first year, redesigned academic support programs, and developed new advising models. Per the Compact, improving data collection on graduation rates for students with a disability is a requirement for the University. By the end of 2025–26 academic year, UCOP will work closely with campuses to improve data collection on graduation rates for students with a disability and to create a dashboard for this information. Moving forward, this information will be used to aid in establishing baseline data and identification of appropriate metrics and goals for the University to improve the student experience for students with disabilities.

Electronic Accessibility

The UC Electronic Accessibility Committee and a group of systemwide stakeholders are drafting an update to the UC Information Technology Accessibility Policy to ensure that UC digital content meets new federal accessibility requirements in the Americans with Disabilities Act and

⁵ See the Academic Senates review and response to the UC Systemwide Advisory Workgroup on Students with Disabilities, <https://senate.universityofcalifornia.edu/bylaws-regulations/regulations/rpart3.html#r778>

⁶ The Academic Senate does not have full jurisdiction over all academic matters for professional students. See Regents Bylaw 40: <https://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/governance/bylaws/bl40.html>

in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. The updated policy will require each UC campus and location to augment its accessibility program to:

- Promote the development and procurement of digital content.
- Require the creation of a program to ensure that faculty are supported in creating accessible course content.
- Remediate inaccessible digital content.
- Offer digital accessibility training.

The updated policy will place the UC system at the forefront of digital accessibility and inclusion for people with disabilities. The draft is expected to enter the public comment period in early 2025.

Campus Updates

The University has made progress towards many systemwide workgroup recommendations and continues to use ongoing and one-time funds to help reduce equity gaps and to enhance student supports. Each campus is responsible for assessing the recommendations against their campus needs and capabilities with the expectation that serious consideration and attention be given to ensure compliance with existing law and to provide a campus climate welcoming of all students. Appendix I provides a summary of campus progress towards workgroup recommendations.

Campuses reported a status update on each of the recommendations indicating if a recommendation was “not started,” “in progress,” or “completed.” Campuses report making progress on all recommendations. In addition, two campuses reported completing the recommendation of providing dedicated inclusive space for students, while the remaining campuses are working towards identifying those spaces. Financial commitments and ongoing allocations will play a significant role in the ability of campuses to complete this work and transform UC into a culture that is intentional and proactive in serving students with disabilities.

CONCLUSION

The University is committed to the success of students with disabilities. The recommendations of the Systemwide Workgroup on Students with Disabilities serve as a guide for the system, campuses, university leaders, and faculty to collectively work together to create inclusive accessible environments for students with disabilities in which they can thrive and feel a sense of belonging. Efforts across the system continue, as campuses work diligently to grow and expand staffing capacity to meet the immediate needs of students. In addition, campuses continue to invest in program services and resources to ensure equal access and support for students with disabilities, including psychoeducational evaluations, accessible technology and equipment, adaptive devices, specialized software, and accessible facilities. The UC has worked closely with

the Academic Senate, the Board of Regents, and student government to support inclusive policies and practices.

KEY TO ACRONYMS

ADA	The Americans with Disabilities Act
ASL	American Sign Language
DACTP	Disability Access and Compliance Training Program
SOCR	Systemwide Office of Civil Rights
PACAOS	Policies Applying to Campus Activities, Organizations and Students
UCUES	University of California Undergraduate Student Experience Survey
UCGSES	University of California Graduate Student Experience Survey

Appendix I: Progress towards Systemwide Advisory Workgroup on Students with Disabilities recommendations, 2023–24

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REGENTS		PROGRESS
1	Strengthen Regents’ Policy 4400, Policy on University of California Diversity Statement, to emphasize disability accessibility as a diversity issue.	Completed. Revised Regents Policy 4400 adopted November 14, 2024.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UNIVERSITY LEADERS		PROGRESS
2.1	Undertake policy review of PACAOS 140.00: Guidelines Applying to nondiscrimination on the basis of disability.	Systemwide review process began in fall 2024.
2.2	Strengthen systemwide guidance and support for civil rights at UC.	The Systemwide Office of Civil Rights is currently developing this area.
2.3	Expand the functions of ADA coordinators and consider appointing UC chief accessibility officers to oversee the holistic approach of disability services.	The appointment of UC chief accessibility officers has not yet been established at the campus level. However, as noted above, SOCR is hiring a systemwide Disability Rights Director, who will provide support to ADA coordinators and Disability Services offices among other campus and UCOP partners.
2.4	Ensure that all university websites, online courses, and audio/video content meet required accessibility standards. Ensure that communications with individuals with disabilities are as effective as communications with non-disabled peers, including providing appropriate auxiliary aids and services.	10 Campuses are “In Progress”
2.5	Develop student services strategic plans.	10 Campuses are “In Progress”
2.6	Create dedicated and inclusive spaces on each campus where students with disabilities can gather and develop a shared sense of identity and culture and foster self-esteem, identity development, and a sense of belonging.	1 Campus has “Completed” 6 Campuses are “In Progress” 2 Campuses have “Not Started”
2.7	Update each campus’ ADA Transition Plan and remediation schedule.	2 Campuses have “Completed” 7 Campuses are “In Progress” 1 Campus has “Not Started”
2.8	Establish/strengthen chancellor-appointed advisory committees.	3 Campuses have “Completed” 6 Campuses are “In Progress” 1 Campus has “Not Started”
2.9	Create a disability inclusive emergency evacuation plan and procedures on each campus and train key personnel on how to safely evacuate persons with disabilities.	1 Campuses has “Completed” 9 Campuses are “In Progress”
2.10	Institutionalize data collection for students with disabilities to develop a systemwide dashboard on undergraduate graduation rates per the Multi-year Funding Compact with the State.	Systemwide efforts are underway to streamline data collection.

2.11 Develop and sustain a professional learning environment for faculty and staff to learn and apply best practices in interacting with persons with disabilities.

The Systemwide Office of Civil Rights is currently assisting with the development of a training program in this area.

2.12 Investigate using common systems and data collection practices.

Systemwide efforts are underway to identify metrics for common systems and data collection practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FACULTY

3.1 Design inclusive courses by making courses accessible during the course design or redesign phase rather than trying to make them accessible mid-course or afterward.

1 Campus has "Completed"
7 Campuses are "In Progress"
1 Campus has "Not Started"

3.2 Designate and support formal faculty liaison(s) to enhance and strengthen communication between faculty, disabled student services, and teaching and learning centers.

1 Campus has "Completed"
3 Campuses are "In Progress"
6 Campuses have "Not Started"

3.3 Undertake review of Academic Senate regulations for incomplete grades and academic standing/progress policies more broadly to ensure that their local application does not have an unintended disparate impact on undergraduate, graduate, and professional students with disabilities.

6 Campuses are "In Progress"
4 Campuses have "Not Started"