

Office of the President

TO MEMBERS OF THE ACADEMIC AND STUDENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE:

DISCUSSION ITEM

For Meeting of November 13, 2019

EXAMINING THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA UNDERGRADUATE EXPERIENCE OVER TIME

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The UC Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES) is a biennial survey of undergraduates that UC has conducted for over a decade. A new UC Information Center dashboard features trends in response rates to survey questions that have remained consistent over time and can assess differences by campus and by students' demographic characteristics and academic experience. This resource provides insight into students' experience and engagement over time. Key highlights show:

- About eight in ten students feel positive about their academic experience, sense of belonging, and interest in re-enrolling, though support has declined over the decade
- Continued high-value placed on the importance of attending a university with world-class researchers, with growing interest for students to personally conduct research with faculty or on their own
- Steady and strong measures of academic engagement in courses, with varying responses related to individual study practices
- Varying trends in students' understanding of those with different perspectives, with increased understanding of differences based on sexual orientation but declines in differences based on political affiliation and religious beliefs

BACKGROUND

Student survey results directly reflect the thoughts and opinions of students and provide universities with a unique view of the learning experience, campus climate, institutional barriers to success, and the changing needs of the student. In addition to providing valuable feedback on satisfaction, this information can help the campus develop initiatives and programs to improve the undergraduate experience.

UCUES response rates for individual administrations of the survey have ranged from 33 to 41 percent¹, with respondents being fairly representative of the undergraduate population in terms of

¹ UC Undergraduate Experience survey responses (<https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/infocenter/completion-and-response-rates-uc-surveys>)

student characteristics like race/ethnicity, student level, and academic discipline. Where survey questions are consistent, longitudinal² data are available to track changes in student responses over time. This discussion item highlights changes over the decade, from spring 2008 to spring 2018.

UCUES assesses many aspects of the student experience and student engagement, including overall satisfaction, academic advising and support, undergraduate research, sense of belonging, and value of a UC education. This student feedback can be a useful tool to support the UC's 2030 goals, including increasing degree attainment and closing equity gaps in students' success. Though the data shared in this report is summarized for the system, UCUES longitudinal data can be viewed at the campus level. The data can inform each campus's path forward to 2030 as both a tool to plan and a means to monitor progress towards goals while taking the context of each individual campus into account.

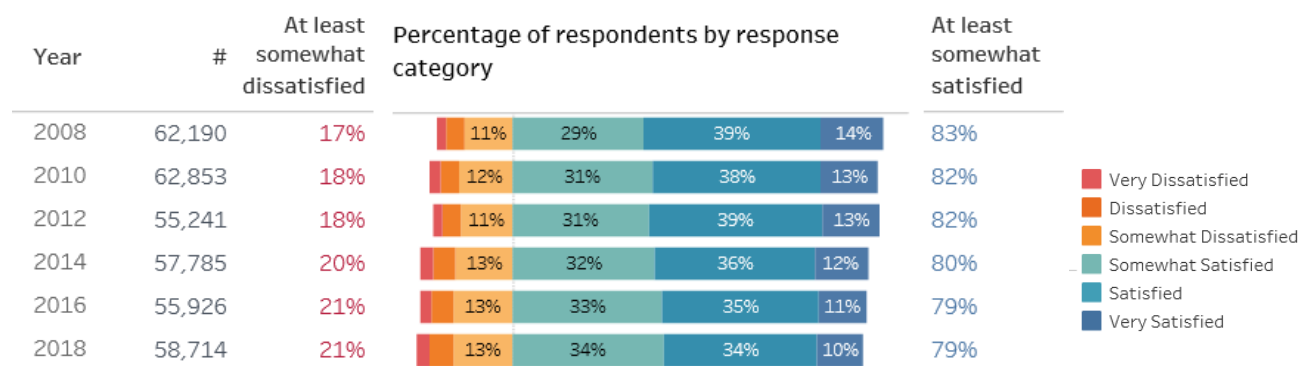
OVERALL UNDERGRADUATE EXPERIENCE

The following three UCUES questions examine student satisfaction and experience:

- How satisfied are you with your overall academic experience?
- Do you agree with the statement “I feel that I belong at this campus”?
- Knowing what I know now, would I still choose to enroll at my UC campus?

Over the last decade—spring 2008 to spring 2018—the share of undergraduates responding at least somewhat positively to these questions declined by four percentage points in overall satisfaction, six percentage points in the sense of belonging, and four percentage points in agreement that they would enroll again at their UC campus. Over this period, there is a decline in “very satisfied” or “strongly agree” responses and a growth in “somewhat satisfied” or “somewhat dissatisfied” and “somewhat agree” or “somewhat disagree” responses.

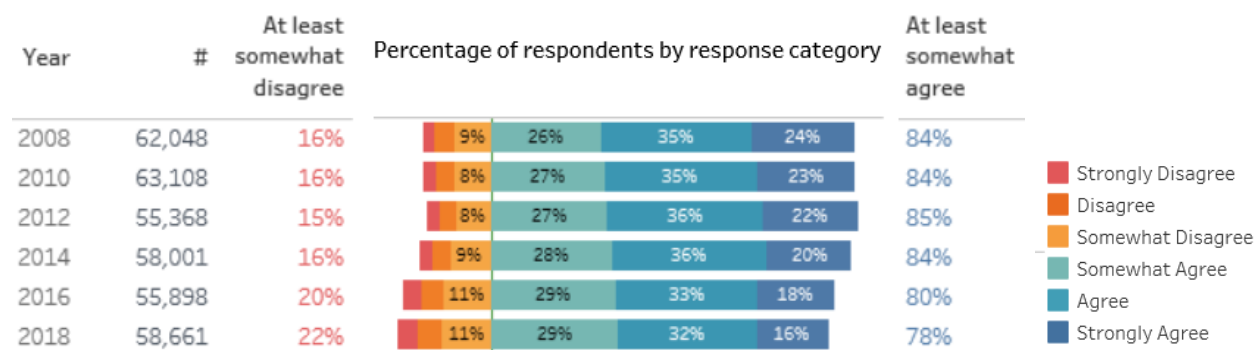
Figure 1: Satisfaction with the overall academic experience, spring 2008 to spring 2018



Source: UC Information Center UCUES longitudinal dashboard

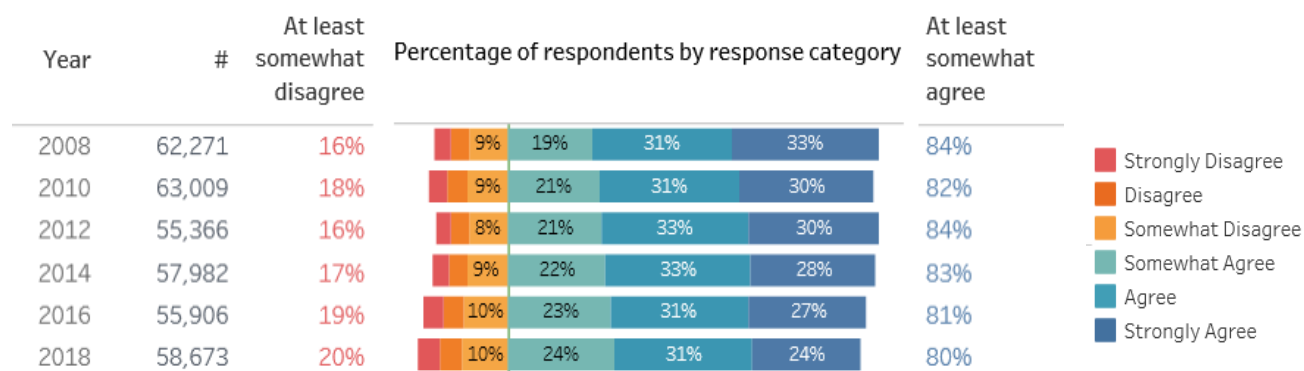
² UCUES longitudinal data tables (<https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/infocenter/ucues-common-items-longitudinal-analysis>)

Figure 2: I feel that I belong on this campus, spring 2008 to spring 2018



Source: UC Information Center UCUES longitudinal dashboard

Figure 3: Knowing what I know now, I would still choose to enroll at this university, spring 2008 to spring 2018

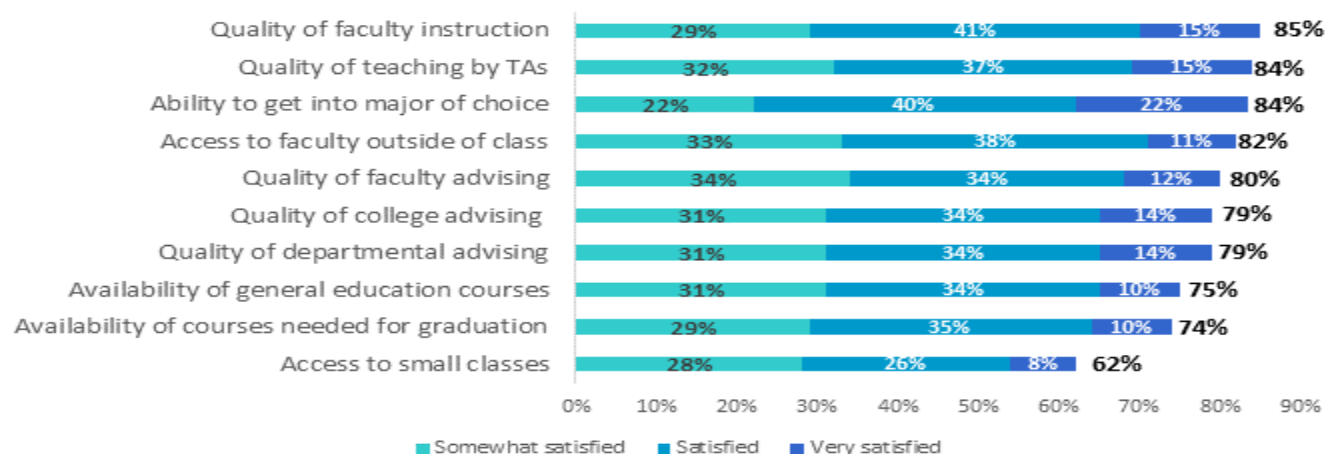


Source: UC Information Center UCUES longitudinal dashboard

Trends by campus vary with most campuses showing overall declines, some by as much as eight to nine percentage points. Responses for new generation students (i.e., Pell Grant recipients, first-generation and underrepresented students) declined six percentage points in satisfaction with the overall academic experience, eight percentage points in their sense of belonging and seven percentage points in their desire to re-enroll.

Other UCUES questions may provide insight to factors that might affect students' satisfaction with the undergraduate experience. For example, UCUES includes questions about the quality of instruction and advising, along with access to faculty, majors, and courses (see figure on the next page for spring 2018 responses). Because of changes in survey question wording, there are only consistent responses over the last four administrations (spring 2012 to spring 2018). Over this period, there has been little change in perceptions of the quality of instruction for faculty, quality of teaching by teaching assistants (TAs), and access to faculty outside of class.

Figure 4: Satisfaction with the following aspects of my undergraduate education, spring 2018



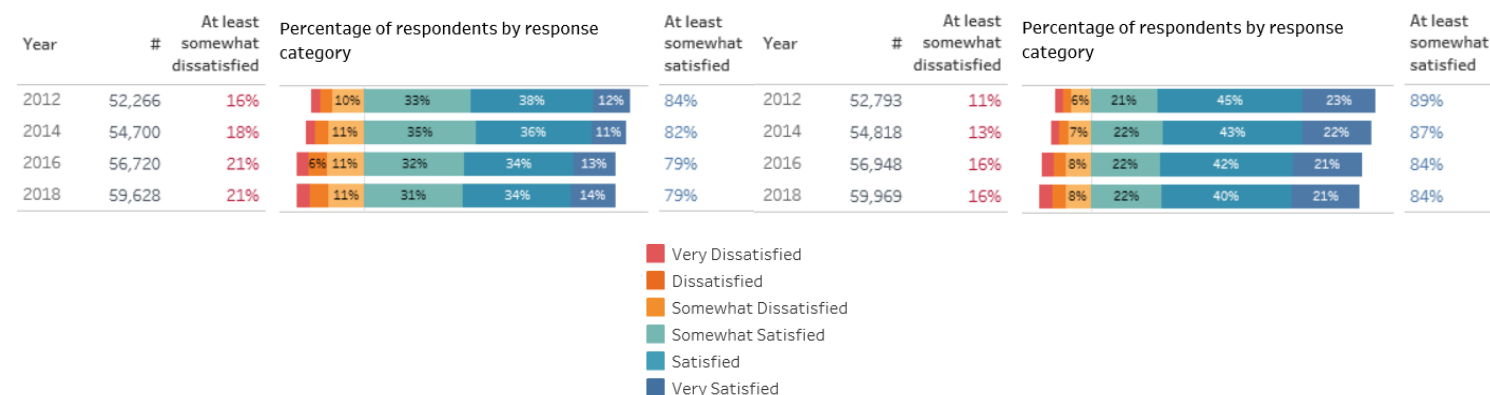
Source: UC Information Center UCUES

There has been growing dissatisfaction with advising on academic matters, including a four point drop for faculty advising, a six point drop in college advising, and a five point drop in departmental advising, along with a five point drop in satisfaction with getting into the major of choice. For new generation students, there is a six percentage point drop across all areas of advising and five points for getting into the major of choice.

Figure 5: Satisfaction with faculty advising and college advising, spring 2012 to 2018



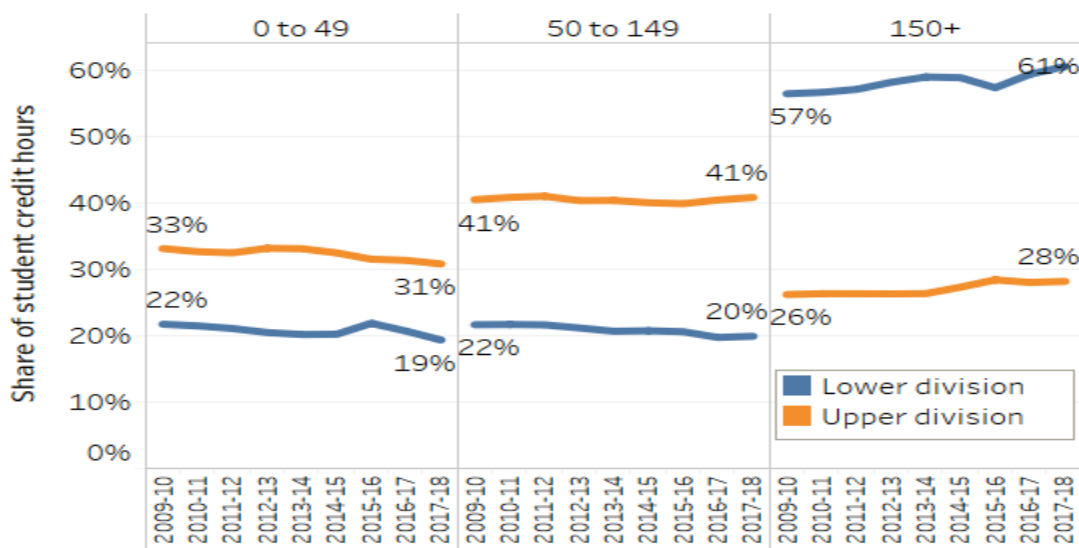
Figure 6: Satisfaction with departmental advising and ability to get major of choice, spring 2012 to 2018



Source: UC Information Center UCUES longitudinal dashboard

Student satisfaction with the availability of general education courses, availability of courses needed for graduation, and access to small classes have slightly declined two to three points, and satisfaction with access to small classes is the lowest at 62 percent. As can be seen below, over the last decade, the share of student credit hours in courses over 150 students has grown two to four points, while the share with less than 50 students has declined two to three points.

Figure 7: Share of lower and upper division student credit hours by class size, 2009-10 to 2017-18



Source: Faculty Instructor Activity report data

Importantly, other factors could contribute to this decline in undergraduate satisfaction. Much of the decline aligns with spring 2016 and spring 2018 responses, a period of time when campuses experienced rapid undergraduate enrollment growth, with a significant portion of that growth unfunded. Incoming students were living in double occupancy rooms that were converted into triple occupancy rooms, and common spaces were made into dormitory space to provide more beds. At the same time, UC saw a significant portion of undergraduates struggling with basic needs, including food insecurity.

While some of these declines in satisfaction may not seem significant, they also coincide with a decline in first-year retention rates of around one point for freshman entrants and, almost two points for new generation students.

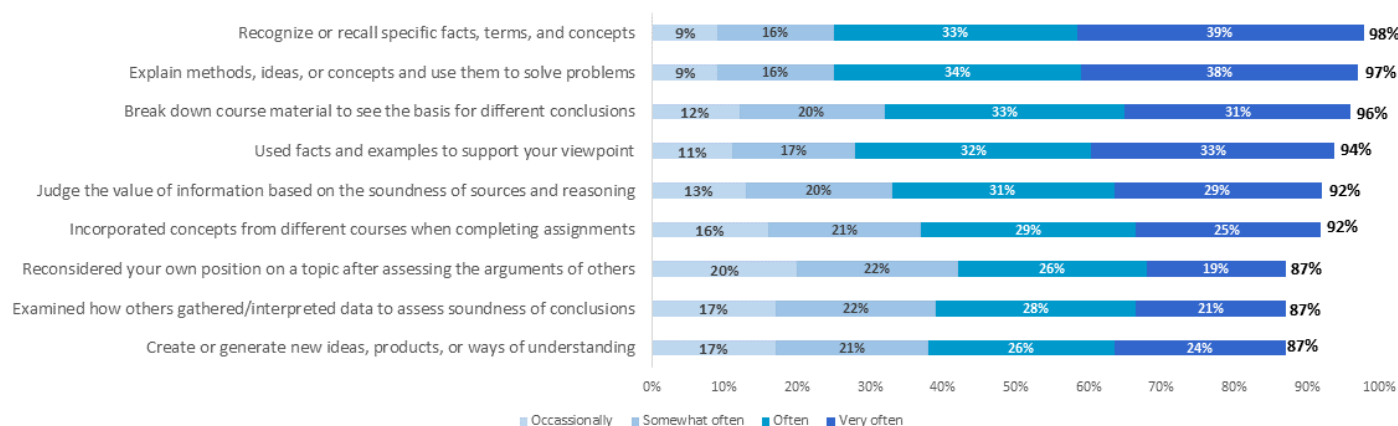
Many UC campuses are challenged with how to reverse declining trends in student satisfaction, as they also strive to achieve ambitious UC 2030 goals of timely graduation and the elimination of equity gaps for new generation students.

ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT IN COURSES AND STUDY PRACTICES

UCUES includes two sets of questions that assess academic engagement in courses, along with individual study practices. Both may provide campuses greater insight into ways to support undergraduates, improve opportunities for engagement, and improve study practices in order to achieve UC 2030 goals.

The first set of questions demonstrate extremely high academic engagement in courses, with responses to items ranging from 87 to 98 percent. Top responses focus on student recognition, explanation, dissection of facts, and using information to come to conclusions. In addition, these responses were relatively consistent over the last decade (i.e., spring 2008 to spring 2018) and consistent for new generation students and their peers.

Figure 8: Thinking back over your coursework in your major this academic year, how often were you required to do the following, spring 2018

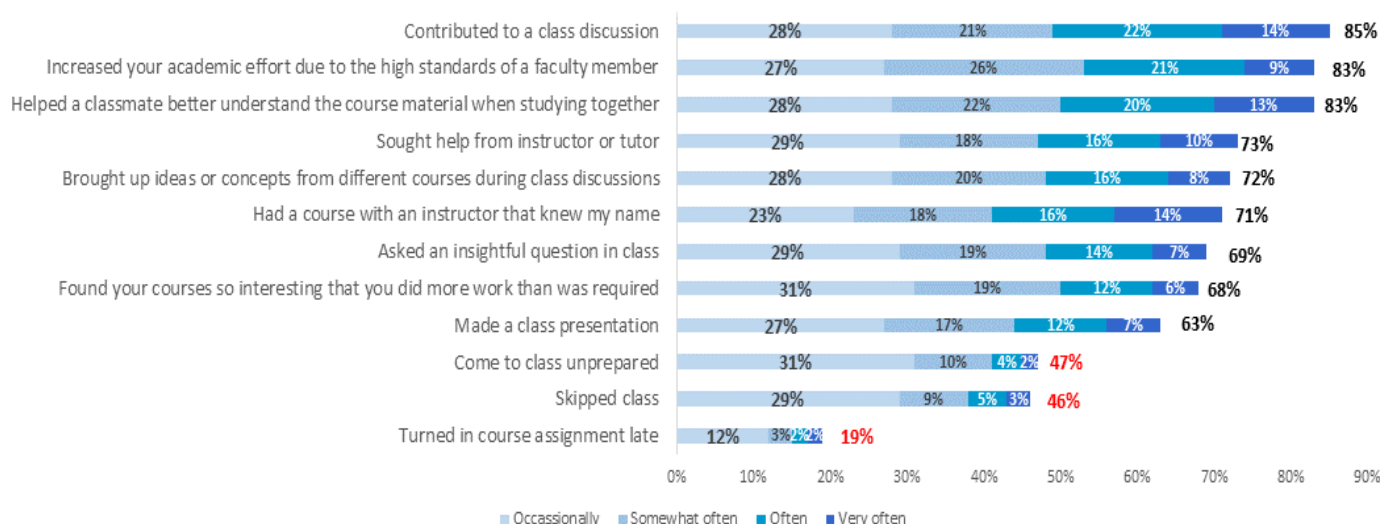


Source: UC Information Center UCUES

The following chart presents spring 2018 responses about student engagement and study practices. Most responses have remained relatively consistent over the decade, with over 80 percent indicating greater frequency of contributing to class discussions, working harder because of high faculty member standards, and helping a classmate better understand material. At the end of the list are three questions that measure disengagement. Just less than half of respondents indicate occasionally to very often going to class unprepared or skipping class, and only 19 percent indicate turning in assignments late.

Responses between new generation students and their peers are consistent across most of these questions. The primary differences were that new generation students (versus their peers) were less likely to report having helped a classmate better understand course material when studying together (79 compared to 83 percent), less likely to report coming to class unprepared (38 compared to 49 percent), and less likely to report skipping class (42 compared to 47 percent).

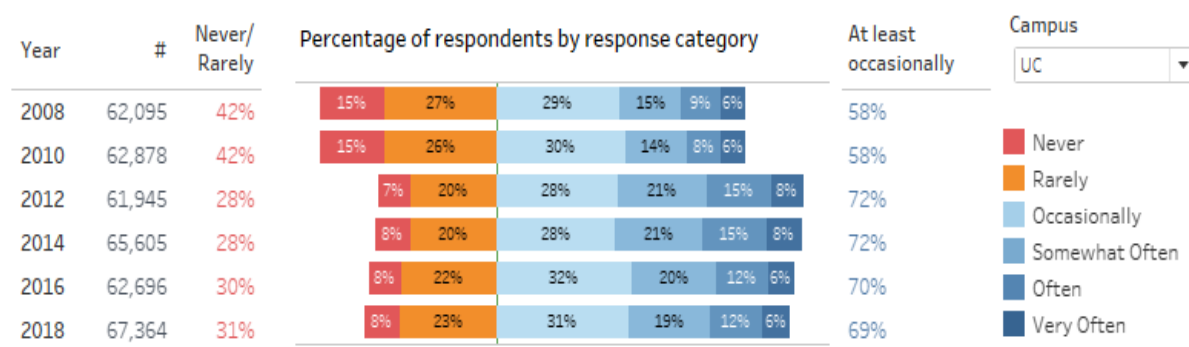
Figure 9: During this academic year, how often have you done each of the following, spring 2018



Source: UC Information Center UCUES

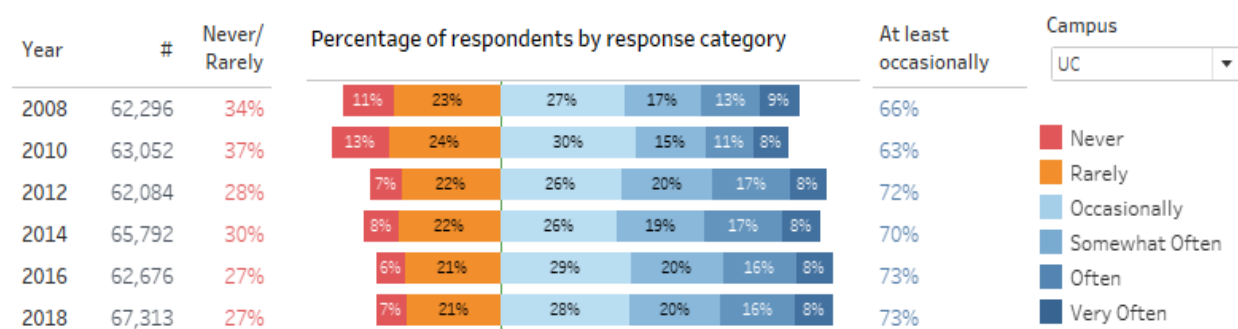
There are two areas with changes over the decade, including an 11 percentage point increase in the frequency of those who found courses so interesting that they did more than was required and a seven point increase in the frequency of those who brought up ideas or concepts from different courses during class discussions. In 2018, about seven in ten students said they were engaging in these activities occasionally to very often.

Figure 10: How frequently did you find your courses so interesting that you did more work than was required, spring 2008 to spring 2018



Source: UC Information Center UCUES longitudinal dashboard

Figure 11: How frequently did you bring up ideas or concepts from different courses during class discussions, spring 2008 to spring 2018

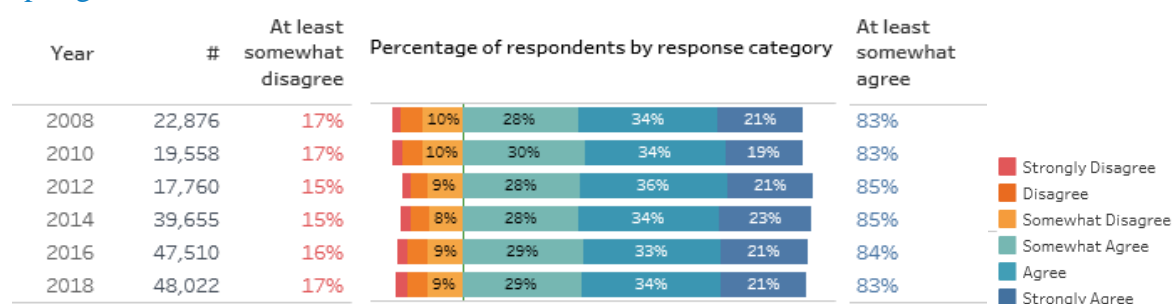


Source: UC Information Center UCUES longitudinal dashboard

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

While some things may change, others remain the same—including the importance UC undergraduates place on attending a university with world-class researchers. Over the decade, the percentage of students agreeing this is important has stayed between 83 and 85 percent. Campus spring 2018 responses range from 81 to 87 percent overall and or new gen students and their peers from 83 to 84 percent respectively.

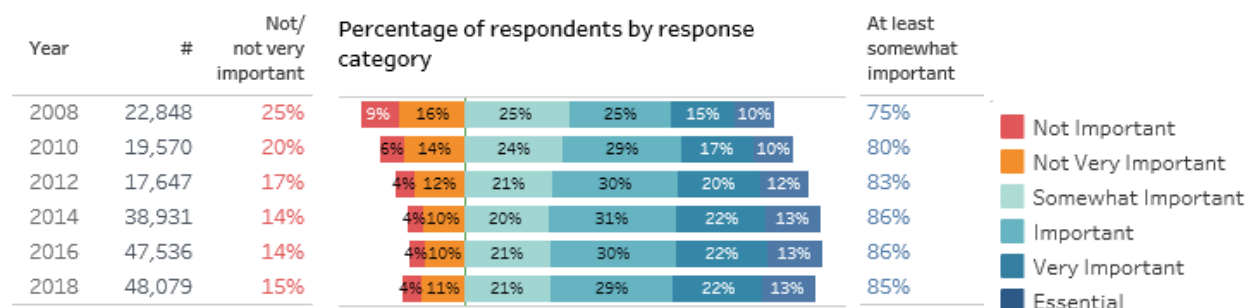
Figure 12: Attending a university with world-class researchers is important to me, spring 2008 to spring 2018



Source: UC Information Center UCUES longitudinal dashboard

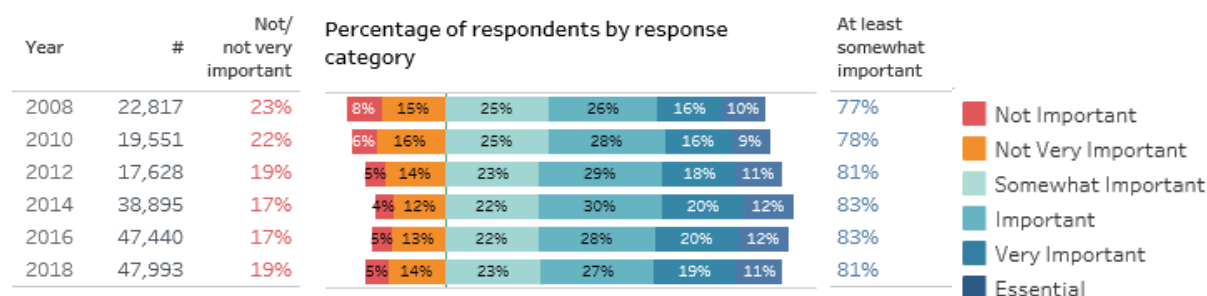
While 90 percent of spring 2018 UCUES respondents highlighted the importance of learning research methods in class and almost 80 percent indicated that having UC faculty reference their own research in class was important to them, a growing percent of undergraduates expressed an interest in directly participating in research, either with a faculty member (75 percent in 2008 compared to 85 percent in 2018) or on their own (77 percent compared to 81 percent).

Figure 13: Assisting faculty in their research is important to me, spring 2008 to spring 2018



Source: UC Information Center UCUES longitudinal dashboard

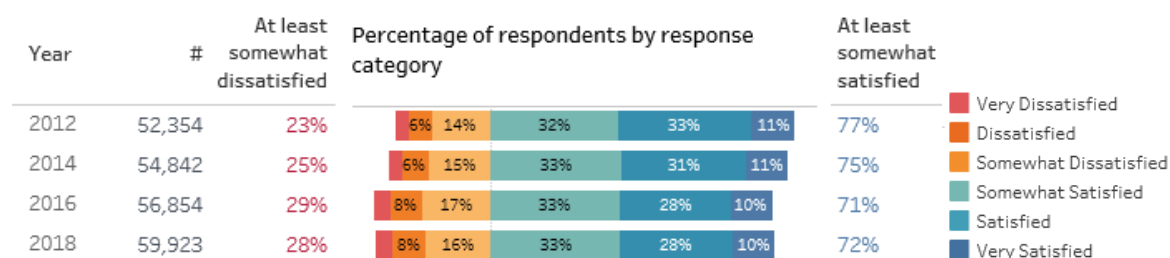
Figure 14: Pursuing my own research is important to me, spring 2008 to spring 2018



Source: UC Information Center UCUES longitudinal dashboard

There has been a five percentage point drop in undergraduates' satisfaction with opportunities to conduct research or produce creative products, with similar percentages for most campuses but a greater drop in satisfaction for new generation students over the period (8 percentage point drop). Declining satisfaction with opportunities for research could be another factor contributing to slipping satisfaction with the academic experience and interest in re-enrolling. For some UC campuses, increasing these kinds of opportunities is part of their strategy for eliminating gaps in timely graduation.

Figure 15: Satisfaction with opportunities for research experience or to produce creative products, spring 2012 to 2018



Source: UC Information Center UCUES longitudinal dashboard

UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

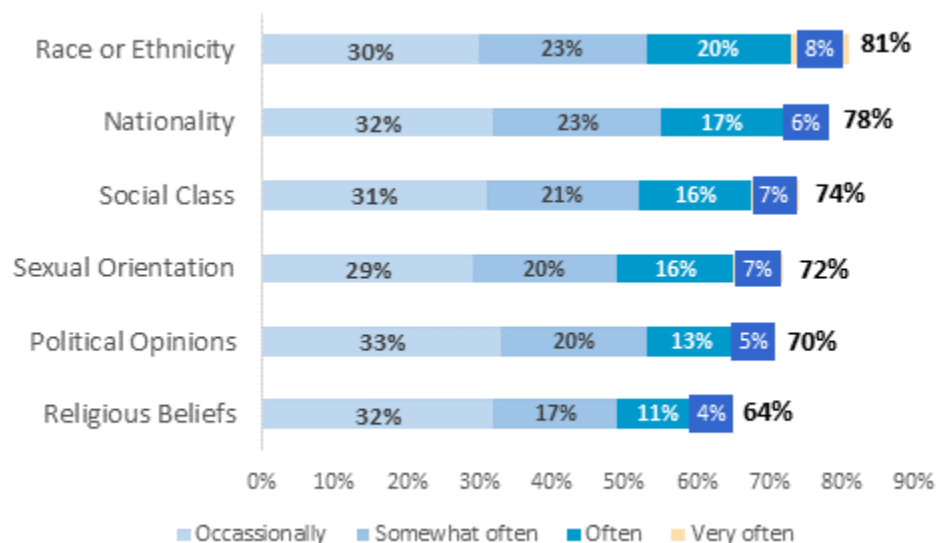
One goal of a residential experience and having a diverse student population is that students gain a better understanding from the perspectives of fellow students that differ from oneself. Universities play a critical societal role to develop future leaders and engaged citizens. Today, there is an ever increasing need to reach across the aisle, listen to those who share different perspectives, and be able to compromise and create common ground.

One relevant UCUES question in this area is:

- How often have you gained a deeper understanding of other perspectives through interactions with fellow students because they differed from you in the following ways, including race/ethnicity, nationality, social class, sexual orientation, political opinions, and religious beliefs?

The figure below presents spring 2018 findings for those with responses of “occasionally” to “very often.” The highest responses were for race or ethnicity, nationality and social class; the lowest responses for sexual orientation, political opinions and religious beliefs.

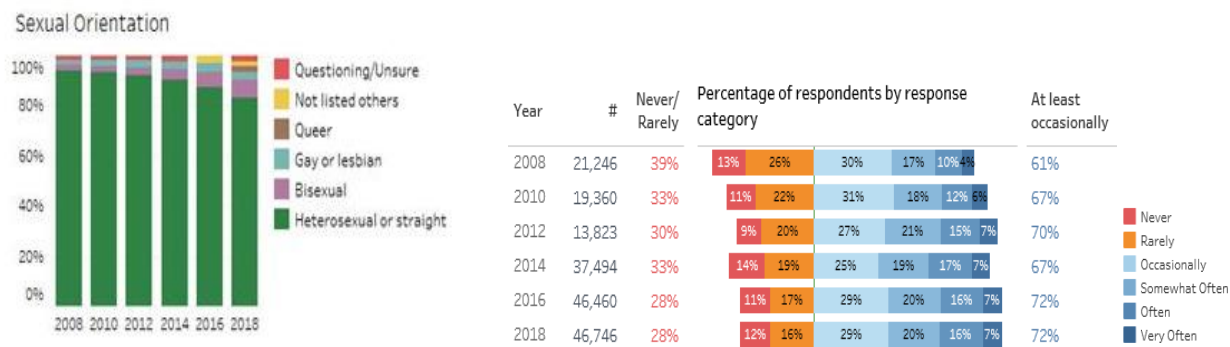
Figure 16: Gained a deeper understanding of other perspectives due to interactions with fellow students who differ from you in the following ways, spring 2018



Source: UC Information Center UCUES longitudinal dashboard

In addition, UCUES responses with the greatest amount of change over the decade were for sexual orientation, political opinions, and religious beliefs, which could be partly due to changing student demographics. For example, as more students identified with a sexual orientation other than heterosexual or straight, more undergraduates reported having a deeper understanding of perspectives based on sexual orientation, growing by 11 points between spring 2008 and 2018.

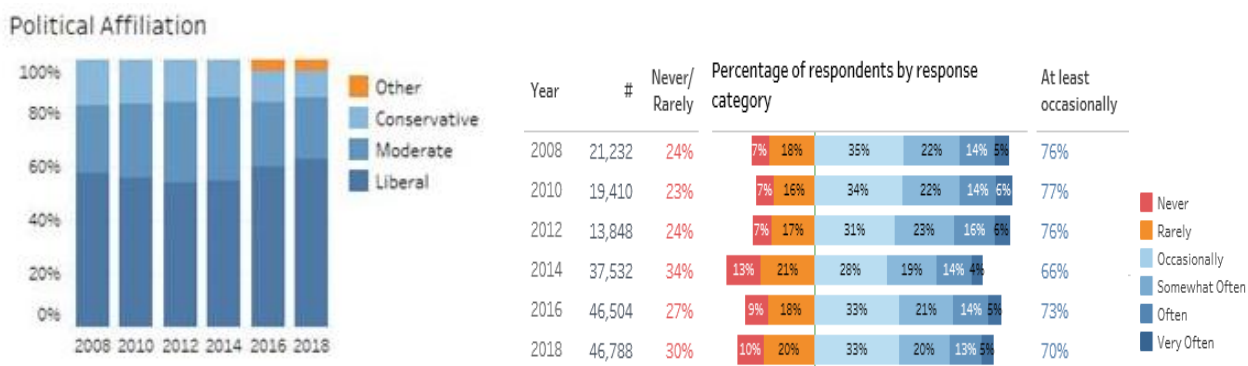
Figure 17: Comparison of trends in UCUES respondents' sexual orientation to responses of having gained a deeper understanding of perspectives due to interactions with fellow students of a different **sexual orientation**, spring 2008 to spring 2018



Source: UC Information Center UCUES longitudinal dashboard

Regarding political affiliation, at the same time, the proportion of students who identified as “moderate” and particularly “conservative” declined. There was also a six point drop in undergraduates reporting they at least occasionally had a deeper understanding of political opinions based on having interactions with students that had different political perspectives.

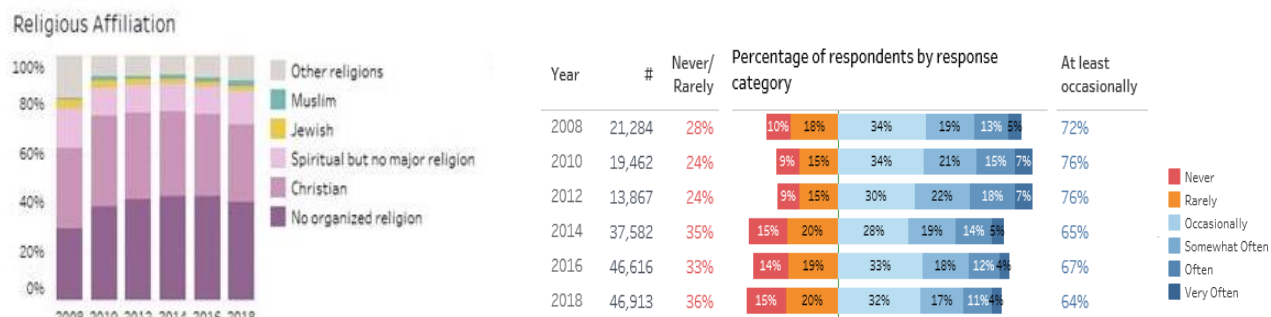
Figure 18: Comparison of UCUES respondents' political affiliation to responses of having gained a deeper understanding of perspectives due to interactions with fellow students of a different **political opinions**, spring 2008 to spring 2018



Source: UC Information Center UCUES longitudinal dashboard

Also, undergraduates reporting reporting that they do not affiliate with an organized religion or that they are spiritual but not affiliated with a major religion increased at the same time that there was an eight point drop in students reporting that they at least occasionally had a deeper understanding of religious perspectives based on having interactions with those who had different religious beliefs.

Figure 19: Comparison of UCUES respondents' religious affiliation to responses of having gained a deeper understanding of perspectives due to interactions with fellow students of different **religious beliefs**, spring 2008 to spring 2018



Source: UC Information Center UCUES longitudinal dashboard

CONCLUSION

UCUES data provides insights into the undergraduate experience, identifying areas of strength, opportunities for improvement, and changes over time. This information is available in the UC Information Center, providing individuals on campus a way to examine trends for their students overall or by student demographics and academic characteristics.

Just as the campuses are developing strategies and approaches to make progress towards their 2030 goals, this dashboard informs the UC system as a whole regarding areas students would deem of high-impact and importance. Whether it is improving the learning environment, increasing access to research opportunities, engagement in campus life, or cultivating a sense of belonging, the UCUES provides a vehicle for students to guide individual campuses to success with their 2030 goals. The presentation will include a demonstration of the UCUES Longitudinal Dashboard.