Survey Results and Analysis

The University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey

The University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES) solicits student opinions on all aspects of the UC experience. UCUES content is broad and covers most aspects of students' academic and co-curricular experience. Students evaluate such things as instruction, advising and student services. UCUES also provides information about student behaviors – their study habits and how they use their time. The survey also is a way of documenting student attitudes, self-perceptions and goals. Details about the structure, content, and history of UCUES and the methods used to administer the survey can be found at www.universityofcalifornia.edu/studentsurvey/.

UCUES was administered in the spring of 2006 as an online census survey, meaning all undergraduates – not just a representative sample of undergraduates – were invited to participate. The UC Merced highlights presented below focus on survey responses from freshmen, because when UCUES was administered in the spring of 2006, the majority of our students were freshmen who enrolled as part of our inaugural class in fall 2005.

Survey Highlights about UC Merced Freshmen Compared to Freshmen at Other UC Campuses

Compared to freshmen from other UC campuses, UC Merced freshmen in 2006 came from poorer families (see chart 1) and a smaller percentage were native English speakers (see chart 10). They compensated for these disadvantages by spending more time attending class, studying, and working for pay than freshmen at other UC campuses (see chart 2). In addition, a lower percentage of UC Merced freshmen reported participating in academic risk behaviors like coming to class without completing assigned reading, skipping class, or turning in a class assignment late (see chart 9). A higher percentage of UC Merced freshmen reported having made greater academic effort by, for example, extensively revising a paper at least once before submitting it or seeking academic help from an instructor or tutor (see chart 8) than freshmen at other UC campuses.

UC Merced freshmen reported a higher rate of participation, compared to freshmen at other UC campuses, in collaborative learning experiences like working with groups of students outside of class and helping classmates understand material better (see chart 5). UC Merced freshmen also reported greater use of higher-order learning strategies like incorporating ideas from different courses, evaluating methods and conclusions, and explaining and solving problems (see chart 6). They reported less use of lower order learning strategies like recalling facts, terms, or concepts than their peers at other UC campuses (see chart 7). In addition, a higher percentage of UC Merced freshmen reported taking one or more service-learning courses (see chart 14).

Perhaps as a result of their greater effort and the opportunities provided by UC Merced for active, higher order learning strategies, UC Merced freshmen reported greater gains in academic and life skills, such as reading and comprehending academic material (see chart 3) and leadership skills (see chart 4), than their peers at other UC campuses. They also reported greater gains in social skills like understanding of personal social responsibility, although unlike the gains in academic and life skills that pushed UC Merced freshmen beyond the achievement level reported by their UC peers, UC Merced freshmen still lag behind their peers in their appreciation of cultural and global diversity, their ability to appreciate fine arts, and other social skills (see chart 15).

Although UC Merced freshmen are similar to their peers at other UC campuses in terms of feeling that they belong on campus, a smaller percentage of UC Merced freshmen reported that they would still enroll at their current campus if they had it to do all over again (see chart 11). The sense of dissatisfaction reflected in this observation is related to a slightly lower sense of satisfaction with the UC academic experience, the UC social experience, and the value of the UC education for the price by UC Merced freshmen (see chart 12). Examination of the reasons for this relative dissatisfaction revealed that they relate to the fact that UC Merced is a young campus. Fewer students at UC Merced reported being satisfied with their ability to get into the major of their choice and with the availability of both general education courses and courses needed for graduation than their peers at other UC campuses. That said, compared to freshmen at other UC campuses, a greater percentage of UC Merced freshmen reported satisfaction with the quality of teaching by both faculty and TAs; with access to faculty outside of class and advising by faculty on academics; and, especially, with access to small classes (see chart 13).

TOOLS

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