



# Office of Student Research & Campus Surveys

## The Success and Satisfaction of Community College Transfer Students at UC Berkeley

*Results from the 2010 University of California Experience Survey (UCUES)*

*May 2011*

### **Setting**

Every year almost a third of newly enrolled undergraduates at UC Berkeley are transfer students. Over 90% of these students matriculate from California community colleges and enter the university as juniors. In recent years, about 50 of California's 112 community colleges provide 90% of these transfers. Four schools (Diablo Valley, De Anza, San Francisco City College, and Santa Monica) contribute about 30%, another twelve the next 30%, and thirty-four another 30%.

As with freshman admission, admission to UC Berkeley for transfer students is highly competitive: Fewer than one in four of applicants for each population are admitted. Similar to students enrolling directly from high school, transfer entrants have demonstrated academic accomplishment prior to Berkeley and then continue their trajectory of success by earning their undergraduate degrees at an exceptionally high rate. More than 90% of California community college transfers earn a Berkeley degree, the same as students admitted as freshmen. Thus, community college transfers are an integral part of the Berkeley story of excellence and achievement.

On the other hand, there are significant questions about the experiences and degree of success of transfer students at UC Berkeley, especially in comparison with students entering directly from high school. To what extent are community college transfer students able to have a satisfactory and engaged undergraduate academic experience at UC Berkeley, given that they are entering a large research university “midstream”? How well do they fare academically, given they are competing with “native juniors” who, having entered as freshmen, have two years of rigorous Berkeley coursework under their belts?

We use both survey and institutional data to examine the experience of community college transfer students at UC Berkeley. Specifically, we address the following questions:

- 1) How satisfied are community college transfer students with aspects of their UC Berkeley experience such as the quality of advising, instruction, course availability, and sense of belonging at Berkeley? What proportion of them would re-enroll at UC Berkeley based on what they now know as matriculated Berkeley students?
- 2) How engaged are community college transfer students in the classroom and how much interaction with faculty do they have?
- 3) How do the degree aspirations of transfer students in their senior year compare with those of their freshman admitted counterparts?
- 4) How does the demographic background (e.g., ethnicity, socioeconomic status) of transfer students compare with that of freshman admitted students?

- 5) How do various academic outcome measures (academic probation rates, retention, UC GPA, and time to degree) for community college transfers compare with those for students admitted as freshmen?

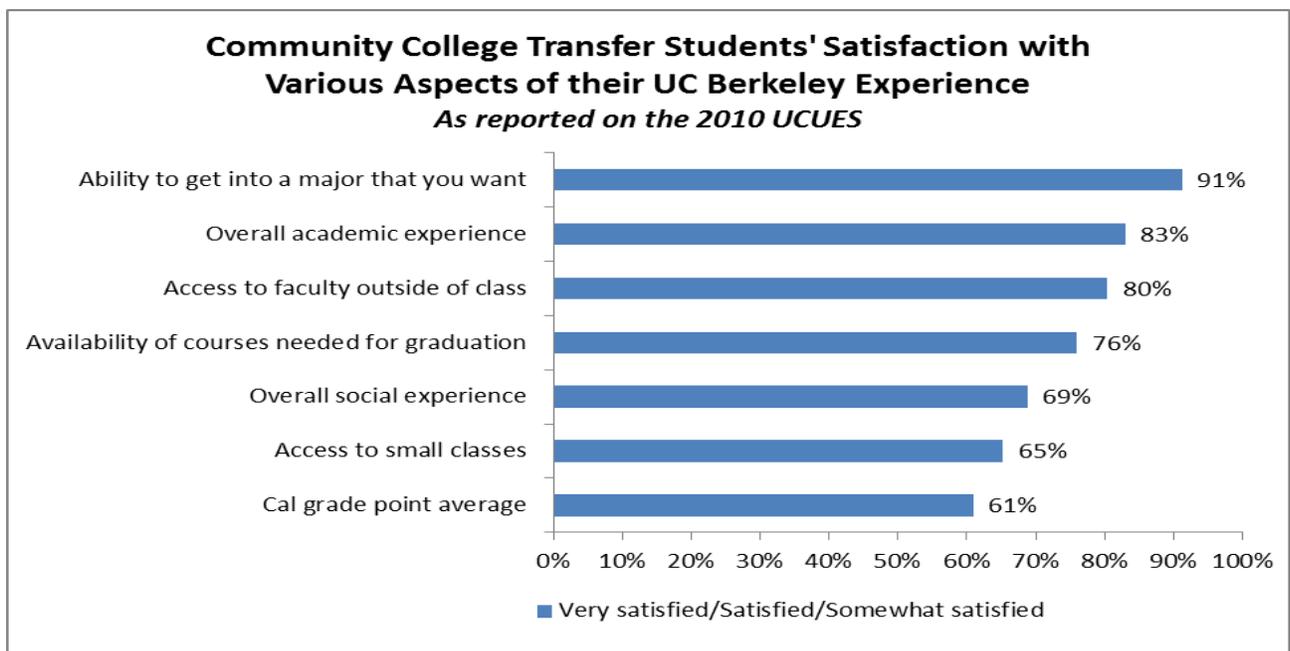
### The Current Research

In spring 2010, UC Berkeley conducted the University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES), which taps into students' academic, social, extra-curricular, and civic engagement experiences during their time at the university. Reported here are some of the UCUES findings that highlight the experiences of community college transfer students at UC Berkeley. The academic success of Berkeley's transfer students, as measured by persistence, graduation rates, and UC grade point average, is also examined below.

Although transfer students are the focus of the current research, highlighted here are select comparative results of freshman admitted students. In addition to global comparisons across the two groups, comparisons differentiating between freshman admits in their first and second years of attendance at UC Berkeley and freshman admits who are juniors and seniors, are also displayed.<sup>1</sup>

### Community College Transfer Students' Satisfaction with their UC Berkeley Experience

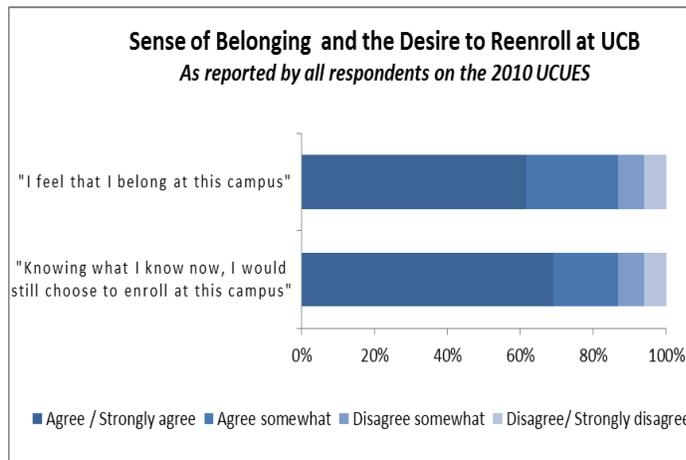
When asked about satisfaction with their ability to get into their desired major, the availability of courses needed for graduation, access to faculty and small class sizes, their UC Berkeley grade point average, and their overall academic and social experience, some aspects of their UC Berkeley experience were rated much more favorably than others. Transfer students were most satisfied with their ability to get into their desired major, with 91% of this group indicating that they were satisfied with this aspect of their experience. Similarly, they reported a high level of satisfaction with their overall academic experience (83% satisfied).



Conversely, this group was least satisfied with their Cal grade point average (61% satisfied; 20% dissatisfied/very dissatisfied). Relatively lower satisfaction ratings were also provided in response to access to small classes (65% satisfied; 18% dissatisfied/very dissatisfied) and the overall social experience (69% satisfied; 15% dissatisfied/very dissatisfied). When comparing these satisfaction ratings with those provided by freshman admitted students, transfer students had significantly<sup>2</sup> higher ratings of satisfaction regarding their ability to get into the major that they wanted, access to faculty outside of class, the availability of courses needed for graduation, access to small classes, and their Cal grade point average. With respect to the overall academic experience there was no difference between the satisfaction ratings of community college transfer students and freshman admitted students. However, transfer students did have significantly lower satisfaction ratings of their overall social experience.

*Sense of Belonging and the Desire to Re-enroll at UC Berkeley*

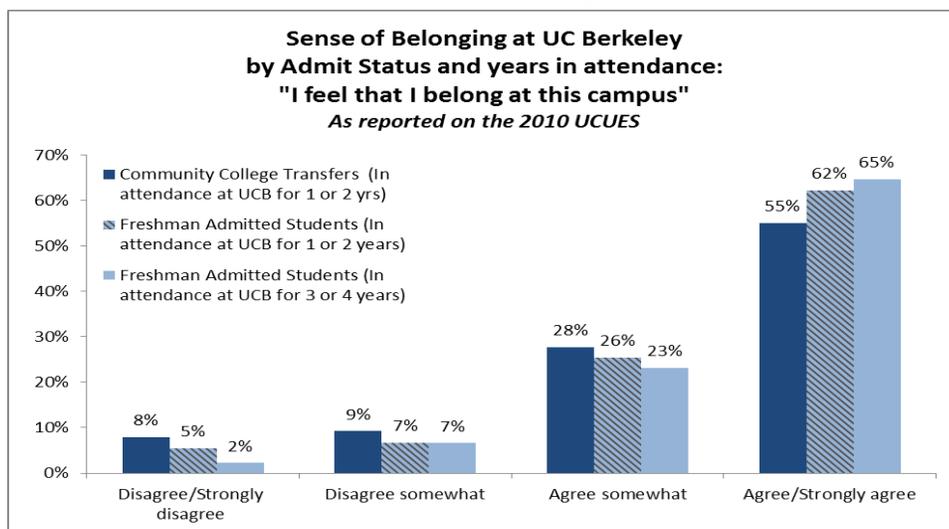
Students were asked to rate their level of agreement with the following two statements: “I feel that I belong at this campus” and “Knowing what I know now, I would still choose to enroll at this campus.” Sense of belonging is high among community college transfers, with 83% agreeing with



the statement and fewer than 9% reporting that they disagree/strongly disagree. Similarly, 87% indicated that they would reenroll at UC Berkeley, whereas only 6% were at the disagree/strongly disagree end of the spectrum.

Community college transfer students do not differ from freshman admitted students with respect to a hypothetical decision to reenroll. However, those admitted to Berkeley from community colleges are somewhat less likely

to report a sense of belonging than those admitted directly from high school. This was the case when comparing transfer students who are in their first and second year at UC Berkeley with those freshman admitted students who are in their first or second year at Cal as well those in their third or fourth year.



Fifty-five percent (55%) of community college transfer students indicate that they agree/strongly agree with the statement that they feel they belong at the campus, compared to 62% of freshman admitted students in their first or second year and 65% of freshman entrants in their third or fourth year.

*Satisfaction with Advising, the Quality of Instruction, and the Value of Education for the Price*

Transfer students report a high level of satisfaction with the range of advising experiences available at UC Berkeley with fewer than 20% dissatisfied with faculty, peer, college, or departmental advising. Advising provided by faculty on academic matters receives the highest ratings with 84% expressing some level of satisfaction. Overall, a significantly higher proportion of community college transfer students are satisfied with advising than students admitted as freshmen either in their first or second year or their third or fourth year at UC Berkeley.

Proportion of UC Berkeley Students Satisfied with Advising, Instruction, and the Value of Education for the Price, by Admit Status

	Faculty Advising	Dept. Advising	College Advising	Peer Advising	Quality of Faculty Instruction	Quality of Teaching by Graduate Student TAs	Value of Education for the Price
COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRANSFER STUDENTS	84%	83%	83%	81%	90%	84%	73%
STUDENTS ADMITTED AS FRESHMEN (IN ATTENDANCE AT UCB FOR 1 OR 2 YEARS)	77%	80%	77%	79%	91%	85%	73%
STUDENTS ADMITTED AS FRESHMEN (IN ATTENDANCE AT UCB FOR 3 OR 4 YEARS)	78%	82%	77%	78%	92%	89%	77%
(As reported on the 2010 UCUES; Satisfaction = Very satisfied/ Satisfied/ Somewhat satisfied)							

Ninety percent (90%) of community college transfer students also report that they are generally satisfied with the quality of faculty instruction, 84% are satisfied with the quality of teaching provided by graduate student teaching assistants, and 73% are satisfied with the value of their UC Berkeley education for the price paid. These percentages are nearly identical to those of freshmen admits in their first and second year (91%, 85%, and 73%, respectively), while comparable percentages for freshman admits in their third and fourth year are higher (92%, 89%, and 77%, respectively). Nonetheless, the main conclusion here is that community college transfers report high levels of satisfaction with the academic advising and quality of instruction that they receive at UC Berkeley.

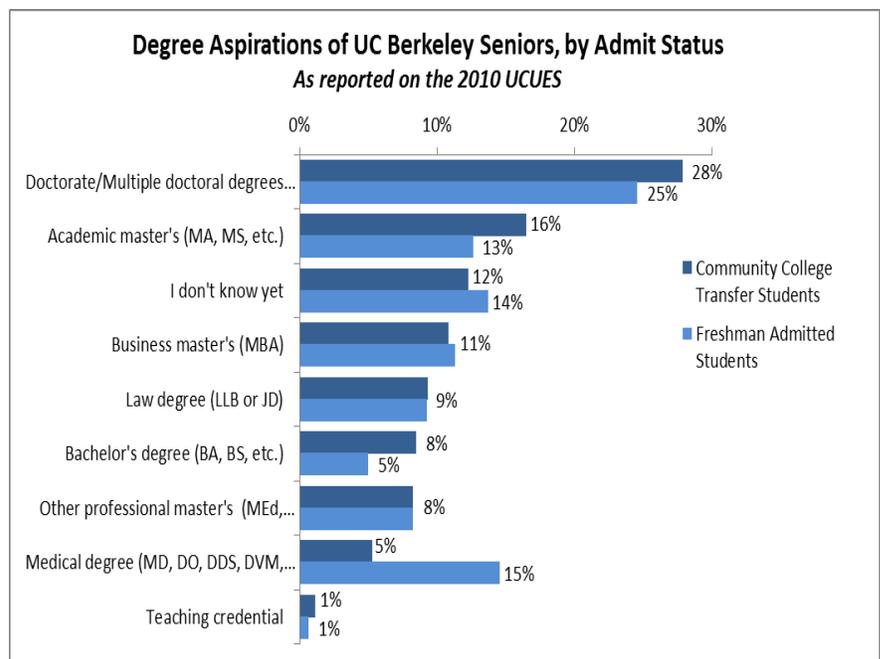
## Classroom Engagement and Faculty Interaction

Transfer students also report a high level of classroom engagement and interaction with faculty at UC Berkeley. Most have occasionally or more frequently<sup>3</sup> in the past academic year contributed to class discussion (84%), had a class in which the professor knew or learned their name (78%), brought up ideas or concepts from different courses during class discussion (72%), and asked an insightful question in class (70%). A large proportion also have occasionally or more frequently communicated with faculty via email or in person (83%), interacted with faculty during lecture class sessions (67%), and talked with the instructor outside of class about issues and concepts derived from a course (63%). Nearly forty percent (38%) report working with a faculty member on an activity other than coursework and 37% have taken at least one small research-oriented seminar in the past year.

Classroom Engagement - At Least Occasionally This Academic Year	
84%	Contributed to a class discussion
78%	Had a class in which the professor knew or learned your name
72%	Brought up ideas or concepts from different courses during class discussions
70%	Asked an insightful question in class
68%	Found a course so interesting that you did more work than was required
62%	Made a class presentation
Faculty Interaction - At Least Occasionally This Academic Year	
83%	Communicated with a faculty member by e-mail or in person
67%	Interacted with faculty during lecture class sessions
63%	Talked with the instructor outside of class about concepts derived from a course
Faculty Interaction - At Least Once This Academic Year	
37%	Taken a small research-oriented seminar with faculty
38%	Worked with a faculty member on an activity other than coursework

## Degree Aspirations

In their senior year more community college transfers aspire to post-baccalaureate academic degrees than seniors who were admitted to Berkeley as freshmen. This is true for both doctorates (28% versus 25%) and academic master's degrees (16% versus 13%) as the highest degree planned. On the other hand, UC Berkeley seniors who were admitted directly from high school were much more likely to aspire to earn an advanced



degree in medicine (15%) compared to seniors who were admitted from community colleges (5%). There are no differences between the two groups in aspirations for degrees in law (9% for both) and business (11% for both), and total proportion with post-baccalaureate degree aspirations (78% for community college transfers and 81% for freshman admitted students) are very similar.

### Demographic Background of Transfer Students

There are important differences in the demographic backgrounds of community college transfers and students admitted as freshmen at UC Berkeley. With respect to ethnic diversity and underrepresented minority representation, the percentage of African-American, Native American, and Chicano/Latino students is somewhat higher in the transfer student population; in fall 2010, 22% of newly enrolled transfer students were underrepresented minorities, compared to 16% in the new freshmen cohort.

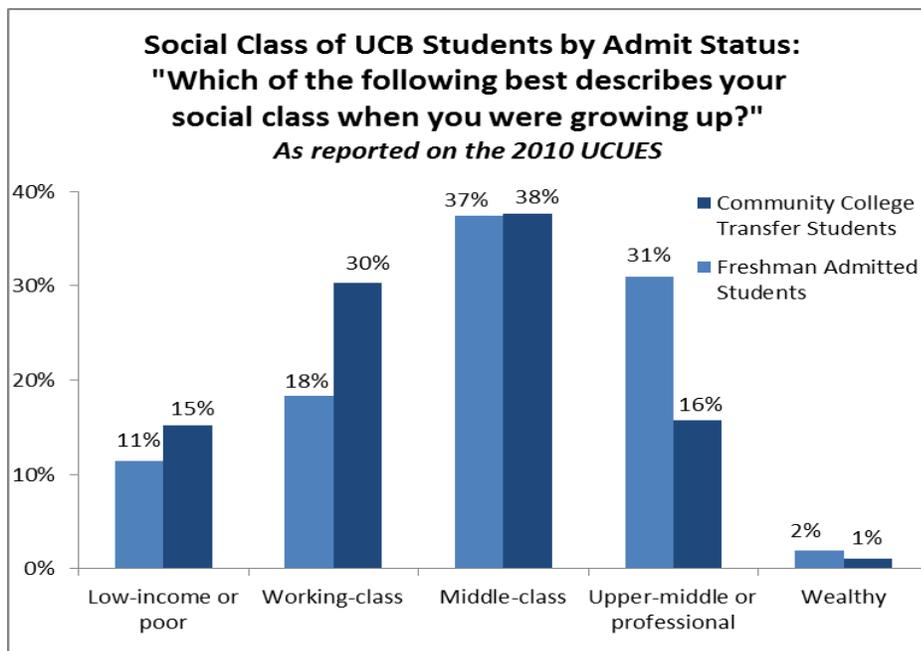
The UCUES 2010 survey data indicate other important differences.

#### *First Generation College*

Fully 45% of transfer students reported that neither of their parents has a four-year college degree (earned either in the United States or a country of origin) compared to 26% of their freshman admitted counterparts.

#### *Family's Social Class While Growing Up*

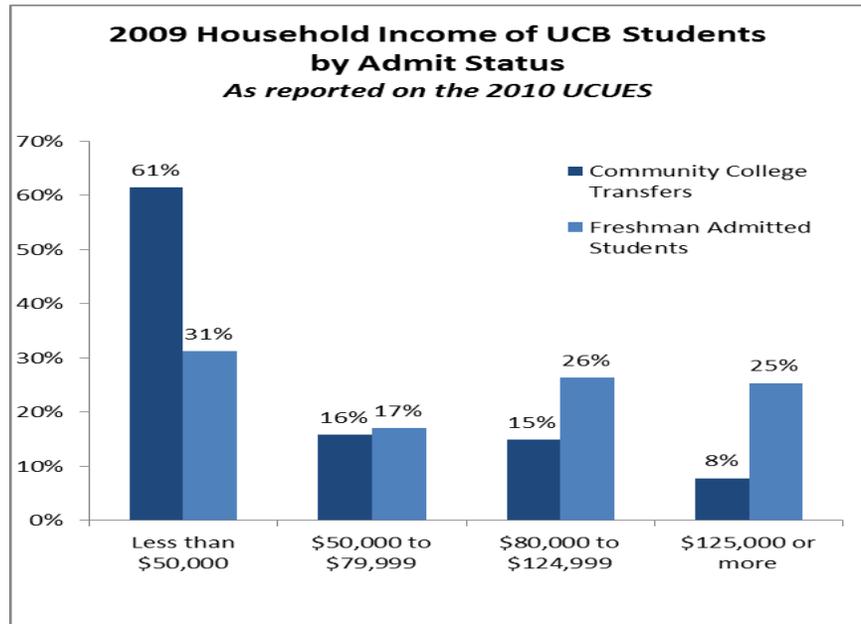
A large proportion of transfer students responding to UCUES report that their social class when growing up was working-class or low-income/poor (45%), compared to less than 30% for freshman admits. Only 17% report their upbringing as upper-middle-class/professional or wealthy. Almost twice the proportion of freshman admitted students (33%) indicate that this is their background.



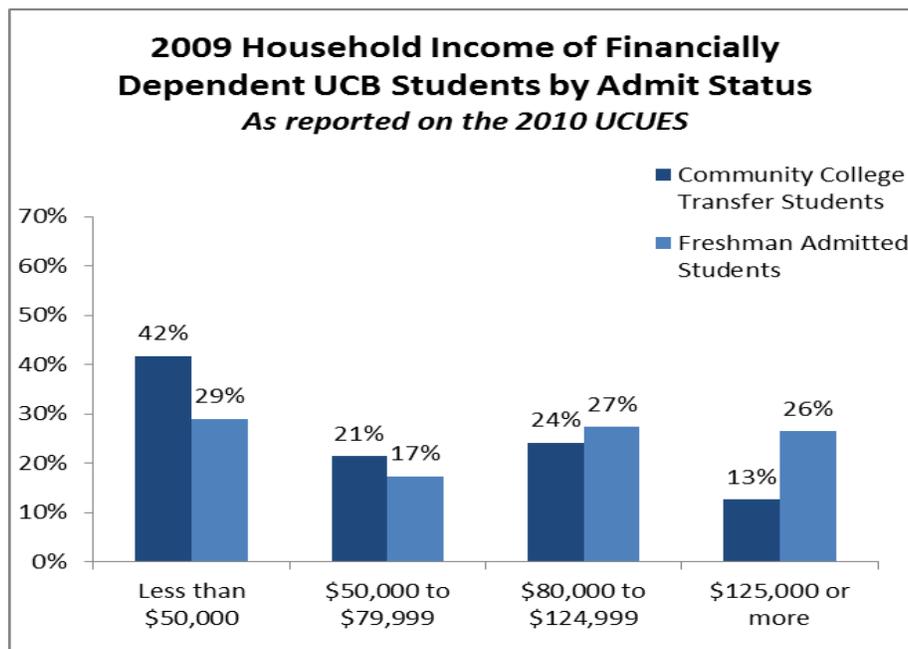
### Recent Household Income

Forty-three percent (43%) of community college transfer students responding to UCUES in 2010 report that they are financially independent, compared to 5% of freshmen entrants. Both financially dependent and independent students were asked to report their 2009 household income, with dependent students reporting their parents' 2009 household income and independent students reporting on their own household income from 2009.

The majority of community college transfer students (61%) report household incomes of less than \$50,000, compared to 31% of freshman admitted students. Conversely, students admitted directly from high school are more likely to report household incomes of \$125,000 or more (25% of freshman admits compared to 8% of community college transfers).

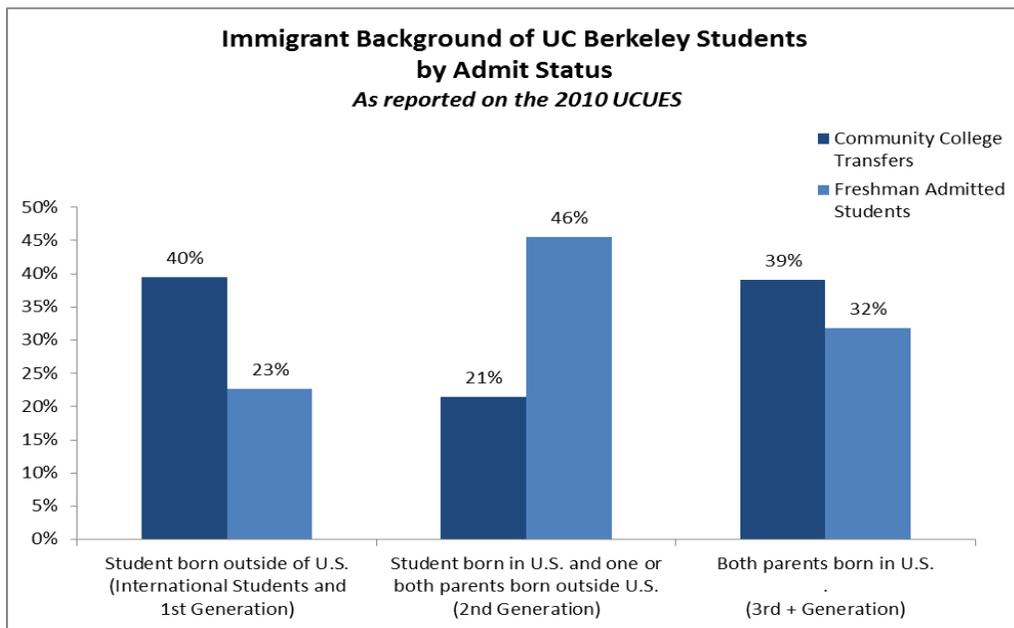


The disproportionate representation of community college transfer students at the lower end of the income range is also the case when considering the 2009 household income of just financially dependent students. For the financially dependent community college transfer students, 42% indicate that their parents' 2009 household income was less than \$50,000, compared with 29% of the financially dependent freshman admits.



### *Immigrant Background*

At UC Berkeley the immigrant background of community college transfers differs from that of students admitted as freshmen. Fully 40% of community college transfers were born outside of the U.S., entering Berkeley as either International students or first-generation immigrant students. Nearly half of these (19%) have come to the United States within the last five years. Only 23% of students entering directly from high school are not U.S.-born, and only 5% have come to the United States within the last five years. Conversely, students entering as freshmen are more than twice as likely to be second-generation immigrant, that is, born in the U.S. but with one or both parents not U.S.-born, than community college transfers (46% versus 21%). Finally, community college transfers are more likely to be third or higher immigrant generation than new from high school freshmen (39% versus 32%).



### **Graduation Rates and Overall Academic Success at Berkeley**

As previously noted, the eventual overall graduation rate for community college students is above 90%. International student community college transfers have exceptionally high graduation rates:

Recent Four-Year Graduation Rates for California Community College Transfers by Immigrant Status and Gender		
F	M	
88%	86%	US Citizen
89%	84%	Immigrant
95%	95%	International Student

[Average for 2004 and 2005 Fall Cohorts]

Four –year graduation rates for community college transfers ranges from 86% for those entering the College of Letters and Science to 95% for the highly competitive students admitted to the Haas School of Business:

Graduation Rates for California Community College Transfers by School/College	
86%	College of Letters & Science
88%	College of Environmental Design
89%	College of Chemistry
90%	College of Natural Resources
91%	College of Engineering
95%	Haas School of Business

There is a perception that community college students perform academically at a substantially lower level than that of their peers who entered UC Berkeley directly from high school. Given notions of the relative academic strengths of students who go to community college initially and the disparities in socioeconomic advantage between transfers and freshman admitted students, this may be a reasonable view. Our institutional data do not support this. In fact, the level of academic success of community college transfers is very nearly as outstanding as that of freshman admitted students on a number of measures.

First-year academic probation rates are at record lows for both community college transfers (4%) and freshman (3%). One-year and two-year retention rates are at record highs, 95% and 91% for transfers and 97% and 94% for freshman admits. The 3.35 average UC GPA at graduation for community college transfers is nearly as high as the 3.40 average UC GPA at graduation for students entering as freshmen. And, as noted earlier, the graduation rate is higher than 90% for both groups. Significantly, 73% of community college transfers graduate within two years of matriculation; this compares favorably with the 71% four-year graduation rate for students entering as freshmen.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES) results from 2010 combined with recent institutional data provides a comprehensive view of the university experiences of community college transfer students and their academic achievement. California community college transfer students are a diverse group, consisting of larger proportions of first-generation college, low-income, underrepresented minority, and International and first-generation immigrant students than the freshman admitted population.

Once at Berkeley, a large majority of community college transfer students (upwards of 91%) report being satisfied with their academic experience, including access to faculty, the quality of faculty instruction, the availability of courses needed for graduation, and their ability to get into their desired

major. While most students at UC Berkeley are satisfied with advising, a higher proportion of community college transfers report being more satisfied with the academic advising they received from faculty, staff, and peers on campus than the freshman admitted group. Contrary to the view that students who transfer to a very large and competitive university such as Berkeley will experience difficulties with advising, it appears that the academic advising received is meeting the needs and expectations of most students. In addition to the positive evaluation of their advising and general academic experience, community college transfer students report a high level of academic engagement, with most indicating that they have contributed to class discussion (84%) and have had a class in which the professor knew or learned their name (78%).

A smaller percentage of community college transfer students report a sense of belonging at Berkeley than students entering as freshman (83% versus 88%). However, when asked if they would reenroll at UC Berkeley based on what they now know, 87% of community college transfer students agree that they would, no different than students entering as freshman

Finally, community college transfer students are very successful at Cal. Like freshman admits, their eventual graduation rate is above 90%. Transfer probation and retention rates and average UC GPA at graduation are all nearly as high as the freshman entrant figures. Equal proportions aspire to a post-baccalaureate degree at graduation. These findings are compelling considering the demographic differences in the backgrounds of community college transfer students and freshman admitted students.

Taken as a whole, our survey and institutional data strongly reaffirm the outstanding success of the California community college transfer pathway to the University of California, Berkeley.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Freshman admits in their first or second year of attendance at UC Berkeley were used as a comparative group, in addition to freshman admits who are juniors and seniors, because the community college transfer student population is primarily comprised of juniors and seniors who have only been in attendance at UC Berkeley for one or two years. Thus, there may be a basis for comparing transfer students with either of the two freshman groups.

<sup>2</sup> Although statistics are not reported in the current paper, claims of significant differences are based on linear regression and chi-square analysis using a significance level of .05 or lower.

<sup>3</sup> Occasionally or more frequently is defined as “Occasionally,” “Somewhat often,” “Often,” and “Very often,” whereas “At least Once this Academic Year” includes all of these categories in addition to “Rarely.”

*For more information, please contact Sereeta Alexander ([sereeta@berkeley.edu](mailto:sereeta@berkeley.edu)), Office of Student Research and Campus Surveys, University of California, Berkeley.*