

Survey of New Students

Curricular Decisions and Guidance for UC Berkeley's Entering Class

April 2013

This is the third in a series of briefs that highlights findings from the 2012 Survey of New Students (SONS). This brief highlights new undergraduate satisfaction with accessing courses, strategies used and guidance received on selecting courses, and advice provided on using Advanced Placement (AP). Providing students with the courses they need is a top priority for the campus.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Fall 2012 new student survey data shows high new freshmen satisfaction surrounding the variety of courses available, whereas new transfers are most satisfied with the courses available for general education/breadth requirements and for fulfilling pre-requisite requirements.

The top factors influencing course selection are shared among new student populations, specifically courses that fulfill major requirements, courses they found interesting, and courses where they were intellectually curious. The most influential source of guidance for freshmen and international students was another student, for transfers was a major advisor, and for California students and out of state domestic was a CalSO counselor.

Finally when asked about guidance surrounding AP credits, high school teachers or counselors, friends, family and fellow Cal students all recommended using AP credit instead of taking courses. Cal advisors were the only group recommending to not use AP credit and instead take courses at Cal. When we look at students by residency, California residents and out of state domestic students were much more likely to come with AP credits than international students.



THE CURRENT PAPER

Using 2012 SONS data, this brief aims to answer the following by entry status:

- 1) How satisfied are new undergraduates in accessing courses?
- 2) What factors and strategies do new undergraduates use in selecting their courses?
- 3) Who do new undergrads consult when selecting courses and how satisfied are they with that input?
- 4) What advice do new undergraduates receive on using AP credits, and their decisions around using AP credits to fulfill their Reading and Composition (R&C) courses?

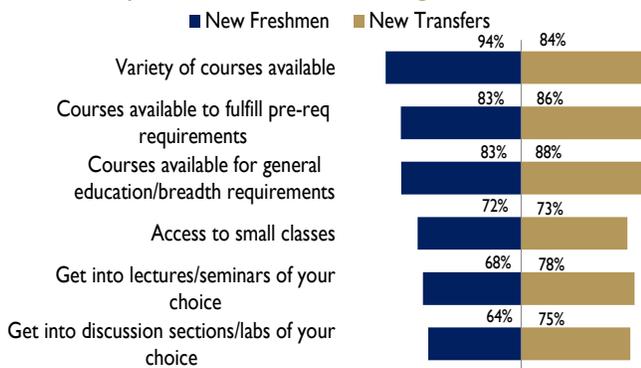
Where we notice differences, we also report out the responses of new California resident, out of state domestic and international undergraduates.

SATISFACTION WITH ACCESSING COURSES

New undergraduates were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction in accessing courses using a 6-point Likert scale that ranged from “Very dissatisfied” to “Very satisfied”. As seen in the chart below, satisfaction levels were high for new freshmen with the variety of courses available, followed by availability of courses to fulfill pre-requisite requirements and general education/breadth requirements. Satisfaction levels were high for new transfers with the courses available for general education/breadth and fulfilling prerequisite requirements, followed by the variety of courses available.

Satisfaction Accessing Courses

“How satisfied are you based on your experiences with the following?”



When we look at the level of satisfaction between these two populations, we see statistically significant differences between freshmen and transfers for the variety of courses available, along with the ability to get into lectures/seminars and discussion sections/labs of their choice (with transfers having greater satisfaction with the latter two).

When we examine responses by residency, we see similar satisfaction levels for the top three choices presented above and there was no significant difference in the satisfaction levels between groups, except for California residents having higher satisfaction when compared to out of state domestic students for their ability to get

into lectures/seminars and discussion sections/labs of their choice.

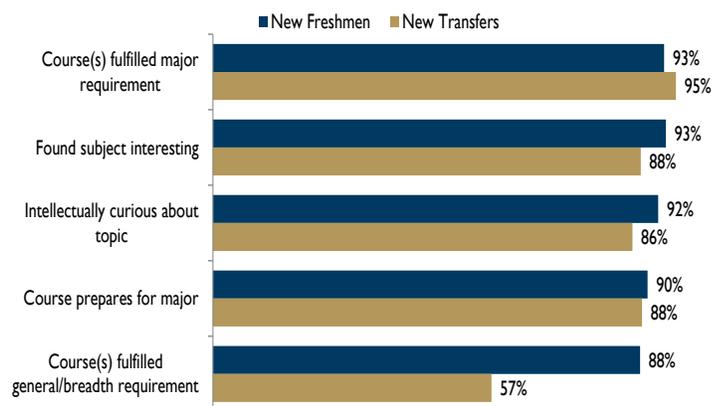
FACTORS AND STRATEGIES IMPACTING STUDENT DECISIONS IN COURSE SELECTION

New undergraduates were asked about the factors that influenced their course selection, along with the strategies they used in making those decisions.

To begin, students were provided a list of fourteen factors to choose from that could influence how they selected courses in their first semester. The top five factors for new freshmen are listed below, which included not only courses that were required but also ones where they found subjects interesting or where they were intellectually curious.

Top Factors Influencing Course Selection

“What factors most influenced how you selected courses for your first semester?”



New transfers shared the top four choices. However, the fifth factor for transfers was whether or not the course fit their schedule (86%).

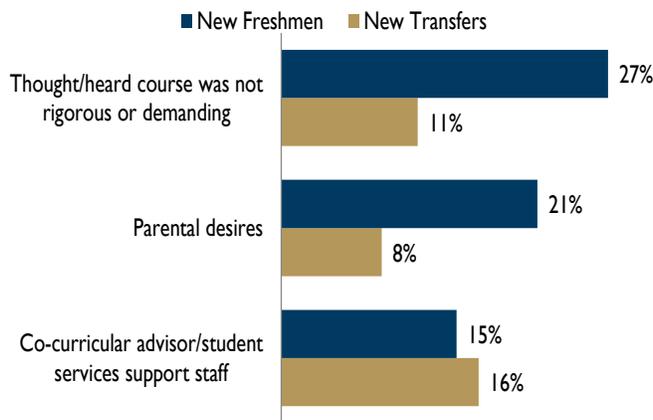
In addition, there was a significant difference between freshmen and transfer where they found the subject interesting and intellectually curious.

The order of the top five factors, as seen above, did not change much when reviewed by residency. The only significant difference among these groups was that international students were more likely to factor in whether a course supported their

needs for a major. For example, international students, at 96% identified course prepares me for a major as a top factor, compared to 88% for California residents and 89% out of state domestic students.

Factors that fell at the bottom end of that spectrum were thought/heard course was not rigorous or demanding, parental desires and recommendation of co-curricular advisor/student services support staff. There was a significant difference between the first two factors for freshmen and transfers. Those same factors were at the bottom end of the spectrum when we looked by residency. The only significant difference was on co-curricular advisors/student support staff where 25% of international students said it was a factor, compared to 14% of California residents and 12% of out of state domestic students.

Factors That Least Influenced Course Selection

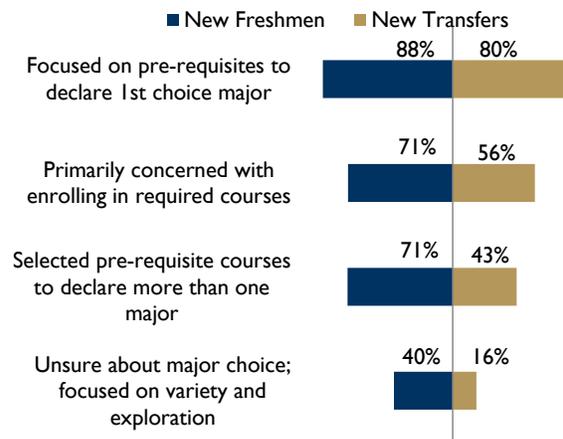


In addition to sharing the factors that influenced which courses they selected for the first term, new undergraduates also shared their course selection strategies which are similar, but not identical across groups.

New freshmen and new transfers reported that focusing on pre-requisites to declare first choice major was their top strategy. And while freshmen and transfers also shared the next three top strategies, the degree to which these factors were in play differed significantly for the two groups based on their needs. Freshmen were more likely to cite strategies of concern over enrolling in required courses, pre-requisite courses for more than one major, and focusing on variety and exploration. There were no significant differences in course selection strategies based on residency.

Strategies used for Course Selection

“What was your main strategy for selecting courses for the current semester?”

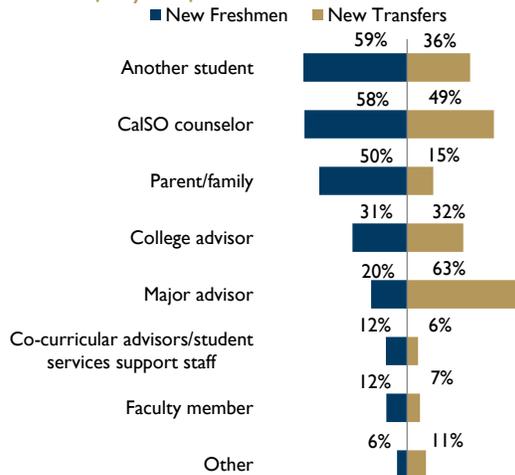


CONSULTATION FOR COURSE SELECTION

New undergraduates were asked who they consulted when selecting courses for the first semester. The top choice for freshmen was another student (59%) while for transfer students it was a major advisor (63%). CalSO counselor was the next choice for both new freshmen and transfer students for consultation, followed closely by parent, guardian or family member for new freshmen (50%).

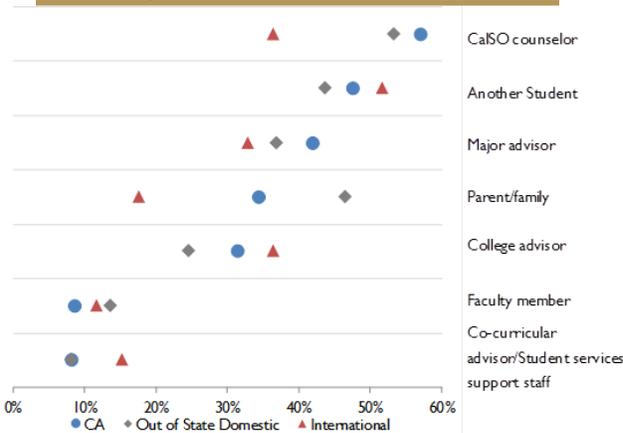
Consultation for Course Selection

“Who did you consult with when selecting courses for your first semester?”



When examined by residency, CalSO counselors were a top pick for California residents and out of state domestic students, compared to another student for international students.

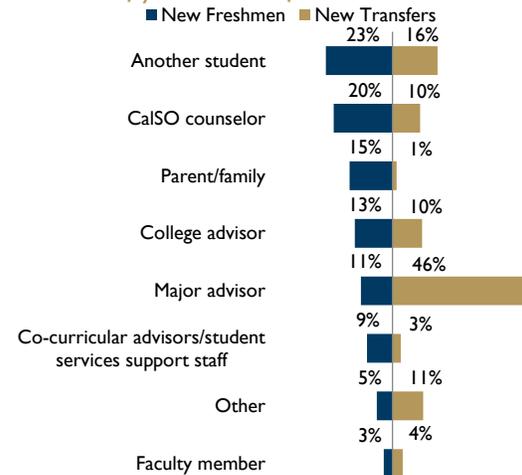
Consultation for Course Selection by Residency



In addition, when asked to rank what type of individual or resource provided the most useful guidance in selecting courses, another student ranked high on the list. At 23%, another student was the top choice for new freshmen, followed by CalSO counselor. For new transfers, major advisor at 46%, followed by another student at 16% were top choices.

Useful Guidance

“Who provided the most useful guidance in the selection of your courses for the current term?”

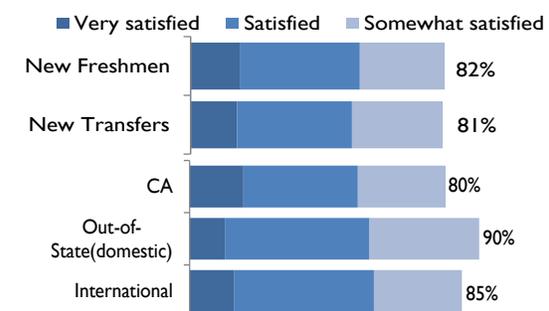


By residency, the pattern was similar but not identical. The top choice for all groups was a major advisor (because of the high percent reported by transfers), followed by another student for California residents and international students, and CalSO counselor for out of state students. Although a smaller percentage felt their parent/family was the most useful source of advice, out of state domestic students were more likely than CA residents and international students to indicate that they felt that way.

Finally, new freshmen and transfers were asked about their satisfaction with the guidance they received from the people they consulted. Across the board, new students reported high levels of satisfaction, with no statistically significant differences found across the groups highlighted below.

Satisfaction with Guidance

“How satisfied are you with the amount of individualized guidance you received from the people you consulted?”

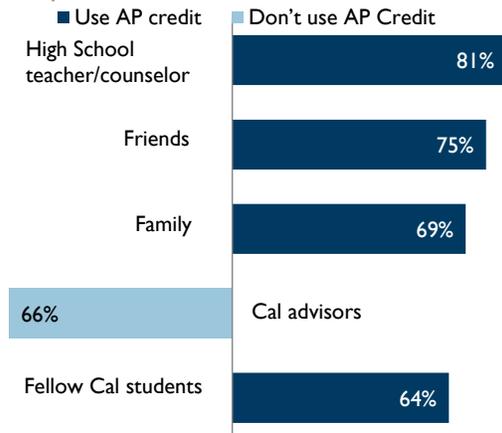


ADVICE WITH ADVANCED PLACEMENT (AP) ELIGIBILITY

Finally, new freshmen were asked about the advice they received regarding the use of Advanced Placement (AP) credits. As seen in the graphic below, Cal advisors were the only group that suggested students not use AP credits and instead take entry level courses at Berkeley.

Advice with AP eligibility

“Regarding use of AP eligibility, what advice have you received?”



It also appears that most new freshmen seem persuaded by the advice to use AP credits. When new freshmen were asked “If you could have used your AP scores for course credits, what did/will you do?” we found the following responses:

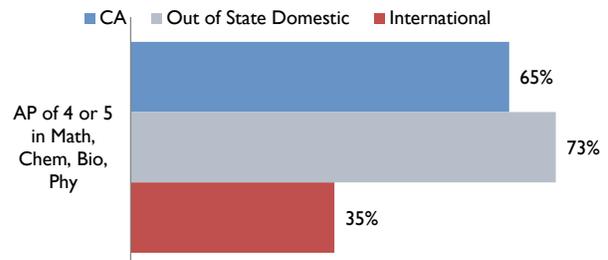
- 42% indicated taking all AP credit and enrolling in advanced courses,
- 41% indicated as taking some credit,
- 15% indicated as taking entry courses instead of the credit,
- 3% other

Looking at specifics, freshmen were asked if they had an eligible AP score in Math, Chemistry, Biology or Physics that would allow them to “AP out” of certain courses at Berkeley. 62% of freshmen indicated having an AP score of 4 or 5 in these subject areas making them eligible to skip certain courses at Berkeley. It was observed that a smaller percentage of international students (35%) came in with

AP credit, compared to California residents and out of state domestic students for whom about 7 out of 10 came in with AP credit.

AP score in Math, Chemistry, Biology or Physics by Residency

“Did you have an AP of 4 or 5 in Math, Chemistry, Biology or Physics?”

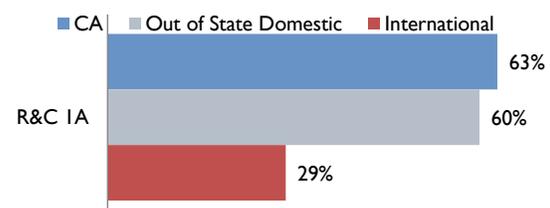


The same question was asked regarding Reading & Composition, along with whether students intended on using AP credits to satisfy the requirement that the two-part R&C course series be completed by the end of their sophomore year.

For R&C IA, 57% of new freshmen said they had AP credit that could be used to satisfy that course requirement and 87% intended to use it. Similar to what we found with the Math and Science AP credits, there are differences by residency where 63% of California residents and 60% of out of state domestic students indicated they had AP units to pass out of R&C IA, but only 29% for international students. Of those who had AP credits, residency did not make a significant difference on their decision to use these credits to satisfy their R&C IA course requirement.

AP credits to fulfill R&C IA requirement by Residency

“Do you have an exam score that will fulfill your Reading and Composition IA requirement?”



When we look at R&C IB, 22% of new freshmen indicated they had AP units to pass that course and 83% of those students intended to use it. When we looked at it by residency, we see the same trends – California residents and out of state domestic students being more likely to have AP credit to fulfill this requirement than international students.

Finally, we were interested in knowing with this requirement to complete R&C early on, if new freshmen were enrolled/planning to complete a R&C IA course in their first semester and, if not, the reason for not enrolling. 32% of freshmen reported being enrolled in a R&C IA course their first semester. For the remaining 68% not enrolled, they provided the following primary reasons:

- 39%** Decided to wait until another semester
- 32%** Other
- 6%** Preference for an R&C IA course in a particular department, but it was already full
- 6%** Could not gain access into ANY of the R&C Ia courses offered across the various departments
- 5%** Did not like the times of the remaining courses that had available seats
- 3%** Will use exam credit instead

Similarly, we wanted to know if new freshmen were enrolled/planning to complete a R&C IB course in their first semester. 21% of freshmen reported being enrolled in a R&C IB course their first semester. For the remaining 79% not enrolled, they provided the following primary reasons:

- 49%** Have not yet satisfied the first half of the R&C requirement (R&C IA)
- 28%** Decided to wait until another semester
- 7%** Other
- 3%** Preference for an R&C IA course in a particular department, but it was already full
- 3%** Did not like the times of the remaining courses that had available seats

- 3%** Will use exam credit instead
- 2%** Could not gain access into ANY of the R&C Ia courses offered across the various departments on campus

Some of the *other* reasons provided for not enrolling in a R&C IA or IB course were:

- Have Community College course credit
- Did not take/pass AWPE*
- Did not take placement exam
- Did not know AP score during registration
- System did not accept AP credit

*Analytical Writing Paper Exam

CONCLUSION

Providing students with the courses they need to make timely progress to degree is a top priority on the Berkeley campus. Through initiatives such as the Common Good Curriculum, offerings and open seats are actively monitored in entry level courses to ensure freshmen entrants have timely access to classes they need.

In June 2013, Berkeley will launch Cal Answers dashboards to present longitudinal course offerings and enrollments, weekly enrollment tracking in courses, and grade distribution data by course. A second release will provide more information on students that take courses offered by a unit, along with the alternate view of declared majors in departments and the courses they take. All of this data is intended to help the campus and individual units better understand course taking patterns, demand and our ability to meet student needs.

For the full set of SONS 2012 results for freshmen and transfers, please visit:

- <http://opa.berkeley.edu/surveys/freshmen>
- <http://opa.berkeley.edu/surveys/transfers>

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