

# Using Institutional Survey Data to Understand the First Year Undergraduate Experience

Stay Day 2016

Sereeta Alexander, Ph.D.  
Office of Planning & Analysis  
June 8, 2016

# Outline

- Goal: Understand the 1<sup>st</sup> Year Experience Across a Number of Domains:
  - Transitioning as a New Undergraduate
  - Resources that Aided in the Transition
  - Affordability & Cost of Attendance
  - Campus Climate for Diversity & Inclusion

# Survey Samples

The Survey of New Students (SONS)  
Fall 2013

The UC Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES)  
Spring 2014

# Survey of New Students (SONS)

- Launches at the start of every fall semester
- All new fall freshmen and transfers invited
- Survey open for first six - eight weeks of the students' 1<sup>st</sup> semester
- Designed to capture students' academic, co-curricular, and social experiences during their transition.

# University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES)

- Historically administered every year at Berkeley; Administered every other year as of 2012
- All undergraduates invited to complete the survey
- Launches in April & typically closes between June & July
- Designed to capture students' academic, co-curricular, social, and extra-curricular experiences during their time at the university.

# Fall 2013 SONS and 2014 UCUES Samples

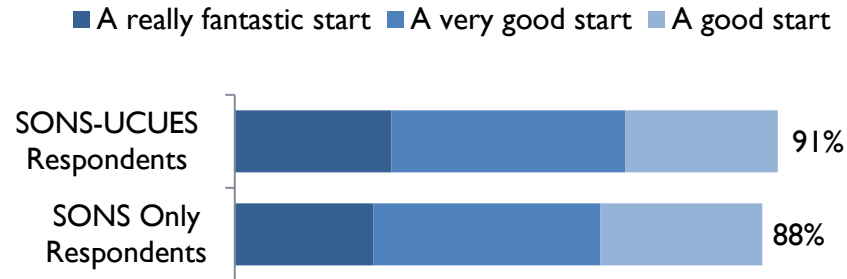
	Invited	Responded	Response Rate
SONS*	6,943	3,066	44%
UCUES	25,404	9,785	39%
SONS 2013 to UCUES 2014	3,066	1,603	52%

\*Note: The 738 Fall Program for Freshmen students invited to SONS 2013 are excluded from the numbers above, as well as the analyses shared in this presentation.

# Transitioning as a New Undergraduate

What do students say about the start of their first semester at UC Berkeley?

# “Overall, I am off to...”



*“The integration into college life has gone much better than expected. Everyone here is always willing to help out.”*

*“Classes don't seem as hard as I feared. While the coursework is challenging, it isn't something I can't handle yet.”*

*“The transition from studying in a community college to studying at a four-year university was much smoother than expected.”*



# The Transition: In Their Own Words

(What has gone well?)

*“Thus far I have been able to sign up for all of the classes I wanted to with ease. I have also found all of my classes on campus with little trouble.”*

*“The academics at the University and getting to know a diverse population on campus have profoundly pleased me.”*

*“My professors are so much more accessible than I expected! I was terrified that they would be much harder to communicate with...”*

# The Transition: In Their Own Words

(What has *not* gone well?)

*“Enrolling in classes and deciphering the many websites that go with them has not gone well. I am still wait listed in one lab and one lecture section for classes I need...”*

*“Classes have been hard to figure out, especially the first few days when we didn't know where to go or if we were supposed to go.”*

*“Adjusting to life on a college campus, i.e. time management, and the first week of homesickness.”*

# The Transition: In Their Own Words

(What has *not* gone well?)

*“As a new student, the campus is kind of big, and I lost my direction several time as I first time go to class. If there are some more campus directory around the campus that will be helpful for the newbies.”*

*“The only real thing that I have found to be disappointing is how decentralized the administration of the campus is.”*

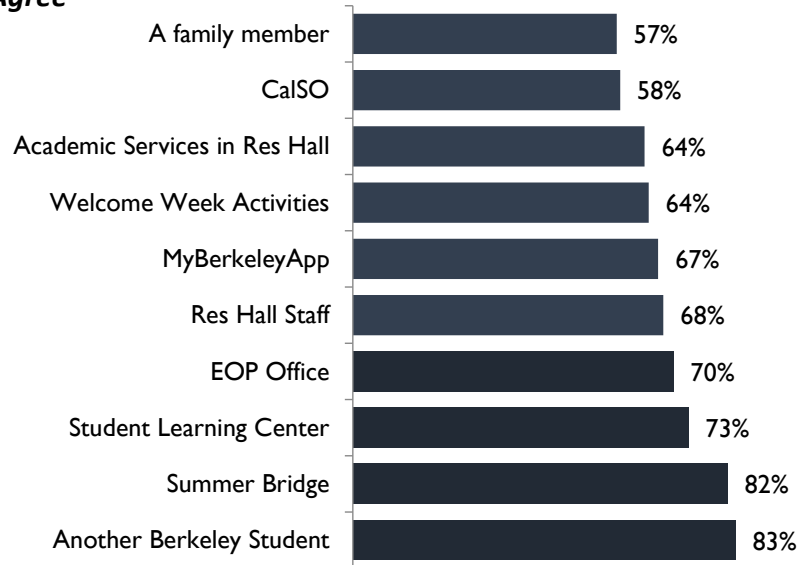
*“Cal is incredibly huge and it has a bunch to offer, sometimes it's hard to hone in on what exactly is available to me”*

# Resources that Aided the Transition

What do students say about the start of their first semester as a Berkeley undergraduate?

# Resources that Aided in the Transition: (New Freshmen)

Percent “Strongly agree” or “Agree”

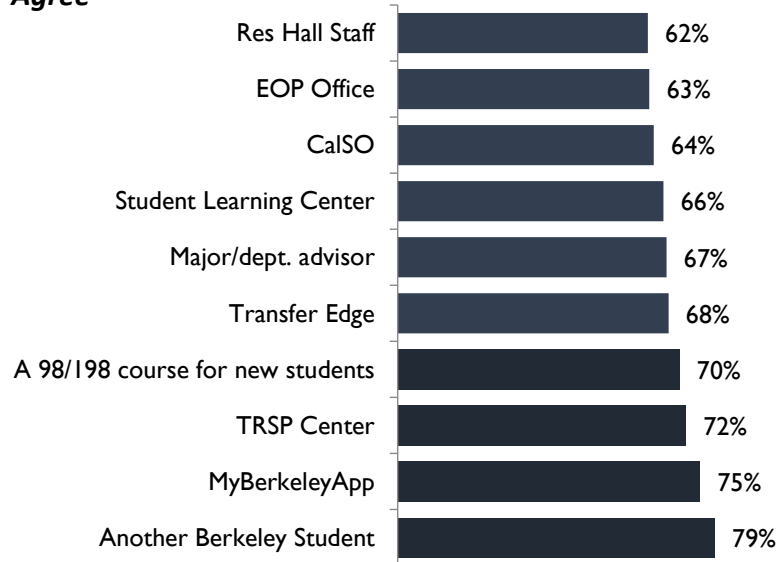


*“My transition to UC Berkeley has gone well. I was a part of Summer Bridge which really helped me get a head start here at Cal”*

*“I am really confident about the classes I chose. This would not be possible without the help of the EOP and IAP counselors!”*

# Resources that Aided in the Transition: (New Transfers)

Percent “Strongly agree” or “Agree”



*“Overall, I've been surprised by how easily I can get answers to all of my questions. I learned very early on how welcoming the TRSP Center is...”*

*“My transition to Berkeley has been very smooth due to my participation in the Transfer Edge program.”*

# Resources that Aided in the Transition: In Their Own Words

*“The International Office has been extremely helpful in providing ample information and resources which allow international students to adjust to new cultures and education systems very quickly and effectively.”*

*“Meeting with my academic adviser has been a lovely experience. She has helped me declare a major and has pointed me to classes that are good fit with my areas of interest.”*

*“Everything went really well, and I'm surprised of all the resources that as a student you can take advantage of it, like the Career Center or the numerous associations connected to the school.”*

*“The advisors in my program all seem very nice and helpful. The Career Center representatives seem there to help as well.”*

# New Students' Perspectives Regarding Affordability & the Cost of Attendance

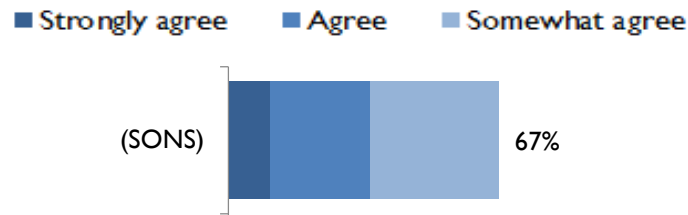
How manageable is the cost of attending  
Berkeley?

How, if at all, does this change by the end of the  
1<sup>st</sup> year?



# Do 1<sup>st</sup> Semester Students Feel that the Cost of Attendance is Manageable?

*“Given the grants and scholarships, if any, that you receive, the total cost of attending UC Berkeley is manageable”*

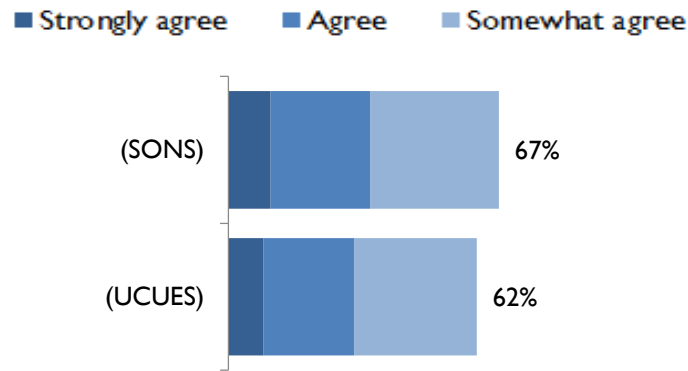


*“Financial Aid covered all my tuition costs. I also moved here during the summer and found a part time job I could keep during the semester so I'm financially okay.”*

*“Although I receive financial aid, I've been finding it very stressful affording my 'back to school' shopping list combined with the outrageously high rent median.”*

# What Do New Student Feel About the Cost of Attendance at the End of their 1<sup>st</sup> Year?

*“Given the grants and scholarships, if any, that you receive, the total cost of attending UC Berkeley is manageable”*

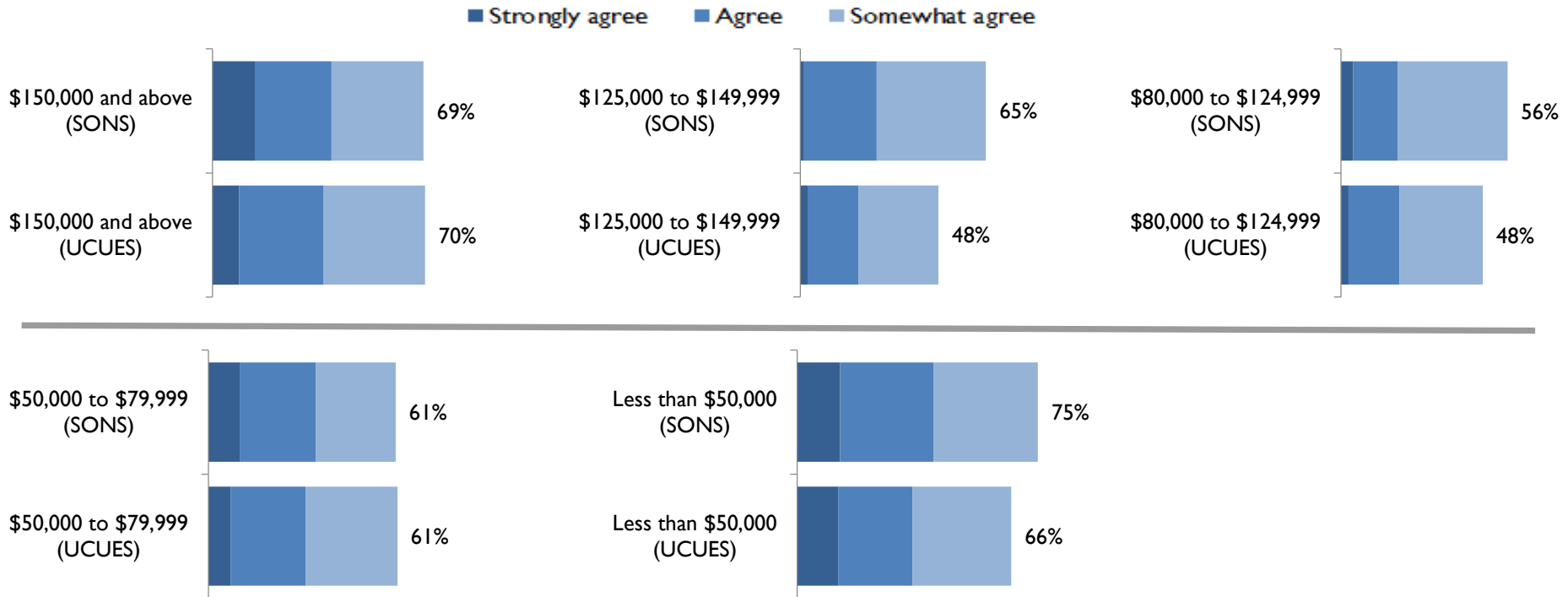


*“It is amazing that my tuition is paid for - I am thankful for that everyday - but I have still accumulated an amount of debt that is very concerning. It was difficult to decide whether to take summer courses, rather than look for paid work.”*

*“The cost of going to Cal tempts me to want to graduate a semester or two earlier to save money, which can cut short my ‘college experience’.”*

# Cost of Attendance is Manageable: Changing Perspectives in 1<sup>st</sup> Year

*“Given the grants and scholarships, if any, that you receive, the total cost of attending UC Berkeley is manageable”*



- Compared to higher and lower income students, middle - income students (i.e., \$80,000 - \$149,999) are less likely to feel that the total cost of attending UC Berkeley is manageable. Further, as the first year progresses these feelings worsen.

# Cost of Attendance Perspectives: In Their Own Words

*“Cost isn't that big of a problem for someone in my position; however, with that being said, it isn't easy to pay this much.”*

*“I cannot sufficiently express my gratitude towards the financial aid program for allowing me to afford such a great education. I am very grateful for programs such as Blue & Gold, and would not have been able to enroll without them.”*

*“The tuition that I'm paying I believed is totally worth the education that I am receiving at Cal. However, the housing and food is what really makes it expensive to live in Berkeley. I am consistently worried about my financial situation here in Berkeley. I can't wait to graduate and be over with it.”*

# Cost of Attendance Perspectives: In Their Own Words

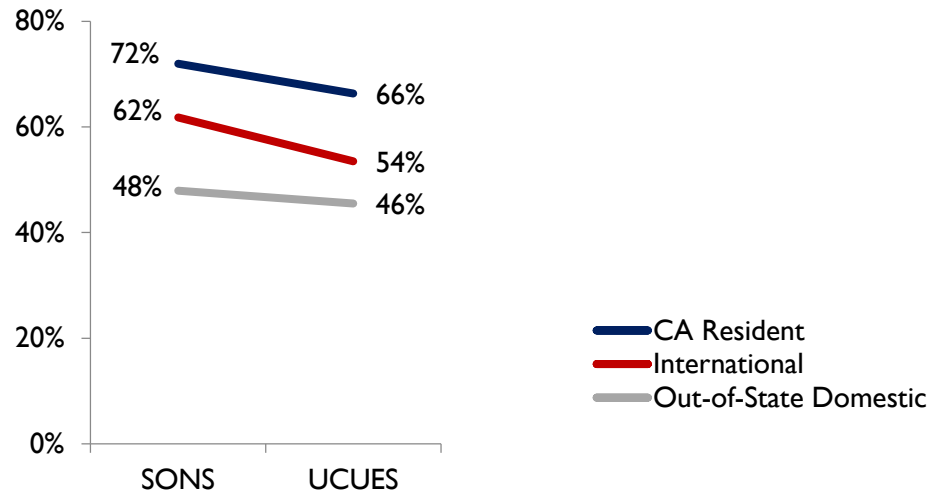
*“Scholarships were generous and most helpful. Cal was the most affordable out of my transfer options.”*

*“My family is rather well-off, so I don't experience any financial difficulties.”*

*“Housing is so expensive in Berkeley. When planning my finances once I decided to attend UCB, I had no idea how expensive housing would be! I work a lot and I don't even make rent every month. Attending school and paying for tuition and books could be more manageable if housing was less. BART is also so expensive! How much time I spend worrying about money and at work really detracts from my capacity to focus on school and do well. I have strongly considered dropping out. I don't know what to do...”*

# Cost of Attendance is Manageable: Changing Perspectives in 1<sup>st</sup> Year

*“Given the grants and scholarships, if any, that you receive, the total cost of attending UC Berkeley is manageable”  
Percent Agreement (“Strongly agree” / “Agree” / “Somewhat agree”)*



*“As an out of state student who needs a lot more financial aid than I'm getting, it's a big sacrifice for my family and my personal fiscal future for me to come to Cal. I love it here and feel I've made the right college decision, but it causes me a lot of stress.”*

# Cost of Attendance : In Their Own Words

*“For an out of state student, tuition is really expensive and forming the first year costs a lot...”*

*“The cost to attend Cal raises my expectations of the quality of education here, which can sometimes be disappointing. However, most of the time, I feel like it is worth my money.”*

*“Like many International students, the cost of attending Cal is high, and our ineligibility when it comes to financial aid packages is tough as well. Despite this, I do think it's worth the money; Go bears!”*

*“It has made me completely re-think my major in terms of which one will yield a higher pay, even if it's something that I know will be more difficult for me and not something I necessarily enjoy. It has caused me a lot of stress and lose some faith in whether or not I belong at Cal.”*

# Campus Climate

What is the campus climate at the start  
of the 1<sup>st</sup>- year?

How, if at all, does this change by the  
end of the 1<sup>st</sup>-year?



# What is Campus Climate?

Campus climate is not the weather:

- “Campus climate is a measure — real or perceived — of the personal, academic and professional interactions that occur.” (UC Office of the President)
- “[T]he events, messages, symbols, core beliefs, feelings, and so, so much more - which make this a welcoming environment – or not - for all.” (Virginia Tech)

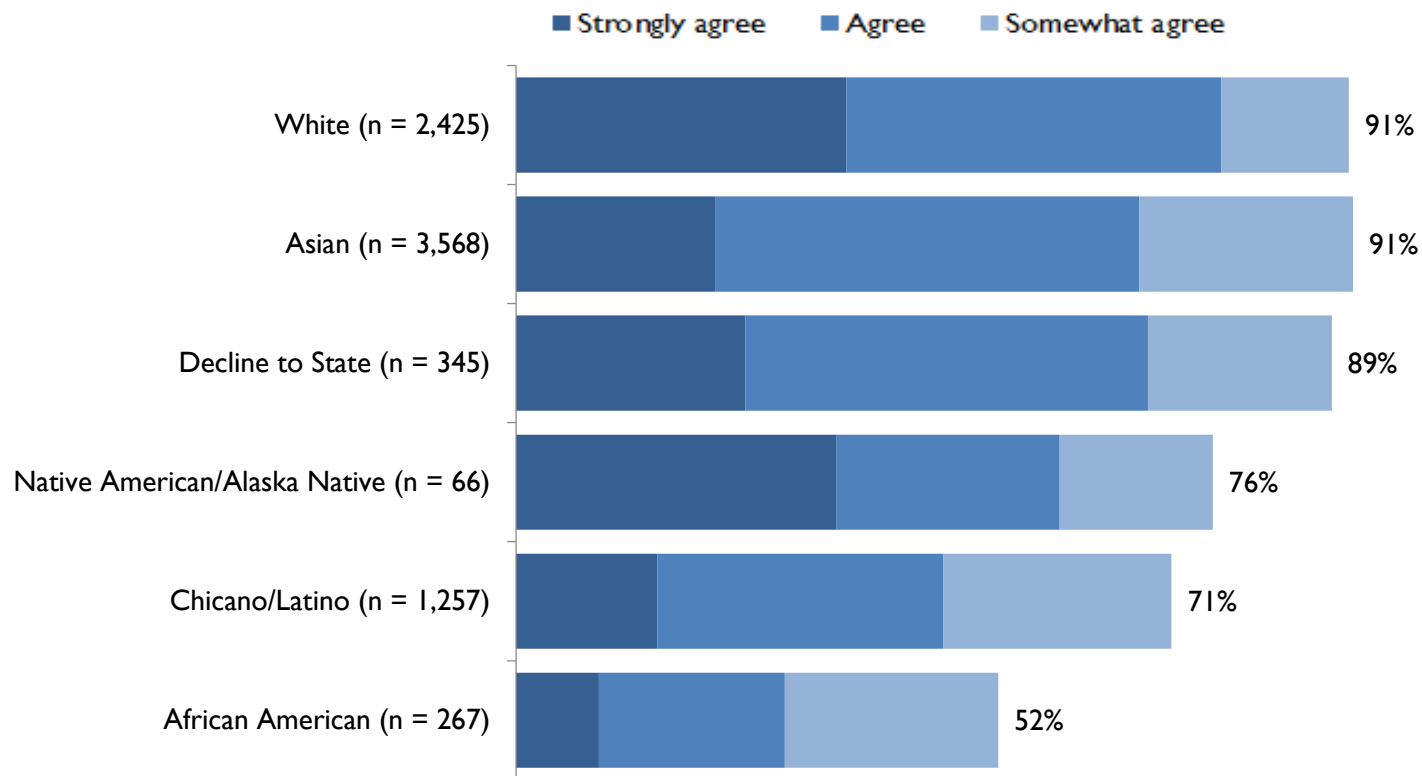
# Climate Metrics in SONS & UCUES

- Respect Rates
  - Student respond to the prompt “students of my [affinity group] are respected on this campus”
  - The respect rate for a group is the percentage of respondents in a given group who “strongly agree”, “agree”, or “somewhat agree” that their group is respected on campus
- Sense of Belonging
- Diversity Importance on Campus
- Feeling Valued as an Individual

# UCUES 2014 Respect Rates by Race/Ethnicity

(new & continuing students)

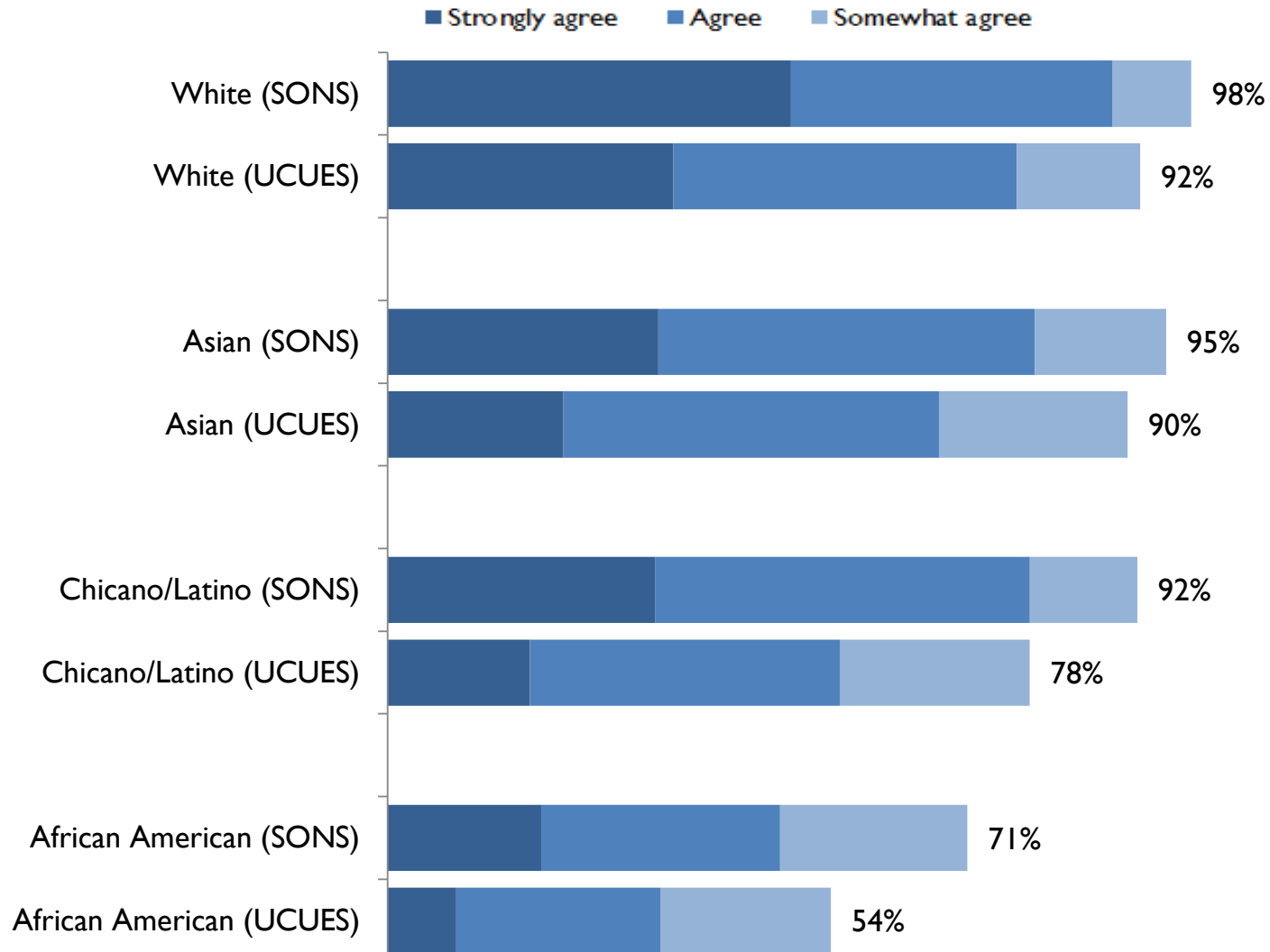
Percent agreement with “Students of my race/ethnicity are respected on this campus” by race/ethnicity



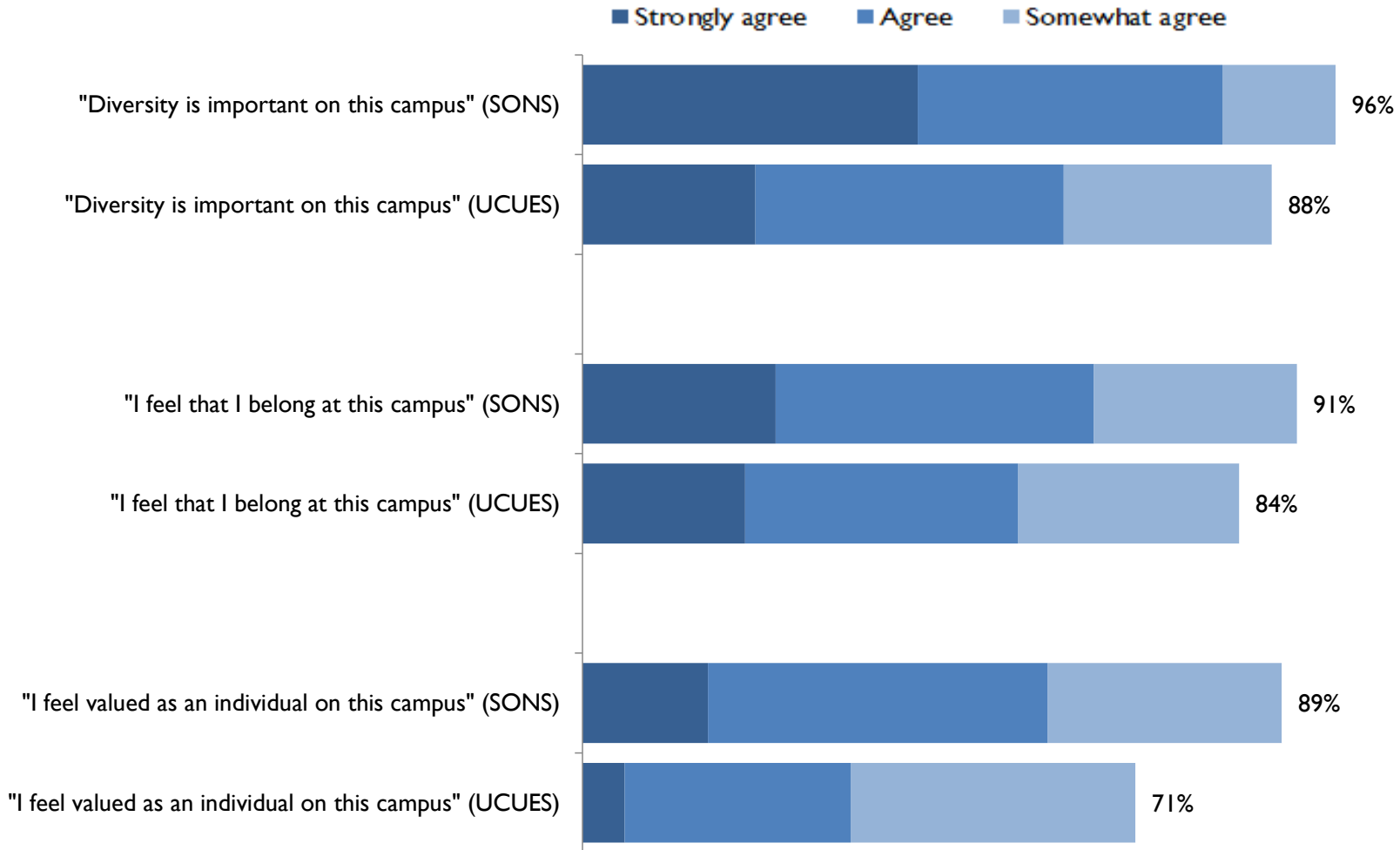
# Respect Rates Decline in 1<sup>st</sup>-Year

(new students only)

Percent agreement with “Students of my race/ethnicity are respected on this campus” by race/ethnicity



# Other Campus Climate Metrics also Show Declines in the 1<sup>st</sup> Year



# So What?

## Preliminary Persistence Analysis

Is there a connection between campus  
climate and persistence?

Is there a connection between changes in cost  
of attendance perceptions and persistence?

# Sense of Belonging at end of 1<sup>st</sup> year is Associated with Retention

1-year Retention Rates



2-year Retention Rates



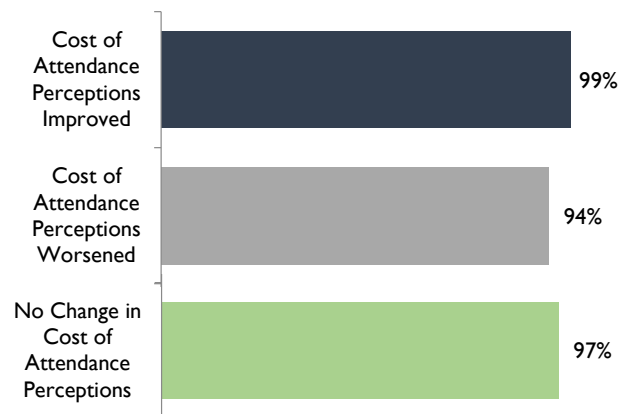
\*Agree = "Strongly agree"/"Agree"/"Somewhat agree"

\*Disagree = "Strongly disagree"/"Disagree"/"Somewhat disagree"

- Almost all respondents who felt a sense of belonging on campus by the end of their 1<sup>st</sup> year were retained 1-year after starting at Berkeley (i.e., into their 2<sup>nd</sup>-year). This compares to a retention rate of 93% for those with a lower sense of belonging.
- This difference continues to hold for 2-year retention, although the gap narrows.

# Changes in Cost of Attendance Perceptions Associated with Retention

## 2-year Retention Rates



*“How much time I spend worrying about money and at work really detracts from my capacity to focus on school and do well. I have strongly considered dropping out. I don't know what to do...”*

- 99% of freshmen respondents who reported improved perceptions regarding the cost of attendance by the end of their 1<sup>st</sup> year were retained 2 years after starting at Berkeley (i.e., into the start of their 3<sup>rd</sup> year). This compares to a 2-year retention of 94% for those whose perceptions about the cost of attendance worsened in their 1<sup>st</sup> year.



# Limitations & Next Steps

- Possible non-response bias
- Results are correlational
- Given that only a sub-set of new students responded to both the SONS & UCUES during their first year, some analysis represents data from as few as 1 in 10 new students.
- Once UCUES 2016 data becomes available, analysis on Fall 2015 SONS & Spring 2016 UCUES data can be explored for further insight.
- Additional analyses linking survey data with student outcomes (e.g., retention, graduation) are needed to better determine how robust these associations are.

# Data Resources & Contact Info

- ❑ SONS & UCUES Results on the web:  
<http://opa.berkeley.edu/campus-surveys>
- ❑ Cal Answers:  
<http://calanswers.berkeley.edu>
- ❑ Office of Planning and Analysis:  
<http://opa.berkeley.edu>

Sereeta Alexander, Ph.D.  
Office of Planning & Analysis  
[sereeta@berkeley.edu](mailto:sereeta@berkeley.edu)

Thanks to:  
Andrew Eppig, Ph.D.  
Division of Equity & Inclusion