

UCUES 2008 Obstacles to Academic Success

Prepared at the Request of

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Executive Summary

In May 2008, UC Davis participated in the University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES), a UC-wide census of all undergraduates at the nine general campuses. The survey included a block of items that addressed potential obstacles to student academic success, and these are the focus of this report.

In general, responses by UC Davis students are similar to those of students at the other UCs, although UC Davis students are significantly less likely to cite *competing job responsibilities* as an obstacle to academic success.

Among UC Davis students, the most frequent obstacles to academic success are *poor study behaviors*, followed by *feeling depressed, stressed or upset*.

The frequency with which specific obstacles hinder academic success varies by student characteristics. For example, Black/African American students are more likely than White/Caucasian students to cite *competing family responsibilities* as an obstacle, seniors are more likely than other students to cite *competing job responsibilities*, and transfer students are more likely than freshman entrants to report *feeling depressed, stressed or upset* as an obstacle to academic success.

Reported obstacles are negatively correlated both with GPA and units carried. The three obstacles which are most significantly correlated with GPA are *inadequate study skills*, *poor study behaviors* and *weak math skills*, and the three obstacles most strongly associated with units carried are *feeling depressed, stressed or upset*, *competing family responsibilities* and *competing job responsibilities*.

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Introduction

In May 2008, UC Davis participated in the University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES), a UC-wide census of all undergraduates at the nine general campuses. The survey included a module which focused on Academic Engagement and contained a block of items related to potential obstacles to academic success. Because these items were presented in a module, only a randomly selected subset of students was given the opportunity to respond.

A total of 7,040 UC Davis students responded to the survey, for a campus response rate of 31.4%. At UC Davis, 45% of respondents were asked to complete the Academic Engagement module; 3,247 students did so, and 3,172 of those responded to the specific block of items related to obstacles. Demographics of the UC Davis UCUES 2008 survey population and the respondents to the obstacles items in the Academic Engagement module are shown in Appendix Table A1. The survey items referenced in this report and the number of students responding to each are also included in the Appendix. Detailed response frequency distributions for all UCUES survey items are available at: <http://www.sariweb.ucdavis.edu/UCUES/dp%202008%20UCUES%20Frequencies%20.xls>.

Results

Obstacles to Academic Success

Respondents to UCUES 2008 were asked to indicate the frequency with which a series of potential obstacles hinders academic success. Response options were presented on a scale of 1=*Not at all* to 5=*All the time*. Note that a low score is desirable for all of these items.

One advantage of UCUES is that it allows for comparisons between undergraduates at UC Davis and those at our sister UC campuses^{*}, and provides context for interpretation of results. Figures 1 - 4 display the mean response at UC Davis to the items related to obstacles to academic success, compared to the highest and lowest levels among the UC campuses.[†]

For most of these items, the mean response at UC Davis is intermediate among the UCs, and not significantly different from either the highest or lowest. There are a few exceptions to this trend, however. UC Davis students are significantly less likely to cite *competing job responsibilities* as an obstacle than students at the campus with the highest response, and significantly more likely to report *other competing responsibilities* than at the campus with the lowest. The frequency with which *competing family responsibilities* hinder academic success at UC Davis is both significantly lower than at the campus with the highest report, and higher than at the campus with the lowest (Figure 1).

* UC Merced is excluded from all campus comparisons due to the very small number of students responding to the survey and the unique character of campus life at UC Merced.

† A committee of UC institutional researchers agreed upon two standards for real, substantive differences between campuses: for mean ratings a difference of 0.2 or more, and for percentage values a difference of 5% or more are considered noteworthy and of practical significance.

Figure 1. Competing Responsibilities as Obstacles to Academic Success: UC Comparisons

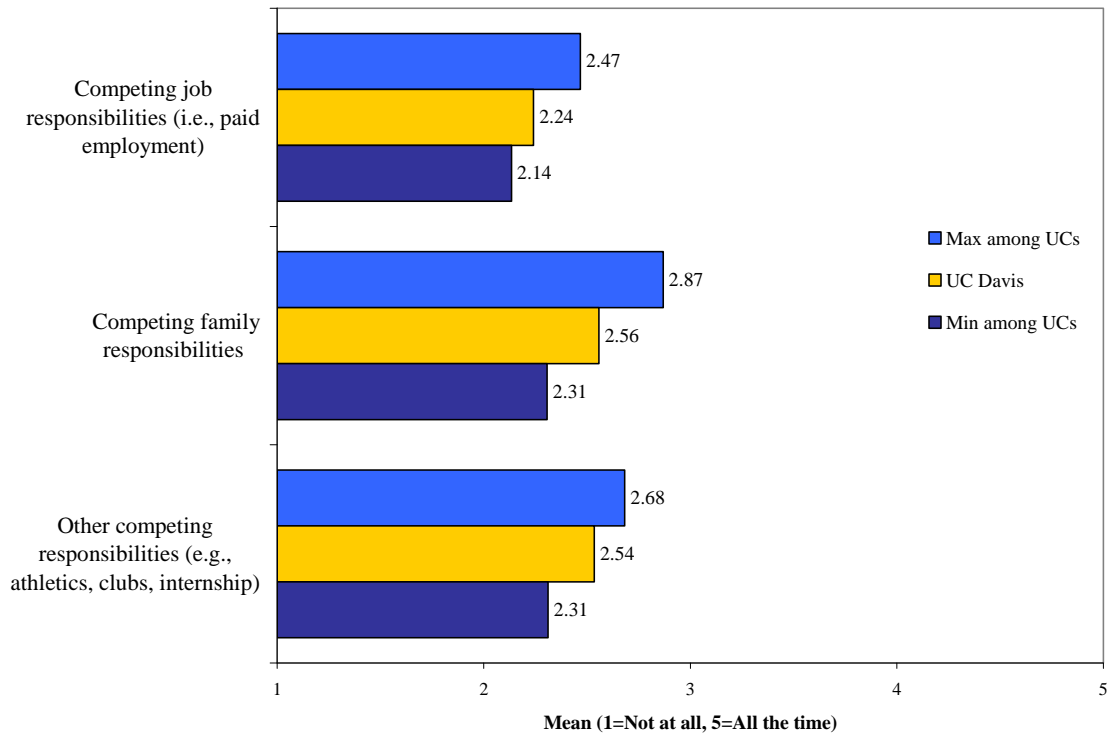
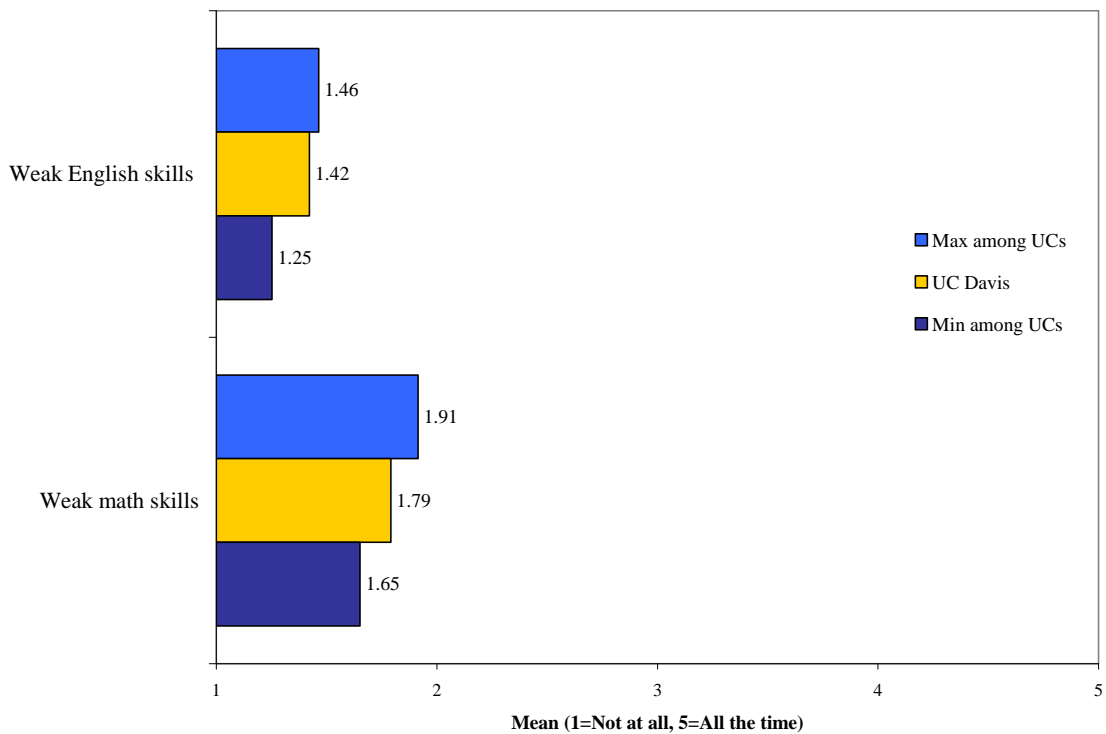


Figure 2. Weak Skills as Obstacles to Academic Success: UC Comparisons



The difference between UC Davis students and those at the UC with the lowest frequency for *inadequate study skills* approaches the 0.2 threshold established for statistical significance but does not quite meet it, at 0.19 (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Study Habits as Obstacles to Academic Success: UC Comparisons

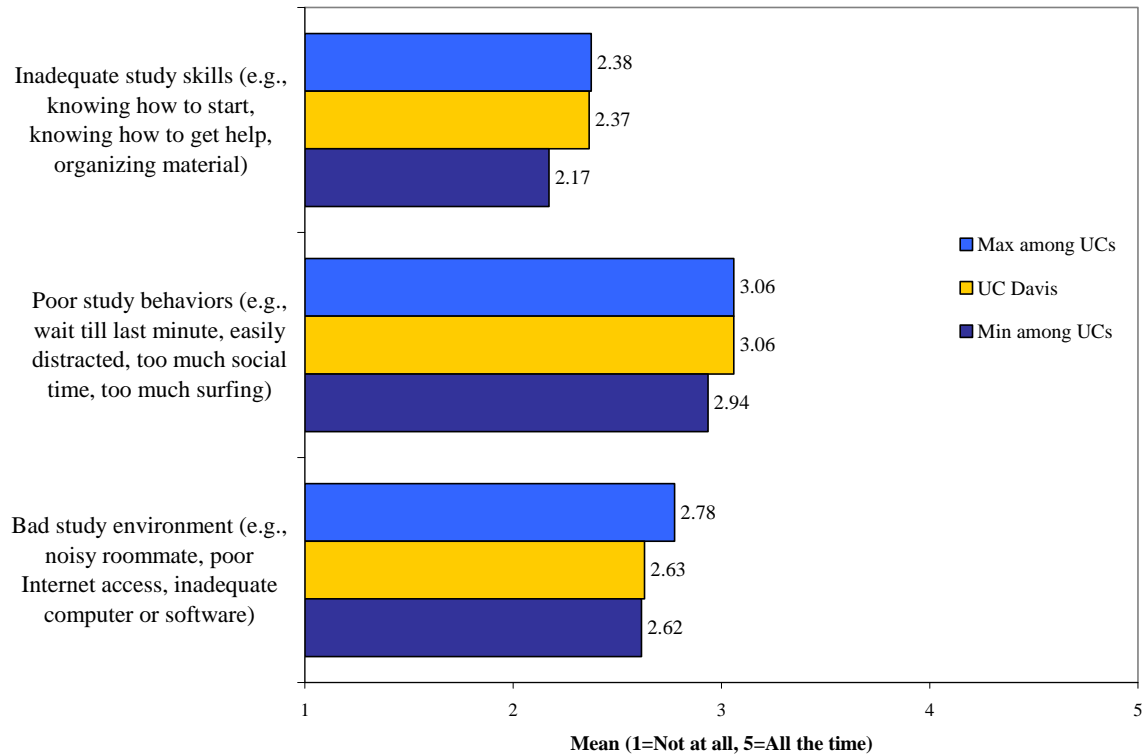
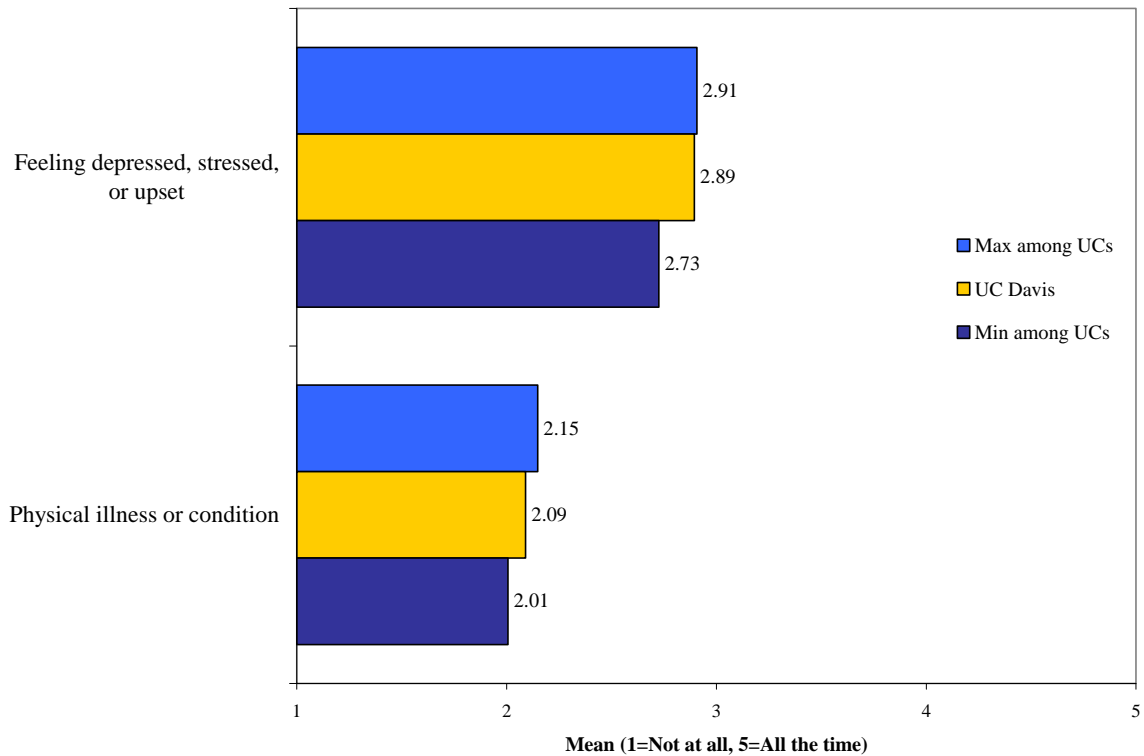


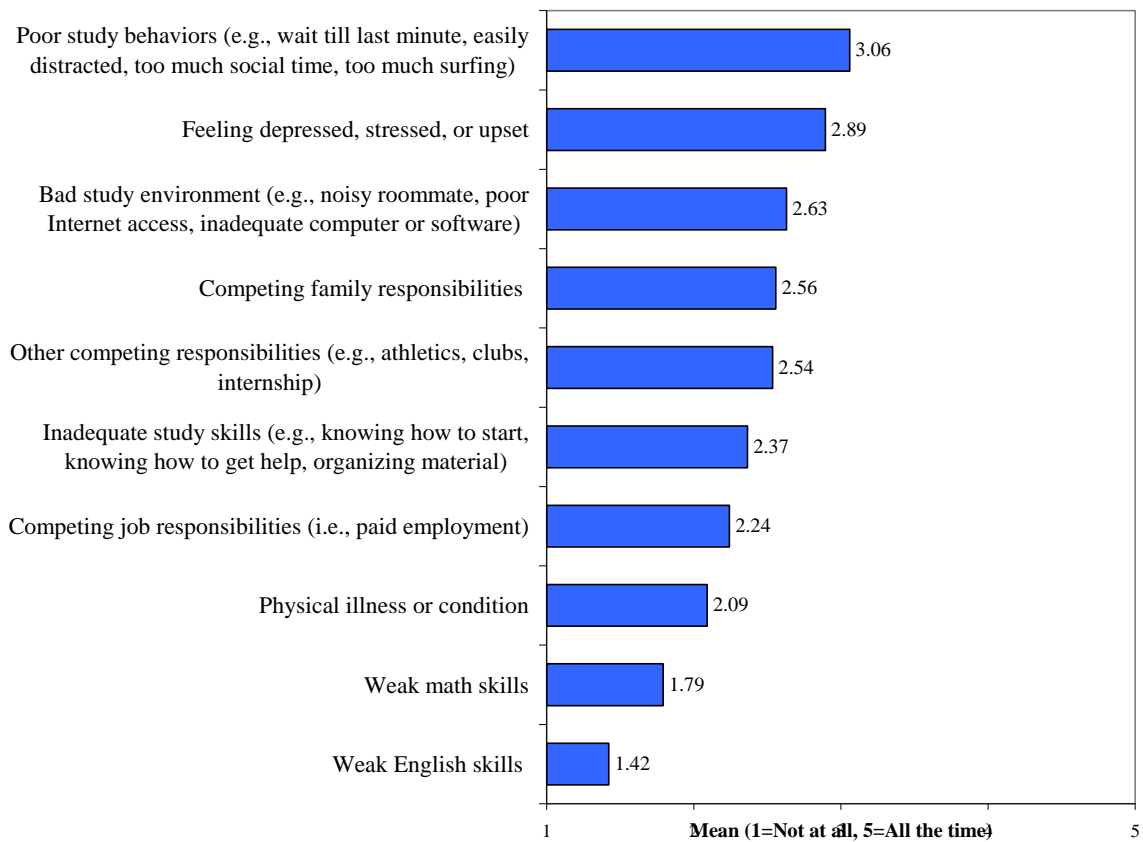
Figure 4. Physical and Mental Health as Obstacles to Academic Success: UC Comparisons



Obstacles to Academic Success at UC Davis

UC Davis students are most likely to report *poor study behaviors* as a frequent obstacle to academic success, followed by *feeling depressed, stressed or upset*. *Weak math skills* and *weak English skills* are least likely to be cited (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Obstacles to Academic Success at UC Davis



The frequency with which these potential obstacles hinder academic success varies by student characteristics, as shown in Tables 1-4. For example:

- *Competing family responsibilities, weak math skills, and inadequate study skills* are cited more frequently by Black/African American students than by White/Caucasian students.
- Females are more likely than males to report *competing family responsibilities, weak math skills, feeling depressed, stressed or upset, and physical illness or condition*, while males are more likely to report *poor study behaviors*.
- Seniors are more likely to cite *competing job responsibilities* as an obstacle to academic success than other students.
- Freshmen are more likely than other students to cite *weak math skills* and *inadequate study skills* as obstacles.
- Freshman entrants are more likely than transfer students to report *other competing responsibilities* and *poor study behaviors*, and transfer students are more likely to report *competing family responsibilities* and *feeling depressed, stressed or upset*.

Table 1. Frequency with which Obstacles Hinder Academic Success, by Student Race/Ethnicity					
Potential Obstacle	Mean Frequency (1=Not at all, 5=All the time)				
	American Indian/ Alaskan Native	Asian	Black/ African American	Chicano/ Latino	White/ Caucasian
Competing job responsibilities	2.4	2.1	2.5	2.4	2.3
Competing family responsibilities	2.2	2.7	2.9	2.8	2.4
Other competing responsibilities	2.6	2.5	2.4	2.3	2.6
Weak English skills	1.1	1.8	1.4	1.4	1.1
Weak math skills	1.6	1.9	2.1	1.9	1.6
Inadequate study skills	2.1	2.6	2.6	2.5	2.1
Poor study behaviors	3.0	3.2	3.0	3.1	3.0
Bad study environment	2.6	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.5
Feeling depressed, stressed or upset	2.8	2.9	3.0	3.0	2.8
Physical illness or condition	1.7	2.1	2.0	2.0	2.1

There are statistically significant differences between subgroups for obstacles shown in **BOLD** type.

Table 1a. Frequency with which Obstacles Hinder Academic Success, by Race/Ethnicity of ASIAN Students

Potential Obstacle	Mean Frequency (1=Not at all, 5=All the time)						
	Chinese	East Indian/ Pakistani	Japanese	Korean	Pacific Islander	Pilipino/ Filipino	Vietnamese
Competing job responsibilities	2.1	2.2	1.9	2.2	3.3	2.2	2.2
Competing family responsibilities	2.5	2.7	2.4	2.5	3.0	2.8	2.9
Other competing responsibilities	2.4	2.8	2.5	2.4	2.6	2.7	2.6
Weak English skills	1.8	1.5	1.6	1.8	1.0	1.4	2.1
Weak math skills	1.9	1.8	1.8	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
Inadequate study skills	2.5	2.4	2.3	2.6	2.0	2.7	2.9
Poor study behaviors	3.2	2.9	3.0	3.3	3.3	3.4	3.3
Bad study environment	2.7	2.5	2.5	2.7	2.9	3.0	2.8
Feeling depressed, stressed or upset	2.9	2.9	2.7	3.2	3.1	3.1	3.1
Physical illness or condition	2.1	2.0	1.9	2.4	2.2	2.1	2.3

There are statistically significant differences between subgroups for obstacles shown in **BOLD** type.

Table 2. Frequency with which Obstacles Hinder Academic Success, by Student Gender		
Potential Obstacle	Mean Frequency (1=Not at all, 5=All the time)	
	Female	Male
Competing job responsibilities	2.3	2.2
Competing family responsibilities	2.6	2.4
Other competing responsibilities	2.5	2.5
Weak English skills	1.4	1.4
Weak math skills	1.8	1.7
Inadequate study skills	2.4	2.4
Poor study behaviors	3.0	3.1
Bad study environment	2.7	2.6
Feeling depressed, stressed or upset	3.0	2.7
Physical illness or condition	2.2	2.0

There are statistically significant differences between subgroups for obstacles shown in **BOLD** type.

Table 3. Frequency with which Obstacles Hinder Academic Success, by Student Class Level				
Potential Obstacle	Mean Frequency (1=Not at all, 5=All the time)			
	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior
Competing job responsibilities	1.6	2.1	2.4	2.6
Competing family responsibilities	2.5	2.5	2.6	2.6
Other competing responsibilities	2.4	2.5	2.6	2.6
Weak English skills	1.5	1.4	1.4	1.4
Weak math skills	2.2	1.9	1.7	1.6
Inadequate study skills	2.6	2.4	2.4	2.1
Poor study behaviors	3.2	3.1	3.1	2.9
Bad study environment	2.8	2.7	2.6	2.5
Feeling depressed, stressed or upset	2.8	3.0	2.9	2.9
Physical illness or condition	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.1

There are statistically significant differences between subgroups for obstacles shown in **BOLD** type.

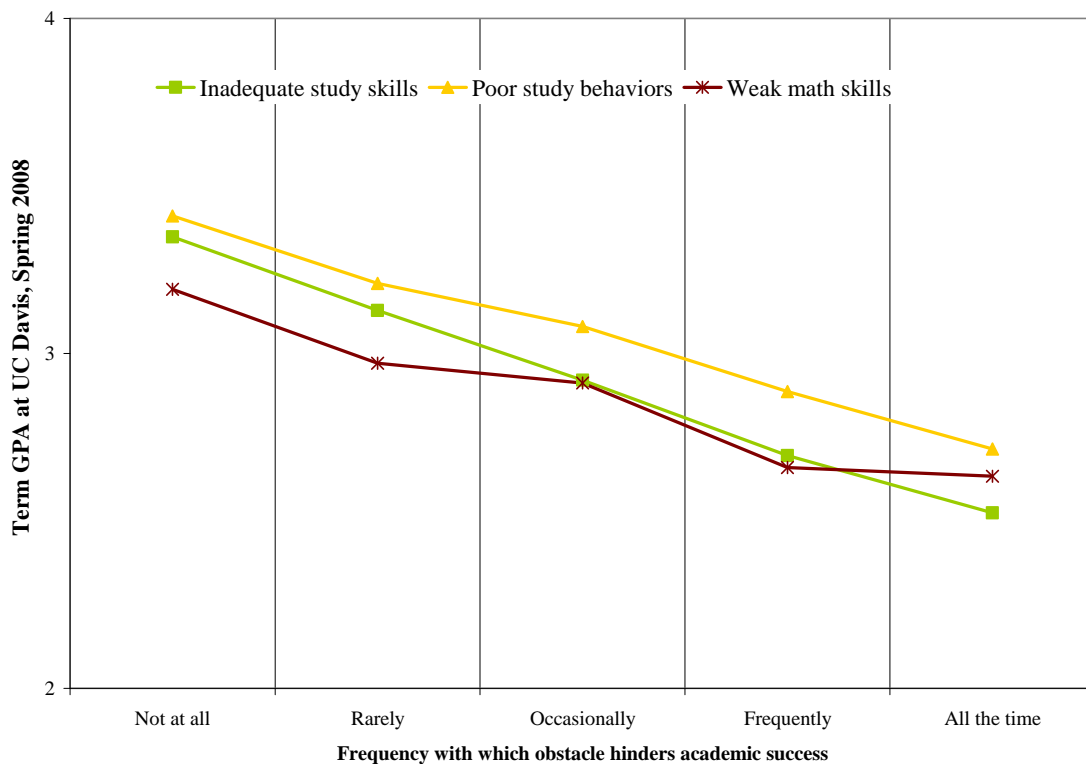
Table 4. Frequency with which Obstacles Hinder Academic Success, by Student Admit Type (Upper Division Students Only)		
Potential Obstacle	Mean Frequency (1=Not at all, 5=All the time)	
	Freshman Entrant	Transfer
Competing job responsibilities	2.5	2.5
Competing family responsibilities	2.4	2.9
Other competing responsibilities	2.8	2.3
Weak English skills	1.4	1.4
Weak math skills	1.6	1.6
Inadequate study skills	2.3	2.2
Poor study behaviors	3.0	2.8
Bad study environment	2.5	2.5
Feeling depressed, stressed or upset	2.8	3.0
Physical illness or condition	2.1	2.1

There are statistically significant differences between subgroups for obstacles shown in **BOLD** type.

Relationship Between Obstacles and Academic Performance

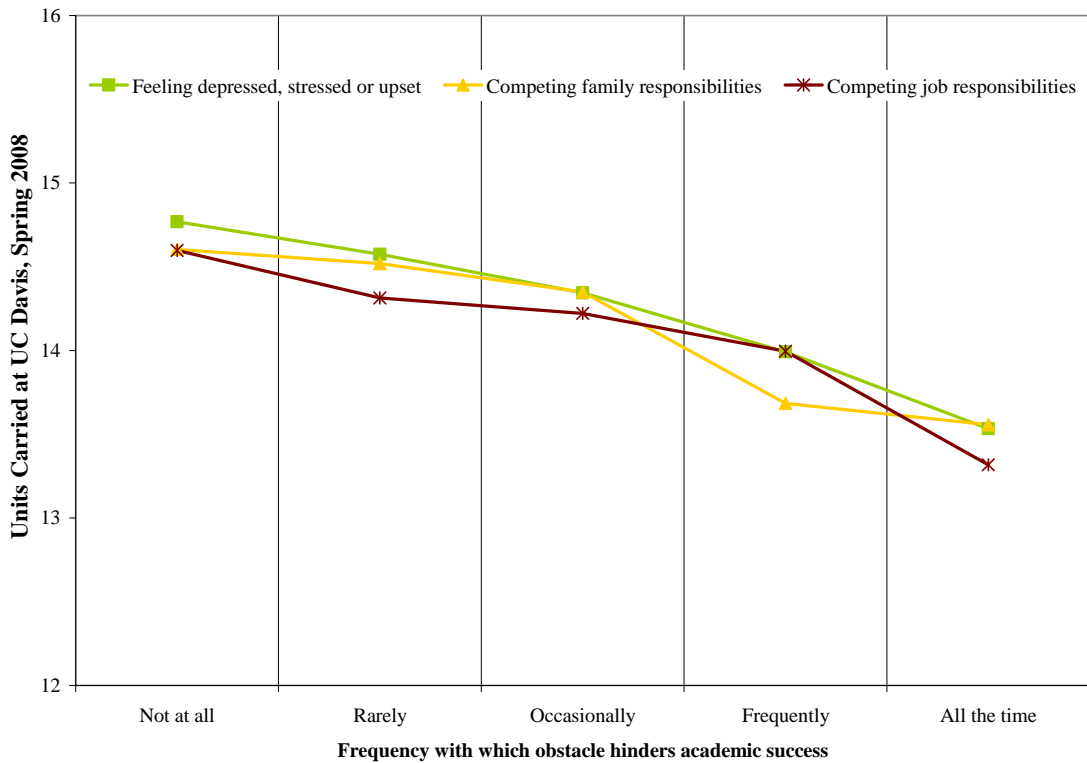
There is a very significant ($p < .01$) negative association between GPA and all of the obstacles except *other competing responsibilities*. The three obstacles which are most significantly correlated with GPA are *inadequate study skills*, *poor study behaviors* and *weak math skills*. The effects of these obstacles are shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Relationship between Obstacles and GPA at UC Davis



Similarly, there is a very significant negative association between units carried and all of the obstacles except *other competing responsibilities*, *weak math skills* and *bad study environment*. The three obstacles most strongly associated with units carried are *feeling depressed, stressed or upset*, *competing family responsibilities* and *competing job responsibilities*. It is not surprising that students who feel hindered by family and job responsibilities would choose to carry a lighter course load. The effects of these three factors are shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Relationship between Obstacles and Units Carried at UC Davis



The impact of job responsibilities on student success is a topic of particular interest at UC Davis and is explored more fully in UCUES 2008 Time Allocation, SARI Report # 401. In that study it was found that about one-half of all UC Davis students report at least some paid employment, and about two-thirds of students who report any paid employment describe it as an obstacle to academic success, at least occasionally.

Appendix

Methodology

Data Collection

In the spring of 2008, the University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES) was administered electronically with an internet-based questionnaire to all 162,259 undergraduates at the nine general campuses of the University, including 22,451 undergraduate students at UC Davis[‡]. The response rate across the University of California was 39.2% but varied widely by campus. A total of 7,040 UC Davis students participated in the survey, for a campus response rate of 31.4%.[§] Actual response rates varied by item. As in previous administrations of UCUES, and typical of survey research in general, female students responded to 2008 UCUES at a higher rate than males. Otherwise, UCUES respondents in 2008 were remarkably representative of the UC Davis population. Demographics of the survey population and the respondents for 2008 are shown in Table A1.

The questionnaire was modular where all respondents received a common set of “Core” questions. Respondents were randomly assigned to receive one of three “modules” each focused on a specific aspect of the student experience^{**}. The distribution of respondents among the modules was determined by each campus. The percentage of UC Davis students directed to each module was selected according to anticipated analytical and reporting requirements, and in keeping with campus priorities. The 2008 UCUES modules were: academic engagement (45% of population, n=3247) student development (45% of population, n=3063) and civic engagement (10% of population, n=730).

Interpretation of Results

The committee of UC institutional researchers responsible for the design of UCUES anticipated that virtually all differences **between campuses** would be statistically significant due to the very large number of respondents. They agreed upon two standards for real, substantive differences: for mean ratings a difference of 0.2 or more, and for percentage values a difference of 5% or more are considered noteworthy and of practical significance. Note that these do not correspond to p-values for statistical significance. This convention is observed in UCUES reports prepared by SARI at UC Davis when reporting differences between campuses. Conventional statistical methods are used when reporting differences between means and percentage values for sub-populations within our own campus undergraduate population.

[‡] The UCUES population was limited to undergraduate students included in the 3rd week snapshot for winter quarter 2008 and who were 18 or older by April 1, 2008. Thus the size and specific characteristics of the population may differ slightly from official enrollment statistics reported elsewhere.

[§] The lower than average response rate is attributable to the decision to actively promote the survey at UC Davis for one month only. Some other campuses continued to email reminders for two or even three months.

^{**} UC Merced administered only the core and the academic engagement module. Some campuses chose to include a fourth, campus-specific module, referred to as a campus “wild card” module, but UC Davis did not, preferring to concentrate responses among the common modules.

Table A1: Demographics of UC Davis 2008 UCUES Population & Respondents				
		UC Davis UCUES Population	% UC Davis UCUES Population	% UC Davis UCUES Respondents to <u>Obstacles</u> Items
Gender	Female	12640	56%	62%
	Male	9811	44%	38%
Ethnicity	American Indian/Alaskan Native	144	1%	1%
	Asian	9582	43%	40%
	Black/African American	655	3%	2%
	Chicano/Mexican-American	2015	9%	8%
	Latino/Other Spanish American	683	3%	3%
	White/Caucasian	7875	35%	40%
	Other/Decline to State	1497	7%	7%
Ethnicity (Asian)	Chinese/Chinese American	4406	20%	19%
	East Indian/Pakistani	883	4%	3%
	Japanese/Japanese American	408	2%	2%
	Korean	706	3%	2%
	Pacific Islander	111	< 1%	< 1%
	Pilipino/Filipino	922	4%	4%
	Vietnamese	1334	6%	6%
	Other Asian	812	4%	3%
Class Level	Freshman	4365	19%	20%
	Sophomore	4771	21%	20%
	Junior	5858	26%	26%
	Senior	7457	33%	34%
Entrance Status*	Freshman entrant	17853	80%	78%
	Transfer	4355	20%	22%

* From UCOP records, some missing data (about 1%).

UCUES Items Referenced in this Report

Academic Engagement Module

During this academic year, how often have each of the following been obstacles to your school work or academic success?

Competing job responsibilities (i.e., paid employment)

(Not at all to all the time) (n=3152)

Competing family responsibilities

(Not at all to all the time) (n=3152)

Other competing responsibilities (e.g., athletics, clubs, internship)

(Not at all to all the time) (n=3156)

Weak English skills

(Not at all to all the time) (n=3145)

Weak math skills

(Not at all to all the time) (n=3144)

Inadequate study skills (e.g., knowing how to start, knowing how to get help, organizing material)

(Not at all to all the time) (n=3150)

Poor study behaviors (e.g., wait till last minute, easily distracted, too much social time, too much surfing)

(Not at all to all the time) (n=3160)

Bad study environment (e.g., noisy roommate, poor Internet access, inadequate computer or software)

(Not at all to all the time) (n=3156)

Feeling depressed, stressed, or upset

(Not at all to all the time) (n=3164)

Physical illness or condition

(Not at all to all the time) (n=3157)