UCUES 2008
Campus Climate: Political Orientation

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 number of items that addressed dimensions of campus climate. This report compares perceptions of campus climate at UC Davis with that of the other UCs, and examines differences in the perceptions of UC Davis students as categorized by political orientation.

On multiple measures of general campus climate, our undergraduates’ ratings of UC Davis are near the highest ratings of campus climate among the UCs. Our campus received especially high ratings as friendly, caring, tolerant and safe.

Among UC Davis students, responses to the campus climate survey items differ significantly by student political orientation. Differences are discussed in detail for each item in the body of the report. However, one very clear pattern emerges in the data: in general, students who describe themselves as Conservative or Very conservative are significantly more negative in their perception of campus climate than students who are more politically liberal. One encouraging exception to this observation is that, although Liberal or Very liberal students rate UC Davis as more friendly than other students, there is no significant difference in ratings for our campus as caring, tolerant or safe by students of differing political orientations.
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Introduction

Campus climate is a multi-faceted concept. One definition of campus climate is:

Behaviors within a workplace or learning environment, ranging from subtle to cumulative to dramatic, that can influence whether an individual feels personally safe, listened to, valued, and treated fairly and with respect.*

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 consisted of a “Core” of questions answered by all respondents and several “modules” to which respondents were randomly assigned, each of which focused on a particular facet of the undergraduate experience. Both the survey Core and the Student Development module contained items that addressed campus climate along several dimensions, and these are the focus of this report. In particular, this report examines campus climate as it relates to student political orientation.

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 Student Development module; 3,063 students (30.5% of this sub-group) did so. Demographics of the survey population and the respondents for UCUES 2008 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.

* http://www.provost.wisc.edu/climate/what.html
Results

General Campus Climate

Respondents to UCUES 2008 were asked to rate their agreement with a series of general or global statements related to campus climate on a scale from 1 to 6 where 1 = *Strongly disagree* and 6 = *Strongly agree*. The items were oriented positively, so that a high rating is desirable.

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 - 3 display the mean level of agreement with statements relating to campus climate at UC Davis compared to the highest and lowest levels among the UC campuses.‡

For most of these items, the rating for UC Davis is near the maximum among the UCs, and significantly higher than the lowest rated campus.

*Figure 1. Global Measures of Campus Climate: UC Comparisons*

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† 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.
It should be noted that levels of agreement with the statement *I feel valued as an individual on this campus* are generally low across the UCs (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Sense of Personal Value: UC Comparisons**

Levels of agreement with the statement *Diversity is important to me* are generally high across the campuses. For this item, the mean level of agreement at UC Davis is near the midpoint among the UCs, neither significantly higher than the lowest nor lower than the highest (Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Importance of Diversity: UC Comparisons**
An additional set of four UCUES items asked students to rank the general campus climate by various descriptors. These items were each presented as a 6-point semantic differential scale with only the endpoints defined. Campus comparisons are shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Perceptions of Campus Characteristics: UC Comparisons

As with most other global ratings of campus climate at the campus level, ratings at UC Davis approach the maximum among the UCs as friendly, caring, tolerant and safe. In every case, the mean rating for UC Davis is significantly higher than that at the campus with the lowest rating, and approaches the rating of the highest-ranked campus.

Overall, on these general measures of campus climate, our undergraduate students rate UC Davis as meeting or exceeding the climate at other UC schools. While this is an admirable achievement, analysis of the campus climate as perceived by specific sub-populations allows us to identify areas where there may be room for improvement.

Political Orientation

Perceptions of campus climate may vary substantially between sub-populations on campus; for instance perceptions of campus climate may differ for students of different races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, etc. This report compares perceptions of our campus climate by students according to their political orientation (self-identified by

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§ The scale for these items has been reversed from the orientation in the survey, so that a high rating is again desirable.
survey respondents) with particular emphasis on survey items that specifically refer to political beliefs and affiliations. All differences in the mean responses between political orientation groups specifically noted in this report are statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level.

UCUES respondents were asked to characterize their political orientation on a scale from *Very conservative* to *Very liberal*. Table 1 displays the number of respondents to the UCUES Core and Student Development module in each political orientation group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Orientation</th>
<th>Respondents CORE</th>
<th>Respondents Student Development Module</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very conservative</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>418</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly conservative</td>
<td>653</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate: middle of the road</td>
<td>1787</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly liberal</td>
<td>1275</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>2040</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very liberal</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skipped question</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is wide variation in the number of students of different political orientations at UC Davis, with students much more likely to describe themselves as politically liberal than as politically conservative. In particular, those who describe themselves as *Very conservative* constitute a very small minority at UC Davis. In some instances, the small number of respondents limits our ability to discern differences in perceptions between groups of different political orientations. To facilitate analysis, these seven political orientation categories are regrouped into three for this report: 1) *Conservative or Very conservative*, 2) *Slightly conservative, Moderate, or Slightly Liberal*, and 3) *Liberal or Very liberal*.

**General Campus Climate by Political Orientation**

Returning to the global measures of campus climate discussed earlier, *Liberal or Very liberal* students are significantly more likely than others to agree with the statements *I feel that I belong at this campus* and *Knowing what I know now, I would still choose to enroll at this campus*. 
Figure 5. Global Measures of Campus Climate at UC Davis, by Student Political Orientation

Differences in agreement with the statements *I feel valued as an individual on this campus* and *This institution values students’ opinions* are not statistically significant.

Figure 6. Sense of Personal Value at UC Davis, by Student Political Orientation
Differences in agreement with the statement *Diversity is important on this campus* are also not statistically significant. However, there are significant differences in agreement with the statement *Diversity is important to me*, with agreement increasing with increasingly liberal political orientation.

**Figure 7. Importance of Diversity at UC Davis, by Student Political Orientation**

Finally, *Liberal or Very liberal* students rate the UC Davis campus significantly more friendly than *Conservative or Very conservative* students. Differences for the other campus characteristics are not significant.

**Figure 8. Perceptions of Campus Characteristics at UC Davis, by Student Political Orientation**
Respect Regardless of Political Orientation

Students were asked whether they agreed that Students are respected here regardless of their political beliefs and, more specifically, that Students of my political beliefs are respected on this campus. In addition, students were asked to respond to the statement I feel free to express my political beliefs on campus.

Agreement with the statement, Students are respected here regardless of their political beliefs, is both significantly higher at UC Davis than at the campus with the lowest level of agreement, and significantly lower than at the campus with the highest. Agreement at UC Davis does not differ significantly from either the lowest or highest levels among the UCs for the other two statements.

Figure 9. Perceptions of Respect: UC Comparisons

Within the population of students at UC Davis, however, ratings on these items vary significantly between students of different political orientations, with the level of agreement increasing with increasingly liberal political orientation.
Figure 10. Perceptions of Respect at UC Davis, by Student Political Orientation

Negative or Stereotypical Views Related to Political Beliefs or Affiliations

Students were also asked how often they had heard negative or stereotypical views about political beliefs or affiliations expressed by faculty or instructors, non-teaching staff or administrators, and by students. Responses were presented on a 6 point scale where 1 = Never and 6 = Very often. Note that, unlike most other items presented in this report, a LOW score is desirable for these three.

Students at UC Davis and the other UCs report a higher frequency of negative or stereotypical views expressed by other students than by faculty or staff; this is also true for students in all political orientation categories at UC Davis. This may reflect the fact that most students spend more time interacting with other students than with faculty or staff, or perhaps faculty and staff are more aware of the fallacy and the potentially damaging impact of stereotyping.

The reported frequency of these types of expressions by faculty, staff and students at UC Davis is near the lowest among the UCs, and significantly lower than at the campus with the highest reported frequency.
Faculty have expressed negative or stereotypical views about political beliefs or affiliations

Staff have expressed negative or stereotypical views about political beliefs or affiliations

Students have expressed negative or stereotypical views about political beliefs or affiliations

Mean (1=Never, 6=Very often)

Max among UCs

Min among UCs

Among respondents at UC Davis, Conservative or Very conservative students are significantly more likely than others to report negative or stereotypical expressions of this kind by faculty, staff and students.

Figure 11. Frequency of Negative or Stereotypical Views: UC Comparisons

Figure 12. Frequency of Negative or Stereotypical Views at UC Davis, by Student Political Orientation
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>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>UC Davis UCUES Population</th>
<th>% UC Davis UCUES Population</th>
<th>% UC Davis UCUES Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12640</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9811</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>38%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaskan Native</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>9582</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>655</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicano/Mexican-American</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/Other Spanish American</td>
<td>683</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>7875</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/Decline to State</td>
<td>1497</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity (Asian)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese/Chinese American</td>
<td>4406</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Indian/Pakistani</td>
<td>883</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese/Japanese American</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>706</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilipino/Filipino</td>
<td>922</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>1334</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Asian</td>
<td>812</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Class Level</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>4365</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>4771</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>5858</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>7457</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Entrance Status</strong>*</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshman entrant</td>
<td>17853</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td>4355</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* From UCOP records, some missing data (about 1%).
UCUES Items Referenced in this Report

CORE
6 pt Scale 1=Strongly disagree to 6=Strongly Agree
Do you agree or disagree with these statements?
I feel that I belong at this campus (n=6899)
Knowing what I know now, I would still choose to enroll at this campus (n=6930)

6 pt Scale 1=Strongly disagree to 6=Strongly Agree
Indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.
I feel free to express my political beliefs on campus (n=6955)
Students are respected here regardless of their political beliefs (n=6927)

7 pt Scale 1=Very liberal to 7=Very conservative
How would you characterize your political orientation?  (n=6857)

Student Life and Development
6 pt Scale 1=Strongly disagree to 6=Strongly Agree
What is your level of agreement with the following:
I feel valued as an individual on this campus (n=2959)
This institution values students’ opinions (n=2952)
Diversity is important on this campus (n=2947)
Diversity is important to me (n=2957)

6pt Scale 1=Friendly to 6=Hostile, 1=Caring to 6=Impersonal, etc.
Based on your experience and observation, rate the general climate for students of your UC
campus along the following dimensions:
Campus climate is:
Friendly to Hostile (n=2985)
Caring to Impersonal (n=2983)
Tolerant of diversity to Intolerant of diversity (n=2981)
Safe to Dangerous (n=2971)

7 pt Scale 0=Not applicable, 1=Strongly disagree to 6=Strongly Agree
Indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.
Students of my political beliefs are respected on this campus (n=2895)

6 pt Scale 1=Never to 6=Very often
In this academic year, I have heard teaching faculty or instructors express negative or
stereotypical views about:
Political beliefs or affiliations  (n=2962)

In this academic year I have heard nonteaching staff or administrators express negative or
stereotypical views about:
Political beliefs or affiliations  (n=2946)

In this academic year, I have heard students express negative or stereotypical views about:
  Political beliefs or affiliations  (n=2959)