

Student Experience

Background

Since its founding, UCSC has aimed to provide undergraduate students with the best of both worlds: the intimacy of the small residential college with the resource power of a major research university.

The current UCSC student experience is marked by a number of elements, including:

- a diverse campus population, one that reflects the shifting demographics of the state as a whole
- a campus of extraordinary natural beauty
- access to diverse academic offerings (more graduate programs as well as undergraduate programs)
- a student body that contains large numbers of first-generation and transfer students
- a mix of classroom experiences (large lectures as well as seminar-style classes)
- a rising cost of education which asks many students to balance educational pursuits with work responsibilities.

Student Ideas

Students are the blood that gives life to the university. Their views of what drew them to UCSC, what keeps them here, and what is necessary to ensure that they will continue to thrive are a critical resource in strategic planning. Student input coalesced around three interrelated themes that require our attention: Education, Community and Efficiency

Education

The opportunity to pursue a rigorous education is central to students' experiences of UCSC. They want the university to support meaningful and innovative collaborations between students and faculty in the classroom and beyond, including promoting research and mentorship opportunities that bring undergraduates, graduates, and faculty together. They recognize that educational success for all students relies on holistic support through a variety of avenues, from Learning Student Services and extended library hours to more experiential learning opportunities including internships, community service and other hands-on programs.

Community

The diversity and inclusivity of the university community and the beauty of its natural environment distinguish UCSC and draw students here. They want the university to pursue policies that sustain and enrich these distinctive attributes. They also encourage the school to develop institutions and events that draw members of the community together to celebrate these qualities and create a stronger school spirit that will also encourage alumni to give back to the university.

Efficiency

Students encourage the university to develop policies that facilitate rather than hamper collaboration, experimentation, innovation and student initiatives. They want their voices to be heard more and they justly believe their involvement can help resolve challenging issues and enhance the creative potential of the university. They require improvements in communication between departments, colleges, and service offices and emphasize the importance of better guides to available campus resources. They see transparency regarding school costs and funding as crucial for their appreciation of university services and for ensuring student retention and degree completion, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

National Trends

Nationally there has been a modest decline in the number of high school graduates since 2010-11, while the racial and ethnic diversity of high school graduates has been increasing. In California the portion of public high school graduates that are racial/ethnic minorities had exceeded 50% by 1992-93. By 2019-20 Hispanic high school graduates are expected to grow and will comprise nearly half (49%) of public high school graduates, while the number of Asian/Pacific Islander high school graduates is expected to level off, and the numbers and percentages of non-Hispanic Whites, Black, and Native American/Alaska Native graduates to decline.

These numbers are reflected in the demographic composition of our students. In 2013 students of color made up over half of the student population and we can expect to see even more growth of Latino/a students over the next decade. This, along with the increase in international students, means that UC Santa Cruz students will continue to have opportunities to interact with fellow students from diverse backgrounds.

At the same time that the student population has been growing more diverse, the cost of a higher education has been rapidly increasing. Nationally, the average net price for in-state undergraduate students at public four-year universities jumped more than 60% (inflation adjusted) since 2009-10. UCSC tuition and registration fees have followed the trend, rising from \$10,596 per year in 2009-10 year to \$15,253 per year in 2013-14. In response to state budget cuts, UC resident tuition now exceeds the

national average for AAU public institutions. At the same time student loan debt has been rising. Average student loan debt among recent UCSC baccalaureate recipients who first enrolled as freshmen and who took student loans was \$20,358, compared to the national average \$26,600 per borrower.

In the last two decades higher education has focused on establishing student-centered, [high-impact educational practices](#) that promote student engagement. These practices emphasize active, inquiry-based learning, community building, integration of in-class and out-of-class experiences, research experience, faculty mentorship, development of leadership skills and civic engagement. There is evidence that these high-impact practices promote an inclusive and supportive climate for students with diverse learning styles and first generation students, and are thus associated with higher rates of student success measured in terms of student satisfaction with college experience, retention, graduation, and post-graduation employment.

Since its early days, UCSC has been ahead of the national trend in offering students a range of high-impact practices including first-year writing seminars and common intellectual experiences in residential colleges, internships and other co-curricular activities, opportunities to participate in faculty's research, capstone courses and capstone-like experiences for both undergraduate and graduate students.

Strategic Themes

Enhance the student learning experience

Our campus was formed around a new model of undergraduate education, now more common as other universities form residential academic communities. As we look to the future, we must explore new frontiers of excellence in undergraduate teaching and graduate training.

Integrate research and education fully. Faculty and students engage in meaningful ways at the intersections of teaching and research. Research mentorship provides guide-posts for the future and expands our campus' research impact.

Build student communities

Communities are essential to the student experience and how students connect to UC Santa Cruz, including their long-term willingness to give back to the campus.

Communities must be conscientiously designed and facilitated within and across colleges, disciplines, and the vast range of distinctive undergraduate and graduate groups and potential groups.

Value the colleges as a key asset. The colleges foster important undergraduate, graduate, and faculty communities. While much has been lost through growth of the campus and budget cuts, there is much to gain by thinking anew how best to engage

students, frosh and transfer, resident and non-resident.

Improve the infrastructure that supports student growth and success

Update regulations and policies to support student initiatives and participation. Improve communications among all sectors of the university for better use of resources and more effective collaborations and training. Implement processes that encourage students' involvement and make valuable use of their feedback.

Recognize students as a valuable resource. Our students engage in our projects of research and creativity; many are dedicated leaders for positive change, and can be an inspiration for the university. Students are involved in all aspects of campus life, have great insights and are eager to be heard and to contribute to the evolution of the university. Expanding opportunities for engagement will not only transform each individual student, but continue to transform our campus' approach to education for all students.

Opportunities

Enhance the student learning experience

Full pipeline approaches. Expanding achievement at all levels requires focus on all levels. College-bound communities are built in middle-school and earlier; each new frosh and transfer student has the potential to join UC graduate programs. Each graduate student can be trained and mentored toward joining the academy, multiplying their achievement through modeling and community building.

Local resources. Promote collaborations with Silicon Valley, local businesses and institutions to provide more internships, learning experiences and job opportunities to our students.

Professional programs and schools. A key component of graduate growth aspirations, professional programs and schools represent an opportunity to further increase the impact of UCSC throughout the region, state, and country.

Build student communities

Colleges. As at the start of our campus, colleges have great potential for facilitating educational innovation and promoting the sense of community students value. Both will be important as the university grows. Launching new colleges (for example, graduate and transfer); establishing faculty and graduate student residents in colleges to expand academic mentorship; and furthering intra-college relationships are opportunities to consider.

Natural setting. Students are inspired by the beauty of our natural setting and consider it a major asset in the special character of UCSC and instrumental in developing of a sense of belonging. Our natural setting can be showcased and

protected through Green Events, sustainability policies, and programs that integrate the environment in students' learning experiences. Promoting our setting and student-focused stewardship can enhance the profile of the university, build stronger school spirit and pride in our achievements, and provide holistic learning experiences that promote a sense of civic responsibilities and engagement.

Improve the infrastructure that supports student growth and success

Student insights and creativity. Students are our most valuable human resource and think tank. Regularly monitoring their concerns and suggestions and encouraging them to participate in the implementation of their ideas can significantly enhance our potential for problem solving, innovation and growth.

Facilities. Additional classrooms (lecture and reconfigurable) would support multiple models of education that will be necessary to serve a growing graduate student population while maintaining a high level of undergraduate training. A student center and additional event facilities would enhance student engagement and promote community. New and expanded facilities will accommodate student growth and enhance student engagement and success.

Short- and Long-Term Plans

Enhance the student learning experience

Maintain forward-looking diversity. Ensure we have diversity and breadth in our portfolio of academic programs, including a broad range of interdisciplinary programs; programs suitable for varying career goals; and programs that transform students in the most effective ways possible.

Graduate Students. Expand graduate programs and increase graduate enrollment. Broaden recruitment regionally, domestically, and internationally. Continue to address graduate student concerns, including funding, professional development and preparation, internships, larger and more integrated graduate international community.

Build student communities

Undergraduate Colleges. Connect the colleges to each other and the campus, bring undergraduate and graduate students together, and build community among students, alumni, faculty, and staff. Consider development of a graduate student college, and a transfer college. Integrate graduate students with the college experience.

All Students. Design structures to tap into student insights, concerns and suggestions frequently, as by Envision UCSC. Promote community building: create processes and systems that ensure communication to and among students and student subpopulations, for example colleges, student groups, majors etc, especially as

related to events (e.g. maintain a comprehensive and interactive central calendar); introduce more campus-wide events (e.g. Spring Festival, Green Festival); support athletic facilities, teams and events; create a student center. Replace risk-aversion mentality and regulations with encouragement of creative innovation that supports student initiatives.

Improve the infrastructure that supports student growth and success

Improve Student Success. Improve undergraduate and graduate student success including retention, time-to-degree, graduation rate, and professional preparation. Adopt a holistic approach to student success, addressing academic, financial, developmental, mental health, and other issues. Further develop information systems, advising, and support to ensure timely graduation. Enhance network opportunities and training related to career aspirations and allow graduated students to have continued access to relevant information and resources.

Semesters. Outside the UC system, semester models are prevalent. Semesters reduce stress, increase opportunities for summer learning and employment; reduce administrative transitions; and provide a larger window for early feedback on student performance. Such a shift has potential to improve both efficiency and educational innovation.