

First Generation Graduate Student Experiences

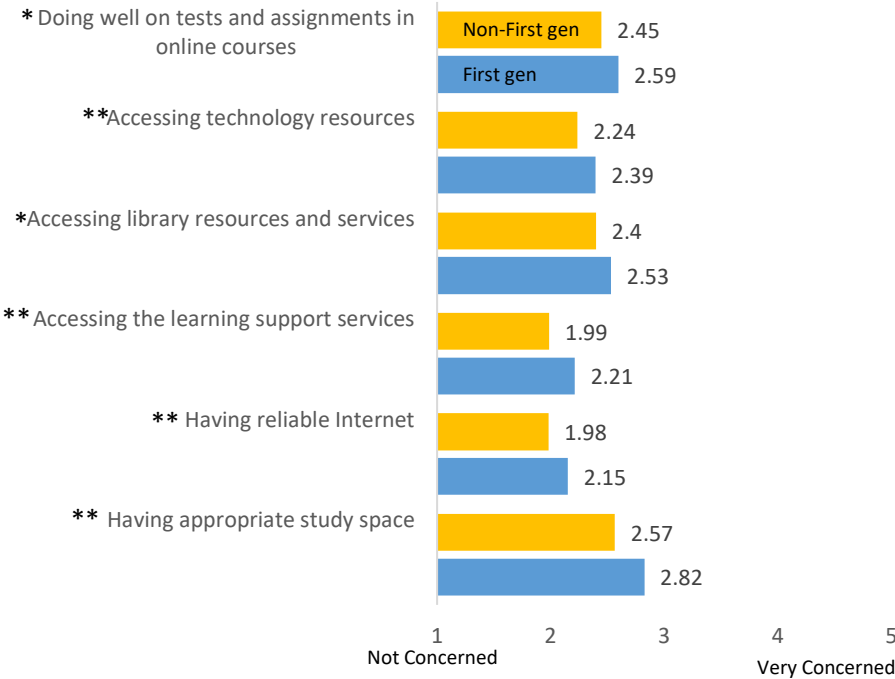
This report provides an overview of UCLA graduate and professional student responses to the 2020 UCLA Graduate and Professional Student Survey (GPSS) comparing the experiences of First Generation and Non-First Generation students. First generation students were defined as those reporting that neither parent/guardian graduated from college. Among all 2417 survey participants who provided information on their parents and guardians’ highest level of education, 709 (29.3%) graduate students were first generation students.

To understand group differences by first generation status, we conducted t-tests. Significance was calculated and reported as follows: one asterisk (*) $p < 0.05$, two asterisks (**) $p < 0.01$. Effect sizes were also calculated. The larger the effect size the stronger the relationship between two variables. The majority of effect sizes fall between 0 and 0.29, indicating that the first generation identity has a small influence on the survey answers. Effect sizes that are larger than 0.3 have been highlighted in the Appendix. This report provides an overview of the most compelling points of difference across the groups. For a complete summary of all mean comparisons with significance and effect sizes, please review Appendix I. For accompanying information including participant demographics and survey methodology, please visit: <https://www.sairo.ucla.edu/By-Survey/GRAD-Survey>.

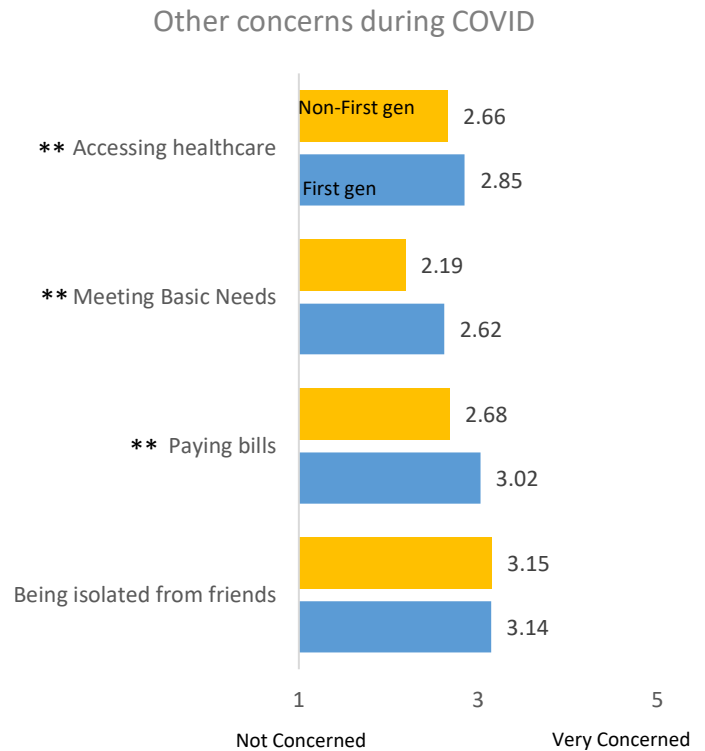
Concerns during the Pandemic

- Both first generation and non-first generation students were concerned about their ability to learn effectively during the COVID-19 pandemic. First generation students showed a slightly higher level of concern than non-first generation students.
- Both first generation and non-first generation students were concerned about their ability to pay bills during the pandemic. First generation students showed a higher level of concern than their non-first generation peers.

Concern about academic performance during COVID

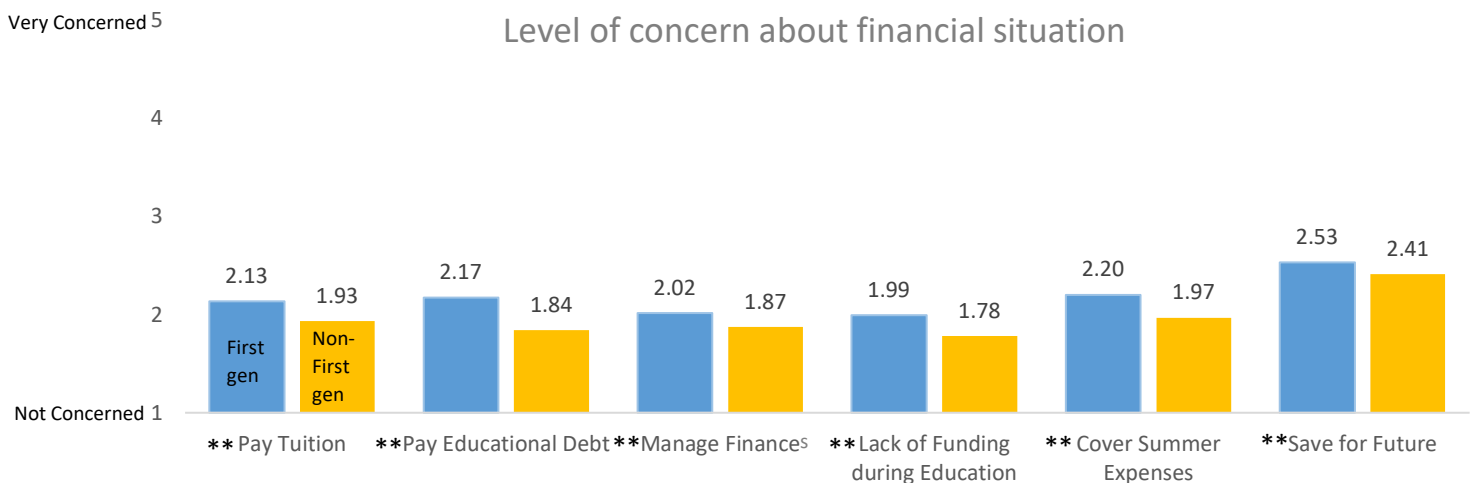


- Overall, students did not show major concerns about many of the possible non-academic effects of COVID. The graph on the right lists the items where students showed the highest level of concern. Please review the appendix for a full list of factors that were included in the survey.
- First generation students showed slightly more concern about meeting basic needs such as food and housing than non-first generation students.
- Both groups showed the highest level of concern about being isolated from friends and families, and there was no significant difference between first generation and non-first generation students' levels of concern.



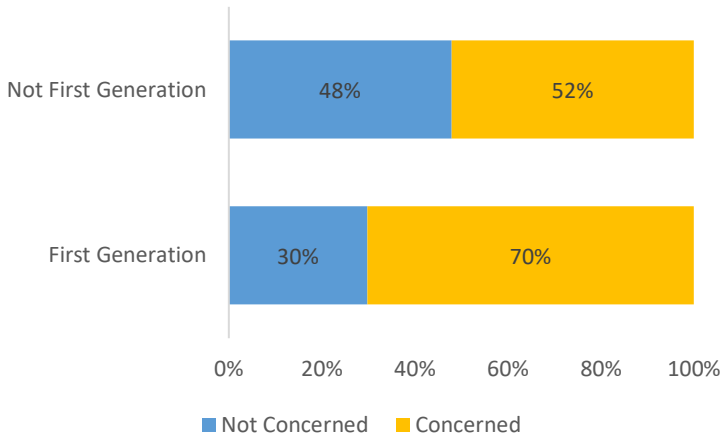
Financial Wellness

- Graduate students overall were generally not very concerned about finances. However, when comparing the experiences of both groups, first generation students expressed more concern about their debt and finances than did non-first generation students.

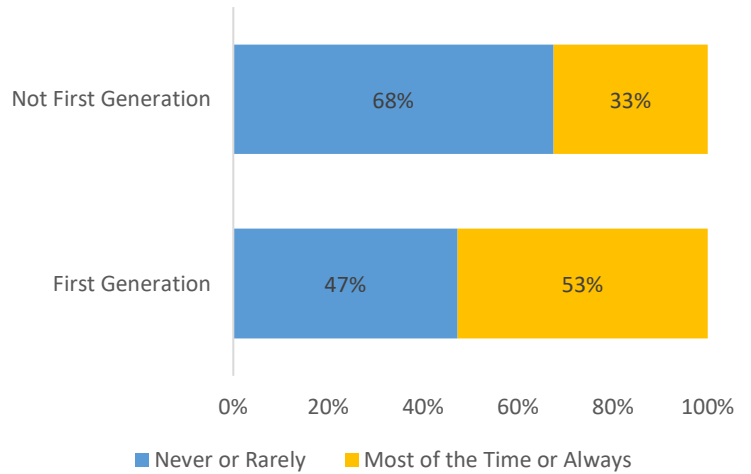


- Compared to non-first generation students, first generation students more frequently carried a balance on their credit cards. They also more frequently consulted with departments or on-campus resources about financing their education.

Level of concern about total accumulated educational debt

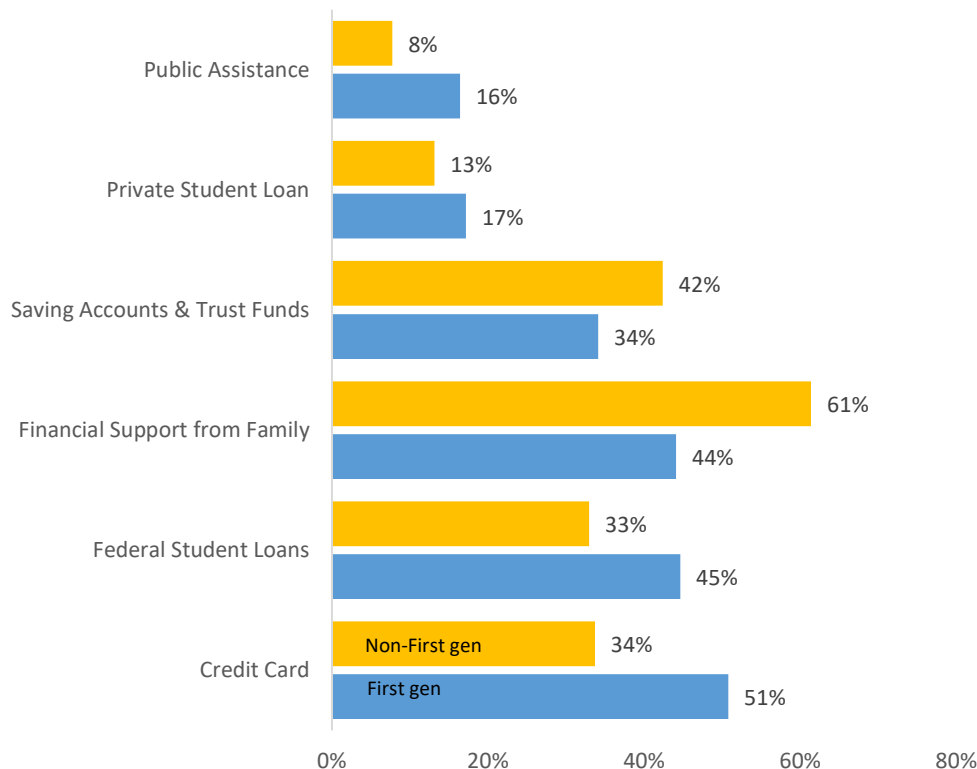


Frequency of carrying a balance on credit card



- There was a difference in the methods students chose to resolve the gap between expenses and income. First generation students were more likely to use federal student loans and credit cards to cover their tuition and daily expenses. On the other hand, non-first generation students tend to use their savings and financial support from their families.

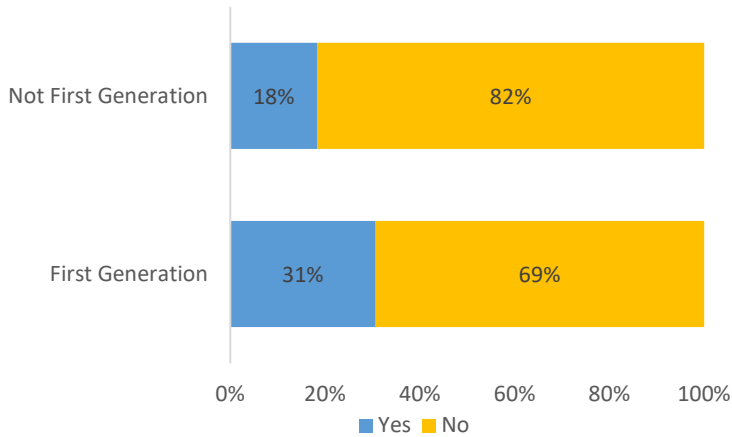
Method of resolving gap between expense and income



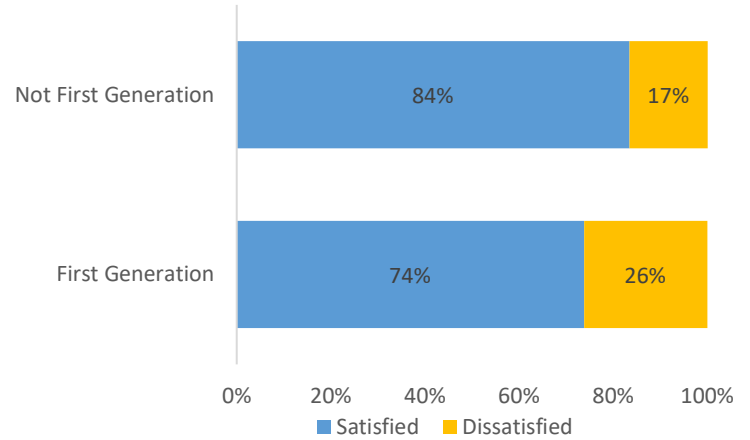
Basic Needs

- More first generation students reported that they had to skip meals, eat less, or cut the size of meals because there was not enough money for food during the past year. There is a moderate correlation between their responses and their first-generation college student identity, as indicated in the appendix.
- While both groups expressed dissatisfaction over the costs of housing, first generation students were also more likely to be dissatisfied about the current location and condition of their housing.

In the last year, did you ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?

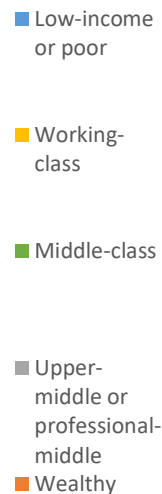


Satisfaction regarding location and condition of current housing

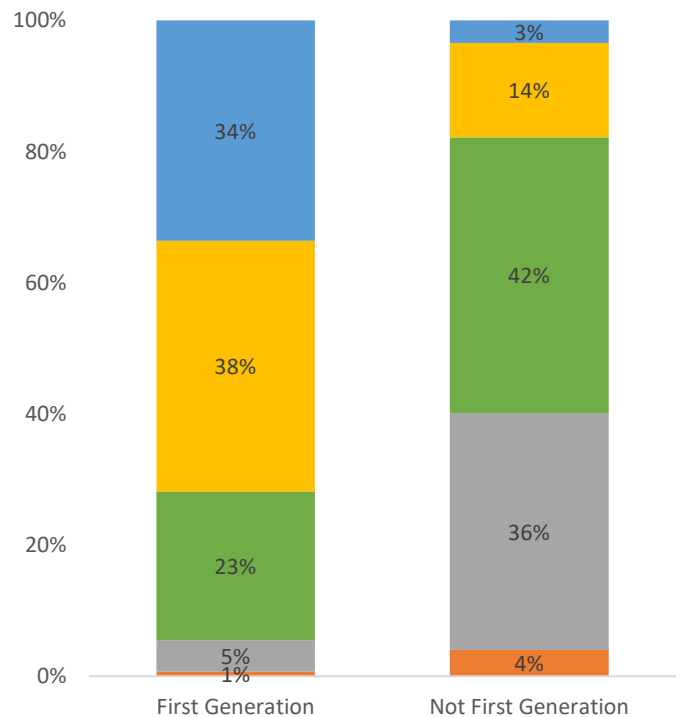


Background Characteristics

- First generation students were more likely to report having a lower socioeconomic status growing up than non-first generation students.
- A large number of first generation students reported that they grew up in working class or low-income households. On the other hand, most non-first generation students report that they grew up in middle class or higher households.



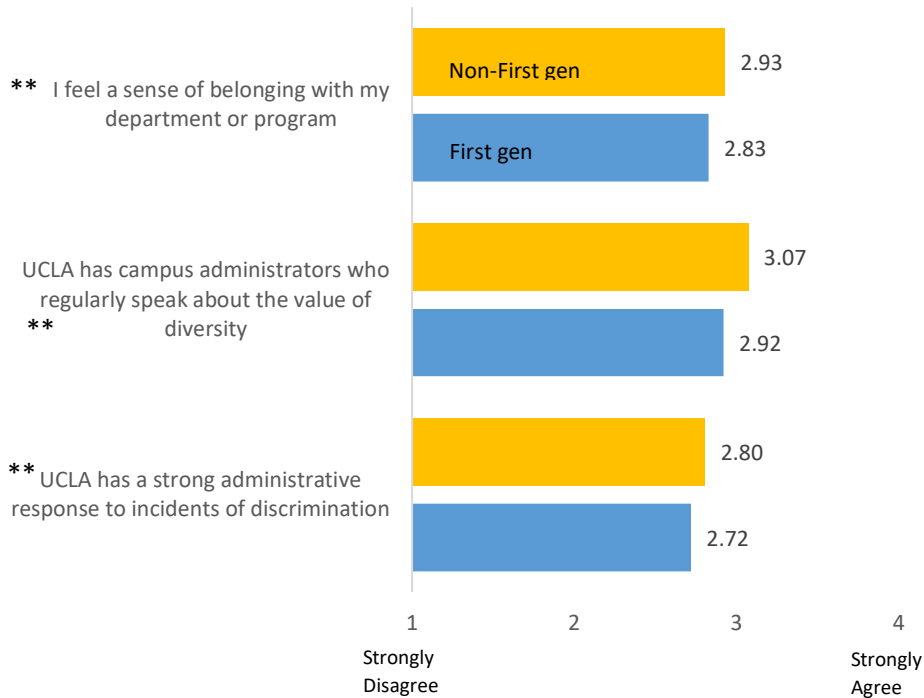
Social class when growing up



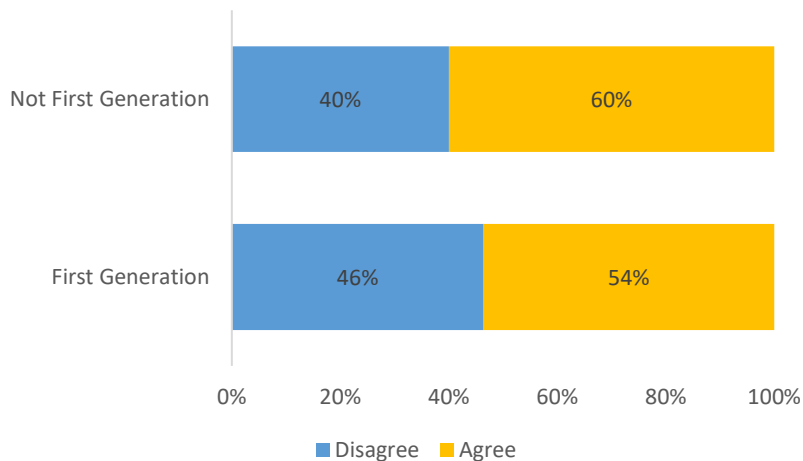
Campus Climate

- On the topic of inclusion and diversity, both groups indicated a similar level of sense of belonging, while first generation students were slightly less likely to agree that the university has done enough to value diversity and equity.
- A significant number of students, from both groups, show that they have difficulty finding mentors whom they identify. While more than half of the first generation students agreed with it, even more non-first generation students agree with the statement.

Agreement regarding diversity and inclusion on campus



I have difficulty finding mentors at UCLA whom I identify with



Open-ended Responses

First-generation students' open-ended responses to the following items were analyzed: *Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience during the COVID-19 pandemic?* (233 responses), *Please describe how the COVID-19 situation influenced your response* (255 responses), *What suggestions do you have for improving the UCLA graduate/professional student experience?* (163 responses), *Is there anything else that you would like to tell us about your experience with advising and mentoring?* (70 responses), *How concerned are you about the possible effects of COVID-19 on you in the following ways? Other concerns please specify* (78 responses), and *How concerned are you about the possible effects of COVID-19 on your learning in the following ways? Other learning concerns please specify* (137 responses). The themes presented below are prevalent among first-gen respondents.

- **Financial burden** is the major factor that influenced first generation students' experience during COVID-19. The majority of students shared that they encountered financial hardship. Among these responses, first generation students mentioned that they encountered difficulties paying for their expenses such as tuition, rent, and groceries. Many wished the university could have provided them with the benefit of discounted tuition and housing to help them during the difficult time.

"UCLA family housing rent is too high, more than 50% of my student paycheck, making it difficult to budget for food and other necessities."

"Please provide more funding for low-income students of color. In my program, most of the funding goes to students with really high GRE scores, which ends up disadvantaging low-income students of color who don't have the resources to pay for multiple GRE tests or for GRE prep resources."

"Don't kick PhD students out from on-campus housing after 3 years... I think searching for a new place to live, moving and settling in while pursuing my degree and working as a graduate student researcher have significantly delayed my academic progress. I wrote an appeal letter to ask if I can stay another year on campus, but it was not accepted. More livable salary is needed for PhD students."

- **Mental health concerns** were commonly mentioned among first generation students' concerns during the pandemic. Students reported that they faced stress, anxiety, and depression as a result of being isolated during the quarantine. Graduate students suggested that they would benefit from more online social interactions and mingling opportunities provided by their academic departments.

"I am massively depressed after being isolated from a vibrant and engaging community at the law school. There is depression everywhere."

"Being isolated when going to school is not an ideal way of learning. I feel like I am missing out on the graduate student experience being able to take advantage of network opportunities, interacting with other students and staff, as well as taking advantage of performing research or doing an internship alongside colleagues where learning occurs."

“I live by myself and it has really been lonely for me. I am very much a social butterfly so this is extremely isolating for me. I have had moments of crying due to anxiety, which becomes a domino effect I can't sleep and then it wears me down.”

- **Academic challenges** came from the lack of study space, library resources, and communication with faculty. When asked to provide suggestions for improvement, first-generation students sought faculty's understanding on the challenges created by the pandemic. Many stated that they had additional responsibilities beyond school work. First generation students hoped that faculty could adjust their expectations for students' academic performance during the pandemic.

“Whilst I think the university reacted very well to the changed environment, there is something about learning in-person which cannot be recreated online. I also found it very disruptive to my ability to learn to be cut off from access to library facilities as I always study in the library and find it hard to study effectively at home. I am sure that my academic performance will have declined this semester which I am very disappointed in.”

“It's been difficult academically as some professors are pre-recording lectures thus not creating allotted class time responsibility for both faculty and students.”

- **Racism and discrimination** added stress to first generation students who identified as being to a racial or ethnic minority. While some students reported micro aggressions and bias from faculty members, a large number of first generation students wished that the university would continue to strengthen its diverse community and hire more faculty and administrators of color.

“I've personally experienced a coronavirus-related racist incident very close to my home, which was shocking and traumatic. I am afraid of having a similar incident again and have become very self-conscious of my Asian American identity whenever I see people.”

“Faculty need to face more serious repercussions for racist language and behavior. We have had several incidents from faculty in our department this academic year which prompted strongly-worded responses from our dean. However, most of the response has come from students, and the faculty members have faced very few consequences as a result of their behavior. UCLA needs to come up with more comprehensive training and discipline for faculty members who engage in such behavior.”

“Maybe include age as a regular term in the inclusion language. I feel that there is ageism, there might be fewer older graduate students in the psychology graduate program, but we do exist and I don't feel we are represented in the diversity aspects of inclusion at UCLA.”

For more information about the analyses presented in this brief, contact:
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Appendix

	Mean- First Generation	Mean - Not First Generation	Significance (Blue shade indicates statistical significance)	Effect Size (Blue shade indicates medium or strong effect size of first generation identity)
How concerned are you about the possible effects of COVID-19 on your learning in the following ways?				
Having reliable access to the Internet	2.15	1.98	0.000	0.159
Learning effectively in the remote instruction environment	3.02	2.96	0.270	0.049
Having access to an appropriate study space	2.82	2.57	0.000	0.225
Accessing the learning support services I need (e.g., writing center, accessibility services)	2.21	1.99	0.000	0.197
Accessing library resources and services	2.53	2.40	0.014	0.110
Accessing technology resources needed to conduct my academic work (e.g., software, computers)	2.39	2.24	0.002	0.138
Doing well on tests and assignments in online courses	2.59	2.45	0.013	0.111
Missing classes	1.97	1.77	0.000	0.167
Ability to conduct research	2.66	2.63	0.620	0.022
Getting the courses I need for my program	1.94	1.77	0.003	0.132
Interacting with course faculty	2.55	2.59	0.512	-0.029
Interacting with my advisor	2.27	2.23	0.457	0.034
Not graduating on time	2.07	2.02	0.405	0.037
Not attending my commencement	2.18	1.94	0.000	0.175
Losing my job/internship	2.25	2.13	0.085	0.077
Not getting a job after graduation	2.79	2.76	0.674	0.019
Paying bills	3.02	2.68	0.000	0.291
Being isolated from friends	3.14	3.15	0.851	-0.008
Accessing healthcare	2.85	2.66	0.000	0.175
Meeting basic needs (e.g., food, housing)	2.62	2.19	0.000	0.386
UCLA is committed to student health and wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic.	2.98	3.00	0.507	-0.030
I know how to protect myself from COVID-19	3.31	3.31	0.905	-0.005

To what extent have the following factors affected your academic

progress during the past year (i.e., previous 12 months)?

Work commitments/responsibilities	2.23	2.17	0.314	0.045
Availability of faculty	2.86	2.96	0.076	-0.080
Graduate program/professional school structure or requirements	2.76	2.79	0.597	-0.024
Other graduate/professional commitments that are not program requirements (e.g., conferences, conference proposal review, publication	2.47	2.53	0.325	-0.044
Courses scheduling/availability	2.65	2.54	0.054	0.087
Personal relationships (e.g., spouse, significant other, parents)	2.76	2.83	0.235	-0.054
Family obligations/responsibilities	2.41	2.55	0.003	-0.132
Financial commitments/concerns	2.26	2.40	0.002	-0.140
Housing situation	2.52	2.60	0.096	-0.075
Commuting/transportation	2.49	2.55	0.191	-0.059
Feeling depressed, stressed, or upset	2.13	2.11	0.647	0.021
Disability	1.71	1.71	0.985	0.001
Chronic illness	1.70	1.72	0.759	-0.014

Compared to when you started your program, how would you characterize your current perception of how long it will take you to complete?	3.34	3.35	0.681	-0.018
How concerned are you about your current academic progress?	2.43	2.55	0.001	-0.145
Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: I have seriously considered leaving my graduate/professional program before completing the degree	2.04	1.98	0.185	0.059

To what extent have you engaged in the following with people at UCLA who are different from you (e.g., by race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, political orientation)?

Shared a meal or socialized	3.71	3.76	0.37	-0.04
Discussed topics about which you had different opinions	3.34	3.34	0.97	0.00
Discussed your different backgrounds	3.43	3.40	0.53	0.03

How would you rate the overall quality of your interaction with people at UCLA who are different from you?

Shared a meal or socialized	4.03	4.20	0.00	-0.16
Discussed topics about which you had different opinions	3.70	3.87	0.00	-0.14
Discussed your different backgrounds	3.89	4.08	0.00	-0.17

Please indicate how much time in the past month you have felt the following

Your daily life has been full of things that were interesting to you	3.04	3.03	0.75	0.014
You felt loved and wanted	3.59	3.69	0.01	-0.109
You have been a very nervous person	3.12	3.09	0.42	0.036
You felt depressed	2.76	2.71	0.28	0.048
You felt tense or "high strung"	3.14	3.19	0.22	-0.055
You have been in firm control of your behavior, thoughts, emotions and feelings	3.32	3.40	0.04	-0.093
You felt you had nothing to look forward to	2.46	2.47	0.89	-0.006
You felt calm and peaceful	3.03	2.97	0.12	0.070
You felt emotionally stable	3.27	3.31	0.30	-0.046
You felt downhearted and blue	2.73	2.76	0.34	-0.043
You felt so down in the dumps that nothing could cheer you up	2.06	1.98	0.06	0.086
You have been moody or brooded about things	2.74	2.70	0.37	0.041
You felt restless, fidgety, or impatient	2.96	2.95	0.83	0.010
You have been anxious or worried	3.25	3.25	0.95	0.003
You have been a happy person	3.25	3.29	0.19	-0.059
You have been in low or very low spirits	2.64	2.57	0.11	0.072
You have felt cheerful or lighthearted	3.06	3.08	0.73	-0.016
You have felt lonely/isolated	2.82	2.82	1.00	0.000

In the past month, how often did you...

Get enough sleep so that you felt rested when you woke up?	2.91	2.99	0.04	-0.091
Have difficulty sleeping (e.g. intermittent sleep, difficulty falling asleep, waking earlier than intended)?	2.53	2.48	0.31	0.046
Feel so tired during the day that it affected your ability to work or study?	2.45	2.33	0.00	0.132

How would you describe your average stress level since the beginning of this academic year? 3.63 3.56 0.06 0.084

Please respond to each item by marking one response:

I feel that people barely know me. 2.90 2.78 0.005 0.125
 I have someone to confide in or talk to about myself or my problems. 3.94 4.06 0.007 -0.120
 I have someone from campus with whom I can do something enjoyable. 3.49 3.59 0.046 -0.090

In the last 12 months:

Did you ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food? 1.69 1.82 0.000 -0.298
 Did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food? 1.67 1.79 0.000 -0.279
 Were you ever hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food? 1.76 1.86 0.000 -0.292

You indicated that you had cut the size of your meals or skipped meals because there wasn't enough money for food. How often did this happen? 2.25 2.26 0.788 -0.022

Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements: The campus culture promotes health and well-being. 2.87 2.94 0.024 -0.101

Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements: Mental health issues are stigmatized on campus 2.13 2.09 0.166 0.062

Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements: I feel I have to sacrifice my health in order to stay on top of my academic responsibilities. 2.81 2.67 0.000 0.159

Agreement or disagreement with the following statements in terms of your graduate/professional experience at UCLA:

UCLA Graduate/professional students in my program are . . .

respected regardless of their race/ethnicity	3.03	3.14	0.003	-0.133
respected regardless of their citizenship status	3.13	3.23	0.004	-0.128
respected regardless of their accent/language ability	2.99	3.04	0.173	-0.061
respected regardless of their gender	3.12	3.20	0.037	-0.094
respected regardless of their gender presentation	3.14	3.19	0.085	-0.078
respected regardless of their sexual orientation	3.23	3.32	0.002	-0.139
respected regardless of their religious beliefs	3.16	3.24	0.007	-0.121
respected regardless of their political opinions	2.89	2.87	0.620	0.022
respected regardless of their social class	3.02	3.18	0.000	-0.199
respected regardless of their parenting/caregiver status	3.16	3.24	0.011	-0.114
treated equitably and fairly by faculty	2.88	2.99	0.003	-0.136

Agreement or disagreement with the following statements in terms of your graduate/professional experience at UCLA:

UCLA has a strong administrative response to incidents of discrimination	2.72	2.80	0.017	-0.108
UCLA has campus administrators who regularly speak about the value of diversity	2.92	3.07	0.000	-0.211

I have sufficient opportunity to . . .

interact socially and make connections with people in my department/program	2.91	2.97	0.065	-0.083
interact academically and make connections with people in my department/program	2.97	3.07	0.005	-0.127
interact socially and make connections with people at UCLA outside of my department/program	2.48	2.38	0.014	0.110
interact academically and make connections with people at UCLA outside of my department/program	2.45	2.39	0.088	0.077
I have a social network outside of UCLA that supports me	3.17	3.21	0.260	-0.051

I would like to meet more people outside of UCLA but am not sure how to do so	2.64	2.65	0.799	-0.011
I feel a sense of belonging with my department or program	2.83	2.93	0.005	-0.127
I feel a sense of belonging on campus, overall	2.75	2.78	0.390	-0.039
Your primary formal advisor is the one faculty member who serves in an official capacity as your academic advisor or research supervisor. Do you have a formal advisor?	1.27	1.34	0.00	-0.156
On average, how many times a quarter do you meet individually with your advisor?	3.03	3.16	0.106	-0.086

Agreement or disagreement with the following statements regarding your relationship with your academic advisor:

My advisor advocates for me and supports me in completing my degree	3.34	3.38	0.336	-0.051
My advisor is focused on helping me gain the professional skills needed to be successful in my field	3.19	3.22	0.574	-0.030
My advisor supports my professional/career goals	3.28	3.31	0.407	-0.044
I feel comfortable approaching my advisor about a variety of career paths	3.12	3.09	0.532	0.033
I feel comfortable approaching my advisor about employment opportunities outside my department.	3.04	3.03	0.833	0.011
I would feel comfortable approaching my faculty advisor for assistance in getting on track with my academic progress	3.21	3.23	0.715	-0.020
My advisor seems genuinely interested in my personal well-being	3.24	3.27	0.380	-0.047
My advisor is aware of and supportive of my financial well-being	2.97	2.97	0.930	0.005
My advisor supports me in balancing my work/life responsibilities with my program.	3.03	3.00	0.542	0.033
My advisor helps me establish a timetable for the tasks of my graduate training	2.96	2.97	0.836	-0.011
My advisor provides timely feedback.	3.13	3.19	0.143	-0.078

My advisor provides constructive feedback.	3.22	3.27	0.256	-0.061
My advisor is open to my pursuing professional development opportunities outside my department.	3.17	3.18	0.805	-0.013
Agreement or disagreement with the following statements regarding your mentor(s):				
I would consider my academic advisor a mentor	2.89	2.87	0.606	0.026
I have a mentor with whom I can discuss personal challenges	3.04	2.94	0.011	0.126
I have difficulty finding mentors at UCLA with whom I identify	2.46	2.36	0.014	0.123
Agreement with the following: At UCLA, I have received sufficient guidance/assistance with obtaining . . .				
Information on how to secure financial support for my graduate work	2.52	2.49	0.545	0.027
Information on how to pursue professional development opportunities related to an academic career	2.70	2.70	0.977	-0.001
Information on how to pursue professional development opportunities related to non-academic careers	2.63	2.64	0.919	-0.005
Support for exploring careers that are of interest to me	2.72	2.79	0.121	-0.070
What or who was...				
The source of information on how to secure financial support for my graduate work?	3.93	4.09	0.124	-0.069
The source of information on how to pursue professional development opportunities related to an academic career?	3.85	3.93	0.456	-0.034
The source of information on how to pursue professional development opportunities related to non-academic careers?	4.43	4.62	0.060	-0.085
The source of support for exploring careers that are of interest to you?	4.41	4.38	0.752	0.014

During this past year, on average how many hours per week did you spend doing the following activities?

Commuting	3.57	3.21	0.000	0.275
Fulfilling family/household responsibilities	3.56	3.33	0.000	0.165
Performing volunteer work or community service	1.90	1.67	0.000	0.229
Participating in student organizations or groups	2.13	2.03	0.079	0.079
Employment/Paid internship on campus	2.49	2.30	0.041	0.092
Employment/Paid internship off campus	2.18	2.17	0.899	0.006
Unpaid internship on campus	1.15	1.11	0.191	0.059
Unpaid internship off campus	1.44	1.30	0.007	0.121

How concerned are you about. . .

Paying for your graduate education	2.13	1.93	0.000	0.245
Your total accumulated educational debt	2.17	1.84	0.000	0.378
Your ability to budget and manage your finances effectively	2.02	1.87	0.000	0.190
Your funding running out before you complete your graduate program	1.99	1.78	0.000	0.252
Filing your taxes accurately	1.92	1.85	0.047	0.090
Covering your expenses during the summer	2.20	1.97	0.000	0.284
Investing/saving for the future (e.g., retirement, home purchase, etc.)	2.53	2.41	0.000	0.168
Has your total income (e.g., from fellowships, stipends, employment, etc. EXCLUDING loans) been sufficient to cover your expenses during this year (i.e., previous 12 months)?	1.56	1.50	0.007	0.120

What method(s) are you using to resolve the gap between your expenses and your income?

Federal Student Loans	0.45	0.33	0.000	0.243
Private Student Loans	0.17	0.13	0.061	0.115
Other private loans	0.07	0.05	0.368	0.055
Credit cards	0.51	0.34	0.000	0.354
Saving accounts, trust funds, stocks	0.34	0.42	0.006	-0.170
Financial support from family, significant other, etc.	0.44	0.61	0.000	-0.353
Public assistance (e.g. Cal Fresh, general relief, state disability, housing assistance)	0.16	0.08	0.000	0.284

Other	0.03	0.05	0.055	-0.118
Not applicable	0.01	0.01	0.743	0.020
How frequently have you done the following in the past year?				
Carried a balance on your credit card from month to month	2.75	2.11	0.000	0.432
Consulted with your department about your finances (e.g. student affairs advisor, faculty advisor, etc.)	1.87	1.67	0.000	0.206
Consulted with on-campus resources about your finances (e.g. counselors from ECRT, Financial Aid, Student Loan Services, Financial Wellness Program, Graduate Division)	1.62	1.42	0.000	0.242
Consulted with off-campus resources about your finances (e.g. banker, accountant, tax professional, wealth manager)	1.55	1.55	0.939	-0.003
Agreement with the following statements in terms of your graduate/professional experience at UCLA:				
The approach to distribution of funding in my department is equitable	2.42	2.52	0.007	-0.123
If I were to take time off from my studies for personal reasons, it would affect my ability to secure continuing funding	2.88	2.80	0.034	0.096
I am comfortable approaching my department with my financial concerns	2.40	2.42	0.605	-0.023
The total cost of attending UCLA is manageable	2.09	2.21	0.003	-0.135
I am comfortable approaching my department with my financial concerns.	2.33	2.33	0.830	0.010
I have experienced delays in the disbursement of my funding.	2.12	2.03	0.103	0.074
Hiring processes have delayed me from beginning employment on campus.	1.35	1.31	0.528	0.029
I have faced financial hardship due to delayed funding disbursements.	1.77	1.59	0.001	0.150
Which of the following best describes your CURRENT living situation?	1.72	1.75	0.154	-0.064
The costs associated with your current housing situation?	2.35	2.37	0.539	-0.028

The location and condition of your current housing situation?	2.81	3.09	0.000	-0.360
What is your current marital status?	1.29	1.33	0.042	-0.091
Student with Dependent Composite Variable using Survey & FAFSA Variables	0.16	0.11	0.001	0.161
To what extent do you think the COVID-19 situation influenced your responses to this survey?	2.81	2.75	0.116	0.071