

# Experiences of Undergraduates with Disabilities at UCLA

## PURPOSE

### Executive Summary

The purpose of this brief is to provide an overview of the experiences of UCLA undergraduates with physical, psychological, and/or learning disabilities as well as overall student awareness of issues facing students with disabilities. Experiences examined include the receipt of accommodations for disabilities, perceptions of campus climate, feelings of satisfaction and belonging, and self-reported awareness of issues related to disabilities, both before and after attending UCLA.

## FINDINGS

Major findings are as follows:

#### *For all UCLA students*

- About 15% of students reported having some type of disability.
- Students reported more frequently hearing negative or stereotypical remarks about disabilities from their fellow students than from faculty, administration, or staff.
- On average, students reported a better level of awareness of disability-related issues at the time of the survey compared to when they started at UCLA, although over 30% of respondents still rated their awareness as *very poor to fair*.

#### *For UCLA students with disabilities*

- 37% of students with disabilities reported receiving accommodations.
- The likelihood of receiving accommodations differed by type of disability.
- The likelihood of receiving accommodations did not differ based on the student's gender, race, or first-generation status.
- Students with disabilities reported lower levels of satisfaction and belonging than their peers without disabilities
- Students reported encountering administrative, academic, physical, and social challenges, and expressed concerns regarding their perceptions of stigma on campus

## IMPLICATIONS

These findings give insight to the challenges facing students with disabilities in accessing accommodations and navigating the campus climate. Students with disabilities felt significantly less satisfied, and less like they belonged at UCLA, compared to their peers without disabilities; many complained that attitudes on campus still stigmatized disabilities. Responses of undergraduates as a whole suggest that while UCLA students do gain increased awareness of issues facing students with disabilities during their time on campus, this awareness is still limited, and more work needs to be done on the institutional level, including educating both students and faculty, so that students with disabilities feel better accommodated and accepted at UCLA.

## Introduction

In order to increase awareness about the campus experiences of undergraduate students with disabilities, this brief provides an overview of accommodations on campus, as well as student perceptions of campus climate and of their own feelings of satisfaction and belonging. In terms of the latter, responses from students with physical, psychological, or learning disabilities are compared to those from students without disabilities in order to gain a broader overview of student experiences on campus.

## Methods

Data utilized in this analysis come from the 2016 University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES). UCUES was administered online to 28,559 UCLA undergraduates in the spring-summer of 2016, with 7218 responses (a 25% response rate). The survey included items relating to academic experiences, co-curricular involvement, intellectual and personal development, civic engagement, and satisfaction.

**Table 1: Demographics of Survey Respondents**

Variable	N	% of Survey Respondents
Students with disabilities		
Yes	1062	14.7%
No (None indicated)	6156	85.3%
Gender		
Male	2621	36.3%
Female	4594	63.6%
Race/ethnicity		
Chicano/Latino	1520	21.1%
American Indian/Alaska Native	9	0.1%
Asian	2309	32.0%
Black/African American	185	2.6%
Pacific Islander	14	0.2%
White	1947	27.0%
Two or more races	402	5.6%
International	636	8.8%
Unknown	160	2.2%
First-generation status		
First-generation	2240	35.8%
Non-first-generation	4015	64.2%

Source: UCUES 2016

For comparisons involving race and ethnicity, categories were collapsed due to small sample sizes, in order to maintain confidentiality as well as provide more statistical power for group comparisons. The four remaining categories were as follows: White, Asian, URM (including Chicano/Latino, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Black/African American, Pacific Islander, and Two or More Races), and Unknown/International.

To analyze the data, we first looked at frequencies and descriptive statistics of the variables of interest. Differences in accommodations for different groups of students were analyzed using chi-squares. When comparing the feelings of satisfaction and belonging of students with disabilities to students without disabilities, the Mann-Whitney test was used in order to compare mean ranks for items that were not normally distributed. Following the quantitative analyses, we explored the open-ended responses of students with disabilities, who were asked to provide any additional comments they felt would give a better picture of their experiences at UCLA. A total of 232 students provided responses for analysis, representing 21.8% of students reporting a disability.

## Findings

### Receiving Accommodations on Campus

Students were asked to report whether they had any physical disabilities, psychological disabilities, and/or learning disabilities. The survey allowed students to report disabilities in as many of the categories as applicable, although multiple disabilities within one category were not counted separately (i.e., the survey could measure whether one student reported both physical *and* psychological disabilities, but could not capture whether a student had only one physical disability versus multiple physical disabilities). A total of 1062 students (14.7% of respondents) reported having some kind of disability. The types of disabilities reported by survey participants are reported in Table 2. Of students who reported having at least one type of disability, 388 (36.6%) stated that they received accommodations on campus, versus 672 (63.4%) who reported that they did not receive accommodations (see Figure 1).

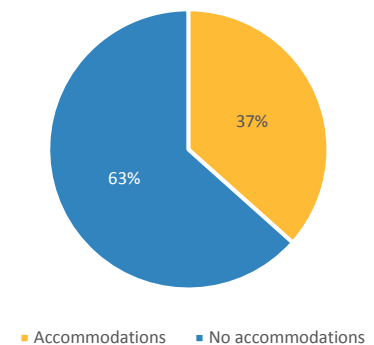
**Table 2: Types of Disabilities Reported by UCLA Undergraduates**

Disability Type	N	% of Survey Respondents
Physical disability only	93	1.3%
Psychological disability only	551	7.6%
sLearning disability only	142	2.0%
Multiple disabilities	276	3.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1062</b>	<b>14.7%</b>

Source: UCUES 2016

**Figure 1. Accommodations for Disabilities**

Percentage of students with disabilities who report receiving accommodations



### Differences Accessing Accommodations

Analyses were conducted in order to examine whether the likelihood of receiving accommodations differed based on disability type, gender, race/ethnicity, and first-generation status.

- There was a significant association between the likelihood of receiving accommodations based on disability type<sup>1</sup> (see Table 3).
- There was no significant association between the likelihood of receiving accommodations based on ethnicity (see Table 4), gender (see Table 5), or first-generation status (see Table 6).

**Table 3. Accommodations by Disability Type**

% of students with each type of disability who report receiving accommodations

Disability Type	N	Receive accommodations?	
		Yes (%)	No (%)
Physical disability only	93	50 (54%)	43 (46%)
Psych. disability only	551	138 (25%)	413 (75%)
Learning disability only	141	52 (37%)	89 (63%)
Multiple disabilities	275	148 (54%)	127 (46%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>1060</b>	<b>388</b>	<b>672</b>

$\chi^2 (3, n = 1,060) = 78.65, p < .001$

Source: UCUES 2016

**Table 4. Accommodations by Ethnicity**

% of students of different ethnicities who report receiving accommodations

Ethnicity	N	Receive accommodations?	
		Yes (%)	No (%)
White	359	142 (40%)	217 (60%)
Asian	230	79 (34%)	151 (66%)
URM	378	134 (35%)	244 (65%)
Unknown/International	79	26 (33%)	53 (67%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>1046</b>	<b>381</b>	<b>665</b>

$\chi^2 (3, n = 1,046) = 2.523, p = .471$

Source: UCUES 2016

<sup>1</sup> Analyses for students with multiple disabilities showed no significant differences in the patterns of receiving accommodations based on the particular combinations of disabilities; therefore, this group of students is reported together in the “multiple disabilities” category.

**Table 5. Accommodations by Gender**

% of male/female students who report receiving accommodations

Gender	N	Receive accommodations?	
		Yes (%)	No (%)
Male	325	124 (38%)	201 (62%)
Female	734	264 (36%)	470 (64%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>1059</b>	<b>388</b>	<b>671</b>

$\chi^2 (1, n = 1,059) = .464, p = .496$

Source: UCUES 2016

**Table 6. Accommodations by First-Generation Status**

% of first-gen and non-first-gen students who report receiving accommodations

First-generation status	N	Receive accommodations?	
		Yes (%)	No (%)
First generation	377	140 (37%)	237 (63%)
Non-first generation	681	246 (36%)	435 (64%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>1058</b>	<b>386</b>	<b>672</b>

$\chi^2 (1, n = 1,058) = .107, p = .743$

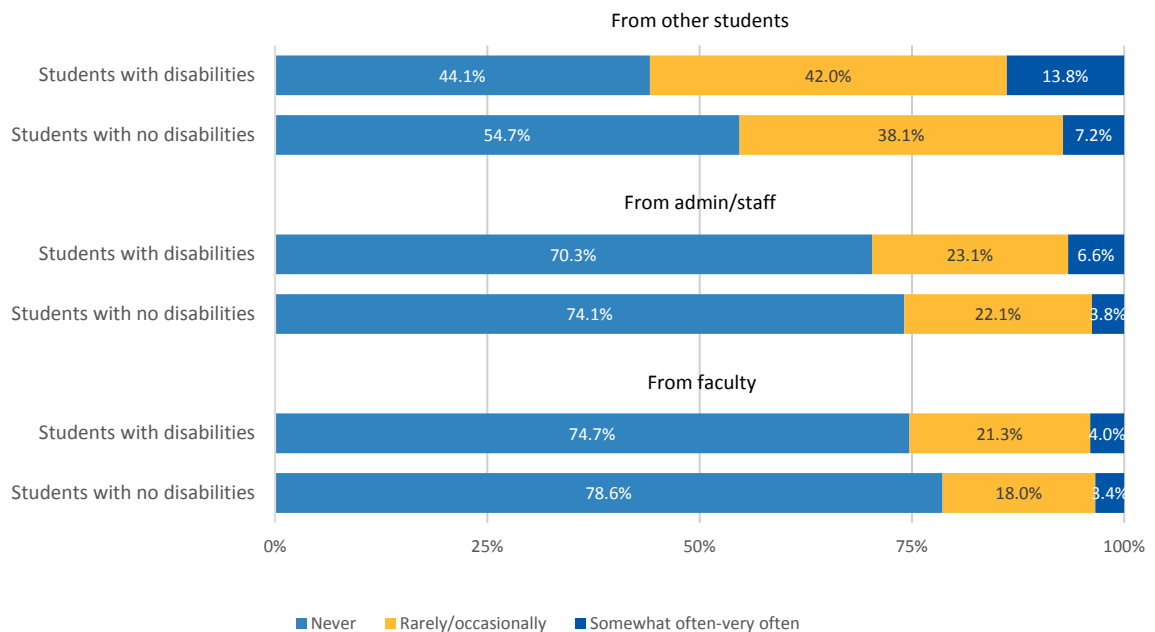
Source: UCUES 2016

## Campus Climate

Survey participants were asked whether they had heard faculty, administrators/staff, or fellow students making negative or stereotypical remarks about disabilities. Students indicated that for both physical disabilities and learning or psychological disabilities, they were most likely to hear negative or stereotypical remarks from other students (see Figures 2 and 3).

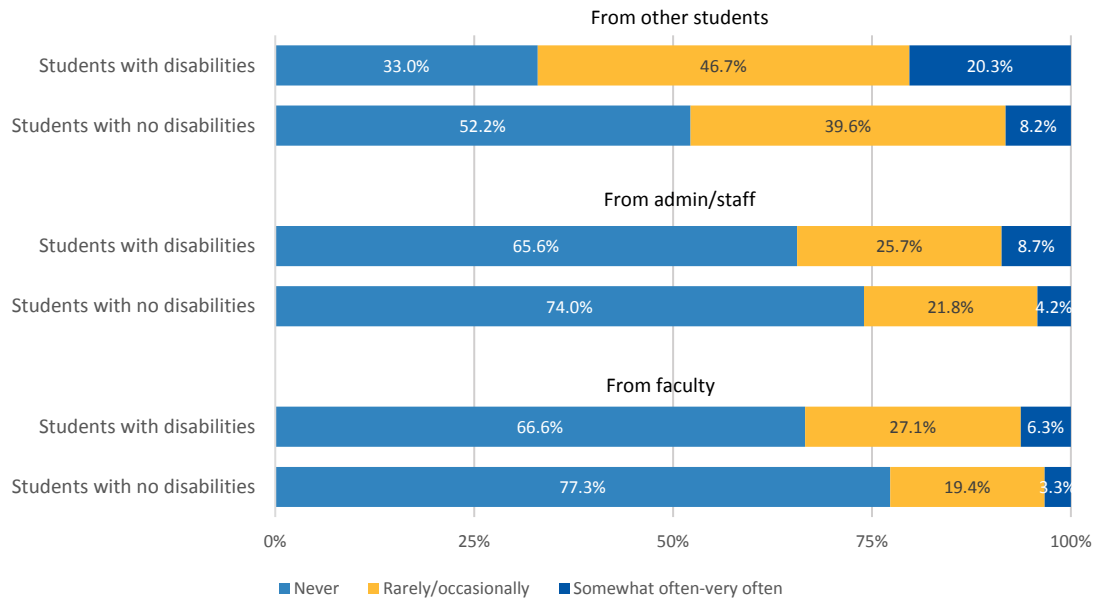
**Figure 2. Overheard negative/stereotypical remarks about physical disabilities**

% reported by students



**Figure 3. Overheard negative/stereotypical remarks about learning or psychological disabilities**

% reported by students

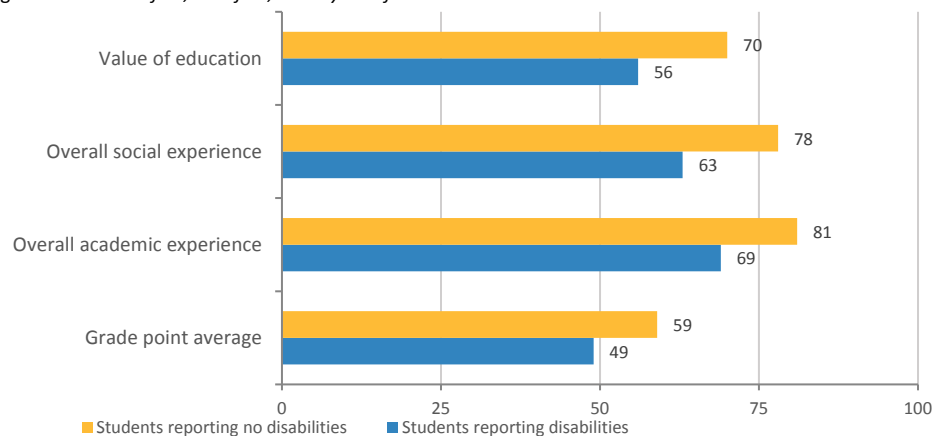


## Feelings of Satisfaction and Belonging

Survey participants were asked to report about their experience at UCLA as well as their feelings of belonging. For questions regarding satisfaction, respondents were asked to rate their feelings as *Very dissatisfied*, *Dissatisfied*, *Somewhat dissatisfied*, *Somewhat satisfied*, *Satisfied*, or *Very satisfied*. For questions regarding belonging, respondents were asked to rate their responses to items as *Strongly disagree*, *Disagree*, *Somewhat disagree*, *Somewhat agree*, *Agree*, *Strongly agree*. Mann-Whitney tests were conducted to determine whether students' feelings of satisfaction and belonging differed for individuals with disabilities versus those without disabilities. For each item but one, students with disabilities had a lower mean rank<sup>2</sup> significant at the  $p=.05$  level, suggesting that students with disabilities had lower feelings of satisfaction and belonging overall. The item for which students without disabilities showed more disagreement, *Faculty promote respect for group differences*, refers to *all* group differences, not only disabilities, so the fact that other students demonstrated lower feelings of belonging is not surprising. In addition, the percentage of students who agreed with this item was comparatively very low overall. An overview of these findings can be seen in Figures 4 and 5 below.

**Figure 4. Feelings of satisfaction**

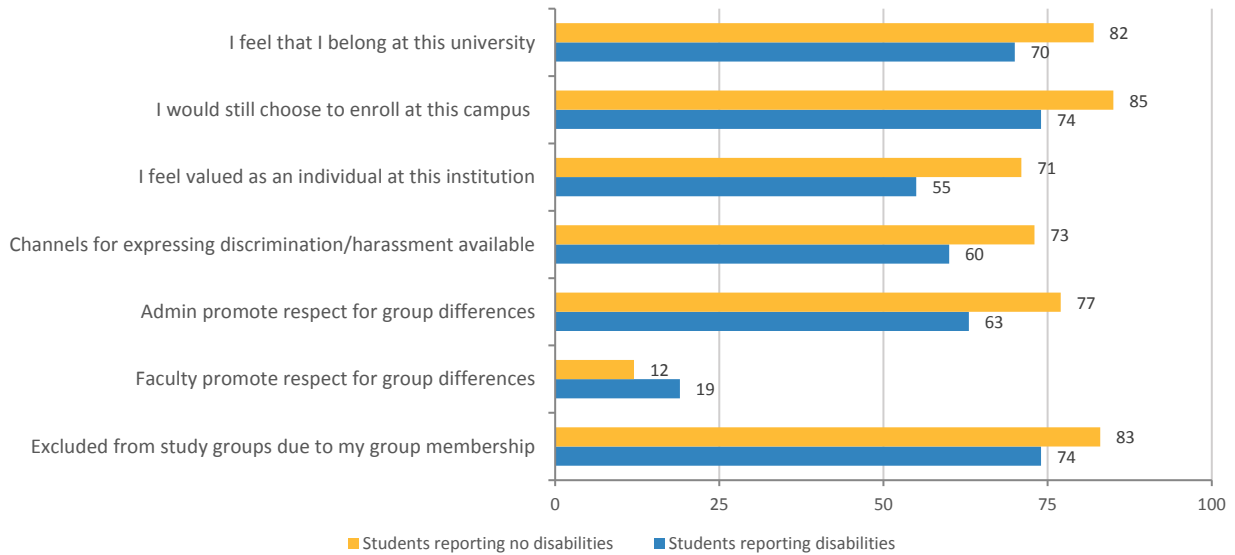
% of students responding *Somewhat satisfied*, *Satisfied*, or *Very satisfied*



<sup>2</sup> For the item "I have been excluded from study groups due to my group membership," the mean rank was higher for students with disabilities based on the reversed nature of the question.

**Figure 5. Feelings of belonging**

% of students responding *Somewhat agree, Agree, or Strongly agree*

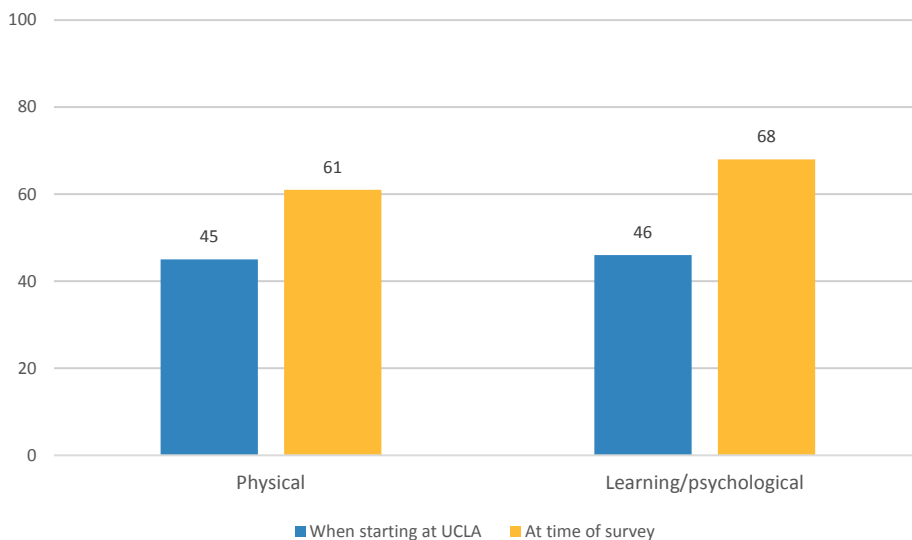


## Awareness of Issues Relevant to Disabilities

Participants rated their awareness of issues relevant to students with disabilities when they started at UCLA as compared to the time at which they took the survey. Figure 6 shows the percentage of respondents rating their awareness as *good, very good, or excellent* at the time they started at UCLA and at the time they took the survey.

**Figure 6. Awareness of issues related to disabilities**

% of respondents rating their awareness as *good, very good, or excellent*



The fact that students' awareness generally increased during their time at UCLA is promising. However, it is important to note that over 30% of respondents considered their awareness *very poor to fair*, even at the time of the survey, indicating that further efforts to increase awareness may be necessary.

In addition, further analyses revealed that awareness differed based on whether the respondent identified as a student with disabilities. Students with disabilities were more likely to rate themselves as *good-excellent* in terms of their awareness of issues related to physical disabilities,  $X^2(5, n = 2997) = 22.411, p = .000$ , and learning/psychological disabilities,  $X^2(5, n = 2994) = 142.867, p = .000$ , compared to students without disabilities (see Table 7).

**Table 7. Awareness of Issues Related to Disabilities**

% of students rating their awareness as good, very good, or excellent

	Students without disabilities (n=2474)		Students with disabilities (n=523)	
	Started UCLA	Now	Started UCLA	Now
Issues Related to Physical Disabilities	45%	60%	50%	66%
Issues Related to Learning/Psychological Disabilities	45%	65%	52%	83%

## Student Experiences in their Own Words

Students who reported any type of disability were given the opportunity to share, in an open-ended format, any other information about how their disability affected their college experience. After deleting responses containing no new information (e.g., “Nothing more to share”), 232 responses were recorded and analyzed. Thirteen responses were positive, 32 neutral, and 186 – the majority – reflected a negative effect on the student’s college experience<sup>3</sup>.

Most positive responses thanked either UCLA’s Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) or Center for Accessible Education (CAE)<sup>4</sup> for the help they had received. Particularly in the case of the latter, however, a number of responses were mixed—that is, they acknowledged the help they had received from CAE but stated that they did not always receive their accommodations. As one student reported, “CAE is great for students with psychiatric disorders- professors in north campus are usually pretty accommodating, but south campus professors are not.”

Students described a variety of ways in which their disabilities negatively affected their experiences. An overview of the major themes is discussed below. Students reported difficulties at the administrative, academic, physical, and social levels, and many described feeling stigmatized for their disabilities.

## Administrative Challenges

Fifty-three students reported encountering structural or administrative challenges, such as accessing services or successfully receiving their accommodations. These reports overwhelmingly came from students with psychological disabilities (including those who had multiple disabilities). Of the 232 total respondents, 76% reported having a psychological disability; however, 92% of those reporting administrative challenges had a psychological disability. Students had two main concerns regarding accessing services at UCLA: that the process for being diagnosed or registered was too onerous, or that they were reluctant to register because they did not want that classification on their record. As one student noted, “...attempting to get a diagnosis and receiving accommodations for such diagnosis seems to take more work than is justifiable for me.” Another shared, “because the disability has to go on the student record permanently, I have not been registered with the disability office at school in case this mark jeopardizes my future.”

<sup>3</sup> Due to ambiguity, one response was not coded as positive, negative, or neutral

<sup>4</sup> The Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) was renamed Center for Accessible Education (CAE) between the administration of this survey and the writing of this report. Where student responses referenced “OSD”, the wording was changed to “CAE”.

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In addition to the first student's concern about the investment of time required to receive services, another respondent also drew attention to the fact that his physical disabilities made it difficult to visit CAE in person as was required to receive services. In addition, several students expressed disappointment with the unavailability of appointments at CAPS, noting that the number of staff made appointment times scarce, and that the student health plan did not cover a sufficient number of visits.

Even students who had registered with CAE were at times dissatisfied with the accommodations they received. Some reported accommodations being insufficient; others reported not receiving the accommodations they were entitled to, either due to administrative difficulties or lack of cooperation from faculty (discussed further below). As one student reported,

"I am supposed to be receiving accommodations but there was always issues with the CAE with getting my accommodations right. There were never note takers for the majority of my classes, there was no Kurzweil assigned to any of my books, my counselor was disrespectful and didn't know how to address me or cared to keep up with me about any of my concerns."

## Academic Challenges

Seventy-five students reported that their disabilities made it difficult for them to keep up with classwork – either in class (e.g., focusing on lecture) or at home (e.g., keeping up with reading and assignments). As one student noted, "Most of the time I do not get to finish my assigned readings." Within these responses, twelve students with psychological disabilities also reported the difficulty of participating in class. Test-taking was also a concern in terms of the increased anxiety it caused for many students, as well as frustration with testing accommodations.

"My psychological disability—anxiety and depression—disables me to participate more effectively in class, including performing class presentations, discussions, and interacting with faculty and students."

"Sometimes teachers are not that caring for your accommodations. For example, I like taking test in classrooms, some professors seemed not understanding. I had one professor that had time to stay after class, but did not want to stay after class and accommodate to me. Also, taking test at the CAE center is very inconvenient. I personally feel like people with learning disability have more questions about the test. But when you take it at the CAE center, you have to walk across campus to ask a question. Some professors do not even like when you ask questions at the CAE center."

Additionally, several students noted that the quarter system only compounded these difficulties, as the fast pace made them feel it was impossible to catch up once they had fallen behind.

## Physical Challenges

Students with physical difficulties reported difficulty walking or parking around campus:

"My condition... is a severe joint disorder that affects my ability to walk up and down the hill every day and get to class on time."

"UCLA is not a disability friendly campus. The Disability van stops running early in the day, they do not pick up at the desired time."

"Often the handicapped parking is "repurposed" for vendors or special functions in Dickson Court, making parking and getting to class very difficult. Parking lot 9 also has the issue where you cannot cut through the CNSI, but have to go completely around it to get to classes in that area."

The physical structures in classrooms themselves proved an issue for students with physical disabilities as well, with several noting the discomfort of seating (particularly chairs with attached desks) for those with back issues, and another replying, "I find I have to fight with other students over my seating accommodations. They



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refuse to give up the disability seating to anyone disabled. Not all students, but some and this makes for a very uncomfortable class environment.”

## Social Challenges

Students reported feeling an impact on their social life, particularly with psychological disorders. In addition, a number of students stated that they felt they had to juggle the energy of trying to keep up with classwork or to be able to socialize outside of class; keeping up with both was not possible for them. Two sample student responses reflect common sentiments among respondents. One noted, “I have social anxiety and mild depression that makes it hard to form lasting friendships and stay motivated to work hard.” Another stated, “My mental illness makes it much harder to interact with other students, focus on my studies, and be involved in college organizations.”

Unlike some of the responses regarding administrative or physical challenges, these responses did not seem to be requesting – whether explicitly or otherwise – any specific action taken from UCLA; rather, their inclusion is intended to reflect additional difficulties impacting their undergraduate experience. However, all of the challenges that have been discussed thus far are likely impacted by what students perceived to be a culture of stigma at UCLA, discussed below.

## Campus Attitudes

Of the 232 respondents, 43 noted having difficulty with faculty or peers due to the prevailing attitudes they perceived at UCLA. Students reporting any type of disability—physical, psychological, and/or learning—shared this concern. Many students felt that disabilities were still stigmatized on campus, and were either reluctant to disclose their disability status or reported feeling afraid that their disability would be perceived as laziness. As one student shared, “I feel like students and faculty don't understand why I need accommodations. I feel bad for receiving accommodations which makes my disability harder to deal with.”

In addition, many students complained that faculty members were not understanding or did not respect the accommodations allowed to the student. The experiences of one respondent are presented below:

“My disability is severe depression and anxiety. It's incredibly difficult to talk about. I had a professor tell me I should drop his course after I told him about it. It makes it nearly impossible to function as a student sometimes, but professors have been stubborn and have refused to understand, denying extensions on assignments. I receive notes through OSD, but volunteer note takers can be inadequate at times.”

The above student's negative faculty experience was one shared by others. However, students' concerns could manifest before they even interact with their professors. One young woman described her reluctance to ask for accommodations in classes in her major field and the need for additional support:

“Asking for accommodations is kind of a double-edged sword. On one hand, it's important to go to professors at the very beginning of the quarter, explain your situation, and discuss options. On the other hand, these are professionals in the field I'm interested in. Their very first impression of me will be the girl with the mental illness asking for special treatment (I'm also backed by OSD)... I really would have appreciated someone who could help me speak to professors without much anxiety and who could support me academically.”

The above examples provide a snapshot of a student body wanting additional support in navigating issues related to, and care needed for, their disabilities.

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## Conclusions and Implications

Students' survey responses give an overview of their experiences at UCLA that is better understood given their open-ended explanations. Thirty-seven percent of students with disabilities report receiving accommodations for those disabilities: perhaps this figure would be higher if students did not perceive the process of receiving accommodations to be difficult, or if they were not reluctant to classify themselves as someone with a disability on their permanent student record. Additionally, of the 37% of students who did receive accommodations, several stated that they were not able to receive these accommodations due to administrative problems or uncooperative faculty.

Students who reported receiving accommodations for their disabilities did not differ by gender, race, or first-generation status. However, receipt of accommodations did differ based on the type of disability reported by the student. Students' open-ended responses can give us some insight here; for example, several students reported not wanting to document a psychological disability for fear that it would affect them in the future, e.g., in military service. Others reported practical difficulties relating to cost or time that affected their ability to register with CAE. SAIRO's previous report, titled "[Students with Disabilities, Campus Resources and Sources of Support](#)" provides further insight into the manner in which students utilize resources at UCLA.

Results show there is room for improvement in the climate for students with disabilities. Survey respondents reported hearing negative or stereotypical comments more often from their fellow students than from faculty, staff, or administrators. This finding is not surprising, as we would expect undergraduates to spend more time with fellow students, which would likely result in hearing more "careless" or casual comments than they might hear from a faculty member or administrator. More striking is the fact that students with disabilities reported lower levels of satisfaction and belonging on every item than their peers without disabilities. Again, their open-ended responses help us better understand the factors amplifying academic and social challenges at UCLA.

Finally, responses regarding students' awareness before and after their attendance at UCLA suggested an overall increase in awareness since attending UCLA. However, it is still important to consider the fact that only 61% and 68% of students rated their current understanding of physical and psychological/learning disabilities, respectively, as *good*, *very good*, or *excellent*, meaning that approximately one-third of students rated their awareness as *fair*, *poor*, or *very poor*. Open-ended responses from students with disabilities suggested that many felt disabilities were still stigmatized on UCLA's campus; this stigma could relate to a lack of overall awareness. While attitudes towards disabilities are undoubtedly complex, the perceptions of the undergraduate student body certainly suggest that the university must continue to work to ensure that students with disabilities feel appropriately accommodated and accepted by their peers, professors, and the university community as a whole. The 2018 *Stigma-Free UC* initiative, which includes talks and webinars for faculty and staff, is a positive step, but requires faculty and staff to attend on their own initiative. Further professional development for faculty, and vocal support from campus administrators setting an example for fellow students, would continue a trend of needed change.

## Appendix A: Reader-Accessible Tables

### Students reporting overhearing negative or stereotypical remarks about disabilities

#### Percent of students who report overhearing negative remarks about physical disabilities from faculty

Never	Students with no disabilities: 79%	Students with disabilities: 75%
Rarely or occasionally	Students with no disabilities: 18%	Students with disabilities: 21%
Somewhat often to very often	Students with no disabilities: 3%	Students with disabilities: 4%

#### Percent of students who report overhearing negative remarks about physical disabilities from staff or admin

Never	Students with no disabilities: 74%	Students with disabilities: 70%
Rarely or occasionally	Students with no disabilities: 22%	Students with disabilities: 23%
Somewhat often to very often	Students with no disabilities: 4%	Students with disabilities: 7%

#### Percent of students who report overhearing negative remarks about physical disabilities from other students

Never	Students with no disabilities: 55%	Students with disabilities: 44%
Rarely or occasionally	Students with no disabilities: 38%	Students with disabilities: 42%
Somewhat often to very often	Students with no disabilities: 7%	Students with disabilities: 14%

#### Percent of students who report overhearing negative remarks about learning or psychological disabilities from faculty

Never	Students with no disabilities: 77%	Students with disabilities: 67%
Rarely or occasionally	Students with no disabilities: 19%	Students with disabilities: 27%
Somewhat often to very often	Students with no disabilities: 3%	Students with disabilities: 6%

#### Percent of students who report overhearing negative remarks about learning or psychological disabilities from staff or admin

Never	Students with no disabilities: 74%	Students with disabilities: 66%
Rarely or occasionally	Students with no disabilities: 22%	Students with disabilities: 26%
Somewhat often to very often	Students with no disabilities: 4%	Students with disabilities: 9%

## Percent of students who report overhearing negative remarks about learning or psychological disabilities from other students

Never	Students with no disabilities: 52%	Students with disabilities: 33%
Rarely or occasionally	Students with no disabilities: 40%	Students with disabilities: 47%
Somewhat often to very often	Students with no disabilities: 8%	Students with disabilities: 20%

## Feelings of satisfaction and belonging

### Feelings of satisfaction: percent of students who report feeling somewhat satisfied to very satisfied about the following items

Value of education	Students with no disabilities: 70%	Students with disabilities: 56%
Overall social experience	Students with no disabilities: 78%	Students with disabilities: 63%
Overall academic experience	Students with no disabilities: 81%	Students with disabilities: 69%
Grade point average	Students with no disabilities: 59%	Students with disabilities: 49%

### Feelings of belonging: percent of students who somewhat agree to strongly agree with the following items

I feel that I belong at this university	Students with no disabilities: 82%	Students with disabilities: 70%
I would still choose to enroll at this campus	Students with no disabilities: 85%	Students with disabilities: 74%
I feel valued as an individual at this institution	Students with no disabilities: 71%	Students with disabilities: 55%
Channels for expressing discrimination or harassment are available	Students with no disabilities: 73%	Students with disabilities: 60%
Admin promote respect for group differences	Students with no disabilities: 77%	Students with disabilities: 63%
Faculty promote respect for group differences	Students with no disabilities: 12%	Students with disabilities: 19%
I am excluded from study groups due to my group membership	Students with no disabilities: 83%	Students with disabilities: 74%

## Awareness of issues related to disabilities

### Students who felt their awareness was good to excellent at different points in time

Awareness of issues related to physical disabilities	When they started at UCLA: 45%	At the time of the survey: 61%
Awareness of issues related to learning or psychological disabilities	When they started at UCLA: 46%	At the time of the survey: 68%