



## 2009-2010 Undergraduate Research Partnership Initiative Report “Exclusionary Spaces”

*The Student Affairs Information and Research Office (SAIRO) is the research and assessment office within UCLA’s Student Affairs organization. The mission of SAIRO is to support the learning and development of the whole student by providing reliable, timely, and useful information about students and their experiences; by developing the capacity of student affairs and other stakeholders to collect, interpret, and utilize data to enhance the quality of students’ educational experience and environment; and by helping Student Affairs units assess and document the effectiveness of their programs and practices.*

### CONTENTS:

Executive Summary	1
Background	2
Study Design and Methodology	2
Findings	4
Recommendations for Student Affairs	15
References	16
Appendices	16

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### Executive Summary

In 2009, the Student Affairs and Information Research Office (SAIRO) initiated a research partnership with current UCLA undergraduates in an effort to collect qualitative data on varying aspects of the campus climate. During the 2009-2010 academic year, SAIRO invited undergraduate students from academic disciplines across campus to participate in the design, data collection, and analysis of a Participatory Action Research (PAR) project exploring community and sense of belonging at UCLA. Undergraduate participants, herein referred to as participant-researchers (PRs) to reflect their dual position as both the subject of investigation and the investigator, identified the following research questions:

How does exclusion influence the undergraduate experience at UCLA?

- How/where do students feel excluded?
- Why is it important for the student to be part of the space from which they feel excluded?
- What individual or institutional strategies/tools help undergraduates navigate what they perceive as exclusionary spaces?

Two SAIRO staff members (with doctoral and faculty-level research experience) supported all research activities by 1) providing qualitative research methods training and instruction, 2) facilitating weekly discussions, 3) developing questions for discussion and weekly agendas, and 4) providing students with the resources and equipment to carry out the selected research design.

## Research Team

### Project Facilitators

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Participant-researchers found that exclusion, a sense of isolation, withdrawal, or rejection from a community at UCLA, can play a significant role in the undergraduate experience. Sources of exclusion influenced both academic and social life at UCLA for PRs. Sources of academic exclusion included limited access to the following: 1) campus resources such as graduate and professional school libraries, 2) undergraduate research, and 3) positive faculty interactions. Registered UCLA student organizations were identified as the primary source of social exclusion among participant researchers. Additionally, widespread technology use had an isolating influence on individuals that extended from the classroom environment to the home environment, resulting in feelings of both academic and social exclusion.

Participant-researchers also identified key strategies and tools that have helped them to transform exclusionary spaces into more inclusive ones in their daily lives at UCLA. Participant-researchers emphasized individual agency as a key mediator of success but also acknowledged the role key personnel and programs can play in facilitating a sense of belonging. PRs developed recommendations based explicitly on findings regarding social exclusion. PRs recommended that campus administrators create programming to promote genuine dialogue and interaction between student groups currently segregated on the basis of racial, cultural, or religious identities.

## Background

The Undergraduate Research Partnership Initiative, launched in 2009, represents a research collaboration

between SAIRO and UCLA undergraduates. The purpose of the initiative is to meaningfully engage UCLA undergraduates in the collection of institutional data, provide Student Affairs and the broader UCLA community with qualitative data on the experiences of UCLA students, and produce on-going research that will identify characteristics of a positive campus climate for students of all backgrounds inclusive of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity, socioeconomic status, and disability. The initiative provides undergraduate participants an opportunity to receive two units of course credit per quarter through the Student Research Program (SRP) and a total of six academic units over the course of a completed project. Additionally, undergraduates gain valuable first-hand experience in designing a research study as well as collecting and analyzing qualitative data. Ultimately, SAIRO's collaboration with undergraduate researchers is an attempt to foster a mutually beneficial relationship in which students' voices are heard and incorporated into the working body of information used in Student Affairs.

The 2009-2010 Undergraduate Research Initiative Partnership study broadly explored how UCLA undergraduates develop community on campus. SAIRO pursued this particular line of research in an effort to add to existing knowledge about the quality of life on campus for undergraduate students from diverse backgrounds. The findings from this study reflect the perceptions and experiences of participating students and may not be generalizable to the undergraduate student population as a whole. Furthermore, the findings of this study are intended to provide an in-depth look at campus experiences and provide a more detailed portrait than existing survey data can provide. The insights gleaned from this study can be informative to administrative decision-making related to fostering a positive campus environment.

## Study Design and Methodology

Two parameters guided the 2009-2010 study: 1) it would broadly explore community building at UCLA and 2) utilize a Participatory Action Research (PAR) SAIRO chose to explore community at UCLA because it is of topical interest in Student Affairs. A PAR design was selected because it allows individual

participants to become researchers of their own experiences so they can explore and identify realistic solutions for the issues they believe need to be addressed within their environment. Participant-researchers chose to use Photovoice, a method that allows individuals to use photographs to identify problems and solutions within their communities (Wang & Burris, 1997; Streng, et al., 2004), to address their questions about exclusion at UCLA. Participant-researchers developed the following research questions for the study:

How does exclusion influence the undergraduate experience at UCLA?

- How/where do students feel excluded?
- Why is it important for the student to be part of the space from which they feel excluded?
- What individual or institutional strategies/tools help undergraduates navigate what they perceive as exclusionary spaces?

The research process was divided into quarterly tasks.

During Fall Quarter, participant-researchers solidified methods and research question, and received approval to conduct the study from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). During Winter Quarter, PRs collected primary data in the form of photos and journal entries (created in response to the prompts listed in Appendix A). Each week, PRs shared photos and journal entries with the research team via discussions facilitated by SAIRO staff (see Appendix B for a list of prompts used to facilitate weekly discussions). These group discussions resulted in refinement and elaboration of ideas and were audio recorded. Data analysis occurred during the Spring Quarter and involved identifying themes inductively from transcripts and journals (open coding) and then reading them thoroughly to find support for those themes (focused coding) of all discussion transcripts and journals by the research team. Table 1 provides an overview of the key quarterly research tasks for participant-researchers and SAIRO staff.

A total of six undergraduate students participated in the data collection and analysis phases of this study. These students majored in various disciplines ranging

**Table 1. Quarterly Research Tasks**

	2009 Fall Quarter	2010 Winter Quarter	2010 Spring Quarter
Participant-Researcher Tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify research question and methodological approach</li> <li>• Complete IRB paperwork</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collect data via weekly photo-taking, journaling, and group discussion</li> <li>• Write reflective memos on the research process</li> <li>• Transcribe audio files from weekly discussions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Code discussion transcripts and journals</li> <li>• Check for inter-rater reliability</li> <li>• Present preliminary findings to Council of Student Affairs Directors (CSAD)</li> </ul>
Facilitator Tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify and recruit participant-researchers</li> <li>• Provide instruction on qualitative research methods and design via assigned readings and group discussion</li> <li>• Identify key tasks and timeline for PRs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate weekly discussion of photos/ journals</li> <li>• Facilitate weekly discussion to generate future photo/journal prompt.</li> <li>• Write research memos</li> <li>• Meet weekly to discuss administrative tasks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate analysis via weekly writing assignments and discussion questions</li> <li>• Create timeline for completing analysis</li> <li>• Facilitate inter-rater reliability process</li> </ul>

from Sociology to Cognitive Science and were at various levels of their undergraduate education. Participant-researchers were of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds. It is also important to note that three of the final six participants began the project after Fall Quarter's conceptualization and design phase. In addition two members of the initial research team did not continue with the project after Fall due to external time commitments and thus are not listed as participant-researchers.

## Findings: A Portrait of Exclusion

Analysis of discussion transcripts, photos, and journal entries yielded several important findings regarding exclusionary experiences at UCLA. Some are the direct result of collaborative analysis while others reflect insights developed by SAIRO staff post-participation. First, we identify the spaces in which students experience exclusion and divide these spaces into two broad categories: academic exclusion and social exclusion. Next, we highlight the factors that mediate exclusion at UCLA and discuss how they operate in the lives of participant-researchers. Lastly, we focus on the ways in which participant-researchers navigate exclusion and thereby transform exclusionary spaces into ones that are more inclusive. We begin with a definition of "exclusion," followed by a discussion of findings.

### Exclusion Defined

Participant-researchers entered this study with an interest in broadly exploring how students create community at UCLA. Through several discussions of community and belonging, PRs identified instances in which they were excluded from communities on campus or times when they contributed to the exclusion of others. Eventually, PRs decided to explore how exclusion, rather than belonging, is cultivated at UCLA and in so doing, defined exclusion as the opposite of belonging.

Exclusion is a corollary to a "sense of belonging," identified in higher education literature as a feeling of identification and affiliation with the university (Tinto, 1975, 1987). This construct is often described as a "psychological manifestation" of the extent to which a student is integrated into the university environment (Tinto, 1975, 1987; Hoffman, et al., 2002). Based on this concept of sense of belonging and discussions

among PRs, exclusion at UCLA is understood as a sense of isolation, withdrawal, or rejection from a given form of community. What follows is an overview of how participant-researchers in this study experienced exclusion (as participants) as well as conceptualized, contextualized, and analyzed those experiences (as researchers).

### Sources of Academic Exclusion

Here, we identify the sources of exclusion influencing academic success at UCLA. Sites of academic exclusion are organized into four categories: 1) access to campus resources, 2) meaningful participation in undergraduate research, 3) faculty interaction, and 4) technology use.

#### *Access to Campus Resources*

Participant-researchers identified the inaccessibility of campus resources as a source of exclusion that directly hampers academic success at UCLA. While PRs acknowledged an availability of many resources to help students succeed academically, they found that campus resources were constrained in two key areas: library use and the layout of campus for students with physical disabilities.

Participant-researchers perceived UCLA's library system as overwhelming and inaccessible to students. PRs identified feeling pressured by an implicit demand to know how to conduct library research without knowing where to ask for help or information about how to access library resources. Some students described asking for help as embarrassing- as if it meant that they did not belong at a research institution. As one student explained, "Anytime I go into a library, it just seems like I'm hesitant to ask the librarian a question because [I] just might seem dumb" (T3, p. 12; 23-24). Although the smaller campus libraries were described as more welcoming to students, they often do not allow students to check out books and serve more as reading rooms rather than full service libraries. PRs also felt excluded from graduate and professional school libraries. Limited undergraduate access to the law library, for example, sent the message that undergraduates are an unwelcome student population. One participant-researcher photographed and described the ticketing system at the Law library, which grants a limited number of tickets per day to undergraduates who are kept under close surveillance:

The UCLA law library has a limited access card that every undergraduate has to get once they come inside. It says, ‘Ticket holders must keep ticket visible at all times. Ticket holders who are in areas reserved for UCLA Law students, or are violating any other library policy or are disruptive in any way, will have their tickets revoked and must leave the library immediately’...This essentially says ‘No Undergraduates Allowed’ to me (T3, p. 11; 30-40).

Students with disabilities found the physical landscape of UCLA particularly inaccessible. One participant-researcher described a hidden maze of wheelchair access ramps that failed to provide timely access from one side of campus to another. Through journaling, this participant researcher described going to class as a “nightmare” in which travelling the shortest distances on campus can be an “extreme journey” (J1, p. 2; 34-41). Figure 1 captures these feelings of exclusion; the wheelchair is located at the bottom of the iconic Janns steps to demonstrate that what serves as a source of pride and beauty on campus for many can serve as a symbol of marginalization and exclusion for others.

Furthermore, this student described a perception that wheelchair ramps on campus are hidden from plain sight in such a way that they look like service entrances. The participant-researcher said:

... [It’s] like every handicap entrance is through the bottom of the basement or the back of the building and they don’t put anything in front the buildings.[It’s] like they don’t want to mess up the aesthetics or what-

ever. It’s a hassle because [for] certain buildings I have to go all the way around a building...[and up] some ramp that’s like too steep of an incline for anyone to make it up. There are stairs in the front and stairs in the back and it’s like impossible (T4, p.3; 22-29).

After hearing about the experiences of one PR, the research team identified physical access as an important dimension of exclusion at UCLA.

#### *Undergraduate Research: Access and Participation*

Participant-researchers noted the centrality of the academic research function at UCLA; however, they often described it as an activity from which they felt excluded. PRs felt that there was little instruction on how to get started doing research, with very little introduction provided by coursework. One participant-researcher described a frustration with taking many courses but still having no idea where to find help with research. He expressed, “You take all these



**Figure 1**

classes (God knows how many classes we have), but there doesn't seem like there's anywhere where you can go and do that if you have an idea that you want to research" (T3, p.18; 9-15).

Participant-researchers in the later years of their undergraduate careers expressed concern over the quality of research experience undergraduates can access. One participant-researcher said, "...I don't get much from my professor, in fact I send my introduction to him last quarter and I don't think he's even read it. I haven't gotten feedback" (T3, p.18; 9-15). Students acknowledged that professors are limited in the time they have to mentor undergraduate researchers, but also described a strong need for help and mentorship. Additionally, participant-researchers expressed concern that research at the undergraduate level often translates into exploitable labor. As one student said, "Everyone knows your mentor is really a graduate student that you're working with. Your professor is never really your mentor. The professor just kind of signs off the paper for your graduate student so that he can use you and him to do the research for him" (T3, p. 19; 22-24). Thus, even when participant-researchers were involved in research, it often was not perceived as meaningful engagement or a mentoring opportunity.

### *Faculty Interactions*

Faculty can contribute to feelings of exclusion just as much as they can help students feel a sense of belonging on campus. Participant-researchers described ways in which both the limited availability of faculty for mentoring as well as the underrepresentation of faculty of color contributed to their feelings of academic exclusion.

PRs found professors incredibly difficult to access given their many competing demands: "I think they just have too much on their plate to mentor an undergrad or every other undergrad that comes up to them and that's probably why they're the stars in their field" (T3, p. 15; 27-31). Another student noted that although it is difficult to form relationships with professors, the quality of education at UCLA is not entirely diminished by their limited availability: "I think that academically we get a very good education, but we're also excluded from the exclusive academic

community and you're not making relationships with professors. It's just much harder to do that [here]" (T3, p.13; 16).

Participant-researchers also had mixed interpretations of racial diversity among faculty- some said that the racial composition of the faculty is less important than the extent they can relate to students via a diverse range of life experiences. However, other PRs felt that a limited number of faculty of color represented a significant source of academic exclusion because it provides students of color with fewer role models and mentors.

### *Technology Use*

Participant-researchers identified technology as a potential source of academic exclusion at UCLA. They noted that while technology can help facilitate communication among students, it can also lead to isolation from peers and disengagement from course material. Text-messaging, in particular, was described as a common distraction during lecture. Participant-researchers indicated that students who disengage in lecture are often seen as either unapproachable because of their immersion in technology, or not worth approaching due to their lack of academic engagement.

Laptop use was also described as particularly distracting. For example, one participant-researcher recalled a course that was much more enriching when the professor banned laptops in class, saying, "I ... think it creates barriers. I have a history class where the professor asked everyone to get rid of their laptops ... and he was a good professor. He was actually able to hold our attention and I actually learned something. I think the laptop would have created a distraction if I had it in the classroom" (T3, p. 6-7, 39-3). In many ways, technology was portrayed as something useful but potentially resulting in disengagement. Participant-researchers recognized the fine line between the two, but didn't know exactly where to draw that line. Figure 2 is a photo a participant-researcher took while studying to portray a link between technology and academic engagement.

### **Sources of Social Exclusion**

Here, we identify the sources of exclusion influencing

social engagement at UCLA. Sites of social exclusion are categorized into two broad categories: 1) social groups and 2) technology use. PRs identified student groups or registered UCLA student organizations as the primary source of social exclusion through analysis of discussion transcripts and journal entries. For all PRs, student groups played an important role in exclusion, and they spent more time analyzing these experiences than others.

### *UCLA Student Groups*

Although student groups can play a positive role in the undergraduate experience, participant-researchers found that student group participation is complicated by 1) pressure to join a group in order to feel a connection on campus, 2) organization of groups on the basis of a racial, ethnic, cultural, or religious identity, 3) identity status often determines eligibility for group membership, and 4) relationships between student groups can be somewhat negative. Collectively, these issues make student group membership quite complex and can sometimes result in feelings of isolation and exclusion from peers.

Students identified a need to belong to a student group on campus in order to turn an expansive community into a smaller one. Participant-researchers described difficulty in forming genuine connections with peers. As one student described, clubs become the only way to connect. She said,

I feel like I need that that like club thing or just like a place where you see people all the time. [Even] my parents were encouraging me to join the Chinese student association to meet people. I kind of feel pressure- like to meet people I have to join like a club but I really don't want to do it that way... (T4, 22; 23-27).

Furthermore, participant-researchers found that groups are more often organized on the basis of a cultural, racial, ethnic, or religious identity than on shared values or goals. For example, PRs described how the desire to volunteer as a tutor in an inner-city school can quickly become a stressful situation because

one must decide which racial group they wish to identify with. Tutoring is divided along racial/ethnic lines, and as one student said, “[The African Student Union goes] to Inglewood High School and M.E.C.H.A goes to East LA” (T4, p. 14; 30). Ultimately, club activities were described primarily as a way to maintain the identity of the group rather than perform community service work. One student said, “That’s one of the things that makes me very mad...at UCLA...[there are] so many people but to fit in you have to identify yourself as something like catholic Hispanic or Asian or whatever” (T4, p. 13; 10-12). Ultimately, individual membership in a student group is determined by how closely an individual meets the religious, ethnic or racial criteria.

Participant-researchers described Greek organizations as examples of groups that are also racially homogeneous. One PR acknowledged that there are different multicultural fraternities and sororities but said, “they are not part of the Greek life” (T4, p. 22; 10). She went on to describe,

I had two roommates who were Asian and they're in one of the Asian sororities. They would tell me to join and rush with them but...I can never...[I] stay away from all the clubs that you have to be a certain race...[the clubs] where it's like in their name. I'm... trying to find my identity and I just



Figure 2

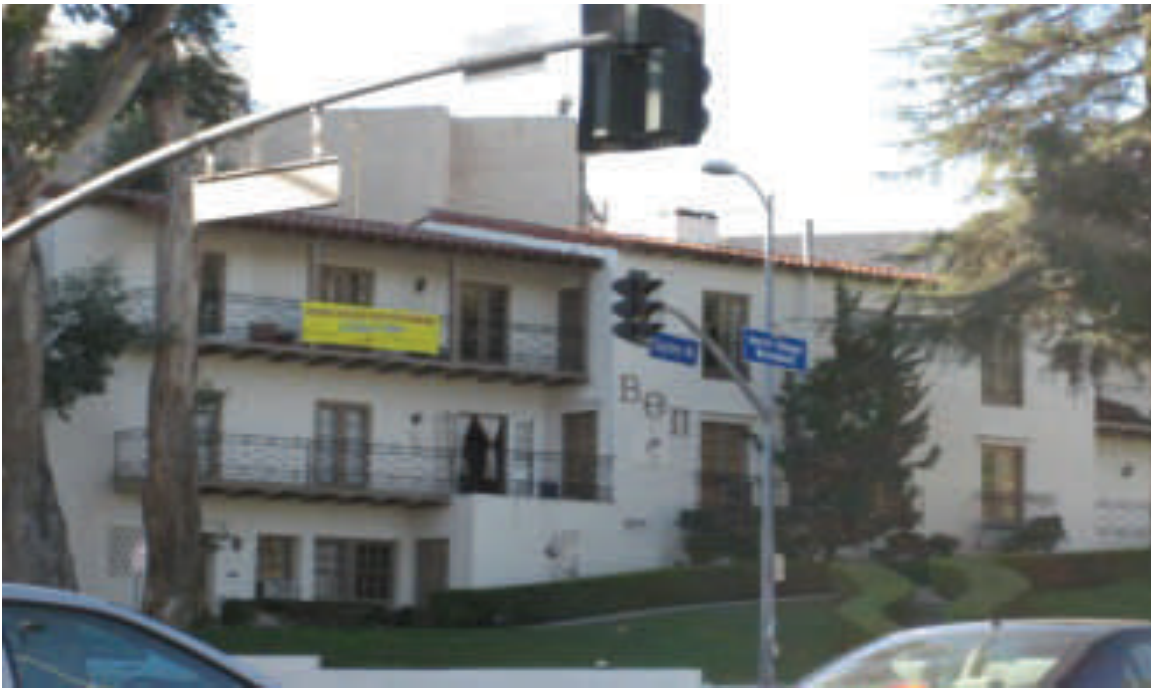


Figure 3

don't want to be named by my race  
(T4, p. 22; 10-16).

Thus, this participant-researcher described a racially segregated Greek system that she didn't want to be a part of if it would preclude her from interacting with a racially diverse group of students. She took a photo (Figure 3) of "frat row," a string of Greek fraternity houses near campus, to express the physical isolation of such organizations from non-members.

The image of "frat row" evoked additional feelings of exclusion for other participant-researchers. One PR described how she couldn't afford to participate in a sorority because of the fees associated with membership. To her, it wasn't worth the added expense to "feel like part of a family" (T4, p. 23; 5-6). Another PR felt that UCLA's frat row symbolizes the exclusion of African-Americans from the housing market. He noted, "all the Black fraternities and sororities don't have houses... when a lot of the frats were buying their houses Black people couldn't even own property over here so that's like a whole 'nother level of exclusion" (T 4, p. 23; 12-22). Thus, much of the exclusion PRs associated with fraternities and sororities at UCLA was implicitly linked to class and racial composition of these specific student organizations.

Participant-researchers also found that students are filtered in or out of groups like fraternities and sororities through flyering practices on Bruin Walk, in which students invite others to group activities by handing out flyers. One PR took a picture of Bruin Walk and described how, like the Janns Steps, this iconic UCLA location is also a source of exclusion (Figure 4). She said, "...Bruin Walk is where I feel I see exclusion the most. I see certain group like fraternities and sororities being very selective with whom they choose to invite to their events just based on physical appearances" (J1, p.3; 10-12).

Another PR said that the flyering system on Bruin Walk is, "kinda sad because you think of Bruin Walk as the center [of campus] that everyone goes through. You think of it more as open and free for all students but it's really invitations to join certain groups" (T4, p. 13; 39-42). Another PR recounted her experience when she asked for a flyer from a group that she knew she physically wouldn't meet the criteria for based on her style of dress. She said,

, ...I think it's all just in their physical appearance because obviously they don't know the person they're giving [the flyer] to. They're very selective



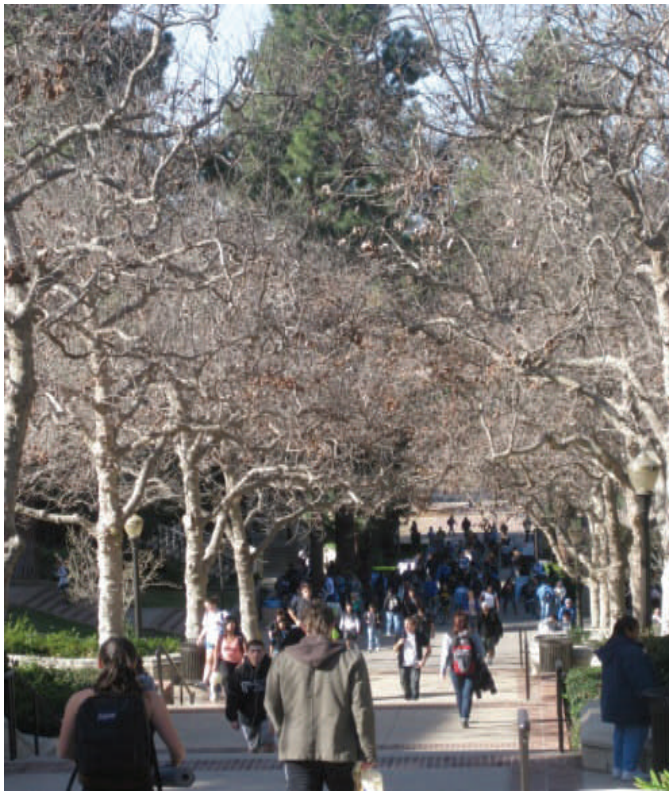


Figure 4

and it just adds to the exclusion. Why can't I go to that just because I might not be as dressed up as much as you are doesn't mean I don't want to go the event.... One time I went up to them in my gym clothes and I was raggedy because cause I had gone running. I asked if I could [have a flyer] and she gave it to me and I said thanks. But... she was very hesitant toward it. She looked at her friend [and waited] until she goes 'okay' (T4, p. 9; 10-20).

Overall, participant-researchers found it difficult to belong to groups organized around a racial, ethnic, or religious identity they did not share. Although technically, PRs felt that they could participate in any group, belonging is often predicated on whether an individual is a member of a particular racial/ethnic group and to some extent, social class. One PR described feeling out of place at an event because her racial identity did not match that of the group: "you could still go but I did once [to an Asian club] and they treated me like the most awkward person in the world and so it's like 'why would you invite someone and not make them

feel welcome?" For this PR, this experience resulted in feeling excluded. She went on to describe, "it almost drives me to be more like, alright, just focus on what I gotta do and get out. Don't try and build a community because my only goal here is to graduate" (T4, p. 9; 29-31).

Participant-researchers said that even if they identify with the racial/ethnic identity of a student group, students may feel marginalized if they do not meet the ethnic criteria or standards of the group. One participant-researcher described feeling angered by the pressure to prove she was ethnically "enough" for the group:

There's all these clubs being proud of the fact that your Asian or being proud of this and it kind of takes away from the fact that you know you are just a normal people getting together trying to do something. It's not like okay we're all Asian lets prove that we are Asian or something or lets certify that we are powerful. I don't really see the point [in declaring] I'm Hispanic and I'm proud of that [but] I'm just like okay I'm Hispanic that's great. But what about my other talents like singing or writing or whatever? ... I guess what I'm trying to say is that there is so much pressure on looking a certain way and trying to look like depending on



Figure 5

where you are going (T4, p. 11; 19-27).

Thus, while student group participation provides members with a sense of community or family, those who are not part of a given group may feel excluded. Such is the paradox of student group membership depicted in Figure 5. The closed circle creates a sense of belonging for those inside but may contribute to feelings of exclusion for those outside.

Furthermore, segregation of student groups leads to complicated relationships between groups with significant implications for individual members. One participant-researcher described how his membership in a student organization directly impacted how others viewed him. His individual identity became inextricably linked to his association with a group organized on the basis of an African-American male status. He took a photo (Figure 6) of only his clothing to demonstrate how his individual identity became lost through group membership. In his journal he wrote, “I feel as if when other students see me especially wearing my [student organization’s] t-shirt they would most likely not see me. I would be invisible to them. Instead they would see a member of an organization...” (J3, p2; 38-40).

Although student groups play an important role in building community for students, participation is complex. Ultimately, pressures to join a group, rejection from certain groups, and conflict between personal identity and group identity relations make student groups on campus a significant mediator of exclusion.

### *Technology Use*

Technology in the form of iPod, cell phone, and Internet use identified as a source of social isolation. Participant-researchers noted that technology was useful in preserving connections to home communities and families, but also described it as a barrier to forming new ones. Thus, while cell phones connect students to families at home, participant-researchers felt that too much communication with home can prevent individuals from forming new relationships with peers. One participant-researcher said, “... you create this mindset that is not revolving around here and now or the community here. Your mindset is thinking about what’s going on at home, what that person at home is doing. And I feel like there’s just so much real estate

in the brain that at one point, you just don’t have the capacity to open up to another community” (T3, p. 4: 28-32). PRs expressed concern that technology allows one to support existing relationships more than it facilitates the development of new relationships.

Participant-researchers described widespread iPod use as enjoyable to the individual, but acknowledged that it is difficult to interact with new people or start a conversation when everyone is listening to headphones. iPod use was characterized as a common feature of modern student life that can potentially isolate individuals. One participant-researcher described how calling home and listening to music from home resulted in feelings of connectedness with home, but brought about feelings of exclusion on campus. She describes her experience as one of transience:

Music is something that’s very familiar and brings back memories of home. Like the music my mom may listen to...or I’ll just call home and...if



**Figure 6**

they're having dinner eating my mom will have the phone on the table and I'll just listen to everyone. It's like I'm home and not where I'm supposed to be. So [in terms of] trying to make friends or something, so far, I feel like my experience has been very transient, like I'm just passing by (T3, p. 2; 8-15).

When and how one is "supposed" to use their cell phone, iPod, or Internet is determined by individuals who are trying to maintain and establish connections with multiple communities. Another participant-researcher echoed this confusion about determining a balanced use of technology: "I don't know if it hinders me academically because it kind of helps me to say 'okay I need to go study now' as opposed to making friends. So I don't know if it is taking away study time at all but it seems to be taking away time to meet other people and do other activities which is what makes [college] fun" (T3, p.5; 1-5). Overall, technology was identified as a source of social exclusion and anxiety about where and with whom energy should be focused.

### **Mechanisms of Exclusion**

Here we describe the mechanisms, or mediating factors of exclusion/inclusion identified by participant-researchers. PRs identified two factors as significant mediators of exclusion: 1) the presence of a "hidden curriculum" and 2) the contextual factors such as marginal status in society that map onto the college experience.

#### *"Hidden Curriculum"*

Participant-researchers defined the "hidden curriculum" of UCLA as a hidden body of information that is absolutely vital to success at UCLA. Examples of "hidden curriculum" range from a type of behavior and way of speaking in front of professors, to knowing that student groups are organized around particular racial, cultural, or religious identities. The extent to which an individual can access the "hidden curriculum" largely determines whether they feel included or excluded.

One participant-researcher described "hidden curriculum" as knowing how to interact with professors. He said that professors don't tell you how to behave in their presence, but it is nonetheless expected that you behave in a professional manner. In addition to feeling that behaviors within an academic environment were part of the "hidden curriculum", students described feeling as though information was withheld from them on numerous occasions. One student described his struggle in trying to find childcare as a parenting student. He said that the lack of information available to parenting students was part of the "hidden curriculum" at UCLA- information he needed to know but found difficult to access. He described:

[The "hidden curriculum"] is not really rocket science but having the resources obscure from the students that are coming in...It's kind of like you're keeping things a secret. I'm not saying this is why they do it but it's almost like 'I'm going to keep things obscure so we don't have to invest more money into providing more childcare for students and there is no bigger need. I mean I came in and I didn't even think I was eligible for childcare or when I looked into childcare it just seemed like a mystery, something mystic...(T3, p. 9; 8-14).

Feeling as though knowledge is kept hidden resulted in feelings of exclusion from UCLA. As one student put it, "you ignore the needs of students by not providing information they need" (T3, p. 10; 21).

PRs found that the "hidden curriculum" within student groups served to deny those who do not fit the criteria access to a peer network. Students described feeling pushed out of groups, left out of events, and denied information about scholarships specific to certain organizations. One participant researcher took a picture of a wall where different student groups display their posters (Figure 7). This PR characterized such posters as advertisements that appear to appeal to a general audience but in practice, each poster is designed to recruit those who fit hidden membership criteria.



**Figure 7**

Participant-researchers described experiences of being pushed out of various groups they thought they could belong to. One PR said that feelings of social exclusion stem from the “hidden curriculum” of student groups: “I think it’s the hidden portion... I don’t think any group is dumb enough to actually write something like you’re not allowed...they’re going to say you’re allowed and if they really don’t like you then they’ll push you out.” That such processes occur but are never discussed is an example of a “hidden curriculum” on campus influencing sense of inclusion/exclusion.

*Contextual Factors*

Acknowledgment of prior high school curriculum and academic preparedness were among key contextual factors that mediated academic exclusion. Participant-researchers described how some students must navigate not only a “hidden curriculum,” but also a traditional curriculum: subject matter individuals can arrive at the university not knowing as a result of limited K-12 exposure. PRs concluded that limited resources for members of low-income, minority groups results in their limited representation in higher education. For example, one student said of underrepresented students, “I think that has to do a lot with the resources and other factors that you know, kind of eliminate

people from those areas to come to the UC because there is lack of resources and like you said, many other factors so, you know, it’s not very easy to say bring them over” (T10, p.1; 40-43).

Membership in status groups that are marginalized in society was identified as having an impact on the college experience. A 2010 incident at UC San Diego involving racist stereotypes about the African American community brought to light how racial groups marginalized in society may experience that same marginalization in college. PRs discussed the serious impact of racially motivated incidents on campus and identified such external factors as significant barriers to feeling safe and welcomed on campus.

**Navigating Exclusion/Inclusion**

Here we describe the specific strategies participant-researchers employed in their daily lives to navigate or overcome feelings of exclusion at UCLA. SAIRO staff divided the navigational strategies identified by PRs into two broad categories: 1) individual agency and 2) institutional actors/structural support.

*Individual Agency*

Participant-researchers identified individual agency as

a tool to transform exclusionary experiences into more inclusive ones. Some participant-researchers attributed success or failure at UCLA to individual effort and will. One PR said that to overcome exclusion, one must push themselves to try new things. She wrote,

I think an important strategy I use to navigate the exclusion I feel is pushing myself to see if I can turn the exclusion into inclusion. Sometimes, this can take much courage for me but my own goals in life and motivation to improve my skills can be enough to get me to do anything despite any negative outcomes. Everyone has goal and dreams they want to achieve. So, it helps me to allow my own goals and future plans to dictate what I do. I won't say that it has worked for me every single time, but it gets me to try things for the sake of the kind of person I want to become (J5, p3; 3-10).

This particular participant-researcher chose to photograph her feet (Figure 8), to indicate that it is she who moves them and that as long as she keeps moving her feet along, she can overcome and transform exclusionary spaces.

For others, individual agency was exerted in order to connect with needed resources. Agency was a prerequisite for inclusion, but not the sole requirement as

one PR said, "Perpetually discussing my needs for housing and childcare led me to find people that could help me find these resources" (J5, p.1, 28-29). This participant-researcher, a parenting student, eventually used his agency to form his own student group to bring together those who could relate to his lifestyle. His photo captured a group of parenting students that is now a formal student organization (Figure 9).

Individuals' actions toward creating a more inclusive environment for themselves may be very deliberate as in the case for one participant-researcher who described his experiences in the Center for Community College Partnerships (CCCCP) community.

The most effective strategy for me to navigate exclusion is to create my own academic and extracurricular spaces where I work. I feel I do not always have the time to attempt to be a part of a group. However, where I work is a group within itself. I work for the Center of Community College Partnerships (CCCCP) on the second floor of Campbell Hall. CCCP employs student workers who have been community college students. Many of the student workers share the same background...The atmosphere is similar to one of the social groups on campus because all of the student workers are able to discuss their problems or issues they may have



Figure 8



Figure 9

with academics or life while working... The environment fulfills the social need by facilitating discussion on life and an academic need because everyone in the office share their secrets to success. (J5, p1-2; 37-2).

For students who feel completely isolated, individual agency is expressed not through contact with appropriate services and support systems, but through self reflection and introspection. One participant-researcher describes the internal process by which he transforms his isolation and exclusion into a private source of strength:

In my individual case I am not the average UCLA student, meaning I am not welcome in a number of spaces at UCLA. In essence almost by default I belong to groups that majority of students are more likely than not excluded from. This I use to my advantage. I am aware that I exist among one of the smallest populations of students at UCLA. Therefore, I have joined groups and participate in activities in which I will find people who I relate to. Moreover, my personal appearance, culture, and activities in many cases suggest the exclusive groups, which I

belong to. (J5, p 2; 26-36).

Thus, individual action or agency is for some the key to success and rooted in a drive to succeed. Others express a connection between individual agency and the availability of resources to provide material assistance. Lastly, individual agency is also expressed as an internal dialogue in which stigmatized identities are transformed into positive attributes and sources of strength. Overall, expressions of agency vary by individuals who may differentially perceive their environments, but for PRs in this study, it is surely part of their success at UCLA.

#### *Institutional Actors/ Structural Support*

Participant-researchers consistently identified people and programs at UCLA that positively influenced their individual success at UCLA. People and programs were most helpful to PRs when they lead to structured research opportunities. For example, PRs explained that Academic Advancement Program (AAP) was helpful in that it notified students via e-mail of available research opportunities through various academic departments. AAP also provided several PRs access to peer counselors who further directed students toward research opportunities. Connecting to people, programs, and then to research was ultimately a key part of success for several undergraduate participants. One PR described how accessing key personnel allowed

her to then access research,

My peer counselor encouraged me to apply for [an undergraduate research program] my sophomore year and I did. I hate applying to anything whenever something requires an application I feel automatically excluded. I never feel that I am competitive enough with other applicants considering my GPA and my lacking writing skills. I feel that peer counseling is the most important tool I have used while at UCLA to navigate the exclusionary space of research. (J5, p1; 9-14).

Structured research opportunities were described positively in and of themselves, but they also lead to extended personal networks and greater sense of belonging overall. One participant-researcher said,

I found research programs, such as the Psychology Research Opportunity Program (PROPS) that provided me with a stipend and with seminars that have motivated me to do research and apply to research conferences. This work also led me to get intern positions with the BRC – Bruin Resource Center and get a lab assistant position (J4, p.1; 24-30)

Institutional actors and structural support most often took the form of structured research opportunities that participant-researchers identified as important in feeling a part of UCLA.

## Recommendations to Student Affairs

The Student Affairs’ Strategic Plan for 2006-2009 calls for an “educationally productive and supportive campus climate for students of all backgrounds inclusive of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity, and disability.” This requires an understanding of how students experience and interpret the campus climate at UCLA. Our findings provide an in-depth account of how a diverse group of six undergraduates encountered exclusion and also how they found ways to overcome it. Indeed there is more work

to be done in order to fully understand different perspectives of the campus environment. To achieve Student Affairs’ goal of fostering a positive campus environment, SAIRO recommends the following research agenda:

- Conduct further data collection on students’ experiences inside and outside of the classroom, including academic and social validation, salience of social identity, experience of discrimination, awareness of privilege, and skills related to inter-group relations.
- Using a variety of methods, including qualitative data collection, to provide a more comprehensive portrait of UCLA’s climate, institutional practices, and student interactions and experiences than is available in existing data.
- Encourage continued integration of student voices in future studies that will direct student programming within Student Affairs.

Based on their findings regarding student group involvement, PRs developed several recommendations to foster sense of belonging on campus. Participant-researchers identified the following non-research recommendations specifically to promote inclusiveness and interaction within and between student groups on campus:

- Create a board of students or oversight committee in which students come together to oversee practices of student groups and group leaders.
- Empower the above-mentioned board to create programming between student groups to encourage cross-group interaction and collaboration.
- Ensure new leadership opportunities within student groups to promote fresh perspectives from student leaders.

SAIRO recommends that Student Affairs units working with undergraduate students note the complicated nature of student group participation and support participant-researchers’ recommendations. Additionally, SAIRO recommends that Student Affairs consider tying funding to demonstration of cross-population programming among student groups.

Another compelling finding presented in this report regards engagement in undergraduate research.

SAIRO recommends the following to promote undergraduate engagement in research and the positive social and academic benefits that flow from such activities:

- Campus-wide efforts to promote meaningful opportunities to engage in undergraduate research, and
- Increased collaboration and partnering with other departments across campus to ensure that undergraduates are aware of and can better access undergraduate research opportunities.

This report has demonstrated the mediating role both student groups and engagement in undergraduate research can play in the college experience. Improving interaction within and between student groups is vital to ensuring a positive campus climate. Providing students opportunities to conduct research allows students to realize the promise of attending an institution with a strong and well respected research function.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

List of photo/journal prompts generated throughout the research process by the participant-researchers and used to direct data collection:

- Identify spaces in which you experience exclusion. Spaces can be physical or non-physical and can be spaces in which you are exclusionary towards others or where you are excluded from a particular space.
- How have experiences with exclusion impacted your academic experience at UCLA?
- What is the impact of the exclusion and inclusion inherent in student group membership on your educational experience at UCLA?\*
- What would change if suddenly the sources of exclusion (either ones you have identified in weeks past or newly identified spaces) you have experienced at UCLA suddenly became inclusive? How would your experience at UCLA change if this were to happen tomorrow?
- What strategies or tools have been important for you in navigating exclusion?

### Appendix B

List of questions used to facilitate discussion among participant-researchers:

- Where and when was your photo taken?
- Why did you choose this photo to share with the group?
- How does this photo reflect exclusion?
- How does this particular type of exclusion influence your experience at UCLA?

\*This more specific prompt was generated by the participant-researcher group after the student group context had emerged in other discussions and the group wanted to explore the concept in more depth.