



Student Affairs Information and Research Office

A department of Student Affairs

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2010 University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey Financial Concerns

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.

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Executive Summary

This report provides a summary of undergraduates’ financial concerns from the 2010 University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES). Highlighted findings include:

- The majority of UCLA students (63%) “somewhat agree,” “agree,” or “strongly agree” that given grants and scholarships (if any) that they received, the total cost of attending UCLA is manageable.
- Sixty-five percent of respondents reported being concerned about paying for college “up until now,” and 77% of continuing students indicated that they were concerned about paying in the future.
- When looking at changes made in the past year due to financial concerns, only 6% of all respondents indicated that they had *not* changed their behaviors because costs were not a problem.
- The top five changes among all students as a result of financial constraints were:
 - ◆ Bought fewer books; bought cheaper, used books; or read books on reserve - 75%
 - ◆ Cut expenses overall; been more frugal - 58%
 - ◆ Applied for financial aid for the first time - 36%
 - ◆ Took more courses per term - 31%
 - ◆ Decided against study abroad - 29%

Survey Administration & Respondent Demographics

The University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES) was administered to 25,546 UCLA undergraduates in Spring Quarter 2010. Approximately 33% (N=8,529) of UCLA undergraduates responded to the 2010 UCUES. Compared to the 2009-10 UCLA undergraduate population, women, direct-entry students, senior-level students, and Asian/Pacific Islander students were slightly over-represented in the UCUES sample. Men, transfer students, freshmen, sophomores, and juniors, White students, and international students were slightly under-represented in the UCUES sample. For more information about the survey, go to: http://www.sairo.ucla.edu/data/efforts_ucues.html

INTRODUCTION

Rising University of California fees over the recent years and concern over the impact of fee increases on students' college experiences led to the inclusion of a set of financial impact items on the 2010 University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES). These items were designed to provide data on students' level of concern regarding college affordability as well as their behavioral changes resulting from financial strain.

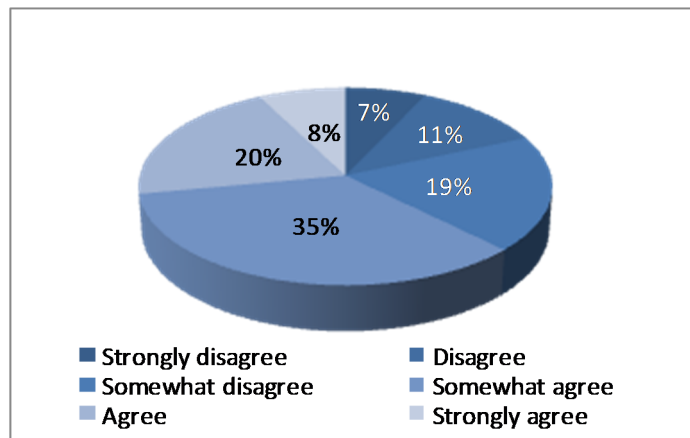
This report summarizes findings for UCLA undergraduates regarding financial concerns and perceptions of affordability and changes in behaviors and activities due to financial concerns. In addition, similarities and differences between direct-entry and transfer students are highlighted when applicable. Approximately 2,023 transfers and 6,456 direct-entry students participated in UCUES.

PERCEPTIONS OF AND CONCERNS ABOUT AFFORDABILITY

Students were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed that the total costs of attending UCLA were manageable (See Figure 1).

Overall, the majority of UCLA students (63%) "somewhat agree," "agree," or "strongly agree" that given grants and scholarships (if any) that they received, the total cost of attending UCLA is manageable. Further, direct-entry and transfer students did not differ in their responses to this item. The finding that most students feel that the cost of attending UCLA is manageable is promising. However, a substantial proportion (37%) still perceived costs to be unmanageable, and Student Affairs may be able play an important role in supporting students and helping them deal with their concerns.

Figure 1. The Total Cost of Attending UCLA is Manageable (N=6,657)

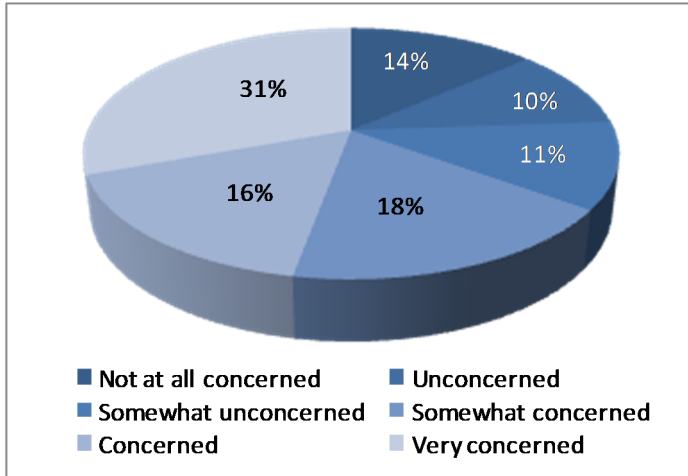


To further explore students' concerns about paying for their education, they were asked to indicate their a) concern about paying for their education *up to now* and b) concern about paying for their education *in the future*. Figure 2 (p. 3) displays the findings for all respondents (i.e., continuing and graduating students) regarding their concern about paying for their education up to now.

Among all students, 65% indicated that they were "somewhat concerned," "concerned," or "very concerned" about paying for their education up to now. A greater percentage of transfer students (58%)

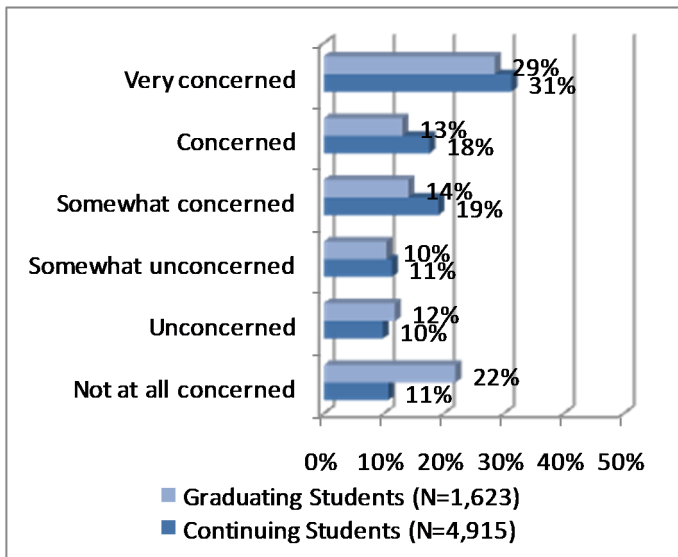
indicated that they were “concerned” or “very concerned” compared to direct-entry students (44%) about paying for education up to now.

Figure 2. Concern About Paying for Education Up to Now (N=6,538)



Concern appeared especially high among continuing students (i.e., those who did not expect to graduate that year) with 68% expressing being at least “somewhat concerned” compared to 56% of students who expect to earn their degree that year (See Figure 3).

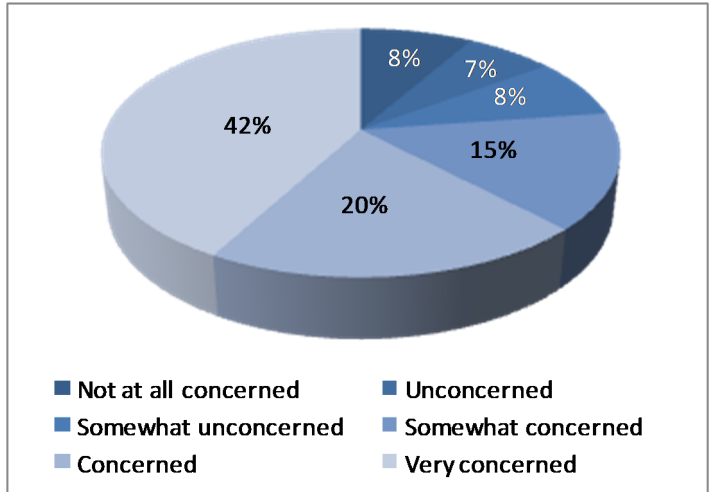
Figure 3. Concern About Paying for Education Up to Now – Continuing and Graduating Students



This finding suggests an increasing concern about the affordability of attending UCLA in the near future and is further supported by the finding that

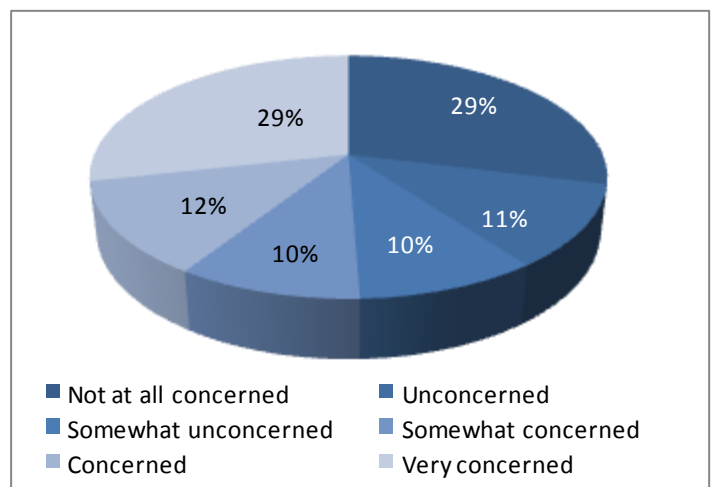
77% of continuing students were at least somewhat concerned about paying for their education next year (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Concern About Paying for Education Next Year—Continuing Students (N=4,898)



As displayed in Figure 5, financial concerns about the future seemed slightly less prevalent for graduating students as a lower percentage, 51%, reported being at least “somewhat concerned” about their accumulated debt. However, over a quarter (29%) expressed that they were “very concerned” about their accumulated debt.

Figure 5. Concern About Accumulated Education Debt—Graduating Students (N=1,617)



BEHAVIORS/ACTIVITIES RESULTING FROM FINANCIAL CONCERNS

The impact of financial constraints on respondents' college experiences was measured by asking respondents to indicate the activities and/or behaviors in which they had engaged in the past year to help meet college expenses, and for some specific items, the frequency of engagement in behaviors. The impact of financial concerns on student experiences was widespread in that only 6% of all respondents indicated that they had *not* changed their behaviors because costs were not a problem. Comparisons of direct-entry and transfer students indicated that a smaller percentage of transfer students, 4%, indicated no change in their behaviors due to financial constraints compared to 7% of direct-entry students.

Table 1 (p. 5) provides a summary of the percentage of students who indicated that they engaged in cost-saving behaviors or activities. The top five changes among all students as a result of financial constraints were:

- Bought fewer books; bought cheaper, used books; or read books on reserve - 75%
- Cut expenses overall; been more frugal - 58%
- Applied for financial aid for the first time - 36%
- Took more courses per term - 31%
- Decided against study abroad - 29%

Changes due to financial constraints are categorized into the following areas: a) financial aid and debt, b) academic experience and enrichment activities, c) post-graduate plans, d) work, and e) personal spending and daily expenses, which are discussed below.

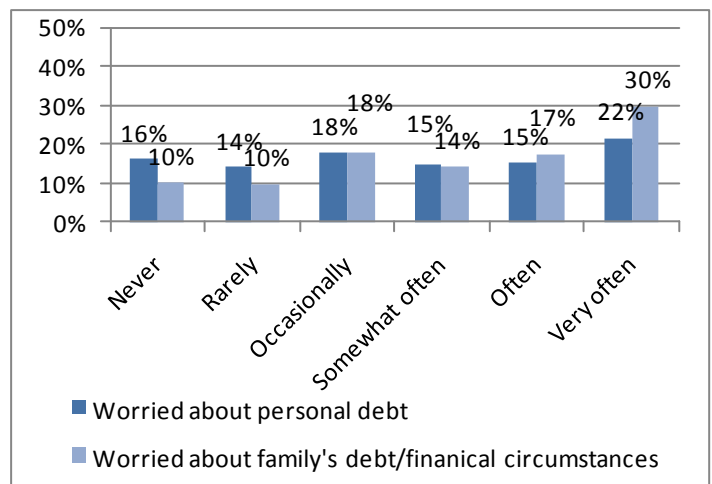
Financial Aid and Debt

As mentioned above, over a third of respondents (36%) applied for financial aid for the first time in the past year. In addition, 22% increased their annual student loan amount, and 15% asked the financial aid office to reevaluate their application. A greater percentage of transfer students (18%) asked for a financial aid reevaluation compared to direct-entry students (14%). It appears that to help

offset increasing costs associated with college students are relying more on financial aid resources, which will likely have an impact on the workload for the Financial Aid Office as more students seek consultation and assistance in securing needed financial support.

Not surprisingly, concerns about debt were at the forefront for many students. Figure 6 displays the reported frequency of worrying about personal and family debt in the past year. Fifty-two percent worried “somewhat often,” “often,” or “very often” about personal debt, and the percentage was greatest among transfers (62%) compared to direct-entry students (49%). An even greater percentage of students, 62%, worried about their family’s debt and financial circumstances. This finding was especially prevalent for transfers (68%) compared to direct-entry students (60%). As a whole, these findings have important implications for Students Affairs departments in better understanding how to help students deal with stress associated with their financial concerns and in considering the impact of stress on learning.

Figure 6. Frequency of Worrying About Personal and Family Debt (N=6,672)



Academic Experience and Enrichment Activities

One way for respondents to help meet college expenses was to reduce expenses associated with their educational experience. The most common strategy, engaged in by 75% of respondents, was “buying fewer books, buying cheaper books, or reading books on reserve.” In terms of academic enrichment activities,

Table 1. Activities and Behaviors to Help Meet College Expenses (N=6,567)

Activity/Behavior	% engaged in
Bought fewer books, bought cheaper used books, read books on reserve	75%
Cut expenses overall/ been more frugal	58%
Applied for financial aid for the first time	36%
Took more courses per term	31%
Decided against study abroad	29%
Increased annual student loan amount	22%
Accepted AP or similar credit instead of taking course	22%
Increased the number of hours worked	21%
Took action to graduate more quickly	21%
Took community college course because it was cheaper	20%
Took a job for the first time in college	20%
Added a roommate	17%
Increased the debt carried on credit card	16%
Asked financial aid office to reevaluate application	15%
Moved elsewhere to reduce expenses	15%
Decided to move home after college	13%
Didn't retake class to improve grade	13%
Decided to quickly enroll in graduate or professional school since jobs are scarce	9%
Changed my commute to campus (e.g., now bike or take public transportation)	9%
Dropped double major or changed plan to double major	8%
Changed my major or minor	7%
Decided against planned internship	7%
Moved home to reduce expenses	6%
None; Cost not a problem	6%
Took fewer courses per term	6%
Decided to postpone graduate or professional school to earn money	4%
Took online course because it was cheaper	4%
Other	4%
Took a leave of absence or a quarter/semester off	3%

some respondents decided against activities such as study abroad (29%) and made plans to forego internships (7%). A greater percentage of transfer students (10%) reconsidered taking a planned internship compared to direct-entry students (5%). These findings highlight the importance for instructors to make course materials available for students who cannot afford to purchase them and to try to keep budget in mind when assigning required course materials. In addition, greater development and offerings of local course-enrichment activities may become increasingly important as students forego off-campus internships and study abroad opportunities.

Another strategy for saving costs is to speed up one's academic progress, which in turn reduces the overall costs of attendance. A fifth of respondents (21%) indicated that they took action to try to graduate more quickly, with a higher percentage of transfers (25%) compared to direct-entry students (19%) reporting the push. One specific action students took to graduate more quickly included taking more courses (31%). This included taking community college courses to save money (20%), and a greater number of transfers (33%) compared to direct-entry students (16%) chose this route. However, only 4% of students reported taking an online course to save money. Other course-related activities undertaken to help meet college expenses in the past year included accepting AP or similar credit instead of taking a course (22%). Accepting AP credit was most common among direct-entry students (26%) compared to transfers (8%). Less common course-related activities included not retaking a class to improve one's grade (13%), dropping a double major or changing one's plans to double major (8%), changing one's major or minor (7%), and taking fewer courses (6%). Only 3% reported taking a leave of absence or a semester off. The trend of taking more courses per quarter may have an impact on course planning and potentially affect how impacted courses are in the future.

Post-Graduate Plans

In general, most respondents did not report making major changes to their post-graduate plans in an attempt to help offset college expenses. The most commonly reported action of respondents was

indicating that they planned to move home after college (13%). Few planned to make changes to their graduate school plans, as only 9% planned to "quickly enroll in graduate or professional school since jobs are so scarce," and 15% planned to "postpone graduate or professional school to earn money." A greater percentage of transfers (21%) reported plans to postpone enrollment in a graduate program compared to direct-entry students (13%). The differences in post-graduate plans for transfers compared to direct-entry students may have important implications for Student Affairs departments such as the Career Center in terms of understanding students' needs and priorities as they prepare for their lives after UCLA.

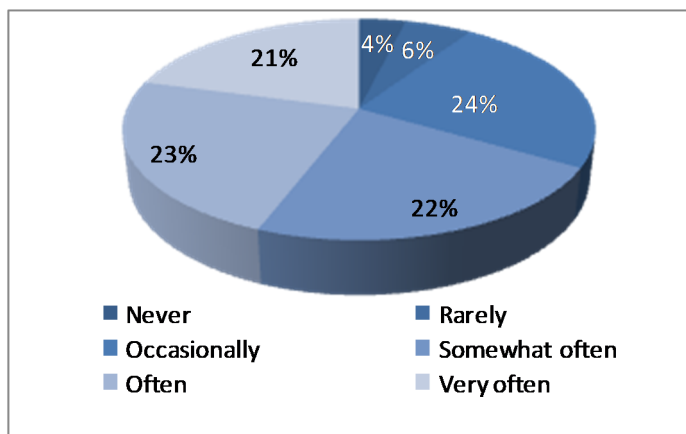
Work

Some students reported changes in work patterns. In the past year, 20% took a job for the first time in college. A greater percentage of direct-entry students (22%) experienced this situation compared to transfers (14%). Similarly, in the past year, 21% increased the number of hours they worked.

Personal Spending and Daily Living Expenses

The majority of respondents (58%) reported cutting expenses overall and being more frugal. With regard to frequency of behavior, as would be expected with a tough financial climate, 67% had "somewhat often," "often," or "very often" cut down on their personal and recreational spending in the past year (see Figure 7). This effect was greater among transfers (52%) compared to direct-entry students (42%).

Figure 7. Frequency of Cutting Down Personal/Recreational Spending (N=6,678)



While some reduction in recreational spending is expected in a difficult budget climate, students also reported a reduction in spending for basic needs in the past year. Twenty-one percent of students reported that they “somewhat often,” “often,” or “very often” skipped meals to save money.

Figure 8. Frequency of Skipping Meals to Save Money (N=6,686)

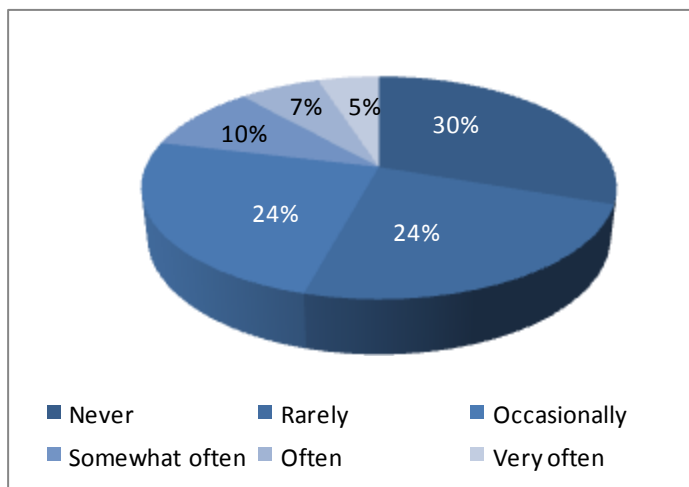


Figure 8 displays the results. A greater percentage of transfers (28%) compared to direct-entry students (19%) reported in engaging in such behaviors. This finding is especially concerning because it is difficult for students to fully engage with their college experiences and maximize learning when their basic needs are not being met.

Some respondents (16%) also increased the debt they carried on their credit card, and this was more common among transfers (27%) compared to direct-entry students (13%). Changes to transportation and housing were also reported by a small number of respondents. The largest percentage, 15%, reported moving elsewhere to reduce expenses (more common among transfers – 20% vs. 13% direct-entry), 6% moved home (more common among transfers – 13% vs. 4% direct-entry), and 17% added a roommate. Approximately 9% reported changing their commute to campus (e.g., ride bike or take public transportation), and a greater percentage of transfers (21%) reported this compared to direct-entry students (6%).