



## Diverse Learning Environments Survey: Experiences of Students with Disabilities

*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

In the winter and spring quarters of 2011, UCLA Student Affairs administered the Diverse Learning Environments (DLE) survey to better address aspects of diversity and climate on campus. The DLE captured information on a variety of student experiences and perspectives. In an effort to better address the needs of all students at UCLA, this brief highlights the experiences of students with disabilities including their academic and social engagement, diversity-related activities, global skills, and perspectives on campus climate. Analysis also considered differences in experiences by disability types.

Results indicate that compared to their peers, students with disabilities show:

- A **lower** sense of:
  - Interpersonal and academic validation,
  - Academic self-concept,
  - Belonging on campus, and
  - Institutional commitment to diversity
- A **higher** frequency of experiencing discrimination and bias
- **Greater** engagement with:
  - Conversation across differences,
  - Diverse curriculum,
  - Global skills and perspectives, and
  - Integration of diverse topics and perspectives into daily life.
- There were **no** differences in reported experiences with harassment, cross racial interactions and co-curricular diversity activities.

## DLE Survey & Sample

The Diverse Learning Environments (DLE) survey developed by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA, stems from research indicating that optimizing diversity in the learning environment can facilitate achievement of key outcomes, including improving students' motivations for lifelong learning, competencies and skills for living in a diverse society, and student retention and success. UCLA participated in this national research effort to generate greater understanding of diversity, student learning, and student success both inside and outside of the classroom.

The DLE was administered in the winter and spring quarters of 2011 as a census survey of all enrolled undergraduate students at UCLA. In all, 7,597 students responded to the survey, representing 30% of enrolled UCLA undergraduates. Compared to the overall undergraduate population at that time, the sample slightly over-represents Asian students and students that enrolled directly from high school and slightly under-represents African American/Black students.

### DLE Sample

	Percent	#
<b>Race (n=4,962)</b>		
American Indian	<1%	11
African American/Black	2%	83
Hispanic	15%	737
Asian	46%	2,283
White	31%	1,536
Multiracial	6%	308
<b>Gender (n=4,989)</b>		
Male	37%	1,847
Female	63%	3,142
<b>Year in School (n=7,461)</b>		
First Year	17%	1,270
Second Year	20%	1,551
Third Year	31%	2,371
Fourth Year or More	32%	2,405
<b>Entry Status (n=7,461)</b>		
Direct Entry	76%	5,685
Transfer	24%	1,776
<b>First Generation College Students (n=4,857)</b>		
Yes	20%	952
No	80%	3,905
<b>Students with Disabilities</b>		
Yes	18%	897
No	82%	4,048
<b>Types of Disabilities</b>		
Learning disability	2%	97
Attention-deficit/ Hyperactivity disorder	4%	174
Physical disability	3%	157
Chronic illness	4%	180
Psychological disorder	9%	423
Other	4%	192

### Overall Experiences of Students with Disabilities

This brief aims to provide more information on the experiences of students with disabilities at UCLA. The DLE offered a unique opportunity to explore the range of types of disabilities students reported and how students with disabilities experienced the campus environment. Analysis utilized factors of items created by HERI to better understand broader themes, such as sense of belonging, validation, discrimination, etc. The reliability of these factors was confirmed with the UCLA data. The DLE Survey Factor Variable list of all 18 factors and the items that make up each factor is available on the SAIRO website at [www.sairo.ucla.edu/dle](http://www.sairo.ucla.edu/dle). Factors were standardized to a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 10. This brief describes the results of analyses comparing factor mean scores for students with and without disabilities.

Students with disabilities (i.e., reporting one or more disability) represented 18% of the DLE survey respondents (n= 897). The most commonly reported disabilities were psychological disorder (9%), attention-deficit/ hyperactivity disorder (4%), and chronic illness (4%) (see Sample for full distribution). Two-thirds of this group identified as female and the majority of students belonged to one of the following racial/ethnic groups, 21% Hispanic, 31% Asian, and 38% White.

Compared to their peers, students with disabilities reported a **lower sense of validation** (both interpersonal and academic validation), **academic self-concept, sense of belonging on campus, and institutional commitment to diversity** (see Table 3).

Students with disabilities also reported a **higher frequency of experiencing discrimination and bias** than students without disabilities (mean difference of -2.43;  $p \leq .000$ ). Incidences of discrimination and bias focus primarily on experiences with insensitive or disparaging remarks and exclusion. Harassment, on the other hand, included experiences with physical assaults or injuries, damage to personal property, and documentation of discriminatory experiences. Students with disabilities did not report any significant differences in the frequency of harassment experienced.

Furthermore, students with disabilities also reported **no differences** with cross-racial interactions (both overall & negative) or participation in co-curricular diversity activities in comparison to other students.

These indicators may reflect a need to create more inclusive practices on campus that aim to reduce experiences with marginalization and create opportunities for students to connect with resources and campus supports.

Results for students with disabilities were not all

concerning, they also reported higher mean scores on a number of factors and areas:

- **Higher reports of integration of learning, habits of mind, and civic engagement.** Students with disabilities reported higher frequencies of applying course materials (integration of learning) and problem-solving techniques (habits of mind), and were more likely to participate in community or global causes (civic engagement).
- **Higher engagement with diversity-related activities.** Students with disabilities were more likely to have conversations across differences and were more exposed to curricular experiences regarding differences in race/ethnic, socioeconomic class, gender, privilege, or sexual orientation (curriculum of inclusion).
- **Higher perceptions of agency.** Students with disabilities were more likely to indicate engagement with social or political issues (critical consciousness and action), feel prepared to engage in global issues (pluralistic orientation) and value these perspectives personally (social agency).

<b>Table 3. Differences in Experiences by Disability Status</b>	<b>Mean for Students Without a Disability (n=4,048)</b>	<b>Mean for Students with Disabilities<sup>2</sup> (n=897)</b>	<b>Mean Difference (Without - With)</b>	<b>Sig</b>
<b>Academic and Social Engagement</b>				
General Interpersonal Validation	48.29	47.55	0.74	*
Academic Self-Concept	50.53	49.06	1.47	***
Academic Validation in the Classroom	48.00	46.89	1.11	**
Integration of Learning	48.64	49.85	-1.21	**
Habits of Mind	48.37	49.57	-1.20	**
Civic Engagement	50.34	51.67	-1.33	***
<b>Diversity-related Activities</b>				
Conversations across Differences	49.20	51.71	-2.51	***
Curriculum of Inclusion	47.60	49.01	-1.41	***
<b>Global Skills and Perspectives (Agency)</b>				
Critical Consciousness and Action	49.43	50.92	-1.49	***
Pluralistic Orientation	49.18	50.87	-1.69	***
Social Agency	49.49	50.40	-0.91	*
<b>Campus Climate</b>				
Sense of Belonging	51.62	48.81	2.81	***
Institutional Commitment to Diversity	51.11	49.25	1.86	***
Discrimination and Bias	49.79	52.22	-2.43	***

Note: \*\*\* $p \leq .001$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .01$ ; \*  $p \leq .05$ ; <sup>2</sup>Includes students that reported one or more disabilities.

## Utilization of Student Services

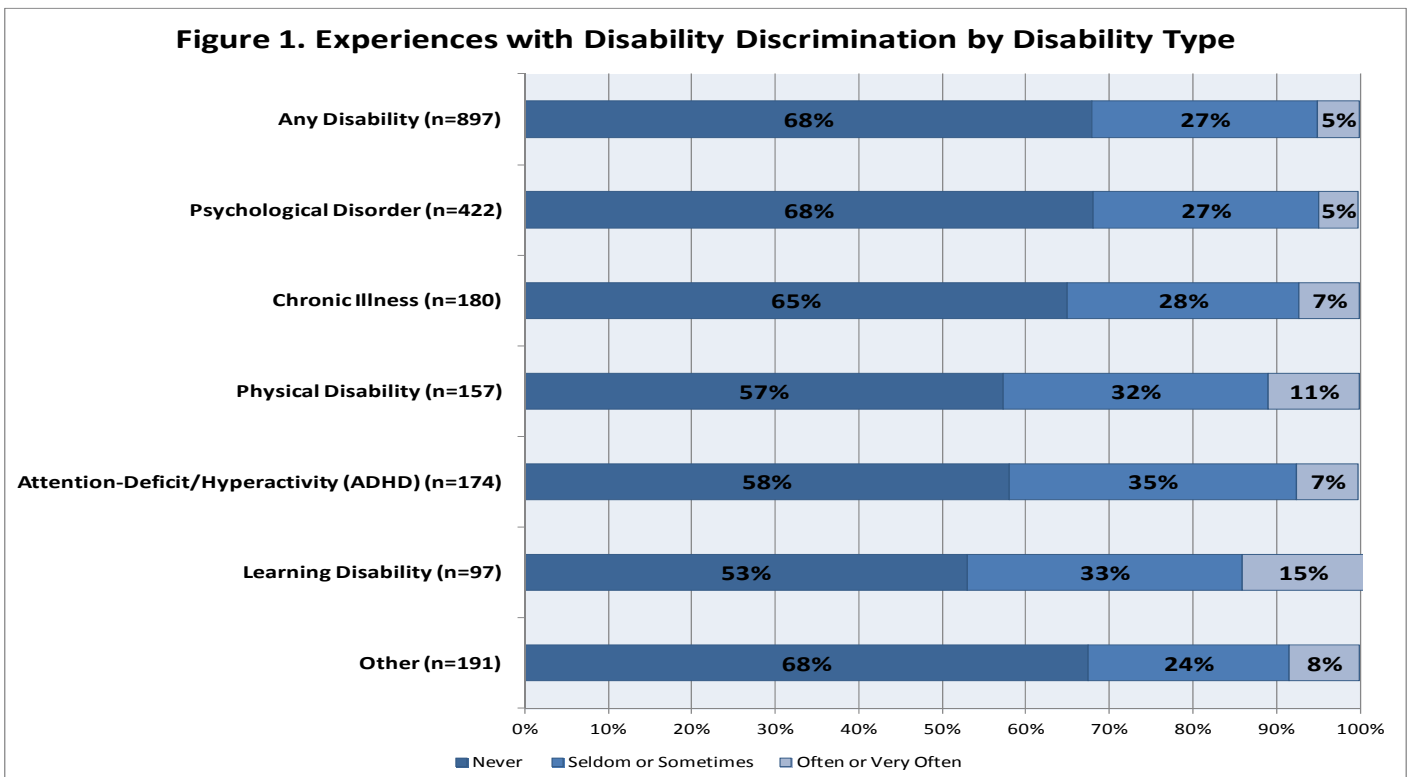
Connecting students with available resources is an important priority for Student Affairs. A quarter of those respondents (25%) who reported a disability reported utilizing the disability resource center<sup>1</sup> since enrolling at UCLA and 10% reported frequent utilization. Students with disabilities are also accessing support through the health center (66% have used service), student psychological services (40%), tutoring and academic assistance (51%), and the career center (74%) (see Table 4). In comparison to other students, students with disabilities reported significantly **higher** utilization of the student health center, student psychological services, disability resource center and the financial aid office. However, students with disabilities also reported **lower** utilization of the writing center and academic assistance services, like tutoring, in comparison to their peers.

	Used service "frequently"	Used service "at all"
Student Health Center <sup>1</sup>	23%	66%
Student Psychological Services <sup>1</sup>	16%	40%
Tutoring or other academic assistance	15%	51%
Career Counseling & Advising	15%	74%
Disability Resource Center <sup>1</sup>	10%	25%
Financial Aid Advising <sup>1</sup>	10%	41%
Writing Center	3%	16%

<sup>1</sup>Denotes higher utilization among students with disabilities in comparison to other students.

## Perceptions of Discrimination Based on Disability Type

Overall, the majority of students with disabilities reported “never” experiencing discrimination due to their ability or disability status (68% reported never; 27% reported “seldom” or “sometimes”; 5% reported “often” or “very often”). When disaggregated by disability type, results were similar, except for slight differences among students who reported learning, attention-deficit, and physical disorders (see Figure 1). Students who reported these disabilities were slightly more likely to experience discrimination than students with other disabilities. For example, students with learning disabilities reported the highest incidence of discrimination “often” or “very often” (15%) followed by physical disability (11%).



<sup>1</sup> As a national survey, the question item used generic wording rather than specific UCLA office names.

## Conclusion

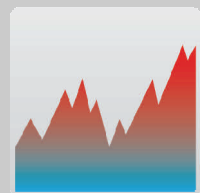
The need for inclusive campus environments and experiences are of great concern for students affairs professionals and departments. Students with disabilities represent one student group that is sometimes not included in conversations about climate and diverse experiences.

Results from this brief offer a unique opportunity for student affairs professionals to consider how students with disabilities experience the campus environment. These findings highlight specific areas that could benefit from greater attention, particularly regarding students' engagement with their academic and social environments and strategies to overcome experiences with discrimination and bias.

Students with disabilities reported lower scores on sense of belonging, self-perceptions of ability, and validation by staff and faculty on campus. However, it does appear that students with disabilities are engaging with campus through diversity-related activities and particularly with diverse curriculum.

As UCLA strives to support inclusive learning environments for all students, these results help frame a discussion of how campus climate influences students' experiences and areas in which greater attention could be focused.

The UCLA DLE logo, designed by Brian Phan, a 2nd year UCLA student in Design and Media Arts, was utilized for all promotional materials and UCLA-affiliated websites.



**What's UCLA's temperature?**  
Tell us about campus climate.  
Participate in the DLE Survey.