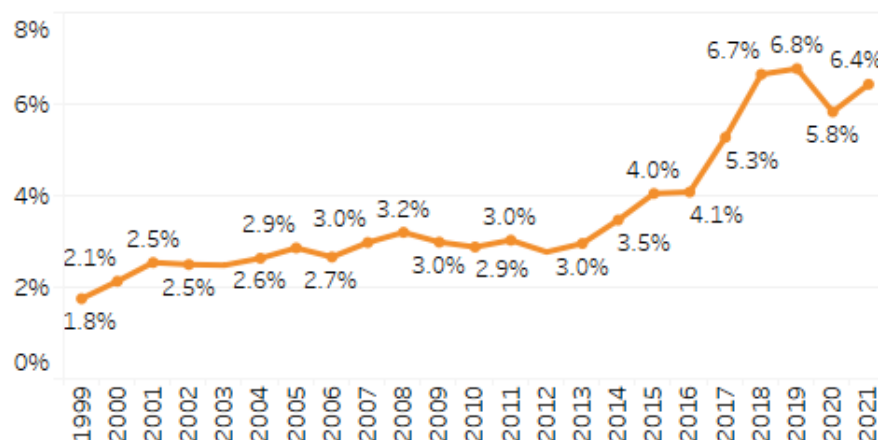


Factors Related to Freshman Three-Year Graduation at UC

Since 1999, approximately 35,000 students who entered the University of California as freshmen have earned a bachelor's degree from a UC campus within three years. For early cohorts, the three-year graduation rate was around two percent. The rate has risen steadily over time, except for the 2020 cohort, which began college during the COVID-19 pandemic (see the figure below). For the 2021 entering class, the cohort with the most recent data, the three-year graduation rate reached 6.4 percent.

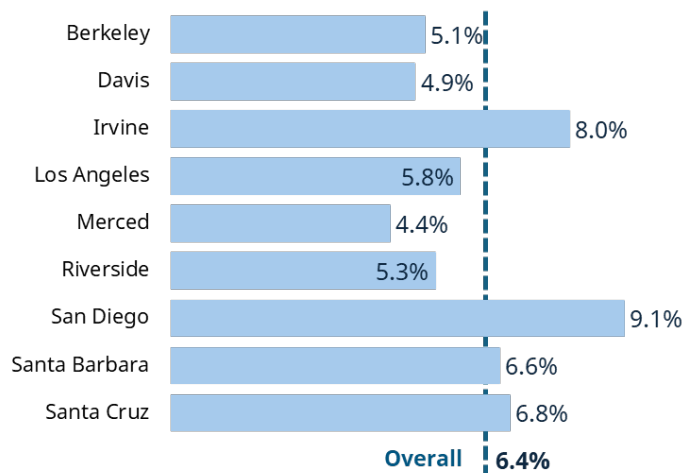
The three-year graduation rate dashboard¹ shows overall rates as well as breakdowns by campus, student demographics, academic performance, and learning engagement factors. It also provides estimated probabilities of graduating within three years based on these variables. Analyses show that individual background characteristics and academic performance are significantly related to early graduation outcomes.

Three-year graduation rates by entering cohort



Students at UC San Diego and Irvine are more likely to graduate with three years, with a rate of about nine percent and eight percent, respectively. In contrast, students at UC Merced, UC Davis, UC Riverside, UC Berkeley and UCLA have three-year graduation rates below the systemwide average of 6.4 percent.

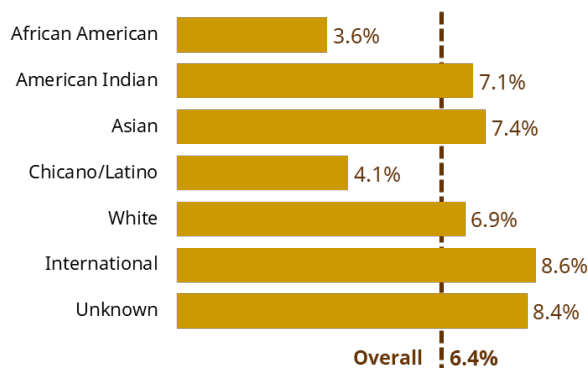
Three-year graduation rates vary by student demographic characteristics. International students and those whose race/ethnicity are unknown are more likely to graduate earlier, while African American and Chicano/Latino students are less likely to do so. Among first-generation students, nearly five percent graduated earlier, compared to slightly more than seven percent of non-first-generation



¹<https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/about-us/information-center/freshman-three-year-graduation-rates>

students. Similarly, 4.5 percent of Pell Grant recipients graduated within three years, versus 7.5 percent of non-recipients.

Ethnicity



First-generation



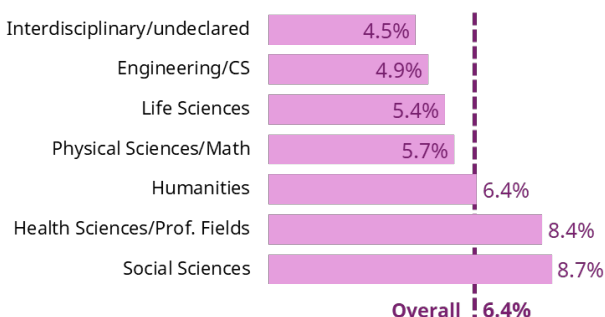
Pell Grant



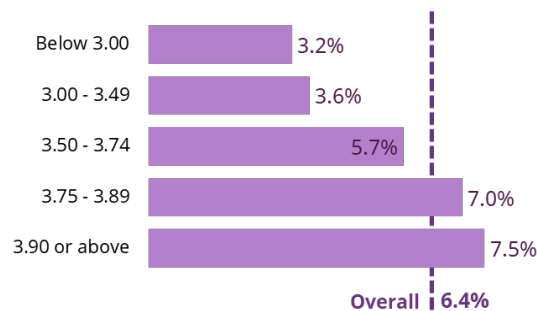
Graduation rates also vary by field of study. Students majoring in social sciences, health professionals, or professional fields are more likely to graduate within three years than those in engineering, computer science, physical sciences, math, life sciences, or those with an interdisciplinary or undeclared major.

Pre-college GPA strongly influences the likelihood of graduating within three years. Students with higher high school GPAs are more likely to complete their degrees early. Almost eight percent of students with a high school GPA of 3.9 or above graduated from UC within three years, compared with less than four percent of those with a GPA below 3.5.

Discipline



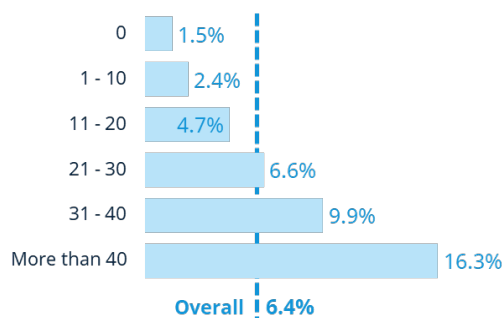
High School GPA



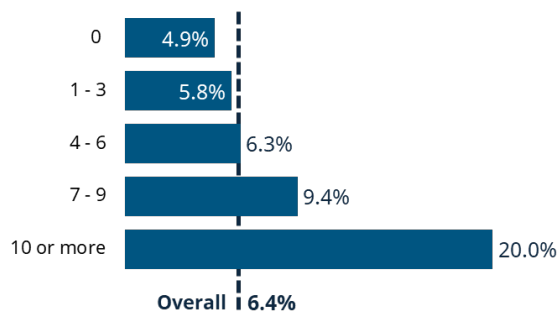
Early accumulation of college credits also plays a significant role. Many freshmen enter with pre-UC units from AP and IB exams, honors courses, or college-level classes. Over 16 percent of students with more than 40 such units earned a bachelor's degree within three years. In contrast, fewer than two percent of students without any early units and fewer than three percent of those with 10 or fewer did so. Even among those with 31–40 units, the graduation rate was approximately 10 percent, highlighting the benefits of early academic preparation.

Another key factor is the number of summer session units completed. Nearly 20 percent of students who completed 10 or more summer units graduated within three years, compared to less than five percent of those who completed fewer than five summer session units.

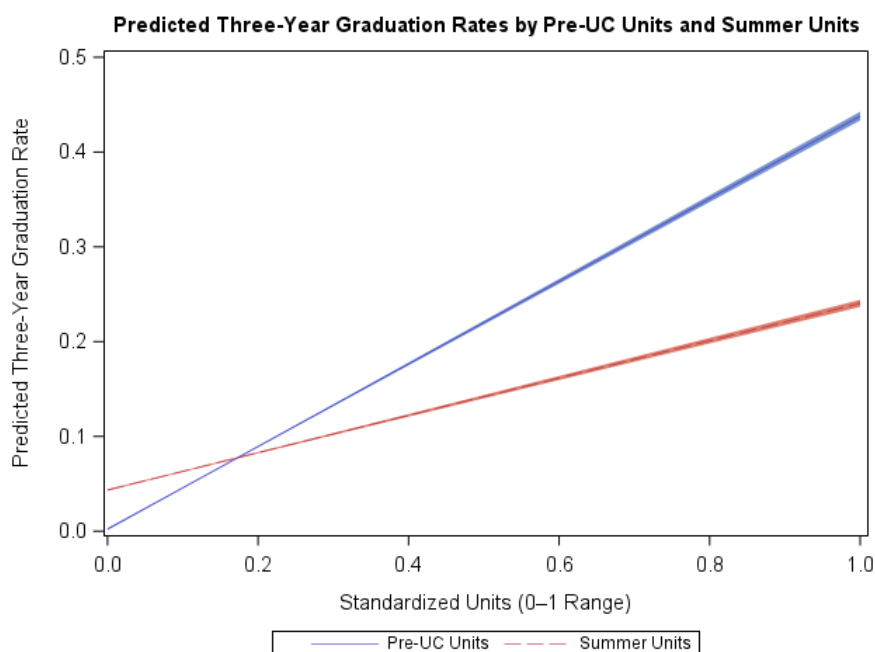
A. Pre-UC Units



B. Summer Session Units



Further analysis indicates that both pre-UC units and summer sessions units (standardized to a common scale) are strong predictors of students' three-year graduation, though their effects differ substantially in magnitude and pattern. At lower standardized unit levels (below *standardized units* = 0.2), the red dashed line representing summer units lies slightly above the blue line for pre-UC units. This suggests that among students entering with few or no pre-college coursework, those who take summer courses soon after matriculation have a somewhat higher initial probability of graduating within three years.



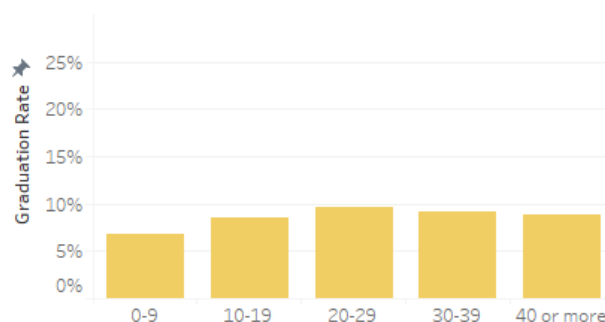
This is likely to reflect students' proactivity, motivation, or effective use of summer opportunities. However, the blue line rises more sharply for those with more pre-college coursework (beyond *standardized units* = 0.2), indicating that pre-UC units become a stronger predictor of three-year graduation for those with a moderate or high level of pre-UC units. Overall, while summer coursework benefits students with limited college level coursework before enrolling at UC, cumulative academic progress before entering the University exerts the greater influence on achieving at three-year degree.

Finally, students who graduated within three years demonstrated a better understanding of their field of study during their freshman year. They were more likely to spend more time attending classes, discussion sections, labs, and other academic activities outside of class in a typical week, and engage in class activities (e.g., class discussions) and faculty research or creative projects.

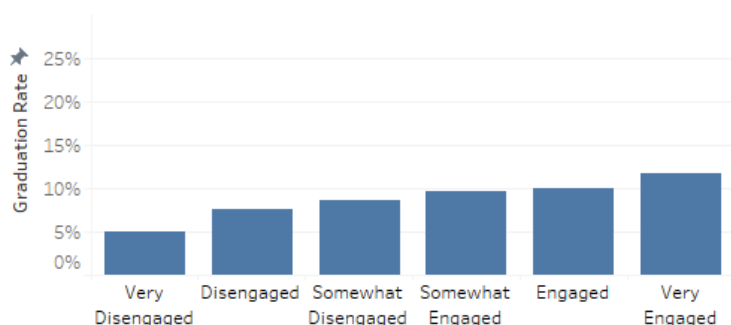
Understanding of a field of study in the freshman year



Hours spent attending classes, discussion sections, labs, and other academic activities outside of class in a typical week



Engagement in classroom activities, e.g., contributing to a class discussion, making a class presentation, etc.



Assisting faculty in their research or creative projects

