

UNDERGRADUATES

Tell us about life at UC Berkeley
and win prizes!

Take the UC Undergraduate
Experience Survey. Every
student has a voice.

Look for your official email or visit:
ucues.berkeley.edu

UC Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES)
UC Berkeley Office of Planning & Analysis

UNIVERSITY
OF
CALIFORNIA



Elite among the Elites: Honors Program Participants' Experiences at the University of California

Tongshan Chang

Institutional Research & Academic Planning

University of California Office of the President

SERU Symposium | September 24, 2025 | Berkeley

Research purpose

1. Understand the learning experiences of honors program participants (HPP students).
2. Identify strategies from honors programs that can be applied across UC's undergraduate education to benefit a broader range of students.
3. Enhance overall student success.

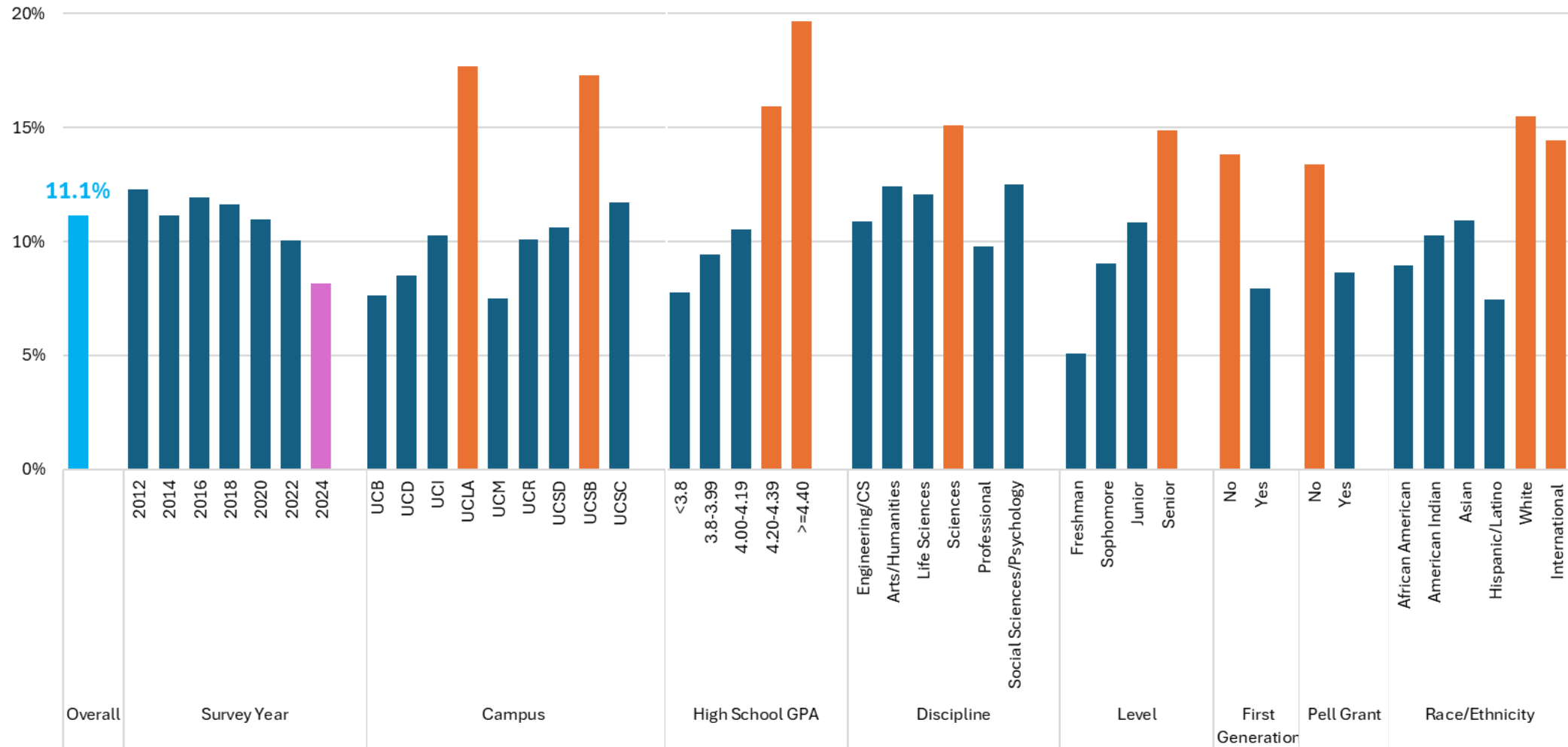
Research questions

1. Who participates in honors programs?
2. What are the learning experiences of honors program participants (HPP students), and how do they differ from those of nonparticipants (Non-HPP students)?
3. What are learning outcomes of honors program participants (HPP students), and how do they compare to those of (Non-HPP students) ?

Data & Definition

1. Source of honors program participation and learning experience data:
UCUES administered in 2006, 2012-2024
2. Sources of student success and post-graduation outcomes data:
 - 1) Four-year graduation data: UCOP institutional data system
 - 2) Graduate degree data: National Student Clearinghouse
 - 3) [next step] Post-graduation employment outcomes: California EDD (California Employment Development Department) and Lightcast

Who participates in honors programs? Participation rate by student group



Learning experiences—course requirement for learning objectives

[UCUES questions] Thinking back over your coursework in your major this academic year, how often were you **required to do** the following

Never=1, Rarely=2, Occasionally=3, Somewhat often=4, Often=5, Very often=6

	Mean			Linear Regression	
	All	HPP	Other	Coefficient	R^2
Recall facts, terms, or concepts	4.96	4.94	4.96	-0.05**	0.04
Explain methods, ideas, or concepts	5.00	5.07	5.00	0.02	0.03
Use facts and examples to support your viewpoin	4.77	4.80	4.77	0.01	0.04
Analyze relationships among ideas or concepts	5.01	5.05	5.00	0.01	0.03
Incorporate ideas or concepts from different courses	4.55	4.63	4.54	0.04	0.03
Judge the quality of information, ideas, or conclusions	4.45	4.57	4.44	0.11***	0.02
Create new ideas, products, or ways of understanding	4.23	4.30	4.22	0.06***	0.02

Note: The regression model controls for demographic and academic performance factors.

Learning experiences—engagement in academic activities

During this academic year, how often have you done each of the following?

Never=1, Rarely=2, Occasionally=3, Somewhat often=4, Often=5, Very often=6

	At Least Somewhat Often			Logistic Regression	
	Overall	HPP	Non-HPP	Coefficient	Odds Ratio
Found your courses so interesting that you did more work than was required	36.5%	45.6%	35.4%	0.21***	1.23
Communicated with the instructor outside of class about issues and concepts derived from a course	35.5%	46.3%	34.1%	0.24***	1.27
Increased your academic effort due to the high standards of a faculty member	53.9%	57.6%	53.4%	0.07**	1.07
Brought up ideas or concepts from different courses during class discussion	41.8%	51.7%	40.5%	0.21***	1.23
Substantially revised a paper before submitting it to be graded	58.6%	61.0%	58.3%	0.08***	1.08

Note: The regression model controls for demographic and academic performance factors.

Learning experiences—engagement in research

Indicate the following scholarship, research, and creative activities that you are currently doing or have completed as a [University name] student

Never=1, Rarely=2, Occasionally=3, Somewhat often=4, Often=5, Very often=6

		At Least Somewhat Often		Logistic Regression	
	Overall	HPP	Non-HPP	Coefficient	Odds Ratio
Assist faculty in conducting research	37.3%	56.4%	34.1%	0.49***	1.63
Assist faculty with a creative project	11.5%	20.1%	10.0%	0.43***	1.54
A creative project as part of your coursewo	62.1%	66.7%	61.3%	0.10**	1.11
Conduct your own research or creative project outside of your regular coursework under the guidance or supervision of a faculty member	23.9%	47.0%	19.9%	0.63***	1.88
Conduct your own research or creative project outside of your regular coursework without the guidance or supervision of a faculty member	17.3%	25.2%	15.9%	0.28***	1.32

Note: The regression model controls for demographic and academic performance factors.

Learning experiences—communicating research results

How did you communicate or share the results of your research or creative project? (Please select all that apply)

	% Selected			Logistic Regression	
	Overall	HPP	Non-HPP	Coefficient	Odds Ratio
Through presenting/exhibiting/ performing it on campus	14.5%	18.6%	13.1%	0.22***	1.25
Through presenting/exhibiting/ performing it outside of campus, such as at a regional, national and/or international conference or competition	31.6%	36.8%	30.0%	0.19***	1.21
Through publishing in a peer-reviewed professional journal	22.4%	27.5%	20.1%	0.21***	1.23
Through publishing in a campus or student journal	15.6%	21.4%	13.6%	0.26***	1.30
Through publishing in an electronic forum or other public arena	33.1%	31.4%	34.0%	-0.05	0.95

Note: The regression model controls for demographic and academic performance factors.

Learning outcomes—gains in competencies

Please rate your level of proficiency when you started at this campus and now.

Very Poor=1, Poor=2, Fair=3, Good=4, Very Good=5, Excellent=6

Gains = the level of proficiency now – the level of proficiency when started

	Mean Gains			General Linear Model	
	All	HPP	Other	Coefficient	R^2
Analytical and critical thinking skills	0.86	0.84	0.86	0.03***	0.43
Ability to read and comprehend academic material	0.90	0.94	0.90	0.06***	0.23
Ability to be clear and effective when writing	0.79	0.76	0.80	0.04***	0.43
Quantitative (mathematical and statistical) skills	0.48	0.46	0.48	0.01	0.11
Leadership skills	0.65	0.72	0.64	0.04***	0.14
Library and online information research skills (e.g., finding books, articles, evaluating information sources)	0.99	1.18	0.97	0.17***	0.32
Understanding your field of study (i.e., your major)	1.52	1.53	1.51	0.03***	0.51

Note: The regression model controls for demographic and academic performance factors, and “started” level of proficiency.

Learning outcomes—graduation and graduate study

	All	HPP	Non-HPP	Logistic Regression	
				Coefficient	Odds Ratio
Four-Year Completion Rate (%)	73.9%	82.3%	72.7%	0.21***	1.23
Graduation GPA (mean)	3.32	3.46	3.31	0.11***	--
Highest Academic Degree UCUES Respondents Planned to Earn (by degree type)	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Bachelor's degree	12.6%	8.9%	13.1%	-0.16*	0.85
Master's degree (academic and professional)	27.1%	25.6%	27.3%	-0.02	0.98
Doctoral (Ph.D., Ed.D, M.D., J.D., etc)	42.0%	50.0%	40.8%	0.18***	1.20
Do not know	18.4%	15.5%	18.8%	-0.13*	0.88
Highest Degree UCUES Respondents Earned within 10 Years after They Graduated from UC (by degree type)	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Bachelor's Degree	62.9%	54.6%	64.2%	-0.17***	0.84
Master's Degree (academic and professional)	27.8%	27.3%	27.9%	-0.02	0.98
Doctoral (Ph.D., Ed.D, M.D., J.D. etc)	9.3%	18.1%	7.9%	0.39***	1.48

Notes: 1. This analysis was based on the 2011 freshman entering cohort. 2. The regression model controls for demographic and academic performance factors.

Summary

Research purpose

1. Understand the learning experiences of honors program participants (HPP).

1. Student groups vary significantly in terms of honors program participation
 - There has been a declining trend over the years.
 - HPPs are more likely those at UCLA or UCSB, with a weighted GPA of 2.0 or above, in a science field, from high socioeconomic family, white, or international.
2. HPP students differ significantly in terms of their learning experiences
 - They were more likely to be required to work on higher order thinking learning objective, e.g., making a judgement, creating a new idea, etc.
 - They were more likely to engage in academic activities, e.g., increasing academic efforts, assisting faculty in research projects.
3. HPP students differ significantly in terms of learning outcomes
 - They were more likely to communicate their research products thorough more formal and academic platforms.
 - They were more likely to gain competencies, e.g., critical thinking, writing, research etc.
 - They were more likely to graduate within four year and more likely to earn a doctoral degree after graduating from UC.

Summary

Research purpose

2. Identify strategies from honors programs that can be applied across UC's undergraduate education to benefit a broader range of students.

1. Honors programs offered by UC campuses

Discipline	# (%)	UCB	UCD	UCI	UCLA	UCM	UCR	UCSB	UCSC	UCSD
Arts/Humanities	64 (35%)	16	7	9	9	1	0	14	0	8
Social Sciences	53 (29%)	11	4	6	7	2	0	6	0	17
Sciences	36 (19%)	8	4	3	7	1	0	4	0	9
Engineering/CS	9 (5%)	4	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
Interdisciplinary	14 (8%)	4	1	2	0	0	0	1	0	6
Campus level/other	9 (5%)	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	0
Total	185	44	18	21	25	5	1	28	1	42

Note: UCSC and UCSB have campus level programs. Other programs include those with a focus on a special area such as leadership, diversity, etc.

2. Top five most common activities/strategies

- 1) Thesis or capstone projects
- 2) Undergraduate research opportunities
- 3) Faculty mentorship/advising
- 4) Seminars and specialized courses
- 5) Advance writing and communication skills

Summary

Research purpose

3. Enhance overall student success

1. There is currently no direct evidence that these strategies alone account for HPP students' remarkable achievements. However, we know student engagement plays a central role in their success.
2. This raises an important question: could these engagement-centered strategies be adapted and applied more broadly across the UC undergraduate experience to benefit a wider range of students?

UNDERGRADUATES

Tell us about life at UC Berkeley
and win prizes!



Take the UC Undergraduate
Experience Survey. Every
student has a voice.

Look for your official email or visit:
ucues.berkeley.edu

UC Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES)
UC Berkeley Office of Planning & Analysis

UNIVERSITY
OF
CALIFORNIA



THANK YOU!

Tongshan.Chang@ucop.edu