

# UCLA

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## UCLA Senior Survey 2008

In Spring 2008, all seniors in the UCLA College of Letters and Science were asked to complete a survey on their academic experience at the university. The survey explored the views of students about their lives on campus, their studies, and their plans after graduating.

The result was 4,566 seniors responding – over 60 percent of the graduating class. The responses document views about the overall UCLA experience, student and campus life, academic majors and minors, the quality of faculty and courses, and research opportunities for undergraduates.

In addition to answering specific questions about the UCLA experience, seniors also had the opportunity to write their own thoughts about a variety of subjects regarding the university.

Almost 2,900 seniors responded to the following question: **What was your most meaningful learning experience at UCLA?**

Sixty-three percent of the survey respondents took the time to answer this question. Categories were created, and selected responses are presented for each theme.

## **Courses and Curricula (987 student comments, 19% of all comments)**

I had the opportunity to engage myself in a diverse set of courses. The University enabled me to explore many of the topics that I had a personal interest in AND receive college credit at the same time.

Being able (for the first time ever) to take classes that reflected my own upbringing, family, and community. Prior to entering UCLA I always felt marginalized. I felt that my family history and the struggles of my community were not deemed important in curriculum. All the curriculum seemed to be Euro-centric with no attention given to communities of color although they too represent America. Taking classes that dealt directly with my community validated my own experiences and made me feel that my community IS important.

Psych M147A [Psychology of the Lesbian Experience] . . . taught me about psych of couples/relationships, which I want to have a future career in, it taught me about myself, and it strengthened my relationship with a friend of mine. I knew from that class that I really did want to pursue a Ph.D. in clinical psych. It just kind of solidified my personal and academic identity.

My most meaningful learning experience was in my accounting classes. All my professors were able to get the class engaged and interested in . . . material that may seem dry. I never left class without laughing at least a few times during class.

As for my most meaningful learning experience, I would have to say that I am engaged in it this quarter. My Honors Collegium 140 class is the most eye-opening, most riveting, at times heart-wrenching class I have taken in my life. It is teaching me to open my eyes to the world around me and stop being racist (everybody, even though they may not admit it, is racist to some degree). It is a wonderful learning experience - I feel like I have grown after each class meeting. Great class! Great school!!!"

My most meaningful learning experience at UCLA was during my Music History 64 class. By looking at the History of Motown and Soul, I was introduced to things that were not apparent in my life and was also made aware of the interdependency between current and past disciplines.

Because the classes are so competitive, I learned quickly how to write really good papers, and as a result, how to make good arguments and how to honestly consider other people's arguments. Makes me glad I chose to major in Philosophy at UCLA.

One of my political science professors explicitly told us on the first day of class that he wanted to complicate the way we think. At first I was incredibly frustrated with the course, but by the end, realized that I had sharpened my critical thinking skills and that by "complicating" my thinking, my professor had truly forced me to analyze my opinions and provide a basis for them. That was definitely my most rewarding class.

. . . I'd say that my classes - particularly within the English department - have been incredibly significant to my own self-growth and understanding of the world. These courses have enabled me to learn about concepts, ideas and worldviews different from my own, and they have encouraged the acceptance and tolerance of all those differences. That acceptance is what I hope all UCLA students can share - an acceptance for every kind of person both here and abroad, and an excitement to learn and grow from interacting with those separate views and individuals.

Taking Soc 145-Sociology of Deviance with Prof. Linda Van Leuven. They were the best professor and best class I have ever taken. Besides learning about a very interesting field within sociology, it completely blew my mind and totally changed my way of thinking and how I view others. I revised my opinions and ethics about tolerance and I've been able to increase my empathy for others. I feel I can understand and get along with people who I disagree with, and use conflict to reflect on myself rather than judge others. I learned about myself and was able to become a much stronger person. This class influenced me in every possible way, and I have never enjoyed education so much as that. It permanently changed who I am.

Being involved with the Academic Advancement Program. They are THE best resource on campus, hands down--most supportive and willing to go out of their way to make your experience at UCLA the best. So, with that, my participation in FSP [Freshman Summer Program], AAP Research Rookies and the Ronald E. McNair Scholars Program has provided the most meaningful academic experience.

## **Personal Growth (879 comments, 17% of all responses)**

UCLA taught me to equally balance academic and social aspects of my life. With a variety of clubs and activities going on every week, I was able to come out of my academic-oriented shell and experience the social life outside of school.

I think I learned the most outside of the classroom from my peers. UCLA is a great environment to learn academically, but an even greater place to grow personally and develop into more mature and satisfied individuals than when we first arrived.

I learned a lot about myself, my strengths and weaknesses, my aspirations, and the value of family, friends. I have grown so much while I was here. I have learned to better appreciate myself and those around me. This growing experience allows me to return home feeling more confident in myself and in my ability to give back to my community and those I love.

That getting an education isn't just about getting good grades and following the structured model of the American school system, but about interacting with others, pushing yourself into new experiences, and discovering things about yourself that you would not have known otherwise.

That I have a lot to offer this world. I have grown up so much during my time here and have gained the confidence I need to be a great member of my community. Coming from a small town, I didn't have that before I came. My experience as a UCLA student is one that I will always look back on with pride. UCLA has taught me to have pride and stand tall in all that I do as a student and as a part of this world.

I realized that I need to put myself out more. In other words, I learned that I need to be more social. . . . Being at UCLA helped me realize that I need to be involved more in events, activities, and clubs. There are so many great students at UCLA who take charge and know what they want to accomplish. They have causes and they fight for what they believe in and they express their opinion without worrying what others might think of them.

Learning about myself and maturing on my own in a college environment. . . . UCLA really pushes you to the limit, but you come out stronger than ever.'

My most meaningful learning experience at [UCLA] was learning that life is not about being the best but trying your best, and, to always ask for help because someone is willing to help you.

Besides academics, the most valuable thing for me was learning who I am in a huge university that allows me to be anything I want to be without judging or questioning me.

I entered UCLA timid, and unsure of my ability to compete academically at the same standard as other students. However, after finding my footing I learned to trust myself.

And that, to me, is the single most valuable thing that I have learned at UCLA. I learned my own self worth.

## **Diversity** **(471 comments, 9% of all responses)**

Being in an environment that is as diverse as UCLA - racially, economically, socially - is the most meaningful experience I've had. I have grown leaps and bounds as a person since coming to UCLA and experiencing the culture it offers.

I learned so much at UCLA, but I believe the most meaningful experiences came from my social interaction with people from all backgrounds in all fields of focus and with all hopes and dreams. My confidence and compassion [are] what I most value from my time at UCLA.

Generally, it was the experience of being exposed to a diverse group of students, not just ethnically, but socioeconomically too. Hearing about the different experiences my peers went through, seeing the variety of life events and steps leading to UCLA that each of us underwent was an eye-opener that allowed me to realize that differences go beyond skin, beyond simple opinions.

Really, [it was] just meeting a whole bunch of people from different backgrounds and majors and [seeing] how we all mesh together quite well within this community. No matter where or what walks of life we came from we are all in the same boat now and can have a connection through our experience at UCLA.

That sometimes we hold theories in life about other people, unfamiliar situations, etc., and that sometimes those theories must be broken or altered in order for us to grow into a better person.

Meeting my first year roommate who happened to be an Asian ethnic minority. . . . She taught me about the diversity of California because she was from a rural area in Northern California. She opened my eyes to what it really means to be a minority, and the struggles first generation college students face while in a Big university setting while away from home.

I feel a completely different, more well rounded, open, confident, and artistically capable person than when I came to UCLA, and it's all because of my interactions with people outside of class. UCLA's size and diversity have allowed me to come into contact with many different cultures and forms of art that I had never before encountered, which I feel have broadened my views as a person and an artist. I now know more about what I want to do, and am not afraid to pursue a career in music.

I learned that my race, class, gender, sex, sexual orientation, and culture are all important. The student organizations, the professors, and the community internships I participated in taught me that I will always face adversity but that I cannot give up without a fight.

I randomly joined a study group for [an] upper division political science class that I didn't have any friends in. The group was diverse in every aspect imaginable. I was nervous,

but we all got along amazingly and we still keep in touch. I learned that people who aren't like me are people that I want to be friends with. Rather than being friends with those that come from the same background and class, meeting others is important to social awareness.

My most meaningful experience at UCLA was being able to be part of such a diverse school. I have learned so much from not only my peers but also my teachers. I feel that because UCLA is such a diverse campus with so much to offer, I was able to push myself to get involved in many things, and also explore different classes that I was always interested in. I feel like UCLA meets the needs of every student, and does a good job of offering something for everyone.

## **Faculty** **(446 comments, 8% of all responses)**

The amazing professors that I had in the Spanish department showed me how great literature is. I could tell from each of them that they personally enjoyed the subjects they were teaching. That in turn helped me develop a love for Hispanic literature especially and literature in general.

The interaction with historians at the top of their field. They knew their stuff, and they brought a palpable brilliance to the classroom, but were also more than happy to discuss my little pet theories in their office hours.

During my final year at UCLA, I met Dr. Susan Plann in the department for my minor. She took me under her wing and gave me the wisdom and confidence to begin volunteering in the local community and working with minority groups. She is the first person at UCLA to help me discover what I want to be in life and I now feel like I have a strong path to follow for the future. She truly changed my life forever.

Having a professor go over a midterm with me and let me know what I could do to improve and then offer to write me sample questions to help me prepare for the final.

In every class the professors challenged me and opened my thoughts to a vast world that before had been obscured. I was always amazed at the treasures shown me. Presentation of the lectures, close interactions of thought, and the light that ensued was the most meaningful experience for me. I'll never forget it. UCLA English Rocks!

I took a class with professor Aron, and went to him for a letter of recommendation. He asked me to what colleges I would be applying, and why. I told him some of my choices in colleges, and he essentially told me to aim higher. It was a nice wake-up call. He told me I will be graduating from a top-tier school, and deserve only top-tier schools from here on. It really gave me a sense of accomplishment and encouraged me to set my sights higher for graduate school.

The most meaningful learning experience at UCLA was a class taught by Professor Peter Thompson. He was insightful and open to discussion. Because of him, I realized that learning is something that doesn't need to be forced, it's fun.

My very first quarter here at UCLA, after transferring in, I was afraid I wouldn't like my major, that I had wasted my and my parent's money, and that I'd have to go back to community college. During that first quarter my first [atmospheric science] professor, Professor Fovell, taught AOS [Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences] 101. He was genuinely excited and passionate about not only his field of study but also sharing that with us. I thought, "This is what I came to UCLA for, this is what I love doing." And I've never looked back with doubt since.

My most meaningful learning experience at UCLA has to have been when I took Dr. Lemelson's course on the Anthropology of Psychological Pathology (Anthro 131) back in Spring of 2007. He was so enthusiastic about teaching and students felt welcome seeking his advice for anything related to psychology and/or anthropology. His insight has been priceless.

Most of the professors were excellent. Many of them tried to help us think more creatively and encouraged us to express our ideas. This greatly helped me to consider having research experiences even if I wasn't that interested in research during my earlier period of college life.

I felt most inspired in the classroom of Professor Paul VonBlum. It was in his class that I decided I wanted to pursue a career that will make a positive difference in the world I live in. I will always be grateful to him, and UCLA, for that.

## **Extracurricular Involvement (288 comments, 5% of all responses)**

I can't pinpoint one thing. I really love how UCLA offers [a] variety of services - the Alumni Association events, the student groups, the research opportunities, the dorm experiences.

My involvement in all the student groups on campus has been by far the most meaningful experience at UCLA. Getting involved in a fraternity, joining the Spirit Squad, and becoming a campus tour guide have enhanced my experience at UCLA by exposing me to ambitious, friendly, diverse peers. . . . I have ultimately learned that only a portion of my UCLA experience is in the classroom.

My most meaningful learning experience from UCLA was not in the classroom but was with my involvement as a student leader of a student-led organization on campus (E3) [Ecology, Economy, Equity]. I learned about my self, my strengths, and my abilities as a person. I've grown exponentially and I feel truly empowered to make a difference in the world. I learned how to make things happen, how to work with administration, how to facilitate, how to be effective, how to organize, how to inspire, how to teach, how to be happy, and a new and better way to live. . . . From this experience I feel I can do just about anything if I put my mind to [it].

Dance Marathon at UCLA. I learned so much about myself as well as other people. I learned that despite all the negative aspects of life, all different types of people were willing to participate. Seeing all the dedicated and hard-working individuals really made me proud to be a Bruin for life.

I think my most meaningful learning experience at UCLA was being a part of the Latin American Student Association. It is with this organization that I have learned so much about myself, and so much about different groups of people. They are an incredibly integral part of this campus.

I started a student group and organized numerous events on campus. I learned more through my involvement in the student group than I could have ever learned in any classroom or book. The lessons I learned complemented my academic education very nicely and contributed to my critical thinking and analytical skills.

The most meaningful learning experience was my involvement in student organizations. I feel that I learned much about myself and my interactions with others. I learned values in my skills as a leader, as a student, and as an individual. I was able to make a difference in someone's life through my volunteer service.

Through my work with the American Indian Student Association as well as my work within the Community Programs Office I have become an empowered student and this is the most important thing I can possibly take away from my time at UCLA.

The student organizations I was involved with outside of the academic realm such as COPE [Community Outreach for Prevention and Education] internship and UCLA Chorale and soccer class through the Wooden Recreation Center. The experiences and lifelong lessons I learned here could never be compensated for through books and lectures. This has helped me value the merits of direct initiation and involvement within the community . . . .

## Friendships (223 comments, 4% of all responses)

Being here has taught me how much there is to learn and how many people you can meet in a lifetime. It's amazing to me how I've expanded my network, and I appreciate the diverse group of friends, acquaintances, coworkers, and organization members who surround me. . . . It's a pity I have to leave this community where there is such a great concentration of amazing individuals, all with their stories to tell and impact to make on the world. We come from all walks of life, but we are all guided by our passions and drives to succeed and give back to the world.

Simply the other students—the kids. Being a part of UCLA's unique, relatively diverse student body, the kind which a university that is both public and prestigious attracts. Finding others who are both nerdy and hip, smart and social, committed to having fun with friends while still upholding family values. Seeing both the good and bad outcomes of many diverse people coming together (or not). Realizing that we remain united through our unique place between adolescence and adulthood.

Though I thoroughly enjoyed all that I learned academically in my classes during my time at UCLA, I think that my most meaningful experiences have come from the variety of incredibly nuanced, motivated, passionate and hard-working people who I am privileged to call my peers. From my co-workers at my on-campus job to fellow volunteers in various mentorship programs to friends who push me to broaden my horizons and my mind each new day, all of these people have helped me to become confident in who I am . . . and to head steadily in the direction of my own personal goals.

Interacting with creative, motivated, and intelligent people. People at UCLA have a voice, and the most important thing I learned was to listen to as many as I possibly could.

The interaction that I had with the students at the university. The warmth in their welcome is my most memorable moment.

That friends and fun are more important than one's GPA. In ten years I will remember and value good times with good people more than any course work or learning process.

The people. The community. Being open to others. Knowing my strengths and weaknesses through interaction with others.

Growing, struggling and striving together with the lifelong friends (family) that I've made at UCLA. . . .

The most meaningful thing I have learned during my stay at UCLA is that people are ultimately the most important thing in life. Your family, friends, classmates, professors are people who have the potential to make a significant contribution to your life and deserve to be respected and valued above grades, success or money.

## **Intellectual Skills (197 comments, 4% of all responses)**

While at UCLA I learned how to learn. Prior to college I simply memorized facts or dates and passed tests. UCLA taught me to analyze things thoroughly in order to understand the "why" instead of the "when."

UCLA planted within me a desire to "dig deeper" and always learn more. This is a very special gift.

I think realizing that I do not know anything. Everything I had known was questioned and analyzed, so I have learned to look at every angle of things before making an opinion of something.

It wasn't what they taught me, it was how they taught me how to think.

I learned how to open my mind and let in ideas that were foreign to me. I gained a comprehensive and universal understanding of academic topics as well as social [ones].

My eyes opened to new ways of thinking. I learned to approach issues from multiple perspectives in order to make the best possible decision.

## Research Experience (162 comments, 3% of all responses)

Learning how to do archival research was important to me. It allowed me to sift through bits and pieces from another time with which I could form my own opinions about the past.

Learning that research is attainable and tangible is most meaningful to me. Students often read textbooks and academic journals and think that they could never make similar contributions to their field of study. UCLA, however, encourages students to ask questions and be the catalyst for research and become the people students read about in textbooks and academic journals.

Even if it was outside of my major, I delighted to visit the various research facilities that UCLA hosts and experience the warm reception all the researchers had to offer. I think if UCLA showed all of its students exactly what kind of exciting work goes on in all departments of the university, the students might be able to discover more interests, hone the ones they have, and have a greater respect and pride in their university.

Working in my organic lab courses and having the opportunity to analyze and synthesize compounds using techniques that will be of use outside the classroom. It was amazing learning synthesis techniques and knowing that the professors who teach you have participated in their creation.

Doing undergraduate research in Dr. Debora Farber's Lab at Jules Stein [Eye Institute]. I was allowed to work independently on my own project. The trust they had in me gave me confidence in myself and the opportunity to really work in science.'

Participating in student-directed research! We have one of the best research facilities in the world.

## **Study Abroad (113 comments, 2% of all responses)**

The most meaningful learning experience was actually not at UCLA but through UCLA, when I studied abroad. However, I think my experience at UCLA prior to my study abroad experience is what really made me reflect on my new surroundings and my academic pursuits, and for that, I am very grateful.

Filed Biology Quarter through the EBE [Ecology, Behavior and Evolution] department. Went to Nicaragua for 3 weeks with 13 other students, 2 TAs and 2 professors. It was great! What an opportunity to meet people and do research.

UCLA's EAP [Education Abroad Program] was the most meaningful learning experience. I went to South Korea, and that has given me my current career path—teaching English in South Korea.

I participated in the French department's travel study program where I took three upper division French classes, and this was a great experience because it provided the support . . . to feel comfortable in a foreign country (fellow UCLA students and faculty) while providing enough difference (classes held abroad) to make you learn something and experience a different culture.

UCLA travel-study program over the summer in Paris, France. . . . This was well-organized, fulfilled a number of requirements, the teachers were top-notch, and the curriculum was fantastic.

I feel that going abroad was my most valuable experience through UCLA. I felt that my eyes [were] opened to another completely different world in which experiencing other cultures firsthand is vital for one to understand what will help the future of our planet and its inhabitants.

In the fall of 2006, I studied via EAP in Siena, Italy. . . . That trip shaped my ability to truly understand and accept human differences, whether they are appealing to me or not. I was very lucky to travel again in the summer of 2007, that time to Mexico through UCLA's summer travel study programs, and expanded upon those lessons once more. But it was studying in Italy that really brought brand new colors to my life and boosted my desire to work abroad, on issues related to equality between nations and their people.

## **Civic Engagement (106 comments, 2% of all responses)**

Being a part of the progressive student groups here, serving the community, understanding my privilege as a college student and working hard to give back to the community that made my experience and success possible.

My involvement with Unicamp helped me to learn a lot about myself and how I want to spend my life helping others in some capacity. In this program I met many other amazing and selfless people and our experience with underserved kids from LA made it clear that much needs to be done to equalize an obvious gap.

The most memorable learning experience for me was during my second year. It wasn't in a classroom or lecture per se, but it was the first time I watched a screening for "Invisible Children" on campus. As an underclassman, I had never been exposed to global issues and the threat of social injustice. It sparked a fire of compassion and activism that has not died yet and has become a passion of mine to pursue further. It is probably what gave me a purpose to work toward and everything in my UCLA education afterwards was geared to knowing more about cultures and issues all over the world and how I can play a part to help.

My most meaningful learning experience at UCLA came when I witnessed the student march for diversity at UCLA. While the UC regents spoke indoors, students shared stories and opinions outside. The march demonstrated an institution that prepared its students to speak up passionately and articulately against the problems they felt needed to be addressed, even if it was against the institution that educated them. Moreover, we witnessed an institution willing to hear our criticism and respect us for our readiness to stand firmly in our positions.

I had the opportunity to teach HIV/AIDS education in rural villages throughout Tanzania during the summer. The only way to learn about the world is to thrust yourself into it.

Working on a project to improve Mayan communities in Chiapas, Mexico. I was able to apply so many different skills and the hands-on experience was incredibly valuable, even though this was not related to my major. My mentor-professor and my fellow project mates made the experience much deeper.

Getting involved with the Student Activity Center and playing a direct role in outreaching and increasing access to undeserved and underprivileged communities, directly working with my peers' retention [issues at] this school, and directly creating community service efforts on campus and off campus.

I was a part of the Student-Initiated Outreach Center's Samahang Pilipino Advancing Community Empowerment program and became a peer advisor to high school students in under-resourced areas. This helped me to decide that counseling and working with the underprivileged is suited for me.

Being part of the Higher Opportunity Program for Education (HOPE) made me feel that I was part of a student community that contributed to both the UCLA community and the local community.

I would have to say that being a minority on campus allowed me to understand the power I have as an individual to help other minorities complete higher levels of education. I learned a lot about myself and how I can work best for others.

Learning that I have the power and ability as a UCLA graduate to create social change.

## Negative Experience (98 comments, 2% of all responses)

Getting dismissed. I learned a lot and turned it into a positive in my life. I actually became involved more and eventually helped students that got dismissed as well, to get them back into UCLA thru SRRP [Summer Readmission & Retention Program]. I love helping students and seeing them succeed.

I enjoyed my major and minor, however I wish I would have had more guidance during my first years at UCLA. I feel I didn't take full advantage of my experiences here at first.

That being disenfranchised on campus can make it more difficult for your success therefore you need to rally and petition for causes that are near to you and your fellow students. Diversity is really non-existent on campus for some groups, which also means that fighting for access, though it may not seem to be a big problem within your own community, is key to gaining this diversity.

My most meaningful learning experience was not very positive, although I find that it will only better me as a person in the long run. The quarter before I was supposed to graduate I took a class I could not handle and was unable to pass. Whether it was due to the intensity of the course or my own personal issues, I was forced into a situation that I had never imagined I would be in. I refused to let this situation define me as a student, let alone a person, and I continued with great effort so that I would remedy the situation and graduate exactly as planned. This entire experience made me realize that who I am as a person cannot and will never be defined by one single moment.

Learning how to deal with a huge community of people that I had a hard time fitting into. I truly had to search and experiment for a long time before I found activities and people that I enjoyed. It was unpleasant for a while, but I feel that I learned lessons that will last a lifetime.

I can't decide what experience was most meaningful to me. Commuting to school has prevented me from experiencing UCLA to the fullest.

My most meaningful learning experience at UCLA was when I realized that 90% of what I have learned at UCLA [is] going to be useless and it is only because UCLA is a name-brand college that I will get any respect in the working world. Honestly, I think people in the working world don't give a s\*\*t if you learn anything; they just see that you graduated from UCLA and are like "ohhhh fancy, you must be smart." As a geography major, I feel like I should recycle my diploma in order to make an environmental statement.

## **Intellectual Interactions with Classmates (85 comments, 2% of all responses)**

The most meaningful experience was being in an environment where my professors and fellow students respected each other's differences and were able to have free and open intellectual discourse.

Finding people to connect with on an intellectual basis. I have never been in an environment with such a thirst for knowledge and understanding. My most meaningful learning experience has been through understanding different perspectives from the students and TAs.

What I learned from the students around me. I've never been immersed in such a diverse crowd of intellectuals. I was exposed to so many different world views and forced to reconsider my own. Hands down this immersion led to the most personal growth for me.

The best experience was being able to share the daunting task of planning my own future with other students who went through the same stressful and courageous moments as I. Together we stayed up through the wee hours of the morning on campus in study (sometimes cram) sessions, eating comfort foods and supporting one another when needed. In the end, my learning experience was shared with my classmates, and knowing that we all went through it together is the best part of all, along with obtaining a degree at the end, of course.

Being surrounded by such intelligent and hard working students made me truly appreciate my experience at UCLA.

It was just great to learn with all the inspired classmates in UCLA.

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