In Spring 2007, 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 5,100 seniors responding – over 65 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.

More than 3500 seniors responded to the following question: **What was your most meaningful learning experience at UCLA?**

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

**Quotes**

**Courses and Curricula (1207 student comments, 34% of all comments)**

- Food, Agriculture and the Environment (Geography 132) with Professor Carney. The mood in that class was amazing. Everyone was so interested in the material, everyone talked in class, the reading material was outstanding, and Prof. Carney was very excited about the subject and able to pass her excitement onto her students.

- Although 2 years of GE requirements seemed useless at first, after taking an array of classes from different fields of study I realized they were invaluable for my overall range of knowledge, and they were generally very interesting. I’m glad I was forced to take them.

- I came into UCLA as a pre-psychology major, but then I took a history class my first quarter as a freshman - History 13C - and fell in love. I immediately changed my major to history and never looked back. I am thankful to UCLA for offering classes that so easily sparked my interest and excitement.
• Switching out of a traditional discipline such as anthropology and majoring in Asian American Studies instead. So much of my experience - the people, parties, events, clubs, organizations - has been a direct result of my decision to major in Asian American Studies. No classroom here has provided a better learning environment open to people of all race, gender, sexuality, and class.

• Taking several IDS [International Development Studies] 100A courses like IDS 100A/B where we explored why third world countries are “poor” and why first world countries are “rich.” The professors and students were very engaged, and the materials were thought-provoking and intellectually stimulating.

• The fact that UCLA is so large and therefore is able to offer so many courses in so many fields is my favorite thing about UCLA and contributed to my positive academic experience here more than any other factor.

• All of my English classes were immensely valuable. I think English offers what no other major can offer in the way of critical thinking and articulation.

• The Economics major challenged me very much. I have learned more Math than I ever thought I would be able to. I feel a lot smarter after completing coursework for this major, which I thought was very difficult at times.

• My most meaningful learning experience at UCLA was my year-long freshman GE cluster in which we studied performing arts. . . . This GE cluster allowed me to take an interdisciplinary approach to my studies, and to look at all the ways in which seemingly disparate fields of study are connected. The class instilled in me early on in my UCLA experience the critical thinking skills that would make me successful in any class.

**Personal Growth (737 comments, 14% of all responses)**

• Being able to analyze arguments as well as thinking in terms of being a woman. I can pretty much carry a conversation with anyone and feel confident in conveying my meaning clearly while making intelligent contributions. I think people look to me when I say things, as if I represent the whole UCLA community, and that feels great.

• I found team work to be the most valuable lesson. I used to like to do things myself. After attending UCLA, I realized that it didn’t matter how smart I was, I still needed help from others, whether it be from faculty or fellow students.

• I learned that going to college was the right thing for me. I was challenged to think, and I was around great professors and fellow students. I enjoyed . . . my entire learning experience, and the struggles I went through trying to graduate. . . . It was difficult, but I now feel there is nothing I can’t do.
Learning how to be independent. With so many students who had different opinions, I had to learn to speak for myself and to do things on my own. . . . With many students of different background, ethnicity, and race, I was also able to learn different points of views.

My most meaningful learning experience at UCLA was learning to be independent and more confident. . . . Initially, adjusting to UCLA’s size was a bit tough for me, but through time I was able to become more self-sufficient. UCLA has the resources to succeed but it is up to you to seek them.

Taking a class on racism, sexism, and heterosexism (Honors 140), which involved intensive reading, discussion, and self-reflection. I grew tremendously as an individual, cultivated greater leadership skills, made new friends, and opened my eyes even further to the injustices in society that I need to take part in righting.

The academics were excellent of course, but more importantly, I feel that I have gotten to know myself in so many ways and discovered what kind of woman I hope to be. I am much more aware of what is going on in the world and how I can start to make a positive difference.

Keeping focused and directed toward successful completion of my personal goals . . . Realizing I can make positive decisions for myself that don’t require approval of others . . . Recognizing that I am a unique individual with abilities in research and critical thinking that are unique and valuable to the academic community.

**Faculty (618 comments, 11% of all responses)**

I am especially grateful to Professors Gallagher, Little, and Watson. Each of them gave me an invaluable education, heartfelt encouragement, and profound personal inspiration. They have transformed my vision of literature, of the world, and of myself, and I will carry their spirits with me for the rest of my life.

Being able to interact with professors who were able to help me through rough times.

Having my preconceived notions about the interest I would develop in topics shattered by the superb teaching skills of some of the professors, particularly those in the history department.

I can honestly say that taking classes with awesome professors was what made UCLA a meaningful learning experience. I enjoyed sitting in every single class I took. All the professors I took were great lecturers—they made the subjects very engaging.

I took a class with a really difficult grader. She told me that my writing needed a lot of work (this was not a writing class). She gave me many suggestions on how to
improve. I took her advice and it helped me tremendously. . . . I was very touched to know that she genuinely cared so much about her students.

- I had professors with very different views on things, and they challenged me to really make sure I know why I believe what I believe.

- My most meaningful learning experience has been that I was able to get very close to my professors. They opened up to me and guided me with their words of wisdom when I most needed it. They are more than professors, they are outstanding intellectuals.

- Professor Von Blum’s lectures always made me think critically about social issues. His passion for the civil rights movement consequently led me to think about my own lack of activism. He inspired me to be aware of social issues and to participate, however little that I can.

- When a professor sat with me after I didn’t do too well on his test and told me I needed to understand the concepts instead of just memorizing the facts. He then helped me in his office throughout the quarter to understand the concepts.

**Extracurricular Involvement (300 comments, 6% of all responses)**

- Becoming involved in Alpha Phi Omega and reading to underprivileged children. There are some important life lessons that you do not learn in the classrooms.

- Being a part of my pre-med organization, Chicanos/Latinos for Community Medicine. This was the organization that helped me gain leadership by being a health project director for 2 years and helped solidify the fact that I will succeed in becoming a doctor one day.

- Being a part of student organizations such as the Student Alumni Association and UCLA Dance Marathon. Both organizations have taught me life lessons that could not be learned in a classroom setting. They allowed me to interact with different types of people and work as a team towards a common goal. They provided a way to give back to the UCLA community.

- My involvement with cultural student-initiated, student-run organizations has contributed the most to my growth both as a student and as a person. Most of what I learned was outside of the classroom, and only then was I able to understand and find the relevance in my academics.

- Seeing all of the groups around campus speaking about important issues going on in the world.
Interactions with People from Diverse Backgrounds (291 comments, 5% of all responses)

- Being able to interact with different people from various backgrounds. . . . In the end, I have realized I cannot be accepted by everyone and I cannot change who I am. However, I can try my best to understand others by being open-minded.

- Getting a chance to know people from diverse backgrounds and cultures. I feel that I am much surer of myself as a person and as a result I have found myself more open to experience new things and people.

- In general, just the diverse group of people I got to interact with academically and socially, racially and religiously.

- Learning that despite racial, religious, and/or political differences, all students at this school stand as one under the banner of gaining intellectual knowledge. The expansion of my mind to acknowledge the plethora of horizons and drives of different people has been a quintessential experience that makes me the person I am today.

- My most meaningful learning experience at UCLA was interacting with students from different backgrounds in the Academic Advancement Program. AAP is a great program to help disadvantaged students receive the tools they need to succeed at UCLA.

- The freedom in expression and the respect given to students from various backgrounds. The availability of a wide array of clubs/community service activities to help expand our leadership skills and social involvement.

- The opportunity, as a non California resident, to go to a school in Los Angeles with such a rich sense of tradition and excellence and to meet different kinds of people—even just the ones from around the state of California—and learn more about myself and who I am in the process. I loved experiencing everything it means to be a bruin.

Research Experience (279 comments, 5% of all responses)

- Researching for my English Comp 100W class was the most meaningful experience at UCLA. I was allowed to create a magazine/research paper on any field I was interested in and chose to look at the education of Native Hawaiians in Hawaii, focusing particularly on schools offering curriculum in Hawaiian language. This allowed me to learn more about my culture and myself along the way.

- Studying with Professor Bell in the geography department for a research course. He never allowed anyone to rest or consider their research as adequate on a first try basis, and this drive for perfection became inspiring. After attending his course I see how professional research is an admirable and important field of work.
• I was involved in the PEERS and CARE undergraduate research clubs. They helped me understand research. Even more so, they made me feel a part of the UCLA community and construct a well-knit group of young minority students with which I was able to feel at home and accepted.

• I think doing lab research at UCLA has been the most meaningful learning experience. I’ve been very involved - from writing my own protocols, to discussing results with my mentor, to presenting data in papers and presentations. I invested my time and energy in the research experience (which has had its frustrating moments!), but hopefully have received valuable skills training and practiced critical thinking that will prepare me for future ventures.

• From my experience this year writing an honors thesis and working very closely with professors and graduate students I have realized what a close group each area of research falls under. Professionals all over the country know what other studies are going on and keep up on all the current research. It is very interesting to see how each person has to be an expert in the field.

• The many research projects I conducted and papers I wrote, both for class and outside of class. This has undoubtedly prepared me for grad school.

• Working with a professor on research, I felt respected and like a collaborator.

• Working on research for local tribal communities. Using resources at UCLA to help surrounding communities.

**Friendships (242 comments, 4% of all responses)**

• The contributions to my success by newfound friends that will be my friends for life. Also, being a part of study groups that were formed by the same students throughout the different classes that we had together, and the feeling of confidence and strength from knowing that we taught each other all on our own.

• UCLA has proven they pick quality students. . . . My classmates, dorm-mates, and club members were among the best people I have ever met.

• The academics can be learned anywhere. But the quality of the people at UCLA is priceless. You establish life-long friendships here.

• The students really make you feel like you belong.
Intellectual Skills (232 comments, 4% of all responses)

• Being challenged by professors and TAs on a level I have never experienced before. Given the opportunity and skills to critically evaluate things in ways I have never experienced.

• Being challenged in classes to think outside my own beliefs and experiences.

• For one of the philosophy courses I took, we were required to meet with a graduate student and a classmate in order to review our writing, get comments, and improve our work. When I got my paper back, I had an important realization: what another person gets out of what I write could be completely different from what I had in mind if my choice of words wasn’t adequate. I learned that it is essential to go over your work and make sure it is as clear and precise as possible.

• Learning to be critical; not just passively accepting information from all sources.

Cultural Awareness and Appreciation of Diversity (223 comments, 4% of all responses)

• Being exposed to and learning to understand and respect the opinions of others even if they differ from mine. I came from a very sheltered background and UCLA’s diversity was a good experience.

• I can’t think of anything specific, but all conversations and classes that allowed me to learn more about and understand people of different backgrounds (whether religious, ethnic, sexual orientation, etc.) have really made me the open and accepting person I am today.

• I was educated about a lot of important issues going on around our world, and not only that, but I was educated about the IMPORTANCE of continuing to be conscious of things happening outside our bubble. I will continue to want to know these things and work to make a difference in the world.

• Taking classes that explored races and perspectives different than my own. UCLA classes and environment have helped expand my views and beliefs in an informed manner. I truly appreciate the diverse ethnic and racial student background. All of my close friends are a different race than my own and I have loved learning about their heritages.

• Writing comprehensive papers and being involved in open discussions in terms of American Literature and how the diversity of cultures in America have paved many roads for literature and expression as well as served as a road map of a growing socially-diverse America.
Civic Engagement (140 comments, 3% of all responses)

• I volunteered for Justice Corps my senior year and that helped me tie in the political ideas that are discussed in class and on campus to the situation in the real world.

• I really enjoyed a class called Latinos, Linguistics, and Literacy with Susan Plann (Spanish) that included a community service component and an opportunity to volunteer at an inner city literacy center for adults wanting to learn to read in English.

• Participating in the Project Brainstorm internship was probably my most meaningful experience at UCLA. I learned how to work in groups as well as present and teach presentations. Working outside of UCLA by traveling to local schools and teaching children about the brain has taught me more than I could ever learn in a lecture hall.

• Learning about medically indigent populations through the Mobile Clinic Project and applying that knowledge directly through service learning.

• Being part of Chicanos/Latinos for Community Medicine (CCM) and becoming a director for the Black/Latino AIDS (BLAIDS) project has been very meaningful.

• Being a part of the student activity center. The programs there helped me develop as a holistic thinker and keep ties to my community. Involvement in programs that service the communities of UCLA let me see how UCLA could potentially play a big part in helping impoverished neighborhoods.

• Participating in COPE [Community Outreach for Prevention and Education] because it provided me with an opportunity to take what I was learning in class and apply it in such a positive way in the community.

Study Abroad (154 comments, 3% of all responses)

• Summer school in Europe with diverse students led me to understand that toleration is the key to peaceful socialization.

• Travel Study in Europe in the summer of ’06. It was the exposure to several other cultures that made it meaningful and my UCLA education that made it possible to see the meaning.

• I was able to go on a UCLA summer travel program with Barry Sanders. It was amazing with a small class, our classes in a hotel, and one on one time with a true professor. . . . I learned a lot and got to be in Europe as I was doing it. Also studying in Australia was amazing. I got to take Aboriginal art and modern Aussie art which would never be offered at UCLA. Study abroad is a time to learn about the world and yourself, and to come back to UCLA refreshed and appreciate your time there even more.
• As a whole, majoring in Spanish was the most meaningful because it gave me the ability to take classes in Costa Rica and Spain. Now I’ve lived with and learned about two different cultures, I am proficient in Spanish and am looking forward to all the experiences I’ll be able to have thanks to my degree in Spanish!

**Intellectual Interactions with Classmates (139 comments, 3% of all responses)**

• Being able to have a respectful debate in a classroom setting between two people who have completely opposite interpretations of certain elements of US History, and afterwards being able to sit down to enjoy a meal together.

• Being in political science classes and interacting with students of all different backgrounds. You can tell the passion they have for the subject matter and the dedication/ambition to do great things in the future to effect change.

• Interacting and learning with top students in the country has been very exciting but difficult. I was often discouraged by the letter grade I received, but I know I have learned a lot.

• Interacting with students who challenged me was something I hadn’t previously experienced, and it forced me to think more critically about things.

**Negative Experience (114 comments, 2% of all responses)**

• Coming from an inner city area, I learned a lot about lack of opportunities for minority races. I had expected more diversity at UCLA, but once stepping on the campus, I learned that more needs to be done to get people of minority races into these PUBLIC universities.

• Experiencing my first bad grade in a class. It taught me that UCLA is an academic environment and that I have to work harder in order to compete with others. Natural abilities simply do not cut it here.

• Bureaucratic bulwarks are what I’ve learned about. Several of them nearly soured my opinion of UCLA. I’ve learned that having an outstanding corps of brilliant professors doesn’t guarantee an efficient administration.

• Pulling an all-nighter studying for Chem 14C, and ultimately ending up with a C- which led me to re-take the class. Lesson learned: don’t pull all-nighters, and study in advance for exams!

• The period of time after I was dismissed was probably the most important experience at UCLA (if not the most significant experience in my life so far). I realized how
much help was available at the institution that I had never thought to take advantage of, and I learned a significant deal about myself as a person.

- Learning to ‘deal with it’ - Classes are full sometimes... roommates can suck... parking is a nightmare... everything is expensive... professors can be busy... loneliness can sneak up on you, etc. All of these things happened, and I just learned to deal with it and to seek support from the non-aloof professors and a positive peer group, which fortunately I had.

**Residential Life (114 comments, 2% of all responses)**

- Being a part of ORL [Office of Residential Life] has given me the opportunity to experience many, many students of different backgrounds. Being able to interact with so many students on so many levels, touching their lives, and contributing to their on campus housing experience at UCLA, is truly a gift.

- Living in the dorms was a life changing experience. I learned to be more social, independent, and understanding of others. I lived with an African American, Mexican American, and Chinese American and spent a lot of time with my roommate and suitemates, so I learned a lot about other cultures.

- Living on this beautiful campus has been absolutely amazing. Meeting new people and the experience I have had at this wonderful, beautiful campus have been life changing.

- My dorm floor freshman year was amazing. I had a laidback, nice RA who encouraged social interaction and group activities. Everyone, on and off the floor, was so friendly and ready to meet new people. I just loved the environment! Interacting with such intelligent, passionate, and thoughtful people constantly encouraged me to learn constantly as well.

**Connected/Integrated Learning (63 comments, 1% of all responses)**

- Becoming a sociology major has been one of the best decisions I have made here. I've been exposed to so many views and ways of looking at how society is organized and learned about other allied fields such as psychology, political science, geography as well. It's been great! Challenging, but great!

- Interacting with the various, diverse group of teachers and students and also the fact that, conveniently, all the courses that I have taken each quarter tie in and relate to each other in the most profound ways. . . . Even when I thought the course materials, reading, and lectures would be totally different and irrelevant to the each other, it was truly amazing the way they tied into each other, and I loved making the connections and threading the similarities together in my head.
• There was no single most meaningful learning experience; the entire 4 years have been filled with knowledge stacked upon knowledge. I learn a ton of new things every single day, even as a senior, that combine with past things to form one enormous and successful learning experience.

• A feminist philosophy course opened my eyes to the implications of gender . . . in our society and the societies of the world at large.

• Analyzing the medical field through a sociological standpoint.

• I took an independent study class where I participated in the Mathematical Competition in Modeling. It finally showed me how math really can apply to reality.

• My most meaningful learning experience at UCLA was from interaction and engagement . . . with my peers on the material I had learned in classes. It was a synthesis of the outside experience of living on-campus with students of different majors and the inside curriculum I received from UCLA professors. [This synthesis of] fresh thoughts with old beliefs and covered material . . . was my most meaningful learning experience at UCLA.