Senior Survey Quotes

In spring 2009, 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 3,763 seniors responding – over 52 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.

Over 2,000 seniors responded to the following question: What was your most meaningful learning experience at UCLA?

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

Curricula (940 comments, 26% of all comments)

- I remember getting an 'A' in Prof. Mary Corey's Intellectual History of the U.S. class. I really felt like I belonged here when I could hold my own in a course like that. I loved my class on the Maghreb with Prof. Slyomovics—it's been instrumental to my understanding of European, African and Middle Eastern history. . . . Finally, I took a course on Medical History with Prof. Meldrum and that was the single most entertaining experience of my life while also being academically rigorous. These classes were something that stuck with me and reminded me what my experience here was about—hard work, earning respect through effort, quality and critical thinking.

- Winter quarter of my first year here as a transfer, I took a classics course with Kathryn McDonnell which entirely changed my perspective of possible academic pursuits. The class was so engaging and so relative to my tastes that it took me by surprise that I had not thought of it as a course of study before. It garnered in me a real love for classical archaeology.

- It was getting through classes more than the actual knowledge. The fast pace and high standards of the UCLA curriculum taught me to operate on a much more efficient, effective level than I ever could have imagined.

- My first class at UCLA really challenged me and taught me that at a university, learning is a cooperative process with the professor and classmates.

- As a student with a major in African American Studies and a concentration in history, this has been a monumental academic year for me. I am so honored to be an African American Studies major and to
be involved in such a rich cultural, political and social time period in history. Everything in the world has changed and I am a part of it!

- My most meaningful learning experience came from the Community Health Science 179 course I took. . . . It was a class that encouraged and promoted self-reflection and critical analysis/thinking. It was very refreshing to be in an environment where the pedagogy is not linear (top to bottom) but rather circular (we all learn from one another).

- One of the first classes I ever took at UCLA was an MCDB [Molecular, Cell and Developmental Biology] class about the biology of cancer. . . . The thing I liked most was the teacher. Our professor was very intelligent and very relaxed around his students, but also taught us very valuable and important things. I was lucky enough to have taken his class as one of my first, since almost everything he taught us has been referenced in many of my biology classes. This class helped me deal with a very difficult time in my life, as my dad had been fighting cancer earlier that year, and by learning more about his disease and what it does to people I was able to move on with my life and succeed as best I could at UCLA.

- The Applied Developmental Psychology minor was incredibly successful in preparing me for the field of developmental psychology, caring for children, and having children of my own in the future. The program was great.

- The history of the Beatles class because it was so enjoyable and relevant to analyze societal standards through the effects of a band. This class single handedly allowed me to choose what I want to do for graduate school.

- The most meaningful learning experience at UCLA has likely been my education minor. The courses I took directly apply to my career goals of becoming a teacher. My classes and the discussions that took place within them have significantly opened up my perspectives of the educational experiences of peoples of different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. The things I have learned and the experiences that I've had with the education minor will be taken with me far into my career.

**Personal Growth (537 comments, 15% of all comments)**

- Everything that I have absorbed from my experience here at UCLA has made me the person I am today. I want to add that, I am extremely happy with who I am as a person. UCLA has taught me to accept myself as an individual and others as individuals.

- I believe that I have truly discovered myself as a person while attending UCLA. UCLA provided all of the means for me to explore my interests, desires, and passions. I was respected as an individual and not judged based on my appearance or beliefs. For the first time, I was able to figure out who I am without any strings attached.

- I have learned that it is important to be true to yourself as well as accept the differences of others in order to work together to achieve our goals.

- Learning to take initiative and make things happen if I want them to. UCLA provides the opportunities for students to succeed, but it is up to us as students to find them ourselves, seek out what we need, and take action. There is not much “hand holding” here, and it's a very big adjustment to make, but at the same time, it prepares you in a way that gives you an attitude ready to tackle the world.

- I have more of an understanding of myself and the things that are important to me, which is probably the single most valuable thing I will take away from my experience at UCLA.
• My most meaningful learning experience has been my personal journey in better knowing and finding myself and my identity. I have always had anxiety over my self-image and how others perceive me, and the years at UCLA have had ups and downs. I have learned that more important than grades or social status is how I feel about myself, and I know that UCLA has helped me realize the importance of this and helped me find my comfort zones.

• Getting over my fear of approaching strangers and starting conversation has always been a problem with me... Being a student at UCLA, I was able to recognize the importance of self presentation and mature mannerisms. From my verbal communication to my critical analysis, I have grown more mature and ready for the next thing to come.

• UCLA taught me how to manage my time, emotions and become a mentally and emotionally stronger person. I came to UCLA feeling inadequate, that perhaps I should not have been accepted, but I gained intellectual and personal self confidence at UCLA, which makes me believe I can achieve anything and everything if I work hard enough.

• Being in an environment that showed me that nothing I ever wanted was unreachable. We come from an institution that holds us to a high standard and because of that we learn to take on these personalities of individuals who have a drive to achieve anything.

• My most meaningful learning experience has actually probably been learning not to be afraid of risks and opportunities, but instead to embrace them. I think I will carry this with me through the rest of my life.

• Learning about myself was the most important thing I will take from UCLA, as cliché as that may sound. I learned that high school did not prepare me for the real world, I learned to be more mature and take more chances, I learned how to study better and how to manage my time, I learned that everyone makes mistakes and that it is a part of the learning experience to do so, and I learned how to be independent and rely on myself.

• Everything here helped me realize who I am and who I want to be.

Faculty (424 comments, 12% of all comments)

• I greatly appreciate the quality of the professors at UCLA—making me... strive to one day be part of this elite group of educators. These experts give a real picture of what is going on in their particular fields and nearly every professor was approachable when it came to getting clarification on a subject.

• I particularly enjoyed two classes that I took through the course of my studies—one in my major, one in my minor. Professor Lopez (English 160) and Professor Bergren (Classics 150A) both contributed enormously to my holistic understanding of each subject, and, more importantly, cultivated my love for each subject by encouraging creativity and valuing students' opinions.

• I remember going to see a professor in office hours, and having a very involved conversation, during which I realized that I was talking to a professor as a peer. The realization gave me confidence in my academic ability, it made me realize that I may not have read as much as my professors, but I can hold my own in a conversation.

• Professor Robert Watson absolutely revolutionized my understanding of Shakespeare and I owe to him my deep fondness for Shakespeare. Professor Colacurcio is one of the greatest gifts to UCLA's American Literature studies. Professor McGurl is a fabulous lecturer. My most valuable non-major class was the historical study of Jesus of Nazareth with Professor Barchy. I really enjoyed and looked forward to meeting with him in office hours, and I learned a tremendous amount from him.
All professors were passionate and proud about the subjects they teach. They were highly concerned for students' learning with [innovative] teaching (e.g. with technology, updated materials according to intellectual trends, interdisciplinary knowledge, etc.). The influences from professors and students were the most meaningful learning experience for me.

Interacting with my professors in my major, as well as very senior medical doctors whom I did research with, really motivated me to put my best forward and set my standards high. The way these individuals shaped my college career is immeasurable, and I owe them so much for making me who I am today.

I enrolled in a World Arts and Cultures class, and was just blown away by the passion the professor had in teaching students in such a different and powerful way. The professor had guest speakers ranging from famous authors to farm owners of California to address the importance of being agriculturally sustainable, aware of labor issues and supporting organic foods.

My most meaningful experience at UCLA was being able to meet faculty and staff that are determined to help all students regardless of their background. It was touching to meet people who care about complete strangers and who will help them out any way possible.

Taking classes with amazing professors, who are innovators in their fields varying from legal theory to environmental health science to evolutionary biology.

The academic excellence of my classes and the professors themselves were the best part of my experience. Being able to learn from influential people in the field was the reason I chose UCLA in the first place and I was not disappointed.

I absolutely loved my major and the classes for it... I appreciated the fact that there were professors from all different backgrounds and specialties, which really made the different classes that much more interesting. Spending time with faculty and taking their classes really shaped the way I see and understand the world and its poor and I wouldn't exchange it for anything.

If I were to choose one experience, it would be the prompting by my American Indian Studies professor Duane Champagne to investigate my ethnic heritage more closely. After this suggestion, my learning at UCLA took on a new purpose and perspective. I have chosen to pursue a law degree and devote a significant part of my life to furthering the upward mobility of indigenous people and poverty alleviation.

The professor of one of my chemistry courses knew all his students names by the second week, even if the student [had] never set foot in his office! The class was terribly difficult and at times frustrating, but because the professor showed us that he cared enough about the class to know who was in it, striving to do that last impossible homework question was much easier.

**Diversity (277 comments, 8% of all comments)**

Meeting the different types of people. UCLA's size was a challenge for me, but it also gave me the opportunity to meet very many people from different backgrounds. I have interacted with people, and have made lasting friendships with people, who are so different from me in every aspect imaginable. I probably never would have gotten a chance to meet them, had I not been at UCLA, and had I not lived on campus.

Meeting the extraordinary people I did at this campus and seeing the struggles they faced. It made me more globally aware... I have met people who have completely changed my view of the world and what I can offer it.
• Coming out as a gay man during my second quarter at UCLA. I would have been unable to live so openly and free of persecution in my hometown, and the rich intellectual and generally diverse environment allowed me to do so [at UCLA]. I learned a lot about myself and others.

• Becoming familiar with such a diverse student body has made the greatest impact. I have learned to be accepting of others, no matter what their gender, race, class, or any other sociological identification.

• Being able to interact and learn with a variety of students has allowed me to open my eyes to cultures and backgrounds that I normally would not be exposed to. More importantly, it is these people who have allowed me to learn how to go about pursuing my career with more determination than ever.

• UCLA . . . showed me how to have respectful and conflicting opinions with others, while keeping an open mind. Students here [have] such differing life experiences and perspectives and it is great to engage with and learn from each other.

• In addition to the countless hours learning from some of the most brilliant and knowledgeable professors in the world, my most meaningful learning experience at UCLA came from interacting on a daily basis with students and professors from different ethnic/cultural backgrounds and walks of life, conversing with those that have different and sometimes opposing beliefs as I do, learning about different current issues and history specific to different cultures through culture nights and performances, and becoming more aware of human rights issues through events, concerts and awareness campaigns.

• Just being around people who are different from me and learning about them, their beliefs and opinions. I feel like I learned a lot about myself while learning about others and I feel that that is an invaluable lesson.

• The experiences I gained from meeting new people from different strata of society [have] shaped my perspective on life and those around me in a way that cannot be boiled down to one specific experience.

**Extracurricular Involvement (270 comments, 8% of all comments)**

• Easily the organizations I have become a part of . . . I feel prepared for the workforce and for any future personal interaction . . . because of all of the incredible hands-on learning experiences I was able to have. I couldn't have found this level of involvement on another campus. UCLA has fostered a love for service and a love for helping others and I will always look back fondly on the student organizations that have touched me.

• Getting involved with Dance Marathon at UCLA. It gave me an amazing network of friends and real-world public relations experience. But most of all, that one weekend was incredibly moving and unforgettable. The amount of money we raised for pediatric AIDS really blows my mind and makes me feel empowered.

• Starting my own organization with a friend to give students the opportunity to explore the medical field at an early stage in their academic careers. I learned a lot about interaction with people and about the difficulties and [rewards] of being a leader. It made me appreciate other student run organizations because I now know how hard they work to serve their members.

• The extracurricular activities here at UCLA like Campus Tours and Unicamp have been the most defining experiences that I have had on this campus. These are the things that have shaped [my] Bruindom, and these are the programs that have taught me the most about friendship, education, and the real world.
• Being part of the UCLA Speech and Debate team was my most valuable learning experience. Discussing politics, religion, philosophy, and current events with peers who I saw as equals was fantastic. I couldn't have asked for a better group of people to constantly debate against, sharpening my mind, and improving my logical and critical thinking skills.

• Being a student-athlete taught me the greatest lesson at UCLA. It taught me to stay disciplined in my schoolwork and yet work hard on the football field. It taught me to balance out academics and athletics, and it taught me to balance out the time I spend between teammates and schoolmates.

• Playing ultimate frisbee (team sports with like-minded people), which helped me meet people both at UCLA and outside it, as well as made me manage time and learn how to take care of my body and mind.

• The MOST important and meaningful experience I have had at UCLA came from my fraternity. My fraternity undoubtedly provided me with endless fun, but more importantly provided me the network to further my professional career, social capabilities and allowed me to give back to the school.

Academic Gains  (198 comments, 6% of all comments)
• How to look at every subject from different perspectives. This helps with any type of problem solving, because being able to see where the disagreement is coming from and why it is happening is core to figuring out how to begin approaching the problem.

• My most meaningful learning experience at UCLA was the opportunity to do simply that, learn. Never again will I have the unique and priceless opportunity to be surrounded by such a wealth of knowledge with the only expectation being that I absorb as much of it as I can.

• The most meaningful learning experience at UCLA was a Political Science class taught by Professor Zaller that taught me how to read for meaning rather than mining for specific information. It was a hard class, but the lessons I learned in the class will remain valuable to me long after I graduate.

• Every class that I have taken has contributed to my overall learning experience at UCLA. Each quarter when exams are done, I reflect back and see how much I have grown intellectually since I transferred. I have learned so much and that's what makes the entire experience meaningful.

• I was very closed-minded coming into UCLA. . . . after hearing different opinions and good solid reasons for those opinions, I have changed my life for the better in that I have broadened my horizons on differing view points and I am more accepting of other people's beliefs and decisions.

• Learning about how people come from different backgrounds and bring different opinions and ideas to the table. Learning that experimental data is . . . not black and white.

• Learning that what is important is not what answer you end up getting, but how you came to it.

• Learning to think for myself and analyze something rather than [being] told what is true and what is not true.

• Learning to form my own arguments and ideas from research, as opposed to only learning about other people's ideas.

Friendships (136 comments, 4% of all comments)
• Being able to meet so many wonderful people who have helped me shape the person I am and will become. My friends have helped me come out from a shell that I had kept myself in for so long and I appreciate them for that.
• How to adapt to a new country and new environment. You might not get along with everyone, but you find your best friends here. It is a perfect transition to the real world!

• I learned more at UCLA in the environment, rather than the classroom. I met some of the most unique and special people to me both in terms of friends and professors.

• I learned that there were many people, students, faculty, and other staff who were always available to me to make my experience at UCLA to be the best. When problems arose there was someone there to pick me up, and provide encouragement.

• Meeting [people] and building friendships that I will have for the rest of my life. My life has completely changed because of UCLA . . . . I have met some of the most intelligent and hard-working individuals and I am a better person for it.

• The people I met were the most influential part of my experience here at UCLA. I took some interesting classes and learned some valuable information but the things I remember the most are the lessons I learned outside of the classroom.

**Research Experience (130 comments, 4% of all comments)**

• Doing research with faculty and graduate students helped me find myself. I loved it, and I am so thankful that UCLA is so open and willing to have undergraduate students participate in the research process.

• I really like the many opportunities to participate in research at UCLA. I feel my involvement in a research setting has helped develop my interest in my future career.

• I volunteered at a Psychology lab, and the research experience I gained was so valuable. During my graduate school interview, it was the center of conversation.

• My most meaningful experience at UCLA was probably my undergraduate research experience. It has really taught me to think on my feet and think critically about problems. It has armed me with the necessary tools to launch my scientific career.

• My most meaningful learning experience at UCLA has come from my time performing undergraduate research. Not only have I learned to apply my biochemistry course material to practical situations, but I have also been challenged to think creatively to solve problems, and have grown to understand what it means to become invested in your work.

• Joining a lab and doing my own research project was my most meaningful learning experience at UCLA. Not only did my lab experience greatly supplement what I learned in my classes, but the collaboration and teamwork in the lab made me feel more part of the UCLA community.

• Working in my research lab, applying the very things I was learning in my biology classes to the problems we were working on.

**Study Abroad (100 comments, 3% of all comments)**

• By far, it was studying abroad in Ghana through the Education Abroad Program. I made life friends, and learned so much about Ghana and West Africa through my interactions with people and my travels to some of the most beautiful places in the world.

• For a summer I studied abroad at Cambridge. I not only learned about the people and culture of countries I visited, but I grew immensely as a person. I met people there that changed my life. While
this was not on the UCLA campus I am well aware that UCLA provided me with this experience. And for that I'm incredibly grateful.

- Studying abroad through EAP was the most meaningful learning experience I had in college because I not only learned more about my field and another part of the world, but I learned more about myself and my strengths than I ever could have at home.

- One of my most meaningful learning experiences at UCLA was studying abroad in Mexico with EAP. I learned how to do research, I learned I didn't like doing research, I stretched and grew as a person. My Spanish, people skills and understanding of the world also expanded.

- Travel/studying abroad with global studies and two UCLA professors to Shanghai, China before the Olympics . . . [Chinese] government, lifestyle, people and community, transportation, and mannerisms were completely different from ours. I learned a great deal just by talking to the locals there who spoke great English and seemed very well-informed of news in the States.

Civic Engagement (79 comments, 2% of all comments)

- Mobile Clinic Project where I had the opportunity to interact with the homeless population of Los Angeles and provide them with basic medical care as a part of this prestigious project in conjunction with the medical school, law school, and public health school.

- My most meaningful experience was starting a club (Bruins for Traffic Relief) and seeing it grow to pass a county measure in the November 2008 election, as well as putting on a debate for city council. I never realized how much stuff could get done if I just showed initiative and got people involved.

- Being a part of Environmental Bruins, E3 and action research teams. All of these extracurricular activities allowed me to build my leadership skills, increase my confidence, interact and cooperate with a diverse group of people, and help me find my passion for protecting the environment.

- I think it was outside of the classroom. Interacting with people out in the Los Angeles community and in national organizations, I realized that it is instrumental to bring the resources of the university outside [to] the surrounding community of the campus.

- My involvement with extracurricular activities such as Social Justice Alliance. Grass-roots, activist organizing provided me with a community and a deep and enriching learning experience about the way the world functions around me.

Residential Life (64 comments, 2% of all comments)

- As a transfer student, living in the dorms was a great way for me to live the college experience every student should have. I was able to interact with other students and go through a transition from home to college with other students. This bond was what my experience at UCLA memorable.

- First year, living on my own in the dorms, especially having to live with such a wide array of incredibly different people.

- My most meaningful learning experience at UCLA was when I was a resident assistant. I was able to interact with a diverse body of students and help them deal with obstacles they faced in college. It gave me the chance to put together meaningful programs, reach out to my peers, and get to know them on a personal level.

- Most meaningful learning experience at UCLA was living in the dorms my first year and adapting to this new environment and interacting with a whole [new] set of people . . . . Living in the dorms made me feel comfortable with living on my own and experiencing college life first hand.
Intellectual Interactions with Classmates (62 comments, 2% of all comments)

- The competitiveness and other students' desire to learn and succeed have really motivated me and helped me grow intellectually and emotionally. Seeing others work and study with such passion has opened my view on how to love learning.

- The quality of students at UCLA kept me motivated. Their drive and intelligence rubbed off on me. The positive attitudes of students and professors forced me to strive for excellence.

- UCLA has changed me. It's taught me that I could do absolutely anything and everything. The students are the best part at UCLA - they are absolutely brilliant. Complete strangers in my classes motivated me to be the best that I can be. I am sad to leave!

- Suffering through academic hardships with other fellow students. I think part of what made the experience so great was being challenged academically, but not being alone while doing it. It's a great balance between academics and social life.

Negative Experience (59 comments, 2% of all comments)

- I couldn't pass a class for my potential major, so I had to choose another one. Even though I was disappointed in myself, I realized that there was something better for me at UCLA. That's how I chose my major (sociology) and I loved all my classes. UCLA has something for everybody.

- The most meaningful learning experience at UCLA was my first view of the competitive environment. It honestly stressed me out and got me overwhelmed. I almost wanted to quit but I kept going telling myself that there is a reason why I got accepted to UCLA. After this experience, I became a stronger individual and became more confident with myself. Overall, my experience at UCLA made me a stronger, competitive person.

- What I found most meaningful was that one should not waste time. Procrastination does not mix with a quarter system, especially if you are used to a semester system. If I had managed my time better I could have achieved higher grades and been able to participate in the campus' research opportunities; a HUGE regret of mine. Time is of the essence and it should be utilized to its fullest, otherwise one is liable to miss out.

- No one cares what happens to you at UCLA... it is entirely up to you to look out for your own success and well-being. Help is never forced down your throat and rarely even offered. You must learn when to seek out help and where the best place to get help is. That is how a large bureaucracy works, and learning how to deal with such a large, impersonal bureaucracy is the most meaningful thing I have learned at UCLA.

- My most meaningful learning experience was learning that I have no idea how to work with the system, and that I didn't take advantage of a lot of resources and events going on at UCLA. So my UCLA experience was largely unfulfilling in comparison to what it could have been and of course I am at fault.

- Realizing my desire to achieve, after having a rough start at UCLA and being dismissed my junior year for academic reasons. I had time to reflect on my life and become more determined to graduate from UCLA and go on to business school.

- When I failed one of my organic chemistry [classes] and had to retake it, I learned far more about the material. . . . . It also made me change my study skills for the better. My failure helped me to become a better student and person.